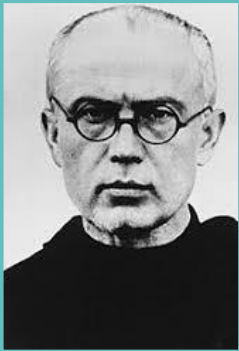


STORIES OF POLISH RESISTANCE



Irena
Sendler



Maximilian
Kolbe



Emanuel
Ringelblum



Mordechai
Anielewicz



Witold
Pilecki



Janusz
Korczak



Jan
Karski



Zofia
Kossak-
Szczucka



Father
Marceli
Godlewski



Jan &
Antonina
Zabinski



Józef &
Wiktorina
Ulma

About half of the six million European Jews killed in the Holocaust were Polish. In 1939 a third of the capital city Warsaw, and 10% of the entire country was Jewish. By 1945 97% of Poland's Jews were dead.

These eleven examples of Polish resistance *do not* purport to give an overview of what happened in Poland during The Holocaust. They have been chosen to reflect the unimaginably difficult choices made by both Jews and non-Jews under German occupation – where every Jew was marked for death and all non-Jews who assisted their Jewish neighbours were subject to the same fate.

These individuals *were not* typical; they were exceptional, reflecting the relatively small proportion of the population who refused to be bystanders. But neither were they super-human. They would recoil from being labelled as heroes. They symbolise the power of the human spirit – their actions show that in even the darkest of times, good can shine through...

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Learning from the Righteous
Inspiring children with the courage of the few

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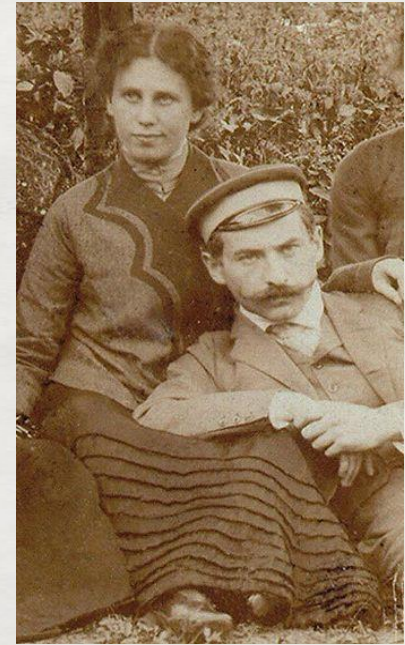
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IRENA SENDLER 1910 - 2008



Irena Sendler was an exceptional woman who coordinated an Underground Network of rescuers that enabled many Jewish children to escape the Warsaw Ghetto and survive The Holocaust. Her father was a doctor who died during a typhus epidemic in 1917 after helping many sick Jewish families who were too poor to afford treatment. Out of gratitude, members of the community offered to support Irena's family after his death and consequently there was a strong bond of friendship between Irena's family and her Jewish neighbours. As a result she learnt to speak Yiddish, a skill that was invaluable in her later work.



"My parents taught me, that if a man is drowning, no matter what his religion or nationality, you must help him, whether or not you can swim yourself."

UNDER OCCUPATION & THE WARSAW GHETTO

Irena was incapable of ignoring injustice and joined Warsaw's Social Services department. She was a natural leader and became the heart of a network of women who had the shared aim of helping Warsaw's poorest residents. Under German occupation it was illegal for Warsaw's Social Services department to help Jews, so Irena altered client documents to continue supporting them. Although this was a very risky thing to do neither Irena nor her colleagues were deterred by the dangers.



Irena's network distributed food and medicines to the poorest members of Warsaw's Jewish community.



When the Warsaw Ghetto was created Irena gained entry by obtaining a Health Inspector pass so she could continue to smuggle in much needed supplies.

Irena was distressed to see so many children suffer from starvation and was determined to do something more to help them.



RESCUE



Children were taken to 'safe houses' and given non-Jewish identities where they acclimatised to their new circumstances.

When residents of the Warsaw Ghetto started to be deported to Treblinka death camp, Irena's network stepped up their rescue operation by smuggling children out of the ghetto. This was dangerous as Germans killed those who helped Jews. Babies were sedated and hidden in tool boxes or medical bags and older children were smuggled out through the sewer system. But the risk remained, even after a child was living in a secret safe-house. If their real identities were suspected by a neighbour they would have to be relocated. This happened quite frequently. "How many mothers do most children have?" one child asked Irena. "So far I've had three."

DESPERATE CHOICES



It was desperately difficult to hand over a child to a stranger and Jewish families agonised over such a painful decision . Those who agreed felt it was the only chance their child had of surviving. Irena described this heart-wrenching sacrifice as a parent's final act of love. "The real heroes were the mothers" she would say. She hoped to reunite the Jewish families after the war and kept meticulous records of each child, burying lists of their names in jars next to a friend's apple tree.



The tree beside which were buried the real names of the hidden children.

In October 1943 she was arrested by the Gestapo and was driven away for interrogation. Although she was brutally tortured, Irena refused to provide any information and was sentenced to death, but on the morning of her execution she was pulled out of line and told to run. Her escape had been bought with a bribe from the Polish Underground.

RECOGNITION



*The tree of righteousness
planted in Israel in Irena's
honour with the medal she
received*



*Lili Pohlman, a Holocaust survivor who was born in
Krakow and hidden as a child in Lvov, championing the
work of her close friend Irena Sendler.*

Irena was recognised as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in 1965. Her close friend Lili Pohlman spoke widely in the UK about Irena's work and in 1999 students from Kansas made a play about her life - finally the world got to learn about this amazing woman and the network she coordinated.



*"I've tried to live a human life,
which isn't always easy"*