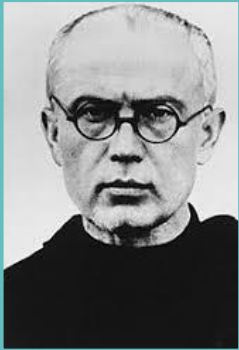


STORIES OF POLISH RESISTANCE



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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ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA & THE ZEGOTA NETWORK



ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA
1890 -1968

The story of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka illustrates the complex relations between Jewish and non-Jewish Poles before and during the German occupation of the country. Before the war she was well known for her intolerant views towards Jews but eventually became one of the main co-ordinators of an organisation that helped many hundreds of Jews escape the dangers of the Nazi regime and continue to support them when in hiding.

In 1936, three years before the German occupation, she wrote –
“Jews are so terribly alien to us... they are a race apart... Their argumentativeness, the set of their eyes, the shape of their ears, the winking of their eyelids, the line of their lips, everything...”

In 1942, after the Nazis commenced the extermination of the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, she wrote –

“The world is watching the most horrible crime that has ever taken place in history, and keeps silent. The slaughter of millions of defenceless people is being carried out amidst general and ominous silence... We must not tolerate this silence any longer. He who keeps silent in the face of slaughter becomes an accomplice to murder. He who doesn’t condemn, complies with the murder.”

ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA & THE ŻEGOTA NETWORK

The organisation that Zofia Kossak-Szczucka helped to set up was known as “Żegota” – the codename for the “Council to Aid Jews”. This was a secret underground network that resisted the German occupation in Poland. Żegota was linked to the Polish Government in Exile, which was made up of Polish political leaders who had escaped occupied Poland and who remotely coordinated acts of resistance in their homeland. When Żegota was formed the Polish Government in Exile was based in London.



Members of the Polish Government in Exile that was based in London for most of the war



(left) British Prime Minister Winston Churchill with Władysław Sikorski, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government in exile, until he tragically died in an air crash in July 1943.

ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA & THE ŻEGOTA NETWORK

At considerable personal risk, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka devoted her time and energy to bringing together a wide range of people to help organise rescue and assistance to Jews in occupied Poland. Half of the 6 million Jews who died during The Holocaust were Polish and in that context, despite Żegota's best efforts, only a tiny number of people could be helped. But rather than judge its impact on purely numerical terms (approximately 5,000 people received, financial assistance, forged identity documents or a safe place to hide) it should be remembered that, in a time of such hopelessness, where the Jews of Europe felt abandoned, Żegota was a symbol of humanity and resistance...

Here are some of the prominent members of this remarkable organisation...

Julian Grobelny (whose code name was 'Trojan') was the president of Żegota since its establishment in 1942. Together with his wife, Halina, he was personally involved in the rescue of a large number of Jewish children. Both Julian and Halina devoted most of their time and energy to their rescue work, turning their small house into a temporary shelter for Jewish children until they could move into more permanent accommodations. The Grobelnys were in close contact with Irena Sendler, who by then was the head of the children's section of Żegota. They also helped Jewish adults who fled from the ghetto, by supplying them with "Aryan" documents, money and medicines.



ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA & THE ŻEGOTA NETWORK



Another important figure in the organisation was **Wanda Krahelska-Filipowicz**. She was not new to underground resistance activities, as in 1906, during the time when Poland was still partitioned among Russia, Germany and Austria, she participated in a bombing attack on the then Russian Governor-General of Warsaw. She was a Socialist activist and the wife of a former Ambassador to the United States. She used her considerable influence to persuade others to support the rescue operation both with their time and, if they were based outside Poland, with their financial support. Using the code-name "Alicja," as well as helping to coordinate the wider organisation, she offered shelter to Jews in her own home.

Leon Feiner was chairman of Żegota from August '44 to January '45. He was imprisoned in the USSR when the Germans invaded in June 1941 and escaped to Warsaw where he joined the underground network. In October 1942 he managed to send a telegram to the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, with information of what was happening to Poland's Jews. He also met with Jan Karski and made the following appeal - "The Germans are not trying to make us slaves as they are doing with other peoples - we are being systematically murdered. Our entire people will be destroyed. A few can probably be saved, but the fate of three million Jews is sealed... the earth should be shaken to its very foundations and the world needs to be roused. Maybe then, it will wake up, understand and see".



ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA & THE ŻEGOTA NETWORK

Władysław Bartoszewski was in Auschwitz as a Polish prisoner from the autumn of 1940 to the spring of 1941. From then on he resolved never to turn his back on suffering. Zofia Kossak persuaded him to join the underground and he began to use his close contacts in the Jewish community to help ghetto escapees find employment and obtained medical assistance for children. He also organised over 50,000 forged identity documents. “Did every document save a life? Who knows? We didn’t keep those statistics. People needed to be rescued. We did whatever we could”. After the war he worked as a historian, journalist and diplomat and when Poland regained independence he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs.



Until the deportations to Treblinka in the summer of 1942 **Dr Adolf Bermann** was involved in providing help for Jewish children in the Warsaw Ghetto. He managed to escape to the “Aryan” side of the city and forged links between the Polish and Jewish Underground networks. Although he had a new non-Jewish identity it was still highly risky to move about the city. Eventually he was denounced to the Germans by blackmailers and captured by the Gestapo. Żegota paid a bribe to secure his release and Bermann resumed his clandestine work. After the war he devoted his time to supporting fellow Holocaust survivors and eventually moved to Israel.

ZOFIA KOSSAK-SZCZUCKA & THE ŻEGOTA NETWORK

A memorial to Żegota is situated outside POLIN, the Museum to the History of Poland's Jews in Warsaw and a special tree of remembrance has been planted in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

