

The Polish Angel

By Kiley Normandin

We often forget some of the heroes that stood in the background of World War II. One of these heroes, Irena Sendler, resembled bravery and compassion better than anyone. Born on February 15th, 1910, she was always around her father who taught her compassion and morals. However, her father, Strainslaw Kryzaniwska, passed away early on in her life from contracting typhus when treating patients his colleagues refused to treat; this included many Jews. After his death, many of the community's Jewish leaders were touched by his efforts. They collectively helped to fund Irena's education, helping her study at Warsaw University in Polish literature. However, once she started studying she realized the ghetto-bench system was in place at her university. She disagreed with it and in protest vandalized her identity card. Sendler was given a three-year suspension because of this. This was just the very beginning of her humanitarian career fighting for Jewish lives.

When World War II broke out, Irena Sendler was a 29-year-old social worker who was employed by the Welfare Department of Warsaw municipality. She quickly took advantage of her job to help Jews; however, that soon became practically impossible after November of 1940 because the ghetto became sealed off to the outside. The poor hygienic conditions, lack of medical supplies, and lack of food resulted in high death rates and epidemics. Sendler had to quickly come up with a plan to somehow help the suffering Jews in the ghetto. She managed to obtain a permit that allowed her to enter the ghetto to inspect the sanitary conditions because the Germans were scared of another outbreak of typhus. She contacted the Jewish Welfare Organization, and once

she was inside, she began to help them. She helped smuggle thousands of Jews to escape the ghetto. She hid them and even gave them new identities with a special name that could be decoded from their old names, so their families could find them after the war.

However, the Warsaw ghetto was soon completely destroyed, and soon after that Irena Sendler was assigned to director of Zegota's Department for the Care of Jewish children. She exploited her contacts with orphanages and institutions, so she could send Jewish children there. Some of the most popular places they were sent to were Rodzina Marii (Family of Mary) Orphanage or religious institutions organized by nuns. Unfortunately, on October 20th, 1943, she was arrested. She was sentenced to death, but her partners were able to bribe the guards for her freedom. After her release in February of 1944, she still continued her underground work, continuing to save Jews. The exact number of Jews her and her companions saved are still unknown to this day.

After the war, Sendler worked as a social welfare official and director of vocational schools, continuing to assist children, even some of the children she rescued. She continued this until she was dismissed from her job for a variety of health issues. This included a heart condition and an anxiety disorder. She lived in Warsaw for the remainder of her life. She died on May 12th, 2008, and is now buried in Warsaw's Powazki Cemetery.

In conclusion, Irena Sendler's extraordinary life serves as a breathtaking example of compassion, courage, and resilience in hard times. Her selfless actions during one of the darkest periods in human history saved the lives of thousands of Jewish children and their future generations. Her unwavering commitment to justice just

shows how impactful an individual can be. As we reflect on her legacy, we can look at her bravery and compassion and how she stood against injustice. Irena Sendler's story reminds us that even in a situation where you feel like you can't escape, there is always hope, and that all of us possess the power to make a difference in the lives of others.

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