

DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE

**BEHIND EVERY NAME A STORY:
THE WOMEN**

April 16 - 23

DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE



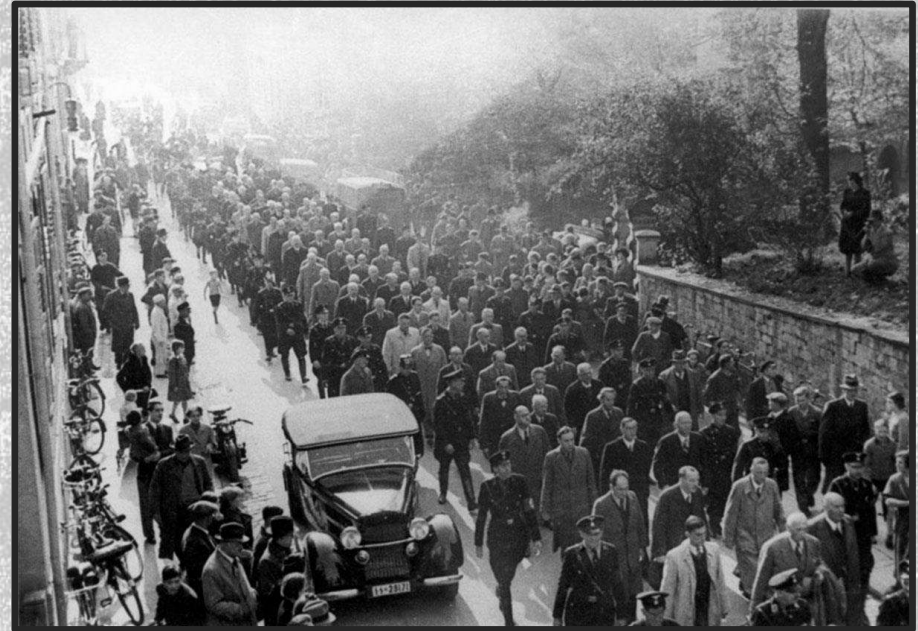
Each year, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum leads the nation in commemorating Days of Remembrance.

Days of Remembrance was established by the U.S. Congress to memorialize the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust as well as the millions of victims who were targeted for racial, political, ideological, and behavioral reasons. More than one million children were killed.

BYSTANDERS

Millions of ordinary people witnessed the crimes of the Holocaust in the countryside and city squares, in stores and schools, and in homes and workplaces.

Across Europe, the Nazis found countless sympathizers who willingly worked with them or were complicit in their crimes.



In Baden-Baden, Nazi paramilitaries yelled at crowds watching this ritual of humiliation: *“Here are the Jews. Do to them what you will!”*

PRESENTATION



Victims had little control over their fates. However, there were some who chose to intervene and help those being persecuted, even though it would place their own families' lives at risk.

This presentation honors Irena Sendler, who smuggled 2,500 Jewish children to safety.

IRENA SENDLER

Irena Sendler was born in Warsaw Poland on February 15, 1910. She studied Polish Literature at Warsaw University.

Her work as an activist began long before her involvement in WWII. She was an avid opponent of college segregation. Jewish students were separated and forced to sit on one side of the lecture halls. In an act of rebellion, she defaced her grade card and was suspended for three years.



IRENA SENDLER

When World War II broke out, Sendler was a 29-year-old social worker employed by the Warsaw municipality's Welfare Department. After the German occupation, the department continued to take care of the countless poor and displaced people in the city.

She took advantage of her position to help the Jews. However, this became impossible once the ghetto was sealed off in November 1940. Close to 400,000 people were driven into the ghetto, and their situation soon deteriorated.

Poor hygienic conditions inside the ghetto, compounded by the lack of food and medical supplies, caused epidemics that led to high death rates.

THE WARSAW GHETTO



Sendler, at great personal danger, devised ways to get into the ghetto and help the suffering and dying Jews.

She obtained a permit from the municipality that enabled her to enter the ghetto to inspect the sanitary conditions.

Using this as a cover, she began smuggling children out using a variety of methods. She hid children under stretchers, carried them through sewer pipes and underground passages, in trunks and suitcases, and by ambulance.

COUNCIL FOR AID TO JEWS

When the Council for Aid to Jews (Zegota) was established, Sendler became one of its main activists. The Council was created in fall 1942, after 280,000 Jews were deported from Warsaw to Treblinka.

By the end of the year, most of the Jews of Warsaw had been killed. However, the Zegota played a crucial role in rescuing countless survivors of this mass deportation.



Young children sit on the pavement in the Warsaw ghetto.

RECORDING THE CHILDREN

Sendler and the Zegota network knew the rescued children must one day be reunited with their families. Sendler wrote down the children's names on tissue paper along with their hidden whereabouts and buried the information in jars beneath an apple tree.

When the war ended, she dug up the jars and started the daunting task of reuniting the children with their families. Unfortunately, most, of the children's parents had died at the Treblinka death camp.



SENDLER'S ARREST

Knowing what would happen if she was caught, Sendler stashed incriminating evidence, such as the coded addresses of children in the Zegota's care. She also hid large sums of money to pay those who would help the Jews.

In October 1943, Sendler was arrested and placed in the Piawiak Prison, where she was interrogated for her involvement with the Zegota. After which, she was sentenced to death. Unbeknownst to her, the Zegota organization bribed the executioner and helped her escape.

Sendler continued working with the Zegota after assuming a new identity.

RECOGNITION

In 1965, Sendler was recognized by Yad Vashem as one of the Righteous Among the Nations. In 1983, she was present when a tree was planted in her honor at the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations.

In 1991, she was made an honorary citizen of Israel.

In 1996, she was awarded the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. She received a higher version of this award, the Commander's Cross with Star, in 2001.

In 2003, Pope John Paul II sent her a personal letter praising her wartime efforts. Later that year, she received the Order of the White Eagle (Poland's highest civilian decoration) and the Jan Karski Award "For Courage and Heart," given by the American Center of Polish Culture in Washington, D.C.

LIFE IN A JAR

Sendler's achievements were largely unknown in North America until 1999. That year, students at Uniontown High School in Kansas, led by their teacher Norman Conard, produced a play based on their research into her life story, which they called *Life in a Jar*.

The play was a resounding success and its acclaim spread. The production was later enacted over 200 times in the United States and abroad, which significantly contributed to widely publicizing Sendler's story. Today, her story is shared all over the world through *Life in A Jar: The Irena Sendler Project*.

Sendler passed away on May 12, 2008, and was laid to rest in a Warsaw, Poland cemetery. She was 98 years old.

CONCLUSION

Irena Sendler said, “ I was brought up to believe that a person must be rescued when drowning, regardless of religion or nationality. The term ‘hero’ irritates me greatly – the opposite is true. I continue to have pangs of conscience that I did so little.”

Days of Remembrance raises awareness that democracy’s institutions and values are not passively sustained. They must be actively appreciated, nurtured, and protected.

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