

## Moral Courage: Irena Sendlerowa, Who Saved Jewish Children in WW2 in Poland

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Wherever radical evil openly flourishes, that's where miracles also abound. A hero is someone who risks her own life in order to save another person's life. A hero may know that what she is doing is dangerous, that she herself might be caught and punished, she might be very afraid—but her fear does not stop her. Such actions go beyond speaking out, beyond documenting the atrocities. It is important to teach our children that high-risk courage, self-sacrifice, morality, and goodness do exist. The world may not always do so.

Indeed, for nearly fifty years, the world forgot about the heroic Irena Sendler. She was “discovered” by four Uniontown, Kansas high school students in 1999. Their research, which they turned into a play, finally brought her story to world attention. When the students visited Sendler in 2001, she was already in her nineties, in poor health, and living in poverty.

Of course, in 1965, Israel had already given Sendler the title of “Righteous Among the Nations.” In 1983, she had visited Yad Vashem, in Jerusalem to receive this award in person. In 1991, Israel also made her an honorary citizen. However, this was not enough to launch Sendler's reputation around the world. Perhaps saving Jews was not viewed as morally courageous to anyone but Jews.

The American Kansas student visit was written up by the Polish and international media, and almost overnight Sendler became a national hero. She was honored with Poland's Commodore's Cross of Polonia Restituta and the country's highest decoration, the Order of the White Eagle. She also became Poland's nominee for a Nobel Peace Prize.

So, who was she and why am I writing about her today?

Sendler/Sendlerowa is the quietly fearless, exceedingly modest, and incredibly brave Polish Catholic woman, a social worker, who rescued 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto and placed them in convents, orphanages and with Polish Catholic families. She carefully preserved their identities so that they could be re-united with surviving family members after the War.

To do this work, Sendler had to persuade already terrified and beaten-down Jewish mothers and fathers to part with their precious children—much like the Biblical Moses' mother did when she placed him in a basket and set him down among the bulrushes, not far from Pharaoh's palace. In a sense, Irena was like Miriam, Moses' sister, who watched over him until he was rescued—only Irena went further; she actually brought each Jewish child out to safety herself.

To do so, Sendler had to risk death, daily. She was finally arrested and tortured by the Gestapo. Sendler was condemned to be executed but her life was saved because, at the last moment, the Polish Underground managed to successfully bribe a German Nazi soldier who allowed her to escape.

Sendler did not like being compared to Otto Schindler whose story has been told both by writer Thomas Keneally and filmmaker Steven Spielberg. According to Sendler's Polish obituary, "she resented being compared to Schindler, the Nazi industrialist who was turned into a mega-hero by Steven Spielberg's movie "Schindler's List". Unlike Sendler, Schindler was never at risk and saved some 1,500 Jews because he did not want his factory to lose highly trained employees who could not be easily replaced in wartime. " Sendler was also very modest when she accepted awards and always took care to praise all the other rescue workers.

So, why am I writing about Sendler today? Well, any day would be a good day, but here's why: First, today is Holocaust Remembrance Day and I want to remember the righteous Gentiles, the saints and angels who rescued and hid Jews. Second, last night, I watched the two hour Hallmark Hall of Fame television docudrama about Sendler. It was emotionally moving, exhausting, tasteful, nuanced, sobering, but also exhilarating. This could not have been an easy film to make given how many Holocaust-era films have already been made, given how much audience "fatigue" about, not to mention hostility towards the subject may exist.

The Hallmark docudrama also shows us women stage center, we see altruistic and dedicated female social workers who made up Sendler's team. And yes, we also see anti-Semitic female social workers who walked out, who refused to help.

Third, yesterday was the fiend Hitler's birthday and the day the United Nations chose to open their Durban2 Conference in Geneva. (Makes sense). Oh, how I wish that Irena Sendler were still alive to address this United Nations conference in Geneva which is supposed to be about "racism." With her sweet, sweet face, and grandmotherly calm, only someone of her moral caliber might be able to explain a thing or two about "racism" and how the UN is currently perverting it, Orwellian style, against the Jews and against Israel. Sendler is not a victim of racism, she fought against it.

We need many more such morally courageous people in the world. And, if we have them, (we very well might), we need to know about them. Perhaps people can launch a YouTube project with this pedagogic and inspiring goal in mind.

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