

Biography of Irena Sendler



Irena Sendlerowa's family name is Krzyzanowska. She was born on 15 February 1910 in Otwock. Her father – Stanislaw Krzyzanowski, was a doctor who treated the poor and the Jews. Irena met them numerous times and knew them very well. Her father, who died of typhoid fever, was a member of the Polish Socialist Party, and before the War Irena was engaged in the activity in Youth Democratic Association and later in PSP. She loathed antisemitism – she took part in protests against bench ghetto at the university.

When – on 5 November 1940 – the Germans created Warsaw ghetto, isolating 450,000 Jews behind a 3-metre-wall on the area of 16 kilometers. It was obvious for Irena that those

people needed help. She was an activist, working in a welfare institution and the tragic situation of people in the ghetto wasn't indifferent to her. As a social worker she could enter the ghetto where she had to wear a characteristic David's Star on one of the sleeves.

In 1942 the Board of Help to the Jews – „Zegota“ was created, Irena got a pseudonym „Jolanta“ and was nominated to be in charge of a group which help the children. And she did best as she could – she smuggled them on the Arian side of Warsaw, hid them in trustworthy families, in orphanages and convents in Warsaw, Turkowice and Chotomow.

Between 1942 and 1945 „Zegota“ helped a couple thousands of Jews. They financially supported 4 thousand, issued 50 thousand false documents and gave thousands of flats to refugees. Those whom she helped to escape from the ghetto and camps were later smuggled to Jewish Hungary.

„Jolanta“ brought money, medicine, food to the ghetto and took children out of it using all possible methods, even drastic ones. Children were given sleeping pills and their bodies, imitating dead corps, were taken out from the ghetto. They were carried in bags, transported in ambulances hidden under stretchers with ill people.

Other method was leading children through secret ways in basements of buildings on both sides of Warsaw. One of most frequently used was a passage under a former Court, which was situated on the border of the ghetto.

First, Irena had been saving orphans but later she realised that all Jewish children who stayed with their parents, would surely die. That made her carry extremely difficult, heart – breaking talks with the parents and caretakers, convincing them that the only chance for their children to survive would be to take them to the Arian side. She assured them that after the War, children would be returned to their parents, and the Poles, who decided to take care of them, would know that it would be temporary. Those separations were tragic, but Irena was right – after the War it turned out that most people from the ghetto died, mainly in Treblinka.

The Germans found out about Irena’s work and arrested her in October 1943. Pawiak, Gestapo in Szucha, tortures, broken legs and finally death sentence. When she was going to the place of execution, activists from „Zegota“ bribed German Gestapo guards and managed to save her.

Irena woke up left alone somewhere on a road but she was free. Later, she read about her execution on posters which were published in public places. She continued her mission but this time under cover.

Irena Sendlerowa claimed that everything she had done during the War was perfectly natural and humane not an act of heroism.

Students of 2 D and 2 C
Under supervision of Aneta Galka