

## **Hero**

People were wailing and moaning, but no one came. Life was being sucked out piece by piece in the most painful way possible. The illness spread to children, infants and 6 million people died. They needed a hero. No one was there to rescue the Jewish people except one hero; Irena Sendler who decided to step up and help the people who were in aid. This person was a true hero because she was courageous, smart, humble and saved the lives of others. She was very willing to put others before herself and she never gave up no matter the risk or pain that came along with it because that's what a true hero does. There is no doubt that she is a perfect example of a hero.

## **Background Information**

Irena Sendler was born on Feb 15, 1910, she grew up in Poland. At the time Poland belonged to imperial Russia and her Family practiced Roman Catholic which was the predominant religion. One of the major events of history was the Holocaust also known as the genocide of the European Jews. World War 2 began and the German invasion of Poland from the west started on September 1, 1939. When Nazi Germans invaded they implanted very harsh anti-semitic laws and they began holding large scale prison camps with mass extermination ovens and gas chambers. The conditions when people lived in the Warsaw Ghetto were horrendous. It was packed with people, and they were barely given any food or water, and disease spread like wildfire running rampant. During the Holocaust, In 1933, Nazis murdered five to six million Jewish people. Millions of Jews were harassed and incarcerated.

## **Acts of Heroism**

Irena Sendler risked her life with her smart and courageous acts to save others. Irena Sendler organized a secret humanitarian program among her friends and colleagues. Her first acts of defiance involved helping Jews and opponents of the Nazi regime flee to safety. Then her mission was to search out families with young children in the Ghetto and convince the parents to let her take their children to safety. She became head of Council for aid to Jews, which was known by its code name Zegota. Irena Sendler began to carry forged passes as a nurse which gave her easy access to the ghetto. Food and medical supplies, aided by the municipal government pass that gave her relatively easy access through the heavily armed checkpoints. She wore the Star of David on her clothing as all Jews in lands occupied by Nazi Germany were required to do so by law because it showed solidarity with the Ghetto's residents. Even though she was able to get into the ghetto using smart tactics, she faced a lot of risks as she smuggled children out to safety. She used various means to get the children out. Some buildings had basements with tunnels that connected to the outside; there was also a municipal court building that had a lot of doors, so all of them weren't as heavily guarded. Irena also came up with a smart plan to use sewer systems from buildings to sneak children out, because the last place the Nazis would think to look would be the sewers. Between the years 1939 and 1942 Irena and her helpers made over five hundred false documents to help Jewish families escape from the ghettos. If someone was caught aiding Jews they were punished by death. There was another fearsome task for Irena Sendler; she had to keep track of the meticulous records of the children's names and temporary homes so that once this was all over the children could be reunited with their family. You might think what kind of threat will come for just writing the names of children, but it isn't as easy as it sounds. Irena would have to

store them in a very safe place and if she was ever caught by the Nazi Germans they would torture her until she told them about the children. Doing this will also attract more activity towards her and she has been barred with this responsibility that requires her to be strong. Irena Sendler was the one chosen to complete this dangerous and important task because her team knew that she was the only one that was brave and determined to never tell any information about the children to anyone. She was willing to take the risks that she was faced with, and she made smart decisions to find the easiest way to smuggle kids out.

### **Difficulties she Faced**

Irena Sendler was determined, she would never give up trying to save lives because she was selfless by putting others before herself. Irena continued her work of smuggling kids out of the ghetto, but soon Nazi's secret police began to have suspicions that someone is smuggling the children out. Not long after their suspicions, they found out about Irena Sendler because a member of Irena's team was caught and tortured and he gave up Irena's apartment. The Nazi secret police raided her apartment and arrested her in October 1943 for the crimes and rule-breaking she had done. She was taken to Pawiak Prison, a notorious place from where only a few emerged alive. In prison, she was viciously beaten and tortured until her legs were broken. She must have felt like a rabbit surrounded by wolves, just waiting to be devoured. Even under what she went through, she stayed fearless, as a true hero would do. Irena Sendler did not divulge any information about her work, names of co-workers and where she smuggled out the children too. That was the day when the risk it took Irena to remain tight inside the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom. The Nazis had no use of her at that point because she wouldn't give any information even if it cost her life, so they decided to sentence her to death. She was strong and did not give up

at any point. Which was not surprising to her because they were going to kill Irena anyways. One of her team members that gave up Irena's location wasn't as strong as Irena was and he couldn't endure much, but Irena was so much more determined. The Polish government knew they could not afford to lose such a strong-willed woman so the exile in London that funded their program in helping Jews managed to bribe a guard. Sendler was eventually able to escape with the help of the guard before she was going to get killed. When the Nazis found out she escaped they placed Irena Sendler under the list of those who were to be shot, Irena was forced to live underground and go into hiding for the remainder of the war. Even though Irena was forced to live underground she continued her work. Despite all the pain she had to endure, she kept going without thinking about herself and she kept putting others before herself.

### **Consequences**

Irena saved a lot of people, but by doing so she not only endangered herself but also everyone around her. Through her acts of heroism, Irena helped a lot of other people, but in doing so she ended up putting her family and everyone close to her in tremendous danger. In order to keep track of the children she rescued, she wrote their information down in jars and placed them in the yard of her friend's house at 9 Yadarska Street in Warsaw. A lot of people put their families first in life, but Irena was different because she thought of everyone as her family. She was faced with a choice of her family or thousands of other lives. What would you have chosen, would you risk everyone you love to save thousands of strangers you didn't know? This decision of putting thousands of lives above her family makes her more of a hero because a lot of people would not be able to face a decision like this. Her decision that she had to make proves her to be smarter, stronger and more of a hero.

## **Recognition and Afterlife**

The Holocaust ended around the spring of 1945 when the Nazi's military started collapsing, so Nazi troops were forced to retreat. Poland was liberated by Allied forces from the Soviet Union. Sendler was devastated to learn that many of the children she helped were now truly orphans. After the war, Irena remained in the field of social work under the new Communist regime. Irena Sendler was recognized for her remarkable deeds, but she didn't help people for recognition or fame, she designated herself to aid people. In 1965 Yad Vashem recognized Irena Sendler as "Righteous Among the Nations", which was an honor given to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during Nazi rule. Irena was one of the first to be awarded this title. In 2003 Sendler received the "Order of the White Eagle ", which was Poland's highest civilian award. Sendler also received a letter from Pope John Paul II applauding her for her daring rescue effort. Sendler's life was chronicled in a documentary film and a play entitled "Life in a Jar ". Irena Sendler was also nominated for the Nobel Peace prize in 2007.

Irena Sendler's deeds will not be ever forgotten. Irena Sendler was a woman who risked everything for the lives of others and whose bravery is unimaginable to many of us. She was courageous, smart and saved many lives. She never gave up no matter the risks and the pain she had to go through. She also inspired many people to stand up for human rights and social justice. The world is reminded not only of the horrible cruelty at the time of the Holocaust but also the incredible difference one person can make.