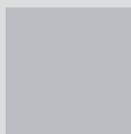
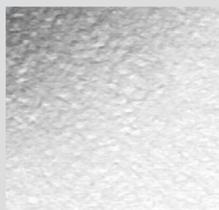


Irena Sendler



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**BIOGRAFIE
WYSTAWY
ELEMENTARNE**

Silent Heroine



Raised in an atmosphere of respect and tolerance, she opposed anti-Semitism from a young age. A social activist and tireless guardian of human dignity, she saved the lives of several hundred Jewish children during World War II. She was named a Righteous Among the Nations because doing good was more important to her than fame and honor. She constantly reminded us of this principle and remained faithful to it until the end. Irena Sendler, known as the "Mother of the Children of the Holocaust" and a "good fairy," remains a symbol of the humanity and heroism of Poles towards Jews by lending a helping hand to those in need.



← Irena Sendler in the Social Welfare office at 10 Bagatela Street in Warsaw, 10 July 1949.

📷 Archive of Janina Zgrzemska/East News



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The family home

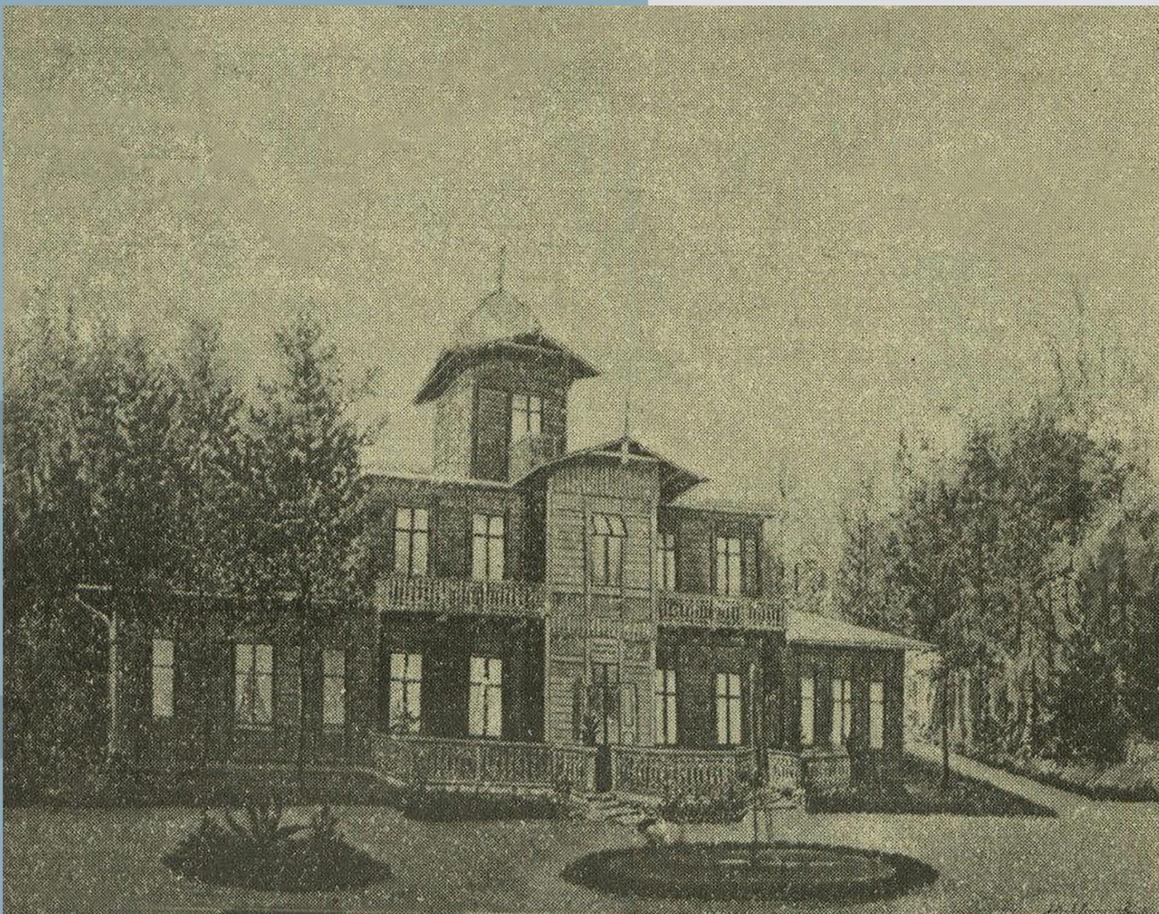
Irena Stanisława Sendler (née Krzyżanowska) was born on February 15, 1910, in Warsaw, into a patriotic family. Her parents decided to move to Otwock because of their two-year-old daughter's health problems. Despite his family's difficult financial situation, Irena's father, a doctor, treated the poor free of charge, regardless of their origin or religion. He died from a typhus infection.

To this day, I remember many things from that period, as they were the most wonderful years of my childhood.

Excerpt from Irena Sendler's notes, in: A. Mieszkowska, *The History of Irena Sendler*, Warsaw 2018, p. 63.

→ Janina Grzybowska and Stanisław Krzyżanowski, Irena's parents, during their engagement. Warsaw, 1903. Irena's father was a socialist doctor with left-wing views. He instilled in his daughter a sensitivity to injustice, a desire to help others selflessly, and an interest in politics.

📷 Public domain



← The building of Dr. Józef Geisler's sanatorium in Otwock, where Stanisław Krzyżanowski worked as an assistant. *Guide to Otwock and its Environs for 1906*, Warsaw 1906, p. 19.

📷 POLONA



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The twenties, the thirties

From the moment I started working there, I was delighted by the atmosphere of kindness, tolerance, and love for all. I was also impressed by the commitment to spreading the idea of goodness and social justice throughout the world. I was completely absorbed by this atmosphere. I was captivated by everything. I felt as if I were in another world. This world felt close to me because of the way my parents raised me.

An excerpt from Irena Sendler's memoirs about the work she undertook in the Mother and Child Aid Section in: A. Mieszkowska, *The History of Irena Sendler*, Warsaw 2018, pp. 69-71.

In 1920, Irena lived with her mother and grandfather in Piotrków Trybunalski. She attended the Helena Trzcińska Gymnasium and was a member of the Scouts. In 1927, she enrolled at the University of Warsaw to study law but later switched to Polish studies. She was suspended for opposing the ghetto benches, a policy that discriminated against Jews. In 1931, she married Mieczysław Sendler. From 1932 onward, she worked in the Mother and Child Welfare Section of the Civic Welfare Committee in Warsaw, which was associated with the Free Polish University. She then moved to the Social Welfare Department of the Management Board of the City of Warsaw. She sympathized with the Polish Socialist Party.



↑ Irena Krzyżanowska (standing in the second row, sixth from the left) and other students and teachers from the Helena Trzcińska Gymnasium in Piotrków Trybunalski, the mid-1920s.

📍 State Archive in Piotrków Trybunalski

→ Irena Sendler (standing second from the left) with the staff of the Mother and Child Aid Section in 1935. Sendler's duties included providing legal and material assistance to single mothers and their children.

📍 A. Mieszkowska, *The History of Irena Sendler*, Warsaw 2018, p. 70.



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Helping Others

After Germany invaded Poland, Sendler continued working at the Department of Welfare in Warsaw and became involved in underground activities within the Polish Socialist Party. She helped young people at risk of deportation to Germany for forced labor, fed Polish prisoners of war in hospitals, and provided money to university lecturers. Despite German restrictions, she also helped Jews. After the Warsaw ghetto was established, Sendler and her colleagues—including Jadwiga Deneka and Irena Schultz—conducted “sanitary inspections” to deliver food, clothing, medicine, and forged documents.



↑ In 1941, there were 85,000 Jewish children in the Warsaw ghetto. The youngest children were the first victim of starvation and disease.

📄 Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance (AIPN)



↑ Jadwiga Piotrowska was one of Irena Sendler’s closest collaborators. She ran an emergency shelter for Jewish children in her home before sending them to convent orphanages and other places. Piotrowska is pictured here with her daughter, Hanna.

📄 A. Bikont, *Sendler. In Hiding*, Wołowiec 2017, p. 159.



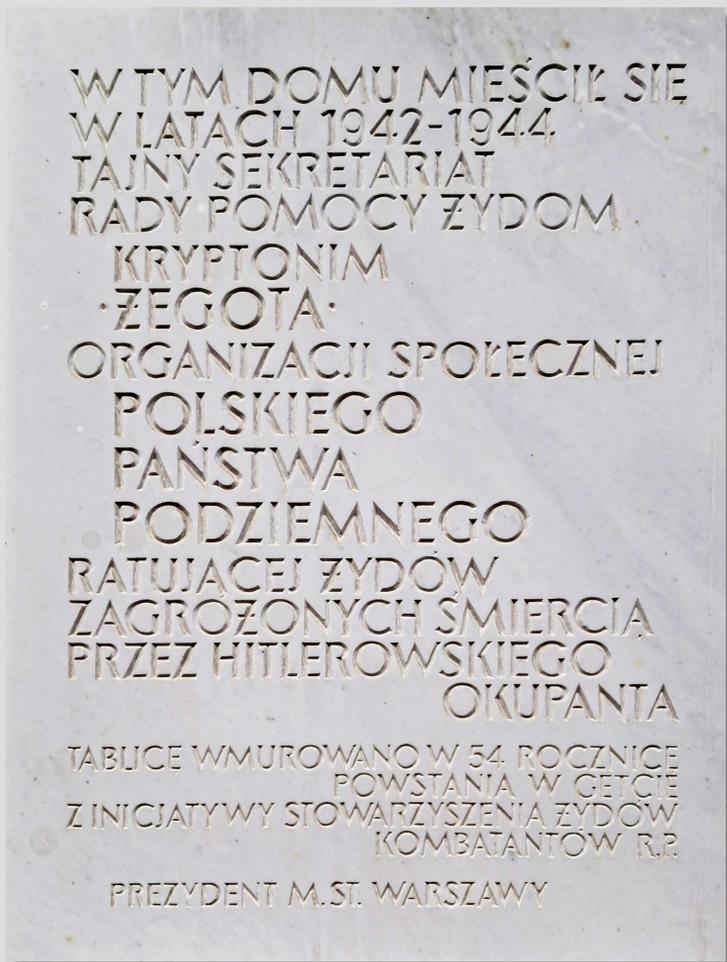
↑ The bridge over Chłodna Street connecting the two parts of the Warsaw Ghetto, the largest of those established by the Germans in the occupied territories, in which up to 450, 000 people were crammed, February 1942.

📄 National Digital Archive (NAC)



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Nurse Jolanta



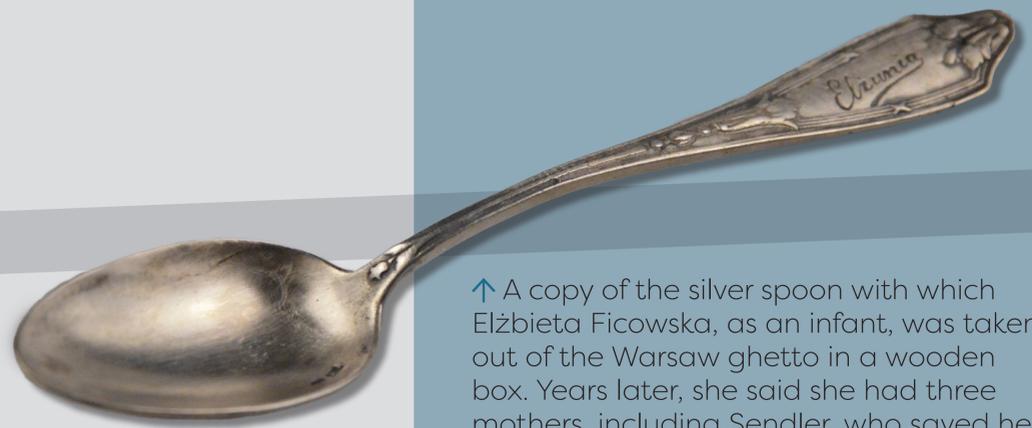
↑ A commemorative plaque at 24 Żurawia Street in Warsaw marks the location of the secret "Żegota" headquarters, which was established on December 4, 1942, to save Jews from extermination. That same year, the Germans began mass exterminations of Jews in camps in the General Government.

📷 Photo by Ilona Religa-Gola



← Pupils in the orphanage of the Franciscan Sisters, family archive of Katarzyna Meloch. Polish Righteous <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/>
📷 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

In 1943, Sendler became the head of the children's section of the Council for Aid to Jews, also known as "Żegota". Working under the pseudonym "Jolanta", she established a network dedicated to rescuing Jewish children. The network found them shelter, forged their identity documents, and provided financial support to those in hiding. The children were led to the "Aryan" side and directed to safe houses and individuals. For safety reasons, the children often had to move. To preserve the true identities of the survivors, Sendler kept records. She wrote the children's details on narrow blotting paper, which survived the war in two bottles buried in the garden of one of her colleagues.



↑ A copy of the silver spoon with which Elżbieta Ficowska, as an infant, was taken out of the Warsaw ghetto in a wooden box. Years later, she said she had three mothers, including Sendler, who saved her.

📷 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



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***Race, nationality, religion are
not important. Only what kind
of person someone is.
Good or bad.***

Irena Sendler, in: A. Mieszkowska,
The History of Irena Sendler,
Warsaw 2018, p. 323.

Salvation

*The sad days of November have come.
And I dream that you are with me.*

A secret message from Janina Krzyżanowska to her daughter, who was imprisoned in Pawiak prison in 1943. in: A. Mieszkowska, *Children of Irena Sendler*, Warsaw 2009, p. 344.

Sendlerowa
Irena
ur. 15 II 1910 Warszawa c. stawiaków i Janiny
arent. 18 X 1943 za działalność w Radzie Pomocy
Żydom.
13 XI 43 zabrana na Smocze Łąki z dużą grupą
wzrostu i szkieletu. Przy sprządkowaniu materiałów
zabrała jej jakis q-c i wypracowała na niej Smocze
i H. Myśliwiec, pośrednicząc jestes zolna Gedy
upomniata się o dokumenty kopięt jej i powie-
rać. Plac na Rozdrożu 3-22
ul. 28-19-43

dziat: ty parsywa baidytko, i di.
Było to wolumine spowodowane ze duse
prezidre mer "Zegota". Chociaż o to, że miała
dusz kartoleki wnytrawany dreci wydowalch,
kt. Zegota uaxielata powooy.
2 1966 r. odznaczona Medalliu Sprawiedliwosci
mer YAD VASHEM w Jeruzolimie jako jedna
z 12 odznaczonych.
Na parę dni przed 13 XI 1943 zabrała z eeli
Barbara Bretnek i Galina Pochom w rozstrzelania
Lm. 12 maja 2008 r. do Włomaców. Pochowane
wskazie na wamawskich Powozkach.
1910-2008* / "Mamien Łabik", "Irena Sendlerowa"
1910-2008* / "Kochanki". Białostyn Urzch do korb. i O. Popowicz.
nr 5 (2008) / maj 2008 r. /

↑ Registration sheet concerning Irena Sendler, a Pawiak prisoner.

📍 Pawiak Prison Museum - a branch of the Museum of Independence in Warsaw

In October 1943, the Gestapo arrested "Jolanta" in the wake of a denunciation and sent her to the Pawiak prison. She was saved from death by "Zegota", who bribed a Gestapo officer. She continued her aid campaign under the name Klara Dąbrowska. During the Warsaw Uprising, she worked at a sanitary post that was later transformed into a hospital, using the knowledge she had gained from a nursing course.



↑ Irena Sendler as a nurse, 1944.
📷 Public domain



↑ Priest Gabriel Boduen Educational Home at 75 Nowogrodzka Street in Warsaw, where Jewish children were given shelter during World War II, 1936.

📍 NAC

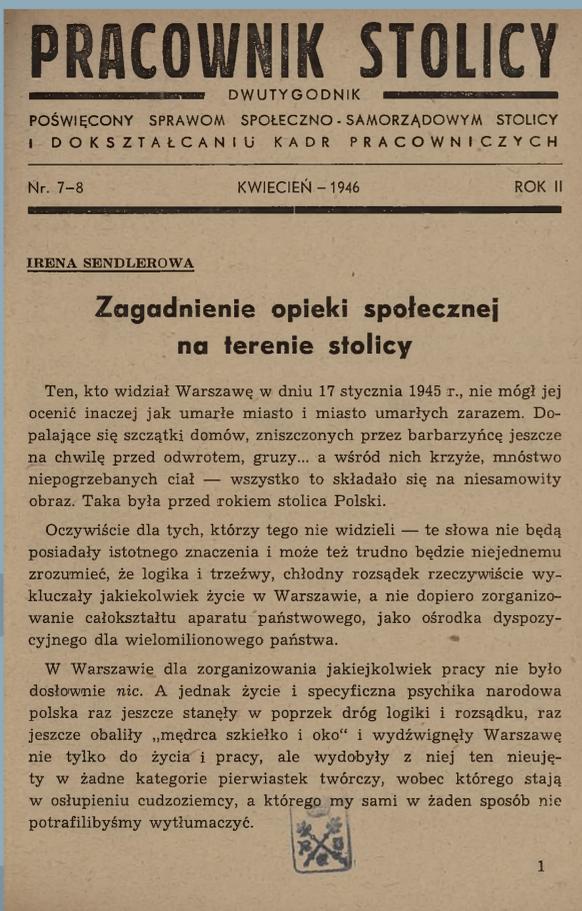


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Post-war Fortunes

Sendler remained silent about her wartime activities for 20 years. During this time, she led an active professional and social life. She worked for the Department of Social Welfare, medical schools, and the Ministry of Health, among other places.

In 1947, she remarried and had three children. That same year, she joined the Polish Workers' Party. Health issues and the political climate brought her involvement in the party to an end in 1968. After retiring, she worked in the school library until 1984.



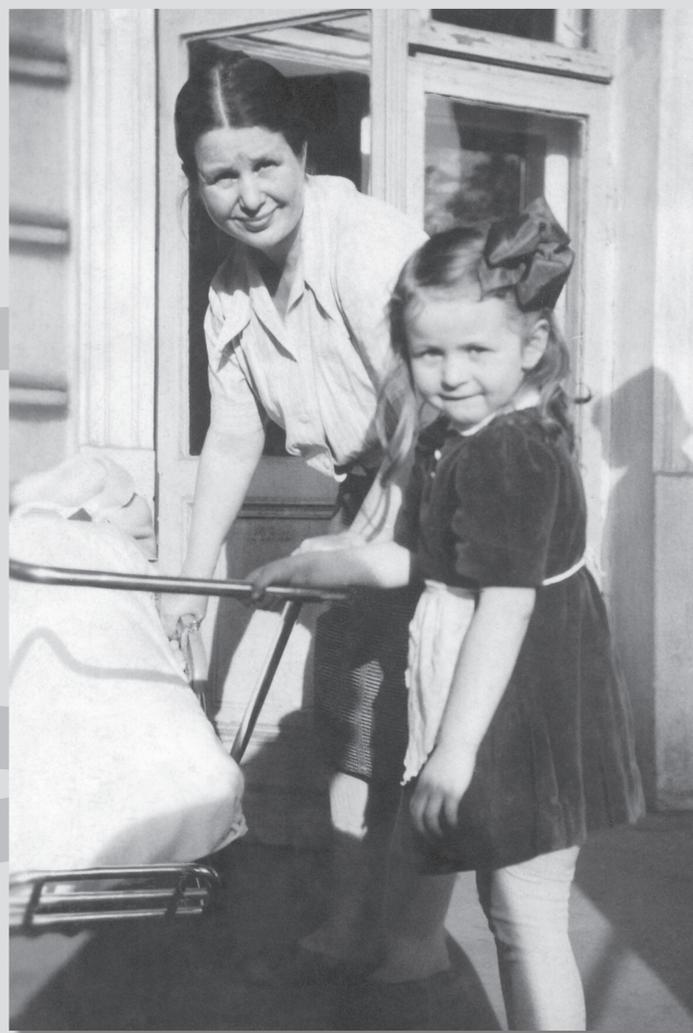
↑ An excerpt from a newspaper article by Irena Sendler. "Pracownik Stolicy", 1946, no. 7-8.

📖 Jagiellonian Library



↑ Irena with her second husband, Stefan Zgrzembki (born Adam Celnikier), and their daughter, Janina, in Radość in the summer of 1948. The marriage lasted ten years; in 1961, Irena married Mieczysław Sendler again.

📖 Archive of Janina Zgrzemska/East News



↑ Irena Sendler with her children, Janina and Adam. Daughter Janina was born in 1947, son Andrzej was born two years later and died after several days. The youngest, Adam, was born in 1951.

📖 Archive of Janina Zgrzemska/East News



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The Righteous



↑ Irena Sendler's "Righteous Among the Nations" medal, inv. no. MHZP-B388/1-2.

📍 POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



↑ Irena Sendler planted an olive tree in Jerusalem on 6 May 1983. During her visit, she also met Holocaust survivors and Israeli youth.

📍 Archive of Janina Zgrzemska/East News

Irena Sendler's actions during World War II were recognized in 1965 when the Yad Vashem Institute honored her with the title of Righteous Among the Nations. She maintained contact with the children and collaborators she had saved during the war. After many years of effort, she finally obtained permission from the authorities for the trip and participated in the ceremony of planting an olive tree in the Garden of the Righteous in Jerusalem in May 1983.



↑ Irena Sendler, photo from her passport records.

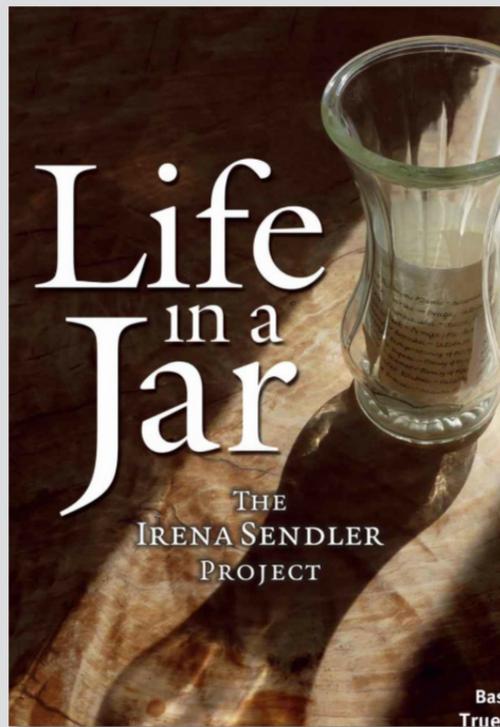
📍 AIPN



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Reminded Heroine

Sendler was awarded several honors and distinctions, including the Order of the White Eagle and the Jan Karski Award. In 1991, she was granted honorary citizenship of the State of Israel. She particularly valued the Children's Order of the Smile, which she received in 2007. Sendler was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize. She gained worldwide fame when four American schoolgirls, inspired by her wartime story, wrote the play "Life in a Jar" in 1999. The play was staged in the United States and Poland.



← The publication *Life in a Jar. The Irena Sendler Project* by Jack Mayer. The first visit of the young American girls to Poland in 2001 became a media event.

📄 <https://irenasendler.org/life-in-a-jar-book/>



↑ Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta for Irena Sendler.

📄 Polish Righteous <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/> / Photo by Mateusz Szczepaniak, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



↑ „Man in a Cage” performance staged during the gala awarding the medal to “To People Doing Good” working for the benefit of persons in need, in line with the idea of Irena Sendler. Warsaw, May 2019.

📄 Katarzyna Ludwiniak



← The Order of the Smile awarded to Irena Sendler. The laureate admitted that next to the letter from John Paul II, this decoration is the most beautiful thing she has ever received.

📄 Photo by Jacek Rajkowski / Polish Righteous <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/> POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



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I would also like to preserve the memory of many noble people who, risking their own lives, saved their Jewish brothers and sisters, and whose names no one remembers. (...) My dream is for the memory to become a warning to the world. May a similar drama of humanity never be repeated.

An excerpt from Irena Sendler's acknowledgement of the Jan Karski Award, which was received on behalf of the honoured at a ceremony on 23 October 2003 in Washington by Elżbieta Ficowska.

A. Mieszkowska, *Children of Irena Sendler*, Warsaw 2009, p. 32.

↑ Irena Sendler, Warsaw, 1 February 2007.
📷 Photo by Stach Antkowiak/REPORTER East News



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Memory

Irena Sendler passed away on 12 May 2008, aged 98. She was laid to rest in the family grave at Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw. Her life story has inspired journalists, directors and artists for many years. An increasing number of public spaces are named after her. More and more schools, streets, roundabouts have been named after her. There is even a flower - a red variety of the "Irena Sendler" tulip. She is the patron of two competitions: "Repairing the World", which honours teachers who promote sensitivity and respect for others and recognises the efforts of Poles to preserve heritage and revive Jewish culture in Poland. This competition is awarded by the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture.



↑ A doll portraying the figure of Irena Sendler, by Jolanta Niedziela-Chudzik, on display at the "Exhibition of Artistic Dolls. Mazovia in a skirt".
📷 Photo by Aneta Popiel-Machnicka, from the collection of the Museum of Dolls, Games and Toys

→ The mural in Rzeszów was created in 2018 by Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa.
📷 Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa



← A ceremony to unveil a memorial to Irena Sendler in Newark-on-Trent, UK was funded by the Institute of National Remembrance on June 26, 2021.
The latest Newark initiative is the Irena Sendler Young Person Award, announced in January 2025. The award recognizes exceptional citizenship among children and young people.
📷 Polish Cultural Institute London

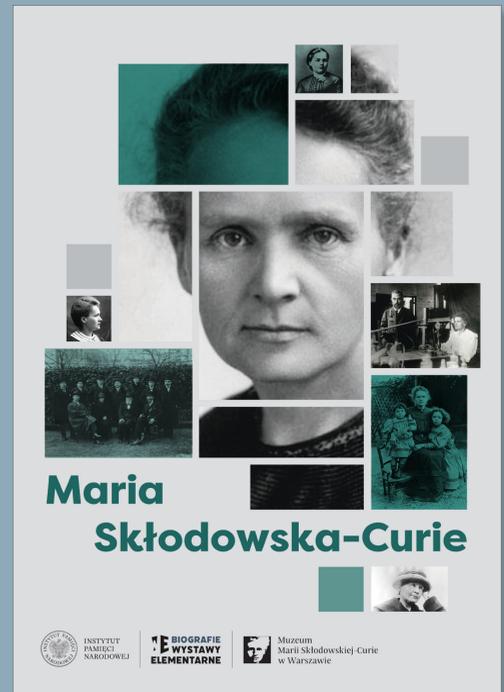
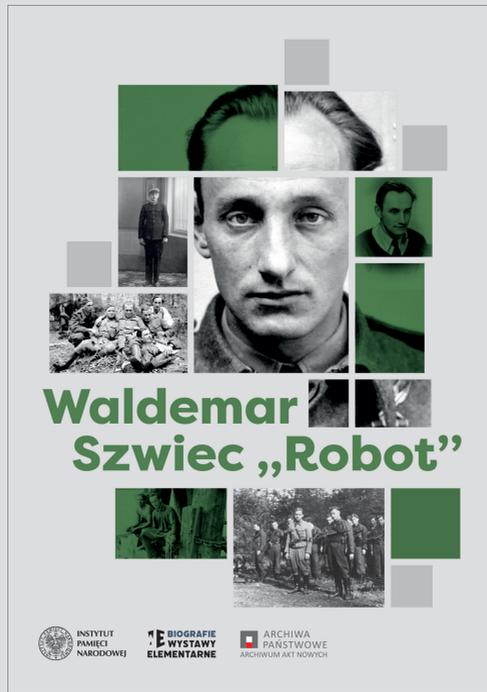
→ Tulips of the Irena Sendler variety blooming by the POLIN Museum.
📷 Photo by Maciej Jaźwiecki, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews



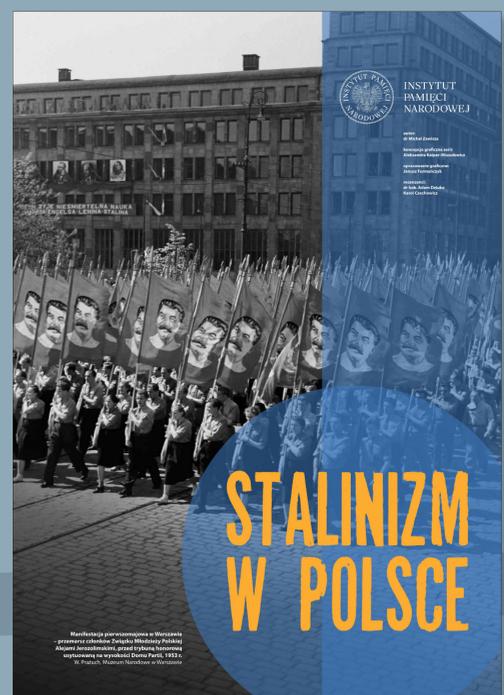
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Photographs featured in the title panel:

Irena Sendler, 1942 Public domain

Irena Sendler with her children Janina and Adam. Archive of Janina Zgrzemska/East News

Irena Sendler with Katarzyna Ludwiniak, founder of the first Polish school to bear the name of Irena Sendler

and organiser and originator of the medal "To the people doing good". Warsaw 2006. Katarzyna Ludwiniak

Irena Sendler as a nurse, 1944. Public domain

A puppet portraying Irena Sendler, by Jolanta Niedziela-Chudzik, presented at the exhibition "Exhibition

of Artistic Dolls. Mazovia in a Skirt" exhibition. Photo by Aneta Popiel-Machnicka, from the collection of the

Museum of Dolls' Houses, Games and Toys.

Author of the exhibition: Ilona Religa-Gola
Review: Magdalena Zapolska-Downar,
Karol Czechowicz
Graphic concept for the series: Paulina Żak
Composition: Janusz Furmańczyk



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