“The mother of the children of the Holocaust”
In 1999 her story became known by a group of students from an Institute of Kansas – USA, who did some research on the heroes of the Holocaust.

They found few references about her, but there was one which surprised them deeply:

she had saved the lives of 2500 children.

How was it possible that there was hardly any information about a person like that?
2003 Winner of Jan Karshi Award of Valor and Courage

“Jolanta”
Irena Sendlerowa (Sendler)
Born: 15 February 1910
Died: 12 May 2008
Irena died at age 98 in Warsaw, Poland
When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Irena was a nurse in the Department of Social Welfare of Warsaw, and was in charge of the communitarian dining rooms of the city.

In 1942, the Nazis established a ghetto in Warsaw, and Irena, horrified by its living conditions, joined the “Council for Aiding the Jews”.

One of the most relevant tasks she undertook was the fight against contagious diseases.

As the German invaders feared the outbreak of an epidemic of typhus, they accepted that the Polish woman took care of the place.

She would soon contact families, and offered to take the children away from the ghetto.
It was terrible: she had to convince parents to give away their children, and they asked her:

“Will you promise that my son will survive?”

Actually, Irena could not make such a promise: she did not know whether they could get out of the ghetto. The only thing she was sure was that the children would die if they stayed there.
Sometimes, when Irena and her companions visited the families to try to make them change their minds, they had all been taken to the extermination camps.
Whenever this happened, she fought harder to save the children.

She began to take them in ambulances as if they were victims of typhus, but soon afterwards she used everything available: wastebaskets, toolboxes, shipments of goods, potato bags, coffins. Almost anything became a way out from that hell.
She managed to recruit one person from each of the ten centers of the Department of Social Welfare.

With the help of these people, she developed centers of false documents, giving Jewish children temporary identity.
Irena never gave up thinking about and fighting for peace. So she insisted on keeping these children alive. She took notes of both their true and false names in small pieces of paper which she then put inside canning jars she buried under an apple tree in her neighbour’s garden.
No one could ever imagine she would save the past of 2500 children.

One day, the Nazis knew of her activities. On 20th October 1943, Irena was arrested by the Gestapo and taken to the Pawiak prison, where she was brutally tortured.
In a straw mattress in her cell she found a picture of Jesus Christ. She kept it until 1979 when she donated it to Pope John Paul II. Irena was the only one who knew not only the children’s names but also the families that had given shelter to the Jewish children.
She was sentenced to death but the sentence was never to be fulfilled: on the way to the place of execution the soldier blurted.

The resistance had bribed him because they did not want the secret location of the children to die with Irena.

The Nazis broke her feet and legs and tortured her, but no one managed to break her will.
Officially, she appeared on the list of those executed. From then on, she continued working under a false identity. At the end of the war, Irena herself dug out the canning jars.
She made use of the notes she had taken in order to take the children back to their families spread throughout Europe. However, most of them had lost their families in Nazi concentration camps. The children knew her only by her nickname: JOLANTA.
Irena lived at a Nursing Center in Warsaw, in a room where there was abundance of flowers and thanking cards from the whole world and some pictures of those surviving children as well as of their own children.

Her father, a doctor who died of typhoid when she was little, often told her to memorize the following:
“Help whoever is drowning, regardless of their religion or nationality. Helping someone everyday has to be a need from the heart.”

Irena lived for years in a wheelchair because of the injuries caused by torture.
She never considered herself as a heroine.
She never claimed any credit for her actions.
“I could have done more” – she always answers.
“This regret will follow me until my death!”
“Do not plant seeds of food.
Do plant seeds of goodness.
Try to make a circle of goodness: it will surround you and you will grow even more.”
Irena Sendler
“An exceptional and extraordinary woman”