



## **Forgotten Voices:**

**Stories of Hope, Courage and Resilience from the Holocaust and WWII**

**From Ireland, Spain, Poland and Germany**

**Supported by Europe for Citizens**



Co-funded by the  
Europe for Citizens Programme  
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This book is created as part of the European transnational project *Forgotten Voices: Stories of Hope, Courage and Resilience from the Holocaust and WWII* supported by Europe for Citizens.

The project uses creative processes of theatre, film, online digital technologies and social media campaigns to remember forgotten stories of humanity, courage and resilience from the Holocaust and World War II, linking those stories to solidarity today and the key role the EU plays in promoting democracy, equality and peace for all.

The project is implemented by the following European partner organisations:

Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality, Ireland

IFESCOOP, Valencia, Spain

University of Hannover, Germany

Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Lodzi, Poland

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# **Forgotten Voices: Stories of Hope, Courage and Resilience from the Holocaust and WWII – Project Description**

Forgotten Voices of the Holocaust uses creative processes of theatre, film, online digital technologies and social media campaigns to remember forgotten stories of humanity, courage and resilience from the Holocaust and World War II, linking those stories to solidarity today alongside the key role the EU plays in promoting democracy, equality and peace for all.

The project uses a diversity of forgotten or hidden stories to explore voices of resistance from ordinary people who stood up against fascism and a hatred of others. Time and time again, acts of kindness, courage and resilience were carried out by ordinary people, both within the camps and in wider society struggling under totalitarian regimes, as people stood up against fascism to protect the rights of others. The project highlights how people from all backgrounds risked, and in some cases, sacrificed their lives for complete strangers, demonstrating a belief in humanity and a determination to fight for a future where all people would be treated equal.

Four European partners from Ireland, Spain, Poland and Germany came together and selected 20 stories of 'hope, courage and resilience' in a time of war, five from each partner country. The stories informed the creation of a digital book, theatre monologue and short film which were then shown to the public and used to bring people together to promote a remembrance of European history. The stories explore what happens when democracy is denied and how this impacts on ordinary people from the genocide of the Jewish and Roma communities to the imprisonment and deaths of political activists, people with disabilities, Spanish Refugees, Polish civilians and German anti-Fascist resisters. By shining a light on dark events of the past, the project uses stories of 'hope, courage and resilience' to highlight the role of the EU today to promote democracy, equality and peace for all. By telling the stories of ordinary people who stood up against fascism and supported democracy and freedom, the project promotes a remembrance of a shared European history and raises awareness of the shared values that Europe stands for in relation to promoting peace, democracy and the wellbeing of all its people equally.

The project culminated in an international creative arts event held during the 2021 Dublin Arts and Human Rights festival where participants took part in interactive theatre performances, film screenings, panel discussions and debates, highlighting stories of a diverse range of groups who stood up against fascism and hatred of others. Participants then engaged in debate on how to recognise the growth of fascism in society and debate on contemporary democratic achievements in Europe and how European solidarity plays a key role in promoting democracy, equality and peace for all people today. A key aim is to encourage participants to recognise the importance of European solidarity and the way in which the EU promotes right and values for all people equally and to engage citizens in actions to prevent the growth of intolerance and to promote diversity and inclusion.

The project is supported by Europe for Citizens and the partners are Smashing Times, Dublin, Ireland (lead partner); Ifescoop, Valencia, Spain; University of Hannover, Germany; and Akademia Humanistyczno-Ekonomiczna w Lodzi, Poland.

# Irish Stories

**Margaret Kearney Taylor, 1924-1982**

**Ettie Steinberg, 1914-1942**

**Mary Elmes, 1908-2002**

**Robert Armstrong, Date Unknown-1944**

**Anne Duchene, 1869-Date Unknown**

## **Margaret Kearney Taylor, 1924-1982**



**Margaret Kearney Taylor**

Margaret Kearney Taylor was born in the United Kingdom to an Irish family. She lived in Paris and later moved to Madrid where she was involved in sheltering people who had fled France during WW2 including Jewish people. Margaret, or Margarita as everyone called her, ran an elegant tearoom called The Embassy on Madrid's Paseo de la Castellana for more than fifty years. What almost nobody knew was that she also helped orchestrate the escape of Allied servicemen and Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi terror during World War II.

The following information is taken from the introduction to the RTÉ Radio one documentary titled *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy* which tells her story.

A few steps from the door of her tearoom – which is still open today and is frequented by Hollywood stars like Harrison Ford and Pierce Brosnan – stood the entrance to the German Embassy, which operated as headquarters for a thousand German spies in the city. Margarita operated under the noses of the Nazis. Her clientele included General Franco's brother-in-law Ramón Serrano Suñer, the Spanish dictatorship's most ardent Nazi sympathizer and Spain's wartime Minister of Foreign Affairs. Margarita harboured escapees in her apartment above the tearoom until their forged papers were ready and they were able to travel on. In a plan masterminded by MI6, which had the imprimatur of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Margarita helped to move them to Portugal and freedom.

Margarita displayed enormous courage. When she died in Madrid in 1982, no one knew – beyond a few other people still alive who were involved in the rescue operation – about the heroic role she played during the war. The RTÉ Radio One documentary *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy*, tells her story

and includes interviews with wartime friends who knew Margarita, as well as testimony from a Jewish survivor who was moved through Madrid during the Second World War.

Margaret Kearney Taylor was good at keeping secrets. While living in Spain she had kept details of her early life secret from many of her friends. She was born as Margaret Mary Taylor and her mother's name was Ellen Taylor. Margaret Mary was born in a workhouse in Christchurch, southern England to a single parent. Her mother was Irish and she too was born in a workhouse in Kanturk, County Cork in Ireland in 1871. It is believed that Margaret's father was John Kearney a Roman Catholic while her mother Ellen was a Protestant. Although born into a background of poverty Margaret would go on to rise to a high position where she mixed with the elite at the highest level of society.

Margaret travelled to France and went on herself to become a single parent giving birth to a daughter. According to *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy* it was in France that Margarita took a paternity case against her daughter's father, a Spanish diplomat with a 'far higher social status than her' and she won the right for her daughter to use her father's name. In 1931 Margarita moved to Spain from Paris with her daughter and possibly inspired by the boulevard cafes of Paris, she set up a bar, tearooms and shop known as The Embassy Tearooms situated on the Paseo de la Castellana, a large avenue in Madrid.

The tearooms were run successfully by Margarita from 1931 to 1936. The day before civil war in Spain began, Margarita and her daughter who was then aged 11, both left Spain through the port of Santander and travelled to England. When the Spanish Civil War ended they both returned to Spain in April 1939 and Margarita re-opened the Embassy Tearooms. Margaret was a successful entrepreneur, and the Embassy soon became one of the most successful tearooms of its time. As a tearoom it was a 'haven of civility where time stopped still'<sup>1</sup> and a shop selling home-made cakes. The tearoom was described as theatrical, selling tea, home-made cakes and later in the evening, cocktails, attracting the public, the aristocracy of Spain and embassy officials working with the numerous embassies located close by. The German Embassy for example was in close proximity and had over 1,000 agents based there.

The aristocracy were associated with the dictator Francisco Franco Bahamonde, a Spanish general and politician who ruled over Spain as dictator under the title Caudillo from 1939, after the Nationalist victory in the Spanish Civil War, until his death in 1975. The tearooms were situated on the Paseo de Castellana which was near a number of embassies, hotels and restaurants frequented by Nazi officials as well as members of the aristocracy of Spain, who became Margarita's main clientele.

However, the tearooms also secretly attracted a different type of clientele. With the spread of the Nazi dictatorship across Europe, secret escape lines or routes were set up to assist Jewish people, Allied soldiers and airmen and other people escaping the Nazis to get out of Europe. During the Spanish Civil War Franco received aid from the German and Italian fascists and when WWII began, he declared neutrality as Spain's official wartime policy while continuing to support Nazi Germany. However as long as Franco felt there was no serious threat from the British, he allowed them to have some presence in Madrid which meant that the British Secret Service had a strong presence there.

Margaret Kearney Taylor continued to entertain the elite of society while 'secretly helping some of the 30,000 people evacuated through Spain during the war'<sup>2</sup>. A number of escape routes were set up under the British secret service in Madrid and ran through the city, particularly routes for escaping Allied soldiers. These escape routes involved links between the British Secret Service, the French

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<sup>1</sup> *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy*, Radio Documentary produced by Richard Fitzpatrick and Tim Desmond, 2016  
<http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/2016/0624/797910-tearoom-taylor-soldier-spy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nohemingway.com/blog/margaret-kearney-taylor>

Marquis, officials working in the British embassy in Madrid and local people both in France and Spain. Margarita provided a 'safe house', with food, shelter and essential cover for thousands of those escaping through Madrid. The refugees would arrive at the restaurant as if visiting the tearooms and once inside they would visit the 'restrooms' and were then spirited away upstairs. Under the cover of darkness, they would then be picked up and continued on their journey to freedom.

During her time running the tearoom, Margarita became friends with the future queen mother of Spain, and a coterie of Nazi-sympathizing fascists, such as Ramón Serrano Suñer, Franco's brother-in-law and a devotee of Heinrich Himmler.<sup>3</sup> It is possible that because of the close connections between Margarita and Ramón Serrano Suñer, her tearooms were not as closely scrutinized by the authorities enabling Margarita to continue her resistance work undetected. Had she been caught she would have faced torture, imprisonment and possible death.

Very few people knew about Margarita's involvement in the escape lines and her story remained unknown until a book came out in 2004. According to the documentary, friends were shocked to discover she had smuggled refugees out of war-torn Europe or that she was associated with the British Secret Service. In the documentary Margarita is described as discreet and as 'so elegant, so calm, so unflappable and so gentle, she knew how to deal with people'. According to Ciaran McCabe, historian at the National University of Ireland Galway, in an interview in the *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy* documentary, 'It is remarkable that she did rise to this fairly substantial, influential position' running the Embassy Tearooms, playing a key role in rescuing thousands of refugees from the Nazi regime. The fact that a single parent whose mother was also a single parent is an extraordinary story of courage and bravery particularly as they lived in a time where social prejudice, stigma and discrimination against women who gave birth outside of marriage was pervasive. Despite the difficulties in life that she experienced Margarita carved out her own successful path and showed a remarkable commitment to protecting the rights of others.

Margaret died on 2 December 1982 and is buried in the British cemetery in Madrid. She was a clever, brave and compassionate woman who played a key role in saving thousands of lives and her story deserves to be remembered - 'her greatest legacy was that she managed to use her position in Spanish society to help so many Allied service and Jewish refugees . . . escape to freedom'<sup>4</sup>.

The RTE Radio One documentary *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy*, tells her story and includes interviews with wartime friends who knew Margarita, as well as testimony from a Jewish survivor who was spirited through Madrid during the Second World War.

<http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/2016/0624/797910-tearoom-taylor-soldier-spy/>

## River of Thorns

*River of Thorns* a new play, written by Féilim James, directed by Eric Weitz, and produced by Mary Moynihan and Freda Manweiler tells the story of Margaret Kearney Taylor, an Irishwoman who escaped extreme poverty to mix with the elite of Spanish society, running the prestigious Embassy tearoom in Madrid. Yet when the Second World War strikes, and word spreads of Nazi death camps, Margaret is compelled to act, to risk it all for the sake of humanity despite living in a fascist state.

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<sup>3</sup>Irish Slice of Madrid <https://irishsliceofmadrid.com/2019/01/23/aristocrat-tea-drinker-jew-smuggler-the-life-of-margaret-kearney-taylor/>

<sup>4</sup> *Tearoom, Taylor, Saviour, Spy*, Radio Documentary produced by Richard Fitzpatrick and Tim Desmond, 2016 <http://www.rte.ie/radio1/doconone/2016/0624/797910-tearoom-taylor-soldier-spy/>

Charting her journey from an austere English workhouse to the glamour of Spanish high life, to secret wartime saviour, this dramatic one-woman monologue is both riveting and moving, exploring what it means to be human in a time of massive injustice.

This unique story premiered at the Dublin Arts and Human Rights Festival 2021, at the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.



## Ettie Steinberg, 1914-1942



<https://www.thesun.ie/uncategorized/3682268/tragic-research-reveals-three-previously-unknown-irish-victims-of-hitlers-genocide/>

Ettie Steinberg was an Irish Jewish woman murdered in Auschwitz Concentration and Extermination camp built and operated by the Nazis in occupied Poland during World War II. Ettie is said to have been born in Czechoslovakia and moved to Dublin when she was a young girl. She was reared in 28 Raymond Terrace, South Circular Road, Dublin and was one of seven children. Ettie attended St Catherine's School in Donore Avenue, Dublin.

In 1937, Ettie married Vogtjeck Gluck in the Greenville Hall Synagogue on the South Circular Road. Shortly afterwards, the couple moved to Antwerp, Belgium to be near Vogtjeck's family business. Because of the rise of Nazism and the persecution of Jewish people, the family were forced to flee Belgium in 1939 and they sought refuge in France. It was in Paris that their son Leon was born in 1939.<sup>5</sup>

The family moved from Paris to the South of France to avoid arrest eventually settling in Toulouse. At this time, the Vichy government – Nazi Germany's collaborator in southern France were rounding-up Jews within the province, forcing the Gluck family into hiding, but Ettie, Vogtjeck and their two-year old son Leon were soon found.

The Glucks were caught in a roundup of Jewish people and were deported from Drancy transit camp outside of Paris on September 2, 1942, at 8.55am and arrived by train in Auschwitz on September 4, 1942. They were immediately put to death in the gas chambers, minutes after they arrived at the notorious death camp.

On the way to the death camp Ettie threw a postcard from the train that said 'Uncle Lechem, we did not find, but we found Uncle Tisha B'Av'<sup>6</sup>. When decoded, it is believed to mean that instead of finding good fortune, the young family had found destruction. Lechem is the Hebrew word for bread and Tisha B'Av is a Jewish fast day commemorating the destruction of the temple. The message indicates that Ettie understood the fate that awaited her family at Auschwitz.

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<sup>5</sup> D. Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth Century Ireland: Refugees, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust*, Ireland: Cork University Press, p. 166

## **At Summer's End**

At Summer's End by Féilim James, directed by Eric Weitz, produced by Mary Moynihan and Freda Manweiler, is a dramatic monologue told from the perspective of a Jewish-Irish citizen murdered in the Holocaust. Her name was Ettie Steinberg. We learn how at a young age her family left Eastern Europe for Dublin, before love led her away to the European mainland. This by turns tender and harrowing portrait of love, loss, and the brutality of war tells one ordinary woman's extraordinary, and often forgotten, story.

## Mary Elmes, 1908-2002



**Mary Elmes. Photo Courtesy of AFSC Archives.**

By Mary Moynihan, Artistic Director, Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality

Mary Elmes (1908-2002), a Cork woman who passed away in 2002, was the first Irish person honoured as 'Righteous Among Nations' for her work saving Jewish children from the Nazi gas chambers during World War II. The award was bestowed on Mary Elmes in 2015 by Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

One of the children saved by Mary Elmes was Ronald Friend, now Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Stony Brook University, New York. At the time he was a two-year-old child whose father would not survive but whose five-year-old brother Michael was also rescued by Ms Elmes. Ronald Friend described the award as 'a long overdue recognition of Mary Elmes' courageous and selfless actions in rescuing me and many other children when convoys were regularly departing to the death camps.'<sup>7</sup>

Mary Elmes was born on 5 May 1908 in Cork as Marie Elisabeth Jean Elmes. Her family 'had a family business in Winthrop Street, J Waters and Sons, Dispensing Chemists, her father being the pharmacist. She was educated at Rochelle School, Cork and then went to Trinity College Dublin. She graduated from Trinity College in 1932 receiving a first-class degree in Modern Languages (French and Spanish).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/cork-woman-receives-first-irish-honour-for-saving-jewish-victims-of-the-holocaust-1.1393486>

According to Clodagh Finn in *A Time to Risk All*, Mary:

‘was awarded a gold medal and left with glowing references, which would help to secure a scholarship to study international relations at the London School of Economics. In a letter to the LSE dated 8 November 1932 her former professor of Romance languages at Trinity, T. B. Rudmose-Brown, wrote: Miss Marie Elmes is a young lady of the highest character and of unusual intelligence. I have taught her for four years and have found her work exceptionally careful, exact and thoughtful.’<sup>8</sup>

Mary then studied as a scholarship student at the London School of Economics where she was awarded the LSE Scholarship in International Studies “which led to a summer school in Geneva in 1936”<sup>9</sup>.

The Spanish Civil war had begun in July 1936. In March 1937, Mary contacted the Geneva office of the Save the Children organisation as she wanted to volunteer in Spain. Mary had already arranged a travel permit to go to Spain and it was recommended that she join the London University Ambulance Unit led by Sir George Young, a retired British diplomat and ‘Aristocrat’. Sir George Young had set up the ambulance unit in collaboration with British and American Quaker organisations to provide medical assistance and humanitarian aid to citizens fleeing from the Fascists.

According to an article by Bernard Wilson on the life of Mary Elmes ‘Mary travelled from Gibraltar to Almeria by a British warship, probably in the company of Sir George himself who had just arrived by ship. A letter to Edith Pye written five days later by Violetta Thurston, Sir George’s leader of the Ambulance Unit says “later, a worker came from Gibraltar, Miss Elmes, and I gave the feeding station to her”<sup>10</sup>.

In February Nationalist led forces under the leadership of General Queipo de Llano, the ‘Butcher of Andalucia’, and made up of up to 25,000 combined Spanish, German, Italian and Moorish troops, had entered the town of Malaga and proceeded to carry out a reign of terror as they took over the city.

Mary was in Almería, assisting at a feeding station set up to help cope with the stream of refugees, as over 80,000 civilians fled from the city of Malaga which had fallen to the Fascists. Whole families fled, taking the coast road to Almeria over two hundred kilometres away. As they fled in desperation they were bombed from the sea and sky by the Fascists and up to 5,000 people were slaughtered with machine gun fire and explosives. Thousands of civilians were murdered. A further 20,000 had given up and turned back, and more than 5,000 had died along the way either shot, drowned or starved.<sup>11</sup> This massacre is known as ‘The Caravan of the Dead’.

Mary worked at hospitals in Almería and Murcia before ‘before moving on to Alicante where she took charge of the hospital’. <sup>12</sup> During this time Mary received news that her father had died but she refused to leave the hospital where she was working until a replacement could be found. “No replacement was forthcoming and so Mary stayed on”<sup>13</sup>. The bombing in Alicante had become unbearable for the children, numbering twenty-three, so Mary found a refuge in the mountains to which she moved her charges, to a ‘deserted villa in the mountains at Polop, a small town some ten miles inland from the

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<sup>8</sup> *A Time to Risk All* by Clodagh Finn, Gill Books

<sup>9</sup> Article by Bernard Wilson *Mary Elmes (1908-2002) The first Irish ‘Righteous’*

<sup>10</sup> FSC Letter. Dated 17.3.37

<sup>11</sup> *Aristocrats, Adventurers and Ambulances*. Linda Palfreeman ISBN 1845 196090 p.129

<sup>12</sup> Article by Bernard Wilson *Mary Elmes (1908-2002) The first Irish ‘Righteous’*

<sup>13</sup> Article by Bernard Wilson *Mary Elmes (1908-2002) The first Irish ‘Righteous’*

little fishing village of Benidorm'<sup>14</sup>. 'Despite her mother's pleas that she should return home, she carried on with her work until the war came to an end with the victory of General Franco.'<sup>15</sup>

The following is from a letter written by Mary Elmes to a friend sixty years after her time in Spain and here she remembers an incident that happened in Polop:

Dear Rose, Have I spoken to you of Palmira? She was a beautiful little girl of 21 months, wounded in a bombardment of the market in Alicante in 1938. Her mother was holding her in her arms at the time of this happening. In the confusion which followed, she lost her daughter. The child was very severely wounded in the left leg, of which the foot was only held on by a few strands of flesh. The surgeon who was responsible for her wanted to amputate the foot. Fortunately, the doctor of our little hospital who was a paediatrician, opposed this and brought her to our place where she lay on a plank for three months, at the end of which she was able to get up and eventually to walk normally. It was a triumph for Doctor Blanc and the English nurses, who should be admired for their devotion and patience. Being so young, she was not able to explain who she was and her family didn't find her for many days – what tears and what joy when finally her father found her! <sup>16</sup>

Mary stayed in Spain until the entire country fell to Franco. In May of 1939 Mary and other relief workers, with the support of the Quaker organization the AFSC (American Friends Service Committee), left Spain and were driven over the border into France bringing with them all the records of their work in Spain.<sup>17</sup> Mary joined thousands of Spanish men, women and children fleeing from the tyranny of Franco's fascist regime, over the Pyrenees into France. At one point Mary returned to Ireland to visit her mother. In July 1939 Mary went for an interview in Paris with the International Committee for Child Refugees and was appointed to do cultural work in the camps in France alongside her friend Dorothy Morris. In a letter dated July 1939, Mary wrote:

'I think that the work will be most interesting and I hope that the years that I spent at college in the study of Spanish literature will prove of something more than the purely personal pleasure that they have been so far and be useful now in the choosing of books for the libraries that it is proposed to start for the men.....Thank you very much in getting me back into this work again. I cannot tell you how glad I am to have the prospect of doing something for my Spanish friends again.'<sup>18</sup>

According to Bernard Wilson:

"in the first two weeks of February 1939, half a million Spanish men, women and children had struggled into France, bombed and machine-gunned by planes, while enduring the hardships of the terrain and the winter weather. The French response was to section off areas of the beaches with barbed wire, and to enclose the refugees between the wire and the sea. They had to scoop depressions in the sand for shelter. There were no toilets, they had to use the sea in full view of everyone. Drinking water was pumped up from underground but rapidly became polluted, bread was tossed over the wire leaving the refugees to fight for food. The French authorities hoped that their unwelcome guests would return to Spain – some did, but

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<sup>14</sup> FSC Letter dated 18.1.38 and report dated Aug 2<sup>nd</sup> 1938 from Dorothy Litten

<sup>15</sup> Article by Bernard Wilson *Mary Elmes (1908-2002) The first Irish 'Righteous'*

<sup>16</sup> Letter dated 1<sup>st</sup> Dec 1998. In Danjou family collection. From Article on Mary Elmes (1908-2002) the first Irish "Righteous" by Bernard Wilson

<sup>17</sup> <https://toulousequakers.wordpress.com/2012/04/28/mary-elmes-1908-2002/>

<sup>18</sup> FSC Letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> July.1939

most refused knowing what fate might await them there. Pablo Casals, himself a refugee, was horrified by what he saw when he visited the camp of Argeles-sur-Mer. The scenes I witnessed might have been from Dante's 'Inferno'. Tens of thousands of men and women and children were herded together like animals, penned in by barbed wire, housed – if one can call it that – in tents and crumbling shacks. There were no sanitation facilities or provisions for medical care.....Scores had perished from exposure, hunger and disease. At the time of my arrival the hospitals at Perpignan still overflowed with the sick and dying.”<sup>19</sup> . . .

By the time Mary arrived in France, things were somewhat more organised, there were now many more camps along the coast and some attempt at shelter and provisions had been made. There was still a pressing need for clothing and food, and conditions were still woefully inadequate. She saw however, that if these camps were to remain for any length of time, there was a need for schooling, for reading matter suitable for both children and adults, for the means to occupy their time and provide some kind of purpose to their existence. In July 1939 she was appointed by the Quaker organization, the International Commission of the American Friends Service Council, to provide relief efforts and cultural activities for refugees from the Spanish Civil War now living in internment camps in France, organizing food supplies and providing educational books for children. She saw the need for books in Spanish, and shortly after her appointment was in Paris buying books for the libraries she was soon to open. She became a familiar figure in the camps, thousands knew her as “Miss Mary” and turned to her for solutions to their problems.”

Mary continued her refugee relief work with the Quakers in France, although not a Quaker herself, providing relief efforts for refugees from the Spanish Civil War now interned in France. In 1940 France fell to German occupation and thousands of Jewish people were arrested and held with Spanish refugees in a former army camp called Rivesaltes, near Perpignan. When weekly deportations of Jewish people began taking adults and children from Rivesaltes to concentration camps in Germany and Poland, including Auschwitz where death from the gas chambers or from starvation awaited them, Mary Elmes and the Quakers started a campaign to save as many children as possible, despite the risk to their own lives. Elmes even hid children in her car and drove them high into the Pyrenees. It will probably never be known how many children and adults she saved.

According to Bernard Wilson:

“now everyone was short of food. Mary and her colleagues in Perpignan opened canteens, provided meals in schools throughout the region, while still continuing the work in the camps. With the fall of France, British workers had to leave, but Mary as an Irish neutral stayed on. She continued her work in the camps. She was now in charge of the AFSC office in Perpignan and her work included the various camps for Spanish refugees on the coast, of which Argeles was the largest, and canteens in schools throughout the region, extending as far as Montpellier and Carcassonne. There was scarcely a town or village in the whole of that huge area that did not receive help in some form or another from the AFSC office in Perpignan”.

In January 1941 a former army camp called Rivesaltes, near Perpignan, was set up as a permanent internment camp firstly housing the Spanish refugees and then in 1942 it was used to intern Jewish people who were being rounded up. All Jewish people rounded up in the unoccupied zone of France were interned in Rivesaltes internment camp. The Quakers and other aid organisations established canteens and workshops there however the camp was overrun with lice and rats and those there had little protection from the harsh winters and scorching summers, the place was filthy with little food

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<sup>19</sup> Joys and Sorrows. Casals. p233. Simon and Schuster 1974 ISBN 671-21774-7



and minimum clothing. Many children died at the camp. As the war progressed, there were weekly deportations of Jewish people, both adults and children, from Rivesaltes in railway wagons, taking them to concentration camps in Germany and Poland including Auschwitz where death from the gas chambers or from starvation awaited them.

It is estimated that up to nine trains left the Rivesalte camp filled with Jewish people. According to Clodagh Finn, 'In a two-month period in the autumn of that year some 2,289 Jewish adults and 174 children, some as young as two, were herded onto cattle wagons at Rivesaltes and taken to Drancy transit camp outside Paris and then on to Auschwitz. An estimated 427 children were saved from the convoys, thanks to the work of Mary Elmes and other women working at the camp'<sup>20</sup>.

Despite the danger to their own lives, Elmes and the Quakers started a campaign to save as many children as possible. If their parents agreed to it, Jewish children in the camp under the age of 16 could be taken out of and sent to designated places. For example, Elmes made contact with, and helped transport young refugees to 'children's colonies and hotels...a ruse to get them to safety since many simply slipped over the border.'<sup>21</sup> Elmes even hid children in the boot of her car and drove them high into the Pyrenees. It will probably never be known how many children she saved.

The aim was to move as many Jewish children as possible out of the actual camps into other places where they would be safe because, during this time, 'if Jewish children under the age of 16 were housed separate from their parents outside the refugee camps, they often weren't searched out particularly if the French officials knew they could already meet their quota for scheduled deportations of Jews.'<sup>22</sup>

In 1942 Mary made contact with an American woman called Lois Mary Guden who had served in France in World War II with the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) providing World War II relief efforts and helping refugee children. Lois Mary Guden was also one of only a handful of Americans awarded the 'Righteous Among the Nations' award. At the time that Mary Elmes contacted her, Lois was working in Canet-Plage at Villa St Christophe, a 20-room convalescent home located on the Mediterranean beach. This home held sixty children, many of them Spanish refugees, and was located about 12 miles from the Rivesaltes Refugee Camp. Mary contacted Lois as she was looking for safe places for children in the refugee camp who were in danger of being deported to concentration camps where their lives would be at risk. Lois wrote in her diary on 9 August 1942 that 'Mary informed me about the return of Polish and German Jews to Poland where death by starvation awaits them'<sup>23</sup>. Lois wrote in her diary on 10 August 1942 'when I got back to colony found a little boy crying – asking for his barrack and for the Secours Suisse (Swiss Aid to Children, organization assisting at the refugee camp); Miss Elmes had brought us three Jewish boys in an attempt to save them when their parents leave; had quite some time quieting the poor little fellow; but finally his sobs died down'<sup>24</sup>.

In January 1943 Elmes was arrested on suspicion of helping Jews escape. She was never charged, but she was first held in Toulouse and then held for six months in Fresnes Prison near Paris. After her release, she continued her activities as before. According to Bernard Wilson she would later dismiss her imprisonment with the words "oh we all had to suffer some inconveniences in those days!"<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> <sup>20</sup> A Time to Risk All by Clodagh Finn, Gill Books

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.irishcentral.com/news/irish-woman-saved-jewish-brothers-and-countless-children-from-auschwitz-in-world-war-ii-138562919-237429511.html>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.goshen.edu/news/2013/11/08/letters-from-lois/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.goshen.edu/news/2013/11/08/letters-from-lois/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.goshen.edu/news/2013/11/08/letters-from-lois/>

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Howard Wriggins "Picking up the Pieces from Portugal to Palestine" University Press of America ISBN 0 761827978

Mary refused to accept the salary which had accrued while she was in prison, and likewise the Legion d'Honneur which the French government wanted to bestow on her and even though not being a Quaker 'she led the Quaker work in Perpignan throughout the war.'<sup>26</sup>

After the war ended, Mary Elmes married Roger Danjou, a French man from Normandy and they settled in France and had two children, Patrick and Caroline Danjue. Mary made frequent trips to Cork before her death on 9 March 2002 at the age of 92. Mary never sought special recognition for all the help she gave and regularly turned down recognition for the work she had done saving the lives of others.

### **Courageous**

Mary was an extraordinary woman and by all accounts very brave, courageous and selfless in her efforts to help others. Because of her activities assisting those incarcerated in the camps and rescuing Jewish children. According to Mary's family, she saved not only children but also adults and people of all different persuasions. It is not known how many lives Mary Elmes saved however there is a ripple effect in terms of three generations of people who would not be alive today if it wasn't for the work of this extraordinary woman. There are many accounts detailing her work in rescuing children and this has been acknowledged by the fact that she received the award of 'Righteous Amongst Nations' for her work in saving Jewish lives.

Smashing Times have produced a play inspired by the life story of women from WWII including Mary Elmes. During the nationwide tour of *The Woman is Present: Women's Stories of WWII* Smashing Times were delighted to receive a visit from Ronald Friend to a performance at the Mermaid Arts Centre in Bray. Ronald had come over from the United States to attend the launch of Clodagh Finn's book *A Time to Risk All* and he and Clodagh then attended the performance. Professor Ronald Friend was one of the children who had been saved by Mary Elmes. At the end of the performance Ronald was invited up on stage to speak as part of a post-show panel discussion. It was like watching history become present as he walked from the auditorium up onto the stage and the entire audience fell silent in awe of what was happening. It was a moving experience to hear Ronald talk about his memories of World War II and of Mary Elmes. Mary Elmes had rescued Ronald and his older brother Michael from a notorious detention camp in 1942, saving both their lives.

During WWII Ronald, along with his Jewish family, his mother, father and older brother Michael tried to flee the Nazis by crossing over the border from France into Switzerland.

'Ronald's father and brother made it over the border but they turned back when they saw that Ronald and his mother had been stopped by the police. They were all arrested and taken to Rivesaltes, an internment camp in south-west France near the Spanish border', the camp where Mary Elmes was working. At the camp Ronald, aged three, and his brother Michael aged six, were rescued by Mary. Ronald's mother also survived the war but his father Dr Hans Freund 'perished in Majdanek camp in Poland in 1943'.<sup>27</sup>

After the war Ronald moved to England and then the United States and he became Professor Emeritus of psychology in Portland, Oregon. Years later, he returned to Europe to find out about the 'forgotten aid worker'<sup>28</sup> who had saved him and he eventually put her forward for nomination for Righteous Amongst Nations to Yad Vashem. It was because of Professor Ronald Friend's nomination and the

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<sup>26</sup> Article by Bernard Wilson on Mary Elmes 1908 – 2002

<https://toulousequakers.wordpress.com/2012/04/28/mary-elmes-1908-2002/>

<sup>27</sup> *A Time to Risk All* by Clodagh Finn, Gill Books

<sup>28</sup> *A Time to Risk All* by Clodagh Finn, Gill Books



research by Bernard Wilson and others that Mary Elmes 'had been awarded Israel's highest honour for risking her life to save Jews during the Holocaust'<sup>29</sup>.

### **Why Honour Mary Elmes**

In September 2019 a new bridge in Cork was opened and named after Mary Elmes. The inscription says 'Mary Elmes (1908-2002), Cork Born Mary Elmes volunteered in the Spanish Civil War and later risked her life in France to save hundreds of Jewish people from deportation to Nazi gas chambers'.

It is important to remember women's stories of WWII to ensure we do not forget the atrocities committed by totalitarian regimes when innocent people were murdered. Up to 70 million people died during WWII including men, women and children. Democratic governments were dismantled, millions of people were persecuted, and atrocious crimes were committed against humanity including the murder of six million Jewish people in the Holocaust and another six million from many different nationalities.

The aim of telling these stories in performance and film is not to glorify war but to acknowledge the human cost of war, the atrocities and destruction that occurred and to acknowledge the voices and experiences of ordinary women in order to reveal a wider picture of what happened. People and nation states suffer when human values such as respect, tolerance and democracy are destroyed. Remembering lessons of the past is a prerequisite for building a brighter future. The aim is to remember and learn from history with a view to preventing similar atrocities from happening in the future and at the same time to remember the many different roles played by women during World War II who found their own way to stand up against fascism and totalitarianism'.

Remembering Mary Elmes is important particularly in relation to her work supporting refugees and those fleeing war and persecution. According to her son Patrick Danjou, Mary Elmes looked for no recognition and simply said 'I did what had to be done'. That is a powerful message in relation to standing up for the rights and dignity of all human beings to be treated equal.



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<sup>29</sup> A Time to Risk All by Clodagh Finn, Gill Books

**Mary Elmes (centre) and Alice Resch photographed with another man, fellow heroes who helped rescue Jewish children from occupied France. Photo by: afsc.org**

## Robert Armstrong, Date Unknown-1944

Robert Armstrong was a gardener who fought in two world wars. He was born in Newbliss, County Monaghan where his father James was an estate manager. The family moved around and finally settled in Longford on the estate of the landlord Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson. The family were Protestant, however it is said that Robert's father James Armstrong sheltered an IRA leader Séan MacEoin from the Black and Tans and later, when he returned injured from WWI, Robert did the same.

Robert Armstrong fought in the First World War. He had worked in Ireland as a gardener before joining a regiment of the British army called the Irish Guards. He was wounded during the war but survived. In between the two world wars, Robert worked for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and became head gardener in the Valenciennes Saint-Roch cemetery in Northern France where countless British and commonwealth soldiers from the First World War were buried. Robert was working as head gardener in Valenciennes when WWII broke out. Most of the staff from the commission were sent back to Britain however, because Robert held an Irish passport and was 'neutral' Irish, he was permitted to remain and he choose to stay on tending the graves during the first years of the war.

During this time Robert joined the French Resistance and began working to assist downed Allied airmen to escape capture from occupied Europe. However, 'on Remembrance Day 1943, he saw a German soldier kick away flowers from Allied graves. Furious, he attacked the man and was arrested. Upon release he wisely fled for a while, but less wisely returned, was identified as a Resistance member and, in May 1944, sentenced to death'<sup>30</sup>.

The death sentence was not carried out and instead was commuted to 15 years in prison. He was moved from prison to prison and subjected to forced labour, beatings and starvation. He died in the Waldheim German concentration camp in Saxony for political prisoners on 16 December 1944.<sup>31</sup>

In 1948 a plaque in French and English was put up in his honour by local people at the Valenciennes Saint-Roch cemetery in Northern France where he had worked as head gardener. The memorial plaque is made of white marble and looks upon 'a border of red roses he had planted himself and beside them, in memory of his country, a bunch of shamrock'.<sup>32</sup> Robert was post posthumously awarded the Medaille de Resistance Francaise.

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<sup>30</sup> [www.irishtimes.com/opinion/garden-path-to-war-an-irishman-s-diary-about-robert-armstrong-1.2714051](https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/garden-path-to-war-an-irishman-s-diary-about-robert-armstrong-1.2714051)

<sup>31</sup> Mc Greevy, Ronan. Wherever the Firing Line Extends: Ireland and the Western Front.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/garden-path-to-war-an-irishman-s-diary-about-robert-armstrong-1.2714051>

<sup>32</sup> McNally, Frank. (2016). A Garden Path to War – An Irishman's Diary about Patrick Armstrong. Irish Times. 8 July

## Anne Duchene, 1869-date unknown



### Anne Duchene, Brussels, 1954

Anne Duchene (née Hodges) was an Irish woman from Waterford. Anne was born in 1869 and when she was 18 she moved to Belgium to work as a nursery governess. During WWII, Anne and her family lived at Rue Sans-Souci meaning 'Street without Care' and during this period, this Belgium-Irish family sheltered Scottish soldiers of the Allied forces. Anne was ...to pay a huge sacrifice through the loss of her two children, a daughter Florence (Florrie) Duchene (1906-1945) who died in Bergen-Belson concentration camp in April 1945 and a son Leopold who was released from a Nazi prison at the end of the war and died soon after.

The American reporter Hal Boyle conducted an interview with Anne in 1954 and he recalls: 'This is the story she told me as we sat in her small living room, hung with pictures of her late husband, her two dead children, King Albert, Belgium's first world war hero, and the present Queen Elizabeth of Britain. "I felt so young and strange and homesick when I first came here," she says, "but people were nice to me and I felt better after I learned their language and their ways. 'I met Josef, a coachman to the King. I forget the year but I remember I was 30." During the first world war, her husband was sent to England with the King's horses. Duchene remained here during the German occupation with her children, Leopold and Florrie. No funds reached them and they had a difficult time. "Often we were hungry," she recalled. "But we made out."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Boyle, Hal. (1954). Article on Anne Duchene, Brussels, The Daily Reporter, Dover, Ohio, November 18.

Prior to and during the war, Anne's daughter Florrie ran a millinery shop. During the war Florrie assisted her mother to hide Allied soldiers who were trying to make their way back home. The family took in two young Scottish soldiers, Private John McCubbin and Private Bernard (Bobby) Conville, both of the Glasgow Highlanders. The two men had been captured by the Nazis in occupied territory and were put on a train for Brussels en route to a prisoner-of-war camp in Eastern Germany.

'The prisoners were packed into filthy cattle trucks. Conville and McCubbin managed to escape from the train as it passed through a forest at Boitsfort, a suburb of Brussels. Their German guard's view was blocked by their colleagues as they forced open the door but he wasn't really concerned at what they were doing. Jumping from the train with bullets whining round their ears, they reached the temporary safety of the woods. Their aim was to re-unite with the British Army; little knowing that it had been driven from mainland Europe by the Blitzkrieg.'

Their first contact with help was with an Englishman, who the soldiers never knew, but who put them in contact with people who could help them. They were fed and clothed by the Bruxellois for six weeks and then, as it was then getting too cold to sleep out, they were taken to the house of Madame Jeanne Duchenne and her daughter Florence Duchenne at Rue Sans-Souci in the Ixelles suburb of Brussels where they stayed right through until September 1941'. <sup>34</sup>According to Anne:

'The woman who hid them became frightened . . . I couldn't let the Germans take those boys again, so I said they could hide with us. We had a bed but no mattress, so Florrie and I ripped open our sofa pillows and made them a mattress so the poor lads would sleep easier. . . That Bobby, he was such a good little boy. All the time laughing. My daughter ran a milliner shop and Bobby used to help her make hats.' <sup>35</sup>

The two British soldiers hid in the Duchene home at night for 14 months, sometimes moving to other places during the day. On 25 September 1941 the Duchene house was raided by three Gestapo officers. In the house at the time were Anne and her daughter Florence along with Private John McCrudden. McCrudden was shot while trying to flee but survived. He was arrested along with Florence and her mother Anne, sometimes referred to as Jeannie by the men in her care. Anne had urged her daughter to flee out the back way but Florrie refused to leave her mother. Anne was detained for almost a year, during which time her husband died. She was then released possibly because of her age. She was 72 at the time. Upon her release Anne continued to hide escapees in her home.

According to Gert de Prins, an Irish historian with the Belgium Department of War Victims, Florrie was a victim of the Nazi 'Night and Fog' decree issued by the Nazis in 1941. After her arrest Florrie was imprisoned and subjected to a military trial that was held in Essen, a city in Western Germany, that lasted from the 8 to 11 June 1943. Following the trial, Florence Duchene along with 20 other Belgian and Polish women were sent to Ravensbrück Concentration camp for women and then to Mauthausen and on to Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, where Florrie died in April of 1945, aged 38, just short of her 39th birthday.

Florrie's name is engraved on the Ixelles War Memorial to the Belgium Resistance in the Ixelles area of Brussels. Anne (Jeannie) Duchene was released from St Gilles prison on the 5 June 1942, after nine and a half months in prison. Anne's husband died in 1941 while Anne was incarcerated and Anne's son Leopold died soon after his release from a Nazi prison. Before his death, Leopold received a King's

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<sup>34</sup> Escape Lines Research and Remembrance Website <http://www.belgiumww2.info>

<sup>35</sup> Boyle, Hal. (1954). Article on Anne Duchene, Brussels, The Daily Reporter, Dover, Ohio, November 18.

medal for heroism. Anne was awarded the King's Medal for Courage at the end of the war. The two men John McCrudden and Bobby Conville survived the war and made it home.

In an article written by journalist Hal Boyle titled 'The Door of Madame Duchene', the journalist asked Anne did she ever regret taking soldiers into her home and her reply was 'No . . I make out. I have no regrets except that I have lost my two children. That is the worst of all.' Then she added, 'It had to be so.'

# Spanish Stories

**Lucía Sánchez Saornil, 1895-1970**

**Helios Gomez, 1905-1956**

**Enriqueta Otero, 1910-1989**

**Marina Vega de la Iglesia, 1923-2011**

**Francisco Boix, 1920-1951**

## **Lucía Sánchez Saornil, 1895-1970**



**Lucía Sánchez Saornil, Source José L Bernabé Tronchoni**

Lucía Sánchez Saornil was a Spanish poet, painter, journalist, militant anarchist and feminist. She is best known as one of the founders of Mujeres Libres (Free Women) and served in the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo - CNT (National Confederation of Labour) and Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista - SIA (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity).

Lucía Sánchez Saornil was born in Madrid, Spain. Her parents were Eugenio Sánchez and Gabriela Saornil. Her mother died when she was young and Lucía was left with her impoverished father and younger sister. From an early age she felt an insatiable literary ardour, which drove her to seek out books. Unlike the majority of Spanish women at the time, Lucía had access to education and, until the age of 18, she attended the Centro Hijos de Madrid school, which included art classes, which she enjoyed. Lucía also completed private classes at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando.

In 1913 she sent the article 'Hablan las muchachas' (The girls speak) to La Correspondencia de España, in which she dealt with the education of women and denounced the discrimination suffered by girls compared to the groups of boy scouts who went out into the countryside. She made a point of this in La Libertad (1924), advocating for the creation of associations in which women would learn about the possibilities of what they can achieve.

Lucia wrote under the male pen name Luciano de San Saor. This pseudonym allowed her to obtain credibility in a male-dominated realm and also allowed her to explore homosexual themes without restraint or censorship. She was involved in the Ultraist movement and in the Spanish avant-garde, both male dominated genres. By 1919 she had been published in several journals. Despite being a prominent figure in her time, Lucia's work is still missing from modern discussions on poetry of her day.

Lucía also wrote about women in the Spanish Civil War. She poetically described their experiences as women in wartime. These writings stand out against other literature written about men in the Spanish Civil War. Lucía articulated her feminist viewpoint in anarchist publications. Despite her silence on the subject of birth control, she criticized the essentialism of gender roles in Spanish society. Lucía positioned herself as one of the most radical anarchist women's voices in this way, challenging the usually assumed ideal of female domesticity. She strongly rejected Gregorio Marañón's identification of maternity as the basis of female identity in a series of articles for Workers' Solidarity.

During the Spanish Civil War, women were mobilized on many fronts. Lucía Sanchez Saornil was a leader on many fronts as well. She took part in the assault on the Cuartel de la Montaña, travelled to the front lines for her chronicles and contributed to the collectives.

While today considered to be an anarcho-feminist she did not use the term feminist. The concept of feminism was associated with the upper-class. Therefore, working-class women who aligned themselves with the class struggle did not embrace the term feminism. However, many of the ideals they did embrace would be considered feminist by today's standards. Many of her peers shared this view.

In the 1920s, Lucía began to affiliate herself with the anarcho-syndicalist movement. Having been a telephone operator since 1916, she participated in a labour strike in 1931. This social activism led to her being let go from the Telephone company, and she moved from Valencia to Madrid where she soon became affiliated with the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT).

In 1933, Lucía was appointed Writing Secretary for the CNT of Madrid, producing their journal in the run up to the Spanish Civil War. In May 1938, she became the General Secretary of Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (SIA), an anarchist aid organization similar to the Red Cross. That is why she travelled extensively to France in search of goods for kindergartens, combatants and other relief work.

Though anarchism and feminism tended to develop side-by-side, Lucía found sexism in the CNT. The CNT denied the need for a separate women's organization, but Lucía co-founded the organization Mujeres Libres to address the needs of women. It is important to note that the CNT appears to be sympathetic to women's emancipation, in comparison to the Socialist party of Spain, the Communist Party of Spain, or the Labour/Anarchist Federation of Iberia. However, it was in the struggle for women's education that she combined her intuition and organisational skills. Her anarchist conception - first the person, then the woman, and finally the worker - led her to denounce the conditions suffered by women, who were forced to free themselves from a triple slavery: ignorance, labour exploitation and female slavery (in marriage or prostitution).

Lucía was involved with Emma Goldman, a notable anarchist. Emma Goldman corresponded with Lucía, and assisted anarchist causes in the Mujeres Libres organization. Goldman's agenda aligned in many aspects with the agenda of Mujeres Libres. Lucía advocated for free love. A lesbian herself, she made refused to hide her relationship with her lifelong partner América Barrosa Mery, 13 years younger, a former actress, whom she met in 1937 while working in Valencia as the editor of the journal Umbral.



In 1936 Mujeres Libres (Free Women) was founded by Lucía and two other women, Mercedes Comaposada and Amparo Poch. The Mujeres Libres organization was an offshoot of the CNT, hoping to address women's issues and sexism within the chauvinistic anarchist movement. It focused on the "double struggle" of women's liberation and social revolution. Mujeres Libres published a magazine as a part of their movement. The three founders also worked as editors, desiring to share their education with all women. In total, there were 14 editions of the magazine published. At its height during the Spanish Civil War, the organization had 30,000 members. The organization attempted to focus on women's liberation and emancipation. Many believed that women's freedom would arise from a classless society, but Mujeres Libres disagreed. It focused on women's sexual freedom, but with some restraint. Women's sexual freedom was seen as a private individual matter, not one for the public or the state. Therefore, programs were limited. Mujeres Libres did not focus as much on lesbianism, love or abortion, as these were more associated with the feminist movement, which Mujeres Libres distanced themselves from. The organization worked to educate women and children. Spain still had low literacy rates in this part of the century. Mujeres Libres endeavoured to educate women in order to give them power. In this education, anarchist teachings were also very present. Mujeres Libres also helped educate children, supporting schools in rural Spain, especially in Andalucía. Day-care programs were also established, helping women to balance work and family.

Mujeres Libres instructed women on the importance of birth control. The aim was to allow women to have children when they chose to. In this era, women were often expected to work at a factory or similar job, as well as care for a household and children. Birth control allowed women to determine the direction they wanted their life to go. Mujeres Libres also held anti-prostitution drives.

With the defeat of the Second Republic, Lucía and her partner América Barrosa were forced to flee to Paris, where Lucía continued her involvement in the SIA. With the fall of France to German forces, it was soon necessary for them to move again and they returned to Madrid in 1941 or 1942. Her exile and return are still somewhat mysterious. The libertarian movement in exile was shocked by her departure, such was her charisma, and missed her from now on.

In Madrid, Lucía worked as a photo editor but quickly had to relocate again after being recognized as an anarchist partisan. She and América moved to Valencia where América had family. Due to the rise of fascism and Catholic moralism, their lesbian relationship now put them at significant personal danger and was maintained in secrecy. Lucía was also unable to be politically active in Francoist Spain. During this time, América worked in the Argentine consulate while Lucía continued her work as an editor until her death from breast cancer in 1970. Her poetry demonstrates her mixed outlook, embracing both the pain of defeat and the affirmation of struggle. She left behind no memoir.

Lucía's tombstone epitaph in the General Cemetery of Valencia reads "But is it true that hope has died?"

## Helios Gomez, 1905- 1956



Helios Gomez, Source <http://www.heliosgomez.org>

Helios Gómez was an artist whose career was unique. He identified himself as Sevillian, Romany gypsy and Barcelonan, and participated in some of the most interesting European creative networks of his time. His work is a paradoxical nodule amidst apparently antithetical elements, emerging as both anachronic and ahead of its time. He was at once a realist, a populist and avant-garde, a political activist and militant advocate of Romany identity, a libertarian communist and a practitioner of flamenco, of the kind that sing and dance. The relevance of the work of Helios Gómez constitutes a unique case in the European artistic panorama of his time.

His anarchist militancy also took an interesting turn as he later shifted to communism which he always presented as libertarian before returning to his anarchist perspectives. His identity as subordinate, Romany and cosmopolitan, as well as the historical period he lived through, led him from the freedom of Europe to jail, a prison-boat and a concentration camp.

When a young Helios left Seville, he had already acquired a thorough avant-garde education. His travels throughout Europe, including Germany and the Soviet Union, moderated his initial radicalism, adjusting it to the realism imposed by the period. His first exhibition featured three differentiated bodies of work: dances, flamenco artists and musical theatre; abstract landscapes of the metropolis, that is, of Seville; and, finally, prints dedicated to the subject of social malaise.

Upon his return to the Iberian Peninsula, Helios settled in Barcelona. Events moved quickly, with what was called the October Revolution or Revolutionary General Strike, the proclamation of the federated Catalan State in Barcelona and protests in mining regions, especially in Asturias. Helios participated actively in the Catalan resistance, was detained and then incarcerated on the ship *Uruguay*, where he did various drawings. When he was released, he travelled to Brussels, where he published “Viva October! Drawings on the Spanish Revolution”, a report and pamphlet, in the best sense of the term, on recent events. Against the violence of current events his socialist realism shifted into expressionism.

The coup d'état by Spanish military officials in Africa caught Helios in Barcelona, and on 19 July he was, rifle in hand, on the Via Laietana barricades. Helios accepted the military defence of the Republic as a member of the Central Committee of Anti-Fascist Militias of Catalonia. Helios joined as a Romany the Bayo Column, which had the idea of liberating the Balearic Islands, though failed miserably.

He then joined Durruti's 26th Division as a militiaman, designing, printing and distributing the division's publication *El Frente* and organizing the exhibition *Homage to Durruti* in November 1938. In the meantime, he was involved in various intellectual activities, writing texts and speeches and participating in the Alliance of Anti-Fascist Writers of Madrid and Barcelona, where he was joined by José Bergamín, although he was not able to attend the conference in Valencia.

Helios fled Spain into France and was interned in the Bran concentration camp following a brief stay in Montolieu, and then moved in 1940 to the Algerian camp at Djelfa after having gone through Vernet d'Ariège, which was only for politically dangerous foreigners, and the beach camp at Argelès. The disciplinary measures were varied, so that at Montolieu they were rather lax, even allowing them to leave the camp and move about France. Helios continued drawing and did the final images of his series *Horrores de la guerra*. The drawing of the bombing of the school is a powerful example of the social and psychological destruction of the world that Helios had aspired to build.

Helios had met the young Salvador Dalí and highly valued his friendship with Lorca. He had also coincided with the communist Louis Aragon in Madrid, Barcelona and Moscow, and even when he went with a commission of intellectuals to the Bran camp. When Helios met Rafael Lafuente, the author of *Los gitanos, el flamenco y los flamencos* [The Romany, Flamenco and Flamenco Artists], this latter offered him his theories: “The surrealist declarations of Aragon could be the preamble of a Flamenco Manifesto or a Declaration of the Rights of the Romany.”

He trustingly returned to Seville and settled in the family home in the city, where he returned to work. Soon, however, charges and arrests followed, and he went back to Barcelona, where his work was a blend of survival and subsistence along with superrealism and surrealism. Oneiric art, which was more or less tolerated by the regime, was also a way to defend oneself from the hostilities of life and from political enemies.

Helios Gómez spent eight years in the Model Prison in Barcelona, from 1947 to 1954, after a rather nebulous sentence, and after having been informed that the sentence had not been confirmed, so that his incarceration was illegal even under Francoist law. He spent his time reading and drawing, and teaching both these skills to other inmates. Helios died in Barcelona two years later, in 1956.

## Enriqueta Otero Blanco (Castroverde), 1910 – 1989



Enriqueta Otero Blanco (Castroverde), Source <https://omnivoraz.com/es/>

Enriqueta Otero Blanco (Castroverde (Lugo), 26 February 1910 - Lugo, 31 October 1989), also known by her nom de guerre María das Dores, was a Spanish teacher, feminist and communist activist who became Dolores Ibárruri's secretary during the Spanish Civil War. She was the best-known survivor of the Galician anti-Francoist guerrilla movement.

She was born in Casa Ribóm, in Miranda, a parish in the municipality of Castroverde. After completing her studies at the Colegio de la Milagrosa in Lugo. She worked as a teacher at the school of San Cosme de Barreiros and promoted theatrical activities and created the company O Punteiro do Carrinho. She performed in Fonsagrada, Montefurado, Corcoesto, Cabana de Bergantiños, Villagarcía de Arosa, Pontevedra and Santo Estevo de Gormaz until, after passing a competitive examination in 1936, she moved to Madrid.

In the Spanish capital she joined the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) under the influence of a cosmetics representative. At the outbreak of the Civil War, she joined the 1st Mobile Shock Brigade of the 46th Division, led by Valentín González, el Campesino, as a cultural militia woman. She became a coordinator at the Carabanchel hospital, where militias wounded in combat were admitted, and was a member of its steering committee. In Madrid she was director of several hospital and cultural centers. She reached the rank of commander. During this time, she also worked as secretary to Dolores Ibárruri (Pasionaria) and formed part of the Cultural Militia School.

In the last days of the Civil War, she was imprisoned by the Madrid Defence Junta in the Ventas prison with 2600 other female communist militants, but she managed to captain a mass escape and took a train to Lugo, posing as a Francoist during the journey while being sought by the forces of law and order. When she arrived in Lugo, a priest friend of the family took her into his house, where she hid until she fled to the mountains.

In Galicia she joined the guerrilla group, the Maquis, with the nickname of María das Dores, taking part in the resistance and forming part of a guerrilla group with Benigno Andrade "Foucelhas", Marcelino Rodríguez Fernández "Marrofer", José Castro Veiga "El Piloto", Júlio Neto, Ramón Viveiro and José Vicente Rodríguez. She was injured in several armed clashes.

On 14 February 1946, a leak to the police led to her arrest in an ambush in Lugo. During the time she was detained in Lugo she was tortured. She was subjected to electric currents and other torments that ravaged her body. "Neither her condition as a woman, nor attending her trial on crutches, nor international pressure would free her from recovering from that terrible ordeal in prison, from where she was not released until after 19 years because she was a dangerous communist". Despite being sentenced to death, when all seemed lost for Maria das Dores, an international campaign of solidarity led to her sentence being commuted. Dictator Francisco Franco, under international pressure and without his defeated allies Hitler and Mussolini, was forced to commute her sentence. In 1966 she was released from prison and returned to her native village where she lived in precarious conditions, due to the lack of means, as Franco's regime stripped her of her teaching qualification.

She worked as a pig farmer, cultivating the land to be able to eat until she was reinstated as a teacher and was able to work again, being assigned to the Fontarón school in 1975, just a year before she retired. During her time in Lugo, after her release from prison, she set up a cultural project called O carriño, a model of popular university, an educational centre installed in a palloza located in the Rosalía de Castro park in Lugo.

In 1977 she was a candidate for the Spanish Parliament in the 1977 general elections for the PCE. In her last years she distanced herself from the local party leadership because of what she called 'family stories'. Her struggle, if violent for ten years, did not lose its ardour afterwards, in the times of freedom. "We were the honest ones of the legality of Spain. Those who defended it to the end and did not hand over power to Franco on a plate".

She is remembered for her rebelliousness in the city of Lugo and died there on 31 October 1989, aged 79, as rebellious as she had lived. She has a street dedicated to her in Lugo, whose city council published the book 'As vidas de Enriqueta Otero Blanco', by the historian Ángel Rodríguez Gallardo. In the same year 2005 a social centre was opened in Santiago de Compostela that bears her name.

## Marina Vega de la Iglesia, 1923-2011



Marina Vega de la Iglesia, Source <https://lasoga.org/marina-vega-de-la-iglesia-una-espia-al-servicio-de-la-resistencia-francesa/>

Marina Vega de la Iglesia was born in Torrelavega or Castro Urdiales (Cantabria, Spain) in 1923 and died in Madrid on 11 June 2011. She was a spy, anti-Franco fighter and Nazi hunter. She was the only woman in the Spanish network in the service of the French Resistance. She joined the Spanish network of the Free French Forces, in the service of Charles de Gaulle, when she was only 17 years old. She worked for the French Resistance, first from Spain against the dictator Francisco Franco, and then in France.

She was born into a well-to-do family with a Republican tradition. Her father, a prison director under the Republic, was sentenced to 16 years in prison for a consummated crime of Freemasonry, according to his file, and sent to a prison in El Puerto de Santa María (Cádiz). Her mother was an employee of the Government of the Republic, and had to live in hiding to avoid reprisals. For this reason, and to protect her, Marina was sent to France with some family friends when she was only 14 years old. These were years of great loneliness, as she was unable to contact her home, nor did she receive any news of them from Spain.

She was living in Paris when the Second World War broke out. The family that had taken her in decided to leave for Mexico. Marina, still without news of her parents, decided to return to Spain. She made the return journey sitting on her suitcase in a crowded cattle car. When she arrived in Madrid she found them. The state of her family caused her to become depressed and she went to León with some family friends. There she met a young man who was connected with the French diplomatic service. When Franco banned the French Embassy, the French secret service moved into the English delegation. Marina arrived just when they were looking for a Spanish woman who had no criminal record and who could move freely around the country, and she was admitted.

After this, she would make multiple trips to the French-Spanish border. She brought people into Spain, brought documents and money back and forth. The support network ranged from tailors to dress the border crossers to document forgers.

Like in a film, she had to be dressed elegantly, with make-up that made her look older and of a certain social status, and carry two pistols of different calibers, which Marina herself said she never needed to use. She travelled first class on the trains she took, as the police did not usually interrogate upper class people. She said that she always had a cyanide pill in her pocket to take in case she was captured by the Nazis.

The Spanish counter-espionage, the Segunda Bis, discovered the office that the network had set up on the top floor of a Red Cross building after leaving the British embassy. They had to flee. "We waited for about three months in San Sebastian until one of the smugglers we had in our service came looking for us. We crossed the Bidasoa on 19 September 1944 with the water here," she recalled, pointing to her chest. Their only luggage: a carton of tobacco and a dozen apples. "How good they were for the days we spent in the mountains".

In France she continued to do information work until the end of the Second World War. She also helped people flee German persecution. "Between 1942 and 1944 I made two trips a week to France. I don't know how many people I might have brought with me. I gather they were French Jews fleeing the Nazis. Also, some English people".

With the end of World War II, the cleansing of Nazis in France and the rest of Europe began. She was demobilized in 1945 and became a soldier out of uniform. Her job then became to track down Nazi Germans and collaborators for trial. This caused them to flee to Spain. She settled permanently in Spain in 1950, when her services were terminated and because her mother was still in Spain.

The end of the Second World War was not as hopeful as initially assumed because the dictatorship continued in Spain: Marina found the situation difficult to accept and once again became active, taking part in strikes, organizing demonstrations against Franco, distributing pamphlets and collaborating with various political organisations. She was arrested and interrogated twice.

From the 1960s onwards, her shadow became more difficult to trace and her life became diluted among the rest of the citizens, although she always assumed certain professional tics such as not sitting with her back to a door or staying on the first floor of hotels to escape more easily in case of need.

"Reconocimientos: Fue condecorada por el Parlamento Europeo por defender la libertad. Toda una personalidad que recientemente ha inspirado la creación del personaje de Lola Mendieta, interpretado por la actriz Macarena García en la serie televisiva El ministerio del tiempo."

"The most interesting part of my life I can't tell. There are things that should not be known. I don't believe much in lying, but I do believe in omission".

She considered herself "a Mason, a republican, a Red, and very honorably so". She is buried in Madrid. She was decorated by the European Parliament for defending freedom. She was a personality who inspired the creation of the character Lola Mendieta, in the TV series El ministerio del tiempo.



## Francisco Boix, 1920-1951



Source: <https://www.elspectador.com/el-magazin-cultural/francisco-boix-y-las-imagenes-de-un-pasado-imposible-de-olvidar-puntos-de-fuga-article-873817/>

Francisco Boix (1920-1951) was a Spanish press photographer, communist and a fighter against fascism who fought in and survived the Spanish Civil War. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in Spain in 1936, Boix supported the opposition to Franco and joined the United Socialist Youth working as a photographer and later as a fighter in the 30<sup>th</sup> division, Spanish Republican army. He was seventeen at the time.

In 1937, the Nationalists in Spain prevailed in the Spanish Civil War. Boix joined the mass exodus of up to a million Spanish refugees fleeing across the border into France to escape from the Franco terrorist regime.

Instead of finding refuge away from the ruthless persecution by the Franco fascist regime, the Spanish refugees were put into camps set up by the French to house them. With the fall of France to the Nazis, many Spanish Republican exiles continued to be incarcerated and were faced with the choice of deportation back to Spain or they were pressured to work with the French army, the French Foreign Legion, or makeshift work units known as the Foreign Worker companies where they were effectively slave labours part of the Nazi war machine. Boix spent time in several camps in France and was eventually interned by the Germans in January 1941 when he was sent to Mauthausen Concentration camp in Austria. It is believed that over 8,000 Spaniard prisoners were incarcerated in camps such as Mauthausen, Gusen, Dachau and Buchenwald and only around 3,000 survived.

In Mauthausen Boix worked in the darkroom under SS member Paul Ricken who, himself, was a skilled photographer. Ricken was part of the 'identification service' and was in charge of taking photographs of Nazi officials visiting the camp as well as photographs of prisoners arriving or leaving. Photographs were also taken of all deaths described as 'unnatural' or 'unexplained' or as 'attempted suicides'. Many of these deaths were in fact murders committed by the camp guards when a prisoner, for example, was forced to either hang himself or be beaten to death. Prisoners regularly died from illness, hard physical labour, starvation, poisoning or the injection of gasoline

directly into the heart which was carried out in the infirmary.

Boix and another Spanish prisoner, Antonio García, ended up hiding or copying the negatives that detailed the atrocities that had taken place in the camp. They eventually managed to smuggle the negatives out, ensuring that over 3,000 photographs of Mauthausen survived as evidence against Nazi war criminals. Boix and García were assisted by other prisoners who were forced to leave the camp for work and with the assistance of Anna Pointner, a citizen in the nearby town. She kept the negatives hidden in her garden until the liberation of Mauthausen in May 1945 by the American allied forces.

Boix later managed to retrieve the negatives that Mrs. Pointner had hidden in a stone in her garden, and he took them with him when he left for Paris. A number of the negatives smuggled out by Boix were used in the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal as evidence and assisted in identifying key Nazi figures who had visited the Mauthausen camp, including the architect, Albert Speer. As a survivor of Mauthausen, Boix was the only Spaniard who testified and gave evidence against members of the Nazi government at the Nuremberg trials in 1946.

After the war Boix spent the remainder of his short life living in exile in Paris, where he worked as a photographer meeting people such as Dolores Ibarruri and Pablo Picasso. Boix died in Paris just short of his 31st birthday in July 1951 from an illness (most likely tuberculosis) which he possibly contracted from his time in the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. He has been referred to as 'the photographer of Mauthausen'.

## Polish Stories

**Maria Pawlikowska Jasnorzewska, 1891-1945**

**Antonina and Jan Zabinski, 1908-1971 & 1897-1974**

**Alfreda Narkowska, 1926-2021**

**Stefania Cendrowska, 1896-1985**

**Ryszard Lerczyński, 1920-2006**

**Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska née Kossak, (Known as Lilka), 1891-1945**



**Portrait of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska Source: (National Library)**

Maria Kossak was born in 1891 into a well-known Polish aristocratic family from Krakow. Her grandfather was the outstanding Polish painter Julisz Kossak, her father was Wojciech Kossak, known for his battle paintings and portraits of famous people. In Kossakówka - their family home in Kraków - she lived with her father, mother and two siblings - Jerzy and Magdalena.

Everyone called her Lilka because she chose that name - first Maria, then Marylka, and finally Lilka. The Kossaks liked to play with words. Lilka's father mixed the following languages: Polish, German, English, and French, creating funny neologisms. For example, when he was furious, he would say "through blue!" mixing the French "parable" (hell) with "par" (through) and "bleu" (blue). Lilka liked to diminish words, mix them and funnily combine them. In her letters, she wrote about herself in a masculine gender and signed them in various ways, eg. as Rat or Lilczur (Samozwaniec, 2004).

In addition, the Kossak house was visited by artists, writers, painters, and architects, such as Witkacy, Tuwim, Leśmian, Stryeński, and Malczewski. Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska grew up in an atmosphere of free exchange of ideas, originality, and pluralism.

Lilka was a slender girl with huge blue eyes. Her sister - Magdalena - in a book about her, writes that "she was a Greek nymph, and a naiad, and a sylph, and a beautiful witch who continued to encounter extraordinary adventures." (Samozwaniec, 2004, p. 13) <sup>36</sup>Her friends and acquaintances also describe her extraordinary beauty - "Lilka's face evoked childish, magical associations. It was the face of a fairy, all rose petals, flower pollen, fleeting shadows, and soft lights. The nose is slightly pointed, pinkish, and transparent like a shell. Her lips are sensitive, small, versatile, sometimes pathetic, sometimes mocking. It was not only this face that determined Lilka's charm but, above all, an irresistible grace, a hundred times more important than beauty. Grace in every movement, word, smile, that nobody could resist." (Krzywicka, 1995, p. 272) <sup>37</sup>Śławomir Koper in his book about influential women of the Second Polish Republic called her an elf from Kossakówka (Koper, 2014).<sup>38</sup>



**Lilka and Madzia Kossak, Source: (Polish Information Agency)**

Her first poems were also as if taken from the world of elves, deep forests, and swamps. For example, a poem written when she was less than fifteen:

Sorrow is the soul of the fumes on the pines,  
rose under the oak of late anemones  
(forest secrets in falls and springs)  
the humming of the source and distant bells  
and the bird worlds where calls mine  
sudden illumination and groans of powerlessness,  
that there is consciousness as great as the sea  
when theirs is faint  
and closed in the night...

and the painful smell of orchids  
among the mosses subjected to rainy arrows,  
fighting with the scent of water and marshes  
by some blind, fragrant white stubbornness

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<sup>36</sup> Samozwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.

<sup>37</sup> Krzywicka, I. (1995). *Wyznania gorszycielki*. Warszawa.

<sup>38</sup> Koper, S. (2014). *Wpływowe kobiety Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*. Warszawa: Bellona.

insane, not knowing themselves screams - -  
the monstrosities of the sweetest phenomena.  
And I have a place in a weeping feast,  
because although nobody knows about it, I am sad,  
like the king's daughter in a German ballad,

because I know what I am crying out of hiding  
like an orchid calling people among the marshes -  
what will come from steps with a rustle  
when in the old and poor fashion  
the roses will all explode with the smell, the stars will fade  
will not be different from life - - -  
it will be one with him.

I will go into the monstrosity of phenomena.  
(own translation)

The world of nature also inspired Maria Jasnorzewska-Pawlikowska in her later works. Her poems are "painterly", colourful, allegorically transporting into the world of forests, trees, flowers, and oceans.

#### **Stolen poem**

The forest froze into a church of iron and rust ...  
In the dome, the sky is blue as cornflowers  
It makes pale blue the ash pole darkness...

The wind is walking through the forest, the old church one,  
It blows on silver beech candelabra,  
And it puts out the leaves: flames and sparks.

Wachlarz, Warsaw 1927 (own translation)

#### **Hurricane**

Heaven is angry  
the clouds are rolling in the crowd!  
Happy trees!  
They will be able to laugh!

Pocałunki, Warsaw 1926 (own translation)

"The elf from Kossakówka" liked walks, bicycles, games in the garden and also painted and wrote poems. Both sisters were brought up in a relaxed atmosphere. "However, parents (especially the father) raised their daughters differently than in an average Krakow home from their circle. The girls were riding bicycles (which was a scandal at that time), on the first floor of the family home Kossakówka they allowed themselves to behave like girls from good homes could only dream of." (Koper, 2014, p. 258) <sup>39</sup>

Magdalena, Maria's sister, describes their "atypical" behaviour and awareness of the cultural change that was taking place at that time. 'In the era in which I grew up with Lilka, some, one might say, youth

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<sup>39</sup> Koper, S. (2014). Wpływowe kobiety Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Warszawa: Bellona.

rebellion was growing with us. Already as young women, we felt great contempt for such ladies, whom we called polite girls, a good girl who obeyed her mother's orders, was religious, well-mannered, kissed nuns on the hand, and priests on the arm, she only read books that were advisable for her age, and it was known in advance that she would marry the person her parents chose. And we've never been polite'. Lilka, at the age of sixteen, read Nietzsche (of which she should have confessed), wrote love poems. "She made fun of *Journal de Margueritte*, a French reading especially recommended for young ladies, and winked to young people." (Samozwaniec, 2004, p. 147)<sup>40</sup>

The only flaw in her ideal childhood was a spine problem that started with a broken arm and then developed further because of improper rehabilitation. Hence, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, throughout her life, struggled with spine curvature, rehabilitation, and stiff orthopaedic corsets, which often injured her body. She hid her handicap under scarves, and on the beach, she spread her long, curly hair, which concealed her protruding shoulder blade as if under a coat (Samozwaniec, 2004).<sup>41</sup>

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska was known primarily for her beautiful love poetry. Her work from the interwar period reflected her constant search for love, its finding, and despair after loss. At that time, she loved, married, and parted with men in her life, which gave her food for poetry.

### **Love**

I haven't seen you for a month or so.  
No change. Perhaps I'm pale rather than fair,  
sleepier, more silent. It shows  
you can live without air.  
Pocałunki, Warsaw, 1926  
(Translation: <https://maria-pawlikowska-jasnorzewska.com>)

### **A Photograph**

Suppose you've had that once-in-a-blue-moon bliss,  
another's body and the entire earth,  
and end with just a photograph like this,  
this – so this is all it's worth...  
Pocałunki, Warsaw, 1926  
(Translation: <https://maria-pawlikowska-jasnorzewska.com>)

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska lived a quiet life in and around Kossakówka. Her sister Magdalena wrote how special and warm were the meetings in her family home - small family celebrations - noisy greetings (because the Kossaks were very loud), a set table, jokes, anecdotes, and guests' visits. "A small family celebration. Until one day ... Fate will have enough. It repeated the same scenes for so many years. Out of the blue ... German bombs! Lilka will never come again, there will be no more greetings, faces wet with kisses, hugs, Dad's witty sayings, Mum's emotions, a lavishly set table. The End. Happiness died and was taken to the cemetery. All the characters of this miraculous repetition die one after another" (Samozwaniec, 2004, p. 231)<sup>42</sup>

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska had to emigrate in 1939, not only because of her husband, an aviation officer but also because of her anti-Nazi work. Due to her anti-Nazi poems and the pre-war

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<sup>40</sup> Samozwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.

<sup>41</sup> Samozwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.

<sup>42</sup> Samozwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.

play *Baba-Dziwo*, which was a sharp satire on Führer, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska could not stay in Poland at the outbreak of World War II.

*A Woman of Wonder* describes the dictatorship of Valida Vrana in a country called Ritonía. Under Valida, people are ranked according to the number of children they have, with boys being the preferred sex. In Ritonía motherhood is not only a compulsory duty but also a tribute to "Her Motherly Highness." Thus, the lives of women are reduced to a basic procreative function (Grossman & Kelly, 2021). *A Woman of Wonder* presents the play as a political and grotesque tragicomedy containing indirect references to the Nazi regime: dividing people into better and worse according to some trait, an element of the Ritonía flag referring to the swastika, a greeting in honor of Valida - "Walid the Great - Strong", being a reference to the Nazi greeting „Heil Hitler” (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, *Baba-Dziwo*, 1986). Therefore, it is not surprising that after the Kraków premiere, the German Embassy protested the play (Grossman & Kelly, 2021).<sup>43</sup>

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska warns against ideologies trying to control all people by a specific template and killing individuality and originality. "To statues - merciless time cuts noses, and protruding ears, to societies - sticking out people! You were sticking out! And worse, you wanted to stick out!" (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, 1986, p. 313).<sup>44</sup>

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska knew that the war was born earlier. It doesn't explode as school textbooks say. It is the flower of the plant called life, which blooms bloodily from "thorny, everyday vines" (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, 2018).<sup>45</sup> The intensified nationalist ideologies she observed before the war, saturated with human hatred, were precisely the thorny, everyday vines of contemporary reality.

#### **War is just a flower**

War is just a flower  
It is just a terrible flower  
Of a plant that is Life;  
It's just a blast and a color  
Thorny everyday vines,  
Swarming wild and valiant;

It's just a terrible flower  
Of what is -  
Fiery, hurts the eyes  
Our eyes are crying profusely!

It must bloom until it dies,  
Losing the awful red,  
Until it turns into scraps of yellowed newspapers,  
Until it finishes its parade...  
Gołąb ofiarany, Glasgow 1941 (own translation)

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<sup>43</sup> Grossman, E. M., & Kelly, P. J. (2021, 02 24). Introduction to *A Woman of Wonder*. Downloaded from Toronto Slavic Quarterly. University of Toronto · Academic Electronic Journal in Slavic Studies: <http://sites.utoronto.ca/tsq/04/grossman04.shtml>

<sup>44</sup> Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, M. (1986). *Baba-Dziwo*. W A. r. Bolecka, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska. *Dramaty* (p. 277-392). Warszawa: Czytelnik.

<sup>45</sup> Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, M. (2018). *Wybór wierszy*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Siedmioróg.

In her poem, Scales, perversely, she does not ask for a good world, but for a balance between good and evil, thus saying that this balance has been disturbed and the world has been overwhelmed by evil.

Scales

Unequal scales- unevenness continues -  
Evil prevails ...

Not for a more beautiful and better world,  
Not for a renaissance on the rubble of losses,  
In a flash, like the Earth does not remember-

But for at least that law over the law,  
As dangerous as generous-  
For the former balance of good and evil,  
Please, the bloody sky,  
Please, our incomprehensible age!  
Gołąb ofiarne, Glasgow 1941 (own translation)

"Lilka hated war, she defined it as "the war against the family." There were probably not many works in the world of literature that condemned the war and its entire hospital horror, as much as her poems and prose, and if she had survived this nightmare, she would have been awarded the Defender of Peace award." (Samozwaniec, 2004, p. 256).<sup>46</sup>

Even if you call it - "right" or "incredible",  
"War of wings", "nations" or "races"- whatever,  
For I already have a name for her that in every hour  
It is confirmed: this is the war against the family ...  
Szkicownik poetycki, 1941/1942

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska became a refugee for the rest of her life. In wartime she wrote:

"Leaves-refugees - are you allowed to betray the truth as bitter as green plants, that even if you were turned back by the return wind in a sudden gust, you would not grow back to your branches anyway? The tree will not take you to itself, because it cannot afford miracles ... The apple is falling not far from the apple tree, but it does not return to the branch anymore. A leaf is falling far away, and the winds do with it what they want ...

And only tells golden legends about maple, oak, poplar, wherever it finds itself.

For the reader who will be hurt by these words, remember that this is only the poet's autumn fantasy. You are not a leaf, the leaf does not read the journals, the leaf lies in the dust on the road and never thinks of itself: "I am like a human soul ..." (Samozwaniec, 2004, p. 255).<sup>47</sup>

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, née Kossak, for her friends Lilka, survived the war but did not manage to return to Poland. She died on July 9, 1945, in Manchester. If she was not defeated by her cancer, she could still "show us" a lot, as she announced in one of her late poems:

**It wasn't all**

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<sup>46</sup> Samozwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.

<sup>47</sup> Samozwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.



No, it wasn't all my dear -  
I'll show you even more  
It was just violets, daisies by the road  
Can't you see my face,

A wildflower will grow out of my heart  
not named in any language - - -  
petals from the sun, carpels from music - - with a scent  
similar to a scream!

Yes, it was not all my dear.  
I was just looking in the mirror.  
It was just violets, daisies by the road -  
Can't you see my lips? -  
(Samożwaniec, 2004, p. 30) (own translation)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Samożwaniec, M. (2004). *Zalotnica niebieska*. Warszawa-Rzeszów: Agencja Wydawnicza Ad Oculos.

## Antonina and Jan Żabiński, 1908-1971 & 1897-1974



**Antonina and Jan Żabiński before 1950, photo: Rajmund Wełnic, archive of Teresa Żabińska-Zawadzki, source: (Dzięciołowska, Polin. Polish Righteous, 2015)**

A zoo where animals live - a normal world.

The Warsaw Zoo was established in 1928 on the initiative of Wentante Burdziński, who was its director for only six months until his death. In March 1929, the facility was taken over by Jan Żabiński and his wife Antonina. They created a zoo from scratch, planning and building a "large breeding farm of wild animals" (Żabińska, 2010, p. 8),<sup>49</sup> showing visitors, representatives of authorities, and photojournalists around the garden, as well as participating in meetings organized by the International Association of Zoological Gardens Directors, held mainly in Germany, where the headquarters of the union was located.

After ten years of operation, in the summer of 1939, the zoo looked impressive. "The Warsaw Zoo (...) had an international reputation: the twelfth elephant captive-born was born in Warsaw in 1937, we were a place where wild boar was born for the first time, and we managed to cross the Chapman's zebra with Hartmann's zebra, and as a result, it turned out that the product of this cross is ... Ward's zebra until now considered a separate species (...) Just before the war, a mare from Przewalski's steppe horses had a foal. The zoo was overflowing with life. It was visited not only by crowds of young people, animal lovers, and walkers. University biology departments, domestic and foreign, the National Institute of Hygiene, and even the Academy of Fine Arts collaborated with the zoo. Sometimes even the theatre and film used the services of the zoo." (Żabińska, 2010, p. 23)<sup>50</sup>.

The Żabiński House, named the Ark of Noah by Antonina and Jan's friend, sculptor Magdalena Gross, was always full of people and animals. The daughter of Antonina and Jan, Teresa, talks about her home in the zoo years later: "This house has always been a refuge for the weak, for those who need help. And this mission of helping and saving them was mainly fulfilled by the mother." (Czajka, 2019)<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Żabińska, A. (2010). People and animals. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

<sup>50</sup> Żabińska, A. (2010). People and animals. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

<sup>51</sup> Czajka, Ł. (Director). (2019). About animals and people [Film].

In the spring of 1940, another convention of the International Association of Zoological Gardens Directors was to take place in Warsaw.

Antonina Źabińska spent the summer holidays of 1939 with her several-year-old son Rysio in the village of Rejentówka, 30 km from Warsaw. On August 24, she went to see her husband in Warsaw, alerted by the news about mobilization. She spent the night from August 31 to September 1 alone in the peacefully sleeping zoo in a new villa built on the site of a former small house. At the same time, Jan Źabiński was on night duty, which was assigned to him at the briefing with President Starzyński because he was a reserve officer. Before dawn, German planes were already flying over the city behind a thick smokescreen. In the morning, after Jan returned, it was decided that Antonina would go to Rejentówka to see her son. Among the crowds of pedestrians and peasant wagons, in the raid of German planes, she rode in a horse-drawn cart more than seven hours to return to Rysio. "German planes were firing at the road, targeting helpless people. And it was not known then that modern war allowed the murder of women, children and civilians." (Źabińska, 2010, p. 27)<sup>52</sup>

On September 5, Jan joined them, and they decide to return to Warsaw together. The siege of Warsaw lasts for several weeks, during which air raids and bombings continue. Enemies bombed the zoo, and as a result, white bears escaped into the wild. To prevent the further escape of predators, which endangered human life, it was decided to shoot lions, tigers, and other dangerous animals.

Antonina and Rysio wandered around Warsaw, looking for shelter in safer parts of the city. Finally, in October, after the Capitulation of Warsaw, they returned to the bombed zoo. In winter, the zoo was closed. Some of the animals were sent to zoos in Germany, and the rest were shot. In the spring of 1940, the Warsaw Zoo transformed into a pig breeding facility.

During a warm May night, two boys appeared at the zoo. They were from the sabotage group, which in the last action, set fire to huge tanks of gasoline. They lay for several hours in the bushes near the Źabiński house, and when night came, they gave Jan the pre-arranged signal of the sound of an owl. They were placed in a pheasant house - a large aviary with a wooden house in the centre. All-day long, from dawn, they weren't allowed to make any noise. Lynx brought them food and something to read. These were the first "pheasants."

Jan Źabiński was involved in underground work in the Home Army from the beginning of the war. He taught in secret from medical kits, stored fuses, and various bomb-making parts in his home lab. In a big fertilizer barrel, he stored iron trichloride, which was used to blow up German trains. Jan and Antonina always carried a small dose of cyanide with them.

In July 1943, great deportations of the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto began. Antonina and Jan Źabiński asked themselves a desperate question: How to help these people? The ghetto was surrounded by a wall, all entrances were guarded, there was a risk of arrest and deportation to a camp for contacts with Jews, and the death of the whole family for hiding Jews. Jan Źabiński obtained a pass to the ghetto under the pretext of taking care of the green areas and smuggled food or messages into the ghetto.

One Sunday, in the summer of 1941, a German limousine drove up to the Źabiński house. Antonina quickly sat down at the piano and began to play the couplet from Beautiful Helena - "Go to Crete" - a warning to everyone hiding in the zoo that danger was approaching. It turned out that in the limousine was Ziegler, a German officer, head of the Jewish Arbeitsamt, who was treating his teeth in the ghetto under Dr. Leonia Tenenbaum, the wife of the entomologist Szymon Tenenbaum. Ziegler, a passionate entomologist, wanted to see Tenenbaum's insect collection at the zoo. Ziegler stated that Tenenbaum

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<sup>52</sup> Źabińska, A. (2010). People and animals. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

is asking for a visit, and he may somehow make it easier. And so, Jan Żabiński entered the ghetto gate for the first time, in a limousine, next to a German officer. In the presence of the person opening the gate, Jan asked if he could contact Tenenbaum this way. Ziegler agreed and said to the man: "Please let this gentleman in whenever he comes to see me." (Żabińska, 2010, p. 102)<sup>53</sup> During the following weeks, Jan used this route to the ghetto several times and visited his Jewish friends. Until finally the moment came of trial and Jan descended from the official stairs to the gate with someone dressed as elegantly as possible, and thus looking a bit different than the average inhabitant of the ghetto. He then ordered himself to open the gate. (Żabińska, 2010, p. 103)<sup>54</sup> The fourth time the guard questioned the person accompanying Jan, but he took out his pass, showed it to the guard from a distance, and said in an indignant, confident voice: "But this gentleman has a pass!" (Żabińska, 2010, p. 104)<sup>55</sup> After that, Jan had no problems with the guard.

At first, Jan acted alone, but soon Akcja Żegota, an organization to help Jews, created by the initiative of Zofia Kossak, Lilka's cousin and Magda Kossak engaged. It was attended by people of Aryan and non-Aryan origin, including: Julian Grobelny, Tadeusz Rek, Piotr Gajewski, Władysław Bartoszewski, Aleksander Kamiński, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Witold Bieńkowski, Wanda Filipowicz, Maria Grzegorzewska, Ewa Rybicka, the Ossowsky professors, Czesława Wojeńska, and Janina Derecka, Maria Kahn, Adolf Bermann and his wife Basia, Hajner, Rudnicka, Rachela Auerbach (Aniela Dobrucka), Helena Merenholc. Catholic religious associations cooperated with them. (Żabińska, 2010)<sup>56</sup>

And so, the animal sanctuary became a sanctuary for people. They appeared at the zoo for short or long periods. For most of them, the zoo was a transit station, and then they were smuggled to other places where they were given shelter and a hiding place, often outside of Warsaw. Some, such as the sculptor Magdalena Gross, or her future husband Maurycy Paweł Fraenkel, stayed at the Żabiński house longer, hiding in wardrobes or the attic in case of danger. They also helped scouts, children, and school-age boys who fought in the Gray Ranks and took part in various sabotage and information campaigns.

"Jews who were looking for a hiding place after leaving the ghetto or had to quickly leave the 'burned; place after the so-called Aryan side asked the Żabiński family for help. (...) Among those hiding in the garden were: Magdalena Gross, Maurycy Paweł Fraenkel, Rachela Auerbach, Regina and Samuel Kenigswein, Eugenia Sylkes, Marcelli Lewi-Łebkowski with his family, Marysia Aszerówna, Joanna Kramsztykówna, Eleonora Tenenbaum, the Keller couple with a child, Irena Mayzel, Lewy the Advocate, Kinszerbaum, and Dr. Anzelmówna." (Dzięciołowska, Polin. Polish Righteous, 2015)<sup>57</sup>

People got names of animals, depending on the aviary they were hiding in. If they lived in a wooden house, in an aviary of pheasants, they would become pheasants. Magda Gross called herself a starling, and little Moshe (Mieczysław) and Stefcia Kenigswein, hidden in the basement, were christened squirrels after Antonina tried to lighten their black hair blonde and made them red. It was safer to be an animal than a human in a war.

Antonina and Jan Żabiński secured several hundred people during World War II. For their help, Jan and Antonina Żabiński were honoured in 1965 with the title Righteous Among the Nations.

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<sup>53</sup> Żabińska, A. (2010). People and animals. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

<sup>54</sup> Żabińska, A. (2010). People and animals. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

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<sup>56</sup> Żabińska, A. (2010). People and animals. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.

<sup>57</sup> Dzięciołowska, K. (2015). Polin. Polish Righteous. Retrieved from House under the Crazy Star. The story of Jan and Antonina Żabiński: <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/pl/historie-pomocy/historia-pomocy-rodzina-zabinskih>

In 2016, a Hollywood production was created that tells the story of the Warsaw Zoo during World War II - Asylum (Zookeeper's Wife), directed by Niki Caro (Caro, 2016).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Caro, N. (Director). (2016). Azyl (Zookeeper's Wife) [Film].

## Nońcia the grandma. Alfreda Markowska, 1926-2021



**A mural on the wall of the Raszyńska Community Junior High School in Warsaw, which resembles the figure of Nońcia. It was designed and painted together with the students by Dariusz Paczkowski from the Klamra Foundation**

During World War II, not only Jews but also Roma people were considered “worthless” by the Third Reich, although the Germans could not decide for a long time what to do with them. In the early 1940s, many Sinti (German Roma) even served in the Wehrmacht; it was common for a son to be fighting at the front while his family had already been sent to the camps (Hreczuk, 2015).<sup>59</sup>

Auschwitz became the symbol of the Roma Holocaust, where the Zigeunerlager or ‘Gypsy Camp’ existed since 1943. On August 2, 1944, the Gypsy camp was “liquidated”: those who could work went to Buchenwald, and women, children, and the elderly were sent to the gas chamber. This date is now a day of remembrance of the extermination of the Roma (Hreczuk, 2015).<sup>60</sup>

During the war, two-thirds of European Gypsies: Roma, Sinti, Keřderasz, and Lovar, were killed, estimated from 250,000 up to 2 million (Hreczuk, 2015).<sup>61</sup> They were murdered in concentration camps or shot in gypsy camps they had set up in a remote area of the woods. For one Roma girl,

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<sup>59</sup> Hreczuk, A. (2015, 01 27). Angel in the skirt, THE ADDITION "AUSCHWITZ. VOICES OF THE LIVING" APPEARED TOGETHER WITH THE NUMBER TP 05/2015. Retrieved from the location Tygodnik Powszechny: <https://www.tygodnikp.usuallynny.pl/aniol-w-spodnicy-26201>.

<sup>60</sup> Hreczuk, A. (2015, 01 27). Angel in the skirt, THE ADDITION "AUSCHWITZ. VOICES OF THE LIVING" APPEARED TOGETHER WITH THE NUMBER TP 05/2015. Retrieved from the location Tygodnik Powszechny: <https://www.tygodnikp.usuallynny.pl/aniol-w-spodnicy-26201>.

<sup>61</sup> Hreczuk, A. (2015, 01 27). Angel in the skirt, THE ADDITION "AUSCHWITZ. VOICES OF THE LIVING" APPEARED TOGETHER WITH THE NUMBER TP 05/2015. Retrieved from the location Tygodnik Powszechny: <https://www.tygodnikp.usuallynny.pl/aniol-w-spodnicy-26201>.

Alfreda Markowska, nicknamed Nońcia, the war started in 1941. In a forest near Biała Podlaska, the Germans murdered all her relatives: her parents, siblings, and relatives. Nońcia survived because she had just gone out to the village to get food. She was 15 at the time. A year later, Nońcia was 16. She was already married and worked on the railroad. This work allowed her to save children from trains taking people to the camps.

Agnieszka Hreczuk vividly describes one of these actions:

"It is dark. The air is heavy as it must be when dozens of people travel for many days in a locked wagon. The stench of sweat, faeces, fear. The train stops, someone slides the door open. Railway workers take out the dead, give water to the living. Watsi makes a quick decision: she presses her son Parno into the arms of a young worker in a long skirt. Maybe she says something, or maybe nothing. It's seconds. The girl sneaks out with the boy under the wagons. The train with Watsi goes to Auschwitz. " (Hreczuk, 2015).<sup>62</sup>

She also saved Roma and Jewish children who survived the massacres. It helped that she had the documents confirming her employment on the railroad, which protected her from arrest. "She reached the places of mass murder of Roma people. She looked for children hidden in holes and bushes. Often, she had a dozen or so of them to support. To feed everyone, she worked, foretold, begged, and stole. She made documents for children, found families, as we would say today, foster families." (Miłkowski, 2021).<sup>63</sup>

Alfreda Markowska saved several dozens of Roma, Jewish, Polish and German children. The history of Alfreda Markowska was told in the book "Na dzia doj, Romnije" (Don't go there, Gypsy girl) (Daszkiewicz, Doliński, Szmidt & Szymanek, 2017).<sup>64</sup> She was also mentioned in the book by Ellie Keen "Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide." (Keen, 2017).<sup>65</sup> On October 17, 2006, President Lech Kaczyński decorated Alfreda Markowska with the Commander's Cross with the Star of the Order of Polonia Restituta.

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<sup>62</sup> Hreczuk, A. (2015, 01 27). Angel in the skirt, THE ADDITION "AUSCHWITZ. VOICES OF THE LIVING" APPEARED TOGETHER WITH THE NUMBER TP 05/2015. Retrieved from the location Tygodnik Powszechny: <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/aniol-w-spodnicy-26201>.

<sup>63</sup> Miłkowski, J. (2021, 02 07). How Grandma Nońcia saved the children- the incredible story of Alfreda

<sup>64</sup> Daszkiewicz, H. A., Doliński, R., Szmidt, I., & Szymanek, A. (2017). Na dzia doj, Romnije [Don't go there Gypsy girl]. Gorzów Wlkp. : Association of Polish Roma.

<sup>65</sup> Keen, E. (2017). Right to Remember: A Handbook for Education with Young People on the Roma Genocide. Council of Europe.

## Stefania Cendrowska, 1896-1985



**Stefania Cendrowska, source: Program of the ceremony "Righteous Among the Nations", Warsaw August 21, 2013, <https://www.polin.pl/template/gfx/sprawiedliwi.pdf>**

Stefania Cendrowska. An ordinary, yet extraordinary woman. She was born in 1896, so when the war broke out, she was already a mature woman, over 40 years old. During the occupation she lived in Warsaw, and later in Łódź, on Nawrot Street. In February 1943 Jutta Szabason came under her care. It was her who led to the fact that on 21 August 2013 - posthumously (because she died in 1985) - Stefania was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations title. On her behalf the medal was received by her relatives, Władysław Kubiak and Matthias Schweikert, and the speech at the ceremony in Warsaw was delivered by the Rescued, Yehudit Cohen from Israel.

Jutta Szabason was born in Hettstadt, Germany, in 1937 as the daughter of Mina Emma Anna, a German, and Chaim Mendel Szabason, a Jew from Poland (who settled in Saxony after World War I and ran a shoe shop), who married in 1921. The family was deported from Germany to Poland in October 1938. She and her daughter Mina went to Germany for a short time but returned to be with her husband in February 1940. The Szabason family settled in Falenica near Warsaw where, in October 1940, a ghetto was established (liquidated at the end of August 1942) in which they also found themselves.

During this period, due to very difficult living conditions, Jutta's father turned several times for help to the American Joint Distribution Committee - a Jewish self-help organization, whose representatives continued their activities in occupied Poland. Whether they received any help is unknown. Jutta's parents were probably murdered in 1940, and the girl was taken in by relatives, including Johanna Schmukler. In the spring of 1941 she, too, turned to Jewish welfare organizations for financial support (documents confirming this are found in the Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw).

Jutta probably came under Stefania Cendrowska's care in February 1943. Due to the liquidation of the ghetto in Falenica in August 1942, during which all Jews living at that time were transported to the camp in Treblinka, it can be assumed that the girl must have been taken out of the ghetto even before that. It is not known how she found herself in Stefania's care. However, in the collection of the Coordination Committee (a Zionist organization which searched for Jewish children after the war)



there is a sheet of paper with Jutta's photograph, name and the information that she had been hidden by Stefania Cendrowska since February 1943.

When Jutta was under Stefania's care, she used the name Jadwiga, but was called Iga. Although after years she did not remember much from that period, which is understandable considering her age and traumatic experiences (e.g. death of her parents - one of her memories/flash of memory is staying in one room with the body covered with a blanket), she did not forget that she was treated like a member of the family. Stefania surrounded her with care and love. They visited Stefania's relatives together, went to the park, and the girl also attended school. But Jutta also recalled that although because of her appearance and her light blond hair she was easily presented as a Polish girl, there were moments of fear and hiding behind a wardrobe.

The girl stayed with Stefania Cendrowska until 1946, when she was found by the Coordination Committee and placed in a Jewish orphanage in Łódź on Piotrkowska Street. Years later, she remembered that she longed to return to her guardian and missed her very much. She also kept the cross she had received from her and held it at night. Together with other orphans she was then sent to an orphanage in Bielawa in Lower Silesia, then to an orphanage in France (in Les Choux), and in 1949 to Israel. There she was adopted by a distant family in the Mizra kibbutz. She never saw Stefania again.

That same year Stefania left for Krakow. There, she took care of her nephews and completed a course as a camp teacher. She wrote heartfelt, loving letters to Jutta, sent Polish books so that the girl would not forget the Polish language, and pictures. She also asked her for photos and letters: "Write to me, my beloved child, if you remember anything from the time in Poland when you were in my house in Warsaw and in Lodz. After all, you had finished two classes in school, and you wrote very well. You only had difficulties with maths..."

However, on the kibbutz Yutta, according to what was believed at the time, left the past behind. The children were to learn Hebrew and become fully Jewish, to integrate as quickly and fully as possible into Israel. They were forbidden to speak Polish and to maintain ties with those with whom the past bound them. Jutta - Yehudit is left with only a few photos.

In Israel, Yehudit started a family and raised three children. Only then, with the help of her daughter, did she begin to search for her roots. After she retired and the fall of the Iron Curtain, she came to Poland to find traces of the story of her parents and her guardian. To find the story of her rescue - the woman who risked her own life to give her love.

An extremely interesting plot of the story is that the search for Yehudit was supported and immortalized in the film "Jutta and Me". Maciej Cendrowski, a directing student at the Łódź Film School, who suspected that Stefania might be his great-grandfather's sister, supported and documented the search for Yehudit and her daughter Orit. According to the film's press materials, we learn that the search uncovered not only Jutta's tragic story but also the secrets of the Cendrowski family. The film - a 2014 documentary etude - was awarded an honorary diploma for "credibly showing the process of searching for one's own cultural roots" at the 24th "Man at Risk" Media Festival in Łódź in November 2014.

It turned out that Yehudit, or rather her daughter, found the letters Stefania wrote to the girl only years later. The adoptive family (in spite of the fact that they were aware of the bond between Yehudit and Mrs. Cendrowska, as well as of their mutual longing) probably hid these letters from her, and even someone secretly wrote back to her (because when Stefania wrote subsequent letters she referred to the replies she received). The film also shows a visit of Yehudit with her husband and daughter in

Poland, a visit to the Jewish Historical Institute, in Falenica, and finally to the cemetery where Stefania Cendrowska is buried. A meeting for which it turned out to be too late... Nevertheless, Yehudit found her guardian's family, including Bobus, the boy Stefania had taken care of and who, together with Jutta, had been immortalized in a photograph she had kept since leaving Poland in 1946.



Still from "Jutta and Me", Maciej Cendrowski and Yehudit Cohen, source:  
<https://www.filmschool.lodz.pl/en/news/471,sekrety-rodzinne.html>

On 23 January 2013, after more than two years of filing an application, and after a long and difficult search, the Yad Vashem Institute for the Remembrance of the Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust posthumously recognized Stefania Cendrowska as Righteous Among the Nations. A heroine - for sure. But the story is not only about courage - it is more about hope and love. What is more important?!

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<https://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=1235513>

Film "Jutta and I", directed by Maciej Cendrowski, Leon Schiller's State Higher School of Film, Television and Theatre in Łódź, 2014 - thanks to Małgorzata Wabińska's help and the Re-director's sharing, for which I thank her immensely - this story has thus taken on a different, more real dimension.

## Ryszard Lerczyński, 1920-2006



**Medal of the Righteous Among the Nations, photo: Museum of the History of Polish Jews, source: <https://polin.pl/pl/>**

The Talmudic inscription "He who saves one life - saves the whole world" can be found on the Righteous Among the Nations medal. The name of the medal is widely known, and it has been awarded to over 27 thousand people who, during World War II, risked their own lives to save Jews from the Holocaust. Among them the most numerous group - over 7 thousand - are Poles. There is only one person from Lodz, a city that is not commonly recognized among foreigners, which is now the third largest city in Poland in terms of population, and before 1939 its population was over 30% Jewish - Ryszard Lerczyński. He is certainly a special figure, worthy of commemoration, but unknown even in the city itself.

Łódź, which during the war was called Litzmannstadt, was initially to be a part of the General Government (it was to be a place of temporary stay for Poles, not directly incorporated into the Reich, an occupied territory), and even its capital. Eventually, due to, among others, the local Volksdeutsche (and it should be remembered that before the war almost 9% of the town's inhabitants were Germans) it was incorporated into the Third Reich within the so-called Wartheland, and the name of the town and the names of the streets were changed. Since autumn 1939 the ghetto was considered and designed, and in February 1940 it was established in the town.

The ghetto occupied the northern, neglected and inhabited mainly by Jewish craftsmen and workers, part of the city - Bałuty and Old Town. In its 4.13 square kilometers, about 160 thousand Jews, who had lived in Lodz before the war, were isolated (although it should be remembered that some of the Jews, who lived in the city, escaped to the east shortly after the outbreak of the war). Between 1941 and 1942, Jews from neighbouring towns and villages, from liquidated ghettos, and about 20,000 Jews from Western Europe (including Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, and the Czech Republic) were moved here. There was also a so-called gypsy camp for Roma and Sinti in the ghetto (it existed at the turn of 1941 and 1942, there were over 5 thousand people there). All in all, about 200 thousand people passed through the Litzmannstadt Ghetto.

From 1942, Jews from the Lodz ghetto were deported to the extermination center in Chełmno nad Nerem, and later also to Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is necessary to mention the most tragic moment in the ghetto's history - "Wielka Szpera" (the name szpera comes from German: Allgemeine Ghesperre -

a total ban on leaving homes). It was a deportation action to a death camp, the victims of which were children under 10 years of age and the elderly over 65, as well as the sick and those who did not work. During the "Wielka Szpera", between September 5th and 12th, 1942, over 15 thousand people were transported to the extermination camp in Chełmno nad Nerem.

Polish inhabitants also suffered repressions. Due to its industrial nature, it was an important point for the German economy. The Germans from Volhynia and Bukovina were to be resettled here. Poles were to constitute the main workforce, but they were not spared from deportations and resettlements. A Resettlement Centre was established in Lodz, to which 5 camps were subordinated and which dealt with the resettlement of Poles from Wartheland to the General Government. In total, between 1939 and 1945 about 450 000 inhabitants were displaced from the Lodz region, which was about 25%.

Initially, the Lodz ghetto functioned as an open Jewish district, but on 30 April 1940, as the first one in occupied Poland, it was fully isolated from the rest of the city. The ghetto was surrounded by a wooden fence and barbed wire entanglements. There were boards along the ghetto's borders informing that it was forbidden to cross them. Litzmannstadt Ghetto is considered to be the most isolated among all the ghettos created by the Germans in Europe. It was the largest ghetto after the Warsaw Ghetto and the last to be liquidated on Polish soil, as late as August 1944. From the Lodzer Ghetto 877 people survived.

The Lodz ghetto owed its long existence undoubtedly to the fact it was a huge labour camp. Chaim Mordechaj Rumkowski, the leader of the Jewish elders elected by the Nazis, believed that as long as Jews were needed by the occupants, they would be safe. Hence - "our only way is work" - he emphasized. In the fall of 1940, the Central Bureau of Labor Ministries was established, which was responsible for organizing production in the ghetto. The number of departments (factories and production workshops) and their employees grew steadily, and at its peak, amounted to over 70,000 people. The factories produced uniforms, rucksacks, shoes and other equipment for the economy of the Third Reich, and above all for the army. Although the ghetto existed for a long time, the conditions in which Jews lived and worked, despite the reduction of its population as a result of subsequent deportations to extermination centres, were very harsh. As a result of famine, epidemics and diseases about 45 thousand people died there.

The isolation of the Lodz ghetto resulting from German legislation, the forces of law and order caring for this isolation and the regulations and policies of Chaim Rumkowski meant that Polish-Jewish contacts were severely limited. Nevertheless, especially at the beginning of the war, they were quite frequent. Political contacts, or rather attempts at them (which never resulted in any initiative) came to nothing, and friendly relations were superseded by smuggling, which in the realities of life under occupation, and especially in the ghetto, was of great importance.

Imprisoned in the Lodz ghetto with her family, Eva Libitzki, who managed to survive the Holocaust, wrote in her memoirs: "The Germans demolished all the surrounding houses, leaving a dangerous no-man's zone between the fence and the Aryan side. Compared, for example, with Warsaw, where one could at least make some contact with members of the 'underground,' after our ghetto was closed no food or weapons were smuggled into it. Practically no Jews managed to escape from it either. Two of the most important arteries in the city - Zgierska and Limanowskiego - ran through the ghetto. Trams running along them carried Poles and Volksdeutsche. We were separated from these streets by a barbed wire fence. In order to get to the other side we had to use a wooden footbridge running almost 8 meters above them. Everything possible was done to separate us from the rest of Łódź. (...) The lack of sewers made smuggling and escapes impossible, as was the case in the Warsaw Ghetto".

Ryszard Lerczyński, was awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations on 1 September 1992. The procedure of awarding him the medal by Yad Vashem was initiated in August 1989 by Chaim Ber Putersznýt and Ruchla Putersznýt (formerly Frymer) whomade a statement to the Polish consul in Sao Paulo in which they described the help Ryszard Lerczynski had given them during the war.

Born in October 1920 in Odrzywół (Mazowieckie Province), son of Marianna and Stanisław Lerczyński, Ryszard was only nineteen when the war broke out. He lived with his parents on 43 Ogrodowa Street in the small town of Ruda Pabianicka, near Lodz. Today it is Pokładowa Street in Łódź. At that time many Volksdeutsche lived in that area.

Chaim Ber Putersznýt (born 15 April 1915 in Łódź), a carpenter, knew him even before the war and offered to help him in October 1939 after getting his parents' permission: "After obtaining my parents' consent, I prepared an insulated room in the attic of our cottage - a small room equipped with all the necessary facilities for human habitation [...] Food for guests was prepared by my mother". Chaim moved in with the Lerczyńskis and, a few days after him, also Ruchla Frymar, then 13 years old, his future wife (born on 28 November 1926 in Warsaw).

The Putersznyts lived in the prepared hiding place for about a year - until October 1940. As they themselves wrote in their application for Lerczyński to be honored: "[...] From the beginning of the occupation [...] until October 1940, in his apartment in 43 Ogrodowa Street in Łódź [...] he hid us from the Germans and supported both me and my wife risking his own life, all the more so because the Germans lived nearby. Our stay [...] had to be strictly conspiratorial, because in case of revealing [...] to Lerczyński Ryszard, like us, there was a death threat [...]"

Very little is known about the Putersznyts' stay in Ogrodowa Street. However, Ryszard Leczyński wrote: "Mr. Chaim Putersznýt was in constant contact with his relatives and friends in the Lodz ghetto throughout his stay in our house, I was his constant liaison, I carried organized food to the ghetto, also medicine, and on the way back letters for Chaim and Ruchla"

In October 1940, Chaim and Ruchla decided to leave their apartment on Ogrodowa Street and move to the ghetto. Probably, the persuasions of their relatives and friends were decisive. It was a time when the situation in the Lodz ghetto seemed relatively calm - the factories created by Rumkowski offered a chance for work and, it seemed, a guarantee for life. Chaim was a carpenter and it seemed that this would allow him to survive until the end of the war. He believed in the idea, which guided the Litzmanstadt Ghetto authorities, that work was the only way.

From that time on Ryszard Lerczyński helped his friends in the ghetto. Despite his strict isolation, according to both his and the Putersznyts' accounts, he visited them in the ghetto. Which was probably easier for him because of his previous contacts with Chaim's family within the ghetto. "Knowing the secret passage to the ghetto, until the end of the war I smuggled for Chaim and for Ruchla and their family and friends the medicines and food they needed". "Mr. Ryszard Lerczyński, in [...] years 1939-1945, at the risk of his own life, selflessly gave aid to the Jewish population in the form of medicines and food [...] which he delivered to the Jewish.

In his accounts, Ryszard Lerczyński also explained the source of the additional food he was able to support the Putersznyts. He was a tailor and often received merchandise or ration cards as payment for his services.

Lerczyński's help ended with the liquidation of the ghetto in the summer of 1944 (it lasted from 23 June to 29 August 1944). Both Chaim and Ruchla ended up in concentration camps, but they managed to survive. After the War, they married and emigrated to Brazil. Thanks to their application, which

contained all the information necessary to merit the award of Israel's highest civilian honor granted to non-Jews, on September 1st, 1992, the Yad Vashem Institute for the Remembrance of the Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust in Jerusalem honored him with the title of Righteous Among the Nations. Ryszard Lerczyński died on October 1, 2006, in Łódź.

"He helped us and our loved ones throughout the entire period of Nazi occupation completely selflessly, from purely human motives, to enable us to survive the hard years of persecution [...]."

How to describe this story other than a story of hope and courage? How to describe its hero - if not righteous?

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## German Stories

**Sophie Scholl, 1921-1943**

**Kate Kollwitz, 1867-1945**

**Oskar Rose, 1906-1968**

**Edith Wolff, 1904-1997**

**Erika Mann, 1905-1969**

### **Sophie Scholl, 1921-1943**



**Sophie Scholl, source The National WWII Museum**

One of the most outstanding German women who rejected the ideology of the fascist Nazi regime by forming an organised resistance group was Sophie Scholl (1921-43). Sophie along with her brother Hans Scholl and a few other young students from Munich, Bavaria, fought against the dictatorship until they were arrested and finally executed in 1943.

Sophie Scholl was born on 9 May 1921. She grew up with a sister and a brother. When the three siblings got into trouble with the National Socialist youth organisations such as Hitlerjugend and Bund Deutscher Mädel, she refused to follow the so-called Führerkult (the manipulation by Hitler to drive his leadership cult, having him acknowledged as supreme leader) and resigned the membership of these organisations. From the winter of 1942 Sophie participated in the Weiße Rose or White Rose, a resistance group whose members included her brother Hans and his

friend Alexander Schmorell. In February 1943 they were caught distributing anti-war leaflets at the University of Munich and afterwards were arrested by the Gestapo. The events following that day are most remarkable for the active resistance against the regime and are a good example of how the Nazi system dealt with renegades like Sophie Scholl. Within two days the three students were questioned by Robert Mohr, the so-called 'Vernehmungsberater', who was responsible for the questioning of witnesses. In fact, his examination had only one goal, to get them to betray each other. But they did not.

Nevertheless, one of the most sensational show trials in the history of Nazi rule took place. The judge of the supreme court, Roland Freisler himself, was in charge of the process. Freisler was infamous for having his own absurd interpretation of jurisdiction and therefore was the most feared 'judge' in Germany at the time. As a result, the verdict was already passed before the actual process began and the propaganda trial ended up with Sophie and her two 'co-conspirators' being sentenced to death by guillotine. Hans Scholl's last words were Es lebe die Freiheit! (long live freedom!) and Sophie's resistance lasted until the very end.

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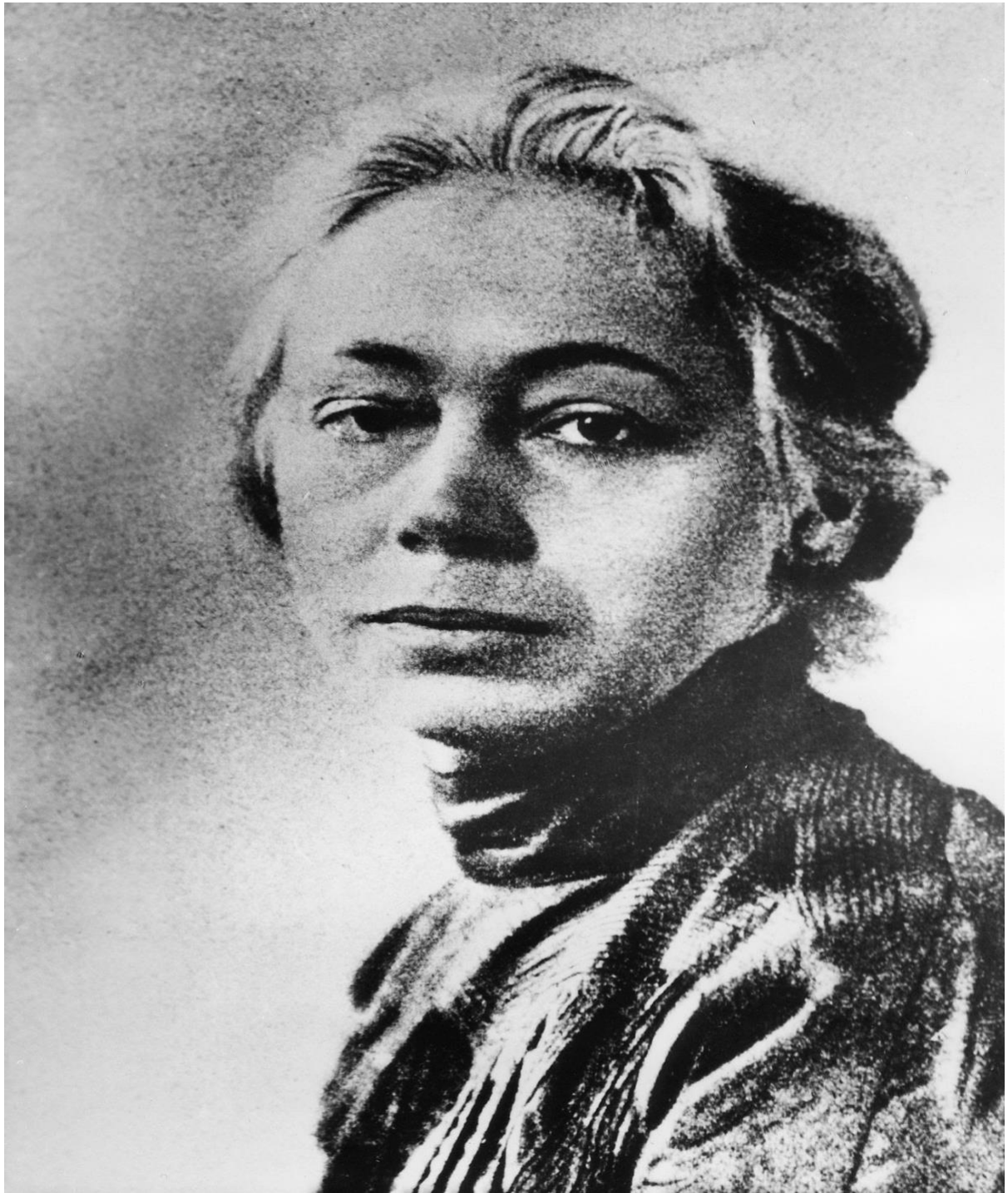
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## Käthe Kollwitz, 1867-1945



**Käthe Kollwitz**

Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945) was a German artist known for her expressionist prints, woodcuts and sculptures, and their compassionate portrayal of human anguish and hardship, especially during wartime, and with an emphasis on women and the working class. 'It is my duty to voice the sufferings of humankind,' she once said, 'the never-ending sufferings heaped mountain-high.'

Kollwitz was a lifelong pacifist and her work criticising nationalism eventually led to her persecution by the Nazis, although it failed to silence her artistic voice.

Käthe Kollwitz was born Käthe Schmidt on the 8th of July, 1867, in Königsberg, the historic Prussian city now known as Kaliningrad in Russia. Käthe's parents had socialist views and they passed these views on to their children alongside a love of the arts.

By age nineteen Kollwitz had enrolled in a painting class at the Berlin Academy for Women Artists (Berliner Künstlerinnenschule). She met her brother's friend, a medical student named Karl Kollwitz, and she was to become engaged to him while studying the following year at the Academy for Women Artists in Munich. After a seven-year engagement, they married in 1891, setting up house in an apartment in Berlin at the same address as Karl's practice. She would live there for more than fifty years. Karl was a socialist and he dedicated his medical work to the care of the poor of Berlin. They had two sons, Hans and Peter.

Kollwitz was drawn to working-class life in her work, coming to form a deeper respect and compassion through her interaction with those her husband treated. The premiere in 1893 of Gerhart Hauptmann's ground-breaking play, *The Weavers* (Die Weber), provided a seminal touchstone for Kollwitz, in its theatrical portrayal of Silesian weavers and their unsuccessful revolt in 1844 against the tide of the Industrial Revolution.

Käthe went on to create her own interpretation of the suffering of the working class through a cycle of lithographs and etchings on the weavers theme. The cycle was exhibited publicly in 1898 to widespread praise although official recognition via the gold medal of the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung in Berlin was rejected by Kaiser Wilhelm II, who suggested that women could not by definition be sufficiently worthy of such honours.

Two jury members of the German Art Exhibition in Dresden saw to it that she was recognised with a small gold medal in 1899. In 1901 she became the only female artist in the avant-garde Berlin Secession group (Die Sezession), a group of artists who positioned themselves counter to the conventional art scene. Kollwitz's next major cycle was titled *Peasant War* (1902-08), another popular but failed revolt, which took place in German-speaking areas of Europe from 1524 to 1525.

Kollwitz's younger son, Peter, was killed on a World War I battlefield in 1914; the loss affected her deeply and for a prolonged period of time. Having started a monument to Peter and his fallen comrades, she destroyed it in 1919. Eventually she began again, and *The Grieving Parents* was completed and placed in a Belgian cemetery in 1932. She was the first woman, in 1920, elected to the Prussian Academy of Arts, an honour that came with income, workspace and a professorship.

Having become a committed pacifist, Kollwitz, produced a new cycle, entitled *War*, in the years following World War I in response to propaganda attempting to reignite pro-war sentiment again. Her last major cycle of lithographs was created in the mid-1930s, entitled, *Death*, in the form of eight stones. Kollwitz was at the height of her professional stature by her sixtieth birthday in 1927 and had become a foremost German artist by the time the Nazis came to power. The Gestapo carried out a year-long campaign to get Kollwitz to renounce her anti-Nazi stance, which she never did. Käthe was forced to resign from her position at the Academy of Art as the Nazis threatened to close down the entire school if she did not. Her work was removed from museums, and she and her husband were threatened by the Gestapo with arrest and assignment to a concentration camp, although no further action was taken, no doubt because of her worldwide visibility.

Käthe's husband, Karl died on July 19, 1940. Her grandson, also called Peter was killed in action during WWII. Käthe was evacuated from Berlin in 1943. She passed her final months near Dresden, as a guest of Prince Ernst Heinrich of Saxony, and died sixteen days before the end of World War II.

During her lifetime, Käthe established herself in an art world dominated by men by successfully developing an aesthetic vision centred on women and the working class. The loss of her second son Peter in World War I had a profound impact on her personal life and work. She used her work to express mourning and death and Käthes famous No More War poster becomes a symbol of resistance to this day. An enlarged version of her sculpture Mother with her Dead Son is on display in The New Guardhouse in Berlin as a memorial to all victims of war and dictatorship.

## Oskar Rose, 1906-1968



**Oskar Rose, Source: Dokumentations- und Kulturzentrum Deutscher Sinti und Roma**

Oskar Rose was an important figure of resistance against the Nazi regime. He made several attempts to rescue his family at the risk of his own life. He dedicated his life to the resistance against fascism, racism and against the crimes of the Nazi regime. His efforts to stop the entire genocide by contacting the Catholic church are unique. Moreover, his commitment has led to the German state admitting the genocide of the Sinti and Roma during the Nazi regime and he encouraged many other people to stand up against racism, discrimination, oppression, exclusion, and expulsion.

Oskar Rose was born on January 27<sup>th</sup> in 1906. He lived together with his family, which consisted of his mother Lisetta, his father Anton and his younger brother Vinzenz, in Darmstadt (GDW & BA 57). Nowadays, the city is located in the southern half of Germany, close to Frankfurt. Due to the successful cinema company of his father, the family lived in prosperity. Oskar and his brother also worked in their family's business. Moreover, Oskar and his family belonged the minority group of Sinti and Roma.

Sinti and Roma groups faced a long history of political prosecution and expulsion. In Germany, Sinti and Roma had been living here for more than 600 years. Documents show that by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sinti and Roma had been spread all over the European continent. However, it was also by the end the 15<sup>th</sup> century that a revival of the oppression and prosecution of Sinti and Roma started remerged. For example, they were forbidden to do manual labour and they were displaced from many areas. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Empress Maria Theresa from Austria-Hungary enacted laws aiming at settling the Sinti and Roma. The result was forced assimilation by the prohibition to speak their own language, restricted marriages, and forced separation from their children. Hence, to settle somewhere had devastating consequences for Sinti and Roma. Many decided to travel around, without having a right for education and labour. In 1871 the German government started to enact

laws for the further oppression of Sinti and Roma. With the seizure of power in 1938 by the Nazi Party the situation of Sinti and Roma got even worse.

Oskar and his family experienced these deteriorating circumstances as well, for example in 1934 when his father was banned from his profession. Through a lawsuit, he could delay this ban for three more years. In 1937 the Nazi Party shut down the cinema of his father and thereby destroyed the basis of existence of family Rose. The family bought a new house in a different town, and they moved about sixty kilometres far away. At this time, Oskar was working in a law firm.

The outbreak of World War II meant another era of mistreatment and exclusion for Sinti and Roma - namely deportations. The deportations started in May 1940. The Nazi regime perceived Sinti and Roma as a nuisance and started to classify the belonging to the group of Sinti and Roma by descent. Director of the authority who developed this system of classification was Robert Ritter. According to his authority, it was already sufficient to have one great-grandparent who was classified as Sinti and Roma to be classified as Sinti and Roma.

In order to evade an arrest, Oskar and his family decided to escape on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1940 and went into hiding. The family members had different places of residence. In 1943, most of his family members got caught, arrested, and deported into the concentration and extermination camp Birkenau. Oskar managed to escape. He got forged documents from a befriended lawyer and used a new name: Alexander Adler. His first place of residence was Munich. There, in 1943, he tried to contact high-ranking members of the Catholic church, for example Cardinal Faulhaber. Oskar wanted to inform them about the plans of the Nazi Party for the planned murder and deportation of Sinti and Roma. He hoped that they would help him. But although many Sinti and Roma were members of the Catholic church, the church did nothing to help them. Cardinal Faulhaber did not even receive Oskar. Recently, people found in Faulhaber's diary an entry stating that he, Faulhaber, "does not intend to offer his help". In the following weeks, Oskar addressed anonymous letters to several other bishops, such as archbishop cardinal Adolf Bertram and to archbishop Conrad Gröber. Moreover, today we have evidence that the Catholic Church was well informed about the crimes of the Nazi regime. Nonetheless, the church did not help Oskar Rose.

In the meantime, Vinzenz, Oskar's brother, managed to survive the extermination camp in Auschwitz due to his musical talent. After some time, he got transferred to a different concentration camp where he got abused for experiments with pathogens. Finally, Vinzenz worked as a forced labourer in the concentration camp Neckarelz. At this time, Oskar again went into hiding at a friend's house in Heidelberg after his request for help had failed. While being in Heidelberg, Oskar learned that his younger brother Vinzenz was in a concentration camp very nearby. Having this information, Oskar developed a plan to rescue his brother. He disguised as an Italian soldier, drove to the concentration camp and pretended that he must deliver an important message from a wounded soldier. The people responsible indeed let him talk to his brother and Oskar informed his brother about his plan. At this time, Vinzenz worked in an underground tunnel and had to load a truck with materials. In order to escape, Vinzenz hid under the seat of a bribed truck driver. This truck driver would then smuggle his brother out of the concentration camp. The plan succeeded and on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1944 Oskar saved his brother. Together, he and his brother went into hiding until the U.S. army liberated them.

For the rest of his family, rescue came too late. Oskar Rose lost thirteen family members, including his parents. According to estimates, between 220,000 to 500,000 Sinti and Roma were murdered in Europe because of the Nazi regime. 25,000 from around 40,000 in Germany and Austria living Sinti and Roma died as a cause of this genocide.

After the war, Oskar continued the family tradition and managed his own cinema company. However, with the end of World War II and with the end of the Nazi regime, Oskar and his brother did not stop fighting against the crimes of the Nazi regime and against its supporters. For example, they tried to collect evidence against Robert Ritter, the former director of the agency which developed a system of classification for Sinti and Roma for the Nazi regime.

Moreover, the brothers founded an association for 'people prosecuted due to racism who are not Jewish' because after the war, Sinti and Roma continued to be discriminated in Germany, for example by the police. This association was the important foundation for later civil rights movements for Sinti and Roma. Oskar Rose died in 1968 and his brother, who continued the political work, died in 1996. A milestone in the history of Sinti and Roma in Germany was achieved when in 1982 the Chancellor Helmut Schmidt acknowledged the crimes of the Nazi regime against Sinti and Roma and classified them as genocide. Oskar Rose's son, Romani Rose, has been the director of the central association for Sinti and Roma in Germany since 1982.

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## Edith Wolff, 1904-1997



**Edith Wolff, Source: German Resistance Memorial Centre**

Edith Wolff is a role model. She directly and indirectly stood up against the Nazi regime at the risk of her own life. She saved many lives of persecuted Jews and fought against a fascist regime. In order to protect other people's lives, she suffered greatly.

Edith Wolff, called Ewo, was born in 1904 in Berlin. She was raised, together with her two younger sisters, in a Jewish-Christian family. Ewo was baptized Christian, but she soon drew closer to Judaism. After finishing school, she studied philosophy, but without completing any formal degrees. Ewo was fascinated by the ideals of the youth movements, socialism, and the early feminist movements. She became a convinced pacifist and Zionist. In 1934, a couple of years later she became Jewish. At first, her decision was only politically motivated. For her, it was an act of resistance against the Nazi regime. At this time, the Nazi regime had already begun to systematically oppress and exclude Jewish citizens. It took many years until she also felt the religious conviction to be Jewish.

The persecution of Jews in Germany and their exclusion from society started directly after the seizure of power by the Nazi Party under Adolf Hitler in 1933. By then, around 525,000 Jews lived in Germany. The regime passed numerous laws, which were all aimed at oppressing and excluding Jews. Directly after the seizure of power, artists, scientists, and other relevant people for public life had to lay down their positions and get replaced by other people through the Nazi regime. The legal foundation for the exclusion of Jews from society in Germany were the 'Nürnberg laws', enacted on September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1935. The laws stated that only citizens with 'Aryan' blood or people with similar blood can hold all political rights. Other people, such as Jews, were subordinate and could not be treated as equal German citizens. The Nazi Party developed a system of classification to determine to which degree the person was classified Jew. A 'full Jew' was somebody with at least three Jewish grandparents, a person with one or two Jewish grandparents were regarded a 'Jewish hybrid' first or second degree. The classification was crucial for the persecution of Jewish people. As a result, between 1933 and 1939, about half of the Jews living in Germany emigrated to different countries.

According to the classification, Ewo was regarded as a hybrid of first degree. This already was a threatening circumstance. However, she still was in contact with many persecuted Jews and helped them to escape. Moreover, she was shocked by the indifference of her fellow citizens towards Anti-Semitic actions of terror. She tried to express her anger about this behaviour through action on her own, such as writing anonymous letters to authorities.

In 1937, Ewo met Recha Freier, a Jewish resistance fighter. Recha offered Ewo to help her in the organisation 'Jewish youth welfare'. The organization coordinated emigration to Palestine. In the organization Ewo met Jizchak Schwersenz. He was a teacher and a Jewish resistance fighter as well. They became close friends. Through him, Ewo learned a lot about the Jewish religion and begun to love and to appreciate the Judaism. One year later, in 1938, Ewo and Recha got excluded from the welfare organisation. The reason was that Ewo and Recha wanted to perform illegal actions against the Nazi regime. They wanted to do so in light of the starting deportations of Polish Jews by the Nazis. The other members of the organization rejected this.

In Germany, from 1938 and especially with the begin of the war, the difficulties for persecuted people to escape increased immensely. Likewise, the oppression of the Jews and their expropriation increased immensely. The Nazis perceived Jews to be their greatest enemy. Their extinction was the Nazi's main goal. From September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941, every as Jewish classified person had to wear a bandage on the right arm, depicting the Star of David. In autumn 1941 the systematic deportation of Jews begun. Jews had to move into ghettos which would facilitate their planned genocide. Even the construction of such ghettos was a mass murder because the police shot every person who was not able to work. The Nazis developed a method to kill many people at the same time using gas. For this purpose, the Nazis constructed extermination camps and special trucks. Starting in August 1941, the Nazis killed nearly 2,700,000 Jews in the extermination camps. In total, the Nazi regime killed six million Jews.

After the deportation of Jews who lived in Berlin started in 1941, Ewo tried to organize illegal means of escape. For example, she supported persecuted people with getting vouchers for groceries and false documents. In spring 1943, Ewo Wolff and Jizchak Schwersenz formed the illegal underground



group 'Chug Chaluzi' in Berlin. This means 'circle of pioneers'. Till today, Chug Chaluzi is the only known, existing youth-underground group. The group's aim was to hide Jews and other persecuted people and to help them with vouchers for groceries and false documents. Ewo and Jizchak tried to establish a daily routine for the children and to create happy moments. They found Aryan families who hid the children. Moreover, they continued to educate the children and taught them the Hebrew and English language, Jewish traditions, and Zionist ideas. This included the history of Zionism and the geography of Palestine. Furthermore, they organized hikes around Berlin. The daily gatherings helped to maintain an exchange between the group members. Ewo and Jizchak even organized the celebration of holidays, performed plays and did a scout competition. All that helped to distract the children from the dangerous circumstances for a little while. Ewo saved thirty three out of forty children that Chug Chaluzi hid.

In the same year, Ewo received a citation from the Gestapo. The Gestapo was the Nazi police and the secret service. But instead of going into hiding, Ewo decided to follow the citation. She was afraid of getting the group into trouble if she behaved differently. After she was imprisoned for seven months, her trial started in 1944. She was able to hide her connection to Jews who went into hiding. However, she was sentenced to two years in prison for 'favouring Jews' due to evidence suggesting that Ewo had given grocery vouchers to Jews. She survived the stay in 18 different concentration camps and prisons and got rescued in 1945.

Immediately after her rescue, Ewo got involved in the women-piece-movement. In December 1950, she moved to Switzerland and three years later to Israel. There, she took part in developing the Jewish-Arab dialogue. Edith Wolff died in 1997 in Haifa at the age of 93.

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## Erika Mann, 1905-1969



**Erika Mann**

Erika Mann is an excellent role model. She dedicated her life to fight for peace and freedom and against the Nazi regime. Although she went into exile, she fought Hitler and his party. Moreover, she was a pioneer of her time. She was open about her homosexuality and was an independently living woman who did what she thought was right.

Erika Mann was born on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November in 1905. Her younger brother Klaus was born one year later. She was the daughter of the well-known writer Thomas Mann. She and her brother Klaus had a very close relationship for their entire lifetime. Already as children, Erika and Klaus were the “Enfants terribles”. Erika was full of life, active and loud.

By the age of fourteen she and her brother founded a theatre stage group for children. In 1922, Erika still went to school and at the same time she was also employed at the ‘German Theatre’ in Berlin. After finishing school, Erika studied acting in Berlin in 1924. She had engagements in German cities such as Berlin and in Bremen. In 1925, she, her brother, Erika’s fiancé, and Pamela Wedekind played a role in her brother’s play “Anja and Esther”. This play made the siblings famous. During her lifetime, Erika represents the image of a modern, emancipated, queer woman. Next to writing and acting, Erika has another great passion: Driving cars. She even wins a 10,000 kilometres long rally through south Europe in 1931.

She married the homosexual Gustaf Gründgens in June 1926 at the age of twenty-one. Later, Gründgens became a famous actor and was supported by the Nazi regime. Three years after her marriage, Erika and Gustaf had a divorce. In the following years, Erika had several love affairs with prominent women. Due to engagements in Munich and several other engagements in Berlin, Frankfurt

and Hamburg Erika finally quit her studies in 1926. One year later, Erika and Klaus travelled the world for nine months. The siblings noted down their experiences in a travel report.

Erika started to criticize fascism already at a young age. In 1928, Erika started to work in broadcasting and published her first journalistic articles. In particular, she wrote for a Munich and Berlin newspaper. In January 1932, Erika attended a pacifist event for peace and freedom. Heavy insults and threats in the national-socialist press were the consequences of this. Thereupon, Erika sued them and won the trial. In June, however, the Nazis prevented her attendance at a big event for performances and theatre by threatening the hosts. Several other threats led to the end of her career as an actress. Erika still published a children's book in 1932.

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler seized power in Germany together with his Nazi party, the NSDAP. With that, the intensified persecution and oppression of political enemies began. Jews and communists in particular got persecution. In the same year, together with her brother, Therese Giehse, Magnus Henning, and Erika founded the literary-political cabaret 'The Peppermill'. For some time, Therese and Erika were in a romantic relationship. Erika wrote most of the texts and performed on stage as well. Centre of their program was the demand for more social justice. Seemingly naive and harmless, but enigmatic songs, poems and sketches expose National Socialism and ridicule it.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of March Erika's parents, her uncle, her five siblings and she herself went into exile. Erika encouraged her family to leave Nazi Germany and held the family together. She was a staunch critic of fascist Germany. First, she went to France and after that she lived in Switzerland with some family members. In Zurich, 'The Peppermill' continued with performances. Through that, they criticised Hitler and the Nazi Party from the exile. As a direct consequence of her political engagement, Erika lost her German citizenship in June 1935. Through a marriage with the homosexual poet Wystan H. Auden, Erika received British citizenship in 1935. Erika never had seen him before their marriage.

January 1936 was the last performance of 'The Peppermill' on European ground after more than thousand mostly well attended performances. Erika and Thomas tried to continue with performances of 'The Peppermill' in the United States, but they were not very successful. The ensemble split up and Therese went back to Germany. In 1937, it was Erika who first settled down permanently in the United States. One year later, her parents and her brother followed her.

The following years Erika dedicated to informing citizens in the United States and in other countries about the cruelties of the Nazi regime in Germany. She published a pamphlet about the practices of child raising in the Nazi regime and made lecture tours to inform about Nazi Germany. Moreover, in cooperation with her brother she published many articles, for example about German emigrants and about the political situation in Germany. During the second world war, Erika worked as a correspondent for American, Canadian and British newspaper and for the American army in various war zones. In 1942, she was hired in the "Office of War Information" in New York. After the war, Erika is the only woman who observes the 'Nuremberg trials'. The trials were about prosecuting the war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes against peace. They started on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1945 and involved the trial of 24 main war criminals and six criminal organisations of the Nazi regime. After nearly one year, 22 war criminals were convicted and twelve of them were sentenced to death.

Her brother Klaus committed suicide in 1949 with an overdose of sleeping pills. After that, Erika suffered greatly and felt responsible for his death. Moreover, the decision from the American immigration office about her receiving American citizenship got delayed several times. The authorities had concerns because Erika lived an unconventional lifestyle. She even was under surveillance by the FBI for four years during the 'McCarthy era'. Allegedly, Erika was a communist. Finally, she convinced her parents to go back to Switzerland in 1952. There, she lived in seclusion and suffered because of various medial issues. Until her father died, she worked as his assistant and secretary. Erika's father died in 1955. After that, Erika managed his and her brother's estate. For example, she advocated strongly for the publication of Klaus' writings. In the following years, her health declined further. In 1969, Erika Mann died from brain tumour in Zurich.

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## **Project Partners**

### **Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality**

[www.smashingtimes.ie](http://www.smashingtimes.ie)

The Smashing Times International Centre for the Arts and Equality is dedicated to the promotion, study and practice of the arts, human rights, climate justice and gender equality.

Smashing Times is an international organisation for the Arts and Human Rights. Our mission is to lead the development of the arts to promote and advance equality and human rights and to connect citizens to the arts, human rights, climate justice and gender equality, working with artists and communities to create collaborative art practice in local, national, European and international settings.

The centre operates as a world class arts space and digital hub for artists, citizens, communities and the general public across Ireland, Northern Ireland and internationally. Core services consist of membership, resources, advice and the implementation of a range of innovative projects promoting professional and collaborative arts practice and a youth arts Ensemble. The centre promotes membership, networking, training, guidance, support and advocacy in relation to using high quality creative processes, collaborative arts practice, research and new digital technologies to promote equality and human rights for all.

Led by Director Mary Moynihan, the centre produces an annual and multi-annual inter-disciplinary arts programme with a focus on economic development, tourism, community infrastructure and education. All artistic mediums are supported with a focus on the performing and collaborative arts including theatre, film, visual arts, dance and music. Smashing Times' vast experience conducting arts-based projects both nationally and internationally and its global reputation for excellence in relation to using professional and socially engaged arts practice to promote human rights is drawn upon in the creation of this innovative space.

### **Iniciativas de Futuro Para Una Europa Social (IFESCOOP), Valencia, Spain**

[www.ifescoop.eu](http://www.ifescoop.eu)

IFESCOOP is a non-profit cooperative collaborating with regional and local Public administration organisations (regional government and city municipalities), with social partners (trade unions and employers associations), as well as with many other institutions and organisations in different fields mainly related to adult education and vocational training. As a training provider, IFESCOOP offers tailor made training programmes for developing and upgrading skills and professional qualifications of workers and unemployed people, thus improving their employment opportunities and supporting their personal and professional development. IFESCOOP provides vocational training for different target groups, where priority is given to specific disadvantaged groups such as migrants, women, disadvantaged people, etc.

### **University of Humanities and Economics (AHE)**

[www.ahe.lodz.pl/dzialalnosc-naukowa/bpe/projekty-miedzynarodowe](http://www.ahe.lodz.pl/dzialalnosc-naukowa/bpe/projekty-miedzynarodowe)

University of Humanities and Economics (AHE) in Lodz, Poland, is an accredited higher education institution offering traditional university programmes (BA, MA, MSc, PhD) as well as postgraduate studies and courses for various target groups. The university focuses on educational research, innovative teaching methodologies and e-learning. Key fields of study and research include education science, psychology, entrepreneurship, the economy, management, innovative teaching and learning, social exclusion, the application of ICT in teaching, systems of quality assurance and validation of prior learning.

### **University of Hannover, Germany**

[www.uni-hannover.de](http://www.uni-hannover.de)

The University of Hannover has over 21,000 students and 1,300 staff. The Civic Education Research Group is a key part of the university and enables both young people and adults to acquire key skills and competences necessary for active citizenship and participation at all levels of social and political life. The research group offers a wide range of teacher in-service and induction trainings covering all aspects of citizenship education in teaching and learning. The trainings are offered at university-level to students as well as on a national and European level. The Research Group has a strong record in developing innovative approaches to teaching and learning, including various projects that apply, adapt and test – in concrete learning situations – tools and policy approaches. The Research Group consist of 14 researchers and practitioners who focus on identifying and developing the integration of the European dimension in teaching and learning.