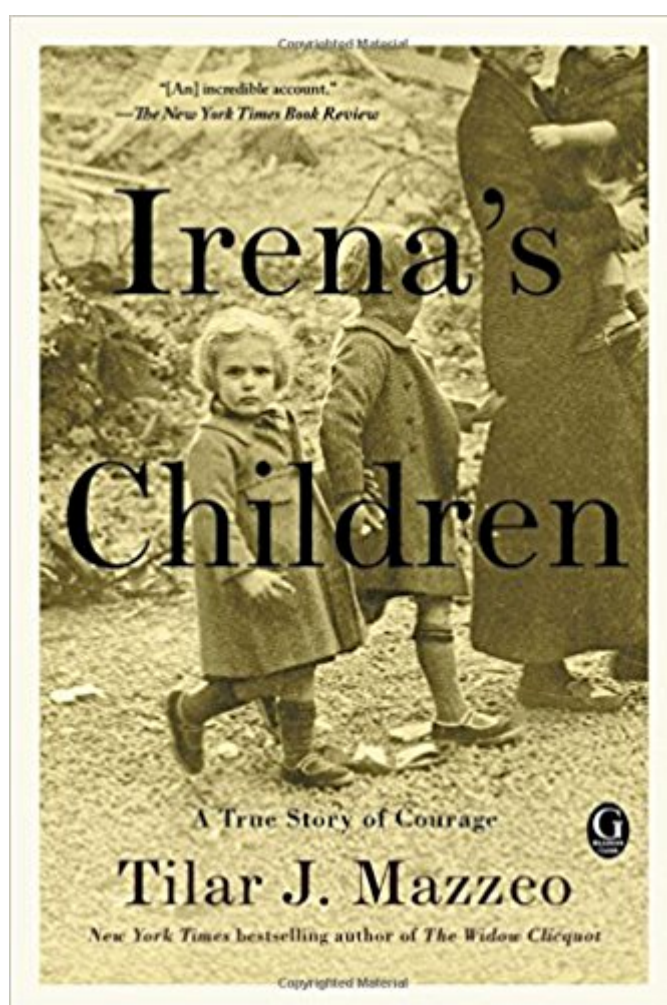


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# Irena's Children: The Extraordinary Story Of The Woman Who Saved 2,500 Children From The Warsaw Ghetto



## Synopsis

From the New York Times bestselling author of *The Widow Clicquot* comes an extraordinary and gripping account of Irena Sendler—the “female Oskar Schindler” who took staggering risks to save 2,500 children from death and deportation in Nazi-occupied Poland during World War II. In 1942, one young social worker, Irena Sendler, was granted access to the Warsaw ghetto as a public health specialist. While she was there, she began to understand the fate that awaited the Jewish families who were unable to leave. Soon she reached out to the trapped families, going from door to door and asking them to trust her with their young children. Driven to extreme measures and with the help of a network of local tradesmen, ghetto residents, and her star-crossed lover in the Jewish resistance, Irena ultimately smuggled thousands of children past the Nazis. She made dangerous trips through the city’s sewers, hid children in coffins, snuck them under overcoats at checkpoints, and slipped them through secret passages in abandoned buildings. But Irena did something even more astonishing at immense personal risk: she kept a secret list buried in bottles under an old apple tree in a friend’s back garden. On it were the names and true identities of these Jewish children, recorded so their families could find them after the war. She could not know that more than ninety percent of their families would perish. *Irena’s Children*, “a fascinating narrative of the extraordinary moral and physical courage of those who chose to fight inhumanity with compassion” (Chaya Deitch author of *Here and There: Leaving Hasidism, Keeping My Family*), is a truly heroic tale of survival, resilience, and redemption.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Praise for *Irena's Children* "[An] incredible account." (The New York Times Book Review) "Irena Sendler's rescue of thousands of Jewish children from murderous German hands is one of the most remarkable tales of righteous courage, resourcefulness, and will to come out of the Holocaust, and Tilar Mazzeo's eloquent telling of that story is remarkable as well. By plumbing Sendler's memoirs and testimonies and interviewing the now-elderly children she saved, Mazzeo has put together an almost granular record of the cruel madness of the Warsaw Ghetto and the astonishing feats of deception it took to help a small portion of its doomed residents survive. Even if you have read volumes on the Holocaust, you will find this book harrowing, surprising, and riveting." (Joseph Berger, longtime reporter for The New York Times and author of *Displaced Persons: Growing Up American After the Holocaust*) "An important, often harrowing, and until now little known story of the Holocaust: how thousands of children were rescued from the Warsaw ghetto by a Polish woman of extraordinary daring and moral courage." (Joseph Kanon, author of *Leaving Berlin*) "Mazzeo chronicles a ray of hope in desperate times in this compelling biography of a brave woman who refused to give up." (Kirkus Reviews) "Irena's Children weaves a fascinating narrative of a devastated city, Nazi depravity, and the extraordinary moral and physical courage of those who chose to fight inhumanity with compassion. This is a book that stays with you long after you've turned the last page." (Chaya Deitch, author of *Here and There: Leaving Hasidism, Keeping My Family*) "This account of tremendous bravery is recommended for teens and adults who are drawn to inspirational stories." (Library Journal, starred review) "While this is not the first biography of Sendler, its succinctness and overall readability will introduce many readers to a truly brave and otherwise remarkable woman who initiated and spearheaded a vast collective effort of decency." (Publishers Weekly) "Mazzeo's portrait of Sendler... is harrowing; some passages are admittedly difficult to get through, but it feels so important that we do." (Goop) "Ms. Mazzeo, author of the bestselling *The Widow Clicquot*, draws from interviews with Sendler's daughter and children she saved to offer new details on Sendler's early life and her remarkable undertaking during World War II." (The Wall Street Journal)

Tilar J. Mazzeo is the New York Times and San Francisco Chronicle bestselling author of books that

include *The Widow Clicquot*, *The Secret of Chanel No. 5*, and *Hotel on the Place Vendôme*. She also writes on food and wine for the mainstream press, and her work has appeared in venues such as *Food & Wine* and in her *Back-Lane Wineries* guidebook series (Ten Speed Press). Her course on creative nonfiction (Great Courses), featured as in-flight viewing content on Virgin America airlines, is widely distributed and has made her a nationally prominent teacher of writing in nonfiction genres. The Clara C. Piper Associate Professor of English at Colby College, she divides her time among coastal Maine, New York City, and Saanichton, British Columbia, where she lives with her husband and stepchildren.

This truly is an extraordinary book about an extraordinary woman. I couldn't put it down.

Reasonable women don't make history, they say, and certainly Irena Sendler was not a "reasonable woman". She was a zealot, driven by a strong moral compass, a deep sense of purpose, and unbelievable courage to put an indelible footprint on the meaning of humanity amidst unbelievable inhumanity. But what particularly sets her apart, I think, was her unique ability to translate these traits into action - to attract others to the cause and to organize their efforts toward a common goal, always under intense stress and just one small misstep from disaster. No question she was totally devoted to the cause, often at the expense of other facets of her life. She was no role model for work-life balance. But through her efforts the lives of some 2,500 children were saved. Surely that's balance of another sort. Anyway, Sendler's is a gripping story and Tilar Mazzeo, as readers of her previous books know, is a gripping story-teller. She does what so many scholars and teachers of history fail to do - bring the events and characters of her story to life. She is an indefatigable researcher who has a fine eye for details, but couples this with a deft narrative style that keeps things moving along at a good clip. Fair warning, though; this is not an easy story to be drawn into - the milieu is so unbelievably horrible and gruesome - and good does not always triumph over evil. But there are enough times when it does to restore one's faith in human nature and provide a ray of hope for the future. So thanks, Tilar. You've hit another home run..

Often referred to as the female Schindler, Irena Sendler was credited with saving 2,500 Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto. As a social worker, she was in a unique position to have access to the walled city within the city and the deprivation and inhumanity within. She saved orphans and children whose families were doomed, often convincing parents to send their children away. These kids were offered new identities with forged paperwork, and taught to live as Christians to ensure their safety. Though the Nazis never determined how imperative she was to the

Polish resistance, they knew Irena was a collaborator and her capture and merciless torture was inevitable. The fact that she survived and escaped was miraculous, and that didn't deter her from continuing her selfless endeavors. She risked her own life daily and the vast network of people who assisted her were heroes in their own right. This book illustrates that being a Pole in Warsaw during German occupation was the worst situation to be in, but being a Polish Jew was an even more horrific prospect. Irena witnessed thousands of people transported to Treblinka, the liquidation of the ghetto, and the destruction of her city. One of the saddest scenes was Irena helplessly witnessing the liquidation of an orphanage and the stoic bravery of the children and the doctor in charge who voluntarily accompanied them. In Irena's own words, "that tragic procession of innocent children marching to their own deaths." But because of her, thousands of children were saved and future generations exist because of her organization, defiance, and bravery. I received a complimentary copy of this book from the publisher.

This is a newly written book about Irena Sendler, the Polish Catholic social worker who saved over 2500 Jewish children during the Holocaust. She smuggled them out, one by one, in most cases, from the Warsaw Ghetto, in which thousands of Polish Jews were crammed, starving, likely to be shot at any time, or forced to board trains for extermination camps. (Though for most of the time no one knew for sure the destination of the trains.....later rumors began to spread, but people still found it hard to believe....). Irena Sendler worked with many others, but was the moral and physical leader of her group.....she took daily risks, going into the Ghetto and then talking Jewish families into giving up their children to her, based on just the hope that they would be safer with her organization than left with their families. (In most cases, the children were hidden in convents and among sympathetic Polish families, who all knew they risked their lives and their family's lives by taking in Jewish children). Irena Sendler wanted to try to reunite these children with their families after the war....therefore she hid each child's name in a glass jar, buried in a friend's garden.....(That is why the older book about her is called "Life in a Jar".....it is also an excellent book....and was instrumental in leading to Sendler being nominated for a Nobel prize.....)Of course, almost all the families of these children did not survive the war.....So few people really cared to know what was going on in those years.....only a few risked it all to try to save some people.....she was one, and was, sadly, forgotten by history until very recently.....I'm glad she is now being recognized for her deeds.....

Most people have only the slightest understanding of what happened in Warsaw under the Nazis. The Germans were determined to eliminate from the face of the earth any trace of the Jews but also the Poles. One would think mankind would be so revolted at what happened there that it would never happen again. However, sadly, that is not the case as helpless people in so many parts of the world today are subjected to acts every bit as vile as those perpetrated by the Nazis. Will we never learn? The author spins a historical narrative with skill and grace. Highly recommended.

This book is a tribute to the selflessness and incredible courage shown by "ordinary " people facing a despicable reality in their day-to day life. Even though the book is obviously following historical data, the author achieves a somewhat fast pace , which makes it easy to read. The young should read it so that they may avoid a Future like this Past. As to the undaunted heroes during Poland's nightmare in the years covered by the book, the world needs more like them.

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