

E4 Victim and Saviour

After the invasion of Poland by the German Wehrmacht in 1939, Alfreda ("Nocia") Markowska's family went into hiding – as Roma, they were persecuted as so-called "gypsies". In 1941, German soldiers discovered the family's hiding place and murdered every one of them. The only person to escape the massacre was fifteen-year-old Alfreda. She had been out to get food. Even though she was later caught, she managed to escape. Using forged ID, she found work with the railway company, where she had to maintain the tracks and carry the dead off deportation trains. One day, a woman on a train to Auschwitz secretly gave her four-year-old son, Karol Parno Gierlinski, to Alfreda, and begged her to keep him safe. Alfreda managed to find him a place with a family. Karol survived and went on to become a famous artist. Alfreda Markowska saved many more persecuted children by organising hiding places and securing false papers for them. It's unclear just how many people she managed to rescue, but estimates put the figure at up to 50 children.



1910

1951

1939-45

💡 Did you know

... that on 17 October 2006, Alfreda "Nocia" Markowska was awarded one of the highest honours of the Polish state, the rarely awarded Order of Polonia Restituta, for her courage and humanity? She became an honorary citizen of her community and a short film was also made about her. She remained a humble, deeply religious woman until her death in 2021.

📝 Your task

There is an article about Alfreda Markowska entitled *A Saint in Hell*. What do you think the author of the article is trying to say? Who else do you know that the description could fit?

📷 About the photo

Still from an animated short film about Alfreda Markowska on the website of the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe that were Murdered under National Socialism © Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas & RomaTrial e.V. 2022



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