



ALFREDA MARKOWSKA

(Stanisławów, Poland, May 10, 1926 - January 30, 2021)



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Alfreda Markowska (in Romani “Noncia”), is a traditional Romani woman hailing from the ethnic sub-group, Polska Roma. During World War II, **she saved approximately fifty Jewish and Roma children from death.**

Markowska is a notable example of outstanding Romani heroism. In 2006, she was the **first Roma to be awarded the Commander’s Cross with the Star of the Order of Polonia Resituta by the President of Poland.** In 2017, Markowska was awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of the City of Gorzów Wielkopolski. Polish filmmaker, Agnieszka Arnold, made a documentary film about her, entitled *Phuri Daj*. Murals of Markowska adorn the walls of Junior High

School No. 20 in Ochota, Warsaw, and Primary School No. 1 in Gorzów Wielkopolski.

Markowska was born in a nomadic Romani family. Her father Jan bred and traded horses. Her mother, Adela (born Chojnacka), raised the children and was a fortune teller. The outbreak of World War II found them in Lviv. They escaped from the Red Army to the areas occupied by the Germans. In 1941, in the forest near Biała Podlaska, the Nazis murdered her family, including her parents, siblings, and other relatives (in total between 65 to 85 Roma). **Markowska was the only one to survive.** She spent days searching the forests for her family’s mass grave before she would find it. She then searched for relatives, who she hoped survived the forest massacre, looking for them in places where there were known to be larger Roma groups, including the ghetto in Bełżec, Łódź

In 1942, at the age of 16, Markowska married. **She and her husband were arrested by Ukrainian nationalists**, who then handed them over to the Germans. They were then sent to the ghetto in Lublin. Fortunately, they managed to escape and settled back in Rozwadów, where, under conditions of forced labour, Roma were made to work on the railways. This gave Markowska access to trains transporting Roma and Jews to extermination camps, including Auschwitz. During transport stops, **she managed to save children, given to her by their mothers.** Among the children she saved was then three-year-old Karol Parno-Gierliński, later a well-known sculptor, prose writer, and poet.

Markowska decided to save everyone she could, especially the children who survived the ordeal of pogroms and massacres. She secretly travelled to places where the Nazis murdered the Roma community in search of children who survived. She returned to

Rozwadów with saved Roma and Jewish children, where she managed to obtain false documents. According to various sources (including research commissioned by the Chancellery of the President of Poland), she found and saved approximately 50 children. Of those children she rescued, she returned those she could to their families. The others she raised by herself or placed them in Roma families. When, in 1944, Rozwadów was taken over by the Red Army, Markowska, along with her family and the rescued children decided to escape the moving front, towards central Poland.

After the war, Markowska's family returned to their nomadic lifestyle. As a result of the policy of forced settlement of Roma during communism in Poland, she settled permanently in Gorzów Wielkopolski. She enjoys deserved respect and authority among Roma communities in Poland.

Sources and further information:

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3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfreda_Markowska
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7. The documentary film "Puri Daj" created by Agnieszka Arnold (never released)

This biography has been written by Justyna Matkowska