

The High School Kids from Kansas Who Found the Female Schindler

By now you've probably heard of the [team of high school journalists](#) from Kansas who blew the cover on their new school principal. In brief, the school newspaper team found that the new hire had fake credentials and wasn't the stellar leader the school had been led to believe.

But these kids aren't the first Kansas students to achieve acclaim for uncovering a story that the rest of the world missed. That honor goes to a handful of girls from Uniontown High School who introduced the world to Irena Sendler, the female version of Oskar Schindler, of *Schindler's List* fame.

According to a [mini-documentary](#) produced by the Kansas State University College of Education, Irena Sendler was a Polish nurse who worked in the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II. Through her work in the Polish Resistance, she saved 2,500 Jewish children from the hands of the Nazis. She was eventually caught, tried, and sentenced to death for her efforts, but managed to escape due to a bribed executioner. Following the war, she used carefully preserved records to return the children she had rescued to their surviving relatives.

As student Megan Felt explains, Sendler's name intrigued the girls in her history project group. Yet despite extensive searching, they were unable to find out much about her, due to Communist suppression of the story after the war.

Perseverance and extensive research finally led them to the discovery that Sendler was still alive and living in Poland, a fact which enabled them to get the story from her firsthand. The little play the girls produced about Sendler's life took

off like wildfire, and eventually resulted in Ms. Sendler being nominated for The Nobel Peace Prize a year before she died in 2008.

But while the girls from Uniontown High School achieved a fair amount of fame from uncovering Sendler's story, they also took away other lessons from the experience. Megan Felt remembers:

"Irena's story was very much a light in my life, something that gave me encouragement that I need as a 14-year-old, that if she could walk into the Warsaw ghetto every day, not even being 5 feet tall, walking pass the German officers with a child sedated in a gunny sack over her shoulder saying, 'They are dead from disease, I'm going to go get rid of the body,' what if the baby would have whimpered a cry? She would have been shot immediately along with the child. ... So, Irena's story, I think very much impacted all of us in a very special, deep way."

In other words, Sendler's story made history come alive for a handful of girls from Kansas who learned to apply the lessons of the past to their present struggles.

That's a rare occurrence these days. Many Americans have become convinced that history is no longer relevant to modern life, a fact reflected in the scores of American high school seniors, which show that [88 percent](#) are not proficient in history. Is it time we made the past more of a priority in today's public schools?

Image Credit: [Life in a Jar](#)