

Name _____ Date _____

What Was Buried: The Irena Sendler Story

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Notes

El\xc5\xbcbieta\xe2\x80\x99s Truth

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When El\xc5\xbcbieta Ficowska was 17, a friend asked her, \xe2\x80\x9cWhy didn't you tell me you were Jewish?\xe2\x80\x9d El\xc5\xbcbieta was perplexed\xe2\x80\x94because she wasn't Jewish.

El\xc5\xbcbieta lived in a loving, Catholic home with her mother, Stanis\xca5\x82awa Bussold.

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El\xc5\xbcbieta had never questioned her upbringing. But her friend\xe2\x80\x99s strange question stuck in her mind, and El\xc5\xbcbieta began to realize that perhaps not all was as it seemed.

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For example, the death date on her father\xe2\x80\x99s tombstone was 1940\xe2\x80\x94two years before El\xc5\xbcbieta\xe2\x80\x99s birth. When El\xc5\xbcbieta had asked her mother about this at age 14, Stanislaw explained that there was simply an error on the gravestone. El\xc5\xbcbieta had accepted this, but now she wasn't so sure.

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Eventually, El\xc5\xbcbieta uncovered the truth: She had been born to Jewish parents in Poland\xe2\x80\x99s Nazi-controlled Warsaw Ghetto. As a baby, she had been smuggled out of the ghetto through Irena Sendler\xe2\x80\x99s network. Stanislaw was one of the network\xe2\x80\x99s organizers.

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El\xc5\xbcbieta\xe2\x80\x99s Jewish parents died at the hands of the Nazis, and Stanislaw thought it best not to tell her the truth of her story. But learning this truth was, as El\xc5\xbcbieta said later, good for her. She had

learning this truth was, as Elxc5\xbcbieta said later, good for her. She had been somewhat privileged and entitled as a child. Now, she no longer felt this way.

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As an adult, Elxc5\xbcbieta became active in the Association of the Children of the Holocaust. But unlike some of the other members, she does not identify as Jewish. As she explained in an interview, to do so would not reflect the truth of her upbringing. \xe2\x80\x9cI am a Jew only when they beat Jews,\xe2\x80\x9d she said.

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Excerpt from \xe2\x80\x9cMy Two Mothers\xe2\x80\x9d by El\xcc\xbcbieta Ficowska

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I did not know then, I could not know, how much self-denial, how much heroism, was needed just to provide a roof over my head. I did not know then, but I have since learned, that there are two ways to extend a hand: one is as a fist and the other as an open palm offering help. My mothers chose the second way, my Jewish mother, who gave me life, and my Polish mother, who saved that life.

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Both accomplished something that went beyond ordinary humanity. To save me in the nightmarish days of July 1942, my Jewish mother endured the pain of giving up her only child to \xc5\xbbegota, a Polish organization that provided help to dying Jews. Through this organization I was placed in less threatening hands, hands that at first had seemed alien but did not turn out so. My Polish mother fulfilled the deepest desires of my Jewish mother. She conquered her own fear to save me, showering great love on me to take the place of the one who brought me into the world and who was soon to leave it.

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Although I was too small to remember her clearly, I will never forget my Jewish mother. I cannot even recognize her face in a photograph, but I see her in my dreams. Both my dead mothers are with me and will remain with me to the end. Their presence reminds me that there is nothing more destructive than hatred and nothing more blessed than human goodness.

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Excerpt from the poem \xe2\x80\x9cBoth Your Mothers\xe2\x80\x9d by Jerzy Ficowski, husband of El\xcc\xbcbieta Ficowski

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But the mother
\nwho was saved in you
\ncould now step into crowded death
\nhappily incomplete
\ncould instead of memory give you

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for a parting gift
\nher own likeness
\nand a date and a name

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so much

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And at once it happened
\nthat someone hurriedly took care
\nof your sleep
\nand then stayed for a long always
\nand washed you of orphanhood
\nand wrapped you in love
\nand became the answer to your first word

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That was how
\nboth your mothers taught you
\nnot to be surprised at all
\nwhen you say
\nI am

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