

FROM OSCAR® NOMINATED FILMMAKER
OREN JACOBY

NARRATED BY
ISABELLA ROSSELLINI

WOULD YOU
RISK YOUR LIFE
TO SAVE
A STRANGER?

MY
**ITALIAN
SECRET**

THE FORGOTTEN HEROES

STORYVILLE FILMS AND ITALY & THE HOLOCAUST FOUNDATION PRESENT AN OREN JACOBY FILM
"MY ITALIAN SECRET: THE FORGOTTEN HEROES" NARRATED BY ISABELLA ROSSELLINI, ROBERT LOGGIA, EDITH DEBORAH PERETZ, CINEMATIC DESIGNER BOB RICHMAN, PRODUCED BY ERIC FORMAN
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:: STORYVILLE FILMS ::

My Italian Secret: The Forgotten Heroes

MY ITALIAN SECRET: The Forgotten Heroes is a feature length documentary that tells the story of courageous Italians, including sports idol Gino Bartali, who carried out ingenious schemes to rescue and protect Jews in Nazi-occupied Italy. Although Gino Bartali is a sports legend, his most daring triumph came when he risked his life countless times to save Jews threatened by Nazi extermination. The story of Bartali and the secret network that he was a member, is just one example of the heroism exhibited by thousands of ordinary Italians who risked their lives to save others from capture and death. As an entire continent was engulfed in a genocide which took the lives of most Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe (11 million people perished, including 6 million Jews), approximately 80 percent of Italy's Jews survived. Bartali, like most of the rescuers, never sought recognition or reward. Few of those he helped knew his name or what role he played in their rescue. In addition to Gino Bartali, thousands of conscientious individual Italians risked their lives in order to assist people who in many cases were complete strangers. Most of these heroes never spoke of their courageous deeds. **MY ITALIAN SECRET** begs the question: Would you risk your life to save a stranger and then never talk about it?

Video Characters:

Gino Bartali - Gino was a famous cyclist who risked his life to assist and shelter Jews under German occupation. He hid false papers in the frame of his bicycle and transported them from Cardinal Dalla Costa to the Bishop of Assisi where Jews found sanctuary.

Charolette Hauptmann - Charlotte returned to Italy with her grandson because she wanted him to know her story. Charlotte's family left Germany in 1938 after Kristallnacht and she was born in Italy. The family lived in Milan for approximately two years and then they were sent to the Ferramonti internment camp.

Ursula Korn Selig - Ursula is a German Jew who went to Italy with her family in 1935. She and her family were protected by **Monsignor Schivo** who hid her father in the countryside. Ursula and her mother were dressed as nuns and lived in a convent.

Gaia Servidio - Gaia's father was a successful Director in a factory in Padua and was well respected in Italian society. Once the Racial Laws were enacted, her father lost his position not only in the factory but also in Italian society. Gaia's nanny, had a friend who warned the family of danger and they fled.

Piero Terracina - Piero described how at first his family was able to hide in Rome but when his sister rebuked an Italian man, he betrayed them and the entire family was sent to Auschwitz.

Dr. Giovanni Borromeo - Dr. Borromeo was director of a hospital in Rome. He invented a mythical disease called "K" to deceive the Germans and save Jews. He hid Jews in the hospital and told the Germans that there was a very contagious and incurable disease called "K" in the hospital which resulted in the Germans deciding not to enter the hospital.

Italy and the Holocaust Foundation, Inc. was founded in 2010 as a not-for-profit organization to share the little known story of Italy and the many individual Italians who helped in saving approximately 80% of the Jews in Italy during the Holocaust. For more information, please visit: <http://www.italyandtheholocaust.org>.

Yad Vashem Recognized Gino Bartali of Italy as Righteous Among the Nations - September 23, 2013

Yad Vashem has posthumously recognized Gino Bartali from Italy as Righteous Among the Nations. Bartali was a champion cyclist and a beloved public figure. During the German occupation of Italy (beginning in September 1943), Bartali, a devout Catholic, was part of a rescue network spearheaded by Rabbi Nathan Cassuto of Florence together with the Archbishop of Florence Cardinal Elia Angelo Dalla Costa (previously recognized as Righteous Among the Nations). This Jewish-Christian network, set up following the German occupation of Italy and the onset of deportation of Jews, saved hundreds of local Jews and Jewish refugees from territories which had previously been under Italian control, mostly in France and Yugoslavia. Gino Bartali acted as a courier for the network, secreting forged documents and papers in his bicycle and transporting them between cities, all under the guise of training. Knowingly risking his life to rescue Jews, Bartali transferred falsified documents to various contacts, among them Rabbi Cassuto.

ITALY AND THE HOLOCAUST: BAD TIMES, GOOD PEOPLE

The Jewish presence in Italy pre-dates the Christian era and the Italian unification ushered in a new era of Jewish prominence in the arts, commerce, science, the military and politics. Jews were assimilated into society and were admired by many Italians. They were fiercely patriotic and considered themselves an integral part of Italian society.

When Mussolini came to power he eventually changed the status of Italian Jews after he began a friendship with Adolf Hitler. He sought this alliance with Germany after the Ethiopian War and the Italian involvement in the Spanish Civil War. Mussolini hoped to ingratiate himself to Hitler by instituting the Racial Laws of 1938 and he is the sole person responsible for these laws.

The laws relegated Italian Jews to second class citizens. They forbade Jewish employment in the civil service, banks, insurance companies and the military. University professors, lawyers and medical doctors were forbidden any type of employment. Many Italians did not agree with these laws and realized they could be disobeyed, ignored or circumvented in their everyday lives.

Resistance to these laws took many forms. Some Jews transferred their businesses to trusted Catholic friends while some groups of lawyers continued to practice law for many of their Jewish clients either secretly or through arrangements with non-Jewish lawyer friends. In addition, Italy allowed thousands of foreign Jews to enter the country and escape persecution in Germany and Austria until World War II began. This was in stark contrast to the Racial Laws.

After Italy declared war on June 10, 1940, foreign Jews were sent to internment camps in the remote areas of southern Italy. In the town of Campagna, south of Naples, a former convent was converted into an internment camp for foreign Jews. In Campagna the Jews did not wear the yellow star, a uniform or any other type of identification. They were free to play cards, soccer, or walk around town. Roll call was taken in the morning and afternoon. In the evening everyone was confined in the convent. Considering it was war time, Jews had sufficient food and no labor was required of them. Over 1,000 Jews were saved because of this camp and eventually many were allowed to join their families. In addition, the Italian government allowed foreign Jews to be reunited with their families and live as a family unit. They lived under limited supervision and permission was required for travel.

In occupied Europe Jews were confronted with a different reality. By January 1942, Jews were forced into a brutal ghetto existence and death. Eventually, Jews were sent by train directly to the death camps. Starvation and death was the fate that awaited every Jew under Nazi control. We must remember the contrast between the treatment of Jews in Italy and that of occupied Europe under Nazi rule as we attempt to understand the Italian story.

This little known Italian story is exemplified by the internment camp at Ferramonti-Tarsia, the largest internment camp in Italy, with a population at times numbering 3,500. Conditions were difficult at first, but they gradually improved. Most Italians lacked the brutality of the Nazi's and treated their charges with kindness and humanity. The inmates at Ferramonti organized themselves in order to create a livable facility. They governed themselves and created a small society that allowed them to live an ordinary life under the circumstances. It was difficult but bearable and was reflected in the children's school and the weddings that were

performed by Rabbis. Jews who lived in the small towns were treated with respect and received the same food rations as the general population. In fact, the Italian government even provided Jews with a small stipend to assist them.

Another way Italians officials resisted was to deny German request for the return of German Jews. Also, up until 1943, Mussolini's government did not release Jews for mass deportation. Unfortunately, this changed with the German invasion of Italy on September 8, 1943. At this time, the lives of both Italian and foreign Jews drastically changed. They had to confront the threat of immediate deportation.

Even with German occupation of Italy resistance to the Racial Laws continued. There were 40,000 Jews in Italy at this time and survival was not possible without the assistance of the Italian people. Thousands of individuals risked their lives to save the Jews in Italy, knowing full well that resulted in immediate execution. Jews were hidden in convents, churches, city apartments, small town and farms. In the town of Potenza, approximately 150 Jewish families were all moved to safety when the Germans approached. In the city of Assisi 300 foreign Jews were hidden during a nine month German occupation and no one betrayed them. The church officials and town's people risked their lives to save the Jews.

There are many other courageous stories of the local police warning individuals of impending arrests and deportation, while simple farmers provided shelter and food to strangers. These stories reflect a special understanding of a humanism of the hearts and minds of the Italian people in the face of great danger. The most important reason for Jewish survival in Italy was the relative absence of anti-Semitism and the fact that Italy lacked an anti-Semitic tradition.

Another way Italians resisted the Racial Laws was that Italian Catholics had a more inclusive interpretation of their religion. They were more tolerant of non-Catholics and they had a degree of toleration that was lacking in most of occupied Europe. Many Italians had a broader understanding of their religion that allowed toleration of dissenters and they adapted the rules to save lives. Their distrust for authority was of a special individualistic nature that was uniquely Italian and allowed them to acquiesce to a personal interpretation to a higher power.

While 80% of Jews were saved, sadly, 20% of the Jews in Italy perished and many Italians believe the survival rate should have been higher. Every Jew who survived had to thank an Italian for being saved. Some Jews were betrayed by Italians and deported. The Italian story is one of rescue, kindness and betrayal. It is important to understand the totality of this saga within the context of World War II in Italy. Intellectual honesty will dictate the flow of this story because the events in Italy are not as widely known as other aspects of the Holocaust.

Italy had the second highest survival rate in occupied Europe. There were a number of factors that contributed to 80% of Jews being saved. Among them was the fact that deportations took place late in the war and German occupation was less than in other areas of Europe. Italy also had a relatively small number of Jews and the lack of anti-Semitism contributed to the willingness of many Italians to help Jews. In the final analysis we should ask ourselves what was it about the Italian character that gave so many Italians the courage to care.

Italian Rescuers/Righteous Gentiles

1. **Marshal Italo-Balbo** – Italian Governor General in Libya who protected the Jews.
2. **Ambassador Robert Ducci** – Chief of the Croatian Office of the Italian Foreign Ministry who saved Jews in Croatia.
3. **Count Luca Pietromarchi** – Chief of the Department of Occupied Territories, Italian Foreign Ministry (later became Ambassador) who obstructed German attempts to deport Jews from Italian areas of occupation.
4. **Guido Lospinoso** – Inspector General of occupied territories who obstructed any deportation attempts.
5. **Angelo Donati** – Advisor to Guido Lospinoso who formulated plans for saving Jews and obstructed deportation.
6. **General Mario Roatta** – Commander of the Italian Second Army in Yugoslavia who refused German demands for Jewish deportation and used force to protect Jews.
7. **General Mario Robotti** – replaced General Roatta as Second Army Commander in Yugoslavia and continued Roatta's policy of protecting the Jews.
8. **Vittorio Castellani** – Liaison Officer with the Second Army in Croatia who implemented obstruction plans which saved Jewish lives.
9. **Giuseppe Bastianini** – Under Secretary in the Foreign Office who rebuffed German diplomatic attempts to deport Jews from Italy.
10. **Ambassador Egido Ortona** – obstructed German plans to deport Jews from occupied France.
11. **Cardinal Pietro Boetta of Genoa** – The Cardinal of Genoa who set up a network to rescue Jews.
12. **Bishop Placido Nicolini of Assisi** – opened the monasteries, convents and churches to shelter Jews.
13. **Father Rufino Niccacci of Assisi** – coordinated the rescue efforts and provided false documents for Jews throughout Italy.
14. **Mario de Marco** – Police Commander of Rome who was tortured by the Gestapo for helping Jews.
15. **Luigi Brizi and Trento Brizi (son)** – printed false documents in Assisi.
16. **Bishop Angelo Roncalli** – Papal Delegate to Turkey and The Balkans signed baptismal certificates issued by Raul Wallenberg to save Jewish children in Hungary. Sent a ship of Jewish children to Portugal.
17. **Giorgio Perlasca** – an Italian businessman who posed as a Spanish diplomat which allowed him to save 5,000 Jews.
18. **Gino Bartali** - Italian national cyclist champion who became a courier for the resistance and hid Jews in his home during the Holocaust.
19. **Father Don Aldo Brunacci** - assisted in the Assisi Underground effort that saved 300 Jews under German occupation.

20. **Cardinal Elia Angelo Dalla Costa** - coordinated the rescue of Jews in Florence during the Holocaust.
21. **Dr. Giovanni Borromeo** - hid Jews in his hospital in Rome by inventing a fake disease called K to prevent the hospital search by the Germans.
22. **Father Don Francesco Repetto** - played a leading role in the Delasem (Jewish relief organization) saving thousands of Jews in Genoa during the German occupation.
23. **Carlo Angela** - falsified medical records in order to protect Jews in San Maurizio Canavese, a small town in northern Italy.
24. **Selva Cipinia** - rescued Jews in Rome by housing some and dispersing others among her relatives.
25. **Don Francesco Brondello** - saved hundreds of Jews by providing them with food and shelter in the Italian Alps.
26. **Maddalena Giraudo** - an inn keeper in the Italian Alps who hid Jews in her hotel which was occupied by Germans.
27. **Monsignor Beniamino Schivo** - saved the Korn family in Citta di Castello near Perugia. He provided them with food, shelter and clothing. The mother and daughter were hidden in a convent dressed as nuns and the husband was hidden on a farm in the countryside.
28. **Ezio Giorgetti** - rescued 40 Jewish refugees at his Adriatic Coastal hotel and eventually moved them from place to place to avoid capture by the Germans.
29. **Father Giulio Gradassi** - saved a Polish family and other Jews and eventually found a permanent safe haven in Castelione and eluded capture.

“Though 7,600 perished, most of the Italian Jews survived the Holocaust. This was primarily, because the Italian authorities obstructed the Nazi program of deportation and genocide, and because of the relative lack of anti-Semitism among the Italians.”

Inscription at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC



My Italian Secret: The Forgotten Heroes

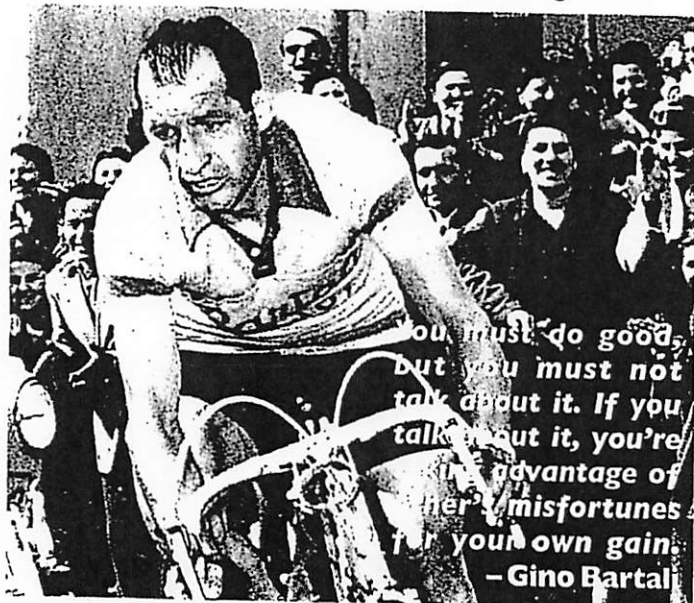
A Documentary on the Italians Who Rescued Jews During the Holocaust

When Benito Mussolini was deposed in September 1943, Italians believed that Fascism and the horrors it brought their country were in the past. But they were wrong—the horrors were just beginning. With Mussolini out, the Nazis moved in. They searched for Jews, offering 5,000 lire—their price for a human life—to anyone who pointed them out. From this sprang a secret rebellion. An underground network of Italians hid Jewish families, falsified identification documents, and developed escape routes.

80% of Italian and refugee Jews living in Italy before World War II survived.

The recently released documentary, *My Italian Secret: The Forgotten Heroes*, tells this story of how Italians risked their lives to save Jews from certain death. Written, produced, and directed by Oscar-nominee Oren Jacoby, *My Italian Secret* details these extraordinary times through first-hand and historical accounts of what transpired.

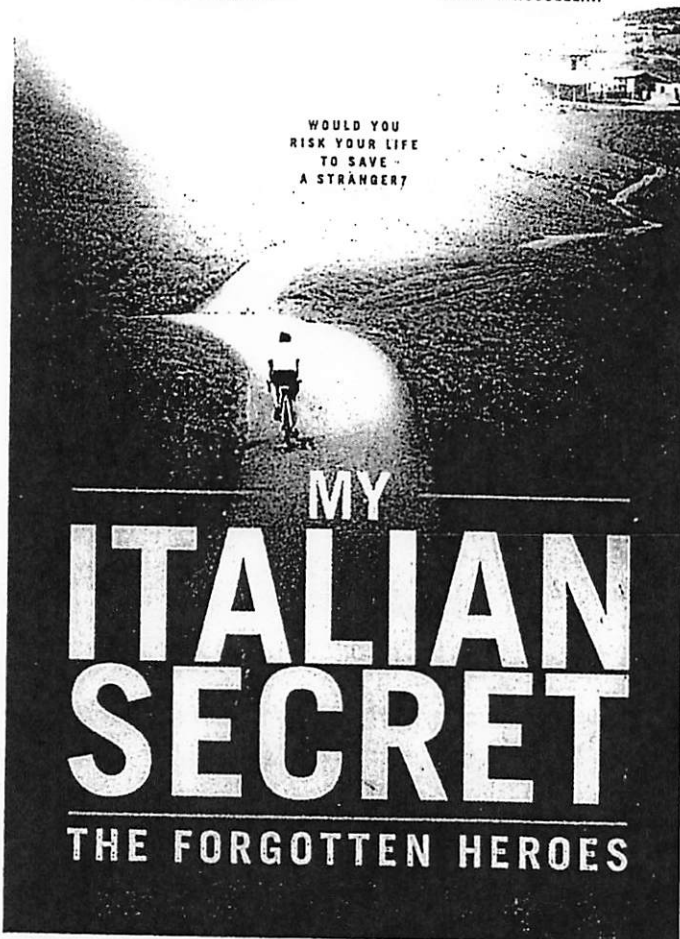
From Delasam to the Assisi Underground, many different networks developed as part of the Italian Resistance to the Nazi Occupation. Some Jews were hidden in convents and seminaries. Others were hidden in hospitals. Disheartening stories like that in which monks of a monastery were executed for helping hide Jews are juxtaposed with liberating stories such as when the head of a hospital fabricated a contagious, deadly disease to prevent the SS from searching a ward where Jews were being hidden.



You must do good, but you must not talk about it. If you talk about it, you're in the advantage of her misfortunes for your own gain. — Gino Bartali

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The film also highlights two-time Tour de France champion Gino Bartali for actions that saved many Jews and weren't known until 13 years after his death.

In addition to these accounts, *My Italian Secret* travels alongside actual Jewish survivors as they return to the places in Italy where these horrific memories reside. They tell their story to the grown children of those who risked their lives to hide them—a very moving experience for both them and the viewer.

My Italian Secret: The Forgotten Heroes is currently available on Netflix.

Italy and the Holocaust Foundation

A non-profit organization founded by NYCSJ Board Member Vincent Marmorale is committed to telling the little known story of the role Italians played in helping Jews during the the Holocaust. Find out more at <http://www.italyandtheholocaust.org/>

My Italian Secret: The Forgotten Heroes of the Holocaust

"MY ITALIAN SECRET: The Forgotten Heroes" is a documentary that tells the story of Italians, including sports idol Gino Bartali, whose most daring triumph came when he risked his life to save Jews threatened by extermination. The narrative of Bartali and the secret network he worked with tells the story of thousands of Italians who risked their lives to save others from capture and death. As most of Europe was engulfed in a genocide, approximately 80 percent of Italy's Jews survived. Most of these heroes never spoke of their courageous deeds or sought rewards.

MY ITALIAN SECRET tells the personal accounts that reflect this little known piece of history. Through these witnesses' stories, viewers revisit a time when individual Italians had the courage to care in the midst of history's worst nightmare.

This documentary is available on Netflix or for purchase from PBS. For further information, visit www.italyandtheholocaust.org. (Vincent Marmorale, Consulting Producer and AMAC member)

