



ZOFIA CHOJNACKA

(Trzebieszów, Poland, November 22, 1913 – Sławno, Poland, November 5, 1986)



Zofia Chojnacka with her husband Józef Trojanek
The image comes from Jan Chojnacki, Zofia Chojnacka's son

Zofia Chojnacka (in Romani “Mamcia” or “Chomyca”) is a traditional Romani woman hailing from the ethnic sub-group, Polska Roma. During World War II, **Chojnacka saved approximately thirty Roma and Jewish children.**

Actively involved in their rescue, Chojnacka sheltered and **took care of Jewish children placed in her care, hiding families of Polish Jews and their children from Siedlce ghetto.**

During the war, she showed extraordinary heroism, courage, and kindness, risking her own life to help save others.

Chojnacka was born into a wealthy Polish-Romani family. She was a beautiful, well-known woman, with a reputation for being an excellent fortune teller, highly empathetic, and having a big heart.

Before World War II, Chojnacka's family travelled by Romani caravans. In 1932, she married Rom, Józef Trojanek. They had five children: Stefan, Stanisław, Ignacy, Jan, and a baby girl (name unknown) who passed away during the war.

Between 1939 and 1942, Chojnacka's family stayed in Warsaw. There, she and other Roma women hid and sheltered Jewish children placed in their care. In 1942, during one of the Nazi inspections to search for hiding Jews, the family was targetted. During the search, officers found and killed Jewish children, including a boy hidden by Chojnacka in her room. The rest of **the Jewish children were mistaken for Roma by the Nazis, and managed to avoid execution.** Chojnacka's son, Jan Chojnacki recalls, “Officers gathered us in the square, in front of the building in Grochów district of Warsaw. They shot 30 Roma men, women, and children. Then, they took the rest of the Roma, including my father, to the Treblinka extermination camp.”

Chojnacka, together with the children and several Roma managed to survive. Meanwhile, her husband escaped from Treblinka to Warsaw. Unfortunately, after a week, he died in one of Warsaw's hospitals due to exhaustion and lung contusion. Chojnacka buried her husband in Warsaw, and remained faithful to him, never to remarry.

Soon after, Chojnacka, the children, and several other family members were sent to the ghetto in Siedlce. There, she rescued Jewish children from mass shootings. Later, thanks

to the help of a Sinti guard, who warned her about the planned liquidation of the Roma, Chojnacka and most of her family escaped the ghetto the night before. **They fled to the forest where they stayed with the partisans**, and the younger Roma began participating in the resistance movement.

Due to the realities of war, Chojnacka’s family often changed their whereabouts. They mostly lived in rural stations, which they rented from local hosts. Finally, Chojnacka and her family ended up in the Rzeszów region. There, she continued to rescue Roma and Jewish children. She went to pogroms to help save survivors. Despite being a widow with four children, she risked her own life to protect orphaned Roma and Jews. Chojnacka’s son remembers, “The Jewish parents who returned for the children entrusted to my mother were overjoyed, and forever grateful for the care she had shown.”

After the war, Chojnacka’s family led a nomadic life until 1964, which marked the forced settlement of Roma during communism in Poland. The family ended up settling in Sławno. Following the war, Chojnacka was reluctant to talk about trauma, pain, losses, and wartime. Nevertheless, she remained greatly respected among the Roma community until her end of days.

Sources:

- 1. The oral testimony was made by Zofia Chojacka’s son, Jan Chojnacki. An older man, unfortunately, he does not write and read.
- 2. The written statement was provided by Zofia Chojacka’s grandson, Roman Chojnacki

This biography has been written by Justyna Matkowska