

Eugenio Damiani

Born in Brescia, he graduated in engineering from the Polytechnic of Milan. Together with his family, he turned his house - "House Damiani" - into a pivotal meeting point for local opponents of the fascist regime. His Genoese wife Ada Grossi befriended, during those years, Russian expatriate Anna Kuliscioff, who then came to represent one of the most influential figures of Milan and Italian socialism. In 1944, he and his son Mario were captured by the police for being antifascists in Milan's Castel Square. Mario Damiani was imprisoned in Fossoli and later deported to Mauthausen-Gusen, where he died. Eugenio Damiani, awarded a Memory Gold Medal, died in Bolzano during the deportation. He was the oldest inmate in the camp, subjected to the cruelest torture.

Alessandro Cofini

Born in Massa D'Albe, in the province of L'Aquila in 1911, despite the constant risk of arrest and execution, together with his siblings Armando, Enrico and Giuseppina and his stepmother Berardina, he hid the Jewish family Nathan in his home (Joe Nathan e la moglie Peggy, le figlie Amelia, Giorgina, Virginia). He managed to keep them hidden for two months, doing his utmost to make their stay a bit more tolerable, and allowed them to escape deportation. Together with his brothers, he denied access to his house to a German garrison and, by doing so, he managed to keep the Nathans safe.

Giorgio Paglia and Maria Lucia Vandone (Cicci)

Convinced antifascists, during the 1940s, they devoted themselves with great generosity to the fight for Italy's freedom. Putting their own life in danger, they devised a way to save a few Jewish kids from Nazi persecutions. They hid the kids in a Paglia's rented apartment in Lanzo d'Intelvi, on the Swisse border. Parents brought the kids to the house and, at night, the couple drove them over the border to an accomplice along with some money. This way, Paglia and Cicci managed to save at least 15 kids. Paglia was shot by the fascist army, he refused to leave his comrades despite the fact that he would be granted a pardon. Cicci dedicated her whole life to those memories and ideals.

Maria Mascaretti

As a deputy office manager at the Registry Office of the Municipality of Voghera during the 1940s, she removed from the registry file the tags corresponding to adult

Jewish citizens, hiding them in a safe place. She also omitted the mandatory wording “of Jewish race” in the files of minors. She hid in her own house about ten Jewish couples fleeing the persecutions. Maria Mascaretti’s story is archived at the Centre of Contemporary Jewish Documentation.

The Sopianac family

In 1941, after the enactment of the racial laws, the Sopianac family, owners of an oil refinery, managed to hide several Jewish people on the premises of their own company in Sveta Klara, near Zagreb. Franjo Sopianac acquired work permits as essential workers for all young women and men who stayed in the factory, which was kept open by the Ustaša as necessary for military purposes. His son Ivan Sopianac and his wife Lela Sopianac at risk of their lives took care of the elderly and the children who could not work and who were kept hidden in the establishments or in their house. They prepared their meals and take care of all their needs.

Erich Eder

Born in Bavaria in 1924, he was 20 when he was sent to the Italian front in Mombaroccio, on the hills of Pesaro, as a Wehrmacht commanding officer. There, he became friend with Father Sante Raffelli, a Franciscan Friar Guardian of the Convent of Beato Sante who hid fugitives, including Jewish families. Alfredo Sarano also found refuge in the convent. Secretary of the Jewish Community of Milan, Sarano fled with his family after hiding the lists of about fourteen thousand Milanese Jews, thus saving them from deportation. Erich Eder discovered the presence of the Jews in the convent but decided to violate the orders and told Father Raffelli that he would not arrest any Jews. After the bombing of the convent, he went back to check that all friars and civilians had survived. At the end of the war, it was discovered that the Eder family had also saved the Jewish Betty Greif.

Maurizio Lazzaro de ‘Castiglioni

During the Second World War, General Maurizio Lazzaro de ‘Castiglioni distinguished himself for his initiatives to protect the Jewish community. While serving as a Commander of the Pusteria Alpine Division, in February 1943, he had his soldiers intervene in Savoy for the release of a hundred foreign Jews who had been imprisoned by the French police in a barrack in Annecy. In the Grenoble Resistance Museum there is also the letter that de 'Castiglioni wrote to the French prefect of Isère on March 14, 1943, attesting to the General's determination to declare illegitimate the arrest of Jews of any nationality by the French authorities in the territory under Italian control («I therefore kindly ask you to proceed with the cancellation of the arrests and internments already carried out»). Thanks to General de 'Castiglioni, Grenoble and its region became a refuge for thousands of French and foreign Jews.

Susanna Aimo

She was a loyal and honest person, who worked as a housekeeper for the Segre family since the early 20th century. Despite the ban imposed by the authorities, she remained at the service of the family, with whom she had a relationship of great affection, during the persecutions. She was ready to sacrifice herself and put her own life in danger in order to protect every member of the Segre family. After they were deported, she kept their belongings safe and gave them back to Liliana Segre at the end of the war. Originally from Mondovì, Susanna was very close to Senator for Life Liliana Segre, who, at the time, was just a child, and she kept protecting her during those years despite the prohibition to speak to or work for Jewish people. A fervent Catholic, she kept praying for the Segre family's dead as if they were hers.