

Easter Egg - GINO BARTALI

While working on the sketches for this book, I listened to a lot of documentaries about World War II on Netflix. I learned so much that wasn't directly related to the book – but the information was too interesting not to include in some small way. For example, on the title page, I included a portrait of Gino Bartali, a cyclist that was a hero to many in Italy for winning the Giro d'Italia in 1936 and 1937 as well as the Tour de France in 1938. But what folks may not know is that he worked directly with a priest and a rabbi to transport fake identification papers from town to town. He played a significant part in the Italian effort to protect Jewish refugees. As he was regarded as a cycling hero, no one thought his long rides suspicious (after all, he was training) nor did they inspect his bike, where the papers were carefully hidden in the shaft. In 2013, he was posthumously recognized as a "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem for his effort to help Jews in World War II.

Here is more from Wikipedia:

Rescues and Resistance role during World War

Bartali used bicycle training as a cover for secret efforts to rescue Jews.

Bartali earned respect for his work in helping Jews who were being persecuted by the Nazis during the time of the **Italian Social Republic**. It emerged in December 2010 that Bartali had hidden a Jewish family in his cellar and, according to one of the survivors, by doing so saved their lives.^[15]

Bartali used his fame to carry messages and documents to the **Italian Resistance**.^{[16][17]} Bartali cycled from Florence through Tuscany, Umbria, and Marche, sometimes traveling as far afield as Rome, all the while wearing the racing jersey emblazoned with his name. Neither the **Fascist police** nor the **German troops** risked discontent by arresting him.

Giorgio Nissim, a Jewish accountant from **Pisa**,^[16] was a member of **DELASEM**,^[18] founded by the Union of the Israelitic Communities to help Jewish Italians escape persecution. The network in **Tuscany** was discovered in autumn 1943 and all members except Nissim sent to **concentration camps**. He met Pope **Pius XII** and, with the help of the **Archbishop** of Genoa, the **Franciscan Friars** and others he reorganized **DELASEM** and helped 800 escape.

Nissim died in 2000. His sons found from his diaries that Bartali had used his fame to help. Nissim and the Oblati Friars of **Lucca** forged documents and needed photographs of those they were helping. Bartali used to leave **Florence** in the morning, pretending to train, ride to a convent in which the Jews were hiding, collect their photographs and ride back to Nissim.^{[19][20]} Bartali also used his position to learn about raids on safehouses.

Bartali was eventually taken to Villa Triste in Florence. The SD and the Italian RSS official Mario Carità questioned Bartali, threatening his life.^[20] Bartali simply answered, "I do what I feel [in my heart]".

Bartali continued working with the Assisi Underground. In 1943, he led Jewish refugees towards the Swiss Alps himself. He cycled, pulling a wagon with a secret compartment, telling patrols it was just part of his training. Bartali told his son Andrea only that "One does these things and then that's that".^[20]

In June 2012, a book about Bartali's wartime activities, *Road To Valor* by Aili and Andres McConnon, was published.^[21]

In 2013, Yad Vashem awarded Gino Bartali the honour Righteous Among the Nations.^[22] He is a central figure in the 2014 documentary *My Italian Secret: The Forgotten Heroes*.^[4]