

## A Big Tent

Heroes exist in many types. Some people think of comic book superheroes, while others think of firefighters or first responders. Traits like bravery, strength, humility, and compassion define heroes. Heroes have one thing in common: they all save lives. The Althoffs illustrate the true definition of heroism. They did not just save one life; they saved seven. The couple showed their true kindness and compassion by providing the family with everything they needed while risking their own safety. Adolf and Maria were very courageous in the face of grave danger.

A circus is known for featuring people from diverse backgrounds and societal outcasts. The Althoff Family Circus was no exception. Adolf Althoff became the head of the well-known Althoff Circus. According to “Heroic German Circus Owners,” in 1939, he married Maria, who also came from a long line of circus performers. Together, they directed the circus during the Nazi rule in Germany. In 1941, they stopped in Hesse, near Darmstadt, where they met Irene Danner, a young German-Jewish performer from a famous circus family. Adolf let Irene perform illegally in his circus despite knowing her ancestry (“Althoff Adolf and Maria”). The Althoffs provided Irene with a false name and fake documents to protect her identity (“Adolf and Maria Althoff”). While under their care, Irene fell in love with another circus artist, Peter Storm-Cento, and gave birth to two children. When the persecution of Jews in Darmstadt escalated, Irene's mother and sister escaped to the circus camp, where the Althoffs welcomed them without hesitation. Later, Irene's father, a German army soldier, fled to the camp after receiving a temporary release to divorce his Jewish wife (“Althoff Adolf and Maria”). According to “Adolf and Maria Althoff,” when inspections were rumored, they hid Irene and her family while distracting the Gestapo. Irene and her family never had to flee during the raids (“Heroic German Circus Owners”). Ultimately, not only did the Althoffs save a family, but also a family legacy.

According to “Heroic German Circus Owners,” when talking about their decision to let Irene and her family stay, Adolf said, “There was no question in our minds that we would let them stay. I couldn't simply permit them to fall into the hands of murderers. This would have made me a murderer.” This reinforces how the Althoffs are my favorite kind of heroes because they provided a ‘big tent’ in every sense. They changed their comfortable, secure, normal lives for people they didn’t know but who needed them to survive. Adolf also stated, “[They] circus people see no difference between races or religions” (“Heroic German Circus Owners”). Heroes are inspirational in many different ways. What surprised me the most was that they did not know Irene and her family before the war (“Althoff Adolf and Maria”). They inspire me to help those in need, even strangers, just like they did. Their story proves everyone has worth and deserves love. The Althoffs are a true inspiration. In the end, the Althoffs' actions prove bravery involves risk and sacrifice but is motivated by love for all of humankind.

Works Cited

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