Teacher of the Holocaust

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Purpose of Thesis

This work of historical fiction, about a young Jewish woman teaching during the Holocaust, was created to focus on how the career of teaching fits into a specific historical event. The ideals of teaching were applied within the setting of a Czechoslovakian town and ghetto during the Holocaust. Much of the factual information is true. Through this work, I hope to bring recognition to the career of teaching and honor to the Jewish teachers who fought throughout the Holocaust to educate their students.

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Teacher of the Holocaust

by

Jennifer Lynn Chesney
This story is dedicated to the many teachers who lost their lives in the Holocaust of the Jewish people. May their valiant efforts to further the education of children, during this time of horror, not be forgotten.
March 1939, Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia

I teach primary level in a small Jewish school outside of Prague, in Rozmital. My job had become increasingly difficult due to the Nuremberg Laws, which had been imposed on the Jewish people. I was the only teacher left from the original school. The rest had stopped teaching to take care of their families or had fled the country in search of a place where they would not be prosecuted. The original school had been taken over by the Germans as office space. The children and I were meeting in a one room cottage near a stretch of woods. The children would say, "Miss Fiala, there are pages missing from my book." I would have to remind them to be thankful that we had books.

I liked to spend a lot of time in the classroom reading fictional literature. I felt the stories helped the children escape their dreary and confusing world, although at this point, it was getting hard to find literature that did not portray the Jewish people as second class citizens or sub-humans. The Germans had ordered that many books be destroyed, and in place of those books, they placed materials that had been approved by the Third Reich. These books contained nothing of the rich Jewish culture that flourished through Eastern Europe.
I provided my children with lessons on Jewish heritage and the influence of Jewish people on history. I thought that if I could instill the children with pride, they would take that home and spread it to their parents. Teaching children gave my a way to reach out to many people. It was important to me to do my best.

By the beginning of August, conditions had become worse. Laws were imposed that forced Jews to register for emigration. We had to turn in our radios and bicycles. The loss of bicycles also meant a loss of students for me. Since our school was outside of Prague, many of the children depended on their bicycles for transportation.

I was glad for the first time ever that I was alone in the world. My parents had died two years earlier in an automobile accident. My father's parents had died of old age in Poland many years ago. My mother's father had a severe stroke and died three months later and my grandmother had followed him within two weeks. I believe it was due to a broken heart. I buried my grandmother only eight months ago. I would not have wanted them to see how the Nazis were slowly taking away all the things we had worked so hard to gain. My father's family was not Jewish, but my mother's was. In fact, my Grandfather Steiner was a Rabbi. He taught young men to be rabbis. He was well known within the Jewish community
in Prague. It made waves when my mother married my father, in 1918, but they were so much in love, no one could deny them. Two years later, I was born. After graduating high school, I had gone on to the University to become a teacher. I had put marriage on hold because teaching was the primary focus in my life at that time.

It was November 1940 and the Nazis went into all the schools and libraries and took out all the Jewish books and periodicals. I had seen Nazis two days earlier in the Prague public library taking away books in huge carts. It was a brisk morning and I had arrived at school early to grade papers. As I entered the room, I saw two S.S. Officers pulling books off of the shelves and throwing them into a barrel. I quickly retreated, hoping they had not seen me. I watched from around a corner of the cottage as the officers dragged the barrel out of the room and set it on fire. Tears streamed down my face as the flames rose. I ran to the woods and hid behind a tree. I sank down to the ground sobbing. I stopped myself because I realized it was now all up to me. All of the information from those books could only be found in my head. It would be up to me to pass that information on to the children. I gathered myself together and walked back to school. The officers had gone. I cleaned up the charred mess. I had a smile on my face when the children walked in the door.
In January of 1941, I was in a Jewish bakery when I overheard two Jewish women talking. "Nazis are making people leave their homes. It has happened in Germany. My sister saw it with her own eyes. She lives everyday in fear of being deported," one said.

The other replied, "That is impossible. We own our homes. Nazis cannot take our homes."

Another woman joined in, "I have heard this too. Nazis are building new communities for us. My husband says if we go, the Nazis will let us live there in peace. The persecution will be over."

The woman who started the conversation was clearly upset, "Have you not learned it will never be over. The Nazis will not stop the persecution until we are all dead. They believe the Jews are the cause all of their problems." The discussion was abruptly halted when a group of S.S. Officers stopped to smoke cigarettes outside of the bakery. As I walked home, I had an eerie feeling in the depths of my heart, like a sadness mixed with disillusion.

I will always remember September as the month of stars. Jews were forced to sew them on all of their clothing. I began to see them everywhere. Little did I know that before this war was over, I would only be seeing a few thousand of those stars left.
In late 1941, the Jewish Elders stepped up activities. The committee of elders was selected by the Nazis and was made up of rabbis and Jewish community leaders. They were in charge of Jewish activities, including education. They wanted teachers to concentrate on general education and foreign language instruction. They wanted the children to be prepared in case they were sent to another country. I was fortunate in that my father's family was Polish. I was able to teach the children some of the basics of the language.

On November 24th 1941, the transports began. No one seemed to know exactly where people were going, but it was apparent they were gone. I started to dread coming to school because I did not want to see another empty desk. Wherever my children were going, I prayed they had a good teacher.

I had heard through Jewish circles that some families were going into hiding. It was dangerous and there were few hiding places available. One December day, a student, Joseph, brought a note saying I was invited for dinner and could bring something to share. Joseph leaned close and said, "Tonight we vanish." My eyes welled with tears. I had made enough of an impact on this student's life that the family was inviting me to go into hiding with them. If I did not hide, I would be deported. What would
happen after that, I did not know.

I watched all day as Joseph beamed in anticipation of the night's activities. I kept Joseph after school to give him a few books to take, thank him, and to explain why I could not come to dinner. "Joseph, I am the only teacher here and if I left, how would all the other children continue to learn? I am responsible to prepare them for what is coming. I need to stay here with the other children. It is important that, no matter what happens, children never stop learning. I must continue to teach." As Joseph hugged me and we said our good-byes, I could tell by the look in his eyes that he understood my words and accepted them.

He walked through the door and turned to take one last look, "Miss Fiala, I am not afraid. You have taught me how our people survived persecution many times before. This time is no different. We will survive." I listened until I could no longer hear his footsteps outside the building. Fresh tears began to flow. I not only felt great sorrow because of the choice I had made, but also joy because of the work I had accomplished as a teacher.

On February 21st 1942, I heard a knock on the door of my flat. I opened it to see a S.S. Officer. He wordlessly handed me an envelope and walked away. I closed the door. I never opened that envelope. I did not
need to; I already knew what it said.

I reported to the train station at 8 o'clock the next morning with only bare essentials and a few small treasured possessions. The train was horrible. We were crammed in so tight that it was hard to breathe. I was thankful to be one of the last people loaded on the train because I got to stand near a small window. However, once the door was closed, I had to constantly push people back who were trying to crowd towards the window. Children cried and some of the adults moaned and shrieked. The noise was deafening. I closed my eyes and tried to block out the horror of the moment. Unfortunately, I had to keep alert or I would be smothered by others trying to get to the window for air.

After a few hours, the train stopped. An officer slid open the car door, "Out fast! Move quickly! Form ranks!" Everyone scrambled out of the train car and lined up in rows of five across. We began to march. Anyone who stopped marching or tried to run away was shot. My body was rigid with fear. I noticed a small girl marching beside me. She was beginning to fall behind. I could not bear the thought of her being shot down right beside me, so I took a great risk and reached out for her hand. I grasped her hand and pulled her in step with the row. She looked up at me with a dirty face and blank eyes. I squeezed her hand trying to infuse life into
her through our entwined fingers.

We must have marched about five miles before we arrived at a huge gate. The sign above read, "Arbeit macht Frei" (work means freedom). Behind the gate was the small ghetto of Terezin, surrounding it was a wall, partially wire, partially stone. Outside the wall, a deep trench full of water circled the large fortress. I knew from studying history that the town had originally been built as a military garrison and later settled by civilians. Now, thanks to the Nazis, it would be settled with Jews. I hoped in my heart the walls of the town would protect us from harm, but my head knew better.

Our transport was quickly separated and sent to stand in many different lines. In the confusion, I lost track of the young girl whose hand I had held. We had been sent to Schleuse, an underground cell where we were forced to undergo a body and belongings search. They took from me my Grandfather Steiner's watch. From here, we were sent to wait in Dresden Fortress, a large army barrack with exercise courtyards and wide archways. I must have been in line quite some time because when received my housing assignment, the sky was already darkening. I climbed three flights of stairs in my building to find that I would be living in two small rooms with three other families. There were eighteen of us in all.
One of the men offered to show me around. He was bald and very thin. His clothes had holes and he smelled of body odor. "This is the sleeping room. We try to share the mattresses. You may take a place on one of the bottom bunks."

I mumbled a feeble, "Thank you." I was in disbelief of my surroundings. One of the tiny rooms had crudely constructed wooden bunk beds against the walls. On the beds were six straw filled mattresses. I stored my few belongings in one corner of a lower-level bed.

He lead me to the other room and continued in an emotionless voice, "This is the eating room. The closest bathroom is across the street." It was immediately apparent that people did not always make it across the street because the room reeked of stale urine.

I was introduced to the other seventeen people and then excused myself. "I want to get to sleep. It has been a long day." One woman looked at me sympathetically. "I understand your pain. I will keep the others out until you fall asleep."

Lying in bed, I reviewed the day in my mind. Still I could not comprehend it. I was not only robbed of my valuables, but brutally raped of my dignity.

When I woke in the morning I found two women lying asleep beside
me. I quietly crawled over them, straightened my clothing, and headed across the street to the bathroom.

The next morning, I went back to Dresden Fortress to get my work assignment and ration card. I reported that I was a teacher and spoke Czech and Polish. I was ordered to follow an S.S. Officer. He took me to another part of the town and into a one level building that had been divided into many small sections. I was to be part of the Jugendfuersorge (Youth Care Service). He left me in a classroom and told me to get prepared. My students would be arriving the following day.

As I prepared to teach my new students, my mind wandered back to my old students. Who was teaching them now? Were they going to school anymore? Would I meet any of them here? How many of them were still alive?

The only materials I had were propaganda books written by the Nazis. I would have to use the knowledge I carried with me to teach the children. It would be hard to teach with no paper, pencils, chalk, or blackboards. I would have little parental involvement and no school board to support me.

The next day, as the children arrived, I realized we were going to have some difficulties. My classroom included Austrian, Hungarian,
Polish, and Czech children. The thirty-three children ranged in age from six to twelve years. I quickly assessed the situation and divided the children up according to the language they spoke. I found that some of the older Hungarian and Austrian children were bilingual and could translate to those who did not understand. I had to say everything twice, once in Czech and once in Polish. Then I had to wait while the other children translated.

The children were eager to get to work. I think they were groping for some sense of normality in their lives. Some of them had brought supplies from home. I encouraged the other children to collect paper scraps and anything they could write with.

That night after school, I went to the Jewish Council. I was shocked to find that the Head of the Council was Jacob Edelstein, a former student of my Grandfather Steiner and a close family friend. I had lost touch with him shortly after the deportations began. Now, I knew why. "Malinka' holcicka (Little one)." He was the only person alive who still called me that. "I was going to seek you out soon. I saw your name on the transport list, but I should have known you would not be satisfied with your conditions here and you would show up on my doorstep first." I told the Council the demographics of my classroom and explained my need for help.
The council agreed, but did not know yet exactly what could be done.

Jacob walked me home that night and we exchanged stories about the events that lead us both here. He looked much older, almost a grandfather. His skin was saggy and wrinkled, his shoulders were hunched, and his walk was slow and deliberate. Time here had taken its toll. He too, was alone in the world. Now we had each other. It felt comforting. "Have you been injured?" he asked.

"Only my pride. They took Grandfather's watch from me."

"Oh my Malinka' holcicka, it is all a part of the Nazi plan to strip away our identities. I am sorry for your loss, but glad you are alive. Your life must now focus on survival."

We spoke late into the night. He told me how the food system worked, how people were assigned to jobs, and how the citizens were treated. He also gave me an extra ration card for food. "Be careful, if the Nazis catch you with that we will both be severely punished." Before parting I hugged him tightly, I could feel his bones through his paper-like clothes.

The next morning when I arrived at school, I found several large boxes just inside my room. I was hesitant to look at first. I timidly drew back one flap on a box. I discovered the boxes contained math, science,
history, and reading books—books written for all languages and at all
levels. "I see you opened your surprise." I whirled around to find Jacob,
is face beaming.

"Oh, Jacob, it's wonderful. But h-h-h-ow and w-w-where?" I was
stuttering in my excitement.

"You would be surprised to find out what some people bring with
them when they come here. There is a whole building full of things they
have taken from people. Fortunately, for us, Nazis are packrats and do not
get rid of any of it."

"You must have been up all night finding these materials," I
exclaimed.

"It was nothing really. Several boys came over from the Youth
Organization. It only took a few hours." His face was full with pride. It
was inspiring to see. He took a few steps towards me and stretched out
his arm, while he opened his hand. In his flat palm, he held my
Grandfather's watch. My eyes widened in amazement. "Aren't you going to
take it? It is the one that belongs to you." He placed it in my hand. I was
speechless. "Hide it well, Malinka' holcicka." My eyes scoured the watch
throughly. I had never expected to see it again. When I looked up he had
gone. It was a dangerous thing for Jacob to do. He had risked his life to
return the watch. The love and caring with which this gesture was done moved me greatly. Here in this desolate ghetto, where death was just over your shoulder, kind acts of great thoughtfulness were still alive. The watch would become my symbol of hope. Along with the recovery of the watch had come a recovery of my pride and dignity.

The following day, two adolescent boys strode into the classroom just before school. One was tall, thin and lanky with tightly curled black hair and olive skin. The other was average sized and had a tuft of fluffy brown hair. His skin was placid and pimply. "Can I help you?" I asked.

"Are you Miss Fiala?" the taller boy replied in Czech.

"Yes," I replied somewhat tentatively.

"Good. The Jewish Council contacted us. We are from the Youth Organization and have been appointed to be your teaching assistants." The boys faces looked hopeful. They both had large brown eyes that shone at the chance to do some meaningful work. In further discussion, I found that they both spoke Czech, but the tall one was originally Hungarian and the other was originally Austrian.

I said a silent prayer of thanks for the Jewish Council. They worked hard to make the hell we were living in as comfortable as possible, especially for the children. Many people hated the Council because they
selected who would leave in the transports that went further east. However, this was a matter over which they had no choice. The Council was ruled by the Nazis and if they did not comply with orders, they would be eliminated.

Learning progressed much faster in the following months. The teaching assistants proved themselves to be extremely helpful. We always had to be careful though, because several of the books we were using were banned. Whenever the officers came around, we had to hide our books, and I had to switch to a lesson based on Nazi propaganda. We spent much time practicing different methods of alerting everyone when the officers would come around. The most used signal was a hand raised high in a fist by the first person to see a Nazi. The fist would alert the other children to quietly slip their books into their desks and me to change subjects.

During the summer months, we often held classes outside of the school. I taught all types of lessons under the guise of games, which the teaching assistants helped me create. The S.S. Officers were none the wiser about the "game lessons." This was good for the children and myself because if S.S. Officers actually discovered the Jewish principles I was teaching, all of us would be killed immediately.
As August came around, the classroom became fuller. I now had forty-five students. The children were sharing all their books and supplies. Even with the two assistants, it was hard to keep up.

One result of overcrowding was bigger and more frequent deportations to the east. Some parents started to keep their children at home. They were fearful that the Nazis would come to school during the day and take the children. Families worked hard to stay together as much of the day as possible because one never knew when he would be deported and people did not want to lose each other.

During October, Terezin’s population was at an all time high. Jacob had told me that there were 53,004 ghetto residents. He also told me that Terezin was only designed to hold 7,000 people. He explained that transports out of Terezin would start becoming larger in number and frequency, due to the over-crowding.

Teaching was becoming more and more difficult. I tried to keep the atmosphere in the classroom as calm and as normal as possible, but it was hard not to notice when there were more students missing each day. The children started to become upset when they did not have anyone to share their books with.

Five more people had moved into my already crowded flat. Food
rations were becoming smaller. We were down to one piece of bread and one cup of watery soup a day. It was a good day if we got potatoes. I always gave my food from my extra ration card to one of the children. They were all so badly malnourished.

One bit of relief we received were the many cultural events that had been scheduled throughout the winter months. The ghetto's population was made up of many artists and writers. Creatively blossomed within the ghetto walls. There were always performances or lectures to attend with the children.

Creativity also flourished within the classroom. I discovered that encouraging the children to write and draw their experiences and the experiences of their imaginations gave them a release and a comfort. Issac, a ten year old boy with sandy brown hair and freckles, brought a paper to me. "I miss the way things used to be. I just want to go home sometimes." He left the paper on my desk. It read,

I've lived in the ghetto here more than a year,
In Terezin, in the black town now,
And when I remember my old home so dear,
I can love it more that I did, somehow,

Ah, home, home,
Why did they tear me away?
Here the weak die easy as a feather
And when they die, they die forever,
Yet we all hope the time will come
When we'll go home again.
Now I know how dear it is
And often I remember it.

It was expressions like this one that showed me the amount of
learning that was taking place in the lives of the children. They were
learning, not only grammar skills, but coping skills. They were dealing
with an uncomprehensible hell better than most of the adults. They used
their pain, anger, and frustration to create priceless works of art and
touching expressions of human nature. I knew the children were what had
been keeping me going. Their adaptability and desire to keep moving
forward and ever upward served as constant inspiration to continue
教学.

I learned so much from them. Their imaginations were boundless and
often removed them from the ghetto. Gabriele Silten, a young German girl,
shared her imaginations with me one day as we walked home from school.
"Miss Fiala, did you know that I can fly?" she said.

"No, but it sounds wonderful. Tell me more," I replied.

Gabriele continued, "You see, I stand in the open arches of my
buildings attic and I pretend that I can fly. I fly out of the attic and over
the wall. I fly can far away from this place."
That evening I climbed to the top of my building and stood on one of the attic beams. I lifted my arms straight out and started to wave them up and down like a bird. I closed my eyes and slowly began to feel as if my feet were no longer touching the beam. In my mind, I was passing over the walls of Theresienstadt with my children on both sides of me. We were flying to freedom. That night I slept more soundly than I had since my arrival here. I was no longer the source of light for my students. They had become the light for me as my days grew steadily darker.

February 1943, one full year. It was a sad time, but also a hopeful time. I was thin, but alive. I had not been deported. I was allowed to teach. These few meager positives gave me the will to go on. In addition, I had to stay alive for the children. Many of them had no parents and lived in the Jugendheime (Youth Hostel). I served not only as a teacher, but as a counselor, an advocate, and a parent.

In July of 1943, the educational community was alerted by the Jewish Council that about one thousand children would be arriving in the near future from Bialystok. Rumors had spread that the children had been witness to the execution of their older siblings and their parents. As my children heard of this, their reaction surprised me, although it should not have. They were eager to prepare for the children. They wanted to make
them gifts, like dolls and other playthings. The compassion they had for the incoming children was overwhelming. These children, who themselves had little more than nothing, could not wait to give and to share with others.

The 1,260 Bialystok children arrived on August 24th, 1943. They were dressed in rags and extremely thin and dirty. Many of them were sick. Because of this, they were kept in quarantine in a special area. One of my Czech students came into the classroom after watching the Bialystok children arrive. He reported, "They look awful. You can't guess how old they are. They all have old, strained faces and tiny bodies...They all have frightened eyes."

I met with Jacob that evening and asked him about the new children. "It is true they saw the deaths of their families. They were spared in hopes they could be traded for Germans held by the Allies," he said.

"They use the children as pawns in the war process," I was shocked.

"Well, isn't that what we all are? Pawns in a cruel game." I guess it should not have surprised me, but it did. Jacob's explanation brought me back down to earth.

"What will be done with them?" I inquired. "Who will take care of them?"
Jacob replied, "The Jewish Council had appointed caregivers to stay with them. The Nazis have ordered that the children receive shoes, clothing, and double food rations. Those children have come to us from the deepest depths of hell. When the children arrived, the caregivers tried to get them into the showers to clean them up. The children started to weep and clung to each other. They embraced so tightly that the caregivers could not pry them apart. One of the children started screaming, 'I don't want to die.' The caregivers were shocked. It turns out the children were witness to mass killings. Many of them described shower houses where people were given soap and sent in, and then no one came out alive."

"Is it true?" I asked.

"So many of the children told the exact same story. I have also heard other rumors of similar happenings," he responded The information Jacob shared with me haunted me for many nights. I dreamed I was being pushed into a shower house over and over again; then I would wake up in a cold sweat. The caregivers must have misunderstood what the children were saying. This could not be true. Other people of the world would not stand by while Jews were being murdered in masses.

It turned out that the Bialystok children were not with us very long. They were deported on October 6th, 1943. Jacob said they were being sent
further east to another concentration camp. We learned later that all of the Bialystok children were killed upon their arrival.

Another long winter was setting in for the ghetto residents. November brought chilly, short days and freezing, long nights. On November 11th, everyone was wakened by a loud siren and the Nazis' howling voices. People were forced from their buildings and into a common area. "Roll Call...Form lines...Stand still," different S.S. Officers yelled different directions. We stood in lines all day with no food, while the officer counted people and called names. Several people had no shoes and little clothing. They had been caught off guard so early in the morning. I spent my time during the day wondering why we were having the roll call. Was there activity in the war that had prompted this torture? If so, what? Had someone escaped? Were they counting us for deportation? At night when we left the common area, there were about three hundred bodies lying on the ground. Poor souls who could stand no longer fell to the ground, to stay there forever.

With December came snow and colder temperatures. The children had been working hard to keep up with their studies. We had gotten behind because of the roll call. It had taken me a couple of days to get the children back on track after that. The roll call had scared the children.
They were wondering why it took place. Never before had we had such a lengthy roll call in such extreme weather.

On the morning of December 15th 1943, I arose early in the morning. I was eager to get to school because the children had been working on art projects and we were finishing them today. It was a cold, but sunny day. I had high hopes for what the day would produce and a smile on my face when the children bustled in. The classroom felt warm with the sun cascading through the windows. The children were restless, but still managed to stay focused on their art projects. Suddenly, the children's faces turned ghostly white. Their eyes widened and their mouths slowly dropped open. The familiar look and feel of fear began to take over every inch of their bodies, which stiffened and shifted, as if their chairs had suddenly become uncomfortable. I knew, without turning, that there were soldiers in the room. They had an omnipotent presence that could be felt. I turned to find three S.S. Lieutenants standing behind me. The officers carried huge guns with bayonets on the ends.

They motioned me to come over to them. My body quivered; my legs weakened. I said a silent prayer for the strength to be able to walk without fainting. They started speaking to me in broken Czech.

"Children...out...truck...move...now...children...go quiet," one officer muttered.
It was hard to understand him, yet the meaning of his words was all too clear. Another soldier, "New place...relocation." I knew what relocation meant. People spoke of camps further East with worse conditions then our current stay at Terezin. It was rumored that these camps contained huge buildings where people were killed in masses. The Final Solution, yes, that was what the Germans had called it. I tried to keep a peaceful look about me so the children would not be further alarmed, but as I came to a full realization of what was happening, a feeling of horror spread through my blood and became visible to the children on my face and in my eyes. The children started to sob. "Quiet...now...silence...quiet...now!!!" an officer began shouting at the children. The children could not understand most of the words, but knew they were supposed to be quiet. Many of the children became immediately silent. However, one Polish child, Abraham, screamed hysterically. I tried to run and comfort him. The officers did not allow this. One of them grabbed me by the arm, twisting my wrist as he did. I heard a crack and felt a searing pain shoot up my arm. An immediate and intense burning sensation radiated from my wrist. He had broken it. I bit into my lip to silence the scream that was about to escape. My mouth filled with the taste of my own blood as my teeth dug into my bottom lip. In the meantime, another officer had grabbed Abraham by the
collar and dragged him outside the room into the hallway. The other officer stood with his gun pointed at the children. The rays of sunlight that glittered off of his bayonet were blinding. A moment later, a single shot was heard and the shrieking was silenced. The officer who held my wrist in his clutches continued giving me instructions, "Children...line...door....outside...trucks...you follow." I told the children to stand and file out of the room by row. They were to go to the trucks waiting outside. I would be right behind them. The children began to file out as directed, as they passed each one looked to me. Throughout our time together, we had built so much trust among one another and that was what they were relying on now. My stomach began to churn. I was betraying them. My only comfort was that I betrayed them in the hope that one of them would live through this nightmare. After the children were gone, the last officer released my throbbing wrist and pushed me towards the door. In the hallway, I had to pass Abraham's lifeless body. His death would always be on my conscience. If only I had not let the children see my fear, maybe he would not have panicked. As I climbed into the truck, I saw the children's teary faces, but did not hear a sound. All the children had seen the penalty for crying out loud. I never heard one of those children cry out again, even as they were beaten and led naked past the
smoking crematorium and into the gas chamber.
Notes

The historical events in this story are real. From 1933-1945, the Holocaust happened and over eleven million people were really murdered. The Nuremburg Laws were forced on Jewish people and their possessions taken from them. Terezin was a ghetto in Czechoslovakia. Jews were sent there from throughout Eastern Europe. On the following pages are actual pictures from Terezin. Although the main character and her immediate family were not real people, many of the other characters were. Jacob Edelstein was the head of the Jewish Council in Terezin. An unknown boy, from Terezin, was the author of the poem "Homesick". Gabriele Silten was a German Jew held in Terezin. She did survive the war. The Bialystok children stayed at Terezin for six weeks before they were sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. The November roll call, during which three hundred prisoners died, actually happened. The drawings, on the following page, are by children who were held in Terezin. Some of the children survived, most did not.
Prisoners arrive at the Small Fortress at Terezin. They must pass through the gate with the inscription—"Arbeit macht Frei."
The fortress walls at Terezin.

Sleeping quarters at Terezin.