

Class Photo

Frieda Soury

“I grew up celebrating Passover and Christmas. I knew I was Jewish but religion was not a central part of my life. When Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, my religion came to define me.” – Frieda Soury



In 1943, at the age of 14, Frieda was deported to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in her native country of Czechoslovakia. Frieda was designated a “mischling,” meaning half-Jewish: Frieda’s mother was not Jewish, but her father was. Frieda was assigned to a room with more than 20 other girls. She remembers that the Jewish girls in her room came and went (later she learned they were deported to Auschwitz or other camps) while she and the other mischling stayed as inmates. Frieda worked on the camp’s farm, planting, tilling, harvesting, and moving rocks. While back-breaking labor, this afforded her the opportunity to occasionally steal an extra piece of food. Of the 140,000 people sent to Theresienstadt, 15,000 were children, and only 1,500 of these children survived the war.

Theresienstadt was liberated by the Russians in May 1945. Upon being freed, Frieda’s father acquired transportation for his family and other children from the same hometown and brought them all back to Ostrava. When she was 18, Frieda went to Israel where she met her husband Aaron. They had three children and then immigrated to the United States. Frieda is a member of the Holocaust Center’s speakers bureau.

This is Frieda’s 1940/1941 school photo. Frieda is standing just to the left of the instructor in the middle of the photo. She is wearing a white shirt.

You might notice that all of the students and the instructor are wearing Jewish stars sewn onto their clothing. This was a Jewish school. After the Nazis occupied Czechoslovakia, Jewish students were no longer allowed to attend public schools.

Some of the people in the photo are cut out. After Czechoslovakia was liberated from Nazi control, Frieda found that only a couple of her former classmates survived. These survivors had nothing left: no photos of themselves as children, their families or their friends. Frieda cut their pictures out of this photo to give to them.