

Surviving THE Holocaust

A Polish girl's family is torn apart when German soldiers invade her village during World War II

Characters

*SOLDIERS 1-4

FRIEDA TENENBAUM, a young girl living in Poland

ANDZIA TENENBAUM, Frieda's mother

JOSEPH TENENBAUM, Frieda's father

*GUARDS 1-3

JOSEF MENGELE (MEHNG-geh-luh), a Nazi officer and physician

NARRATORS A-E

*Indicates a fictional or composite character. All others were real people.



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PROLOGUE

Narrator A: On September 1, 1939, **Nazi** Germany invaded Poland, setting off World War II (1939-1945). Adolf Hitler, Germany's leader; the **Gestapo**; and members of the Nazi Party persecuted Jews throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. By 1941, Jews were being forced to give up their homes and property. They were herded into ghettos— isolated areas where they were brutalized by soldiers and starved. Jews were beaten or murdered at

random. Fear grew. Soon, Hitler and the Nazis began implementing the “Final Solution,” their plan to systematically murder all the Jews of Europe.

SCENE 1

Narrator B: In November 1940, Frieda Tenenbaum is 6 years old. Her sister, Dorka, is 2. The girls and their parents, Joseph and Andzia, live in a small town near Lodz, Poland. The family has moved from a comfortable home to

a cramped apartment shared with other Jewish families, thinking that they will be safe there. But one night, German troops arrive in trucks, filling the streets.

Soldier 1 (shouting into a bullhorn): All Jews, pack your things—one bag per person. Be ready to move at 5 a.m. Anyone who disobeys will be shot!

Narrator C: Just before dawn, Jews are marched to a local church. But at the gate . . .

Soldier 2: Old people to the right. Everyone else to the left. Now!

Frieda Tenenbaum: No! Where are they taking Grandma?

Andzia Tenenbaum: I don't know, but keep quiet! You've seen what they do to complainers.

Soldier 3: Get on your knees! Eyes down! Anyone who looks up will be shot.

Narrator D: Frieda and her family

Words to Know

- **Nazi** (*adj*): of or related to a political party that came to power in Germany in 1933 under Adolf Hitler
- **Gestapo** (*n*): the secret police unit of Nazi Germany
- **Holocaust** (*n*): the systematic murder of European Jews and other oppressed groups by the Nazis during World War II
- **emigrate** (*v*): to leave one country to settle in another



*Left: Frieda and her parents in 1946.
Below: Adolf Hitler salutes German troops marching to occupy Poland in September 1939 at the start of the war.*



kneel with the others. Some weep. They are kept on their knees all day, then sent to ghetto apartments.

SCENE 2

Narrator E: The Jews are put to work. Joseph, who is a tailor, is given the task of making uniforms for German troops. Frieda and

Andzia have to do laundry.

Frieda: I'm starving, Mama. We work so hard! Then all we get to eat is rotten potatoes.

Andzia: Count yourself lucky, Frieda—and remember: Never let them hear you complain.

Narrator A: In May 1943, when Frieda is 9, the Germans return.

Once again, they bark orders through their bullhorns.

Soldier 4: Attention, all Jews! Pack your things and get in line!

Narrator B: Slowly, people are marched to a rail yard.

Joseph Tenenbaum: This is a train for hauling cattle!

Frieda: Look, Papa! The soldiers are pushing people inside!

Narrator C: By nightfall, the filthy cars are jam-packed with Jews, including the Tenenbaums. Then the train begins to move.

Andzia: At least we're together.

Frieda: Where are they taking us?

Joseph: I don't know, but it can't be good.

Narrator D: The train takes them to Blizyn, a Nazi-run labor camp. Adults and older kids are forced to work. Frieda takes care of Dorka.

SCENE 3

Narrator E: Six months later, on a cold November morning, Frieda is alone—Dorka is in the camp hospital with a fever. Outside, shots ring out. Someone screams. Suddenly, Frieda's father appears.

Joseph: Frieda, come quickly!

You must hide—and keep quiet!

Narrator A: Hidden under a pile of uniforms in the room where her father works, Frieda hears more shots and screams. Then her father returns.

Joseph: You can come out now.

Frieda: Papa, what happened? Why are you crying?

Joseph: They took all the children—even Dorka.

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Frieda: What about Mama?

Joseph: She tried to stop them, so they beat her, but she's OK.

Frieda: Where did they take Dorka?

Joseph: I don't know! They just threw her in the back of the truck with the others and drove away.

Narrator B: Children are no longer allowed in the camp. A supervisor counts Frieda as an adult so that she can work with the women.

Narrator C: The next spring, Joseph and another man are taken and locked into a barbed-wire pen.

Frieda: Mama, I heard a guard say that they'll be taking Papa away tomorrow!

Andzia: Yes, and they're making them go barefoot so they won't try to escape over the fence. But I'm going to get your father some shoes. Come with me, Frieda.

Narrator D: Andzia finds a pair of shoes and throws them over the fence. A guard grabs her and begins to beat her.

Frieda: Mama!

Andzia: Get back, Frieda!

Guard 1: Why aren't you crying, woman? Come on, cry!

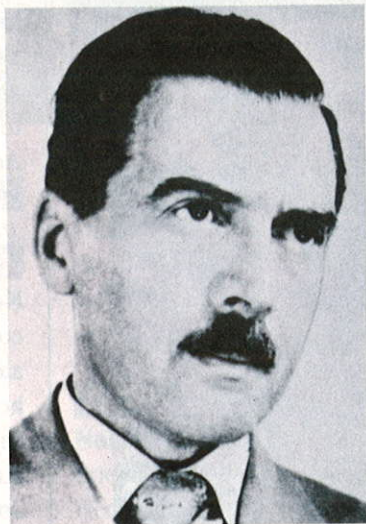
Narrator E: The guard continues to beat and kick Andzia, but she refuses to cry. He walks away in disgust instead of shooting her.

Frieda: Mama, are you all right?

Andzia: I think my arm is broken, maybe some ribs. But at least your father has shoes.

SCENE 4

Narrator A: In August 1944, Andzia and Frieda, now 10, are once again herded into a railway cattle car. Along with other



POLAND, 1944



women and children, they are taken to a concentration camp, Auschwitz. The name strikes fear into their hearts. Rumor has it that terrible things happen there.

Narrator B: When they arrive, they see a stern-looking man wearing a white doctor's jacket. He's watching as the guards and their snarling dogs force the new arrivals into line.

Josef Mengele: Guards! Check everyone closely. Bring any twins

straight to me—especially children.

Narrator C: Frieda doesn't know it yet, but Mengele performs cruel medical experiments on twins. He also decides who will do hard labor and who will be killed immediately. Many who are chosen to work die of illness, starvation, or the cold.

Frieda: I'm so scared! They shaved off our hair and gave us rags to wear. Then they tattooed numbers on our arms. Anyone



Top, left to right: Hungarian Jews at a roll call on arrival at Auschwitz in 1944; after liberating Auschwitz in 1945, Soviet soldiers look at piles of shoes taken from prisoners. Bottom: Josef Mengele, who conducted cruel experiments on prisoners.

who steps out of line gets killed.

Andzia: No matter what, Frieda, you must survive. We've already lost Grandma, Grandpa, and Dorka. We don't know if your father is dead or alive. I can't lose you too!

Narrator D: One day, Frieda and Andzia are put in a line with other women and girls. They are taken to a building labeled "bathhouse." Mengele stands nearby, giving orders as the line files past him.

Mengele: Women, go right! Elderly women and children, left!

Narrator E: When Frieda and her mother reach him . . .

Mengele: You, girl, to the left. Woman, go to the right!

Andzia (clutching Frieda's hand): No! I want to go with her.

Frieda: Mama, don't leave me!

Guard 2: Then go with her! You'll regret it. All of you in this group, take off your clothes and wait here!

Narrator A: Frieda, Andzia, elderly women, and children stand naked in the cold for hours. They hear an explosion, but no one knows what is happening. A few hours later, a guard approaches.

Guard 3: Get dressed, all of you! Return to the barracks!

Frieda: That was strange. I thought something awful was about to happen.

Narrator B: She is right. Something awful would have happened to them. Frieda learns later that the "bathhouse" was a gas chamber. The Germans had planned to kill the group—as they had done to more than 1 million others—by filling the air with poison gas and burning the corpses.

Narrator C: But the day Frieda and Andzia were to be killed, a Jewish work crew used smuggled dynamite to blow up one of the camp's five gas chambers. Their attempted revolt failed, but it saved Frieda's life and that of her mother.

EPILOGUE

Narrator D: In January 1945, Auschwitz was liberated by Soviet soldiers. About 7,000 prisoners were found alive. Auschwitz was one of six death camps established in Poland for the extermination of Jews. In all, the **Holocaust** claimed the lives of more than 6 million Jews and millions of others persecuted by the Nazis.

Narrator E: Frieda and her parents survived and **emigrated** from Poland to the United States. Some of the Nazi leaders were tried, convicted, and punished for war crimes. But Hitler killed himself before he could be captured. Mengele fled to South America, where he eluded authorities for the rest of his life.

—Zoe Kashner

*This play is adapted from an account in *Kinderlager: An Oral History of Young Holocaust Survivors* by Milton J. Nieuwsma. Copyright ©1998 by Milton J. Nieuwsma. Published by Holiday House, Inc.