



Fortress of My Youth: Memoir of a Terezín Survivor

Jana Renee Friesova

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Jana Renée Friesová was fifteen when she was imprisoned by the Nazis in the Czech ghetto town of Terezín (Theresienstadt). Her memoir unfolds before us the poignantly familiar picture of a young girl who, even under the most abominable circumstances, engages in intense adolescent friendships, worries with her companions over her looks, and falls in love. Raised a Catholic by secular Jewish parents, she did not even know she was a Jew until the German occupation of her country in 1939 when she was twelve.

Whereas Anne Frank's diary ends with deportation to a concentration camp, *Fortress of My Youth* is the story of another young girl who tells us how she and her family were taken to Terezín, what food she ate there, what work she did, how her friends died from disease, how thousands were sent from there to Auschwitz, how her family members were killed, and how she escaped the gas chamber. But she also tells of love, joy, and sacrifice: musicians, writers, and intellectuals among the inmates who were determined to pass on their cultural heritage to the youth in Terezín; a network of Czechs outside the walls who smuggled in food; her singing in performances of Smetana's *Bartered Bride* and Verdi's *Requiem*, the most profound experiences of her life.

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