

## My Aunt Alice

Somebody brought many photos of members of the Jewish community of my town of birth, Prostejov, to the Jewish cemetery. Our community no longer exists. Only one elderly Jew, as well as a few descendants from mixed marriages, now live in Prostejov.

Among these many photos, which Mr. Ivan Cech (a non-Jewish resident of the town) sent me from Prostejov recently; there was a very old picture of my aunt Alice.

We used to call her Alis. I had never seen auntie Alis so young and so beautiful. I am sure that at the time when the photograph was taken, she was not yet married. Alis became the wife of my fathers' elder brother, Otto.

I was a curious child and used to listen with much interest to the adults' conversations. I remember hearing once, that my aunt Alis wept on her fortieth birthday. That Alis cried, because she did not want to lose her youth. This happened in the year 1936, at a time when we still lived at home in peace and in comfort.



Aunt Alis and uncle Otto were the parents of an only son - of my cousin and friend, Jirka – George.

We were all deported to Ghetto Theresienstadt on the 2nd July, 1942. I learned to know aunt Alis better in Theresienstadt, when she lived with us and with other women and their children in the same room, where we lived on the bare floor. Like all mothers and wives, aunt Alis tried to save a little from her scanty food ration to give

to Jirka and to uncle Otto. The families used to meet in the mothers' rooms in the evenings before the nightly curfew.

After a few weeks in Ghetto Theresienstadt, living with grandmother in a building for the elderly, my grandfather died on the bare floor in a crowded room. I loved my grandpa; nevertheless I was grateful that he was spared more suffering. After grandfather's death, grandmother came to live in the room where mother, aunt Alis, my small sister, myself and other women with their children were accommodated. (I later moved to the girls' home L410).

Almost all our relatives were deported to Poland a very short time after our arrival in Theresienstadt. The transports to the east were dispatched so quickly that there was no time to say goodbye. We learned that they were sent away, when we no longer encountered them in Theresienstadt. We did not know that they were sent to their deaths.

After less than one year in Theresienstadt, my father died.

Aunt Alis, uncle Otto and Jirka stayed in Ghetto Theresienstadt more than one year. They left Theresienstadt with one of the two fateful September transports (1943). The fate of those two transports was especially cruel. For the people of those two transports, a Family Camp was established in Auschwitz. In those six months more than one thousand people had died in the Family Camp from hunger and disease; some committed suicide by touching the electrified wires. Six months after their arrival, those who were still alive were sent together to the gas chamber.

After the war we heard - I don't know from whom and how - that father's brother, Alis's husband, our uncle Otto, had died in Auschwitz from hunger and disease.

Aunt Alis and Jirka went with the others to the gas chamber on the night between the 7th and 8th March, 1944. From the gas chamber escaped the sounds of their singing the Czech national hymn, 'Kde domov můj' and the Jewish anthem, Hatikvah. They sang as long as there was breath in their lungs.