

The Felt Hat

My grandmother was a good woman. Shortly after she arrived in Theresienstadt she was widowed and was transformed from a chubby woman to become mere skin and bones. After my grandfather's death she came to live with us in Q802. Grandmother was pained at seeing her only daughter, my mother, and us, her granddaughters, living in such terrible circumstances in the ghetto. She became accustomed to sleeping with the rest of us on the crowded floor and living with the constant hunger, illness, and fear of transports to the East. She never found her sisters and brothers who were taken to Theresienstadt from Brno three months before us. We discovered later that her two brothers Ernst and Zigo Steiner were sent to Poland with their families. Her two sisters Klemi and Gisela had died in Theresienstadt before our arrival. In spite of all this, grandmother still found a place in her heart to care for others who were worse off. She took an elderly gentleman, who came alone from Germany, under her wings. When he contracted dysentery, a common malady in the ghetto – 'Terezinka' we nicknamed it – she cooked cereal from the food we had brought from home for him. Once, towards evening, the gentleman came to my grandmother on some pretext, and asked her to guard the one precious thing he still had – a light grey felt hat. The next day this man was found hanging in the attic of our building. He had been living there with hundreds of other elderly Jews from Germany, all of whom had come to Theresienstadt in the summer of 1942 believing they had come to live out the remainder of their lives in a health resort.

In October 1944 my beloved grandmother was sent to Auschwitz, and went straight from the train to the gas chambers. We missed her so! She had been with us in Theresienstadt for over two years.