



Tereszka

This photo was taken by war photographer David Seymour, also known as "Chim". He took this and many other photos of children who had survived the war. In the introduction to his book of photos he said,

"I would like to speak about the 13,000,000 abandoned children in Europe who had their first experience of life in an atmosphere of death and destruction, and who passed their first years in underground shelters, bombed streets, ghettos set on fire, refugee trains and concentration camps. The survivors have grown up in a world of fear — the fear instilled by men who kill." <http://aphelis.net/tereska-draws-home-david-seymour/>

It is estimated that over one million Jewish children living in Poland were killed during the Holocaust. Tereszka was one of the very few who managed to survive.

Children and the Holocaust

During the Holocaust, children were subjected to many injustices and cruelties.

In the early 1930s, German children took part in "race education" classes. These sessions promoted the idea that Jews were a separate, inferior race. German teachers would force Jewish children to come to the front of the classroom so that their distinguishing characteristics could be pointed out. By 1938 Jewish children were forbidden to go to German schools at all.

As the war progressed, the Jewish population was forced to live in ghettos. The conditions in these ghettos were terrible. Many children were orphaned as their parents were either killed or deported to concentration camps.

Children were also deported to concentration camps. Very young children and the elderly were immediately sent to the gas chambers. Older children and young adults were kept for slave labour. This work ranged from electrical work to carrying heavy stones for construction to burying the dead. The labourers were kept in the camps until they reached a point where they could no longer work at which time they were exterminated.

In order to survive these conditions, young people in the camps formed very close ties with each other. Oftentimes they had become separated from their family members and developed new relationships within their barracks. Despite this tenuous support, all of these children suffered emotionally from the horrible conditions and treatment they endured and witnessed.

Occupied Poland and Soviet Union

In their "search to retrieve 'Aryan blood,'" SS race experts ordered hundreds of children in occupied Poland and the occupied Soviet Union to be kidnapped and transferred to the Reich. The children were to be adopted by racially suitable German families. Although the basis for these decisions was "race-scientific," often blond hair, blue eyes, or fair skin was sufficient to merit the "opportunity" to be "Germanized."

Resistance and Rescue

In spite of their acute vulnerability, many children discovered ways to survive. Children found ways to smuggle food and medicines into the ghettos. They used play as a tactic to distract Nazi guards, allowing adults to perform small acts of resistance. Children in youth movements later participated in underground resistance activities.

After the War

With the surrender of Nazi Germany in May 1945 there were thousands of orphaned children in displaced persons camps. When possible, they were re-united with their families. However, in many cases all their family members had been killed. Many surviving Jewish children fled eastern Europe as part of the mass exodus to the western zones of occupied Germany or America.

For all, the memory of the events of the Holocaust has been impossible to forget.