

Handout 2

Resistance and Remembrance

The Terezín Tree

The following is an extract from the biography of the Czech Jewish family of Jiri and Irma Lauscher and their daughter, Michaela.¹ The extract describes the actions of Irma Lauscher, while she was imprisoned by the Nazis in the Theresienstadt Ghetto.²

“Irma was involved in the clandestine classes offered for children and taught them about Jewish traditions. In January 1943, Irma bribed a camp guard to smuggle her a tree sapling. She needed the young tree to celebrate Tu B'Shevat,³ the New Year for Trees, with the children. She planned a secret ceremony with dancing and singing with the children and together they planted the tree, using their precious water rations to nurture it. Other children continued to care for the tree they called Etz-Hayim, the Tree of Life, and as it grew it was a symbol that life goes on. It was difficult to get paper and pencils, and Irma would sometimes trade her scarce bread for supplies. Over 90% of the children in Theresienstadt did not survive the Holocaust. [...] [After the war,] The tree sapling that Irma and the children planted was relocated and became a site of memorial and remembrance.”

¹ IHRA, *Jiří Lauscher collection* <<https://portal.ehri-project.eu/units/us-005578-irn677569-irn512867>> [accessed 03 October 2022].

² The Theresienstadt Ghetto, established by the Nazis during World War 2 in the fortress town of Terezín, served as a transit camp for Jews whom the Germans deported to killing centres, concentration camps, and forced-labour camps. It was expected that the poor conditions there would hasten the deaths of many deportees until they could be deported.

³ This is an annual Jewish festival that celebrates trees and the natural environment.