



# Video Story Transcript

## A Window of Beauty: A Story of Courage from the Holocaust

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a0SoYsQyllc>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, my name is Nancy Shapiro-Pikelny. When I was 11 years old, I received this book as a gift. It's a collection of poetry and art that was done in the concentration camp Terezin. It was created in defiance of Nazi brutality. The name of the book, I Never Saw Another Butterfly. It was created by children, secretly and courageously. Now in that book there was only a brief mention of a drawing teacher, nothing more. And for years, I wondered who was this brave teacher and who were her students? I recently discovered a story of one student, a girl whose nickname was a Zuti, little rabbit. A name that was lovingly given to her by her friends because of her enormous buck teeth. Her real name was Rutie Shaffner. The Nazi sent Rutie Shaffner to the concentration camp in Terezin. And she was put in building L-410, room 28, along with many other girls her age. And there, the children suffered from disease and starvation. But Rutie's life was lifted up out of the horror of the Holocaust through art, because of her teacher an artist. A woman named Friedl Dicker Brandeis. I want to tell you a story, an excerpt from a story that I call, "A Window Of Beauty," that I created by gathering remnants of history and also by imagining the missing pieces. Imagining all of the lost threads, in the winter of 1944, in the concentration camp in Terezin, Czechoslovakia.

One day Rutie Shaffner decided to go on a hunt to find any art materials that her teacher Friedl could possibly use in their secret art classes. She began her hunt at the first light of dawn. She went into an alley and found a box and she grabbed it away from a rat that was chewing on the corner of it. And in that alley, there was charcoal and string and wire. She filled the box and then she headed out from the alley when she saw, in the distance, a group of Nazi soldiers crossing the street, coming in her direction. She didn't know what to do, so she slipped into the doorway of a building. She crouched down low. Her heart was pounding. What if they see

me? What if they find me here? Well, the building seemed empty and so Rutie dared to go inside. And in that building, Rutie made a wonderful discovery - paper. Paper! Stacks of ledger paper, office paper that had been left in that abandoned building. Rutie filled the box. And when the soldiers had gone, she ran all the way to her building L-410, room 28, up those three flights of stairs and she brought that box of treasures to Friedl. And from the odds and ends in that box, Friedl was able to teach those children the art of collage making. Rutie cut the shapes, and she tore them, pasted it on that ledger paper, and when she had finished, Rutie had created the sunrise in Terezin.

Well, the snows of winter eventually melted. And in the spring the Nazis needed to make a plan - how to fool the International Red Cross. You see, the Red Cross was coming to Terezin in the summer for an inspection. And so, the Nazis needed to make that concentration camp look beautiful for one day - the day of the inspection. And so, the Nazis ordered the Jews to paint the fronts of buildings, to clean up the garbage in the alleys, to build a playground. A playground that would be used for that one day only. The day of the inspection. And the last part of the Nazi plan, so that the Red Cross would not see the overcrowded conditions and Terezin, the Nazis increased the number of transports to the east to the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It was on a Thursday that they posted the next list. And among the 2,000 Jews on that list was Rutie Shaffner, little Zuti, little rabbit. She was only 13 years old. Now nobody, none of the people on the list, knew what it meant to be sent on a transport to the east. And so, they hurried to find anything that they could take with them on the train. A spoon, a tin cup, or a prayer book, a ragged blanket. And there was tremendous commotion and fear as the Nazis called out names and numbers and pushed the Jews into the cattle cars. And there stood little Rutie in that crowd. And she remembered her friends up in room 28. How they had loved her and protected her for the last few years.

She was trembling when she heard Friedl calling her name. And she looked up and saw that Friedl was making her way through the crowd. Friedl came up to her and said, "O,h Rutie, I came to say goodbye and I'm glad I found you. And I want you to take this with you on the train. One of the last drawings you did as my student. Look what a wonderful artist you have become, Rutie." And when she heard that her face broke wide open into a huge smile those buck teeth in full view.

"No, Friedl, I want you to have the drawing. You keep it." And Friedl did. Friedl and the girls of room 28 never saw Rutie Shaffner again. She was taken to the gas chambers of Auschwitz where she died on May 18th, 1944.

Now in September of that year, Friedl asked a friend of hers to help her fill suitcases with the many drawings collages and paintings from the children that she had saved for the past two years. They filled those suitcases, carried them up to the attic above room 28, and hid them there. In the following month on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the Nazis sent Friedl and hundreds and hundreds of children, and women, and men on cattle cars bound for the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Their lives ended there but their story did not. Because when the war was over, those suitcases filled with all their artwork... they were discovered, and taken to the Jewish museum in Prague and eventually published some of that artwork was published in this book. Now in the latest edition of this book, there appears Rutie's sunrise collage. In Hebrew, we say zekher tzadik livrakha, may their memories be for a blessing. And I hope that we can make their lives a blessing by telling these stories about real people who had names and faces and a love for beauty and creativity. People like Friedl and Rutie.