

FREDY HIRSCH

"Every group had a counselor. And above all the counselors was Fredy. Fredy was admired by everyone. And when you look at [their group photo], you grasp the catastrophe. All of these children perished. Out of all these children, only a handful survived."

- Dita Kraus, an Auschwitz survivor who knew Hirsch from Prague and Theresienstadt

Alfred Hirsch, known as Fredy, was born in Aachen, Germany in 1916. In Aachen, he began his career as a teacher and educator in various Jewish youth organizations. An enthusiastic and talented athlete, Fredy also worked with Jewish sports associations. After the Nazis came to power in Germany, he fled to Czechoslovakia, where he believed he would be safe.

In 1939, the Nazis marched into Czechoslovakia and began implementing laws against Jews. Among the many laws, the Nazis forbade Jewish children from attending school, joining clubs and teams, and visiting public places. To remedy this, Fredy arranged a wide variety of educational activities, classes, and sports programs for Jewish children. Children who survived the war would remember the activities Hirsch arranged fondly, gymnastics classes and soccer games which made their lives seem a little more normal and bearable. He was also involved in Zionist causes and assisted in efforts to bring Jewish children to Palestine.

When he was deported to Theresienstadt in December 1941, Fredy organized activities for the children there. He set up games, including soccer and track and field events, in the grassy areas of the camp. Fredy was described as athletic, attractive, and extremely caring. He made sure that the children kept themselves as clean as possible despite the lack of hot water and soap, even running cleanliness competitions. Survivors remember him as a kind and reassuring presence to the children.

In September 1943, Fredy and 5,000 other people were sent to Auschwitz. This transport was moved into an empty camp at Auschwitz called the Family Camp. Fredy supervised the hundreds of children in the camp. He did everything he could to make life better for the children, even in the middle of Auschwitz. Through his charm and impeccable bearing, he managed to convince the SS to provide more food and to treat them better overall. Tragically, Fredy was unable to save them. In March 1944, all the children who arrived on the September transport were murdered by the Nazis. The circumstances of Fredy's death are unknown, but it is thought that he went to the gas chambers with the children.

Not only is Fredy remembered for the quality of life that he provided for children, but his refusal to leave them; throughout his imprisonment, was given several opportunities to escape, but always refused to leave the children behind.

"Fredy was completely open about his sexuality. Everyone knew he was gay, everyone knew he had a lover [...] during my work I discovered that people accepted his sexuality. People talked about him in a warm and humane way."

-Rubi Gat, director of the biographical documentary "Dear Fredy"

