

Thieves of Dreams Zloději snů

Songs of Theresienstadt's Secret Poetess

Písně tajemné básnířky Tereziína

Anna Hana Friesová
1901-1987

Lenka Lichtenberg

Thieves of Dreams

In memory of my grandmother: the passionate and resilient woman; the lover, wife and poetess I never knew she was.

When my mother Jana Renée Friesová passed away in 2016, I was sorting through her desk in Prague and discovered two small notebooks. They were filled with poetry my grandmother, Anna Hana Friesová (1901-1987), wrote in the Terezín concentration camp. I knew that both my mother and grandmother were imprisoned in Terezín during the war — my mother wrote a book about it in 1996, *Fortress of My Youth*. However, I knew nothing of my grandmother's experience. Most of us, if we're lucky enough, have a brief window with our grandparents. That time isn't typically spent listening to their traumatic stories.

But there before my eyes were tattered pages with the handwritten dreams of my grandmother — and her nightmares in the camp, stories she never told me. So, I embarked on a quest to share her writing from the “hell on earth”, to quote Primo Levi, and to bring her voice back to life in the way I best knew how: as music, in a project spanning eight decades and three generations.

Some family history:

My Jewish grandparents, Richard and Anna Hana, were so worried about antisemitism in the aftermath of violent pogroms in the early 20th century that when my mother Jana Renée was born in 1927, they entered the word “none” under religion on her birth certificate. My mother only learned she was Jewish at the age of twelve when the Germans occupied Czechoslovakia in 1939, and she was banned from attending school and from most regular daily life activities.

My grandfather Richard was the first person in our family to be arrested by the Gestapo, apparently betrayed by a colleague at work for saying something derogatory about the Nazis. Six months later, he was released from prison, and returned home — as my mother described — a broken man.

On Christmas Day of 1942, my mother and her parents were sent to Terezín, where they were separated, as men, women and children were sent to different sections.

My grandfather Richard managed to get a job in the camp's bakery. While it meant working rigorous hours, starting at 2:30 am, he was occasionally able to steal some bread to share with his wife and daughter when they managed to see each other. My mother, just 15 at the time, was forced to do agricultural work.

I don't know what type of gruelling forced labour my grandmother endured in Terezín, but I imagine that the verses she wrote represent the one time each day that she had some control over her life. Maybe writing them was her way of escaping reality. Most are about love, with some depicting the brutal breakdown of her marriage during the war, such as *Feet are marching, two and two*. Others are love poems you'd never expect to be written on the brink of death, as when she explores her most intimate romantic fantasies in *Then, miracles could still happen (Miracles)*. Similarly, in *My paradise of solitude*, Anna Hana describes how she built for herself a place where she could do whatever she wanted. She dreamed of this imaginary world to survive the cruelty of the real one.

When my grandmother was sent to Terezín in 1942, she thought her mother Františka (my great-grandmother) would be safe, as her second husband Jan, a local judge, wasn't Jewish. However, in 1944, an anonymous letter was sent to the Nazis, reporting that they were illegally storing food (to send to Terezín). As a result, Jan was arrested and shot, and Františka was sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

The poem *I wanted to curse you, bitter land* talks about cursing the homeland that betrayed Anna Hana's family. The betrayals stung, as our entire family had felt so patriotic for the Czech nation, its language, and its culture.

Anna Hana's poems never mentioned the horrors of the camp explicitly. Perhaps this was self-censorship in case her writing was discovered. One exception was the poem *It was a cold dusk, my love*, which appears to describe the final moments Anna Hana and Richard spent together. While there are no names mentioned in this poem, the message of *It was a cold dusk, my love* is clear:

<i>It was a cold dusk, my love</i>	<i>With our last tear the final darkness fell</i>
<i>when we were saying our goodbyes,</i>	<i>and God couldn't see our faces.</i>
<i>with aching hand</i>	<i>The end fell into our eyes like a stone onto a mirror,</i>
<i>and dead word.</i>	<i>only the wind wanted to know what was going on.</i>

Richard was sent to Auschwitz and executed in a gas chamber on October 10, 1944. My mother and grandmother were now the last living members of my immediate family. They were liberated by the Soviet Red Army on May 8, 1945.

After the war, Jana Renée and Anna Hana tried to rebuild their lives. My mother studied journalism in college and became a philosophy professor at ČVUT, Czech Technical University in Prague. My grandmother spent her remaining decades enjoying life to the fullest; likely due to her experience during the Holocaust, she lived each day as it would be her last.

Neither my mother nor my grandmother told me what happened to them during the war. In fact, I only learned that I was Jewish at the age of nine when I was invited to perform at the Prague Jewish Community Centre, and my mother finally told me about our heritage. She saw being Jewish as a burden, a risk of becoming a victim of antisemitism.

For me, embracing my family's heritage was, at first, an act of defiance, and then a way of loving and honouring my roots through learning, creating, and sharing my Czech, Yiddish and cantorial music. Opening that desk drawer in 2016 and finding my grandmother's poems marked the beginning of a new journey of discovery and deeper learning. Its result, *Thieves of Dreams*, is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Terezín's secret poetess; to my beloved, philosophical, beautiful mother; and to the six million that were murdered and never got to share their stories with the world.

- Lenka Lichtenberg with Dan Rosenberg

Dan Rosenberg is a journalist and music producer based in Toronto, Canada. His reports can be heard on Afropop Worldwide, Toronto's ClassicalFM and other outlets. He is also the producer of Yiddish Glory, Silent Tears: The Last Yiddish Tango, and dozens of albums in the Rough Guide to World Music CD series.

Kam jsme to zašli? / What is this place?

What is this place?
Where have we come to?
What happened to the way
you used to look at me?

We're eternally lost
and eternally redeemed.
In the darkest of nights
remember the sun!

Love is the only spring
through which our life is born
Cherish your life
and regret none of it.

We're eternally lost
and eternally redeemed.
In the darkest of nights
remember the sun!

Kam jsme to zašli?
Kde je pohled Tvůj?
Jme věčně straceni a věčně spasceni.
Ža nocí nejtmaších na slunce pamatuj!

Jen v lásce život proniká.
Ty miluj ho a nikdy neletuj.
Jme věčně straceni a věčně spasceni.
Ža nocí nejtmaších na slunce pamatuj!

music: Rachel Cohen; arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg

Zas v slunci zlatém / In golden sunlight

Zas v slunci zlatém
jde jaro s blátem.
tam, jako kdysi krásná;
srdce, jak v říční spalo,
se a kalu vyzvonalo,
p. na něco se krasá.

Vše bude jako bylo
a nic se neměnilo,
je místo sněhu je květ;
je mladý a nové voní,
muv, co bylo loni
a nebude upravit.

Foda se přiměla k dalším,
les si šel pro fialky
a srdce pro lásku;
trochu ho ubýlo v roce starším,
trochu ho ubývá každým jarem,
jak v řece obláku.

Once again in golden sunlight
the spring comes along with mud
as it is with all things of beauty;
the heart, cured of its sadness
in winter's hibernation
is getting ready to strike.

All will be as it's ever been
nothing has changed at all,
only in place of snow,
there is a blossom;
so young, with a fresh scent
knowing nothing of yesteryear
it will not recount old tales.

Water has rushed in from far away,
the forest went picking violets
and the heart has gone,
looking for love;
smaller than the year before,
a little diminished each spring,
like a pebble in the river.

music: Milli Janatková; arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg

Čekáme kdesi na konci aleje / Waiting at the end of an alley

We are waiting somewhere at the end of an alley
a peculiar trinity: myself, tears and hope -
we wait for someone's voice, someone's footsteps -
we may have been here for months - maybe even years.

I am so uncertain - time has vanished and is no more,
perhaps spring will come again - perhaps just the decay of autumn.
I feel numb, only the heart keeps tolling,
that life is nothing but eternal waiting.

Weeks may have passed -
even centuries -
sometimes sun exists and
sometimes there's just a curse;
there's nothing but
a chilly silence
at the end of the alley
where my tears and I
are still waiting
- all hope has gone.

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Čekáme kdesi na konci aleje
podivná trojice: já, slzy a naděje -
čekáme na cizí hlas a cizí kroky -
jme tu snad měsíce - snad roky.

Nevím - čas zmizel a není,
snad bude čas jaro - snad jen podzimní tlesk -
někdy nás, jen slzy vypráví,
že někdo je ani jen pouhé čekání.

Snad přestý týden - snad století -
někdy je slunce a jindy jen prokletí;
je studené ticho na konci aleje
kde čekám já a pláč - o deště naděje.

music: Shy-Anne Hovorka; arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg

Zázraky / Miracles

Then, miracles could still happen.
And everything that you cared for -
into the oddity of twilight,
one word was exhaled a thousand times.

Your love, embodied in my heart.
You know how I said 'I want'
to all your desires. And the heart beat
with a mysterious promise.

There never have been more magical moments
and evenings, and intimacy more brilliant
and nights in dreams more beautiful
and a heart has never dreamt so exquisitely
as in our togetherness.

Dovedly přijít jste zázraky
a vše co mělo být -
podivné souhrady -
v nich jedno slovo vydechuté tichotat.
Tvá láska vtělila se v moji srdce.
Váš jak jsem věděl že všem touham svým
"Chci." A srdce k tomu tlouklo slibem tajemným.
A nikdy kouzelných chvílí nebylo
a věcí a aduvenění jasných
a mojí ve snu krásných
a nikdy naše sdělení nebylo
ně s sebou v setkání.

music, arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg

Byl studený soumrak, můj milý,
když my dva jsme se loučili,
dotčen rukou a mrtvým slovem.

I poslední slon i poslední tma spadla
a brk nám nvidil v obličje,
Rome pad' do očí jak kamen do pradála,
jin viti chtěl vědět co se to děje.

Mrtví se ptali hlasem věčnosti,
smích jejich tichos se nesl do polí;
a vesmír reklaxoval řár naší žalosti.
Bolest je chvíle, věčnost má nebolí.

Dotud se koupe v horkých slz lázni,
je srdce živo a dotud pít;
vařte si hore, vy šťastní blažni,
bolest je život, bolest je bytí.

Konec je smíření, Rome je věčné nic,
když se nic neáje, taky nic nebolí;
my už jen hledíme ze slepých přítelnic
na řivu bolesti šťastného okolí.

Byl studený soumrak, můj milý,
když my dva jsme se loučili,
dotčen rukou a mrtvým slovem.

Studený soumrak byl, můj milý / It was a cold dusk, my love

It was a cold dusk, my love,
when we were saying our goodbyes,
with aching hand and dead word.

With our last tear the final darkness fell
and God couldn't see our faces;
the end fell into our eyes like a stone onto a mirror,
only the wind wanted to know what was going on.

The dead wondered, a voice of eternity,
the laughter of their silence carrying over fields;
the universe cooled down the heat of our sorrow.
Pain is but a moment, eternity holds no pain.

As long as it is bathing in a spa of hot tears,
the heart is alive, and it can still feel;
value your grief, you happy fools,
pain is existence, pain is being alive.

The end is reconciliation, the end is an eternal nothing,
when life is not lived, nothing hurts;
now we only gaze from behind blind pupils
at the living pain of our happy surroundings.

"Zvyk to je příšera, jež hltá všechno chtění,"
tak praví Shakespeare, a já píš ti,
že láska je zvyk, a zvyk je láskou mne,
tot' dvojí vězení, jež nutno líšiti.

Ke konci lásky vědych stíny straší,
jak lidé před smrtí, jímž Rym smilknutí,
nemíná jinak být před koncem lásky naš
a proto naposled, já, drabý, řeknu ti:

Jen jeden život mám, tak jako každý z tvorů,
a čas mi nepřidá na skoupen věné křev,
mně nové mládí už nevzejde na obzoru,
neb dary pro štěstí jsou chudě vyměřeny.

Jen jeden život mám a ten ti patří celý,
s kořenem v zemi, s květem v oblaci;
tak vždy to bývá, že nem se s nebem dělí,
a pak to všechno roadne ubohe.

Nam mne pomoci, my jdeme cestou slepou,
ta někde končí, pil je únava,
na křižovatce vždy se cesty pletou,
ta legitimní vede doprava.

Ty pravé cesty, ty mne sotva analy,
Ahasver lásky těžko třepí na mě;
mně levé cesty vědych vyhlásky,
vždyť tamí srdce je na levé straně.

Zvyk to je příšera / That monster, custom

"That monster, custom, who all sense doth eat",
or so says Shakespeare, and so I write to you,
when love is a habit, and habit is not love,
one must see the difference
between these two prisons.

When love is near the end, shadows haunt us,
like people facing death and eternal silence,
it cannot be otherwise before our love expires
and that's why, my love, I'll tell you for the last time:

I have only one life, and it all belonged to you,
with roots in the ground, with blossoms in the sky;
as always happens, the earth shares with heaven,
and then everything wilts miserably away.

Now our clock is slowing down,
and lazy desire will not wind it up again;
what love's hand would reach for
the familial purr of the mundane.

I write this in ink and think through blood
and in the end I'm not ashamed to tell you,
that you were the first to own my non-virginal body,
that I gave you all I had and am left
with nothing at all.

That I gave you all my dreams,
and those are worth
more than a body,
a body becomes dull,
even according to Shakespeare,
but our dreams revolt and
haunt us with their beauty
and over time,
desire turns into a vampire.

I write this in ink,
and think through blood
it must be time now to tell you all
who knows where
the roads will lead
I just know for certain
that I have nothing left at all,
nothing, nothing.

Utíkej, utíkej člověče / Run, run, you little human

XXI.

Utíkej, utíkej člověče,
vždyť vyhraje ten, kdo utíká,
každá cesta jde do daleka,
není daleko od člověka.

Utíkej od svých slov a rad,
tad' budeš věčně jin utíkat;
to není útěk, to se jím olečeš,
sobě a srdci mentačeš.

Až utečeš poslední radosti,
teprv se naučíš psychlosti;
utíkem znavený, redraný, bosý,
budeš se plácet kolem své psy.

music, arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg

Run, run, you little human,
the winner will be the one who gets away,
each road leads to a remote horizon,
but never far away enough from man.

Run from your words and betrayals,
from now on you'll always be on the run;
it's not an escape,
you'll just drag yourself along,
you'll never escape
yourself nor your heart.

When you've outrun your last ounce of joy,
only then will you master true speed;
tired from running, barefoot, in tatters,
you'll find yourself spinning around
your own axis.





Divoká, dravá voda byla / Wild, beastly water came

Divoká, dravá voda byla,
přistaly jí těžké kameny,
uhoř i úrodu odplavila
a pňavila plameny.

Tady se doufalo, tady se pilo,
tady se stavěl rodinný dům,
všechno se smítlo a odplavilo,
je dobře jinou kamením.

Jsem sevřaný mosty a strhaný hráz,
plně jsem vřítiny shasený,
umřelá bolest, srdce je bláze,
mlotý je na řívu spasený.

Povodeň přišla, bahno plylo,
a snad v něm rose pivoť vrhlík,
při vzniku světa to také tak bylo,
vždycky se časem všechno mlučí.

Povodeň přišla, je bílé ráno
a pan bůh řekl vldně: "dost".
Svět začne znovu, nevidano,
i Rome světa je pňavenost.

Wild, beastly water came rushing down,
just heavy boulders remained,
it swept away fields and harvest
and put out the flames.

Here someone hoped, there someone sowed,
here they were building a family home,
everything was swept up and washed away,
satisfied are just the stones.

Bridges and dams are ripped
from the shores,
and fires smothered like complaints,
grief has died, the heart is in euphoria,
salvation comes to the walking dead.

The flood has passed, just mud left behind,
where new life may sprout again,
that's how it was at the dawn of the world,
in time, everything always goes to ruin.

The flood is now over, it's a white morning
and God kindly said: "It's done."
The world begins again, unbelievably,
even the end of the world is a revelation.

Koleda, koleda za vašimi vrátky / Trick or treat, we're at your gate

Koleda, koleda za vašimi vrátky,
my nechtíme domnití, my přijdeme zas zpátky,
my jen tu stojíme, má láska a překvapení,
nědyt tam se nešel, kde má nic není.

Někde je zlato a rukou lidsá je dlat,
někde srdce ják hodiny přestalo stát
a já už je nemohu dát,
aby pak měřilo vteřiny pro jinou,
to, co mi všichni laskavě promine,
já raději takmu.

A jsem-li chudák, jsem chudák bohatý,
camol mi šlytichně skáče na paty,
já budu mít hlad.
Když dojde chleba, já se trávám,
pokrmu, to je taký strava,
tak co se mi může stát!

Trick or treat, we're at your gate,
we're not coming in,
we'll go back home,
we're just standing here,
my love and astonishment,
there's really no begging,
where there's nothing left to give.

Somewhere there's gold
and a hand too lazy to give it,
somewhere a heart has stopped
like a clock
and I cannot wind it up any more,
for it to measure out seconds
for another woman,
let them all kindly pardon me,
I'd rather beat it.

And if I'm a wretch,
I am a wretch that is rich,
destiny needlessly nips at my heels,
I'll never go hungry.
When bread runs out,
one can eat grass,
knowledge is nutrition too,
so what could happen to me!

Idou naše nohy, dvě a dvě / Our feet are marching, two and two

Idou naše nohy dvě a dvě
po dlaždicích a po trávě,
po kamenech a po květech
a svoji blízkost necítí.

Idou nohy, idou a nesou nás,
řádky mezi námi už je čes,
jině naši blízkost oddalil
a naše touhy na sta mil.

Snad naše srdce doufají,
že se zas spolu shledají
po dlouhé cestě kolem světa,
ně přijde touha, přijdou léta.

Těžko jít v před a těžko zpátky,
my propadli eš i přiznání,
je tolik cest a chodníků,
po nichž se chodí se rykem.

V dalece, kam doletí jen pták,
kam dopadne vždy touhy rák,
kde sem vstupuje do mbe,
tam křídla kradí pro sebe.

Our feet are marching, two and two
on the pavement, over grass,
over stones and flowers
not sensing each other's proximity.

Legs march on, and carry us,
but time already stands between us,
having broken our closeness
and our desires by a hundred miles.

Perhaps our hearts still hope,
to reunite one day
after a long journey around the world,
before longing expires, before years end.

It's hard to proceed and hard to return,
we missed the crossroads and the destination,
there are so many roads and sidewalks,
that one walks down by rote.

In the distance, to where only a bird can fly,
and where eyes of desire always reach,
there, where the earth enters heaven,
we live only for ourselves.

Chtěla jsem tě proklít, hořká zemi / I wanted to curse you, bitter land

Chtěla jsem tě proklít, hořká zemi,
protože's tak divně zachácela
s mou vírou a mými nadějemi,
protože's lhala, že lhala jsi celá.

Chtěla jsem tě proklít, anáma' stráni,
já tráva a květy vyrostly pro jinou,
prada, tvá prada nesnese slitování,
ať jara mé radosti tvé květy zahynou.

Proklít všechna místa, kde jsem šťastna byla!
Náhle srdce změklo, jako když se plamí;
místo toho jsem se tiše pomodlila:
vždyť tam byly v květu všechny stromy.

I wanted to curse you, bitter land,
because you've dealt so strangely
with my faith and my hopes,
because you lied, the whole of you
had lied.

I wanted to curse you, meadow so
familiar, whose grass and flowers
had grown for another woman,
betrayal, your betrayal
must not be granted mercy,
let your blossoms perish like my joys.

Damned be all places,
where I'd been happy!
Suddenly my heart softened,
as if broken; instead of cursing
I whispered a prayer: after all,
all the trees there were in full bloom.

Můj ráji samoty / My paradise of solitude

Můj ráji samoty; ty čase bsa lidi.
Kdy duše se mluví do maha slunci
a všta se říkat nestydí,
Rádóné a posvátné věci.

Kdy duše se baví s duš' nejbliž',
a to je vždycky ta jeho,
a kromě toho už nikdo neshýjí
rozmluvy samotného.

Ka' duše nejbliž', samoto milá,
v hodinách lásky a tichání mladen
jsi mi jsi tihou a labyrintem byla;
ted' jsi mým domovem, ted' jsi mým hradem.

My paradise of solitude,
my time away from people,
when the soul can undress
in its nakedness and lips
don't shy from talking about
beautiful and sacred things.

When the soul can converse
with its soulmate, which, of course,
is always its own, and apart
from God no one else can hear
the discourse of the self.

My closest soul, dear solitude,
you were such a burden
and labyrinth once
in hours of love
and youthful roving;
now you are my home, my castle.

Terežin, Roven 1948

Ženeme čas

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Ženeme čas
Ločimo Koleni stějin
ulihai mihou
poranina lod
sta klamnički svetel
stěžnje nam cestu
sta stalyčki sponaliti
by čitilo čod.
Lodi sveta jide
pliva umirani,
Korniollo členi
medime o nji bog
mel, setle, se vepira, pustit pitež,
Lodi Koleni a vepirava strog;
stank se vepiraj nad pidi
zad silenci
všim vsta kajat
Kvory čer drap
čivljen to jen
to jeto nas molyški
však klas nas
prato muzlat;
Lodi sveta miholaj
aklaj neweham
mā, my o nāni
dobry vepir, rōd
mad, jiji stōār
medime vepir, nāi
mihou, nāi drāt
ne však udolat;
Muzlat bog
paluba, piteži, ped Kociji

Ženeme čas / We're chasing time

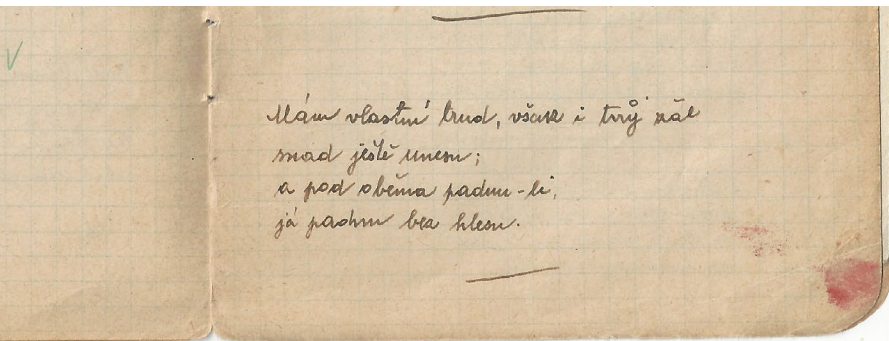
We're chasing time
turning the wheel of history
a wounded ship
races through fog
hundreds of deceptive lights
make our journey harder
hundreds of weaklings
want us to slow down.

The worldship moves on
full of dying,
we want to take the helm
we battle over it
the age-old world refuses to let go
the ship teeters, the engine splutters.

Fear of mutiny lifts a gallows
over the ship's bow
a bloody talon tries
to gag everyone's mouth
it's only been a moment
since you've not heard from us
yet our voice
has not been weakened.

No-one else can save the worldship
from destruction
but us alone
with the world order
that we've been fighting for
we'll hoist our flag
over the ship's mast;
they can hold us back,
but they cannot crush us!
The battle is not over
the ship's deck creaks under footsteps.
They can hold us back,
but they cannot crush us!

Mám vlastní trud / I have my own grief*



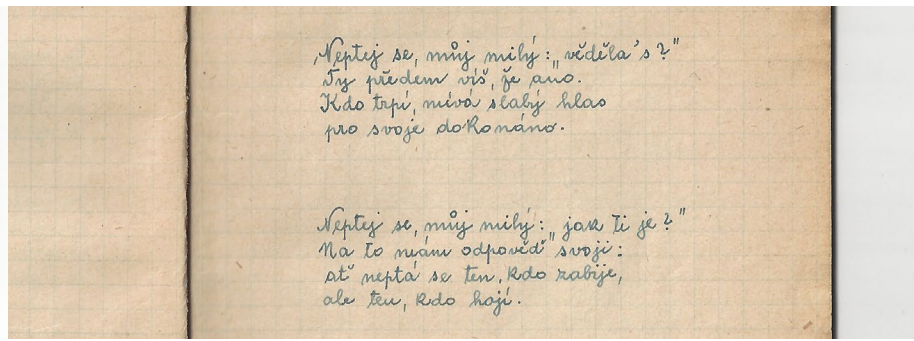
*I have my own grief, but perhaps I can manage
to carry yours as well;
and should I collapse under both their weight,
I'll collapse without a sound.*

*This song includes a recording of my mother Jana Renée Friesová. She describes how on December 17, 1942, she and her parents had to leave their home in Josefov, until then a place of happiness. With all the Jews from the region, they had to report at a gathering place in Hradec Králové, where they handed in the keys to their home to the Nazi authorities and waited for the transport train to take them to Terezin. "Doufám a věřím, že se vrátíme. Nashledanou," she says, quoting the last entry from her diary, written two weeks before their departure. "I hope and believe that we will return. Goodbye."

Mám vlastní trud brings together my grandmother, through her poem, my mother, through her spoken words, and myself, through music and performance. To me, it represents the most authentic and meaningful tribute to these two women and our history.

music, arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg

Neptej se, můj milý / Don't ask me, my love



*Don't ask me, my love: "Did you know?"
That I did, you already know.
The one who suffers tends to speak softly
of what is already done.*

*Don't ask me, my love: "How are you feeling?"
To that I have my own answer:
let such a question come not from a killer,
but from one who heals.*

music: Milli Janatková; arrangement: Lenka Lichtenberg



