

There's something about a Beth Jacob girl

Who ever heard of Chaya Feldman? The name of Ann Frank is well-known because of the diary she wrote detailing the last days of her young life under the Nazi crack. But there weren't enough days remaining in Chaya Feldman's life to write a diary. Chaya left only one letter.

Chaya Feldman was a student of the Beth Jacob School for Girls in Cracow, Poland. The school was founded in 1923 by Sara Schenier, the daughter of a Hassidic rabbi who read a quotation written by ancient Jewish sages stating: "It is the women who in all nations and at all times have the greatest influence in the making of coming generations."

When the Nazi nightmare ended Chaya Feldman's life, the letter was found hidden in the crack of a wall at the school. It read:

"When this letter is found, I will belong to the past. We are 93 girls between the ages of 14 and 22. All of us are teachers or students of Beth Jacob."

"The day of July 27, Gestapo officers came and herded us from our homes and they cast us into a dark room. We have only water to drink. The younger girls are terrified, but I console them and tell them shortly we will meet and be together with our mother Sara Schenier."

"Yesterday they took us out of the dark room. They bathed us and took away all of our clothing. They left only shirts for our bodies. They told us that German soldiers will arrive to visit with us. We solemnly took an oath that we will die together. The Germans do not know that the bath they gave us was our T'pilah (ritual immersion) before our death."

"Each of us has prepared poison. When the soldiers come, we will drink the poison. Today we are fast on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The fast, which consists of no food or drink, lasts at least 26 hours. All Jews beyond age of 12 for

have only one request. Recite the Kaddish (memorial prayer) for 93 Jewish daughters... Chaya Feldman of Cracow."

TODAY THE MEMORY of the Cracow Beth Jacob girls who died rather than violate God's law remains alive in our community. One of hundreds of Beth Jacob schools throughout the world, the Sally Allan Alexander-Beth Jacob School for Girls is in Beverly Hills in the former Valley Woods school. It was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Norman Allan of West Bloomfield Township in 1978 and named in memory of their daughter.

My own daughter, Evelyn, graduated as president of the 1977 class and my second daughter, Shoshana, is a B.J. third-grader.

There's something different about a Beth Jacob girl. Fashion magazines cannot dictate to them, because both at school and at home, they dress in accordance with Jewish tradition. Skirts must cover the knees; sleeves beyond the elbow and collar bones indicate where a proper neckline should belong. Slacks and shorts are taboo. The only thing a Beth Jacob girl will reveal in public is her brains.

"I don't try very hard to get high grades," Evelyn once told me, "I won't have any friends."

AFTER OBTAINING their teaching certificates, many Beth Jacob girls return to the school as faculty members. Hindel Goldstein Greenfield, daughter of school principal Rabbi Shalom Goldstein, returned to become a first-grade Hebrew teacher. Shoshana was in her class, and I am alive today because she learned her lessons well.

I was nine months pregnant with Yaakov Meir when the doctor gave me permission to fast on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The fast, which consists of no food or drink, lasts at least 26 hours. All Jews beyond age of 12 for



Jocelyn Krieger

girls and 13 for boys must fast.

By mid-afternoon on that Yom Kippur, I decided to retire to bed because I was extremely sleepy. Minutes later Shoshi appeared with a plate of cake and a glass of milk.

"You have to eat this, Mrs. Greenfield told us in class that a person isn't

allowed to fast if they're sick," Shoshi insisted. "Life is the most important thing, and you're allowed to put your life in danger only if you were going to save someone else's life."

At first I refused. But Shoshi was persistent. Throughout the afternoon she kept giving me food and drink.

The following day I decided to visit my obstetrician. When I told him what had happened on Yom Kippur, he answered:

"Your daughter saved your life and the baby. You weren't sleepy. You were going into a coma. You are very sick and I'm admitting you to the hospital immediately. My diagnosis is pre-eclampsia."

LAST SUMMER Hindel Greenfield died one month after the birth of her first child. An unsuspected blood clot claimed her life. Her father continues to educate each Beth Jacob girl as if she were his own daughter. Perhaps that's why when they graduate, they express sentiments like these words written by Deborah Laymen and Evelyn Krieger.

"Looking back through time our first day — open arms waiting to embrace us. Direction. Acceptance. Small things forever cherished. New surrounding envelope us, Torah and Yiddishkeit, trials and tribulations. Beginning a long journey wondering where it would lead to. Entering a world of learning growing us through the years. Growing. Changing. Striving to achieve love of God, friends. Walking together, becoming a part of it all. Beth Jacob — it has shaped our lives. The hour glass has slowly run out opening new dimensions in time."

Jocelyn Krieger is a Southfield resident, free-lance writer, music teacher and actress in broadcast commercials.

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