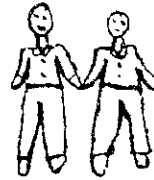
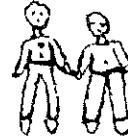


## Saving the Children

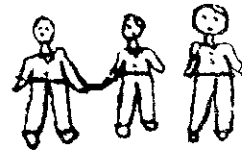
FRIEDA SINGER

to Gizelle Hersh

They had taken away  
her hair  
her shoes  
her name a bluish numeral  
under the skin<sup>1</sup>  
her gender denied  
in a sea of men  
yet something of her  
as she was remained.



In the barracks  
where work makes one free<sup>2</sup>  
she learned to stand  
motionless from five to ten  
for *Zeile Appell*<sup>3</sup>  
camouflaging her skin where  
blemishes meant selection to the left,<sup>4</sup>  
urging her sisters  
who refused  
the moldy soup  
the sawdust bread  
that to eat was to resist  
to eat, even to eat  
the pain.



1 **bluish numeral** . . . : tattoo. Jewish prisoners were given an identity number to dehumanize them.

2 **work makes one free**: translation of the motto above the gates of Auschwitz, *Arbeit Macht Frei*.

3 ***Zeile Appell***: roll call.

4 **selection**: sorting process. Healthy prisoners went to the right; the young, the old, and the ill were sent to their deaths.

To eat, even when  
the throat gagged  
from the disinfecting stench;

to eat, even with  
swollen ears  
and frozen feet  
in cubicles too narrow  
to stand or sleep  
where one worn blanket  
was assigned to cover ten;

to swallow  
even the teeth marks  
of the snarling kapo guard  
doubling back upon them  
the injuries from above.

To remember always  
that first day  
when a flick of the wrist  
sent her to the right  
her parents to the left.

Mother, where are you,  
twelve year old Katya would scream  
night after night.  
At sixteen, more adult than child,  
she had promised  
to care for the children  
the promise that kept her  
and them alive.