

# Anna's Pocket

*In October 1944, at age thirteen, Anna Rado was transported from Auschwitz, Poland, to work in an airplane factory in Gebbardsdorf and another factory in Georgenthal, in the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia that had been annexed by the Germans. This is a story of one person's kindness to her.*

After months in Auschwitz, alone except for six weeks when she was reunited with her cousin, Anna received news that some of the girls in the prison camp would be taken to Germany to work in a factory. Anna was among the girls transferred to the new camp, which turned out to be an improvement. The girls were given more food, and they had bunk beds. They had real work to do and were treated as useful and valuable prisoners.

Anna had two jobs in the factory. One was to disassemble machine parts to extract small screws, which were then to be used for other wartime purposes. The other was to clean a secretary's office. The cleaning job proved to be a good one. The secretary provided one of the few acts of kindness Anna experienced during her imprisonment. She often wondered why she—out of all the prisoners—was fortunate enough to get such a good job. Perhaps, she thought, it was because she could speak German, which helped her communicate with the secretary.

One day, the secretary remarked, "Anni, thank you for doing such a good job cleaning my office. You are very careful in here, especially with the important things on my desk. I know you are hungry, and I will bring you food every day if you have a pocket."

"No, I do not need anything," Anna replied.

She did not want the secretary to think she was stepping out of bounds. She was just a prisoner doing forced labor.

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"I have a piece of bread here," the secretary continued, "and I will bring more later."

"No, thank you. I have nothing to carry it in. Anyway, if the guards see me carrying anything, they will think that I stole it. Thanks for thinking of me, though."

"Now, wait a minute. I know we can figure this out. Tomorrow when you come in here to work, I will have something for you."

When Anna got back to her barrack, she searched around and found a small scrap of cloth, a needle, and some thread. Using her sewing

skills, she created a pocket and attached it on the inside of her dress. It was not visible at all on the outside. It felt as if it had always been there. This pocket might help her bring some bread or bits of fruit back to her friends.

The next afternoon, the secretary kept her promise. Anna finished cleaning, and when she was getting ready to leave, the secretary offered her the promised food saying, "Here, Anni, I have brought you a little sandwich. Please take it and enjoy it."

Anna looked down at the food and could not believe what she held in her hands. When one has so little, such a gift is precious. The act of kindness itself was even more important, though. For so long now Anna had seen only cruelty and suffering. The secretary's compassion gave her hope for the future.

With tears in her eyes, she said softly, "Thank you, thank you."

In the days that followed, the secretary continued to bring Anna little packages of food that she was able to share with her friends. The extra nourishment kept them alive. Sewing the pocket into her dress was a dangerous but clever and brave thing for Anna to do, and the secretary acted bravely, too. It was very dangerous to give food to a prisoner. If they had been caught, both the secretary and

Anna would have been punished. In spite of the risk, both chose to perform acts of kindness. The secretary could have ignored Anna, but she saw a situation that was wrong and wanted to help the starving girl who cleaned her office. Anna, although very hungry herself, shared all the food that the secretary gave with her friends. After the war when Anna was liberated, she wished she could find the kind secretary and thank her again for saving her life.

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*Written by Jeanette Pierce*



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*Grace Hoffman Mueller, artist*