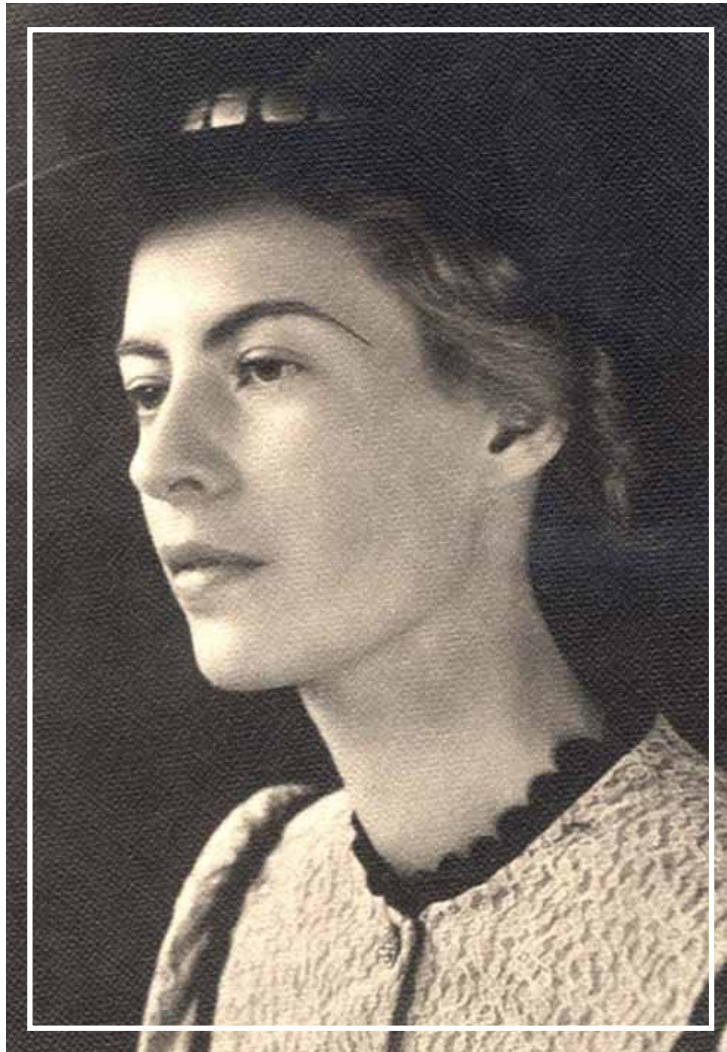


GROUP 6

**DR. ELLA REINER-LINGENS  
AND HER HUSBAND KURT**



Dr. Ella Reiner-Lingens

Ella and Kurt Reiner-Lingens were both young doctors in Vienna when the Nazis annexed Austria to the Third Reich. By this stage, Kurt had a long history of opposing the German government, a product of his upbringing as a minority Catholic among Protestants in his native Germany. The Catholics was known for its opposition to Nazism, and therefore its members were persecuted. The situation worsened to the point that Kurt, as a result of his student anti-fascist activities, was forced to move to Austria to complete his medical studies.

Ella was a native Viennese, an exceptionally talented woman who completed her doctorate in law and then moved on to medical training. With the annexation of Austria, she began to assist Jews. During the Kristallnacht pogrom, she hid ten Jews in her room. Later she agreed to hide a young Jewish woman named Erica Feldan. When Erica became ill and required surgery, Ella used her maid's identification papers to get the Jewish fugitive the care she needed at a time when Austrian Jews were outside the law and certainly ineligible to undergo surgery at a hospital.

Ella and Kurt's house was open to Jewish friends and acquaintances. Some of the Jews who reached their home left valuables with them so they would not be stolen. The Lingens helped in many other ways, all the while endangering their lives and that of their young son. They escorted Jews to the border in attempts to help them flee, and took care of their valuables in their absence.

The Lingens' fate was sealed by informants. On 13 October 1942, they were arrested by the Gestapo. The Germans sent Kurt to an army unit whose members were sent to the Russian front as a punishment for various crimes. There, Kurt was mortally wounded. Ella was ordered to be deported to Auschwitz, and she was forced to part from her young son. In the camp, she worked as a doctor for camp prisoners – and was thus able to save several Jews from death in the gas chambers. Even when her term of imprisonment was nearly complete, she took a fateful decision to stay on to help others. Toward the end of the war, she was sent on a death march to Dachau, in Germany.

Ella managed to survive the Nazi horror, and to stand proud both as a mother to her young son and as a member of the human race.

## From the testimony of Ella Reiner-Lingens

“Most of the time, we could only watch helplessly as selections were performed. But one time, I was able to intervene. A few days before, I had been called to the political department... the patient was a woman named Lyman from Frankfurt. From the end of August 1943 until February 1944, selections were made every four weeks, not only from the sick wards but also throughout the camp. Some 500-1000 women were selected each time and I was certain that Miss Lyman would be among the victims. She was very depressed, shaking with fear and despair and clutching my hand tightly. ‘Help me,’ she begged again and again...

“The camp doctor had told me not long before that I needed to be very careful not to make mistakes, as my release was expected within a few weeks. As an Aryan German, my intervention on behalf of this woman would anger the Waffen SS and jeopardize my release. Only someone who had been in a concentration camp without knowing how long their imprisonment would last can understand the significance of this shard of hope for freedom. My son was only three when we separated. Only a parent of children can understand the depth of longing of a mother for her son. Alone and in pain, I paced back and forth along the path of the camp in the twilight of that winter day. Grey buildings, watchtowers and electrified fences stretched across the horizon – an image of ugliness and despair. I was about to be released from this places and its horrible memories, and now I was being asked to risk it all and make myself unpopular for the sake of Miss Lyman, who was basically a stranger to me.

“There wasn’t much time, and I had to take a decision. In my mind’s eye I saw my little boy and heard his sweet voice as we parted, wrapping his small arms around me and begging ‘Mommy, please don’t leave me.’ And then I saw the eyes of this young woman who looked at me pleadingly as she said, ‘I’m so happy to speak with a German.’ There was a fierce struggle within me between wanting to go free and the mercy I felt toward this woman. My sense of obligation to save lives, as both a doctor and a human, conflicted with my obligation as a mother to survive for her son’s sake, as each day in the camp increased the risk of death.

“No one could say the solution was clear or obvious. I was torn and couldn’t reach a decision.

“Then, I had an insight. I had the privilege of claiming that my life and the life of my son was more important than the life of a stranger. But that wasn’t what I was facing. If I failed, that is, allowed the murder of someone whom I perhaps could have saved, only because

I myself was in danger, I would have made the same mistake as the German people... the people who ordered and carried out these horrible crimes were not many, but countless bystanders allowed them to carry out their plans because they did not have the courage to stop them. They claimed 'There was nothing we could have done,' even when they could have done something. If I turned my back, because I was afraid of staying longer in the camp, I would be no different than the all the other Germans who were free and who watched passively out of fear that they would be imprisoned and sent to a concentration camp. In this case, the SS would have successfully 'educated' me, as the Gestapo agents who sent me to the camp liked to say. The significance of this was – everything I sacrificed would have been in vain, and I might as well have stayed home. The feeling that welled up in me was neither mercy nor obligation, rather, a hatred for the regime that wanted to depress me and steal my honor. In my heart, I said to my child: 'Son, you may have to wait a bit longer for your mother, but when she returns to you, she will be able to look you in the eye and you won't have to be embarrassed that your mother tongue is German.'

"I turned and walked toward the political department of the women's camp..."

### Discussion Questions:

- What motivated Ella and Kurt Reiner-Lingens' acts of rescue?
- Describe the rescuers: age, gender, political and religious outlook, etc.
- What difficulties and dangers did they face?
- Was the rescue a result of a one-time decision or perhaps were Ella and Kurt Reiner-Lingens called upon to take responsibility for rescuing at several points? If the latter, what were they?

