

AND YOU SHALL TELL YOUR SONS

MEMORIES OF ANOTHER TIME: #55108



The tragedy of my people and my own personal tragedy began in 1940 when Hitler transferred Transylvania from Rumanian rule to Hungarian rule. I was not yet 18. My family became homeless when the Hungarian feudalists – Graf Zicsi and others – returned to Ardeal, a region in Transylvania, and confiscated the homes of Jews in the area.

My father, wounded during W.W.I, was a decorated veteran and had served as General Director of the Rumanian land owner Mănescu. After years of service to Mănescu, my father was able to purchase our home, and when he passed away in 1937, the family, though poor, has a degree of security just by owning our home.

We found refuge in the home of a Rumanian peasant who agreed to rent a room to us. The room barely fit two beds, a table and a cooking stove. Yet, we had no other place to live and it was better than nothing.

In 1941, my three brothers, Michael, Yosef and Avraham were seized by the Hungarian police and taken away for forced labor. My fiancé, Moshe Eliahu Gross and my sister Irene's husband were also taken away. Irene and her two little daughters, a five-year old and a four-year old moved in with us. The already cramped quarters became overcrowded. Yet, we pursued our daily lives, my pious mother praying throughout the day for the safe return of her sons and other Jews who were seized.

Anti-Jewish decrees followed. Although I had a good trade as a seamstress, as of 1942 the Jews were not permitted to leave their immediate community even for work. Consequently, I could not keep appointments with my non-Jewish clients in neighboring cities and towns. To continue supporting my mother, my sister and my two little nieces, as well as sending packages to our men in the various forced labor units, I resorted to knitting. I knitted day and night, producing pullovers, socks, gloves, etc... and sold the garments to the peasants in my town. Compensation was in the form of fruits, vegetables, eggs and other food stuff.

In the interim, the Jews were ordered to wear an identifying yellow star, further restricting our mobility. We were confined at this point, to our room and to the street in which the house was located. Occasionally, when I was unable to sell the knitted goods in our town, I removed my yellow star and, dressed in peasant clothes, I boarded the local train and ventured to neighboring cities and towns. With blue eyes and a small nose, and lots of makeup, (Jewish girls did not wear makeup) I passed as a non-Jewish peasant. Some local farmers recognized me occasionally, but because of their respectful remembrance of my father, they did not disclose my identity. During most expeditions, I was successful in selling my wares and I engaged in these trips more and more often. I managed to establish contact with family members and members of other Jewish communities. Thus we were able to exchange news of loved ones. This exchange of information alleviated somewhat our concerns and life normalized, relatively speaking. That is, until the night of May 3rd, 1944.

Following Germany's total occupation of Hungary, two Hungarian *gendarmes*, fully armed, knocked on our door and notified us that they were guarding our door to prevent our escape. We were ordered to pack a bundle small enough to hand carry since, on the morning of May 4th, we would be going on a forced march to the next town (located approximately 6 km from our town) in which a Jewish ghetto was already established and sealed. My sister and her daughters had

been removed three days prior to May 3rd. They were marched with other Jews 8 km back to the community in which she lived before her husband was taken away. I saw my sister and her children in Oradea once again, through an opening of a cattle car, as we were transported to a ghetto outside that city. For practical reasons, the main ghetto in Oradea in which my sister was held was (as most other ghettos) located near the railway, to facilitate transports of Jews from one destination to another.

Our train did not stop however, but continued to the outskirts of the city and came to a halt at a brick factory. I recall thinking before falling asleep on the dusty earth floor of the factory, if only my mother has heeded the peasant's advice back in our home town... After my sister Irene and her children were removed from our room, our landlord advised us to run away. He offered us peasant clothes and even a paid guide to cross the border to Rumania. He told my mother that the Russians were expected to invade the area within three or four months, and we would then be able to return safely. Hindsight proved him right, indeed. How ironic! My mother, fearing rape or murder during our flight, and desperately hoping to be reunited with Irene and her children, also believed German assurances that we were being taken to labor camps. And so, she refused to take the risk.

As for me, I could not leave my mother and flee on my own. I just could not even consider it.

I also recall thinking of all the bread we carried with us. We packed mostly bread in our luggage. I could not stop asking myself why we did not remember to give some to my sister. The train moved so slowly, we surely could have done it if we had only thought of it...

In the brick factory ghetto, we met many acquaintances and family members. We met my fiancé's mother, her sisters Lili, Olga and Irene, and his little brothers Yitzchak and Zvi. My fiancé's father who was wealthy, as well as several other well to do Jews, were brought back to the ghetto a few days after our arrival. Severely beaten and tortured, they could hardly support themselves (standing up). We discovered that the authorities were trying to force them to disclose the hiding place of their gold and jewelry.

Two weeks after our arrival at the ghetto, orders were shouted at us by our guards. We were told to gather, without our luggage. We were lined up in a long column, five people per row. We were sure that we were being taken to a labor camp. Anything was better, or so we thought, then lingering in our present unsanitary crowded conditions. The old, the sick, the children, and the rest of us, were all forced to march a distance of approximately 2 km. Our destination was the warehouse – where the people were housed – at the station of Oradea.

We were ordered to board freight cars, 70 people per car. A terrible chaos ensued. Those lagging behind were beaten by the guards. Families were frantically trying to stay together. Children, who found themselves separated from their parents, were crying and looking for them. Parents were screaming the names of their children desperately trying to find them before the train left. I will never forget that scene.

I succeeded in boarding the wagon with my mother and another family with whom we were acquainted. There was no place to sit. Adults tried to hold their children in their arms as long as possible. A mother of seven children gave birth to her eighth child. In the midst of the

suffocating odor of the excrement mixed with pesticide emanating from the pail placed in the freight car; amidst the corpses of those who just couldn't endure the horrible traveling conditions, the maddening hunger and thirst, strains of "Siman Tov and Mazal Tov" rang out, congratulating the mother and welcoming the newborn into this world. Only this was not a world, it couldn't be. I thought of the irony of that moment and I felt for the first time, the loneliness of a deep despair.

We stopped briefly at a station in the city of Tokaj. The doors were not opened, the pail was not emptied, and the dead were not removed. With great difficulty, I was able to push two small glass bottles through the barbed wire covering the window of our car. I asked a guard to fill them with water. Two guards told him not to do it. He ignored them, filled the bottles and handed them back to me. My mother and I took just one small sip. We wanted to give the rest to the children. They were in such bad shape. Blisters had erupted around their mouths and noses, their lips had deep bleeding cuts. The water would do them good, I thought. Unfortunately, they never had a chance. Two young Ukrainian deportees returning home after three years of forced labor were seized again and were 'traveling' with us. They grabbed the bottles and each emptied one. I judged them in my mind. My gentle mother asked God to forgive them.

The last station on Hungarian soil at which we stopped, was "Kassa" known today as "Katovitz". The cars were opened, the dead removed, pails containing excrement were emptied and water pails refilled. Unfortunately, the door to our car was stuck. The Hungarian *gendarmes* were changed to SS guards. The men in our car began reciting "T'filat Viduy" as the train started to move slowly out of the station. Many in our car had died. The two Ukrainians stacked the bodies neatly in a pile. The odor of the dead mingled with the other foul odors. I thought that this must be what is known as the "Inferno". My thoughts have changed since then. The trip was just a sadistic foreplay of fate.

Four days and nights after leaving Kassa, we arrived at the Auschwitz train station. We saw through the window, men dressed in striped uniforms. The stripes were wide, the uniforms loose, and the men gaunt. Much to our joy, all the car doors were opened. We did not know this place called Auschwitz, but anything was preferable to remaining in that freight car. Or so we thought.

These men in striped uniforms were shouting the strangest things to us in Yiddish, as they were rushing us out of the cars, tossing out the dead and the dying. They were telling us to hand over the children to the older people. What a strange thing to say to a mother or a father especially when one arrives at a strange place – following such a horrible trip! And how is one supposed to find their children later? They were also asking for food, especially bread and cigarettes. Couldn't they guess by our appearance, that we had no food? How could they treat the dead with such indignity – and how could they treat the dying so roughly?

The SS were shouting "Los! Los!" their wide-eyed dogs growling, barking, bearing their teeth and lurching at the deportees. The men in striped uniforms continued performing their gruesome work, some, pointing to the dark smoke looming from one area of the place, told us "Do you see that smoke? You will no longer need the food and the cigarettes." It was Erev Shavuot, 1944.

On the ramp, we saw this man who waved people in the crowd to the left or the right. Later I found out that his name was Dr. Mengele. He was smiling as he passed sentence of immediate

death to some – and smiling when he gave others a temporary stay of execution. But on the ramp, those men in stripes called that verdict “life” nevertheless. My mother and I were pushed towards the end of this long column of terrified prisoners. We saw many who opposed going in one direction or another, or handing their children to a total stranger; The SS set the dogs on these persons who dared to disobey the orders. They died a terrible death as the dogs tore chunks of flesh out of them. Others were beaten to death by the SS. The lucky ones were shot. One well aimed bullet at close range – what could be better if one must die?

At last, we were in front of Mengele. My 57 year-old mother, destroyed by the devastating trip, was waved to the left. I ran after her, but with a heavy blow, was directed to the right. Running towards the crowd on the left, she cried out – begging me to follow the orders for she could not bear to see me beaten or killed. “we should not separate this way – and promise me,” she said “that you will not cause your own death because with God’s help, we will be reunited.” My mother said that under a sky darkened by the smoke of her burning people. And she still mentioned God.

Later on, I learned that my sister refused to hand over her daughters and was ordered to the left with her little girls. She was only 32 years old.

After the initial selection at the ramp, I caught up with the group (sentenced to “live”) from my transport and, chased from behind and sides of the disorganized column by the SS and their snarling dogs, we were herded like cattle into a large hall. With machine guns pointed at us, we were ordered to disrobe. When all were naked, a group of men shaved our heads, underarms and private parts. A disinfectant – D.D.T. powder – was sprayed on each of us. We couldn’t recognize one another. We looked so different. We called each other’s names, trying to hang on and share our fears with someone we knew.

After this dehumanizing procedure, we were chased into a hall with showers. Following this shower, they tossed some clothing to us – belongings of Jews in the transport which arrived before us. We were chased out again and passed the gate of “C Lager”.

Above the gate was written:

Arbeit macht Frei!	Work makes one free,
Rede wenig rede Wahr!	Speak little, speak truth,
Achte deine Forge Zetzte!	Respect your superior,
Der Bloc ist dein Heim, halte ihm rein!	The block is your home, keep it clean.

SS women took over the task of chasing us into Block #18. Eight hundred inmates in each block, approximately 12 women on each wooden slab, each row had 3 levels of bunk “beds”. The smoke and stench of burning flesh permeated our bunks and were choking us.

The night had fallen. Many young mothers suddenly realized the fate of the children handed over to the elderly. Their wailing screams of torment and terror filled the night. But the night did not last long. At 2:00 AM, we were chased out of the bunks while the SS women barked “Los! Los!” at us and struck well aimed blows at anyone within reach. Once outside, we were placed in rows of 5 women, and waited. It was cold and dark. The only visible light came from the crematorium compound.

At 10:00 AM, bloodthirsty women arrived. This was my first *appel*. Not all survived. Many were selected and immediately sent to their deaths. I could not find a rational system by which the selection was conducted. Strong young women as well as weak ones were sent to their doom. There was no seeming pattern. The selection appeared to be arbitrary.

Forty-eight hours after our arrival, we received our first “meal” – bitter black tea cooked from grass. In it, we later found out, the Germans mixed sodium bromide, a drug which, upon ingestion, stops the menstruation cycle and affects the nervous system causing apathy and lack of will. We took turns sipping since each twelve inmates received one pot.

At the second *appel* conducted at 2:00 PM each row of five women received a narrow bread about 25 cm long. The bread was a mixture of sawdust and flour. Since we had no choice, we became accustomed to its taste although at first, we found it inedible.

At this time, we were permitted to perform our bodily functions. The C Lager toilet facilities were such that 500 people could use them at once, with no privacy. Two additional stations served at washing stations with 400 faucets each. Within a period of one hour, the 32,000 inmates of the C Lager were given the use of these facilities.

Our “free” time was used in search of relatives. It was difficult to recognize familiar faces with everyone’s heads shaved. However, within a few days, I found Olga and Lili. They were in Block #28. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, their 44 year-old mother was sent to her death with her 10 year-old daughter, Irene Binah and her 7 year-old son Yitzchak. I could still remember Irene’s beautiful red hair, her big charcoal eyes, and a face full of freckles. And Yitzchak – forever exasperating people by sneaking frogs in their pockets. A bright boy, full of life. How unforgivable! I raised my head and looked at the smoke. And I thought – so many. Until liberation, I don’t recall ever using the word “million”. There was nothing that I counted in millions. Certainly not Jews – not murdered Jews.

We knew that the friendships we developed were very temporary. There were so many selections during the numerous *appels*. Some women who arrived at Auschwitz in the early stages of their pregnancy, were now showing, and were exterminated. Others were defeated by the extreme heat, standing hours upon hours, until the SS came to conduct the selection. And still others were enfeebled and wiped out by the bitter cold during autumn and winter. Either way, the fate of those who collapsed was sealed. We tried to help one another by slapping each other’s faces if there were signs of faint; or we’d rub one another’s backs. If a *kapo* or SS noticed acts of mutual support, their fury was marked with severe blows of a stick.

One time, during such an incident, we attacked an SS whom we nicknamed “Red Fox”. She had red hair and was extremely cruel. We yelled – “girls, let us not allow her to beat us” and we fell upon her, pulling her hair and hitting her as best we could. Eventually, she freed herself, and ran off. We were sure that she would return with another SS, determined to punish the culprits. In order to elude the Red Fox, the participants in the attack, switched from Block #18 where we had a kind Jewish *kapo* named Miri to Block #28 under the sadistic *kapo* Stefi. Girls from Block #28 moved temporarily into Block #18 to make sure that the number of inmates checked out during *appel*. The switch was not discovered and we lived. If that was living. We lived through

starvation, beatings and selections. Each day that passed, we committed to memory scenes of the never ending nightmare, scenes which do not let us sleep through a night even decades later.

The trains continued to arrive with new deportees who, if selected to live, filled the place of the women among us who were sent to die.

Following the *appel*, we had one free hour, when we were permitted to visit one another. After the free hour, a strict curfew was imposed. Those who did not comply, were shot from the observation towers. The towers were left unattended when the allied forces were bombing in the vicinity; never the train station to Auschwitz – never the crematoriums – never the death machine – never the railway to Auschwitz. During an allied bombing attack on neighboring targets, my childhood friend Terry and I ventured to the bathroom facility. We had a severe case of diarrhea. We then ventured toward the neighboring camp to which Czech people were deported, and near the place where the new arrivals made their final trip – the gas chambers. I'll never forget the pitifully gruesome sight of thousands of corpses – men, women and children – stacked one on top of another – most with their eyes wide open, just staring. The following day, we learned that they were all poisoned.

The “Czech camp” as we called them, did not undergo selections. Complete families lived there for a few months. The Nazis conducted an experiment – they wanted to see how long these people would survive, deprived of everything including food and water. Eventually, those who survived were poisoned.

I cannot forget that scene, and all others I witnessed, of a people – my people – who raised its young to be good and kind to others – human or animal, and was thus destroyed.

I saw many sights of incredible cruelty. But the unspeakable evil and enormity of the Nazi genocide is still incomprehensible.

We were subjected to the horror of selections at least twice each day. I still recall an unexpected selection conducted by Mengele himself. My block was ordered to the entrance of the C Lager. He was seeking blue-eyed girls. We were ordered to undress. When he stood before me, he checked my hands and eyes, and said smiling, "Los," indicating that I join the rest of the blue-eyed girls. We were told that we were selected for our good looks, to join the soldiers fighting at the Russian front, to "pleasure" them. My Instinct told me what to do. Naked as I was, with my clothing under my arm, I started running toward the barracks. I heard one shot and expected to fall any second, surprised that I was still running. I then realized how ready I was to die. I am 70 years old now, and decided to ask my friend Terry who witnessed the event, to tell me what happened back then. How come the shooting stopped? How come I was not killed? Terry told me that the SS officer called Peter, aimed at me, but Mengele stopped him and ordered him to shoot in the air. Strange event because as I knew Auschwitz, miracles did not occur. The murderers always had a reason for their actions. When the girls returned to the barracks, they wanted to throw me out, fearing collective punishment for my defiance I refused to leave. No reprisals followed.

Another time, in the bitter cold of a winter night, with rain and ice pelting from the sky, we were chased out of the barracks. The icy mud was ankle deep. We were ordered to run in the direction

of the gas chambers. Then, the counting started. At the count of 50, they stopped just at the row of five in which I was. We were then rushed back and told that the crematorium was full. Yet miracles did not happen, not in Auschwitz, a place forgotten by God.

I remember another time following an *appel*. About 400 of us were driven once again out of the block, lined up, as usual, in rows of five and ordered toward Birkenau. We knew that our death was imminent. The sun was shining, and in the distance was grass covering the landscape. We could not understand how the sun could shine so brilliantly while the crematorium was releasing thick clouds of smoke – the smoke of our burning people – with the smell of charred flesh wafting through the air. But we did not have much time to philosophize – because we were herded into a large hall, ordered to undress, shaved all over again, and disinfected. This time, D.D.T. powder was also pumped into our rectums. All this was performed by men wearing striped uniforms with the yellow star of David on their chests. We were then returned to the block we came from. I could not find the piece of bread I received at the *appel* which I had no time to eat before we were rushed to the disinfection center. Someone else ate it. Perhaps she thought I would no longer need it.

Because of continuous hunger, and because food meant sustenance, a chance not to be selected, many women resorted to stealing food from others. Since 12 women had to eat from the same pot, it was difficult to divide the liquid food into portions. Many women, when their turn came, ate others' shares as well. To avoid this, when it was my turn to carry the liquid they called food – a barley soup with floating worms in it – my friends and I passed the SS kitchen garbage dump and collected empty tin cans. Thus we were able to divide the nauseating "food" into 12 equal portions.

On Tisha B'Av, we were treated to a special food – squash soup. Since it was a day of fasting, some of us saved our food for the evening in the tin cans. Unfortunately, the squash soup spoiled and was inedible. We did not eat nor drink until the following day, after the *appel*.

The days, weeks and months passed, the angel of death lurking everywhere. Nightmares constantly replayed chilling, terrifying scenes of the day. Some women could bear it no longer – they sought death by throwing themselves on the high tension electric fence surrounding the camp. Within seconds, their bodies were burnt, glued to the wires.

Often, we were assigned to different blocks, to fill the spaces of the dead. Block #29 was infested; lice biting unceasingly tormented us. In Block #30, there were no bunks. The inmates slept on floors that were covered with lice-infested hay. Rain penetrated through the roof, flooding the floor. We couldn't even sit down. For several days, we were not taken to *appel* and did not receive any food. I do not recall how many days went by this way.

One night, we were chased out and again ordered to run toward the crematorium compound. It was October 1944. It was so frightening. We were starving and demoralized. My mind turned to prayer and I recited "'B'shem Elokei Israel". The selection that night was one of the most horrible I remember. We were weighed at one point. Mrs. Roth, a 38 year-old woman looked awful. She was immediately shoved to the side of those to be murdered. Aghi, her daughter and my friend, was only 14 years old. She clung to her mother, but was forcibly separated as the SS looked on laughing and laughing. From then on, I cared for Aghi and we both made it back home together

after the war. That night, our private parts were shaved. We were then chased – always chased – into the showers and still naked, into a yard. It was dark, cold and raining. Dawn found us shivering, clinging together for warmth. As daylight broke, we were hustled into a large hall adjacent to the train station. We each received a uniform: shirt, pants and jacket with a large white cross painted on the back, and in the front was a number. My number was 55108. We also received shoes made of wooden soles and canvas uppers. We supposed that we would be taken to a labor camp. While waiting, we received a cup of hot bitter tea. About noon, a freight train pulled up to the station. We, 600 Jewish women in all, boarded the train and arrived at our destination in the evening. It was a *Lager* for "Heftling" – slave laborers. We were led to a large hall – the lunch room – and divided into blocks. Each block contained several rooms. In each room, were 10 bunk beds, 20 girls were assigned to each room. Each bed had a sleeping sack made of crepe paper, a blanket, and a long table with two long benches alongside, open windows (for sanitary reasons) and central heating. Even the bathrooms were heated. We did not yet know why we were brought to this location, but we were hopeful that leaving Auschwitz meant that someday, we would return home with God's help.

That evening, we were led once again to the mess hall and were given two slices of bread, soup in an actual soup bowl, and a spoon. The head of the *Lager*, and an extremely cruel and obese SS officer explained to us that we were to work in a bomb manufacturing factory, in three shifts – 6:00 AM to 3:00 PM, 3:00 pm to 11:00 PM, and 11:00 PM to 6:00 AM. We would be required to fulfill a preset quota, and those who fell short, would be shot. Anyone who engaged in disciplinary actions would also be shot, or punished by being locked into a subterranean cell with no water, bread, or light until death claimed her.

We returned to our rooms and ate the soup. Some of us saved the bread for the next day. We were wakened at 5:00 AM and the first shift of slave laborers left for work. I was among them. We arrived at the Hertine bomb factory, located close to our dwelling quarters. Slovak professionals (hired help – not slave laborers) instructed us in what to do. We were divided in sectors: work on the 75 kg bombs, work on the 250 kg bombs, work on the 500 kg bombs, work on the mines, also called "plates," work on mines, also called "pares," and work on the famous V-2 bombs.

The French prisoners worked in the factory and were of great help when we did not understand something. The Serb prisoners were not permitted to enter the factory compound. They worked on maintaining the grounds. The French and Serb prisoners received from the Red Cross, a monthly package including clothing. They felt sorry for us and showed kindness by often throwing food our way when the SS officers were not looking.

The shells of the bombs arrived at the factory from another location empty. We were assigned to fill them with explosive materials and arm them. Often, when we ran out of explosives, we were taken outdoors to work our shift in totally useless but exhausting chores – called "frische luft" – fresh air. The Serb prisoners explained to us that this was done to prevent us from resting. We were also told that the 800 Russian female slave laborers employed before us, were removed because all had suffered from complete exhaustion. An example of "frische luft" activity was to stand up to our knees in snow in the bitter cold, in a circle formation, and for the duration of our shift, transfer to one another, bricks up and down the hill which, after making the full circle, would end up down hill in the place they were initially taken from.

The food quality, low to begin with, progressively deteriorated. We were greatly surprised when a gentleman dressed in elegant civilian clothes, came at mealtime to check the quality of the food. We also received soap which made us very happy. We did not know that this was “Reine Juden Fet” – soap made from the fat removed from Jewish bodies. The elegant gentleman talked for a while with the head of the *Lager* and the obese cruel SS officer nicknamed by us, the “Swollen One”. The “Swollen One” stormed into the kitchen, ordered the Jewish women who served as cooks out of the kitchen, and beat them till they lost consciousness. The cooks were fat and no less cruel than the SS whom they served. Although it was not a pleasant sight, we felt that these women who stole our food and sold it, deserved to be punished. The next day, they were dismissed from their jobs and sent to work as slave laborers. (The SS supervisors were also changed).

That day, we had a “frishe luft” day, one of the most difficult I can recall. We were assigned to dig trenches 2 meters deep and 70 cm wide. The digging and removal of earth was difficult. Yet, the work warmed us up that frigid rainy day.

We subsequently learned that the elegant gentleman was a general director of the Flick Concern, a conglomerate which owned the Hertine factory. The Flick Concern, still in business today, was actively engaged in arming Iraq for many years prior to the 1991 Gulf War.

In December 1944 a sabotage was staged by the Serb prisoners of war. This act destroyed completely the 250 kg bomb section. On that particular day, prior to the explosion, I worked on the 3:00 PM to 11:00 PM shift. The SS female officer assigned to us left us unsupervised. Some of the inmates including myself, needed to use the bathroom. We were not permitted out, nor could we continue working without using the bathroom. Several of us sat down on a bench. The Slovak in command came into our compound and was surprised to find us sitting down. We told him our predicament. This man was not good, nor was he evil. He called another SS supervisor who led us out. Just as we were clear of the building, we heard a terrible explosion. The SS ran for cover and disappeared, as did her fellow Germans. The illumination of the compound was totally destroyed. What a wonderful opportunity to escape! But, where to? In the hostile terrain, with easily identifiable uniforms, emaciated and exhausted, with the wide shaved path across our heads, we were easy targets for the SS, Ukrainian and Croatian guards with their savage dogs. We gathered and returned by ourselves, to our dwelling quarters, hoping to witness additional explosions. But, that never happened.

The Germans were totally disoriented by the event. We remained in our quarters for several days until they reorganized. Forty-three Jewish slave laborers perished, as well as several Slovaks, a few French prisoners, and two or three female SS overseers. The 75 kg and 500 kg bomb sections suffered very little damage. The trains did not function on our route for awhile. They utilized us to clean the destroyed 250 kg bomb section. At this time, we were supervised by Wehrmacht soldiers, their machine guns pointed at us throughout our shift.

One morning, an old Wehrmacht soldier handed me two slices of bread spread with margarine. He told me that this was his ration of bread for the day. He said that he was ashamed of his present duty as a soldier, that he was a music professor in Frankfurt and that his only child, a son, was killed on the Russian front in Stalingrad. He cautioned us to work slowly and attentively

because under the debris, there could be unexploded live bombs. The labor was extremely difficult. We used big air hammers to break up large cement blocks, put them in wheel barrows and push them out of the compound to trucks which were awaiting this cargo. These trucks were not permitted to pass beyond the signs posted around the compound which read: "Attention! Deadly Danger."

Occasionally, we worked in the subterranean compound where the V-2 bomb was produced. Our assignment was to collect the refuse materials from the bombs, load them onto wagons with a capacity of one ton (1000 kg) and push the wagons out of the subterranean bunker. We were often required to dismantle the bombs which had not detonated. This was done by hand, with a bronze hammer which does not produce sparks upon impact. The smallest spark would have caused the bomb to explode. Only Jewish women slave laborers worked on this deadly assignment. All the others kept a distance of at least one km.

In February 1945 during "frishe luft" we were taken 200 at a time, to an ice covered field where beets were harvested in the fall. We were assigned to find and collect beets that were left behind, (of course, with our bare hands). We were covered with mud and ice, but we were so famished, that when the overseers were not looking in our direction, we hastily ate an occasional beet with the mud still frozen onto it.

An occasional Russian "Rata" plane flew over, setting the piles of hay – left there since fall – on fire, and returning our greetings of joy, left the area undisturbed. During this time, the German overseers ran for cover by hiding among us. Some nights, we heard Russian squadrons as well as allied planes, flying high above us on their way to German targets. Why didn't they ever target the Hertine factory? Or Auschwitz, for that matter?

One night, during February (or was it March?) in 1945, the alarm sounded again, as was the practice when allied or Russian planes flew over. The German overseers ran for cover, as was their custom. We ran outside unsupervised, to watch, as was our custom. From a distance, we saw the bombing of the city Dresden located at about 65 km from the Hertine factory. The bombing illuminated the entire region. A truly apocalyptic sight. Unfortunately, the well merited destruction of Dresden did not last long. The city was rebuilt with American money under the "Marshall Plan".

United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt died April 12, 1945. The French prisoners who were our main source of information and link with the outside world, informed us of his death. As communication was forbidden, the French prisoners whispered the news as they walked along our fenced-in compound. They also reported that the new president, Harry S. Truman was expected to be much more aggressive and would defeat the Germans, thus bringing the war to an end.

Shortly after Truman became president, the "Swollen One" conducted an *appel* and shrieking at the top of his lungs, told us that we would not survive the war. (As I recall, it was toward the end of April.) He then ordered us to undress completely and line up along the storage area. We each were tossed a single piece of clothing, unpaired shoes – I received a boot for my left foot and a high heeled shoe for my right foot – and one whole bread and a piece of margarine. We were chased to the train station and were loaded onto freight trains. The train started moving,

destination unknown. Toward the evening, the train pulled into a station whose placard read Leitmeritz. We were ordered out, lined up, and compelled to march through the afternoon. It was dark when we reached some empty barracks lined with lice-infested hay. We decided to stand all night, but by morning, we were completely covered by crawling lice. As the morning light appeared, we stepped outside only to be greeted by a most horrible, pitiful sight. In a yard, surrounded by barbed wire, a large group of men were gathered. They were wearing their striped uniforms with the yellow Magen David on their chests. There were hundreds – perhaps thousands – of emaciated, fleshless skeletons, falling and dying right in front of our eyes. Every second, another skeleton fell to the floor. We started throwing them pieces of bread. They fought to get to the fence and pick up the pieces, barely able to drag themselves, creeping to the food. They so much wanted to live!

Again, we were lined up and marched a distance of approximately 5 km to Therezienstadt (Terezin). We were led into large empty rooms, about 20 women in each room. We could not find drinking water but the plumbing was intact, so we drank from the toilets, lifting the water to our parched lips with the palms of our hands.

Transports of victims arrived from all over, as the Russians and allied forces closed in on the Germans. We met up with family members and acquaintances. The only food we received was a liquid in which worms 2 to 3 cm long were floating. We removed the worms and drank the liquid. Around the city, we could hear the engaged firearms, the war. What pleasant music to our ears! The noise came closer and closer. On May 8, 1945 towards evening, we heard the rumble of tanks passing near us. One of the girls looked outside and screamed, “Russians! Russians! We are liberated!”

For the first time since that day when I was taken from our little room in the peasant's house, I sat down and cried, and I mourned. I mourned for those who did not live to see the day of liberation. My friends, my sisters in suffering, forced me out into the street. The Russians driving through the streets, tossed us bread, canned food, chocolate, all day, all night, and into the morning.

To our surprise, in the yard of our compound, there was a functioning kitchen set up by the Red Army. We received bread, milk, sugar, tea, butter. For lunch, cold beef and as much bread as one wanted. We had to control our desire to devour everything they offered. The Russians warned us that eating too much in our state could be fatal. Many liberated victims died of overeating. Everywhere in the streets, we saw the dead and the dying. We searched desperately among them for a familiar face. We tried to bring the dying to the compound, hoping the Russians could save them.

Later, we learned why the Germans in a last effort gathered approximately 40,000 Jews into Therezienstadt. The Nazi plan was to detonate the camp with preplanned and carefully placed explosives. That is why the swollen one was so sure of our death. But the scheme was disclosed to the Russians by the SS officer who was to carry out the diabolic plan. In an attempt to thwart the massacre, the Soviet Red Army rushed to liberate the city.

The next day, we found the streets crowded with soldiers of the Red Army. The streets were littered with German corpses, German civilians, entire German families who, in an attempt to escape the front line, were caught in the cross fire. Their fate was well deserved, we thought.

In a large field, surrounded by barbed wire, we saw tens of thousands of German soldiers taken prisoner by the Soviet Army. We derived such satisfaction just looking at them!

A Russian soldier, (this was not his first act as a liberator) taught a few of us how to use his machine gun and told us to shoot into the German body of prisoners. He assured us that no harm would come to us, and felt that we should commit at least a small act of revenge against those who destroyed the lives of so many of our people. He also said that the German prisoners were not yet counted, and thus, did not have the status of war prisoners.

In my mind and heart, I killed them many times, before liberation, then, and after. But none of us (we were about 10 girls) took the machine gun. I still wonder if I should have killed some Germans. I was there, witness to their atrocities. Why didn't I do it? Was it good or bad that I did not do it?... And today, the neo Nazis are marching again, their numbers are increasing by the thousands, just like then... like the Nazis of the 1930's, and just like then, nobody stops them.

Shortly after I was liberated, I contracted typhus. The Russians set up field hospitals to care for the thousands who became ill. After a coma that lasted two weeks, I woke up feeling a wet rag on my face and a pill being placed in my mouth, followed by a few drops of water. As he saw that I opened my eyes, the medic introduced himself with a smile. He was Sasha. I recuperated slowly, and looking around, I noticed that the beds were actually iron closets laid on the floor and turned face up. A blanket was placed beneath us, one covered us and another was under our heads. The makeshift hospital was in a very large hall with a tremendous number of sick people. The dead were cleared out each day at noon. In the morning, some still ate some of the strained cheese, semolina cooked in milk, and drank some of the fruit juice they were given. By noon, they were dead. How terrible not to survive now, when the ordeal seemed to be over! I looked around with the intention of remembering the sight forever, and I do. But it's indescribable.

Suddenly, I heard two men speaking Hungarian. One addressed the other as Silberstein, my maiden name. Somehow, I managed to stumble over to them, hoping to find a relative. After talking to Mr. Silberstein, I realized that he was a distant cousin of my father's (לִּטְוִי). I had never seen him before.

My friends and co-sufferers visited me faithfully. They snuck in by wearing Red Cross uniforms which they somehow obtained. When it was clear that I had rejoined the living and was transferred to the area of the convalescents, my friends told me that 15 friends and cousins were waiting eagerly for me to join them so that we could return home together. A train, provided by the Red Cross, was taking survivors back to Transylvania. It was best if we left as soon as possible. I snuck out of the field hospital and passed by the guard without the necessary documents, but no one stopped me. After all, I was escorted by two "Red Cross" nurses.

Boarding the train was more complicated than we thought. We needed certificates which were checked at the boarding place. For several days, we went to the Red Cross officers to obtain the certificates. Lines moved slowly, and we never reached the officials. In an act of rage, I went to

the front, grabbed the stamp and a batch of certificates, and stamped them for my friends, my family, for myself, and strangers. Then we left. No one stopped me. We filled in the proper information and headed for the train. We even took my distant cousin, Mr. Silberstein, with us. He became severely ill on the train and was removed at Görlitz, a German city, and was placed by former Jewish partisans into a hospital there. Unfortunately, he never made it. He was about 50 years old. Jewish, as well as Serb partisans were waiting for the train at every station we stopped. They handed us food and water. As we neared Hungarian terrain, at one of the stations, waiting partisans hung signs on several train cars with women aboard, reading: "Warning! Typhus and syphilis infected on board!" The partisans had heard of cases of rape and wanted to assure our safe conduct through Hungary. I had nothing to worry about, I thought. My head was shaved (it was shaved again at the hospital when I was ill) and I weighed 81 lbs. I looked like a twelve year-old boy.

It was mid-July, 1945 by now. As we passed cities and towns from which we were deported, we looked carefully into the crowd awaiting their loved ones at each station. Upon entering the small city of Teleagd, not far from Oradea, the girls looked outside and called with great excitement: "Yozsi, Yozsi, come quick, your sister Lori is here with us!" My brother was deported from Teleagd, and was at the station waiting – hoping – for the return of his wife who was pregnant at her deportation, and his two year-old daughter. They never returned. Neither did her parents nor her six sisters and one brother. Yozsi and I remained in an embrace and cried for a very long time. This is what we have left of our families, and our looted destroyed homes. I stayed that night in Teleagd, and slept in a peasant's house. Early the next morning, when I awakened, I noticed someone staring at me. It was my beloved fiancé, Moshe Eliahu (Otto). He had come back one month before me. I told him that his sisters, Olga and Lilli were fine and should be home shortly. Otto asked me to marry him as soon as possible. I agreed, but not before my hair grew back and I resumed a more feminine look. I wanted to resemble as much as possible, the girl he fell in love with before the war.

My brother Yozsi and I found a warm place in the welcoming home of my sister Channa Leah and her husband Avraham Hemli in Timisoara.

This is briefly the story of one who survived the Nazi inferno.

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