

' R A V E N S B R U C K '

N ... After eight days in crowded cattle-cars, we, slave laborers from the ammunition factory 'Masag-Pelcery' in Czestochowa, Poland, arrived in Furstenberg, Germany. The day was the 23rd of January 1945.

It was a calm, sunny winter morning; snow-covered fields and trees as far as the eye could see... For a while we felt so remote from the stark reality around us... It was heaven to us who for over two years labored behind barbed wire...

B escorted by armed SS men, we marched from the railway station to the concentration camp Ravensbrück.

B The heavy, barbed wire gates swung wide open and the hell broke loose...

N We were told to undress, all our private belongings were taken away. We were subjected to a thorough and brutal body search for hidden gold and diamonds. After an icy shower in a barrack where windows were missing I was given a torn skirt, a threadbare coat, a man's shirt, a pair of wooden sandals, but no underwear and no stockings...

B My sister Tamara looked at me. "Tushka", she exclaimed, "if not for your blond hair I would never recognize you!"

B I cried a little. "I will still survive Hitler", I said.

N We were put in enormous barracks, one thousand women in each. Windows were missing and an icy wind was blowing right through...

N Our 'Stubenalteste' (a woman in charge of the barrack) was Marysia, a Polish woman from Warsaw. She did her utmost to make our lives still more miserable...

B To torment us, she woke us up in the middle of the night, screaming at the top of her lungs: " You, Jewesses from Czestochowa, get ready! " , implying that we might be taken away to be gassed...

Marysia had a special passion to hit me on the face and she did it on innumerable occasions... She knew I was a lawyer and wanted to humiliate me...

I was sick with diarrhoea but was afraid to admit it, as I would immediately be taken to the 'Lazarett' - a camp hospital - and from there to a crematorium...

Marysia ordered us to get up at four in the morning instead of at seven... The morning roll-call lasted four hours... We had to stand through the call with our arms above our heads.... Many women fainted... Many died.

N At eight in the morning, we were marched off to shovel sand, a chain of two hundred women, eight hours a day, in 20 degrees below zero...

N R Once I tried to straighten my back a little but an SS woman noticed it and hit me across my back with a heavy stick... B My sister screamed and started to cry and just for that she was hit as well... W

Going to work, we passed ~~by~~ by piles of naked corpses in front of the barracks, waiting to be burnt in the crematorium by the 'Totenkommando', ~~an~~ detachment of prisoners whose ~~only~~ task was to cart away corpses...

After a few weeks, we were assigned to a different work... Twenty ^Gwomen pulled a heavy cart loaded with one thousand blankets twice a day from a disinfection chamber to the camp, 14 km. in the morning and again in the afternoon... ^{to begin with} The cart had to be pulled out of a deep water hole... It was twenty degrees below zero and water in our sandals turned to ice... ~~SS~~ ^{B D} pulling out of the cart was the hardest task of all...

My sister and I were always used as the two 'front' horses; we were exhausted, thirsty and hungry, but the time passed so much faster...

Occasionally, we pulled carts with lumber to the crematorium where chimney smoked 24 hours a day... The SS told us that the wood had to be dried to be used afterwards in the kitchens, but we knew better...

In the evening we had ~~a bowl~~ of soup made of rotten turnips and a piece of black bread...

One morning, on the 17th of February, after the roll-call, we were not marched off to work as usually, but instead they kept us standing for many hours in front of the barracks. We were then marched off to the camp hospital where we had to undress and stand in the nude to be inspected by the SS and camp doctors.

Afterwards, we were quarantined in locked barracks for three days without food or water.

Some women had bread, but I ² and my sister ¹ had none, as on the previous night our bundles with bread were stolen from under our heads while we slept...

B We buried our heads ⁱⁿ with our coats and wept from hunger...

After three days the doors were unlocked and we were marched off to a shower - than we were standing in freezing weather outside the

B barracks, our hair still dripping...

B Same day in the afternoon, one thousand Jewish women were escorted to the railway station, I my sister and I among them...

B There were at that time more than 100,000 women from all European countries overrun by the Germans, but for that particular transport only Jewish women were selected...

B This was the most tragic scene I had witnessed during the Holocaust, a procession of ghosts rather than human beings...

We were forcibly pushed into the waiting cattle cars, over one hundred women in each and the doors slammed shut... There was not enough room inside to stand with both feet on the ground...

B Every morning when the train stopped, the SS women screamed: "Wieviel Tote?" (How many died?)

B Doors were unlocked, corpses removed and dumped in the nearby bushes or woods, pails with excrements emptied. We were given some water and sometimes a few boiled ^{miscel} potatoes.

B Those standing near the doors were more fortunate and could get some ~~water~~ ^{potatoes} and water. When I once complained to an SS woman that we in the back of the car could not get anything, the enraged 'Aufseherin' (guard) hit me over the head with a heavy stick... Only by raising my forearm I had prevented the losing of an eye...

B In our car alone ten young women died... They first became insane, then fell in coma and went out like candles...

B One of them, a beautiful Hungarian, standing next to me whispered: "I want to see my husband once more...", and then she was gone...

B I myself was twice on the verge of death, but was each time saved by a Hungarian woman who placed a pinch of salt on my tongue...

From time to time our train was attacked by Allied planes; then the train stopped and the SS were running for cover in the nearby ditches or woods. ^{BW} We, the prisoners, remained locked in cars...

B This terrible ordeal lasted for sixteen days and sixteen nights...

On the fourth of March the train arrived in Burgau - Dachau. Finally, we, the survivors, could leave the cars...

B As I had been for the last three days without a drop of water, I literally saved my life by eating for 24 hours snow which I scooped now and then with an empty can at the risk of being severely beaten or even shot by a guard...

Today - here
this is our 'Kaver' (oves)...

May I now humbly bow my head and pray for the innocent Jewish women

who perished in Ravensbruck 'Al Kiddush Hashem'....

Esther Przeworski Pratt

Note: The above 'Eyewitness to Holocaust' address was delivered by the writer at a 'Yam Hashoah' Observance and 30th Anniversary Commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a Tribute to the Six Million of Nazism, Sunday, April 15, 1973, 2 P. M. at Hollywood Temple Beth-El, Hollywood, California.

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