

RABBI SAMUEL AND ELLA FREILICH PAPERS, 1940-2001
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The following is a translation of Ella Freilich's diary:

Dear Children

Mama wanted so badly to write for you a diary and each time she tried the memories of her pain destroyed the truth (?). Maybe one day you will try to say to the world what I could not.

I m writing these few lines in the first hours of the year 1970 with a broken heart because right now I know for sure I will never write

Liberec, November 2, 1945

Diary

I want to write down here a portion of my life from the year 1944.

It was around Easter, when everything was prepared as it usually is to sit down to the festive table, when the uniformed Germans with animal facial expressions barged in without even so much as greeting. Their first question was: How many rooms are there here? Mother quivered with fear because two weeks earlier they had come to the store and to our house and although everything was legally proven to be our possessions, they took away whatever they wanted. The value of these goods cannot be estimated.

My dear mother with her fine and good nature could not imagine how this could be possible. The German beasts examined our apartment and did not want to leave. They occupied every room without considering whether there would be room for us to stay here. The kitchen remained but not for long, even there they congregated and we had to leave. After a while not one of us had space in our house in which we had lived for 40 years. I as the bravest did not

want to show that I was afraid of them so I sat on a chair of one of my grandchildren in a corner of that formerly beautiful home and read.

The reading did not interest me; I just wanted to watch over the things that they called property. The day they moved in to our house, we closed the store, the clients troubled us, they needed fabrics but we couldn't even take a pair of scissors in our hands to cut off a piece of textile.

These beasts stayed with us for eight days. They wanted everything they saw. One of them was or rather had a bit of civility and saw that we are living corpses, and then he realized that we are also humans when he saw the beautiful pictures of all of us on the walls.

He took down my most beautiful picture and I sat in the corner like a beggar and he told me don't be afraid, the German nation is not that bad. Nothing will happen to you even if there will be some black days ahead. I was forced to write on the picture that I donate it to him as a memorial and that it will be a talisman for our reunion next year.

On the eighth day, I don't remember the date so exactly, they were ordered into a military formation and they had to go immediately to the Russian border. The whole family rejoiced that we might again be able to sleep in our own beds. My beloved mother still prepared an excellent dinner and pampered child as I was, I still told her that it was not good. There may not be in the whole world another mother like mine who so loved her child.

I wonder today whether there may have been some instinct that whispered to her "I must love my child immensely, she will remain still young enough and who will then continue to like her."
(?)

After that dinner we went to bed thinking that tomorrow we will straighten everything out. We went to sleep and I dreamed that we are freed from all enemies and I woke up in the middle of the night very happy but I did not want to wake anybody to tell them. I try to go back to sleep and at six in the morning someone knocks at our door, saying that we have to evacuate immediately because the front is approaching.

It was horrible but one understood and one reasoned that it was war and there are no exceptions. A few seconds after the first news came another notice that applied only to Jews; that Jews should gather up to 50 pounds of their possessions and go to the main high school. By ten o'clock everybody had to be there already.

There were no exceptions for people were incapable to do that for health reasons., Our physician who loved our father tried everything to get a reprieve for the most incapacitated and

with great difficulty he was able to get our house to become a hospital—of course with our own means—where they sickest people were brought. Among these was also my grandmother and my beloved mother, all of whom I nursed.

In the mean time, the others were locked up in the school where they didn't get anything warm to put in their stomachs. It took 14 days before the whole county was imprisoned. I tried everything to get at least come coffee or soup to the innocent children and it was a very hard struggle. I succeeded.

Mother, who had two daughters with several grandchildren and other relatives imprisoned in that school –and it was after all about people—cooked day and night so that she could give these poor ones something. There was such a crowd there that after only a few days people became terribly hungry.

During the days when we were still at home, we imagined all kinds of good things; that they imprisoned everybody so that they could gather up all the possessions but never that one day they would be burned to death.

After a fortnight they wanted to liquidate our hospital. The doctors accepted bribes and the reality was that the sick ones were already so far gone that they had no idea what was going on in the world.

There was a concilium (meeting, tr.) and they extended the time, but they forgot to register my 96 year old grandmother on that list. Again it was a " lucky" week when they tried to put ad old but still good looking old women in her place. My mother was not willing to go along and they waited for me to decide whether we should let her be carried away without us. Of course all I knew was a mirage and who knew how they will deal with that innocent woman and God knows whether she will survive, so I said we should all go. These few days don't matter anymore.

The day before I had received a letter from my fiancé for which I had eagerly been waiting, hoping that he would give me good advice. He writes that his hands are tied. So there was nothing more to do than to leave our house. The other patients advised us to stay, the Russians are 50 km from the border, they can get here in one night but, nothing else mattered to me, even if it was only my grandmother, only the love of my mother for her mother.

They gave us half an hour to get our things together. We had nothing prepared because we did not think it would happen this way. Anyway we could not eat.

In the last moment I burned things which were valuable for me, letters from my fiancé, the pictures of the president liberator, etc.

For my father there was a permanent light in the living room and we didn't say anything to the barbarians except that they should leave it on another three weeks when the mourning year ends but out of spite, they turned it off. Now comes the moment when the keys to all our possessions have to be turned over. Mother who already did not know what else to do started kissing the walls and door knobs and shouts loudly: we are thrown out of my home, where I lived so many years. Is that possible?

I was crushed, I put my rucksack on my back, I am stronger than iron and I say: let's go, Mummy, and let's all go. Belongings were and will be. God will help us. My dear mom couldn't let go of the door knob and yelled at the top of her voice but her voice shuddered and she started to leave. The car that had been ordered to carry the luggage was waiting outside, that was exceptionally permitted because the most seriously ill joined us who had not want t to remain there without me even though they had permission to stay another 14 days.

The car took the patients to the local district office where there was a group of people because the space in the school was already overcrowded. Before we were able to enter, we had to go control. Everything that was packed had to be unpacked. At the same time the personal examination proceeded although these parcels contained nothing that was not permitted. They warned us that that we had to show all money and gold. We couldn't say that we had nothing and we produced all jewels (not all) ,they threatened us that this can't be all and that we must have a lot more. The aunt who followed us was sure that they would not examine her so carefully but on the contrary because she was a widow, these Hungarian barbarians said turn over the money and the jewels that you are hiding for the Wiedner family because otherwise we will smother you. She fought back and they threatened her with stockings and after that they found some money that had been sown into the seams.

After the examination we returned to the locale where there were already lots of people who had gone through this. The room where people were imprisoned for 14 days looked awful. One could not breathe, children were crying, it can't be described because every thinking human being can imagine it, I can't find words to describe what it was like.

Thankfully they did not keep us there for long. The second morning they transported us away. I did not take any food, we had rice, they also took that away and so I had the guts to come forward with a great request to one of the guards, that they should let me go home to get something. By chance I got permission but I could not recognize our house when I got there.

A horrible feeling, it hurts to write about it.....

An hour after my return we were at the railroad station and they chased us into a car like animals. They started hitting us with truncheons without considering whether the people were

old or sick or were children. I am a witness, the former nurse; I was watching the sick ones but these barbarians.....

They shut the doors without giving us even a drop of water. There were 75 persons with one can for personal needs and nothing else. Light came only from the small window that showed through the grates. It was in the month of April, the sun was warm and the heat got into the car. The patients with whom I traveled in the car suffered terribly on this trip. We arrived in Satmar(?) there they opened the door of the car and there we saw a number of our coreligionists who brought food to the car of the kind that you can imagine. Each one of us again had a bag of food. The whole long day we waited until we started again. The parting from these people was very emotional but it wasn't that bad and we continued.

That night we still arrived at a site and when they opened the doors we saw that we were in a place called Materalka (?) They got us out of the car, into rows and we walked down some street. We thought that they had prepared a part of the town for us and that we will stay there. But before we even entered that space we saw our coreligionists cut off their peyes and their beards because the guards who were guarding the so-called ghetto told them that they would be killed by the "Schwabs" (slang for Germans, tr.) if they ever saw them with that hair..

On the way there, it rained terribly, I myself had no more strength since I was caring for the sick, my 96year old grandmother, who no longer saw and their entire luggage. The people there were probably already so hungry that they looked at some of these bags to see what they could take away from the newly arrived guests.

When we got there, we saw a huge desert like the Sahara but with the difference that a cold wind was blowing and we could not stand in one place. We notice our children; Magda, Sari, Mojsis, Hedvika, Mojziska, Zcuka, Lolika, Simonek, mother's sister Ruzenka and I were the new guests. We also had the uncle's cousins and a lot more relatives, familiar and unfamiliar people unable to recognize anybody.

Red faced , shaved, standing in this awful rain, the Schwabs hitting people over the head with their whips, always seeing blood. The feeling of seeing all this can't be described.

We had no food, they gave us a ration of bread and some sort of soup every day that was not enough to live or to die but they required that people kept everything very clean to the best of the abilities of these poor people.

We did not stay there very long, only six weeks. Grandmother who suffered terribly because her good children had been hounded from their home died three days before the next transport. She was completely alert and two minutes before her final breath she muttered my name.

Mother who was in the same room as grandmother because of her age came back to join our group. We had a space where 18 people slept which was alright when it was dry but when it rained we had more than 25 cm of water. It cannot be described what it is like to lie in the wetness with wet blankets and featherbeds and no place to keep them dry....

After six weeks they called us to the place where we had first arrived in the ghetto and registered us alphabetically. That day they warned us again to surrender all money and jewels because everybody who would be caught would be condemned to death. We were 16,000 and among them there were people who, at the first warning, gave the Hungarian police enormous amounts of valuables. When others saw that, they, too started, because all of us had kept some jewel as a first aid.

Everything was badly done and had a bad result because half an hour later we had to leave everything and just remain in the clothes we were wearing. And if anything was found on anybody, he would be shot immediately.

At that moment we knew that our life was over if they didn't even give us a coat to wear. It means the same as with our Polish brethren: we will have to dig their own trenches and be shot into them like cowards. If it were certain that that would be our fate, one would revolt and take revenge against those who beat us so mercilessly but even in the last minute one hopes that it will not end that way. And that is how it was with us.

In groups of seventy five we had to be prepared to line up in front of the cattle cars so that when the door opened we would all get in, without consideration that there were old dying people, women who were in labor or who had just delivered, nothing mattered. I don't even say enough because the guard hit one of the severely ill men over the head saying that he should jump and not walk so slowly.

The world had never seen anything like that and hopefully will never see what all went on there. Old women were unrecognizable. Now the train arrives. At the cars we see a lot of German SS. Again the fear where are we going and what more do they want? We thought it would be better if they shot us right away rather than take us somewhere else. For 75 persons the outcome was that a mother had to leave her child or the opposite and they were separated without knowing what will be.

One successively hardened. When all had boarded, the SS outside sung with glee" Hergott, Hergott, noch einmal..." (Dear God, once more, tr.)

The train ride, it is dark, the children's eyes close for sleep and everywhere a hard floor and not even that because everywhere there is a foot or a leg because there were so many of us. The children were hungry and I don't even write about the adults any more. We ride for such a long

time, I don't even remember. We get to Kosice in Slovakia. There is talk that it is not out of the question that we would get out of the cattle cars there. I was glad because I thought that I might see my fiancé who was so good to me.

Unfortunately it did not happen that way. The train just stopped so that they could refill our buckets with fresh water. A bunch of SS men were again waiting for us and took us over from the Hungarians. Probably there were some borders. Some sergeant just walked through our car and some curious person asked him where they are taking us and the answer was: the Germans want to kill you all. Meanwhile a German spoke up and said don't be afraid, nothing will happen to you as long as you will work for the Germans, you won't be hungry. They gave us fresh water, the car filled up with fresh air and we continued. Of course the doors had to be shut like in a cattle car. We ride a long time, the train stopped at some Polish stops. We don't see much because it was strictly forbidden to peek out of the barred window but it was possible to see Polish inscriptions.

Night is descending, we still ride, the children in the car do not want to know or rather do not understand what is going on, they are used to normal food and to quiet. One can hear crying and yelling. And I still yell at my youngest grandchildren, my nerves were that taught. I still today reproach myself.

We continue riding and riding. We have no words for each other and if we do, we wring our hands and wonder where can they be taking us and what does it mean. Finally one night we think that the train rides in such a way that they might want to murder us. Waves in the sea would be better than us in those cars.

Finally we arrive in Oswiecim/Auschwitz. Through the barred windows we see lots of men and women in striped uniforms. We hear a tremendous roar like if motors were running. We see motors on which people are stacked and are carried. Our senses were not prepared to understand and to take in what we saw and what was happening. Each one of us was terribly weak. When we look out the other barred window we see huge flames. It seems very strange but the optimists among us state that there must be a big fire or they are burning the rags that people brought or somebody said the trash. That fire however was not natural. I compare the fire with a huge storm and lightning that shakes you but that is over right away. But there it was night and day. The stench was horrible but we did not know what it was. We saw all that at night but we did not know anything positively. Fear and awe enveloped each one of us. Everybody, even those who did not believe in God, started to pray a prayer before death and promised, if God spared them, they would be the best on earth.

My dear mother drew us to her with these words: come my little children, at least I will have you close to me, press close to me, my child, I had such a hard time to raise you and I was so

afraid for you, of God. The words got stuck in her throat and she could no longer speak. I could not calm my only mother down, I felt the end was near, I thought what kind of feeling is it when one is not breathing and another parting in the railroad car was not possible, it demolished me so completely that I tried to go to sleep. I was successful.

When I woke up, it was daylight, they open the door a bit with the order that we may not get out of the car. The eyes see the immense length of the train and the width of the railroad station. On the other platform we saw open cars with immense mounds of belongings on the ground that one cannot imagine.

The Hungry people in my train didn't dare say a word because everywhere it was full of SS. But there were people walking around in striped shirts, sometimes they threw bread into our car and when there was no SS in sight they said to turn the children over to the old ones and to the young, make yourself older. Not all of us understood what that meant so some did not take this very tragically. In addition, that first impression of Oswiecim was so perfidious that one could never believe what awaits one. Lots of people, clean barracks, etc. etc.

Then came the moment when we had to leave the railroad car. I don't know exactly what time it was, maybe 10 in the morning, the whole family gathered together, so that we should not lose each other. We walk a few hundred steps, in front of the gate I do not notice a burly, fat SS man who pushes me to the right and I can't see where my family was. I shout at him: I want to stay with mummy" He didn't even react but he pushed me and I got sick and didn't know where I was. When I repeat" I want to stay with mummy, he answered: You will see her this evening." I believed him and trundled after the other women who were on the same side as I. We go on an endlessly long road, I see block, wire, channels, sand and earth. The blocks were so extensive that the human eye could not see to the end. We finally got into a huge space that they called "Raum".

We were still properly dressed when we entered this space; they told us to get undressed, all naked. We could not understand that, we see men, so how is that possible, but they started to be strict with us, they yelled so there was nothing we could do. We stand there naked. If there had been only a few of us, it would have been terrible but because we were several thousand, one got lost in the crowd. I stood in a row with a friend and a man in a striped jacket who was smoking. My friend would have been happy to have a cigarette, she made a gesture to that effect and the man offered her and me a cigarette. We have a good smoke. I feel like asking him why they brought us here and I completely forget that I am naked. That prisoner in the striped jacket could not tell us much because we had to walk on to get our heads shaved. God, I think, what good would my hair be to them? But I don't have much time; I already want to have it behind me. My hair was cut and I saw the blond locks on the floor, they shone like gold. We

continue, we bathe and again inspection to see if we don't have anything on us, some jewel or similar. We get a grey long dress, one shirt, a pair of pants, that's all they gave us.

We didn't have any of the other things that a woman needs but 99% we didn't need, we didn't have a towel or any other vital items.

We continue walking, a catastrophic spectacle when we saw each other. Powerful rainfall washed us as we continued walking. They still did not give us anything to eat although for the whole trip we had nothing. We arrived in an office, rather a hall where we had to state our name, year of birth and place of origin.

Finally we get into a block number 14a. They counted us and we were more than 1400 perons. Can anybody imagine what kind of noise and yelling there was. The first day we didn't know yet about the disciplinarian. But it didn't even take 12 hours the next day, at 3 in the morning they start yelling "aufstehen" get up, "gehen Kafee holen, to go get coffee, the people didn't know that that means that they had to get up but they soon found out. They were so trained to notice if somebody noticed th person who said to herself I still have a few minutes that that person was always the first. That is how it went day and night. The atmosphere in Oswiecim was different from that in central Europe. When it started to rain, such high water and mud was standing on the courtyard or rather the Appellplatz that it came up to your knees. But if the sun shone, it was worse than in the sahara.

Every one of us had blue lips because one did not get enough water. There were "Waschraume" wash rooms but there wasn't enough time for all of us to get there because at 9 o'clock they tried to make order even if people were dying of thirst and hunger. If somebody fainted, it was very hard o get her a few drops of water. As I write I myself can not believe that it was true.

The camp was divided into groups A, B, C. When you looked from one camp into the other, you had the impression of seeing another world. One always saw so many people there, only an electrified barbed wire separated us and of course the extent, the human eye could see that far but was not able to recognize anybody. I always said to myself that my family and my relatives are most likely behind that barbed wire. Although daily we heard the news that our relatives were burned to death we did not believe it. We always believed that they live somewhere in another block because we saw some old person, or a sick person, etc. And so our eyes deceived us.