RUDI HERZ

My name is Rudolph Herz. Most people call me Rudi. I was born in a very small town on the outskirts of Cologne, Germany in a village called Stommeln on August 23, 1925.

My family had lived in this village for about 200 years. We were well known. Most people knew that we were Jewish. There was a Jewish synagogue. My family and almost all the Jewish families, were respected because most of them were tradespeople or had a profession. I did not really feel until I was 7, any anti-Semitism. There was occasionally a nasty word thrown by smaller children, but that was about it. I do not recall any overt anti-Semitism in the years before Hitler came to power.

First Experience with Nazi Regime: 1933

My first experience with the new Nazi regime was at school. In January or February 1933, they marked the event of Adolph Hitler coming to power. Germany at that time had one national anthem ^_Deutschland, Deutschland Uber Alles^_. This was sung at festivals but on that day we were all assembled in the school yard. A German national flag was unfurled and we sang the national anthem. I did not object to it because I felt myself truly German, although of the Jewish religion.

After the flag was raised, we thought we'd go back to class but instead slowly and majestically the swastika banner was unfurled. That was the first awareness we had that things were going to change. From then on we experienced overt anti-Semitism and not of a religious nature either. Before that the Catholics were prone to holler an epithet after us like "dirty Jew" or "Christ kill^V ers." We had long been persecuted for our religious beliefs, but race had not been used to set Jewish people apart. This Nazi form of anti-Semitism which talked about Jews as racially inferior was something new to us.

Storm Troopers in Front of their House

One of the most frightening experiences I had as a child was in 1934 or 1935 when young Storm Troopers marched up in front of our house and sang such songs as "When the Jew's blood drips off the knife, Then our lives will be twice as good." This made a very grave impression. We talked to our parents about it. They were just as disturbed as we were but in order to give us a sense of security, they said "Well it's just hooligans, young boys who have nothing else to do." We accepted it because what else could we do? We knew that our people had always been Germans and we were true Germans by being German citizens.

This changed in 1936 with the Nuremberg Laws. First of all we had some young girls cleaning for us. They had to leave. In 1936 the Nuremberg laws decreed that Jews could no longer have a German, an

Aryan, of childbearing age in the house. You had to hire a woman of over 45. From then on the treatment we got in school also changed. We were not permitted to join the youth groups. Our textbooks changed as well. The textbook no longer agreed with what my parents and my grandparents told us. In 1934-1935, the new textbooks took a nationalistic slant. They emphasized the Germanic heritage. We went along. We did not have the judgement to know that much of what was in our books were falsifications. Their only purpose was to glorify the German. We accepted it because, think ing of ourselves as Germans, we felt that we also had been fight ing the Romans with the German national hero Herman the Cherusk. We pictured ourselves among the brave German fighters in the Teutonberg Forest, defeating the Roman General Varus and his superior army.

1938: Moves to Cologne

The local Nazi authorities told my father it would be healthier for us if we moved into the larger Jewish community in Cologne. Those that didn't move voluntarily did not have very much longer. They were forced to do so in 1938 by an edict from the Reich, the German government, that all Jews must leave villages of less than 80,000 or 100,000 and must move to larger population centers.

In Cologne we were a family of nine persons. My grandmother was living with us, my father and my mother, four brothers and one sister born in 1938.

My father no longer could have the grain business. He took over a small transport business. We had two small pick-up trucks and we did hauling. The children helped. We had that business until 1940 when all business activity was forbidden by the German gov^V ernment. We began seeing signs in the store windows-- swastikas and the words "Jews are not welcome here." People who did not wish to say that on their windows said instead "Aryan proprietors" or "Aryan business". Most of these merchants had small flags with swastikas flying in front of their establishments.

Kristallnacht

In 1939 Kristallnacht occurred. My grandmother's house was totally ruined over night. My grandmother was pushed down the stairs into the basement. The Nazis broke the water pipes and my grandmother who was about 67-70 nearly drowned. A neighbor had to haul her out of the basement. That person was later denounced for helping a Jew. They managed to call my father. We went with our trucks to pick up my grandmother and my aunt. We ourselves were saved by circumstance of which I was probably the cause. At one time I found in a magazine a large picture of Paul von Hindenburg, the field marshall under whom my father had fought in World War I. When the Nazi Storm Troopers burst into our apartment in Cologne, the first thing they saw was the large picture of Hindenburg. It surprised them a little bit. We were all hiding but I could see where they were standing. My father explained that he was the recipient of a decoration for bravery in the First World War. They

asked him how the picture came to be on the wall. I had pasted it there. My father told the SS men he had served under Hindenburg in the 65th Rhenish Infantry Regiment for four years. Then he was a French prisoner of war who was not released until 1921. So they just smashed the front door and warned my father that he and his family should leave Germany as soon as possible. Unfortunately for us, almost all the borders were closed against us. So we stayed in Cologne.

My father was forced to sell his business and all of us had to find work in Cologne--either road work or work in a factory. School ended for me in 1939. From then on I had one year of instruction in cabinet making. I was an apprentice in a woodwork^V ing shop operated by the Jewish community. After I completed my apprenticeship, a German firm that manufactured barracks for the military hired me.

1939: War Begins

On September 1, 1939, the newspaper on the corner proclaimed that war with Poland had started, that Polish militia had attacked a German radio station in Gleiwice and was repulsed. We were now at war with Poland. Three days later Germany found itself at war with France and England as well. I had just turned fourteen and to me this was all marvelously exciting. There was a small overpass near my house and I saw a German sentry guarding the railroad with bayonet and rifle.

1942: Resettlement Orders

In Cologne we had many relatives. My father had three sisters. My cousins were also there. Then in 1941 the resettlement orders began coming. We were spared to about the beginning of 1942. How^V ever, all of our other relatives were taken away. The first to go were the unmarried sisters of my father who were taken to Lodz ghetto. We heard only from them that they wanted money because they could write a postcard from the occupied territory. Poland by that time was occupied by the Germans. They wanted $500, $600 to buy a loaf of bread. This was beyond us. We did not have that kind of money. We were impoverished ourselves. We sent what we could-- clothing food. We did not know if they ever received it.

They perished in the Holocaust.

The next one to go was my father's oldest sister and her husband and three children. They went to Riga. None of them returned. We only knew that the Lettish militia was as helpful as possible in eliminating German Jews. The third sister and her four children and husband were taken to the Kiev area. They did not make it into a camp. They were shot as they were forced out of the railroad cars. We have counted, it is a sad harvest so to speak, of the 64 immediate family members-- uncles, brothers, sisters-- my brother and I are the only survivors.

Sent to Theresienstadt Ghetto

On May 30, 1942 Cologne suffered a devastating bombing raid by Allied forces. Around one thousand British and American bombers took part. Cologne turned into a ruble heap. Two months later we received our notice to report to the rail head with fifty pounds of personal baggage. They had old railroad cars with wooden seats and we were given one compartment for ourselves. We did not know where we were going. We were apprehensive but we were still together. My grandmother was with us. We had my small baby sister with us. We had a baby carriage and food. We had taken some water. I don't think we stopped anywhere in Germany for any thing-- for food, for water, nothing. The train made it through in about three days. We arrived somewhere in Czechoslovakia. We were told to get out of the railroad car. Nobody knew where we were. We got out and started marching and we marched with fifty pounds of baggage.

We trudged some five miles to an old fortress where we were met by Czech militia. All of our belongings were inspected for valu^V ables. They were very thorough. Not very many people came through with anything but the bare belongings and some food.

It was still daylight when we passed through the outer gates. We had to pass through a check point. At the other end, families were separated, male and female. My mother with the two youngest chil^V dren went one way. My father, three brothers, and I went another way. We were sent to an old, two-story house with six or seven rooms. We wee assigned a room in which there were already eight men. Several days later we learned that our mother and the two younger children were lodged in a large stone barrack for women.

We did not know where we were until the next day when we saw Czech writing on old stores. We were in Theresienstadt ghetto. At the time 60,000 people were crowded into a space that had never housed more than 8,000. By the end of 1944 around 120,000 people were crammed into this ghetto. No privacy whatsoever. Everything sur^V prised us because it was so unfamiliar. We did have our small assigned space. Our suitcase were there. We had a few blankets that we put on the floor.^T

There was a huge, three-story building, another stone barracks, that had a kitchen in it where the cooking was done for the entire Jewish population of the ghetto. The next morning we were given a ration card for food. A man stood there and clipped our coupons and we were given one ration cup of coffee, a pat of margarine, two slices of coarse bread, and a teaspoon of marmalade for our breakfast.^T

Has Job as Grave Digger^G^T

After two or three days we were assigned work. All the new males arrivals that were capable had one assignment--grave digger. Because we were young and able to lift a spade, we were marched out to the huge burial grounds. There we dug individual graves. People, especially the older people, 80 and 90-year-olds, were

dying like flies. No food or medical attention. We were busy dig^V ging graves all day long. We saw the arrival of hand drawn carts that were piled high with coffins, plain pine boxes. These were brought in convoys of 15 or 20 boxes. Boxes were lowered into the graves without benefit of a rabbi or anything. Later on when my grandmother died, we found out that they had memorial services in the town itself but nobody was permitted out of town except for the burial crew. We did the grave digger job just long enough to learn the ropes. In the ghetto we learned the ropes very fast. You had to know what to do and where to trade what for what.^T

Later I found out about a separate building within the ghetto were young people ages 6 to 18 lived and worked. I was able to get into this building with my brothers. My father remained in the house that we were originally in. My mother was still in a barracks for women, called Elbe Kaserne, with the smaller children. We made the best of it. Books were smuggled in to us by Czechoslovakian Jews newly arrived in the ghetto. We had sort of a library.^T

We were very much restricted in what we could do. We thought that now that we were in Theresienstadt ghetto we would no longer have to wear the yellow star with the word "Jew" on it as we had been forced to do in Germany. No, even in the ghetto with only Jews around, we still had to wear that hateful yellow star.^T

One day we heard something that was very disturbing to all of us. We heard then for the first time about Auschwitz in Poland. That's where the killing was done. That we would be sent there and that we would share this fate, none of us knew, not even when we were in Auschwitz itself.^T

Tries to Stay in Theresienstadt^G^T

In March or April, 1944, we got the dreaded notice that we had been selected for resettlement farther east. I made a special effort to see the Jewish elders of Theresienstadt to try to gain a reprieve for our family, but I gained nothing. I went to see the two SS ghetto commanders, Dr. Seidel and Dr. Berger. They asked me what I wanted. I said in view of the fact that we were such a large family and my father was a decorated, World War I veteran, couldn't we stay. They told me to bring my family over to them. So we stood there and they looked us over and my father explained that he had served in the infantry. It made absolutely no differ^V ence. They let us stand until the call came to enter the trains.

On the Cattle Cars^G^T

The train cars were actually cattle cars. We had our bundles and we entered the cars. We sat on our baggage so there was not very much room between us and the roof of the cattle car. In our car there were approximately 80 to 100 people. It was quite crowded.

We were sitting tight on tight. We had some water. We had some

food but no comfort whatsoever. The cars were sealed. We could not open them from the inside. The windows were small, open rectangles. Perhaps we could have jumped off the train and run into the countryside, but we did not if anyone on the outside would help us. We thought most Czech civilians would probably turn us in. We could not speak the Czech language. It seemed better to go along with the SS and do what they wanted. By that time the war had been going on four or five years. We thought the end might be in sight and we would be liberated.^T

At night as we traveled, we heard gun shots. We did not realize what it was. Only after the war I learned the SS troops were on the roofs of the cattle cars shooting past the windows to discour^V age anyone from sticking his head out or getting out of the cattle cars. The train was moving at a fairly great speed and we did not know what country we were going through. There was no stopping.^T

Our train had left Theresienstadt at six o'clock in the evening. At four o'clock the next day we arrived in Auschwitz. Of course we were thinking of escape, but it would not have helped us. We knew that no German could be trusted to do anything but turn us over to the local authorities for a reward of money or food. We had no way of knowing if the Poles would be any different. Someone would have to hide us or bring us food. We had no money to pay for our keep.

So in the end, to keep our family together, we dropped any plans of attempting to escape.^T

Arriving in Auschwitz^G^T

We arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau. As we approached the camp, we saw women in striped uniforms working in the field. We thought where there are vegetable fields there is surely work for us because we were from a small farm community and we knew about farming.^T

When we arrived, it was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The doors were yanked opened. The first thing we heard was someone shouting "Out, as soon as you can, out." Everybody said what about our belongings. "Your belongings you leave there." We grabbed what we could and all of the family assembled outside. Before us stood an immense rectangle of land surrounded by electrically-charged barbed wire. This was the Auschwitz concentration camp.

Waiting to be Assigned to Barracks^G^T

We were assembled in long rows and marched between the troops of the SS special death-head division into the camp to a broad ave^V nue. We were marched up and down this street for 4 or 5 hours between posts of barbed wire with a huge sign "Extreme Danger, High Voltage Electrical Wires." We saw guard towers up high above us. We saw men with machine guns but even then we did not know that we were in a death camp.^T

Back and forth and back and forth, they just kept us in motion. As the evening grew on and got closer to 1 o'clock in the morning, we were more and more desperate. You could hear more and more cries for food.^T

Finally they put out deep boxes. Everybody was relieved of what^V ever valuables they had. Women and men were forced to strip off their wedding rings and hand over their prized possessions, memen^V toes, lockets of relatives no longer there. Whatever we had, we lost. Those who did not give up willingly or fast were simply beaten over the back or head. As a 16 year old, I had only a slide rule. I gave it up. I had nothing more to give. I had no rings, no jewelry, no watch. Then we were separated into male and female groups. Men and women were walked separately to what they called the B camp of Auschwitz. The women's camp was separated from the men's camp by a wide road. There were about 24 barracks for men and the same number for women. There was the A camp which was for Russian prisoners. The C camp was for gypsies.^T

Assigned to Barracks^G^T

We were assigned to barracks. In the barracks we went through the same routine again. The barracks elders or capos were German cri^V minals who had been taken from German prisons and sent to concen^V tration camps to serve as the overseers of the barracks. They made us walk by a crate again and put in our valuables. If we had not given up everything, they threatened us or beat us to make sure we gave up anything we had hidden from the SS. The only thing I had that they wanted was a leather jacket. I told my father later on that I regretted having to give my jacket. He said something that I've never forgotten. He said "Child, if we ever get out of here, I'll buy you ten of these."

We were then assigned to bunks. The bunks were in three tiers- lower, middle, and upper. My brothers and my father were assigned to an upper bunk. It had straw ticking. It was just burlap filled with straw. We had not eaten at that time and we were not to get anything to eat. Then the next morning the routine began in earn^V est.^T

The Daily Routine^G^T

The barracks was the point where food was distributed and things went on. In the morning we got cups and spoons. We were given bread made from a mixture of wheat husks and hulls, rye, and bar^V ley to eat. Every person got two slices of bread, sometimes a pat of margarine, sometimes a little bit of marmalade. The coffee was toasted acorns ground up. It tasted terrible. The midday meal was soup with maybe a little bit of meat. Potatoes were the main ingredient and the kind of beets you normally feed to cattle in the United States. We were already hungry in the Theresienstadt ghetto because we did not get enough to eat. In Auschwitz it was worse. We were beginning to starve. In the evening we got another slice of bread, some coffee. No marmalade, no butter, no nothing.^T

Roll Call: The Appell^G^T

In the morning we had the counting of the prisoners. We were arranged in groups of five with just small distances between us. The SS trooper would come by and start counting one, two, three, four, five. If he miscounted, he went over it again. Sometimes we stood there two hours. I kept wondering why none of us tried to overpower this lone guard who had just a small pistol. But what could we have done? There were guard posts on either end and high tension wires in between. We would all have been killed. ^T

We did not know that Auschwitz was an extermination camp or that we could be put to death. The only thing that we did know was that there was always this sickly sweet smell in the air. We saw a large chimney belching smoke 24 hours a day. We saw German mili^V tary ambulances with the Red Cross symbol on them going back and forth. The Germans had painted the symbol on the ambulances to hide their true purposes from the camp prisoners and from overfly^V ing airplanes. Much later we found out these ambulances were car^V rying military personnel or cyanide poison gas cannisters for use in the gas chambers. At that time we were not permitted that close to the entrance gate of the camp. There was a small guard house manned at all times by about six SS guards.^T

Learning the Facts of Life in a Death Camp^G^T

I first realized the brutality of the way of life and death in the death camp, when I witnessed the flogging of a human being who had taken a piece of bread belonging to someone else. It happened at the mid-day meal. Suddenly an old Jewish man, 65 or 70, was taken by the German capo and laid over the horizontal part of the heat^V ing system, a brick flue. Two other capos held him down. He was given fifteen terrible cuts with a walking cane. The sound of the cane striking his flesh and his screams and pleas for mercy still echo in my memory. Toward the end of the beating his screams died and from his throat issued only sounds that a dying animal would make. When they finally let him off, he could no longer stand. Two prisoners were ordered to hold him upright and a piece of cardboard was hung around his neck. It had printed on it in crude letters "I stole bread." The old man was totally destroyed. Mucous ran out of his nose and tears streamed down his face. He was then marched around the barracks. All of us had to look or we were beaten also.

Thus were we all of a sudden acquainted with the facts of concen^V tration life. Perhaps it would closer to the truth to say concen^V tration camp death.^T

Making the Best of the Situation^G^T

My father, brothers, and I made the best we could of the situa^V tion. My younger brother had hidden a book by the German poet Goethe. We read it twice. We read it three times. In Theresien^V stadt ghetto we had some sort of cultural life. In Auschwitz there was nothing. It was the end of everything. We read the

book. We memorized it. We quoted from it. We had a deck of cards. We played card games. There wasn't anything else we could do. My brother got a job laying a stone road. They gave him a half a por^V tion of food more. But the work was excruciating. Nothing grew in Auschwitz. There was not a bird, not a living thing, no grass or anything.

Food^G^T

There was a drainage ditch running through the B camp. Daily the SS guards sent prisoners from other camps to lay sod along the banks of this ditch.. My mother checked the sod. We were desper^V ate for food. She remembered seeing in our small village the geese eating the wild grasses. She knew there were plants that we could eat in the sod. She gathered them and whenever we could we ate them. We were actually starving. We were dreaming of food. We were talking about food. We had not had enough to eat for three or four months already. We were at the end of our strength. Yet we hoped in 1944 that the end of the war was in sight.

No News^G^T

In the middle of July news traveled through the camp that there was an upheaval in the German government. Neither at Theresien^V statdt or at Auschwitz were we able to obtain any news. Rumors by the hundred thousands, not one bit of hard news. The Normandy landing might have already taken place. We were not aware of it . We were totally sealed off from the rest of humanity. The upheaval was the assassination attempt on Hitler on the 20th of July.

But our hopes were dashed in the next three days when we found out that measures would be more stringent than ever. Heinrich Himmler had been chosen to head the Interior Ministry in Germany. All the camps were under his jurisdiction. I had visions that we would be hailed in triumph back to the places where we came from and restored to all civilian honors and compensated for what we had suffered.^T

No Knowledge of Gas Chambers^G^T

People died of hunger because they had come to camps already weak^V ened. Here there was no such niceties as a burial in a coffin. The people who had died were thrown or stacked at the very end of the barracks row underneath the watchtower. They were stacked like cord wood, naked, without dignity, as they had died staring unseeing. Nobody to close their eyes. They were stacked four feet high. Every 24 hours a cart came. People were simply grabbed by the hand and foot and tossed on there. We knew they were taken to the crematory to be incinerated, but we still had no knowledge of the gas chambers and that people were killed or gassed in such numbers as they were.^T

We did know that the transport that preceded us had some people from Theresienstadt ghetto on it. We asked the German capos and other workers in the B camp where they were or what had happened

to them. They told us that they were moved. They deliberately did not tell us that their fate was the gas chamber. We were deceived by all of the camp officials. They were told by the SS if anyone talked about gas chambers and crematoria that this would be their fate too. And they knew the Germans meant it.^T

Moved from Auschwitz after Dresden Bombing^G^T

The only reason that I and my oldest brother got out is a bombing raid on a factory in Dresden, a large city about 150 miles away. It had been badly damaged by Allied bombers. All of a sudden we were called out. I was 19. My brother was 20. We were still in good physical condition. We were told that we were to be shipped off to a camp where we would do work in the German war industry.^T

Preparing to Leave Auschwitz^G^T

That was in August 1944. My brother and I were told we were going to go to a town near Dresden. We did not know what to believe. My mother sneaked into our barracks and took leave of us. She said "Let me stay with you tonight, my child."^T

I said "No, they don't allow it. You'll only be beaten if they find you here. Please leave. We'll be all right." So she left the next day early in the morning.^T

August: 1944 Getting Ready to Leave Auschwitz^G^T

We were taken to a barracks and told to undress completely. We thought that this was going to be the end. I had a small knife and some token I had been given by a girl in Theresienstadt. I had hidden it in my shoes. but they took care of that. Our shoes were disinfected. A Polish prisoner in striped uniform was there. He had a basin and we had to walk through this basin. He took our shoes and shook them out and beat them together. He found coins and valuables that people had tried to hide and we were given our shoes back.^T

Our next station was a barber. We were shorn completely bald and given striped uniforms with a number sewn on.. Each camp had its own numbering system. The oldest block elders and capos had low numerals like 642. We knew that they had been in German prisons and penitentiaries since 1934-35. Our numbers were stenciled in black ink preceded by a yellow triangle superimposed on a red triangle to form a Star of David. My number was 85,501. My oldest brother's number was 85,500.^T

August 1944 to January 1945 in Schwarzheide^G^T

We were loaded into cattle cars. we had nothing to sit on. We had lost a lot of weight and we were sitting on our bare bones on our behind. The railroad cars were locked. We had no tools to break the cars open. The planks were heavy so we gave that up . Finally we arrived at our new camp. It was called Schwarzheide. It had been a labor camp for prisoners of war, mostly deserters. By the

time we were sent there, it was a satellite camp of a much larger concentration camp called Sachsenhausen.^T

We were driven to an assembly place and marched about four or five miles from the railroad siding to the camp. We knew that we were in Germany because some of the inscriptions were in German. This camp did not have electric fences, but there were barbed wire fences. We were not given anything to eat or drink. We were dying from thirst until finally the camp authorities turned on the water faucet. We nearly killed each other trying to get something to drink. We had not had anything to eat or drink since the night from Auschwitz.^T

We were assigned to barracks. I was with my brother. We were told if you must go at night to the latrine, you must announce yourself to the guard with these words: "Prisoner asking to go to the lat^V rine." Then you had to wait a moment. The guard did not acknowl^V edge you, but then you could go to the toilet. Flood lights illu^V minated the camp. I hated the indignity of having to announce your destination, the latrine.^T

Unloading Bricks and Carrying Cement^G^T

Our job was to unload bricks from a railroad car. We did it with^V out any nourishment. We got approximately 700 to 800 calories a day while doing a job that required a minimum of 2500 to 3000.^T The work groups were marched out of the camp. At the entrance to the factory we were split off. Three or four SS troopers marched us to the place where we unloaded the bricks from a railroad car and stacked them. The brutality there was quite simple. The guards had rifles and they would take the rifles and beat us on the back on the head. Not on the face. Apparently they figured out if they knocked our eyes out, we would not be able to work. So they con^V centrated on the back mostly. Our other job was carrying cement bags.^T

At lunch some food was brought out from the camps. Occasionally I got some additional food because quite a few observant Jews decided not to eat it because it contained mussels, forbidden by Jewish dietary laws. I was able to get occasionally a bowl of soup more mainly because people chose not to eat it.^T

I was at Schwartzheide from July 1944 to October 1944. then I was transferred to the Lieberose concentration camp.^T

Eats Some Horse Meat^G^T

One of the highlights of Lieberose was when German civilians fleeing from the Russians made it as far as the camp. Their horse died and the prison cooks went out and got the horse, carved him up, and made a soup and some stew. We had meat for the first time.

One horse didn't go very far for 8000 prisoners but they used everything.^T

You ate because you had to hope for the next day . You had to get through that one day. Again we tried to make time go by. We tried to visualize what we would do when we got out. We had hopes we would find all of our family members again. That was how we lived from day to day. I did not see anyone of my family ever again until I met my younger brother in New York about two years after the war. I had only one sign that he was alive because one of the people that I worked with in one of the camps said that I looked like this kid he knew from Cologne. His name was Carl Herz. I said "That is my brother. Where did you see him?" This happened during the last three months of my life in a concentra^V tion camp.^T

Death March from Lieberose^G^T

One day I found a scrap of paper saying Allied troops are fighting the German army in the Hurtgen Forest. This was on the Germany-Belgium border. We knew that the Allied invasion had taken place. Later we learned it had been the Battle of the Bulge. All of a sudden we were given two loaves of bread in the morning. Instead of going to work we were told take our blankets from our beds and assemble by barracks. This is how the death march began and it was truly a death march. Of the 8,000 people that left Lieberose barely 1,500 arrived at the main camp.^T

It was snowing. We were exhausted by nightfall when we reached our first destination. People were already starting to break down after 7 or 8 hours of marching. We were told if you cannot march any farther sit down by the side of the road. A wagon will come and pick you up. There was no wagon that came and picked them up. I knew this when we had marched about 10 or 15 minutes more and sat down a minute to rest. The end of the column passed by and those people were not in the wagon. We would hear a few shots. It was the end of those people who could no longer make it.

The second day was worse than the first. We had no place to rest. The German guards made themselves huge bonfires where they sat around and were at least warm. We had no such thing. We froze. We had no protective clothing. No coats. Our shoes were nothing-wooden clogs, no socks. We froze. Our bread we had eaten after the second day. We were getting weaker and weaker.^T

They grabbed anyone that was weak and pulled them out of the ranks. They told them trucks would be coming to pick them up. They massacred them.^T

The war was coming closer. We marched. We no longer had bread or anything else to eat, but we had the snow for water. The SS troopers had machine pistols and were walking alongside our col^V umn. They were not happy because they had to march on foot to guard us. They also had no beds to sleep on. They were surly and the slightest infraction resulted in a beating with these heavy metal guns.^T

Finds Some Cod Liver Oil to Drink^G^T

In one of those places where we camped at night, I found in the straw something that saved my life. A Norwegian prisoner had lost a bottle nearly full of cod liver oil. I still had a crust of bread left. I had never had a great liking for cod liver oil and shared it with my friend. We ate cod liver oil on bread with salt.

It tasted like the finest delicacy you ever had because it sus^V tained us. Our bodies were able to absorb it. I know it saved my life. I finished that bottle. It gave me the strength to hold out until I finally got to the main camp in Sachsenhausen, some 90 miles away.

My friend and I tried to steal another prisoner's bread. Our plight was so desperate that we stole from each other. I have been a lawabiding citizen from the moment I was liberated from the concentration camp. I ran for the House of Representatives in South Carolina. But then we were reduced to scum. Our humanity was gone.^T

Arrives in Berlin and Taken to Sachsenhausen^G^T

Finally we arrived at the outskirts of Berlin. We were given a luxury that I never had. A ride first class on the German subway.

Beautiful. We saw the stations flash by--Friedristrasser, Tier^V garten, all the German stations. We rode the trains because many of the roads were bombed out. We got off the subway at Oranien^V berg, a suburb of Berlin, and marched to the main camp, Sachsen^V hausen.^T

In Sachsenhausen for Three Weeks: 1945^T

When we came into the camp, the barracks were arranged in a semi circle. They had this wonderful inscription: "There is only one way to freedom and its mileposts are duty, obedience, and love of country." That is what greeted us there.^T

We were assigned some barracks. There was nothing for us to do. There were no work details. They were just waiting for the Rus^V sians. It was January or February, 1945 nearly five years of war. We were given some watery soup and one slice of bread, calorie content about 300. It was a mixture of prisoners from many nations --Norwegians, Danish, Dutch, Belgian. We spent fourteen days in total ignorance of what the Germans would do. We knew only that the end was near for the Germans. We hoped that we would survive it. We feared the German guards, the SS, in a fit about losing the war would just gun us down.^T

We stayed in Sachsenhausen about three weeks. Each week we were shaved. The head and face were shaved. The beard was shaved. It was a degrading thing. We had a round cap and whenever we saw an SS guard we had to smartly grab this thing and hit our legs with

it, instead of a salute. The cap was not to be taken off. It had to be grabbed and torn off the head and slapped against the leg while we were walking looking neither right or left. When we encountered a German guard, we had to do this to show our total and abject subjugation.^T

Train Ride to Mauthausen^G^T

Then one day they assembled us and told us we were going to Mau^V thausen concentration camp to work in a factory. We were marched to the railroad cars. This time the SS did not have the German rolling stock--passenger or freight cars--just decrepit old cattle wagons. I often wondered how, despite their dire need to remove German population from the war zones, they were able to find rolling stock to transport concentration camp inmates. Nev^V ertheless they did. We were loaded into the cattle cars. The SS man took up his guard position carrying his gun. He was the only one who had a seat. He had brought a chair. We sat on the floor.

We had nothing to sit on. We were so thin we were sitting on our coccyxes and it was extremely painful. People started to die in this railroad car. We finally stacked the corpses up and we sat on them. The worst part to sit on was the face but we even then we were so crowded we sometimes sat on the face. Most of us would try to sit on the rumps of the dead.^T

Mauthausen^G^T

We made it to Mauthausen. Out of our car of about 70 or 80 people only 20 or 30 people got out of the car. The rest were left behind, dead, dying, or too weak to walk. We don't know what hap^V pened to them. Perhaps the work details from the main camp came and picked them up later. This concentration camp was fortress-like, overlooking the Danube River.^T

They marched us up to the top of the hill and it was excruciating. We had not had water now for about a day and a half. We were wild with thirst. There was a channel of water running down by the side of the road. We all dipped our cup in this dirty water. We drank it and we thought it was great. I don't know why we didn't get typhoid. Then the SS didn't want us to do that. They clubbed us back but I managed to get half a cup and drink it.^T

We were assembled and told to take off our clothing in the bitter cold. We were allowed to keep our shoes. I thought they really meant to kill us this time and I prepared to die in a gas chamber. A guard came along with a blue marking pen and stenciled a number on every prisoner's chest. I had the number seven. None of us knew whether 7 meant death and 3 meant life or 8 meant something else. But we were sent into the shower. All of our clothing was taken away. We had no clothing to dry us. We were run out of the showers into the place between the barracks and we stood there. Then it occurred to us we were assigned to barracks number 7. Those with the 7 on their bodies. We were given some sort of

clothing. I was handed a winter coat. I was totally naked under^V neath, shivering in the cold on the cobblestones. Finally some of the German capos threw me a pair of underpants and an undershirt and that was the total amount of clothing I had for subzero weather.^T

In the barracks the capo came around and asked if there were any Germans among us. A friend of mine and some other Germans answered "We are Germans."^T

He looked at us and spit out, "Jews! I didn't mean you." We thought for once because we belonged to the great German nation that these German capos at the end of the war would finally real^V ize that we were people who had shared their culture their aspira^V tion their suffering as a result of the Versailles Peace Treaty. Forget it. We were treated as the scum of the scum.

We starved in those barracks. One day they came asked if anyone was a mechanic, welder, or carpenters. I said I was a welder, although I didn't know anything about welding. "OK, you are going to Gusen to an airplane factory . Anything was better than where we were.^T

We were next to a women's camp in Mauthausen. It was separated from us by a tall brick wall, but we were able to talk to the women and find out where they had been and how they were treated. They were as ill treated as we were. They were starving. We heard these anguished voices from the other side -women's voices I'm from Graz. Is anyone from Graz? Yes, did you know my father or did you know such and such." In the end always the same thing: "Have you perhaps a small piece of bread you can throw to us?"^T

In Gusen Factory^G^T

We were put in a truck and sent to a camp called Gusen. By this time we were so thin that three of us were assigned a bunk bed about three feet wide. One person slept with his head at the foot end of the bed, while the other two slept with their heads at the top end of the bed. We could not turn over because we were laying so close to each other.^T

We had very little to eat and yet we were forced to work twelve hours a day, six days a week. In our emaciated condition we just dragged ourselves to the factory. It was in underground tunnels.

The factory produced fighter planes. I was assigned to help an old German prisoner who was a master welder. I didn't do any welding.

I dragged heavy aluminum wing spans and body parts to him and he would run his spot welding machine on them. It was excruciating work.^T

At Gusen, there was a humiliating new way of showing that we were prisoners. Our hair was permitted to grow out about a half inch.

Then through the middle ran a strip of shorn scalp. Here in Amer^V ica it would be a novelty that high school boys would do just to be different. Over there it was one of the most degrading things we had to submit to .^T

We no longer wore prison clothing because the German prison fac^V tory could no longer keep up with the demand. Also many textile factories were destroyed. Whatever old piece of garment there was we got it. It didn't make any difference anymore.^T

We worked in this factory and on Wednesday afternoons we had our treat. They had a sweet noodle soup that we lived for from week to week.^T

Going to the Wire^G^T

One thing that occurred frequently in those last days was what we called "going to the wire." Some people wanted to end their life and they couldn't unless they did something that was totally for^V bidden. Touching the barbed wire meant that you were trying to escape. I witnessed this three to four times in Gusen. In des^V peration a friend would say "I can't stand it anymore. I am going to the wire." He would go to the wire and touch the wire and a shot would come. The Germans were excellent marksmen. It only took one shot. That was the end of the suffering for that person.^T

I was a nineteen-year-old. My humanity was so debased that I felt that if the German's asked me to fight in their ranks I would have done it in order to get out. I must have been at the end. I felt that way. It didn't come to that.^T

Then about April 24 or 25 officials at the underground factory started to burn and destroy documents. We knew then the end was near. About April 23 or 24, the first Red Cross packages began to arrive and the SS disappeared. They silently stole away. They were replaced by Austrian military police who guarded the camp from then on. We still couldn't get out. We were prisoners but there was no more work and we waited.^T

Liberation^G^T

Some food came in. Not very much. We are now approaching the end of the odyssey. It wasn't even an odyssey . The odyssey was a lot easier for the Greeks than our trips through hell. On May 5th a tank came up to the barbed wire area where my barracks was located. The conversation was in Yiddish mixed with some English: "We are the American army. Your camp is being liberated. Stay here. You will get soup. The soup column is right behind us." His tank was followed by some jeeps and trucks. They picked up the Austrian military police and took them away. The guards' rifles were thrown on a pile and set afire by the American troops. Some^V body asked the soldier how come he spoke Yiddish. He said "I am a Jew from Brooklyn, New York." We didn't know Brooklyn. "You are free. The American army is behind me but stay in the camps so that there is no confusion. We assure you that you will be fed."^T

My torment had ended. I did not care any longer. I felt truly like a bird who has flown out of a cage. I did not know what the future would bring. I tried to go back to Germany. I tried to find my way back home I made my way to Linz, a nearby city. I went to a hospital. First they treated the scabies which had enveloped my entire body.^T

I was walking to Linz when a column of American soldiers picked me up and sat me on a jeep. One of them had a harmonica and they drove me through the villages. They stopped there and I played ^_Deutchland, Deutchland Uber Alles^_. They wanted to show the Ger^V
mans that the end had come. They had a bust of Adolph, one of the hundreds of thousands of busts, mounted on the jeeps. They had fixed it with a wire so that the head nodded back and forth.^T

I got number one American food. The first time I ate it, I could not even keep it down. After a while I could eat white bread some toast. I gradually got a little bit of strength back and I also got closer to Linz. I was not able to understand any English. The American soldiers could see from my face and my appearance that I was one of the concentration camp inmates. By that time they knew what "concentration camp" meant. They had liberated Dachau. I followed General Patch's army.^T

I was in Linz when General Patch held a review of his troops. One thing that impressed me beyond anything that I had seen was that the US army marched without any sound at all. They did not march with their hobnailed boots in goose step on the pavement. There was no sound just the soft muted foot fall. I thought how could they walk like that. This is not military. You have to have the hobnailed boots. The Americans did not have that, but they knew their business. They overcame the mightiest army in world.^T

Nobody in a well-fed nation like ours can possibly understand. We fasted for three or four years. To me it is inconceivable how any American in the land of the hot dog and the Mac hamburger could feel what hunger pangs are except coming from school and not get^V
ting fast enough to the refrigerator. I laugh at it now, but it was a bitter feeling then.^T

The only thing that kept me going was the will to see the end. I may have had feelings of vengeance but it didn't carry far. I could not conceive of slitting the throat of a German or putting him up against the wall and shooting him. My greatest despair was that the world took little or no notice of our suffering. My hope for so long was that I would get out alive and see my family again. From day to day I lived with this hope. It sustained all of us who survived. ^T

For myself I have decided that I will never stand by idly if per^V
sons of another race or belief are insulted or assaulted, even if it should mean injury or death to me.^T

Many people said well when I talked to them about that I'd been in the camps, the said well you must forget all that this is a new life . Forget all that start anew You were lucky and I thought it was useless to tell them that I wished that I could have shared my parents my families my sisters I would have gladly shared everybodys fate. I did not want to be separate and apart from them and I felt survivors guilt.^T

There has not been any day in the last 40 years that I have not thought of Auschwitz, of our people, and of the destruction of Jewry as a whole. The best and the brightest that were killed for no reason at all. Because I knew the best and the brightest in the camps. We had pianists that equal anyone that you can name here. We had philosophers , we had surgeons. They shared the death the defeat, the death of my sisters my family the fate of every Jewish person in Europe. We are not very many.^T

I have died in Auschwitz for, my soul died in Auschwitz and its still there. I have died for the last 40 years and there is no psychologists that can rid me of this it is so ingrained in me . I have seen ovens I have seen crematoria. I did not share the fate of the people in the crematoria but my soul is there. I have never lived a normal life. To myself I have never admitted that I live a normal American life. My family life and my own inner life it's there.