

Susanna Lukács Christensen, born in February 1933 in Makó, Hungary, discusses her parents, whom she met late in life through a marriage broker; the mother, born in 1898, having lived with her mother until her death; the father, born in 1892, being disabled, having had one of his knees removed and suffering from asthma; the father previously having been an office worker in Vienna and Budapest; being the only child and feeling she was the center of the world; the relatives of her mother buying two grocery stores for her parents; living outside the Jewish community and the family having very few Jewish friends; her father being an atheist and believing in assimilation; in 1939, her father insisting she go to a Catholic school to be "hardened"; her mother taking her out of that school when she started making the sign of the cross when passing a church; switching to a Jewish school where she was bullied by teachers and students for not observing Shabbath and feeling it was also because they were poor; her father realizing early that something terrible was about to happen; the Arrow Cross Party coming to power; Jewish merchants not being allowed to sell certain products, like wine; going to a non-Jewish secondary school and being one of only two Jewish students who got in on a quota because of their academic achievements; the teacher forcing the other Jewish girl, who was religious, to write on Shabbat; her teacher in Hungarian language saying everything would get better when the Germans came because they would remove all the Jews; remembering the shame of having to make and wear a yellow star in spring 1944; moving to one of the two ghettos of Makó, an old age home on the outskirts of town; not going to school as of April 1944; the managers of the old age home disappearing, later understanding they were deported because they were Jewish and Romanian citizens; at 5 am on June 16, 1944, the military police coming to their home, giving them 15 minutes to pack a bag and food for a few days; her mother boiling eggs to bring since they keep well in the heat; packing blankets and jackets; staying in a camp on the outskirts of Szeged, in a two persons tent, for a few days; all Jews from Makó being there, about 2000; being told they had to hand in all their money, valuables, jewelry and pens, or one in ten people would get shot; her father keeping a pencil anyway; still feeling safe with her parents; being moved to an old brick factory with all Jews in the province and staying there for a week, only having the food they brought with them; fights over food breaking out; being forced to strip naked to be disinfected and a German soldier walking around the women to humiliate them; the camp being divided into three groups; the first group being put on a train that reached Auschwitz; allied planes bombing the train tracks and preventing the second group, and the Lukács family, to be sent to the concentration camp; 23 of them ending up on a big farm in Austria, where her mother worked on the fields; helping in the kitchen; in November 1944 starting the journey to Bergen-Belsen, arriving December 7; staying with the same group and still having their own clothing; teachers in the camp organizing school but soon getting too weak and apathetic; her father deteriorating and becoming unresponsive; praying a bomb would hit them and end their misery; on April 6, 1945, the Germans telling them to pack and feeling hope return; arriving last to the lorries because her father could only crawl; the family not getting a spot on the train; a woman offering to take only her, but her father saying that if we die, we die together; waiting on the platform; getting some bread from a woman living nearby; a very long train set arriving and German guards forcing out prisoners in striped clothing; offering one of them food and a German guard beating the man to death for trying to grab it; a lorry taking them back to Bergen-Belsen; ending up in a barracks with sick Dutch prisoners; only 4 out of 40 in the barracks survived; a very sick Dutch boy singing "Es geht alles vorüber" (Everything will pass) before dying on April 17; standing by the gate watching carts with naked bodies pass and realizing her own legs looked like theirs; watching British troops arrive on April 15 and telling her father who thanked G-d they were free; her father passing away but feeling relief instead of grief because he had been in such pain; a British Jewish chaplain who spoke Hungarian, putting his hand on her head, blessing her and crying for the first time in a long time; arriving to a hospital; her mother being given the choice to return to Hungary or go to Sweden for 6 months to recover; leaving for Sweden on June 24, 1945; missing talking to her father when she was a teenager; wanting to tell her father "you did not die in vain".