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My dear friends, I am here to tell you the story of my life. It is a story full of of anguish, terror and despair. It is a story of a young Jewish girl's struggle for survival during the Holocaust . When WW II started I was 13 years old; by the time the war ended and I was liberated I was 18 years old. I am aware that some of you feel that we should move on, leave the Holocaust behind, look forward. Well, I have to tell you that I do not have this option for closure. My genealogy research stops at the gates of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and other concentration camps; I do not have a date for Izkor, I do not have a grave I can visit., I do not know how or where or when my dear once were murdered. I miss my family. My mother who survived the war with me, passed away in 1973, and although I have lost most of my family long before, hers was the first funeral I attended; all the others Hitler took care off. So, I ask for your understanding.

I was born in Poland in a city called Tomaszow Mazowiecki; of the 40 thousand population 13 thousand were Jewish. The main industry was textile, 85% in Jewish hands. My father was a textile manufacturer. I have an Orthodox background. I went to private school. My school offered a dual education, Polish and Hebrew with a smitten of English and Latin. I loved school, I loved reading. I still do. However, September 1, 1939 my world changed never to be the same. This was the day that Germany invaded Poland. Instead of going back to school after summer vacation I joined my parents in a basement which served as a bomb shelter. Three days later when we came out of the shelter the city was on fire; a bomb which did not detonate was in our back yard. We knew that we were in for bad times we just did not realize how bad. The German army entered the city marching down the streets in full military gear on

their way to conquer Warsaw and with it Poland.

Jews were ordered to wear a yellow star of David for immediate identification and a ghetto was established. The Jews were restricted to live in a designated part of the city where the prevailing population was already Jewish. All Jewish property was confiscated. This was the beginning of a premeditated, systematic effort that accomplished the extermination of 6 million Jews in addition to Gypsies, homosexuals, Communists and others. Life in the ghetto was torturous. The Jews could not leave the ghetto and the gentiles could not enter. There was no food available unless one had money and could buy some on the black market at very inflated prices. People were starving and dying like flies. There were no medications. There was not enough space to live; often a few families shared one room and typhus was rampant. Every morning a horse and wagon moved along the streets of the ghetto streets picking up the dead.

With time the ghetto was getting smaller. People were being sent away to work others were dying from malnutrition and typhus. One night we heard shots all through the night. In the morning we found the whole Jewish elite doctors, lawyers, teachers including their male offsprings dead in the gutters. As the ghetto was shrinking we kept moving within. At one particular time my parents and I were living in a room at the borderline of the ghetto and the city overlooking trenches left by the Polish army. One morning when I was by myself I noticed a pick up truck stopping before the trenches and people being unloaded. I did recognize the civilian men; they were Jewish men who lived across the apartment of my best girlfriend. The father and the four adult sons were known to do commercial painting for the German army. One by one they were shot down into the trenches by one of the German officers. Rumors circulated that one of the men hit a horse belonging to a German.

A cleaning establishment that cleaned uniforms collected from dead German soldiers at the front opened outside the ghetto; Jews were being hired. My father decided that we should take a job and perhaps we may have a better chance to survive. The work was repulsive; our job was to scrub off the blood of the uniforms. The location of holes in the uniforms were telling the tale of the soldiers' death. One morning, the Jewish workers, that worked at the cleaning establishment, were taken to a warehouse. Before we entered the warehouse a large number of male workers were detained and taken away by German soldiers. My parents and I were among the one that remained. We felt relieved; we were still together. A little while later the Germans came back and took with them 150 men they needed to fill the cattle cars. My father was one of the 150. This picture will forever be engraved upon my memory: as I looked out the window I could see my father's face ashen, his figure shrunken. This was the last time I saw my father; he was 39 years old. I never heard from him again. We were told later that the shipment that included my father went to Treblinka. Treblinka was a camp that did not hold inmates, they were killed as they arrived. I miss my father badly.

A few month later, in process of liquidating the ghetto, a group of Jews was sent to Pionki, an ammunition factory that the Polish army left intact when they surrendered to Germany. My mother and I were included in this shipment. There we worked in place of men who were taken into the army. We left the barracks in the morning and came back from hard work to camp in the evening. The ammunition was made with 100 % proof alcohol. Some people found a way to smuggle the alcohol into the camp and exchange it for food. One evening when we came back from work we met with three corpses hanging at the entry of the camp as a warning to all not to smuggle alcohol.

August, 1944 all the Jewish workers were shipped out of Pionki, destination unknown, among them my mother and I. We were packed 120 or more to a cattle car; there was not enough room to sit; we were all standing. The trains were rolling for days. We did not get any food; nor did we get any water to drink. Finally we arrived at our destination: Auschwitz. Not having had any access to news, radio, newspapers or any other kind of information we did not even realize from the beginning that we were in the devils den. When we arrived, we were pointed in the direction of a building in the distance. On our way there we met some Jewish men working at the road dressed in blue and white striped uniforms with yellow stars. These people told us that we are not in this camp to work and that we are walking straight to our death. We absolutely refused to believe them. The sense of denial was very strong.

Finally we arrived at an undistinguished building. Men and women were separated. As we entered we were told to undress completely leave everything behind and pick it up on our way back from the showers. In the mean time we were led to the next room where our heads were shaved presumably for sanitary reasons. We were ordered to enter the showers. Little did we know at the time that only by the grace of G-d did we come out alive from these showers. The same taps were capable of discharging water or poisonous gas. In the majority of cases it was the later. On the way out, still naked, instead of getting our things back, we encountered 2 German officers holding oxen tails. They directed each one of us to the right or left. There was a method to this selection. The one to the right looked younger and healthier. The one to the left were the sick mostly older women and children. My mother and I were sent to the right. The proportion of "to the right" was much smaller than to the left. The women to the right were tattooed with consecutive numbers, the one to the left were not. Never again did we see the people who were selected to the left. After the selection we finally got some clean shmates to cover our bodies; no underwear.

How can one describe Auschwitz? It was the extension of hell. The part of Auschwitz, where my mother and I were placed was called Birkenau. The camp was separated from other camps with wire loaded with electricity. Thousands of women were roaming around. Each woman, with the exception of the girls who were guarding us, had no hair, wore an ill fitting garment and looked like a zombie. We entered Auschwitz looking and feeling like normal people and soon we looked and felt like animals. We slept on three story bunk beds on boards no linen no blankets, 12 to a row. Not having anything to do, just waiting all day to be counted was very demoralizing. The biggest problem was food or rather the lack of food. We were given our daily food portion once a day. It consisted of a thin slice of black bread and a tiny patty of margarine. In addition we were given a bowl of soup fitted for animal consumption. This had to last a whole day. We all learned what a powerful weapon hunger is. Not the kind of hunger that comes with dieting or a shortage in the refrigerator or not being able to get to the market on time; no, this hunger was so strong that it made me forget anything else and eventually made me forget how to be human. At times when I dared to think of survival it would be to have a loaf of bread all to myself.

After four weeks of this "gehena" we were advised that the group that came from Pionki, will be leaving Auschwitz the next day, again destination unknown. We were full of apprehension; is this good; is this bad? The following day the group was taken for processing but by the time we arrived at the showers, that we were to take before we left Auschwitz, it was already too late; the showers were closed for the day. As a result we had to sleep that night outdoors. This was the night when I opened my eyes to reality. This was the night when denial did not suffice. The fires were burning straight into the night skies, braking up into splinters of souls going straight to haven in a hurry to leave this imposed hell. The stench of burning bones permeated the area and filled

my nostrils; and to this day when I think of it, it still does. I was thinking, is this how my father perished ? Is this how I will die? All these people that were sent to "work" did not go to work at all. They all landed here or in a place like this...This was the night when I lost my hope for survival.

Following morning the group left Auschwitz. From there we were taken to a succession of working camps that provided little work and little food. All were ammunition factories in Germany proper. Whenever we could we did make sure to produce ammunition that would not work properly. This gave us a feeling of contributing to the war effort. We knew that we were committing sabotage because this is what we were aiming to do. It did not matter that if caught we would be killed on the spot, since we also knew that we will not survive. The words "Shma Israel" were continuously on our lips. We were waiting for the call, we were ready for G-d to accept us. It was not a matter of if but when. I recall one camp when the allies were bombing the ammunition factory and we shared a bomb shelter with the SS girls who were in charge of us. They were petrified from fear of dying and we were trilled to see them squirm; if we die at least we take them along with us.

The feeling of impotence increased when we came to Bergen Belsen. It was winter. We slept in tents on the ground. The washing facilities consisted of long outdoor pipes with intermittent faucets. The pipes were frozen; there was no water coming out. The bathroom facilities were also outdoors, long narrow branches of wood to be used as seats over trenches in the ground, all in view of German guards watching us from towers.

From Bergen Belsen we were taken to another ammunition factory in Torgau near Dresden. This place must have been the realm of the devil. Hard work, very little

food, the worst sanitary conditions, cruel SS women; but there was also hope because we could hear the thunders of artillery coming closer. However, when they came too close, we were loaded into cattle cars again. 750 Jewish women into 13 cattle cars. But this time there was no place where to take us. The trains were going in circles. We could see, through the little cattle car window the names of the same cities over and over again. April 10, 1945, the inevitable happened. The trains were stranded at a large railroad station full of ammunition and other explosives not having where to move. We heard the sound of planes and then the bombs started falling. By the time the Allies realized the human cargo it was too late. Everything around us was exploding. Some of the wagons disappeared with the women in them; some women were hanging from the little windows as if they wanted to escape. Our wagon fell apart. Now what do you do with freedom of movement in enemy territory? The women who survived the bombardment had a choice of going right toward the forest or left to a little road. As we found out latter, the women who went to the right were shot down by the SS women who were hiding from the bombs at the forest. My mother and I chose to go to the left.

By this time we were a group of 10 Jewish women. During the bombardment my mother sustained a wound in her head and I was wounded in my back. As we walked we came upon a city of universities and hospitals where our wounds were taken care of. A German doctor took out a piece of steel from the back of my mother's head. Nothing could be done for me, I kept spitting blood. Years later while taking an x ray my doctor was surprised to find a foreign body in my abdomen where the piece of steel wandered from my back. The American Army gave the German doctors a few hours time to get the sick and wounded out because the area became a part of the war zone; the Germans were shooting from buildings marked with the Red Cross. At first the head doctor, told us that we will be included, and will be a part of this humanitarian

gesture; but when the time came to leave she advised us that the Americans did not want us. What was there to do? We were left in an empty city with no provisions and a few Russian P.O.W, all amputees. A few days later the Russian Army occupied the area. They gave us food and a place where to stay. We were fortunate that one of our woman spoke fluent Russian. Following morning the Russian speaking woman asked our saviors for some supplies. She spoke again Russian but these soldiers were not Russian, they were German soldiers who during the night recovered the territory. What followed was the only truly humanitarian act that I witnessed from a German during this whole horrible ordeal of the Holocaust and I own my life to it. The soldiers took us to the head quarters where we were turned over to a very young German soldier, perhaps 18 or 19 years old in full combat gear and rifle in hand. We did not hear the orders he received but were told to follow him. It was obvious that he was to kill us. We followed him for some time along railroad tracks when he pointed to a road leading to a city, turned around, and left without a word. We walked quite a while. Artillery was shooting from both sides. We were in the midst of the front. We arrived in a little city. A doctor took care of our wounds. The baker gave us bread. We slept in a barn. The mood in Germany was changing. Germany was about to surrender.

So, Hitler is dead and I am alive but at what price?

I see a parade of faces before my eyes that no one remembers because there is no one left to remember.

I am left with a survivor guilt syndrome “ did I take the place of my dear little cousin whom I loved so dearly? “

I function well during the day when I am more in control of my feelings, but when will the night terrors stop?

When will my husband stop waking me in the dark of the night to interrupt the horrors of my nightmares? Please tell me when? p