

YOM HASHOAH

I SURVIVED
I REMEMBER
BUT
YOU MUST NEVER FORGET

by

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HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

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PROLOGUE

THE HOLOCAUST WAS THE PLANNED, SYSTEMATIC ATTEMPT BY THE NAZIS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS TO ANNIHILATE THE JEWISH PEOPLE, TO ERADICATE EVERY VESTIGE OF JEWISH LIFE AND CULTURE FROM THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT, AND ULTIMATELY FROM THE WORLD. THIS IS WHAT THE NAZIS CALLED "THE FINAL SOLUTION TO THE JEWISH QUESTION". DURING WORLD WAR II, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE THROUGHOUT EUROPE WERE SWEEPED INTO THE NAZI NET OF DEATH.

MOREOVER, THE NAZI ASSAULT AGAINST JEWS WAS UNIQUE IN THAT IT INVOLVED THE MOBILIZATION OF ALL THE RESOURCES OF THE STATE AND THE MOST ADVANCED SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE TIME TOWARD A SINGLE GOAL, THE TOTAL ANNIHILATION OF A GROUP OF PEOPLE.

THROUGHOUT OCCUPIED EUROPE, JEWS WERE ROUNDED UP, ISOLATED FROM THE REST OF THE POPULATION, STRIPPED OF THEIR POSSESSIONS,

BRUTALLY HERDED INTO MAKESHIFT GHETTOS, AND
ULTIMATELY DEPORTED TO SLAVE LABOR AND
DEATH CAMPS. NO JEW WAS EXEMPT, REGARDLESS
OF AGE, SEX OR STATUS.

THE NAZI'S SINGLE-MINDED EFFICIENCY,
COMBINED WITH THE COLLABORATION OF
SYMPATHIZERS, APATHY OF BYSTANDERS, AND
INDIFFERENCE OF THE ALLIES, RESULTED IN THE
MURDER OF SIX MILLION JEWS--TWO THIRDS OF
THE JEWISH POPULATION OF EUROPE.

GOOD EVENING LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MY NAME
IS ROBERT MENDLER.

I AM A SURVIVOR, A SURVIVOR FROM THE WORST
TRAGEDY IN HUMAN HISTORY. I WOULD LIKE TO
TELL YOU A LITTLE ABOUT MYSELF.

I WAS BORN IN POLAND IN A SMALL TOWN CALLED
NOWYTARG, NOT TOO FAR FROM A LARGE CITY,
KRAKOW.

ON SEPTEMBER 1, 1939, WHEN WORLD WAR II
STARTED. I WAS 13 YEARS OLD.

SOON, THE GERMAN ARMY OCCUPIED MY HOME TOWN
WHICH WAS LOCATED 14 KILOMETERS FROM THE
CZECHOSLOVAKIAN BORDER. BY THEN,
CZECHOSLOVAKIA WAS ALREADY OCCUPIED BY THE
GERMAN FORCES.

IN NO TIME, THE S.S. COMMANDOS AND GESTAPO WERE TAKING JEWISH HOSTAGES. IT WAS ONLY THE FIRST FEW HOURS OF THE GERMAN OCCUPATION.

IN THE NEXT 24 HOURS, THE ORDER CAME OUT THAT ALL JEWISH MALES AND FEMALES OVER 10 YEARS OF AGE MUST REPORT TO THE TOWN SQUARE. WE WERE BRANDED BY BEING FORCED TO WEAR WHITE ARM BANDS WITH A BLUE STAR OF DAVID SO WE WOULD BE RECOGNIZED AS JEWS.

AS TIME WENT ON, WE WERE ASSIGNED TO DIFFERENT FORMS OF HEAVY LABOR. WE WERE DEPRIVED OF ALL EDUCATION. WE WERE MISTREATED AND BEATEN. OUR FOOD WAS RATIONED. YOUNG WOMEN'S HEADS WERE SHAVED, AND THEY WERE FORCED TO PERFORM HEAVY LABOR. OTHERS WERE RAPED BY MEMBERS OF THE S.S. TROOPS.

AFTER A FEW MONTHS OF OCCUPATION, I WAS SENT TO A LABOR CAMP IN A SMALL TOWN CALLED "ZAKOPANE." THIS WAS MY FIRST CAMP AND MY FIRST EXPERIENCE AWAY FROM MY FAMILY AND MY HOME. I WAS 14.

I WORKED IN THE STONE QUARRY. MY JOB WAS TO CRUSH THE STONES TO BE USED FOR THE BASE OF A SUPER HIGHWAY WHICH WE LATER BUILT. EVERY THREE WEEKS WE WERE SENT HOME FOR ONE DAY TO DO OUR LAUNDRY AND TO SEE OUR FAMILIES IN THE GHETTO.

AFTER A FEW MONTHS, I WAS SENT TO A DIFFERENT CAMP. I WAS ASSIGNED TO THE LUMBER YARDS, THEN THE STEEL FACTORY, AND FINALLY TO THE COAL MINE.

WE WERE CONSTANTLY GUARDED BY THE S.S. TROOPS. MANY OF MY COMRADES WERE KILLED FOR NO REASON AT ALL--EXCEPT THAT THEY WERE JEWS. THIS WAS HOW WE LIVED UNTIL SEPTEMBER 30, 1942.

EARLY THE NEXT DAY, ORDERS CAME OUT THAT ALL JEWS MUST REPORT TO THE SPORTS STADIUM AT 7 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING. WE ALL WENT WITH OUR FAMILIES. WE WERE DIVIDED INTO THREE GROUPS. THE YOUNG AND HEALTHY FROM AGE 13 TO 50 ON ONE SIDE. WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND THE ELDERLY ON ANOTHER SIDE, AND THE SICK AND CRIPPLED ON YET ANOTHER SIDE.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE THEN TRANSPORTED TO THE GAS CHAMBERS IN BOX CARS. THE SICK, CRIPPLED, AND ELDERLY WERE TAKEN TO THE TOWN

JEWISH CEMETERY AND EXECUTED AND BURIED IN ONE MASS GRAVE.

IT WAS THEN THAT I LOST MY FATHER. HE WAS 45 YEARS OLD, AND A COUNCILMAN IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY. ALL THE LEADERS OF THE COMMUNITY WERE EXECUTED--500 IN ALL WERE KILLED AND BURIED IN ONE GRAVE.

THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF THE FINAL
SOLUTION OF THE JEWS IN EUROPE.

AT THIS TIME, WE WERE SENT TO DIFFERENT
CONCENTRATION CAMPS. WE DID ALL KINDS OF
WORK. WE WERE USED AS SLAVE LABORERS FOR
THE GERMAN DEFENSE.

IN 1943, I WAS SENT TO AUSCHWITZ AND
BURKENAU. AS WE ARRIVED BY TRAIN IN THE
BOX CARS, WE WERE GREETED BY THE FAMOUS
STURM FUROR, DR. MENGELE. WE CALLED HIM
THE "ANGEL OF DEATH." HE AND ONLY HE
DECIDED WHO SHOULD LIVE AND WHO SHOULD DIE.

I WOULD LIKE TO TELL YOU A LITTLE BIT ABOUT
THE LIFE IN OUR CAMP.

LIFE IN CAMP IN BUNA

EVERY DAY WE WOULD GET UP AT 5 A.M., MAKE OUR BEDS AND GO TO THE LATRINE TO WASH AND TAKE CARE OF PERSONAL THINGS, THEN BACK TO THE BARRACKS. WE RECEIVED ONE SLICE OF BLACK BREAD, BLACK COFFEE, AND SOMETIMES A PIECE OF MARGARINE.

BY 6 A.M., WE ALL REPORTED TO A COURT YARD. WE WERE DIVIDED BY "COMMANDO". MY COMMANDO NO. WAS 47. EACH COMMANDO HAD HIS LEADER WHICH WE CALLED "CAPO". MY CAPO WAS JEWISH. HIS NAME WAS LUSTIG. WE WERE LUCKIER THAN OTHERS.

BY 7 A.M., WE BEGAN TO MARCH TO WORK. AT THE GATE, THE BAND PLAYED; AND WE WERE COUNTED OUT. COMING BACK, WE FOLLOWED THE SAME ROUTINE. LUNCH TIME THEY BROUGHT SOUP IN A BIG THERMOS BACK TO THE FACTORY WHERE WE WORKED.

I WORKED FOR I. G. FARBEN CO., IN BUNA
WERKER, AT AUSCHWITZ.

WE WERE ASSIGNED TO CONSTRUCTION WORK,
ALWAYS GUARDED BY THE S.S. TROOPS. IT
WASN'T PLEASANT, BUT WE GOT USE TO IT.

WE ALL KNEW HOW TO HANDLE IT. AFTER WE PUT
IN 12 HOURS AT WORK, WE RETURNED BACK TO
CAMP. AT THE GATES, THE BAND PLAYED UNTIL
WE REACHED THE COURT YARD AND UNTIL WE WERE
COUNTED OUT. THEN WE RETURNED BACK TO OUR
BARRACK FOR OUR RATION OF SOUP, BREAD, AND
COFFEE.

ALMOST EVERY WEEK, WE HAD TO OBSERVE THE
HANGINGS OF OUR COMRADES. OUR COMRADES
WERE HUNG FOR WHATEVER REASON THE NAZIS
COULD FIND. THEY ALWAYS HAD AN EXCUSE.

CREMATORIUM

I SPENT TWO YEARS IN AUSCHWITZ. ON JANUARY 18, 1945, THE SOVIET ARMY WAS ADVANCING. THE NAZIS ABANDONED THE CAMP AND MARCHED US ON FOOT 65 MILES THROUGH HEAVY SNOW AND COLD WEATHER. MANY OF US DID NOT SURVIVE. PEOPLE WERE DROPPING LIKE FLIES. FINALLY, AFTER TWO DAYS OF MARCHING, WE REACHED OUR DESTINATION, A LITTLE TOWN CALLED "GLIVITZ."

WHEN WE ARRIVED, 150 PEOPLE WERE LOADED INTO OPEN BOX CARS TO BE TRANSPORTED TO SASKENHAUSEN WHICH SHOULD TAKE ONLY FIVE HOURS TO TRAVEL. WE TRAVELED FOR TEN DAYS THROUGH CZECHOSLOVAKIA, AUSTRIA, AND GERMANY WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER. WE ATE SNOW. PEOPLE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA WOULD THROW BREAD FROM THE BRIDGES WHEN OUR TRAIN WAS PASSING BY. WE BECAME CANNIBALS AND ATE DEAD BODIES.

FINALLY, WE REACHED OUR DESTINATION, BUT BY THEN MORE THAN HALF OF OUR COMRADES HAD DIED FROM STARVATION.

AFTER 9 CAMPS AND ALMOST 6 YEARS BEHIND BARBED ELECTRIC WIRES AND CONSTANT MISTREATMENT, WE ARRIVED AT THE FINAL DESTINATION.

MY LAST CAMP WAS IN BAVARIAN. WE ARRIVED IN A SMALL CAMP IN POCKING ON APRIL 1, 1945. FOUR HUNDRED MEN WERE ASSIGNED TO BUILD A SMALL AIR FIELD FOR THE STUKA JET FIGHTERS. I BELIEVE THIS WAS THE WORST CAMP. I EXPERIENCED GREAT HUNGER, MISTREATMENT, AND SICKNESS.

ON MAY 1, 1945, THREE OF MY FRIENDS AND I ESCAPED FROM CAMP AND HID ON A GERMAN FARM BECAUSE THE U.S. ARMY WAS IN TOWN.

THE GERMAN GUARDS WERE SETTING EXPLOSIVES AROUND THE CAMP TO BE BLOWN UP AS THE THEY LEFT. BY THE WAY, THE GERMAN FARMER TOOK A GREAT RISK IN HIDING US, AND THE NEXT DAY THE FARMER CAME WITH THE AMERICAN SOLDIERS TO THE BARN WHERE WE WERE HIDING. AT THAT TIME, WE WERE TO WEAK TO WALK--HE SAVED OUR LIVES.

ON MAY 2, 1945, WE WERE LIBERATED BY THE U.S. FORCES.

AT THE AGE OF 19, AFTER ALMOST SIX YEARS IN TEN CONCENTRATION CAMPS, I WEIGHED 75 POUNDS. I WAS SICK WITH TYPHUS AND SPENT THREE MONTHS IN A U.S. ARMY HOSPITAL, BUT I WAS HAPPY TO BE ALIVE AND FREE AGAIN!

I WAS ROBBED OF MY FAMILY, MY FRIENDS, AND MY CHILDHOOD, MY EDUCATION-- EVEN THE RIGHT TO MOURN FOR THOSE WHO WERE MURDERED FOR NO REASON.

AFTER THE WAR, I LIVED IN GERMANY FOR FOUR YEARS. I HAD NO PLACE TO GO. I CAME TO THE UNITED STATES ON MAY 5, 1949. FREE AT LAST--TO MY NEW HOME, MY HOME SWEET HOME!

FIVE YEARS LATER, I BECAME A UNITED STATES CITIZEN AND GOT MARRIED. I NOW HAVE TWO GROWN SONS.

I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS I HAVE FOUND IN THE UNITED STATES. I AM PROUD TO CALL LATROBE AND THIS BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY MY HOME.

HERE IN THE UNITED STATES WE TAKE MANY OF OUR FREEDOMS FOR GRANTED. THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, FREEDOM OF RELIGION, AND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.

NONE OF THESE BASIC FREEDOMS WERE PRESENT
IN NAZI OCCUPIED EUROPE. UNFORTUNATELY,
THE SAGA OF MAN'S INHUMANITY DID NOT END
WITH THE THIRD REICH. BIGOTRY AND HATRED
REMAIN POTENT FORCES IN OUR OWN TIME. IN
RECOGNITION OF THAT FACT, WE MUST NEVER
AGAIN TAKE LIGHTLY THE WORDS OF THOSE WHO
WOULD ROB US OF OUR FREEDOM AND DIGNITY.

REMEMBER, WE SHOULD ALL WORK TO PRESERVE
AND PROTECT THESE FREEDOMS SO WE NEVER HAVE
ANOTHER NAZI GERMANY AGAIN. I GIVE SPECIAL
GRATITUDE TO U.S. ARMY'S, 83 DIVISION, FOR
LIBERATING ME AND GIVING ME A SECOND CHANCE
AT LIFE AND FREEDOM.

MARTIN NIEMOLLER

I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU THE WORDS OF
PASTOR MARTIN NIEMOLLER.

"IN GERMANY,

THEY FIRST CAME FOR THE COMMUNISTS, AND I
DIDN'T SPEAK UP BECAUSE I WASN'T A
COMMUNIST;

THEN THEY CAME FOR THE JEWS, AND I DIDN'T
SPEAK UP BECAUSE I WASN'T A JEW;

THEN THEY CAME FOR THE TRADE UNIONISTS, AND
I DIDN'T SPEAK UP BECAUSE I WASN'T A TRADE
UNIONIST;

THEN THEY CAME FOR THE CATHOLICS, AND I
DIDN'T SPEAK UP BECAUSE I WAS A PROTESTANT;

THEN THEY CAME FOR ME, AND BY THAT TIME
THERE WAS NO ONE LEFT TO SPEAK UP."

MARTIN NIEMOLLER, PASTOR
PROTESTANT CONGREGATION BERLIN
IMPRISONED IN SASKENHAUSEN AND
DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMPS

WE ARE THE LIVING WITNESSES OF THE MOST
BRUTAL EVENT IN THE HISTORY OF OUR PEOPLE.
WE LIVE WITH OUR MEMORIES AND DEAL WITH OUR
EMOTIONS IN DIFFERENT WAYS AS WE GO ABOUT
OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES. TO SOME, THE
CRUELITIES, FEAR, AND DEHUMANIZATION OF OUR
HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE IS STILL SO VERY
PAINFUL THAT THEY ARE UNABLE TO TALK ABOUT
IT EVEN AFTER ALL THESE YEARS.

OTHERS MANAGED TO CONFRONT THE PAST, AND
ARE MOTIVATED TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES IN
THE HOPE THAT THE HORRORS OF THE PAST WILL
TEACH SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS FOR THE
FUTURE.

THOSE OF US WHO ARE INVOLVED IN HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CONSIDER IT A RESPONSIBILITY THAT HISTORY HAS PLACED UPON US. WE ARE WILLING TO RE-OPEN OLD WOUNDS AND SUBJECT OURSELVES TO THE PAIN EACH TIME WE TELL AND RE-TELL OUR TALE, FOR WE MUST NOT PERMIT THE EVENTS OF THE HOLOCAUST TO BE FORGOTTEN.

OUR HISTORY IS THE HISTORY OF THE GRANDEUR OF THE HUMAN SOUL AND THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE. FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION, GOD REDEEMED OUR FATHERS AND HE WILL REDEEM US AND OUR CHILDREN IN THE DAYS TO COME. WE STAND BEFORE GOD...WE BOW TO HIM, BUT WE STAND ERECT BEFORE MAN!

WE SURVIVED BUT OUR LIVES WERE DESTROYED.

THOUGH WE LOOK LIKE YOU, WE CAN NEVER BE LIKE YOU. WE WEAR NICE CLOTHES. WE TAKE VACATIONS LIKE YOU. WE MAKE BEAUTIFUL AFFAIRS AND INVITE MANY FRIENDS.

BUT THE FRIENDS I WANTED MOST TO SEE, THEY
NEVER ARRIVED. WE GO TO FUNERALS, AND WE
CRY FOR THE ONES THAT WE NEVER BURIED.

I ALWAYS WAKE UP AT NIGHT AND THINK OF
THEM. BUT IN THE END, SURVIVORS COULD NOT
KEEP SILENT. IT DIDN'T WORK FOR THEM OR
FOR THE GENERATION THAT FOLLOWED. THEY
FELT THEMSELVES RESPONSIBLE TO THE PAST AND
FOR THE FUTURE.

AMERICA GAVE US A HOME WHEN WE HAD NONE.

AMERICA EMBRACED US WHEN WE FELT REJECTED.

IT GAVE US A FEELING WHEN WE WERE
STATELESS.

THE INITIALS "D.P." WHICH IDENTIFIED US AS
DISPLACED PERSONS YEARS AGO HAVE TAKEN ON
NEW MEANING. TODAY THE LETTERS "D.P."
IDENTIFY US AS DELAYED PILGRIMS. WE ARE
PROUD TO BE AMERICANS.

I SURVIVED...

I REMEMBER...

BUT YOU MUST NEVER FORGET...

THANK YOU.

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