

From the Testimony of Anna Lenji on Transportation from Hungary to Concentration Camps

Q: Did you have any idea of what that would mean, to be picked up and transported?

A: Well, we didn't have very clear notions, but we realized that we would be taken to camps. In a minute I'm going to tell you what idealistic views we had of that because we were picked up one morning at six o'clock. They banged on the entrance gate and for us, who were the grandparents, the grandmother, my husband's father, my husband's sister and her three-year-old baby and myself, there were about ten soldiers for this helpless little group, which was absolutely ridiculous because even if only one soldier would have come we couldn't have done anything against it, but there were ten of them. And then we were taken into a camp where of course we stayed for two or three weeks and were fed miserable food. And we lay on wooden beds or whatever.

Q: What could you take with you?

Ai: This small bag which we had prepared - a pair of shoes and cosmetics like toothbrush and soap and a comb and a brush - and a change of underwear and I was quite lucky because I had a warm leather coat, mutton, sheep-lined coat which was fur-lined, but in the inside so I could keep it until the end of my deportation and then my husband had a warm coat and that was all, that was about all we had.

Q: Had you considered before hiding?

A: Yes, we considered hiding, but this was quite impossible because as soon as we would approach the railway station there would already be a number of people around us. Everybody knew us, everybody knew who we were - that was a small place. You couldn't get lost, you couldn't hide because it was just impossible. There were only a few Hungarian families and mostly these originally German "schwabbs" who lived in that place. What I could do was ask one of the workmen in the factory whether he would be prepared to save some of the silver cutlery which I had with me and he very kindly offered to do

that and as a matter of fact, after we came back from deportation he handed it back to us which was a very rare thing. He was just a decent person. Now we had a maid at home - we had several maids - but one who was particularly devoted to me. She was a Hungarian peasant woman who was totally illiterate, but when we were taken away she had somebody write a note to my parents to Budapest to let them know that we had been picked up and taken away, which I also thought was very decent of that woman, so she had that good feeling to let my parents in Budapest know...

And so after two weeks we were taken, we were put into...

Q: Who were you together with? Where were you?

A: The camp was of course run by Hungarians under the orders and supervision of the German soldiers. We were not maltreated in that first initial period. We were given food and we were given blankets and we could sleep and eat, but we did nothing during the first two weeks.

Q: You were together in one barrack?

A: In one barrack we were all together - men and women and children and everybody. We were all together. My sister-in-law with her three-year-old baby, three-year-old daughter was also there. My father-in-law, the grandparents - incidentally, the grandfather died. He was quite advanced in age and he died a natural death of course under these terrible circumstances. It probably hastened his departing this world. And then one day we were put into these wagons, these horrible, horrible wagons, these cattle cars in which they squeezed seventy-five people and during three days and three nights we were there in these cattle cars, all locked up without air, without any possibility of moving around and all necessities had to be done in those cattle cars for three days and three nights. We were unable to sleep. We only had the food that we took along. And as I discovered, you can do without food, but you can't do without liquid and by the end of the third day I already had visions. At that time I didn't know that these were visions, but I saw all the faces elongated, very narrow, very long and that was a kind of hallucination which begins when you don't get enough liquid into your body. My husband had his diplomas with him, that he was a graduate of the German Technical University in Brun and he was convinced that even if we are being taken to Germany he

would be taken to a factory and be employed as an engineer because there is probably a technical, a shortage of technical manpower since most are on the front as soldiers. Now by the end of the third day when there was only one wish in everybody's heart, to get out of this hell, all of a sudden they opened the doors of these wagons and shouted that six hundred fifty young, healthy people are required for field work. I said to my husband: "Just let's get out of here, just let's get out of here, at any price and at any cost" and he said: "Well, you think so? Shouldn't we go on and use my diploma and maybe they'll employ me as an engineer?" I said: "I can't bear it anymore" and that was our good fortune that we got out of the cattle cars and they accepted us. We were both young and healthy and strong-looking so they kept us down and all the rest had to get back into the cattle cars. Among them, my husband's family - his father, his father's second wife, his sister and her baby. The grandmother in the meantime died in the wagon.

Q: In the wagon - was it opened at all?

A: No, it wasn't opened at all. There was a small slit in the wagon, on the top somewhere, so that some air could get in, but very little and it was terribly hot. This was on the 1st of June, Pentecost and it was a nightmare. Well, anyhow, so we got down to the ground.

Q: Did anybody else other than your grandmother die?

A: Oh yes. Several died during this journey, but I can't recall anymore who it was.

Q: But what happened to the bodies?

A: Nothing. They were left there until the doors were opened and then the bodies were taken out. Until then the bodies were there.

Q: And you had no chance of getting water to drink?

A: Nothing, absolutely nothing. We had no access to anything. We had no contact with anybody. We were all there in that wagon and whoever had a little water, a drop, drank. Whoever didn't have, didn't drink. But that was only what we took along with.....whoever took along with him any water. But certainly we couldn't take a supply for three days or three nights - that was impossible.

Q: You'd been supplied with food and water?

A: No, no. All we had was what we took along ourselves.

Q: Yes, but you'd been told to take?

A: No. We weren't told anything.

Q: There were people without anything?

A: Probably.

Q: And how did you manage? Was there a bucket there or something?

A: No, nothing.

Q: What happened if you.....

A: Nothing. You had to do it the best you had. In your hand, on the soil, in your bag, whatever you had. It stank up to high heaven of course and it was a terrible, terrible thing. It was hell. So we got out and that's why we decided that we would at any price get out and then we had to say goodbye to my husband's family because they were shoved back into the cars, but of course nobody knew who's doing the right thing. We didn't know whether we would survive. They didn't know whether they would survive. And we arranged that whoever gets back first to Budapest would let my parents know that on this date we were still together. Unfortunately, the car, the railway went on to Auschwitz and of course there immediately my sister-in-law who had her three-year-old little girl with her were ordered by Mengele to the right, to the left. Anyhow, to the side where they were put into these gas chambers and that was the end.

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