

## Ruzena Deutschova In Auschwitz



On the right is Trude, my girlfriend, who isn't Jewish, and I'm on the left. The photo was taken in 1964, I went back there during a cooperative excursion. After the war, I always wished to return there someday and to light a candle there.

The entrance, which says "Arbeit macht frei", that is, "Work will set you free", is unforgettable thing for me. Not far from the entrance were the offices, they've put a museum there now. The gas chambers were in the back. In front, a gallows appears before your eyes. That's where they hung [Rudolf] Hess after the war, who was commander of the Auschwitz lager. A lot of prisoners lost their lives there before him. However, we didn't see the barracks where we were housed. They'd been torn down.

As we arrived in Auschwitz, the train stopped. A man, who they later said was Mengele, just waved: Right, Left. My mother and siblings left, me and my sister were sent right, or vice versa, doesn't matter. My sister got lost among all the people in the meantime. I ran after Mother to help her with all the kids. Mother sent me away to 'find Hana, because you've got more brains than her, the family should be together'. I don't know about my older brother either, he also got mixed up in the crowds. They surely put him with the men, I don't remember that. As I ran around looking for my sister, Mengele gave me slap, and shoved me over to the other side, which saved my life. I broke into tears because I couldn't help my mother. We didn't know right away, what was happening, we didn't know.

They housed us in a barrack, where there were a lot of us. It was raining. There was standing water there, so we could only sleep sitting or standing. There were hundreds of us there in one place. You

couldn't get any rest there. Every night someone went insane, ran around or messed themselves. There was no water there. We had to go out to a latrine, but nobody dared go out at night because they were afraid they'd be shot. We woke at dawn. They counted us. We stood in lines of five, a lot of us suffered at night because of the cold. In the daytime, a person agonized through 35 degree [C.- 95 degrees F.] heat. Every dawn, we were practically frozen, just standing in line. They poured coffee into a 'csajka' [a tin or aluminium plate with high sides] for breakfast, towards evening we got a little piece of bread with some bit of meat. We were continuously hungry. There was no water, they brought that from the cistern. You had to stand in line for water. My sister Hanna and I, and three girlfriends from Galanta stood in line. Of course, everybody pushed near the water. The SS soldiers hit the women with the metal [buckle] on their waist belts, as they scuffled for the water. If someone was hit in the head, it could kill them. there were always a couple who died.

Once I got sick, I got typhus which causes a high fever. In the barrack, where we were, there was a place where they collected the sick. From there they took the sick along with the dead in a Red Cross car straight to the crematorium, we knew that. My sister, and girlfriends started crying, don't give up. As they all hustled out an SS woman came and gave me two slaps so hard I'll never forget them. I was seeing two candles burning in front of my eyes. My ear started bleeding, my mouth, everything, but I got better. I was able to go out, and I stood out there in line. The sickness went away, even though I didn't go to a doctor. A seventeen year old person wanted to stay alive. The Slovak girls who were living in the camp already for three years [the first transport of Jewish girls and women aged 16 -30 arrived from East Slovakia in Spring of 1942], they were the 'Lageralteste' or 'Stubendienst'[German - 'Camp elders' or 'Room Duty']. They always said, 'Do you see that smoke? They're burning. That's where your mother and sisters went'.

I found out about the death of Mother and my sisters still in Auschwitz, in July. We'd been there for two weeks, and we heard. We smelled it also, because it stank, the smell of burnt meat lingering constantly. New prisoners arrived daily. We were in barrack seven. I remember the gypsy [Roma] camp was on the other side, where there were German gypsies. One night we heard only that they were yelling, help, help, they're taking us to the crematorium. In the morning, everything was quiet, none of the gypsies were left there. They were all young, we couldn't get to them, there was an electrical fence separating us from them. We saw them. In their place came prisoners like us.

I met my mother's younger brother, Uncle Alter in Auschwitz. He unpacked the trains. The old man asked, who's with me. I said, 'Hana'. - 'Go to work, if they take you.' I asked him, 'Where's mother?'. He said, 'Mother's already in a good place.' He worked in the crematorium, with clothes. We reported for work a couple days later when there was a 'selection'. They took us to an area, there could have been thousands of us. They took a thousand for work. They put us on the night shift at the crematorium. In Silesia, the weather is terrible. It was so cold at night, we almost froze, while in the daytime, you can hardly stand the heat, it burned your skin. There was a woman from Pozsony [Bratislava]. It was cold, we were shivering, so she said she'd give us a little gas[heat], but we shouldn't yell. When she turned on the gas, we thought we were being gassed. Of course, we started screaming. She shut everything quickly so the Germans wouldn't hear. The next day they gave us water, to bathe, we got clothes, and headed towards Allendorf [One of the labor camps of the Buchenwald concentration camp]. We went for three days, they bombed Dresden horribly. They let us out there, so we could do a little 'business', at least. One German who happened to be passing, asked me, naturally in German, what are you? a boy or a girl? I said girl. He shook his

head and said, 'Gott, how you look!' So you can't say that every German was rotten.