

# Lilly Lovenberg

Lilly Lovenberg

City: Budapest

Country: Hungary

Interviewer: Ildiko Makra

Date of interview: May 2004

*Mrs. Lilly is 86 years old. She is a woman of short stature and average weight, gray-haired, and an exceptionally nice, smiling person. Though she has difficulty walking, she is completely self-sufficient at home.*

*Her fresh mind doesn't show her age, and she is spiritually a very balanced, cheerful personality. Generosity and care flow from her personality, especially in regard to her family, children and grandchildren.*

*She's extraordinarily good-natured, and her value judgements are sober. Since the death of her husband, Lajos Lovenberg, she has lived alone in a two-room apartment in good condition, on the second floor of a multiple-story apartment building in the city.*

*Her modest home is orderly and clean. The shelves of the bookcase are lined mostly with books on Jewish themes, but also photos of her family, grandchildren and husband, and a few nice religious objects.*

*She spends her weekends at her children's homes. Lilly said that she thinks its especially important that future generations understand the events of the past, primarily the destiny of the Jewish people, and mostly the story of the Holocaust, everything the Jews went through and had to suffer during World War II.*

- [Growing up](#)
- [During the war](#)
- [After the war](#)
- [Glossary](#)

- **Growing up**

I'm Lilly Rosenberg. I was born on 1st January 1918 in Hetyen [today Ukraine], Subcarpathia [1](#).

My mother, Maria Klein, was born in 1871. There was a one year gap between her and my father. Jakab Rosenberg, my father, was a merchant and farmer.



He was born in 1870. Both of them were born in Hetyen. We weren't strongly religious, but we observed the holidays, and prayed. My mother kept a kosher kitchen. Both of them perished in Auschwitz [today Poland], in 1944, in the crematorium.

My father had only lived in Hetyen, before they took him to Auschwitz. He started working when he was fourteen, and got together enough money to buy 40 hold of land in Hetyen. My father, my brothers Moric and Gyula, as well as our coachman took part in World War I. While they were there, my mother had to look after her other four children and the farm.

Having arrived back, Moric bought the farm from the money he had saved during the war. The farm was managed by Moric and my father from then onwards. Anyhow, the other sons were helped with university education while the daughters with finishing four classes of the civil school.

My parents had six children: three boys and three girls. My eldest brother, Moric, was 24 years older than I. Gyula followed, then Berta was born in 1904, Jozsef in 1908 and Erzsebet in 1911. Apart from me, only Gyula survived the war [WWII]. He went to Spain in 1929. He lived in Madrid for two years.

Then he went to Venezuela, because his wife's brother was an engineer, and lived there, so they went there. They lived there for some time, then went to Dominica, and lived there for a longer period. He wasn't in Europe during the war. He died in 1968.

Berta got married in Szamossalyi to a produce salesman. They had three children: Judit, Eva and Marta. My older sister, who was separated from the family, was with me to the end, but she couldn't take it. We were liberated, but from the starvation she caught typhus. I survived, and she died in Prague [today Czech Republic] on the return trip.

Jozsef was a doctor, but died young. He didn't marry. In Marseilles [France], he was shot down with his partner. He was one of twenty doctors who fled from Prague. The Germans caught them, and executed them in 1944.

Moric was taken to Auschwitz also. He took care of the finances, because he was the oldest, since Gyula wasn't home. Once he got so involved in the work that he got a hernia. That's how he got into hospital during the time when all the Jews had to register.

The doctor knew him and respected him, and took him in among the patients and operated on his hernia. In Auschwitz, they first picked him to work, but when a German went into the bath, and saw his fresh thirty centimeter scar, they took him away to the crematorium.

When I was a child, Moric and Berta were mostly with me. We worked at home, did handwork, sewed, while Moric directed the farm work. We went to a Calvinist school in Hetyen. I liked mathematics the most. Later I liked history, too.

I was raised in a decent, religious family. My parents taught me every tradition. Our household was kosher. I went to cheder, and learned to pray. I liked Pesach the best because we had special dishes.

There were 150 residents in Hetyen. It was a small village, but pretty. There were only three Jewish families in Hetyen. The closest religious community was in Beregszasz [today Ukraine], and that

was Neolog [see Neolog Jewry] [2](#). I went to cheder in Ujfalu, my parents always sent me there during vacation.

My aunt Pepi [Valter, nee Rosenberg] lived there. In the summer break, I learned how to pray in Hebrew for two months, year after year, until I became a big girl. There was an older man, who taught the Jewish children. There wasn't a Jewish school in the area.

Our house in Hetyen had three bedrooms, a big veranda and a big yard. I remember when I was three years old, there was a Czech-Hungarian border realignment [see Trianon Peace Treaty] [3](#). The English and French came with big automobiles.

We were playing on the road with a little boy, with black, broken stones which were to be used to fix the dirt roads, when these cars came by. They said, 'Oh my, the border re-alignment is today.' That was in 1921. They separated Tiszakerecseny. We were also on the borderline, on the Czech side.

In my youth, we went to Kaszony[mezo] for get-togethers. We sang and danced. We sang the Hatikvah [4](#), the anthem of Israel today. This was in the Czech period, so I could have been 17 or 18. There were many Zionist organizations in Beregszasz, and I went to the Somer [see Hashomer Hatzair] [5](#). It was so centrist. Dezso Rapaport organized the Zionist movement. Uncle Berti [Bertalan Bernat] was a big Zionist, he always told us to learn a profession, because they needed that in Palestine.

Once I went to visit Berta in Szamossalyi. That's when I first heard the huge anti-Jewish instigations, at a rally before the election. Then what happened was that a Calvinist bishop arrived in Hetyen at the Calvinist church and gave a speech. Everybody went to hear the bishop speak.

He was a very democratic person. And he said, 'Unfortunately, hard times are coming, black clouds rumble above us. German boots are already stomping on the streets of Prague. I'm afraid, that black clouds will reach us soon.' I still remember those exact words. Then we didn't have to wear the yellow star yet, we still went about freely.

[Editor's note: Yellow stars were introduced in Hungary after the Nazis occupied the country on 19th March 1944.]

Before the deportations, I started to work, in 1942. In Beregszasz, I learned to tailor and I taught tailoring, because Uncle Samu, the exceptionally big Zionist, said, 'No diplomas, learn a trade, because in Israel that's what is important.' So I learned a trade and continued to do it. The Jewish laws affected everything, our whole lives. The educational ones meant I couldn't continue my tailoring classes. I had been learning to sew for a year, and tailoring with a famous seamstress.

I was still in Hetyen in 1942, and was still teaching tailoring, but I had to stop because racism really started then. Fascism had spread to a few places. Hetyen hadn't yet been touched. It hadn't been decided yet, that Jews couldn't have industries, but it was clear that we had to sell the business: the spices and general store.

We weren't allowed to have a business. Moric, Erzsebet and I were home then. Gyula had married, Jozsef was studying in Prague. My older sister had found a husband in Mateszalka District, in

Szamossalyi and had three children. You could travel, but Jews weren't allowed to continue their business activities; I had to give up teaching in 1942.

- **During the war**

When the Germans entered Hungary [see German Invasion of Hungary] [6](#), it was put up that every Jew had to put five days of food together, and to be in readiness by a certain time. I already told you that Moric got a hernia from the hard work. I'd never seen anyone so tortured in my life, as my brother was then.

They operated on him, it was a success. Meanwhile, they had taken us to the ghetto. When they came to register all the Jews, there were no Jews in the hospital, and Erzebet and Moric weren't home. So they weren't registered anywhere. A couple of days after Moric's operation, they both came to the ghetto on their own, to be together with us.

At the beginning of April 1944, the constables [7](#) came for us, stopped a wagon at our gate, and we had to get into it. The whole family went: first my father, then Mother, then me.

They took us to the Beregszasz ghetto. We were on the grounds of a brick factory.

At the end of April 1944, they took the area's Jews and the Ruthenians together, by transport. At the beginning of April, they had begun herding us into the ghetto; we were in the ghetto for a month. We stayed under the roof in the brick factory.

The food we brought with us ran out in a few days. Then Etelka, the watchman's wife came into the ghetto. She said, 'They say that they're killing all the Jews, all of them.' I told her, 'Etelka, whenever there's a big harvest, one or two stacks of wheat are left. I'm going to be one of them. I'm going to survive.' I told her that.

On 30th April 1944, they took us away, and on 2nd May, we arrived in Birkenau [today Poland]. They told us they were taking us to work, and the old people would go to special treatment. They didn't say where, just that it was in Germany.

They didn't tell us anything, just treated us like animals. In the boxcars, everybody went together, but when we arrived, and got off the train in Auschwitz, they separated the women from the men. The trip took two or three days. The train stopped along the way, but we couldn't get out.

We just stayed in the boxcars the whole time, the little window was barb-wired, and we peeked out of there. Some died along the way, they threw them out. My parents, Moric, Erzebet and I were together. At Kassa [the city was on the Hungarian-Slovak border], when the Hungarian constables gave us to the Germans, my brother was laying there fresh out of his operation in the train car; we were crowded together.

He said, whatever happens, Lilly is going to survive. We had to leave our belongings there. 'Everyone move calmly, everyone will get their belongings,' they said in German. Everything was in German. We understood; my parents spoke German fluently. And for those who didn't understand, someone translated to them.

In the ghetto, they had already told us that whoever had valuables, gold or jewelry, had to take it off. We took everything out. I left a watch. When we arrived in Auschwitz, the people in striped clothes, who had already been there for a long time, from Slovakia and Germany, waved at us not to bring anything in.

So I took my watch and threw it to them. They yelled in German, 'Men together, and women together.' When we had been separated, they yelled for the women over 60 to step aside, a German SS [man] pointed in which direction!

My mother was 70 years old and weighed 85 kilograms. She had been 100 kilograms a long time ago, but when these troubles aroused, she lost weight. That's when we got separated from each other. We thought we would be able to visit each other. The Jickovics girls, three sisters, also from Hetyen, were there with us the whole time.

Their mother went together with ours. But we decided that Erzebet would go with the older women to take care of them. Then they took us into the bath where we had to unpack our clothes; we were still in our own clothes, when we went to bathe. The older residents [the prisoners] started staring at them, and came for them. I said, 'Don't touch them, they are mine!' They had a good laugh, and then took them.

They shaved us bald; we got a full length gray dress, big clothes, knickers, stockings and a pair of socks. We had seen a group, all bald. 'How they look!' we said. We thought they were crazy. They told us, 'Just wait, soon you'll be crazy too.' And then it was our turn. When we came out, we didn't recognize each other. We looked around to see who was where, everyone had totally different faces.

As we moved, I hear somebody yelling, 'Lilly, Lilly!' My sister came with a loaf of bread in her hand, the baked kind from home. 'What did you do? How could you leave Mother?' I asked her.

'I didn't want to, but the Germans wouldn't let me go, they beat me back with a rubber club.' 'And why did you take the bread from Mother?' I asked, and she said, 'He took it from her and gave it to me.' I said that not all Germans are the same. Erzebet survived all the horrors. She died on the way home, but I'll get to that later.

Moric was chosen for work, and when he went into the bath, a German saw his thirty centimeter fresh scar and took him away to the crematorium. The first day, when we had to stand for the 'Zellappell' [German for roll call], at 4am the fun had already started. Zellappell means the counting.

That's when they counted us. I got two socks, and one was a really warm stocking, which came up to my thigh, the other was a short sock. And bald, in the dawn cold, I tied a turban on my bald head, so I wouldn't freeze. When the SS came to me, he slapped me so hard, I thought my head had fallen off. 'What are you thinking? You have a turban on!' He took it off my head. I had no idea it wasn't allowed. Such a hard slap on the first day for me!

Our barrack commander, Alizka had been there for four years, and was a Slovak Jew. The barrack commanders were Jewish also, but there weren't just Jews, there were also Ukrainians. There were those who had been convicted of something. There were Communists, and German prostitutes.

They convicted them, and they worked in the camp as overseers.

There were robbers and killers, too, it was only that their sign was a green triangle pointing down. Every three months, they put the people who worked at the crematorium into the crematorium, so there wouldn't be anybody to talk about what happened there. They made the Jews do all the internments.

Erzsebet's condition was weaker than mine. They often took her to the hospital, where she got a little better, but soon broke down again, and they took her in again. Once they whispered behind me that yesterday there was a big selection at the hospital, and my sister was one of the selected. That night I escaped to the hospital, and found my sister: she was alive.

They put us in the group called Canada. The Canada group meant we sorted the clothes taken from the transports of Jews. [The Canada command was a group of hundreds of inmates in Birkenau, whose job was to meet the arriving trains, unpack them, and sort the different valuables and belongings found on each train.

The warehouse where the belongings of the dead were sorted was called Canada.] The better things had to be packed separately. The underwear and everything had to be separated. It wasn't hard work, and we got the very nice clothes, the striped ones: grey and blue stripes and a blue silk belt.

We had a red scarf on our heads, and everything was brand new. We got black boots which we had to shine up every day. We had to march nicely because the international express train passed by there. We went to work next to where the train went by. So foreigners saw what great things the prisoners were doing. That lasted six weeks, because then the transport from Hungary was over. And our jobs were done, Canada was shut down.

They put us to work cleaning up ruins. We had to dig out the rocks with a pick-axe from the dilapidated and bombed houses. It was horribly heavy work. We had to load the big rocks into a coal tub. When the tub was full, 18-20 of us pulled it by the thick ropes attached to the side.

We had to transport that for I don't know how many meters. I was in the 18th group. After we'd dumped it, we had to put the stones in nice piles. After we made the piles, we pulled the coal tub back, and started the work again. That went on for a while. Then they put us in potato-loading: loading train cars full of potatoes for soldiers. I was scared by then, because my arms were really heavy.

When we arrived, they gave us bread, and I thought it was home-made soap, that's how it looked. That's what we had, plus two dekagrams of margarine, plus they gave us a half liter of soup which was concentrated. It looked like the slop they used to give to the pigs at the neighbor's house in Hetyen. There were potatoes in it. Everyday we got the same thing, no variations.

For dinner, we got a cup of black coffee: something brown with saccharin. You had to save your bread. I don't know how many dekagrams it was, but it wasn't a half kilogram. I always went out to the trash heap, and collected the vegetables off the top, which the kitchen had thrown away. We washed them well, and in a tin can on two bricks, we cooked what we had found, inside the barrack. There was a place in the middle of the barrack for that.



In the area of the Lager [German for camp], where we were, those who were chosen for work could do things like that, because they didn't inspect us. After work and before Zellappell, we had an hour to travel freely between the barracks. Those in Lager C didn't go to work, they didn't get food. They were exterminated.

In the beginning, we didn't even know. We found out, about three weeks later, that our parents were no longer alive. The barrack commander, Alizka, yelled for silence, because there would be big trouble.

There were 800 of us in one barrack, and so there was a lot of noise, and she was always scared, and in revenge she told us to remember where we were, and that our parents had been cremated the day we arrived. We had always seen the big fires. They don't bury people here, they burn them. We didn't think we would end up there.

They only took Jews and gypsies to the crematorium. The gypsies worked in the neighboring barrack, and one day no gypsies came out, not even one. They said that they had cremated 3,500 gypsies that night. It was horrific. When we found out they had cremated the gypsies, and we didn't know who would be next in line, we panicked.

Then we were storing potatoes. That was our work after Canada, and since I was the daughter of a landowner, I knew how to store potatoes. We took 50 kilogram crates over to the railway to the warehouse. Once, somebody hid four potatoes.

One of the SS [women] carried a mace with a ball on the top like the swineherds used to have. I wasn't there, because my sister was in the hospital then. I had just gotten back, when everybody was standing there with their skirts up, and she'd beaten their bottoms.

Everybody got clubbed eight times. She told me to stand in line! I got them too, but with full force. Those who got it first, she hit with her full anger. Our behinds were blackened. Then we looked at each other to see how badly our bottoms had been beaten, and the Germans were peeking in.

One of them said to the clubber, 'How could you beat them like that, they're women.' And when our shift was over, the more sensitive one came over to us and said, 'Everybody can take four potatoes, but hide them, so they don't see them at the entrance.' That's how they compensated us.

It happened one night, when I first heard Hungarian from someone other than my colleagues. I went out to the trash pile to look for something. In the dark, I heard a guard cursing in Hungarian, 'God dammit, what do I do? Shoot her?' He was talking to himself. When I heard him I thought, thank you God, there are Hungarians here! So I went away, he didn't shoot me, I got lucky that night.

[Many Hungarian ethnic Germans, so-called 'Schwabian' SS, served in the camps. There were also Transylvanians, ethnic German 'Saxons', who knew Hungarian very well. For example, one of the selector physicians, Victor Capesius was often sent out to the Hungarian transports, because it was very calming for the deportees that someone spoke their mother tongue.]

Once, we got near a cabbage field around noon near where we worked. There the girls ran in, one, then another, and got out a cabbage, and ran back. I was so scared, I didn't dare. I saw the guard there, he was aiming at me. I called out to him in German to let me take a cabbage. Not possible. But what did he do? He turned around, turned his back to me.

I understood that he didn't want to see anything. I pulled one out, and my friend pulled out two. I barely stood up, when I heard an SS on a horse galloping towards us, and poor Nelli started to run with two cabbages.

She shouldn't have run away. I didn't run away. I stood petrified, and let the cabbage drop from my hand, and waited. When he got there, he jumped off the horse, put the reins in my hand and jumped on Nelli. Well, Nelli in her wood clogs, and pipe-cleaner legs, got it. He hit her with the highest degree of sadism, kicked her, cut her, crushed her and humiliated her, 'Die Schweine-Judin!

If a German officer says stop, and you dare run away!' He left her there, Nelli had pissed and shat herself. Everything came out of her. The German took down our numbers and said that we were going to court, because it was forbidden to steal cabbage. What hurt me was that the others who had also taken cabbages had fled.

My sister had sent word from the hospital to bring her some kind of vitamins, a little cabbage leaf. That's why I took the cabbage. Well, then we went to court. Three days later, they called us over. The woman judge addressed me to tell her what happened. I told her that my sister was in the hospital, and I wanted to bring her some vitamins, a little cabbage leaf.

That's why I pulled out the cabbage. 'And the guard?' she asked. I said, 'I didn't see him, he was standing with his back to us. And that's why I dared to pick the cabbage.' The woman judge liked the fact that I didn't get the guard involved in it. That's why she didn't punish me by having me shaved bald again. The punishment was to shave the hair which had grown back on our heads.

That meant a lot, because around then there was talk about the front getting closer. And they took transport away from there. We were punished with a red mark on our backs. [In Auschwitz, the political prisoners got a red triangle, this mark was on their chest, in front.] This marked that we couldn't go out of the Lager grounds to work. That was our punishment.

There was no time limit: we didn't know how long it would last. Those prisoners who had this mark were condemned to be cremated. But this was secret. [In this story, this could only be some kind of SS-authority, perhaps the Gestapo Politische Abteilung, but it's likely, that they simply summoned them to a high-ranking SS guard (woman). And since this was Birkenau, it's truly miraculous that they weren't immediately shot.]

I was put in the punishment barrack, and my sister Erzebet stayed in the other barrack. There was food in the punishment barracks. They had milk there, and boiled potatoes. I took some milk to my sister because they gave us the best of what they cooked. The workers just got the scraps.

Those who were punished were long-time prisoners already. There were Jews, Ukrainians and also high-ranking ones there. They had their connections with the kitchen. We were in Birkenau [(Brzezinka)] [8](#) for six months.



Suddenly we heard that they were taking the transport to Germany. The order came that nobody could leave the barracks after dark. Trucks were coming, and we had to get on. This was what they told the punishment barrack. There was lots of screaming, and rumbling.

When the barrack was half empty, the barrack commander came over holding a little girl by the hand, maybe sixteen years old. She told me, 'You and Nelli come with me.' She took us to the empty part in the back. She said, 'Hide in here, in one of the beds farthest in the back, on top, in the hollow of the bed.'

The sound of a fly is not loud, but don't even make that much noise. 'I'll come back for you!' We got in and waited in silence. Suddenly, the barrack emptied out. There was a horribly great silence: you can't imagine what that terrifying silence was. We stayed there covered up.

I heard an SS officer asking the commander woman, 'All 800 are gone?' She said, 'Yes' in German. The officer left, and the woman came over to us with tears streaming down her face, 'So now you can come out. Come out, that's all I can do.' I didn't understand what she meant by that. We followed her. 'And where do we go?' we asked. 'Wherever you want', and she left.

Only later did I find out that we were the only three who survived that night, out of 800. The others were all killed that night.

After that, I went looking for my sister in the barrack I'd been banished from. It was completely empty. I started to ask around and they said, 'They're over there, crammed together, two barracks in one, like herrings. A train is taking them in the morning.' And so I went over there, and good Lord!

The guard, who was a prisoner too, didn't want to let me into the barrack where my sister was. I showed him my number, and told him to look for my sister. I told him that she was in there, and that I had been left behind. He let me in. I screamed out her name and found her. She was squashed. I almost passed out from the horrible smell in there.

Then in the morning, they started for the trains. They gave us two slices of bread for the trip. And we had a backpack, which I had saved. It's in the Yad Vashem [9](#) Museum in Israel.

We thought they were taking us to Germany. We didn't know what day it was. We had to walk to the trains for nearly two days straight. Then we had to stop because there weren't any more trains, they had to give them to the army, they needed transport. They put us in a giant tent, a thousand of us slept on the bare ground. They brought us soup, but it was so salty, that we couldn't have it. It was nettle soup.

Then, two or three days later, a train came and took us to Ravensbruck [10](#). There we were in quarantine for three weeks. We got soup at noon. It was a huge camp. Some went out to work. There was so much sadism, cruelty.

They beat up the prisoners; they were dirty, and muddy. It wasn't like in Birkenau, or in Auschwitz, that there was a number on our arm, but instead there was a huge swath of lime on their backs, and a cross on their clothes. You could see they were prisoners from far away. They were numbered, but their backs were marked.

But they didn't take us to work, we were under observation in quarantine, to make sure we didn't bring any typhus or diseases in. Beds were side by side. Next to me there was a woman, she was very glad to be in her own clothes. It turned out that she was the wife of the Captain of the Budapest Police.

I asked her, 'Well, how did you get here?' She said, 'They called my husband in for interrogation once and he never came home. I went looking for him, I waited and waited, they said he would come. Then I asked to speak with my husband. They told me to get dressed, take some clothes with me, and they brought me here. Here I am. I don't know anything about my husband.'

They then transported us further. We traveled for days in the train, and arrived in Germany one night, in a small camp 200 kilometers from Berlin, Malchow [11](#). Malchow was a labor camp. We arrived at night, there were no lights, no water, there was nothing. Everybody had diarrhea, and all kinds of problems.

Everybody went to the makeshift wood shack nearby to take care of their business, but early the next morning, we cleaned it out, because an SS woman came. We had arrived in a strange place, and didn't know where the toilet was. We didn't know anything. But we weren't the only ones who'd done that.

This SS woman saw that we had cleaned it up, and she said, 'We did the same thing, we didn't know where the WC was.' It was humane of her. We were in quarantine for a while. They only gave us a couple of faggots of wood, so there wasn't really any heating. There were 38 of us in those bunk beds on legs. And we only had a thin black and white blanket on us.

It was already late fall, because the grass was frozen. We were ordered to rip out the grass. After we did that, we were ordered to go near the forest to cut sod squares. They put me in an automobile, but I thought I was going to die. It was so numbingly cold, without clothes, in drizzly, rainy weather. But thank God in the last minute, the SS woman couldn't stand the weather either. She cancelled the work and we went back.

After that, they assigned us to work in a munitions factory. We had to go on foot a long way, eight to ten kilometers. In the morning, we got a cup of black coffee, and 20 dekagrams [7oz.] of bread. At the work place, where we were assigned, we went into a long, enormous, indiscernible forest, a terribly long way, but you couldn't tell anywhere on the road, where we were. We went underground, below the forest. There was a huge munitions factory under the whole forest, 58 bunkers.

I went to a bunker where we filled shells with gunpowder. As I wasn't in such a bad shape as some, they put me on the machine. The filled shells came down the conveyer belt in boxes, and I had to jerk the machine. That sent the box further down the slide. But if I didn't pull the machine precisely, we would all blow up. The German said, 'Be careful, it has to be precise, otherwise we blow up.' We worked there for a long time.

Then when one machine broke down, a worker came to fix it, who was French, and he always sang. And in his song, he let us know that we shouldn't be scared, we would soon be free, because the front was coming. There was nobody there who could have told us that.

We worked everyday, we left and we came back. Twelve hours of work a day, but we had to keep the place tidy when the other shift came in. We worked two weeks day shift, and two weeks night shift. That went on for quite a while.

One day, one of the little shells jumped into the pocket of one of the prisoners. When it was time to leave, near the gate, he tossed it out. The Germans found it, and they thought there was some kind of conspiracy going on. They didn't let us go to work, they drove us out into a clearing, and we had to stand in a circle. 'Tell us what's going on, who brought the shell in?' Nobody knew anything! Then we ran in circles. All day running, and running.

They gave us no food and no water for three days. After the third day, every tenth person fell over and died. And then they gave us a little coffee slop one day. More running, running again, people fell out of the circle, by the weekend it was every fourth person. Nobody knew anything. One of the SS women passed out, she couldn't stand the sight of the torture. After some time, somebody cried out that there was a crazy person among us, and he threw the shell. We hadn't worked for a week.

When they let us work again, we had a half hour lunch break. They gave us a cup of soup, with a carrot floating here or there. We tried to survive on our own. Since we were in a forest, at noon we went looking for milkweed: a kind of weed that drips a white liquid when you pick the stem or leaves, and wild sorrel. You were lucky if you found it. We ate that.

We couldn't go to the trash pile anymore, and there weren't vitamins on the trash heap at dawn, like in Birkenau. The front was closing in. We didn't have to work. There started to be less Germans.

They didn't give us food. We were very hungry. Hunger was terribly strong. I went to the trash can, looking for horse bones, because there was a little meat here or there on them. Then an SS woman came and started to whip me. But I didn't care about the whipping, I took that bone. That bone meant life. I washed it as well as I could, cut off what I could, that was food. I was reduced to 38-40 kilograms.

We got an order not to sleep two on a bed. But there was no heating, it was cold. My sister lay down next to me. We put the blankets together, and then an SS woman came in, and saw my older sister laying there. How did she know that it was her who had come over and not me? She pulled my sister down.

Grabbed the wide whip from her waist, and started thrashing her back. 'You obey orders! You aren't allowed to sleep there!' She beat my sister's back bloody. Everybody swooned, they couldn't stand to look. The poor thing survived that too, and we survived it, but it's impossible to forget. A week later, further transport arrived. Then they ordered us: two to one bed. A week earlier that was exactly what they had beaten her back bloody for.

There were a couple more days, when not only two slept in a bed, but those who came had to sleep on the ground inside the barrack. More groups came because they started evacuating there in Malchow also, and they took prisoners deeper and deeper into Germany. The courtyard was filled with prisoners. If somebody had to go to the toilet, when they returned, there was no place for them. There the prisoners were stripped off their human dignity. There were a lot of bad people there.

Some were capable of betraying their own kind, out of envy, because they didn't get something. One time, an SS officer came in one evening, and asked us who wanted to work. My sister and I immediately volunteered. He said we had to clean an apartment. Now the others wanted to go, too. 'I don't need any more, just the two who volunteered first,' he said.

The cleaning was good, because the German put three pieces of bread out that he didn't want. He had cookies, which they'd sent from home, garlic, whatever, he had it all. We stole a little bit of everything. That little bit meant life. Then my sister and I each put the bread into the satchel which we had under our skirts so that we could get it past the gate. But my hand froze to the basin when we had to clean out the coal ash from the stove, and sweep up the coal dust. We cleaned it beautifully, and brought him coal, he was very satisfied. This also meant life for us.

We went again: my sister and I volunteered to help carry soup in large pots. But we also brought our cups with us, under our skirts, and we ladled them full and drank while on the way back. But my own kind went and betrayed us. They'd sunken to the point where nothing mattered to them, they'd gotten that far.

I stayed sharp. When we arrived, by the time we had drunk the soup, we washed the cups and put them back in their place. The woman came immediately to our cubicle, and saw that the cups were clean. 'So you lied!', and the traitor got slapped. She didn't volunteer to work, but she was jealous that we drank a cup of soup. I could keep track of time.

In Ravensbruck also, when we went to sleep there, our room was next to the kitchen. They brought the big pots of soup from the kitchen, when the guard left, I immediately counted out the exact moment, and poured out a plate, we both drank it, then I washed it and put it away. That's how I stayed alive.

When they started to evacuate Malchow, the Germans fled. But a German officer came, and told us to take whatever we could carry from the warehouse, because we won't get anything to eat for a week. Nobody would be able to give us food, because there's no telling which group would get here first. I was the last one into the warehouse.

There was only a little sugar left, I found a rag and put the sugar in it. Then an SS in a coat stepped in and said, 'How dare you come in here?' And pointed his gun to shoot me. But they weren't allowed to shoot us by that time. Germany had already fallen. This was the beginning of May, in 1945. On 2nd May I was liberated.

### • After the war

He really should have left already. There were still Germans there, but everybody knew they'd lost the war, and well they were scared to do something that might get them court-martialed. I was lucky that one woman had seen him coming. She hid behind a door, and started screaming. He was surprised that I wasn't alone, and so he couldn't finish me off. Then he hit me in the head. My head bled really badly, but we were in the hospital, because they emptied the barracks and the sick stayed behind.

They said they were going to execute the sick. But I didn't leave my sister there. It was such a horrible situation, everybody messed themselves, laying there in their own dirt. My head was bleeding so one of the women knew who the doctor was, and implored her to bandage my head. 'I haven't got anything, the best I can do is wash and bandage it with paper,' she told me.

The Germans left and we stayed. Then the French, Red Cross assistance, and volunteer nurses arrived. They started making order. My sister said, 'Get out. Get something to eat.' They were taking food to the Germans, and I got onto the little wagon from where the French were bringing it, so they had given me a spoon of warm soup for my sister.

The guy knocked me down so hard, I almost passed out. Then the others started abusing him, 'Aren't you ashamed to treat a woman like that?' his partners said. Then he tried to make amends, but it didn't matter to me anymore. I had a little self-respect in me. Then I saw in the window a piece of sausage which they had put aside for somebody, and I took it. I had a bad impression of the French.

Then they left, and they put us in the barrack where the Germans had been. It was a little better. Then the Germans became our servants. They cooked, cleaned, and everything. Then the Russians came, and we were very glad. A liberation group, a 20,000 man army surrounded the camp. They broke into the camp where the German women were, and slept with them.

We were there for a while, then all at once the Red Cross cars started coming. They gathered us, and we went into town, to Malchow. In one of the buildings there, it was like a palace, two old ladies were closed in. 'There's nothing left, they took it all. We've got nothing left', they said. 'We don't want to hurt you, we just want to eat', we told them.

They had nothing to give us. We kept going. We collected valuables here and there, what we could, and packed them into the suitcase to take home. I had two big suitcases, and I got blankets, I sewed a dress for myself out of an eiderdown quilt. Then all the aid organizations came, except the Hungarian Red Cross. The Yugoslav, Czech, they all came. Finally, we reported that we wanted to go to Czechoslovakia, because we were here under the Czechs. With that they took us to Prague. It took four days.

In Prague, they took both of us to different hospitals. We were there for three more weeks. I couldn't get out of bed, but I was looking for my sister. There was a boy there, who was also a Hungarian Jew, who came from the Ruthenian region. I asked him to find my sister. I couldn't get off the bed. He left, looked and looked, and in the end, he found her. Then we asked the doctor to let me go.

I found my sister, I saw one of her eyes was glassy, unclear, it had 'patinaed' [literally 'tinned up']. 'Lilly, we're going home, right, I'm going to be better, too, and I'll go with you in a week,' she said. 'It's visible how much you're changing for the better!' I said.

One of the Czech women who worked there, and knew Hungarian, called me over when I came out. She said, 'Your sister would have died already, but she couldn't. She was always calling for you, Lilly, and Moric, her brother. She waited so badly for you.' When I went back the next day, she had died of typhus, and the water filled her up. She was full of water. The local Jewish community office buried her in Prague, in the new Jewish cemetery, in row 13.

I went home alone, it was terrible. In July, I went back with the three Jickovics sisters. Around then, there were train robberies, and they knew that the Jews were all taking back something with them, and then they broke into the next car, and totally robbed the men there. A boy came with us, who was also from Hetyen, with his three female cousins, and escorted us home. He sat by the window, in case somebody tried to climb in there, he'd stop them. That's how we didn't get robbed.

When we got to Pozsony [today Slovakia], the young conductor asked us for our tickets. We told him that we didn't have tickets and that we were coming back from the Lagers. He told us he wasn't interested, and to show him proof. That's how he tricked us.

We showed him our identification cards, the proof we got in Malchow that we were in the camp. He collected them from all of us, then he said he'd give them back unless we paid for our tickets. We didn't have any money. He took everybody's identification, so we arrived home, and nobody had proof that they had been in the camp.

When we arrived in Budapest, we went to Sip Street [Budapest Jewish Community], and they gave us proof on the basis of our tattoos, which showed when we arrived there and what our numbers were. That was our first identification. My number is here on my left arm: A-6742. We went to the accommodation for the camp victims, and then went to visit my cousin who had returned home.

I knew there was a lot of work waiting for me in Hetyen. I was left on my own. I went home, knowing my parents were no longer alive, Erzebet was dead, and I didn't know anything about Moric. But a boy came from the neighboring village and told me not to expect him.

My parents, Berta and her three children all perished. One was fourteen, one eight and one four years old. Her husband died in a work camp. Erzsebet died on the way home, Jozsef was shot in France by the Germans. Gyula wasn't in Europe during the war. He lived in America, and regularly sent letters and packages. But we never met. I just saw photos of him. Then I knew I was completely alone. He died in 1968. I didn't know anything about him until his death. He's buried in America.

When I went home, a villager was living in our house. When they took the Jews away, they divided up their [the Jews'] homes. He'd been given ours. He said it was his house, they had given it to him, but he agreed to empty one of the rooms for me and give me lunch.

As for those who we had given valuables and money, they returned everything: Gabor Suto was a respectable landowner. When they started taking the crops from the Jews, he even arranged for two wagons of wheat to be put at his place, to give back to them when this thing was over. That's what happened. After the war, he brought back the full crop.

Then I got married. After liberation, Hetyen became part of the Soviet Union, and we became Soviets, those laws were valid for us. At that time, they said, 'The land belongs to the one who works for it.' [Editor's note: The landownership reform law of 1945 allowed possession of 100 hold of land, except for peasants who could own 200 hold, and people who fought exceptionally against the fascists in battle, could own 300 hold.

The lower limits of the law seemed radical at the time the law was made, and at the same it was really very arbitrary, as if they'd said fifty or five hundred was the maximum.] I soon met my



husband, a very handsome boy, but very poor. We met in Beregszasz. A family who had relatives of my relatives in Ungvar brought us together. They told me to go to him, and that he wasn't a debauched man. He was 32, and wasn't married.

Lajos Lovenberg, my husband, was an orphan, born in Beregszasz on 24th August 1912. His mother died in 1924. He was raised by his relatives. His father remarried, and he couldn't accept his stepmother, so he left. He wanted to keep his religion strictly. He worked for relatives. He kept the books for them.

He finished eight years of elementary school, and graduated from the commerce school in Beregszasz. By the time we got married, my husband was taking me to school after work. 'You always take me to school, why don't you enroll?' I told him. He did, and we graduated together.

He had been in the work service, among the first to be called up, and among the last to come back. He'd been there for six years. First he served in Hungary, then they gave him to the Germans, but they put him to work in Vienna [today Austria]. They worked hard.

On 19th March 1946, there was a chuppah in the courtyard of the Beregszasz synagogue. My wedding dress was partially made from a Red Cross package. I bought little pieces to go with it. When we were in Prague, on the way home from the camp, we got 1,500 crowns: I bought a pair of sandals with it. The weather was beautiful on our wedding day, bright, not a cloud in the sky.

A week later, on 24th March we had a civil service in Hetyen.

When I got married, Bela Tot, the self-proclaimed owner of my house, emptied the kitchen, so that we could use one room and a kitchen. My husband was on his way to Beregszasz, when a man he knew stopped him. He said he'd found a wallet in the grass, with documents in it that were Bela Tot's. My husband took it, and brought it home. He looked into the documents.

Well, the fascist committee had given him the use of the house. We went to a lawyer, and he told us we had to sign over the papers from my father's name to mine. It was an immensely great feeling, when I closed the door that night. That's how I got my house back. Then we got children.

Life went on, hard times came, my husband found a job. He got a position at the financial department, collecting taxes in the village. He was a very intelligent man, he became the notary. Then they reported on my husband. An attorney came out to investigate the report.

My husband wasn't willing to give him anything: 'because I didn't do anything,' he said. 'I was only following my orders.' Later, the hearing came, and I took clothes to my husband. Well, then I stayed with my two little children. I was left alone with a four and a half month old and an eighteen month old child in 1948.

He stayed there for ten years. Later, we appealed, but for nothing. When Stalin died [1953], they examined the documents and found it was a false suit; they overturned it and made restitution. After four years, he came home, and became employed as a buyer. I was in health work, for twelve years altogether.

Since 1978, we've lived in Budapest. I found work immediately. First at the waterworks, I worked for half a year, then at the Gas Company, where I worked for sixteen years as an accountant. I

already worked in Beregszasz as a pensioner in the department.

I retired when I was 53. My husband also worked in the Gasworks all the way up to 1996. My husband departed from us on 24th September 2002. We buried him in accordance with the Jewish traditions in the Jewish cemetery.

- **Glossary:**

**1** Subcarpathia (also known as Ruthenia, or Zakarpatie): Region situated on the border of the Carpathian Mountains with the Middle Danube lowland. The regional capitals are Uzhhorod, Berehovo, Mukachevo, Khust. It belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until World War I; and the Saint-Germain convention declared its annexation to Czechoslovakia in 1919.

It is impossible to give exact historical statistics of the language and ethnic groups living in this geographical unit: the largest groups in the interwar period were Hungarians, Rusyns, Russians, Ukrainians, Czech and Slovaks. In addition there was also a considerable Jewish and Gypsy population.

In accordance with the first Vienna Decision of 1938, the area of Subcarpathia mainly inhabited by Hungarians was ceded to Hungary. The rest of the region was proclaimed a new state called Carpathian Ukraine in 1939, with Khust as its capital, but it only existed for four and a half months, and was occupied by Hungary in March 1939. Subcarpathia was taken over by Soviet troops and local guerrillas in 1944.

In 1945, Czechoslovakia ceded the area to the USSR and it gained the name Carpatho-Ukraine. The region became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1945. When Ukraine became independent in 1991, the region became an administrative region under the name of Transcarpathia.

**2** Neolog Jewry: Following a Congress in 1868/69 in Budapest, where the Jewish community was meant to discuss several issues on which the opinion of the traditionalists and the modernizers differed and which aimed at uniting Hungarian Jews, Hungarian Jewry was officially split into two (later three) communities, which all created their own national community network.

The Neologs were the modernizers, and they opposed the Orthodox on various questions.

**3** Trianon Peace Treaty: Trianon is a palace in Versailles where, as part of the Paris Peace Conference, the peace treaty was signed with Hungary on June 4, 1920. It was the official end of World War I for the countries concerned.

The Trianon Peace Treaty validated the annexation of huge parts of pre-war Hungary by the states of Austria (the province of Burgenland) and Romania (Transylvania, and parts of Eastern Hungary).

The northern part of pre-war Hungary was attached to the newly created Czechoslovak state (Slovakia and Subcarpathia) while Croatia-Slavonia as well as parts of Southern Hungary (Voivodina, Baranja, Medjumurje and Prekmurje) were to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (later Yugoslavia).

Hungary lost 67.3 percent of its pre-war territory, including huge areas populated mostly or mainly by Hungarians, and 58.4 percent of its population. As a result approximately one third of the Hungarians became an - often oppressed - ethnic minority in some of the predominantly hostile neighboring countries. Trianon became the major point of reference of interwar nationalistic and anti-Semitic Hungarian regimes.

**4** Hatikvah: Anthem of the Zionist movement, and national anthem of the State of Israel. The word 'ha-tikvah' means 'the hope'. The anthem was written by Naftali Herz Imber (1856-1909), who moved to Palestine from Galicia in 1882. The melody was arranged by Samuel Cohen, an immigrant from Moldavia, from a musical theme of Smetana's Moldau (Vltava), which is based on an Eastern European folk song.

**5** Hashomer Hatzair: 'The Young Watchman'; A Zionist-socialist pioneering movement founded in Eastern Europe, Hashomer Hatzair trained youth for kibbutz life and set up kibbutzim in Palestine. During World War II, members were sent to Nazi-occupied areas and became leaders in Jewish resistance groups. After the war, Hashomer Hatzair was active in 'illegal' immigration to Palestine.

**6** German Invasion of Hungary: Hitler found out about Prime Minister Miklos Kallay's and Governor Miklos Horthy's attempts to make peace with the west, and by the end of 1943 worked out the plans, code-named 'Margarethe I. and II.', for the German invasion of Hungary.

In early March 1944, Hitler, fearing a possible Anglo-American occupation of Hungary, gave orders to German forces to march into the country. On March 18, he met Horthy in Klessheim, Austria and tried to convince him to accept the German steps, and for the signing of a declaration in which the Hungarians would call for the occupation by German troops. Horthy was not willing to do this, but promised he would stay in his position and would name a German puppet government in place of Kallay's.

On March 19, the Germans occupied Hungary without resistance. The ex-ambassador to Berlin, Dome Sztojaj, became new prime minister, who - though nominally responsible to Horthy - in fact, reconciled his politics with Edmund Veessenmayer, the newly arrived delegate of the Reich.

**7** Constable: A member of the Hungarian Royal Constabulary, responsible for keeping order in rural areas, this was a militarily organized national police, subordinated to both, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Defense. The body was created in 1881 to replace the previously eliminated county and estate gendarmerie (pandours), with the legal authority to insure the security of cities.

Constabularies were deployed at every county seat and mining area. The municipal cities generally had their own law enforcement bodies - the police.

The constables had the right to cross into police jurisdiction during the course of special investigations. Preservative governing structure didn't conform (the outmoded principles working in the strict hierarchy) to the social and economic changes happening in the country. Conflicts with working-class and agrarian movements, and national organizations turned more and more into outright bloody transgressions. Residents only saw the constabulary as an apparatus for consolidation of conservative power.

After putting down the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Christian establishment in the formidable and anti-Semitic biased forces came across a coercive force able to check the growing social movements caused by the unresolved land question. Aside from this, at the time of elections - since villages had public voting - they actively took steps against the opposition candidates and supporters.

In 1944, the Constabulary directed the collection of rural Jews into ghettos and their deportation. After the suspension of deportations (6th June 1944), the Arrow Cross sympathetic interior apparatus Constabulary forces were called to Budapest to attempt a coup. The body was disbanded in 1945, and the new democratic police took over.

**8** Birkenau (Brzezinka): From October of 1941 to March of 1942, a camp called Auschwitz II. was constructed three kilometers from the main camp in southern Poland (on the border of Silesia and Galicia). This death camp was the main collection and distribution site for the Jewish and Roma (gypsy) deportees transported from European countries that joined or were occupied by Germany. This is where the systematic elimination of the nationalities deemed undesirable to Nazi ideology took on industrial proportions.

After the prisoners incapable of physical work were selected out and killed, those remaining were transported on to forced labor camps and war factories. The eliminations took place in four crematoriums; the people herded off the railcars into the gas chambers in the basements of the crematoriums - originally used for disinfection - were poisoned there with cyanide gas (Zyklon B). In 1944, the camp was capable of murdering and cremating 6,000 people daily. Aside from this, biological experiments were performed on living people on the camp's grounds.

The aim of the experiments was the examination of the physical effects of various extreme conditions practiced on a human body, as well as the control of sexual potency with "medical" intervention. By the time the camp was liberated on 27th January 1945, at least 500,000 to 2,000,000 people were killed in Birkenau.

**9** Yad Vashem: This museum, founded in 1953 in Jerusalem, honors both Holocaust martyrs and 'the Righteous Among the Nations', non-Jewish rescuers who have been recognized for their 'compassion, courage and morality'.

**10** Ravensbruck: Concentration camp for women near Furstenberg, Germany. Five hundred prisoners transported there from Sachsenhausen began its construction at the end of 1938. They built 14 barracks and service buildings, as well as a small camp for men, which was completely separated from the women's camp. The buildings were surrounded by tall walls and electrified barbed wire. The first deportees, some 900 German and Austrian women were transported there on May 18, 1939, and soon followed by 400 Austrian Gypsy women. At the end of 1939, due to the new groups constantly arriving, the camp held nearly 3000 persons.

With the expansion of the war, people from twenty countries were taken here. Persons incapable of working were transported on to Uckermark or Auschwitz, and sent to the gas chambers, others were murdered during 'medical' experiments.

By the end of 1942, the camp held 15,000 prisoners, by 1943, with the arrival of groups from the Soviet Union, its numbers reached 42,000. During the working existence of the camp, altogether

nearly 132,000 women and children were transported here, of these, 92,000 were murdered. In March of 1945, the SS decided to move the camp, so in April those capable of walking were deported on a death march.

On April 30, 1945, those who survived the camp and death march, were liberated by the Soviet armies.

**11** Malchow: A small German town in the province of Mecklenberg-Pomerania. In 1943-44, a prisoner of war camp was added to the munitions factory beside the town, that worked as a sub-camp of about 4000 deportees for the Ravensbruck concentration camp.