

Rosalia (Rosie) Csengeri

A Mother and Her Twin Daughters Between Life and Death

Rosalia penned the following in Israel sometime in the early to mid 1990s. Before World War II, Rosalia lived in a neighboring city to Portz. Jaffa Moses, Eva's mom, would visit Rosie's family store to purchase material for dresses. The two mothers became friends, as they each had a set of twin girls about three years apart. The two families had parallel journeys as Jews during World War II.

It is hard to specify exactly when it began. With the coming of the Hungarians in 1942, or with that “trip” to Zalau, with the blackout, and the many other things that terrified us all. I will begin in June 1942, when my husband and his friends were taken to forced labor.¹ The draft was not by age: each informer would point out someone that he chose according to his interest, and the authorities would assemble the groups.

“People in the know” learned from authentic sources that apparently this entailed four weeks of service, and that it wasn’t worthwhile for anyone to try to obtain the exemption, because in any case he will be required to perform these services. Better get it over with in the summer, because whoever doesn’t will be subject to constant harassment. We were talking about four weeks ‘till mid-August.

I was left alone, a 26-year-old woman with two four-year-old daughters. The pessimists – when they interpreted the way the draft was done – were suspicious and predicted evil. They didn’t hide their thoughts, and whoever could, gained exemption. My husband was drafted. Very soon it became apparent that the pessimists were right, and that the draftees were the victims of organized deception. 214 Jews from Szilagysag² were taken to the Ukraine, with the intent that they should never return. This was revealed to us, to me and my husband, by Franz Sabo, a farmer from the village Camar, who serving as first private, accompanied my husband’s crew.

We chose not to believe him, but rather those with “good connections”. It is impossible to describe the fear and the anxiety that I and the other families of those transported to the Ukraine felt. Until – after a few weeks – we received the first green military postcard, with the standard sentence “We are well and feeling fine” and signed. ³

I was one of the lucky women who received the card, because many weren’t so lucky. Anyone who wrote more than those words had his postcards torn to pieces.

To the worry were added the problems of daily living. It was difficult to obtain food, even bread or flour. Even the rationed food was not supplied regularly, because there were shortages. The Simleu Silvaniei merchants, instead of giving preference to the women who had been left alone, took sadistic advantage of their unprotected state, and sent them back and forth with the excuse that they had run out of merchandise.

The authorities conducted searches in Jewish homes. They looked for food, and if they found any, they withheld food stamps. And this is the best circumstance, because in some cases it was labeled “hoarding”, for which the maximum punishment was deportation to the Kistarcsa camp.⁴

¹ We lived in Simleu Silvaniei, Transylvania, Hungary. My husband, Zvi, owned wine cellars and exported wine.

² A county located in the northwest section of the country. Today named Salaj

³ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 9

⁴ A transit camp nine miles northwest of Budapest.

While shopping in the market, we heard on all sides that “the Jews are buying up everything, and because of them it is impossible to get anything.”

Blackout was instituted. We had to cover the windows with blue paper. It was impossible to obtain enough blue paper. But even if you did succeed in buying it, they looked for something to blame us for, as if some light filtered through, and that was enough reason for harassment. After that they found “patriots” who went daily to report to the authorities that light was seen coming through here and there, and that the Jews are doing it on purpose, in order to signal to the enemy during air raid attacks. We lived in constant terror.

For Christmas the soldiers at the front and those who guarded the work camps went on vacation. Of course, no Jew got anything like that. My husband and others paid the guards who went on vacation and the soldiers to send regards to their families. Some of them exploited this to extort (money from) the families of the forced laborers in their homes. There were those who said that they brought regards from them, and were willing to “bring them money”, although they never even met again that same forced laborer whose family they visited.

One day Pam Latchi, the brick maker (not a Gypsy) who was a guard, appeared at my father-in-law’s house, and asked him for such a huge sum of money, that my father-in-law was unwilling to pay. By the way, he didn’t bring even one written letter from my husband. Later he came to me and threatened that if I didn’t give him what he asked, he would “fix my husband”. As I had no cash, we agreed that I would bring him the money to his home in Debrecen⁵. I arrived in the city in the evening, and alone I plodded through garbage and puddles, until I reached his hovel in the Gypsy’s lane. Before this he made me promise that I would come alone and tell no one of my coming. I gave him the money and one photograph, but my husband never received anything from him.

That was the way we lived until March 1944, when the Germans entered Hungary. An order was issued to wear the “yellow star”. That changed the situation completely. Previously, we had only worried about our dear ones who had been exiled to the Ukraine, because we had had no sign of life from them for months. Between fear and hope, we ambushed the mailman – perhaps he brings a postcard from a husband or from the Red Cross. We tried to send messages to the Ukraine that they should try to become prisoners of the Russians. We will never know if they understood our hints. We didn’t dare give our advice openly. Later came the great disappointment – that the fate of those who fell prisoner was worse than that of those who went through the whole retreat. Relatively fewer prisoners returned.

Now came the era of Krasznai⁶, the county official. He gave the order (which was illegal) to collect from the Jews all the sheets, blankets, sacks, and copper utensils. More than enough volunteers were found to carry out this order. Simleu Silvaniei excelled in collaborators. Daily

⁵ Hungary’s second largest city after Budapest.

⁶ Special gendarme unit from Budapest operated by Krasznai Laszlo. He was also the commandant of the Cehei Ghetto.

they came to collect and confiscate. And when there were no more sheets, they took tablecloths, carpets, covers. Every group of scoundrels decided what they wanted to take. They looked for food, but who in those days had food? If by chance they found some, they took it all. "It is for the poor soldiers at the front", they said.

The Jews did their best to be seen in the streets as little as possible. If they had to go out, he who met Krasznai, had to take off his hat to him, and women, like men had to step down off the sidewalk and walk around in a wide arc. The good Hungarians in the street laughed, derided the Jews, shamelessly, as if they had not previously known them.

That was it. They didn't consider the Jews as human beings like themselves anymore, but as a lower form of creature whom one could hurt without fear of punishment.

We began to hear rumors about the setting up ghettos. The rumors were realized more and more with every passing day, and we began to think of escaping to Romania. My mother, who fervently believed in the rabbis, used to visit the Vizhnitz⁷ and other lesser rabbis in Oradea to ask for advice and help. When the Jews were already forbidden to travel by train, and the information we received became alarming, my mother decided that come what may, she was going to the highest authority of the rabbis, to the Satmar⁸ rabbi. She arrived there dressed as a peasant. The significance of this trip can only be understood by those who are familiar with the train connection between Simleu and Satu Mare.

She went in to the rabbi, and asked his advice, what should she do.? The rabbi soothed her, "Go home my child. Everything will be all right." When she came home, she told us what the rabbi said. She was not calm but thought less about escaping.

The authorities searched for my father-in-law, who hid in my home for weeks, because already then, many Jews were exiled to camps, and we were afraid that that was the reason they were looking for him. One of the neighbors recognized him, and therefore he returned home. He was arrested together with my mother-in-law.

My fourteen-year-old brother-in-law came to live with me, and influenced of what was happening, we prepared for the ghetto. Because there were none to be bought, I myself sewed knapsacks for the children and for myself. On May 4th, at dawn, the police went out to gather up the Jews, with the help of the civilian population. The Hungarians were filled with a holiday spirit. The shops were closed. Some of the civilians helped implement the exile to the ghetto.⁹ They guarded, so that no one escaped the scene with brutal laughter taunting us. We walked in the middle of the road, behind us came the ox drawn wagons. The wagons carried the old and the sick who were too weak to stand on their feet. Whoever fainted was thrown onto the wagon.

⁷ A Hasidic dynasty – a conservative group of Jews.

⁸ A Hasidic group that was founded in 1905 in the town Szatmarnemeti, Hungary, present day Satu Mare, Romania.

⁹ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 18

I marched together with my young brother-in-law and my two daughters, my head dizzy and empty of thought. When we were taken out of the apartment and we joined the line, I was filled with the will to live, and I remembered that I forgot the salt inside. I asked the civilian who was about to close the apartment (those who helped the gendarmes were volunteers, and not at all young) to let me return for a second to get the salt. He answered, “You’ll never come back here,” and pushed me roughly. Thus, I was denied taking a little salt.

The Jews were brought to the school yard, where the mikvah¹⁰ was also found, in order to leave us there. When we arrived, I saw that the people were being beaten with sticks, and they (those who were beating) were shouting that they wouldn’t soil their hands by touching the Jews. I also saw a group of religious Jews, bearded, wrapped in tallit¹¹ and tefillin¹², they were probably made to do so, goaded by the gendarmes, the volunteers were beating them with whips and sticks, kicking them, while mimicking the sound of the prayers. Those hangmen were very careful not to touch them in order not to contaminate their “Aryan” hoofs (paws).

At night in the school yards, the gates of hell opened. There was no room for the people, no water, no lavatories, and the people milled around in the darkness to find some small space, carefully trying not to urinate on their neighbors, while the guards laughed in amusement. And all this but a few hours after they were evicted from their warm homes!

The next morning, we were marched toward Klein’s brick factory¹³ in Cehei, four or five kilometers away. Here there was no possibility of getting organized. The only covered areas were under the structures where the bricks were dried and the furnaces. These structures were built to be open to the wind, after all they were designed for drying bricks. The furnaces had openings on all four sides so that the bricks to be fired could be piled up, which then blocked the openings. Thus, all sides were open to a height of three or four meters. From pieces of wood and boards that they found within factory area people tried to make a shed, to afford them some sort of shelter. Others made tents out of their tallit. Those with “luck” crowded into the structures and furnaces. Those left outside had to make do with the makeshift tents.¹⁴

Among the amusements of Krasznai, the supreme judge of our fate, was the deed he would do once in a while: when it was raining, and the people made extra efforts to strengthen the ties of their tents against the wind, he would kick down their poor shelters, and watch, filled with pleasure as they tried to reconstruct them, hoping that he was satisfied with his evil doings, and would not destroy them again.

Because the people of Simleu were the first to arrive at the ghetto, we succeeded in obtaining a place together with our children in one of the buildings, and blankets, that we carried on our

¹⁰ In the Jewish faith, this was a ritual bath to restore purity

¹¹ Jewish prayer shawl

¹² Small black leather boxes with straps that are worn during prayer

¹³ Link to info about ghetto: <http://holocausttransilvania.ro/en/exhibits/show/ghetouri-si-lagare/ghetou-simleu>

¹⁴ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 19. Additional info – The Berettyo River ran through ghetto

backs, to make ourselves a “hostel”. The next day they began taking people to headquarters that were set up in the ghetto, where, with brutal beatings and other methods of interrogation, they tried to wring information as to where they had hidden their valuables. Among other things, they forced them to drink buckets of watered-down vinegar, they beat them on the soles of their feet, they conducted searches on naked men and women. The women were searched by the town midwife and by a woman called Doha Iran, in the most intimate places. I was also called for interrogation, and pleaded in vain that I had nothing, that my husband had been in the Ukraine for two years, and I had been forced to sell anything of value in my possession.

Whatever was left of my jewelry I had to give up to the authorities. I ran to my clothes, which had been thrown on the ground, and I showed them the list of things, the receipt of which the national bank had confirmed. Even my husband’s gold watch (which I was particularly unwilling to part with) appeared on the list. Lately my parents had been supporting me. In vain I pleaded. They hit me left and right, but I had nothing to tell them.

Here I will remark that after our return, we found many such lists in the plundered Jewish homes, on which were written in detail all of the jewelry that had been confiscated, the names and precise addresses of the owners, and a warning that dire punishment would be inflicted for concealed or missing pieces. The handing over of the valuables was confirmed with a receipt.

When my father was thrown out of the interrogation at the ghetto headquarters, his arms, his legs, and his body were all swollen. Whoever admitted something, was accompanied to his former apartment or hiding place, so that he could remove the items, and afterward was beaten again under the pretense that he had planned to wrong the Hungarian nation.

As already said, even before the ghettos were set up, all the Jews had to relinquish their valuables to the national bank. Most people obeyed this command. In spite of this, many were tortured, although they had nothing to confess.¹⁵

Meanwhile, my mother-in-law and father-in-law were moved from the police station to the ghetto. They were interrogated under terrible torture. For days they were given no food and hardly any water.¹⁶

No food was supplied to the ghetto, and we, who came by foot, could carry very little with us. We lived on handouts that we got from the villagers. They had been checked less thoroughly, had been brought in on vehicles, and thus were in a more favorable situation.

It was shocking to witness the cruel treatment shown to the community’s rabbi, the old Rabbi Aharnreich. Krasznai stood him in the center of the brick factory and commanded him to cut off his beard. He had a beautiful snow-white beard, always well groomed. He pleaded: “I have lived

¹⁵ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 20

¹⁶ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 20

for eighty-two years and have never touched my beard – not with a razor, nor with scissors. It remains whole as it grew in.” Krasznai didn’t listen to him at all. The rabbi refused to obey the command. Then the “supreme judge” called the S.S. officer, who pointed his gun at the rabbi and shouted at him, angry because he was being bothered by such a thing. The rabbi mumbled some prayer and lifted his arms in surrender, and Marmorstein cut his beard with barber clippers. The rabbi without his beard was a terrible sight. The tears ran down his naked cheeks, but he stood there until Krasznai and the S.S. left. Only then did he agree to be accompanied to his place, supported on both sides. The rabbi’s daughter-in-law gave birth there, on the floor, and her baby in her arms went to the gas chamber.

The train to Auschwitz¹⁷

Before we boarded the train, they demanded that everyone leave his overcoat behind.¹⁸ The rabbi wore a kapota¹⁹, without a short jacket underneath, and they wanted to send him in only the shirt on his back. There was a lot of running around until a needle and white thread were found. They folded up the bottom of the kapota, and hastily sewed up the hem, so that now the kapota could be considered a short jacket, and they shoved him onto the car.

As we boarded the train, they conducted another search. People were undressed, and if anything was found, that person was again beaten. So, it happened, among others, to my aunt. The poor woman ran, half crazed, to the gendarmes, with a photograph of her son who had been killed in the Ukraine, and asked each one of them: “And can I take this?”

Into the carriages (according to the signs on them: 8 horses – 40 people) they crowded 70 – 80 people, the old, the young, the sick without distinction. There was no bread or water.

Out of four windows, two were boarded over. The other two were strung with barbed wire. The children begged for bread, and my father-in-law, who just couldn’t stand this, fainted. There was nothing we could use as a lavatory. I took the children’s potty, tied by my side, which everyone used, one by one, if they could wait their turn. Afterwards it was passed from one to another until it came to those who stood near the window, who were busy day and night, in exchange for the better position they were lucky enough to get.

I had a reed-encased bottle of water, which I had gotten from a country acquaintance. Five liters for seventy people. At one of the stations where the train stopped, I was told that, accompanied by the person in charge of our carriage, we could get down to bring water. My brother-in-law, Yano Weiss, a former officer in the Hungarian army, who now served as “officer” of the carriage, got off with the bottle to bring water. Members of the “Lavanta” (a pre-army youth movement) who were at the station, wanted to take the reed bottle from him. He refused to give it up, and they surrounded him, kicked him, and before his eyes they broke

¹⁷ There were three transports – May 31, June 3, and June 6. Eva and her family were on the May 31 transport

¹⁸ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 22

¹⁹ A long black coat

the vessel. I don't know how we arrived alive in Auschwitz. There is no creature in this world who could bear the suffering brought upon us.

Throughout the journey, my father-in-law took note of the train stations, and until we arrived at Kosice, Slovakia, believed all the while that we were being taken to work in a place called Knairmizu, although by a round-about route, as the word had been spread in the ghetto. We were boarded onto the train on Shavuot²⁰, 1944. After five days we arrived somewhere at night.²¹ It was dark, we had no idea where we were, we didn't even see any buildings. At dawn they moved the carriage to a ramp and shouted in German that we should very quickly disembark the train.

The Petlings (camp prisoners), in striped suits, came and shouted at us, "Crazies, idiots, why did you come here?" We didn't understand the meaning of their words. We still believed that we were being brought to work.

When I disembarked from the train, in an instant all my family disappeared from in front of my eyes. Only this I saw - that the people were being sent to two different lines.

Suddenly I saw my father-in-law step out of line and call out to me, "Rosie, Rosie, they are calling 'Twins'..." Then I shouted out "Here are twins!" Immediately one of the S.S. came. He looked at me and when he saw that I was weak, and to add to this impression, my shaven head - because the rabbi said in the ghetto that if we shave our heads we will go home - pulled the children out of my arms and sent me to the others. But the children began to cry, and wouldn't let go of my hand, and so the S.S. let me go with them. Behind me came Nandor Freidman and when he saw that they were taking me separately, he said, "Rosika, I don't know if you are doing the right thing by saying they are twins." He suspected that surely something bad would happen to those separated from the masses. It didn't occur to him that the opposite would happen. They would exterminate the larger group.²²

They brought us to a building, undressed us for washing - stood us under the shower heads. I had to explain why I was bald, as they thought my head was shaven because I had lice. My head had been shaven, but instead of returning me to my home, it almost sent me to the gas chambers. While we were still waiting outside the area, a group of women came and asked us where we were from. They were bald, wearing wooden clogs, and the robes they wore were belted with a string so that I didn't even bother answering them. I thought they were crazy. But when they were repeated the question, and talked like sane people, I told them that we were brought from Simleu Sylvaniaei. They told us that they were from Satmyr, and that they were here for ten days.²³

²⁰ A major Jewish Festival, originally to celebrate the harvest but now also commemorates the giving of the Law (the Torah).

²¹ Approximately May of 1944.

²² Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 28-29. This is also the first mention of Mrs. Csengeri in the text.

²³ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, pp. 29-30

From the hall the S.S. men accompanied us to the camp, to the infirmary, where the experiments took place. They gave us something that resembled bread, which we grabbed and ate on the spot. But to our surprise, we were given no other food. At noon we got some liquid, on the surface of which floated worms. The children didn't want to eat it, but the senior inmates approached and said: "This is the food here, and whoever wants to survive or hopes to be liberated, has to eat it all. I cried for days that I want to see my family. Then the 'representative' said to a Christian, a Polish woman, "Go and show her parents, her brother, her relatives."²⁴

She took me out of the hut. She pointed at a huge chimney from which a red flame rose to the skies and said: "Here your parents rose to heaven. You should be happy that you have twins, and there is a chance that you will be liberated."

I lost consciousness, and awoke to the woman slapping my cheeks and saying "Are you crazy? Here you can't faint. You can't cry. That can be your downfall. Here you have to be strong."

Then I clammed up. I lay on my cot. I had no strength to think. The two girls came to me and shook me. I got up because I thought – I still have two daughters, and for them I must live and suffer.

In Mengele's Hell

Next day they took the three of us to the infirmary. They drew blood from us, gave us injections, compared the hair and the body parts of the two girls, and lastly took their fingerprints.

To eat, we received thereafter only a thin slice of bread and wormy soup. The children asked for bread, and I had none to give them. It was horrible to look into their pleading eyes. Helplessly I wrestled with myself. Super human power was needed to decide what to do. If I give them my portion, then, as the other members of my lager²⁵ warned me, I will be lost, and my children will be left alone. Only those who have been through this hell can understand this diabolical dilemma²⁶. In the end, I gave them most of my portion anyway, and I lived on that disgusting liquid and on anything else I could find occasionally and at great peril, from the kitchen garbage. Every time we went to the infirmary, I said my good-byes to everyone, because I didn't know if I would return to see them.²⁷

Often Mengele would come to oversee the experiments, and he always took interest, "Where are the Csengeri twins? They are the prettiest twins." That happened also on June 6, on the girls' seventh birthday. The fear in my heart was a hundred-fold, because many pairs of twins

²⁴ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, pp. 32-33

²⁵ Camp, but in this instance might mean a smaller sub group or barrack.

²⁶ An example of choiceless choices

²⁷ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 48

disappeared, and everyone knew that as a final 'experiment' they had been injected with an identical dose of poison to see if death occurred in both of them at the same time. I was deathly afraid that Mengele had chosen them too, for the final experiment.

Once, two 25-year-old women were brought in. The nurse took two vials out of her pocket. She injected them and then took them to Mengele. No one ever saw them after that. Once, before they drew blood from the children, Mengele came in and gave them two injections. They must have been very painful, because the girls screamed loudly, and didn't want to let them draw blood. Mengele sent me out of the room, but I peeked through a crack and I saw that he was hitting them. I burst in, in a frenzy. I pleaded with him to do with me as he will, but to let the children live. They caught me, gave me an injection in the back of my neck, which caused the loss of my sight. Mengele said: "Now you can go." I could barely make my way back to the hut. The girls took me. There I lay for ten days, unconscious. Meanwhile they continued to take the children for experiments. The representative hid me, fearing that if I was seen, they would sentence me to be exterminated.

Dr. König²⁸ who conducted experiments on mad²⁹ people, once wanted to send me to the gas chamber, but in the block, he was told that Mengele was conducting experiments on me and would examine the results. Thus, he didn't dare touch me, and let me be.

While I was lying unconscious, they placed my portion of bread beside me. They thought the children would get it. Sadly, others stole those portions, so that the children were hungrier than before.

Ten days later, my consciousness returned, but my sense of hearing was almost completely lost. One doctor told me that the injection I received caused meningitis. While I was in the infirmary for three months, every day I had to go to clean out the morgue. Those piles of dead bodies were horrifying, the sight of the bodies brought while they were still moving, bleeding, but that made it possible for me to be with my daughters, and it was no problem for me to get to them with my portion of bread.

But one day they announced that they were taking us from the infirmary to another block. An hour later, I was separated from the children. They went to the children's block, and I to the workers' block. We despaired that we wouldn't be together any more.

I was able to obtain an upper cot. The windows were there, there was more light and garbage didn't fall on my face. At night we awoke to a loud noise, screaming and yelling. I looked out the window and saw that they were throwing the sick from the infirmary onto a truck, half naked or wrapped in rags, as they found them. Denigrated, deteriorated, and skeleton-like. At dawn, when everything had calmed down, I went to the block we had been brought from the day

²⁸ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 38

²⁹ crazy

before. Not a living soul was there to be found. Only blankets and rags thrown around on the floor. I went through the back door to the block opposite. There the woman in charge weepingly told me that at night they took everyone to the gas chambers. Now I knew why we were taken from them. Mengele still needed our blood.³⁰

Three months later we were taken ten or fifteen kilometers away to dig trenches with picks. The wooden clogs we were wearing kept sticking in the mud. At the first light of dawn I went to the children, who were there in a separate children's block. And through a rat hole I handed them bread.

I was terrified that I wouldn't hold up to the effort of the hard work, and then either they would shoot me, or the S.S. would set his dog on me, and he would tear me to pieces – because that was what happened to those who were incapable of working any more. But the German order prevailed: we had to carry the body back to the camp. The accounts had to tally.

On our way to work, we passed by the crematorium, there we met the commando workers. Their eyes protruded unnaturally, their faces twisted, until we were really afraid of them. We couldn't answer their questions when they asked about their relatives.

During the work hours the S.S. ate red apples in front of our eyes, like pigs, in a provocative way. Many of us fainted at the sight. Now we worked digging to uncover rubber roots and to clean them. I succeeded in getting away among the trees, where I saw an unidentified root. I dug it up but realized that it was only a wild branch. As I was working, I pricked my finger. The wound became infected, and for lack of vitamins due to undernourishment, the wound couldn't heal. That was how I had to work, afraid that they would find out, until one doctor took pity on me and treated the wound.

Autumn, it was cold, but we still worked outdoors, in the mud, wrapped in rags. We had to continue to give blood. When it was our turn to be counted, I passed the girls my bread, which they saved for the morning. But sometimes a rat took it from under their heads. One night it even bit Lea's toe.

Once I found a large pile of carrots, and I told my friends that I must take some for my daughters. They didn't want to let me because the S.S. was watching from the tower, and that would mean a bullet for certain. I tore myself from their hands and started to walk toward the pile of carrots. I couldn't resist the temptation. The guard pointed his rifle at me and said: "Don't you know it is forbidden to go there, and I have to shoot you for this?" I began to cry and said that I was very hungry and couldn't stand it anymore. He felt sorry for me (things like this also happened) and said: "All right, go ahead and take some." I filled up my apron and went back to my friends. I shared the carrots with them, only I saved some for the children.³¹

³⁰ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 64

³¹ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 48

In October, Mengele again gave me the injection that caused meningitis. Again, I lay unconscious with a high fever. My daughters didn't know what happened to me, didn't get my portion of bread. We never knew what they were thinking during those days.

One night I regained consciousness and sensed hurried movement around me. I was hidden on the third cot, and from there I saw how a woman gave birth on the floor. They quickly took the newborn baby from her and shoved something into its mouth. They wrapped it in a blanket and rushed with it to the morgue. The bleeding woman was laid beside me, to save at least her life. The poor thing cried all the time that she wants to see her child, wants to name it after her parents, although she must have known the truth.

When I left the infirmary, I was taken back to work. This time we had to pull - push gigantic wagons until we were exhausted. They were filled with rubbish, barrels of feces.

And again, there was a "selection". On such occasions, curfew was pronounced, to prevent from getting away. They took most of us away, to the crematorium. I was also taken away in the "selection". On the way to the crematorium, the Polish women, who were in the first rows, threw themselves on the ground, didn't want to move. The S.S guards with their dogs dashed over there, and in the commotion, I managed to escape from the last rows with about ten friends. Having no choice, I ran to the toilets intending to jump in. A young girl held me and sat me down next to her and said, "Sit here next to us quietly, and make believe you are answering nature's call." I stayed there until the group left, and then went back to my block. When the infirmary clerk saw me, she called me to her room. "Well, come in. I'll register you again. One who came back from the dead." And thus, I was saved.

It was Yom Kippur³². We fasted. Then I heard that there was to be a "selection" of twins. I said I was a nurse, and thus gained entry to the block. I went to my girls, pinched their cheeks to give them some color. They were not among those taken away.

Shortly after that there was another "selection" among the workers. I was taken like the others, naked, trying to cover myself with my rag, and again I was placed in the lines of those designated for the gas chambers. I already had experience in a similar situation, and again managed to escape. I broke into an unused latrine, which had been locked, and for hours stood up to my knees in excrement, until the search for escapees ended. With great difficulty, I reached my block. There my friends gathered all the water they could find, so that I could wash myself, and not arouse suspicion.

The days passed. Here we were in the midst of a cold winter, and still taken to work outdoors. We put on any scrap of rag we could find, trying to protect ourselves from the cold. We were

³² The Day of Atonement or repentance of sins.

very hungry, the girls too, and we decided together with Mrs. Goldenthal³³: we have no choice but to get some kind of food. We stole our way to the kitchen garbage, and were able to gather a few frozen potato peels, and some frozen pumpkin. We happily began our return to the block when the S.S. kitchen overseer saw us and poured a bucket of cold water on us. But she didn't notice that we had something. Thus, like icicles, frozen to the bone, we arrived at work. My friends slapped our backs so that the S.S. wouldn't notice our condition. At the block we were greeted with the news that tomorrow there would be another "selection". There Job's³⁴ tidings (bad news) were realized, and again I was sent to the left. I didn't feel strong enough to go with the group, and to escape on the way. I could hardly walk, let alone run. The only possibility was to get over to the right. I succeeded and returned to the block with the others. When I got there I began to shake, and couldn't stop for several hours, in spite of the efforts of my friends. And 'til this day I begin to shake whenever I become excited. The clerk registered me again, for the third time.

Bitter cold reigned. I was put into the *schonung*³⁵ but because I could still walk, I was sent to gather scraps of iron outside. Wrapped in rags, without gloves, I went out. Outside, everything was covered with snow. The S.S. beat us with rubber batons, because we couldn't gather the required amount. We were in despair. We lost all hope.

By chance I met Rosi Mozesh, who brought a little life into our hearts, a spark of hope, with the news that the Russians were approaching, and if we had survived until now, we could continue, and not give way to despair.

The experiments continued. I can't understand how they succeeded in squeezing more blood out of our bodies. In the mornings I stole away to the children, before they awoke, and took them out to wash no matter what the weather. We washed together, and I combed their hair with a fine-tooth comb, so that they wouldn't become infested with lice. That was the reason enough to be sent to the gas chambers. Hunger and the constant drawing of blood weakened me and the children. Whenever we could, we, together with Mrs. Goldenthal, gathered frozen potato peels and other scraps with which we fed the girls. By chance the Hirshfeld and the Valderman boys from Simleu found out where I was (they were probably around 16 years old), and they managed to send me some food and a few pieces of clothing. They sent hats to the girls, which they were wearing when we were liberated.

I was very bitter. My hearing was very poor, my strength was gone, and I could hardly help my daughters. My friends consoled and encouraged me. Soon we would be liberated, and then the

³³ Mrs. Goldenthal was a prisoner in Auschwitz. She had twin boys suffering through the experiments and a daughter who she managed to hide throughout her time in Auschwitz. Together with Mrs. Csengeri, they cared for the children after the death march but before the Soviet's liberated the camp. They also travelled together after liberation to a town called Oradea between Hungary and Romania.

³⁴ Job is a biblical figure and also a book in the Old Testament of the Bible

³⁵ The was a temporary release from hard labor or permission to stay in the barracks.

doctors would cure me. After our release, I was indeed treated, but they could not restore my hearing.

In the end redemption.³⁶

One day we saw that the Germans were packing up, and hastily leaving the camp. The few that were left stood the prisoners in line to get ready to move on. It was bitter cold. My daughter Lea who was suffering from diarrhea, could hardly stand up. I was desperate. While they were arranging the lines, one of the Germans gave the order that the sick and the children could stay. We returned immediately with the children, but we were afraid to go back to the hut, so we hid in the S.S. kasrakin³⁷. Many did the same. The Germans left, and we stayed there. We hid for a whole day and managed to heat the place by burning the furniture that we broke up. Now we weren't suffering from the cold, but we didn't have a morsel of food. In spite of the fact that a few Germans kept coming back to look for escapees, the next day we left our hiding place. We discovered a pit of potatoes and removed some with a pick. We didn't dare go as far as the store rooms because the Germans were still there, and meanwhile we had found food.

At night flames broke out, sky high, from the direction of the store rooms: the Germans had set them on fire. They threw burning torches into the huts to annihilate anyone hidden there. Luckily the flames didn't reach us. The snow slowed down its spreading. Also, the store rooms didn't burn entirely. The next day we realized that there were no more Germans there, and we were free to go. We found out that many had stayed and hid in the camp. The mob streamed to the storm rooms, broke into them, and assaulted the food shelves, trampling each other. With Mrs. Goldenthal, we got a box of sugar cubes, which we dragged over the snow to our hut where the orphaned children had gathered. We distributed our booty among them, leaving some for our children. I now had four girls. I had adopted the two orphans Miriam and Eva Mozes. I had decided that if I was liberated with my daughters, I would consider them as my children and bring them home with me. We sensed an atmosphere of freedom but were still fearful of the possibility that the Germans would return.

On January 27, on Saturday afternoon, we saw the Russian soldiers arriving in white overalls. They knocked on the doors of all the huts, looking for Germans. They immediately gave the children some sort of biscuit, that we didn't dare give them before, because we didn't know what it was. We were overjoyed at regaining our freedom. The Russians calmed us down. We would soon be going "home".

We went looking for people we knew in the camp. Unfortunately, we didn't find many. We happened on a sewing workshop. There I hastily sewed together something resembling a small sack, which I filled with thread. Later, during our travels, I could always trade those threads for food. I was afraid to give to the children what we had received from the Russians.

³⁶ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, pp. 79-86

³⁷ Some sort of dwelling, possibly a German barrack or housing unit.

A professor from Prague who had been liberated with us examined the children. I told him that experiments had been performed on us, what food had been supplied to them, what vitamins they had received at home. He determined that the children were healthy, thanks to the condition they were in when they left home. But now they needed proper nutrition. That became possible only two months later.

The Russians took photographs. They filmed us by the barbed wire fence as we left the camp. They promised to give us pictures, but we never got them. Two years ago, we succeeded in obtaining two copies, in which we appear. Those pictures were also shown on television.³⁸

As no author's pen can fully describe the suffering, the degradation, the terror, the atrocities that we had to endure, so it cannot express the heavenly joy that accompanied our liberation. That kind of liberation happened only for the Jews.

We could openly search for food. We came to one S.S. Camp where we found canned sauerkraut. That was all. But there were wonderful blankets and sheets, which we brought to our hut. We looked for matches, and so we came to the Russian kitchen. But we couldn't speak to them, and the Russian soldiers didn't understand what we wanted, and instead of matches they brought us a pig's head, which we gratefully accepted.

While we were still going after food with Mrs. Goldenthal, Mrs. Cohen stayed in the hut to look after the children. We cooked the pig's head, and when we began to eat, Mrs. Cohen's daughter opened her mouth, "Mommy, we don't eat pig." Mrs. Cohen's daughters weren't twins. This, of course, she told us only after liberation. At the time that they were unloading the people from the trains, Mrs. Cohen lay unconscious, and stayed inside with her daughters, whose difference in age was just one year. A prisoner whispered to her, "say that they are twins." And so, the S.S. sent them with the twins. Until the end they were considered twins, and Mrs. Cohen once heard the doctors talking among themselves, "even among twins, such perfect likeness is rare."

The tribulations of the journey home

Now I had to take care of four girls. On my one side (we slept on the floor) were my own daughters, and on my other side the two little Mozes girls. We stayed in Auschwitz for some time. We had been liberated, but we weren't free. The Russians kept order, we weren't allowed to leave the camp. They said that they were taking us home, but instead they took us to Katowice³⁹, where they housed us in a Kasraktin⁴⁰ outside of town. The food supply was very poor (also for the Russians themselves), and we always had to devise schemes to escape from

³⁸ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 95

³⁹ From: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/128603304@N03/16269109876> . Eva and Miriam stayed with Mrs. Csengeri from February until September 1945 first in Katowice and then in Cernauti. After additional time spent in Schultz, in the Soviet interior, Mrs. Csengeri and the four girls eventually arrived in Simleu Silvaniei.

⁴⁰ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, p. 105

the camp to obtain some food. The Joint⁴¹ was already functioning here but wasn't very efficient. We could get enough soup, but the Joint kitchen was six kilometers away from where we were, we couldn't reach it with the children. And so, it went on – manipulation: the Joint sent food and clothing for us, but the local population divided most of it amongst themselves. For four biscuits that each girl got, we had to sign in ten places.

All this didn't worry us very much, we wanted to go home. Especially those whose husbands had been in the forced labor camps. I hoped that on my return I could see Perry. From Katowice we were taken to Czernowitz near the Romanian border in May 1945. Here there were some Jews. I left the camp to beg. Wherever I saw a mezuzah⁴² I went in and received a little something. They didn't have much either. An aunt of the Mozes girls was here in Czernowitz and knew about the girls' presence here. She brought a hundred grams of sour candies, and quickly disappeared, so I shouldn't leave the girls with her.

From the Russians we received some sort of dried herring, that we didn't dare give to the girls, and together with Mrs. Goldenthal⁴³ we decided to go to the city to exchange the fish for some more acceptable food, because feeding four girls was a difficult task. The Russian patrol caught us and handed both of us over to the guards. They jailed us. We had managed to pass the fish that was in the basket to a fellow inmate. But we had an umbrella that the Russian guard thought was a weapon. Inside the jail there were a few prisoners who already knew Russian, and they explained to the soldiers what an umbrella is used for. Meanwhile, our friends told the commanding officer of the camp that the mother of the twins was being held prisoner. He immediately ordered our release. Apparently, he knew why we ran away to the city. Afterwards we also went out to the city to get some sour cream for the girls in the market.

Despite their promises, they didn't let us go home from Czernowitz either, but took us even further away, to White Russia⁴⁴, where we stayed for six weeks. Here we did laundry for the men, who had already obtained some money and paid us for our work. Besides this, every one of us, even the children, received half a package of tobacco, which we sold, and with the money supported the children. Washing remained a problem, because we had the use of only one bowl, and in it we had to wash my four daughters and Mrs. Goldenthal's three children.⁴⁵

Our suffering had not yet come to an end, but our lives were not threatened, and we were not humiliated. The Russians tried to help. They gave us some army shirts from which we sewed

⁴¹ The Joint is the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. It is a Jewish relief organization based in NYC. After the war it helped provide urgent necessities for Holocaust survivors, shipping more than 227 million pounds of food, medicine, clothing, and other supplies.

⁴² A mezuzah is affixed to the doorpost of Jewish homes to fulfill the Biblical commandment to remember God and that the home is a holy place where we should act accordingly.

⁴³ Eva talks about Mrs. Goldenthal's twins, p. 106. They are also mentioned on the Candles site:

<https://candleholocaustmuseum.org/learn/twins-found-by-candles.html>

⁴⁴ This was a refugee camp in Slutsk, close to Minsk in the Soviet Union.

⁴⁵ Corresponds to *Surviving the Angel of Death*, pp. 110-111

clothes for the children. For the two Mozes girls who were a little bigger, we somehow succeeded to obtain suitable shoes, but not for my girls. I sewed them slippers from a blanket, which they came home with. Together with Mrs. Goldenthal, we went to work in the kitchen, and the food that was left after distribution we could give to the orphaned children.

Afterward we continued to travel in cattle cars⁴⁶. Of course, there was no comparison to the conditions we endured during our trip to Auschwitz, but still we had to handle our baggage, which we carried on our backs. At Czernowitz a family named Tessler came to the station, and asked that when we board the cars, we testify that they are part of our group. Of course, we agreed, and so we arrived with them in Romania. Finally, at Solca, Romania where we were taken from Czernowitz, we were informed that we were going home. And that really happened. We traveled for two weeks, because every train that was going in the opposite direction, that is to Russia, was given priority.

The only food we received was the “shotski”, small cubes of dried bread. Meanwhile we discovered that the food that had been allotted to us was bartered for vodka. But the sewing thread saved us. At every station we made use of this rare treasure. According to plan, we were to arrive at Arad where we were to be held for a few weeks. Our trains stopped at Irina very close to Nagy Varad⁴⁷. Acquaintances from there found out and smuggled the four girls from the car. They took them home, washed them, and for the first time, put them to sleeps in beds on white sheets. I was stuck in the train. Friends of my husband from the forced labor camp who had already come home, when they heard what had happened, came to the train with a wagon, bribed the officer, and so, at one o’clock in the morning, at last I could say that I was free.

The children slept deeply. All the while I watched them. I couldn’t take my eyes off them. Only at dawn did I succeed in falling asleep. Everyone surrounded us with love, but I found out that in the place where we have lived previously, there was no one left. I was informed that the Mozes girls had a rich aunt in the city. I went to her with the four children. I told her that I still had no relative who had returned and would take her sister’s children. She refused. And so, I left for Simleu with them.

Our apartment had been plundered, emptied. For two more weeks we all slept on the floor. Then another of the Mozes girls’ aunts came from Cluj to take them. But the girls refused to go with her. They said: “Aunt Csengeri is our mother.” I didn’t know what to do. A friend of ours, Yossi Laks, advised me not to keep the girls under any circumstance, because it appeared that they had some wealth, and it would be rumored that I kept them for that reason. So, they went

⁴⁶ Roughly October of 1945.

⁴⁷ NagyVarad is the colloquial term. Oradea, Romania is the formal name of the city.

with their aunt. Later they made Aliyah to Israel, and today one of them lives here, and the other in America. This is hearsay – because neither of them has seen fit to pay me a visit⁴⁸.

Two weeks later my husband came home. The girls recognized him immediately, because in the camp I had succeeded in hiding a photograph of him, which I showed them frequently. Then we began life anew.

Nine months later a son was born to us. The first brit milah⁴⁹ in Simleu after the deportation. The children went to study. They had diplomas. After a delay of twelve years, we were able to make Aliya⁵⁰ to Israel in 1960⁵¹.

I was left with a handicap. My hearing never returned. But I find solace in my eight grandchildren, who all live in Israel. Among them, twin boys. My oldest grandson is completing his studies in dentistry this year. Three others are in University after serving in the army. One grandson is in the army, and my son's three children are still in school. Hitler didn't win.⁵²

Extra information which might better explain the situation during this time period.

Between 1945 and 1950, Eva and Miriam Mozes were living in Cluj, Romania, which is situated about two hours by car from Simleu Silvaniei where Mrs. Csengeri lived with her husband and twin daughters. Eva and Miriam were recovering and attempting to adjust to their life under Communist rule while dealing with personal demons relating to the Holocaust and the loss of almost their entire family.

In 1950, at the age of 16, both girls boarded the last ship to leave Romania before the Iron Curtain descended and all communication with the outside world became impossible. Mrs. Csengeri and her family were not able to emigrate to Israel until 1960.

Meanwhile, Eva, living in Israel had met American Tourist and Holocaust survivor Michael Kor. They married in 1960, and Eva moved to the United States.

Unbeknownst to Mrs. Csengeri, Eva did attempt to contact her, but only managed to speak with Mr. Csengeri who refused to allow Eva to speak with his wife. Saying that, "Speaking of those times upsets her too much." Not wishing to cause Mrs. Csengeri any further pain, Eva respected his wishes.

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49 Also known as a bris. This is a ceremony on the eighth day of the newborn boy's life where he is blessed, circumcised, and named.

50 Making Aliyah is moving to Israel to be nearer to God.

51 Eva moved to the United States in 1960.

52 The best estimate is that this was written in the early to mid 1990's

