

## **Our Deportation to Auschwitz... and Nightmares of Other Camps**

*Ella Revai's (maiden name: Kircz) recollections of her Concentration Camp Memories, written between Aug. 2010 and March 2011, in Thornhill, Ontario. Translation from the Hungarian original by Alex Revai.*

*After having spent about a month in the Ghetto of Sátoraljaiújhely, Hungary, Ella, along with her father, Aron Kircz, and the rest of the Jews from her birthplace, Cigánd, Hungary, were loaded into cattle cars and sent off to Auschwitz on May the 25th, 1944.*

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**After three days journey in the cattle cars, we arrived in Auschwitz. 80-85 people crammed in each car, no water, no toilet. We were locked in and couldn't imagine where they were taking us or what will our fate be.**



**We arrived in Auschwitz on May the 28<sup>th</sup>, 1944. They chased everyone out of the train. The women and men were herded separately, the children stayed with their mothers. Here I was separated from my father, whom I never saw again...!**



**We were herded in rows of five and marched in front of the SS selection team. Here was decided our fate, life or death. Anyone, who was directed to the right by dr. Mengele, stayed alive, for the time being. Anyone sent to the left were condemned to die in the gas chambers. (Translator's note: at the time they didn't know about the gas chambers. They learnt about them only later on)**

**The young ones, among whom I found myself, were taken to the sanitation facilities. They shaved our heads and other hairy parts of our bodies. We couldn't even recognize each-other. Everyone received a single piece of shabby dress, without regards to size or fit. Later we exchanged them amongst each other so we could wear them. The insane-looking crowd was ready to march.**



After all this they herded us towards the lagers. My crowd ended up in lager "C". I found myself in barrack #19. There were 32,000 people in the lager and 1,000 people in a barrack. There were bunk-beds. On every level, there were 12 people. We were crowded like herrings in the can. If one needed to turn, the entire row had to sit up and turn together.



When they woke us, it was still dark outside. We had to line up in rows of 5 at the side of the barracks and stand there for hours, twice every day. The name of this line-up was called Zählappell (roll call).



During these roll calls many fainted, but we were not allowed to bend down to help them, lest we would be beaten by the Aufsäherins (female supervisors).



When the Zählappell was over, they took us to the latrines. From here, back to the bunk-beds. They brought us some soup. One portion for 6 people in an aluminium bowl. We took sips by taking turns one-by-one. The daily bread portions were handed out during the roll calls. Occasionally they gave us a spoonful of marmalade or some cottage cheese. The latter they slapped directly into our hands. We had no cutlery.

Time-to-time, so that we wouldn't be bored, there came the selections. When there were not enough cattle cars arriving, they picked people from lager "C". The crematoria had to operate continuously.



Most of the time it was Mengele with his entourage, who came to make the selections. Anyone not found to be strong enough, or even just had some skin blemishes, were taken away. It was during such selections, that we noticed that a friend here or an acquaintance there was no longer amongst us. They were taken away. Their disappearances were very painful every time.

My life in lager "C" lasted for three months. I'm unable to write down all the daily tortures we had to endure. I don't have the strengths, nor can I bear the mental anguish. Every moment of these terrible experiences live in my mind and my heart.

I still have to come back to the selections to relate the degrading manner in which they were conducted. Most of the time we had to stand bare naked. On our left arm hung our rag that we used to wear. With our bald heads we looked like patients in an insane asylum. They turned us back to front (*to check us out*) and decided who stayed and who would be taken away.

After three months I, too was selected. There came a man in white gown, who inspected our hands. He needed 200 people. I was selected into this group. We heard that they would be taking us to work. This is where I lost contact with my friends from my village. Only a cousin from Bodrogkeresztur came with me.

All that day we stayed outside the gates of the lager, until the evening. We thought to ourselves that the trucks would be coming to take us to the gas chambers...

Miraculously, they walked us to another lager. This was lager "B". It was even worse than lager "C". There were only empty barracks. No bunk-beds, no toilet, no water, no kitchen. In this lager there were no selections, only the Zählappell, twice daily. They were just counting and counting us, as if we were so important.

For breakfast they brought us some gooey, whitish puree. Sometimes tea. We were happy with the latter, as we could at least wash our eyes with it. Otherwise, there was no opportunity to wash up. The food was brought to us in containers from another lager. By the time it reached us, half of it spilled to the ground. We used buckets for our needs and then emptied them in trenches.

Time-to-time were taken to the sanitation stations. They were very afraid of epidemics. Many people had the scabies. On one occasion, my cousin also ended up in the barrack, where they had people with scabies. I tried to sneak after her, but didn't succeed to stay with her. Every night a doctor checked out the people and if they no longer had the scabies, they were thrown out. When she checked me out and saw that I didn't have the scabies, she beat me and threw me out. She asked why was I there if I didn't have any symptoms.

As it were, I didn't see my cousin Lili (Feinsilber) until after our liberation. Her terrible demise (*shortly after the liberation*) deserves another, separate telling.

I continue with the events at lager "B". As I mentioned, the barracks were totally empty. In a corner there were piled up rags and blankets. After Zählappell, we ran in and grabbed whatever we could. We threw it on the floor and lay down on it. If we couldn't grab one, we just lay on the floor.

In the neighboring lager was the infectious diseases hospital. Every night trucks came by to pick up the dead and half-dead. We were forbidden to go out from our barracks or even look at these happenings. Despite of the restrictions, everyone knew what was happening.

On one such occasion, we were ordered outside. As we learnt, a young girl jumped off the truck and escaped to our barrack. As they counted us, they discovered that there was an extra person. They counted and recounted us. Finally, one of the SS soldiers told us that if the extra person doesn't step forward, he will start shooting every fifth row. After several nail-biting minutes the young girl stepped forward. They took her away immediately...

Our days passed with such and similar excitements. We were starving, cold, rain-soaked and thirsty. There were always a few optimists, who encouraged us by saying that it will all end and we will be freed. We hardly believed that they would be taking us to work, as we were told earlier at lager "C".

Finally, one night, in October they came for us. They shouted for the 200 women, who were selected from lager "C". We were very afraid to move. Three months had passed here, too, we couldn't really believe that we would be taken for working. They counted the 200 and took us from the lager to be cleaned up. We received clothing, coats, shoes and even some food. They loaded us into cattle cars and left Auschwitz during the night. We had lived for 6 months at that murderous pace...!

After three or four days of train ride we arrived to Horneburg. (\* see corroborating Wikipedia notes at the end) Horneburg is about 25 kms from Hamburg. From the train station they took us across the city. We found ourselves in a forest. There were two newly built barracks waiting for us. The third barrack was built for the supervisors. They gave us two blankets, a bowl and a spoon. Things we hadn't seen for 6 months. It was unbelievable. We were very happy and began to believe that indeed we were taken here to work. And so it was.

We worked for an airplane parts manufacturing operation. The sign over the entrance said it was the Lederfabrik (Leather factory). Here we had a surprise. The same white-gowned man, who selected us from lager "C", assigned us to various work stations, again, by looking at our hands. We worked in three shifts. Every day we had the long walk from the forest to the city. The supervisors (Aufsählerins) made us sing all the way. We were freezing all winter long. We were bald, no socks and only had a rag-tag coat and wooden slippers for shoes.

Here, at least we had bathing facilities. Here, too, we had wooden beds, but at least one bed per person. Two women received one cotton towel, which we wrapped on our heads and alternated daily with our partners. Of course, the towels were wet from drying ourselves with it every day. There was a young girl with me. Her name was Edit, with whom we were together from the moment we arrived here. We shared everything. Since I was a few years older, she clung to me (as if to a mother). I was 20 years old at the time. Unfortunately, we became separated before our liberation and I don't know what happened to her. To this day I'm trying to find her, but no luck. Her full name was Edit Linzer (or Linzerova). She was taken to the Satoraljaujhely getto from a small, nearby Slovakian village. She had two other sisters, who, together with their mother, were gassed (in Auschwitz).

We worked in Horneburg from October to February (1945). In relative terms, this was the most bearable place among the others. The SS Aufsäherins, almost without exception, were dreadful. They invented any opportunity to make our lives miserable.



At the factory the food wasn't too bad. The factory manager wasn't treating us badly. Our immediate supervisor was a Dutch prisoner, who was exceptionally nice. Occasionally he brought us apples. He tried to lift our spirits by saying that it (*the war*) couldn't last much longer. I wish we knew his name. Today he could be acknowledged as a righteous gentile. His humanity in those circumstances meant the world to us.

For the SS Aufsäherins we were their Sunday entertainment. They had us stand (Zählappell) in our off time. They counted us day and night. On one such occasion they took me and another girl from Maramaros. They asked what we were laughing at. They took us to their rooms and beat us with a wooden rod. For weeks we were turning and tossing from the painful stripes on our backs. We were not to tell anyone what they had done to us. Had they had any human souls, we could have been spared from these extra tortures.

And so time was passing. The air raids became more frequent. Hamburg was being bombed. Suddenly, one February day, they put us on a train to some place. We never knew where they were taking us or what would our fate be.

We arrived at place, called Porta. There was a hidden factory, carved deep down, inside a karst mountain. They put us to work immediately. As we learnt later on, the place was being built by male prisoners, many of whom died as a result of the inhumanly harsh conditions.

Here, again, we met with our Dutch supervisor, who was brought here before us in order to set up the factory for our arrival. Here we lived and worked in unbelievable circumstances. We hardly had anything to eat. Even if they brought some soup, by the time the containers arrived to the mountain, most of it spilled to the ground. There was hardly any left to distribute. While we worked, we heated some water on the gas burners (*which were used to seal the glass tubes that we made*) and we drank it so that we would have some strength to finish the shift.

Here, at Porta, even our kind Dutch supervisor couldn't help us any longer. Often he said that he didn't have anything to pass on to us. He truly felt sorry for us.

The Germans urged us to produce more. They thought it would help (*their cause*). Later on, even this place was no longer safe. The allies were approaching. There was some hurried construction of new barracks at Porta. Our worked was stopped.

One day, they brought us up from the cave factory and marched us on. Perhaps even they didn't know where to. They took us to the new barracks built at Porta. There were many prisoners crowded here. That's where they were trying to hide us from the approaching liberators. There was total chaos. Soon they took us further from here, to Fallersleben and Haldensleben. Sometimes by train, sometimes on foot. Here or there they left 50-60 prisoners (Heftlings), depending on how many the lagers on the way would accept. The situation was horrific. Finally, we were liberated in Salzwedel, on April the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1945.



CAMP COUNCIL CONSEIL DE CAMP Hillersleben		2252 *
Certificate / Certificat		
Name Nom	Kircz Ella	
born né	18. V. 1924.	à Cigand.
was since dès depuis	28. V. 1944.	jusqu'au 14. IV. 1945.
in the german camp dans le camp allemand		Bergen-Belsen
as comme		Jew.
imprisoned emprisonné		
Get off: Libéré:	April 13th 1945 le 13. April 1945	
The liberation was in the train (exported the 7th April 1945 from concentration camp in Bergen-Belsen) near the station Fallersleben 16 km. from Magdeburg by the 6th US Army. La libération eut lieu du train (exporté le 7. April 1945 du camp de concentration à Bergen-Belsen) près de la station Fallersleben 16 km de Magdeburg par la 6me Armée Américaine.		
Remarks Remarques	Since 28.V.1944. till 14.IV. 1945. in Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, etc. Fallersleben and Salzwedel.	
	Hillersleben, labor Magdeburg Burgencetsch Hillersleben	
	D. P. CENTER Hillersleben CAMP COUNCIL	
	4 JUN 1945	

Here, too, there was a concentration camp with who knows how many people. We were starved skeletons. When they started shouting that we were liberated, we didn't even have the strength to walk to the gates. As it turned out they (*the Germans*) wanted to blow up the lager. Fortunately, there were some already liberated Italian Jewish prisoners in town. They noticed what was being prepared and they managed to cut the wires. The Germans had no time to repair the damage, because the Americans arrived. We owe our lives to these Italian prisoners.

The same night they (*the Americans*) took us by trucks to an emptied military base. They gave us beds and fed us. There was plenty to eat and they were very mindful of our cleanliness.

All the survivors started searching for their relatives and friends. There were lists prepared with everyone's names, which were copied and taken to other liberated groups at nearby facilities. Many found relatives or friends this way. We started moving about. The situation was quite chaotic. The Germans were gone, we were free. Five of us (girls) kept together: three from Bodrogkeresztur, one from Sarospatak and I, from Cigand. We even managed to return home (*to Hungary*) together. A truck took us to Hillersleben, where we heard about some people from my village.

Hillersleben was a picturesque little city. Beautiful trees, shrubs and flowers, just like a vacation spot. Tidy houses with flowers everywhere. Cleanliness all around. After a hellish year everything looked miraculous. The Americans took good care of us, except they were not in a hurry to get us back home. We, in turn wanted to return, hoping to find surviving family members. Unfortunately, we had to be very disappointed. Only a handful of younger people survived and returned to our village. My entire family perished. Only an uncle returned from a Russian prisoner camp.

*That's how we started our lives, from nothing.*

*I'm not going to detail my return trip to Hungary. It was quite complicated. The rails were damaged, train traffic was very sporadic. There were many stops and waiting. This, too, has passed.*

*I'm 86 years old now. I know I'm missing lots of details. Many a thing I don't even remember any more. When I was younger, I didn't have the time to write everything down.*

*I'm finishing the writing of the story of this very sad part of my life on March the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011.*

*Ella Revai*



**Ella Revai, 2004**

- During [World War II](#) a [concentration camp](#) was established in Horneburg.<sup>[2]</sup> It was a subcamp to the [Neuengamme concentration camp](#). From Oktober 1944 until February 1945 about 200 [Hungarian Jewish](#) women and 50 [Dutch](#) women were forced to work for the *Philips-Valvo-Röhrenwerke*. Especially the Dutch women were also forced to work in the port of Horneburg. The Hungarian women were coming from the [Auschwitz-Birkenau camp](#), the Dutch women transported from [Ravensbrück concentration camp](#). Mid-February 1945 the [SS](#) deported the women to the subcamp [Porta Westfalica](#). (Excerpt from Wikipedia)





