

May, 1995

Respected Teachers and Students, respected Audience:

First of all I wish to thank you for inviting me, thus I can contribute to a mission, "remember the past and learn from it." All over the world there are now celebrations that 50 years ago the Nazis surrendered.

World War II was started by Hitler, it caused more destruction than any other conflict in human history. The number of war dead reached at least 40 million and additional millions were afflicted. Also the property damage during WW II was devastating.

Hitler in his book, "Mein Kampf" (My Struggle) described his ideas, accordingly the Germans were a master race and should rule the world. He emphasized that the Jews were an inferior race and should be annihilated. He effectively employed propaganda and blamed the Jews for Germany's problems. First, in the 1930-ies laws were introduced to limit the rights of Jews, later they were herded into separate places, called ghettos and subsequently to concentration camps, where most of them were murdered. About 6 million European Jews were killed. That was the Holocaust.

There are people who deny that Jews were systematically killed, who cover-up atrocities, who call the Holocaust a big lie. The small number of Holocaust survivors have to tell what happened, that everybody should know about it and together we all should say, "never again!"

I am a Holocaust survivor and will retell some episodes of my life. First let me tell you about my background. I was born in 1929 in a Hungarian town. It was a pleasant town with good schools, museum, theater, concert hall and we had various activities. The town was famous for its sausage made with red paprika; we can buy it also in Chicago. My father was a medical doctor, his specialty was radiology. He had many patients, rich and poor, he also conducted clinical research. He was respected and well-known not only in our town but nationwide. He wrote a medical textbook used at the universities. My mother worked with my father. I had a brother 4 years older. We were well off, we had a nice house with a garden, this time of the year the lilacs were in blossom. While my brother and I were young children, we had German governesses. They instilled in us punctuality and neatness. We learned the German language.

As my brother and I were growing up, we learned about the war, about antisemitism, about the laws against the Jews.

One episode stands out in my mind. I attended an "academic school" (after elementary school children could choose between regular and academic school). Only a certain number of Jews were accepted in the academic school, that is there was a quota. Since my father was an influential citizen, I was accepted. In the classroom there were desks for two students. In my class there was an odd number of students, and I was the one who was sitting alone. One day a new student arrived, the daughter of a high ranking army

officer. She would not sit next to a Jew. The teacher rearranged the seating and the worst student of the class was placed next to me. Her name was Zita. Zita protested and cried. I tried to console her, told her that I can tutor her, that I can help her with the homework, that she can copy the tests from mine. Few days later, we had a math test. I hold my paper in a way that Zita could easily copy everything. The last task was to draw a right triangle with 2- inch legs, using ruler, compass and protractor. Next day, when we got our tests back, Zita was very happy, she got an A, but I got a B. I asked the teacher, why did not I get an A, I made no mistake. She said, pointing to the triangle, this is not precisely 90 degrees. I started to explain how I made the drawing but she sent me back to my seat. After class, I again approached the teacher, but she retorted, "buy yourself a new protractor." This was a nonsense; one can draw a right triangle without a protractor. At that moment I realized that I did not get an A because I was a Jew. I was very disappointed. Later on I wished that getting a B instead of an A should be my biggest problem.

Hard times were coming. To keep up the spirit, some Hungarian Jews made up jokes: Hitler asked his military advisor, how long will it take to occupy Hungary. The answer was, that depends, if they put up resistance, we can crush it within couple of hours, but if we have to listen to welcoming speeches, that may take days. In the Spring of 1944 the Germans did march into Hungary. Jews had to wear a canary yellow star on the left side of the chest area on outer garments. One law followed the other to curtail the rights and working opportunities of the Jews. Soon the Jews were moved to ghettos. The ghettos were surrounded by walls and barbed wire, entrance and exit at the gate was controlled by police.

As mentioned before, my father was an influential medical doctor and he was able to arrange that our house was designated as a safe-house and we could stay there. However, our relatives and the other Jews lived in the ghetto. After a short period of time, the mayor of the town informed my father that the safe-houses will be eliminated. At night my father took me to one of his patients who agreed to hide me and my mother on his farm. We were hidden in a loft behind hay.

By this time, both my father and brother were drafted into the army wearing a yellow armband indicating that they were Jewish. My father was assigned to work as a medical doctor and my brother was put in a labor-camp along with other Jews.

In the radio and newspapers it was repeatedly announced that hiding Jews is a serious crime and will be met with the death penalty. The farmer who first willingly hid us, became scared and asked us to leave. Provided with falsified papers, my mother and I took a train to Budapest but were apprehended by police and taken to a prison. The Jews from the prison were taken to another place where Jews were collected for deportation. Here we saw my father. Men and women were separately loaded in cattle wagons en route to Auschwitz. About 90 people were whisked into one wagon, it had 2 very small windows with iron bars. A pail was provided for excretion. One woman died, her body was covered, then another one

died. The place smelled. There was no way to escape. We had no food. The trip lasted several days. When we arrived at Auschwitz and got off the wagon, not realizing what was awaiting us, we sighed with relief. The announcement came, that children under age of 16, adults over 45, pregnant women should go to the left, the others capable of hard work, to the right. Some mothers having young children on their arms were advised by Jewish captives working at the railway, to give their children over to the grandmothers. I wanted to go with my mother, after all I was already 15, I was athletic, I could pass for 16. But my mother believed that children will have easier tasks and so I went to the left. Then suddenly I was overcome by fear and wanted to join my mother. By hiding and running I got away from the group sent to the left. Later we learned, that they all, including the young mothers holding on to their children, were taken to the gas chambers, gassed and cremated. This was a new and horrible way to systematically kill people. The gas chambers resembled shower rooms, people got undressed and went to the chambers, then the chambers were closed. Instead of water, hydrogen cyanide was released into the chambers. As the people were inhaling the poisonous gas and started to suffocate, they were screaming. The screaming stopped as they died within 15 minutes. After a half an hour ventilating machines sucked out the poisonous air, the chambers were opened and the bodies were removed by inmates under the supervision of the Germans. The chambers were ready for the next group within an hour. This cruel efficiency enabled the Nazis in Auschwitz to slaughter about 30,000 people a day. I luckily escaped this fate.

In Auschwitz our heads were shaven, our clothes and even glasses were taken away. After shower we obtained 1 piece of cloth. First we were barefooted, then we got wooden sandals. We were housed in large barracks. I was desperately looking for my mother. I met women from my hometown, who saw my mother. Actually, I passed by my mother but did not recognize her: she was so broken and I had no glasses. On the third day, one woman from my hometown brought us together; that was an emotional moment.

Several barracks (about 30) constituted a section, which was surrounded by wire with high voltage. One day I witnessed, as a captive touched the wire, she was instantly killed.

The routine in Auschwitz was as follows: twice a day we participated in the so-called Zehl-appel, head count, that is we were standing in rows, 10 people per row in front of the barrack and somebody counted us; I remember a German woman with red hair accompanied by a large dog. Zehl-appel was also our mealtime, usually some black fluid with salt, called ersatz-coffee, in the mornings and turnip soup in the evenings. After Zehl-appel we marched to the latrine, then back to the barracks. In the barrack we sat in rows on the floor, the space was very tight. The first woman in the row leaned to the wall, she spread her 2 legs to the sides, the second one was sitting between the former's legs, she also spread out her legs to the sides and so on. It was most embarrassing but some of us could not withhold urine for the whole

day or night, so we were sitting in our urine.

My mother and I had a happy moment in Auschwitz, when my father, who was assigned to work as a medical doctor, sent us a scissors and we were able to cut our fingernails.

The most fearful event was the so-called Selection. We got undressed, had a shower, then marched naked in front of a German officer who made the selection into 3 groups. The strongest people were transferred to labor-camps, the weakest were sent to the gas chambers and the rest back to the barracks. My mother always marched just behind me; she said, if I am selected for work, she will straighten up to be selected also for work, if I am sent to the gas chamber, she will follow me there too. Day after day, week after week, month after month we were left in the reserve group who may still become good cheap laborer, if needed. In the Fall, during a Selection the German officer, Dr Mengele, sent me to the group of the weak. Instinctly, I accosted him and said in German that I am young and strong, I want to work. And he hit my behind with his cane and said, "go" and I ran to the group of the strong. Then I looked back to see where is my mother. I could not find her. I never saw her again.

I was taken to the labor-camp at Birnbaumel. Here the barracks were much smaller than in Auschwitz. We were sleeping on wooden bunks lying close together like spoons, we all had to turn from one side to the other in unison, we were covered with blankets. The women from my barrack were assigned to carry large felled trees. During the winter months the heavy work, malnutrition, cold weather took their toll on me, I got sick and was taken to the hospital barrack. The medical doctor in charge knew my father and paid special attention to me, she saved my life (I had strep throat developing into acute rheumatic fever).

Spring arrived. The Soviet army was approaching Birnbaumel and the Germans evacuated the labor-camp, only the patients of the hospital barrack with one German guard was left behind. I wanted to join the women leaving the camp but collapsed and was taken back to the hospital barrack. The German guard instructed us to dig a large grave. We knew that his instruction was to shoot and bury us. We were hysterical, we were screaming. Our screams were heard by a group of Soviet partisans and they came to our rescue. I don't know the exact date of our liberation but it was about 50 years ago.

The Soviets took us first to Trachenberg, then to a camp near Lublin and then to a huge camp near Minsk. I won't go into details, suffice to say, I returned to Hungary in the Fall of 1945. I felt very much out of place. From all the Jewish girls in my age group only three of us returned to my hometown. Then we went to Budapest and studied at the University. My two girl friends could not cope, they committed suicide.

I myself was low-spirited but recalled the numerous discussions with my mother during our ordeal in Auschwitz. Her teachings were: have a goal, strive to achieve your goal, make sacrifices if necessary but don't give up. Study and learn, what you have learned that is yours, nobody can take it away from you. My mother said to me, "if you don't know what to do, think about

what would I, your mother advise you." I followed my mother's advice and have no regrets. I overcame tremendous difficulties, became a scientist, married another Holocaust survivor, who is also a scientist, we have a wonderful marriage, we have two sons, they also became scientists, they are married and have children.

My story attests the atrocities of the German Nazis but thanks to the Allied Forces, The Nazis were defeated and Hitler's aim to annihilate all the Jews was not realized. All humans are equal and we all have to prevent the recurrence of a Holocaust.

Thank you.