



Eugene's Story, Chapter 3

On the 16th of May the train slowed down and the doors were opened and we arrived in Auschwitz Birkenau.

Now I like to emphasise, a boy of 16, never experienced any nature of any sort of horror, having experienced almost 3 days on that train cramped in, listening to people crying and dying, the smell was terrible, I was absolutely petrified, numb, I didn't know what was happening. We were ordered, the doors opened, we were ordered out, "Raus, raus," out quickly, bloody Jew. We arrived at Birkenau on the platform, there must have been thousands of people there. I noticed men with striped uniforms which very shortly I had to wear it. Dogs, the SS, there were a number of officers in front of us and just by a point of a finger all the females were ordered to the left and all the males on the right. Within a few minutes I witnessed my mother and my two sisters being marched away to the left. And from that I had no opportunity to kiss or say goodbye, I didn't know what was happening there and from that day onwards, from that moment onwards I never saw them again. Within a few minutes I got separated from my father. He was 57 years old, he was a tall man. I know later on I come to the conclusion that he and my mother must have been aware of what the future held for us. I got separated from him within minutes, no handshake, no goodbye, and that was the last I saw of him.

That transport was the first Hungarian transport arriving in Birkenau. According to the Auschwitz chronicle there were 3,168 people. Out of that transport there were about 200 or 250 people selected for slave labour, mostly young boys or men who looked fit to be used. Of course I wasn't aware of what was happening. We were then marched off. At the end of the platform, anybody who has been to Auschwitz since this building is still there.

We were ordered in there, immediately asked to strip in a massive big hall, they had hooks half way up and then hooks on the top. We were ordered to hang our clothes up, tie our shoes together and to remember where we left it because once we'd been disinfected we'd be coming back for it. Of course that wasn't the case. The door opened, naked were. We went through this room, in front of us there were men in striped uniforms, scissors and shears in their hands, little benches and little stool, we were ordered to sit on it, they cut all

our hair, removed all our hair from our head first then every bit of hair of every other part of our body.

Mentally I can't explain it to this day what condition my mental state was at that time. I certainly felt absolutely numb and that continued for some time. We were ordered into another room then, we got disinfected. We were issued with some underwear which was taken off from prisoners who arrived there and were gassed and we were issued with that. We were marched in towards a barrack.

Till two year ago I wasn't aware of that about 20 of us were photographed by the SS four hours after our arrival in Auschwitz and that is in the Auschwitz album what I obtained 2 year ago and there I am on the photograph in that book.

It got dark then and then we were marched a long way to our destination which we didn't know where we were going, what was happening but as we set off on to the left I saw chimneys blazing away, smoke, flame coming out of it and a horrible smell was all over the camp, terrible. The time I spent in Auschwitz and Birkenau that was there continuously 24 hours a day. Didn't know what was happening until next morning this Mr Kornreich the friend of my father who got selected with his son for slave labour like myself, said to me, "Jeno I'm sorry to tell you what we witnessed last night all the smoke and the smell it was the bodies of our own family burning." And that's the way I learned what has happened.

And we were given our uniform, we were given, registered, my number became 55546. I lost my identity, my name, I lost everything within a very very short while. In Auschwitz life was impossible even to attempt to understand what was happening to us. I certainly was completely lost, numb in every possible way. It's very difficult to describe even now that the things what occurred and I witnessed were horrible.

Our routine became as follows. There were between 850 and 900 of us in a block. There were bunk beds, bottom layer middle layer top layer. It varies but normally about 5 of us on a bed with one blanket on the straw. In the mornings we were woken up quite early, we had to go up, out and to be counted what they call an appel and that took place every night as well. And that was a routine in all the camps where eventually I was moved to. Our food used to be about a pound, a loaf of bread size of a brick which weighed

according to records one pound in weight and that became three prisoners to one loaf. In the morning we got a cup of ersatz café or black water if it was black, and at night we got a bowl of soup or a plate of soup, a tin plate which consisted a few potatoes red cabbage and turnip. And that was our intake.

Sanitation, matter of fact in Birkenau there is still approximately 10 blocks still intact, they keeping it as a museum. And the toilet facilities, this particular block is still there. It's got 3 rows in with 50 holes in each row and you used to sit 25 looking at one way and the other 25 the other way so you more or less were sitting back to back. And it's well documented because the picture of it, the actual block is in the Auschwitz album. Wash basin, [---] a cold tap and there were no facilities whatsoever so please imagine that you came out from a normal living environment into a hellhole like Birkenau and you, in a very very short time it's forced upon you to change completely because it was a question of survival. Although I personally never thought that way at all because I was absolutely numb, I never knew next minute what's gonna take place.