



Iby's Story, Chapter 4

Well the journey took three days with many stops in between because I think the train was being shunted this way and the other and although we had been told that we were going to Auschwitz I had no idea what Auschwitz was, where it was or what was expected of us. When we arrived in Auschwitz men in striped pyjamas and shaved heads opened the wagons and said, 'Leave all ill people, old people or children here. The rest of you out, quick, quick, men to the right, women to the left'. Well there were five females of us there. One of them was a doctor who was middle aged and grey haired. Another one was a youngish doctor, a dental hygienist, a nurse, and I and we put a scarf over the head of the doctor because we didn't really want to be separated, we didn't think she should go and be with the elderly. I think having by now a shrewd idea that she wasn't, any that were left behind wouldn't survive and we just got out of the wagon, we linked arms and marched towards Doctor Mengele who thought it was exceedingly funny that instead of the shuffling people that here were three women who linked arms and who were marching ahead towards the gate which had over it the sign 'Arbeit macht frei', work gives you freedom. We had arrived in Auschwitz.

The first thing that we were all taken into a big room, or hall, told to strip, then pushed into another room in small groups where we were sat on little stools and had the hair shaved all over our bodies, heads and everywhere else, surrounded by SS men and women who thought the whole thing was exceedingly funny and amusing. One of the people with the striped pyjamas was walking round with pliers and checking up whether people had gold teeth or gold fillings in which case they pulled the teeth out. Fortunately I've had good teeth all my life so I didn't have that problem. We were next pushed into another room where we were showered and then onwards to the next one where we were given assorted clothes. We were told to keep our shoes on. I think it would have been too difficult to fit people with shoes, whereas clothes could be any shape, size or colour and during that process normal procedure was that people got, had, you were registered, you gave your name, where you were born, where you came from, what your profession was, but that was already to check with the list that they had from the Hungarians and you had a number given and the number was tattooed on your left forearm. Somehow or other I don't know, to this day I don't know why, I don't know whether it was

just me or the people on this transport, we didn't get the number tattooed on us so I'm a woman who hasn't got a number.

We were then taken into the camp proper, which consisted of huge wooden huts and the walls were wooden, the lighting was through, there were windows high up so that no space was wasted where there were windows and the kapos, the people who were charge of each hut in our case were Czech so I could communicate with them, which gave me a slight advantage because I got a slightly bigger piece of blanket and I got maybe a little bit thicker soup because the ladle went down a little bit deeper when we once a day got our ration of soup. I can't remember how many people were in each block but at night in the evening the kapos drew chalk lines on so that there were three lines of people on each side of a central corridor and there were so many people that you could only sleep curled up line you know spoons against each other and if you had to go to the toilet which was at the end of the block bucket you just couldn't find your way back because there was no way that you could find the little gap, that would have been taken up by somebody else stretching themselves.

Now our days in the camp were taken up with a roll call which they called appel, where you stood in lines of five for hours while they counted. Now how they managed to count all the people in Auschwitz where if anybody stumbled in the line they were taken out and put in the gas chamber, where people in desperation threw themselves against the barbed wire fences that were electrified, I just don't know. I think it was probably a way of control rather than a question of being counted and we stood for hours in the morning, and midday and in the evening, whatever the weather was.

Once a day they came and they gave you some, it was supposed to be soup, but all I could identify was that it was liquid and that there was something like grass in it and once a week you were taken to be showered and to leave your clothes and get another set of disinfected clothing on you. On one of those occasions I saw a group of Gypsy women breaking stones and it was the first occasion when, and the only occasion when I saw people who were not either in striped pyjamas, in uniform or in rags in which we were and this first occasion I realised that there were other people there as well, not just the people who were taken from Hungary or wherever from.

One day after having been showered, instead of getting our usual rags we were given dark blue skirts and white blouses to wear, and when we came back to

the hutment all the latrines had been taken away and instead of that there were wooden tables and benches and we were told to sit down and were each of us given a card and a pencil and told to write home, which was a very good question, who did you write to? Most of us knew their family was there and then a group of officials came including the Papal Nuncio and he was all in purple dressed like the cardinals dressed in purple and the image was being presented that this was a well-organised thing. Well I had learnt from when I went to school we were taught Latin as a living language so we spoke Latin and looking down I said, 'Non credite quad vadite', 'Don't believe what you are seeing' and I stole a look up and realised he was taken slightly aback and he extended his hand in blessing and I just hoped that, I was pretty certain the German soldiers hadn't realised what was happening. Whether the message ever got back, that is something I don't know. As soon as he had been gone we were straightaway stripped of our clothes, given our old rags, the tables and benches were taken to another part of the camp so somebody else was going to show the same image.

One of the questions I get asked is whether people prayed there. I don't know. We didn't. We felt that it was the most God forsaken place there ever was. Not only that God, there was no God, but that he actively had turned his back on the whole thing. We just felt a complete absence of it. The odd thing is that when I talk to people who have been and visited there, they get the same feeling, that so therefore this is a feeling of the place, so not only we feel it but it is a thing that has stuck to the place.