



Iby's Story, Chapter 6

By the end of March the air raids were very frequent, the work in the factory had slowed down tremendously, the Germans seemed to spend most of their time in the bunker which was just like an upside down torpedo and they had slit trenches and they were very, very angry because we wouldn't go in the slit trenches if the people were put back into the camp because of an air raid. We just stayed outside and we talked and enjoyed the fresh air rather than going in the slit trenches or going into the barracks which made us very unpopular. At the end of March a train came into the railway lines which was running alongside the camp and the SS men and said that they were taking all the sick, all the ill, all the ones that couldn't walk by wagon and the rest of us would have to walk and when I asked them where they were taking us, they said they were taking us to Bergen Belsen.

I didn't know at that stage that Bergen Belsen was also an extermination camp so we had quite a few patients who went, had to go by, I mean we didn't think it was a bad idea for people who weren't particularly fit to go because we had no idea that the end was as it was and also they insisted that the women with the babies should go as well. Now one of the mothers put the baby on a little heap of straw by the doorway for some fresh air and when everybody was on the train then one of the soldiers picked, or held himself up by the edge of the door and swung himself up into the carriage. Whether by accident or design he stepped on the baby and killed it outright. You can imagine the outcry of the mother but he said, 'You ought to be grateful to me. I probably saved your life because if you with the baby would arrive in Bergen Belsen you would go straight into the gas chamber. Like this you have a chance to survive'. I later found out that yes, not only did she survive, she met her husband and they emigrated to Australia and they did have children, but I didn't keep contact with them. I just heard it.

So they took the train away and the following day, the following evening they started to march us towards Bergen Belsen and they marched us during the night time and hid us in barns in the day time. We could hear a lot of air raids going on around it and every time that happened in the dark we were hidden in the day time, they couldn't see us. After about three or four days I was getting the feeling personally that we were going around in circles and anybody who

had lagged behind a soldier detached himself and we just heard a shot and the soldier came back and the other person didn't and by this time my left hip was again giving me a tremendous amount of trouble and if it hadn't been for support and practically being carried by my friends I probably wouldn't have been able to carry on like that. I would have finished up being shot as well. After about three or four days of walking, they couldn't find a barn for us anywhere in the morning so they told us to lie down in the fields and they themselves, the guards laid down in the ditches and we could hear the church bells ringing in the village in front of us and we saw white sheets hanging out from the windows and then we saw tanks with pink, I don't know if it was paper or fabric over the top to identify them, a lot of planes overhead and we noticed that the guards were edging backwards towards the woods at the back of us and a wave of women just exploded from the fields and surrounded the tanks. What the American soldiers would have thought of finding them surrounded by hundreds of women with half shorn hair and ragged clothes I just can't imagine. I couldn't move, I was in the ditch and the American soldiers told us that they were the advance guard, they were encircling the Ruhr, there would be no troops there for three days and for three days we could do what we wanted. As far as they were concerned we were in charge.

Well as I said I couldn't really move, I was just lying in a ditch so they lifted me up and they got me into a farmhouse that was nearby and laid me down on a wooden settle in the kitchen and at the table was an old man, a woman, a little girl and the little girl whispered something to her mother and the mother nodded her head and she came over to me and she had a brown painted egg in her hand and she said, 'It's Easter Sunday'. So we were liberated actually on Easter Sunday.

Those who were fit rounded up the German soldiers and put them in the crypt of the church and locked them up there, but there were women soldiers as well. There was one woman in particular who had always been, I wouldn't say even unfriendly, only mocking of us because we had short hair or no hair at all, having been shorn, so she was put on a chair in the middle of the village and had all her hair cut off. We thought it was the least we could do.