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As a survivor of the Holocaust I come from another world. I come from a universe where my people were condemned to torture and death for no other reason than they were Jewish. Of course not all the victims were Jewish, but all the Jews were victims.

My first poem will hopefully make the other world a little more real for you

Come, take this giant leap with me
into the other world the other place
where language fails and imagery defies
denies men's consciousness and dies upon the alter of insanity.
Come, take this giant leap with me into the other world the other place
and trace the eclipse of humanity
where children burn while mankind stood by
and the universe has yet to learn why.

What I am saying is that normal standards don't apply to the Holocaust, that it is unspeakable and unthinkable. In fact, the Holocaust is a crime without a language.

First a few words about my early childhood. I was born in Cracow, Poland. I lived with my parents and my only sister with whom I survived. It is a miracle that the two of us survived, but when you consider out of a family of 84, (we stopped counting at eighty-four) only my sister and I survived, it is not such a miracle. It is a tragedy.

My early childhood was very normal, very uneventful. I was pampered and protected like any little girl. I have wonderful memories of my grandmother. I brought a photograph with me today of my grandmother and just three of her many children. My mother is in that photograph sitting on the floor. She's perhaps a year and a half old. The summer months that we would spend on my grandmother's farm were terrific. My memory of picking mushrooms and berries and the wonderful smell of fresh baking bread always come back to me when I speak about my early childhood.

I remember my parents and aunts and uncles would talk about trying to get out of Europe. Getting out meant that you had to have someplace to go. The United States had very strict immigration laws. We could not go to Palestine because the British would not allow any numbers of Jews to come. In fact, in '39 the British literally closed the doors to the Jewish people who were trying to get out and so there was no place for us to go. No matter how my parents and the other members of my family tried to figure a way out there just wasn't any. And so we were trapped and we were slaughtered.

For me, the beginning of the end started in 1939 with the invasion of Poland. The Nazis marched into Poland on the first of September. By the sixth, in just six days, they took over my city. Immediately the early prosecutions began. We had to wear the armband with the Star of David. There was forced labor. My father's business was taken away so there was no money coming in. There was the incredible secret wedding of my sister marrying Norbert in a cellar, a moment I will never forget. The very first victim in my family was an uncle Henry who was arrested together with the leadership of his city and taken to Auschwitz before it became a real death factory. He was killed and his ashes were sent to my aunt. That was the first time I saw my father cry and of course it would not be the last. Very shortly after the invasion I remember leaving Cracow for a little while. We went to the city of Tarnov where most of my family was rounded up in the square and shot.

My very first memories of the Cracow ghetto are of the wall going up around a small section of the city and the Jews herded into the ghetto. It was pretty much like every ghetto you may have seen in documentaries, only smaller than the Warsaw ghetto. Conditions were horrific; there was hunger; there was death; we were terribly crowded. I remember living with perhaps three four families in a room. We would hang blankets from the ceiling just to have some sort of privacy.

Then transports started. Of course we did not know at the time that these people were destined for death. The first to be rounded up and taken away were the old, the sick, and the children. Old could be anyone 50 or 55. The sick included those either physically or mentally handicapped and the children under fourteen. My parents realized that I was in trouble because I was not fourteen and managed to get me false papers claiming I was fourteen. And so we began to cheat. I cheated a lot. I cheated with my sister making myself older and her younger. At one point I cheated by getting documents claiming that I was not Jewish. My parents never told me how this was done because they were always afraid that if I was caught and tortured, I would probably have told how I got them and endangered other people. These papers would allow

me to get out of the ghetto as an Aryan. My mother even died my hair blond. Temporarily I was safe; however the lists were growing constantly. One day my mother was on the list to be evacuated to be sent out of the ghetto. The transports were going constantly and there was that one horrific night when my mother was taken away from us. I always find it very difficult to talk about it so perhaps I'll read just part of a poem which I wrote in my diary that night in the ghetto. Later on of course we were not allowed to even have paper or pencil, but I would remember my poems in my head and eventually after the war, I wrote them down in Polish and finally into English. This is part of the poem that I wrote that very night when my mother was taken.

I suffered but I didn't cry,
the pain so fierce so deep,
it pierced my heart and squeezed it dry
and then I fell asleep.
A sleeping agony in dreams and nightmare that was true.
I heard the shots the screams that came from us, from me and you.
I promised I would tell the world,
but where to find the words
to speak of innocence and love
and tell how much it hurts
about those faces weak and pale, those dizzy eyes
around six million lips that whisper help but never made a sound;
to tell about the loss the grief
the dread of death and cold
of wickedness and misery
oh no it can't be told

My mother was taken to Belzac, one of the six death camps in Poland and of course, we never saw her again. Soon Blanca, her husband, Norbert, my father and I were taken to our first camp, Plashov. It was not an extermination camp, for lack of better words for this piece of history. When I mean is that there were no crematoria and no gas chambers. However, there was a hill where people were stripped of their clothing, shot, and dropped into a ravine where their bodies were burned. It was a pretty awful place. There were also a lot of public hangings. I have a long poem about the hanging of a young boy and an old man. The young boy was hanged because he sang a Russian song. The punishment is just mind-boggling. There were dogs that would tear people apart. We had a commandant, Aman Ghett, who was a real monster. He came inspecting us at work one time when I was digging ditches and building the road from the stones of the Jewish cemetery on which the camp was built. We were breaking up the stones and he came by and didn't like the way my friend's mother was working. He took out a gun and shot her. For his amusement he would order prisoners to run and then would shoot them for target practice. It was an awful place. We had all kinds of floggings and all kinds of public punishment. But being with my sister all the time was a great comfort. Of course this was not a camp that was as bad. Everything is so relative. It was not as high-security either as Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen.

I want to share a poem with you which makes me feel a little better. It is about my father. He and Norbert were in the men's part of the camp. My sister and I were together in the women's part. I sneaked in to see my father and, one day, and was a boy, probably also cheating about his age, playing the harmonica. You already have an idea how dangerous it was to have anything personal because of that boy who was hanged when he sang a Russian song, but still he hung on to that very precious harmonica and he played it. My father looked at me and said, "You and I never had a chance to dance together." I call this poem victory.

I danced with you that one time only. How said you were, how tired lonely. You knew that they would take you soon so when your bunk mate played a tune, you whispered, little one let us dance. We may not have another chance.

To grasp this moment sense the mood your arms around me felt so good; the ugly barracks disappeared there was no hunger and no fear. Oh what a site just you and I my lovely father once big and strong and me a child condemned to die. I thought how long before the song must end there are no tools to measure love and only fool's would fail to scale your victory.

My father and Norbert were taken away shortly after that to Mauthausen, another unspeakable place. My father was killed just weeks before the end of the war.

My next camp was Auschwitz. I think it is probably the most notorious of all of the death factories. The smell of

Auschwitz is something that I'll never forget especially when I hear and read about the historical revisionists/distortionists. These people claim the Holocaust never happened. The smell of Auschwitz is always there to remind me that I really was there. I remember Auschwitz as being very cold. I remember the selections, who was to live and who was to die. I remember being very wet and very cold. I remember being dismissed just before we were to get our numbers and our heads shaved because so many people were brought in that time on that particular day that they never got to us.

From Auschwitz we were taken on the Death March which has been written about and discussed many times. It was January sixteenth. We were with about sixty-thousand people and certainly not dressed for a hike in the winter. It was very cold; the roads were very slippery. We lived mostly on snow. I remember my sister would not let me sleep because it was very easy to die in the snow. Of course if you died, you were left. If you could not keep up with the column or you could not march fast enough, you might get a bullet. If not, you just dropped by the roadside. Every very morning, the roads were loaded strewn with bodies of the people who just didn't make it. I remember just wanting to lie down and die. Of course my sister would always push me and poke me and drag me along. She would not let me die. Through all the other horrors, she was always there, supporting me, helping to find an extra piece of bread.

After many days, the Death March for us ended when we were put on cattle cars that took us into Bergen-Belsen. Cattle cars are a whole other universe too. These cattle cars were open so we were covered with snow and we lived literally on snow. Occasionally going through Czechoslovakia I remember there were some brave Christian farmers who would throw raw potatoes into the cattle cars. I usually talk about that because there was so much horror, so much collaboration among the native populations, especially in Poland, that I liked to point out that were some brave people who occasionally saved a Jewish child or even a family. We call them the Righteous among the nations.

I think that Bergen-Belsen was worse than Auschwitz. It was a death trap. They dumped thirty of us, woman, into one barrack made for maybe 40 people. There was no food; there were no blankets; there were no bunks. The only food we ever got was we from when we would sneak behind the German kitchens to steal whatever they had thrown away. Had we been caught, we would have been shot. Typhus was the biggest killer. Everybody in Bergen-Belsen had typhus and we were all beginning to die. Then suddenly one day thirty women were selected to go to another camp, a slave labor camp. There were maybe sixteen-hundred work camps in Germany, Austria, Poland, and France and elsewhere. Somehow my sister and I were among the thirty people who were taken to this other camp again. We were put into cattle car. By this time, my sister was already sick with typhus and dying. I remember growing up very quickly because there wasn't a thing I could do for her. I was totally helpless. Once I caught some rain water for her.

After many days of that horror we arrived at a small camp called Venusberg. It was run by SS women who were very brutal and cruel. In fact, I got my one and only physical beating one of them because I got into line for food a second time to get some for my sister who was very sick and could not stand in line. I gave her my bowl and I got in line again. Even in that 'good' camp, we were starving. I was very hungry, but when I got in line the second time this particular monstrous big SS woman recognized that it was my second time and she beat me. I never got my second bowl of soup. There were many other instances of horror. We also worked very hard making airplanes for the German Reich at Messerschmidt. By then there was some prisoners of war in that factory. We were not allowed to communicate with them of course, but through the grape vine we would hear that it was almost over; just hang in there and the war would be over.

I tried to hang in there, but I got very sick with Typhus which is a very debilitating disease. I had a high fever, diarrhea, was throwing up, and very thirsty. There certainly was no medical care whatsoever. I was thrown in a barrack for the sick from which very few people returned. When they decided to evacuate that camp I was sure they would burn that barrack with all those people who were too far gone. My sister and another friend dragged me out of there and again we were put into cattle cars. My very last trip in those sealed cattle cars took sixteen days. It was so very hot and perhaps it my high fever of maybe hundred and five or six, but I was mostly delirious and totally unconscious. I do remember instances when they would open the sealed doors and my sister would prop me up against the back of the car and pinch my cheeks. She would make me sit up somewhat straight so that I would not be thrown out with the corpses.

We finally got to Mauthausen, the same camp where my father and Norbert were taken; the camp where Norbert survived, but my father was killed just weeks before the end. I remember very little except being very sick. We were six on a bunk like sardines. I remember one day I looked up and there was a black American soldier. The Allies of course knew what was happening to us by 1942, but unfortunately we were not a priority. In fact they refused to bomb the railroad tracks which took the victims to Auschwitz. Although the leadership of the Allies knew what was happening, the soldiers did not. This particular black soldier that I remember was standing there totally devastated by what he saw. The horror on his face is something that even in my state, I cannot ever forget. I was unable to really distinguish between nightmare and reality. I weighed about sixty pounds and was really more dead than alive. I will conclude my presentation with this poem which I call

My Black Messiah

A black GI stood by the door
(I never saw a black before)
He will set me free before I die
I thought he must be the messiah.
A black messiah came for me.
He stared with eyes that didn't see.
He never heard a single word
which hung absurd upon my tongue.
And then he simply froze in place
the shock the horror on his face.
He didn't weep, he didn't cry
but deep with-in his gentle eyes
a flood of devastating pain,
his innocence forever slain.
For me with yet another dawn
I found my black messiah gone.
And on we went our separate ways
for many years without a trace
but there's a special bond we share
which has grown strong because we dare
to live, to hope, to smile, and yet
we vow not ever to forget.