



Rise Stillman

Rise Stillman born in 1930 and lived in Velke Komyaty, a small village with her parents in what was then Czechoslovakia. She was the fourth child in a family of six children. There were about 25 Jewish families in the village, all Orthodox and most of them were quite poor. The town was at the base of the Carpathian Mountains and most inhabitants were small farmers. In 1942, a while after Hungary took over the area, life became more difficult.

During October or November of 1943, one of Rise's relatives who she called "Aunt Pepe" needed assistance. She had broken her hip and her daughter, Emma, needed help caring for her. They lived in a town a few kilometers away and Rise, who was 13 at the time, was sent to help. After a few weeks, she missed her family and wanted to return to her home. Emma thought it would be too dangerous to travel so she stayed. She did not see most of her family again.

Germany occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944. About a month later, on the day after Passover in April, two soldiers knocked on their door and demanded that they immediately leave their house and move to the ghetto. By May, the vast majority of the Jews in the area had been relocated to the ghettos and the mass deportations began. Early one morning they were taken to the train station and packed into cattle cars. It was too dark in the car to see very well and there was no room to move. She was on that train for three days without much food or water. When the car doors were opened, she heard men shouting, dogs barking and loud music blaring. She had arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. She was separated from her relatives through the "selection" process. She never saw them again.

Rise was herded into a large hall and had her hair shaved off, a tattooed number was affixed to her arm, and she was given a prison uniform. Shortly afterwards she was selected as part of a group of prisoners to be taken daily to Krakow to dig trenches. In October 1944, she was taken to Bergen Belsen. There she worked in a potato field gleaning any leftover potatoes after the harvest. They were warned not to take any produce for themselves. By that afternoon they were gathered up and taken to the farmhouse area. There, they were forced to watch an SS officer beat a man to death because he had stolen a potato. One of her last assignments was working in an underground munitions factory that was located in a salt mine. The food, working and sleeping conditions were always abysmal.

When the war was over in May of 1945, Rise was taken to Sweden to recuperate from her malnutrition and experiences in the various camps. She was able to emigrate to the US in February 1948. She went to Ohio to live with relatives who had come to the US before the war. In Ohio, she married an American whom she knew from work. They had a son who eventually

relocated to Arizona for employment. After her husband died, Rise moved to Arizona as well. In addition to her son, she also has a granddaughter. It is only very recently that Rise has begun to tell her story of life during the Holocaust.