

From the Testimony of Nehama Baruchson-Kaufman about Escaping from the Germans Till Liberated by the Red Army

...Winter, snow... We kept walking eastward, two thin girls, abandoned to their fate... among concrete ruins, on roads and paths where the war had brought destruction. Our shoes were tattered, our ragged clothes were completely shapeless, and during that whole time we did not find a single living Jew. There seemed to be no more Jews left in the world and we two were the last who had survived the catastrophe.

The German raced past us in headlong flight, moving westward. Tens of thousands of refugees were on the march, and we were among them. We walked on swollen feet, hungry for a piece of bread, hiding in abandoned huts outside villages. No one who was not there can understand it, and we can add nothing new for those who were there.

Leah was still so weak that she could hardly lift her feet. "Where are you dragging me? Who is waiting for us?" she pleaded. I did not reply. I was afraid that unnecessary talk would weaken me. Only once I could not contain my temper and I erupted angrily: "Well, really, as though it makes any difference whether we are going toward the east, the west, or the south", for we were moving into the unknown.

...Somewhere the Russians were still fighting the Germans, but even though we heard the thunder of artillery we kept going. Our bodies longed to stretch out on the ground, to rest, to forget everything. But our feet continued to walk through fields of ice and mounds of snow, and unbelievably we slept as we walked. We sank into a kind of stupor, but beneath the edge of consciousness caution propelled us forward. The instinct of self-preservation prevented us from sitting down, otherwise we might not be able to get up again and we would freeze to death. In this was we kept walking and marching, walking and growing weaker and faltering. At farms we held out our hand for a slice of bread, we begged.

...For two whole days we hid in the house [of a Polish peasant woman] as waves of retreating Germans came in to rest, to search, and to check things out, before they went on. Throughout that whole time the column of retreating Germans passed by the village, soldier after soldier and battalion after battalion. They did not call it a “retreat” but an “evacuation”. In the final stage of the withdrawal a special corps, the rear guard, went through. Its purpose was to kill everyone who remained, to destroy everything so that nothing would be left for the enemy. With lances and bayonets they killed the cows and other animals, they prodded piles of hay in the barns and jabbed at mattresses looking for people in hiding. That Polish gentile woman hid us under two mattresses. We heard them enter the house, pounding with the bayonets and sticking them into various places; we heard them very well, but they didn’t find us. When they left we came out and heard that the Russians had arrived.

I remember that I picked a flower in the garden and gave it to the first Russian soldier I saw as a mark of appreciation for the liberation. We were so happy, and we thought: this is the start of a new life!...

Source: *The Anguish of Liberation- Testimonies from 1945*, edited by Y. Kleiman and N. Springer- Aharoni, (Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1995), pp. 17- 18