

From the Testimony of Tova Berger about the Death March to Bergen-Belsen

A: Yes. At the time they were bombing around we started moving.

Q: You knew it was planes of Russians, Americans?

A: Yes. They used us as a human shield. They let the people know, whoever was doing the bombing, that they have “Fluechtlinge” with them, and then the bombing wasn’t done because they knew that thousands and thousands of Jewish people hid in the camp and they wouldn’t do the bombing, so they used us as a human shield in a lot of places. But then they started using us in order to escape for themselves. A lot of soldiers, SS soldiers, took us with them and we started the “Death March” to Bergen-Belsen because Bergen-Belsen was still out of reach.

Q: So they took you out of the camp, the soldiers, with the SS. The SS were still there.

A: Yes. The SS took us out and they took us all marching in the winter sometimes without shoes, sometimes we had very bad shoes. And I remember that we marched - they took about two thousand people from Schlesiensee. Yes, it was a lot of people that were working there.

Q: Jewish people only?

A: Yes.

Q: From different countries?

A: Yes, from different countries and maybe not only from Auschwitz. I don’t know from where they brought them to work there.

Q: They were all working in the trenches?

A: Yes, the trenches, to do this stuff. And some of them in factories - I don’t know exactly what everybody was doing, but I remember that we were seeing that thousands and thousands of Jewish people were walking and all the sides were lined with SS soldiers. Nobody could even think about escaping. But I was thinking about it and some people did, just to lay down and wait until they passed because we knew that they are running away from something. Somebody is going to recover us. Some people tried that and they were shot

right away. So they had a philosophy they told us right away - whoever cannot walk doesn't have to walk. You sit down.

Q: And they shoot you.

A: They shoot you. So my sister wasn't as athletic as I was and she told me very quietly, "I am going to sit down. I cannot walk anymore." So I said, "Okay, then I'm going to sit down, too." We were very close. So in order not to have me sit down, she continued. Sometimes we got a piece of bread and we saved it for the morning.

Q: They gave you a piece of bread or someone on the way gave you now?

A: They were not allowed to give. We picked up bones from the streets and were eating it. They weren't allowed to give us. Some farmers were looking at us with very sorry eyes, but they couldn't touch us because the SS wouldn't let them help us. But sometimes we got bread and we put it away under the straw for next morning because half of it we ate and the other half we hid because we couldn't walk otherwise, we were so weak. And sometimes they stole it from us, other people. Some people behaved like animals. They stole our bread and sometimes I told my sister I already had my portion and I wanted her to eat more and she told me the same - we were protecting each other and lying to each other in order to survive. And I remember that this march was so terrible that after two thousand that started out from Schlesiensee, I think only fifteen were left, fifteen or twenty. A very, very small number of people. We couldn't survive it. We marched thirty miles a day. We walked thirty miles a day, without food, without water, in cold temperature. Very inhuman conditions. We arrived in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: How long did it take about? How many weeks?

A: Weeks.

Q: Weeks and weeks and weeks in the snow. You slept on the road in barns?

A: In barns. We always slept in barns. During the day we walked and at night we slept in barns because the SS men wanted to go to sleep.

Q: Yes, of course. They gave you just this little food, very little. No water and no...

A: Just enough to survive, but we couldn't take the physical exercise. I mean, the walking was too much with this kind of food that they gave us. We were all

young, everybody was under twenty. But even so, it was such a condition that it was unbearable. A lot of people died on the way in the marching. It was no question about it. Not everybody survived. So we got to Bergen-Belsen and it wasn't better.

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