

## From the Testimony of Judith Becker about Obtaining Shoes During a Death March

So to go back again to the shoes, the night before they led us out to the Death March, about two or three days before, they opened up all of the storage areas and they told the people to take whatever they want. Now the good stuff had already been taken by the Nazi guards and also by some of the Slovak kapos. At that time Auschwitz and Birkenau was mostly staffed, the Jewish staff was from Slovakia. And the Slovakian women took some of the Hungarians who came from Slovakia into their group, but there were no Polish-born women in the administration. So they opened up the storage things and we ran there and we took, I took...sheets were available and blankets and sandals, these Ersatz sandals. I don't know what possessed me, but I took as many as I could carry and that's about it. I was looking for more canteens because the three of us didn't have one yet - one of us had one. And that night, the last night, I don't know if Marlot forgot it or...because we always used to sleep with the shoes under our head. Now whether she forgot to put them there or whether somebody took them from there, I don't know, but her shoes were gone in the morning. So when we started out on the march she had to wear these sandals and they disintegrated in the snow - it was January. And in addition to which she developed scurvy. Her entire mouth became swollen and her teeth started to come loose and she was delirious. She was in high fever and it was very bad, so what we did, first of all we had to march at a very steady pace and not to lose our row. In other words, the row was five people. And anybody who slowed down was shot and we knew where to go because on each side we had a wall of corpses. And there was absolutely no mercy shown. One woman who was walking next to me recognized her husband as lying there by the side so she ran over to see if he was still alive. So the Nazi says: "Oh, you want to be with your husband?" And he shot her in the head. That's why they called it a Death March. We were decimated and really we were walking through empty, empty fields of snow and there were farms maybe very far away - we could hardly

see them. The only way we knew where we were going, as I said, was the two walls of corpses on either side. And she couldn't keep up, she didn't want to keep up. So we had to drop almost everything, but we shredded blankets and we tied them around her feet to hold her shoes together, then we tied around here to hold her teeth in, and then we took the rest of the blanket and between us we carried her. Well, this only went on for so long, we couldn't keep this up, and then I noticed that some of the kapos, some of the Slovak kapos had a wagon which they themselves pushed and they had loaded their stuff and I think the reason they let them have the wagon is because some of the SS or some of the kapos, the "*schwarzwinklers*" who very anxious to make sure that they got out with their goods had put their stuff on there so they were pushing this wagon - it was sort of like a flat platform on wheels and there were twelve, fourteen, fifteen women pushing it. So I dragged her to the wagon and I attached her because I was afraid she wasn't going to hold on. So I wound it around and I attached her to the wagon. And one of the "Slovachkas" noticed it and she pushed her away so it was a bad situation, a very bad situation and we did the best that we could. We had thrown away everything, we just concentrated on dragging her. And then again one of those miracles happened. There was a bombardment and they made us get off the road into the cellar of a farmhouse and the SS went inside and ordered a meal. And the daughter of the people came down to bring up potatoes or whatever they had in the cellar and I begged her for some food and she was very brusque, she was very nasty - a young girl. And she took off, like all good German girls, she took off her shoes and put on "*hauspantoffel*", she put on these wooden clogs in order to go to the basement because the basement didn't have paved floors. And I'm taking a look at these shoes and they are exactly her size. I knew, I didn't have to think about...I says this is: "HaShem Yisborach" is putting these shoes here because otherwise we're finished. So I quickly run back to the basement and I take two pairs of these new sandals that we had schlepped along and I put them in place of these shoes, you know, ran down, put them on her, make them full of mud so they wouldn't look new - because they were brand new, she must have just gotten them for Christmas - and hoping that she would not come back until we were already chased out from

the basement. So "*Der ribbono schel ulom hat geholfen*," the signal came that we have to leave and she was still in the back looking for her stuff, so she wanted to get by us, so the SS man wouldn't let her. He was afraid that we would attach ourselves to her, whatever. He told her that she must stay separate. So we were being chased out of the basement. My sister now has shoes and of course she immediately sounded the alarm and they were chasing us. Not necessarily us - they were chasing for her shoes for quite awhile, but she had shoes. And with those shoes we managed much better than without them. You know, she was still sick, but at least she had shoes.

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