

Oral history interview with Judith Kalman Mandel
RG-50.233*0083

Summary

Judith Kalman Mandel, from Hatvan, Hungary says that her family “were Hungarians who happened to be Jewish -- very proud to be assimilated and very well liked, in the beginning.”

But after the Germans occupied Hungary on March 19, 1944, Jews had to wear the Jewish star, children spit on her and called her names, and Jews were moved into a ghetto. Once, she and about 50 others from the ghetto were forced to march in the middle of the gutter, kissing the ground filled with horse-dung, while “the people of this lovely little town... laughed and cheered and clapped,” She recalls “Hungarian so-called police beat us unmercifully, unmercifully.”

Before their possessions were confiscated, she and her mother destroyed their most treasured items, including pearls flushed down the toilet. Although peasants offered to hide Judith and her mother separately, the mother refused to be separated from her child.

They were sent from Hatvan to Auschwitz, and arrived on June 15, 1944. Mengele separated them. Judith’s barrack that had about 1,000 people, all sleeping on the floor. Things that helped “hold myself up high: I never stole from my fellow inmates; never fought for food; and never sat on the kuble,” a barrel used as a communal toilet.

After three weeks, she was sent to Krakow Plaszow concentration camp, where she moved large gravestones. Women pulled heavy wagons. Gestapo constantly beat and tortured people, and often had dogs bite women’s breasts and men’s testicles. She saw children burned alive. She survived typhoid fever, helped by a friend who sneaked her out of the hospital, and also blood poisoning and pleurisy. She was beaten so many times that she thought often about killing herself. One of her friends grabbed the fence and electrocuted herself. Another was beaten so often in the eyes that she became blind in one eye. Judith recited poetry and also sang for food.

They were sent back to Auschwitz, a three day journey with no water. Some drank their own urine or blood and died. Corpses were thrown in the back of the very crowded train.

She weighed only about 44 pounds when American troops liberated her train on May 1, 1945 at Seeshaupt, Germany. She was taken to Munich, then to Dachau. A friend, Dr. Gatheish Gabol. found her and took her to Partenkirchen, Germany to a hospital for a week. Then, she was in an UNRA camp until September. She found out that her mother, aged 38, grandmother, and cousins perished. She found her father, who had been liberated in January, after she returned to Hungary. Eventually, she married and they emigrated to (an unspecified city) United States.

“What happened to us could happen to anybody else who is surrounded by fear, anger, discrimination,” Judith says, and credits her survival to luck. “I am very, very happy...it was worth it -- to be alive.”