

Tikvah

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Word Count:

“The Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human.”

-Adolf Hitler

“State your name, woman!” a Nazi soldier screamed in my face. They lined us up in our ghetto. The trains arrived. It was obvious that the Nazis would take some of us away.

“Tikvah Levinthal,” I said, almost in a whisper. I was very nervous. Everyone was. If I was taken away on their trains, I wouldn’t see my children again. My husband was killed months ago. Every day has been a struggle to provide for my children. Both my children are with me. They found us hiding in a bunker that we made. Someone had told the Nazis of our location, hoping they would be spared. That was never the case.

“Tikvah Levinthal...” The officer repeated. “Do these children belong to you?”

“Yes...” I said in a whisper.

“DO NOT MUTTER! You shall speak up. Repeat yourself.”

“Yes.” I knew that whatever my answer was, it wouldn’t affect what would happen next. The officer grabbed me by the arm and put me in a line. There was nothing I could do, but struggle. I screamed amidst the silence of the dark, dirty ghetto.

“NO! MY CHILDREN!” The officer smiled. He then proceeded to kick me with his hard, black rubber boot. I cried out in pain. The officer tightened his grip and forced me into the dark

| Tikvah

train. I managed to get one final glance at my children before the train door shut. Both were crying. They didn't know what to do. They had no one to go to.

I sat in the dark of the train for an hour before it started to move. I sat there, silently weeping. I repeated an old Hebrew prayer to myself. The prayer was passed through the generations of my family.

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be in your heart

And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall speak of them

when you sit at home, and when you walk along the way, and when you lie down and when you rise up.

And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes.

And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” This gave me hope for what was to come.

After what felt like hours on the train, we stopped. I overheard a Nazi officer say, “We’ve reached the Ravensbrück camp.” I have no idea as to what these camps would be, but I had to be strong. I must survive for my children, and for our future. It’s going to be hard to

survive in these “camps”, but I must. There are no decisions to be made; I must stay in the camp and live.

The doors open, and I am thrown outside of the train into the dark of the night. It appears to be past midnight, but I cannot be sure. Glancing around, I take in my surroundings. It was hard to make out faces in the night, but it was obvious that the lines consisted of mostly women. We were marched to a group of twelve barracks for prisoners. Inside the barracks, there were 60 spaces to sleep, with three bunks in each space. We were assigned a bunk, and told to sleep. As I lay down in my bunk, I thought of my two kids. Their smiling faces, always optimistic, even in the darkest times. I can't sleep, but no one can. I lay awake and worry.

The next day arrives in what feels like an eternity. We are woken very early. We are marched from the barracks and split into groups. My group was taken to a small, empty field. If anyone was out of line they were whipped by one of the snickering Nazis.

“You shall dig, Jews,” yelled one of the Nazi officers. “And, it would not be wise to refuse.” The officer looked at all of us, smiled, and then yelled “NOW GET TO WORK.”

I began to bend over and scratch at the cold, hard dirt with my bare hands. We were not supplied with the proper tools to dig. We all knew that they were making us dig to humiliate us. There was no point in this job, but I had no choice. A woman asked out loud, “Why must we dig? We don't even have the tools!”

An officer said something in German, looked at the woman, and grabbed her. He pulled out his shiny pistol. The soldier's intentions were clear. There was a loud bang, and the woman lay dead.

| Tikvah

“Anyone else?” The officer spat with a smile. Everyone continued with their work.

After a very long day of work, we were given a bread crust and a bit of water. Back at the barracks, there were twenty-four bunks empty. We lay in silence. A friend from the ghetto dropped a note from her bunk, written in Yiddish. It said, “*I have found a way to escape. I can only take one other person. Meet me near the fence after work tomorrow.*” I’ll go. She is trustworthy.

Another long day of digging. I remained unnoticed, obeying the Nazis commands. In the dark, I snuck to the spot the woman talked about. Sure enough, she was there.

“Quick, crawl through the hole,” she said. We slipped through and ran until we collapsed. We stopped and looked around. I have to survive to make it back to my children. I will survive, so that my children will see me once more. My name, Tikvah, means hope. We can hold on to hope, because hope will never fade.

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