

Be Strong, Be Brave

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The crash of the door falling to the ground, the piercing scream of my mother, and the heavy trampling feet said it was not a normal night. Then I knew they had found us. The Green Police had found out we were Jewish. Something must have gone wrong. Papa changed our papers to testify that we were Christians. How did they find out?

With so many questions racing through my head, I ran down the stairs. I got to the bottom step only to find that two Nazi soldiers had started to search our house. The other two were holding guns. Papa tried to explain to them that we were just a German Christian family. The two soldiers looked at each other and I knew what was going to happen. "Papa, I love you!" I screamed, but he will never know. My scream was drowned out by the sound of a gunshot. I watched father crumple to the ground, a sight I thought I would never witness. After that, everything was confusing, blurry almost. I just watched my papa get shot, but I was not crying, I just felt numb.

I turned around and saw another soldier holding my mother at gunpoint. He said something about a concentration camp and shoved my mother towards the empty doorframe. She refused to go. The soldiers exchanged the look once again. This time, my mother yelled out to me, "Iby, be strong, be brave." I saw my mother fall to the ground. Then, the soldier yelled out something I could not hear. The four soldiers assembled in our kitchen and talked for a minute. One came over to me and forcefully grabbed me by the arm. He led me out to a truck with a swastika on it and the other soldiers followed.

I looked back at the house I was walking away from and remembered the life I used to know. I had no idea where I was going, but I had a feeling it would be terrible. I thought of my parents. They sacrificed their lives to save me. Now I must live for them.

Be Strong, Be Brave

I finally realized that I was sitting in the Nazi truck. We drove for about ten minutes and then stopped at a railroad track. There was a train on the tracks and people were being forced into it. I could hear screams, gunshots, and crying all around me. The soldier who killed my father shoved me into the boxcar with about sixty other people on it. A man told me we were going to a concentration camp. That is when I could take it no more. I started to cry, thinking about the camp, the soldiers, and my parents. I cried myself to sleep.

I woke up with a start when I heard a guard shout. We had arrived at the camp called Mauthausen. They branded me with a number, which was used instead of my name. The work was so hard, harder than anything I had ever done in my life. At that moment, I heard my mother's voice. She told me to pretend that the work was just the chores I used to do at home. Her voice calmed me, so I kept working. Finally, soldiers came to us and said we were done. They brought us to a room with a long table that had a bowl of broth for each of us. Anyone who refused to eat was shot on site. The broth tasted bad. It made me wish I had my mother's noodle soup from back home. Mother's voice came to me again. "Iby, remember the good soup from home?" I imagined the warm broth and noodles my mother used to make and my cold broth did not seem so bad. The soldiers came to us once more that day to send us to bed. I would not even call them beds, just long pieces of wood. There were no blankets either. We just had the thin clothes we were wearing. As I sat there freezing, I thought of the times when mother used to hold me in her arms and sing to me as a child, warm and comforting. This made the night almost bearable.

The terrible cycle of work, broth, and falling asleep freezing has gone on for so long. It has been almost eleven months. Every day, when we come back to our bunks there are fewer and

Be Strong, Be Brave

fewer of us. Mama's words have made my time at the concentration camp easier. "Be strong, be brave" were her last words. I think I have lived up to them.

Today, they are separating us either to keep working or to be sent to the gas chamber. I pictured my life as a child with my mother and father and all the wonderful times we had. As I walked in the line, I saw a little boy who was no more than eight. "Be strong, be brave", I whispered to him as I walked by. I hoped these words would help him like they had helped me. I hoped he would be liberated and get to live a happy life, like so many of us would not. I knew my time was coming to an end. I prayed and then told my mother and father I would be with them soon. I felt a hand on my back as I was pushed into the gas chamber.