

# Left Without Freedom

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999 words

Screams.

Screams of pain, of horror, screams of families torn apart, screams of mercy.

That's all I'm aware of.

We are immediately herded off the train as it pulls to a stop.

Shoved,

Kicked,

Spat on.

We were animals to them.

No, less than animals.

To them, we were little bugs you toss around for fun.

The first thing I saw was a sign above the daunting entrance.

“ARBEIT MACHT FREI” it read, its metal letters bending into abnormal angles.

Work will set you free.

Work? What kind of work? I'll work. I need distractions, as many as possible.

I am shoved through the gates,

The stench of decaying bodies knocks me off my feet.

No, not decaying,

Burning. Burning bodies.

A middle-aged man yanks me back into a standing position immediately.

“Be careful,” is all he says.

It was the first verbal interaction I'd had with anyone in months.

The Nazis split us by gender,

And I had my head shaved with all the woman.

I received striped clothes that scratched my skin.

They felt like sandpaper.

However I hadn't changed clothes in months.

So I couldn't complain.

Three weeks.

Three weeks of dread,

Of excruciating pain,

Of listening to the strangled cries of torture around me,

Of gnawing starvation,

Of moving through my days with my eyes averted to the ground,

Of avoiding the men in shiny black boots dispersed through the prison,

Of dreading the day I'll take my shower, or get cooked alive in an oven,

Of missing Mama, Papa, and Abel,

Of despising the fact that I'm Jewish,

Of hating Hitler and his Nazi army.

I slept on hard wood shelves in a room with countless others.

Nightmares haunted me.

Then one night, as I cried out from the dark void my dreams had thrown me in,

Someone spoke.

A new woman, whose cheekbones weren't as sunken in,

Whose eye sockets weren't hollow,

Whose skin wasn't merely draped over her bones the way mine was.

Whose milky, swirling blue eyes still had life to them.

She looked optimistic,

Hopeful,

Even in the dim light of the stuffy, crude building we slept in.

I was desperately jealous of her.

She crawled over moaning dreamers on the floor to get to me,

Then sat next to me and spoke,

“How old are you?”

“12,” I croaked, the Nazi voices still ringing in my head.

“Family?”

“All gone. Taken.”

“We will be saved, the Soviets - our angels - will come soon. Have hope,” she whispers.

Another voice slices through the dark like a knife falling through water.

“Hope breeds eternal misery.” It was an old voice.

Wise,

Broken.

“No, the Soviets will help. They will rescue us,” the new woman whispers hoarsely.

“Help us? Help us?!” The crumbling voice cries,

“Really!? They are completely indifferent! They’re bystanders to this entire situation!”

“No.”

“If they were helpers, they wouldn’t have let me suffer like this!

They wouldn’t have let my daughter die,

They wouldn’t have taken every ounce of health from my body,

They wouldn’t let it be work each day just to stay alive!”

“Work will set you free,” I mutter.

“What do you think girl!?” The broken voice grunted to me.

“Nobody can be indifferent. Everyone has opinions, feelings.”

“The Nazis are indifferent towards our survival.”

I stayed quiet.

Then she was taken.

I never even learned her name, but the hopeful woman with milky eyes was taken.

The Nazis evacuated thousands of us from the camp.

I was devastated when I wasn't taken.

I wanted to leave with the happy woman,

The final thread of hope I had.

Even when the Soviets came,

Even after they rescued us,

Proved the milky-eyed woman was right,

Proved there were helpers and rescuers left in the wretched hell of a world we lived in,

Liberated the mere 6,000 of us remaining in the camp,

Liberated me,

I still felt

Empty,

Indifferent to what would happen to me.

Now, I sit in my bedroom,

Watching Mother Nature's tears dribble down the window in the palm of the night.

I think of the day's events.

I think of the screams of horror, pain, mercy, and families being shattered today,

All at the hands of a single man,

A terrorist much like Adolf Hitler.

I think of how things never change.

I close my eyes,

Swimming in recent memories of two of the most loved buildings in New York dying,

Burnt to scrap just like the Jews at Auschwitz,

Crumbling until there's nothing left like the broken woman in the barracks,

Flaming against the hazy blue sky of New York,

The color of the sky matching the hopeful woman's eyes.

My eyes open,

And glance at my filthy doctor's scrubs,

covered in soot, blood, and debris from the buildings,

Hanging in the corner of the room.

I was most definitely a helper on this day in history,

September 11, 2001.

I had worked harder than ever today as a first responder,

Saving numerous lives,

But only to redeem myself for those who saved me.

Work will set you free.

I would not be a bystander, or indifferent like some in the Holocaust.

I would be a helper, a rescuer.

When I entered camp Auschwitz as a child, I went in with something important,

But I didn't come out with it.

I left it in there with the souls of nearly 1.3 million others.

I'd lost my freedom.

I'd gone in that torturous world,

Completely oblivious to the horrors people can put each other through,

Free from the sights and knowledge I was to see and learn in there.

Now, however,

I'm still a prisoner.

Despite the lack of indifference demonstrated by our Soviet saviors,

Despite the fact that they were rescuers, helpers,

Just as I am today, at age 68.

Even though I am no longer at the hands of the Holocaust,

I'm still not free.

Because once you know something,

There is no way to forget it.

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