

Surviving the Alphabet

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Our Lady of the Elms

474 Words

No one really wanted to talk about it. Even me. The subject--ever so touchy, could trigger memories like an MP 40. I was fresh out of the camps. I started at Stutthof. Then transferred to Majdanek. I ended up in Auschwitz for the last two years of my German captivity. Liberated on January 27, 1945, I was sent back to a different "refugee camp" as they called it. I spent a little under three months there. Then what?

Then to pick up and keep moving. To gather up all my strength and the last drop of my tears to use when I need it most. My gait never changed- head low and eyes down. I was too afraid to look up and see nothing had changed. But now the year is 1956 and I've started a family.

My daughter Frances is nine now. She is being taught about the atrocities that happened just a mere 11 years ago. With very scanty information, she knows that I am a primary source. She likes to take notes on this particular subject.

"...and the last camp I was in was Auschwitz."

"How do you spell Auschwitz?" she said innocently.

"Well..." I knew I was about to have flashbacks. "A... is for all alone." I was torn away from my mother quicker than we could think to say goodbye. I was thrown into a hell of hatred. "U is for under the winter sky." The brutal, forced marches in the snow took the lives of many. Already in terrible condition, we were left to face frostbite and frozen limbs, a gun, or risk the escape route. No matter who stopped or when, the snow kept falling, the wind kept howling, and the frost kept biting. "S is for soup." Once in a blue moon we had something other than boiled water and compost. "C is for confusion." We never really knew what the date was, when we were leaving for the next camp, when we would see someone we knew again, when we would get out. "H is for help that won't come." Under the "care" of the Nazis, we were always on our

toes making sure we weren't the next one shot or exterminated. "W is for why." Nobody really knew *why* we were there, what we did. "I is for in line." Standing in line for roll call. Staying in line not trying to escape. "T is for the target." We were the targets of their minds, words, and actions-- and their guns. "Z is for zoo animals." Our captors were bred to treat us like animals. We were ignored, mistreated, and alone.

"That was A-U-S-C-H-W-I-T-Z, right?"

"Yes, dear. A... A is for all alone..."

"But, mother," she said slowly.

"Yes, Frances?"

"You're not alone."

"Why, yes Frances," The realization sunk in. "Perhaps you're right."

Sources

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