

August 21, 2000

Dr. Judita Hruza's letter on the Reunion of the Veterans of the 71st Infantry, who liberated Guns kirchen Lager

I was one of the 17,000 prisoners of Guns kirchen death camp whose lives you saved. My name is Judith Hruza, born Ilkovics. I'm a retired physician and live in New Jersey with my husband. We have two children and four grandchildren. My life is good.

All this exists because you came to Guns kirchen in time to save my life. I have been grateful to you ever since. I wish I could thank you in person, but I will be in Europe at the time of the Reunion. I hope and pray that some of you will contact me by phone, fax, e-mail so we could exchange some personal experiences during those exciting days of May-June 1945.

Until this time I would like to tell you what it meant to me when you arrived on this glorious day in May. From October 1944 I had been in death camps and on death marches throughout Hungary and Austria. Guns kirchen was our last stop. We had known all the time that we were condemned to die before the end of the war. Our only hope was that you would liberate us before the Germans will succeed to kill us all.

In Guns kirchen they almost accomplished their goal. Beside the shootings and beatings, people were dying from "natural causes" at an increasing rate of several hundred a day. Natural causes were starvation, exposure, dehydration, typhus, and wounds. Had you come two weeks later you wouldn't have found anyone alive.

Those of us who could were still able to walk left the camp when we saw the white flag waving on the guard house. We walked towards the main road to meet the US Army. It was like a fairy tale: the endless column of Jeeps with the white stars, the cigarettes and goodies to us. They looked at us with pity and horror in their faces as if they were seeing ghosts and maybe they were. We shouted "hurrah" and scrambled for the gifts. I bit into my first Hershey bar and the sensation was unfamiliar to me and almost knocked me over. In a moment, as the fragrant sweetness was spreading over my tongue, long forgotten images came to mind: images of my life before, life of love, safety, and freedom. I realized that I had survived and I felt a rush of joy.

A few days later I was admitted to Lambach Hospital with typhus. Despite the misery of the illness, I savored the luxuries of clean skin and clean sheets on my bed and the care of my dear US Army doctor Dick Elliott, as he was nurturing me back to life. His buddies visited us at night in our hospital room, brought cookies and hot cocoa and tried to coax us into eating. I was surrounded by compassion and care. It gave me strength and the will to live and hope.

As long as I live I will always be grateful to you.

Thank you forever.