

April 11, 2010

Questions posed to Judita by students at Giff Hill School in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Judita's answers are in bold.

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1. Have you ever met any other Holocaust survivors after it was all over?  
**Yes. Back in Budapest I enrolled in medical school and I lived in a kind of dormitory-shelter for student survivors who had no family, no income, poor as church mouse. Several were from the same camps as me. We became good friends.**
2. What kind of work did you have to do?  
**During November to march in the slave labor camp we most were digging wide trenches against the Russian tanks.**
3. How do you feel about Germans today?  
**I have no ill feelings about Germans today. This generation has no responsibility for what their grandparents were doing.**
4. What motivated you to be strong and not give up?  
**I didn't want to make the Germans a favor to die before they kill me. I wanted to see my family. I wanted to see the Germans defeated and I was curious what would be the world without the anti-Jewish laws.**
5. Were you ever beaten?  
**I was slapped on the face for my own stupidity. Our guard, a high school student cursed at an old woman for working too slow and I asked him, "Did you learn this language in your senior year?" He slapped my face hard saying, "I'll show you what I learned."**
6. Do you have any scars from your experience? What are they?  
**Only on my soul.**
7. Besides your mom, who encouraged you the most to keep moving?  
**My mom's best friend, who became my surrogate mom during our ordeal.**
8. Did you see any mass executions?  
**I did and I was among the prisoners to be killed in the mountains running down into the valley. Luckily the killing was stopped before all of us were dead.**
9. As soon as you were freed, where did you go and what did you do?  
**I got typhus and was put in a military hospital. Then we were housed in a camp for displaced persons to wait for our transportation back to Hungary. We arrived in Budapest, Hungary on August 1945, three months after liberation which was on May 4, 1945.**
10. Do you have nightmares about your experience?  
**I used to have often the first years. Now I still used to dream that my parents are alive and they are on the way to the US and their plane crashes and I wake up crying.**
11. When and how did you find out they died in the camps?  
**I found out from my brother but I did not want to believe it.**
12. Did you ever see Hitler in person?  
**No, Hitler never visited our camps.**
13. Do you think the German soldiers were ever scared to kill so many people?  
**Yes, in the beginning they were ordered to shoot.**

14. What were you thinking when people were getting killed around you?  
**I was scared, desperately calling my mom, promising to be good and regretting that I had not eaten the bread in my backpack. I wanted to take 20 more breaths and survive to see the sea. Looking down the road ahead I dreaded that I'll be falling in the mud that was red from blood.**
15. What do you think now when you see someone with blonde hair and blue eyes?  
**I have no problem with blonde and blue eyes. My husband, my children, and granddaughters have this coloring. I only envied girls with those qualities because the Germans made special favors for them because they looked so German.**
16. How did the Nazis convince so many people that the Jews were bad?  
**After World War I in 1918 Germany lost the war that she had started. They had to pay high retribution to the winning countries and Germany got bankrupt. There was high unemployment, people felt hopeless and angry. Hitler, an unsuccessful painter, but a good speaker and agitator, convinced the crowd that their misery is caused by the Jews who belong to an inferior race and don't even deserve the title "human," while the Germans are the "Master people." Everything will be better when the Jews disappear from Europe. In the future Europe will be grateful when the Germans kill them all. They called it the Final Solution and Hitler implemented it in every country he occupied.**
17. What was the hardest thing you ever had to do?  
**Physically it was digging the frozen ground and marching in the freezing rain. Mentally, it was to take a warm coat off a dead body. After the war up to this day the hardest thing had been to accept the fact that my parents were killed and to accept the fact that I'll never see my parents again.**
18. Did you ever help anyone keep going?  
**Yes, we all helped each other. When somebody fell down or sat down we pulled them up and dragged them and when we couldn't anymore the others took over.**
19. Do you have any possessions from before the war?  
**Very few. Some valuables were returned to me that my mother had given neighbors for safekeeping. Friends returned some photos. My brother returned to our house but he only brought a handkerchief full of dirt from our garden because the new occupants did not even let him enter the house.**
20. Did you have any close friends during the Holocaust?  
**I did. We met again in the dormitory while in graduate school. It was really a shelter for the poorest students with no family, no money, no income, no roof over our heads. We lived like a family.**
21. Were you ever marked with a number on your arm?  
**No tattoo. They only did that in Auschwitz.**
22. Was Raoul Wallenberg a rich Swedish man?  
**Raoul Wallenberg came from a very rich Swedish family. He came to Budapest as an attaché of the Swedish Embassy in Budapest, but mainly to save the Jews. He bought large apartment buildings in the name of the Swedish king and housed there Jews saved from deportation.**
23. Why would you eat the mold from the bread?  
**I would eat everything that I could chew and swallow, never mind the taste.**
24. Did you make any friends on the death marches or did everyone just want to keep to themselves?

**I made many friends during the marches. We were looking out for each other.**

25. Do you have any children?

**Yes, I have two children, both doctors.**

26. Do you still go back to your hometown?

**No. I want to preserve the memory of our house with my parents in it.**

27. Did you ever confront any of the SS soldiers after the war?

**No, I never had the opportunity to meet any of them.**

28. Did you ever lost your faith?

**I had my first doubt when a prisoner physician was operating on a fellow prisoner and the guard threatened to shoot him if he doesn't stop immediately. Hundreds of us were praying from the bottom of our hearts for God to save him, but he was shot anyway for his bravery and dedication. We all were disappointed.**

29. Did you meet people of other races/faiths?

**No, the Jews were kept strictly separated from other prisoners. We had the worst conditions of every camp.**

30. When you hear about Germany on the news or meet Germans today, do you feel any hatred or resentment for them?

**Of course not. I cannot blame an entire nation for what the former generation has done.**

31. What happened to the man that was caught for giving you and the woman fake Swedish passport? Was he punished?

**Raoul Wallenberg did not give us fake documents. He issued them for real people who were unable to pick them up because they were not permitted to walk on the streets after October 15. So instead to throw them out, he gave them to the Jews on the road to save those. Our own documents had been take away, we were nameless. Wallenberg wasn't caught and wasn't punished. After the war he was captured by the Soviet army and nobody has heard of him since.**

32. How did you support your brother while going to medical school?

**We were both supported by an American Jewish organization called the Joint Commission. We got shelter and food, in addition I was tutoring high school students in English and Latin and my brother repaired electricity in bombed out houses at 16 years old while going to advanced high school.**

33. Did you ever try to escape?

**Yes, and I was caught and brought back to the colony of marchers and I was glad that they did not kill me.**

34. How does it feel to be a survivor of the Holocaust?

**It changed my life. I appreciate life more. I enjoy my daily showers. I appreciate my family, the love that they are giving me. Whenever I leave my house I take a piece of bread in my purse as a security blanket. When something bad (not tragic) happens to me I find myself counting my breaths and know that I can take any number I want and I am safe and my family is safe and things will be better. If it is not a life and death question then it is not worth being depressed over.**

35. Why didn't the Nazis just exterminate the people from the beginning instead of putting them through camps and everything?

It took time for the Nazis to work out a plan to do the mass extermination. In the beginning they killed by guns, then by toxic gas, then they worked out a system by which they utilized the prisoner's own strength to do some work on minimal upkeep. They would last for about three months. The Nazis utilized the prisoner's every asset – their clothes, jewelry, money, and after death their hair for filling mattresses, gold teeth, skin for lamp shades, and body fat for soap.

36. How long did it take you to recover?

**From the typhus I recovered in three weeks. Back in Budapest it took me longer to recover from the loss of my parents. Also, I was hungry all the time and at school I was unable to concentrate on the lecture for hunger. It took me another year to recover as I became an A-student through my entire studies till I got my MD in 1951.**

37. How did your children react when the guy in the shop said that the shooting on the hill was not true?

**They were hugging me and pulled me out of the story, helping my brother.**

38. What were your emotions like?

**In the store I was at first angry and later helpless because I saw in my mind the bloody bodies, I could hear the screams of the victims and the orders of the guards, "rush, rush Jewish pigs" and I was helpless against the guy's statements.**

39. When you hear about wars today, do they compare to the experiences you had?

**The Holocaust did not start with the war, but much sooner. And when the US entered the war it gave us tremendous hope because its victory was the only hope that we had for survival. When we heard the explosions coming closer and closer, it was music to our ears. Before the war started, Hitler occupied one European country after the other without a single shot, no country resisted. At the beginning of the war the countries began to resist and the Germans started to retreat. I will eternally be grateful to America for saving my life and many others.**

40. Do you keep in contact with any survivors that were with you?

**They are mostly dead. I belong to the youngest prisoners, now 65 years later I belong to the oldest survivors. We are an extinct species.**

41. Have you ever gone back and visited any of the places after the war?

**Yes, several times. Once participating in a documentary movie then on two separate unveilings of memorials and once for survivors' testimony.**

42. Why did you become a psychiatrist?

**I was always interested in the working of the mind. When I came to this country I changed my specialty. I have never regretted it.**

43. What was the first thing you wanted to do after you were liberated?

**I wanted to eat, eat, eat. Then I became very ill with typhus and then all I wanted was to lie in a bed with clean sheets and rest and let others take care of me.**

44. How did your experience change you?

**I value life more than before. I enjoy little things, like taking a shower or coming home from the cold, taking off my clothes wet from the rain. I used to be weak, sickly, shy, and prone to melancholy. I became more energetic, outgoing. I know that after enduring the camps and marches, I can take anything. I don't let everyday mishaps drag me down; when it's not about life and death, I can handle it.**

45. What was the worst moment for you?

- When the guards tore up my passport and we crossed the Austrian border. I wanted to die.**
46. Were you ever in a camp? Which one? If so, what was worse – the death marches or the camp?  
**Yes, of course. We were marching from one camp to another. Their names were: Koszeg, Rechnitz, Mauthausen, Gunskirchen. Hard to tell which were worst. The marches were exhausting and the nights in the rain didn't let us sleep. We were starving, but could eat snails, grass, leaves, and the occasional piece of bread from people in the villages. In the labor camps we had to dig and with very little food had no access to any food. The worst was Gunskirchen where people ate human flesh, but it was also the best because we were liberated from that camp.**
47. Why do you think you survived?  
**Mainly I was just lucky. I was determined to stay alive, that as long as one prisoner is still walking, I will be the second still walking.**
48. Is it difficult to tell your story?  
**Not really. I am determined to tell the story whenever I have the opportunity. I will be fighting the Holocaust deniers as long as I can talk.**
49. How did your brother manage to survive?  
**He got himself a christening certificate in another name and managed to survive the siege of Budapest and the Nazi hooligans who were dragging the Jews from their houses and shot in the Danube River. He was quick in his thinking and managed to get out from dangerous situations.**
50. Did you ever hear about Oskar Schindler during the war?  
**No, we did not know anything about the other camps or victims. I only saw the movie.**
51. How accurate is the movie about him?  
**The movie is close to the truth, only the reality was much worse.**
52. How did Jews feel about those Jews who worked for the Germans?  
**In the camps we did what they ordered. Everybody worked for the Germans. Some jobs were better than others (e.g., cleaning the SS quarters was better than digging). Working in the kitchen was also better. But we didn't blame the lucky ones for their jobs.**