

## Ruzena Deutschova

1927

Dombo, Czechoslovakia

My grandma lived with us when I was growing up and I remember her gravestone was bought many years before she died and was kept in the garden. She loved to garden and collected rose petals and made syrup from them. She collected many kind of herbs, if a cure was needed; she found one for almost every malady.

In Dombo, we went to a river to swim. It was large enough for them to float rafts of cut trees down it to the sawmill. Dombo was in a mountainous area, full of forests. We drove the geese up to the top of the mountain to mind them, and we played a lot then. The ground was clay, I remember, we made all kinds of biscuits out of it, which we decorated with little flowers.

My favourite subject was history. I love it to this day. But my favourite teacher was Zoltan Reisner. He came back here after the war and wanted to marry me. I would have married him for sure, if I hadn't become the woman of Herman Deutsch in the meantime.

In 1938, when the Hungarians came in, the very next week, they expelled us from the village, saying that father was a 'Bolshevik'. We didn't even know what it meant at the time. In December, it was already freezing, my parents were railroaded out into the cold, under the open sky with six children. The Jews from a nearby town immediately intervened as well as they could and sent a car for us. That was the first time I ever rode in an automobile. Straight away we got a furnished room with beds, which was also arranged by the Jewish community. They even went so far as to get us a residence permit, but my father still had to report to the border police every day.

I had eight siblings. Between my oldest brother Beno and the littlest, Miksa, there was a difference of fifteen years. I only vaguely remember my youngest siblings, since I was with them a relatively short time. My youngest brother, Miksa was just four years old when he and mother, Sari, Manci, Eszter and Sandor were gassed.

I was together with Hana, my little sister, in the Allendorf labour camp (a sub-camp of Buchenwald). When we were liberated, we went home together, but in 1946 she left for

Palestine where she and her husband caught a boat to Israel where my sister was conscripted as a soldier.

The so-called 'Jewish Codex' put out in 1941 fundamentally changed our lives. It was a series of laws and regulations that stripped Jews of our civil rights and means of economic survival. We all felt like we had been robbed of everything. They robbed me of my entire childhood. In Galanta, where I was living, in 1944, they locked up the Jews in the ghetto, from here we went out to work in the fields. We were moved from place to place, living in horrible conditions, where we couldn't cook or wash and there was no toilet. We hoed corn and radishes, spinach, and picked poppies – whatever there was. The whole family was still together then, except for father. He was assigned to forced labour in Mateszalka.

Eventually we were dragged off to the new town brick factory, where we stayed for two weeks. We slept where the bricks were stored. We didn't work, just waited to see where they would take us next. One day, Hungarian constables hustled about 40 or 50 of us into one boxcar, but I don't know how many of us there were in total. They stopped the train periodically on route to take off the people that had died. We finally found out that they were taking us to Auschwitz, but didn't know what fate awaited us there. We constantly threw little notes out of the cattle cars along the way where they were taking us, hoping that they would be found and we would be rescued. We had no food or water and there was no toilet, just one bucket for all those people, it stank horribly. After two days travelling, we saw Auschwitz. My mother said, 'There's no way out, any more.' She felt that we'd arrived in a bad place. She knew what was happening.

When we arrived, the train stopped. A man, who they later said was Mengele, just waved and shouted: right, left. My mother and siblings went one way, me and my sister were sent the other. My sister got lost among all the people in the meantime. I ran after mother to help her with all the kids. Mother sent me away to 'find Hana, because you've got more brains than her, the family should be together.' I don't know about my older brother either, he also got mixed up in the crowds. As I ran around looking for my sister, Mengele gave me a slap, and shoved me to the other side, which saved my life. I broke down in tears because I couldn't help my mother.

They housed hundreds of us in a barrack. Every night someone went insane. They would count us at dawn. They poured coffee into a *csajka* (a tin or aluminium plate with high sides) for breakfast, towards evening we got a little piece of bread with a bit of meat. We were continuously hungry. The only water came from the cistern, which you had to stand in line for. The SS soldiers hit the women with the metal on their belts, as they scuffled for the water. If someone was hit in the head, it could kill them. There were always a couple that died.

New prisoners arrived daily. One night we heard from the gypsy camp people yelling, 'Help, help! They're taking us to the crematorium!' In the morning, everything was quiet, there was no one left. We smelled it, it stank, the smell of burnt meat lingering constantly.

I was in Auschwitz from June until mid August and I found out about the death of mother and my sisters in the July. I met my mother's younger brother, uncle Alter, in Auschwitz. He unpacked the trains. He told me to work if they would take me. He told me that my mother had already gone to a good place. He worked in the crematorium, where they would sort the clothes and personal belongings from the people who were to be burnt. We reported for work a couple of days later when there was a 'selection'. They took a thousand of us for work.

In August 1944, when we ended up in Allendorf, we lay down on the ground and kissed it. There were little flowers growing in the camp. Everybody got one bunk and we got a little blanket and a sack of hay each. Life here was more humane. My knowledge of German helped me get work in the kitchen where I stayed until the end of our time in the lager.

We stayed in Allendorf until March of the following year when we were evacuated. We marched day and night, for I don't know how many days. The Germans were going to Berlin, but we didn't know where we were going. They locked us in a pen where there were sheep grazing where we heard they wanted to burn us. The female supervisors were really horrible, but there was a guard, Adolf Hupka, who couldn't help us enough. He told us that the next day we would be free but he didn't know what would happen to us. The next day the guards took off the death-head insignia from their caps and coats, and we fled into the forest. I think it was the Black Forest. We just kept fleeing until a Pole took us into his manor, and told us to be quiet. The manor was full of tanks and German soldiers so we thought we'd fallen into a trap. All at once a black tank stopped in front of us. They were blacks. Americans. Soldiers. Officers. They even spoke Hungarian. They said, 'Stay here. We'll come back for you tonight.' And they came back for us, took us into a village, and housed us in a school there where we ate tinned American food. It took a week for the Mayor to come and see us, when an American officer threatened to hang him if he didn't find us placed to stay. After this the Mayor personally came and wrote down everything that we needed.

I was together with my girlfriends and my sister Hana, all the way. We went to Kassel, to the American military headquarters, so that we could get home. My girlfriends wanted to go to America since they had nothing to go back to, but Hana and I still hoped that mother or our siblings would come back. We wanted to go home. We travelled by truck all the way to Pilsen, where we were handed over to the Russians. It was a horrific experience. Whatever we had left, the Russians took from us. Some of us were raped. We finally got

home to Galanta. It was then that I found out that our father was living in Pest. So I went to find him. By chance I saw him come out of a building where returning prisoners were being housed. We both started crying. Everyday he had been going to the train station to see who came home. He didn't know anything about any of us.

I married Hermann Deutsch in 1947 in Prague. My husband borrowed my wedding dress from an acquaintance of his. I met him in the Jewish kitchen, where I was working as an assistant cook. There was a 24 year age difference between us. My husband was Jewish, and that was very important to me.

Almost all of our friends emigrated to Palestine by 1948 – they went home. My husband and I got ready to leave; we even packed for it and labelled the crates. But I was pregnant so we felt we couldn't go. That was really painful for me. I would have gone.

We were very glad about the formation of the Israeli state in 1948. Even today, if we sing the Israeli anthem, my tears start gushing. We were really sorry then that we didn't leave for Israel, but we were really scared that they would put us in prison. It was enough to just say somebody was a Zionist, and they were locked up. My husband's business partner was locked up for five or six years because he wanted to go to Israel on an airplane.

During the latest census, I considered myself of Slovakian Nationality. I live here, in Galanta, so I consider myself Slovakian. At the same time, I haven't given up my Jewish religion. That's 100 per cent.

*Original interview conducted by Martin Korcok and printed by Centropa ([www.centropa.org](http://www.centropa.org))*

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