

FIVE DAYS OF HOLOCAUST: TERROR, VIOLATION, SADISM AND
TREACHEROUS NAZI HATRED FROM
MY 1962 DAYS AND NIGHTS

---by Wladyslawa Poniecka Wojciechowska

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Remembrances of a former political prisoner from World War II, arrested in Warsaw, Poland in 1940. She was imprisoned for three months in the investigatory prison "Mokotów" in Warsaw, and for twenty-one months in the prison "Pawiak" in the Warsaw ghetto. She was sent by the gestapo from Warsaw to the infamous concentration camp for women in Ravensbrück, Meklemburg; in 1943 sentenced as punishment to the camp in Neu Rohlau, Flossenburg. On March 19, 1940 she was condemned to death by the Sondergericht. On April 2, 1940, the gestapo executed (by shooting) her brother Kazimierz Poniecki in Palmiry. On January 6, 1941 the gestapo sent her father, Stanislaw Poniecki from the Pawiak prison to Auschwitz, the death camp; he died there. On January 6, the gestapo sent her youngest brother, Zdzislaw Poniecki, age 15, from the Pawiak prison to Auschwitz. On September 23, 1941, the gestapo sent her mother, Maria Poniecka, from the Pawiak prison to Ravensbrück, the camp for women. On May 5, 1945, Wladyslawa Poniecka Wojciechowska was liberated by the Eight Army of the American forces in the American zone of Germany, in the city of Kladrau.

Wladyslawa Wojciechowski is currently residing in Temperance with her husband, Marian Wojciechowski, and their youngest son Lucian. Daughter Maryann and her husband Zbigniew Malas are living in Vista, California. Son John and his wife Cathy live in Las Vegas, Nevada, with her three grandsons Craig, Jack and Todd, and Cathy's children Tim, Jeff, Darryll and Kristen. Mrs. Wojciechowski has always been very active in the Polish community and in the preservation of Polish heritage and culture; she is also the leader of Polish Girl Scouts in the U.S.A. This is a continuation of her work during the war when she was a member of the scout youth organization "Szare Szeregi" ("The Gray Ranks") and a soldier in the underground army of resistance.

REFLECTIONS ON THE DEATH MARCH

The names of the inmates are true. From that transport, there are more than twenty of us still living: two in London, Great Britain; one in Montreal, Canada; two in Chicago and myself in Temperance; and the rest live in Poland. We communicate frequently; the ties that bind us will never be broken. We do not know what happened in that shed with those who were ill. How many of those are still alive?

I didn't know at the time that my mother, Maria Poniecka, traveled the same route from the concentration camp at Ravensbrück to Warsaw. Unfortunately, she did not find our home standing, only ruins. My father never returned from Auschwitz; we learned he was murdered there in the death barracks. My older brother Kazimierz was killed in Palmiry outside Warsaw; the Nazis tried to cover up their crime by bulldozing over the bodies, but there were witnesses. My younger brother Zdzislaw traveled exactly the same road from Flossenburg to Dachau; after liberation, he spent ten years in hospitals and sanatoriums recovering from devastating physical injuries.

--Wladyslawa Poniecka Wojciechowska

FIVE DAYS OF HOLOCAUST:
TERROR, VIOLATION, SADISM AND TREACHEROUS NAZI HATRED
FROM MY 1962 DAYS AND NIGHTS

In 1945, the gestapo began to liquidate in various ways their deadly concentration camps throughout Europe; in great haste and panic, they tried to cover up any traces of their heinous attempts to commit genocide on the largest scale ever known to mankind. These coverups gave rise to even more atrocities and deaths.

I was an inmate of the Neu Rohlau concentration camp near Carlsbad in Sudetengau at the time. Suddenly on April 30, 1945 at midnight, gestapo men and women armed with machine guns and German shepherds (specially trained police dogs), entered the camp territory, where about two thousand women political prisoners from many countries were being held. With great brutality they forced us out of the barracks onto the lighted outdoor square called "Plac Apelowy," the "Place of Roll-Call." It was a nightmarish sight of frightened women, barefoot, only in nightgowns on a cold April night. We stood at attention stiffly, straining in fear, quiet like frozen statues. We were very much aware of what our fate would be at the end of the war. All the reflectors were lighting up the square and people, giving the scene unearthly terror and deep despair. We stood like that for several hours; finally, we were forced back into the barracks. Immediately there was the scream of the siren, but at least we were dressed as we lined up ready for the march of death. They regrouped us in lines of five inmates each, the great gate was opened and we marched out straight onto the wide road, in the midst of

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unworldly shrieking: the dogs were set on the women, and there were cries of pain. We knew the road led to the extermination camp of Dachau. The gestapo was in a great hurry; we could not even march, but had to run to the nearest forest which absorbed us like a dark, damp sponge. After several hours of such forced running, whether you can believe it or not, I held my heart in my hands; I could feel it almost jump out of my chest. Although there were more than two thousand of us, there was such an unearthly quiet in the forest that one could hear only the sound of an occasional twig breaking. The dogs trailed us closely. I could feel the nose and breath of a dog following me without letup. That's why I marched as evenly as possible, because any slip or a slowed tempo inevitably meant the beast would tear out my throat. I was the last, behind the rest of the camp, so I could see the whole scene, and remember forever.

The macabre procession moved forward; we were on a narrow, twisting pathway heading down. We weren't familiar with the terrain, but they insisted we march in lines of five, almost impossible to do on such a narrow path in a thick forest.

I kept feeling the dog's breathing on my calf. The same thought kept going round and round in my mind: where are they taking us and what will they do with us when we get there? I had just had my fifth bout with pneumonia, I was breathing quickly and in a shallow manner, my throat was drying--and although I had learned how to survive over those many years, how to breathe carefully and ration the meager reserves of my lungs and heart, this time I could not do it; I could not save any of my energy and strength, I was being used up completely.

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I knew that if we did not rest soon, my death was certain. I saw before me an older woman, who was waiting to seize an opportunity to escape from the ranks. She was able to hide unnoticed in some ravine. I could hear terrible screaming: it was the SS men beating with rifle butts a young girl, who had apparently fallen when she tripped over the roots of a tree. The girl, bloody from the beating, was Zosia Emich, and her sister Marysia, who tried to help her, was also beaten about the face and head with the rifle. The column proceeded onward. Day was beginning so we felt a little more cheerful, although we were all in a lamentable condition. Many of the women had lost their wooden clogs, because it was difficult to walk downhill in such shoes. The SS men and women were yelling constantly and their trained attack dogs helped to maintain terror among us; it was reinforced by continuous hitting with dull rifle butts. The infuriated and crazied dogs obeyed every command. The haggard and emaciated group of inmates dragged forward, footstep by footstep. Around noon the first rest stop was allowed, but for many it was the last stage of their lives--they died from exhaustion. The forest had ended, so we fell down in an open field and fell asleep immediately. For our trip we had received an ounce of margarine and an ounce of sugar, but they were already eaten long ago, while we were still in camp in Neu Rohlau. We lay in the field in positions of great pain, lacking the energy to move, feeling no emotions, reacting to nothing. We no longer cared, and nothing mattered. Faith and hope had abandoned us. We were so tired and changed, that we could not even recognize each other. All at once a motorcycle appeared

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with an SS man with orders to retreat immediately. Detonations interrupted the ominous silence. Those were American airplanes attacking and bombing Dresden to retaliate for their airmen. The earth was moaning, the sky glowed with fiery light, crying for justice and revenge! With great effort we lifted ourselves upright from the field, and looking towards the skies we sought strength to continue our own Golgotha. We helped each other, raising older women from their knees, pulling others out of the mud where they became stuck and couldn't move. Many fell back into the wet grass and had to be helped up anew and given words of encouragement to travel onward, who knew, perhaps to freedom?

Once again we lined up in fives, but they no longer counted us. After all, had anyone counted all the corpses left in the forest and on the road and in the field? The realization came to us that we had left the barbed wire, that they were dragging us for the final atrocity to the crematoria, to the most horrendous camp of death Dachau, where we would be tortured, completely destroyed, killed. Would it not be better to die here? Some women had lost all hope; they no longer believed in God, or in themselves, or even in a miracle. And so once again we dragged listlessly through the forest, that was being awakened by spring to life. Birds were singing, buds were bursting, we could smell fresh resin. And here our lives were ending, although we too wanted to live fully like human beings as it was meant to be. The fatigue was so overwhelming we could not even speak, even cries of pain ceased. Thirst was stronger than hunger. We were twisting in pain, our faces distorted with the paroxysm and hideous spasm of death.

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Walking out of the forest, an SS man stopped and waited for a young girl, who had found a hand-pushed child's cart somewhere and was using it to transport her sickened old mother. With her last resources of energy she was able to push the cart fairly well over the ground. Her mother sat in the cart like a little child, her skin and bones barely holding together. But now the soil had turned to sand and the girl started to have trouble maneuvering and pushing the cart. I was the last one walking because I, too, had no strength left. I walked around them as if drunk, reeling about on my tired and unfeeling legs, to catch up with the rest of the column. The SS soldier loaded his weapon. I heard the girl begging him not to shoot her mother, that she would sacrifice herself for her. She spoke incoherently, but such a confused speech would move even the heart of a hardened criminal--but not a criminal of this inhuman sort. The German shot his weapon, and killed the mother. The girl knelt by the body and froze in that holy position; who knows, perhaps her heart burst...?

Beyond the forest there was a swampy area in a field surrounded by mud. We were ordered to halt. No one chose a spot, we all just fell down where we stood from fatigue. They started a bonfire in the middle of the muddy bog. I don't recall how many didn't get up after that. For two nights now we had slept under the skies out in the open. The mud stuck to our faces, our hair, our dresses and our feet; it dried with the blood all over our bodies in a hard shell. Ahead of me walked a Yugoslavian woman, who was a wonderful prima ballerina dancer before the war. Her step was so shaky that her friends could hardly pull her along with them. On her feet she had the most

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the most beautiful shoes, that she had received in a parcel from her mother. The shoes had very long shoelaces that had separated from the ribbons and whipped unmercifully her legs and the legs of her friends around her. The laces, soaked through with mud, had stiffened and become an additional instrument of torture. The artist could not bend down to fix the laces, because she would be shot. Once again we walked ahead on a road to nowhere. For the third day in a row we had not eaten or been given anything to drink. As we passed a village, the SS men stopped us because they saw from the houses that it must be well off. The farmers came out from their homes and told us not to move around anywhere. No wonder. We looked more like nightmarish ghosts than human beings. A group of small children and teenagers started to look at us strangely. With great contempt and hatred they began to throw rocks at us and insult us, calling us bandits. We stood there without a sound, without moving, like spirits from that other world, feeling nothing, and most certainly not expecting love from our neighbors. Hardened, we stood with our eyes piercing the ground. Without a word, without a movement, like stones, like boulders. A vision appeared in my memory from the Pawiak prison, a most dreadful prison, a place of torture, where the old, the young and even children were killed every day. The jail was in the very heart of the Warsaw ghetto. As though crazed, small Jewish children milled about the prison, looking up into the windows hoping to see their parents. The children were maybe two or three years old, dressed in rags, screaming at the top of their lungs, a sound which froze the blood in our veins as

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they called out: Mamele, where are you?! In my prison cell on the third floor of the women's prison "Serbia" we broke the window glass with a shoe and threw pieces of bread to the Jewish children, until September 23, 1941. And here we were standing, stoned by German children, verbally abused, insulted with derogatory names, called the worst bandits... No one gave us any water to drink, not even a piece of bread. We were famished, and frozen. After the rain our dresses were heavy and dragged us to the earth. The mud which had gotten into our underwear and stuck to our legs dried on our bodies. We women prisoners, who witnessed criminal acts over several years, dreamed at night and still dream at night of piles of bodies tossed directly into the fire, of people murdered with poisoned gas, of women kicked by other women dressed in uniforms, the most horrible army known in the history of the world. There are still witnesses living, therefore we still have a very short time in which to remind the world of what really happened. We were helpless against the mass killing of children, as had never happened before in the history of all nations.

A farmwoman invited the SS men and women and they entered her house. The lady of the house wants to be hospitable to the women prisoners and pours rye seeds into pails and covers them with boiling water. After awhile, she hands each of us a cup of hot rye. There are too many of us for the only water well, so some are cupping up and drinking water from a puddle filled with stagnant, smelly water. Those who ate the rye cereal and drank the stagnant water died in terrible pain, without any help. I put one seed of rye in my mouth

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and held it there a long time, but I was unable to swallow it, unfortunately. But later when I sat down on the grass I found wild garlic grass and ate some of it, and even gathered some up for later, and hid it in my sleeve. We all must have been close to dying, because a huge cloud of insects buzzed over us, forcing themselves into our ears, eyes and mouths.

Once again a bonfire was lit and we were told to lie down. After awhile, several hundred bodies interwove in unusual positions, falling asleep almost simultaneously. I am tormented by lack of sleep, yet my eyes are wide open and I cannot fall asleep. Different thoughts come into my mind, many reflections, the night is bright, and towards Dresden the sky is half red. Everywhere people are suffering in many ways. From Dresden come sounds of strong detonations, the rumble of mine-throwers, the scream of shrapnel, and the earth is moaning. Airplanes are flying over us in countless swarms.

Along the way we kept meeting columns of marching male prisoners, live corpses. Those who could no longer walk were placed by the SS men on the ground in twos and threes, covered over with blankets, and shot. The blankets moved strangely afterwards for a long time. We witnessed such scenes even when we were still in the camp in Neu Rohlau; they were repeated over the two weeks before our departure from the camp. We were not allowed to look in that direction. This is how the prisoners from Flossenburg perished, murdered behind the barbed wire of the women's camp in Neu Rohlau in 1945.

Despite overwhelming efforts they were not able to murder all of us. In no other war was such a hell on earth experienced.

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We passed villages, where sometimes we saw the naked, smoke-ravaged torn limbs of trees, a tangle of metal beams and bent metal. After a few hours of forced marching, they announce a rest period. This time they tell us to sit. We are not allowed to lie on the grass, or stand. They announce a rest stop at the rail station in Kladrau. The station is situated in the midst of a thick forest, there is a road leading upwards, but we don't know where it ends. It is very sunny; we look around for water, to drink and to wash ourselves. We separate to look after our personal needs. The station is almost invisible, almost hidden in a deep ravine. This makes us feel better. There is no other living soul besides us and the SS men and women. Even the dogs are resting, sleeping, as exhausted by the ordeal as the prisoners. The women prisoners, crazed with the first sunbeams of spring are beginning to move away too far. Three of them are going up a hill, about a hundred steps away. I'm standing nearest an SS soldier, who is flirting with a German prisoner named Hilda, and chatting on banal subjects. Suddenly he reaches for his rifle, smiles sardonically, aims at the women and shoots.

The echo of that shot resounds from ravine to ravine. Janka falls to the ground, and her friends carry her down the hill on their hands, the wound is serious because the aorta is damaged, and pumping blood.

Wanda, currently residing in London, began to save her, to apply first aid. She pressed against the artery, which was slowly but surely continuing to bleed. We gave up our head scarves to staunch the blood, but it was not enough. We gathered around Wanda and the dying Janka. The SS soldier stood with

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his smoking rifle and himself could not believe what he saw. We started to undress and hand over our underwear, our bras, our panties, our scarves, the last things we had, and then we had no more. Wanda attempted the rescue to the very last drop of blood, but Janka became paler and paler, and kept looking at us completely conscious. Near Wanda a pile grew of the last, blood-soaked remnants of our underwear. We knelt around them, praying outloud in several languages: in French, Yugoslavian, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, German, Italian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Hebrew and Lithuanian. Unfortunately, Janka died before our eyes. That moment served to unite several hundred women of many nationalities and religions more in the name of the ideal of freedom than even family blood ties. At Kladrau station this terrible and indescribable tragedy marked us for the rest of our lives.

At that same station there were scattered very large carton boxes. Nobody would even have thought that at least ten of the women prisoners would hide in them in order to sneak into the forest late at night and survive for several days because it was evident that the American army was somewhere close by. Since most of us weighed anywhere from fifty to one hundred pounds, it was very easy to conceal and hide in a large, even a small carton.

They no longer counted us at each stop. It wouldn't make sense, anyway, because many were shot to death, many were left behind due to exhaustion, many ran away to the forests, or were lost who knows where. The whistle makes us jump up again, but this time at least we drank enough water. Still, they haven't given us any bread, any soup. We are all so terribly, strangely

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hungry, the only thing that keeps us going is the hope that maybe today, maybe in a few moments, we will encounter the American forces.

Our legs are hurting so badly we can hardly get up without help on our own, but slowly we crawl out on our knees, on our hands, we help each other, we pull each other, and then we all fall down together. We're headed in the opposite direction again, our nightmarish procession is headed by a crusade of living corpses. Suddenly a sharp command calls a halt. We are standing in a field where one can't see anything beyond a forest and nearby an old, tall, large shed. Our self-preservation instinct is now on alert, it's telling us that we must be cautious, that strange things are happening at this very moment, and our fate is being decided right now. A quick breeze blows up above us and it's beginning to get dark very quickly. Our SS men and women are grouped together, they're unraveling a map and trying to decide what to do next. A storm is brewing over us. It got cold suddenly and the first drops of rain fell on our flushed faces and burning heads. The Germans are still conferring, and even the dogs have curled in their tails and are whimpering for mercy. The earth keeps resounding with groans. In Dresden's direction the sky has turned red again and looks apocalyptic, above us the sky is dark blue. The SS order us into the shed. We are running through the potato field, we've lost our shoes and now it is completely dark. At the last minute we get to the shed as though it were our last hope, our last chance. Lightning flashes, throwing light into our faces. There are still several hundred of us, but it's difficult to say how many really. We gulp the falling

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rain greedily as it slashes our faces...

The last hours in the shed: Scenes from Dante's inferno, hell on earth

We are standing before the large shed, which is over a steep precipice, behind it a dark, thick forest. In front of the shed there is a barrel dug into the earth, all in mildew, with smelly water. The SS men unbarred the doors of the shed, opened them wide and started to push in the remnants of humans one after the other, like pieces of glass. I felt fear and panic at the sight of the shed, so I held back, with about eight other Polish women prisoners from Warsaw to enter last. And so it happened. With boots and rifle butts they slammed the doors shut. I backed up against a wall and decided I would not sleep, I would be on the alert. Meanwhile, terrible Danteic scenes were taking place in the shed.

The first women who entered the shed were being pushed forward by the following ones, who were trying to find more comfortable places near the walls. It was completely dark in the shed.

The first to enter were able to guess at the contours of the shed by the light of the lightning flashes. They started to look for places higher on various beams and shelves and poles. Some even crawled up into the ceiling eaves. I cannot recall ever in my life living through such a storm. Some of the prisoners drank water from the barrel, and now were suffering and vomiting, crying in pain as their stomachs wrenched. The fate of those who entered the shed first was tragic, even more tragic for those women who climbed up near the roof beams. The old rotted wood cracked under the weight of the women and they all fell to the ground. Lice, dust, and scraps of dirty rags fell down

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on our eyes, on our lips.

Thoughts of home shaped our sense of life, consumed our time, colored our perceptions of living. Thoughts in this way tore us away from the macabre reality. Many of us were beginning to suffer from bloody dysentery. Suddenly one prisoner had an attack of terrible hysteria, she laughed as though she had the hiccups, and then she just continued to laugh without stopping, long and hopeless. Usually in the last phase of such hysteria, the prisoners would freeze in their positions like mummies with opened mouths, catatonic. On some faces intense concentration and meditation was visible. They wanted to meet death with dignity. Others prayed and their prayers acted as the best medicine, which healed everyone around. In the most dangerous and hopeless moments those screamed the loudest who lost their faith in everything and believed in nothing: You Poles, pray to your God for mercy on all of us. We were not allowed to leave the shed, and the epidemic of dysentery spread to all of us. Those who sat high on the beams or near the roof took care of their personal needs directly into the labyrinth. In vain we called for help, beating against the doors of the shed. The storm was shaking the shed. The crowd was overcome by a collective sense of obstinacy and determination. We hit and beat our fists against the doors, but no one opened them, nobody heard our yells, even nature was against us because the thunder drowned out our screaming, the sound of rain against the walls and roof of the shed, the wind howling like the devil himself. Our prisoner garb was slowly being saturated with our sweat, our blood, our tears, our excrement...

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All at once, one of the prisoners yelled that the SS men were planning to blow up the shed. The nervous tension among us escalated and kept growing. Soon all eyes were turned to the small doors still closed and barred. From all corners of the shed half-humans, half-corpses on all fours started to emerge. Most were numb from horror, because it appeared the last remnant of hope was lost, not to be attained. The detonations from the thunder and lightning which rattled the whole shed and especially the roof which was leaking, and which buckled with the wind as if it were ready to collapse on us, and the systematic swinging of the window attached by one hinge, all of this multiplied our great fear. Through the screams, the groans, the curses, one could hear the crackle of breaking boards. Some of the prisoners, suffering from fever, cried, they moved about on their knees, they hid one behind the other and wailed, howling like dogs. A young Ukrainian girl sat in the center, folded her hands across her breasts and pretended she was rocking a baby, and sang a lullaby over and over. This mood spread to everyone. A Russian prisoner, Katusza, screamed that before dying she would just like to have a last piece of bread. The others tried to quiet her, and even used the method of pulling by the hair to silence the prisoner crazed with pain. Each of us lived through this in her own way. Among us there were students, dancers, poets, teachers, professors from known European universities, all looking with dead eyes on the debasement of the twentieth century of civilization. The Polish women prisoners prayed individually and together with hope and faith, raising the spirits of those women who were completely broken and in despair, left to ruin.

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Leaning against the doors of the shed I had this complete scene before my eyes. From time to time lightning still lit up the shed for a moment and I would think to myself that what I was seeing in that one second of lightning no one else would probably see in their whole lifetime.

After Katusza's cries, who was a pilot from Stalingrad, suddenly out of nowhere there was the most horrifying scream in French, then slowly the scream transformed itself into a wondrous aria... Several hundred prisoners stopped breathless and through all of us there passed as though an electric shock, injecting us with an invisible, all powerful spiritual strength! The voice of an artist from the Paris Opera, trembling, started to vibrate like a tensed string. As I still stood leaning against the doors, I felt an unspoken touching moment overcoming all of the prisoners, though they were half alive, human rags, all were moved deeply. Tears were pouring down my face. The singer, as though intoxicated by the melody and enchantment of the marvelous poetry of the words of the Marseillaise, sang and sang, and possessed all of us completely by her magical talent. The song was like a silver cascade, spreading skywards, and we listened to the music like spellbound ghosts caught in the old spider webs covering the whole shed. We forgot about reality, our torments, our suffering, our pain. As she continued to sing in holy ecstasy and rapture, we were seized by a most terrible pain and longing for freedom! For that one moment she gave our tortured hearts a time to forget, a moment of painful, but strangely true happiness! Her singing was joined by those who could sing French, others hummed the melody, some could only make gestures stressing their feelings,

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still others declaimed words from the past, like penitents pressed to the last boundaries of endurance. The artist reached the zenith of her talent, until the the stressed string of our nerves and human feelings burst, and the song of triumph broke into a desperate sobbing, which filled the shed, all of the space in that wretched shed...

We cried, we wailed, we sobbed for a long time, loudly and sincerely, and though it was dark in the shed and we couldn't see each other's faces, several pairs of hands reached out for a last, sisterly farewell! We told each other our last wishes and promises, of never again war! We swore that if any of us survived this living hell, they had the duty and responsibility to scream out at the whole world and tell all the women on earth about the crimes perpetrated on innocent children, on women who were homesick for their separated children, on husbands, on mothers, on fathers, who longed for their loved ones, who missed normal lives in homes and in schools... We would tell the whole world about the medical crimes performed on young girl prisoners in Ravensbruck, pseudo-experiments performed on live patients, that girls were forcibly operated on in the most primitive medical conditions and perverted methods.

I am still afraid to fall asleep in the mysterious shed. The longing for freedom I feel is almost unbearable. My heart is beating like a hammer, I am breathing unevenly and I want to control my feelings, my regrets, my fear. I am thinking, what is to become of us, who is the next one to die nameless, how many will survive even the next twelve hours? Beyond me there are six million murdered children, elderly

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elderly people, young persons, people my age. My number is 7532. Before me another six million number-beings have died, those who cannot be accounted for until this day.

I want to live at all cost! I have a lot of experience in surviving crises and many hopeless situations, after all, I am a Polish Girl Scout instructor, I know how to survive in the forest, in mud, in water, in fire, in hunger, in dirt... My scout honor strengthens me, and I take on new powers and faith!

I begin to pray, but I can't concentrate and remember the words to the prayers. So I pray repeating over and over only two words, Jesus, Mary! I find an internal peace and calm, and I only have one desire left, to crawl to the boundaries of Poland, my homeland, and kiss that ground on which the Nazis built the huge factory of death Auschwitz and the huge bakery of crematoria, in which six million people were roasted in the twentieth century of culture and inventions. Their ashes were transported to Germany to be used as fertilizer. From their cut off hair they made tapestries, wove rings and hairpieces and wigs. From their skins they made lamp shades for elegant salons. Their gold teeth were melted down and formed into art pieces for palaces, for their harlots. Wedding rings, engagement rings, heirloom rings, ended up in the German treasury or in the pockets of the Gestapo.

We all finally fell asleep from exhaustion and complete depletion, both mental and physical, spread out in various positions; some slept standing up with opened eyes, others lay like abandoned sacks, those who were raving feverishly rocked back and forth as if in a trance, or a strange dance, others

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were hanging up in the beams, almost ready to fall on top of us, but they no longer cared.

The storm abated at last; I sat with the doors of the shed against my back, propped up strongly so I would not fall asleep. I had the terrible scene before me, as though it were a theatre of old specters. The stench of death rose over us.

I heard voices beyond the doors, and a change of guard. The soldiers were speaking in Czechoslovakian. I woke up my friends with whom I was planning an escape. I knocked on the doors and they were opened at once, held back by the soldier's boot, and a rifle aimed straight at my heart. I calmly asked if we could go outside to the toilet, but my heart stopped beating for a moment. He let all eight of us leave, and discretely went off way behind the shed. As soon as he left, we rushed into the forest and disappeared into its darkness...

We spent two more nights in the forest, we hid ourselves in the ravines and in trees which gave us shelter. We were filthy, resembling chunks of earth, our hair was matted and filled with mud, plastered with dirt. We were wet, our bones were frozen completely. We kept near the village, from where we could hear dogs barking. Those two nights were horrible. We tried to keep each other warm in this manner: one would get in the center, and we would surround her and try to warm her with the heat from our bodies.

The next day, on May 5, 1945 around six o'clock in the morning, we could no longer stand the pain of hunger and thirst and cold, so we slowly approached the houses nearest the forest. We noticed that there seemed to be noone in the village. On the square a white flag was hanging. With great caution, a

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few of us entered the first household and found an old woman there, who was just as frightened as we were. She gave us some milk to drink. The situation was dangerous because in those times you could trust no one. We left with the jug of milk and headed for the street, because it was safer. We sat around the jug and took a sip in turn, fairly, to get some nourishment even for a moment. At the same time, a soldier with a rifle and in a helmet entered the square of the village. He stood by us, and asked why were we sitting there, and who are we?

The only evidence of identification of who I was happened to be a piece of paper from the packaging of a parcel sent to me from the International Red Cross in Geneva, written in four languages: English, French, German and Russian. I handed it to the soldier. He took off his helmet, put down his rifle, and held out his arms to us, he hugged us, and cried over us and with us. In broken Polish, he said:

I am Polish too! I'm from Texas!

This American soldier of Polish origin from the great state of Texas assured us that he would lead us to General Eisenhower himself! He tenderly touched our dirty faces, and kissed us, and told us not to be afraid, because he was an American soldier. The soldier took us to the army doctor, who checked us over and administered first aid. We were suffering from frostbite on our ears, hands and feet. There, thanks to the soldier from Texas, we received clothes from the Czechoslovakian Women's Organization, we ate our first American dinner after five days of excruciating hunger. The American army doctor cried over us too, promising that no evil would ever harm

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us again. I am so very grateful for God's providence over me, and I salute the unknown soldier from Texas. Our liberation came in the village of Wszekary, near Kladrau Sudetengau.