

International Liberation Commemoration 2017

Robert Menasse (Austrian author)

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen

Anniversaries of the liberation of national socialist concentration camps and extermination camps are days of joy and days of memories as well. I, indeed, feel the impression, that increasing sorrow mingles into that joy and more and more concerns into memory.

Alarming developments take place, in some symptoms reminding to times, which should have been banned by the oath "Never again!"

Obviously that "Never again!" was too abstract in order to prevent an ideology to come to life again, an ideology that once wasted Europe and killed millions of people: Nationalism as a political promise of salvation. Since some years we experience, that political parties and trends grow more powerful, which challenge the political consensus of after war period and the European concept of peace and agreement. Nationalist slogans are creating an atmosphere of threat and collecting more and more votes. We know that these political movements will fail. We know it, because we have historical experience. They have failed and been defeated once. And we know, because we do not remain in the past, we live in the present willing to create our future in a globalized world. Globalization means nothing else than abolition of national borderlines, of national superiority, national economics. All, really all, which basically defines economics, politics and society turned to be transnational: value creation, financial business, production and distribution of food, ecological problems, terror, internet attacks to data protection and civil rights. Nothing can be regulated politically within national borders or being stopped outside. Therefore nationalists will fail again. But this certainty means no consolation. Because between our present knowledge and their failure in future there is a period of time, in which uncountable human beings probably will perish again and European civilization will be destroyed once more.

That one who promises salvation by "national solutions" will fail – but which opinion people will express then? They will say: this politician wasn't enough consequent, we need more consequent nationalists. But these will fail too. The effect: a claim for a more radical and consequent nationalism? This will be the political spiral, which leads to fascism, to a competition of nations, to hostility between nations, finally to destruction of the European peace project and abolition of the basic European systems of law.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen. I am sorry, for being not diplomatic: Facing this development the prayer mill is no salvation. We can repeat "Never again!" more and more, we can request to stay alert, we can repeat once again "Wehret den Anfängen" ("Resist the beginnings"), we can invoke once more to "Keep remembrance alive" and "learn from history", we can once more demand to hand down the experiences of survivors to the next generation, we can nod once more to the invocation "Never forget!", we can spin the prayers mill again and again. The last years have proved that we can address nice speeches to the audience to dominate Sundays, but not real policy from Mondays to Fridays, which turns to be softer and weaker concerning the demands and slogans of nationalists.

I am aware, speeches at occasions like that should follow the principle: "This is no location to be factual, I should stay personally concerned!" That means to show personal affection, preferably because of my own family history, to touch you emotionally and being touched by your presence. To deliver such a speech it needs pathos – feelings of an empathetic human being cannot be expressed without pathos on such a place. Believe me: I could address such a speech, honest and with authentic tears. I have the appropriate family, which I could present as a proof. And then what?

Another year, another speaker, who will admonish. And his warning will be less enlightening, because times will have grown a little bit darker. And soon the crank of the prayer mill will get baggy.

Please do not mistake my meaning: I am not without respect and empathy because of being factual. Please understand my objectiveness as the expression of my respect and concern.

If we think of national socialist crimes, if we commemorate the victims on that very day, everyone a unique and unrepeatable life, which was exterminated and vanished in the abstractness of an unaccountable number, the tortured, the broken souls, the starving, the betrayed, that one who served in the wrong uniform and perished, the ones who were bombed into homelessness, uncountable numbers of people seeking for asylum and the "Displaced Persons", the largest migration movements since Migration Period – if we commemorate all victims, it is astonishing, that the agreement all this should "never happen", seems to be raised to question. But is that really correct? I don't believe that anybody wants to get back that period with all its consequences. And yet in whole Europe increasing numbers of people vote for that apocalyptic bandits, nationalists, who are toying with fascist symbols. I am not really interested, if all these voters are fascists, it is horrible enough that they have no problems with fascist slogans and symbols. At the same time I think it is possible, that they nod honestly and agree, if somebody commemorates NAZI victims and says: "Never again!"

This means, in an objective view, we failed to explain "Never again!" in its complete meaning.

Many people consider “Never again!” as “never again a war”, “never again” concentration camps, “never again” piles of corpses! Nobody indeed prefers that, but they do not take into account and do not understand, that first of all “Never again” means a policy, which leads to those crimes, even though those crimes may be not desired and announced. I need not list the names of European “Fuehrer” figures, you know them. None of them demanded to rebuild camps. Truly?

The next keyword of our commemorative work is “Resist the beginnings”. Yes, please, of course. But: If we recognize symptoms, here and there, which are alarming, is it enough to fight these symptoms? This is nothing else than conventional medicine, but holistic medicine would be necessary. Having prevented narrowly a politician with national socialist corn flower on his lapel at the highest level in Austria, means no triumph, no “resistance of the beginnings”, because this man now has to content himself with the second level as one of three presidents of Austrian parliament. The question is: Which are the causes for those symptoms, what is going on in our society leading to such a political representation. We failed to explain the complete meaning of “Resist the beginnings!” The thing is to take countermeasures to social developments, not only luckily preventing a single person, which is representing these developments. How could all that been forgotten, even though we were admonishing and commemorating?

Now the third mantra of our commemorative culture: “Never forget!” To be honest I don’t believe that there is a high number of people, having forgotten what they have learned about NAZI crimes. But I am convinced an overwhelming majority of people never heard, which the consequences were, we experienced from the first half of the 20th Century. In an objective view, we failed to explain, what we should “never forget!” After liberation from NAZI terror the survivors, the returnees from their exile, the heroes of resistance, the reeducated NAZIS built up their states. But this was not all. A generation of farsighted politicians and visionaries raised the question, how can we prevent politically that the past can happen again. They came to the following conclusion: Nationalism caused the destruction of Europe and made these major crimes possible. Overcoming of nationalism is the only way to rebuild a sustainable peaceful Europe. This was the basic idea of the European project of unification and peace: Overcoming of nationalism, finally the nations too and installation of a pan-European legal status based on human rights. Human Rights Convention, proclaimed by UNO after the war in 1948 as a non-binding recommendation, in an extended version is the precondition for access to European Union. The European Court of Human Rights situated in Strassburg ensures that human rights are respected. It can be said: The European idea, which led to today’s European Union was born in the NAZI concentration camps and extermination camps. Victims came from all European countries, they were forced to wear the same striped clothes, the all lived in the shadow of death and all of them, as far as they survived, had the same desire: the guaranty that Human Rights will be recognized for ever. Nothing else in history ever has linked together different identities, mentalities and cultures, religions, so called races and hostile ideologies, nothing else created such a fundamental community as the experience of the camps. Nations, national identities were invalid, Spaniard or Pole, Italian or Czech, Austrian, German or Hungarian, all irrelevant, religion, origin, all became obsolete due to desire to survive, to live a life in dignity and freedom. In past and present this is the basic experience and the final idea of united Europe, the European Union. And this is the reason why the first president of the European Commission held his inaugural speech in Auschwitz, not in Brussels. Who does remember that?

“Never forget!” is absolutely right and essential – but some day we forgot to say: it is not essential to criticize and prevent nationalists within the nations, but rather tackle nationalism at its roots and overcome the nations. Never forget: nationalism had wasted Europe completely and finally destabilized the whole world. Never forget the sentence of Stefan Zweig: “Nationalism destroyed European civilization!” Never forget: The European peace project was founded as a result of experiences with nationalism, facing the aim of overcoming nations. Never forget: Nations are incompatible with the principle of indivisibility of Human Rights – because: Nations demand their part of worldwide resources in competition to the desires of the others. But Human Rights are no magic cake, everyone can get the biggest piece of. Never forget: the European peace project is based as an idea on the indivisibility of Human Rights. Never forget: “Never again!” is only guaranteed by a unified, post-national Europe. Never forget: “Resist the beginnings!” means uncompromising resistance against all those, who are boycotting the development of a free post-national European Republic.

All that we have not mentioned for a long time, when we said: “Never forget!” WE forgot that.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

The mantra “Never again!” owns a difficult philosophical content. Our world, settled by human beings, does exist as a historical world, as a historical process, which means, that the world has a beginning and will come to its end. But “Never again!” means a promise for eternity. But if the last eyewitnesses will have perished, the last ones, who can bear witness by their biography, then this eternity will have come to an end. With the last eyewitness the whole historical era will be buried – please apologize, if I am stating that point so simply. For the next generation this era will be as far away and declined to a myth as the destruction of Troy.

Our challenge will be: not to tell and remind again what happened, which conclusions we drew from history. Our challenge is more complicated: we have to prevent that eternity comes to an end! This is our complex task: To prevent

that at the end all that was just a period of history, a historical story, what should have to be a doctrine out of history for all times.

We only can succeed, if we restate the consequences drawn 70 years ago, as an unfulfilled political claim for the future.

We want a unified post-national Europe to prevent nationalist revenants! But this means, recognition of alarming symptoms and to deliver warnings is not enough. We have to recognize what is new and try to deal with, even though our old mantras are inoperative. The new anti-Semitism for example: We always were busy with taming of classic anti-Semitism, but today we have to deal with an imported anti-Semitism, which came to Europe through migration and political Islam from Arabic countries. At the same time classic anti-Semitism is turning against new “enemies”: no longer against Jews, but against Muslims and refugees. It is the same mechanism in order to establish national and closed “we-groups”, now mobilizing virulent Islam phobia and xenophobia. This is, what we need to understand and at the same time this is the trap: We have to fight anti-Semitism without strengthening the Islam phobia. Moslems are the new Jews and we must fight racism in the shape of anti-Islamism, without trivializing political Islam.

Today we celebrate the annual day of liberation: we celebrate the triumph over a criminal regime and commemorate and honor the victims. But: Never forget: It is much more to do than admonish!

I wish you all a long life!

Max R. Garcia (survivor, USA)

Ladies and Gentlemen, Ebensee Officials, children from far of Europe. I am here from San Francisco, California, on the Pacific Ocean. Next month I will be 93 years young that is not an error. I have been coming here to honor and remember those of my fellow prisoners who have been murdered here by the Nazi's.

It is painful for me because my younger sister, Sienie, was the first one in our entire family to be murdered 16 days after her 16th birthday on November 24th, 1926. She was the first one of the entire family. She was gassed on December 10th 1942 in KZ Auschwitz. Her crime was to have been born a Jew, as the Nazi's saw it.

My father and mother were gassed, murdered, in Destruction camp Sobibor in Eastern Poland. They arrived on July 16th, my mother's birthday. At this point may I ask you to rise with me for one minute of silence while we remember, and honor, those who lie here among us, murdered for whatever reason the Nazi's, Germans thought was possible and profitable for their war effort.

Thank you!

I, myself, went into hiding in Amsterdam-East in the Apartment of the Jaap BOAS Family, in the Indiese buurt, a working class neighborhood. He, Jaap, was Jewish, a diamond polisher like my father, but Jaap's wife was a non-Jew therefore she was not required to wear a Yellow Star where within, in black, the word “JEW” was written in accordance with their laws instigated in Nürnberg, Germany, during one of their Nazi Assembly's. These stars had to be worn on all outer garments. Jaap's wife, nor their children had to wear those stars because their mother was a non-Jew. Insanity was rampant among the Nazi's and Germans at that time during WWII.

It was the 2nd of January 1943. I was still 18 years old, or young, when through my own stupidity I betrayed myself on an evening a few days after I had turned 19. My parents came to visit me at the Boas apartment a few days after I had my birthday and then a few days later still the son of the Boas family was still at home and was looking out of the front window and saw a black vehicle stop in front of the building in which their apartment was located and hollered to me to get to the roof and hide behind one of the larger skylights and by now it had gotten very dark and even with their lights they didn't even see me with their flashlights on.

After quite a while I was called off the roof and the lady of the home stood there and whispered in my ear the location of a safe house, handed me a satchel with some of my clothes in it, my false ID papers and some money and I was off.

I went to my aunt's apartment on the van Woustraat (I knew where their keys were kept) and I proceeded to get my bicycle again because I was going to fix it up and would try getting to Switzerland. Alas, that very night I was arrested; betrayed by an older fellow Amsterdamer living directly across from my aunt's place and inasmuch he had called the local Police he got his 25 Guilder reward. I was taken to the Police HQ and they only wanted to know who the person was who had created my “false” documents. Didn't Know. Then they suspected that I did know they beat me up some. The next morning I was transferred to the Jewish Theater on the Plantage Midden Laan which had been converted into a “holding facility” for Jews only who had been caught. Second little beating this time by the “Green Police”, a Nazi Unit of the SS. Still couldn't tell them.

Then was transferred to Westerbork, a transit Camp for Jews, I was placed in the punishment Block because I refused to cooperate. I was there for a week or more, don't know exactly and then one morning was told to pack all my goods and come along with the SS guards who took me to the Stations where a freight train was waiting for us, the criminal Jews to be transported into unknown.

Climbed into the car I was assigned to and the bottom was covered with straw and in the middle of that car stood a large metal can with water in it that was going to be a toilet. We were heavily guarded. No windows in the car. Just straw. After

every one assigned to that car was inside the car the guards rolled the doors shut and locked the door from the outside...and with a few shrill noises from the locomotive we were on our way. Where to "on our way we were going" we were not told.

In the darkness of the car and when our eyes got used to the darkness I looked about and realized for the first time who my fellow travelers were and they ranged from families with children to old people, young couples and teenagers like myself. I had never been on a train before in my teenage years; been on streetcars in Amsterdam prior to Holland having been overrun by the Nazi horde.

The trip lasted three days and nights. We stopped at certain locations and two young men were to schlep our "toilet" to the door and empty it somewhere, brought it back to the place where it had stood and men and women (the older ones had to be helped to get on it, do their thing, and been helped down). No toilet paper provided!!!

And so we arrived at our destination. The train had stopped in the middle of the night, it was pitch dark we detected looking through the slats of the wooden walls of the car and suddenly, all at once, all doors were rolled open and we were addressed by men in striped uniforms and striped caps and they talked to us in a language none of us understood. We, from Holland, spoke Dutch only and in the Jewish area of Amsterdam one could hear Yiddish words such as "mayem" for water or "smeris" for policeman; they tried using German but to no avail. They asked for help from some of my fellow travelers, but none came forward.

Men over here, women with children over there, "leave all your luggage in the car it will be brought to you at the place you will be staying". Line up with five people in a row (both for us and also for the women) and at the fronts of each column was a table behind which people in SS uniforms were seated and used their thumbs to designate which way one was to go.

The place where we stood was very brightly lit, SS-men with barking dogs on a leash were going mad as was the shouting by the SS and the striped men. Obviously I came through all this with flying colors, were loaded on a truck and taken away from the place where we had just arrived and when we halted in some place with guard towers all around us with SS guards armed with machine guns. We still did not know where we were.

We were unloaded and told to go upstairs, take off all our clothes and pile them in a corner designated by one of the stripes men. We were allowed to keep our belts and shoes otherwise everything else had to go in that corner and that included watches, rings, pens, billfolds, everything and us sitting there several other striped came by and handed each of us a 3"x5" card on which there was a number printed. And while I was sitting there he asked me for my left arm and tattooed that number on my left forearm where it still is.

We were told to write our names on them, the last address in Amsterdam, the names of my parents and our trade or profession. While sitting there and thinking about all the things that had happened to me I realized they would have no need for diamond polishers but I had been an apprentice diamond polisher until I broke that stone I had been working on and my teacher let loose with an array of curse words. I had never heard before and when, during that tirade what I wanted to be I blurted out "architect". He laughed and tore into me and made fun of me. I went home, my mother asked me if I was sick and I told her "no" that I was done being a "slijper", that I wanted to be an architect.

Father came home, mother started to tell him but he cut her off by saying all the diamond factories in town, in Antwerp, Belgium, had heard and knew that he, our son, wants to be an architect. Where that idea did come from, my father wanted to know. I told him growing up in Amsterdam and walking the canals one begins to see the beauty of those buildings and I want to be able to do so as well.

After dinner my former teacher came by to talk to my father and told him he wanted me to come back and he wanted apologize to me for his outburst but my father told him he would have to talk to me directly as he pointed to me and I, a solidly adamant fourteen year old told him "no way!"

A year later we returned to Amsterdam because my father saw a war coming on and he believed we would be better off if we were in our own country Holland, so we left. It was 1939 and I would be 15 years old in June and my father allowed me to smoke cigarettes.

I had held different kind of jobs and finally found a job to my liking at a travel Agency and I was to start on Sunday, September 3rd, 1939 and on that very day England and France declared war on Germany because they had a Joint Agreement that if Germany were to attack one of the three (Poland, England or France) the others would come to the aid of the one attacked. Ergo, the Big War was on and my boss told me I will have to let you go because no one in his right mind will do any traveling.

My father had found an apartment for us on the other side of the Amstel, the East side, whereas we had lived on the West side before going to Antwerp. He asked me, tell me really, I was to go with the truck he had engaged to go to Antwerp and bring all the furniture and other items back to Amsterdam and he would see to it that all the big items were hoisted to the new place. So on my 15th birthday I was back in Antwerp and do a very responsible job bringing it all back that very same day.

Poland had been defeated in a Jiffy and a still had settled over Europe except for minor skirmishes; autumn was about.

Then on May 10th, 1940, all hell broke loose when Germany invaded Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark and Norway all on the same day. Holland fell after 5 day war. The Queen, Wilhelmina and her daughter, Juliana, had fled to England and some of the House of Orange had gone to Canada.

I saw the Nazi's enter Amsterdam via the Berlage Bridge which was near where we now lived. The bridge was filled with Dutch Nazi's in their black uniforms with arms raised in the Nazi Salute and shouting "Heil Hitler". Many of them were found floating in the canals the following morning in their Nazi uniforms.

A few days later I pedaled to Rotterdam, against my mother's wishes, to see for myself what the Nazi's had done and it was brutal; some of the bombed areas were still smoldering. War had come to us in a foul way because Hitler's had his Ambassador tell the Queen the night before their attack that she had nothing to fear.

My father became local window guard which meant he was out in the evenings making sure that no lights could be seen by airplanes flying above coming from England on bombing runs. My sister, Sienie, 1 ½ years younger than me had found a job in an Atelier where they were repairing German Army uniforms. It was located across from the Diamond Exchange, near the Weesperstraat and near the newly build Jewish Hospital.

Nothing really happened besides rationing and a late hour curfew and all Jews held jobs within City Government, or were members of Orchestras or Museums, or medical doctors working in Non-Jewish facilities were ordered discharged and the "Jewish Laws (the Nurnberg Laws) were implemented and we had to be in our homes by 8 PM.

There were many more such restrictions and we abided by them and in June 1942 things began to happen when all of us had to start wearing on our outer garments a Yellow Israeli Star in the center of which, in large black letters, was the word "JOOD". The first arrests were made on a Saturday directly in front of the Portuguese Synagoge. They were shipped to KZ Mauthausen, in Austria, where they were murdered.

My father and sister received permits from the SS who were THE occupying German administration that they were in vital industries and were safeguarded from arrests. By the way Holland was occupied by members of the Austrian SS, real anti-Semites.

Now let me tell you about KZ Auschwitz and my being there. Perhaps it is more what you have heard from someone, me, who arrived there an August 26th, 1943. Earlier in this talk I told you about our reception and after our registration we were taken to the showers. The only things we had were our shoes and the belt that had secured our pants.

Here we were shorn of ALL our hairs, head, armpits and crotch and then chased through the exceedingly hot overhead showers, many of my fellow travelers were burned by the hot water. After we had run through it there were some prisoners that stood there and doused us with Lysol over our bald heads, our armpits and our crotches and someone else gave us a pair of trousers and a jacket plus a piece of cloth that was supposed to be head gear and then onto trucks that took us to BUNA several miles away from Stammlager (Auschwitz) where they were building a facility for I.G. Farben to make artificial rubber.

Here we were given a spoon and a bowl of a brownish metal clad with some brown/reddish cladding that, we were told was for soup once a day and coffee or tea twice day plus the Rations we would receive at the end of the day.

The Dutch clung to each other as I noticed and most of them were considerably older. I stayed away from them picked myself a space and burst into a fantastic cry. I guess I needed that because it all was just too much for me.

Another teenager, or someone who took pity on me started to talk to me in a language I did not recognize tried to connect with me and after several tries we had found our common conversing and he asked me if I wanted to live and when I answered in the affirmative he told me that I had fallen from the sky, had no family, had no other connections and start to learn at once the number on your arm in German and also Polish because they ran the camp and if your number was called you'd better answer in the language it was called and after you learned it do the same thing in Polish you will save a lot of beatings. Don't eat all your bread in one fell swoop but learn to eat sparingly. If you learn those things and do them your chance of surviving will have increased tremendously. And a final thing to note is don't hang around the Dutch because nearly all of them will run into the electric fence with which the camp is surrounded. I took it to heart and began first to learn the German version and when I believed I could do it I started the Polish version.

Never saw this fellow again but I know that he instilled in me my desire to live.

The next morning I was assigned to the cinder block detail which did the carrying of the cinder blocks to the masons and then went back to pick up the next load and did this all day long. Heavy work. After several days of doing this I noticed that my middle finger on my right hand had started to turn green and yellow and requested to be allowed to go to the clinic; permission granted and hat very same day I was place on a truck with other prisoners and headed to Stammlager Auschwitz.

When the clinic doctor saw the finger he had me go to the medical block for contagious diseases because until the doctor said I could. I was there for a number of days until I was released and I was assigned to a block and given an odd task because I did not have a detail to report to and every morning me, and others, were assigned to the clean-up detail within the fence that surrounded the Camp and pick up paper, and other such things, that had blown in. While inside that area with SS guards and a Kapo behind us we walked outside the Camp but within the space between the inner and outer

fences. I did that for several weeks when my number was called and I was to report that afternoon to the SS Arbeitsführer who told me to report the next morning to the “Tischlerei” detail.

The next morning I did report and went outside the Camp to my designated work space and was amazed with the lucky detail. The bastards had checked my card and had assigned me to the Carpentry Shop. Winter was slowly approaching and I was in a place where the shop was roofed over, the equipment we were working on threw off a lot of heat and neither the Kapo nor the guard was to interfere with us and our immediate supervisor was either a Polish civilian or a German one. I stayed with that detail all through the winter and when spring rolled around I was reassigned to the roof-repair detail. I was not too happy with that change and I went to the complaint line in front of the main kitchen. The SS Officer in charge would not allow me to stay with the Tischlerei detail and denied my request. I went to the back of the line and when he came to me and I started out again his glove clad fist hit my face and I went flying. A few fellow prisoners saw what was happening ran over to me and berated me for the risk I had taken. He could have killed you, they said and I replied he didn't.

The next morning I reported to the Roof Repair Detail with a swollen face. These were one-story buildings in KZ Birkenau and the roofs needed repairs because the winter just passed had caused some damage. When the sun started to get warm I took off my jacket and enjoyed the warmth on their roofs I came down with a severe cold, reported to the clinic and was to report into the hospital because I had pneumonia in my right lung and it needed to be fixed and that consisted of sucking-out the water out of my right lung and that meant standing against the wall and plunging a 1/8" diameter needle into my lung and sucking out the water; this was done twice a day.

I was now in Block 9 on the 2nd Floor, directly opposite of Block 10, the women's experimental Block in which many young Dutch women were located and experimented on. On the 2nd floor I met a fellow Dutchman, 5 years older than me and very well known in the musical world in Amsterdam as a famous young trumpet player. He became the Conductor of the KZ Auschwitz orchestra when the earlier orchestra was sent to the interior of Germany when the Red Army began their offensive. Lex van Weren was his name and he, too, was diagnosed as having pneumonia so we became friends because all Dutch women wanted to talk with him but Lex could not “lip read” and I could because all my aunts were deaf and when they all got together it was one of the quietest family get-together one could imagine.

So when there was a “Selection” on our floor (a selection being a thinning out of the patients on that floor) the Dutch women were very interested in how Lex and I had fared and in their own way helped us by smuggling pills to us for our well-being. I was the silent speaker and they understood me.

SELECTION: One stands stark naked at the far end of the Block in the Hospital and walks to the person seated behind the table at the other end of the Block. Your life is in his hand as to how he decides.

I have been through 4 Selections, the first one was getting off the train, the other three were in the hospital in KZ Auschwitz. Obviously I was successful in all instances or I would not be standing here.

The orderly worked on my right lung which meant twice a day, once in the morning and again in the afternoon, and honestly, I cannot remember how long it took, but finally just before I was to be released he found out that my left lung was also infected and now he had more work to do.

At least I was released from the hospital, it was Thursday afternoon and I remember it well, very well, I was back in my block at my “bed” and I started to have severe pain in my belly. I went to the shit holes and tried to poop but not to avail; I tried to sit but the pains continued and on Friday morning I was in the “clinic” where the doctors looked me over in some detail, gave me a couple of aspirin and a slip of paper allowing me NOT having to go to work. The pains continued and unabated and on Sunday the clinic was closed and the pains were so bad that I was convinced that on Monday I would be in Birkenau and be gassed.

On Monday I was again in the clinic but this time the doctor called the SS doctor on duty and told him he had a Jewish boy who had a 4 ½ day appendicitis that was ready to burst what am I to do? He told him to get him to the operating room and he would be right over.

Bend over I walked from the clinic to the hospital where an orderly took me to the Operating room and took off my clothes, sat me on the edge of the operating table and the doctor, who had come in, gave me a spinal anesthetic, which freezes your body and placed me ready for the operation. In the operating room were me, the patient, the prisoner-doctor, a Jew, the orderly and the SS doctor then on duty. That was all, nobody else.

He came in, walked to me on the operating table and the Jewish doctor cut me open, spread the area so the SS Doctor could look in and then left the room. The Jewish doctor did everything by himself and closed me up and the orderly, with the help of another orderly, carried me to the recovery area and placed me on the lower bunk to thaw out. There is more to tell you here but you must be able to understand. I am going to be 93 years YOUNG next month and I feel fine.

Meanwhile I now place you in the office of Lex van Weren, the Dutch trumpet player who now by now had been made the Conductor of the prisoner orchestra, who was talking to a Capo who was talking to a Capo who asked him to teach him how to play the trumpet and Lex's reply was get yourself a trumpet and I'll teach you but, conversely, you have to do me a

favor and that is I have a buddy who is in the Hospital ready to be released who needs all the help he can get and I want you to take him into your detail. Done he replied.

When one is released from the hospital, line up in front of the Prisoner Arbeitsführer who then places you in your old detail or as in my case, into a new one. So when he came to me he told me I was to go into the Paketstelle. I asked him where it was and he turned around and pointed to a door and said "there".

I opened the door and to the left was a small office in which an SS guard was seated and ahead of me was another door in a wall that reached the ceiling and when I opened in a man came to me and introduced himself as the Capo of the Paketstelle and took me in a large workplace with several long tables at which men were working and there also was a narrower table on which there was something cooking. I asked the Capo what my duties were and he replied, pointing to the guard's office "keep him happy!" and what is that to be I wondered and he replied: "shine his boots, bring him coffee, keep his space clean, all the things you can think of!"

That sounded like a job that really said to me; don't aggravate him. He introduced me to him but not shake hands. The capo left and I got to work and I did that every day and after about a week I was informed that I was moved to another sleeping space and when I met the guy who was in charge of that facility he took me to the front of his second floor and showed me a room with a single bed with blankets on it, a pillow case, a chair, a closet with a door and a counter that held a sink and a mirror on the inside face of the door and above it all a light with its own on/off switch. I thought they were kidding me. And above all else the caretaker told me that I did not have to get up when the bell sounded at 4:30 AM because he, the caretaker, would give the SS men the paper that all beds were occupied. I could not believe my eyes, nor my ears... a paradise in the KZ! Later on I learned that tailors stood ready to make me a uniform and other items as well and inasmuch as I had now money available, money in the KZ are food items, I had suddenly become a very rich man/prisoner. I ordered a suit, trousers, shirts, shoes, socks, cloth handkerchiefs, gloves (winter was coming) and, as an afterthought, I also ordered a winter coat and a handmade cap and hand painted numbers plus a cap. When I got the items and stood in front of my mirror all dresses up, I thought myself as a prisoner/male picture of what the well-dressed should like.

I really looked like a very prominent important personage among the rest of my camp's prisoners. If Hitler or Himmler would have seen me, a Jew, decked out as I was they might have had fits.

The clinic was very close to the Paketstelle and one day I happen to see MY doctor and I asked him "why was I operated on?" he answered I kept also wondering and once I saw the SS doctor and I posed the same question to him he explained that when he was in medical school in Germany they had excellent teachers but all the photos in our text books were in Black and Grey but no color so here was an opportunity to see a true appendectomy that was the reason. Are you curious? No, just one doctor wondering about another doctor. That's all.

Christmas, 1944, was nearing and looking at all my co-workers I saw a lot of red triangles (political ones) and a few green (professional criminal ones) but I was the only Jew. One day the capo called us all together in a big room and suggested that it would be proper if we, in the Paketstelle would give the SS Commandant's wife a beautiful X-mas gift and he suggested a silver tea and coffee set and he asked all of us to collect all sorts of fruits and sweet items that we could use in trading. We all agreed and somehow he got in touch with the local Oswiecim (Auschwitz) citizens and one by one pieces started to arrive and were approximately packed and when all the pieces were together they were placed on a wooden horse drawn flatbed and all the workers, in their best garments, except me because the Capo explained to us all it would not be proper to have a Jew with us. And so a few days prior to X-mas the flatbed was rolled out the Main Gate took a right turn and rolled to the SS Commandant's home and the flatbed unloaded and the pieces carried into their home and the Paketstelle crew safely returned to our place in the camp.

On Sunday January 18th, 1945, the last prisoners in CC Auschwitz save those who were patients in the hospital, were ordered to be ready by one o'clock, to leave CC Auschwitz on a march going west. That was all we had been told, that was unofficial. We left the Main Gate at about 1 PM. No prisoners were counted no music could be heard and the snow was about 6" deep. We of the Paketstelle had found a flatbed truck that we had to push ourselves and it was loaded with all sorts of food items that we had saved for just such occasion. Little had we understood what it would take to push such a loaded vehicle and it didn't last long when food was sent flying to make the flatbed lighter but the snow, frozen water really, wasn't cooperating and the only pleasure we got out of all this was the SS Guards running out after the food was tossed out of the flatbeds.

We were not fully at the end of the march but we began to hear shots being fired by the guards when slackers could not keep pace with the march and were shot. We could not see them when we passed them. Time had gone by, it was quiet among the marchers, we barely set on foot in front of the other and finally word came down to us to get off the roadbed and lie down. I had cursed myself earlier about having the winter overcoat its pockets fully filled with food as well as all the other pockets in the pants, the jacket, the gloves I had ordered and the scarves and I realized that I had held superb foresight.

Now there were no hot liquids to be had and we would have loved to have some hot "larger Kaffe oder heisses the".

It had taken us, the survivors of “the march” six days to get to where we were and that was Gleiwitz, in southern Poland. It was known as a “marshalling yard”, which meant “a place where trains could take on fuel and water for their engines”. All this I learned after we were told to rest, that this was not our final destination and they would not tell us what our final destination was. I had lost track of Lex who was with his musicians I assumed. I do not remember how long we “rested”. I do remember very clearly that we were not fed and snow was our preferred liquid.

At least we were roused and told we were leaving for our next stop, our final one assumed, but we were so numb that I didn’t know whether we were moving. The car I was in was a cattle car because it had no roof on it... four walls and a single door that was locked and on a ledge above us was an SS guard with some weapon in his lap.

It was an ordeal. It took us 11 days and nights to get us to Mauthausen, which, among the ones who were still alive in our car and were long-time KZ prisoners held on of the most brutal KZ’s in the entire Nazi Kamp System. The doors were opened and those who could still use their legs were told to exit and we were formed up and were forced to run up the hill that faced us with SS guards egging us on.

After the liberation at KZ Ebensee I met a young Austrian who had been studying the Camp’s situation in Austria and during our talks I asked him how many of us about “our ride from Gleiwitz to Mauthausen” he told me about our exiting the cars and I asked then how many of us had survived the ride. After not wanting to tell me first I told him to tell me and then he allowed that all of those who had gotten on the train only 10% exited alive at the Mauthausen Railroad station. He further enlightened me that the reason it had taken 11 days to get from “G to M” was for the many stops we had to allow German Troop trains to pass us with fresh German Troops for the Eastern Front or we were loaded with wounded soldiers heading for Germany.

When we had entered KZ Mauthausen we stood near the “Delousing facility” and while waiting here we were re-registered here because our KZ Auschwitz was not applicable here and consisted of metal plates on which ones was a number hammered and held a piece of leather or cloth so one could wear on guarded by a “Green Triangle Prisoner”, a professional criminal, and when I came to be next and he saw my prisoner outfit he started to beat me so severely that MY fellow prisoner who also had survived the ride interfered, pulled me away and told the “green one” to stay away.

We went through the showers and the Lysol routine and were taken to a naked field adjacent to the “facility” and learned later that this area was the “Sanitation Area” where we would be for the next 10 days. It was the end of January/start of February 1945. It was brutally cold and all we wore were the items tossed at us nothing else. Those who didn’t make it were left behind while we were loaded onto trucks and taken to KZ Melk, a sub-camp of Mauthausen, on the Danube. By “Naked” I mean “grass” only. We were put to work inside the nearest mountain and I was led by the fellows who had helped me in KZ Mauthausen and they told me to stay with them at all times. I did. We were housed in an old Military Barrack of the old Austrian Army. Every morning we were picked up by trucks and taken to the mountain and after having “worked” 12 hours these same trucks would pick us up and take us to our sleeping building to receive our daily food ration.

We had been at Melk for about two weeks when we were taken, by food, to a bank that led to the Danube where several barges were waiting for us and took us to Linz, on the Danube. What was remarkable, as far as I was concerned, walking down that bank my mind was beginning to work again and I was taken down everything my eyes saw and my mind recorded.

The trip on the barge was uneventful except for having to go to the toilet because there was toilet paper in the place and that was quite a treat. We also, each of us, received a loaf of bread when we reached the bottom of the stair that led to the street. They called it “BREAD” but it was not that we had eaten in Amsterdam but, alas, better than nothing. Also I must remind the reader, or listener, that my shoes had long since gone and I walked on wooden clogs “Klompen” called in Holland, which didn’t make it easier to walk on snowy streets or on icy paths going up a hill slide.

From the bridge across the Danube to walking the street down the hill to the lake where a lot of sliding, took place. We took a night to turn and walked, shuffled really, several days before we reached Ebensee and then reached the road to the camp. The road of the City of Ebensee, was narrow and then we walked through several areas that had been cut through the bottom of the hill, mountain really, to get one there then through the Main Street over another bridge that crossed the Traun river, passed the cement factory and again very much uphill over a road paved with cobble stones which caused many of us, me included, to slide on the icy surface until we, exhaustedly, I might add, reached the wooden gate to the camp.

Here, where you are seated, was the camp, the houses you passed, where people now live, stood the barracks where we lived in bunk beds, 4 to a bunk, three layers high and worked 12 hours shifts in those mountains, day and night, with a Camp commander and a trained fighting dog who, on the orders of his master would tear into a fellow prisoner. That was his entertainment, the SOB. It is my understanding that he had been tried in a Court of Law and found guilty and handed a sentence of life imprisonment and then got cancer, a severe case of it, and I wished him all the pain that he was entitled to. He died in prison in Bavaria, Germany. Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for listening to me.

Izchak Rosenbaum (survivor, Israel)

My name is Izchak Rosenbaum I am an Israeli Citizen and a Holocaust survival. I am a father of 3 children and grandfather to 9 grandchildren and 2 great-granddaughters.

I am standing here today with my three children to pay tribute to my parents who had been killed by the German Soldiers during the second world war.

My father is buried here in Ebensee graveyard along with a few hundred victims. My mother was murdered in the gas chambers upon her arrival to Auschwitz. Her faith was determined as she was holding a lost little girl's hand.

I was born in 1930 in Czechoslovakia in a town called Khust, my father owned a shop of electrical appliances and tools, he was active in the local Jewish community. He was amongst the founders of the Jewish primary and secondary schools as the Jewish children were not allowed to attend the government schools. He founded and organized a Soup Kitchen for needed people who lost their jobs.

In March 1944, the Germans conquered Hungary. A couple of weeks later, the Gestapo arrived at Khust and the transports to the concentration camps begun.

On June the 5th, my mother's birthday and my 14th birthday, we, women, men and children, were loaded onto cattle carts together with other families. After 4 days travelling in terrible conditions we arrived at Auschwitz. The doors opened to a terrible turmoil and shouting that we are going to the chimneys. While waiting for the selection somebody advised me to declare that I am 16 years old. This advice helped me stay with my father and by that kept me alive.

It is impossible to describe our life in Auschwitz under the shadow of the never ending smoking rectangular chimney. Our world collapsed but we still tried to hold on to every piece of life possible. Terrible smell of human flesh burning was in the air, those who could not bear it ran into the electrified fence.

A couple of weeks later whilst on the way out of camp I was walking and holding my father's hand when an SS soldier jumped at me and dragged me with force away from my father and pushed me into block 21. Since that moment, I never saw my father again. I was left all alone.

In 1957, I received the following letter from my father's friend Dr. Hegedus -

"... As I recall, in June 1944 you were together with your late father in Auschwitz. When we left the camp grounds an SS man separated you from your father, I will never forget the sorrow on your father's face when you disappeared.

I was together with him during all the time in KZ Melk concentration camp in Austria. We slept next to each other, we went together to work and we shared each other's piece of bread. All I can tell you is that your father was a great man and you should be proud of him".

From Block 21 I was transferred to KZ Muhlendorf which was a new camp built for forced labor prisoners who worked to prepare a construction site to produce ME262 fighter plane engine.

The conditions in Muhlendorf were miserable and become worse every day. I carried 50kg cement bags on my back all day long. As winter came conditions worsened, and the daily food rations became smaller. our clothes and shoes did not fit the cold climate. My toes were frozen and I was unable to walk to work. I was transferred to separate section of the camp from where the prisoners were taken back to Auschwitz for elimination. I understood that to survive I must go back to, so I told them that I am fit to work. I used the paper from the cement bags to wrap my wounds. Every day, after working for 12 hours, I cleaned large cooking pots in the kitchen so I could scrape a few more tablespoons of porridge. Along with the winter came the different diseases in kz camps such as lice, diarrhea and typhus. The number of prisoners who died due to the difficult conditions and hunger rose to several hundred a day.

By the end of April 1945, the American forces were advancing towards the Nazi camps. Prisoner's from both Muhlendorf camps were loaded onto the train which travelled to an unknown destiny. There was a command from the SS headquarters that none of prisoners should reach the American forces alive. We found out that the train was intended to reach Tyrol Austria where special SS forces were waiting to exterminate the prisoners. The train was known as the "Death Train".

After 4 days being insufferably cramped on the Death Train, an American fighter plane attacked our train by mistake. It was not long after that the train finally came to a stop.

Yes! I was on that train and I survived! liberated by the American forces.

I do believe that the reason that I survived lies in my strong belief that GOD will help me stay alive and the education I received from my parents.

It took me another year after the liberation I arrived in Israel (that time Palestine). My uncle who was already in Israel took me under his supervision and took care of all my needs.

At last it was wonderful to feel at home. My first decision was to make a new start in life, to interact with the Israeli's and to become one of them. I decided not to share my story with anybody and kept this promise for forty years. Like the

Israeli's, I enlisted to the army during the Independence war and studied electronic engineer in the Technion - technical university. I loved everything in my new life, I was happily married for 62 years, raised a family that I am proud of.

When my grandchildren started school I felt I had no choice but to tell them my story. I volunteered to lecture in front of their classes and share with them my memories from the war and the concentration camps.

It was only 40 years after I got off the "Death Train", that I started lecturing about the Nazi's horrors in front of groups of Israeli soldiers.

Today I am standing here in memory of my parents and family and to those who did not survive the Holocaust. It is important to share the Jewish people's story during the Holocaust in order that this genocide will never happen again.

I always end my lectures by emphasizing that Israel is my sole home.

I would like to thank Dr. Quatember who helped me locate my father's burial site and to place a stone with a Star of David on his grave.