

Excerpted from

In Fragile Moments

By Zsuzsanna Fischer Spiro (1925-2016)

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Whoever reads my story, you must promise that you will remember and never forget. I tell my story to speak for the millions of innocent victims who cannot speak for themselves so that never again will this happen. I dedicate my story to my dear mother and to all the mothers who never lived long enough to know the joy of being a grandmother and to my two wonderful sons who never knew the loving touch of a grandmother.

This is my living testimony.

My name is Susan Spiro. I was born Zsuzsanna Fischer on November 18, 1925 in the small village of Tornyoşpalca, Hungary. I grew up in Kisvarda, Hungary, a city that is approximately 300 kilometers from Budapest. My family and I moved there when I was 12 or 13. I had a loving mother Gizella (ne Funk) Fischer who was born in August 1891 in Vasarosnameny, Hungary, a loving father Ervin Fischer born January 22, 1890 in Kisvarda, Hungary, an older brother Endre (Bandi) Fischer born November 5, 1920, an older sister Klara born July 1, 1922 and a younger brother Tibor, born January 23, 1929. Endre was born in Nagykaroly, Hungary but the rest of us were born in Tornyoşpalca, Hungary.

I had a normal, carefree and happy childhood. Tornyoşpalca, where we first lived was a small village. It was like any other small village, no paved roads, no transportation except carriages driven by horses or cows, no electricity, no central heating, no telephone and yet I still remember that I had a happy childhood. There was one main road in the town and our family lived on a side street. There was a factory which made alcohol from potatoes and my father was the manager of this factory. Our house had electricity which was a big luxury then and we had the first and only radio in the village. In the summer my father would put it near the window and people would come to listen to it. We also had chickens, geese, cows and a vegetable garden. The majority of the villagers were not Jewish. There were about fifteen or twenty Jewish families in the town. Mostly we were friends with the other Jewish families.

Life in the village was very peaceful. Everyone knew each other. The majority of the non-Jews worked on their farms and the majority of the Jewish people had a trade. There was one big store in the whole village which supplied groceries or materials that was owned by a Jewish family and there were two butcher stores owned by the Adler family. One was for kosher meat and the other one for non-kosher meat. They also owned a pub.

We would get together with them on Shabbat. They had two daughters my age Olga and Magda who I was friends with. Both of them perished in the war.

The Jewish children went to school with Christian children. I had non-Jewish friends but we weren't so close. For example if I went to their house I couldn't eat anything because it wasn't kosher. There was a Catholic school and a Protestant school and I remember one fall when the school year started, all the Jewish students from the Catholic school ended up in the other school. We were never told why but I believe that it was because the teacher was anti-semitic. Every morning when it was time for prayers, the teacher told the Jewish students to go outside. We got along with the Christians and treated each other with respect. However, I remember one time the priest at Sunday church had told his congregation that the Jews were the ones who had killed Jesus, and afterwards they came and told us this. At the time I didn't even know who Jesus was.

And now I am an eighty-eight year old woman living thousands of kilometers away from everything I left behind having survived Hell. Still I remember the happy little girl I was in Tornyospalca who loved her family

very much. Little did I know that my future loving and caring husband, Joseph Spiro was living just a few kilometers away in Gemzse. We were married in 1949 for 62 years until his death and I will love and miss him forever.

When I was 12 years old, my family moved to a city called Kisvarda, Hungary, my father's birth place because my father had gotten a job there and he had a lot of relatives living there. Kisvarda had a large Jewish population and had a lot of Jewish life to offer.

I went to high school for three years but unfortunately did not complete the fourth year of school. I loved school and being a very good student I had big plans for the future. However, all my plans, and ambitions for my future came to an end because of the devil "Hitler". I will never forgive the Nazis and Hungarians for this and everything else I had to endure during the war. It was 1940 and I was 15 years old in my third grade in high school when my first disappointment came. The principal of the school was a fascist and an anti-semite. The Jewish girls were separated from the Christian girls with the excuse that there were too many students in the one room. Our new class

was made up of Jewish girls and a few slow learner Christian girls.

However, we knew what the real reason was. I was me very angry and hurt by this and as a result I left school. The following year my teacher asked me to return to school but I was not willing to go back.

My mother told all her children to learn a trade because of the uncertainty of our future so I learned to sew. At the time I was a teenager and didn't know very much about what was happening with the war and I don't know what my parents knew at the time. They kept everything quiet. The first time I heard something was around 1940 or 1941 when I met a Jew who had escaped from Poland to Hungary hoping to have a better future in Hungary. This was the first time that I had heard stories about what was happening in Poland and how the Jews were persecuted but I never heard about the killings. Around this time the Jewish men were called into the Hungarian army including my dear father who was already over 50 years old and my older brother Bandi (Endre). This was not the regular army. The men did not wear the army uniforms and they did not get guns. They were only good for the dirty work. My dear brother was sent to the Russian front somewhere. He never returned and we will never know if he died from hunger, froze to

death or if he was killed. He was only 21 years when he disappeared. After a few months my father came back.

The atmosphere was very anti-semitic. We lived in constant fear not knowing what would happen next. There were new Jewish laws that took away everything from us. Jewish people were not allowed to work. There were signs that said Jewish people and dogs were not allowed in the stores or other places. Jews were not allowed to own businesses. On the street the Hungarians called us dirty Jews and we couldn't do anything about it, not because we were cowards but because there were only women and old men left. All the young men were in the army and even if they would have been home what could they do with empty hands against loaded guns? I remember that there was a group of Hungarian men, something like freedom fighters who I believe were mostly criminals who had been released from jail and they went from village to village stealing from the Jewish people. There was a huge Jewish community in Kisvarda and there was a marketplace where people would meet to get together. One Sunday afternoon some Hungarians made a speech. "Whose fault is it that the people are poor? The Jews! Whose fault is it that there is a war? The Jews!" If anything bad happened it was always blamed on the Jews.

March 19, 1944 is a day that will live forever in my memory. This was the date that sealed our horrible future. It was on this date that the Germans invaded Budapest and took over the leadership in Hungary. There was a rumour that the Jews in the countryside would be safer than those in Budapest, but unfortunately this was not true and most of the Jews who left Budapest believing they would be safe perished in Auschwitz. Our “dear” Hungarian Christian friends left us to the mercy of the Germans. Those who were our friends became our enemies and they turned away from us as if we had leprosy.

More laws against the Jews were introduced. One of the new laws was that all the Jews had to wear a yellow star. I remember that day we were ordered to wear the star as if it happened yesterday and ever since then I have hated the colour yellow. For days I didn't go out of the house. I was not ashamed of being Jewish but still I felt so violated. The more they hurt us, the more proud I was to be Jewish but still I only went out to the street when I really had to. I was only 18 years old then but I didn't want to see anybody. I was already fed up with everything. I did not know that I should have been happy because I was still together with my family, my dear parents, my sister Klari

and my brother Tibor. I did not know that it would only be a few short weeks before things changed. How could anyone know that the devils had been freed from hell?

The day after Passover in 1944 the Jewish population from the surrounding villages was taken to the ghetto in Kisvarda. They were only allowed to take a change of clothes and some food. The ghettoization of the Jews living in Kisvarda began in April 1944. At the end of April we had to leave our home and move into the ghetto which was located in the most Jewish district of Kisvarda by the synagogue and the surrounding streets by Csillag St and Petofi St. All the Jewish people living within 30 to 40 kilometers from Kisvarda were transported there and forced to live in the few streets of the ghetto. Everybody knew which streets made up the ghetto. Gendarmes (Hungarians) were guarding the ghetto and the roadways were closed with barriers. Luckily my family had some relatives who lived on a street which was part of the ghetto so we stayed with them. We slept on the floor and had to share the room with strangers. Nobody had a separate room. I don't remember how and what we were eating because we were not given any food. We didn't have anything to do in the ghetto so I helped mothers with their children and I also helped in the ghetto's kitchen. Most of the men were

not there as they had been sent to the forced labour camps. Day after day we became more frightened, but still hopeful that the situation would get better.

The first time I saw a German officer was a few days before the deportations to Auschwitz. All of the Jews from the ghetto were deported in May. When the German officers came we were forced to stand in lines for hours until they counted us. They made a list with the names of every person and I still do not understand why because within a few days many died, nameless, and those who were still alive able to work were like walking skeletons. We became numbers on the lists the murderers kept.

The people from the ghetto were divided into two transports. The first one left on Monday May 29, 1944 and the second transport left on Wednesday May 31, 1944. There were rumours that we were being sent to Germany and that the young people would be working and the old ones would be watching the children. We didn't know anything about where we were going to be sent. We knew who was going with the first transport and that our street was going to be sent on the second transport so we were lucky that our family had two more days to be together. We were crying when we went to say goodbye to our relatives and friends who had to leave on the first

transport because we did not know what to expect but somehow we felt we will never see them again. The second transport left on May 31, 1944. That day it was our turn to stand in line with our few bags. We didn't have anything else with us but I wished that they would have taken everything from us, even our clothes from our bodies if only we would be allowed to stay together. I cannot express in words how terrible we felt. No one could imagine how horrific it was. To this day when I think about it I cannot hold back my tears.

Under the watchful eyes of the Germans we walked to the train station. Our Hungarian "friends" were watching and laughing at us as we went by, waiting for the first chance to steal everything from our homes. The sickly old people only wanted to die in peace where they had lived and the dear innocent babies who couldn't hurt anyone had to die because their greatest crime was to be born Jewish. It was very hot that day and we had to sit for hours at the train station. I almost fainted from thirst and I am sure some people did. Finally the train came. It was a cattle train. The soldiers counted us treating us like animals forcing us into the wagons of the train. At the time the only thing that was important was that my family should stay together. About 60 – 70 or more people were forced into one wagon. Luckily

I was in the same wagon with my family. The wagon doors were closed and locked from the outside. The conditions in the wagon were awful. There wasn't any room to sit, there was no washroom, just a bucket in the corner and we were not given anything to eat or drink. We were in the wagon with strangers and we had to relieve ourselves in front of everybody. It was humiliating. It was so crowded we couldn't sleep. There wasn't enough air as there were only two small windows in the wagon, and although they provided a little light so that we could tell if it was day or night, it didn't provide enough air. It is a miracle that I survived the train ride and am sitting here alive today to tell about it.

The train stopped once in a city called Kassa. I know this because someone saw the name of the station. Kassa, then a part of Hungary today is named Kosice in Slovakia. The doors were opened to remove the bodies of those who had died between Kisvarda and Kassa giving the Gendarmes a chance to take the remaining valuables from the Jews. People had hidden their jewellery. Some even hid their jewellery in a jar of jam. This was the last chance for the Gendarmes to steal whatever jewellery they hadn't already taken from the Jews. Shortly after we stopped, the train started again and

about 43 hours later we arrived in Hell. We had been on the train from May 31 until June 2.

It was dark when the train arrived in Auschwitz Friday night June 2, 1944. In my mind I envisioned the nice familiar Friday nights when our dear mother used to light the Shabbat candles. This was the first time I remember turning against G-d. Seeing the SS guards and hearing them play on the accordion a then popular song called "Lili Marleen". I asked myself the question which remains forever without an answer "How can they be happy and playing music when they know very well that in a few hours thousands of innocent people will be their victims?" When the wagon doors were opened we saw smoke, but at the time we did not know what the smoke meant. I was standing together with my family not realizing that this would be the last time we would all be together. When I saw people in striped uniforms pushing the old sick people in a wheelchair I had no idea where they were being taken.

Then in the dark night we heard the terrible order that men had to be on one side and women had to be on the other side. Everyone was crying and shouting. My brother and father went to one side and we were calling our

dear father's and Tibi's (Tibor) name to make sure that at least they were together. My sister Klari and I were holding our mother from both sides so that she was in the middle between us. The three of us were standing holding each other's hands when suddenly a light from a flashlight was on our faces. We were standing face to face with the conductor of death who with his left or right hand determined life or death, mostly death. Later I found out that the man was Lucifer himself or the so called Dr. Mengele. He took my mother away from Klari and me and for a few seconds it was not clear if I were to go with my mother or not but then he asked me my age and decided to let me stay with Klari. My sister and I were told to go in one direction and my mother in the other direction. That's when my mother took off her scarf from her head and turned back to me and gave it to me saying, "You have a cold, you need it more than I do." as I had lost my scarf and had been sick on the train. When I didn't want to take it from her she told me that her cousin had an extra one and she would get it from her. She went to another section with her relatives. I didn't know that soon they wouldn't need a scarf anymore. I still don't remember if I had a chance to kiss her goodbye and I didn't know then that was the last time I would ever see her or feel her motherly love for me.

We were standing in a separate line tired, crying and waiting to see what our future would be or if there was any future for us at all. Our line was made up of women and girls from approximately 18 to 40 years old. Some of the mothers were crying for their babies who had been taken away from them. Klari and I were crying for our dear mother and our loved ones. Then we started walking not knowing where we were going. On that Friday night instead of candles glowing we saw flames coming out of a chimney. The smell was terrible but we did not have the slightest idea what it was. If we would have known I am sure we would have all gone crazy. When we were getting closer to the camp I started to scream because I saw human body parts burning in an open fire. One woman tried to calm me down and told me to stop screaming. She said I was imagining things but I am sure she knew very well that I was right. Later, we found out that when the crematorium couldn't handle all the bodies they were burned outside and maybe not only those who were already dead.

Slowly dawn came and I could see that everything was grey. There was no greenery, no grass, no birds. We arrived to a building which was called a bath house and it really was a bath house. Water came out of the pipes, not gas. First, we were told to strip naked and to leave our clothes in a certain

place. We were told to keep our shoes and when Klari was told she could keep her glasses we took it as a sign that we would stay alive. We had to stay in long lines. The building was divided into different rooms. We did not know what was happening to those who were ahead of us but we did not hear any screaming so we thought that they were not being killed. Then it was our turn to go into the next room. That was where they shaved our hair until we were bald. Not only did they shave our head but also all of our body hair until we were totally hairless. Afterwards when we first saw each other it was difficult to recognize each other. Then we were sprayed with some kind of chemical and had a shower. After the shower we were told to get dressed. We had to take whatever clothing there was. My first outfit was an evening gown and a pair of men's shorts for underwear. Some women were wearing men's clothes. I never saw my own clothes again which was my favorite outfit.

It was a bright sunny day when I came out of this building but I couldn't see anything except the wire fence. Somebody said she saw our beloved ones standing further away, waiting their turn for a shower but this was the gas chamber and death not water came from the pipes of this shower. This was the last we knew about our dear innocent mother who went with the other

mothers and their darling little children to their deaths. It is so painful and hard to write about this but unfortunately it is factual and true.

We had to stay in line again, five in every line and we were guarded by the SS officers and German shepherd dogs as we arrived to the camp that was called C lager. C lager, like all the other lagers, was surrounded by electric wire fences. It was sure death if you touched the fence. The SS were positioned every few yards, watching us and they were also standing guard in a watch tower. I don't understand why we had to be guarded so closely. After all we were in rags, without hair and there was an electric fence but most of all we were sick at heart with no will or way to escape. C lager became our future home. There were barracks on both sides. My barrack number was 15. The barracks had been built for horses during the World War I. There were no beds and we had to sit on the muddy dirt floor with our feet spread out so the person in front of us could sit by our lap. We sat like this five in every line. I do not remember clearly what happened in those first few days in the barrack and I can only thank G-d and my sister Klari that I survived. According to my sister I did not respond to anything, even when they gave orders to stand in line or to do this or that. I did not care about anything. I almost lost my mind. I only remember that I was very cold

and I was asking for a blanket to keep warm, the kind we used to have in our home and when Klari said that we didn't have it anymore I was so confused that I asked her to give me my father's winter coat.

Every dawn we had to stay in line, five in every row and it was the same every evening. From then on we were always in rows of five. It was the same when we were given something to eat. I don't know what they gave us to eat, but it wasn't like any food I had ever had before. I can't even try to explain how horrible it tasted. The first person in the front of the line was given the bowl first and then passed it back to the next person behind her until it reached the end of the line and if there was something left then it went again from mouth to mouth. This was how we ate our food with strangers. We didn't even have a spoon, but we were all in the same boat and nobody really cared.

Meanwhile the Germans were continuing with the selections to send people to the gas chamber without any warning or reason. From the barrack we had to go through a door in single line and either they didn't like the way you looked or for no reason at all they just grabbed the person and sent them to the other side which meant certain death. Those people selected were never

seen again. I can't begin to explain the feelings I had when I saw those unfortunate sisters crying who had been separated from each other leaving the one who had not been selected alone by herself.

One day Klari came to me with great happiness to tell she had met our cousin Anna from Vasarosnameny. We were both so naïve because this made us hopeful that maybe our mothers who were sisters were alive and together. Anna was there with her 3 sisters. Anna was the oldest and she wanted us to be together with them. Their barracks had wooden bunk beds and they had grey blankets which had been used for the horses, but for us it was a luxury compared to our sitting position on the dirt floor in our barrack. At that time I developed a problem with eating. I could not even swallow the small portion of food that we were given. I could only eat the small portion of bread, which I don't think was really bread, and some margarine. Later I was very ashamed when I found out that Anna had given me her portion of bread just to keep me alive, G-d bless her memory. When she could no longer tolerate that I wasn't eating she slapped me on my face. I remember I was crying, but not because I was mad at her but because I was grateful. I knew that she wanted to keep me alive and she only did it for my own good.

Still, the Germans kept counting us every morning and night even though they knew that no one could escape. Each day the number of prisoners grew smaller and smaller and more and more bodies were delivered to the entrance of the lager in a grey horse blanket. We were not put to work and we lived in constant fear. As the selections continued we wondered how long we would stay together. Finally, one day we all had to stay in the middle of the lager. There were thirty-two barracks in the lager with about a thousand people in each barrack and within a few moments there were thousands and thousands of naked skeletons standing in line. We all had to undress and stand naked and we were so emaciated that we looked like skeletons. Yet again we had to face Mengele. The selection took place near the kitchen which was near the entrance of the lager. Again we saw our friends crying, sisters who were already marked for death standing in a special circle. Then it was Klari's and my turn. We had to stand with our left arm held up high in the air. I don't know why we were told to raise our left arm. We were told to turn around and then Mengele sent us to separate sides. In my panic I don't remember which one of us was supposed to go to the left which we knew meant that we had only a few more hours of suffering left. Suddenly a miracle happened. Klari called out in Hungarian "Testverem" and I said in German, "my sister". There was a Hungarian doctor standing

next to him and she told us that he is not supposed to know that you are sisters. Mengele then told us both to turn around again and he sent Klari and me to the right. This was the second time that by a miracle I survived. Right in front of him Klari and I started kissing each other which was a big mistake because their goal was to make us unhappy and suffer. I am not a strong believer in miracles, especially after what happened to our people but there it was, a miracle. I felt that my dear mother was watching over us. I don't believe it happened to anybody else. After the selection, Anna and her sisters were sent to another lager and I was sad to see them go but at least they were together.

Later we found out that Anna and her sisters had been sent to the neighbouring B lager which I heard was a work lager. There was only the electric wire fence between us. You would die if you went near it or touched it but sometimes from the distance we were able to see each other through the fence. After that selection we went back to our barrack. It was almost empty and everyone was crying for their loved ones who were no longer here. You could see the smoke coming from the chimney and smell the terrible odour. By this time we had heard that they were burning the bodies of their victims. The chimneys were working day and night and there

were more and more selections almost daily. Sadly we had to say goodbye to our friends from home. Again I would have to say it was a miracle that Klari and I were still together. Somebody was watching over us.

One day after another selection we were taken from C lager to B lager which was the same one where our cousins Anna, Bozsi, Klari and Iren were. It was a very strict lager and so it was impossible to be together with them in the same barrack but at least we had a chance to see each other from time to time. Back in June before we were moved to B lager, when we first arrived in C lager we could see through the fence to B lager. There we saw families together, children and the elderly. We heard they were from Czechoslovakia. One morning we woke up and it was very quiet. Not a sound was heard from the other side and we saw that the lager was empty. We suspected that they had been sent to their death making room for us. When we came to B lager we were very upset to find their personal belongings and family pictures they had left behind and we had the sad job of burning these. I especially remember a picture of a young boy and girl, their pictures tied together with a pink ribbon. With a broken heart I wondered what had happened to those two young people. Where were they now? I never knew them but I was crying for them. I imagined their young faces disappearing in the flames,

and the little children's shoes. Who wore them? I am tortured by these memories that are still with me, yet I don't want to forget. I feel it is my duty to remember them and to write about them. Having survived I owe this to them and to bring more Jewish children into the world to keep their heritage alive.

Life in B lager was the same. There was roll call early every morning and another at night, always five in every line. Under the SS men and women, the Blockelderste were in charge of us. The blockelderste or kapos were one of the prisoners who had been assigned as a block leader in the concentration camp. I am ashamed to admit that these Jewish girls were not much better to us than the Germans. When I first arrived in Auschwitz one of them welcomed us with the greeting "You came through the door and you will leave through the chimney." At the time I didn't have the slightest idea what she was talking about. I think that the Germans put something in our food because I do not think that I was rational. I also believe that is why I and many other women didn't get their period anymore. It was in this lager where we lost our identity completely. We were given tattoo numbers on our arm. I was no longer Fischer Zsuzanna but was now A 12396. I still do not understand why I was so afraid of having the number. I cannot describe what

it was like to become a nameless slave. I had completely lost my identity. I was no longer a human being, only a number. I look at my number today and I realize that this number is the shame of the Germans and not my shame.

B lager was a work lager but we didn't do any work here. This was the lager from which they sent labourers all over Germany to replace those who had died or were unable to work anymore and had been killed or sent back to the crematorium. In one of the next selections Klari and I were chosen to be sent out for work. We were happy to leave Auschwitz, the smell and the smoke. By then we knew what was happening. When we were examined again before leaving they found red spots on my stomach. Thinking it was an infection I was kept back but luckily Klari was kept back with me. I don't think the red spots were anything, probably a result of the diet we had. For the entire summer we were never given a piece of fruit or a vegetable. Later I found out that the transport I missed was sent to a lager that was next to the one where my dear father and brother were. However, the important thing was that Klari and I were still together because I am sure that without each other neither one of us would have survived.

It was fall and I do not know how we knew the date but we celebrated Yom Kippur shivering in the same rags that we had been given in the summer. We were taken to a city Birkenau where we were sprayed with some chemical to disinfect us because there wasn't anything to wash with. I am really surprised that we did not get some illness. This was the first time we had left the lager since June and naturally we were accompanied by the SS men with their German shepherd dogs on both sides. At first I was anxious to leave the lager but I was very disappointed when I did. While we were in the lager I wasn't really thinking about life outside the fence but then I saw that outside of the camps life was going on as if everything was normal. It made me sick to see the German mothers with their children, the flowers in the garden, so I didn't mind when we had to go back to the lager to be surrounded by the wire fences because I didn't want to see how life was for everyone else on the outside and mostly I didn't want to think that it was October 10, 1944.

Finally we left Auschwitz. Klari and I were sad to say goodbye to our cousins but we took comfort in the fact that they were still together and that Klari and I were together. As I mentioned one of our cousin's was also named Klari. We did not know then that we would never see her again because she had died on her way home from hell when she was 18 years old.

After we left the lager we were standing in line for hours waiting for our orders without having the slightest idea where we were going to be sent to. Would we be sent to work or to die? We hoped it would be far away from the crematorium as it was still running day and night.

After walking for miles we came to a building which reminded us of the one we had first arrived to in Auschwitz. This building was also divided into separate places and again we did not know what was happening to those who were ahead of us in line. Some of us made it and some of us didn't. We were walking in single lines now in a very dark narrow hall. We didn't know it but the SS were standing behind hidden doors. We only saw them when we were right there. We had to walk by them and they were playing their favorite game which was to take out certain girls from the line and of course these girls were never seen to be seen again. Klari and I made it through and finally we were standing outside on the other side thankful that we were still alive after standing in line for hours in the dark evening. Then we got into a cattle train. We must have still been valuable to the Germans because in every wagon two SS men were guarding us even though I am sure it would have been impossible to escape.

Shortly after the train left it had to stop because there was a terrible air raid. We were at the train station which made the situation more serious. It seemed as if there were bombs for everywhere except for Auschwitz. I believe and know that with two or three bombs the allies could have saved millions and millions of lives because the Germans would not have been able to rebuild it to continue with their mass murders. This will forever remain a shame for the entire world because after the war it was discovered that the allies knew about the trains and the gas chambers but I believe they closed their eyes because it was happening to the Jews.

After a few days of travelling the train arrived to a small town called Markkleeberg, which was part of Leipzig, Germany. Compared to Auschwitz, it was like a nice resort town. The biggest difference was that there was no chimney, no smoke and no terrible smell from burning our dear Jewish martyrs. This was a small lager with a few barracks. In comparison to Auschwitz the barracks were luxurious as each one had a washroom. In Auschwitz the bathroom was a large room the size of a barrack which could hold about 1000 people. The toilets were just holes cut out of large boards that we sat on. It was so humiliating. While we were sitting and relieving ourselves male Jewish prisoners came to clear out our feces from underneath

us. Of course there was only cold water but while we were in Auschwitz we did not shower for almost five months. We were even given a bar of soap to wash with but I wish I hadn't used it. A little later I heard the unbelievable truth that the soap had been made from human flesh, and naturally after hearing that I never used the soap again. When the war was over and we returned to Kisvarda the soap remnants were buried in a common grave in the Jewish cemetery.

In the barrack there was a single bed for every person with a blanket. There was no heating and when it became very cold Klari and I were sleeping together so that this way we had double blankets to keep us warm. In every other way this lager was a miniature Auschwitz with SS men and women, the deadly wire fence, the dogs and every morning and evening we had to stay in line to be counted twice a day. The Sunday after we arrived here was the very first time we were given some meat and potatoes to eat, which we hadn't had in the past five months. More and more transports arrived to the lager and with the growing number of people the food situation became worse and worse. In the first few days of our arrival we had to do very difficult work carrying stones. I don't remember where we carried them and why but they were very heavy.

I had been there about two weeks when we all received grey uniforms and from then on we were working for our German enemies in an airplane factory. Our work helped their war effort but what could we do, we had no choice as it would be certain death to refuse. This factory belonged to a company called Junkers, in Markkleeberg. We worked 12 hours during the day one week and the following week we worked 12 hours during the night. If we did a good job we were given some coupons with which we could buy something at a little store there. I remember that I bought myself a present of a pair of wooden shoes. There wasn't very much food but it was enough to keep us alive. I still do not understand how we were able to work 12 hours a day under those conditions. Then again, I can't understand a lot of other things that happened as well.

When we were not working our roommates favorite topic was to exchange recipes. It made me sick just to listen to it but maybe they thought that speaking of food would help them to forget how hungry they were. Every evening we got our daily bread and margarine portion. I don't remember what we had to eat during the day. The bread we got in the evening was also for the next day. Some girls ate their whole bread right away and said that at

least they could feel they had had something in their stomachs, but Klari and I did not eat it all at once. Klari had a special talent for slicing the bread with a wooden knife in order to save half of it. She was able to cut the thinnest slice of bread and thanks to her Klari and I always had a whole bread saved for the next day. This meager portion of bread was priceless. We were always hungry and every morning before we left for the factory we hid it under our uniform to prevent anyone from stealing it from us. We had to be very careful to keep it hidden because if the guards would see the bread they would have taken it away.

One evening I turned against Klari. I knew she was only saving the other half of the bread for our own good but I told her that I was going to go along with the rest of the girls and eat my entire portion of bread. One never knew what would happen tomorrow. She argued with me but gave me my share, however, I changed my mind and decided to save some for the next day.

When it was breakfast time I looked through the machines to see if she was eating her bread and I ate my bread at the same time as her. So, my independence lasted for less than a day and that evening we were crying together saying to each other “what would our dear mother say if she would

know we had an argument over a piece of bread?” You cannot imagine what hunger can drive a person to do.

The rest of the weeks and months went by without any special changes. I worked on a very special machine. There were only two in the whole factory. We called the foreman Haman and one day my machine didn't work. He tried to fix it without success. I was standing there next to him, shaking because everybody was afraid of him. After awhile, still not able to fix the machine he asked me “do you know what this is? It's sabotage.” Then he started singing and spoke to me again “do you know what the penalty for sabotage is? Death”. I cannot describe my feelings and how terrified I was. One day there was a big air raid and somebody said that Haman had been killed, but to our big disappointment he was back a short time later.

There were more and more air raids and somehow we knew that the Americans couldn't be very far away. Unfortunately this worked against us. When we were working at night, instead of being able to sleep during the day we had to go to a bomb shelter, which wouldn't have saved us anyways. How many times we wished that the guards would just let us sleep instead of

having to be in the shelter. In the beginning of April we noticed that the Germans were acting strangely. Later on we found out that even in those last days the Germans were planning to hide the machines from the Americans but they ran out of time.

It was Friday April 13, 1945. We didn't have to go to work that day. We could hear the noise from the battle ground and we just knew that the war couldn't last much longer. Then the Germans ordered us to leave the lager immediately. We didn't know what to do. Some of us were thinking about hiding in the lager believing the American army would be arriving shortly, but if the Germans were to find us they would kill us immediately. Some of the women did hide but having lived through almost a year of suffering Klari and I decided not to hide and to go with the transport because we didn't want to die in the last days of the war. Klari and I took our valuable piece of bread we had saved and left the lager at the night with the other prisoners to the uncertain future. The Germans knew they had lost the war and didn't have too much time left and still they would not leave us in the lager to await the Americans. We Hungarian Jews were their last victims.

Later, we heard that we would be liberated the next day which would be wonderful because a few hundred lives would be saved and that our suffering would soon end. As we were walking we were guarded by the Germans who promised that we were going to a different lager. I know it sounds strange but even after all these years I remember clearly how much I wished to be in a lager and not outside walking. At least the lager would have protected us from the cold wind and rain and we would have had a roof over our heads. The Germans didn't say anything except "Schnell" which meant faster and faster. I am sure that they didn't have any idea where they were taking us and were just exerting their power over us until the last minute.

We were near a small forest when suddenly in the sky we saw planes flying above. They flew very low and I am sure that they saw that we were not soldiers because they didn't shoot at us. This was very frightening. We did not sleep through the night and the next day which was Saturday night the soldiers let us lie down in an open yard but it was impossible to sleep. The only clothing we wore was the uniform from the factory and I couldn't even close my eyes for a moment because I was so cold and hungry, but mostly because there was a bright light shining down on us from the sky. I don't

know what it was but the Russians were using it. At this point we were closer to the Russians than the Americans. Sometimes I still have nightmares about this bright light. I know it is hard to believe but we kept on like this for over a week without any food or shoes. From all the walking we did our shoes fell apart so we threw them away, and still we were able to go on, but not everybody did. Our numbers became less and less. The Germans didn't bother to count us anymore. When we saw the bodies lying on the road what else could we do but look at them and walk by. Whoever was able to, still had to walk "schnell." Even after all these years I wonder how I ever survived.

With broken hearts we walked through cities between the houses usually in the dark. I looked at the windows where people were sleeping, families peacefully together and we were like criminals in the dark. Schnell!" There was no place to stop to rest our tired bodies. Besides, it was better in the forest or anywhere, just not amongst people reminding us that once upon a time we had our families and a home also. It was especially difficult to be amongst the German civilians. We didn't look like human beings anymore.

About three or four days later when we were resting for a few hours in a forest we began to think how long can we go on like this or should we try to escape? It couldn't last much longer. Was it worth taking a risk? But when it was time to leave we left the forest and joined the transport. Shortly after we heard shots and realized that some unfortunate girls who had decided to stay, would now stay there forever.

After about a week of more walking it seemed to us as if we had been walking in circles. On one side there were the Russians and on the other side there was the U.S. army, and still the soldiers didn't let us go. However, we noticed some changes in their behaviour. The SS guards were not watching us as strictly as before. Maybe they finally realized that their days were over. One Saturday night Klari and I decided that it was enough and we hid in a small building in a lumber yard with two other girls who were also sisters. Suddenly I felt like a bird who had escaped from a cage. Having been a slave for so long we didn't know what to do with our sudden freedom. The only thing we did know was that we couldn't stay there.

We were constantly hungry but sometimes we found some raw potatoes a farmer had forgotten in the ground. Our only concern was to survive. How

could we avoid our enemies in a strange land? We were still wearing our rags and looked like skeletons. The Germans could tell just by looking at us who we were and where we had come from. Our plan was to go in the opposite direction just like the Germans were doing. They were escaping from their homes and from their enemies.

We realized that if we wanted to survive we would have to do something to help ourselves. We started begging, but most of the time we were stealing because we needed food and clothing. I am not ashamed to admit that I had become an expert in stealing as this was the way to survive. We couldn't depend on anyone for help. Besides the Germans had stolen everything from us, especially our loved ones, and this could never be repaid.

We never stayed longer than one day in the same village because we were afraid of being captured. It was still Germany, still enemy territory. Then one day our freedom came to a sad end. Klari and one of the sisters were waiting for me and the other sister at a meeting place we had decided on earlier. After the other sister and I had finished our usual begging or stealing trip, we didn't find them at the meeting place. We didn't know what to do or where to go except to cry. We still knew how to cry. We were still human

beings even if we didn't look it. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity we saw some people walking towards us and when they got closer, to my indescribable happiness I recognized Klari and the other sister. Klari told me later how they had begged the SS to let them look for us. This was another miracle.

Our short freedom was ended and once again we were slaves, just a few days before the war ended. I don't know if it was pure luck or the soldiers realized that they had killed enough of us already because instead of shooting us, the SS walked with us to the next village to meet up with another transport. The prisoners in this transport had been captured from different places and were a mixture of different nationalities, mostly Polish women, not all of whom were Jewish. They were not very friendly but perhaps they had suffered even more than us if that were even possible. When we first joined the transport there were mostly old men guarding us, most likely because they were too old for regular service, but about two days later the famous Gestapo took over guarding us. They were worse than anything we had encountered up to now, much worse than the SS, if that was even possible. This was the first time I had ever seen them. I will not go into any more details because the plain facts speak for themselves. I survived

with my sister Klari and am alive to write about it. Even I do not comprehend how I survived the unbelievable suffering we had to endure.

We were liberated by the Russians on Tuesday May 8, 1945, the day the war ended. I saw German officers on the street stripping their ranks from their uniforms in the hope that they would look like plain soldiers, and not SS making it easier to escape from their well deserved punishment. I hope they didn't make it. I never hated anybody in my life before but the Nazis taught me to hate and even now after so many years I still feel the same way about them. Unfortunately, as long as I live I will not be able to escape from my nightmares and my memories which are so painful even to this day.

We were in the forest under the Gestapo's watchful eyes when somebody came with wonderful news that the soldiers were changing from their uniforms into civilian clothes and were leaving. I was so weak I couldn't stand up and I will never forgive myself for not having crawled on my knees to see the big cowards escape. Without their guns and whips in their hands they were nobodies trying to save their worthless lives.

I don't remember how but after a short rest we left the forest not having any idea where to go in this strange country that we had every reason to hate. I keep wondering how we were able to survive. There we were in a strange country, barefoot, with short hair and everywhere we went people knew who we were by the way we looked. Nobody cared about us. It was as if we were still slaves. We were hungry and I couldn't remember when the last time was that we had eaten something so we went knocking on doors begging for some food. We found an old woman who was feeding her cat and she divided the food between her cat and us. How I hated that cat. I was angry at the poor cat because I was sure that she had had breakfast that day while we did not.

It is difficult to remember all the details after so many years but I remember that we never knew where we would be sleeping the next night or what we would have to eat. Naturally Klari and I wanted to go home because we were still hoping that we would find some of our family waiting for us there. We were not far from Czechoslovakia but there wasn't any means of transportation. Sometimes we were able to get a short ride on a truck but mostly we were walking to get home as if we hadn't walked enough from

April 13 to May 8 under the Germans. Even now I wonder how we did it. Sometimes we were standing for hours at a train station hoping to get on a train which would take us closer to home, a home which at the time we didn't realize no longer existed.

Finally, we arrived in Pozsony Bratislava which is a very nice city and for the most part we found the people there friendly, which was very different from our previous experience. The JOINT, an organization supported by the Jews from the USA had been established there and found us a place to stay with a Christian woman who said that her husband was Jewish but that he hadn't survived. She was very nice to us and gave us a bed to sleep in. We even went to a restaurant to eat. Even though our situation had improved Klari and I were restless to go home to find out if any of our loved ones had survived and might be waiting for us there. When we were walking by the shore of the Danube River I knew Hungary was on the other side and standing there by the shore I am ashamed to admit that I was homesick for the country which had treated me so badly.

I had my first feeling of happiness in Pozsony, Hungary, which is in present-day western Slovakia. Klari and I accidentally met a man on the street who

was from Kisvarda. We recognized each other and he told us that he had seen our dear father about two weeks earlier. This was the first news we had heard about our family for almost a year. It is impossible to find the words to express our feelings of happiness at hearing this news. After this Klari and I began to hope again and tried even harder to find some kind of transportation to get home. We arrived in Budapest on June 10, 1945.

Remembering our Auntie Margit's address in Budapest, we were able to find her. To our great joy our dear Grandmother was also there. She could not believe her eyes when she saw us and she was crying and crying for so long that I thought she was never going to stop. We were the first ones who had returned from the whole family and after the news about the treatment of the Jews had reached Budapest she and my auntie were afraid that nobody from the family had survived.

My grandmother and aunt had spent some terrible months in the ghetto in Budapest but thankfully they had survived. Fortunately, there hadn't been enough time for the Germans to liquidate the ghetto. I was told that the young people from Budapest had been sent to work in Germany. Most of them never survived, as they had to walk in the middle of the winter. My husband's two sisters Margit and Regina were in Budapest and were

unfortunately amongst the many that never came back. I was told that the NYILAS favorite game was to cut a hole in the frozen Danube River and shoot thousands of people into the river. These murderers, the NYILAS, were the Hungarian Arrow Cross, a fascist anti-semitic party which assumed power in Hungary in 1944 and assisted the SS in the deportation and killing of the Jews.

A few days after we found our grandmother and aunt, our uncle Miklos Bacsı returned. He was Margit Neni's husband and my father's younger brother. Unfortunately their two wonderful sons Pista and Feri, our first cousins, never came back. They had been in their early twenties, may their poor souls rest in peace. Just as in Pozsony, there was a JOINT organization in Bethlen Ter(Square) in Budapest to help those who had returned from the war. Klari and I had registered our names as did the other survivors and we went there everyday to check the list of names of those who had survived the camps. One day to our great joy we found our dear father's name on the list. Klari and I ran back to tell our grandmother the good news. The following day was the Sabbath and although she was in her late seventies she walked all the way there, not because she didn't believe us but because she wanted to see with her own eyes the name of her dear son on the list of survivors.

About a week later I was sitting in the back of the apartment when I heard her screaming from the kitchen. Fearing something had happened to her I ran to go to her when suddenly I saw my dear father coming up the stairs. Once again I cannot describe my feelings, especially when he told us that our dear brother Tibor had survived with him. Up until that moment I had no knowledge of Tibor as his name had not been on the list of survivor names. Klari and I ran to Bethlen Square to find him. He also had not heard any news about us and when we saw each other there the three of us were kissing and hugging endlessly.

At least now the four of us were together, Klari, Tibor, my father and me. I thought I was dreaming. Unfortunately my dear mother and my dear brother Endre (Bandi) never came back. After a few days of rest we knew we had to start our new life without them. Klari and I had already visited Kisvarda and Vasarosnameny for a few days before our father and Tibi had come back because we had cousins there. We had travelled there on the top of the railway cars. When we had been in Kisvarda we were unable to find a piece of furniture or anything from our home before the war so we knew we had to start all over again, except we didn't have any idea how. Eventually my

father decided that he would go back with Tibi to Kisvarda to look around and Klari and I would stay in Budapest until they could make some living arrangements for all of us. At the time finding transportation was still difficult. Somehow my father found a truck and a driver who was willing to take him and my brother to Kisvarda. As soon as they left to go to the truck Klari and I decided to run after them to find them and go with them before the truck left. We felt that we had been separated long enough and now that we had found each other we wanted to stay together from now on.

I do not know how long it took until I realized that we had to start our new life again if we wanted to survive. I have a good memory but somehow those first few days and weeks are not clear. It took some time until I understood that I had my freedom back and I didn't know how to use it, what to do or how to start living again. I could wake up when I felt like it and eat when I was hungry if we had food. This is how we started our sad life together, instead of six it was just the four of us and it was never the same as before the war without my mother and eldest brother. My family and I moved back into our old home from before the war as it was completely empty. Some of our non Jewish neighbours said that more Jews came back than had left and they were absolutely not delighted to see us. I had a bad feeling about them

even though some of them were nice to us. I just couldn't forgive them for what had happened to us.

My father was 55 years old when the war ended. Of the entire Jewish population of Kisvarda only three men who were older than 50 had come back and not a single woman over 40 came back. All of us in the family were broken both in spirit and physically. But somehow we managed to start to lead a fairly normal life. Life went on. Soon we heard that some people were marrying and a new generation of Jewish children was being born. My father got a job as a manager of an alcohol factory and eventually I was able to get a job, sewing for a Jewish friend of mine. Sadly, my dear mother wasn't there to tell me that I was just 20 years old and could go back to school to follow the dream I had before the war. Most of the Jewish people who had survived realized there was no future in Hungary for the Jews and moved away from our city to Israel, to the United States and to Canada. Most of the ones who moved away were single but we were a family together and decided to stay in Kisvarda.

When I met my husband Joseph Spiro, another Hungarian holocaust survivor by accident, I wasn't thinking about marriage at the time. In June 1949 I

went to visit my aunt in Budapest and we met each other again. We started to go out and became engaged at the end of July. I stayed with my Aunt Margit until our wedding which was on September 11, 1949 in Budapest in the Dohany Synagogue. Joseph had his own apartment, and so I had a home again where I belonged and a good husband. Who could ask for anything more? I was pregnant and we were happy to start our family but it was as if we hadn't suffered enough. Our son George (Gyurikank) who was named after my husband's late father was born on June 11, 1950. We were so delighted when he was born but the doctor gave us the bad news that he was sick. Sadly we lost him when he was 11 months old. Since he had been sick from birth he never had a bris and we buried him in Budapest. My sister, my five cousins and a few other women all had first born babies who had died as well. I believe that there was something put in our food during the war that caused this to happen. As I met and married my husband after the war, I never had a chance to meet his family. His mother Pepi Klein Spiro, his brothers Bela, and Dezso, his sisters Margit, Hermina and Regina all perished during the war. Only his sister Ilona who had been in Budapest survived.

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In memory of my dear mother, Gizella Funk Fischer

A few years after liberation, realizing I will never be together with my mother again I suddenly had an urge to visit her grave even though I knew that she did not have one. Her ashes had been scattered over Poland or wherever the wind was blowing that day on June 3, 1944. My dear beautiful mother, you never had a funeral, or a gravestone and nobody said kaddish for you. I loved you and will love you forever.



Fischer family in Kisvarda in 1942: Klara, Endre, Tibor, and Susan (L to R) with their parents.



Susan in 1949



Wedding of Susan to Joseph Spiro, Budapest, 1949



The Auschwitz tattoo (her sister Klara has the consecutive number, A12397)

