

Holocaust Survivor Testimony of Veronica/Vera (née SOLOMON) HECHT, USA

As a survivor, I will try to tell my story and experience of the holocaust, from the day we were deported to the ghetto until liberation.

I was born June 2, 1930 in Valea Lui Mihai, Romania. I lived there with my parents and nine years old brother, until April 1944. That is when our "normal" life ended, and we were taken to the Nagyvaradi ghetto.

The living conditions in the ghetto were inhumane. It was a lumberyard-one large open area with no walls and no doors. We used the linen that we brought with us to set up some privacy. We made walls from the sheets and we made beds from the pillows and blankets.

At the end of April the entire ghetto was transported to an unknown destination. Our journey started in cattle wagons. There were so many people with small children that sitting was impossible. After they locked the doors, everyone started to pray. When we arrived to the Hungarian-German border to a city called Kassa the wagons were opened. The Germans made an announcement that all jewelry, valuables & money should be passed up. They assured us that if we don't give it up it will be taken from us anyway. Some of us got very emotional. I remember how I was crying when my mother took out my earrings and removed my chain. She said to me with tears in her eyes "don't worry my dear, when we'll be home again, I'll buy you other ones". After all was collected our journey continued. After a long ride we arrived to Auschwitz. The wagons were opened. Polish prisoners and German soldiers were yelling at us Snell, Snell!!!!

Then we were all lined up and the "selection" started. I was very lucky that I was kept together with my mother and directed to the right. My brother, who was only 9 years old, was directed to the left with my aunt and her ten-year-old son.

At that point we did not realize what the "separation" really was. Then we were taken to a washroom. An announcement was made for us not to worry. We would soon be reunited with our family. They told us to take off our clothes and shoes, and like robots we all did as they told us.

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I cannot find the words to describe the humiliation and the shame I felt when I stood in front of the German soldiers stark naked, as he cut off my beautiful hair. After that, we went through a disinfecting procedure. When we came out to another room, I was crying for my mother calling her name. She was right next to me but I could not recognize her.

We never got back our clothes from the big pile. They gave one dress to each person. I got a pair of Holland wooden shoes. My mother got a mismatched pair, one high heel shoe and one with low heels.

When we arrived to our block #18, the block Elteste (commander) gave us a speech. When we heard it we thought she was crazy. She said pointing to the crematorium, "You stupid Hungarian Jews deserve to be here. See that, your loved ones went in by the door and came out by the chimney." Even then we did not believe what she told us.

Every morning at 5:00AM we had to line up for counting. I still feel the hard pinches in my cheek that my mother gave me. She made sure I didn't look pale. She always said, "Stand straight and smile".

I feel very lucky to have survived together with my mother. Not too many people from my generation can say that.

My mother was a very intelligent and brave woman. She never lost her will to live. She always said "you will see, we are going to survive. Be strong! Be a fighter! G-D is with us".

I am sure that a lot of you are holocaust survivors. Every person who lived through the concentration camps can write books about it.

Let me tell you one of my most unforgettable experiences in Auschwitz. At one of the selections I was separated from my mother. She was taken to another Block. Whenever there was a separation the destination was always to the crematorium. I cried day and night. Then suddenly I heard my mother calling me by my name. It was night time.

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By some miracle she managed to hide under a wooden bed until dark. Then she snuck out from the barrack and returned to our block. After that we were even closer to each other.

Finally at the end of October after a large "Selection", we were chosen to go to a working camp called TEPLIC SCHONAU. There we worked in a bomb factory. The conditions there were better than in Auschwitz. We got food three times a day and we had our own bed.

After four months my mother and I were taken to another working camp called OEDERAN [a sub-camp of FLOSSENBURG.] This one was a bullet factory.

When the Americans were close to liberating the camp, they quickly took us to THERESIENSTADT. We were liberated by the Russian on April 9th, 1945. In the middle of June, the Romanian government sent cattle wagons to bring us back.

When we finally arrived in Valea Lui Mihai, to our home town we started looking for my father. We found out that he died in one of the Concentration camps. With my mother, we started a new life.

In 1950 my mother remarried a wonderful man from Oradea Nagyvarad. He was like a real father to me. In 1959 I got married to Pinchas Hecht who is also a survivor and in 1961, I gave birth to a girl, Erika.

In 1964 I got my visa from the Romanian government. This meant that I was finally free to go. It was very painful saying good by to my parents. I was not sure that I would see them again.

My journey to freedom took several stops. From Romania I arrived in Rome, Italy. From there we continued to the United States; a country where I was to start a new life as a free person.

My parents arrived in the United States in 1966, just one week before my son was born; my daughter was five years old.

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My mother passed on in 1972 and my stepfather passed on in 1979. I have six beautiful grandchildren. I always talk to my children about my experience from the Holocaust. We survivors can not be silent. We must tell our story to our Children and Grandchildren....Never Again!!!"