

Tibor Gohman With Miklos Gohman



This is me, Tibor Gohman (on the right) with my older brother Miklos. We were close friends and when Miklos received his first salary, he invited me to a photo shop to be photographed for the memory. This photo was taken in Munkacs in 1943.

In 1938 Subcarpathia fell under the Hungarian rule. My brother Miklos couldn't afford to continue his studies after finishing school. The family of five of us could hardly manage on my father's salary. In 1941 Hungarians introduced food cards. Jews received rationed food by these cards. Food was very expensive at markets. Miklos became an apprentice with a tailor. I finished school in 1942 and had to go to work. I became an apprentice of a joiner. I had a one-year training and in 1943 I began to work as a joiner in a shop. In 1943 Jews were ordered to have yellow stars on their clothes, on the chest and on the back. It was not allowed to be outside without stars. Any Hungarian soldier could kill a Jew even without taking them to the commandant's office.

In spring 1944 a ghetto was established in Mukachevo. Yevreyskatya and Danko Streets were fenced with barbed wire and they ordered Jews to move therein. It was allowed to take some food and few clothes for luggage. There were many people in the ghetto. We stayed in the ghetto few weeks. Then near the gate to the ghetto they placed an order for inmates of the ghetto to pack some food and clothes for moving to another place. We were taken to Ungvar [40 km from Mukachevo, 680 km from Kiev] to a brick factory. We stayed about 10 days in the ghetto in Ungvar. In April 1944 railcars for cattle transportation arrived at this spur. We were taken to these railcars. We were not given water or food. I don't remember how long the trip lasted, but it seemed eternity to me. We knew that we were taken to a concentration camp: there were rumors about concentration camps in Mukachevo, but nobody knew those were extermination camps. We were sure those were forced labor camps, something like work battalions.

We arrived at Auschwitz early in the morning. I was almost 16 and I was strong and big. They separated me and my brother Miklos from our parents. My parents and younger brother were taken to a group guarded by Germans with machine guns. We were in Auschwitz until night and then we were ordered to board a train and taken to Katovice, a work camp of Auschwitz. My brother was taken to another camp.

Every morning after breakfast we marched to work sites. Katovice like other Polish towns was ruined. Almost a whole town was in ruins. We were to remove this debris. So we were cleaning up the town, street after street. We were given spades, picks and crowbars in the camp. After work we carried our tools back to the camp. We worked without days off and didn't know the count of days or months.

In January 1945 Soviet and American troops began to advance. The front line was approaching Auschwitz. We were formed in columns and marched to Mauthausen under convoy having weapons. We were not given any food or water on the way. About 5 thousand people left Katovice, but less than a thousand reached Mauthausen. Many died of hunger. People happened to freeze to death at night. We didn't work in Mauthausen. We were lying on plank beds shivering from cold. We were weak and knew that death was unavoidable; one way or another we were going to die either from hunger or the guards would kill us. It lasted until 8 May 1945. On this day US troops entered the camp. This was our liberation day.

I was dreaming of coming home. I said that I wanted to go back to Subcarpathia. The officer told me that Subcarpathia did belong to Czechoslovakia any longer and that it was annexed to the USSR. I knew very little about the Soviet Union. Few other people wanted to go to Subcarpathia. They gave us tickets and some food to go. I decided to go to a public bathroom. Before going into the bathroom I left my clothes and underwear to the laundry. I washed myself and went to pick my clothing, but it wasn't ready yet. I was sitting there wrapped in my towel waiting for them to bring my clothes, when all of a sudden my older brother Miklos came in. Of course, he was thin and he changed, but I recognized him immediately. He recognized me, too. We started talking and were afraid to lose the sight of each other even for a minute. We went home together. We arrived at Mukachevo in July 1945.