



The Survivor Mitzvah Project

Holocaust Remembrance Day

*As we honor the dead,
let us remember
the living.*

It is said that a person never really dies as long as just one person remembers. This letter was sent to all of us from a survivor who will never forget.



**German machine gun bullets in
Belarus Forest**

Greetings dear Zane and my dear American friends,

You asked me to write about the war. Although it's hard to live through the hardship again, I will shake my brain and carry myself back to that faraway wartime childhood. War and children of war, dreadful words, but you cannot escape them.

To save us from the advancing Germans we are evacuated on a train, our "Escape to the East." The train whistle blows – and we are moving. How heavy, how anxious are our souls. None of the Jewish families had ever left their homeland. We leave elderly parents behind who would soon be burned alive. Everything we own, all that is dear to us is left

behind, including the sacred Jewish cemetery of our ancestors, surrounded by pine trees. We lock our hut. We take the keys. We are coming back soon. We wanted to think so.

Suddenly, we hear a roar of planes. Not ours, the enemy's. The roar becomes louder and louder and...oh, what horror! Bombs are pouring from the sky. We see shell holes from the explosions. The moans from people merged with the earth's moans. We have hardly left our own western borders and the Germans are already in our lands. And then, one of the bombs hits our train car. It explodes the rear of the car; we are in the front, which saves our lives. The train is on fire, noise, and pandemonium, the moaning of the wounded... Everyone grabs their children and jumps out. Everywhere people are thrashing around. The wounded people fall down, rise, and run stumbling on the dead ones. Blood... blood is everywhere.

No one cries from terror. We all freeze stiff and numb. Mothers cover their children's faces, some with the palm of the hand, others with the hem of the dress, or simply bury their child's face in their laps. Children shouldn't see blood or bodies torn to pieces.

And the bombs keep raining on the train, already almost totally destroyed. Everyone tries to hide behind any possible shelter. Someone shouts, "There is a forest there on the right! Grab the kids and run there!" We look back – a forest! We grew up surrounded by forests. We were not afraid of wild animals. We loved our wildlife. When picking berries in the woods, we were always careful not to take all the berries, but leave some in the forest clearing for the animals. The enemy that came to our land was more frightful than any wild beast. Our beasts never attacked man. We rush to them for rescue.

Some run, some crawl, those who can't are pulled by the others, kids are carried on their mothers' backs, the older ones run holding on to their mothers' skirts. Even the youngest understand: we have to run, fall down, but rise again. There in the woods, is life! Behind us - exploding bombs, fire, blood, moans of the dying. Monsters worse than animals were in these planes. It seemed there was nothing and nobody scarier on earth. The train was bombed on a tip from someone, the Germans knew that there were Jews aboard. And Jews must be annihilated, each and every one. Children, elderly, pregnant women... The world must belong only to them, Aryans.

The bombs continue to fall, whizzing, destroying everything and everyone. And we run, crawl, and finally get to the forest. Not all of us reach it, but our family did. We fall on the ground, literally trying to merge into it, to become unnoticed from the air. We hear a burst of machine-gun fire: German troops are combing the forest finishing off those who had run away. We lay in a ditch, afraid to breathe. Mothers close their infants' mouths so they could not start crying unexpectedly, and in this way sign a death sentence for everyone. The babies had no understanding how important it was to keep quiet. These infants, by coming into this world born of Jewish mothers had signed their own death sentence. The mothers try to do everything to save their children as only Yiddishe Mamas can. Yes, war is war – bombs, bullets, blood and ferocious anti-Semitic hatred.... Nazis had guns in their hands, bombs in their planes, death camps, and gas chambers.

There are two babies among us. They are ill, they want to cry loudly, violently. Mothers are horrified. They try to keep their infant's mouths closed with their hands, but can't manage much longer. There is a young man among us, covered in mud from head to toe, but very handsome. (Only later did we learn his first name was Chaimka). He knows that our only chance of being saved is without those infants. For us to live, their mouths would have to be closed for good. All the Yiddishe mamas look down at their babies in silence with horror in their eyes. All know well - we will all die together with the babies. Chaimka understands their horror; after all he had his own Yiddishe mama somewhere. He sighs, listens and then whispers, "Close their mouths for just a bit, later you will understand. Maybe I will be lucky." He is silent and looks around at all of us. That look pierces the hearts of all of us who lay merged with the earth.

He crawls away on his stomach towards the gunshots and German curses. Suddenly, we hear the overly loud voice of our Chaimka. Raising our heads, we see the SS soldiers with Chaimka pointing to the direction opposite from us, repeating only one word, "Yuden". The Germans follow him away from us. Then a burst of gunfire - and then all is quiet. Chaimka paid for his bravery with his life. Having killed enough Jews for one day, the Germans considered the operation finished. They had done their jobs well and it was time for them to eat, to stuff their faces with food.

We crawl to our fallen hero and lay beside him for a long time, not moving. Only the earth moans, our group of people keep silent. The babies are silent. To our surprise they have fallen asleep in this silence. The babies that saved us with their calmness sleep quietly while all around the earth moans from explosions. But this isn't a silence of Peace. This troublesome road eastwards from the occupied West was only the beginning for us. How many similar trials awaited us on that road to life! This is not the way children should sleep. Infants need to hear the peaceful silence of the Earth. Hush - a human child is sleeping. This is the true Hymn of the Earth! How many infants were among the 6 million Jewish lives! Their everlasting sleep did not bring peace to this Earth.

Our savior didn't even leave us his last name. Our Chaimka. Young, muddy, covered by bloody dirt from head to toe, so handsome, so bold, so dear - our Chaimka. He wanted to live as much as we did. Life is wonderful, but only when there is no war, no mothers' palms covering their infants' mouths, no horror in children's eyes. I remember him looking at us as he said good-bye to his mother in his soul, and crawled on the muddy ground on which he was supposed to walk with his firm man's steps. All of us who watched him crawling were able to walk the earth later.

We will remember our Chaimka until our last breath. There is no last name, but there is memory.

Till the last breath.

Kisses, Mariya K. - BELARUS

Remember his name - Remember Chaimka

*On Holocaust Remembrance Day
we remember those who perished.
But what about their family members
who by some miracle survived?*

Elderly and alone, ill, destitute, and forgotten, they need us now more than ever.

Please make a special donation to help Holocaust survivors on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

As we honor the dead, let us remember the living.

Thank you for your kindness and generosity.

- Zane Buzby

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