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Susan grew up in Hungary, and experienced antisemitism from a young age. In 1944 Susan was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was separated from her family. After the war, she found out that more than 50 of her relatives had been killed and that only her brother had survived.



'How do you get over such an experience? Is it possible to walk away and learn to live with all of this? How do you find the strength? Life is precious - you can go in one of two ways - up or down. I chose to walk away and rebuild my life. There was no revenge, and no justice.'

I was born in 1930 in Felsögöd, Hungary. My name was Zsuzsanna Blau. I lived with my mother and father and my brother, Laci. At home I enjoyed a very sheltered life, secure with my family. My father was my role model: a strong personality who was protective, reliable and caring. I became aware of antisemitism in my hometown from a young age. In 1938, my uncle was murdered by Fascists. His attacker was sentenced to just two years in prison, and served much less time than that. The attacker then returned to live opposite my widowed aunt. From 1938, my brother Laci was also affected by antisemitic laws. He had hoped to go to university, but a law restricted the number of Jewish students who could enter higher education, preventing him from attending.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, antisemitism in my town became more visible, with anti-Jewish graffiti appearing on the streets and antisemitic propaganda being broadcast on the radio. Physical attacks on Jews also became more common, and Laci was badly beaten at a Boy Scout meeting. The situation got worse following the German invasion of Hungary in March 1944. We had to wear a yellow Star of David to identify ourselves as Jews. I think about how my father would have managed as he realised he was not able to protect us from the looming threat. This impossible, painful situation would have created a huge void in his purpose.

Eventually a letter was issued by the council for all Jewish fathers to attend a meeting to discuss the welfare of their families. My father was among those men who went to the meeting, but when they arrived they were herded into waiting lorries and taken to a concentration camp. I never saw my father again and I am still not sure whether he died in the camp or was deported elsewhere. In 1944 the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators organised the deportation of Hungarian Jews: in less than two months from mid-May 1944, almost all Jews were deported, mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. When my family were ordered to leave our home, we still hoped that we would be allowed to resettle elsewhere. I took a portable sewing machine with me. Along with Laci and our mother, we were all sent to a ghetto in Vác and from there to a prison camp. In late May 1944, we were sent by cattle truck to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In the waggons the sounds were crying, praying, and pleading to God. My mother and I did not speak - we had nothing to say. I clung to her and wanted to lose myself in her embrace.

On arrival we scrambled out of the trucks, and men and women were separated immediately. I was also then separated from my mother who was sent to join a group of elderly prisoners. I was left on my own, surrounded by shouting, not comprehending anything. I felt pure terror and devastation. I soon learned that my mother had been sent directly to the gas chambers. I was selected to work, and remained in the camp for around 10 weeks. Once I entered the camp all of my faculties, emotions, fears and hopes diminished. I was dehumanised, and in a different world. I had entered a place that was unknown to anything I could imagine. My emotions seized up and the experience shut me down, and shut me off from the world. I survived by behaving as a robot. From Auschwitz I was sent to Guben in Germany to work as a slave labourer in an armaments factory.

With the Allies advancing, the prisoners were forced on a death march to Bergen-Belsen. On 15 April 1945 I was liberated by the British army. I crawled towards my liberators, unable to walk and close to death. I was hospitalised for tuberculosis, typhoid and severe malnutrition, and was sent to Sweden to recover.

I was left with nothing – no family, no education, no money, and only speaking Hungarian. After liberation, I found that Laci was the only member of my family to have survived: more than 50 of my relatives had been killed during the Holocaust. Laci continued to live in our parents' house, although I wasn't able to return to Hungary to visit him for 20 years after the end of the war. During his time at Auschwitz-Birkenau he had been forced to work in the Sonderkommando, moving bodies from the gas chamber to the ovens. He suffered with mental health problems caused by this experience until his death in 1995.

After the war, I lived in Sweden before moving to Canada, where I met and married a fellow survivor. Together we had three children and six grandchildren.

How do you get over such an experience? Is it possible to walk away and learn to live with all of this? How do you find the strength? Life is precious – you can go in one of two ways – up or down. I chose to walk away and rebuild my life. There was no revenge, and no justice. In my case I think I rebuilt my self-esteem through the joy of having children and building a family. I also chose to exercise my free will. I find that trying to make a positive contribution to society, such as through volunteering, helps greatly.

I now live in London and continue to share my testimony in schools across the country.

Find out more... The Holocaust: hmd.org.uk/holocaust