

Witness of Henia Levi, nee Frei

Ghetto Fighters House Archives, Catalog No. 11582

Henia Frei was born in 1916 in Bielitz, Poland. Her witness describes her experiences during WW II, in the Tarnow ghetto, the Plaszow, Skarzysko, and Czestochowa camps; a death march to the Ravensbrueck, Burgau, and Tuerkheim camps. After her escape and the liberation she spend some time in the Ottilien Hospital.

This translation is of the last paragraph of the narrative on page 26, starting line 10. This paragraph follows her story of seven women, including her older sister, who were being shipped off on a train with many other Jews to an unknown destination. The group of women escaped from the train just days before the American army entered that area. The story resumes here when they were being hidden in a room in the farm of the mayor of a village.

“In the meantime, we were told there is a large camp in Landsberg, and they walked there. We were still with the German where we had been staying. We decided we would go another day to see if there were Jews [in Landsberg]. We thought we were the only ones. Then the girls returned and told us there is a large camp, and so we also went there. Halfway there we saw an American camp, and they gave us a ride to Landsberg. When we told them that father is in Israel, they said to us that if we want to go to Israel we need to come to the camp. But we saw the conditions in the camp, and we were not enthusiastic. We said we are not staying in this camp. We returned with the same ride. They took us to St Ottilien. In the meantime there was a curfew (?) so we stayed there. We did not know what to do next. A Jewish soldier amongst the Americans told us that over the hill there was a sort of a hut where Americans were, and over [another] hill there was a large hospital. It had previously been a monastery before the war, and the Germans took it over as a hospital. Then he said there is a hospital there and there are many Jews. He brought us there and we stayed. First we stayed to sleep. Then they said why would you work with the non-Jews, the Germans? Come here. Bring your belongings. And stay with us. That is how we came [to St Ottilien]. We were there another year. The soldiers from the brigade were also there, Ben Gurion came there. That is how we created a connection with father, with the help of the soldiers. They took photographs and sent them in a letter [to Palestine]. We then received a letter, followed by a certificate and in 1946 we went to Israel”.

Translation from Hebrew by Prof Eli Ipp