



A Letter to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

May 30th, 2013

I am writing to you regarding thought of my most precious possession. Tomorrow June 1st I will be 88 and I have to give thoughts what shall happen to it.

In the spring of 1944 I was in KZ Camp Kaiserwald, Riga. My mother was in a sub-camp of Kaiserwald: Straßdenhof. It was perhaps 10 miles from Kaiserwald. There was basically no contact and I was never able to see her there. One day another *Häftling* [prisoner] came to me and told me that he was with a *Kommando* [labor detail] in Straßdenhof and he has something for me from my mother.

There were two slices of bread in a handkerchief sewn like a little sack. My name was written on there in my mother's handwriting. Only a person who was in camp like we were could understand the sacrifice which this meant. We received one slice of bread each evening and some watery soup each midday. We always had hunger pain and if the Nazis did not kill us outright, many of us died from starvation. So these two slices meant that my mother did not eat her one slice for two days. Only a mother could do something like this and at that only a mother like mine.

I shared the bread with the *Häftling* who brought it. He could have kept the two slices and I would have never found out. I ate the bread with terrible mixed feelings.

During a good part of my incarceration in Riga I worked in the same *Kommando SS Kraftfahrzeugwerkstätte Riga*. [SS labor detail for vehicle repair in Riga].

On August 4th 1944 another young Jewish man who worked there came excitedly over to my workplace and told me that an SS man just had told him that the SS brought in gas-vans and told him that all Jews age 30 and older in camp Straßdenhof will be killed today. The young man was from Lübeck and came with the Hamburg transport to Riga. His mother was in Straßdenhof as was mine.

How I got through this terrible day I still don't know. It was a day where I thought I would go insane, feeling totally helpless. One thought I had was that I hoped my sister would survive. She was murdered at the end of 1944 in KZ Stutthof at age 20.

Why the SS man told the young man from Lübeck I don't know. He was a *Mischling* (half Aryan). The Gestapo Hamburg deported a number of mixed marriages and their children. He

was liberated with me after a death march from Stutthof. We were liberated in Rieben [in Pomerania]. The *Kommandant* [commander] of that last camp had everybody marched out of this camp and shot before the Russians came in. A number of inmates were lying on the floor with typhus, the man from Lübeck and myself amongst them. The SS *Scharführer* [SS rank] yelled to an SS man: *Verschwende keine Kugel an die, sie werden sowieso verrecken* [Don't waste a bullet on them, they will die anyway].

My treasure is about 6 ½ x 7 ½ inches. Years ago I had it enclosed in Lucite for better preservation. It is in a frame about 10 ½ x 11 inches on a picture stand. It is on my dresser so I see it when I get up and when I go to sleep.

At age 88 I have thoughts where it will end up. I would like my boys to own it, but perhaps it is of interest to the museum. It could be on loan there for an exhibit.

Please let me know, it means a lot to me. I think a lot about it and very special thoughts on Mothers' Day as on many other days.

Thank you,

Ernie Haas

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