

Brick Factory Escape
by Aviyah Farkas, September 22, 2019
The true story of my father's escape from deportation to Auschwitz.

Before dawn, Kalman Gutlohn was startled awake by incessant pounding on the apartment door. Minutes before the pounding began, he had briefly lowered his guarded half-awake sleep as he allowed himself to sink into the softness of his wife's body. His beautiful wife Anna who he hadn't slept next to for the past three and a half years. Last night when he secretly entered the apartment building, he couldn't imagine his luck to be home again.

Now fully awake, Kalman leapt to his feet and opened the door to find a fierce Arrow Cross militant pointing a gun at him.

"Get out. Get out you filthy Jew. Go. Now. Quickly."

Kalman's wife who was not Jewish, began to protest,

"He's my husband. You can't take him."

The militant spat,

"Shut up you witch, else you'll come too."

With no choice but to obey, Kalman joined hundreds of other Jews who'd been picked up in the early morning raids. They were marched to the Brick Factory on the Buda side of the city, about 5 miles away. There they joined thousands of Jewish men, women and children, families, the very old and young; sitting, standing, miserable, waiting in the frigid rain and ankle deep mud. They were held at gunpoint by Hungarian guards welding clubs and bayonet tipped rifles. Upon entering this Hell, Kalman knew, without a doubt, that he would escape. Just as he'd escaped from his forced labor battalion three weeks ago.

This was November, 1944 and the Budapest Jews were gathered to begin forced marches to Auschwitz.

Kalman went about making himself "invisible", watching and waiting for his instincts to tell him when to act. Several women, some holding infants, waved Baptismal certificates and shouted,

"I'm a Christian, I don't belong here; let me out."

Immediately, they and their children were all shot. There was sheer chaos. People were shouting, pleading; they were pushed, shoved into makeshift huts; others were forced to line up and were told to march out the large front gates. The heavy rain made the chaos worse. Kalman knew he had to make a move. He'd been closely watching the guards and decided to approach a benevolent looking older guard who was standing off to the side. He went up to him, showed his yellow forced labor arm band and boldly lied,

"I've been separated from my labor battalion, the 109/36.
Can you help me get back to them?"

For a moment the guard just looked at Kalman showing no reaction. Kalman wasn't at all sure he'd heard, the rain was pounding. Then suddenly, the guard took his rifle from his shoulder, placed his bayonet on the rifle's end and shoved it into Kalman's back.

"March. March out," he commanded.

The next thing Kalman knew he'd been marched out of Hell, onto the adjoining street. They walked a ways, in silence; the guard still behind Kalman. Soon enough, they were side by side and Kalman knew his lie had been heard, and his life had been saved. They found a nearby tavern, Kalman paid for a round of drinks, gave this gentle older guard all his remaining money, they shook hands and parted. The guard went back to his duty, happy for the respite out of the rain and the warmth of strong slivovitz. Looking out for Arrow Cross terrorists, Kalman got to the safety of the Swiss Legation, and temporary freedom.

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