

The Holocaust is Always and Forever in my Mind
Mary Aviyah Farkas © June 2024

The Holocaust is always and forever in my mind. It is like the death of a child which never leaves the parents' thoughts; the death of a dearest loved one which comes and goes throughout the day; flitting thoughts which pervade my consciousness. My true friends are those who I trust to hide me, protect me. I hate having to pack a suitcase, thus I hate to travel, because it reminds me of the millions who had to pack suitcases. These thoughts are the lens which color my perspective about the world, others, my life. Not as a haunting, a negative, a burden, rather as an acknowledgement of what my family and those they loved, and what the millions of other Jews had to suffer.

I am in the habit of praying before I eat or drink, anything. I give a Bracha to God, who I firmly believe in, for my ability to eat and drink. Always. Three times and more each day I remember the Holocaust, before eating. I marvel at the abundance of having enough of all that I need. I Bless God, the Force, the Power which resides in All, despite this God causing my family, and millions, to be hunted and killed. But this God allowed my father, his sister and his mother – my aunt and grandmother – to survive. When I walk and feel some very little discomfort from too cold, too warm or hot, shoes too tight, too loose, I remember the discomfort, nay the pain and torture of those who died from being too cold, too hot, from shoes too tight, or none at all.

As a child, the youngest of five, I knew, in my bones, that I had to “Be Good.” And oh how I tried. I knew that my life, the life of my parents and siblings could, just might depend on my Being Good. Also, I witnessed my mother, beat my father bloody accusing him of having a *kurva*, a whore, a mistress who he supposedly met while he had to stay in Romania, waiting for his transit papers after the war. My mother, an American and Catholic (though never religious) helped save my father's life. My father literally would not have survived without her bringing him food and water while he was in hiding during the last 6 weeks of the Siege in Budapest.

Less than two months after Pest was liberated by the Russians, my father took a risk and traveled to Bucharest where he knew he could get work with the Jewish Joint. My mother was able to follow him to Bucharest where they had an unbelievably comfortable six months free of fear and free of constant, chronic hunger. As an American citizen, she was able to leave the graveyard of Europe as early as November 1945. My father wasn't able to get to the U.S. until August 1947.

Sadly, in the U.S., my mother developed delusions, now called situational psychosis. Till the day she died, she believed that his Romanian *kurva* came with him to the U.S. and

bore him two sons, who never aged. Throughout my life they remained 9 and 10 years old. Whenever my parents fought, she would throw this make-believe woman into my father's face.

I also witnessed my mother beating my next older sister, Alexandra, Lexi, with the heel of a high heel shoe. Maybe because Lexi looked like my father? Maybe because Lexi was the rebellious child? For some unknown reason, she never beat me. Maybe because I was "Good?" I'll never know.

My two sisters and I knew, in our bones, that the secrets we shared would remain forever between the three of us. Never to be uttered to others. And we knew that if one of us said to do something, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, we just did it. We never asked why. Stop the car pull over; don't sit there sit here; stop talking, shut up; go this way not that way. Almost always spoken in Magyar, our secret language, part of our bond. We understood, unspoken, the need for us to obey a command from the other. Of course as the youngest, I rarely gave such commands, I always followed. Never asking why. Our parents never taught us this "Always Obey Without Asking", they didn't need to. Somehow we knew it could mean our life or death. With all of my siblings gone, I suffer their loss. Is this the curse of the youngest child? They too are part of the consciousness which drapes my heart.

Now that I no longer work for a career, no longer have to "make money," I devote myself to teaching others about those years when the world was insane, when hate enveloped people's hearts and clouded their ability to reason. Those years which literally caused insanity for my mother. Years when the insanity of blood tainting blood was made real, real enough to kill. The insanity of seeing another as somehow sub-human, less than, not worthy to live just because of who they are. This insanity spread virus-like and infected the minds and actions of most of the world. The havoc and hurt it left is truly unspeakable. There truly are no words. As I teach I can only provide a small glimpse of the immense tragedy of this time. Will a child touring the museum, who has never had to hide, never had to consider that today will be their last, understand?

I live with these daily thoughts just as I live with my daily Blessings and Prayers: as a Given in my life. As a thin cover which drapes my heart and mind, which colors my thoughts and reactions. Not a burden, not a hardship, rather a Gift. A Gift to be able to feel deeply the suffering of others. A Gift to know that despite cycles of extreme insanity and murder, we humans continue to thrive, to bear offspring, to teach and learn, to create. Maybe, just maybe to improve.