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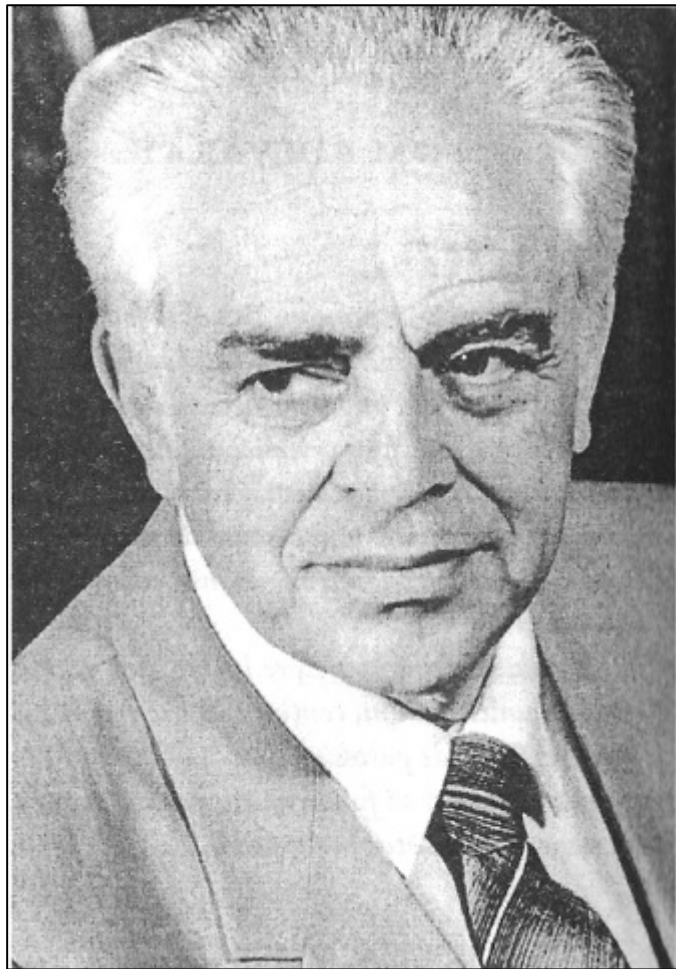
This is All I Remember

PART VI

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10. MY LAST JOURNEY TO BUCHENWALD

On the night of April 1st, our camp was evacuated. We set out for Buchenwald after midnight. Before leaving, the kapo distributed food, and got hold of a cart and horse. He filled the cart with food.

After the first one hundred meters I felt I was unable to go a step further. That was the first of six days during which we left a hundred kilometers behind us. We rested during the night and the kapo had bread baked for us. We marched during the day. The roads were machine-gunned by the Allies from airplanes. They split us up in smaller groups and left large gaps in between to minimize the danger. I knew about a few of my companions that they were planning to escape. I asked them to let me know about it because I wanted to join them. They promised they would. And now, here was the right moment. Our group was in the bend of the road, unguarded, and the guards of the preceding and following groups could not see us. My fleeing companions were already far away when I noticed them. I made up my mind quickly and ran after them. My little collective's two other members came along as well. We came across a "free" Czech worker, who asked us, with suspicious insistence, what we were up to. We didn't mind him much and hurried to catch up with our companions, who were still in sight and were taking a short rest. When we caught up with them they reproached me for having endangered their escape by following them. And indeed, in the distance, we noticed an armed guard, who must have been informed by the Czech worker, coming in our direction. I saw only one way out: the three of us will go back. True, this could be fatal, but the Czech worker saw only us three and therefore the guard could only know of us, and so we wouldn't be endangering the escape of our companions; on the contrary, we would be covering it. We turned back. When we got close to the guard I told him quickly that we were not escaping, as he could see for himself, since we were coming back of our own will, but only got scared of the shooting planes. The guard, luckily an older Wehrmacht soldier, took his gun off his shoulder but not to shoot at us but just to hit us with it. We started running and since we were faster than he was, we got to our group before him. We did not get hit. A few days after liberation I found out, to my sorrow, that the six wonderful young men managed to hide in a haystack but next day they were discovered by a member of the civilian guard (armed war cripples), and they were shot.

We kept marching on. When we were four kilometers from Buchenwald, we stopped. It was rumored that the camp was being evacuated. They were starting with the Jews and the people in the transports were killed on the way. The kapo installed us in an abandoned factory building and sent word to Buchenwald that, because of the danger of infectious disease, the doctor had ordered a few days of quarantine. The kapo had won SS first lieutenant Adam on

his side (the captain had not come with us) by promising him his protection after liberation. This is how we managed to stay four days in the factory building, where we found all kinds of treasures. I stumbled upon a knapsack filled with potatoes, which we boiled and the three of us had such a feast that we were close to being sick. Which was unlucky. Because next day the bread kapo Otto had them bake was even better than before and we couldn't even touch it. Meanwhile, and this was also Otto's work, they threw all kinds of little cloth squares in the yard. We didn't need much instruction. We quickly took off the Hungarian Jew sign from our breasts and we each chose some square and sewed it on. I chose a red one with an F in it, that is, I became a French political prisoner.

On April 10 in the evening -- obviously things couldn't be dragged on any longer -- we walked up to Buchenwald. Here the stray rumors were confirmed. Most of the Jews had been already dragged away. They housed us in the second floor of a brick building (now there was plenty of room) and I was wandering aimlessly on the morning of the 11th on the alleys of Buchenwald. Suddenly, from behind a fence, I am addressed by a prisoner shrunk to skin and bones, in whom I recognized, I don't even know how, the religious Jew from Mármaros, who, in Magdeburg, would not eat the traces of pork in the soup, in spite of the Rabbi's dispensation. He recognized me too. He asked me about my brother. "My brother?" I answered with bitterness, "He must be dead for months now." "What do you mean?", he answered. "I saw him here only yesterday." For a moment I stood there as if struck by lightning and then I started running all over the camp, and after half an hour I spotted Joki's still athletic figure. I embraced him crying but he pushed me away, scared. He had been a Frenchman for months by then and was frightened that a Hungarian Jew was compromising him thus. But, pointing to my little square I calmed him down quickly: "Don't worry, I am French too. After all, we are brothers." It must have been around 10am. The air siren sounded in an unusual way. Joki came with me into the brick building. Our French doctor, his face beaming, observed: "Das ist nicht Fliegealarm, das ist Feindalarm." (This is not an air-raid alarm; it is enemy alarm.) From the watchtowers surrounding the camp the guards kept on shooting for a few more minutes (they shot into our room too), and then, suddenly, we saw armed prisoners breaking out of the camp and we noticed that the guards had disappeared from the towers. Around twelve o'clock Buchenwald was free.