

With My Own Eyes: HOLOCAUST. GENOCIDE. TODAY.

PART ONE

This is the first in a three-part series featuring testimonies from local Holocaust survivors. In this article, you will read an interview with Magda Schaloum, who survived Auschwitz.

This series supports the Holocaust Center's recently re-released film, "With My Own Eyes: Holocaust. Genocide. Today." which weaves testimonies of local Holocaust survivors with contemporary issues of bullying, bystanders and world genocides. Watch the film online or order a copy of the dvd (with bonus features) at wsherc.org.

Magda Schaloum, Auschwitz Survivor



Magda Schaloum was born in Gyor, Hungary. On March 19, 1944, when she was 22 years old, the Germans occupied Hungary. The Nazis began systematically depriving Jews of their rights and forcing them to move into ghettos. Along with her mother and brother, Magda was deported from Hungary and sent by train to Auschwitz.

What was it like for Jewish people in Hungary before 1944?

MAGDA: Hungary was an anti-Semitic country. It was my dream to go to college and become a kindergarten teacher. In 1939, laws were passed against Jewish people and we lost many rights. I was no longer allowed to finish school or go to college.

After the Nazis took power in 1944, what happened?

MAGDA: One night a neighbor stopped me on my way home and said, "Don't be surprised when you get home. Your parents and your brother are already packed, and you have to leave your home." When I got home, I took a suitcase and put in whatever I could. The next

morning, when we had to leave, people came in and took whatever they wanted. Nobody stopped them.

We were taken to a small apartment building. Our apartment was like a normal-sized bedroom. We were 10 people sleeping in this room.

Can you describe your deportation from the ghetto and arrival in Auschwitz?

MAGDA: One day they said there were going to take us somewhere. They put us in a cattle wagon. Each section was packed with about 100 people.

After traveling nights and days, we finally arrived on the 21st of June. I remember the date because it was my brother's 15th birthday. We were so glad that we could get some fresh air. The Nazis had us stand five in a row. They yelled out, "Separate the women and separate the men!" At that point, they took my brother away. That was the last time I saw my brother.

My mother was sent to the left, and I was sent to the right. I ran after my mother. The guards pulled me back, saying that we will be together again after our showers. I hugged my mother and I kissed her, but I never saw my mother again.

After 10 days in Auschwitz, Magda was transferred to Plaszow, a slave labor camp near Krakow, Poland. The work and conditions were terrible. Magda was forced to push a wheelbarrow repeatedly up and down a large hill to move dirt. When she stopped to rest, she was beaten.

MAGDA: As the Russians moved closer to Krakow, the Germans moved prisoners back to Auschwitz. This is when I got my tattoo: A-17170.

You got married shortly after you were liberated. How did you meet your husband?

MAGDA: After liberation, I spent time in Feldafing, a displaced persons (DP) camp. A young man walked by me one day, stopped, and said in German, "Fraulein?" I didn't understand a word. He spoke six languages, but not Hungarian. And then, suddenly he said, "Rendezvous?" In my country, and many other countries, this meant a date. I said, "OK," and about six weeks later we got married.

Before immigrating to Seattle in 1951, Magda and her husband Izak had two children. Their third son was born in the United States. Magda has six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

MAGDA: I share my story with students because I want them to hear from a survivor, and to know that this really happened.

