

Found by Sarah Heckmann

So there I was, huddled in the closet with Mutter, Vater, my fourteen year old twin sister Ingrid, six year old brother Otto, and two year old sister Christa. The closet was very cramped since there were six of us in the three by three foot space. We were hiding from the Nazis that were stomping up the stairs. We had tried to hide ourselves with the coats and blankets that were in the closet, but my waist length, curly hair was not easy to hide. Ingrid was gripping my hand as tight as she could, and it felt like my hand would break.

Ingrid and I could not look more different from each other. Ingrid is tall, five feet eleven inches, and muscular, especially for being fourteen. I, however, am on the other end of the spectrum. I am very short, four feet nine inches, and very thin. She has Vater's dirty blond hair, about shoulder length, and is quite tan from all the sports she plays. I have Mutter's dark brown, curly hair, waist length, and pale skin. The only thing similar about us is our grey eyes, the color of ashes of a dying fire, like they could burn a hole in anyone's soul. That is what set us apart from the rest of our family. They all had hazel eyes, with a gold lining around the rim. Their eyes looked like the sun just as it finishes rising.

I heard our cots being turned over, the attic being ripped apart. I heard a man say, "Wait, there is a closet over there." I heard stomping across the wood floors, seemingly in slow motion. The door opened slowly and a large man with a uniform and a hat was standing there.

"Ja," he said, with a scowl, "They're in here." I felt Ingrid's grip get tighter and I clenched Mutter's hand. I was at the front of the closet since I was the smallest. The first man took my arms and started to pull me out of the closet. I screamed and started flailing my arms and legs. His grip only got tighter. Mutter did not let go of my ankle until another man grabbed her and Christa. I had stopped flailing and was now being forced to watch my family get dragged out of the closet. Ingrid fought against the soldier grabbing her, but of course, she did not win the fight.

Otto was the calmest out of all of us, aside from Christa, and he let the soldier take him. I guess he understood that he would not win the fight so there was no use in wasting his energy. Vater was the last to be taken out of the closet, and it was the hardest to watch. Vater, the strongest person I know, was crying. In that moment, he seemed weak. But I knew he wasn't. I couldn't resist and I started to cry. Mutter grabbed my hand as we were led down the stairs and taken outside to a van.

They did not have a care in the world that we were humans. They shoved us into the back like we were rabid animals. I could see out of a little hole in the tarp on top of the van, so I watched as Erika, who had become a good friend since her family had taken us in and she was fourteen as well, started to cry as we were riding away. I had whispered, "I'll see you again soon," to her as we were leaving, but I'm not sure if I was trying to convince her or myself of that.

I had no idea where we were going, and none of my family did either. We drove for around three hours before we stopped, and the soldiers told us to get out. We had stopped at this huge building that looked like a paper mill. I knew this would not be our last stop. We were taken inside the building and led all the way to the back. We were told to sit quietly by another family, on a concrete floor, until someone told us to do otherwise.

After what seemed like forever, two men came and got us and took us back outside, but in the back of the building. There were larger trucks there and we were loaded into one. There was already two other families in the truck, and even though the truck was larger than the first

one, we were really cramped in there. We drove for about five hours and when we got out, we were at a huge plot of land. There were lots of small buildings and one large one. We went to an area of dirt that had a small pavilion with tables and needles in it.

We were lined up and told to strip down to our underwear and put our clothes in a bin. A few soldiers handed some people tan uniforms and told them to put the uniforms on. Once they did, the soldiers led them to a small building with a large window on it. I had no idea what that building was for, but there was a man with controls and he clicked a button and I was told by a soldier to look away. Four men came around and tattooed numbers on our left arms. My number was B1379, Ingrid's was B1380, Mutter's was B1381, and Christa's was B1382.

Vater and Otto were in the other line, so Otto would be going with Vater. Soldiers came around and gave us uniforms to put on. We were then led through a small building and seated on the ground on the other side. A man came out and told us what to do and what not to do. "You WILL do what we tell you to do. You will NOT be lazy, disrespectful, or uncooperative. You WILL eat what we tell you to eat, no more and no less." There were so many more rules to remember, and I was afraid of what would happen if I broke one of the rules. As soon as I thought that, he told us what would happen, and it was not good. "If you break any of these rules, you will be taken straight to the gas chambers. If you are lucky, you will be taken to another, harder camp," he said, as he pointed harshly at all of us.

We were then forced through gates, where men were separated from women. Mutter tried to pull Vater with her and Ingrid tried to pull Otto with us, but a soldier forced them apart. I watched as tears streamed down Mutter's face and Vater was screaming her name. "Edith! Edith! Edith!" His screams got quieter as he was swallowed by the sea of people being forced through the gates. I grabbed Mutter's hand, the one that was not holding Christa. Ingrid grabbed my other hand and we walked through the gates onto the other side. We were no longer separated from Vater and Otto, but we would not see them until we began working.

Since it was nighttime, we were forced into these small buildings that had huge wooden pallets nailed against the wall and we were told this was where we would be sleeping. We chose the bottom pallet by the door so we would not have far to go when we were exhausted after working. We were sleeping near two girls, around twelve, who did not know where their mother was. I felt terribly sorry for them since they would not have anyone to comfort them.

We were woken in the morning by a loud bell that was rung around 5:30. I was already tired, so I knew this would be a tough time to get through. However, I *wanted* to live and I knew I would fight until I got out of this.

I think that is what saved me, my fighting spirit. It has been thirty years since the end of the Holocaust, and I will always be haunted by the terrible memories, even into my old age. My whole family, except Christa, survived, but we knew she would probably not make it since she was so small. We all live in Columbus, Ohio, Otto, Ingrid, and I work as surgeons so that we can help people, and Mutter and Vater are retired and live with me and my family. I think we all wanted to live in America so that we would not see things in Germany that would give us terrible memories. I do not think of my tattoo as a reminder of a horrible thing, but as something that I was strong enough to overcome. The last words that Christa said will haunt me most of all. "Heidi! Save me!" she cried to me, as she was dragged away by a man in a tan uniform, never to be seen again.