

# LUCIA AMATO

*Rhodes Island, Auschwitz, Willemstad, Theresienstadt.*

I guess I must start with the terrible journey to Auschwitz. The train wagons were \_ packed over capacity. We could hardly sit on the floor, and could not stretch our legs. In one of the corners, there was a small barrel - that was our toilet. In order to maintain some sort of privacy, we would use clothing as a curtain. At the stations when the train stopped, the guards would open the door and shout and scream, "**Raus! Raus!**"

Many of the older people could not get up and walk because their knees and legs were so stiff from being bent for so long. A guard would climb into the wagon to empty the toilet, and I remember that one just kicked it onto the floor so that the contents spilt all over the floor, and onto us.

Later when we were transported to Athens, we were guarded only by five German soldiers. There were hundreds of us. I often wonder why we never thought of killing them and escaping. There were some strong men among us; but I suppose we were not brought up to kill, and of course, we never realized what was going to happen to us.

Auschwitz was the most terrible period of my life. The day after our arrival, we were told by the inmates who worked in the crematorium that our parents had all been killed the previous day and that the smoke we saw was the burning of our parents. They also told us that it was no use crying for them,

"You must be brave and save your own lives or the same thing will happen to you".

But we could not, we cried and cried for a long time.

Every morning at 3 0' clock there was the call-up. We would have to stand outside in the freezing cold weather for a long time. We never had any underwear. I remember trying to warm up my sister by hugging her, and the 'Kapo' would hit us and separate us. We had only one meal each day - usually a small bowl of soup made out of potato peels which we had to share among five or six of us.

I was there with two of my sisters. The younger one died very soon as she could not handle the hunger, the conditions and the bad treatment.

One day, one of the prisoners was found missing during the morning call-up. The guard told us that unless we told them where she had gone, they would shoot 10 of us randomly. We were very scared that they would kill us all. The next day she was found and brought to our block.

We could hardly recognise her. She had been so badly beaten that her body had huge bumps all over, especially on her head. The Germans then gave us batons and forced us to beat her. That was absolutely awful! We were crying while we pretended to do so.

Finally she became unconscious and we were convinced that she was about to die. The Germans threw a bucket of iced water over her to revive her, and she did not die. That was enough to put anyone off trying to escape from the camp.

From Auschwitz we were transferred to Willems tad, where we worked in an ammunition factory. Every morning, we had to go to work on an empty stomach and it was only when we returned that we were given this watery soup and a piece of bread. I would always give my elder sister some of my portion.

One night, I remember that I was so hungry that I began to lick the sides of the cauldron; the "Obersiering" caught me and hit me with a baton and then kicked me all over my body. Then she stuck me in the corner of the room and two other "Obersierings" came towards me, one of them holding a pair of scissors. I thought this was the end of me, and that she was going to cut my throat with the scissors.

Instead they cut off the little hair that had just begun growing again and I was thrown into the snow and left there for two hours or more. As further punishment, I was moved to the night shift at the factory. That was very difficult because one needed to sleep during the day and that meant one would miss lunch, the only meal.

We were moved from that camp to Theresienstadt by train, during the Allied bombardment where we were liberated by Russian soldiers. I remember that they brought us a lot of chocolate. They caught some of the guards and told us to stone them, but we could not do that.

*LUCIA AMATO was born in Rhodes Island in 1921 and attended the Scuola Isralite. She survived Auschwitz, Willemstad and Theresienstadt from where she was liberated on 8.5.1945. From Rome she went to Rhodesia in 1947 and moved to South Africa in 1978. She married Moise Amato in Gatooma, Rhodesia and has a son Alby and a daughter Janette.*

Source: "IN SACRED MEMORY" Recollections of the Holocaust by survivors living in Cape Town, edited by Gwyne Schrire.