

LEFT OR RIGHT?

By Judy Aaronson

Vera Federman stumbled off the dark train. The light almost blinded her, and she grabbed her mother's hand. Vera and her mother were pushed out of the car. The first thing Vera heard was music. An orchestra was waiting for the people on the train. Vera was starving, dizzy, and exhausted. She groaned in hunger.

As Vera stepped into the light, she saw a huge sign. *Arbeit Macht Frei*. Vera translated the German writing, Work Will Set You Free.

Vera and her mother approached a man, who immediately began poking and prodding them. Vera didn't want the man to be doing this. This was quite disturbing.

A few minutes later, a soldier approached twenty year old Vera. Vera shook with fear and grasped her mother's hand.

"You." The soldier barked, glaring at Vera and her mother.

The soldier pointed at Vera's mother, gesturing to the right. Vera's mother's eyes filled with tears as she was ushered away from her daughter. Vera was confused and scared as her mother's hand was wrenched out of hers as the soldier pushed her away. Where was her mother going? Vera didn't want to be away from her!

"You." The soldier barked again, pointing the left. Vera trembled in fright.

"No! No, please! Let me go with my mother!" Vera pleaded.

“No, you won’t do. You are too scrawny and weak looking.” The soldier pointed to the left again.

“Please!” Tears were streaming down Vera’s cheeks.

“NO!”

Then, Vera had a plan. She walked over to the left, but then quickly changed directions to go back to the soldier, hoping that he wouldn’t recognize her.

“I already told you, you are too thin!” The soldier roared.

“Please, sir! Please! I want to be with my mother! I’m only fourteen!” Vera trembled.

“You won’t do! Get out! Get out!” The soldier shooed her away.

“B-but I am very strong! I can work!” Vera pleaded.

“GO!”

Just then, a German woman leaned over to the soldier.

“Let her in.” The woman said.

The soldier narrowed his eyes. Vera trembled. The soldier hesitated before sighing and pointing to the right. Vera was flooded with emotion as she ran to the right, to her waiting mother. Even though Vera had no idea what was going on, or what might come, at least she had her mother.

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Vera's story inspires me to have courage and determination. During Covid, we didn't know what would happen. We watched helplessly as hospitals filled up and people died. Vera's story of survival helps me have hope during this horrible time.