

From the Testimony of Eva Braun: When I Heard About Freedom, I Was Also Very Afraid

Eva Braun, born in 1927 in Slovakia, was deported to the Auschwitz and Reichenbach camps and worked in the Phillips and Telefunken factories. She was liberated by the American army at Salzwedel.

"We woke up in the morning and there was absolute silence everywhere. The watchtower was empty. The SS men had disappeared. Suddenly we heard a noise from the direction of the road. We were very weak.

We were just sitting around the block. We couldn't move, but some girls ventured outside. Tanks and cars were approaching. We could hear them. We were terrified that the Germans were coming back. And then someone shouted that they were Americans. The Americans came in and liberated us.

...It was freedom. We were elated. The members of my group were too weak to go out and welcome the soldiers. It was too much for us. We were drained, exhausted, we couldn't move. Even so, everyone went up to the soldiers and they gave us their ration packages. They warned us not to wolf down too much, as it would kill us. Gradually we stood up and went forward to receive a bit of food.

All through the war we had prayed for liberation, and here it was suddenly. You are free! But after I had digested the idea of freedom I realized that actually the whole time I had been hoping to see my father, and I even dared to hope that I might possibly see my mother, in spite of everything. I knew in my heart that this was almost completely unrealistic, but I was sure I would see my father. But still, there were doubts, and I began to understand that it might not happen.

When I heard about freedom, I was also very frightened. What would we find? We had survived, and we had to return to civilization, but how did one behave

in a normal world? We were two young girls who had nothing. Who would look after us? What would we do?

There was excitement, but our feelings were mixed. We were afraid. It's hard to describe and explain these feelings of simultaneous fear and joy. That was our next stage. Now, after liberation, what were we going to do? We had nothing. We were frightened that we might not have anyone left in the world. We needed someone to look after us and take care of us. And to a great extent I was looking after my little sister and another girl. More than anything else I wanted someone to look after me and relieve me of the burden of caring for the girls, so that I wouldn't have to be responsible, so that I would be under an adult's protection. It's hard to explain it, but I wanted someone to look after me, I wanted someone to lean on. It turned out that freedom is relative to a very great extent.

Worry about the future weighed heavily on me. We had to build our future, but how does one build a future?"

From: Kleiman, Yehudit and Springer-Aharoni, Nina, *The Anguish of Liberation*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1995, pp. 45-46.