

From the Testimony of Hilde Sherman about the Deportation to Riga and the Arrival to the Ghetto

[Hilde Sherman was deported to Riga on the transport that was guarded by Salitter and his policemen - see Deportation to Riga – German Report]

...According to Gestapo orders, we could take up to 50 Kg. of luggage and a bed roll 70 cm. long and 30 cm. wide with blankets etc. Of course, everyone tried to squeeze his best belongings into the suitcase, as no one knew how long they would have to last during this so-called resettlement'. Each family was to take a small stove and peas, lentils, rice, etc. And you could not buy anything, so people started to exchange. I gave someone a suit in exchange for candles. I exchanged an embroidered tablecloth for a shirt and a pair of shoes. [At this time] we really didn't have anything left. And so we boarded the train on the 10th [of December 1941]. I said goodbye to my parents. This was the second time in my life that I saw my father cry.... He and my brother accompanied me to the railway station at Moenchengladbach The train was already waiting there with people from Krefeld and the entire area. All the villages were being cleared of Jews....

My husband's name was Kurt Winter. I was deported with his family. We arrived at Duesseldorf at dawn. We had to disembark and walk to the slaughter house yard, where we were gathered. I remember that even at that point the older people were unable to carry their baggage and simply threw it on the street. I saw how the people [of the town] were watching. They did not go out on the street, they were watching from behind the windows. I saw how the curtains were moving. No one can claim that they did not see. Of course they saw us. We were over one thousand people. We then arrived at the slaughter house yard and stood there the entire night. Everything was deep in water. It was a terrible night. That was the beginning. It was the first time I was beaten. It was by a high-ranking SS officer who stood at the entrance. There were steep stairs leading down into the yard and the people were not moving fast enough. So he pushed me and screamed: What are you waiting for? For

the street-car? There will never again be a street-car for you. It was the first time in my life that I was beaten, that I was touched by a stranger. But this was only the beginning. Shortly afterwards, we had to undress completely and our things were taken away. I had worn two or three layers of clothing because my mother had said: perhaps you will be able to keep the clothes that you have on your body.' We never saw our suitcases again.

The next morning at dawn we were forced to the ramp. The train had not arrived. It was bitterly cold. We stood there and stood there from 4 a.m. until 9 a.m. We were then called and the trip began on 11 December 1941.... Everything had been taken from us. One of the people asked one of the guards, an SS man, when the train was coming. They took out a club and beat him for so long until he remained there on the ground. He didn't get on the transport. This was our first dead. This was the beginning...

We were in a passenger car. This was before they started using cattle cars. We were so crowded that it was unbearably hot. In addition there was heating, which was superfluous. But in the other car, where the children were put, there was no heating at all. They almost froze. The train left and arrived in Berlin in the afternoon. There the train was directed back. We looked out of the window. The trains were locked from the outside, but we could look out of the windows. We were looking for the last two cars of the train where our luggage was, to see whether they were still attached. This was what we feared most at that time, as if it was important.... I remember we were suffering from terrible thirst. We had taken bread with us, but the thirst was terrible. Everyone in the car was running a fever because of the terrible heat. We arrived at Insterbruch, right at the Polish border, what had been Poland. There the train stopped. The train was opened and we were allowed to get off and gather the snow for drinking. We could drink it when it melted.... I had not taken off my boots knowing I would not be able to put them on again on my swollen feet. I was the only one who was not running a fever and who could get off the train. So I put as much snow as possible into dishes and even handed it to the adjacent cars through the windows. I ran along the ramp. At

the end of the ramp I saw a mailbox. I prepared a postcard for my parents and wrote to them that once their time comes, they should take only warm clothes. The postcard actually reached them, as an acquaintance later told me. We traveled for three days and four nights through Lithuania. I was deeply impressed by the houses of the peasants with their straw roofs. It was something we had not seen in Germany. They also used wells. In Germany we had running water. The people were at the wells with felt boots and sheepskins. They looked so miserable. I thought: my God, these Lithuanians, they are all good Catholics, if this is what their life is like under German occupation, what will be our fate as Jews, as deportees.... At night, the train suddenly stopped. We had no idea where we were. At dawn we could see a sign saying Shirotawa. Where is Shirotawa? What is Shirotawa? It was terribly cold. Around 10 a.m. we heard dogs barking. SS troops arrived and circled the train. The doors were opened and the screaming began: Out, out, fast, fast. We had to get out, and the last people had to clean the cars with their hands. There were no tools. We had to stand in line on the ramp. A car arrived with two high-ranking SS officers. They got out of the car, and I remember that one of them started screaming: Line up in fives and off with you to the ghetto. A man called Meyer, he was from Gort, a small village near Duesseldorf, had two children on his arm, two small boys, and asked: Sir, is it very far to the ghetto? Instead of an answer, the officer took out a stick...and hit him in the face. He released the dog, a German shepherd, who attacked the man. The man fell to the ground and the two children too. When he got up, his mouth was all bloody and his teeth broken. This was our first impression of Latvia, of Riga, of Shirotawa. The train started moving slowly. There was ice everywhere.... The ghetto was about 20-25 km. From Shirotawa. People threw away their bags. The Latvians were not only watching, they were looting. As soon as the train left, they stole everything that was on the ground. Then we went through a suburb, then up a little hill. Then there was an iron gate. It opened and we were in the ghetto.

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