

GLASSES

As stated, during the Holocaust objects often took on a meaning entirely unrelated to their functional purpose. This, for example, was the case with Bluma Wallch's glasses and Hinda Cohen's shoe.

Tula Wallach was about sixteen years old when the Germans occupied Lodz. A short time after the occupation, her father and two brothers fled to the east. Although her mother implored her to join them, Tula refused to leave her sickly mother alone and remained at her side in Lodz.

The mother and daughter experienced four and a half years of hunger, yearning and despair together in the Lodz ghetto as they took care of one another, constantly in fear of deportation and separation, the fate of so many.

In August 1944, when the Lodz ghetto was liquidated, Tula and Bluma were deported to Auschwitz. Tula described the journey to Auschwitz in the train car:

Late at night, I got down on the floor. I sat down next to my mother and her thoughts were ever so clear, because during all the years, we had worried so much about Father and my brothers and knew nothing of their fate. We knew that they had fled to Russia and that they didn't know what had happened to us. She was so ill and miserable and wretched, and I desperately wanted to help her. But I had no way to do so.

Upon their arrival at Auschwitz, despite Tula's attempts to remain at her mother's side, they were forcibly separated and Bluma was sent to her death. When Tula was forced together with all the other women to undress and hand over all her valuables, she removed the ring her mother had given her from her coat pocket along with her mother's reading glasses that she happened to have with her. She threw the ring on a pile of objects, but kept the glasses, claiming she needed them to see. A short time later, she found a piece of rope, which she wound around her body and on which she hung the glasses.

Tula relates that although she knew she would never see her mother again, she continued to search for her even after she was transferred to another camp.

When the war ended, Tula was among the few that survived. She eventually immigrated to Israel, where she raised her own family. Some fifty years later, Tula Meltzer came to Yad Vashem and decided to donate her mother's glasses to the museum. She explained her actions thus:

I have brought them to Yad Vashem because I had them for many years, and from time to time, I would open up the package to look at them, broken and falling apart, and each time the pieces were smaller. I couldn't fathom what would happen if I died, and my children took the pieces and threw them away. Each time, there were fewer pieces, until I decided to bring them to Yad Vashem.⁴

The glasses are currently displayed in Yad Vashem's Holocaust History Museum.



Fragments of glasses that belonged to Bluma Walach from Lodz, who was murdered upon her arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Her daughter Tola managed to preserve the glasses until liberation, tied to her body, as a last memory of her mother.

Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection, courtesy of Tola (Walach) Melzer, Haifa, Israel.