

THE SHOE OF HINDA COHEN

Zipora (Tzipole) and Dov (Berka) Cohen were a young couple when they were taken, together with their young daughter Hindele (Hinda), to Aleksotas, outside the Kovno ghetto. Hindele was only a year old and had been born in the ghetto after Zipora lost her first pregnancy. Tzipora and Dov were brought along with a thousand other prisoners to do construction work in an airfield. In Aleksotas, the women and children were separated from the men, and Zipora and her daughter went to sleep each night hugging each other and crying in longing, fear and hunger. In the morning, the grownups were taken out to work while the children remained behind in the care of a handful of adults and elderly people.

The morning of March 27, 1944 was different. Instead of doing their regular work, the women were sent together with the men from the camp's back gate to work in the airfield performing hard labor that did not appear to have any visible purpose. Everyone could sense that something was imminent and when the Zipora and Dov returned to the camp in the evening, they were stunned to discover that their daughter had been taken, never to return. After the adults had left for work, a children's *Aktion* began, during which the 300 children of the camp were deported by train to Auschwitz, where they were murdered immediately upon their arrival. Hindele, who was only two years old at the time, was snatched from her bed ill with chicken pox, covered only with a blanket that the woman taking care of her had managed to wrap her in at the last moment.

Dov and Zipora stood shocked and bewildered at the sight of their little girl's empty bed. Under the bed, they found one of her shoes along with a pair of mittens that Zipora had knitted for her. Dov took the shoe and etched the date of the *Aktion* on its sole, swearing to safeguard it for the rest of his life.

Later in the war, Dov and Zipora managed to escape to the forest. They were liberated by the Red Army and in 1947 had another daughter. They immigrated to Israel in 1960.

At their request, their grandchildren delivered little Hindele's belongings, which Dov and Zipora had safeguarded their entire lives, to Yad Vashem.

Religious objects also received added significance in addition to their traditional function.



The baby shoe of Hinda Cohen, with the date of her deportation to the death camps carved into the sole by her father.

Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection.