

*Through Deep Snow*  
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Testimony: Jack Lewin

Frozen winds whipped across the road, whistling over snowdrifts that blanketed the Polish countryside. As night turned to dawn, rows of men in striped jumpsuits trudged onward under a slate-grey sky. Nothing louder than a distant cough dared to interrupt the cadence of snow crunching beneath their weary feet.

The date was January 18, 1945, a little more than a day after the Germans evacuated the work camp of Trzebinia. Soviet forces were closing in, and Jewish prisoners were being marched towards Auschwitz in a group of over eight hundred. Seventeen-year-old Jack Lewin was among them, shivering in the bleak winter.

As he walked, his mind wandered to a time before Trzebinia, before witnessing the selection of his mother in Birkenau, and before starving in the ghetto. He remembered sunny days spent singing and dancing in the summers of his youth, though he no longer recognized the joy and freedom he once felt.

With each step, Jack thought of a loved one who had been taken by the Nazis: his father Hersch, his mother Dinah, his cousins, his aunt. One by one, they slipped out of his life and into the snow, each carrying with them a piece of Jack until his will to continue on wasted away. Surrounded by hundreds, he was alone.

Suddenly, the prisoners came to a halt. Jack winced as pain rushed back to his legs that grew numb from the somber rhythm of the march. Pangs of hunger rattled around his stomach as the cold cut deeper into his being.

Minutes later, a commandant appeared before the prisoners and asked those incapable of walking any further to step forward. Anticipating that he would be placed in a supply wagon, Jack was the first to volunteer, followed by a group of older men broken by the march.

Standing amongst people labeled Muselmann, or walking corpses, Jack quickly realized his mistake -- he had become a burden to the Nazis. In an instant, he knew he would be marched into Auschwitz and killed, but he was not afraid. At the very moment that death became imminent, relief filled his soul like a sip of warm tea: "I was so much at peace. I was completely resigned. I knew that we were going to the [...] gas chambers. [...] But I didn't care. [...] One thought kept me going -- a happy thought. I knew that when I get to the gas chamber, I'll be able to sit down."

On that bitter morning, Jack reached his breaking point; he had no energy left. His emotions were warped so drastically by the anguish he endured that he accepted his execution with calm reserve.

Aside from the millions of lives lost, perhaps the most overlooked tragedy of the Holocaust is the lifetime of suffering that followed those fortunate enough to survive. Though Jack was rescued from Auschwitz ten days after leaving Trzebinia, a part of him is still lost in the Polish countryside, buried with his family in the vast ubiquity of snow.