



A Tale of a Boy who Lived during The Holocaust

Steven Garth Callaghan Q.P.M. Kanada - The possessions and precious belongings of the Jews transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau were left in the train carriages and on the ramp as their owners were quickly put through the selection process. When the selection process was complete, a work group of prisoners called the 'Kanada Kommando'

collected the belongings of victims and took them to the 'Kanada' warehouse facility for sorting and transporting back to Germany. To prisoners Canada was a country that symbolised wealth. They, therefore, gave the ironic name Kanada (the German spelling of Canada) to the warehouse area as it was full of possessions, clothing and jewellery.

My prayers were broken by the shouting, we were told to strip off our clothes and run round the yard. We were then put into groups. That was the last time I saw my father or brothers. I managed a brief conversation with my grandfather, he told me I had been a good boy and followed God's

Commandments. He said that when I next saw my mother I was to instruct her to give me his medals. He asked me to take care of them, he said goodbye and hobbled off to stand in a line, he had been excused from running due to his war wounds. Whilst I was sad at being separated from the rest of my family my sadness was tinged with

happiness that I was now an explorer and starting a new adventure! The group I was in were marched to the back of the camp this was the first time I had seen the flaming chimneys with the dense black smoke I thought we must be near the altar as the smell of burning flesh was stronger. We were taken into a block, there were lots of people running about, then I noticed the strange men wearing stripped uniforms pushing carts and undoing the luggage cases.

I asked one of the guards at the block 'where are we?' he replied, 'you are in Auschwitz Camp you are one of the lucky ones, you are in Canada' I was dumb struck I was in Canada. I had fulfilled my promise to God and my grandfather, I was in Canada.

It was not what I was expecting, where were the snow-capped mountains? Where was the clean air? All I could smell was the stench of burning flesh. Where were the running rivers? All I saw was mud! I was sent to work going through suitcases and sorting things out. Shoes, gold jewels clothes, even gold teeth, everything was sorted into piles.

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The guards were vicious, they were drunk and gave out beatings for any reason, no reason.

They raped the women working in the blocks. They told us we were in a position of trust and anyone found stealing would be shot. As I worked I prayed to God thanking him for sending me to Canada, he had answered my prayers. After some days working in the block another of my prayers appeared to have been answered. I was put to work sorting out a batch of artificial limbs. As I lifted a leg, all the memories of my past came flooding back. I was holding the leg of my grandfather. The leg I had signed. No longer was it scarred, it seemed the pain had gone. Had my signing the leg worked? Was it a sign from God? Had he been cured? My eyes started to fill with tears. I fell to the ground sobbing uncontrollably, but it was not tears of pain but tears of joy.

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For the broken hearted.

Generations removed

At the command

was angry with frustration

Of one human

At my inadequacy.

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Saw remnants of life

Theard the silent cries

history that couldn't even whisper.

I realised that my grandfather and I had travelled to Canada together, he had lived his dream and I had kept my promise to God. As I worked sorting items into batches I wondered if my grandfather had made up the stories about Canada. Had the soldier ever existed? Had he made up the promised land to raise morale in the trenches of the Somme? I now knew the land of milk and honey that the soldier talked about, was not the promised land that God had delivered me and my family into. There was nothing here but misery and death, was God testing him? Was there

something better waiting for those who passed the test? I could only pray for a better day and to be reunited with my family. At some point one of the men in the stripped uniform gave me a batch of cases to search. As I looked at the pile my heart sank. I reached for the handle. Even before I opened it I knew this was the case my mother was carrying when we left our house. The contents would reveal memories of a past life, of happier times, of hope when I

had a future. I opened the case and lifted out my mother's silk scarf. It was heavy, as I unfolded it I saw my grandfather's war medals. I stroked them gently, my hands. trembling. As I held the medals in my hands Grandfather's face appeared to me, I remembered his parting words to me, 'you have followed God's Commandments and you are a good boy, the medals are yours'. I was to take care of them. I would take

Without thinking I slipped them into my shirt pocket. I heard a guard shout, 'thieving scum', I did not hear the noise from the shot that smashed my skull, but I died knowing that I had been to Canada.





HOLOC



To you and me Its history. Unspeakable. Silences that hide Broken hearts. Harrowing memories of Shoe mountains and Discarded skeletons. Tormented souls Clinging to their beliefs For survival.