



Survivor-Centred Visual Narratives

Handout: Example Testimony

The First Attempt at Escape

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Survivor's Name: Ibolya Grossman

One bright and mild October day in 1949, Andy and I went to the railway station where I was to meet the peasant woman who was our escape escort and another couple who also wanted to escape. Mama came with Andy and me. How hard it had been for her, knowing our intentions and having to hide her feelings. But she was strong. Mama even got on the train and accompanied us for a short while. Then she kissed us, wished us luck, and got off the train at the first stop. The other couple and the peasant woman were sitting in different rows from us. I kept an eye on the woman so we would know where to get off the train. After disembarking, we went to her home in a village near the Czechoslovakian border, where we had to wait until dark. I thought it was time to explain the situation to my son. I told Andy we were going to another country to meet Uncle Béla, who would become his new daddy. I explained that we had to be very quiet and careful because if the border guards captured us, they would put us in jail. Andy, who was six years old at the time, seemed to understand and was very co-operative.

After dark, we continued our journey on foot, often uphill. After a couple of hours, Andy whispered, "Mommy, I'm very tired. Let's take a rest now." "Please, darling, don't sit down," I replied. "If you sit down, we will get lost because we will lose the others." My son wanted to be brave, so he walked some more. But after another hour, he couldn't go any farther. I told our escort that Andy couldn't keep up. The woman then hoisted him onto her back and continued walking. It was only a minute before Andy fell asleep.

I was also very tired, and the knapsack on my back was getting heavier by the minute. I thought how nice it would be to leave my heavy burden behind, but I couldn't do that because the knapsack contained some basic necessities: a change of clothes for both of us, an extra pair of socks, some toiletries, and two towels. Not even a toy for my son.

As we walked, I said a silent prayer. "Dear God, please let us reach the border safely. Let us start a new life in a free country. I don't have to tell you how much we suffered from our fellow Hungarians, how they hunted us like animals. You saved my son's life when he was a very sick baby in the ghetto, and I'm thankful for it even if you let my young husband be killed. Please, save us again, my God."

This time, however, my prayer went unanswered. Suddenly I saw a bright flash in the dark, and a voice yelled, "Stop or I will shoot!" We had been caught by the Czechoslovakian border guards. We were so close, so very close to freedom. Our escort, with Andy on her back, disappeared behind a hill. The rest of us stopped. Then, not seeing my son, I ran after her screaming, "Stop! Bring my child back!" Finally, the woman, carrying Andy, came back to us.

The border guards took us to their barracks. Much later, I was informed that there was an arrangement between the border guards and the peasant woman to capture everyone she took to the border. She was a traitor.

<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/survivorcentredvisualnarratives>