

WW2 Diaries 2

~ The following account of Emilia Coen and her family's lives are fiction, with the exception of some dates and events which are true. The rest is created life for her. I hope you enjoy reading! ~

September 11, 1935

Tonight was a night of hardship for myself and my family. The people they call Nazis, who are directed by Adolf Hitler, declared what they call racial laws. When we first heard that term we weren't sure what to think of it. Stuart and I have been discussing the topic with Isak while trying to keep Felicia and young Alberto away from it. Felicia is too soft-hearted to handle such things and Alberto, much too young.

November 3, 1935

It has been months since the "new racial laws" have come out, but until now, we have not understood them. I think that because not enough people knew the details of the laws was what moved the Nazis to publish them. The Nazis said that printing them in a German paper would do no good because the people in the Jewish community doesn't read those papers. So, they come to our family shop. This is what they had us print:

"Racial Laws include the following:

- No Jewish persons can become German citizens
- Jewish are forbade to marry or have extramarital relations with German citizens.
- These are to have the goal met for a pure Aryan race.

These new laws are going to affect the Jewish community greatly. They are going to separate us from the Germans politically, socially, and legally. They are going to make our lives so hard. Because the Nazis had our family business print these papers, we thought to make money off of them. Money we could put away and save. The Nazis had a different plan. They didn't pay us a penny and they didn't sell the papers for a profit either. They just threw them into the streets for people to pick up and read.

January 21, 1936

Bringing in the new year this year was different than any other. People were less festive, more worried about just being

outside on the streets. Even worried that some day their families would be separated by this new control over Germany.

April 7, 1936

Felicia has always done very well in school, but lately she has been failing. I ask her why, but she is quiet and doesn't wish to tell me why. I feel it is because she is having a hard time not being able to see all her German friends. This has been really hard on her too. I don't know what to do to help her through. It is hard to see my own daughter suffering so much, but this is going to get even harder on all of us. I can feel it.

December 18, 1936

This past year has been very hard for Stuart and Isak. They have to work all the time in the shop, and yet, we are still short on money. Money would help us right now. We have little food, and our only warmth comes when we have time to cut firewood.

The shop is bringing in so little money because there are no new stories to print, and those that are new, no one wants to hear about.

October 20, 1938

These past few years have been very troublesome for my family and our business. The Nazis have become a regular sight at our shop. They keep coming in and looking at what Stuart is printing, and also asking him to print more for them. When he can, he says no, but more than once they have made him print, with no profit, papers for them.

Other people we know have closed their businesses because it was too hard for them to run the store and protect their families. Protecting families is strange. Now we can't let our children go to school alone. A parent must take them there and also bring them home. It is hard to do, and if this family didn't have Isak, we would probably have to sell, or close, our store. Isak works so hard alongside his father and is such a blessing to us.

November 11, 1938

This is, well, very difficult for me to write. On November 9th-10th, the Nazis burned our Jewish synagogues, they destroyed so many businesses owned by Jewish peoples, including our business. They took away so many young men, and worst part is, they took my Isak. I don't know where they took him, but the

Nazis come rushing into the house and asked for the men who were over 17. They took Isak, but thankfully Stuart was in the shop at the time, so they don't have him too. The only thing that worries me is I haven't seen Stuart since those nights.

So many men are gone from the town it seems eerie. There have been no reports yet on how much damage was inflicted, but we expect news to come out soon.

Felicia was very upset when they took Isak away. She never told Isak once, but she loves him very much. She is such a sweet girl and her feelings run very deeply in her. Loosing Isak is going to be really [difficult] for her. I don't know if or when she'll fully recover.

Alberto, it seems, is too young to completely understand what happened as he hardly seems affected. He asks constantly where Isak is, but I don't have the heart to tell him the truth. Alberto's innocence is really bothering Felicia. She is so hurt she can't see that he is just too young to see everything happening.

These past couple of days have been very difficult. I hope Stuart comes home soon.

November 13, 1938

Now I know why my Stuart never came home. He was killed by the Nazis when they destroyed our shop. My Stuart is gone! Never to return! First I loose my dear boy Isak, then Felicia is practically gone in her state of mind, and now Stuart is gone! I loved him so much. He was my life!

I am feeling so very alone and afraid without Stuart. My family and all we have worked towards for our future disappeared in two nights! I found out the information about Stuart from a paper written by Germans who heard about the situation. They call the nights Kristallnacht (night of shattered glass). They say this because of all the businesses and synagogues that were destroyed. They said in the paper that 7,000 businesses were destroyed, 100 Jews were killed, and 20,000 men were sent to camps. As for the rest of use, we await our fates.

November 20, 1938

The Nazis have wasted no time in doing something with the rest of us who survived those awful nights. They came into my home and told me and my children to pack only necessary items. They never told us where we were being taken or what would happen to us once we got there. They took us to places they call ghettos. Places where the people are packed into small homes and forced to wear arm bands with a yellow star on them. The bands

are to show to all that we are Jewish. The ghettos are still in our town, but far from everything we know.

This move, to these conditions especially, has been rough on Felicia. Just when it looked like she was improving over the loss of her father and Isak, this is even harder on her. She is having such a hard time with all of this. Sometimes it seems she only keeps going on with life because she waits for the day Isak will come home. She got this idea from a Nazi soldier who said it to another woman, but in all reality, the possibility of my Isak coming home seems very unlikely. I wish with all my heart, but from the stories I have heard about the camps they sent our men to, Isak is as dead as his father. I hate to think this for they are my family, but all thoughts about getting Isak back hurt my heart so badly.

November 24, 1938

We have now been in our new "home" for two weeks. Our home is very small, which is in some ways a blessing, but only because we share the space with two other families. Some people share with six or seven.

In our home we have three mothers, and elderly grandfather, four small children, and one girl Felicia's age. These age combinations are good for everyone because we all have someone to do things with. Alberto stays with two girls and one boy his age. Felicia, and he new found friend, Lynne, take turns caring for Aruthar, while I have two mothers to talk to.

All of us who live in these places are forced to work in exchange for food. Felicia and Lynne work every other day at a clothing factory and when they aren't working, one is always home with Art. Art is too old to work so he receives rations of food, but we all put the food together and share. Myself, Joane, and Maria all work together at a local shoe plant. As for the young children, they have to stay home. This was very hard for us as mothers to do at first, but we soon found that they knew to stay inside and to be quiet. This was a relief on our hearts because to worry about them all day was very hard on us.

Food should be something we have enough of, but it's not. With less people we seem to have less food, especially after working all day. There aren't many elderly people left here because they died of starvation. They don't work, so they get small rations of food. We have probably kept Aruthar on this earth because we share food with him. We have also seen people our age and even children die because they were starved. These living circumstances are really unbelievable at times too.

We are overworked every day from 7:00 am to 6:30 pm each day except for Sunday when it's 11:00 am to 6:30. Almost

everyone works in different places too because there are so many of us. The work is hard, the buildings are cold, and people are always sick. You fear becoming sick every day and you put yourself nearer to death from the daily exhaustion. It is an odd life we now live.

December 19, 1940

This is the best Christmas we have had in the past three years! It's not yet Christmas, but Isak has returned home and is now living with us! I'll tell more about when he came home:

It was just the time of day when we all come home from work, and I was just starting supper. It's not very often that we get visitors in the ghetto so the knock on the door worried myself, Joane, and Maria. They took the children to the kitchen while I went to answer the door. When I opened the door, a dirty man stood there. He had a smile on his face like I had never seen before. I was puzzled, and until I heard him speak, did I know it was Isak. He said, "Mama! It's me! Don't you know your own son?" That was when I knew. I brought him to the kitchen and it was a joyous family reunion. After eating, he went to clean up. When he was clean he still didn't look like I remembered him being. Something happened to him while he was in the camp. His eyes were dull instead of full of life, yet filled with an air of all he must have seen. He was more muscular than I remember, and he has a strange mark on his left arm. He was carrying a stack of worn, dirty, and torn papers and he asked where his father was. At this Felicia broke into tears and it took me a few minutes to be able to tell him. For the next hour after Isak heard the news, he wept for his father. When he came to himself again, he showed me the papers he had. They were letters written to Stuart from Isak while he was in the camp. These are some of his letters:

Dear Papa,

I write to you because I don't know if I could tell Mama about the things I have seen and experienced. I have been in a large truck for very long now with no water and little food. I don't know how many days exactly or today's exact date, but it's too many to be away from you and Mama. The soldiers with all of us tell us that we are going to a place called Auschwitz-Birkenau, but they will us no more. This worries some of us, but others just seem to be living in a trance. Well, I must go.

Your devoted son,

Isak

Dear Papa,

The days are long and the work is hard. I hope you and mama have an easier life. I am fit, so the work is less of a burden, but it is still tearing at me little piece by little piece. I'll try to explain the work as I have seen it so far. They organize us into different kommandos. Some who had a profession in bricklaying build buildings. There are also electricians, blacksmiths, and others here too. The other kommandos are usually people unloading many things from trucks to rail cars. Once we carried 200 pound sacks of wheat and oats to barges on a river. The smaller and weaker people here have such problems. I don't understand this place at all.

Your devoted son,
Isak

Dear Papa,

I'll try to tell you more about this place now. We are packed in like sardines. We are underfed with poor food, and we are overworked. The cabins we sleep in have bunks fitted so close together that two men have trouble passing in the same spot. There are two men to one bed and the bunks are three beds high. The beds are planks of wood covered with a thin straw mat, each man has one blanket. The food is bread, soup, and a coffee substitute because the water here is undrinkable. The bread is like money for us too. We can trade for tobacco products, a spoon, paper and lead, and other small things. This is how I have the paper to write to you too. The soup is not very good and a person should try to be in the middle of the serving line because then you get the best mix of vegetables and broth. The work I already explained, but it is still eliminating us one by one.

I wish I could be home with you all in my own bed and have some of Mama's cooking. I miss you and long to be home.

Your devoted son,
Isak

Papa,

I am now in the infirmary because something got dropped on my foot and cut it badly. Before I could get to the infirmary I just let my foot be because too many people never came back out of the infirmary, and I was scared. My foot swelled so much that I couldn't remove my shoe. It bled so much that there was a paste of blood and mud in my shoe. Before entering the infirmary the doctor looked me over to see if I could be healed. I think that if I couldn't not be healed, they would have gassed me. Being in here has been good for me so far though. We can rest

most of the day in our beds, which we have all to ourselves (!), we can eat in bed, and we are actually somewhat clean here. This would be the place to be and all you have to do is keep yourself injured. The only problem is that you don't always get well here because they don't care for you as best they can.

My foot is getting better, but I think I'll still be here another week.

Your son,
Isak

Dearest Papa,

I am becoming very weary of being in this place. Yesterday we were all required to get a number tattooed onto our arm as a sign of identification in this place. We have to show our number now to get food, to be assigned to a kommando, and also to get into the infirmary when needed. There are also many more people here too. Many speak languages we don't know so there is confusion everywhere. We are all so very dirty now too. Most of us work in a coal mine all day and the thought of being clean is gone. It's cold out now and washing wastes body heat and energy, two things we don't have to spare. The newer arrivals, or so we "old folks" call them, still try to be as clean as possible. They will find out sooner or later not to try though. I wish to be home, Papa, with you and Mama, Felicia, and Alberto. I miss and love you all.

Your son,
Isak

Dear Papa,

I have been waiting for this day for some time. I apologize for my penmanship for I am in a truck going on a rough road. You may wonder why I'm on a truck, but I'm leaving Auschwitz-Birkenau! I don't understand why, but they have let about thirty of us go! We were in our work kommando mining coal and during the lunch break they put us onto the trucks. We have driving for quite a time and we are all anxious to get home. Hopefully I'll be home soon and then I can see you all again.

With love,
Isak

December 21, 1940

Isak is so very different. I have noticed that he misses his father a great deal, but he is also like a machine. He wakes up early, works hard all day, and then sleeps at night. There is no work for him to do other than chores around the house, so he

has redone our roof, fixed the kitchen table, and other small things. He is happy to be home though. He doesn't talk much about what he has seen, but from reading his letters, I don't blame him. I think it will be best for him to put it all behind him.