

The excerpt below is from my uncle Norbert Friedman's book. Together with his father and two uncles, my Uncle Norbert survived eleven concentration camps in three years during the Holocaust. These remarks coincide with name of his book "Sun Rays at Midnight." In his remarks, he is alluding to the good people who helped him get through the Holocaust as synonymous with the sunlight he found in the darkest times of midnight.

"Reb Mayer Katz came to our work camp in the summer of 1942 from the village of Pzeslow. Though he was small in size an aura of sweet quiet strength radiated from him. His gestures were delivered, his matter of speech, soft and reassuring. It did not take long for the other inmates to take note of him. He would, in the face of the most depressing events, offer hope and moral support; he would often quote from the Talmud."

Norbert Friedman related this personal story:

"There were hundreds of souls packed into each car. The car had four small, steel barred windows, one in each corner, hardly enough to provide ventilation. Desperate men were licking the salty condensation from the walls. At our end of the car we designed a system of rotation, so that each one could at least for a brief period of time stand by the window to revive himself.

The second night was chaotic. Hopeless; despondent men directed their frustration at each other. Two men took poison, their corpses were propped against the wall so as to take up less space. The third day of our voyage took us through German countryside where we could see people working in the fields, but no one paid heed to our anguished cries. The thirst and the stench, the heat and lack of air were becoming unbearable. Our lips were parched and our spirits totally deflated.

That afternoon the train stopped at the railroad station of a big larger town. Wehrmacht and SS troops were patrolling the station, and we also saw some army nurses. Feverish pleas of "wasser, wasser, water, water could be heard from all 24 cattle cars. Fate so willed that at the end of the car it was Reb Mayer Katz's turn to stand at the window facing the station. Miraculously one of the nurses heeded Reb Mayer Katz's plea and handed him a bottle of water. The men in the wagon all surged towards Reb Mayer. Before he could drink from the bottle to quench his torturous thirst, he turned slowly towards the inside of the cattle car, considering the unruly mob for a moment, while still holding the bottle outside the window. Then, without bringing the bottle close to his own face, he moved it to the mouth of the next man to him, and in his caring voice implored him; "drink, drink mein Kind, nur a Klein bisschen." "Take only a little sip, my child. And then he went on to the next person and so on. As if mesmerized, the men stopped pushing. Those close by obediently took one swallow or two. Even when the bottle was empty it was still being passed around. Human dignity and Sanity slowly returned, as by a miracle. There were no complaints, only weeping and sobbing.

We hung our heads in shame for our animalism and also in tribute to Reb Mayer's personal restraint and sacrifice.

We arrived at the Konzentration Lager, Flossenburg 24 hours later. The four days and three nights on the train seemed like a lifetime, as dissent into Dantean depths, ending in a victorious ascend back into man's dignity. All of our victory was the result of Reb Mayer's limitless love of his God, expressed by his caring for his fellow man.

Was Rob Mayer Katz Ha'kohain, One of the Lamed vov tzadikum? One of the 36 legendary saintly men whose righteous deeds sustain the universe?

His blessed soul was extinguished in the winter of 1944 in the Flossenburg camp. But the memory of him, his faith and his piety, served me as a beacon of hope in a then hopeless world and saw me through the abyss of despair. "God's rays of sunlight,"---- he showed me---"shining through the abyss of despair. " God's rays of sunlight"---he showed me ----"shining through the Midnight of mankind."