

# Camp Csillageröd – the story of Ilona Lendvai [1944 - 1945]

Her eight month as a prisoner in the Csillageröd fortification of Komarom.

*„We lived in Túskevár. We were four children. I was six when we lost our father. The Germans deported him in forty-four . The Roma called him Csuri, but his name was Istvan Lendvai. From there, from Komarom, they took my father, my grandfathers and my uncles to Germany and Dachau. Only an uncle on my mother’s side came back three years later. Since then the poor man has also died. Only he came back from all these families“*

Ilona Lendvai was born in 1938 into a family of sedentary Roma in Túskevár in Western Hungary. In 1944 she was deported with her whole family to the Csillageröd fortification of Komarom.

*„My father worked at a butcher’s with his younger and older brothers. He was a driver....In those times my grandfather had horses. Because, you know, all the Roma like us had horses. He travelled to markets, sold them, bought some others; he traded them. He had a big family, five daughters and three sons, thank God. Our family was big. In those times we lived in style, not like the other Roma who did not have anything.*

*They took us in October. For eight month. In the bar a peasant, a friend of my uncle told him: `Flee, old friend, because they will take you!“ But we did not have time to run away, because that night they came for us. They pulled us out of the beds. My mother had barely time to dress, and they took us away. There were some Hungarians who defended us. One was transported because he defended the Roma. He told them not to hurt the Roma, because they were working Roma. He told them to leave the Roma alone. So they took him, and he did not even come back again.“*

With her whole family Ilona was first taken to a regional camp in the provincial town of Devecser and from there finally to Komarom, from where all her male relatives were brought to Dachau.

*„We arrived in Komarom. They drove us like sheep. They brought corn stalks and spread them out on the ground, so our place was relatively clean, compared to what was there....*

*I had not seen so many corpses before in my life. There everyday we saw a crowd of corpses, children and elderly people as well. Lots of them starved to death. Those who talked back were shot in the head or beaten to death right away. They beat them until they died. But there were some guards, who felt sorry for the people. Sometimes they would throw us a piece of bread or they would not talk so rudely to us.“*

*„We could only go out into the courtyard when they distributed the food. The resourceful among us went there two or three times. They did not notice it because there were so many people. One family was given half a kilogram of bread. And coffee in the morning. Cabbage had been cut into pieces and boiled in salty water.*

*That was what they gave us, and carrots boiled the same way in salty water. And sometimes a few potatoes.*

*Some Beash brought food with them. They let them take it in. One of them had a pack of flour, the other had meat and fat. They had carried it with them on their backs. Once my aunt said to one of them: 'Please give me some grease!' But he did not, he put it aside. The people did not want to give food to one another.*

*I was the oldest child in the family. I had three smaller brothers and sisters. Once when I went out to get some food, the other Gypsies took the bread out of my hand. I said: 'I hope God will not save you and you will die from it, die from that bread, if you are able to steal something, that I wanted to give to my little brothers or sisters.' But he took it. And whether you believe it or not, he died, the one who took it from me.*

*The resourceful ones could feel good. The women went to the kitchen to help out cleaning potatoes, vegetables, carrots and to steal something so we could eat. My aunt even managed to get some grase. They prepared a soup for us. That was something! If they had cught them stealing, they would have beaten them to death..."*

*There was a woman from Nyarad and another one, who slept with the guards. Their lives were a little better. I am angry with them because I saw them hitting the others. They felf they were above us, that they could give orders. And they survived.*

Ilona Lendvai survived, returned to her home town, married and eventually raised five children. But she never forgot her poor father. Her father had served as a soldier in World War I, which he survived against all odds and died in Dachau at the age of 26.

*„The men were there for nine days. Then they separated us. Only the mothers with families and the children could stay together. Seven men. Father, my grandfathers and their sons. Only my uncle came home. They took them to Germany. That was the last time we saw them. My mother saved two girls who were our relatives. She gave them my sisters, and they pretended the children were theirs, so they survived. Nobody checked us. My dear father. They took him away and we never saw him again. My uncle saw him dead in Dachau. He recognised the body of my father. He said they were killed in gas chambers. They pushed them into the gas chambers and showered gas upon them. And the dead they put between rows of wood, one layer of corpses and one layer of wood and then they lit them. The burned the poor ones. 'Unfortunately this is what happened', my uncle told me many times, 'I saw what happened to your fathe!'"*

Lit: Janos Barsony and Agnes Daroczi (Eds.), Pharrajimos. The Fate of the Roma during the Holocaust, New York, Amsterdam, Brussels 2008; Gabor Bernath (Ed.), Roma Holocaust – Recollections of survivors, Budapest 2001.