

HELL  
Echoes  
the  
Ashes Of  
AUSCHWITZ

by  
Joel Edelman

with  
Clair E. Weldon

# **HELL Echoes the Ashes Of AUSCHWITZ**

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## Preface

Two and a half years ago, I was surprised when I was asked to collaborate on and promote this extraordinary autobiography of a man known as Joe the Barber. I had seen him around town many times and I had noticed he often wore a red coat and was very well-dressed.

When my assistance was requested, I spent a great many hours with Joe — visiting him in the privacy of his abode and asking some very personal questions. The answers served only to bring about more and more questions that became increasingly intimate; but they had to be asked — and answered — before I (and you, the reader) could have the missing pieces to complete this most puzzling life story.

I am a Christian and a man of the cloth. As such, after each interview, the Holy Spirit within me seemed to reveal to me the innermost secrets of Joe's life and the surrounding conditions. Slowly but surely, enough pieces were being found so that this puzzle could be completed. Each note from my pad added yet another piece to the jigsaw of information. Finally, I envisioned how the Providence of God fit into this story!

Although Joe is Jewish and I am a Christian, we found we could agree on at least one concept: that there definitely was a Providence of God working on behalf of Joe; and that this Providence wanted him to remain alive so that he could tell this story. Each day as I heard from his own voice of the suffering and inhuman treatment of the Jews, and of the circumstances he had lived amongst — of the screams of the concentration camp victims — of the smells of the corpses — of the daily orders called out by the Nazis toward Adolph Hitler's Final Solution — all of this time, my mind and my heart kept asking the same questions

over and over again: “How could this happen to mankind? Why had the Holocaust ever happened?”

Then my mind went back to the Jewish prophet Jeremiah, who had this inspiration from God:

*“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart ...”* (Jeremiah 17:9-10a)

Yes, the world finally cried out after the Nuremberg Trials after hearing the evidence of genocide of a human species, and they asked the same question: How could this happen on planet Earth to one race: the Jews? My candid opinion is that it is simply that God’s prophecy had to be fulfilled — and it was fulfilled by the 6,000,000 European Jews who died as a sacrifice to satan — who were thrown into the furnaces of Auschwitz. I believe that Hitler was a crazy, depraved man who had studied the occult and who had given his heart and soul to the spiritual ruler of darkness. Recent research of Hitler’s life seems to bear this out.

Hitler’s heart was indeed “desperately wicked” as God’s Word had stated. I humbly appreciate being chosen as a servant to help bring this story to the world that all of mankind might benefit from it and that both faiths — the Judaic and the Christian — may be strengthened by God’s prophecy being fulfilled by the fortieth anniversary of the Holocaust — of this dispensation of Grace!

Rev. Clair E. Weldon  
Evangelist, Youth on Fire for Christ  
P.O. Box 94, D.T.S. Omaha, NE 68101  
June 11, 1987

## Acknowledgment

I want to thank **Vincent Emmanuel**, the Italian immigrant band leader and my friend who introduced me to Joel Edelman. I also want to thank **Elaine M. Heath**, a Czechoslovakian lady who was my first typist; my secretary, **Lucy Boland**, who typed the manuscript; our friend, **Howard Berger**, our local continuity editor who prepared it for a publisher's acceptance; **Mike Beck**, an artist who has planned a hardback cover for future exposure; also a friend and employer, **L.H. Baker** of Advertising Service Company; and my friend, **Steve Idelman**, Chairman of the Board of Idelman Telemarketing, Inc.; and **Lou Chiganos**, manager of the same facility, for hiring me while I was writing the book, enabling me to feed my family.

Yes, Steve, as one of the initial twenty people you trained, I appreciate having earned the title of Your Anchor Man, **named by Lou!**

I would also like to thank my 80-year-old daddy, **Edward T. Weldon**, who gave me advice and encouragement, along with my brother, **Gary (Klutzy) the Clown** who gave me a job selling and recording commercials for **John Tynan** of Good News Radio 1420 AM in Omaha; Virginia, John's wife, for feeding me and getting me to work on time (most of the time) and **Renate Olhava**, a housewife, who lived in Germany during the time this story actually unfolded, for reading this manuscript and for her comments; and last, but not least, I want to thank the godfather of my son, little **Edward Arley Weldon**, "**Jolly Joe Martin**," who wrote our explosive foreword. Jolly Joe played Bill Grey in the Circle film ABC-TV movie "Amerika." **Thanks also to Paul Skoglund** for all the pictures.

Also, I want to thank **Andy Guthrie**, Bureau Chief of “Voice of America,” for at least taking some time with me upon hearing of a new book coming out and for requesting the information for a possible telephone interview when I went to see the **President of the United States, Ronald Reagan**, on September 24, 1986 here in Omaha!

## **A Comment**

“My family and I went to Germany to visit our ailing grandmother when the war broke out. Due to the politics, my family had to remain in Germany, and I lived there during the war.”

“My family, nor anyone we knew, knew of the atrocities going on, and as they were all citizens of that country, you have to take note as any type of government is responsible for its citizens, so are the citizens responsible (for) what the governments will do. From this, the world should learn that the citizens of all the governments should be actively involved in allowing the individual governments to do only what their conscience would allow them to do.”

“Then, and only then, will the world be united under God’s loving eyes.”

**Renate Olhava**  
Logan, Iowa

## Foreword

During my appearance in ABC-TV's "Amerika," I became very aware of what it means to try to survive under a violent, military power, and reading Joel Edelman's account of his experiences, I felt that I was again under that vicious power — only this time, it was real — not a movie! This is, without a doubt, the most vivid and personal account ever written of those terrible days that we must never let happen again!

**Jolly Joe Martin**  
(Bill Grey in the  
ABC-TV Circle Film  
"Amerika")

## Dedication

I dedicate this, my first book, to my wife, Betty Lue, and to my son, Eddie Arley, for their understanding of my being away from home while writing this book — and for the cups of coffee that kept me awake at night meeting new friends.

... and to all the members of minority races who have crossed my path throughout the years — and who have befriended me — and who've shown me that “someone out there cares for his fellow man”

... and to the families of the 6,000,000 European Jews who became ashes in the fiery furnaces of Auschwitz during the Holocaust —and to the remaining 10 percent who are still living with their private memories of that hell ...

... and to my friend — who Omaha knows only as ‘Joe the Barber’ — who lived and breathed every terrifying moment of this story while death was breathing down his neck and with the Grim Reaper always at his door...

... it is to these people that I dedicate this true autobiography of Joel Edelman, a name to remember!

Clair E. Weldon



# One

In September 1939, the German army invaded Poland. On the first day, the Germans entered the homes of the people there, yelling, “Jewish people out!” That was our initial insight into the diabolical German soldiers who were to make a huge dent in history at the expense of millions of innocent people.

They took my classmates out, loaded them into trucks, took them to a farm and made them dig a large hole. The boys were shot and buried there. A few days later, my brother-in-law asked me to go to a store and get him a pack of cigarettes. I was never to see my family, except for my brother, again.

While on this seemingly simple errand, I heard someone yell, “Halt! — or I’ll shoot you! Hey, come here!” It was the Gestapo. I was hit on the head with a billy club, put into a truck with about twenty other twelve-year-olds and forced to sit there in the dark until the trucks were all filled. Soon, the cavalcade was rolling — en route to Germany and an odyssey that could only have been devised by the most fiendish minds in Hell.

When the truck was about forty miles from Auschwitz, Poland, the Germans opened the back of the truck and had us march in the light of the new day from the town in which we had stopped. We were led to a large brick house, which would be guarded by a pair of soldiers all night to ensure that none of the boys would be able to escape.

When the new morning dawned, we were taken from the house. One by one, the population of the house diminished. Nineteen boys had been led out when the Germans came and took me with them. We were taken to various sections of Germany to build concentration

camps. Camps such as Auschwitz, Burboldt, Golds, Goldmussel, Swaburn, Nedheille, Tollbrick and Chevackis were beginning to take form.

History records that twenty-one to twenty-five concentration camps were constructed. I remember the camp at Auschwitz, a site that specialized in the extermination of women and children. Infants from the age of two weeks old were housed in separate areas of the facility.

The German soldiers were trained to ask the women, the children and the babies if they would like to take a bath. If and when volunteers accepted the offer, they would be shoved into a room with very high ceilings and they were told to remove all of their clothing. Water, they were told, would soon be forthcoming from the waterpipes which led to the showerheads. But instead of cool, refreshing water, only Zyklon B gas was emitted. The deadly fumes filled the room, killing all of its inhabitants. Hundreds of people each day believed the take-a-bath lie and died. And this was to be only the first of many lies the Germans were to tell us in a never-ending search for new ways to exterminate the Jewish race.

Week after terrifying week, more and more Jews were corralled from the furthest reaches of the area and brought to Auschwitz. Week after week, the Germans told the newcomers the same lies about the showers. And each week, the inevitable result: untold masses of Jews being exterminated in those fatal showers. This knowledge, however, was gained only later. No one in the camp was aware of the abomination that was taking place in the bath house with the high ceiling.

I had been in Auschwitz for about four years when the order came for us to get into the trucks. The sixteen-year-old boys were all taken to Buchenwald,

Germany to work on construction crews. I was among them.

Not everyone who made that forty-mile journey, however, was to return six months later. We were given only one piece of bread to eat each day, and we were generally treated like swine. The lack of sufficient food and the heinous treatment killed many of my co-workers. Some people thought that they were the lucky ones — the ones who had died — because their torture was over. Ours was just beginning.

The young men who survived were eventually loaded into the trucks again for the return trip to Auschwitz. The unspeakable ordeal left me feeling like “a living dead man” by the time we were headed back.

Mistakenly thinking that perhaps the worst was now behind us, we bounced along the back of the trucks for forty miles. Little did we know that Adolf Hitler, along with Himmler and his henchmen, were planning to devise even more atrocities. It is inconceivable that these plans could have had their genesis and their conception in any place other than Hell.

The S.S. empire was a devilish organization which utilized the concentration camps in conjunction with other enterprises to form a very lucrative business enterprise. The Germans were able to produce everything from army uniforms to soap, often using parts of the bodies of their Jewish victims to make this wide variety of products.

One of my jobs at the camp in Auschwitz was to turn the revolving tumbler that acted as a crank attached to a metal bar. Fat Jewish men were placed into the revolving cylinder. Flames attacked these obese men from both sides, burning the victims and killing them. Once the corpses were sufficiently baked in the ovens, fat would begin to drip from the bodies into barrels

below that were patiently waiting for the necessary ingredients contained in the fat.

The Nazis needed a minimum of one fat man per day to reach their quota on barrels of fat. When they had accumulated a satisfactory number of barrels, we loaded them onto trucks and traveled with them back to Buchenwald, where the fat from the heavyweight victims would be used in the manufacture of Rivf No. 20 soap, a most popular brand of its day in Germany.

This having been accomplished, my colleagues and I would be dragged, kicked and prodded back into the trucks like so much cattle for the forty-mile trip back to Auschwitz, where the incredible cycle of events would start once again in the never-ending quest for more soap.

There, we would resume the job of working the Hell ovens of Auschwitz, a chore not unlike shoveling coal for the smoldering flames of Hades.

## Two

The Germans were becoming so adept at killing the Jews that a new problem arose for the Third Reich: how to dispose of all the bodies. One method that they used was to have the prisoners dig a huge hole. Road graters would cover up the dead bodies of the gassed victims. To avoid yelling, they decided not to shoot their victims, but rather to simply cover them up with giant dunes of sand.

One time, I traveled to Auschwitz and then was sent to Nedenheusel by train. There, I saw the German soldiers order masses of young people out of the barracks early in the morning to dig a hole perhaps 200 feet long and 50 feet wide, working from midnight until 3 a.m. Most of these diggers did not know that they would be digging graves for some of the best looking girls in the world.

After the hole had been dug, the Germans had put wood and spilled gasoline on the top of the hole to cover it up. Then, once all preparations had been completed, they would yell out a lie, “Come on out! You’ll be free! The war’s over!”

The beautiful young maidens had been gathered from many nations surrounding the area: Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. They were ordered to strip and march around the big hole that had been dug the previous night and smoothed over by the road graters.

As they walked out of the concentration camp into the light of the moon, they were instructed by the soldiers to walk single-file around the hole fifteen or twenty times. Then, the soldiers told them to wait for the new clothes that would be brought to them. This lie would prove to

be the final one these beautiful young ladies would ever have to hear.

When the soldiers were inside the building, they unleashed at least two hundred German Shepherd killer dogs, as someone lit the gasoline. The girls, shocked by the sudden appearance of the dogs, were all forced back into the burning hole and barbecued. Almost mercifully, I was transported from that camp, where the atrocities seemed even worse than before. Almost daily, I would think that the viciousness had reached its apex, but just as often, I would be surprised and disgusted to see something more horrible the next day.

I was moved to Fulbrick, Germany, where conditions were about the same as elsewhere. After two months of life in this camp, many of the workers, several of whom had been big, strong, healthy men, were coming down with a variety of illnesses such as anemia, stomach problems, influenza and the like.

Much of the time, if you had somehow avoided the diseases the Nazis would take more direct measures to ensure your lack of health. Some people had asked for new shoes, as theirs had worn out. The Germans would customarily fit them with shoes that were too small, and when the men complained, the Germans would obligingly ask them to step into the back room for a proper fitting.

There, the shoes would be removed and the unshod Jew would stick out his foot for a sizing. The Nazis would then cut off the toes of these victims and then make them put the shoes back on — still bleeding.

“Now don’t you tell anybody or you will end up like the rest of the disobeyers,” they were warned.

All of this disease and brutality added up. We would go to wash our faces in the morning when we arose to see thousands of bodies of our colleagues — all naked.

This became an epidemic. But, as always. we were not there for a very long time, and soon the order was given for the trucks to put down the end gates again, and the Germans would load us up, kicking and screaming, for the move to yet another facility.

Yes, this was the hell on Earth that I witnessed, as ninety percent of the Jewish race was exterminated in Poland. I am one of the ten percent who somehow, by the grace of God, escaped. I thank God for that.

## Three

The Nazis, in their unending quest for new ways in which to exterminate the young Jewish girls, were becoming more and more innovative. The Nazi lies continued seemingly without end in Auschwitz. The falsehoods were manifested for a variety of reasons.

The German soldiers were not allowed to have sex with the Jewish girls, because Hitler wanted to keep the “superior Aryan race” as pure as possible by avoiding cross-breeding, especially with the Jews. However, many of the soldiers decided to forget about this regulation, especially whenever a particularly beautiful teenage girl was captured.

Thus, as with any unpopular rule, a way of bypassing it was found. All it took to avoid compliance was to have a friend who was a doctor. If the girl became pregnant, the doctor would decide to perform “a medical experiment” on the victim, “for the advancement of science.”

In the girl’s third or fourth month of pregnancy, the alleged experiment would take place. I saw what they did with my own eyes, and I shall never forget the day it happened — and I shall forever curse that day!

A man came in with a surgical mask on and a white surgeon’s outfit, acting as if he were going to examine the beautiful, seventeen-year-old Jewish girl, whose only “crime” had been to submit to the rape of her German captor. The examination did not seem to be a strange turn of events to any of us, since any pregnant woman should be periodically examined by a qualified physician.

But then he suddenly brandished a bayonet, or perhaps some type of knife, and literally cut the girl’s stomach, much like the performance of a Caesarian



section would be performed today. Immediately, the blood gushed forward in several directions at once, as the girl — who had not been anesthetized — screamed and gasped for breath. Finally, mercifully, the flow of blood stopped, and one more dead Jewish teenager dropped to the floor. And in that same instant, one more German officer's lust was covered up, and he was free to do it over and over again.

The lie? Oh, yes, well the Nazi doctor explained that the operation was performed because scientists needed to know how a fetus was formed while still in the womb. "For the advancement of medical and scientific knowledge," an innocent woman and fetus were destroyed, according to the doctor, while the real reason was that some German soldier had wanted to have sex with the attractive young girl four months previously.

But the lies were not reserved only for the teenage girls. Even younger children fell victim to the schemes of the Nazi soldiers as well. Under orders from Adolf Hitler, officers manned about a hundred trucks, equipped with loudspeakers, and invited the young children out to see the camps, with the promise of giving them candy, chocolate, milk, rice — whatever it took to bribe them into coming.

However, when the children arrived at the camp, they were dumped into the hellish flames of fire in the oven — and burned alive!

This went on incessantly, twenty-four hours each day, up until the time that the lively young children had been finally converted into nothing more than ashes. And to this very day, whenever I look at my left arm and see the tattoo of number 16901-B, which was my prisoner number, I can still see the children and I can still hear their screams — the futile screams as “Hell echoes the ashes of Auschwitz.”

That was more than forty years ago, but the horrible memory still lives today in my mind as well as in the minds of the others who heard those horrid screams from those helpless children who had only wanted a piece of candy.



Joel Edelman shows his prison number tattoo, 16901-B.

## Four

Sometimes the Germans opted for working the children to death, rather than burning them immediately. The youngsters were placed into bondage and assigned to make beds, clean the living quarters, scrub the floors and wash the dishes for the army. They were treated as slaves, as the Nazis were apparently oblivious to the fact that these were only seven, eight and nine-year-old children.

And while the boys and girls were busy cleaning up after the soldiers, that left the Nazis plenty of time to make some money from the corpses of their victims. One of the best known methods of this was to make gloves, umbrellas, and tanned lampshades from the skin of the Jewish prisoners.

But the memories still linger. Memories of — unbelievably — thousands of men and women — all dead! The Germans accomplished this by pumping poison gas onto the trains that were transporting us from town to town. By the time that the train pulled into the next station, there were no passengers who were capable of getting off.

As before, the bodies of the most corpulent men were kept to make more soap in Buchenwald. I kept turning that demonic tumbler during much of my time in the camps. The fat kept on dripping into the barrels, on and on, endlessly.

The monotony ended when we were once again moved. We were sent several times to work on construction sites. There, we were rationed one piece of bread each day, but periodically they would augment our diets with some spinach and a cookie and some water —

just enough to keep us alive and working more gruelish hours for their benefit. We were fed just barely enough to give us the energy to pinch ourselves and make sure that we were still among the living.

Following the construction work, we were taken back to Nedenheusel to work on the construction of airplanes for the Luftwaffe Air Force. We were riveting on the metal framework, filling our quota of 200 to 250 planes per day. We filled that quota, somehow, each of the hundred days that we were there. Then, we were given our next assignment.

My comrades and I were told to work on building Adolf Hitler's pride and joy: the Luftwaffe. It was an immensely unsuccessful venture, as not even one airplane was ever finished. Interminable delays on delivery of wheels, motors and a wide diversification of other parts eventually turned into no delivery at all for the necessary parts.

From our point of view, however, this was one of the most wonderful times, as we were finally being fed three times a day, with a new ration of a couple of potatoes along with some dark brown bread and water.

The German farmers were bringing the potatoes for the Air Force, so that they could keep us alive long enough to be of some use to them — so that we could try to make more and more of their planes, which in turn would be used to kill more and more of the Allied Troops that were coming to help us.

A couple of years later, as strange as it may seem, I was to become one of the people bringing these potatoes. But for the time being, I was just glad to see some real food.

Obviously, working in such jobs was one of the most sought after positions in the concentration camps. Aside from the benefits of more and better food, the Nazis would

omit you from the list of prisoners to be killed if they thought that they could get some useful work out of you.

Thus, even though I was a barber by trade, I informed my captors that I was a metal worker. This appeared to be the perfect vocation for me to adopt. But my enemies would not simply accept a prisoner's word for what he was capable of doing. When I professed to have this ability, I was orally tested by one of the German officers, who opened the interrogation by asking me, "Joe, how do you cut your metal?"

I used all of my resources in trying to pass this most important examination. I called upon all of the times I had seen metal workers doing their jobs, when I was but a child in my native Poland.

"It depends on how many millimeters you want to be cut from the metal," I answered.

"Two inches," he said. Then he proceeded to pick up a piece of metal and place it into the vice grip in a perpendicular position. He took a metal saw and cut off two inches by measuring the metal bar and marking a spot at the two-inch mark.

After his exhibition, he looked me right in the eye and asked, "How would you do this?" He had said it with a devilish grin, as if he didn't believe I was a metal worker and that I was deceiving him in order to lengthen my life expectancy.

I showed him how I would have cut the metal one quarter of an inch higher than he had done. "How come you cut it off a quarter-inch higher than where the spot is?" he asked.

"Why?" I repeated in half-mocking tones. "Because if you cut it straight where the spot is, it would be very rough and not smooth enough to use; so you take this file and file it off another quarter inch to where the spot is marked."

“Why do you do it that way?” he asked.

At this point, I became very determined to extinguish any doubts that he still may have had as to my authenticity. I had established in my own mind that I would not allow any questions to expose the fact that I was actually an imposter who was simply acting out a role of a metal worker. I knew that if I could persuade this officer that I had vast amounts of experience, I would be assigned to one of the construction crews in a concentration camp and that “expertise” and that “knowledge” would spare my life — at least temporarily!

So I looked directly into his eyes, trying to display the full authority and security in my knowledge and ability that a career metal worker would have shown to him and I explained a variety of techniques that I had seen used. This knowledge came in very handy, and I once again went over the cutting and filing maneuver to “make it smooth and look nice and fit perfect,” I told him. He shook his head, as if in doubt, but took my number and I was soon assigned to one of the Nazi construction projects.

## Five

In September of 1942, I was once again transported back to my native Poland — to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. Upon arrival there, I was told that I would again assume the job of turning the terrible tumbler for the oven that baked the obese Jewish men for the makings of Rivf Soap No. 20.

It was during my stay here that God once again made Himself manifest to me. While we were going through the unspeakable torment in the camps, God was still blessing us in many ways. He showed me that one member of my immediate family was still alive, although I had long ago believed them all to have been killed.

Across the camp, I recognized the familiar countenance of my brother, Itzhak Edelman, who was one of the most famous violinists in the world at that time. My brother had played concerts all over Europe for statesmen and nobility, and was always asked to play for the President of Poland at the New Years Day celebration.

When I first saw him, I was filled with a combination of elation and surprise, and I ran across the compound and said, “Hi, brother, I’m so glad to see you!” And we sat and reminisced, expressing our mutual joy and shock that our brother was still among the living. But my brother’s fame was to be his undoing.

Someone in the camp noticed him and shouted, “Hey, don’t I know you? Aren’t you the famous concert violinist, Itzhak Edelman of Poland?”

My brother looked at me with a surprised expression. He did not know whether this was simple admiration of a talented personality, a show of applause from a fan or a premonition of something that was to be fatal for him. As

it ended up, he thought this was a foreboding of his demise: a sign that his work here on Earth was coming to an abrupt end. We were both virtually sure that this would, indeed, be the last year that we would see each other, but we were also thankful for the opportunity to see the other brother one final time. At the same time, I was sure that I had been somehow chosen to tell this true story.

But in response to the question of his identity, my brother simply shook his head, denying the fact that he was the celebrity that the man thought he was. In a split second, Itzchak turned down the acclaim and notoriety that had taken him a lifetime to earn.

You see, as the son of a Polish mother and a Jewish father, and with the trade of a concert violinist, which could be of no use to the enemy, my brother thought that there would be no use for his very polished talents, and the Nazis would almost assuredly kill him immediately. Even if the Nazis would enjoy listening to the most beautiful tones that he could coerce out of a violin, he felt that he would be a traitor both to his Polish ancestry and to his Jewish heritage to entertain the very people who were busily and demonically exterminating his people.

And so, my brother simply shook his head, and said, “No, I am not who you think I am!”

If Itzchak had a trade such as a carpenter, as our father had been, or a metal worker, as I was claiming to be, he felt that the Nazis would permit him to live a little bit longer. But, being a concert violinist, he was sure that he would become just another number in the crematory ovens of Auschwitz.

But, when his true identity did indeed become known, Itzchak Edelman was told that he was to perform one last concert — the one that was to be his greatest, the time that he would reach the pinnacle of success and achievement. My brother was to play for



some German VIP's, some generals, their wives and guests and some other important members of the Nazi party.

He explained that it would take him a couple of months of preparation to go through the camp and find suitable back-up musicians, for practice and for all of the things that go into setting up a successful concert. For several weeks, he was given free rein to go all over the grounds in search of the best people to play with him. In addition, he spent much time composing and writing new songs for the concert he was to perform on Christmas Day.

He finally found several musicians who were scheduled to die almost immediately. They gratefully accepted the offer, which gave them two more months of existence on this Earth, and two more months of wishing and hoping that the satanic genocide would end. For the next sixty days, these Jews were allowed to live and practice their music because they would be of use to Adolf Hitler's Nazis.

Therefore, the concert appearance allowed my brother and perhaps some fifty other people an additional sixty days of existence on Earth. I recall that the Christmas concert was not the traditional music that one would usually associate with the Yuletide season. There were no carols; there were no references to reindeer or fat, jolly men in red and white outfits; there was nothing concerning sleigh rides or the giving of presents or evergreen trees.

In lieu of these traditional themes, the concert took on a much more classical posture. The religious music was omitted and the classical score was done in full orchestration, and upon completion of the scores, my brother would systematically shred the compositions into tiny, illegible pieces in order to ensure that no one could steal what he had created.

Itzhak refused to permit that concert to ever be reproduced, and took the only means he had of making sure that it would be the one and only time that his Christmas concert for the Nazis would be taking place. Although he had performed for the nobility and statesmen of several European countries, my brother refused to prostitute his music by placing it on the commercial music market.

Prior to the Christmas concert, in the early evening of December 25, 1942, the Germans served the prisoners our only “Christmas present,” a tiny piece of horse meat, with each portion being able to be consumed in one gulp. This was a rare treat, however, in honor of the upcoming concert.

And so, the concert was an ultimate success. The S.S. men and the Nazi officers and other military personnel cheered and applauded and gave the performers a standing ovation. The German officers were so impressed with the abilities demonstrated by their Jewish prisoners that the group was ordered to have yet another concert for the New Year. So none of us had to go through the torment of hearing the Nazis call out our names that night or go to the ovens of the concentration camp in Auschwitz. We were given another reprieve to prepare for the New Years Day concert, in which we were once again to entertain our captors and their friends and associates.

And so, my brother, Itzhak Edelman, the famous European concert violinist, was to play his ultimate concert before this assemblage on New Years Day of 1943. He felt, though, that he was not really playing and composing the music just for our enemies, but rather that he was playing to demonstrate the torment, the horror and the troubles of his people — the Jewish race.

The concert lasted about an hour or so, with the audience sitting in admiration of the marvelous talents being displayed by the fifty-piece orchestra before them. And then, with the determination and authority of a conductor, he motioned for the orchestra to be silent and he turned to face the audience — the audience that was destined to be the last one to hear him — and he searched out my face. He looked so sad.

He announced, “I’m going to play this solo for myself!”

And into that one number, my brother concentrated all of his God-given abilities and all of the talent that had been stored up in a reservoir of musical ability, and the final result was the most melodic assemblage of notes I have ever heard from a violin. And it became increasingly evident to me that my brother was not really playing for himself, as he had said, but that he was playing for his people and for God.

The solo was actually a musical prayer to the Lord to plead for the extinction of the madness of Adolf Hitler’s regime; it was a plea for the exodus of the Jews to freedom from the shackles of their Nazi captors.

While he was playing this solo, I noticed a German officer seated near me, eyeing his wife suspiciously. A group of their friends were with them, and when the officer looked at his wife, he saw tears streaming down her cheeks at the beauty and the emotion of the music.

At the conclusion, the entire audience rose in unison and gave Itzhak Edelman his final standing ovation. As the listeners commenced to settle down, I looked at the officer again, and hate — an awful, ugly hate as I had never seen in human eyes before — filled his entire being. I felt that it was a hate caused by jealousy as he realized that even with all of his prestige and authority he could not move the emotions of his wife in the same

way that some Jewish prisoner in a grey, striped prison outfit could move her.

Or, perhaps, he was just looking for an excuse to kill a Jew, a result of the brainwashing of Hitler's troops; we will never know, but he slowly unclipped his pistol from its holder, placed his finger over the trigger, aimed directly at the back of my brother's head and shot him.

Itzhak immediately fell dead as a shocked audience sat in disbelief. My brother's violin, the instrument with which he had made so much beautiful music, fell with him. These two creations — one of God and the other of man — the two instruments that had been used as one in such a powerful manner, both lay prone together.

It was at that point that an unprecedented event took place. The German officer's wife looked at her husband — perhaps for the very first time she REALLY looked at her husband — and started crying hysterically.

“Why did you do it?” she asked.

No answer came, but instead the lady assaulted her spouse. She dug her fingernails deeply into his skin and ripped and scratched his face so severely that blood began to flow. She had attacked the killer of one of her idols, the famous concert violinist, Itzhak Edelman, with incredible intensity. And so, they walked away in anger and silence from the auditorium.

The entire sequence of events upset me terribly. As my only brother lay dead in front of me, I could only think that this was an act of God once again. I felt that God had saved him from becoming another victim of the crematorium so that he could have a proper burial place in the ground.

Some of the Jewish prisoners and the other members of the orchestra dug the hole and placed my brother into it in his grey striped prison outfit. And to this day, I still thank God that he would not permit my brother's body to become only ashes in the ovens of Auschwitz.

## Six

The only thing worse than being trucked from one concentration camp to the next was walking from one to the other, and finally, we found ourselves without transportation. We were instructed to keep marching at a steady pace, night and day. In an attempt to keep us marching briskly, the Germans would walk behind us, shooting automatic weapons directly behind us. If we slowed down, we were shot. Some couldn't make it. They dropped like flies.

At this point, the Germans came up with a new idea. They decided that leaving a uniform on a dead prisoner was wasteful, so when they shot one of the stragglers, they would take the uniforms off, discard them and put on the clothes of the slain Jew. Presumably, they felt that the war was finally coming to a standstill.

It was during this march that I met and befriended a gypsy foreman named Hans Frantz, who had come from some other camp. Hans and I trusted each other and at one point, I asked him to speak to a German soldier in his native tongue to see if the officer wanted a shave. I told him that I was an experienced barber, and would perform the task for him.

The soldier enthusiastically said he would like very much to have a shave from a good barber, as it had been quite a while since his last one. Hans looked over toward me and yelled, "Joel, come down here, you want to shave him?"

"Yes," I said, "but wait a few minutes and I'll be there." I had to stall long enough to find a razor and soap and brushes and I borrowed a room. So, I finally had enough courage and sufficient equipment to shave

him. But a not completely unexpected problem occurred as soon as I found myself standing over the German soldier with a razor in my hand.

For an instant, my true feelings of having a desire to cut his throat came over me. After all, he was a German and the bitterness within my heart — God help me — was still there because of the way in which his people had treated my people. But then I realized that he personally had not harmed me, and as it turned out, he was a grateful gentleman. He offered me a mark, the German equivalent of a dollar, but I said, “No, I don’t want anything. But if you insist, I could sure use a piece of bread.”

He said, “Oh, yes,” and slowly reached into his pack.

Suddenly, I got very nervous. I was not sure if I had said what I thought I had said in his language, as I wasn’t extremely fluent, and perhaps I had insulted him by my refusal of his gratuity. In either case, I felt sure that his hand would come out of his pack with a gun — a gun that would shoot me and end my existence.

My worrying was all in vain, however, as he removed a half-loaf of black bread and gave it to me. When the other Germans heard about this, that Hans’ friend was a good barber, eight more Germans came to me that day and got shaved. Each one gave me a half-loaf of black bread, so I had plenty to share with my closest friends who were marching with me to Nedenheusel.

My renown as a barber was to save my life a little while later. We were finally marching into the city of Bugenboldt in the summer. We had been marching day and night for what seemed to be an eternity. The German officer in charge was swimming in a lake, and Hans suggested I take my razor and brush and soap and offer to shave him. As I proceeded toward the lake to talk with him, a very familiar tone from a German soldier yelled, “Halt, where are you going?”

I told him that I was going to shave the commanding officer, but I was shaking in my boots, as all he could see was that I was approaching an unarmed German with a razor. Just at this time, though, the colony started marching, and another officer said, "Let him go; that's our barber!" He let me go.



## Seven

Whenever the Germans occupied a town, they would install a curfew of six o'clock. No residents were able to be outside after that time. The Germans used teenage troops that had been trained by the military to patrol and enforce the curfew. These youngsters were armed with pistols, although they were no older than our Boy Scouts.

Sometime after the shaving incident, Hans and I found ourselves walking alone looking for a hiding place, as the curfew was quickly approaching. We had traversed some eleven or twelve kilometers that day, when suddenly, we saw what later proved to be an illusion.

There in front of us were two men, one with what appeared to be a shotgun, which later was found to be only a piece of metal on the end of a cane. We were both filled with trepidation as one of them approached and asked, with a French accent, "Monsieur, how are you?"

It happened that they were very friendly and gave us some uniforms, of a sort. I was given a blouse and a skirt to wear, in order to conceal my true identity, and in my new disguise, Hans and I continued on our trek.

We arrived in a little German hamlet and knocked on one of the doors. An old woman and a young fellow came out, and I inquired if we would be able to come in and get one night's lodging.

"No, nein!" she cried in German. "Go, or I'll call the police," and she closed the door. But the young man soon opened the door, and I said, "You see here that I've got clippers, razors, and soap, and I'll give you the whole lot of them for a night's lodging."

He winked at me out of the corner of his eye, and turned to me and whispered, "Wait until this old lady goes to sleep, and then I'll let you in."

We waited and waited and finally he came and opened the door to the pig stall. Hans and I were ready to bed down for the night, but I knew that one of us should stand guard at all times.

"Do you want to sleep first?" I asked my gypsy friend, "Or do you want me to sleep first? Somebody has got to be awake and watch," I suggested.

So, Hans decided that he would be the first to sleep, "I will watch until midnight, and if someone should knock at this door, I'll be standing behind it and you open the door. I'll grab him from behind and have no choice but to kill him with a hammer. Otherwise, he'll kill us — if it's a soldier or the police," I said.

And so, at midnight, I awoke Hans from his sound sleep and we exchanged places.

Although Hans had said, "Okay, I'll watch it now," I found that I could not sleep, because I didn't really trust him to do his job; and after all, my life was on the line. My lack of faith in Hans turned out to be well-deserved, and when he began to snooze, I had to slap him awake.

This caused a rather heated discussion, with seriously harsh words coming from my mouth, after which Hans conceded, and said, "Okay, I promise not to sleep anymore until you wake up." He remained on guard until, if I recall correctly, about five o'clock in the morning.

It was at that time that the same young fellow who had let us in originally came in with two potatoes for each of us. I offered to work for him without monetary remuneration, saying, "I can work for you and I'll only need three or even two potatoes. I don't want any pay — nothing. Only something to eat, just some potatoes."

“No, nein,” he said, “The old lady found out you were here. Get out of here quick or I’ll be in serious trouble for trying to help another human being.”

And so it was to be. Hans and I walked out into the streets. We had not gotten very far at all, when all of a sudden, somebody came up behind me and grabbed me. Fear —bone-chilling, unspeakable fear — came over me, and I became stiff as a corpse. For many seconds, I did not even move a muscle. I don’t know if it was out of fear for moving or whether I was frozen with fright, but I stood completely still. Then a hand came around me and it grabbed my neck and also Hans’ neck.

Yes, there was the familiar military ring in the air, as the voice uttered a command of “Halt!” Death could not be far away now, but it seemed so unfair. “Oh, oh, no, no. Now we will get killed; and after all we’ve been through,” I thought to myself. “After the concentration camps and being halfway starved to death. No, no,” I kept begging under my breath.

But God blessed me, I think, in sparing my life so that I could tell this true story to this generation of people. It was all part of His preconceived plan and He instrumented in His providence for the man who grabbed me to be the mayor of the town, a man of full authority. He was just the man needed to provide for our protection and safety within the town.

And finally, we made our escape from the horrible struggles of the most fiendish schemes of Himmler’s S.S. empire and from the hellish thoughts and ideas of Adolf Hitler’s crazed and hating ways of my people, the Jewish race.

We confided in the mayor and told him where we had come from and what we had been through and he promised to help us. “Now this is what you’ve got to do: there’s Nazis in that church over there,” he said

pointing. “Lots of them. You’re going to cook potatoes twice a day and deliver them to the soldiers,” he added.

“Now wait a minute,” I complained. “I don’t have papers or anything. I might get shot.”

So he took us both into his office and gave us papers, saying, “You both work for the city — starting today.” Then he told us we were to start cooking potatoes at 4 a.m. and deliver them to the soldiers twice a day.

One day, though, while delivering the potatoes, my identity was discovered. As I entered, one soldier motioned for me to come over to him, and I did. “Okay, what do you want?” I queried.

“Hi, you know what I want,” he answered. “What’s that you’ve got on your arm?”

Somehow he had found out about the concentration camp identification number tattooed onto my arm. “You’d better cover up this number,” he warned.

I was amazed that he didn’t just kill me, but I was in for more surprises. “Come here. Here’s a little pistol. If somebody catches you, shoot them. And don’t tell anybody that I gave you a pistol. Remember what you’ve gone through and that will be enough. The war is about over and I want you to live.” Those words will forever live in my mind.

## **Eight**

The following Friday at 4 a.m., as I was about to start my potato run, I noticed a group of German farmers on a hill nearby. I asked them what the big attraction was and one of them answered, saying, “Can’t you see those American tanks that are approaching?”

I threw down the potatoes and stopped the first American tank by waving my hands in a ‘surrender’ motion. A soldier came out of the tank with a machine gun in his hands, asking me what I wanted. I explained that I needed someone to interpret for us, and a Polish-American, Lieutenant Kennedy, from Chicago came out and invited me into his tank.

Kennedy asked me how many German soldiers were in the area, and I told him that many of them were in the church. When he had gotten sufficient information from me on the local German force, he turned the loudspeaker over to me and had me order the Germans to come out with their hands over their heads.

They did so, and Lieutenant Kennedy was called in on his walkie-talkie and he issued the order for more backup troops, machine guns and trucks to surround the prisoners. The trucks came and the Germans were loaded into them. But as the Germans were being hauled away, I noticed the one who had saved me and given me the gun. I saw my opportunity to return the favor.

I told Lieutenant Kennedy that I had to ask this German some questions to get some more information from him. “What kind of questions?” he wanted to know. I told him that I had to do that in private, so that we could sit together and talk.

The German told me that some more Gestapo were in the area. Then I looked him directly in the eye and asked, "Are they still in the church?"

"I can't answer that," he replied.

"Okay, get out of here and go home to wherever it is that you live," I advised him.

I told the Americans to let him go, and then told my newfound friend, Lieutenant Kennedy, that he should check the top floor of the church. We decided that he should go up there and holler, "Anybody in here?" and then pretend to leave. We knew that he would shortly hear some noise if anyone were indeed still on the floor.

Kennedy's men concurred that it was a "good, ol' common sense" idea, and after questioning some of the Germans, we decided that we had better utilize the same scheme in the basement of the church, with sufficient personnel guarding them. Then we awaited the outcome of this plan.

It worked, and we thought we had most of the troops, but there did not seem to be many officers among the new prisoners. Knowing Hitler's military regime ideas, we assumed there were Gestapo and S.S. men still hiding. So the Americans cut holes in the east, west, and south walls of the church.

I was handed a loudspeaker again and issued the following warnings: "We are going to shoot all the corners out and pour in gas if you do not come out peacefully."

After a few minutes, two men slowly opened the door from the basement and walked out of the church building with their hands held high above their heads in a motion of surrender. From the tattoos on their arms, it was apparent that one was a Gestapo and the other was a S.S. man. The Americans took them into custody, handcuffed them and trucked the prisoners to the Prisoner Camps.

This was in the fall of 1944. It was September, about two months before the snow would start falling in massive quantities. Lieutenant Kennedy was controlling a German town of approximately six thousand people using his battalion of maybe fifty men, along with a supply of tanks and trucks. And me.

Kennedy had named me mayor of the town by signing an official-looking document. So here I was; I had progressed from a half-starved prisoner in a concentration camp, to a potato cooker for the very people that were torturing and killing my people to a mayor of a town that they had previously controlled.

My job was to weed out Nazis, but meanwhile I had plenty to eat and just about everything I could need. For the first time in years, potatoes, ham, cheese, butter, bread, eggs, milk and candies were in plentiful supply. So were Chesterfield cigarettes, which I consumed with a passion.

The situation remained the same until 1946, when the American occupation of the town ended and the Russians replaced them. The Americans were leaving to go to the western zones as all four of the Allied powers: the Americans, British, French and Russians were dividing up the demilitarized zones in an effort to keep the Germans down militarily.

After the Russians had occupied the town for a while, I got tired of their always wanting me to speak in their language. The Russians always seemed to think that I should be more fluent than I was in Russian, and so one day, about two o'clock in the afternoon, with all of my worldly belongings in a solitary suitcase, I left.

I tried to hitchhike, but I never did get a ride, so I walked and walked for at least five or six miles until I reached the western zone at approximately four o'clock in the morning. Fortunately, though, I asked around and

found out that there was an organization for former Jewish prisoners who had escaped or had been let go.

The organization was not unlike the American Red Cross. We were offered food, clothing, shelter and a little money. I used the money to take a bus about thirty-five miles to Berlin, a trip of about an hour and a half. We then went to Berrigan, Belgium where we were picked up by the Jewish organization and again given food, clothing, and sleeping quarters. It was at this time that I decided to try to get to the United States of America.

The United States and the other Allies decided to help the situation by accepting the displaced persons from Europe. American organizations and a Jewish society in Germany gave me a golden opportunity to get money and food and come to the shores of New York.

The opportunity did not present itself immediately, though. When I finally decided to try to get a visa and come to America, I had to wait for a period of about three years before a barber — a man of both my own race and vocational background — sponsored me to go to New York through the Jewish Relief Organization.

But soon enough I was headed out of Europe that had been devastated both physically and emotionally by the worst war in history and I was headed to the shores of the most promising nation in the world. New York, here I come!





## Nine

As the ship pulled into New York Harbor, I saw a figure of a great lady of liberty with her hand holding a torch to light the way for the people to come to a new life and a new opportunity. In a multitude of ways, that sight of the Statue of Liberty and all that it represented — after the unspeakable tortures we had all endured — was perhaps the most refreshing vision that anyone had ever encountered.

When I finally arrived, however, the ordeal was not yet over. The emotional scars finally took effect and manifested themselves in a nervous breakdown. As I disembarked from the all-metal ship carrying some seven hundred people, the captain and his crew — all displaced persons — I heard somebody yell my name “Joel Edelman.”

It was a lady from the Jewish Relief Organization who was to take me to my temporary lodging quarters for the night before, handing me \$10 and giving me train fare.

I found out the next day that we were to go to Chicago. When I got off there, another lady from the same relief organization met me, told me to wait all night in the train station, gave me some money and told me I was to go to Omaha, Nebraska.

When I got off in Omaha, I was met by the wife of a very prominent gentleman. The man, Mr. Farber, was at that time a vice president for the Union Pacific Railroad. He drove me to Omaha to the Jewish Community Center. I bedded down for the night, but the realization that I could not speak the language, or even write my own name in English, came over me and

frightened me. I had picked up the ability to communicate in Polish, Russian and German from hearing it daily in the camps, but unable to speak or write the English language, I found myself unable to work and boredom set in.

Finally, I decided that I had to do something for myself, so I applied for a job at the old Hinky Dinky Supermarket warehouse in west Omaha, and got a job at a dollar an hour. After a year, I felt that I was ready to go out on my own, as I had proven I could handle a steady job, so I left the Jewish Community Center.

I moved into the Mecca Hotel in 1951, and it was at this point that my English really started to improve. It is from Omaha, where I decided to settle down, that I am presently writing this book. People have often asked me why it took more than thirty years to do so, and the answer is complex and multifaceted.

I was sick and tired and worn out because of the toll that the years had taken on me from the most heinous ordeal. These tales are true; they are not myths or fables. The accusations I have made within these pages could not have been set down on paper without veracity being behind them.

Friends, I was there. I turned the tumbler that moved the dead Jewish heavyweights to the fiery ovens and saw with my own eyes the fat dripping and the bodies baked like a barbecued chicken or duck; I lived and breathed every single minute of this unbelievable story. And to prove that this is a true story, I am prepared to offer a challenge to anyone. If this is fiction — and not fact — then this proof will not stand up to an investigation:

*I, Joel Edelman, challenge the readers of this book \$1,000.00 payable to anyone who can prove that this story is not a fact! This is a true story, not a book of fiction. This book is a factual account of my life — my autobiography — and the proof is as follows:*

*No person can find Jewish people who were born in the years of 1940-1944 in any area where Hitler occupied because he would not allow such a birth. His occupation was carried out under the name of the “final solution,” and it removed this age and race and nationality of people from the planet earth!*

*Neither you nor anybody else will be able to find these Jewish people alive today!*

I, Joel Edelman, being of sound mind, this date March 18, 1985 being the fortieth anniversary of the holocaust, do hereby certify that this story of my life is fact and not fiction.

Mr. Joel Edelman

(Signature)

*Marcene Davis*

(Signature)

March 18, 1985



Joel 'Joe the Barber' Edelman





Joe Martin, left, and Clair 'Eddie' Weldon. Martin, who wrote the foreword to this book, portrayed Bill Grey in the ABC-TV Circle Film, "Amerika." Weldon is associate writer of this book, and has been involved in "The Voice of North America."

