

MARTHA LONDNER

Martha survived Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and several camps in Germany.

“At the end of 1943, I was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the number 72507 was tattooed on my arm. I spent a terrible winter but, being young and healthy, I escaped the gas chamber.”

Martha Londner, née Baumann, was born on April 14, 1920, in Vienna, Austria. Her parents divorced when she was six years old, and her sister Ilse was three. Their mother moved to Paris to join a sister. The girls did not have a family life but lived mainly with nurses or in boarding schools. Martha's father was a shopkeeper. When Hitler annexed Austria to Germany in March 1938, the Nazis requisitioned Jewish goods and businesses, including his. He sought refuge in France, where he was captured and deported to Maidanek in 1943. In 1939, Ilse was sent with a children's transport to Denmark and later to Sweden, but Martha remained in Vienna.

Starting in 1939, Martha worked as a nurse in the Vienna Jewish community's hospital. At the beginning of 1943, she was deported to Theresienstadt where she continued working as a nurse. In July 1944, after a selection by the SS, she and the rest of her group were sent to Germany to various camps. They worked doing cleanup work in factories after bombings. Martha was fortunate enough to escape the bombs, which killed many of the other young women.

The winter of 1944-45 was very difficult. In March 1945, they were transferred to Bergen-Belsen where there was a typhus epidemic and where many got sick and died. On April 15, 1945, Martha was liberated by English troops. Her mother, living in France, found her through the Red Cross, and Martha went to Paris in October 1945.

The following year, Martha married Serge Londner, a Polish-born man who had lived in France since 1925 but had taken refuge in Switzerland during the war. He was a tailor, and she worked with him until his retirement. They had to work hard to build a life together for they started with nothing. Serge died in May 1997, after a prolonged illness. Martha lives in Paris near her daughter and grandchildren. She is active in the organization of Auschwitz survivors and often speaks to schoolchildren about her experiences during the war. Her sister Ilse survived the war and moved to Israel in 1950.