

Carrying What Matters
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What do you bring when you don't know where you are going? The night before Elly Kamm and her family were forced to leave their home, I wonder if she packed. Did she carefully fold her clothes? Or was there no time, the sound of soldiers' boots stomping out that luxury.

This question has haunted me since I learned the story of Elly Kamm, a Holocaust survivor whose courage defied a world intent on erasing her existence. Elly was just a girl when the Nazis invaded her world. Born in 1926 in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, her childhood was stolen piece by piece. By the time she was deported to concentration camps, her life had been stripped down to its barest elements: survival, identity, and hope.

Elly's story reminds me of the story of my great-grandmother, Maria Isabel, who fled Mexico during the Cristero War from 1926 to 1929. She was about Elly's age when her life changed forever. The government turned against Catholics like her, burning churches and killing those who resisted. One night, Maria's father woke her and told her to run. She ran through the night with her baby sister on her back, a rosary in her hand, and nothing else. Not knowing where to go, she fearlessly relied on faith. I used to ask my mother what Maria said about that moment. My mother's answer was always the same: "She didn't talk about it. She just prayed."

Elly didn't have time for prayer in Riga-Kaiserwald and later Stutthof. She carried not much more than the memory of her mother and her ability to use caution to sustain herself [00:32:10-00:33:26]. Her answer is simple but profound: hope. Hope that one day the nightmare ends, that she would see freedom, that her life had meaning.

Maria held onto something just as tightly: her faith. Every bead of her rosary was a prayer for survival, every step across the rushing river a testament to her belief that something better existed on the other side. Bead by bead, prayer by prayer, she kept going.

Both women remind me that survival isn't just about what you carry in your hands--it's about what you hold in your heart. When Elly was liberated, she had nothing left of her home, her family or childhood, yet she carried her story, sharing it with immense courage so the horrors of the Holocaust would never be forgotten. For Maria, it was the hope of religious freedom. These invisible burdens, faith and identity, are heavier than any suitcase, but they are also what gives us strength to endure.

So what do you bring when you don't know where you are going? I think of Elly's hope and Maria's faith. Their stories teach me the deepest truths of humanity, that I can survive through hope and endure through faith, even in the darkest places. It's not about what we take with us, but rather what we refuse to leave behind.