

1996

Liberation: May 8, 1945

Jen Suster
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Suster, Jen (1996) "Liberation: May 8, 1945," *Exile*: Vol. 43 : No. 2 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol43/iss2/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.

Liberation: May 8, 1945

for Gerda Weissman Klein

“Why, today is your birthday,” the doctor exclaims,
spooning thick chowder to my lips while a nurse rubs
my feet for circulation. He notes on my chart
my date of birth. I am twenty-one today. Next
to that number, he pencils my weight: sixty-eight pounds.

1939: home with Mama, Papa, and Arthur, together.
Last night, I made my Papa a vow I’d never lose faith.
Those lonely nights I felt Papa’s arms wrapped
tightly around my neck and the words, “Never give up.
Promise me you’ll never give up.”

Only yesterday, the Nazis murdered sixty-seven
girls on our march of death. Suse died
this morning pumping water, only one hour
before I could tell her we were free.
I just want to sleep. Why won’t they let me sleep?

Rescuers reached me first, frozen bones and sunken
eyeballs. I must’ve looked like an animal, yet still
wearing those ski boots Papa had insisted I bring three
years ago—how did he know? I’ve been liberated, they say.
Why would soldiers want to rescue a Jew?

A young American god reaches out to save me.
He brings warm strength, a forgotten piece of humanity,
my humanity. On the loneliest of nights, I felt Papa’s
arms and my promise to him and to the American
soldier. “Never give up.” He smiles upon me.

—Jen Suster '97