

RG – 50.029*0021

Horn, Irving

Note: Time coding for this set of time coded notes is in the PAL setting on the VCR.

0:00:27 Q: Please tell us your full name, where and when you were born and what life was like before the war.

A: Irving Horn and he was born in Radom, Poland on February 25, 1927. His birth name is Esahar Hershenhorn. He changed it when he came to the US. He came from a middle income family. First memories: the Jews had to integrate their schools (all Jewish schools, etc). Irving was transferred to a school outside his town. Polish schools were mixed in apartment buildings so there were tenants and students together (on separate floors). During registration, the Polish principle commented; "Well what was that Jew doing here anyhow?" That was the first time Irving had to face anti-Semitism. There was a lot of anti-Semitism before the war that Irving could feel. He was beaten up at this school daily. After a year, his mother put him in another school, located closer to downtown, and there were a few more Jewish students. At that school, they were only beaten up weekly.

0:04:00 In June 1939, Irving took the Junior High entrance exam that all 6th graders took that year he was at a Jewish day school. His family went on vacation, and then the war broke out. The school never opened again. Radom was occupied by the Germans seven days later, on Friday September 8. There were restrictions instituted immediately. Examples of forbidden things: radios, assemblies of five people or more, property, and stores. After a week of the German takeover, Irving and his brother were arrested and taken to the Gestapo who demanded a ransom from the Jewish community for him and other Jewish boys they had kidnapped.

0:06:20 It was quite a large ransom, but they paid it. The boys were released. Irving said that the worst thing was not being able to go to school. So they started a secret school in 1939. It existed until 1941, when the ghetto was sealed off. They knew the risk was arrest and several years in prison.

0:07:48 Q: What was life like in the Jewish Community before the war?

A: Radom had a population of about 100,000 people and 25,00 to 30,000, were Jews according to Where Once We Walked) of them were Jews. The population was mostly orthodox Jewish. They would observe the traditional, orthodox Sabbath. Everything stopped on Friday evening. He said that the younger generation was not like that. They were more "forward looking". Most people spoke Yiddish. Within the Yiddish area of the ghetto, the only language that you

needed to know was Yiddish. There were very few people who were illiterate in Yiddish, but there were many who were illiterate in Polish.

- 0:10:06 The younger generation was progressive. They would play football (soccer) but were forbidden to play on Saturday. They also tried to speak Polish more and assimilate more. They thought they were more intelligent than the older generation because they could speak Polish. Also, the upper class spoke Polish. It was a blue collar type town. There were a lot of tanneries. It was the principle industry. Irving's father worked in a tannery owned by German people. His grandfather had actually owned his own tannery.
- 0:11:58 At work, the day after the war broke out, Irving's father was told that they could no longer employ Jews. His mother normally did not work; most women except nurses did not work. Religiously, all prayers were stopped after the occupation. They forbade any assembly of more than five persons was forbidden. Since ten people are required for a minyan (quorum), one could only pray individually. Irving was supposed to have his bar mitzvah in February 1940, so he was tutored by a melamed (teacher). They did not have a Torah. There was also a food shortage. They had to be careful when they had his bar mitzvah ceremony. They invited male relatives over, so that they would have the requisite ten males present. There were German guards patrolling around. When they found someone they put them to work. Also, if the guards saw someone with a beard, and lots of Jews wore beards, they would cut off the beard.
- 0:15:24 There was a shortage of fish, so for his bar mitzvah meal his mother made some meat taste just like fish. Slowly religious and other types of Jewish life came to a halt. It was very dangerous. The Germans wouldn't allow the Jews to walk and live on certain streets. Later Jews were not allowed to own stores. Then all Jews over the age of, he thinks, 14 had to work. The Germans established a Judenrat, where even Irving had to work. He was called to work once a week. The rich people would pay for substitutes.
- 0:17:12 There was a shortage of food. The worst thing was that there were diseases. Life became miserable. There was an epidemic of typhus. Both his brothers got typhus. It became very difficult to stay at home (after school) and do nothing. So, with the help of his mother, he got a job with a dental technician while he was still going to school. He had two brothers, each seven years older than he was. When the war broke out, they were both 19. They had a very difficult time. He also had a sister (who is actually an adopted cousin, the child of his father's older brother and his mother's older sister). Irving's sister was 14 years older than him. He still misses her. She was married in 1938 or 1939 and had a baby girl in 1940 named Malka.
- 0:20:42 He didn't realize the impact of not being able to earn a living back then because he was very young. Jews were not allowed to do many things. His father used to do illegal things. His father would buy raw animal skins and convert them into

leather. His father would smuggle these products out of the town, by Poles during the war. His father was caught by the Polish police and the Gestapo. For two years, they were being chased by the police. His brother was arrested too (this was already 1941). They took him for interrogation early in June of 1941.

- 0:23:41 It was difficult to get him to the Gestapo building for interrogation because there were thousands of German troops marching to the Russian front in the streets; it was Operation Sarasota. This was three weeks before the war with Russia broke out. It was very difficult to make a living. But there were people who made a good living. There were also a lot of poor people who were starving. There were lines for bread. This made for an uneven structure throughout the ghetto.
- 0:25:26 The ghetto was formed in April of 1941 by an announcement that was posted on several streets. There were two ghettos in Radom, so the announcement said that everyone who lived outside of the ghettos had to move into one by the given date which Irving doesn't remember. The Judenrat assigned places to live for those who didn't already live in the ghettos. Irving's family already lived in the main, large ghetto. There was a smaller one that was on the other side of town called Klinista.
- 0:26:35 Irving's family had two rooms and a kitchen, and they were assigned two more families to live with them. Up until that time, they had still been running the illegal school. But with three families to a place it was impossible to run a school. They created a Jewish Police that had its own hats and armbands. All the Jews had to wear armbands with the Star of David on them. There were some activities inside the ghetto. There were some cultural activities, and they had set up a Metal School (for shaving metal). They were taught how to use lathes. They even put on a show.
- 0:28:21 The Jewish hospital was right outside the ghetto. In order to go from one side of the Polish area to the other side, the Poles had to cross the ghetto. Conditions in the ghettos got worse. The first thing that started happening was the Gestapo would raid the ghetto. They would come at night and arrest 30 to 40 people for unknown reasons. And if they didn't find the person they were originally looking for, they would take a substitute. They would shoot some people on the street as they were looking for people. There were several of these raids. One time they came and arrested all the Kosher butchers. One of Irving's friends, named Naden worked with his father who was a butcher. He was taken away also and interrogated. Irving remembers when they brought Naden back to the ghetto (he lived above Irving's family), the Gestapo brought the boy to the back of the house and shot him right there as the boy called for his mother. The boy's father went mad after that.
- 0:30:40 The Gestapo took 9,000 (out of 10,000) people from the small ghetto one night. They also killed several hundred. They packed the people on trains and sent them to Treblinka. They realized that there was more room on the train so they

gathered a few thousand from the main ghetto. Irving's sister was amongst them. He became emotional when remembering his sister. The above took place in August 1942, and a few weeks later (still in August) the deportation of the main ghetto took place.

- 0:32:24 The Ukrainians came on a Sunday morning. The remaining Jews knew they would be deported, but at the time they didn't know to where. Irving and his father volunteered to work on an estate ten miles away. His brother worked in the town's weapons factory. His mother was supposed to work there with his brother, but the Ukrainians would not let her. She was deported that night along with 90% of the main ghetto. He believes that hundreds were killed. They (I guess the Ukrainians) went to the Jewish hospital and shot all the sick people.
- 0:34:20 They buried hundreds or maybe a thousand people that night. He says, however, that he was not an eyewitness to that. The ghetto, he found out from his brother who was still in town, had been reduced to two streets and only 2,000 people. Irving and a friend left work claiming they were ill so that they could go back to their home in the ghetto. The administrator gave them a letter claiming that it was giving them permission. Instead it read: "These two Jews do not want to work hard. I suggest you shoot them". They of course did not transmit the letter and instead stayed in the small ghetto. The Germans or Ukrainians would always do things to the Jews in the ghettos especially on Jewish holidays. On Purim, they decided to execute all the Jewish doctors. Then they started a list for Jews who wanted to go to Palestine. Many townsfolk signed up including Irving and his brother. On January 13, 1943 they called everyone out of the ghetto and started reading from the Palestine list. Miraculously, his and his brother's names were not called. Half of the ghetto was deported to Treblinka.
- 0:37:58 Irving dodged further danger when lying about being a doctor's brother. He went with his brother to work in the weapon's factory where several thousand Jews worked. Jacob Holtz was a very vicious guard at the factory. He would execute people. Irving's job was to clean up after horses, but one day he was called up to dig a grave in 15 minutes for a person Holtz had shot.
- 0:40:57 Irving and his brother stayed at this factory in Radom until 1944. On July 20, 1944, there was an attempt on Hitler's life. Six days later they heard shots. The Russians had arrived in Ludwin, which was about 30 miles from where they were. He and his brother asked some Poles who were working in the factory if they would shelter them until the Russians came. He and his brother thought they would be able to survive the war in that way. The Poles refused. On July 26 they were evacuated. The Germans marched the Jews to the main street of Radom. The Poles who were on their way to work cheered and clapped that the Jews were being removed from the town. The Poles pointed out where some Jews were hiding so they could be shot. The Poles were extremely unfriendly.

- 0:43:22 The small ghetto was joined to the people who worked in the weapon factory. New guards were brought in, and it became a concentration camp. Most of the time they were guarded by Ukrainians. On July 26 they left the town because the Russians were in Luba near by. They were accompanied by Ukrainians, Latvian, Lithuanians, Estonians, and the SS guards. The SS were very mean. They marched all day. In the evening the SS suggested that those who were having trouble marching sit down in a carriage and rest for a while. The carriage was taken to a forest and they were all shot. They would sleep in the fields. On the second night some people wanted to escape so they would hide in pipes in the fields hoping that they would be forgotten. But in the morning, the SS put machine guns inside and shot them.
- 0:46:14 On a dusty hot day (it was summer), they were very thirsty. The SS shot people who would run for water. On Friday at noon they arrived at Tomaszow Mazowieck. They put the females in the city jail and the men in an empty factory. Irving was one of the youngest. They stayed in Tomaszow for a week. Then they were put on a freight train and arrived in Auschwitz after about a 30 – hour train ride.
- 00:48:11 They arrived at three am. They knew the reputation of Auschwitz, but didn't know what was going to happen to them. They heard that some of the people from their ghetto were still alive after two years. This gave them some hope. They were lined up. They were told to give up their gold and diamonds (which they didn't have). They were told to hurry and get back on the train. They didn't know why. Just then another train came. It brought people from the Lodz ghetto, about 4,000 men, women, and children. They took them off the train, and within 15 minutes took them all to the crematoria. Not one of them survived. After that they took Irving's group. They went through an inspection. They were looking for people over 40, under 18, or twins. Irving was 17, his dad was over 40, and his brothers were twins. So the brothers separated, his father did not shave, and he shaved twice. Those who were chosen were killed. The women stayed in Auschwitz, and the rest of them were told to get back on the train. Then they left Auschwitz. Irving, his brothers, and his father were not selected.
- 00:53:14 They left Auschwitz on Sunday arrived in Czechoslovakia on Monday and where they made a stop. There were trains going to Auschwitz. They went through Austria and stopped right outside Stuttgart. They were sent to a delousing station for a shower. They were in Vaihingen an der Enz. This place was 22 km out of Stuttgart. They had just put up five buildings for them to live in, mere shells. There was barely anything there. The meals were coffee (burnt chickoree), soup, (basically water and turnips), and a slice of bread. That's all they got. There were many diseases, and there was starvation. He worked in a big factory called Bowshater. After a few weeks Irving, his father, and his brothers were transferred to another camp ten miles away called Winderitsing.

- 1:01:20 This was one of the worst camps. There was no water inside at all. The toilet was a big hole in the ground. Diseases were rampant. At first there were only Jews at the camp. Later, some Poles were sent there, but most died after a few months because of diseases. The prisoners were working to build something underground, he was not sure what. Irving found that it was easy to slip away from work. So he slipped away. He went to a barn and stole some fruit and went back to the camp. He would do this quite often. He befriended a farm owner's wife and would spend quite a bit of time with her. One night, on a snowy Christmas Eve, the guards looked for him.
- 1:06:50 They beat him up to find out where he went. He lied and said that he went to the airport. They put him on his knees outside in the cold as punishment. He asked what they were going to do to him. They said they were going to shoot him, but because of a great victory the Germans had won that day they reduced his sentence to 50 lashes. Then he was in solitary confinement, and he got pneumonia. There was a room called the hospital. All the doctor had was aspirin. When Irving's fever went down, he was made to carry bricks. He couldn't carry the bricks because they were too heavy so they put him in solitary confinement.
- 1:09:53 When he left the solitary confinement, they announced that they were evacuating the camp. The sick people were sent to one camp, and the healthy ones were sent somewhere else. His brothers were sick and were sent to Vaihingen. He and his father were sent to Koerdorf. All these small camps were under the administration of a concentration camp in France called Natzweiler. Their clothes were deloused and returned to them. They also had to wash themselves. A Pole named Tadik worked there. This camp housed mainly Hungarian Jews. They had a choice of working or going to the doctor. They were only allowed to go the hospital if they thought they had a fever of 104 degrees.
- 1:14:16 He was led to a TB Hospital. No one would come near. He was the only Polish Jew in there. Everyone was a Hungarian. No one was allowed to leave. Irving thought that he would never leave. He was there until late March 1945 when it was evacuated. He could not really communicate with the others. There were about 150 people there. They were very nice. Late in March, they were told that the Americans were coming and that the camp was being evacuated. They were put on a train and mixed with other sick people in the train with them. All the healthy people were marched out of the camp. They went to Dachau. They only stopped to remove the dead. They had no food for days. Then after 3-4 days they heard bombing, planes, and commotion. For almost a week they were not fed. In his car only about 10 survived. Finally, they were let out of the train. This is when Irving met his father. He had been in one of the other cars.
- 1:18:57 They were still not fed. They did get a little water on Saturday night (the last time they had water had been Tuesday night). That Sunday was Easter Sunday. They were fed after six days. They stayed in Dachau from April 1, 1945 until late April. They said that camp was much better than the other camps they stayed at.

His father hurt himself and it became infected. They showed the gangrene foot to the Red Cross when they were inspected. They were told that his father had to go to the hospital. But that same day, all Jews were told to evacuate Dachau. They were taken on passenger trains, and they all received Red Cross food packages.

- 1:22:37 Irving was so hungry he ate his package but it aggravated his sickness. They went to Tirol on the Austrian border. They were told that Austria was no longer at war, Hitler was dead, and that they were all free. They were told that they had to go back to Germany to get fed; the Austrians would not feed them.
- 1:24:03 They were taken to a place in the Tyrolean Mountains. It was snowing that day on April 29 and it was cold. The SS guards were changing into civilian clothes and leaving during the night. Left on their own, Irving and the others walked and reached a village. He found and followed his Hungarian friends from Koerdorf. They spent the night in an empty house. They went down to the station where a shipment of sugar arrived and many people were waiting for this sugar.
- 1:29:55 Irving went with a mailman and he was hidden in a mail truck. The Americans were expected the next day. They heard troops coming in at two am. The Americans were there. But Irving was very sick so the mailman and his wife sent Irving to the military hospital and there was a German doctor there. He didn't have a fever so he was told to leave. An American jeep pulled up as Irving fell down the hospital's three steps. An American picked him up, put him in the back of the Jeep, and drove him to headquarters somewhere.
- 1:33:40 They took him back to the hospital from which he was ejected. The Americans told the German doctors that if he (Irving) dies, they would die. Irving was at the hospital for most of May, for he was very sick. Someone told him that his brother was spotted in Munich and asked Irving if we wanted to go. He agreed and met his brother in a camp called Feldafing near Munich. The two of them went to Dachau to find their father. They found out that he had died. Their younger brother was liberated in Vaihingen by the French. These people were put in a displaced person camp in a castle. They went to meet their brother. In August 1945, they were kicked out of the castle, put on trucks, and sent to Suttard.
- 1:37:13 Irving and his brothers had a culture shock. They didn't know that they needed money. They didn't have any. It took a period of adjustment to get used to real life. They had been used to concentration camp life. People were assigned to them to try and get them back into society again. They started at a Hebrew school and prayers. Their assigned people gave them a model of how to live. Irving and his brothers had lost respect for laws; they had to learn about them. Irving enrolled in a technical university established by the Poles in Heslinger near Stuttgart, and he also kept a German tutor. He studied civil engineering for a couple of semesters until he came to the US.

- 1:41:38 The Germans had tried to cut off their education, and they were victorious in that way. The American Joint Distribution Committee had an office in Stuttgart. Some students worked there. In December 1945 Harry Truman allowed 100,000 displaced people to come to the US. The AJDC asked some people if they wanted to go. That was how they went to the US (New York). He came in January 1948 and went to the City School of NY. He was drafted and fought in the Korean war. After he got out of the army, he received his degree in engineering.
- 1:47:36 Irving shows family photographs and the announcement of the beginning of the Radom ghetto.
- 1:49:08 In 1989 he received a call from the Justice Department to go to East Germany to testify in the trial of a Nazi. The Nazi turned out to be Jacob Holtz, the guard at the ammunition factory in Radom. He testified in an East German court and was the only Jewish witness who testified. Jacob Holtz was accused of killing at least 18 Jews. Holtz was sentenced to life in prison.
- 1:51:27 Q: Is there anything you wish to add to your oral history?
- A: I would like to say I have a wife Janet, and we have been married for 32 years and have two children Mark and Rochelle. Hopefully we can put those experiences behind us so they do not affect our future. However, I want people to know about it so it will never happen again. It is an experience that other people should know about so we can avoid it in the future.