

RG-50.029.0025

Netzer, Calvin

- 00:00:48 Calvin was born in 1924 in Mielec, a town with a very religious Jewish population in Poland. He was born October 10, 1924. The town had three synagogues: orthodox, ultra-orthodox, and reform. Calvin lived in a strictly self-supporting Jewish community. Jews could not go outside the community to get better jobs unless they were very educated. Calvin's father had a vegetable business.
- 00:03:17 Calvin had two brothers: one had emigrated before the war; the other was never located. Calvin attended public school for three years, but most of his schooling was in Hebrew school. He experienced much anti-Semitism in public school.
- 00:05:21 In 1937, his father's vegetable business was destroyed by a storm, and the family was poverty stricken. Calvin's family was forced to rent their house to three other families, and they lived in the kitchen. His mother died when he was eight. Before the war, there were between three and five thousand Jews in the area and 15,000 non-Jews. The small group of Jews lived in a concentrated area of the town.
- 00:07:22 War broke out in 1939 on Rosh Hashanah eve. German soldiers entered the town playing music, and then the soldiers surrounded the Mikvah. They forced people to stay inside and set it on fire burning everyone. They also ordered people to stay inside their dwellings and then burned them alive.
- 00:09:49 Remembers the two shochets (ritual slaughters) being killed and strung up where they strung up chickens.
- 00:11:05 Calvin was 15 years old when the war broke out. Describes his Bar Mitzvah. When soldiers entered his community, they burned all three synagogues. Calvin's house was right next door to one of them. One of the tenants who lived with Calvin's family was a German spy and arranged to have Calvin's house doused with water. She also gave them a picture of Christ to hang in their window. She was the one who saved them from being burned to death inside their own home.
- 00:14:23 After the Germans occupied Calvin's town, one person from every household had to go to work cleaning toilets, working in factories, and performing other laborious tasks. When Calvin's father became too sick to work, Calvin replaced him. People were allowed to leave their homes,

but only to go a few blocks. However, everyone was too afraid to leave his or her homes.

- 00:17:03 Calvin's family and another family attempted to escape but were caught and threatened with death on the spot.
- 00:18:19 Calvin's father used to tell him, "Look forward, do not look back, keep moving, keep going, and stay alive." This became the theme by which Calvin lived and it helped him to stay alive. At one point, when Calvin was hospitalized, a German woman doctor hid him and another child when the Nazis came into the hospital looking for people. Calvin realized all people were not bad. This same doctor helped them escape to an all-Jewish town by putting them on a wagon. From there, he took a train to his aunt's farm where he stayed for two days.
- 00:22:50 One morning he heard German cars coming. He jumped out of his window and escaped into the woods. Unfortunately, the Germans took his aunt and the whole family away. Finally, Calvin met his brother, and they walked for a very long time until they got to their uncle's home. They were found by the Germans in the attic. He told the Germans he was 13 years old and his brother was 12. The Germans informed them that Calvin was old enough to go to work, so they took him, leaving his brother.
- 00:27:22 Calvin was taken to Skarżysko Kamienna in a packed cattle truck. For six months he worked digging anti-tank trenches and cutting sod to cover the holes. There were three living quarters with bunk beds stacked three and four high. His clothes were marked with a Star of David. It did not matter what religion or nationality one was, only that one stay alive. The prisoners were awakened before daylight and made to work until dusk. Lunch was some soup, and dinner was a slice of thin bread with soup. "I kept thinking only about looking forward."
- 00:31:50 If someone stopped working, the person was simply thrown in to the trench he was digging by the other workers. They slept in clothes so they were ready when the soldiers told them to get up and work. There were no women in this camp. After his stay in Skarżysko Kamienna, Calvin was sent by truck to Czechochowa and worked on a railroad. Because Calvin was small, he was assigned to clean the inside of locomotives, and was very well liked by the engineers. They taught him how to repair engines and locomotives. He was even given a whole bucket of soup to bring back to the barracks. These barracks were much more comfortable and had only two-level bunks.

- 00:35:10 Calvin's locomotive operator friend was killed, and Calvin was chosen to replace him. He was liked by Major or Captain Lefler (not sure of rank). Lefler ordered Netzer's guard to get him clothes with marks on them and give him bread. Calvin was lucky because Lefler beat the other prisoners, but liked him. He and Lefler became buddies. He taught Lefler how to operate the train, and they went together on the train, but Calvin couldn't get off. Lefler was sent to the front, gesturing with his hand across his neck. He knew he would be killed
- 00:38:44 Calvin was sent to Buchenwald in the winter with a couple of hundred men. They stood for three hours without explanation before being assigned rooms. One person died immediately. They cleaned the streets of Weimar while people walked by spitting and laughing at them. The bunks were so narrow you could not turn around. If you got up in the middle of the night, you would not come back because they killed you.
- 00:41:53 Along with the street cleaning, prisoners also collected bodies for burning and put them in a room. At one point, Calvin was so thin and sick that he was put there, but he got out. Calvin found out that his father was shot while being evacuated from his town. He was shot behind the ear, and Calvin still dreams about that. He never heard anything about his brother, but he is still looking.
- 00:44:44 The conditions of his life were work hard and eat little. The Germans wanted you dead, but while you were dying they wanted you to work. Calvin was in Buchenwald for over a year (1944-45). In March or April, Calvin began a death march from Buchenwald with 3,000 other Jews through farmlands with soldiers on both sides approximately every five feet. It was cold and rainy. The march would stop only when the soldiers needed a rest. The soldiers would drop scraps of food and cigarettes along the path and then wait until someone tried to pick them up. The soldiers would then shoot the person.
- 00:50:30 The soldiers were Hungarian, Yugoslav, and a small number were German. Calvin admits to stealing ammunition from German soldiers to send to Israel. Toward the end of the march, the group passed near a British camp, and many of the soldiers got scared and ran away. The British forces led the Americans to the place where Calvin was, and the fifty people who were still alive were liberated. He shows a picture taken by British a soldier.
- 00:52:16 Calvin ate soap thinking that it was chocolate. He got very sick. The doctor, Major Baker from New York, thought he only had six months to live. At liberation there were only 26 survivors of the original 3,000 who had begun the death march, and one of those died while being treated.

- 00:54:28 Calvin convalesced in and then moved to Legalechffelt near Bad Reichenow, which was a Displaced Persons camp. There they had social activities and played soccer. He still had no idea about his family in America. In 1947, someone told him that there was an ad in a New York Jewish paper that his uncle and brother were looking for him
- 00:58:30 It took a while for the immigration papers to go through. His uncle sent packages, and he shared everything with friends. In 1948, Calvin was allowed to leave for America. He arrived in New York City and proceeded to Washington DC to live with his uncle. He learned a trade and went to work with his brother. He soon met his wife.
- 1:02:39 Many aunts, uncles and cousins died in Poland. Calvin looked everywhere for them but did not find a trace. He repaired motors and became an electrician. He forgot all the languages he knew: Yiddish, Polish, German and Russian. Calvin adjusted quite easily to his new life by following the advice of his father about always looking forward. If you look forward, things are easier. After the mandatory five years, Calvin became a U.S. citizen.
- 1:07:16 Pictures of the friends day after liberation.
- 1:10:49 Pictures of father, mother and brothers. Calvin after WWII. Wife and two sons urged Calvin to record his memories. Everybody should do it, not just for Jewish people. It should be a living memory for all people to know.