

-TITLE-MARK STERN  
-I\_DATE-AUGUST 2, 1989  
-SOURCE-UNITED JEWISH FEDERATION HOLOCAUST CENTER PITTSBURGH  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-DURATION-90 MINUTES  
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
Childhood - 1939

0:01:00 Mark was born on June 5, 1923 in Gorlice, Poland. He had an older brother and an older sister. His father worked in an oil refinery.

0:04:00 When Mark was two, the refinery was destroyed by fire and the Sterns moved to Kraków. Mark's father began a very successful contracting business. Both parents were from rabbinical families (Mark's mother's was Hasidic). The family was very orthodox in the home even though they were partially assimilated. They lived among Poles and not in "Kazimierz", the Jewish section of Kraków.

0:05:25 Mark was brought up with a good Jewish education despite his family's partial assimilation. His father only went to synagogue on holidays since the store was open on Saturdays, but insisted on keeping his home kosher and sending his children to an excellent Jewish school.

0:09:26 It was 1937 when Mark first realized how anti-Semitic Poland was. His brother was beat up (for being Jewish) on his first day at Polish university. Because there were no Jewish universities in Poland, Mark's father sent Mark's brother to study in Palestine.

0:09:50 Mark's father realized what was coming up when two aunts came to live with the Sterns after Germany began its expulsion of Jews.

0:10:27 Mark's father planned to escape to Palestine after Mark graduated high school in 1941. Mark's sister was getting ready to join their older brother in Palestine when the war broke out in 1939. She died in the gas chambers.

0:11:56 Before 1939, Mark didn't feel much anti-Semitism. His friends were Polish and he lived in a Polish neighborhood among Gentiles.

0:13:26 But Polish anti-Semitism was becoming more and more apparent. During Easter, they would have to lock their doors and bodies would be found in Kraków. Because his father was affluent, Mark could attend private school.

1939-1941

0:14:30 Mark stayed home from school in September 1939. The streets of Kraków were bombed during Blitzkrieg. By then, word was out that all adult Jews would be sent to concentration camps.

0:16:00 Mark's father escaped, saying that the situation couldn't last long. Mark never saw his father again.

0:17:19 At the age of 16, Mark had to take responsibility for his family. They had no money lying around because their bank accounts were closed. All of their valuables were taken by the German army. Mark sold the store's stock for money until one day several Germans took it over. They said that Jews were not allowed to own businesses, but not to worry, all assets would be transferred to their account. When Mark asked if he could still work there, they said that they don't employ Jews.

0:19:19 Mark, his mother and his sister pack up in a truck and move to live with his grandmother in the Gorlice Ghetto where slave labor had already started by 1941. They had to stay in a 4-5 block area. Mark worked in an all-Jewish work detail building a road to Jaspo.

0:22:27 Mark wonders at his ability to survive after 4 years of forced labor, slavery and degradation. When he was liberated, he wanted to forget and start a new life. Only after he settled down did he begin to remember and want to. Mark emphasizes that what he says is directly from his personal experience.

0:24:07 Mark was very moved when his grandmother died. She was the last person he could actually bury in Gorlice. He points to his grandmother and this experience has giving him the strength to survive.

0:25:00 In the Ghetto, Mark met a girl and struggled to make a life. The biggest shock was when the Germans held the first selection in 1942. Mark still didn't know about the gas chambers.

0:27:13 The three were selected to leave. Mark swapped his stamp collection in return for their lives. His mother still went to the trains, but his sister was spared. That night, Mark escaped to see his mother. He ran alongside the train calling her name. He saw his mother's face in one of the openings. She told him to go, not to get caught. Mark says he will never forget this memory of seeing his mother for the last time. His girlfriend and sister were taken on the second transport. He never saw them again.

0:31:08 Mark remained with about 200 other men to work in Hobag (Holzbau A.G.) labor camp making pre-fabricated housing for the German army. Here, German shepherds were trained to tear apart anyone who stopped working. The man Mark worked with was torn apart "genitals and all" for stopping for 1 minute. There was brutal laughing. Mark had to keep working.

0:33:31 Mark was then sent to "Mielec" camp where he made parts for German airplanes 12 hours a day. He got sick, but was allowed to live because the man responsible for the group knew Mark's family.

0:35:13 As inspector of parts, Mark was in contact with the underground and assisted in sabotage. He was caught once and was to be killed, but his supervisor worked out a deal and Mark received 100 blows of a broomstick instead.

0:38:35 The prisoners did talk of escape, but the plan was found out and its leaders were hanged at the gallows. They could hear the shooting from the front lines. Soon they were taken in boxcars on a day-and-a-half journey to "Poishor"(ph), a satellite of Auschwitz. After several weeks, there was a selection and more boxcars--this time to Germany. Mark remembers standing packed against others for days without sitting, without water, dying. When someone did die, they would pile the body onto the others to make more room.

0:43:15 When they arrived at Flossenburg, the stench must have been horrible because the Germans screamed and threw water on their stinking, tired, half-dead bodies. About half from each car survived the journey. Here, Mark was completely dehumanized--from a person to a slave, to nothing. Mark was so skinny that it was difficult to walk or to do anything, but his strong will told him he had to. He thought of his grandmother, that she was watching -- Mark felt he had to show her that he was strong.

0:46:54 Every morning Mark woke up and felt the person lying next to him. If he was cold, he was dead. If he wasn't, Mark woke him up to go to work. Mark saw people throw themselves onto the electric fence because they didn't want to live this way.

0:50:48 Mark worked in the airplane factory until evacuation. Relations between the other prisoners (murderers, homosexuals and political prisoners) were strange. Everyone took advantage of the Jews who were a minority in Flossenburg. Once a homosexual Kapo approached Mark. To this day, he is afraid of other men touching him.

0:53:10 Mark doesn't remember names, only faces.

1945

0:55:02 Mark was 22 when the camps were liberated in 1945. They knew the Russians were coming and that the Germans were going to destroy the camp. In April, they were put on trains and left the camp. Mark will never forget the gate because he was told when he arrived that he would never walk out. During transport, the train was bombed by American forces. People ran everywhere. The Germans started shooting. Mark froze.

0:56:54 The death march to "Schwandorf" (ph) lasted 10 days. They walked without stopping, without food, chewing on grass. The last day of the march, two friends forced him to continue. Without them, he would have been shot.

0:58:18 A day later, they were put in a clearing where the Germans had set up machine guns to shoot them. Just before they did, American tanks liberated them. The Germans fled. The survivors went to a nearby village to get food. Some died from overeating. The Americans didn't stop for them, but kept pushing the Germans back. They threw cans, chocolate and cigarettes to them -- things they hadn't seen since before the war.

1:00:14 The Americans told them to shoot the Germans they had caught, but they were weak and tired and only interested in surviving. They were still dehumanized.

1:01:56 Later, at the American Red Cross station, Mark was confused as to where he came from. He said he was stateless and that he just wanted to get out of there. After they gave him a passport, he and some friends went to Hamburg where a German soldier's wife gave them a large apartment in her hotel. Mark would drink all day, wake up drunk with a hangover and start drinking all over again.

1:03:14 One day, Mark woke up and realized that he had become a non-entity. He decided to go to Italy in order to get to Palestine to see his brother. He took a bus from Munich--after seeing his papers, the drivers never asked for money.

1945-present

1:05:00 After spending some time in a displaced persons camp at the border, Mark met his wife. She was going to see her family in America.

1:09:17 They were deloused before crossing the border--Mark had to open his pants so the powder would go everywhere. Mark stresses that these were the kinds of horrible things one had to live through.

1:12:26 Once in Italy, Mark sent a message to his brother through the Palestine Brigade. He remained in Italy for 2 years (1945-47). He moved south to find the kibbutz training "Tricaza" (ph) community. There, Mark and his wife were married.

1:15:41 They visited a survival community in Fanom and learned labor skills through a program set up by Israeli Haganah. This is where Mark's brother found out about him. He told Mark to come to Palestine to fight for liberation, but Mark went to America with his wife after getting a degree in engineering.

1:20:06 Mark and his wife left Italy in 1947 and stayed in New York until 1973, working in a factory, the restaurant business and the shipping industry. Mark says the scars of the Holocaust will never leave him.

1:25:45 Mark says it is very difficult to be a survivor because of the guilt, but feels it his responsibility to prevent this from happening again. He would do anything possible to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive.

1:28:30 Mark will never go to a concentration camp again. He thanks God for Israel because he knows the Holocaust won't happen to the Jews ever again.

1:29:59 Mark Stern is now the President of the Survivors Organization of Pittsburgh.  
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