

Marx, Ernie
July 26, 1995
Washington DC
RG-50.106*0019

Ernie Marx (Ernest L. Marx) was born in Gelnhausen, Germany, November 8, 1925. His father, Sigmund, became a rabbi in Ruttenberg and then in Speyer am Rhein. Ernest's bar mitzvah was never celebrated because of Kristallnacht. Nazis appointed his parents to organize and chaperone Kindertransports of Jewish children from the Rhein to France. Ernest went to France on a Kindertransport, and his brother went to Switzerland. Ernest and mother imprisoned in Gurs; father was deported to Auschwitz, where he died. Ernest escaped from Gurs and joined Maquis resistance group. After war he was reunited with mother and brother, they immigrated to the United States in 1947, and Ernest worked in uncle's delicatessen in Indianapolis. He then moved to Minneapolis, Dayton, and Louisville, where in 1978 he became religious director of a synagogue and started speaking in schools about the Holocaust.

0:28

Ernest L. Marx was born in Gelnhausen, Germany, November 8, 1925. His father was Sigmund, his mother was Bertha, and his older brother was Julius. His father was a cantor in Gelnhausen until 1926. He then became a rabbi in the small, medieval town of Ruttenberg, Germany. The family lived above the synagogue.

2:15

Ernest was a mischievous kid. He was arrested for playing in the fountain of a well where supposedly the Jews had poisoned the water. In 1932 his father was arrested for spying because an American rabbi had come to visit him. The family lived across the street from the prison so they could see him. He was released in a few days.

4:02

The family moved to Speyer am Rhein. Ernest was blond and did not look Jewish, so he could play with gentile children. His brother was dark and was not accepted. In 1935 Jewish children were not permitted to attend public schools. Ernest's father established a small private school above the synagogue for Jewish children.

5:31

When Ernest was ten years old, many privileges were taken away. Jews were limited in purchasing food and could only be out until a certain time. Ernest was amazed and excited by the Nazis who were marching and parading. He had no idea about the impact. "I was very innocent."

6:51

On Sunday mornings Ernest would bike with his father to a nursing home and visit the few Jewish families who lived in nearby villages.

8:12

Ernest was a great soccer player. He loved all sports
“I was a happy kid.”

On Nov. 19, 1938, Ernst was going to be bar mitzvah. He remembers being nervous because he did not know his portion. But he was looking forward to the celebration. On Nov. 8, Ernest's birthday, he received a brand new bicycle. It was hung in the bay window, but he was not allowed to ride it until he knew his portion. “Boy did I start studying.”

On November 9, they heard sirens going off and saw flames in the synagogue. “We didn't know what was happening.”

Two Gestapo men came to the door and ordered Ernest and his father to come to Gestapo headquarters. About 80 men and some boys were assembled, then shoved into a truck, and driven all-night, ending up at Dachau. Children were separated from adults.

13:35

They knew Dachau was a prison. They had to take showers and have their hair shaved. Ernest's father reassured him that no one would harm him. His father had faith and also had been in the German Army during World War I and probably believed that they would not be harmed. Ernest was very close to his father.

17:20

Everyone slept on wooden planks with filthy straw mattresses.

18:49

First week in December everyone was released. Kids did not know where fathers were. No one could think about what would happen.

20:00

Ernest and father were driven home in a car by the SA. Father was in charge of keeping the area left bank of Rhine River *judenfrei*, free of Jews.

When they came home, Ernest's bike was gone. He had no bar mitzvah. Still hates Nazis for taking his bike.

21:35

Family was reunited. Gestapo put Ernest's parents in charge of Kindertransport to France and Holland. On Dec. 16, 1938, Ernest was put on train to France with about 800 kids. He was placed in a Baron Rothschild seminary in Paris. His brother was put on train to Switzerland. Their parents moved to Mannheim and continued to chaperone children on the Kindertransport.

25:51

Sept. 1, 1939. War was declared. Fortunately, Ernest's parents were in Paris, and they were in contact with him. Parents had to register as German citizens. Mother was sent to Gurs; Father was sent to Saint-Germain?

When Germans invaded France, French put Ernest and other children in castle in Le Moges. Ernest could visit and correspond with his father.

Tape 1

Side B

31:15

Ernest was sent to Gurs. He had learned to speak French in the seminary. There was never enough food. They did absolutely nothing at Gurs. "I felt alone in the world." He was 17 years old in Oct. 1942.

35:00

Ernest did not know where his father was. French had delivered him to Germans. Mother had a stroke in Gurs.

He and other children were told to go to Alps because Italians were not as bad as Germans. In Cher they made contact with a woman in the French underground who told them how to join the Maquis. They went on a trolley to meet their contact. On the way. Germans boarded the trolley and asked for identification cards. Driver said Ernest was his apprentice. "He saved my life."

41:07

Ernest went to mountains near Modane and joined underground organization of 400 Spaniards who were ex-felons, very mean, and hated the Nazis. Everyone had a false name. Ernest had to hide his Jewish identity. When he was in the resistance, he had to be on guard when trains were being blown up or stand on guard at the camp all night with a machine gun.

"Life was not bad, but I was scared by the guns."

46:41

Ernest recounts a strong memory when he ran from Gurs. He stayed in a farmhouse in a little town and suddenly saw a church in flames. Townspeople who had hidden Jews or others were put into the church, which was then set on fire.

51:12

At the end of the war, Ernest was attached to the French army as an interpreter and was stationed outside of Paris. He went to Paris to search for his parents. He knew that his brother was in Switzerland.

"We did not know about Auschwitz until after the war."

58:37

Then he had an amazing coincidence. He got on the streetcar that was being driven by the same driver who had saved his life. Then he saw his mother sitting on the front seat. “This is one of those things you never forget.”

His mother told him that his father had perished in Auschwitz.

He, his mother, and brother then went to HIAS and decided to go to the United States. His mother’s uncle in Argentina paid for their passage, and they left for America on June 13, 1947.

Tape 2

Side A

:72

People knew of father’s death because he was a spiritual leader for inmates.

Ernest talks about his father. “He couldn’t see bad in anyone. He had a tremendous sense of humor. His marriage was good, and he believed that anyone could do what he or she wanted to do. He was always an optimist.”

“In my dreams, I still see my father walking with me on a Jewish holiday—not Yom Kippur—smoking his cigar. He assured anyone who asked that a non-Jew had lit the cigar for him.”

.

5:17

When they came to the United States, people who met them told them to forget the past. Ernest did not speak in public about his experiences until 1985, when Rabbi Schlossberg, his boss in St. Louis, urged him to speak about Kristallnacht.

6:49

Ernest’s mother did not remember most of what had happened. His brother died in an accident in 1970.

11:12

When Ernest came to America, he went to Indianapolis where an uncle lived and owned a delicatessen. He got married in 1959 and went to Indiana University business school at night. He did not get a degree but worked in the food business.

He moved to Minneapolis and became a cantor on Shabbat. He then moved to Dayton, Ohio, and participated in services with Jewish servicemen on the military base. He and wife were divorced.

In 1978, he had an opportunity to open a restaurant in St. Louis. Then he was offered a job as religious director. Now he gets satisfaction speaking in schools in “the hinterland” because many kids have parents who do not believe that the Holocaust happened.

“How can anyone believe that six million—even one million people were killed? I was a young punk who loved life. I still believe that I am one of the luckiest people in the world. I always hope that the next day will be better than yesterday.”

17:00

Ernest describes his father's love for him and the influence he had on his life even though it was only for a few years.

"Why do I still believe in God? The answer is why not"?

18:10

Only in the last ten years did Ernst talk out about the Holocaust, and he also feels strongly that America should have done more. "I have an obligation to spread the word."

Ernest gets very emotional at time of Yom HaShoah. When he went to Israel and said Kiddush at Yad Vashem, it was a major moment in his life.

He never wants to go to Germany.