

-TITLE-WALTER BEER  
-I\_DATE-MARCH 5, 1987  
-SOURCE-CHILDREN OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS - ATLANTA  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-EXCELLENT  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-AVERAGE  
-DURATION-2 HOURS  
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
Pre-war period:

1:01:00 Walter was born on May 4, 1922 in a small town in Czechoslovakia called Vitsovika (ph), a suburb of a small mining town called Morostaovska (ph). Relatives on his mother's side were all merchants (haberdashers, real estate venturers and store owners) and well to do and his father's family came from middle Moldavia and his brothers were all doctors and lawyers. Incidentally, Walter's uncle (Joseph Guttmann) issued an affidavit from the U.S. for Walter's immigration.

1:04:55 His mother (Henrietta), father (Hugo), brother (Jan) and sister lived in a large house with the mother's grandparents. The house was further subdivided into several other tenements and a grocery store in the back. With seven rooms their living situation was considered upper middle class.

1:10:30 Prior to W.W.I his father produced fine liqueurs and later sold the business, got a degree in accounting and managed the account of a toy manufacturer and was greatly compensated (salary and perks). His father was born in 1890 and attributes his success in business to his fluency in six languages of the region.

1:12:35 Walter's mother was born in 1893. His parents were teenage sweet-hearts. Walter saved secret love notes that father sent to her. After writing 'I love you' on the card his father covered it with a stamp. Only she knew where to look.

1:15:15 Walter was the youngest and sickly member of the family. Father tried to get him involved in art. Walter wasn't much good at school and by 1938 he felt he could 'see the writing on the wall' and wasn't concerned with studying. 1/2 year after voluntarily resigning from school the occupation began.

1:17:25 When he did go, Walter went to a Gymnasium and pursued a liberal arts education. It wasn't a Jewish school (only 20%), primarily comprised of the Jewish middle class.

1:18:45 The weekly holiday Shabatt was kept in the family by the grandmother who adored Jewish traditions. Although Walter's father was a renegade he still participated. Walter spoke fondly of his grandmother and the time he spent with her during childhood. The family went to synagogue on high holidays and made traditional meals and both men were bar Mitzvahed.

1:23:50 Through various groups (Macabee, Macabee HaTza'ir) Walter had many Jewish friends. His father praised the works of Theodore Herzl and was a proclaimed Zionist. He organized various activities for the youth groups when Walter was young. They also had non-Jewish friends and it was 'a very nice country' up until 1939.

1:28:15 In the middle ages some of Czechoslovakia's leaders defended the Jew's against their 'blood libel' sentence. In their day however the common people (coal miners) were quite anti-Semitic and when the Germans walked into town, friends turned their backs. Walter speaks of an incident where one of their German maids before she left one morning placed a German newspaper in the bed. The Sturmer had on it a picture of the Jewish man complete with long nose and hints of blood libel and greed. It was obvious she meant for them to find it. From business correspondence between their home and Germany, insignias which read 'Heil Hitler' began to show up. Although unheeded by the father, this was a fore runner of what was to come.

#### Period of Occupation

1:31:30 When the Nazis occupied the country, life changed dramatically. All Jews had to stop school at all levels. Jobs were taken away and his father lost the benefits. Jan, his brother, left for England to work while Walt stayed behind in forced labor.

1:31:55 Forced labor was supervised by the Czechs. And for no pay they walked to the work sight and picked and shoveled. Walter remembers one day when he caught a nail in his hand and had to run back to town for medical attention. He couldn't get into a hospital as a Jew.

1:39:15 Prior to the Ghetto in 1939 he was transported with 300 German men to Poland after the Polish-German war to the town of Nisko. There he built barracks and since his father was held back for WWI injuries, he was alone. He tried to escape while in Poland towards the Russian side. The closest town was Rubov and they were stopped one morning by the army, asked to present their communist cards and were returned unpunished to work detail. Six months later he was home again and life was good for a short time. It was 1940.

#### The Ghettos

1:44:35 In 1941 all of the community was shipped to Terezienstadt between Prague and the north eastern part of Czechoslovakia into the Ghetto where Walter and his father would remain until 1944. The people traveled in passenger cars with the windows blackened. Some made special food which was made out of flour sugar and butter, made a paste of it and stuffed it into stockings and also hid jewelry and other small items in the dough.

1:49:50 The young and healthy survived. The old couldn't cope with the morality of the situation and were taken advantage of. They were also put in the Sichenheim, a special place that was separated from the families where they received little medical attention.

1:51:40 The cultural life was well organized. Hebrew was taught by important professors. The Ghetto was self-governed and three main countries were represented (Germany, Czechoslovakia and Austria). Collaborators like Mister Mummenstein who aided the Germans were persecuted, being either shot or hanged.

1:59:50 Lev Beck was one of the important community elders who acted not as the spiritual leader but rather as the director on how to behave in the Ghetto and beyond. There was communication from Auschwitz and also there was constant movement in and out of the camps. They knew about the mass killings and of the crematoriums. Beck spoke of the smoke and flames and told all to present one's self well when in selection.

1:01:15 Walter went to Auschwitz in 1944 because the Nazis forced his father to go. After the selections, people were striped, shaved and sprayed with a stringent disinfectant. Barracks were plain and in the middle there was a rise spanning the length of the hall on which the SS marched.

1:11:10 The latrines were an impossible sight. Frozen in the winter the shit piled high and had to be knocked down and carried with coal scuttles. Walter was issued gloves and was assigned to carry the many dead from the barracks.

1:17:05 Collaboration was not tolerated among the Jews. The head of the German electricians was able to get his own room. One night he was pushed into the fence and was burned horribly. After six months and major rehabilitation, the fellow inmates stepped on him and eventually killed him by cracking his skull. There were no reprisals. The Germans found it an additional bonus that the Jews would kill themselves.

1:19:10 On April 14, 1945, the Nazis lined the men up and marched them. These death marches killed many men. A distant cousin to Walter was in this march with him. He fell behind. Walter tried to help him up from the ditch but had to leave him. The SS, with their shepherds and shotguns killed him swiftly.

1:23:10 The men lived in hope at that time . They didn't know if

they would all survive but the knew that some would. At the end they had to sleep on soccer fields or on the roads and had to dig up roots for dinner, sometimes building a pit fire to cover their potatoes in while they cooked.

1:25:55 One morning Walter and his friend awoke to find the SS had disappeared. After removing their insignias, they went to a nearby village and a farmer let them sleep in his loft. After sighting the SS, the farmer threw them out. Returning to the soccer field they had left, the men found the other Jews had been gunned down with a spray of metal.

1:29:05 The two men went back to the town and heard moaning coming from behind an overturned jeep. There was a badly wounded German soldier motioning for his gun. They gave it to him and he shot himself. Readily Walter and his companion stripped the man of all belongings of worth.

1:52:00 Looking back on the experience Walter says he lived in hope for surviving the camp life. It didn't mean that he became ruthlessly immoral by taking away from the dead. He was fortunate enough to have a trade that he could use to his advantage.

1:54:40 Is another Holocaust possible? He believes that it could happen again because there is an undercurrent and even in the US there is this current of anti-Semitism based on what he feels is economic jealousy.

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