

Abstract  
Toby Stern

RG 50.549.02#0005

Toby Stern was born in Romania, July 15, 1920. Her father died before she was born. Her mother and five siblings lived with grandmother in a very religious home. Married a "wonderful man" in 1939. Lived in Bukovina. Romanians and then Hungarians persecuted Jews. In 1942 husband sent to Russia where he died. In April 1944 Nazis invaded. Toby sent to Auschwitz, went on death march. After liberation, she returned to Romania, learned husband was dead, remarried, and a few years later came to United States. Several years later one of her daughters died accidentally, reactivating all of Toby's other losses. Toby suffered a deep and lasting depression.

## **Toby Stern**

August 7, 1993

RG 50.549.02\*0005

This interview follows previous videotaped interview

Tape 1, Side A

: 11

Toby Stern was born in Romania July 15, 1920. Her father died before she was born. Her mother was left with five brothers and Toby. They lived with her grandmother, who was a midwife and supported them. "She was our father."

The family was very religious. Mother worked very hard. Had school in their house in exchange for children's' tuition.

:26

Toby was married in 1939 when she was 18 years old. Her husband was wonderful. They lived in Bukovina and had two children, one of whom died. Husband had a very big store.

:36

After three months of marriage, Romanian pogroms started. People took out everything from stores and homes. Toby and family had to hide in woods for two weeks. No food, no water, no toilets.

**:44**

When they returned home, found that house was badly damaged. Only one box of eggs was left.

That Friday men went to synagogue and women lit candles.

Two soldiers came into house and asked aunt Toby for money. Aunt was very rich, but said she had nothing. She was shot and killed in front of her three-year-old child.

**:62**

Toby and family had to run away again to the woods. Husband mistakenly thought she had been killed. He begged a former customer to hide him and wife in basement.

**:80**

Man had to ask him to come out. Soldiers wanted to kill them. Husband gave soldiers money and then ran away. Uncle who was a rabbi and businessman and his two sons were killed. Toby's husband buried them one night after they had been lying in the street for days. They then went  
→ to Kōmenets (?) - Podolski.

**1:07**

Husband went to synagogue. Met mayor who sent him with others to the Judenrat who registered them and sent them to jail. Then one-day husband and others were sent away in an open truck to Sighet but were not killed.

Toby was pregnant and went to live with mother-in-law who got her some food. Toby and husband wrote letters to each other, but neither one received them.

On Tisha b'av, Toby's brother took her home to her mother.

### **1:55**

Toby thought her husband was dead. Six months later her husband came to mother's house.

### **1:64**

In 1940 Hungarians came in. In 1942 all young people were called to register and were sent to work. Husband went away in January and died in Russia in February. He was buried with 35,000 other people. Toby was pregnant with second child who lived for two days.

### **2:01**

Older baby was very ill and malnourished. Toby found a doctor in Sighet, who saved the child. Heard nothing from husband and did not know he had died until 1947.

### **2:51**

Hungarian solders were very bad, and they kept bothering her. She couldn't work because she was afraid to go anywhere.

## **2:56**

April 1944 (Friday). Toby was cooking and baking challas for Sabbath. Two soldiers ordered them out of house in five minutes. She pleaded to be left with child who was now very sick. Soldiers screamed at her. She and family were sent to the synagogue.

## **2:80**

On Sunday Jews were taken to ghetto. Gentiles watched with pleasure. Toby shared a little room with 20 people. Grandmother, aunt with nine children, and mother slept on the floor.

## **2:97**

Four weeks later they were taken by train to Auschwitz. Germans took everything from them, especially jewelry. One hundred people were in each car for five days without water or toilets. Many people died.

When they came to Auschwitz, they were so happy and thought they would get water. But Germans did not let them have any.

Brother, mother, grandmother, and child all together. Some people asked for the child. When they came to Mengale, her child begged to stay with her but could not.

This was the last time she saw her child.

### **3:65**

Toby stayed with cousin for three months in C Lager. They were given pieces of bread that tasted like sawdust, and she could not eat it.

They went to crematorium where they were given showers. Told to take off clothes. After shower, they were given clothes that did not fit and their hair was cut. No one could recognize any one.

### **4:00**

Czech families kept together. All were killed.

### **4:46**

Toby and cousin sent to lager B, where they were tattooed. Toby's number was 810598

One thousand people were in each barrack, and there were 32 barracks.

### **4:76**

Toby was a good singer. German heard her and asked her to sing for him while she was being tattooed. She couldn't do it.

A few days later they needed people to sew clothes. Her cousin was a good tailor and told her to come with her.

## **TAPE 1, Side B**

**:02**

Stayed with cousin for nine months through the winter. She replaced buttons and repaired clothes.

“We didn’t know anything. We saw red smoke and smelled the burning.”

**:15**

Toby found a lot of money and jewelry in clothing. Made a little sack and put everything in her pocket. Foolishly told other people and everything was taken away.

Every four weeks went to crematorium for showers to get rid of lice.

**:39**

Someone told Toby that children were OK, and they were being fed chicken soup, white bread, and milk. She went with woman to find out about children. Polish men told them children would not have survived. “You stupid Hungarians, the first day they came to Auschwitz, they were all killed.”

**:54**

January 18, 1944 Russians came near the camp, but Germans took prisoners away. Gave them some bread, a can of meat, and a blanket. They walked for three weeks in deep snow.

**:72**

Toby describes daily life in Auschwitz. There were 450 toilets in each room. You went to toilet in the morning and then when they ordered you to go. In another barrack, there were 450 faucets. Cousin went to take shower every day, but it was too cold for Toby. They worked all day and had roll call twice a day.

**:88**

One day one person was missing. Every half hour they had roll call for two or three days. One day the missing person came back. She had been sick and had slept for three days and nights. They gave her whole bread and salami. After she finished eating, they hung her and made everyone watch.

**1:08**

None of us thought we would survive.

Religious girls stayed together. One girl was fasting on T'ish b'av. She washed a handkerchief to put it on her head. It blew away, and she ran after it and hit the electric fence and was killed immediately.

Many people committed suicide.

Toby talks about how wonderful her husband was. She wanted to live and be reunited with him.



**1:40**

Thousands of people in Auschwitz. After the death march only a few hundred survived.

**1:59**

The snow was very deep. Dogs used for watching them. Many people froze every night. Sat in circle close to each other for warmth. Shoes were wooden and did not bend.

**1:95**

Put into open train, sat in snow. Each car had 120 people and four soldiers.

Came to Ravensbrueck and suddenly it seemed like summer.

People ate snow and ice.

**2:10**

Made a tent in the snow. Pushed people into tent. Toby could not get in. A few days later, she and cousin sent to another tent where 14 girls slept in three layers. She was on top with her cousin.

Non-Jewish girls were very angry. She and cousin gave them bread in exchange for few more places for Jewish girls.

**2:63**

Three weeks. "No toilet, no food, we were like five "sisters." "We used pots for toilet and cooking. You couldn't imagine."

### **2:83**

Four weeks later trucks came to take them to Rechlin. Soldiers lived there in a beautiful building but had run away, leaving a set table. They slept in beautiful beds with white sheets and ate farina.

### **3:02**

Six girls decided to open a little factory. They slept in basement on hay mattresses. Thousands of lice.

Girls worked for soldiers but kept apart because of lice. At night, Toby's cousin sewed for a soldier who gave them whatever food they wanted.

Toby took out whatever food she could find to the hospital.

### **3:93**

After three months, they started walking from Rechlin to Mauthausen. Went to sleep in a large garage. Slept on floor.

During night, Russians bombed bridges.

SS gave them packages from America. Then the soldiers started running away and taking off their uniforms and pins. Russian soldiers liberated the group, and then took them into woods. They returned to garage at night.

Finally, sent to New Bramberg DP camp in Germany. They were afraid to go home and afraid of the Russians.

## **Tape # 2**

### **Side A**

**:05**

Toby does not remember how they got to New Bramberg. They walked for many days through pastures and slept in barns. Toby and her cousin stayed in New Bramberg for six months until 500 Romanians could be assembled.

They heard terrible stories about Russians who wanted to sleep with the girls.

**:61**

She was sent on train with 500 people back to Romania. She found friends. She was the only married woman who came home. She still didn't know that her husband was dead.

She was reunited with her brother who had been in Auschwitz and had heard that she had been killed. They tried to find out about her husband

**1:02**

Her beautiful house was broken up and made into horse stables. Some things were still there. Neighbor had kept

many things, including pictures, which she returned to Toby.

Went to mother-in – law’s house in Transnistria to wait for husband. (For first time, Toby mentions her three- year-old child.)

### **1:32**

Reunited with oldest brother who had found a cousin who was a US Army chaplain and had lived in Romania until he was 16 years old. He was stationed in Czechoslovakia and wanted to see Toby. Toby and brother went to Czechoslovakia but cousin had just been transferred to Germany.

Reunited with another cousin who took her to Germany.

Finally, ended up in a woman’s house who put them in touch with UNRAA. Reunited with other family members.

### **3:03**

Toby did not want to remarry. Thought she could never find a man like her husband. For three years she lived with sister-in-law and took care of her. She wanted a child so badly

### **3:70**

Brother found a man who they knew, and Toby remarried. Her first child was a miscarriage, but then they had five more children. She was so happy. They were beautiful and

good children. Lived in Paris for 18 months. Husband brought people from Vienna to Paris illegally.

**4:75**

Husband was arrested, but Toby's brother in Paris got him released. Toby and husband went to Belgium and then Germany for two years.

**5:22**

In 1950 UNRRA brought them to America. When they landed, an UNRRA representative met them and helped them get started.

**5:56**

Toby became very ill. Cousin came to get Toby and husband. After three months, moved to an apartment that had terrible cockroaches and rats.

**Tape 2,  
Side B**

Her husband was a good man. He worked hard. They were married for 50 years.

**2:83**

Husband had a butcher shop and worked 18 hours a day. Toby cleaned the store on Sundays, and when youngest child was three, she worked full time in the shop. She wanted to go to school, but it was never possible.

Many years later one of her daughters went to Florida, caught cold in a hotel and died from an allergic reaction to penicillin.

**3:27**

Her daughter's death brought back all of Toby's losses, and she was in a deep depression for five years. She didn't want to go anywhere.

**3:49**

Toby's husband was very patient, even when she talked about her first husband.

Toby reviews their time in Paris and Europe. Husband had been arrested for smuggling people into Paris. It was the only thing he could do to make money.

**3:74**

She wanted to stop being so observant but couldn't give up religion.

**4:31**

Children did not want to hear about her life experiences. Now her daughter is very involved. Made a tape in Spielberg project. Gave 120 pictures to HMM.

**4:63**

It is very hard for Toby to talk about her experiences, but she feels that she has to do it.

## **TAPE 3**

### **Side A**

**:03**

Memories of Auschwitz haunt her. Very painful to talk about

“I hope I was a good mother and grandmother to my very loving family.” She always protected her children and taught them good things not bad things.

“The war didn’t change my character, but I just kept questioning why we had to suffer. There is no answer to why. There are questions, but no answers. Because we are Jews, why do we suffer? They killed everyone: doctors, lawyers, rabbis—just because they were Jews.”

**:29**

Losing daughter was a terrible tragedy. “I dream a lot but it doesn’t go away. It stays with you.”

**:57**

“When we are with friends who were there, we always talk about the Holocaust. Everybody lost family; everybody suffered.”

“We have a very hard life, but I have good children and a good husband.”

**:84**

“I had a lot of friends before my daughter died, but for five years, I didn’t spend time with anyone. Now I don’t do anything, except observe customs.”

**1:24**

“There are many stories, I didn’t tell.”