

One Survivor's Journey and Legacy

"(I survived the Holocaust through). . . pure luck. God's will and, I guess for me, to tell you the message right now. To tell you the story, that's the reason we survived."

...up to liberation

Ben Stern
Holocaust Survivor
Columbia, SC

July 21, 1924-- birth of Ben Stern (Sterenzys), the youngest of 4 children, in Kielce, Poland.

Summer 1925--family picture with baby Ben in front. Only 2 survivors of the Holocaust are in this picture, Ben and his oldest sister Zoscia, (Sofie).

Summer 1929--family moves from Kielce to Lodz, Poland looking for work.

Fall, 1931--Chaim Stern (father of Ben) begins to feel the unrest in Europe, and warns his sister Helen Lipton to be "careful" in Germany, since she would be visiting from the USA with her 2 small sons, Joe and Morey.

Spring, 1938--Visa photo taken of Ben's mother-Hadassah, brother -Joel, father-Chaim, and Ben in the hope of immigrating to the US. The correspondence to the United States reveals an increasing sense of urgency for immigration. Their letters become pleading.



Ben and his oldest sister, Zoscia (Sofie), were the only survivors of the family. Picture was taken in 1925 in Kielce, Poland.

Picture for visa of Hadassah, Joel, Chaim, and Ben.



Fall, 1941--Kielce becomes a ghetto.

Spring, 1942--The SS (Nazis) raided his family's home and made selections of who would live and work for them, and who would not. Ben watched as his sister, Zoscia, (Sofie) was forever separated from her small son (who was killed before her eyes as they "tore" the legs apart from the child, and threw them away). Other family members were transported to Treblinka Concentration Camp. Ben was taken to Henrikov (near Kielce), to work at a shoe factory. He worked in this work camp until 1944, then was sent to six concentration camps: Auschwitz, Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen, Kausering, Dauchau and Allach.

Fall, 1939--The family moves back to Kielce, Poland, as word spreads that Lodz will soon become a ghetto. Ben begins work in a carpenter shop.



One of the last letters from Poland by Ben's family. The word "Geöffnet" meant it was opened and checked by the German mail censors.



Late April, 1945--Ben and others had to march from Dauchau to Allach, which was only 3 kilometers. Ben's brother Joel was on this march, too.

"I fell...I couldn't walk anymore. I weighed about 87 pounds and I fell, and that was lucky that I couldn't walk, because everybody else got shot."

Ben Stern, 1977

(Ben's brother, Joel, died on that march).

Sketch image of a liberated Jewish prisoner.



April 30, 1945--Ben Stern is liberated from Allach by the 42nd Infantry Division of the American Army.

"I couldn't exhibit any emotions, because I was so sick and so weak. I weighed 87 or 89 pounds. Inwardly, I was overjoyed, but if you had been an American soldier and had looked at me, there was no reaction, because I could not move. I was flat gone. It was a blessing in disguise that I couldn't eat. Other prisoners went to the bunkers, the area where potatoes were stored underground, and started eating raw potatoes. Many died."

Ben Stern, 1977