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Intro- Second Generation of Jewish survivors from the Holocaust.

Thank you- 4 weeks into program

Why am I here to speak to you?

This past November, I went to Germany with my younger brother & sister to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Kristallnacht.” We were invited from the small town from where my father was from, the town of Borken. In our small group of 7, there was only one person who actually was born in that town, and Gershon was 89 years of age. The twenty five other people from the old guard of Jewish survivors, who were invited back, were too old or frail to go on this trip. That included my father.

After that experience, I feel a calling had been placed in my lap. A symbolic torch has been passed to me & other second generation members to retell personal stories from the depth of darkness, so that a new light of hope will come in your world, a light of peace, tolerance and understanding.

Some people will deny the Holocaust never happened.

Some countries are afraid to teach it, fearing it may offend some people.

There are some countries in the Middle East, who would like to see another Holocaust tomorrow against the Jewish State, racing to make a nuclear bomb, going unchecked!

We live in a world today where there is genocide in Darfur, Africa based on ethnic differences.

The lessons you are learning, is about what our country, America’s basis principles were founded on. That all men, women and children are created equal. Freedom for all. Even that tenant took a while to include all people.

We are the most diverse nation on the planet. And as long as we respect each other and show tolerance to one another, no matter what your background we will remain a strong nation. We all have something to bring to the table.

So why am I here?

(2)

To tell the story of what happened to my father, Herbert Klaber, in one of history's darkest periods.

He is still living with my mother in the Chicago area.

What you may not realize is this did not happen that long ago! If you have grandparents or greatgrandparents, ask them if they were alive during this time.

My father Herbert would tell you he was very lucky, and believes God saved him.

I'd like to start by doing a little exercise!

So you get the sense of the enormity of a number. I'm referring to the number 6,000,000. That was the number of Jews exterminated during the Holocaust, most of them systematically. Millions of other people were also killed during this time. My focus here is the 6 million.

Let's start counting

25- 1 min., 1,500- 1 hr., 36,000 - 1 full day, 6,000,000 – 167 days, a school year.

Story Of The Klaber Family, as told by Herbert

The Klaber family has been in the Northwest Region of Germany for generations. My father Max was born December 3rd, 1874. He had 7 sisters and two brothers.

Max Klaber used to tell us stories of his youth. Among those he told us about, the time he was riding a bicycle. He was speeding down a small hill and ended up landing against a tree. He was a young man, losing all his teeth. I remember that Papa had false teeth all through his life.

Later on in his life, Max became a traveling salesman. On one of his travels Max met a beautiful lady in the town of Raesfeld. Max fell in love with Regina Rosenbaum & they got married at the end of the 19th century! The young couple moved into a small house in the small town of Borken.

(3)

On July 20th, 1902 their first child was born, they called her Erna. In September of 04, Willi was born. Then Betti in 07, and Albert came into the world in 1909. the next son Erich came into the world in 1914. that was around the time WW1 started. Max Klaber volunteered to join the German army as a medic. He was 40 years of age. At that time, mother Regina, Erna and Willi took care of the oil business while Max was away for 4 ½ years on the western front, serving his beloved Germany, where he saw lots of pain and misery.

During WW1, Max had invented a way to transport wounded soldiers on trains so that they could get immediate medical assistance. When he came back from the war, he started the Red Cross in Borken. The youngest son Herbert was born on March 19th, 1920.

I remember when I was two years old. My father built a new house on the Gemener Strasse, on the border between the town of Gemen & Borken. I started to cry, and said I don't want to move, but wanted to stay in our old house.

How does one remember such minor things. Our family at this time lived a very comfortable life.

My father, together with brother Willi & Albert built a great business, as representatives of the Standard Oil Company.

Being the youngest in the family, my mother spoiled me. She protected me from the older boys. He loved his mother Regina.

From the age of six to ten, Herbert went to a Jewish Day school in Borken. A small school with about 25 children in attendance.

By 1930, at ten years of age, Herbert was in 5th grade at a public school, known as a "gymnasium". They were some of the best times for our family & me!

We belonged to an Orthodox synagogue in Gemen. The cantor by the name of Safra taught him his portion from the torah for his Bar Mitzvah. That is a right of passage for Jewish boys, when you become a man.

(4)

This could have been a joyous and wonderful event, but the date was April 1, 1933. Adolph Hitler had been Chancellor of Germany since January 30th

On this day, the boycott of all Jewish businesses began. Nazi brownshirts were marching and made life miserable for all the Jews in Germany. Very few of Herbert's relatives attended his Bar Mitzvah.

A new reality had set in for this young man.

The next year 1934, Herbert was thrown out of the Gymnasium, for nothing more than being a Jew. So he worked at his fathers' business from the age of 14 to 17 in Borken. He would have liked to go to school, but he was not allowed.

In 1937, with limited choices, Max and Regina decided to send their youngest son Herbert to Holland, to live with family friends- the Bauman family, who had a kosher butcher shop in the town of Wintersweigh, right over the border from Germany.

Herbert went to a trade school, to learn about bicycle and auto repair.

The Dutch despised Herbert because he was German. (how Ironic)

During that time he obtained papers in Holland, that allowed him to work there.

He would come home on weekends to Borken while he stayed with the Baumans during the week. He would ride his bike around 10 miles to get back home. As time went on, the German border police became more abusive to Herbert and harass him on his bicycle trips back home.

Looking back, my father tells me he was very fortunate to be in Holland during that time.

Specifically, the date was November 9th, 1938, "Kristallnacht". Night of Broken Glass.

Back in Borken, father Max, brother Willi and Albert were all thrown in jail. The owners of this wonderful enterprise were forced to sell their business to a nazi at a fire sale price.

The horror had just began. The Nazis turned up the heat and made life systematically worse for the Jews as time went on.

(5)

The beautiful Synagogue in Gemen where Herbert had his Bar Mitzvah was torched to the ground during on this day.

The Klaber family in Borken, were known as pretty good athletes. Back in June 1895, father Max had won 1st Place on the Horizontal Bars at a state gymnastics competition in Zuelpich Germany.

Willi, who used to belong to a sports club, "Deutsche Turnerschaft" was also a state champ in gymnastics. He was one of the founding members of this club. When the Nazis came to power in Germany and invented all these laws against all Jewish people, Willi and all other Jews were kicked out of the club he helped found. Erich was an exceptional soccer player with a thunderous right kick unmatched. He had real aspirations of playing for the German National team in the Berlin Olympics of 1938. That dream came to an abrupt halt for the crime of being Jewish.

During this time, life became unbearable for Jews in Germany. Many Jews from Germany were trying to escape to Holland, illegally if possible.

Willi and Albert snuck into Holland, and were caught and put them in what they call an internment camp. They were like, illegal aliens.

The internment camps were full of Jews.

When the Nazis invaded Holland in May 1940, the job of rounding up the Jews was made easier because so many were already at the internment camps.

Erna was at such a camp, called Westerbork. She wrote to Herbert in 1943, and pleaded with him to join her at the camp, to look after her baby brother.

From 1939 thru 1943, Herbert worked odd jobs on various farms in Holland as a farmhand, making contacts along the way.

April 10, 1943 was the deadline set by the Germans for every Jew in the Netherlands to report to the concentration camp.

Dad decided, "I was not going of my own free will, he sought out a hiding place & sent word to his sister Erna in Westerbork secretly of his plans.

Erna was eventually sent to Buchenwald concentration camp.

My father tells me that before his parents, Max & Regina in their late sixties were transported to Teresenstat Concentration camp, they lived with ten other Jews in Borken at the Gans house. They were the last remaining Jews

(6)

in Borken to be transported to the concentration camp. Since then, there have been no Jews living in Borken.

Max was a diabetic and died of starvation in Theresienstadt. Regina was sent to Auschwitz where she was exterminated.

This is the last correspondence my father received from his parents, while he was in Holland. Never to see or hear from them again.

My father Herbert never knew what happened to his family until after the war.

Read letter.

Here are some excerpts from,
Life In the Darkness.

So Herbert's decision to go into hiding was cemented in stone, not knowing what was to be for the rest of his family. His sheer gut instincts told him this was the right choice for him.

Can you imagine every tiny decision you made, was magnified as to determine your fate.

Things did not go so well at first.

A former friend had promised to give him shelter, but on April 7th, the farmer's son told Herb that it would be impossible for his family to keep their promise. Herb was terrified, without a hiding place or protector.

Dutch people put their lives on the line to give shelter to Jews or stranded Allied soldiers or other "dangerous persons". If the German SS discovered a "dangerous person" both he and his protector were deported to a prison camp or worse.

In the beginning, the Germans relentless in their searches found fugitives easily because most everyone was inexperienced at this sort of deception. Knowing how to make safe hiding places or to be elusive could be gained only by experience. You learned very quickly when your life is on the line.

Herb had two days to find another hiding place, before the April 10 deadline. His mind racing, he recalled a second cousin Max, who had already been hiding for months. Here was his last hope.

(7)

As darkness approached, he went to the farmhouse where his cousin was hiding. He had found his guardian angel, H.J. Lievestro, a tough independent man, with a fierce streak of being self reliant. Four other Jews had found refuge under Lievestros' protection. After a long conversation with the farmer, Herb was invited into the group Lievestros' own family included his wife, 3 daughters, and two sons. So this brave man took in five strangers into his home. My father tells me that it wasn't for the love of the Jews that he took in all these people, but his hatred of the Nazis.

Herb now had a Dutch name, Derk.

His first night in these surroundings were very unpleasant. The knowledge that he was in a life or death situation kept him sleepless all night.

Dreams of the past filled my mind, those peaceful, happy days of my boyhood with my parents, two sisters and three brothers. Here we sat as hunted animals. Our only chance of staying alive was to remain undiscovered until the allied armies could liberate us from the German beast.

That he did.

Along with about a dozen other Jews that Lievestro had saved, during this time.

From April 1943 to April 1945, there were many twists and turns in the lives of these people who were in hiding. Many anxious moments, where they were almost hunted down.

Dad says I'll never forget my birthday on March 19th, 1945. The approaching cannons and machine guns sounded like a symphony of freedom. The Allied armies were marching and nothing could hold them anymore.

April 1st, 1945, Easter Sunday at 9:00 am, we were liberated by the First Canadian Army.

Only he who has gone through years of fear, injustice, persecution and oppression can imagine what it means to be free. It's like giving a caged bird their freedom. It all seemed like a dream, the first American cigarettes, hundreds and hundreds of tanks, trucks and cars; smiling faces all around you happiness wherever you looked, men weeping for joy, women kissing

(8)

their suntanned liberators. To be a witness to these scenes, on this unforgettable, bright Easter morning in a small dutch village, was like a dream.

Our greatest expectations cannot conceive of such a site. In a moment like that, you really appreciate being among people that survived.

After the war, my father learned the fate of his family. Erna had survived Buchenwald camp. Willi and Erich made it to the US, where Erich joined the US Air Force, in the Pacific. Betti perished in an institution. Albert, the good looking one died in Aushwitz while being experimented on. My father Herbert made it the United States, to Chicago where Willi and Erich were living. He had four children with mother Marcia who he met in Chicago.

After the war, Lievestro the farmer who hid all those people, was shot in the back by the local game warren, sympathetic to the Nazis, saying he was hunting without a permit. Was this an accident?

Lievestros' family is honored at the Avenue Of The Righteous Gentiles in Jerusalem at Yad Vashem, the memorial to the 6 million.