

Holocaust Survivor Biography: Peter Stern



Peter Stern was born in Nuremberg, Germany in March 1936. His father, Artur, was an auto mechanic and a vocational school instructor. His mother helped raise Peter and his younger brother, Sam, in a building that housed four other families and shared a kitchen. One of his first vivid memories was walking home with his father and stones were being thrown at them by a group of young boys not much older than him. Peter couldn't understand why this was happening nor why people stood by and watched it happen.

In 1941, his family was deported from Germany to a holding camp in Latvia that was surrounded by frozen water, though no fences, guards patrolled the perimeter. In the spring of 1942 they were transferred to the Riga ghetto and were crammed into a room with other families. He remembers always being cold and from his window he could see people being moved onto trucks. Within a few weeks they moved to a small building outside the ghetto and this is where Peter tried to learn his ABCs but at the same time learned about fear and death. He was six years old. His father continued to work as an auto mechanic for the Germans though he was not paid.

In the beginning of 1943 they were transferred to a work camp deeper in Russia. One day while working on a damaged electricity transformer, the Russian army attacked the camp and Artur saved a German officer's life. This changed the course of the family's experience. The officer arranged for the Stern family to be hidden in the Riga prison, rather than be returned to the ghetto. In January 1944 the family was once again put on a truck and deported back to Germany where Artur was imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp, where he died. Karolina, Sam, and Peter were transferred to Ravensbrück concentration camp and then, in the face of an Allied advance, moved to Bergen-Belsen. They were liberated by the British on April 15th, 1945 and were moved to buildings previously occupied by German soldiers.

Peter, Sam, and Karolina were moved back to Nuremberg, Germany in the fall of 1945 and lived in a building that was once a home for the Jewish elderly. From there they moved to a displaced persons camp in Munich, Germany and then another camp in Bremen. On January 7, 1947, they were able to immigrate to America with the help of distant relatives who lived in Atlanta, Georgia. They arrived in New York City on January 27th. In 1954 Peter graduated from high school, then attended University of Missouri and received a degree in metallurgical engineering. He is married and has two sons and grandchildren. Peter and his wife Julie recently moved to the Philadelphia area.



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Witness to History Project:

The Witness To History Project is designed to further the message and lessons of the Holocaust by direct interaction between students or interested adults and Holocaust survivors. Participants "adopt" a survivor by learning his or her unique account of via listening to the survivor tell his/her story, asking questions, writing a biography, reviewing a videotape, and memorizing and re-telling the story to others. Ultimately, the participant will have the lifelong job of educating others about the Holocaust by sharing this personal narrative. Contact the Holocaust Awareness Museum to participate.

Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center

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