

Auschwitz Survivor Testimony

Abraham Mastbaum

The subject of today is Auschwitz, who is directly linked to the past of Germany. More specifically about the survivors, most of them left Germany as soon as possible after the Liberation. But not all of them. We met one who stayed, Abraham Mastbaum.

My end of the war.

The life of Abraham Mastbaum begun 83 years ago, in a small polish town, Gombin. Gombin, 70 kilometres northern from Warsaw. Today he lives in Hannover (Germany), as one of the Jewish survivors of the death camp Auschwitz.

“We didn’t know at that time that it existed an Auschwitz. We didn't know at all. And when we arrived at Auschwitz, we saw there women without hair, and men in stripped pyjamas. And when we arrived in Auschwitz we saw the ramp where Mengele was standing, and we were 26 Jews standing on the ramp, wondering what was happening, we didn't know about Auschwitz. And Mengele with his stick in his hand, and his SS officers, started to sort out people. Young people who were able to work, left, and the ones to the gas chambers, right.

Every morning we got a bowl with a waterish coffee Ersatz (Mukefuk), and a small piece of bread. And we had to work all day without receiving any food. And in the evening when we had to march, only then we got some beet soup. And several thousands died there, several thousands! And we had to work so hard in Auschwitz, in the fabrics, building all day long. in the winter without any coat or gloves, only with the stripped pyjama, can you imagine that? Frozen off hands, frozen off ears.

The SS had all this big German Shepherd dogs. One day I was on the construction site with my friend Finkelstein, and we saw how an SS brought a bowl of food for his dog. The dog was attached, the SS brought him the bowl and left. And I said: "Salik look at this, look what the dog is eating. So, my friend took a little stick and started playing with the dog, while I was taking the bowl from the dog, and we both ate it, and for us it was really something big. And now imagine the SS would have caught me taking the food, he would have shot us both right there. Imagine that, everything I'm saying is true, it's not a lie.

Every two weeks a few SS men came with a truck and a little table that they put outside the door. The whole block had to undress, naked, everyone had to pass in front of the SS men.

Think about it. And for the ones that hadn’t anything on their bones, the truck was already there, to the gas chambers. The person knew that he was going to be gazed! Could you imagine that?!

I was lucky, I was young, I could work so they sent me aside. It happened every few weeks. People were already naked and knew they are going to the gas chambers!

The 27 January 1945 the Red Army arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. One day before the SS sent the remaining prisoners on the Death March to Gleiwitz. It was a 70 km March, they were hundreds of dead bodies. It was a cold of -20 °C, there were one meter of snow. We had to walk next to the bodies of the prisoners on the floor, they were even SS bodies because they couldn’t carry on, the Russians were just behind us”.

Only 7000 prisoners survived at Auschwitz in 1945.

1.5 million people, Jews and Gypsies have been systematically killed.

At the time these images were reaching the world, Abraham Mastbaum was still fighting for his life at the Camp Mittelbau-Dora and later at Bergen Belsen. His brother didn't survive.

With a friend, the 22 years old, after the Liberation of Bergen Belsen reaches the destroyed city of Hannover. In the camp he learned German and wanted to stay in Germany.

"We took an apartment, both guys, each of us had a room at the Ruecklinger street. The Americans were there, and the black market started. Cigarettes, coffee. I received one package of cigarettes from the Americans and I sold two cigarettes at the Train Station, so I could afford to buy a piece of bread.

In 1953, I opened my first store in Hannover. Just with old clothes, old tuxedos, old shoes, old shirts. People brought in their things, I would sell them, and this is how I earned my living.

In 1960 Abraham Mastbaum got married in Paris. He has 3 children who are studying abroad.

At night, so tells his wife, he screams, remembering his brother that he buried with his own hands.

And one question tortures him again and again.

"And I am asking myself still today, why did I survive and not them. Why me?"