

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. What question does Joseph always ask himself?
What is his answer?
2. Where was Joseph born? How did the Nazi takeover of his country affect his childhood?
3. Why was Joseph better able to withstand the journey to Auschwitz in 1944 than his parents?
4. Why was Joseph able to survive rather than his parents and younger siblings?
5. How long was Joseph in Auschwitz, and where was he sent from there?
6. How long did Joseph spend in concentration camps?
Why was this shorter than for others?
7. Describe the conditions in his new work camp.
8. What happened to the transport that Joseph was on in Spring 1945?
9. What was their eventual destination, and who liberated them?
10. What problem did Joseph and other survivors face after liberation?
11. Would you say that Joseph's answer to his initial question is correct? Why? Give examples.
12. What demand does Joseph make of all who listen to his story?

Holocaust Survivor Joseph Klein

Filmed on May 12, 2005



"I was lucky to survive."

- Joseph Klein

Face to Face
A Holocaust Education Program at
Congregation Shaarey Tikvah
Beachwood, Ohio

Joseph Klein was born in 1929 in a small village in a part of Czechoslovakia that later became Hungary. His family consisted of his parents and six siblings – three brothers and three sisters.

After 1938, Jewish families were not able to send their children to school or own books or businesses, and food was scarce. Things got worse in 1944, when the families were assembled in a ghetto near their hometown for a few days and then transported by cattle cars, “packed like sardines,” to Auschwitz. Joseph was 15 years old at that time.

As they got off the train, a Nazi officer, perhaps the infamous Dr. Joseph Mengele, sent women and children (including Joseph’s mother and sister) to the left. Guards said that to the left there would be showers, but in fact, those sent to the left went to the gas chambers. Those strong enough to work went to the right as slave labor. Joseph feels that he was lucky to survive. He attributes his survival in part to the relatively short time (one year) during which he had to endure terrible conditions and to the fact that he was young and adaptable.

Joseph was assigned to a work force, and then he was sent to Buchenwald to work in a petroleum refinery near Leipzig, Germany. Food was a scant bowl of watery soup. Prisoner-workers were housed in barracks with three to five people on one small wooden slab for each bed. The barracks were surrounded by electric-wired fences, armed Nazi guards, and watchtowers manned by guards with

machine guns. In the spring, they were again transported, by coal cars this time, to a destination unknown.

The Allies were bombing the trains, and in the confusion, some prisoners were killed. Joseph and others leapt off the train and ran into the fields. However he and the others were caught by young soldiers, who treated them brutally. The entire group was on a forced death march for days until they arrived at Theresienstadt. Joseph wanted to give up on the march but a friend from his hometown encouraged him and kept him going. Of the original 3,500 people who started the march, only about 1,250 survived.

In May, 1945, the prisoners at Theresienstadt were liberated by the Russians; however, many of these survivors were so weakened by starvation that they contracted typhoid. Many died of typhoid fever, but Joseph recovered and was sent to London as an orphaned child.

In England Joseph learned to speak English and was trained to do typesetting. He was also then “adopted” by a family and remained with them for several years before he came to the United States. One year after he arrived in the United States, he was drafted into the US Army to serve in the Korean War. When he returned, he started working in his trade as a typesetter.

He traveled to Israel in 1958, where he met his wife and married. They have two adult daughters and five grandchildren.