

e - Markus Reich
Date of Birth - May 12, 1923
Place of Birth - Bochnia, Poland
Parents - Solomon and Malke Reich
Siblings - Manya, Nataalka, Yitzak
Children - One
Grandchildren - Two

Markus Reich grew up in the town of Bochnia, Poland. His family would purchase milk from nearby farmers, turn the milk into cheese and then sell the milk and cheese to their neighbors. Each morning, the four children would rise early to make the three mile walk pushing a two wheeled cart to buy the milk from the farmers. By the time he was eight years old he had stopped going to school so that he could be of more help to the family livelihood. By the time he was a young teen he apprenticed with this uncle for three years to learn to be a tailor. Such was the life of children throughout Poland and much of the world.

By the end of 1939, the Nazis had made their way to Bochnia. Jews were ordered to wear an armband identifying them as such. In early 1940, at the age of sixteen, Markus was walking through town when the Gestapo pulled up in a canvas-covered truck "catching" young people for slave labor. Markus was captured, along with several others, and taken to some woods outside of Tarnow, Poland. There he built barracks for guards and prisoners and also an airport. In addition, he carried bombs into the woods where they were stacked. It was extremely heavy and dangerous work. During this same time, there were also constant horrible beatings inflicted by the guards on the prisoners.

One day, after about a year, Markus and a fellow prisoner managed to escape by pretending to be regular Polish workers. They put a piece of lumber over their shoulders and walked out. Since the prisoners at Tarnow did not wear uniforms at that time, the two did not stand out. The weather was bitter cold and his fellow traveler lost a finger perhaps due to frostbite. But they did make it back to Bochnia. His parents were shocked as they were sure he had died. Soon after his return in 1941, Markus' father fell ill and died of natural causes.

Soon after his father's death, the Jewish leadership of Bochnia was forced to give a list of boys and men for slave labor to the Nazi regime. Once again, Markus was sent into slave labor. By 1943, he was in Plaszow outside of Krakow where the guards had formerly been prisoners in German prisons. Markus became a self-taught carpenter while building barracks. For about one year, one particular Nazi gave Markus extra bread for washing, feeding and riding his horses. Otherwise, his main diet was watery soup and a small piece of bread.

At Plaszow*, Markus found his cousin, Max Hilfstein and his wife Erna. Max was put to work as a barber for the Nazis. This cousin pulled him out of a line of 200 Jews who were soon shot to death. Markus, along with others, was forced to bury them. Markus remembers that during the last days at Plaszow all the prisoners were being transported to death camps. Markus and his cousins were among the few remaining prisoners who were ordered to march to Auschwitz. Erna was too weak to walk. Max turned to his cousin Markus and asked "Will you help me carry my wife to Auschwitz?" and he did.

In Auschwitz, Markus remembers the day that he and other prisoners saw Allied planes flying overhead "all shiny in the sun" and they wondered why the Allies were not bombing it. These last survivors of Auschwitz didn't know if they would be alive the next day anyway - why not bomb it now? Markus was in Auschwitz for two weeks before he and others were again forced on a death march

to Gliwice where they were put in open box cars. As the train traveled through Poland into Czechoslovakia, people were taken on and off the train, and no one was given any food. Markus recalls gathering the fallen snow to quench his thirst. People standing on bridges were shot when they tried to throw food into the passing open box cars.

Marcus estimates there were about 100 survivors when they were forced to begin marching again. In May of 1945 Markus and another man escaped by lying "dead" for hours in the snow. When the soldiers had passed they walked to a farm in the countryside outside of Garching, Germany. On the way they met SS soldiers who let them pass. Markus said, "G-d had to look down on me". Later he learned that the remaining thirty prisoners from that last death march were all shot.

When Markus reached the farm outside of Garching, he was met by Maria Anglebrecht. She offered him food and milk to eat. Markus was so thin he had difficulty sitting and could not work for over a year. Maria's husband had died early in the war from pneumonia. Maria helped Markus recover his strength. They became close friends and eventually married. Following the war, Markus stayed in Garching but he and traveled to Dachau to give testimony as a witness at the war crimes' trials. After four trials it became too hard to constantly relive what had happened. Markus learned that his mother and siblings had all died in death camps. Following the war, Max and wife Erna made it safely to New York where he became a hairdresser, and she earned a PhD in Science and was a professor and author.

Max went to Altotting, Germany to register with the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. He began to focus on emigrating to either Australia or the US, while working some of the time in a US Army Kitchen.. With Maria's help, he chose the US. Finally, in April, 1951 "the Joint" sent Markus to Asheville, North Carolina. On his arrival, he stayed at the YMCA and learned English by watching old Westerns. He regularly ate at the S & W Cafeteria in downtown Asheville where he could simply point at what he wanted. In 1953, his wife Maria and daughter, Manya, joined him in Asheville.

Markus worked at a number of jobs including Consolidated Metal and began to learn about tool making. In the 60's Markus started his own company originally called Biltmore Metal Stamping. After several rocky starts, the name was changed to American Tool and Mold and the business began to do very well. Markus sold the business in the mid 1990's, though he continues to work there part time. Maria and Markus' daughter, Manya, married Gary Hughes and together they have a daughter, Nataalka. Manya and Nataalka were the names of Markus' sisters.

Markus receives a pension from the German government for head injuries caused during the beatings. He was seen by two German doctors in Knoxville, Tennessee who verified and documented his injuries. Markus says " Since I came to the Untied States, America has been very, very good to me. I worked all the time. America gives you opportunity , not success."

*Plaszow, outside of Krakow, was the main camp featured in the story of "Schindlers's List".