

*George Heller*

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A Holocaust Survivor Story

The Holocaust was an awful and terrifying event that happened in the 1940's. The deterioration of a single race and religion is unforgettable. George Heller, a survivor of this terrible epidemic had an incredibly interesting and compelling story. George Heller was born in Budapest Hungary in 1924. He grew up with his brother and sister and his parents, Kalman and Gizella Heller. In the city where George grew up, his neighborhood was predominantly Jewish. Budapest was approximately 50% Jewish so he grew up practicing Judaism with his family. He was raised in a Conservative Jewish family. His family owned a small business in Budapest before the Holocaust. George attended four years of elementary school in Budapest as well as having eight years of Gimnazium (high school). Religion and education were both taught at his public high school.

Life as a Jew was not as difficult in the beginning; he lived within a Jewish community and was a university student. When he was growing up, George had extensive education in several languages: Hungarian, Hebrew, German, Latin, English and some French, This made a huge impact on his communication skills and his ability to adapt. At the beginning of WWII Hitler did not pay too much attention to George's country because it was run by an anti-Semitic leader; therefore, Hitler left it to the Hungarian government to handle its "Jewish Problem." Hungary had its own Nazi party, the Arrow Cross. Towards the height of the anti-Semitic movement, Hitler's forces entered Hungary and took George and many other Jews in a labor camp in Hungary, then shipped them to Austria, where they did intensive labor, endured freezing climates, and had very little food. Afterwards, they were forced on a three-day death march to the Concentration Camp of Mauthausen. If someone paused for even briefly, they were shot and killed on the spot.

At the age of 27, George's brother was sent to a forced labor camp on the Russian front and sadly died as a slave laborer. His sister was brutally murdered in the Ghetto in Budapest. Losing family members is physiologically and emotionally difficult. The amount of pain and suffering is unbearable. He overcame so many deaths in his family which only shows how much courage and bravery George has. Following his brother's death, in 1944 George was forced into the labor service known as the Hungarian Labor Service. Following several month of slave labor in Budapest, George was sent with other slave laborers to Austria. His unit was transported in a cattle car train with no bathroom facilities, no food or water, and no windows for air. Not only were there limited resources, they put 80 Jews in each cattle car. This caused many diseases to spread which ultimately caused even more deaths. George is considered lucky to have survived the Box Cars. During his time at the labor camp, he was forced to work in extremely harsh conditions such as digging holes with very little food and water. Six months later, George

was required to death march to the Mauthausen Concentration Camp. This death march lasted for 3 days without any food or water. When there was a chance to stop, George would eat grass from the ground just so he wouldn't starve to death. He lasted in the concentration camp until the spring of 1945 when American troops had liberated them. It was the fall of the Nazi regime and the fall of the genocide.

Once the war ended, George Heller wanted to know what had become of his family. His friend was traveling to Budapest, so he was able to let George know what had happened; when he returned, his friend notified him that his mother was alive and had sent him the address of an aunt who was living in New York. Because of his broad range of languages, he was able to obtain work as an interpreter for the American Army at a Displaced Persons Camps. Later on, he was working for the United Nations Team (UNRRA) managing the DP camps, and worked there until the spring of 1946. His work was recognized when he was given a visa to immigrate to the United States. When he left, he was on the fifth transport to America. He arrived in New York with two dollars in his pocket and the shirt on his back. His aunt met him at the dock and took him to stay at her small apartment. She was married, and had a job as a seamstress. In order to begin supporting himself (as his aunt did not make much money), George became a busboy on the Lower Eastside of New York for about one year.

After about six months as a busboy, George received a letter from a program urging him to pursue college. He enrolled at Temple University in Philadelphia, and stayed there for four years. Two of those years were spent studying liberal arts, and the next two were business. After he completed the four years, he searched for a job, but jobs were incredibly difficult to obtain due to the GI's returning from the war. While still searching for a solid job, he met his wife and they married in 1954. He was doing poorly, while he and his wife were living in New York City. He was now thirty years old, and applied to enroll to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. For three years, he studied electrical engineering and computers at MIT. He also studied at New York University and at Columbia University.

He worked at the MIT computer center, and then got a job at International Business Machines Corporation (IBM.) He worked at IBM for thirty years. Throughout that time he became involved in how to teach computers; he chaired the Education Committee of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), for its education program for computer science. In 1968, he became a National Lecturer of ACM, in 1971 he was elected to the New York Academy of Sciences. In the year of 2004, he was listed in "Who's Who in America." He has been retired for the past eighteen years and lives happily with his wife of fifty-three years; they both teach classes at the senior center. They have four children and nine grandchildren.

George Heller's story is remarkable, unique, and unforgettable. Life as a Jew during the Holocaust was extremely difficult and even deadly. George is one of the few who survived the trauma and he deserves to be commended for his nobility and courage. As we found out, his life story is far from over; he is an active member in his community and continues to inspire others as he has inspired us.