

## Survivor Stories – Ben Stem

We were rounded up and packed into cattle cars like sardines. We could not move our arms or legs. We travelled for 2 days – day and night. The heat was unbearable. Then one morning at dawn, we looked through the cracks in the cattle car. I saw the name Auschwitz.

When daylight came, they slid the wagon door open. All we heard was “Quick, quick get out of here, get out of here!!” I had to crawl over people who had died from the heat and from lack of food and water. SS men with skulls on the hats and collars stood in front of us stretched out at intervals about every 10 feet.

The SS officer in charge stood with his German shepherd. The officer had one right foot propped up on a little stool. We lined up and filed by him. Right there selection took place. As each person passed by him, he pointed left or right. The thumb left and right was your destiny. The people who were sent to the left went to the gas chambers, and we went to the right.

We were deloused because we had lice. One guard stood there putting some kind of chemical on our heads. Another put it under our arms. A third one shaved our heads. Then we were given some prisoner’s uniforms. Then we lined up again in single file and were tattooed on the forearm. My number was B-33484.

We were marched to a barracks in another part of Auschwitz. Above the entrance was an arch with an inscription which said in German “Work makes men free” pretending that this was a work camp. In front of us was a crematorium and gas chambers. We smelled the flesh of human bodies burning. We couldn’t mistake that smell for anything else.

I stayed there until the end of 1944 when the Russians started pushing the Germans from the Eastern front back to the west. The SS loaded us into cattle cars again and took us to a labour camp in Western Germany called Sachsenhausen. I was there about a month or 6 weeks, before being moved on again to another camp called Dachau close to the Austrian border. By now I was just a skeleton. Fortunately, the war then ended and I was freed by American soldiers.