

Aron's Story of Survival

Written by Max Tarlin and Ben Schwartz

This is the story of an amazing man whose perseverance willed him to survive tougher times than anyone could imagine. Aron was born in July of 1926 in the country of Poland. Aron, who was born in Dukla, lived with his parents and was one of nine children. When he was two and a half years old, he and his family moved to Szczakowa. Growing up he enjoyed school as he lived walking distance from a Polish Public school. Due to the fact that he was Jewish, Aron wore payas, which made him a victim of bullying. One time when he wore his yamaka to school, his peers took notice and picked on Aron, just because of what he was wearing on his head. However, he also attended Hebrew school, where he and other people of the Jewish community were able to learn without having to be worried about others making fun of them because of their faith. Walking to and from his long and hard hours of school each day, Aron practically had no free time. However, Aron had the distinct privilege of becoming a bar mitzvah at the age of 13 in July of 1939. But, shortly after, the war began.

In September 1939, Hitler and the Nazis invaded Poland, first striking the border just 20 km from Aron's home in Szczakowa. In 1941, when the Nazi regime reached his neighborhood, he and his family were removed from their home and sent to a nearby ghetto. The ghetto he was moved to was about 5 isolated houses, where they would place 5 families in each small home and give them barely enough food to survive off of. The little food given to the people in the homes had to be rationed. Half-rations were given, possibly a quarter-pound of bread per person a day. Since space was limited, the families in these houses slept anywhere possible, no matter how uncomfortable it might have been. During his time in the ghetto, Aron was given a job in a tannery, sweeping the blood of the cows and other animals that had been slaughtered.

Surviving the hard times while living in the ghetto was Aron's first true test of survival. Due to the little amount of food given, some people starved. To ensure that this did not happen to him, Aron had to figure out when to eat and when not to. According to Aron, the rations were enough so you wouldn't die; this is because the Nazis needed the Jews to do manual labor. Aron and his family lived in the ghetto from approximately Fall of 1941 to Spring 1942, but then the selection process began. Left or right, Auschwitz or not, survival or death, were the only possible fates that were to be chosen for you. After being instructed by his mother to lie about his age, saying he was sixteen, Aron was fortunate enough to not be sent to Auschwitz; unfortunately some of his family members were not as lucky. Like Aron, some members of his family went to other concentration camps, and some went with his mother to Shanov, another ghetto. But his family had been separated.

Throughout the time period of the Holocaust, Aron had been sent to nine different concentration camps. While at the concentration camps, life was hard for everyone there. The food, as Aron described it, was non-existent. Aron would eat anything he could find no matter what it was. To say food was scarce would be an understatement during these times. Any food was a luxury and starvation was present in the

concentration camps. There were people who died of starvation, and others who were beaten to death because they were unable to work or walk anymore. At one of the concentration camps Aron was at, one man had caught a German Shepard and killed it so he could eat the meat. To teach a lesson, they hung the man by his hands and he screamed for two hours. No one could sleep and the man eventually died. This horrific story shows the brutality of the Nazis.

During his life in the camps, there was a various amount of jobs done by the prisoners of the camps. Jobs depended on where you were sent. The conditions of the workplaces were terrible and many people grew weak because of it. Some, like Aron, worked in factories to make weapons for the Nazis. Aron fixed and built tanks, and stuffed powder into bullets. His face became yellow because of the powder. Unlike the Germans working in the factories, he was not given gloves or a mask to protect himself. Aron received this job on the fact that he looked healthy enough, although eventually he could hardly even board the train, because he was so weak. During the Holocaust, when people were moved from camp to camp, they were not told where they were going. At this point, Aron didn't care anymore where he was sent next. Eventually, in 1945, Aron was liberated and the Nazi reign was over. Aron was free. Through a mix of strength, luck, and willpower Aron was able to endure the hard times put before him and survive this horrible time in history.

After the war ended, he went out looking for his family but to no avail, except one of his sisters. He learned that in April 1945, his brothers along with 15,000 other kids were killed. The thought that the Nazis had killed all but one of his 7 brothers and sisters was devastating. But he had to move on as much as he could. After the liberation of the concentration camps, from 1945-1949, he lived in Austria in a DP (Displaced Persons) camp. While living there he received plenty of food, three meals a day. He also learned and began to read a lot. He was able to do this by obtaining books from America in Yiddish, in which he read the entire history of America in Yiddish. When he came to the country he knew more about the history than some Americans. He didn't go to school, but did read a lot and got education on his own the best he could, all in Polish, Yiddish or Hebrew.

Aron came to America in January 1949, when jobs only paid minimum wage. During his early days in the U.S., Aron could not find a job. After living in New York for a while, he moved, now living near Boston. With the help of a Jewish agency, he finally found a job and was making 75 cents an hour. For Aron, this job was alright, but he was trying to do better. Aron quit the job and found another 9 months later. This job was about a dollar an hour and some overtime. To him this was more than enough because he was not used to luxuries. One of the jobs Aron held was in a butcherie, until the summer of 1952. He wasn't the butcher, but he wrapped the meats. Due to his experiences and what he had been through, Aron was growing up very quickly. If someone were to compare him as a 22 year old to an American 22 year old, they would seem like a child.

Aron started to sell watches, and survived through the business. He sold soup for cigarettes, and then sold those for bread and so on and so forth. He sold a watch he bought to a man who was an amateur actor, who taught him English, and sold it for 10 dollars profit. This gave him an idea, and he

went and became a watch salesman. He took four watches and then he got the job as a watch salesman. His meat job paid about \$2000 per year. He then made an extra \$2000 selling watches and other things. After leaving the meat job, he bought himself a car, a Ford. For many years, Aron went to customer's houses, and became a salesman on the road.

Another test of Aron's strength and ability to survive came in 1971. On a trip to Boston, more specifically Roxbury, for a project, he was held up and shot in the middle of the day. Aron lost everything and couldn't go back, out of fear that he would be found and shot again. This was a major factor as to why he opened up a store and lived as far away from Roxbury as possible. He paid for the store, and bought it for very little money. Even though he was now the owner, he decided to keep the name, Brenner's. The shop sells children's clothing as well as boys and girls scout equipment.

Aron's story shows just how hard it was for a man to survive through the treacherous days of the Holocaust. But he kept fighting and fighting and learned to never give up. Today he lives with his wife and has a daughter and 3 grandchildren. This story really impacted us as kids because Aron was working in camps and barely eating enough to survive when he was our age. But one story struck us more than any other. In the middle of the night, before they had been sent out of Poland, Nazi soldiers came into his house and took him and his brothers and brought them to a public area. They did not torture him due to a girl's pleading, but did tell both of his brothers to strip off their clothes. Then they beat on them for about a half hour until they were all black and blue, just for the entertainment of the people watching. They made his brothers do tough exercises and because of this, they had trouble walking home. Stories like the ones shared by Aron should not have happened, and only further proves how horrible those times were. Aron is a man who will always persevere through tough times, which is something to be proud of, and why we will cherish his stories, memories, and breathtaking experiences now and we will forever.