



## HENRY H. OSTER, OD

*"Be aware of how easily people can be persuaded to commit genocide if nobody speaks up against it."*

Henry Oster was born Heinz Oster on November 5, 1928 in Cologne, Germany to Hans and Elisabeth (née Haas) Oster. Although he was an only child, Henry and his parents were surrounded by their large extended family. Henry vividly remembers hearing about Hitler and the Nazis when he was only 5-years-old. However, he had no idea how this news would eventually impact his life. Henry entered grade school in 1934. However, in 1935, the Nuremberg laws prohibited Jewish students from attending any school, so Henry was expelled from school.

In October 1941, Henry and his parents were forced onto a train and sent to the Lodz (Litzmannstadt) Ghetto. While in the Lodz Ghetto, Henry was forced to work twelve-hour days in the fields and the local cemetery. He lived with his parents in a single room with 18 other people in a building that was not equipped with any modern facilities. Henry's dad died of starvation within 6 months. In 1944, Henry and his mother were deported from the Lodz Ghetto, forced into cattle cars and transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau Death Camp. Upon arriving at the extermination facility of Birkenau, Henry was selected for slave labor. His mother was murdered in the gas chambers on the same day of arrival. Henry was later tattooed with the number B-7648. The tattoos were done in a very primitive way without anesthesia and "hurt like hell." However, Henry soon realized this was to be the least of his worries while in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Henry survived on the verge of starvation, working 16 hours a day in the stables. Somehow, he managed to survive three separate selections, when less fortunate inmates were selected, sent to the gas chambers and murdered.

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With the Soviet Army advancing, the end of the war approached, and the inmates of Auschwitz-Birkenau were evacuated to other camps in Germany. Henry survived the Death March to the train station, and then was transported by open cattle car to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. While at Buchenwald, the Nazis rounded up over 1,000 Jewish boys, all less than 18 years of age, and put them to work in the quarry or to clean up rubble. The ultimate goal was to murder all of these young boys.

From April 1- 11, Henry and the other inmates were not given any food by the Nazis. On April 11, 1945, General George Patton's U.S. Third Army liberated Buchenwald. Henry watched joyfully as the American tanks rolled into the camp, and the Nazis and German soldiers fled. While the American Army had brought some food, they had not expected to find the concentration camps scattered throughout Europe. The Army was not prepared to care for the already weakened survivors. By the time the infantry entered the camp with medics, some of the prisoners were dying or had already died.

After the end of the war, orphaned children were sent to France, England, or Switzerland. Henry was sent to an orphanage in Ecouix, France. He was the only survivor of nineteen family members. Henry remained in the orphanage until an uncle living in Los Angeles found his name in the L.A. Times on the B'nai Brith Messengers List of Survivors. In 1946, Henry immigrated to the United States, arriving first in New York and then to Los Angeles to join his uncle.

Henry learned English, pursued his education, completing high school and qualifying to attend U.C.L.A. with the intention to become an optometrist. Henry developed a successful private practice in Beverly Hills and then decided to join Kaiser-Permanente for a total of 60 years as a practicing optometrist. Henry married Susan, and they have two daughters, one son, and four grandchildren.

As a Holocaust Survivor, Henry realizes that his personal testimony documents one of the world's greatest crimes against humanity. He became one of the first speakers at the Museum of Tolerance because Henry knows from personal experience how easily people will commit genocide if there is no one to speak up against it.