

HENRY WERMUTH



HOLOCAUST
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Henry Wermuth's mother and sister were taken away by the Nazis in the summer of 1942. Henry and his father were forced to work for the Nazis and Henry took an opportunity to try and derail a train that Hitler would be travelling on. Although unsuccessful, Henry was later awarded a medal for his attempt to assassinate Hitler.



'I have no hatred towards the German people, because in the same set of circumstances, with support from newspapers and the radio, it could have happened here. There's plenty of antisemitism in England.'

Henry Wermuth was born in 1923 in Frankfurt, Germany, to Bernhard and Ida Wermuth. His sister, Hanna, was born in 1929. As a boy, Henry was fiercely patriotic and experienced almost no antisemitism.

The rise of the Nazis in 1933 changed everything. The SA (the military wing of the Nazi party) would march through town singing about murdering Jews. Henry never understood how the Germany of which he was so proud could elect Adolf Hitler.

In October 1938, the Nazis deported German-Jewish citizens with Polish ancestry to Poland. This included Henry's parents who were born in Poland, so the whole family were woken in the middle of the night and sent to Krakow by train where they stayed with relatives. Henry spent a happy year there until Germany invaded Poland in September 1939. Soon, Jews living in Nazi-occupied Poland were forced to wear a white armband with a blue Star of David and made to clear streets of snow and ice.

Bernhard and Henry supported the family by trading on the black market until Bernhard was caught and sent to prison. Bernhard was released in late 1940 and Henry's family moved to the small town of Bochnia.

By the summer of 1942, Henry and Bernhard were being forced to build roads for a nearby labour camp called Klaj. They heard rumours that two million Jews had by now been murdered. Henry knew that soon deportations would begin from Bochnia and wanted to save his family. Henry used cardboard to make a hiding place for Ida and Hanna in the crawlspace above the family's front door.

On 22 August, Henry and Bernhard's work group were told that they would be spending the night in Klaj. As they left, Henry urged his mother 'Promise me you will go into the secret place'.

On 24 August, the deportation of Bochnia's Jews took place. A week later, Henry and Bernhard returned to Bochnia and found photographs of Ida and Hanna in the crawlspace. On the back of each picture was a goodbye message. Ida would probably have heard the SS shouting that anyone who did not board the train would be shot. It may have seemed safer to go. It was the first and only time that Henry saw his father cry. Henry's mother and sister travelled from

Bochnia to Belzec extermination camp. All those on board the train were murdered.

In the autumn of 1942, Henry heard rumours that Hitler was due to pass near Klaj on a train. Henry believed his mother and sister were still alive and that if Hitler died, everything would go back to normal. Despite the danger and Bernhard's objections, Henry felt he had to do something. That night, Henry made his way through the forest to the railway line, avoiding guards patrolling the area. Using stones and thick lengths of wood, Henry blocked the track. The following morning, Henry waited for the sound of the collision, but it never came. He never found out what had happened.

Soon after, Henry and Bernhard were put on a train and sent to Płaszów labour camp. Subjected to sadistic and violent treatment, Henry remembers Płaszów as the worst of the nine camps he was imprisoned in.

On 31 July 1944 Henry and Bernhard were marched onto a train heading for Auschwitz-Birkenau. Suspecting they were to be murdered, Bernhard said to Henry a sentence that he has never forgotten 'Should we be gassed, breathe deeply, my son, breathe deeply, to get it over with quickly'.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz, they were sent to be deloused and told to undress. Certain he was to die, Henry kept the photograph of his mother and sister in his hand. However, Henry's group was marked for work instead and the next day he was tattooed on his forearm with the number B3407.

Inmates were fed tiny portions of bread and margarine, and a bowl of thin soup. On such a small amount of food, and with such a heavy workload, people were starving to death. A friend, Max Spira, would fill Henry and Bernhard's bowls from the bottom of the container, which meant that they received more vegetables, stopping them from starving.

In January 1945 the SS evacuated Auschwitz, marching prisoners out of the camp and on to a train. The next few months saw the SS trying to avoid capture, and Henry and Bernhard were moved from camp to camp – Nordhausen, Osterode, Helmstedt. One morning, the kapo in charge of Henry's group hit Bernhard in the head. The prisoners were loaded onto a train, and Bernhard began to complain of increasing pain. He was taken to the hospital wagon but died on 27 April 1945, just 11 days before the war ended.

That day Henry entered Mauthausen. Conditions were appalling and Henry was starving and suffering from diarrhoea. Henry weighed only five stone when American soldiers liberated Mauthausen on May 5, 1945. He had survived, and faced rebuilding his life with no friends or family.

After liberation, Henry made his way to the United Kingdom. He was only allowed to stay for two years, but after writing to the Queen Mother and finding a job, he was able to settle in Britain. He became a successful businessman, married, had two children and now has three grandchildren.

Henry continues to speak about his experiences. In 1995, he was awarded the Johanna Kirchner Medal by the City of Frankfurt for his attempt to assassinate Hitler. He has written a book about his experiences, entitled *Breathe Deeply My Son*. A film about his life with the same title is due to be released in late 2017.

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HENRY WERMUTH



YMDDIRIEDOLAETH
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Aeth y Natsïaid â mam a chwaer Henry Wermuth i ffwrdd yn haf 1942. Cafodd Henry a'i dad eu gorfodi i weithio i'r Natsïaid a gwelodd Henry gyfle i geisio achosi i drên a oedd yn cludo Hitler ddod oddi ar y cledrau. Er na lwyddodd, fflnyddoedd wedyn cafodd Henry fedal am ei ymgais i ladd Hitler.



'Does gen i ddim atgasedd tuag at bobl yr Almaen oherwydd gyda'r un amgylchiadau, gyda chefnogaeth y papurau newydd a'r radio, gallai fod wedi digwydd yma. Mae digon o wrth-semitiaeth yn Lloegr.'

Ganwyd Henry Wermuth ym 1923 yn Frankfurt, yr Almaen, i Bernhard ac Ida Wermuth. Ganwyd chwaer iddo, Hanna, ym 1929. Yn fachgen, roedd Henry yn Almaenwr i'r carn ac ni ddaeth ar draws braidd unrhyw wrth-semitiaeth.

Newidiodd popeth wrth i'r Natsïaid fagu grym. Byddai'r SA (adain filwrol y blaid) yn gorymdeithio drwy'r dref yn canu am lofruddio Iddewon. Daeth Henry byth i ddeall pan fyddai'r Almaen oedd mor agos at ei galon yn gallu ethol Hitler.

Ym mis Hydref 1938, fe wnaeth y Natsïaid alltudio dinasyddion Almaenig-Iddewig o dras Pwylaidd i Wlad Pwyl. Yn eu plith roedd rhieni Henry a oedd wedi cael eu geni yng Ngwlad Pwyl, felly cafodd y teulu cyfan eu dihuno yng nghanol y nos a'u hanfon i Krakow ar drên, lle buon nhw'n aros gyda pherthnasau. Treuliodd Henry flwyddyn hapus yno nes i'r Almaen feddiannu Gwlad Pwyl ym mis Medi 1939. Cyn bo hir, roedd Iddewon yng Ngwlad Pwyl a oedd yn nwylo'r Natsïaid yn cael eu gorfodi i wisgo band gwyn â seren Dafydd arno ar eu braich a chlirio eira ac îa oddi ar y strydoedd.

Roedd Bernhard a Henry'n cynnal y teulu drwy fasnachu ar y farchnad ddu nes i Bernhard gael ei ddal a'i anfon i'r carchar. Cafodd Bernhard ei ryddhau ddiwedd 1940 a symudodd teulu Henry i dref fach Bochnia.

Erbyn haf 1942, roedd Henry a Bernhard yn cael eu gorfodi i adeiladu ffyrdd ar gyfer gwersyll llafur cyfagos, sef Klaj. Fe glywson sôn fod dwy filiwn o Iddewon wedi'u lladd erbyn hynny. Gwyddai Henry y byddai pobl yn dechrau cael eu halltudio o Bochnia cyn bo hir ac roedd eisiau achub ei deulu. Defnyddiodd Henry gardbord i wneud cuddfan ar gyfer Ida a Hanna yn y gwagle uwchben drws ffrynt y teulu.

Ar 22 Awst, dywedwyd wrth grŵp gwaith Henry a Bernhard y byddent yn treulio'r nos yn Klaj. Wrth iddyn nhw adael, dywedodd Henry wrth ei fam am addo mynd i'r man cuddio.

Ar 24 Awst, cafodd Iddewon Bochnia eu halltudio. Wythnos yn ddiweddarach, dychwelodd Henry a Bernhard i Bochnia a dod o hyd i ffotograffau o Ida a Hanna yn y man cuddio. Ar gefn pob llun roedd neges ffarwel. Mae'n siŵr y byddai Ida wedi clywed yr SS yn gweiddi y byddai pawb oedd ddim ar y trên yn cael eu saethu. Efallai bod mynd yn edrych fel y peth mwyaf diogel i'w wneud. Dyma'r tro cyntaf a'r tro olaf i Henry weld ei dad yn crio. Teithiodd mam a chwaer Henry o Bochnia i gamp lladd Belzec. Llofruddiwyd pawb oedd ar y trên.

Yn hydref 1942, clywodd Henry sion fod Hitler yn mynd i basio Klaj ar drên. Roedd Henry'n credu bod ei fam a'i chwaer yn dal yn fyw a phe bai Hitler yn marw, byddai popeth yn dychwelyd i fel ydoedd cynt. Er gwaetha'r perygl a gwrthwynebiad Bernhard, roedd Henry'n teimlo bod rhaid iddo wneud rhywbeth. Y noson honno, aeth Henry drwy'r goedwig at y rheilffordd, gan osgoi'r gardiau oedd ar batrôl yn yr ardal. Defnyddiodd Henry gerrig a darnau truchus o bren i rwystro'r lein. Drannoeth, arhosodd Henry am sŵn y trên yn taro'r rhwystr ond yn ofer. Ddaeth e byth i wybod beth ddigwyddodd.

Yn fuan wedyn, cafodd Henry a Bernhard eu rhoi ar drên a'u hanfon i wersyll llafur Płaszów. Cawsant eu trin yn sadistaidd ac yn dreisgar, ac mae Henry'n cofio Płaszów fel y gwerysll gwaethaf o'r naw iddo gael eu carcharu ynddyn nhw.

Ar 31 Gorffennaf 1944 cafodd Henry a Bernhard eu rhoi ar drên i Auschwitz-Birkenau. A hwythau'n amau eu bod yn mynd i gael eu llofruddio, dywedodd Bernhard frawddeg wrth Henry nad yw e byth wedi anghofio - 'Os byddan nhw'n defnyddio nwy i'n lladd, anadla'n ddwfn, fy mab, anadla'n ddwfn, fel bod y cyfan drosodd yn gyflym'.

Ar ôl cyrraedd Auschwitz, cawsant eu hanfon i gael eu glanhau o lau a dywedwyd wrthynt am ddadwisgo. Roedd Henry'n siŵr ei fod ar fin marw a chadwodd y llun o'i fam a'i chwaer yn ei law. Fodd bynnag, roedd grŵp Henry wedi'i glustnodi i weithio a'r diwrnod wedyn rhoddwyd tatŵ o'r rhif B3407 ar ei fraich.

Roedd y carcharorion yn cael tamaid bach iawn o fara a margarin, a phowlen o gawl dyfrllyd. A hwythau'n cael cyn lleied o fwyd ac yn gwneud cymaint o waith, roedd pobl yn marw o newyn. Byddai ffrind iddyn nhw, Max Spira, yn llenwi powlenni Henry a Bernhard o waelod y crochan, fel eu bod yn cael mwy o lysiau a ddim yn newynu.

Ym mis Ionawr 1945, fe wnaeth yr SS wacáu Auschwitz, gan wneud i'r carcharorion orymdeithio allan o'r gwerysll a'u rhoi ar drên. Dros y misoedd nesaf, roedd yr SS yn ceisio osgoi cael eu dal, a Henry a Bernhard yn cael eu symud o un gwerysll i'r llall - Nordhausen, Osterode, Helmstedt. Un bore, fe wnaeth y kapo oedd yn gyfrifol am grŵp Henry daro Bernhard ar ei ben. Cafodd y carcharorion eu llwytho ar drên, a dechreuodd Bernhard achwyn ei fod mewn mwy a mwy o boen. Aethpwyd ag e i'r wagen ysbyty ond bu farw ar 27 Ebrill 1945, 11 diwrnod yn unig cyn i'r rhyfel ddod i ben.

Y diwrnod hwnnw cyrhaeddodd Henry Mauthausen. Roedd yr amodau'n erchyll ac roedd Henry'n llwgu ac yn dioddef o'r dolur rhydd. Dim ond pum stôn oedd Henry'n pwyso pan ddaeth milwyr America i ryddhau carcharorion Mauthausen ar y 5ed o Fai 1945. Roedd wedi goroesi, ac yn wynebu gorfod dechrau ei fywyd o'r newydd heb ei ffrindiau na'i deulu.

Ar ôl cael ei ryddhau, teithiodd Henry i'r Deyrnas Unedig. Dim ond am ddwy flynedd roedd ganddo'r hawl i aros, ond ar ôl ysgrifennu at y Fam Frenhines a chael swydd, cafodd ymgartrefu ym Mhrydain. Daeth yn ddyn busnes llwyddiannus, priodi, cael dau o blant a bellach mae ganddo dri ŵyr.

Mae Henry'n sôn am ei brofiadau o hyd. Ym 1995, cyflwynwyd Medal Johanna Henry iddo gan ddinas Frankfurt am ei ymgais i ladd Hitler. Mae wedi ysgrifennu llyfr am ei brofiadau, *Breathe Deeply My Son*. Bydd ffilm o'r un enw am ei fywyd yn cael ei rhyddhau ddiwedd 2017.

Am fwy o wybodaeth... Yr Holocaust: hmd.org.uk/holocaust