

# DENNIS URSTEIN

## BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Dennis Urstein was born Adolf Urstein to Leon and Marie Urstein on February 24, 1924, in Vienna, Austria. He had one older sister, Lily. His father was a printer and

wrote articles for anti-Nazi Social Democratic newspapers. Dennis sang in the choir and sometimes at weddings in the main synagogue in Vienna. He went to public school and remembered being called names because he was Jewish. He had some non-Jewish friends, but after German troops entered Austria in March 1938, they would not talk to Dennis anymore.

Almost immediately after the German troops arrived, Dennis was arrested and sent to Buchenwald, although he was subsequently released. It was not until hearing of the events of Kristallnacht Pogrom in November 1938, that the family decided to leave Austria. At the end of 1938, Dennis and his parents went to Belgium while his sister received a visa to go to England as a domestic worker.

In 1941, in Belgium, Dennis was arrested again because he was not wearing the mandatory yellow star. He was sent to Mechelen, a camp in Belgium. The next year, in August 1942, he was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Dennis worked in the “Kanada” warehouse where he and other prisoners sorted through the clothing and other possessions of the new arrivals, sometimes finding extra food. On April 22, 1943, Dennis witnessed his parents’ arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau and subsequent selection for the gas chambers. In October 1944, Dennis was transferred to Ohrdruf, a camp in Germany. Because he spoke German he was given record keeping duties. When word came that the U.S. Army was getting near, the prisoners were evacuated and forced on a death march to Dachau. There, Dennis was liberated by the

U.S. Army on April 29, 1945.

After the war, Dennis returned to Belgium where he was recruited to work for the Counter-Intelligence Court (CIC) apprehending war criminals in Vienna. He met his future wife Claire Kimerling at a streetcar stop in Salzburg while working for the CIC. In 1947, they married and had a daughter, Marilyn. In 1948, Dennis and his family joined Dennis’ sister, Lily, in England; it was the first time Dennis and Lily had seen each other since before the war. On February 1, 1951, Dennis, Claire, and Marilyn immigrated to Canada.

In 1972, Dennis received a letter asking him to testify at a war crimes trial in Vienna. Between 1972 and 1992, Dennis was a witness at four different trials, two in Vienna and one each in Duisburg, Germany, and Siegen, Germany. He worked as a packager at a restaurant for twenty-eight years and then became the director of packaging at a Canadian grocery store. At the time of Dennis’s interview in 1995, he had a granddaughter named Eliza.