

A BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH STERN  
Written by his daughter, Ruth Stern Gasten  
March 6, 2017

Joseph Stern was born in Nieder-Ohmen to Hirsch and Roschen Stern on September 29, 1895. His father, grandfather, and great-grand father were cattle dealers who bought and sold cattle for the local farmers. Josef had an older brother, Meier, a younger brother, Albert, and two sisters, Paula and Toni.

In 1932 he married Hanna Nussbaum from Ulmbach and had a daughter, Ruth, born on August 28, 1933. He went to school until the eighth grade in Nieder-Ohmen. Joseph was on good terms with his neighbors and played sports and cards with his school friends. He fought for Germany in World War I.

Until Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Joseph lived a happy, quiet life. In 1935 when the Nuremberg laws were passed, he grew concerned because Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend public schools, and his two nieces had to leave home to continue their education in Jewish schools. Christians were forbidden to fraternize with Jews, and life grew more troublesome. His wife, Hanna secretly wrote to her aunt in Chicago to see if her aunt would sponsor us to come to the USA.

After Crystall Nacht, in November, 1938, my father was taken to Buchenwald Concentration Camp. About 3 weeks later, my mother received a letter from her Chicago aunt saying "Come to Chicago". Hanna took little Ruthie and went to see the regional SS Commandant in Stuttgart to show him the letter and try to get my father released. The commandant agreed to have Joseph released. He came home in about 2 weeks later, thin and pale.

We sold our belongings and left for our new home in Chicago, USA, in January, 1939. Josef was 43 years old. There were very few jobs in Chicago, but after a few months he landed a job as a beef boner in the stockyards where he worked till his retirement.

Although Joseph had no higher education, he had the soul of a philosopher. Unfortunately, you can't make a living being a philosopher. He never fit into the competitive culture of the United States because money was not important to him. He loved to read and discuss ideas. When he was a boy, he read books by American author, James Fenimore Cooper – The Last of the Mohicians, The Deer Slayer, The Pioneers and grew to love the wide open spaces of the American West. As an adult, his favorite writers were Heinrich Heine, who wrote in 1821, "They that start by burning books will end by burning men" and Friedrich Schiller, who lived from 1759 to 1805 and was a renowned poet, philosopher and historian.

Joseph loved animals and little children. They knew it and followed him around. He really understood people who were having a hard time in life. Maybe it was his experiences in Hitler's Germany that gave him his empathy for the downtrodden, or maybe it was just part of his personality. Perhaps in the final analysis, the measure of a man's life is how he affected the lives of others. If that is so, Joseph Stern was a success.