



Video Story Transcript

STAN-A STORY OF A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/ljk9X3not1I>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, my name is Dan Keding and I'm going to tell you the story about Stan, a Holocaust survivor.

In between sixth and seventh grade, my family moved from the south side of Chicago to the north side. And I remember the day we arrived at the new apartment building we were going to be living in – one of those U-shaped apartment buildings with a courtyard. Well, we pulled up behind the moving van and, as I got out of the car, this enormous shadow covered me. And a voice boomed out and said, “Welcome to the neighborhood! I’m Stan.”

And this great, huge hand that could palm a bowling ball came out of that shadow and he pumped my arm. And I was looking at the biggest human I had ever seen in my life. Stan was six foot six at least; 300 lbs. of muscle. He had a big, floppy hat on and a crooked grin and he walked with a slight limp.

And he held court inside our courtyard. There was always a lawn chair there. And pretty soon, that summer, there were two lawn chairs. Stan and I became friends and every day, we would sit there and he would tell me stories.

He was a Polish Jew who had come to America after the war and he told me stories of Poland, the old legends. He told me Jewish folk tales. He told me stories of the war where he'd fought in the Resistance in Poland.

We'd go for walks sometimes. And even the adult bullies would walk off the sidewalk and smile kind of sheepishly as Stan would say, “How ya doin?”

And they'd go, "Okay," 'cause his shoulders took up most of the sidewalk.

He was a sweet and kind man... gentle. One day, he turned to me and said, "You know, Dan, you're gonna be a big man when you grow up. You know what's important, don'cha?"

Well, I had been watching Errol Flynn for years, you know. I knew what was important. "Honor," I said.

And he looked at me and said, "Honor? (*spit*) Honor is a luxury. Honor is stupid!" He says, "If a man curses you... a man dishonors you, you walk away. They're less a man than you! The only things worth fighting for are family and friends." That was a lesson I needed to hear.

Well, one day we were talking and Stan, he turned to me and said, "It is so hot out today."

And it was July, and I said, "Oh, you're right!" We were both soaked in the sun and he took off his floppy hat, which I'd never seen him do before. He took a big, huge bandanna and started to wipe his head, which was totally devoid of any hair and was covered in surgical scars.

As he put his hat back on, I turned to him and said, "What happened to you?"

He said, "During the war, we ambushed a Nazi patrol and there were more of them than we thought. I was wounded. That's why I limp. And before I could take my own life, as we often did in the Resistance, I was captured. Because I'm a Jew, they sent me to a concentration camp, Dan. Because I'm so big and so strong, they experimented on me."

The doctors at the camp had opened his skull dozens of times to see how the human brain worked. But, you know, they couldn't find the gentleness and the beauty of his.

One day, he turned me and said, "Dan, let's go for a..." And he slumped in his chair. I panicked and I ran up the steps of the apartment building, knocked on the door where his, his wife and he lived.

And I said, huh, huh, I said, "Huh, huh, is... it's Stan! He's had a heart attack. He's had a stroke!"

She said, "Shh... stop." So, I did. She said, "It's what they did to him, Daniel. You haven't seen it before. Once, twice, even three times a day, Stan passes out. Just go downstairs, sit down next to him. And when he wakes up, he'll start a sentence from where he left off."

This is kind of spooky for a boy going into seventh grade, but I did as I was told. And I went downstairs and sat in that lawn chair. And after about five minutes, those huge shoulders squared up and the head came up and he said, "walk around the neighborhood and see what's happening."

I said, "Sure, Stan, let's go."

One day, my stepdad was changing a tire. He couldn't get the last lug nut off. Uh, and Stan walked over and said, "Hey, Herm. What's, what's the problem?"

And my stepfather said, "I can't get the lug nut off this last one. They must have put in on too tight with those pneumatic tools they use now."

Stan says, "I can get it off."

And my stepdad handed him the tire iron. And Stan looked at the tire iron as if it was some kind of strange, foreign instrument. And he put it down on the grass, reached over with two fingers, grabbed the lug nut and went (*clk*) and took it off and handed it to my stepfather. He told that story for the rest of his life.

When school started, I went to the Catholic school. Mom always said, “Dan, you have to go to the Catholic school because I can't impose you on people who are paid with taxes.” I thought that was cruel of her but it was true.

One day I said to Stan, “Stan, why don't you come to school, tell your stories?”

And Stan got this look of mock horror on his face. He said, “Oh, no, Dan! I went into that Catholic church one time and I saw what they did to the last Jew they got their hands on.” And then he started laughing at the top of his voice and his laughter rolled out of the courtyard and into the street.

It was late autumn and I was coming home from school when I saw an ambulance pulling away from the apartment building. Jenny, who lived in the basement, she was standing there and I said, “What happened?” And she told me that it was Stan.

We didn't have garages or workrooms or basements even. When we built things, we built them in the kitchen because that's where the linoleum was and you could clean it up. Stan was building a bookcase and he slipped and the saw went through his wrist. And before he'd get to the phone, call for help, he had one of his spells and he bled to death on the kitchen floor.

And I stood there at the curb and I wanted to hate someone so badly. But all the men who had hurt my friend were dead.

At the funeral, his wife told me not to forget his stories and I promised her I wouldn't. And then she grabbed the lapel of my coat. She looked me in the eye and she said, “You know, Dan, the Nazis killed my husband but he was so strong, it took him 20 years to die.”