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## John Farnbacher interview for The Survivors of the Holocaust Oral History Project

John Farnbacher

Julie Orenstein

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John Farnbacher

8/7/84

by Julie Orenstein

TO THE READER:

THIS IS A SUMMARY OF THE INTERVIEW. WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO REPRODUCE THE CONVERSATION IN NARRATIVE STYLE, HOWEVER IT IS NECESSARY FOR THE TAPE COUNTER NUMBERS TO CORRESPOND WITH THE SUBJECT BEING DISCUSSED AT A GIVEN POINT ON THE TAPE. FOR THIS REASON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE MATERIAL RETAINS AN ELEMENT OF THE "STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS." WE APPOLOGIZE IF THIS IS CONFUSING.

FOR SPECIFIC REFERENCES, PLEASE REFER TO THE INDEX WHICH FOLLOWS THE SUMMARY.

ANY OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS SUMMARY ARE THOSE OF THE INTERVIEWEE.

Begin Side One.

John M. Farnbacher will be 61 in the Fall. He was born in Augsburg, Bavaria, which is Dayton, Ohio's, sister city. He was born there in 1923 and left in 1936. Augsburg is similar to Dayton in size and economy, but it was founded 2000 years ago this year by the Romans. Its rivers are similar to Dayton's, National Cash Register has a plant there as does Messerschmit. It is an industrial town of about 20,000 people. John has a brother 2 years younger than he is. His mother's parents moved to Augsburg from Koblenz. The family spoke German. John learned Latin in the Catholic gymnasium he attended and had private French lessons as well.

His mother would have had the usual 8 years of school at a private institution, he believes. His father went to business school and was an officer in the German Army in World War I. His father owned a wholesale company as well as 2 factories, one which produced toys and another which produced belts and suspenders. John's uncle was also involved in these businesses. John's mother had 2 maids. It was not common for women to work. She was from Montabaur near Koblantz, and John's father's family had been in Augsburg since before 1800. The family business was founded in 1810. The family was not very religious, which John feels was common for German Jews. He doesn't remember any Orthodox practices, but more that his family was assimilated, having adopted the same customs as Christians except for attending church. Before his bar mitzvah his family attended services regularly on Saturdays. In Europe it was more common to attend on Saturday morning as opposed to Friday evening which is more popular here. The family always went to the High Holidays services. He does not remember the synagogue as a center for social or cultural activities. His parents did not belong to any clubs, but enjoyed going

to operas. Opera was a more common form of entertainment in Germany, which John feels is more cultural than America. There were not many movies. His parents were not actively political, but they were anti-Nazi. He remembers visiting his grandparents when he was a boy as well as trips to Switzerland, Italy, and the Alps. He had 4 years of elementary school. After elementary school children either went to hoch schul, which was like our high school, or they went to private schools which were better. The best education was received at the Catholic school where John went. He learned Latin, Algebra and other academic subjects. No vocational subjects were taught there. He planned to attend college. The years during which he was in public school, 1929 - 33, were years of relative calm for Jews in his town. He doesn't remember any anti-Semitism. Once he began attending St. Stephen's School, he found that anti-Semitism increased, but it was all outside the school. The Catholics were also persecuted. Bavaria was "99% Catholic, ½% Jewish, and ½% Protestant." The priests refused to teach race hatred.

John left the Catholic school in 1936. His father had wanted to leave since 1935 and had applied to America for visas. He sent both the sons to England so they could learn English. John left before the Nuremburg Laws went into effect and before the real violence, such as Kristalnacht, occurred. His family was still in Germany however. His father was interned, the family was not allowed to have a maid, and their jewelery was taken. Because of his standing in the community, John's father was not taken to a camp, but was held under arrest at home. John went to England by himself at age 13. He spoke no English. His father had convinced the German government that if John studied in England and learned English, it would mean that the family business could expand into the English-speaking market and increase German exports. At first the gov-

{Page three missing}

they owned in a lift-van (a huge crate), but due to the beginning of the war it was all lost in Holland. The American quota was full for that year, so John had to find someone to sign for his parents and assure the British government that they would not become a burden on the state so they could move to England. The family of a friend of John's from school was willing to do this. John's parents also had to promise they would not get jobs, presumably so they wouldn't interfere with citizens' chances at employment. They came to England on August 30, 1939 and the war started on September 3. They came to England via Amsterdam and soon found that the outbreak of the war, having trapped the Jews in Germany, caused the American quota system to move more quickly for those who were not trapped. They were allowed in in April 1940 and came to New York.

John visited home once in 1937. He took the train from London, a ferry to Belgium, and another train to Augsburg. All the way back he was afraid and his parents told him not to try to come home again. After his parents came to England they lived in a one-room flat in London. They had no money. He stayed with them for the 2 days before they left England. Their ship left from Liverpool. John's parents lived in England 6 months and he has no idea what they lived on. They came to the United States on the White Star Line. They came to New York with no money. John was very impressed by the Statue of Liberty and said that he felt free. Their American relatives were nice, but didn't want to help much. They did help them rent an apartment. John was glad he could speak English. They had nothing when they arrived, since all their belongings had been lost. When the war began, the ship that brought his parents to England was called back to do military service. The captain was only allowed to unload the passengers, not their belongings, so the lift van was unloaded in Amsterdam

and lost. He was 16 when he arrived in the United States. He got a scholarship to go to Ohio University in Athens, Ohio. He had worked in a factory. His uncle had an egg farm in New Jersey and he sent the family eggs to sell in New York. John had a job in Brooklyn at \$12.00 a week. He caught the subway at 5:30am and got home at 6:30pm. This was from April to September 1940. John received a degree in Engineering from OU. His father was about 60 years old when they came to the US. After John left his parents became managers of an apartment complex in Florida. His mother, who had never cleaned before, was the housekeeper. In 1941 they came to Dayton where some friends of theirs from Augsburg lived. They also wanted to be near John. The Jewish community in Dayton helped them find an apartment over a grocery store and gave them used furniture. They lived at Broadway and Riverview. They had studied English in Germany. John's father got a job as a stockman for Rikes.

His mother worked there, too, first in the stockroom and then as a saleslady in the Moraine Room. Then during World War II they heard that Wright Patterson Air Force Base was looking for German-speaking people to translate captured documents and they went to work there. John was drafted in 1944 and was stationed there for the same reason. Because of his background in engineering, he not only knew what the words meant, but could see how the designs worked.

John graduated from OU in 1945. He had been drafted in 1941, but was rejected due to his nearsightedness. By 1945 the military was taking anyone. He had papers ordering him to Okanawa, but his parents mentioned that he would be useful in the work they were doing and he was transferred. He made between \$50.00 and \$75.00 a month. After his discharge he used his GI Bill to get a master's degree from the Ohio State University.



John's parents never kept kosher, although his grandparents did. His parents' religious practices did not change after they came to the United States. John was not religious while in Swanage as there was no synagogue. He felt he didn't want to raise his children Jewish, so they wouldn't suffer as he did. He lost everyone but his parents and his brother in the Holocaust. John's uncle and his family died, except for one daughter who came to America from England. His mother's sister also came to the US and lives in Providence, Rhode Island, with her son. The rest of the family was taken to Theresenstadt. John's mother got tickets to go back to Germany through Russia so she could try to get them out. The route through Russia was the only way that was open. It was a small family. John's paternal grandparents were dead before the war.

John worked for 10 years as an engineer. His father started a business in 1947, selling toy samples. Rikes helped him and bought from him. John's brother joined the business in 1951 and their mother worked there, too. The business grew and finally John left his job at a local foundry to join the family business. The Farnbacher Company burned in 1978. It was well insured and 99% of its accounts were collected, so the family was still well—off. John now works for the Finke Co.

John wanted to marry a Christian and have Christian children because he feels that a major persecution of Jews could occur in the United States. He feels that the New York Jews make their wealth obvious in the same way that German Jews did. When he sees them in public places he finds them loud and demanding and feels that they make themselves too conspicuous by "throwing their money around." He feels that they make people jealous and that that was the mistake the German Jews made.

## John Farnbacher

## INDEX

	side	counter #	page #
America (see United States)			
Amsterdam, Holland, W. Netherlands	1	250-275	4
	1	350-375	5
Anti-Semitism	1	100-125	2
	1	225-250	3
Assimilation	1	050-075	2
Augsburg, Bavaria, West Germany	1	001-025	1
Bavaria	1	001-150	1-3
Catholics	1	100-125	2
Crystal Night	1	125-150	2
Dayton, Ohio	1	001-025	1
	1	375-450	5
Education -parents'	1	025-050	1
-John, Augsburg	1	025-050	1
	1	075-125	2
-John, England and America	1	175-250	3-4
-John, college	1	350-400	5
	1	450-475	5
England	1	125-325	2-4
	1	475-500	6
Europe	1	075-100	2
Florida	1	375-400	5
German language	1	025-050	1
Hitler	1	175-200	3
Holocaust	1	500-550	6
Italy	1	075-100	2
Jewish community in Dayton	1	400-425	5
Jewish community in England	1	150-175	3
	1	200-250	3

# INDEX

	side	<u>counter #</u>	<u>page #</u>
Kashruth (see Kosher)			
Koblentz	1	025-050	1
Kosher	1	475-500	6
Kristalnacht (see Crystal Night)			
Latin language	1	025-050	1
	1	100-125	2
Liverpool, England	1	300-325	4
London, England	1	300-325	4
Messerschmitt Aircraft	1	001-025	1
Montabaur, Bavaria, West Germany	1	025-050	1
National Cash Register Company	1	001-025	1
Nazi Party	1	075-100	2
	1	175-200	3
New York, New York	1	275-300	4
	1	325-350	4
	1	350-400	5
Nuremberg Laws	1	125-150	2
Ohio State University	1	200-225	3
	1	450-475	5
Ohio University (at Athens)	1	200-225	3
Okanawa	1	450-475	5
Orthodox Judaism	1	050-075	1
Providence, Rhode Island	1	500-525	6
Reform Judaism	1	050-075	1
Russia (see Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)			
Swanage, Dorset, England	1	175-200	3
	1	475-500	6
Switzerland	1	075-100	2
Thereseinstadt	1	500-525	6

# INDEX

	side	counter #	<u>page #</u>
	.....	_	
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	1	500-525	6
United States	1	125-150	2
	1	150-175	3
	1	250-614	4-6
University of Dayton	1	200-225	3
Wright Patterson Air Force Base	1	425-450	5

HOLOCAUST HISTORY

DATE OF INTERVIEW 8-7-84

TRANSCRIBED BY R. K. FEIST

WORD PROCESSING BY CANDICE S. KARSCH

JF = JOHN FARNBACHER, THE INTERVIEWEE

JO - JULIE ORENSTEIN, THE INTERVIEWER

JF This is Tuesday, August 7, 1984

JD Tell me your full name please.

JF John N. Farnbacher.

JO May I ask your age?

JF I will be 61 on my next birthday.

JO Where were you born?

JF In Augsburg (48.22N, 10.53E) in Bavaria, near Munich. Incidentally Augsburg is now a sister city of Dayton, I don't know if you knew that.

JO No, I did not know that.

JF There is a sister city of Dayton in Japan and one in Germany, and Augsburg happens to be the sister city in Germany.

JO Did you grow up there?

JF I was born in 1923 and I lived there until 1936. So I was 13 years old when I went to England.

JO What was Augsburg like? Was it a small town or a big town?

JF No, Augsburg is very similar to Dayton. It is the second or third largest city in Bavaria. It is the capital of a county and at its center. It was formed by the Romans some 2,000 years ago. Next year will be their 2,000th anniversary. It is located on two streams, one of them is a big one similar to Dayton. There are quite a few similarities and that is why they selected each other as sister cities, it does include the fact that NCR has a large plant there. They also

make Messerschmitt airplanes in Augsburg, or rather they did; I don't know if they still do.

JO Was it an industrial city?

JF Yes it was a city with very heavy industry. I believe that it has about 200,000 inhabitants. That is a large city for Germany.

JO Did you have brothers and sisters?

JF Yes, I have one brother. He also lives in Dayton, now.

JO Is he younger than you?

JF Yes, he is 2 years younger. He will be 59 this year.

JO Did anyone else live in your home? Other relatives?

JF My mother and father. My grandparents, on my mother's side, were living in Augsburg at the time I left Germany. They were from another area of Germany, near Koblenz, that is near the Rhine River. (Koblenz is located 50.21N, 7.36E) Things got very difficult there for Jewish people, so they came to live with us. They were also older so they were to the point that they were glad no longer to maintain a separate household.

JO What language was spoken in your house?

JF Oh, German! We didn't know anything else.

JO You didn't learn any language in school?

JF I mainly learned Latin in school. I went for 3 years to a Catholic Gymnasium. Incidentally that school sent its choir to Dayton several times. In any case, the main foreign language there is Latin because it is a Roman Catholic institution. I also had some private lessons in French, so I spoke some French, when I left Germany, no English, whatsoever.

JO What kind of education did your parents have?

JF I really don't know. I believe that my mother had a primary school education. Something like 4 years of grade school and 4 years of high school. I believe that at the time 8 years was the norm. My father had some additional training. He went to business school, then he was an officer in the German army in WWI. He owned a large business.

JO What kind of business was that?

JF It was a large wholesale merchandising company. He also owned two factories. One of them was making toys, the other one made belts and suspenders. That was owned by my father and his brother, my uncle.

JO Did your mother work at all?

JF No. She was very busy running two maids. It was like a business enterprise. She was in charge of taking care of the maids, the cook, and the seamstress, in other words running the household. In Germany, at that time, women did not usually work.

JO Do you know how your father came to be in Augsburg?

JF No, my mother is from Montebard (not certain of the spelling). That is the small town near Koblenz from where her parents came. My father's family can be traced back prior to 1800 in Augsburg. How they got to Augsburg prior to that time I wouldn't know. I believe that they founded their business about 1810. That was my great, great grandfather. I have a picture incidentally of some of the people here.

JO I would like to see these pictures sometime. So they were in Augsburg then for generations.

JF Yes, I have records of their living in Augsburg prior to the year 1800. Naturally we have no information about anything prior to that.

JO Was your family very religious?

JF No.

JO Were they more assimilated then?

JF Well, in Germany, most of the Jews were not very religious. I don't believe that we know any one who was what you call here Orthodox. don't remember anybody either Orthodox or Conservative. Everybody was pretty much like the Reformed group. They were, as you said, pretty much assimilated. They did not consider themselves different from the other Germans. They did not go to the Catholic church, the Dome. They went to Synagogue on Saturday not Sunday. That was the main difference. Our customs were pretty much like those of the rest of the people.

JO Did you attend Synagogue regularly?

JF Yes, usually at least until Bar Mitzvah. I believe that in order to prepare for Bar Mitzvah, we had to attend quite often and I believe that we usually went on Saturday morning. They didn't do much on Friday nights, it was not like here where the main thing is on Friday night - at least it is for the Reformed Jews. Saturday morning was the main Service. We also always did go on the High Holy days.

JO Did your family belong to groups connected with the Synagogue? Was the Synagogue the cultural or social center for that?

JF I don't believe so. I don't know that they were. My parents just went there and they know that their friends went there. It did not assume the social function as it does here. It was a small, religious and educational organization.

JO Did they join many outside clubs?



JF No.

JO Did they tend to go to the theatre or opera?

JF Yes, to the opera. They liked the opera. Of course, and this again was very common in Germany, there actually was an opera in Augsburg, and they had a season through the fall. They went to most of the performances. I even went to some when I was 10 or 11 years old. We were generally told what the opera was all about, ahead of time so that we could follow the action, even if it was not in German. They also had concerts there. I think that there were cultural possibilities for most everyone. We didn't listen to the news much and there was no other kind of entertainment.

JO Do you recall much about your parents political affiliations?

JF No. I really don't. They were not active.

JO Do you remember much about your early childhood? Before you started school.

JF Very little. It has been a long time ago. I went to see my grandparents in Montebarr near Koblenz, several times. We also used to go on vacations every year, and, that, I remember very well.

JO Where did you go?

JF Oh, to some nice places, such as in Italy, or Austria, in the Alps. We also went on winter vacations. We were not poor, we disposed of a lot of money.

JO You said that you went to school in a Catholic school?

JF Yes. After the first 4 years. There were 4 years of compulsory elementary school, similar to what we have. After these 4 years you didn't have to go to school. Then you went to what you called:

"Hochschule". That corresponds to our high school, for 8 years, which is a public school, or you could go to private schools if you wanted better education. The best education in Augsburg, at that time was a Catholic Gymnasium. This was private and you paid tuition there. That school would prepare you to enter college.

JO So for the first 4 years you went to public school?

JF Yes. I was only there until I was 13, and for 3 years I went to that Catholic gymnasium. The emphasis was on Latin and Algebra, Mathematics, mostly academic subjects. Nothing at all in the way of vocational or practical skills.

JO So you were preparing to enter college?

JF Yes although I did not think that far ahead at the time. You know that is when Hitler started and there were other things to think about.

JO Were there any overt expressions of anti-Semitism in either of these two schools?

JF Yes. In the first 4 years from 1919 to 1933, there was not very much of Hitler. He came to power in 1932 and assumed power in 1933. As I left the public school, at the Catholic school which was called St. Stephan, there were some things. However, these things were mostly from public school students rather than from the people at the Catholic school. Hitler also persecuted the Catholic faith. The priests, the fathers, etc., were also under some pressure. Now, I should have said that Bavaria is 99 percent Catholic, one-half Jewish, one-half Protestant, so most people were Catholic. The people who went to the Gymnasium were less influenced by the church. The brothers and the priests, who were doing the teaching they were not going to preach race

hatred, as the teachers in the public schools did. So anti-Semitism was less pronounced where I went to school, then it was in public schools. So the incidents were more likely to happen with students who were not in the gymnasium. However, I did hear things. I did leave in 1933, which was prior to when things got really bad.

JO So you left the Catholic school in 1933?

JF No, I started there in 1933 and I left in 1936 to go to England. My father had decided in 1935 that it was time to get out of Germany. He had come to the United States but he decided that we had to go somewhere else since the United States wouldn't let Jews in (actually this means that the United States made no exceptions of the immigration laws in favor of the Jews). The next best thing they could think about was to send me and my brother to England to learn English, then they would get out themselves and then wait to go to the United States. That was the only way they could think to solve the problem. It turned out that that is how they saved our lives..

JO So did you leave before the "Nurenberg Laws" came in.

JF Oh yes! They just had a few laws when I was there. In 1936, things were not quite as difficult. The worst outbreak of violence started in 1938 when someone was shot. You may know more about it than I do. They called the first pogrom the Kristalnacht. At that time my father was interned. My brother was still there. They took away their maid. You had to give up all the jewelry and gold etc. For a while there was a permanent police in their apartment. My father was one of the leading citizens of the town, something like David Rike in Dayton. He had a very big business and everybody knew him. They did not take him

to a concentration camp because of that; he had some friends who said: "You can't take Mr. Farnbacher to a concentration camp." So they interned him in his home, that was much better than what happened to anyone else, than to any of the people who went to concentration camps. A lot of the people never came back. At the time I was in England so I don't know these things first hand. I just heard about it later.

JO So you were in England?

JF I was in England. I was only 13. I couldn't speak English. That made it very difficult. My parents did some very tricky negotiations with the German government. My parents did some exporting of toys and leather goods and things, to the United States and to other countries. They said that if we could run this business with someone who knows English, we can export more. The German government was very hungry for foreign currency. They got someone to go along with this idea, so they could transfer the funds needed for my education. After a while the German government said "No, we are not going to do that! No funds." Then the English Jewish community did help me by supporting me financially.

JO You said that about 1935 your father had decided that it was time to leave Germany?

JF Yes. He was in the United States, actually in New York, and he saw that people here could say anything whereas in Germany things are limited. So he said: "We must leave." He was partner with his brother, my uncle, in this big business. His brother said: "No, we are not going to do this, it is going to get better." So my father said: "Well, you stay and we are leaving!" So he applied for visas

for all of us. Of course there was a long wait; 4 years or so. My father, however said: "We have to get out of here."

JO So your father did not have anything special during this trip?

JF No, just seeing the United States and realizing how things were in Augsburg made him decide to leave.

JO When did you first become aware of Hitler?

JF In 1932, just before he came to power.

JO What were your thoughts then?

JF I was very young then. I was about 9 years old. I don't remember much. Maybe I thought: "Gee, I hope that this guy does not get elected. You see Hitler was elected by a possibly fraudulent vote. Everybody said that they voted against him, but somehow he had the majority. I believe that Hindenburg was President at the time. They threw everybody else out and they took over. I remember sometimes sitting up in our apartment. We had a very nice apartment. I showed you a picture of it. It was up high and was overlooking a beautiful park. We would see the NAZI's down there, in their brown uniforms, marching up and down. They scared everybody.

JO Do you remember specifically what you were afraid of?

JF Well, their coming, taking us prisoners and killing us. You know pretty much what they had in mind. They were going to take everything we had and kill us.

JO I talked to several other people who, at the time were children. That is why I asked, because at times their perceptions are so much clearer than those of adults.

JF Nobody came right out and told us that, we just know (the NAZI songs

which they sang while marching stated their intentions in so many words that Jews were in danger). They called us Jews and other things (the yellow stars of David which all Jews had to wear by NAZI law). By that time I was already gone.

JO You went to England then without your brother?

JF Yes, I went all by myself. I believe that my father went with me when I left to get me started. He actually couldn't speak English either. We went to a boarding school in the South of England, near Brighton (50.50N, 0.10W), near Bournemouth (50.43N, 1.54W). We had made arrangements that some funds, which he had somehow transferred, would pay since the boarding school was not cheap. I only returned to Germany for one vacation. After that I did not dare go back because they might not let me back out.

JO What was the name of the school you went to?

JF It was called Oldfield School (JF, spells this) in a little town near Bournemouth. The little town was Swanage (JF, spells this) (50.37N, 1.58W) in Dorset. That was a primary school, sort of like a grade school. I graduated from there, then I went to another school called Hirstubine College which is one of the famous English Public Schools. These schools, in England were anything but public. You pay tuition. They are a good way to get into Oxford or Cambridge. These are the ultimate in England. They are the two top universities. You take examinations there. I took the School certificate and then the Higher certificate. That qualified me for entrance into Cambridge or Oxford without anything further. This was then accepted here, in the United States, where I went to Ohio University, University of Dayton, and Ohio

State University. They accepted my credits, together with some tests as being equivalent to something beyond United States High School graduation. I was able to get into some mathematics classes at the Sophomore or Junior level. So the education of an English Public School is similar to high school in the United States.

JO So, how long were you in England?

JF I was there from 1936 to April 1940.

JO Did your brother come along?

JF My brother came then two weeks later. They tried to do the same thing then (it is suspected that JF means years rather than weeks) but they couldn't get the money. I was able to, through the Jewish Community in Bournemouth. They were able to get a scholarship at the same school where I went. He went there while I went to the Public School. He was there for about 2 years.

JO You lived at the school?

JF Yes. These were both boarding schools.

JO You must have had a language problem.

JF Oh, yes! You can say that.

JO How quickly did you learn English?

JF You learn it pretty quickly when you have to. I think that it took about 6 months. At first I knew "Yes" and "No", that was about it. Some of them know some French and some know a little Latin. I know Latin quite well; I had had 3 or 4 years of it, and I had had 5 years of French. That is how we got by. I listened, and I remembered. This boarding school had little children from 6 years on up. I was 13 then, so I was one of the older ones. I remember that these little children

could speak English so well. I couldn't believe how they could do it, and I had so much trouble. I had to think so hard to learn how to speak English. But you soon learn, when you are forced to. I was never able to completely eliminate the accent. My brother, however, has no accent in English. He lost his.

JO Was there a large Jewish Community in the area of Bournemouth?

JF In Bournemouth there was but I never met any Jewish people in Swanage.

JO There were no Jews in the school.

JF Oh no.

JO Did you experience some anti-Semitism at the school?

JF No. None at all. They were very friendly. They knew that I was different since I couldn't speak English - and so I was. However, I tried to participate and I tried to learn. I could keep up with them in athletics, pretty well; so, other than for the language problem I could keep up.

JO What did your parents do while you were in England?

JF I wasn't there so I really don't know.

JO Did you write pretty much?

JF My father had that big business. In 1938 they forced them to sell it. The forced sale was all legal. You know in Germany everything had to be done by the book. It was all legally taken away from you. They sold it and then all the money was confiscated. I know that there were large sums involved. They did that and then they packed their things. My mother was probably very busy just arranging everything. They packed what they called a "lift van" (a prefabricated container which was then transshipped by boat) with all the physical belongings and



they sent it to the United States. It just got here when the war broke out. It was about 1 week too late, so they did not unload it. They took it back to Europe and unloaded it in Holland. Then it got lost. The next thing was to get my brother out. They got him out in 1938. Then they mainly spent their time getting out of Germany. The way they got out was interesting since they couldn't get to the United States because of the quota system. I was at Hirstubine College then (transcriber is not certain about the exact name). They told me that if you could get an affidavit to come to England they could get out of Germany. However, they wouldn't let you in unless you had someone guarantee that you would not become a burden to the state, just like they required in the United States. I became friendly with several of my English classmates. One was fairly wealthy. I believe that this father was in real estate. He lived in a town north of London. When I couldn't go anywhere (when school was in recess) they invited me to stay with them on holy days. England does not have a long summer recess as we do. They have one month, in either July or August. I told them my predicament that my parents couldn't get out. It turned out, I don't know the details that this man gave the affidavit that he would make sure that my parents would not become a burden to the state, such as welfare, or anything like that. For the British my parents had to agree not to work. You were not allowed either to work or to get welfare. That is not what we do with the refugees who come here now; however, in England it is still pretty much that way. You can not come to England and become a burden. This man guaranteed that, and my parents scraped together whatever little money they had and lived in

London. They came out 2 days before the war started. The war started September 1, 1939. They came out September 14, 1939; they came to Amsterdam, then to England based on this man's affidavit. They stayed in London, asking the United States Government to please get on the quota. When the war broke out in September 1939, everything changed since all the Jews were caught in Germany and could no longer come to the United States, then the German quota got a lot more open. We were still considered Germans, although we were in England, because we had been born in Germany, as far as the quota went. So our number to family received one quota number if traveling together) came up in April 1940, much sooner than would have otherwise have the case. As soon as it came up we got tickets to come to New York. So I left school and came with the family.

JO You said that you went home to Germany on one vacation.

JF Yes.

JO Was that in 1938?

JF I imagine. I started in England in 1936. I remember that the routing was to take a train from London then a ferry across to Belgium and the Bremerhaven (53.33N, 8.35E) in Germany. I remember arriving in Augsburg and seeing my parents and being very happy and a few weeks later I took the train back. I was pretty worried when the Germans had my passport, since they controlled everything. I said: "I hope they don't make difficulties, that I pass their border controls." Then I got back on the ferry to England and back to school. After that my parents told me not to come back because they might not let me back out.

JO When your parents came to London where did they live?

JF In a very small apartment. They didn't have any money. They had to leave all their money in Germany. They had a one room efficiency in some inexpensive London tenement I imagine. I was there for only 2 days because I stayed at the school I went to. That was until 2 days before the ship left; then I came to London with whatever few possessions I had. They we went to Liverpool and we took the ship to the United States.

JO How long did they live in London?

JF They came over in September 1939 and we left in April 1940. About 7 months.

JO I am just curious how they payed for the apartment?

JF I don't know. They were able to take a little bit with them, somehow, very little. They left everything behind them. I don't know how they did things. When we came to New York, we had just had enough means to pay for the passage on the Cunard White Star line. We had no money for anything when we got to New York.

JO Do you recall your first impressions of New York?

JF The Statue of Liberty was very impressive. I said: "Gee, at last we are free!" (The English passenger ship had operated under blackout conditions in order to outrun the German submarines). You do of course get a little overwhelmed by the city. I had an aunt and uncle who lived in New York and we were still hoping to see them. They had not wanted to get involved (give us affidavits) because they did not want to have to support us either, although he was quite wealthy. However, they were nice to us, at least they met us. They rented a small

apartment for us. After that, it was up to us. We had been hoping that at least someone would meet us at the boat so that we would know where to go. It is so overpowering when you come in. However, by then I could speak English, that was a big advantage. In England it was worse since we couldn't speak any English and they didn't speak any German in England.

JO So your parents came basically without jobs, or money?

JF Oh yes, without anything! Yes, just the clothes on our back. All our furniture and our valuables were in the lift-van which was returned to Holland. You know, it is something like today's container boxes.

JO Are they crates?

JF It is like today when we buy toys (The Farnbacher Co. in Dayton sold toys wholesale) in containers from Japan or Hong Kong, or whatever. They can fill the entire thing full of stuff. The container is then loaded on a ship by a crane then unloaded and put on a truck and you can ship it anywhere. All the furnishings and other earthly belongings were in that thing, and then it was not unloaded. The ship came to New York, they unloaded the humans - the passengers - that was when the war broke out so they said that they didn't have enough time. The German government ordered the ship back to Germany. They asked: "What about the stuff in the cargo hold?" They said: "Forget it, just get back here!" As is ended up all these lift-vans, I am certain that there were also others, they ended up in Amsterdam. Either they were broken into and effects stolen or otherwise destroyed during the war.

JO You were about 16 when you came here?

JF I was actually 17 when I came to the United States, or nearly so.

had my 17th birthday in September of the year where we arrived in April.

JO How long did you live in New York City?

JF Not very long. I received a scholarship to go to Ohio University in Athens. The school (OU) started right after Labor Day. I worked in a factory, you know we needed money. My uncle had an egg farm in New Jersey and he would send us 30 dozen eggs in a crate; we took them out and candled them (that is the act of holding the eggs between a source of light and the eyes to detect staleness, blood clots, etc.) then we packed them up in 1 dozen egg crates and we went from one apartment to the other, trying to sell eggs. That was the first thing we did, and how we made a little money. It was hard work and the financial return was very little. Then I got a job for about \$12.00 a week (30 cents an hour at the time was federally established minimum wages) in Brooklyn. We lived up on 207th Street in Manhattan, that is a long ways from Brooklyn. I took the subway at 5:30 or 6:00 am. I did that for 44 hours a week and made about \$12.00. In 1940 that was better than nothing. In 1940 I was the main wage earner. I did that from April until I got the scholarship when the school started in September. went to Athens, Ohio and I started my engineering studies.

JO Did your father work in New York?

JF He had a very hard time. He was at least 55, or he could have been 60. He was selling these eggs but it was very hard to make a living that way. So that winter, when I went to OU, they went down to Florida to manage an apartment for one of the people who had given them the affidavits. This man, a friend of theirs, lived in New Haven, CT. He

owned apartment houses in Hollywood, FL. They ran these apartment houses like a janitor and a maintenance man. My father had 2 left thumbs, you know that he had been a businessman. My mother had never cleaned anything. She had always had 2 or 3 maids and she now was the cleaning woman to clean up and rent the apartments. They did that that winter and then that was 1940 - 1941, they ended up here in Dayton, because I was at OU. There was another couple who lived in Dayton and who were from Augsburg. They heard that it was Ohio, so they thought that it is in Ohio, that is where John in going to school. They figured that it would be right next door. Of course Athens is about 200 miles from Dayton. I guess that they never looked at a map. They figured that it would be easy to visit their son. So they came to Dayton and the Jewish Community helped them. They helped them very little, but they helped them a little to find a place. They gave them some real terrible old, used furniture, but at least they had something. They rented a small, terrible place, just over a grocery store for them. It was on Broadway and Riverview. It was real minimal. Today it is a service station.

JO Did they have any trouble learning English?

JF No, they had studied English in Germany. They knew where they were going. They also lived in England for several months. I had had no notice as to where I was going. I had not known exactly when I was going to go to England, once the decision was made that I was to go. I just quit school and took a crash course in English. I had had only about 2 or 3 weeks. After I went to England my parents and my brother took English lessons. So we could understand some and when you spoke

slowly they could keep up with you. Then I believe that my father got a job at Rike's. My mother finally went to work also. It is amazing what you have to do when you have no money. I believe that my father worked in the warehouse, as a stockman, maybe he was doing such things as pricing merchandise.

JO What did your mother do?

JF She first started in the stockroom and then since she can sell very well, she ended up in the Moraine room selling coats, and better dresses. There she made a little more money. Then when the war came along, 1941 - 1942, and things got tough in the department stores they heard that the people at Wright Field were looking for people who could speak German. They had captured some German things (documents) already then. Lather on it became a flood. They captured all these German documents, and they wanted people to translate them. During the period of 1943 - 1944, they then worked for the Air Force at Wright Field and made reasonably good money. Then I was drafted into the Air Force in 1944 I believe. Then I was stationed out there also because they mentioned that I was in the Air Force and that I could speak German. They were desperate for people who could speak German. They captured so many documents that no one could go through it all. They had crates after crates of things. So I was employed over there also in the Intelligence Division, in G2. With my engineering background I could - I have 2 engineering degrees - not only translate the documents but also figure out what they were talking about. So I helped classify and translate documents for the Air force.

JO Did you get drafted after you graduated from College?

JF Yes, in 1944 or 1945, I guess. I was first drafted (called in for the draft but not sworn in) in 1941 but I am nearsighted and in the beginning of the war if you were not a perfect 100 percent specimen you got classified 4F or 2A. So I was turned down because of my glasses. Later on in the war, when you were breathing you were plenty good for the army, then I was drafted into the Air Corps. I was all set to go overseas, to Japan, I believe, but then the Air Corps. somehow heard about me. I was lucky that I was in the Air Corps., not the Army. The Air Corps. had all their documents and were looking for people who could speak German. Somehow my parents did tell someone about my language, just in time, because the entire group that I went to basic training and then mechanics training and other training with, the whole troop was going overseas. I got my orders one day before they got theirs. Their orders were to go to Okinawa, I believe. I was sent up to Wright Patterson. That was very nice. I lived at home and translated, all for \$50.00 a month, or whatever they payed me. Maybe it was \$75.00 monthly.

JO Did you have a Masters degree at that time?

JF No, I had my Bachelors degree. Later, after I got discharged of course, I was entitled to the GI Bill. I thought: "Why not use it?" So I went to get my Masters degree of Ohio State University. Then I went to work after I graduated. That is where I met this young lady.

JO I should have asked earlier "Did your parents ever keep Kashrut at home?"

JF No! My grandfather did. You know my mother's father. They were considerable more religious. The entire community in Augsburg was very



easy going, in so far as religion goes. They went to Synagogue regularly, but that was it. That is all they did.

JO I was also wondering whether their religious practices changed after they came to this country.

JF No.

JO Were you religious when you were away from home, at school?

JF Not really because I had no occasion. There was no Synagogue in England. There was one in London of course. Then I felt, and this goes into my deep inner feelings, that what happened to me is something which I certainly don't want to happen to any children of mine. So I married a Catholic wife and my children are Catholic. I have never joined their faith because that would make me feel a little hypocritical doing that but I feel that, if I hadn't been Jewish, I still would be in Germany. Well, maybe then I would be worse off. I felt that I don't want my children to have to go through what I have had to go through.

JO Did you lose a lot of family?

JF Yes, everybody. I just had my parents. They lived in this country. They passed away of natural causes. I also have my brother who came with us. They only other members of my family I mentioned my father's brother, who wanted to stay there. He and his wife and all his children, except his one daughter, perished. The daughter lives in Chicago. We got her to come here. She is a little older than I am. She had lived in England and had a very hard life, so we talked her into coming to the United States. Actually, she met a very nice lawyer and she is very happy in Chicago. The only other member of my family

who survived are; my mother had a sister, this aunt and my uncle, they came to the United States, about the time we did. I don't know. They live in Providence but they are quite elderly. He is 92 and she is 81 or 82. They have one son who is about 58.

JO Everybody else got killed?

JF Yes, everybody else got killed.

JO Did you ever try to find out what happened to them, after the war?

JF Well, we know what happened to them. The last we heard is that they were taken to Theresienstadt. My mother tried desperately to get them out, after we were here. They had even picked a spot to go through Russia. They were going to go that way because you could no longer go through Europe. Nothing worked. They just couldn't get them out. Actually we didn't have a very big family. My father's parents had died earlier, they were older. But my mother's parents and all my uncles got killed.

JO So your degrees are in engineering?

JF Yes, I have 2 engineering degrees, but I worked in engineering for only 10 years. I got my 2nd degree in 1947, and in 1957 I got out. After the war my father didn't want to go back (probably meaning Europe). He said "I don't know anything else so I will start a business in retailing." We said: "You can't start a business in the United States!" He said: "Why? I am going to do it anyway! I can't do anything else." So he took some little toy samples, because he had been in the toy business, and he took a street car, which they then had in Dayton - the street car out to Soldier's Home with his little samples and walked all the way back. He was trying to sell these

little toys. Then he had toys shipped to his house on Lexington Avenue and he took them on the street car to sell them. Then Rike's helped us. He met the toy buyer at Rike's and he bought from my father. That is how our business got started. We had a pretty large business, toy business. He started this in 1947, right after the war, then my brother got into it in about 1951. My mother was in it. It kept getting bigger. Then in 1957 - I had a pretty good job at GHR Foundry, which just recently closed, however. I was high up in the management - they told me "Well, why don't you join us?" We debated for a long time whether to do that. We finally decided that I should. My brother and I, after my father died, we made this business pretty large. We had about 30 employees.

JO What is the name of the business?

JF It is no longer in existence. Farnbacher Co. In 1978 we had a very big fire. It all burned down.

JO I remember that.

JF You were here then? We then had the toy business in Dayton. So we lost 2 businesses in our lifetime. However, this time was not quite so bad. We had substantial insurance. At first it was a tragedy and my wife thought that I would have a heart attack, while it was happening, however, when things began to settle we were able to collect 90percent, no 99 percent of our accounts. We could pay our bills and after it was all settled we had more money than we thought we had. So now I work for what was then our competition, the Fink Co., which is a local wholesaler. I take care of all their toys.

JO You said that you had your children raised Catholic?

JF Yes.

JO Because you were afraid of something like this happening?

JF I wouldn't want anything like that. Of course Sally is Catholic, so it would be natural to her. However, I was looking for a Christian wife because I felt "well this can happen again."

JO Did you suffer a lot while you were growing up?

JF I think that in the United States the Jews have a better chance. However, I do sometimes feel, you know, what New York Jews seem like, especially when you go abroad or when you go to Florida. They have loud voices, and they want everything and they are very rich. They attract attention. That is what we used to do in Germany. I always think, well, of course, we didn't do that, but others, friends of ours did. My parents were always introverted. However, we went to the finest places and we had the best dinners. Incidentally we didn't have cars. My parents had, I believe, 6 or 8 cars which belonged to the business, but my father never learned to drive, so we always had a chauffeur. Of course we never did these things, but I felt that that is part of what happened to the Jews in Germany. Being very wealthy, they were in control and they showed it to everybody. I often think that when you go to Miami or some other places where the wealthy Jews are, they are asking for trouble. You know, if you are inconspicuous and just do your business nobody cares how much money you have. It doesn't matter. But if you tell everybody how rich you are it makes people envious. We felt that the Jews in Germany did that. We hope that they don't do that here.