

4-21-1981

# Ernest Heilbronner interview for the Emmanuel Ringelblum Collection

Ernest Heilbronner

Carole Erich

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HOLOCAUST HISTORY  
DATE OF INTERVIEW 4-21-81  
TRANSCRIBED BY R. K. FEIST  
WORD PROCESSING BY CANDICE S. KARSCH

EH = ERNEST HEILBRONNER, INTERVIEWEE

CE = CAROLE ERICH, THE INTERVIEWER

CE It is Tuesday, April 21, 1981. My name is Carole Erich and I am in the apartment of Mr. Ernest Heilbronner at 228 Niagara Street in Dayton, Ohio. I will be interviewing Mr. Heilbronner in connection with the Holocaust Project.

CE Mr. Heilbronner I'd like to ask your age.

EH 75

CE And the date of your birth.

EH April 9, 1906.

CE You were born where?

EH In Stuttgart, Germany (located 48.46N, 9.11E).

CE Your parents names?

EH Ludwig and Selma.

CE Your mother's maiden name please?

EH Weiss (spelled by EH).

CE You have two brothers?

EH That is correct.

CE Their names please.

EH Frank and Harry.

CE Do you recall the year they were born?

EH Frank was born in 1896 and Harry was born in 1900.

CE You said that you lived in Stuttgart. Do you know how far back your family

history goes in Stuttgart, and in Germany in general?

EH I think that in Germany, in general, it goes back to 1750.

CE How long did your family live in Stuttgart?

EH I don't really know.

CE I'd like to ask you something about your living conditions in Stuttgart when you were a child. Did your family own a home or rent an apartment?

EH An apartment.

CE You lived in an apartment?

EH Yes

CE Did you have people working for you? Servants?

EH Yes.

CE What type of thing did they do?

EH Housework, cooking. Whatever the servants were doing.

CE How many at one time?

EH One.

CE What did your father do for a living?

EH When I was born my father retired. He had been manufacturing textiles.

After his retirement he worked on different projects like impregnating certain papers. That was paper material which came from Japan and was used as gaskets.

CE Did your mother work?

EH No! My I say that my oldest brother, Frank, died in 1956, in Chicago.

CE We will get to that eventually. I'd like to go back and talk a little more about your family life. Was your family political? Were you interested in politics or involved in any way in politics?

EH My father was a Democrat. There is no doubt about that.

CE Was he a political man?

EH Oh no! Not at all!

CE Did you consider your family an assimilated German family?

EH Definitely!

CE Were you, at that time, a practicing orthodox Jewish family?

EH No!

CE In no way?

EH In no way!

CE You did not keep Kosher?

EH No! No.

CE Did you attend religious services of any kind?

EH Only on the holy days.

CE That would be at the synagogue?

EH Yes.

CE Was your family a particularly culturally oriented family? Were you interested in the arts?

EH Yes, my father was very much interested in the arts, in reading and especially Geography and History. These were his main interests.

CE Was he an educated man?

EH Yes! Oh yes!

CE In what way? To what extent?

EH He naturally went through High School. He was what you could call an all-around man. He was not musically inclined, but still when we kids practiced the piano he could recognize the mistakes. However, he did not especially care to go to concerts or things like that.

CE And your mother?

EH She was more interested in the music. She was, in the main, a good housewife, that means mother and housewife.

CE She was not involved in any activity outside of the home?

EH No!

CE What type of neighborhood did you live in? Was it a primarily Jewish area?

EH No! No.

CE Very much integrated with the community?

EH Yes.

CE Can you remember, as a child, any incidents where being a Jewish boy was detrimental? In other words, did you have any problems as a child living in that type of an environment?

EH No! No.

CE Did you attend the regular Public School?

EH Correct.

CE For how many years did you go to school?

EH Ten years.

CE You went up to the 10th grade?

EH No. Let me put it this way. Three years of grade school, then five years of high school, then two years of commercial High School.

CE Was that training in a particular area.

EH No.

CE It was just a general training.

EH Yes.

CE Your brothers, were they also given the same educational background?

EH Oh yes! My middle brother became a DiplomIngenieur. (This corresponds to our Professional Engineering, i.e., a state license beyond the undergraduate university

learning). He graduated from the Technical High School. My older brother, he went to Commercial School in Neuchatel in Switzerland (47.05N, 6.50E).

He was trained in business.

CE In the area where you lived, in Stuttgart, we now will get a little bit in the early history where it started to have problems in Germany; the depression and that sort of thing. Was that a particularly industrial area, where you lived? Was it a hard hit area? Can you remember the circumstances of the economy as you grew up as a teenager, as you got through the 1920's?

EH Not specifically. There was a big factory right about one half block from us. The Busch Company, which made blocks for cars. However I didn't look so much at the economy because, after I graduated from Commercial School, I went into banking. I was an apprentice in a bank. Later I changed to be a salesman in a department store.

CE How long did you work in a bank? Was there a reason why you did not stay with that?

EH You see I was working, during the inflation, for the bank. That was while there was the big inflation; every day you got a different kind of money. (Actually the value of the German Mark might be cut to 10 percent of its value in a single day or even less). I really don't remember what the reason was why I changed.

CE Do you remember the year, approximately, when you made this change?

EH Yes, that was about 1923.

CE Were things getting a little rough then, or had they been rough for some time in the economy in Germany?

EH I think so, yes. I know that my father also died in 1923.

CE Was your mother able to continue without financial aid?

EH Yes. Yes, although my father lost quite a bit of money through WWI. The war bonds you know. However, we actually didn't suffer. We kids didn't suffer at all. We always had a clean, well kept household, in every way. We had peoples as guests, such as family. We had a normal life.

CE Your father invested in the German war effort?

EH Yes, when the war broke out, he signed up. He gave his gold watch and gold chain for the Kaiser. He got an iron one and an iron chain in exchange.

CE He very much supported the German war effort?

EH Absolutely! My oldest brother, he was only 16 (that would mean that he went into the army in 1913, i.e., as Europe was preparing for WWI whereas the shooting started only in August 1914), and was at that time in Berlin; when the war broke out he wrote my father that he wanted to enlist. He had to have my father's permission. He enlisted in the German army.

CE How long was he in the service?

EH The war ended in 1918. In November 1918.

CE He went through the whole war?

EH Yes.

CE Was he injured in any way?

EH Yes, he was gassed. I think that he was hit by a shrapnel once.

CE Did you middle brother enlist also?

EH No. He was drafted, but fortunately, when he was about ready to serve the war was finished.

CE You say that your family entertained. Were you a very social type of family? Did you entertain a great deal, or was it primarily family?

EH It was primarily family. Now my mother had several ladies coming for

coffeeclatch and things like that, but the entertainment was mostly of family.

CE When your mother entertained, it apparently did not matter whether she was entertaining Jewish friends or German Christians.

EH Mostly Jewish friends.

CE The woman who worked for your family was she Jewish or German? (Meaning Christian)

EH No!

CE Did she work for you for quite a long time?

EH Yes! All the maids whom we had stayed a long, long time.

CE Do you remember any of their names?

EH No.

CE After your father died, in 1923, you were still in school at the time.

EH I think that I was at the bank. I also took dancing lessons at that time. There were several Jewish couples taking such lessons.

CE Ballroom type dancing?

EH Yes, ballroom type.

CE Did you say that that was put on by the Jewish Community?

EH No, that was put on by a choreographer of the ballet, of the theatre. He gave private lessons.

CE Was there an active Jewish Community recreational center or anything of that type?

EH No! No.

CE You had no involvement with the synagogue as far as recreation is concerned?

EH Not at all. I belonged to a youth organization, but that was more for hiking and just such things. I would state that my father never went to the



synagogue after he was married, never.

CE Was there a reason for that?

EH Yes. When he was young his father forced him to go to synagogue at 5 o'clock in the morning, every morning, and he was opposed to the idea that his children should get the same kind of life. He also had the feeling that the rabbis were hypocrites; that, if you had money, they talked for an hour about you and, if you had no money, they were done with you in 15 minutes. He was a very good friend of his Rabbis outside of the synagogue, and he went out of his way to please them. I will give you an example: he was on a street-car one day and the head Rabbi was on the same street-car so he said: "Would you like to have some strawberries? I have some in my garden." So the Rabbi and his wife went with my father into the garden. My father picked them, they sat down at the table and they enjoyed them very, very much. Another time my father had to go on a trip and at the last minute the Rabbi came and he was out of breath and went into the car and could not find a seat. My father said: "Here is a seat for you!" The Rabbi said: "Here you can see the experienced traveler!" So, outside the synagogue it was OK. My father's friends were all Jewish people. The biggest disappointment was that his best friend promised my mother that, if anything would happen to my father he would take me into his business, and when we tried to take him up on it, he turned "thumbs down".

CE What kind of a business was this man in?

EH He was in silks. He worked with silks!

CE You mean textiles?

EH Yes, textiles.

CE Thinking back on it now, do you wish that it would have worked out so that

you could have gone into that business?

EH No!

CE Why do you say that then?

EH Because he was a pretty stern fellow. I don't really know what would have happened.

CE You say that you went to work in a department store? As a sales clerk?

EH Yes.

CE How long were you there?

EH For about a year.

CE Was that a German or a Jewish department store?

EH Yes, yes, a Jewishly owned store. Afterwards I moved to Heidelberg, Germany (49.25N, 8.42E) to a department store where I worked for three years. Then I worked in Nurnberg (49.27N, 11.05E) also in a Jewishly owned place called "Karper Schoppen". Then I left from there to go to Kemnitz (the transcriber cannot locate this town, maybe the spelling is wrong or the name has been changed). I was there for about two weeks, then I came back. Then I started my own business. I did that because my middle brother was associated with his father-in-law in a big knitting company. I visited people, private people mostly, who needed extra large underwear and shirts. My clients consisted mostly of state or federal employees. In this way I was sure that I would get payed. That was also my downfall because as soon as Hitler came to power they were no longer allowed to buy from me.

CE Let's backtrack a little bit now, I believe that we have gotten ahead of the story. Conditions back, in the early twenties were quite bad in Germany. Do you recall when things started to change? When Hitler began to have an influence in the situation in Stuttgart?

EH Yes. The so called SA (these were the brownshirted storm troupers who made up the "Sturm Abteilung" which means the division which was going to attack) stood before Jewishly owned stores and told the people not to buy from Jews (this was the famous Boycott which Hitler organized shortly after assuming the office of German Chancellor in 1933). Naturally, as I pointed out once before, I lived right across the street from a big meeting hall. Hitler, in the beginning, when he came by taxi used that hall. He became very strong on the basis, not only that he accused the Jews but that he wanted revenge because the German people had been beaten in WWI. He wanted to put back the army (the treaty of Versailles, which ended WWI, severely limited the size of the Germany army and navy as well as removed some territories from Germany, some of them temporarily such as Upper Silesia and the Saar region, some of them permanently such as Alsace-Lorraine) into the cities which used to have soldiers (army garrisons were usual in Europe) and he naturally gained the applause of the merchants of these cities because it brought business in. He also appealed to the youth, which had been mostly unemployed. They were glad to get some uniforms and some brown belts, you know some of the heavy belts, it made them appear important. Anything which had to do with uniforms attracted people.

CE I was just going to ask you, what year was that that Hitler had that meeting in Stuttgart, do you recall?

EH No.

CE Had you heard of him before? Were you familiar with him at all? With what he was doing in Germany?

EH Yes, because, as you may remember there was the "Hitler-Putsch" (the attempted coup d'etat by Hitler and General Ludendorff in Munich) in 1930, or

something like that (actually it took place on November 8, 1923). They put him then in jail. He was known to be out to start a revolution (he had denounced the Treaty of Versailles in a public meeting on January 27, 1923). However, nobody thought that he would take it out on the Jews (Hitler had publicly stated on February 20, 1920 that his "German Worker's Party" attacked Jews, large property owners and capitalists). We also had an organization called "Black-Red-Yellow" which were the colors of the Republic of Germany, as set up during the revolution of 1848. That was not the flag of the Kaiser. The Kaiser's flag was black, white, red. This organization consisted mostly of liberal socialists. One of the leaders was the Minister of the Interior of Prussia whose name was Serbing. He was the first one to go over to Hitler, instead of leading us against Hitler. (Actually the Minister of the Interior's name may be Goering, but it is difficult to hear on the tape, who became second in power to Hitler as Minister of the Interior of Prussia and President of the Reichstag). That was the end of the story (of our organization).

CE You were, at the time when Hitler came to Stuttgart, the owner of your own little business?

EH No. No.

CE You were still working either in the bank or in the department store? So you were able, despite his visiting to go ahead, it had no influence on you starting your own business.

EH No, no.

CE What year did you start that business?

EH In 1931.

CE Were you very successful?

EH I would say "fair!"

CE Did you have employees working for you?

EH No!

CE You were out on your own?

EH Yes. In fact I worked indirectly for my brother. I got the merchandise from him. I put my orders in and they provided me with the material to sell.

CE You were like a sales person for the company then.

EH Yes, indirectly. I will tell you what concerned my own business. I had a very good relationship with my customers because, in contrast to how it is done in the U.S. where you rush with the customers, I took my time. I looked into the family life of the customer. I made notes to myself. When I came back, they were flabbergasted that somebody thinks about what happened to them. This makes me a bit angry, that this is not done here. I would say that wherever I came I was well received.

CE Did you work also within the community and had Jewish as well as German customers (CE utilizes poor terminology again since the Jews in the area were just about all German citizens having been subject to the military draft including fighting in WWI, having the full rights to vote and paying all the standard taxes and no special assessments, at least that was the case prior and during WWI as well as during the Weimar Republic. It is surprising that EH did not correct her on this item), or was it exclusively one or the other (meaning Christian or Jewish)?

EH All my customers were non-Jewish.

CE Non-Jewish? There was never any problems at all working with non-Jewish people?

EH Not at all, except one time a lady was so enthused about the NAZI's (members of Hitler's party called the National Socialist party after January 27, 1923). She went to a meeting and she was impressed by the snappy appearance of the youth and the flags and the trumpets and or everything else--so she said: "You know, I was so interested in that, maybe we will get a better Germany from the NAZI's". I didn't say anything. I went for lunch in a restaurant and came back after the lunch then her husband was there. While she was in the kitchen I said: "You know, I think that your wife was very much impressed by the appearances." Do you know what he said? He said: "That is a women for you." He didn't think that could happen. The majority of the people who voted for Hitler were youth and women, not men (probably statistics would not hear this out).

CE That is an interesting comment. Why do you think that that was?

EH In the first place there was not enough to eat (in Germany in the late twentieth and early thirties) and women are very emotional. He (meaning Hitler) had a way to enthuse the people through his speeches, which were well prepared. Then there was Mr. Goebbels, his public relations man. (Joseph Goebbels served Hitler as Propaganda Minister). Goebbels was preparing the masses for Hitler's appearances. All Hitler had to do was to come in and everybody screamed "Hurrah!" Goebbels incited them really.

CE However, you said that the merchants welcomed him?

EH Yes. You have to realize that, for example, a town near Stuttgart had two regiments of artillery, two regiments of cavalry, and one regiment of infantry before WWI, and through the Treaty of Versailles that was terminated. All the army which Germany was allowed was 100,000 men. That included the navy, the army and the air force. Hitler promised them: "I

will bring your soldiers back!"

CE He was going to defy the Treaty of Versailles?

EH Absolutely! He marched into the Rhineland, which he was not supposed to do.

What happened afterwards; Czechoslovakia and Poland. He just went ahead.

Nobody opposed him. He also had a friendship treaty with Russia. What did he do. He invaded Russia too after a while.

CE OK, we are getting a little bit ahead of our story, we will go into that a little more in depth later on. At the time when you owned your own business, do you remember what year that was? Also how old you were?

EH I started in 1931, and ended it in 1933 so I was, at that time, 25 until I was 27.

CE I would like to ask you also what happened to your oldest brother after he had gotten out of the military service, after he had completed his service requirements.

EH He worked for my cousin, in Germany. He even went to Spain for him. He spent quite a few years in Spain. He was working in import and export. He came back from Spain and worked then in Germany for this cousin. Actually, I don't know whether, while he was in Spain my brother worked for my cousin or for another company, I am not certain anymore.

CE However, in the early thirties he was back in Germany?

EH Yes!

CE So all of you boys and your mother were living in Stuttgart?

EH No! My oldest brother was married in Ludwigshafen (Ludwigshafen am/Rhein 49.29N, 82.27E) with a girl from Stuttgart. They had three children, no, at that time, in Germany they had only one. They had two more here in the U.S.

CE Your middle brother was also married. Did he have children also?

EH He also had children. He had two boys.

CE Did both of your brothers marry Jewish girls?

EH Yes! No, all three kids, of my brother Frank, who lived in Ludwigshafen, were born in Germany. I know that because when they immigrated to the U.S., they came through Paris. The little boys and girls.

CE So they were just babies at that time?

EH No.

CE I mean in the early 1930's?

EH Yes, I would say that they were about five or six years old; seven or eight, at the most.

CE At the time when you started your business, you said that there really was no threat, that the Jewish community felt no threat from Hitler, at all, or were you getting leery of what he was doing.

EH No, really not (Hitler's party's strength snowballed beyond expectations in the elections of 1932--but, even then, he could not form a government without including several other parties) because so many Germans believed that he would not do what he had said he would do.

CE He had already threatened the Jewish community?

EH Oh yes, yes. When I was no longer able to sell to the German government employees, as I described, my two married brothers said: "Oh, why are you still here? Try to get out as fast as you can!" I must say that I was a very outspoken fellow and they feared that I might make trouble for them because of that.

CE That was in 1933?

EH Yes.

CE The two years that you were in business for yourself, did you see a



manifestation of trouble brewing? Where there indications that things were not going well with the business or with your German Christian clients over that two year span? Was there slackening in business? Or had it been fine until 1933?

EH It was pretty good.

CE Was there any speed up in activities with the German NAZI movement, within the Stuttgart area, or within Germany?

EH Oh yes. As I stated earlier there were some NAZI's standing in front of the stores.

CE Did that happen more than one time? Periodically?

EH Oh yes! (Actually the official "Boycott" was the 24 hour period of April 1, 1933, and only then at least nationwide.)

CE That is what I did not understand. It was a recurring incident.

EH That is right.

CE Were you or your family harassed in anyway?

EH No. One time my oldest brother was on a train, while traveling in Germany, and some Nazis approached and said: "You are Jewish" So he opened his jacket, pointed at his chest and said: "This is what I fought for Germany for!" and they let him go.

CE Did you have to have any particular kind of identification, at that time?

EH No!

CE Did you have to register in any way?

EH No!

CE OK, let's move on to 1933, to the point where your friends, and family suggested that there really was no reason for you to continue living in Germany. You were single at the time?

EH Right!

CE In business, at that time, what had happened to it?

EH I just couldn't continue. Even the factory, where my brother worked, eventually had to be taken over by the Nazis (that, however, did not occur right away in 1933--these anti-Jewish decrees became progressively harsher until they were total in 1938).

CE How did that work? Was an order sent down or were troops moved in? How was that brought about?

EH I was out of the country. My oldest brother came to this country in 1937 and my middle brother came in 1939. The factory was gone. Both came here with their families and had to start all over again.

CE But your middle brother, the one with the factory, the textile factory which you worked. Was his factory closed down in 1933?

EH Yes. I wouldn't say in which year. I don't remember. (Regulations were doled out by the Nazis which forced Jews out of businesses. The businesses were targeted by size because Germany was still recovering from the depression. First sales were encouraged, including stock sales, but in 1937 and 1938 they became mandatory with sales occurring at prices set by the German government to specified purchasers selected by the authorities. The moneys which were payed out went into escrow accounts where they were first frozen, then confiscated. After WWII these forced sales were declared fraudulent and restitutions were negotiated). My brother Harry stayed as long as he could. His father-in-law, with whom he was associated, stayed even longer in Germany.

CE But there were problems, obvious problems?

EH Right!

CE Can you explain a little more how these problems manifested themselves.

Were orders given that Germans (again meaning non-Jewish Germans) were not allowed to buy? Did troops come to the textile factory and order them not to buy?

EH I am sorry, I was out of the country. I left Germany on the 25th of April, 1933 for Paris, France and that was all I know. There was not much communication. Furthermore my oldest brother, who was still in Ludwigshafen after 1933, came sometimes to France and we met.

CE I am sorry, I misunderstood. I thought that your brother's textile factory was having problems before you left Germany.

EH Oh no! No! Not at all!

CE OK, so it was suggested that you were to leave. How did your mother feel about this?

EH My mother was very sick at that time and in a sanitarium. If she had known that I go the U.S., she would probably have died right away, because she had a very bad impressions of this country although she was never here. She had the feeling that people would take advantage of me; that if anybody would cry on the boat I would give them my last shirt. My uncle, who was her brother, received me at the dock and invited me for dinner and the next day, put me out on the street and told me "look for your own business!" This was his attitude.

CE So you went without her knowledge?

EH That is right!

CE How did you leave the country?

EH By train.

CE You were able to get papers without any problems?

EH I got a paper, a visa from the French government to go to France, on my German passport.

CE May I ask you how many languages you speak?

EH At that time I spoke French and German.

CE Fluently? Fluently French?

EH Not fluently, but I had some inkling from school. When you have to, you learn fast.

CE OK, you left your two brothers behind?

EH Right.

CE And went alone to France. Was someone going to meet you in France or were you totally on your own?

EH Completely on my own.

CE How were your funds then? (Foreigners were not allowed to be gainfully employed in France without special permission.) Were you able to take care of yourself financially?

EH No, I wouldn't say that. As a matter of fact I went to a Committee for the Refugees in Strasbourg (48.35N, 7.45E located just across the Rhine river from Germany) to which town I came first. They gave me a train ticket to Paris. Once in Paris I went to the Committee also. They put me up in a hotel and saw to it that I got to eat. Eventually I think that I got some money from my brother, from my oldest brother.

CE Your brothers were still able to work in Germany?

EH Yes.

CE Were your brothers, at that time thinking also of immigrating from Germany?

EH Definitely! Definitely.

CE Were there problems in them getting out of the country?

EH Yes, there were limitations. However my middle brother, especially, was very fortunate. The normal thing was that you could only take one spoon, one fork, and one knife with you, as far as sterling silver is concerned. You could take no fur coats, no luxury like that. Still my brother, as a businessman was well known to the tax people and even to the guys who worked for the Gestapo (Geheime Staats Polizei or Secret State Police) and for the Nazis. Through his connections he was allowed to take more out than normal. When it came to his collection of stamps they said: "Stop! We have given you enough now! If you send us two hundred Swiss Franks and you give us the address of the man where you will be, we will let him take the stamps to Switzerland." My aunt was in Switzerland, that was my mother's sister. However, in general, they were very generous and helpful to him (in allowing him to take his private possessions with him). That was not the case in every city but it was in Stuttgart.

CE During these early years, you say that you had left the country at one point and your brother had worked in Spain, was that much of a problem with leaving the country and returning?

EH No! No.

CE You could travel without any difficulties?

EH That (my brother working in Spain) was long before Hitler came to power.

CE However your brother, during the 30th, between 1933 and he left in 1937 as you said, was able to come and go as he wanted (his brother came to France where he saw EH) into and out of the country? Or did he face restrictions?

EH No! No. He went via Amsterdam (52.22N, 4.54E) and then by boat.

CE But on business he was not allowed to travel.

EH No! No. (Actually it was possible to have valid passports and you could

secure visas on this passport if you had a valid reason for a trip)

CE You kept up apparently with your family in Germany. You corresponded with them while you were out of the country. Did they tell you or keep you up-to-date on the condition about how the country was changing under Hitler's influence, shall we say from 1933 through 1939? Where you aware of what was going on?

EH Oh yes. I listened to the radio, I mean that I was not completely cutoff. I could understand the French radio.

CE But I mean first hand information, with or through your family.

EH Oh, when my brother came for a visit he brought me up-to-date. He visited me several times. Even my mother visited me.

CE So they were allowed to travel?

EH Yes, my mother went to Switzerland. Then she came over to see me.

CE She did find out that you left the country?

EH Yes, but she never knew that I went to the U.S.

CE That was the big thing then? Apparently she just didn't want you to come to the U.S. You could go to France but not to the U.S.? In Switzerland, why was it that you picked France over Switzerland at the time? Particularly since you had relatives in Switzerland.

EH In order to enter Switzerland you had to have money. You had to show that you had to have enough money to live. The Swiss were very strict about whom they let in. My aunt, fortunately, through her husband, had the Swiss citizenship. She could go with her daughter into Switzerland. Then the daughter went to Israel (Palestine at that time). That was very interesting. She got sick with an ear inflammation and the doctors in Israel couldn't treat her. She was allowed by Hitler to come back to

Stuttgart. She was in the Catholic Hospital there. The nuns were praying at her bed. They cured her. Then she could go back to Switzerland again.

Here a section of tape is missing and in spite of going back to the archives, this could not be reconstructed and since Mr. Heilbronner is no longer alive, this cannot be undone. The transcriber is sorry about this.

Note of May 1990.

EH I got disturbed the next night and was given food. The lady who worked on me was an old, old lady. So, when I came out a fellow said to me: "Do you know who that lady was?" I said: "How should I know?" She was the widow of Dreyfus (Capt. Alfred Deyfus born 10-9-1859, died 12-7-1935 was falsely accused of spying in the French Army for Germany, he was arrested in 1894, sentenced to life in the French Penal Colony in Guiana, pardoned in September 1900 and restored to army honor on July 21, 1906. This was the cause célèbre of Anti-Semitism in France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was at the Dreyfus trail that Hertzl became a Zionist). Remember, Capt. Dreyfus who was discriminated against. She knew what discrimination was. She worked for that committee.

CE That is very interesting. Now you were in Paris; you had no funds; you had no job. What were the conditions like in France, in Paris, at that time?

EH You could not get employment (foreigners needed a special work permit in France if they were to work legally) as a foreigner. The so called "Carte de Travail" (working permit) was only given to foreigners who know something which the French did not know, where you could be of special use to the French. However, there was no prohibition to start your own business, at

any time.

CE So you started your own business?

EH Yes, I tried it with different things. First I sold an item like Drano, then I sold the type of fan, like I explained to you. I sold wrapping paper and string. Finally, I sold printed material. However, I must say that all my customers in Paris were German Jewish people. The Frenchman is very conservative. Once you are in (meaning accepted as doing business with individuals) you are in for the eternity They are not interested in your price, they are not asking if they can get it cheaper but they all said: "Oh, Mr. So and So has been coming for years and we will continue to take from him!" Everywhere, on Christmas, there is a big bottle of wine or of things coming in, as present. They were very, very conservative. They were polite but you couldn't deal with them.

CE One thing I wonder about is, was there, at the time an established immigrant community in Paris at the time?

EH Yes, definitely.

CE Do you remember where it was located in the city?

EH I don't think that it was an organization of German Refugees. However, I know that two refugees, for example, started a restaurant which I frequented quite a bit. Others also went into business for themselves. I cannot remember that we had an organization as such in Paris. We had one in Chicago, but not in Paris.

CE When you said that you sold these items, did you go house to house or apartment to apartment, that type of selling, or did you have your own little stand or something like that?

EH For the fans, I had a stand; but for the other items, I had to go quasi from



house to house or by recommendation or something of that kind. I must say that my brother, through my cousin got a friend in Paris, a Frenchman, who helped me quite a bit.

CE Did you make a decent living that way? Were you able to get along quite well?

EH I got along, yes. I never had to suffer financially in any way.

CE This German-Jewish community that you lived within, had it blossomed into a full fledged alliance with other stores which just serviced each other? Did it blossom in that way so that it was quite economically isolated from the rest of the French community?

EH Do you mean in Paris?

CE Yes, in Paris. Were you able to just service yourselves as part of your own business which each started?

EH Yes, in fact in one business, if I didn't tell them a joke, I could not get an order. They knew that I get around in the bistros (small establishments in France where one stopped to drink, usually wine or liquor, and spend time chatting).

CE How did you get along? You said that the French business people were very conservative and loyal to his customers. How did you get along with the average French citizen? Were they concerned about this influx of refugees from Germany?

EH I don't think so. They were very happy about it. France was a country, I imagine, which opened its door to everyone. Certainly, England took some, Sweden and Denmark took some, but France took the largest number of refugees from Germany, there is no doubt about it.

CE Did you have any feelings, at that time, about this, about the country, that

it would not take in anymore refugees, like the U.S. would not increase its quotas?

EH Right!

CE How did you feel about that?

EH How could I feel about it! You could not go into the U.S. without having an affidavit (promise of support from a private citizen or citizens). You were not allowed to come in. In as much as I had a place to be, there was not much for me to get worried about.

CE You felt fairly safe and secure in Paris?

EH I had two uncles in the U.S., one in New York and one in Memphis, in fact my middle brother was in the concentration camp in Dachau (that is located just outside of Munich). When my uncle from Memphis sent an affidavit he was released from Dachau and could get out.

CE Let's talk about that a little bit. When was he incarcerated?

EH I believe it was in 1939. I don't know. Maybe it was 1938. I was out of the country. I didn't know from many members of the family who disappeared, I heard about it only later, much later. However, when you had an affidavit (he probably means visa since an affidavit was only for U.S. internal use, it was not an official permission to enter the U.S.) from any kind of a country to go, the U.S. was a neutral country at that time, they would let you out.

CE Can I ask you what happened to your mother?

EH My mother? I believe that she committed suicide by cutting herself right here. She wanted to do it and she died in the sanitarium in Germany, in 1939. I was not allowed to come back for the funeral.

CE Did this have anything to do with persecution?

ED No! Not at all!

CE It was a personal thing?

EH My mother was in a way a very weak person. My father was dominant, I wouldn't say tyrant but the master. Her whole family, including her sister and her brothers were on the kind of weak side. My mother was quite often sick.

CE Did she have tuberculosis? (This was probably asked due to the death in a sanitarium versus as hospital.)

EH No! No, no, no.

CE You apparently don't know what happened to your brother; when he was picked up in Stuttgart. Was his family interned? Do you know that anything about that?

EH Which brother?

CE The younger brother who was in Dachau. Was his family all taken at one time?

EH No, no, no! It was only him who was in Dachau, as far as I know.

CE His family was not taken at all?

EH No! No. (*In 1938 generally only the men were put into camp.*)

CE Your older brother, was he in Stuttgart or in Heilbron? Frank, the oldest brother?

EH He was already in Chicago.

CE He had left already?

EH He immigrated in 1937.

CE Ok. Let' s return to Paris. You are in Paris and you are making a living, you are doing OK. Tell me please when things started to change for you in Paris?

EH Things changed naturally when the war broke out, between Germany and France (that was September 30, 1939) in 1939.

CE Then what happened?

EH We had to report to the ("we" meant all the adult males 17 through 55, then extended to the age of 60, within the week, who either were Germans or had been Germans before they were stripped of their citizenship by the Nuremberg laws) stadium in Paris. The Stadium de Colomb, all the Germans and all the Austrians (Austria had been annexed to Germany in 1938.) There was no money to be brought with you. You were to come with just the suit which you had, that was all. I had to give up my hotel room. My luggage was still in the hotel. As a matter of fact, I had a nice stamp collection. The Nazis stole everything. We bedded down on the steps of the grandstand, on straw, fully clothed for about ten days. We received poor food, but enough to keep you going.

CE Now the Germans, at this time, had invaded France but they had not gotten to Paris as yet. (Actually the invasion of France occurred on May 10, 1940, after the "Phony War".)

EH No, no.

CE So everything which happened up to that point happened under the French government?

EH Right.

CE What happened after these ten days?

EH We got moved to different camps. As I told you earlier; in one camp we had to dig trenches, in another camp we had to make charcoal and things like that.

CE Do you recall the sequence at all of the camps you went to? Do you know how

long you were in each camp and where they were?

EH No!

CE Do you recall their names?

EH No! I know that one camp was in Cipra, another one was near Orleans (57.55N, 1.54E). I don't remember the rest.

CE Now you were sent to these camps because you were German, not because you were Jewish?

EH Right!

CE Did you at any time feel discriminated against because you were Jewish?

EH No, because we were all Jewish. The entire group was Jewish. I was not the only one. The Gentiles were all sent down to the Cote d' Azure (the area which includes Cannes 43.33N, 7.01E and Nice 43.42N, 7.15E on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea) Nice and Marseilles (43.18N, 5.24E). They took them away because they thought that they were more dangerous. They put us in the middle of France, not them.

CE So you were in the middle of France. The Germans were on the Eastern border and France was on your Western border and you were in between. (EH was in the center of France with French troops deployed North and East on the border with Germany.) Can you describe some of the conditions within these camps? Can you estimate how many people were there? Were they segregated according to sex. (The question doesn't make much sense but it was recorded as is.)

EH No, they were all males, in the first place. In the second place the only segregation was between Austrians and Germans, that is in the camps. We couldn't get a long with each other. In the last camp, I remember that the canteen was run by Austrians. (Here a phone call interfered)

CE Can you tell how large these camps were? In the first camp, anyway?

EH About 500 people! No, the first camp was smaller. In the first camp there were between 80 and 100 people.

CE You had apparently French army troops in command?

EH Yes!

CE How were you treated by them?

EH Fair! In fact, in one of the camps when it came to New Year's Eve, the commanding officer put a bottle of wine on every table. That was the first time I heard that some people were signing on New Year's Eve (EH attempts to reproduce a melody.) As a matter of fact, we had two musicians with us, they were Austrians, one played the violin and the other played the accordion. It was a very nice party. No, they treated us fairly. I can't complain that I was mistreated. (Except of course for the absolute deprivation of liberty because war existed with a country from which the prisoners had been expelled, the only way to obtain one's freedom was to join the French Foreign Legion; then no questions were asked),

CE Do you recall what job you had in that particular camp?

EH No.

CE Do you remember how long you were there?

EH I have no idea.

CE At the time when you were interned in this camp were you aware of what had taken place in Germany, what was going on with camps?

EH No, no, no! The only time was when there was an alarm of an air attack. That, however, never happened. The last time I was with the French, I had the feeling that things were not going so well and that the British needed some help. As a matter of fact those who wanted to go to the British could

go. Those who volunteered went by train through the valley of the Loire (the river which flows through Orleans). They finally found the British outfit. Although I have a paralyzed leg I marched as well as I could, because I know that the French were finished. I had that feeling. So we marched into that British camp. We had to get rid of our clothes and received some corduroy suits. Then we were shipped to another camp where we had to lay rails. Finally the British disappeared and we were left alone (that must have been in May-June 1940 when the French-British forces were defeated in Belgium and isolated in Dunkirk. France itself collapsed and the German army occupied the Atlantic coastline up to Biarritz and the North of France including Paris up to the Swiss border). We were about three thousand men. Every one went South as well as he could. There was no transportation. As I pointed out to you (obviously out of range of the recorder) I got into an old Citroen car with two heavy set people, a man and his wife. The car was packed in the rear with their things, linen and such. They took me from one place to another because I told them that if "Hitler gets me he will cut my throat!" In one place where they brought me I found some of the other Germans who came from another company. That whole thing happened so long ago that it's hard for me to remember everything. Who can remember everything which happened 42 years ago?

CE Yes. You have done extremely well with what you remembered, you really have. I have been prodding your mind a little with my questions and you have done very well. You mentioned that you hurt your leg. Can you tell me how that happened. You also had a paralyzed leg.

EH That was from childhood on.

CE How did it happen?

EH No one from the family really told me the truth. Somebody said that I fell from the table when I was a baby, and that from then on my foot was crooked as it is now. I do remember that I was at an orthopedic doctor who put a machine on me and that I was carried by the maid. It was what we call "Infantile Paralysis", or "Polio". I was then two or three years old, in 1908 or 1909. However, fortunately there were good shoe makers in Germany so I wore shoes which were all made by hand, including my supports and everything. I am getting along fine.

CE Were you not bothered by this affliction until you had to lay the rails?

EH I really wasn't afflicted so badly, but I just didn't have the strength.

CE You were about 25 or 26 at that time (EH was 34 on April 9, 1940).

EH Yes.

CE When you were with the British you said that you marched into the British camp, and were suited up into corduroy, do you recall how long you were with the British forces?

EH Maybe two or three months, at the most.

CE Was this an actual camp, or was it a British club guard or something like that? Were they fighting forces, or were they others?

EH No, no, no! That was not a fighting force.

CE Was it a British camp for refugees?

EH It was a camp established for the refugees.

CE In France?

EH Yes, in France.

CE Can you compare the way you were treated by the French to the way you were treated by the British?

EH I saw no big difference. I mean neither one was what you could call polite,



however, they were fair. I would put it that way.

CE Now, were they treating you like Germans, or were they sympathetic to your cause because you were Jewish?

EH They knew naturally who we were, there was no doubt about that. They used us to work, as a work force. They didn't say: "Come to us and we will hide you!" Or something like that. They had a purpose, that is why they took us.

CE Then, when things got bad, they pulled out

EH They pulled out!

CE Do you recall how they told you that this was going to happen? Did they just up and leave? Were you given any warning, at all?

EH In the morning the captain said: "Well, good-bye! The French will be here at 11 o'clock! They will take care of you for us. Good-bye and I hope to see you." I wish that I would never see that guy anymore. The French never showed up.

CE Was that a barbed wire enclosure?

EH No.

CE You were free to have left at any time, even otherwise?

EH Where would we go? We were dressed in a certain way. Not everybody spoke fluently French. We had no reason to run away.

CE You don't think that you could have done better elsewhere?

EH No, no, no.

CE Ok, the British have left, the French did not come, now, what did you do?

EH As I pointed out to you; we had to walk, and walk, and walk, I threw my passport away. I threw everything which I had on me away except my suit.

CE Now, why did you do that?

EH Because it was too burdensome, when you had to walk.

CE I mean your passport, why was it a special burden, why was it significant that you would throw that particular item away?

EH I just didn't want to be known anymore as a German. You see, it was a German passport.

CE If you could have changed your clothes, would you have tried to blend in with the French? Were you concerned that much, that you wanted to escape your identity, your previous identity and blend in with the French citizenry?

EH One time, in Paris, I went to the Police Commissioner and asked about naturalization. He wanted five thousand Franks under the table. I am glad that I didn't do it. Everything in France, when you wanted to go to sell, the first thing was: "How much is in it for me?" That is why you couldn't do any business in France. When you, as an American, came to Paris: Oh yes, they have an interpreter who speaks perfect English! but you payed more because the commission for the guy who got you the interpreter was included in the price.

CE You moved down toward the South. You left the area and started marching. Did you stay as a group or did everyone just take off on his own?

EH Everybody took off on his own! That is right! First I went with a few, but they marched all much faster so I was left behind.

CE At any time during this whole adventure in France, were you able to form any kind of friendships at all, or were you totally isolated as an individual? Did you meet anyone you wanted to stay with if you could have?

EH We were in camps. Naturally you started friendships with many people, however, you lost contact immediately after separation.

CE While you were in these camps, were you able to have any recreation of any

kind? Were you able to play cards, or anything of the kind?

EH No, no. In Orleans, we were once taken to the Jewish service by the guard.

(The war in 1939 broke out just prior to the Jewish High Holy Days.)

CE Do you remember what that corduroy suit looked like? Was this something which you will never forget?

EH Oh no. Corduroy is corduroy. It was usually a grey-greenish suit.

CE You mean khaki colored corduroy?

EH I have a coat right here, it is the same color corduroy even if it is not from the army.

CE Did it look like a prisoner's uniform?

EH No, not at all!

CE It was a suit of some type?

EH Yes it was a suit. It didn't have any vest, but otherwise it was a suit, it had a jacket.

CE You didn't stick out as a prisoner?

EH Oh yes! In the streets oh yes! If I had wanted to escape, someone would have asked me what kind of clothes I had on.

CE Ok! You have left this camp. You have walked and walked. Where were you heading? Or did you know where you were heading?

EH I was heading South, period! (The Germans were marching into France from the North, i.e., from Belgium in late May and in June 1940 so South, towards Spain, seemed the way to go. Rumors had it that the French would form a defensive line at the Somme River, then at the Seine at Paris, then at the Loire at Orleans, then anywhere north of Bordeaux. The French government retreated from Paris to Orleans to Bordeaux, where it surrendered after debating whether to go to North Africa.)

CE Anywhere South? Now the country was divided at that time wasn't it, between the Vichy government sector and the German controlled section? The Southern or free area did exist? (That only occurred after the French surrender on June 22, 1940. EH is not sure about dates.)

EH Yes, Yes! You mean the "Occupied Zone" and the "Unoccupied Zone".

CE Right! Were you aware that that was happening?

EH I was aware of that. I was definitely in the "Unoccupied Zone".

CE Where did you end up?

EH I ended up in Marseille. (43.18N, 5.24E)

CE How long did this journey we will call it, take from the time when you have left Paris, were interned by the French and later the British, then set loose and got to Marseille, how many months had passed?

EH Let me think back about that. After I left the British, I would say about two months.

CE Were you ever close to the actual fighting? (There was no organized fighting in 1940, South of the Somme River other than some scattered air raids).

EH No! Never! Never. Before we left that British camp, we heard bombs fall. We heard them! I found out that they had bombed an ammunition train in the City of Rennes (48.05W, 1.41W) which was about fifty or one hundred miles away (that must be an error since no bombing can be heard at that kind of distance.)

CE Apparently you had nothing, no money, no finances of any way! How did you get the food with which you lived on while you traveled? What did you resort to to keep alive?

EH You mean traveling to Marseille?

CE Right!

EH I don't remember anything anymore. (There were enough refugees of all kinds wandering about that soup kitchens were organized and that dormitories were set up in otherwise closed school buildings by governmental units, if they were functioning, or by volunteer groups including Church and Jewish groups! No questions were asked by anyone of anyone since knowing too much might be dangerous.) I know one thing, that is that when I was in Toulouse (43.36N, 1.26E) at the railroad station, they gave me a loaf of bread and a can of corned beef. When I came to Marseille to the Jewish refugee home I got food.

CE The date is April 28, 1981, Tuesday morning. I am continuing my interview with Mr. Ernest Heilbronner. When we last left we were talking about your leaving the internment camp and heading towards Marseille. When you arrived in Marseille, what did you do? What was your initial act? Where did you go?

EH Before leaving Toulouse, I met a German refugee whose wife was in Marseille at a refugee home. I continued my trip to Marseille with him. I went in that home where I was welcomed. I don't know if I told you that I met a man who did some book binding for me, while I was in Paris. He was an Armenian. When I told him that I had nothing on me except the suit which I was wearing, he took me to different Armenian businessmen in Marseille. These businessmen provided me with shoes and socks and whatever. After a while, I was able to communicate with my brother in the United States. Because I was in the "Unoccupied Zone" of France he was able, to see to it through a relative of my uncles in the United States, who lived in Cannes, that she sent me money. I stayed in Marseille in a hotel. Wait a minute, I think that I moved from

this refugee home to another refugee home. This second refugee home was kind of a spiritualistic society. We, there, had people from Spain (many "Republicans" had escaped from Spain during the Civil War and taken refuge in France, particularly after Generalissimo Franco and his Falangists triumphed in Spain in 1939) and refugees from all over. We had two Austrian musicians with us who entertained us. We got very good food. (During 1940-1941 food, in France, became more and more scarce. Everyone had rationing cards and you could not always purchase, on the legal market, whatever you were entitled to on your rationing cards, so food was very important.) It so happened that I met some German people who had been very good to me in Paris, but they didn't have much to eat in Marseille. So I saw to it that the mother came to peel potatoes at the refugee home, and took food home for herself, her husband and her daughter. I think that then I moved to a hotel where I had to cook by myself. I had to stand in line to purchase one egg, for things to cook with, in short, I had to stand in line for everything. Then I contracted yellow jaundice by eating liver sausage which was infected because the French really had nothing to eat. I spent about 40 days in a hospital.

CE I would like to ask you about this German family which was very good to you.

EH Family Strauss, was their name.

CE They were German, they were not German-Jewish?

EH They were German-Jewish, yes.

CE They were a German-Jewish family, refugees also?

EH Yes! As a matter of fact the daughter is now living in Oklahoma, near Tulsa. She is working for the big oil company, Phillips 66. She is translating for them. She is a very capable girl. She is a college

graduate from the University of Wisconsin. She speaks fluently Spanish, French, and German.

CE Is this the only family whom you kept in touch with whom you had met during your flight from Germany?

EH In Paris, naturally, I met many people. I don't know what happened to them!

CE Were you aware, during all this time when you were moving about, in France, of the actions of the Vichy Government (that would be the government led by Marshal Petain which was set up after the surrender to Germany) toward the French Jews and of their lack of help toward the foreign Jews (that government did not pass any Anti-Jewish laws until after the British-United States Allies occupied North Africa in November 1942).

EH No, I was not aware of this. As a matter of fact Marshal Petain, the fellow who had quasi-sold out to the Germans, came to Marseille on a visit and I saw him there. You know that he was condemned afterwards to an island (on August 14, 1945 Petain was found guilty of intelligence with the enemy and sentenced to death. This was commuted to exile and he died July 23, 1951) He died on that island. He had been the victor of the battle of Verdun of the French over the Germans in World War I. He died a dishonored man's death. He had been completely forgotten.

CE Did you happen to hear his speech in Marseille?

EH No. I just saw him driving through town.

CE When we left you, you were in the hospital, for about 40 days. Can you tell us what happened after that? You were getting money from a relative in Cannes, or via a relative in Cannes.

EH Yes! That was the case.

CE At least initially?

EH Yes, yes. In fact that was the case all the time, to keep going. You see I didn't do any business there. I had to support myself. I did it with money coming from Cannes.

CE Then you were discharged from the hospital. Did you then go back to the hotel?

EH Oh, yes.

CE What was your next move, or what was the next move which was taken on your behalf to get you out of France?

EH In the first place I got in contact with a United States ship company, however, as you know, nothing (no United States ships) came to Marseille. The closest they came was Lisbon, Portugal. My brother said: "If you can go to Portugal, we send you the money so that you can stay there until you can get a boat." However there was just no chance. You just couldn't get a Spanish visa, if you didn't have a Portuguese visa. You couldn't get a Portuguese visa if you couldn't tell which boat and on which day you would leave. So, I had to contact another German refugee who said that he is aware that there is a transport coming from Gurs. (That was a camp in Southeastern France, not far from Pau-43.18N, 0.22W, where the French had interned all German women after May 1940 and to which the Germans had deported German Jews from Baden and other places. From the camp of Gurs, people were given the possibility to pursue their immigration process with permission to repeatedly travel to Marseille where the consulates including the United States Consulate were located. If a United States visa was obtained, the United States provided a travel paper for a one way trip to the United States to take the place of German or Austrian passports which could no longer be obtained by Jews). The transport was made up of 600



people who are supposed to leave with the next boat which is called either the SS Winnipeg or the SS Martinique, I am not sure which (it was the SS Winnipeg on which transcriber also traveled and the destination was Fort deFrance, Martinique). He said that he could get me a berth on it. By putting some money under the table (i.e., bribery) he was able to place me on that boat. Now, in order to get out of Marseille, a distant relative, who was a French citizen, loaned me the money to buy a ticket to New York, by any route I could go. I left Marseille on May 6, 1941, with about 600 people aboard (actually there were about 200 people in addition to those of the transport from Gurs.). It was really not a passenger boat but a freighter (with, normally room for somewhat over 100 passengers for leisurely cruises around the Pacific Ocean) which had cabins for people who could afford it. The rest of the people were all accommodated in the holds on bunks. Before I could leave I had to get permission from the commander of the port. The NAZI's checked everything (there were effectively a couple of German and a couple of Italian officers aboard the ship who checked the transportation papers with the photographs against the people coming on board). Even when I was aboard the boat, there were Italian and NAZI officers lined up at dockside. Although Marseille was not in the "Occupied Zone", there was an armistice commission of the armistice between France and Germany and Italy there. When we finally left, when we were about half way out, we had to return back, because the engine of the accompanying torpedo boat didn't work. We thought, now we will be lost. The plan was to take us to Morocco, they wanted to make a railroad through the Sahara and we should have worked on that one, but the Germany were much faster. We went on to Casablanca. From there we passed Gibraltar. On June 9, 1941 I arrived in

Miami. (Actually the SS Winnipeg left Marseille alone on its own power but by a rather circuitous course, while within the harbor. Then it hugged the coast of France and Spain and made an overnight dash to the Mers el Kebir, the port of the City of Oran. It was from there that the SS Winnipeg made two departures due to an Italian-British battle at sea, so the story was told, before stopping in Casablanca where its holds were filled with cork for the French West Indies. From Casablanca the SS Winnipeg joined a troop transport convoy for the Far East until close to Dakar then crossed the Atlantic by itself with lights doused at night. The SS Winnipeg was captured by a Dutch cruiser working for the British and escorted into the bay of Port of Spain, Trinidad. In Trinidad it was the British's turn to examine the papers of the passengers. In Trinidad also the SS Winnipeg was declared as joining the commercial navy of the Free French who obeyed General De Gaulle.)

CE Can I ask you what you did about identification papers since you told us that you had thrown your passport away?

EH I got, what you may call, a "Nentin" Passport. These passports were issued to people without a country. As a matter of fact, I have it here. I was not aware that my brother had had an affidavit waiting for me at the American Embassy in Paris. I was aware, after I finally got the passage, that he had deposited \$150.00 for my immigration to the United States in Miami.

CE If you had gotten this money and the affidavit from your brother, would that have given you a different type of status? I mean by that, the status which you had as a man without a country, so to speak, were you treated differently because you had that status than you would be, if you had a

proper affidavit?

EH No. (An affidavit of support is an affidavit and stands on its own. Either it is acceptable or it isn't and it is the visa which must be granted.)

CE It didn't make any difference?

EH It would only have made one difference. That is that I went continuously to the American Consulate in Marseille for other people. I got threatened that I would not obtain my visa if I continued to come because he thought that I get money for that work, which I didn't.

CE You mentioned, on the first tape, that you were going to the American Embassy (she does mean Consulate, since EH was not leaving Marseille where there were no embassies) to get apparently passports or affidavits, that sort of thing, for other people who were in...

EH That is right, in Gurs!

CE At that time there was no connection apparently between the American Consulate in Marseille and the American Embassy in Paris which would have gotten you your papers?

EH Not at all. I was not aware that my brother had deposited an affidavit. He didn't want to influence me to come to the United States where maybe it wouldn't have worked out.

CE Did you actually make the decision to come to the United States, or did you just decide to leave France? In other words, if you had had a choice to come to the United States or to Israel, or to South America, any place, would you have chosen otherwise, or were you just anxious to get out of the country.

EH In the first place I was anxious to get out the country, in the second place I was anxious to meet my family again.

CE Where were your brothers living in the United States?

EH My oldest brother was living in Chicago. My middle brother was living in Perry in the State of New York (about 45 miles east of Buffalo).

CE Now you apparently had no trouble, once you were able to leave on the freighter?

EH Yes.

CE You said that you returned to port and that you were able to leave again when the escort ship was fixed. You had no trouble in the crossing?

EH No.

CE You went directly to Miami?

EH No! No, no. We were supposed to go to Martinique but our boat was captured by the British. They took us to Port-of-Spain, Trinidad. We were interned there (officially the British did not "intern" the passengers of the SS Winnipeg, but just "Examined their papers." That was good since people whom the British interned in 1941 were denied entrance to the United States, as a matter of course), because we were still considered Germans. My brother was able to send me an airplane ticket from Trinidad to Miami. So, naturally, I was released by the British. The British arrested us purely out of security reasons. Eventually all the people who were on board came to the United States through the help of Jewish Refugee Organizations. (That was not so since several dozen passengers were Frenchmen returning to the French West Indies. Some were landowners, other military and dependents of military, etc., there also was, of course, the French crew, many of whom "opted" to join the De Gaulle led Free French) by boat. I had the privilege to fly.

CE You said Jewish Refugee Organization. Was that the JOINT Distribution Committee?

EH Yes, it was the JOINT.

CE You arrived in Miami, Do you remember the date?

EH I arrived in the United States on June 9, 1941.

CE In Miami?

EH Yes.

CE What happened next? Did you go directly to New York or Chicago?

EH To Chicago.

CE You were reunited with your brother then?

EH Yes, with my oldest brother . I stayed there for a while. He got me a job with Sears Roebuck as a packer. Because I didn't know the English language so well it was probably the only possibility. Everybody at Sears naturally tried to speak German. It seemed ridiculous to me. I got fired from that job. Then he got me a job in a punchboard company where I was a shipping clerk. When the war broke (that is after Pearl Harbor when the United States got involved), I reported for induction although I was much too old. I got special permission, from the Governor of Illinois, to enlist because I was not a United States citizen. (Some confusion exists since no State Governor could give a permission involving the Federal enlistment procedure.) I was drafted into the limited service and assigned to the Military Police. (The regular draft, rather than an enlistment, was the only way a non-United States citizen could get into the armed forces and then only into the army. Limited service assignments were made available to people who had less than the required physical qualifications.)

CE Was that in the United States Army?

EH Yes! In the army. I was shipped out to camp Grant, near Rockford, Illinois. From there we were moved out to California, near San Luis Obispo.

We received our basic training. Later we moved close to Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, I contacted some German families. There I was invited, but only when I had leave from the army. After I got sick with an inflammation of my throat I was put in a hospital in Santa Monica. I was discharged from there. I must say that while I was in the army I was able to get my American Citizenship, because I was engaged to an American girl (EH was eligible for citizenship after serving for three months on active duty. Engagements did not influence citizenship requirements, only marriages did)

CE Can I ask you a personal question?

EH Go ahead!

CE When you tried to enlist originally, was it your intent to return to Europe to fight the Germans directly?

EH Yes. My brother who had made out the affidavit and had to take care of his wife and two daughters also said: "As long as I am responsible for you, and you don't have the United States citizenship I don't want you to get married, I don't want you to get tied down, because I cannot support everybody in this world!" So he, indirectly forced me into that. It was better both ways, that I enlisted as you can see (actually EH was drafted) and that I got my citizenship in Los Angeles.

CE How old were you when you arrived here and enlisted? You said that you were too old for the draft, were you about 28 years old?

EH Oh, I was much older than that! Let me see. The war broke out when?

CE December 8, 1941, I believe.

EH I was 36 years old. That was unusual to be drafted at that age.

CE How long were you in the service?

EH Seven months.

CE So you were able to get your citizenship quite rapidly.

EH Right.

CE Where did you meet your wife?

EH In Chicago.

CE You met her before you joined the army?

EH Yes! She never believed that the army would take me because of my partially paralyzed legs. That is why I was put into the "Limited Service"! I still think today that if the army had been smart it would have taken advantage of my knowledge of Germany to put me in charge of German prisoners. However it didn't work out that way.

CE Do you suppose they may have been concerned of retaliation on your part with revenge from you?

EH Yes, probably!

CE You were discharged in Los Angeles. Were you married at the time or shortly thereafter?

EH Shortly thereafter. My wife did not want me to stay in California. She said: "If you are going to stay in California, forget about me." She said that because she had a good position as a social worker in Chicago with the armament industry, I could have gotten a job immediately in California. But she said that Chicago is a place where you always can get a job; you don't depend on the movie industry. So then I returned to Chicago.

CE I think that we better establish your wife's name here, before we go any further.

EH My wife's name was Miriam.

CE What was her maiden name?

EH Hotkins (spelled by EH)

CE Was you wife Jewish?

EH Yes!

CE Was she an Orthodox Jew?

EH She was brought up Orthodox, but she went with me to the Reformed Synagogue.

In general she was opposed to any kind of formal religion where you always sand up and sit down, repeatedly, and where you are directed to do this and to do that. She was very interested in the downtrodden people. Her background was her interest in the poor people. She was not an outgoing person, she was an introvert. She was not a joiner. She had few friends, very few.

CE You said that she was a professional social worker?

EH Yes.

CE Whom did she work for?

EH She worked for Cook County, Illinois, that is Chicago. Then when we moved to Waukegan, Illinois (42.22N, 87.50W) she did some social work also, for a while, but not for very long because the conditions were so stringent that when, for example, some poor people had a garden, and they sold some cherries, that got deducted from their welfare. That was a state law. Then she worked for the recreation department as a secretary.

CE You returned from Los Angeles to Chicago when you were married. What was your first job after you had gotten discharged from the army?

EH My first job was with Republic Steel, on the Southside of Chicago. I had to count the kegs of nails, and bails of wire which were loaded into the railroad cars on the outside docks. It was a very tough job because it was winter time. I still had my army coat and army boots, fortunately, however, every time I came home about one or two o'clock in the morning, my wife had



a warm bath ready for me. Then I could relax. Then, after I lost that job, I went into the civil service (as a war veteran EH received a five point bonus, or a ten point bonus if he was discharged for

"Service-connected-disability", which may well have been the case, in hiring and an absolute preference in retaining his job, by law) for the United States Navy in Chicago. That was at the Navy pier. I was a storekeeper.

CE How long did you do that?

EH We moved eventually from Chicago to Great Lakes, Illinois because in Chicago, the navy had to pay rent and in Great Lakes, Illinois which was 45 miles outside Chicago, that was federal property, so no rent. I did the same job of being storekeeper. However, that commuting trip to Great Lakes was too strenuous on me. For that commute I had to get up at 5 a.m., had two hours of travel each way, and the same back. So, finally my wife decided in 1951 that it was time to get out of Chicago. Then we moved to Waukegan, Illinois.

CE What did you do there?

EH I still worked for the navy (The Great Lake, Naval Station is just South of the city limits of Waukegan).

CE It was a transfer, in other words?

EH Right. (EH probably kept his job and just moved from one apartment to another)

CE Did you have a family by this time?

EH No, we had no children.

CE For the rest of your career, since that time, did you stay with the service, that is the navy, and retired as such? Was it that kind of a job, or have you worked at other jobs?

EH No! I worked here in Dayton also for the Defense Electronics Supply Center.

(The Great Lakes Naval Station became part of the Defense Supply Agency, then it was absorbed by the Defense Electronic Supply Center, called DESC, in Dayton. Both functions and people were transferred to Kettering just South of Dayton). After a while, I had the feeling that the job in Great Lakes would eventually be "phased out". That actually happened. I then worked here until 1973. Then I retired.

CE When did you retire from DESC?

EH In 1973.

CE You moved to Dayton when?

EH In 1963.

CE Did your wife work in Dayton?

EH Yes. She was working in social work, for a while. Then she learned how to transcribe braille all by herself. Then she worked as a volunteer for the school system. She had machines here and she kept herself busy in this way.

CE You apparently are active in your church here in Dayton.

EH Yes.

CE What church is that?

EH Temple Israel.

CE Did you have a very active social life then, in the Jewish Community?

EH Here in Dayton?

CE Yes.

EH No! No! Not at all! When you are a widower, if you are single, and you are at an advanced age you are disregarded.

CE That surprises me, within the Jewish Community?

EH Yes in the Jewish Community! Yes!

CE You sound bitter about that.

EH Very bitter!

CE Tell me about that. Why is it this way?

EH Because people are self-centered, self-interested. Hooray for me, the heck with you! That is why. I bet you that there are 50 couples in that congregation where only man and wife eat together. There is nobody else. How much would it cost to put a third plate on the table and to call me and say: "Would you like to have a bite with us?" or "Just have a talk with us." "Drop dead!" (Spelled by EH to emphasize). It is very, very bitter. I remember that, when we came Dayton, we had no children, and we were older people. I was 57 and my wife was 56. We had a very nice social life in Chicago, but not in Waukegan. In Waukegan you were considered nobody, if you didn't have much money. I mean in the Jewish circles. My wife taught Sunday school at the synagogue in Waukegan, but that didn't help us. People here, in Dayton, are snobs, there are clicks and as one man said: "You know couple go out with couples. Period!"

CE That may be the case with all of the elderly, Christians or whatever the denomination.

EH I agree with you, that might be, yet I have a strong feeling that the churches here are much more interested in their individual members, specially when you are active in the church, and you try to do things.

CE You did stay active though? You mentioned that you were the chairman of something.

EH I am the Vice President of the Temple Senior Congregants. I was on the Board of the Men's Club for twelve years, then I got fed up. Because they know that I don't drive, they wouldn't even offer me to take me to the

meetings. Nobody calls you! It is bitter!

CE That is a shame.

EH It is not that I don't have the money. Wherever I am invited, regardless of where it is, I bring a gift. I learned that from home. Even though people say: "Oh, that was not necessary!". Still nobody can say that I ate for nothing! No! Not me. I am too proud for that. Naturally, I cannot invite people here since I am not a cook. Of course I could have coffee and doughnuts. However, which couples want to come to a single man? Who wants to come?

CE Have you tried?

EH I have tried. They tell me: "We are too busy!". "We are with the family!"

CE Is that the way it is with all of the churches? There are other Temples in the area aren't they?

EH It seems to be that at Beth Abraham Synagogue, which is right across from Temple Israel, the people are more friendly to each other. That they are more interested in each other, but I don't like their service. Beth Abraham is Conservative Judaism. I like a service with organ (EH was musically quite knowledgeable and for many years of his widowhood was a subscription member of the Dayton Philharmonic Wednesday series. After he stopped driving people with whom he had served on the Board of the Men's Club, or who otherwise knew him from Temple gave him rides on these Wednesdays. EH was also a longtime member of the DESC Toastmaster's Club. This Club honored EH with special awards for longtime service including a presentation while EH was hospitalized at Good Samaritan Hospital, one of several times). That (lack of an organ) reminds me too much of Waukegan, where we went to a conservative synagogue. Oh, I know many people who belong to the

congregation: but here, at Temple Israel the people, they say: "Oh yes, how are you, how do you do?" and that is just about all. Three people have said: "Oh, we will invite you for dinner!". I should live so long! Maybe next year at Christmas. This is what gets me; when somebody doesn't want to do anything; don't talk about it!

CE Along the same line I would like to ask your opinion as to how you feel about the overall world view. Did you feel that, let's say, your God let you down, under the circumstances of the Jewish Holocaust. How did you feel about your religion and about what happened to the Jewish people?

EH I was never brought up in a religious home. What happened to the Jews made me stronger in my attachment to the Jewish religion. Although, considering how the people treat me here, I often was debating: "Why should I pay two hundred dollars a year to a Temple where the people are not friends with me?" Yet I feel that in America it is customary that you belong to either a church or to a synagogue. (In Germany, at the time EH lived there you automatically belonged, although you payed no dues to a church or synagogue. During the Weimar republic you payed taxes to the state from which taxes the state payed the expenses of the religious institution in proportion to the people who claimed to belong to that institution.) If you don't belong, you are socially not accepted. However, I must say that I enjoy the services. Our Rabbi is very, very busy. (Incidentally, it is customary at Temple Israel, as well as most other religious institutions to waive dues obligation for anyone with an insufficient income providing he or she requests such a waiver). He know that I am alone, but he doesn't do anything about it. The Rabbi wrote an article in the paper with the headline "Open your gates!" You might just as well have talked to the

radio, over there. You would have gotten the same response as he did.

CE Have you ever considered, or have you ever visited Israel?

EH No, and I am not interested.

CE Why is that?

EH I would say that I never was a Zionist (Movement of modern Jews to establish a homeland in Palestine; this was activated under the leadership of the Austrian journalist Herzl after witnessing the virulent Anti-Semitism existing in Europe which was brought to daylight at the end of the nineteenth century during the trial of Capt. Alfred Dreyfus) although I am presently a member of the Zionist organization in memory of my wife. She had been working for an ardent Zionist here, in Dayton, and he got her involved. So now, I continue to pay my dues but I am not active in any way. The goals of the Zionist Organization of America to establish the State of Israel has been accomplished, and I see no need that this organization continues. I also know that, if you go to Israel, you have to walk, walk, walk quite a bit. Physically I wouldn't be able to do it. Even when I was younger I never had a desire to go there.

CE Did you ever have the desire to return to Germany?

EH For a visit, yes! I was in Germany in 1974, but I don't think that I could live there anymore. In my hometown synagogue there are no longer any hometown people born in Stuttgart. They are all people from Poland. People who had to flee from the East (even after the defeat of the Nazis there were Anti-Jewish Pogroms against Jews returning from Russia and living in the underground) who have no attachment to any of the people who used to live there. I have a Gentile friend in Stuttgart. He sends me articles about the city and things like that. He also sends me stamps. However, I have no

special desire to go there. I have a desire to go to see the Scandinavian countries. It is not easy, as you saw my nurse here. I pay her and if I go on a vacation I still have to pay her. That comes right out of my money also. I probably could afford it, but when you go on a cruise, or whatever it is, you have to walk, walk, walk.

CE I think that we are just about at the end of this interview. There are a few questions however, I would like to ask, perhaps I should have asked them earlier, two of them actually. In regards to your religion, were you Bar Mitzvahed?

EH Yes!

CE Was that in Germany, as a child?

EH Yes!

CE And secondly, were you ever forced to wear the Star of David? (Jews in Germany after 1938 had to wear this identifying mark of specific size on their outergarment under pain of immediate imprisonment. This later became the law through all of German occupied Europe).

EH No, no, no!

CE The yellow star?

EH No! I know what you are talking about. No! That was specially the case in Denmark (there as an act of peaceful defiance, after the German surprise invasion of April 1940, the King put on the star to attempt to protect the Danish Jews), where the Jews were forced to wear the Star of David. In Germany the Jews were hiding (that was possible only in Berlin and, even there, the exception rather than the rule), I don't believe that they wore the star of David.

CE When the Germans came in and made them put on the yellow star, you were

never forced to?

EH No. I was not (He had left Germany before that law went into effect, and had left France before the law was extended to that country.) I escaped early enough.

CE I understand that they did that in France also, but you were apparently gone.

EH That could have been the case.

CE Is there anything which you would like to add to this interview that I may have neglected to ask?

EH No. I can only say that I thank God that I was able to get out of Germany. However, I am sure that I wouldn't be any happier in Germany than I am here in spite of the fact that I am neglected by my co-religionists. I have two families, Jewish families here, they call me and invite me from time to time. One family does that, the other one there, the husband comes to me twice a week to see me, just to talk with me. He is the most wonderful person. On Wednesdays he goes to Covenant House (the name given to the Jewish Home for the Aged of Greater Dayton) that is a Jewish home, he talks to the people there. He helps them as a volunteer in the recreation department. Saturdays he does it again. He is a wonderful person. (There were several other people whom EH got together with in order to exchange stamps. EH had replaced the collection which he had had in Paris prior to his internment and had gathered an appreciable collection which he endeavored to improve through exchanges and/or purchases.)

CE I have enjoyed this interview enormously. I want to thank you for it. You have been very kind to give us your time.

EH Oh certainly. I can always say that if out of this interview the American



kids learn something, I will be happy. I hope that the American people never have to go through what I had to go through. I hope that people come to their senses, that people vote when they are supposed to vote and that they elect people of honesty and integrity. People who are interested in the welfare of their constituents and not in the party. That is the most important wish I have, and that they think before they vote, that they inquire; where are we going in this country. Hopefully the morals in this country, change. Hopefully you have more employment for people. Hopefully racial disorders stop and racial discrimination stops. I can't hate anybody because of his color, religion or anything else. Because I was persecuted, my faith is even stronger, my faith in mankind. I am also careful with whom I associate. I know that there are bad people amongst the black ones, there are bad people amongst the white ones. There are bad people amongst the Christians and there are bad people amongst the Jews. The effects are the same. That the Jews are the Chosen People does not mean that they are any better than any one else!

CE Very good! Well thank you very much.