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Oral history interview with Ernest Pollack

Interview date: March 17, 1988

Summary

Ernest Pollack, born in Vienna in September 1912, discusses his family and childhood; his father (d. 1918) serving in the WWI army and visiting home every two years; Ernest was the eldest, he had a younger brother and sister, family living in poverty, Ernest going to school, finishing his education in night school, supporting his mother and siblings, starting work in haberdashery business at age (about) 16, his grandparents and extended family living in Budapest, Hungary, his mother keeping Kosher, discusses Vienna being occupied by Germans, Jewish businesses being closed, the rounding up and deportation of Jews; Catholic church cardinal of Vienna Yusef Innitzer helping Nazis during Anschluss, Ernest attempting to escape, but not being able to obtain visas, discusses one day walking in a nature preserve to get fresh air without knowing that at the time a Nazi brigade caught Jews in that same place, managing to get home safely, trying to get a passport from a non-Jew, hearing a rumor that Luxembourg allowing refugees in for a short time, leaving to Luxembourg immediately in May 1938. Ernest discusses his siblings leaving Vienna; his brother on a ski trip to Switzerland in 1938 and not coming back, his sister getting a domestic permit to England to work as a domestic worker in 1938, his sister getting a visa for their mother and eventually (date?) leaving to England. Ernest taking the train to Luxembourg, remembering when a German soldier at the border looking at his luggage and sandwich and letting him through the border, writing to his mother, staying in Luxembourg for about a year and a half, working different jobs like cleaning carpets, working in gardens and kitchens; in 1940, trying to flee to Belgium, returning to Luxembourg and marrying a woman who was a Jewish refugee from Poland and a refugee in France, married by Rabbi in Luxembourg, Jewish community hiring 3-4 buses for about 100 Jews leaving Luxembourg, leaving with this group with his wife, staying overnight in Paris, then arriving in Vichy to a town Andaiy (PH) with the hope that they would eventually arrive in Cuba, arriving at international bridge between France and Spain, next arriving at border between Spain and Portugal, Portuguese police forcing them to stay on the train without leaving for 8 days, sent back on train to Bayonne France, under German military command, sleeping in old factory for a few weeks, then gestapo trying to deport the group of about 80 people to Gurs camp, rabbi from Luxembourg coming to Bayonne with gestapo and at this time, an American citizen was allowed into occupied France with permission working for US committee in New York to bring Jews to Dominican Republic, he was looking for people who could do agriculture work, Ernest and his wife selected and taking a train to Marseilles in late 1939/early 1940, taking a train over Pyrenees to Portugal in 1940, after arriving at the border of Portugal, arriving in Lisbon and staying there for 10 days, boarding the Portugal cattle ship to Ellis Island, staying in USA with his wife for a week or two, taking a boat to Dominican Republic, and living there for 10 years and becoming a successful farmer, veterinarian, doing Jewish activities, having a rabbi, mohel, synagogue, cemetery. Ernest and his wife having a son in Dominican Republic, a famous author named Morris visiting and helping Ernest and his family to get an affidavit, leaving to NY, USA and living in NJ, at the time of this interview, March 17, 1988, his children working as teachers and living in NJ, Ernest's wife passed away in 1986, and he has two grandchildren.