

Robert Wagemann
RG-50.028.0066

Summary

Robert Wagemann discusses moving to the United States in 1963; his birth in Mannheim, Germany in 1937; his parents; Mannheim before Hitler's rise to power; his parents' conversion to become Jehovah's Witnesses; his parents' experiences with persecution for their religious beliefs; his father's work for BASF in scientific laboratories around Germany; the liquor store owned by his parents; his mother's arrest and incarceration shortly before his birth; not having access to doctors due to the his family's religious beliefs and incurring a birth defect in his hip; being summoned to the university clinic in Heidelberg, Germany when he was four or five years old; his mother overhearing the doctors' conversation and narrowly avoiding being sterilized due to this birth defect; a neighbor who regularly warned the family when searches were planned to take place; his father's conscription into the army of Nazi Germany; doctors' discovery of his father's diabetes and his excusal from military service; his parents' refusal to say "Heil Hitler" and teaching him to also refuse; the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses; an uncle's work with Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, during World War I and this uncle's marriage to a Jewish woman; the bombing of the family's home during an air raid on Mannheim; how he and his mother moved in with his paternal grandparents in Ingelheim am Rhein, Germany, a suburb of Mannheim; not knowing that Jews were being deported to concentration camps and killing centers— just knowing that they were disappearing; how his father's traveling for work always kept him one step ahead of the police and Gestapo; studying the Bible even before entering school; experiencing discrimination at school; his and his mother's move after an incident at school to his maternal grandparents' home in Haardt an der Weinstraße, Germany, where they lived for the rest of the war years; living off what his grandparents' farm produced; his grandfather becoming mayor of the town during Allied occupation; reuniting with his father after the war's end; how Jehovah's Witnesses publications were banned during the Third Reich; his mother's participation in distributing Jehovah's Witnesses pamphlets and publications during the war; witnessing a deportation; living on his maternal grandparents' farm in Haardt an der Weinstraße; attending Jehovah's Witnesses meetings with his parents in secret during the war; his memories of the end of the war; working for BASF after the war; a doctor who attempted to correct his birth defect; meeting his wife at a Jehovah's Witnesses convention in Germany; his children; and his thoughts on the importance of the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.