

RG – 50.029*0020

Gluckstein, Fritz – 1 Tape

Note: This set of time coded notes have been timed using the PAL setting on the VCR.

Residence: Bethesda, MD

Interview Date: 4/26/92

Interviewer: L. Papier

00:00:41 Q: Would you state your name and where you were born?

A: I am Fritz Gluckstein. I was born in Berlin, Germany January 24, 1927.

00:00:57 Q: Tell us about your early childhood?

A: Idyllic. My father was a judge. We had many family and friends. There must have been anti-Semitism, but I didn't notice it. I have the most pleasant memories. We went to synagogue on Fridays, and on Shabbat there were special services for children. I remember a Seder, I went with a maid, and we brought a pike and inside the pike, was another little pike. Honest gefilte. And my father raised his wine glass and smiled. I knew we had good wine at that Seder, if he smiled. I wasn't aware of any differences between Jews and non-Jews.

00:03:19 Q: Describe your daily life during this time.

A: My education began when I was six years old in a neighborhood public elementary school. This was before Hitler came to power. Nothing happened, at school, for the first two years – maybe an occasional snide remark. We had these forms to fill out, questions about ourselves, and my teacher told me – don't put down Jewish, but Mosaic. I don't know what it meant. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, my father lost his job. We moved to a much smaller apartment, we had no maid. Money was tight. But my mother was not Jewish, and her sister took care of me. She bought me everything from socks to suits. My father began doing honorary work for the Jewish congregation. I think I knew something was happening.

00:06:25 Q: Tell us about anti-Jewish laws?

A: Then, we were not allowed to have maids, but it meant little – we had no money anyway. I was too young to appreciate what was happening. I knew my father had lost his job, and people were leaving the country. People discussed leaving the country – should we go? What would we do? They said, after all, it won't be that bad. My father had served in the Army, and was decorated. We said this is after all a country of poets and

thinkers. Let's see what happens. Some people realized what was going on and tried to get out of the country. Some friends of ours tried to go to the United States. There were quotas for visas – the lines outside the American Consulate were very long. My mother stood in the line for these friends. Nothing was concrete. I put it all off on having less money, the smaller apartment. It got worse after the first two years. Anti-Semitism got stronger and stronger, even in the school. I wasn't forced to leave school, but it became untenable. I went to a Jewish school. More Jewish schools were being established. Some of these schools were private, and others were run by individuals or by the congregation. Eventually, Jews were required to leave public schools. It took some time though, and it had become too miserable to stay anyway. Jewish private schools were very similar to public schools. There was the same curriculum in the Jewish schools.

00:11:27 Q: Please cite examples of state-sponsored persecution.

A: I was too young I knew my father had lost his job. I knew Jews kept more to themselves. Outright, state-sponsored persecution did not come until 1938 with Kristallnacht. This was foreshadowing. Jews had to have their names on their storefronts in big letters, so you could tell which stores on the streets were owned by Jews, and non-Jews. So, one day, I went to school and I saw glass on the streets. And I realized there was glass all over the street in front of the Jewish stores. And there was smoke coming from the synagogue. This was Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht was the first major government sponsored event I recall. The other things I remember are minor such as Germans marching around in uniform, singing some songs. We took it in stride. You ignored it.

00:14:10 Q: Was the Jewish community large?

A: Yes, the Jewish community was large. It was one of the largest in Germany with Orthodox Jews, conservatives, and liberals. When the time came that Jews were not permitted to go to concerts and theatres, we had our own concerts and theatres. We were very active.

00:15:15 Q: Did these restrictions occur before Kristallnacht?

A: Some. Things weren't that obvious before. I recall things becoming different after that night. No movies, no theatres. The war started in 1939. Everybody had the same ration cards in the beginning. Later our cards were stamped with Jew in the middle. Then, they stamped Jew on the coupons because of what happened. You could cut off the coupon and not know if it belonged to a Jew. Jews could only go to the store between four and five o'clock. You had to be home by eight o'clock. And certain parts of Berlin were off-limits. Sometimes, the regular police did not

know all the restrictions, such as you could not go down the main boulevard, Koefusandun. The regular police did not know, but we knew. The curfew was unofficial, too but we knew it. If someone saw you and reported you to the regular police, nothing happened. But if the Gestapo knew, there would be consequences. These were subtle changes. They did not come overnight.

00:18:48 Q: What happened to your family and friends after Kristallnacht?

A: The dam broke. Things really started to happen. Some friends were sent to camps. Others were deported to Poland. There were more regulations. Jews could not own furs. We could have no valuables, or pets. Our family got rid of our dog. We could not have phones, radios. Bit by bit. Today this, and tomorrow that. And these were not written regulations, but by mouth. You knew you had to do it. In school, classes were sent to collect the valuables. The synagogues were used to hold the collections, to collect valuables, bikes, furs, certain musical instruments. There was food rationing. You could only purchase food between four and five o'clock. No milk, no white breads, no meat. Jews could not go to the barber or the hairdresser. We had a friend who had learned to cut hair years and years before, and he had to remember how it was done. When the war started, there were the ration cards. One event in particular, I remember. We were told in school that we had to wear the Star of David. A rabbi who taught Hebrew told us. We talked about it, what it would mean, and what we would do if we were attacked. There was also a white star that had to be fixed above our apartment door. I believe some people were embarrassed. I believe there were attempts to organize insults on Jews, but people did not rise up against Jews. When rations were cut, particularly for Jews, I remember walking on the street. There was a woman walking in front of me. I remember she turned suddenly, and gave me food. Some people were most embarrassed. My mother's sister did much to help us, and so did non-Jewish friends, relatives on my mother's side. My aunt gave us food in the dark of night. One evening, she met me at a corner to give me groceries. And who was there, watching? The biggest Nazi in the neighborhood. My aunt said to her, "Good evening. I am going home. The boy is helping to carry my groceries." The question about the star was what to do after air raids. We had forced labor, cleaning up after the air raids. I went to one place, and my father was in another. If you wore the Star of David, you were likely to be beaten up. If you went without the star, there might be a check. They would see a young man, without a uniform. It would be very strange. Is he a deserter? Without your star, the officer would arrest you. It happened to me twice. The first time, it was the regular police and they probably didn't know I was supposed to wear the star. The second time, it was Gestapo. I could tell by the uniform. I am quite sure he knew I was supposed to wear the star. But, he checked my identifications and gave it back to me. He let

me go. If you wore the star, it had to be sewed absolutely tightly to your left side. They came with a pencil and tried to get the pencil behind the star. If the pencil went behind the star, then you were in violation of regulations that said you had to have the star fastened on. They arrested you. When the deportations began, the real Holocaust began. You'd go to school in the morning, and some benches would be empty. The teacher would try to find out where the students were. Of course, there was no phone, so a student would be sent. And they would find a paper seal on the door. They came in the night. You'd never know who would be next. Later, it become more organized. They'd send lists to people to fill out, so you would list your belongings. When the Gestapo came, they would check the list against what was in the house. This way, you could not give away any of your property. I understand that if the transports were not full, they would pick up children off the streets to fill them. Some Jews, without stars, tried to go underground and disappear. Some Jews assisted the Gestapo to find other Jews. It was a very sad time. One time, I was without my star on the platform of a street car. And there was a woman, a spy. I got off at the very next stop as quickly as possible. I wonder what happened to them, these spies. The Russians came in and I understand they did not survive, but, I don't know.

00:33:25 Q: What year did the deportations begin?

A: They started about 1942. I think in 1941 or 1942. Bit by bit. First, some of the class might be missing. Then, it was very organized. They sent the lists. I used to work at a factory, and one morning they came in trucks. They took us all to an empty amusement hall. Some unfortunates had to go to the concentration camps. Because my mother was a non-Jew, they let me go. When I came home, some good neighbor said the Jew is back! First they got my father and then, me. They took me to an old people's home, with a cemetery in the back. Moses Mendelsohn was buried in the cemetery. There was an interrogation. The German Gestapo sat in chairs along the wall. The interrogation was done by the Austrians. They tried to trip us up, incriminate ourselves. I was fortunate, they let me go. I remember this, it was my sixteenth birthday. My friends were waiting for me at home, and I was delayed. Good neighbors tried to warn us – they're going around picking up Jews. Other neighbors called the police. We were bombed twice. The second time, we went to the hospital. In the morning, the Gestapo wanted all of us for work at their headquarters. I used to go quite regularly in the morning to the Gestapo headquarters. The Krufiss Einschalt, Eichmann was there. Eichmann was a non-descript man who never raised his voice. The real heavy was his deputy, Gunther. He'd tiptoe through the halls, wanting to catch people at rest. I was at the meeting house recently, and they showed pictures of war criminals, still wanted. There was Rolf Gunther. One officer, Heidenburg, treated us exemplary. He particularly treated me in an exemplary fashion. He tried

his best to keep me from unpleasant work and nasty officers. I could feel that he wanted to do his best. In fact, I hope he made it. One guard, who if you blew your nose, was after you. Another, he never did anything. You found human beings in the Gestapo. It was rare, but you found them.

00:41:10 Q: Did you have a bar mitzvah?

A: In 1940, I had a normal bar mitzvah. Food was scarce. But thanks to my aunt, we had enough. We saved food from the rations, and my aunt knew a baker. I remember that the synagogue was cold, and it took place in a smaller room. I got Mark Twain books. It is a very pleasant memory.

00:42:49 Q: Tell about the forced labor.

A: After the school shut down, the students were forced into labor. My first job was in a factory, where I made instruments. They came in trucks then and took us to an amusement hall. My second job was with a company that took care of burned buildings after air raids. It was hard work. One day, a wall fell on me. There were all sorts working, young and old, lawyers and musicians. For the young, the problem was, that we weren't learning anything. We didn't go to school! We were schooled on the job. We were asked questions while we emptied the wheelbarrows. It was almost like regular classes, the fellows who filled the barrows switched. I still remember some questions, some poems, translations. It was mental discipline. My mother had to go to work, too. She worked at a factory, making uniforms. The Jewish Hospital was in good shape. The bad medical care was not bad. But if you were sick, after two days a doctor would come and see if you were still sick or if you could go back to work. Jewish physicians were only allowed to treat Jews. They had blue signs with white letters. It was the same for the lawyers. There was less need for the lawyers, then.

00:50:28 Q: What happened to the Jewish community when the Nazis began to lose?

A: In Berlin, the community was close at one time. But there was actually not much Jewish life anymore. People were afraid to go to services. The first place to pick up Jews was at the synagogue. Minsk was bombed out, more or less; there were no regular services anymore. We met in minyons. At Passover, we baked our own matzoh out of rye flour. We only came together to find out what the new rumors were. There were not people to take care of the graves in the cemetery, so we worked there. Or, we sorted papers in the administrative buildings. Until quite late, we had a congregation newsletter. But that stopped. Prior to the end, you were glad if you saw another Jew because he wasn't deported. Most were deported. Some lived underground.

00:55:42 Q: How did you avoid deportation?

A: My mother wasn't Jewish, and they weren't as efficient as they thought. They did not get to it. I am glad to be alive. If the Russians had not been so fast, I wouldn't be here. In the northern part of the city, they had begun to line up the Jews and shoot them. When the Russians came, we had a difficult time proving to them that we were Jews, because there were so few left. There were two armies. One to the south and one to the east. One day, I went out to get water and somebody told me to stop. It was a Russian. Others had already been in my house and they waved to the man.

00:58:41 Q: How many Jews were in Berlin at the end?

A: I don't know. Who was a Jew? Who was not? Who had to wear the star? A Jew with four grandparents had to wear the star. Half-Jews, the children had to wear stars if they were raised as Jews. No stars if they were not raised as Jews. They had better ration cards, but they still had to work. One who was called a mischling "half breed" had no star. The other was gertenschuller "in effect, Jewish" had to wear a star.

1:01:01 Q: Explain the ration system.

A: There was no white bread and no meat. Between four and five, you had to do your grocery shopping. There was nothing left in the shops, by then. Decent shopkeepers kept food. Some were most decent, and went far beyond the call of duty.

1:02:33 Q: How were living conditions in Berlin?

A: During the day, we worked ten or twelve hours and during the night, we got up three times if we were lucky. Five times if we were not. We would have to walk to the air raid shelters because the Nazis thought we would signal to the planes. All we wanted was to sleep. The weather forecasts would tell us how many air raids there would be that night. We actually welcomed bad weather.

1:05:14 Q: How did you survive?

A: There were three categories of survivors. The first, my case, my mother wasn't Jewish. Most went underground. They took off their star, and disappeared. Others, the Gestapo forgot. They would go to pick them up and maybe their house wouldn't be standing. And then they would forget them. Most however, went underground. You talk about active resistance, but in sheltering Jews, there were many cases of passive resistance. Pastor Rachwitz went all out to shelter Jews in a church. He

persuaded his congregations to shelter Jews. Notes were written Jew sheltering Rachwitz. Catholics and Protestants some went all out. The second time we were bombed, we were allocated quarters with another family. My father's colleague went underground and came with us. It was a risk. You could convince people for a time that you had a right to be there. Some got caught and, didn't make it. Much was done by the resistance to help the Jews. Food, clothing, and an explanation for the people who were in hiding. Some actually went underground. They never came outside. They were in a basement, or a shelter in the yard. You would have to explain why there was this person, my uncle. Young people were the hardest to cover up. There always was the question, why are they not in uniform?

1:10:28 Q: Describe the final days of Berlin.

A: There was an air bombardment. Russians were on two sides. The German army was in the streets, preparing for a street by street defense. It actually happened in the east, but in the west, the Russians were too fast. One day I walked out, and all around there were dead bodies. I thought a man had fallen so I tried to help him up. That was my first time seeing a dead body. And sanitation had broken down. It was April, warm, and most unpleasant. The Russians handled it well. They couldn't bring too much food with them. In the cemetery there was a greenhouse. The Russians took out the flowers and grew tomatoes and in parks and gardens, they had vegetables. The city was divided of course into zones, Russian, American, British, and French. The divisions were important for Jews. When one wanted to immigrate, it was very difficult to apply for a visa from the Russian sector. You were lucky to be in the American or British sectors. Even the French made it difficult. They all took turns providing food and everyone waited for the American month. They gave us white bread. Much better food. Currency was not Mark, but American cigarettes. Every Friday night, we went to the Chaplains Center in the American sector. Rabbi Herbert Friedman, gave me my first piece of gefilte fish. He got an Army truck to deliver to each home. He had lists of letters, and he checked all the addresses. One night, friends here had written to the rabbi-chaplain. He found us. Water and electricity were back. Everybody wanted to know what to do? Younger people wanted to leave. My father had gotten his job back, but he said if he had been ten years younger he would have left. But what could he do as a judge? He had to stay. He said to me you go. And don't study a profession limited to one country. I left as soon as I could. I had no hate towards Germany, but I did not think it was my duty to rebuild it. I helped bring in food, CARE packages, along with rations of coffee and beverage powder. It was a great moment, opening the packages, when one found cigarettes. Their worth depended on the brand of cigarettes. Camels got you lots of food. Each brand had a certain value on the black market. My mother helped

people that were going to be deported. When they got the lists, a sign of deportation, she would help them pack. With experience, she knew what was needed. She gave moral support. It made it easier. She'd go back to their homes when the Gestapo came, and make it easier. We named our daughter after my mother. Her name was Heveld, but because of Ruth, you know, where you go, I will go we named her Ruth.

1:25:41 Q: How and when did you come to America?

A: After the war, I went back to school. I tried to learn English. I told a professor when I got here, and he asked about my English – when I came here I could read Shakespeare, but not the funnies. Now I can read the funnies, but not Shakespeare. We were given joint affidavits. Jews were assigned and sent to the U.S. One day, it was my turn. I could carry 100 lbs. I didn't have that much. Now, I look at what I have amassed. Then, I had only fifty pounds. The food was fantastic on the ship. I never saw the Statue of Liberty; we came in the middle of the night. I saw cars from the deck, some lights, and a street. That was my first sight of America. It was overwhelming in New York. No ration cards. It was amazing; you could go to the store and buy anything. It was so safe and civilized. I asked someone about the boxes by the mailboxes, why did people leave them there? I was surprised that nobody took them.

1:31:14 Q: Were you sponsored?

A: No, it was a joint affidavit. A friend in L.A. wanted me, and they would have become my sponsor. But, I wanted to try it on my own. I was given the choice of Detroit or St. Paul. I went to St. Paul. I took the night train to Chicago, and then to St. Paul. Bill Hoffman picked me up. He is an author of, "Tales of Hoffman" and "Those were the Days". Family Services took good care of me. My first job was as a porter, and then I assembled refrigerators. I went to the movies, and I read the funnies. I met my wife at the Hill House. I was the assistant caretaker. Students came and cooked their dinners there on the weekend. They mixed up the dishes, I used to get so mad and say, "You've mixed up the dishes!" Once there was this pretty redhead, I told her about the dishes. That's how I met my wife. I came here and started to study at the University of Minnesota. In Germany, I had finished the mid-term, but it didn't do me any good. I started again as a freshman. I wanted to become a veterinarian. While I studied, I tutored others in German. Then I spent two years in the Army in Frederick, Maryland. Then I went to a lab in Iowa, as an animal pathologist. Then to the Department of Agriculture here in DC, in 1960. I did foreign work, seeing about diseases that animals had in other countries. I went to the Smithsonian; I did not work with stuffed animals. Then I went to the National Library of Medicine, where I still am. I still

have the star. It had to be tightly attached. I still have the paper that excluded me from service in the German Army in 1944.

1:45:04 Q: Is there anything else you want to add?

A: I am fortunate to have survived. I am grateful to the United States for the opportunity for a new life. I had to be convinced to give this interview, but I feel it is necessary. It really happened. Too many want to believe that it did not happen. We must make sure it is never forgotten. That the Holocaust is never forgotten.