

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Ernst Weihs
May 30, 1989
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Ernst Weihs, conducted by Linda Kuzmack on May 30, 1989 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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ERNST WEIHS
May 30, 1989

TECHNICAL CONVERSATION

Q: So we'll start the interview by you telling us your name. Tell us about your family, and tell us about your background.

A: You mean from way back?

Q: From way back. This is a long reach.

A: Well, my name is Ernst Weihs, and I was born in Vienna in 1908. I am coming from a completely full Jewish background because my father was Jewish, my mother was Jewish, both grandparents were Jewish. So, I was born in 1908. And, uh, I had a sister; she was born in 1914. And we lived in Vienna. My father was...actually my grandfather had a store in Vienna; and my father was working with him. And he didn't like it. And, uh, he had, uh, two brothers, one was engineer; and the younger was...uh a doctor. And he hated the store and he hated office work; but he became then an accountant later on, you know. And, uh, we were together-- the whole family was together 'til the war broke out in 1914. And then my father had to go to war. And when he came back in 1918, he met somebody else. They met in Salzburg--that is close to Vienna. And when he came finally home, he was asking for a divorce. So, we had these four years of war, we had hardly anything to eat. My mother had to go out in the country, exchange her rings and everything for food, what it was like at this time. Everything was rationed. You had to get card or marks, cards for your food. You got frozen potatoes and all that stuff. Anyway, then finally when he got his...uh his divorce, we still--my sister and myself were still with my mother. Up until 19... until the time when I was 11. And he didn't give her any child support or anything. She had to raise the two of us. And it came the time when she just couldn't do it anymore, and told me that I have to go and live with my father. So...and she kept my sister. So my father was in another state of Austria with his new wife. They worked, uh both as accountants, for a company. And one day I packed a little suitcase and went on a train and went to see them, you know. And it was real...not very comfortable for them, because nobody knew that he had a 11 year-old son. So he actually didn't, uh, look forward to that very much. But he had no other choice. And, uh, so that I stayed with them and I went to school there. I mean, I finished elementary school in Vienna, and my mother let me go to--by the way, here you call it college, [but] it was gymnasium in Vienna--in Vienna for one year. But I didn't do so good in Latin and Greek. So when I came to my father, first of all he didn't want to spend the money to go to a college or something. So he said, "I just...you just try to finish high school here, you know, and then we see." So in the meantime uh they uh asked me to be baptized, because my stepmother was Lutheran. And when they married, my father became Lutheran too. So I got baptized over there when I was 11 or 12, and I had my documents. Actually, I didn't have anything to do with being Jewish from that age on, you know. From 11 on. I went to church; and we had religion outside with the Pastor and so on. So I stayed with them...uh 11, 12, 13, 14...when I was 14--

'til I was 14. So, my father... I, myself, at that uh age, I didn't really know...know what I wanted to be later on, you know. I thought maybe I'd follow him and go in a school and learn accounting, or whatever. No he didn't...he didn't want that at all. He was...he hated his job. He was more for nature. He loved flowers and animals--I mean, not animals, but fish. He loved fish and flowers. Cactus, actually. And he was...when we lived together with him, we had the whole--even before, when he was still married to my real mother, he had the whole living room full with aquariums, you know. With fish and everything. And every time he bought a new fish, he hid it behind him and sneaked it in; because my mother didn't want him to spend the money. They were very expensive, and we didn't hardly have enough money to live on. So when he was with his other wife, he did the same thing. He had these aquariums all over the house; and he had the windows covered with flower pots and everything. And he wanted me not to go in a office...work in an office. Go out and be in the outside, in nature. So one day they went on vacation to Germany and they went to all this...the biggest nurseries that there are in Germany. And finally he found me a place to learn, to begun, in a nursery, in...in Kempten there. Close to Munich. You know, in Bavaria. So but I thought maybe it's alright. I was real skinny, not strong as anything. And they came back, picked me up and took me there to that nursery. Was only the boss, his wife, and they had a daughter which was a little younger than I was.

Q: How old were you at that time?

A: I was 14. When you have to learn this job, you have to learn 3 years; and in these 3 years, they gave me a room and board, you know, and no money. You didn't...you don't get paid for it. You're learning. So...but I had to get up at 6:00 in the morning; I was already out there, working. And I was...I wasn't strong or anything, but I made it, you know. Carried this big stuff around and worked in the greenhouse, worked outside. And my boss was...he was an excellent nursery man, a gardener. He was the best in the city. But at home, he was the worst. He beat his wife up every other day. (Laughing) So this girl and myself, we grew up in that milieu, you know. And she was, I think, only 2 years younger than I was. And I had to work 6:00 in the morning, and even some...most of the time until 9:00 in the evening. And uh when it was dark outside, come in the shed and I had to cut the wood, you know. And so on. And then when he came home from drinking, he said, "You can go now." To sleep, you know. And then he was full of hard going, he came back at 11:00 back from the...from the...back from the gardens, from the greenhouse. And he then he went up and hear beating up again and again. Oh, well, it was terrible. But I... And then, of course, when I came there, the first few months I was crying every night. I was homesick. And my parents in the meantime got transferred back to Vienna from that place where they used to work out in another state. So they stayed in Vienna. And uh well, after 3 years he wanted me to stay on and he would pay me. And I said, "No, I don't want to stay any longer." In that job, you go from nursery to nursery to learn more and more and more. So he got me a job in another one about Augsburg. Augsburg is about three hours by train. And I stayed there. That uh was nice, you know. The people that worked in the nurseries, most of them, they stayed in; they got their bed and their food and everything there. So I stayed there. Another couple of years, I moved on to Stuttgart--which is Germany, too. And I stayed there another couple of years.

And then--I think it was 1928--I came back to Vienna. And, uh, my father and my stepmother had a nice apartment off in the suburbs, and I had a room there. But my work was on the other side of the city. It was one of the biggest nurseries in Vienna at that time. So I worked there, but I had to go back and forth. And after awhile, it was too much; so I got my own room close by about 5 minutes from the nursery. And I had my own room and everything. And I made my money there. And some days, holidays when I was off, I went home. They did my laundry at home and everything; and over the weekend I stayed home. And then I went back to work. So, that went on from 1928 to 1938. I was there 10 years.

Q: Working in gardens?

A: In the nursery.

Q: Had you seen your mother during that time?

A: Yah. My mother was...my mother, my sister were living about...very close by to where I was working. I saw her off and on, and went out with them sometimes, you know. I saw her up 'til 1939. So I worked in the nursery 'til 1938; and then Hitler came and, uh, everything changed. But I was working. Nobody knew that I had a Jewish background, because I had my, I went to church and everything. They all didn't know about it. And, uh.... Not the people where I used to...where I had my room, and not the people where I worked. They couldn't believe this. Then in 1939, the officials out there where I worked came and told the man that I was living with that "You have a Jew up there in the room, you know, living with you." And the guy--he was an engineer--he was already part of the party there, you know. And he said, "What, what are you talking about? You must be crazy. Mr. Weihs? No. No way!" So he said, "Well, let's go up and find out." So they came up there and asked me my background; and I had to say "Yah." I mean, I myself was already Lutheran for uh so many years; but that didn't help, that doesn't help, you know. As long as you were Jewish and your parents were Jewish, that's it, you know.

Q: In '38, did you begin to fear that this might happen to you?

A: Huh?

A: In '38, when Hitler came to power, did you fear that was going to happen to you?

A: Well, first we all thought it will be okay, they will leave us alone you know. And people were screaming already; my mother--my real mother--said, "If he only let us scream with them!" (Laughing) But he didn't, you know. I mean, the people of Vienna, they uh were, of course, on his side. And they hated the Jews for centuries, you know. They were glad they had a chance to get rid of them. So these people came up, and said he had to let me go. I can't stay in his house. And in the nursery, the guy...they couldn't believe it, you know. I just, I said, "Well, I am sorry, but I have to quit. I have to quit."

- Q: How had they found out? They had gone and searched your records?
- A: I guess, yah. In Austria, your driver's license is not enough. You know, you got to fill out...and the police wherever, what you leave, every time you move, you have to register. They know exactly what was going on, you know. And uh so I had to quit, and...uh the job and the room. But--I forgot to tell you--in '37 before Hitler came, my father passed away. He had a gall bladder operation and didn't make it. So my stepmother was living alone out in the suburbs; and I moved...I lived on with her up to, oh, in '39. And uh...so I didn't have a job; I didn't have... I mean, the people out there, they didn't like the idea either, that some Jewish people lived there, you know.
- Q: You said in '38 everything changed when Hitler came to power. Could you tell us some of the things that changed?
- A: Well, first of all, everybody had to wear the star, you know. Whoever was Jewish had to wear the star.
- Q: You, too?
- A: Yah, sure! And uh...I mean, most of the time we just covered it up when we could get away with it, you know. But if they caught you, that was...that would of be terrible, but... Then finally, you know, they closed Jewish stores, they started deporting Jewish... And uh I...I was home, and for a little... Yah, the thing was that I was registered Jewish in the Viennese Kultursgemeinde there. At the same time, I had my paper that said I am Lutheran, you know. So I actually two chances to get out of Vienna, either with ...on the Jewish side or on the Lutheran side. But uh my mother wanted me...tried to get me to Palestine, but it never came to it. You know, at that time they were smuggling the people out. My real mother. And uh on the other side--the Lutheran side--I was registered in...there was a Swedish mission for Jewish people, and I registered there. So the Jewish uh side wants send me outside Vienna. There was a farm where they trained youngsters for farming and then send...maybe they could get to Palestine. So I worked there, I think, one summer. Milking the cows and cutting the hay; and all that stuff, you know. (Laughing)
- Q: A Jewish Agency, HeChalutz? Which group did this? Do you know?
- A: That was...they called it...was the Kultursgemeinde in Vienna.
- Q: So the Kultursgemeinde sent you to the farm.
- A: Yah, right. And then I got a card from the Lutheran people, from the Swedish mission, I should come to an interview. And they were sending people to Sweden, you know. They had transports to Sweden. So I came back from the camp; and I went to this...it was a Pastor that was running the whole thing.

A: Do you know where he was from?

A: From the Lutheran church, under the Swedish mission. And he said, "Well, we'll take all your dates and maybe we can get you uh on a transport. But right now, there is nothing going. We have to wait. In meantime, if you want to, we have a heim [Ger: home] for the elderly--old Jewish people--and maybe 3 houses in Vienna." They bought a big estate and with little rooms, and they had the people staying there. "If you want to, you could go out there and work for us." They had a huge garden to take care of, you know. "And you could work there 'til we have a chance to get you on a train, you know, out."

Q: And who ran this? Who ran this place?

A: It was a Swedish Deaconess, she was connected with that Swedish mission from Stockholm, and she was running that home for the elderly. So I went there, and I got my room. And there was a girl there that also worked to clean the rooms, and have everything help in the kitchen; and she became my wife, you know. We were the only young ones there. So we worked and worked, and went out together. And finally, we got engaged. She came from Vienna, too. Her parents had a different story. Her mother was Catholic. Her father was Jewish. The Swedish mission people baptized her Lutheran...(laughing) in 1938, I think it was. So she was what they then...they called "Mischlinge." Half this and half that. So they promised her, too, she could get a chance to go to Sweden. And in the meantime, she took that job out there. So we worked together. She made up all the beds in the morning and this, and helped with the water; every morning have to carry up in the morning. And then I worked in the garden there. They had fruit trees, and they were huge. And they had all these nice old people there, and we always entertained them. And then I was the one that had to go down in the village and always get the food. And we had cards, you know, take up for so much butter, so much meat, for so much this.

Q: Ration cards?

A: Yes. And I had a backpack and a bicycle. So I was going into the city, buying everything, come back and bring the food. Up to the time where the villagers said, "No, he can't come anymore. He is Jewish. He can't come anymore. We don't want him here." I mean, the people that run the stores, they wanted me, you know. They were good with us. But Mayor and all these people, they...they were strong Nazi and they didn't want that. So the Swedish sister, the Deaconess, had to go and do the job, with the shopping and all that stuff. So that went on. So in the meantime, we got engaged. It was uh '39. I came...I met her--my wife--in August '39, when I came working there. And we stayed there...'40,'41. Two years. And her father was with us. He had to leave his wife; otherwise, she would lose the apartment in Vienna, you know. My wife's father.

Q: He was Jewish and the mother was Catholic?

A: He was Jewish, and the mother was Catholic. So the mother could keep the apartment; and

even my future wife, she could have stayed with her mother. But she went with her father. And uh...so finally we got engaged. And in 1941, they...uh people said it has to be closed. The whole thing, all the people had to go out in the village. They closed down the home. And the Swedish mission had a huge building in Vienna itself, you know, where they had apartments and offices and stuff like that. All of the empty spaces, they made something like a hospital on the ground floor where we all had to move to Vienna. The old people, they were all in the 80s--70s, 80s. They had women, most of them there. And someone of them had to be in bed; and some of them got apartments in the house. And uh we still were taking care of them; and there was...uh each apartment had its own uh stove. I had carry the coal up there and take care of these people. And we fed them there too. We had a kitchen where they had cooked; and they was all supplied from Sweden, the food, you know. Okay, so then came 1940, then came spring of '42. In Spring of '42, there was another organization from Holland. And this...they were helping people that got evacuated to pack and go to. There was one school that was just for people to get ready there and for the train to go. So in order to stay a little longer...and they said if I help them I could probably be protected a little more. So we had to go out with the German soldiers to Jewish homes in the night, you know, make the people pack--they at least who is going to go--and get ready and help them 'til the truck came and then loaded them up. And, of course, there were terrible situations, you know. The children started crying. And the children were not home one night. We were sitting through the morning one night, and they insisted the kid has go with them; and we waited with the Gestapo there. And I did this for another year while my wife was still in that house with the mission. And then...

Q: Before you go to "and then...", back up a little, please. Tell us about...tell us the name of this organization. Tell us how it worked within...you said the Germans really controlled it. Tell us about that.

A: The Germans what?

Q: You said the Germans really controlled this, but it was a Dutch organization. What was the name of this?

A: The Germans just let them do it, you know. One was a Swedish organization, a Swedish mission; and the other one was Dutch.

Q: What was it called?

A: And they were called Guildemester. They brought food and they fed the people and helped them with clothes, and so. But they all had to be closed uh in 19...in the spring of 1942. And finally, we all had to go.

Q: Where?

A: From Vienna. So they took us in this school, where everybody gets ready for transporting.

There was uh...but my wife and her father were still in Vienna; but myself and our friends, mostly men, we had to leave Vienna. And...with a suitcase. And they took us to Czechoslovakia.

Q: What did they tell you? How did they tell you that you had to leave and why?

A: Well, they came...they came one day and said, "You have to be on this and this date there and there." And that's it, you know. There was not an invitation. It was just, "Do it, or else!" So we were all put on a train, and went to a city was called Theresienstadt [**NB:** Terezín]. You probably heard about that. That was old military city, with kasernes [**Ger:** "barracks"]. There were no more soldiers; and it was made up like a ghetto, you know. People came from all over the places. And the men were living in one of these big houses. The women, the others. And during the day, they worked...we worked on the railroad; unloading the coal, whatever came for the ghetto. And some of them they had their own locker, lumber shops, and everything. It was like a...like a city by itself, you know.

Q: Had you heard of it before? Did you know when you were going there what it was like?

A: Yah. No, we didn't know what it was like. We hear about it, that there is a ghetto in Czechoslovakia, but we didn't know what it was about. We had our own money, you know, own stores and everything like a...like Columbia here, you know. Everything was wants.

Q: How did you live? Tell us about, you talked about having money and going to a store. What kind of stores were you in?

A: Well, I mean the money didn't mean nothing because everything was, you could only get bread or this or that, in rationed. Everything was rationed, you know. And uh...then later on, we were allowed to get packages from home, which was something. We had big kitchens where cooking and where we could eat for dinner, for lunch and dinner, you know. But uh it was like a black market afterwards, you know. The Czechoslovakian people, the people that worked on the railroad, they sold you uh cigarettes and they smuggled out our letters home. And uh a lot of them were really with us, instead of against us. So we struggled through; and uh it was not too bad actually. The old people, after a few weeks, they were all gone. They died.

Q: Of illness or degradation?

A: Of malnutrition and diarrhea, and stuff like that. They just, they just...you know, they were laying on the floors, and they just couldn't make it. And the food, they didn't get, they didn't get too much. But we were still young and we got, later on we got help from home, you know, with bread and stuff like that.

Q: Was your wife with you?

A: No. My wife was still in Vienna. I was there in early '42. And then they told them in Vienna, they told, "You can join your people. And this is like a working place where you can be. And uh you can be with your fiancé, with your husband, with your father, whatever." So what did she do? Instead of staying with her mother, her father had to go. So she went with her father, and came a half a year later. And I am standing there shovelling the coal off the...on the railroad, and where they coming out. They coming out from the train. And I said that and I see them close there; and I said, "Why didn't you stay with your mother?" "No, I want to be with you and with my father." So we stayed together for another, I think, another half year or almost a year. And we were living separate, but we could see each during the...just normally. We even got married there.

Q: Describe that for us.

A: We had our own Mayor and everything.

Q: Did you elect him?

A: Yah, the people elect him. And then uh I mean there were a lot of people come up from the Kultursgemeinde that came with us. So they took over right away. And so they had uh ...and I don't know how it was, we...they had the nicest dresses you could buy there; you know, on the black market, or something. I can't even remember how it worked. We were really good dressed, and we had our friends. And we went...she went from her house and I from my house to get married there. And I went down the street to that house and there was a alarm, you know.

Q: Watch tower?

A: A air alarm. So we both, I had to duck in the house somewhere, and she had to duck. When the alarm was over, we made. It was like a real ceremony there, you know. And then we had...there was a café in the ghetto, and we and our friends went there and celebrated. And everything seemed to look like normal. I mean, everything that we brought in our luggage uh was confiscated, you know. They had big uh buildings where they stored all the clothes and all the shoes and all this...the jewelry. It all was gone. But we had ...we could--I don't know how it was--we still could buy things to... There were seamstresses, and we made...made dresses and so.

A: It wasn't like a country club. I mean, there were guards...?

Q: Yah, there were guards. Sure. We were all...when we went off to the railroad to get the stuff, there was always soldiers with us. And in the streets. And there was a SS commander there, you know. So anyway, it was, uh, fall of '42. And they came and said, "So and so many men have to go to Germany." And they had places where they should work, and they need them. And then they just called our names. And whoever they wanted. And gathered us up; and we had to say goodbye to everybody. My wife was still there. Her father was still there. I had to

leave them. And we went on a train. And the funny thing was, when we went on the train, he said we go to Germany but we went through Vienna. We looking out the...this windows, and here we are in Vienna. If we just could jump out, we would be home again, you know. But we couldn't. So from...from Austria, they went back and went up to Poland, and ended up in Auschwitz.

Q: Just a second. Tell me...take a little longer to describe the train trip to Auschwitz. What kind of a train were you in?

A: Well, it was what you call the box cars, you know. Where you usually transport cows or whatever, you know. We had a little straw in there, and they locked them up from the outside. And uh all of us, we got a piece of bread when we got in the train.

Q: What was it like?

A: It was terrible. Because it was a lot of people in there, hot; some of them started crying, some of them screaming, some of them fainting. But, anyway, we made it to Auschwitz. We came there in middle in the night.

Q: Did you know what that meant?

A: No, we didn't have no idea at the time, you know. Anyway, we...was a whole train full of cars...uh, railroad cars. And the soldiers and the lights and the captain--or whatever was the officer standing there--like they say, left, right, left, right. That's how we had all to jump down, in rows of six, and march in front of him. And uh we were a group of people that knew each other from Vienna for so long, we...we always stick together. I had my friend and his wife and her two brothers. One was I think 12 and one was 16. So we came in, to that right for him; and that little brother was already...we never saw him again, you know. And the rest of us went in the camp. And the ones that were actually the worst were the Polish Jews that the SS put in charge of this barracks, you know. They were hitting us and screaming. They were worse than the Germans for a while, you know. So we, first of all, we had to go in these barracks, and the next thing was: "Take everything off. Take a shower." And then they gave us this striped shirt and pants coming out. You had to go to the barber, cut all your hair off, and then you came out. And when we came out I said to my friend, "Where is uh this guy?" And he said, "He is right here behind you." We didn't recognize each other anymore, you know. All the hair was gone. And the uniform. So they put us together in these barracks and that was the first couple of days. When it was time to get out of the barrack, we made a...there were about 50 and they stood one close to the other one in a circle and we were going just like this just to keep ourselves warm, you know, all together. And we saw the chimneys and everything; but we didn't really, the first time, know what was going on. Until we found out, we didn't get this little boy with us any more, and so, and then the other ones told us all these people go into the gas chamber. So a couple of days later, what happened? All the women came. They told them in Theresienstadt, "You can join your husbands or fathers. They working there in Germany. You can join them and it will be just

like here." My wife was among the first to go. Again, and her girlfriend, you know. So one day, everything was fenced. We saw them a little bit across from us. No hair. Just like us. That was the last time we saw each other, you know. And we...a little group of us, were...I don't know, we were just lucky. They were looking for men to work in another labor camp. They didn't give us...even give us any numbers. I think it was only a week that we stayed there.¹ And then they, uh, packed us up again in the trains and took us to...I remember now what the city was, next to Dachau. It was Kaufering.² Kaufering was the city, you know. And there was a uh labor camp, and that is where they took us. So we didn't know where our wives were anymore. We just got out of Auschwitz in between a week or two weeks, something like that.

Q: What was the basis for selection, do you know?

A: Huh?

Q: What was the basis for the selection? Why did they choose you for that?

A: Well, they choose us, I guess, by the strength of the bodies, you know. That people they could work, but I can't even remember what they put us to work. I know where I worked. Luck again: I worked out in the fields to bring in the potatoes and the cabbage and all that stuff. Some of them worked in the camp. Some of them worked in close-by factories, I think. And there were all men only, in that camp.

Q: Old men? Oh, all men.

A: All men. No...no woman. So we--our group of friends--we stick together again. My friend was assigned to the kitchen, and so he could once awhile putting something to eat. We had this little barracks. You know this was, was a roof of grass, covered with grass; then you go a few steps down, the door, and there is the wood, and you lay on it... on a blanket, on this wooden...

Q: Platforms?

A: ...platforms, yah.

Q: How many people in a barrack?

A: Oh, I guess we must have been 40 in a barrack, at least. One of them...we were not long there, and one of them hanged himself. In the morning we waked up, and the guy was

¹ E.g., in Auschwitz.

² Subcamp of Dachau.

hanging next to me. He couldn't stand it any more.

Q: Did that happen a lot?

A: Well, I guess. Now what happened a lot was--what I never could understand--that friends of mine--6 feet tall, 200 pounds, really strong guys--they died away like flies. And we were just medium, not...not really strong. We just made it. My friend was in the hospital, I think, 2 or 3 days; then he came out and never again. But some other ones from our group, they just...you know, diarrhea came and...

Q: Were you starved? The diet?

A: No, we didn't have much to eat. We had cabbage soup, you know, and the bread... Almost nothing. But like me, I was out in the fields and we had these big coats. It was...it was fall. It was cold. We had a big coat, and the coat had big pockets inside. I put the potatoes in there, you know. And we came home--the soldiers already knew what we were doing, I think. And each barracks had a little stove where we could make a fire. And put the potatoes in the ashes. And when everything was quiet, around 11 or 12 at night, we started eating the potatoes. I guess, and somehow... And cabbage. Somehow, that kept us going I think. And the other guys, if... As soon as you got sick, you were done. Got very diarrhea, or whatever it was. There were only skeletons anymore. And it was in the winter then, in November. And they made us, we were...we had to go out with a 2 wheeler you know. We had to pack all these dead bodies on the 2 wheeler. And we see my friend here, my friend here. I mean, up here, they were there. Just skeletons. Frozen stiff, you know. It was cold at that time. No clothes, nothing on. So we had to put them on the 2 wheeler, go out in the fields with the soldier, dig the holes, and just put them in there. Cover them up. And then later on, we didn't even have anymore uh...uh room. We had to carry them to another camp to be buried there or burned, I don't know. Anyway, we had one guy that was, on his own free will, went to another camp to work. And then he came with a troop of people back; and he was...we had to empty these cars, and they were on this straw in there. And some of the guys were laying dead and the other ones hardly could get up off the car. And when they came to the camp, I'll never forget that. They came like ghosts, you know, swaying like this, only a little littler then. A whole group of people looking at us. And fall. Then they came in, and I had to give them cups of water. They went on their knees crawling to us, that cup of water. And then they fed them. Most of them, I think, didn't make it. And then we had uh people come in. And we had people come in from all over, from France and everywhere. And then the Red Cross was sending uh packages. And uh they came the packages and some broke open; and they had dried beans and peas in there. And these guys were storming against this stuff, eating this dried...dried beans. A lot of them ate grass, you know. From the barracks, they ate the grass. I actually never got in that bad a situation. I always had my potatoes and soup; and then we made it that way. Anyway. And next to our camp, was a railway going from Kaufering to Dachau, where the Germans transported their troops and material and everything else.

Q: Before you tell us about that, we are going to have to change tape.

A: Oh! I am going too long already.

Q: It will only take a moment.

A: Oh.

End of Tape #1

TAPE #2

A: We were not allowed to cook. There were some other...there were bread and stuff in there. I don't what happened, what actually was in there, all of it. But I know it spilled, and these guys were grabbing and putting that stuff in their mouths.

Q: We are rolling again.

A: Oh, okay. So, then it was...that went on 'til, oh, spring of '45. I was there 'til spring of '45.

Q: Kaufering?

A: In Kaufering. After...then one day, they said we have to evacuate. The camp is going to be closed, and they going to take us to Dachau. So we got our clothes, we didn't have anything else, and we got our piece of bread, and we started marching. It was, I think, it was two days, we should have marched. We...we marched about 2 hours. And it was hill up; and you could see from the hill down to the camp, and all was uh...the whole thing went up in flames. You know, the American bombers bombed the camp plus the railroad. They were waiting to cut off the railroad bridge from there to Munich, so the Germans couldn't transport their stuff. And they must have known all the time that there was a camp, a labor camp there. Otherwise, they never touched it. They flew over us a lot of times. And that moment we went out, two hours later, everything went up in flames. So we started marching through the woods towards Dachau. In the meantime, the soldiers that were supposed to watch us...half of them disappeared. It was almost May, it was April '45. And the other ones took everything off, their medals and signs. And nobody paid any attention to us. So we were marching in a long line. And we were a group of my friends and a couple of other ones. His cousin and a couple of other ones. He said, "I don't know. Maybe we better don't go to Dachau. I don't know. They might kill us in the last minute there, you know, before they...before they give up." So one time in the afternoon, we went along in the line and got a curb where no soldier could actually see us. And the five of us, I think it was, jumped on the side in the pit and hide...were hiding. 'Til they were out of sight. Nobody cared how many in the group any more. So then we got out. We started marching and uh we didn't know where we were going, how far we are from Dachau. And we go on that street; here comes a German woman on a bicycle and we said, "What is going on?" She said, "The Armies are coming. The Army. The Army are here." We said, "Well, that's good." And we hear shooting. In the...in the next village we hear still shooting going on. So we went there towards that village, and we ducked out when the...when they started shooting, and then we come, we came to the middle of the city, of the, of that village. And here were all the American tanks, the soldiers sitting on the tanks smoking their cigarettes and having a good time. And then all of the sudden, there came some airplanes and so everybody ducked. But it was American airplanes, you know. So what we going to do? My friend was able to speak a little English. So they took us to the commandant; and they took us in a hospital. They thought we have to recover. We didn't look too bad, but still. We were laying in that hospital a few hours. Wounded German soldiers; and we were laying in front of them, and they didn't actually know who we are. And

here comes the nurses. "Oh," they started crying, "the American soldiers... The end... Too many died already..." And this and this. And we are in the middle of this German hospital. That was a terrible situation, you know? But the nurses were nice to us. I don't know whether they knew who we are or not. But anyway, they took care of us. And we were actually not safe. We were just resting from the...from the trip from Kaufering to there.

Q: Can you talk about being in a German hospital. The Americans put you in a German hospital?

A: Yah, they occupied everything then, you know. But they had 3 German nurses and everything and German wounded soldiers were there, you know. So we were there, I think, a week or longer. While we were there, the Americans completely took over the city. And all the guys that got free from the labor camps, they went down in the basements, opened the wine barrels. There were that fine wine. Took all of anything they could eat, you know. And, actually, we missed the whole thing, you know. When we came out, everything was organized. And they were...I think you can say they were looting, as I remember. The Germans were really scared then. The people that lived there. And there was a whole American outfit there, a battalion or whatever it was, you know. And when we came out, [they] gave us...they put us in a school. And there was one...you can call it a restaurant--not a restaurant, but a inn or something--where we could go and eat...eat lunch and dinner. They even had dance in the evening. And they made it as nice as possible for us, you know. 'Til end of May or June. And then they had transportation to Munich for us. And there you could stay again; and where were you supposed to...want to go home, and you could go with the train home. There was no need for money or anything. I don't know, I was hanging around there a long time. I had a friend...I met a guy there. Uh, he was from Spain. Another "inmate," so to speak. And we...I didn't know what to do. Should I go back to Vienna or...? He said he is going to go to Spain, and I should go with him and live. And I didn't know what...what happened to my wife. I had no idea. But then my friends, they all went back to Vienna. So I took a...went on a train, went back too. And I came to my stepmother's apartment; and the owner of the house wanted her to move out. Because one part of the...of the floor was his, and the other part was hers; and he wanted the whole thing together again. So she wanted me to stay with her as long as I...as a captive, from... As I was living with her, he couldn't do anything about evacuating her or telling her to get out. But in the meantime, I found out that my wife was with her mother in a little city close by of Vienna. It's about 2 hour drive back by train to Vienna, uh from Vienna to Baden. It's called Baden-by-Vienna. So I said, "Well, I can't just stay here. I have to see where my wife is." At that time, my stepmother and my wife didn't get along too good. In the first place, my stepmother didn't want me to marry her. And when this was all done...I mean, it was in Theresienstadt when we got married, but that was nothing official. It was not...the state didn't recognize that marriage, you know. But anyway, I said to her I had to look her [NB: his wife] up. So I went to Baden. That there was a small city close to Vienna. Actually, it is not so small. The people come there from all over the world. They have this thermal baths. And she was there in her mother's sister's house, they were living. And her mother's sister was living in another city. They had their own house there. So she was living there. And I had a uh piece of paper from

the Russians, that I was released from Dachau and so, in Russian. I think I gave it to the...; last time, I sent it. So the Russians were actually in that sector of Austria, patrolling the city of Baden, you know. It was in four parts. It was Aus...Russians, English, French and, uh...

Q: Americans.

A: Yah, Americans. So I showed him this on the street. He let me go. So I went up there. And my mother-in-law...my wife wasn't there. And she was scared. She didn't even want to let me in, because I was looking different. She said, "Is it really you?" She looked up from the window outside, "Is it really you?" "Yes, [Eva (ph)], let me in." Finally, she got convinced that it's me. She let me in. And then my wife came in the evening. And she looked, of course... Her hair was only that long. And so we were together again. But food! There was no food. We had beans and bread everyday. There was no food to get. Hard to get. And she looked...she was very skinny. I mean, while I was getting out of that--the city where I was staying next to Dachau was Fürstenfeldbruck, I told you that. That was an air base, a former German air base. And she was...when she left Auschwitz...they took her away from Auchwitz, they took her to Czechoslovakia in a camp. Belsen, I think.³ So with her girl friend, she was there. And she was miserable there. She almost died. She...they lost her shoes. And it was cold, they had to march in the snow. They had a factory where these girls had to work. They had for hardly to eat. She had only 2 holes here, a big hole here. But she had one good thing. Her cheeks were always red, whether she was sick or well, or what. So when the doctor was patrolling the barracks and she was laying there, her friends said, "No, she is alright. She is feeling okay. She's just a little tired or something." So they let her go. Otherwise, if you were a little sick there, they took you away. So she made it. And when it came to May '45, and when the camp was open, she came to Vienna on a train was full of Russian soldiers. But she said they were real nice, didn't do anything to them. Probably they looked too ugly, didn't want to do anything to them. (Laughing) And she went home and stayed with her mother. So when I came, we were together again. But in Vienna--it was '45--it was not pleasant. It was demolished very much from the bombs, you know. So everything was...half of Vienna was in ruins except the steeple, churches and some museums, stuff they didn't touch. The [Vienna State] Opera even got a little bombed. And the apartment where her mother was living in Vienna--when we got back, one wall of the house was gone. It was open. And the living room had a piano there standing, and her mother saw this. And this piano was just right on the wall ready to fall down. But, you know, they repaired everything, of course. It looks beautiful now. But uh we couldn't stay there so that's why she was in that uh city of Baden. That's why she was staying there. But the two of us...in '46, the Swedish Mission came back. They got their house back and uh...uh they opened up kitchens for the school children all over Vienna for lunch. They feed the children. And the simplest part of the whole thing were all the people were living was that house that the mission owned. And they took over one...one big...used to be uh... Not a castle; was a big thing--Luxemburg, Schloss Luxemburg it was called. They used it as magazines [NB: warehouse] for storing the

³ Bertgen-Belsen is in Germany.

food and everything. And so they took us. We went back to them. We got an apartment upstairs. I was taking care of the whole house as far as the cellar where the food was. I had to bring the food to the kitchen; they had a huge kitchen there and everything. Taking care of the...I had to...they had...like they had this little, they had this stoves. But not, you know, the big ones made out of uh, of uh...

Q: Tiles?

A: Tiles. Yah. So I had to serve all these people with this coal from down the . They had the big thing out behind, going up and down there, didn't have an elevator there. And so we were living with them. We had our food, every night we invited somebody else of our friends to come for dinner; because in Vienna there was...was so terrible then. Nobody had something to eat. We had the food of... they had plenty of everything, like in peace time, yah. So we stayed with them for quite a while. Then my wife got a job working in the...in the bank where she used to work before she was evacuated. And she worked there, and our girl went to nursery school there. And I was working in the house still with them.

Q: In a couple of minutes: you mentioned your girl went to nursery school. Talk about when the baby was born.

A: When she was born. In '47. Yah, '47; when we was still there. And my wife never forgave me this: I look at the baby, and I said, "My God, we got a little monkey here." Oh, she was so upset! (Laughing) She never...she always mentions that. But now she is a pretty girl. But um then... She was born in '47, and we stayed with them 4 more years 'til she was 4. And then my mother and my sister left Vienna in '39. They got out to New York. They got to New York. They send us what they call a "affidavit," you know, to come. They wanted us to come. And friends of ours went a year before us, and they were writing us letters: "How beautiful...! How beautiful...! Sunday, we go with our car. Our radio is playing. And it is just out of this world!" And when we came here, they had a Pontiac! (Laughing) But they were happy; they were living in a basement. But anyway, the story...yah...

Q: What happened to your father?

A: He died in '37. He died before the camp, my father. And my stepmother...my stepmother bought her own apartment; and later on she had to leave where she was living. She had her own apartment. And I didn't have really a job, a profession, and didn't pick up my profession anymore, so my wife said, "Why don't we go? Your mother is writing so much about America. Why don't we try?" And we figured out: well, our girl was 4...we come over here, she has a brand new future and it might be a lot better for her to be here than in Vienna. [In Vienna,] we never knew what's was going on. At that time, it was bad...was bad time in Vienna, you know.

Q: How bad?

A: Well, food-wise. You know?

Q: You're still talking food.

A: Well, food-wise. And jobs, you know, there was... Everything was ruined, most everything it was. I probably could have gotten back my job where I used to work in that nursery. [Vent(ph)], his father died and he took over. A whole year: "Come back, come back. We need you. We need you." But he wouldn't give me...he said, "I got only a small room for you, but it wouldn't be enough for you and your wife." So we would have been separated again. She didn't want that.

Q: Was there...was there...? How did it feel to be a Jew in Vienna, then?

A: Oh, afterwards? Well, nobody paid any attention anymore. I mean, the two of us...we figured we are Lutheran again, you know. And, yah, we got married in Vienna. That deaconess from the mission, she knew the Pastor from the Lutheran congregation in Vienna. And we got a real official marriage again, you know, in church. And we had to register with the...you know, in the...where you get the license and everything. So everything was done the right way then, you know. Because that marriage in Theresienstadt was actually a ghetto marriage that nobody would accept really, you know. So she said, "Why don't we go?" And we packed up. Yah, we had to go register with the consular; the American consular, you know, in Vienna. And they took us, we could have our luggage with us, you know, crates. We took a couple of crates with us with dishes and all kind of stuff. And they took us to a camp in Hamburg, Germany, to stay until a ship was available for us. And then we went to the United States with uh a former military ship, you know. So we were separated again, the men and the women. And my wife...it's not like today; I think it took 12 days to come over. And she was sick...sea sick, from the first day to the last day. She just...she just can't do it, you know. And my daughter and myself, we were in good shape. My daughter was sick once. I was...I wasn't sick at all. We got this tickets for meals; I had mine and my wife's. Because she couldn't eat, you know. And funny thing...on the last day before we came to New York, she got well. She got up and played cards with the ladies there. So we finally came to New York. And my mother, my sister was waiting for us there, you know. And they took us home; and they had uh apartment rented for us where we could stay until we find something. Uh, that was terrible. This apartment was terrible. It had only a curtain, and behind the curtain was a little thing where you could cook something there. A little room... We couldn't do nothing. We just... Yah, there was from the mission, from the Swedish Mission, was a office in New York too. They are all over. And they made sure that we get our crates and everything. And so we stayed; I think, we stayed with my mother 2 months. And I made an application in the Botanic Garden in New York to get a job. I never got an answer. I was...I don't know what to do. And my wife had an aunt in Long Island, in East Hampton, that she knew from Vienna. Way back. They were here, her aunt and her uncle were here in the '30's already, you know. They had a little restaurant, pizza restaurant, in Long Island. So New York ...we didn't like New York too much. So my wife said, "Why don't we...?" And they were calling us on the phone, "Why don't you come over here for a while?" So we packed up again and went to

Long Island, and stayed with her aunt. She had that restaurant, and we helped her. Uh, she had... the aunt was staying up til 12:00 or 1:00 in the morning waiting for customers. She didn't want to close early, because maybe another customer come. So my wife stayed with her every night 'til late in the morning. We got our daughter in a kindergarten there. And I got a job in a place where they homogenized the milk and packed the milk and have it ready for... Where the farmers bring the milk to, and you put it in the cartons like. And I worked...I had to get up everyday at 3:00 in the morning; and the guy picked me up at 3:30. I didn't have a car or anything. Couldn't even drive. And he took me with him, that he worked there, too. But we were off at 3:00 in the afternoon or 3:30; and he brought me home again. So I did this over the winter. And then our friends, the ones that were living in Washington already for a year, the ones that were writing us, we should come, come, come. They said, "Come over and maybe we will find something here." So that was in the spring of '51--no, '52. '51 became '52. I went alone. I said, "Let me just look." And I went alone. I slept in their apartment, and this friend of mine was a plate maker. He worked for a big lithographic company, the printing, and he got me a job in that plant, in the press room. He was making plates somewhere, and I was in the press where they had these huge presses. And really, I mean, I got in that union and it paid good, and I worked for them 13 years, 13 years. In the meantime, in that house where my friend was living, he was living in the basement and the owner of the house had the upstairs. He was the Maitre d' of the Mayflower Hotel in Washington. And one day he came and he said, "Why don't you come down and help us out when you are not too busy?" You know. I worked only 8:00 to 4:00, or something or 6:00 to 2:00, or something like that, in the printing plant. So, that is where it started. So many nights a week I went down there and I took my friend, Bornsmith (ph). He didn't...he didn't like it. He never went again. But I stick... stuck to it. I was working with the waiter in the bank with the department of the Mayflower another, the same 13 years. And so I had actually two jobs; because when we came we didn't have no money, no nothing. We got...when we came in '51, we got a room in a single home with a widow and two kids. She had a boy and girl. And we rented the bedroom, the bedroom for us. We could share the living room, kitchen, and the.. And so that was working out good. The two girls went together to school; the other girl was a little bit bored. First my daughter went to kindergarten. In a half year, she spoke English...like no accent, no nothing.

Q: Were you raising her as a Lutheran?

A: Yah, sure. Yah. Yah. We were Lutherans. I couldn't change that. And so, my daughter was in the nursing home, we picked her up, my wife. And then the lady that we lived with, she worked for Safeway; and she got...after the 5 and 10 cent store, she got my wife a job at Safeway. And she stayed at Safeway 25 years. Yah. And then she retired in '78. And I started working in that printing press in the morning; and in the afternoon...late afternoon, I went to the hotel and was helping there. So I had actually two jobs, so we saved a little money. And we stayed with that lady 5 years, here on Forest Glen Road in Maryland. And after 5 years, we had enough money and we were looking for a house in Wheaton, out in Wheaton. At that time, I think the house was \$12,000 and the down payment was \$500. So we got a house. And it was uh...uh 2 bricks, you know. Two houses together; but it had upstairs with 3 rooms

and a nice living room, dining room, kitchen, beautiful yard. So the cost was \$12,000, but I think I paid down \$500 and that wasn't enough. I had to have another second mortgage with the owner, and paid the owner...I don't know, 5 years, \$35 a month, or something, you know. So I was...we had a house, we had no furniture. So we started buying the furniture, little bit here, little bit there. And my salary, her salary together, and when the first of the month came, everything was on charge. They had to be divided so much then and there, so much money here. So we pay off this stuff in a little while. And we did it. We paid off the second mortgage in 5 years. We stayed there 12 years, in that house; and in the meantime, we put our daughter through college in that house. When she came back, she didn't want to stay with us anymore. She got her own apartment with her girl friend. So we had that big house with the bedrooms, upstairs and everything, and said, "It's too big for us, two of us. Let's find a small one." So we find a small one where we are now. And that was only \$19,500 at that time. I think today it's \$80,000, though. And uh so we sold that house. We got out \$12,000 from that house clear, put it right away there. And I was always afraid of mortgages, owing here and owing there. So whatever I could scrap together from savings and so, we paid the house off right away. And from then on out, it got a lot easier. And there were only the two of us. Our daughter was by then...got a job--a social worker--which she still has it.

Q: Do you talk to her a lot about your experience?

A: Uh, not too much. She knows where we were. But you know more, I think, than she does. Now. But she told me all the time, "Write a book. Write a book. We want to know what happened." It's better she don't know, you know. But anyway, we are out of the woods, you know. We are both retired. We get our pension. We get our social security. She got her...she got 3 kids: 3 boys. And she...her husband got a good job with the government; and they have huge house in Silver Spring. So everything right now seems to be okay.

Q: Congratulations!

A: It was a rough time. But they say if you want to, you can make it, and we made it.

Q:

A: And can't complain anymore.

Q: Do you ever keep in touch with your mother's family?

A: My mother's...real mother's family?

Q: Yes.

A: There is no more anymore. My mother died. My mother died in Newburg, actually, in the '70s. Her parents came from the Czechoslovakia. They died. Actually, my real grandmother was with us in Theresienstadt. And she was...she was in the 70s, and she got out. She used to

live in Paris for a long time after that, after '45. But I was...

Q: How did she get out?

A: I mean, she...when it was liquidated and the Americans freed them--or the Russians, whoever was there. She was still alive, and her daughter died. She made it, you know. She had a lot of kids. And they met in France; and I lost track of them, you know. But otherwise, everybody else is in America. My father's side...my father's side, uh, my grandmother, of course, is long dead. And my grandfather died already earlier. And his two brothers, my father's two brothers--one was engineer, he worked in Italy, got malaria, he died young. And the other one was uh...was a doctor; and after the war was over, he divorced his wife in Vienna, he came over here. He got all his exams made over, and he married a nurse. And they were...they settled down in Cleveland, and we visited them a couple of times. But uh they both dead now. So what we have left in Vienna is only a cousin and her children, and another one. And so...and friends. One of my best friends. The best friend I had at that time, he died a couple of weeks ago. He went with me through all this, so to the end. And his wife, too. But she's still alive. But he had...he was diabetic from way back; and then lately he got...he got 2 heart attacks, and he couldn't make it, he was sick. It was just a couple of weeks ago, I found out that he... And he just retired. That's the terrible thing about the retire. He used to...we worked for...he was a director in the bank. He had a good life and everything, you know. Now when he finally retired, it was 65 when he died, two years later he's gone. That's real sad. And a few months the insurance stop. You enjoy your life. Save all your life, and then you go. The same thing happened, too. I used to work in the Mayflower; and my head waiter, uh, came from Europe too. He was Jewish too. He worked his way up from bus boy to Maitre d'. He worked over 30, 35 years there. He retired that spring, and he was dead in September. He had a brain tumor. This is true. And I was wonder how we come out...we came out alive, you know. We went through so much. My wife was always...was really with one foot already in the grave, waiting.

Q: What do you think is the answer? How come you did survive?

A: I don't know. I really couldn't say. Maybe believing that we, if we try enough we can get out of it, but I couldn't really answer that. When I saw these guys passing away like flies, why not me? I could have the same thing, you know. There was very few that really got out of it, and so it's hard to say. I'm not too religious, but I still believe somebody up there must like me, you know. I came through, and the same with her.

Q: Mr. Weihs, Thank you!

A: No. Oh, My God, you got to hurry. Yah, I gonna make the...it takes me under a half hour to get home.

Q: That's not bad. That's even in rush hour?

A: Yah, I go New Hampshire [Avenue]. I live next to the University [of Maryland].

End of Tape #2

Conclusion of Interview