

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

## **Interview with Carl Hirsch RG-50.030\*0441**

## **PREFACE**

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## CARL HIRSCH

Question: Could you be so kind to tell us your name?

Answer: My name is Carl Hirsch, pronounced in English Hersh(ph).

Q: When were you born?

A: I'm born April 1, 1912.

Q: And where?

A: In a suburb, Mulezootshka(ph), next to this town of Czernowitz in the province Bukovina of the Austria-Hungarian empire at that time.

Q: Can you tell us in a few words about your school years and your life, your family life during your childhood?

A: In August, 1914, when the war started and the Russian occupied the Bukovina, my mother fled with many other people from Czernowitz to Vienna, so my first four years which I remember are from Vienna. We were two children, the father was on the front in Italy. He came once in a while to visit, maybe three or four times during the war.

Q: And after the war, what happened to your family?

A: In June, in July, 1918, we came back to Czernowitz and my father who got wounded in the war left, lived for year and half more and then he died. And now we stayed with our mother and four children at that time, two were born during the war and after the war.

Q: Where, where did you go to school?

A: I went to school, primary school in Czernowitz. These were still in German though it was already next to Romania. Then I went to high school in Czernowitz and then in 1929, then I stayed for two years at University of Czernowitz. Starting with mathematics(ph), 1931, I went to Berne(ph), to study engineering but one year later, I came to Bucharest to the polytechnic school. And here where I graduated in construction, civil engineering in 1935. 1936, I did army service from 1937 through 1940, I stayed in Bucharest and sometimes in the provinces and worked in engineering.

Q: When did you, did you return to Czernowitz?

A: I returned to Czernowitz at the end of June 1940 when the Russians occupied Czernowitz, first in order to be with my family, and secondly because at that time an anti-Semitic government was installed in Bucharest.

Q: Can you go back for one moment to the inter-war period and tell us if you witnessed any, witnessed any instances of anti-Semitism in Romania?

A: Before I came in contact with the Romanians, I didn't know anything about anti-Semitism. Say around the age of ten or 12, there was a Congress of, Congress of Romanian students in Czernowitz and they went around town and sang their, their chants about long live Romania, death to the Jews. They took off the, there was a municipal theater, they took off the sign \_\_\_\_\_ which was now only for Romanian place. One year later or two years later, there was after the education was taken over by the Romanian government and the students didn't know enough Romanian, most of them failed at the matriculation exam called baccalaureate and some, one protested very heavily. It was shot down by a Romanian student. The student, after a trial was acquitted. This way, I got to learn about Romanian anti-Semitism.

Q: Let's go back to the summer of 1940 when the Soviets, soldier troops occupied Bukovina. Go ahead, yeah.

A: I would like to continue.

Q: Yeah, please go ahead.

A: Then when I was a student at the Polytechnic in Bucharest, there were a number of students were anti-Semitic but the engineering atmosphere prevailed and were, we were treated more or less equally. But at the end of our studies, we didn't have the same opportunities like the Romanian graduates. The Romanian graduates had open fields, we could take only second-hand positions. This was still much better than for other professions. From the probably early thirties, no Jew could get a job as a teacher in public schools, only in private schools. And no Jew was ever admitted to be a civil service employee. Same thing in the Army. 1936, when I was in the Army, in just an eight months course for engineers, the, none of the Jews were, was admitted to the exam to become

officer in the Reserve of the Romania Army. So. And we had to serve a few months longer. In my, in 1937, at the end of 1937, when I was employed in a private engineering firm, the \_\_\_\_\_ the government, the embassy made(ph) the government came to power, Kovan Kuza(ph) and our company gave us every months by the end of the month a note that this is our last month of work and say on January 1, '38 I got a note that, that my employment will end January 31<sup>st</sup>, '38. February 1<sup>st</sup>, I got another note through January, February 28<sup>th</sup> and so forth. Then Koga Koola(ph) lived, Koga Kooza(ph) fell and we continued to work a second great, second great engineers, always, always just with smaller, smaller pay and less rights than the other, the other engineers.

Q: Okay. Do you want to add on this subject anything else or we can go to the year 1940?

A: Let's go to the year 1940.

Q: Okay, so my question is, what did you witness in terms of Soviet occupation of Bukovina from July 1940, until June 1941. Where during this period of time, during this 11 months, any special policies against the Jews enacted? Were the Jews deported or not?

A: During this year, it's a full year, not 11 months, it was, it started end of June, end of June 1940. War broke out June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1941 and probably early July, the Russians left and the Romanians came back. During this months, during this year, I wouldn't say there were any anti-Semitic acts taken by the Soviet government. There were acts rather taken against people who, people who, owners, owners of industrial plants, owners of commercial . . .

Q: Establishments.

A: Establishments. And so forth. Because some or most of that, some of them, because the Germans and the Romanians had left, so most of these owners who stayed were Jews. And quite a number of them were sent to Siberia. Quite a number of them were sent, this was already in June of 1941, a few weeks before the war broke out.

Q: Did you witness such a deportation?

A: I witnessed such a deportation because I witnessed first when I came in the morning to the office, I was told what happened. Then I had to go a school for some construction work and the girl came and said, "Goodbye children," policemen, Russian policemen next to her. She said,

“Children, these men came to pick me up, my parents are at the railway station. I have to go with them.” And I had a job next to the railway station and I came and saw these people in the trains on their way to Siberia.

Q: Okay, let's move to 22<sup>nd</sup> of June, 1941. Could describe to us what the beginning of the war meant for you and your family and how was Jewish life in Czernowitz during the first days of the war?

A: Okay, so, June 22<sup>nd</sup>. We woke up and on the radio we heard Hitler's voice. Two hundred Russian divisions are on border, we have to defend ourselves and have to go into the, the Soviet Union. There were like probably eight or ten days of waiting period and then the Russians left. Quite a number of Jews left with them. I would estimate this as between eight and ten thousand.

Q: From a population of?

A: Of, of Jewish population of 60 thousand, approximately. I was tempted to go as well. Quite a number of my friends went, but we were treated badly by the Russian leaders. Say, the, when we stayed at the office in the last day, they gave authorizations to, authorizations of evacuations to all the Russians who came from the Soviet Union but wouldn't give any to us. So I was afraid, at not myself just with some friends, that we would go and they wouldn't even let us in. We were afraid of the Germans coming here, here as, as occupiers but plus, at that time, I was already in love with Lotte. She said, she said, “I never would leave my family, either.” And so we stayed and waited for a few more days when the Romanians and with them a few Germans came into Czernowitz.

Q: What happened when the Romanians and the Germans entered Czernowitz? What happened to the Jews?

A: Okay. This is just on hearsay. A few were, a few hundred, maybe a thousand or more were murdered in the first few days. I know about \_\_\_\_\_ worked, worked with me. And the chief rabbi, Dr. Mark(ph) and then they started taking us to manual labor, cleaning, then for some construction jobs but say, they came into the houses and took us. Then . . .

Q: Who, who came into the houses? Romanians or Germans?

A: Romanian soldiers. No Germans, I think, were ever involved in any administration of any measures in Czernowitz at that time.

Q: Can I ask you another question?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you remember when and if a yellow star or another type of sign was introduced for the Jews?

A: I would say a few weeks, maybe only two weeks later. We were obliged to put on a yellow star. I remember exactly the day, when for the first time we came out into the street with yellow star. Two reactions remain in my memory. One reaction was a Romanian priest who passed us on the street, took off his hat. Another reaction was when the wife of a Romanian janitor who said, "That's very good that this happens to you."

Q: What happened next?

A: Okay, next, it was very tough with, because, at this time there was no, not, not enough food. There was many other, there was no electricity, so we had to go and buy food and buy, buy kerosene. And you couldn't get kerosene and food with the star. So we stayed and we \_\_\_\_\_ took off the stars and stayed in line and took kerosene. Few days later, a young student, military student, we had at that time I think this was a still high school for military high school, say in, in preparation for officer school. So a student of this school recognized me a day or two later that I didn't have the star and he saw me with the star and took me to work in the, in the field. With other like 40 or 50 Jews. So we worked all day and in front of all of these, he, he picked me \_\_\_\_\_. Now, this didn't go on for long. Because sometime, say mid-August, okay, I tried to get a permanent work so I wouldn't be taken to . . .

Q: Forced labor.

A: Forced labor. And I went to the railway station because a few years earlier, I was there as a student. We had to go every summer for practice and one of the summers, for two months, I worked in the railway station in what is called the maintenance section which maintained the track and the bridges and the, and the buildings. And the head of this section was the, at my time, he was

the assistant head. So he recognized me and he talked this over with the, his chief which was the inspector for that bridges and track and they took me to work. Though at that time I got paid only the pay of a soldier and from then on and through this employment, I, I was not harassed again with forced labor.

Q: Okay, can you describe where did you live, how was housing? If you could take your time and describe for us the process of ghettoization(ph) in Czernowitz?

A: Yeah. Okay. Now at that time, yeah, so let, yeah. Two of us, my brother who was a student at the Polytechnic in Bucharest, we, he has not finished at that time, and myself, we came back when the, with the Russia occupation. My mother and my two sisters, they had quite a good apartment and we stayed all four of us together under, under the Soviet Occupation and continued then under the Romanians. Lotte, with her family, stayed diagonally across on the same street so we met there quite often and though as I said, in the beginning, we had problems with food, but because in the Bukovina, like in all of Romania, food was plenty and then we got to barter different things from house. We bartered with the peasants and we got at that time food enough. Now, this is only say one more month because in October at that time, the ghetto started.

Q: So what happened to you and your family?

A: At \_\_\_\_\_ the ghetto?

Q: Yeah.

A: So on October 11<sup>th</sup>, this was on the Sabbath Day, one morning, maybe the, the work was from eight to one and from four to seven at that time.

Q: What was, what was [talkover]

A: I worked for the railway.

Q: Oh I see, yeah I see.

A: So before eight o'clock, I just ran across the street to say hello to Lotte and a neighbor of hers told me, "Mr. Engineer, would you read this to us?" The elderly people, elderly people miss our parents, didn't still know no Romanian at that time. I read to her, it said, "There will be punished with death everybody who will house Jews, who will give shelter to people not, not entitled to and



those who will help flee people away.” So I said to her, “I don’t understand. This has no relation to us. We don’t want to flee and we don’t want to give shelter,” and I read to her. One o’clock I came home for lunch and I saw already people on the street with backpacks. Say what happened? We have to go into a ghetto. So I came home and we packed. My family, they were already packed but we didn’t ever to go. So I went across the street to Lotte and she said, “We go to a cousin of mine who is in the street, in a street which belongs to the, lives in the street which belongs to the ghetto,” so we went. And then, there were 11 of us and my mother and her four, four children, Lotte and her sister and their parents and the fiancée of the sister, mother. We all went to this cousin of Lotte’s who lived not far from this place and we slept on the, the floor for a few days. Six o’clock in the evening, they, a barricade was, was built and we couldn’t get back, get out of the, of the ghetto. Next two days, there was just met on the street and discussed what is going to happen we’s, we were supposed to be \_\_\_\_\_ into Transnistria, which is a province east of Bessarabia, which Germany gave to the Romanians for \_\_\_\_\_. On, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, we were told that these three, few streets including ours should pack and go to the railway station. So we put all our belongings on a peasant cart. The peasants came to make some money and we waited on the street to go to the railway station to the trains, bringing us Transnistria. In the meantime, while staying there, the people started talking that some number will stay, will not go. And said, one lady said, “You know, engineers should stay.” So a Romanian major passed by and I said, “Mr. Major, I \_\_\_\_\_, should I stay or go?” He said, “Stay.” So I took with Lotte this cart which had all the belongings of the 11 of us and we took it out of the streets leading to the railway station into a part of the ghetto we were supposed to leave the next days. We had to bribe a soldier because he was supposed, we were not supposed to go, go there and there we stayed on the floor, all of us, one night only. Next, that evening, Parryom Poppovitch(ph) came to the Jewish Hospital which was the seat of the Jewish community or say the council, Jewish council, \_\_\_\_\_ we could \_\_\_\_\_ the community and said, “I have with you, I have for you good news,” he said. Because he talked to them in Germany, news was called paseera(ph) he said, “Paseera(ph) which is good news. You will stay.” And the day after, they opened a few more streets for the ghetto and we got into a very good

house belonging to uncle of Lotte's where we stayed for the next, 'til the end of the ghetto. But, okay, so I said . . .

Q: For how long did you stay in that house?

A: For almost, okay, so next day this good news from Parryom Poppovitch(ph) were not that good any more because we were told lists will be arranged by professions and then they will decide who stays, who goes. So, on this day, I said to Lotte, "Either we stay or we go, let us get married." This was already the Friday after the Sabbath Day when the ghetto started. And I saw across the street from this house where \_\_\_\_\_ said, "Rabbi, we would like to get married." He said, "Too late." It was Friday, two o'clock.

Q: So the rabbi said it's too late.

A: Yeah. So next morning, we went to the commander of the ghetto who was a major of the Romanian army. The army was the supervised, this matter \_\_\_\_\_ and said, "Mr. Major, we would like to get married." So he gave us a soldier, an escort and we went in the morning to the court because it would, the court had to give us a dispensation so we could get married without two weeks waiting. Then we went back in the afternoon, we went to City Hall. City was supposed to, they opened at five o'clock in the evening. \_\_\_\_\_ five o'clock in the evening, so we took this soldier four o'clock and I went first to the railway administration and they told us don't worry, we have given, we have given the government all the names of our Jewish employees, you will stay. Then I went to our other place where my, where my brother worked and this lady took his name, all the personal data, said, "I will help him." Then five o'clock we were married. The, all the employees in this registration office were very gentle. Either by themselves or the mayor was Parryom Poppovitch(ph) but the registrar who was a university professor, he told me, "Mr. Engineer," before the procedure, "Mr. Engineer, I hope to celebrate for you \_\_\_\_\_ Jews many more happy, many more happy occasions also here in Romania." And then we went back home, they already, each \_\_\_\_\_ took out of his backpack whatever, \_\_\_\_\_ and this was our, our marriage ceremony. And we didn't get, go on the honeymoon to Transnistria. Two days later I got two authorizations to stay, one on the list of the civil engineers, \_\_\_\_\_ 27 engineers say,

took a number and then I got it from the, as a railway engineer. And my brother was a mining \_\_\_\_\_ so he got it too. Two days later, we went home. I think approximately 12 days after we left.

Q: Let me, let me ask you if you witnessed, witnessed any scene of deportation of other people.

A: I was in the railway station and saw them going to the trains.

Q: What did you see?

A: I would say that I didn't see anybody being beaten. Everything was orderly. They went with their backpacks to the trains and went on the train. There was no, this was already November 1941. In January '41, they had these little squalor, or how you call it in, in Bucharest.

Q: Uprising.

A: Uprising. Here...[End of Side 1 of Tape 1]...there was no brutality. Everybody went with his backpack quietly to the trains. I was told later when they came back, that they were chased across the \_\_\_\_\_, with, with brutality. But I didn't witness, I, I witnessed only quiet, their quiet way into the, boarding the trains. Saw it, I saw it from the window of my offices. I would like \_\_\_\_\_ to end . . .

Q: Yah.

A: Because I already said this about the gentleness in the office of the registrar in, in the city hall. That during my, the following two and a half years, during my work in this railway office, I encountered only gentleness. Some \_\_\_\_\_ they have been anti-Semites, they were happy that the Jews were not \_\_\_\_\_. The assistant head of the section kissed me when I came back to work and a German, a German \_\_\_\_\_ who worked with \_\_\_\_\_, he treated me with full sympathy and all the others as well.

Q: Tell me, please, what happened, how was the life in, in Czernowitz between the fall of 1941 and 1942, during the spring of 1942, summer of 1942? What else happened?

A: Again, what I will say, yah, in the meantime, many business people, Romanian business people who left Czernowitz when the Russians came in plus other business people from Romania came in and opened the, their previous businesses. Plus, they were given the businesses of the Jews and the

business of the Germans. During the Russian Occupation, the Germans emigrated to Germany. There was, this was an agreement between the Soviet and the German government. So there was a lot of business to be had in, in Czernowitz and many people from Romania came. If they needed, they needed \_\_\_\_\_ and these were the \_\_\_\_\_ so they took them into and they, they may not have paid them very well but they were very happy to have people to carry on their business. So, somehow, a rule of law was back and you had to wear the star. And we had the curfew at eight o'clock in the evening. But we're very young and we had friends and we met Sunday for be playing bridge or in order to, not to be on the street at eight o'clock, we slept with our friends or they came to sleep with us and we partied and lived there quietly. With fear, with fear because there was, we knew there is a still long way to go.

Q: Let me ask you another question. Did you witness the deportations from Czernowitz from 1942, from June 1942 and if you witnessed something, what exactly you witnessed?

A: Okay. In, in June 1942, on three consecutives Sunday mornings in number \_\_\_\_\_ two or three thousand Jews Czernowitz, were taken again into Transnistria. These were mainly the people who didn't have government authorizations, who had had authorizations only from Parryom Poppovitch(ph). Plus, other people who were politically suspect. For instance, a cousin of Lotte's, a doctor, who had, who was a director of a hospital and other people who were not considered reliable. Leaning, left leaning, or if an engineer who, like me, had come from Romania to Czernowitz to the Russians. But he was, he was with the railways, say 50 kilometers south from, from Czernowitz and he left his employment and came to Czernowitz. And the police found out and they took him so these people were deported in June of '42. We, in the first night, the bell ring, so I went to the door, open the door and here two soldiers, policemen, \_\_\_\_\_ policemen asked me, "Are you Kahanni(ph)?" Says, "No," I say, "Kahanni(ph) lives here next door." So this lady Kahanni(ph) had a Polish authorization, she knew somebody was coming and went into hiding. But early morning, we \_\_\_\_\_ from our windows, people being assembled in the streets on their way to these \_\_\_\_\_. This was the \_\_\_\_\_ that they stayed throughout Sunday, some of them at that time were released. The leaders of the Jewish community came over there with the

agents of the government and with some \_\_\_\_\_ some discussions, a few were taken back but for the few who were, who, who came home, other people were taken. There was a quota which had to be like 20 or 35 \_\_\_\_\_, I don't exactly. And the third Sunday, too many people were released and in the evening, they didn't have the number and they went into, to streets and without any . . .

Q: Warning . . .

A: Warning, they took all of the Jews from these two streets. And this is the deportations \_\_\_\_\_ and there were two years of, of relatively quiet life. People went to work and by 1943, mid 1943, the yellow star was taken off.

Q: Do you know why? Or you can you, can you [talkover] comment on this?

A: I will comment on this that in the meantime the Romanians found out that the Germans will lose the war and they had to play along and, but they needed, they needed some, anybody, that they were not fool on the side of the Germans. Basis what, what I suggest. Now, similarly, similarly, when two months after I came back, so, when I came back to work in 1941, say in early November, by mid-December, the, Bucharest gave the order to give us food \_\_\_\_\_. Started from the day, August, when I started to work. [talkover]

Q: So, which, which year was this?

A: '41. So by, by December '41, I got paid for four months which was quite a, amount of money. Come '42, they said, "You got, get paid for nine months, three months you are a soldier." So they gave us pay for nine months, three months I had to work without money. '43, we were already assimilated to the Romanian truce and there was only one month without pay.

Q: I understand. Can you, can you describe for us what the ration meant for you and when \_\_\_\_\_?

A: Okay.

Q: So.

A: Now, we all witnessed \_\_\_\_\_ we were not allowed to listen to radio news but we had neighbors who listened or we went to neighbors who listen so we already knew that the Russians

come closer and closer. And in March they were already, say, not far in former Poland, say like hundred or 200 kilometers from German \_\_\_\_\_. Now by say, after mid-March, say maybe this was already 20<sup>th</sup> of March, the Romanian left and there were a few days of an interim(ph). In these days, no more Romanians \_\_\_\_\_ there but few German, probably German SS or so. And Lotte's sister, she went across the street and was taken by these Germans into a place where she was interrogated. And then the Germans brought us to that house and there was most elderly people, \_\_\_\_\_ I was the only youngster and they came to me with, with, with \_\_\_\_\_ down here next to me. Do! Give me your watch. So I gave \_\_\_\_\_ the watch and then he took the other watches and they left. Next day the Russians were here so these watches fell into the hand of the Russians because the same thing continued the next few days with the Russians. When the \_\_\_\_\_, "Give me your watch."

Q: Let me, let me ask you another question. Did you witness the return of the Jewish deportees from Transnistria to Chernowitz?(ph)

A: What we first witnessed was a few Polish Jews who came right after the, the Russian Army, Soviet Army. And here for the first time we heard about a real Holocaust. We knew that say, that brutal things happened. But we didn't have any details about what was happening. Embarrassingly enough, do you know a name, a man by the name of Fred Bernard(ph)?

Q: No.

A: He has a witness. I, one, say two or three days after the Russians were back, I meet on the street, this man Fritz he was called, now he's Fred. Said, "\_\_\_\_\_." So I said, he fled with the Russians and couldn't get through and he lived in Kalizia(ph) in Poland, to these two and a half years. And he told me details about what he witnessed first being in, on, from a hiding place on top of the house. He witnessed how the Germans, a German \_\_\_\_\_ and a Polish \_\_\_\_\_. He told me that only details. He survived then, he was a doctor and he had helped quite a few people over there in Poland and they hid him so he came back with \_\_\_\_\_ with the trucks, with the Russian Army. So from them, we found out first about all that \_\_\_\_\_. Then already

a few, the last few days when the Romanians were still with us, a few already had come back from Transnistria. Rules in Transnistria had already been a bit . . .

Q: Relaxed.

A: Relaxed and they were able to get on the street what people's ever means of transportation. But then we quite many, came back. As a railway engineer, I went, I went far out say into Bessarabia and I saw them walking, walking home from those \_\_\_\_\_. So I, I met quite a number of people coming back. Plus, between this \_\_\_\_\_ was an aunt who came back from Mogilev and a cousin who came back. Which I had to go, the Russians didn't let her go across the bridge over the, the river \_\_\_\_\_, and I went after \_\_\_\_\_, I brought her back because I had my papers. \_\_\_\_\_. So, so we met all these people coming back, there were quite a, quite a number.

Q: How did you, how long did you stay in Romania after the war?

A: Okay, now. We stayed one more year with the Russians.

Q: Okay.

A: So, 1945 . . .

Q: Yah, because Chernowitz remained in the [talkover] Soviet Union.

A: But, because of the events of war, quite a number of people from the southern Bukovina were caught. Couldn't get home because this was still \_\_\_\_\_, the Romanian Army were there. So here in April '45, they said we let you go home to the southern Bukovina. So we registered our name and didn't get through then we registered under a false name and we didn't get, but then a, a friend of ours \_\_\_\_\_ registered under my name, under another name and I got two \_\_\_\_\_, authorization to leave. So I took this false \_\_\_\_\_, we were able to get out from Czernowitz into Romania.

Q: How long did you live in Romania?

A: We lived in Romania between '45 and '61. So . . .

Q: So in '61 you, you left for . . .

A: '61, we left for Vienna. We left . . .

Q: How, how long did you stay in Vienna?

A: We stayed for one more year in Vienna.

Q: And then you came . . .

A: We came to United States in 1962.

Q: In 1962. Okay, thank you very much.

A: Okay.

Conclusion of interview.