

Frank Hyde

Tape 1 of 2

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Abstract

Frank Hyde was born August 8, 1921 as Frank Bekarek in Prague, Czechoslovakia where he was raised with his sister, Marina, who was three years older. Frank attended a German school under the Czechoslovakian government to learn German. The family spoke Czech at home and he did not know Yiddish. His father's family came from southwest Bohemia and thought his ancestors were Catholic. When Hitler marched into Prague in March '39, Frank's life changed as young, single Jewish males were placed into forced labor. He was assigned to a unit of the Jewish government that emptied heavy iron sewing machines, mirrors and pictures from apartments and stored them in a synagogue in a suburb of Prague. Also, he had to wear a Jewish star and had an 8 PM curfew. Frank met Georgine at a dance when she was 14 or 15 and he was four years older and they married in October '41. In March '42 he was deported to Thereisenstadt until September '44. It was horrible but like paradise in comparison to his later experiences. He had left Georgine and his mother behind. Three days later Georgine was shipped to Gros Rosen, a Russian camp, and his mother was killed. Georgine was sick so was placed in the hospital upon her return to Prague. Frank went to Auschwitz in an open box car and, upon arrival, a doctor made the selection. Frank was in Auschwitz from September 28th to December 28th when he was transported to a camp where he worked on a huge machine producing casings. On April 7, 1945 he was placed in a train heading east. It stopped and the prisoners were told to get out to be counted. He and three others found themselves without a German guard so hid overnight on a hill and returned just when the train was leaving. They told the guard they were Czech workers and spent the night in jail and the next day hitchhiked into Prague. They hid in someone's home until May 9, 1945 when order was reestablished and found their family. Frank and Georgine remained until '48. He met Walter E. Hyde and got an English passport. In February '48 Georgine went to London and then to relatives on her mother's side in Ecuador. Frank was able to leave Prague by train to Paris He reached Paris just before July 14, 1948. Frank went from Paris to Marseilles and then to Australia arriving in January 1949. Georgine lived in Melbourne for a few years. A lawyer in Queens helped Frank change his last name to Hyde so his son was named George Hyde.

Summary

- 00:00 Frank Hyde was born August 8, 1921 as Frank Bekarek in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Frank changed his name from Bekarek to Hyde after the War. He was raised in an area like the lower east side of New York. The buildings were four stories and only those more modern than his had elevators. His family lived on the top floor because his mother's mother had lived in that apartment when his parents married. His father was Hugo Bekarek who was born in 1878 and his mother was born in 1892. Their address was 11 Bilkova Balletza (?) (Street) and it crossed Paris Street or Passiolcha Belletza (?). . It was in the center of town near the Jewish section where there was a Temple and a small cemetery. That was the Temple where the Jews went on holidays and where he was Bar Mitzvah. Before Hitler no one cared about religion, just about soccer. .
- 05:00 His sister, Marina or Mimi was three years older and he had a brother he never knew as he passed away from a childhood disease. His mother's name was Ida and she was at home, mostly cooking. Lunch was the main dish and supper was something special such as sausage. His father represented the sweater factory which made cardigans. Prague was cold and you had to go through Austria to get to Italy to feel warm. His father came home at night and they had a normal life. Food is pre-cooked here but they had to cook from scratch. Frank was a sickly child and spent a lot of time in bed during the day and saw his mother making Noodler (?) pasta from scratch with eggs and cutting it on a plate and used it for soup. You could not buy it in a store. He left Czechoslovakia in 1948 and cannot remember some words. After lunch, everything had to be spotlessly clean with the floors polished. They had no housekeeper. In the afternoon he participated in sports such as soccer on Mt. Etna nearby and in the winter they would ice skate.
- 10:00 He does not remember what his sister did. They would put water on the tennis court and skate on it. Frank would go with his father to see his friends playing cards and smoking and his mother would pick him up. Later, circumstances split up the family and he got married young. As a boy, Frank felt closer to his mother. They went shopping at Bassanashramer (?) which was like Macy's Department store and would go to the butcher shop where they sold salami and pork, no raw meat. Pork was popular there but here people do not eat it. He was around 13 to 15 when he went with his mother and had a taste of dele. His parents did not observe the dietary laws. No one discussed it. The neighbors did the same. Czechoslovakia was created in 1918 with a constitution identical to the US constitution as President Wilson was instrumental in carving out the country.
- 15:00 Europe was ruled by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire by the Hapsburg King and German was the language. Masaryk (?) petitioned Wilson to give Czechoslovakia self-determination so after World War I the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was cast off. Three states were attached to Slovakia to create Czechoslovakia. The Eastern part of Czechoslovakia was close to Russia so was influenced by Russia. Frank attended a German school under Czechoslovakian government as his mother wanted him to talk Czech and learn German. They spoke Czech at home and he did not know Yiddish. He

heard it for the first time at Auschwitz. Everyone spoke Czech. His father's family came from southwest Bohemia and thought his ancestors were Catholic. There was a split in Catholicism and they chose the Jewish religion so their name is not Jewish.

- 20:00 Frank's wife's name is Feldman which is Jewish. When he was 6 or 7 in 2nd grade, his teacher assigned him to the Catholic religious class because of his non-Jewish name. Frank objected and was sent to the Jewish religious class. Everything happened to him because of his Jewish faith but he changed his name for a different reason. He married Georgine (?) in 1947 when the Soviet Russian influence was tremendous. The Czechs felt the West had let them down as England, France and Italy did not help them maintain their identity and Hitler marched in. He and his wife did not care for it. They both survived Auschwitz and returned to Prague in '45. They remained until '48 as the situation was difficult as there was no freedom. In early '48 they tried to leave. He could not as he was of military age and he thought it easier to leave alone. He met Walter E. Hyde and got an English passport. In February '48 Georgine went to London and then to relatives on her mother's side in Ecuador. The uncle had been a dentist but in Ecuador he served on boards and became Consular General. The situation in Prague became worse and Frank tried to convince Georgine's parents to go to Ecuador but there was no mortgage in Prague so her parents did not want to leave. The relatives survived in Quito and returned to Prague. Georgine heard of the relatives in Prague and that the uncle had a connection to manufacturing.
- 25:00 They received money to go to Puerto Rico where Frank had an offer to build a factory. He thought the uncle would help him. Georgine went to Puerto Rico and Frank remained in Prague but they did not divorce. Frank was able to leave Prague by train to Paris and found the French very helpful in reuniting families who were DPs like him. He reached Paris just before July 14, 1948 and De Gaulle was riding down the Champs D'lycee. Frank saw someone who knew people in Prague and took him to the parade. His mother's sister had married a Jewish Viennese who did not like the situation and they took a boat to Palestine. They stayed there during the Hitler years, returned to Prague and only found Frank and his sister so did not like it there. They thought it too autocratic and thought that Czechoslovakia would not survive so convinced his sister to go to Australia. The aunt's husband had died in Palestine where he was buried. His sister was good at languages including English, French and Italian so had no trouble in deciding to go.
- 30:00 They went by boat. Frank went from Paris to Marseilles. It took 60 days to get to Australia traveling from July 1948 to January 1949. Georgine was married and lived in Melbourne for a few years. In Prague Frank and Georgine got passports from Walter Hyde so Hyde became their last name. She was able to leave for England using that passport. A lawyer in Queens helped Frank to change his last name. Therefore, Frank's son was named George Hyde. The situation in Europe probably changed before Hitler

because of the depression. After World War I, France and Germany were not friendly. Bohemia was created to be occupied by German minorities with no anti-German feeling. After World War I, the League of Nations told Germany that they cannot go to the Saarland where there was petrol. Hitler invaded two places and no one stopped him. There was no anti-Semitism in Prague. Everyone spoke Czech. Mr. Ehrenstein (?), a Polish Jew moved into Frank's house and was appointed leader of the Jewish community. Mr. Ehrenstein spoke Czech and his wife helped Frank's mother with her shopping so they remained a little longer in their home than others. Life changed after '37 or '38 when Czechoslovakia was forced to give up their border countries and there were negotiations between Ribbentrop of Germany, France, Count Charne (?) of Italy and Mr. Chamberlain from England.

35:00 Hitler promised that his demands on Czechoslovakia were his last territorial demand. The country looked sliced and indefensible. The Germans were their enemies. All the Europeans wanted to be German. Hitler promised jobs and delivered it as he built up the armed forces and manufacturing weapons. March '39 Hitler marched in. The protectorate of Bohemia/Moravia had a figurehead who was anti-Semitic and German-speaking. Deportations were started. Frank's life changed as young, single Jewish males were placed into forced labor. They all met at the square and had to report to work for the Germans. He was 18 and working for a Jewish firm when it was taken over by an SS with an armband and swastika. There was less change at home as they had dances and went to coffee shops with restaurants and dancing. Frank's father was at home as he was forced to retire. Frank took his first salary to his parents as expected. When the Germans found out that he was Jewish, he lost the job. Laws changed

40:00 There were no restrictions on soccer. Non-Jews were pressured not to socialize with Jews so his friends were afraid to be friendly with him. He had to wear a Jewish star and be home by 8 PM. He had a violin since he had played as a child and was required to submit it to a certain place. Hostility and violence increased so there were difficulties between the Jews and non-Jews. His older cousin and wife who had no children were among the first to be deported to Lodz, a ghetto in occupied Poland. They survived until liquidation but he lost a leg in Auschwitz and returned home. Frank was close to them though the cousin was born in 1900 and was close to 50 when he was 22 or 24. Frank met Georgine at a dance when she was 14 or 15 and he was four years older. Her father had a wholesale business in a building he owned in old Prague. They went dancing there using a gramophone to dance to "Pennies from Heaven." Jews who lived in the border countries spoke German and a little Czech. Their countries were given to the Germans and they returned and danced at that house. They had an electric gramophone. It was difficult to go as you might be found out.

45:00 Deportations started to Thereisenstat, the model ghetto. They were wealthy and there house was given to a Lieutenant. Deportations started gradually. Frank got married as

the edict for single men to be deported or go to forced labor was announced. He did this to delay deportation as everything was done to delay deportation as they did not know what was going to happen. Frank got married in October '41 and soon there was Pearl Harbor and he thought the US would go to war. In '39 and '40 he had to wear a Jewish star, there was little transportation, mostly streetcars. The entrance was in the middle and Jews had to sit in the rear. Georgine's sister married a non-Jewish Czech in Liben where they had a wedding celebration. Once a single Jewish male was married, he reported for work but was not deported. Frank lost his accounting job. If he did not work, he did not get coupons for food. He was assigned to a unit that emptied heavy iron sewing machines, mirrors and pictures from apartments and stored them in a synagogue in a suburb of Prague. Frank had a picture from a Jewish family.

- 50:00 Western Europe was under attack by both British and American planes. They hit German households who came to Prague where they received stamps to buy food and other necessities. They could buy paintings with these stamps. There was a pile of paintings and Frank would hold them up so they could look at them. He worked for a Jewish organization when he got married. They had to report to the square to an SS guard who remembered that Frank had held up the painting for him so he was allowed to postpone his deportation for a little longer. Frank's sister worked for the Jewish government that coordinated with the German government that was sent to Thereisenstadt. Her office kept statistics of how many people were killed and the number and name of each transport but she perished. Frank was deported to Auschwitz by train where a doctor made the selection. From 1941 to 1942 Frank lived in Thereisenstadt which was horrible but like paradise in comparison to his later experiences. He wore his own clothes, lived in a crowded barracks constructed for the Czech armed forces, went out for the bathroom and lined up for food. It was a regimented life and they slept on three tiers of barracks.
- 55:00 Everyone argued as it was crowded with people from many places. For the first six months he distributed coal. People had assigned boxes to fill up with coal to heat the barracks. He was happy to be given a private scale to weigh the coal. Hitler marched into Prague in March '39 and war began September 1, 1939. Frank played cards with a Catholic friend who lived nearby and also played soccer. In the evening they would play cards at his own home. There was no TV at that time. The friend's divorced mother dated a German. Things gradually got worse and the friend did not want to be seen with a Jew. When Frank saw the first plane on 9/11, he thought the guy was bailing as he had seen the same thing at Auschwitz.
- 60:00 Frank worked for the Jewish government until March '42 when he was deported to Thereisenstadt until September '44. September 28th was a Czech holiday and he was told to build a new camp. They assembled a number of men in open box cars. Frank knew the Americans were going East. There was no food or bathroom in the box cars. They

traveled northeast. One man in the train was from Auschwitz and wore a striped uniform. The Germans tried to intimidate them. It took two days to get to Auschwitz and the train went in circles. Finally, after October 1, 1944 the train stopped. The Germans got Georgine's father and two uncles. There were only men there. When confronted by the Germans, his father-in-law thought himself old at 50 as he had lost his home and business so Frank went one way and the father-in-law and two brothers went the other way.

- 65:00 Their shoes had to be disinfected with water and they got them back but they were very cold and the weather was freezing. They were standing with no clothes. They were given clothes and were assigned to the barracks of horse stalls. The stable had cement floors with a table to sleep on. He felt he was not going to survive and was told to say that he is a locksmith. Therefore he would perform indoor work in a factory rather than work outside. He had left Georgine and his mother behind. Three days later they came the same way. Georgine was shipped to Gros Rosen, a Russian camp, and his mother was killed. Georgine was always sick as the camps were harder for women.
- 70:00 She was placed in the hospital upon her return to Prague. When they were being deported, people changed their names as they thought it would be helpful but he did not change his name at that time. The first transport was up to the letter K so he was left behind. He was assigned to remove a group of dead bodies from the gas chamber to the crematorium to burn them. After a month, Frank was transported. He worked from 6 AM to 6 PM. He worked on a huge machine producing casings. He filled up the bricks and slept at temporary shelters with men. On April 7th, they emptied the train of bricks and got on and left for the East, away from the American soldiers.
- 75:00 Frank was in Auschwitz from September 28th to December 28th. The railroads were ripped up and they traveled two days in Germany or West Poland next to a train with German soldiers heading West. They were told to get out to be counted to see how many were still alive. The British bombers came and started to shoot so they panicked as they were outside with no supervision. There was a hill behind them where they decided to hide. He was 24 and had stamina to run to the top of the hill. There was no German guard so he was free but had no papers and a striped uniform. The train was hit and there was commotion.
- 80:00 There were four of them. It was cold. They decided to stay overnight on the hill and then return as they had no papers. The train took off so they went back up the hill. They had no food during the two days they remained there. The roads were occupied by the National Guard. The four spoke good German and planned to say they were Czech workers from the train. They went down and put their hands up to the soldiers who had guns and told them their story. Their clothes had been damaged. They were placed in jail to await speaking to the magistrate the next morning. They discarded their clothes and saw the magistrate with their unstriped clothes and were freed.

- 85:00 A truck stopped for them that did not use gas. They took out the engineer's seat and put in wooden chips to produce fire and steam so they could move. The four of them hitchhiked to Prague. The truck driver said they probably would not make it. It took them seven days to get there. They arrived on Hitler's birthday. They had not eaten in 13 days when they were helped at a woman's home. They were given tea and a shower. They had so many lice so could not shower as it would bring the lice into the house.
- 90:00 They could not leave the house without papers as they would be stopped. They had short hair so people would know they were prisoners. They stayed until May 5th. Until the 9th, it was horrible as vendettas took place. People found out where the Germans were hiding and killed them. On the 9th, order was back as they had real police. The French helped reunite families in Prague. They hung signs on the newsstands that they were searching for lost people and what address to report to. The survivors had arrangements where to meet. Frank went to his sister's house and one at a time people returned and they found out who had survived.
- 95:00 Frank obtained an apartment in Old Prague on the 2nd floor in a new building but without an elevator. He had no money. Later he got a job with a Jewish firm.