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Summary

Felix Heinz Heilpern was born March 8, 1927 in the Leopoldstadt borough of Vienna, Austria with two older sisters, Gertude and Wilhemina. His parents were Hans and Sidonie (Ehrenpreis); both grew up in Vienna. His maternal grandfather was the chief judge of Poland. German was spoken in the home as was Yiddish. His father had a household moving business and a summer house on the "old" Danube. Felix and his father often took vacations by walking to Prague and back. He describes his home and school life as the Nazis came to power in Austria.

His father was arrested in April, 1938, sent to Dachau and on to Buchenwald, requiring them to move to a smaller place, and earn money by line-standing. His mother answered a published notice for children to go to America and Felix was one of many interviewed at the U.S. Embassy; a group of 50 children was chosen and he left in July, 1939. Felix says one couple who had interviewed him wanted to adopt him, but he declined. Felix traveled to Southampton, and then to the U.S. on the ship, President Harding.

Reluctantly, his mother's cousin agreed to sign an affidavit ensuring that Felix would not become a burden to the state, which allowed him both to stay and cleared the way for his father to be released from prison and his family to come to the U.S. While arranging for his parents' arrival on September 1, 1939, he waited with the other children at a camp in Pennsylvania. His father opened up a luncheonette in the Bronx at which most of the family worked. He started school in the seventh grade without knowing any English, but performed well. He graduated high school in 1945 and but failed his fitness test for the Air Force, resulting in the Army drafting him. Despite his German language skills, the Army sent him to the Pacific theater. He fought in both the Philippine and Okinawa campaigns. At the start of the occupation of Japan, due to a routine IQ test where he scored very highly, he was placed in charge of 7,000 Japanese civilians. He learned to speak Japanese fluently.

Felix returned to New York in August, 1946 and enrolled at Columbia University graduating in three years. He moved to Orlando, Florida and became a restaurant manager, before returning to New York driving a taxi. He met his first wife, June, a nurse at Fordham Hospital. His father died shortly after they all moved to Long Island in 1954. In 1960, he took a job at the Health Department in Albany. Felix didn't return to Austria to visit until the 2000s.

He firmly believes that Franklin Roosevelt was motivated by antisemitism when he barred a ship of 1500 Jews before the war from landing in Cuba and then the United States. This, combined with the treatment of his family in Austria as non-citizens and periodic shows of antisemitism in the press, leads him to believe that Jews are unwelcome in America and another national crisis would create a problem for American Jews.