

## Summary of Oral History: ALFRED FIELDS

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Alfred Fields was born Alfred Fuhrer in Cologne, Germany on August 1, 1907. He changed his name when he arrived in the US. His parents were originally from Galicia in Poland. His father, Isidore was born in 1893 and had many siblings. All were killed except for Lotte, who came to the US in the 1930's. His mother, Gisela Haber, also had many siblings killed in the Holocaust but had a brother and sister who had previously emigrated to the US and who brought Alfred's family here.

Alfred's father was in the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI and afterwards got a job in Berlin at a shoe store. He then started a shoe supply store in Cologne with a non-Jewish partner. The family was well-off and not too religious but belonged to a synagogue. He described his mother as the soul of the family.

One day brown shirts came into the store and threatened the family. Alfred and his older brother Harry fled with their mother to Holland. Their father had been arrested, but was freed by the Germans to flee to Holland with them. They settled in Zaandam, a suburb of Amsterdam where the mayor welcomed refugees.

The family started another shoe supply store there. They stayed in Zaandam until they were sent to Westerbork in January, 1942. Arthur's memories of that time included pleasant memories of a normal childhood, with weekend trips to Amsterdam to eat in the Cafe Beck. At one time Arthur's father, who was a Zionist, arranged for the Palestine papers, which would send them to Palestine; at the last minute he changed his mind. Alfred told of the Germans seizing Holland in May 1940 and gradually imposing the yellow star and not allowing Jews to go to regular school or beaches or parks. Alfred biked 1 1/2 miles to a Jewish school in Amsterdam.

Alfred's family was one of the first to be deported to Westerbork by the Dutch as German citizens. They went on a regular passenger train. Later, the Germans took over Westerbork and it became a transit camp for Jews then sent to Auschwitz. When Alfred and his family were there they slept in separate barracks but were allowed to be together the rest of the time. Alfred said life was not too bad there. There were concerts and other activities. They could get local mail. Because the family was on the Palestine list, and supposed to be exchanged for German citizens in the Middle East. They were not deported to a concentration camp for 2 years. He described that every Tuesday a train would load 1000 Jews and later he found they were sent to Auschwitz. Alfred said Westerbork was not too horrible as it was later.

In 1942 the family was finally sent to Bergen-Belsen. They were still considered for a possible trade with Germans and were cordoned off from the rest of Bergen-Belsen. He stated the camp was like Westerbork but worse, with lice and disease and little food. They were mistreated, but not killed. Alfred and his brother worked as carpenters and his father worked in the storage room. He describes the worst thing as being on roll calls twice a day, where they had to stand outside in all weather, often for hours.

In April 1945 the family was put on a train to avoid the British army close by. They were on the train for 14 days and ended up near the Elbe River. The Russians liberated them the next day and they were sent to Trobitz where they took empty houses and were able to eat a lot of food, although many got sick from too much food at first. Eventually the family was taken by a regiment of African American soldiers back to Holland. Alfred had typhus and typhoid during this time.

The family went back to Zaandam and Alfred told how they made a living from artificial felt flowers. Non Jewish friends gave them back the silver that they had hidden with them. The family went to the US in 1948 with the help of Alfred's aunt and uncle. At first, Alfred became a diamond cutter, but he didn't like that. Then he became very successful in the textile business and traveled all over the world. He and the family got German restitution money. He never spoke much about his experiences except to his daughter Lisa.