

**Time-coded notes of Interview with Werner Ellman
December 12, 1986**

00:00 The interview begins with a discussion of the book *The Gates of Hell*. Ellman notes that people today are denying that the Holocaust ever occurred. His brother is one of those people. Ellman says that the most extensive museum on the holocaust is in East Berlin. He describes it as one of the greatest things he has ever seen. He discusses how the East Germans have accepted that the Holocaust occurred and are now willing to face their actions.

02:00 Ellman was born in 1924 in Bundenwer, Germany. His father moved to the United States in 1928, followed by Werner, his mother and one brother in 1929. Two brothers were left behind for reasons not stated in the interview. The move to the U.S. was due to the poor economic conditions in Germany at that time. The father had lost everything he had in Germany because of the horrible economy. Ellman received all of his education in the U.S.

03:10 He describes his home in the U.S. as having been a very German home. The family joined German fraternal groups. The parents were very pro-Hitler. Ellman says that his parents simply continued their German lifestyle in the U.S.

04:00 Ellman continues the discussion of his household in the U.S. He describes it as being very anti-Semitic. He recalls that it was more than just hating the Jews but was very sinister. He was told stories by his parents of Jews stealing babies and conducting rituals with the blood extracted from the baby. His home was very much geared toward hating, he says. Ellman says that the hate was necessary to carry out the killings done by the Germans. He says that genocide could not be committed against the American black because the intense hate like that expressed toward the Jews is absent. He notes that, perhaps, the plight of the American Indian is a close parallel to the Holocaust. The Indians too, he says, were looked upon as animals. He says that he had no choice but to hate the Jews because as a child he knew no other way. He had no alternatives. He did not meet his first minority until he was in the U.S. Army.

05:30 In Chicago, Nazi organizations were very active, he says. He remembers the tavern and the hall in which the meetings were held. He attended youth groups which he described as semi-militaristic. He also attended summer camps that were of similar fashion. He describes this as having been a very ongoing thing.

07:00 Ellman cites the use of antisemitic songs and stories in order to indoctrinate him. The ideology, he says, was all pervasive.

08:00 Ellman grew up in a Serbian neighborhood and attended Catholic schools. He says his entire childhood was very Catholic. He even considered going into the seminary to become a priest. He says that the hatred of the Jews and the love of humanity were two different worlds. They never seemed to conflict. That was the way life was, he says.

09:00 Ellman is asked if there was much religious antisemitism to which he responds that it was everywhere. Catholics, he says, blamed the Jews for the Depression.

10:00 In 1938, the family returned to Germany. The father had been working in the PAW and the economy was too bad to raise the family properly. Ellman says that Germans had been trying to lure back to Germany the people who had left in the late twenties and early thirties. They were very successful in doing so, says Ellman. Three of his high school friends had moved back with their families. Ellman's relatives in Germany paid for him and his mother to go back for the summer of 1938. They went over in March and returned in late October.

11:00 He did not enter any type of youth group while he was in Germany but Ellman remembers being very envious of the Hitler youth. He doesn't know exactly why he didn't join but guesses that perhaps his mother wouldn't allow him to for fear that he would not want to return to the U.S.

12:30 Acts of antisemitism in Nuremberg, where he was staying, were almost common but low-key, says Ellman. He saw the stars in the windows, but never came into contact with German Jews. He describes them as being "fleeting people...in black hats and black coats, hunched over."

13:30 Ellman says that there was always an association between Jews and gypsies for the Nazis. They were both described as varmint in caricatures. He remembers his summer in Nuremberg as being a typical summer vacation, however he does remember many feelings caused by living under a dictatorship. He says the atmosphere in reference to the hatred was very prevalent. There was a feeling that the Jews everywhere had to be eliminated.

16:00 He also describes a constant fear of what was said even in the home. His mother would lecture him on being careful about how he would describe America. He was not supposed to say that it is a nice place, etc... The fear was especially acute because the grandmother was a friend of a Nazi general named Striecker(?).

16:30 When asked about Anschluss, Ellman noted that troop movements were very prominent at night only. Being only 35 miles from the Czech border, Ellman regularly saw these troop movements.

18:00 He says that there was a general attitude among the German people that they were going to conquer the world. They said it and they believed it, he says.

19:00 Ellman knew of the Munich Crisis in the Fall of 1938 only from the readings he had done since. The Ellman family returned to the U.S. because the father wanted to stay there. He says his father wanted to remain in the U.S. for reasons that were not political, but most likely personal. His father did not return to Germany until 1970 and even then did not visit the family. Ellman assumes there existed bitterness between the family and his father that were associated with his father's loss of the family business and flight to the U.S. in 1928.

21:00 Of his departure from Germany and return to the U.S., Ellman says that he was scared but only because he had to high school when he got to Chicago. He remembers being excited about the ship ride back. Asked what he thinks might have happened if he remained in

Germany, he answered that he most likely would have become a good Nazi soldier. He says it would have been impossible for him to deal with the anti-Semitic indoctrination he had been through if he had remained in Germany. In the U.S., he says, it is a liar who claims he has not been raised anti-black or antisemitic. In the U.S., though, one can deal with it as they grow up; one can break out of the indoctrination. He says he had to experience his first minority, who he became friends with in the Army, in order to realize that they were actually people.

25:30 Ellman says we must recognize the indoctrination and environmental conditioning of bigotry to overcome it. He says he has never met a German of that era who has even commented on what a horrible thing it was that they did to the Jews. There is no remorse. He calls this "real hatred", a hatred so deep it is irreparable.

27:30 Crystal Night occurred when he was in the U.S. He says it was just a place more organized than any other. It was the day, according to Ellman, that the Germans said the Holocaust was real and they were going to do it "to the whole bunch". He credits the Bavarians as being the true core of the hatred.

30:30 Ellman provides a picture of the Jews as he was taught to see them. Through jokes, songs, verbalizations they were slimy people, very sinister. This was real hatred, he repeats. They were not seen as human beings. There was nothing wrong if you hurt a Jew, he was told.

32:30 He says that the roots of this hatred extend throughout Europe. Hitler simply built on them, Germans capitalized on them. He says it was a far, far greater and deeper hate than just antisemitism.

34:30 Ellman says he began to question the hatred as he grew up through meeting and making friends with minorities. He began to question his own Catholicism. The liberation of Mauthausen and interpreting at the Dachau trials, led to him identifying people as truly beautiful, he says. He still has his prejudices, he thinks, but he understands them a little better. He has guilt that he feels he will never get rid of even though his brain tells him he has no reason to feel guilty.

37:30 Following the interview, Ellman says that his brother believes that the Israelis are the new Nazis.