

**Time-coded notes for Interview with Walter Thalheimer
December 12, 1986**

0:00 Born in Frutenberg and always lived there. It was a small town.

0:01 Father served in World War One.

0:02 He has one sister, and he was born in 1925. His family went a spa for family reunions.

0:03 He had a very comfortable life, lived in a nice villa and was very happy until 1933. He remembers his parents being upset when Hitler came to power, they hoped it would pass.

0:04 Soon after Hitler came to power they received the first sense of what was about to come. Jews were singled out and marked out as Jews.

0:05 They started rounding up Jewish men in the community. Grandmother came to the house since she heard rumors of the rounding up. She also smuggled out his father's gun.

0:06 They came to his house to arrest his father.

0:07 All Jewish men were taken into so called "protective custody." His uncle and father were released right of way because of their war records.

0:08 Life went on somewhat normally. Gentile children join Hitler Youth groups and gang up on Jewish children. In 1936 his father and uncles decided to move the family to Stuttgart.

0:09 He wanted to go to the U.S. but could not get an affidavit of support.

0:10 Sister was permitted to go to a gentile school. However he was not allowed to go to one. He went to an all Jewish school.

0:11 He got a good education and started to see signs on stores saying no Jews allowed. The same was true for parks.

0:12 He did not miss being in the Gentile community. It was only a minor inconvenience. All changed November 9th 1938 with Kristallnacht.

0:13 His synagogue was burnt down, and just about all of the Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps

0:14 His father had a boyhood gentile friend who had risen in the Nazi party and left his father off the list to be arrested.

0:15 Hundreds fled to the American consulate, and they sent some these refugees to his house. Almost 60 people in house for almost a week.

0:16 His other uncle went to the concentration camp and came home six weeks later very ill. Businesses at this time were instructed to fire Jews. Jews had to demolish the synagogue.

0:19 Jewish stores were looted, and homes were broken into.

0:20 The family had to move out of its building. There was only one doctor to see all the Jews.

0:21 He broke his arm and had trouble getting it cared for.

0:22 Nothing happened but they did not know that his father was not on the list to be arrested.

0:23 Afterwards they did not dare to go outside for over a week.

0:24 He had to go to school at his principal's office. His favorite teacher, who was in his early 20's, committed suicide.

0:25 The local gym organized a group of young boys to help poor and needy people move out of their apartments.

0:26 A distant cousin got them affidavits of support to go to the United States.

0:28 A scandal at the consulate about someone taking bribes made it hard for one to get a Visa.

0:29 He finally got a visa to the U.S. in April 1940.

0:30 They could only take 4 dollars per person, but they tried to smuggle things out.

0:31 His cousin paid for passage over Holland, and they were told that they were to leave on April 28, 1940.

0:32 He went to the border and crossed it without a problem.

0:33 After being held up for six hours, they were told that they had to go back to Germany, because their ship was not there yet.

0:34 So they went back to Cologne and were put up by a Jewish refugee committee.

0:35 He had to stay outside of Cologne because of war time laws. They found out that they could leave again on the 9th of May.

0:36 This time, getting across the border was not as easy. There were thousands of soldiers here at this time. The border patrol gave people a very difficult time.

0:37 After 1938 it was illegal to kill kosher cattle making it difficult for some to keep their kosher ways.

0:38 While waiting for their departure they were put in a Holland refugee camp in Rotterdam.

0:39 While in Holland, the Germans invaded twelve hours after they entered Holland.

0:40 Rotterdam held off the Germans for five days.

0:41 On the fifth day they received an ultimatum to give up or to be bombed to pieces.

0:42 People were afraid to have them because they spoke German and tried to have them arrested but they were released.

0:43 They did not dare to go outside.

0:44 The Germans bombed the inner city mercilessly. Bombs were falling all around them. Their house caught on fire.

0:45 People were running from the city and people were being trampled. They ran for over an hour to get outside the city. They slept on an open field.

0:46 They were afraid to speak because of their German accent.

0:47 Afterwards they went back into Rotterdam and were helped by a rabbi.

0:48 They first went to poor refugee family, but they finally went to better refugee home.

0:49 Attempted to get an exit visa in order to leave through Italy, but they could not get one.

0:50 They had no money. In September 1940 Germans declared Rotterdam a war zone. So all non-residents had to leave including themselves.

0:51 The family was split up among different families and were put up by different people.

0:52 Finally his father was able to get some of his money left in Germany and they were able to rent their own place.

0:53 He took up shop as an apprentice in a machine shop.

0:54 During all this almost every night they had air raids, for planes were always flying overhead.

0:56 One night a plane crashed right near their house and damaged their house. They had to made for a week.

0:57 Summer of 1942 a letter from the Dutch Jewish consulate told them about a possible transportation to a camp. They had to wear the Jewish Star.

0:58 The Dutch would go out of their way to make the Jews feel welcomed after the declaration of the Star.

1:02 They were told to report to a school where they would be transported at midnight they were marched to the train station

1:03 The underground one needed a lot of money.

1:04 500 of 600 Jews reported.

1:05 Transported to Westerberg a transfer camp. Jews from all over Holland to be sent to other camps.

1:06 Several categories kept one from being shipped out of Westerberg, including those who served in World War One.

1:07 So at the time being they were able to avoid being shipped out this time.

1:08 He was assigned to garbage detail. Men and women were separated.

1:09 A major in Amsterdam brought a whole bunch of Jews into the camp.

1:10 He got a job as a page which gave him access to lot of rooms transports were going twice a week.

1:11 They did not know exactly what Auschwitz meant.

1:12 Saved his family from transport for the time being by pulling their names.

1:14 His parents were sent to Theresienstadt as a reward for serving in World War One. The kids got jobs.

1:15 All the children were sent to Theresienstadt to meet up with their parents. The parents were in not such a good condition.

1:16 Each one lived in a different armory. They were working 10-12 hours a day.

1:17 They had a 9 o'clock curfew.

1:18 Germans wanted to make a film to show how well the Jews lived. The film was a hoax.

1:19 In October of 1944 rumors started of transports starting again. He and his father were the first on the list to go.

1:20 They were packed into cattle cars. They had no idea about the severity of what was to come.

- 1:21 No toilet facilities. They knocked out a board and were shot at.
- 1:22 The situation in the cars became pretty bad. The trip took two days.
- 1:23 On the Auschwitz platform they were first introduced to the smell of the crematoriums.
- 1:24 They went through selection and he was separated from his father. His father was gassed.
- 1:25 They were only allowed to keep belts and shoes and were given rags.
- 1:26 Kapos would take their shoes.
- 1:27 Kapos would also take the gold from peoples teeth.
- 1:28 He was in Birkenau.
- 1:29 Each camp was enclosed by electric barbed wire. Had to stand at attention for 10-12 hours.
- 1:30 He carried the group from the kitchen to the barracks. Had to go through selection once a day.
- 1:31 Two day old beards were reason enough to be gassed. They asked for craftsmen and he was picked.
- 1:32 Was transported back to Germany in November 1944 and saved a friend in doing so.
- 1:33 He was sent an ammunition camp.
- 1:34 Worked with a German Gentile who was a communist.
- 1:35 The communist smuggled him shoes and food. Some people sabotaged the works.
- 1:37 They would put sand into bearings.
- 1:38 They attempted to keep machines from running.
- 1:39 12 hour shifts and 5 to 6 hours of unloading trains. Germans were entertained by the punishment of the Jews.
- 1:40 A lot of punishment was given out.
- 1:41 He got shingles but the doctor could not do anything for he had no material. After one air raid several buildings were destroyed and he had to work 72 hrs straight.
- 1:42 He then had to disarm unexploded bombs.

1:43 During this time he was fed well. One bomb squad did die.

1:44 Many people at Auschwitz committed suicide by running into the electric fence. Germans left the bodies there.

1:45 SS played cruel games with the Jews.

1:46 He only lived for the minute at Auschwitz.

1:47 There was no selection at the munitions camp. Early 1945 artillery fire could be heard.

1:48 German officers burnt down the place and they were immediately transported in open cattle cars.

1:49 He was on the train for 5 days. The train was attacked by planes and everybody ran. The train was in Czechoslovakia. He and a friend ran and escaped.

1:50 He spent 5 days in a forest. They were caught by an SS man. Were placed in a local jail.

1:51 The next morning two old guards marched them 30 miles.

1:52 They were brought to the SS Headquarters, where one guard left and they were now guarded by only one guard.

1:53 He was able to escape into the forest for two weeks and lived off of grass and rotten potatoes. They started to hear artillery fire from both the east and west.

1:54 They came upon a farm house lived in by women. The women fed them and helped them out.

1:55 The ladies told them of a path that they could use at night to reach the American front.

1:56 An American soldier found them and sent them away from the front line to where there were some other escapees.

1:57 They received clothing and food, for he only weighed 85 pounds.

1:58 After the war he went back to Holland. But of the 500 who were deported from his camp at the beginning of the war only 5 survived, one of whom was his mother.