

-TITLE-WALTER CHOTZEN
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE-HAWAII HOLOCAUST PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCEPTIONAL
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCEPTIONAL
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
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Summary of interview with Walter Chotzen

00:00:00 My name is Walter Chotzen (?) and I live in Honolulu.

00:00:30 Born May 17, 1911 Ziegenhalt (ph) Germany - goat's neck in translation. A small town on the Czech border.

00:01:00 (They rearrange the seating) They repeat the above introduction.

00:01:30 A town of about 10,000 people. Had two older sisters, the older is still alive in New York.

00:02:00 Married for 43 years, with eight children; his wife is a professional photographer.

00:02:30 There were about a dozen Jewish families in town, merchants and manufacturers. Father manufactured wooden object used in the brewery industry.

00:03:00 Manufactured other items for the industry and was also a wholesale merchant for them.

00:03:30 Went to the University of Berlin though he hated school. Was supposed to become an engineer but found the courses hopelessly theoretical.

00:04:00 Quit after one or two semesters. Through connections of his mother

00:04:30 Was apprentice to a form manufacturing business furniture and supplies. After two years, joined the firm. Then Hitler came to power.

00:05:00 The firm was told that it could no longer sell to the government of Prussia if it employed Jews. Somehow, the Jewish ownership was obscured.

00:05:30 Jewish employees were fired and I went back to work in my father's enterprise. But my father was a very powerful person and I found it difficult to work there.

00:06:00 Also, we were shunned as Jews, so it was lonely. Most of my friends were Protestant although the town was largely Catholic.

00:06:30 They were a small minority, the Protestants, and so more accessible to us. But when Hitler came to power, they would not associate with us. When they saw me walking down the street, they would go the other way.

00:07:00 One of them came to me once - he had stolen some money he was holding for the Hitler Youth and he wanted help from me to replace it. I refused.

00:07:30 I remember one night I wanted to go out dancing - interrupts self to describe industries in town.

00:08:00 Part of the town was a resort town - not very high class, but spaz (joyful), and it was pretty.

00:08:30 So I went to one of the hotels where they had dancing, but no one wanted to dance with me.

00:09:00 The only place we could go was Czechoslovakia, just across the border. But the Sudeten Germans were there and they were as bad as the Germans. The Czechs were more liberal and they needed the money.

00:09:30 My father, to give me some opportunity for variety, sent me on business trips. The people with whom he did business didn't know he was Jewish, until I came along. If you didn't say, " Heil Hitler " when you came in and went out, they knew you were Jewish.

00:10:00 So after I visited, they knew he was Jewish and stopped doing business with him. My business trips were not too successful.

00:10:30 One evening in a hotel, there was a nice group of men sitting around the table and I was so desperate for company that I ordered a round of drinks for them.

00:11:00 They took the drinks but ignored me. I was so despondent that I got drunk. That was a pattern. Did I tell you about the draft notice?

A: No

00:11:30 Although Jews could not serve in the armed forces, we had to register for the draft. And then my year was called up.

00:12:00 We were told to report, and of course, many of my friends were there but they all ignored me. Except one who spoke to me briefly.

00:12:30 We had to strip naked and I was the only circumcised man there.

01:13:00 I stumbled and the Nazi officer made fun of me and the others roared with laughter, to show their patriotism.

00:13:30 All you can do is push it back in your mind. I forgot about it until I was in a counselling session long after.

00:14:00 I want to say something about the financial situation. My father found that his business was going down and wanted to get out of Germany.

00:14:30 Arrangements were made for me to go to America, but my father wanted to stay. He was optimistic about what would happen.

00:15:00 First he had to find out how he could sell his factory and how he could get money out. I left home in 1938, so it was about then.

00:15:30 We lived on the border and we had a pass so that we could cross the border whenever we wanted. So I came up with the idea. We used a little glass pill container.

00:16:00 We filled it with money, put it within a lead pipe, and put the pipe in a can of oil. It sank to the bottom so that if you shook it, it wouldn't rattle.

00:16:30 Once a guard did shake it but it didn't rattle. We couldn't deal with the Sudetens, but we had a good friend at the border town, and he would transmit the money to relatives in Prague.

00:17:00 The relatives put the money into a savings account, and when Hitler came into Czechoslovakia, it was all lost.

00:17:30 No one ever caught us. But early one morning we got a call from the Gestapo that they wanted us to come to the police station with the auto papers.

00:18:00 They had me drive out in my car, two secret policemen.

00:18:30 They said they had proof that I had been smuggling money out of the country and I said I had not done it. They said they had proof.

00:19:00 They said that I had crossed the border at a particular place, but I knew that I had not and I was able to show by me papers that I had not crossed the border there.

00:19:30 They said that they would let me go and that they would approve my request to go to the US. If I had been caught, I would have been sent to a concentration camp, may be not made there.

00:20:00 I WAS TREATED COOLLY, BUT NOT ROUGHLY. I was not manhandled at all. I know a person in my town who was a manufacturer.

00:20:30 He was being blackmailed to pay money to a right-wing organization and he refused, so they beat him up.

00:21:00 Our AREA WAS Catholic and so it wasn't so bad. I don't remember anything happening for Kristallnacht. My father losing his factory was interesting, about 1938.

00:21:30 It also shows how corrupt the people were. The Nazis set the price at which we could sell low, so that it could go to one of their cohort. We found a party member who we paid to bribe some of the people in the big city who were in charge.

00:22:00 The bribe was to boost up the price. He was a Nazi, but later he brought me some money in Holland. He was a Nazi but they all had their price.

00:22:30 I was already in Holland on my way to America when he brought me the money at the risk of his life. My father found a wealthy landowner.

00:23:00 The factory went to him for his son-in-law. The price was still very low, but my father arranged for an under-the-table deal.

00:23:30 My sister and brother-in-law already were in Sweden so my father used photographic equipment that was highly valued.

00:24:00 The equipment was put into packages valued at about ten thousand dollars each, and with great difficulty they were shipped out of the country but only one arrived.

00:24:30 I had about \$600 for my parents, in Rotterdam, but suddenly the mark was devalued and it came to \$400.

00:25:00 I was very sad to leave my parents; I didn't know if I would see them again. And I was the one who wanted to support them.

00:25:30 They were in hiding in Berlin - they didn't register like they were supposed to. They were there about a year until their visas came through and then they went to Sweden.

00:26:00 The war was on so they couldn't get a ship to the US, so they went by the Siberian railroad to Vladivostock, then to Japan and then to Seattle, where I was living.

00:26:30 We were able to keep in touch by mail. When I knew they were coming I had to do something because I was earning \$15 a week. I had a lawyer friend from my home town

00:27:00 who had lost his legal practice in Germany and had become the representative of a dress manufacturer and had done very well. He knew of a territory that was available.

00:27:30 He advised me to go to New York, and told me everything to say. I did that but the company was on strike and the manager was very busy.

00:28:00 I said that I could sell dresses, that I wanted an allowance of \$55 a week, and that I had a car. My parents arrived and expected that I would be living on the outskirts of town, in a tent.

00:28:30 When they arrived I had an apartment and a car and I met them at the dock. It was a very emotional experience.

00:29:00 I wasn't too worried about them because they left German for Sweden soon after I did.

00:29:30 The sister who was younger, six years older than I, was in Sweden, and her son still lives there. The older sister married a physician who left Germany in 1935, lived in New York, and arranged for our visas.

00:30:00 Q: How long was your family in Germany?

A: I have a Hebrew book at home

00:30:30 With various inscriptions as to its travels.

00:31:00 Provides family history.

00:31:30 More about peddlers and one who made it big.

00:32:00 One of the family was one of the foremost damask weavers in the world, employing thousands, but lost that to the Germans.

00:32:30 My father's father went into the thread business and made the worst thread. But he thought he was something, this was around 1870 when Germany had just beaten France.

00:33:00 He went bankrupt and my father had to rescue him. I still remember the thread machines as a child. But it was turned into manufacturing wood items.

00:33:30 My father's family was in Germany about five generations.

00:34:00 My mother's father lived in a small town in the country where there were a lot of landed aristocracy. He owned a small liquor manufacturing plant and a tavern.

00:34:00 He became quite wealthy but lent his money to the young aristocrats - he was flattered that they wanted to borrow from him and he ended up committing suicide.

00:34:30 One debtor paid enough for the son to go to college and the daughter, my mother, to go to art school.

00:35:00 We did not have a schul - just a prayer room. I was Bar-mitzvahed by going to the county seat.

00:35:30 I learned a little Hebrew, but it was a painful experience.

00:36:00 Horror tales of public school teacher.

00:36:30 I had a private tutor so that I could go to the high school in the next town - which involved taking a train and transferring.

00:37:00 Did this for a year and then a new school opened in my town.

00:37:30 It was a very nice, modern school. I was the only Jewish student there.

00:38:00 There was anti-Semitism there before the Nazis came in.

00:38:30 There were social cleavages. My father would go drink beer and bowl with certain people, but the families didn't intermingle.

00:39:00 More about anti-Semitism.

00:39:30 A Christian friend, a doctor, said that he believed that some Jews could kill children to use their blood in rituals.

END OF TAPE

00:40:00 Q: Can you tell me a little about Fritz?

A: He was my father's younger brother, a psychiatrist, at a large institution in Breslau. Shortly before Hitler came to power, he had married

00:40:30 a nurse of a right wing family. She was a Nazi, but not ANTI SEMITIC. She was very happy when Hitler came to power.

00:41:00 My uncle was unhappy. Also, he was being sued by a patient who claimed he had taken a spinal tap without permission.

00:41:30 The judge was hostile, but he won. The patient appealed and he had to go through the whole thing again. One day I got a phone call from his wife

00:42:00 My uncle had committed suicide and I had to tell my father.

00:42:30 His wife was a typical right-wing German.

00:43:00 She was betrayed by her family for having married a Jew.

00:43:30 We were friendly. I wrote her after I was in America.

00:44:00 About living in Berlin - Berlin was one of the most free and lovely and loose

00:44:30 Everything went. It had a Jewish population of about 250,000. No anti-Semitism until Hitler came to power.

00:45:00 About Julius Streicher - he published cartoons that exaggerated Jewish features. He taught people how to recognize Jews.

00:45:30 People would make anti-Semitic remarks out of the blue.

00:46:00 More anti-Semitic experiences.

00:46:30 Continued as above.

00:47:00 Called a "goddam" Jew by a street sweeper.

00:47:30 That was in '33. '34. '35.

00:48:00 It was advisable to go to Berlin to get the visa, it was faster. I went, but the place was crowded. Fortunately I have a good ear for accents.

00:48:30 I stopped an American and apparently he didn't think I was German so he took me aside and I got my visa with no difficulty.

00:49:00 Doesn't remember having a "J" on his passport. But father had to change his name from Otto to Osrael, and mother to Sarah.

00:49:30 First memory of Nazis.

00:50:00 It was in Berlin, Hitler was elected, was living in a room, hear it in radio, people next door were jubilant.

00:50:30 Went to the parade on Unter der Linden. There were hundreds of thousands of brown shirts marching. I knew that was the end.

00:51:00 Went back home to wait for my visa and papers. I was very fortunate, I was never physically hurt.

00:51:30 Name, birth date of family.

00:52:00 Continues with genealogy.

00:52:30 Continues with genealogy.

00:53:00 Father was in 70's when he came over but he loved it.

00:53:30 Mother's family was exterminated.

00:54:00 Mother's brother chose not to come out. He was harbored by a gentile girl friend.

00:54:30 But he became ill and needed to be hospitalized, so she got poison for him and he killed himself. There were good people too.

00:55:00 Another uncle, a lawyer, and all the other relatives were exterminated, including those in Czechoslovakia.

00:55:30 Can't recall sources of information about family.

00:56:00 More about family.

00:56:30 More about relatives who perished.

00:57:00 Father was a member of "German Citizens of Jewish Faith." I was not involved.

00:57:30 They needed me for a minion on holidays and they had to come looking for me because I hid in the woods. I could read a little but it didn't mean anything to me.

00:58:00 Here I was taken in by an orthodox family and they were warm and loving but the religion meant nothing to me, In Germany we were middle of the road politically.

00:58:30 We did not belong to any political party. As Hitler became stronger I became socialist. I talked with the workers and they were socialist.

00:59:00 There were many unemployed. Since women didn't work, this meant every second or third person was unemployed.

00:59:30 Q: Do you have any sense of the feeling of American Jews for the Holocaust?

01:00:00 A: I had the feeling the well-to-do, the Temple Jews were very cautious about receiving us German Jews. The Orthodox welcomed us with open arms.

01:00:30 We were between the Conservatives and the Reform Jews, but our attitude was more towards Reform. But they were cautious just the way we were when Polish Jews came into our area.

01:01:00 I remember one scene. My father got a call from the jail. He was a respected figure, a member of the city council.

01:01:30 They had a Polish Jew in jail, and my father got him out. It turned out that he was collecting money

01:02:00 He was collecting for victims of the pogrom in Poland. My father gave him money, and in order to get the money out of Germany, he put it in a tube and put the tube up his rectum.

01:02:30 We were embarrassed by them, their clothes, their beards

01:03:00 In this country, I had the feeling that the attitude of the Temple people was something like that. When I first came to Spokane, I was invited to dinner once and that was it.

01:03:30 It was the Orthodox who saw to it that we had something to eat and a place to stay. There was some feeling that there might be spies among us, and B'Nai B'rith voted that we should be shipped inland.

01:04:00 I was photographed for the front page of the newspaper, going to the police station with my German radio because of the fear that their might be a short wave mechanism built into the radio.

01:04:30 The B'nai B'rith voted to have us sent inland. I never joined B'nai B'rith for that reason.

01:05:00 I don't recall talking to Gentiles about the Holocaust. But I have spoken to real Germans - we are members of Servas and we have had visitors.

01:05:30 Most of them are young and so were only children at the time. But several weeks we had a women who said that her father was a Nazi, and pleased with everything, and she hated him and was uncomfortable.

01:06:00 I have only been to Frankfurt, and we went to a place where people sat and drank alcoholic apple cider, and I expected that someone might make a crack, but no one did.

01:06:30 Earlier, on a train, a drunk came through the car and I felt fear; the whole thing came back to me.

01:07:00 Q" Do you think it could happen here?

A: I'll give you a cynical answer. We have the Negroes ahead of us. If it came to anything like racial violence, I think it would hit them first.

01:07:30 I don't think it could happen here. I don't agree with those who say that you have to be an active Jew because ONLY THE Jews will stand by you.

01:08:00 I think there are others who would. And I don't think the RADICAL RIGHT IS ACTUALLY ANTI-SEMITIC.

01:08:30 Is there anything you would like to tell us to prevent it from happening here?

01:09:00 The basic problem for German was the economic upheaval that was CAUSED AFTER THE WAR. So I think we all have to be for social equality and social rights.

01:09:30 When I read about the homeless, and that poverty is going up and up, for a rich country like this its shameful.

01:10:00 Everybody is afraid to raise taxes, and we put the money into armaments, which does nothing for anybody.

01:10:30 Interv.: You know that another part of this project is about the internment of Japanese. Do you have any comments on that?

01:11:00 I think it was very wrong and that they should get compensation..

01:11:30 Some sign that we are sorry. Of course its the

taxpayers who have to come up with the money.

Q: Did you know any Japanese when you lived in Seattle?

A: Yes, the milkman. Now he has an import business.

01:12:00 Yes, I knew about the internment camps when I was in Seattle. I was working for a very shrewd man.

01:12:30 And he came home with beautiful vases he got for 25¢ and 50¢. It was shameful. As an immigrant only a couple of years in the country, I thought the government knew what it was doing.

01:13:00 I was very pro-government at the time. I believed them about the Rosenberg case.

01:13:30 Went into the army in Feb. of '43, got out two years and eight months later. Served in U.S.

01:14:00 Wandering question from someone off stage.

01:14:30 The question wanders on : How come we only interned the Japanese, but Germany went further.

01:15:00 Q: How did it get to the point of extermination?

01:15:30 It happened gradually. No one wanted to take the Jews, and they wanted to get rid of them. I imagine they didn't want to feed them.

01:16:00 Nonsense from the bleachers.

01:16:30 If the Japanese had come in here, there would have been a lot of problems.

01:17:00 They just knocked off a yellow-skinned person in Detroit.

01:17:30 When I came over here, I thought the dogs were more friendly. Perhaps they are better fed, and people are more relaxed.

01:18:00 Interv: And now we have the problem with pit bulls and other kinds of thins.

Res: And how you can say that we are going to lower taxes and raise the defense budget.

01:18:30 Q: Why did you consent to do the interview?

01:19:00 Though I don't belong to B'nai B'rith I approve of the project. We have to be vigilant and I appreciate what they are doing. Its important that we are vigilant, not just for Jews but for fair treatment.

01:19:30 Q: Have you heard of the liberation of Dachau by the 522nd?

01:20:00 A: It was very moving. I drove by Dachau in a car. It was four or five years ago. When I saw the big sign, I cried and cried.

01:20:30 I saw a series on educational television and when the Americans come in and rescue the prisoners, that's when I break down.

01:21:00 Three-way irrelevant conversation.

01:21:30 Res is asked to repeat his comments about the liberation of Dachau by Japanese-American troops.

01:22:00 Does so. Thanks
.END.