

-TITLE-OTTO ORENSTEIN
-I_DATE-
-SOURCE-HAWAII HOLOCAUST PROJECT
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-DURATION-
-LANGUAGES-
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Otto Orenstein was born in Vienna, Austria on July 16, 1921. He is married to Clara and has been married for 38 years. He was not married prior to the outbreak of the war. He was seventeen years old when he left. His father was Ernest Orenstein (no middle name) and was born February 8, 1892 in Vienna. His father worked for one of the two biggest banks in Vienna. His mother was Vdenka Pollak Orenstein (Czech).

She was born in a small village outside Vienna on September 9th, 1895. His mother's father was Czech: Hugo Pollack His mother's mother was from Hungary: Techla Pollack His father's father was from Austria: Adolph Orenstein His father's mother was from Poland: Sarah Orenstein So Otto is a perfect example of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. He has one younger brother (five years younger - he lives in Honolulu after having lived in California and was born in Vienna. Otto's education prior to leaving Vienna: He went to for the first four grades, then to Gymnasium for five years and then to Handel's Business College until the Nazis came over and all the Jews were expelled from all the schools - after March 11, 1938. In Austria he attended synagogue regularly - they had religious education for Catholics, Jews and Protestants. They had religious classes once a week and on Saturday afternoon required attendance at temple which was in the same district in which he lived. He attended faithfully and there were no problems. This was long before the Nazis came, of course. If you wanted a good grade, you attended. His teacher was also the Rabbi of the synagogue and knew who was there. At that time he really didn't experience any anti-Semitic experiences in going to the synagogue. There was anti-Semitism in Austria at that time, but he didn't experience any overt experiences. His family was not observant at all. They did observe some holidays but neither parent was religious. Prior to the outbreak of the war, September 1, 1939, Austria was occupied by the Nazis on March 11, 1938 and things were fairly unpleasant. So on December 28, 1938, he left Vienna and went to Cologne to try to cross the border illegally into Belgium with the husband of his grandmother's non-Jewish maid and spent one week in Cologne - made three attempts and on the third one they were lucky enough to get across. Some Belgian farmers smuggled them to Brussels and gave them money for a railroad ticket.

Went to Antwerp - he had a relative who went to Antwerp several months earlier, so he went to see him. He showed him where to go and what to do. He lived in Belgium... his whole family had applied for an American Visa to come to America. In those days the quota was low and applicants were high, so you knew you had to wait a number of months and years. He waited it out. His younger brother eventually went to England and went to school there and after living through the blitz, finally came to America and his parents escaped to Norway and waited there until their turn. He was the first to arrive in America in April, 1940, and his parents came about six weeks later. His brother didn't come until December, 1940.

TAPE STOPS - BEGINS AGAIN: Going back to his sixth birthday...in 1927, his family was on vacation in a mountain not far from Vienna. His birthday was July 16 and he remembers they got newspapers from Vienna. There had been riots and burning at the Ministry Building related to political events. Clashes between the Social Democrats and the and subsequent trial and decision. A number of demonstrators in the upper echelons of the Social Democratic party were Jewish...there was only a suspicion of anti-Semitism. There had been riots and shooting and his father's father had died and his father had to go back to Vienna. The next interesting event was in 1932 involving the political situation in Austria which had changed. social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Nazis couldn't get together. Parliament was at a standstill. So the Christian Democrats decided to form a minority government and rule and freeze out the other parties. Social Democrats called a general strike on February 12, 1934, and a Civil War ensued. The Government called out the Army and police. Public housing projects were being held up. Most of the people who lived there belonged to the Social Democratic party which was the leading party in Vienna and they became fortresses - the army started to use artillery...trying to drive out the Social Democrats. There was a week of civil unrest and as a result, the Social Democratic party was banned like the Nazi party had been banned before. In his next memory from childhood, the same year he was up in Tirol (?) on summer vacation. The Nazis had an uprising in Vienna and stormed the Chancellor's office and assassinated him...there was more civil war between the Nazis and the government. As a result of this, Austria became a single party state. All other parties were banned. It became a semi-fascist state. But that wasn't enough for Germany and the next event took place on February 12, 1938. His family had planned a hike in the Vienna Woods with some friends and on the way there they saw some newspaper headlines which announced that Austrian Chancellor had been called to Berchtesgaden to meet with Hitler and Hitler intimidated him greatly and the Nazi party became the permitted party in Austria again. Personally it affected him greatly because he was a member of the Austrian boy scouts and the boy scouts threw out all the Jewish members, so he instead joined (young Macabi?). His father, when he saw the headlines, said that this was the beginning of the end and, unfortunately, he was more right than he knew.

One month later on March 11, 1938, the German Army marched into Austria and occupied the country and Austria became part of the German Reich. When they got back, there was no new anti-Semitism until after the German occupation. He had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. He has non-Jewish friends who survived the war. With the Anschluss, things were going from bad to worse. Chancellor wanted to call a plebescite. On March 11th, the Chancellor resigned and the German army took over. He remembers that day because he had gone to the business academy by that time and on Friday afternoons, they had physical education class in town and afterwards he had a Consular Academy class where he started to learn Czech. On that day in the center of town, there was a lot of tumult - discord over the plebescite. After classes, about 9:00, he could see swastika flags and all the houses on his street were decorated with swastika flags. When he got off the streetcar, he walked to his house. The streets were empty. The next morning, he went to his grandmother's apartment which was near the inner city of Vienna. He noticed planes flying overhead all morning long. Austria didn't have any air force that they knew of, so they knew they were German planes. That day and the next, there was a lot of activity. He saw Himmler drive by in an open car - and Goerring...he never got to see Hitler. Sunday, they had a great mass meeting near the Imperial Palace and Hitler spoke that day. Soon after, his father lost his job in the bank where he had worked for twenty-five years. He, with all other Jewish students were kicked out of the school they attended. One morning, there was a knock on his door and some uniformed Nazis appeared and informed them that they had been kicked out of the apartment where they had lived for thirty years because they wanted to make room for Nazi party members. They were to go to live in the basement of the villa of a Jewish merchant in the next district. They opened the windows, put everything out on trucks and moved it to their new residence. But they decided not to live there. Conditions were not good - just a rumpus room with a small toilet, not a real kitchen, just some hot plates. They decided to move and stay with his grandmother. The situation was deteriorating. His uncle who also lived there committed suicide because he was told he was going to be arrested the next day and taken to a concentration camp. Fortunately his brother had been smart enough to escape first to Czechoslovakia and then to the U.S. and by that time he was in New York.

Concentration camps had been established in Germany since 1933 - not just for Jews, but for people the Nazi's didn't like. They knew about them. Not too many Jews had gone there beforehand and there not that many, but with the annexation of Austria, the number increased. Dachau was the most famous. Ravensbr ck was only for women. Concentration camp building started around 1938 and in 1939 with the occupation of Poland, the more infamous ones like Auschwitz, Birkenau, Treblinka were built in Poland. As a boy, he was aware of concentration camps, but the real horrors did not start until later. He had one close escape in November. A Polish Jew named Greenspan had assassinated a member of the German Embassy.

Germans used it as a pretext for Kristallnacht, the first round-up of Jews of any large magnitude. On November 11th, they received a call from the police station in the district where they were living. They ordered his father to appear at the police station. He left and about an hour or so later, some SS Gestapo men came to their apartment and said they were looking for him. Since he wasn't there, they took Otto instead and rounded up every other Jew in the vicinity and eventually loaded them on trucks and took them to an SS barracks - on the way they made sure that they took them by the temple of the local district - a Portuguese temple - it was burning. They wanted to be sure that they got the message. They took them to an SS barracks and they spent the day there and at that time there were German SS troops. In the evening, the German troops were replaced by Austrian SS. They interrogated them and he had his school pass with him and was able to prove that he was only seventeen and they let him go. Most of the people he was with that day ended up at the concentration camp at Mauthausen. A little later, an article appeared in the local paper about the conscription of local boys, 18 years or older for either the German Army or work battalions. His mother and father decided they's better get out of town. His grandmother had a maid, not Jewish, but married to a Jewish man and he was ready to leave town, so he and this man left Vienna on December 28, 1938 and went to Cologne to try to cross the border illegally into Belgium. They made their headquarters in Cologne and tried three times. The first few days they spent trying to find out how they could get across and the first time they tried, Mr. Markstein got sick. On the next try, the Gestapo ordered them back. On the third, they were finally successful and crossed the border. Belgian farmers put them up for the night and the next morning, they took them, first on foot, then by car, to Brussels. They gave them money to buy third class tickets to Antwerp. They landed in Antwerp on January 4, 1939.

How they actually crossed the border. They had no documents. Mr. Markstein went before - he was supposed to come back, but never showed up - so he went on ahead and tried to board a streetcar, but the border police said "what are you doing here?" When he told them he was trying to go back to "zu hause" (ph), they took him to the station and interrogated him. He told them his story about Mr. Markstein and they showed him - go this way...he went that way and in the dark he and Mr. Markstein stumbled on each other. They went with Belgian farmers and was allowed to stay there, but had no money. The _____ supplied him with money and the Jewish Community of Antwerp had a soup kitchen and he lived a hand-to-mouth existence, waiting for his visa to come. This came to an end when war broke out in September of 1939 and Belgians interned refugees in various camps. He went to a camp called _____, not too far from Antwerp and stayed there until his visa finally came in March, 1940. Finally he got his visa and went to Antwerp.

In the internment camp, they had used some old army barracks. You couldn't leave the camp, but you could do what you liked. He volunteered for farm labor service because he didn't want to sit around the house all day and play cards.

It was generally a detention camp where you keep an eye on people.

He had left Vienna in December, 1938. In 1939, his brother was able to go to England and to school there. His parents stayed on because his grandmother was very sick and finally died in the summer of 1939. So his parents managed to get a visa for Norway. (is an organization to help persecuted peoples). His parents left Germany on the last ship to get out. They corresponded with him on a weekly basis since before the internment camp and sent him care packages. He applied for a passport in Vienna. His father briefed some officials. Went to the former Rothschild palace, because that was where the Gestapo headquarters were - also saw Adolph Eichmann in Vienna on the day he was standing in line for his passport - he thought that he saw him - remembered that he thought that he looked Jewish. He wasn't very high official at that time. He got passports - they wanted to come to America because his mother had met Mrs. Pickford. In the Spring of 1937, King George VI was crowned after his brother abdicated and a school teacher from Honolulu, Mrs. Pickford, used the occasion for a trip around the world to go to the coronation and on the way she passed through Vienna. She was on the streetcar that his mother was on and his mother saw her struggling - she didn't speak German. He mother helped her to find a pension and took her around Vienna a little bit and that December, they exchanged Christmas cards with her. When the Nazis came and it became, imperative to get out, his mother wrote letters and wrote to Mrs. Pickford too. Mrs. Pickford wasn't all that wealthy, but she had a wealthy friend, Mrs. Caroline C. Westerfeld and Mrs. Westerfeld gave them the affidavits and that is how they happened to end up in Hawaii. They even stayed with her when they got there for about a month in a very nice big house with a dining room big enough to hold a ballroom in it. Her brother had a house two doors down which later became the Elks club. In 1932, they weren't smart enough to know it was time to get out. In Belgium, they were waiting for passports. The quota was not very large in Vienna, so for that reason, he went to Belgium to wait for the visa...to be out of Germany and to wait for the visa in a neutral and peaceful place except it did not stay neutral and peaceful for too much longer. He was the first to come to America and after he had left Belgium, six weeks later the Nazis had overrun that. His parents had lived in Norway in the meantime, and they almost didn't make it out because their ship - they were supposed to board the ship in Oslo, but at that time, there were already British troops in Norway and the British would not let them board because the only passport they had was German so they got everything straightened out and had to rush by railroad to Bergen, another port where they finally did board the ship and it was a very good thing because one day later, the Nazis invaded Norway and they would have caught them if they didn't make it. So, they came to New York and they all waited there. In July, they finally started the request by way of Cleveland and San Francisco. On the Monterey on July 15, 1940, they landed in Honolulu and the next day was his birthday.

In the Honolulu Advertiser on July 16th, there is a front page article about his parents and some of the Norwegian artifacts which they brought back with them. He was the first to arrive in New York on April 4th and stayed at Stephen Weiss's house, a temporary shelter for refugees. He stayed there for about six weeks. A few weeks later, his parents who had left Norway just in time came to New York and stayed there. A little later they got an apartment on West 86th Street near the River and stayed there until July 1st when they left New York. His brother was there - he had gone to school in England and in December, 1940, he was on one of the children's transports that went from England to America, Canada in his case the U. S. He himself came on a French ship. It was wartime already and the ship was blacked out but aside from the perils of submarines, it was a regular ship. Had gotten a passport in Vienna already. Had to go to Antwerp to go to the American Consulate to get his visa. From there he went to the train to Paris and in Paris there were under police surveillance. They were just changing trains from one station to the other, on the way they stopped and fed them lunch in one of the cafes and went by train to San

, the harbor from which the French ship left and they boarded the ship and that night they left. All the family had German passports. When they finally arrived in Honolulu, his father, who had been working for a bank for thirty years, got a job as an accountant. Worked on various army posts. On December 7, the next day he was told because he was an enemy alien because of his passport, he could no longer work for the army. But that wasn't all. He himself was working for the newly opened Sears Roebuck at the time and went in on Monday, December 8th and worked his eight-hour day and when he came home he found that the FBI was waiting for him - rounding up his parents and him and taking them down to an internment camp. After a few days, all the people who were imprisoned ended up on San Island. They spent the next few months there. Men and women were separated and his mother ended up being the leader of the womens' side. His father was let go relatively early. They had a good record on him. Then they let his mother go and finally a few days later, he was let go too. They then went to the big island of Hawaii where his father found a job on one of the sugar plantations. His being Jewish made no difference.

[HE NOW TALKS OF THE THREE ITEMS HE BROUGHT WITH HIM: COPY OF HIS BIRTH CERTIFICATE TRAIN TICKET - BRUSSELS TO ANTWERP STUDENT CARD THE PASSPORT WAS GERMAN WITH A BIG RED J STAMPED ON IT TO IDENTIFY THE BEARER AS JEWISH - EVERY MAN WAS GIVEN A JEWISH LAST NAME]

He has talked to his family about his experiences. Friends and non-Jews ask questions - a lot following the showing of the Movie Holocaust. They wrote some articles about the Jewish people in Honolulu that had been through that and one was about him. He was working at the phone company at that time and they interviewed him. He doesn't generally talk about it. Just reacts to questions. He had never made a secret of his Jewishness. He has not experienced any anti-Semitism in Honolulu. Re discussion with non-Jewish people after the showing of the movie Holocaust.

As a result of the article appearing in the paper, a number of people wanted to know more and to know if it was true.

END OF TAPE

Shows the picture of his birth certificate and his student card which got him out of concentration camp and the train ticket which got him from Brussels to Antwerp.

Early experiences in Vienna. On his birthday, he had a significant event. Went to school in Vienna, first to Kindergarten and went to school near where he lived. After 10th year, went to Gymnasium - Greek and Latin high school. In 1937 went to , business high school in Vienna. In 1938, the German border was a bit away. They were circling around and there was the impression that there were hundreds and hundreds of planes and there were really only dozens. On Sunday, March 13, there was a mass meeting on the Danube canal. So ships could land in the heart of the city. He saw Goerring - he was in his grandmother's apartment and had a good view - tens of thousands of people standing,cheering - giving the Nazi salute. The meeting was well prepared. When he walked home that Friday night, many buildings had swastika flags already. The swastika flag was illegal until about a month earlier.

[STUDENT CARD APPEARS ON SCREEN]

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION

CLOSE-UP OF HIS SIGNATURE

CLOSE-UP OF TRAIN TICKET
.END.