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-CONTENTS-

Richard Strauss was born in Mains, Germany, in 1924. He grew up in Germany and Italy. He has worked most of his life in the hotel food industry. He was not married during the war.

His first recollections are from his school years in Germany in the 1930's. He went to German public school. Life was OK; he heard an occasional anti-Semitic slogan from his schoolmates. Things were fine until 1933, when Hitler was elected. His father had been active in the Social Democratic party. On the night of the elections, his father's political "cronies" told him he should leave Germany immediately, which he did. The very next day, the Gestapo came looking for his father to "interrogate" him; interrogation meant being taken to some room, made to talk, and then sent to concentration camps, which were already being set up in 1933. There were camps near his town, camps like Ostraven and Ludwigshaven. These were not death camps like Bergen-Belsen, but people were held there, some were killed, and many others were mutilated and then released, but they had become vegetables. The first prisoners were mostly communists and other labor parties, and also a few Jews. He was 6 or 7 at this time.

The first restraints against Jews came in 1935. Jewish children couldn't go to the German gymnasium (high school) unless they could prove their fathers had been on the front lines in World War I. Strauss's grandfather had been an officer in the Prussian Army, and had been wounded in the first weeks of the battle, so Strauss could have gone to gymnasium if he wanted. He didn't because of the changes in Jewish economic life. He was taken to Italy. In Germany, Jewish owned businesses were being taken away from the Jews. The Germans would have internal revenue officers review the bookkeeping of a Jewish business. They would find "errors" and then force the owners to sell their businesses to interests of the Nazi party for a "friendship price," which would be along the lines of 120 Marks for a business worth over 1 million Marks. The owner would then be taken to a concentration camp unless he held a valid visa to leave Germany. Strauss's family was in a special situation: his great uncle had started a wine exporting business.

This business brought hard currency into Germany. His family travelled in America, Switzerland, Italy and England on business. Germany was bankrupt at the time, and the world markets would not accept German Marks. Hitler created the Sparmark, usable only in Germany. But hard currencies were still necessary, so that Germany could buy things like oil. The Strausses business dealt one-on-one with its customers, not with wholesalers, so that the Nazis couldn't take it over and still be able to run it. The Strausses customers included barons, dukes, and even the American counsel-general to Italy. Therefore, the Strausses were allowed to continue running their business. His uncle could leave the country at will on business, but his wife and children had to stay in Germany to ensure he would return.

Strauss's father was still involved with the company, but he had left the country before the restrictions were enacted, so the Germans made little effort to bring him back as long as the money kept coming in. The family kept the business going until 1938, until Kristallnacht. After Kristallnacht, everything went "kaput." His mother and father were divorced, and part of the settlement was a generous financial settlement for his mother, so she had enough to live on independent of the business.

In 1933, Strauss began attending the Jewish school in Mains instead of the German public school. Former schoolmates were in Hitler Youth uniforms. They would see him on the street and yell "Jud, Jud," (Jew, Jew) at him. He played with the children of an Obersturmbanfuhrer (equivalent of a colonel) of the SR who lived downstairs from them. In 1935, the parents told the children to stop playing with him. The family was still polite inside the house, but outside the house, they wouldn't acknowledge the Strausses.

As part of the examination of the Jewish businesses, the passports of those involved were confiscated. The Nazis didn't realize that Strauss had a child's passport, so it was not taken. When his father found out that their business was being reviewed, he had his mother send him to Basel, where his father picked him up and took him to Italy. There he was placed in a boarding school from 1935-1938. His life was pleasant there, and he had no problem with the Italian children. In 1938, Mussolini enacted anti-Semitic laws, including one that required all foreign born Jews to leave the country within 3 months. He and his father left; he was returned to his mother in Germany, to attend the Jewish school that was still open until it could be arranged for him to leave to somewhere else. He returned to Germany in August 1938. Kristallnacht was November 10, 1938. He believes the Germans were waiting for an excuse to orchestrate Kristallnacht.

Three weeks before it happened, all the Polish Jews in Germany were sent back to Poland. A man in Paris, Greenspan, was angry because his parents were among those sent back, and so he shot Neurad at the German Embassy in Paris. The Germans used this shooting to orchestrate Kristallnacht.

His father had gone to Switzerland in 1938, waiting for a visa to Cuba. Once in Cuba, he tried to get into the United States. But he was unable to get in because of the quota. He then went to Australia and lived in Melbourne with friends who had immigrated there from Germany in 1934. His father arrived in Australia in 1940.

His mother and he realized Germany wasn't a safe place for him, but thought that he'd have a better chance of getting an American visa in Germany. His mother thought of Germany as the land of Schiller and Goethe, the place where she had good friends and a nice apartment. The laws that stopped Jews from being doctors to Gentiles or from being lawyers or judges didn't affect her. But Kristallnacht did; once Kristallnacht happened, she began working seriously for a visa for herself to emigrate to the U.S.

When he returned to Germany in 1938, he was that more people his age were in the Hitler Youth. His circle of friends was restricted primarily to Jewish people. He took this in stride. They were left pretty much alone. He could go and visit the workers at the business. The people in the apartment were nice to them. They weren't allowed to eat in restaurants or go to theaters, so they ate at home. The stores had signs in the windows saying they didn't want Jews as customers, but some store owners would call and say the signs were only there because they had to be, and that if they wanted to come shop there, ask for a certain person, and that person would help them. He felt kind of honored by that. He felt safe on the streets until Kristallnacht.

On Kristallnacht, before anything actually happened, one of the workers from the business drove in front of their apartment and honked the horn. When his mother went down to talk to the man, the man told her to get Strauss, some money and some warm clothes, and that he would drive them to a park because he liked them. He was a member of the Nazi party, but only because it was required of him. They went to the park, not knowing why he had brought them there. They stayed there all night. In the morning, they began walking back. As they got into the city, they passed a few Jewish home, and the windows were smashed and the furniture was thrown all over the place. Many people had been arrested. As they got nearer to the center of town, they saw more homes with smashed windows and furniture everywhere. The largest department store in town was Jewish owned, and the display windows had been smashed. There had been a little looting, but the Nazis prevented it for the most part, because they knew that the Germans who would eventually take over would be able to sell the merchandise. They walked past the synagogue, which was in flames. They saw people being "arrested" by thugs. Old Jewish women were being forced to sweep up the broken glass. The police just stood by. The fire fighters were at the synagogue, but only to make sure that the flames did not spread to any German homes.

Strauss and his mother witnessed all this, walking home, hoping to avoid being accosted by the thugs. The thugs had been brought in from another city, so the Jews of Mainz would not know who had done the destruction. Some of the townspeople were very supportive of what the thugs had done. The Jews had no place to turn for help.

Later that afternoon, they returned to their house, which had not been damaged. They attributed that to the fact that they lived above the Obersturmbannführer, who probably did not want any disturbance there. After Kristallnacht, the family downstairs would not talk to them at all, but they were not nasty. Soon after they got home, the local rabbi called them and asked that if their home was not destroyed if they would take in some homeless people. They took in four homeless people for three or four months, until the furor died down. These were people they didn't know, from small towns that were now displaying signs like "Gottscheim ist Judenfrei", "Gottscheim is free of Jews." It was inconvenient to have these people in their home, but they did it because everyone who had a home left took in the homeless.

After Kristallnacht, his mother wrote to her sister in the U.S. to ask for an affidavit so that they could immigrate to the States. An English Rotary Club started a program to bring German children out of Germany. The Germans allowed children under 16 to leave. He was 14 at the time, and was able to get on one of the transports. On August 2, 1937, his mother took him to the railway station. He is unable to describe how he was feeling and how she must have been feeling. She knew as she put him on the train that she probably would never see him again. They went to Holland. At the border the German guards got off, and Dutch ones got on the train. At the first small town, the children were given refreshments, and then they continued on to catch the boat to England. He did not know any of the other children in the transport, or the people who were to pick him up in England. They had a store in Portsmouth. They had a boarding house for their employees. He lived there and worked as a window dresser's apprentice. He was happy, except that he couldn't correspond with his mother, and did not know where his father was. In the meantime, his mother got a visa. In November 1941, her number was called, and she was on the last train out of Germany. The Nazis let Jews with valid visas go, because they considered them one less Jew they had to feed until they killed them. She caught the last boat from Portugal to America before war was declared. He didn't know where she was at this time.

Before Hitler attacked Holland, he sent in the Fifth Column. The British were afraid that the German refugees were another Fifth Column, so on May 10, 1940, they interned all the refugees in England. They interned 90,000 people from age 16 to 65 years old, but had no where to put them. The internees were kept in warehouses and other places until camps were built. Three weeks after he was interned, he was sent to a camp on the Isle of Mann with other Jews and German refugees. Soon after, England decided to free up as many soldiers as possible, and so decided to send the internees to

Canada.

He went to Glasgow and was put on a ship, where he and all the other transportees were treated horribly. The ship's captain's wife and son had been killed in German bombing raids on Coventry, and he decided to make the refugees pay. They had to take off all their valuables and put them in a pile. One old man was unable to remove his wedding ring, so a guard cut his finger off to get the ring. They were put into holds designed for 120 people; there were 500-600 people per hold. Some were able to get the 120 hammocks; the rest had to sleep wherever they could. The first few nights were especially bad, because most of the people were unused to sea travel and there was no fresh air, so many people got sick. They were allowed 10 minutes of fresh air a day; while on deck, the soldiers would throw glass on the deck which they would have to walk on in their bare feet. A few people committed suicide. Just off the coast of Newfoundland, the boat was ordered to go to Australia instead. In Bombay, eight internees were taken off. It turned out that two of them were secret service agents sent to watch how the internees were being treated. They made their report, and the entire crew was arrested when they returned to Liverpool, but that didn't help the internees going to Australia.

Reaching Australia, they were taken into custody by the Australia military. They were put into internment camps, ready for them. They were given preprinted postcards on which they could indicate that they were OK or not OK, and send to someone. He sent his to the friends of the family in Australia, not knowing his father was with them. His father got the card, and arranged to visit his son. His father resolved to get him a visa to America. The consul just happened to be the same man that was the consul to Italy, a former customer of the family business. The consul could give Strauss a visa, but only if he could come to the consulate, which he couldn't do. His father went on to America. The Australians realized they only had one division to guard all of Australia, and so they gave the internees a choice -- go back to England and join the British Army, stay in the camp, or join the Australian Army. He joined the Australian Army in 1942, at age 17, and was discharged in 1947. He became an interpreter at the rank of sergeant. He guarded POW's captured in North Africa that were interned in Australia. He had to stay in the Army until all the POW's were released. Some of the POW's were politically active, and so he was forced to wait until Britain was ready to handle taking them back, which was in 1947. He went to the consulate, picked up the visa that had been waiting for him, and arrived in San Francisco on December 4, 1947. His mother was there. She found out that he was in Australia when she arrived in the States in 1941, because his father picked her up when she arrived in New York. Mother and son corresponded while he was in the camp and in the Army. Once in the US, he went to New York to visit his father. He got an apprenticeship at the Biltmore Hotel. After three years, he went to San Francisco to be with his mother, and began working at the Plaza Hotel. He was promoted and for a while worked for the Mormon-owned Hotel Utah, where the other employees tried to make him to convert to Mormonism.

He then went to Hawaii with the Sheraton chain. He received several promotions. After some time, he decided to go back to New York, where he still had many family members. He worked in Leona Helmsley's hotel, but didn't like her very much. He returned to Hawaii, where he worked until retirement. He now does volunteer work.

While guarding the Italian and German prisoners, the POW's didn't know he was Jewish. The Germans would ask him why a good German boy with a Rhineland accent would join the Australian Army, but he would refuse to answer. He wouldn't talk to them about the German treatment of Jews, because he didn't want to start an argument; also, since they were with the Africa Corps, they didn't have any connection to the concentration camps.

He has witnessed a few cases of anti-Semitism in the US, mostly from French chefs he's worked with. He refuses to respond to them to prevent provoking an argument.

He remembers breaking out into a cold sweat while watching the War and Remembrance episode dealing with Auschwitz, thinking that the could have ended up there. His uncle, his uncle's wife and his grandfather went to Dachau. His grandfather had a German maid who had tended to him since 1924; she was sent to the camp with him and received his ashes. He doesn't know how his uncle and aunt died.

He first heard of the concentration camps in 1933, and of the death camps in 1938. He doesn't know what reaction he had, except that he felt very sorry; he had seen people who came out of the early concentration camps as vegetables.

To prevent another Holocaust, he feels that people must be educated that all people are human and have a right to live. The most horrifying experience he had was watching the Germans force the Jews to clean up the glass the Germans had shattered on Kristallnacht.
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