

Fritz Schonbach
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Abstract

Fritz (Frederic) Schonbach was born in Vienna, July 1, 1920. His father owned a successful manufacturing and wholesale business, and the family was very well off. Fritz went to a private school until Nazis came into Austria. Parents enrolled him in small Swiss school, and then they went to Italy where Fritz joined them. In 1939 Fritz went to London, and parents went to Argentina. When England went to war, Fritz was interned with other German and Austrian refugees, and then sent to Australia. He volunteered for the Australian army, and for four years he loaded and unloaded freight. After his discharge in 1946, Fritz used his military benefits to enroll in art school in Sydney, where he met his wife. Three years later they hitchhiked around Europe and then reunited with parents in Argentina until 1959 when he, his wife, and children came to Washington. Most of Fritz's parents' families perished in the Holocaust.

TAPE 1
SIDE A

:29

Fritz (Freidrich) Schonbach was born in Vienna July 1, 1920.
Fritz was an only child.

1:08

Fritz's family was very well off. His father, who had served in the

Austrian army, started his own manufacturing and wholesale business.
"We played down our relative wealth and lived modestly in an apartment near the city until Hitler took over Austria."

3:31

Fritz went to a private school until March 1938. Fifty percent of the students were Jewish. When Nazis came in, Jewish students told to go home.

5:57

Only Jewish teacher was Fritz's homeroom teacher who emigrated
To Iowa. Fritz is still in touch with his widow.
The school was completely integrated. Jewish and non-Jewish students were friends.

8:06

All schools were regulated, including private schools. So when pro-Nazi regime came in Jewish students told to find other schools.

Fritz' school was only one that did not dismiss Jewish students. The only difference was that in his school, the classrooms were divided: Jewish students on one side, non-Jewish students on other side.

12:01

In 1934 Nazis put tremendous pressure on Austria. Everyone knew what was happening. Anti-Semitism in Austria was "a given" and ran very deep. The socialist party leader was assassinated.

15:14

Fritz describes the many cultural amenities of Vienna. He also was a competitive swimmer and was a member of the Jewish swimming team. H could have gone to the 1936 Olympics, but decided not to go.

Nazi organization became stronger and started a terror campaign.

Many Austrians, including some of Fritz's friends turned up as Nazis.

21:30

Fritz's parents were somewhat religious but not very observant.

TAPE 1

SIDE B

27:40

Fritz said that everyone knew about concentration camps by 1934-35, especially Dachau. Father had established a small bank account in Switzerland and in 1937 took his wife and Fritz to meet the bank manager.

When Anschluss came, even Austrians were amazed.

32:07

Parents decided to get Fritz out of Austria. Everybody was trying to get into another country. People were lined up in front of every foreign consulate.

Many people tried to get affidavits from other countries. Then found out that borders were closed in many countries.

34:00

Parents sent Fritz to a small Swiss school. "It was like arriving in heaven." After a year he enrolled in class to pass an Oxford world exam.

Parents and relatives finally got out to Italy. Italians were very lenient.

38:05

Fritz joined parents in Italy and they then in 1939 permitted him to go to London.

Parents went to Argentina.

In London, Fritz teamed up with group of refugees to rent house in London suburb. He enrolled in art school. He always wanted to be an artist.

42:41

All Austrian and German refugees were brought before a tribunal to decide whether they would be interned.

When war broke out, English did not understand that Nazis goal was to eliminate Jews. German and Austrians in England were divided into three categories: (a) immediate internment, (b) free until further notice, and (c) friendly alien not to be interned.

Fritz was in category (b).

47:07

When war broke out, everyone was issued gas masks. Although Fritz was exempt until further notice, his landlady denounced him because she heard him speak German. When tribunal questioned him, he was dismissed. But in spring 1940, when Germany was occupying many European countries, Britain needed a scapegoat. Then almost everyone was interned.

TAPE 2

SIDE A

: 26

Fritz describes mechanics of internment.

May 14, 1940, Fritz was picked up at school, taken to his home to get a few things, then taken to police station and again interrogated.

Internees were bussed to a big stable and ended up at big racecourse for two to three weeks. Heavily guarded.

6:42

Very bored. Group of young people tried to fill time. Fritz was glad to be socializing and connected. Everyone did chores to earn money for food.

12:36

A few weeks later, transported to Manchester, then sent to Isle of Mann.

17:04

A few weeks later, internees ordered to go to Canada. Traveled for eight weeks, realized that they were going south to Australia.

Fritz had time to draw, and he made caricatures and cartoons of people on the ship. Everyone liked his drawings.

Became good friend of older man who taught him virtue of patience.

Other prisoners were not Jews but were political refugees and had been in German prisons.

40:50

Landed in Australia, put on train, and went to sheep grazing country where there were two internment camps that each housed 1,000 prisoners. Very agreeable environment.

Fritz and two other boys put out a camp newspaper twice a week. He did many drawing and cartoons. Very popular. Many of his subjects were of the camp and events.

49:30

Fritz was depressed. Wanted to be fighting Nazis and used in the war effort.

51:01

Fritz and parents finally located each other, although they did not reunite until several years after the war.

56:45

Fritz joined the Australian forces as a volunteer in the labor corps auxiliary. Very good leadership. For three or four years they unloaded and loaded goods and at least felt like they were part of the military effort.

TAPE 3

SIDE A

5:54

At end of war, Fritz stayed in army for another year. The labor corps was considered essential.

9:34

In 1946 Fritz was discharged from army and was eligible for the Australian GI Bill of Rights benefits. He enrolled in art school in Sidney for three years. He loved Sidney because it reminded him of Europe. He met his wife in Sydney; they hitchhiked through Europe, and ended up in London.

At end of 1950, father sent tickets for them to come to Argentina where he and mother were living.

16:02

Fritz and wife lived in Buenos Aires from 1951-1959. They had two children. His parents helped support them.

Fritz came to Washington, and in 1960 his wife and children joined him.

17:01

Almost all of father's family who lived in Poland perished in Holocaust. Some members of his mother's family survived.

19:30

He has reconnected with a few cousins.