

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum  
Interview with Hermann Kosak  
June 18, 1997  
Margaret Garrett, Interviewer

Tape 1 of 2, Side A

(The first minute of the tape was recorded in error and is not part of the testimony. Testimony begins after slating. MG)

Name at birth: Hermann Kosak. Date of birth: May 2, 1924. Place of birth: Vienna, Austria.

Mr. Kosak's earliest memory is going to temple with his grandfather early in the morning and late at night. He was the only child at the temple. The others were old men praying. His Aunt Minna (phon sp) lived with the family as did his youngest uncle, Jacob, who was called Kobe (phon sp.) His grandmother died in 1917 so he never knew her. He never knew the grandparents on his father's side because his mother and father were divorced when he was two years old. His mother refused to talk about it. By the time he was four his mother remarried. From the ages of two to four he lived with his grandfather. He also remembers as a child walking along the Danube, which was nearby. He remembers going to kindergarten. This was his first encounter with anti-Jewish sentiments. He didn't know what it was but he was called dirty Jew and hit.

On his fourth birthday his Uncle Jacob gave him a little vehicle. He was taken away from his grandfather by his mother. She had remarried, Emil Kaplan, who was an Austrian veteran of the First World War. Emil Kaplan had been injured in the war. Because of that he had difficulties walking and difficulties with his stomach when he became excited. Hermann's mother and step-father had a hard time finding a place to live. Austria was in economic distress; it was the twenties. They finally found an apartment, rather small, one kitchen and one room, which was their living room and bedroom. He was a happy child. He didn't feel deprived. He missed his grandfather and his aunt. They came to visit weekly or monthly. His grandfather was very orthodox and concerned about religion. When his grandfather came Hermann had to start learning to read Hebrew. By the time he was five or six he read Hebrew. His grandfather taught him. His mother and step-father were not as religious. They did keep

Kosher. They did not eat pork but he thinks mixing milk and meat was not a problem.

Then Hermann was in a new kindergarten. There were hardly any or no Jewish children. The next year he went into the regular public school system. A large percentage of the students did not care but about ten percent of kids always tried to hurt somebody. In any class there is always the big kid who picks on the little kids. Here it was picking on the Jew, that was the pastime. There were no other Jewish kids in the class at that time. Later there was Richard Greenberger that he knew from school or from religious school. The school was Catholic. Austria was a Catholic country. When they came to class in the morning they had to stand at attention while the class recited the Pater Noster. Then they sat down and the day began. Hermann was the only one who didn't participate. He would stand up but he didn't participate. For the Jewish kids there was religious school on Wednesday afternoon for a couple of hours. There they got instruction in the Old Testament. There was a teacher who would read in Hebrew. Regular school was from eight in the morning until one in the afternoon. Religious school was after this. One afternoon a week they had gymnastics after school. Saturday morning they had arts and crafts.

They had heavy homework--two or three hours a day. There was very little time to play. There were few other kids to play with. There were some Jewish children in the neighborhood. Across the street was a Jewish butcher shop. The butcher had four daughters. The youngest was Hermann's sister's age. Hermann spent a lot of time with a retarded boy who lived next door. Hermann's family lived in an apartment building. There were a lot of apartment buildings with no space between them. Hermann's sister was born in March 1928; she was almost four years younger. Her name was Margit. Usually he played with the boy next door, whom he felt sorry for. Nobody wanted to play with the boy next door because he was retarded. He was a very sweet boy, about Hermann's age. The boy next door liked to collect butterflies. So Hermann started to collect butterflies but soon got sick of this because they had to kill them. They stuck the butterfly's head in denatured alcohol. It would wobble around for a minute and then be dead. Then they mounted it with a pin on a piece of cardboard. Mostly they went on walks. Vienna has lots of parks. Schonbrunn was a ten minute walk--a big castle that became a public park. It was an attractive place for children because it was very large and lots of variety of places to play. They played Indians and cowboys, running

around mostly, playing catch. They had little time for playing.

His family on weekends often went to visit family. They did not have a radio. They did not have a telephone. There was no television. They went to the movies maybe twice a year. Hermann's step-father had a rather large family. One of his brothers, Simon, had four children; two boys who were about Hermann's age: Herbert who was Hermann's age and Ernst who was two or three years younger. It was fun for Hermann to go visit them. On weekends in the summer the family went picnicking. His mother would prepare a basket with boiled eggs and bread and herring and they would take streetcar 49 to \_\_\_\_\_, the last stop and then they were in the Vienna Woods and they could go in the woods and picnic there and it was pleasant. They sat around and watched nature and listened to the birds.

Hermann's step-father by profession designed the top portion of shoes . He couldn't keep a job because he was suffering from his war wound. He had surgery several times. His mother did not work so they were rather poor. They received monthly payments from Hermann's natural father for Hermann. Hermann only saw his natural father twice. Hermann corresponded with him. Hermann thinks his step-father received some compensation for his war injury. It was hard except Hermann didn't know it. He didn't know he missed the radio and the telephone. He didn't know that some people ate meat more than every two weeks. He never went hungry. They had bread and vegetables. He always liked breakfast. They had hot chocolate and rolls. They had their big dinner at 1:30, after Hermann came home from school. It was often vegetables and soup and bread. In the evening they had leftovers or sandwiches. He was not unhappy about it. He was satisfied. He thinks he was healthy and his sister was healthy. He had the measles and mumps.

It became more difficult in the thirties. There was a Nazi movement that was illegal. He became aware and uneasy about Nazis in the thirties when he was about ten. In 1934 there was a drastic change. There was an uprising in July, a Socialist uprising. Hermann and his family woke up in the middle of the night and heard shooting and machine guns. They found out when daylight came there was no electricity and no gas and some sort of revolution. It lasted only two or three days because Mr. Dollfuss, the Premier of Austria, suppressed it. A lot of people were killed and arrested. A few months later Dollfuss was assassinated by the Nazis, who tried to take over the Austrian government. They did not succeed at

that time.

The Nazi movement grew more and more. They were forming gangs. They had youth groups. Part of the activities were to harass Jews, which they did with regularity. They would attack you if they saw you in the street, physically attack. Hermann learned to be a good runner. They would beat him. They would throw garbage at him or spit or throw things at his window. The Jews were the only tangible minority in Vienna. There were no blacks. There were very few gypsies. Hermann never knew one. Hardly any Protestants. Hardly any foreigners. For people who were angry and wanted to express their anger, Jews were an easy target. There was more and more of that.

Life was becoming uncomfortable for Hermann. He had to walk to school, a 15 minute walk. He had to constantly watch to see if someone was waiting for him around the corner. This was other kids. After he got to school, while the teacher was in class there was discipline. Hermann had a very good friend, William Clement. They were together in grammar school and for a total of eight years, through the equivalent of Junior High School in the US. Clement was a very solid friend in his class and he protected Hermann. He was bigger and taller and stronger. Clement had some terrific fist fights because of Hermann. Clement proved that he was capable so Hermann was left alone while he was at school. But after school they went opposite ways, so Hermann was on his own then.

The next drastic change was that Hermann joined the Boy Scouts and the choir at the synagogue. He was one of eight boys in the choir. They all belonged to a Boy Scout Club. They met at the synagogue. They had uniforms and went on long hikes on weekends and camping. This was a different kind of experience and a socializing experience. He started in the choir when he was eight and was involved until he was twelve. At that time he started studying for his Bar Mitzvah with his step-father's father, who was a cantor and orthodox. His thirteenth year was full. That was 1937. It was getting worse and worse. The Nazis were getting stronger in Austria. The kids became more brazen. They knew the teachers who were Nazis and who were not. Hermann knew too. There was a teacher who taught mathematics. Hermann learned that the teacher walked the same way he did for quite a way to get the streetcar. It was more than half the way home. Hermann asked permission to walk with this teacher and he gladly let him walk with him. So he was lucky there.

There were two or three teachers who were Nazis. One was very outspoken. He was a history teacher in junior high school. He blamed everything on the Jews. Hermann had him for four years. He said things like the Jews were responsible for the Black Plague in the Middle Ages. He told the most horrible stories. The other Nazis teachers did not say anything. The children found out who the Nazi teachers were because they got a special distinction. They wore a special knob on their lapel to show that they were underground Nazis. It was a distinction. He was surprised that a couple of teachers turned out to be Nazis. They were always decent to him. No teacher ever hit him. After Dollfuss was assassinated he was replaced by von Seyss-Inquart, who was much more friendly toward the Nazis. Dollfuss was an Austrian patriot. The idea of Austria being part of the German nation is an old one. The idea of being part of a large nation was appealing to many Austrians. The unemployed would get gift packages from Germany. It is not surprising that the Nazi movement grew in Austria.

They knew there was something going on. There were more and more Nazis in the streets. There was talk about Austria possibly becoming part of Germany. There was supposed to be a plebiscite for the people to determine whether they wanted to be part of Germany or remain independent.

Suddenly the Germans were there. Hermann's family did not know what had taken place. They did not have a radio and the newspapers did not tell them what was going on. There were Nazi flags on all the buildings; people going into hysterics. Hermann walked around stunned. He was then thirteen. There was dancing and screaming. German soldiers were walking around and people were kissing them and dancing with them. It was like a big liberation. Hermann's family was very sad. They didn't want Hermann to be outside. He saw Hitler come in. They immediately found out that the Jews had lost their civic rights. They could not rely on the government for any assistance under any circumstances. Within three days the Jews were not allowed to own any property. It was all confiscated. The looting began immediately.

Hermann's family did not own any business. He could not go to school anymore. After several weeks the Nazis opened a school for Jews, called the Jew School. Jews could not work for the government anymore. Previously Jews were usually automatically excluded because to get a government job you had to be Catholic. Relatives of Hermann's who were in business were affected. The Nazis kept the Jews on to work in the businesses. Some people were talking about leaving. His aunt Nina was going to come to the US anyway. Just before WWII some of her siblings came to the US. She was going to join them and had already applied for a visa.

Hermann's step-father and sister had left Austria and gone to Holland where his step-father had two sisters. One had married a Dutchman and lived in Amsterdam and been joined by Hermann's younger sister. Hermann and his mother stayed behind to close the apartment. They were supposed to follow to Holland. In the meantime, in July or August, the border had been closed to Jews. Hermann and his mother sneaked out of Vienna in the middle of the night. When they arrived at the border of Holland they couldn't cross.

Before that Hermann and his mother had been robbed in their apartment by Hitler Youths, who tore the place up. The Youths also took their documents, which kept them in Vienna a while. When his mother became angry she had no fear. She went to Gestapo headquarters to complain and get their passports back. They had railroad tickets, caught a train to Aachen, got a room in a small pensione. There was a nice middle aged woman who knew they were Jewish and who let them stay there. Hermann and his mother tried to go across. The Nazis let them out with seven marks, about two or three dollars. A few hours later they were back. They decided they had to try again. They tried three or four times, different ways, and couldn't make it. They got out of Germany but not into Holland. They were out of money. There was not a Jewish community service in Aachen so they had to go to Frankfurt. They went there with great hopes. The agency in Frankfurt apologized, said they couldn't give them any money, but they could give them tickets back to Vienna.

So they wound up back in Vienna, where they had nobody left but his Uncle Victor, who was his mother's oldest brother who was an artist and lived in an artist's studio with his wife. The uncle and his wife had visas to go to France and were ready to go to Paris. They took them in. While they were there Kristallnacht happened. His mother was looking for a place to stay after Uncle Victor left. Hermann was going out to the railway station to see about tickets. They were about ready to go again. When he crossed the Danube canal he saw Nazis beating up a man terribly until he was unconscious and throwing him in a truck. All this was being photographed by an American photographer. Then Hermann saw smoke rising over the neighborhood. As he was running back to his uncle's studio his uncle was on the roof and saw a synagogue burning.

The next morning Hermann went out again and was arrested by the S.A., the brown shirts. They took him to a synagogue across the canal in the Ninth District. They had about twenty Jews there. The Jews had to carry out the charred lumber and whatever was left after the place was burned down. They had to work there all day, no food. While working there he passed other men working there and heard about the preceding night and children who had been thrown from apartment buildings into the street and people who had been thrown into the Danube and other horror stories.

When Hermann came back with the news, his mother had found a friend who would put her up. Hermann decided he would go ahead. He had read a

lot of detective stories and thought he was a big shot and had gotten special shoes with rubber soles so he could walk silently at night and had memorized the maps of the border and knew the crossings by heart. He knew how to get there. He must have gotten the maps from the library. In the meantime they found out that his father and sister had gone to Brussels from Amsterdam. His father's brother was in Brussels. Most of the people from his family who had escaped were in Brussels. The Belgians were a little more lenient than the Dutch. If you had stayed in Belgium for three months without being sent back you had a claim to stay there. Hermann told his mother he would find a way and then come for her. He was then fourteen.

Hermann went to Aachen. It took twelve hours on the train. He went to the hotel where he had stayed before. The woman there said she had no room. After going to many hotels he finally was told by a man with tears in his eyes that they were not allowed to give rooms to Jews anymore. He went back to the railway station, bought a ticket to the nearest town, went out on the quai, installed himself on a bench. Soon two Gestapo guys came along and arrested him. They wore gray rubber raincoats and gray hats. He showed them his ticket to go on the train. They said you can't sleep here, come to the waiting room. They went to the waiting room. Hermann tried to sleep.

In the morning he thought he would go back to the first hotel and saw that one of the Gestapo was trailing him. He did not want the woman at the hotel to see that a Gestapo was trailing him. To get rid of the Gestapo guy he went to a busy downtown section and kept walking around the block. He kept doing this for a couple of hours. The guy got tired of following and fell behind and Hermann was able to lose him. He went to the woman at the first hotel and asked the woman if she knew any Jewish families he could contact. She told him of a man who had a factory and then gave him something to eat. Hermann went to the man, who no longer owned the factory but was running it. They had a little house in front of it. The family said they had a son in a concentration camp and were afraid and made Hermann swear he would not come to their place if he was followed and that he would not stay more than a week. If he could promise that they would keep him. He promised. The next morning he tried to cross over to Holland again. He left his money behind because he knew if he crossed they would take his money. He was searched carefully, in every orifice, to make sure there was no diamond smuggling.



After getting out he was in no man's land. There was a Dutch border guard so to avoid the guard he walked sideways. He got through and looked for the railway. He looked for Maastricht, where Holland, Belgium, and Germany all come together. All those countries had big border guards there. He was promptly arrested by the Dutch. They took him off the train. He decided to make a fuss. He told them he didn't want to go back. He gave them the address of his father in Amsterdam. They said he had to go back. They put him in handcuffs and put chains around his ankles, and walked him outside the police station and put him on the back of a bicycle and a policeman pedaled him back to the German border. People stared at him. He had difficulty holding on to the belt of the man who was pedaling. By the time they got there it was dark. The man put him down and took off the chains and handcuffs and told him to walk down the road. He started to cry. He hadn't eaten all day and was exhausted.

Suddenly there was a flashlight in front of his face. A German voice told him to halt. It turned out to be an elderly man who was on guard there. He took him to a heated shack and gave him an apple. The man said he was getting off in an hour and he would take him to his family in Brussels on his friend's motor bike. At the motor bike owner's house the bike owner yelled at the man and said he must be out of his mind to help a Jew. The man said he would take Hermann to the street car to go back to Aachen, which he did. Hermann tried again the next day, without success. He decided the problem was that he had been trying to get on a train and that he should try to walk across and keep walking until he was deep in the country and then take a train. He would have to walk around Maastricht. He walked by a train station in Aachen and saw his mother who had just arrived. She was happy to see him. He took his mother to the people who had owned the factory. This was Friday and he said they would leave Sunday. When they stayed there they had something to eat and the people were kind.

Sunday morning he and his mother went to the German border. They walked straight into the woods toward Belgium. Suddenly he saw three border guards with dogs. He and his mother hid behind a big tree. It was December. The dogs didn't become aware. When they were out of sight they continued walking. They came to a steel mesh fence. He and his mother had one suitcase. On the other side, 15 yards away, was a 40 foot wide river. They could not swim. Hermann helped his 42 year old mother

climb the fence, threw over the suitcase, and Hermann climbed over. They walked into the river where the water was ice cold. The water came up to his neck and he was holding the suitcase over his head. They came out the other side soaking wet and took off their coats.

## Tape 2; Side A

Hermann and his mother wrung out their coats. It was very cold and they were freezing. All they knew how to do was get moving. He had it mapped out in his mind. He knew they would have to cross a railroad. His mother kept asking him whether he was sure he was going the right way. His mother asked some people whether they were going the right way. They were very friendly and told them to go in the opposite direction, which they did. Hermann then felt they were going in the wrong direction and told his mother. By now they were not so wet and not shivering so badly. They stopped and ate a chocolate bar. They discussed the direction and they turned around and went north. They walked along a highway and saw the city of-----and the railroad tracks he had been looking for. In the village was a small railroad station. They brushed themselves off. Hermann asked in German for two tickets to Brussels. The man picked up the phone and Hermann was very frightened. He heard the man talking in French on the phone. The man then sold him the tickets and Hermann realized he had been asking on the phone if they could take German money.

They got on the train to Liege where they changed to an express. The conductor punched their ticket and didn't say a word. They got off the train in Brussels. It was a city of lights and people were laughing and sounded happy. The contrast with where they had been was mind boggling. It was December 8, 1938. They looked out for policemen. They walked down the street and Hermann was afraid they were walking in the wrong direction. They took a taxi and in ten minutes they were united with his step father and sister in Brussels. (Break in taping)

Eventually they rented an apartment which was next to the railway station. They started waiting for a visa to emigrate to the US, where the family of his mother was living and his step father had a sister. In the meantime Hermann and his sister were enrolled in public school. They did not speak French and could not speak a word and were just sitting in class. Hermann thought they would be leaving for the US any day. He learned Flemish, which is easy if you speak German.

His parents decided he should learn some sort of trade. He enlisted in a trade school which was sponsored by the Jewish community. They were teaching youngsters to be locksmiths, auto mechanics, electricians, etc. The students were all Jewish immigrants and had to speak German. The

instructors spoke German mostly. The total student body was about 45 or 50. The first year they all had the same things. They had advanced math and learned to work on different kinds of machines. The second year there was a choice. At the end of Hermann's first year the Germans attacked Belgium on May 10.

Outside of school his life was better than he had had in Vienna. Belgium was a rich country. There was an abundance of food and goods. Just about every housewife had a fur coat. Stealing was unheard of. People did not lock their doors. You couldn't buy one chocolate bar because they were three for a penny. As a Jew it was paradise. The Belgian people had deviated from the Austrian in that way. He felt no anti-Semitism. They may have objected to a lot of immigrants but not because they were Jewish. His family had a private religious life in Brussels. His mother always kept the Sabbath, lit candles, said the blessing over the candles, and Saturday they were not supposed to do any work but read and behave themselves and be kind to each other. On the high holidays they would go to the synagogue.

They were not part of the Belgian Jewish community but there was an immigrant Jewish community and they had immigrant friends, people they had already known in Vienna. They were all waiting to get out, most to America, some to South America. It was very difficult to get out. The borders were closed. It took them a while to realize that, before it sank in. The American consul in Austria was not friendly. He was very brusque. There was talk about him taking money under the table for visas. The quota was very small, one a day, 365 a year. In Brussels Hermann and his family were stateless. When they applied for identity cards in Brussels they were immigrants from Austria. When the war started they had to be interned because they were enemy aliens. It was at this point that his diary begins. (Mr. Kosak has given a copy of his diary to the USHMM.) His diary is a detailed account of his life the next few years, beginning with this period.

Hermann summarizes the next few years. He enrolled in art school on a whim. His cousin, Ernest, always loved to draw. Art school was free and Hermann had nothing else to do. At that point he was not going to school; the Germans had invaded the country. Ernest did not want to go to art school alone because he could not speak French. Ernest and his family called Hermann "Harry" because Hermann was a German name. Art school

was one of the important things he did. Subsequently the assistance he got from friends he made in art school--they were his connection to the Belgian population. He had to speak French there. He did not look Jewish; his sister did not look Jewish. If you looked Jewish you could not be saved.

In 1940 at age sixteen he was five foot eight; he had shot up pretty fast. But he was very young looking for a while until he started growing a beard, when he started looking older. That became a dangerous age because as the war progressed the Germans did not only arrest Jews, they also arrested non-Jews of military age. He had to be extra careful. It was easier to be a girl to be hidden because you could not be proven Jewish if you had learned the catechism. A boy could be proven Jewish because in Europe only Jews were circumcised except rare circumstances, for medical reasons. It was a dead give away.

They lived in a state of anxiety and fear and Hermann developed a sixth sense. Hermann could walk down a street at night and know whether or not there was someone behind him. He does not know how much of this is genetic and how much is learned. He thinks it helped him to learn to be on the alert because he had to be self reliant early in life. He had no older brothers and sisters to look after him. His step-father had no particular interest in him. His step father was around but not involved and there was no bonding. Hermann took care of himself. Occasionally he had to look out for his sister. He was a little bit estranged from his mother because he held her responsible for having a step father. That was childish but it was true. So, early in life he had to make decisions for himself. When he was on his own it was not a big blow. It was a relief. He felt free in some ways. He didn't have to answer. At home he came from an old fashioned surroundings. Whenever you went out you told your mother where you were going and when you were going to be back. He had to be in bed every night at eight o'clock, even though he was sixteen years old. It was a routine. He had to get up at seven and go to bed at eight. If he wanted to see his friends, he had to ask permission. If they said no, it was no. You didn't argue. He also had a great fantasy, a great imagination. He used to read detective stories. As a child he had an imaginary friend who walked with him when he went home from school and he would talk to him. He talked to horses. They nodded their heads and he thought they understood what he was saying.

Hermann's uncle and his uncle's family were arrested in July 21, 1943, Belgium's equivalent of Independence Day. The German's were particularly vicious on holidays, not their holidays, other people's holidays. Jewish holidays they were out en masse making the holidays unpleasant. It was on that day that Hermann and his sister left home. The big impetus to do that was they were afraid that Aunt Rose might tell about them. They suspected that the people who were arrested would be questioned by the Germans. Hermann and his sister took off and he took his sister to some Belgian friends. It was no problem putting up Margit. She was a twelve year old girl. She did not look Jewish at all. She had light sandy hair and blue eyes. Her features were not Jewish. Hermann had a big problem. Being caught helping a Jew was suicide. He has undying gratitude and great admiration for the things that people did to help Jewish people. If you as much as gave a cigarette to a Jew it was a death sentence. What is so unbelievable about the whole thing is the cruelty of a civilized nation. There are Germans who are upset about this. But that a civilized nation can produce a good number of such people to be so cruel, so uncivilized is a frightening thing. The most astonishing thing is that you find people who have no good reason to help you. The Germans were constantly offering jobs to Belgians. They could have a good life. Rations were increased considerably, their income was increased considerably, they could travel in Europe. There were a percentage of people who were actively helping Jews. Margit's protectors often had Hermann for dinner. This makes you believe in something good. Hermann was able to find people to help him, sometimes on the spur of the moment. He wrote about this in his diary.

Hermann established himself in a room in Brussels and got some jobs that helped him support himself. He got a false identity and stayed in that room for a while and then decided to get out to the country. It had gotten more dangerous in Brussels and there were more and more raids. The Germans were having troubles in France, the Allies had landed. His sister was in the country. When she visited him on his twentieth birthday Hermann suggested he go to the country. He went to the country and stayed with the Colonel, Charles Henri (phon.), for close to a month. Then he went to work on a farm. Hermann believes in interference, that there are forces operating. The Colonel had sent him out of town to the farm and therefor Hermann was not with him on the day that he was killed and therefor Hermann's life was saved. Hermann's life was also saved by his step father when he received the order to report to the transport to the

concentration camp. The step father, who had given him a terrible childhood and upbringing, saved his life by going to the Jewish Committee and putting on an act and getting a relocation order, which was very unusual.

## Tape 2; Side B

Hermann had gone to the farm, as described in his diary. Previously he had worked for the Colonel for three weeks. His job was to carry a suitcase for the Colonel because the Colonel had a wooden leg. Hermann wasn't sure what he was doing but actually he was carrying dynamite. The underground was blowing up bridges on the main railway line between Germany and Paris. No train could go through there unless the bridge was fixed. The underground was made up of former soldiers in the Belgian Army. The dynamite that he was schleping was used for this. On the day that the Colonel was killed he had a boy with him carrying the suitcase. The Colonel had been detained in Brussels. They went ahead to plan to blow up the bridge without the Colonel as he was coming in on the train. The explosive was set so that it would blow up the bridge as the train came across. The Colonel was on that train and was killed. The boy that was with him had his legs broken. If Hermann had not been on the farm he would have been that boy.

The farm was a difficult time for him, as described in the diary. He was there three weeks and learned that the Germans were raiding villages looking not just for Jews but for young men. They needed manpower in Germany--in factories or German farms, slave labor. They would also pick up Jews they came across. Hermann was working like a dog and was undernourished. He left the farm and on the way back to Brussels stopped at a monastery on a retreat, as described in his diary. They would not hide anybody but it was legal to be on a retreat. His girl friend was Catholic and very religious and Hermann had been exposed to instruction. He knew the Catholic prayers and the holidays and could pass as a Catholic as long as nobody pulled his pants down. He told them he had had some difficult experiences in life and had been turned away from the faith a long time and now wanted to go on retreat and they welcomed him with open arms.

After two weeks at the monastery he went back to Brussels. It was a difficult time for Hermann because he did not know what had happened to the Colonel. The Colonel's wife was not receptive; she did not know what had happened to him. Hermann did not know where to turn. The Father Superior when he was leaving gave him 50 francs to buy a ticket to get back to Brussels. Hermann had a room in Brussels, which he was paying rent on while he was away. He also had friends there.



Hermann returned to Brussels in August, three weeks before liberation. The Germans were looking for Jews until the very last minute. When they left, they left on garbage trucks. They were the only vehicles left. The Allies entered two days after the Germans left. This is where his diary ends.

This was 1944. Hermann's sister survived the war. She was in an orphan home in Brussels. Hermann went back to school, waiting for an American visa. His family in the US kept sending him affidavits, which they had to renew every year. Hermann was almost ready to give up. He didn't want to go back to Vienna. He thought maybe someone would come back from the concentration camps. Forty three had been deported out of fifty. Nobody came back from his family. His mother had been on a transport of 3000 women. It left in January, 1944. Out of the 3000 women, 29 came back to Brussels. Hermann spoke to most of them. He showed them pictures of his mother. One was sure she knew his mother and said she worked in a brick making outfit in Auschwitz. That was all she could tell him. Then the Russians came and marched the prisoner survivors on a death march and most of them didn't make it. He does not know when his mother perished.

Hermann couldn't get a permanent job. No one would hire him as they knew he was going to leave. One day he came home to his rooming house and he heard the lady living next to him crying. He knocked on the door and asked if he could help. She said the American consul had offered a visa to her two year old daughter and not to her. She could not send the child without her. The same day Hermann saw in the newspaper that the Belgians had been looking for a black marketeer who had disappeared and they had found him and arrested him. The next day the headline was that the guy was leaving for the US. He received an American visa. That confirmed what many suspected--if you go to the American consul with enough money you get an American visa. The rest of them will never get one. Hermann decided he would settle this. He by now had graduated from the Royal Academy in Brussels and had a degree and was a bona fide artist. He could find employment with an advertising agency. He would just as soon stay in Brussels with his friends but the only family he had was in New York except for his sister, who was in an orphan home. The indecision was painful.

Hermann went to the American Embassy and asked to see the Consul. He said if he could not see the Consul he would tell all the passersby what he

knew about him. He was ushered into the Consul's office and offered a cigar. He told his story, that he and his sister had tried to immigrate to the US since 1938 and this was 1947. Hermann threatened to get in touch with President Truman. One week later he and his sister got their visas.

When he left he intended to let President Truman know about this but his aunts told him to forget it. He came to New York City. He stayed with his Uncle Victor. They had a room for him. He was 23, it was 1947, he did not speak English. He studied English, looked for jobs. He was an artist, painter. Someone arranged an exhibit for him. Someone introduced himself as director of an art school in Mount Vernon New York and asked Hermann to teach painting for him. Hermann taught there eight months. At Christmas time he received a letter from the President of the US--drafting him into the Army. It turned out to be a very good experience for him. He told them he spoke French and German and they sent him to Japan. He wound up in Tokyo as an MP at GHQ. It was a wonderful experience. All of a sudden he was a powerful man. He had been a downtrodden refugee for years and suddenly he was a king. There were 10 million people in Tokyo. As his first experience as an MP he had to cut the electricity off in all of Tokyo because somebody needed to move a building across an electrified rail road track. What power! On his say so they turned it off and turned it on. It was a healing period. He believes it did a lot to restore his self confidence.

To get discharged from the Army after 18 months he had to sign up for the Reserves. He got out 6 months early because he signed up for 4 years in the Reserves. He was getting worried because he was getting old and did not have a high school certificate yet. He realized as a painter he would not make a living unless he was exceptionally successful and lucky. He was 26 and it was 1949. He was getting antsy. He spoke English but he had learned it in the Army and some people blanched when he spoke. He made a friend in Tokyo, a young man his age, who was a survivor of a concentration camp. He had been adopted by a family in Kansas City. Hermann stopped in Kansas City on his way to New York. In New York he got a job designing ties, paying eighty-three cents a tie. He worked like a dog to make a living. The owners had control over how much you made by throwing out some ties as no good. He had to belong to the union. So he called the people in Kansas City and asked if they had been serious in saying he could live there and they would help him find a job. They said yes. He could stay with them until he got settled. He had his aunts and

uncles in New York but they were all working. He had nothing in common with them. It had become depressing. After the service he had gained weight and was healthy again. He said good-bye to his aunts, went to KC, and worked as a shoe clerk in a department store. It was a lot of fun. He was one of the few single males there, 26 years old. He was there a short time. He got orders to report back to the Army and later was discharged at Battle Creek, Michigan, where he met his wife. He was still not a citizen. He applied for citizenship and got a job as a commercial artist at Boeing in Battle Creek, where they were making the mid-section of the B 52. He became a three dimensional illustrator.

The important thing that he is impressed with is that despite what happened during the Hitler period, humanity seemed to have learned or benefitted very little from the tragedy. There are still people who are being murdered because their religion is different, their skin color is different, because they have different ideas about life. He thinks that this is really the great tragedy of our time. We have to try to improve it and change life in this world. The spirit of humanity has to change. It is not a rat race for the almighty dollar or who is who in America. We'll have to make life better for the human being, not just faster.

## Conclusion