

**Erwin Deutscher**

**Tape 1 Side A**

**November 9, 1997**

**RG-50.106\*0085.01.03**

**Abstract**

This first part is about Erwin Deutscher who was born in Vienna on Sunday, June 28, 1923 and grew up there. It ends when the family is preparing to leave upon Hitler's occupation as the father had to close his dairy factory and Erwin is the last Jewish student in his school. Erwin is the eldest of four siblings consisting of 3 boys and one girl. Erwin's family is integrated but he attended twice weekly religious classes, Talmud Torah, had a Hebrew tutor and was Bar Mitzvah. There were few Jewish students in his elementary school but most of the Gymnasium students were Jewish. He collected JNF boxes and was captain of three soccer teams. Although aware of the changing political climate, the family did not imagine that the horror would come to them. Upon Hitler's occupation, the family secured papers to leave Vienna but they had to await the quota to reach their number. Seeing the Nazi flags on government buildings upset Erwin. Erwin's father spent four years in the Austrian Army so did not expect to be required to march one afternoon with a funny hat and a broom in the town center. Then Erwin's mother was imprisoned for several months as a woman reported that she owed money. Erwin and his father met Eichmann when they had to go to the Rothschild Palace to have papers signed allowing Erwin to go to Israel as he was selected in a program.

Tape 2 takes place from the time that Erwin is planning to leave Vienna for Israel to the time that he lives in the US where he completes his family and is active in Jewish organizations. Erwin saw Jews required to clean the streets of Vienna with a toothbrush. On October 18, 1938 he took a train with 25 boys from Vienna to Trieste and boarded the ship to Haifa the next day. He joined an Agricultural School for two years and then joins the Mounted Police Settlement Forces and the Haganah. In May 1938 his two brothers arranged to go to the US. Meanwhile his father is deported to Dachau and upon his return is considered too thin by the US Consulate to go to the US. Soon his father is sent to Buchenwald but the US pays his way out and Erwin's grandfather sends the parents tickets to take a ship to the US. The Spanish Red Cross notifies Erwin in 1943 that his parents and sister reached the Apennine Mountains. His sister marries an Italian and remains there. Erwin meets his wife in the Army and they marry and have a child. He helped rebuild the vehicles from the British and served four missions during the War of Independence. Erwin wrote to President Truman who helped him obtain a visa despite the quota and, after 13 years, he visited his parents in the US. He just went to visit but remained a resident.

In this last part Erwin mostly discusses his attitude toward the Holocaust and life. He was lucky that he and his immediate family survived and he wrote his life story for his children. He met the Archbishop of Cincinnati who did not respond when questioned why Christians think the Jews killed Christ as he was born to die and how could a divinity be killed. Erwin does not feel

connected to Eichmann though they met. He believes that Eichmann was probably glad to be caught and not jailed as the Nazis, including Hitler, were scared of being jailed. He is satisfied with his level of observing Judaism and that his three children have contact with Judaism. Erwin feels a little more Israeli than American but is happy to visit Vienna. He retired 10 years ago and still has contact with Metropolitan Life.

### Summary

- 00:00 Erwin (Reuven in Hebrew) Deutscher was born in Vienna on Sunday, June 28, 1923 and later lived in Cincinnati, Ohio. His father was born in Emperor Franz Joseph's Austria which was further north and occupied by other countries but now is part of the Ukraine. His father spent five years in the Austrian Army and was a prisoner in Italy and escaped. His mother is from the same area and studied in Prague for a year and met his father in Vienna where they got married. Erwin's father's name was Fredrick (Ephraim in Hebrew) and his mother was Ida Bacharach (?). There were four children including Erwin; three boys and one girl. One brother is still living. Erwin was the eldest and his sister, Rosy, was next to him. She lives in Italy and married Marcello Campanula (?), a Jewish man in Florence. His brother Eden was a soldier in the American Army in World War II in the Japanese Theatre and was also in the Korean War and is now deceased. His brother Sigmund lives in Denver and is married with three children and two grandchildren. Erwin's father was liberal orthodox. They attended school on Saturday but did not write. They were integrated Jews. Since '37 they study religion at school. Before the Social Democrats, they did not have to state a religion. The Catholics received instruction in class.
- 05:00 The Protestants and Jews met twice a week at a center which gathered children from many schools and taught a little Hebrew. Erwin attended Talmud Torah to learn the bible and had a private tutor at home to learn more Hebrew. Since he was the eldest his family focused on him. Erwin did not attend synagogue on Saturday morning as he was in school. At 3 PM all the synagogues in Vienna had youth services for 45 minutes. The Rabbi made a speech and there was a choir. Erwin's family owned a dairy factory where they received pasteurized milk from farms and produced butter and cheese. They had horse-drawn wagons and delivered 25 liter cans to stores. Their family had a beautiful apartment in the third district at Kadivol Naginplatz (?). Many neighbors envied them for the apartment. They got key money to free the apartment and bought a villa home across the way. He attended 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade at an elementary school and for 5<sup>th</sup> grade he went to a gymnasium. He had to take the one-hour walk there on Shabbat. The schools had both Jewish and non-Jewish students. There were one or two Jewish students in his grade

school. 85% of the students in the gymnasium were Jews. There were never any occurrences at school that offended him. In Vienna the students were permitted to eat rolls in the morning. His mother gave him extra rolls for the poorer children. He always had friends. The Priest was not a full-Priest and hugged him and gave Erwin his photograph. Erwin had a good relationship with the teachers.

10:00 There were few Jews at his first neighborhood and less at the Villa. At Hitler's time they found out that more Jews lived there. Years later he met a student from grade school at a college in Paris who said they were lucky they met during Hitler's time. Conditions were OK in the northern part of Vienna where Erwin's home was located. The family only spoke German at home. His mother's relative had the only kosher bakery in Vienna as the orthodox did not concern themselves regarding whether bread and baked goods were kosher. The baker was single and on Friday afternoon he would bring them cholla and stayed overnight. He would chant the portion of the week of the Torah. Since he was a baker, he was always tired and would fall asleep as he chanted. When his nose touched the book, he would awaken. This event continued for two to four years. Erwin would watch whether the baker would continue reading from the spot where he stopped reading. Erwin's father was not political. The Jews joined the Social Democrats as Christian Democrats was the other party. Erwin's father had been a proud soldier in the Army and loved Vienna. Erwin got the feeling that Hitler had no right to tell the Jews to leave. Erwin and his father felt they had the same right as others to live in Vienna.

15:00 His father was a Zionist. When Erwin was 10, he had a tutor, Mr. Horowitz, who came to his home. After World War I, Vienna was the capital of Austria so the Jews felt they had the right to study at the University of Vienna. The students at the University were very learned but poor so they earned a nominal amount of money by teaching children and shared lunch with them. The tutor also went to tutor the butcher's son who was older than Erwin. Erwin was close to his tutor who suggested that he become active in the Orthodox Zionist movement. He would walk in the woods with them and two afternoons a month would collect the JNF boxes. He counted the money in front of the families and would suggest they add a bit to make a shilling. He received a golden pin as was outstanding in the movement. Years later, during Hitler's time, the Minister of the Interior took 25 children from Vienna and 25 from Germany to Palestine. Zionism moved Erwin and he was the family member who was most interested in it.

20:00 Erwin liked soccer and was the captain of three teams. There was a tournament system for one year when he was 12. He organized the teams. He thought if one team won, they would have a chance. Two teams lost and the third had a victory and Erwin marched in the victory march in the stadium. The children were all gentile and better players than him but they permitted him to lead them. Hitler moved into Vienna in March '38 and none of the Jews left until then. Erwin was 10 in 1933 when Hitler first came to power. The Jewish tradition was for the eldest to inherit and do whatever the family demanded

and he did so. Erwin was coordinator with the lawyer who handled the prisoners. He was alert to politics. A Jewish friend overheard conversations. They thought it was bad in Germany but did not dream that it would be so bad for the Jews in Vienna. He knew there was anti-Semitism in Poland and that Italy was fascist but had Jewish generals. He felt that things were bad but not yet a disaster. The Jews were used to trouble. He received a monthly magazine in school that told about the Spanish conquistadors in the Middle Ages. He read about what happened then but did not believe that it could happen to the people in Vienna. Erwin did not see Hitler in this manner. The Viennese Jews were not prepared to leave. They were so impressed by the Allies.

25:00 They did not feel that England and France would permit something like that. Erwin felt there was humanity. He had a relative on his mother's side in Berlin. He looked charming and came to Austria as he no longer thought he liked Germany but in '34 there was no position for him in Austria. Erwin showed him the city as he knew it well and they saw a movie by Pearl Buck played by an American. The relative decided that he did not like Austria and returned to Germany. Before '38 they never imagined such happenings although they knew that individuals went to concentration camps. He saw the '36 Olympics in the movies showing a few Jewish athletes. At age 13, Erwin did not think of Hitler. There was an announcement posted on the walls and he told the housekeeper and went to a friend who was Nazi. The friend made anti-Semitic remarks, spoke of the Poles and said that the Jews spoke funny. Erwin felt that if someone was against him, he would speak up. There was slang sometimes at Talmud Torah by Buxbaum who was not a good student. He would cross the street and say, "Jew Boy" though he was Jewish himself. He was from a Nazi family and his grandma would tell him to copy her. Erwin did not feel inferior to be a Jew.

30:00 He never wanted to be a gentile. He was independent and decided himself whether to attend synagogue or not. On Shabbat his father would ask what he had learned in his Hebrew studies. He felt close to his parents. They did not speak about Hitler or dream how bad things would be until Hitler entered the city. On February 28, 1938 they realized that the Chancellor of Austria had to go to Berchtesgaden to speak to Hitler. He was forced to take two Nazis into the government which he accepted as a compromise. Newspapers reported that Chisnick (?) knew how to handle it. On March 11<sup>th</sup> Hitler arrived to disturb things as elections were being held on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The Nazis killed Dollfuss, the Chancellor of Austria in 1934 and Chisnick (?) took over. They knew that Mussolini did not like Hitler and was stronger than Hitler but he gave in. They did not realize that Hitler did not want the Jews and would place restrictions on them. From February 28<sup>th</sup> until March 10<sup>th</sup> their friend, Ettinger visited them and said they should consider the developments in Germany. Later Erwin met Ettinger in New York. Erwin was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in Gymnasium at the time and thought he could analyze the world and all would agree with him. On March 11<sup>th</sup> Hitler came in from the West and marched

into Austria. Chisnick (?) called Krupnick (?) who was rich and told him to get out and don't look back.

- 35:00 He took a train to Italy and left everything. When Chisnick (?) met with Hitler, he made a radio appeal to the people and spoke about Austria's achievements. Hitler spoke about what Germany accomplished the last five years. Chisnick (?) said that it was nice that such a little country like Austria could do so much to make the people confident. He was arrested. He could have gone to the Pope to tell the Nazis to leave him alone but he did not. It was felt that he was not fully aware of what was happening. **Tape 1, Side B.** Erwin's Bar Mitzvah was held in '36 and was charming. His father was to meet his special teacher at Dacha-Schnabel but he did not make it. The Bar Mitzvah was in a Stiebel (small community prayer center), not a Synagogue. They served cake and strudel made by his mother. Erwin was trained to give a speech after reading the Torah but choked the last few sentences. Later he met someone in Tel Aviv who had attended and remembered the event. He walked to school and walked across the Danube in the winter. It was like crossing the Red Sea in the exodus from Egypt. They sang the song of Devorah. The Tuesday before his birthday, Erwin took his bike to cross the Danube. It was January and the wind was biting as he rode over the bridge. He learned to put on tefilin and went to school. Although he did not invite non-Jews to his Bar Mitzvah, they sent gifts to his home. They could not invite many people to the small Stiebel.
- 40:00 In the late afternoon of March 11, 1938 they heard that Hitler had moved in from the West. Non-Jewish neighbors came to their apartment as they heard it announced on the radio. They were very friendly to them and said that nothing would happen to them as they are good Jews. When his father made Kiddush (prayer) that Friday night, he cried. Many gentiles came and soothed them. One said not to worry that Frank still had the red flag in his basement. Frank's mother sold cows and was a good friend. Erwin felt his family was above average but not upper class. They never had financial problems. Erwin was 15 and knew that something was going to happen. He felt they would not remain in their home permanently. Later they found out that things were much worse than expected. The Jewish leaders were silent. They hoped that other nations would help. Erwin continued to attend school and at the end, he was the only Jew. He knew that Chisnick (?) was out and Hitler was in. Once he saw Hitler at the Ringstrasse. He also saw Hess.
- 45:00 His strongest impression was seeing the Nazi flags flying at the city buildings across the lake. He saw them every morning and felt that was not them but a different world and they must get out. It was a little frightening. He saw three young SA men walking in goose steps on the street and he was smiling on the sidewalk but did not really accept the situation. One fellow student, Harlow who he gave rolls said that things are better now. One student went to Germany for a few weeks and said all is fine thee. He was non-Jewish, not close to Erwin and outstanding in scholastics. All the Jews left the school

except for Erwin. There were one or two Jews at the Villa where the family moved. Erwin did not feel uncomfortable. The twice a week Jewish lectures were discontinued. The only Jewish teacher was the religious teacher. The morning class started with the partenos (?) prayer which Erwin did not recite.

50:00 In the middle of the wall was a cross and next to it Hitler's picture and then they took away the cross and said, "Heil Hitler" which Erwin did not say and no one said anything about it. He was 15 years old and proud and did not fail secondary school. A dentist in the inner city had a son who got parrot sickness. It was contagious and sometimes fatal so Erwin kept away from the son. Erwin asked his science teacher about the illness who, thanks to Erwin, gave an hour lecture on the illness. The principal called Erwin into his office and told him not to be afraid. A few days later Schwender (?), a Nazi, took over as principal. The principal who left gave some mementos to Erwin. Erwin attended school until he left Austria. His brothers walked across the river to the Jewish School. As soon as Hitler entered Austria, Erwin's father's business was closed and he knew that he must get out. Erwin's maternal grandfather, Joseph Bach (?), was the chief Rabbi in Oklahoma City. He had two sons from his second marriage. He went to the US in 1898 but Erwin's mother did not follow. One son was a surgeon for the Roosevelt family and the other was head of the Pittsburgh Utilities, and there was a third son. Erwin met his grandfather in 1951.

55:00 The family got their papers immediately in April but the American Consulate quota list made them wait. If they had delivered the papers earlier, the family would have received a lower number but they did not know about the quota. In April after Pesach an SA man picked up Erwin's father and he returned feeling depressed later in the afternoon. They had collected a bunch of Jews and made them perform a fun march wearing funny hats and using brooms in the city. Erwin's father was embarrassed as he had been an officer in the Army. Probably he was not seen as he marched in the middle. His father told the SA man that he was a fighter on the front for the Austrian Army and asked why he was being humiliated. The SA gave him chocolate. They marched to a beer and yeast factory that was 100 years old where he saw Frank, the man with the red flag in his basement. Frank was wearing an SA uniform and he had teenage Jewish girls cleaning the windows of the factory. A few hours later a neighbor visited them and felt that it was a shame about his father's required performance. Irwin had a beautiful mountain bike which he rode during Hitler's time. A man claimed that he owed him money for it as it was not fully paid. Erwin's father saw this and took the man by the neck and told him to leave Irwin alone. Irwin went to the Police Station and saw the Head of Police who said he guarantees that Irwin's family is great and that they paid for the bicycle. Then the officer visited them and suggested they give a few marks to the man. Their business stopped and people owed them money and his father owed money to those who pasteurized the milk. They had to go to the court house with notes to pay.

- 60:00 Irwin saw a man in a mahogany office with Nazi items who indicated that it was a new regime but justice is observed and gave him notes. He ran home and said that his mission was accomplished. They still had a little money to survive including Austrian shillings and German marks. In their garden they had a small house which they rented to an old gentile woman who paid them even when the Nazis said she did not have to pay. His mother told Mrs. Finch that she would pay some money on her debt. A few hours later Nazis picked his mother up. A Jewish lawyer composed a letter to find out where she was imprisoned. She was in the district commissioners, the head of the district. The four children were permitted to visit their mother and when they left they saw Mrs. Bauer (?) and told her to go in and tell them they are a good family.
- 65:00 Erwin's father remained at home as thought it would be easier for the children to get in. Mrs. Bauer and her husband were good friends but he became a Nazi and they divorced. Erwin's sister got candy from the non-Jewish children and jumped to her mother and cried and stuffed her with sweets. They could not get their mother out of jail and she was transferred to a real jail. Erwin got selected to go to Israel. A non-Jewish lady who had been in the jail with their mother came and told them not to worry about her. Their mother came home a few days later after being imprisoned for two months. There was a rumor that Mrs. Finch called the Nazis party who picked up their mother shortly after. She returned in July. Erwin finished school and prepared for Israel with endless papers.
- 70:00 The Nazis took over the Rothschild Palace in Vienna which became the immigration office. They demanded that his father come to sign papers saying that he did not owe taxes. He was scared and the person in charge was Eichmann. Erwin pulled his father and he did not move and Eichmann screamed and said, "Don't you want to sign the paper so he can go?" Many Jewish girls were doing the paperwork. Later he realized that it was Eichmann. At the time they did not realize they were killers. It was a beautiful palace with paintings. There were lots of people in uniform. Nevertheless, Erwin went to see all the floors. Eichmann was 32 years old at that time. Erwin wanted to get out of Vienna so went to City Hall, a beautiful building with a moving elevator which you must jump on. There was a big sign next to it, "Jews forbidden to use it." Erwin crawled onto it and used it for 20 minutes over and over again. Everyone who entered said, "Heil Hitler." No one bothered him until a homosexual came on asked him why he was not saying, "Heil Hitler" and told him to go away. When he saw Hitler he thought all his screaming was crazy and loud. A neighbor with a black uniform, not SS, connected to artillery while dying said he died in the name of Hitler. Erwin laughed at the idea of someone dying for one person.
- 75:00 Erwin always felt ahead of others.

**Erwin Deutscher**

**Tape 2 Side A**

**November 9, 1997**

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### **Abstract**

Tape 2 takes place from the time that Erwin is planning to leave Vienna for Israel to the time that he lives in the US where he completes his family and is active in Jewish organizations. Erwin saw Jews required to clean the streets of Vienna with a toothbrush. On October 18, 1938 he took a train with 25 boys from Vienna to Trieste and boarded the ship to Haifa the next day. He joined an Agricultural School for two years and then joins the Mounted Police Settlement Forces and the Haganah. In May 1938 his two brothers arranged to go to the US. Meanwhile his father is deported to Dachau and upon his return is considered too thin by the US Consulate to go to the US. Soon his father is sent to Buchenwald but the US pays his way out and Erwin's grandfather sends the parents tickets to take a ship to the US. The Spanish Red Cross notifies Erwin in 1943 that his parents and sister reached the Apennine Mountains. His sister marries an Italian and remains there. Erwin meets his wife in the Army and they marry and have a child. He helped rebuild the vehicles from the British and served four missions during the War of Independence. Erwin wrote to President Truman who helped him obtain a visa despite the quota and, after 13 years, he visited his parents in the US. He just went to visit but remained a resident.

### **Summary**

00:00 In the summer of '38 Erwin's father went to the Central Office for Jewish Immigration to get the papers. He was a member of Shamerati (?), a Zionist group who met one Saturday with the leaders who were pleasant. Dr. Weinstein, a tranquil Viennese Jew wanted papers for the trip to Palestine with 25 children. A few wild Nazis came in and broke furniture which was unexpected. The meeting was held to inform the children what to expect in Palestine which the leaders told the Nazis. They were all upset as these were the great leaders in the city. Things were wild. They went home and decided to hold the instruction elsewhere. They had no telephones. Each person had to be contacted. One leader's wife was in Haifa and another in London. Then there was a direct assault. Jews were required to clean the streets with toothbrushes. When Erwin saw it, he moved away as he was scared or ashamed. The victims were told to get dressed. Some women were in fur coats. It was sad to see the voting posters that Shusnick (?) had put up. Some stupid people stood on the side laughing. Erwin did not feel threatened; just felt taken advantage of. He had to return to the Rothschild Palace Immigration Office about his papers.



05:00 At that time, students stood at the corners of the streetcars rather than sit inside. A few students, who were older than him, announced that things are better now than before. "Buck fish", students between 15 and 17, said it is better but why mistreat the Jews in such an embarrassing manner. Erwin concluded that if the fuehrer knew about it, it would not be permitted as it was just the lower class acting that way. Later Erwin found that it was more the fuehrer than the cultural nation of Germany. Jews were involved in the culture. It was said that in Hitler's time, Jews could not be found in the German nation as they were foreigners and spoke slang. Erwin felt that Hitler had no right to kick the Jews out; that it was his city to enjoy. Even today Erwin feels the same way. Now they try to impress that he is the great one. His parents stayed home and Erwin got his papers for Palestine. It was the last day of Simchat Torah, a religious day, but his father let him go to the bank to get Palestine pounds. Erwin did not start school that Fall when he was 15 as he was leaving. It was sentimental that he was leaving his parents and siblings but he was going to Palestine to build a country. Erwin went to the Southern Station to take a train to Italy. He walked a couple of blocks from the bus to the station. An elderly lady said that he is a poor Jew being kicked out and he responded that he is going to his own country.

10:00 His family went to the terminal and they danced the Hora. It was a good atmosphere and he went into the train. It was sad to say good-bye to their parents but the children were happy. His father told him, "Be a Jew." Erwin had a grandfather in Rava-Russkaya, Poland and wrote to him. He saw him when he was six-years-old. He wrote to him in German using Hebrew letters and the grandfather replied that he should not go to Palestine. He said that it is hard to be a Jew and that he should wait for papers to the US. His parents wanted to go to Palestine. Erwin's mother wanted to see her father in the New World who she had never seen. Erwin has a photo of the boys going on the trip showing they were all older than him. The transport was handled by Joseph Borg, a Palestine cabinet member, who was very active. A year later he tried to get people out of Czechoslovakia. He was not worried about Hitler. Erwin left Vienna at 10AM and arrived in Trieste at 10 PM. The other boys fell asleep during the trip but he wrote down the names of every station in a notebook. One man begged him to take a golden pin to his two sons in Palestine. The Nazis with black uniforms did not see it. Erwin did not go to sleep until he reached Trieste. They left the train and saw the Mediterranean. He thought it was the ocean as the water was open. He saw big ships and he smelled freedom as people were smiling.

15:00 Erwin felt that he left all the gray behind him. He concentrated on himself, not on his family. When he reached Palestine a few days later, he wrote his father and said that he is so free and it is good but he is homesick. Later his father was at Dachau and there was Kristallnacht so he did not hear from him. People in Palestine were preoccupied as there was unrest. His voyage on the ship, the Galilea (?) was good except there was an Arab Nazi who said that as long as there are Jews and Arabs in Palestine, there will never be peace. Erwin left Vienna October 18th and boarded the ship the next day. Jews gave them equipment including mosquito netting and special boots which they did not need. He carried a ring, some Hebrew

items, his passport with his picture, membership in Shemarite (?) and a photo of the group in Trieste. Later the entire group became famous in the Army. It was a five-day voyage filled with meetings and American films which did not hold his interest as he was only interested in what was to come.

20:00 They discussed the Zionist movement. There were the 25 Viennese and others. Erwin's aunt went to Palestine in 1932. His uncle was the second victim murdered for money. He had a factory which made brushes from animal hair. There was a dispute between suppliers that someone stole from the slaughter houses. Life insurance was not common at that time so money was collected for the widow and two children and they went to Palestine. Upon arrival Erwin's group were afraid and stayed at Bait Olum where they saw some Viennese and were served in a smelly dining room. There was no linen covering the tables, just material that smelled. It was like a commune. The group attended an outstanding school. There were 10 boys in a room. It was like a British School. He was homesick at first. The Viennese were more homesick than those from Germany who had been in preparatory camps. It was thrilling to arrive in Haifa which was beautiful with mountains. There were Jews all around and it was exciting to think they were building a country.

25:00 Erwin spent two years at the Agricultural School which was a religious compound. They worked together. There were many famous people: the Chief Chaplain, Chaim Bar Lev who was head of the military, and two sons of Ben Svi who was the future President. It was an elevated atmosphere and they all studied. After two weeks they were given rifles and they worked and exercised. The first time he ate an olive, he found it bitter but he got used to it. His mother sent him a letter and left space for his father to write but he had left. The next time, his mother said that the father had to get food at the market and he did not write. The third letter, she said the father was at meetings so did not write. Then she wrote that his father returned from Dachau and then went to Buchenwald. Someone got an urn from Buchenwald. Erwin did not learn of his father's experience during Kristallnacht. He heard that a few stores were damaged. Erwin knew that his parents had papers for the US. His father weighed 45 kilograms or 80 pounds when he returned from Dachau and the American Consulate said he must recover before making the voyage across the ocean. His father was discharged in January 1939 and picked up in June for Buchenwald. Since September 1939 Erwin heard nothing from his parents. Later he found out about concentration camps and felt badly. Before that he had hopes but then the doors were locked. Other relatives came on illegal transports from the Danube and taken to British Islands including Cyprus.

30:00 Erwin's father was at Buchenwald until January 1940 when the Commandant said the US is trying to get him out and paid for him to be released soon. His father asked him why they hurt Jews and was told that most are bad. When it was time for his release, there was one millimeter of snow and he had to march with the Aryans who were released. They marched in goose step so when the first one gets tired he goes to the back but in this case his father was always kept back. The SS wagon came and threw him in and drove him to the terminal where he stood. A detective

came and asked him why he is standing and he replied that he was hungry. The detective told him to go into the restaurant but the sign indicated that Jews and dogs are not permitted inside. The detective brought him food and the cashier gave him a sandwich. At that time Jews could only take a local train but the detective placed him on a military transport where they drank beer and no one bothered him and he had dregs of beer.

35:00 In Vienna the last streetcar has a blue light and it was passing so he walked home across the river and arrived around 2 or 3 AM. He climbed over their green buck wood fence and knocked on the door but Erwin's mother did not want to let him in. Finally, she opened the door and he fell down and she put him to bed and fed him. The next day Erwin's mother went to the store for food and women screamed, "You dirty Jew, why do you come here?" which embarrassed his mother. She was told to come later for leftovers which she would have to pay for. His mother went to the store and got two packages for free. In that neighborhood, the Jewish doctor did a lot of good. Tape 2, Side B. In the Fall of 1940 Erwin finished at Mick (?) Yisrael, World War II started and the Arabs stopped attacking. Erwin saw a large building with a copula between Natanya and Hedera where Mizrachi started an agriculture experiment but World War II stopped it.

40:00 B'nai Akivah saw the empty buildings and opened them. The students were between 17 and 19 and he was the youngest. They were encouraged to go to a kibbutz or work. Irwin and four other students wanted more education but had no money so they became managers of the agricultural fields. They worked ½ day and studied ½ day but got up early and studied in the evenings to study as much as the others. The situation got worse with El Alamein and Stalingrad. The Haganah prepared them that if the Germans crossed Egypt, the women and the children would be sent to southeast Asia (India) and the men would hide in the mountains and fight them. Luckily, El Alamein was the beginning of the end. He studied two years and with the others continued to go to high school in Jerusalem and was in the Haganah. Rabbi Menkin (?) had a brother, a mounted policeman, who was visiting. His name was Benumin Menkin (?) and he asked Erwin to join the force and grabbed him and told him to come to riding school

45:00 Erwin became a member of the Mounted Police Settlement Force and then went to Haganah Headquarters. He did not know his parents' situation and thought about them. He kept busy. He did not expect his parents to be killed. Irwin was given a new machine gun. In 1943 Erwin received a telegram from the Spanish Red Cross which said that his parents and his sister reached the Apennine Mountains. That was the only information he received until the end of the War. He had two brothers: Edmund and Sigmund. In May 1939 they arranged to go to the US. Edmund, the elder one, was drafted later into World War II. He was Bar Mitzvah without his parents. They went to Pennsylvania for two years schooling and then to their grandfather in Oklahoma City. Then they were placed in Chicago and Edmund went into the Army. The British conquered the middle of Italy. Roosevelt permitted 1100 people entrance to the US and they arrived by ship. They were interned in Las Vegas. When Erwin's father was released from Buchenwald, he obtained a ticket on the ship, "Rex (?)", from Geneva but it was postponed

because Mussolini knew they were entering the War and would not announce that the trip was canceled, just said postponed.

50:00 The Italian Jews, especially those from Florence, helped the Jews at first but later things got bad for them. When Erwin's parents hid in the Apennine Mountains, the sister fell in love with Marcello Companello. Six hours before the ship was leaving Naples, she decided to stay and married him. They had two daughters. Erwin's grandfather sent Erwin's parents tickets to take the Rex and when it was postponed, sent them tickets a second time. Meanwhile Erwin was in the Haganah and was a member of the mounted Police force attached to Haganah Headquarters. Israel was partitioned into three parts: Upper Gallilee (?), Middle Gallilee and Lower Gallilee. In Nafar (?) there were smaller districts broken into settlements. Erwin was 4th highest in Nafar Haifa which was central Nafar. He handled administration and hidden weapons. Each village had some hidden in soil so they would not rust. They had Czech, English, American and German weapons and all were separated.

55:00 There were people responsible in each section. Erwin was in charge of all of them so the British were after him. He had two court martials: one for the weapons but he was freed and one for having a shortwave radio. They would listen to it for 20 minutes each morning and then take it apart. His offense could not be proven 100 percent so he was not disciplined. In '46 he was given a mission to go to Europe. Erwin met his wife in the Army in '48. In '47 when they announced the partition of Palestine, Erwin was active in Haganah. Before World War II was over, Erwin would dream how the world could be peaceful. When it happened, there was bitterness in Europe. It was a shock when the British locked the doors to Palestine and the people arriving by boat were not permitted in with any redress. When the petition was declared, Erwin was in Natanya. The first bus to Jerusalem was ambushed with five killed including a friend. It made no difference that he was Viennese as others were Italian, Romanian and from other parts of Europe. Some were fascist like his father who hid when he was an officer in the Army.

60:00 Erwin felt paralyzed as he was saved and part of history which he enjoyed and was proud of. He volunteered for four missions and broke through to Jerusalem during the War of Independence. His vehicle was damaged so he pulled back. Palmach went up one hill and killed the Arab leader, Abdul Hussein (?), the father of the man now in Jerusalem making peace. The Haganah had the problem of bringing food to Jerusalem. Yemenites had stone baskets and built a stone road south of Jerusalem called Tifereth, sadness and glory. The British evacuated the Nazis from Tel Aviv to Serona (?). When the Israelis took over the section for government buildings, the slope had tents from which to fight for Jerusalem. After the mission, they rested in the tents and the quartermaster asked them to help rebuild the vehicles from the British. They were command cars and jeeps. Those vehicles bought from southern France were sabotaged with holes and had to be repaired. Erwin was in charge of the operation but someone else was in charge of repairs.

65:00 They had no shop for the repairs. The vehicles were not painted according to standard so stopped doing that later. The supervisor of the garage had to inspect the vehicles who said they could do anything they liked. They came with a young lady and she was to remain in Tel Aviv. Now that Israel is a State, the lady has to attend the Army training course and do the repairs according to regulation. Next door the lady said she was told he could find a way for her. He had a pickup truck and took her to the women's training area but there was no officer there. He got hungry and had no money and there was no restaurant there. They saw sabras, prickly pears, and ate them. Jaffa was conquered and he had an entrance card. There was no one there and they roamed around and at the base, they said that she can work. Four months later they married. Marriage was not in his plans as first he wanted to visit his parents. The American Consulate said he does not need a visa as his parents are in the US but later immigration had a quota and said he needs a visa. They had a child and lived in an apartment and wrote President Truman. He replied through the Embassy and Consulate that handled immigration.

70:00 The Consulate gave permission and, after 13 years, he visited his parents. His father was more religious. Erwin arrived Friday afternoon at Idlewild and there was a plane leaving for Cincinnati and the pilot permitted him to fly. When he saw his parents, he thought they looked young and recovered but sentimental. Erwin and his family stayed awhile but did not want to work in his father's business. They needed a refrigerator so worked for it and stayed longer and longer. His parents needed him. Erwin and his wife had two more children. The US is a magnet culturally and educationally. His brothers came earlier and he stayed so long that he felt more American than Israeli. Israel is still a part of him. The children studied there. Erwin returned to Austria to settle State problems. He had left involuntarily from Austria and Hitler had no right to make him leave so he has a different philosophy than others. His wife was born in Volene (?) and at age three in 1930 went to Israel. Her family is charming and accepted him.

75:00 Erwin's father was in the restaurant business which was not for him. Rabbi Eliezer Silver, the head of Orthodoxy in the US and Canada, suggested they open a kosher restaurant. Erwin wanted a temporary job as a shipping clerk but his two bosses were too bossy. They promised great things and promotions. He earned three times as much as was promised and he got promoted quickly. He studied 15 hours a week. He was active in B'nai B'rith and President of his ZOA (Zionists of America) chapter. He felt that he gave his children a good Jewish education.

76:00

**Erwin Deutscher**

**Tape 3 Side A**

**November 9, 1997**

**RG-50.106\*0085.03.03**

## **Abstract**

In this last part Erwin mostly discusses his attitude toward the Holocaust and life. He was lucky that he and his immediate family survived and he wrote his life story for his children. He met the Archbishop of Cincinnati who did not respond when questioned why Christians think the Jews killed Christ as he was born to die and how could a divinity be killed. Erwin does not feel connected to Eichmann though they met. He believes that Eichmann was probably glad to be caught and not jailed as the Nazis, including Hitler, were scared of being jailed. He is satisfied with his level of observing Judaism and that his three children have contact with Judaism. Erwin feels a little more Israeli than American but is happy to visit Vienna. He retired 10 years ago and still has contact with Metropolitan Life.

## **Summary**

- 00:00 In this last part Erwin mostly discusses his attitude toward the Holocaust and life. He feels a part of the generation that suffered but he was lucky as he and his immediate family survived. His paternal grandfather was 86 in '39 when he passed away but his father's siblings and their families perished. Erwin knows that many survivors did not mention the past because of their nature but he was open except for some details he recently wrote. His daughters are involved in the Holocaust and one interviews Spielberg's subjects and Erwin's son went to Israel. All his children know sufficient Hebrew to communicate. Their home was Jewish but they had contact with non-Jews. Erwin tried to reflect why the Holocaust happened. He feels the Nazis and the Anti-Semites could not have done what they did without a couple of thousands of Christians' help. He once flew first class from Cincinnati to Washington, DC and Archbishop Alter of Cincinnati sat next to him. The Archbishop said his functions in DC were to educate young priests and he had problems with that.
- 05:00 Erwin told him that he is not Catholic and has some questions. The first was that if Jesus' function was to die, why were the Jews accused of killing him. The Archbishop had no response and asked for Erwin's other questions. His next question was how can a divinity be killed and, again, the Archbishop just looked at him and did not respond. Erwin feels the subject needs to be clarified because G-d would not have created one group to kill another but would have done it himself. Erwin noted that he was always proud and strong as his outlook was good and he did not permit others to diminish him. He never felt that history involved him with the wrong path or philosophy. Erwin believed that there was no anti-Semite in his classroom strong enough to attack him. Erwin feels that his knowledge of Israel gave him a purpose in life to transfer to the next generation. Once he discussed with his father whether a survivor is more privileged and he does not know. Erwin survived both the Nazis and when he served during the War of Liberation in Israel. He saw that the one who died was not necessarily the hero.

- 10:00 When Erwin first met Eichmann, he did not think much of him. Eichmann only reacted because Erwin pulled his father. Erwin saw Eichmann joking with Jewish girls and could not figure it out. He felt that Eichmann was persistent to see that everyone does things correctly. When the Israeli police did not act correctly, Eichmann reminded them of the proper procedure, just like a typical Nazi. He was a high officer so felt he must command respect. Eichmann was cruel and might have known some Hebrew. He was relieved to be caught. Some Nazis escaped punishment. Eichmann did not feel bad that he got punished by Israel but would have been equally punished if jailed. Erwin did not feel a connection to Eichmann though they had met. Hitler feared he would be caught alive and put naked in a jail like an ape. Nazis felt scared to be jailed. When questioned whether he felt Israeli, Austrian or American, Erwin replied that he was born in Austria and enjoys being there as it is his connection to the past. He feels mostly Israeli as it was unplanned for him to become an American though he does not feel guilty that he left Israel. There are great Jews both in and out of Israel. It was a glorious period for the Jews in Babylonia. Israel was rebuilt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a different world now.
- 15:00 As for his commitment to Judaism, some try to continue their Judaism to keep their continuity but that is not the right outlook. When he looks at his grandparents' behavior, you see that they were not observant for continuity. They just observed as that is the way things are done. Erwin feels that he can't do more and doing less would be negligent. He observes Judaism in the way he understands it. Erwin interpreted the prophet, Habakkuk's philosophy, "live by your fate" to mean to live the way you develop your fate and accept it. He realizes that the Orthodox might interpret Habakkuk differently. Erwin came to the US and immediately continued his education. First he studied economics and then he got an M.A. and a PhD in Hebrew letters from Hebrew Union College. He was 55 years old and his company wanted to transfer him to Philadelphia and he did not want to leave his family in Cincinnati. His professor was from Scandinavia and was uncomfortable that Erwin's career could not be consummated. Erwin said he was doing fine except he envied the academic world. The professor called the Hebrew Union College and Erwin was admitted. Erwin no longer does much in B'nai B'rith and ZOA as they are inactive groups so is only involved in his synagogue.
- 20:00 He has many friends, some from Europe, some from China and some others who are non-Jews. He feels that non-Jewish people from Europe who lived through the Holocaust reached the same stage in life as him. He votes in elections to express himself. Though he retired 10 years ago, Metropolitan Life still invites him to their conventions including one in Vienna. Though he is close to 75 years old, he still bikes and goes horseback riding. He gave his true story but might have left out some details. When he looks back, Erwin smiles that all came out good for him. He is sad that things were not good for others due to people's hatred and the US did not save sufficient people. Some could have been taken to Alaska, South American or Asia. The World did not help enough. He

wrote his life story for his children. He saw what others wrote at the Hebrew Union College and felt it was insufficient. They concentrated too much on the bad things. He felt that his childhood with his parents was outstanding but he is sorry that he did not think to write when his father was alive. Erwin is satisfied that he met the interviewer who he felt is charming.

25:00