

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**Interview with Hans Ziegler
December 21, 2012
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PREFACE

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HANS ZIEGLER

December 21, 2012

Gail Schwartz: This is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Volunteer Collection interview with Hans Ziegler, conducted by Gail Schwartz on December 21st 2012 in Washington, DC. This interview is being conducted over the telephone. What is your full name?

Hans Ziegler: My first name is Hans.

Q: And your last name?

A: My last name is Ziegler, Zed-I-E-G-L-E-R.

Q: And when were you born and where were you born?

A: I am born on the 12th of June 19 and 25 in Brno. It was the former Czechoslovakia.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about your family. Tell me about your parents. How long had they lived in Brno.

A: My father, Alfred Ziegler had lived in Brno from I think he is born 18 and 86 to 19 and 42 when he was taken to the Holocaust.

Q: And your mother?

A: My mother is born on 24th of November 19 and 97 in **Austrova**.

Q: 1897.

A: Yes, of course. 1897, right. 1897 in Austrova, which was former Czechoslovakia. But at the age of two years, she was taken by her family to Vienna.

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Q: Tell me a little bit more about your father. What did he do, what kind of work did he do?

A: My mother actually was most of her time in just the family and then the war started then. She took several jobs just to make any money because she lost her husband. And –

Q: We'll talk about that in a minute. I want to do a little bit about the pre-war, story of your family. What did your father do?

A: My father was actually the owner of a factory for textile.

Q: Did you have any siblings, any brothers or sisters?

A: I did, I do not have any brothers or sisters. And my father was beside of that, the counsel of Uruguay, of Republic of Uruguay.

Q: Your father?

A: Yes.

Q: What did he, how –

A: Ok, he was the owner of the textile fabric, but he was actually a, also a counsel of the republic of Uruguay.

Q: How did that happen? What was that about?

A: He just applied for it and he got the job.

Q: Did he go there at all?

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A: Pardon.

Q: Did he go to Uruguay at all?

A: No, he was never there. He was just a –

Q: Representative?

A: A representative, yes.

Q: For textiles or for everything?

A: No, no, no. The textile business was, is not dependent on his, on his counsel. It was the counsel actually is diplomatic, he has diplomatic job so this is a **honored** counsel, yes.

Q: I see. And did he spend a lot of time doing this work for Uruguay.

A: Oh of course he did, yes. He actually was the consulate was in Brno and actually the main office was in Prague.

Q: What religion was your father?

A: He was Jewish.

Q: And your mother?

A: She was Christian.

Q: She was Christian. And growing up, you went to elementary school.

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A: I, went to yes I did yes. I was in elementary school for five years and then I was in what we call gymnasium, here in Europe yes. And at the gymnasium I was for four years. And then I continued at, actually at chemistry school. It was called a higher chemistry school for four years. So actually I attended school for 18 and a half or something years.

Q: When you were growing up, did you consider yourself Jewish? Were you raised that way or raised as a Christian?

A: No, no, no. Actually I was raised more Christian because, actually my father and my mother got in 1934 divorced, yes. And then I lived from 1934, I lived just with my mother, my Christian mother. And so actually I was educated more in the Christian way.

Q: Did your father have a big family?

A: Oh yes, my father had a very big family.

Q: Did you know these relatives? Did you –

A: Yes, of course I know. Do you want his father and his mother, my grandfather and my grandfather?

Q: You mean the names, that's fine, yes. What are their names?

A: Ok my grandfather was David Ziegler and David Ziegler was actually the owner of the textile factory. Yes. And my grandmother was Caroline, Carolina Ziegler. Both of them were Jewish.

Q: Were they practicing? Did they live openly as Jews?

A: My grandmother yes, but my grandfather I don't think so.

Q: Your father was raised as a Jew?

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A: Yes.

Q: Was he observant at all? Did he, do you remember when you were living with him if he did any of the holidays or things like that, Jewish holidays?

A: He sometimes took me to the –

Q: Synagogue?

A: Yes and even to the cemetery and to the, to the – to the synagogue yes.

Q: You didn't go to Jewish religious school. You said you were raised as a Christian. How did your parents meet? How did they find each other?

A: Ok. My mother was adopted by her, actually by her aunt, yes. It was a sister actually from my grandmother, if you understand what I mean. And the sister of my grandmother was living in Brno. And she was actually married to a man named **Liebel** which was Jewish and this was actually a friend of my father. And so actually my father met my mother in this family. You understand what I mean?

Q: Yes, I do.

A: This is a little bit complicated.

Q: It's ok. So you went to school. Did your friends know you were half Jewish? Your school friends, did they know that your father was Jewish?

A: I think so, yes, because actually I attended a school. The first school I attended was a German school. And just for four years. And there were not only half Jewish people like me, but even Jewish people, Christian people altogether.

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Q: Did you, did anybody make fun of you when you were young because you were part Jewish?
Any of the other children make –

A: I don't think that at that time, that I attended a school. In the early 30s the children were caring about who is Jewish or who is Jewish.

Q: Ok. Let's move on a little bit. So you were going to school. And when did things start to change, when did conditions start to change?

A: Well actually the conditions start to change when my parents divorced, because my mother took her flat in Brno as well, but apart of my father. And then I started actually to see my father only once a week.

Q: They got divorced in 1934, you said.

A: Yes, 1934.

Q: Did you, you were eight years old in 1933. Had you heard of a man named Hitler at that point?

A: Say it again in 1933.

Q: In 1933 when Hitler –

A: Yes, the date.

Q: When Hitler came into power.

A: Hitler.

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Q: Did you hear about him when you were a little boy of eight years old?

A: No, no, no. I did not no. I did not know because this was the time I was too small to understand what was going on and nobody talked about it.

Q: Did you speak German?

A: I, yes. I speak, actually I spoke both, German and Czech.

Q: Then you are living with your mother and then what happened. When did things, the next thing?

A: Things actually changed very late. And this was of -- because of the factory actually got out of business in 1937. This was the time before Hitler. And so my father actually was only the counsel of Uruguay and this was his job for the time when Hitler came in. And so actually my father, because of his job was actually higher job and so actually he got through the Holocaust I think a little bit, I little, just a little bit later, just in 42. But –

Q: Let's stay in the 1930s for the moment. Ok. Now were you aware of the September 1938 Munich agreement, with Chamberlain and so forth.

A: Oh of course I were. Yes.

Q: You were 13 years old.

A: Yes, I was but I was aware of that, yes.

Q: Do you remember talking about it with your parents or what your feelings were?

A: Actually I did not have the opportunity to talk to my father about this because I think my father was trying to hold me out of this thing. So I actually I told, I talked about this just with my

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mother. And my mother was I think not the right person to explain all these things to me. So actually I got my information just from other people and what I actually find out by this time, by the newspapers or by the radio.

Q: What were your thoughts? Do you remember what – were you frightened? What kind of –

A: No I was, I was never frightened.

Q: You weren't.

A: I was never frightened. I was just, just getting aware of that with my father will be in the future something happens. And actually it happened then yes. But I could not, I was too young actually to make a decision or to tell my father it will be better to stay out of the country or go away. And my father was still very I think sure of that, that because he is a counsel, nothing can happen to him.

Q: But he was staying in Brno still?

A: He was still staying in Brno. This was a mistake.

Q: At that time, in 38, what did Hitler mean to you as a 13 year old boy?

A: Actually he meant very much to me because at the time when the Germans came in, so actually immediately they, because of my appearance, yes, they could think that I am Jewish.

Q: Oh really.

A: So when I met some soldiers for example in the streets or outside of my home, so they started to ask me about that. So I was very well aware that what's going on. And what can happen in the future.

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Q: I mean you were a young boy. You're talking about the spring of 1939 when the Germans came in.

A: Yes, yes. That was the time. Because this was actually the time that I could understand what's going on. I was at that time 14 or 15 years old and at that age you can understand what's going on. And the second thing was that yes, what was your –

Q: Could you understand Hitler's speeches? Did you ever hear any of Hitler's speeches?

A: Oh yes, I heard it. I heard, I heard very much of these speeches because my mother was listening to him. And we could understand this very well and we were aware what's going on.

Q: Did you talk these things over with your other school friends?

A: No. Never.

Q: Why not?

A: Because at that time I was in the Czech school and there in the Czech school there were the political talking, yes. Amongst the children, the students, yes. Was actually not, not common.

Q: Do you remember spending time with non-Jewish children your age? Did you do sports and things like that?

A: With not Jewish?

Q: Yeah, your friends who were not Jewish. Did you have non-Jewish friends?

A: Of course, I had not Jewish friends, but I had even Jewish friends because at that time when I started to go to the gymnasium this was the late 30s, so I had Jewish friends. Later I did not. I think from 1940, when I changed from the gymnasium to the chemical school yes, at the age of

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15, so I actually had no Jewish friends anymore. Because at that time no Jewish people were in the class with me.

Q: Were you interested in sports?

A: Oh yes, I am interested in sports from my very –

Q: What did you do when you were that age in sports, with the non-Jewish students?

A: With the not Jewish. Actually I started doing some athletics and from 1940 I started to swim.

Q: Let's get to 1940. So now you're in, you said you're in a chemical school.

A: Yes. I can tell you why. Because at that time, in 1940 it was forbidden for people with a parent, with a Jewish parent, to go to the gymnasium to the higher classes. It was allowed only to go to a chemical school or to a, to a what we called actually not a gymnasium, yes. And I don't have the right expression for it now. It's –

Q: What were your thoughts when you couldn't go to the, they told you, you couldn't go to the gymnasium anymore?

A: No, actually it was not bad because I decided at that time I want to be a chemist. So this was actually was not actually something I didn't like or something like that. I wanted to be a chemist.

Q: Did other Jewish students go with you, switch?

A: No, no Jewish people was in my class anymore.

Q: Oh right you said they were not in class anymore. But there were other half Jewish students still in the class.

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A: No, not even that.

Q: You were the only one.

A: I was the only one, yes.

Q: It's 1940 and you started the new school and then what happened?

A: Well, first I went maybe moment, it was, yes. I was three years without actually anything happened. But –

Q: Did you know what was happening in the rest of Europe, what Hitler, what the Germans were doing in the rest of Europe?

A: Of course, I know yes. I knew about it because my father actually was, was taken to the Holocaust in 1942 and –

Q: Where was he taken?

A: He was taken to **Terezin**, to **Theresienstadt**, Terezin. And not only my father but my aunt and my grandmother as well.

Q: Were you able to say goodbye to him?

A: Yes, I was able to say goodbye to him but I actually did not know. I just thought that he will not return. But I didn't, of course I didn't know it by sure. If you know what I mean.

Q: Yes. So what was it like –

A: Because there was still a hope that something will happen in the meantime. So my father can return and so nobody was sure about it. Because –

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Q: Did he say anything special to you, when you said goodbye?

A: He did not. Actually he did not and I actually was – I didn't talk to him so open how I should and how he could. And we were aware – I thought that actually he is holding back something to me because I was at the age of 16 at that time and I think he was not of the opinion that I can understand the whole thing and that I, he wanted probably to hold me out of it.

Q: Yes. So did you have any contact with him after he left?

A: No, I did not have. I only got two postcards and there, of course was nothing important because this was everything censored and he couldn't actually be open or, or tell me something.

Q: How long was he in Terezin?

A: Just a short time. I don't know actually how long but I think not longer than a couple of weeks.

Q: And then what happened?

A: Then he was transported to other areas and actually I don't know where because I have more - when I investigated about that so I got more answers. So actually I don't know for sure what happened to him.

Q: So he did not survive?

A: No, no, no he did not survive.

Q: He did not survive. Ok. Yeah, so now you're with your mother and it's as you said 1942 and you're going to school. Did you talk about the war with your other friends? Or did you talk about the Germans among the other boys?

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A: Oh yes, for sure. We talked about it because I can tell you something. In our school, it was a Czech school. In the beginning of this, of the fourth class which was in 1933, they came, the Germans came in the school and took –

Q: You mean 1943?

A: 1943. Did I say something else?

Q: You said 1933.

A: No, no, no, no. 1943.

Q: 1943 the Germans came to your school.

A: The Germans came to the school and took the most part of the class to Berlin for some forced work. We were at that time in our class, a number of 39 people. From this 39 people were five girls and the other ones were boys. Yes. And they took from the class 23 of us and we went to Berlin for forced work. Forced work means we just were taken for help after the bombing and actually they took the people who actually died by the bombing and took them into the, so there couldn't – for example, happened something with a _____ mill or something like this when the corpse would be a longer time in the bombed area.

Q: So you were 18 years old by this time.

A: No, no I was younger than that. I was 16.

Q: I thought you said it was 1943.

A: Yes, but in 1943 I was three, four, oh yes, excuse me I was 18. Yes. Yes, of course.

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Q: What did your mother say to you when you had to leave?

A: My mother actually was so surprised that she said nothing because she didn't know what to say because this was something that has never happened before. This was not because I was a half Jewish. This was because I was actually at, in a Czech school and even the Christian, all the people were taken to Berlin.

Q: How long did you stay in Berlin?

A: Half a year.

Q: And then?

A: Then I returned to school and in a short time, I made my examination and after that I went to, I got a job. In the job I actually was just one and a half months, and they took me because I was half Jewish.

Q: How did they come and take you? Can you describe that?

A: They didn't take anything. They just sent a letter. I had to come to a certain place and there I was told that I will be taken to a camp.

Q: Do you remember where the place in Brno was?

A: I'm afraid not.

Q: Were there other students, other young men with you that day that you had to report, were there other boys?

A: I had of course to report with other, with other people but I didn't know them at that time.

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Q: Did you take anything special with you?

A: No, I don't think so. I just took what I had on me and some very, very few things, almost nothing.

Q: Did you say anything special to your mother?

A: I said my mother, she should not be afraid. Because I am young enough to, if I will be able so I will come back.

Q: Were you very religious? Was your mother a religious Christian?

A: She wasn't, she was not very much religious but she went to church sometimes and she prayed and but she was not actually a religious woman. She was not.

Q: Did you go to church with her?

A: Just sometimes at Christmas or something like that.

Q: You're reporting, you're being sent away. What month in 1943, do you remember?

A: It was September.

Q: And was this 43 you said or was it 1943 or 44?

A: It was 44.

Q: 44, oh ok, right. So September, and where did you go? Where did they send you to?

A: They sent me first to Prague, to a place where all these people were collected together so they could do for safe reason. But at that time, we didn't know what actually will be done with us.

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We just were collected. It was, it was a former school building and the school building actually we met with other people. And then they transported us to the camp.

Q: Which camp?

A: It was the camp was, the name was **Postelberg**.

Q: What kind of a camp was it? What, how –

A: Actually it was a camp for half Jewish people and people who, Christian people who were married to Jewish women.

Q: Where was it near, where was it located?

A: It was located by – it was already on the area which was occupied. It was a German area, yes. It was not anymore that, in Bohemia. If you know what I mean. It was behind the border of the republic.

Q: How do you spell that? How do you spell Postelberg?

A: P-O-S-T-E-L-B-E-R-G. Postelberg.

Q: You went there and what was, can you describe the camp to me?

A: The camp were actually situated in a, in a woods area which was from one side bordered by a river, a small river. From the other side by a rail track yes. And so it could be very well watched by a few people because they watched the rail track and they watched the river so we actually could, nobody could actually go out of the camp.

Q: What were the living arrangements like?

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A: The living arrangements. Very poor. It was actually barracks yes. You know the barracks which are already in concentration camps. So wooden, wooden buildings. It was a building, small area yes and we were actually situated with about ten people in one room. And actually what we did, we were jobbing actually for a construction company which built in the outside area from _____ property at an airport. Actually it was an underground airport which were able when they landed to go into the ground, actually to be hidden before everything yes. There was just an area for landing and the, actually the planes were underground. But actually this was, it was actually what they wanted to build. We just started it on the field and we never finished it.

Q: Was it all young men or were there women there?

A: No. Because there were even older men because there were for example married to Jewish women and they refused to divorce so they were taken to this camp, and – actually there were people of all age.

Q: But all men, all men.

A: All, just men.

Q: Just men. And did they give you enough food to eat?

A: Excuse me.

Q: Did they give you enough food to eat?

A: The food was actually very poor. There was of course a kitchen and which actually was, the cooks were out of the, out of the taken people. And the food was very poor but we actually worked in fields and the fields where we worked there were some –

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Q: Potatoes or –

A: Some, there was some food growing on the field. So we – I don't know how is, it was a, the plant which other sugar made from.

Q: I'm sorry the what? Say that again.

A: Sugar, sugar.

Q: Sugar cane you mean. Beets.

A: Yes, sugar so, so we actually we –

Q: Are you talking about beets?

A: We tried to dig this out of the ground to eat this because we didn't have enough food.

Q: Right, did you wear a uniform?

A: No, it was not uniform. We had just what we had all the time from home and it was getting from day to day was poorer and poorer and the shoes actually were replaced by just wooden --

Q: Clogs.

A: Clogs and then we had nothing there. It was from day to day was, was worse and worse.

Q: What did you talk about with the other young men?

A: We actually talked, talked only to men who we actually knew about that he is safe. Because nobody knew if there, if there for example is somebody who is just listening to us because we are talking about it, then so we were very careful about that.

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Q: Did you talk about trying to escape?

A: Sure we did, yes. Sure we did and I tried to escape and I did escape.

Q: You did?

A: Yes, I did.

Q: Tell me about that.

A: Ok.

Q: When was that, what month?

A: This was in April 45.

Q: Ok, so you were there from September.

A: In April 45 I, I escaped. Of course it was very -- how to tell, it was a dangerous time because it was to escape. Some, we knew that some of the people who escaped before me they just took and then they came to other places for example to Terezin and just was very much more dangerous at that time.

Q: So there were no, were there Russian troops around or not in that part of the country?

A: No there weren't. At the time I escaped in April. There was, there were no Russian troops. No, no troops at all. Not American troops and not Russian troops. At that time because it was beginning of April yes. And in April actually they -- at the of April, the Russian troops came to Brno. And this was at the time I was already back at home.

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Q: Oh, ok. Can we go back in time? I meant to ask you. Were you aware of what happened when you were younger, were you aware of what happened in **Lidice**?

A: No.

Q: You were not aware?

A: No, no I wasn't. Of course, at the moment yes, that it happened. Yes I was aware of this because I was aware for example that **Heydrick** was killed. And I was aware that somebody, something will happen to punish the people and to get actually the responsible people who did that. So I was aware of that.

Q: But do you remember it as a very frightening time? For you?

A: Excuse me.

Q: Do you remember that as being a very frightening time for you?

A: Actually I was never frightened because I was too young to be frightened and when nothing happened actually to me at that time. It was the time before, before I go to the camps and before I went to Germany. So I actually wasn't aware so I wasn't, I was never afraid at the time.

Q: When you were in the labor camp and then in the later camp, did you have any connections with your mother?

A: At what time do you mean?

Q: Well when you were –

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A: When I was in Berlin, so I had because there was a possibility to write home and to be actually in connection with the home. But later then of course not. We were, when I was in the camp it was very bad.

Q: You had no connection with your mother when you were in P –

A: No, no.

Q: How did you escape? What did you do?

A: I actually there was a – I told you before that the camp was bordered by one side by a rail track. And on the rail track there were some openings for water to escape. Yes, because. And through this – actually it was a, it was a tube. Yes. You could actually climb through the tube and go on the other side of the rail track and because all the area was in the woods. I told you that. Actually you just have to go through that and ended in a wood and then you could escape.

Q: Did you do it by yourself?

A: No, we were three of us.

Q: In the dark? You did it in the dark, at night?

A: Yes, at night. Of course and then after that we had to avoid any, any areas with people and just we tried to find out a train which is transporting in the morning some people to work. And we actually got among these people going to work and so by when the, avoided then go to Prague. We have to go around Prague and so we got in the maybe six or seven days to Brno.

Q: You went back to Brno?

A: Yes, of course I went home.

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Q: Were the other two young men from Brno also?

A: Yes, we were, we were all three from Brno.

Q: Brno. Do you remember their names, of the other two?

A: Ah.

Q: That's all right.

A: Excuse me. One, one was from Prague. And the other was from Brno. I can remember yes.
The name was, I never –

Q: That's ok.

A: I talked just once, one time to him after that.

Q: You get back to Brno. Do you see Germans?

A: I got back, I got back with the train which arrived at 6:00 in the morning with, when the work started. Brno and then I went because I knew very well the surrounding from Brno, I went to a wooden area where I was hidden during the day and when the dark started, so I went to **Luverno** then and home.

Q: You went back to your home you said?

A: Yes.

Q: And your mother was there?

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A: My mother was there, yes.

Q: Oh my. What was that like to see her again?

A: Oh I cannot, I cannot tell you but it was, she was very happy that I came back. You can imagine that.

Q: And so then the next thing to happen.

A: Ok, then in, I was it was just maybe a week before or ten days before the Russians came into Brno. So it was not a long time. Nobody knew about this because I got home. It was already dark so nobody could recognize me. Only in the street where I was living before that so nobody knew that I am home.

Q: Did you stay inside?

A: Yes I stayed inside and stayed inside until the Russians came to, to Brno.

Q: What was it like to see the Russian troops coming in?

A: It was awful

Q: Awful?

A: Yes it was awful.

Q: Why was it awful?

A: Because I can tell you why. Because I was living in an area. There were some cellars, some wine cellars yes. And the Russians found very well and easy out that there is wine in the cellars and they just got into the cellars and all the time were drunk. It was very, very bad at the time.

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Q: But you must have been very glad in the beginning to see the Russians coming?

A: No, no it was not very happy about that.

Q: Well it meant they were, the Germans were defeated. Didn't it mean that the Germans were defeated, that the Russians were there?

A: My mother was also German.

Q: No, I know that but I meant wasn't she and weren't you both happy that it was now Russians instead of Germans?

A: I don't think so.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: Ok.

A: We were just, just regret that the Americans came not yet, but the Russians. Because it's actually the first time after they came so two weeks yes were very, very bad.

Q: And then the Americans came?

A: The Americans came just to the western area to Pilsen and to the rest of the area.

Q: So they did not come to Brno?

A: No, no, no, they don't.

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Q: So then what happened?

A: Yeah then I got repatriated yes. I came, I just remember that I, the day I was born on the 12th of June I got my repatriation registration. And then I actually got the repatriation registration so I was able then to -- because I already finished. I had finished my secondary school so I tried to get the inscription to the university.

Q: You are now 20 years old right?

A: I was right, 20 yes.

Q: What did it mean to you that the war was over?

A: So I was very happy that the war was over and actually I could actually study chemistry which I did then. And I just, I was very happy that I survived it.

Q: Yes, and then at the end of the war did you think your father was still alive?

A: No, no, no. I, at the end of the war, I was 99 percent sure that he is not alive anymore because nobody was actually alive. Not only my father, but my grandmother and my aunt which stayed in Brno as well. So actually half the family stayed and half the family escaped so.

Q: Where did they go to? Where did the other members go to?

A: So my cousin went to United States and yes he, actually he became a very famous man there. He was a very, very known medical doctor at the University of San Francisco where he actually made some research work in the blood studies.

Q: What was his name?

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A: **Brecher**, George Brecher.

Q: Where did some of your other relatives go?

A: The other ones go to Israel and but my cousin, my other cousin, actually two of my cousins went to Israel and –

Q: When did these relatives leave?

A: Ok, before the war.

Q: They all left before the war? Ok.

A: All, not all but most of them.

Q: The ones who did leave, left before the war.

A: Yes.

Q: And the other ones did not survive?

A: No, they did not.

Q: Now you're 20 years old, and what do you then do? You start university?

A: I started university yes, of course, and I studied university for three years and then came the Russians. And then came the Russians and I had to leave the school.

Q: Really? Because?

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A: Yeah because of my relatives. Because, because of all the things happened. My, my father was actually was, they think –

Q: A capitalist?

A: He was a capitalist and actually a counsel of a South American country and so I had to leave the school.

Q: This is what, 1948?

A: 1940, actually it's the beginning of 1949. I was, I was almost done with the school.

Q: And so what did you do?

A: Well I went to -- actually I went to the military. Because I was of the age of, of 20 and this was the time to go to the military so I went for two years to the military.

Q: What was your reaction when you found out after the war was over when you found out what happened to all the Jews? Did you remember your thoughts?

A: Well this was actually because of my father and because of the family a very sad time because I knew that half of my family actually went through the Holocaust. And the other part of the family is in Israel, which I had not actually any, any knowledge about them, what they are doing. It was interrupted. Everything was interrupted.

Q: Now you're in the military for two years?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you just stay in Czechoslovakia? Did you stay in Brno or where were you?

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A: No, because I told you that I started with the age of actually 15, to swim. And this helped me in the military because there was, I was very good at the time and actually I was what they called a representative, which represented the country in swimming. So actually I got even in the military in a company which were just able to in the main time to do the sport, to continue the sports.

Q: So you did a lot of swimming in –

A: I did, actually the last time of my military only swimming.

Q: Really?

A: Yes.

Q: In the country?

A: Yes and this was, this was even possible when they knew that my father was Jewish and he was a capitalist and everything. So everything was pardoned-ized, yes, and I was good in swimming so do the swimming.

Q: When you got out of the army, what did you do?

A: Then I started to do my, because I was educated in chemistry so I started to do my chemistry work.

Q: In Brno?

A: In Brno.

Q: And who did you work for?

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A: For **Zburovka** Brno, which actually the, -- Zburovka means army, for arms factory yes. In the war time they made guns and rifles and things like that and in the, in the normal times they made some, some official with meant on and hunting rifles and something like that.

Q: And so you worked there?

A: Yes, I worked there as a chemist in the laboratory.

Q: And you lived with your mother?

A: I lived still with my mother, yes.

Q: How long did you work for that factory?

A: For that factory I worked actually let me see. Many years.

Q: What was it like under the rule of the Russians? Under the communist rule?

A: Under the communist rules, it was everything very bad still. In the 60s and there started a time which was called the Prague –

Q: Spring?

A: Spring time. And actually helped me to get a better job and because I was speaking some languages, so actually got even out of the country.

Q: Where did you go?

A: First I went to Egypt.

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Q: Egypt.

A: Yes, Egypt.

Q: To do what?

A: You have to do work for Zburovka of Brno which actually was delivering some military equipment to Egypt.

Q: And then where did you go after that?

A: Then I went to Afghanistan.

Q: And what did you do there?

A: The same thing.

Q: Same thing?

A: Yes.

Q: And did you have a family by then, were you married?

A: At that time I was already, I had a family of course, but I was already not divorced from my wife, but we lived –

Q: Separate?

A: Separate yes.

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Q: Do you have children?

A: Yes, I have three children.

Q: You were in Egypt. Then you were in Afghanistan and then where?

A: Then I, then came the Russians again. Then came the Russians in 69. And then I escaped again to Germany.

Q: You got out to Germany, yeah. And did you work in Germany?

A: Yeah, of course I worked in Germany for maybe wait a moment. From 70 to 83. I worked in Germany.

Q: When you said you escaped, how did that work? How did you do that?

A: I just at that time I worked in Afghanistan. So I just from Afghanistan didn't return to Czechoslovakia, but I went to Austria where you remember that I told you that my mother was actually a Viennese. So the other part of my family was living in Vienna. In Austria. So I actually went to this part of the family to join them and from there I went to Germany.

Q: And where in Germany did you live?

A: In **Neuss**, which is actually one town with Dusseldorf together.

Q: Why did you go to Germany?

A: Yeah, because I was actually in Germany I was actually how is the right word. I was -- because my mother was actually a German yes. I'm and my father was actually of German origin. So actually the German actually --

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Q: Accepted you?

A: Accepted that I am German. Because I actually you know that I even went some years to a German school so I actually spoke very well German so they actually granted me for German.

Q: How did you feel –

A: I didn't have, I didn't have any problems with -- to prove that I am of German origin.

Q: But how did you feel living in Germany knowing that Germany was the one to start the war?

A: Well it was a very long time since that because it was already you imagine that it was already 1970. It was actually 25 years later. So actually this thought were very, very a long way away and even the, the Germans at that time tried actually because they knew that I coming from and who I am and they tried to help me and after 25 years there were other people than the Germans, than the Nazis yeah. There were no Nazis. There were other people, younger people and who understood the situation and who actually were feeling that the Germans at the war time did not the right thing and so actually I did not have any problems to settle there.

Q: Then you stayed in Germany and when did you leave?

A: I stayed in Germany for maybe 12 years.

Q: Who did you work for in Germany?

A: In Germany I worked for, you want the name of the company or –

Q: Sure, do you remember the name?

A: The company was **Longbine** and **Fundhauser** for there I worked for seven years.

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Q: As a chemist?

A: As a chemist yes. And then I worked for **Hillyer and Knur** again as a chemist and the leader of the chemical laboratory. And then I went to United States.

Q: Where did you come, what city?

A: I came to Warren, Ohio.

Q: And who did you work for here?

A: For Thomas Steel.

Q: Who?

A: Thomas Steel. Thomas Steel Company.

Q: And how long did you stay in the United States?

A: I stayed in United States maybe nine years.

Q: And you lived in Ohio, the whole time?

A: At that time I lived in Ohio, yes. And actually I retired there and I was actually of the opinion that I will stay there forever. For good, but what happened was that you know the situation in 1990. They opened the borders to the Czech Republic and so I just several times went to the Czech Republic and met friends there. And the people I knew before, so actually decided to go back to Europe.

Q: And so now you live in the Czech Republic and in Germany?

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A: I live in Germany.

Q: You don't live in the Czech Republic anymore?

A: You cannot say. I have a flat there but return. Something between. I am, I pay my duties and my taxes in Germany and in the Czech Republic, I am only to visit.

Q: Do you think this war time experience made you feel more Jewish or did not have any effect?

A: I always felt more Jewish than Christian. I can tell you that because I, even better knew the Jewish part of the family than the Christian part of the family. I spent a long time with the Jewish people and a few times with the Christian people. So I actually felt even that I was educated in a Christian way, I felt more to be a Jewish people.

Q: How do you feel now? Do you still feel that way or is that –

A: Yeah, still feel that way, yes. I'm just, I was already last year I was in Israel and where I have a cousin still living. Actually it's not my cousin, it's my grand cousin, the daughter of my cousin. So.

Q: What are your thoughts about Israel?

A: Oh I was just surprised how changed by the time I was there before.

Q: When did you first go?

A: I, in the 90s, sometimes in the 90s. The late 90s I think, 97. Something like that and then I, after 15 years I went again and I was surprised what happened and in the meantime –

Q: You mean the development? What do you mean you were surprised?

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A: Yes, I mean the development and I mean the amount of the people. There were a lot of new people coming there and doing their business. And a lot of changed. It was already, I could only see in the airport and on the way I actually to **Rishanon El Tzion** [ph] where my cousin is living. And I met actually a lot of the family of the young people and spent a lot of time with them.

Q: Do you feel that the world has learned any lessons from the Holocaust?

A: Oh I definitely think that, yes. Even the German people. Actually the, my sons actually two of my sons are married to German girls, yes. And the girls and even the families of the girls, yes, are absolutely thinking that this is Hitler's time was something which shouldn't happen at all. So actually there are, they are very open people. And even that they know that my sons are actually half Jews because my wife is half Jewish as well.

Q: I was going to ask you about her, really.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: Is she from Czechoslovakia? Where is –

A: Yes, but I didn't know. I didn't know. At the time I actually we met the first time and then we spent our early times together so I didn't know about that.

Q: How did you raise your children? Did you raise them as Christians or Jews or how did you –

A: No I raised them, I didn't raise them religious. I did not.

Q: What about your wife's family? What happened to them? Did she lose any relatives?

A: Of course she lose their father and the mother was Christian so she survived.

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Q: How long, when did your mother pass away?

A: My mother. My mother passed away in 1976.

Q: Do you know where your wife's Jewish relatives were taken to?

A: I don't know about that anything. I'm sorry about that.

Q: Your children, what are their thoughts about the war and the Holocaust and everything. I mean they obviously knew what happened to their –

A: Of course, they knew yes. They, they knew and actually they are especially one is actually in knowing the relatives and even some relatives from Israel was there that visited our family years ago. So actually they know about that.

Q: And then you said you have a third child? Where is your third child. Two are living in Germany and where is your third child?

A: Two are living in Germany and one is living in the Czech Republic. He just refused to immigrate because his wife didn't want to go away from the parents, from her parents.

Q: What do you consider yourself today? Are you Czech? Are you German?

A: I consider myself German.

Q: You consider yourself German now?

A: Yes.

Q: That's very interesting.

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A: Because I paid my taxes in Germany so I consider myself. I cannot tell you that I am a Czech when even when I am just living between these two countries. Yes and sometimes I am in the Czech Republic where I have a flat. And sometimes I am here. I have, half the family I have here. The other half is in the Czech Republic. So what shall I do?

Q: You're retired now?

A: Oh I am retired very many years because I am very old man already.

Q: Do you think about the war often as you've gotten older?

A: Oh yes, I think about the time and especially in the last years I am very often thinking about my father and about his time, what could happen after the war if my father would survive.

Q: You mean what he'd be doing, is that what you mean?

A: What, actually I, yes what, what he will be doing and actually I didn't actually get very much education of my father's side because you know my father was out of my life in 1934, which I was nine years old. So he had very few possibilities to educate myself and to think what he thinking what I should be in my life if you understand what I mean.

Q: You have three sons?

A: Yes, I have three sons.

Q: When those sons were the age that you were when you were in the labor camp and in the other camp, did it make you think of those times? When they were that same age that you were, did it bring back memories of what you were doing when you were their age, the hard life that you had in –

A: I don't think that they are thinking about that because I, in my family I actually told very few

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things about my former life, about the Holocaust and about the, about my experience in the camp in Berlin and the camp in Postelberg. So and I don't think that they were very – they know about it, yes. But they didn't question too much about that. You –

Q: But, yeah go on.

A: Two of the sons are medical doctors, and the third one – because my wife was a medical doctor. And the third one is studying construction and is a construction engineer, a building engineer. So actually they did very well. I'm very happy with my family and even with my sons because they developed in very good and useful people and I am very happy about that.

Q: Are there any sights or sounds or smells or something that make you think of the war time years when you were in Postelberg or in Berlin? Today, is there anything that reminds you of that time?

A: Of course I – it does because about the time in Berlin I wrote a book. I wrote a book with a friend of mine which spent the time in Berlin with me. So actually I had a lot possibilities to think about the time and I even visited Berlin many years later to see about the areas and about the places where I actually spent my time in Berlin.

Q: Tell me a little bit more about the book.

A: Well it's actually a book which happens about the time when we were at the school and how we were taken about the school and what we actually thought about the whole thing on the trip, because nobody actually knew where he is going. We didn't know that we were going to Berlin to take care about the dead people and about the ruins there. And we were actually astonished when we landed at Berlin, the capital of Germany and had to be there almost one half a year and do the job. So this handles about the book and then it handles about actually the time when the Germans came to occupy the Czech area. And then it handles about even about the time that the Czech Republic changed to the communist republic. In both of these times were actually for us a very hard time to survive this.

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So actually it had, it had the book handles about the surviving both of these times, the German time and then the communist.

Q: What is the name of your book?

A: The name of the book remembers a little bit of the Hemingway book because Hemingway wrote a book about the lost generation. And we, our book actually got the name let me translate. It's the Then Lost Generation.

Q: Who was the other author?

A: The other author was named Fisher. Josef Fisher.

Q: Was he also half Jewish?

A: No, no he was Christian.

Q: Where, has the book been translated?

A: Because you remember, you remember it was since at the time we were taken from the school because we were half Jewish.

Q: Has the book been translated?

A: No, never, no, no.

Q: It's in the Czech language.

A: In the Czech language but the Czech language and sometimes some chapters are in English. No in German so excuse me. Some chapters are in English because we reproduced some flyers which were coming from the Americans and from the English from the planes down to Berlin.

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Q: So you say as you've gotten older you think more about your war time experiences?

A: Well I actually got older so I thought actually more at the time in Berlin because I tried to forget the time in the camp with the Jewish people, the half Jewish people. It was something which I didn't like and what I actually wanted to get out of my mind.

Q: Do you have grandchildren?

A: Yes, I have two grandchildren.

Q: You don't speak of the war years now with your children, with your sons anymore. Right?

A: Did I try to speak about that, so they tell me father, we don't want to speak about that because we already know everything. That you told. So –

Q: What are your thoughts about the United States? You said you had thought maybe you would retire here but then obviously changed your mind.

A: Oh yes, actually what I wanted to do is retire and stay in the United States and what happens, then there was a possibility to return to the Czech Republic, back to Czech Republic. So I actually – and then I still thought that I will stay there because I thought that some of my sons will come to me, to United States. And actually it would happen that one will stay in Czech Republic, the other one in Germany and the third one the United States so I didn't know what to do. Yes, it was a little bit complicated.

Q: You still have a son in the United States?

A: No he then decided to go to Germany because there was some difficulties with, when he studied at the university so they didn't want to actually acknowledge that he studied in Germany, the studies. And then ended in United States. There were some difficulties. So actually he said

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he would lose two years and he didn't want to lose the two years so he stayed in Germany. You understand what I mean?

Q: Have you been back to the United States since you left?

A: Oh yes, several times.

Q: Have you been to the Holocaust Museum in Washington?

A: No, I have been to the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem.

Q: And what were your thoughts there?

A: Oh this is great. It's just great. It's something which I didn't even expect to see because actually a new one. When I went to Israel the first time in the 90s it wasn't built yet. And actually it is a pretty new museum. I was just astonished and I was very actually I was very glad that I can see things which I actually wasn't aware of. I was very impressed about that.

Q: Such as, what did you – you said you learned some things.

A: Yes, of course I learned some things and –

Q: Such as what?

A: Well mostly about how people care about the times and how, how they are able to reproduce things which are actually where I thought were forgotten because nobody actually right after the war, actually nobody talked about this time. There were other sort of people and people got, actually tried to get their lives again and I think they hadn't time to talk about this. And when I saw it after all this time, this museum I was very impressed by the way, how it handles things. And even there is another part of the museum which handles just children. And it is extremely

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interesting, this part of the children you know. Because how well the children survived and how they actually got through these times.

Q: Do you think the Holocaust could happen again?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: Yeah, because people are thinking in Germany all the people are, there is a part of the people who are actually still having in mind the Nazi area. There are very few people and they do not have any influence at the politics and I don't think that, and the people since that time is now 50 or 55 years after the war. They just change in thinking and they are not any more racist I think.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to add to what you've said. Any thoughts that you have?

A: I think we almost covered everything I wanted to tell about this.

Q: Any other things.

A: I am just happy that I could yes, there is something because the family of my cousin I told you about the medical doctor in San Francisco. So actually when I spent my time in United States all these ten years, I met this guy very often and we met even several times a year. Even when we were I was in, actually in Ohio and he was in California. So we met at least twice or three times a year and spent very much free times together. And this family is a Jewish family. He married then a woman from Prague. She is Jewish and he adopted actually her five children. And even with this family I was very close to this family and spent a lot time with this family.

Q: How do you spell his last name?

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A: Brecher, B like Bertha B-R-E-C-H-E-R.

Q: And his first name is George, right.

A: George, yes. He's a very famous man. He could, you can find it on the internet . His work and he was all over the Europe and he was very famous.

Q: Is he still alive?

A: No, no he died maybe, he was very, he was 12 years older than I, so actually he died at the age of 92 several years ago in I think it's several years.

Q: Anything else you wanted to add? Before we close?

A: I don't think about anything else now.

Q: Why did you want to do this interview?

A: I wanted actually to do the interview because I am very glad that people want to talk to me. And actually the interview was it was a supposition from Mickey that I could do it and I wanted to talk to somebody who can understand what I actually went through and who even can to, to make sure that it won't be forgotten.

You see my English since I am now 20 years. It may be over 20 years I am out of United States so it's a little bit rusty. But I would live in the United States, I think I would be, I would brush it up a little.

Q: Your English is wonderful and it's wonderful –

A: Thank you about that. It's not so wonderful, but some expressions I'm just seeking some expressions which are disappeared the time.

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Q: When is the last time you came to the United States?

A: The last time I was there. Wait a moment. The last time I was there in 2006. Competing.

Q: Competing?

A: Competing yes.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Competing in swimming.

Q: Oh my goodness.

A: There was a –

Q: Where were you swimming?

A: In Palo Alto. There was the world championship of seniors yes. I am competing with the seniors and it's called the masters, the master's championship of the world.

Q: How did you do?

A: I won. I won. It's my best. Swimming is my profession you know that.

Q: What stroke do you do?

A: If you want to be good you have to know every, any stroke.

Q: Are you still swimming?

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A: Yes I am still swimming. I am swimming three times a week and in summer time every day.

Q: That is a very good note to end on unless you had anything else you wanted to talk about.

A: Oh no. I think this is all.

Q: Well we'll end on that high note of your swimming success. That's wonderful.

A: I am still glad that I can do it at my age you know because I am now 87 and I can still compete and it doesn't make me any problems so I'm happy about that.

Q: We will stop the interview now. I just wanted to say that this concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Hans Ziegler.

A: I thank you.

(end)