Interview with Dr. Herbert Jonas
By David Zarkin
May 6, 1983

In Dr. Jonas' office
St. Paul, Minnesota.

Jewish Community Relations Council, Anti-Defamation League
of Minnesota and the Dakotas

HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY TAPING PROJECT

(…) cannot understand what word is said.

Q: This is an interview with Dr. Herbert Jonas for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project by David Zarkin at Dr. Jonas' office on May 6, 1983 in Saint Paul.

Dr. Jonas please tell me your complete name, including your Jewish name, if it is different.

A: Well, it's very simple: Herbert Jonas; and no Jewish name there.

Q: And when were you born, Dr. Jonas?

A: May 23, 1915.

Q: And in what town and country were you born?

A: Düsseldorf, Germany.

Q: What were your parents' names, and where were they born?

A: My father's name was Rudolf Jonas, he was born in Daltmo (sp?). Germany. My mother's name was Erna Jonas, born Danzig, like the city of Danzig? Born in Moivee (sp?), Germany.

Q: And your grandparents' names and where were they born? Do you remember them?

A: My father's parents were born in Westphalia. I don't know the town exactly, and was Ferdinand and Clara Jonas. They lived in Dortmund, where my grandfather

had a grocery wholesale business, and he was the secretary or business manager of the Jewish community.

Q: Were your grandparents from Germany, too?

A: Oh yes.

Q: I mean your great-grandparents?

A: Yes, I have records, not quite firm records, going back through relatives in Iowa and San Francisco who we discovered accidentally in Israel, that family goes back at least to the early 1700's, who had always been living between Westphalia and the Dutch border, especially in the town of Borken, B-o-r-k-e-n, which is near the Dutch border, and had intermarried, frequently, so it's kind of a clan by itself.

And on my mother's side, the family came apparently, on my grandmother's side -- Bertha Danzig -- from the old city of Worms, W-o-r-m-s, where the (…) where famous rabbis lived, up in the Polantany (sp?) for Western Germany, southwestern Germany, but I don't know too much about the history there except there seems to be some blood in there that came from Spain, from the Spanish exodus, and some that came with the Roman migrations, 2,000 years ago. People settled there. On my grandfather's side, on my mother's grandfather's side, I don't know much, he died very early, and we don't know much about the history of this man. He died in the early 1900's.

Q: In Germany, or…?

A: In Germany. And my grandmother took over business and then they moved to Cologne from Moivee, where she and her older son opened up a real estate business. And this son had come to the United States in 1905, and went to Alaska to look for gold. He didn't find any gold. And the earthquake came in San Francisco, and he went back home to Cologne.

Q: Back to Germany.

A: Back to Germany. This particular person, of interest probably to future historians, stayed in Cologne. He hid while the Nazis were there. He had married a Catholic lady, and two weeks before the Americans moved in, somebody denounced him, and he was caught and died in Bergen-Belsen.

Q: When you say denounced him, what exactly does that mean?

A: Somebody saw him on the street, he went out, so the story goes, that he wanted to take some pictures of the destruction of some of the real estate he had. Another story is that he wanted to join the American troops standing outside the city and help them come in, and some of his former clients saw him, and turned him in.

And he had been hiding underground in Cologne with the help of friendly people for four years, so that's this person.

Q: And this person was…

A: My uncle.

Q: This was your uncle, OK.

A: On my mother's side.

Q: And so he died in the Holocaust.

A: Uh-huh. Now, to continue this particular tale, that…he had a brother, another brother of my mother's, a chemist. The inventor of the first plastic fabrics -- self-made chemist.

When the Nazis came to his house in 1936-or-7, I believe, where he had lived with a Jewish lady, they both took cyanide before the Nazis could take them.

My mother had a third brother, who died before the First War, a writer who died of T.B., so he's not involved in the Holocaust. On my father's side, there were several brothers and sisters. I'll start with my father first. He was…or had studied in Germany before the First War, first engineering, and as a Jew he couldn't get a job -- which he should have known -- then he went into economics, and he couldn't get a job -- before the First War.

Q" Before the First World War.

A: Before the First War. Then he went into journalism, and he found a job at a newspaper, in Manheim, Germany, where he also met a cousin of my mother, his future wife, who was a publisher of a journal about the theater. Something like the American Journal Variety. This journal was called Das Theater. My father took over this one, too, and became a publisher.

Q: In what town was this? What city?

A: In Mannheim.

Q: Mannheim?

A: First World War came along and he was drafted into the munitions industry, because of his knowledge of engineering and economics, with a company called Rheinmetall, Rheinish Metals, a big munitions factory.

Q: What kind of metals?

A: The Rhineland. Rhineland Steel in translate.

Q: Oh, steel, O.K.

A: Rheinmetall means along the Rhine river and steel.

Q: O.K.

A: …with whom he stayed until the end of the war -- First World War, when he had to go underground, when the Communists took over for awhile in the Rhineland, 'cause he was a capitalist. When he came back he opened up his own publishing house in Düsseldorf. He printed books, magazines, newspapers…

Q: This was back about when?

A: Between 1920 and 1929.

Q: I see.

A: So I grew up as a printer's ink.

Q: You worked in the shop -- in the printer's shop?

A: Well, I was a boy still. I was born 1915, but I grew up in this atmosphere of newspaper business. And specifically my dad was interested in writing critiques for the theater and the arts in his own paper. He lost this in the depression, 1929.

Q: He lost the newspaper?

A: Yes, the whole publishing house.

Q: O.K.

A: Because his customers couldn't pay him. He couldn't pay for the paper.

Q: The advertisers couldn't pay…

A: They paid him with goods, with wine and groceries, and furniture with which he couldn't pay the supplies or electric company.

Q: Uh-huh, yea, right.

A: And then he got a job with the largest German newspaper in Berlin, Berliner Tageblatt, equivalent to the New York Herald Tribune, and he became a leading

person there, and in the fall of 1932, the Jewish publisher fired practically all Jewish employees, trying to save his neck. He knew the Nazis were coming.

And then my father was unemployed, but in 1934, the day that I left Germany, he started to work underground for a Dutch newspaper until 1941 --April, '41 -- with false identification papers with which he survived

In April, '41, he and my mother took the last sealed train out of Germany via France and Spain and Portugal to come and join me and my sister in California.

Q: That was the last -- what train did you…?

A: Sealed.

Q: What's a sealed train?

A: Sealed train means the Germans sealed the doors so nobody could go in and out, and the seal was not taken off from the train until they stopped in Lisbon, Portugal. Was special train. Like a prisoner's train. You see?

And my father then worked in Berkeley, California as a streetcar and bus mechanic…

Q: This would be in what year then?

A: From '34 until 1945, when he died of cancer. He worked as a mechanic and as a warehouseman for Palmolive Peat Corporation, always hoping he'd go…could go back to Germany and go back in the newspaper business.

And my sister who is living now in Boston, Gertrude Jonas, was born 1918 -- August 17, 1918 -- and she left Germany in 1938 and joined me in California where we both were students at the University of California. She made her master's degree in music.

And she spent two years, from '36 to '38, in what we call Hachshara camps. Are you familiar with that? Hachshara?

Q: Maybe we should explain about that.

A: That is the agricultural training camp for people who wanted to go to Palestine.

Q: And they were located where?

A: More than several places in Germany. This was near Berlin under the surveillance of the storm troopers. And they had to do double duty; work on the

farm and work also for the Nazis -- where upon she had a nervous breakdown and was in a coma for three months prior to coming here.

Q: How did she get here? How did she make those arrangements?

A: Well my relatives in California, in Stockton and San Francisco and San Jose…

Q: Stockton?

A; Yea, Stockton, you know where that is.

Q: Yes, near Sacramento, yes.

A: Yea, Stockton and at Santa Clara and San Francisco we wrote affidavits. And in 1939, you could still get out. And she studied music where I was studying agriculture.

Q: What kind of work did she have to do for the Nazis?

A: Oh they had to furnish food for them, and they had to take exercises and air raid exercises in air raid shelters. In other words, half the work in the training camp was for Jewish training and the other half was supplying supplies to the Nazi Party. They used them as slave labor.

Q: Agricultural supplies.

A: Yea. So that's her story.

Now, come back to my mother's side. Let's see…now wait a minute. I've gotta think. I want to amplify (…) on my mother's side so to…

She had relatives in the town of Aachen, A-a-c-h-e-n. It's also called Aix, A-i-x, at the German-Dutch-Belgian border, the town where Charlemagne was crowned in the year 800.

And that part of the family fled to Holland, and some of those disappeared when they were occupied by the Germans -- some survived.

Now coming back to my father's side, the uncles I alluded to before.

One brother had a department store in the town of Düsseldorf with the name of Alfred Jonas. He had married into the family of Coppel, C-o-p-p-e-l, like Ted Koppel on ABC in the evening? Maybe he's related, I don't know.

And that family fled when their store was taken over in 1933 by the Nazis. Alfred Jonas died of cancer in Holland before the Nazis came, but his wife and one son

were grabbed by the Nazis when they invaded Holland in 1939, and disappeared, while two daughters escaped -- or rather were underground with Dutch families and came to the United States after the war. They were hiding like Anne Frank, in an attic.

Another brother, Hubert Jonas, who worked with him, with the help of his Catholic wife, was hidden in Germany, and then hidden in Holland. So he spent half a year in a concentration camp, but she got him out again…

Q: Do you know which one?

A: I don't know, there was this famous camp in Holland. I can't remember the name. And he survived the camp. Was a very sick man when he came out. He came back to the town of Düsseldorf and died in 1953.

And that more-or-less runs out the family story. Now to your question about what I, personally, experienced in 1933 to '34 when I left. I left June 19, 1934 from Berlin.

Q: Oh, I'm preceding that, too. We can talk about what happened before the war, before the Nazis actually came to power.

A: Well, before the Nazis came, as far as anti-Semitism goes, I experienced this right in the town of Düsseldorf when I was in grammar school, elementary school, where we had bloody fist-fights between myself, and communists and myself, and the good society of the industrialists -- both.

The communists would attack Jewish kids with open bottles and knives, because we were equivalent to capitalists. To the people of the industrial, managerial society, we Jews were communists. We got it from both sides.

And my dad said one day, "Now if you come home again beaten up, I'm going to give you a shellacking, too. If you beat them up, we open a bottle of wine." And that worked. I never got beaten up again, though I had to change schools several times. I have a few scars on my legs, still today, from these fights. And that's when I decided that I wanted to go into agriculture, go to Palestine.

Q: That was in 19…?

A: That was about 1926, '27 already. And always had in my mind to come to California, join relatives that came in the 1880's the big migration of the 1880's, and learn agriculture.

When I came to Berlin, to high school, in 1930, there was anti-Semitism -- plenty of it. And also very strong animosity between the eastern Jews and the, you

might call it, indigenous German Jews -- something I still feel right here in town now-a-days. The clash of two civilizations, Eastern and Western.

And we had some tough times in school. Being a very outspoken person, I complained to the principal about mistreatment by certain teachers who always gave me an "F". And so I got transferred again.

With the approach of 1932, it became more obvious that the National Socialists would take over.

Q: The Nazis…

A: …would take over. So I started to join a Jewish sports group and learn jujitsu and judo, against the wishes of the Jewish community who was scared to provoke the Nazis. And a…

I remember there were many communists in uniform in school. The day the Nazis took over, they put on their Nazi uniform. (…) kind of glove.

Now my father knew, just as well as I did, that Nazis would come, and I left school the summer of '32 to learn something practical, which meant I never finished German high school, which at that time was 13 years.

Q: You mean you'd been in school 13 years, is that…

A: No. If I had finished, it would have been thirteen. I finished after 11 years.

Q: I see. You quit after 11 years there.

A: Yea, which was sufficient to come here. And I went to work in a department store, a Jewish department store, with the name of Nathan Israels, which had been founded in 1815. And all it's members were British subjects, because the women were sent to England to deliver their babies there, to be sure the Germans wouldn't touch them. That speaks for a long term of anti-Semitism in Germany.

And there were two sons in this store, Wilfred and Herbert Israel. Wilfred was a man who founded Bet Shamin (sp?) the children's village, in that time, Palestine. And he and the actor, the one who played the Hunchback of Notre Dame…

Q: Charles…

A: No, not Charles Laughton, there was a famous actor…have you seen the old film? Hunchback of Notre Dame ?

Q: Yes.

A: It's a Jewish actor. (…) Anyhow…

Q: Not Lon Chaney?

A: No. They were shot down by…they were flying back from Palestine to England when the Germans shot them down. But he had managed to found Bet Shamin (sp?) and the kibbutz, Hachshara, which was the same group of German Jewish kids to whom I belonged to. And this man, Wilfred Israel, convinced me to come to California as soon as possible…

Q: Tell me just a second about the group of Jewish kids that you belonged to before we skip over that.

A: That was, they're still living in the kibbutz called Hachshara, and they had a German name called *Werkleute*. That means, working people. They were a kind of politically active, like the British Labor Party or something like this, but with a very strong, cultural, intellectual input. And they have now-a-days the agricultural sector, furniture factory, and a big concert hall. They give many concerts there. Have you seen them? Have you been over there? It's an interesting place.

Well, in any case, after finishing two years in that store of apprenticeship, I decided it's time to get out. In fact, I wanted to get out in 1933, but my parents wouldn't let me.

Q: What town was this in now?

A: Berlin.

Q: Berlin, O.K.

A: My parents wouldn't let me go yet. And in '34 I was 19 years old and I just took off. I went by boat through the Panama Canal to San Francisco. And then I worked on farms for a year, and then went to school in California, and got my B.S. in fall of 1941, a Ph.D. in 1950. And that's about…gives a rough outline of what happened.

Q: I think that there's a lot of good stories there, you know, I mean recollections about people and events, and maybe there's some others that you could think about. For instance while your father was a journalist and you working, also, associated with him, what news events do you remember during this time? Up till 1934, or did you get news? I suppose that wasn't a problem, maybe you could tell me something about it.

A: The news events were…how do you mean…?

Q: World events, things that were going on in Nazi Germany, things that were going on in Europe…

A: Well, of course, we could…we would get news indirectly. If you live in a city like Berlin, it's like Washington D.C. You know people, you hear about it, you have press services, and being with a very large newspaper, of course you have lots of sources, and you know whose reporters were harassed. You knew that Nazi Storm Troopers would come into the place and smash up 15 presses, or beat up reporters even before they came into the government. And threaten people at home. Or say in the store that I worked in, they would come in and beat up people, and the police never interfered -- that was before 1933.

But the communists did the same thing.

Q: They did?

A: Yea. It's an old tradition in continental Europe. If you don't like someone in the news business or in some other companies, people take to the streets where they invade the premises and beat people up -- especially between World War I and World War II.

And before World War I, the Kaiser did the same thing. Like my mother's cousin who was locked up in jail for writing something the Kaiser didn't like, because he criticized the Kaiser's girlfriend who was a ballerina, and so the "dirty Jew" was locked up, which was a (martyr?) in those days, to be locked up for reporting the free press.

So, we knew what was going on. You were always under tension.

Q: Did you father have any problems with the Nazis because of his publishing business, or…?

A: Oh, well, let's see, in the Rhineland, in Düsseldorf where he had his own business, people were more liberal. They were not Prussians. And they were much more tolerant.

That's another interesting aspect of the German-Jewish history that you might not be aware of, and that is: In northwestern Germany, people were much more tolerant, to have influence by French traditions from the French revolution. And the…along the Dutch border, people were much more tolerant. They never bothered the Jews. The big pogroms were in southern Germany, because that's where the Crusades came through from France heading for the Holy Land. They never hit the north. So these families lived there for a long, long time, and never were bothered. But in Berlin, under the auspices of the court, until the early part of this century, Jews had to have a permission to live there. And then around

1890, 1900, it became liberalized, but Jews were still second-class citizens, and anything was permissible. You see what I mean?

Q: Yea, right. Yea.

A: But they were (…), I mean they were the maintenance of culture, civilization, medicine and so on. In other words, the Germans wanted to have it both ways. They wanted second-class citizens, but they used them as first-class experts, a kind of a schizophrenic society in (…) today.

Q: They do.

A: Oh happened (…) several times.

Q: How did the Nuremberg Laws affect your family at the time, or were those…had you already left?

A: Well the Nuremberg Laws didn't affect us, because they were essentially that Jews could not be civil servants, Jews could not be teachers, Jews could not intermarry -- that didn't affect us, as a family. It made it tough for both my uncles who had Christian wives.

Q: In what respect?

A: Well the wives were harassed as if they had been Jews…

Q: Oh, I see.

A: …but they were not locked up.

Q: I know we've discussed certain members of your family. Are there some that we haven't discussed as to whether they perished in the Holocaust, or whether they got out, or have we discussed all the members of your family: cousins and aunts and uncles -- and what became of them…?

A: No, the others. No. This is all that lived at that time. That means a total of four of them died in concentration camps or disappeared, and the others got out and survived in some fashion or another. And others had died before already. Now these other people I mentioned to you, there was everyone.

Q: O.K. What languages were spoken in your home?

A: German.

Q: Was your family secular or religious in practice or orientation?

A: Well, I'd say equivalent to Reform in the United States.

Q: O.K. Did you have any formal Jewish education yourself?

A: No, not really, because the two rabbis in the town of Düsseldorf, I didn't care for. And as happens in many families, while my parents were not enthused about Jewish education, my sister and I went the other way. We educated ourselves by going to lectures and the Jewish youth group, and of course in Berlin there was the Institute of Jewish Studies headed by Rabbi Leo Baeck and Yochan Prinz (sp?), and we learned quite a lot there, so at the end, we knew more than our parents.

Q: Were there regular programs that you went to at the Institute, or did you…

A: Oh, yes. They had as long as I was…well until about 1938, I would guess, it was like a college: courses, theater, lectures; like an extension service, owned by the Jewish community. Very active. Symphony concerts and so on. And that (…) Jewish Community Center, only more intensively so --or Saint Paul, the Community Center.

And then we both accumulated a large Jewish library, and I still have one right now.

Q: That you were able to bring with you.

A: Well, some…some we brought over. My parents a big container via Siberia to California. Some of the things were stolen by the Russians or Germans and some came in. And then of course, I've bought much in the meantime, continuously.

Q: Did you have contact with gentile people during the time you were in Germany?

A: Well, in the beginning, of course, before '33. We had contact with gentiles. And the one year that I was under the Nazis, '33 to '34, I had contact, but it became less and less and less. People were scared. When my sister left in '38, she had even less contact.

Q: In what kind of settings would you have contact with gentiles?

A: Well they wouldn't dare to come to the apartment anymore. You would meet them in restaurants, or you would meet them at work. Meet them on the street. But they wouldn't come to your house. If they came, they would come at night to the back door -- when nobody was watching. Similar to the situation of Russia today. People couldn't come in.

But I had some contacts, too, I might say, where we had some fist-fights where I'd use my judo to good advantage.

Q: What kind of incidents were those? How did those…?

A: Well you'd go out…Nazi Storm Troopers or young Nazis in school, or at work or anywhere else, they could attack you any time they wanted to. And they call you dirty names and start pushing you, like young people do, and then you have to defend yourself -- which was not permissible, according to the rules of the Jewish community, because we're not gonna supposed to provoke the enemy. Another reason why I left so early. I didn't want to participate in this lying down.

Q: Did you have any discussions with other people in the Jewish community about what was going on at this time?

A: Well, not formal discussions.

Q: Well, I mean among friends.

A: Here?

Q: No, in the Jewish community in Germany when you were…

A: Well of course, synagogues were still open, and the study centers and so on. Of course. You exchanged an information: which streets were safe, which streets were not safe, which stores were safe, which one was not, which grocery store to go to and get food, and which you wouldn't get any food. Sure. Because the big department stores didn't start until I left -- until after I left! You see. The big deportations started about 1938, after the Crystal Night when all the Jewish establishments were busted out. So, that's when it really became bad.

Q: That was about in what year?

A: '38, November '38.

Q: So, was there discussion with you and your friends about leaving Germany and, ah…

A: Sure, we're discussing this, and some left, and some said, "Augh, will blow over." Some were scared, some didn't want to leave their families behind. Some insist on going to Palestine. Some made it and some didn't.

Q: Now you had contemplated going to Palestine, didn't you, or…

A: I wanted to go after I'd finished studying agriculture, but I never made it, because the war came along, and my family came over, and I had to take care of them first. So I didn't get to Israel until 1956.

Q: Oh, O.K., so you were thinking about going from this country, from the United States…

A: I wanted to study here and then go over, but then the war came, you couldn't move. And during the war, I was working for the United States Navy.

Q: You were.

A: Yea. Civil Service, in the electronics and engineering.

Q: Oh, I see.

A: From Pearl Harbor until Christmas, '46. Then I went back to school. So, things never come out the way you want them to come out.

Q: Did you have any problems with security clearances, or did you need security clearances?

A: Here?

Q: When working for the Navy, or was that taken care of…

A: No, I was a civilian already, I became a citizen in '41.

Q: O.K., you were already a citizen, O.K.

A: Yes. Of course there was also some anti-Semitism involved. I was here five years by 1939, and I lived in the International House at the University of California at Berkeley. You might know it. And the immigration people at that time were in the Labor department, and they thought I was a communist, because of International House.

Q: Oh.

A: And they lost my papers, probably, until one of my professors found out about it. He had a hunch. We told them the International House belonged to the Rockefeller family. Two weeks later I was a citizen. (Laughs)

B: And so I had no security problems -- being a citizen.

I married in May, 1942.

The tape's getting full?

Q: Yes, I have to turn over the tape. It will just take a second.

(End Of Side One)

Q: This is an interview with Dr. Herbert Jonas for the JCRC-ADL Holocaust History Project by David Zarkin at Dr. Jonas' office in Saint Paul on May 6, 1983.

Let's continue the discussion of your recollections of families and relatives and friends in the pre-war and post-war time that you recall. After you got to this country, did you hear from people in Germany about what was going on? Was there any communications?

A: No, not really, because nobody dared to write anything in the mail, because the mail was censored. It was the only thing you could find out is when people came over. However there were not many refugees coming to San Francisco, that area. They all went on to Hollywood -- if they went to California -- and Los Angeles. So I was rather a rare animal. In fact, San Francisco radio station, KGO, had a teacher in school -- in college that time --that me, come to the studio and tell them about Germany on circuit for the eleven western states, early in 1935, because they had never met a refugee from Nazi Germany until I came. The other refugees were all people had come over in the 1880's, 1890's.

But later on, of course, people came over. And I met many people, and I hear about it, what they went through. There was family members disappeared -- the usual story. But you couldn't get it by mail.

Q: Not by mail.

A: No, because every letter was opened. And during the war, from '39 to '41 until my parents came, we could exchange a few letters through the Red Cross -- Red Cross mail -- but they were censored, too. So I got more information from the American press than I got by mail. You see?

Q: And your parents came over in what year did they come over?

A: April, '41.

Q: Is there anything more we should tell about their story?

A: No, that's about it. If they had been harassed personally, physically, they never told me. But since my dad had false papers, and his other connections, and he looked very German, had long, flax-blond hair and blue eyes, coming from northern Germany. They never suspected him of being Jewish. And my mother kept in the background.

B: So, I just remember an incident what happened after the First War -- that's interesting, too. In the town of Düsseldorf there was a Jewish grocery store across the street from us owned by a man with the name of Erdman (sp?), and the

communist hordes who tried to take over western Germany beat him up, destroyed one eye, and burnt up his store -- in 1921 or '20. When I went back a few years ago, I visited that place, and I met the people who had taken over his store at that time and who are retired now. I met them purely by accident.

B: And I asked them "Do you remember old Mr. Erdman -- when I was a little boy?"

"Oh, you mean that dirty…" They didn't say anymore. And they changed their language, realizing who I was.

So you see, the anti-Semitism is endemic. There was nothing new about it. So…we lived with it and didn't think much about it. From the sociological point of view, I would say that the older people accepted it. The younger people, born during the First World War, right afterwards, did not accept it. And they're the ones who left early.

If you look at the statistics of the people who were caught by the Nazis and put into camps, you will notice that they put into camps people who were in their 40's and 50's and old people and young children. The people who were like me, late teenagers, early twenties, were not caught by the Nazis.

Q: With a few exceptions, maybe.

A: With a few exceptions. They all had skipped out -- I mean, in Berlin and western Germany-- in the beginning, when they start rounding up -- the beginning in '33 to '35, '36, they, as I did, skipped out.

B: There's an interesting sidelight to this. In April of '41, I went through Denmark on a bicycle to join a group of Jewish young people from all around Europe who were meeting in a Danish Army camp with the help of the Danish army and the Jewish community in Copenhagen. Try to exchange information, what to do, where to go, and so on.

B: I was smart enough not to go in the traditional Jewish, young Jewish short pants, blue shirts and so on, so on, as all the youth groups over there had their own, what you might call a uniform I came in regular street clothes with a necktie which I took off in the camp, put back on again when I left.

We had to go by ferryboat from Denmark to Germany, and of course the Nazi storm troopers checked everyone coming off the ferry. They didn't bother me. I took my bike and went to suburban railroad station in Stetein (sp?), and I took a train to Berlin.

Two of my best friends were with me. They were too proud to put on regular street clothes. They were in their shorts, hiking clothes. They disappeared in April of '41. So you had to…

Q: …know what happened? Oh.

A: Disappeared. Never came back. Probably got shot, beaten up.

B: And another good friend of mine -- of Italian background -- Edsel Zarainey (sp?) whose father was the physician at the royal court. This young man was a founder of the Hehalutz movement; it's a Jewish pioneer, Zionist movement. And I met him many times in Berlin. We were very good friends. Spoke fluent German and English. He organized the underground young Jewish youth movement -- the underground railroad from Germany to Palestine.

When the Jewish Brigade was formed, by the British, during the war to fight the Germans, he volunteered as a paratrooper. He parachuted into Yugoslavia and was caught and executed after a long, long torture.

I found out about this after the war. Friends told me. Similar to that story of this girl from Palestine, I forgot her name, who also parachuted into Hungary and was caught. I can't remember her name now. But these are some indirect things that affected my life quite a lot -- indirectly.

And I might say right here for the record, that since I came to this country, I never denied that I was Jewish. I never denied that I am for Israel. I always show my disdain for people who try to hide and say they're not Jewish. My students know it. In my lectures I mention things that go on in Israel from the agricultural point of view. And I feel much better about it, and I've found people have a much higher regard for me than if I would trying to hide it.

There was a case a few years ago. One of my neighbors called my wife a "dirty Jew-girl" -- right here in Saint Paul. And she told 'em "Shut up, you dirty (foghorn?)," and he shut up. He became very polite since then. I would say if you speak up, they don't bother you. We both learned this over there.

Now my wife does not like to talk about these things, because she lost many, many more people in her family…

Q: She lost many more people…

A: Many, many more people, and has affected her psychologically very much, so she doesn't want to talk about it.

Q: I see.

A: She lost about three-quarters of her family.

Q: How did you and your wife meet? Or where did you meet?

A: We were both students in Berkeley.

Q: Oh I see.

A: Where my sister was a student.

Q: Can you tell me what it means to you to be a survivor of the Holocaust?

A: What it means?

Q: Yes, right.

A: It's a good question. You can answer that in many ways. If you ask Cooperman, he would give you many interpretations.

I feel that being a German Jew, we are the last of a breed. We're living fossils. There aren't any more. The Russian Jews, there's some Polish Jews, they're Hungarian Jews, but German Jews, there aren't anymore. The Jews living in Germany now, there are about 5,000. There used to be about 600,000. Half of them are displaced persons from the east, a thousand Israelis who study there and do business. German Jews are very, very few. So the tradition, and developments of German Jewry is finished -- after 2,000 years.

And, if you think about this, it gives you a certain outlook on life, a certain stubbornness -- to some people -- and some people again will feel very depressed about it.

Q: Would you be in the first category, the people who…

A: Yea.

Q: Yea, O.K.

A: I'm the first category.

Q: All right.

A: And I make it a practice -- I belong to the Leo Baeck Institute (you might know about this)…

Q: Tell us about that.

A: You should know about it.

Q: Well…

A: The Leo Baeck Institute exists in New York, London and Jerusalem, and it is a very serious element, U.S. government supported enterprise, that collects all documentation concerning German speaking Jews from east Germany, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary (…) or the composer Mendelssohn, or Einstein -- as much documentation, on tape like this, or written documents. And they put out a whole series of year books, quarterly journals, and they incorporate and publish by now maybe about 50 books (…) honored, and has become the only research depositary on German speaking Jewry. But that's nothing compared to…in Polish, or Russian Jewries, or French. There's a French Holocaust Institute in Paris. I have been there. They're collecting, but they're not at that extent. And of course there was money available here when it started. So some of the things I mention here are deposited there by documentation in the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. Also things from, as I mention the beginning, relatives whom we discovered here.

There's another Herbert Jonas at Fort Dodge, Iowa, a veterinarian who we discovered as related. And he knows very much about the family. I have some of the documents from him. And there's another one, Jared Jonas, in San Francisco, who's also related to me, and his wife is related to my mother's side, indicating again the close knit intermarriage of these old Jewish families.

And my mother's side we found out, is also relationship to the Port Heinrich Hilet (sp?) who was born in Düsseldorf, my hometown.

And some of those people, from both mother's and father's side must have had cross-overs, hundred, two-three-hundred years ago, because all refer to the town of Kleve which is near the Dutch border on the Rhine river where apparently the long-range saga existed, too -- old Roman settlements. And it's almost impossible to take apart this interwoven family ties. That's a whole story by itself.

Q: Well, that's interesting, the fact that your family goes back many, many years in Germany, in Holland, too, I guess.

A: In Holland, too.

Q: Yea.

A: Of course the Dutch-German border shifted back and forth, and people speak both languages. And these people in San Francisco, relatives who were again related to the department store my uncle had, his wife's family we found out is related to those people in San Francisco. That San Francisco's the family Sloss (sp?) who came the 1880's who built up the Seattle and Alaska shipping trade, lumber and fur, whaling. We found out they're related to my mother's family in Kualt (sp?)

which we didn't know when we came here. I found out later on. They come from the same neck of the woods.

Q: So you've done some studying then on the genealogy then of your family.

A: Well a little bit on the genealogies, same as my relative from Fort Dodge, Iowa, and slowly things piece together, you see, but I never have the time to go into the old libraries in Germany and whatever's left over after the Holocaust.

I have a nephew in Boston who did this as a hobby as a teenager.

Q: Doing -- doing what?

A: He went to Germany and studied it as a teenager, trying to figure out his family background.

Q: I see.

A: And, he's now well known bio-chemist at M.I.T, Bobby Weinberg (sp?) Even had him…you had him even on KUOM, indirectly, from All Things Considered.

Q: Oh I see. On national public radio there. He was featured on that news and public affairs program that's broadcast nationally and heard locally.

A: About the gene structure of cancer.

Q: Oh I see. O.K.

A: He's my nephew who did these studies.

Q: On the genealogy of your family.

A: Uh-huh.

Q: O.K. So how far was he able to trace them back, do you know?

A: Oh, to the early 1700's

Q: To the early 1700's, your family -- in Germany.

A: And his figures seem to jive with the ones that they have in Fort Dodge.

Q: In Fort Dodge.

A: Yea, the other Herbert Jonas.

Q: And they've also done genealogy work, too. And they've traced your family back…

A: About the same way.

Q: Yea, back to the early 1700's

A: They're some missing links which we only can put in by conjecture.

Q: Do you have any photos or mementos or other things from say, pre-World War area of…

A: No, just the family photographs.

Q: I see. Have you had the chance to read any of the books, novels, or other kinds of accounts of those years, or see any films, and if so, do you think they accurately depict --or do any of them? Or would you…

A: Do you mean films that you…like Holocaust films on T.V. or so on?

Q: Yes, and novels, and also biographical accounts that have been written regarding the Holocaust or the…

A; Well, I would say those things which, like this big series from Hollywood, there's too much Hollywood drama in it.

Q: I see.

A: The essence is all right. Films here show 'em very good. I've seen one very good series of films in Switzerland two years ago.

Q: Do you recall what the film was?

A: It was in German. It was very, very accurate. No theatrical play, no love stories put in.

Q: I see.

A: That was…one film was which was also shown here called <u>The Boat is Full</u> ? Have you seen it?

Q: No, I haven't. <u>The Boat is Full</u>.

A: That meant the Swiss were not letting any German Jewish ref -- or any refugees come in.

Q: I see.

A: After the Swiss population found out about it, they smuggled them in illegally. These were that story.

Then I saw…I go over there quite often. Another film made in Germany about Dachau, the Dachau concentration camp near Munich. Very accurate. Very documentary.

Q: And that was a German made film.

A: A German made film. In fact, I was over in Switzerland, in Germany this past winter, and they showed a whole series of German concentration camp films, which were superb documentaries. Nothing Hollywood about it.

And their reaction to our big Holocaust series on T.V. was; "A very good film, but why you put a love story in there?"

You see what I mean?

Q: Yes, yea, I do.

A: You, as a journalist, understand it.

Q: Yes, yes, I do, I do.

A; And they have very much literature over there on Holocaust books, now.

Q: They have a lot of literature on it.

A: Oh, full of it.

Q: In Germany. Yes.

A: And France, too.

Q: And France.

A: Now as far as biographies go, there are two books which are authentical. One is written by the widow of Enrico Fermi who developed the atomic bomb in Chicago -- Italian Jew -- who wrote about famous German Jewish scientists who were involved in the Holocaust -- or Jewish scientists, not just German Jewish.

Another one came out by the Springer Verlag in Germany about Jewish scientists.

Q: That was by who?

A: Springer Verlag. You have seen this Springer, S-p-r-i-n-g-er Publishing House. Puts out a lot of scientific books. They published a book on that.

I have seen nothing comparable documentary in book form in this country.

Now I have given my library of the Leo Baeck Institute to Mount Zion Temple.

Q: When you say your library, you're talking about all the books that you've collected.

A: All of the books I got from there, which are still kept. I give it to them. And the Bible here from Mount Zion temple, Saint Paul.

Q: I've probably read some of the books that you've contributed then.

A: The only ones written in German, none were written in English.

Q: Oh, O.K. Maybe not. O.K.

A: That's about it.

Q: I guess that is about it.

A: I cannot say anymore.

Q: O.K. Well I appreciate this.

A: That's long enough. You know a quarter-to-three. We start at one. One-thirty.

Q: One-thirty, yes. I just have to put an end tag on here.

A: Set up a (…) examination here.

Q: Oh, O.K. I'll… This completes the interview with Dr. Herbert Jonas by David Zarkin on May 6, 1983.