

September 19, 1991

Slate # 1349-021

Interviewee: Mr. Max Heller

Interviewer: Richard Irwin

Notetaker: Rose Shames

0:00 - Max Heller born in Vienna, Austria 1919. Description of childhood-  
parents, sister; father in business; orthodox Jewish observance, happy home life.

0:55 - Anti-semitism very prevalent.

2:20 - 10% population in Vienna was Jewish.

3:00 - Public grammar school, private gymnasium.

4:00 - Many non-Jewish friends even in presence of antisemitism. Hitler comes to  
power. It was hard to accept and believe what was happening.

5:28 - Description of political turmoil. 1938 - Hitler invades on Friday evening.  
Austria asked to decide whether to become part of Germany. Jews had to scrub  
streets, clean gutters.

7:00 - Population jubilant on day of invasion. Immediate confiscation of Jewish  
assets in banks. Everyone had ID cards so everything was well organized. Changes  
were immediate and drastic.

8:30 - Friends suddenly were wearing Nazi uniforms. Businesses taken away,  
neighbor against neighbor. Could not believe that world would let this go on.

10:00 - Shabbat observance night of invasion -crying-

10:50 - Grocery stores cleaned out.

12:00 - Met an American girl in August, 1937 at a dance. Kept her address. Mary  
Mills of Greenville, South Carolina. After the invasion, wrote to this girl asking  
for help to get out of Austria. She was a Christian. By miracle, she helped. Contact  
with Mr. Salzberg who sent papers.

14:30 - Conditions becoming worse. In June, began to hear about camps. People  
suddenly taken away.

16:14 - Papers received for Max and sister at end of July, 1938.

18:19 - August, 1938 sailed out of France. Saying goodbye to parents at train  
station.

19:36 - On arrival in New York, had \$1.60 in pocket. Impressions on seeing the Statue of Liberty, friendliness of people and police.

21:20 - Found a job in Greenville, South Carolina. Aunt in Newark gave them money to get to Greenville, a sandwich, and pack of cigarettes.

22:30 - Impressions of South Carolina. Picked up at train by Mary Mills and Mr. Salzberg. One hour later, began a job at shirt factory sweeping floors.

24:30 - Judge Plyler came to welcome him. Warm welcome and offer of courses at Furman University.

26:00 - Sister arrived later. Remained in communication with parents who were on the Polish quota hoping to get to the U.S.

28:26 - Parents got out due to kindness of clerk. Mr. Salzberg gave them all jobs.

30:00 - Meeting future wife, Trude. Married in 1942. 3 children and 10 grandchildren

31:20 - People in Greenville didn't know what was happening in Europe. There was not much reporting in papers.

33:30 - Antisemitism in Greenville. One incident involving apartment rental. But then other good experiences.

35:00 - End of war celebration. Personal reflections on U.S. role in defeating Hitler.

37:10 - Began to feel like an American when dreams began to be in English. Love of America.

38:05 - Life in Greenville after war. Became vice president of company, but wanted to go into own business. Opened a shirt business in Williamstown in 1946, and then in Greenville.

40:00 - Was very interested in community affairs. Sold business in 1962 and wanted to be in public life. Ran for City Council and served for 2 years. Became Mayor of Greenville in 1971 and served for 8 years. Also chairman of State Development Board.

43:38 - 53 years in South Carolina. Change in racial issues, treatment of blacks. South Carolina should be proud. Relationship between blacks and Jews today. Need better leadership, communication, people need to think and be truthful.