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**Paul Leeser Interview on August 23, 1978**

- Mr. Leeser was fifty-seven years old at time of interview; born in Rhineland, in German State of Westphalia, in small town of Hanborn, where his parents (Louis and Henrietta) had married; visited grandparents in Buckenburg; moved inland to Rinteln, a town of 6,000, in 1927 or 1928 near Hameln in Minden, in province of Hesse; lived with parents and younger brother, Werner; parents had dry goods store; family lived in a dwelling behind the store
- Attended Hebrew school; after fourth year, went to German Gymnasium (secondary school) and stayed for five years, but then all Jewish children required to leave; when came to the US in 1937; German education had been good, so no problems getting into US high school; spoken German in the home, not Yiddish
- Attended synagogue; bar-mitzvahed; observed the holy days; rabbi traveled; did not keep kosher although parents grew up keeping kosher; however, mother (whose father had been a butcher) avoided “treff” meats, but not specific limits on beef, lamb, veal; did not practice “Pesach-dicke” (separate dishes for food)
- In Germany, socialized with many non-Jews; people accepted religious differences and grew up “without any hard feelings”; a nice childhood until Hitler—vacations, Jewish summer camp
- At beginning of Hitler’s rise people seemed to think the anti-Semitism was “idiotic”; heard anti-Semitic songs and phrases, but did not “take it personally” and seems unclear if it reflected a predilection to Nazis
- The realization that would be persecuted came slowly, but really felt in election of 1932; young people were told that they must stop associating with their Jewish friends; Hitler youth told that Jews were a lower form of life; very disturbing when parents of the Gentile youth began disappearing when their children informed on them for “anti-social” behavior; people disappeared; then restrictions came (e.g., no public pools and signs warning “Jews not wanted here,” and soccer leagues (joined Jewish league)
- Anti-Semitic radio and newspaper ads that included “The Jews are out misfortune” and “Get the foreigners out of the country!”; Nazi banners; propaganda aimed at “nationalist field” originally, but later grew into race-based; Jewish caricature (long nose, bald head, bulging eyes), with slogans like “the people that starve you!” and “they are the criminals”—but, most of non-Jewish friends were apologetic, but afraid to speak up
- Daily life affected by rise of Hitler: religious training in schools stopped; no public sports; people began to harass Jews in public; businesses suffered; parents’ store could not make a profit
- Tried to train as a carpenter, but the local carpenter’s association was pressured to terminate him
- When Hitler came to power, Nazis confiscated all their cash except for 25 German Marks before they were allowed to leave the country, but allowed to take furniture and other valuables (except not a family tree)

- Nazis passed laws “writing” the truth; for example, passed law that it was a lie to say that there were Jewish veterans of WWI; this led to burning of books that stated that there were Jewish veterans
- As to Nuremberg Laws: in Germany, did not refer to them that way when they were being enacted, because they were enacted separately, over time, not in one statute; despite the laws, Mr. Leese’s parents gentile employees stayed at the store until it was forced to close; their maids also stayed as long as they could; Jews were expected not to participate in “Eintopfgericht,” the food program whereby people were required to eat a simple meal, with the difference between that and a more complex meal to be given to the Nazi party); people too poor to eat a meal would share in meals of others; but concerns that Jews would poison
- Interestingly, perhaps, Mr. Leeser states that employee relationships remained the same: they were affectionate to his father, giving him a party when they had to leave; they did not want to leave his employments; they risked this despite threat of being called “soft against the Jews” by the Nazis.
- Gentile doctor in town continued seeing Jewish patients, although it might not have been able to get Jews into hospitals (his father had a heart attack but was not hospitalized)
- Came to the United States in 1937 when sponsored by aunts, on the SS Harding; however, unlike many people, his family had choices, between Shanghai, US, and Palestine; left Bremenhaven, then to Southampton, then landed in New York Harbor
- The Jewish experience was very different for Mr. Leeser in the US (especially in Wisconsin). In Germany, there was a “truly integrated” Jewish community; in the United States, socialization is integrated.