

## HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY

Date of Interview: September 6, 1978

Sig Sander, Interviewed by Rabbi Cary Kozberg  
Transcribed by R. K. Feist  
Typed by Maureen Barash

RK: This is Cary Kozberg speaking and conducting the first interview with Mr. Sig Sander at his home at 715-713 Westchester Court in Springfield, Ohio, on September 6, 1978.

How old are you?

SS: I am seventy years old.

RK: Where exactly were you born?

SS: I was born on January 3rd in a little town in the central part of Germany, Soul. (Transcriber could not locate this on a map.)

RK: Did you grow up there also?

SS: I grew up there until I was twenty years old and went to Nuremberg, Germany (49.27N,11.05E).

RK: How big of a town was Soul?

SS: About 18,000 inhabitants. It was well known for its armament factories. The best guns were made there. The largest factory of arms was in Soul, at that particular time, the only one which was allowed to make arms under the Versailles Treaty (that was the treaty that ended World War I and severely restricted German armaments, amongst other things).

RK: Do you know when and why your family came to Soul?

SS: My Father came to Soul in 1889, I believe. That was the time after my Father was married, and he and his brother opened a dry goods store. The dry goods store existed until 1923, when the inflation struck and they had to liquidate the enterprise.

RK: When did you leave Germany and when did you come to the United States?

SS: We left Germany in 1938 and came directly to the United States. We lived in New York for about one-half year and then transferred to Springfield, Ohio with the help of the National Refugee Committee (that was a Jewish organization headquartered in New York City which attempted to relocate refugees from New

York City, where most landed and tended to stay in spite of a scarcity of jobs). They did attempt to distribute refugees throughout the United States, wherever they could make a living).

RK: Could you tell me something about your education?

SS: I attended the public school, later on the Realschule, which is just like High School here. I graduated from there and then, in 1923, when I was ready to go to University, there was no money, due to the inflation. My Father lost everything due to the inflation so I had to go to work and at a later time, I picked up the additional education that I needed through evening school, in Nuremberg, and in other larger cities where I lived.

RK: What was the religious life of your family like?

SS: We definitely lived as conscientious Jews in Germany. We had a small synagogue. We had maybe sixty members in the congregation at that time. We had a so-called melamed (a Jewishly educated teacher) who was rabbi, teacher, shochet (a qualified ritual slaughterer as per the custom) and everything else in this community. He taught the children. There were no other "Sunday School" teachers, no other religious school teachers, but he - and we had large classes - taught us the same lessons every year over and over again. I think that in the thirteen years I went to school there I heard each and every time how Moses hit, with his staff, the Red Sea and that the Red Sea divided. It was a common joke that when we get older that we did not believe in these things anymore, but we had to listen anyway because the younger children had to listen to that and learn it. We learned Hebrew in the same manner. If we knew it, fine, and if we did not know it we had to stay after school for one, two, or three hours, until we knew the passage by heart.

RK: What about home celebration? Did your family keep the Sabbath?

SS: No. We did not keep the Sabbath. We kept every other Holy Day though. My Father's store was always closed during the High Holy Days (Rosh Ha Shonna and Yom Kippur, i.e., the Jewish New Year) but never closed on Saturday. We were not, what I would call, in that respect, orthodox Jews, nor did we have a Kosher home anymore, as we used to. These changes had all been created by the impacts of World War I, when it was almost impossible to keep Kosher.

RK: Were you Bar Mitzvah? (The celebration of the coming of age of Jewish boys at the age of thirteen.)

SS: Yes.

RK: And your brothers were also?

SS: All the male members of my family were Bar Mitzvah.

RK: What was the principal language spoken in your home?

SS: German.

RK: Was there any other language spoken?

SS: Any other language? No.

RK: Did your parents or yourself think of yourself as rich or poor people?

SS: I think that we were just comfortable middle class.

RK: Did your parents relate socially to non-Jews? Before Hitler?

SS: They had friends who were non-Jewish. However, the social intercourse, in those days, was entirely different than it is now in the United States.

RK: What do you mean by that?

SS: That you did not socialize as much with other people. Certainly, they knew many people as friends, but the friendships were not as thorough and as deep as they are amongst people here.

RK: Was there involvement by Jews in other secular activities? Such as theater, music, or sports?

SS: Some people were involved, but not in sports. Such involvement existed mainly in larger cities. There were a lot of Jews interested in football, which is known here as soccer. A lot of Jews were patrons of that. Of course, in larger cities they also sponsored theater and concerts and so on.

RK: How about politics?

SS: There were not too many Jews involved in politics except some in the so-called "Democratic" party. Socialists had several Jews in their leadership such as Karl Marx, who had been born Jewish. However, they were no longer Jews in the way we understand it.

RK: They were not practicing Jews?

SS: No. Not practicing Jews.

RK: In what sense was the synagogue the center of Jewish life?

- SS: There was no other activity in the synagogue other than religious activities.
- RK: No cultural or other activities.
- SS: No.
- RK: Not in your town.
- SS: Not in our town, in larger cities, yes.
- RK: How would you describe your childhood?
- SS: Well, until the age of six, I had a childhood very much without care. However, then, when I was six years old World War I broke out. Then came the hunger (food rationing was prevalent in Europe in both World War I and World War II) and everything else. Two of my brothers served in the military during World War I. One brother was killed. We were always hungry. The supply of food was terrible, but we lived through it all right.
- RK: Were there any other special events that you can recall? Happy or sad ones?
- SS: Oh, there were many, but they would not be of interest right now, I don't think. They were small town stuff.
- RK: What kind of school did you attend? Jewish School or Secular School?
- SS: Secular school. We had the typical Prussian High School with marching and drum and pipes and such. Marching through town with a flag. I remember that our principal rode on a horse in front of us. It was halfway military. Everybody wore a uniform-like clothing: white pants and green shirt and a black belt with a gold buckle. Every student had to wear the same. Every class had its special class colors. You had to wear a special cap with a black bow. Whenever the year was over the student pitched his hat and he got one with a new color. Then he was in a new class. Only the ones who were not promoted to the next class got to wear the old hat again. It was a kind of let down for them.
- RK: What subject did you learn?
- SS: In High School I learned: English, French. Six years of French and six years of English.
- RK: Was this reading knowledge? or speaking knowledge?
- SS: Reading, speaking, translating, grammar - especially grammar. Just to give you an example: in French we had one solid year learning nothing but irregular verbs.

In the fourth year, I think, we started reading French books, and translating them; having to write stories pertaining to the various portions of the book.

RK: Your family did not speak what is called Yiddish?

SS: No. Yiddish is unknown in Germany. (It at least was unknown in Central or Western Germany until fairly late in World War II). We had a little deviation which was called "Judisch-Deutsch" which was a mixture between German and Hebrew words, not like Yiddish. As you know Yiddish was actually the language of the middle-ages in Germany which was taken by the German Jews when they were sent into exile into Poland. There they mixed it with Hebrew words and Polish and Russian words and created the Yiddish language, as it is known today.

RK: To what extent did you associate with Jewish children in and out of school?

SS: During school time we were not very much connected with Jewish children, since there were mostly non-Jewish children. For example, in my class, there were only four Jewish children, two of whom came from a little town which was fifteen kilometers (about nine miles) from our town. They went by train in the morning, and left by train in the afternoon again.

RK: Were the relationships good between Jews and non-Jews?

SS: Very good. Sometimes there were fights, as you can imagine, and whomever was the stronger one won and the other got beaten up.

RK: Are you talking about anti-Semitism?

SS: I do not think anti-Semitism had much to do with it. There was a little anti-Semitism, but that was not the important part of it. The stronger survived.

RK: Before 1933, were you aware of anti-Semitism?

SS: Certainly, I would say that the anti-Semitism started in Germany in the twenties. When I went to school, and before my graduation in 1923, I caught two of the upper class men painting and sticking swastikas on houses and house doors and such. I reported this to our principal whereupon I was called in the principal's office. That was later on, of course. I was asked whether I would press charges. I said: "I do not think that they should do this." He said: "I agree with you." The principal was a Socialist. Then he added: "However, if you press charges, they will not graduate." Thereupon, they told me that if they were not going to graduate, I would probably be beaten up. So, I did not press charges. This was in 1922. My brother lived in Nuremberg at the time, and one day he got into a fight there not with Nazis (members of Hitler's party which was called the National Socialist Party) at that time (the party of Hitler only grew in the late twenties).

They took him out of a restaurant and beat him up so badly that they broke his glasses, he had a bruised nose and a bruised face. He was badly beaten.

RK: Were there any other incidents in the community? Something which made the newspapers?

SS: Oh, there was always what you could call conservative anti-Semitism in Germany. Jews were not allowed to go into certain clubs and groups and such. Of course, you are aware that here, in the United States, that exists also. You have it in country clubs and organizations where Jews are not allowed to participate.

RK: What was the response of your family, or even of your Gentile peers to such anti-Semitism?

SS: Some were sympathetic and some were aroused by it.

RK: Was your family particularly upset?

SS: Sometimes, yes. Of course, we had a certain amount of strength within us because we were definitely Jewish. So not everything could hit us as hard as it would hit people in the United States who are without roots. We knew that we were Jewish and that we just could go so and so far, and that was it.

RK: You accepted this?

SS: Yes, that was it.

RK: You recall where you were living at the time?

SS: Certainly! I was then living in Stuttgart (48.46N,9.11E) Germany (obviously they have switched the time frame from the 1922 period)...on the day when Hitler came to power. I was in Karlsruhe, Germany (49.01N,8.24E) which is just about fifty or sixty miles from Stuttgart. I was, at that time, visiting the Ministry of Economics in Karlsruhe in order to introduce a new bookkeeping system in Baden and Wurttemberg (two German provinces in the Southern part of West Germany). I had made the connection in Wurttemberg and they had recommended to me Baden so that Baden and Wurttemberg could combine and have the same system (today one of the states of West Germany is Baden-Wurttemberg). They were really favorable to this thing and that same afternoon we went out of the Ministry to have lunch. A colleague from Mannheim (49.29N,8.28E) with me who was not Jewish. The news came over the radio, that is how you got your news in those days, that Hitler had obtained power and became Chancellor. Of course, that was a terrific letdown at least for me. I felt that all my efforts were for nothing, since I did not expect to fulfill what I wanted to. However, the same day, we stayed for dinner in a town named Pforzheim (48.53N,8.42E) which is on the road between Karlsruhe and Stuttgart, there people were beside themselves with

parades where they carried torches. Such parades, called Fagelguz parades, went through the towns with bands and unbelievable uproar. Even the post office was rather mixed up because they stamped all their letters, two of which I still have, as the thirty-first of February when it was the thirty-first of January, when that happened. These are quite valuable items for the annals of philately.

RK: What was the reaction of your peers?

SS: Stuttgart was a very conservative town and they were not very much in favor of the Nazis in the beginning. My friends who, to a certain extent were not Jewish, all felt that this government would be just temporary like all the governments had been and be toppled soon and that a new one would take its place. They never thought that shortly thereafter the Reichstag building, where the German legislators met, was torched by members of the Nazi party under direct orders from Goering, who was then "Minister-President of Prussia" and the Nazi's said that it was done by the Communists. So they outlawed the Communist party. Shortly thereafter, they outlawed the Socialists as well as the unions. With that, Hitler assumed full powers. He made himself not only Reichshanzeler (the official title of the head of the German government) but also he made himself Minister-President of Prussia (assuming the function that Goering had held) as well as the "Führer" (i.e., leader). Hindenberg, who as President of the German Weimar Republic had appointed Hitler Chancellor, was the President, but he was over eighty years old, and quite obviously not aware of everything that was going on any more.

RK: Did you know people who became Nazis?

SS: Certainly! Many of my friends who were very friendly towards me to my face, I later found out that they wore Nazi uniforms. Some of them could not help themselves, they had to in order to make a living (people were fired from jobs such as firemen or other public sector jobs, if they failed to join the Nazi party).

RK: Was that the case in the beginning?

SS: Maybe not in the beginning, but later on they were more or less forced. I am not quite certain whether they truly liked to be members. They were happy that they were forced to (so that they did not have to decide for themselves), because it was a liability to be friendly with a Jew, at a later date. For example, in April of 1933, when the boycott was announced, that was on April 1, when it was suddenly announced that nobody would be allowed to go into a store that was owned by a Jew. In front of every store were two storm-troopers (they were the Nazi regulars uniformed in brown with a swastika armband who were members of the SA or Schutz Abteilung, i.e., the Protection Battalion) and any person who went into that store was photographed. These photographs were used as a sign that this person was not in favor of Naziism. Every Saturday morning which I can remember, there were people on the street who sold you either a button for your

lapel or a flower or something like that - one day that was to help pay for rearmament and another day it was to help buy new airplanes, another day it was for welfare. All this money which was collected week after week, was used for rearmament (the treaty ending World War I severely limited German armaments and expenses for it). Even during the first four months they began to invade the privacy of the homes by saying: The fourth Sunday of every month, there will be a so called "Eintopf gericht" (a one pot dinner). Everybody in all Germany had to cook only in one pot, a stew or whatever it was. (It was customary that early during the following week students had to get up in class to report on what they had eaten) the savings between this meal and a normal meal had to be paid and was collected that same Sunday by a functionary of the Nazi party). This functionary went from house to house. This money went into "welfare," but it was actually used for rearmament.

RK: What were the reactions of your family and your Jewish friends?

SS: A lot of the Jewish people thought that this would blow over, as the Socialist had blown over and that in a little while they would be voted out. Nobody had any idea, except for a very few, that that which happened would actually happen. In 1934, I, being a pessimist all my life, tried to persuade a lot of my friends at that time to leave everything in Germany and to take all the money they could get and get out. At this stage you could still take everything out except that you had to leave fifty percent of your money there. Some people who had a lot of money, took the fifty percent of their money and went somewhere else. However, a lot of people did not do it. I tried, when I got married in 1934, I started to make plans to leave Germany. We learned Spanish, thinking that we would go to Argentina. We tried to learn Hebrew because we wanted to go to Israel. It took until 1937 to get an official affidavit of support from an aunt of mine to come to the U.S. (that was a document which stated that the new immigrant would be taken care of financially and not become a burden on the state. It was strictly not enforceable legally, but it assumed a moral obligation). In 1938, we left Germany.

RK: Did you know Jewish people who, shall we say, fought against anti-Semitism?

SS: There was one group in Germany. The "Naumann Group" who were very upset, that they were not accepted in the Nazi frame. However, right in the beginning the Rosenberg law (named after Alfred Rosenberg, the philosopher of the Nazi movement), and the Rosenberg book which showed clearly that they did not want any part of any Jewish person, no matter whether that person was one-half Aryan or one-quarter Aryan (that is defined by the number of grandparents one had who were Jewish) or even one-eighth Aryan. As a matter of fact, later on, the Storm Schutwaffe, the SS (these were the Nazi protection division who wore black uniforms with the swastika armbands and provided the cadre for the concentration camps) were screened to the one-sixteenth...Aryanship, before they were even considered for membership. Anybody had to prove that he was of



pure Aryan blood before he was accepted in the black shirts. (To the best of the transcriber's knowledge, it was a purely male outfit.)

RK: How did the occasion of Hitler coming to power affect your everyday life? Could you go into the stores, into schools, ...

SS: I did not go to school anymore but I had the job of an accountant and I installed systems of accountancy in various businesses. At the time Hitler came to power, I was what you could consider a specialist in printing houses and newspapers, I should say newspaper printing, I had at least seven or eight clients who already had used the system which I had installed in conjunction with another man who did the cost accounting. After Hitler came to power, the Nazis went to every printer who also published a newspaper and said: "Beginning on the first of this month, we are going to be fifty-one percent partner in your business. You will own forty-nine percent." If the owner objected, they said: "That is quite all right! We will not have any official news published in your paper anymore, because, you will not get the news. We are going to print a newspaper in Stuttgart and this newspaper will be put into your town with a new heading and will be the official paper in your town. You will eventually see your paper worth nothing." Of course, anybody would take the forty-nine percent of something and would let them have the fifty-one percent of something and would let them have the fifty-one percent, when faced with this choice. That was the only way to save his business. During this time I installed four or five different systems in more newspapers, under these circumstances. However, the last newspaper where I installed my system was in Schramberg, Germany (48.14N,8.23E). These people knew that I was Jewish. I went down there and started working. As soon as I started and I came to the office they said: "You cannot work here, of course. You have to go to a hotel." I said: "all right!" and I went to the hotel and as I went up to the second floor (here is used the European first floor expression since the Europeans do not call the floor level with the street the first floor) of the hotel to the room, I got to the hall and found that two storm troopers were standing there. They said: "Go right in here. The bookkeeper is right in here and you can instruct the bookkeeper to do the work." When I asked why, they said: "Well, you do not seem to realize that the new law will not allow you to be with an Aryan woman under forty-five alone in any room!"

RK: The Nuremberg laws!

SS: Yes sir. (There appears to be a slippage of a couple of years, at least, since the so-called "Nuremberg laws" were not promulgated until 1935.) Well, I did the instructing under the auspices of the two storm troopers. That was the last work which I did, because I would not subject myself to such harassment. A few days later, I worked on municipal accounting, I was also a specialist in municipal accounting, and I installed this system of municipal accounting (about which Sig Sander had traveled to Karlsruhe when Hitler assumed power) in larger and smaller municipalities. The last one was in the city of Boblingen

(48.41N,9.01E), there I went to the school board in order to install this system. The customary way in which I kept my arms occupied so that I would not have to raise my hand for the "Heil Hitler" (Long Live Hitler) salute (right arm extended upward at about 45 degrees hand outstretched) was to travel always with two suitcases. I had those under my arms. So how could anybody ask me to raise my hand? I just could not. Well, when I left, I said: "Goodbye gentlemen and I will see you then in two weeks, when the installation will be made." Just like jackrabbits they jumped up and stuck their hands up and yelled: "Heil Hitler." Well I said goodbye and walked out. When I got home I told my wife: "I think that this is the last time I will see them!" Sure enough, the next morning we got a wire which said that the order was canceled since they found out I was Jewish. Thereupon I was called to the headquarters in Berlin and I lost my job. That was the end of my activities in Stuttgart as an accountant. We were not allowed to do any other accounting work because we, as Jews, were not considered reliable enough by the German government to do any other type of accounting work, because they felt that we would cheat. When I lost my job, I stayed in Stuttgart until 1938 (when we emigrated). I was there for a year without a job. I traveled during that time in Switzerland and I did exactly the same work that I had done in Germany (this proves that Sig Sander had a very desirable skill, since otherwise the Swiss would not grant Sig Sander the permission to work, which was needed). Every month I took one trip to Switzerland and did some work there. I never made any bones about it.

RK: Did you have any incidents, for example, in restaurants or while shopping?

SS: Yes, particularly in Nuremberg (49.27N,11.05E). I went to a restaurant in Nuremberg. The coffee-restaurant have dances in the evenings, or at least music. You sit down and order a cup of coffee and while you are waiting for your coffee with your friend, or whomever you are with, the waiter without your knowledge points you out as being a Jew. So he tells them to have some fun while he brings you your coffee. So you take the little pot which they bring you and you try to pour the coffee into your cup and nothing comes out. So the first reaction which you had was that there was something wrong with the pot, wouldn't you? When you open the pot and there is a piece of paper in there which says: "You g-d-dammed Jew, get out of here!" So, when you read this, you blush immediately and the reason of all the people is that they clap their hands and laugh at you. They call it "Bekantes Gelachter Verwend" (knowledgeable conspiracy of laughter) and you leave. It was very humiliating. I saw people in Nuremberg, who were a Jewish man and a non-Jewish girl, who were caught copulating, and as they were - without any clothes or anything - they were loaded in a truck. That truck was run through the city with a big sign on it: "Rossenschande!" meaning "violation of the race" (actually meaning literally - racial disgrace). It was unbelievable that things like that happened. I have seen, in Nuremberg, when Julius Streicher, I do not know whether you have heard of him, he was the editor of the *Sturmer* (the party newspaper of the Nazis) which was posted on the walls on the streets in Germany...he went around in his great

big Mercedes car, which was always an open convertible. When he saw a Jew walking along the street, he told his chauffeur: Stop! Wait! Then he stood up in his car, took his bull whip out and aimed the whip at the Jew. The Jew then got a streak over his face and was bloodied, then Streicher drove away. Such incidents happened in Nuremberg time and again. Nuremberg was a lot more anti-Semitic than Stuttgart was. Stuttgart was a little more conservative.

RK: Why did you choose to leave?

SS: Well there was no other way but to leave.

RK: Why did you not leave any earlier?

SS: We had to wait until we received an affidavit, a sworn promissory note from a United States citizen which a United States council considered adequate to certify that the would-be-immigrants would not become a burden was required which had to be accompanied by proof in terms of a copy of an income tax return. Many people hesitated about this exposing their tax return and thus their financial status. (These affidavits were not enforceable by law, but people usually did not know that), or we would have left earlier.

RK: How did you know about this stop?

SS: We first went to the United States Consulate. Then, after our number had been reached (the United States immigration law of 1921, revised in 1927, established national quotas for emigration proportional to the national make-up of the United States population, excluding people of "yellow" race. The people were called to the United States Consulate for processing on a first-come, first-served basis - in general - otherwise said, when their number had been reached) we were processed. It took over one year before our number was assigned. Then we went up there and got interrogated and got all our papers set up, and finally got a visa. That was in January 1938. We intended to leave on May 9th. I went to my lawyer and my lawyer said: No, you are leaving on April 9th. Then he called the shipping agent who had our tickets. The attorney had already called him. He was a Jewish attorney. He had told the shipping agent, not to make the report to the officials that I was leaving on April 9, but to make the arrangements for April 9. He did that. We packed on March 1 or March 10, and traveled in Germany for four weeks on false addresses. For example, if I went from my home town and said I went to Hameln (52.06N,9.21E), the town my wife comes from. So when they wrote a letter to Hameln, I was not there. We went to Berlin and we went back to Soul, my home town. I had packed all my belongings and had them sent to the boat. Then I went back to Stuttgart. In Stuttgart I finally had to get my passport. That was the only thing which we worried about. So Ilse and Peter, who was then two years old, and I went to the police and received our final OK to then leave the country. We got the OK, and with this OK, we were allowed to get Seventy-two Dollars. That was the only money which we were able to take out of

the country. We received that OK on March 31, 1938. On April 1 we went to Switzerland. We were in Switzerland for four days and met the boat in Le Havre (49.30N,0.08E). Finally, in Switzerland, the mail of the German officials caught up with me. It said that I had to go back to the taxation office in order to make a declaration about what I was taking out of the country. I waited until we were in Le Havre in France to see if our stuff was all on the boat, which it was. It went on the free harbor in Hamburg on an American boat. Then I wrote to the German official that I had left one month earlier and that I was sorry that I could not appear. When they got that letter my Mother was called to appear in front of the official. She was over seventy years old at that time. She was interrogated about what I took along. Well, I did not have to take much along, because I did not have it. That was the time of our emigration. It was a very harassing time. We had gone from Switzerland into France and from Paris to Le Havre, and then to the United States. We arrived in America on April 15, 1938. That was Erev Pesach (the evening of Passover).

RK: I thought that that was very meaningful timing (since Passover celebrates the anniversary of the beginning of the Exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses).

SS: Yes, that was a remarkable day, hot as it is here right now. It was over 80 degrees F (European spring is generally much cooler).

RK: You left family in Germany?

SS: My Mother was there and my sister was there. My two brothers and another sister and her husband were there also. My brother and his wife and my brother-in-law and my sister came over to the United States in November, of that year. My other brother came in June. They all lived in New York City and nobody could understand why I did not want to stay in New York City. As soon as I got to New York I made an application to go to the interior of the country. Particularly I had the idea to go to the interior of the country because the man who taught us conversational English was an American Sea Captain in Stuttgart. He came from Milwaukee. He used to be a United States citizen, but his son became so enamored with Germany during World War I, that he made his Father become a German. The old man suffered since that time because he hated Germany, as much as he could, however he lived there for his son's sake, who finally became estranged from him. This man told us: "You should not stay in New York City, you should go back into the interior of the country, you will be able to lead an entirely different life." He told Ilse (obviously Sig Sander's wife) about how to make American beds. He told her what kind of houseware she should buy. He told her how to bake a pie. He told us a lot more pertinent things. When we came to the United States, we were integrated easily, knowing what the United States was like because he had given us the inside story. Many of the lessons were nothing but to listen to folk songs by Steven Foster. He gave us the idea about what kind of meat to buy, how to be economical with meat. He told us:

“You can live on 10 cents a day, as far as meat goes, if you buy the right cuts of meat.” That may have been true in those days, but try it now. He also taught us to use the language, as Americans use it. I, myself, had another teacher in idioms and for one-half year, I did nothing but study American idioms. So, I did not translate German into English and I was able to make myself understood better.

RK: Before you came over, when you made an application for a visa, did you have to have a sponsor here?

SS: Yes, I got the affidavit from an aunt of mine. She originally said that she would sponsor me alone. I wrote to her that I would never be financially dependent on her, that I could guarantee that because I had some money in Switzerland which I had worked for and which I picked up on my way out. Only then did she give an affidavit for Ilse and Peter, at the same time. So we had three affidavits. Otherwise, I would have had to come here alone and they would never have come out.

RK: Was the American Consul helpful to you?

SS: They were very nice. Of course, if you would have seen the U. S. Consulate in those days, in Stuttgart, there were hundreds and hundreds of people in the waiting room day in and day out. They were all waiting for a visa, or trying to find out how they could come over here. (Obviously Sig Sander is talking about the Consulate staff.)

RK: But they could not all get out?

SS: No! The only thing which I found very peculiar was, when we were in that Consul's office and he signed our affidavit, our passport and so on (when the visa was issued). I had never seen anything like that, he had his feet on his desk. That, for a German of my upbringing, was the most unusual thing I had ever seen. You talk about freedom of behavior. We saw it right there.

RK: Could you describe in a little more detail what life was like for you upon arriving to the United States.

SS: Well, it was rather difficult when I came here. In the beginning I could not find a job. (In 1938, the Depression in the United States was still rampant and the unemployment level was high.) I had twenty-five letters of recommendation when I came over here and I thought that I would show one letter of recommendation and I would get a job. When I finally made my first visit to the people instead of twenty-five letters I had forty letters. Spending nickel after nickel for subways (that was the fare in the New York subways until 1947) and going from office to office without anybody offering me a job, just more letters of recommendations. Finally I gave up, because I had had so many failures, you see in those days the

system of getting rid of you was to get my name. They wrote my name down and said: "I will call you!" Finally I got wise to that and I went in to see one man again and I said: "I think that I gave the wrong address." So the man said: "Well, that is all right, give me the information and I will correct the address." His face got red when he had to reach down in the wastepaper basket where my card had already been deposited and he had to give it to me. So from that moment on, I lost interest and faith in letters of recommendations. Finally, I got a job offered to me, in a bowling alley as a pin boy.

RK: In New York City!

SS: In New York City for \$7.00 (seven dollars) per week and lunch. I was very elated when I came home to my wife and told her that tomorrow I can go down and get a job for six or seven dollars a week and lunch. I was very happy that I finally had found something but when I got back there the next morning I was told "I am very sorry, sir, but someone was here and took the job for \$5.00 a week." So I went around and around again and I finally got a job at S. Klein's. (That was a clothing store of very cheap clothes at 23rd Street and Broadway.) Have you ever been in New York City?

RK: No.

SS: Klein is a self service department store which sold ladies dresses. I was one of the "boys" who picked up the dresses which the women had dropped after they looked at them. You had to pick them up and hang them back on the rack. I did that for six weeks. I would say that there was more, I could not say anti-Semitism, by the Jewish girls, American girls, toward us than I had ever experienced in my life. They made fun of us.

RK: Because you were refugees?

SS: Yes. Whenever we said something, they reported us to the supervisor, that we were not willing to do the work. We never could understand what they said because they talked among themselves in Yiddish and we did not understand Yiddish. It was a very unhappy six weeks while I worked there. Well, during that time, I waited and waited and I never found another job. I probably was a salesman, and I was a horrible salesman, until I finally, in November, got a call from the Refugee Committee (that was a branch of the HIAS, i.e., the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, which was set up to help Jewish immigrants to enter the United States and then to get located satisfactorily). They said that they had a community located for us. Actually they said that they had three communities. They were Springfield, Hamilton, and Portsmouth. They told us that they think that Springfield is the largest. They also said that I talked a pretty good English. I felt that I could hardly talk any English - and added that they would rather send us to Springfield, which had a population of 25,000. That was the largest of the three. Well, I said, anything sounds good to me to get out of here. All right, we

will go to Springfield!" Then they said: "Come back at 2:00 and we will get you set up. When can you leave?" Well, I had an apartment rented in the Bronx (one of the five boroughs that make up New York City) at that time. I said: "I will have to see and let you know on Monday. They said: Well you ought to make up your mind by Monday because we have too many people applying. I said: I will take it, but I cannot tell you what day we will leave. (Ilse had landed a wonderful job with my aunt selling hosiery.) She had a department in a store and she made fairly good money. Peter was very happy in a small kindergarten. I was the only one who did not have a job, so I cooked, cleaned, and everything else. I wanted to get back into work. So when my wife came home from work I said, "Can we leave in two weeks?" She said, well it is hard to do but all right. So I went back to the lady at the refugee committee and told her about it. In the meantime, I found out about Springfield. I discovered that it had 68,000 people and not 25,000. I told her that and she said: "I did not ask you!" They gave me the tickets for my family and myself to go from New York to Dayton, using Pullman, (this means that the three of them traveled by sleeping and parlor railroad car) and in Dayton we changed to another train which took us from Dayton, Ohio to Springfield, Ohio. At that time major trains did not stop between Columbus and Dayton...where we were picked up by two people from the Jewish community and brought to the house of another family from Germany who wanted to do something for us. We stayed there for six weeks and then we rented an apartment.

RK: What year was that, in 1938?

SS: That was in November of 1938. We got here on November 2nd. We stayed with these people until the middle of December. Then we moved into that apartment and we stayed there, I think, until June of the following year when we moved into our house, in back of Mercy Hospital.

RK: Did your training and education in Germany help you here?

SS: When I first came here I laid linoleum, for three weeks, for Jack Rubin, Joe Rubin's Father. He found out that I was not a good linoleum layer. They tried everything, but I was not good at it. So they tried to do something in my line and I tried to get into the accounting field. I was an accomplished photographer at that time. I had taken courses in Germany to learn photography and I had complete Leika equipment (the German manufacturer of lenses and other photographic equipment), which I had brought with me and I had no place to use it. They did not wait for me, as a photographer either, in America. There were others, some of them better. So, after being in this linoleum business for three weeks, they found that I was not good at it and I went into a small factory which was bankrupt. I did some work there for half a year, until I got located at the workshop which was Menstro (the transcriber is not certain of the name) on a part time basis. By that time, I had started already taking on accounts in accounting and that was the beginning of my career here as a public accountant.

RK: While you were in Springfield, were there any agencies in the Jewish community which helped you?

SS: No. The Jewish community had only fifty to sixty members here. The Temple had about fifty members and the shul had about thirty to forty members. Many people had dual memberships. At that particular time they started the so-called "Good Will Club." They raised Three Hundred Fifty Dollars. These three hundred fifty dollars were the funds with which they supported us for the first few months. However, when I had enough income so I repaid the money which they had advanced me, and with the money which they had they brought another family over. Then they had another fund raising affair where they raised another Three Hundred Dollars. So they had a capital of Six Hundred Dollars to finance four or five families. Some of them came and some of them left again. They were not the type of people who would stay in a small community like this. We were the first ones and then came another family here. They were supported by a Cincinnati relative. They were settled here. Then came the Karga family, also through the Refugee Committee. He was a tailor. He was quite a good addition to this community.

RK: How would you compare life here in the United States with your life in Germany?

SS: Life in the United States cannot be compared with life in Germany, to begin with. This is a lot freer life than it was over there. You are not, you're not as regulated as you were over there, with the exception of the time when the war, World War II broke out, when we were very much regulated. We could not move out of Clark County (Clark County Ohio is the county whose county seat is Springfield. Transcriber failed to mention earlier that Springfield is twenty-nine miles east of Dayton) without permission. Otherwise the life here is so much more comfortable and informal than it was in Germany. (The transcriber found no such limitations to crossing county or even state lines while not a citizen, during WWII.)

RK: You do not find any similarities?

SS: Similarities between Germany and the United States? There are no similarities, at least I do not think so. It is entirely different. You would have to ask my wife about the differences. You just cannot compare it. That is like homey (transcriber believes that an idea of lack of hurry in getting things done, and the idea of following a pattern or or tradition exists there also). You were more informal. You addressed people by their first names, that would have been impossible in Germany. We still know people from Germany, from thirty or forty years ago whom we meet now and we still use the "Sie" in addressing them (that is the formal way of address, not the "Du." The "Du" corresponds to our "you," but it is still used only very sparingly.

RK: The "Sie" is more formal?



SS: Oh, yes, more formal. When Ilse's Mother came here, we found the difference between the formality of German as against the informality of America.

RK: Do you like the informality then?

SS: Yes, because you feel that you are part of it. It was that when we came here in 1938. I remember the first affair that we had. They invited me to it. It was a dinner for Mr. Max Gross who left town. I was invited. I went to the biggest cafeteria (in Springfield) which they had at the time. In all my life, I had never seen a meal served like this. There were great big slabs of roast beef which were sliced up for the evening. I had never seen anything like it of the kind. Everybody called me by my first name, and when I replied by calling them Mr. so and so, they replied: "Do not call me Mr., call me Max." You got a lot closer a lot quicker, acquainted with people in this manner. In addition to this, in 1939, when I think, or it could have been 1940, no 1939, I was elected secretary of B'nai Brith already. (B'nai Brith, which is Hebrew and translates into Sons of the Covenant, is a Jewish fraternal organization.) I got the tremendous amount of \$25.00 a year salary, which I turned over to the welfare drive as my donation to the UJA (the UJA, or the United Jewish Appeal, is a drive for funds held yearly to raise money for needs of Jews or Jewish families and Jewish agencies in this country and elsewhere). I served the B'nai Brith lodges as Secretary for seven years. I collected the dues and I wrote the minutes for that time. That was of tremendous value to me, because I got acquainted with the language; I was forced to write, which I never did otherwise. I wish that we still had the minutes, because I would love to read them now with the broken English which I used at that particular time. However, unfortunately, they are not available any longer.

RK: How would you compare your present religious practices with those in Germany?

SS: In Germany? I would say that I am practicing more now than I did in Germany. In Germany, we went to the synagogue maybe once a month. Of course, we lived in a larger city and the distances were larger. On a Friday night, unless you were invited by a friend you went to the synagogue first, and after the synagogue you went home to have dinner with the family. Our system here, I think, is better: you have dinner at home and then go to the Temple. Usually, you stay an hour or an hour and a half in worship as a relaxation also. After all, I felt for the many years that I have been going to Temple here that the Friday nights, to me, is a separation between the days of the week or the week of work with the one hour or so of rest...for many, many years. I have made many of clients really angry when I refused to discuss any business on Friday nights. They always saw me there and felt that they could pick my brain during that hour when I was there. I always told them that I refused to do that, if they wanted to see me they could come to my office. I would say that the practicing Judaism here, in America, has been to me more meaningful than the one in Germany, because the one in Germany was still of the semi-orthodox manner. We did not belong to what we know as a

reform congregation. I was thoroughly familiar with Hebrew and practices of the synagogue and so on, I like it better here.

RK: Do you associate more with Jews than non-Jews?

SS: I would say that it is fifty-fifty. We have a huge number of non-Jewish friends with whom we are in contact. Some of them are true friends; some of them are acquaintances. However, in the last few years, with advancing age, your contemporaries are leaving or dying and you do not have as many contacts as you used to have.

RK: Would you say that your association with Jews and non-Jews are the same or different than they were in Germany?

SS: Definitely! Definitely! In Germany, you see, when we were more matured anti-Semitism was already on the increase and you were very much cautious of the fact that you had to answer the question. "Is he really anti-Semitic or is he not." As a matter of fact, when I came over here from Germany, I studied the face and the profile of every Gentile, and in my own mind, and figured out what he would look like if he had a Nazi stormtrooper's cap on. If he fit that profile I just set him aside, I did not want any part of him. Usually, I was right, at least I thought so. There were lot of people who I found out later were actually not true friends, whereas others were very, very good to me.

RK: Did you meet very many anti-Semitic actions?

SS: Oh, a few, not too many. I had a few incidents, but not truly anti-Semitic.

RK: What organizations are you associated with in Springfield?

SS: Non-Jewish?

RK: Secular.

SS: Oh, I am a member of the Masonic Lodge. I belong to the Civic Theater. Oh, not too many organizations, to which I belong any more. I am a member of Mitchel Hills Country Club. I am not a socially minded person. I am a member of the Art Center. I belong to any organization to which it is worthwhile belonging to, when they wanted me as a member, I became a member. I am not the country club type.

RK: You were a member of health organizations?

SS: I was President and Chairman of the Board, later on, of the Community Hospital.

RK: Do you ever think of your life in Germany?

SS: Very seldom. I reminisce a little bit, once in a while.

RK: How do you feel when you do that?

SS: That it was a thing of the past. Now, for instance, we have been in Germany four times, after Hitler, after we lived here in America. The first time was a very, very hard time for me to adjust to. I limbered up a little as I met a few more people whom I knew from before, and found them to be just as nice as they were in those days. Of course, I would not see the ones who were not nice. I became a little more lenient towards their attitude and by the mere fact that, in 1970, when we went through Germany, I visited an old client of mine, whom I had not seen since 1934. You have no idea of the reception which I got. It was like a long lost friend coming home. We visited him again two or three years ago and they, in return, came last year - no, this year - to visit us. They were here in Springfield. Those people knew that I was Jewish. This man was a young man at that time, he took me to his parents in Speyer on the Rhine (49.19N,8.26E). The parents were outspoken enemies of Hitler. They were in the printing business. They printed all the McGuffey Readers, you know the books for the first and second grades in schools. Those people showed me, the, in quotation marks, trash which they had to print, under Hitler, for the children. Now the children adored Hitler. They gave him flowers and all that. All that trash that is printed now! Children do not learn anything anymore. These are the people which I was acquainted with and when I visited them this time, I asked that I wanted to see this book again, which they had shown me at that time. I said I would like to have a few of them. He said: "You could not buy this for a million marks, that was the last one which was saved." He had it in his archives, this one book. It was a wonderful reunion which we had with them last year. They showed us a wonderful time. (The years do not appear to be logical, since earlier Sig Sander spoke about visits of two or three years ago). We saw his family, just to show you how nicely we were treated. We reciprocated, we reciprocated when they came over here.

RK: How do you think your children's lives are different from your own?

SS: My children's lives...

RK: Yes, definitely.

SS: Well, of course, they have entirely more freedom for youngsters than we had. We were brought up to obey, and if we did not obey we got beaten. Here children, now, speak their mind. It is more informal lifestyle. I do not know if it is completely right, but it is a different life. As a matter of fact, our youth, right now, live under an entirely different balance of attitudes. It is a new ball game. It is awfully hard for me to get accustomed to.

RK: Is there anything that you would like to pass on to future generations?

SS: Well I always thought - for a long time already - but, I have not found the proper wording and besides that I am not literally enough up to date. I would like to leave to my children what I would call an ethical will. It would state the way children should live, how they should live. What is actually ethics. Money does not mean anything. When I am going to die, there will be very little of it left for them, because I have never strived to be a wealthy man. I live comfortably, but I do not think that when both of us are gone, we are going to leave a tremendous value to our children, and they know it. What I have given them, I think, was the very best education both of them could have. I have made arrangements which will profit my grandchildren and their grandchildren. This is probably what I will leave when I go, with the exception of a few small bequests that I will leave probably to the Temple and to the hospital and so on, within the framework of my small means.

RK: Have your experiences in coming to this country made you want to leave something special to them?

SS: To whom?

RK: To your children or grandchildren.

SS: To leave what?

RK: Ideas, anything.

SS: I have been trying to spread that gospel to all people, but I can not spread it now to people who are not willing to listen. There are very few listeners in this country. Very few who are willing to listen to the story. When I ask them if they say: "Oh, it is nice!" They are not interested in that. If you talk to your children about what happened, in the days to come the answer will be: "Here comes the sermon again." As I said before it is a new ball game. It is hard to do. The other day we had some people here and I got a phone call yesterday where the lady said: "You know that was one of the most inspiring evenings which I had had in a long time. We really sat down for two hours and talked. That is something we had not done in many, many years. We remembered a lot of things and we really got to a lot of things we do not think about any more. Well, I think that it is up to us, not only we, but to our whole community, to create an historical background of what happened years ago. As I told you before, I have intended, but I have never been able to do it, to have the older members of the congregation's brains picked to give all the information which they have concerning the history of our Temple. Unfortunately, we did not get it, so we have to listen to some people who have very erroneous ideas about what happened twenty and thirty and forty years ago.

RK: Thank you very much.

SS: You are welcome.