

-TITLE-BENJAMIN HIRSCH
-I_DATE-NOVEMBER 10, 1986
-SOURCE-CHILDREN OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS ATLANTA
-RESTRICTIONS-
-SOUND_QUALITY-EXCELLENT
-IMAGE_QUALITY-GOOD
-DURATION-1 HOUR 45 MINUTES
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH
-KEY_SEGMENT-
-GEOGRAPHIC_NAME-
-PERSONAL_NAME-
-CORPORATE_NAME-
-KEY_WORDS-
-NOTES-
-CONTENTS-

Minute 45 of the first tape through to the end of the interview is about Benjamin's life in the United States, except for the story he recalls at minute 36 of tape 2.

Childhood

1:02:55 Ben was born in September, 1932, in Frankfurt, Germany. His family consisted of mother, father, 7 kids, of which Ben was the fifth. His father was a dentist and a leader of the Orthodox Jewish community. Ben can't remember any time when Jews weren't worried because they were Jews. He attended a Jewish day school.

1:04:13 Ben doesn't remember any friends in Frankfurt. Possibly all his associations were with siblings. He left at age six.

1:05:39 Ben had to worry about being physically attacked by young German children in 1937-38. He remembers that before restrictions he used to go to the parks.

1:07:02 He had to know how to defend himself. He would run to the closest house and yell "mama" and the chasers would run away because they would think it was his house and that his mother was going to come out.

1:08:15 Ben later learned from his siblings that at this time his parents argued over whether to send the kids away. Mother wanted to send them away. Father said it would pass.

1:09:35 Ben remembers Kristallnacht vividly. His father was taken away immediately after it, but Ben doesn't know whether it was as a result of Kristallnacht. Mother found out about a "kinder - transport" to Paris arranged by the head of the kindergarten in Frankfurt. Two of Ben's uncles who were much older than he, had already gone on a "kinder-transport" to Israel.

1:10:35 The five oldest children were able to go. Jewish kids under 13 were able to leave. His sister Flo was too old to go, but was allowed as a counselor.

1:11:20 Ben remembers the day, not the night, of Kristallnacht. The Germans took Torahs out of the Shul and there was a picket fence and they punctured the scrolls on the fence.

1:12:45 The Nazis had black round things that they threw in and thus destroyed the shul building. There were a lot of Jews standing there crying and non-Jews cheering and he thinks some non-Jews were there not cheering too.

1:13:55 The five oldest kids of the family were sent to Paris together and were split up in Paris so they could stay with relatives there. His two sisters stayed with one uncle, his brothers with another. Ben was to stay with Uncle Yakik, but for some reason Yakik was not allowed to keep Ben, so Ben was sent to stay with a friend of the family also in Paris.

1:14:42 Kindertransport was a train. They were supervised by Ben's 13-year old sister.

1:15:39 The night before they left Germany Ben's mother was packing and everyone was crying. He didn't understand why. To him, going to Paris was an adventure.

1:16:39 (crying) That was the last time Ben saw his mother.

1:18:20 In Paris, Ben went to a public school. Some kids asked him where he was from. He told them Germany. They wanted him to prove it by speaking German. It had only been two weeks since he got to France, but he was speaking French and could remember no German, so the kids beat him up because they thought he was lying. Overall, however, the kids were nice to him. He doesn't know how he was speaking French so soon.

1:19:00 Ben would cry when his brothers left after visiting him. Mr. Sandberg, who he was staying with, comforted him.

1:21:22 They were in Paris only for 3-4 months in 1937-38. Ben's older siblings got letters from his parents. Ben was sent to Marmenille(ph) to a children's home. Ben's brothers and sisters were sent to children's homes soon after, the two girls together, and the two older boys together. The people they had stayed with in Paris, Jews themselves, sent the kids away because they Earned Nazi discovery.

1:21:52 One time Ben's brothers brought him a chocolate bar for his birthday. They were very hard to get. They had forgotten that Ben didn't like chocolate, but Ben gave pieces away, which gained him a lot of friends.

1:24:52 The homes were run by Jews for Jewish refugee kids. Some were clandestine. Manmarsille was a suburb of Paris. They stayed there until Paris was put under siege. Then for safety all of the kids from all the homes were sent to Cleurs, to Chateau de Mangenpie. (ph)

There Ben found out he would meet his brothers and sisters to go to the States.

1:25:17 Ben later found out that a doctor who had worked in running some of the homes had gone to New York and published an ad in the New York Times with names of all the kids in the homes, asking anyone who recognized the names to come forward and vogue for their support so that the kids could come to the US. Ben's mother's cousin in Rome, GA, claimed Ben and his 4 brothers and sisters.

1:27:07 The childrens' homes provided schooling. Ben's brothers were in a home for religious kids, but Ben wasn't because it opened after Ben had already arrived in Manmarsille. The kids where he was were all Jewish, but degrees of religiousness varied. Ben's parents home had been kosher, shomer shabbat. Frankfurt had quite a large Orthodox community.

1:28:13 1941: Arrangements were being made to go to the States.
1942: Ben got a letter from his mother in a camp. His father was also in a camp, Orani&nbung.

1:28:41 In gathering in Jerusalem in 1981, Ben met a lady who had stayed in their house after the five kids have left. She stayed in the room with Bens little brother and sister. She says that when she was forced to leave Frankfurt and go to Berlin, Ben's father visited her as late as 1941. Ben thinks it is remarkable that his father was able to travel freely as late as 1941.

1:30:14 Ben's father died in 1943 because he was refused treatment for bleeding ulcers while he was working as a dentist, incarcerated at Orani&nbung. Ben found out from the lady who he met in Jerusalem who had stayed in their house that his father was very active in the community. He had set up a kosher soup kitchen for the elderly and he saw to the education of eight girls from outside Frankfurt who went to stay with them. Ben thinks this probably kept him alive longer.

1:31:40 Ben met up with his brothers in Cleurs. While in bread line, Ben had severe stomach cramps. He was told it was appendicitis, so he would not be able to leave with his brothers on the transport leading to the ship to the States. Ben went to stay at Chateau de Maureille (ph) where his sisters were.

1:33:55 Ben later met the person who got to go on the transport in his place. She was the nurse at Ben's daughter's summer camp. She told Ben that he saved her life because she would have turned 16 by the time of the second transport, and the deal between France and the Germans was that Jewish children be allowed to leave freely, but at age 16 they had to be turned over to the Nazis. It turned out Ben didn't really have appendicitis after all.

1:35:14 Ben travelled with his sisters by train through the Pyrenees. The transport was supervised by young adults. They spent the night in Madrid at a convent where things were clandestine. They continued to Lisbon which felt almost free. It was a neutral zone.

1:36:15 They spent two weeks in Lisbon. Then he left on the same boat as his brothers earlier had-- the SS Muselman.(ph)

1:37:58 Ben thinks he was just a regular mischievous kid. He just figured this was the only way to live. It became a game. He recalls that in a bomb shelter he once drank a bottle of ink on a dare-- not the sign of a scared kid.

1:39:08 Ben is asked to name those who were in his family:
Father: Dr. Herman Hirsch
Mother:Matilda Abba(ph) Hirsch
Siblings(from oldest to youngest):
Flora, Asher, Sarah, Jack, (then Ben), Berlie, Rosalind

1:40:58 Ben's brothers came to the US 3 months before Ben and his sisters. Ben was at sea 14 days on the passenger ship SS Muzzio. There were about 700 kids on the ship. There were only two such transports-- his brothers' and his--then the Nazis found out and the transports came to an end.

1:42:18 Ben was already quite independent by this time because he had spent two years living away from family.

1:43:37 SS Muzzio was a Portuguese ship. There were some stow-aways on the ship who had escaped from prison in Lisbon. Rumor had it that the stow-aways had killed and cannibalized a crew-member. The stow-aways were taken off ship at Yartoberka (ph) on labor day.

1:45:07 They arrived in NY and were met by social workers of some organization. They were kept in a holding place and were given chewing gum. Ben had expected to see Roosevelt riding up and down the streets on a white horse.

1:46:23 Ben didn't know what would happen to him in NY. He just figured he would "go with the flow", that his sisters would take care of everything. Ben and his sisters spent several weeks in New York before going to Atlanta where his brothers were. They communicated in French.

1:47:50 Ben thought there would come a time when he would see his parents again, but it wasn't something he sat and waited for. He couldn't even remember his parents anymore.

1:49:10 Ben went to Atlanta and was put in a foster home where his brothers were, with the Bergman family. An organization called the Hebrew Orphans' Home had a fund to pay the foster parents.

1:50:04 Ben stayed with four foster families all together. He stayed 1 year with the Bergmans, who also had children of their own. Then he went to the Hirshbergs.

1:51:40 He was put in the third grade, but soon jumped to the fourth because the fourth grade teacher spoke French. Ben learned English quickly and soon forgot French.

1:53:20 In 1942 in Atlanta, Ben and his siblings received a couple letters from their parents. They were censored, but at least their parents had the peace of mind to know the kids were safe and together.

1:54:48 Peers in Hebrew school asked him about the situation in Europe and he realized how little he knew. No one in the Jewish community talked about the existence of death camps.

1:55:37 People Ben stayed with never talked about the situation in Europe. The only concern seemed to be how to take care of the family. There was a lot of pity for Ben, especially when he first arrived.

1:56:45 During his first year in the US Ben was invited to the house of a non- Jewish classmate. The kid and his parents showed great concern for what was going on in Europe. Later when Ben was in high school, the same kid came up to Ben on the street and held a knife to his ear, threatening to cut it off. They walked three blocks that way. The kid said he was doing this because Ben was a dirty Jew.

1:57:45 Ben says as much as he was persecuted in Germany, it doesn't hold a candle to how he was persecuted here.

1:58:33 Ben used to walk home from Hebrew school and a gang would come up to fight him. Ben soon learned that it was worse to fight back because then if he won other kids would just come after him. So he just stood there and took the beating.

1:60:35 The other children he was walking with would run away if they could, or sometimes they were made to watch. Ben was about 12-13. The kids who beat him up were a little older. Anti-Semitism was worse against Ben because he was a foreigner.

1:62:09 One day after being beaten up in high school, Ben went home and a social worker was there talking to his mother.

Ben told them what had happened and the boys who had beat him up were sent to reform school. When they got out they were nice to Ben.

High school/Army/Adult in US

2:01:43 Though Ben's being beaten up could have been more because he was a foreigner, Ben says he thought the whole world was anti-Semitic-- he had seen it in Germany, France and the US.

2:03:10 In tenth grade a big kid stood up for Ben when Ben was about to get beaten up, and he never had any problems after that.

2:04:20 Ben's brother Asher was in the US army in the late 40s. He went to Germany and confirmed that their parents were dead. They had assumed as much when they didn't hear anything after the war. But they wanted to know where, how, when they died. Yad Vashem found out for Ben's aunt in B'nai Brak.

2:06:22 There was a death certificate for Ben's father. An uncle saw Ben's mother, brother, and sister in line for the gas chamber at Auschwitz. Yartzeit for his father is 25 Cheshvan; 28 Cheshvan for mother brother and sister. (Ben's grandparents had all died of natural causes before the war.)

2:07:34 Ben was about 14 when he found out his parents were dead.

2:08:57 When Ben first came to the US he wore a kepah. A Jewish teacher at school told him to take it off because it was bad for all the Jews in school that Ben wore a kepah. That didn't make sense to Ben, so he left it on.

2:10:14 The teacher got a bully to take the kepah away from Ben in the schoolyard. Ben beat him up and got it back. The next night the bully and his gang beat Ben up. Ben stopped wearing a kepah. It wasn't worth the pain.

2:11:04 Asher had been the biggest traditional influence on Ben, since Asher had a fuller traditional education. When Asher left for the army, Ben continued to keep shabbas and to keep kosher, but by age 15-16, he became tempted and went to work selling at Saturday football games.

2:11:56 The rabbi told Ben he would pay him the same amount as he could make working on Saturdays to wash the rabbi's car (much more than the cost of a carwash). Ben refused.

2:13:03 When Ben went into the army, all the non-Jews asked him questions about Judaism, and Ben realized how little he knew. That bothered Ben because so many had died because they were Jewish, and Ben had given it up without even knowing much about it.

2:15:24 Mrs. Guncher, a foster parent, was traditional orthodox. At age 16, Ben went to live with his sister Sarah who was married and living in Atlanta. Ben stayed with her 4 years, and returned to live with her after the army while he finished college.

2:17:04 After the war nobody wanted to talk about it. For the Jews it was a conscious decision; to non-Jews; it was just unimportant.

2:21:44 Ben graduated high school in 1950 and still keeps in touch with some people from his class. By that time, he didn't get treated like a foreigner because he had so little accent. Ben always expected to be singled out for being a Jew.

2:24:44 Asked recently as part of a Jewish committee to vote on approval of a document outlining what Christmas celebrations are to be allowed in public schools, Ben was the only one to vote against it. Jews should not restrict Christmas celebrations regardless of what the Constitution says. Let someone else do it, because it will just make the Jews more hated. Jews can send their kids to Jewish schools if they don't like it.

2:26:15 Ben believes that having a state of Israel has helped the Jews a lot. Here Jews are choosing to live in a Christian world, so they should accept that some things are Christian.

2:27:49 Ben is now orthodox again. He decided the best way to learn is by living it, and if he found he didn't like it he would give it up.

2:30:01 Ben applied for war reparations. He was denied for loss of education. The German government claimed that Ben was too young to have started school before he left, when in fact he was in the first grade in Germany. She got \$3,000 for the loss of his father. He has the money in a CD. He doesn't know if he'll ever touch it, but he just wanted the Germans not to have it.

2:33:32 In 1954 Ben was in the army and worked hard to be sent to Germany because he didn't believe his brother and sister were really dead. While in the army, he went to Frankfurt every weekend because he and his siblings owned the family house, the only one on the block to survive and Ben was trying to sell it.

2:36:05 Somehow when Ben went to Frankfurt out of uniform strangers knew who he was-- his situation not his name. Some people came up and hugged him and cried, One man beat him up.

2:39:18 When Ben was living in France he was sent to a summer camp to fatten him up. First they cut off his testies and gave him a plate of ham. They kept giving him the same plate of ham at every meal and he refused to eat it. He was 6-7 years old. Ben doesn't know if it was run by Jews or non-Jews. They took him to the pigpen, punctured the pig, and let the blood drip into a bucket. Then they threw the bucket at him. Ben doesn't remember, but he is sure that he ate the ham after that. He has tried, but can not find out who did this or where it happened.

2:41:21 Ben thinks the Holocaust could happen again. If they set up camps in Russia, what could anyone do? He would protest, but it wouldn't help.

2:43:00 Israel is at least a place to go. People could escape clandestinely. Even in the US there are a lot of hate groups. There are no guarantees that their kids who are being taught hate won't get power.

2:45:00 Skokie was very painful to Ben. It upset him that Jews would fight for the hate group's right to march.
.END.→