

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HAROLD STERN

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Nora Levin
Date: September 10, 1981

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HS - Harold Stern¹ [interviewee]

NL - Nora Levin [interviewer]

Date: September 10, 1981

Tape one, side one:

NL: This is an interview with Mr. Harold Stern, September 10, 1981, Nora Levin interviewing. Tape one, side one. Harold, would you please tell me where you were born and when and a little about your childhood, your home life in your hometown?

HS: O.K. I was born August 31, 1921, in the city of Frankfurt on the Main [*Frankfurt am Main*] in Germany. My parents were married just about a year and it was the post-war period in Germany. At that time it was very difficult to find apartments, and to get settled, and they managed to find a place finally, I understand, on the third floor in the West End of Frankfurt very close to the place where my grandparents lived. I am talking about the father and mother of my mother. We lived there from 1921 until 1930. I went to school when I was six years old. It's called *Vorschule*; it's an elementary school where you go for four years and from there you proceed to the so-called middle school or the *Gymnasium* if you want to pursue a professional education at the university.

NL: Was this a government school, or a school set up by the community of Frankfurt? Was it a Jewish school?

HS: It's very unusual in Germany to go to a Jewish school unless you want a particular spirit or a particular type of education. In Frankfurt it became a matter of necessity due to the fact that the Jewish students were thrown out of public schools more and more as time went on.

NL: But this was a public school that you went to?

HS: Oh, absolutely, yes. That was even before Hitler. That was from 1927 to 1931, and Hitler only got into power in 1933 when I already was attending the *Gymnasium*.

NL: What was father's work at this time?

HS: Well, it is a bit of a story. Conditions were very unsettled after the war, and my grandfather on my mother's side had a mica factory. Mica is a material, a mineral which is used in irons or in ovens to insulate heat from the outside. It comes in sheets and gets split. In any case, he had, my grandfather had that factory in the outskirts of Frankfurt together with somebody else who was very active at the local synagogue and, do you want the name of that factory?

NL: No, that's not necessary.

HS: Not important. O.K.

NL: A feeling about the economic conditions.

¹Former first name Helmutt.

HS: My father worked there until, he was a member of the Board whatever the equivalent is today vice-president. My mother also worked there off and on as a secretary. We had a maid, so it was no problem.

NL: Did you have brothers, sisters?

HS: No, I am the only child, but the interesting part of that other story was for today inflation got so bad that my grandfather lost his factory due to the economic conditions and had to give up his factory, and my father became a sales representative, and my grandfather continued to be an agent for mica-processing in some form or another. He dealt with England, I remember, and even had an office at one time in London and...

NL: So the family managed fairly well through these adverse times.

HS: Yes. My mother was very helpful in supporting my father in the business and they worked together, and I remember them going out late at night with important letters to the railroad station to send out the orders and information immediately to Silesia where some of the factories were, or to the Rhineland, because if you did not do that in those days, the competition was so fierce that there were always two people standing behind you with something new.

NL: Frankfurt had a large Jewish community?

HS: Frankfurt had a population of five hundred thousand. I don't recall how many Jewish families there were, but it was a substantial element in the city from way back actually, and the Jewish population in Frankfurt had contributed tremendously to learning, to culture, to restoration of the old city. There was an Association of Friends of the Old City. It was really a very liberal and friendly atmosphere.

NL: Didn't Rosenzweig have his school there? And then Buber? I think Frankfurt was the center. Did your parents belong to the *Kultusgemeinde*?

HS: Yes, you paid taxes. In Germany everybody paid taxes according to his religious classification. This does not mean that you pay taxes according to this religious beliefs, but he paid taxes because you belong to a Catholic or Jewish or Protestant...

NL: In Frankfurt was this money collected by the State?

HS: That money was paid to the State all over Germany. It was called a *Kultus steuer*, which was a cult [cultural] tax. From that tax the State maintained the salary of the rabbis, the salaries of all the organizations, the priests and churches, and whatever. I don't know to what degree they paid towards the maintenance of religious teaching organizations, but in those organizations people, of course, contributed also by way of the students that were sent to the school, tuition.

NL: Your parents belonged to what we would call the Liberal or Reform segments?

HS: Yes, it is very funny story. My mother only went to synagogue to please my father, who came from a very Orthodox background, but he, too, had lost his father very early and grew up in Frankfurt. My grandmother, who had lived in Paderborn, Westphalia, where they had some kind of a store, moved with her four children to Frankfurt to join the

rest of her family after the death of her husband who had been considerably older, I never met him, and brought up those children in Frankfurt. There were two boys and two girls. Now, they maintained a traditional life. My grandmother was a traditional woman, a very strict woman, she had to be, and did a very good job. My father and his brother traveled a great deal before the war. They were in the U.S. and South America on business and there came a time when they were hardly home any more in Frankfurt. So they got away from the tradition a little bit and my mother grew up in a Jewish household, that just was Jewish by classification and paid the taxes, but kept nothing.

NL: Did you have any sort of Jewish education? Did you go to a Sunday School?

HS: Yes, of course, that came later. We belonged to a Liberal congregation which we went to and it was a well-known synagogue, the Westend Synagogue in Frankfurt and it was a tremendously big place, a very modern place, very beautiful, wonderful rabbis. Cantorial art flourished and, of course, they had a school, too. Now when you go to school in Germany, at least at that time, you had Religion. You had with your three hours, you also had Religion. From the very beginning, there were two sessions a week, where you had to go whether you liked it or not.

NL: Did a rabbi come into the school?

HS: No, there was a regular Jewish teacher, who was even a director of one of the schools, co-director of that elementary school, who not only taught Religion, but also taught German and History and different subjects.

NL: And this person was paid by the State?

HS: Of course. This was a regular teacher in the teaching system. You must keep in mind that under the German system, everybody was recognized in his own right as a teacher. There was no such thing as anybody being of different caliber for certain purposes, and...

NL: You went twice a week to this special class?

HS: Well, it was in the school building. A certain class was set aside just for religious instruction, which was used by Catholics and Lutherans alike.

NL: Did you learn any Hebrew in this, or just history...

HS: At that early age I didn't, but I must say that, when I started going to school at the age of six, there were already some young people who had private lessons in Hebrew, because their parents wanted it. And I must say, I didn't even know what Hebrew was when I started school. That was the situation there, and after my fourth year in elementary school, I went to the *Gymnasium*, because I was trying to go to the university later on. That took place in 1930, before Hitler got into power in 1933. So I really had a very good German-type education at that humanistic *Gymnasium*. It was the best school in Frankfurt, and I went there with a lot of my friends.

NL: That was government or was this private?

HS: All government.

NL: Now what were your relation with non-Jewish children? Did you have non-Jewish friends there?

HS: I must tell you that overall there were good relations. There were always some anti-Semites. Always. This is a part of life in Germany, as it is perhaps everywhere else, and under unpleasant economic conditions this is coming out more openly than at other times. But generally speaking...there were about one-third Jewish in that class. It was usually good relations with the exception of two really fierce anti-Semites, who were usually the bad sheep of the class to begin with, and nobody took them very seriously. This changed in the course of time under Hitler propaganda. In the early times there was no such problem, but I must say that there was one thing that sheds a little bit of light on the way things were in Germany. I was born during a year when there was a surplus of children in the post-war period, and that was in 1921 when apparently everybody had children. By the time I went to school, the regular facilities of the State schools were insufficient to harbor everybody, and some of these classes, where there were usually four, had to have six class accommodations. So our group was sent close by to a strictly Catholic establishment. And that was really a revelation. The Catholic people in that school and the students were absolutely anti-Semitic, strongly anti-Semitic. That is before Hitler. It had nothing to do with Hitler, except maybe the Party was coming up.

NL: This was religious anti-Semitism?

HS: This was anti-Semitism ingrained in the Catholic population and fostered by parents and probably by the clergy, too. We had constant physical fights. That lasted for a year. Then we went back to our own school where there were more Lutherans and Protestants, so to speak, and there were fewer Catholics, and this whole situation eased up quite a bit. But, of course, in the meantime, the Nazi Party became stronger, and the economic conditions for many people in Germany, especially for the laboring people, became very, very difficult. Unemployment got worse and worse; the government was too weak, couldn't stop anything from getting worse and with that, the rise of the Nazi Party was getting a hold of the students and young people, which was unfortunately inevitable, with all the propaganda. So this carried on into the 1930's. Now when I got into the *Gymnasium*, the teacher, the director of the school was half-Jewish. He was very well known in Frankfurt as a strong liberal educator, and I really remember his speech welcoming the new class into his school, in which he said that all political tendencies would be strictly cut out from his school. Little did he know what was going to happen to him because within four years, he lost his job and he went to England, and was interned, and later committed suicide. It was a very difficult time for people who felt total acceptance, and that reversal was experienced by many thousands.

NL: Your own parents' economic situation, was that, too, damaged in the early '30's?

HS: Well, my father built up this business with the help of my mother, and unfortunately my father had a weak heart muscle from malaria that he had incurred in his

travels abroad. He got very sick in 1929 and had a heart attack and pleurisy, and we could not stay in our apartment anymore where he had to walk up three flights of steps. We moved to a different apartment, close to the city, where we occupied the first floor. After we had moved there in July, he got sick; he had had another heart attack and died in August, 1930.

NL: How did Mother then manage?

HS: My mother continued the business after a fashion. She was very well-liked, and she even went traveling. She went to Darmstadt and Wiesbaden and Mainz, and things were a little bit easier. There were heavy sample cases involved, and I remember carriers coming to the apartment and picking up the sample cases, and having them ready for my mother to work with at the customer's place the next morning. It really was a system which we could learn from, maybe.

NL: I'm sure. It was all very systematic.

HS: It was a smaller city and everything was much easier to come by.

NL: And so you began to feel the more vehement anti-Semitism in the early '30's? And were you aware of any Jews already trying to leave the country in '32 or '33?

HS: Hitler came into power only in 1933. After I had gone to the *Gymnasium* for about three years it was only then, in April of 1933, that we had the first boycott action. You are familiar with that?

NL: Yes. Was Mother's business affected by that?

HS: Well, we didn't have a store, so my mother's business at that time was not affected. But as the years went by, towards the '36 - '37 period, really, my mother carried on quite well until the Nuremberg Laws.

NL: September '35?

HS: Well, it was after that that the economic pressures mounted because some of the customers could no longer receive Jewish representatives, could not work with Jewish people any more, and by the same token the manufacturers couldn't keep their Jewish representatives because it was bad for business. Well, the pressures were there. Eventually it actually did become illegal, too.

NL: Did she have to give up the business?

HS: Yes, she had to.

NL: And how then did you manage economically?

HS: We must have had some money and we had a nice apartment with a maid up to 1938, and the maid had to leave because, at one point, I had turned 16 and you could not have a non-Jewish woman in a household with a 16 year-old so-called man. I was in school until I was 15.

NL: So you were in school until 15. Were you forced to leave school?

HS: I was and I wasn't. As the times progressed, more and more Jewish people left Germany. I happened to be in contact with people who had connections to Switzerland, France, and England, and America. With Frankfurt being so close to the western border

and all that trade going on, a lot of people fortunately were connected. But I lost quite a few friends who had to leave overnight. Their parents had money outside, and the Gestapo got a hold of that information, and they got a warning. A very good friend of mine just left overnight with his parents. It took years until we met again. So, it was a matter of a tightening net, of an ever more closing circle. Nobody expected to be exterminated, but the writing was on the wall, and as I went to school, there were fewer and fewer Jewish boys in that school. I was one of the few because, I left because I didn't especially like to go to make a change still before leaving Germany, and I wasn't too badly off or persecuted and...

NL: Your teachers weren't too hostile?

HS: Most of the teachers were very nice. Some of them were from the old guard, Prussian officers, fairly decent people. There were, I remember my Latin class, for instance. When I first started out with Latin, I did very poorly. I could not relate to Latin at all, and apparently that teacher was furious at me. He knew I could do better, and I simply fell flat on my face, and he had me put right in front of his desk. In every Latin class, which was at least once a day, I had to change seats with somebody else, and I always thought that the guy did it because he was experimenting with his Jews. He didn't say so, and he was very successful with me. I did very well in the end. I became his pride and joy after a while, but, I think it was a start which was semi-political. Then we had a man who was a math teacher who taught at the University of Frankfurt, and he was a teacher who should have stayed with the university. He was a very bad math teacher for gymnasts, gymnasts is the wrong word, for students who were attending the early years at the *Gymnasium* and he was almost abstract, and he was always very, very nice to the Jewish students and joked with them and fraternized, and was very nice to the mothers and the parents in general. The school had a country home in the mountains near Frankfurt, it is called the Taunus; and the classes went up there once a year for a week, and we could also go on vacation. Any time there was a vacation we could go to this country home. He was there and he was very very nice, but he was the first man who came in with a swastika on his sleeve, the first one of all the teachers, with a big smiling face, and all the other teachers laughed at him, too.

NL: What year do you suppose this was? 1936-37?

HS: '36, '37.

NL: Did his attitude toward you change?

HS: Not really.

NL: That's interesting.

Tape one, side two:

NL: This is tape #1, side #2 of an interview with Mr. Harold Stern, September 10, 1981, Nora Levin interviewing.

HS: Eventually all teachers came in with the swastika on their sleeve. It was compulsory. At the end of the class everybody had to get up from his desk and stand there and raise his hand and say, "*Heil, Hitler.*"

NL: Including the Jewish students, of course.

HS: Yes. I remember distinctly there was a man who came from the Rhineland, who had a very strange pronunciation, and everybody made fun of him, especially with the way he said, "*Heil, Hitler,*" and some people said, "*drei Liter,*" and others imitated him, but there was one Jewish boy who was a little bit slow at one point and got caught imitating him. HE didn't do much about it, though.

NL: He wasn't a fervent Nazi, then?

HS: It was still at the time when things were a little bit easier.

NL: Apparently Frankfurt was a fairly liberal community then?

HS: It was liberal, it was probably ranking next behind Berlin in humanism and in the feeling of internationalism. I would say perhaps Hamburg was the third city where people tried to keep up a front of decency, and...

NL: When did you leave school?

HS: Well, then, because the director, long since the half-Jewish director had left, and we got a real Nazi as a director. He had short cropped hair; he walked around with a swastika; he had his scars from his student years. The man was like in a movie about Germany. You could not have cast him any better. Then dissensions arose between the Jewish students and the other students. There was a little episode, for example, where they played with marbles, and when the Gentile students took away the marbles from the Jewish students in the school yard, nothing happened, but when the Jewish students won in the marble game, then one guy one time got so upset about it that he started crying, and at that time the director was walking through the school yard during intermission, and that man went to that pupil and said to him, "If the Jewish guys give you any trouble, just let me know." That was one episode, and then some other time we had music lessons together with another class of the same level, because, as I explained before, there were so many people, and you had two or three classes together. The class was about 30-35 people, and we went to the auditorium, where, by that time, we didn't learn anything about music or harmony, but all the music consisted of Nazi songs. I had been in the school choir up to a certain time, and then when it changed to a point where you only sang these stupid Nazi songs, I resigned from it. At that time, on that particular day, they had on the agenda a song which was anti-Jewish. Not particularly anti-Jewish, but it had two verses that were anti-Jewish, the rest was very patriotic, and I didn't sing the anti-Jewish verses, and I didn't think much about it. As I left the schoolyard afterwards with my bicycle, the super-Nazis

of the class waylaid me and beat me up. This was, I don't know whether it was because I didn't sing the Nazi verses, but because probably the song had inflamed them. I finally left that school and went to the *Philanthropin* for six months. This was in 1935. I would say 1935. And went for six months to the *Philanthropin* school, which was the Jewish school, where I was reunited with a lot of my former friends and people I knew from the outside from sports activities, and I learned there an awful lot, and I was really sorry that I had not left earlier.

NL: This was a Jewish studies program essentially, plus...

HS: No, it was the Jewish School in Frankfurt. There were two Jewish schools in Frankfurt that were famous all over Germany. One is the *Philanthropin* and the other one is the *Samson Raphael Hirsch School*. If you want, I will give you a book on the *Philanthropin* school. It is written in German by all the teachers and other people and has good source material.

NL: You stayed there for six months?

HS: Yes, and with the situation the way it was, it was no longer a matter of trying to go through to college or university afterwards, because there were no more students allowed in the colleges, Jewish students. So, from a practical point of view, I was supposed to learn something or get into something that I could use later on non-professionally, or going abroad. I wanted very much to go into learning how to make shoes. What happened was already—at that time people were giving up their businesses left and right. A non-Jewish company couldn't and wouldn't employ anybody Jewish anymore, and so I found the parents of a friend of mine who had one of the big shoe companies in Germany, a well-known brand. They took me in as an apprentice. Now I wanted to be very much on the practical side of shoe manufacturing, because everybody said you have to know something practical when you leave Germany, but my mother put a stop to it and got me into the commercial part of the factory. It was, unfortunately, a mistake which she did not realize at the time. I got in there in spite of the vice-president who was Aryan, non-Jewish, and even lived on my street, that he did not advise non-Jewish people to be employed anymore in that factory.

NL: Jewish, you mean?

HS: Yes, Jewish. He didn't want it any more and he thought it was unwise. I suppose by that time they had directives from the Chamber of Commerce, which was of course under the Nazi party, but the Jewish owners prevailed and got me in there. The factory was in Hoechst near I. G. Farben, and I had to get up very early in the morning and take a train from Frankfurt to Hoechst to be there at 9:00 and look after things.

NL: Now, Harold, before we continue, I wonder if we could go back, since we talked this afternoon about several other experiences which I would like very much for you to recount on tape. Can you tell me again a little about your holiday in Italy in the summer of 1935 and the so-called shadows that you began to feel? I had said it seemed to be a carefree holiday and you didn't agree.

HS: Well, already at that time, Germany and Italy cooperated quite a bit, politically. However, the big thing in Europe at that time was the preparation of Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, and the school I went to for this vacation was a great big villa overlooking a fishing port on the Ligurian Riviera close to Genoa.

NL: And the name of the school, please?

HS: The name was Villa La Palma in Recco. The little town was called Recco. It was a very picturesque place. It lived from the sea, on the sea. It had a beach. On Sundays they had lovely concerts in the village square that we went to, and it was a picturesque, beautiful setting.

NL: Could you feel any Fascist tone or force in Italian life?

HS: Well, we were secluded insofar that we were under very strict supervision at the school, and all activities had been structured. We were never on our own, except once in a while we would go out to the little village on our own, but this, too, was a 20-minute walk, and you had to walk up a very steep hill coming back.

NL: So you were very much secluded.

HS: We did have contact so far that we bought little things in the village like ice cream, and with our limited Italian we couldn't go very far.

NL: You were saying earlier that the head of the school...

HS: The head of the school was a German-Jewish *Privatdozent* [unsalaried university professor], so to speak. He was a professor from a university who had lost his job as a Jew, on top of which he was suffering from a disease that caused him tremendous tremors. He was comparatively young and he had a little boy at that time, he was about six years old, and he and his wife took over that villa and made a school out of it, with a staff of former German teachers, partially Jewish, partially non-Jewish, but if they were non-Jewish they were anti-Nazi.

NL: And you went to this school with all-Jewish group?

HS: Yes, I went to that school with several friends from my school in Frankfurt and a young man who was half-Jewish.

NL: Now, we also talked during the interlude about some friends of yours or acquaintances who were leaving for Palestine. Were you and Mother at all thinking about going to Palestine during the late or middle '30's?

HS: No, we could never think of it. First of all, my mother still had her business, and she still had her father and sister living in Frankfurt, whom she was supporting. I myself was going to school and she was not about to interrupt that either. For a woman alone, with a business and being established and family connections, we were still comparatively untouched directly by what was going on, although the atmosphere in general was becoming less and less attractive.

NL: Tell me a little more about the Zionist school that your friend went to, that you thought of going to.

HS: This school was in Herrlingen near Ulm. People sent their children there from all over Germany in preparation of *aliyah* [emigration to Palestine]. It was a very strict school. Of course, Hebrew was taught, and it was a little bit on the Spartan side. People would get up at 6:00 in the morning to take cold showers. My mother went there after they thought, she and several parents, thought I should go there with their children. She took it upon herself to take the trip to Bavaria to look the school over herself, and when she got there and saw what was going on and everything, she said, "This is not for Harold." Consequently, nobody went, by the way.

NL: She brought her report home to the community.

HS: It was a good thing that it happened that way. First of all the school was later on totally surrounded and closed by the Nazis, which was a bad experience for anybody who was there, of course, and, then, some of the people who were going to be with me had to leave Germany overnight, and it was a good thing that they were with their parents in Frankfurt and could take off when the gong sounded.

NL: Did you have any direct contact with the Zionist movement in Frankfurt?

HS: Not me personally, but there were many people who belonged to the Zionist Youth Group. It was called *JPD [Jüdische Pfadfinder Deutschlands]*, which is a German abbreviation for Jewish Boy Scouts of Germany, but it was a definitely Zionist-oriented organizations.

NL: And were considerable numbers of Jewish Youth members?

HS: Absolutely. The others were in something called *Schwarzes Faehnlein* which means Black Pennant, also a big organization which operated under the auspices of the *Reichsbund Jüdischer Frontsoldaten*, which was the organization of former Jewish soldiers, war veterans.

NL: Was there also a *Blau-Weiss*, a Blue White group in Frankfurt?

HS: *Blau-Weiss* I only know as a sports organization.

NL: A Jewish sports organization?

HS: I don't recall this. It's possible.

NL: In the other cities of Germany apparently it was a Zionist group, maybe more so between the wars in 1910-12, 1918-20.

HS: *Blau-Weiss* brings up thoughts of a football team, I mean a soccer team, really, Bavarian.

NL: Now I think we can move to...oh, you made some reference to Dovercourt...also in '36, you spent a vacation there. Tell me a little about that.

HS: My English teacher in Frankfurt had relatives in Dovercourt, who knew somebody with a boarding house, and this lady took in maybe eight to ten Jewish young men from Germany with the objective of learning English before they emigrated. However, with all the German boys there, who, of course, only spoke German, because they didn't know enough English to make it very easy on themselves. We learned very little English, but it was very nice to be on the beach.

NL: You were there for several weeks?

HS: Yes, I was there for maybe four or five weeks. Some of them had connections in London and went to London for a few days and came back. It was interesting. We could walk; one night we went down to the harbor in Harwich and looked at the ships and all that.

NL: Was Mother perhaps thinking of sending you to England or trying to get you to England?

HS: Well, we were forever thinking of getting out of Germany somehow.

NL: So, this excursion was conceived with the possible thought that you would...

HS: For everybody. Oh yes, for everybody. By 1936 people had to flee, working on getting out of Germany any way they could, if there was any possibility at all.

NL: The German government, Nazi government, in '35 and '36 when you took these summer vacations, were not restricting you in any way?

HS: Oh no, we could not take out any money; we went out with ten *Marks* which was what everybody took out.

NL: No, I mean for the summer excursions?

HS: No, they were not restricted.

NL: You could spend money in the summers of '35 and '36?

HS: No, we couldn't take any money out any more.

NL: Well, how were you being supported?

HS: Well, somebody in England had relatives in Frankfurt, and we gave that money to relatives in Frankfurt, and instead of supporting their relatives from England and Frankfurt they paid towards that boarding house in Dovercourt and we paid for the maintenance of that party in Frankfurt.

NL: I see. Now we will resume the story of your work in the shoe manufacturing factory. You were saying that you had to get up very early and get a train.

HS: There was a great deal of chicanery involved. They, of course, wanted me to be out of there, to get out of the factory. There were still Jewish employees and many of them relatives of the owners who were the three brothers. They had cousins and nephews and friends in there in various positions. A lot of the salesmen were still Jewish and later on they lost their jobs. They put me into a department called filing department, which was a tremendously big office with very high shelves of folders for each customer, and I had to come in in the morning and open the mail, sort the mail, and in the evening, when letters had been written that had to be signed by the executives, each letter was put into a separate page of a big folder, and I had to present this folder to the owner or one of the owners who, in turn, looked it over, signed it, and I would turn the page to the next letter. When these pieces were signed, I took it back to the filing department, which also served as the postal area for the company, and they sent out several hundred letters a day. They had to be put into envelopes and then put through a machine, which at one and the same time folded the

envelopes, sealed them, and stamped them also. Then the whole thing went into a basket and was taken out.

NL: How was the atmosphere for you?

HS: Unpleasant. The leading people were in cahoots against the new Jewish arrival and kept me in this department where there was nothing to learn, deliberately, for nine months. No one had ever been in this department for that long. It was mind-killing, monotonous. The top man would call out the name of a customer in a little town in Germany, and I would have to go and run and get this file for him, and bring it to him and take others back. No apprentice was ever there in that department so long. The idea was that you circulated from department to department. Well, I finally had enough of that and really got into another department, which was the billing department, where the atmosphere was very much more pleasant, with the same company, and from there I went into the order department where I processed orders and that was very much nicer too. Whenever you talk, you worked with simple people and equal people on the scale of employment, they all were very nice. It was the high-ups that gave you trouble.

NL: You felt anti-Semitism from the higher level?

HS: Not overt. It was disguised under a type of Germanic humor that you don't find anywhere else. It must say that the Jewish salesmen who came in from time to time participated in this, because the position of an apprentice in a German commercial establishment is like that of a pariah to begin with. With this tradition behind them, and having to go through it, it's like going through hazing at a college. So, unfortunately, they didn't know what they were doing, and some of them were caught in Germany with a very unhappy ending.

NL: How long did you stay in this apprenticeship?

HS: I stayed in it for 15 months, because eventually the company was so-called "Aryanized." The owners sold and went to America, and there was really no point in staying any longer because they would have kicked me out anyway, and they were very happy and relieved when I handed in my resignation. They gave me a very nice testimonial, and were very nice with regard to restitution, and many years later they must have dug into their files 25 years old to come up with the proof that I worked there and how much I had earned, and were very, very helpful. And I must say so were the people, that my mother represented in Germany, many years later. They showed a lot of interest and friendship.

NL: It helped to confirm her accounting.

HS: Absolutely.

NL: And so this takes us to what point in time now? You resigned when?

HS: I was 15 years old when I left school. That was in 1936. That was probably Easter 1936. I was in England later on. It's a little hard to reconstruct it like that. I think late in 1937. When I left the shoe factory, there was nothing I could do. Nobody would employ me anymore, and something had to be done. I started to study Spanish with a refugee from Barcelona who had married a German insurance executive who was, of

course, on the side of Franco, which in those days you didn't ask much about and didn't question, because the middle class was unpolitical, especially when you were Jewish.

NL: Why did you want to study Spanish?

HS: Well, it was always a good idea that when you left Germany, Spanish might have been important, just as English was.

NL: You already knew a good bit of English by this time?

HS: Yes.

NL: So, what did you then do?

HS: I tried to get a job the worst way. I even went to Offenbach, to the leather factories. They were mostly in Jewish hands, but everybody was giving up.

NL: Was the Jewish community helping to set up vocational training programs?

HS: There was a very good vocational ORT school, yes, and people came from all over Germany to Frankfurt, but my situation was in flux. I had left employment...

NL: You had had an apprenticeship.

HS: No, no. All interrupted. And you just can't go into an ORT school without a program, in the middle of the season, so to speak.

NL: I see. You couldn't go into that.