HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

HENRY FROEHLICH

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Liesl J. Loeb
Date: August 23, 1997

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HF - Henry Froehlich[1] [interviewee]
LL - Liesl Joseph Loeb [interviewer]
Date: August 23, 1997

Tape one, side one:

LL: This interview takes place on Saturday, August 23, 1997. The subject of the interview is Henry Froehlich, and the interviewer is Liesl Joseph Loeb. Henry, please tell me where you were born, when, and a little about your family.

HF: Well my name is actually Hans Arnold Froehlich, and that's spelled F-R-O-E-H-L-I-C-H. And I was born in Rottweil am Neckar.

LL: And can you spell that, please?

HF: R-O-T-T-W-E-I-L, small lower case "a", hyphen, capital "N". It's a river in Swabia in Wuerttenberg [Württemberg]. Wuerttenberg is nicely spelled W-U-E-R-T-T-E-N-B-E-R-G.

LL: And that's in Germany.

HF: That's in the southern part of Germany, in the Black Forest.

LL: Right. And tell me something about your life in your early childhood.

HF: We had a small town of, we lived in a small town. It was about 10,000 inhabitants. My father was a shoe merchant. He had a shoe store in town.

LL: How many Jewish people do you think lived there?

HF: About 20 families. And we had one synagogue, which was also the home of the Hebrew teacher. We called him, it, *Israelitische Kultus Gemeinde*. Do you want me to spell that?

LL: Well, it would help.

HF: *Israelitische* is I-S-R-E, I-S-R-A-E-L-I-T-I-S-C-H-E, and the *Gemeinde* of course is congregation. And the...

LL: Can you spell that?

HF: *Gemeinde* is G-E-M-E-I-N-D-E.

LL: Good.

HF: And the families were all of similar cultural backgrounds. Some were, a couple of families were very rich. A couple of families were very poor. Most of them had stores, of different types. One was a department store. One was a textile store. One was a houseware store. I don't think there were any laborers as such. But there were teachers and there were lawyers and there were doctors in town, that belonged to the Jewish community. My family was called a *Reingeschmeckte*, that's R-E-I-N-G-E-S-C-H-M-E-C-K-T-E. [local term]

LL: What does it mean?

[1]Former names: Hans Arnold.

HF: That means you've arrived within the last generation. You were not here for the eight or ten generations.

LL: I see.

HF: Because most of the people prided themselves of having been the third or fourth or fifth generation Rottweiler, people living in Rottweil. And my father had moved to the city, to the town, after having been born in...Hessen, it's H-E-S-S-E-N actually. And he had been from Hessen. My mother was from a town near Berlin. And they had met in Mannheim, M-A-N-N-H-E-I-M. And that's when they got married. They got married after the First World War in 1920 and settled in this small town in the Black Forest because it was such a beautiful little town and my father liked it and he had, he found that it would be a good chance to make a shoe store there because there weren't many shoe merchants in town. My mother found a job there in the local department store. And from my earliest recollections they were always both working. My mother was working in a department store. My father was working in the store. And the earliest recollections I have was that I had an older brother who was born in 1920, so I imagine my parents must have been married in 1919. So my older brother was born in 1920 and he was crippled from birth. He had been a victim of a bad obstetrician who had created a problem for my mother, as well as for another woman in the same year who also had a first child who became crippled in the same fashion, whereby they were not able to walk except in a very cramped style, as if they had had infantile paralysis. But it was not infantile paralysis. They simply discovered that their muscular structure was damaged during birth. So when I was born and I was, started to walk, my brother didn't walk. It became a very interesting situation for me to know that I have an older brother who couldn't walk and who was very jealous that I started to walk and he couldn't walk. Those are my earliest memories. And then my next earliest memories are that the years of 1924, '25, '26 were terrible for business people because it was the inflation. And money wasn't worth anything. And my parents used to have money that was sufficient to fill a bathtub—paper money. And each day the money was worth less. And my father started to deal in shoe laces because shoe laces was the best currency to have. It was better than money, and it was easy to keep, and easy to trade. And I remember that I had as a child a savings account. And one day the savings account in 1926 was suddenly closed and opened with the new German *Mark*, which became a currency situation that I am not familiar with now but I know that all of a sudden the money was good again. And up until then, millions of *Marks* were used as paper, wall paper. The...

LL: Can you tell me your father's name and your mother's name, please?

HF: Mmm hmm. My father's name was Nathan Froehlich, and my mother's name was Liesl, like yours. And her last name was Raphael, R-A-P-H-A-E-L. And she was born, and I recently discovered again that her mother's maiden name was Josephsthal, like your name, Joseph, except with the word "thal" on the end, T-H-A-L.

LL: Spell the whole thing, Joseph-...

HF: Josephsthal is J-O-S-E-P-H-S-T-H-A-L. And...

LL: And tell me, did your older brother live?

HF: Yes, he lived and he was constantly receiving medical attention because as the situation was improved he began to walk. He began to have use of his hands and legs. But he could not freely walk and probably ate up most of my parents' resources because there was, they went to the ends of the earth for, you know, for all kinds of real medications and quack medications and resorts with mud baths and everything else. And every conceivable method of getting him better was used and they spared no expense to get him better. And he was, he lived right through the Hitler period and he was killed in one of the euthanasia campaigns in 1943 and we have not been able to find out where, although I have someone working on that today, and for the last two years. And we have followed up some leads as to where he may have been killed, but we do know that he was killed because someone received his clothing in 1943 in a package. But that person who received the clothing and told me about this doesn't live any more. And I have since read about the euthanasia campaigns that took place, and where they took place. And there is no question that he was killed there. But exactly where and how, I don't know. There is a conflicting report in the archives of Rottweil, and Stuttgart where we lived last, that he was killed in a town in Poland. And it has since been discovered that the town in Poland where supposedly there was a death certificate in his name is a town that doesn't exist, and that that town in Poland, which has been visited, exists, but there was no such home or such address or such place there. But that the Germans, in order to hide euthanasia did exterminations that took place within Germany did not want to make so many death certificates in the same city and they suddenly picked a town and place in Poland. And there is a history behind that from which there is a number of books out now.

LL: Did you have other siblings?

HF: I had a younger brother named Max. He was born in 1926 and he emigrated to the United States in 1940 also. He emigrated in 19-, in February of 1940. I emigrated in March of 1940.

LL: What was your life like before the war, or before your life was changed by the Nazi victories in Europe?

HF: I went to my, in my little town I went to school. It was a Catholic town. It was 99% Catholic and I was one of the few Jewish children. We were excused from religious classes because the priests were teaching religion in class and as Jews we were called *Israelitische* religion, I-S-R-A-E-L-I-T-I-S-C-H-E. We were Israelitic, we didn't call it Jewish. We called it Israelitic religion. And as such we had our own religious education, I remember, from a Jewish teacher, once or twice a week. I don't remember. But the only thing I remember in school is that I was always excused from the, on a daily basis from the one hour of religious instructions by the Catholics. That did not have any effect from, as far as my schoolmates were concerned, except that they were jealous that I got time off and they didn't.

LL: Did your family experience antisemitism before the Hitler period? And if so, please tell us about it.

HF: I don't remember any antisemitic situation that could purely be because we were Jewish. There were competitive things happening between different dealers, between different stores. And my father had billboards in town and sometimes the billboards were cut down. But we found out they were cut down by the carpenter that got the job of setting them up again. And he arranged for them to be cut down so that he could get some extra work. But that happened not only to him but to others as well. And eventually they got rid of the carpenter.

LL: And did, you had no problems in school at all, then? You played with Gentile children as well as Jewish children?

HF: There were no Jewish children that I can think of that I could point out. I was part of the class. And I don't remember anything that specifically had to do with the fact that I was Jewish. But I only went to school there until 19-, from 19-, I was still *bar mitzvahed* in Rottweil, and that was in 1935. But I believe that by 1936 we had moved to Stuttgart, to a larger city, because Hitler came to power in '33 and I had been in school up to about the eighth grade or the ninth grade. And after that, in 1933 I was 11 years old. Hitler came to power in '33 and after that, it became very obvious that there was no future for us in Rottweil, in such a small town, because the teachers that were in my school at that time, those who were sympathetic towards the Jews, or those who were not Nazis, as per se—they didn't have to be sympathetic towards Jews, but if they were not Nazis—they were sidelined and put into secondary positions. And those teachers who were members of the Nazi Party got top positions. And one of them, who was an out and out S.S. type person, became the physical education teacher, and he delighted in torturing me. He made very, very antisemitic statements in school. If I wanted to answer a question, he would say, "Why does the Jew have to know everything?" And that shut me up for the rest of the class and made it unpleasant to be continuing in school. And some sympathetic teachers told me I would be best off if we moved to a bigger city and if I got out of school. So I never went past the year 1934, no, 1935 about, when I was 13. And I must have been in about the eighth or ninth grade when I left. And then I had no further schooling.

LL: Did you or your family belong to any Jewish organizations, or to synagogues before Nazism changed your life?

HF: We belonged to the local synagogue, that's all.

LL: Not *B'nai B'rith* or...

HF: No, no.

LL: Any other? Did...

HF: Not that I could remember.

LL: Did any men in your family serve in any national army?

HF: My father was a rank below Corporal in the German Army. I don't know what the rank was, but it was a rank, I think it was a rank above Private and a rank below

Corporal. But I have all of his photos in his German uniform. I know he had been going with my mother during the war and that there's a lot of exchanges of letters that I became privy to which they wrote to each other while he was in the service. He did not want to get married while he was in the army and while there was a war going on, so they waited. And now I remember, they waited until 1919 when the war was over, to get married in '19.

LL: Nine-...

HF: 1919.

LL: Do you remember how you, and members of your family, reacted to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January, 1933?

HF: With great dismay. My father was probably, either what was it then called, the Christian Democrat or Socialist? And...

LL: A Social Democrat, perhaps?

HF: Social Democrat perhaps. And we were sympathetic towards the Communist Party, but not to any large degree except that we shared their hatred of Hitler. The Communists were the most outspoken enemies of the Nazis and as such they had a, we had a great deal of sympathy for them.

LL: Did you have any contact with the *Reichsvertretung* or Council of German Jews?

HF: Not while I was in Rottweil. As soon as I came to Stuttgart, I began to do part time work for them. And when we came to Stuttgart, I had no more schooling. And I immediately apprenticed with a German, I wanted to learn a trade. I became entranced with the idea of a Jewish State. I was reading the Jabotinsky auto emancipation book which is a book that became the Bible for me for Zionism, and for having a State for the Jews, because I could not believe that the Jews could have a future in Europe as long as there was such a situation as Nazis. And most of the people of my parents' generation felt that Nazis was a passing situation since there had been something like eight or nine chancellors before Hitler and no chancellor lasted more than two or three years and then they were changed. And it was not considered to be something that the German public would tolerate for too long. So they felt that Nazism and Hitler's election was a situation that you'd have to live through but eventually it'd have to be replaced with someone else. That attitude did not prevail in my mind because I had this drastic change from a small town schooling into a big city and I wanted to learn a trade so I apprenticed. And I also had to make money. I apprenticed with a, my first apprenticeship was with someone who—there's a German word for it but I'll say it in English—he did paper hanging in the summertime and mattress making in the wintertime. So, in the summertime I hung papers. I was a paper hanger. And in the wintertime I made mattresses.

LL: Did your father continue with the shoe business in Stuttgart?

HF: No, my father had to close his store. Actually he was boycotted during the first boycott by the Nazis in 1934, I think it was and had to move from, the Germans were told not to shop at Jewish stores. So therefore he had to take, his customers had to come in

through the back door so they wouldn't be seen. He had to move to a smaller place and eventually closed the store and started to traveling to small towns, with shoes, and held semi-, not seminars, but he held selling shows at hotels in the small villages. And when we moved to Stuttgart, he continued that for a while. But he had no more store, none. He didn't have a store any more.

LL: Could your mother work in Stuttgart?

HF: No, she did not work in Stuttgart. We rented out our rooms. We had an apartment in Stuttgart and we rented out our rooms because Stuttgart was the headquarters of the American Consulate. And Jewish people wanting to go to America would have to come, usually the night before they had to go to the Consulate, and they could not stay in public hotels. So the Jewish community had everyone who was Jewish to open their homes, to rent rooms. And we rented our rooms. And we had different people almost every night staying at our house, before they would go to the American Consulate the next day.

LL: That's interesting. That was the boycott of April 1, 1933?

HF: '33?

LL: Yeah, according to my questionnaire. It says 1933.

HF: Hitler was elected in January.

LL: And this was April 1st.

HF: Mmm hmm.

LL: I mean, it's easy to...

HF: Well, it's, I remember the boycott very well, because my father was not in town, and my mother saw this *SA* man, and that's *S.A.* in the brown uniform, with a sign, "DO NOT PATRONIZE FROM JEWISH STORES." And she really fooled him and gave him a chair and says, "You don't have to stand. If you've got to be here, why don't you sit down?" And he was the most ridiculous looking man in a uniform that you ever saw. And on that day more people came through the back door to buy than on any other day.

LL: And did he sit down?

HF: He sat down, and he apologized.

LL: Between 1933 and the passage of the Nuremberg Laws of September, 1935, how was your life changed, if at all?

HF: I was pestered a lot in school. And my father's business went downhill. And we had to move from, we...reluctantly moved from Rottweil. My father was in love with the town. I was in love with the town. It's a very picturesque town. And...

LL: It's on a river, isn't it?

HF: It's on the river. It has a lot of charm. And we had a lot of friends there. And the idea of being uprooted from something that I thought would, being a newcomer, so to speak, amongst people who had been there for generations, I had hoped to start the new, next generation in that town and have there a lot of generations. Because we had that kind of feeling for the town.

LL: Well, if you say, "I had a lot of friends," and there weren't a lot of Jews, most of your parents' friends were not Jewish?

HF: No, they were not. We had, the Jewish families were our friends, but we were, most of the other friends were Gentiles.

LL: And how did they behave towards you until you moved?

HF: Apologetically, and some were outright risking their Gentile friends in order to be extraordinarily friendly to us. There was a so-called group of *Bibelforscher*, and that's Bible, Bible...

LL: Scholars?

HF: Bible scholars, who had not been Catholic, and who considered themselves to be a very, very active civil rights type people. And we knew them because we had a maid and the maid was the maid for these people as well as the maid for our house. And when this, when the Nazis came, they went out of their way to tell us that we should never have to be worried about anything because they'll stand by our side. There were young men, young boys in school who went out of their way to be extraordinarily friendly with me. One of them was the son of a military officer of a fairly high rank who lived in town. He was a military officer in the First World War. He hated the Nazis, and his son hated the Nazis. And his son made an open effort to be friendly to me. On the other hand there were others who were absolutely mean.

LL: During this early period, did you or any member of your family discuss the possibility of leaving Germany? Please tell me any details you recall.

HF: I don't recall anything in Rottweil. When we went to Stuttgart, emigration became a topic of everyday conversation. First of all we had the people coming to the Consulate who stayed in our house. We were trying to find if we had relatives in the United States. We began to have meetings with people who were active in the organization, which is what you call before the *Reichsvereinigung,* the organization of Jews in Germany. They had offices in Stuttgart and they had meetings and the idea of emigrating became a topic of conversation in many families and it was always a very, very open discussion between suicide and emigration. People who had no hope of emigrating because the world was basically closed to us, if you didn't have relatives in America and you didn't have a lot of money—you could buy your way into Switzerland and you could buy your way into some South American countries—but if you didn't have money, and we were not wealthy, we were very middle class or lower middle class, and the lower middle class people could not hope to have enough money to go out of the country unless they had sponsorship with direct relatives in another country. So the conversation of emigrating became the main topic of conversation.

LL: I think later on it wasn't a matter any more of lower class or upper class because the Nazis confiscated much of the wealth of the Jews who were still in Germany as we get closer to 1939. Is that not so?

HF: That's right. But I'm now in '36 and '37 and '38. Between '36, '37, and '38, those were the years where the people who left were the ones who left with money. And the, that wave of people leaving, we were envious of their ability to get out of the country, because they were able to take complete lifts which...trailers, packed with furniture and everything else. And they were able to leave the country, take every, all their household goods with them, take a certain amount of money with them. And the regulations became more stringent each year. But from '35, '36, and '37 and '38, the topic of emigration showed that if you had money you could get out, and if you didn't have money, you were probably lost.

LL: During the period from 1933 to 1938, did your family have any contact with non-Jews? If so, would you describe their behavior? This is the question on my form. And in a way you've already answered that question.

HF: I've answered that, yes.

LL: What happened to your family during *Kristallnacht* in November, 1938? Were you already in Stuttgart at that time?

HF: Oh yes.

LL: Would you describe what happened in Stuttgart and to your family?

HF: Well when my, after my father could do no more business with the, with shoes, by traveling, he sold out everything we had, and he obtained a job with the Jewish congregation at the synagogue as a...custodian. The Stuttgart Synagogue was a very large synagogue, had a fairly large congregation.

LL: Was it the only synagogue in Stuttgart?

HF: To my knowledge that was the only synagogue. It was a centuries old building with a cupola, with a huge, the capacity must have been somewhere around five, six hundred people. And it was well-known as a historic landmark. And it required a custodian to fire the ovens and to heat it and to clean it and so forth. And my father was made custodian and earned his money that way. And he went there every day. And I had, since I was working for a paper hanger/mattress maker, who has, who was Gentile, he was forced in 1936 to fire me. He was, they came to him and said, "We've discovered that you have a Jew working for you. You can't have a, you can't do any contracts with the city or with the town. And you have to, unless you fire the, you can't have Jewish, you've got to employ a Gentile now. You've got to employ an Aryan." A-R-Y-A-N, *Arier*, A-R-I-E-R. And if you, he was almost in tears. And he says, "I just can't keep you any more. You must find yourself another job. Find yourself a job with a Jewish tradesman of some sort." I found the only Jewish firm that was a trade, in a trade. It was in a company that it was a plumber, a contract plumber, who was, his name was Kahn, K-A-H-N. And he had a plumbing business with several apprentices and journeymen and masters. And he had enough Jewish trade to keep him busy from people, having to clean their toilets, to having new construction where he got contracts to build old bathrooms and old installations. And he took me on as a true apprentice. And I learned, I became a true German apprentice,

which means that you had to work four days a week. On the fifth day you had a half a day of instructions, technical instructions in school on how to become a plumber. I got onto the Social Security system. I filed, I got my pay, paid my Social Security. And he had about six or eight employees. I even got to, I had all my tools in the tool kit. I supposedly became a fairly good apprentice over the next couple of years—this was from '36 to '38, I think—and had, was on my way to become a journeyman, from...

LL: Well, when you went to classes, were these classes all Jewish apprentices?

HF: No, they were all...plumber trades. I was a...

LL: And you were accepted there?

HF: I was accepted there, yes.

LL: Nobody made any problems for you?

HF: No, no problems there. This was strictly trade, a trade union type of *Handwerker Gesellschaft*. [Tradesman's Association] I can't spell that.

LL: Yeah. O.K.

HF: And this was a, and I don't know whether anybody knew that I was Jewish. I was in my blue jeans and in my work clothes, and with my tools in my pocket and my tool kit and I just came like everybody else. And I don't recall having had any problem on that. This was not a normal educational process. This was a...in the trade business, of making, going from apprentice to journeyman to master. Master plumber. I had made it to journeyman and I was riding a bicycle which had belonged to the, to me, which had been bought—I don't know how we bought it, but it was an old post office bicycle, which in the German post office system, the bicycles are all yellow. The postmen ride on yellow bicycles and they're known as the postal bicycles. And we had one of those. I had one of those.

LL: With a basket on it or, obviously, some...

HF: What? No, my...tool kit was on the back.

LL: O.K.

HF: My tool kit was on the back. And when my father went to synagogue on, in the morning of November 9th, he came back horrified to our house. And I had not yet left the house. And he said that the synagogue is in flames, and that the people are standing around and are yelling and screaming that the Jews should be killed because this happened the day or two days after the German Vice Consul in Paris was shot by the young man from, whose parents had been ex-, had been taken to Poland. What was his name?

LL: Herschel Grynszpan.

HF: Grynszpan, yeah. This murder of the German attaché at, in Paris became the headline, and of course the entire business of having the *Kristallnacht* all over Germany and having all of these people arrested was a direct response, claimed in the German press, to have been the spontaneous reaction of the German people against the Jews, who were responsible for this. I'm going to interject something here.

LL: Yes.

HF: One of my workers in my shop was a Polish Jew, from a Polish-Jewish family, who also was a plumber's apprentice. And one morning in October he didn't show up. And when he didn't show up we went to his house. And we found out that his door was locked, and it was padlocked by the police. And the people that were next door neighbors said that he, they were...

Tape one, side two:

LL: ...side two, of interview with Henry Froehlich. And we will start again about your fellow apprentice in the plumbing business, that when you found out that he had been sent away. Continue, please.

HF: Yeah, and...I don't want to do injustice to him. He was one grade ahead of me. He was already a journeyman. He was...my boss.

LL: I see.

HF: In the sense he was my instructor and had been a little older. And we, well we worked very well together. And when he did not show up that morning we went to his apartment with, I went with someone else, because we couldn't understand why he didn't show and then the apartment was padlocked by the police. And the neighbors told us that they had come during the night and that they were taken away. And we made inquiries with the police, I believe, and also with the Jewish organizations in Stuttgart. And we were told that all people whose passports were Polish, and who were residing in Germany as visitors or not, or did not have German citizenship, or did, excuse me, or were stateless—stateless Jews and Polish Jews—were all rounded up during the night. And this was in October before the Paris situation. And they were all shipped to Poland. And basically nobody knew where they were shipped. At that time, I had already done, been working part time for the *Oberrat*, O-B-E-R-R-A-T, which was an affiliation of the roof organization of the German-Jewish organization which you called the *Reichsvereinigung.* I can't spell that now. But the, it was a...quasi-governmental office, because the Jewish religious community had theoretically the same status as the Catholic community and as the Protestant community, and as such taxes in Germany were levied for all religions. And the taxes that were, each Jew, each religious organization was allowed access to the income tax records of the citizens. And if they were Jews, then a portion of their tax went to the Jewish organization, to support schools, hospitals, etc. and a portion of the taxes went to Catholic or Protestant. But the religious organizations by laws that had not yet been abrogated by Hitler continued to go on the basis whereby this organization was allowed to levy against the Jews. There was no need for any charity of money or any raising of money. A fixed amount of money was coming in every month, into this organization, and it took care of the Jewish interests. And this organization in Stuttgart was called the *Oberrat* and it had its jurisdiction for all of Würtemberg. But it had additional jurisdiction over the Emigration Assistance Office, which was affiliated with HIAS, H-I-A-S, and affiliated with the Joint Distribution Committee.

LL: And does this have any reference to the Polish Jews being sent back?

HF: No, it had no reference to that except that they were constantly being kept informed. Whatever was happening to Jews in Stuttgart, the police organization still had to inform the *Oberrat* what's happening.

LL: I see.

HF: The *Oberrat* kept the, had to keep the police informed on what's happening in the Jewish community and vice versa. There was a relationship between the police, the Gestapo, and this organization. So it was very easy for them to say, "What the heck happened here? Why, where are all the Jews that were taken away during the night?" And they said, "Well, don't you know, they were not Germans so they had to be deported. And because they were not Germans they were deported. And as far as we know they were deported to Poland." There was a difference between three different organizations. There was the city police of Stuttgart, which is the civil police, with very little power. Then there was the Gestapo and then there was the *Sicherheitsdienst*, S.D. the Security Services. The Security Services were above the Gestapo and they were above the local police. And there were certain hierarchical relationships with jealousies. So the Police Commissioner would prefer to give the Jewish organization the information that he had before the SD would give it to them, because he also had to know.

LL: I see. Getting back to *Kristallnacht*...

HF: Yeah.

LL: How did it affect you personally? Your father found the synagogue ablaze and came home.

HF: Yeah. My father found the synagogue ablaze and I had already been on the way to work when I saw what was happening and that's why I wasn't home. And I saw trucks being loaded with people, in different streets. Jews lived all over Stuttgart in different sections of the city, and I saw trucks with the black [black-shirted] S.S. people knocking on doors and bringing people out and loading them onto these lorries, onto the trucks.

LL: When you say black you mean with black uniforms?

HF: Black uniforms, yes.

LL: Yes. And were these people all men or men and women?

HF: All men. And when I saw that some of them were people I knew, and I saw they were...it didn't take much deduction to see that they were burning the synagogue and they were rounding up Jewish men. So I bicycled home on my yellow bike. And I told my father to get out of town. And he had a sister in Frankfurt who was married to a Gentile, a painter. And he said that he was going to go to Frankfurt. And I don't know how he got to the station. I think he took the streetcar to the railroad station, bought a ticket, and went to Frankfurt. And we knew where he was going. And I told him to stay out of town until we could tell him that the coast is clear. And we made a quick code that he is going to talk about Tante Erna, an aunt that didn't exist. And that if he talked about an Aunt Erna and we said she is not well, then he would stay away. And when we tell him that she is well, then he could come home. That day I bicycled all over town and warned everybody to get out of town, everyone that I knew. Which, the people I knew I called, rang their doorbell if they weren't already, if there was no truck in the street I would ring the doorbell and say,

"Get the hell out of here." And in some cases they did and some cases they didn't, but I was running around on that bike all day long.

LL: Weren't you afraid for yourself?

HF: I was never, not really suspected. With a yellow bike you were a postman. You were a government person.

LL: I see.

HF: At least that's what I felt. And I felt that with a yellow bike I had absolutely been, nobody would ever touch anybody on a yellow bike or they wouldn't get their mail!

LL: Now, what happened with your father.

HF: Well, let me give you the first day. At the end of the first day, I was coming home and I, my mother told me that they had been at the house and looked for my father and she said, "He's not here." And they looked for my brother and he is crippled. And they didn't do anything to him. And they looked for me and I wasn't home. But she said, "They came in the house and they took away two other people," who happened this is an apartment house with about ten or twelve apartments. Two more apartments were Jewish people. And they took the men from these two, from these apartments and put them on the truck and loaded more people on the truck in the street that we lived on. So we, my mother knew what was going on. And she was almost afraid they were going to take my brother, because they were very rough.

LL: Your younger brother?

HF: My older brother.

LL: I see.

HF: Because they thought that he was pretending not to be able to walk. And in the evening my father called and my mother told him, "The aunt is sick." And then we knew the telephones was not a safe thing to do, but that's the call that apparently was run through. I was then told by my mother that the bicycle isn't going to hold me forever, and that if I had been home, I would have been gone. So I had a woman in another part of town who was my teacher in English. I had private lessons. I had taken private lessons in English from a teacher, a woman teacher, once or twice a week. And I bicycled to her apartment, to her small home, in a completely different section of Stuttgart. And I told her what's happening. And she said she heard about what's happening. And if I want to stay with her, I can stay with her. So I put my bike in the house and I went in there and I stayed there. So that if they would ever come back in our house, I wasn't going to be there. I did that for the three days. I did not stay home. But each day I would ride around and start looking for people. Some of them had gone. Some of them hadn't gone. I could not go to my office. I could not go to the repair shop. Because that had also been totally smashed. The repair shop had been totally smashed, and we couldn't do business there.

LL: You're talking about the plumbing.

HF: The plumbing shop, yes.

LL: Yes.

HF: The plumbing. The plumbing supply house was Jewish.

LL: Yes.

HF: And they had smashed it all, thrown the tools all over the yard and everything else. And where the boss went, I don't know. Or whether he was taken, I don't remember. But it was impossible to continue to go there. So I was riding around on the bike. I was stopping in at home if I saw there were no truck on the street. I would ride home and check with my mother. And she said that they were back again, looking for me. And I didn't think it was safe for me to be home. She also said that my father was calling from Frankfurt and that everything was all right. And she told him that the aunt is sick. On the third day, I had, on the second, actually, on the first and second day, both days, I had seen them round up the Jews that, and take them to the central police headquarters where they were told to stand in the courtyard. And I saw them standing in the courtyard. And I saw that they were being guarded. But they were not molested. But they were all being assembled for something there. And I didn't know what was going to happen to them, but they were, all the people that were rounded up in the trucks were first taken to that central courtyard and they were standing there. And I was driving, riding by and saw them. When I came home on the third day, my mother told me that the, my father had called and said that he was terribly worried about my crippled brother, and about me, and he couldn't stand being away. And that afternoon he came home. And within two hours someone knocked on the door—two S.S. men—and I was there, and he was there. And he showed them his military pass and his decorations and his pay book and everything else. And they told him, "No, come with us." My father gave me his wallet and a few other things of his personal belongings, and said, "Take good care of the family." And they took him away. And he came home one day too soon. They did not take me. I don't know why not. I have a plumber's tool, which is a very heavy wrench, and I was terribly tempted to hit them with the wrench. And it took me all my powers not to hit them because I didn't know whether, I didn't really care what would happen to me. But for them to take my father was just such an outrage, and to treat them that way, and to go through the house and march in every room. I had that wrench and I was going to hit them. And I know I could have killed one of them with that wrench. I don't know, I have the wrench to this day and I don't know why I didn't do it. But I think I'm glad I didn't! [pause] The temptation was great.

LL: I can imagine. How long was your father in...

HF: We got one postcard from him from Dachau. And the next thing we received was a phone call in, on December the 12th, which was one month after they took him away. And the phone call was from the western, well, the tele-, the post office telegraph, telegraph office. And my mother screamed and said, "They killed him! They killed him! They killed him!" And the telegram said [German]. Which means...

LL: Just translate. Never mind spelling.

HF: Which means, "If you want the corpse transferred to Munich, you have to send 500 *Marks*." That was the first news.

LL: And what was your mother's reaction? Did she do that?

HF: She screamed. She screamed.

LL: Did she do that?

HF: She, no, she screamed, collapsed, and of course they needed to deliver that because there was an address on it. The address was the Jewish Community Center in Munich, to whom you had to send the money. I had friends in the, on the street, the woman who was a fairly well-to-do Jewish...family, whose brother was taken away. And I went to her and told her what happened. And she shoved 500 *Marks* in my pocket. [tape off then on] We went to Munich, and I think it was around the 13th or 14th of December. And had never been to Munich. And we had to report to the Jewish Community Center, or the cemetery. And the area in the cemetery where there were funerals taking place was filled up. They were being, there were people being buried every day, by the hour, who had been shipped in from Dachau. We did manage to see the casket. The casket was opened. I didn't recognize, but they claimed it was my father. And there were belongings that they shipped back with him, that were his belongings.

LL: And you think the person in the coffin was not your father?

HF: I think it was. I think it was.

LL: I see.

HF: I mean he was blown up and I did not let my mother see him.

LL: O.K. Did she go with you to Munich?

HF: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yes. I was fifteen years old.

LL: O.K. And you then had the body shipped back to Stuttgart?

HF: No, we buried him in that Munich cemetery. And the Munich cemetery had actually, at that point, been a burial factory. It was taking place every day by the hour. The caskets kept coming in from Dachau every day. And the telegram was actually sent by the Jewish community. But they had thought that Dachau had notified us. They didn't know that there was no notification to next of kin. We had found out later from other people who were in the same bunk as my, *Block* as my father was, that he had gotten very, very ill, that he reported to the...

LL: Infirmary?

HF: Infirmary. And that he was called a malingerer and he was thrown out. And it was winter time, of course, and he died after he was thrown out of the, literally thrown out the window, as a malingerer. And we, after the funeral, a taxi cab driver told us that he had made so many trips to the cemetery and that he felt so bad about what was going on. And he says, "You should have seen how the *Kristallnacht* was in Munich." He said, "They burned down the department store, [unclear]. They herded the Jewish people into the department store to the top floor and told them to jump."

LL: Just one more horror tale.

HF: Yes.

LL: Were you or any members of your family able to work after this time, and how did you support yourselves?

HF: Ah, that's a good question. I thought that my father had life insurance as a veteran, and we were not able to collect any of that to my knowledge. We were of course having some income from renting rooms all the time, for people who came to Stuttgart for their visa and for the American Consulate visit. And the *Oberrat*, and I'll keep repeating that word...

LL: That's all right.

HF: It's a...

LL: That's the Jewish Community...

HF: Yeah, this was the semi-governmental agency.

LL: Commit-, yes.

HF: Semi-governmental agency...

LL: Yes.

HF: Had by then been transformed into an emigration center. And it had on its premises a representative of the *Sicherheitsdienst*, the security service, to whom the *Oberrat* had to make daily reports and who was on the premises talking to everybody. And he was a *Judenkommissar*, a Jewish...Commissar for Jewish Affairs. And he had to make his reports to his superiors of what was going on. And the people who were being helped by HIAS or by the Joint Distribution Committee to go, to emigrate, if they had to go to the American Consulate, they were told to come to our office the day before.

LL: You say "our office." You're trying to tell me that you worked in this office?

HF: At the *Oberrat*. I immediately got the job in the *Oberrat*.

LL: O.K.

HF: I immediately got a job there as soon as my father was killed, and as soon as I came back. I went there because the, I had worked there part time and I had helped out on *Winterhilfe*, [winter aid] Jewish winter relief efforts that were made. And all the Jewish, everybody was a volunteer there.

LL: Yes.

HF: And after that they told me that I have a permanent job there and they needed me as a file clerk at first and as an assistant. And they had about 25 to 30 people working there. This was a very fascinating office, because as a semi-governmental office, it had maintained all the records of all the Jewish communities in this part of Germany for the last 300 years. And the file room was filled with files that were going back to the 17th and 18th Century. I had to file current material onto files that consisted of an old piece of cardboard with a string at the bottom and a string at the top, and the bottom paper was yellow from 1670 or 1870 or whatever. And then the latest paper on top was 19-, and it all had to do with the same building or the same institution or the same hospital or the same school or the same community.

LL: Did this job sustain you and your mother and brothers?

HF: Definitely, yeah. I was getting a reasonably nice salary. I don't remember how much, but it was very helpful. And between renting our rooms and having the salary from there, this was, we, I don't recall having any financial troubles, any financial problems.

LL: And by this time it was 1939?

HF: 193-, this was November, 1938.

LL: Still 1938.

HF: Now, I started working there right around the 15th of November. [He must mean December, 1938.] We had to reconstruct all the records from this, from the burned-out synagogue. They had to reorganize themselves as an emigration office because by now it became obvious that you couldn't stay in Germany and that everybody, and the people who applied for help at this office, or help with the American Consulate, help with emigration to any other country, were lining up in the morning between 7:30 and 8:00 from all over Germany. And when I came to the office I felt like a hero because here I was going past all these people who were snaking up the stairway and going, walking right in. And they wanted me to help them come into the office where they have an appointment. It was an ego building thing that was undeserving.

LL: And did this office also handle the quotas...

HF: No, the...

LL: Or distribute quota numbers?

HF: No, they...the quota numbers, the American Consulate was there to issue visas for entry in the United States for permanent residence. We had to learn the entire immigration law of the United States and we, that was one of the things we had to do every day, learn immigration laws of all the countries. Now the American immigration law provided for 27,000 Germans, people born in Germany, to come into the United States per annum. And so many, a much smaller number from Poland and much smaller number from Eastern Europe and a smaller number from Italy. But there was a quota for every country which, as you know, was based on the ethnic...

LL: Proportions.

HF: Proportions of what the United States was when the, so that the ethnic mix would not change in the United States by suddenly having too many Eastern or too many Southern or Balkan people. And the German quota was 27,000 people, and we had something like 360,000 applications.

LL: But the quota numbers, were they not issued by the American Consulate?

HF: They were issued by the American Consulate, not by the *Oberrat*.

LL: I see.

HF: And there were addition...

LL: Did you work with the American Consulate?

HF: Of course.

LL: And did you work with any German authorities?

HF: Gestapo, and *Sicherheitsdienst*, the S.D.

LL: What was the role of the Gestapo in all this?

HF: They had to validate that all the taxes were paid, that the people leaving had no criminal records, that they were not on any wanted lists, that all of their personal belongings had been surrendered, that they had clearance from everything else. There was bureaucratic red tape to the enth degree before someone would get the necessary clearances. They were needed from every sort.

LL: And did people have to pay for the certification of this?

HF: I don't think so, no. I, the quota numbers were interesting. And I'm going to say this here because you're putting it on tape. But it probably is public record anyway. The American Consulate would take an application that says, "I want to emigrate to the United States and I have relatives in the United States and I am filing this application today." And if it was filed on the 12th of September, it got a number that was in line with that, up to that date. There were exceptions. The exceptions was that anyone who was a descendant of Lafayette, who was considered to have been very helpful in the Revolution in the United States, had preferential treatment. That's in the law. And we manufactured a lot of descendants of Lafayette. He was a very profligate person! And we had...fairly good means of doing some of these things. That was what our job was. And finding ways in which to get people out of the country.

LL: Lafayette was the only persona?

HF: That is the only persona that, on record, whose descendants have *carte blanche* to come into the United States, *if* they can prove that they are descendants of Lafayette.

LL: And how did you manage to prove it?

HF: Don't ask me. [chuckles] The other situation which we ran into a lot had to do with essays that children wrote in school. And we had children who had written as part of their education in grammar school or high school, they were oftentimes asked to write their wish list of what they would like to be and do in life. And some children wrote letters to President Roosevelt and said, "I would like to come to America." And when such a letter was in the school, the school teacher—this can be back in 1926 or 192-, any time during the period from 19-, that I remember, when people went to school and were given these essays to do. If such an essay was written and the schoolteacher was inclined to do something with it, as part of the school program, they would put the letter in an envelope and send it to the White House in America.

LL: Now wait a minute. You're saying this is in the 1920's? This...

HF: Whenever. In other words we had...

LL: But I mean, it wasn't just Roosevelt. It was any president...

HF: Any president, any...

LL: Then in the White House.

HF: Any president in the White, and to the President of the United States.

LL: Yes.

HF: If there's someone as a child would write that.

LL: Yeah?

HF: And if the letter was sent to Washington, the White House would generally send it on to the Immigration and Naturalization Office. And it would get a number there.

LL: Yeah?

HF: And these numbers were valid. And they would say, and they would, these people would get a nice thank you letter. These children would get a nice thank you letter from the White House saying, "We are delighted that you want to come to the United States. Your interest in immigrating has been recorded under number such and such."

LL: And that was a quota number?

HF: And that was a quota number, and it was transferred to the respective Consulate in Germany. So the Consulate in Stuttgart had the number of very low numbers, for certain people, many of them not Jewish.

LL: Yes?

HF: But when we discovered that any were Jewish, we would notify them. And we had cases where the entire family came in, and the only person that got a visa was the son or the daughter who had written such a letter. And the parents had to wait. They couldn't, they didn't have the same number. And we had heartbreaks.

LL: I would imagine so. This is something that I don't think anyone has heard before.

HF: No. This is...

LL: Is this, it is known that...

HF: It's not, it was never...publicized, and nobody, the Consulate as I know now, was interested in keeping as many people out as they could.

LL: Definitely. We know that.

HF: So therefore they had medical examinations and they had other reasons for keeping people out.

LL: Yes.

HF: And they had, they were looking for ways of keeping people out. But we discovered that there were, when we asked for the numbers, we needed to integrate the numbers that the Consulate had, (a) to find out which ones were Jewish and which ones were not and (b) if they were Jewish, could we find them? Because that was our job. And the Consulate cooperated with us on that. So when we saw these very early numbers of people who never left Germany, who just happened to have a low number, we tried to locate them. And that's, some of the people got out that way, but they were mostly very young children, whose parents did not have the same low numbers.

LL: Did, were you able to transfer any of the numbers assigned to non-Jews to Jews?

HF: No.

LL: No, you couldn't do that. But you thought of it perhaps.

HF: I don't think so, no. We wouldn't monkey with the Consulate. But we, what we tried to do, which was very difficult, is to settle the question of birth place. Because many people who were considered Germans, had a birth place that no longer was Germany—Danzig was not Germany—so if someone was a Jew in Danzig at the time when he was born, it was not Germany.

LL: And what did that mean as far...

HF: They fell under the Polish quota.

LL: Was that better or worse?

HF: People, much worse. If they, much worse. Anyone whose residence changed countries, he was always considered to be born in the country that it was at the time of birth. So, it was, the numbers game was a horrendous game.

LL: Tell me, when did you leave Germany? And not only that, please mention on which ship, what was your destination, and what was your impression when you arrived in this country?

HF: I'm going to go back in a minute for, because, since you explained a few other things to me before we started taping, I am working off memory.

LL: Fine.

HF: And as I say to you about the story of Lafayette, and the story of the school children writing numbers [letters], I know of specific cases. I do not know, it would require verification, in some way, shape or form, before you make this a final status report. Because I have never really re-checked it back, because I only knew of people who got these Lafayette quotas and I know of...a specific case where a child got through because I interviewed him. And he got through and his parents didn't get through and it was based on an essay that he had written in school, in this case to President Roosevelt.

LL: Please elaborate.

HF: Well, I, before we make something on tape that becomes a historical fact, I would like to have, I will try to have this re-checked myself. I haven't been in touch with Immigration and Naturalization. I don't know the statute as it was about Lafayette. It was as it was told to me.

LL: Yeah.

HF: And as my people, I was not the, I was 15 years old. It was my superiors who did all this...work.

LL: O.K.

HF: So, before it becomes a fact on record, it needs to be verified.

LL: O.K. We understand that.

HF: I don't want to go down in history books as the worst liar in...

LL: Did you want to elaborate on this one case?

HF: No. On the one case, it's a very interesting case. This one case was a man who was a distant relative, his parents were distant relatives of mine. And Father and

Mother, their name was Strauss. They had two children, a son and a daughter. And they were about a year apart. Helga and Sigmund, or Siegfried. Siegfried is the one who wrote the letter to President Roosevelt. And he had the letter which said that, "Your number is 1626," whatever it was. And he applied. He had an affidavit from an American sponsor, and his family had affidavits and they had relatives here. And the parents applied for immigration and they got number 25,626—I don't know the number, but they got a huge, a much, much later number than what the son had.

LL: Yes, yes.

HF: And when they submitted their affidavit to the Consulate, the affidavit was for the whole family. And the family was called to the Consulate to examine them for eventual visas. And when it came to interviewing them the night before, the father took me aside and he said, "I have to make a confession." Is this coming in?

LL: Yes, just speak toward the mike.

HF: "I have to make a confession and I want to tell this to you. My son is my son. But my daughter is not my daughter. I lost my wife in..." [tape ends]