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Summary

Max Mayer was born in 1915 in Bad Duerkheim, Germany near the Rhine river. His father, Salomon, was a wine maker. His mother, Hermine, was a homemaker. Both his parents' families had lived in Germany for hundreds of years. His father's family was from Bad Durkheim. Max went through grade school and high school with no problem, but it was not possible for him to go to university since Hitler had come to power by then. He did not experience antisemitism at school nor among his friends and neighbors before Hitler. His family belonged to a small orthodox synagogue in Bad Duerhkheim, though they considered themselves Conservative Jews. After Hitler came to power most non-Jewish friends ignored him. He also said that many professionals and intellectuals supported the Nazis.

Max wanted to emigrate soon after Hitler became chancellor. Max got into fights with people, and he recognized the danger of Nazism as soon as the boycotts began. His father would eventually lose his wine business. His father, however, did not want to emigrate believing that Hitler would not be able to stay in power. By the time his parents realized the danger it was too late. Max went to Switzerland and then France in 1934 but could not find work, so he returned to Germany. He said that the Swiss and French did not want German Jews, but the level of antisemitism was nothing like in Germany. In 1936, his uncle, who was a doctor in the United States, got an affidavit for Max to come to Philadelphia, and he left Germany in May of that year. He said that though it was a German ship he was treated very well. Unfortunately, his parents never made it out of Germany. His father became ill and died in 1939 of natural causes. His mother was deported to a holding camp in France and then to Auschwitz where she was gassed. Max found this out through letters. His mother sent him a goodbye letter right before she was deported from France to Auschwitz.

Max wanted to bring his parents to the United States but was not in an economic position to do so. His uncle and cousin did not want to sponsor another person, but by that time it may have been too late. Max said that he experienced very little antisemitism in the United States but that both US Jews and gentiles, including President Roosevelt, chose to blind themselves to what was happening to the Jews of Europe. Max visited Germany in 1966 with his youngest son, and he said that he was treated very well, though most people said that they could not do anything during the Nazi period to help and that they did not know what was happening to Jews. Max believed that they did not want to know.