

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Brunn, George

Date of interview: 2/24/1999

Summary: George Brunn (ne Georg Brunn) was born on June 28, 1924 in Vienna, Austria. He remembers his childhood in Vienna. His Father, mother, Grandmother, and brother lived in one apartment. His family was not very wealthy but was rich in knowledge of the arts. George was close to his father, although his father was an emotionally cold man. His mother was more open. His father worked in a bank and died of cancer in 1936, causing his Grandmother to move back to Czechoslovakia. His mother then had to take charge of the family. She had to learn how to get herself and her children out of Austria.

George says he remembers that when the Nazis marched into Austria on a Friday in 1937, his mother had applied for Visas by Monday. Luckily, his mother's brother (who lived in the United States) made it possible for them to emigrate to the U.S. by giving them their visas. However, the Nazis made it nearly impossible for Jews to leave by requiring them to provide a great deal of paperwork to apply for official travel documents. George remembers having to wake up at 4:30 am to stand in line to acquire tax papers and other needed forms.

George recalls when the Nazis came, all Jewish kids were removed from their high schools and sent to a segregated Jewish high school. Both he and his younger brother John went to a Jewish school. George mentions that he does not remember anyone at school being particularly mean to him or treating him differently, though the teachers at his school (who were Aryan) were very unpleasant and unhappy to be teaching at a school for Jews.

Between 1935 and 1937, George became aware of the Nazi threat. His family was still financially troubled after the Depression hit Austria. His Grandparents lost their money and so his family was not wealthy. George read the newspapers and listened to the radio daily. In 1938, George knew of Hitler and knew something bad would happen. He remembers seeing the Nazi uniforms and German soldiers. When his mother heard Schuschnigg (the chancellor of Austria) on the radio, she knew they had to leave Austria. He remembers seeing people (Jews) scrubbing the streets and feeling sad and confused.

He recalled that the Nazis examined the books on his family's shelf. Some of the books were forbidden, and the Nazis looked through them, read a couple of lines and left. George also remembers walking down the street to his synagogue and discovering that it had been burnt down (Kristallnacht).

In November 1938, he and his mother and brother left with their passports. His

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father's family did not try to leave and were killed in camps in Czechoslovakia, though he does not give many details. On November 30, they took a train to France. They stopped in Basel, Switzerland. He says he was happy to know that he was in a free country where he could buy a cup of coffee if he wanted to. They then went on a ship, where he was introduced to cereal, Hitchcock films and laughter. They sailed to New York.

He says that he wanted to learn English so he went to a boarding school in Vermont and learned very quickly. He talks about his life after Austria, and the tape gets very fuzzy. We cleaned the machine and the tape, but it still went fuzzy. That concludes Mr. Brunn's interview.