

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Cotton, Alfred

**Date of interview:** 10/20/1999

**Summary:** Alfred Cotton (nee: Baumwollspinner) was born on December 29, 1925 in Hamburg, Germany. He was an only child, and his parents were Polish citizens, and held Polish passports. His father owned a wholesale wine distribution business. On Jan. 30, 1933, the day that Hitler came to power, Alfred recalls that their maid left in the evening with a swastika pin on her coat. She was not wearing the pin in the morning when she arrived. His first experience with anti-Semitism was while on vacation in Germany in the summer of 1935. He recalls seeing signs, which read, "Jews not welcome" for the first time. It was the first time he realized that because he was Jewish he could not do certain things.

In 1938 his parents realized that they would be unable to run their business any longer. They could not find people to work for them, and people no longer wished to buy from them. His father was able to sell the business. They had several rental properties in Hamburg, which they still received income from. Soon after his father was expelled to Poland. Alfred and his mother were allowed to stay in Germany. The afternoon before Kristallnacht all the teachers at his Jewish school were arrested and placed in concentration camps. There was no school for two weeks. When the teachers returned, their heads were shaved, but they would not discuss where they had been or what happened to them. Alfred's uncle and aunt were attempting to immigrate to the U.S. They decided that it was not safe in Germany any more and decided to go to England in 1939 until they could come to the United States. His uncle wrote to Alfred's mother offering to get him placed on the Kindertransport. His parents decided that this would be the safest thing for him, and six weeks later on June 12, 1939 Alfred left Germany for a boy's camp in Suffolk, England. After a few weeks, all boys who were 16 or older and all staff were arrested and interred all over the world. Some went to the Isle of Mann, others to Australia, and some to Canada. After this the camp was closed. Alfred then went to Sheffield, England where he was placed in a camp run by refugee women. He attended public school.

In 1942 deportations took place in Poland in the city where his parents and grandparents lived. He does not know what happened to them, just that they died. He does not see any point in investigating the matter further. He immigrated to the U.S. in the 1950s. Some of his wife's family was already living in Berkeley, which is how he ended up here. He has attended several reunions of the Kindertransport in New York and California. He clearly stated that he believes something like the Holocaust can and will happen again. Alfred attributes this to the German desire to be led and told what to do.