

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Ellington, Theodore

Date of interview: 7/30/1989

Summary: Theodore Ellington (Ted) was born in February of 1928 in Vienna, Austria. He was an only child and mentioned that this was common in those days for financial reasons. Ted's childhood was marked by anti-Semitism and he grew up being defensive of being Jewish. Vienna schools were very religious and so Ted had to attend Christian educational activities but was also required to go to Jewish education sessions. Of the 35 children in Ted's elementary school class, about 7-8 were Jewish.

Ted's family was not by any means wealthy but they were able to maintain a healthy lifestyle with what they had. Ted's father made a living selling foodstuffs for livestock. When Ted was growing up in Vienna there was a lot of economic inequality and his family used to provide lunch for an unemployed family once a week.

In 1934 the Nazis made an attempt to take over Vienna and there was a lot of violence. Four years later, in 1938, the German government gave Austria an ultimatum and came in to the country. This was a traumatic time for Ted and he remembers seeing tanks in the streets and army planes flying overhead daily. Vienna was covered with Nazi flags and swastikas and the Austrian population was overwhelmingly pro-Nazi. When the Nuremberg laws (Nürnberger Gesetze) came into effect, Ted was forced to go to an all Jewish school, where Nazi children would gather outside and taunt the Jewish students.

The Nazis began to go on rampages of Vienna, synagogues were burnt down and Ted's grandfather's store was destroyed. In 1938 Nazi officers stormed Ted's family's apartment and his father was badly beaten after asking the officers for paperwork stating that they were allowed the search. The officers took virtually everything the family owned, including his cherished stamp collection.

Ted's parents decided they wanted to relocate to safety in the United States and after some family friends agreed to sponsor them, they filed the paperwork, which would take a long time to come through. Ted's parents decided to put him in a program that was run by the Quakers that took children from Austria and placed them temporarily with a family in England while they waited for their paperwork to go to the U.S. However, Ted went to Belgium first to live with his uncle. He lived in Belgium for about 6 weeks beginning in April 1939 and then went to England in May, where he ended up staying with a family until 1946. The family that took Ted in was a very happy one and was kind to him.

Ted's parents were able to take a boat to San Francisco in 1940 and eventually, after living and going to school in London, Ted was able to take a boat to New York in 1946. He then took the train to San Francisco and was reunited with his parents in May 1946. Ted attended San Francisco City College for one year and then went on to UC Berkeley, from which he earned his degree in accounting in 1950. After graduating from college Ted joined the army for 2 years and then

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became a CPA. He was married in 1965 and has two daughters and still resides in the Bay Area.