Interview with THEODORE ELLINGTON
Holocaust Oral History Project
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Interviewer: Susan Siegel
Transcriber: Cindy Garza

Q: WHY DON'T YOU JUST INTRODUCE YOURSELF?

A: My name is Ted Ellington, and we're here in San Francisco, the date being July 30th, 1989. My friend here is Sue Siegel, who is giving the interview. Right?

Q: OR CONVERSATION; I'D RATHER LOOK AT IT THAT WAY.

A: Yes, a conversation. Anyway, would you like to—

Q: WELL, TO BEGIN WITH, WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME EXACTLY WHERE YOU WERE BORN, AND WHAT YEAR.

A: I was born in Vienna, Austria, in nineteen hundred and twenty-eight. And I lived there for the first eleven years of my life. My memories of those first eleven years were of a lot of heavy anti-Semitism, let us say. And, of course, Vienna was a— Austria had great problems during the '30s. There was genuine poverty, unemployment, a very strong Nazi party which was made illegal for a number of years. But it certainly didn't stay illegal; it made its presence felt very strongly. So I do remember all of my childhood being strongly marked by having to be very defensive about being Jewish.

Q: EVEN BEFORE YOU WENT TO SCHOOL? WITH CHILDREN THAT YOU WERE PLAYING WITH?

A: I would say so. I would say, yes, it was noticeable.

Q: WHAT WERE SOME OF THOSE EARLY—

A: Well, I remember there was an annual children's parade in Vienna, which I wanted to participate in. And my mother said, "No, if you're Jewish they will not take you." It was that kind of thing.

I remember once winning—there was some sort of newspaper competition and I won a prize—a free theater ticket, I think. And when I got to the theater, there were about a hundred children

there who had also won a prize, but it was pointed out, you know, "Here's a Jewish boy. What's he doing here?" I took off. It was widespread hostility.

Q: HOW OLD WERE YOU? ELEVEN?

A: Oh, four, five, six years old. I think it was— It really permeated the country. I remember going to my uncle's house, and being very young, I poked around on his desk, and he had collected a lot of Nazi literature. Here was a whole drawerful of Nazi pamphlets, and of course the emphasis was on anti-Semitism.

You felt it. You knew about it when you were quite young. Austria, of course, was a very religious country. Catholic country. It wasn't a question of whether it's Catholic or Protestant or whatever it is. But religious education was required. There were prayers in the morning. So of course, this put the Jewish children into an awkward position. And there was religious education.

My impression is that we sat in with the Christian religious education, but we also had to go once or twice to have Jewish education. This was required by the city, by the state. So, this certainly separated people. There was no slipping by, in a way.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HOW MANY OTHER JEWISH CHILDREN THERE WERE IN CLASS WITH YOU?

A: Oh, I would say the class was probably 30 to 35 children, and I would say there were maybe seven or eight Jewish children; maybe 25 percent, 20 percent, something like that, I should think. It was probably fewer than that.

Q: HOW MANY BROTHERS AND SISTERS DID YOU HAVE?

A: I was the only child. I think the tendency in Austria in the '30s was for small families. People—economically—were not comfortable. There was a tendency for the Jewish children possibly to be a little bit more middle-class than the rest of the children, which sort of created possibly an economic area of difference.

I remember going to school at that time where a substantial number of children—let's say out of this class of 30 or 35, maybe seven or eight children—received a free breakfast. They got a bottle of

milk supplied by the state and a hunk of black bread. And it was that kind of poverty that permeated the country. But it permeated all of society.

I also remember that there was a Jewish family that lived around the corner from us, and the head of the family had been unemployed for as long as he could remember, and once a week we would bring them in for lunch. My mother would give them a lunch once a week, so that they'd have one decent meal a week at least. This was a boy and a girl.

So there was a lot of economic inequality, misery, and of course this Nazism thrived on this kind of thing, as you know, in Austria as well as in other parts of the Continent.

Q: MAY I ASK YOU WHAT PROFESSION YOUR FATHER HAD, OR WHAT BUSINESS?

A: Well, my father was in the animal foodstuff business in the '30s, where he sold foodstuffs for cattle, animals, chickens, whatever.

Q: DID HE EXPERIENCE ANY DIFFICULTY IN THE EARLY TO MID '30S?

A: Oh, I would say so, yes. Especially since the business took him out into the provinces, into the country, and Nazism was very strong in the provinces, even maybe stronger than it was in Vienna itself. So that did create a problem.

Q: WAS THAT EVER DISCUSSED AT TIMES? AT THE DINNER TABLE? OR DID YOU JUST PICK IT UP?

A: You picked it up automatically. People would go on vacation, let's say, in the country, and the brown shirts, the Nazi flags, they were there. I also remember very vividly that the Nazis made an attempt to take over Vienna in 1934. There was a minor revolution, where the Nazis took over the radio station in Vienna, and there was a lot of violence.

The president of Austria at that time was Dollfuss. He was shot and killed, and I remember the funeral because it was a military funeral. One of the main streets, the Kantnerstrasse, in Vienna, which came away from Saint Stephen's—the cathedral—and behind the hearse were 13 military trucks with flowers. It was just— At this point I could be wrong: Maybe it was 12, maybe it was 14;

but I have a very strong feeling it was 13. And I'll never forget these huge military trucks just completely loaded up with flowers, with wreaths, with the traditional things.

I also remember this particularly well because it was in February 1934. February was my birthdate, and my birthday party was put off because people were afraid to go out in the streets for several days. There was a lot of violence going on. Vienna was a violent city in the '30s. It was not a pleasant place. Even before the Germans came in. So, anyway, all of this led up to 1938, February-March 1938, when the Germans gave Austria an ultimatum, and—

Q: AND THEY ROLLED IN.

A: And they came in. And that, too, was a very dramatic experience. And I'm sorry that it's never been— There've been some movies about Vienna and the occupation and that period, but the sense of those days when the Germans came in was sort of incredible. There were hundreds of German army planes circling the city, at a very low altitude, and they flew around and around. And the place shook. And the tanks and the trucks came in, and the city shook with violence and fear.

And, of course, Schuschnigg, who was then—after Dollfuss, I think Schuschnigg was the president when the Germans came in—Schuschnigg resigned. And I remember my father having me on his lap, and we were listening to Schuschnigg's speech of resignation. And he said, I think he said "Gott in Danenlagger lighturstrick," "God, Austria lies in your camp, is in your hands." It was all fairly dramatic stuff when you were 10 years old.

And, of course, the next few days, the Germans just poured in, and the Nazi flags covered Vienna and Austria. These had all been kept under the blankets for months. Obviously, these could not be produced, created, overnight. It was a little uncomfortable.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER AUSTRIANS GREETING THE GERMANS? BECAUSE IN MOVIES I'VE SEEN, IT SEEMS THEY ALL STAND THERE AND SAY "HEIL, HITLER."

A: Oh, the whole population was in triplicate.

Q: AND THEY WELCOMED THEM?

A: Oh! It was a heroic welcome. It was incredible. You know, Hitler drove into Austria in an open convertible. No president of the United States would dare travel around this way today. There were no bodyguards. Hitler stood up in his car, with his arm raised, and obviously there was nothing to fear.

So he took over, and the population was . . . well, enthusiastic. There's no doubt about it. There must have been— There was a Communist party in Austria; there was a Socialist party. There were some unhappy people, and there were street demonstrations until the end between the Nazis and the other parties, but they were overwhelmed. There was no doubt about it. The population was overwhelmingly pro-Nazi. Vienna was a sea of swastikas.

The next thing, of course, that we felt, was that—as a child—the Nuremberg Laws were introduced very quickly, and Jewish children were segregated. They segregated the schools. Jewish children had to go to certain schools, and I do remember that the teacher we had in our school during the last month or two before the segregation took place was extremely nice, extremely nice to the Jewish children, as best as he could.

But there was a great deal of time spent on lecturing on the glories of being proud of the Ein Reich, ein fuhrer. It was "one nation, one country, one leader," that was the slogan. And of course, children were taught Nazi songs, and all this was very uncomfortable, obviously. And the non-Jewish children didn't want to speak to the Jewish children. It was not exactly a happy situation. What else can one say?

And then going to a segregated school is just like a segregated school would have been in the South fifty years ago. It certainly didn't do anything for one's morale. And quite often the Nazi kids would gather round outside of the Jewish school. I can't remember, really, any violence, but implications of violence. And fear.

1938 was the last year of my high school, and I then went to the secondary school. There was only one Jewish secondary school at that point, the Judisch gymnasium, the Jewish gymnasium, which

was the secondary school, high school. And that was quite a long way away. I went there, and I do remember that as the year went on, the classes kept thinning out as people were leaving.

We had a super teacher. One of the things I remember her saying—and by this time it was early 1939—she said, "I'm not going to leave Austria as long as there's a Jewish child to be educated." I've always wondered whether she made it out or not.

Q: MAY I ASK YOU, TED, WHETHER THERE WERE ANY REPERCUSSIONS OF NOVEMBER 10, 1938, IN AUSTRIA?

A: Oh, yes. I forgot. Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht was the night, of course, that was a day or two after a German diplomat had been shot in Paris, and in retribution the storm troopers smashed up Jewish shops, burned down the synagogues. I don't know of any synagogues that survived in Vienna. I know that my grandfather had been the president of a synagogue, and that went up. There was nothing left after that.

We went to school that morning—it was the 10th or 11th of November—but we were sent home about mid-day, when the violence began to spread all over Vienna. The sequence of events was: My uncle was arrested and sent to Dachau, which was one of the early concentration camps. My grandfather had a dry-goods store close to where we lived. My grandfather—sort of fortunately—died on the way, but my uncle and my mother had run it.

Anyway, that evening, the storm troopers drove up to the store, broke into the store, and just took everything out of there, and said, "We're going to give this to the poor." Welfare. So the store was completely wrecked—wiped out, in effect.

We, as a family, in our apartment house, all the Jewish families were herded into one apartment in this apartment house. I would say there were about 40 of us ended up in one apartment. Our own apartment, like all the others, was sealed by the Gestapo. The Gestapo said, "We've got to search your apartments to see whether you're a menace to the state," and so we were locked out.

And I remember we, as a family, slept under the piano there for a while. [laughter] And, of course, it was probably crowded for 40 people. Anyway, it was a little uncomfortable and a little uncertain,

and after a few days we were allowed to move next door to some friends of ours—they were Hungarian, by the name of Lare. And we moved in with them for a few days until the Gestapo got around to calling us out and sealing the apartment. And they searched the apartment.

When they came to search the apartment, my father asked them for identification. They wore civilian—plainclothes. And my father said, "Could you show me your authorization for searching this apartment?" and "Who are you?" And they started beating him up. You know, you didn't challenge anybody as to the legitimacy of they were doing, even illegitimate as it was.

Well, anyway, they went through the apartment, they searched everything; they dug around in every drawer, tore everything up. The only thing that— There wasn't much to find, but they took my stamp collection. That was easy to take. It wasn't of much value. But, you know, it was a symbol of the times.

The other end of the story is, as I said, we had moved in with the Lares for a few days—some friends from next door—and we used to listen to Radio Strasbourg. The way to get news about what was going on in Germany on Kristallnacht and so on was the French radio. They had a German program at a certain time every night—8 o'clock or 9 o'clock at night.

So, very quietly, you would listen in to shortwave from Strasbourg, and Strasbourg always knew exactly what was going on in the major cities in Germany. Of course, you couldn't get anything of this sort on the German radio or newspapers or anything else. But they had very good reportage.

The other little incident was that the Lares had a friend who was in the S.S. And he would pop by occasionally to say "hello." I don't really know why he came by; I think he came by with some news occasionally, but it was always very scary when you heard that knock, and there was that S.S. uniform. And before he came, you'd have to change that Strasbourg station, make sure that— You were not supposed to listen to foreign broadcasts. So, these were the little tensions of the time.

Meanwhile, my parents— It was quite obvious that one had to get out of Austria, and we made plans for my parents to come to the United States. Obviously, that was the place to come. We had

some distant relatives in America, a great uncle, whom I was named after, and who had come here, I would say about 1900.

Now, for one thing he was an old gentleman by that time. By 1939 he must have been in his 70s. He had been quite well off at one time, but I think he was no longer well off. And he had married a lady who was a Christian Scientist. And he had— He had buried his past. In other words, he was no longer Jewish. He had passed completely. As far as his family knew, he was not Jewish.

And I think, you know, after 40 or 50 years, it was an impossible situation to have these Jewish relatives appear from Vienna. A combination of things: He did not sponsor us. One needed a sponsor to come to the United States in those days, as they probably still need. So he did not sponsor us or do anything for us.

But my family had a friend, a lady who had married a German. Her name was Oppenheimer, I believe. He had come to the United States fairly early in the '30s, and they sponsored us and sent us an affidavit. But there was a long—as you know—there was a long waiting list, and even though you were— You know, you got a number and then you simply had to wait until your number came up. So we waited in line there.

Meanwhile, my parents thought it would be an idea to send me to England. The Quakers had— The Quakers in England organized a program to get children from Germany and Austria and place them with English families—hopefully on a temporary basis, until their families could get out and find them.

And so I was registered with the Quakers. An English family, who were not necessarily of the faith—the Quakers organized this thing—but an English family. There was a very strong anti-Nazi feeling, a very strong feeling in England against the Nazis, and the sort of almost symbolic gesture at that time was to bring in—to take in—a child into your home. A lot of English families did this, and they were very generous. So this English family, by the name of Sporn, registered with the Quakers, said, "We'll take a child if you can find one." And so this was how I got on the list.

Q: DO YOU REMEMBER HOW YOU FELT ABOUT LEAVING YOUR PARENTS? WAS THAT SOMETHING YOU UNDERSTOOD WAS GOOD?

A: Understood and, I must say, was quite, was very cheerful about it. It was traumatic for my parents, I'm sure, but it was not for me. It was very exciting.

Now, what happened was that these English papers also took their time about coming through. And meanwhile, an uncle of mine—a divorced uncle of mine—whose name was Paul— It's important to bring out the fact that he was divorced because of another story about his children. My uncle Paul had lived in France during the '30s quite a bit and worked in France, so he was very fluent in French and very comfortable in France.

He had gone illegally over the border into Belgium. In other words, he packed up his bag and went into Belgium. Belgium was very generous to refugees, I think. Belgium was fairly easy to get into at the time. France was difficult, Switzerland was impossible, the Dutch I think were difficult, but Belgium looked the other way.

So there were a lot of refugees—political and religious refugees—in Belgium. Anyway, my uncle Paul got to Brussels, and he had some very good friends in Antwerp, some older people, and arranged for me to go to Belgium. So instead of going to England, I went to Belgium first. And this was about early April or mid April 1939.

I went with this children's transport—there must have been forty, fifty, or sixty—and we were escorted by Austrian nuns. They were our guides. We stopped in Cologne, as I mentioned to you earlier on, had a quick tour—a couple of hours' tour—of Cologne, and got to Brussels, and some of us shipped on to Antwerp.

And I lived in Antwerp for four or six weeks, with some very old, Orthodox Jews. I mean the kind of Orthodoxy that I'd never come across before. It was not the most comfortable way. These people were very old, and— I must say that, you must understand that in Vienna, generally speaking, it was a very Reform Jewish community. And this is a generalization, but certainly—

Q: YOU GREW UP THAT WAY?

A: I grew up that way. So I lived with this family for six weeks, who didn't quite know what to do with me, and I didn't quite know what to do with them. I used to wander around. I spent about six weeks really sort of wandering around Antwerp by myself. They sent me to— There was a couple from Vienna in Antwerp, and they sent me to their house in the mornings, and he was a language teacher and I was supposed to learn Latin and Greek, I think for a couple of hours every morning, which [laughing] wasn't the most inspiring thing to do at that time.

And after that, I would sort of escape, and I would go around the bookshops and the parks and see Antwerp. Well, about six weeks later, I got a letter from my Uncle Paul in Brussels, saying "Your English papers have arrived. Get your bags together, catch the next train to Brussels, and from Brussels you'll go to England." So I said goodbye to Antwerp, and was sent, again with maybe 50 or 60 children, to England.

And arrived. Saw the white cliffs of Dover, which was very exciting, I must say. I'll tell you, crossing the border out of Germany into Belgium was really one of the great thrills of my life. You know? And it was for everybody else. There was a search; they searched the luggage. And it was goodbye. Getting on a boat to go to England, and seeing the white cliffs of Dover, which is a sort of—

Q: DRAMATIC?

A: Is a very dramatic experience. And some English people met us on the train and were very nice to us, and I think they were from a Quaker group, and made us feel very comfortable, even though there was a language barrier. And when I got to the station in London—I think it was Victoria Station; it doesn't make much difference which one— But anyway, the family that was adopting me temporarily—the Sporns—were there. There was Mrs. Sporn and one or two of their— They had three daughters.

But, anyway, one of the daughters spoke some German, and so they picked me up there and took me home. And these nice people thought I was coming to stay six or eight weeks until my parents got their papers for America, and then would take me with them. Well, the six weeks— I was sort

of the Man Who Came for Dinner. I stayed in England from '39 to '46. So, they were stuck with me for seven years.

Q: YOU BECAME ONE OF THE FAMILY?

A: I became one of the family, and we still are a family.

Q: THAT'S WONDERFUL. HOW OLD WERE THEIR DAUGHTERS?

A: Their daughters were just a little bit older than I was. I was eleven when I got to England, and they were, I would say, 13, 15, and 18 approximately. And, of course, I was the pet of the family, and they were a large family beyond their immediate family, and they were just wonderful. They were not— He was a schoolteacher, and an English schoolteacher lives on fairly tight rations, when you have three daughters. It was really marvelous the way they took me in and I became part of the family, and supported me. Whatever else had happened, it was a very good seven years.

Q: RESTORED YOUR FAITH IN HUMANITY?

A: Oh, yes, yes. And it was a very happy family. You know, all the pressures that I'd had in the '30s, the discomfort of constantly having to keep your head down, were gone. You were a free citizen. It was just— One became a human being.

And I went to school, of course. He was a schoolteacher. In fact, I was in his class for a few months. I got to England in about May 1939. Then, of course, war broke out in September. September 1, Germany invaded Poland, and on September 3rd, Britain and France declared war on Germany. Very important, the difference: The war broke out on September 1, not on September 3rd. Germans like to say that war broke out on September 3rd. War broke out when Germany invaded Poland on September 1. Britain and France had a non-aggression agreement—had a mutual help agreement, whatever it was—and declared war. When Chamberlain declared war on Germany it was also a very dramatic speech that was about, it must have been 10 or 11 o'clock on September 3rd, in the morning.

Anyway, Plans had been made to evacuate the school children out of London at that time, because everybody thought that the German Air Force would come screaming over the skies of London. They didn't. But, anyway, the school children were all evacuated. So, we all evacuated to about 30

or 40 miles north of London. So I got in with some new families, which was a little unsettling, but I think we had a good time. We only had to go to school half the day, because we went to village school, and of course the village kids had to go to school also. So, we had a half shift, and the rest of the time we went on walks, hikes, and relaxed quite a bit.

And I stayed with two— We were all billeted with various families, and stayed with some very nice families, good families. The second family that I stayed with I'm still in close touch with, and see every two or three years. They were all very kind.

Then nothing happened. This was the period of Sitzkrieg, you know. Everybody was sitting down; there was not much going on in France. So, we all went back to London. Nobody really enjoyed being in the country that much, so a very large number of the evacuees went back to London, including myself.

Then, of course, May 10th, 1940, the Germans invaded France, and the whole of Western Europe sort of collapsed. And the air raids started— I think the air raids started—the bad raids—after France fell, and Belgium, Holland, all that sort of thing, I think the air raids started kind of heavily in August of 1940, and then I was evacuated again.

We had some— My family had some distant friends in Devonshire, in southern England, and they had invited me down there for summer vacation. I went down there. They had another daughter. I stayed there for two weeks, went back to London for about a month, and then the raids became very heavy. Then I was sent back down there to Devonshire, and I went to school in Devonshire for about three years. But, basically, the family in London, the Sporns, were really my home, I think.

To get back to Vienna, and what was happening to my parents. In April 1940, just before the Germans invaded France, their affidavit, their papers for the United States came through. And they went down to Genoa, in Italy, to catch a boat. They had a passage on an Italian boat. And when they got to Genoa, Mussolini stopped all ship traffic across the Atlantic, because he was planning, obviously, for the German invasion of France, and the subsequent entry of Italy into the war had

been planned, and Mussolini didn't want to have his ocean liners sitting in the middle of the Atlantic when he came into the war.

So all traffic across the Atlantic was stopped, and my parents had to go back to Vienna. It must have been mind-boggling, and unfortunately I never really caught up quite with the details of their experiences there. But they were very fortunate. They received a visa to leave Austria via Russia. There was a time when there was a window, when, of course, Russia and the Germans had become good friends after the Polish debacle, and—

Anyway, they got a Russian visa. And it must have been June or July of 1940, they caught a train to Berlin. I think it went up to the Latvian Republics—one of the Latvian Republics—they went down to Moscow, had a couple of days in Moscow, toured Moscow, and then took the Trans-Siberian Railway across Russia, and went down to Korea—Seoul; spent the night in Seoul, where apparently—Well, that's another detail.

Anyway, they went to Seoul, they went to Tokyo, Hawaii, San Francisco. So they landed in San Francisco about August or September of 1940. The trans-Siberian trip must have been kind of mind-boggling. I don't know whether it was a week or 10 days, something like that, sitting on these very hard benches, apparently. It was physically—without any exercise, being able to move very much, and so on—was extremely uncomfortable. Everybody had swollen legs, knees, and so on.

Though the positive part was when they stopped at railway stations. And of course, nobody who left Germany or Austria had any money or any possessions; they came out with one suitcase and no money. The peasants who sold food to trains along the stations, when they realized that these people had come out of Austria and Germany, gave them all the food that they wanted, and were very generous.

They spent a night in Seoul, and I remember my mother saying "We had to keep the lights on all night because the rats were running all over the hotel room, and the way to keep them down a little bit was to keep the lights on." They then went to Tokyo, and there was a Jewish community there that met them and "entertained" them, at least showed them Tokyo, and my mother said, "You

know, this is wonderful being in Japan. We'll never be in Japan again. Let's stay a little while." My mother wanted to stay for a week or so, and have the pleasure of seeing Japan. The interesting thing was that here it was, August 1940, and the people said, "We are going to go to war with the United States. You'd better get out of here as fast as possible." This was the summer of 1940. This was 15, 16 months before Pearl Harbor, and this is how the people were talking.

So they took the Japanese boat that they were slated on, and set sail, and landed at one of the first, the outer islands, in Hawaii. The only thing to say about the Japanese boat is that on board, the sailors knew that— The Japanese, of course, were friendly with Germany, and knew that these people were fleeing Germany, and they treated them very badly. They threw the food at them—there was very little of it—and they treated them like animals, I gather.

They got to one of the outer islands. The first land stop was one of the outer Hawaiian islands, and one of the newspapers got wind of the fact that this Japanese freighter—I think it was a freighter—had a large number of refugees from Austria and Germany on it, and then wrote up a little story about the fact that they had had an unpleasant trip for what must have taken six weeks to get that far.

Anyway, by the time they got to the next island—I think it was the main island; I think it was Honolulu—there was delegation there that met them, and treated them like royalty. They were taken to the best restaurants, they were provided with towels to go on the beach. The people in Hawaii were absolutely marvelous to them. And this was the first time that my parents, and this whole group of people, felt what life could be like again, and the freedom, and the United States.

Q: SOMEBODY WANTED THEM?

A: Yes. And it was kindness and generosity. And so then they came to San Francisco. And I think, like most people at that time, the tendency was to look to New York. New York really was America. But, of course, they had no money, they had no means, and San Francisco was very nice. They couldn't go anyplace else, really.

So, anyway, they stayed put. And this is how they came to land in San Francisco. And I remember my mother saying, she started looking around to see where they would like to live, and she wandered around Nob Hill, and she [laughing] saw these marvelous apartment houses on Nob Hill, and said, "Well, I think I'd like to live here." [laughing]

Anyway, reality set in, and they met an immigrant lady, an older lady, from Rumania, who had gone through similar circumstances, and she took them into her house for a while until they got settled and until they found work. Again, this is a family that we still have some contact with, here in San Francisco, and their grandson became my mother's godson. There was a great deal of kindness and— Well, kindness, here in the States.

Q: YOU WERE GETTING LETTERS FROM THEM WHEN THEY WERE EN ROUTE, OR ONLY WHEN THEY GOT HERE?

A: Well, that's interesting, too. The communications between them and— While they were in Vienna and I was in England, and the war broke out, of course there was no direct communication. There was no way of getting letters directly from Vienna to England; we were at war. They sent letters to friends in Hungary for a while, and the friends from Hungary would forward them to me. And vice versa.

It was also possible to send very short messages via the Red Cross to Geneva, and Geneva would forward them. So this was the communication. While they were en route, I did get a couple of postcards from Moscow, and I think they wrote from Hawaii, but I think the letters— I think all the mail got to me in England long after they had arrived in San Francisco. There was a lot of fiddling around to get news.

Another interesting little sidelight was that after the war, I received a letter that my parents had mailed in Vienna to Hungary. Apparently the mail from Hungary went to France. It must have gotten to France just when the Germans invaded France, and it was kept in a bag for five years. I received this letter five years later. And it was stamped "LETTER DELAYED DUE TO THE OCCUPATION OF FRANCE" on it.

Meanwhile, of course, I had moved around, and all sorts of people had forwarded this letter. It's an interesting little piece of correspondence.

Another aspect of the family story is this uncle of mine who in the first place had gotten me to Belgium and then had helped me to get to England. When the Germans invaded Belgium, he took off and headed into France. And, being a fairly sophisticated person and whatever, he had accumulated a few American silver dollars, which of course in wartime in Europe, a silver dollar was worth a lot of money.

So anyway, he got into France. There was a fantastic stream of refugees all over from Belgium into France and from France into the head of the German army. The Germans stopped, and there was a free—for a while, for a number of years maybe—there was a free zone in France. A relatively free zone. Which Petain, I think, managed for the Germans, in effect. Belgians and Austrians were interned by the French as part of a settlement between the French and the Germans.

Anyway, my uncle had been in the dental equipment business in France during the '30s, and he managed to get a periodic pass out of this detention camp to work with a local dentist in a village. And having this little bit of freedom enabled him to make some contacts. One day he took off and went across the Pyrenees, and got into Spain, and eventually from Spain got an affidavit to come to the United States. So he escaped.

I think, early on, I mentioned the fact that he was divorced. Now, his former wife and he had a daughter who was about my age, maybe a year older, whose name was Hannah. On her mother's side, there were some relatives in Czechoslovakia. And even though they had papers to come to the United States, their Czech relatives said, "Listen, this is all going to pass by. Don't go to the United States. It's like going to the moon. Come and stay with us in Czechoslovakia."

So they went to stay with the people in Czechoslovakia. Naturally, the Germans finally caught up with them. And, of course, they didn't survive. Now, what is doubly tragic is that, apparently, my cousin Hannah was alive about four or five days before the war ended. She was still alive, so either she died or they massacred her just before the war was over.

Q: HOW DID YOU LEARN THAT SHE WAS STILL ALIVE?

A: Well, my uncle apparently had some indications that she was alive. He went to—I think the day after the war ended—he flew into Vienna to try to find her, and, anyway, she was gone. There was no trace. No nothing. There were some small concentrations camps all over Austria, and she must have— Anyway, they didn't make it.

My mother also had a brother by the name of Heinrich—Henry. And he was a bachelor, footloose and fancy-free. And he was the kind of person who probably could have, like my uncle, made a dash across the border someplace along the line. But he didn't. He, too, thought everything was going to pass away, and he— A non-Jewish ladyfriend, girlfriend of his, hid him for a number of years. According to her story, he got— He had to just get out of the apartment one day, take a walk, get some fresh air, see what was going on. He was picked up by the Germans, and we don't quite know what happened to him.

The girlfriend—his ex-girlfriend, Gretel—thought that he had been conscripted into the auxiliary German Army. They had sort of a— They used prisoners and so on for auxiliary work force. Also, you know, they used them to—on the Russian front, let's say—to go in front of the Germans, to go through the minefields, to see, blow up the mines, draw Russian fire. It was a no-win position.

My mother also had another story that he was tortured to death, I don't know, in Vienna. What it boils down to is that, from our experience, those who didn't get out of Vienna didn't survive. There were no survivors.

Q: THEY EITHER GOT OUT OR THEY—

A: Yes. There was—I mean, in Holland people went into hiding and survived, and same in Denmark and in France to some extent. It needed— There needed to be some support from the population someplace to survive, obviously. But in Vienna, there was none, I don't think. So, it's a very sad story. But, you know, my mother said there was not a single friend that she had who survived after the war.

Q: IT'S A MIRACLE THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO GET OUT AFTER THEY HAD TO RETURN FROM GENOA.

A: It was absolutely marvelous. Yes. It was a remarkable experience.

So, anyway, so I was in England. They were over here. And about September of 1939—September '40, because they got here about August or September of 1490—about October 1940, I got my papers to come to the United States, and was all ready to sail.

And then the Germans sank a liner which was full of civilians. A lot of English children were sailing for the United States, were being evacuated from England to Canada—more to Canada—and to the United States. Anyway, this liner was full of kids and civilians. So at that point, the war got very heavy, and all civilian traffic to the United States was stopped. You could only get passage if you were military or of national importance.

So I was basically stuck in England. That's not quite the word, but there was no way of getting over here until about 1944—1945 I should say. In 1945, again I got passage to come over here, and the war in Europe fortunately ended, and then all transportation was requisitioned to bring back the American troops. Either to bring them back to the United States or to ship them over to Japan. So again my passage was cancelled for a year. And then finally in 1946, I got passage and came over here.

Q: AND RE-UNITED WITH YOUR FAMILY?

A: And was re-united with my family. And I came over in a Lend-Lease aircraft carrier. The American Navy had Lend-Leased a great deal of equipment to Britain during the war, and this aircraft carrier was being returned to the United States, and there was only a skeleton crew on board, so they took civilians on board. We landed in Norfolk. It was a slow trip, ten days or so. But it was feast. The aircraft carrier was equipped for hundreds of people, thousands of people.

We had been on fairly lean rations in England during the war, and this aircraft carrier was absolutely loaded with food to the gills. We ate well, which is not really important, but it was quite nice. You

know the kind of thing: An orange in England during the war was only for pregnant mothers, you know. [laughing] To be able to eat an orange and banana, and this type of thing was exciting.

And we were met in Norfolk by a committee that gave us a great deal of hospitality. Took us to the country club, gave us an open house at the country club until we caught the ferry from Norfolk across the Chesapeake Bay, and then we took the train up to New York. So we had a wonderful—And being on that boat was also mind-boggling—the candy and all of these things which had been rationed and we hadn't seen.

Q: AND YOU WERE JUST EIGHTEEN?

A: I was eighteen at the time. Oh, this coming to America after Europe is a very exciting and marvelous experience. Especially the differences. And America, too, had its hardships still in '46. But it was the land of milk and honey compared to— [laughing]

Another aspect to this story: You know, the deportations that took place in '41, '42, '43, when things got really very, very difficult for the Jewish population in Europe. When my father went from Genoa back to Vienna in the spring of 1940, and they were waiting for their Russian visa to come through and get all that squared away, my father was served deportation papers. So, these things started in 1940.

And my father got these papers, "Report to the railway station with your saddlebag" at such-and-such a time, such-and-such a day. And my father simply didn't go. Otherwise, obviously, he would never have gotten out alive. And we had other relatives who were deported early in 1940, and disappeared. In Poland, wherever.

So, I think, historically, it is the Wannsee Conference, which has been filmed, historized, as the time when the Germans decided to basically exterminate the Jewish population. But it really started way ahead of that time. It didn't need that conference, I don't think.

Q: DID HE GO INTO HIDING, THEN, TEMPORARILY, WHEN HE DIDN'T SHOW UP FOR—

A: I don't think so. There was a period there in my parents lives, no longer know why, but I don't quite know how they existed. But, obviously, I don't think they got their apartment back. I don't know how they managed, but anyway . . .

The mechanism was not in place to go around picking up people yet. I think the implication was that everybody was sufficiently intimidated that they would do what they were told to do. So the Germans were not always that effective, or whatever.

Q: THEY GOT VERY EFFECTIVE LATER.

A: They got very effective, as I said. Because nobody survived during the war in Vienna that I know of.

Q: AND FROM NEW YORK, DID YOU TAKE THE TRAIN TO SAN FRANCISCO?

A: I took the train to San Francisco, because that was the reasonable way to go, still, in those days. I went to Chicago, had half a day in Chicago, managed to see a little bit of Chicago, and then took the train west.

In 1946, a railway strike broke out. And I think we were in Omaha. I'm pretty sure it was in Nebraska that the train came to a halt, and the railway said, "This is it, folks." [laughing] It was also kind of an exciting thing to have happen to you, when it's your first time in the United States and traveling across, and kind of anxious to get to where you're going.

And you can imagine, the Greyhound buses were— The alternative was a Greyhound bus. So finally, I got onto a Greyhound bus. And I think it was in Omaha or Lincoln, or some such place up there. And went down to Salt Lake City. And in Salt Lake City I had to wait about a day for a connection, and had a chance to see Salt Lake City. And then I took the Greyhound bus from Salt Lake City to the Bay Area.

And it was an absolutely incredible trip, because driving across the Salt Lake, and up into the mountains and across the Sierras in a Greyhound bus is really a marvelous experience. It's a wonderful way to see the country for the first time. I remember the bus coming down into Berkeley and Oakland,

coming down from the mountains, about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, and the sunrise over the bay. It was an absolutely incredible experience.

Actually, I got to San Francisco a day earlier than my parents had expected me. So there I was, knocking on their door at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning, and my parents thought I was the newspaper boy making his newspaper delivery. They didn't recognize me. [laughing] So I had to introduce myself to my parents.

Q: IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOME REUNION.

A: Yes. It was an exciting time.

Q: SUDDENLY THEY HAD A GROWN-UP, AND THEY HAD LEFT A CHILD.

A: Yes. From eleven to eighteen is—

Q: KIND OF AN ADJUSTMENT, TOO, ISN'T IT?

A: And, you know, film was very hard to get during the war in England. It wasn't like sending a picture every month or two or three or four. I think they only had a couple of pictures taken in that period of time. I think there were some in 1940, and then my parents asked for a picture, and I think we had to go to a portrait studio to have a picture taken to get across to them. So there was a big gap.

Q: DID YOU GO TO SCHOOL OR GET A JOB?

A: Well, I came here in about May 1946. So I did get a job until September of 19— Until school started. I went to San Francisco City College for a year to establish residency, because that was a lot less expensive than going to U.C. when you were not a resident. And I went to San Francisco City College, and it was an absolutely marvelous college. There were marvelous teachers there at that time. I shouldn't say at that time; I don't know about now. But very, very dedicated, capable people there. And I had a very good year at City College, and then went over to U.C. Berkeley.

But before I went to school I got a job with an old-line hardware company here in San Francisco, and then for three or four years while I was going to school, they took me. Whenever I had a

vacation—Christmastime, Easter time, summertime—they always found some work for me, and they were very good to me. So that helped quite a bit to get me through school.

After that—I graduated in 1950 in accounting and finance—I went into the army for two years. The Korean War had started; there was conscription, so I spent two years in the army, most of which was spent at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Then when I got out of the army I went into public accounting, became a CPA.

But the army was also a very good experience for me. Not necessarily always pleasant, but it was—I think it was a good Americanization process. You had to adjust to a lot of people and a new way of life.

Q: WERE YOUR PARENTS ABLE TO FIND WORK WHEN THEY GOT HERE IN 1940?

A: Well, they did the usual thing that most people did: They went into domestic work. You know, jobs were not that plentiful, I don't think, in 1940, so they went into domestic work. Which was more or less successful. I don't think they were great domestics. [laughing]

There was a story that my mother used to tell about the family that they worked for, who used to move down— Had a summer house down the Peninsula. And one day, the man of the house said, "Will you take a fork and go out and dig up some carrots?" So my mother took a kitchen fork instead of taking a garden fork to dig up the carrots. So this was— They were city folks, and were not exactly used to the country life. And I think when they first had to make toast they didn't know how to make toast. It was all a little different.

My mother had, in anticipation of coming here, taken a lot of cooking courses. And she had boxes and boxes and books and books of recipes, of Viennese, heavy, continental, sticky [laughter] cuisine, of course. It was not very useful for America, but anyway, they had good intentions.

And eventually, they broke out of this business. My father went to work at the Kaiser Shipyards in Sausalito, where they built the Victory ships during the War, and my mother went to work for a bank. And that worked out quite nicely also.

Q: WONDERFUL STORY. DID YOU GET MARRIED?

A: Yes. I got married in 1965. San Francisco girl, and we have two daughters, one of whom has just graduated from the University of Oregon and is at home, looking for a job. The other daughter is 18 and just finished her first year at U.C. Riverside. And is having such a good time down there that she is not coming home for the summer. She has found two jobs, and she is taking six units at school, and having a wonderful time. So, they are thriving.

Q: WONDERFUL. DID YOU SHARE A LOT OF YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES WITH YOUR CHILDREN?

A: Yes and no. Not formally. Bits and pieces, I think. As I said, I have a great reluctance to go back to Vienna. My mother and father never went back. They never wanted me to go back. My daughters in the last year or two said they'd like to see a little bit of what it's all about, and I think one of these days . . .

I've gotten as far as getting a map of Vienna the last few weeks and putting an "X" on where we lived and where I went to school. And one of these days I think we will go, but I think I'm going to make it one trip. Maybe I'll find it marvelous, I don't know. But a lot of people do go back and enjoy it.

It poses some problems to me. I am not sure that— Yes, the people have changed, but the change was beaten into them, to some extent.

Q: [INAUDIBLE]

A: Well, no, I don't. I mean, people have told me, you go into a Viennese apartment, and there on the mantelpiece, you still see Brother John in his S.S. uniform. You know, I don't really want to see it. I don't really give them the benefit of the doubt, I don't think.

They wanted Hitler and they got Hitler. And people suffered terribly. We had a concierge in—in all apartment houses, just like they do in France—and in Vienna there was a concierge who was sort of in charge of the apartment house. And the concierge in our apartment house— There was a man and two sons, and the father and both sons died on the Russian front. It wasn't much fun after France, after—

Q: WHEN THEY STARTED LOSING?

A: When they started losing. But I have the uncomfortable feeling that the jackboots are still under the beds. Under the mattress, you know? I have no confidence. And I know there's a younger generation and it's changed, but my associations are such that I find it difficult to go back and see it. I still have a vision of March 13, when they came in.

My uncle, who on Kristallnacht, was arrested and went to Dachau— It was still possible to get people out of concentration camps in 1939. They had to prove that they had a visa for another country. And, first of all, one could buy visas for Shanghai and for funny places in Latin America, and so on. But I think just before he was supposed to go there, he got papers, somebody found him a job in England again. This was domestic work, again, which was about the only way adults could get into England.

So he got out. He got out of Dachau, and I remember, everybody's head was shaved. I mean, these people were obviously completely intimidated. They had to sign papers that they wouldn't talk about their experiences there. My uncle has never been able to talk about what happened there. But he's gone blind, and he says it was due to what happened in Dachau.

A couple of things happened. One of the gruesome things they did, they made people stare into very bright lights for long periods of time. They had locomotive lights, tremendously powerful strobe lights, whatever they were. And they made him stare into these lights, which wasn't very good.

I also think he got knocked in the head, and this can affect your eyes, obviously. But he cannot talk about it. Now, some years ago, when he was here, my daughter was in high school, and the high school was discussing family trees and family histories, and all this kind of thing as a project. And I said to my daughter, "Why don't you go sit down with Uncle Egan, and let's get some family history down, because everybody's getting older. You've got time, and its a project for you." He clammed up completely. He just couldn't talk about it. So, that's the way my family, I think, basically feels about it. Nobody's been back.

Q: YOU HAD A GREAT DEAL OF LUST FOR LIFE, OR YOU COULDN'T HAVE ENJOYED SOME OF THE BAD THINGS THAT YOU WENT THROUGH WITH SO MUCH ABILITY.

A: Well, I was very fortunate.

Q: YES, VERY FORTUNATE. I THINK YOUR SPIRIT THAT ALWAYS MADE YOU SEE THE BEST OPPORTUNITY OF LEARNING AND EXPERIENCING HELPED YOU A LOT.

A: Well, I had some very good years in England. They weren't always easy, but some very good years in England. I made many friends there. The family I stayed with is really still part of my family, and I've been fortunate enough to see them quite often in the last 20 years. They've come over here; we've gone over there. And being able to live in this country is also very fortunate.

Q: IF YOU THINK BACK ON YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD—AND YOU HAVE AN AMAZING DEGREE OF RECOLLECTION—WHAT WOULD YOU SAY WAS THE THING THAT YOUR PARENTS INSTILLED IN YOUR UPBRINGING THAT GAVE YOU THAT STRENGTH THAT CARRIED YOU IN A POSITIVE WAY THROUGH SOME OF THESE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES?

A: Well, I think you follow some examples along the way someplace, and I think both my mother and father were very strong in their lives, and there was never any thought of giving up. They were very strong. And for older people, when they come here, it's not easy to start a new life, and with language problems. My parents were not language geniuses, neither of them—it was very difficult. But they were always very, very positive in their outlook. They were strong; that's all I can say. And hardworking.

My mother was the kind of woman— You know, when people would stop speaking because of this whole Nazi problem in Vienna—you know, your neighbors would stop speaking to; they'd look the other way when you would pass them on the street or passing on the staircase in your house. And there was a young man who lived in my house, he must have been my age, and we'd always been very friendly. And all of a sudden, he'd look the other way, and he wore his Nazi armband, and so on. And one day, my mother sort of passed him, and he looked the other way, and my mother gave

him a couple of whacks. She just said, "you don't do this to me." She was— This was not the kind of thing one really did, but she was the kind of person who wasn't going to be insulted by little boys. She had a lot of strength of character and will to live, which was very important in those days.

Q: AND THANK GOD, IT GOT INTO YOU, TOO.

A: Well, a little bit of it, hopefully.

Anyway, I'm sure there's some more anecdotes and stories one could talk about, but I think I have temporarily run out.

Q: THANK YOU SO MUCH. I THINK YOU'VE SHARED A LOT. YOU'VE BEEN VERY GENEROUS WITH YOUR TIME.

A: I've been very pleased to have been invited.

Q: STAY HEALTHY.

A: Thank you very much. It's was a pleasure meeting you and being here. [To cameraperson:] And thank you very much.

CAMERAPERSON: THANK YOU.

A: I hope this has been of some interest.

[pause]

CAMERAPERSON: Shall I shut the camera down now?

Q: YES

[recording equipment turned off, then back on again, with Theodore Ellington speaking when recording resumes]

This goes back to my years in England, which were interesting, of course. But what I was going to say was, there was a book published, maybe in the mid-sixties—time flies—maybe a little bit later, which was called *They Came As Children*. And it's a collection of short essays by people like myself, who went to England without their parents, and their experiences. For people who are interested in that period or in those experiences. I don't know the author and don't know the publisher, but *They Came As Children* is a fascinating book of that period.

Q: YES, I THINK THAT WOULD BE AN INTERESTING BOOK TO READ.

A: It's out of print now, but, it must be possible to find it. As a matter of fact, I made quite a few Xerox copies and gave it to a number of people, and I still have it at home someplace.

CAMERAPERSON: WERE YOU FEATURED IN THE BOOK?

A: No. No, I was over by this time, but there must be about 40 essays in the book. Just an interesting period.

Q: THERE IS SOME INTERESTING LITERATURE COMING OUT NOW ON HOW SURVIVORS HAVE RELATED TO THEIR CHILDREN, AND HOW THE CHILDREN HAVE UNSPOKEN EXPERIENCES. AS IF SOME OF THOSE EXPERIENCES, EVEN THOUGH THEY WEREN'T OPENLY OR OUTSPOKENLY SHARED— AND THERE ARE SOME DOCUMENTARIES THAT HAVE BEEN MADE ON CHILDREN OF SURVIVORS. AND IT'S QUITE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW—EVEN WITH PARENTS WHO WEREN'T VERY OPEN ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES—HOW NEVERTHELESS THERE WAS AN IMPACT.

A: Yes.

Q: IT JUST CAN'T BE HELPED. YOU ARE WHAT YOU ARE.

A: As I think I said before we started the camera, a friend of mine in England, one of the grandchildren of this extended family of mine in England, took a Sociology course during the last six months, and her interest was in the period and the refugee problem back in 1939, 1940. And I put a fair amount of this on paper in a very rough sort of way, and so that sort of brought back a lot of these things, and I think my girls took a look at that, which gave them some exposure.

It's not always easy to relate it. I think I said, 25 years ago I don't think I could have talked about it. Or, didn't want to talk about it, let's put it this way. Wanted to forget it. And as time goes by, I think this generation now has come to terms with it, and feels much more open.

I did mention to you, possibly, that there was a convention, in effect, in London during the last month or so, of people who had come to England during 1939-1940, and it was basically a "50th anniversary" time for meeting.

Q: DID YOU GO THERE?

A: I didn't go there. But somebody just now sent me some newspaper clippings about the thing. It was held in the form of a festival, in the form of a concert. New Dominion played. I haven't got all the details yet, but some people feel that this is the time to tell the story. I think it's too bad that the older generation—my parents—didn't deal with it, didn't really record it. Because it's fairly easy now; with a tape recorder one doesn't have to write a book about it. And a lot of history has been lost.

Now we have a friend in Berkeley, a lady who is in her late 80s, and she is spending some of her time recording her history.

Q: THAT'S WHY WE APPRECIATE THAT YOU CAME AND SHARED WITH US. BECAUSE IT'S IMPORTANT, VERY IMPORTANT.

A: Yes, I think it is. I'm very glad that you're doing this project. I think it's invaluable. In 20 years, it won't be available. It's interesting that the Anschluss, the occupation of Austria by the Germans, was 50 years ago, 1939. And I wanted to find some books for my children. I wanted to have something at home that, if they were interested, they could pick up.

There's been quite a bit of fiction written, which doesn't quite tell the story. And I had difficulty finding literature on it. I found a couple of books in German on this, but this doesn't do my children any good. I understand that the University of North Carolina has a good book on the Anschluss, and I've been meaning to write there to find out what that's all about, or get a copy.

Q: I'M SURPRISED, SOMETIMES, ALSO, HOW LITTLE HISTORY IS TAUGHT IN THE UNITED STATES ON SPECIFIC THINGS. THERE'S A GENERAL INCLUSION IN EUROPEAN HISTORY, BUT IT'S NOT VERY DETAILED.

A: I think the concept of the Holocaust Center, and there are courses being given on the Holocaust in public schools, I think, and so on. I think that is very important and very valuable. It has made the younger generation a lot more aware of what took place.

This friend of mine in England, Clare, who wrote this paper, basically about the young people who came to England, got into studying why they came and what happened on the Continent. She went into a complete tailspin when she realized what was happening—or what had happened—in the concentration camps, and why these children escaped—the parents often didn't. She went into a complete mental state of shock. She was not directly affected; it was just by the horrors of reading about it.

It's very important not to forget, not to lose sight of it. Hitler said someplace along the line that "in thirty or forty years from now, who is going to give a damn that we killed the Jews, or killed the Gypsies, or killed our opposition." And I think if we do forget about it, then we are just proving him right.

Q: YOU'VE HELPED US NOT TO FORGET IT.

A: Well, thank you. Appreciate your time and your efforts. I think it's a very good project.

CAMERAMAN: AND YOURS, TOO.

A: Well, not at all. I look forward to getting a tape sometime. I think it'll be useful to have for my family.