

-TITLE-HERMAN PEPPER  
-I\_DATE-SEPTEMBER 4, 1990  
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO HOLOCAUST ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-GOOD  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-GOOD  
-DURATION-1 HOUR  
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
1:00:00 Life Before the War

1:01:20 Herman Pepper was born March 18, 1910 in Brody, Poland, which was then part of Austria and now is part of Russia. He doesn't know how long his family lived in Brody; he knows his grandparents lived there. The family left when he was four because of World War I. He has no memory of Brody.

1:02:10 His maternal grandparent; had lived in Brody since the turn of the century. His paternal grandparents came to Brody from Radikov (ph), near Lublin.

1:02:55 He moved to Vienna at age four. He remembers where he lived. He faintly remembers his mother, who died in the flu epidemic of 1919. He learned to speak German. He doesn't think he ever spoke Polish; his parents spoke German, and although Brody was a Polish town, the official language was German since Austria controlled it.

1:03:50 His maternal grandfather was religious. His parents were not as religious. His family went to temple in Vienna. He was bar mitzvahed there. He doesn't remember the name of the temple.

1:04:35 He lived in two different areas of Vienna -- the Second section, and later the 17th, near the medical school. He had one brother who was four years younger. He was an infant when they left Brody. He also had a step-brother from his father's second marriage. This step-brother was 14 years younger than Herman.

1:05:30 He went to grade school and gymnasium in Vienna. He also went to medical school, and graduated in 1936.

1:06:10 Beginning in 1934, the German-Austrian fraternities in the university began to gain in strength and prominence. There were big fights in the universities. The Austrian universities were autonomous, so the police could not come inside to stop the fighting. These fights grew and grew until 1938. The fraternities became more and more powerful; they called themselves national socialists.

1:07:30 These parties had always been anti-Semitic. Before 1934, it was accepted that no Jews were members of these fraternities. These fraternities became forerunners of the Austrian Nazi movement.

1:07:50 Beginning in 1934, 1935, there were these fights in the medical school, which was separate from the university. The fights would center in the anatomy department. The Vienna medical school had two faculties. Anatomy was very important in the curriculum. All the Jews would join one of the faculties, which included Professor Tandle (ph), a well-published doctor who was also a liberal socialist. There was a fight between the students of Professor Tandle and Professor Hoffstaeder (ph), a professor in the other faculty.

1:09:45 The fights were physical ones. Bones were used as weapons, especially femurs. Chairs were also used. The injured would be pushed outside the medical school, where an ambulance could pick them up and take them to the hospital. Herman was once injured. He was knocked unconscious, and was taken to the hospital. These fights were daily occurrences.

1:10:01 The fighters would be separated by a corridor that ran down the center of the lecture hall they shared. There were a lot of American students in the medical school, students who couldn't get into the American schools. There was even a branch of the American Medical Association there. Austrian medical school lasted five years, not four as in America.

1:10:50 The division between the students were constant from pre-clinical up through graduation. The students could choose which faculty to join. Any student that could meet the school's qualifications could go to medical school. After two and one-half years, some would be weeded out.

1:11:45 The students knew where the different faculties stood politically. Tandle was a lone socialist; he was a member of the socialist democratic party. Hoffstaeder was a "German." The University was run by the State; the professors were state appointees. The two professors names had been there for a long time, because they had tenure.

1:12:45 The fights would generally erupt after one side made some comment about a "Jew boy." The student body was already divided by their choice of faculty. The fights lasted until 1938.

1:13:15 The American students were not surprised by the fights, because they built up gradually. The Americans would try to avoid the fights if they could. No one was ever arrested, because there was no evidence.

1:13:40 He can't remember details of the day he was injured. People would look for excuses to start a fight. There would be hundreds of students involved . He would fight back to protect himself.

1:14:15 There were 500-600 Jewish students in the medical school. Only about 50 percent would graduate . The exams were oral, and so it was easy for a professor to flunk someone he didn't like, by asking questions about an area the student was weak in.

1:15 :12 Everyone knew about Hitler's rise in Germany. No one at this point thought he'd get into Austria. Herman had no family in Germany. He did know a journalist who came to Vienna from Berlin and worked for a Viennese paper.

1:15:45 He was not aware of anti-Semitism as a child. He didn't look very Jewish: he had straw blonde hair. Many Jewish families lived in his neighborhood. About half of the 24 kids in his gymnasium were Jewish . He had no problems stemming from his being Jewish in medical school until 1934.

1:16:45 It was a known fact that the fraternities were anti-Semitic. They didn't provoke incidents until 1934; they just didn't let Jews in.

1:17:10 Following his graduation, he interned in a Viennese hospital. He specialized in gynecology and obstetrics.

1:17:35 When Hitler took over Austria, everyone who knew better left the state hospital. Herman joined the Rothschild Hospital, a Jewish hospital. All the doctors there were Jewish, as were other members of staff. They got papers that were supposed to protect them.

1:17:55 The paper didn't do much good. Eventually Herman was arrested and taken into a cell in a house. Everyone was arrested at some point and interrogated. He was arrested shortly after the Anschluss.

1:18:25 He got a permit to get out, because he had a visa to the United States. When Hitler took over Austria, there had been a rumor that people could register at the US Embassy in Vienna and get a visa to leave. His brother went to the Embassy and put down his and Herman's names. The rumor was wrong. They didn't get visas immediately. But their names were on the List. This helped him get out later on.

1:18:55 Herman had relatives in New York who had been there since the turn of the century. They were from his father's family. He had a cousin working in the Foreign Policy Association of New York. This cousin got someone to make an affidavit. The affidavit was sent to Vienna, where it arrived at the American embassy. Because his name was on the list there, he was given a visa; he was able to slip into the small Polish quota.

1:19:35 He got his visa. His younger brother's name was also on the list, but he didn't get a visa and had to wait. The two brothers went over the border to Switzerland, where his brother waited for his visa and left for the United States.

1:20:00 His brother hadn't written down the names of his parents and step-brother. The parents tried to stick it out. They eventually left, and went to the Franco-Spanish border with his step-mother's brother and sister. His parents were picked up by the Germans and gassed.

1:20:35 The aunt and uncle escaped, and now live in Florida. His step-brother had been smuggled out of Vienna to Trieste, and from there to Palestine. The step-brother stayed there until the war broke out. He joined the Jewish Brigade of the British Army.

1:21:00 Their unit was captured by the Germans in Cyprus. They were treated as prisoners of war, not Jews. The Germans honored them as soldiers. They experienced no discrimination in comparison to the rest of the POWs. They were in the prison in Cyprus until the end of the war, when they returned to Palestine. The step-brother lives in Tel Aviv today.

1:21:45 After graduating from medical school, Herman worked at the Wiedner Hospital in Vienna. There had always been anti-Semitism in Austria, but he never experienced any personally. Anti-Semitism reached its peak in 1937 and 1938.

1:22:17 When the Germans marched into Austria, everyone became Nazis. Up until then, everyone had thought they could keep the Germans out.

1:22:31 From the minute the Germans came, Herman planned to leave. His father and brother were arrested. At this point, the Nazis still wanted all the Jews to leave. The Jews could take their clothes and \$30 in cash. Many stayed, thinking everything would blow over. These people were caught later. In the beginning, you just had to show you had paid your taxes, and you could buy a ticket and leave.

1:23:27 The problem was where you could go to. No one wanted to let the Jews in. It was relatively easy to walk across the border to Switzerland, where you would wait for a visa. One of his friends did this, and went to Australia.

1:23:35 When he was arrested, he was released the same day. In the beginning, there weren't concentration camps yet. The Nazis would come by, and tell you to go with them. You had no choice, you went with them. When Herman was arrested, he was brought to a cell where there were 150-200 people. All of them were interviewed. If you could show you were leaving in the next 48 hours, you could go. He had his passport and his permit to leave, so he was released. If you had no proof you were leaving, you were put in jail.

1:24:15 Some would be in jail for a couple of weeks or a month. His brother was in jail a few weeks, then was let go, at which time he walked across the border to Switzerland. His father was in jail a few weeks, then was let go.

1:24:37 The day he was arrested, he was at home. The Nazis came to the door. Everyone knew who the Jews were. The Nazis had lists of everybody, which Herman thinks were compiled before they marched into Austria. There were only 200,000 Jews in a population of 2 million in Austria, so it was easy to keep tabs on the Jews.

1:25:05 The good Catholics were against the Nazi policies. They weren't really anti-Semitic. Catholicism was the state religion; the state paid for religious education. You had to get permission to get out of the religious classes.

1:25:40 As the German Anschluss came closer, the Austrians began wanting to become part of Germany.

1:25:45 He was arrested early in the morning. His parents were in the house. He didn't fight the Nazis, he just went with them. His brother and father were arrested later. His brother didn't have his exit permit when he was arrested.

1:26:15 While his father and brother were in jail, no one could go see them; they couldn't even find out where they were being held, although there was only one main prison in Vienna.

1:26:30 As soon as German was released, he went to stay with the parents of his girlfriend, the Soyka family. He couldn't go back to his parents' house, because he had told the Germans he was leaving Vienna. Otto Soyka was a well known Jewish writer whose books had been serialized in a major Austrian newspaper. Herman married Hendricke (Heddie), his girlfriend to get her out of Austria.

1:27:00 He stayed with the Soyka family only a few days because he was afraid of being caught. The family lived in the same apartment complex as the former prime minister of Austria, so it was well known to the Nazis.

1:27:30 Herman never returned home after his arrest. Between his release and the time he left Austria, about a week, he married Heddie. They went to a marriage bureau, and got married under a portrait of Hitler. He had a visa for one person, but it permitted him to bring his wife, and this is why he married Heddie. They had no previous plans to marry.

1:28:15 When things got really bad, Heddie went to London to work as a domestic, and learned English. She didn't like England, and came back. Amazingly, she was able to come back on the train without being bothered by the Nazis at all.

1:28:40 After the wedding, Herman and Heddie left Austria. They bought a train ticket to Zurich. In Zurich, they bought passage on a ship from LeHavre to New York. He would only travel on an American ship. They went to Paris to wait for the ship.

1:29:30 He left Austria with \$30. He still has that same \$30 today. When he got to Switzerland, a Jewish refugee association gave him money to live on. At this time, the problem was just beginning; there was no massive flood of refugees yet. He went to temple on Friday night, was invited to dinner; the people were very nice to him.

1:30:00 Being a physician was very helpful. He got the same treatment in Paris. He received money from a Jewish organization until the ship came in.

1:30:15 He was in Zurich one week, then went to Paris to wait for the ship.

1:30:30 His brother and best friend crossed the border. His best friend had been in jail because he was a member of the social democratic party. Herman and other Jews received help from Jews in Switzerland as long as they intended to leave. They weren't given the choice of staying and becoming Swiss citizens. He was in Paris for about 10 days.

1:31:05 The feeling once he got out of Austria was indescribable. He was still able to correspond with his parents at this time. He didn't see his parents at the train station when he left Austria. He was very worried while crossing the border, but was able to get through with no problems because of his papers.

1:31:25 He and Heddie divorced later.

1:31:35 He was picked up in New York by a cousin who didn't know he was married. He stayed at the International House in New York for a short time. His wife lived with another family.

1:30:35 He stayed in New York only a short time. In New York, a Jewish women's organization gave him \$12 a week to get a loan and buy food. They also looked for work for him. Four weeks later, they found him a job in Florida. He told them he could speak English, although he couldn't.

1:32:50 He got a job in a small place in Coral Gables, a convalescent place. He learned English from the patients and the radio.

1:33:05 He still received mail from his family after Hitler invaded Poland, until his parents were apprehended. He tried in 1939 and 1940 to get an affidavit for them to come to the US.

1:33:30 The last he heard from his parents was in 1940, before the US got into the war. After the US entered the war, no mail could get in. Heddie stayed in New York. His job didn't want a married man, so he told them he was single.

1:33:55 He learned English fairly quickly. After three months, he went back to New York to take the medical boards. First he had to pass an English test. He was told he spoke English "fluently wrong," and passed because he told the examination board a few jokes. He passed the medical tests and got his medical license.

1:34:20 Two other friends married their girlfriends to get them out of Austria. One friend went over the border and came back for his wife later. The other couple went to Shanghai, and are still married.

1:34:35 Shortly after Hitler came, Heddie went back to England. She saw adds for nursemaid who could teach the children German in anticipation of losing the war.

1:35:05 She stayed three months, and then went back to Vienna. Heddie's mother had divorced Otto Soyka and was married to H.H. Ya kov, a famous writer. He wrote for Dass Tagesblatt, the number one Berlin paper, before the war. He was the first journalist to fly across the Atlantic in the Zeppelin. He left Berlin for Vienna, and married Heddie's mother.

1:35:55 The Ya covs got out of Vienna through London and New York. Her grandparents were caught and killed in the gas chambers. They didn't think anything would happen to them in Austria.

1:36:10 Heddie eventually came back to New York. Herman was still married to her when she brought her parents over. She had no problem getting from Vienna to London.

1:36:30 From 1939 to 1943, Herman had an internship and residency in Florida. He volunteered for the Army, but was kicked out when they discovered he wasn't a citizen. He then volunteered for the Navy, but they wouldn't let him in because he had been kicked out of the Army. He was then declared an essential worker at the hospital, and worked there until the end of the war.

1:37:15 He came to California because he had a friend in Hollywood who had married an Austrian physician. He bought a car and drove across country, stopping in San Francisco area looking for jobs. One hospital there called him back, and he went there to work.

1:37:50 He met his wife at that hospital; she was also a doctor.

1:37:55 His brother was in New York. It was through this brother and his step-mother's sister that he found out what had happened to his parents.

1:38:15 His step-mother's brother lived in Vienna. Before the war he worked in Herman's father's paper sack factory. He married there; his wife was killed. He went to Yugoslavia and fought with Tito as an officer. Tito invited him to become a Yugoslav citizen, but he chose to return to Vienna. He married again and established an export business with Yugoslavia.

1:39:00 Herman travels a lot, and is often invited by the International Congress to lecture on birth control pills. He went to Vienna to lecture in 1952 or '53. He didn't know his uncle was there at that time. He also went there with a friend after the war. They bought a car in Stuttgart and drove over.

1:39:35 He noticed in Europe that the dollar could buy a lot of things.

1:39:50 He also has an aunt in Vienna. She had escaped to Holland, where she was hidden by a family for the whole war.

1:40:00 His step mother's brother had hidden in Austria, in a peasant farmer's loft, for the entire war. The peasant hid him for no money. His uncle had no money.

1:40:25 Herman has been back to Vienna many times since the war. He's seen many of his old friends from Vienna. One classmate from gymnasium has become a presiding judge. That man was a good Catholic, never a Nazi, and had stayed out of politics during the war.

1:40:55 His friend had known what was being done to the Jews in the war. Herman believes the good Catholics didn't become Nazis and stayed out of politics.



1:41:05 He had two classmates who lost jobs because they wouldn't become Nazis. He has a few Jewish friends left in Vienna. Two didn't escape the Nazis; they stayed too long.

1:41:30 He likes to look at both sides of an issue. He thinks (then Austrian President Kurt) Waldheim was obviously a Nazi, but that what he did, he did only because it was his job. He thinks Waldheim should stop lying about his past, and ask people what they would do, had they been in his shoes, given those orders. Waldheim should say he had no choice. He feels everyone would forgive Waldheim if he told the truth, and that he didn't mean what he did. He could have told the truth while he was Secretary General of the United Nations.

1:42:25 He feels he can't generalize about the Austrian people. There were obviously a lot of anti-Semites, still today. There are only 12,000 Jews left in Austria, plus 5,000 Russians.

1:42:30 Herman had three kids. He told them about the Holocaust as they grew up. They know his story. He personally didn't see much "brutal stuff" so he can't say much about it.

1:43:00 Herman was lucky, and got away with practically nothing. He had relatives killed, and he can't forget that. He personally experienced no anti-Semitism in Austria or the US. He has a lot of non-Jewish friends. He has made a lot of enemies because of his involvement in hospital politics, but he doesn't think anyone has ever attacked him for being a Jew.

1:43:40 His grandfather was very religious. His uncle was religious until he fought in Yugoslavia. He made a vow to become very religious if he survived. He is still very devout today, praying three times a day, etc. He was able to do well financially after the war, and gave much to his synagogue. His uncle is a "true believer."

1:44:10 Herman is not very religious. He pays his dues. His brother in Israel is religious, going to temple every week, although he doesn't keep kosher or pray three times a day. Herman goes to temple once a year.

1:44:25 (Asked a question about Prof. Tandler, but begins to talk about Viennese politics instead.)

1:44:55 Otto Soyka is dead. He was one of the first to write science fiction, in the 20's and 30's .

1:45:00 His parents were picked up in the Pyrenees . His step-mother's sister and brother were in the same building, but they escaped. It was from the sister he learned his parents' fate. Their names are in the book in Yad Vashem.

1:45:45 His brother was smuggled out by an underground group to Trieste, and smuggled onto a beach in Palestine in the middle of the night. He fought in the Haganah. The family had known the brother would leave with this organization.

1:46:20 The Austrians knew about the camps in Germany through the papers, which were run by Jews. He remembers reading about the camps.

1:47:20 About 50-60 percent of those who took the medical boards in the States were flunked. This was partly because the States couldn't absorb that many new doctors at once. All of them eventually passed.

1:47:50 Femurs were a good weapon when the students fought one another, because they had a ball on them.

1:48:30 He considers the \$30 he left Austria with as his security. He never asked any relatives for any money. The \$30 were never touched. They were his last straw.

1:49:05 He has a special feeling about the American flag. It gives him goosepimples to hear the national anthem. He doesn't think people who don't come from other countries can understand that feeling.

1:49:40 He wouldn't go back to Austria if you would give him \$1000 a day. The few people there he knows aren't anti-Semitic. Many of his friends are dead now.

1:50:00 Anti-Semitism in the United States is very hidden. Once he tried to go to a hotel which he knew was empty, but they refused him a room. He doesn't know how they knew he was Jewish. He has no other personal experience of anti-Semitism.

1:51:00 One of his best friends is not Jewish; the man is not religious, either.

.END.□