

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Feistman, Peter

Date of interview:

Summary: (Deceased 10/26/2003). Peter Feistman was born in Munich, Germany September 26, 1923, and he was the only child of two wealthy Jewish parents, Fritz F. Feistman and Else Kahn Feistman. His parents owned a successful business supplying hops to local breweries. Between 1936 and 1939 he became aware of Nazi activity, and he remembers talk at family dinners discussing escape from Germany. As Peter recalled, the family felt secure that they would be able to buy their way out of Germany when the time was right. The only casualty in Peter's immediate family was in 1936 when Peter's Aunt Marie committed suicide right after the German doctor to whom she was married had died, leaving her unprotected from the Nazis. Peter recalled that Kristallnacht was the catalyst for getting him to leave Germany, as it was after that horrible night that they began to plan their escape. Peter was fortunate enough to leave Germany by train headed for England in July 1939, and the Kindertransport expedited his escape. His parents fled sometime thereafter, but Peter did not mention a specific date.

The first school he attended was McCooley House (?) located in Sussex, England. This was a very orthodox school and Peter had not grown up with all the religious activities, so he was moved to another school called Athelstaan. He remained there until he turned 16, at which point he was sent to a transient camp on the Isle of Man for one month and then on to Camp Hay in Australia.

Peter spoke of his boat trip from the Isle of Man to Australia as being long and uncomfortable, and his group had been given no details as to their destination. Somehow he and his companions had been misclassified as German POWs, and they were treated as such at their final destination at Camp Hay, New South Wales. In this camp they were provided only the minimum care required by the Red Cross for housing POWs, rather than the care and kindness normally given to refugees of war. Peter was held there, in the Australian outback, for the next 3 years. Life there was bearable only because of the kindness shown by the local Quakers bringing in food and clothing. Jews in neighboring Sydney and Melbourne did not know that Peter's group was made up of refugees, not POWs, so they did not offer any assistance to them.

In 1943 a Major from England discovered the wrongful classification of this group of refugees and offered to resolve the situations. Peter was given options, and he chose to enlist in the Australian Army where he stayed through 1946. At that point the army offered Peter travel fare to wherever he wanted to go. While in Australia, Peter had learned his parents were in New York and that became his chosen destination.

Once there, he became involved in the hotel business with his parents. The family briefly returned to Munich in 1952 for restitution purposes, in hopes of recovering family real estate and business holdings left behind. Peter recalled

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that while the city was in ruins there were signs of rebuilding all around, and while there he experienced no anti-Semitic hostility from the Germans.

Peter continued to travel on his own to Peru, where he met his wife Karen somewhere around 1948. He brought her back to New York where they married and had a daughter, Evonne (?). Peter had always wanted to return to California, after his brief lay over in San Francisco in 1946 en route to New York. In 1954 his dream came true, he and his family made the move to California. Having been involved in hotel management with his parents, he ended up buying and operating a hotel in Watsonville, until 1979. At this point in time Peter and his wife moved to Santa Cruz, California and are currently residing there.