

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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Name of interviewee: Flusser, Peter

Date of interview: 4/22/2002

Summary: Peter was born in Vienna, Austria on July 3, 1930 and attended a private school there until the age of seven. His father worked in textiles before the war, while his mother held one of the highest positions at a bank. Peter's father was Jewish yet non-religious and his mother was Protestant. Peter was brought up Christian Lutheran and never considered himself Jewish nor did he know that his maternal grandmother was Jewish until later in life. The entire family left Vienna before the Germans marched in and moved to Prague as his family still had Czech citizenship from previously living in a small town near Prague before moving to Austria. This move was motivated by both the coming German occupation and business problems. However, before the war Peter doesn't remember any anti-Semitism in Vienna or Prague.

Peter first heard of Hitler while staying in Prague, where his father also acquired a girlfriend. His mother wouldn't stand for this, so in 1939 she took Peter and left for Shanghai, where a cousin already lived, leaving his younger sister Susan who was two years old at the time in Prague with his father. It took Peter and his mother a month to reach Shanghai and they had to pass through several cities including Paris, Colombo, Saigon, and Hong Kong on the way. In 1941 Peter's father and sister joined them in Shanghai by means of the Trans-Siberian Railroad. While in Shanghai Peter lived with his family across the street from his cousin and later moved to a new house to live with his mother's new husband after she remarried. Later, however, the Japanese, who occupied China, asked them to move into another house in the Hong Ku ghetto.

While living there Peter attended St. Francis Xavier College outside the district. In 1945 the Americans attempted to take out the Japanese Naval Headquarters near his house and hit his house with a bomb. The cement ceiling collapsed, trapping Peter, who knew he was hurt and was later rescued from the wreckage. Gangrene developed in Peter's injured leg, which was later amputated. Peter further describes this time in detail, including his treatment and education.

After the end of the war Peter immediately applied for a US Visa and in 1947, with the help of his uncle already living there, traveled to the US. Peter's mother, sister and stepfather took a boat to a German displaced persons camp until their US Visa application was approved a year later, while his father and his new wife settled in Vancouver. Peter stayed in New York and attended Columbia University until 1955 when his future wife convinced him to finish his studies in Kansas. Peter finished his doctorate, had four children and teaches mathematics at a private college in Kansas.