

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Caspary, Gerard

**Date of interview:** 12/20/1990

**Summary:** Gerard Caspary was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in January 1929 into a fairly well to do family, which apparently previous to his arrival had amassed and subsequently lost quite a fortune. He describes his youth, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, as 'impoverished – we had only one maid'. He describes his home life as 'Jewish, but non-religious'.

He remembers a family trip to Holland in the summer of '31 and a maid of whom he was fond, named Clara, who left before his third birthday. He recalls her taking him to church, with no objection by his parents. At age 'three to four', he describes seeing German flags lining the streets of Frankfurt. (The year was 1933, the year Hitler was appointed Chancellor). He recalls seeing from the living room window the Nazi youth group who marched goose-stepping down the boulevard in celebration, and how he used to like to imitate it.

Gerard's father had been the manager of a large department store called Hanza's (?) until the Nazi's proclaimed a boycott of Jewish stores. Gerard remembers that he used to enjoy visiting his father in the store. He sensed that his father had a powerful position. However, after the boycott, his father had to get another job in another store, one that did not have the prestige of Hanza's.

In 1933, soon after the boycott, and very early on, his father decided to move the family to France, even though they knew no one there and spoke no French. His father left first to procure a job and an apartment, and for a while life was fairly normal. Gerard learned the language easily and committed himself to his studies. One gets the impression that he was an accepted and excellent student, though somewhat of a loner, he says, due to the embarrassment he felt over his German accent. At the "Lycee", he experienced no anti-Semitism.

In the eighth grade, (1940?) on the first day that the Jews were required to wear the yellow star, he remembers the teacher calling all the students together and warning them that he knew each and every student, and if there was any anti-Semitic behavior in his class, he, war or no war, would inform the headmaster, and make it impossible for that student to sit for the Baccalaureat exam, thus ruining his future. Gerard recounted how the teacher looked at the class and proclaimed that day a 'day of shame for France'.

Gerard remembers the round up of the Jews in Paris, the 20,000 who went to Auschwitz. He has a faint memory of a friend of the family who joined the Judenrat, and either tried to warn the family when possible of danger or informed on them. He is uncertain. On October 22, that same year, at eight in the

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morning, both his parents were deported to Drancy before his eyes. He never heard from them again. As rehearsed, he ran out the back door through a hole in the fence that his father and he had prepared, which connected to a neighbor's house. He moved a few times and was hidden by several friends of his family for the duration of the war, first in Paris for a short time, then outside Paris in Versailles by a woman who he believed was protected by the Prefect of Police. His life stayed fairly stable because of the structure of the French school system, which maintained its firm structure in spite of the war.

At the end of the war, a relative in St. Louis, MO sent for him. He continued his education in the United States, and eventually became a professor at Berkeley, where, at the time of the interview, he still worked.