

-TITLE-EDITH PERLMAN  
-I\_DATE-SEPTEMBER 5, 1990  
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-MODERATE (IN FIRST PART SOUND FLICKERS)  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-GOOD  
-DURATION-1 HOUR 45 MINUTES  
-LANGUAGES-  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
-TITLE-

1:01:20 Edith Perlman was born in Vienna on May 5, 1923. Her mother and father were both Czech. Edith's father worked as a travelling salesman. In 1932, when Edith was 9 years old, her father died of kidney failure. Edith grew up with her mother and her sister who is 6 years older (lives in Marin County.)

1:03:50 Edith says she has tried to block a lot of the memories of Austria from her mind. She remembers being a happy girl. Edith was very athletic; she liked to swim, ski, and hike in the Vienna woods. Edith has lived in San Francisco since 1945, when she had to run away. She never has felt fully at home in the U.S. and says that she would have been happier living in Europe.

1:06:45 Edith explains that she has stayed in the U.S. because of the few relatives that are here such as her 45 year old daughter and her sister. Edith's sister, who lives in Marin County, went through the same kind of experience as Edith but in a very different way. Edith and her sister were together until 1942 when Edith left her sister in Nice (S. France) where they arrived after many other destinations. Edith's sister came to the U.S. in 1949-50, with her husband and son, after being liberated by the American troops.

1:08:15 In March 1938, when Hitler came to occupy Austria, Edith remembers a couple very bad experiences in Vienna. One day, Edith and her sister were taken by the SS or Gestapo and forced to scrub paint off a monument. At this point Edith's mother realized that they needed to get out of Vienna. Because they had Czech passports, they were able to leave more easily. Edith and her sister went alone to Milan, Italy. Her mother remained in Vienna to store the furniture and then went to join them in Italy.

1:11:20 In 1938, Edith and her family went to Paris, France where they stayed for one year during the time that the war broke out. Edith was disappointed that she was unable to attend high school. She lived as a refugee in Paris. Because of the war, people told them that it was unsafe to stay in Paris. First they spent 7 months in Toulouse, then went to the Coastal town of Nice. Edith liked living in Nice better than the other places.

1:13:25 Since they were refugees, their living conditions were pretty bad. Edith hated Toulouse because there were rats where they lived. Nice was better because they lived in a small apartment which had two small burners for cooking. Rations began in Nice and food was very hard to attain. As a teenager, Edith was given more food than adults. In Paris, Edith was forced into beauty school which she didn't like. The schooling enabled her to find work in Nice as a beautician. Other than this money, Edith's family as well as other refugees were supported by donations from certain Committees.

1:15:25 During the Vichy Government, things began to get very bad. Jewish people started being deported to concentration camps. One day, in 1942, Edith was riding her bike to the beauty salon when she saw a whole bunch of people who had been stopped by the police and were showing their papers. Edith was scared and ran away. She found out later that they were rounding up Jews.. At this time nobody knew about Auschwitz and the idea of death camps.

1:17:25 Edith decided that she wasn't going to stay in Nice. She told her mother that they had better get out or they were going to be sent to the concentration camps. Edith's mother didn't think anything was going to happen and didn't feel the need to run away. After the bike experience, Edith felt that she had better leave Nice. Edith knew someone who told her about an underground group who was taking people across the Pyrenees into Spain. Edith sold her bike and took her savings from work in order to pay for this trip. Edith's mother thought she was crazy. But Edith felt that she was lucky to have escaped the concentration camp this time and that if she didn't now she wouldn't be so lucky next time. People didn't know what the concentration camps were but they feared them.

1:20:00 Edith went on this journey by herself. Edith remembers walking with a group of people. She had one small suitcase and no money at all. They walked for three days over the mountains in extremely hot weather. They were all given espadrilles for the trip. They finally arrived at some place where they took a train to Barcelona. Edith was given addresses of Jewish committees in Barcelona that would take care of her. Edith contacted a Jewish man who she stayed with for seven weeks. He warned her not to go out on the streets or she would get picked up. Edith was young and in Spain; she took some chances because she wanted to see Barcelona.

1:23:20 The man wanted to get Edith out of Spain and into Portugal where it was supposed to be much more safe. This man got Edith a false passport. On the train, she was picked up because they realized that she carried a false passport. Edith was sent to a military prison, in Fuente Rabia (ph). She had no food and became extremely ill. Edith was scared that they would send her back to France.

1:26:45 There were Germans all over this town. Edith decided to ask the soldiers if she could go on walks. They agreed and gave her a couple of soldiers to walk with her. On one of the walk, Edith saw a parked car with an English license plate. She went to them and told them that she was a prisoner/ refugee, and asked for their help. One man was from the British consulate and the other was from the American red Cross. Edith felt very lucky. These men agreed to help Edith.

1:29:00 Edith is sure that if she hadn't of met these men, she would have been sent back to France. One of the men in charge, a spaniard, was especially nasty and would tell her that nobody wanted Jewish people in Spain and that she should go back to where she came from. Edith pleaded for them to let her stay in Spain. One day the British and American man came in a black Chevrolet and took her out of the prison. Edith explains that they had some kind of authority. Edith was so happy that these men brought food and soap with them.

1:30:10 They took Edith to a place on the Coast where she had a wonderful meal and night's sleep at a hotel. She was so happy to have her first real meal in weeks. They brought her to a small town where she stayed in a boarding house for three months while they tried to get her papers so that she could go to Portugal. Edith remembers the boarding house as having cockroaches and terrible food.

1:33:30 There were other refugees in the boarding house. Edith met a young man who had relatives in the U.S. He was interested in Edith and wanted her to come to New York with him. Edith didn't like him and therefore passed on his proposition. At this time, Edith's Aunt, who lived in New York, was trying to get Edith a Visa to come to the U.S. She eventually got a Visa to get to Portugal.

1:36:10 Edith spent 3-4 months in Madrid where she obtained her visa for the U.S. Edith is not sure who took care of all this, her Aunt or the British man, but it was all taken care of. There were many Nazis in Madrid and Edith was scared that she would be sent back to France and then to the concentration camps.

1:38:10 Edith finally went to Lisbon where she obtained a Visa for Canada. They were letting a certain amount of people go to Canada throughout the duration of the war. And because Edith had a Czech passport she was enabled to get a Visa. Edith had a horrible experience in Lisbon. She became very sick and ended up in the hospital for a few days. She was supposed to take a boat which would go to Montreal, Canada via New York but she missed the boat. Edith realizes now that her illness was the result of psychological stress because of all that she had experienced.

1:41:20 Edith stayed in Lisbon for three months. It was not a bad experience. It was a beautiful city and she made friends with other refugees. There were many people who were waiting to take the six week boat trip to either Canada or the U.S. Edith finally made her boat to the U.S. She arrived in New York and was surprised that her aunt was not there to meet her. Edith was very frightened in New York. She felt that she had been very brave considering her age but that this big city was just too much for her. Years later, Edith explains, she suffered many psychological problems from her experiences and constant fear.

1:44:38 Edith first learned about Hitler on television in 1938. She remembers being frightened.

1:45:45 Edith remembers instability in Vienna after Dolfa (ph) was assassinated in 1937.

1:48:45 Edith felt some anti-semitism. She explains that the Jews were always looked down on in Vienna. Edith first felt anti-semitism among her classmates in school. The Jews and non-Jews didn't mix. Edith remembers that she envied the aryan girls who had long hair that they could wear in braids. These girls, Edith explains, were anti-semitic; they didn't want anything to do with the Jews.

1:51:00 Edith had one close friend at school named Reton (ph). Edith doesn't know what happened to her friend. Edith doesn't know very many survivors of the holocaust. She had a couple cousins who fled to Australia and an aunt who went to San Francisco. The aunt committed suicide shortly after Edith arrived in San Francisco.

1:53:00 Edith remembers masses of Nazis in the streets shouting. She knew from the beginning that they were against the Jews but didn't know the extent of the hate. Edith didn't know any soldiers or non-Jews. As soon as Hitler came, Edith realized that she and her family had to get out of there. Edith was running away for seven years, from 1938 to 1945.

1:55:35 Edith didn't know any other people who were leaving Austria. Edith's mother took a few weeks to put away the furniture; she thought that the whole thing would blow over and that they would soon return to Vienna. Edith's mother thought that France would surely be safe. When Edith left, she knew that the concentration camps were bad places but had no idea that they would become death camps. Edith's mother was killed at Auschwitz in 1943.

2:00:00 Due to the shortage of food in France, they began rationing programs. Edith remembers that during the war time there was no decent food.

2:00:45 In Vienna, Edith lived in an apartment on the fourth floor. She remembers a couple soldiers coming to take Edith and her sister to a monument in front of a pharmacy. (experience already explained earlier in less detail) They were yelled at and harassed as they were forced to scrub the paint off of these monuments. Edith explains that they created busy work just to degrade people.

2:04:20 France and Spain were just as bad as Austria because, Edith explains, Hitler was everywhere. Only Portugal and Switzerland were neutral grounds and it was very difficult to get there.

2:05:30 In Paris, an Organization paid for Edith to attend Beauty school. She never finished because she was forced to run away. Edith hated beauty school and had wanted to study medicine. Edith feels that she could have done a lot of things in her life but because of the events that occurred, she didn't even make it past high school.

2:07:12 Edith had a hard time forming relationships because she was constantly running away. Because of her status as a refugee she was forced to be isolated. In Paris the food was not bad. When Edith went to the South of France food was harder to obtain. There were huge lines at the black market and that was only available for people who had lots of money.

2:11:30 In Nice the police came looking for Edith. The landlady warned Edith not to come back for a few days because her name was on a deportation list. Edith slept on roof tops for awhile.

2:13:50 Edith received some help from people such as the man who told her about getting across to Spain, however, she feels that she mostly relied on herself. Edith remembers how beautiful it was as she walked across the Pyrenees.

2:15:25 People were frightened in Nice. They knew that sooner or later they would be taken to concentration camps. Being a Jew and a refugee, it was impossible to lead a normal life. Edith feels that her Czech passport was her ticket to the U.S. She knew people with money and even they were unable to find a way out.

2:19:30 Edith explains that people listen to her story but not for a long time. They often are amazed at how she escaped three countries: Austria, France, and Spain. Edith claims that the French people were just as anti-semitic as the Austrians. The Spanish were a little better however, they also collaborated with Hitler. Edith relates Hitler's politics to the recent war in Iraq.

2:24:00 Edith didn't meet many non-jewish people. In France, she was friends with a non-jewish boy. Edith was scared of being picked up and asked his family if she could stay with them. Edith says that they refused because they were anti-Semitic.

2:27:00 When Edith came to the U.S. she was very alone. Her aunt was crazy and didn't want Edith to live in her apartment. Edith was poor and had no decent means to make a living. Edith ended up marrying someone who, she feels, she wouldn't have married under other circumstances. She ended up having a divorce. She married again later to a man who had a heart attack and died a few years after they married.

2:31:00 When Edith crossed the Pyrenees, she got food at a farm in the Pyrenees. It was the last decent meal that she ate for a long time. In Spain she ate mainly beans and oranges. There were 4-5 people on the journey. The guide was a spaniard who Edith doesn't remember at all. Edith didn't trust anyone.

2:33:15 Edith, as a young girl travelling by herself, did encounter some problems. People tried to make advances towards her. Edith describes herself as having been very prude and innocent.

2:37:40 In the Spanish military prison, Edith was extremely sick. She remembers having no food and feeling very alone. There were soldiers everywhere. There were a few other french women prisoners with Edith.

2:40:35 Edith learned fluent Spanish in the prison. Edith doesn't know why the guards didn't interfere when she began talking to the British and American man. Three days after Edith saw them, the men came and took her away with no problem from the camp.

2:44:25 Nobody knew about Auschwitz and Treblinka. People only knew that there were concentration camps and had only heard of Dachau by name.

2:45:10 Edith didn't ever see the British and American men again. She thinks that the American Red Cross helped get her to the U.S.  
.END.