

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

RG-50.477\*0657

Name of Interviewee: Amkraut, Alfred

Date of Interview: 3/18/1993

Alfred Amkraut was born on September 21, 1926 in Saarbruecken (Saarbrücken), Germany. Alfred was raised in an Orthodox Jewish home near the town's synagogue. Alfred attended elementary school in Saarbruecken before moving to Frankfurt at the age of nine to live with his aunt and uncle and to continue his education at the main Jewish school. A few weeks prior to Kristallnacht, Alfred and his relatives, along with other Polish nationals living in Germany, were transported to the German-Polish border by the SS. They eventually returned to Germany, whereupon Alfred's uncles and father were taken to Buchenwald. After the events of Kristallnacht, Alfred's family applied for visas to Central and South America, and the family left for South America in July 1939. Though there was a tight-knit Jewish community in La Paz, Alfred still felt ostracized while living in Bolivia and never experienced a sense of freedom until he came to the United States.

### Summary Version 2

**Name of interviewee:** Amkraut, Alfred

**Date of interview:** 3/18/1993

**Summary:** Alfred Amkraut was born on September 21, 1926 in Saarbruecken, Germany. Both of his parents, Jonas and Clara, were natives of Poland. Clara had moved to Frankfurt, Germany with her family when she was about 17 or 18 and Jonas came to Saarbruecken after the First World War. Alfred grew up surrounded by a large family. In addition to his parents and older sister, Alfred had grandparents and three aunts who lived in Saarbruecken with their families. Alfred also had many aunts, uncles and cousins living in Frankfurt. Jonas and Clara, who ran a business selling materials (primarily textiles), raised their family in an Orthodox Jewish home, only three blocks from the town's synagogue. Jonas' father, Benjamin, had been a Chasidic Jew and Jonas himself received his education in a Hungarian yeshiva. The family attended religious services every week, although neither Jonas nor Benjamin were particularly comfortable in the German synagogue and preferred the traditions of the Eastern European Jews. Alfred remembered that, during his childhood in Saarbruecken, he was very separated from Gentiles, and that only when he came to the States did he begin to interact with non-Jews.

Alfred attended elementary school in Saarbruecken through the fourth grade before moving in with his aunt and uncle in Frankfurt at the age of nine (1935) to continue his education at the main Jewish school there. Alfred described the Jewish school in Frankfurt as very strict – the students attended

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classes six days a week and spent a good deal of time studying the Talmud. Even in 1935, as anti-Semitism began to grow, Alfred did not feel in danger or particularly uncomfortable living in Frankfurt. During any free time that he had that he did not spend reading, Alfred would borrow one of his cousins' bikes and go on rides around the outskirts of the city. During his vacations from school, he would travel with his mother, sister and a couple of aunts and cousins to the beaches in France or Belgium or the mountains of Alsace. He recalled one trip to Paris in 1937, the year that the city hosted the World's Fair.

The atmosphere in Frankfurt changed dramatically in 1937/1938 with the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws and the events of Kristallnacht. A few weeks prior to Kristallnacht, Alfred and his relatives, along with all the other Polish citizens living in Germany, were picked up by the SS and transported to the German-Polish border. They were loaded on a train, carrying suitcases filled with all their belongings, and taken to the Polish border, where Alfred met up with his parents. At that point, they were led through an underground passage (which undoubtedly ran into Poland) for two days before the Germans told them to go back home (to Germany). The transport apparently stopped because the Poles began transporting German citizens across the border into Germany. Not all of Alfred's family returned to Germany, however. His aunt and her family and an uncle stayed in Poland, where they were caught and killed later in the war.

Two weeks after they returned from Poland, Alfred's father was picked up in Saarbruecken on Kristallnacht while two of Alfred's uncles, who were stateless, were taken to Buchenwald. At this time, Alfred was still living with an aunt in Frankfurt and he only learned about his father once his mother arrived at her sister's house in hysterics. Jonas was released a few days later, but his entire right side was black and blue from being beaten by the Germans in the streets of Saarbruecken. After Kristallnacht, it became obvious to Alfred's family that they had to leave Germany, so they began to apply for visas to Central and South America. Their visas came through to Bolivia (they had help from Alfred's uncle's brother who was living in La Paz at the time) and the family left for South America in July of 1939. Alfred remembered feeling guilty about traveling on a Saturday until his father insisted that "this is to save your life" and it was thus acceptable to break the Jewish law.

Once in Bolivia, Alfred, who had studied Spanish while in Germany, acted as translator for his parents when dealing with immigration, customs and apartment rentals. His parents set up a business in La Paz like the one they ran in Saarbruecken and Alfred attended the American school there until his dad died in 1941 and the family could no longer afford the tuition. Alfred never stopped feeling oppressed while living in Bolivia. He recalled the natives as being very xenophobic, but because all the foreigners were Jews, the xenophobia came off as anti-Semitism. Alfred said that, despite the tight-knit Jewish community in La Paz, he felt ostracized in Bolivia and never experienced a sense of freedom until he came to the United States.

\*Note: the tape cuts off far before the interview is complete. The video does not record any of Alfred's story of his life after Bolivia, in the United States.

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