Interview with HENRY AND BETTY FREUND

Holocaust Oral History Project

Date: 12/13/89 Place: San Francisco, CA

Transcriber: Julie Michelle Jones

Q: SO BETTY, WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

BETTY: I was born in Vienna, Austria, March 11, 1911.

Q: AND HENRY WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

HENRY: In Italy, Plato in the Tuscany not far away from Florence.

Q: WHEN?

HENRY: 1901, January 6th.

Q: NOW HENRY, I'LL START WITH YOU. HOW BIG WAS YOUR FAMILY? HOW MANY PEOPLE?

HENRY: The family four. We have two brothers.

Q: AND WERE YOU RELIGIOUS? WERE YOU VERY JEWISH, YOUR FAMILY? DID YOU GO TO SYNAGOGUE?

HENRY: Oh yes, absolutely, yes. You want to know how we got to Austria?

Q: YEAH. [interviewer is motioning to Betty] WHAT WERE YOU GOING TO SAY?

BETTY: [talking to Henry] She wanted to know if your parents were religious. You didn't understand her. [Henry is hard of hearing]

HENRY: No, no, we couldn't. There was no possibility. My father was very very sick, polio sick. I never saw him walking. He passed away 1960 and he's born Modling, Austria.

Q: NOW WHEN DID YOU GO TO AUSTRIA? YOU WERE BORN IN ITALY?

HENRY: Yeah.

Q: AND WHEN DID YOU GO TO AUSTRIA?

HENRY: When my father got so sick that he had to give up his job there. He worked for big company in Plato, it was called infabriconi and the doctor recommended some cures, cold water cures. What did they know, you know, 50 years ago. So that's how we got to Austria to Modling. Why to Modling? Because in Modling there was some family related to my mother and that's how we got there in about, I guess, 1906, 1905.

I went to grammar school in Modling and that's where I learned German. We talked Italian at home and Czech.

Q: WHAT WAS GROWING UP LIKE? WHAT WAS YOUR TOWN LIKE?
WHAT WAS YOUR LIFE LIKE? SCHOOL? SHOPS? IN AUSTRIA, WHAT WAS
LIFE LIKE BEFORE THE WAR?

HENRY: [Henry speaks in German to Betty]

Q: [interviewer speaks to Betty] ACTUALLY, IF YOU'D RATHER ASK THE QUESTIONS. WHAT I'M TRYING TO GET IS LIFE BEFORE THE WAR.

BETTY: [talking to Henry] She wants to know how you grew

up in Modling.

HENRY: What?

BETTY: How you grow up in Modling. Your life story in Modling. Your schooling, your friends.

Q: [speaking to Betty] YOU CAN ASK HIM IN GERMAN IF YOU'D LIKE. WE WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR LIFE BEFORE THE WAR.

HENRY: Oh, okay. We went to Modling and I remember first we took some apartment in Modling and, then there was a time that we moved, then was a time that my parents decided to buy a house and they found a house. However, certain repairs had to be done on the house and I believe there was about two or three weeks and for those two or three we moved into a hotel called the Rettle Hotel and then we moved to that house, 173 house number 41 and my mother took care of our father.

It was not a nice childhood really, you know, to see all these things. Then I went to school, grammar school and so on and we lived there amongst non-Jews. There were no Jews in the neighborhood they were downtown and we got along very very fine. The neighbor to the left was Gutenburger. They had vineyards and they had the stables with cows and porks and chickens and everything. And my mother bought the milk from them and when in the morning Mrs. Gutenburger would go to the fence and shout 2/3 - 2/4 the milk is here." So my mother went to the fence and got the milk and sometimes she would say, "I'm

sorry. We have no milk, the cow is sick." So we didn't have any sometimes we had goat milk.

But I believe we lived a very healthy life. It was in the country. We had a nice little yard and the house was for us. Dad couldn't walk. He was laying down all day long and then we bought a $\ell \psi = 0$

BETTY: Wheelchair.

HENRY: But he was a very smart man and he helped us in studying and even all my colleagues used to come to our house to get tutored by him. So I went to the grammar school and then

. It was three years then one more, I think, four. One was $2 \sqrt{3} - 2 \sqrt{4}$ and myself that was all. Everything Catholic. The whole school had about, I guess, 350 students and there were about 18 Jews amongst them and that's it.

I did quite well in school I was always ambitious to do the best I could. And there was a fellow over there in school \mathcal{N} , a Catholic, and believe it or not I still correspond with him. I just got a Christmas card yesterday from him and he writes on the Christmas card -- the picture on that Christmas card is made by Haunce Esinger. He was a schoolmate of me, too. He was a painter, an academic painter and a professor. So I got the card. I can show it to you. [Henry gets out card to show interviewer]

Q: THAT'S BEAUTIFUL.

HENRY: [showing back of card] See that's his name.

[camera takes close-up of the front of the card]

BETTY: We just got it yesterday.

Q: AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED? THEN WHAT HAPPENED AFTER

HIGH SCHOOL? [Henry has a hard time hearing] AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

After high school I want to go and study HENRY: engineering, especially bridge engineering. I was so enthused about bridges; however, I could not do it. I had to stop because there was no money here. I had to go start earning something and I had a little job in a leather store. The owner was Jewish, Kaufman and in the store I remember I had to sell leather for shoes and I learn how to cut the soles and the leather for the upper parts. So I was about a half a year, three forths of a year there. And then I got very sick and the doctor said, "You have to go to a certain place out of Modling, called Garden. was, I believe, run by the Red Cross and I was undernourished. You know that I went around sometimes with some other kids. went to the stores and they had in bells plum jam, black, in bells and we got in it and we stole it. I had something to eat. [Henry appears to be upset and ready to cry]

Q: HENRY --

HENRY: So I got too sick that lung 377

BETTY: Tuberculosis.

HENRY: I lost so much weight and Dr. Schwartz send me over to that % and I was there amongst some -- about 20 people and there, you know, I got to eat and then I got all right. I had a good nature it seems and then I went to the doctor and the doctor said to me, "Henry," he says, "there is no job for you to stay in the leather store. You know what we do?" He says, "I send you to a very rich man. They have a boy." [Henry is crying]

Q: DO WE HAVE ANY KLENEX, JOHN?

HENRY: "And he is seven years old and they need a young man who loves -- who loves -- who loves nature [Henry is crying] and who's honest." And so I got to the house $\psi \phi$ in the $\psi \phi \phi$ and that's just a little place not far away about two or three miles from Modling and there, you know, the morning I came I took care of the boy. I went for hikes and for walks, helped him in the school mathematics.

There were two girls, Ruth and Nettle. They were still smaller and they took — they took me in like a son.

[Henry is crying] So I was there about half a year and then one day comes Mr. Ficher. I never met him before and he watched me awhile and then he says, "Listen, that is not job for you. On April the 1st, in two weeks, you come to Vienna and you come and you see my manager at that place

And so I got into the hardware business and that

was my -- my life savings. I worked hard, Sundays, Saturdays. So then one day the man who took care of a cartel bureau for two companies. One was called Sushly and one was 475 and thev had an office in Vienna, on the first district and there was a gentleman there, a German, and he took care of too much of girls. He took too much of gambling, so they throw him out and Mr. Ficher recommended me and I took over there and they thought the best would be to make me an expert manager and I was the expert manager for that bureau, a cartel bureau for two companies. in 1929 Mr. Ficher came to me says, "Henry, you will go the to Balkins and pick up business." But I tell you one thing, if you don't do right, you were last time there. So I said to myself, well if I say no, I won't go. If I say yes and take a chance, maybe everything was right.

so I went and I did very well and for the next eight, nine years, I was traveling six months out of every year in the Balkins, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania. I came into Poland, Czechoslovakia and that's the reason on my last -- my last travel was on February 13, 1938. I left Modling and Vienna to travel to Budapest and I had an agent there by the name of by and I remember the next day he invited me to lunch at home, to his home and we are setting there and listening to the radio and these terrible messages came about Sushnick, Hitler, these kind of things.

Okay, from Budapest I went Yugoslavia to Belgrade. I did very well in Belgrade and then I take the night train, it was about 11th of May to Novi Sad. A town near the Hungarian boarder, a big town in Yugoslavia. I had some very big customers there. I remember one named 547. He was the biggest and I used to go certain hotel and I arrived always at midnight and this time I came and lights were on and people on the street and I couldn't figure that out the reason they told me. Hitler is in Vienna. It hits me like a rock.

The next day I go into the customer. I'm like dazed. I didn't know what I'm doing. I went to the street. I didn't know what I doing. I did some business. I sent it back to Vienna. Then from Novi Sad I had to travel another town and then I went to Romania to Bucharest. Bucharest I used as a headquarter. From Bucharest I went to different towns in Romania like ψv , satu Mare, $\psi v v$ and some and then one day I got the letter from the office from a Commissioner $\psi v v v$, engineer and he writes me, "I'm sorry to tell you, but you are fired."

Now I had an authorization to collect money from the customers and that's how I get so I could live on. I lived in hotels, then I couldn't afford it any more so I looked for a room and I remember it was a very old man and his daughter. She wasn't too young either and he was a refugee from Russia from

Leningrad. So I had a room there and I tell you everywhere you go in the Balkins mostly one thing you find right away is bed bugs. I had -- I had cases that I lay down and suddenly I hear droppings. The bed bugs would run up the ceiling and drop themselves down. So I used this kind of -- I don't know, liquids and thing like that, but it didn't help. You get used to everything.

And then I went to Chanawits from Bucharest and we had sales agency called Mortiz Green. Nice, nice man. He had a daughter. She got married and she married a lawyer, an attorney and I got talking to him and he said, "Henry," says, "Where were you born?" I says, "In Italy." He says, "You are safe if you get an affidavit from American you can go right away. The quota is open."

So anyway, I started -- I had a cousins here Erma Caufman. She really started the whole thing. She had a sister in Chicago, Leiberman, and these two women they try to get me out and get me in America. There were naturally troubles to get the affidavit. They didn't work out too well and it wasn't right, they had to be returned and so on and so on, but I could work on my brother too because my mother, if you get an affidavit for Carl, we can get him out of the house. So I did the best I could, you know, to get my affidavit and my brother's. Then one day everything clicked and I got my affidavit and I got

from Anglo California In San Francisco a letter of credit for twelve hundred dollars, that was money put up by my cousin. You know how I felt? [Henry is very upset] I felt like I be a billionaire.

Q: HENRY, WHEN WAS THAT? WHEN?

HENRY: I came to america in May 1939, so it was during April/May of 1939. I was away from Vienna a year, a little over a year. And I got letters from my mother all the time. We wrote each other. I have hundreds of letters at home, incredible. I don't know how to do it anymore, how to keep them and how to file them. And she wrote me everything. She write me about my brother, about Kristallnacht, about all these terrible things, about people who come to the house to look for me and they couldn't find me and they wanted to know where I am. She naturally wouldn't say that.

So anyway, I had the affidavit and my boss he fled to Paris and he opened up a little shop making the same merchandise that we made in Vienna, hardware for furnitures. And he writes me, "Henry, will you come to Paris, you work for me?" So I was — then the son was here, so we two went out getting business. We went to the cabinet makers in Paris to sell furniture hardware. I talk quite well French and one day I say, no I think I go. I had the money. I paid everything for myself. I never asked for anybody and on the Normandy from the harbor I

took off. Was a beautiful four days on that ship and I arrived in New York on 13th of May, always on the 13's and I had some friends there from Modling. Rosenbaum there, has clothing store.

BETTY: Rosenswag.

Modling and he said, "Henry, I got a room for you." So I was a week in New York. Then my cousin in Chicago, she wanted to see me so I went to Chicago and was over there about two, three weeks but I didn't like it too well. I didn't like Chicago. And my cousin from San Francisco wrote me letters, "Don't stay in Chicago, come to San Francisco." So went there with the Challenge to San Francisco and arrived on the 13th.

Q: SO YOU HAVE BEEN IN SAN FRANCISCO -- YOU HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE 1939?

HENRY: Yeah, since 1939. So I had some catalogs I made for the company in Vienna and some literature and I went around in San Francisco from one hardware wholesaler to another to get a job. Very hard to get, so I even cleaned apartments. They looked like -- terrible! I won't tell you what it was and what I had to do for a fellow, a Jewish fellow named, Stein and he gave me little pocket money and I could eat at his place, but I didn't want to stay, you know, with them and I went around looking for a job in hardware business.

So one day I went to a store, to a wholesaler on

First Street, Sutton was his name. It was an agency for the Morris Drill Company back East. He says, "Why don't you see Sorbach at Newsbaum on Fourteenth Street. Okay, I went there and there was a girl, the secretary and she said, "There's nobody here. They are all gone, come tomorrow." So I went tomorrow and I met a gentleman named Sorbach and right away he could use me. So I got the job there. Then later on I met Mr. Newsbaum and I tell you, he was a Jewish man. I had the feeling the he doesn't like me too much. He didn't like refugees, I guess, or something. I don't know. But anyway, I stood there and I was there for 43 years. Both partners died, someone else took over and the company name was now Newsbaum and Levy and these both gentlemen here in San Francisco. I was there until 1980 and a year later they sold out.

Q: AMAZING. WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY? YOUR MOTHER? YOUR FATHER? YOUR BROTHER?

HENRY: Oh, okay. My brother was caught in Dachau. Family got him out and he went to Chicago and that's where he stopped. He worked as a, I think, sheet metal worker for a company who made these newspaper stands and he did quite well financially, much better than I did. And then finally he got a job at Marshal Field in the fur department and he was connected with furs in Vienna. So he was there for quite a few years until he retired.

And every second year they came to San Francisco and they stayed with us. He has a son. My mother was taken away as few times to Vienna then back and so on, finally from Vienna she was deported to Riga and that was the last I ever heard. According to the Vienna City Government Registration Camp, she past away over there in '45 and they gave me the date and that's the last I ever heard. I tried to get in touch with Riga to find out what happened to all the Jews. Are they buried there? Is there a cemetery there? Is there something there? I wrote to a Rabbi, but I never got an answer. Now, I guess, there's a possibility now to get more information because of all the things happening now.

I have a son, he is in San Francisco.

Q: HENRY, ABOUT YOUR FATHER?

HENRY: My father died in nineteen hundred and thirty. He was not quite 70 years old and he's buried in Modling. In '78 we went back. I went to my neighbors. I met them and we worked for few days in a cemetery cleaning up the grave, cutting the bushes and the administrator of the Catholic cemetery was a very nice man. He gave me the tools, a saw, a hoe and everything I needed. His name is Rudolph Grassel and you wouldn't believe it, since ? 962 that time I sent him every Christmas I send him 300 Austrian shillings. I just mailed him a letter yesterday. And I know he's taken care of.

Q: I AM SURE HE IS. I'M SURE HE IS.

HENRY: My brother was there before myself and he put a placque for my mother on the same headstone.

Q: THAT'S NICE. BETTY, NOW I'M GOING TO TALK TO YOUR WIFE. YOU SIT BACK AND RELAX FOR A FEW MINUTES. BETTY, WHY DON'T YOU START OUT -- WE'LL JUST START OUT THE SAME WAY AGAIN. WHERE WERE YOU BORN AND HOW MANY PEOPLE IN YOUR FAMILY?

BETTY: I born in Vienna. Do you need the date too? Oh, that's touchy.

Q: GIVE US WHATEVER DATE YOU'D LIKE.

BETTY: March 11, 1911.

Q: YOU'D NEVER KNOW IT, YOU'D NEVER KNOW IT. AND HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE IN YOUR FAMILY, BETTY?

BETTY: We were five children and my parents, my bother and four sisters.

Q: WHAT WAS YOU HOME LIFE LIKE, RELIGIOUS? WAS IT RELIGIOUS?

BETTY: Very religious.

Q: How much religious?

BETTY: It was very religious, almost orthodox and we went to synagogue and Sunday school, Hebrew lessons tutoring and private lessons at home.

Q: WHAT WAS YOUR FATHER'S BUSINESS?

BETTY: We were in like House of Fabrics is

something -- but not in a big scale, a smaller same idea as House of Fabrics is.

O: AND DID YOU GO TO A JEWISH SCHOOL?

BETTY: No, no. I went to |0|0 grammar and we had a middle school and called |0|0 and I didn't want to go on studying. I was a very good student but I wanted to be in business. So I went to |0|7 school that's where you work languages, typing bookkeeping, that is my profession, I'm bookkeeping. Seventeen years old I started my first job.

O: WHAT WAS IT?

BETTY: I started all bookkeeping correspondent and correspondents and I could use my French, too and I learn English, of course, too. We had to take two languages we had to take.

Q: NOW WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP, DID YOU FEEL ANY ANTISEMITISM WHEN YOU WERE GROWING UP IN VIENNA?

BETTY: Yes.

Q: COULD YOU -- DO YOU REMEMBER ANY EXAMPLES THAT WOULD SHOW PEOPLE HOW IT WAS?

BETTY: You know we didn't -- I had really -- kids in school were very nice, but of course, we always lived in our own circle only in business. My father and mother, you know, had contact with and lots of non-Jewish people but we didn't experience anything there either, but on the streets and these kids.

Q: WOULD THEY THINGS?

BETTY: Yes, called me Sarah, Sarah. There was no reason. When we played together, Sarah, Sarah. It didn't, at that time, mean that much to us.

Q: AND NOW WHAT HAPPENED AFTER -- LET'S SEE, YOU WERE IN SCHOOL AND YOU GOT YOUR FIRST JOB, THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

BETTY: After my first job, my sister got married, one of my sisters got married and I tookover her job because this job they were dissolving the company where I worked before. I tookover my sister's job in the same line, House of Fabrics. I always liked that line and I stayed there until '38.

Q: AND THEN WHAT HAPPENED IN '38?

BETTY: In '38 the people had to close their store and I was without a job and no possibility whatsoever. So we had to try to get out too, my whole family.

I was dating my husband at the time in Vienna, you know, so America came up, of course, because he had his visa to come here we never could get together because he never went back to Vienna after March 11, 1938 so we tried to get together somehow. So I applied rather late at the American Consulate for my visa and -- but it took too long to wait, times were dangerous and I had left people, cleaned the streets and robbed and in the meantime my brother was taken to a concentration camp so we have lots of possibility to go to England on a domestic permit, so I

choose that. I have to wait in England for my America visa. I have a picture if you would like to see that. Want to see it now?

Q: SURE. LET'S DO THE PICTURES AT THE END, THAT WOULD BE GOOD.

BETTY: And in England I waited, it was ten months

towns. Very very nice people, he was revern from Oxford somewhere. He treated me marvelous and that's where I have shelter while waiting for my visa until it finally came.

Q: THEN WHAT HAPPENED, IT CAME?

BETTY: It came.

Q: WHEN WAS THAT?

BETTY: That was in '39, March '39. Now I had no money to come go America. I had only four dollars I was allowed to take but some how through the -- she helped me in England there was a Bloomsberry House, they help refugees and I got my ticket to America and I came on a commercial furnace liner. It was one of the last ships before it was sunk by a U-boat. It took me two weeks from Liverpool to Novascotcia, Halifax Novascotcia.

Q: WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY?

BETTY: Well, thank God we all met, but then I had to have one thing that was very important. I had to have an affidavit to go to America. My parents had some cousins who provided some visa affidavit, but they couldn't do any more but strange people

I never met before. I kept writing letters from -- and they sent me an affidavit to America when I came here to Chicago and visited them. The people didn't know me and I didn't know them, that was in Chicago. My parents were saved, my brother was in concentration camps. My sister all went to England on domestic permits, too. We saw right away we had to get out of Vienna, otherwise we would have landed in the gas chambers.

Q: AND WHAT HAPPENED WITH YOUR BROTHER? WHERE WAS HE?

BETTY: He was in Dachau concentration camp and he was -
so relatives sent an affidavit for him but they couldn't do it,

four girls, it was too much for them so we had to rely on

strangers to help you.

Q: AND ONCE YOU GOT TO AMERICA, WHAT HAPPENED?

BETTY: Now I sitting in Boston from Novascotcia, went over to Boston. Now I needed a ticket to come to San Francisco to join him. My parents were in Chicago at that time already. They had no money. So I came across Boston to San Francisco by Greyhound bus but I stopped in Chicago for a couple days to see my parents. They said, you go on where your heart is and I continued on Greyhound. I arrived here, he was there after two years, two years we did not see each other.

Q: ARE YOU GLAD YOU MADE THE TRIP?

BETTY: Oh, my God. It was the best thing of my life.

Q: TELL ME A LITTLE ABOUT WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE IN VIENNA

BEFORE YOU LEFT? YOU MENTIONED IT WAS SCARY THAT --

BETTY: Terrible, it was terrible. We were afraid to get out of the house. They took people out from the streets.

Q: THE BROWN SHIRTS?

BETTY: Yes.

Q: AND NOW --

BETTY: We afraid to go on the streetcar. We just afraid to live.

Q: AFTER THE WAR WAS OVER WHEN YOU HEARD ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED WHAT WAS --

BETTY: You mean the World --

Q: AFTER WORLD WAR II? AFTER YOU HEARD ABOUT THE CAMPS AND THE EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS?

BETTY: Well, when we were in Vienna in '38, '39 we knew that was going -- ready to happen because it started happening in Vienna

o: YOU SENSED IT?

BETTY: Yeah and everything, you have to get out. You have to get out that's why we went to England

Q: YOU MOVED RELATIVES?

BETTY: Yes, aunts, uncles. The younger generation saved themselves a little bit like we did just to get out but my aunt and all the people are perished.

Q: NOW SINCE WORLD WAR II AND WHAT YOU HAD TO GO

THROUGH, DID YOU COME OUT -- IS THERE A GOD? DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD?

BETTY: Of course, of course.

Q: DO YOU FEEL VERY --

BETTY: Of course a little bit of luck too.

Q: WHAT DO YOU THINK THE REASON YOU SURVIVED? WAS IT LUCK?

BETTY: It was destiny. Yes destiny I believe so.

Q: WHAT ABOUT ISRAEL? HAVE YOU BEEN TO ISRAEL?

BETTY: No, the closest we came was when we were in Vienna but since we were out too long we traveled a little through Europe it was too late to go to Israel, so we'll go next year.

Q: ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC STORIES THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE IN VIENNA?

BETTY: Well, the way we met. We met on a skiing trip up in the Australian Alps at Christmas '35. I was with relatives up there and he was with friends there and that was destiny, too. It was his first time up there. I went there several times before and we met on the railroad station on the way home to Vienna from our Christmas vacation, separate of course, that's how we met, I think, that's it. I never started dating. We married in San Francisco. May 13, 1940 that -- 1290

Q: THERE'S SOMETHING TO IT.

BETTY: Well, that was the first we could get married. I

arrived on a Friday and 13th was a -- Monday was the earliest we could get married. We had to wait, you know, couple days for the blood test I believe whatever.

Q: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SAY? ANYTHING THAT YOU FEEL YOU LEARNED FROM THE WAR? DID IT MAKE YOU A DIFFERENT PERSON?

BETTY: Yes, of course it made me a different person. I look at life a little bit different. Of course, I was young then, you know.

Q: IN WHAT WAY BETTY?

BETTY: Take what you can and enjoy what you can. You never know because you went through so much hell in England. I never thought I would be in San Francisco when war broke out.

Q: YOU DIDN'T THINK YOU WOULD GET THE VISA?

BETTY: It was going to be late, it might be too late. I came here in May and war broke out on September 1st was very last. Of course, the journey across was -- it was terrible, but it was wonderful. I was looking forward to a new life

Q: I THINK THAT'S ABOUT ALL WE HAVE. OKAY, I WANT TO THANK YOU VERY MUCH. IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE?

BETTY: I think our story together makes the effect come out much better.

Q: YEAH, IT WAS WONDERFUL. VERY NICE OF YOU TO TELL YOUR STORY. THANK YOU, IT'S A GOOD STORY AND IT WILL HELP.

BETTY: Wish we did have -- I want to show you some pictures. [pictures shown by Henry and Betty]