

-TITLE-AXEL SCHLOSS  
-I DATE-MAY 1, 1990  
-SOURCE-SAN FRANCISCO ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
-RESTRICTIONS-  
-SOUND\_QUALITY-FAIR  
-IMAGE\_QUALITY-POOR  
-DURATION-1 HOUR 30 MINUTES  
-LANGUAGES-ENGLISH  
-KEY\_SEGMENT-  
-GEOGRAPHIC\_NAME-  
-PERSONAL\_NAME-  
-CORPORATE\_NAME-  
-KEY\_WORDS-  
-NOTES-  
-CONTENTS-  
-TITLE-

Childhood - 1990

0:02:19 Axel was born on January 21, 1933 in Plaven in Vogtland, Germany. He spoke very little about his childhood but remembers that approximately age 5, he was placed on a train and sent to Belgium. He believes his brother and sister were born in Berlin, where his father had worked in the department store Herman Tish.

0:02:21 His religious background was Orthodox, but somewhere between conservative and orthodox. He did not go to Sunday School but remembers having gone to synagogue with his father while in Germany. He was put on a child transport by his parents to go to Belgium in 1939. His parents attempted to cross over from Germany into Belgium several times, but have been caught by the Germans. He believes that his father's tefillin was cut up by the SS guards at the German border in 1939.

0:05:51 His older sister, age 10 and he, were placed on the train and sent to Brussels, Belgium. He remembers being on the train, coming to the German border, where he attempted to give some chocolates to the guards at the border, to the shock of the other children on the train. Once arriving in Brussels, he went to stay with an aunt and uncle. His sister went to stay with other relatives, but by the time he was ready to go to bed that first night, he carried on so badly that they got his sister from the other relatives and the four of them slept in 1 bed that night. He stayed with his aunt and uncle until his parents arrived in Brussels which he believes took a few months.

0:07:45 He said his parents lost most of their possessions trying to get over to Belgium. What ever they had in Belgium, they bought on the black market.

0:08:06 They stayed in an apartment in Brussels, that he says was awful. There were mice, and bed bugs. They were able to move to the Jewish community in Brussels somewhere near the train station where they stayed until the war started.

0:09:16 He said he was so young that he was unaware of any of the problems going on in the world and unaware of any problems with the Nazis. He started elementary school in Belgium, and went to the first grade. He remembers going to synagogue with his father a few times before the war began. He parents attempted to find jobs. His father was unable to find any job and his mother did some sewing jobs. He believes that they received some financial help from the Jewish community.

0:10:20 His mother provided most of the necessities for the family through the work that she was able to do. He did not notice any sort of anti-Semitism in the schools. He did indicated that he only went to the first grade and later on will explain that he was in the first grade for 5 years. So that when the war started the school stopped and he started the first grade again, after he was liberated, but he had to stop the first grade because of some fighting he believes a civil war of some type, was going on in Belgium, because he spoke German, they thought he was some sort of spy, so they kicked him out of the first grade, but then they sent him back to the first grade for some period.

0:11:45 He was in Brussels from 1939 to the fall of 1943. In the fall of 1943, he and his family were arrested and they were sent to a camp in Belgium. He believes Malines and from there his mother, sister and father were sent to Auschwitz.

0::12:47 He was selected to go to a farm camp with some other children in Belgium.

13:13:14 His parents stayed at the original camp until January and then he believes that they were sent to Auschwitz along with his sister.

0:13:49 He stayed at the camp until June 4, 1944 when he and the other children escaped from the farm camp. He said that they had been put into a barn/stable. This barn had a trap door that was originally apparently used to get rid of the manure from the stable animals which had been wired shut. Apparently some of the boys, not him, had removed the wire and opened the door and they escaped through that trap door.

0:14:37 The Germans had brought them to this farm house which was fortified, it was a walled chateau, the Germans lived in the Chateau and the boys stayed in the barn . He is not sure of the number of children that were in the barn. He thought originally that about 30 people escaped, but later he had learned from the records kept that approximately 120 children had escaped.

0:15:32 His daily routine was that they got up early, they had some breakfast, which was generally some potato soup, and once in a while they had some bread, which he said was a rather strange kind of bread that fell apart when you pulled it. He said it looked like spider webs . He said that they were left pretty much to themselves all day long, which in the beginning meant all the boys were fighting between themselves, but they finally realized that they were all losers by doing this and learned to co-exist. There apparently were also girls kept at the camp, but they were kept separate.

0:16:57 They were very hungry and fed very poorly. He does remember on a least one occasion eating grass in order to supplement his diet. He believes that there was plenty of food on the farm which generally went to the Germans. He had no contact with the farmer who had owned the property.

0:17:34 He said that there was an infirmary on the property, but anyone who got sick and was sent to the infirmary was never seen or heard from again. To his knowledge, no one received any medical treatment for any kind of condition.

0:18:00 He did not know what happened to his parents. He originally thought that they were alive and that after the war and liberation that they would get back together again. He did not find out about their father until after he was liberated.

0:18:30 He believes he was on the farm for approximately 6 months. When they escaped, they went into the village where they were rounded up and sent to a girls school. He remembers sleeping on the straw at the girls school and he remembers staying there for a couple of days when they were sent by the Belgium underground to the next village named "Par aux Bois" ( PHON).

0:19:38 He stayed there until liberated on September 6, 1944.

0:19:57 This was a public elementary girls school and he was taken by truck to the Sisters of Charity and from there, they were called one by one out to be placed with families in the village. They spoke French and he also spoke fluent French. He remembers staying until 1945.

0:21:03 He had his first medical check-up after this where he was found out to have had ringworm and was sent to a hospital in Brussels.

0:21:35 After the liberation he remembers that Jewish adults came and started taking care of him. He believes that there were some help from American Jews. He had gotten out of the hospital in 1946 and went back to Belgium where he stayed with the orphanage.

0:22:26 He remembers, Israeli soldiers coming to the orphanage. He was liberated by the Americans and said that he did not know of the danger to himself or to his family and was completely ignorant of what was happening around him.

0:23:05 He said the Americans fed them well and that the towns people also pitched in. Because they had been in camps and did not have rationing of coupons it was very difficult to initially get some food. Once the Americans came in these things were straightened out.

0:23:45 He only kept collaterally in touch with one of the children who had been in the camp with him. The gentlemen currently lives in Pennsylvania.

0:24:01 All of his family died in Auschwitz except for one aunt who lives in Germany and a cousin who lives in England. The aunt had converted to Catholicism before the war had been sent to a work camp but survived the Holocaust. His cousin in England was with him in Belgium when the cousin arrested and sent to France because they thought he was a spy because he spoke German. The Germans actually liberated his cousin and gave him a train ticket to Belgium but because the cousin did not like what was going on in Belgium, decided to go to France and wound up in Vichy France. However, while he was there the French began looking for him so he hid on a farm. Once they found out that he was on a farm he then decided to go to Spain where he was jailed then sent to North Africa where they tried to get him to join the French Foreign Legion.

0:26:14 From there the cousin went to the British Consul who got him into the British Army where he ultimately volunteered for the Commandoes.

0:27:01 His father had 10 brothers and sisters who were all lost in the Holocaust and he believes his mother was an only child. One of his father's brothers had died during World War I while fighting for the Germans.

0:27:56 Axel went back to the camp in December 1944, because of stomach problems which turned out to be appendicitis. He was picked up by the Americans and taken to a nearby town for an operation.

0:28:30 During this time, the Battle of the Bulge began and he was returned to the orphanage where he stayed until the spring when they found out that he had ringworm.

0:29:17 He was then taken to a hospital that was run by the Belgium authorities. He was placed in a room that had no furniture and no bed. It was a dormitory style arrangement where they had paper for sheets.

0:30:00 He believes it was inspected by the Red Cross who found out that the director had been hording all the supplies and the six children remaining were taken to another place that had bunk beds and nurses where they were treated very well. He was taken to the doctors by army staff cars or by ambulance and received x-ray treatments to clear the ringworm.

0:31:24 Most of the Orthodox Jews were sent to Jewish families. While he was sick for a couple of months and he was quarantined for about three to six months, after which he was sent back to the orphanage where he stayed until late 1946.

0:32:08 His cousin had started looking for the remains of the family and his cousin and aunt came to the orphanage to find him. He did not recognize his cousin who was in full commando uniform, but was eventually introduced by the director.

0:34:07 He was not Bar Mitzvah and the only religious service he remembers was being taken to a Chanukah party by the Americans. The party was in a convent where they had covered the religious artifacts with sheets. At the Chanukah party, they were given sandwiches, they saw a show, had cartoons, and then went to a turkey dinner with ice cream.

0:36:27 The only items he has from that period are a picture of his mother and sister which he received from the Belgium archives after the war.

0:36:40 He stayed in Brussels at the orphanage for approximately two years and December 1947, he went to the United States where he was sponsored by Arthur A. Newhouse, a distant relative of his.

0:36:58 He came to the United States in a troop transport which was full of people and their families of European's who had fought for the United States Army. Once in the United States, he was pick-up by relatives in New York and stayed in their home for approximately 2 weeks before they put him on a train to California.

0:37:52 This was the first time he was really scared. He could not speak English and felt very uncomfortable. Once in San Francisco, he was given food, clothing, stayed in a clean place and felt it was sort of like a fairy tale for a while.

0:39:15 Mr. Newhouse had arranged for relatives to pick him up in New York and place him on the train. Once on the train, he felt lucky that he sat next to a women who spoke German who was able to help him get necessities while on the trip to San Francisco. His first year in San Francisco he went into the 7th grade and within 1 month was then transferred to the 9th grade. He learned English within 6 months.

0:41:00 Since Mr. Newhouse was a bachelor, he arranged to have Axel placed in a Jewish orphanage where he stayed until he was 18 when he joined the United States Army. He served 2 years in Alaska and 1 year in Colorado. After being discharged, he got his citizenship.

0:41:53 He held odd jobs until he worked for the Bank of America for approximately 6 years and then went with Levi Strauss for 20 years where he was a computer operator on a mainframe computer.

0:42:49 Last year he returned to his hometown, But had been to Europe before this. He went back to Plaven because he wanted to get his birth certificate and some other papers together. Once in Plaven, he said it looked like the war had never touched the city but was told that 8~% of the city had been bombed, but there are still very little conveniences and the village looks like it was right after the war.

0:42:52 He said he was treated very nicely by the officials of the town who took him to the place of his old house which had been bombed out and to the old synagogue which had been burned down. He said that there is a Jewish cemetery and museum kept in Plaven which has a plaque dedicated to the synagogue.

0:47:32 He has no real feeling about the unification of Germany. He said it is really one country and he has never received any compensation and does not want it from the Germans.

0:48:09 He does however want all the Germans to wear black arm bands and close their businesses one day a year to commemorate the Holocaust.

0:49:07 About three years ago, he wrote to Mayor Feinstein of California for a letter of commendation that he wanted to present to the Mayor in the town of Belgium where he stayed.

0:50:40 Once he went there he found out that the city actually needed a playground. So he contact some Jewish organizations to try to get some funding and ultimately the B'nai Brith International in DC agreed to handle the transfer of the money. He was able to collect \$17,000.00 for the playground. Basically from San Francisco Bay Area.

0:52:33 August 4, 1990, they had the dedication of the playground.

0:53:00 He remembers Kristallnacht. He knew that something was going on in the town and the Hitler youth with their drums marching through the town. His parents had taken him away. The next day he and his sister went to the synagogue which they saw was burned out but the church across the street was perfectly fine. The downtown shops where the Jews had owned the businesses had the windows broken out and were painted with whitewash and had (swastikas).

0:54:39 Some of his family had been arrested at this time and sent to Dachau, but were later released.

0:54:59 Last year he visited Dachau and 3 years ago visited Auschwitz. He says Auschwitz has been left mostly intact and still smells of death, but Dachau apparently has been leveled and a barrack rebuilt and it still has one gas chamber. Dachau is 3 subway stops from Munich while Auschwitz is out in the countryside and is about an hour from Krakow. Both places have museums, pictures and books and he used the archives at Auschwitz to find out which transport his brother and sister were on.

0:58:01 The Belgium archives got: the identity papers of his brother and sister. He could not find anything for his father. He said his father was taken from Belgium apparently to France as a German spy and the French ultimately, sent his father to Auschwitz and I think he learned this information through the U.S. Army. He says his brother and sister were sent directly to Auschwitz on transport #21 and were sent directly to the gas chambers there. He believes this was so because his brother had very poor health and he thought his sister was in an in between age where she was of no value. He believes his father went to a slave labor camp first.

0:59:45 He says his father took him and his sister to the train station for transport for children only at Cologne (Ger. Köln), which was then sent to the German border. He thinks he was taken there around 11:00 am in the morning and arrived in Brussels in the evening. This was a voluntary transport and he believes his mother sold all the furniture to gather money. His father taken his sister and him to the train station where he saw his grandfather, and then from there, got on the train.

1:03:05 He remembers going to synagogue on Saturdays with his father and had gone to visit relatives in Belgium a few times.

1:03:39 The last thing that he remembers is Chanukah 1938 and since then he says he occasions and once in a great while, goes to synagogue now.

1:09:57 He said most of the kid in the orphanage where young. Those over 15 were generally sent to slave labor camps. After liberation, there were children up to 17-18 years old and as young as 3 & 4.

1:10:57 He did not learned of Auschwitz until he got to the United States, although he had heard kids mention death camps before that.

1:11:26 He says, while at the farm camp, the kids were able to make crystal sets and able to listen to the news programs.

1:12:44 They were able to escape in the afternoon. He had been standing outside and someone dragged him in, told him the door was open, they went through the door and crawled outside. Once outside, they walked over to the town and they were able to do this because the back part of the building had been closed and was unguarded and all the guards were out front. He said the guards were Flemish guards from Flanders and so there were a lot of them in the SS.

1:15:38 He went to the girls school which was a public school, then from there was sent to a private school. Today, most of the towns people did not remember where the girls school is but he remembers.

1:15:39 The village next to them was Parwayboubon (PHON). He said most of the people in the village came and took some of the boys and some of the kids. The Mayor even took two children. He stayed with a lady he called Madam DePas, who died a few years ago. She had a son who is still alive, who is married and has a child and a grandchild, that he keeps in touch with.

1:17:52 Since he was one of the few kids who spoke both French and German very well, they took him down to the telephone exchange where he was translating the German messages to the towns people back to French.

1:18:47 After he was liberated, he says that he was a pretty wild kid and sort of ran up and down the country side. He stills keeps in touch with the son of Madam DePas. He has met Dr. Jaffe, who was the lady in charge of the orphanage after the war. Her husband was put on the same transport as his brother and sister. To his knowledge there has been no reunion of the people at the orphanage and that they are apparently spread out all over the world from Australia, to Israel, to Belgium, to Canada, etc.

1:21:56 He says he is self-taught from the school of hard knocks. He read a lot of books at the orphanage, and they had beautiful library. They started a bindery there, which they did for a living, and bound the books and made the library very nice. He learned the computers from IBM and did finish 12th grade in the United States.

1:23:28 He worked at Micrographic for Strauss.  
.END.