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1:02:42 Walter Obermeyer is now the President of the Temple Israel Congregation, in San Francisco. Walter was born in Bad Salzuflen near Hannover and Bielefeld. It was a small town with a spa that catered to people with respiratory diseases. He lived there for the first seven years of his life.

1:01:55 Walter remembers living in a nice house, he told that his father was a merchant. Walter remembers the first seven years as being very easy for him, he had good friends. He said that his father died when he was seven, in 1930, describing it as an extremely traumatic experience. After his fathers death Walter and his mother moved to Augsburg in Bavaria to live with his mother's sister.

1:05:55 Walter talked about having very close friends in the town that he was born in. He told of one time after Hitler came to power when he returned to the town he was born in to visit family that lived there, he remembers that many of his old friends refused to acknowledge him because he was Jewish. He recalls having seen the first brown shirts marching through in 1932 when he was on his way to school. Talking about this reminded him of seeing them earlier. Walter told about once when he lived in Bad Salzuflen he and his parents were standing out on the porch and a troop of Nazis marching by. He remembers how upset his father was when he saw this.

1:06:25 Walter talked about Hitler taking power, and commented that he was amazed even as a child that the Jewish adults of Augsburg didn't realize what was happening. He recalls that most people thought that it would all blow over and that things would return to the way they were. Walter recalled that even as a child he realized that things had changed and everything was not going to return to normal.

1:07:05 Walter tells how he got the message in school that Jews were "different," however he told how he still had good friends incited him over. Walter said that he didn't go to these friend's houses because he didn't want to endanger them. Walter also refused to sing the German national anthem or heil Hitler.

1:09:05 Walter also told how he dropped off the high school soccer team because he was Jewish. He also told how some of the things he did were very stupid, but despite this stupidity he is now glad that he did it. Walter remembers how Nazi's used to sell things and say that the money was for the poor, and when he was approached Walter would tell them he was Jewish. Walter said that he wanted a high identity profile. He told how in school he was respected more than other Jews who tried to get along with the Nazis. Walter said that there was only one synagogue in his town, and maybe 500 Jewish families.

1:11:15 Walter said that because there was no separation of Church and state that part of his education was religion, This religious education continued in his school until he left Germany in 1937, and that he learned the basics of Judaism in school. Walter said that as a teenager that he was too dumb to fear, but looking back he realizes that he was pretty dumb.

1:12:00 Walter left the country in 1937, and said that he gives full credit for this to his mother. She applied for him to be on a children's transport out of the country. She knew that she couldn't go, but she applied for him, her only child. His mother was finally able to leave in 1938, after Kristallnacht, and left on a visa sponsored by Walter's foster parents in the United States.

1:13:45 When asked about what happened to his mother Walter said that she got out of Germany alright, but that she went into a diabetic coma in New York and died there. Walter said that all the excitement of Germany, and finally being able to leave didn't help, and probably contributed to her death. When asked about his own escape he said he was extremely lucky to get out that there were only 14 children who left with him. He said that he knew he had to go, because staying would have been like committing suicide. Walter then told a story about a cousin who escaped to England, but then returned to Germany and died in a concentration camp, and another uncle who built a new house in 1937. He expressed disbelief that they were so blind to what was happening.

1:15:55 Walter told how all of his father's family died in Germany and that his mother's sister escaped to San Francisco, and a cousin got to New York, but the rest of his family died. Walter told how his father had eight brothers and sisters, and they all died. He said that he refused any help from anybody. Walter also said that he left willingly, but that he hated to leave his mother, but thought it was the best choice.

1:18:10 Walter said that he thinks the reason that so many adults had problems with leaving was money. That many of the Jewish adults were very wealthy, and didn't want to leave all their worldly possessions behind; but that on the whole they were all interested in staying alive. Walter told how he caught a ship in Bremerhaven, the S.S. Berlin, and that once on the boat he had no trouble. Walter landed in New York, and stayed there a couple of days with his aunt's husband's sister. He could speak no English when he arrived in New York, so he was very thankful to be about to stay with her.

1:20:20 From New York Walter told about how he remembers riding in a Taxi with a radio in it, he remembers skyscrapers and central park. Walter also spoke about the train ride from New York to San Francisco, and remembers seeing blacks for the first time. He rode the train with the 14 other kids, and there was one lady in charge of them, different kids got off at different cities, and San Francisco was the last.

1:22:05 Walter says that he feels that he was very lucky, that he got a very good family. His foster parents ere in their 50's and expecting to be grandparents when they took Walter in, and had escaped from Romania themselves. They became members of the congregation that he is now the head of.

1:25:05 Walter said that when he came he wanted very much to be American, but couldn't speak English, so that he had trouble in English and Social Studies. He also talked about how surprised he was that there were electives. Walter told about how once he couldn't find a class, and ended up in the girls showers, and that luckily the gym teacher spoke German.

01:27:08 Walter said that he thought that schooling in Europe was much better than in the U.S., because he was far ahead of most people when he came here. He said that English wasn't hard to pick up, because he really wanted to communicate. Despite this Walter remembers being extremely embarrassed of his accent, he remembers one time that he was debating in class, and hated speaking out loud.

1:29:28 Walter talked about anti-Semitism, he said that he didn't feel any in the United States, but said it definitely existed in Europe. He told about a time that he was only feet away from Hitler. He was at Augsburg city hall with a Gentile, and forced to heil Hitler so he did when Hitler came down the street. He said that he looked like a Gangster, in his trench coat and in a Mercedes.

1:30:00 Walter remembered the people around him going completely crazy when they saw Hitler. Walter then said that the German people were 99.9% behind Hitler. The interviewer then cut him off and said that she wanted to talk about his experience in the army an German reunification.

1:32:15 In reply to the interviewer's question Walter said that we are living in interesting times. He said that one year ago nobody would suspect that reunification would happen. He told about his return to Germany for the first time one year ago. He went back to where he was born, he said he was surprised that when kids asked older people what they had done during Nazi Germany that nobody wanted to talk about it.

1:34:35 Walter explained that he had returned to Germany on an invitation from his home town, that it was also the 500th anniversary of the town. He said that the people of the town bent over backward for him, and that they even invited a Jewish singing group to town to sing. Walter said that he felt the younger generation sincerely wanted to change things in Germany, one example is that his old elementary school had been turned into a homeless shelter.

1:36:45 Walter also went to Augsburg on this same trip, and said that he felt much more comfortable then he expected he would. He feels that all of Europe will unite some day so he has no problems with Germany reunification. However, he said that the world has to be ever vigilant in order to prevent what happened from happening again. He said that if France and England had stepped in early none of it would have happened.

1:39:00 Walter said that in Germany Democracy had been an unknown factor, before World War II, but that now it would be much more difficult for a Hitler to emerge. He said the Germans were easily led during the 30's, but that still today the world must be vigilant. Walter said that the Germans were given a band, a uniform, and a march and they were told what they wanted to hear, and they liked being told what to do.

1:42:00 Walter told about how he wasn't allowed to join the U.S. army because he was not a citizen, in fact he was considered "an enemy alien." Walter said that he had an eight o'clock curfew, he didn't like it, but said that he understood that the U.S. was in a precarious situation.

1:44:15 Walter said that like everybody else he was afraid of the Japanese. He talked about how U.S. camps are often compared to concentration camps, he said that although he doesn't condone what happened he understands why it happened, and said that they were nothing like the concentration camps.

1:46:35 Walter told about how he finally got a notice saying that he could join the army, even though he was not a citizen. He said that he was put in the air corp, that he had wanted to be in the signal corp, but ended up going to basic, and then radio training.

1:48:25 Walter talked about being classified as a radio gunner, he became a citizen while in radio school in South Dakota. He said that being German in the army did not create a problem at all, that he was just one of many different walks of life.

1:50:33 Walter talked a lot about South Dakota, he met a lot of Jewish people there, he said it seemed like there wasn't a war because the people had everything. He then went to gunnery corp, however he laughed about getting air sick, and ended up grounded doing tower work.

1:52:45 Walter ended up in the Pacific, which came as quite a surprise to the interviewer, who seemed to have thought that he fought in Europe. He was in the army for 3 1/2 years, from 1943-46. He talked about being in the Solomon Islands, and in Fiji, however he was never in action, and talked a great deal about being sea, and air sick.

1:54:45 Walter then talked about the one air raid that they did have, and the outstanding defeat of the Japanese. After the war ended Walter went to school on the G.I. bill. He started at City College, where he took two classes, English and History.

1:56:30 He then told a story of how he ended up at Berkeley. He talked about how an old friend had an apartment at Berkeley and needed a roommate. He studied Business Administration, basically because he didn't know what to take, and graduated in 2 1/2 years. Walter laughed at his stupidity for not going to graduate school, but at the time figured it was time to enter the work force.

1:57:40 Walter said that it wasn't easy to get a job at the time, and said that he roamed to streets looking for one. In 1948 he got a job with Levi Strauss, and ended up working there for 25 years. He started in the sock department, and then moved into sales.

1:58:50 Walter trained with Levi Strauss for a year and a half, he then was asked in he wanted Texas or San Francisco. He then went to Bakersfield, where Levi's became known as the Jewish Gaberdines.

1:60:45 Walter then moved to San Francisco. Walter talked about meeting his wife after graduating from Berkeley, she was a Recreation major, she then became a school psychologist. Walter then talked about how a few years back she had gotten her Ph.D in Psychology, and done her dissertation on Children of Holocaust survivors, regarding mixed marriages, divorce rates, etc. It also came out that his wife is a holocaust survivor from Berlin, who had also escaped.

1:62:55 Walter said that his wife didn't lose much family, she came over with her parents. They then talked about if she had been interviewed. He went on to talk about his children. Walter has 3 children, 1 boy and 2 girls, and will soon have 5 grandchildren. His son lives in Oregon and is in the U.S. Forest Service. Walter was asked if he had any misgivings about having children in this world, that was capable of Nazi Germany. He seemed almost shocked by the question.

1:64:50 He then talked about the fact that of course there are problems in life, but said that problems are what make life exciting. He also said that the good outweighs the bad, and that one shouldn't dwell on the bad, he then made the excellent point that although we shouldn't dwell on the past, we also shouldn't forget it. He then said that was all he wanted to say.

1:67:20 Another interviewer then asked about the specific logistics on the transport. Walter said that he had no recollection of the trip, but that it was an ocean liner, not really a transport. His mother applied for him to be sent to the United States. He then said that the world stood by and did nothing, that the Vatican was the first to sign a treaty with the Nazis. He then talked about a conference called by Roosevelt at lake Geneva with 32 other nations to decide what should be done about the Jews. He said that only three of these countries, Denmark, Holland, and Costa Rica were willing to take a few thousand, that nobody else wanted any Jews.

1:68:20 He then said that he didn't have to tell her about the ship that had to turn around. He went on to say that he points his finger at the rest of the world for the Holocaust. He said he hopes the world has learned to accept minorities and not look for scapegoats for problems created by individual nations.

1:70:37 He said that when he looks at what is happening in the Eastern block he finds that anti-Semitism is raising it's ugly head. In Russia, and Poland what bothers him is that the Church does nothing, and that they should be the first to take a stand. He also said that it is hard to understand how Carter can leave Syria and claim that Israel lacks human rights when he doesn't see it in Syria.

1:70:44 He said that he expected more from Carter, but one has to take a stand and watch the pronouncement of others refuse them, or instead let them grow into big problems.
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