

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Brunn, John

Date of interview: 5/9/1996

Summary: John Brunn was born on January 19th 1927 in Vienna. His father, Ludwig, loaned money, and his mother, Elizabeth (Greenwalt) worked in a factory. He had a brother, George. He has many memories of his childhood. His grandmother also lived with the family. He spoke in detail of being a Jew and never feeling accepted in the world as a child. He talks about his religion class in grammar school and how the children were separated into two different classes. John speaks a lot about his education because his family felt that having an education was very important. Education was a major theme during most of his childhood. He also talks about the family's apartment that was two bedrooms for five people. John says that as a young child they practiced Judaism, but they were not strict Jews. They observed some of the most important Jewish holidays, but not all of them. He ends by saying that he had a very happy childhood until the Nazis came.

When the Nazis came to town in 1938 John and his family left Vienna. He was nine or ten years old and he remembers hearing about Hitler on the radio. He says he was in his house when he heard the German planes overhead. John's father was not with them because he had passed away when John was 9 years old. John's mother had a brother in New York so she contacted him and he helped them get to America. He sent them papers so that they could get through. John, his mother and brother all traveled to New York and made it through immigration with no problem. They came to New York with only ten dollars and from there they started all over. His mother went out and found work and the two boys went to school. After some time John decided to enlist in the Army. When he was done with his time in the Army he moved to California and studied at Berkeley. He said that ever since he came to America he has lost some of his Jewish identity. However, he enjoyed school and continues to reside in the Bay Area.

John is now a teacher and has been teaching for 35 years. He teaches physics and feels that he is following in his father's footsteps because his father loved physics. He is married to a woman named Sally. Together they have 2 children. A daughter Nancy and a son David. He does not have any grandchildren, but is close to his children. David is Buddhist and Nancy is Jewish. John is happy that Nancy is Jewish and he hopes that she will follow in her father's footsteps. John is a caring man and says that if he has learned anything in life it is to value life itself because you never know what is going to happen tomorrow.