

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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Name of interviewee: Ganz, Werner

Date of interview: 2/28/1995

Summary: Werner Ganz was born on Jan. 30, 1926 in the town of Achen, Germany, the younger of two brothers. His parents were Paul and Greta Ganz, and his brother, Ernst, was four years older than Werner. The family lived in a neighborhood of Jews and many non-Jews. Werner attended public school. The family is described as middle-class, but they had servants. They attended synagogue only on High Holidays.

With the rise of the Nazis, Werner's mother wanted to leave, but his father, a decorated WW1 soldier couldn't believe things would get disastrous for the Jews. But anti-Semitic laws took away the family business and forced them to dismiss the servants. In school Werner suffered threats and abuse from non-Jewish kids who accused him of killing Christ. During a swim class a group of boys tried to drown him. The day after Kristallnacht, Werner and other Jewish kids were dismissed from school.

Werner's father had a serious back condition, so the Gestapo decided not to arrest him, but after Nazi interrogation, the parents decided to leave. Late one night a family friend picked up the 12 year old Werner and his cousin and hid them in the car as he drove across the border to Holland, where Werner's brother was already living and attending school. Their parents arrived soon after by train. Thus, the family escaped the atrocities that were soon to come, though three close relatives did die in the camps. Werner mentioned that several German Catholics were helpful to his family and other Jews.

Financed by his aunt, the family left Holland for New York in Feb. 1940. Werner's parents had a business making buttons for women's clothing. Werner went to high school in NY then joined the U.S. army. While in the army, he read the New Testament and eventually became a Christian (he now describes himself as more of a Buddhist). He began a career as an engineer in Ohio where he met his wife, Ruth. He concealed his Jewish background from his employer who had a policy of not hiring Jews. Werner did not even tell his children about his being a Jew until the two boys were teenagers.

Werner is convinced that the nations of Europe knew the Holocaust was taking place and chose to do nothing to help save the Jews. He believes that another Holocaust could happen and points to the growth of Holocaust deniers, the poor economy and large frustrated populations. To this day, Werner says he feels guilty that he survived, while so many good people were murdered.