

Interview with PAUL HERTZ

Holocaust Oral History Project

Date: August 1, 1989      Place: San Francisco, CA

Interviewer: Peggy Coster

Transcriber: Michelle Scotti

Q: OKAY. AND YOUR LAST NAME IS HERTZ?

A: My last name is Hertz, H-E-R-T-Z.

Q: OKAY. THIS IS AUGUST 1, 1989. WE'RE IN THE HOLOCAUST CENTER OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA, AND THIS IS PAUL HERTZ, AND I'M PEGGY COSTER THE INTERVIEWER.

OKAY. WHERE DID YOU LIVE IN GERMANY?

A: Where do I live now?

Q: NO, IN GERMANY WHERE DID YOU LIVE?

A: I lived in a south town called Goch, G-O-C-H. It's very close to the Dutch border, and I was working in Bielefeld, Germany as a department store buyer and department manager.

Q: SO, AT THE TIME WHEN THE NAZIS WERE COMING INTO POWER--

A: When the Nazis came into power I was living in Dusseldorf, Germany. I also had a good position in a big department store. I had a good position as a buyer, a department store manager, and--

Q: OH, I'M SORRY. GO AHEAD.

A: And I could not keep this position much after 1933 when the Nazis took over. They made it hard for people to buy merchandise from Jewish stores. So the Jewish store was taken over in 1936 by a Gentile people, and even though they kept us for awhile, but we could not stay any longer and I took--It was still too early to immigrate. I had so much money in Germany. I did not want to leave and the longer people at the time did not think that the Nazi people would last long and so I took another position in Bielefeld, Germany. Also, in the Jewish store because

there it was not that bad yet, the people were a little more tolerant, but after I worked there about two years in 1938. Before--at one evening about June 20th, two plain-clothes men came into the store about 7:00 o'clock in the afternoon and asked for Paul Hertz, and when I came to them, they said, "Are you Paul Hertz"? I said, "Yes."

"When were you born"?

I said, "June 30th, 1897."

"We have to arrest you."

And I said, "Well, it's a very bad time for me because I have an appointment to meet my wife at the railway station. We are going for a rest to Switzerland tonight. Can I go to the station and let my wife know?"

And they looked at each other and one said, "I think we can allow that." So, I went to the station, but my wife was already informed by my colleagues. She knew already. I said, "Well, here they have arrested me; and we cannot go to Switzerland, but you can go."

And she said, "No, I won't go alone." So they took me to a prison in Bielefeld, Germany, and I ask why they arrest me, and they said, "Well, it is the order of the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. (Eckers )." And so they kept me three days in a prison there. Then after three days they took me out into a (catavagen), and they drove me with seven other Jews to a concentration camp near or around (Emburg), Germany called Sachsenhausen, and when we came, when we arrived there and left the--our wagon and eight number of

Spelling

Spelling

Spelling

Jews were driven from there to the camp. An hour away they shouted at us, the S.S. men shouted at us, "Lie down. Get up. March, march." Lie down until we arrived at the camp and a number of the older people, of course, couldn't take it. They already died. They had heart trouble and so on. And so I came to the camp, arrived at the camp, and the next day my hair got shaved. And the one who did it was one of the prisoners, and I said, "Is it obviously that bad?" And he said, "Yes. I'm going to tell you one thing. If they ever tell you to march, march over the boundry of this camp, they will shoot you. So don't go over the boundry," and that saved my life. We had to work with shovels everyday and work in the sand and shovel and shovel, and one day, one of my fellow prisoners asked me some questions. He was born in the same town my wife was born, and he asked me some questions, and I answered and one of the men, the S.S. people that watched over us came and said, "Who talked?." And I said, "Well, he was asking a few questions. I talk a little bit."

"Get up. March, march. Lie down. March, march." And a few times that I came to the boundry and again he said, "March, march. I said, "I cannot march any further." He said, "Oh, you are afraid of your life." Because if I had to walk over the boundries they would have shot me, and they would have reported that on--that I was shot fleeing. So I had to go back and several weeks, however, weeks we had to work. We hardly got anything to eat. What we got to eat

was too terrible that I got infections all over my body and after about seven weeks, and several weeks, I lost about close to 30 pounds. And my wife worked in the meantime very hard to find out where I am. She go to the Nazis organization. She was not afraid of even going to the prison a few times, and they told her--they wrote her a letter that I was in a concentration camp in Sachsenhausen. They didn't name it concentration camp, and they named it working camp or something; and one day--this was when they arrested me--was about June 20th--one day in the beginning of August, when we were at a roll call, every evening there was a roll call. They asked us a question, if everyone was there and so one evening in the beginning of August, I was called. Paul Hertz. And three people came foward. And they said, "When were you born?"

I said, "June 30th, 1897."

"You are going to be out of here tomorrow." My wife, I knew from the card she sent me once that she was working under immigration to America. At that time you could still do it. So you can be out of here tomorrow. You cannot go into your barrack. You have to sleep somewhere else, because I couldn't talk to the people anymore. So the next morning there were several of us that came out of the camp. They brought us to a train and we asked to go get a sandwich. "No you'll be home in a few hours." And so in a few hours I got home to my home town, Bielefeld. And I was taken to the prison and the men there when they saw me, he

said, "Oh, am I glad you are here. Your wife drove us crazy. She came almost every day asking for you, and so you go home." So I went home in my lost weight situation, and I had--oh, I have to mention something. At the day we came out of the camp, they took me to take my clothes and the one who gave to me too was also one of the prisoners, and the clothes I couldn't even wear any more, the weight I lost. And then I said to him, 'You know my watch, my golden wrist watch is not here.'

And he said, "Well, you probably lost it on the way to the camp when you lie down."

I said, "I wonder if somebody found it."

"Look you crazy. But you go now to a doctor. He will take care of your infections." I had a lot of infections; and then we got back to the camp and then the man said, "Is this your watch?"

"Yes." Somebody turned it in. I got my watch back. At that time not everybody was a criminal, you know. There was still some people that were not really the bad Nazis. It was only 1938, and I went to my home. My wife was very happy to see me, and she told me that we have to immigrate back to America. No, to Cuba. I said, "How come to Cuba?" She said, "Because our number is not, my number--we have a number and the number was not called." We have in the meantime, we have to arrange for the only country where we still could go that would accept us, that was Cuba at the time, it was it. Anyway it was still Democratic. In

( Cuba we got an and I stayed there. We stayed there a few weeks because I had to wait for my number to call; and while I was there, I got a telegram, a cable, from Germany, from Holland, and from my cousin in Holland sent me a wire and also my brother is in concentration camp. See that you get him out to Cuba. In the meantime, the 9th of October is there and they arrested at the ( ). They arrested a lot of male Jews. And one was my brother, and they took him to a camp too, and my cousin who knew about it sent me the cable. So I went to the people I had met in Havannah, Cuba, if they could get in touch with the immigration department and could get my brother in here. And they succeeded in a few days. They got him immigration, visa to Cuba. And they left; but before he came out of the Cuba, I got the notice that I could get to America. That was the beginning of August, the 25th of August. I, we had to leave.

Q CUBA?

A Germany to Cuba. It was--

Q WOULD YOU LIKE SOME WATER?

A Yeah. It was at that time they didn't really take you to the gas chamber yet, and I was actually saved by the fact that they arrested me on that day in July, and that I could take my brother out and I could get to America. I had a cousin here and my brother had an uncle here. I had a cousin here who came here a few weeks before me and they had rented an apartment for me and the consul in

( Spelling Germany--the consul at ( ), at the time asked if I have any money outside Germany. I said, "Yes." I smuggled some money to Holland and "How much is it?"

"I said it's about 7 or \$800."

He said, "You don't need anybody to watch for you, you can go on your own." So I could come to San Francisco with my wife and my cousin. He rented an apartment for me on Sacramento Street.

Q SO YOU ACTUALLY GOT OUT OF GERMANY BEFORE THE WAR STARTED?

( Spelling A Yes. Shortly before the (C ) and shortly after the war started. As a matter of fact, somebody else, relative asked me when I was in America to get him out of Germany and I was not successful anymore because the war broke out and nobody could get out of Germany.

Q HOW DID BEING IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP SAVE YOU FROM--

A The concentration camp, how was it there?

Q NO. HOW DID IT SAVE YOU FROM ACTUALLY WORSE FATE?

A How did it save me from--

Q YEAH. YOU SAID IT SAVED YOU FROM BEING ARRESTED LATER.

OH, IS IT BECAUSE YOU LEFT THE COUNTRY?

A Pardon?

Q HOW DID IT SAVE YOU FROM BEING REARRESTED LATER?

( Spelling A When I came out of Germany, I came out under the condition that my wife could get me out. That is the reason why I left Germany within three weeks; and so you have three weeks. We prepared to go to Cuba and we came to the railway station in Germany, in (K ). Plain-clothes

( men came to me and said, "You're leaving?" I said yes. And so we left that day.

Q OH, OKAY. DID YOU HAVE ANY CHILDREN OR ANYTHING?

Spelling A I have a daughter in (I ), New York, and she also video taped me already. She has a video tape from me, from my story. About three years ago I was in (I ), and she want to video tape the whole story. I told her about it.

Q WAS THERE--WERE THERE ANY PEOPLE WHILE YOU WERE IN THE CAMP OR IN GERMANY, WERE THERE ANY PEOPLE THAT YOU REMEMBER PARTICULARLY?

( A Yes. There was one man who has lived here in San Francisco, and I met him here; but I didn't know him from the camp. I know that I was friend of their daughter and son-in-law. And they told me that their father was in Sachsenhausen. So I met him. He died many, many years ago. That was it. It was one man. And I in Sachsenhausen itself, in the camp, I met one man, only one man that I knew before. He was very nice man. His name was Hymen, and he lived also in Bielefeld, and I recognized him because he was already--his hair was drawn and he was there and I slept with him. Together we slept on the floor, and I slept next to him. Those are the only two men that I really remember that I saw in Sachsenhausen, but I was very lucky. I mean at that time was the most terrible time of my life, and I think the only reason I believe that I could take it was because I was in German Army. It was about World War I, and I could take a little bit of that stuff,

you know.

Q WHAT KIND OF STUFF?

A Just working with the shovel and the treatment I got, you know. It was something that I could take a little bit better than many of the older people because I was only 41 years old at the time, and a lot of people couldn't take it. A lot of the people died there. But it was a time that I didn't have to go to the gas chamber. They didn't put the gas chamber, so I save my brother. My father died while I was still in Germany in 1938. Just shortly before I immigrated. Thank God he died. He was 79 years old, and he didn't have to experience all these things that happened later. My brother moved together with my mother-in-law, and they were taken together about two years later to a concentration, to (T ), and I thought that I didn't know what happened to her, but in Jewish paper, a notice that my wife died in the concentration camp in (T ), and then I got a letter from a woman that came from the same town I was and knew my wife and my mother and she said she can tell me that she did not get killed. She died there. It was so called (muster) camp. We call it in (T ). It was better there than our, than the other camps like (H ) and many of the others.

Q WHAT DOES MUSTER CAMP MEAN?

A Pardon?

Q WHAT DID MUSTER CAMP MEAN?

A Well, they showed it to people from other countries, showed

( this camp to show them that the people were treated. It was to show them to have one camp that they could say that you will be treated.

Q DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR FAMILY AFTER THE WAR? DID YOU HAVE TO WAIT THAT LONG TO FIND OUT?

A Yeah, my father died, and my mother found out from this lady that told she was in the same camp, and my mother died there. My mother-in-law, we never heard of her and my wife's brother, he escaped, got out of Holland. He escaped to Holland and from there to South Africa; and the other brother, he probably was taken to the gas chamber because we never heard of him anymore. He couldn't leave Holland in time.

( Q YEAH?

A And the Nazis took all the Jews there too, you know.

Q WHEN DID YOUR FIRST BEGIN TO NOTICE THE TROUBLE FOR THE JEWS WHERE YOU LIVED?

A When did I--

Q WHEN DID YOU FIRST BEGIN TO NOTICE THAT THE TROUBLE WAS GETTING WORSE?

A When I was in Cuba, we saw in the papers about what happened to (K ). We saw it in the papers.

Spelling Q WELL, IT WAS UNCOMFORTABLE EVEN BEFORE THEN, WASN'T IT? BECAUSE THE NAZIS STARTED THE ANTI-SEMITIC STUFF BEFORE THAT DIDN'T THEY?

( A Not long before, not before November 9th, you know.

Q IT WAS BEFORE THE PRE-HOLOCAUST TIME?

A Yeah, and that's why I was in the camp. The pre-Holocaust time we were treated miserably, but we did not get even taken to the gas chamber, and we were still allowed to leave Germany; and we could leave some of the furniture out, but we had to pay a lot of money for that.

Q YEAH? OKAY, WAS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU REMEMBER PARTICULARLY THAT YOU'D LIKE TO--

A No, this is what I hopefully remember. I still have some of the furniture of Germany in my home, and I haven't heard from many of my relatives and I know they just, they probably just got killed somewhere there.

Q OKAY.

A I that what you wanted to know?

Q YES. YES.

A Well, that's all I could tell you.