

Summary of Oral History: Oral History Interview with Josef Hochfeld

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SUMMARY

Josef Hochfeld was born April 8, 1912 in Hamburg, Germany where he graduated from a public high school which included student travel in the curriculum. Discusses family life, parents were middle class, assimilated Jews and he was Bar Mitzvah in an orthodox synagogue; Recalls realizing trouble had started when he saw the SA marching and singing songs against the Jews and the SA beat up Jews; discusses boycotts of Jewish stores; Josef discusses his sister who was two years younger than him and immigrated to Belgium in 1938. There she married, had a baby and later died at Auschwitz; Josef discusses life during pre-war Germany: completing two years of study of pharmacy in Leipzig where he took the State Board exam in 1935. After he worked a year for a Jewish pharmacist, the store was required to be sold to a non-Jew and he worked in a clinical lab of a hospital; Josef was arrested after Kristallnacht and was deported by train to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, he recalls life in the camp: standing for hours at roll call, carrying rocks back and forth, being permitted to write letters and receiving treatment when ill. He remained 10 weeks until his future father-in-law, a Rabbi, obtained a ticket for him to Shanghai from a shipping company; After release, Josef got married but his wife, seven years younger than him, was reluctant to leave her father alone (her mother had died when she was eleven). Josef discusses his emigration to China; his wife joined Josef six months later in Tientsin, China and her father came later via a German freighter; Josef met a dentist on the ship to Shanghai who obtained a position for him in Tientsin, a city with better living conditions than Shanghai where Josef experienced hunger and skin infection from the poor sanitation. His parents followed the couple to China in 1940; His wife gave German and English lessons and they received lessons in Chinese; Josef was successful in obtaining positions during the Japanese occupation. A German Consul gave them documents without the "J". They had a son and spent nine years in China; Josef recalls his emigration to the US in 1948 and later succeeded in bringing his parents here. They resided in San Francisco as the State did not require citizenship to obtain a pharmacy license; Josef attended his high school reunion in Hamburg. He retired four years ago (1984.) Josef and his wife are members of a reform temple in San Francisco.