



*"My name is Elmode Moses
and I was 12 years old..."*

*Actually, on the St. Louis?
I was 11 years old."*

Harvey S. Moser

And please state your name when you were on the ship and what age were you.

Elmode Moses and I was 12 years old. Actually, on the St. Louis? I was 11 years old.

Did your family come out of Hamburg?

My parents come out of Hamburg. We came out of Cherbourg because the year before, or right after Kristallnacht, the Night of the Crystal, there was a rumor that Jewish children might be sent to concentration camps. Because of that my parents quickly had us smuggled across the border into France. Actually, we lived in Southwest Germany where France, Switzerland, and Germany meet, in that corner. And I remember at midnight there was a woman who I assumed looking back was a professional smuggler. She smuggled us across the bridge into from Germany to Alsace-Lorraine, France. So, we spend a year there. Now, since we're illegal aliens, we had to stay most of the time, if not all the time, in our house, in the house where we were. And after a year there they were able to obtain the visas on the St. Louis. So, when the St. Louis left, as you had mentioned it had left from Hamburg. Initially it was a German liner, part of the Hamburg America line. And it went and picked us up in Cherbourg, my brother and myself, and on we went towards Havana, Cuba.

What do you remember from the ship?

I must say it was a luxury liner at the time. The captain was very nice to all the passengers, all of whom was Jewish, and he made it a point to tell the crew and a few Gestapo people that apparently were on board that there was not to be any discrimination, that the passengers were to be treated like any other passengers on the ship. The food was very good. We had a menu every night. There was music. It was a wonderful crossing.

What made your family decide to leave Germany on the Saint Louis?

In 1933, actually we were totally packed. We had all our furniture, which we were allowed to take out, and we had it all ready in these big lifts they were called, these huge containers. And we were packed. My father said, "You know what? This is gonna pass over. I think we're gonna stay." He had been in this town for 35 years. He had a good business there. We had a beautiful house, and a garden, and actually he did not have trouble in the town, although I must say later on it started up. So, I'll talk about that in a minute. So, my mother said, "All right,

we're gonna stay." By 1936, when the Nuremberg Laws were passed, my father had to sell his business and at that time we moved to a town Freiburg which is right nearby, a bigger city. I might say before we moved every day, every day, the Brown Shirts would march by our house on Main Street, the main street of the town. It wasn't called Main Street. It was called Meerlen Strassan, Number Nine. They would march by every day and sing the same song and sing the same stanza as they came past our house. And in German the song was, that part of it, [speaks German] which means "When Jewish blood spurts from the knife, all will be well." So that was going on every day, and I remember that, but people would march, the Brown Shirts marching by. So, on the other hand, I must say that the teacher that I had in the third grade, I went up to the third grade in the German school, he wore the brown shirt uniform also of the SR they were called with a swastika on the side. He was very nice to me. I was a good student and, if anything, we got along very well. Similarly, in the kindergarten where I went to school, it was part of a church, the sisters in the kindergarten were very nice to me also. At Christmastime and other Christian holidays I was allowed to go home, and there was no sign of discrimination that I can remember. In fact, a few years ago we went back to the town. It was called Haslach, Haslach im Kinzigtal. It was a very small town, and I went to the kindergarten just to revisit with my wife, and I saw one of the sisters there. Of course, I don't know if she was one of the sisters who was my teacher, but in any manner, I told her this story, how nice they were. She says, "Oh, yes. You must be talking about Sister Maria, Sister So-and-so. I'll tell you that you were here." And, again, as I said, they were very, very nice to me. Of course, I was Jewish, and by the way there were only two Jewish families in the whole town.

Did you family survive the Holocaust?

Yes. As a matter of fact, the house that we had in Germany, it was a very big house. We had 14, 15 rooms, and it was the biggest house in this village. During the war, of course we had left, they housed, the government housed German citizens from the big cities that had been bombed out. So, they came to live there. And then afterwards, when the war ended, the French officers decided – this was a French zone in Germany – decided that would be their headquarters. And after that they took in Turkish, I think first Italian laborers, that is people who came from Italy to work and after that they took in Turkish immigrants who were working there. And although it was a 14-room house, initially they cut the whole thing up into cubicles. There must have been somewhere near 80 separate areas. The house was all run down, and what the town decided to do is to tear the house down, but they rebuilt it in exactly the same style as before in honor of my father and mother.

And in fact, there on the side of house inside there's a big plaque commemorating the fact that we had lived there before the war.

Are you bitter about how Germany treated you?

Well, I'm ambivalent I would say. The very first time I visited I was in the U.S. Army. I visited after the war. I went. I was there by myself. I went into a guest house which is about 300 yards from the house, and I sat there drinking a beer minding my own business when walks in, a guy says, [in German] "What are you doing here?" So, he says, "We were in the same grade with you, same class with you. Oh, wait till I tell the other boys that this one is still here, and that one" – he mentioned some names. Of course, I didn't know any of the names. He says, "We have to get together tonight and have a little party to celebrate your coming back." And I said, "No, thanks very much. I really have to move." What I was thinking about, yes, there were people that were very nice to me, but there are others who were not so nice, who were terrible to the Jews. And who knows how many of these classmates of mine would have been the ones that would have pushed me in the oven so I'd be a bar of soap or a lampshade if it were up to them. So, I have mixed feelings. I would say, really, I have no great love for the Germans as a group. In fact, I think the whole thing was terrible, terrible. On the other hand, I will say there were some people, we know that, that were nice to the Jews.

What happened on the ship once you got to Havana harbor?

We were on the ship. It was a ten-day cruise, very pleasant, very nice, lots of fun. And we landed in Havana Harbor the first day and they said there would be a delay of one day for some official matters. The second day they said, "Oh, yes. There will be a delay of another day. They haven't straightened things out." And so it went for six days, and on the sixth day we found out that we could not land.

What was supposed to have happened to the Saint Louis?

What was supposed to have happened is that when you board the ship in Germany you had to pay \$900.00 for the visa. It was either \$900.00 or 900 marks, but I remember the number 900. And that would ensure your entry to Cuba. Later on, in Havana and thereafter, we found out these visas were bogus. They were being sold by a representative of the Havana government in Hamburg, and it was just a ruse.

What happened with all the money that the passengers spent?

He was planning just to keep the money, and when we landed in Havana the man who was in charge of immigration said, "You pay another \$900.00 here and you can land." In other words, that was gonna be for him. Nobody had that kind of money because in order to get on the ship to leave Germany, no matter how comfortable you were before, you had to leave all your money, your silver, your gold, everything behind.

Was there a reaction on the ship? Did passengers have any plan?

So right away of course there was, a committee was formed, "What are we gonna do?" And they cabled New York, the Joint Distribution Committee, and a representative came down and at first said, "We don't have that kind of money to pay \$900.00 for every passenger." And they started haggling, arguing. So I think they said, "Well, you either come up with the money or the ship has to leave. And you have to come with the money in 48 hours." The man flew back to New York and talked to his supervisor or whatever, and he came down about half a day after the 48 hour deadline. He says, "All right, I have the money now." But the Spanish official said, "No," – the Cuban official. He said, "The deadline was yesterday. You leave. That's it." Wouldn't deal anymore. So then the boat, we were informed, the passengers on the boat were informed. We didn't know about all these dealings with the committee. I learned about it years later. Passengers were informed that we have to go back to Europe. And this was a German ship and the ship owners wanted our ship back in Hamburg. If the ship goes back to Hamburg it's obviously doomsday for everybody on the ship, all the Jews.

Did the passengers know that going back to Germany then would mean certain death?

People knew that very well. It was already 1939. So, the handwriting was on the wall.

Were there any desperate reactions from passengers trying to get to Cuba?

I was standing on the deck as the ship was ready to leave and standing next to me was a man who I saw cutting his wrists and he jumped overboard. And immediately the harbor police who had been of course around the ship all the time, guarding it, they picked him up. They took him to the hospital in Havana. His wife asked the authorities if she could also go to the hospital, be taken off the ship. They refused. "No." She