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Interview with witness Carl Wahren from Norrköping

Summary

Carl was born 1933 in Norrköping. His father's father was a secular Jew from an old Swedish-Jewish family. His other grandparents were non-Jewish. Carl's family belonged to the wealthy bourgeois group in Norrköping. As Carl remember they had no contact with the Jewish Congregation in Norrköping, however during the war they became involved in helping Jewish refugees and also had a Finnish child living with them. Carl was the only child until after the war since his parents did not want to have more children while the war was going on.

Details

- During a business trip to Czechoslovakia in 1938 or 39 Carl's parents witnessed a lot of antisemitism. Afterwards, when Carl's father told his father what happened in Europe and in Germany he almost refused to believe it: "the Germans cannot be like that". Later Carl's parents got letters from the people they had met asking for help to emigrate to Australia.
- Two Czech children came to them, Freddie and Gitta, their mother also managed to come to Sweden, to Osby in the south where there was a Jewish orphanage, but she was not allowed to stay and later ended up in a concentration camp. Carl's mother went up to the Foreigner Bureau [The National Board of Health and Welfare's] and cried in front of the director and Carl's family guaranteed all costs but she was still not allowed to stay.
- There were no Jewish symbols in his home but on the other hand a strong Christian tradition. One time when he was whistling in school, the German teacher screamed "Jewish bastard" to him and Carl didn't understand why.
- Carl said that he experienced antisemitism a few times in connection to birthday parties. One time, which was particularly scary, he was at a friend's birthday party and an older cousin suggested that they should "beat up that Jewish bastard", but none of the other boys thought that was a good idea. Carl believed that he had a much more privileged position than for example Peter Freudenthal (the other interviewed witness in Norrköping) since Carl's family was well-established and Christian.
- Carl's best friend told a frightening story one Monday morning in school. He had been at a birthday party and the father had dressed in full gestapo uniform and tried to impress all the boys there. He held a short speech for the boys, who were around 10-11 years old, he had told them that when the Germans had liberated Sweden from "Judaism and imperialism" he would be the boss and then he had read a list of people that "would learn the truth" [death list], there was the Wahren family and other well-known democrats.
- The father in uniform with the death list was the optician, Neuman (the same person that the other witness in Norrköping, Peter Freudenthal, also mentioned). According to Carl, he was infamous for walking around on his Sunday walks with polished boots, gestapo uniform and a riding crop.
- Carl used to take piano lessons from Peter Freudentahl's mother. The Freudenthals were "super vegans" and they served "crushed egg shells and strange un-chewable plants", so Carl's parents dreaded being invited to them (this story Carl told with a laugh).
- It was through the Nazis' rise to power and the war that Carl's family got in touch with Jewish issues. According to Carl the war was constantly present in his home and no one was allowed to disturb during the news on radio.
- Carl's family were in close contact with the Norwegian Jewish refugees in Norrköping and they often held parties in their house.

- However, Carl had not heard at all of Lindö (the Kibbutz outside of Norrköping) and had no memory of when the survivors of 1945 came to Hedvig's Rectory after the Norwegian Jews had returned home.
- However, Carl remembered very well when the refugees after the war started coming since they were eating dinner and his father got a call from Malmö. There was a refugee there who claimed that she knew Carl's parents and asked if she and her friend could come to them. Her name was Eva, from Prague, and she became a very close friend for life. She later became a communist, she said that in the concentration camp the only ones you could trust were the old-style communists, the orthodox Catholics and perhaps the orthodox Jews.
- There was a little Finnish boy, 2 ½ years old, who came to live with Carl's family. He was in an extremely bad condition, he only weighed 24 pounds (11 kilo) and was very sick, the doctor said he needed constant care. Carl's mother found a young girl who moved in to take care of him, so they lived three persons in Carl's small room. For Carl it was a very positive experience, like having a little brother. He returned to Finland, which was very difficult for his parents.
- After the war Carl and his friends wrote their own anti-Nazi song based on the Lili Marleen leid (Swedish text):

Först så tar vi Hitler i hans krumma ben
Sen så tar vi Göring och slår uti en sten
Sist så tar vi Ribbentrop och hissar opp i närmsta topp
Då hörs det hemska skrin från trenne nassesvin