

Summary of Oral History: Oral history interview with William Safran

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Summary

William Safran, born in 1930 in Dresden, Germany, describes Hitler being in power throughout his childhood; Nuremberg Laws being promulgated in 1935; Jews having to stand in the back in tramways and give up their telephones, typewriters, bicycles and radios; going to an elementary school established for Jewish students; the number of school pupils decreasing as Jews began to emigrate; Kristallnacht in 1938 and the burning of the synagogue in Dresden; his father being a modern Orthodox rabbi whose small synagogue collapsed when its members were deported; his mother then taking on jobs, which became problematic when she was forced into labor in a munitions factory in 1939; having to wear a yellow star of David marked with the word Jew and being beaten by two Hitler Youth people; being deported on January 20, 1942, the same day as the Wannsee Conference, which issued "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question," the systematic mass destruction of Europe's Jews; being settled in a ghetto in Riga, Latvia's capital, on the Baltic Sea; periodic roundups in the ghetto that took old people, sick people and children to be killed; the ghetto being dissolved in 1943 and people being sent either to forced labor camps or to be killed; the soviet army coming west, so people were shipped to Stutthof concentration camp in Poland; people in his camp dying primarily through starvation; his father getting ill and being taken away and not seen again, shortly before a death march began out of Stutthof; that during the death march, a Wehrmacht officer took him and his brother to a barn, then to a satellite camp for Hungarian Jewish women; his brother dying of typhus shortly before he was liberated in March 1945; he and other boys going to a nearby empty German village, then to Łódź in Poland by train; being placed in an orphanage then getting reconnected with his mother and sister.