

HOLOCAUST TESTIMONY

OF

THEODORE WERTHEIMER

Transcript of Audiotaped Interview

Interviewer: Fred Stamm
Date: February 11, 1981

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Gratz College
Melrose Park, PA 19027

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TW - Theodore Wertheimer¹ [interviewee]

LW - Lena Wertheimer [wife of TW]

IS - Ilsa Stamm [wife of FS]

FS - Fred Stamm [interviewer]²

Date: February 11, 1981

Tape one, side one:

FS: Theo, *erzählen Sie mir mal*, tell me about the occurrences prior to World War I. What kind of work were you doing, Theo?

TW: I was, first I was learning in Weimar as a, in a *Kaufhaus* [Ger.: department store].

FS: As an apprentice?

TW: *Ja*, and then after three years of learning how it was in Germany youth should do for everyone ...

FS: Apprentice.

TW: Yes. Then they sent me on the road to sell merchandise in Thüringen [Thuringia], in Thüringer Wald [Thuringian Forest] [unclear] *Manufakturwaren* [Ger.: manufactured goods] *und* about ...

FS: In other words what you sold were mostly dry goods, dry goods?

TW: Right, right and it took me about six weeks to finish my tour and this I did three times a year. And 1914 I was called to the army.

FS: Had you served actively in the army before?

TW: No, I was *Ersatzreservist*³.

FS: What does that mean?

TW: That means when you're not quite right *körperlich* [Ger.: physically].

FS: Oh, physically you were not 1A.

TW: Right. Then they write you for *Ersatzreservist*. That means in case of war you have to be called right away. And this, it was, it happened about September 1914. I just was on, in [unclear] business and my *Chef* [Ger.: boss] called me by phone I should come home right away. I had direct papers here that means you have to go to the army right away.

FS: If I remember, if I remember correctly, Theo, you were very anxious to, you told me one time you were very anxious to join the army.

¹Introduction by Fred Stamm. Theo Wertheimer is the Senior Member of the German Jewry in Philadelphia. I am a student at Gratz College and this work of recording German Jewry is done under the auspices of Professor Nora Levin. The next voice you will hear will be that of Mr. Theo Wertheimer. I might add here, though, that Mr. Wertheimer has passed his 92nd birthday but he is truly 92 years young.

²Fred Stamm, Lena Wertheimer and Ilsa Stamm were all born in Germany. Periodically they share observations about pre-war life.

³ Substitute in reserve.

TW: That's right, that's right. That's right, everybody was anxious because they didn't want to wait because a, a soldiers are ashamed to be home not to be in the army.

FS: Tell me, Theo, when the war started in 1914, when the war started, did you expect, did you expect a short war? What did you expect?

LW: *Ich hab fünf Brüder gehabt.*

FS: Speak English. This is Mrs. Wertheimer speaking now.

LW: I had five brothers and the youngest came just from the *Abitur*⁴, what do you call it in English?

FS: Finished junior college, which then, which then entitled him to be a Junior Officer in the German army.

LW: No, he was not, he was not [unclear]. But he said he wants to go as [unclear] a volunteer.

IS: Volunteered, *ja*.

LW: And then he said, "Father, don't be afraid, in six weeks the whole war is over."

FS: Now, was this a general belief that this would be a very short war?

LW: *Ja*, definitely.

TW: *Ja*, because everybody thought Germany is so, so...

FS: Strong militarily?

TW: Right, they can do it right away. And so in September 1914 they called me.

LW: And on the 31st of July we had the whole, a lot of relatives who came from Paris with the last train and who came from Switzerland and they went right away to the army.

FS: Am I correct in assuming that these people, these men returned voluntarily to the army?

TW: Right, right. Right away, everybody out of Germany came back right away.

LW: A few days before the war it was a maneuver in Germany, our section and...

FS: This was a maneuver by the German army, of course.

LW: *Ja*, and my father and my one brother was *Einjährig*.⁵

FS: He was a Junior Officer.

LW: *Ja*. Another one was on duty. I had two brothers in the same regiment and they were in the maneuver in our neighborhood and my father said, "Let's go and look," you know.

TW: Everybody was so anxious.

LW: And the Major, Major came to my father and said, and shook hand and said, "Oh, you can be proud of your sons," and this had my father [unclear].

FS: Wasn't there a certain amount of antisemitism in the German army which prevented Jews from rising in the officers' ranks?

⁴ Graduation.

⁵ One year volunteer.

TW: It was not open.

LW: They only were-- my oldest brother was, he was *Officer Aspirante Salut* [unclear]. He didn't get a lieutenant.

FS: Why? Because he was a Jew?

TW: Nobody knows about the reason, you know. It was more secret in those days, the antisemitism was in, but not open.

FS: Now, let me ask you a question which has puzzled me for years and years.

TW: I tell you a little story. Everybody was so anxious that he was called and he was ashamed to walk around not to be called.

FS: Theo, tell me, you knew there was antisemitism even, even though it was subdued. Can you tell me why were German Jews such super patriots, can you answer that question?

TW: No, I can't. It's hard to answer this question because we are brought up from this. We are Jews in the family...

LW: And you know what the Kaiser said, "*Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr, Ich kenne nur noch Deutsche und da dank das Vaterland is Euch gewiss.*"⁶

TW: That was...

FS: Translated is, "I no longer know parties, I only know German." But, tell me, the Emperor said that, Wilhelm the Second. Why, why did the German Jews, in spite of this antisemitism were such super patriots?

TW: It's hard to answer this, very hard to answer. In the family, we were brought up like this. We were told in the schools as a...

LW: When the Kaiser has, had birthday and it was a parade, you know, the next bigger town where I lived [unclear] was Freiburg and we travelled to Freiburg to see this parade for the Kaiser. So *patriotisch waren Wir* [Ger.: so patriotic were we].

IS: Maybe...

FS: The voice you hear now is the voice of my wife, Ilse Stamm.

IS: Maybe the Jews thought by being such super patriots they could buy their life.

LW: They didn't, they didn't. It was a different, different than it's here, isn't it?

FS: Well, what do you mean by being different in what sense, different atmosphere or what?

LW: It was different atmosphere.

FS: Would you say that, that this patriotism was prevalent in all Jewish families or most Jewish families?

TW: *Ja, ja*. Most families.

FS: Was it also prevalent in, in Jewish schools?

TW: Well, no. Not schools, Jewish schools like this. We had our Sunday schools that's all, but the teacher was a teacher for the public schools.

⁶The gratitude of the country is certain.

LW: We had religion lessons on the same, when we had it with the Jewish teacher.

TW: On the same...

FS: You both went to public school?

TW: Right, right, first public school four years and then in the high school.

FS: Okay, now when you finally got the letter, when you finally came back, what happened then? When you came back after your tour of travelling and selling was over and you had this letter to report to the army.

TW: Right away I went, I had to go. You want to know about every single...

LW: See, this was, this was later but when the war broke out in Germany my, my brothers which were in the army before, they had a letter of must, when the, when the war breaks out they had to go and they had to go there and there to make themselves...

TW: [unclear] they have to do it of prior to the outbreak of the war. This was an automatic reporting at that time.

LW: Ja, that's, this what they had and what they did. All Germany. You see, he, he went later.

FS: So when you went you reported to your unit?

TW: No, no. We were brought to [unclear] near Berlin and there was a new army put up and we were trained for six weeks.

FS: In this army camp.

TW: In this army camp, a very famous camp, and then they put up companies, battalions and regiments and then a whole army.

LW: Infantry.

TW: And then the end of the year, I don't know exactly the date anymore, a whole army went to Russia.

FS: And what this army was-- what was the name or the number of this army, do you remember?

TW: 40th Battalion Army Corps. My number was 4th Company of Infantry, Regiment 261.

FS: You at 92 years have much better memory than I have at 60.

TW: And then we fought in Ost Prussen [Ger.: East Prussia] and we fought in Russia and we made a full march in Prussia and we saw Kovno. Then I got sick and was brought back to Germany and was in Burgsteinfurt in Westphalia for five weeks.

FS: Let me ask you a question, in your unit were there many Jews?

TW: Not many Jews, maybe my company there were maybe 10 Jews.

FS: How many men?

TW: 200 men in the company.

FS: Now, was there in your military papers for ...

LW: [unclear]

TW: Oh, I have it here.

FS: It was not noted.
LW: You have your military papers.
TW: I have it here.
FS: Tell me first was it noted in your military papers that you were Jewish?
TW: No.
FS: It was not so?
TW: No.
LW: You're sure?
TW: I'm sure.
FS: Your officers, officers, did they know that you were Jewish?
TW: Oh *ja*, and there was a Commander, the First Commander of this company was Graf Eckberg [phonetic] and he was a very, very nice man to everybody.
FS: Now, from your fellow soldiers, since you're primarily concerned with the fate of the Jews, from your fellow soldiers did you feel any pressure for being a Jew?
TW: No, no.
FS: Were you accepted by them as a soldier?
TW: Right, right. I didn't know anything about ...
FS: In the early days of the war, in your company, do you remember any Socialist activities among the common soldier?
TW: No. Not at all.
FS: There was none.
TW: Everybody was, was the same thing.
FS: What-- in the various battles where you took part in, in East Prussia and Russia, were casualties heavy?
TW: *Ja*, more so it was heavy when we stormed Kovno, a very strong force hit them.
FS: And this was occupied by the Russians?
TW: *Ja*.
FS: Out of the 200 men in your company, what would you say how many casualties were there?
TW: Wait a minute, I have a book here.
FS: Well, just take an educated guess.
TW: I can't say exactly. Because it was different. Later on we came to France, there was a lot of casualties.
FS: So the casualties in the beginning were not so great?
TW: Not so...
FS: Not so.
TW: Not so big. Casualties were mostly by the cold, frostbite and some people died getting wounded, and couldn't be helped and they froze to death.
FS: Did you, in these other battles, take many Russians prisoners of war?

TW: *Ja, oh, ja.*

FS: Do you remember having taken Russian prisoners who were Jews?

TW: No, I don't know.

FS: Did you have contact with the Jewish population in the area which you occupied?

TW: Sometimes.

FS: Tell us about that.

TW: You know when I was after I told you I was in Burgsteinfurt when I was healthy again, I came back to my *Ersatzbattalion*⁷ in Berlin in [unclear] and had to wait to get me out again. And in the meantime, we were used to transport things like meat, like live cattle to the front and we had to go to a company transport until I was in Pinsk and in Pinsk...

FS: Pinsk was in Posen.

TW: Poland.

FS: In Poland.

TW: In Pinsk I got in touch with a Jewish family.

FS: Did you know this family or you...

TW: No, I don't know.

FS: You just met them?

TW: *Ja. Ja.*

FS: What do you remember of, of the family, of the reception. How did they [unclear] you?

TW: Very nice, very nice. As soon they knew I'm Jew they were nicer.

FS: And did you stay with them or just...

TW: No, I was only-- we had, we couldn't stay at all, you know, we were only a couple of days there and I ate. They gave me tea and cookies and only a couple of hours.

FS: Did you have any, any political discussions with them?

TW: No.

FS: None at all?

TW: No. Not at all.

FS: So you don't really know. See, my reason for asking this is the proclamation by Ludendorff,⁸ "*Meine Lieben Polische Juden*," "My dear Polish Jews," that's why I'm asking whether there were-- how much fraternization was there between the Jewish population and the Jewish soldiers? That's my reason for asking. Lena, now tell me about your brother what you mentioned before.

LW: One brother came from the French...

FS: From the Western Front?

⁷Substitute Battalion.

⁸General Erich Ludendorff. WWI war hero, later involved in 1923 putsch and later distanced from Hitler. The Holocaust Encyclopedia, Yale University Press, 2001. P. 286.

LW: From the Western Front to the ...

FS: Eastern Front

LW: Russian Front and they needed them, you know. And they were weak. They lost so many and they picked them up from the West, from the Western, from East, no...

FS: From the Eastern Front. Was he transferred as an individual or his whole unit was transferred?

LW: No. The whole unit.

FS: The whole unit.

LW: And then they met, you know. And then the one said you came from the-- one came back. And he was wounded. He had a, a shot, very light wounded, you know and then he said.

FS: This was one brother speaking to the other.

LW: *Ja*. Then the one said, "I wish I were so..."

TW: He fell.

FS: Now this was when approximately, which year?

LW: 1916.

FS: By 1916, do you think that much of the enthusiasm for the war had dissipated?

LW: *Ja*, very much.

TW: Oh, *ja*, very much.

FS: Do you think that people felt that the war could no longer be won?

LW: *Ja*.

TW: That's right.

LW: By '16 they knew they couldn't win.

FS: Now, Theo, when you went back on the, to the front, where did you go then?

TW: Then, I was in, from Russia we were brought to France in a transport.

FS: This was approximately when?

TW: 19, wait a minute, 19...

FS: '15.

TW: This was, *ja*, 1915 and we were brought to Belgium first and were trained in a camp and then we were brought to the front in France, in North France near Tours and on 13th of February, 1914, no '15 I was wounded.

FS: Now in 1915 was this already *Schutzengrabenkrieg* [Ger: trench warfare]?

TW: *Ja, ja*.

FS: It was not, no longer [unclear]...

TW: No, no. It was not '15 it was '16 and '17. This was not a moving war. This was a stationary war. We were in *Schutzengraben*.

FS: Trenches.

TW: In trenches, yes, back down and then I was brought to a *Feldlazarett* [Ger.: military hospital]. I was shot in here and out here.

FS: From here to here.

TW: *Ja*. Here in, out here. *Und* then I was about five days and from there we were brought by transport to Kassel, in Germany in the *Lazarett*. There I was staying about two months and then they brought me back to Berlin to the *Ersatzbattalion*. And later on, when I was-- in the meantime I got vacation and went home to my parents [unclear] and then they sent me in the Western part again, but not the front. They sent me to Forbach in Alsace Lorraine.

FS: Let me just interrupt you. When you went home on furlough to your parents, do you remember what that feeling was among the townspeople, among your, among the Jews in the town, among the fellow soldiers who were on furlough, what was the feeling as far as the war was concerned?

TW: The feeling was no good anymore.

LW: They didn't like it anymore.

TW: They didn't like it anymore and they were sorry the war is lost.

FS: Did they openly say that?

TW: Not openly, it was too dangerous to say it openly.

FS: Now, by this time had any antisemitism against Jews developed?

TW: No.

LW: No.

FS: How about among your fellow soldiers, were Jews still blamed for...

TW: No, never, never, not a word.

LW: Not like here. And the *Antisemitismus* [Ger.] was [unclear]...

FS: How long did you stay home?

TW: Two weeks.

FS: Did you visit your synagogue in those times?

TW: Oh, *ja*. Oh, *ja*.

FS: And there were mostly old men, women and children?

TW: Ay, ay.

FS: And then after two weeks you went...

TW: I went back to Berlin and they sent me to a *Rekodendepot* [Ger.: recruiting depot] to Forbach. That means in case they need more soldiers, they call and they had to be transported from Forbach to [unclear]. But in this-- I was there about four weeks, but in this time in the four weeks, something happened. Every day we were on the place to be ready to be transported to the front and there was nothing happened. But one day we were transported to the train and were loaded and everybody thought we go to the front again, but the locomotive was on the other end towards Germany. That was the revolution.

FS: And this was in 1918?

TW: *Ja*.

FS: And just to bring us up to date, Lena, your brothers, you had started telling us about your brothers. Now, what happened to your brothers?

LW: One got killed in Russia, the one who went to Russia that time.
FS: He was killed?
LW: He was killed. The lieutenant wrote a letter to us to my parents that the, that the Russians had the German overpowered and he got...
FS: He was shot in the belly?
LW: *Ja*, in the belly. We made from this belly shot, we made a leg shot for my mother, you know.
FS: I didn't understand what you just said.
LW: *Verstehst du?* [Ger.: do you understand?]
TW: We lied about...
LW: So that my mother-- she didn't...
FS: Oh, you lied, you didn't tell your mother.
LW: No, we changed the letter, in the letter, the word, from belly we made leg.
IS: Wounded in the leg.
LW: It's not so bad, you know. And my mother got diabetic from that time on.
FS: And what happened to the other brother?
LW: Other brother. He came home.
FS: He survived the war.
LW: *Ja* [unclear]. But first he was in the first *Schlacht* [Ger.: battle] in Mühlhausen, my oldest brother.
FS: This was in the very beginning of the war.
LW: *Ja*. 1914. He got his little finger got crippled, shot up.
FS: Now, when you were on this train, the train, who told you the war was over?
TW: *Ja*, we saw it, the war was over. When we came, the train was travelling toward Germany and in Saarbrücken the train stopped. And we had to, to leave all our, our guns there and we saw there is a revolution.
FS: How did you see it? How did it occur? What did you actually see?
TW: I didn't see much, but people were crying and they were enjoying, enjoying that the war is over and we had to give everything back.

[Tape one, side one ended.]

Tape one, side two:

FS: Now, when the revolution started in Germany, did you feel-- tell me how you were mustered out eventually. Tell me what happened at the end of January?

TW: I had to stay about three or four months in Berlin and then they mustered me out and sent me home.

FS: Do you remember anything about the Frei Corps in Germany?

TW: No.

FS: Do you remember anything about the Soviet Republic which was established in Bavaria?

TW: No, no, no.

FS: In other words, you didn't get to know these things at all?

TW: No, not at all.

FS: You just didn't travel-- what did you do right after the war?

TW: After the war I stayed home. I did nothing. All of a sudden I met a friend of mine who went with me in school and he had a factory in Emmendingen and he said, "How would it be when you come to me?" So I said, "Yes, why not." So I worked with him and in this time there was a factory for *Säcke*, that means bags, *ja*, jute, from jute bags and they delivered it to big chemical...

LW: They had two factories.

TW: But, in the meantime, in the meantime something happened. In Elsass-Lothringen⁹ there was a factory with textile shoes. Shoes with soles, *gefluchten schlen* [Ger.: braided, twisted soles], heavily textured soles worn mostly by workers in the coal mines and it was a big...

LW: On the roofs.

TW: The roof, *ja*, *Dachdecker* [Ger.: roofer] but the fabrication in France was no good anymore because the delivery couldn't be done to Germany anymore. So my friend made a deal with owners of this factory and they brought the whole factory to Germany.

FS: This must have been before Elsass was transferred to France. Must have been immediately after the war.

TW: *Ja*, '19 when was it...?

FS: '18. Must have been '18 or '19.

TW: *Ja, ja*. And then I worked with him.

LW: They had the shoe factory over there, too.

FS: Now, what do you remember when negotiations in Versailles took place? What does either of you remember about that?

TW: About what?

FS: Versailles. The negotiations, the peace negotiations in Versailles, in France, do you remember anything in the paper? Did it affect you in any way?

⁹Alsace-Lorraine.

TW: No.

FS: When the war was over who took the reins of government, was it workers, Socialists, who was it?

TW: *Ja*, Socialists.

FS: In your town, also?

TW: Everywhere.

LW: All over.

FS: And was there a different way of governing or ...?

TW: No, not. Later on, yes, you know.

LW: You know what we did, how my father and my uncle and a few brothers, they bought another lot of land there you know. Because the money was no good anymore, you know.

TW: There was the inflation.

LW: Inflation, and people went sometimes in the morning when the new cost got out, you know, they went to the bank with what they had.

FS: Tell me what you know about the inflation. How did it affect you? What did you do with the money, how did you live? How did you survive?

LW: Once I went to Berlin, once with my, one of my brothers were in Berlin, in, in-- he was in Nationale Kommunist.

FS: He was a Communist?

LW: *Ja*, and he let me come to him, you know, he was not married and I paid for the *Reise von Gera nach Berlin* [Ger.: trip to Berlin]

FS: The voyage.

LW: The voyage. One million was one pound. The slip was one million marks.

TW: We had the money we earned in this time was very bad. We got the money and we had to hurry to get something for.

FS: Just one minute. Just to come back to what you said before, when you visited your brother in Berlin, do you remember anything any occurrences as far as a putsch is concerned?

LW: [unclear-- multiple conversations].

FS: There was a Civil War in Berlin, but you were never aware of that in any way. Okay, go ahead, Theo, I'm sorry I interrupted. As far as the money is concerned, what did the, how was the average person, let me just say this, how was the average Jewish family affected in this inflation? Did they do better than the population?

TW: No, no.

LW: I only know that we had horses, two home, you know and then they stop build the mark, you know.

FS: When the mark was devalued...

LW: One horse cost one mark, so was the inflation, from one day to the other.

FS: Was your family, was your family better off than the average family?

LW: *Ja.*

FS: What's the name of the town where you come from?

LW: Lahr.

TW: Emmendingen.

FS: In which state in Germany?

TW: Baden.

LW: Baden. This was on the Swiss border, on the French border, you know, where I come from.

FS: Was it ever occupied by French troops?

LW: No.

FS: Was there any animosity between the French population and the German population or did they not get in contact with each other?

TW: No.

FS: You mean there was no animosity or they didn't get in contact? Which of the two?

LW: They were too far away anyway still, you know. But Elsass was then French before it was German.

FS: Now do you remember whether the Jews in Alsace or Lorraine were they for a transfer to Fr-- for a transfer...

LW: They want to be because they didn't like the Germans.

FS: They wanted to be French.

TW: That's right.

LW: They didn't like the Ashkenazi.

TW: That's right.

FS: They wanted to be with France. Was this a general feeling among the Jews?

LW: No, I just talking from the [unclear]. Just the Alsatian Jews.

FS: They wanted to be French.

TW: We talking about the Jews. [unclear-- all talking at once]

FS: Were most of these people able to speak more French than German?

LW: No.

TW: A lot of people had relatives in Germany, the Jews.

LW: I had in Basel, I had a ...

TW: Uncle.

LW: No, not a uncle, nephew, a cousin, and he was a butcher, very good business, but he couldn't stand the Germans, you know.

FS: He didn't like the Germans.

LW: He didn't like the Germans. He couldn't stand them because they always say they won the war, you know and his wife was from Elsass, Elsass-Lothringen. And we came from Elsass, 300 years back.

FS: Your family.

LW: Yes.

FS: So, Hitler's *Putsch* [Ger.: coup] took place in 1923 in Munich, do you remember anything about that?

LW: No.

FS: Do you remember anything about Ludendorff¹⁰ in the first four years following the, the immediate years following the war.

TW: *Ja*, we know what was going on.

LW: *Ja*, that he was a leader.

FS: Which party in Germany in the early years '19, 1919 – '24, which parties did the Jews support? For whom did they vote?

LW: Liberal.

TW: Liberal, what is the name?

LW: *Sozial* [Socialist].

TW: *Nicht Sozialdemocrat* [Ger.: not social democrat]

FS: *Deutsche Demokratische Volkspartei*. [Ger.: Democratic People's Party].

TW: That's right.

FS: The reason why I ask is, the reason why I ask this question is that from what I have heard Jews did not support the *Sozialdemocraten*, the Social Democrats.

TW: *Ja*, that's right, that's right.

FS: [unclear] Jewish.

LW: No, they were...

TW: They don't, they didn't support the *Sozialdemocraten*.

LW: No.

FS: No. That's what these two books there are...

TW: And so [unclear] was a red...

LW: Why?

TW: I don't know.

LW: *Was war Er dann denn?* [Ger.: what was he then?]

TW: *Weis Ich nicht*. [Ger.: I don't know]

FS: *Deutsche, Ich glaube die Partei war Deutsche Demokratische Volkspartei* [Ger.: German, I believe the party was German Democratic People's Party].

IS: *Ja*. But Lena is saying "What were they?" And Theo answered "*Weis nicht*." [Ger.: don't know].

FS: I translate for...

TW: I don't exactly the name of this guy.

IS: We're thinking.

¹⁰Ludendorff, Erich (1865 – 1937) – German military leader and nationalist politician, arrested after failed Putsch. Served in Reichstag, 1924 – 1928 for Nazi Party. Split with Hitler in 1925. Wrote pamphlets denouncing 'Jewish-Masonic-Bolshevik' conspiracy. In 1933 warned Hindenburg not to appoint Hitler chancellor. Encyclopeida of the Holocaust, Vol.3, p 920.

FS: *Ja*. He also had a red tinge to it, wouldn't you say, a Communist tinge, perhaps? No?

LW: I know, one of my brothers who was economist, he said we get *Kommunismus* [Ger.: communism] for sure.

FS: Well, let me ask you this, as the post war years progressed, when did you first realize that *Deutschenationale Volkspartei*, Hitler's party, was as strong, was becoming a strong organization?

LW: End of the 20's.

FS: Would you agree with that?

TW: *Ja, ja*.

FS: Do you remember any of the activities of the NSDAP in Emmendingen?

TW: Oh, *ja*.

FS: Tell us about, both of you, as you think of it, try to remember.

TW: There was one man, he was from Bavaria somewhere. He was...

LW: Then the *Antisemitismus* came then.

FS: Well, tell us about it. It's very important that future students will know about this. The origin, go ahead, Theo.

TW: *Ja*. He came in town and opened up a little business for repairing umbrellas.

LW: That was Schnitzler [phonetic]?

TW: Schnitzler, *ja*, Schnitzler. And he ...

LW: But this was 1929, 1930, when I came to Emmendingen.

TW: *Ja*, that's right. That was the time when you came it started and he was organizing everywhere in town, party...

FS: The Nazi party.

TW: Nazi party. *Ja*, and everything went smoothly to this party. I was a member of the family *Feuerwehr*.

FS: Volunteer Fire Organization.

TW: Huh.

FS: Volunteer Fire Organization.

TW: Fire Organization, *ja*. The time came I had to go out.

LW: This time it started with the...

FS: You had to leave it?

TW: Leave it.

FS: This was prior to the advent of Hitler?

TW: Not prior direct, but you saw you can't stay anymore because everything went to Hitler.

LW: They went against the Jews. They didn't like the Jews.

FS: This was prior to Hitler. Now, do you remember any activities of the *Deutschenationale Volkspartei*, the *Stahlhelm* in Emmendingen? Do you remember this?

TW: *Ja*, in every, in every, in every town they founded this party.

FS: Was there any cooperation between the *Stahlhelm* and the SA, Hitler's...
TW: I don't know exactly.
LW: They were all the same already because they hated the Jews.
FS: You mean both groups?
TW: That's right.
FS: Did it affect your business in any way? The early antisemitism?
TW: *Ja*, I had to go out of...
FS: I mean did it affect your business in any way?
LW: He was manager...
TW: My business, I was manager of the factory, and they told me at this time I have to go out.
FS: You have to leave where?
LW: He had to leave. We had to leave the firm and the city.
FS: You mean this was prior to Hitler?
LW: Oh, sure.
TW: Oh, *ja*. Not prior, Hitler was there already.
LW: Hitler was there already.
FS: In other words, up until January 30th, 1933 when Hitler took over, prior, before, was there a lot of antisemitism in Emmendingen?
TW: *Ja*.
LW: *Ja, ja*.
FS: Did any of the antisemitism come from the churches?
TW: No, no, I don't think so.
FS: Neither the Catholic church, nor...
TW: No, no, I had a neighbor, he was the pastor and he was very nice man and we never heard a word about this.
FS: How about the Catholic church?
TW: The Catholic church was, no, never from the Church.
FS: Do you remember any of the activities of the *Hitlerjugend* [Hitler Youth] before Hitler, before Hitler's advent into the government, do you remember that? Was the *Hitlerjugend* very active? Who put up all the posters in Emmendingen?
LW: The *Hitlerjugend*.
TW: The *Hitlerjugend*. They were very active.
FS: Did it only affect the children, the Jewish children, this movement?
TW: That's hard to say, you know.
FS: When Hitler was finally made Chancellor by Hindenburg in January 30, 1933, do you remember that?
LW: *Ja*, then it was over for us.
FS: What did people say, what did you say? What did you think?
LW: You couldn't say anything, you, you ...

TW: You only want how to get out.
LW: ... you were [unclear]. They didn't let you live.
TW: That was the first thought what we had to get out.
LW: ... out of the country.
TW: You look for a, for a...
LW: ...place...
TW: ...a reason. Not for a reason, to look to go somewhere and to get affidavit.
That's the first thing we had to do.
LW: The people didn't, didn't talk to you anymore in the street, you know.
TW: ...they were afraid to talk to you anymore..
LW: ... they were afraid they going too friendly to you. You felt it all over.
FS: Okay. Let me ask you this, Theo. How long did it take-- Hitler took over end of January 1933, how long did it take until the people started to turn against the Jews?
LW: In '33.
TW: Right away. Right away.
LW: '32 already. Before Hitler was on already.
TW: [unclear] openly, but you felt it, they were against you for little things. Our neighbor was owner of a restaurant. His name was Meyer. He was so nice man and just of a sudden he couldn't do anything, anymore. He didn't speak anymore to us and it was over. And the same thing was with my father. There was a Catholic man, a real Catholic. That was one of the, the one he could, he would have come to us again, but he couldn't. But on the day when we went out he came in the night and visit us.
FS: You mean, before you emigrated.
TW: Right, right.
FS: ... to the United States. And when he met you on the street he pretended not to recognize you at all.
LW: We didn't know and so were all of them...
TW: ...all of them...
LW: ...they all had, was afraid when they were good to the Jews or were Jewish -- all of them, they all were afraid to be good to the Jews.
TW: You don't believe it, how they behaved, all the inhabitants from Emmendingen. On the day, the 9th of November, 1938¹¹ we were arrested in the morning, all men and were brought in the jail.
LW: Now, listen to this, listen to that, he was in the cellar, he was in the cellar with the heater, you know.
FS: You were fixing the heater?
LW: Fix the heater. We had...
TW: [unclear]
LW: We had...

¹¹Kristallnacht – November 9, 1938.

FS: Central heating system.

LW: [unclear] and I went to the door. So they said, "We have to arrest your husband, you know." And then I said, he is not dressed yet, finish clean up and he has a cold and everything. Then he said, who was the name, the one in Paris?

FS: Grynszpan.¹²

LW: Grynszpan, he didn't get dressed either. When he shot-- who did he shot?

FS: Rath, vom Rath.

TW: *Ja*, and then they arrested me and brought me in the, in the jail, and all men from Emmendingen. And in the evening that's the main thing what I wanted to say, in the evening we were lined up in front of the jail and like soldiers we marched to the town, to the town and everybody from both sides of the street were what you call...

FS: Hollering at the Jews?

TW: That's right, that's right.

FS: What did they say?

TW: We couldn't understand a word, but they were glad that we have to go and so we were marched to the station and at the station were hundreds and hundreds of people.

LW: I took the [unclear], the [unclear] and wife and small children.

FS: The people which lined the streets, did you recognize any?

LW: *Ja, ja*.

TW: Schnitzler, Schnitzler was the mailman. He was parading us on the bus when we were lined up on the station platform.

FS: I know you didn't have any children of your own, but what of the children you knew, what kind of an impact did it have on them?

TW: You know, I tell you something, I think there were very, very sad not many children around anymore.

FS: By 1938. You mean that most of them, most of them managed to leave.

LW: *Ja*. They had relatives and friends and they had relatives in [unclear].

FS: So the parents sent the children out first?

IS: How long did it take you to get an affidavit? In 1933 you knew...

[Tape one, side two ended; interview ended.]

¹²Grynszpan, Herschell – assassinated the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris, November 7, 1938. He died two days later; his death was the pretext for *Kristallnacht*. Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, Vol. 2, p. 628.