



Interview mit

# Fred Sterzer

InterviewerIn: Philipp Rohrbach

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Verwendete Kürzel: PR Philipp Rohrbach  
FS Fred Sterzer

## Teil 1

**PR:** This is an *Austrian Heritage Collection* interview with Mr. Fred Sterzer, conducted by Philipp Rohrbach on September 18th, 2008, at Mr. Sterzer's office. Mr. Sterzer, could you please tell me your life story?

**FS:** [Lacht.] In five minutes or less. I was born in Vienna, on November 18th, 1929. We lived in the 20th district, as I mentioned to you, in the Brigittenau. I went to *Volksschule* there, and I was a very good student. I still have my records to prove that. And when the Germans came to Austria, we eventually had to move from where we lived in the 20th district, which was...to a large apartment in the 1st district, which clearly had belonged to a Jewish family who had left. It was a huge apartment, and a number of families were put into the same apartment. And we stayed there until October 1942 when we were deported to Theresienstadt. We included eventually...sorry, before that my grandmother on my father's side had died in Zelinkagasse 2, my grandfather was still there. My sister managed...emigrated first to England, and from there to the United States. And the grandmother on my mother's side emigrated to London. She had a son there, who had lived there for many years. He went to England as a professional soccer player, then worked for a bank, and he took her. My parents, my brother: they all had affidavits to go to the United States. My brother and I, who were younger than my sister, could have gone, too, but my parents felt we were too young. My parents could not go because my father was on the Polish quota because he was born in Galicia, which at that time was part of Austria. But that did not matter. And my mother was born in Budapest, in Hungary, which again, at the time she was born, was a part of Austria. But still they did not count. So they had the quota system, where they...could not get the visa to emigrate to the United States. And they felt that the children, that my brother and I...my brother was about four and a half years older than I...we were too young to go by ourselves to the United States.

My father was an attorney, a lawyer. He had an office in Wipplingerstraße, together with his brother, Otto, who was born in the same year. My father was born in January and he was born on December 31st. And in 1938, during the Kristallnacht, my uncle Otto was sent to Dachau. And...my mother, there is a story on it...my mother got him out, and he then emigrated to Shanghai. Apparently what happened is: some years before a woman who was as a client of my father ran into him on the street and she was very distraught and she needed money. And my father gave her whatever money he had on him. And later on, it turns out that her son became SS [Schutzstaffel] officer. And through his intervention he got my uncle out of Dachau, and he then emigrated to Shanghai. He did not need a visa to go to Shanghai, and he survived the war in Shanghai. And I still have correspondence from him.

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In any case, we then were the five of us: my grandfather, my parents and I were sent to Theresienstadt. I was put into a building for teenagers – *L414* – while my parents, my grandfather, and my brother stayed together in one of the *Kasernen*...whatever. Early on, my grandfather died but for a long time I was not told.

They did not want me to get upset. In Theresienstadt I worked on various things. Most of the time – certainly towards the later part – I worked in agriculture. There were many fields around Theresienstadt...and since the Germans had evacuated the whole population that was there before it became a ghetto there were all these fields around. And we would go out and work on the fields. They had supposedly the largest field of tomatoes in Europe, and stuff like that. Potato fields, huge fields, and I worked in the fields, which turned out to be, I think, very good for me because I was not only sunburned, but I had a lot of calluses on my hands, which later on was a benefit. My brother worked in the bakery, my father was put in charge of the *Entlausung*, and my mother worked peeling potatoes, and stuff like that, in the kitchens.

In Theresienstadt...well, there is one other thing, which I think is nice to know...is that...the former head of the Jewish *Gymnasium* in Vienna, a man named Dr. Nohel, was in Theresienstadt. He was a mathematician, and he...when [Albert] Einstein was in Prague, he had hired Nohel as his assistant. And Nohel, some evenings, would give me instructions in mathematics, which turned out to be useful, because when I got back to Vienna – after being in the hospital for a long time – I got the best marks in mathematics in my first test there, in a real *Gymnasium*.

Then in October [19]44, my father was sent away, we did not know where they went. And soon thereafter, my brother was called up. Now my brother was a childhood diabetic. Somehow, I do not know how, they had gotten him insulin in Theresienstadt. When he was called up to be transported out of Theresienstadt, my mother volunteered herself, and me, to go along. She felt that we would be reunited with my father and she was always worried about my brother who was...who needed insulin to stay alive. On the transport to...as it turned out to be Auschwitz...my brother had taken along a package of insulin, but we were sitting on top of a lot of luggage, and somehow that package fell in there, we could not retrieve it. When we got to Auschwitz my mother was selected for the wrong side, and did not survive, of course. And my brother...I remember getting off the train there, telling...there were Jewish inmates, who were unloading the trains...I told them: "You know, my brother is very sick." They said: "Do not tell anybody he is sick, whatever you do." So we did not. And we survived two selection processes, one when we were dressed, and one naked, where they shaved you, everything. And somebody I knew well, who was my age, who had a *Buckel*...was selected out, I remember, when we were selected naked.

1/00:10:56

Then my brother got so sick, he started breathing acetone. So, finally, I had no choice to tell somebody there: "He is going to die there." So he was taken away. And...I asked two friends of ours, who were twins, as it turns out, to take care of me. Anyhow, the day after or so, we were...there is one thing that happened, I always remember: They asked everybody who was under sixteen or whatever, I do not know...every teenager to step forward. So I stepped forward, I thought this was a good thing. But then they sent everybody who wore glasses back, which I thought was a very bad thing, and therefore I did not wear glasses anymore. I hid them in my clothing, and the next night I broke them, while I was sleeping. There

were two teenagers whom I knew, who did not wear glasses, and they were called out, and...I met their father later in Vienna, they never came back. So this was sheer luck as most of the survival is sheer luck. And has...it taught me a lesson, that is the wrong word, but since then I never push. If things do not want to go, let them, because maybe it is good for you.

Anyhow, we were all sent to a work concentration camp, a work camp called Friedland [Außenlager des KZ Groß-Rosen]. All this happened in October of [19]44. Before you leave Auschwitz, you have to undress, take everything off – that is the reason I mentioned that – take a shower, and then they sent you off.

So we came to Friedland. And in Friedland I worked...first we dug a big tunnel, where they wanted to put the factory inside the tunnel, but the damn thing was never finished. I then worked in a factory that made propellers for *IG Farben*, for the German Air Force. One of my memories is that I was deathly afraid that I was going to cut off my hand, because the machines did not have guards on them, and there was one particular one that I worked on, where you had to grab above and below, and there was a rotating, sharp metal thing, where you cut the...propellers, you had to shape them, they were...it turns out that about...three months ago or so, I happened to get a call from a girl, turns out that her grandfather was in Friedland. And he injured his finger. He survived, but she said, he could never...he could play the violin, he could never play the violin, because...I know how, you put your *Hand* there, you were tired, it was terrible.

Friedland...well, there was very little food, and people would die of malnutrition, including some I knew quite well. About the worst thing that I have ever seen in my life. I guess, at the beginning of [19]45, when the Russians were...driving towards Germany, they emptied out the concentration camps, and walked them west. So one day, we had, I think, four barracks there...we had to empty out one barrack, and they put a number of these concentration camp inmates, who had come from the East into this building. And they did not give them anything to eat. These people were crawling around...on the places where we put garbage, there. And we had nothing to eat, but they had absolutely nothing to eat. It was terrible.

1/00:15:56

Later on, just before the end of the war, we were digging trenches along highways. These were v-shaped trenches, and the highway itself...you put u-shaped things made of trees, where...if the Russians would come, you could put the trees in between these two u-shaped structures and block the tanks. One incident, which is sort of silly, but I will never forget: There was shale on the bottom of these trenches, and you had to go with a pickaxe to loosen the shale, so then you could sort it out. And at that time, there were...the people who were watching over us were from *Volkssturm*, older people. And there I am trying to get loose that shale, and there is that son of a bitch on top would throw a rock at me, and said: "Not there, go there!" [Lacht.] They would tell you what to do. But they could have shot me, they did not. Somebody, who was sort of a big shot in the camp, escaped. And he made it safely, because I met him in Vienna after the war. But then they made us stand for...you worked for twelve hours, and you had to stand at night another twelve

hours, because they wanted to find him. What happened then was work again, and I still remember, I was so scared that I am really going to lose my hand now. You did not know what the hell you were doing.

Anyhow, in...one other thing: across from the camp was a hotel, *Hotel Zur Guten Hoffnung*, hotel for good hope, and I always said: "I am going to stay in that hotel." [Weint.] Which I did. In...I guess it was May 8th, the Russians came. They came on bicycles and with submachine guns. And we opened the doors to the camp, and we went up into the woods, we did not want to get involved in the fighting. Next day, all the Germans had fled, and we went back into the town. I mean, there was still food on the table. People had clearly left in a great hurry. I want to tell you something my father had told us, who was a soldier in the First World War and, of course, was in Vienna afterwards. That the currency after the war was worthless. I always remembered that, and I was sure – it turns out my brother remembered that, too – the currency is going to be worthless. I was in the bank of Friedland, where all this money was around. I did not take any, who wants to take the money. So you went from house to house, and grabbed a few things, clothes or something. And food of course, which made you very sick. Not that the food was bad, but you were not used to...this food. And I stayed for a few days in the hotel to good hope and then I took a train to Prague. And from Prague I...either by...no, eventually I got on a truck of Russian soldiers, and they took me to Vienna.

1/00:20:16

And in Vienna, I went to the Vienna [Israelitische] *Kultusgemeinde*, and said...you know...and I discovered there, that two of the cousins of my father had remained in Vienna to take care of Jewish children from some place in the Balkans. Why the heck the Germans would kill all the Jewish children in Auschwitz, but the ones they moved to Vienna, they did not kill? And one of these cousins – I called him [unklar] – was a physician. She was my physician when I was a child and her sister took care of them. So that...so I went there, they were *im zweiten Bezirk*. They put me up – I still remember – on the fourth floor. And I had of course completely given up...that my brother would be alive. I mean, can you imagine: Auschwitz, they took him away as he is breathing acetone. So I was hoping that my father might have survived. It turned out he did not. I met somebody – who is still in the [United] States [of America] – who was with him on the train, sitting behind him to Auschwitz, and said he was sent into the wrong directions. But the next day, in this place for children there, exactly the next day. [Weint.] I am sorry, this...is the one...thing I always get emotional about. I heard the screaming downstairs. It turned out my brother was there. He had come with somebody else, opposite direction, they went on the other side of the Danube, and they came across and they came to the Leopoldstadt, and asked somebody: "Are there any Jews there?" So they sent him to this house.

Now my brother's survival...is one of the mysteries...the incredible stories of the war. At that time in Germany, people were dying...diabetics, because they could not get insulin. He wrote up his story, which I could send you, if he agrees to that. But fundamentally what happened in Auschwitz is that, at that time, in October [19]44, they had sent Hungarian Jews in masses to Auschwitz, and they had...in Hungary there was insulin. So there was a dispensary in Auschwitz, and they had insulin, and so they gave him insulin. He said

an SS officer came back, and they said: "Oh, he injured his leg working. He is going to be okay in a couple of days." And that is it. It is a long story, but he survived, and he finally wound up in Sachsenhausen. And he had also somehow gotten hold of some German money, and he threw it out of the window of the train, because he also remembered that my father was saying that it is going to be worthless.

In Vienna then, I went to visit somebody I knew, I do not remember who, in a hospital. There was a Jewish hospital *im zweiten Bezirk*, and there was a physician named Dr. Hahn, and I told Dr. Hahn: "I do not feel so good myself, either." So they took my temperature, which was very high, and they kept me there. So I was in the hospital for seven months. And I got out in January 1946. And I went directly to...again, we got back the apartment in the first district, went directly to...I was admitted immediately to a *Gymnasium* there, *im ersten Bezirk*, and this is where the first test, I got the best marks in mathematics thanks to Dr. Nohel. I...took the *Matura* there in [19]47, and then emigrated with my brother to the United States.

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One little story, to show you how miracles are insane: After the war, Vienna was divided into five zones, one for each of the occupying forces and the center was international, where they changed every month. If you lived in the Russian zone...people did not even know it was a Russian zone, there was an arbitrary...they would not let you go to the United States. And we lived in the first district, international zone. So we come to the consulate, and: "You cannot go." I remember, I spoke reasonable English, I guess. I got really very excited and said: "This is completely stupid! Give us the visa during the months the Americans are in charge of the first district." Anyhow, I think they were impressed that I could speak English, and pointing out that the whole thing was really stupid. So we got our visa and in August 1947, we left for the United States. And there was my sister, and...I...we arrived on August 20th, 1947. And the month after that, September, I was enrolled at *City College of New York*, and got a part time job – through my sister, at the same place, where my sister worked as a bookkeeper – as an errand boy for twenty-five dollars a week. That was fine. I eventually got a raise to twenty-eight dollars a week, but in any case, I went to *City College*, always working, of course. And graduated from *City College* in [19]51, went to *New York University* in the Bronx, because we were living in the Bronx, got a master's degree in physics. And in [19]54, I got a PhD in physics, mostly downtown NYU. I got a job...well, I worked already, while getting the master's, I worked in New York for a company called *Elite Control*, I guess. Before that, I worked for small companies as an errand boys or stock clerks or whatever. And the job was with RCA [Radio Corporation of America] in Harris, New Jersey, I got started in [19]54. And in [19]56, I moved to the RCA laboratories in Princeton, New Jersey, where I stayed, eventually becoming director of a laboratory there, on microwaves. And then in [19]87, I guess, RCA was taken over by *General Electric*, and...maybe [19]86. [19]87 GE decided to give away RCA laboratories to an outfit called *SRA International*, and made it very attractive to leave, so I said: "I am going to leave." And they asked me and some other people to stay another year to help in the transition, and during that time I founded this company, which is now over twenty years old. It is a small company, which does research and development, and that is it.

**PR:** What is the name of this company?

**FS:** *MMTC*, it is on the card.

1/00:30:11

**Ende von Teil 1**

## **Teil 2**

**PR:** One of my first questions would be: can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents? What do you remember of them, where they were from?

**FS:** Well again, I only know three of my grandparents. My maternal grandfather I never met. My maternal grandmother used to live with us, and she would do all the cooking. And I remember, as a child, we went to a hotel...in the mountains there is a train that goes from Wiener Neustadt...it does not matter. I refused to eat there, so they finally had to call my grandmother, who made me scrambled eggs, and I ate, because I was only used to eating what my grandmother cooked. So she lived with us, and then again, my mother's brother, her son, who was very athletic, he played for the *Hakoah* in Vienna – football – and he was...also played for *Auswahl Wien* [Wiener Stadtauswahl]. He was a defensive back, and people...many people I met, remembered him. They said: "Nobody could ever run him over." He was very strong. And then he emigrated, I guess...he went to play in England soccer. And so he...eventually, well...after the war, he came to the United States, but he was in the British Army during the war. And again, he was instrumental in getting my grandmother to England, where she died after the war. The other two grandparents...my father's father had a photography store in the tenth district, in Favoriten, and his wife was a housewife, I guess, and that is it. Apparently, in Poland, he clearly used to work in the fields, because he would tell me how he could pick up these big sacks of potatoes and put them on trucks et cetera. But in Vienna, he had this photography business. And clearly did well there, because they had a villa in the outskirts of Vienna, where as children we used to go there. That is about it.

**PR:** Could you please tell me what your grandmother's name was? The one who lived with you and--

**FS:** --well, the last name is Truma, and her son's name was Truma, too, and the others were of course Sterzer. Richard Sterzer was the grandfather.

**PR:** Speaking about your parents, could you tell me what your father's name was, when he was born, and also a little bit about his...he was having his attorney's office on Wipplingerstraße, you mentioned this.

**FS:** He was born in 1895, on January 23rd, it turns out, in [unklar]. I have some papers here, which I could...and he, again, studied at the university. He was, I understand, *Obmann* of the Social Democrats or

something. Later, the one thing I remember, when [Engelbert] Dollfuß was around, he represented...he was the attorney for the *Hakoah*, but he was also the attorney for...*die Rote Fahne*, I think it was called. And my mother was always afraid they were going to send him to a concentration camp – Dollfuß now – because he represented them. And my mother always complained, you could not walk with him on the Ringstraße, because everybody would say: “*Herr Doktor* here, *Herr Doktor* there.” You could not make any progress, he knew everybody. There is a coffeehouse in the Wipplingerstraße – I forget the name – where he used to go. So he was rather well-known. And he knew many of the, I guess, political figures in Vienna. [Tür im Hintergrund wird geöffnet und geschlossen.]

2/00:05:13

And some people here told me that he was the smartest man they ever knew. He was not smart enough to get us out of Vienna, but anyhow. He was a great raconteur, and people used to come to...I was told...when he pleaded before the court, to listen to him. The other thing I can tell you about him is, that...he told me, that before Dollfuß came to power, he was a criminal attorney mostly, it seems. He never lost a case, because there was a jury. Afterwards there were three judges...he could not...that was a different story, he could not tell them sob stories about the clients. But with the jury, he would...again...apparently he always won his cases.

This reminds me of something else, because somebody else reminded me that...this granddaughter I mentioned came here with her mother to find out more about her grandfather that had also been in Friedland [Aussenlager des KZ Groß-Rosen]. There was a famous trial in Vienna, maybe you know...*Lainzer Tiergarten*, some people got murdered there or something, I do not quite know, but this was a famous thing. I have seen it in books even. And my father represented, I think, the taxi driver who took somebody there, and somehow was implicated in this. And he got him free. As a result, he would always drive us to Vöslau on vacation, this cab driver. I do not know if he was really in danger of being implicated. But before we left, we gave him or his wife all the jewelry we had. Before we went to Theresienstadt. And when we came back, my brother went to see them, they claimed it was bombed out. And the mother of that granddaughter of the guy who was in Friedland with me, somehow brought that up. She said, everybody she knows, they all lost their jewelry. Everything that was left behind, everything was bombed out. Maybe it was bombed out, how are you going to prove it? But we never got it back. So I do not know about my father, but...during World War Two [meint: Erster Weltkrieg] he was sent together with his brother...again, they were the same *Jahrgang*...with his brother to officers' training school. And the way my father told me...they were marching – go left, go right – and I do not know, my father did something wrong, and he said, there came this colonel who was very small, and he started screaming at him. And my father started laughing. As a result of which he was kicked out of officers' training school, but my uncle remained. And my father did not make it higher than *Zugsführer*, but my uncle became a *Fähnrich*, and was on the Italian front and got shot at, and terrible things happened to him, but not to my father, who was kicked out, because he laughed at the colonel. [Lacht.] That is about it.



**PR:** Both of them were attorneys?

**FS:** Yes, they both were attorneys.

**PR:** Do you remember where in the Wipplingerstraße they were having the--

**FS:** --24, I think.

**PR:** 24. What happened to his attorney's office?

**FS:** I do not...we did not get that back or anything. The only thing, again...during most of the time when things were being settled, I was in the hospital, and my brother took care of this, and he managed to get back this apartment, Zelinkagasse 4, Tür 3, where...we had lived before we were sent out, but we could not possibly afford it. That was a gorgeous apartment. When we left for the United States, I knew I would never, ever live in such a nice apartment. Out of the question. Inlaid floors and the ornaments on the ceiling...a ball room, you could open the doors, it became five windows along. So we got it back, but there were several of our friends who had also been in a concentration camp, who lived in different rooms, and this was a huge apartment. There was a German family, who I guess had lived there after we had left, who came back, I do not know from where, and they lived in the servant's quarters. That was the type of the apartment then.

2/00:11:03

**PR:** What was your uncle's name?

**FS:** Uncle? The lawyer? Otto. Otto Sterzer. He survived in Shanghai and came to the United States, and died here eventually. He had a hard time here, because they do not need lawyers with Austrian degrees here. But he married here. It turns out I was in Shanghai last year and sort of asked around. Some people who remembered that there was a Jewish...colony there. My uncle, I remember, told me that if there was a fire, the fire department would come, and unless you pay them, they would not put out the fire. But he worked. They must have had a newspaper there, he worked as a reporter for that, I suppose, Jewish refugee newspaper. Let me see. [Holt einige Fotos und Zeitungsartikel.]

This is my father. He used to give lectures in Theresienstadt, and there is a list of lecturers, you see?

**PR:** Karl Sterzer?

**FS:** Yes, doctor of law. It is a terrible list. What is terrible is that these were all highly educated people, and the...everyone...otherwise, they would not give the lectures. You can pull this off the internet.

**PR:** Yes, I would write this down. But do you remember what happened to the Wipplingerstraße after the Anschluss?

**FS:** No. See, this is my father's mother...that is my uncle in his uniform. Here it says when he was born. Richard Sterzer. He died in Theresienstadt, but I do not know the date. It says here November 21st. I do not know how I found that out. That is my father. [Blättert durch Fotos.] That is my mother that is their *Heiratsurkunde*.

**PR:** Can you tell me a little bit--

**FS:** --see: born in Budapest.

**PR:** On November 3rd, 1898. So her name was Rosa Regina Truma, before she married. Can you tell me a little bit more about your mother?

**FS:** Not much. Again, she was a very energetic person. And she is the one who got my uncle out, because she went to Morzinplatz, where the Gestapo [Geheime Staatspolizei] was, and...no one wanted to go there, she did. Again, she went there, and I guess through my father she knew this...anyhow, she was the one who got him out of Dachau. And she...I can see, she was a very pretty woman, and that is me. [Zeigt ein Foto.] I do not know really, she had some degree. I do not know how you say it, I guess, like a secretarial school, I think, but I am not sure, certainly not a university degree. That is it. This is my brother. He was born in 1925, on April 28th.

2/00:16:08

**PR:** His name is?

**FS:** Ernest. Ernst. He had three names, Ernst Alfons Victor. And I was Friedrich Albert, and then under the Germans, of course, you had to add "Israel" to every name. This is the villa I mentioned, in Pötzleinsdorf. [Zeigt weitere Fotos.] This is my two grandmothers and my mother, her children. My sister. *Schulnachrichten*. This is Dr. Weiz, who took care of the children with her. See, she wrote there. And this is...I do not know, this is...*Schulnachrichten*, what did I get? A number two? *Schreiben, naja*...did not improve. [Lacht.] So that is it.

**PR:** So you and your--

**FS:** --my brother, he fortunately had *Genügend*, see? [Lacht.]

**PR:** Which school did you go to?

**FS:** This is a very good question. And...the *Gymnasium*, these schools I know...beim Augarten dort, vielleicht sagt...es sagt dir nichts. Wasnergasse...that was the Wasnergasse, where *die Schule*. The...I do not remember the...this is my brother writing from the concentration camp. This is where I stayed in Theresienstadt. [Zeigt Fotos.] No, I am sorry, these were the soccer games. My brother played soccer, and I used to go and watch him of course, all the time. They played in the inside of this *Kaserne*. And I stayed here: *L414*. See, this is Dr. Otto Sterzer, in Shanghai. We could send it to him, this is...my father sent it to

him, and I got it from my uncle. This basically says everything is fine: „Lieber Otto“, you know this greetings. [Zeigt Fotos und einen Brief.] Let me look here, I must have my...that is the transport list from Auschwitz to Theresienstadt...no, from Auschwitz to Friedland, and...I do not know, I must have taken it out.

2/00:19:59

My brother from Sachsenhausen...that is my brother. That is his...I guess, they got...my brother got a note there, which enabled him to travel. That is me. I will tell you that, even though it does not involve me: Again, this granddaughter who finally found me through, I guess, the Holocaust museum, and somebody else who found me again a long way around, who was also in Friedland. I asked him if he knew this guy, and he was Paul...Pavel, Paul Fertig, the answer was no. But this is...I wrote him a note, and this looks...to be like a typical Jewish family, but he is...let me see, Hans Fertig...etcetera...death rate of 84.7. A lot of them died, of course, and I said: “This is so terrible, so many people died.” He says: “That is nothing, from my family, no one survived.” Look at this, this really bothers me: “...were sent to Treblinka in transport B1, nobody survived.” [Liest etwas vor.] That is a death rate of 100 percent. Then, I guess, this girl’s grandmother had a daughter who died in Theresienstadt. Anyhow, but he wrote back...they did terrifically well...considering what other families had. [Sucht in seinen Dokumenten.] I am looking at my *Matura*, because I do not know the name of the *Gymnasium*. It was maybe *Schottengymnasium*, it was close to Zelinkagasse, because I could walk there every day. But as I remember, it does not say on the *Matura* certificate where the school is, that sort of general...how do you call it...from the Ministry of Education, whatever.

**PR:** So you mentioned this apartment in the 20th district. Where was it in the 20th district?

**FS:** Karl-Meißl-Straße 12, Tür 11.

**PR:** Can you describe the apartment to me?

**FS:** No, because I do not have a very good memory. [Lacht.] It was not a large apartment, and in the apartment...there lived my two siblings, my two parents, my grandmother, and we had a maid, we did not have a car. The maids at the time, I remember, were paid 30 schillings a month. So the apartment was sort of one block from Augarten. Which is very nice, you could go there, and...the Wasnerstraße [meint: Wasnergasse], this reminded me, was the school, was at walking distance. So it was a modest apartment, but these were tough times. I mean, this was the great depression, and then whatever. But as a child, you did not know. It was fine, you went to school, you went to the park and you played soccer in the street, and that is it.

2/00:24:50

**PR:** Do you remember how important religion was for your family?

**FS:** Well, for my paternal grandfather, for Richard...he knew a lot. I think he had read the Talmud in Poland. My father said he was not religious, neither, I think, was my mother. But we did not have pork at home, and stuff like this. And I remember that, after the war, it took some effort to eat my first ham sandwich, but I did. But we used to go to synagogue on the important holidays, yes.

It reminds me of something not pleasant: Our rabbi eventually became the head of...the Jewish community in Theresienstadt. It was our rabbi in the 20th district. He was an arrogant son of a bitch. He was hated by everybody. If he would have returned to Vienna, we would have strung him up on the next light pole. His name was [Benjamin] Murrelstein. The Czech government, by the way, trialed him for cooperation with the Germans, but he was found innocent. He would simply claim that he did what they told him to do. Period. His two predecessors were killed, but Murrelstein survived, and eventually, I was told...went to work in the Vatican, of all places, but he had a degree in religion, so he knew a lot. But he did not come back to Vienna, which was a good move on his part. Universally despised and hated. Maybe overdone, I do not know, but I think it had to do partly, because not only had he survived and his predecessors did not, that he was clearly a very arrogant individual, and...so this has not helped in my opinion of religion...no.

**PR:** Which synagogue did you attend?

**FS:** I do not remember. Im 20. Bezirk. And then later on in Seitenstettengasse. We were invited back on the 60th anniversary. They had a service in the Seitenstettengasse. I think it is the only synagogue that remains. I do not even remember where the synagogue was in the 20th district. But no, not very religious, except this grandfather, who did not live with us up until the war. And my father was not religious. Period. Neither am I.

**PR:** Your father was somehow related to the Social Democratic Party, the Socialist Party?

**FS:** Yes. Apparently he was an important figure in the university, and again, he represented the socialist newspaper, so he was clearly a Social Democrat. How important a position he had after, I do not know. What I do remember is that there was a Jewish member of parliament, and he knew him well, because this guy was in our apartment, I remember. So he knew people in the...but otherwise, I do not know. But again, I met here a fair number of people who knew him and could have told you more.

**PR:** Do you remember the role that politics in general played in your family, connected to the family life?

**FS:** No, the only thing, that I mentioned earlier, is: I remember my mother was afraid, because he represented the *Rote Fahne* there, which is not...and Dollfuß was already...they already had concentration camps, that...so it was not a safe thing to do. But I assume he really believed in that, and I would guess, as many Jews in this period, because the socialists were the more liberal party, some of the leaders in the older days, at least, were Jewish.

2/00:30:15

**PR:** What do you remember of your school days?

**FS:** My old school days? Well, the ones before the war...the elementary school...I believe I was the best student in my class. There is one incident, that I remember, which was after Hitler came to Vienna. When the...what should we call it...the students tried to beat up other Jewish kids, and they hid behind me, because they would not hit me. I do not know whether it was because I was the best student, because I was popular, I do not know. But I remember that incident. My brother remembers it from school, but he has told me the incident...again, before Hitler there...that there was...the gentile kids, the teenagers challenged one of the Jews to fight their leader. And apparently this kid trained a lot, and my brother Ernest said he made a hole in the kitchen where he lived, because he would hit against it. In any case, they had this fight there, and the Jewish kid knocked out the other guy, and they all said: "Wow, this is going to be all over the world. The Jewish kid beat another kid." Well, of course, as you probably know, Max Baer was Jewish so there were Jewish champions. There was a lot of anti-Semitism before. The other thing is, that they...when Hitler came he was greeted like the savior of the world. It was incredible. Everywhere you went there, everybody was wearing a swastika, out of every window there was a flag with the swastika on it. So I guess, in [19]43 the Americans and the Russians cleverly decided, that Austria was a country that was taken over by force. Apparently they did that hoping that the Austrians would rise up, which was completely insane. It tells you that they did have no conception at all on what goes on in the world. The percentage of members of the Nazi party was larger in Austria, even though Austria had less time to join. They were very...a huge percentage of the population...clearly not only...they voted 98 percent, but this does not matter...but clearly in favor of the Anschluss.

After the Anschluss, I was sent to...I went to a Jewish school, *Chajes Gymnasium*, which was a good school. And my father could no longer practice, so he worked for the *Kultusgemeinde*, advising people. I guess on whatever legal rights they had – you could no longer practice law – and he did this until we were deported.

2/00:34:35

And from my class in the *Chajes Gymnasium*, as far as I know, there are only two survivors in addition to me. They are both special cases. Some quite interesting. They are both still alive, one is a lawyer in Vienna, and the other one is a cardiologist. The lawyer, her father was a...she was a *Mischling* and therefore she could somehow survive. They tried to flee, but whatever. Her father was a lawyer, too. But she survived. And the other one...her father was a physician, he was the head physician for the *Polizei* in Vienna. He went to school with...the head of not just the SS, but of everything. The successor...he was directly under [Heinrich] Himmler, he was on the first Nuremberg Trials, from Austria. Tall man, his name will come to me [meint: Ernst Kaltenbrunner]. He was of course sent to death. But her father went to school with this guy, and apparently helped him. As a result of which – I did not know this at that time – they were considered

untouchable in Theresienstadt. They were in Theresienstadt, too. I knew them well. And so they survived. She survived because they could not be sent away.

I will tell you just two stories from this...getting together in Vienna, for the 60th anniversary. One about Theresienstadt: somebody I know, a girl, she was a year younger than me, was in the same place in Theresienstadt as I. She and her sister were sent to Auschwitz, and they both survived. They went to various camps, and at the end of the war, they came back. They were marched back to Theresienstadt. When they came back to Theresienstadt, they said...their own mother had not been sent away, could not recognize them. The other one is...just idiotic...the thing was: there was a woman there, a *Mischling*. Her brother was in the German Army, and as she had a brother in the German Army, she was protected, she was not sent away. Then her brother died in combat in France, so she no longer had a brother, and they sent her away. See, makes sense, right? So this is how the regime worked. I do not know what...I can give you copies of my professional biography, otherwise only little stories.

**PR:** There are actually a few more things I would be very interested in. Speaking about the school, and--

**FS:** --which school?

**PR:** Elementary school, like the school in the 20th district.

**FS:** Yes, I do not remember much, but go ahead.

**PR:** The second thing is: do you remember how the relationship with your neighbors was? Back in the...before the--

**FS:** --no, I really do not remember. The one thing I remember is that the guy who owned our house had been...he was a gentile, he had been to America, and, I guess, had made money and came back. And all I remember is, he bought...he had a safe, and he bought it from us, because it could not be moved to the Zelinkagasse. I do not remember. My brother, who [unklar] for a long time, my sister...would have remembered much more. My sister wrote...again...who came to the United States probably 1939, 1940...wrote up her history...that I can send you. It describes little stories. And of course, she was born in [19]23, she was six and a half years older than I, so she remembered much more, and my brother remembered much more. But what he wrote up there is not about his youth, it is about how he survived concentration camp.

2/00:39:41

**PR:** Because you mentioned your sister now: what was your sister's name?

**FS:** Gerda. She married here and she has a son. She died. The husband died, quite some time ago. She came here, she lived with relatives in Perth Amboy. There is a little story in there, but I happen to think that little stories tell you more than all the statistics put together: The little story about this, and us too – me too

and my brother – that sometimes, I would guess, in the 1920s, a distant relative of my grandfather, from Poland, came to Vienna. And my grandfather must have given him money or something, so that he would come to the United States. The man's name was Parnes, and Mr. Parnes opened a bakery in Perth Amboy, which was hugely successful. They say people came around for many, many miles to buy...his bread was famous there, and this was real bread. And Mr. Parnes, I guess, did not forget, and he sent affidavits to everybody, including my sister, but again only my sister went. But he sent it for me and my brother. We came on his affidavit too, after the war. But she came here, and she stayed with the Parneses in Perth Amboy for a while. And she said the Parnes once took her to New Brunswick, do you know New Brunswick? To see the mountains of New Jersey, and he had seen the Alps. [Lacht.] It was really mountains. She also said, she took a course in German in high school, and the teacher could not understand her, and she could not understand him, so he gave her an A, and told her not to come to the class anymore. But anyhow, she then went to New York, and she became a bookkeeper and married. And since her son moved to California, she moved there too, they both moved to California. She, for reasons I do not really understand, was sent to a private girl's high school. Why she was sent to a private school, I have no idea. But several of the girls in the school emigrated to the States, and they became close friends. In fact, my nephew, he was in New York, told me – and I have forgotten, this is very bad – I should call up one of them. There is one...at least one or two are still alive.

My father gave lectures, like a lot of other people in Theresienstadt, as you probably know. In the evening, they had plays, and concerts, and lectures, and it is just, again...these two are the two girls who came back to...Ilse Adler and Lily Adler...came back to Theresienstadt, and their mother would not recognize them. [Zeigt ein Foto.] They were walking around, I guess, half of Germany.

The mother of that granddaughter, who was here...when I mentioned this thing about Dr. Nohel giving me...studied with him, I do not know how often, I guess once in a while. Mathematics. I made the observation, which I never thought about is that they really tried to teach Jewish children there. That is true. I am sure he was tired, and worked all day, and needs to go teach calculus or something, but he did. He was killed in Auschwitz, by the way. I know this of...one of the friends, who survived, sent me. He knew him too, this friend. His sister was a secretary to Dr. Nohel, and she did not survive. But he sent me...some place I have the...did not see Nohel's name here, he was in only one or two. Did not make it.

2/00:45:30

Here he is: Dr. Paul Nohel. Was born 1885, and sent away. I guess there is a *Totenbuch* from Theresienstadt. [Schnäuzt sich.] I never noticed this: „*Aufenthaltsbestätigung, Zelinkagasse 1.*“ Already in [19]39, I guess. In March of [19]39 we moved to Zelinkagasse, until we were deported.

**PR:** You told me a few things you remember about the Anschluss. But do you have more recollections? Besides these things...about the Anschluss?

**FS:** You know the usual: we all had to wear the stars, and we had to go to a Jewish school. And this one incident, where the other Jewish children hid behind me. Not...you had to go...and you had cards to get food. The *Chajes Gymnasium* did not continue to exist until we were deported, it must have been about a year or so. I have to look it up, I have a book on it. Then, we had no schooling at all, because the *Chajes Gymnasium* shut down. But...no, I can tell you about somebody else, to have a good story. Somebody I knew very well, quite well I should say, who became a physician in Vienna, and has since died of pancreatic cancer. He is the husband of the woman I said was in Theresienstadt – protected. He was hidden by a gentile physician for the entire war. It is amazing. He said, he went to movies, everything. And I knew the doctor too, he was a nice guy. And again, he married this school friend of mine, both physicians then, and they came to this country, and then I met them here. They could have stayed both, and they went back, because they did not want this physician – Dr. Feldner – to be alone. So there were good stories too, but not many.

I went to school with...I guess at the time my best friend...a kid who...let me back up: I have several friends from Vienna yet...superb chess players. One of them is an international master, and he drew once in a tournament against the world champion. He said...this other friend of mine, Bobby Teig, was much better than [unklar]. Probably would have been...but he died. He said, he was a real genius. And the one...I still see him quite often, a fellow named Kurt Spielberg, he was also a PhD in physics. He is not a professional player, but he played on the professional level. He said, Bobby Teig was much better than any of them. I used to play with him. I mean, it was impossible, he was too good. So that was not a good time.

2/00:50:46

This list here: if you look at this list, it is terrible. Just to look at them, everybody died in Auschwitz. Died in Auschwitz, died in Auschwitz, died in Flossenbürg. They were all highly...obviously highly educated people. [Schnäuzt sich.] It is a shame. All for nothing, so stupid, the whole thing. Well anyhow...everybody. Here, Professor of medicine, I guess...died, nobody alive there...no, this one, still alive, all the others...it is a long list. There was...I mean half of the Viennese Philharmonic went to Theresienstadt. So anyhow, let me find the biography. [Steht auf.]

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

So there you have it.

**PR:** Your biography. Your family and you were in Vienna in November 1938. Can we speak about...I do not know how much you remember, or how much you witnessed back then, but can we speak about the November pogrom, the so-called Kristallnacht?



**FS:** Yes. Well okay, let me see. The problem is that my father had nearly a perfect memory. He could quote verbatim from, I do not know, *Iliad* and whatever. I unfortunately do not. I always did not have a good memory. The only thing I remember about the Kristallnacht is that they picked up my uncle Otto, and he was sent to Dachau. I would suppose we were...I was eight years old or something...yes, going on nine. Not any more than that, that is about it. I guess we were kept indoors, but I do not really remember, sorry. Again, my brother or sister could have told you, I am sure, lots of stories. Everybody was afraid, and we learnt that Otto had been picked up. And vaguely, at least...they were very upset about uncle Otto, and my grandfather was upset, he lived with him, but...that is it.

**PR:** So your family had to move to the 1st district in 1939. Can you describe this apartment to me? And do you remember the process of moving there and your parents' reaction?

**FS:** No, the apartment was, as I said earlier, gorgeous. The entire floor of the building. Now there is a night club underneath. I went there after the war. I did not go to the apartment. The apartment had five large rooms, and small rooms, and the salon there, and the inlaid floors, which were inlaid with fancy wood and so forth, and servant's quarters, and everything. And they put a number of Jewish families in there. One in particular I remember, is a very beautiful young woman, who used to take me walking. And she came to the United States too, they left before. And she was very friendly with my sister, and she died some years ago. Yes, from a small...it is not quite middle class, I do not think, maybe not...small apartment, we moved to this huge apartment, except you only got one room. But it was quite adequate. [Tür im Hintergrund wird geöffnet und geschlossen.]

2/00:56:08

And I take it back, we also had a little room, which somehow...I remember, maybe it was my...maybe it was a servant's quarter, I do not know. All I remember, I had a lot of papers there, and I was doing experiments, and one day I came home, and I was infuriated. My mother had cleaned up everything, and threw away all this valuable stuff. That is the one thing I remember. Now, I cannot...afterwards, again, many people came to the apartment, not...after the Anschluss. Talking about emigration and so forth. We tried to emigrate. I can tell you one thing. We finally got visas to go to Cuba, but the war broke out before we could leave. So, yes, they tried desperately to go. I guess, one mistake – if you want to – was not to let my brother and myself go, even though we both survived. But I do not know. But obviously our lives would have been totally different. I really do not...again, I really do not want to tell you things I read though. So it was certainly bearable in Vienna until we were deported. That I remember, even though there was no school, but I did things, and--

**PR:** --what did you do there?

**FS:** [Lacht.] I had this small room there, where I did experiments, where my mother threw out everything, when I was away one day, it was terrible. I played games, and had friends come over, and played some chess – except with Bobby Teig, he was too good for me. And we had some soldiers, and I remember, I had

a wooden cannon, where you could...you had projectiles, and you could throw them on soldiers. You could not go to the movies of course, or any of that.

The first time I went to the movies was after the war. I can tell you one little incident, and it is so silly, from after the war. In Friedland, where they did a cut [unklar]. They basically shaved you with a strape down the center of your head. And I remember, after coming back to Vienna, I went to get a haircut, and the guy wanted to know: "How come the center of your hair is not as big as the rest, as high as the rest of your hair?" I do not know. The camp...the bad thing was that people were terrible, they were talking about food all the time. I still remember, there was one man, he must have been well off and he was from Berlin, and he was saying when he would go to the bathroom, it was very cold there, this is North Germany there. In the winter, he would say, in Berlin, when he would go to the bathroom, he would run the shower just to get the bathroom warm. This I remember.

2/01:00:09

And I told silly jokes, one of them I still remember: „Warum darf man keine Biene baden? Weil es heißt: Badekabine.“ That comes from Friedland. The other thing I remember in Friedland is: there was...everybody was getting thinner and thinner, except you would get...their bellies would blow up. There was the guy who was the cook there. He looked fine. He had enough to eat. [Lacht.] But that is how it is. The guy who ran the camp came from Vienna. Max Max was his name, he was a test pilot. And I guess, when you came there, you had to tell what your profession is. I said I was a *Lehrling* in something. But he said, he was a test pilot, so they made him in charge of the camp. Max Max. He survived of course, and I met him once in a while...I saw him once in a while in Vienna, after the war. So there is not terribly much.

Theresienstadt once: I lived in this camp, I remember, I went to get a haircut and the barber got all upset, because my hair was dirty. "Jewish child, why do you run with your dirty hair?" So I washed it. It is true, they were very...tried to take care of the youth in Theresienstadt, because they knew this was the future. I read some place, I did not know it at the time, that the rations for the children were larger than for the grown-ups. I will tell you one other thing from Theresienstadt, which I am very proud of, truly. I worked on the outside, and when you came in, they would search you, you should not bring anything in. Theresienstadt...have you ever been there? No. Surrounded by walls, it was a fortification, fortified town. And I made an appointment with somebody inside the town, to come to the edge of the fortification, and lower down the rope. We agreed on a time, and I would have a sack where I put potatoes, and whatever, and they would pull them up, so I did not have to go through the...I was...one of the greatest things I ever did. [Lacht.] I was very proud of this, I got around the...because it was not a good thing if they found food on you, potatoes or whatever, when they searched you. The other thing I would do...people would wear long pants. They would hide some things in there. I always wore short pants, *Lederhosen* I guess, and put it in here, that so I was never searched, but the others were searched and of course they would find. My first job, I think, was to be a cobbler, which I was not very good at. And I once went with a knife like this and I still have a scar here, look. Trying to cut leather.

I also worked as a painter in Theresienstadt. You were painting...I guess, it must have been in the winter, when you could not work outdoors. We used to play soccer there. On top of the walls, there was like a green there, so...it is a long time ago.

## Ende von Teil 2

## Teil 3

**PR:** Do you have any recollections of the days before the deportation?

**FS:** Well, we went to...I think it was Sperlgasse. They took us there, by the way, after they...when we were to the 60th anniversary there...you stayed there, I guess, a day or two, before they took you by...some means to the railroad station – *Lastwagen*, I guess – to Theresienstadt. What I remember is: when you got off in Theresienstadt, you had to walk quite a long distance with your luggage, which caused some problems for my grandfather, who I believed was about 70 years old at that time. It was a big walk and people left their luggage or something. But we managed, and I guess they searched it and assigned where you have to go. I was in this children's place, which was...there were four levels of beds and you...I was on the top. You had ladders to climb up. One thing I remember – not from that time, but from now – is: when we were invited back by the Vienna government to Vienna, they took us to Theresienstadt. We all were survivors, we all had been there. And among them was a friend of mine, he has since died of lung cancer, never smoked – Henry [unklar]. And there were these guides, you know, it is a tourist town now. So the guides would take us some place, and say: "This is what happened here." And poor Henry got all excited, and said: "This is not true! I was here, no, this is all false." Did not bother the guides one bit, not at all. So next time you go to some historical place, they tell you, they were told to tell you. Absolutely did not make a dent in them. The rest of us would just laugh, it was ridiculous what they were saying. But poor Henry got all excited: "No, no, no, this was not like this." [Lacht.] So this is how history gets distorted.

In Theresienstadt, I could have survived indefinitely. I do not know if it was only because of the food they gave us, or because I could eat food, something on the outside on the fields. And again, it saved my life working outside. I would assume, because I looked like...I could work, so I passed twice through the selection process.

Now I only remember really silly stories, which would not add anything: After we got out of Friedland with two friends of mine – they were twins – we went to a farm. We were looking for food. We saw a chicken there, and we finally managed to catch the poor chicken, and we did not know how to kill it. I remember, I tried to go like this. This is not how you kill a chicken. You have to twist it. It was terrible, but we finally managed to. Then we found more food around. And again, a lot of people got sick, and...I got sort of sick.

So...did I learn anything? The one thing with the glasses: do not push. If things do not go the way you think, do not get upset, it might be for the best of it. And I use this all the time. Whether it is good or bad, I do not know what I do now. Because I always remember, had I pushed there, probably would not have made it.

Otherwise, as you well know I am sure from other people, it is mostly luck. If I would have been sent to...mines I probably would have died.

3/00:05:06

The other thing is just a general observation. The whole thing was stupid, from the German point of view. They put us in this factory to make propellers. Everybody had a very specialized job, and it takes you a while to learn this. I was with a new *Fräse*, to put...they had to be done just right, let me tell you. In the beginning, we had a quota. In the beginning, it was impossible to do the quota, we could not. And after a while you learnt, and you could do it, you get very good at these things. They let people starve to death, and somebody else had to come in to learn. Completely stupid if they wanted to get the production up. Apparently they did that everywhere. I guess they did not take into account that it takes a while to get proficient at anything.

One other thing: we wore wooden shoes, wooded soles, and you had to march. And these damned shoes, when there was snow on the ground – it was in Silesia, *Schlesien* – would get snow on them, and it would form like...a half sole in there, which made it very hard to walk properly, and you had to march. And if you fell...I mean a whole row before you, it was awful, and you had to, in between, put your feet together to try to get rid of the snow. But then you would lose the steps, this was a...bad things happened if you did not march properly. So this was not good.

Food was obviously very little. Again, people died of starvation...not of starvation but of lack of food. And you could tell...this girl's...the granddaughter, she told me her grandfather...his wife had remained...she was not deported, she remained in Theresienstadt, and her grandmother told her, when her grandfather came, he had a big belly, bad sign. That means he was...if he would have stayed much longer, he would have died of starvation. As I am sure many people told you, you could tell when people gave up. They had the name for this: *Muselmänner*. I do not know where that came from, but people gave up. In my case, it never even occurred to me. I guess I was too young. I said: "I am going to stay in that hotel there. I am not going to make...I am not going to die in this damn place." So, I guess, being young helped. Older people, that knew they lost their families, I guess, gave up. Felt weak, so they gave up.

Bottom line is: I look upon it and the whole thing was completely stupid. All these Jews could have helped the German armament industry. They could have used them, they could have used them in the army to replace...to do things, they did that for nothing, this is completely insane. For really nothing. Not to take advantage of this.

I just read something a week ago, it has nothing to do with this, you shut off that...I will tell you, because it is about Austria. You may know, that now you can enrich nuclear material using centrifuges. It is the big problem now. You know who invented that? It was an Austrian prisoner of war in Russia, who built the first centrifuges there. Eventually in the 1950s they let him go, and he then eventually came to United States. But he is the first one to figure out, how to build a centrifuge, that could take the velocity, and so forth. Weird

story. [Gernot] Zippe I think was his name. Must have been a terrific engineer. But it shows the Russians at least took advantage of this. They did not...so there you are. My professional life you are not interested in.

**PR:** Well, we will come to this.

**FS:** My God...go ahead. [Lacht.]

3/00:10:21

**PR:** I am sorry, you have to tell me when it is getting too much. You told me that after the liberation you went to Prague. How long did you stay in Prague, approximately? Of course, it is not--

**FS:** --I do not know. I stayed for a day or two. Maybe no, I went...I know what happened in Prague. I went to Prague to the railroad station, because I arrived at the railroad station. In Friedland, I had found in one of the homes there, a suitcase and I put all sorts of stuff in there. The problem was we had not seen any of the stuff for a long time. You would go around and put this in the suitcase and you take out, you found something better and in the end you had nothing. But the suitcase was stolen while I was on the *Bahnhof* in Prague. And I think I took the train to Bratislava. And in Bratislava, that I know for sure, I took a...I got some Russian soldiers to let me go on a truck with them to Vienna. So it was a very short time. I do not think I stayed in there any lengths of time. I was hoping that my father would be still alive, so I was anxious to go. These two friends I mentioned stayed longer in Friedland there, and came...maybe a couple of weeks later, while I was very anxious to get to Vienna, and see if my father had survived. I do not... I certainly did not stay in a hotel or anything like that. I probably took the train immediately, I had the...I have that on a wall at home. I got a piece of paper – similar to what my brother had there – that would say that I had been an inmate in Friedland, and people should let me go...travel. So that is how I arrived in Vienna.

**PR:** How was it for you, being back in Vienna?

**FS:** Well...please do not ask me how it felt. That granddaughter kept asking me how it felt. It is terrible, like they do it in every interview: "How does it feel to win...the hockey cup?" When I came back to Vienna, there were things to do. I found the house where my two aunts or cousins of my father were with all the children, my brother came. But very shortly after, I went to visit – and I do not recall who – in the hospital there, and I stayed in the hospital for seven months. I stayed there until January of [19]46, when I...they must have arranged it earlier, they let me, I guess, walk out of the hospital and arranged to go to *Gymnasium*. So I went and I stayed in the apartment, which my brother had gotten back in Zelinkagasse, and I went to the *Gymnasium*. In the *Gymnasium* itself, I never felt any anti-Semitism, even though I am pretty sure I was the only Jew in the entire place. Most of the other people who came from the concentration camp, basically all my friends...there was a special school in the Albergasse for Jewish children who missed...did not go to school. Now the thing that I find significant, for me anyhow, is that I went back to this *Gymnasium* – after not having been in school for several years – like nothing has happened. The only thing that gave me trouble

was Latin. Like nothing. On the basis of this, I have a dim view of education in general. There...the next day, I think, we had a test in math I did terrific, but in another subjects too, I was okay. It was okay in Latin too, but there I had to study, I do not know...they were reading Caesar or Livius, that was terrible, but I learnt. So I do not know what the heck they have learnt in there. I think it was four and half years I was not in school. I do not know. It was a *Gymnasium*, there were bright kids there.

3/00:15:31

I was asking several people – including for example my stepfather-in-law who graduated from *Harvard* and *Harvard Law School*, and had practiced before the Supreme Court – whether I could pass the New York Bar exam, and he said: “Are you kidding? Of course not.” And there were other people...so what they learnt in school could not have been very important.

So there was no anti-Semitism that I am recalling in school there, although they all knew of course I was Jewish. I guess it helped that I was a pretty good student. And so that is it. I did not make any friends there, while I was there, with the other students, but I was certainly accepted. By that time, it was already a long time after the war had been over. Things started to settle down, and... My brother worked as a cook for the American military. I remember, he would come home with big cans full of fat, because they would throw out fat. Now you would say it is horrors, but it was terrific food then. I also was sent, after the war, by the Jewish community to a sanatorium in Italy. I guess it must have been during the summer, which was very nice, in Mirano. And also they had a camp for Jewish kids near Graz. I think it also must have been in the summer. It was nice. But otherwise...I went to school and that was it. I would go to the opera with a friend, who is now in Brazil. We would go standing room...would not bother anybody, we were young.

I had no...about the feeling about Vienna: there was absolutely no...not a second of doubt that I wanted to leave Vienna, none. That was a given. Out of the five friends who were with us in the apartment, one stayed in Vienna. All the others left. The one is still in Vienna, by the way. But there was not a second of consideration, there was...none whatsoever. But look, it is hard to be angry at particularly young people. On the street you did not know, at that time. I guess 90 percent of the people were Nazis, but some were not and you could not tell who were not. I know some...a German couple here. I worked with him in California. He is the only German I believe, when he said his family was anti-Hitler. I really believe him. The rest, they all changed all of the sudden. But it is very hard.

3/00:20:01

You are too young for this, but after the war a record came out called *Herr Karl*. You know the record? There is a friend of mine, at the time a young woman – *Mischling*. She and her brother or sister stayed in Vienna all the time. She was toughish, but if something went wrong she would call him *Herr Karl* to get him upset.

I will tell you something else. I often go to lectures here in *Princeton University*, and there was a lecture by a professor from Innsbruck, very good lecture. [Es klingelt an der Tür.]

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

He was saying that the Austrians in general always blamed something else, somebody else. And he said, just before he left, there was an article in the *Kronen Zeitung*, about this lousy American who had won the downhill races, and he had trained with the Austrians, so he cheated the Austrians out of the chance to win the gold medal. And I asked this guy: “How long is this feeling of being a victim in Austria?” And he started telling me about how bad things happened after World War One et cetera. But then, on the way out next to me there was a man, who turned out he was a professor of history. He said: “This is not so. This happened already at the time of Frederick the Great and Maria Theresia.” The Austrians had lost every war ever since and always blamed it on somebody else.” This is an old... I guess it comes from the feeling of being a victim, because...they lost everything: They lost against *Friedrich* the Great, they lost during World War...they lost against the Prussians of course. That was in 1866. So there was a continuous loss, and people, I guess, get to be...it cannot be their fault. Why are we losing all the time? I mean in World War One...the Germans had to come and rescue the Austrian army there in Italy. They had to rescue the Austrian army in Poland. So this professor said: “No, this has been going on for hundreds of years.” Because of their history. But this guy from Innsbruck said: “They are always the victims. Everybody victimizes the poor things.” Which is not good to be...to feel like you are being victimized, but I am sure it will change, maybe it is different now, I do not know. But there is a lot of truth to that, let me tell you. “Hitler came? He is our fault now?” Hitler’s fault? Everything is everybody else’s fault. And that is really bad.

For a long time in this country, with the blacks, it was the same thing. Everything was somebody else’s fault. I mean it is true, but it was their fault too, you got to do something. You cannot exist on the basis of saying this, you cannot. Why you need to do anything, it is somebody else’s fault.

So yes, there was a lot of this in Vienna after the war. “We were taken over, but it was not our fault.” I remember I used to go to some...there were meetings of the people who have been in concentration camps which were socialists, and clergy, and so forth. Many people, there were not just Jews there. But like everywhere else, there were good people like this Dr. Feldner he risked his life. And no kidding, you know that. And he was not the only one. But...it is difficult to judge. You do not know. What would you have done? There was a lot of pressure.

I know you Austrians, but let me say, I personally believe that part of the reason...the Austrians were worse, I know that. I have talked to the people from Berlin, there is no question. I think it comes partly because of this feeling of being victims, and therefore being allowed to do things, because we are victims. And the other thing is, as you undoubtedly know, that the political anti-Semitism arose in Vienna. You know of course what happened at the end of the 18th century. Poland was divided into three parts. No war. There was a German part, an Austrian part and a Russian part. So the Austrian Jews were part of an empire. They could move wherever they want to, including Vienna. They came in huge numbers to Vienna, Leopoldstadt for example. Huge numbers were there, they competed for jobs and everything else, and this did not go over very [unklar]. Same in Germany. There was this gigantic influx because...we were part of Germany. They could not stop you. And things were better in Vienna, I guess, that is why my grandfather came to Vienna. And Vienna was, I guess in the [19]20s, and part of the [19]30s...many very famous people came from there in all fields. From physics to...you name it. Large number of Nobel Prize winners in medicine, and everything. It is, again, a great pity. I guess, the *Universität* of Vienna was one of the greatest in the world. I do not know how it is now, but you certainly do not hear much about what goes on there. While there used to be world famous figures in all fields there. Sad. Anyhow, you have any more questions?

**PR:** Yes. You told me that you went back to Vienna in the [19]90s, like 1998?

**FS:** I went back there before. Yes, go ahead.

**PR:** To some extent, you already answered this. But you became an American citizen--

**FS:** --yes, as soon as I could. As soon as it was legal. I am now...I want you to know, I am also an Austrian citizen. I became an Austrian citizen, because I had been in concentration camps, there is a special law. I get some pension though I never worked in Vienna, in Austria. And the pension, I think, is larger if you get the Austrian citizenship.

**PR:** What I would be interested in is: how would you describe your feelings towards Austria today?

**FS:** I can tell you, the first time I went back, and again, you may not like that, I had some dealings with the bureaucracy and so forth, and with people. I said: "My God, I used to be like that." I am serious. It was terrible. And I knew I used to be like this, *kleinlich*, this was *fürchterlich*. The people are very *kleinlich* there. I mean I do not know...you ate a piece of bread in the restaurant, they want you to pay for that. They have been...it is terrible. This is not true in this country. People are not *kleinlich*. But I used to say to myself: "My God, I used to be like this." And dealing with the bureaucracy was horrible. I used to get very mad. I used to holler at them, because they are not used to being hollered at. They are *die Beamten*, they are big shots there. It was very bad. Not bad, I mostly had the feeling of how much I had changed, that I found this behavior, which obviously I had the same behavior at the time I left. So there was a change.



3/00:29:54

Since then...I think, it was a very nice thing, in my view at least, for this...I have been there two or three times before that...for the city of Vienna to invite everybody there, and to take us to Theresienstadt. I thought this was a very nice gesture. Some people I know did not want to go, because you know...but I said: "What the heck?" I mean...we went...I guess to the Sperlasse, there was sort of a meeting there. And students were sitting in the back. And I had a lady friend along, non-Jewish, American. She did not understand a word what was going on, but she was affected by that, and she claimed that the students were crying. [Schluchzt.] People were telling these terrible stories. The sins of the father do not go on the children. There is a new generation there. To tell you how old I am: when we were in Vienna, we stayed in this hotel, and as a child I had read Karl May. I asked the guy: "Where can I buy Karl May?" He did not think I could find it anywhere, so he sent me to some bookstore *am Graben*, who still had some. There is a whole different thing there. So I do not know.

Right now my feeling towards Austria? I get from the Austrian consulate...maybe you know that...they send out every two weeks a letter about what goes on in Austria. It is a nice letter to keep you in touch about what goes on, and it gives you the history of somebody, who was a *Bundesminister für...* I guess *Bundeskanzler...* before he was *Bundesminister* for education, and so forth. Clearly a nice man. Had done many nice things, he was a decent individual. I am sure there are many decent people in Vienna, maybe more than there used to be. And of course people that participated with Hitler are mostly dead. And again, it is...worse to ask oneself: what would I have done under these circumstances if I was not a Jew? This is not easy to answer. I hope I would have been like Dr. Feldner. But I do not know, nobody knows. So it is...it is not easy to judge. One should not judge, because you do not know. But there were plenty of really nasty people that is for sure. And initially – I must tell you this – I felt more comfortable in Germany than in Austria. The people are more straightforward somehow. In Austria, it is...I do not know, maybe it sort of changed over the years, but in the beginning...in Munich and in Germany, I used to go there sometimes on business...in factories and stuff...it is hard to explain, but I really felt more comfortable there than in Austria. Maybe the people there are more like the people in the United States. I do not know, but you get the feeling that they are more straightforward. May have all changed by now, I do not know.

**PR:** When was your citizenship granted?

**FS:** I do not know, a few years ago. I got a little statue of the...I think the...I do not know, *Stephansdom* or the parliament or something, as part of the citizenship. And I think, but I am not sure, that there is some sort of a rent once you reach 75. It is higher if you are a citizen, but otherwise there has been no benefit or anything.

3/00:35:16

These things from the Austrian...I am allowed to vote, I did not...from the Austrian consulate: very nice, very informative, and so forth. I mean you cannot be angry, I mean, these are different generations there. This is two generations ago when this happened. It is a long time ago. All I know from these reports is that Austria is doing very well. I guess you know that, economically. And apparently they are dealing reasonably well with all the immigrants from the East. I once went there. It was a long time ago, including my mother-in-law. And we went to the house, where she used to...she comes from Vienna...where she used to live: Full of Turks, but full. So I guess the Austrians try to deal with them as well as is possible, which is a good thing. The citizenship, I cannot tell you, maybe five or ten years ago. It was not a big event in my life. [Lacht.]

**PR:** And when did you get your American citizenship? You told me a few years after you arrived here.

**FS:** Yes, I think you have to be five years in the country. As soon as I could. I would guess it was in [19]52. That was...no questions. I know some people. I guess mostly the *Mischlinge*, who held on to their Austrian citizenships, did not get any American citizenship, even though they were entitled. There was absolutely no question that I would get it as quickly as I could. Just like there was no doubt whatsoever, that I was not going to live in Austria. Zero. So there was no hesitation whatsoever. And I like it in this country. I am used to it, and I like it. The country has been very good to me and very nice to me. I came here with a suitcase made out of papier-mâché, and twenty dollars, but it was okay. After all, they let me study, and I think everybody has been fair to me. It is a good country for immigrants, and that is it.

I have no hatred or anything, that is impossible. There are people there, different people, and that...I go to Austria. I went there with my late wife, who felt more uncomfortable than I did. She is French. It was okay. I guess she was scared. We once stayed in a *Gasthaus* there, and at the table there was a guy, who proudly was saying how – I do not know – he had fought with [Erwin] Rommel, and telling everything about Rommel. He was a...she did not like that. But the guy was proud of his war experiences. No, there is no...very...no hostility. Not in the present day Germany either. Which I am sure there are Jews who feel different about it, but I do not.

3/00:39:40

**PR:** How do you feel identity-wise today?

**FS:** I am American of course. I mean this Austrian citizenship was purely because...I think there was something about that helped the Austrian pension, otherwise I do not have any feelings for Austria or anything. This is not true of other people. I talked to somebody, who used to work...he is sick now, he is from Vienna. He is a *Mischling*, too. They go back every year to Vienna. And I know another one, the one from Brazil, who spends several months every year in Vienna going to theatres, and operas, and stuff like that. But in Brazil, it is different. You do not feel that much at home. But I do not have any particular...I would not mind going back to Vienna. There are some parts of Austria I did not see, but no, I have no particular feeling

about it. If I would have the choice to go to Switzerland or Austria, I probably would go to Switzerland. But it is nice, there is nothing wrong with Vienna, except it is very expensive...here, but it is okay.

**PR:** Do you speak German from time to time?

**FS:** Very rarely. I do not have anybody to speak with. So no. I read once in a while...German books. It so happens I picked up...some time ago, they have a book sale here every year of used books, and I picked up some German books, and one of them I looked at last night: *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, [Friedrich] Schiller. That guy knew how to write, let me tell you, incredible. Really some of this is...wow! See, I read some German books every once in a while. I have very little opportunity to speak German. Once in a while I go to German movies. No. And the German speaking people that I know speak English too. So there is no...probably would like to go back to Vienna maybe, just to see. This lady friend of mine claims that I got lost in Vienna: "You lived here!" [Lacht.] What happened...on a ski trip, when the ski trip went to Vienna, bad things happened...not bad things: We went to a restaurant in the center in the *Innere Stadt*, and they had *eine Kugel auf der Wand* from the *Türkenbelagerung*. And I ordered a giant *Wiener Schnitzel*, it was delicious. We were with some Americans – physicians it turns out – from the trip, from the ski trip. They sort of stuck with me, because I knew my way around. And for the next day for lunch, they insisted we go to a German...Austrian restaurant and there I had another *Wiener Schnitzel*, and after this I got very sick. I had to get my gallbladder taken out. [Lacht.] But that was a huge...two huge *Wiener Schnitzel*, but they were good. I had my gallbladder taken out here, I did not have to, but it was sort of advised. Now it is...so it is a long time ago, there is nothing...I went back to the Karl-Meißl-Straße, I saw the house there, I saw the Augarten, and I went to look at Zelinkagasse, and the Wipplingerstraße, the few things that I remember from my...from before the war. But I do not feel any particular affinity to Austria, no. Probably has mellowed over the years, but I do not think I was ever hostile. It is hard because...but it is true that not for a second would I think I would want to stay there. That was without a question, after what had happened. But personally no...the individuals, no.

3/00:44:50

**PR:** So your brother and you emigrated together from Vienna to the States?

**FS:** Correct.

**PR:** So that was a decision both of you made or--

**FS:** --yes. Again, that was not something you had to think about. Partly because my sister was here, partly because we had affidavits, partly because we wanted to get the hell out of Austria. There was not for one second a discussion. "You want to leave?" No. That was understood from the beginning. From the beginning when we returned, we wanted to get to the United States as soon as we could. It was a given. We would not have stayed another day that we did not have to. I remember when we left, there was a *Beamter* there, and

he was saying how sad it is that young people are leaving Austria, but so...that is how it is. But it was a good move to come here. I do not know, I probably would have done okay in Austria, would have gone to the university and studied physics like here, I do not know.

**PR:** Was it hard for you to adjust to the new environment?

**FS:** No. I like the United States. I liked it from the beginning. It is difficult to say why, but I did. It...I do not know, even though I had menial jobs...not menial [unklar]...I worked every summer as...either as a bus boy...at the Catskills. I went to school, I had part time jobs before or after school, and people were nice to me, and I sort of liked it. Maybe partly because the situation here in general was better than in Austria at that time. There was unlimited food and whatever, but I liked it, and being poor did not bother me.

**PR:** There are just two more things I would like to ask you: The first thing is, that I would like to hear a little bit about your career, your profession you made here. You gave me the outlines, but you are a physician, and I mean I saw it in your biography. A lot of things happened in your life here. And the second thing would be the question...if you could tell me something about your family here.

**FS:** The family is sort of a sad story. I married a Jewish woman who, it turns out, was born in France – who by the way was hidden during part of the war in a convent. And again, I assure you these nuns were taking...risking their life there for a Jewish child and they did not know...what the heck. We had no children. She died of breast cancer quite some time ago. My in-laws both died of cancer. My brother died quite some time ago, again, as a middle aged person with childhood diabetes. And my sister died some years ago, so did her husband. The only close relative I have is a nephew, the son of my sister, he lives in California. That is as far as relatives go. The relatives...the two cousins of my father in Vienna died a long time ago.

**PR:** What was your wife's name?

**FS:** Betty. She was born in France, and her mother came from Vienna, her father came from Poland via Vienna to France. And this must have been around...he told me, he still saw *Kaiser Franz Josephs* funeral, so he must have been in Vienna in 1916. He did not like Vienna. He loved France. He was a dentist and had a really good career there, and came to this country, again, when my wife was in *Gymnasium* at the time. And he says, he did not see any reason why he wanted to come. But he came for the same reason I left Vienna, he could not stand it anymore. It was nice before, but during the war bad things happened there, and...he avoided camps, and he...they fled from one place to the other, and many people who he had since met, were very nice to them, but overall he could not stand them. And...so that is it.

3/00:51:09

**PR:** And your professional career here?

**FS:** [Lacht.] Professional. Well, I studied physics, and I have a PhD in physics from *New York University*. To make you feel a little bit better about Austria...I came here after the *Matura*, right after the *Matura*...is that the kids in *Gymnasium* in Vienna were on average much brighter than the people in college. As you know there was a big selection process, no comparison. And I knew a lot more about mathematics and other things than the kids who started in college here. As a result of which – even though that I had to work all the time in order to support myself – I managed to finish in three and half years. And I finished in January, it turns out. And the only scholarship I could ever get...they usually had given it for September when the new year...was one for foreigners, some organization, I forget its...so I went to *New York University*, and I got a scholarship there too, so I did not have to pay tuition. In fact, I never paid for my entire education myself...any money. Either I had a fellowship or something, or in the beginning at *City College*, you had to pay for one year, some Jewish organization paid for me. At NYU, again, I got first a Master's degree and then a PhD. While getting these degrees, I worked for a company that made relays, and I taught for one year at *New York College for Engineering*, while I was getting my PhD, and decided that I did not like teaching. And I got a job at *RCA*, first in Harrison, New Jersey. And then the whole outfit was transferred to Princeton in 1956, and I worked in Princeton. And there, at first, I became a group...and then I became a director. And I [unklar] a laboratory in Princeton, and also at the same time for a long time I had a laboratory in Summerville, New Jersey. The one in Princeton was on microwaves, the one in Summerville was an advanced research laboratory...advanced development laboratory on monolithic integrated circuits. Then they decided to separate Summerville, and I had to decide whether I want to work on integrated circuits or on microwaves. I...instantaneous decision...and I chose microwaves. I spent my whole career on microwaves. My Master's thesis was on microwaves, my PhD thesis was on microwaves, this is the only thing I know. So I was then full time in Princeton, as director of the *Microwave Research Laboratory* what became the *Microwave Technology Center*, which are the first three letters in MMTTC, the last three letters. I wanted to call the company MTC, but the name was taken. There is a trucking company, they call themselves MTC, so I added another M. And in Princeton was...the laboratory was a very nice place to work. They treated you very nicely. I was in the upper level of the management of the laboratories.

3/00:55:46

And one of the things I did was, I started work on using microwaves for treating cancer. That had...I guess, partly to do because my father-in-law had prostate cancer, which started to spread. And I promised: "I am going to find something to treat you." And that, by the way, turned out...I did treat him. So I worked on...I brought in a lot of money to *RCA Laboratories*, so they left me alone government money. They could do...with part of my time, with some other people in my laboratory, do medical work even though it was not supported. On top of which they...everybody knew, we were working on cancer, so the machine shop would give us priority, and they treated the wife of somebody from the machine shop. So I worked...it was not for money or anything...we would go to *Montefiore Hospital* and we built equipment there for no charge to the hospital, for treating cancer patients with heat. And the only thing RCA got out of it...in their annual report

they would probably say we are supporting cancer treatment. And I did treat my father-in-law, and later on I also treated my wife there. And they survived for a very long time, but not indefinitely.

And then in, I guess [19]86 or [19]87, I am not sure, RCA was taken over by *General Electric*, and...again, I was offered a handsome golden parachute to leave, and I retained this golden parachute, if you want to, even though I stayed there a year longer on a special deal. And during this time I formed this company. And this is now over twenty years ago. And we do a lot of medical work using microwaves. And I have written a lot of papers on various applications of microwaves, including a lot of medical papers. And we have contracts from the *National Institute of Health*, and a deal with...various aspects of medicine. And we have also arrangements with companies, [unklar] mostly right now on medical applications. As I think, one of them probably says: I was elected to the *National Academy of Engineering*, which is unusual, because I am not an engineer, but yes, it is true. [Lacht.] And I keep working in this field. I find it interesting, and I keep doing new things, and...that is it.

3/01:00:00

**PR:** Is there anything I forgot to ask you, anything--

**FS:** --my God, no--

**PR:** --you would like to add to the interview?

**FS:** No. [Beide lachen.] You asked me everything, now you know--

**PR:** --so thank you very--

**FS:** --everything you need to know. [Tür im Hintergrund wird geöffnet und geschlossen.] Except if you asked my co-workers you would get a different story.

**[Ende des Interviews.]**

Interview mit Fred Sterzer am 18. September 2008, Princeton, New Jersey/USA, geführt von Philipp Rohrbach, Austrian Heritage Collection, Signatur AHC 3217; URL: [www.austrianheritagearchive.at/interviews/person/108](http://www.austrianheritagearchive.at/interviews/person/108)