



Interview mit

John Fischer

InterviewerIn: Philipp Haydn

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Verwendete Kürzel: PH Philipp Haydn
JF John Fischer

Teil 1

PH: This is an *Austrian Heritage Collection* interview conducted by Philipp Haydn, with John Fischer, here at his home in--

JF: --Deerfield Beach--

PH: --Deerfield Beach, Florida. Today is 2nd January, 2008. Mr. Fischer, could you start telling me a little bit about your family background, your grandparents, and when you were a child?

JF: Yes, I cannot go back as far as my grandparents, because I never met any of them. My mother's side was Hungarian, at the time part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My father's side was from Hungary. I was more in touch with mother's side of the family, who lived in Moravia – as I understand from about the seventeenth century...an old established family. And they were dispersed in several cities of Moravia. My mother, she was born in [unklar], a small community close to the Austrian border, in about 1873, and she lived until 1938. We were educated in Vienna, Austria. After the breakdown of the monarchy and the end of World War I, Czechoslovakia became an independent state, and my parents – or father, whoever – opted to remain Hungarians and Czechs, which they were authorized to do at that time, and which has proven to be a mistake, because the schooling and everything else that dealt with our future life depended on our Austrian citizenship. We – or they, rather – were granted the possibility to revoke their decision, and we became Austrian citizens around 1920, I would think, maybe [19]21, [19]22, so that the Czech part of our family became the strangest in our family life. As a rather young child, I was sent every so often to Czechoslovakia, just to have enough...to eat, to grow up, because after the breakdown of the monarchy, times in Austria were very tumultuous, both in politics and as well in the economy. So we suffered quite a bit from malnutrition, because of...obtaining necessities and needs of everyday life. I went to school in Austria. By that time, of course, everything had been settled as far as politics were concerned. I started my schooling in 1915, at the age of six, completed the mandatory schooling about five years later, and was admitted to a school of higher learning. The name is usually not familiar in other countries. It is called a *Realgymnasium*, which means I got education both in humanities, as well as in technical schools, but at that time – as I mentioned before – we were foreigners in the country that I was born in.

1/00:05:06

My parents would have had to pay the tuition at five times the amount of its original value for the native born children. Unfortunately, my grades did not reach the point where I would have been entitled to a stipend. And I had to interrupt the studies after three years to complete it in the public school system, where I graduated to be considered as a graduate high school – our high school – student. Our working times followed immediately, so it only took a very short...I think in a matter of days...until I was accepted as an apprentice in a factory, where I spent the next fourteen years, starting in 1924. As an apprentice, I had to have three years of schooling in the factory, in its ways of conducting business, and attending mandatory school, only two or

three days a week to complete the studies as a clerk, more or less. My interest, even in these young years, turned to foreign countries. At a relatively young age, I started to study French as – at that time, the most important – second language, followed by English, continued with Italian. Italian, as it turned out, became the most important one. For political reasons, Austria and Italy became closer united to...Italians were interested in creating a strong buffer state between Italy and Germany, who at the time, were not allies, but the opposite of it. It gave me the opportunity to...since we were exporting most of our merchandise to foreign countries...the opportunity to employ whatever knowledge I acquired over the years, and it helped me to gain a position of quite some responsibility. I had been made the manager of their shipping department, where I had to see that our goods were shipped the best way, the fastest and cheapest way, to our customers all over the world. It gave me the opportunity to concentrate, and perhaps even specialize, on the commercial aspect of the three languages that I had already mastered to some degree at that time. And I believe firmly that this helped me a great deal, and even would have been my future.

In 1938, on 13th March, life as we knew it came to an end, when Hitler annexed Austria, and every employee or every worker was forcibly removed from their jobs. At that time, I was incarcerated in a concentration camp as well, for the duration of three months. It was before Kristallnacht, so we were released and could...concentrate our efforts on trying to find a place, where to live, where we would be accepted. It is common knowledge what was going on, so my detailed experience is just, in fact, one of hundreds of thousands who were able to leave Austria. And with the help of my relatives...no, I would rather correct it...with my wife's relatives – we got married in March [meint: Juni], 1938 –, we were able to reach France.

1/00:11:01

And the American relatives – again on my wife's side – sponsored our immigration to the United States. Again, in France, as it happened in Germany...in my native Austria-Hungary, we were considered aliens, and as such, concentrated in, what has been called *camp des étrangers*, which, translated, means camp for the foreigners. I spent three months there, when the visa finally arrived. We were six out of 700 who were in the same position. We were given the visa and could leave in February, the middle of February, 1940, to come to the United States. Here, we started a new life. I am wondering whether this will be enough for you, to give you a short review of my youth. Is there anything you would like to know in particular, that you feel would help?

PH: Did you have any siblings?

JF: I had a sister, who died in this country, in 1965, at the age of 56 years.

PH: How about your parents? What was their profession?

JF: My father was an agent in leather goods. He died in 1924. And my mother passed away during June, 1938, exactly at the time I was incarcerated. I had to spend time in a prison. It was an established prison for the purpose of housing prisoners, and we were there – again – by the hundreds, living in rooms built for two or three, close to twenty at a time.

PH: This prison, was it located in Vienna?

JF: Yes, the name was *Landesgericht*, which would be translated to court of the land. It was a higher court...a trial court, not the first instance. And prisoners who were sentenced to a year or less, they were kept in the same building where the trials were taking place. So it was established both as a court and as a prison.

PH: When were you actually arrested?

JF: On 13th March, 1938, one day afterwards.

PH: Could you describe 12th and 13th March, from your perspective?

JF: Yes. It was a Friday [meint: Samstag], a rather unpleasant cold day. I was sitting with my relatives, my father-in-law, my wife at the time...not yet my wife, we married in June...and we heard noises in the street, singing these dreadful songs, that Jewish blood will flow in the streets. And we were aware what had happened, because we read in the paper that then-chancellor [Kurt] Schuschnigg was summoned to Berchtesgaden, to be told to either become a German satellite or it will be invaded.

1/00:15:47

As far as I know, he left without giving a promise, so a day [meint: Monat] later, or two days [meint: Monat] later, the German army marched into Austria, without any opposition at all. As a matter of fact, it appeared that a good many of the Austrians were jubilant about having Hitler as their future head of state. It was a dreadful time. I had to go out and visit the dentist at the time, and a detective – as it turned out – appeared and said, “What are you doing here?” So I told him, that I was in treatment. And he said, “Could you come with me to the police department? There are a few things we would like to straighten out, and we need your assistance.” I walked with him, because I did not think of anything bad, but from there, we were kept immediately, without even having a chance to notify anyone of our family. And it was only by accident, or when some sort of information...I realized that my wife came, but was not allowed to talk to me directly. She could talk to me so you could hear her voice, but not my wife to me. She could only speak over a distance to me, and she brought me a few belongings, so that I could at least clothe myself. From there, we were sent to the *Landesgericht* that I mentioned before. And from the *Landesgericht* I was set free, to leave the country within 90 days. I had to sign for it, which is the reason for the rather speedy departure that we did, and managed to have the visas issued for France, for a stay of six months – which we hoped would be enough for the arrival of the American immigration visa. But it turned out that we stayed for about more than one and

a half years. And as we understood, we were looked after, and tried to...we found out, after we left, that there was a lot at stake. I could have never been angry at the French, even though they committed quite a pressure on us – not only on us personally, but on a good many people – to leave their country. Because overall, they saved a good many lives, and even though we were not treated in a, let us say...welcoming way, our thanks – or at least mine – are still with the French for having given us the opportunity to leave the country and escape at least Hitlerism.

PH: So at Kristallnacht, you were already--

JF: --no, I left in September...it would be about...six weeks before Kristallnacht...or Crystal Night. By that time, I was able follow what was going on, and I was aware of the change. I would not have been able to leave the country after Kristallnacht, which was when the decision had been made to exterminate the Jewish population altogether.

1/00:20:28

PH: Before you were brought to *Landesgericht*, were you at a police station?

JF: Yes, what you would call...let me think to find the proper...the home of the military...the police *Kommissariat*. So it was sort of a headquarters of the Viennese police, and they were equipped as well to keep suspects – at that time, of course, because they were not tried yet – overnight, maybe for two nights, and they were not prepared to handle prisoners as such. We only had bread and soup for about eight or ten days, and no interrogation, nothing whatsoever, and we came...were transported without as much as being informed where we went, to go to the *Landesgericht*, where conditions were – as I mentioned again before – at least geared to housing prisoners.

PH: Do you remember the location of the police commissariat?

JF: Yes, the name of the street was Roßauer Lände. It is a large, red-brick building on the banks of the small Danube river – not the large Danube, which crosses the city, but the tributary of the river, which goes through the inhabited part.

PH: When you were brought there, were there other people?

JF: Yes, there were not only other people, but we were in the company of – of all people – the minister of justice, the equivalent of our attorney general [meint: Unterstaatssekretär für Justiz (1919-1920) und Mitglied des Verfassungsgerichtshofs bis 1930]. His name was [Arnold] Eisler, and we happened to be quartered in the same room, so we spent quite a while together.

PH: Did you have a conversation with him?

JF: Yes, we had conversations. I mean, we could. He was a quiet man...very quiet. He could not understand what was going on, because it was completely strange. But we were about fifteen to twenty men, so we spoke freely among us. I was among the ones who asked questions and had answers.

PH: Did you get any insight from them?

JF: No. *Minister* – as he was called – Eisler came under the same circumstances, had been arrested under the same circumstances that I was, and thousands of others. So we just happened to be housed together, but we did not have any common reasons to even...why we were apprehended.

PH: So most of these prisoners, they were political prisoners?

JF: There were many political prisoners. But we were with a known jewelry merchant and those, who could not be considered prisoners, and there were other, simple, plain working men, as I was.

PH: Do you have any explanation on what grounds you were arrested? Was it just because you were Jewish?

JF: The grounds? Yes, Jewish...simple, there was no other need to explain their actions, because we were Jewish.

PH: Because I have not talked to anyone who was arrested right after the Anschluss.

JF: Well, I happened to have been in the wrong...right place at the wrong time. I had go there, but apparently they were under some suspicion or else they would not have had a visit of a detective when I arrived, which of course I could not know.

PH: That was at the dentist?

JF: That was at the dentist.

PH: Which was close by, probably.

JF: Well, it was not...the distances were not that large. I could usually walk.

PH: Do you have any explanation why the detective was at this dentist's?

JF: Well, I can only assume, because everybody of Jewish faith was suspected of being some enemy, so that they were told – as most of us were –, “You are communist.”

1/00:25:45

And that was their only...not a [unklar], but their only reason to find an explanation for us being detained. There was no actual...none of the men around in the whole room had anything at all to do with politics,

except of course the minister, who was there because of his standing in the country. He has been made a prisoner...I am sorry...he has been made a minister, because of his knowledge of the law. The same way our attorney general would be elected, or named by our president.

PH: Could you describe a bit more the conditions in the *Landesgericht*?

JF: The *Landesgericht*...admittedly, I have to explain the difference between housing that was prepared for holding prisoners, and the other places, which were not, where we were placed in a room which did not even come close to be called a detention center. It comes to my mind that there was a third place where we were transported to before we reached the commissariat. It was a school building in the Karajangasse. A school building, which had no provisions for adults – men or women for that matter. Schools were separated. And we were kept there also for a number of days, not being interrogated. And you cannot, in the farthest imagination, imagine that a school building will serve as a prison.

PH: That was in between Roßauer Lände and *Landesgericht*?

JF: Between the...

PH: The people you were imprisoned with, they always changed or they came with you?

JF: We changed in the Karajangasse, but we were the same when we were in the room at the *Landesgericht*. We did not receive any...as it turned out, I was one of the first ones to leave, because our visa had come, and we were...my fiancée at that time, could inform the police that we are ready to leave. This was before Kristallnacht, so our...being able to leave was completely different from after the Kristallnacht, where they went about to destroy the population.

PH: During your time at the prison, were you ever interrogated?

JF: No, not at all...not once. Neither time, neither at the police department, or Karajangasse, or *Landesgericht*. I was simply told, "Wake up, you are free."

PH: The guards, were they Viennese or German?

JF: They were Viennese. At the *Landesgericht*, all of them were Viennese. So they treated us, let us say, in a professional way, if something like that is possible, and not in a way that, for instance, the SS [Schutzstaffel] stormtroopers or the SA [Sturmabteilung], which are their handling part, would have treated us. We were free of any hate remarks, because they treated us as prisoners, like they would have treated any other prisoners.

1/00:30:17

PH: While you were in prison, did you get news from the outside about what was going on?

JF: I believe, yes. Mr. Eisler could get a paper, so we read it, but bear in mind that they were under the control of the Germans, so we did not get any objective information. We got everything that the Germans imposed upon the Austrians to print, and that is what we read.

PH: How did your fiancée get the news that you were imprisoned?

JF: How my family got the news? To this very day, I do not know. My wife showed up, so... As I maybe mentioned before, but I never saw my sister nor did I see my mother. I did not have a father at that time anymore, so I did not see anybody. And when I came out, I found out that some of my friends were not there and apprehended as well.

PH: Let us go back to the day of the Anschluss. Did you hear Schuschnigg's speech on the radio?

JF: Yes, he said a short farewell, and left us in the hands of...a good fortune. He left...I believe he himself came to this country. He lived here in...as I understand, he lectured at the *University of St. Louis*.

PH: What were you doing during the radio speech? Were you with your family, with your mother? Were you at home?

JF: I think I...probably, I was at home. I did not have anybody to speak to, nor did I even know what to say, because I was not aware of the consequences as they turned out to be. And I went about the days...I was still young. I came home from work and went about the day, and I did not give much thought to the events that would take place.

PH: In this one day, that was between the speech and your being arrested, did you already see a change in the city, in the people?

JF: Well, I think he returned from Berchtesgaden and I believe there was more than one day [meint: Monat], because I remember, I was amazed of how the tone of the paper, that we read, had changed. It was a journal leaning towards the leftist side of the population, and within a few nights, the most important was to spew hate against Jews. One thing had nothing to do with the other, because some of the best politicians in our country were Jews, so it had to be...it was decreed, so to say, by Hitler's deputies. He himself came on the...later...for an entrance. But they had to change the writing to Jew-hating overnight, which had been done.

PH: Can you tell me a little bit about where you were living, the neighborhood?

JF: It was a working class neighborhood. But not that much of a working class, because across were the quarters of Schuschnigg. But it was a working class neighborhood. The only factory that I knew close by, was a [unklar], which produced...like our [unklar]...commercial vehicles. The next factory in our neighborhood was where I worked, about a twenty minute walk, which I walked every day four times.

1/00:35:36

And I grew up there and in the few years, I made friends with our neighbors – as you usually do with neighbors. But there is nothing in particular that I could say, that distinguished them from us. They were more or less our kind of people.

PH: What was the street name?

JF: Wallensteinstraße, named after...either military man or politician in Austrian history, of the middle ages.

PH: Which district is that?

JF: 20th.

PH: And the factory was also in the 20th district?

JF: In the 20th.

PH: So the population was relatively mixed?

JF: Yes. I mean, yes--

PH: --Jews, gentiles?

JF: Correct, yes. The Jewish population, as it more or less turned out, was concentrated in Leopoldstadt, the 2nd district, which you may have heard before, and that goes even back to the middle ages [meint: Frühe Neuzeit], when Jews all had to settle on this common ground.

PH: How did your neighbors react after the Anschluss? Was there any difference, were you treated differently?

JF: It depended a great deal on the personalities. Some of them accepted it with joy, some of them accepted it with necessity, as a matter of fact. And I believe that very, very few felt unhappy about it.

PH: Did you also have personal experiences, where you were treated in a certain way?

JF: No, not that I can recall, but I would not really know that anybody changed his or her attitude towards us for the six months that we still were in Austria...from March to September, when we left.

PH: When you were out of prison, you went back to the same apartment?

JF: We were allowed to keep it, as far as I know. When I left, my sister was forced to go and live with others, because I left the apartment to her. My mother, at that time, was unable to handle anything, and as it so happened, I was aware of the fact that domestic help was needed in England. And female applicants were treated with more...interest, because they were needed as domestic help. And that was how my sister could live. And I did find her, and kept in touch with her and was finally able to sponsor her to this country.

PH: When you try to compare the Vienna from before your imprisonment to the days after you were released, was there something atmospherically or in the people, that was significantly different?

JF: Well, we speak about six months again, at the beginning. I would like to tell you that I tried to keep away from people I did not know as much as I could. Those that I knew, either retained contact or they themselves walked away from me, not to be seen in my company. So how it came about, I would say I did not run into any difficulties, because of Hitler's presence, but I did not look for any contacts either.

PH: And if you look at signs, were there flags out suddenly?

JF: Constantly! Everywhere and in huge masses. Streets, even of rather minor importance, had flags, the main streets had flags, almost to the extent that you felt that it was a city of flags.

PH: Also on private balconies?

JF: In private as well. Yes, but of course, obviously I did not look for any inmates, or any people, who displayed flags. It was a good reason to avoid them altogether.

PH: I am just trying to get an idea, how omnipresent--

JF: --the flags were? Yes, in main streets, very...in less than main streets, to some extent, and occasionally in the small side streets.

1/00:41:48

PH: Wallensteingasse is close--

JF: --Wallensteinstraße.

PH: Is it close to Augarten?

JF: Yes.

PH: Do you remember whether in Augarten there were also some demonstrations or *Aufmarsch*?

JF: Well, there were marches all over the city. Wherever there was an opportunity to celebrate the change, I think it took place. But there is a lot of time that I spent at the *Landesgericht*. But I did hear Hitler's reception from the nearby Heldenplatz, if that name came into your discussion, where Hitler came, between March and June, and had been jubilantly received. He held a speech there. I did not hear that, but we heard the noise of the population.

PH: How would you describe that? Ecstatic?

JF: Yes, definitely jubilant...exactly.

PH: That was while you were at *Landesgericht*?

JF: Correct. *Landesgericht* is in the heart of the city, as is the Heldenplatz, so we could hear the noise from there, through the windows.

PH: Did you know what was going on?

JF: Well, we knew what was going on from our experience, but we did not know any details.

PH: When you were released, the people on the street, were they wearing the *Hakenkreuz*?

JF: That is correct, yes. As a matter of fact, everybody wore them, to distinguish them from somebody who is not welcome. At that time, I used the word welcome very loosely, because not threatened might have been the better one. Anyone who did not wish to be threatened by agents of Hitler, wore the *Hakenkreuz*, the insignia.

PH: So you would say also people wore it that maybe were not completely sympathetic?

JF: Yes. Not only completely, yes, but definitely those who were indifferent, and understandably those who were enthused about the change.

PH: Can you tell me a little bit more about Vienna in the interwar period? How did it--

JF: --you mean to speak about after I left in March?

PH: No, between the two wars.

JF: Ah, between the two wars.

PH: Yes, going back in time a little.

JF: It was when we had the change from a socialist government, which incidentally Mr. Eisler was part of [meint: Arnold Eisler war Unterstaatssekretär für Justiz (1919-1920) und Mitglied des Verfassungsgerichtshofs bis 1930], to a revolution in February, 1934, where [Engelbert] Dollfuß, chancellor Dollfuß, acquainted us with a taste of what dictatorship means. Yes, I noticed a change, definitely.

1/00:45:14

Up until 1934, that is from 1918 to 1934...how shall I say this...it was a land of modest chance of acquiring any wealth, but I was lucky enough to keep the job that I had. I mentioned in the beginning, I was employed throughout the days of my stay in Vienna, whether there were good times or bad times. And the bad times followed when in 1929, I think, there came a complete collapse of our economic system. We were rescued in some way, but part of the rescue consisted of our leadership of the factory was dismissed, and a representative of the industry took over our factory, together with another one of a similar nature – the name

was *Ditmar-Brünner*. They made lamps. So both of them were considered...no, that was...I correct myself: *Feinstahlwerke Traisen*. That was the company...and our company, who had been supervised by a representative of the bank. And we lost our leadership, the ownership, and I received a letter that I had been dismissed, but the company reserves the right to rehire me, if it suits their purpose. I was rehired, so I was with them until the very last day of my stay as a free man in Vienna.

[Übergang/Schnitt.]

PH: How did you spend your leisure time, your non-working time in Vienna? Did you go to coffee houses?

JF: No, on the contrary, I studied languages. It was a night school system, where we could spend...where I did spend the evening hours from Monday until Friday. And although it was not for credit, I acquired enough knowledge to use it in my working place, which turned out to be a blessing. In the leisure hours, I was an active soccer player, so I played on weekends, usually. And hiking was also a welcome opportunity, which I did with friends for the better part of my adult life.

PH: Did you go to Semmering?

JF: Well, I am familiar with the Semmering, we walked there, but we did not spend time there...leisure time, yes, but not vacation time.

PH: Wienerwald?

JF: Yes, Wienerwald was our territory. There are beautiful ways to walk and we took advantage of it.

PH: And soccer, did you play in a club?

JF: Yes, our company had a club. I could not make any attempts of higher...or let us say join a club, because that meant being away from work for training and things. So I never really played soccer in higher circles, but within our group we could manage a team, and I played without being in a league.

PH: There were also quite famous soccer players, like [Matthias] Sindelar or--

JF: --so you know the names! Yes, I can tell quite a number of them. [Hustet.] If you are interested in them.

PH: Did you watch their games?

JF: Well, very seldom, because we played on Saturdays or Sundays. As a matter of fact, if you met one of the players in a bath or something, you would play. I played with [Rudolf] Hiden at one time, [Hans] Löwy, [Ignaz] Feldmann, [Johann] Ehrlich, [Otto] Fischer...I met him again in France.

1/00:50:20

PH: They were part of *Austria Wien* or the *Hakoah* team?

JF: Well, the *Hakoah* team, I knew only...I was too young to play, but I knew Löwy and Feldmann...we were acquainted. The older generation were Norbert Katz, Max Grünwald, [Wilhelm] Halpern, [Max] Scheuer, [Karl] Trummer, [Alois] Hess, [Alexander] Neufeld, [Moses] Häusler...yes, some of them I remember.

PH: Going back to those political incidents, as you mentioned Dollfuß. Did you also experience or witness some of the fights in the streets?

JF: No, I did not witness them, but I was familiar with them, from what you would call the good old times. Yes, there were fights.

PH: Which then culminated in the *Karl-Marx-Hof* shooting.

JF: Yes, you speak about the *Karl-Marx-Hof* shooting. That was Dollfuß, in February, 1934. Dollfuß, [Ernst Rüdiger] Starhemberg...shot...yes, I know that know. We were not present. Our neighborhood was not affected, but *Karl-Marx-Hof* was. And...a lot of other buildings too. Those were the buildings that were built by the socialist regime, and were attacked by the opposite, the *Christlich-Sozialen*.

PH: And when Dollfuß was assassinated?

JF: Well, we knew about it, in July...1934...or was it 1936 or 1938? I do not know anymore.

PH: I am not sure.

JF: Yes, but anyway, yes, we knew about it. And at that time, of course, we were told exactly what had happened, because at that time we still had a free press. So we knew that there must have been an inside job by allowing the assassins to gain access to his office, because that is where he was killed.

PH: What about religious traditions in your family?

JF: No, well...we were observant to the extent that my father took us to the temple on the high holidays – and mother, of course, too. We were seated separately. And my wife was religious, and she maintained a rather religious life in America as well. We could choose freely, and we did choose a congregation, and I believe our whole social life is set around the synagogue...here.

PH: Were politics ever a subject? Were you interested in politics?

JF: Not very deeply, no. I was mostly interested in our business. [Hustet.] It has occupied me quite intensely. I tried to get ahead by learning things.

PH: You are talking about Vienna?

JF: In Vienna, yes. I am still speaking about Vienna.

PH: What about ideas like Zionism? Were you ever involved in that?

JF: Terrorism?

PH: No, Zionism. *Zionismus*, like [Theodor] Herzl.

JF: Oh, Zionism. I knew about it, but I did not actively participate in any *Jugend* or discussions or anything. I knew about Herzl, of course.

1/00:55:10

PH: Can you describe arriving in New York, in the United States? How did this feel?

JF: Well, as a matter of fact, I did arrive... [Hustet.] Excuse me. When I have the autobiography, I can better read it, if you excuse me for a minute. I read it from my notes. Would that interest you? Or should I just tell it to you?

PH: Just tell it to me, then it will be like an extra source.

JF: Well, we left Le Havre on 16th February, 1938 [meint: 1940], and – under duress – across the ocean, it took us fourteen days to travel from Le Havre to New York. Because of the U-boat threat, we were blacked out, literally. Of course, when we came to the lights of New York, we could see the difference. And my wife's family, who sponsored us, in Reading, Pennsylvania, came for us the same evening, to bring us to Reading. We came to Reading, and settled on in a rented place. A lady occupied herself with providing jobs...we were six families who lived there...providing jobs for us, and we were all working within weeks. So, life in America started for us without, I would say, worries of how we would make a living, or how we would provide for food, shelter and clothing, because both of us and my sister-in-law, who was with us, were bringing home money right from the beginning. And from that time, until this very day, I was blessed with providing enough sustenance for all of us whenever I was called upon to...lead a family, so to speak. We never had children, unfortunately, but my sister-in-law married after several months. And my wife and I occupied our house for 46 years. So from the very beginning, from the meeting at the New York pier, until 46 years later, we never had another...we lived in the same place, the same house. I eventually bought it, and it became our home. And I retired in 1976.

PH: What about your professional life? What was your first job?

JF: I started in a shirt factory, as we all did start in factories. I served in the army from July, 1943, until December, 1945. Then I came back to the job, but then I felt I could do better. So after two not so successful salesman jobs, I was hired by a factory, and remained with them for 21 years. So I am not much of a job changer. I had one important job in Vienna and one important job in this country, along with two unimportant ones, and that was my career.

PH: What was your position in the later job, the one that you did for twenty years in the United States?

JF: 21 years! I said, I was a sales representative.

PH: A sales representative?

JF: Yes. I covered the territory of Pennsylvania for a manufactural company in sportswear.

PH: For 21 years?

JF: For 21 years, from 1945 to [19]76.

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PH: You were traveling?

JF: Yes, I was traveling constantly between...we changed the assignments from time to time, but let us say the eastern third of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia was a territory by itself, but I travelled thoroughly the eastern part, let us say...from the Delaware River up to the New York State Line, down to the Maryland State Line, and up to the...Allegheny Mountains maybe, the center. The next part was the Philadelphia territory.

PH: Who were your customers?

JF: Retail stores.

PH: Now, after your arrival in the United States, did you also have contact to other emigrants?

JF: We used to have good friends...I of course looked for my sister, who I eventually found while in the service. I was stationed in England. And we made a good many friends in this country.

PH: And those friends had the same background? Were they Austrian born?

JF: Some of them were Austrian born, some of them were...let me recall...were Germans. And I do not think we had any...well, mostly Germans and Austrians, but I was on good terms even with Native Americans, who became part of our social life in the synagogue. We became friendly with Native Americans, who accepted us, and where we were part of their circle.

PH: How did you meet your wife in Vienna?

JF: By...well, I would not even say by accident. We were living side by side for quite a number of years...lived close by, and walked together. So, we grew...let us say, it turned slowly into love, simply by being together and doing things together in the same circles, the same neighborhood. We had the same friends and the same acquaintances even. She was a piano teacher.

PH: In Vienna and also in the United States?

JF: No, here she worked as a sales...an alteration lady in a dress store, and was unhappy for all her time of working. She worked from 1945 to 1950, but her love was for the piano. And later on, I was able to give her that pleasure at least, that she could stay home and play the piano. And I did the work myself.

PH: But she did not have students?

JF: No, she did not. Well, yes, she acquired students, who she wanted to teach for the sake of teaching them, but not as a profession. If she ever earned any money, I would not have known.

PH: Now, coming to the big topic of anti-Semitism: Would you call the Viennese anti-Semitic before 1938?

JF: It definitely existed, and I mean, I can only go to my observations. We had names that...at that time, the famous saying of *Kaiser* Franz Joseph was, "I am the one who determines who is a Jew." So he accepted gentile people who converted to Catholicism as Jews. Examples are Gustav Mahler, Bruno Walter...and others as well. Conversion to Catholicism was reason enough to be accepted as a Jew. Anti-Semitism existed in every form and shape. I was familiar with it from close observers, that my superiors never could obtain a position of importance, either in the industry or in commerce. We knew it, of course, from Gustav Mahler, who came to America, and wanted badly to be the director of the *Wiener Staatsoper*, but could not as long as he did not convert.

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It existed. The worst form of raw anti-Semitism existed in the Vienna University. Students were the worst group. They engaged in fistfights and more brutal ways of showing their anti-Semitism. I was not directly involved, because I never visited, but a good many of my friends who did go to university and told me about it. It was a very unpleasant – to put it mildly –, gruesome at times, activity, that has been done.

PH: It is hard for you to say, it even got worse after [19]38, because you were--

JF: --in [19]38, we were completely at the mercy of anybody's whim. Anybody who wished to, could beat us up, simply because we were Jews. And it has been done.

PH: Have you ever been beaten up?

JF: No. I escaped the period after Kristallnacht. But there were beatings of Jews too. No, I was never involved in anything of that sort.

PH: And later in France, and after, did you ever encounter anti-Semitism then?

JF: If I encountered anti-Semitism...well, not openly, that I could point out to, but were I to look at people, who were at my side, who lived at my side, I have seen it too frequently, and it could apply to myself as well, without remembering any facts in particular.

PH: After the war, did you ever visit Austria again?

JF: Yes, we were in Vienna three times, but only for the purpose of visiting my relatives in Czechoslovakia, which I mentioned before. Of those, two families...one and a half families, I would say, survived the Holocaust. And I visited them, but I never returned to the place where I lived. I do not even know what the house looks like that I left in 1938.

PH: Did you have any encounters with Austrian, that left any lasting impressions on you?

JF: I could look for things, because they would be, let us say, interesting by any standard: Our visit to the state opera, performances at the state opera, hiking in the Vienna woods, *Wienerwald*, the drinking water, the friends that I had there...most of whom disappeared in the Holocaust. I could not find them. One that I met, died at a rather young age.

1/01:10:12

Anything that impressed me...I have to think a little bit harder. Yes, one trip on the Danube river to Budapest, and on the other side to the Wachau...I have to think a little bit harder...the pastry, the Viennese pastry, should be included into the pleasures. I do think, by any standard, you cannot overlook the beauty of the Vienna city and its surroundings, made famous by [Franz] Schubert and [Ludwig van] Beethoven...so the music that has been created. I am already running into difficulties of what to remember as impressive. Yes, I believe that is about as much as I can think of at the moment.

PH: What is your relationship with Austria today, if any?

JF: Well, the only one is that they found it convenient to give us a pension. You could apply for a pension, and the time that we spent in the American army has been credited to us. So we have a pension, almost similar to the American social security – which has been negotiated. And...I believe that is about all I think I can say. And trying to get the graves in good shape, where my parents are buried, in Vienna. Without the cemetery and without the pension, I do not have any other contacts.

PH: Do you follow politics at all, in Austria?

JF: At that time, no, because I was too occupied with my job.

PH: And nowadays?

JF: Nowadays, of course, I follow it.

PH: In Austria too?

JF: No. You mean, if I know about Austrian politics? Well, if I would not have been told about [Jörg] Haider or [Kurt] Waldheim, I would not know who their representatives are. If you ask me today who the chancellor is, I do not know. Or the mayor of Vienna, I would not know him, or the foreign minister.

PH: Thank you very much!

JF: That is it.

PH: Do you have anything to add?

JF: No, no, on the contrary. I am glad to answer you anything, and I am only ten minutes late.

[Ende des Interviews.]

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