**Interview with Erwin Weissmann**

**May 15th 1997**

Q: This is tape one of an United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Interview with Mr. Erwin Weissmann conducted by Christian Kloesch on May 15th, 1997 in Queens, New York.

Could we start the interview with the most basic facts. Could you tell me your name at birth..

A: I am born July 17, 1909 in Baden bei Wien. My parents name were Leopold und Malvine Weissmann. Mein father was owner of a shoe store. Und I was working for myself as in Modisten trade, Modisten supplies.

Q: And can you tell something about your family, family of your father.

A: We had a very close family. We got two brothers, two brothers, one name was Wilhelm and the other one was Josef. They both were working in my fathers store. I was the only one, who was working outside. We used to have a quiet good business and it was liquidated in 1938, after the Nazis came in. And I was sent to a concentration camp. I was two month in Dachau and after this I emigrated to Belgium illegal und was in Belgium one year and after this I came to the United States of America and worked here all kind of business. I was here working as a, in fur business, then in clothing business all kind of. Then I started to have my one business, it was a farm in Vineland, New Jersey. I was a chicken farmer for 31 years. Und after that I traded in eggs. That’s my whole story.

Q: Where you parents also were born in Baden?

A: My father was born in Baden and my mother came from Hungary, from Tokai. The grandparents were in wine business. A very famous wine supply store place.

Q: And what was the maiden name of your mother?

A: Her maiden name was Stern, Malvine Stern.

Q: Your mother were born in Hungary and when your parents married...

A: And they moved from Hungary to Austria.

Q: And they married when?

A: What year? 1905, 1906, I don’t know exactly. 1906.

Q: And did you have brothers and sister?

A: I have got two brothers. One brother was two years older than I am und one was two years younger than I am. And both were working with my father in the shoe store.

Q: (Mrs. Weissmann) ...the Jewish life and also your schooling that you go to school that you went away to Yeshiva. That you should talk about.

A: I went to public school, and after that I went to the Buergerschule until the second grade and then to Handelsschule, two years of Handelsschule.

Q: And you went to a public elementary school?

A: Pardon me?

Q: You went to a public elementary school. It was not a Jewish school.

A: No, there was no Jewish school in Baden. Baden was a community with, I think, 250 Jewish families, in the summer there were more. We have got a nice synagogue with a Rabbi and Cantor und a I think ten employees, all kind of business, all kind of work they have done. This was the community.

Q: And this synagogue. Can you remember were it was?

A: The synagogue was in the, what’s the name, ja, we were there...I was two years ago, I was there. In Breierstrasse.

Q: Breierstrasse.

A: And the synagogue stands still there, but it was a (Mrs. Weissmann, I think the city took it over or something..) They left it away, it was plundered, it was in very poor situation. The house is still... (Mrs. Weissmann, still damaged, no repairs), no repair. And there are no Jews in Baden, very few Jews life now in Baden.

Q: Today.

A: I think there is no any service.

Q: And before 1938, there were about, 250 families.

A: 250 families, now maybe 4-5 living there, but there are not observant, they don’t need a synagogue, they don’t need anything.

Q: And what was the name of the Rabbi?

A: Rabbi, the last name was Karlebach, but years ago there was a Rabbi, he only was there for three years, the last three years. But there was a Rabbi, Rabbi Reich, was there for forty years in the community. He was a man, who died at the age of 77, 78, he died.

Q: And the Cantor’s name?

A: Cantor, it was not a regular cantor, they always changed. There was a Cantor for two years, for three years. The last name was Kreuzstein, Rabbi, Cantor Kreuzstein, Kreuzstein was his name. But there was a schames(ph), a sexton with the name of singer he was there a for quiet a while.

Q: Can you describe a little bit the household..

A: Pardon me?

Q: ..the household were you brought up, your family life?

A: My family life we was living in a very nice house, in the Breitel..,I even have a picture here....Now this house looks in poor condition. Because in Austria in this time, there was a Mieterschutz, is it still there? A Mieterschutz. And the landlords can not make a living there. They lose money everyone, this houses are neglected in Austria. Nobody, maybe new houses can ask better rent, but the old houses are in poor conditions. This house looks no anymore..

Q: And you had an apartment there?

A: We used to have the apartment on the first floor. There was four rooms, two bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room and a dinning room and a Vorroom was there.

Q: And you lived there with your parents and your two brothers?

A: With my parents and my two brothers, we all were single.

Q: And you had a maid?

A: Occasionally, occasionally, ja.

Q: And. Could you describe the religious life of your family?

A: My religious life was quiet orthodox, we were religious Jews, we even closed the store on Sabbath. It was quiet a sacrifice for us, because the main business day was Sabbath. The most people didn’t work and bought the shoes on Sabbath. Our store was quiet good, we used to have two employees, besides my two brothers.

Q: And you kept kosher?

A: We kept kosher und all other orthodox things.

Q: And you didn’t.. Did you go to school on Saturday?

A: There was a service (Mrs. Weissmann, you had to go) We used to go, as a child I used to go without books, I went there. (Mrs. Weissmann, just to sit there)

Q: And you didn’t write?

A: I didn’t write on Saturday. (Mrs. Weissmann, it was compulsory to go to school and to sit there, after the service in the synagogue was finished, right? You had it like that, that’s what we had in Germany? You had to go there in the morning?) No, no, in the morning. It was different. Every country, every city had different regulations.

Q: And, your neighborhood. Were there other Jewish families in the house?

A: Ja, not, in the house yes. in the house we have got eight parties und it was four Jewish parties in this house. My father used to own this house.

Q: He was the owner?

A: Ja, the owner.

Q: And can you remember the names of this families? Of the other Jewish families.

A: Rosenberg, Jaul, Goldschmied, Viola. This were the four parties. No, no the Jewish parties, there were four gentile parties there. Jews were mostly poor people, one was a Schneider, a tailor, Mr. Jaul was tailor. The other ones got a very small store, Mr. Rosenberg and one was a Optiker, and the forth one was a Hausierer. How do you call it? Peddler....

Q: And you first attended the elementary school?

A: Pardon?

Q: You first attended elementary school for four years and then?

A: And then to the Buergerschule, I don’t know how they call it now. Buergerschule for four years and two years in Handelsschule?

Q: And did you have other Jewish class mates?

A: Class mates. I have got very few, very few (Mrs. Weissmann, But you had some.) Ja, all this people were younger than I. In this class there were not many, were no one I can remember. Younger people...

Q: Were you a member of a youth organizations?

A: No, I was a member of the community. (Mrs. Weissmann, No, but also. Did you belonged to Makkabi?) No Jung Jude, Jung Judea, that was it the youth group.

Q: Can you tell me..

A: Than we have got another youth oriented, Blau-Weiss.

Q: Can you tell me a little bit more about this youth organization?

A: The youth organization, we made trips, we played football, soccer. We came together and social contact, you know.

Q: And you had a special place to meet?

A: No, in the community, there was a place, in the place, next to the synagogue. (Mrs. Weissmann, the synagogue is quiet a large complex. I have never seen the synagogue, but there is a wall around it. And there more buildings inside, we had no chance to getting in, when we were there.) It was closed up, this place. We were looking for it, but it was closed up. Baden have got a Jewish cemetery, it was in bad condition too. We went there, were looking for the grave of my grandfather and grandmother. We found the grave of my grandmother, but not for the grandfather. And we were a second time there and on the second time, we found the grave from the grandfather, but not from the grandmother. Everything was overgrown, it was very hard to find. And this Jewish cemetery, it is in the neighborhood of the synagogue?

A: No, it was outside of the town. (Mrs. Weissmann, next to the other cemeteries, non-Jewish cemeteries) In this neighborhood were all kind of cemeteries. It was one of the few.

Q: And can you remember how many members were in the Blau-Weiss?

A: Ah in the Blau-Weiss, maybe 20, 25 young people.

Q: Age?

A: Age from 10 to 20.

Q: 20. And it was some kind of sports club or?

A: It was more, ja it was a sport club.

Q: And you also had some lessons about Palestine...

A: No, (Mrs. Weissmann, they went not that far, but you went to a religious school, after school, in the afternoon, right?) My Jewish education was in the Kultusgemeinde they called it, there was two hours in the afternoon, in the morning there was school and in the afternoon was a Hebrew school for two hours.

Q: And there you learned Hebrew?

A: Hebrew, ja, the prayers. The bible, ja. (Mrs. Weissmann, And also Jewish history from the creation of the world..)

Q: And this was every day in the afternoon?

A: It was four days a week, four days in the afternoon and Sunday, no, five days. We were four days during the week from Monday to Thursday and then Saturday in morning, Sunday it was two hours. (Mrs. Weissmann, Ten hours a week), Ten hours a week ja.

Q: And the teacher was the Rabbi?

A: No, the teacher was not the Rabbi. It was a special teacher, a Hebrew teacher, he wasn’t the Rabbi, a Hebrew teacher.

Q: Can you remember his name?

A: Mrs. Tukes (ph), the other one was Loewenstein and the third one was. O.K. I don’t remember the name.

Q: Was the Jewish community in Baden an orthodox community?

Q: Did you have gentile friends in school?

A: Ja. I have got gentiles friends.

Q: Did you ever experienced some antisemitic...

A: Ja, I got plenty of that. Ja. Some young people were not very friendly were always want nothing to do with Jews. Were always kind of mixed reaction.

Q: Can you remember some special events.

A: No, special not.

A: Ja. I had the feeling. (Mrs. Weissmann, When you were called Jude or Saujude. You know what it mend. Doesn’t even had to be Saujude, Jude was just as derogatory.)

Q: And were there also some antisemitic teachers in school?

A: Teachers, not that I remember. Teachers were very liberal. No, teachers were not antisemitic.

Q: And after school, you start working?

A: After school, I was working in (Mrs. Weissmann, You went to Jeshiva for one year) One year I went to Hebrew high school in Hungary, in Oedenburg, Sopron. A half a year I went to Sopron and another half a year, I went to Pressburg. There was a very famous school.

Q: When was that?

Q: No, in which year?

A: Which year...(Mrs. Weissmann, mid twenties, maybe 1925, 26, 27) 1926. It was for one year, I went there, learned Hebrew, only Hebrew, because my Jewish education was very low. This year I could learn four hours a day, you know, six days a week.

Q: And afterwards, you came back to..

A: Afterward I was working in a silk place, which sold silk. I was Praktikant there, practice there four three years and then I was salesman for other three years.

Q: In Baden.

A: Not in Baden, in Vienna. It was a big place, it’s name was „Duldner und Deutsch“. It was place with 60 people, who were working there.

A: Pardon, im 7. Bezirk, Neubaugasse. You know the neighborhood?

Q: Ja.

A: It is a very nice Neighborhood. (Mrs. Weissmann, I think they are still in business) Ja. Someone they came back, he was in Israel for a time and he came back and opened up again, but in a very small scale. I think, the son, the grandson is working now, with one person. Very small scale.

Q: And you worked there how long?

A: Six years.

Q: From 1927..

Q: So from 1927, or 28, you worked to..

A: ....Maybe form 28 to 34, I don’t exactly know, about.....I was working for myself.

Q: And have you some recollections of events like such of the „Justizpalastbrand“ in 1927?

A: What? (Mrs. Weissmann, Justizpalastbrand, you had a fire there?)

Q: Ja. It was a riots of the social-democrats.

A: No.(...)

A: My parents were arrested, my father, my mother too, were arrested and were sent first to Gurs.(Mrs. Weissmann, No, your parents?) To Gurs and afterwards to Auschwitz. (Mrs. Weissmann, I thought they went right away to the east.) No, they were there a very short time.

Q: And did you parents fell threatened, fell the tension for 1938?

A: The store was occupied by the Nazis and liquidated without any \_\_\_\_\_\_. My parents went to Vienna and then from Vienna, you are right, from Vienna they were deported to Auschwitz.

Q: Can you remember the Anschluss, March 11, 1938?

A: Well, it was the day where Hitler took over everything over. I remember the day. I was arrested and was I sent to first to Vienna, from Baden to Vienna and I was in Dachau for two months.

Q: Right after the Anschluss?

A: Ja, right after the Anschluss (Mrs. Weissmann, was this nach dem..... Anschluss oder war das nach der Kristallnacht? I think, you was arrested after the Kristallnacht) I have a card here, it was sent from, I liked to show it to Mr. Flesch? This is a card what I sent from Dachau, from Concentration camp to my parents to Austria. (Mrs. Weissmann, But I think you were arrested after Kristallnacht, because you were there in Winter? When you were in Dachau?) From November. (O.K. Das war Kristallnacht, November 9th) Ja, maybe. (You were not arrested nach dem Anschluss)

Q: You were arrested in the Kristallnacht?

A: Ja, in the Kristallnacht im November. You can read it?

Q: Ja. And the time before. After the Anschluss. How did your life changed?

A: Right after, I didn’t do anything. It was a short time, I didn’t do anything.

Q: After the Anschluss?

Q: And can you recall. How did your friends and neighbors behaved towards to you?

A: They behaved very badly. They didn’t talk with us. They didn’t communicate with us. We was isolated.......

Q: Can you recall some laws and degrees restricting Jewish life in Baden?

A: The Jews law didn’t exist after the Anschluss, it disappeared. I was in the service. The synagogue was closed. The cemetery was closed. Everything disappeared, was liquidated and disappeared.

Q: And the store of your father?

A: The store was taken away, without any \_\_\_\_\_\_.

A: Were arrested. The parents were first not arrested. They were living still and moved to Vienna. And lived there for a couple of months. (Mrs. Weissmann, They had to, but that was after march, after you had left, you and your brothers.) Ja. I am and my brother was..We went illegal to Belgium. I with my brother.

Q: Excuse me, I have to change...

Side B:

Q: Can you tell, you said you were arrested after, in the Kristallnacht. Can you describe how it happened?

A: They came to the house and picked me up. But I was in Vienna in prison and from Vienna they moved me to Dachau.

A: By train, ja. It was one of the worst trips, I ever, whatever what I erlebt. Everyone hat to look into the light for eight hours till we came from Vienna to Munich. And in Munich we took a different train. The train what they use for cattle, you know, and with this train. But the train from Vienna to Munich, we have to look up and a lot of people couldn’t do it. They were killed. They used....guns, ja. We came to Dachau, they schlepped out from every(Mrs. Weissmann, Wait a minute. You came to Munich first. That was in Munich.) in Munich they took out that people from, from the train.

Q: They were shot?

A: They were shot, ja.

Q: Because they couldn’t look up in the light?

A: They couldn’t look up for hours and hours. It was very bad.

Q: And this was a SS from?

Q: Germans or Austrians?

A: Germans, mostly Germans, likely there were Austrians too, but I wouldn’t know. (Mrs. Weissmann, You wouldn’t know, unless you met a neighbor their, you wouldn’t know were they were.)

Q: And were there other Jewish men from Baden in the train too?

A: Ja there were people from Baden too, but mostly was Viennese people.

Q: And they arrested all Jewish men from Baden?

A: Ja, but not everyone was sent to Dachau. Only the younger ones. My father was not sent.

A: Yes my father was arrested too, but they let him go again und he was in Vienna. For how many months? For five, for six months and then they arrested him again and he was shipped to Auschwitz, both my parents. (Mrs.: Weissmann, I don’t know even, if it was arrested, it was just.)

Q: They had to move to Vienna.

A: (Mrs. Weissmann, They had to move to Vienna and then they we don’t know) Sammelstelle, collecting the people.

Q: And do you know when they were sent to Dachau, to Auschwitz?

A: The exact time, I don’t know, when they were sent.

Q: And could describe. How was the situation in Dachau, when you were there?

Q: Liberia?

A: And with this, I got out and went back to Austria. And from there, they told me to have to disappear. At this time people could get out still. You have to disappear in two months. And after two months, I got a visa, I couldn’t get to Liberia. It was in, when we went out it was in January. And I could get a ship only in May to Liberia. So I had to get out illegal. So I went illegal to Belgium. Belgium wasn’t occupied it was still a free country, so we agreed to be there then. I was living in Belgium for one year.

Q: You were sent to Dachau in November 1938...

A: 1938 till two months till January, the end of January. And form January,....I was in Belgium from January to March 1940.(.....)(Mrs. Weissmann, And in March 40, he came here to the United States)

Q: Can you recall some name of the perpetrators in Dachau, of the SS, guards.?

A: No, I don’t remember any names. They didn’t tell us any name. (Mrs. Weissmann, Eight weeks is a long time, but to short to get really inside information.)

Q: And there were other Jews from Austria and from Vienna?

A: Ja, there were trainloads. There was barracks in Dachau, there were number. We were number four. And in this barracks there were a few people from Austria, people from all over, from Graz, from Linz, from all over.

Q: Can you describe a little bit the relationship between the prisoners?

A: The relationship,(...) we tried to help.

Q: In which way?

A: It was, some people were very nice, some people was steeling from the other one. Everyone got some bred in the morning and when looking for their bread, he discovered, it wasn’t there. Some neighbors took it. Everyone looked to survive, you know. It was very hard. There was friction under the people. Some got more to eat, the other less to eat, you know. And the weaker one couldn’t get enough.

Q: Could you receive letters from home?

A: I got a letter and I wrote back this letter. I could everything twice, once a month, I didn’t write much.(......Mrs. Weissmann, „Jeder Schutzgefangene darf im Monat zwei Briefe oder zwei Karten empfangen und auch zwei absenden.)

Q: And can you remember how your brother got the visa for Liberia?

A: We didn’t get the visa. My brother came to Belgium and from Belgium he was sent, he didn’t go out. And he didn’t survived. ( Mrs. Weissmann, „The only had a cousin here and he only had enough to sent out one Affidavit.)

Q: You had a cousin here in the United States?

A: In the United States. He came from Cologne, he was already here couple of years and he got something, he got a small place, where he made a living. So he said an Affidavit and this Affidavit was not strong enough for three people. So he sent only one and it was for me. And with this Affidavit, I got a visa. My brother got a later list, he was, you have to be register in the registration. (...)

Q: Quota number?

A: Ja.

Q: And you got an Affidavit from your cousin?

A: From my cousin, cousin of mine.

Q: And your brother?

A: The brother got some Affidavit, but they were not good enough. They were brothers, not brothers, cousins from that cousin and they were not good enough. And they didn’t survive. They were sent to Gurs in France. And from France they were sent to Auschwitz. And my parents and my brothers was killed in Auschwitz.

Q: And you said, you left Vienna in 1939 and you went to Belgium. And were you supported by some relief organizations there?

A: Well at the beginning, I was supported, afterwards they said, „You have to go in a camp, you can not life outside.“ I was living in Antwerp. So I peddled, I sold coffee,(....)

Q: Illegal?

A: Illegal. I went to people, Jewish people there and everyone bought something und I made a living. I survived, I didn’t made a living. It was and then I got a Affidavit from America from my cousin and I came over. And I was supported from the Joint Community, with the visa, with the money, you know.

Q: You mean the money for the visa?

A: For the visa, I got (Mrs. Weissmann, „For the visa, who paid your fair?) Partly the joint, but I got together 1.000 Frank. It was a very small amount and the difference the Joint gave me.

Q: And you left in March 1940? Can you remember the journey to America?

A: To America, I came with a ship.

Q: From Antwerpen?

A: Via Antwerpen with a ship to New York. And it was a very stormy voyage, it was very bad. All the people got sea sick. I was one of the few, who didn’t get sea sick. And we came to New York. and in New York my cousin was there to take, to welcome me. and he supported me for one month and after der Zeit, I was working as a Praktikant in a fur store. And since that time I was standing always on my one feet.

Q: And your cousin. You first lived in the apartment?

A: ....No, (Mrs. Weissmann, „No, he rented an furnished room. He, that’s what he paid for one month) And after that I paid myself.

Q: And this was in Manhattan?

A: What?.....Ja. Washington Heights.

Q: And when did you learned that you parents were deported to Auschwitz and were killed?

A: (Mrs. Weissmann, „I think, you heard about it before, I don’t know when.) I was married already. (Mrs. Weissmann; „No that was when we heard that they had been killed. They died. that was in 1946. Passover 1946, we got notice that they were killed.)

Q: From the Jewish Community in Vienna?

A: No, from the Red Cross. (Mrs. Weissmann, No, from an individual, somebody wrote you a letter.) Ja, a women from my hometown, from Baden, she wrote me that my parents. (....)

Q: And where other relatives of you killed, murdered during the holocaust?

A: (Mrs. Weissmann, „A aunt, an uncle, who lived in Baden. A cousin in Baden) A lot of people. And people, who have got uncles and aunts in Hungary. They all disappeared, everyone disappeared.

Q: How were you affected about that, what happened during the Holocaust? Did it affect you religious life?

A: (Mrs. Weissmann, „No, we are orthodox.“) We kept going to synagogue. It didn’t affect my religious life.

Q: Did you ever visited Baden?

A: Twice we was there. When was the first time? (Mrs. Weissmann, „In 86.“) I showed my wife, where I was born and showed her the old neighborhood. Und then we was there two years ago. (Mrs. Weissmann, „From Vienna a invitation.“) I got a invitation.

Q: From the Jewish Welcome Service?

A: Ja.

Q: Did you get an invitation from the community in Baden?

A: No. (Mrs. Weissmann, „No Baden is now part of Kultusgemeinde Wien) Is a part. Ja...... There are no Jews in Baden.

Q: And did you met some friends from....

A: (Mrs. Weissmann, „Yes in 1986 you met two people. One in Baden, one in Vienna“) And this one man from Vienna, I wanted to visit him a second time, he had died.

Q: Was he Jewish?

A: Yes.

Q: O.K. Did we forget anything?

A: No. I don’t have a big list. People can talk, talk......

Q: O.K. Thank you very much for the interview.

A: You are welcome. It was nice to meet you.

Q: Thank you.

A: (Mrs. Weissmann, „We appreciate what are you doing, trying to undo some of the bad things that happened.)

Q: Ja. It is not possible to undo it.

**Conclusion of Interview.**