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Frage: I would like to ask you about your parents, where they came from, what their profession was, when were you born, if you have sisters and brothers and so on and about your earliest childhood memories.

Antwort: Yes, I was born on June 22nd 1921 in Eisenstadt, my name when I was born was Pollitzer, which was later changed in the USA to Poll, not because I wanted it but I was the youngest of 4 boys and one sister, and by the time I came to the States they all had changed their names already, so it would have been very awkward for me to continue with the name Pollitzer, and every one else in the family was called Poll, except our father, he wouldn't change the name, he stuck to Pollitzer. My parents were both born in Burgenland. My mother comes from Sigless near Mattersburg, and my father came from Pötsching, and they both grew up with very little formal education. A teacher came to the house, to teach them how to read and write, together with a Jewish education. And my father was the oldest child in his family and his father died when my father was only 17 years old, so he had the responsibility, and there were 5 or 6 siblings younger than he was so he had the responsibility at an early age to really work hard and to support not only his mother but his younger brothers and there are a few sisters. Well he lived in this way, my parents lived until they got married. They got married in Sopron in Ödenburg, because that was at that time emotionally very close to them, not only geographically. There was talk at the time that Ödenburg should be the capital of Burgenland. But in 1919 I believe, they decided it should become German, and Eisenstadt should be the capital of Burgenland. So they lived the first few years in Ödenburg and then they moved to Eisenstadt, where my father, like half of the population in Eisenstadt, at least the Jewish population, started to work for the Wolf winery. He became an expert in wines and they sent him all over the world to taste and to buy their wines for them, even to Sicily and wherever there were wines to be had. Financially they had a tough time because we were quite a few in the family. He earned enough to make a living, but we all went to gymnasium, one of my older brothers continued to study and graduated from law school in Vienna and then it became a little easier, my sister in the meantime got older. I mean there was 8 years difference between me as the youngest and my older sister; my oldest brother was 16 years older. So that's how we continued in Eisenstadt. First I went to the Jewish Volksschule the first 4 years, aged 6 to 10, from the age of 10 I started to go to the Gymnasium where I stayed until just before the end of the 7th grade, they came in March, so in April I had to leave, in June the year would have been over, so at the end of the 7th class I had to leave, 1 year before the matura. They marched in in March, so we got the order, my father, even though he was a respected modest citizen of the town, everybody liked him. The Gestapo came within one week and arrested him and he was incarcerated for 5 weeks, and he only got out because one of my older brother's schoolmates was an illegal Nazi even already before Hitler came to Eisenstadt. He put a good word for him. He got him released after 5 weeks. (coffee) They said we had to leave our apartment. We didn't live in the Judengasse. We lived down around the Schloss, around the Hadyingasse/Weigeltasse, it's a strange situation. I took my children there to show them where I was born. I believe there were only 2 bombs that fell on Eisenstadt. during the war. One of them was a direct hit on the building where our apartment was. There's a new house there now, so I couldn't show my children the house where I was born and where we lived. But we had to move temporarily from there up into the Judengasse where my paternal grandmother still lived by herself and she had room, an extra room, so we all moved in with her, (nolens volens?) we had to move in with her, we had no other choice. But by September when the first Jewish holidays came about, we had clear out, all the Jews had to be out of Eisenstadt, Judenrein, so we moved from there to Vienna. (Are you interviewing a man named Ten formerly Zehngut?, he lives in Philadelphia, Zwischengespräch über "Zehngut".....) I shared with this man Zehngut change to Ten in an apartment in Vienna. The Kultusgemeinde paid for it. We had no money or anything and also my parents got an apartment in Vienna. We were fortunate with the American immigration situation because we had no relatives here, we had no waiting list number, and yet through a friend of my brother's wife's friend, who was established here already long before the Nazis came. He was well to do here, he had his mother there, he befriended an American Vice consulate. Within 2 weeks he had 4 American visas without waiting list, I was not included, but my 2 older brothers and my sister and my parents and myself we just had to stay behind, but that was very fortunate because we were desperate, if that hadn't happened they would have had to leave the country illegally like so many others climbing over the mountains or winding up in Auschwitz. At that time nobody knew about Auschwitz yet. So that was a fortunate situation. I got an Affidavit, and my parents, once my brother was in New York and he looked for a job with the "Bullover watch" people, because that's the same connection related to his wife so Mr Bullover said the business isn't good so I can't give you a job, but do you have anybody left in New York. So my brother said yes I have my

parents and my younger brother so he called in his secretary and he dictated an Affidavit and.....? So in the meantime we registered with the American Consulate and that American visa actually came through for my parents in August of 1939 and also for me, now in the meantime I have to tell you that after the Kristallnacht where I was still in Vienna it got very urgent for me to leave but I couldn't, I was waiting for the visa. But the Vienna Kultusgemeinde had an action with the British . The British opened a Kitchener Camp, the Kitchener Camp was in south –east England near Canterbury, and that was a delapidated first world war army camp and they said we let the first Austrian and German Jews come in here and give them room and board, well room and board came from the Jewish organisations anyway to help us rebuild that camp. Of course everybody was happy with anything you know, they became bricklayers etc, and I was already, I didn't fit into this programme age-wise, I didn't fit into a Kindertransport, and I didn't fit into that programme, but there was a very kind woman at the Kultusgemeinde who handled this, and she said I'll try to slip you through, nobody will pay any attention, so she slipped me through and I was actually the youngest one. My work in the Kitchener camp was that I became in charge of the mail, I was in the mail room , I was in charge of the postage stamps, and had to make sure that the mail is properly stamped and goes out of the camp. We were 6 thousand people there in Kitchener Camp and when the war started they had us go to the shore and fill bags with sand which went to London to protect the buildings with sand , sand bags, and that's where I was. My parents as I said got their visa in August, got booking on the SS Bremen , that was one of the larger German boats, and took off from Bremer Hafen. I still went out to visit them in Southampton, that was a big excitement for me, I got permission from the Kitchener camp to go to South Hampton and visit them. They were on high seas. On September 1st the war broke out in Europe and Hitler gave orders for the Bremen to turn around and go back to Germany, with my parents on it and that captain of the boat, something happened which is probably unique in the Nazi history, he disobeyed the order to turn around, luckily, and he says it is better to take the boat to New York and paint it grey, war-time grey, and then take it back to Germany , which he did because the Nazis were afraid of the u-boats at that time, that they would sink the boat. We thought for sure that they would put him against the wall and shoot him, but that was not the case, he was only relieved of his command, of the Bremen command, and he was an honourable person, he says there are 5 thousand people who were mostly Jewish emigrants, I cannot turn around; and that's how my parents got to New York. I in the meantime was still in Kitchener camp, my visa came through in early 1940, so in February 22nd, I landed in New York.

F: I have a question going back to the time before 1938 in Eisenstadt, You were 17 years old more or less in 38, so I guess you can remember your childhood

A: Very well

F: Can you tell or narrate something which happened in the context of the Jewish tradition. Did your family keep up the Jewish tradition?

A: Yes, pretty much so. The generation of my father to substitute for a really high class general education I would say , they substituted with religious observance, that gave them more context in their life, so most of them remained observant Jews, they didn't exactly know why, when we asked questions we never got proper answers, why is it this way or this way and this way, but there was in our household fairly strict adherence to the Jewish customs especially on Shabat and on the holidays, and the Kosher food laws etc. The fact that we never got proper answers led also to the result that we dropped away pretty quickly from that, not that we changed the religion, but it wasn't that strict anymore, ,my brothers already went to work on Shabat , but the high holidays were observed , Rosh Hashana and Jom Kippur, like with most people and the whole congregation of Eisenstadt, the stores that used to be closed on Saturday slowly began to be opened, despite the Rabbis speaking against it, but that wasn't good enough

F: Do remember about any conflicts between the Jewish people and the Rabbi? In the tradition in that respect?

A: Well I was actually too young, I mean I'm sure there were no serious conflicts, but with that particular Rabbi there were personality questions like you usually have in a small town.

F: Do you remember, because before 38 there was also anti-semitism in Austria in Vienna and I guess in Burgenland and Eisenstadt too, did you sense any anti-semitism before and how did you feel it?

A: There was strong anti-semitism in Eisenstadt, I felt it primarily in the school, Our neighbours were very friendly with us, Roman catholics, and they had one son one year older than I in the next grade between me and "___Matamon"? , but people said they were illegal Nazis, but I couldn't detect any such thing, we had the most cordial relationship, in fact I went with him to the midnight mass on Christmas and things like that, to his church, and on our holidays he came over and he ate with us and stayed the night and things like that. So I didn't feel it with the neighbours at all. Where I did feel it was at school. There certainly was the Turnverein, there was no way we could join the Turnverein, then there was one swimming pool, our building was shared with the military, and in the whole of Eisenstadt there was only one pool, and they harassed us, they didn't really hurt us or kill us , but you know you can make things pretty unpleasant for somebody without killing him, so that's what happened, and then later on the way to school, you see I went to school the same way as some of them , and there some incidents where some of the students threw stones at us and things like that. But they let us feel that we are not the same as they are.

F: The people who made you feel like that were illegal Nazis or?

A: Yes, I would say they came from the homes of illegal Nazis, but it didn't only take illegal Nazis in Austria to be anti-semitic, you know, you had what one normally thought were the best citizens and the best catholics of believing people, and all of a sudden they turned out to be anti-semitic over night. It's a strange phenomenon, this anti-semitism even today, people become anti-semitic without even knowing why. I understand there is anti-semitism in Japan where there are hardly any Jews. This is all propaganda. The Jews are supposedly the ones with the money which is a fact, originally when they came to Russia that looked different, spoke differently and they taught their children how to read and write, something unheard of there, and they were hard-working people, the others when they got paid went to a bar and half of their salary went in to drinks, and the Jews don't do that or they didn't do that, so they saved their money and after while they had a few schillings

F: In many articles and some in Interviews I did, there was an opinion that before March 1938, the non-Jewish and Jewish people were living together in a more or less integrated way, and that March 12 of 38 came very suddenly, so do you think that March 38 came so suddenly?

A: It didn't come suddenly

F: Did you or your parents have any idea about what was then coming ?

A: We did know that the Nazis couldn't be stopped in Austria. What we didn't know was the effect of it , that they would move at that speed, the way they moved, that came suddenly, that came as a surprise or as a shock or as a disappointment whichever you want to call it, but we knew that the Nazis couldn't be stopped in Austria.

F: How did you live on March 12th 1938?

A: I still went to school for 2/3 weeks after March 13th

F: Do you remember what you did on the day?

A: We watched the German soldiers march through the main street of Eisenstadt.

F: What was your personal first reaction?

A: Well, it was a certain feeling of uncertainty, where we didn't know what's going to be. We were fearful, we were scared. But like I said nobody expected the speed with which they proceeded. When we left our neighbours cried even though they approved of the Nazis, they said "we didn't think it would affect people like you" or something like that.

F: And then you and your family were first moved from the Haydngasse to the Judengasse?

A: In Vienna

F: You stayed in your grandmother's flat?, in this short time, 5/6 weeks you told me

A: Yes until the summer

F: How was life during these few weeks?

A: Well it was OK except that every day we heard from someone else that he had been arrested and he was beaten up by the Gestapo, and we had a very tough Gestapo chief in Eisenstadt called Koch, and he was apparently more extreme than was expected of him you see

F: During this short time in the Judengasse, did you and your family, or your father think about immigration places or searching for a visa

A: Of course, of course

F: And then you moved or you had to move to Vienna?

A: And then we had to move to Vienna, with my grandmother who was over eighty at that time, and apartments were hard to find at the time in Vienna you can imagine, so furnished rooms were the thing to get and I shared a room with this Tainwood? Henry

F: And you stayed there until 1939?

A: I stayed there through the Kristallnacht as I said, I walked the night through the Kristallnacht, and when I wanted to come back to my room, we had decent janitors, and the wife of the janitor said "don't go to your room", because they are rounding up all the Jews, so I walked all night I walked in the street of that "Kris?November" and I passed by the synagogue, they were all in flames. Anyway I stayed there (In that room) until I got the possibility to go to England to the Kitchener camp which was in April 1939, which was already fairly late

F: Did you go to school during this time in Vienna?

A: No, yes and no. I didn't go to Gymnasium in Vienna, but I had to do something you see. The Kultusgemeinde gave Umschulungskurse for people in order to prepare them for emigration, so we had an "Optamologist"? who was friendly with our family in Eisenstadt, and he said why don't you take up Opticianry, wherever you're going to go you will be able to make a living when you know about opticianry, and that's what I did, and the Kultusgemeinde did good courses, they had professional opticians as teachers, and that was really good for me, that was the foundation of what my future life was going to be. And then I was in Kitchener camp of course where I couldn't practice this opticianry business, but when I came to this country in February 1943 I did some opticianry work, but my liberty lasted only 2 years, because after being here 2 years uncle Sam said I want you, and put me in uniform and back to Europe again. I was an American soldier by December 1942, 1 year after Pearl harbour, and I was 3 years over there as an American soldier. I was even a D-day soldier. I was not in the infantry, but because of my knowledge of languages I was in what they call the intelligence service, which was stupid, to make us land on D-day, and I survived and I went all the way from the Normandy over to the Elbe to meet up with the Russians.

F: So before Europe you met Russians in Thurgau?

A: Yes exactly

F: I didn't know that before, but it's very interesting. Let's go back to year 1940, so you also lived the time of the air-raids in London, or in the south?

A: In Kent

F: Were there any air raids or Blitz or attacks over Kent at this time?

A: Air attacks no, no attacks, we only had the silence going, but no bombs were dropped, they all flew over Kent into London

F: So you weren't in a British camp, because the Austrian and German citizens were brought to camps as "friendly aliens" or something like that.

A: That was not the case, not with me. That was in the Isle of Man, Australia etc. not from the Kitchener camp, as a matter of fact the Kitchener camp started the pioneer core, which is an adjunct to the British army for non-British citizens. And then came the American visa and you went to the USA

F: So in the 40's you knew exactly that you wanted to go to the USA? Why did you want to go the USA?, because of your family, relations etc?

A: Why did I want to go to the USA?, for various reasons, there was no other place to go to, and I didn't try any other place; I could have gone illegally to Palestine at that time, but the British clamped down on that too, they didn't give out any visas. You know what happened with Cuba, Cuba was selling visas and then they didn't let them in to the St. Louis. I would have gladly considered any other country, even though I would have always preferred this country, but if it had not been possible I would have gladly considered another country, there was no other place for us to go to.

F: So in the first time in the USA you stayed in NY I guess?

A: I stayed in NY

F: And when were you called up for the army, was it the same year or was it later?

A: No it was, I worked for 10 months in Washington DC. There was a job available and I took it, so I was there, and then that was already the 2nd year I was here, and then I was called up, was that your question?. I could have refused to go to the army, but I could never in my life have become an American citizen

F: And so you joined this unit at the -----? (in the meantime?), but as a translator I understand. What was your job as a translator?

A: An interrogator, interrogating German prisoners

F: That means prisoners taken by the Americans

A: Yes, that we captured

F: And I guess you did a questionnaire of their life-stories, whether they were Nazis or not, or something like that?

A: Yes, most of the time we got very little out of them, because the Geneva convention said all they have to say is name, rank and serial number

F: And by the time you were on the way to Thurgau, how long had you been in Europe or Germany then? After you'd been freed

A: Well from June 1943, till the end, April 1944, until it was all over

F: And you stayed longer there, with the army?

A: And then our unit was ordered to go to Bremen, for 4 months before we went home, and in October 45 I was sent back home to NY and discharged from the army.

F: With your life-story, you were expelled by the Nazis, you are or you were very European with your European roots, what did you feel about coming back to this country, also to Germany, how was your feeling with the people there, people who had also expelled you and your family

A: It was a good feeling,

F: What do you mean by a good feeling?

A: It was a good feeling that I came back into the company of my friends, all with similar backgrounds, 6 or 8 of us, not as conquerors in that sense, but nevertheless victoriously you see.

F: So you felt like a liberator of Europe I guess?

A: Yes, in a way yes

F: Did you also have personal contact with people in this case, with German people

A: You mean afterwards, when it was all over?

F: Yes afterwards, or on the way to Thurgau

A: Yes here and there, whenever we stayed a little longer in a town, you know we were constantly on the move, but sometimes we stayed a little longer in a place, and we did have contact yes, and the people tried to be friendly. First of all they didn't know, many of them were scared the stories they were told, that they all get shot, that the Americans will come and shoot the Germans, none of that was true of course.

I'll tell you an interesting story. As part of my job I was always hoping that I'll meet a German soldier from the Eisenstadt area and possibly one that I knew was a Nazi before. Well that wasn't the case. The closest I came was when our unit was ordered over to Brest in France. We were there in the middle of the night and we were walking, our team, we had to get up, have a bunch of Germans come in and interrogate them. And that was a tough outfit, it was a Fallschirmgruppe, and they were tough people, they didn't cooperate at all. By coincidence I got a Feldwebel and he was cooperating with me from the moment he sat down. You must realise this was in the middle of the night, candlelight and he sits there, I sit here and he was cooperating, and he kept on saying "I know you, and I didn't pay any attention to that, but from his accent I could tell that that is possible, so after we'd got through he told me various things, positions and names of the generals and other officers, and he repeated "Ich kenne Sie", and I said how can you, he said you are Freddy Pollitzer from Eisenstadt, and I went to school with your older brother Ernst; we were together in the school orchestra and I often ate with you at your home. That was the Feldwebel. That was about the closest contact I had in my area. And then he said, I've answered all your questions, and being an enthusiastic violinist, and in the bunker where I was held by your colleagues, I had an Italian violin, which I'd come to or bought on the Italian Campaign. I know exactly where it is, if you could go there with me and fetch the violin I would be extremely grateful. I was glad, I was a few kilometres behind the front line there in the middle of the night. And I said to him, my dear friend, even if we could go and get the violin now, how long does he think he would be able to keep it whilst in captivity. He said, I can gladly make you a few sandwiches, but getting the violin from somewhere where they are shooting all around, no thanks, not necessary. That was the only incident of this kind, Sylwarchi was his name.

F: Do you think he cooperated with you because he knew your family?

A: Yes, for 2 reasons, for one because he knew me, he was somehow happy that he knew me, and secondly because he had hoped that I could go and get the violin back with him..

F: And maybe had hoped for other advantages in the judgement of him?

A: Yes but, I don't know whether you can imagine what it is like in these few minutes of interrogation with him and then he is sent off and put onto a lorry together with ten others and is transported backwards to a concentration camp or something, and then I don't have anything more to do with him

F: Were you also there when your unit freed a concentration camp or maybe on the way to Thurgau?

A: Yes, near to one concentration camp, but not directly present, no, at least I wasn't, the front companies did that, the infantry companies

F: When were you first aware of the extermination camp of Auschwitz

A: Late, late, almost at the end of the war, that was April, or February/March 1945

F: But Majdanek was freed for eg by the Soviet Union, by the Red Army, in 44 I guess? So there was no information from the Russians about this? to the Americans

A: We didn't hear anything about the extermination camps, nothing, strangely enough, they must have concealed it so well

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