<u>John Franklin</u>

Wartime Experience: Camp Survivor

I was born in Würzburg, Germany on July 2, 1930. My given name at birth was Hans Frankenthal. There were two children in the family, my brother Werner and I. He was seven years older than I. My father was a wine dealer, selling Franken wines all over Germany. His father was a cattle dealer as was my mother's father. Because my father had received the Iron Cross 1st. Class during World War I he thought that the Nazis, after coming to power in the 1930's, would not harm someone who had fought for the fatherland. However, he was wrong, as the Nazis started to persecute the Jews and others. Incidents of anti-Semitism increased until they reached their climax on "Kristallnacht". My father was arrested, beaten, but released after a few days. It was then that he realized that his Iron Cross and his valor during World War I would not protect him.

In 1938 the family decided to flee to Holland. With the help of Dutch friends, my parents and I, as well as two of my father's brothers (his partner Moritz and younger brother Eugen) and my grandparents (Samuel and Ida Frankenthaler settled in the Hague. My brother was sent to England to attend school and only returned to Holland a few times to visit. On his last visit in early 1940 my parents booked passage for him to the U.S. He had been given a visa, while we still waited. The ship which he took to New York was the last Dutch ship to make it safely to the U.S. from Holland. Holland was attacked by the Germans on May 10, 1940.

At that time, we had about twenty relatives, refugees from Germany, living in Holland, some of whom we helped to enter Holland. Many of the adults had thought Holland would remain neutral as it had in W.W. I. Soon after Germany conquered Holland, all foreigners had to move away from the coast. We, my parents, my two uncles, my grandparents and I moved to Den Bosch, a provincial capital where we had some Dutch friends. As time passed German pressure on us increased. We had to register as Jews and were forced to wear stars. It was at that time that Jews were being arrested and sent away in large train transports. We began to hear about people being smuggled to England in fishing boats or overland through Belgium and France to Switzerland by individuals who made a business out of it. However, there were many cases of Jews paying these people for these services and then being turned over to the Germans instead. My family decided not to take the risk.

In January 1942 my grandfather, in his late seventies, died of heart failure. Den Bosch was quickly being emptied of its Jewish inhabitants. Either they went underground, were told to move to the Jewish ghetto in Amsterdam or were transported to work camps (then called "work camps" since we didn't know then that they were later to become the infamous concentration camps). At this point, at the urging of my parents, my grandmother went into hiding. We had very good friends in a nearby community called Boxtel. They were two sisters, Cor and Jo van Hooff, who had taken in a friend, Toon van Uden, a bachelor, who had been an alcoholic in his youth. They were all around sixty years of age and good Catholics. They hid my grandmother for strictly humanitarian reasons, knowing they were endangering their own lives

by doing so. Later, they also hid a young Jewish couple from Rotterdam. My grandmother lived in a very small room under the roof and her only consolation during the war was her religion. She did not leave her room until Holland was liberated and she never skipped her prayers for us. Her prayer book and her faith kept her alive. In the meantime, my parents, uncles, and I moved to the Jewish ghetto in Amsterdam where we occupied a small flat. Toon van Uden visited us as often as possible by train to bring us food from the country because the rations we were able to purchase were barely enough.

In Amsterdam I attended a Jewish high school, as I had in Den Bosch, since I was not permitted to attend public school. At night, after dark, the SS and Dutch Nazis employed by them, made nightly raids into the ghetto, arresting and taking away many families. In the meantime, a very good friend of my uncle Moritz and a former client who had a restaurant and night club in the Hague, started entertaining and pressuring the Nazi commander in charge of the "Jewish problem" in Holland on our behalf. Due to his efforts and some payments from us to the German commander through our friend, the restauranteur Ab van der Veen, we received a stamp in our passports which delayed our arrest by about six months, a delay which probably saved my mother's and my life. All were fortunate that my father had saved money to take care of our needs. He had been able to purchase quite a few stocks during his business days in Germany in the 1920's and 30's. These stocks were certificates in American corporations, mostly blue-chip stocks. Before we left Den Bosch my father buried the certificates in the ground somewhere near Den Bosch. My mother knew the location.

One evening in early 1943 the SS knocked on our door, came in, and arrested all of us: my father, his two brothers Moritz and Eugen, my mother and me. Naturally we could be found at home since the curfew prohibited us from being out of doors. All of us were trucked to the Jewish Theater ("Joodse Schouwburg") which was the gathering place before shipment to a camp. There we stayed overnight until we were shipped by train to Westerbork, the Dutch concentration camp used as a temporary holding camp. Our stay in Westerbork lasted a few months. In the camp we were surprised by the presence of my father's brother Ludwig, the surgeon, his wife Ilse and their two sons, Günther and Wolfgang. Günther was one year older than I, while Wolfgang was one year younger. Ludwig Frankenthal had been chief of staff of a hospital in Leipzig, Germany, before we helped him and his family to flee to Holland. It was during World War I that he started experimenting with molds to fight bacterial infections. It is perhaps his research, as well as the contribution of others, which later led to the development of penicillin. Both his sons were gifted young people. His wife Ilse came from a family by the name of Hinrichsen, owners of a large music publishing business in Leipzig. They were the publisher of the music of Gustav Mahler, among other artists. Ludwig was now head surgeon at Westerbork, treating and operating on Jews as well as German army personnel at their request.

Late in 1944, after the Allies started moving north from France and the Germans were retreating to Germany, Westerbork was being closed because there were no more Jews in the Netherlands and, as well, because of the impending advance of the Allied Armies. The Germans told Ludwig just before the last human transport was to leave Westerbork that they would spare his life but would ship his wife and sons to the east. Ludwig refused the offer and

consequently he, his wife, and his sons were on the last transport that left Westerbork. When they arrived in Auschwitz, Ludwig, holding a son in each hand, was directed to one side, while Ilse was separated to another side. Ludwig, Günter and Wolfgang went to the gas chamber, while Ilse went to a forced labor detail. She survived the war, to be liberated later in Germany. She returned to Holland where she worked for Phillips. Later, in retirement, she ran a community travel advisory office. I visited her every time I went to Europe. She spent the last years in a Catholic retirement home, never having told people that she was Jewish, and, to the chagrin of my mother and me, was buried in a Catholic cemetery. She died July 29, 1987. She had lost brothers and her parents to the Nazi persecution, but she had a brother and sister who had fled to England and an older brother in New York named Walter who had come to the United States before WWII and had continued the music publishing business. They had all tried to persuade her to join them after the war, but she decided not to.

In Westerbork, mid 1943, my mother was caught trying to smuggle a letter out to her mother. As punishment she and my uncle were sent to Auschwitz on the next transport. Moritz was never heard from again. Mother survived Auschwitz-Birkenau. As the Russians approached from the east the Nazis forced thousands of prisoners, including my mother, on the infamous death march westward to Germany where she was later liberated and, as soon as she was able, returned to Holland. There she found my grandmother as well as could be expected for a woman of her age who had been deprived of her family.

Shortly after my mother and my uncle were shipped off to the unknown, my father and I and his brother Eugen were put on a transport. We arrived a few days later at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The camp was divided into many mini camps. There was one for Russian prisoners of war, one for citizens of German occupied countries who had been accused of somehow having broken some law, and our camp, made up of Jews from Greece and Western Europe. We slept in a large barrack with two tiers of bunks together, each high enough to sleep three persons. We all had to stand at attention every morning on a parade ground in the center of the camp to be counted. In rain or snow this sometimes took hours. Our bodies were weakened gradually by the lack of nourishment. Our food was a piece of bread once every week and a bowl of watery soup of potatoes and vegetables once a day. My father and uncle worked every day making or repairing boots for the German army. I was lucky that I was too young and too small to do manual labor. This probably saved my life since I didn't have to expend too much of the energy from my meager food rations. My father often took food out of his mouth to give to me.

For a period, I was a messenger for one of the guards at the camp. He was a small, older man, a member of the "Heimwehr" or home guard. He was threatened by the SS that if he were to show favor to a prisoner he would be sent to Eastern or Russian front. Despite those threats, he was a decent human being, allowing me to share his small guard post where I could warm myself at the small oven I kept going to keep him warm. Occasionally he would take a small potato from the pocket of his large and thick army overcoat and give it to me, urging me to cook it in the hot ashes of the oven. I did so gratefully. He was the only German whom I found to have any humane feelings during the war. Most were SS guards and officers who were

brutal and sadistic, seeming to enjoy maiming and destroying lives which they believed to be inferior to theirs. They even laughed as they hurt or killed people. In retrospect, it was unbelievable.

We lived from day to day, each person for him or herself, trying to survive. I remember that I saw someone stealing someone else's bread ration for the week and eating it secretly under his one thin blanket. The victim, having been deprived of that food, was weakened even more and died shortly thereafter. People died like flies and were dumped in large lime pits. As they lay dying, fellow prisoners undressed them to take their pants or jackets, replacing their own torn or worn-out garments. But what they took first were their boots. Then the naked bodies, thin as rails, skeletons of bone and skin, were tossed onto a wagon by a group of strong and well-fed prisoners (many of whom had been in camp for a long time as political prisoners and who survived by beating up other inmates and taking their food and clothing). Of that group, many survived. They were the strong and brutal ones. The Germans used them to keep the rest of us in line. They were called KAPOS (probably from "Kamp Polizei") or Camp Police.

Days in camp did not vary. Monotony did not enter our minds since survival was the only thought. Sometimes, someone tried to escape. Never successfully, as I remember. The electrified fences and guard towers with machine guns discouraged that. Sometimes a prisoner could not take it any longer and would run to a fence and throw himself on the electrified fence, killing himself. During this time, we saw Allied planes overhead on their way to or returning from a target. Sometimes we saw a plane falling behind, losing altitude, and then crashing, having been hit by anti-aircraft fire. We knew the war was getting closer, but we had no details. In 1944, my father's brother Eugen died of starvation.

In the beginning of the second week of April 1945, because the British troops were approaching from the west, what was left of our Jewish camp was put on a train to be transported to Theresienstadt concentration camp. We were all very weak and many were dying. We knew something was going on, but not exactly what. Sometime before, we had heard through camp rumors, that some German officers had been executed at another site in the camp, but we did not know the details. Evidently, as we found out later, these men had been implicated in the unsuccessful plot to kill Hitler. Now we were on a train going east, guarded by the SS. My father died on April 13, 1945 and was buried in a mass grave next to the railroad track. Every morning the train stopped to remove and bury the dead.

I was now alone.

During the next ten days the train traveled slowly through the German countryside and then through Berlin which, we observed through cracks in the side of the railway car, had been bombed very heavily. On one day we were even strafed by Allied planes and again some people died. The locomotive was hit by bullets, and I believe the escaping steam could be heard for miles. Another day, another train from the other direction pulled up alongside of us. They were all box cars with the doors open and filled with wounded German soldiers lying on the floors of the cars. We realized then we were getting closer to the front. We were heading

southeast, out of Berlin, and suddenly the SS guards were replaced by the "Heimwehr", the elderly German Army troops. On the morning of April 23, 1945, even these men had deserted. We did not know it then, but found out later, that they threw away their guns and put on civilian clothes and tried to melt in with the general population.

We did not know that there were no guards anymore, but heard shooting, first at a distance, then gradually closer. We started to venture out of the train and it was then that we realized that our guards had left. We soon saw Russian Army troops. They were Cossacks in carts, pulled by small but energetic horses, who were not interested in us, but in the pursuit of the enemy. We started to walk away from the train which had stopped not far from a small community called Tröbitz to find food. I was alone and ventured into the community. There was nobody to be seen. Finally, I saw a wooden gate to a farmyard open and I walked in. A dog was howling, and a man lay dead not far from him, shot through the head, while Russian soldiers were looting everything they could find. The man, it seemed, had tried to keep the Russian soldiers from entering his farm. They were searching everywhere, removing carpet in the living room and finding a huge hoard of clothes and food, even tennis balls by the thousands, which they assumed he had plundered from a German occupied country. The language of the man was not German. They naturally assumed he was a Nazi and executed him. I was successful in finding some food, the only thing I was after.

Soon thereafter, the Russian administration arrived and issued us Russian registration cards permitting us to eat in their field kitchens since we had been prisoners of the Germans. All of us were shaven to get rid of the lice. We, the survivors from the train, moved to a small village named Kirchain and there demanded rooms at various farms and homes. The villagers didn't like our demands, but they had to accept us since they were an occupied land under a ruthless army. The war was not over yet, but already the mayor of the village had been replaced by a communist sympathizer who tried to take revenge on his former suppressors and who favored people protected by the Red Army as we were.

I lived on a farm, together with the Robinson family from Holland: father, mother, a boy and a girl my age. They had been on the train also. One day Mr. Robinson needed medicine for a serious ailment. Since there was no medicine in the village and everyone was sick but I, I was selected to cycle over to the next small town to get the medication. I borrowed a bicycle from our farmer and pedaled to the town. On the way back I ran into a Red Army soldier on a bicycle with an automatic rifle. He stopped me, pointed his gun at me and demanded my bicycle. His was broken and mine was fairly new. Naturally, I complied, and walked the new bicycle for a while until I realized that all that was wrong was that the chain was off the sprocket. I put the chain back on and pedaled the bike to the farm. Unfortunately, the medicine was too late for Mr. Robinson. He died shortly thereafter.

Two boys my own age and I formed a sort of alliance. All of us had lost our parents and thought we were alone in the world. The Russians treated us well. We worked for their field kitchen and, in turn, had plenty to eat. They became fond of us and even offered to take us back to Russia and send us to school there. We declined, wanting to go back to Holland to see if any

members of our families had survived the war. Finally, after a few months and the end of hostilities and German surrender, a few American trucks came to our village to pick us up and drive us to Leipzig. Leipzig was part of the Russian zone of occupation as decided at the Yalta Conference by Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt but, because each army was supposed to advance until it met another of the Allied Forces, the Americans had pushed way past their boundary until they met the Russians at Torgau on the Elbe. We were liberated perhaps 60 miles east of Torgau. We were driven to Leipzig to a repatriation center and housed in large barracks there. We were given showers, dusted with DDT from head to toe and given clean clothes and shoes. After a brief period, we were put on a train, together with American soldiers returning home, and were sent back to Holland. On the train I met a Jewish American soldier with his girlfriend who invited me to join them in coming to the United States. Again, I refused, not knowing if anyone from my family was still alive.

Upon arrival in Holland those of us who were born in Germany were again interned, this time by the Dutch. They had to determine who was a refugee from the war and who was a Dutch Nazi trying to flee occupied Germany. We were put in an old castle in southern Holland and treated well by the Dutch. I had a Dutch International Red Cross Identification card with me which helped identify me as a refugee before WWII. We had never become Dutch citizens and because we were Jews, Hitler had taken away our German citizenship. In the eyes of the Germans, we were not Germans, and in the eyes of the Dutch we were not Dutch. That was my dilemma.

One day one of fellow prisoners told me that an American Army officer was at the gate of the castle asking if anybody had heard of the whereabouts of Ludwig and Ilse Frankenthal, my father's brother and his wife. I said that they were my aunt and uncle and that I had better see the man myself. He turned out to be Ilse's older brother Walter who was looking now for his sister, her husband and their children. I told him that I had seen them last in Westerbork camp in 1943 and that was all I knew. He, in turn, was happy to tell me that my mother, Klara, had returned from Auschwitz and that she was together with her mother, my grandmother, Ida Frankenthaler, in Boxtel, with my family, the ladies van Hooff and Toon van Uden. I had referred to them as aunts and uncle and now was deliriously happy to hear about my mother. I contacted her immediately and told her that I would join her upon my release. This happened a short time later and I embraced my mother and grandmother with great emotion.

For the next few days we told stories about our last two years and the death of my father. Never thereafter did my mother and I discuss those years. They were there, privately remembered, feared in our dreams, but never again shared openly. However, because of it, I believe, my mother and I had an especially strong devotion to each other. We now took a large room in a small but nice hotel in Boxtel to allow me to recover my health. I had a physical examination that was given to all ex-concentration camp inmates and it was determined that I had tuberculosis. I was told to rest in bed for a few months. I did and my mother took care of me. After that my mother, my grandmother and I took an apartment in the nearby provincial capital, Den Bosch, from which we had fled in 1942, and attempted to assume a more normal like. Naturally, the first thing my mother did upon getting settled was to contact her brother,

Arthur, and her son, Werner (Warren), in San Francisco to tell then that three of us had made it through the war. They were overcome with joy. Our connection with our family in the U.S. had been broken with the occupation of Holland in 1940. It was reestablished again with great warmth and emotion.

In 1946 my grandmother fell and broke her hip. Her heart was too weak to allow doctors to operate. Her son, Arthur, flew over from San Francisco to bring the first penicillin that we had seen. The U.S. Army naturally had it, but not the civilian population in Europe. My grandmother had been in a coma. Arthur sat at her bedside and waited. She came out of the coma and talked to her son after so many years. They talked for a few hours and then she died peacefully. After that my mother decided, with all our family gone, that there was no reason for us to stay in Europe. She unearthed the stock certificates buried by my father and sent them to the U.S. for certification of ownership since they had been damaged badly by water. The companies had records of our ownership and eventually exchanged them for new certificates.

Arthur and Warren sponsored our immigration application to the U.S. It was granted and in January 1947 we took a plane to New York to become the newest immigrants to this nation. Warren picked us up at the airport and after a few days in New York City we took a train across the country, arriving in California. We boarded a ferry there to cross the bay to a grand welcome by our family. Both mother and I grew and prospered in our new environment.

Mother especially became a proud and patriotic citizen of her new country. She never looked back, except for a few trips with me to Europe, particularly to Untereisenheim and Würzburg. She loved America and what it had given her: protection, equality, and a haven from persecution. When she was addressed in German, in the US. or abroad, she refused to answer in that language and always answered in English.

In the 1950's both my mother and I filed for restitution from the German government. Mother, due to the murder of father, received close to $1,000.00 a month for the balance of her life. I received a lump sum of $1.200.00 for my "unwanted experiences", for the loss of liberty and education. I would say for both my mother and for me the experiences in the concentration camp shaped the people we became, both positively as well as negatively. It is difficult to separate our inherent personality traits from those arising from our wartime experience. Most importantly, though, we were both survivors and remained so all our lives.

I graduated from the University of California in Berkeley and spent two years in the United States Army. In 1954, I moved to New York and in 1958, I returned to San Francisco. I earned my teaching credential and taught until 1980, when I retired. In 1987 I met and married Margery McFarland.

Aditional Family History

My father's family came from a small village named Schwanfeld near Würzburg, Germany. They were named Frankenthal. My mother's family was named Frankenthaler and came from a

nearby village, Untereisenheim, near the river Main. Going back to Schwanfeld, I discovered a Jewish cemetery there which had not been destroyed by the Nazis and which went back at least 700 years in history. I was able to find the names of many of my relatives among the headstones dating from this century, but because I am unable to read Hebrew, I was not able to read the names of Jews who died before the early 1900's.

My mother's village did not have many Jews so that those who lived there had to walk to the larger village where my father lived to attend religious services. And so it was that my father and my mother met. My father's parents died in the mid 1930's and are buried at the Jewish cemetery in Würzburg where they had moved to be near my father. Amazingly, that cemetery was not vandalized during Hitler's time as so many were. In this cemetery there is even a memorial to those from this region who were victims of the Holocaust. Not much is known to me about my grandparents on my father's side. Their names were Joseph and Clotilde Frankenthal. I do not know Clotilde's maiden name nor where she was from, nor do I know very much about my grandfather since I was too young when he died.

My grandparents, the parents of my mother, were Samuel and Ida Frankenthaler (her maiden name was Blümlein) and because they died in den Bosch, Holland, they are buried in the Jewish cemetery of that town in the suburb of Vught. Ida Frankenthaler, a Blümlein, left a book, now in my possession, recording births, marriages and deaths in her family dating back to 1811. Consequently, I know more about that side of the family. She came from a large family of four boys and five girls. The boys were Jacob (later Jake), Emil, Max, and Hugo. It was Jacob who first immigrated to the U. S. in the 1880's, gradually bringing over his brothers. The last one, Hugo, as a young man working his way over on a sailing ship, fell from the mast and died of a broken neck in 1899. Jake remained a bachelor, was a co-founder of the grocery firm S&W, and later helped bring over many of his nephews. He told his sisters that he would sponsor their eldest sons and he did. Emil and Max married American women and their families lived mostly around San Francisco. The sisters were Ida (my grandmother), Sophie (the Mittel's grandmother) and three others, of whom only one never married. Those who married chose German men and raised their families in Germany. Many of them made it to Holland in the Nazi era but were transported to death camps. Sophie Blümlein, later Mittel, and her husband Adolf, were hidden in Holland during WW II, survived and were brought here by their children in 1947. They lived here happily until their deaths a few years later.

My grandfather, Samuel Frankenthaler, husband of Ida, also come from a large family as was common then. He had a brother who immigrated to New York and later became a judge there. His granddaughter is Helen Frankenthaler, one of America's most famous painters. My mother, Klara Frankenthaler, became Frankenthal when she married my father. She had only one brother, Arthur, who left Germany to avoid the World War I draft and who settled also in San Francisco, marrying Marion Solomon. He had one child, Ruth Franken, later Spitzler.

My father had seven brothers and one sister. The oldest was Ludwig. Some of the brothers, including my father, helped him financially to get through medical school. He became a famous surgeon in Leipzig. It was the custom then in some families to make sure that all the siblings

were financially secure before any of them could marry. Ludwig married Ilse Hinrichsen. Next in chronological order was my father, Max. He married Klara Frankenthaler and had two sons, Werner and me. Upon arrival in the United States Werner was changed to Warren, my name to John and the family name was anglicized to Franklin. Next came Moritz, my father's partner in his wine wholesale business in Würzburg whose territory was Belgium and Holland. He was the most jovial and sophisticated of the Frankenthals. He remained a bachelor all his life.

Eugen was the next brother. He and his brother Salli sold big machinery such as lathes. He lived then in Nurneberg , but later lived with us in Holland before deportation. He never married. He had a large anrt collection, especially many Käthe Kollwitz lithographs. All were stolen by the Germans when he was forced to flee from Germany to Holland. The next in line was Salli, Eugen's business partner. He fled to Israel in the mid-1930's but returned to Europe after the war. Switzerland was his new home where he lived with his longtime companion Selma. Against his wishes, Selma followed Salli to Switzerland where, because he felt sorry for her, she remained with him until the end of their lives. He died in 1976, followed a few years later by Selma. They are both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Zürich. I visit their graves each time I am in Zürich. Salli left his estate to his nephews and nieces, Warren and me in the United States and the three children of Julius, Miryam, Sarah and Efi, in Israel. Thanks to Salli I was able to retire early from my teaching career. It also helped my brother Warren and his family live an easier life, as it did our cousins in Israel.

After Salli came Julius. He was married in Germany but did not do well financially. He turned constantly to his brothers for money. When he finally came to them for money to buy boat tickets to Israel, they were only too happy to help him. They, too, had families to support and saw his departure to Israel as hopeful. They wished him success in his new life. Julius died in Israel after World War II. Gustav was next. I never met him, but only heard about him from my family with whom he had no contact. He lived in Würzburg, married a non-Jewish woman, and was a wine merchant of limited success. There were no children. The only thing I remember about him was that he was transported to a camp and never returned. His wife, who separated from him, survived the war. Karl was the youngest brother. I remember visiting him a few times in a mental institution where he had been placed by his brothers. My father, mother, Moritz and I often took trips together on Sundays in the Mercedes convertible, purchased by my father on the day of my birth. Sometimes all of us would visit Karl. We do not know exactly what happened to him but know what Hitler did to those in mental institutions. He murdered them.

The only girl in the family was Nanni. I do not remember the order of her birth among the eight brothers, but I do remember how she looked. She was not attractive. As a little boy I had to greet her when she visited us from her home in Würzburg. I did not care to kiss her since her face was very hairy but had to anyhow. She was also apparently limited mentally and, therefore, her marriage was annulled after a few weeks. She was also placed in a Jewish home for the mentally retarded and suffered the same fate as Karl.