

Ed Kranzler

Wartime Experience: interned in Dachau then Immigrated to the US

I, Ed Kranzler was born on October 22, 1907 in Vienna, Austria. My parents, Regina Zwinger and Israel Isador had met and married in Vienna. My mother, Regina was originally from Wurtemberg, Germany, a small town near the Black Forest. She came to Vienna as a young woman to be governess to the family of a cellist in the Vienna State Opera. Her father was a cantor in Germany and had arranged the job for her. My father, Israel Isidor, was born in Yeshinitza, Poland. In Vienna, he owned a manufacturing plant for professional and blue-collar clothing. My father was responsible for the labor and my mother met with the customers.

My parents first began their family in 1897, giving birth to my brother Leopold. After Leopold, my mother had three more children, although each died in childbirth. And then I was born in 1907. My family had lived in a rental apartment complex that had a park with horses, a horse buggy and domestic help. The machinery for the business was located in our basement. Unfortunately, later on, the business had financial trouble and my family had to give up our domestic help and other luxuries, which we took for granted as a middle class family.

Early in my life I started to experience anti-Semitism. As early as age six, I remember the children in the schoolyard saying, "the Jews killed Jesus". There were other Jewish children in my school, and they were also singled out to sit down during prayers in the morning. However, despite the anti-Semitism, because Austria was a religious country, we as Jewish children were required to attend religious school. In order to pass secular school, we were required to pass reading and writing Hebrew exams. This followed a long history of anti-Semitism in Austria, although the hatred was different than the Nazi anti-Semitism.

I also began to see anti-Semitism at my first job. At age 15 or 16 I left school and began to go to work. My teacher had taken a personal interest in my skill in experimental science. The teacher recommended that when I quit school, I should not go to trade school or into business because it would be a waste of my skills. Instead, my mother connected me with an optical outfit where they made microscopes. Unfortunately, this job included only grinding one lens and I was very bored. In addition, the other workers constantly prodded me why I was not in downtown Vienna in the second district with the rest of the Jews. After one year I could not take the monotony or the anti-Semitism and so I quit.

A gentleman from my parent's coffee house (social center) began to take an interest in me and hired me as an assistant manager at a factory. I was being trained to be the production manager, but the manager did not like me once he realized I was after his job. I quit this job and looked into different sales jobs. However, as my wife used to tease me that I could not sell cheese to a mouse, I knew sales was not for me.

About this time in my early career, Austria was infiltrated by the Nazis. The Austrian head of government, Dolfus, was murdered by Nazis masquerading as Austrian soldiers. The new head

of state, Shuznik, began a propaganda campaign similar to Hitler. His name was written all over the streets. In turn, when the Nazis invaded Austria, they beat up the Jews and forced them to clean Shurni's oil paintings of his name from the streets. Both my wife and I were forced to get down on the street with buckets of soap and water and had to clean the streets. In addition, Jews were not permitted to enter the library or other government buildings.

This anti-Semitism continued at this pace until November 8, 1938, the day of Kristallnacht. Kristallnacht means "night of broken glass". In retaliation for the murder of a German embassy employee in Paris, the Nazis started a campaign of terror. They burnt down synagogues in Germany and Austria, looted all of the Jewish stores, and shot civilians. 20,000 Jews across Germany were arrested, and 2,000 Jewish men were rounded up and sent to Dachau.

I was in Dachau for two months. I am still not sure why they let me go, but I did not go back to ask why. I arrived in Dachau in a cattle wagon. There were fifty men to a cattle wagon and we had no air, food or water. We were given hay to sleep on and we were each given a number. At this point, there was no work for us. Instead, the Nazis, with machine guns in our faces, forced us to stand at attention or march all day long. When we arrived, they had us stand in line and asked us what our profession was. I remember the doctors and lawyers proudly announcing their professions. The Nazis responded by hitting them and saying "you are not a doctor, you are just a dirty Jew".

Like I said, I am not sure why I was able to go, but after two months they called my number and I was given papers to sign saying I would leave Austria and I would renounce my Austrian citizenship. After I was released, I went back to Austria in a passenger train and immediately called my wife. At that time we were not yet married. I found it funny because her mother said she could not come out to see me because she had a cold. I had just spent two months freezing, only wearing pajamas and a sweater and she could not come out! I was lucky because many men had died of pneumonia.

When I got back I wrote hundreds of letters to relatives and to embassies across the world to try to get visas to leave Austria. I received hundred of rejections. Nobody had enough money to sponsor me. My brother could not understand why I continued to write so many letters even when I was constantly rejected. Eventually I received a letter from a relative in Sacramento named Feingold who sent a guarantee (an affidavit) saying he would sponsor me. He had worked for my father at one time when he was a refugee from Poland, so that might be why he agreed to help me.

I still had to report to the Gestapo headquarters every day. It was very scary because you never knew what would happen when you entered each day. I remained in Austria for another 11 months before I was able to leave. My wife and I decided to get married because we felt it would help us to get together again. We got married in a broken down synagogue.

I left for England but my wife stayed in Vienna for a few more months. She took a British liner to the United States by herself. My wife did not know where to go when she arrived in the United

States. I told her to go to the Jewish Committee, not to the Feingolds, my relative who sponsored us. However, my wife went to the Feingold's. It did not work out. They were not intellectual and they did not understand her.

When I arrived in California I went to the state to help me find a job. They placed me with a photographer in Redding, California. It was horrible working conditions. We had to develop pictures in the toilet. The man also wanted to exploit me. He thought I should work for free as an apprentice and he would give me a meal ticket and lodging in his trailer. After one assignment taking pictures of an accident and a man's brain exploded, I quit. I went back to the state employee manager.

I continued to try millions of things but nothing worked. I went to Sacramento and stayed with relatives for a few months. After living in Vienna, Sacramento felt like a village. I really wanted to be in a larger city. I continued to learn English and my wife had all types of jobs. She played Beethoven on the radio and had her picture in the paper. I did not like my English teacher. She only used children's books in class. The philosophy for teaching in America is all screwed up. I ended up learning English on my own. My wife and I would go to all the movies we could. Even the stupid ones. It helped us to learn English on our own.

The rest of my wife's family and mine died in Europe. I think my brother Leopold was murdered in 1942 by the Nazis, but I am not completely sure. My mother died of cancer before the Nazis, and my father committed suicide in 1928 because of financial business problems. We only know of one of my wife's cousins who survived the war.

It was hard living in San Francisco. The Jewish Committee should have helped us find better housing. They found us housing on Golden Gate Avenue, in the Mission District. It was a horrible neighborhood and they should not have expected us to live there. I went to different bigwigs in the Jewish Community for help. They said because I had a German accent I was not wanted at their businesses. I wanted to do something bigger at this point than the jobs the Jewish committee was helping me find. These bigwigs would not help. As for my wife, she ended up teaching piano and had recitals of her own. She had a little publicity in the pink section but the Nazis destroyed her career as a pianist.

I started a job with the government in 1953. I was tired of all the warehouse jobs. At that time the language barrier was gone and the civil service test was easy. You just had to be able to add or something. What bothered me most about that test was the speed requirement. I was not used to somebody standing there with a stopwatch. It made me nervous. I kept on going back and changing my answers or reviewing my answers and not completing the test. So I never scored high on the test. However, they still called me. Maybe they needed a man or something. I stayed there for 24 years. Till 1974. I got mad about the promotion policy. I went to the personnel office and said I wanted to quit. She said no, don't quit; wait till they retire you, because then you can apply for unemployment insurance. I followed her advice.

In America, like Vienna, outside of work my wife and I took lots of classes. In Vienna I studied psychology, the humanities, and music history. I needed an outlet because I could not stand any of my jobs. There was a professor, Alfred Adler, an associate of Sigmund Freud whose classes I attended. It gave me a leave from my jobs. In America I studied at San Francisco State.

The Holocaust was a shocking experience for me. At one moment you are a citizen, and then you are an enemy of the state. You had to renounce your citizenship. You have no choice. You can do nothing, left out in a vacuum. The anti-Semitism was always there but not that violent. I continue to do a lot of reading on the Holocaust. I must have a masochistic attitude. I care about what happened to the people I left behind. I see what could have happened to me. It is survivor's guilt. I have survivor's guilt. It is hard to talk about it. I also find it discouraging few people know anything about the Holocaust outside of Hollywood. But at least I can provide more information about what happened.