

**Transcript:**

Fritz Preis

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Interviewer: This is Mr. Fritz Preis who is going to discuss with us this afternoon about coming to United States from Germany in 1939 because of the problems with the Nazis and conditions in Germany. So, Mr. Preis, if you will just go ahead and tell your story starting wherever you want.

Fritz Preis: Okay. Now, let me do it a little bit different. Let me tell you about living in the twilight zone in Europe before I came here. Here, I came to the gold country and then over there a different story. Now, I brought something here. This is a passport. Wherever you went in this world, they know who you are. This J.

Interviewer: Is that J for Jew?

Fritz Preis: That's right. Wherever. That's the first thing...this is one of those things. Now, I don't know if you ever saw an Austrian driver's license, that's what Austrian driver's license looks like. I just brought some things along.

Male: Can you hold it real still? Let me get a snapshot of your picture?

Fritz Preis: Okay. Whenever you are ready for it, then I'll just take it away.

Interviewer: Okay.

Fritz Preis: Okay. All right. I have a few other pieces. Now, here, I got a book, Totenbuch Theresienstadt. This is a paper which was sent from Vienna, Austria to Theresienstadt and from there, distributed to all the concentration camps. My mother's name is in there. My aunt's name is in there also. Just brought it

along. They sent it to me. They are Jewish Community Center in Vienna. They call it Kultusgemeinde.

Interviewer: I mean those are the lists of the people who were in the concentration camps—

Fritz Preis: —from Austria which was sent to Theresienstadt and from there, then transferred to different...There's different numbers and so on in it. My mother's name is in there. [unintelligible 0:02:08] brought this one along and a few other little papers which I think are not important. Okay, now...I can get started now. Before the Nazis took Austria over, if this is what you want to listen to—

Interviewer: Yeah.

Fritz Preis: Okay. I've worked in Vienna in a nightclub. The way I got to the nightclub, I'll make it very short. I'm an engineer. I worked for an engineering company in Vienna and we built for the nightclub a stage which rolled out and hydraulically lifted itself up. And the owner of the nightclub was scared something might happen to it during the show and so on, so one of us four engineers had to be there every night, to be there. And then, the engineering business got bad and we decided one of them should go to work steady there. And we pulled matches and I had the short the match. This was my luck...And I'll show it to you. I will tell you later how come this was my luck. It was a break in my luck. So, I worked there maybe a year and a half, maybe a little longer than this. And then started in Vienna, every night, the demonstrations, right in the main street, [Kertenstraße (sp) 0:03:31.0]. The Nazis were going up and down, hollering and screaming and so it was going on for months every night.

Interviewer: What year was this?

Fritz Preis: This was in 1938, end of '37 and '38. And beginning then in...not beginning in '39, in March 11, '39, the Nazis occupied Austria. And they came to Vienna, and opposite the nightclub in Vienna was the main radio station, and the main radio station was occupied immediately. The SS came and our place was closed, nobody came anyway in this night. Now, my first experience with the Nazis, I drove a car for the company for the nightclub. I just want to get in the car, two Nazis with brown shirts stopped me. The car is required for the party. I said, "Go ahead and have it." But they said they cannot drive. You know, in Austria, it was not like here. Here, everybody can drive. In Austria, they could not. And

so, I had to drive for them and it was strictly a plundering drive. They were going from store to store, Jewish-operated, owned stores. They were going from store to store. In one store, we came in, it was a shoe store, the whole shelves, everything was empty, maybe just a few pairs. And one little note to it. One of the guys, let's say, in Austria, the people had a store and the ground floor and they were living behind it or above. And I had to go with those guys. Wherever they went, I had to go with them. One of them had a gun, a six-shooter. He unloaded the gun and when he came and asked and knocked on the door, was very polite, "Would you mind to open the door?" and loaded one bullet after the next. So, they were polite enough and opened the store. Like I said, we came in the shoe store with just a few pair of shoes there, and throw in the car, regardless of size, and so on. We drove off; we went to a closing store, came on to...I don't know how many. One place, I'll never forget that. It was the first night. On one place, we came in, there was a long stairway going straight up, and we've been up a stairway and he knocked on the door, with the gun unloaded and started the whole business all over, will ask the man to open the store and while he asked, on the opposite side, right opposite the door was a picture of Dollfuss. Dollfuss was a chancellor which the Nazis killed in 1933 or 4 or something like that. And he had a picture hanging there and before he even could move, he had two shots in the stomach already. He didn't give him a chance, just bang-bang. Now, you could figure my feeling. I never saw anything like it, never lived in something like it. So, I went with them again. I had to go with them and we went to the headquarters there. You know, where they set up a headquarters, and they said, "We had to shoot that guy because he refused to take the picture from the door." And they never gave him a chance, the guy never had a chance. So, they clapped him on the shoulder. He's going to advance in the party pretty fast. That's what they told them. So, these were my experience the first night.

Interviewer: Did they know you were Jewish?

Fritz Preis: I assume so, maybe, maybe not. I have no idea. It was middle of the night. I couldn't tell you. The whole deal was in the night hours, maybe, maybe not. In any case, I knew it.

Interviewer: Did you know any those these people?

Fritz Preis: No, no, no. Just on the street. I just want to get in the car, and they stopped me right then and there.

Interviewer: I mean the stores you went into. Did you know any of them?

Fritz Preis: No, no.

Interviewer: They didn't know you?

Fritz Preis: No.

Interviewer: They didn't recognize you.

Fritz Preis: No, no. No, look, being over a million and a half or a million and three-quarter people, you know, a big place, Vienna. You didn't...not in Nashville like in wherever, but in Vienna, you didn't know anybody. So, these were the beginning. The next day came, what you call it, declaration I think would be the right expression. No Jew could have a job anymore. On the day after, no Jew could have a business anymore. Now, this could be just the opposite, maybe the business first and job after. It doesn't make much difference, one day. We were on board, I remember, I left about...I go back now two days, in the afternoon, it was 6 o'clock or so, I left the nightclub. And we were living about five driving minutes from there, past by next to the opera house in Vienna and we were living two or three blocks from there. And the police was standing in the street all over and just when I came home, then Chancellor Schuschnigg abdicated, I heard on the radio. And I remember I talked to my parents, let me see, what expression, I got to translate this. Not...the end of existence or something similar, translated from Austrian to here. And when I went in back, in the night that I told you already what happened, and in the night, they were going on this way. I didn't drive the car anymore. And no business, no job, the only one thing where we could live on was selling piece after piece what we had. Money we didn't have. In Austria, people were not good off like here. Money we didn't have. So, we started to sell piece by piece out of the house and...But there came in another part in Jewish life. We went to a grocery store, want to buy something to eat. "We don't have nothing for Jews." So, we didn't eat this day. Another time, to come there in a grocery store...Now, in grocery stores in Vienna were not like here. They were Mama and Papa's stores, not...supermarkets were nonexistent in Europe. And another time, come to store, "You can have it, but it cost you so and so much." Now, there are two, you have two choices. You starve another day or you give them whatever they want. You are absolutely...you didn't have no right in any way, in any form. You're absolutely nonexistent. More like, they said, you are vermin, nothing. And this was going on this way. One day, I remember, I had a police parking

ticket or something like it. So I figured I'd go and pay it and I took the car, for a long time I drove the car because they were in another district of Vienna and just for that two schilling, about two schilling. I paid two schilling, turned around and see black in front of me. I keep on looking up, I see a head of a Nazi, an SS man there. "Are you a Jew?" "Yeah." And then, whatever I say here in English was all said in German. "Yeah." "Come along." So I had to drive for them and this was the time when, you might have heard it already, when the people had to clean the streets and things like that, he had a list so long. Some people were waiting with the bucket already. They knew already they were going to be picked up. They were waiting with the bucket, and so we picked up the people all over the place. Somebody said about them this one, they said about them, just [unintelligible 0:12:17.7], he told me on this. He had still a little heart, I must say. On one place we came and he came back maybe a minute or two later, and said, "Oh, they are two old little ladies. What shall I do with them?" He left them alone, but I'm quite sure he changed later into...So we're going on this way. We kept on selling and selling and selling piece after piece and I and my parents were sleeping just on one mattress. I was sleeping on the blanket. My brother was not home. He was sleeping somewhere else. And we just tried to live one day to the other. But one thing in between, I'd like to say, I had a radio, which was theoretically against the law. Jews could not have a radio. You know, Jew should not communicate and it was a good radio, a shortwave radio and listened every night to one station in Europe which more or less were conveying a message to Jewish people about how bad things were in Germany. And you wouldn't guess which one. Try to guess. Which gave Jews a hope, one station in whole Europe. Radio Moscow. Only station, whole Europe, very, very unusual, but the only one station where we listened to it. Now, talking about this radio, one day, knocked on the door, two or three of my friends were with me—knocked on the door, SS man stands there. "You got a radio?" I figured that's the end of the life. I say, "Yeah, I got a radio." He says, "I want to buy it." Very unusual. He could have taken it up. He could have arrested me, everything. "I want to buy it." I should take it there. Well, I lived in the fourth district, this one in the seventh district, but not too far—I should take it there. Take it there. He gave me 125 mark, 125 schilling, I don't know what money we had then, mark or schilling. He paid. Nobody ever I figured ever come back, but I came back. Lucky. So, it was going on this. Jobs were practically unavailable, but some friends which I grew up with, they gave me occasional work, here and there. And one of them I worked for, sign painter for a little while and in this steel construction company which I had back before. I worked there a little while and then he, the owner of the steel construction company, had a new apartment, and he wanted me to paint the doors, the windows and so it was fine. So, I painted there and in the same time, we had kind of a little school or something. Most people didn't know anything to do with the hands. So we had in a basement, or I call it half basement in a house, opened up a little school which showed people how to use their hands to...I taught them how to run electric motors, all the technical things and so on. And this was going on for...we came together in the morning hours and therefore

very close to the house, we have a painting, very close there. And one morning, I came over and they had so little...shul in there. You know what I'm talking about? In Vienna, we had a lot of different...religious, Jewish religious groups. And each one had their own little shul, you know, beit house or I don't know. You got to use the expression for that. I couldn't tell you. A little place maybe 30 places where there...and we walk by every morning. One day, it was in splinters. So, worked a little bit farther, a few steps down in this basement. Nobody worked there. Then, two more of the instructors, I'll call it instructors, we were instructors, that came there. "What's going on?" Nobody knew what's going on. And a few minutes later, came one of the brown shirt Nazis, with a long cape or whatever you call this. You might have seen the uniforms already. And he had two other ones and he said, "This is a Jew school." Like...some of the expressions I use, I tried to translate which might not work very well. All right. We tried to teach people a little bit of something, so...So he told the other two guys, the leader, they should look around. There are [unintelligible 0:18:04.4], armor men, guns and things. So I told the two other guys which were with me, "You better watch them. They might lay something, something there, and we'll be in trouble." So each one of them went with one of them and they couldn't find nothing, really but nothing there. And we left there and I went then to the painting. And then, I found out, this was the so called Kristallnacht. I didn't know nothing about it. Now, the Kristallnacht, in my opinion, is a different deal than everybody sounds like. Kristallnacht, they broke the window, no. And in the first place, the Jews didn't have— I talk about Vienna, not Germany. The Jews didn't have a place anymore. There were no business anymore in Jewish hands. Am I going out of focus all the time?

Interviewer: No, you're fine. Can I interrupt right here? Let's change the tape.

Fritz Preis: Okay, now my opinion about the Kristallnacht, it is different than people say about broken glass. Like I said, there were no Jewish-owned places anymore in Vienna. Nowhere. All Jewish places were taken over on the 12th or 13th of March, 1938. They call it caretaker, or something like it. Some apprentice boy or apprentice girl were made the head of the business. And with strictly the purpose to ruin the business, then it's finished which didn't take long because the Nazis took care of your bank account. They took care of the stocks and so on and they were managed in very, very short time. Let's talk a little bit some more anti-Semitism in Vienna, were not something new imported. Anti-Semitism in Vienna was born in the people. The first word what the little babies learned when they were on feeding here, Sow Jude. This means "pig Jew." And they never knew, this is two words, so it was figured, it's only one, one word. And growing up this way is not easy. I remember I went to kindergarten. My father was a First World War soldier. And he had a punctured lung, so he was training then and we lived in a little suburb of Vienna. Now, I'm going back now quite a few years. He was training soldiers to drive trucks. Truck driving then in

the First World War was something unusual and so we lived in the suburb and I remember when I went to kindergarten, I walked on one side on the street and the others were on the other side on the street, and I even still remember what they were singing. You called...all right. [Unintelligible 0:21:34.7]. Translated, "Jew, Jew, spit in the hat and tell your mother this is good." It's something like it. As a little kid, I never knew what's the difference. I'm like everybody else, I wore a pair of pants, so I never knew what difference between me and somebody else. We were all kids. Later on, I found out that Jews were a different animal than anybody else. And so, these were going on in this little country town. So, later on, I was finding out, being a Jew, you're second-grade citizen to begin with in Austria. So, when the Nazis came, the anti-Semitism was actually legalized, let's say it this way. It was there all the time, only they were legally against that, but when they came in were legalized. So everybody could do what they want. You were going around, like I said, you were living in a twilight zone or no-man's land, either way, expression you want to use. You knew you have no right, no nothing. Whoever came to you could do with you whatever they feel like, nobody would help you. You're on your own. And I was lucky I got by with the whole deal, maybe a little mental impression, more than a little...Let's say this way. One time, I worked, I got stopped by Nazis. They put me on the truck and we had to go to the railroad station. We had four or five railroad stations in Vienna, West, Rail West, and there was a lot of noise there. They shipped a trainload of Viennese-Jewish children to England, but the Nazis didn't want to keep the parents and their kids apart. So, they carried a bunch of Jewish boys together to do this. So we had to form two chains, hook together. One of them looking towards the kids and the other one was looking to the parents. Now, when I say it makes a mental impression, then, but only the noise what bothered me, I didn't have no idea what really was going on. But later on, when I had my own kids, then it really dawned on me, the kids didn't know, they never see their parents again, but their parents knew they're never going to see the kids again. You catch on to this afterward, then were just one of those things. And so, you live through little things like this and it's quite, quite...

Interviewer: During this time, did you wear a distinguished insignia—?

Fritz Preis: No, they didn't have this thing. This came afterwards. But then, we didn't have to do this. But you try to stay off the road just as far as you could, just if you had to go, absolutely had to go somewhere. Otherwise, we didn't go out of the house.

Interviewer: And you were how old during this time?

Fritz Preis: I was born in 1912, in May 1912, so about 26 years old then. So, my luck, like I said right in the beginning, me working, or pulling the short match. The owner of the nightclub escaped from Germany already. He came from Würzburg, Germany. He was lost everything in Würzburg, Germany and came and started a nightclub in Vienna again. And I worked for him and when the Nazis then came, he more or less volunteered himself and he went in the sanitarium. A sanitarium is something similar like you would call here in the West, like Parkview [unintelligible 0:26:00.6]. He wanted to be away. He didn't want to be seen by nobody and I went to see him and took care of him [unintelligible 0:26:11.2] went with the [unintelligible 0:26:13.4] in the head official, state-operated, lone office in Vienna. They call it Dorotheum, a ring and another deal where he could keep his life. But one day, he told me he's going to get me the papers to come to the United States. I didn't ask him for it. I didn't know he had any chance for it. And he really did and this brought my luck. That's what I said before, when I pulled that little match to work in the nightclub is where my luck to be with the man otherwise I never would have gotten here.

Interviewer: Those were immigration papers that he salvaged you?

Fritz Preis: That's right. His brother was a doctor in Newark, New Jersey, actually, Irving, New Jersey. Newark goes to the 20th and 21st [unintelligible 0:27:14.8] and he was a doctor there and he had some other people that were in Bronx. I've been once there, visit the people and then thank them very much for helping me coming over here.

Interviewer: It was there you went out of Germany, I mean out of Austria.

Fritz Preis: Yeah.

Interviewer: And this man was Jewish?

Fritz Preis: Yeah, Strauss was his name, Jacob Strauss.

Interviewer: So he stayed in Germany. He stayed in Austria?



Fritz Preis: No, he stayed. He made a mistake and he told me. Everybody else told me. I didn't know it myself. You should go to the American consul and get a number. You see we had then, then they had quotas, which they have again now, quotas. And then, the quotas. So if you had a number until you get the papers, they called it affidavit, by the way, to somebody signs, they take care of you here in this country. If your number were low enough, you could go as what he told me. He says, he didn't need it. He's German. But then, he found out he needed it to go three years, took their money, to Haiti. Stayed in Haiti for three years before he could come over here. I met him a few times then; he was living in Orange, New Jersey.

Interviewer: Were you separated from your family at that point?

Fritz Preis: Sure, I was separated. I came all by myself here. I didn't know anybody here in Nashville, very unusual. I came to Nashville.

Interviewer: How did you get to Nashville?

Fritz Preis: This is very unusual indeed. In the first place, I rented \$1.10 on the ship. That's all that I had. So, they had their horse race on the deck, a big dice, and the horses must have come from the one of the merry-go-rounds and so on, they had one there. And they threw the dice and I think about six horses or something like it. And then the steward moved it from one place and I figured \$1.10 or 25 cents less, really didn't make much difference. So, I bet on one horse and I won \$3 and a quarter, 3.75, one or the other, I know it was more than \$3 and less than \$4 that's what I remember. So, I was rich. A lot of money. And then, I came and landed, I had a little less than \$3. They had a bar there. I think a drink were 15 to 20 cents on unintelligible 0:29:55.7]. So but very rough travel. On a partly freighter, partly cabins there, just not too many people on it. And about three days, the storm and the wave were going all over the ship, only a small ship, 13,000 tons. On another ship, you could see it from our ship—the waves were going all the way over there. And for three days, only three or four people went in the dining room. I was one of them. It just didn't bother me. So, I made it over here. It took 13 days to cross. I left Austria in skis. I left in ski time around Easter time in March. Everybody goes skiing and I figured it's at least, even if I had the legal papers, but at least I'm unnoticed. So I took my skis and went to the mountains and left the skis there. That's the way I left Vienna with the ski train, about maybe five, six hundred skiers on a train.

Interviewer: Did you have to bribe anybody to get out?

Fritz Preis: No, no. And to remember how I got the money for the ticket, I couldn't tell you. But there were some help organizations there, one of them were Quakers and one of them were [unintelligible 0:31:36.0], and maybe another one. There you got it from, I couldn't tell you. In any case, my mother vanished, like I showed you the book from Theresienstadt, and my father...My mother wrote me once. He got picked up in October 1939 and was sent to Poland. A bunch of Jews got sent to Poland to clean up there. The damage where the Germans said to clean up there, on the part where he were, I think the name were Lodz, in the Russian zone, and he got to Russia this way. But in 1941 or so I got once a postal card from him. He was very cold. He didn't have nothing to wear, whatever they picked him up on the street, that's all he had. And that's the only one time I heard from him. I never heard again from him. They were very cold. So that took two years for the card to come over here from Russia. The war was started already, but...

Interviewer: How did you get from New Jersey to here now?

Fritz Preis: All right. Now, this is...from New Jersey. I've worked in Babylon, Long Island on a service station on a highway in Babylon, Long Island. Now, first, my first job, why New Jersey. I worked with the electrician, and he paid me \$3 a night. That's quite a fortune, \$3 a night. And we put in a grocery store instead of the incandescent lights, fluorescent lights. So, the grocery store stand out in one reason or another [unintelligible 0:33:41.8] that closed about 6 o'clock in the evening. And I remember the first time we were in the store, very unusual. I looked around, nobody is in the store, only he and me, nobody else. I said, "What's going on here?" All right. They all left. We worked all night long. In the morning, when they come, 6 o'clock, we go. And I just couldn't get over it. In Austria if you would have been in the store like this for each finger, it would have at least five people watching you. But nobody watches. He says, "What's the big deal that you could [unintelligible 0:34:17.3]?" But another experience I had, the first night I brought in New Jersey. I went in a supermarket. I never saw a supermarket in my life, but just right opposite on the street, a supermarket. The name of it was Pickup and I remember this. And I couldn't get over the prices. A dozen oranges worth 19 cents, a dozen eggs 19 cents or 23 cents or something like it. I mean I just couldn't get over it. The only one thing I found potatoes were very expensive here in relationship to Austria because in Austria, a potato...That's the only one thing we're living on, potatoes. And they have nothing else, but potatoes you could live on, really very cheap there. In any case, I worked for this electrician. I still got the first dollar bill I ever made. He gave me \$3 first and I had the first one I put separate, but I still kept it. This is silver, the certificate. It's a little bit bigger than what we got now. I worked maybe two weeks there, and then, his business got slow, too.

So, I saw once advertising in Babylon, Long Island, in German newspaper. Somebody looks for a mechanic in a service station highway, all right. So, I went out there. That's one experience of my life. The man was a German fellow. Henry, I remember. I couldn't remember the other names. He took me in one of the standard cars. What they had at that time is...and he had a big Doberman and we went there and he bought two steaks, first time in my life I had a steak. I never have one before. Two big steaks. He cut two or three pieces off and the next he threw to the dog. My eyes nearly fell out of my head, seeing a big steak like that. But just one of those things. So, I worked there for a fabulous sum of \$25 a week, but he was a drinker. He never came 11, 12, 1 o'clock and open the place. I was sitting on bridge on the highway. We we're watching the traffic and the place was closed. So, every week, was a little less and less and less he could pay which he really didn't have. He didn't make any money. So, after we got down to \$10 a week. After that, it was making no sense because I paid \$8 a week room and board there, it made no sense to stay there. So, I went to New York. I had maybe 20, 25 dollars or something like it. I rented a room in St. Mark's Place. This is all the way downtown in New York and stayed there I think two weeks. We're very close to HIAS, the HIAS on Lafayette Street. And I looked around from there. In New York, they had employment offices. On the Sixth Avenue I remember there, whole walls full of little cards. There's job for sale. They sold jobs. Only if you bought a job, if you didn't like it after three days, they gave you 75% of some money back what you paid. Now, I figured I'd buy myself a job. And I went out to a little place in Southfields in the Catskills somewhere. I couldn't find it anymore. I know I went with a bus out there. And stayed there three days, I made \$18 and I paid \$8 for a job. I got six back, so I was rich all over again. This was going then...And, I have one little experience I had there. A friend of mine and his future wife, they are married now. A little hot for August, just before I came here in Nashville, hot, real hot. And we went in the Central Park. We all three fell asleep under the bush. And maybe 2, 3 o'clock in the morning, I saw a light in my face, and a policeman there. And I remember what sort of he said, but I didn't know then what he meant, but it inscribed in my head. "What the hell? Two in one business." That's what he said. We didn't know what he meant, but it stayed in my head maybe six months later, what he really meant with it. Now, we were very innocent. We just fell asleep there. It was so hot then. And then, a few weeks later, I then decided, maybe less than two weeks maybe because I stayed only two weeks altogether in New York. I decided I want to go to Texas, and the reason for this is very simple. We saw in Vienna movies from America. Gangster movies for New York, gangster movies from Chicago, Western movies from Texas. So, I didn't like New York; I didn't like Chicago. I figured I don't like Chicago, I didn't like New York. And so, I figured Texas is it. So I went to the bus station what English I could scrape together. They explained to the guy I would like to go to Texas. And I didn't have enough money, then he told me it costs \$22 and some cents to go to Texas. So, I went over to the [unintelligible 0:40:13.4] the camera there in the pawnshop and told the woman there, boarding, not boarding, it's not correct. Just renting a room out there, I paid

rent there. I'm going to leave, but I'll be sending the pawn ticket and the money someday and she should get maybe she really does; I still got the camera, by the way. In any case, they gave me \$15 for it and I stayed another few days in New York and when I pooled the last money what I figured I can, I went to the bus station again and he told me Nashville is about the halfway. \$11.

Interviewer: Did you ever meet the doctor in New York that—?

Fritz Preis: In New Jersey? Yeah, yeah, I stayed there for a very short time while I worked for the grocery store, hanging the lights, I stayed there.

Interviewer: With the doctor?

Fritz Preis: Yeah, with the doctor all the way up, just as far as he can go in my little room there, just board there, and the mattress on it, but there was freedom, it was heaven there. I mean not to worry who would see you, don't see you, what we're going to eat today and so on and so on. It was just one of those things. I remember he took me once out...I jump around now but you asked me a question. He took me once out and said, "I need some clothes." I didn't have any. I left Austria what I could carry in a shoulder bag; that's all what I have. I need clothes so I went with him. That was in Newark, New Jersey. It was a big place [unintelligible 0:42:02.7], you might have heard the name already. They had a sale there. Now, I bought shoes, socks, underpants, undershirt, a shirt, and a suit, all of them for \$11 and 80 cents. What a most unusual thing. I mean, in Vienna, you had to work at least a month, a month and a half, put all money together to buy a suit. You had to work at least five, six days to pay a pair of shoes. Shirt maybe three days, and there the whole deal, you can buy for a few dollars. I mean, this is just something which is very unusual and we jumped a little bit out of line again. And...let me see where we were before. All right. I went to the bus station. I bought the ticket. Now, I bought the ticket about \$11 and 80 cents before going to Nashville. No idea where Nashville is, whatsoever. Now, I didn't have any idea what they say, what the distances are in this country. I went in the bus and I figured I'm going out in Nashville. I had to transfer eight times without language. And this is a not easy. I know we went Trenton, in Washington, and Charlotte, and different...Roanoke. I remember a few names. In any case, the first time I saw something which surprised me very much—we were in Washington, DC, in a Greyhound Bus Station, colored only and white. I never saw this before. In New York, they're all mixed up. It's the first time I saw this. Before, you see something like this, you're not used to it, it's very unusual to see this. And in any case, the last night in the bus, by 2 o'clock in the morning, we're in a little town, the name was

Pulaski but not in Tennessee, in Virginia, just before we came to Bristol, Tennessee. About 2 o'clock in the morning, the bus driver went out, and I know the expression every bus driver had. I never knew he said until later on. "Ladies' restroom," he said. "We had stopped, ladies' restroom." That's what he said. I didn't know what he meant until like I said, maybe six months later. I knew a little bit English and I knew what it meant. Nobody went out of the bus there, 2 o'clock in the morning. A few seconds later, he came back and said something. And everybody stormed out and listened to the radio and I found out then the war started in Europe. This was the 1st of September, and the Germans invaded Poland. So, when I came to Nashville, the same day the war started in Europe. And the only one thing I made...All right, it took us in 36, 37 hours, or something like it to come from New York here. But let me tell you a little deal of what happened to me in New York, what can happen too with a language. I had only one suit and the other one what I bought. So, one of them that I had on when I left Austria and one of them I bought. So, with just what I had on in Austria I worked, and everything else I did with it. So, opposite side, where we were living on the St. Mark's Place in New York, but a Chinese laundry. So, so far, I knew, you wash your hands and then they are clean. That's all what to do about this. So, I went to the laundry and told the man, "Wash my pants." He looks at me, "Clean." I looked at the pants, showed him a spot, I said, "Wash." He looks at me, "Clean." I told him, a few more spots, "Wash." He scratched his head, wash, wash. Now, then, when I came to Nashville, the pants was so short that I had to cut it all the way down. But, later on, I find out, wash is something different clean is something different. But so far, my concern, you wash your hands and then they are clean afterwards. So, just little things like this can happen to you.

Interviewer: Did you know anybody? You didn't know anybody in Nashville.

Fritz Preis: No, I didn't know. Now, that's what I want to explain to you. I went to the HIAS and told them I don't want nothing, no. The only one thing that should make some kind of arrangement, somebody should pick me up on the bus and take me to a German boarding house. I don't want no money. I don't want nothing. I'll take care of everything. I didn't have no money when I came to Nashville, either, maybe 3 or 4 dollars or something like it. And so, they took me to Mrs. Windmüller. You might know Mrs. Windmüller, and I made a deal with her. I said, "Just as soon I can pay you, I will pay you." And she believed me. In any case, I stayed there about two weeks, two weeks after that, I had a job then from Frank Coal Company (sp), you might...remember Frank Coal Company (sp), a maintenance mechanic. Now, I bought a little radio from Montgomery Ward and I worked by myself in a shop and listened to all the soap stories. And that's the way I learned English. I never had the opportunity to go to learn it in a school. I went three times to Watkins, but I started work 6 o'clock in the morning. So when I came to Watkins in night school, I was so tired, I fell asleep.

I did this for three evenings; on the three evenings, I fell asleep. It didn't make no sense. So, I listened to every soap story and all the war news and everything and I slowly learned English. I waited for a word sometimes, I figured that's what it might mean and waited again for it and so on. I would say the war news helped a whole lot with it because a lot of expressions on, more or less international. And reading and writing I learned, newspapers. Reading newspapers. There are some words can throw you off. The word "know." "You know," you know, this is spelled different then it's said. You can say no, or you know and so on and so on. That threw me for a long time, this one word. You know, one day, it hit me. Then that's what it means. The first word I ever learned in the United States was between. This I learned already in New Jersey. The word stop, stop is international. You know, stop. And there were bus stop, and there were two garbage cans and no parking. Parking is an international expression, too, between, and there were areas there. So I figured between means...I thought a bit. I remember things like this for a long time. And so...I worked for **Frank Coal Company (sp)** about two and a half years. Then, we accidentally find out, if I am married...I got married three months after I came to Nashville, not correct, hold it, hold it, not correct. I met my wife in October, and we're married in January whatever it is—three months maybe is correct. And I'll be more than 50 years married now and it worked out quite well. Then the war started. No, before the war started, before the war started. We accidentally found out, if somebody is married to a citizen, he can become citizen not in five years, in two and a half years. And this was end of October in 1941. And they gave me a book so thick that I can learn all the amendments and the constitution or other things, so thick. Three weeks later with the examination, the 15th of November 1941, so I just looked and I had a photographic mind. I could look at a page and know what's on it. And **Judge Elma Davis (sp)** was the presiding judge there. He asked me 56 questions. I gave 56 correct answers. And there were Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and who knows who were there and he made me an example to the other people, how could I know all those things and so on. I made my citizenship and there was a newspaper man, **Harl (sp)** was his name. He came from Tennessee and he asked me what I'm doing, and I told him maintenance mechanic at Coal, yeah. And then he said, if somebody can do so good, he'd get me. And he got me then a position with Kennedy and Bowden and that's just the whole deal, but just luck one after the other. So, that's the way I started. Then, from then on, **[unintelligible 0:52:19.6]** in Europe, I **[unintelligible]** there. And from then on, going up a little easier. My language got better. That's what it took. A lot of people don't have patience today with the language, but no language, you are nowhere. And my language got better and my positions got better and I would say, for the last 35 years, I was chief engineer in different manufacturing plants. I've worked for Englund Equipment Company in Nashville for about six years and then I went to McMinnville. I've worked for Powermatic machine designing which I loved very much. Design whole projects, design the machine, everything else to make the machine, very nice. And then, I worked for Lasko Metal Products, the last thing I worked for 20 years, the one in Franklin, here.

Interviewer: How did you meet your wife? Was she also from Austria?

Fritz Preis: No, my wife, she lived here. She came in 1934 I think, 1930. She was here in Nashville. Her name was Kahn, her maiden name. She was a relative of the Mays. You might know the Mays, Mortimer May and Dan May and so on. So, when I came here, I met once her parents, and...there were two funny little things, there were three sisters. My wife had two sisters. One of them is Lily and one of them Mila. And one young man from...we lived in...Mila Windmüller's boarding house. He said he takes me over there. He introduced me, but the middle one he got a date. And the old one is too old and the young one maybe...so I went over there and took first the young one, out to be exactly. But the old one I married.

Interviewer: That's cute.

Fritz Preis: Life is fun. But life was good to me here in the United States, very good. I worked hard. I worked for about three years in two jobs. I worked on one job from 7:30 in the morning, no 7 to 3:30 in the afternoon. And the next one started 4 o'clock in the afternoon, worked 1, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock at night, just as long as I could. The next morning was there again. About two and a half or three years I did this and I had a work shop at home, made furniture at home, kitchen cabinets and some things like that.

Interviewer: You left Austria in about 1939.

Fritz Preis: I left March 1939.

Interviewer: Was that after you left was the period when they closed down so there wasn't any more immigration?

Fritz Preis: The immigration was not easy. If you did not have absolute positive place where you can go, you couldn't go. If I wouldn't have a legal entry paper to go to United States, I never would have gotten over the Swiss border. You see I went in the skis there. I never have gotten over there. They would have sent me right back. But since I had legal papers, they didn't, they let me go. And I had luck really.

Interviewer: Well, it's very interesting.

Fritz Preis: Worked out very well.

Interviewer: Very good. You had a happy ending.

Fritz Preis: Yeah, I had a happy ending, yeah.

Interviewer: Is there any other before we close? Is there any other thing—?

Fritz Preis: I don't know, you ask me—

Interviewer: —you have to tell me?

Fritz Preis: You ask me questions, I give you answers.

Interviewer: All right. Anything you'd like to say about your boyhood that would be relevant to us?

Fritz Preis: My boyhood, I grew up in the First World War, during the First World War. I was born in 1912. The First World War started in 1914. My father was in the army, the Austrian army. And we grew up in a little suburb of Vienna and we were poor, no shame. We were very poor. Being in a losing country, a country which loses the war, which didn't dawn on me then, a little kid like this don't know nothing from nothing, so long we had everyday something to eat. But I remember we went, I say we because my brother and I, we went on the fields and stole, stole, and I say this correct because they were watching it...turnips—I ate them right there. That's all we had to eat and things like this. We went into other fields out there and picked some greenery, which my mother cooked to eat something, things like this. This was not a good time. One thing I remember when we started in school, I had mentioned before, I had kindergarten, I walked on one side and the others walked on the other side, when I started in school, we still were under a little country town. They issued some shoes to us. And



the shoes were wooden, platform, and there was a form piece of cardboard, nailed on, on the string were twisted paper. Now, there were no teachers there. There were two nuns. They were the teachers because our teachers and some were going to army already and so on. And the nuns were very mean, by the way. For everything what we did. I mean, this was not a religious deal for them. I mean everybody were treated the same way, not me. Whatever anybody wanted, wham. Everybody. In any case, we didn't want to get the shoes wet so we wore them over the shoulders, but they didn't let us go without the shoes on, so we slipped the shoes on. When we were out, we'll put them on the shoulders again. Because it wouldn't hold much. Now, that life was very hard, very hard. In 1939, my father was involved with this training of truck drivers which I mentioned before already. And knowing something about it, and so, he started then...we went to Central Vienna, about two blocks from the opera house, we were living, and he started the filling station, but the filling station were five gasoline drums next to the house and the pump came up on the bucket to the filling station. That's where he started and that's what he made a living on it. And then came 1929, and everybody got broke including us like here, but in Europe got broke, too. So we started from bottom all over again.

Interviewer: How did you happen to go into engineering? Did you go—?

Fritz Preis: My brother is an architect. My brother designed the Arizona Memorial in Hawaii. And I'd just been schooled, too, and just maybe had a talent for it.

Interviewer: But you weren't right on through a higher education in order to get—?

Fritz Preis: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I've been to public school and to...the school names are different. What they call high school here, they called middle school over there. And then the college, which they call higher education. So, the names are not absolutely correct.

Interviewer: Did you experience the same anti-Semitism during—?

Fritz Preis: Absolutely, absolutely. This was...you just, like I said, the kids are born with this already. And you feel all your life you are secondary citizen. Maybe, in Germany was different, I don't know. We never lived there. In Austria, we're this way. All of us, I must think, there were 97% Roman Catholics, 2%

Protestants, and 1% Jewish population in Austria, just one of those things. And maybe changed already, I couldn't tell you, I really wouldn't know.

Interviewer: So your match was lucky.

Fritz Preis: Again?

Interviewer: The match was lucky. The match you drew at the—

Fritz Preis: Yeah, yeah. The match...

Interviewer: It saved your life, actually.

Fritz Preis: That's right, yeah.

Interviewer: Well, very good. We thank you very much.