

HENRY CANN



ALBERT CANN AND HIS SIBLINGS, THEIR SPOUCES, HIS NIECE AND NEPHEW  
ALBERT LEFT AND HIS BROTHERS



My father was born in Germany. My grandfather was born in Germany. My great grandfather



...My family tree goes back to 1400 on my father's side. On my mothers side the family tree goes back to the mid 1800s.

My father's family came from Reimagen, where the bridge was. My grandmother's family were Auerbachs. Two of my grandmother's brothers were rabbis. Another was a doctor in the Israelitic hospital in Cologne. Another was in Cologne in the Centralfahreign, a liberal Jewish movement. The Jews didn't have legal rights because they weren't organized.

My father was a member of the Berger verein, the local citizen group. He was a founder of the glass insurance company. They decided they could do their own instead of paying to

a large company. He was a respected person who was Jewish. He was too old to be at the front in World War One. He was in the army. He was a guard in a Russian Prisoner camp.

My father Albert Cann married in 1912 and opened a shoe store in Koenigswinter. They had a leather business in the back. In the hinterhaus, he had a place where he sold leather and nails to shoemakers.

Originally they were Shuhaus Cann, Lederhandlen. On their wedding day Speier gave him permission to call his store Speier Shuhaus. That was something special. He also bought from Speier. They were wholesalers, not manufacturers. But the name meant something to my father. Both shoe businesses were on the main street. The guy next door, Paul Bafort, was a

Jeweler and watch repairman. He was a habitual drinker. For 2 or 3 years he didn't pay his rent. But my father was good hearted. The jeweler had 2 little children. My father couldn't throw him out. So he became a good Nazi, figuring that way he wouldn't have to pay his rent.

Albert Cann gave a 10% reduction. He helped you even if you didn't have



the money. Many of the older people in the town remembered him that way.

*My name is Henry Cann.*

I was born in a small town in Germany in

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15. The name of the town is Koenigswinter. It is located on the Rhine near Bonn. I went to elementary school for four years and to a real Gymnasium in a nearby town. I finished school with the ein jahrig. (That means 2 years past high school) in 1931. left

**HILDA BOY HENRY teddy hartoch  
ken annie hartoch**





At that time already we had signs of Hitler going up, and incidents in school that occurred occasionally. But some of the older teachers, of course, were not for Hitler and did not agree with this. I recall a case when one of my co-pupils just for fun put a swastika on his desk. He used the knife and scraped a swastika on his desk. One of the older teachers saw this and he was very angry about it. He slapped the kid around and said "What is this? You're starting already in school? It's a terrible thing, especially since there were only 2 or 3 Jewish children in the gymnasium of 250-300 pupils.

Hilda, Henry

(Adele, Henry's mother was a Hartoch and Annie

was her sister in law.)

So in 1932 I finished school and I left my home town. I went to be an apprentice in Cologne. After 8 months this particular company failed. I transferred and became an apprentice, also in Cologne,

in the Speier Shoe Company. It happens that one of my uncles was a manager in a smaller town of the same company. That's the way I got the job. It was very hard for Jewish kids to get a job in other than a Jewish company.

I finished my apprenticeship there. Since I had gone past high school, the apprenticeship that was usually three years was cut down to one year. That was 1935. I went for typing and bookkeeping school in Cologne, the Chamber of Commerce school. I finished there.

By that time it was Hitler's time. (Hitler came to power, officially in 1933.)

I was transferred with this company to three or four different stores. As a young man I had the chance to become a manager of a store. But first you had to put in so much time in different stores, just to qualify for it. First as assistant manager. And this way I came to Munich.



Just to give you a feeling for the Hitler time: As it happened to develop we had mostly women working in the store. The men became either decorators or managers. So in a shoe store over there we had 20 different girls working. One of them, when Hitler came to power, suddenly she turned out to be a member of the National Socialist party. To be a member you had to pay dues. And that was all secret, because officially no one would have admitted to being a Nazi. Suddenly she was there, and she was a member of the party, she wore a button, and the store was Jewish owned. Some one came in and wanted to buy something she would walk up to them and say "Do you realize this is a Jewish store. You aren't supposed to buy here."

The Jewish owner or manager, I was the assistant manager, couldn't do anything to her because she was a full fledged Nazi and she had the protection of the party. That was in Munich. It got to the point that when you asked an employee

"Would you please serve the customer" the employee said: No, we are having brodse (breakfast time) downstairs."

(normally the employees had a room downstairs. When you needed someone to serve

the customer you would ring a bell.)



So it got pretty tough for a Jewish manager or assistant manager to do anything the party wouldn't agree on. It was practically impossible to do any business there. The company had Aryan people working for it too.

Eventually I wrote a letter to the company in Frankfurt, the headquarters. I told them I didn't see any future in working in that store in Munich, because the employees there killed the business. Unless they would send an Aryan, non-Jew, manager, I didn't see how the store could exist. If they would send a manager who was not Jewish he could say, "This is a store where you are being employed. Either do the business or you can go." But a Jewish man couldn't do it any more at the time.

I remember one incident. We had a young decorator there. The place was a big place. We had 50 chairs back to back. The decorator, at one time, went ahead, downstairs in the hallway and put an oversized Swastika in the wall. You couldn't tell him to put it away anymore, to take it off. So all I told him was: Did he realize this was the emblem of the party. What would the party people say if he would smear this thing on the wall like this. Naturally he got scared and he took it off.

After a while I was transferred to our store in Leipzig. That was in 1938. The manager in Munich was an uncle of the owners. He was an old man. They retired him and got a non-Jewish manager. It probably worked much easier that way.

In Leipzig there also was a relation of the owners on the wife's side, Mr. Gelhorn. He was very nice. Everything else was good. But it was 1938. The Hitler movement got stronger and stronger. The pressure on the non-Jewish people was not to buy in Jewish stores. In fact, on a Saturday afternoon, the stores was filled with people. People didn't react too much. They weren't all Nazis at that time. Like they were not all Nazis afterward. The pressure was so strong that they rather would give in than take a chance. Anybody who, worked in Europe, in Germany, had to have an identification with them. So one Saturday afternoon a group of maybe 15 Nazis came into the store. It was filled with people. They went from one to the next customer and said "Let me see where you work. Let me see what you do and who you are." So the people got scared and left the place.

I remember I went to a policeman on the corner and said "They can't come in like this." These people were not in uniform. They were just rabble rousers for the party. Everybody was hurrying up to become a good party member, to show by his deeds that he was a good party member.

I told the policeman "Here. We need help in the store. These people come in and they are chasing our customers out."

And the man said "I'm sorry, but I can't do a thing about it."

That was August, September, 1938.

Over there (in Germany) you had to report within 24 hours if you make a change of address. If you didn't report it and you live with somebody, these people will be fined if THEY don't do it.

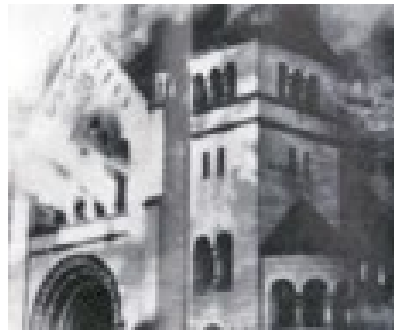
It's still that way now. I remember when I came to Leipzig, going to the police station. and signing a whole folder of papers, maybe 5 or 6 sheets. I said I moved from Munich to Leipzig, etc. I live with a Jewish family. I later found out that one of the papers I signed was the ration list for me.



In Leipzig, I lived with a Polish family. The father wasn't alive. There was a mother and three or four children. They were very religious. In fact they were so religious that I was the Shabbos goy. Before I left for work on Saturday morning I used to fix up the stove so they wouldn't have to touch it. And on Friday night they would all come into my room, because nobody would turn on the light except me. We got along well in spite of that.

Leipzig is maybe 100 miles from the Polish border. In the beginning of October they suddenly had an "action". They arrested all the Polish citizens who lived in Germany, meaning the Jewish Polish citizens. They arrested them, put them at night and darkness over the Polish border, and didn't let them back in again.

So these people I lived with, found out about the "action." They went to the Polish consulate. At that time the Nazi government still respected the sovereignty of the different consulates. These people stayed in the Polish consulate for 2 weeks. I brought them food, there. As long as they were there they could not be touched by the Germans. After 2 weeks they called off the action. And that was the end of that.



November the ninth they burned all the synagogues, all over Germany, everywhere. It was supposed to be spontaneous, but there was no such thing as spontaneous acts that happen everywhere at the same time. (At that time they claimed that the people arose, that it was public reaction...the way they burned the synagogues and all that. Everything was planned in advance. And even in August, when I registered, they knew what was going to happen in November.) The people were supposed to have done it because they were indignant about the Jews. At the time there were only 500,000 Jews in a population of 85 million. So the Jews were less than half a percent.

#### **SYNAGOGUE ABLAZE KRISTALLNACHT BADEN-BADEN**

One night, at 11 PM, young fellows in trench coats came around. They had the paper I signed when I registered at the Police station when I first came to Leipzig. They were the Gestapo. They wore trench coats, their unofficial uniforms. They asked me if I was Henry Cann.

Yeah.

Please come with us.

Where to?



To the police station.

When you are a German, you listen to the order of the police. You don't question it. You don't take a chance. You don't jump: You don't run. You just do what they tell you. If they say stay in the corner for an hour, you stay in the corner...at that time. That's the way you were brought up. To obey the law.

I was waiting in the police station. Nobody knew what was going on, because they were bringing people from all places. One of those young people said "Hay, we have to get some more people."

If I had the guts at the time and I would have walked out with them. I could have gone home and they would never have come for me again.

I stayed like everyone else. After a few days, that night, or the next night, they took us out of town to a factory. They let us stay there. I don't think they fed us anything for a night or so. maybe some water. They made us run, double time. The old people couldn't run. They fell. The Nazis stuck their feet out, and people tripped over them. Whatever indignities they could think of.

By that time we knew, through the grapevine, that we were going to the concentration camp. They were rounding up the young people, the older ones too.

I remember standing in the underpass in the station. We were lined up in military order. A young policeman came up behind me and said, wherever you are going, to the concentration camp, never volunteer. I later found out he was right.

We were shipped in regular railroad compartments from Leipzig to Buchenwald near Weimar. (Goethe and Schiller lived in Weimar.) From there on they put us in trucks. And then they got rough. The regular SS commanders took over. We young could jump fast, but the older people had a very, very bad time. And you couldn't help anyone.

We got to the entrance of the concentration camps.

A sign said "Arbeit macht Frei", labor makes free. That was their motto.

**Buchenwald concentration camp** was a [Nazi concentration camp](#) established on the Ettersberg (the Etter Mountain) located near [Weimar, Thuringia, Germany](#), in July 1937. The prisoners were primarily used as [slave labor](#) in local armament factories

The word "Buchenwald" ([German](#) for "[beech forest](#)") was chosen because the Nazi authorities were not willing to name it after the Ettersburg (the keep) or Ettersberg (the mountain) because of the close ties of the location to [Goethe](#), who was being idealized as "the embodiment of the German Spirit" ("Verkörperung des Deutschen Geistes"). Between July 1937 and April 1945, approximately 250,000 people were incarcerated in Buchenwald by the [Nazi regime](#), including 168 American, Australian, British and Canadian POWs. The number of deaths is estimated at 56,000. Many inmates died during human experimentation or died as a result of arbitrary acts of the guards.

They said "run." The reception committee was waiting there with all kinds of weapons and sticks and ropes, just to beat you up. So I remembered the best thing was to run into a guy instead of running away from him. So I ran into someone and he couldn't do much to me. And we were inside.

There were thousands of people who came in this "action there were so many people they weren't prepared for it. They were still building barracks. There was an established camp nearby. They had people in there, already.

When they took over Austria in 1938 they gathered up young Jews, especially those who were active in Jewish organizations, and brought them to Buchenwald. So the Austrian Jews were old timers, already.

Some prisoners were wearing Nazi uniforms. They called them Capos. They were supervisors. They were regular criminals. They weren't Jewish or nothing. But the Nazis gave them ranks. To look good-for the Nazis they had to be as bad or worse than the Nazis. They told us what to do.

It was in November. We were without food or water for a while. There was one "wash" barracks.

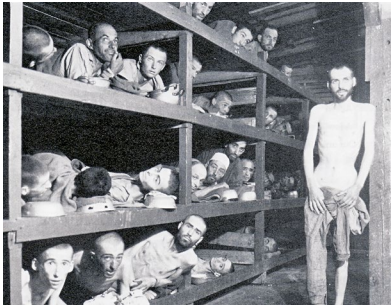


Some people came with a lot of money in their pockets. They were on their way to the banks. They picked them up on the streets and no one had frisked them. So the fellows who were already in the camps, most of them were Jewish, said "Hey, you want to drink some water. We have a bottle of water here. We will sell it to you."

At that time it didn't matter to us anymore, because we knew that sooner or later they would get your valuables anyhow. But it was a bad feeling, when you think that Jews can sell other Jews water. It still stands out in my mind.

They had electric wires around the camp. People jumped into the wires to end it all. They had pits for latrines. People drowned in them. They shot people. One man said "I was in the first world war. I got the Iron Cross."

And this 20 year old Nazi kid said "What the hell do I care about you and your Iron Cross." And he socked him around. The old man was lucky. I saw them hang people to scare the others.



We were sitting on the outside for a night and a half. Then they built some barracks. They put us in the barracks with our clothes on. Nobody ever touched us anymore when we were in there. The next morning they brought in some coffee in big containers. They put them in front of the barracks with a couple of tin cans. They said "bring them in there." Maybe later they brought some pieces of bread. It wasn't organized.

There were so many of us that they just put us in the barracks. There were no beds. We just layed flat on the planks. The planks were stacked in layers: one, two, three, four high. So the young guys got on the top. The bottom was mud.

There were people who were diabetics. There were people who were sick and had no medication. They just died. They didn't have a chance. There was no one around to take care of them. There were too many people at one time. After a few days a routine sets in. They brought us some bread. They had some soup.

### **Buchenwald 1945**

They said there was sawdust in the bread. When you are hungry you can eat anything. I don't remember that much anymore. But I know people would kill for a piece of bread, if there was a necessity for that. Personalities didn't mean nothing. civilization is just a veneer. It comes off really fast in a situation like this.

It's every man for himself. The Nazis knew that. The more pressure they put on, the more help they got from the Jewish people themselves. The same thing that happened in the ghettos. You would give someone else's name rather



than be the person who has to go. Although in the end they get you too. You know that in the back of your mind. But, under the circumstance, if you have a chance, you save your skin from one day to the next. There was no bravery because it didn't do you any good.

You couldn't help anybody. First of all you didn't know anyone. I never knew anyone from Leipzig. People came from all over. So there wasn't any relationship. No family came together. We were all men. From 18 years old to men in the 60's. After a while they

released the men in the 60s.

### **Buchenwald 1945 MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE**

The whole thing was called protective custody, to save us from the Germans. That was the excuse. But the real idea behind it was to get you in a situation that, if you could find a way to leave the country they pressured

you into it and got you to leave the country. While I was in Munich, in 1938, I heard that the consulate in Stuttgart, the American consulate for all of Germany, would give out waiting numbers. The quotas went by the country of your birth. So if you were a Jew in Germany and you were born in Hungary, you would be under the Hungarian quota. The German quota, in total was 25 or 27 thousand. Naturally everyone wanted to get

out. If there were 300,000 Jewish people, there still was a 10 year quota. I heard about it. And at that time in 1937-38 I realized there was no future for Jewish people in Germany anymore. The only thing I could do at the time was prepare to leave the country.



I did get a waiting number. It said there on that mimeographed sheet that my number was 5330. I kept it. Every day they would say we want 250 volunteers. They would have uniforms. They would take the civilian clothes off and transfer you into the regular camp. And you would be marching up and down, up and down for 8-10 hours a day. Just to keep you busy. They had quarries where you work. I didn't volunteer.

### **JEWS IN LINE TRYING TO GET TICKETS POST KRISTALLNACHT**

You were allowed to write 2 cards. I wrote home. But they told you what to write: "I am here. I am doing fine. Do not send any money. You will hear from me." That's all we were allowed to write.

A lot of people did send money. When money arrived they said this, this and this guy: You have some money down by the cashier. Come and get it. The ones that went down there never came back. In other words they put them back into the main camp. That was another ruse to get them out, instead of volunteering. I figured I had some money there. I don't think they ever called my name. I wouldn't have gone anyway.

On December 17th (the 18th was my birthday.) I was called down. The loud speaker in the camp called my name.



First they took us down. We had a haircut. (They hadn't bothered with us because we were still in civilian clothes.) They took us up to the official building. They had a bunch of people there. They said: "you are going to be released now." They warned us that if you ever tell anyone what happened here, what you see, what you know, you'll be right back here. We didn't know what happened. We did not know why we were picked out. We went to the cashier. (And found out what had happened.) The people I lived with (that was their chance to do something for me.) wrote to my father who lived in the Rhineland. He was at that time over 60. They told him we can get a visa for your son to go to Shanghai, China. And he might be released from the concentration camp if he has a visa. That was the only official thing you could get to get out at the time. That's the reason I was called. The guy talked to me and he said "You are going to Shanghai."

When you are in that situation you don't care where you are going. You know. Fine. I'm going to Shanghai.

I had 50 or 60 marks down there. He asked "Where are you going back to?"

I said "I'm going back to Leipzig." That's where I was working. My things were down there. They gave me just enough money to go to Leipzig on the railroad. We were so dirty. We hadn't taken a bath in a month. We didn't have water to wash with. Just a little to drink now and then. So the first thing we did (they had shaved our hair off at the last minute, just to get even) we went into the bathroom on the train and we messed the place up.



