

**EI-1033**

**HENRY SAEMAN**

**BIRTHDATE: MAY 2, 1927**

**INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 8, 1999**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 71**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE PH.D.**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: STEVEN MICKLOVIC**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: ALECIA BARBOUR**

**GERMANY, 1941**

**AGE: 14**

**SHIP: THE CUIDAD DE SEVILLE**

**PORT: BARCELONA**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **GERMANY: REGENSBURG, BAVARIA; HAMBURG,**
- **THE US: OHIO**

LEVINE: Ok today is January 8, 1998 and I'm in –

SAEMAN: '99

LEVINE: Pardon?

SAEMAN: 1999

LEVINE: Oh, '99, sorry and I'm in the oral history studio in the Ellis Island Immigration Museum with Henry Saeman who came from Germany in 1941 at the age of fourteen years. There are a number of earlier names that Henry has had like Mox, Manfred, Heinz, and the Nazis

gave the name of Israel Sämann. S with the Umlaut over the A and double N. [Clears throat] Ok, and let me just say Mr. Saeman's birth date is May 2, 1927 and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you could tell me where in Germany where you born?

SAEMAN: In Regensburg. A city in Bavaria located about eighty or ninety miles north of Munich.

LEVINE: Ok, and were you in the same place before – up until – when were you --?

SAEMAN: I wasn't. My mother, who succeeded in getting my sister out of the country in 1938, around the time of Crystal Night [*Krystallnacht*], to Israel, to Palestine then. Opened the door for me to go to a preparatory camp for Palestine and that was to go to school in Hamburg for one year. But the opportunity to go to Israel seemed to be closing down because the war had already begun and the opportunity to come to the United States opened up and that was the direction.

LEVINE: Ok, what was your mother's name?

SAEMAN: Frida.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

SAEMAN: Firnbacher.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

SAEMAN: F, as in Frank, I-R-N, as in Nancy, -B, boy, -A-C-H-E-R.

LEVINE: Ok, and your father's name?

SAEMAN: Martin – A

LEVINE: Martin A?

SAEMAN: No, Martin, Martin.

LEVINE: Martin - And were your mother and father from the same area in Bavaria as you were born? Were their families from that area?

SAEMAN: They were from Bavaria. My – my mother was born in a town near Würzburg called Kosmannsdorf and my father was born, I believe, in a town called Suggenheim and that was also in Bavaria. Their respective families moved to – my-my grandfather moved to Straubing which is not far from Regensburg and my – my father's parents moved to Ingolstadt which is on the other side and they were about fifty miles apart and I have no idea how they met.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Maybe you could summarize what happened to you and your family from the start of – well lets say 1938, or whenever things started to change for you.

SAEMAN: Well, my mother had begun to work toward getting her children rescued and getting herself rescued but her primary interest was getting her children out. And so as I've said, she succeeded in doing that with my sister, who miraculously left Germany two days before Crystal Night and was in Trieste ready to board a ship to Israel probably the night of Crystal Night and –

LEVINE: How many of there were you?

SAEMAN: Two.

LEVINE: How many children? Just two, uh huh.

SAEMAN: And my mother continued to work toward-toward getting me out of the country and that finally happened. She perished in the Holocaust. Was taken from Regensburg to Piaski or Lublin and as so many others never to be heard from again.

LEVINE: And how about your father?

SAEMAN: My father actually died when I was two years old. He was a decorated German soldier in World War One and he died of an injury - ten years later.

LEVINE: How – you came apparently to this country aboard a ship of refugee children, could you explain how that all came about?

SAEMAN: My understanding is that HIAS helped - helped children between ages ten and sixteen to emigrate from Germany. How I was on the list, I don't know. Except, perhaps at-- by the grace of the US embassy – I had to go to the US embassy that year and apparently receive clearance to emigrate. And – so – it, I know no further details other than that we were asked to be in Berlin at the point of debarkation in July, 1941, and there were, I think twelve or fourteen other children there who had apparently had received similar permission to leave and we left.

LEVINE: And where were you coming from when you received that notification to go to board the ship?

SAEMAN: At the time I was either in Hamburg or just leaving Hamburg to go back Regensburg because I had been at the camp Hachsharah at the camp where we were being prepared for Israel. I had been there for one year. And so I may have been in Regensburg when we received the notification. Doesn't matter, it went to my – my mother received it and so that's how we were notified.

LEVINE: So had you been – had you been in any way interned before that?

SAEMAN: No, no. [Pause] Except for Crystal Night, the largest number of Jews at that time had not yet been sent to concentration camps. On Crystal Night of course, many, most were sent. We escaped it. We were there. Our house was-was pummeled and rather severely damaged by the Nazis but we were not taken to a concentration camp.

LEVINE: What was – could you describe the voyage?

SAEMAN: The voyage –

LEVINE: Or what stands out in your mind as to that period. What were you thinking, what were you feeling, and what happened?

SAEMAN: The situation was, that this – this is now July 1941. Pearl Harbor was to occur six months or five months later. The Germans were – the German U-Boats were destroying or torpedoing American ships in the Atlantic. President Roosevelt declared a moratorium perhaps two months after I came here – or perhaps a month after I came

here of further passage of ships, of American ships taking people. This means that perhaps the Spanish ship could have still come here but to all intents and purposes was over. But back to your question – we left from Berlin at that time. And this was a time when France was occupied by the Nazis. Or at least it the – there was – France was divided into two parts; the Vichy Government on one side and the rest of the country, which all the way to the Spanish border were under the – under the – were Nazi occupied. We left from Berlin and we were in a section of a train that apparently was branded that this was where the immigrants were or where the Jews were, or whatever. And we were on that train for an incredible five days I think –going through Paris, stopping there but not being allowed to be at the train station. Not being allowed to get off by rather being shunted aside like a – like –

LEVINE: Cattle?

SAEMAN: Yeah, like a – like a cattle train or a – but it was a passenger train. The sleeping we did, we did on the baggage compartment and so forth so it was a pretty horrendous trip to-- from Berlin to the Spanish border. At the Spanish border where we finally crossed, where we saw the Nazis for the last time, we went on a Spanish train which, because it was so primitive [laughs] it was a terrible ride too. I think for a relatively short distance it took twenty-four hours. For fourteen, and fifteen, and thirteen year old kids [laughing] that was not an easy journey. And then we landed – we –we got of in Barcelona and we were there for a number of days. And I remember the wonderful experience of a number of us, having a great game of soccer. And –

LEVINE: Having been penned up in a train.

SAEMAN: Having been penned up in a train and all the other things. And much of what had happened was already – was quickly forgotten. And from there we went to – through the Strait of Gibraltar, on the Cuidad de Seville and up to Lisbon and then down to the Canary Islands and I think the only reason for that was to pick up bananas. Which we didn't – we could have done without for the extra – we were on that ship for twenty days until we landed in New York. And had this marvelous site of waking up one morning and there in the distance was the Statue of Liberty. Of course we didn't know much about that but nonetheless the site of land and the site of America was a great thing.

LEVINE: Who else was on the ship with you? I mean, - you were ten or twelve children --

SAEMAN: There appeared to be, as I recall there seem – there may have been a leader and the rest of us were – I don't know who supervised us. I don't recall that. It has been after all, fifty-eight years or fifty-six years.

LEVINE: And then you went to Ellis Island and what was your experience and –

SAEMAN: Brief.

LEVINE: -- how would you describe what happened to you there?

SAEMAN: Brief. I had a relative in New York who was waiting for me and I guess we came through here and I remember a picture being taken and shortly thereafter – I don't remember how long we were here --

not long. I'm sure the authorities who were accustomed to handling hundred of thousands of people saw us and being rather benign group of kids who were easy to process.

LEVINE: Now what could you say about your encounter with HIAS?

SAEMAN: Zero. I don't have any other than I am forever grateful of them to have done this on behalf of children. I said I'm grateful for them being so active in the – helping finance the migration – immigration of Russian Jews in recent years.

LEVINE: And why don't you mention about the picture just on the tape so that maybe we can locate it.

SAEMAN: For whatever reason, there was a big deal at the time or so it seemed, about a picture being taken. All of us who came on this youth transport were in the picture.

LEVINE: Was it taken here at Ellis Island?

SAEMAN: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think it was – it may have even been taken on the ship before we came off and came in here, something like that. I - I – I'd love to find a way to contact the people who were – on that transport with me to see what happened to them.

LEVINE: Did you ever maintain any contact.

SAEMAN: No, with none of them. The premise is that within two days HIAS sent me to the care of the Jewish Family Service Agency in Cincinnati and why my lot fell on Cincinnati for no particular reason.

Everybody else, similarly may have gone to Atlanta, or San Francisco, or Kansas City, who knows.

LEVINE: And were you sent to what, a foster family or something like that?

SAEMAN: A foster family. Mm hmm, a foster family.

LEVINE: Just before we leave this part, can you say anything about what you were thinking or how you were feeling when you were on route here? Or what you expected or ---

SAEMAN: [Pause] No, I don't have much recollection. But I have been for many years one who took things as they came. And maybe I was born that way, maybe I just accepted whatever was there for me and took it in stride but I don't recall many such details.

LEVINE: How about the family? What was their name?

SAEMAN: The family in?

LEVINE: The family in Cincinnati.

SAEMAN: Well the first family I went with, their name was Spiegel. And they had a son who was a year or two younger than I. And I was with that family for about a year and a half, but – I didn't get along too well. And I say that in a very legitimate way because I was a hard person to deal with. I had come from – from a year in Hamburg where the war was on and the British were bombing Hamburg, even in 1940 – that early. And that meant getting up in the middle of the night and all the time and then going back to sleep and half an hour later the alarm would sound again and you'd have to go to

the cellar – to the basement. And in the process I probably became a nervous wreck. And [laughs] the people I lived with in the suburban Cincinnati home were not used to someone who was a nervous wreck and fourteen years old. And that caused some complications the – the interesting thing though was – and I was saying it to my son here today – that symbolizes or signifies the difference between the immigrant of today and the immigrant back then. That is, within six weeks I spoke adequate English and I was sent to school and the agency was very attentive to me and wanted to see me succeed.

LEVINE: This was HIAS?

SAEMAN: No the agency in Cincinnati that took over at that point. When I left New York, I was out of HIAS's hands, if I ever was in HIAS's hands but –

LEVINE: Do you recall the name of the agency in Cincinnati by any chance?

SAEMAN: The Jewish Family Service Agency. And I became very friendly in this process with them. But for one reason or another I had to move from one family to another. It was a ---- a somewhat difficult period of adjustment to grow up. You know, I had no parents. I more or less had to grow up on my own.

LEVINE: Did – so you lived with several families then, before you were finished?

SAEMAN: Yes. I finally found a woman who took care of other children who had taken in other children off and on in her life and we became very close – to the day she died.

LEVINE: When did you – about how old were you when you first moved in or became close with her?

SAEMAN: Seventeen and then I went into the military after that, at eighteen. I was drafted even though I wasn't a citizen yet. And – but I went back to her and I was – the table reversed. She was-- she helped me grow up and I helped her in her infirm years.

LEVINE: Well that's – that's nice. Well maybe - we have so little time and I'm so sorry because this could be I'm sure a lot more. Could you say what you did after you came out of the military? Just kind of a thumbnail sketch of your life.

SAEMAN: Well, after I came out of the military I, again, I was so fortunate to have gained the rights of the GI Bill of Rights. The entitlement of the GI Bill of Rights, I can't envision how someone with my background, a few years in the United States, could have gone to school at the government's expense. But I did and I at least got an undergraduate degree. From there I went to a newspaper career for fifteen years in Springfield, Ohio, at the Springfield News and Sun. And I think I made a good name and reputation for myself there. And then I was a reporter at the Dayton Daily News for three years. And in the meantime, of course I was married and had two children. My wife is a native Ohioan and –

LEVINE: What was her maiden name?

SAEMAN: Her maiden name was Kasner.

LEVINE: And her first name?

SAEMAN: Mitsy. Mitsy Kasner. And we've been married for forty-four years or forty-five years now. So I've been very – I've been blessed with that. She – from the end of my newspaper career, I became executive director of an association of psychologists, the Ohio Psychological Association. And I held that position for eighteen years where upon at age sixty-three, I decided to change course. I wasn't ready to retire and we started a newspaper combining whatever talents I had from the newspaper career with psychology and the newspaper is called the National Psychologist and Marty and his mother and I have been publishing that newspaper since 1991 and we are still doing it.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Well what would you say is your greatest source of satisfaction looking back on your life?

SAEMAN: Well I'm always pleased when I can help other people. In terms of my greatest source – well I've had many satisfying experiences and to pick one out in the spur of the moment, I can't do it. I don't know but there've been many – it's been a good life.

LEVINE: I was gonna say is there anything you'd like to say because we are out of time and we have to close unfortunately but is there anything you can think of that you'd like to say in closing? I mean, you are here at Ellis Island where you first stepped down after being in Europe.

SAEMAN: What I can say is - that I would have gone the way of my mother had I not been – had she not been able to get me out of the country when she did. It was the eleventh hour. There wasn't much time left and I would certainly have died in a concentration camp a few

months later. But for some reason, I didn't. So I'm fortunate to be alive and I'm fortunate to have led a good life and that hopefully I'm making some contribution to the world or to *Tikun Olum*.

LEVINE: With your newsletter that you publish, is there – I don't know if it's possible but could you say what it is that you feel that contributes.

SAEMAN: Oh, that's--what we have is a business type publication that's sent to thirty one thousand psychologists in the United States and in terms of the contribution it does not do anything for the betterment of the world. There would be other critics who would love it [laughing] or not like it, but I'd think it be – it's not appropriate for me to say that we have a great publication that makes a contribution to anybody other than some psychologist perhaps.

LEVINE: Well I'm so sorry we are out of time but I've been speaking with Henry Saeman, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on January 8, 1999 signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW