

RG-50.002.0104

Summary

Libby Feit, born in 1934 in Berlin, Germany, describes growing up in what she calls “the Jewish ghetto slum of Berlin;” her father’s work as a tailor; how the family lived in the back of her father’s store; the entire neighborhood being Orthodox Jewish; her parents and older brother; being born as a triplet and the disappearance of her two sisters; never knowing for sure what happened to her sisters; the deaths of her parents and brother, leaving her as the sole survivor of her family; traditional Jewish customs surrounding death; her attempts to learn more about the fate of her sisters; her parents’ origins in Poland; how her family never obtained German citizenship; an uncle living in Detroit, Michigan, who sent the family papers to come to the United States; preparing to leave Germany before Kristallnacht, during which her father was arrested and sent to the concentration camp at Dachau; being in the hospital at the time due to diphtheria; the destruction of her father’s store during Kristallnacht; speaking German at home; how her parents spoke Yiddish; moving to the United States in 1941 without knowing any English and getting beaten up and called a Nazi by other students at school; living in a Jewish neighborhood in Detroit; continuing to feel like a foreigner, despite learning English quickly; finding a sense of belonging during a trip to Israel later in life; her mother’s attempts to find her father during his two weeks at Dachau; how her mother obtained a forged letter from the U.S. Embassy Berlin and went to Gestapo headquarters to demand her father’s release; her father’s return home a few days later, after which he fled Berlin; moving with her mother and brother to stay with an uncle in another part of Berlin; how this uncle’s family was soon after deported to the Łódź Ghetto and later killed; antisemitism and persecution in Berlin before the war; her parents’ extended families in Poland; her father’s and his younger brother’s flight from Będzin, Poland and arrival in Berlin in 1928 to avoid conscription in the Polish army; leaving Berlin by train with suitcases full of food; traveling by ship with her mother and brother to the United States; how her father rarely talked about his experiences in Dachau; arriving in New York and then reuniting with her father and uncle in Detroit; the well-organized and very welcoming Jewish community in Detroit; living with her uncle’s family before moving to their own home; her relationship with her older brother; growing up in Detroit; experiencing antisemitism in the United States; constantly hearing news about the war and her parents’ reactions to developments in Poland; an uncle’s experiences with debilitating flashbacks to his experiences in the camps during the war; a cousin who was interned in Cyprus before immigrating to Israel in 1948; the fates of other family members; the Red Cross’s postwar efforts to reunite family members; her husband, three children, and grandchildren; meeting her husband while in college in New York; making it a point to share her wartime experiences with her children as they were growing up; her oldest son, who became a captain in the Israeli navy; moving to New Jersey to be closer to her husband’s family; and her feelings about the potential reunification of Germany.