

Dr. Eric Simon

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Summary

Dr. Eric Simon was born as Joseph Eric Simon on June 2, 1924 in Wiesbaden, Germany to Paula Mayer and Joseph Simon and has a brother, Walter Ernest Simon, 19 months younger, who lives in Philadelphia. His father was in the grain and feed business. They resided in a large apartment in a building owned by his grandfather where they kept many books. When Eric was around six years old, he was diagnosed with TB of the eye and was sent to a children's camp near St. Moritz, Switzerland to recuperate. The following winter he and his brother attended a Jewish camp, also near St. Moritz, Switzerland. There he learned to ski which he enjoyed with his father for a few years and through most of his life. He was always close to his brother. Eric enjoyed sports. The family had kitchen help and a nursemaid. They belonged to the Conservative Synagogue. With the Nuremberg laws, the maid had to be over 65 years old. His parents vacationed separately as his mother was the office manager and someone had to remain with the business. After the Nazis came to power, around '34, the Jews were not permitted to use the public swimming pool, and they could not go to the movies or sit on certain park benches. Eric's non-Jewish friend could not play with him, the students in his gymnasium were unpleasant toward him during Hitler Youth Week, every page in his history book indicated, "Jews are our misfortune," and he was no longer permitted to belong to the soccer team. Strangers yelled at Eric, "dirty Jew." His father's business and warehouse were taken away so the family lived on their savings. The family learned the news from British radio, local newspapers and saw SS parading. His father felt they might have to leave Germany so he smuggled money out to Switzerland, Belgium and Holland. In 1936 his father visited his cousin in Cleveland to determine how he would live in the US. She was the grandmother's brother's daughter and she gave affidavits to 15 relatives. Two days before Kristallnacht, the family obtained their visa. Their grandmother's apartment was ruined but no one came to Eric's apartment on Kristallnacht. The next day they drove around Wiesbaden in their car as learned that Jews were being arrested and sent to concentration camps. His father stayed at a British Jew's home for a few days and then an Italian friend helped him take the train from Wiesbaden to Amsterdam. Gestapo came to their apartment the next day looking for his father and they proved that he was in Holland. Their car and phone were removed and they were required to leave within a month. They packed some furniture in a Lift to the US and took \$100. They received some restitution for their losses. They left Germany December 10, reunited with his father and took the Statendam Holland-America ship on December 14 from Rotterdam arriving December 23 in Hoboken, New Jersey. They traveled to Cleveland where their cousin helped them find an apartment and Eric started school which was co-ed, a new experience. Eric only knew a little English and his teacher wanted him to remain in junior high but he persuaded her to graduate him to high school. There he succeeded but less so in English. His chemistry teacher influenced him to study chemistry. His father was successful in his lighting business in the US and was able to send Eric to college. Eric graduated

in 1942 and was to be drafted unless he attended Case or held a defense position. He attended the 2 and ½ year program in chemical engineering, graduating summer '44. He attended a program to learn to be a counselor in a Jewish camp and met his future wife, Irene Ronas, and they immediately were drawn to each other. He was drafted in September '44 and sent to Alabama for basic training. Then Eric was sent to Ohio State University to get his engineering degree in Columbus while Irene was nearby in Cleveland. Soon Eric was sent for a second basic training in combat engineering and then to Rhode Island to teach English to German POWs. After a year he was shipped to a POW camp in Virginia where he was the government discussion leader. It was a German POW who told him the facts of the Holocaust which he found unbelievable. Eric was discharged early (March 1946) to attend the University of Chicago where he obtained an MA and Ph.D. in organic chemistry. Then he received a Post-doc Fellowship from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis and studied biochemistry. He received scholarships for 15 years in NY City to work on neuroscience regarding how the brain reacts to opioids. He published 278 papers on the topic and discovered that opioids bind to protein molecule receptors which results in feeling high, low or gives relief to pain. Eric has received many awards for his work. He and Irene had three children: Martin, Faye and Larry, four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. In the late 90s he was invited to Wiesbaden where he spoke at his Gymnasium and a student questioned why the third generation is paying restitution. While at a sabbatical in Paris, he visited his hometown as none of his relatives perished or were in concentration camps so he felt comfortable in Germany. Compared to others, he feels he was lucky during the Holocaust. A Jewish Museum was built in Wiesbaden which collects documents on the Holocaust so he submitted his mother's passport. After the Holocaust, Eric became less religious and considers himself a cultural and ethnic Jew. He recently retired and will celebrate his 67th anniversary on August 9th.