

## **Ingeborg Mayer Protentis**

**August 8, 2016**

**RG-50.030\*0886**

### **Part 1 of 2 Parts**

#### **Abstract**

Ingeborg Mayer Protentis was born as Ingeborg Mayer on February 17, 1932 in Wurzburg, Germany to Rosa Reichenberg and Max Mayer. Ingeborg was the youngest of four children with a brother, Emile who was 21, a sister, Betty who was 18 and a brother (unnamed) who was 15. Her parents were partners in a bakery and cafeteria. Before Kristallnacht, her father was put into Dachau and Buchenwald because he was Jewish. Her mother went to Gestapo Headquarters with one of her jewels and gave them the jewel by shaking their hand and her father was released over three years after his arrest. She was six-years-old on Kristallnacht when they heard knocking at the door but one of the students who owed them money stood in front of the door and told the Gestapo to pass them by. Ingeborg cries when she remembers a very traumatic time and can hardly talk about it. She was in a barracks with women and children when an officer picked her out. She was happy as thought she was going to go out and play and was with a lot of little girls. Before she went, her mother told her to keep herself clean and pretty and don't scream or cry. She thought she would get out if she crawled through the door but finally someone took her back to her mother. She always kept extra clean and learned to protect herself and knows there are situations to be avoided. She came to the US in February and was seven years old when placed in second grade and graduated high school by 18. The family got an apartment in NY and partially furnished it with some furniture from Germany. Her father was a baker but would not pay for her college education so she went to work and met her husband. They had three sons and she had a good life. Ingeborg went to Israel three times and met the entire family.

#### **Summary**

00:00 Ingeborg Mayer Protentis was born as Ingeborg Mayer on February 17, 1932 in Wurzburg, Germany which is in Bavaria near Munich. Her parents were Rosa Reichenberg and Max Mayer. Ingeborg was the youngest of four children with a large gap between them. At birth Ingeborg had a brother, Emile who was 21, a sister, Betty who was 18 and a brother (unnamed) who was 15. Her family was assimilated into German society. Her mother was a partner in the father's bakery and cafeteria. Her mother suggested taking a ship to Palestine but her father said he is a German first and Jewish second. He ended up in Dachau and Buchenwald. Her father came from Arable and her mother's parents, Babette and Rafael were probably of French ancestry. Her mother had two brothers, Ludwig and Solomon. They had a large house and after her

father came home from the concentration camp, the servants quit as they could not work for Jews.

- 05:00 The two brothers came to the US before World War II. Ludwig lived in Manhattan and became a baker. Her father was orphaned at 13 so Ingeborg had no paternal grandparents and her maternal grandmother died. Ingeborg recalls her grandfather Rafael being very clean so called him, "Mr. Clean." He would be dressed up in a suit and came home from work and washed up, even the bottom of his shoes and the bottom of his cane. He lived with them in Manhattan where they only had one bathroom and it was hard to get him out of the bathroom. He picked her up from school daily. They were close in a German way as Germans are less affectionate than Mediterraneans. Ingeborg does not remember him in Wurzburg. Her family owned the Mayer's Bakeria and Anthony's Bierfut Restaurant. It was across from the University of Wurzburg so mostly men came in. One or two students could not pay their bill. They had a large house and after her father came home from the concentration camp, the servants quit as they could not work for Jews.
- 10:00 Other Jewish families were evacuated and came to stay with them on Kristallnacht in November '38. They were like shadows. Ingeborg slept in the bed with her mother and heard noises with men pounding doors and shouting and their boots on the marble steps which she can hear to this day. There were women screaming and children crying. Her mother put a dresser against the door and held her and cried about dying. She heard glass breaking. They lived in a Cul de Sac with three urban mansions. There was a knock on the door from a man from across the Cul de Sac who said, "Frau Mayer, they are gone." She moved the dresser and opened the door. Ingeborg found dolls and all kinds of stuff strewn all over the house. She was six-years-old. One of the students who owed them money stood in front of the door and told the Gestapo to pass them by. Her father was already in Dachau. All the people who her father gave shelter to were taken and later went to the US and Palestine. Her father thought the student would not return the money. Both the restaurant and the bakery were closed as they had no workers. Ingeborg feels she earned the title, "survivor."
- 15:00 Her father had lived in the area a long time. Ingeborg has his diploma as a Master Baker. He saved money and at age 22 bought the house which was later bombed by the British and rebuilt. In 1978 Ingeborg saw her grandson spending an exchange year at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland. She told her husband not to go on the Autobahn and they went to Wurzburg. She asked for her street and an old man with a cane pointed out her house that was rebuilt as an apartment house. It had been rubble. In 2013 she saw a photo of the city rebuilt.
- 20:00 The State of Germany asked for back taxes on the house as her father was in a concentration camp and the taxes were not paid. She contacted Claims Against the

Holocaust and learned the '85 value was \$1 and ¾ million for the property. Ingeborg feels she had her life, a beautiful country and a husband and is grateful to the US for giving her a new life. She did not get restitution. She went to the German Consulate in Boston and learned her two cousins perished in a concentration camp but she never took money. After the war, her father came to the US and went to the Red Cross to find out about his relatives and found out the extended families ended up in concentration camps. His sister Rosa was a teacher and perished in a concentration camp. Rosa looked like a teacher and dressed in a high neck dress with bright collars. Ingeborg did not see her often. Rosa told her to remember what she said. Rosa was a popular name.

25:00 Ingeborg's parents were both 44 when she was born. Her mother was very driven. The parents were both wealthy. Her mother had jewelry – a tiara with stones and a bracelet with stones. Ingeborg would sit on the steps at dances where the women wore beautiful green, red and white stones (emeralds, rubies and diamonds). One night her mother awoke her in the middle of the night and took her to see a barrel on the roof. There were support eaves and the attic was made of wood with sawdust in the bucket where her mother put in the jewels. She told Ingeborg to remember the numbers: one, three and seven in case something happens. She should take the jewels to a church and don't tell anyone about it. They were placed low for Ingeborg to reach. The church would take her in for donating the jewels. They flushed the sawdust down the toilet. Her mother went to Gestapo Headquarters with a jewel and asked about her father and gave them the jewel by shaking their hand.

30:00 Her father was released. Her father had a huge library. When the storm troopers came in and saw the books, they put them on a pile and burned them. Ingeborg saw her books in the flames, stories about animals. When she came to the US, she thought of the animals coming out of the books. Ingeborg remembers being in a barracks with women and children. An officer came and picked her out. She was happy as thought she was going to go out and play. Her mother told her to keep herself clean and pretty and don't scream or cry. There were a lot of little girls. She thought she would get out if she crawled through the door. Someone came and said she was not supposed to be with the soldiers and she was brought back to her mother. Her mother put a blanket around her and held her tight. She became compulsive when she grew up for cleanliness in her home. One of the men came to her an hour later and she recognized his voice. (Ingeborg cries when telling this story.)

35:00 She decided to be best at school. She came to the US in February and was seven years old in second grade and a year and a half behind but graduated high school by 18. Her father was arrested in the café for being Jewish. Her parents were religious to a degree. They kept a kosher home but her father did not go to synagogue often. He went more often when he came to the US and asked Ingeborg to attend with him. Ingeborg never told anyone what happened to her with the Nazi officers. When she was 16 she told a

physician who wanted her to tell her parents. Her husband was so lively and loving that she did not want him to know what happened to her. He encouraged her to go into therapy and she did it for years and told most everything. This opened a door and she cannot go on. She remembers someone put her in a box and covered her with blankets and put the cover down. Since then she is claustrophobic. Ingeborg told her four sons some of her story. She believes they are incredible human beings.

40:00 They are protective and they are love. Her grandchildren are even more protective of her. The fifth one is coming home. She tried to tell her story but the people living in Germany now are not those who committed the atrocities. They are dead and gone. She does not have hard feelings against these people. She learned to protect herself. She got her daughter married. Ingeborg knows there are situations to be avoided. She traveled a great deal and knows there are things going on in good countries that are not healthy. She is grateful for being here. No matter what is said, America is great. It does not have to be made, it is great.

45:00 We believe that people want to come and make a life for themselves here. Her coming here and meeting her husband and having sons was great. She always told those who were born to give back. She has a son with the FBI, one child started a program for underprivileged children in high school and a step program for them to go to college and the third is a microbiologist and this weekend did the Paramus side for California and the youngest son is a psychotherapist for the mentally retarded. They are giving back. The meaning for survival and her husband are these wonderful men. Other siblings left – Emil, the brother who could not get a visa into the US so was sent to Palestine, her sister, Betty, to her mother's brother who is a baker in Manhattan who came in '39 and a brother she does not discuss. Ingeborg was three when her father was arrested. A German Sheperd and a black car came with two or three men in black coats and hats and asked her name. She responded and they asked her father's name and when they took the father, her mother ran after them and asked where they are taking him. They responded, "Don't worry, he will be home in a few days." It was three and one-half years until he got home. She saw her father once when he was on his way from Dachau to Buchenwald and the train stopped in Wurzburg in the middle of the night. Her mother woke her and they went to the train station and saw her father at the window and her mother lifted her up to kiss him through the glass.

50:00 She left Germany in January '39 and took a soup tureen that belonged to the King of Prussia along with one and one-half rooms of Baroque furniture that she hated. Her mother took her to the pier where their big crates were parked and were told there was time to bring more belongings. Her mother hailed a cab and returned home and brought more belongings to the pier. Ingeborg was not attached to her nanny who was weird as she did not teach her things. One day her nanny placed an orange on the table before her and she did not know it was fruit. She never saw one before and tried to bounce it but it

made no noise. Then she played with it and juice came out which she got all over her clothes so she discovered how to peel the orange. Her nanny never told her but she learned by self-exploration. She had previously had small pieces of orange that someone else had peeled.

55:00 Ingeborg remembers the bakery and always tends toward sweets and cookies. Every time she fell, they would give her whipped cream on a cookie and told her hurt would get better. Her father was a Master Baker and decorated things like a fairytale such as castles with moats around. They tasted good and they made her special things for special days that you would not want to bite them as they were so pretty. Her father took her around the café and introduce her, "This is my daughter." She was three. He introduced her especially to older ladies with hats with pretty flowers. Her mother worked with her father. She was the brain in the business. Her father was tremendously innovative and her mother was the director so that is where she got her inspiration. Ingeborg would give out the water and listen to the women talking. She got married and had four sons. She was taught, "Before you start first grade, learn to make your bed." She made it though sloppily. One person cooked, one put the wash away, one set the table, one cleared it and one swept the floor. It was an equal opportunity house which started with her mother and she trained her sons to be good husbands. When they were little, they would bring her a box of pansies and pink dandelions. There was a good melting of the father and sons. Her sister got married at 18 and had a daughter and had a hard time as the daughter was handicapped and died. Her sister's son moved to New York a year ago and visited her and took care of all her papers and affairs and got her sister proper services before the niece died from pancreatic cancer. She was put into hospice. Her father opened a bakery in New York and she went after school and picked up the disabled niece who had several operations.

60:00 Ingeborg took her home and took care of Evelyn like a little sister. It was hard when they lost her. She called her a couple of times a week. She came for Thanksgiving and her sons picked her up and brought her back. Her sister died in '69 from cancer so Evelyn lived alone. Betty lived in upper Manhattan in Washington Heights. Emil did not come to the US. He died of obesity in '69. He was in the Israeli Army and went hiking in the Alps. She never met him. Once her sister called that she got a call from someone who saw him. Once his oldest daughter and her husband were visiting in Manhattan and Ingeborg met her there and brought her to her home. Ingeborg went to Israel three times and met the entire family. She stayed with a great-nephew who built a house with one room for her family. He is 44 and taught her to play soccer. He visited here a few times. One year they were traveling with another Israeli couple. He said he had to go to Boston to pick up friends and while walking out the door, said they are coming from Canada and staying with her.

- 65:00 Luckily, Jeffrey was at winter break and changed the sheets. She was the only one to return to Germany. Her mother brought extra items here. She remembers they left the Port of Bremen in February and had a cabin on a ship. She and her mother mostly stayed in bed due to seasickness. Once they went to the dining room and saw others eat corn-on-the-cob for the first time. They stayed ten minutes and returned to their cabin. Her mother said that she has cousins. Her mother and brother died in '69 and her sister in '84. She went with her son and asked her niece to look at her papers. They found a letter from Jamie Miller from Memphis, Tennessee in late '82 with genealogy. Her son was home on break from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst said there is a relative in Mississippi called Camien who may have been our sponsor. He put \$1,000 a person in a bank and left it for five years. She never knew that as they never met.
- 70:00 She called up the Camien Department Store and asked for the President. She spoke to his aunt, Rose Bud. Her maternal grandfather came to the southern part of the US in the early 1900s and there are relatives all over the country. Rose and her husband went south and met Camien who sponsored them and said he has jobs for them. He hired the first Black, a woman, and contributed to the Baptist and Methodist Churches. It was his son Jamie Miller's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Eight of her grandfather's siblings came to the US. Camien married one of her grandfather's sisters. Her grandfather came here with his father before Germany invaded Poland. She told the doctor that she is giving his interview. In college, she read, "The Extermination of European Jews."
- 75:00 She has a copy of the book. She learned the Nazis decided that Jewish men who fought in World War I and received a medal should be released. Ingeborg's father received the iron cross so that might be why he was released from the concentration camp. Her father had many scars on his back which might have been due to beatings. She had a horrific childhood but was determined to survive and bring good into this world. She would not let anyone destroy her will. She came here and saw freedom. She first lived across the street from the school where she played ball and threw balls through hoops and was made captain of the high school basketball team in high school. She accelerated in classes and got accepted into CCNY but her father would not let her go. She got a job and attended CCNY at night. She had a breakdown and could not do it. She completed one semester. Ingeborg worked for Edna Johnson, a shoe company, where she assisted the treasurer and learned about the stock market. Sam trained there to be a road salesman so they met.
- 80:00 When her father returned from the concentration camp, he looked thin and gray and she felt threatened by him. He came to their apartment and he looked like a stranger. When he was arrested, he was a little fatter, with red hair, moustache and goatee. They lived on 87<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, a German/Jewish area, and her father went into the bakery and said, "Max Mayer, Master Baker" and got a job. He was a hard worker. On Jewish High Holidays, she got a new dress and went to synagogue. Her father went early and she came at 10 or 11 AM. She walked to the synagogue all dressed up. At age 11, she was

already developed and her mother had bought her a white dress and her father said, "Jewish men daven (pray) and the crescendo rose and the Rabbi came down from the bema and asked the two of them to go to the back. The Rabbi told her father that she is a woman now. Her father said that if the Rabbi does not want his daughter to sit next to him, he will leave and did so. (In traditional synagogues men and women (age 12 and older) sit separately.)

85:00 Her father always considered her his equal and wanted her to go to college. They had conversations about everything from age 11 to 14 and he respected her opinions and she respected his. Ingeborg was closer to her father than to her mother. She owes her life to her mother who used her jewelry as a bribe when she went to Gestapo Headquarters. Ingeborg usually had hard-boiled egg and toast and her mother peeled her egg even when she was 18. She conversed with each parent separately, not with both parents together. Ingeborg never saw much love between her parents. Both parents adored her. They never spoke about Germany except her mother said that America is the most beautiful country in the world, the land of opportunity where you can be anything you want. Ingeborg did not know that her mother's brother came in 1900 to the US and had property or why her brother was not brought over from Israel.

90:00 She asked but she received no answers. Her grandfather lived with them awhile. He monopolized the one bathroom. He died when she was nine. She told her children about herself and Sam tells them his family background. She does not know of some of her own background. She was left with blank spaces. Ursula, a retired OBGYN in the Survivor's Group went to Germany and found out about her father in Munich. Emil married in February 1910 and lived in a city with seven Jews. He was ambitious in Wurzburg and respected by students at the university. Packers at the pier knew her father. Her parents did not speak of their childhoods. Ingeborg learned English and to play basketball. She was seven in first grade and her teacher told her to stay after school to learn English. The teacher, Mrs. Shellersimsky, made her aware of the world and how to read. About two years later, the family moved to the Bronx and she was well-versed in English by then to become an interpreter. Ingeborg spoke German at home.

95:00 Ingeborg was on committees and did not think it necessary for those from foreign countries to be taught in their own language. She thought it a waste of money. She was close to the Superintendent of Schools. The person in charge of the bilingual program thought it hard for children from foreign countries who don't know a word of English and enter a class where only English is spoken. She was against Ingeborg being against her. One of them said that the children from Germany who go into a class have no idea what the teacher wants. The teacher would point and Ingeborg would eat or go home as directed. Her teacher showed her how to put on her coat. She learned English and skipped three classes and graduated before she was 18 though one and one-half years behind. Ingeborg says she understands it is the lady's job and it might be needed for

children who are older. She still thinks that immersion into language totally is the way to learn quicker. She remembers seeing the Statue of Liberty as the ship stopped and her mother told her to put on her best dress. She went up to the deck and saw a crowd but they were so quiet that you could hear a pin drop and some were crying. Her mother pushed her to the front. There were lines. She could not understand why people cried to see the stone lady. Ingeborg knew it was the Statue of Liberty. She does not know if there were other Jewish refugees on the ship. There were Americans on the ship. The ship was the Bremen, a German ship with German personnel. The Room Steward brought them a huge basket

100:00 She told the children in her neighborhood whether you go to church or synagogue or what country you came from, it means you are free when you see the Statue of Liberty. She was met at the pier by her Uncle Ludwig and driven to his apartment through Times Square. She was surprised that shades were not pulled down and the lights were on. It was not like dark Germany and no one was walking with the Star of David on their sleeve. They stayed with the uncle for a week and then got their own apartment. Her mother's jewelry went to save her father. Her mother put a couple of things into a cotton cloth into a teapot which she put into a bigger pot. It helped them get out of Germany. There is not much left in the pot. She still have one piece of her mother's jewelry. Her mother was daring, brave and smart. They had enough money to rent an apartment. They had brought their Baroque furniture but had to buy a kitchen set and a bed. Ingeborg was the maid. They had five rooms. Her father opened a bakery and her mother worked at the counter with Ingeborg's sister and her husband.

105:00 Their best friend Charlie Feldenscoft said his sister-in-law used to live in NY and stood in line on Sunday for their baked goods. Her father did well but there were family squabbles. His bread and rolls were light and fluffy. Ingeborg worked behind the counter and sliced bread, weighed the items and checked what to charge. She spoke English to the customers. Her teachers encouraged her to go to college. She got mostly As and a few Bs. She wanted to be a scientist like Mme. Curie and find a cure. Her teachers helped her fill out the form for City College. It was competitive and cost money and her father said he did not have any and she is a woman. She got a job and met Sam and things worked out.

108:00

## **Part 2 of 2 Parts**

00:00 Ingeborg shows: 1) Her maternal grandmother's pin from Germany which has seven diamonds and indicates it is platinum. It is the only piece of jewelry her mother left. 2) Ingeborg's German passport she used to travel to the US. She was a minor so she is on her mother's passport. The front page shows a red "J" for Jewish. The next page has a



photo of Ingeborg and her mother taken in January '39. The next page shows their names have an inserted "Sarah" as a middle name. The following page has "Sarah" and an eagle and a swastika. 3) A photo of her parent's home, an urban castle, which was bombed by the British. Ingeborg returned to Germany with her husband 20 years ago and asked an old man whose house it was. He said it was rebuilt and is now an apartment house. She recognized the building but did not go in. 4) A photo of her parents, Max and Rosa, with her and her husband taken 60 years ago. She was pregnant with her son, Sam, who was born in '54 in Brooklyn. Then a close up of the above are shown.

05:00