

Ginger Lane

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Abstract

Ginger Lane (née Bela Weber) was born on November 27, 1939 in Berlin, Germany. She was the youngest of seven children. Alphonse, the only brother was born in 1927, Senter in 1929, Ruth in 1930, Gertrude in 1932, Renee in 1935 and Judy in 1937. Her father, Alexander, was from Westphalia and went to Hungary to sell his umbrellas where he met his wife, Lena, whose father was an orthodox cantor. Her father was Catholic and converted to Judaism to marry the mother and became observant. They moved to Germany. In 1940 her father and all the children had to become Catholic. When Ginger was three, the SS arrested her mother and she never saw her again. Her mother had been hiding Jews to help them escape from Berlin. She recalls her father tinkering with radios and he later became an electrician. In March 1943 the family was arrested and let go after a few weeks. A family friend hid them on his orchard outside of Berlin for one and one-half years. Her father and Alphonse remained at home as they found work and visited the younger children on weekends. The children experienced hunger during that time and returned to Berlin when the Russians were getting close. They hid in a shelter during the bombing. The children had to declare themselves to be orphans to be sponsored by the Jewish Children's Agency of Chicago. They took trains to various DP camps before taking a ship to the US. Upon arrival they stayed in the Bronx until foster care could be arranged in Chicago. Each child was placed in another home. Ginger felt they were being deceptive when they hid in the orchard because they were Jews and converted to Catholicism and when they declared themselves orphans. She was confused when moved to many places in Germany and to several foster care homes until she was adopted by the Spiegels. Being adopted at that time meant no contact with her relatives nor with her documents. Instead of coming to America in 10 days, her father came in 10 years with his new family and Ginger never saw him. She met Gita, her stepmother's daughter and Harry, her father's and stepmother's son. Ginger learned about them when she became an adult. Her adopted family felt she would be confused if associated with her birth family. Her siblings knew about her and often followed her. In 1951 she became a US citizen. Her adopted parents gave her dance lessons and tried to give her sufficient food as she was malnourished. Ginger received \$39 in reparations from Germany for the death of her mother. Judy visited Ginger before moving out-of-state and Ginger received letters every five years from her siblings. In 1986 she had a reunion with her siblings and a party ten years later at her home. Alphonse thanked her adopted father for his care. She maintained a close friendship with Gertrude and Alphonse until he passed away two weeks ago. Ginger told her children about her birth siblings and her daughter was amazed she has 23 first cousins. Ginger is thankful for the kindness of her adopted parents and of the Germans who hid them.