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Summary

Nora (née Shapiro) London was born January 8, 1924 in Berlin to parents, Jacob and Janna (née Schiller, or possibly, Begagon-Aronson) Shapiro. Both were born in Odessa, Russia. Jacob moved to Berlin to study engineering which was not permitted in Russia. They had an arranged marriage in 1911, which Janna resisted. Nora describes the living situation for her parents and their families had in Odessa. Nora had one older sister, Gabrielle, born in 1918. Their Berlin house was on Ruhrstrasse and still stands. Her parents spoke Russian to each other at home, but German to Nora.

Her father worked with early German car manufacturers starting around 1912, and was involved in founding Daimler, the predecessor to Mercedes-Benz. Her parents became German citizens before WWI, which required a religious conversion; they converted to Protestantism. Her mother, disliking Berlin and preparing to divorce, moved to Paris with Nora. Her sister eventually joined them. The Nazis jailed her father for three months around 1935 as a speculator. On release after paying a large fine, he also fled to Paris with his new wife, Eda Denbo.

Nora went to local school as the only Jew, but experienced no discrimination. They were not very religious, but her consciousness as a Jew increased as a teenager in the face of conversion attempts by her catholic school's nuns. Her sister did convert and married a Catholic in Spring, 1940.

As the French army collapsed, Nora and her mother fled towards Spain with her uncle, Simon Begagon-Aronson (a Parker pen distributor) by car. At 16, she was able to travel on her mother's "nanzen" papers. The Portuguese consul near Biarritz defied orders, and gave visas to them and thousands of other Jews. Through her uncle, Mr. Parker of Parker Pen arranged visas to America. They travelled by seaplane, the Pan Am Clipper, via the Azores and Bermuda.

Nora settled with her mother near Central Park West and then at 150 W. 79th Street. Her sister remained in Paris in her mother's house until hiding in the countryside, reclaiming it after the war. Her father eventually came to the U.S. He committed suicide while she was at Columbia University.

Nora visited Paris shortly after the war, and Berlin a few times over subsequent years.