

Margot K. Stern

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Abstract

Margot Stern (née Margote Kahn) was born May 29, 1930 in Bonbaden, Germany, a small town about 40 minutes north of Frankfurt Am Main. Of a populace of about 1,000 people, it had about 10 Jewish families. In the center of the town was the baker where the families brought prepared breads to bake. Her parents were Irma Lichtenstein from Munster and Gustave Kahn from Bombardon. Her father's store was on the first floor of the house which was owned by the father's parents who also lived there. He sold tablecloths, linens and towels until Kristallnacht when the Nazis locked it up. Margot was scared of school where the teacher hit her hands because she was Jewish. The family was close to their non-Jewish neighbors until Hitler's laws forbade interaction with Jews. The Jewish children in town were older than her so she did not have friends until she was sent to live with a foster family in Frankfurt after Kristallnacht as could no longer attend the local school. Margot's family was observant and had to walk to Braunfels to attend services. Her father was arrested on Kristallnacht and sent to Buchenwald until January '39. Life was scary in Frankfurt as they had to go down to the cellar almost nightly due to the bombing. Margot attended a Jewish Zionist School in Frankfurt and saw posters that said, "Jews are our misfortune" as she walked to school. Upon her father's discharge from Buchenwald, Margot's parents moved to Frankfurt and her father had to perform forced labor and report to the Gestapo on his progress on departing from Germany. When the path to China closed, the family went twice to the American Consulate at Stuttgart until they got sufficient affidavits from US relatives. They received ration cards permitting less food than non-Jews. Her father obtained tickets on the Nyassa, a fishing vessel leaving Portugal for the US. They went to Berlin and HIAS and the JOINT (Jewish organizations) helped them and suggested they fly out of the country. After many attempts they flew to Stuttgart, to Lyon, to Marseille, to Barcelona, to Madrid with help by the Jewish organizations upon transferring until they reached Lisbon five days later just 15 minutes before the ship ticket office was closing. This was April '41 and it took two weeks to cross the Atlantic to Brooklyn where an aunt and uncle met them and took them to their Washington Heights apartment in Manhattan. After two weeks they obtained a room nearby and Margot started school which she enjoyed for the first time and after a month, learned English. Margot returned to Bombardon (?) briefly and had a visitation to Frankfurt three years ago where hearing German disturbed her. She spoke to school children and saw that some were learning what their grandparents did during the war. Some of her relatives are listed on a plaque at the Frankfurt Jewish cemetery.