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Summary

Susan Stahl was born Suse Stein on November 14, 1925 in Burgsinn (Bavaria), Germany. She had two younger brothers; one died of scarlet fever after Hitler came to power. Her father, Erna Katz, came from Burgsinn; her mother was from a small town in another part of Germany. Susan enjoyed vacations with her maternal aunt, not married, and grandfather who lived in another small town. Her maternal grandmother had died during the influenza pandemic in 1918. Her father had served in WWI and earned the Iron Cross first class. He supplied raw materials for shoemakers. His mother lived in a double house with Susan's family. Her father also had a brother and his wife who lived in Berlin. They would be instrumental in helping rescue Susan and her family. There was a small Jewish community in her hometown and most Jews owned small businesses. Susan and her family mixed mostly with other Jews. The family was observant but not orthodox and belonged to the small synagogue in town.

When Hitler came to power in 1933 Susan was visiting her uncle in Berlin and witnessed his motorcade and Hitler salutes. Back home she and her younger brother saw the Hitler youth parades and her brother wished he could be part of it. At first, little changed for her and her father's business. But gradually the local Catholics did not want to be seen with the family. Her teacher at school showed himself to be a Nazi anti-Semite and treated her harshly. Her brother's teachers, on the other hand, were kinder. After a while, her father took her and her brother out of this school and sent them to a one room schoolhouse in a neighboring town run by her Hebrew teacher. Apparently, he was an awful teacher. Everything changed on Kristallnacht. Her father, who had been trying to get the family out of Germany since 1936, was arrested with the other German men of the town. Susan and her fellow students were ordered to leave school and go home. Once home she saw bonfires in front of Jewish homes, but her house was saved because of her father's Iron Cross. Two weeks later he and the other men in town were sent home. Her father never spoke of his experiences, but he seemed fine.

By the end of 1938, Susan's grandmother and grandfather were in old age homes. They and Susan's aunt, her mother's sister, would later be killed by the Nazis. Her parents went to a Zionist Hachsharah where her father hoped to learn how to farm. Susan and her surviving brother went to Berlin to stay with her uncle and aunt where he was put in a Jewish orphanage. When the aunt and uncle were able to flee to England and later to the United States Susan was also put in the orphanage. Her parents then moved her to a Jewish school to learn dressmaking, but the Nazis moved her and the other girls to another building and forced them to work as slave laborers. Fortunately, her father was able to get papers to go to the United States since her uncle and aunt, now there, sponsored them. This was in August 1941. A month later, after some further difficulties, the family were able to emigrate on one of the last trains carrying Jews from Germany.

After some adjustment, Susan came to be grateful to the United States and neither she nor her parents felt any loyalty to Germany, even after the war. It has been hard for her to talk of her experiences and only recently was willing to tell what happened to her.