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Summary

This interview is primarily with Isabel Langsdorf. Her daughter, Julie Langsdorf, conducted research on her mother's early life and participated in the interview.

Isabel Langsdorf, born Ilse Bauer, was born to an unwed mother in Frankfurt, Germany on November 4, 1937. She did not remember her biological mother nor her biological father, but her mother's name was Ida and her father's name was Solomon. Her mother spent time in Gurs and then was transferred to Auschwitz where she was killed. Her father left for Uruguay and Argentina in 1937 and returned to Germany in the 1950s. Her mother left Isabel at a Jewish home two weeks after she was born. All this is known from the research done by Julie.

Isabel lived in the Jewish home in Germany until she was almost three. Through research she learned that the home was badly damaged during Kristallnacht but she was able to stay on in one of the buildings. A Dutch social worker, (Geertruida "Truus" Wijsmuller-Meijer), who helped save up to thousands of children and adults during the war, actively worked to have Isabel adopted. Her eventual adopted parents, however, were in Aruba, so Isabel needed to be sent there. She was given to a family in November 1939 who were going to Aruba, but German mines blew up the ship near the English shore. Close to 200 people were killed, but Isabel survived with injuries and was hospitalized. After she recovered, she was sent back to the Holland and the Jewish home. Her social worker found another couple leaving for Aruba from Lisbon, and she took Isabel to Spain where someone else took her to Lisbon. The ship left in May 1940, two days before the German occupied the Netherlands. Isabel arrived safely and was taken by friends of her parents because they were interned by the Germans. After a few months, the adoptive parents (Lieberman) finally gained custody of Isabel. Again, Isabel discovered all this later.

Isabel's newly adoptive parents were very loving. Neither parent had family in Germany or other parts of occupied Europe. The family stayed in Aruba, in the Dutch West Indies, for many years. Though Jewish, they were very secular and had no attachment to Jewish organizations. Their friends were made up of German speakers, Jews and non-Jews. Isabel knew almost nothing about Judaism. She attended school in Venezuela until she was eighteen when her parents sent her to a private school in Toronto, Canada which taught in Spanish and English. After finishing high school there she went for a year to study in New Brunswick, Canada. She returned to Venezuela for one year and then went for higher education to the Pratt institute in Brooklyn, New York where, following her mother's artistic interests, Isabel studied design. Except for summers Isabel never returned to live in Venezuela. She married at 21 in 1958 and moved to Washington, D.C. She has lived there, or nearby, ever since. In addition to her husband, she has three grown children. Isabel considered herself very fortunate and wished her birth mother had survived to enjoy life after the Holocaust. Although it was hard for Isabel to show emotion and become close to people, perhaps because of her early life, she loved her adoptive parents and has lived a happy life.