

RG-50.030.1097

Summary

Irma (née Irmgard Wertheim) Pretsfelder was born September 4, 1926 in Bürgeln, Germany. She had a brother four years older, Erich, who died fighting for the U.S. Army in WWII. Her parents, Bertha (née Katz) and Isidore, were Orthodox. Her father was a cattle dealer, who had fought for Germany in WWI, earning the Iron Cross. Her father had three sisters, one of whom married his mother's brother. They had one son, Siegfried. Irma describes the character of her mother and father and their local friends.

Her early schooling was largely unaffected by Hitler's rise to power. Her brother was sent to Frankfurt when he finished school at 14 to prepare to immigrate to join relatives in America. He left for the U.S. just before Kristallnacht at age 16, first to New York and then to Baltimore. Irma's parents openly discussed the rising anti-Semitism and how they might handle it. Due to harassment by her peers, she changed to a school in a Marburg synagogue. On Kristallnacht, the synagogue was burned down and her father was arrested without cause and sent to Buchenwald.

On his release in 1939, she says her father was a "changed" man. They arranged travel to Britain where they were assigned to a farm in Leicestershire that treated them poorly. Irma was then sent to a distant relative in Maidstone where she could attend school. Once the war started, a tribunal determined that her parents were enemy aliens, sending them to separate detention camps on the Isle of Man. After a while, they were released back to another farm. Three years later, Irma found work in a biscuit factory. Her father had health problems and died in 1945, shortly after hearing of her brother's combat death in Manila.

Though only distant relatives, she and her mother were well-received when they could reached Baltimore in 1946. Irma worked in a department store, while her mother worked in a clothing factory. She married in 1948. Her husband was also from Germany, the town of Fürth; his sister attended school with Dr. Henry Kissinger. She had a son and daughter, Jeffrey and Shelley; one other child died at seven months. Irma concludes her testimony with reflections on her life.