

## **RG-50.031.0105**

### **Summary**

**Lillian Merriam Gerstner** b. Nashville, TN on October 10, 1951; Director of Special Projects/Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois, formerly Site Director/Illinois Holocaust Memorial Foundation (Main St.), graduate Northwestern/Chicago; mother/native of Berlin, survived because of gentile grandmother (mother converted to Judaism in marriage); Jewish grandfather, arrested 1943, died at Auschwitz; father native of Warsaw, survived Siberia/Soviet labor camp; parents arrive to US 5/13/1949, never spoke of their Holocaust experiences, Lillian pieced together parents' stories following their deaths; joining earliest Skokie support group for 2<sup>nd</sup> generation non-Holocaust survivors; discussion re: Skokie's attempted neo-Nazi march (late 1970s); recollections volunteering in HMFI's earliest days, office personnel/volunteers, including but not limited to Ann Lambert, Barbara Abrams, Joe & Gita Neumann, Margie Oppenheimer, Pearl Karp, Judy & Al Lachman, Ellen Harris, Leon Stein, John Fink; Lillian volunteered to type newsletter, later was asked to join office full-time; Lillian's work on survey sent to educational superintendents, leading to Illinois House Bill 3 (1/1/1990), becoming first state to mandate Holocaust education; earliest speaker's bureau, which included Lisa Durham (primary organizer), Felicia Brenner, Bella Korn, Barbara Steiner, David Figman, Judy & Earl Lachman, Mark Weinberg, Adam Storkopf, Peter Kirchberg, Werner Edelman; academic speakers, other imp figures in HMFI earliest days, Erna I. Gans/1st President, Barbara Steiner/membership, Abe Kogen/treasurer, Myrtle Figman; early fundraiser honoree Manfred Steinfeld; Skokie 2<sup>nd</sup>-generation support groups: ACHS "Association Children of Holocaust Survivors", HACS "Holocaust Association of Child Survivors", "Hidden Children"; museum receiving few pieces of anti-Semitic mail, some vandalism to building; Gershanov Memorial Student Essay Contest; lending library; artifacts donated to museum; Book of Remembrance first used as teaching tool, later placed in new building's Room of Remembrance; museum's documentary films in collaboration with Loyola, e.g. "Voyage of St. Louis" & "Choosing One's Way /Resistance in Auschwitz/Birkenau," produced/directed by Ted Kay/Allen Secher; Judy & Leon Stein teacher's guide; study guides; Lillian's effort on building bibliography; museum soliciting first non-Jewish board member; expansion efforts, new buildings.