

Summary of Oral History: Alice (nee Klugmann) Thomas

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This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [03/2022]

Alice (nee Klugmann) Thomas b. 2/14/1921 Vienna, Austria, raised by mother, father, and mother's mother-born Czechoslovakia, d.1935 age 75, buried on top of one of her daughters, another one of her 15 children died at age 21; Alice grew up in a Jewish community in Vienna (3rd floor flat); attended all-girl school; mother worked in lace factory, father a bookkeeper for another business; memories of Jewish holidays and Shabbat; first boyfriend escaped to US, served in US Army; second boyfriend fled to France but was later killed; public school and joining Zionist group; only Jewish family in apartment building, neighbors were friends until Hitler came; high school and Berlitz French training, became opera fan, enjoyed American movies; family vacations, visiting father's parents, discussion re: extended family; political happenings leading to war; her work at textile mill under wonderful employer, saving up to become a doctor; Alice reflects back to 9th birthday, receiving a piano; Mar 1935 Nazi march in Vienna; 1938 family move to Vienna's safer 1st district into one room; family picked up by Nazis, Jews put through orders designed to dehumanize, father had been picked up during Kristallnacht, killed at Dachau; receiving letter from father that Nazis broke his hand, later learning he was used for experiments; discussion re: a Christian friend, her drunken father turning on Alice and family; Alice's Christian employer transfer her to safer work in the country but employer eventually had to let her go; after Kristallnacht, Alice's mother encourages Alice to flee to aunt living in London, immigrates as domestic server; Alice's separation from her mother, uncle takes her to train; 5/17/1939 passage to England through Holland, Alice and children sickly; Alice credits England with saving her life but was initially befuddled at British constant use of word "bloody"; becomes nanny to Nobbs family with girl (Audrey) and boy (Peter) who were wonderful to Alice but she suffers in missing parents—Nobbs try to locate Alice's parents to no avail; meeting future husband in Peterborough - Frank Thomas, a cabinet maker, b.US his family had moved to Wales; Alice leaves Nobbs family after a year to marry, England changes her status to "enemy alien"; couple works in airplane parts factory constantly bombed but rebuilt; discussion re: war rations; 1944, daughter Carol b. 3 days after Japanese surrender; learning her mother had been killed at Buchenwald; post-war Alice pushes away from Judaism, which upsets her during interview and she discloses that she has wrestled with depression throughout life; 1948 Alice and Frank sell house, immigrate to US, settle in Chicago but Alice struggles to find happiness; Frank finds work, Alice becomes a beautician, they buy a house; daughter Carol is not raised in Jewish faith, celebrate Christmas but do not attend church; Carol earns a MBA; at time of interview, Alice does not have local friends in Jewish faith, most neighbors are Christian and are aware that Carol is Jewish, have no problem with it, however Carol maintains connections with early-life Jewish friends who had fled to Israel and L.A.; Skokie Nazi march and US resistance to US first black president prompts Carol to believe another Holocaust could happen; Carol reads from last letters received from her mother; interview brings in Alice's Jewish neighbors and friends Bobbie Fleishman and Mike Schmidt, instrumental in making interview possible - Mike presents copy of Alice's birth certificate, photograph of Alice's Vienna 4th grade class - Mike surprised that they had taught some Jewish studies in public school, photograph of Alice in her Zionist group, Alice's passport out of Vienna (black strap had been applied to Jewish passports), copy of marriage certificate 7/20/1940; early photo of Alice and daughter Carol; Alice's British passport to US where they were housed in Brooklyn with uncle.