

Oral history interview with Roni Berenson

Roni Berenson was born in 1930 in Berlin, German, where she lived until 1941 when her family left Germany. In 1935 they moved to the Tiergarten district, Berlin. Her father was Victor Lewinsohn; he was a dentist in Berlin. Her mother was Annie (or Anne) short for Alexandrine; her maiden name was Proskauer; she was a bookkeeper. He was a veteran of World War I on the Eastern front. He was born in the part of Germany that was, at that time, part of Poland so he had a Polish quota number. Her family belonged to the Jewish Congregation. On Kristallnacht, the school (Jewish) she went to was burned because it was attached to a synagogue.

Two young male cousins went to Israel in 1934 or 35. They returned in 1937 to take their mother (her aunt) to Israel. In 1938 an uncle and his wife went to Bolivia; after 5-6 years, they went to the US. Another aunt and her husband went to Shanghai where they opened a bakery; they eventually ended up in the US. Another aunt went on a young people's transport to England in 1939 and lived in London.

Another aunt and uncle, Jacob and Lissen (sp) Rotman (sp) were taken in February 1943. Her grandmother, Mrs. Lewinsohn, was taken in January with the first transport, as well as Else and Trudi Cohen. Franz Cohen was not heard from. They had lived on Flensburger Street in Berlin. Cousins who had been bombed out moved to Steglitz, Berlin. A family they knew, the Pinnars (sp), were taken away before they left Berlin. Another family they knew, the Hoffmanns (sp) were also taken away. June 1942 her aunt Margareta was taken away.

Her grandmother had to deal with the head of the Berlin Police Department, Strecker, for not having written on a document that "Sarah" was her middle name.

She and her parents left Berlin on July 14, 1941. They took a train that crossed into France at Bordeaux, then through Paris, and into Spain, ending at San Sebastian. Then, in Barcelona they took a converted freighter that transported 1,000 people. The trip took two weeks; they arrived in New York on August 21. Only one ship left Europe after theirs; it left just a few days later. The next one after that was the St. Louis.

When they first arrived, they stayed with cousins who lived in Cleveland Heights. The family's name was changed to Lewinson. When her parents got jobs, they moved to Cleveland where they belonged to the Gates of Hope congregation.

She currently lives in Mayfield Heights, Cleveland, Ohio.