

Joan Schwab

File 1 of 1

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Abstract

Joan Schwab was born on March 24, 1926 in Berlin where she lived until 1939 when she was chosen to attend school in England. She was successful to get her twin brother to England, too, but not her parents. Her parents wanted to leave as the Gestapo came looking for her father but they could not leave legally as did not have a sponsor. They were sent to Thereisenstadt and perished in Auschwitz in 1944. The twins were evacuated to Chichester when the War began. First they were placed in the same home and, later, were separated. It was difficult adjusting to speaking English and to living in a home with no hot water and an outside toilet. The twins returned to London in 1944. Joan took a one year bookkeeping and typing course and obtained a position in a London law office. She remained with the Denims and soon converted. She obtained a translator position near Munich so that she could search for her parents. Both in England and as a translator, people looked at her as German rather than as Jewish. She remained for two years and decided to immigrate to the US as she learned that she had an aunt living in LA. Joan married a Jewish/German refugee who is in the foreign service and they had two daughter who they did not raise as Jews.

Summary

00:00 Joan Schwab was born on March 24, 1926 in Berlin to Israel Nussbaum and Toni Nussbaum Ezekiel (?). She lived in the Tiergarten section of Berlin and they had lovely artwork. From age 6 to 10, she attended private school with her twin brother and another girl where they had one teacher for the three of them. Then for a year she attended another private school that was mixed Christian and Jewish. Afterwards Joan attended the Jewish School, Altmere Beast (?) which is now the Anne Frank School. The family attended services at Adas Israel Congregation every Saturday morning and on the High Holidays. Her mother was from the Bundist party and not religious. Her grandfather and his son moved in with them in 1936 and the grandfather stated that he fought for the Kaiser, was born in Germany and will die in Germany (but died in a concentration camp). Her grandfather was more religious than the family but did not object when they ate out pork. His shop was taken away from him and he helped Joan's father with his four leather shops which was helpful. The leather shops were shoemaker/bedaska (?) which sold equipment and materials (liche bronze (?)) for shoemakers. They observed the holidays at home. She liked Sukkoth as a butcher gave them sausage. They fasted on Yom Kippur. In 1938 her brother was Bar Mitzvah. By that time they thought of emigrating and the parents told them not to hit back if anyone called them "Jew." Although they were not allowed to go to the movies, the cleaning lady took them along

with her daughter to see Shirley Temple. Her mother played cards and helped in the shop. It was a happy childhood.

05:00 Berlin was a better place for Jews than other places. They went to a festival on Unter den Linden where they saw Hitler and policemen on horses. A horse kicked her mother and the police asked their names as wanted to help them but they did not want to answer, "Nussbaum." Her mother had blond hair and blue eyes so looked Aryan. The experience was scary. As the Nazis rose to power, the family got scared and talked about it but thought it was just a passing phase. They thought that people would realize that Hitler was no good. They prepared to go illegally overseas as did not have a sponsor but they stayed. After Kristallnacht, they thought more seriously about leaving. They received a phone call from a 16-year-old cousin who worked in Berlin and told Joan's father to go for a walk. He went to his sister's as the Gestapo did not bother women's homes. Joan's grandfather was 72 so he stayed home. Joan's uncle went to his girl friend's house. The janitor's wife asked if Joan's father was home and they said that he was not. They did not know if the Gestapo had asked her to find out or if she was doing it to warn them. Two men in black leather came and asked for her father and they said that he was out. The Gestapo looked through the apartment and asked how old her grandfather was as he was sleeping. Her mother was shaking. At the Jewish school, forms were passed out that a secondary school in London together with the PTA were bringing three Austrian, Czech and German girls to their school.

10:00 Joan completed the forms and she was chosen as the German girl. On May 21st she went to the railroad station to take the children's transport. It was a dreadful experience. A Polish woman was dragged by her hair by the Gestapo and was screaming. It was a new experience to go to another county where another language was spoken. She was told not to have any jewelry and she was wearing a gold ring so she put it in the trash. When the train got to Holland, she took it out of the trash. They were welcomed with cookies, crackers and juice upon arrival in Holland. She was thankful when she got to Holland. Soon after arriving in England, she suddenly became much bigger, like a normal 13-year-old British girl. Her parents wrote that they made illegal attempts to leave but her father thought they would be caught at the border. Joan succeeded in getting her twin brother out but not her parents who perished in Auschwitz. Six weeks later was Kristallnacht. Her father's brother, Dortmund (?) was a teacher and returned from the concentration camp with frostbite. Her English teacher came back from the concentration camp with smashed front teeth. It was dreadful for Joan as she trusted the system as a child but now realized that nothing would get better. The Germans were not yet ready to keep the men permanently, just kept them for six weeks. They fined all the Jews for the Kristallnacht damage and made them give up their silver to pay for it. At that point, Germany did not have sufficient facilities to imprison all the Jews.

- 15:00 The Germans wanted the Jews to leave so they could obtain their money. Therefore, any Jews who wanted to leave would have to do so without taking any money. Her father lost his four stores during Kristallnacht and had no income so they had to live on their assets. Joan did not have any Christian friends because their class only contained one Jewish girl besides the two of them. The family did not associate with their neighbors, only with Jewish circles. They lived a life apart and were careful not to give cause for the neighbors to criticize them. They listened to the BBC and to foreign broadcasts but made sure the noise did not penetrate the walls as they could get arrested for listening to them. On the train to England, she got fed when they reached the Dutch border and on the ship crossing with white bread and corn flakes, both new to her. Upon arrival in England, she took a train to London and was placed in a large hall where they called out the children's names. Yolanda, the ward of the headmistress, was there to pick her up. Later, Joan found out that the German teacher paid for her education. She was placed with Norman and Elsie Denim (?) who had a girl her age and a son four years older. Yolanda told her that this was the last time that she could speak German. They had tea and sat around a table and served something that looked like chocolate paste.
- 20:00 The son, Hugh, said that it was chocolate. She went upstairs and cried and realized that she must adjust to her new life. Joan is still close to Mari (?), her foster sister and to her foster brother. She would write her parents regularly and they responded. Her Auntie Elsie took her to Sunday school, thus missing services at her Plymouth Christian Church though she was devout. Joan had carried one suitcase from Germany filled with nice clothes which were not needed as they wore school uniforms. Mari's friends contributed some uniforms for her and she grew so fast that she outgrew her beautiful clothes. When Joan was evacuated to Chichester, Auntie Elsie sold her clothes and she was only left with three pairs of black wool stockings which she hated to wear. She was formerly rich and now she was poor. It did not bother her except for the clothes as everyone was kind. She felt liberated as was away from the atmosphere where she could not say what she thought and no longer had to be afraid of the police. It was a wonderful feeling to be free. She was not worried to be Jewish in a Christian community as everyone was kind and no one asked if she was Jewish nor treated her any differently. On Sunday morning she walked across the common to Hebrew School and approached the Head Rabbi to ask him to find a home for her brother. He said that she lives with non-Jews and until she moves to a Jewish family, he could not do anything. She became depressed and started crying and told Aunt Elsie. Uncle Norman decided to adopt her brother and he came to England in August '39.
- 25:00 Uncle Norman processed papers for her parents but war broke out in September so they could not leave. She was ashamed that a Jewish person would act like that and still feels bad about it. Chichester was a small town in Sussex in SW England and had no Jews. Uncle Norman wrote the Red Cross and asked if they could go to church and Joan's

father responded that the children would know what is right. Uncle Norman was a customs official in the British civil service and had a Ph. D in theology and was interested in Jews and understood the connection between the Old and the New Testaments. Auntie Elsie did not treat her as a Jew but as another child in the home. When her doll's eyes fell out, Auntie Elsie took her to a doll hospital and had eyes placed back in. The foster parents were not physical so there was no hugging so she hugged the doll. Her brother had Hugh as a companion and fit in for the three weeks he was with the family. Then they were evacuated as the War began. Her new school was in English so the first few days were difficult. It ended up like Yolanda indicated with no German spoken, just English. She imitated Yolanda and told her brother that they were only going to speak English. Her brother arrived two months after her.

30:00 Joan was placed in a lower grade in school so it would be less difficult for her. One child called her "fish face" so she called their dog, "spotty." English class was her favorite and she liked geography and drawing but not science. Her brother started school when they got to Chichester and was best in math. Joan felt that England and Germany had the same level of education and there was a similar amount of school time and homework. She remained in Chichester until 1944 when she graduated from high school and returned to London. She and her brother were billeted in the same house with an old lady and her middle-aged working daughter. Soon they were reassigned separately. Her brother was happy in his household and in 1944 he returned to London. Joan was placed with a woman who got a nervous breakdown and a neighbor took her in along with three other evacuees. The four of them slept in one double bed and Joan got upset when the dog spilled hot chocolate on her. They were able to take a shower every two weeks by placing money in a machine to turn on the hot water. They took turns to be first, second, third and fourth in the shower. It was very cold as they only had one fireplace in the living room. There was no hot water and the toilet was outside. It was a lower middle class home. Auntie Nell was educated until age 14 and could barely write. Her husband was a fish monger and was called up to be with the police.

35:00 The other three children returned to London and she remained. When the husband was called up, Joan got closer to Auntie Nell. They had little money. Joan was given a bicycle on one birthday so she could cycle the two miles to school and back for lunch. Now Aunt Nell is in an old age home in London. Joan and Aunt Nell slept in the double bed so they could rent the other room out as they needed the money. Mr. Watts came every summer to stay with them while he sold ice cream. At first he did not want to live there as Joan was German but relented and stayed. Auntie Nell was not a devout Christian but felt Jews are different but soon learned that they are not different. Joan kept a locked diary and wrote in it when she was unhappy. One day Auntie Nell read it so Joan stopped writing and became unhappy. Her writing was in German so Nell could not read it. They only had cold water and no bathroom so took a bath in the kitchen. She

washed her neck with cold water when the teacher remarked that she had a dirty neck. One day Joan saw a German airplane flying low in the sky and she was afraid that she would be machine-gunned down so ran off her bicycle into a doorway. The plane might have crashed. There was an Air Force base nearby and the German plane might have been looking for it.

40:00 Joan resented going to Sunday School at church. A man called her, "My child of Abraham" and she argued that she was not as it meant a lot to her. One night she dreamt of Jesus Christ and she was happy as she had converted and could talk to him anywhere whether in the kitchen or in bed. She remembered Jehovah as a jealous G-d. Jesus seemed more like a friend and a father that she did not have. It was nice to grow up in the small city of Chichester. Her high school was held in the Chichester high school building. The teachers lived nearby and looked after the students in many ways. When they were 16 years old, Joan and her brother were called before the Council in Turnbridge Wells and asked if they would give away secrets to the Germans to save their parents. They replied they would not and did not know any secrets. The British were not too skeptical of them as Germans or as children as they spoke English. Many Germans were sent to the Isle of Man or not allowed to stay in important areas such as London and Birmingham. Joan and her brother were considered to be German, not Jewish refugees. Since they were young, they were not interned. They returned to London to the Denims. Her brother is in Sri Lanka. Mari was at Cambridge. Her brother had a job with a lawyer when they lived with the Denims. Joan had a scholarship in Chichester and wanted to attend secretarial school as was aware she was being supported by people who were not her parents. She wanted a profession whereby she could support her parents. She had a one year bookkeeping and typing course and obtained a position in a London law office and remained with the Denims.

45:00 They went to church together and she converted and became a Sunday School teacher. Auntie Elsie took her to the Jewish community and told them that she converted. A Jew from Cambridge wrote Joan to assure that it was satisfactory with her to convert. Her brother got married and did not raise his children with an affiliation. Joan's husband is also a Jewish/German refugee. He is in the foreign service and they did not raise their children as Jews. One daughter is married to a Jew and identifies as Jewish but does not attend synagogue although her son was Bar Mitzvah. Her other daughter is not religious, is professional and is about to marry a non-religious Catholic. During the War, they had doodle bugs (?) and V2 rockets so she had to stay six weeks in an air raid shelter with 300 people. Her office was bombed and she had to clean out the glass. Doodle bugs were pilotless planes, the first rockets programmed to go over cities. They would make noise and when the motor stopped, it crashed. In 1941, just before her parents left for Thereseinstadt, they requested money to go to Shanghai. She had no money to send them

and never heard from them again. She thought people would think she was writing to the enemy so did not write again.

- 50:00 In 1944 her parents went from Thereseinstadt to Auschwitz and were killed immediately. After the War, Joan went to Germany to be a translator and would visit the Joint Distribution Committee weekly and submit 18 names to see if there were any survivors. She met a lady who last saw her parents in Auschwitz and told her that they were killed. One aunt and one cousin survived. Joan became a translator. She had been trained in Paris and given an American uniform and went to Pulach (?) outside of Munich. Her job was to translate letters that were confiscated for censorship. This was to try to determine where the Nazis were located. At 18, she was one of the youngest translators. Most of them were either refugees who had spent the War in England or were American refugees. She remained for two years and met other British people but she was the only one who thought of herself as British. The other thought of her as German. The Americans were thought of as Americans. She felt free to immigrate to the US and wrote to her aunt in LA who had immigrated at age 21. Joan learned about her aunt through her sons. She felt that this was a good decision. Joan had learned of the translation opportunity from members of her church that Americans were hiring people to go to Germany and thought she would have the opportunity to find out about her parents. It was well paid and she met others in the same position. It was wonderful to see the Germans were so poor and humiliated that little children had to collect cigarette stubs. She had hated the Germans before and later was able to go to Austria as an American diplomatic wife and treated them fairly.
- 55:00 The Denims always prayed in their living room before going to church. After the War, before Pulach (?), Uncle Norman finished prayers and Auntie Elsie prayed and said that if her parents died, she thought they would go to heaven even if they did not know Jesus Christ.