

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
Volunteer Collection Interview

Regine Ginsberg
RG-50.106*0183

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Interviewer - Gail Schwartz

Track 1 - Regine Ginsberg (nee Regine Zylberstejn) was born in Brussels, Belgium on November 19, 1925. Her mother, Leah Silaman, born in 1898 in Biala Podlowska, and her father Wolvich, born in 1896, were married in Poland and had a son in 1918. They left for Belgium when Wolvich was to be inducted into the Polish army. He was in the leather goods business and had a factory behind the house. Grandparents, aunts and uncles then came in the 30's to Brussels. The family had a beach house in Blankenburg. Regine's family was religiously observant. She remembers Passover preparations and making wine, her brother being tutored for his Bar Mitzvah by the rabbi. She spoke Yiddish at home and French in school. She did not mix with the non-Jewish children in her neighborhood. She went to public school until she was 14. German Jews would come for dinner between 1935-1937 which was the only way she learned that there were problems. Not being an independent child she was protected from hearing about Hitler. Her father wired \$10,000 to Chase Bank in New York in the 1930's. Her first memory of the day in 1940 when she and her family left their home was of bombs coming down and people boarding up the windows. They started running to catch a train, not taking suitcases, because they thought they were coming back. The train was filled with refugees and Regine was frightened and did not understand what was going on. Though she was 14 she does not remember the train trip. They got to the south of France and stayed with a farmer in St. Gaudens, and being close to Spain she could see the Pyrenees. Her parents thought of their children's survival first, and then of themselves. Her 21 year old brother, Jack, wanted to go back to his girlfriend in Brussels, but everyone just waited in a small apartment and used food stamps. They were arrested and put in prison in St. Gaudens. People spit on them when they were walking in the street to the prison. She and mother were taken to a prison in Toulouse and then released because Regine was 14. Her brother and father were in prison in the vicinity of Toulouse where they wore a uniform and clogs and were released after 7 weeks. Her mother smuggled herself back to Brussels and brought back Sabbath candlesticks and Wolvich's tallis and tefillin and diamond jewelry which she used to bribe the guards. Her father wrote to a cousin Hyman Moravitz in Squirrel Hill, Pennsylvania, and he would go to the consulate in Toulouse hoping to get news. The family finally got papers in June 1942. They were on the last boat out of France from Marseilles because two weeks later the Nazis occupied all of France. She remembers not seeing or hearing anything, but just holding her father's hand in the street. The voyage took six weeks, with stops in Casablanca for two days, then to Vera Cruz. Her parents never explained why or what they were doing and Regine asked no questions. She felt relief after leaving Belgium and when they got to New York in June 1942 she understood she was safe. Now she worships this country. She did not speak English and had not gone to school for two years in France. They first went to their cousins in Squirrel Hill in Pittsburgh, and then settled in McKeesport. She learned English quickly upon starting school in September 1942. Her father and brother would go to New York to buy leather goods and the family lived in a rented apartment. It was a difficult adjustment and

she felt insecure and frightened by many things and does not remember ever being at peace in high school. Her mother adapted well, learned English and worked with Regine's father in the leather goods store which became a successful business. Her brother married and moved to Texas so her parents moved to Dallas. Regine went to Texas also where she met her future husband Reuben Ginsberg in Athens, Texas. He was going to Columbia Law School in New York, and they married in 1947.

Track 2 - Regine's father changed his name from Zylberstejn to Silven when they lived in McKeesport, so her name became Regine Silven. Her brother enlisted in the army during the war and was sent to Belgium and did intelligence work acting as a French interpreter. He lived in the family house in Brussels with other soldiers. Her family didn't talk about the war years. Her mother was unhappy in the US and her father had a heart attack at age 50. Though it was a struggle here they showed the courage of survivors.

Reuben was a student at Columbia Law School in 1947 and they lived in Nyack, New York in the army barracks at Camp Shanks. Regine took courses at Columbia also. Her emotional security depended on him. She was fearful of thunder, of flying, of going into a store, all of which she attributes to her childhood wartime experience beginning at age 14. She has a son and 3 daughters.

Israel had more meaning to her later on in life. Her parents had known that Jews were exterminated, that there were ghettos and they knew they had to save themselves and their children. They did not discuss what happened even in 1945 as it was too painful because they lost members of their family.

After Reuben graduated from law school, they moved with their son Michael to Tulsa, Oklahoma and then back to Dallas, Texas where Reuben practiced law. She became an art dealer and opened up a gallery in the 1970's. She raised money for the renovation of a Dallas nursing home. She had a Bat Mitzvah in 1992. Her husband passed away in 2008.

Life didn't start for her until she moved to Texas. Her best memories are from that time on. There are two parts to her life. She didn't want to think about the early part as it affected her emotionally so she closed it off, though her war experience has made her strong in crises. She was overprotective with her children. She was incensed with the treatment of black people in the United States. She says America is her country and she hopes the world has learned the lessons of the Holocaust.

She had nightmares at night of Nazis chasing her but kept it to herself. The best memories of her life started with her marriage, when she started understanding life. She appreciated the freedom in this country, where you don't have an ID card saying you are Jewish. She says the new generation of Germans should not be blamed. She has no desire to go back to the south of France as she does not have good memories of that time.