

MIRIAM KNEOPFLER
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Miriam was born in Berlin in 1918. Her parents were actually stateless, having come from Russia in 1905 and not considered German citizens. She had a brother who was 16 years older and a doctor, and 2 older sisters. Miriam actually wanted to study medicine, but her parents pushed her towards a career in music. Her father, who died in 1936, was an accountant. A sister who was married to a gentile died in childbirth and her husband remained in Germany. The family was not religious and they had many non-Jewish friends.

She was aware of the rising anti semitism by 1934 and 1935 but it wasn't until Kristallnacht that they thought of leaving. Her brother went to America. Miriam could have gone to England as a housekeeper but she refused. She and her then boyfriend had an opportunity to go to Shanghai; her mother and sister didn't go and eventually were killed in the camps. Miriam and her boyfriend left for Shanghai on the boat Julius Caesar in Italy. The mood on the boat was joyous, and it carried all German Jews. Miriam was able to leave with some money and valuables.

In Shanghai her boyfriend, who had a doctorate in economics, got a job working as an accountant in a bus company. They had a good life- maid, piano, they ate out often. She said the biggest adjustment she had to make was being without her mother, as she describes herself as a spoiled brat. Miriam tried to get a job with the orchestra but it didn't work out. Through her friendship with Allis Hayim, a Jewish Egyptian, and the right hand of Sir Victor Sassoon, she was able to give a piano recital on November 25, 1941. But then the war broke out a week later and Hayim and others were taken away and put in internment camps. The Japanese made all Jews live in a certain area that was very crowded, but Miriam managed to live outside this Hongkew area. She gave piano lessons to Chinese and Koreans. The Hongkew area was very primitive, with outside toilets. People were allowed to work outside the area. They had radios, but didn't really know what was happening to the Jews in Europe.

After the war ended Miriam worked for Americans. She had a lot of secretarial jobs. There was lots of trading going on, and professionals could easily get jobs, especially refugee doctors. Miriam had broken up with her original boyfriend, but started a relationship with the son of one of her mother's friends who had emigrated to the US in 1921. She married him when she got to America. He died in 1958 and she married one of his brothers in 1963. After the war her prospective mother in law sent her money in Shanghai.

Many of the refugees started to leave when the communists came into power. She hated to leave, but she wanted to reunite with her brother in America. She left for America in 1947. First, she went to San Francisco, where HIAS paid for her expenses. She stayed 3 weeks and went to New York by train. Her brother came to meet her with his 18-year-old son and also her future husband came with Sammy Goldstein. Miriam got married in November of 1947 and had her first child in 1948; they lived on Riverside Drive in Washington Heights near the Hebrew Tabernacle where they were members.

Miriam says she was never assimilated and never liked living in Washington Heights. She doesn't consider herself German or American and stated that she doesn't really have friends. She doesn't like the idea of Jews active in politics and the government in America, because she thinks it brings more hate... called it "disgusting". Miriam visited Germany to see her brother in law and two nephews. She thinks she expected more from her children than American parents; her children were sent to private schools.