

ELLEN WALL
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Ellen Wall, nee Wertheimer, was born in 1921 in Frankfurt to wealthy family in the business of motorcycle and bicycle parts. Had many non-Jewish friends until 1933. In 1935 she was kicked out of school. Discussions about emigration started in earnest after Kristallnacht. Her father was sent to Buchenwald for 2 weeks and when he came back he couldn't stop crying and wasn't able to work. After a year at home, Ellen started learning office skills and worked at a Jewish firm, but again after Kristallnacht she lost her job. She tried to work in a knit work factory in Scotland, but she got final permission on September 1, the day war broke out.

After war was declared there were many air raids and family went to cellar every night. There was much less food and they had to take in boarders, although kind non-Jewish friends gave them extra food. One day an SS man, Gastner took over their apartment. They felt hopeless. Ellen started working for the transport department in the Kultursgemeinde. She worked for the woman who ran the kinder transports and, because she saw the lists of people who were going to go on transports two days early, she was able to warn people.

Ellen and family were sent to Theresienstadt in the fall of 1942; she states they were lucky to go there instead of Poland. They stayed there until liberation. She goes into great detail about life in Theresienstadt. She talks about how you had to be a hustler and a black marketeer to do well there; if you had nothing to trade, you died. Her parents adapted well and kept busy. She says that as long as one stayed healthy you could survive until the transports began. Many of the younger people were Czech, and she learned Czech and was friendly with youth. She talks about the lice and vermin, lack of dental care; how internment brought out the best and worst in people. She says most of the inmates ignored the obviously fake installations and buildings that the Germans put up to make Theresienstadt a model camp, but they did enjoy the fabulous concerts the Germans put on.

It was only towards the end of the war that they realized where the transports had gone, as people came back from Auschwitz and Ravensbruck. They knew when people got sent to a nearby prison, Der Kleine Festung, they never came back. She describes the time near the end as the worst time, because they learned of the concentration camps and typhoid disease became endemic. She said by that time people were so weak that there was a kind of dullness. The Russians liberated the camp, but mostly stayed away because of the typhus. The Red Cross came in and SS disappeared. She and her parents left the camp by bus in July and went back to Frankfurt. She describes being satisfied that the city was in ruins. Ellen's English was pretty good, so she got a job with the US Army doing office work. Although she mentions some antisemitism in the upper ranks of the armed forces, she was young and had a good social life. There was a soldier, Eddie Rosenbaum, who was great at organizing; there was a huge black market that flourished.

Through the Joint and HISS, Ellen and her parents went to New York on the first boat, the Marine Flasher, that shipped refugees, so there was a lot of attention to the ship when it landed in NY. Ellen's uncle in New York had become very rich and vouched for her family. Her mother and uncle were the only survivors from 7 siblings. The family first settled in Washington Heights and then for several years in Yonkers, in an apartment her uncle owned. Ellen met her husband, a Hungarian, in Yonkers through close Viennese neighbors. After her father died, Ellen and her mother moved back to Washington Heights. She first got a job at Vogue Magazine, and then Simplicity where she worked for many years. She describes a wonderful social life with other German Jews, but said there was a big gulf between them and the Polish/Russian Jews who had come to NY before. She found it easy to adjust to life in America. She said her father became very religious in NY, but her mother was cynical; she never kept kosher again. Ellen has frequently gone back to Germany, but feels terrible that the Germans are doing so well now.