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Summary

Irene Freund (née Grunfeld) was born on October 15, 1930 in Mannheim Germany. Her father Robert was an interior decorator, and her mother Emma was a homemaker. Both parents were born near Mannheim. Her father came from a family of five siblings; her mother had five or six siblings. Irene also had an older brother who was sent to England in 1938. Irene went to public school in Germany until she was ten when she was no longer allowed to attend. Her parents were Conservative Jews who went to synagogue regularly and kept kosher. The family spoke German at home. Irene said that she did not remember any harassment or persecution before she left Germany, though her father's business declined because of Nazi edicts. Her father did not want to leave Germany. She remembered a happy life in her home in Mannheim until she and her parents were sent to the internment camp at Gurs, in France, in November 1940.

At Gurs, men and women were separated. She never saw her father again. She stayed with her mother in the women's barracks. Though administered by the French, conditions at Gurs were bad. The inmates had little food and the guards were rough. Irene and her mother stayed at Gurs for about a year and then were transferred to another internment camp in France, Rivesaltes. Irene remembered better treatment there and she was able to attend school to learn French. Her mother, however, became very sick and was placed in the infirmary. Irene remembered bringing her mother extra food, but her mother had not recovered by the time Irene left Rivesaltes. Irene assumed that her mother was eventually sent to Auschwitz.

After about a year in Rivesaltes, the OSE, a French children's welfare organization, evacuated the children to French homes. After a while Irene and many other children were transferred to a convent where the children had to pretend to be Catholic. She remembered being treated very well at the convent and she attended school. German soldiers did come once seeking Jewish children, but apparently the children and the nuns convinced the soldiers that the children were Catholic orphans. She was there for about a year. At the end of the war, OSE sent Irene and other children to a home for children in Lyon where she was well treated.

After the war Irene went to Limoges where one of her cousins lived. An uncle tried to convince her to go to Palestine, but she wanted to stay and find out if either of her parents would appear on the Red Cross lists of returnees. Sponsored by a cousin in Scarsdale, New York, Irene finally left for the United States in March 1947. She had been in France for almost ten years. She later married a survivor from Czechoslovakia who had lost most of his family.