

USHMM

Irene Woods

OGA/  
Boston 8-25-88

Born Berlin, Germany, March 24, 1921. Lived with his grandparents and her mother; her parents were divorced and her father lived in Holland.

Grandfather was in the lumber business; he helped support them; her mother worked occasionally.

They were upper middle class and were conservative Jews. They observed the holidays and Sabbath.

Her parents went to high school. She left German public school in 1935 and went to a Jewish private day school, which she graduated.

Before the war they had mostly Jewish friends but lived in a mixed neighborhood.

Berlin did not have the antisemitism before and after the Nazis came that the small towns in Germany had. It was a cosmopolitan city with a lot of embassies. Jews were free to do most things but could not go into movies or theatres, so they established their own.

The war didn't become imminent in Berlin until 1939 and she had left by then. Jews could leave Berlin until then but it was difficult to get into another country.

Her father left Germany in 1933; he'd been to Hitler's early rallies and knew how dangerous it was for Jews. Many German Jews felt the trouble would blow over.

In July, 1939, she and her mother went to Holland and then America in August. The grandmother was not able to get out and died in Aushwitz. The war started September 1939.

She remembered the Nazis coming into power in January, 1933 and the torch parades in Berlin. Gradually, privileges were taken from Jews.

In the smaller towns around this time, the cemeteries were desecrated and the Jews were beaten because they were known. It was different in the big city because the Jews weren't readily identified.

Her husband was in a concentration camp for only a few weeks; she met him in the U.S.

She didn't know about the camps when they were in Germany. Many camps weren't in operation until after 1939.

She was sad to leave Berlin because she loved the city. She saw children's transports leaving Berlin to safety.

They stayed in their house until they left. There was a rule that a non Jewish maid couldn't work in a house where a Jewish man lived because he'd probably rape her. They were able to take their possessions and had them appraised and left the same amount of money with the government. They had to turn in all jewelry to the government earlier. They couldn't take money out.

They went to Holland by train. A Nazi she befriended on the train helped them get through without a problem.

Several aunts and cousins died in Auschwitz. She showed her passport with a red J and a document her husband got when he left Buchenwald.

She showed her birth certificate and report cards.

She talked about her feelings at the time; she didn't really understand the magnitude of what happened.

When she came here she landed in New York and came to Boston where she stayed.

She taught about how her experiences effected her values; she believes in equality.

She felt welcomed by Americans when she got here but she felt uneasy being in a new culture for a while. There was an organization for immigrants. She and her mother are receiving reparations.

She doesn't discount another Holocaust happening.