

## **RG-50.322.0030**

### **Summary**

Helga Silbermann, born 4/23/1927 in Berlin. Father Martin Levy and mother Gertrude (Berger) Levy owned shops as long time Berlin residents. One older sister. Conservative German speaking household in which they kept kosher. No Yiddish spoken, nor did family associate with Polish Jews who emigrated to Berlin and spoke Yiddish. Father served 4 years in German army in WW I. She went to a secular high school with 10 other Jewish students until Hitler came to power and the school required the students to say "Heil Hitler." Then went to a Jewish school until ~1938. Her sister wrote her high school thesis on Judaism. At one point, her uncle in southern Germany was arrested and sent to a concentration camp for 4 weeks after which he went to Palestine. Her older sister left Germany in 1936, also going to Palestine. Parents did not want to leave. Helga became a tailor after she left school. On Kristallnacht, her grandparents' store was damaged causing them to sell it. The family was required to turn in its gold and silver. They tried to go to Shanghai and also Palestine but nothing came of it. Father was beaten by SS and mother forced to work. Helga had to work in a Siemens factory after a brief stint on a farm. She stayed at the factory for 2 ½ years. In 1942 (4/24 or sometime in August, unclear), her parents and maternal grandmother were deported to Theresienstadt. Helga had to leave their apartment and moved in with a man whose parents also had been deported. Through a friend of her father, Herr Kreutz, she was able to get a room with a woman, Frau Winneman, who agreed not to report her to the SS. She had no ID paperwork and was at risk. She stayed 9 months until meeting Emil Messerstruck (sp.?). They moved in together and he obtained ID papers for her. He was later caught and killed. At some point she and Emil split up and she moved in with a non-Jewish aunt for a few weeks and then on to the aunt's aunt in the countryside for ~2 months. Eventually, she moved back in with Frau Winneman as war neared end. The Russians came first to Berlin and raped many women, including Helga. Later, when the Americans entered that part of Berlin, she met Bill McDaniel, an American soldier, who helped her get tailoring work and later reviewing mail because she spoke some English. She met a cousin from Queens, NY who had searched for her at the request of her sister. McDaniel got her a visa to go to the US and she arrived on the SS Marine Fisher on 6/26/45. McDaniel and she went to his home in Newton, IA to meet his parents who were unaware she was Jewish. They never married and she left Newton for NYC with help from a Jewish tailor in Newton. From there she went to Florida with a friend where she cleaned rooms and worked in a store in Jacksonville. Eventually, she went to Cincinnati where she got married and moved to Dayton. After having 2 children they were divorced.