

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

P.O. Box 25506, San Mateo, CA 94402

Name of interviewee: Donner, Martha

Date of interview: 1/13/1999

Summary: Martha Donner (maiden name was Feibusch) and her family were from the town of Elberfeld, Germany. Her father, Hermann Feibusch, was born in the Polish Corridor and had been a member of the German Army during WWI, earning an Iron Cross. He was an avid athlete and participated in the local bowling league as well as engaged in recreational swimming. Eventually, increasing anti-Semitism in Germany curtailed his participation in sports. Martha's mother was born in Germany. Her maiden name was Marga Gusdorf. Martha remembers her as being constantly depressed, neurotic and extremely obese. Although the family was not deeply religious, Martha and her sister, Ilsa, attended Hebrew school and celebrated the High Holy Days. As a preteen, Martha joined a Jewish Youth Group she claims that she had never really established a German identity and this club provided her with much needed social contacts, and she accepted the Zionist philosophy of the group. Martha attended public school in Germany from about five until ten years of age. She began high school at a private, all-girls institution but was expelled due to her Jewish heritage in 1937. She remembers feeling persecuted by other non-Jewish students as well as teachers.

With the aid of her Uncle Morris, who relocated to San Francisco in the 1920's, the family immigrated to the United States in late 1937. Martha was 15 years old.

In 1978, Martha and her husband returned to Germany for a bittersweet visit. She has gradually reclaimed her Jewish identity and now considers herself a Reform Jew.