

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Gilbert, Lore

Date of interview: 3/10, 4/8, 11/10 & 12/9/1992

Summary: Lore Gilbert was born in Worms, Germany in 1929. Her father was Yaacov Sundheimer. Mother Gertrude Caire, daughter of Adolf Caire. Her sister Miriam was born 1922. Her father was born in Bierstadt, a town near Worms. Grandfather's business was there. Her father thought the family originally came from Spain. Her family was a typical middle class merchant family. Father was a grain and feed merchant in business with his brothers, 1 older, 1 younger. They were not religious and did not keep kosher.

Worms is the oldest Jewish community in Europe. Gravestones in the cemetery go back to the year 1000. The synagogue was built about 1213. Worms was very anti-Semitic. Lore was terrorized as a child. She was afraid to walk to school. Kids would taunt them, call them dirty Jew and throw stones at them. When she was 7 or 8 she wanted to go on the children's transports to England but parents said she was too young. Lore's landlords were anti-Semitic. She played with their son, but after 1934 he made her feel uncomfortable and called her a dirty Jew. After Kristallnacht, in 1938, her father's assets were taken and they were given a small allowance. He couldn't continue his business. The family moved to Heidelberg when the landlord wouldn't renew their lease. Leaving Worms saved their lives. They would have been sent to Auschwitz from there. On October 22, 1940 the deportation from Heidelberg came. It was a total surprise. Her family was sent to France because the Germans had negotiated with the Vichy government to use their camps, which were ready. 5,600 people were deported on 3 trains. They were regular trains with seats. They had to keep the blinds down. The SS came through every now and then and told them if they looked out the window, they'd be shot. Her father always looked out. They had to turn in gold jewelry. Before they got on the train they had to sign everything over to the state. They were deported before the yellow star law was imposed. They ended up at Camp de Gurs, in the Pyrenees. Lore describes her family's internment in Camp De Gurs and subsequently her family's luck in being selected to go to the Dominican Republic thanks to her cousin, Walter, who was secretary of DORSA, the Dominican Republic Settlement Association, whose directors were associated with HIAS. They were establishing a community in the Dominican Republic for refugees and he got papers for them. This came out of the Evian conference that Roosevelt called for to talk about the Jewish problem. 33 countries came and only 1 said they would take Jews from Europe, the Dominican Republic. They said they would take 100,000 Jews. No other country made this offer. The dictator of the Dominican Republic, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina had a number of reasons for doing this. He wanted young males who could work. He was a terrible racist and wanted to lighten his population, he wanted to be in the good graces of Roosevelt for loans or money, after the war, in which he slaughtered 12,000 Haitians.

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Her father was asked by DORSA to make a list of people who wanted to go to the Dominican Republic from Camp de Gurs. He had a long list of people who wanted to go. On the way to Sosua, Dominican Republic, Lore's family spent time in Portugal. They would go daily to the Dominican consulate to ask when they would send someone to get the others from Camp de Gurs. In the end the Jewish organizations never went back to France because it was too dangerous for them personally. Instead they went to England, Luxembourg and Switzerland. The refugees from these countries never were in camps but were in danger of being deported due to their visas expiring. Lore believes that this was unforgivable. Most of the inmates at Camp de Gurs were eventually sent to Auschwitz, when the Germans occupied the rest of France in 1941-1942. Most of the elderly and children did not make it. The French underground saved some of the younger people.

There were so many gifted people among the Sosua refugees. They had a bakery, a restaurant, craftspeople, furniture makers, a machine shop, a library, a goldsmith, a dairy, sausage makers, dressmakers, 3 or 4 doctors and a dentist. DORSA provided free medical care for any native who came. Trujillo had given them a Bill of Rights. They had more rights than the Dominican people. They had no restrictions, freedom of religion, and could go into any business. Most refugees to Sosua did not intend to stay. There was a group of people that came to Sosua after the war from Shanghai, most likely because they didn't have relatives in the US. The people that remained were mostly dairy farmers.

Lore and her sister left for New York, in March 1946, 10 months after the end of the war. They worked to afford affidavits for their parents who came in October. They stayed with relatives. Lore describes their new life in America and her father's difficult adjustment to a new country. He eventually found his niche filling out papers for himself and then for others for reparations from Germany. He never needed to use English.

From Camp de Gurs, Lore's grandparents were sent to Camp Noe in France. From there they were then taken to a hospice for poor older people by the French Catholic church. There was hardship with food, but they could be together. Grandma cared for grandpa who had a stroke. When he died he had a regular Jewish funeral. He was close to 80. Grandmother survived and came to New York in May 1946. Miriam wanted to thank the convent years later, but never got a response to her inquiries.