

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Black, Steffi

Date of interview: 11/17/1999

Summary: Steffi, an only child, was born on October 17, 1920 in Berlin. Her mother, Charlotte Pink (maiden name) and her father Felix Israel were both Polish. Her father was the youngest of seven children, brought up by an older sister, Jenny. Steffi's parents met in Berlin and were married there. Neither was religious and according to Steffi, Judaism was not important to them. At that time in Germany, there were taxes to be paid for religious affiliation and they didn't have the money or the interest. Steffi's mother, Charlotte, was actually baptized as a child in Switzerland and for part of her childhood she attended Zwingli church in Switzerland. Charlotte only practiced Christianity when she was in Switzerland. Her father, Felix owned a factory in Berlin and worked with his brother, Leo, installing electricity in the city.

Steffi then went on to discuss some of her childhood. She describes her parent's relationship as rocky from the start. While Charlotte was pregnant with Steffi, her father actually moved his girlfriend into the house. Steffi saw this woman during her childhood but never really knew her. Later, during her parent's divorce she moved, from the age of six to fourteen, to the North Sea with her governess. Steffi does not remember much of her schooling, but she does recall constantly missing her mother during the years they were apart. She remembers resenting her father because she felt he left them. In the early 1930's, Steffi moved with her mother to Switzerland where her mother married her second husband, Otto Goetz, who later became ill with a kidney infection and died. This marriage only lasted about three years. During this time her father was in the war in Spain, so he was unable to visit Steffi or send her any money. In the summer of 1932-33, Steffi went to Poland to visit her grandparents where she spent a lot of her time. She also attended a Jewish school for about nine months, but she said she felt left out since she was not Jewish. She was forced to wear long sleeves because she had painted a swastika on her arm out of admiration for Hitler.

At the age of twenty, Steffi's father bought her a passport for \$3,500.00 and the two of them left for Cuba and then acquired visas to go to the United States. Her father died in Nevada in 1946. That same year Steffi married her husband, Mel, a poor but very determined man, who had scholarships to attend Harvard and later medical school. She also mentioned a previous marriage to a gay man whom she divorced.

In 1980 Steffi went to Germany to visit the house she grew up in. She said it felt awkward and uncomfortable. Even though Steffi had not been directly involved in the war, her life had been torn apart as a result.

Steffi has recently lost her husband and spoke of her three children. Her oldest daughter, Erica, is fifty two and has been married to the son of an Episcopal bishop for thirty two years. The next child, her son, James, is fifty and

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somewhat disabled with a psychiatric condition and now lives with a young woman. Steffi's youngest is Kate, who is a doctor in Santa Rosa. She is currently going through a divorce and she and her husband had adopted a baby boy named Joshua, who is Steffi's only grandchild.