

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Apte, Evelyn

**Date of interview:** 6/16/1999

**Summary:** Evelyn Lowen Apte (nee Eveline Loewenberg) was born on 6/4/1929 in Goerlitz, Germany. She had one brother, Gerald. Her father, Herman Alexander Lowen, was a cavalry officer during the First World War. Her mother, Else (Gradnauer) Lowen, had a great interest in art and actually went to a famous art school in Berlin, but nothing more came of that. Her family did not consider themselves religious; although Evelyn's father attended a synagogue, they went no further than that. Her family celebrated Christmas and Easter and other Christian holidays, but when the war began the Jewish holidays became more culturally significant to the family.

Evelyn recalled having a happy childhood, and said that she was a self-taught reader by age four. Since she was still a child, Evelyn did not know exactly what was going on around her, and in fact she also explains that she did not know what it meant to be Jewish even though she herself was a Jew. At about 5-6 years old, there was a march for Hitler outside her house, and it seemed so exciting that she wanted to be part of it too, so she said "Heil Hitler." She says that she did so because everyone was doing it, and she just wanted to become part of the crowd.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Evelyn's father decided to emigrate as soon as possible because Germany was not the place it had once been. She recalls going to the American consulate in Berlin and receiving a physical, but she did not know why. The family's emigration to America was kept a secret (at least to Evelyn and her brother). When the family went to Berlin, she was left behind because she was sick. She was about 7 years old at the time, and felt abandoned, left in someone else's care for several days, until everything was set for the family to go to America. The family got around the quota system by becoming property owners in America through a contact in Frankfurt. When they arrived in Portland, Oregon, the original sellers backed out of the deal, but then Mr. Lowen found another couple, the Hummels, who were willing to make a trade. They were an American Nazi couple that were willing to trade their property in America for one in Germany.

Evelyn told the interviewer that the family traveled to Paris, France early 1937 by train, and eventually went on a boat headed towards America, more specifically New York. They arrived on February 22, 1937. During the trip, Evelyn's family worried that they would not be allowed into America since Evelyn had previously been sick.

The Lowens had left so much behind, but the worst was the family members.

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Both of Evelyn's grandparents died, and her grandmother died after traveling to Siberia.

Many of other family members eventually joined them in Portland. Many of Evelyn's cousins and aunts came to America but there was one uncle who went to Brazil, got married and had his own family. That uncle was Evelyn's mother's younger brother, who eventually died in Brazil about ten years before Evelyn's interview. One of Evelyn's paternal aunts died of influenza, and the other died of old age in Portland.

Once in America, Evelyn and her brother were enrolled in school where they learned to speak English fluently. Their parents spoke the language, but had heavy accents. Evelyn's family received depression property from the Hummels, which meant that Evelyn's father had to work to pay off the mortgage and back taxes since the Hummels had not paid taxes on the property. The family helped with her father's jam business, to make sure the family could progress in America. The transition to America was difficult, especially for Evelyn's mother. Evelyn describes her mother as an angry, depressed woman because her mother refused to talk about or even remember anything associated with the war or Holocaust.

When in high school, Evelyn felt like an outsider in high school, but in college she began to feel American. She says that she had no other desire than to feel American, because she wanted to leave behind Germany and the war and simply move on. The whole experience did not become real to her until her parents' deaths, when Evelyn found some of their correspondence and was able to see for herself the pain that her parents had gone through before and after the war. Evelyn says that her father was a great German but also a great American, and when he became a citizen the first thing he did was buy a big American flag to show his pride at being an American citizen.

In 1966 Evelyn went to Germany, when her children were about 7 years old and 10 years old, and they actually went to her childhood house and went to visit her grandparent's graves. They drove across the Neisse River and into Poland. After that one visit to Goerlitz, she had no desire to return. She does not enjoy speaking German with people her age, but she says that she is willing to speak German with the younger generation.

Evelyn went to Reed College in Oregon for two years, and then transferred to University of California at Berkeley where she did her undergraduate and some graduate work, finishing her education in London. Evelyn became a social worker, mainly because it was a job that her family found acceptable, and because it allowed her to go to graduate school.

Evelyn's son told her that she was "the luckiest of the lucky" before the interview, and until then she agreed or realized that she was lucky. She always felt like the refugee kid, something that made her feel unlucky. Evelyn does not feel bitter,

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but she is still angry to see what humans are capable of. She says that it seems so unreal what we as humans are able to do to one another. She loves working with infants because she knows that there is so much potential in those children.

Evelyn still considers herself an atheist, but is still close to the Jewish culture and traditions. She believes that another Holocaust could occur, though she hopes not, that there is also always the potential for change. She also mentioned that the new generations of Germans are looking at their past and have different views from their parents and so there are great people coming out, and so Evelyn thinks that there is hope.

At the end of the interview, Evelyn confessed that she was aware that her experience of the Holocaust was not as horrific and painful as other survivals, but she was forced to leave her country at such an early age. She had to learn English and the Americans customs, and learn to survive, which was a challenge and something rare and admirable. She also mentioned that there is a large community of Jewish refugees in Portland now, and even though she lost the people that she came to America with, it seems like she is still living a good life with hope that humanity will change for the better.