

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Baum, Charlotte

Date of interview: 7/30 & 8/6/1989

Summary: (Deceased in 1991)

Charlotte was born in 1922 in Berlin, Germany. She remembers a very happy childhood living with her parents and one brother. Her father ran a Hungarian restaurant that had been in the family for several generations. Her family belonged to a temple, and her mother went to a different temple that was more conservative. Charlotte remembers Kristallnacht, and says that her father was convinced that he - as a law-abiding German citizen - was not in danger. After Kristallnacht, the family was hidden by two different families for a week. They were going to go to Shanghai, but right before they were scheduled to leave, they got visas to go to Riga, Latvia. Charlotte remembers that they had to sell absolutely everything, but once they got to Riga the Jewish community there helped them tremendously.

In 1940, the Russians came to Riga for a short time. They were followed by the Germans in 1941, and immediately all Jews had to register and wear a yellow star. Charlotte recalls that the Latvian Nazis (who terrorized the Latvian Jews even before the Germans came) were extraordinarily brutal. Soon after the Germans arrived, the Jews were put into a ghetto. They had very little food. Later came the signs saying they were going to be "resettled" and had to be ready in one week to leave the ghetto. Charlotte saw an ad for seamstresses for the army, and she decided to answer it. She was not in the ghetto during "resettlement" and when she returned several days later, the ghetto was completely emptied. She describes in detail how she discovered that thousands had been marched into the woods and shot.

Charlotte did various jobs (dishwashing, peeling potatoes, etc.) for the army while she continued to live in the ghetto. Transports from Germany started to arrive, and she was reunited with her best friend from Germany. In 1943 she was transferred to a concentration camp where she stayed for about five months. She describes escaping selection as well as the conditions in the camp, and later on her journey (including days on a boat with very little food and water) to Stutthof, a concentration and extermination camp. She continued to do various jobs, such as farm work. As the Russians approached, her group of women was forced to walk for four days through the woods by the German army, and eventually she and her friend were able to escape to an abandoned farmhouse. She was liberated in 1945 by the Russians, and ended up in France after saying she was French so she would not be sent back to Germany. At this time, her parents were already in America (and had been for most of the war), so she was able to join them.

Charlotte explains how her willpower helped her survive her experiences, and

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

says that the support of her good friend from Berlin was essential. She believes that her experiences have taught her the necessity of getting involved and standing up for what is right, not only for herself but for everyone else as well. She says that even in the worst circumstances, there was always a little hope, and that the people who gave up were "marked for death." She has shielded her children from her experiences, but has tried to teach them compassion. She also believes that some of her split-second decisions were made with "outside help" and that there was another force that helped her survive.