

Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

Name of interviewee: Clark, Irmgard

Date of interview: 3/12/2003

Summary: Irmgard Clark was born in Berlin, Germany May 8, 1921. She was the only child of Paul Salamon and his wife, Margarita. Her father designed women's clothes and her mother assisted with the bookkeeping. The family lived in a furnished apartment in a nice neighborhood.

The family was not religious but Paul, who was half Jewish, was more observant than his wife. Paul's father, Albert, was religious and observed the holidays. Irmgard felt Jewish whilst growing up and attended religion classes at school. She went to synagogue and comments on the social aspects, rather than the religious significance.

Irmgard and her parents had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Irmgard attended public school and says she was a good student and liked history and languages. Her father, Paul, was in the German army for a few years.

When Irmgard was 12, Hitler came to power and she talks of some of the difficulties associated with this. Because her last name was known to be a Jewish name, she was met with derision. She was no longer able to go to the theatre (only one theatre permitted Jews to attend) and Jews were forbidden to use public benches. Sporting clubs would no longer permit Jews. Jewish students had to leave school, except for those who had a father serving in the German army. Irmgard remained at school for a short time as her father was still in the army. Her father, Paul, could no longer sell his clothing designs under his label and some of his non-Jewish tailors allowed him to use their names. Because she was no longer able to go to school, she learned to sew, as a trade was important.

Irmgard says she was not aware of Kristallnacht until the following day when she saw a lot of the damage. Her father left the apartment to stay with a relative as the Nazis were arresting Jewish men.

Irmgard and her parents left Germany for Shanghai in 1939. They traveled on a Japanese ship, which carried coal and had second class accommodations. They were treated well and she viewed this experience as an adventure. The family was allowed to take 3 suitcases with them and the shipping company sent on their bedding and some household possessions to Shanghai. They were not able to take any money or jewelry with them, although some people did, her father would not. Almost all the passengers on board were Jewish. Arriving in Shanghai in the spring of 1939, the passengers were housed in an overcrowded factory that was set up like a dormitory. Soon after, the family moved to a small apartment with a bathroom. For several months Irmgard went to school to study English. Her parents sold household possessions in order to survive.

Irmgard then got a job with an English couple and lived with them whilst taking care of their children. When Japan entered the war the couple were sent to a detention camp and Irmgard then got married, she was about 18 years old. She describes her marriage as an economic necessity. Her husband, Hans Levy, was

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from Vienna and had lived in Italy for several years. He was a successful hairdresser and they had a big wedding. They lived in a small apartment and had a pleasant social life. The couple lived in 'Frenchtown' until Japan entered the war, and then had to move to the 'Honkue' ghetto where conditions were difficult. Irmgard says that when the war ended there were celebrations. The Americans arrived soon after and she met an American sailor, Robert Clark, whom she later married in Shanghai.

They went to the United States about a year and a half after the end of the war and her parents followed six months later. Her husband was from Minnesota where they lived and Irmgard worked in the post office. They later moved to Oakland, California with their three children. The couple had two sons, Robert and Blake and a daughter, Madeleine. Although Bob was not Jewish, they raised their children in a Jewish home and went to synagogue.