

## Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project

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

**Name of interviewee:** Gerson, Lily

**Date of interview:** 2/21/1996

**Summary:** Lily was born on 10-24-22 in the 2nd District of Vienna, Austria. Her early memories are mainly of school and playing with her friends. She notes that she knew back then that there was anti-Semitism, but had not personally experienced it. By the time she turned 12 in 1934 things had changed; in particular she notes that the welfare programs for poor people stopped, yet she also notes that these changes did not directly affect her family. Once the Nazis took over, she feared for the lives of her family and friends.

Her mother, Anna, had family in the United States. After much convincing and arranging, in 1938 Lily's older cousin, Dela, signed an affidavit stating that she would be financially responsible for Lily and her brother Freddie. It took her family two more years to get all of the appropriate papers in order. In February 1940 Lily and Freddie left Vienna to come to the US. After a train ride from Vienna to Trieste, Lily and Freddie took a 14-day boat trip to the US. Once in New York, they were met by a woman from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) who helped them board their Greyhound bus to Chicago where their cousin was living.

Once in Chicago Lily and Freddie were separated. She went to work as a domestic and he was sent to live with a Jewish family and attended school. Lily was making \$5 a week in hopes to pay back her cousin for the \$700 she had spent getting them to the US. They attempted to raise the money needed to save Lily's parents, but that never worked out.

Lily met her first husband (who was never actually named) when she was 24-25 years old; she was not specific as to her exact age. They wed 3 months after meeting. They had 3 children. In 1961 she returned to live in Vienna with her husband for a year while he was studying. Her husband died after 26 years of marriage.

She then met her current husband and married him 2 years later. At the time of the interview, they had been married for 20 years. Between her husbands kids and her own, they have a total of 11 grandchildren.