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Summary

Gerda Sophie Rich (b. Rosen) was born in December 1919 in Paderborn, Germany. Her father owned a hat factory and was widely known and admired in the town. She had one brother who was seven years older. He went to Paris when Hitler came to power but was killed by a bus in May 1934. Ms. Rich remembers no grandparents. Her parents were very traditional, lighting candles every Shabbat and observing all the important holidays. She went to a Catholic parochial school led by French nuns and said that she had a very good education. She was happy there until Hitler came to power when her previous friends and classmates began to ignore her because of the anti-Jewish laws, but she remembers no antisemitism. She graduated in 1936 and then went to a Jewish trade school in Frankfurt where girls learned cooking and sewing. She stayed only one year because her mother suddenly died.

Ms. Rich stayed with her father until May 1938 when she went to a hospital in Berlin to learn to be a dietician. On Kristallnacht, she witnessed chaos in the streets and many injured Jews at the hospital. Her father's factory was not burned down since it was in the process of being sold to a gentile. She went home to be with her father again. He then died and she realized that she would have to leave Germany. Just short of nineteen and still a minor in German law, she was helped by a lawyer, a friend of her father, who filed a successful claim that she did not need a guardian. This enabled Ms. Rich to leave for England in 1939 before the war started. She showed the interviewer her passport which had the name "Sara", required for all female Jews, and a "J" for *Juden* (Jew). She stayed with an English family as a domestic and nursemaid for their two children.

In 1941 she was able to immigrate to the United States and stayed, at first, in New York. Her sponsors lived in Los Angeles but believed that it was better for her to stay in New York until the war was over. She had studied in England to be a dental assistant and worked in New York with a German-Jewish dentist. She also met her husband in New York whose original surname was Eichenberg but was convinced to change it to Rich before they met and wed.

After the war, Ms. Rich and her husband settled in Los Angeles and later in Orange County. In 1949 she had the first of her two daughters. She remained active in Jewish life and brought up her daughters as proud Jews. Her grandson was about to have his Bar Mitzvah. She loved the freedom of living in the United States and has been very happy here. She and her husband visited their towns in Germany in 1976 and 1989. The townspeople treated them very well and the older ones remembered her father fondly. She received restitution from the German government for the loss of education and the loss of her house.