

Interviewee: Gerda Gross Schlame

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Interviewer: Alejandra Morales Stekel

Gerda Gross was born in Breslau, Germany in 1912. Father was from Bavaria, and peddled merchandise. Father and mother were married in 1910.

When father went to fight in WWI Gerda was left alone with her mother. She went to school for 10 years. The family was observant. In school, the rabbi taught religion even though Gerda's was a mixed population school. The majority of the children were Evangelists. When the Hitler era began Gerda could not continue to study. She began to work in a children's clothing factory, owned by Jews, until she was dismissed for being a Jew! She learned to make children's clothes there (which helped her to have work in Chile.) At the beginning of 1937, because of the laws against them, Jews couldn't work in a gentile-owned store, or be openly friends with non-Jews. There were some Germans who tried to help Gerda's family, but she turned them down. Mostly the Poles were against the Jews, she says.

Gerda was married in 1938 and left for Chile in 1939. Her husband had a visa but no one to use it. When he met Gerda, he invited her to go to Chile with him. They were married on October 6 by a rabbi Hoffman in a small synagogue. That night, the synagogue was burned to the ground.

On November 9, walking in the street with her husband, they were told to hurry up because they could not be seen outside. It was Kristalnacht. That night, they decided to leave Germany which they did at the end of December from Hamburg in the direction of Valparaiso, Chile. Her husband's family went with them.

Mother died of heartbreak because of her daughter's departure and nothing is known to her about father. The Red Cross said that he may have been deported to Poland.

Gerda's life began in Chile, in Concepcion. After the earthquake, there was lots to be done and husband found work. They had been allowed out of Germany carrying only 10 marks! Their son was born in 1940. When son found work in Santiago, the family moved there.

Gerda went to Germany only once after the war.

She feels anti-Semitism is reemerging. She heard of slurs against the Jews in Chile. She also feels that nowadays, after their Bar-Mitzvah, children forget or are not interested in their Judaism. Evidence of that, is the high rate of mixed marriages (affecting her family also.)