

Interviewee: Helga Horwitz

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Interviewer: Sonia Brodsky

(The first couple of minutes of the interview are not there. From the excel file I see she was born in Berlin, Germany.) Helga Horwitz was born in Berlin in 1927(?) Father had a men's and boys' clothes manufacturing business. The family lived in the Grunewald neighborhood, in an apartment building that provided gardens for each apartment. Family was well-to-do. Father was very generous with the poor. He even took care of two indigent families (fact which the family found out only later on.)

Every day the family went to the forest to stroll.

When Helga was 6, in 1933, parents sent the children to a Jewish school. Helga had an older sister, 4 years her senior. The schools they attended were Lessler schule (?) and Wald schule. Father was a condecorated veteran of four years of WWI. He considered the Germans his friends...

Helga's friends were all Jewish, except during kindergarten hours, when she played with all of the children.

In 1933, Helga started school when Hitler was elected. Parents had some fear but they couldn't imagine what came after. Parents always considered themselves German of Jewish faith. Mother was more traditional re: Jewish faith. (Anecdote: when father was serving Germany's army on WWI, he was sent to deliver some documents. He

lost his way at night, and heard Russian spoken. He said, out loud, "Shma Israel". And someone answered the same way, took him by the shoulders, and turned him in the right direction. Father was a man of faith...)

Helga went to the Wald schule until age 11. Between 1933-38, school was quiet and pleasurable. Parents experienced anti-Semitism but Helga did not. Father, for instance, could not make any clothes that looked like army wear.

Kristallnacht. November 28. Parents, fearing something, went to see the great grandmother who lived in Breslau. Sitting at a café, they were approached by the Nazis and father was put on a truck and taken away to Buchenwald. His lower spine was broken. Mother asked to be taken too, but she was refused. She called home and told them what happened.

That day, Helga went downstairs to go to school, using the service stairs. She crossed paths with the woman who delivered the newspapers. The woman was crying, saying: "They burned down the synagogues. We will pay for it". Helga returned home. Her sister was on the phone with her mother, who was screaming "they put father in jail". In Buchenwald, the inmates were kept standing for an entire week, without food or water. When he left the concentration camp, the father vowed never to say anything about what occurred there.

Upon her return home, mother found the honor cross her husband had been awarded in WWI, and took it to the police station. She was told: "Why did you leave home? We know your husband, and we would have never arrested him. But, we have a quote of Jews we have to round out each time".

After a month in the camp, the father was released with the condition that he and his family leave Germany within 15 days.

Mother tried to obtain a visa anywhere, but father came out of the camp so sick that he had to be hospitalized. (Upon his return home, he was made to turn over all the goods of the factory.) Mother and daughters left by themselves. Father had a sister in Switzerland, and she sent a 3-month visa for the 4 of them. The aunt's husband had a factory there and his partner was in charge of collecting the monies owed them. He disappeared with all the money, and the uncle was put in jail for 3 years for lack of payment of his debts. That's when the family arrived. Helga's family was aided by the Joint. The sister was sent to work cleaning houses, and Helga-11 years old then, was sent to work in a farm in the Alps to do all chores. The language barrier and misunderstandings. Parents were not allowed to work, receiving some money from the Joint.

Next job Helga had was helping a girl with a mental delay. She continued her studies while helping the girl in hers.

In the meantime, mother found a visa for North Africa. The chief of police advised them not to go there because Mussolini was now in North Africa. He then extended the local visa for the family for another year.

(The evangelical church in Chile remembers Kristallnacht every year. A priest was talking about San Kalen (?), the city where the family was in Switzerland. He mentioned a righteous gentile who was taken to jail 3 days after he extended the visa to Helga's family. He had done the same to 1,000 other people who were in transit from Austria. He was

caught and sent away. He died of hunger and was buried in a common grave. Helga could not remember his name.)

Helga's sister was working with young children and she contracted whooping cough. Helga and the father also contracted it.

When the visa to Chile was obtained through Helga's sister's friends (who were already living in Chile, in 1939,) Helga was sick but managed to conceal the fact while traveling there by ship. Grandmother also managed to get to Chile, through the charity of the Joint.

Most of Helga's extended family died in concentration camps.

In Chile, Helga's mother was a nurse in an immigrants' home. Helga went to school and learned to make artificial flowers; sister worked taking care of children. Helga studied mechanical dentistry and became an assistant to a dentist.

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