

Evelyn Bendix Fielden

Wartime Experience: Fled to England

I was born in Berlin, Germany, in 1921. My parents were both Jews, but they baptized me when I was a baby. My father was well-to-do, and wanted to integrate into Berlin society. He had his nose operated on, and from the time I was a child he told me he had fallen off a horse. He had friends in high places--among them von Ribbentrop, Hitler's future foreign minister. Ribbentrop's numerous children played with me.

In 1934 when I was thirteen, I wanted to join the League of German Girls to get my sports medal. My mother said I could not do this since we were Jews. That was the first time I had heard of this, and I came to realize how artificial life was in Berlin. I disliked it and everything German. An English girlfriend arranged for me to live with her mother in England. My parents objected at first, but then they relented. They felt that Hitler could not remain in power for long--and besides, he "only wanted to eradicate the Eastern Jews." I left Berlin for England in April, 1939. Before leaving, I registered at the American Embassy to get a quota number for later emigration.

When the war broke out my English benefactor told me to leave. She could not have an enemy alien living in her house, and she farmed me out as a housekeeper to an old man in the country. I had to shoot rabbits for him every day because he liked to eat them. I ran away and went to London--but the police got hold of me and put me in jail for not registering as an enemy alien. When I was released, I joined the Land Army as a motorcycle dispatch rider. After that I had countless other jobs, but I was always hungry.

My parents escaped from Berlin in 1941. They travelled through Siberia, China, and Japan, where they caught the last ship to Pearl Harbor. Eventually, they settled in San Francisco. In 1944 my American visa came through, and I came to the United States.

I met my future husband in England, and we married in San Francisco. When his work took him to Germany, I was catapulted back--where I remained for ten years. After working for the Department of State in Vienna (where my daughters were born), we were transferred to Berlin, Washington, D.C., Rio de Janeiro, Paris, and Mexico City. I tutored English, and taught calligraphy.

In 1975 we settled in Napa. I am active at the Holocaust Center in San Francisco, and I volunteer at the Magnes Museum in Berkeley.