

Eva Gottheiner

Wartime Experience: Left Germany and Went to Shanghai

My name is Eva Leni Gottheiner, nee Krisch. My parents were Willy and Paul Krisch, nee Warschauer. My mother was born in Posen and my father in Tremessen. After getting married to my mother, my father accepted a job in Breslau, Germany, as head bookkeeper with a large department store owned by Jews. I was born in Breslau, Germany, on January 22, 1921. I am an only child.

My childhood was very comfortable. In 1933, when Hitler came into power, I was 12 years old. In 1935, I and all Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend public schools. The Jewish teachers, too, could not teach there any more. So those Jewish teachers taught us in the basement of our synagogue. My schooling ended in 1937, at age 16. I then took a part-time job caring for a Jewish family's young child until the end of August, 1937. Then I apprenticed myself as a dental technician for one year, but had to leave because the boss was not Jewish. A Jewish dentist hired me to be his assistant, and I worked for him until my parents and I left Germany to immigrate to Shanghai, China, in March, 1939.

The reason my parents finally decided to leave Germany was that the Nazis took my father to Buchenwald, a concentration camp, the morning after "The Night of the Broken Crystal" (Kristallnacht) on November 10, 1938, along with many other Jewish men. For four weeks we did not know where my father was taken. Then he wrote us from Buchenwald that he was still alive. My mother took a certificate which showed that my father was a decorated soldier in the First World War and begged the Nazis to release her husband. Two weeks later we were notified that my father would be home in a few days. We picked him up at the train station and brought him to the hospital as he needed to get well. After his release, he immediately tried to find out where we could immigrate to.

We had no relatives in other countries to help us out, and entry visas were required everywhere except in Shanghai, China at that time. So my father booked passage for us on Lloyd Triestino's "Conte Biancamano" for a 28 day voyage to Shanghai. A train took us to Genoa, Italy, where we boarded the ship. We left Germany with two suitcases with personal belongings and ten marks per person. The Nazis confiscated all our belongings including valuables and jewelry. .. We left Breslau in March, 1939 and arrived in Shanghai in April. The ship had many Jewish refugees on board who also headed for Shanghai. There was an outbreak of scarlet fever on board ship, and I was one of those who became ill.

At our arrival in Shanghai in April, 1939, we were greeted by representatives of the Jewish committees who had come to Shanghai to assist all Jewish refugees who fled the Nazi terror. My parents and I were assigned a room in an area outside of Shanghai called Hongkew, a district, where most of the refugees from Europe lived for the next 10 years. I was hospitalized immediately due to the scarlet fever I had contracted on the ship. During that time, my boyfriend, Peter Gottheiner, from Breslau also, arrived. Peter's parents also fled to Shanghai.

About one year later, after I got my strength and health back, I was sent to the YMCA in Shanghai on a job search. The business language for foreigners was mostly English, and I had almost 5 years of English during my schooling in Germany. So I got a job as a live-in nanny to a little girl with a British family. After that family left for England, I had a job with an American family and cared for one of their young sons. That family, too, left eventually, as did most foreigners except us Jewish refugees. In 1942, Peter and I got married. By May, 1943 the Japanese were very much in charge already and they ordered us Jewish refugees into a barbed-wire surrounded ghetto in Kongkew.

I then found a job as maid-housekeeper for a Jewish couple who had a business to take care of in Hongkew. On July 17, 1945, our ghetto was hit by American bombers who wanted to destroy the Japanese radio station in Hongkew. We had many hits in our area, and the building we had a room in was hit also. We were relocated along with many others, but thank God we were not hurt. After the war ended and we were no longer restricted to the ghetto, my husband and I were hired by the U.S. army to work as civilian employees. We processed requisitions for perishable and non-perishable food for the U.S. troops located nearby. We loved our jobs and were given transportation to and from work by their army trucks. One day a soldier walked in, and asked for my husband. He was an old friend of Peter's from Germany who had relatives in Chicago who sent him an affidavit to save his life. His name was Eric Klaber.

Eric enlisted in the army when the war broke out and was stationed near Shanghai when the war was over. He knew his friend Peter had fled to Shanghai and he wanted to find him. I had heard of Eric but had never met him before. Eric wanted very much to help us get out of China. He found a couple in Chicago who were kind and compassionate enough to send us an affidavit so we could enter the United States as refugees. In 1948, the U.S. consulate in Shanghai notified us that we could enter the United States. In February, 1949 we arrived in San Francisco, California, where we were allowed to settle because my husband's parents and brother already lived there. They had been given an affidavit from friends in New York earlier.

The Jewish Committees did not want to split up families as we knew, by then, about the concentration camps. After getting settled, I found a job with Western Pacific Railroad as a statistical typist where I worked until my daughter, Vivian Grace was born that September. My husband went to study for his physical therapy license and then opened his own office. Until we were able to make it on our own, we were given much support from the Jewish Committees, and I am eternally grateful for their kind assistance. In September, 1951, my son, Ronald Bruce, was born. A short time later, my parents arrived in San Francisco, also with the kind help of the Jewish JOINT distribution committee.

We were a close family with both grandparents enjoying their grandchildren very much. I worked in my husband's physical therapy office part-time for many years. In 1951, both my parents died within 2 months of each other. I had no other family ties as all my other relatives had not survived Auschwitz, except one cousin who was kept underground during the war in Hamburg. I visited him in Berlin in 1972, and again some years later before he died. My father-in-law passed away suddenly in 1960, and my mother-in-law died in 1963. She had lived

with us after her husband's death. We had moved to a house outside of San Francisco to accommodate our growing family. We also took in a foster son for some years. My husband and I divorced in 1973 after 30 years of marriage.

From then on I worked full time and part-time until my retirement from work in 1993. Since then I have been involved in various kinds of volunteer work and hope to be able to continue for some time to come. My son is married and owns a restaurant with his wife. There are no children. My daughter is a physical therapist, like her father was. She resides in Southern California, and my son and his wife live in the foothills of the Sierra. Thank God, I have a very warm and caring relationship with my children. My former husband and I have a cordial relationship, and we are in constant touch with our children. I hope to be able to enjoy my life and my children for some time yet.

In the photo taken of me, I am holding a photo album with photos taken in Shanghai that hold many precious memories.