

## Bianca Hirsch

Photographed with her husband Warren

Wartime Experience: Sent to live with relatives in the US

My parents, Siegbert and Betty (Rubenstein) Zwang were married on August 20, 1922 in Mannheim Germany. My brother, Hans, was born on September 12, 1923, and I came along two years later, November 11, 1925. My Dad owned a factory, manufacturing women's blouses and men's shirts, and wholesale table and bed linen. My parents attended the Main Synagogue regularly and I participated in the children's choir where I met many children, including Werner Hirsch.

In 1933, my second year of elementary school, the teacher separated the Jewish and gentile girls and rarely called on the Jewish children. By 1934, we were prohibited from going swimming, attending movies or playing in the public parks, but luckily there was a Jewish Sports Club which gave us an outlet for physical and social activities. In 1935, I passed an examination for entry into a Catholic Girls High School, but although I passed the examination, an edict from the government stated that no new Jewish children were to be matriculated into Catholic schools. However, the Jewish children who were already in attendance, were permitted to remain. Because my father was a decorated soldier in World War I, I was able to enter Hans Thoma Maedchen Real Schule (Hans Thoma Girl's High School) where I remained for 1 ½ years until we immigrated to the United States.

In 1937, my parents brought my brother, me and two cousins, Ruth and Bella Neumann, to the United States because they felt Germany was no longer safe for us. It was a difficult decision for them to make. It took a great deal of courage and unselfishness to send the children to safety. My brother and I were given in care to relatives in Coalinga, California, while my cousin, Bella, went to Berkeley to live with an aunt, and my cousin, Ruth, remained in Chicago with members of her father's family. My parents returned to Germany, hoping against hope that my father would not have to give up his business and leave Germany. His brother from Coalinga went to Germany in the summer of 1938. and my father persuaded him to go with him to the American Consulate in Stuttgart so that he could get his visa extended. Luckily, my uncle knew the American Consul who told him that under no circumstances would he extend my parents' visa. Consequently, my father decided to "sell" his business (it was a forced sale with little exchange of money The "profit" of the sale was confiscated as "Jew Tax"). Finally, in 2, October 1938, my parents left Germany, nine days before Kristallnacht, each with 10 Marks (\$2.50) in their pockets. My father was heartbroken since he did not speak English and was not sure if he could ever support his family again.

Although we did not experience the horrors of concentration camps and years of deprivation, we were uprooted and deeply affected by the dramatic changes in our lives. I have always felt that it was an enormous sacrifice on the part of our parents to send us to safety thousands of miles away, while they were hoping to salvage the ability to support their family. I only realized

the enormity of this sacrifice when I had children of my own. After all, I was only eleven years old and my brother was thirteen, my cousins Ruth and Bella were fourteen and twelve, respectively. We were sent to relatives we did not know. We were lucky that we were treated kindly, were well cared for, and loved. Nonetheless, the separation was traumatic and left scars that slowly healed. When my own children each were eleven years old, I took them aside and tried to teach them about the sacrifice that our parents made for the safety of their children. Ruth and Bella never saw their mother again. She was sent to Camp de Gurs in France and released. While waiting in Marseilles for a ship to take her to America, the war broke out and she was picked up by the Germans and sent to her death.

In 1939, when the school year was over, we returned to our parents who had settled in Chicago. I attended Senn High School where I was active in student government, and many clubs and organizations. Upon graduation, I took a job as legal secretary during the day, while attending Northwestern University night school for two years. I transferred to day school where I earned my B.S. degree in Psychology in 1947. Upon graduation, I told my parents that I did not want to settle down in Chicago, since I did not like the climate. I decided to move to San Francisco. I was able to get an internship in the Department of Public Health, while attending the University of California in Berkeley, where I completed my M.A. Degree in Child Development. I worked on a switchboard for my room and board and had a job in a dress shop to cover my expenses.

While in San Francisco, I called Warren (Werner) Hirsch, whom I knew from Mannheim. He had come to San Francisco with the Children's Transport. His brother, Erwin Hirsch, was a cantor who officiated at my cousin's wedding. When he learned that I planned to move to San Francisco, he gave me Warren's address. In addition, Warren's friend, Hans Salomon, who had been an apprentice in my father's business, had also given me his address. After a brief courtship, Warren and I were married on July 3, 1948, in the presence of about 150 of our friends and family. After the birth of our children, I started to work on my doctorate at Stanford University but ended up earning my degree from the United States International University in San Diego.

Throughout our marriage, Warren owned various pharmacies in San Francisco and the Bay Area, and I worked as a School Psychologist, teacher and newspaper columnist. As Associate Clinical Professor, I continue to consult to the School Age Clinic at UCSF Medical School. We have two beautiful children, who are both attorneys. They are married and we have a very lovely daughter-in-law and a very nice son-in-law and four beautiful grandchildren.

In 1990, a group of former Jews from Mannheim arranged for a reunion at Kutscher's in the Catskill's of New York. More than 300 people attended, renewed, old friendships and shared memories. Many people had not seen or heard from each other in more than fifty years. Two of the former Rabbis of Mannheim, Rabbis Gruenewald and Richter and the last Cantor in Mannheim, Erwin Hirsch, repeated a service with the music that was traditional in our synagogue. The reunion was an emotional event that will never be forgotten by those who attended. Since that time, I have published a newsletter twice a year which has facilitated

communication, linked people all over the world and brought together many former friends. It is a labor of love which has truly brought its own reward.

We have been uprooted and gone through difficult times; We have been deprived of much of our carefree youth. However, we have a great deal for which we are grateful, particularly that our parents were able to leave before Kristallnacht and were able to see the birth of all of their grandchildren. We have truly been blessed.