

## Fred Kirschner

Photographed with his wife Hilla.

Wartime Experience: Fled to England and Immigrated to the US

I was born October 30, 1919, the son and second child of Dr. Max Kirschner and Gertrude Kirschner of Frankfurt/Main. My father, Max Kirschner, was the son of Cantor Emanuel Kirschner and Ida Buehler Kirschner of Munich. My mother was the daughter of Siegfried Schmidt and Martha Fuld Schmidt of Frankfurt. My sister, Eva, was born on December 8, 1917, in Bayreuth in Bavaria, where my father was stationed as a medical officer following World War I.

Eventually we moved to Heddernheim, near Frankfurt, where my father practiced medicine until approximately 1936, when laws were passed permitting Jewish doctors to only treat Jewish patients. At that time we moved into my grandmother's house in Frankfurt, where my father could work with a group of Jewish doctors. I transferred to the Philantropin, the Jewish high school of the Ziehen Oberreal School in Eschersheim, a small place next to Hedderheim. At that time, I first met Hilla Muenzer, since we both had become members of the Jewish scouting organization, but we lost track of each other after a couple of years.

My father and I were shipped to Buchenwald following Kristallnacht. While my father was released shortly as a "Frontkaempfer" in World War I, I was released in February 1939, provided that I could leave the country within 30 days. I left on the 28th or 29th day on the strength of a visa to England that my mother had been able to obtain. My sister had previously gotten a domestic permit. I luckily got a volunteer job at the Jewish Refugee Committee JRC in London and was able to find the various records and money guarantees, which had gotten lost, to enable my parents and cousins also to leave Germany and come to London very shortly before the start of World War II. While in London, I met Hilla a couple of times together with other friends who had managed to get to England. I continued to work for the JRC and was retained even after the war started. The committee helped me get registered as a neutral, so I was not interned, like so many others. I also could move about freely.

Since so many applicants for US visas were not able to get out of Germany, the numbers assigned moved fairly quickly, and in February 1940 my parents and I got our visas for the United States. My sister had already left and had again a domestic job in the outskirts of New York. Thanks to a letter of introduction, I immediately got a job with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in New York as errand "boy." Eventually, as immigrants kept leaving Germany via Russia and Japan, I was asked to work in that department, handling some of the shipping arrangements as well as some via Portugal. I did that until I was drafted into the United States Army, where I served a relatively short time.

After that, my job at the JDC was no longer available, and I stumbled into a job as a credit manager and had to get through some quick on the job training. After some time, I applied and

got a credit job at Saks-34, part of the Gimbel's Corporation. Again, after a few years I felt the next step needed to be taken, and I moved to Alton, Illinois, where my sister lived with her husband. After lengthy internment in England, they had gotten to the United States. He had passed his medical license again in Illinois and gone into private practice.

While I was in Alton, Illinois, I heard from Hilla through mutual friends. I told her that I would be in New York over Labor Day 1947, and we met. Before we went back to Illinois, we decided to get married, which we did on February 8, 1948. As business expanded, I had the opportunity to acquire offices in California and Hawaii, and we moved west, first to Long Beach, California, and then to San Rafael, California, a suburb of San Francisco. We have three sons and one daughter and six grandsons, and while I am semi-retired, I still lead a busy life, both professionally and personally.