

Hilla Kirschner

Photographed with her husband Fred

Wartime Experience: Immigrated to England

I was born in Frankfurt/Main and went to grade school and high school there. Later, I was in Berlin at the Jewish hospital training to be a nurse. Life was precarious at that time. We had a harrowing time during and after the Kristallnacht. We saw the burned-out synagogues. They took our doctors and male nurses away, never to be heard from again. We were like zombies, walking around doing our duty.

In March 1939, in the days that followed this horrible night, I immigrated to England on a domestic permit. My first job was in a children's house with a very nice Jewish family in London. Eventually I got a position at the Hampstead nurseries, which were run by Anna Freud. We took care of children who were bombed out of their houses, who were shell shocked and very scared. They received treatment and were cared for and slept in underground shelters. Two years later I moved on, working as a counselor in a children's club, setting up programs for after-school activities for youngsters to keep them off the streets. I had not intended to stay in England but wanted to go to Palestine, but the war ended that dream, and I spent those years in London during the Blitz.

My brother had immigrated to the US on a scholarship to the Union College in Schenectady, New York, In July of 1946, I immigrated to the United States, four months after my mother. She came to the US after having survived three years in the concentration camp Theresienstadt. Many of my relatives perished in Germany. Two weeks after I arrived in New York, I started working at a day nursery on the lower East Side. A year later I got the position as director of a day nursery in Jamaica, New York.

Accidentally, I ran into a former friend of mine from Frankfurt and because of her I met my husband Fred. We had known each other since we were teenagers in Frankfurt. I knew his parents and sister and they knew me, and Fred knew my mother and brother. My father had died in 1930 and is buried at the "new" cemetery in Frankfurt.

Fred and I married in 1948. We have four children, three sons and a daughter, and six grandsons. We live comfortably in San Rafael, California, 20 miles north of San Francisco. We both do volunteer work for the county, enjoy traveling and enjoy our family, children and grandchildren.