

Jutta Organek

Photographed with her husband Bernard

Wartime Experience: Hidden in Germany

I was born in 1930 in Berlin, Germany. Ours was a strictly middle-class family. My father was a physician and my mother a registered nurse. They met in a hospital when my father was a senior medical student. My father was Jewish, my mother Protestant. They were married in 1920. I was the oldest of three children. My brother Lothar was born in 1932 and another brother, Siegfried, was born in 1934. It was a premature birth and the baby only lived 10 days.

My father came from an Orthodox background and his marriage to my mother caused great turmoil. My mother agreed to raise my brother and myself Jewish, since religion was not important to her. We did celebrate Christmas and Easter in addition to all the Jewish Holidays. As a matter of fact, my brother and I got the two sides of the family to compete as to who gave what for Christmas and Hanukkah.

By 1935 things began to deteriorate, you could see the adults frowning and talking in hushed voices. My parents believed that children should not be burdened with bad news. A mistake, I believe, since sooner or later it had to be faced. In 1935 my father was not allowed to call himself "Doctor" anymore even though he graduated from the Berlin University Medical School Summa Cum Laude. He was given permission to treat Jewish patients only, a rare privilege. Not every Jewish doctor was so fortunate, and permission was based on his World War I army service. He was a medic during that war, his brother, Leo, died in that war.

It felt as if the Germans came up with new restrictions and different laws to harass us practically every week. For instance, in 1935 they passed the law that stated that only persons of "Germanic Origin" could be German citizens. Jews were not of Germanic origin therefore they could not be citizens. In November 1938 Krystallnacht happened. A lot of our patients sought refuge in our waiting room. We were located one flight up and a lot of our patients had small stores with living quarters right behind it. Together we watched the Fasanenstrasse Temple burn. You could see it from our back window.

Two days later my brother and I went back to school. We were told that Jews had to leave German schools, right now, not at the end of the day but immediately. When I got downstairs, I found my brother crying. He was only 6 years old and assumed he was being sent home because he had done something wrong. I told him he had to wait with his tears and I was going to wait with mine until we got home. I wasn't going to let any German see us cry. When I told my father what had happened and saw the look on his face, I didn't cry then either. Even now, when I think of the events of that particular day I'm filled with rage.

We enrolled in a Jewish secular school, which was in operation until 1941 when the Germans passed a law which closed all Jewish schools and forbade all education of Jewish children. If you

were caught giving or taking instruction it meant instant deportation to a concentration camp. In 1938 right after Kystallnacht my father's youngest brother, Herbert, decided it was time to leave; the only place he could find to go to, was Bolivia. He begged my father to come along, but even after all the signs of danger my father thought this madness would not last and decided to stay. My uncle and his family left. They survived the war in Bolivia. To be sure they also suffered great hardship, but they survived.

In January 1941 my father committed suicide. At that point the Germans deported all the intellectuals from Berlin. My father thought, mistakenly, that once he was gone, they would leave us alone. He hoped that once he was not in the picture we would be left alone because our mother was not Jewish, that of course didn't happen. We spent the next four years hiding. Luckily in 1942 our apartment house suffered a direct bomb hit; we were in the cellar and most of us survived. We said that we were bombed out and lost our papers. By another stroke of luck the police precinct in our area was destroyed the same night. So we gave all our statistics but omitted the fact that we were Jewish. With the precinct out of action our story had to be taken at face value. Still we had to be very careful because a lot of people in the area knew that we were Jewish. Some helped us with food and coal, but there were those who would have denounced us to the authorities.

My mother found a teacher, also half-Jewish, who gave us regular lessons. This was done in hiding of course. Dr. Landsberg needed to be paid and we used our scarce resources for education. My mother, for the rest of her life kept wondering if she should have bought bread instead. I for one was very grateful for the lessons I had. One of the subjects was English and that came in very handy indeed.

May 1945 found us still in Berlin and living from day to day, running and hiding, hoping for an end. The end came when the Russians took our part of the city. There was heavy fighting still, even children of twelve were pressed into defending "The Fatherland". We breathed a sigh of relief when we saw our first Russian soldier, short-lived relief, the Russians turned out to be no great bargain either. They plundered everything they could lay their hands on. Came nighttime they went looking for women and girls to rape, too young or too old didn't exist. So we were hiding some more.

About six weeks after the end of the war Berlin was partitioned among the Allies and we had the good luck to be in the British Sector. We were safe from marauding soldiers. The British didn't countenance any nonsense from their troops. We tried to get our lives back together, which wasn't easy. Food and fuel shortages continued for a long time. Housing was difficult to come by and we had no means of support. All of this proved too much for my mother. She had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized for a whole year. I found employment as a maid and later as a receptionist in a Beauty Parlor that served British troops and their dependents. I got the job because I spoke and could write a fair amount of the language. My brother was too young to work. He had to live in a German orphanage until my mother came home. When she was released, she found a job and I returned to school.

On December 5th, 1947, the Jewish Community of Berlin organized the first Chanukah party since the war. I wanted to go. My mother thought I was too young. I finally talked her into it, but she came along to chaperone me. At that party I met a young man but the name of Bernard Organeck. For him it was love at first sight in a few weeks I decided he was right. My mother thought that I was too young to make a lifetime commitment, but of course I had to grow up fast and I was much more mature than most girls at seventeen. When the Russians blockaded Berlin in July 1948, the Americans flew out all displaced persons (Bernard was a displaced person). The only way to go with him was to get married. So, we were married July 27, 1948.

We both wanted to leave Germany as soon as possible and we opted to try to go to the US. Since we didn't have relatives in the US, we asked the Joint Distribution Committee for help in locating a sponsor. On October 5, 1949, we arrived in New York. We traveled by plane because I was 8 months pregnant. It was certainly a completely different world. Some things were wonderful. I remember that I emptied every jug of milk in sight (milk was still scarce in Europe). Our destination was San Bernardino, CA. We arrived there on Oct. 17, 1949. Bernard found work in a clothing factory. He started at \$.65 cents an hour, even then, that was not enough to live on. He supplemented it by doing alterations at home in the evening.

On October 29th of that year our son, Harvey William was born. He was a happy healthy and very active baby. The Jewish Community of San Bernardino was very nice to us. They held a baby shower and organized a Bris. All the members of the Congregation came to that event. Eventually Bernard got a better job, tailor at the local department store and it didn't take long he was offered the position of foreman with a corresponding increase in salary.

We had a hard time getting used to the climate and to small town life. We decided that we would try Los Angeles. It wasn't hard for Bernard to find a job since by then he spoke a passable English and he was and is an expert tailor. He got a daytime and evening job and worked long hours, but we were able to save some money.

In the meantime, Bernard's brother and family had also immigrated, so had his uncle. They all settled on the East Coast. Everyone wanted to reunify what was left of a once large family. Since Bernard had the most movable trade and both of us spoke more English than the rest of the family, it was decided we would go to New York. We did so immediately since we were expecting again. We said good-bye to some very good friends we had made and in September 1951 resettled in New York. The job market turned out to be more of a problem than anticipated. In New York there are more tailors than on the West coast, so the beginning wasn't easy. December 25, 1951, our son Steven was born, he also was a healthy if small baby.

Bernard worked hard, always, but we made progress. We bought a house on Long Island and Bernard's brother bought one 5 houses away on the same street It enabled the cousins to grow up together. My brother-in law has three children. We were glad that our children experienced a normal childhood with most of the creature comforts that we largely missed. Most important of all, they had the opportunity at a good education and the chance to pick an occupation they liked. They didn't just have to take a job to make a living.

They have become successful adults, successful as in “Good People”, also successful in what they do for a living. Both sons are married and our son Harvey is the father of our two grandchildren, Jacob, who is 18 years and just graduated High School and will attend the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in the fall. Danielle, our granddaughter is 16. She is a wonderful girl. This summer she will go to Israel for 6 weeks.

After our sons had completed college and settled in other parts of the country, we decided that we could find an occupation that required fewer working hours than the one we had (I had gone to work full-time in the business after our youngest son entered college). We also had enough of winter. Our son, Steven had settled in the Bay Area of San Francisco and when we visited him, we were always sorry to leave. So, we sold the business back East and came to Northern California, we have never been sorry.

We are looking forward to many more years in this wonderful place. The past is always with us, but we have been very lucky to have had such a full life after the Holocaust ended.