

Ursula Pedersen

Photographed with her sister Nancy Grosso

Wartime Experience: Sent to England on a Kindertransport

I was born on March 31 1930 in Danzig. My name was Ursula Schulz. My mother, Edith, was Jewish and my father, Franz, was a Catholic. I had a stable, loving home and believe that the secure upbringing of my early years carried me through the many changes I experienced. I remember a number of events involving my sister Nancy during our years at home. My memories are sometimes of fun, sometimes of sibling rivalry.

Due to the Versailles Treaty, Danzig was a free state and its population was both Polish and German speaking. It was an ancient Hanseatic port city, very beautiful. It was approximately 30 square miles bordered by Germany, Poland and East Prussia. We sometimes went for Sunday drives and often it wasn't too long before we came to a border, had to stop, show documents. On one occasion, my mother was searched.

I went to a Jewish school, I believe one of two in the city. It was in the shadow of the famed Marienkirche. In early 1939, the school was doomed to be closed, and my parents were very concerned that I could no longer attend school for although Danzig was still supposed to be free, it was actually controlled by the Nazis long before its annexation in September, 1939. I remember the Hitler Youth roaring through the streets, and the long Nazi flags being flown from the top floor of buildings, almost touching the pavement.

I don't know how it was arranged, but I traveled to England on a Kindertransport train which left Danzig on May 3, 1939. At the time I was sent to England I was nine and my sister Nancy was five. My parents and sister and other relatives came to see me off at the train station. I didn't know that the separation from my parents would be forever. The train was sealed, and we traveled to Amsterdam where we walked to a large hall, got jam sandwiches and something warm to drink before boarding a boat to cross the English Channel and then a train to a large London railway station, arriving on May 5. I remember those two days, (May 3-5), every year. At that point photographers came and I 'made' the front page of a large newspaper. Then a person came and picked me to go with them. I don't believe I protested, and I never saw any of the children I traveled with on the train again.

The Kindertransport was organized hurriedly by Quakers in the waning months before the outbreak of World War II, and my official guardians in England were the Jewish Refugee Committee. At first I lived with a very kind farm family for two months, but was unhappy. They spoke no German and I no English. It was a rude culture shock.

The Refugee Committee sent a social worker to check on me and re-assigned me to a family closer to my own background in the outskirts of London. This family was in the diplomatic corps. When I set the table at every meal,, I placed a German/English dictionary next to my

plate and an English/German dictionary next to theirs. And so I learned English and started to adapt.

Once war was declared on September 3, 1939, over the issue of the annexation of Danzig into Germany, it wasn't too long before I evacuated to the South Wales (along with half of the London school children, it seemed.) In all, I lived in ten homes during the ten years I lived in Britain; from farmer to school teacher, coal miner, salesman, juvenile parole officer, a boarding school and adopted relatives.

I learned English, lost my German accent and indeed my mother tongue, and fitted in. I attended a very good English school and made friends, but a few months after the war ended I received a telegram from my sister who was in a Displaced Persons camp in Berlin. The news was that both our parents were dead. My father had been taken by the Russians after their liberation of Danzig and was never heard from again, and our mother had died of typhus shortly afterward. My English guardians offered to formally adopt me, but I preferred to emigrate to the U.S. and be with my sister and real family.

My sister Nancy emigrated in 1946 and I arrived in 1949. Our uncle and aunt in Modesto, California, sponsored and financed both our trips to the U. S., and we both lived with them as we adapted to a new country. I had a warm reception on my arrival from New York by train, and that night Nancy and I talked for hours trying to piece together ten years and two worlds.

After a year of Modesto living I moved to San Francisco, working a secretary. In 1954, I married Ole Pedersen, newly arrived from Denmark. We moved to Marin County in 1956, purchasing a home in Terra Linda. We have two children, Barbara and Andrew, who live in the county as well.

I am very happy that Nancy and I live close to each other now and can be both sisters and good friends. I don't think either of us especially clings to the other or dwells much in the past. It is so long ago.