

Elizabeth Pschorr

Wartime Experience: Remained in Germany

I was born in Hamburg on September 23, 1911. My parents, Gertrud, née Blum and Marcel Holzer had a son, Erich three years older and lived in an apartment house on the third floor. My father worked in my grandfather's firm, Adolf Blum and Popper, shipping and forwarding. My father's family was Austrian. While we were very close to my German grandparents we did not have much contact with the family in Vienna. They were Jewish and I suspect that my father wanted to get us away from persecution and therefore had us baptized Lutheran.

My parents were not members of any religious group. Like so many German Jews my father felt German first. Actually I can only speculate on these matters because till his dying day in this country my father never spoke about this. He had great ideas about his profession and during World War II he worked for the German War ministry and was in charge for food supply for the army at the frontier. He wanted to be part of that great machinery of world trade, import and export. Consequently I was completely unaware of my Jewish ancestry. My first encounter with anti-Semitism occurred when I was about eight years old and my best school friend told me that she could not play with me anymore because I was Jewish. But after my girlish pain over the loss of a friend had healed the subject was forgotten.

But 1933 when the Nazi party ruled Germany my "Aryan" fiancé and I began to discuss this theme of our different backgrounds. We came to the understanding that our love was stronger than any such matter and we got married. Fritz Georg Pschorr was the member of an old Munich brewery family. Most of his relatives did not approve of our step. It remains unclear if their attitude was the result of a political conviction or ignorance of Hitler's ideas.

My father was denounced by a disgruntled former employee, who had joined the Nazi party. My father went to a concentration camp near Berlin, but was released six months later. He had to leave Germany and all his possessions behind and emigrated with my mother to the United States. We stayed behind. Our marriage fell under the new laws formulated at Nuremberg and was called "a privileged marriage", a mixed marriage with children. For that reason I was also exempt from wearing the yellow star. But I had to surrender my German passport and got an Identity card with the "J" printed on it and the added name "Sarah".

Our three children, Rainer, Michael, and Irene were baptized and members of the Lutheran church. Our eldest son, Rainer died of Polio when he was eight-years-old. My only consolation was that he was spared any of the anticipated hardships. But we were lucky to escape most of the dangers thanks to the refuge we had in Feldafing near Munich. There is the old Pschorr family property. We escaped the great destruction of Hamburg by moving to that country place and also avoided my registration at the Jewish Center. This was a required act all over Germany and served later for tracing Jews for deportation. If I got an order to register, I was not aware of it because my husband kept these threatening events from me. When the orders to appear for deportation finally came we were not aware of it while in Bavaria.

Our hardships in daily life consisted of trying to be as inconspicuous in the village as possible. The principal party leader was trying to earn his merits by having his community free of Jews. He did transport the only other Jewish person, an elderly paralyzed lady, away. Although she died on transport he had done his duty, one said. One day he appeared with the tailor of the village who was now the party police and threatened me in the absence of my husband. But he did not dare, apparently to go any further than confiscating money and some rations. I had to find food for the children and medical supplies. Irene became very ill. She had Osteomyelitis and it was a real problem to get her to a hospital in Munich. I could not use any train or other vehicle, but I ventured several times to look after Irene. On the train I had to hide with my Jewish ID card from the Gestapo checking every passenger. I always managed somehow in these overcrowded trains. And finally after six months of these trips Irene was taken home to Feldafing. How I managed to bring her there I do not remember. The main thing in my life became her care under those conditions. I went begging to the farmers, exchanging my clothes for eggs and butter for the two children.

Fritz's life was also saved because of our changed residence and because of our marriage. He was drafted into the army. After being trained in a training camp the officer in charge wanted to enlist him in an officer-training course. He had to fill out an application and disclose his wife's identity. Consequently he was released from the army and enlisted in the Organization Todt. This meant low and extremely heavy labor. On his way to Hamburg where he had to enlist he got violently ill. He had Hepatitis and was thus saved from serving till the liberation army reached us.

When the bombing started, my soul was split in two. Dear God, I prayed don't let us be hit. And my other half said Send more bombers, bring an end to this misery. The American army, a tank unit, settled in Feldafing. That village housed meanwhile the refugees from Northern Germany and every family had one room. The population of about 1000 had tripled. A train with surviving and dead inmates from concentration camps had stopped there as well and most of the former house owners had to surrender their houses to the camp for survivors.

I began to seek a contact to my parents in USA and managed to convince some of the American soldiers of German-Jewish identity. They became my bridge to my parents. Eventually I registered in the D.P. camp as refugee and survivor. Through the organization "Joint" I then got my family on the emigration list. We were called up to register in the emigration camp Freiman and waited there for six weeks to be boarded on a troop transporter, "The Marin Flasher" to sail to America.

I wrote a book, 'A Privileged Marriage', describing all this in detail. In my life I encountered events and situations, which I find worthwhile to know in order to have a vision about changes and events of human interest in Germany.