

## Edith Samuel

Wartime Experience: Immigrated to Canada and US

March 8, 1921 I was born in Magdeburg, Germany at the home of my maternal grand-parents: Israel and Leah (Beiser) Kesten. My mother was their oldest daughter: Eva (Kesten) Rostholder. There were four more daughters (a set of twins), and a son. My father David Rostholder was a merchant.

The grandparents, along with the three oldest children, had come around 1900 to live in Magdeburg. About the same time, my father with his only and oldest brother Felix came from Kolomea, belonging to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire at that time .During W.W.II the Nazi-regime staged a pogrom one day, and killed every man, woman, and child living in Kolmea at that time.

Before the Hitler regime 2000 Jewish souls resided in Magdeburg. When the war was over, 34 souls came out of the ruins and hiding, mostly of mixed marriages. The only proof of us having ever lived there, is the Jewish cemetery. The large temple was destroyed during Cristal Nacht, November 1938.

My father served in the Austrian army during WWI ending up as a prisoner of war in Italy. My parents were married in June 1920 in Magdeburg. My childhood was a happy and carefree one. There were many cousins to play with. The family was close knit, and very caring for each other. We were conservative Jews. with kosher house- hold. All the Jewish holidays were observed, we attended Hebrew school, and a weekly religious school. Our standard of living was comfortable, the family had dry-goods or clothing stores. There are many Kesten relatives in New York city, the first ones leaving Ko1omea prior to WW 1.

From the nine cousins in Magdeburg, three of them perished in the Holocaust with their parents, three settled in Israel, and three came to live in the U.S Our grandfather perished in Theresienstadt.

Hitler had just been elected and March 9,1933, one day after my 12th birthday, his S.S. followers staged an attack on the Jews in our town, and other cities all over Germany. Storming and plundering Jewish stores, vandalizing homes and arresting prominent Jewish men. I recall how 4 S.S. men forced their way into our large flat, laughing at our scared faces, and stating: "This was only a warning!

After that day, the life for the Jewish people went downhill. My grand-father and uncle did not wish to leave, stating "A11 this will pass soon" and urged my father not to leave without them. Of course, nobody had any idea then what terrible times were ahead.

November 1935, my mother passed away, at age 40, she had a heart ailment, for which no surgery was done at that time. My father had to take care of his two young daughters alone

and hired a housekeeper to run the household. My only sister Ruth, born in 1926, developed a heart ailment and died in the spring of 1939, at age 13. She was buried at the Jewish cemetery children section in Magdeburg which was destroyed during the Nazi-regime.

Summer of 1936, my father's only sister, Ethel Lutvak, came from Canada to visit us. Because of the "Olympic-Games", things for the Jews were sort of "put on hold". Aunt Ethel had left to live in Canada as a young bride and had not seen her brothers since then. It was a happy and tearful reunion. She was shocked when she saw, how we were living in fear every day, and there was no more future for us in Magdeburg and wanted to take me home with her, when her visitor's visa expired. But that was not possible, and my father did not want me to leave at such a young age. As soon as she returned home to Windsor, Ont. Canada, her family worked out a plan to let me come on a student visa at first. Canada had very strict immigration laws at that time, and the quota-numbers were very low. So in May 1937, I embarked alone on the S.S. Berlin in Bremerhaven to travel to Canada. On the morning of my departure, my grandfather came to our flat. He placed his hands upon my head, saying an ancient Hebrew prayer. We both cried.... I was 16 and little did I know then what this parting meant at that time.

In Halifax, Nova Scotia, the immigration-officer decided not to let me enter Canada until my relatives had posted a bond of \$500 so I would not become a public charge! They put me up in an immigration hotel, and a telegram was dispatched to my relatives to produce the requested bond for me to enter Canada. That was a great deal of money at that time but they were able to post the bond with the help of the Jewish community. I took the train for 2 days to Windsor, Ontario and a telegram was sent to my father, that I had arrived safely.

I was welcomed warmly into my aunt's home. She had a large family and it was depression time so things were not plentiful, but everything was shared. During her visit my father and his brother had given her some money and jewelry to take along, to take care of me. The money was not too much, as it was then already very dangerous to take money out of Germany. I came only with two medium size suitcases, mostly clothes, and hardly any money. Every month, my father would send me \$10 that was all that was permitted from the German Government and even that was stopped after a while.

My aunt's two sons had lots of fun teasing me about my English. Her husband John was a kind man and he would often take me to the movies to learn English. The youngest daughter Pearl at first resented very much, that I had come to live with them and it took years until she behaved civilly toward me. Her older sister Edith protected me. Her ex-husband was from a well-to-do Jewish family in Detroit, Michigan and was her former father-in-law, who gave me the affidavit to come to the US

The school in Canada would not accept me as a student and I was told that after my 4-month visa expired I would be sent back to Germany where the fate awaiting me there would surely mean being sent a camp. The Canadian relatives and their friends went to work at once. Their efforts paid off and I was to enter the U.S.A. on a legal basis with a German quota number.

These were as not used much in those years. A place was secured for me to enter in Detroit, Michigan, across the river from Windsor.

In September 1937 was taken per car by a Jewish lawyer Nathan Milstein in his car to the Canadian American border with a valid entry-visa and at long last I was "home". I adjusted well in Detroit and was able to enter high-school and received my diploma 2 years later. About the same time Sophie and Sigriund Rohlik, family friends in German had arrived to live in Detroit. They treated me as their own as they had no children. They were very successful in business and their generosity with their "adopted" children was endless.

I remember September 1,1939 very well. It was a balmy night in Detroit and I was sleeping by open window when the silence was broken by newspaper boys calling out loudly "Hitler invaded Poland, war has started all over Europe! I knew from then on, that "things" would never be the same again for my family left behind in Germany! Much later, with the help of the Red Cross, and some survivors in Israel I found out that soon my father and most of the men, old and young, were rounded up in Magdeburg and put into prison and from there shipped off the concentration camp Buchenwald. All mail from Germany had ceased.

In June 1940, after graduation from high school in Detroit, I moved to Chicago to live there with Canadian cousins Jeannette and Joe Lutvak and their small son Mark. I worked in an office and also did some baby-sitting. But the war was still raging on in Europe and I decided to enter the U.S. Nurse's Cadet Corps. I went to a training hospital in Hot Springs National Park, leaving Chicago April 1. 1943 in a terrible snowstorm, to start my training. It took 3 years to graduate as a Registered Nurse. The work was hard, 12 hours shifts, then classes und studies. We relieved nurses to serve in the Army and Navy hospitals in the US and overseas. It was a very good experience, and I had now a wonderful profession for the years to come. I graduated in March 1947, and now the whole world was open to me!

By that time, the war in Europe was over. It was 10 years by now since I had seen any of my family again. All I wanted was to be in San Francisco when they arrived from Shanghai by former American troopships. With the little money I had saved by working as a nurse, I was able to purchase an airline ticket. June 1947 arrived on Unite Airlines in San Francisco not knowing that I was to settle there at long last!

I had made a reservation at a hotel where a telegram was waiting for me at the hotel from the relatives in China, telling me, that their departure was delayed for 4 weeks, due to my aunt's chest x-rays would not pass to enter the U.S.A

I could not stay at the hotel for four weeks the next day I contacted Jack Weisenfeld a former soldier, whom I had met at a U.S.O. dance in Hot Springs. He had lived in San Francisco, prior to the war, and he returned after his discharge and was working for the San Francisco Chronicle as a typesetter. I told him what had happened, and he drove me to Mount Zion Hospital where I was hired at once to work in the pediatriic department, my specialty. Moved into their nurse's

residence for \$10 a month. I had to obtain a valid California license and as my training was so intensive, it was granted without any trouble.

On July 3, 1947, I was standing along with many anxious people at pier 35 waiting for the arrival of the "S.S. Gordon" from Shanghai, with my relatives on board. Little by little we could relate the fate of our family that we had left behind in Europe and perished in the Holocaust. Little did I also know on that day meeting their ship on the pier, they also had bought" along Leo Samuel, my future husband! Leo and I dated for one year before we were married in June 1948 at the home of Rabbi and Ruth White

Leo was born in 1916 in Rohdewald, Germany. His mother was a WWI widow left with 4 children. She was then in her early 30's. Their life was a meager one, and relatives helped. The two older boys were raised in a Jewish boarding-school, learning a trade. Their only sister married young into a mixed marriage. Her gentile husband would not divorce her as the Nazi-Regime requested and he was sent to a labor camp! She in turn somehow survived with her three children, wearing the Yellow Star, and denied access to the air-raid shelters. One brother survived in South Africa. The other brother was taken with his young wife and 15-month-old baby-boy to Auschwitz, he never saw his wife and child again He returned as a sick and broken man to Hannover after his liberation December 15, 1941 Leo's mother was on a transport to the Ghetto of Riga along with all the Samuel family from Hannover, and the rest of the Jews still residing there. It was bitter cold and nobody came back or survived this transport!

In 1938, Leo left Germany for Shanghai with little means, and endured the next nine years working at odd jobs. Life was very hard there, but better than any camp in Europe at any time. There were hospital stays, operations and the later chronic asthma was caused from all that. Leo was a trained tannery worker from Germany and found work in this field right away in San Francisco. Mt. Zion hospital was within walking distance from our apartment, and I kept on working as a nurse there. On December 2, 1949 our first son Steven David was born, named after both grand- fathers. It was such a happy day for us, as we both felt part of our family was given back to us. On March 13, 1951 our second son James Eric was born, named after both grandmothers. Soon after that, we were able to purchase a house and to buy furniture and have a car too. We had a nice circle of friends, mostly of the same backgrounds, we still remained good and loyal friends to this day. My husband by had his own small wholesale grocery business, which he operated until ill health forced him into early retirement.

I continued to work as a part-time nurse for many years and also help my husband with his business, doing the bookwork and others. We Had many nice family vacation and took some nice trips. Leo was brought up as an assimilated Jew, but, after all that had happened to us in Germany, we always were members of a temple, and other Jewish organizations, supported the Jewish Federation. Jewish holidays were observed. Both our sons attended Hebrew and Sunday schools and had Bar-Mitzvahs.

For our 30th wedding anniversary we traveled to Israel, meeting old-time friends from Magdeburg, whom I had not seen in 42 years. It was a very warm re-union still after all that

time! One year later, July 16, 1979 my dear husband passed away at age 64 due to his severe chronic bronchial asthma, and a fatal heart attack. We were married 31 years, not long enough! I never had any desire to re-marry.

Alone now I did part-time nursing until it was time to retire. I kept busy with volunteer work at the Jewish-Home in S.F and the local blood bank and did some traveling on my own and learned how to play bridge. With the urging of my children, I sold my house in San Francisco moved closer to my children and had to leave behind many old-time friends and activities

My daughter-in-law says that I adjusted to living in the "country" in one day! Joined the near-by temple, the Jewish Community Center and a weekly writing class, The non-Jewish members of the writer's class want to hear all the stories about the Holocaust saying that they never had known such events took place.