

Anita Horn Steinacher

Photographed with her husband Gerald

Wartime Experience: Sent to England on a Kindertransport, Immigrated to the US

I was born in Cologne, Germany, on June 19, 1923. My parents were Hertha and Karl Horn. My mother was also born in Cologne, on October 14, 1898. Her parents were Helene (called Hedwig) and Jacob (called Julius) Gans. She had an older brother Carl and a younger one called Erich. My mother was like me, the apple of her father's eye. My grandfather had a paint business-manufacturing and sales. Grandfather Gans was born in Herlinghausen on 7/24/1863 and died in Cologne on 10/17/1922. My grandmother Gans was born in Ruhrort, Germany on May 12, 1868.. Her father was a butcher and her maiden name was Cohen. I remember her very well. She loved to play cards. In summer we would meet her in the park, where she and her friends would play bridge and have coffee and cake.

My father's parents were Albert and Helene Horn (nee Gottschalk). He was born in Trimmersdorf - Kreis Grevenbroich on 4/28/1858 and died in Cologne in January 1905 from throat cancer. My grandmother Horn was born in Koenigsfeld, a tiny village in the Eifel on February 22, 1863. Before she was married, she was the cook for a wealthy Jewish family in Frankfurt. And what a cook she was! We, my brother and I, always had Friday night Shabbat dinner with her and the food and especially her pastries were always wonderful. The Passover Seder was always at her house and it was my favorite holiday. There were always lots of guests, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends. My grandmother had many special things just for Pesach. She had embroidered a runner for the table, pillow-cover, towel etc. all with scenes from the Passover story, all very colorful. Unfortunately, these were some of the things that were lost when my parents had to leave Germany. She also had special silver cups for everyone in the family, a couple of these are still in our possession.

My grandfather Horn started a beauty parlor and barber supply business in Cologne. After he died my grandmother continued to run the business until my dad was ready to take over. By that time World War 1 started and his management skills had to be put off another 4 years. The business flourished through hyper-inflation (where they carried the worthless money to the bank in a laundry basket), the depression, and until the Nazis came on November 10, 1938 - the day after the "Kristallnacht" and destroyed fixtures, all glass and mirrors and merchandise.

Considering that my grandmother Horn had little formal education since she lived in such a tiny village and school ended when you were 14 years old, she was determined that all her children - besides my dad who was the oldest - and his 4 sisters were well educated. My dad was sent to Nuernberg to learn more about running a business and to Paris for a year. He spoke French fluently. She saw to it that the girls learned some kind of trade- One went to Paris to become a "modiste"(make hats), another had business training and after her marriage, ran a branch of the store in Essen.

My parents met at a New Year's Eve party in 1921—and it was love at first sight. They were married on August 27, 1922. Rabbi Rosenthal officiated. I remember him very well. He was the chief rabbi of the synagogue we attended. My parents first lived in a small apartment, but my maternal grandfather died shortly after their wedding and since Cologne was under British occupation, they moved in with my grandmother Gans. Otherwise a British soldier would have been billeted in her large apartment.

My childhood was a very happy one. My dad adored me and so did my "Ene". She was my mother's aunt, childless, lived close by and spent a lot of time with me. Her real name was Leni; she was quite fashionable and took great delight in seeing to getting pretty things for me and she loved fussing with my hair. She and her husband, Uncle Paul, took me along on long weekends and I stayed with them for a week or so during the summers. They built their own house in a suburb of Cologne in an old orchard and I have fond memories of climbing into the cherry tree from my bedroom window and picking cherries. Unfortunately, they were deported by the Nazis to Theresenstadt. where they died. They had tried to move to England but found that the climate made Uncle Paul sick and so they returned to Germany and lost their lives.

My brother Albert was born on July 1, 1926, shortly after we moved into the remodeled flat above my grandmother Horn's. It was a nice, big flat and we were very comfortable. We lived on Marienplatz 28a, across from the church "Maria im Capitol". The parsonage was right next to it and there was a huge chestnut tree in their garden. The church and parsonage were enclosed with a stone wall and at the end was a very pretty arch. I went to school in the public Jewish grade school in the Luetzowstrasse. You can see our class picture with Fraulein Loeb, who was our teacher for the 1st through 4th grade. She was very strict but an excellent teacher. When we were in 3rd grade the whole class went to Bad Kreuznach to a Kinderheim - like a fancy camp - where we had classes in the morning and went on walks and outings in the afternoon. It was great fun, only I was so spoiled and hated the food. My mother sent care packages every week, so I didn't starve.

My best friend was Suse Cahn. Our parents were very good friends and we grew up together. In the summer of 1933, while we were away on vacation, they moved to Holland. Walter Cahn, Suse's father was a Social Democrat besides being Jewish and his safety was threatened when the Nazis came to power. This was my first experience of someone I knew emigrating. It came as such a shock that anyone would be threatened, after all this had always been our home and why did it have to change? We visited the Cahns frequently in Holland and Suse came on summer vacations to stay with us. We always remained friends and visited both her parents and later on Suse and her husband Walter Bear. During World War II, when Germany occupied Holland and they started to deport the Jews, they were saved by being hidden by friends and neighbors.

Our own lives continued normally and quietly. We visited with my Aunt Ina Bloch (my father's oldest sister) as often as possible. Their daughter Hanna, one and a half years my senior, was and is my favorite cousin. We were close, even though they lived in Essen, about 2 hours by train or car. She and her brother Albert now live Buenos Aires, Argentina. Occasionally we saw

my Aunt Dora, also a sister of my dad. She, Uncle Albert and their daughter Ellen lived in Elberfeld. Tante Dora was a very sweet lady, but she had a lot of misfortune. Her two older children died of typhoid in the early 1920s. And they were the only ones of my parents' siblings that were deported by the Nazis and died in a concentration camp. [note: this statement is contradicted by the information about Aunt Leni and Uncle Paul who were sent to Theresenstadt and died described 2 pages before this.]

Tante Erna was another one of my dad's sisters. She and her husband, Uncle Walter, and my cousins Karl and Adele lived in Cologne also. After my grandmother's death, they moved into her flat and we were then one happy family in the same house. Adele and my brother Albert are very close in age, and they were the best of friends. They both went to England in the same children's transport in January 1939. My mother's brother Carl lived in Cologne, he, Tante Lise, Herbert and Werner, lived in Chicago after a stay with her brother Herman in London, England.

In 1933, I started to go to the "Lyceum", a public girl's high school. I thought it was wonderful, but because of the Nazi regulations it became more frustrating and difficult for Jewish kids, and so my parents transferred me to the Jewish high school "Jawne". This was a private school with a small enrollment, but by the time the Nazis had been in power for a while, 1935-37, and before everybody that could left Germany, the classes were overflowing. We as kids had a wonderful time; we learned a lot and most of the teachers were excellent. In conjunction with the school was an orthodox synagogue and under the influence of my favorite teacher, Fraulein Sonne, I became very religious. But this phase didn't last too long. My mother put a stop to my religious fervor.

Despite all the political turmoil our lives were quiet and in Cologne Jews were not mistreated. But more and more of our friends and schoolmates emigrated, some to other European countries, some to the U.S. and others to Palestine. By early 1938, my dad applied for visas to Australia, but they were denied since he was already 48 years old. They applied for immigration to the U.S. after that and were granted visas in late October 1939. By that time the infamous "Kristallnacht" had long passed and Albert and I were living in England.

I left Cologne January 11, 1939. My parents, Albert, my aunt Grete and several friends came to the station to see me off. The train was going to Brussels, then to the English Channel, from there by boat to England and by train to Victoria Station. When we came to the German/Belgian border all Jews had to get off. They checked all the luggage and then strip searched me to be sure I wasn't smuggling more than the 10 marks allowed or gold and silver.

My mother's cousin, Max Phillips, met me at Victoria station and took me to Mrs. Coates - Meese's house. I still marvel at this lady, who never had children, to take in a teenager from another country because of the political situation. My "room" was a small balcony in one corner of the studio up some wooden steps. I had always lived in a normal kind of apartment or flat and moving into a studio was certainly interesting. Auntie Doris rented out part of her studio - home, and we had to use the bath in the rented part. It is amazing how quickly a teenager can adjust.

Since I had a pretty good background in English, it didn't take me long to be quite fluent. A couple of weeks after my arrival in London I enrolled in the Poly-technical school, just down the street from the studio, and learned tailoring and design. A short time later one of the neighbors asked me to help her in her dressmaking shop. I tried very hard to get visas for my parents to come to England at least temporarily but was not successful. But life in London was exciting anyway. I had met some other "refugees" at get togethers arranged by some Jewish committee and I knew a few families that had moved to London and environs.

And then in September the Germans marched into Poland, and England declared war on the Germans. We all went to church that first Sunday in Sept. and still remember singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with the rest of the congregation. Of course, the family didn't want me to return to London. Living in a studio with a glass roof did not seem too safe and I was sent to Wilton. Lots of troops were stationed in the vicinity. Also, a group of refugees from Czechoslovakia had settled in Wilton and twice a week I went over to their house to teach them English and help them get used to the English way of doing things. There were some couples and several men that had escaped.

The responsibility for someone else's teenager with all these soldiers around was more than he wanted, and so, after a few months I moved again. I lived with Ben and Avril and their little daughter, Ann, in Stanmore. Avril was a trained nanny and she taught me to take good care of Ann. We lived in a typical English house, very comfortable and I was happy to be close to London again. I stayed with them until my parents were settled in San Francisco and asked to have us join them.

My brother's stay in England was not as happy as mine. He came to London with a children's transport and lived with a family in the East end of London in very primitive conditions. The people meant well, after all they took in some unknown 12-year-old, but their lifestyle was totally different from anything we were used to. They also did not want Albert to visit with me or my mother's cousins. When he had his Bar Mitzvah in July '39 we all went to the synagogue for the service, but they wouldn't let him join us for a party. AT the beginning of the war, all school children living in London, especially the East end, were evacuated to the country. Albert was sent to St. Albans. There he lived with an elderly couple and their dog. This was much better. The worst part was that Albert never wrote, and it was a wonder that he came to London at the appointed day to get our visas at the U.S. Embassy.

We left London around May 20, 1940, went with a children's transport to Liverpool where we stayed overnight. We boarded the ship the next day and crossed the Atlantic safely in a convoy.

In New York we were met by Mrs. Stella Sender, the mother of my friend Lotte. We stayed overnight with them and the next afternoon some lady from the emigration committee put us on a train to San Francisco. This was on a Sunday and we arrived in Oakland on Thursday evening. For someone used to European distances it was mind boggling to travel in one country for 5 days. The next amazing thing for us, once we had met our parents again and Tante Flora

and Uncle Sieg Hertzmann , was to take the ferry over to San Francisco, past the fair on Treasure Island --- all lit up --- a wonder after the blackout in England.

It was a little difficult at first to be together with my parents again and another new country. My parents lived in a one room apartment, the apartment house belonged to Uncle Sieg, and Albert and I stayed in one or the other vacant apartment. With the help of various people, I found a job as an au pair --- with the Daniel Hone family. They had two boys, Daniel and Stephen, 4 1/2 and 2 years old. Temple Emanuel sponsored meetings for German refugees, and it was a good way to get together. Eventually my parents moved to a larger apartment, and I gave up being a live-in nursery maid. I took care of an older boy, Noel Kirshenbaum; he was 7 at the time and I went to school part time.

I found a job working as a finisher for Karp and Golson. They made women's dresses and their factory and salesroom was at 131 Sutter Street - a building just for women's clothes, both manufacturing and wholesale. One of the other tenants was Koret, then just beginning and for whom I worked later for almost 6 years. During all this time my mother worked as a maid for a number of families. My dad did janitorial work for a while until he worked in the kitchen of Laubscher Bros. Delicatessen, at that time a well-known deli on Market Street. After that he worked at Goldberg Bowen, the fanciest grocery store in S F.

Then Pearl Harbor was hit on a lovely sunny Sunday on Dec. 7, 1941. Many changes all over SF. Young men were drafted or volunteered for the services, and after training were shipped off from SF. In July 1943, I met Gerald Steinacher at the weekly Sunday dance at the JCC. I had gone there with Herbert Rothschild, a soldier stationed at the Presidio, whom I knew very well from Cologne and who had been at our house for dinner before the dance. Herb and Gerald had been together at Fort Sill for basic training and then both came to SF. I met Gerald again at the JCC a few days later. In January 1944, we became officially engaged. Not too long afterwards Gerald was sent to Camp Ritchie in Maryland to be trained for interrogation etc.

The end of March 1944, I went to New York to visit my friend Lotte Sender and so I could see Gerald whenever he could get an overnight pass. Altogether I lived 3 months in NY.

We were married on May 19, 1946. We returned to SF to a one room apartment. Gerald found a job and we settled into our own routine and married life. We had Linda on April 11, 1949.

Gerald started working for the Feldman Co. in August '49 and he has been a manufacturer's rep. ever since. Yvonne was born on January 2, 1952. She was a very good baby and my dad called her "Wonneklos" - pleasure dumpling.

At this time Trude Plack and I got involved in starting a co-op nursery school - Miraloma Park Co-op Nursery school - still in existence; we went to the 40th anniversary party not too long ago. In the summer of 1953, we moved to Los Altos. We were really liked living "in the country" as my mother called it. There were still more orchards - mostly apricots, prunes and cherries - than houses. I got involved again in starting a co-op nursery - Los Altos Parent Pre-school - also

still flourishing. We met many nice young people through this, many who still live in the area. Most of our neighbors and friends had 3 or more children, so we decided to follow the trend. Bob was born on April 22, 1955.

We were fortunate to be able to add to the house a short while later and life was good. In the summer of '55, we joined Congregation Beth Am that had been started earlier that year. At that time there were very few Jewish families in the area and our kids were often the only ones in their class. Beth Am was an exciting congregation, mostly young people with many good ideas. Of course, at that time we couldn't possibly imagine a congregation with more than 1000 families.

In 1960, Gerald, I, Linda & Yvonne set out on our "big" trip to Europe and Israel. We had hoped to visit Gerald's father, but he died in March '60 after failing health. We flew to London where we stayed about a week. We met Averil, with whom I had lived before going to the U.S., and Gerald's relative Fritz Lein showed us much of London, Kew Gardens and surroundings in his chauffeur driven Rolls. Next was Paris and from there we flew to Zurich via Rome. We rented a car in Switzerland, toured all over, staying in Grindelwald, St. Moritz, and then driving on to Innsbruck. From there into Germany, Nurnberg and Cologne to show our kids where we used to live. We ended up in Holland and , took the kids to Madurodam and the Floriade and eventually set sail for New York on the Nieuw Amsterdam.

Unfortunately, my Dad did not feel well early in 1961 and was found to have throat cancer. After major surgery he recovered well. And we went to Carmel with all the family in October to celebrate my mother's birthday. By January 1962, he was back in the hospital for more surgery and really never quite recuperated and on April 12, '62, he died. Of course, we could see it coming, but still were not prepared for the shock. Considering how dependent my mother had been on my dad in many ways, she handled it very well. It was fortunate that she had been working at the City of Paris all these years and continued to do so until she was in her seventies and the store closed.

In 1961 when Bob went to school until about 2 pm, I went back to work, at first just a few hours.

Eventually I started to work for Phil Goodman CPA. I was his first employee and he and I went on to bigger and better things. I retired from his office in June '85.

Our kids grew up unbelievable fast like most kids do. All of a sudden they were ready to be on their own. Linda married Steven August 2, '69, and Yvonne married Les on July 4, '71. Bob played bachelor for quite a few years until he met and married Karen November 9, '86. We feel very lucky to have such a great family, especially with our grandchildren Jenny and Ben, Jonathan and Sammy, Erik and Deena. My mother became "grandma" to our girls' husbands and their families. She lived to the ripe old age of 85 1/2 and died within a few hours from a ruptured aorta. She was active until the day she died, and we felt very fortunate that she went so quickly.

Now we are the "older" generation. We feel very fortunate to have all our family in California and can watch the little ones grow up. Our greatest "nachas" is having everyone together for holidays and special occasions.