

Gerald F. Steinacher

Photographed with his wife Anita

Wartime Experience: Immigrated to the US

I was born in Nuernberg on March 14, 1916, to Jennie (nee Rosenberg) a Jacob Steinacher. Since this was during World War I, my father was serving in the German army and was away from home. My mother and older sister Elsbeth were staying with my maternal grandparents. My mother had a very difficult delivery and since all the better doctors were serving in the army, she had very little help, and never fully recovered. I do not remember my mother at all, she passed away in May 1920, after spending her last years in a sanatorium. My father never remarried. He did not wish to inflict a stepmother on my sister and me.

I went through the usual grade and high school classes. Even at that time anti-Semitism occasionally raised its ugly head. The teachers would single us out and make nasty remarks. My father suggested in 1932 that we should leave Germany, but my sister and I did not want to do so.

After high school a large company "AEG" gave me a 3-year management training contract. Because of the Hitler times they broke the contract and I started to work for Mr. Feibelman and learned about electrical installations. In 1936, my sister visited our cousin in Jerusalem. Our cousin Lotte had emigrated there to become a nurse at the Hadassah hospital. Elsbeth was so impressed with then Palestine that she wanted to emigrate there. I had no such desire and started to make arrangements to obtain a visa to come to the USA. In June 1937, my sister married Siegbert Bernheim. I attended the wedding, they emigrated to Palestine, and in July 1937, I set sail for New York. On board ship I met some very nice people that were looking for a renter once they were settled in New York and so I found my first home. I was lucky that my sponsor could help me find a job with Lightolier - a manufacturer of lighting fixtures. I started in the stockroom in their showroom on 34th Street. Eventually I was transferred to their design department in Jersey City. I really enjoyed this work and was there until the army called me in March of 1943. I was inducted at Fort Dix, N.J. and had my basic training at Fort Sill, OK. There I was also sworn in as a US citizen. One of my buddies was Herb Rothschild, who informed me on our arrival in San Francisco that he knew all these girls in S.F., and it turned out that my future wife, Anita, was one of "these girls".

It was a beautiful day in S.F. and I decided right there and then that this would be my home after returning from the service. We were stationed in the Presidio - what a blast. That must be the most beautiful base in the whole US. I worked in an office, doing some designing for a colonel and not working too hard.

In early 1944, Anita and I became engaged. She was ready to get married, but I wanted to wait until after the war was over. In early March I was transferred to Camp Ritchie, MD, to learn how to interrogate German prisoners. I caught a bad ear infection and missed being shipped

overseas with my group. After some photo reconnaissance training and other classes, I was finally shipped to England in October 1944, and from there to Le Veseine, France. By then I was assigned to a team, and since we were not too far from Paris, my captain and I had several chances to visit there. We missed being sent to the front by the intervention of Bill Kunreuther, another Nuernberger. When we eventually moved toward the front, most of the fighting was over in France. In Germany we were stationed near Wiesbaden first and later Ludwigsburg. We stayed in a nice home and had a German woman keep house for us. While I was there, I could visit people that had survived the war, both in Stuttgart and Nuernberg.

In early 1946, I had a leave and I visited my grandmother who lived in a Senior residence in Lengnau, Switzerland. I also had a few days of skiing in Prontesina, and I promised Anita I would take her there someday (which I did in 1960). After being quite sick with hepatitis (thanks to a shot with an infected needle), it was finally time to come home. I was deactivated at Fort Dix, spent a few days in New York, and then took the long train ride to San Francisco. After our great reunion, we got married on May 19, 1946, at Temple Beth Israel. We honeymooned in Santa Barbara and Los Angeles. I was told L.A. would be the place for me in the lighting business, but Anita would not hear of living there (and I don't blame her).

We were lucky to have found a small apartment on Franklin Street in San Francisco with the help of Lotte and Sid Weiss who lived in the same apartment house. Eventually I found a job with Mr. Andersen who manufactured fluorescent fixtures. From there I moved to work for Mr. Dausse who sold fixtures, etc. In the meantime, my father wanted to come to live with us and since there were no apartments available anywhere, we bought a house. It was very hard for my dad to get used to S.F. He spoke no English, we both worked full time and so did everybody else also of the older generation. He worked in our garden and made it look lovely, but especially when Israel was established in May 1948, he could not wait to return there. He went back in July, built a little cabin on Elsbeth's property and kept busy until he passed away on March 8, 1960. I was lucky and had a chance to visit him in October 1955.

I worked for a short time for a neon sign manufacturer and at Macy's in the lamp department Thursday evenings and Sat. to make extra money. This turned into a full-time job after a little while. In the meantime, our daughter Linda was born on April 11, 1949, and Anita stayed home with her. Anita's dad saw an ad for a lighting fixture salesman in the Chronicle. I applied and started my 37-year association with the Feldman Co. I enjoyed being my own boss, traveling all over Northern California and to Reno, NV. I added several other lines over the years and made a comfortable living for us. Our daughter Yvonne was born January 2, 1952, and son Bob joined the family on April 22, 1955.

We moved to Los Altos in November 1953. I had "discovered" it when I called on a customer in this town and Anita wanted to get away from the fog and wind in San Francisco. We have been very happy here, close enough to the city and now with shopping, theatres, concerts, Foothill College etc close by. We joined Congregation Beth Am in the summer of 1955, shortly after its founding and have been active members ever since. All the kids are married now. Linda to Steven Wolan since Aug. '69 and they are the parents of Jenny and Ben. Yvonne married Les

Goldman on July 4, 1971, and they have Jonathan and Sam. Bob married Karen Kelso in Nov. '86, and they are the parents of Erik and Deena.

Over the years we have traveled a lot — Anita is a frustrated travel agent. We have visited my sister and her family many times and she has been here from Israel twice. It's wonderful that we can stay in touch with frequent phone calls.