

Gertie Hotzner

Wartime Experience: Immigrated to the US

I was born on June 10, 1925, in Vienna the second child of Wilhelm and Therese Wohlfeiler. My brother Walter preceded me by 2 years. We were a very close family, spending a lot of time together. There were musical evenings in our home, and a lot of card playing.

My paternal grandfather died before I was born, and my grandmother died when I was a year old. On my mother's side, her mother died before my parents were married, but my grandfather, Rudolf Deutsch lived with us for some time when I was small. He died in Teresianstadt concentration camp. My father had about 7 living siblings out of 14 born alive. Three of them, including my father died in the holocaust. On my mother's side one sister died in Auschwitz and two other siblings survived.

When Hitler marched into Vienna in March of 1938, everything changed. I was caught in the center of the city on that fateful day, standing in the middle of a mob shouting "Zieg Heil". That was a most frightening experience for a 13-year-old girl. A short time later we were thrown out of public school and had to attend a Jewish school, along with girls from other districts. We were thrown out of our flat that was our home long before I was born. It had belonged to my grandparents. We moved to cold water flat, and on Kristall Nacht, the SS appeared at our door and arrested my father. My mother insisted on going along, so that my brother and I spent a very fearful night alone. The next morning they returned. My brother was arrested on the street; he escaped before they could book him and one of his friends who didn't have the courage to run, died in a concentration camp. My brother was 15 at the time. Walking on the street in Vienna in those days, I encountered many terrible things. Kids followed me shouting "Sarah", spitting at me and harassing me. I witnessed old Jews having to wash the sidewalk on their knees, windows were broken in the Jewish stores, and people were put on trucks, taken away, probably to camps.

We, that is my mother, brother and I were able to leave Vienna in March of 1939. My father who was born in Silesia was under a different quota and was supposed to follow a year later. We had affidavits from the U.S. where my father's oldest sister lived since 1907. Before my father could join us in San Francisco, he and his brother were deported to Poland where they were chased off the train with dogs and rifles pointed at them. There they survived for a while doing roadwork, and anything else that was available. We received letters from them, and sent packages and money, which they never received. The winter there was terrible and it was a miracle that they survived as long as they did. Finally, my uncle was very ill and they could not move further north to keep ahead of the German army. Then the letters stopped, and on the day we celebrated the end of the Japanese war we received a letter from a polish doctor that both my father and my uncle had been killed. How and when we never learned.

I graduated from high school in San Francisco in 1943. I lived at home with my mother and brother. My first job was in a dental lab and later I worked in an office of a garment

manufacturer. I was married to Walter Hotzner, a refugee from Hamburg Germany, who had returned from his American army duty in 1946 after having served in the Philippines and at war's end in Japan. A year later, we were married. We both worked and we had our first child, a girl, whom we named Teresa after my mother who died of cancer at age 57 during my pregnancy. . She was born on Sept. 16, 1952, and my second daughter, Judy, 2 years later on March 24, 1955. My husband a number of jobs, for about 10 years he co-owned a high-fidelity business, and later worked as a salesman in a furniture store. He retired in 1990, and died in June 1993, after having had many health problems over the years, and several heart attacks, the first one when he was 29 years old. He died shortly before his 70th birthday.

My brother was a CPA, now retired, and I learned bookkeeping in his office. For a number of years, I worked as an independent bookkeeper mostly part time, and I still have a few clients. My daughter Terri has two daughters, Becca and Hilary I am engaged in some volunteer work, ho hiking and exercise. I have very good friends, some of them I have known since I first arrived on these shores. My father's only living sister, who will turn 100 years old this year lives by herself in Beverly Hills CA. and is very alert and able to care for herself. My mother's youngest sister is in very bad shape in a retirement home in S. F. being 94 years old.

I am photographed with a picture of my father, taken by my brother in 1938. Saying goodbye to my father at the Vienna railroad station was terribly hard, I was closer to him than anyone in the family