

GABRIELLA MAUTNER

Gabriella and her family survived the Holocaust by staying on the move and hiding in Italy, Holland, Belgium, France and Switzerland,

“Considering the horror of the past and the painful memory of all those less fortunate than my family, I am forever grateful for the gift of life. Among other things, it taught me never to take anything for granted.”

Gabriella Mautner, (née Kramer) was born in 1922 in Chemnitz, Germany where she lived with her parents and older brother Wilhelm. In the spring of 1933, soon after the Nazis came into power, she and her cousin Hannah were called a dirty Jews by bullies and made to sweep the street. Her father had read Hitler’s book MEIN KAMPF. He saw the handwriting on the wall and that night the family hastily left for Switzerland by train. They first went to stay with friends in Italy then to Holland, to join Gabriella’s uncle in running the family business. However, it was soon confiscated by the Nazis and ordered to leave the coast.

In January 1942, Gabriella’s family was among the first to be called for deportation. Feigning illness, her father was able to secure a short extension. With much difficulty, the family managed to get to Belgium and hide. After five months in Brussels, Gabriella and her mother were caught in a Gestapo trap, but thanks to false papers and pretending to understand only French, they were released. They immediately prepared to travel to the still unoccupied south of France and reached a village near Lyon. Unfortunately, the French Vichy regime had begun arresting Jews in the area and turning them over to the Germans.

After two desperate and failed attempts the family finally reached Switzerland. But in a short time, they were arrested and sent to a camp together with hundreds of others. Thanks to friends who vouched for them they were freed about two months later and took refuge in the nearby mountains.

Gabriella’s brother had immigrated to America in 1938. They had a brief reunion near the end of the war he as was back in Europe fighting with the 45th Division under General Patton, helping to liberate Dachau.

Gabriella immigrated to the United States Gabriella earned a master’s degree and is a published author of novels and memoirs. She taught creative writing at San Francisco State University and the Fromm Institute.