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SCHWAB (ROTHSCHILD), MARIANNE

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EMIGRE

FRANKFURT AM MAIN (GERMANY)

Marianne Schwab, nee Rothschild, born in 1919 in Frankfurt/Main is the daughter of Louis and Melanie Rothschild of Bad Homburg, Germany, a few miles north of Frankfurt. Bad Homburg was described as having a then population of about 60,000 to 70,000 inhabitants of which approximately 5% were Jewish. Her father operated a banking business in Bad Homburg and although in the same business as the famous House of Rothschild dynasty of Frankfurt, the family was not directly related to them. Her father was also president of the Jewish community, and her maternal grandfather was a city councilman in Bad Homburg.

Her parents owned a large three-story house, among other real estate property, in which the family occupied the lower two floors. The family was orthodox Jewish, followed the strict dietary requirements (kosher), and observed all holidays. She had one younger brother, Eduard. Photos of the family and the house were displayed.

Mrs. Schwab attended public schools in Bad Homburg and does not recall any overt anti-Semitism against her or her parents, in general, prior to 1933. She felt that relations between Jews and non-Jews were very cordial in her hometown. However, following the election of the Nazis to governmental control in Germany and the enactment of anti-Jewish laws, these relationships became very strained. After the Nuremberg Laws were enacted in 1936, Mrs. Schwab was expelled from the Lyzeum (High school for girls) she attended, so she took training for two years in physical therapy in Frankfurt. Her father's bank was aryanized. i.e. control was taken over by non-Jewish management.

On November 9, 1938, during the mass riot against Jews now known as Kristallnacht, about 10 to 12 men in civilian clothing broke down the door to the Rothschild home and ransacked it destroying everything in sight. Fearing for her safety, she jumped out of the window and ran to the police station requesting help. The police refused to intercede and told her to return to her home. Still fearing for her safety, she asked to be placed in protective custody and was placed in a jail cell. Upon her release she found out that her parents and her brother had fled their home and found sanctuary in another building. They were not harmed. None of the perpetrators were recognized suggesting that they were brought in from another town to avoid any legal action against them for their unlawful activity. One of the remnants from the destruction at her home is an oil painting which was severely slashed and is now in her possession. It was shown during the interview.

The events of Kristallnacht convinced her parents, who had previously thought they could ride out the Nazi regime, that there was no future for Jews in Germany. Her brother went to Holland in January, 1939 to study agriculture for eventual immigration to Palestine. Mrs. Schwab left for England in March, 1939 with her grandmother to live with an aunt in London.

Mrs. Schwab was in England for about 1-1/2 years, experienced the bombings of London, and left for the United States from Scotland. Luckily, her sailing date was postponed due to ship repairs. Ships that did sail on that day were sunk by German U-boats. A cousin of hers was killed during an air-raid on London.

Mrs. Schwab arrived in the United States, via Canada, on October 4, 1940, where she was met by another aunt. She lived with relatives and found work in a candy factory. After being laid-off, Mrs. Schwab obtained a position as a nanny in Washington, D. C. Upon the urging of her employer, she decided to continue her education, and graduated from George Washington University with a B.S. in Physical Education and minors in German, French, and Spanish.

While in New York she became re-acquainted with Fred Schwab whom she had known in Frankfurt. Mr. Schwab had since immigrated to Detroit and was then serving in the U.S. Army. Following a period in which their relationship grew, Mr. Schwab proposed to Marianne and they were married at the end of the war in September 1945. They have two children, Dr. Leslie Schwab and Madeleine Gerrish, and four grandchildren, two from each offspring.

At first they lived in Detroit and later in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where Mrs. Schwab worked in the school system teaching physical education and subsequently switched to teaching German, French, and Spanish.

The house of her parents was confiscated by the Nazis, and they were moved into a "ghetto" street. From there they were deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp where they died. Mrs. Schwab had received a letter, through the Red Cross, from her mother dated August 27, 1942, stating that their deportation was imminent. It took place the next day. Her brother was seized by the Germans in Holland and eventually was murdered in the Mauthausen concentration camp.

Mrs. Schwab has returned to Germany several times, with her husband, on invitations from the City of Bad Homburg and her former high school, the Kaiserin Augusta Victoria Lyzeum, where she addressed the students. She also had reunions with her former high school classmates. At all times she was treated very well, with great respect, and she expressed the highest regards for those with whom she came into contact. However, she qualified her high esteem of the current residents of Bad Homburg by stating that she only came in contact with the "nice" people.

Her return to her home town was publicized by the local newspapers with articles which were shown during the interview. Also, a book on the 100 year history of Bad Homburg contains several pages featuring Mrs. Schwab and her family, their history and their experiences during the Nazi regime. One gentleman in bad Homburg discovered three paintings of local scenes painted by Mrs. Schwab's mother in the attic of their former home and personally brought them to Mrs. Schwab in the United States. She also recalled at least two incidences where non-Jews aided her family during the Nazi period.

In a message to those viewing the interview, Mrs. Schwab stated that although she has not forgotten nor forgiven the actions by the German people and still suffers agony about what happened to her parents and brother, she has no hatred in her heart. She stated that hatred prevents one from functioning properly, poisons one's soul, and destroys a rational approach to history.

Interview Information:

Interview and Synopsis by: Hans R. Weinmann

Date of Interview: January 28, 2003

Length of Interview: 1 hour 52 minutes

Format: Video recording

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