

EVELYN BERGL



Walking home from school in Vienna, 6-year old Evelyne Arzt saw the synagogue burning. She felt fear as she waited on the winding stairs of her grandparents' apartment for her father to return from work. Her father was a sales executive for a large fabric factory. Her mother was a homemaker.

Then her mother screamed, "They took Papa!"

Edward Arzt was held in Dachau and Buchenwald for nearly a year. Hermine Arzt did not know where her husband was. She stood in lines night and day - pail in hand to scrub streets if so ordered - to obtain papers to flee anywhere that would accept Jews. When Edward Arzt was released, he had 24 hours to leave Germany. Fortunately, his wife had a passport for him. She and the children followed a few weeks later.

The trauma of that experience erased all but a few memories of early childhood for Evelyne. She recalls visiting her aunt's villa outside Vienna, where she had to be on her best behavior. Her mother taught her to knit. She made doll clothes with a toy sewing machine and fabric samples. When her father was in Dachau, her brother, Heinz, took her to an amusement park and gave her no choice about riding the roller coaster, saying, "I swear on our dad's life you have to go."

The family was traditionally observant. They kept a kosher home. "On Saturdays, we couldn't do anything," she recalls. "We even tore the toilet paper the day before..." Largely for survival, only German was spoken at home. You could lose your job if you were heard speaking Yiddish.

The family was reunited in Italy, where residents helped the Arzts hide in the Siena woods for a year, after which they lived in a displaced persons camp in Rome.

Evelyne arrived in Brooklyn at age 15 with one year of formal schooling and was placed in seventh grade. She made honor roll but recalls, "It was very hard to go with the little children after I had lost my childhood."

She left school to help support her family as a seamstress and married her brother's friend, Zdenko Bergl, whom she had met in Rome. He had already settled in Kansas City. His parents lived with the couple for 40 years, first in a windowless house on Truman Road and later in the home they built.

"We always got along," says Evelyn, who after the war removed the final "e" from her name. "They just couldn't understand why I need a dishwasher!"

Evelyn enjoys reading and spending time with her poodle, Sukie. America, she says, is a wonderful country.

She returned once to Vienna, but riding the train produced such painful flashbacks that she doesn't believe she could go again. Holidays are especially painful.

"I see my dad praying with his glasses on so he could see who wasn't behaving," She says. "And my mother saying: 'Eddie, everything is getting cold. How long are you going to pray?' and he would say, 'Until I'm finished.'"



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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