

# GUSTAVE EISEMANN



When Karl Eisemann traveled to the United States in 1936, his brothers, who had emigrated previously – Gustave in 1918 and Moses in 1933 – urged him to leave Europe. But he didn't – until 1938, when customers of the international scrap metal company for which he worked told him they "just couldn't deal with a Jew anymore."

His brother in Kansas City signed affidavits assuring that the Eisemanns – as well as 150 others – would not become wards of the state. Among that group was Karl's son, Gustave, who was 12 when he arrived in Kansas City. He became a *bar mitzvah* at Beth Shalom synagogue in 1939.

Karl and Irene Eisemann and their three children had lived comfortably in Berlin. The children's nanny wore a starched uniform. Gustave's parents took him to the opera, museums and theater. They vacationed at the beach on the North Sea and in Czechoslovakia. They spent the week of *Sukkot*, a Jewish autumn holiday, in Frankfurt with grandparents.

Gustave walked or rode his bicycle to a Modern Orthodox Jewish day school except in bad weather, when he took the train. He had Hebrew lessons twice a week and on *Shabbat* afternoons.

Karl Eisemann heard Theodore Herzl speak at the Second Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. He saw Jesse Owens run in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. Gustave's great uncle went to school with Chaim Weizmann.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, Gustave saw Hitler Youth and antisemitic newspapers on the street. His parents spoke English or French in worried tones at the dinner table. The only Jews in their apartment building, the Eisemanns became increasingly aware they were not accepted. During air raid drills, building residents went to the basement wearing their war medals – among them Karl, who had won the Iron Cross in World War I. Yet the Eisemanns were told, "Jews don't need to come down here."

On the ship to the United States, Gustave recalls being shocked by the abundance of food. Upon arrival in Kansas City, the family lived on the top floor of an apartment at 3757 Paseo. Karl Eisemann went to work for the Continental Grain Co. Gustave entered the seventh grade with a little English dictionary. It took him only six months to learn the language, in spite of a teacher who told him he'd "never amount to anything."

He was one of the first Jews admitted as a resident physician at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. In the 1960s, he and his partners challenged the denial of admissions privileges to Jewish physicians by St. Luke's Hospital. Gustave served as an aviation medical examiner in the U.S. Air Force. He met his wife, Elinor, during a fellowship in hematology at Boston's New England Medical Center.

The Eisemanns have three sons – a corporate executive, an attorney and a physician – and eight grandchildren.

Gustave's favorite holidays are Passover and Thanksgiving. Every year before dinner on Thanksgiving, he makes a speech expressing his gratitude for being able to live in America. On Passover he remembers that he is like the Israelites who left Egypt and came to the Promised Land.



Portrait by David Sosland

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

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