

EVA HARTWICH



Early childhood in Hanover, Germany, was comfortable for Eva Braunschweig. Her family lived near a park in a three-story house with large rooms and stained glass windows in the sunroom. Eva and her older sister had a dog, lots of toys, and a sandbox and swings in their big backyard.

Eva's mother, Erna Braunschweig, employed two maids, one as a nanny, the other to cook and clean. "Mother told the cook what to prepare and went out with her sisters for coffee and to play cards," she recalls. Her father, Joseph Braunschweig, was a proud German World War I veteran who owned a wholesale fabric business. Visits to his parents were a trip back in time. They owned a horse and buggy. "I wasn't comfortable going," she says, "because I couldn't do anything on Saturday." That was Shabbat, the Sabbath.

Eva had many non-Jewish friends and felt accepted in Hanover – until, as she says, "Hitler came and taught them."

In the early 1930s, the Braunschweigs left Hanover for the small town of Peine, about two hours away. Joseph Braunschweig bought a department store and his wife helped as a cashier. The family lived above the store. In 1933, not long after Hitler came to power, word went out to boycott Jewish merchants and Nazi guards stood in front of the Braunschweigs' store to enforce it. Depressed, Eva's father committed suicide. He was 46. Eva was 12. Her mother sold the store and moved back to an apartment in Hanover.

In 1938, Eva's uncles and male cousin were arrested. That, along with her sister's urging, convinced her mother that it was time to leave Germany. The Nazis did not allow the Jews to take money out of the country, but Eva's mother was able to take her china, crystal and sterling. They journeyed to Shanghai, where the Braunschweigs joined relatives in the ghetto filled with 17,000 refugees from Central and Eastern Europe. They survived on proceeds from the sale of Eva's mother's belongings. They knew nothing about concentration camps back in Europe until after the war.

It was in Shanghai that Eva met and married her husband, Werner Hartwich, who bought crystal and china from immigrants and sold it to the Chinese and Russians. The Hartwiches lived in two rooms with his mother and their son, Ralph, born in 1946.

Arriving in San Francisco in July 1947, they were sent to Kansas City because Werner Hartwich's parents had been in the grain business. Werner Hartwich worked at the Board of Trade for 45 years. Eva did clothing alterations at home when Ralph and her American-born son, Steven, were small. Later, she worked in stores.

The hardest part of adjusting to America? According to Eva, it was learning English. "We learned it in private school in Germany," she says, "but that's a higher English. We had to get used to Missouri English! I am happy to be a U.S. citizen!"



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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

© 2001 Midwest Center for
Holocaust Education