

ANN JACOBSON



The German government hired Fritz Reisner, an Austrian civil engineer, to build oil installations during World War I. After the war he moved to Germany, where he met Eugenia Goldman, who had moved with her mother from Poland to Berlin. Eugenia, a graduate of the Berlin Conservatory of Music, spoke six languages and was working as a secretary to Pola Negri, the movie star, when she met Fritz. When they married, he was 40 and she was 36.

Anni Ernestine Reisner was born to them in Berlin in 1926. Fritz Reisner worked for Olex, a German oil company. When they moved to Stuttgart, Germany, the Reisners lived in a large house on a hill and drove a Mercedes. The children had a nanny. Eugenia Reisner had live-in help.

In 1933, Anni's father received a letter from his company asking him to resign. Germany was requiring businesses to be *Judenrein*, free of Jews. Eugenia wanted to go far way. Instead, Fritz took the family to Vienna, where he could work for his brother-in-law's company with

no change in his way of life.

Fritz didn't believe in organized religion. Until Anni was seven, the family had a Christmas tree, and Anni knew no one who kept kosher. Eugenia, however, came from a religious family. In Vienna, she sent Anni to Hebrew school. Anni also trained to be an Olympic swimmer and belonged to a Zionist youth organization.

Anni's application to a Vienna private high school was rejected because she was Jewish. Instead, she attended a private Jewish *gymnasium*, or upper-level school, until all schools were closed to Jews in November 1938 after *Kristallnacht*. On that night, three Gestapo officers came to the Reisners' home and demanded that Eugenia hand over her money and jewelry. Eugenia asked when she would get her things back. "Lady," they said, "you should be glad we didn't throw your children out the window."

Fritz and Eugenia were planning to send Anni and her younger brother on a *Kindertransport* to England, when, in February 1939, the U.S. consulate approved their immigration.

Anni, 13 when her family arrived in Kansas City, babysat, cleaned houses and worked a weekend job. Eugenia catered baked goods. Fritz Reisner was a maintenance man, salesman and finally a bookkeeper for A.D. Jacobson, the plumbing and heating company owned by her future husband's family. Anni – now Ann – married Elliot Jacobson in 1946, after earning her degree in modern languages at Kansas City University. Fluent in four languages, she taught German at the University of Kansas and Kansas City University until her children – Mark, Steven, and Susan – were born.

"From the moment we found out how many people perished," says Ann of the Holocaust, "I have been driven to make my life count for something."

She went back to school, earned a degree in social work and developed the Panel of Americans. A project director for the George Washington Carver Neighborhood Center, she also founded what became Black History Month in Kansas City. She organized the Volunteer Center and later became its director. She was one of half a dozen women in the United States to hold an executive position at United Way. President Richard Nixon appointed her to the board of the National Center for Voluntary Action.

She has published in the field of volunteerism. A delegate to the Jewish Agency in Israel, she served three years as president of Jewish Federation of Greater Kansas City and recently held the same position in Naples, Florida. She is presently the national president of Shepherd's Centers of America.



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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