

NORBERT LIPSCHUETZ



In 1933, when the Nazis took over Germany, 8-year old Norbert Lipschuetz saw Jews – and people who looked like Jews – beaten on the streets of Berlin. In 1934, he was expelled from public school. In 1935, the Nazis stole his father’s carpet business.

Most Jews hoped the discrimination would pass. “Why should we leave everything we have worked for?” they thought. The Lipschuetzes were worried, but there were few places where Jews were welcome, even if they had money.

Norbert’s mother, Margot Lipschuetz, had a millinery shop before she married. She was 39 when Norbert, her only child, was born. His father, Isidore Lipschuetz, owned a carpet business.

Norbert had his own room in the spacious apartment he shared with his parents and grandparents. He belonged to a sports club and enjoyed movies, opera and hearing his aunt sing in the Jewish theater. Norbert sang in the boys’ choir in the synagogue where he went for Shabbat with his father. Norbert’s was one of the last *bar mitzvahs* in Berlin before *Kristallnacht*.

Until 1939, Norbert took a train every day to a Jewish school where, he says, he had excellent teachers. A year later, he finished pre-trade school, but no one was hiring Jewish apprentices.

After the war began, Norbert was a slave laborer from 1941 to 1943 in a Nazi ammunition plant. When the Nazis came to ship the workers to a concentration camp, they asked whether anyone had a non-Jewish parent and Norbert cleverly said yes. Temporarily released, he went into hiding with his mother in an apartment leased to an elderly Swede. His father, deported several years earlier, never returned.

Norbert met his wife, Lilian, in 1947 in Berlin while helping an American chaplain organize a youth group. She was working with children in a displaced persons camp. They were married in 1948, had a daughter in Berlin and spent their first year in the United States in Lincoln, Nebraska, where they had a son. There and earlier in Berlin, using skills he had developed in the synagogue boys’ choir before the war, Norbert acted as a cantor.

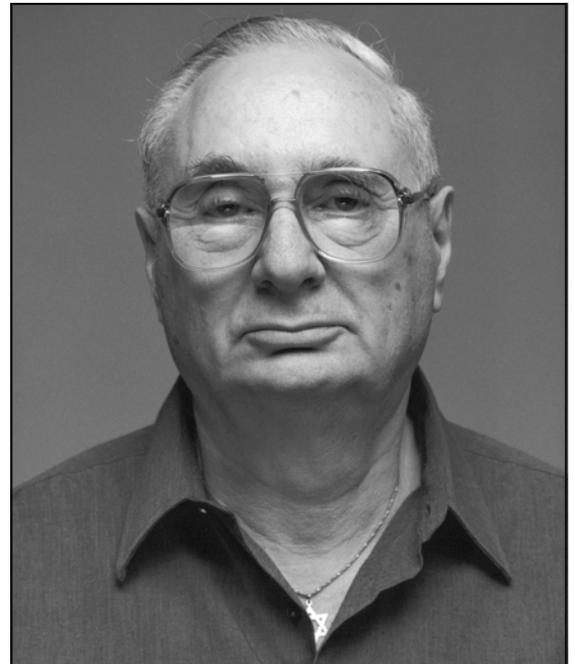
The couple welcomed the opportunity to move to Kansas City in 1951. Lincoln was small with few Jews. It was not uncommon there, Norbert recalls, to hear remarks such as, “You know what Hitler did was really bad, but with the Jews he should have killed them all.”

His mother lived with Norbert and Lilian in Kansas City for a time but returned to Germany. Norbert visited her there for her 80th birthday, but he couldn’t afford to go to the funeral when she died a year later in 1967.

In his first four years in Kansas City, Norbert Lipschuetz worked as a truck driver, factory worker and carpet layer. He spent 17 years as a piece worker for Ace Electric and 15 years working for a railroad.

After retiring at age 62, he worked part-time as a driver for the Hadassah Thrift Shop. Lilian worked six years for Macy’s to afford braces for daughter Yvonne, born in 1955. Their last child, Jeffrey, was born in 1959.

The Lipschuetzes have lived in the same house at 82nd Street and Grand Avenue since 1971. They are both active at Kehilath Israel Synagogue.



Portrait by David Sosland

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

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