

GEORGE ROSENBERG

Before *Kristallnacht*, before the Jews were required to wear yellow Stars of David, the Rosenberg family lived in a big apartment with maid service in an affluent neighborhood of Hamburg, Germany.

Julius Rosenberg's connections as an export-import merchant made it easy for his son Guenther to develop a hobby of stamp-trading. Guenther's mother, Lilly, a professional singer, died when he was 7. His father, who had been wounded fighting for Germany in World War I, and his uncles belonged to one of Hamburg's five or six synagogues. "Each of my brothers had a *bar mitzvah*," recalls Guenther. "On holidays, it was like a family reunion."

Hamburg's Jews were somewhat insulated from antisemitism, thanks to the city's international status. "Hamburg had a big harbor and a lot of foreign visitors," Guenther recalls, "so the Nazis were perhaps less aggressive at first."

On November 9, 1938, *Kristallnacht*, synagogues and Jewish businesses in Hamburg suffered less damage than similar places elsewhere in Germany. Gestapo agents who escorted Julius Rosenberg to a labor camp the next day were "apologetic."

Julius Rosenberg died in 1940 and Guenther, a teenager, spent his last months in Hamburg living in a Jewish orphanage. In 1941, Guenther obtained a student visa to come to the United States. His older brothers, Helmuth and Erich, were not so fortunate. Unable to obtain student visas or bypass U.S. immigration quotas, they died in concentration camps.

Guenther, now George, continued his education in Greenwich, New York, living with his cousins. Drafted into the U.S. Army infantry in 1944, he was transferred to a U.S. prisoner-of-war camp in North Carolina to serve as an interpreter. His mission, in part, was to identify German prisoners who could be classified as war criminals. "It was amazing how many German prisoners had relatives in this country," he says. "They came to visit and sometimes tried to bribe us because they wanted to give prisoners certain articles that were not permitted."

After being discharged from the army, George Rosenberg completed high school, worked part-time and, in 1949, earned a degree in accounting from New York University. Jobs being hard to come by in New York, he accepted a position with a St. Louis accounting firm.

George and Marlene met at a function sponsored by a St. Louis synagogue young-adults group. They married in 1956. After Marlene died in 1998, George retired from the accounting firm where he had been a partner for 13 years and moved to Kansas City to be near his son, Joel. George keeps busy consulting with a number of former clients and occasionally travels to St. Louis where his daughter, Lisa Burton, still lives. Now remarried, he and his wife Janetta are considering a trip to Europe.



Portrait by David Sosland

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

© 2001 Midwest Center for Holocaust Education