

Ruthie & Bill Katz Archives: IMMIGRATION

By Ellen Katz Block

The recent separation of children from their families at the southern border of the United States resonates profoundly with many of us, especially as Jews. Almost all members of this congregation have parents, grandparents and great grandparents who came to the U.S. seeking greater opportunities than they had in their native countries or who fled violence and persecution and sought refuge here. We know the unfathomable pain for children and parents who were separated in the Holocaust and the lasting emotional scars which were carried forward into future generations, even as those who came made significant positive contributions to the communities of their adopted land.



In our NSCI Bill and Ruth Katz Archives, we have preserved the powerful words of several of our congregants who have had great involvement in our NSCI community and who have shared their stories and memories with us. One of these people is Lore Kirchheimer, who talked to the students in our religious school about her childhood in Germany, Kristallnacht, the kinder transport, and her life before and after she arrived in the U.S. Lore describes how things were normal in her town until about the mid-1930s when suddenly the public areas which had been open to everyone, had signs that said, “No Jews.” This was followed by no longer being able to go to her public school; she had to attend a “Jewish school.” Then on November 8, 1938, - Kristallnacht - her family was herded into the kitchen of their apartment while Nazi stormtroopers destroyed dishes, furniture and other belongings, burned books and terrified the Jewish population all over Germany. She describes her father’s imprisonment in a concentration camp, his return to the family and his escape to Shang-Hai, one of the few areas which would take Jews. Lore was put on a kindertrain by her mother and sent to England where she lived with a family which ultimately had to take refuge in the countryside to escape the Nazi bombings.

During the early part of the war, Lore received letters, channeled through the Red Cross, from her mother and from her father but eventually those stopped. She subsequently learned that her mother had died in Auschwitz and that her father had died from illness in Shang-Hai. Her older brother, who had been in school in Italy, had made his way to England but was interred by the British who were trying to determine whether young German boys were refugees or spies. He was sent to Australia and when he had the opportunity to go back to England, he did so, but on the way, his ship was torpedoed by the Japanese.

Future articles will feature the stories of Arvey Wolke and Lilli Greenebaum. We invite anyone who would like to record their narrative with us for preservation in the NSCI Archives to contact Merle Branner at archives@nsci.org.