

The Ruthie & Bill Katz Archives  
Our Immigration Stories: Inge Rothschild

By Ellen (Katz) Block

*We continue to document the stories of valued members of our congregation who arrived in the U.S. as immigrants and without whom our congregation and country would be less diverse and less resonant. The following story about Inge Rothschild is compiled from an interview with Merle Branner, February 25, 2019.*

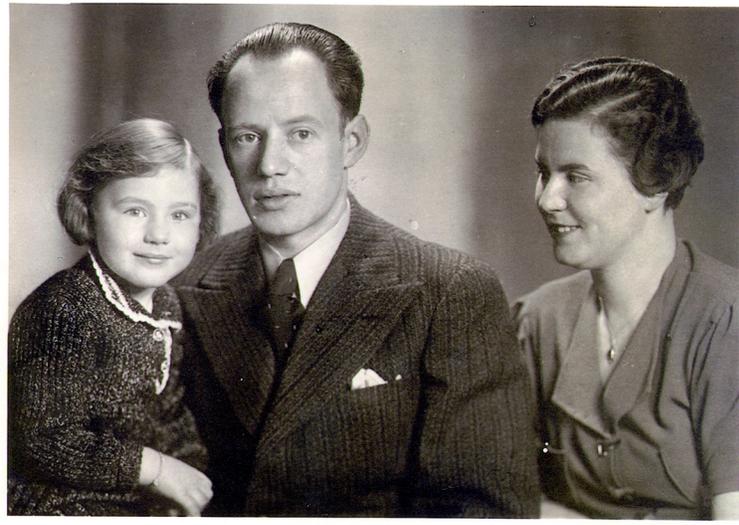
Born June 8, 1934 in Frankfurt, Germany, Inge Hilde Raphael Rothschild's story is a little different than that of others in our congregation who arrived as immigrants, in that she was so young when she came to the U.S. that most of her memories are from what she was told by her parents and extended family. Inge's father, Arthur Raphael, was an Orthodox Jew who worked for a shirt company in Frankfurt. Her mother, Reny Götz Raphael, a receptionist in that same company was Catholic and converted to Judaism before her marriage. Arthur and Reny certainly couldn't date in any traditional sense since Aryans were forbidden to have contact with Jews. Undeterred, they met in the woods near where they lived. Despite Reny's conversion, Arthur's family sat shiva for their son and only a few relatives kept contact with him and his wife. One, an aunt, had the couple regularly for Shabbat dinner. Quite incidentally, this aunt lived in the same apartment building as Rabbi Herman Shaalman, Rabbi of Temple Emanuel in Chicago who was well regarded as a pioneer of interfaith affairs.

Arthur and Reny lived on the first floor of an apartment building in which Reny's parents and sister lived on the third floor. Unlike Arthur's parents' estrangement from the couple, Reny's parents accepted Arthur as a Jew and their daughter's conversion to Judaism.

Hitler came to power in 1933 and almost immediately the decrees of the Nazi regime affected Jewish life. Jews were only allowed to buy groceries and supplies from other Jews so Reny's cousins, who lived in Heidelberg and grew much of their own food, brought produce for Inge and her parents. Being Catholic, Reny's parents, did not have the same restrictions as Jews though Reny's father was picked up by the Gestapo and beaten because his daughter had married a Jew. Reny's parents and sister lived in Frankfurt throughout the war.

During a fortuitous visit that Reny, Arthur and Inge made to relatives of Inge's father, Reny lamented that so many people they knew were leaving Germany because they had sponsors in America while they did not know anyone who could help them. One of the relatives said, "but there is someone" and told the family that in the 1850s, an American concert violinist had come to Germany to perform and had met and married a great aunt. The couple had returned to America to live.

In January of 1938, Inge's father wrote to the National Council of Jewish Women and to HIAS in New York explaining that he had a great aunt in Atlanta. They knew the woman's maiden name, Amelia Raphael, and her husband's first name, Alexander. Within a very short time, HIAS found the family in Atlanta as, by happenstance, Amelia's grandson, Alexander Dittler, was President of the Congregation and his wife, Eleanor, was



President of the Sisterhood of The Temple, a Reform synagogue and the oldest congregation in Atlanta. Within three months, Inge and her parents arrived in New York and settled in Atlanta, one of approximately ten Jewish families helped enormously by The Temple. Inge's father had no formal education but worked in and eventually became head of the shipping department of Dittler Brothers, the largest printing company in the South. Inge's mother, who had trained as a tailor, was a dressmaker and much in-demand seamstress.

Inge recalls that the radio in their house was on all the time so that the family could learn English. As soon as possible, her parents became U.S. citizens and she was automatically granted citizenship as their child. Her sister, Lillie, was born in Atlanta in 1940. Whereas German had been their initial language, English became what was spoken from that time on. Arthur's father died in Germany in 1935. Arthur was able to reconcile with his mother and bring her to Atlanta to live.



Inge attended nursery school at The Temple, driven there by the chauffeur to the Uhry family, the Uhry's being the Jewish family depicted in "Driving Miss Daisy," as well as the chauffeur to the Dittler family. When she attended public high school, Inge stuck closely to the few other Jewish students, but she recalls that, even at a very early age, she would walk well behind her parents when the family was out. At that time, without any real understanding of the situation, many people regarded all Germans as Nazis and Inge did not want to be identified as being German and certainly not as a Nazi.

Almost all of Inge's family on her father's side, perished during the war. Some cousins escaped to New York, some to Uruguay, yet they all stayed in touch as much as possible. Family on Inge's mother's side survived in Germany during

the war so, difficult as it was for Inge's father to return, the family did make many wonderful trips to Frankfurt to see them, including descendants of the family from Heidelberg who had helped them and with whom they still maintain a close relationship. Inge has also been part of a Visitor's Program, sponsored by various German cities, to reconnect with Jewish men and women who had to leave Germany for religious or political reasons. On the Visitor's Program, you could bring a companion and Inge chose to bring Lillie, her sister who had been born in America. On this same trip, Inge addressed students at three different high schools and answered questions. In each group, at least one student asked what could be done to ensure that what had happened would not happen in the future. Inge was also asked to give the closing speech at the final dinner. Aside from being an emotional trip altogether, an additional poignant aspect of that talk was that the dinner was held in the Frankfurt Town Hall, the very building where her parents had been married.

