

Jewish life in Frankfurt – The story of Hanna Maier Barrows

Elizabeth “Betsy” Lopez, born in the USA in 1943 and now living in Boston, is talking at the FDG about her family history.



Her mother Hanna has – for a long time – been reluctant to talk about her past, so Betsy decides to do some research and finally finds out that her family has Jewish roots in Germany.

For most of the time her grandparents Hans and Anna Maier live in Frankfurt, the “liberal” Hans Maier developing modern concepts of urban social welfare (“Wohlfahrtsfürsorge”). They have three children: Hanna (*1915), Heinrich (*1918) and Margarethe (*1921). In 1924 the family moves to Dresden and Hans Maier becomes the head of social welfare in the Saxon ministry. After the so-called “Machtergreifung” the family suffers from the beginning

harassments and moves back to Frankfurt where they have to face animosities and hostility as well. Hans Maier is forced to accept a leave and has to ensure a living for the family without income.



Hanna and Hans Maier, 1917

In 1935 Hanna passes the Abitur exams at the Schillerschule and begins her chemistry studies in Göttingen. Her mother Anna takes ill and dies in 1937, her death breaking Hans’ heart. Shortly before Christmas 1937 he commits suicide, by taking an overdose of pills. Before his death he has installed his brother Max as the guardian of the children and he arranges the emigration of the children to the USA. Max himself emigrates to Brazil – before the Pogrom Night 1938.

Hanna undertakes the journey to the US alone. Dependent only on herself she starts working as a domestic aid. In 1941 she gets married to Robert Barrows, has

four children, Betsy being her second-oldest. Hanna is not willing to talk about her history, she rather talks about seasickness during the long passage to New York and the exploitative working conditions as a house maid. Betsy insists, but her mother refuses to tell the whole story: “your life has been very different from mine and I don’t have the words to explain to you what it was like”.



Hanna, 1936

Betsy’s grandfather Hans has always seen himself as being without religious affiliation, whether to protect his family or because he was an atheist (which was not unusual in the workers’ and youth movement), cannot be found out.

Hanna herself never mentioned her Jewish roots to her children. Betsy, on the other hand, is a member of the

Episcopal Church, together with her husband Orlando. Their daughter Gwendolyn is married to an orthodox Jew and has become a member of the Jewish orthodox community in Westport, Ct.

With a lot of empathy Betsy talks about her family history. She has prepared a PPT, so that we can all keep track and after the presentation there are lots of questions and conversations about and beyond her stories. How and why does hate grow? Why are people excluded? Do religious convictions favor prejudices or do they found a community, based on fundamental values and beliefs? What about OUR family history?

Time seems to fly in the lessons and we all feel that we have taken part in a very intensive and inspiring



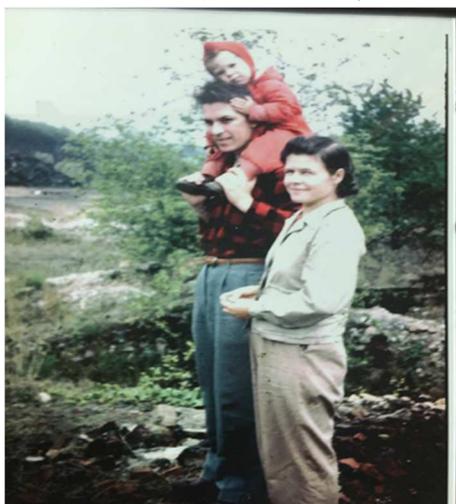
Hanna’s German Passport, 1938

talk.

We, the classes of Mr. Hoffmann, Mr. Pfeiffer and Mr. Kleiner would like to thank you, Betsy, and your husband Orlando, sincerely for sharing your family history with us.

The city of Frankfurt regularly invites former Jewish citizens and their children and grandchildren to visit us. The organization “Jewish life in Frankfurt” takes care of the guests and the contact to the schools that participate.

(Walter Kleiner)



Hanna and Bob Barrows, 1945