

Name: **Rivka Rita Reiser, née Klahr**

Date of Birth: July 12, 1924

Birth Place: Haifa, Palestine (now Israel)

Parents: Abraham Klahr and Anna Klahr née Engelberg

Siblings: Two sisters, one brother

Children: Two

Grandchildren: One

Rita's early years were checkered to say the least, she was born in Palestine, now Israel, the youngest of four siblings. Her mother was an ardent Zionist, hence her decision to take her three children and other relatives and the yet unborn Rita to Palestine. Her father did not accompany them, he had just established a deli shop. Life in 1924 was hard in Israel, and her mother was persuaded to return to Hamburg when Rita was 7 weeks old.

She attended private Jewish schools in Hamburg, but her mother took her and her brother several times to England for months at a time. Her father remained in Hamburg and finally persuaded the family to return to Hamburg for good even though Germany was already under Nazi laws, which were very clear about making Jews secondary citizens. The father claimed that nothing can happen to his family as he was awarded the Iron Cross in World War I. Rita continued to attend Jewish schools. Rita's sisters and brother were, fortunately, able to leave earlier for West Africa, Israel and England respectively. Rita, as the youngest, stayed until 1939.

Hamburg was a past Hanseatic City State and an international port and anti-semitism was felt less than in other parts of Germany in the early stages of the Hitler regime. But gradually life became harder for the Jewish community; only one Jewish school was allowed to remain near the end. In 1938 that too was closed and Rita had to leave school at the age of 14. The family's two stores were confiscated. All Jews were moved to one part of Hamburg, a literal ghetto. The parents and Rita had to live in one room sharing the kitchen with another family. It was forbidden to walk in a group of more than two persons and there was nowhere where young people could meet. Every Jew was issued an identity card (Kennkarte) with fingerprints and a photograph showing the right ear. The card was stamped with a large "EJ". All the first names were changed, males were named Abraham, and females Sara. Food became scarcer by the day and only one store was opened once a week where Jews could shop for necessary groceries at exorbitant prices. Mother slowly sold the few remaining pieces of jewelry she had saved to feed the three of them.

Her father finally consented to leave Germany, but unfortunately the Nazis demanded high taxes which he could no longer afford. Through her mother's foresight she was that year able to obtain

a British Passport for Palestine which allowed her to leave, though reluctantly (without her parents) to England. She was attached to one of the last Kindertransports and arrived in England alone, all of 14 years old.

An older cousin acted as her guardian who made a home for her in his home in North London. She was apprenticed to a hairdresser whilst going to night school, to continue her education. After war broke out she started working in a war effort factory, experiencing the London Blitz. Work continued throughout bombardments and later the buzzbombs, and finally V2 rockets, before the war in Europe ended.

Throughout she hoped that her parents were still alive, but finally had to accept the fact that both perished in the Holocaust. Later tracings through the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem and the American Red Cross revealed that the parents were first deported to Theresienstadt the Nazi "Transit Camp" in Bohemia, and from there to Poland. Nothing more is known. During the war her brother joined the Royal Air Force and after discharge in 1946 continued to work for them as a civilian. At the same he was also helpful to the Hagana, Jewish Defence Force with essential information. Her oldest sister joined a kibbutz in Palestine, married and had two daughters. Her second sister joined her fiancé in St Vicente, in the Cap Verde Islands of the West African coast, and married there. She had a girl and a boy.

Also in 1946 Rita tried to get a ship to her sister in St Vicente, but no ship was available. Instead she decided to visit her brother and sister in Palestine, as there was no requirement for an immigration certificate with a Palestine passport, and ships were available. Her brother in Haifa took her in and she started working for a hairdresser; she also joined the Haganah Underground. After war broke out in May 1948 she was an early draftee into the Israel Army.

Whilst still in the army she married Peter Reiser in January 1949 and served until her discharge due to pregnancy. David was born at the end of 1949 and Gad four years later. The family moved to Nahariya in 1958 and lived there until 1965, when Peter was transferred by his employer to New York. Peter's mother stayed behind in Nahariya. After two years the family decided to remain in the USA as the boys would have lost at least a year by transferring back into Israel schools. For several years each of Rita's siblings lived on a different Continent. The oldest sister in New Zealand, the second in South Africa, the brother in Israel, and Rita in America.

For the first time in her life Rita was able to decide where to live and she chose Asheville. Before that all moves were dictated by emigration, war, and Peter's work, from New York, to Atlanta, Quebec, London, and back to Quebec. This is now the longest time in all her life (14 years) that she lived in the same place and home.