



Jeanette Grunfeld

Jeannette was born on June 4, 1921, in Cologne, Germany. An only child, she had a happy childhood, with wonderful parents and privileges that came with the wealth and status of her family. Her parents, grandparents, even great grandparents were all college educated, and the family had roots in Cologne dating to the first century when her ancestors came with the Romans from Palestine. Her father, who held a business degree, had a cattle ranch, but when her mother didn't want to live on the ranch he went into the cattle insurance business, headquartered in Cologne.

At age 10, Jeannette attended Catholic school since it was the closest to her home. However, twice a week she took lessons to learn Hebrew. After passing her tests, she went on to study at the lyceum, a private school, where she continued the study of French, becoming fluent, and also took one year of English. Jeannette was a good student and all went well until one day her teacher said, "All Jews are cowards." Jeannette, who admits to having chutzpah, ran out of school, went home and returned with framed medals and other awards of honor for services of her father, a decorated soldier in World War I. She challenged the teacher's claim, saying, "You are a liar, Dr. Kreitz," and citing all of her father's hard-won medals. Her mother was called in and Jeannette was expelled. She then transferred to a Hebrew Academy high school and had to commute by bike from the suburbs into the city. Within a year, non-Jewish boys threw her off her bike. They were the same boys she knew from public school. Her parents sent her to France, but after nine months she chose to come home; she missed her family.

One uncle, Benno, saw the proverbial writing on the wall and urged Jeannette's parents to flee Germany as he had to England; another uncle moved to Belgium and Aunt Hannah, to England. But Jeannette's father did not want to leave his business. Sadly, in 1937, SS troops picked him up and, over the course of three days, beat him into paralysis and forced him to sign away his business. When Jeannette and her mother were called on to pick him up they took him to the hospital but were informed that he could not be helped.

Prior to Kristallnacht, the family was given a warning by a friend and went to the Jewish Hospital to hide for three days. They returned home only after receiving a call from that same friend. Their synagogue, which had been largely donated by Jeannette's maternal grandfather, had been ransacked and completely destroyed, as was their own home. However, all her father's WWI decorations, including the Iron Cross, were left on the wall untouched.

On Jan. 18, 1939, at age 17, Jeannette was put on the kinder transport to England. She was placed with people her family knew, but they treated her poorly, giving her no blanket for

warmth during the cold winter. Jeannette used her vocational training and got a job as a dressmaker on Bond St. and moved into a boarding house. However, whenever she went to the shared bathroom to wash up, men would intentionally walk in. So she moved yet again, finding a room in a home owned by an older woman. However, when war broke out, the woman left for the countryside; Jeannette returned from work to find her packed suitcase with the doorman. She moved into a youth hostel and remained there until 1946.

At age 18, Jeannette had to appear in front of a judge because she was an alien. As fate would have it, the judge had been stationed in Cologne with the English Army of Occupation after WWI. He knew her parents well, had bought horses from her father, and had even bounced baby Jeannette on his knees. She was granted permission to stay in England. In 1941, Jeannette quit her job as dressmaker and joined the ranks of the London Auxiliary Ambulance Service. Having once wanted to be a doctor, she became a medic instead. She learned how to drive an ambulance during blackouts and made runs to the hospital and morgue during air raids. Her years of studying French paid off as the Aussies in her unit called her 'Frenchy' to avoid saying she was a German Jew. While her work was dangerous (2 of the 14 drivers were killed) she was determined to help the world. Besides, she "wanted to get back at Hitler."

At the end of the war, Jeannette hoped to return to Cologne, but a letter from her boyfriend advised her to stay away as nothing was there anymore. Jeannette's mother perished in Auschwitz; her father was deceased as well, although Jeannette has never been able to ascertain when, where or how he passed away. In 1946, Jeannette received an affidavit of sponsorship from a cousin in New York and made her way to Washington Heights. She got a room with a German Jewish family, applied for a social security card and found a sewing job. She was introduced to a house painter, Ted Grunfeld, from Hungary and they were married

six weeks later. They had a son, Stephen, and a daughter, Bunny, later married to Gene Cole. Jeannette is very proud of her two grandsons: Adam is a Lieutenant Public Affairs Officer serving in the Navy and is currently (2012) in the Mideast on the USS Eisenhower; the other, Josh, is living in Melbourne, Australia, where he is on a three-year assignment for the Zionist Federation of Australia. These grandsons are proof that Jeannette has met her goal ~ she did get back at Hitler by ensuring that the Jewish race would live on.