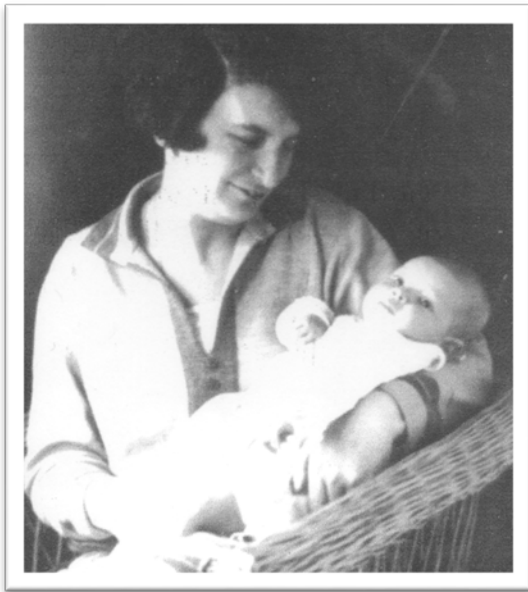


*Helga Melmed recalled her first experience with Anti-Semitism in Germany as a young child, on her first day of school . . .*

*“My first impression of bad things going on was as a five year old child. I started school and I had my little bag of candy, and I started school like all the other children. As I went in I was welcomed by my first grade teacher, Frau Vega, and it turned out that she immediately did not like me. During the classes she would call me names and she would beat my hands with a ruler and she would tell me I was a dirty Jew. I went to my mother and I asked her ‘Why am I dirty? I took a bath,’ and it was very difficult for my mother to explain what that meant, and that was how I started off with school.”*

*When asked about life before Hitler, Helga smiled as she recalled being adored by her parents who provided her with a loving and secure home environment, free to explore her surroundings and use her imagination to engage with the world.*





*Helga described her parents shielding her from fear, wrapping their arms around her and reassuring her, even as they were loaded into cattle cars, after being forced out of their home, that “as long as we are together, everything will be alright.” When asked whether she believed them, her answer, without hesitation, was yes. “It wasn’t true, but I believed them.”*

*The ability to internalize the loving images of love and safety likely sustained Helga during the tough years that were ahead of her. After the death of her parents in the Lodz Ghetto in Poland, she and seven other orphaned children were adopted by Chaim Rumkowski, head of the Lodz Ghetto. Three of the other girls became her “concentration camp sisters,” Genya, Madja, and Mirka” and they “clung to one another” for the entire time in the labor camp. They survived by sharing a quarter of their bread ration four times a day, ensuring that they had the energy necessary to gather heavy concrete debris, load it into huge bins and push them up steep hills all day, every day. In addition to sharing their most precious commodity, food, they shared a deep loving friendship. Even as they marched to Bergen Belsen from Auschwitz, often referred to as the death march, they relied on one another for the strength to take every step. Forced to walk at gunpoint for days: “If you fell, you were shot. If you tried to run, you were shot. If you couldn’t keep up, you were shot. We clung to one another for our lives.”*

*Helga developed typhus fever and Tuberculosis shortly before she was liberated and was sent to Field Hospital. When well enough, Helga was one of she was sent to a hospital in Sweden by boat, joining thousands of other Jewish survivors sent to Sweden on white busses by Count Folke Bernadotte. There she spent close to a year in a hospital regaining her health. While in the hospital, a German man named Hans Schroder heard of her and began to visit, bringing her gifts, fruit, flowers, and eventually he brought her*

*home to spend a weekend with his family. This friendship blossomed and after a year in the hospital, Helga was discharged to his home and lived with his family as his daughter for three and a half years. Once again, Helga was part of a loving family, and Hans and Nina Schroder treated her as they did their two daughters, Ursula and Margeet, then 5 and 7 years old. This is the family who loved Helga back to life.*



*Eventually, Helga's aunt learned that she had survived, and sent for her to come to the United States. Helga reunited with the only 3 living relatives of a very large family, and began life again in this country. She attended school, went to nursing school and obtained an RN. She married Charles Melmed, the brother of her*

*roommate, Leeba, and she had four children, after a devastating loss of her first child shortly after he was born. Helga has four children (Lenny, Janice, David and Lisa) and four grandchildren (Scott, Guy, Carly and Cecelia).*

*She had lost track of her little sisters in Sweden, and was able to locate them through a journalist who frequently came to the United States. She gave him their first names and the street where they lived when she was a young girl. Amazingly, he was able to locate both of them and the reconnection was made. Her stated wish at every interview was to find them again, and when at Barry, she spoke about how much it meant to her to be able to speak to them on the phone. Having just lost her husband one month before, she spoke of a dream of going back to Sweden "one day" to see them again.*

*One of the members of the audience, whom she refers to as her “guardian angel” was so moved by her story that he sent her to Sweden.*

*This was perhaps one of the most meaningful gifts that Helga ever received. She was able to visit the hospital and found that it had become a museum. She was surprised to see photographs of her on the wall. She sat in the home where life became real again, had tea and biscuits with her little sisters exactly as she had 70 years before and it was as if nothing had changed.*



*Helga returned to Barry to share the remarkable story of that journey back in time, and what it was like for her to go back to thank her little sisters (seen to the left and below, Helga in the middle) for the gift of love and reciprocity. It was a remarkable opportunity for the Barry University community to hear of this story of resilience and joy restoration.*

