

# HERMAN COHN

## BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Herman Cohn was born to Ilonka and Siegfried Cohn on September 8, 1921, in Essen, Germany. While giving birth to Herman's younger brother, Walter, Herman's mother passed away, and the two boys

were raised by their stepmother, Theresa. Herman's father served in the German Army, but later worked in the family-owned furniture store and then took over a linen manufacturing business.

Herman grew up in a deeply patriotic, non-kosher Jewish home in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, where he had both Jewish and non-Jewish friends. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, Herman remembers experiencing antisemitism when non-Jewish friends and neighbors began to disassociate themselves from him and his family and Herman's father lost many of his regular customers. Around this same time, Herman began an apprenticeship as a tailor in Cologne in anticipation of a later move to the United States.

Following the Kristallnacht Pogrom, in 1938, Herman abandoned his apprenticeship. Realizing the urgency to leave Germany, Herman's family obtained a place for him on a kindertransport to the Netherlands while awaiting a visa to the United States. Herman departed Germany in November 1938 and upon arrival in the Netherlands, Herman was taken to a transit camp outside Amsterdam and soon after, to a youth hostel near Devantour.

In December 1939, Herman and his family obtained a visa to the United States and reunited in Rotterdam, the

Netherlands, where they all boarded a ship to New York. Later, Herman's family relocated to Chicago, Illinois, where they were joined by Herman's brother, who had been sent two years previously to live with family in the United States. In Chicago, Herman attended night school at Inglewood High School and worked as a tailor.

Herman was drafted into the United States Army in June 1942, and emerged from his training in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as a gunnery instructor. Later, Herman was sent to Camp Hood, Texas, for officer's candidate school until April 1944, when he was deployed to a tank destroyer replacement depot at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. One week before his deployment, on March 30, 1944, Herman married Elsa Kahn, whom he had met two years prior. Soon after, Herman was assigned to the 54th Army Field Hospital and was sent to the United Kingdom onboard the Queen Elizabeth. Two months later, in June 1944, Herman disembarked on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France. By late April 1945, Herman and his unit reached southern Germany, where Herman served as an interpreter for a chaplain visiting prisoners at the recently liberated Dachau concentration camp.

Herman remained in Germany until December 1945, when he was discharged from the army and rejoined his wife in Chicago. There, Herman opened a dry-cleaning and tailoring shop and later, formed a partnership to open a men's wear business. Herman and Elsa had three children: Howard, David, and Joyce; and at the time of his interview in 1996, he and Elsa were residing in the Hyde Park area of Chicago and had six grandchildren: Amy, Joshua, Lauren, Aaron, Dana, and Zachary.



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