

ESTHER CLIFFORD

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Esther Clifford was the youngest of five children born to Abraham and Selda (Sophie) Ebe on December 5, 1920, in Munich, Germany. Originally from Poland, Esther's parents moved to Germany in 1913

in search of a better life. She had three sisters, Regina, Mary, and Rosa, and one brother, Leo. In 1921, the Ebe family moved again, this time to Frankfurt where they lived modestly in a small apartment behind Abraham's leather goods store. Esther remembers a happy childhood where she loved to sing and dance and aspired to be a Hollywood movie star. Although they often attended Yiddish services at their synagogue, Esther and her siblings preferred to worship in German.

In 1926, Esther entered school. Not long after, her parents became mildly worried about the rise of Hitler and Nazism. In 1933, Esther remembers reading antisemitic propaganda and witnessing public book burnings. By 1934, Esther was forced to leave school because the presence of the Hitler Youth had made it too dangerous for her to attend. By this time, Esther's sisters, Regina and Mary, had both married and left home.

Esther's father was denied his annual business permit to operate his shop in 1936 because he was a Polish Jew. Although Esther's father continued to clandestinely work as a street vendor, the family redoubled its efforts to emigrate. With a New York City phone book in hand, they spent precious time and money trying to find Jewish Americans to help them obtain immigration affidavits for America. In 1938, they were arrested along

with other Polish Jews and deported to Poland where they disembarked in Beuthen. Separated from her parents and two siblings during a forced march, Esther was sent to a nearby makeshift prison from which she escaped. Afterwards she returned to Frankfurt, retrieved some of her family's possessions, and stayed for a time with the hatmaker for whom she had worked prior to deportation.

In November of 1938, Esther witnessed the sky ablaze with burning synagogues during the Kristallnacht Pogrom. Fleeing to her sister Mary in Munich, Esther arrived there only to see more deportations and destruction, so she returned to Frankfurt where she hid in the attic of her family's apartment for a couple of months before being discovered and forced to sign the apartment over to Nazi officials. Then with the help of family friends, Esther obtained a visa to England where she was hired as a domestic worker in Brighton. Esther met her future husband, Rudi Kleczewski (later Clifford), a German Jewish refugee who had joined the British army. They were married in a synagogue soon after. By this time, her sister, Mary, was in Shanghai while her sister, Regina, lived in Vichy, France. After a wrenching letter describing the widespread starvation in the Warsaw ghetto, Esther never heard from her parents or her siblings Rosa and Leo again.

In 1948, Esther and Rudi immigrated to the United States, staying for a time in San Francisco where Mary was already living with her husband. After a year, the two families moved to New York City, where Esther and Rudi later had a son, Allen, in 1957. For twenty-one years, Esther was a librarian in Rockland County. At the time of Esther's interview in 1996, she and Rudi had two grandchildren, Lauren and Justin.



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