

BRIGITTE ALTMAN

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Brigitte Altman was born to Elias and Dina Friedmann on August 15, 1924, in Klaipeda, Lithuania. The family lived in a culturally Jewish, observant community where her father owned

flour, lumber, and textile mills. Brigitte attended four years of public school and nine years at a private academy for girls.

Brigitte first experienced antisemitism in school at age fourteen when her non-Jewish friends refused to sit with her at lunch and her teachers became distant. Her family began to receive news of Jewish persecution from relatives and from refugees who passed through their town. Although her parents knew that that their best option was to emigrate, they were unable to leave due to strict quotas. In June 1939, Brigitte's family relocated to Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania, and soon after, her mother suffered a stroke. When an opportunity to escape to Canada presented itself, the family was unable to travel due to her mother's poor health.

After the German occupation of Lithuania in June 1941, Brigitte's family was relocated to the Kaunas ghetto where living conditions were poor and there was no running water. Brigitte was assigned labor in a vegetable greenhouse that catered to high-ranking SS officers while her father's labor detail constructed a military airport for the Germans. Her mother, who was malnourished and suffered from pneumonia, died shortly before Passover in March 1942.

House searches, roundups, and selections were common in the ghetto, and after a mass roundup of children, Brigitte's father became determined to help her escape. With the assistance of his former business associate, Brigitte's father smuggled her out of the ghetto. She went to live with the man's family and was eventually sent to work on a farm.

In 1944, Brigitte was liberated by Soviet forces and made her way back to Kovno, where she temporarily worked for the railroad. During this time Brigitte became active with a group of Jewish refugees who intended to smuggle themselves into Palestine. While en route, she heard that her father was alive and living in Graz, Austria so she changed her plans and reunited with him. Eventually, Brigitte and her father immigrated to the United States.

The two arrived in the United States in 1949 and moved to Dallas, Texas, where they had relatives. Brigitte enrolled in a technology school and in 1951 met her future husband, Fredric Altman, a career Air Force officer. They married and moved to Fort Worth. At the time of her interview in 1997, the couple had four sons: Louis, Dean, Michael, and Leslie.



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