

HENRY LAURANT

BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



ECHOES & REFLECTIONS

TEACHING THE HOLOCAUST. INSPIRING THE CLASSROOM.



Henry Laurant was born Hans Werner Levy to Walter and Erna Levy on May 28, 1924, in Königsberg, Germany. A highly decorated veteran of World War I, his father had his own

medical practice. Henry and his older sister, Anneliese, were raised in a secular home, receiving little religious instruction.

Although Henry had some fond memories of his childhood, many instances of antisemitism were among his most vivid recollections. At school the discrimination and violence worsened as Henry grew older. He recalled fending off attacks from Hitler Youth and being subjected to a barrage of antisemitic classroom lessons. As a result, Henry turned to Zionism to strengthen his Jewish identity. As his parents were ideologically opposed to religion, Henry developed his sense of identity and religious traditions through family friends and by going to synagogue.

For a time, Dr. Levy's status as a war veteran allowed him to continue seeing Jewish patients. In 1936, amid rising worsening conditions, Henry and his family left Königsberg and moved to Berlin where Henry's father began a psychoanalysis practice, and Henry and Anneliese entered a private co-ed Jewish school.

In 1938, during the Kristallnacht Pogrom, Henry, his mother, and sister took refuge in a friend's house while his father purposely hid elsewhere. Shortly after Kristallnacht, in December of 1938, Henry's parents arranged for him to go to England as part of a Kindertransport. He reluctantly agreed amid his parents' assurances that it was only a temporary separation.

Beginning in March 1939, Henry lived with a group of boys in a large house at Bradford-Yorkshire. Prior to the outbreak of war in September 1939, he remained in weekly contact with his family. After the war began, their messages via the Red Cross were less frequent and more guarded. Henry remained at the boys' home until May 1942.

By early 1943, communication with his parents had ceased altogether. After Anneliese's arrest and deportation to the east, Henry's parents went into hiding for several months before being caught trying to illegally cross the Swiss border. Although Henry sensed the worst had happened, he did not know until many years later that his sister was murdered in Riga and that his parents perished at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

After being turned down by the British Army, over the next three years Henry performed war agricultural work while attending evening classes to obtain his high school certificate. In May 1945, he was accepted into the U.S. Intelligence Corps and sent to Germany. After Armistice, in 1946, Henry returned to England and earned a degree from the London School of Economics. After marrying an American woman in England, Henry obtained a visa and followed her to the United States where he earned a graduate degree in economics from Columbia University. Henry had two children, Alexander and Nicholas. At the time of his interview in 1997, Henry was living with his third wife, Leslie Ford, in Maryland and had two grandchildren, Gabriel and Nicholas.