

*Survivors' Stories:
Anniston's Temple Beth El
and the Holocaust*



Sherry Blanton

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Regina Freibaum Nathan **1892 - 1983**



Regina (Ina), born in Giershagen, Germany, was the daughter of Salomon and Rosalie Hagedorn Freibaum. Rosalie died in 1897 when Ina was just five years old. Ina had four siblings. Her brother, Lee, had come to this country as a teenager in 1903. Lee, already well established in Alabama, signed affidavits for twenty-nine relatives still in Germany promising to be responsible for them personally and financially, if the United States government would allow them to enter this country.

Felix and Regina married in Emmerich in 1911 and had three children: Herta (Helen), Heinz (Henry), and Margareta Sybilla (Greta). When Felix and Ina were making plans to leave Germany, they converted all their money into possessions as Jews leaving Germany were not allowed to take money but could take possessions. Once they arrived in Anniston in early 1937, one of the boxes that had held their possessions became the home for the chickens raised in their yard on Walnut Avenue. Ina died in Anniston and is buried in the Temple Beth El portion of Hillside Cemetery.

Correspondence with George Nathan, in writer's file, December 2, 2009.
Correspondence with Don Kemp, in writer's files, November 17, 2009.

Photographs courtesy of Don Kemp and George Nathan.



Felix and Ina



**50th Anniversary Wedding Celebration
Temple Beth El, Anniston, Alabama 1961**

Notes on the Project

The congregation of Temple Beth El in Anniston, Alabama was founded in 1888 and its sanctuary built and dedicated in 1893. Over time doctors, lawyers, teachers, businesspeople, soldiers, and their husbands, wives, children, and extended families have filled the pews. Among the members of this congregation, probably never totaling more than fifty families, were sixteen individuals with unique pasts. They were Holocaust survivors. The Birmingham Holocaust Education Committee has defined a survivor: "A Holocaust survivor is any person, Jewish or non-Jewish, who was displaced, persecuted, or discriminated against due to the racial, religious, ethnic, social and political policies of the Nazis, and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945. In addition to former inmates of concentration camps, ghettos, and prisons, this definition includes, among others, people who were refugees or were in hiding."

Some of Temple Beth El's survivors had very dramatic stories full of danger and intrigue; others had stories filled with horror and sadness. Walter Israel described his journey as an "adventure." But all lived under the terror of a regime that made them targets simply because they were Jewish. Our survivors settled here, finding safety and security in the Deep South; they faced a new way of living from adjusting to the climate, to learning to speak English (and understanding our famous Southern drawls), to working at jobs that were as foreign to some of them as the food. Many of them now worshiped with new religious traditions; some had been Orthodox . . . others Conservative Jews; now they worshiped in a classically Reform congregation. But all were survivors. They made new lives; they married; they had children; they operated successful businesses. "America," as Greta Kemp once said, "became our country of choice and Anniston became our home."

All sixteen of our congregation's survivors are now dead, but their stories of courage and tenacity will survive. Family members have shared family records and chronicles, photographs, and personal memories. Alfred Caro, Walter Israel, and Sophie Nathan gave testimony for the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education. (Alfred Caro's testimony has been posted on YouTube.) I was fortunate to be able to interview Alfred Caro, Walter Israel, Rudy and Greta Kemp, and Ernest Kohn many years ago. We can all only be better for learning about their experiences, their spirit, and their determination.

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Family Members of Our Survivors Who Helped with the Research

Alice Caro Burkett
Allan Arkus
Danny Einstein
Don Kemp
Else Israel Goodman
Fred Kemp
George Nathan Gil
Kempenich
Herbert Kohn
Michelle Kemp-Nordell

Birmingham Holocaust Education Committee
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