

Erika Waechter

Circumstances of arrival: Erika is a Holocaust refugee. Her parents fled with her from Germany in 1938. The family lived in Sweden for two years while waiting for a visa to get into this country. In describing what was involved, Erika stated: *We had to go around the world to get to the USA. The German U-boats were in the Atlantic, and the Jewish Refugee Committee said that we had to avoid them.* The family left Sweden for Moscow, took the Trans-Siberian express to Vladivostok, and then took a ferry to Japan. After two weeks in Japan, they sailed for the United States. Erika was three-and-a-half years old when she and her parents crossed the Pacific Ocean to San Francisco. They then crossed the U.S., settling in the Boston area where they had relatives. After the war ended, Erika's grandmother, who had stayed in Sweden, came to join them for a year or so before she moved to Palestine.

The Waechter family moved to Virginia in 1947 and then settled in the Eugene area in 1950. Erika's father, Heinz, was an architect, and designed Eugene's first synagogue. Her mother, Lisl, established the Pearl Buck Center in Eugene for mentally disabled children.

Work: Erika is a licensed clinical social worker, who has studied and taught in many places in the United States and in Germany, Switzerland, and Israel. Her main focus is family therapy. She along with her brother Martin and others helped found the Center for Family Development in Eugene, where she continues her practice as a consultant and therapist.

When I first came to Eugene, I found it not easy in many ways, especially with approaching adolescence. I remember for a long time I felt like a foreigner. I did not feel like an American. I wasn't sure what an American was. But due to the Nazis, I didn't feel like a German either. I felt I was a child of the world.

English was my third language. My first was German, and then Swedish. I spoke at an early age.

In 1950 Eugene was small ... the population was thirty-five thousand, five thousand of which was the University I remember walking to Roosevelt Jr. High School through fields. I didn't mind that at all.

Photographer: Irwin Noparstak

