

What Hanni Gelles told me

Her story begins as a 15 year old German Jewish girl in the Berlin of 1935. Hanni was living in an apartment building with her parents. She liked the city, her family, and her life there.. Some family friends from England came to visit and stayed in the building for a period of time. Hanni had a good time playing with and escorting their children around. The children's parents were so happy with how well their children were treated that they told Hanni that anytime she wanted to come to England, she could stay with them and help out with the children.

Three years pass and it is 1938. The Third Reich under Hitler is becoming increasingly anti-semitic. There is harassment in the streets and the tension builds until Kristalnacht: the night that the brownshirts invaded the synagogues and broke lots of stained glass and crystals. Hanni no longer felt comfortable in Berlin and felt that she would be better off leaving, so she contacted the friends in England and was offered a job there. Her parents did not want her to leave, but she felt that Germany was no longer a place for a young Jewish girl to live.

Hanni went to Leicester, England where the friends lived and started working with the family. She became the maid, the cook, the children's sitter, and found that she was working all the time. She never had any time off or went anywhere on her own. After months of working, she decided that she needed to connect back with her faith and said she needed to take some time off to visit the local temple. So, she found herself with the Saturday off to visit the temple. There was a social group there and that is where she met George Gelles.

George was raised in Austria. When he was 18 years old, he responded to an advertisement from an English tobacco company that needed some labor. He was fortunate to get the job and then also found that he was working long hours in the factory in England. George and Hanni shared a lot together. Fairly soon, the two of them decided to get married and start a new life together. They had two children, David and James.

George and Hanni Gelles moved to Montreal, Canada after the war. George became educated as an accountant. His boss at work showed him the game of golf and he became very interested. He fell in love with the game and really liked spending time on the golf course. However, it was cold in Montreal and golf could not be played in winter. Hanni knew of his interest and suggested that they move to Los Angeles so he could play golf year around.

George then got a job as an accountant with a firm in Beverly Hills. They moved to North Hollywood in 1960 to a nice home with a pool in the backyard. Their children went to Hollywood High School. [Comment: Hanni was a great person with her children's friends and invited them over on many occasions. She got along so well with people of all ages. She was especially good at connecting people with other people where they had something in common. Anyone who knew her felt fortunate to have her as a friend.]

George, being an accountant, said that it was important to pay off the house and continue to live there. George joined the country club and played golf frequently. Later, he then started his own accounting business when he found that he was doing most of the work for the firm, but not getting fairly paid for his efforts. He was dedicated to his clients and worked especially hard every year during "tax season". He would invite friends to play golf with him at El Caballero Country Club. Hanni took up tennis for a while and they engaged in the country club activities. One such "tax season", George found he had prostate cancer, but decided to finish his client's tax returns and get treatment after the season was over. After all, the cancer would normally spread slowly. Unfortunately, the cancer was the fast kind, and it was too late.

Hanni lived in the same house for the next ten years. Nothing much had changed since they moved there in 1960. The garage remained full of memories. There were some health problems, but she was able to overcome them. In 2007, she took a trip to visit old friends in Montreal and then went back to Berlin. After all these years, it was actually possible for her to go back to her birthplace and attend a Bar Mitzvah in Berlin. She was delighted with the trip.