

## Gabriele Silten

Berlin, Germany, 1938. A pharmacy owned by Ernest Silten and his son, Fritz Silten, was forcibly sold by Nazi powers. Jewish-owned businesses were already sold or out of business when this process, called *Aryanization*, became enforced after Kristallnacht (PBS). This same fate met many other Jewish-owned businesses at the time of the Holocaust. Millions of Jews were slaughtered and forced to live in horrible conditions throughout the late 1930s and 40s. The Siltens were one of many Jewish families who lived in Berlin. For 5-year-old Gabriele Silten, it was this closing that started her and her family's battle through the Holocaust.

Gabriele Silten was born in Berlin, Germany May 30th, 1933, to her parents, Ilse and Fritz Silten. She lived her life as best she could with antisemitic laws in place. Her father, Fritz Silten, worked at her grandfather's pharmacy until they were forced to sell the building for much less than its value by the Nazis. After selling the pharmacy, Gabriele's father moved the family to Amsterdam, hoping they could live peacefully (Museum of Tolerance).

A year after the move, Gabriele's grandmother, Marta, joined them. Her grandfather chose to stay in Berlin. Gabriele went to school, made new friends, and learned the Dutch language. Unfortunately, the serenity did not last. In May of 1940, Nazis invaded Amsterdam. Suddenly, she could not play with her Christian friends and had to wear the yellow star to school. A few years later, the family was deported to Westerbork. Once there, Gabriele's grandmother discovered she was scheduled to be sent to Auschwitz. Tragically, upon learning this information, Marta committed suicide, as did her husband in Berlin, to avoid the concentration camp. Soon after, the remaining family was moved to the Theresienstadt ghetto. The Theresienstadt was a significant place of deportation and Nazi propaganda during the Holocaust

(Holocaust Encyclopedia). Thankfully, in one final lucky break, they were liberated in May 1945 and moved back to Amsterdam in June.

Gabreile's story struck me as unique. It is very rare to hear a holocaust account of not only a survivor but someone who lived through it and survived with their family. Through all of the pain and tragedy they experienced, they experienced it together, and I think that is beautiful. It makes me think about the many other people who suffered through the Holocaust. So many of them were alone or separated. The bravery it took to face those horrors alone is unimaginable, and even the ones who survived lost almost everything. I feel like the survival of the Silten family truly stands as a testament to how much being there for each other and supporting each other is essential. I think researching and learning about these people and their lives has made me hug my loved ones longer because no matter who you are or what you believe in, we all need people who will stand up for us and suffer with us out of love.