



## **In the Wake of Madness**

Suggested Interview questions for author Bettie Lennett Denny

Q: How this book actually came together is a bit of a story in itself. Tell us about its evolution.

A: Anecdotes first, historical corroboration, discovery of letters, finding volunteer translators

Q: What did you feel most acutely about your parents' situation?

A: Lack of agency, power. They did what they could, but the tension over paperwork was as terrifying as the bombs flying over their heads. Leaving behind parents was excruciating for both my father and my mother.

Q: Your parents had a Dominican Republic passport that allowed them to cross borders more easily. How did that come to be?

A: Background of Evian Conference. How adamantly nations of the world voiced their disdain for Jewish refugees and offered no or little hope. How and why the DR stepped up. My parents' trip to Paris to "purchase" their papers.

Q: Were there other surprising things you learned?

A: So many things! How much support there was for Hitler in America. The quotas would fluctuate without notice, leaving people without tickets when they could go or with tickets they couldn't use. Influential people at State Department who had FDR's ear weren't interested in helping Jews. Photos of the German American Bund at Madison Square Garden were particularly shocking.

Q: Your parents made it out of Nazi-occupied Europe in April 1941. But your maternal grandmother was left behind. What happened to her? How did she escape?

A: Financial help from Jewish helping agency. Description of the back door route over the Pacific all the way to Chile

Q: Part of the story takes place in New York. How did your parents feel about America when they arrived in April 1941?

A: They felt the ambivalence of being German and Jewish. The Aufbau instructed them on how to be good citizens, keep their heads down. Changed their names. They were stateless – until US entered war after Pearl Harbor; then became Enemy Aliens.

Q: Why was it important to capture this story for people to read?

A: My parents were lucky. They weren't in a death camp or a labor camp. But their lives were upended like millions of others. Those stories are often forgotten. And, of course, all of these stories remind us of the consequences of hatred left unchecked, the dangers of authoritarianism, the effects

of propaganda. The second generation – the children of survivors – is getting older. If those stories aren't captured soon, they will be lost.

Q: You recently reclaimed your German citizenship. Can you explain your thought process.

A: Societies and nations are fluid. I hated anything German since I was a kid. Never thought I would set foot in Germany. Now I see 21st century Germany, despite its problems, as a democracy perhaps stronger than ours. Sadly, I see how our own nation has been susceptible to deep divisions and growing hatred, how easily large swaths of people are misled by cult-like leaders and propaganda that, thanks to social media, can now spread faster than Hitler or Goebbels could ever have imagined.

Having my German citizenship means I have the right to live anywhere in the EU – that my children and grandchildren have the same right. I hope none of us ever need to leave America, but it seems prudent to have options.

Q: Do you have unanswered questions?

A: I have lived my entire life musing on things that no amount of research can ever answer.

- 1) Would I have the wisdom and courage to leave the nation of my birth if I were in danger?
- 2) Would I have the courage to hide someone, risk my life or my family if others needed *me*?
- 3) Why do people find it so easy to hate, to dehumanize whole segments of society...and how could ordinary people let these atrocities happen?
- 4) How to find peace and joy in your little circle of life without abdicating responsibility for your fellow human beings.