

**J**n March of 1940, as a result of Hitler's plans to eradicate Jews, 10-year-old Lizzi left Vienna and joined a small transport of children seeking refuge in America. Two weeks later she began her new way of life in San Francisco, getting a new name, Phyllis, and having to learn a new language. Her family was scattered on three continents, but linked by letters.

This coming-of-age story is told through the letters in this poignant memoir. Phyllis wrote her parents details of her new life as she grew into adolescence and became an American, while they tried to parent her long-distance. During the next six years she moved in and out of foster homes and an orphanage due to her rebellious behavior, but as she defended herself stoutly in her letters, she gained self-confidence and the skills to become an independent, responsible adult. Her parents tried desperately to join her, but were stopped by incredible red tape and war hysteria. Her mother's letters are unbearably painful, but despite her hard labors in German slave camps, she didn't give up hope. Her father's letters show his resignation to the bureaucracy that has him erroneously incarcerated in Australia. The moods, hopes, fears, and accomplishments of all are recounted in the details of the letters, thereby authenticating one family's experiences during World War II, and the love that sustained hopes of a reunion. Interwoven between the letters is a narrative that depicts the times and places of that era.



Photo: Doris Azevedo

**Phyllis Helene Mattson** was a community college teacher of Anthropology and Health Sciences in Silicon Valley. She graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, received graduate degrees in Anthropology from the University of Wisconsin and Public Health from Harvard. She started her career in health research, culminating in a book, *Holistic Health in Perspective* in 1981, then turned to teaching. In 1989-90 she taught English at Shandong University in China, and in 1994 joined the Peace Corps in Nepal. She has two children and two grandchildren.

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