

A TIMELY AND RIVETING STORY OF A REFUGEE GIRL FROM NAZI GERMANY TURNED TRAILBLAZING NEW YORK ADVERTISING EXECUTIVE WHO SHATTERS GLASS CEILINGS

My AMERICAN DREAM



BARBARA SOMMER FEIGIN

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A Journey from Fascism to Freedom
by
BARBARA SOMMER FEIGIN

In July 1940, Barbara Feigin was a two-year-old toddler when she fled with her parents from Nazi Germany. Risking their lives with only \$10.50 and what they could carry, and with no idea where they would settle and how they would make a life for themselves, they embarked upon a 17-day terrifying journey by train from Berlin to Yokohama, Japan. Every moment, her parents feared they would be stopped and taken off the train as they traveled through Lithuania, Russia, China, Korea, and finally to Japan where they boarded a Japanese ship and sailed across the Pacific to Seattle, Washington.

Over seventy years later, Feigin made an incredible discovery—her father had kept a journal of their escape from Nazi Germany. Her parents had rarely spoken of their escape and had never mentioned her father’s journal, and she remembered nothing of their passage. There had been a gaping hole in her family’s history, and her father’s journal would help to fill it.

My American Dream is a memoir of resilience, grit, and grace that starts with the entire text of Feigin’s father’s journal, relating in his own words the terrifying details of the family’s escape. Feigin goes on to weave together three intertwining narratives of her own life. First, she tells of being a young, German-speaking refugee living in Chehalis, a tiny town in southwest Washington State, yearning to become an “authentic” American and of her experiences with antisemitism.

Feigin details how she rose through the ranks and became a trailblazing executive in the advertising business in New York City in the 1960s, in the ‘Mad Men’ era when career-building opportunities for women were virtually non-existent. She tells of ultimately securing a seat in the executive boardroom, where she was often the only woman in the room.

Finally, she tells of her life as a wife and mother of three sons (including one set of identical twins), spending 25 years as the caregiver-in-chief for her husband, Jim, who suffered two very serious strokes when he was quite young. The family’s strong bonds and great love for Jim helped them navigate this traumatic time.

Despite overwhelming odds, her parents’ journey to America has fueled Feigin’s lifelong resolve to dream big, work hard, and never quit. *My American Dream* is an inspiring story of love, dedication, and how uncovering the past and preserving history can inform your identity.

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64 Black and white photographs, including a map.

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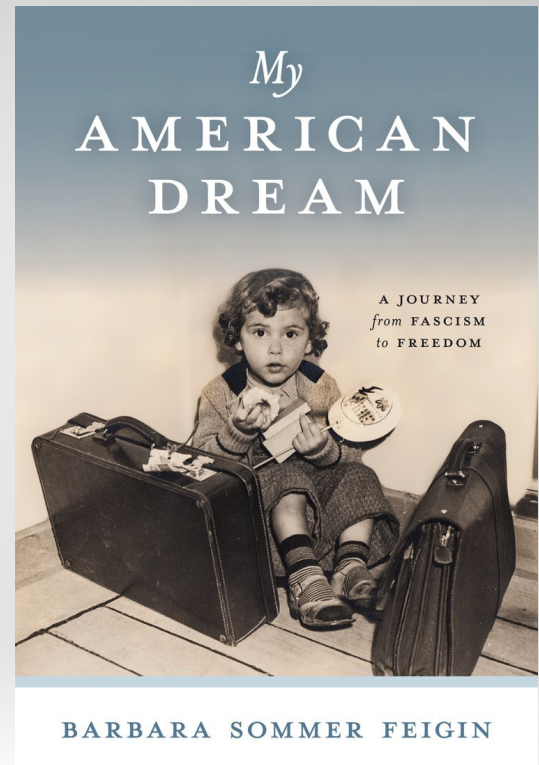
Barbara Feigin graduated from Whitman College, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science, and completed a graduate program in business administration run jointly by Harvard Business School and Radcliffe Graduate School.

In her illustrious 30-year career at Grey Advertising (now Grey Global Group), she solidified her reputation as a visionary thinker. In all her years as a senior advertising executive and a corporate director, she was more often than not the only woman in the room. In 2017, Feigin was named one of the century’s Legendary Pioneers by Grey.



MY AMERICAN DREAM: *A Journey from Fascism to Freedom*

On August 4, 1940, *The Seattle Times* featured a photo of a toddler sitting on a dock, surrounded by suitcases and looking dazed. After a harrowing journey with her parents, she'd just stepped off a boat and into her new life in America. Barbara Sommer Feigin was that little girl.



SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What was your reaction when you learned about and later read your father's journal chronicling your family's escape from Nazi Germany? What were your thoughts. . .your feelings?
- What was settling in Chehalis like for your parents and for you?
- How did your mother's diagnosis of terminal cancer affect you and your family?
- Have you ever experienced antisemitism? Tell me about that.
- What was your experience like when you went to Boston for graduate school at the Harvard-Radcliffe Program in Business Administration (H-RPBA)? What were the positives and the negatives?
- What was it like to build a successful career in the male-dominated advertising industry in the 'Mad Men' era, a time when career-building opportunities for women were virtually non-existent?
- How did you feel about, more often than not, being the only woman in the room in meetings with senior executives and corporate directors? How did you handle that?
- How did your family handle your husband's very serious strokes when he was quite young? How were all of you affected?
- What was it like for you to become your husband's caregiver-in-chief and to take over sole management of the family's affairs after his strokes, while at the same time taking on even more responsibilities in your career? How did you manage that?
- How did you tackle re-inventing yourself after your husband's death?
- What do you believe is your greatest accomplishment?
- What do you hope to accomplish with your book?