in 1940, to her retirement in San Antonio in 2015.

Helene was born in Brussels in 1936. Hitler’s Nazi regime marched across Europe, and her Jewish family knew they needed to leave. Helene’s mother, Lena, held an American passport, as she had been born in Philadelphia during her parents’ brief sojourn there. This American citizenship was the key to Helene’s escape just steps ahead of the Nazi soldiers.

Lena was expecting another child, so the family waited as long as they could until the deteriorating situation hastened their departure. Her father remained with them to see three-year-old Helene’s sister born in Bordeaux as they fled through France. Lena caught the next train to their ship with Helene and the newborn baby. The day after they left the hospital where she had delivered, it was bombed.

Meanwhile, Helene’s father, who was not granted American citizenship, had kissed his family goodbye, then traveled with his brother-in-law through the south of France, finally waiting in Casablanca, Morocco, before rejoining the family in America almost two years later. They reunited and moved to Norfolk, Virginia, where her father returned to his occupation as a furrier. Two more little girls were born, and Helene remembers happy times growing up with three younger sisters, safe in America.

Helene married a Navy man, with whom she had her three children: daughters, Deni and Sharon, and son, Len. Their many postings led the family to Texas, where, like her mother, Helene showed great resilience during the delivery of her son in an ill-equipped rural hospital.

“I had to hold the anesthesia mask over my own face,” she said. “And they had only three bassinets in the hospital, so when Len was born, they put my baby in a grocery cart!”

The family spent 1971-1975 in San Antonio, where they became active in the Agudas Achim synagogue. When the next move took them to Louisville, the children’s hearts remained in Texas. All three attended the University of Texas in Austin.

Helene’s first marriage ended, and she went to work at the Kentucky Fried Chicken headquarters in Louisville for ten years. It was in Louisville that she met the love of her life, Norman Banks. His sister, whom she knew from their synagogue, fixed them up, Helene said. They spent 24 happy years together until his death in 2008.

“Norman didn’t know a stranger,” she testified. “He was loved by everyone. He had the best sense of humor I ever encountered. He taught me to enjoy life.”

The couple traveled, visiting Italy, Israel, England, and Canada. A memorable trip was their return to Brussels in 1994. They found the home in which Helene had been born. It was a historical trip, she said, not a family reunion, because no one was left there to find.

Back in Louisville, Helene took advantage of retirement to volunteer, serving in leadership roles with the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, her synagogue, and other charities benefitting women and children. It was there she began collecting unique menorahs, a selection of which grace her beautifully decorated home in Independence Village.

Deni lives nearby in Bulverde, and Helene enjoys being close enough to connect with her grand and great-grandchildren. Helene actively serves at Agudas Achim. She attends water aerobics and fitness classes conveniently located at Independence Village’s clubhouse and plays Mah Jong and Mexican Train with friends.

“The surroundings here are beautiful,” she said, “and the activities are very well done.” In her spare time, Helene enjoys music, needlepointing and collecting blown glass artwork.