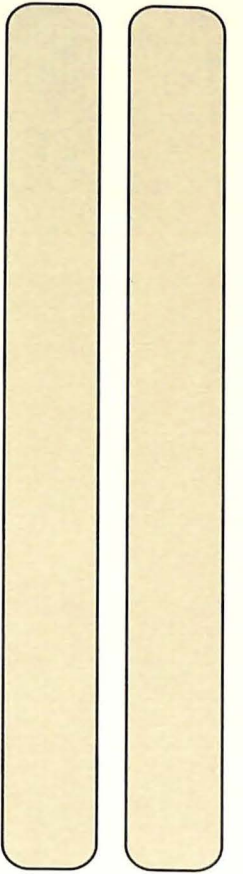


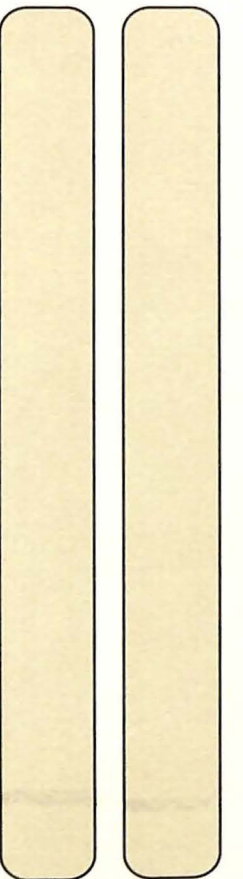
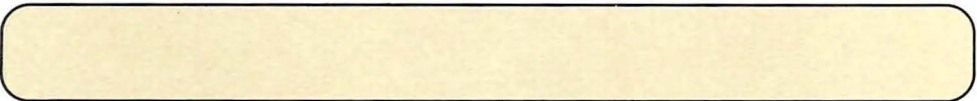
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Memories of our Wandering Years

/ Susame friedmann-kirsch



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MEMORIES OF OUR WANDERING YEARS

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FOR MY SONS DANIEL AND RONALD 1984

The house in which I grew up was built around 1902 by my maternal grandparents, Paula and Hugo Schmidl. When I visited Vienna in April 1980, I went with Poldi, who was our maid when I was a child, to look at the house and garden. The door was open, and we entered the garden and staircase. I walked upstairs, but did not have the nerve to ring the bells of our former apartment or of my grandmother's. We walked around the garden. Poldi found it very neglected, and I found it smaller and changed. The house has three stories and stands in a big garden in an expensive suburb of Vienna called Das Cottage.

My mother was around five years old when her parents moved to the top floor nine-room apartment in Das Cottage. Her grandmother, Nanny Speyer, moved to an identical apartment on the second floor. The first floor has two apartments. When I lived there, one was for a caretaker and the other for rent. When my greatgrandmother died in 1925, my parents and my brother Gerhard, then five years old, moved into the second floor apartment. My 12 years in Vienna were spent in that house.

I loved to play in the garden. When I was very small it encompassed my whole universe and I was convinced that the equator ran right through the middle of the garden. A large oval lawn took up most of it, and was big enough for soccer games. Unfortunately, Grandmother's rosebushes were rather close and suffered occasional direct hits. A sliver of the oval was an evergreen forest with marvelous underbrush. Grandmother, widowed since before my birth, spent a lot of time lying in a hammock stretched between two trees.

At one end of the lawn were a plum and a cherry tree; I loved harvest time. One corner of the garden was a playground with sand-box, jungle-gym and ping-pong table. The jungle-gym was built to specification when my mother was a child and was still in perfect condition when I was ready to use it. I spent hours on it.

In another corner of the garden was my favorite tree, a walnut tree. I spent more hours climbing it or just sitting on a high branch reading. I was about seven when I learned to climb it under my grandmother's tutelage. She stood next to the trunk and told me which hand had to grab which branch with thumb on the bottom and where to place my feet.

Also in the garden we had a six-sided terrarium, which I could crawl into until I was four or five years old. In the terrarium were turtles, lizards, and gartersnakes. Gerhard and I sometimes wound the snakes around our necks and wrists to greet squeamish relatives or friends of Grandmother. The lawn, including forest, was surrounded by a pebbled path, wide enough to accomodate two bicycles, and we and our friends rode around and around. The path was the only place we could ride our bikes, since the sidewalks and parks were off limits, and the streets too dangerous.

My paternal grandparents lived about six blocks away. Gerhard and I had to visit about once a week. I was not too keen on it, since it took me away from my friends and our games. My grandparents lived in a three story townhouse with a large garden in the back. When I visited them they lived on the second floor, but when my father and aunt were children they also used the ground floor. The top floor was occupied by my grandmother's sister, her husband,

and adult daughter. Grandfather Alfred, who had a moustache, adored me. Unfortunately for him, I did not like being kissed, especially if food remnants were still in his moustache. He called me by all kinds of nicknames, but his favorite one was Skinny Bones. I was so terribly skinny that when it was windy and rainy, he would warn me not to open my umbrella lest I be carried away by the wind. Once he told me that when he was young he met someone who knew Napoleon. I was terribly impressed that through my grandfather I came so close to Napoleon.

Although I was closer to Grandmother Paula, I preferred Grandmother Luise's sandwiches. Hers were made of large, rich dark slices of bread, but Grandmother Paula's maid used small white slices of bread.

*Begin* Hitler entered Austria on Saturday, March 12, 1938, my father's birthday and two days after mine. My twelfth birthday party, planned for Saturday, had to be cancelled. I was very upset about this, and I did not understand that our world had come to an end.

At that time I was in my second year of gymnasium, the equivalent of sixth grade in the United States. School reopened the following Wednesday. A few children did not return and others left during the rest of the school year. I finished the term and so did my two best friends, Edith and Gerty, who lived on the same block as we did. Edith and her family left at the beginning of summer for France and eventually arrived in the United States. After Edith's family left, her nursemaid telephoned Gerty and me and said we were welcome to any of the toys and games we fancied. Gerty's parents and mine were horrified when we showed up at home with a

lot of junk because they knew that soon we would all have to leave Vienna. Gerty already knew that Australia was their goal.

A few days after Hitler marched into Austria, I was playing in Edith's house, when mother telephoned me to come home immediately. She knew that the Gestapo was about to search Edith's house. I procrastinated and was caught there and not allowed to leave for about an hour. I was not scared, but my parents were. Finally the Gestapo permitted me to leave, but not before searching me. That afternoon, I was wearing a coat inherited from Gerhard, which had a breastpocket. Three days before Hitler annexed Austria, the Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, had announced a plebiscite to prove to Hitler that the Austrians did not want him. Airplanes had dropped thousands of propaganda leaflets in the streets before the vote. The plebiscite never took place, but one of the leaflets was in the breastpocket of my coat, picked up on March 9, on my way to school, and long since forgotten. Luckily, the Gestapo overlooked that pocket. When I returned home, my mother was furious, searched me again, and found the leaflet.

Sometime at the beginning of summer 1938, Poldi had to leave, because Gentiles were not allowed to work in a household with a Jewish male under the age of 45.

Years later, in 1980, Poldi told me that when she left our household in 1938, she was hired by a Gentile couple who had moved to the second floor apartment of a house in Das Cottage, recently vacated by emigrating Jews. An older Jewish couple and their maid remained on the first floor. Poldi's new employer, a salesman, was not in Vienna when she started her job. His wife was hardly ever home and did not tell Poldi what to do or what she could eat

before she left the house. Bored and hungry, Poldi finally went downstairs to Fini, the maid, whom she knew, who fed her. That went on for a few days; then Poldi confronted her new employer, complaining about the lack of food and work. She was told that she was "spoiled rotten by those Jews." Poldi gave notice and became a tramway conductress.<sup>1</sup>

Shortly after Poldi had to leave, we moved upstairs to live with Grandmother Paula. We had our apartment dismantled, packed and shipped to Hlinsko, Czechoslovakia, where my family's upholstery mill was. Hlinsko was also our destination. (The crates were never unpacked while we were there and I do not know who got the furniture and household goods in the end, the Nazis or the Communists.) But Czechoslovakia had closed its borders, and Jews had a hard time obtaining an entry visa. My father was anxious to get out of Austria and found a "Macher" - an arranger - who, by bribing various bureaucrats, would arrange my parents' and my emigration. Gerhard had already left Vienna for Hlinsko in 1936 to work in the mill.

We left Vienna on August 17, 1938, ostensibly as tourists. Cousin Fred Frankl came to stay with Grandmother Paula. I still see them at the window waving to us as we left by car. Earlier that day my grandparents came to say good-bye. I never saw them again. My friend Gerty, too, came to say good-bye and to play one more time. She inherited all my games and toys plus my part of the loot from Edith.

Ludicrously, we left Vienna in a chauffeur-driven car flying the Nazi flag, accompanied by the very Jewish-looking Macher. The first night we stayed in Graz with Grandmother Luise's family. The following day we crossed into Yugoslavia to wait for the Czech visa.



My mother was very pleased when the Yugoslav border guard asked the driver to remove the Nazi flag.

The car dropped us in Ljubljana, the first larger town in Yugoslavia, where we stayed a few days. Since it was summer, we went to a beautiful pool, which had a very high diving board, probably seven meters high. It was the first and last time that I dived from such a height. We moved on to Zagreb and soon after to a spa outside the city where we lived in an old and primitive farmhouse. The spa was a summer and weekend vacation spot and had many guests. I had a good time swimming, hiking, and taking baths in the bath-house. One night when mother and I were alone, we heard someone walking around the house. Mother got scared. After some time, pebbles hit the shutter, at which point mother got so mad that she opened the shutters and windows and screamed, "Who is there?" A calm voice answered, "So it is Hansi after all." It was Carl Orne, then Ornstein, son of my parents' best friends, who wanted him out of Vienna to await his U.S. visa.

In September, while we were at the spa near Zagreb, Hitler passed an edict that all Austrian passports were to be exchanged for German passports. Jews were to have the names Sarah and Israel added to their names and a big red J (for Jude) was to be stamped on the first page. We were told that the German consul in Sarajevo was not a Nazi or anti-Semite and would not comply with the latter part of the edict. He would issue regular German passports.

We left with Carl via Belgrade, capital of Yugoslavia, for Sarajevo, where I had my first exposure to Muslim culture. That part of Yugoslavia had been under Turkish domination for a few hundred years. I loved everything; bazaars with their smells and tradespeople and artisans; the many mosques with the beautiful

carpets; and the -- for me -- strange customs. But I was horrified when I saw a whole lamb being roasted on a turning spit, its glassy eyes looking at me. First we lived in a hotel, but could not afford it for long. Neither could we afford to maintain Carl. Father went to the Ashkenazi Jewish Community to ask for help. Sarajevo had two Jewish communities -- one Ashkenazi, the other Sephardi -- both wealthy, but with little sympathy for each other. The Ashkenazi Jewish Community placed Carl with a widow of a rabbi and her children.

After living in the hotel, we moved to a furnished room with a view of a school. By that time I missed school and children my age. Enviously I watched the children play soccer in the schoolyard. But, I had also fun times with Carl and the teenaged daughter of a Viennese friend, both of whom followed us from the spa near Zagreb. (They were waiting for their visas to England). Together we went exploring Sarajevo and its surroundings.

Sarajevo is a beautiful city in a valley encircled by rather high mountains. On one mountain was a restaurant, where I was introduced to goat cheese with fresh vegetables and yogurt. It was love at first sight. I remember one hike with my parents and Carl particularly well. As we walked through the woods and the road made a sharp right turn, there was an incredible aluminum monster in front of us -- the first trailer any of us had ever seen. It belonged to an Englishman who invited us to inspect the inside.

Before he would issue the J-less passport, the German consul wanted proof that all of us had been baptized for at least five years. Because his parents converted before he was born, my father was Catholic since birth. But mother and I had to get a baptismal certificate. Through friends, Father found a Serbian-Orthodox

priest (Serbian-Orthodox is the dominant religion in Serbia and Bosnia) who for monetary consideration was willing to baptize Mother and me and to predate the baptismal certificates. The ceremony took place in a small village church in the mountains. Our taxi driver took the sharp curves on the narrow road up the mountain much too fast, and I did not think we would survive the day, especially as I felt guilty for being baptized. Father had implored me to behave during the ceremony. It was rather a strange scene. At one point Mother and I had to walk three times around a rickety table holding a candle in our hands, while the priest mumbled incantations in a strange language. Neither of us dared to look at each other for fear of bursting out laughing. Soon after we handed in the baptismal certificates to the German consul, our German J-less passports were issued.

Either before or after the baptism, I am not sure exactly when it was, we went on a trip to the island of Hvar in the Adriatic to see old friends of my parents. We took the narrow-gauge railroad to Dubrovnik. I fell in love with Dubrovnik, a marvelous walled medieval city on the coast. We stayed a few days sightseeing and then took a steamer which crissed-crossed between the many islands to Hvar.

While on the island of Hvar I met a German-speaking Yugoslav girl who was my age. One day she asked me, "What is your father?" which in German can have two meanings: who is he? or what is he doing? Since it had been drummed into me never to admit that we were Jewish, I assumed she wanted to know whether father was a Jew. I answered, "He is an Aryan." She asked me what that was. I forgot what I answered.

One day my parents' friends and the three of us rented a small fishing boat with the fisherman and sailed for the day to an uninhabited island. On the way we caught fish. Once we arrived we built a fire, looked for sticks to be used for spits, and charcoal broiled the fish -- which were the best fish I ever ate. On the way back I felt sick.

After two weeks we returned by steamer to Dubrovnik where we stayed again a couple of days. The last evening we ate lobster. Mother did not let me finish eating the lobster because she was afraid I might get sick again on the train the following day. I have never forgiven her, and we still banter about it every time we eat lobster together.

Father had Czech business friends in Sarajevo who invited us to their house frequently. This was toward the end of September, when Hitler was starting to put pressure on England and France to make Czechoslovakia give up the Sudetenland, the German-speaking part of the country. When we visited them, we all listened to the Czech news on the radio. I could see how nervous and tense our hosts were, which made me tense, too. We awaited anxiously their translation. On September 30, 1938, Chamberlain and Daldier caved in to Hitler's pressure. Hitler then marched into the Sudetenland. The many Jews in the Sudetenland fled to the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Our Yugoslav three-month visas expired in the middle of November, and we left with our brand new German passports for Budapest. Little did we know at that time the problems the German passports would create the next time we went to Yugoslavia.

In Budapest we stayed in a very elegant pension (rooming-house) in the center of the city. Although I remember little of

our six-week stay in Budapest, I do recall that we went swimming in a very nice indoor pool and that we visited the zoo. I also had to go to the dentist, because my eye-tooth came through above a baby eyetooth, which was pulled. Our Czech visas were issued and around Christmas 1938 we left Budapest by train for Hlinsko. My brother Gerhard met us at a junction where we changed trains, and he rode the last few stops with us. We had not seen each other in over a year.

The whole idea of going to Hlinsko was to get money out of our family's textile mill for our flight to Central Europe. Of course it was too late.<sup>2</sup>

In Hlinsko, a mill town, we stayed in a small hotel, while Gerhard continued to live with our relatives, part owners of the mill. One of my mother's cousins and family lived in an adjacent town. Her daughter and son became my playmates. He, his parents, and grandfather died in the gas chambers. The daughter survived.<sup>3</sup>

I wanted to go to school so it was arranged that I should attend a boarding school in Prague. I was very unhappy and homesick though, so I returned to Hlinsko. Unfortunately, there was for me little to do there. I helped in the mill -- though I imagine I made a nuisance of myself. Eventually an old-fashioned foot-loom was prepared for me to try and work on. Gerhard worked in the office. On Sundays we went on bike rides. Poldi, our maid from Vienna, came to visit, but a few days after her arrival, Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia on March 15, and Poldi had to return to Vienna. She could not very well explain why she had visited her former Jewish employer.

About this time, the early spring of 1939, my aunt left Vienna for Australia and applied for our immigration visas. Father must have given up on the mill because all four of us moved first to Prague, and then to a weekend vacation hotel outside Prague. While in Prague we lived again in a hotel. I went three hours a day to a language school to learn English. Some teachers were English, others Americans, and I learned quite a lot. When summer started we left Prague. I enjoyed that summer very much. I swam, played tennis and ping-pong, went rowing, and above all had lots of company my age. After a while the hotel became too expensive for an extended stay and we moved to an apartment not far away, but spent most of the time at the hotel, using its facilities and taking our main meals there. Mother played a lot of bridge and father, Gerhard and I, and whoever wanted to join us went on lovely hikes exploring the castles in the area.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of August, father wanted to leave Czechoslovakia. However, the Nazis demanded an exorbitant tax, and we did not possess the money. The only way out was to cross the border illegally. Father found a "Macher" who would organize our escape to Poland. He knew guides who would walk us across the border. We took a train to Luhacovic, a spa in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, near the border with Poland.

Talk of war was rampant, and I was absolutely petrified when I saw from our train freight train after freight train with military equipment passing us. Since not all four of us could cross the border at the same time, it was decided that father and I would go one night, and mother and Gerhard the following night. After

one night in the spa, where we blended in with other tourists, father and I took a train to a small village closer to the border with Poland, from where we were to leave before dawn the following morning.

I remember those days as the worst of our three-year Odyssey. I was scared of war, scared of crossing the border, and scared of leaving Mother and Gerhard behind. Would I ever see them again? Father asked me to go to bed early so that I would not be tired the following morning. I could not fall asleep. I had never been in such a primitive house in my life. Hooded figures came and went, whispering to each other. Finally I did fall asleep. When I woke up I realized immediately that something had gone wrong, because the dawn has passed and the sun was shining brightly. Father told me that we could not go because a German soldier had been shot and martial law declared; it would be too risky to try to cross the border.

So we returned to Luhacovic to the great surprise of Mother and Gerhard. After some debate our parents decided to return to Prague rather than try to cross again into Poland. War broke out shortly after our return to our apartment. The murder of that German soldier probably saved our lives. Had we succeeded, we would surely have been trapped in Poland. Later we learned that the guides robbed the Jews of all their belongings before showing them the way into Poland. Our Australian visas arrived about that time, but we could not use them anymore because we were now in enemy territory.

Gerhard, who was over 18, could apply for his own exit visa and had no problems getting it. In October or November, he left

for Slovakia, formerly a part of Czechoslovakia, and then a satellite of Germany. By then, the war in Poland was over, and on the western front all was quiet.

Since in the fall of 1939 I had not yet reached my 14th birthday, I was legally obliged to attend school, but by law it had to be a Jewish one. Every morning I took a suburban train to Prague to attend school. By that time I could speak Czech, but not very well, so mother decided that it would be easier for me to repeat the sixth grade instead of going into the seventh grade. I rather enjoyed being in school again, though I did not learn much. Most of the children and the teachers were German-speaking--refugees from the Sudetenland--but by law the language of instruction was Czech. Every day the student body changed. Some children left for countries all over the world, only to have their places taken by new arrivals.

Father decided to try to cross into Slovakia during the Christmas holidays. Again a "Macher" arranged our crossing. Again we left, as from Vienna, disguised as tourists. This time, however, we were going skiing.

The hotel was on the Czech border with Slovakia; skiers came from both sides of the border without being troubled by border patrols. The arrangement was that my parents would walk or ski with a guide into Slovakia, and I would be driven in a car by the "Macher" and his girlfriend. Our rendezvous was at a restaurant in a village on the Slovak side. Unfortunately, we did not know that the small village contained a bar and a restaurant with the same name. So my parents wound up in one place and I in the other,



and we all sat for hours, waiting for each other. It was as harrowing an experiment as when we had tried to cross into Poland. Finally the "Macher" started to investigate and learned about the bar with the same name and my parents and I were reunited.

After my parents and I were reunited, we said good-bye to the "Macher" and set out walking to the next village where the railroad line started. I do not remember whether we carried our luggage or how it got to the railroad station. We walked without talking, when suddenly a flashlight shone at us and a Slovak gendarme stopped us. I do not recall how we got out of that situation; I do recall that we were scared. Most likely, Father told the gendarme lies or gave him money. Finally we reached the station. The station master's room had a lovely fire in an old-fashioned stove and a big map on the wall. I showed him Sarajevo on the map and told him that was where we were from. He looked at our passports which did not have the entry stamp to Slovakia. I don't know whether he was trying to be helpful or whether he was suspicious. He called the next station to announce our arrival so that we could formally enter Slovakia--the last thing we wanted. I was half asleep when we reached the next station. I think father bribed the guard and we were on our way to Bratislava, capital of Slovakia. Gerhard was there to greet us.

The following day he and I went sightseeing. Bratislava is on the Danube, not too far from Vienna. When we passed the bridge across the Danube, the border, I said, probably jokingly, that I would cross to visit our various grandparents. (That was before the deportations started.) Gerhard got so upset that he hit me. That was the last time he ever hit me.

After a few days in Bratislava we continued to Budapest, but without Gerhard. We had visas for Hungary and Yugoslavia, but Gerhard did not. We returned to the nice pension where we had stayed in the fall of 1938 and were welcomed by the Jewish owners. Gerhard returned to the distant relatives in east Slovakia, where he had been since he left Prague.

Our Hungarian visas were good for three months. I remember those three months much better than the first six weeks we spent in Budapest. The 1939-40 winter was very cold. The Danube was solidly frozen and looked beautiful. In the pension lived three young women in their twenties, and I had a crush on one of them. All three were very nice to me. My other eye-tooth came through the same way as the first one in 1938, and I returned to the same dentist to have it pulled.

One day Gerhard appeared. He had crossed the border from Slovakia to Hungary illegally. The owners of the pension let our parents hide him in their room, which I had shared with them. I moved in with one of the other guests. Gerhard and I played Monopoly every day for hours.

One very early morning the police came to the pension to determine whether anyone was living there illegally. One of the guests took me from the lounge to her room so that the police would not interrogate me. I was very apprehensive. I need not have been, since Father again handled the situation with his usual characteristic fast thinking. Since it was early in the morning, Mother was still in bed and my brother Gerhard about to get dressed when the police marched in. When the police asked him

the identity of the young man, Father, feigning embarrassment, told them that he was impotent and that the young man was his wife's lover. The police were full of sympathy and left.

Gerhard waited for a certificate (visa) to go to Palestine, which friends in Tel-Aviv had arranged for him. The only ones available were for a Yeshiva (Talmudic Academy). When the certificate arrived, Gerhard had to join a group of Yeshiva-bochers (Yeshiva students). He was worried that he would not know how to behave. Before he left for Trieste, Italy, to board the boat, he bought a hat to look more religious. But, it blew away the first day out to sea. Shortly before our three-month visa for Hungary expired, Father had managed to acquire Italian visas for us. We still had the German J-less passports, which made things easier.

Soon after my fourteenth birthday, in March 1940, my mother, father, and I left Budapest for Belgrade, Yugoslavia. There we ran into trouble as soon as we registered in the hotel. Father was called to the police and given 48 or 72 hours to leave the country. He was given no explanation. We could have gone to Italy, but Father did not want to use those visas that soon; also they were the last visas we had. Father turned to my aunt's former business partner who lived in Belgrade for advice.

His advice was to go to Budva, a vacation place south of Dubrovnik, close to the Albanian border. The local police commandant was known to be receptive to bribes and for a certain amount of money would overlook our presence. We took the same narrow-gauge railroad we had taken once in each direction in 1938 from Belgrade

to Sarajevo and from there to Dubrovnik and back. I enjoyed this trip as much as the previous ones. Much to my annoyance, Mother again slept through the same scenic spots as the previous times. I think we broke the journey in Sarajevo. We stayed again in Dubrovnik. I don't remember what we did about the hotel registration. We could have said that we were leaving for Italy by boat. From Dubrovnik we took a bus to Budva. It was an old rickety bus and the driver took the hairpin curves on the steep mountains along the Adriatic coast much too fast for my liking; in fact, I was too scared of winding up in one of the ravines to enjoy the scenery.

Budva, destroyed during an earthquake in the 1970s, was a picturesque walled small city on a peninsula surrounded on three sides by the Adriatic Sea. In 1940 it had no electricity. We had two rooms, with balconies and a magnificent view, in a brand-new hotel built into the wall. The only other guest that April was an American woman, about 50 years old and very trim. Her ex-husband was British so she had a British passport. But she kept her maiden name, Ruth Mitchell. (Her brother was Billy Mitchell, well-known in the United States during World War I for advocating a separate United States air force at a time when the government was not ready for such a venture. He was court-martialled for his outspoken views.) Mitchell was a photographer for Life and had interviewed Mussolini and Hitler. Her last assignment had been Italy, but she had to leave when Italy entered the war and Britain became an enemy. While in Italy she fell in love with a young Albanian, half her age, who subsequently

was imprisoned in Albania, not far from the Yugoslav border. Italy had occupied Albania and he was a political prisoner. She chose Budva, near the border, to be able to cross illegally to visit him in prison. Or so she told us.

The actual city of Budva had spread beyond the walls, and the restaurant where Mitchell and we ate was outside the wall. It was owned by a couple my parents' age -- she a local Montenegrin and he half-Swedish and half-Russian Jewish. Between his Yiddish and Swedish he understood our German. Both he and Mitchell realized that we were Jewish, although we never admitted openly to it. Since it was off-season during the war and we were the only guests, we all ate together.

We spent a great deal of time with Mitchell, who was very good company. Once we hired a taxi to visit Cetinje, capital of Montenegro (independent before World War I), high in the rugged mountains. Another time we looked at St. Stephano, a picturesque fishing village and former fortress on another peninsula across a large bay from Budva. (After World War II the Yugoslav government turned the whole village into a huge tourist hotel, but that too was destroyed in the earthquake.) We also hiked in the vicinity of Budva. To our surprise on many hikes Mitchell found old peasants fluent in English. They had worked in the United States and then come home to retire. On one hike I found a male land turtle who, from that point on, travelled with us in a white shoe box with holes punched for air. On warm days we walked to a gorgeous sandy bay and swam. One day Father and I built out of sand a huge relief map of Europe. I enjoyed the activity and learned geography at the same time. At either end of the bay

were rocks for me to explore or climb, and mother of pearl shells to search out. One day Mitchell took a whole roll of film of me, but the photos got lost in the mail. To me, life in Budva seemed idyllic, but Father was worried that Germany might soon attack Yugoslavia. Hitler had not yet invaded Holland and France, and Father feared he might go in either direction. Norway had been occupied in early April of 1940 (shortly after we arrived in Budva). Every morning, Father scanned the horizon from the balcony to see whether the Italian navy was approaching. But Italy had not yet entered the war.

It must have been the middle of May 1940 when Father decided to go for the day to Dubrovnik. I do not recall the specific reasons. Father may have wanted to look for further visas or ways to escape the trap. Mitchell joined us. We hired a taxi for the day. On the way back, after dark, the taxi had a flat tire in Kotor, a town at the end of deep fjord and home base of the Yugoslav navy. Father implored Mitchell not to walk around in the harbor, since she looked very conspicuous in a flannel pantsuit, an outfit rarely seen in those days, and especially unusual in that part of the world. Although we entered the first little restaurant, Mitchell, unable to resist her journalistic instinct, went exploring before joining us. Word spread about the stranger in the harbor, and when we left for the repaired taxi, we were stopped by gendarmes and asked for our identification papers. We were three strangers with German passports and one with a British passport, enemies, in the harbor of the Yugoslav navy -- very suspicious indeed. I never knew how much it cost, but Father got us out of this predicament, too. He was furious with Mitchell, for we were not even supposed to be in Yugoslavia.

Sometime in May we left for Italy. Father wanted to leave since he was convinced that Italy was going to attack Yugoslavia and he preferred to be in the country that was attacking rather than in the one being attacked. Our destination was Nervi on the Italian Riviera, east of but not far from Genoa. Friends staying there recommended a hotel on the rocky coastline. We said good-bye to Budva and our friends there and headed for Dubrovnik again, to board a ship for Trieste, Italy. I am pretty sure that we stayed at least one night aboard. The journey along the whole length of the Yugoslav coastline, with many stops, some familiar to me, was very interesting. I tried to befriend a girl my age, but her parents, obviously Jewish, kept her away from me, thinking that I was German.

In Trieste we met a cousin of my grandfather Schmidl, a resident of Trieste, who showed us around. We also ran into a couple and their two teenage daughters, with whom we were friendly when we lived near Prague. They were bound for the United States. From Trieste we took a train to Milan where we broke the trip for a day or two.

We continued to Nervi via Genoa. Nervi was a real summer resort, but I was disappointed with the rocky shore. For me, until then, sea had meant sandy beaches. But I soon learned that swimming among the rocks was much more interesting than at sandy beaches. A Tarzan-like young Italian equipped with a spear jumped from rock to rock, spearing crabs in the cracks. He offered the torn-off legs to Mother and me to eat. Since I loved shellfish I immediately started sucking on the leg. I still have to laugh

when I remember how I screamed when, while sucking on one part of the leg, the other started to wiggle. But I got used to it and enjoyed eating them.

Nervi had a large park and a small zoo in it. I felt sorry for the animals in their small cages. A lioness had just given birth to a litter and I was allowed to hold cubs no bigger than cats. We had not been in Nervi long when one day, in the park, we heard Mussolini over a loudspeaker declare war on France and England. To be precise it was June 10, 19~~40~~<sup>3/40</sup>, and until that day Italy had been friendly with Germany--but neutral. People around us in the park started to cry. Italians--especially the Italians on the Riviera--did not want to fight the French. Too many had relatives on the other side of the border. That night and every night until June 18, when France capitulated, Genoa was bombed by the French air force. Though it looked like fireworks, I was absolutely terrified. Father, who was a World War I veteran of the artillery, watched with great interest from the boardwalk. He tried to calm me down by telling me that the bombs were falling quite a few kilometers away, but I was afraid and that affected my bladder. We did not have a private bathroom, and after running constantly to the toilet down a long corridor at night, I started using a chamber-pot which by morning was quite full.

After Italy entered the war, Hitler's influence on Mussolini increased, and life for Jews became harder, especially refugees from Germany and Austria. Some refugees in the hotel suggested going to northern Italy near the Swiss border. Father investigated, but decided against it. We still had the same passports, so back we went to Zagreb. Again we took the train from Genoa via Milan,



Trieste to Zagreb with stopovers in Milan and Trieste.

In Zagreb father hired a lawyer to find out what had caused our expulsion from Yugoslavia the previous time. He found the reason. A family Kirsch entered Yugoslavia in 1938 with Austrian passports and three-month visas and never left. Therefore we were somewhere illegally and wherever we surfaced we were to be expelled. Their cross-reference did not work and they did not realize that he had left on German passports. By 1940 no one had Austrian passports anymore, so we were caught when we registered in the hotel in Belgrade. The lawyer straightened matters out and arranged three-month visas for us.

My recollections of our second stay in Zagreb are slightly mixed up with those of our first stay. I do remember that the second time we stayed in a furnished room. One day we found a note in our room to the effect that our landlady did not allow pets, meaning my turtle. I don't know why Mother did not insist on getting rid of it. Perhaps she understood that since I had no friends I needed my turtle. In any case we emptied a suitcase and poor turtle had to live in it, dirtying it with its food and eliminations. Occasionally I had a girl my age to play with. We met old friends and made new ones. The young woman from Budapest on whom I had had a crush came to visit, which made me very happy. It was summer and we went swimming a lot. We also revisited the spa where we had stayed in 1938. One of the new refugee couples we met had heard that the Argentinian consul in Sofia, the Bulgarian capital, sold Argentinian passports, good for any country but Argentina. Off went my father and new friend Mr. Goldberg to Sofia to check the rumor, which turned out to be true. I don't

recall the exact sequence of the deal, but one day soon thereafter we were proud owners of brand new, bright blue passports. I remember that the other couple changed their name from Goldberg to Garvin in the process.

Now our next destination was Istanbul, Turkey. One more problem had to be solved. Where were we going to change from one passport to the other? We could not leave Yugoslavia with a passport that had no entry stamp in it; neither could we enter Bulgaria (which had to be passed on the way to Turkey) even though we had a transit visa with a passport that did not have the Yugoslav exit stamp. I think Father found someone willing to sell exit stamps.

We left Zagreb on the Orient Express, passing through Belgrade, Sofia, and a tiny corner of Greece on the way to Istanbul. In Sofia we stopped and went sightseeing. It turned out that we had left Yugoslavia just in time. A few days after we traveled, on October 28, 1940, Italy invaded Greece from Albania, and the Orient Express stopped running. We reached the Turkish border in the early morning hours and stood there for a long time. We were allowed off the train. I walked around looking at the eerie landscape and a partial moon -- in the same position as it is on the red Turkish flag. I had never seen the moon almost lying on its back, but then I had never been that far south.

Our hotel in Istanbul was lousy. One evening when alone, I heard an incredible noise in the stove-pipe. Eventually a family of mice came dancing out of the stove. Soon we looked for a furnished apartment and found one in an older inner suburb. The owners of the two-story house were two elderly Greek sisters who

lived on the first floor. We rented the five-room apartment on the second floor. My room had a balcony, which became the new home for my turtle. The furniture was dark and heavy, probably old, and full of woodborers working away at night. The landladies were pleased to tell us that we had rented a "famous" apartment; Leon Trotsky had lived there after his expulsion from Russia, on his way to Mexico and eventual assassination. He too was a poor refugee who could not afford anything better. The location on a quiet street was conveniently close to shopping and trolley stop. I went shopping with Mother, but refused to enter or even go near the butcher shops, none of which had cold storage facilities. All the smelly carcasses, mostly lamb, hung on hooks outside and inside the shops. Once a week was market day. We hired a boy with a big basket on his back about 12 to 15 years old, who accompanied us from stall to stall and who at the end of our shopping expedition, carried our supplies upstairs. I remember nothing about our kitchen, a sign that I did no cooking whatsoever.

Soon I settled nicely into a routine and came to love Istanbul and its surroundings. Since I finally wanted to go to school, we made inquiries at the English high school, but it was too expensive. Also the school term had long since started and we did not know how long we would stay in Istanbul. Instead I registered for English and French courses at the Berlitz school, where I went a few times a week.

To get to school, I took the trolley car, which had a two-class system. The first car, red, was first class, the second, green, was second-class. Distance was divided into zones. The

trip to school took two zones. I got money for first-class and two zones, but usually walked a few stops into one zone and went second-class. I was pinched in both classes. The first-class pinchers were just better class (economic) pinchers. I did not like being pinched, but we were in the Middle East, where pinching was routine, even of young girls.

The trolley money thus saved I spent on stamps. I knew all the stamp shops in Istanbul and spent a lot of time with my stamp collection, which had crossed the border illegally with us. I also read a lot, mostly detective stories which I discovered at that time. Once a week mother and I went to the Austrian Library to exchange books. One day Mother insisted I read no more detective stories in German. If I wanted to read them, she said, I would have to read them in English. In German I was to read good books. Mother had an old school friend, married to a Dutchman, who had been living in Istanbul in a nice house for a long time. Once a week we were invited for dinner to their house. I loved going there because it was such a civilized environment. I had forgotten how non-refugees lived. They had shelves upon shelves of books and among them rows of Penguin detective stories, which I was welcome to borrow. Sometimes the Dutchman would help me with my pronunciation and vocabulary. Eventually I developed a crush on him. By reading the detective stories I increased my English wordpower considerably.

Istanbul was full of Central European refugees, some of whom, like the Garvins, we had met during our travels. The Garvins came with us to Istanbul. But we also acquired a whole new set of friends.

Talk evolved mostly about how to get out of this last corner of Europe. I remember one set of friends discussing the possibility of taking the train through Anatolia to Teheran and then a boat down the Euphrates to the Gulf of Persia and eventually India. They had heard that some refugees had succeeded in that venture.

We did a lot of sightseeing, especially on weekends. I remember our first visit to the one square kilometer covered bazaar in Stambul, the old part of Istanbul. We were enticed into all kinds of little shops. In one we were offered Turkish coffee and being new to shopping in a bazaar, Mother felt obliged to make a purchase, and wound up with a little Turkish-looking ash-tray. Once at home, she was very disappointed when, on closer examination, she found that it was made in a town in Czechoslovakia that was famous for tourist souvenirs. We also toured the famous Hagia Sofia and Blue Mosque in Stambul. We went on many boat trips--one through the Bosphorus into the Black Sea. The Bosphorus is not very wide and we could admire the fortifications on the European and Asian shores. Other boat trips took us into the Sea of Marmara where we had a choice of four small islands to visit, each with different vegetation. On the biggest one, donkeys were for hire and we explored the island rather uncomfortably on their backs. Many times we crossed the Bosphorus to Asia Minor by ferry. From the ferry we had a marvelous view of all of Istanbul.

Towards the end of 1940, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria joined the Axis, and the noose around Istanbul tightened. The war between Italy and Greece was at a standstill. The Italian soldiers were no match for the Greek soldiers. But at the beginning of April, Hitler joined Mussolini in the Greek campaign and slowly

the Greeks were pushed south. The various refugee groups started to petition the British in Istanbul to help evacuate them.

Father joined an Austrian group and became one of their leaders. He did not trust them and when he found the Czech group more congenial he joined them. One evening late in April when we were at dinner at the house of our Dutch friends, we received a phone call from a well-known Jewish merchant. He told my father that the Austrian consul had denounced us as German spies to the Turkish police and he advised us to leave as soon as possible. Father had been correct not to trust the Austrians.<sup>5</sup> The following day we packed frantically, and the day after we left.

We crossed the Bosphorus by ferry the last time and took a train through most of Anatolia to a small town, called Mersin, near the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, across from Cyprus. The train trip took about 24 hours. Once every two or three weeks an Egyptian freighter went from Mersin to Alexandria via Haifa. When we arrived in Mersin the freighter was in the harbor. Although we had cabin accommodations for the next freighter, when Father saw that one was still in the harbor, he arranged for us to be deck passengers. The reason was that he was afraid of the Turkish police and wanted to get out of Turkey as fast as possible. The trip took only 24 hours, so we slept on deck chairs. The ship was full of Polish and Czech soldiers coming from the Soviet Union to join the Polish and Czech armies in the Middle East under British command. The rest of the passengers were Turks and Arabs. We left Mersin in the evening and after a rather restless night on deck we reached Alexandrette, exactly in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean. The freighter anchored outside the harbor.

Many soldiers and I dove off the ship to swim in the clear blue-green bay. We had a marvelous swim, but shortly after the last swimmer had climbed aboard, we watched in horror as sharks circled the ship.

On May 1, 1941, we docked in the harbor of Haifa, Palestine. Palestine had been a British Mandate since World War I. Under Arab pressure Britain allowed immigration only to a minuscule number of Jews. But Jews arrived illegally on boats. When the British Navy intercepted such boats, the Jews were either interned in camps in Palestine or taken to Mauritius, an island in the Indian Ocean. Thus, Jews were boat people before that description was invented for Vietnamese refugees.

As soon as we had docked the British boarded for passport control. Slowly the ship emptied but we, a few soldiers, and some civilians were not allowed off. Father, realizing that we were in trouble, threw a package of letters from his parents in Vienna overboard. He did not want the British police to find them on him. But the package was fished out by an Arab fisherman who promptly turned it over to the police. My brother, who was then on a kibbutz near Tel-Aviv, tells me that he was ordered to appear at C.I.D. headquarters in Jerusalem (C.I.D. stands for Criminal Investigation Department) and asked to explain the letters. The C.I.D. headquarters was only satisfied when he returned with an old letter of his grandparents to compare handwriting, whereupon the letters my father had thrown overboard were returned to my brother.

Eventually a group of us was marched off the ship under police escort to an armored troop carrier and driven to the downtown

prison. At first I was amused. But then Mother and I were led into the women's compound which consisted of a yard, across which a washline with the white uniform of the commandant and a huge unbaked pita were strung. One huge cell held straw mats, two Turkish toilets, one water faucet, and lots of Arabs, mostly Bedouin prisoners. I burst into tears. It was quite a culture shock to say the least.

It was May first, and two young communist Jewish women were imprisoned for precautionary reasons. Since they spoke Yiddish, we could communicate after a fashion and it was they who introduced us to our new environment. They told us that most of the Bedouin women had murdered their husbands, probably for good reasons. The Jewish women and the Bedouin women were very nice to us.

Father was taken into the male part of the prison, which was much bigger and more crowded. The British Commandant of the prison seemed quite embarrassed and friendly and asked what he could do for us. I wanted to have access to our luggage to be able to change from my dress into shorts so that I could sit on the floor. The Commandant granted the request. I never could squat like the Arabs. Slowly I calmed down. The gate to our compound opened again and a young well-dressed Polish woman, who had been on the freighter, was ushered in. When I saw her burst into tears, I suddenly found the whole affair funny again.

The following morning, Mother, I, our luggage, and my turtle in its shoebox were led to a police van under guard and driven to Atlit, a big camp for illegal immigrants. I tried to make conversation with the Arab policeman, but he did not answer. As we learned



later, Father was taken the same day to the fortress in Acre and later to a camp outside the fortress. Father's cellmate in the fortress was an Arab, Abdul Kadar, who was fluent in German. Many Arabs were sympathetic to the Germans. Abdul Kadar was probably one of them and this would explain his incarceration. (I had learned about the fortress in Acre in elementary school in Vienna when we studied the Crusades.) In later years father loved telling stories about his internment, which he seemed to have enjoyed. Most of his camp mates were soldiers from Poland and Czechoslovakia and much younger than he. (The soldiers were interned under suspicion of being Communist agitators.) It must have reminded father of his days in the army during World War I, which he also enjoyed.

Atlit was divided in half by a road. On one side were women and children, on the other men. A few hours a day the gates between the two parts were opened so that families could get together. But we children found plenty of holes in the fences and went wherever we pleased while the British soldiers and policemen looked the other way. We were housed in 40-cot barracks, but the one assigned to us was half-empty. Each barrack had a roster of who was on duty to clean and bring food from the central kitchen. The camp inmates were predominantly German-speaking refugees from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia. Lots of children spoke my language, an experience I had not had in a long time. In the morning I went to school run by inmates, and in the afternoon I played and had a very good time. Even my turtle had a good time. The children had a fenced-in turtle area and when I released mine

to join the others, the sex-starved male went absolutely wild, attacking all the females, much to the amusement of the spectators.

Unfortunately I came down with typhoid fever soon after our arrival. I ran a very high fever in the barracks and after a few days was transferred to the camp hospital, run by Jewish doctors and nurses from outside the camp. My case was mild, probably because I received three anti-typhoid fever shots before we left Istanbul. Mother knew that I was scared of typhoid, and I was not told what I had. I was in a room with five other, slightly older, girls and I must have been very unobservant not to recognize my illness. There was an epidemic in the camp, and three young men died while I was in the hospital. Patients were given oily liquids and we were always hungry, so we talked mostly about food.

I was the only Austrian in the room. It was at that time that I found out how different German German is from Austrian German when it comes to food. Mother smuggled herself into the hospital part of the camp every day to visit me. She got into trouble every time she was caught because the authorities were afraid of spreading the epidemic. Gerhard, my brother, received permission to visit Atlit. He too did not know that I had typhoid fever and somehow got into the hospital grounds and visited me. Since we had not seen each other in over two years we kissed and hugged until a horrified nurse dragged him out. Luckily he did not get sick.

After two weeks mother stopped visiting and when I asked why, I was told that she had been transferred to another camp where I would join her later. This turned out to be a lie. I had been without fever, but when I heard that she had been transferred, it

upset me so much that the fever returned. Eventually I was dismissed from the hospital and returned to the barracks. I was informed that I would not join mother in a women's prison in Bethlehem. I was very weak, having lost a lot of weight and grown during my illness. Everyone in the barracks was very nice to me, and my friends took over my duties. Soon after, the British slowly released illegal immigrants, and many of my friends left for Youth Alya schools. Youth Alya was founded by an American woman, Henrietta Szold, and was meant to bring children from Europe without their parents. Since none of the parents in camp had money or knew what they were going to do, the camp children were taken to such schools.

Gerhard, through Youth Alya officials who were kibbutz members, obtained my release too. I needed still more recuperation. Gerhard came to fetch me, and most of my luggage. Mother had taken very little to the prison. It was arranged that I and my turtle would board with a widow and her son who was my age, not far from Gerhard's kibbutz in Raanana. I ate and slept a lot, and Gerhard visited me or I him every day. I also visited Tel-Aviv to see many old Viennese friends. After four weeks I was strong enough to join my Atlit friends in a school in Jerusalem. Before I left I released my turtle.

Once in Jerusalem, I applied to the C.I.D. for permission to visit mother in prison, located in an old mansion of a house. Mother was with European women, so-called political prisoners, separated from the Arab criminals, who had to work. There were times during the day when political prisoners and criminal prisoners could mingle. Again, my mother found the Arab women very nice.

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They shared the food their families brought, which was so much better than the prison fare. Since mother had to leave behind most of the luggage when she was transferred to Atlit, I was allowed to bring her some clothing. Every time I went to visit I had to go to the C.I.D. and wait and answer a lot of questions before permission was granted. I visited mother three times before she and father were called before an Advisory Board which heard their case. It was the first opportunity my parents had to see each other again. Father gathered from the questions they were asked that the same Austrians in Istanbul had again denounced him as a spy. I do not remember exactly when my parents were released, but I think it was about four months after our arrival in Palestine. Since I had not seen father in all that time, I got permission to leave school and go to Tel-Aviv to be with my parents.

My parents rented a tiny old three-room house which became my new home base. With two other people father started a dress business. I stayed two years in boarding school with frequent visits home.

The school was located in two houses in a very posh Jerusalem suburb. We were about 30 boys and 30 girls between the ages of 12 and 15 when we started the two years. I was the oldest girl. The school had a female director, one female counselor and one male counselor. The kitchen was under the supervision of a live-in female cook. Every day a woman came to take care of the laundry.

We children more or less ran our own show. Mornings we went to a public school, but since most of us knew little Hebrew and

had not been in school lately, we were segregated into our own classes. Usually we decided what we wanted to learn. I remember that we asked to learn about Buddah during one term and about Ibn Saud the next term. We had lunch at home and in the afternoon we worked. We could choose from four different kinds of work; flower gardening under the supervision of the male counselor; cleaning house under the female counselor; work in the kitchen or in the laundry. I worked almost the whole two years in the kitchen, where we worked in shifts. I chose the early morning shift or the evening shift. With every afternoon off, I could sneak to town or do what pleased me. During those war years there was a constant shortage of food. I was very skinny and always hungry; by working in the kitchen I could eat more. That work consisted of setting the table for the 60 children and adults and cleaning up after the meal washing all the dishes and big pots.

We had our own government at school and I was sometimes part of it. Usually we spoke German. The two Hungarian and five Bulgarian children learned German before I learned Hebrew.

After initial difficulties I was very happy there. Father came often on business and I always went with him to visit clients. After the two years some of us went to a kibbutz. I knew that I would not like the kibbutz life, but thought it was a good opportunity to try it out. I stayed two or three months. My parents were well-settled by that time and I joined them in the tiny house in the middle of summer 1943. Helping mother keep house at that time was not easy because there were no modern conveniences. We cooked on a one-burner kerosene stove and did the laundry by hand

in a big tub in the yard. Mother and I went to the beach every day. But soon I got bored and in the fall started a course in sewing.

My first job was in a terrible environment and I did not stay long. At that time I joined a swim club where I met a young woman from Vienna, a very good dressmaker, who needed an apprentice. I worked with her for two years. During that time I studied at night for the entrance examination to the University of London which is recognized in the United States as a high school equivalency test. After I passed the examination I started to work for my father in the dress business. While in school, I met Miriam, who became my best friend, and through her I met a whole crowd of very nice teenagers, including your father.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Later during the war, while working on the tramway, Poldi saw my paternal grandparents among many other Jews on a truck being deported. Some of those other Jews were probably my grandmother's brothers and sisters and their children who had lived in a provincial capital of Graz, where by grandmother was born. The Nazis cleared the smaller towns of Jews first and forced them to go to Vienna, an assembly point for further deportation. Once forced to go to Vienna, my relatives from Graz stayed with my grandparents until all were shipped east. Poldi was so upset that the following day she went to my grandparents' house wearing her uniform with her identification number to find out what had happened. She was told by the Nazis who had moved in immediately to mind her own business. They also denounced her to the office responsible for tramway conductresses, and when she was called in by her boss she was sure she had lost her job. She got away with a reprimand.

Grandmother Paula, through a Gentile neighbor, found a lawyer, a member of the Nazi party, who had promised to protect her in her house till her U.S. visa arrived--a distant relative furnished the affidavit. In return, her house would become his. He kept his promise and she left on the last steamer to cross the Atlantic before the U.S. entered the war. After the war she joined us in Palestine.

In 1950 she traveled to Vienna. She received a fraction of what the house would be worth today.

2

Rereading the story of our emigration, I realize that I never worried where the money came from. I did not know until I recently asked my mother.

We left Vienna with a substantial amount of cash, but since my parents did not know how long it would take to receive our Czech visas, we lived very frugally. Only in Budapest did we have expensive accommodations. Once we reached the one remaining family mill in Hlinsko (the mills in Austria and the Sudetenland having been expropriated by the Nazis), we had no financial problems until we left again illegally.

Before we left Hlinsko, we worked out an agreement with my great-uncle, a partner, who stayed behind, only to die in Auschwitz. When goods were shipped to Hungary or Yugoslavia, where we had many customers, the customers would complain every so often of damaged goods. My great-uncle would then agree to reduce the price and the customers would give us the difference. It was the only way to get money out because a Nazi controller sat in the office of the mill. In Italy we had no customers, but since our passports were issued in Yugoslavia, we were allowed to take money out of that country. Once we used up what we had, an old friend, then in London, who had money in Italy, lent it to us. In Turkey Father was allowed to engage in export and import business and did quite well. Thus when we arrived in Paelstine, we were not penniless.

3

She was found half starved when the United States Army entered Dachau. Among the American soldiers was one who spoke Czech and helped trace her relatives in Switzerland.



<sup>4</sup>Father had always been a great railroad buff and hiker. Every year during my childhood he bought the European railroad timetables, a book an inch thick, and read it as other people read novels. Reading maps and geography were his other hobbies. He loved to organize geography writing games in which we would choose a letter and then think of as many countries, cities, rivers, mountains starting with that letter as possible. The winner was the one who had the most left after crossing out those names anyone else used.

Father also loved to organize Sunday hikes. With maps and railroad schedules in front of him, he would decide where to go. We would take the railroad in one direction, then hike in the morning, have lunch in a nice restaurant, continue our hike, and meet a different railroad which would take us home. For half-day hikes we took the tram to the Vienna Woods. On our emigration, wherever we were, we went on sightseeing expeditions. Mother was less interested in hiking and did not always join in.

<sup>5</sup>Later in the war the British exposed the consul as a double agent. Mother seems to remember that the British caught him spying in Iraq and believes he was executed. My brother thinks he was interned in a British camp in Africa and returned to Vienna after the war.

After I had written my story, I came into the possession of letters my brother had written to my best girlfriend and his childhood sweetheart, G. The letters cover our emigration. They start in 1938, written from Hlinsko, Czechoslovakia, to Vienna where G lived. They continue to 1941, as we all keep changing addresses. I translated the relevant part. Since my brother is 5½ years older than I, his perception of what what my family had to go through was much more mature than mine.

Hlinsko Sept 6, 1938

Dear G...We have to keep our fingers crossed that by next year both of us shall have landed in Australia. Just now I received a letter from my aunt in Vienna, that she and her husband have no hope to be able to leave Vienna before next year...You have no ideas what difficulties have to be overcome before my parents and Susi will get a Czech visa. I went again to Prague. Matters have advanced somewhat, but it will still take time. Anyway, I am happy that they are in a healthier climate. (My parents had left Vienna August 17 and where at that point in Zagreb, Yugoslavia). Susi wrote that she has climbed all the wallnut trees in the vicinity of Zagreb.

Hlinsko Dec 17, 1938

Dear G...My cousin Gerty, who has been in New York for 2 years, is trying to obtain an affidavit for us...Just in case, but we still want to go to Australia.

Hlinsko Dec 23, 1938

Dear G...This time I have very good news to report. I just received a cable from Budapest that I can expect my parents and Susi on Sunday or Monday. You can imagine how happy I am. In January it will be one year since I saw mother or Susi...Father had come to Hlinsko once.

Hlinsko Jan 5, 1939

Dear G...Father has been to Prague for one week already. He is trying to extend the permissio to stay in this country and is also inquiring about visas to other countries...In spite of our unclear future, we are having a good time, playing Rummy and Monopoly and other such silly games.

Here some letters are missing. It seems that my parents with the help of a friend already in London are trying to obtain an entry permit to England.

Hlinsko April 14, 1939

Dear G...To-day father went to the office that grants exit permits. It does not look as though he will be successful. G (friend in London) is trying to get me into a school in London. It might perhaps expedite my entry before our visa arrives. Susi's name was put on a list for a children's transport. But so many apply that it is doubtful that one gets accepted. To-day news reached us that my aunt and husband finally received the entry permit to Australia. That makes us very happy, since she will try very hard to get us there. In spite of all that, I am enjoying myself. There is little to gain by sitting 'shive' with the parents.

We moyed to Prague.

Prague May 2, 1939 addressed to G's family in London on their way to Australia and written by my mother, who went to school with G's Mother.

I would have so much liked to wish you a goos trip to Australia in person...Please keep your fingers crossed, that you can help us celebrate our arrival in Australia. Our affairs here and the English visa has not advanced one millimeter. One has to have patience and

Prague July 30, 1939

... We are back to square one as far as our departure is concerned. Last week I was busy every day running from office to office for confirmations and permits. Most of those I had already received once or twice, but since most of them are valid for only 4 weeks one has to reapply. All these are just in preparations for an exit permission. Father and Mother ran around all day long, but unfortunately without any success. On top of everything the English consul is creating a lot of problems. Although we have the permit, he does not want to issue the visa. He has many objections which are too tiresome to go into.

Prague Aug 8, 1939 to Melbourne

The English visa is in the passport. And 3 days ago we heard from our grandparents in Vienna, that a cable arrived from Sydney, that our permit was granted. With all the bad experiences we had, I cannot be a 100 percent happy. One does not know how many obstacles one can still encounter. ... I figure it will take at least a year until everything is settled. Here we to receive permission to leave, we would be completely happy. But that is the biggest obstacle we have to overcome. For 4 days we sat and made long lists of our wardrobes. An export license is required for every handkerchief. To-morrow an estimator will come. Each person has to fill out long forms.

Prague Oct 19, 1939

To-day I received permission to leave and could leave on the next train, would I know where to go. During the one month the exit visa is valid, I'll try to get a visa for one of the Balkan countries and wait there for my people. That can take many months. Unfortunately I cannot travel alone to Australia, since the entry visa is for the whole family and not a single member. It is even questionable whether the visa is still valid.

I received contradictory information about that. You can see the incredible difficulties that have to be overcome.

Budapest Oct. 19, 1939

... I left Nov 17, having received my exit permit to Bratislava (Slovakia). ( My brother went to Budapest to find out whether the Australian visa was still valid and was told that he needed special recommendations from Canberra which he will try to get from our aunt).

... I hope that the parents and Susi will get here somehow. Even if matters should proceed, it will take half a year. I shall be thankful if it works at all. I hope it will not be another Fata Morgana.

Bratislava Jan. 19, 1940

... In the meantime my parents had decided to leave the Protectorate illegally. The main reason for that is, that my father's bank account in Vienna has been confiscated by the Vermoegensverkehrsstelle (one of the Nazi offices). It is not clear to me why. He realizes now, that he would be unable to raise the funds to pay for the various taxes, such as Reichsfluchtsteuer and Judenabgabe. To write in great detail about the matter would be too tiresome. In order to make a long story short, one day a man appeared here. He had been mentioned by my father and I was supposed to arrange matters with him. We agreed on day and hour when he was to lead my people over the border and when to expect them on the Slovak side of the border. I immediately notified my parents. I proceeded to the agreed upon village, but when I arrived no one was there. To cheer me up I was told by some of the Jews there, how people crossing the border would be accosted by revolver toting robbers and robbed of everything, like in the Wild West. And how most were turned over to the Gestapo without any qualms.

As you can imagine, I spent the whole day in terrible fear. When they had not appeared by nightfall, I went to a restaurant and sat with some Slovak and German bankers to find out if someone crossing the border had been captured. I found out that during the last week no one was arrested. The news did not calm me down, since they could have been arrested long before they reached the border. After a night full of anguish the same story the following day. A day of trepidation that did not seem to end. In the evening I talked again with the bankers. That day too, no one was arrested. When I realized that that terrible wait was useless, I returned in very bad shape to Bratislava. There, at least I had hoped to find mail. But there was none. For ten days no mail, although I usually received news every other day. One was not allowed to telephone or cable. I could do nothing but wait. It was the saddest Christmas I ever experienced. So I continued in great fear till Dec. the 26th. One did not need a very vivid imagination of what could have happened. Dachau with the worst tortures or at least exposure to the brutality of a Gestapo officer. I even began to doubt that they were still alive. On the 26th I was finally relieved of all the conjectures and fears. In the morning the bell rang and father appeared. I don't have to tell you..... They arrived early in the morning and mother and Susi were still asleep in the hotel, dead tired from the hardships they had to live through.... It turned out that they never received my plans and chose another way of crossing the border. Unfortunately we could not stay together very long, On the 30th they left for Budapest, since their visa expired and could not be extended.

A few weeks later my brother joined us in Budapest and proceeded to Palestine from where he continued to write to G.