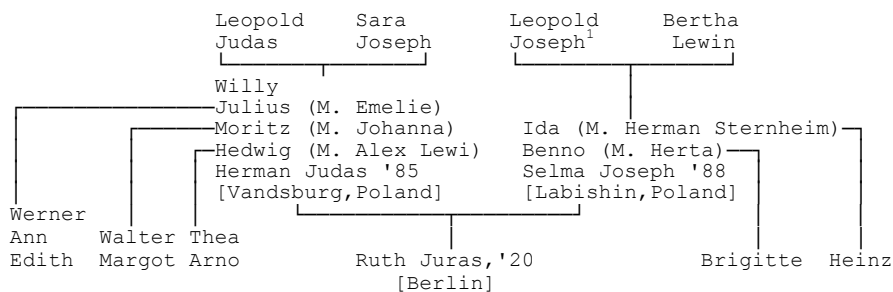


This is the story of Ruth Juras' escape from the Holocaust. However, the word escape is entirely inadequate to convey her experience, given all that she lost and left behind and all the pain that she suffered in its wake.

Ruth was born in Berlin in 1920, shortly after the Great War, as shown in the following family tree.



Leopold Judas, Ruth's paternal grandfather.

Her grandparents and parents were born in what was in the 1930's, and is now, Poland, in the vicinity of the city of Poznan. In their early lifetime Poznan was part of Prussia, known in German as Posen. (The entire province was known as Posen, as well as its capital, the city of Posen.) This was to be fateful for her parents, as the narrative will point out later. The Judases' and Josephs' move to Berlin, a distance of about 150 miles, was typical in that period for gentiles and Jews alike.

Berlin was the Prussian focus for a great in-migration, as industry, business and commerce expanded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Just prior to the turn of the century Berlin's population was almost 1.9 million, of whom about 92,000 were Jews who comprised almost five percent of the total. Like the Judases and Josephs (who, while in Posen, were German-speaking residents of the province living alongside ethnic Poles who were

maintaining the Polish language and culture), many of Berlin's Jews came from the province of Posen seeking not only improved economic opportunity but also greater personal freedom (both religiously and culturally), greater social acceptance and enhanced upward mobility for themselves and their offspring. Thus, whereas the Jewish population of Posen was 62,000 in 1871, it had fallen to 30,000 by 1905.¹



Sara Joseph Judas, Ruth's paternal grandmother, who died in childbirth bearing Ruth's Uncle Willy.

Ruth's parents were married in Berlin in 1914, and their first child, Edith, was born in 1915. However, she lived only until the age of two. Ruth's father Herman was conscripted into the German Army very shortly after the commencement of the Great War. He was sent to the eastern front where he was captured by the Russians in 1916, and he remained a prisoner of war until the end of hostilities. He returned home with the rank of corporal



This photo, with Herman at the far left, was taken at the front just before the Brusilov campaign, in which Herman was taken prisoner by the Russians.

and the recollection of the Kaiser's war-time assurance: "Der Dank das Vaterlandes ist euch gewiss".²

1 The Josephs on both sides of the family were unrelated.

2 "Know that you have the gratitude of the Fatherland."

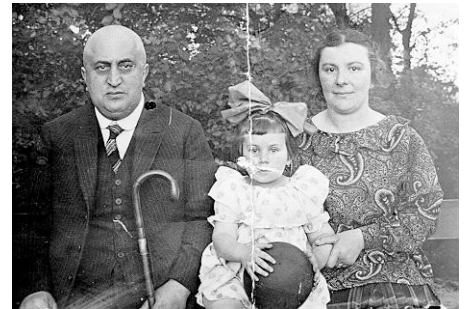


On the well-known Unter den Linden, shortly after Ruth's birth

Ruth's birth on December 4, 1920, inaugurated a period of happiness and modest prosperity for the family, in spite of the critical economic situation of the post-war Weimar Republic. Ruth's maternal grandparents were relatively well-off, although they were not wealthy. They maintained a successful dry-goods manufacturing and distribution business, supplying men's and boy's clothing and had

them cut in their large Berlin apartment, sending the work-in-process to sewing contractors for finishing and shipment. The sales activity for the firm was also centered in the apartment. So successful was the firm that the Josephs saw fit to set up their son-in-law Herman (Ruth's father) in a similar venture.

In 1923, Herman had the family's surname legally changed from Judas to Juras. (His brothers did likewise.) This decision stemmed from the desire to assimilate further and more easily into German society (for business and more general reasons) as well as to avoid whatever subtle or explicit anti-semitism that might be targeted at such an obviously Jewish name.³



Herman, Selma and Ruth in 1923

³ The aftermath of the Great War was accompanied by intense political turmoil which included numerous incidents of anti-Semitism. In 1922, the prominent Jewish industrialist, Walter Rathenau, was assassinated while serving in the Weimar Cabinet.



Ruth and Selma (front row, far left) on vacation at Bad Flinsberg, 1929

The Jurases were able to attain a middle-class level of prosperity by the late 1920's.

This was not an insignificant achievement, given the political and economic upheaval of the immediate post-war period. However, the Jurases' dry-goods manufacturing business

provided important necessities and, given the way the business was organized, was able to respond to the ups and downs of the economy without excessive hardship.

The Jurases lived in a predominantly Jewish neighborhood in Berlin near Alexanderplatz. Until 1931 or 1932 they lived at 9 Wadzeckstrasse, after which they moved to a larger apartment at 21 Hirtenstrasse. For Ruth's primary education she was enrolled in a Jewish public school near Kaiserstrasse. The German governmental educational policy provided public funds for both Jewish and non-Jewish schools. In this environment she received an introduction to her Jewish heritage and traditions along with her secular education. However, in 1930, at the age of 10, she applied to the Sophien Lyceum, a private gymnasium for girls on Weinmeisterstrasse, where she was tested and accepted. To gain higher education in Germany in those days required attendance at a gymnasium, and this school was considered by the family to be a step up and had affordable tuition, so Ruth was registered. The student body was overwhelmingly gentile, with Jewish students accounting for only about ten percent of enrollment. Since no traditional Jewish subjects were taught, Ruth also began attending a supplementary Hebrew School under the auspices of



Ruth with her parents (toward the upper left) at a resort in the Hartz Mountains, 1928. The family outings indicated material comfort in spite of the hard times.

the Oranienburgerstrasse Synagogue. This large, ornate synagogue offered a Reform service and was where her parents, who were not religious, occasionally worshipped.

That enrollment in the gymnasium occurred after the stock market crash of 1929 and that her attendance continued during the subsequent economic depression, indicated the resilience of the Juras' business fortunes during this time. Another indication of the family's improving standing was the hiring of a live-in housemaid. In 1928,



An early school photo taken at the Sophien Lyceum, August 8, 1931

Elsa Dobrunz, a young gentile woman about 18 years old, was brought into the household to keepphouse and look after Ruth, who was about ten years her junior.

Ruth's mother Selma was a modern woman who had become very active in the family business, so much so that help was needed for homemaking and supervision for Ruth.

Elsa slept in the apartment's workroom which was used by day for cutting fabric, but which had a day-bed that could be opened at night. Ruth became very close to Elsa, who, in some respect, became the replacement for the older sister that Ruth never had. Elsa took her to and from school, to the Friedrichheim Park to play, and they both shared other joint activities. This closeness of feeling

with Elsa (on the part of the whole family) was also

attributable to the fact that Elsa's sister, Lotte, was similarly engaged by Ruth's Uncle Benno and Aunt Herta. It has been said in jest about the middle class Jews of pre Hitler Germany that every boy was given violin lessons, and every girl studied the piano. Whether true or not, Ruth did study the piano beginning at the age of 11, practicing on the upright in the apartment until the



Elsa (at the right) looking out of the family apartment window with Ruth and Selma alongside.

age of 14 or 15.

All told, the period of Ruth's childhood up until the attainment of power by Hitler was happy, pleasant and full of hope and bright expectations for the future. Although Hitler's Nazis became active throughout Germany shortly



Selma, Herman, and Ruth,
1934

after the Great War, they did not come to power until January, 1933, when Hitler gained the Chancellory and almost immediately seized dictatorial control. This date marked the great watershed for German Jews, as anti-Jewish propaganda intensified and pernicious, discriminatory legislation and government policies were instituted. From 1933 onward, the lives of Germany's Jews were made miserable, as anti-Jewish policies and legislation grew ever more severe. As it was for Germany's Jews, so it was for the Jurases and for Ruth.

One of the first acts of the Nazis in 1933 was the promotion of an economic boycott of Jewish businesses. Although not overwhelmingly subscribed by the German citizenry initially, the repetitive propaganda and social pressure soon took its toll, so that even Germans without much sympathy for Naziism came under intense pressure to avoid Jewish businesses. This policy had the intended effect on the Juras' clothing business, so that Herman was forced to wind it down by 1935. The diminution in income followed by the complete loss of livelihood was a great blow to the family, and its material well-being then suffered a steady decline. Ruth's father, Herman, having closed the business, later went to work for a local Jewish hospital on Iranienstrasse. The Jewish community, through the Gemeinde (and later the Reichsvertretung) did its best to look after the welfare of its members in spite of the intense pressure that it faced, and his job was such an example. Although the job did not pay very much, Herman was able to bring food home from the commissary, which helped. Another source of sustenance was the inheritance that Ruth and her mother received from

Selma's parents, who passed away in 1927 and 1929.

Economic boycotts were hardly the only discriminatory and punitive measures enacted by the Nazis. In all, over 400 pieces of anti-Jewish legislation were passed by the regime from 1933-1945. Their intent and effect was to eliminate the civil rights of Jews (their citizenship was, in fact, revoked), disqualify them from participating in the German economy and social life, to humiliate them and make them objects of derision to the German citizenry, and to completely



Elsa's wedding to a policeman was attended by Ruth and her parents

isolate them from the German population. Among the most notorious of these were



Ruth and another Jewish classmate in the foreground; by 1935 they were prohibited from sitting together with the other girls.

the so-called Nuremburg laws, enacted on September 15, 1935. Among other things, these laws decreed the racial distinctiveness and inferiority of the Jews and penalized them for interaction with (those who were defined as) Aryans. One relatively minor provision of these statutes was the prohibition of gentile female household help from living in Jewish households.

This provision of the law would have prevented Elsa from continuing to work in the Juras household; but, as it turned out, she had married and voluntarily left them just before the legislation was enacted. Afterwards, the legality of a replacement became an academic point given the declining economic fortunes of the family under the Nazi regime.

This period of deteriorating conditions left its mark on Ruth during her early and middle adolescence. By 1935, she and the other Jewish students at the Lyceum had to sit at the rear of the classroom, separated from the gentiles. Worse still, with the family business gone and household income greatly

diminished, her family could no longer afford the tuition at the Sophien Lyceum. Like almost all the other Jewish students, she had to withdraw from the school, much to her great disappointment. This separation was so painful for her that she could vividly recollect the final moments even sixty years later, including the comforting words of a sympathetic teacher, Professor Schaeffer, who said to her on her departure, "for you the sun will shine again someday".⁴

There being no opportunity for advanced education, the Nazis having by then proscribed Jewish attendance, meant the end of Ruth's formal general education. Also, the family's economic situation, combined with Ruth's inability to attend school, led to her holding a variety of jobs which included child and health care, and office work (for the Katzenstein Leather Goods Company).



Professor Schaeffer, Ruth's favorite teacher, who she greatly admired.



⁴ Professor Schaeffer was clearly not a Nazi.

However, by this time, even though only a teenager, she was forced to confront her future in Germany, and, as many young German Jews were doing, she became active in Jewish youth groups. Under the influence of her older cousin Arno, who was a leader in the local Zionist Youth Organization, she, too, became active. Many of the organization's activities were social or athletic (she participated in the group's Bar Kochba gymnastic and athletic events). By then it was impossible for Jewish youth to socialize with gentiles, so the youth group provided a framework for the Jewish youngsters to get together. However, its most pointed role was to give hope and direction to Germany's Jewish youth. In particular, the idea of leaving Germany became widespread in the minds of young people. As her awareness of her own vulnerability grew, Ruth became convinced



Ruth Joined this Zionist Youth Organization
(Ruth is at the center-rear, in a dark blouse)

that she should prepare for the possibility of emigration. Considering her own age and the options available, she decided early in 1937 to participate in a nurse-training program sponsored by the Jewish community. It was her belief

that with nursing skills, her chances of emigration would be enhanced. At that time, she also began the study of English at home using both books and (Lingaphone) language records, since she believed that England or the United States would be the most desirable refuges. (She had had no prior exposure to English in school, French having been taught at the Lyceum.)

Ruth pursued this plan in spite of her parents' initial disapproval. Although distressed with life under the Nazi regime, they were, in 1936 and 1937, not convinced of the need to emigrate. The senior Jurases, as with many of the older-generation Berlin Jews, were later in starting preparation to leave than people elsewhere in Germany, because that city's population was the most

cosmopolitan and least Nazi throughout all of the Reich. Also, life in the big city allowed a degree of anonymity, leading to a perception of safety not shared in smaller towns. Thus, the unrealistic sense that Naziism would pass or that its effects would be mitigated, taking longer to dissipate in Berlin than elsewhere, was to work to their disadvantage. What is more, Ruth's father Herman believed that his status as a World War I German Army veteran would protect him and his family from the worst of the regime's excesses. To emigrate at their ages (Herman and Selma were 51 and 48 in 1936), given their economic situation and inability to speak any language other than German, was not an easy prospect for them to fathom. Thus, Ruth's parents viewed her earnest preparation to emigrate as the impulsiveness of youth; they thought her a head-strong, reckless girl. She was thus compelled to initiate her plans independently, and this she did.

Ruth's nurse training program took place at the Iranienstrasse Hospital, a Jewish hospital in her neighborhood. (In fact, it was her participation there that had led to her father getting the employment at



At the Iranienstrasse Hospital, 1937; Ruth is at the upper left.

the hospital which was mentioned previously.)

Her program combined practical nursing work with classroom instruction. One of her vivid recollections of this experience was of some Jewish patients who were recovering from their incarceration in Sachsenhausen, a concentration camp northwest of Berlin⁵. One day, she overheard one of the Jewish staff physicians

⁵ At that time, Germany's concentration camps were primarily intended to crush opposition to the regime and to punish violators of its edicts. The harshness and cruelty at the camps, which led to many deaths over and above the executions of some of the inmates, was meant to intimidate the population. It was thus the intent of the Nazis to have survivors, in order that the message gets out. It was not until after the war began that the camps became even more oppressive and lethal.

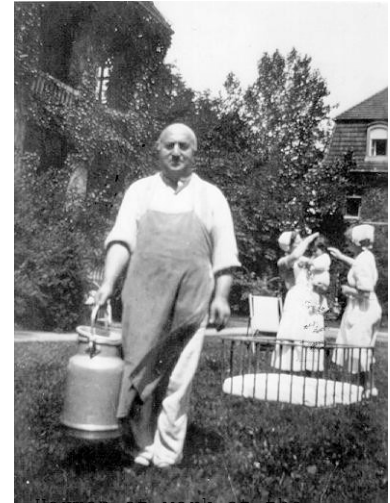
pointing out the Sachsenhausen discharges to a visiting gentile physician, along with the comment that the concentration camp phenomenon was attributable to the German culture. (Clearly, the gentile physician was trusted by the Jew, and the gentile was not a Nazi.)

In spite of the difficulties of these times, Ruth and her family did not have a feeling of impending doom. As is only natural, they tried to make



Ruth with her cousin Arno, who had a great influence on her

the best of their situation, trying as much as possible to enjoy their time outside of work. Ruth's activities with the Zionist Youth Organization included athletic exercises as part of the Bar Kochba gymnastics group, as well as social events.



Herman at work at the hospital, 1937

Her membership in this group followed the example of her older cousin Arno who was a group leader. The activities took place in the evenings and weekends as the members kept

themselves busy, they being proscribed from interaction with gentile youth and being prohibited from attending many public programs (Juden Verboten⁶). In addition, she frequently went to the theater escorted by her cousin Heinz, ten years her senior and who she greatly admired. Heinz was a theater buff and Berlin had much to offer, being one of the world's great metropolises and the cultural capital of Germany.

⁶ Jews Prohibited.

Sometimes they attended as a group, other times just the two together. Often they went to the Volksbuehne, and sometimes saw Shakespeare. Other recollections of Ruth's include attendance at the 1936 summer Olympics held in Berlin. Considerate and cautious of world public opinion, the Nazis had muffled their anti-Jewish propaganda during that time. That and the fact that she did not look Jewish, but in fact had an Aryan appearance, allowed her to come and go without fear. Ironically, one of the events she witnessed was Jesse Owens' victory in the long jump (one of many instances that should have served to refute the Nazi theories and propaganda of German racial superiority).

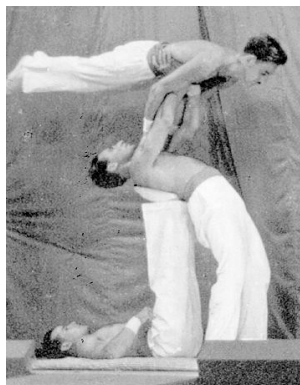


Cousin Heinz, whose attention Ruth found flattering, had moved easily within Berlin's cultural life.

Nonetheless, by the summer of 1938 the situation had noticeably deteriorated. Hitler had accomplished the long-sought annexation of Austria in March with minimal force and no real Western opposition. What previously had been referred to as 'Anschluss', with the meaning of voluntary unification, thereafter became known as forced annexation.

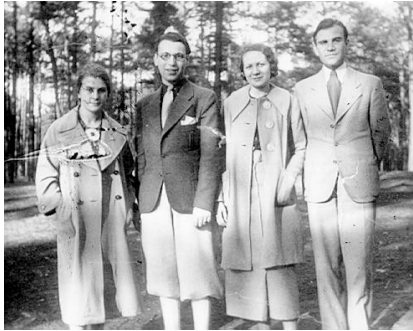
The spring and summer then became witness to Hitler's demands for the Sudetenland, the Bohemia/Moravia area of western Czechoslovakia populated substantially (though not by a majority) of ethnic Germans.

International and domestic tensions were on the rise. The conditions for the Jews in Germany were similarly worsening. Sensing that the time had come to act, Ruth wrote to the British Home Office seeking an emigration visa and work permit as a nurse-in-training, referring to the planning and preparation that she had already begun. She attended to this task entirely herself and without the professional aid of any attorney or counselor, using the English she had learned on



An exhibition by the Bar Kochba group, an Athletic activity of the Zionist youth group. Ruth was an active participant in these events.

her own. At first, her parents tried to dissuade her; but, given her insistence, they did not object further. As the summer wore on, however, and the international and domestic situation continued to worsen, they experienced a change of heart. Her parents, by then also acknowledging the need to prepare for departure, engaged the assistance of a distant relative in Indianapolis to obtain the necessary sponsorship papers for U.S.A. Affidavits for Ruth and her parents were soon forthcoming. The



Ruth (left) escorted by Heinz on an outing.

Indianapolis-based sponsor, having attained considerable



Cousin Edith at her Wedding to Lothar Becker, 1937.

wealth and motivated to help as many of his relatives as possible, devoted considerable personal energy and resources in this effort. (By the time the U.S. entered World War II, he had brought out 40-50 people; and prior to the U.S.'s entry in the war, he even personally traveled to Europe for this purpose.) However, having gotten the affidavits, the senior Jurases put them aside for possible use later; they did not then apply to the U.S. government for

visas. By the fall of 1938 about 1/3 of Germany's Jewish population had emigrated. This, in fact, had been the object of policy of the German government: namely, to rid Germany of its Jewish residents by taking measures creating hardship and duress.

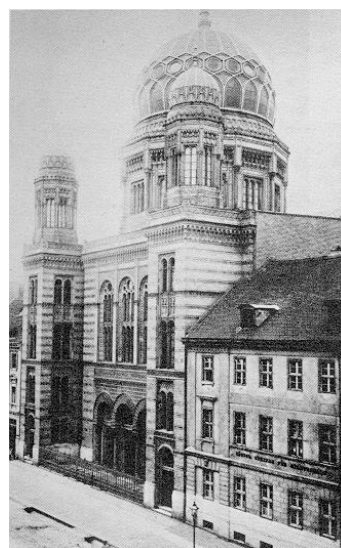
The event later called Kristallnacht⁷ served to energize those having any doubts about the advisability of preparing to leave.

On November 9, 1938, the regime unleashed an unprecedented reign of violence and terror upon the Jews and their property and public places,

⁷ Literally, the night of [broken] glass, from the effect of all the shattered windows and shop display cases.

including synagogues. All over Germany, mobs organized by the Nazi party broke into Jewish homes, businesses and public places where they looted, burned, destroyed, beat and killed at will. Even in sophisticated Berlin, the organized carnage took place; and among the Berlin synagogues burned was the ornate edifice at Oranienburgerstrasse, where Ruth and her family worshipped and where she had attended Hebrew School.

In the wake of Kristallnacht, Ruth's parents finally decided to apply for U.S. visas. However, by then U.S. consular offices were inundated by such requests, so ominous had the climate suddenly become. Thus, even though the Jurases had suitable affidavits of support they had to vie for the available spots based on the restrictive immigration quotas then in effect.⁸ These quotas were based on the country of origin of the applicant, the country of origin being defined by the place of birth and that place's current national affiliation. Ruth's parents, having been born in Posen (in 1938, being part of Poland), were issued a queue position based on the Polish quota, which at that time had a hopelessly long wait that was much longer than what would have been in effect had they been classified under the German quota. However, they did not consider any other options as realistic; so they waited. Although Ruth, having been born in Berlin, was classified as German quota, she could not obtain a U.S. visa independently since



The Oranienburgerstrasse
Synagogue before
Kristallnacht

⁸ The U.S. Government made no effort to relax these quotas, even on humanitarian grounds, in spite of the heartrending appeals then being made by sympathetic individuals and organizations.

she was not of majority age.

Meanwhile, Ruth's request to the British Home Office did not go unheeded. Although unbending in its refusal to direct increased immigration to its Palestine Mandate(it had succumbed to Arab pressure in its 1939 White Paper by freezing immigration there), it did substantially increase the number of German Jews admitted to the British Isles. From Kristallnacht to the outbreak of the war, 40,000 refugees were admitted. Acknowledging Ruth's request, she was issued a 12-month



Cousin Margot, who emigrated to Palestine in 1938, with her child and husband, Rosner, in Haifa.



Aunt Ida in an earlier photo (1932) with Heinz to her right

visa and work permit with permission to enroll in a British nurse-in-training program at a hospital in

Birkenhead, just across the bay from Liverpool. For young women her age (she was then 18 years old), the only means of independent entry into Great Britain was

as a domestic or a nurse-in-training. Her anticipation of this eventuality and her nursing studies had worked to

her advantage, and she received her visa early in the spring of 1939. Her cousin Ann had also applied for a British visa (as a domestic), and she also received on shortly after Ruth. With freedom-giving visa in hand, Ruth made her final preparations to leave Germany. She was to proceed west across Germany by train, crossing the border into Holland, and then to continue by train and ferry to London where she would be put up for a short time by her maternal grandmother's cousin, Kaite Salomon. Mrs. Salomon lived at 81 Upper Clapton Road, in London's East End Jewish neighborhood.

By the spring of 1939, those fortunate enough to have gotten legal visas were permitted to leave with little more than the shirts on their backs. By then all that was permitted the emigrant was limited personal luggage for clothing and 10 marks in cash. Ruth's Aunt Ida, whose family still had residual savings in the form of gems, tried to convince her to carry some of it as contraband. Aunt Ida's idea was to hide the gems in the hollows of clothing buttons which she could fabricate with her button-making machine. Even though under some pressure from her aunt, Ruth demurred, being intent on survival and by then fully understanding the ruthlessness and vindictiveness of the authorities should she be caught.

As it turned out, Ruth's leaving was almost exactly coincident with her parents' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. It was thus decided to host a gathering in recognition of both events. The party was held on Sunday, April 30, 1939, in the Juras apartment on Hirtenstrasse. It was an open house and all the family members still in Berlin attended: on

her father's side, Aunt Mielke and Cousins Ann and Edith (along with her husband Lothar - Uncle

Julius having previously passed away); Aunt Hedwig and Uncle Alex with Cousin Thea; and on her mother's side, Aunt Ida and Uncle Herman with Cousin Heinz; and Uncle Benno and Aunt Herta with Cousin Brigitte. Ruth's friends also came to say farewell. What mixed, bittersweet emotions must have been felt that day: relief that Ruth would soon be safe, combined with the pangs of impending separation and the uncertainty regarding all who would be left behind. For Ruth's mother, Selma, this event was too much to bear and she broke down in a flood of emotion, begging Ruth not to leave. But Ruth did proceed with her



Ruth's internal identity card (kennkarte), in which she is pictured in her nursing uniform

plan, knowing that it was the right thing to do and hoping that she would be the agent to help her parents to also leave Germany.

Ruth's train departed Berlin on May 10, 1939 after many sad farewells due to the uncertainty and seriousness of the situation. Not only were her dear parents left behind, but their prospects for leaving were not bright. Her Uncle Benno, Aunt Herta and Cousin Brigitte had visas for Cuba in hand (which they had literally purchased from corrupt Cuban government officials as a part of a group). Cousin Arno had already left for Holland and was expected to meet her after her train crossed the border. Her cousins Walter and Margot had been in Palestine since 1938. Her other cousins, Edith, Thea and Heinz were still in Berlin. Of her living aunts and uncles only Willy, a bachelor, was not in Germany, he having emigrated to America in the 1920's.

(That he could not provide the family with affidavits himself was due to his own poverty.

He worked for a men's clothing firm in New York City,

barely able to support himself.) When the train reached the Dutch border, the passengers had to disembark to clear customs.

To Ruth's surprise and much to her trepidation, she was among a small number of people singled out by the German border authorities



Ruths passport

for close inspection. Whether this was a random event or due to her attractive and Aryan appearance, will never know. Escorted by a matron to a private room, she was forced to undress in the search for



Ruths Passport p.2



Arno and Lotte Lewi in Holland

contraband while her luggage was closely examined. Thankful that she had refused her Aunt's plan to carry the gems but concerned that some inexplicable obstacle would yet prevent her departure, she nervously endured the inspection. Mercifully, she passed through customs without incident and proceeded in safety to Holland. There she met her cousin Arno as planned. He had obtained a visa for Holland as part of his plan to emigrate to Palestine. Part of a Zionist youth group, he was a participant in a Dutch youth Hachshara (a training camp for settlers intending to settle in a kibbutz in Palestine) made up of German Jewish refugees. While in the Dutch youth center, he met a young Jewish emigré

named Lotte; and soon the two were married. Unfortunately, due to the British White Paper restricting immigration to Palestine, the young Lewi's were unable to leave Holland before the German invasion one year later. Caught in the German occupation, they were both sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp; but both miraculously survived the war. After its end, they were finally able to emigrate to Palestine, albeit illegally, being among those taken from Europe on chartered boats which were able to evade the British blockade. However, their health, particularly Lotte's, was never the same; and they never had children.

Ruth arrived in London on May 11 and spent a little more than a week with her mother's cousin as



Katie Salomon, Ruth's distant English cousin

planned. From there she proceeded to Birkenhead General Hospital (near Liverpool) where she registered as an alien as required, and commenced her program as a nurse probationer.

An early incident there so embarrassed her that she remembered it forever. On being introduced to the staff, each of the first two or three nurses was presented as Sister "so and so". Knowing that the institution was secular and that the nurses were not nuns, she remarked how nice it was that the family was all working together. The spontaneous laughter that followed her remark indicated her mistake in not knowing that all nurses were addressed as Sister in England. Her face blushed with discomfort as she realized the faux pas.



At Birkenhead Hospital
(Ruth at the center)



Birkenhead Hospital

She quickly fell into a demanding Routine at the hospital. Practical nursing chores were combined with classroom instruction. The trainees worked six days per week, were provided room and board and limited spending money as opposed to a living wage *per se*. Her supervisor and mentor was Nurse Davis, who took a genuine and devoted interest in her and her welfare. Nurse Davis watched over her like a mother hen, giving her tickets to events like the Liverpool Symphony and generally doing what she could to insure that Ruth would not become discouraged or go astray. (It was not uncommon among the refugees formerly of substantial means that many could not adapt to their demanding circumstances. Some of these young women turned to

prostitution.) Ruth did not forget the kindness shown her by this nurse and was to maintain occasional but regular correspondence with her until her death many years later. During this time Ruth was able to send and receive mail from her parents in Berlin; she hoped that she could arrange for them to leave Germany for England.

Shortly after Ruth's arrival at the hospital her Cousin Ann came to England in July as a domestic. She had gotten a position with a family in London with the assistance of her former employer in Berlin who had emigrated earlier and was by then successfully engaged in the garment business. Ann's intention was also to establish herself in London and send for her mother later.



Ruth's Cousin Ann, 1939

Just about the time Ruth was arriving in England, her Uncle Benno, Aunt Herta and Cousin Brigitte left for Cuba on the liner St. Louis. It was to be a bitter voyage which would focus the world's attention on the plight of the German Jewish refugees. All 937 of the passengers on that ship had set out for Cuba with the best of expectations; all had obtained their visas the same way. However, while en route, the visas which they had purchased from agents of Cuban

government officials were declared invalid by the Cuban authorities, apparently in an

internal governmental dispute. The ship's

German captain, sympathetic to the predicament of his passengers, sailed slowly along the North American coast to buy time while frantic appeals were made for refuge in Canada, the U.S., the Caribbean and Latin America. Not one country agreed to give sanctuary, not even for the children. So great was the despair on board that when the ship began to return to Europe, travelling north along the American Coast, there were passengers who jumped into the sea in desperate

attempts to swim to shore. A few committed suicide on board. Most, including the Josephs, were brought back to Europe.

Meanwhile Ruth's work at the hospital in Birkenhead progressed without incident. She became friends with several of the institution's nurses and trainees with whom she worked and lived. Mail from home indicated that her cousin Thea was to be married on September 1, 1939. Ruth's concern for her parents led her to obtain offers of positions for them as husband and wife domestics in England. However, the necessary visas were not forthcoming, the number of people then seeking them far outstripping the British government's willingness to supply them.

The German invasion of Poland on September 1 and the British declaration of war on September 3 made her an enemy alien and also foreclosed the possibility of her parents joining her in England. British concern over a German fifth column led to procedures that required resident German aliens to be interned, unless someone would vouch for them at an official tribunal, or if they could otherwise be found reliable. Nurse Davis felt sure enough of Ruth to vouch for her, and she was thereby able to keep her work permit and avoid internment. Cousin Ann was not as fortunate. She was interned on the Isle of Man nine months after the outbreak of the war and not released until nine months after that when the authorities could satisfy themselves as to her political reliability.

After the war broke out, it was no longer possible for mail to be exchanged directly between Germany and England. However, Ruth's correspondence with her parents was initially maintained through friends in neutral Belgium; her parents would post the mail to their Belgian friends in Antwerp who would forward it to Ruth, and vice-versa. At one point this correspondence was delayed and Ruth became concerned. However, the mail did resume; and when her next letter finally arrived, Ruth was so relieved that she unthinkingly exclaimed to the nurse in her presence that she had finally gotten her expected

letter from Germany. So worried were the British authorities that spies might be among the refugees, that the citizenry were warned to report even the least suspicious of incidents. The nurse exclaimed in return: "Nurse! How can you have had mail from Germany when we are at war?" This was followed several days later by a visit at the hospital from an Inspector from Scotland Yard, who began to question her about reported correspondence with Germany. The appearance of the Inspector, representing the possibility that she could be mistakenly in trouble, combined with her concern for her parents and the pressure of fending for herself with almost no one to turn to caused her to burst into tears. However, the Inspector quickly determined the true nature of the correspondence and left her with a sympathetic reassurance that reinforced her positive impression of the British character as generous and understanding.

Generous or not, the German invasion of France, Belgium and Holland in May, 1940 and the unexpectedly rapid collapse of the allied defense (including the narrow escape of the British Expeditionary Army from Dunkirk) was soon followed by the loss of Ruth's work permit. (It also ended the exchange of mail from home.) Without the work permit, her prospects were unattractive at best. She left Birkenhead for London, and in July her expiring visa was extended by the Swiss Legation, which then handled the interests of German nationals in England. However, it was good only until October 25, 1940. By then, without employment, she had become dependent on others. She and refugees like her frequently stopped in at Bloomsbury House in London, the local headquarters of the Joint Distribution Committee, an American Jewish agency providing relief for European Jewish Refugees. Without earned income, she had to accept the small allowance that the JDC provided. Sometimes she would return to her mother's cousin's house at 81 Upper Clapton Road for a few days. At other times she stayed in rooming houses, sharing with four or five other young women in the same circumstances to stretch their money. Funds were barely enough for necessities, but occasionally they would splurge, just to relieve the tension.

Once that summer, one of the young women noticed an announcement of a production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to be performed in Hyde Park. They had only enough money to either eat or attend the concert, but not both. That night, they chose not to eat.

Ruth wrote to her parents' sponsor, Mr. Gustav Efroymsen, in Indianapolis that summer, asking for his help in finding her a job in England or whatever assistance he could provide. In response, she was contacted by the secretary of one of Mr. Efroymsen's business acquaintances in London, a Mr. Wolfson, a well-known, wealthy British Jew. Although unable to provide a job, he did give her \$40 on Mr. Efroymsen's behalf.

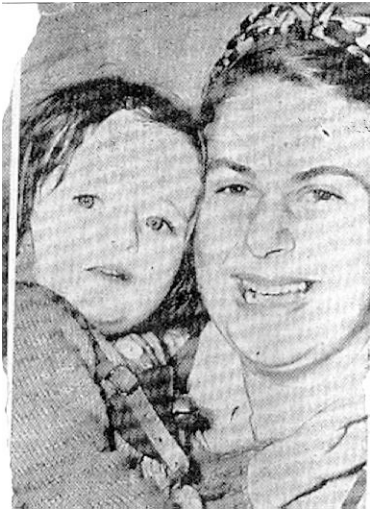
However, it was apparent to Ruth that in her circumstances she might soon be interned, perhaps for the duration of the war. Although her cousin Ann had already reported for confinement on the Isle of Man, Ruth was reluctant to do so. Mostly, this was due to her fear that the British, too, might succumb to German military power, as had almost all the rest of Europe. By then the Battle of Britain⁹ had begun; and in spite of assurances from all of her British acquaintances that their island would prevail (and that the refugees and internees would thus be safe), she decided (at the age of 19 and for the second time in two years) to leave her precarious location for a safer one. The question was: where to go?

The summer of 1940 was hectic, tense and uncertain in Great Britain. Germany was simultaneously consolidating its *Festung Europa*¹⁰ while softening up Britain for invasion by aerial bombardment by its Luftwaffe. All over Great Britain there was feverish preparation for land war while the Royal Air Force struggled to keep the Luftwaffe at bay. Ruth, along with the rest of the refugee community, was at the receiving end of a mushrooming rumor mill concerning the options they could consider for their immediate future, as well as about

⁹ The Luftwaffe's aerial campaign in preparation for invasion.

¹⁰ Fortress Europe

conditions back home. The Joint Distribution Committee advertised at Bloomsbury House the opportunity to leave England for an agricultural settlement in the Dominican Republic. The JDC let it be known that the Government of the Dominican



Disembarking with Monica Maar (from a newspaper clipping recording the event)

Republic would accept refugees; and, in fact, the JDC was calling for volunteers for a communal agricultural settlement it had established, to be populated by young people who had no other material means with which to establish themselves once they arrived. (At the worldwide Evian Conference of pre-war 1939, which was called to deal with the growing German Jewish refugee problem, the Dominican Republic's dictator, Rafael Trujillo, was the only world chief executive to welcome the Jews without restriction. The conference was an utter failure, as each country looked to the others to absorb the large numbers of Jews seeking to leave Germany and

their barriers to immigration were strictly maintained. Although the Dominican Republic was the only exception to this shameful policy, Trujillo's motives were not at all pure: he was a racist seeking to add whites to his darkly colored population.)

With the prospect of departure for the agricultural commune in the Dominican Republic confirmed as genuine at the London office of the JDC, Ruth decided to volunteer. As unappealing as his option was to her, she



Another news clipping of the Arrival in NYC

deemed it the only one that would soon become available with her visa not long to expire, her funds precarious and the possibility of German invasion mounting.

However, she did not even have enough money for ship passage to Santo Domingo. The JDC, upon hearing her plight, offered to pay her passage in exchange for her stewardship of a young girl already scheduled for departure. The child, named Monica Maar, was only two years old and had been staying with her father in England, her mother having already left for the U.S. However, Monica's father had by then been interned, and the family preferred that the child be sent to join her mother. Ruth accepted the responsibility and made preparations to leave England.

Their ship, the Cameronia, departed from Glasgow on August 31, 1940 with a shipload of British war evacuees as well as Ruth and her charge and 30 - 35 other passengers bound for Santo Domingo via New York. There being no direct liner connections between Great Britain and the Dominican Republic, the Dominican Republic Settlement Association (the U.S.-based refugee aid organization that was developing the Sosua colony for which Ruth was bound) had arranged for connections via New York. They arrived in New York on September 10, the voyage taking longer than in peacetime in order to avoid German U-boats. The arrival of the ship was greeted by a large contingent of the press, which viewed the passengers' stories as most newsworthy since it was the first ship to arrive with refugees after the beginning of the German blitz of London. Ruth, in particular, became a focus of attention, given the young Monica in tow. Their photographs, with Ruth's radiant smile, appeared in a number of New York's newspapers that day as part of the reporting of this story. Ruth was also greeted by her Uncle Willy, whom she had previously notified of her plans.



En route to the Dominican Republic aboard the S.S. Cherokee

Her uncle was not personally known to her, he having emigrated from Germany when she was a young child. His delight at seeing her come down the gangplank was combined with astonishment at her possession of the young child, but his surprise was quickly put to rest by Ruth's explanation of her mission.

The emigrants were permitted to disembark and remain in New York until their scheduled departure for the Dominican Republic on September 19th. Thus, Ruth received a brief taste of her third great metropolis before having to move on to the agricultural settlement in Sosua. She stayed with her uncle who lived in a rented, furnished room at 161st Street near Broadway in Washington Heights (He was unable to afford an apartment of his own.) She hoped that her stay in the Dominican Republic would be temporary and exceedingly brief, and she wanted to return to New York permanently. Her uncle assured her that he would quickly send her an affidavit of support once she reached the settlement at Sosua. Their ship, the S.S. Cherokee, did not leave New York Harbor until September 21; and they arrived in the Dominican Republic on October 3. Life at the Sosua colony was difficult, but hardship was not the problem. Ruth was accustomed to hard work and self-reliance, but of a completely different sort. She was a city girl at heart and was not in her element at the commune. It had been hacked out of the jungle and was extremely primitive. The climate was



Time off at the Sosua beach, Dominican Republic, November, 1940

oppressive; her blond, light appearance made her a frequent focus of unwanted attention from the young male natives in the neighborhood. Culturally, Sosua was worse than a backwater. There was little to do outside the settlement that she enjoyed, and what was available was unfamiliar. Her work in the communal

kitchen was of a lower order than even she, at her young age, was accustomed to. Ruth and her four or five kitchen co-workers arose at 4 a.m. each day to start their work. Their evening recreation consisted of self-entertainment: singing and dancing.

Like most of the settlers, Ruth spoke almost no Spanish; they conversed among themselves in German.



Ruth is standing behind the table at the right side of the settlement's dining room with her left hand under her chin.



Uncle Willy, seated in front of the Manhattan apartment where he lived

Her determination to leave as soon as possible increased. Her Uncle Willy's affidavit of support arrived in December, and she immediately took it to the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo to apply for a visa. The Consul, after reading the affidavit, indicated that he was unable to issue a visa based on those papers because Uncle Willy was earning too little to provide for her should she not be able to provide for herself. (He was employed by the Silver Crest Men's Clothing Company, earning \$32 per week plus commissions.) At this news, Ruth broke down in a flood of desperate tears, her disappointment at being denied the visa combining with the fear that she might be stuck in the Dominican Republic indefinitely.

Fortunately for her, the Consul was a sympathetic man. The majority of State Department personnel in those days were not. Whether of their own disposition or as a result of the explicit direction of the Secretary of State, Edward Stettinius, U.S. consular officials were doing all they could to throw

roadblocks in the way of even legal immigration although the circumstances were critical and the applicants desperate. The State Department had erected a wall of red tape to minimize the number of visas issued. So pervasive was this effort that the number of visas issued was even less than the immigration quota allowed by law.

The Consul, seeing Ruth's reaction, asked whether she knew of anyone else who might provide an affidavit for her. She responded that her mother's distant cousin from Indianapolis had provided her parents with affidavits in 1938. The Consul expressed interest and Ruth showed him copies of the affidavits that had been provided her and her parents in 1938. When the Consul read them, he assured her that if she could obtain an up-to-date version of that affidavit from these people in her own name, he could surely issue her a visa. Thus relieved, she left the Embassy to write to Mr. Gustav Efroymsen.

Gustav Efroymsen's story had classic Horatio Alger attributes. His father had run away from home near Posen as a teenager in the mid-nineteenth century, unable to get along with his stepmother and ambitious to emigrate to America to improve his life. The extended family had been alerted and asked to notify the parents if the youngster showed up seeking help. As it turned out, he made his way to the Berlin apartment of Bertha (Lewin) Joseph, Ruth's maternal grandmother. Bertha was won over by the young man's appeals not to compromise him, and she put him up until he could earn enough money to continue his voyage. Upon his departure, she even contributed a small sum to supplement his savings. His son, Gustav, was born in Evansville, Indiana in 1870 and became extraordinarily successful in America, becoming a prosperous retailer who, with his brother-in-law, purchased the H.P Wasson department store in Indianapolis. Then, in 1932, he acquired a hosiery manufacturing firm headquartered in Indianapolis called Realsilk, which became so successful that he became a man of great wealth. Mr. Efroymsen never forgot his roots, particularly Ruth's grandmother's help for his own father during his time of need.

So, it was only a few weeks after Ruth wrote to him in Indianapolis that the required papers arrived, the affidavit of support actually being sent by the Wolfs, Gustav Efroymsen's sister and brother-in-law. The visa was promptly issued and Ruth wrote to her uncle asking for ship fare. However, Uncle Willy responded that he didn't have the funds to send her, so she wrote to the Efroymsens once again asking for help, this time for money. Enough was sent for ship passage and about \$80 to spare; she sailed for New York in May, 1941, not yet 21 years of age.

It was just about two years from the time she had left Germany that Ruth reached America. She had almost no money and was joining her uncle, whose financial circumstances were not much better than her own. She had not heard from her parents since her last correspondence from England just prior to the invasion of France, although she had written to them from the Dominican Republic.

She stayed with her uncle only briefly, soon finding a live-in job as a child-care aide for a family named Bernstein on West End Avenue in Manhattan. Through the Bernsteins, she met other young immigrant German Jewish women and began to develop a circle of friends. Uncle Willy suggested that she deposit the money left from the Dominican voyage in a bank, for fear that it might otherwise get stolen. With a new coat and hat that her uncle had bought for her, she went (unaccompanied and for the first time) to a New York City bank. There, unfamiliar with the procedures and thoroughly unsure of herself, she looked about for a clue of how to proceed. Suddenly, a young man asked her in German, "Sprechen sie Deutsch?"¹¹ and, "Can I help you?" The young man, a recent Jewish immigrant from Vienna, did help her -- and then asked her for a date. She accepted Benny Kleinfeld's offer and they began to keep company. They were married on January 4, 1942.

¹¹ "Do you speak German?"

Ruth had written to her parents from the U.S. since her arrival, but had received no reply. The occasion of her wedding, however, warranted another try; so she wrote again, this time in care of the Red Cross (due to the fact that by then Germany and the U.S. were at war). To this she did receive a response, but not from Berlin; her parents' letter, transmitted to her also by the Red Cross, was from the Theresienstadt concentration camp. They



Ruth Juras and Benny Kleinfeld were Married on January 4, 1942, one month after Pearl Harbor

acknowledged the receipt of her letter with the news of her marriage, expressed their pleasure with her safety and happiness and the fact that she was no longer alone. For Herman and Selma, this was to be their last consolation on earth and one not enjoyed by many others among their fellow inmates. Although Ruth wrote repeatedly, she never heard from them again.

* * *

Epilogue

Theresienstadt had been a Czech military facility in western Bohemia, not far from Prague. The Germans evicted its pre-war occupants and began using it as a concentration camp on November 24, 1941. It was unique among all the camps in that it was billed as a ghetto for "privileged" Jews. There the Germans sent prominent individuals who were known and cared about inside Germany and world-wide, such as Berlin's Chief Rabbi, Leo Baeck. By maintaining such a place for VIP's, the Nazis hoped to stifle criticism of their regime and its anti-Jewish policies. As the Jews of the occupied countries of Europe were being rounded up and deported to concentration camps, the Danes were among the few who stubbornly and uniformly resisted this brutal, cruel policy. For the most part they refused to release their Jewish citizens and refugees, smuggling many to neutral Sweden. Of the 500 or so who were captured, the Danes insisted that they be sent to a camp that would be inspected by the Red Cross. The Germans sent them to Theresienstadt, where they could receive packages from Denmark, and where it was promised that a Red Cross visit would be permitted. Many German Jewish World War I veterans were sent there also, and this is the likely reason that it became the destination of the Jurases as well. The Nazis were shrewd enough to realize that their own citizens would be less likely to question or challenge the regime if appearances were maintained that the veterans were not being ill-treated.

However, the Final Solution¹² had already been decided; and those living at Theresienstadt were no exception to its mad fury. While the Nazis cleverly maintained the facade of a model ghetto for the outside world, those inside were suffering and dying. Of the 140,000 people sent there, only 17,000 survived. Prior to the war, 3,500 inhabitants occupied the place; under the Nazis upward of 60,000 were packed in at once. Theresienstadt became a way station to death; 90,000 were deported east to the extermination camps. Of the remaining 50,000, there were 33,000 who died there. The conditions, although not as bad as the worst of the camps in Germany, were nonetheless inhuman. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, insufficient food and medical care, and overwork faced the inmates. The promised Red Cross inspection was a mockery of the guarantee, as the Nazis prepared carefully for the one they allowed by deporting all those too sick to be seen by visitors and simultaneously postponing transports of replacement inmates. The place was cleaned and tidied up for that one visit, and the resident Jewish leadership was intimidated into not revealing the truth. The Red Cross inspection was so staged that the Gestapo even made a motion picture of the camp at that time for its world-wide propaganda campaign.

After the war ended, those like Ruth who had managed to escape tried hopefully to locate their loved ones. To each of Ruth's inquiries there was no positive answer, until at last she learned through the Red Cross that they had perished. Not having the heart to inquire further, she let the matter rest. Decades later, the Gedenkbuch¹³ would show that Herman and Selma had been deported to Auschwitz. Records at Theresienstadt indicate that they arrived there in October, 1942, only to be sent to Auschwitz three months later in January, 1943. The two massive volumes of the Gedenkbuch listing the 200,000

¹² The liquidation of European Jewry

¹³ Gedenkbuch [Memorial Book], Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, 1986, edited by Dr. Hans Booms

Jews of Germany who were murdered during the war indicated that the Jurases were 'verschollen' [lost] at the most infamous of the death camps.

As for Ruth's other blood relatives, her Uncle Willy passed away in New York shortly after her marriage. He was so indigent that the newly married couple, whose own means were then very limited, had to bear the expenses of the funeral and burial themselves.

As for those who had been left behind on her father's side, Aunts Mielke and Hedwig and Uncle Alex had all perished during the war (Uncles Julius and Moritz and Aunt Johanna having passed away previously). Aunt Mielke had been deported to the ghetto at Riga and was listed as verschollen there - Aunt Hedwig met her end on July 3, 1942 at Freitod - Uncle Alex was deported to the Lodz ghetto and was listed as verschollen there; Cousin Arno survived the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and joined his Cousins Walter and Margot who had made it to Palestine in 1938; Cousin Ann, who had left Germany shortly after Ruth, spent the entire war in England. She later came to the U.S. in December of 1946. Cousin Edith, Ann's sister, did not survive, being listed as verschollen at Auschwitz along with her two twin infant sons Berl and Denny; Cousin Thea, Arno's sister, who had been married the day the war began, was also killed, although the family cannot now find a record of her since her married name has been lost. (Ann's older brother Werner had died of scarlet fever in the 1920's.)



Brigitte Joseph in France,
November 26, 1939

On her mother's side, Aunt Ida, Uncle Herman and Cousin Heinz all were killed, being listed as *verschollen* at Auschwitz. Her Uncle Benno, Aunt Herta and Cousin Brigitte, who had been turned away from Cuba in 1939 on the liner *St. Louis*, returned to Europe where they settled for a time in LeMans, France. However, all three were deported to Auschwitz by France's Nazi occupiers in September 1942. Only Benno survived the war - Herta and Brigitte were *verschollen*.

All told, of her seven aunts and uncles alive in Germany when the war began, only one survived. Of her cousins, the three in Germany at the outset of the war were all killed, as was Brigitte, who was deported from France. Only Arno survived.

After being liberated, Uncle Benno returned to LeMans to reclaim the personal possessions that he had left for safekeeping with the local citizens. Benno and Herta had once been well-to-do; yet all that had remained to them in LeMans was their belongings: clothing, furs, and some silver family religious heirlooms. What he found upon his return was that these had all been distributed (or sold). However, by law, he was entitled to have them back, the liberated French having acted to punish those who had collaborated with the Nazis or exploited the misfortune of others.



Uncle Benno, after
His arrival in the
U.S.

Ruth was able to help her surviving uncle to come to the U.S., and she was there to welcome him when his ship docked in New York late in 1946. She accompanied him through customs, since he spoke no English. The customs agent, seeing his papers which indicated that he was unmarried, assumed that the possessions were merchandise for sale. The agent therefore announced that he would charge an import duty on all the items. This was not only a predicament because Uncle Benno

had no money whatsoever, but also it touched a raw nerve in Ruth that her only surviving relative from her parents' generation was to be charged for her murdered aunt's and cousin's clothes! Ruth began to weep uncontrollably as she explained the situation to the astonished agent. He immediately relented and passed them through without duty.¹⁴ * * * *

¹⁴ Copyright © by Ira H. Kleinfeld, January 21, 1997
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ⁱ Material on the Jewish in-migration to Berlin is from Leonard Baker, Days of Sorrow and Pain, Oxford University Press, 1978