Chapters From My Past

by

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FOREWORD

This collection of autobiographical memoirs would never have been written, had it not been for incessant pleas by my daughter Evelyn to embark on such a project. Even then, I remained impervious to her urging until she gained a powerful and persuasive seconder in Alice, her stepmother.

As an occasional writer who likes to wield his pen (or preferably his word processor), it would be idle for me to pretend I needed prompting to have the possibility of an autobiography occur to me. But to think of it was to immediately dismiss the notion, whenever it bobbed up. Surely my life was too commonplace, I reasoned, or at least not remarkable or unique enough to engage the interest of those members of the public who habitually read biographies. Nor am I or was I ever a celebrity whose name or fame would rouse curiosity about my life story and thus lure readers. No publisher in his right mind would care to risk investment in such a work, and I for my part had neither the means nor the urge to author and then print and publish at my own expense an ego-tripping worst-seller destined to be pulped in the end.

What finally persuaded me to set down my memoirs was that wife and daughter told me to forget about the reading public and to write this thing just for the sake and edification of my children and grandchildren and their descendants, who were entitled to have an authentic account of their ancestor, of his life and of what agitated him and made him tick, and how he happened to originate in pre-World War II Germany and unexpectedly ended up establishing a new branch of the family in postwar Australia.

Once I began compiling my story for them, I made two surprising discoveries: One was that not only all my kinsfolk, but an amazing number of friends and strangers found it of great interest and clamoured for the chapters that were still to be set down. The other was that what had started as a chore for me that had to be done, gradually turned into a writing pleasure and also made me realise that I needed to put down these memories while they were still alive, before they fade in my own mind; so that I still can look back on them and reminisce, as old men are wont to do. And so I gratefully dedicate this book to Evelyn and Alice for having nagged me into writing it.

In reading my story the way I have tried to put it down honestly, frankly and objectively while at the same time stating my subjective views of and reactions to my experiences, I hope that my children in particular will gain a better understanding of and deeper insight into their father and his attitudes to people, things and events, and in the process make us a still closer-knit family than we already are.

East Bentleigh, Vic.
January 1991 R.L.K.

Meier & Lilly Kahn

CHAPTER 1: BEGINNINGS

I was born on 27th August 1923 in Fuerth, Bavaria, as the only child of my parents, Meier Kahn and Lilly Sylvia Kahn, nee Stern. Fuerth is a twin city of Nuremberg. Like Franconia generally, which comprises most of Bavaria north of the river Danube, it had a relatively higher incidence of Jewish settlement than one found in any other parts of Pre-Hitler Germany.

The year and place of my birth were the same for Henry Kissinger, the notable American Secretary of State, with whom I also share the fate of emigration as a Jewish refugee from Nazism. But except in girth, my eventual attainments and prominence do not measure up to his.

Fuerth, though, was to be less of a home to me than to Henry Kissinger; because it merely represented the first posting of my father as a member of the German judiciary. Within half a year or so, he was transferred to Nuremberg and subsequently promoted to the district court in Ansbach, another Franconian town, to which I trace my earliest vague childhood memories. Then in 1928, we moved to Aschaffenburg, in the north-west corner of Bavaria, as a result of my father's promotion to the county court in that town. This is the place I came to regard as my home town. For this is where I spent my ten most impressionable and formative years and where I received all my primary and most of my secondary schooling.

Papa, born on 12th May 1886, was 14 years older than Mama. The youngest of three sons of a very orthodox Jewish family, he was sent away from home to receive a secondary education in Fulda, the nearest provincial city, leading on to studies in Law at the universities of Munich and Wuerzburg; whereas the two elder brothers inherited the family property. This comprised a small farm and general store in Mittelsinn, a rather grimy and backward village in Lower Franconia.

During World War 1, Papa was called up into the infantry reserves of the German Army, serving first on the Russian front, where he twice incurred malaria in the notorious Pripet marshes, and later against the French in the Champagne. He finished the war with the rank of lance-sergeant and was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class for leading a successful reconnaissance patrol against the Russian enemy.

Following the war, Papa resumed his jurisprudence studies - most of which he had quite forgotten in the trenches. During his University days, he was a very popular and prominent member of the "Veda", a Jewish student fraternity, largely modelled on the traditional ultra-nationalistic German duelling student fraternities that would not admit Jews as members. There Papa, like a good German, engaged in much carousing and sabre duelling (of which he proudly bore several battle scars in the face).

Papa first encountered Mama in the gangway of an overcrowded express train, when she left her compartment seat for a change of scenery and to shake a leg. Not knowing this, and presuming that like himself she had standing room only, Papa gallantly offered her a seat on his suitcase that also stood in the passage. As they fell to talking, they discovered to their mutual delight that they were both en route to Wuerzburg to attend the annual festive gathering of the "Veda", Mama with her brother Alfred, another duelling member of the fraternity, who had talked her into accompanying him to the "Veda" celebrations when he visited his family. But Alfred saw his sister very seldom

during the festivities, as she was always in the company of Papa and had no interest for anything or anybody else. Before long, they had a wonderful wedding with all the German student glamour.

Mama hailed from Schluechtern, a small market town in the adjacent Prussian province of Hesse-Nassau, within easy railway reach of Mittelsinn. Born on 18th March 1900 as the second daughter of a Jewish wine merchant and distiller, Mama inherited the musicality of her pianist mother and studied violin at the Erfurt conservatory.

Alma Stern

Mama's sister, my aunt Alma, married soon after World war 1 Dr Wilhelm Frank, a specialist in skin and venereal diseases, with consulting rooms in the very hub of Frankfurt. His father was a timber merchant in Mayence. During the war uncle Willy had served as a senior staff doctor in German field hospitals, while aunt Alma tended to war-wounds as a hospital nurse in Schluechtern.

Alfred Stern

Mama's brother Alfred was the youngest of the three Stern children, born in 1902. He studied industrial chemistry at Berlin university and after attaining his doctorate taught Chemical Engineering at the University of Karlsruhe. Uncle Alfred did not marry until 1936, soon after his admission to the United States following a precarious and penurious few years in Paris. He had fled there when the Nazis sacked him from his academic position when they assumed power in 1933. At the time of this writing (January 1990) he and his American-born wife Lorraine are living in retirement in Montreal, close to the families of their two children.

These sketchy details of my relatives should suffice for the moment to indicate the kind of middle-class social background which informed my childhood and helped to shape my upbringing.

Members of the German judiciary, unlike their British and Australian colleagues, do not start out as private lawyers who later "take silk" to become candidates for Crown briefs and judicial appointments. Instead they enter upon graduation into the legal civil service. This is a separate career service; much like, say, the State teaching service in their or our environment. Advancement is generally by promotion, alternating between positions of public prosecutor and judge at rising levels of courts.

When my parents married in 1922, Papa was still serving his articles, and rather impecunious, except for the generous dowry of household goods Mama brought to the match. By the time I was born in 1923, conditions were really tough. Germany was reaching the peak of its astronomical post-war inflation, and there was an acute housing shortage, forcing my parents to rent a small single room apartment.

To make it all still worse, I came into this world as a puny, weakly two months premature baby with a birth weight of only 1.7 kilo. Those were the days before humidicribs, and my chances of survival were rated very poor indeed. That was particularly the "expert" opinion of uncle Willy, the medico in the family. But Mama and Papa would not give up hope, and with the aid of several weeks spell for Mama and me at a special foundation for the nursing of premature babies I was pulled through. Of course my circumcision had to be delayed well beyond the traditional eight days after birth. Mama's gynaecologist firmly advised her against further pregnancies. Else I would in all likelihood not have been reared as an only child.

As for inflation, things got so bad that Papa's modest salary had to be paid to him in daily instalments instead of the usual monthly pay cheque. Mama would then immediately go shopping and spend it straightaway, before it could devalue much further. Of necessity this rush to spend became the common practice of wage and salary earners at the time. But it went against the grain of Papa. So when Mama's father provided them with a gift of a few hundred American dollars, Papa insisted on locking them safely away, to keep them for a really rainy day, as he said. During the peak of the inflation those dollars assumed a terrific purchasing power; but Papa steadfastly hung on to them - till things got normal again and they reverted to their ordinary value!

After the end of Germany's ghastly inflation, circumstances improved considerably. Papa received promotion and, with a period of economic prosperity, salary scales for the legal public service became more generous too. Thus my earliest childhood recollections (except of a fleeting impression of a tramway ride in Nuremberg) are of living in Ansbach in a large upstairs flat. Through the double-glazed windows of the front rooms I could watch the military band and marching columns of the local garrison passing on the street below. Rooms in the back opened out into a spacious balcony with a wide, breast-high stone railing, upon which I would sometimes assemble my collection of toys. One afternoon, however, I failed to pack them away before bed-time. As luck would have it, during the night a wild rain and thunder storm blew up and swept each and everyone of my precious toys from the top of the stone railing into the concrete backyard below, where they were pointed out to me next morning, all wrecked and broken - "Alles kaputt!". I was told in no uncertain manner that there would be no replacement for what I had lost through my own wanton neglect.

Not very long after, that same balcony was the scene of a much greater and more fateful tragedy. For it provided a grandstand view of the devastating fire which broke out one night in the house next door. For my part, I slept soundly through it all, undisturbed by the noise and alarm and excitement as the fire brigade came and went into action. But it was most upsetting for Mama, who witnessed it all from that balcony.

At first I did not notice anything untoward at all. In the morning, after Papa had gone off to work, Mama took me for a walk. As on previous occasions, the route led up a slowly sloping lengthy avenue, lined with trees and handsome villas and culminating on a plateau that featured a lake. Most importantly, from my point of view, there was a big cafe on the lake shore, where I could expect to be treated to a handsome portion of delicious whipped cream and would afterwards build castles in a close-by sand pit provided for visitors' children.

And so I trotted off expectantly with Mama, one hand linked to hers, the other clutching the handle of my tin bucket with its little hand-spade and fork in it. But then it happened. We were about half way up the hill towards the lake, when Mama suddenly veered from the footpath to the left, into the grounds of a house of family acquaintances. Grabbing my bucket and spade from me, she hurled them to the concrete pathway and broke into loud crying and sobbing, seemingly ignoring me. The next moment the door of the house opened and the couple living there appeared and immediately led her indoors, leaving me standing outside, completely bewildered and almost as upset about the violent treatment meted out to my bucket and spade as about the strange and terrifying behaviour of Mama.

Later, somebody opened the door and fetched me in too. I was told my dear Mama was very ill, but I was not allowed to see her again. Not for quite a few months, while she ever so slowly recovered in a sanatorium from the serious nervous breakdown she had suffered when she could no longer suppress her hysterical reaction to the excitement and fear of the fire next door on the night before.

I cannot recollect who looked after me in the next few days. Very soon, however, Papa found for me a foster-mother, Miss Friedel Schloss, a very pleasant, capable and conscientious Jewish lady, perhaps in her late twenties, who came to live with us during Mama's enforced absence. I do remember that Papa used to visit Mama at the sanatorium regularly and frequently; but, excepting the stark incidents just described, I have no distinct memory of that early period in my life and do not even recall the eventual reunion with Mama, nor our move from Ansbach. Maybe by the time Mama was returned to us we had already shifted to Aschaffenburg.

CHAPTER 2: ASCHAFFENBURG

When I briefly visited Aschaffenburg after 45 years absence in 1984, it had grown to about 60,000 inhabitants - all gentiles. Back in 1928, when I first settled there with my parents, the population was only about 34,000, but included some 600 Jews. They had a stately synagogue, erected in the heart of town and built in the favourite Turkish style, that is with large central dome and Moorish arched windows and portal. The masonry consisted of alternating layers of reddish and whitish sandstone. It would be fair to say that the architecture of this substantial edifice, as indeed the mode of the orthodox services conducted therein, resembled those of Melbourne's Toorak rd and St Kilda synagogues, as we know them.

The rabbi, Dr Raphael Breuer, was widely renowned for his memorable sermons. To hear them, people would often flock to his services from far and wide, even from the teeming Jewry of Frankfurt. As rabbi for the district, Dr Breuer also looked after the spiritual welfare of the smaller aggregations of Jewish families scattered throughout the Spessart forest region, for which Aschaffenburg serves as the economic and administrative focal point.

Although the congregation was nominally orthodox, it included a considerable proportion of members who, like our family, were lax in Jewish observance and certainly did not keep a kosher household. I am still puzzled how this fairly small community enabled three competing kosher butcher shops to eke out a living in Aschaffenburg. The only other professional Jews in town were Mr Leo Schloss, the very kind-hearted, capable and devoted full-time teacher of Judaism, and Mr Seif, the greying, rusty-voiced cantor of the synagogue, who also doubled as schochet for poultry and as coach for every barmitzvah boy.

Apart from a handful of doctors and lawyers, a banker and some cattle traders, most other Jews were engaged in business as shopkeepers, including several department store proprietors, or owned men's clothing factories, the predominant industry of the town. As far as I know, they did not figure in the other local main industries, which were paper manufacture and high-precision measurement tools, as well as three breweries and two daily newspapers. While not the only jurist, I believe Papa was the only Jewish civil servant in Aschaffenburg.

As elsewhere in Germany, mixed marriages were not uncommon, especially in professional circles, and I recall the instances of a dentist, a lawyer, a high-school teacher of classical Greek and a notary public. The populace at large was about 90% Roman Catholic, which was the norm for Bavaria. Other non-Jews were nearly all Lutherans.

This, then, was the local Jewish situation in which I started to grow up. It formed a very important ingredient in the texture and flavour of my boyhood. Yet it was only with the advent of school age at nearly seven years that I gradually became aware and conscious of it. Before then, and almost incredible as it may seem, "Jew" and "Christian" were virtually unheard of terms and concepts to me. In retrospect I can only surmise that such notions were deliberately and sedulously avoided by my parents so as to try and leave the serenity and innocence of my tender years unclouded. Like some couples who handle the delicate problem of imparting "the facts of life" to their child by letting him, seemingly accidentally, discover a carefully chosen sex education book put

in his way, so my parents seem to have relied on regular and systematic Jewish religious instruction from the first week in primary school onward to broach to me the facts of being Jewish.

Initially this caused me some secret shame and embarrassment. For I quickly realised from the foreknowledge assumed by the questions asked by our teacher of religion, Mr Schloss, and from the ready responses issuing from all my Jewish classmates (four boys and four girls in number) that here was a subject area in which my dear parents had left me woefully ignorant. Fortunately I managed to cover up my lack of Jewish background for the few weeks it took me to draw level with the others; nor did I ever let on to Mama or Papa what temporary problem their policy had caused me.

That pre-school Jewish unconsciousness of mine is strikingly demonstrated by the following little episode: Mama, mindful of her translation by marriage from Prussian Hesse-Nassau into Bavaria, often called me "My little Bavarian". The intended term of endearment used to rile me no end and really made me squirm, as I considered it terribly mawkish. Then, one day, three barely teenage girls cornered me near home and challenged me to tell them what I am. I could sense from their demeanour and laughter that they were out to shame and embarrass me; yet the more I refused to give them an answer, the more they kept demanding and laughing. But I was far too ashamed to confess to them that I was a little Bavarian!. It was years later before the penny dropped and I realised that they had dared me to say I am a Jew.

All the same, once school began, the Jewish facts of life were soon brought home to me; not only by the good Mr Schloss, but also by the classmates of my State school when they came out of their Catholic pre-Easter lessons and accused us Jewish boys personally and in no uncertain terms of killing Christ! Strange and indeed absurd as it seemed to us, the obvious 1900-year alibi we could readily offer cut no ice with them at all.

Under the benign influence of Mr Schloss, I soon acquired sufficient Jewish consciousness and militancy to score a significant moral victory against heavy odds when we visited aunt Alma and family in Frankfurt during the December holiday season. Imagine my consternation when family and friends were assembled around a richly decked out Christmas tree on Christmas Eve in a supposedly Jewish home, and each and every youngster present was separately called upon to perform by intoning some Christmas song or carol of their choice. I tried to dodge my turn, but when everybody else had had theirs, they would not let me off.

I saw myself in a real fix. If I persisted in my refusal, as I was determined to do, it would be attributed to inexcusable shyness or laziness on my part. At the same time I realised that it simply would not do to spoil the festive occasion by declaring outright that it did not behove a self-respecting Jew like me to participate in the open adulation of the Jesus baby as our Saviour. But what really made my blood boil was that my parents failed to guess how I felt and thus did not come to my rescue, instead of condoning the urgings made upon me.

Fortunately, in the nick of time, I had a brainwave for an elegant way out of my dilemma: I agreed to sing, but selected for my performance "O Tannenbaum". That was the one seasonal song with no religious references or overtones. Instead it dwelt innocently on the ever-green propensities of the fir tree! After that rendering I noticed with grim satisfaction that Papa and Mama and all the

other grown-ups in attendance finally got the drift of my real feelings and as a result perhaps felt just a little bit ashamed too.

To be sure, the incidence of Christmas trees in assimilationist Jewish homes of the Weimar republic was not all that unusual. More often than not they were put up ostensibly "for the sake of the maidservant" of the household; but at the same time they provided an opportunity to give presents to the younger children of the family, so they would not feel deprived in comparison with their Christian playmates in the neighbourhood.

Coming to think of it, this questionable practice also extended to our home of the Ansbach days, and I quite enjoyed in helping to put on the tinsel and stuff. Indeed on one occasion my dear Papa made an appearance heavily disguised as Santa Claus and severely demanded the most stringent promises of good behaviour if I were to be privileged to deserve and receive any hoped for gifts. His make-up, which had me really fooled, did not resemble the jolly Fathers Xmas of our department stores nowadays, with their scarlet-red suits trimmed with white fake fur. Instead his flowing garb was a dark cinnamon brown and must have been modelled on the severe-looking Santa Claus that appears in the grisly pages of the Struwwelpeter's cautionary tales, which were a children's classic for my generation and several earlier ones, going back at least a hundred years.

But to revert to Aschaffenburg. We set up home in a corner position at Gruenewaldstrasse 19, where this quiet, leafy street crossed Jahnstrasse, named after Germany's leading pioneer and advocate of gymnastics. The choice of this street for honouring "Turnvater Jahn", as he was dubbed, must have been prompted by the site of the town's "Turnverein" or gymnastics club, with premises extending into the corner directly opposite our address.

As for Gruenewald, which literally translates as greenwood, the name seemed fitting enough for our street which at its top end easily led to the outskirts of the rich forests covering the Spessart mountain country. Actually, the naming was meant to honour Aschaffenburg's most celebrated son, the painter Matthias Gruenewald, of whose highly treasured output of late Gothic religious art the town itself regretted to retain no more than one example.

Our side of the street was made up of fashionable villas of pre-war vintage, each with its own garden and ranging from upper middle class abodes to one or two outright mansions. Facing this opulent top end and running all the way down to the Jahnstrasse crossing, there ranged the massive and severe looking building complex of a large seminary or college for female teachers. I used to watch with a mixture of fascination and admiration the comings and goings of the busy and earnest looking student teachers in their distinctive violet velvet peak caps, as they passed through the institution's heavy main portals which cut and fronted the street corner diagonally across from ours.

Directly opposite us loomed the elevated sports ground with its adjacent large gym hall and a public bar, all part of the aforementioned Turnverein. For the rest, the street side opposite petered out rather incongruously into a large piggery. Not much more than a meshed wire fence separated the mired farm grounds from the footpath; and so in passing that way I could readily observe the big fat sows wallowing and revelling in their rich mud and morass. Even if it is only a pun, the grinning, grimy owner of all this mess, farmer Sauer, strikes me now as having been singularly aptly named.

The dwelling on the residential side of Gruenewaldstrasse rented by my parents was a spacious 5-roomed flat occupying the complete ground floor of a slate-roofed villa built in the Italianate style. The top floor of the three-storey building was occupied by the owner, Mrs Schleiermacher, a genteel elderly widow related to the noted former German Protestant theologian of that name. Occasionally her grand-daughter Renate, little older than myself, came to visit, though not as often as I would have liked. For then I had sometimes the privilege to be invited upstairs for afternoon tea and cake and to play with the attractive pig-tailed little blonde. I have not the slightest recollection of her face, but I suspect that for several years young Renate contributed to my vague image of the ideal girl-friend.

More important for me - an only child whose Mama had refused to send him to kindergarten, and who therefore had been very much conditioned to learn how to entertain himself and play on his own - was the close friendship I quickly struck up with Emanuel Rupprecht. Mani, as he was called for short, was a year younger than I and lived a few doors away in Jahnstrasse. His mother was of Jewish birth but had been baptised to marry his Protestant father. Professor Rupprecht was an eminent scholar of classical Greek which he taught at the Humanist Gymnasium (grammar school) that his son Mani and I would both attend in later years. Mrs Rupprecht was a refined lady and retained a beauty that could pass for Jewish or Italian. She was always full of kindness. On the other hand there was little sympathy between Mani and his teen-age sister. The two perpetually quarreled. Such was the immediate background of Mani, who became my daily playmate until I started going to school.

Aschaffenburg nestles between the mountainous forests of the Spessart and the fourth rounded corner which the quadrangle of the Main river describes around these woodlands before it enters the plains of the Rhine valley at their widest part. Somehow the situation of the town makes for a sunny Riviera-like local climate unusually benign for its geographical latitude and has earned it the epithet "Bavaria's Nizza (Nice)".

Blessed thus with predominantly fair weather, Mani and I were given most of the time to outdoor play and pursuits. Towards that end, my parents had provided me with two wheel-toys. Although I gave them plenty of use, I was never really satisfied with them. Instead of my simple conventional scooter I unsuccessfully aspired to the much dearer treadle-driven variety which allowed you to have both feet all the time off the ground. And I would gladly have traded my tricycle for a "Hollander", the generic name for a low-slung four-wheeled one-seater, propelled by a vigorous T-bar action similar to that of a railway-fettler's trolley.

Other outdoor games we similarly played along the footpaths of our quiet neighbourhood included such old-time favourites as running a hoop, whipping a top, tossing or nudging coloured clay marbles along the gutter, hop-scotch and blowing soap bubbles into the air. Or we would repair to Grandma's meadow, a nearby public park and playground, if we wanted to fly kites, dig canals or build castles in sandpits, ride swings, see-saws or slides or if we just wanted to throw a ball to each other.

When the weather required indoor games, we favoured dominoes, or waging war using a toy castle with drawbridge and masses of tin soldiers defending it from its battlements or besieging it. Each side was supported by a tiny spring-loaded gun firing cannonballs of dried shelled peas; till

one side or the other had to surrender because all its forces had been laid low by the enemy's artillery. And then there were glove puppets, for which we concocted our own Punch and Judy routines.

Also on the more artistic side there was plastic clay modelling, cutting out paper figures and patterns, and of course colouring and painting, at which I did not really shine. My one creatively unique painting effort got me into serious strife with my parents when they discovered that all the luscious dark grapes which grew like ivy all over our front balcony and its surrounds had been thickly oil-painted a scarlet red during what must have been a sudden excessive burst of artistic enthusiasm on my part.

Those were for me still the happy, and sunny days of early childhood, though the clouds of the great economic depression began to gather around us. In town I could see the lengthening queues of the shabby, shuffling unemployed "going stamping", as it was called, for the dole. And at the wrought-iron front garden gate of our next door Jewish neighbour's villa, a dozen or more hungry teenagers would line up regularly for a charitable hand-out each of a big "Klappstulle", a German-style sandwich whose generous filling rested between two hefty thick slices of rye-bread. I remember gazing at this pitiable spectacle one day, when one of the hopeful recipients of such largesse nervously turned his eyes on me and hissed: "You get nothing!"

Soon the Depression took its toll of us too, when Papa's salary, like that of other officials, was reduced to the frugal level which had obtained before the pre-Depression boom years. It was a cut-back that was never restored.

Our cold-water flat was agreeable enough for summer living. We gladly tended the few plots comprising the front garden that were naturally allocated to us as the tenants of the ground floor, with direct access via our balcony steps. In season the narrow floral beds were decked in mayflowers, snowdrops, violets and forget-me-nots. There were fat strawberries which we had to harvest in competition with numerous snails which also showed some interest in our grapes.

Satisfaction with our flat was only short-lived. When the notorious winter of 1929/30 set in, with snow and frost galore, even in mild Aschaffenburg, our abode turned into a veritable ice-box. Water froze in the mains and had to be thawed out every morning by a plumber calling with his blow-torch. Even then the pipes re-froze within an hour or two. Attempts to heat any of our rooms, whose ceilings now appeared to us as preposterously high, were of no avail. Eventually the whole family huddled around the corner of the living room, in which the heavily stoked anthracite stove afforded a modicum of warmth over perhaps a quarter of the room. My cot was shifted from my own room and received pride of place near the stove.

My parents' anxious concern to keep me warm gained added urgency as I incurred German measles and these set off, as they are always liable to do, and especially so in the cold of winter, a very nasty inflammation of the middle ear. Nowadays this is fairly easily fixed; but at the time anti-biotics were still a thing of the future. Instead the sole Ear, Nose and Throat specialist in town was invoked to puncture my left ear-drum (a nastily painful procedure which I still remember), in an effort to drain the accumulated pus. Somehow he botched the job and I would have lost all my hearing, had I not been rushed to the Jewish hospital in Frankfurt, over 40 kilometres away. There

better access to the rapidly spreading pus was achieved in an operation to chisel out the bone behind my left ear.

Ever since to remind me, that ear protrudes less from my head than the other, lending more asymmetry to my frontal portrait than a side parting of my hair. For a great many years my hearing seemed to be unimpaired by the mastoid operation or what led up to it. But in more recent times I have noted that the ongoing diminution of the aural function that occurs with "creeping old age" is more marked with me on the left than on the right side.

The immediate effect of the winter was that we gave up living in Gruenewaldstrasse in favour of a 5-room ground floor dwelling in a brand-new block of flats at Jahnstrasse 2, less than half a kilometre away. At first the much lower ceilings in our new home seemed almost poky by comparison. But the hard-coal consumption to make the entire flat comfortable proved to be less than what it had taken in fuel at our former address to keep warm one corner of a single room.

CHAPTER 3: LIFESTYLE

To alleviate Germany's chronic postwar housing shortage, the authorities had encouraged a more equitable utilisation of the available housing stock. Thus where the number of rooms in a dwelling exceeded the total of the residents by more than one, a hefty luxury tax was imposed on the household for each extra room taken up. As a family of three in a five-room dwelling we escaped this impost, because one room served to accommodate our housemaid.

Compared to present-day living-standards, the service of a live-in housemaid compensated for what we lacked in electric labour-saving amenities such as dishwasher, clothes washer and dryer, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator and freezer. Nor was there any need to hire a baby-sitter. But a seamstress was casually employed, usually for several days at a time, to attend to Mama's wardrobe; and most of Papa's suits were bespoke-tailored.

As a typically finicky, house-proud German hausfrau, Mama closely supervised and actively took part in the tidying, dusting, darning, mending, cleaning and laundering chores, and insisted on doing all the household shopping, cooking, baking, and food-preserving herself. What leisure time she nevertheless gained by the employment of house help was largely devoted to personal correspondence, embroidery and more especially to music. There was rarely a day when Mama would not practice religiously at least two hours on her violin, an expensive instrument, reverently treated like a sacred object, that I was not allowed to touch at any time.

On the other hand, she tried to teach me piano from about the age of ten or eleven; for it was her fond dream and ambition that we would eventually team up as a piano and violin duet for house music. Such a prospect must have been all the more enticing for Mama at a time when radio and recorded music were as yet in their infancy and house music was still the rage in many households that laid claims to culture. Alas, such hopes came to nothing. For although I inherited an ear for music and readily imbibed a taste for classical music, all my tortuous efforts at the piano were doomed to early failure because of a congenital inability to master the reading of musical scores.

This is a handicap which despite several repeated efforts in later life I have not been able to overcome. The prevailing system of musical notation, by its very nature in the number and spacing of tone intervals, cries out to no avail for an inventive genius who can come up with something less confusing and more easily visually discerned by the likes of me.

My personal frustration at what I can now only describe as my musical dyslexia soon built up in me a stubborn resistance and refusal to practice at the piano, until Mama most reluctantly abandoned her patient attempts at teaching me the instrument. Her resultant great disappointment was shared in equal measure by my maternal grandparents - "Oma" and "Opa" as they were to their grandchildren.

Mama

The intensive active cultivation of music in the family stemmed from Oma, a pianist who had found in Opa a willing pupil. As a husband-and-wife team they regularly played duet, either

"four-handed" or on separate instruments. The music room of their home was spacious enough to accommodate quite comfortably a grand piano, an upright piano, a large sofa and several chairs, cupboards and shelves for the storage of sheet music, and still leaving enough area free for a small dance floor. There was also a table to support a large early model radio, driven by a power plant reminiscent of a car battery but three times its size. All this was tastefully decked out mainly in green and black, and notably with several graceful silhouettes relating to the world of music. Among sundry other pictures and wall ornaments, pride of place went to a laurel-crowned death mask of Beethoven, done in white plaster.

Opa

Before I abandoned the piano, Opa was sometimes at hand to supervise my practice sessions. On these occasions he was indeed literally at hand. For he would open out his jack-knife and uphold the sharp point of its blade below one or the other of my wrists, a drastic measure to stop me from letting them sag to the edge of the key-board while my fingers laboured among the ivory keys.

Yes, Opa loved to pose as a martinet. He often boasted of the harsh Prussian army regimen to which he had been subjected during his military call-up and would have you believe that it had been wholesome and character-building, by instilling much necessary self-discipline. But if you asked him how far that got him in the forces, he would ruefully add that his commission as an officer had been cut off eight days after his birth - a wise-crack which sardonically alluded to his circumcision and to the fact that the Prussian Army of his days rarely, if ever, allowed a Jew to be promoted beyond the rank of sergeant.

Oma taught Opa not only piano, but also English, the language into which the two of them would lapse in my presence if they wanted to discuss something not meant for my ears. Oma was quite a linguist, fluent in five languages. Born into a Sephardi community in Baranquilla, Colombia, she was brought up bilingually in Spanish, the language of the country, and English, which was the preferred tongue of the upper classes there, such as her family of well-to-do businessmen and bankers. A similar situation obtained in 18th century Germany, where the upper classes conversed in French rather than in German, a notable case in point being King Frederick the Great of Prussia.

Oma

In order to give Oma a better education than available in her native Colombia, her father took her at age 12 to Frankfurt, where he held office as Colombian consul. The move made Oma soon equally fluent in German. Given a talent for languages plus a ready background of English and Spanish, she easily absorbed French and Italian when taught to her as foreign language options of her secondary school education.

Small wonder, then, that a considerable proportion of my grandparents' extensive library shelves were replete with foreign language books, notably English classics and poetry. But I particularly recall a specially bound collection of Machsorim - sets of prayer books - with a separate volume for each high Jewish holiday or festival. Oma had five such matching sets; one where each page of the Hebrew liturgy faced its translation into German on the opposite page. In the four matching sets the translations were rendered in English, Spanish, French and Italian respectively. It must have taken quite some effort and expense to procure such a collection; though I doubt that Oma made much use of it, as she was not much given to religious devotion; nor did she keep a kosher household.

No more ritually observant was Opa; but his musicality and sonorous bass/baritone voice led him to organise and conduct the local synagogue choir of Schluechtern. And in honour of my barmitzvah he composed and sang a lovely new melody of the Yevorechecha, the traditional priestly blessing of the congregation. Recorded on a small disk, and followed by Oma reciting the text of it in its German translation, this became a treasured family memento for me, which I eventually passed on to uncle Alfred. For my part I shall always remember the melody composed in my honour.

Opa's vocal talents also served to enhance other festive occasions arising among relatives and in a large circle of friends. Yet, if anything, Opa was still more in demand as occasional poet. His reputation was such that no personal celebration was considered complete unless marked by his often witty verses. Over the years, these very personalised compositions went to fill several leather-bound diary volumes. You could say they became Opa's collected works, all carefully set out in his exemplary copperplate handwriting, done in purple ink.

Lora & Uli Frank

The grandparental home in which all this cultural activity burgeoned was situated at No. 58 of Fuldaerstrasse, Schluechtern's main thoroughfare. For the major part of the long annual summer holidays, when schools in Bavaria closed from mid-July to end of August, that was the destination for me and for Uli and Lore Frank, my maternal cousins from Frankfurt. There could not have been a better meeting place for us. The substantial house and grounds designated by this address encompassed a great many facilities to gladden the hearts of us youngsters and to make us eagerly look forward year after year to be Oma's and Opa's summer guests.

The house, with its wide frontage right onto the edge of the footpath, was flanked on either side by a pair of hefty stone pillars between which swung iron gates wide enough to admit large vehicles into the cobble-stoned courtyard surrounding the building and linking it with the industrial premises required for the liquor and distillery trade. The firm itself was owned and run jointly by Opa and his two younger brothers, my two great-uncles Hermann and Leopold, who resided in the adjacent two houses up the street, at No.60 and 62. In its hey-days before World War 1, Stern United Cellars and

Distilleries had employed up to a dozen or so workers. But the successive depredations of war, inflation and Depression had gradually shrivelled the enterprise, and by the time I entered upon the scene the staff was down to three.

There was Backhaus, the sole remaining cooper, an elderly man with a weather-beaten face partly hidden by a bushy, rust-coloured moustache. In my mind I can still see him as he wielded chisel and hammer to knock the iron hoops off used and returned barrels, to take them apart after a good cleansing in water, and as he then smoked them out with a fire made of the long yellow-green leaves of dried reeds, that would kill off the tang of the previous contents remaining soaked up in the heavy oak timber. To re-assemble a cask, he pressed and hammered the bottom and the top into the lower and upper groove of each stave freshly lined with hemp. When an occasional small old barrel was discarded from further service, we children eagerly seized upon the bottom and top, which made excellent wheels for our go-carts. For the chassis of our vehicles we drew on surplus wooden boxes and crates that had served as containers of bottled wine by the dozen.

Then there was Karasch, who looked Italian to me and must have been about 30 years of age. He attended to all the loading, unloading, shifting and stacking of barrels and cases - surely a heavy, onerous task; yet he handled it with amazing ease. For Karasch was incredibly strong and muscular, a veritable Hercules who liked to amuse and overawe us children by walking on his hands all over the yard. He made no secret of being a Communist and used to go off to political demonstrations against the Nazis. When they got into power he suddenly disappeared and it was feared that he had been arrested by the Gestapo. In my childish naive innocence then I clung for a while to the hope that even the wicked Nazis could not inflict any harm on a man of such immense physical strength as the mighty Karasch.

Neither Karasch was replaced on the staff nor Backhaus, who had already retired because of age, leaving as the last employee of the firm Keim, who served as driver and general factotum, and who lived with his wife and son Hans on the premises. By then, growing anti-semitism and other factors had reduced business to such an extent that Keim alone could cope with all the blue-collar work that still cropped up. But I am getting ahead of myself and want to hark back to the happier days in Schluechtern before 1933.

From the courtyard where old Backhaus plied his trade I could proceed to a large open garage and climb into the elevated driver's cabin of a giant truck parked there and displaying its maker's name plate, reading 'Buesing N.A.G.'. Or I might enter into a cavernous hall lined with rows of immense oaken storage barrels lying on their side, each with its spigot and drip tray invitingly at the ready. A strong scent of kuemmel (caraway brandy) could be identified among the waft of bewitching liquor fumes that pervaded the air and teased one's nostrils as one wandered from cask to cask, or tried out the almost cathedral-like echo that made the voice rebound among the oakwood.

Behind the cellars rose the bottling plant. Here was to be heard and seen the steady splashing action of the bottle-washing machinery as it flushed and brushed and rinsed and cleansed row upon row of empties to prepare them for their impending alcoholic contents. Later, when they emerged from the filling station and all freshly corked, I was allowed to operate an elegant little machine that

simultaneously picked up matching labels from two stacks, gummed them and then affixed the bigger label to one side of the bottle while winding the smaller one round the bottle-neck.

I took equally much pleasure in operating the next stage of the production line, when I loosely capped each bottle with a coloured capsule and then completed the sealing process by working the lever of a device that so compressed the capsule as to make the tinfoil firmly adhere to the top and side of the bottleneck.

At other times I might volunteer to help in the packing or unpacking of full bottles in their cases, each bottle being individually sheathed and cushioned in its own shroud of straw. But the opening of cases or their nailing down and stencilling remained the prerogative of adult action.

Next to the bottling plant, though under the same roof, was the distillery, a windowless part of the building. A short piece of steel pipe protruded from the rear wall and released a steady flow of white steam that clouded the immediate surroundings whenever the still went into action. The inside of the distillery remained an unseen mystery to me. The door to it was barred with double locks and even Opa or his brothers, who had the key to one of the locks, were prevented from entry - except in the presence of an official inspector, who retained the key to the other lock. By this cumbersome procedure the government prevented any possibility of "moonshine" and jealously guarded that particular source of its excise.

Beyond the distillery there stretched a large, sunny lawn where shade could be found inside a cosy arbour or under the branches of a huge cherry tree.

Most of the remaining grounds were taken up with perhaps a quarter acre of closely cultivated fruit and vegetable garden. How we children loved to pick and eat the gooseberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries and especially the red currants, all of which grew in profusion, or to participate in the harvesting for grandma's kitchen by picking the tomatoes, peas, green and yellow beans, or lifting out the tender fresh carrots. The harvesting of other garden produce was left to the adults, while all the cultivating was the province of a professional gardener on his weekly visit, except that we attended to the use of garden hose and watering can as required.

I do not remember how much of the large quantity of apples, pears and stone fruit used in the household was grown in this garden, or perhaps in those of the two great-uncles' adjacent properties; but all this and more went into preserves which in their glass jars lined shelf after shelf of Oma's big larder in the attic. They always included a large contingent of extra thick plum jam and of orange marmalade.

Whenever any produce was to be bottled and preserved, Oma, despite her advanced years and fragile health, would don a big apron and pitch in alongside Marie, the two of them working close together as a seasoned team.

Marie, or Marie Kaufmann, to give her full name, was the faithful retainer and had been with the household ever since she left her home in the nearby village of Laibach in her early teens, before my Mama or her sister were born. She was a real dear who had in effect become an integral member of the family, regarding herself and being regarded as such. To my and Mama's generation she was like a beloved live-in maiden aunt, with tremendous empathy for us grandchildren and our concerns. Many were the evenings when my cousins and I met in Marie's room after the evening meal and the

four of us played feverish games of Ludo. Even today, whenever I see a game of Ludo, it still conjures up for me Marie and those happy evenings.

A few years later, when she was really getting on in years and ailing, my parents brought Marie to Aschaffenburg and we did all we could to look after her while she was put up in an attic room facing our house in Jahnstrasse and then, in her dying days in a nursing home. She left quite some tidy savings to her next-of-kin; because in her life with my grandparents there had hardly ever been any call or need for her to spend anything on herself, and to our knowledge she had never developed romantic attachments or interests.

In stark contrast was the case of Marie's niece Betty. When, on the strength of Marie's connections with my grand-parents, Betty was awarded the post of housemaid in the Kahn household, she did not last very long. She soon became involved with a young man who put her in the family way, as they say, a fate that also befell our next house-help. Then we found Martha, who came from Thuringia and had an accent to prove it. Martha had the appearance and mentality of a die-hard spinster and preferred spending her weekly days off staring out the window of her room for hours on end and watching the world go by. As good fun it was questionable; but as a contraceptive it was foolproof.

During more prosperous times such as pre-war, there had of course been one or two house maids employed by my grandparents; whereas Marie's ostensible role was and remained essentially that of a personal maid and companion to Oma. The household was one of long standing, its Schluechtern antecedents going back to the second half of the 18th century. Opa's paternal grandfather, whose original name was David Seligman, was the first in Mama's lineage to assume her maiden name Stern as family name. (That must have been the time when the law of the land required Jews to adopt surnames.) He established a manufacturing business in Schluechtern that later passed to his son David Liebmann Stern, Opa's father.

Opa's maternal grandparents were also Schluechtern born. The grandfather, Loeb Mordechai, who had taken the surname Preuss, denoting his Prussian citizenship, was a colourful character, a very pious Jew who operated as a travelling hawker and marriage broker in the region. He was generally called "Preussje", the little Prussian from Schluechtern, and became the subject of a charming literary and pictorial vignette by Ludwig Emil Grimm, one of the two Grimm brothers of fairy tale fame.

On Oma's side, some of her ancestry has been traced back nine generations, reaching into the late 16th century. Although Oma and her mother were born in Baranquilla, Colombia, most of her forebears hailed from the Dutch Antilles, notably the important Jewish community in Curacao, with still earlier generations going back to Amsterdam.

To any student of Jewish history, this thumbnail genealogy of Oma would be suggestive of Marrano stock. And true enough, if you studied the four large and imposing oil portraits of Oma's grandparents that looked down from their golden oval frames on the walls of the visitors' bedroom in her Schluechtern home, three of them were clearly suggestive of Sephardi or Spanish types. But the fourth, depicting Oma's paternal grandfather, looked a ring-in. This impression was strongly reinforced by the respective family name attaching to the subject of each portrait: Pinto, Senior and de Castro for the three Spanish types, and Wolff for Ralph, her paternal grandfather, and thus also

Oma's maiden name. Ralph's own father was an Ashkenasi Jew born in Kreuznach, West Germany, who as a seaman had been ship-wrecked off Curacao and thus came to settle there.

In the same room as the above oil portraits, but in a much smaller frame and covered under protective glass as well, Oma had preserved two early Colombian bank notes which were hand-signed by relatives of hers who occupied leading positions in the country's banking world. Functionally these hand signatures corresponded to the facsimile signatures of the deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia and of the Secretary to the Treasury which appear on our own bank notes. Fortunately for two of Oma's forebears, Colombian bank notes then were a much rarer commodity than in our inflationary times. Else the mind boggles how much personal autographing of money might have been required of them.

By comparison to Mama's background, far less knowledge has come to me of Papa's antecedents. Most of his kinsfolk perished in the Holocaust. Of the remnant none has had the drive or any real opportunity to conduct or to commission any serious family research that might rediscover and throw some light on the origin and history of earlier forebears than his grandparents.

The burial ground for the Jews of Mittelsinn and those of other localities in the area was the Jewish cemetery situated near the village of Altengronau and reputed to be over a thousand years old. It is the last resting place of Papa's parents and grandparents. Tombstones on some of the earlier graves indicated that Jewish settlement in Mittelsinn goes back at least 300 years.

Early in 1939 there were still 35 Jewish family units in Mittelsinn, comprising 107 persons, perhaps 10% of all the village inhabitants. Only 20 of these 107 Jews were left alive after the Holocaust. There was not one married couple left among these survivors. Nearly all were children who, like myself, had been saved by being sent abroad in one or another of the "Kindertransports" organised in response to the horrors of Crystal Night (10th November 1938).

Of the 35 Jewish families, fourteen bore the surname Kahn, and Papa's brother Moses was known as Moses Kahn III, as there were four by that name. It is a moot point whether all these Kahns descended from one or from two different Mittelsinn forebears of that name, as in South Germany Kahn was the prevalent Germanised spelling of the equivalent Cahn, Kohn, Cohn, Cohen, Kahan, Kagan etc. elsewhere, usually adopted as surnames to denote descendancy from the priesthood among the 12 Biblical tribes of the Jews.

Samuel Kahn - My Parental Grandfather

The earlier Mittelsinn Jews included artisans, but later ones were usually traders in a small way. Thus cobblers seem to have become shoe retailers and weavers became dealers in textiles or drygoods. Others traded in such things as ironmongery, textiles, drygoods, spices or some groceries. Papa's was one of the only two Jewish families in Mittelsinn who also engaged in agriculture. Their combination of small mixed farm plus general store had come down from my great-grandfather David Kahn to my grandfather Samuel Kahn and from there to my uncle Moses.

Grandfather Samuel's first wife died in childbirth with one of her twin babies, a girl. The surviving twin was a sickly boy, who became my uncle Joseph. After his first wife's death, grandpa Samuel married her younger sister Yetta, who gave birth to uncle Moses, then to a boy called Leopold who died in early childhood of croup, and finally to Papa and thus became my maternal grandmother. Uncle Moses, in inheriting the house, shop and farm, also inherited the responsibility to maintain and care for uncle Joseph, who was crippled but a very kindly man and deeply learned, especially in Judaism.

Martha, Aunt Helene and Uncle Moses

Uncle Moses and his wife, my aunt Helene - a very kind and gentle woman whose maiden name was Rosenthal and who also was a native of Mittelsinn - had four children. David, the eldest, drowned in a swimming accident at age 21. The second, my cousin Betty, married a Jewish butcher in Cuxhagen and the two of them went on aliyah in 1937 or 1938. Their splendid three daughters and son gave rise to beautiful families in Israel and, in the son's case in Toronto, Canada. The third child of uncle Moses and aunt Helene, my cousin Martha, perished with her parents in the Holocaust, but the youngest, my cousin Manfred, a few years my junior, was saved by a Kindertransport to Switzerland in 1939. He spent the war years there in some hardship, but at least in safety, and then went on aliyah to Israel, where he married a sabra and had two sons and a daughter. Eventually in the 1960ies the Manfred family left Israel for America and re-settled in New York.

Manfred

During the early 1930ies, the period when I used to go on summer holidays to Schluechtern, there were also times to go on visit to uncle Moses, whose household then included aunt Helene, uncle Joseph, and cousins Martha and Manfred. Cousin Betty was seen only occasionally, and my acquaintance with grandpa Samuel and grandma Yetta was of a fleeting nature only, as both died when I was still very young, and although I recollect seeing them and cousin David before his tragic death, I do not remember any conversation with them. You could almost say that I knew them by sight only, rather than from talking to them. Though I do recall that grandfather Samuel smoked a very long-stemmed pipe and engaged in bitter arguments with Papa and uncle Moses, and that kindly but ailing grandmother Yetta usually appeared before me in an off-white dressing gown and a frilly hood, rather like the grandmother as commonly depicted in illustrations for "little Red Riding Hood".

Betty

In common with a great many other German villages, Mittelsinn was very backward and bedraggled, a stubborn heritage still from the devastating Thirty Years War of three centuries earlier. Except for

electricity and a small railway station without built-up platform on a one-track branch route, the place lacked most of the basic infrastructure we take for granted. The only made road was the highway that ran past the station.

The village itself lay off this road, and all its built-up streets were excessively cambered to let the rain run off before it caused mud and quag-mire; because in every other respect these streets were bumpy and unmade. There were no water mains. Instead nearly every house had its own hand pump to raise water from below the ground. This was adequate for most purposes. But drinking water for human consumption had to be obtained from a fountain near the far end of the village. This meant a daily walk for one or more people from every household to draw water from this source and carry it home in wooden vessels. Chore though this was, I guess it had its own reward; because I have never drunk water that tasted as lovely as that fresh out of this well.

A much less agreeable feature was the big dung heap kept in the ground of each house with adjacent stables for farm animals. That included uncle Moses' property, with its horse, two cows and perhaps a dozen or so chickens. It was good fun for me to roll in the hay that was stored in the barn or to go for a ride with uncle Moses in the horse-drawn cart to some of the other villages in the district, such as Obersinn, Burgsinn or Jossa. Or to feed the chooks or to watch the cows being hand-milked. Or to marvel at the diversity of fairly basic merchandise being held in the general store and with none of the fancy packaging we now take for granted.

The household as such was run on strictly orthodox Jewish lines. Grandma Yetta and aunt Helene wore "sheitels", the traditional wigs of modesty for married women, and uncle Moses and uncle Joseph both laid "tephillin", the phylacteries tied to forehead and right forearm during their weekday early morning prayers, and included "tzitzis", the small shawl with ritual fringes, in their underwear. Neither uncle sporting a beard, their faces were increasingly unshaven and stubbly as the week progressed and with razor blades taboo and electric razors not available, their one weekly shave occurred on Friday afternoon by means of a horribly smelling cream which burned all hair growth off in about ten minutes when applied to the face. The result was a cleaner shave than any other conceivable method but would have devastated their skin if used more frequently. Hot meals for the Saturday lunch were provided by having the pre-cooked one-pot dish quietly kept hot over a slow-combustion kitchen stove, stoked before sunset on the Friday. I do not recall how the sabbatical problem of artificial lighting was coped with - whether by employment of candles or of a "shabbes goy" or keeping to daylight hours only, or a mixture of such expedients; for there were no automatic timing devices yet.

I must point out that Papa was the only member of the family in Mittelsinn who departed from this orthodox mould in which he too had been brought up. Although the others obviously disapproved, his break with traditional observance never led to any estrangement in what was indeed and still remains a very warmly loving family. For my part I found the strict Sabbatarianism rather irksome, and though I learned to put up with it, there eventually came a little crisis when I revolted.

During one long summer holiday it had been planned that I should spend the first three weeks at uncle Moses' in Mittelsinn and the remainder in Schluechtern, where the cousins from Frankfurt would also be due. It did not quite work out that way. The summer was hot, and the

aforementioned dung heaps of Mittelsinn aggravated the chronic fly plague in the place. Sticky yellow flypapers suspended from lights or ceilings were black with greedy victims in no time at all, without noticeably diminishing the invading hordes. Other defensive measures such as wielding fly swats or chemical warfare with fly spray pumps were more effective; however, all such action had to cease when Sabbath set in. The long hot Saturday seemed to drag on interminably for me, as flies galore swarmed all over us with impunity. Eventually the yearned-for sunset arrived and at full nightfall the liberating effect of the spray pump was once more invoked, and this time with a vengeance, making the flies die like flies, as one might say. The place was strewn with the dead insects and I felt fatigued and sick with the vapour of the spray; but at least the enemy was dead and I staggered to bed, looking forward to a better morrow - or so I thought. Imagine how I felt when on waking up Sunday morning I found the house as infested with he pesky pests as ever. "This is enough", I said. "All that Sabbath endurance for nothing. I have had it!" I telephoned Schluechtern, explained my distress and secured permission for my earlier arrival. Then I packed my things and was off, on the next train to Schluechtern. It was my first rail trip ever to travel unaccompanied. And it was possibly the first time that flies had thus driven away a visitor.

Papa

CHAPTER 4: FATHER

Now that I have dealt with the Mittelsinn scene from which he sprang, let me focus on Papa. I still see him as the most important single influence in the shaping of my own character - the model I have consciously and unconsciously aspired to emulate in many respects.

To anybody who knew Papa, he was an unforgettable personality, possessed of such flair and charisma as I could never hope to attain myself; but that to have in my father made me the quiet envy of others.

It would be difficult to say which was the greater: the prestige and dignity that accrued to him from his office, or the prestige and dignity that he lent to his office, be it as prosecutor or as judge.

By most of the world who knew him, he was respectfully addressed by his title, "Mr State Attorney", or "Mr County Court Councillor". Except for relatives, nobody called him by his given name, Meier. To Mama and his inlaws, as well as to closer friends and colleagues at court with whom he was on first name terms, he always was "Kebes", the nickname that had stuck to him since high school days. It was an appellation he could wear with pride. For it had been bestowed on him after a classics master, slightly vexed by Papa's habitual searching questions during lessons, exclaimed, "you are just like that Kebes we are reading about". The teacher was referring to Kebes, an inquisitive disciple who figured in one of the Platonic dialogues used in a Greek textbook.

What came down to me from all this was the occasional reference to me as "a little Kebes" whenever friends of the family wanted to indicate approvingly that I was, in their eyes, showing some promise "to take after my old man". But more important, I feel that it had much to do with Papa's readiness to give me a good reason for anything he required of me.

His propensity for firing more questions in class than the run-of-the-mill pupil would, had most likely been inculcated in Papa by his talmudic studies, in which he was well versed and which still remained the daily pursuit of his step-brother, my uncle Joseph.

I have sometimes asked myself whether Papa veered away from the orthodox ritual observance of his parental home despite his assiduous Jewish studies or because of them. Theology as such was never discussed in our home. As to his Judaism, he told me time and again: "It would be silly for me to proclaim that I am proud to be a Jew. Even if I am not proud, I shall still be a Jew." Pride, in his view, was not warranted here, since his status as Jew had required no effort on his part to achieve.

But Papa was most insistent that during my school years I should learn what Judaism is all about. "I don't care whether you turn out Orthodox or Liberal or whatever", he told me, "that is something for yourself to decide in due course. What I am concerned with is that, when the time comes, you should have enough knowledge and learning of Judaism to know what you are deciding about!"

To be sure, many Jewish parents have made similar remarks to their children, often merely as a cover-up for their attempts to indoctrinate their offspring with Judaism. But I can see now that Papa's deliberate policy of keeping Judaism and all notions of religion under wraps for me before I reached school age absolve him of any charge of indoctrination. Clearly he decided that I should not become a Jew in the religious sense because of early conditioning, but only because, and provided that, Judaism on its own merits commended itself to my maturing mind.

Anyhow, Papa's exhortations must have suitably impressed me. Although I came from the least religiously observant home, I consistently topped my little class in religious instruction and was the only pupil to invariably receive a "1" for "very good" in my school reports.

When it came to asserting his paternal authority, Papa never resorted to corporal punishment. Throughout my childhood I can count only two spankings he ever gave me. Both instances were on behalf and at the behest of Mama. Papa's own way of dealing with any misdemeanour on my part, however serious, was to take me to task verbally. To that end he could bring to bear, if necessary, all his forensic skill and eloquence as public prosecutor to make me really feel guilty and contrite. Quite often on such occasions I would much rather have settled for a good hiding. But

however severe a dressing down I might have received from him, by bed-time he insisted on our usual tender exchange of good-night kisses.

Because of my young years, I was never granted the privilege to watch Papa directly in action as prosecutor or judge. I might go, with or without Mama, into the Courthouse which was only one block away from my primary school and, by knocking at the door, gain access to his own office - probably for the purpose of joining him on the walk home after the day's duty was done. But that was all.

On one such occasion, when my door knock was not answered, a kindly attendant appeared and told me that Papa was delayed by an extended court hearing. Then he offered to let me wait by watching the proceedings from the spectators' area at the back of the courtroom. I felt nervous to accept, but he ushered me into the public gallery area, where the crowd of adult spectators readily made room for me in the front row, so that I should have a good view. I sat down and managed to spot Papa in his black biretta and gown, standing around and seemingly in deep thought. I began to think this should be very interesting to watch, when, to my great disappointment, one of the court officials noticed my presence and came up to imperiously demand my removal as being under age. The whole incident passed without Papa becoming aware of it. This was probably just as well. Although he was amused when I told him about it later that day, he might have been seriously and embarrassingly distracted in his forensic alertness and trains of thought if it had come under his notice how his little boy gained illegal access to the session, only to be unceremoniously removed.

On the other hand, I remember an occasion when Papa invited me to accompany him on an important official trip, with a chauffeur and accompanied by a police inspector. An aeroplane had crashed into the forest country near Echterspfahl, a village in the heart of the Spessart mountains, killing the pilot. The scene of the disaster was within his bailiwick as district attorney; so Papa had to personally inspect the havoc caused over a considerable area, as litigation could be expected over the cause of the crash, the extent of the damage and whose responsibility it was to bear the costs of all the destruction. For me, the trip was the privilege of a car ride - then a rarity for me - a visit to the forests and hills and the amazing sight of the widely scattered plane wreckage. But of course it was not really an opportunity for observing Papa in his role as prosecutor.

And then there was the notable affair that provided the professional highlight of Papa's career while taking him beyond his actual range of official duties. Here again, I had only a tangential perception of Papa in action, mainly by way of his frequent travels and lengthy absences from home and family.

The event in question was a spectacular burglary, in which a well-organised international gang of thieves broke into Aschaffenburg's castle through an upstairs window and pillaged hundreds of precious copper etchings by Rembrandt, cutting them out of the album frames in which they were kept. The art work thus stolen, valued in millions of Reichsmark, formed a prominent part of the Bavarian State Graphic collection held at the castle since it had been taken over from its original owner, the archbishop elector of Mayence, when Aschaffenburg was ceded from that see to the kingdom of Bavaria in 1814.

The burglary created quite a sensation. In view of the importance of the case, the attorney-general for Bavaria came from Munich to Aschaffenburg to survey the scene and to discuss the crime with the local state attorney, i.e. Papa. As nobody had a clue where to look for the perpetrators, the attorney-general, in sheer frustration, remarked to Papa: "Ah well, since this case is in your bailiwick anyhow, you might just as well look for the thieves too!" The comment was hardly likely to be meant seriously. For surely this task was the province of the police force. But Papa took up the off-hand challenge, and was given extended leave of absence from his regular duties to take charge of the detective work involved.

For a start, a high monetary reward was offered for any information leading to the solving of the crime, and this was publicised abroad and overseas as well as throughout Germany, since it was likely the thieves would try to smuggle the loot for sale abroad. At the same time a special art catalogue, carefully itemising and describing each stolen etching, was prepared, and printed copies were sent to every known art museum, art gallery or institute and to notable art dealers and auctioneers all over the world, cautioning them and briefing them what to do if any of the missing treasures found their way to them.

It took nearly half a year of sifting and following up the many reports prompted by the offer of reward. Each had to be checked out before it could be set aside as a false clue. Finally there came a slender but promising lead through a hesitant young widow in the city of Dresden, leading to indirect contact with a fence for some of the stolen etchings. But Papa had to patiently cultivate the personal acquaintance of the diffident widow to gain her confidence and active cooperation, and then he assumed the identity of an art smuggler to gradually gain the confidence of the fence. He also arranged for the splendid co-operation of French police in Strassburg and Paris to secure the recovery of the greater part of the stolen treasures by their piecemeal purchase, before the fence was arrested. An earlier arrest could have been made, but then the etchings, which were considered more important than catching the culprits, would very probably have disappeared and been lost forever. The fence was the only member of the gang to be captured.

The above is only a very skimpy outline of the case and gives no real indication of the devious methods that were required in its pursuit, nor of the grotesque episodes that occurred and that Papa had to deal with before the matter was brought to a close and he returned to his normal duties.

The lengthy investigations were of course hush-hush; but people in town surmised that they were in Papa's hands. So that I was often asked how the case was going. But I had no more knowledge than my many questioners. When it was all over, Papa was briefly the hero of Aschaffenburg. Although his name was not mentioned in the Press, he received a high commendation from his official superiors in Munich and was promoted to councillor of the county court, i.e. county court judge.

By the time the promotion became effective, the Nazis had come to power - a quirk of fate that probably made him the only Jew who still received official advancement under the Nazis, who would certainly not have set such promotion action in train. Indeed the only reason Papa was not sacked rather than promoted, was that at that stage Jews in official employment were still exempted from dismissal, if they were returned soldiers of World War 1. For in 1933/34 the Nazis still felt that they might scandalise public opinion too much if Jews who had risked their lives to serve the

Fatherland were victimised like other Jews. Clearly the Nazis saw a need to desensitize and to condition the average German gradually before they could expect him to acquiesce in the growing official persecution of his Jewish fellow-citizens.

In the same way I was still tolerated in high school while Jewish children whose fathers were not returned soldiers were no longer admitted. The choice for me was the "Humanist Gymnasium" or the "Oberrealschule". Either was entered via an entrance examination, mainly in German composition and in arithmetic, after four years of primary education, for a nine years course leading to Matriculation.

In the Oberrealschule the emphasis was on Science and modern languages - French and English. In the Gymnasium the stress was on the Classics, i.e nine years Latin, six years ancient Greek and only the last three years with the addition of either English or French. Physics and Chemistry were neglected until year 7. Students hoping to enter the traditional professions needed to enter the Gymnasium as at University Latin was a prerequisite for Jurisprudence and Theology, and Greek for Medicine. In the light of political and economic prospects for Jews or the lack of them, it probably would have made sense for me to be sent to the Oberrealschule. But Papa, who had of course been educated at a Gymnasium, believed strongly in the value of that kind of education, so to the Gymnasium I was sent.

Looking back on it now, I think in the long run his decision was right, although in the short run an early course in English rather than in Latin would have been more useful immediately after my leaving Germany. In the very short run, however, the decision in favour of the Gymnasium proved better too, inasmuch as that school manifested little or none of the antisemitism that prevailed at the Oberrealschule. The contrast may have had something to do with the humanistic educational philosophy that informed the Gymnasium education, and that made most of the staff, however nationalistic in sentiment, abide by the new Nazi order in a rather perfunctory manner only, and without any real enthusiasm. Certainly the Nazi authorities must have felt something was amiss from their point of view, because soon after I was forced to leave the school after the terrible "Crystal night" of November 1938 - more of which in a later chapter - they sacked and replaced the headmaster.

By 1935 the Nazis felt confident enough of public opinion to remove returned soldier Jews like Papa from office; but at first they still paid him his full salary. Only in 1938 did they take the next step to reduce his salary to a 60% annuity pension such as he would have received on age or invalidity retirement.

Being no longer in the service, Papa was free to do any other work he could find; but any earnings from such work would have led to an equal reduction in his pension. So instead he busied himself with giving free legal advice and general counselling to members of the Jewish community. These free services must have been greatly appreciated; because when it came to my bar mitzvah in September 1936, I was overwhelmed with a mass of valuable presents from the most unexpected quarters and such as no member of our family could have afforded. All these gifts to me, including a bicycle and an accordion, were expressions of thanks to Papa.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL

While we lived in Jahnstrasse, it took me half an hour to walk to school. Part of the route led through the lovely "Schoental" gardens. On the way home I usually halted briefly at the smallest of several lakes, which was richly stocked with sundry exotic water fowl, headed by a trio of black swans. To watch them or to feed them stale bread became a habit with me. They were my first black swans. Even today, whenever I set eyes on one of these uniquely Australian birds, they remind me pleasantly of Aschaffenburg.

Reaching school age is an important turning point in one's life. If, as in my case, there has not been a preceding half-way house by way of preschool or kindergarten, the first day in school can be quite awesome, even oppressive with the change in life-style that it brings on. To alleviate and sweeten the transition, German parents follow the charming custom of presenting their child on the first day of school with a "Schultuete". There is no word for this in English, but it can best be described as a gaily-coloured big cardboard cone, like a dunce's cap, filled to the brim with lollies, chocolates and other sweets. Clutching this cornucopia of goodies the new pupil is then photographed while still smiling with happiness. I am not sure why, but on my first school day I was presented with two such packages, one a wide and stubby emerald green cone, the other a more elongated pink one.

Perhaps the extra Schultuete was to compensate me for discovering later in the week that my first teacher, an elderly pedagogue by the name of Alzheimer, was a veritable tyrant and sadist. I was one of the lucky minority in class who never were the object of his wrath; yet I shuddered when I saw what he did to others. He certainly knew how to wield the cane. But his favourite form of meting out punishment was to grab the designated miscreant from behind by both wrists and then repeatedly bang the captive hands on the school desk in front of him. It was not only a very hurtful sensation for the victim, but also an extremely noisy, terrifying and unsettling experience for the boy in the adjacent seat, as I sometimes was. The whole class sighed with relief when old Alzheimer was retired after the second term.

There was nothing wrong with the teachers I had for the rest of my time in primary school. By today's standards, classes were rather large. Yet teachers seemed to have no difficulty in coping with the 48 boys in my grade and giving each of them adequate attention. As an ex-student teacher myself, I can only marvel at how they did it; though I must admit that prevailing standards of discipline and authority were much more strict and rigid than in our society here and now.

The primary tuition I received was consistently competent and I did not find it difficult to cope with the lessons. Probably my aptitude helped, and my age too, as I was already close to seven at entry to grade 1. Another important advantage was that I had already learned to read printing, by sitting at the knees of Papa when he relaxed at home over his daily newspaper, and made him help me decipher the large lettering of the headlines, a practice which he gently encouraged.

By the time my class had mastered its primer, I was well into reading other books. The range, variety and alluring presentation of children's books available then was nothing like today's, but even less comparable were the distractions from reading, which did not include TV or comics.

My childhood reading began with Struwwelpeter and the fairy tales of Grimm, Hauff and Hans Christian Andersen. Of the latter I had the total collection in six bound volumes given to me as a birthday present. There were the tales of thousand and one nights and the many stories of Greek mythology. There were the comic verses and drawings of Wilhelm Busch, the children's stories by Erich Kaestner and the adventure novels by Karl May. There were excellent German translations of The Last Mohican, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Robinson Crusoe, Dr Dolittle, Gulliver's travels; Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and other Mark Twain stories.

All such reading, and much more, had me sometimes criticised as too much of a bookworm by my parents, when they thought it was done at the expense of wholesome outdoor pursuits. But it certainly eased my way into writing prose and composition. And that became my real strong point throughout my schooldays and later in life. Particularly in high school, the best compositions whether

from class tests or from home assignments, were read out by the teacher in class without mentioning the writer's name, before handing back all the marked work in order of merit. During the reading out everyone in class would try to guess the writer, and on the rare occasions that I was not among the place-getters thus honoured, my classmates found it hard to believe my denials of authorship. As a representative of the Jews whom the Nazis tried to humiliate as un-German, I derived much grim satisfaction from being the undisputed leader in the subject of "German".

It also was some compensation for the one subject in which I always was an abject failure - Physical education, especially where it involved any gymnastic apparatus, be it parallel bars, horizontal bar, horse, climbing bar or rope, ladders, rings or any other gymnastic instrument of torture, as it was to me. If in German I was consistently on top, then in physical education I was consistently at the bottom of the class, and I used to dread the school days when this subject came up. The humiliation I felt at my poor showing was doubled and tripled by the fact that the Nazi culture laid such excessive emphasis on sport and physical education and that I feared by my abysmal performance I would reinforce the Nazi propaganda against Jews as being racially inferior at the physical level. This is the one subject that really blighted my school days and from which I could see no escape except growing up. It caused me enough unhappiness to make me often wish my youth away.

At high school level, the Gymnasium gave extraordinary prominence to Latin, with six hourly lessons per week, almost equalling the seven hours devoted to all aspects of "German". After my first week at Gymnasium, Papa tried to get an idea how I was taking to the new subject, my first foreign language, and examined me about my homework, which comprised extensive exercises based on the grammar and vocabulary covered by the first two chapters of the Latin text book. Both he and I were alarmed when we discovered on the Saturday afternoon that I was quite inadequate to the task.

The crisis was important enough for Papa to take me and my Latin text book and Grammar for a long Sunday walk on the right bank of the Main and to drill me thoroughly and patiently for hours on end while we were thus strolling along the river, till I was absolutely word perfect on everything in those two chapters.

By Monday evening when Papa inquired how I had fared with all that drill, I had a surprise for him. In the morning Mr Siebenlist, the Latin teacher, had apologised to the class for having, by an oversight, set as homework a range of material we had not yet covered in class! All the same, Papa's assiduous efforts were not really wasted. They gave me a valuable lead and impetus in this subject, which I managed to retain and that helped to keep me among the top Latin pupils in class.

Among other teachers and their subjects I recall with pleasure my first Algebra teacher, who taught with much verve and humour, two history teachers who lectured so vividly that their lessons required no homework on my part but were readily enough remembered for test in the next history lesson. In Geography, primary tuition instilled in me much love and pride in Aschaffenburg and its surroundings - a fine warm local patriotism, as it were. There was also much cultivation of map drawing and I attribute to that my proficiency in map reading and a well developed sense of direction in finding my way about, even in unknown territory, and in noting useful landmarks for orientation. In high school I enjoyed Geography lessons because they were delivered virtually as

travel talks that roused one's interest in the regions or countries covered - until Form 5, when the subject turned into Geology and Meteorology, which I found very dreary. Nowadays history and geography tuition is much more sophisticated, but I fear it has become much less enjoyable in the process.

Ancient Greek proved to be a much less agreeable subject than Latin; partly because the language was more difficult, but more importantly because the teacher, Mr Fuller, was always peevish and dissatisfied. Our teacher in Music, or rather singing, had a very frustrating task. While he tried to get us boys to sing sensitively and with true musical feeling, the physical education instructor worked at cross purposes with him by constantly demanding that, in typical Nazi style, we should shout as we sang while marching around the gym.

Nature study I found usually boring, except for studying the amusing idiosyncrasies of its teachers; but on one occasion I managed to get a "very good" when I realized that it could be

achieved by making a very special effort at producing a meticulous work book of drawings and their annotations. This meant that for once I topped the class by getting a "1" in every subject (except, of course, physical education). Papa was so thrilled and pleased with my results that he rewarded me by making me wag school for a few days to accompany him on a trip to Munich. At first I was surprised that he would connive at my truancy. But as he pointed out very correctly, I was not really missing anything, as all the non-Jewish boys had gone on a fortnight's Hitler Youth camp while only the few girls in class were left behind with the two Jewish boys - my friend Rudi and myself - to mark time, without learning anything new...

Rudi, whose full name was Rudolf Sternheimer, came into my life on my first day of primary school and we rapidly became close and lasting friends, staying together throughout school and beyond, until the fortunes of World War 2 forced us apart. Our respective parents had been acquaintances but were by the friendship between their sons also drawn into close friendship. Rudi and I spent so much of our free time together that the most effective form of parental disciplining for misbehaviour became to forbid us to meet outside school hours. Our friendship developed into a kind of hard nucleus around which formed associate friendships with other Jewish boys in our age group.

Perhaps the bond between the Kahns and the Sternheimers became even stronger when at the age of 15 I all of a sudden developed a crush on Rudi's sister, Lotte, three years my junior. Except for a reciprocated puppy love for my cousin Lore in pre-school days, this was my first romantic love, which I declared by composing a poem in the form of an acrostic on Lotte's full name and had it delivered in writing through the hands of Rudi. I had to do something spectacular like that, as I saw Lotte was on the verge of becoming the "steady" of another boy. Whether it was the poem - which was rather corny but technically faultless and very much to the point - or the sheer disclosure of my affection for her, I don't know, but I won her over. Thus Lotte became "my first flame", and I carried quite a torch for her for a long time.

CHAPTER 6: NAZISM

The gathering storm clouds of Hitler's access to power had been on the horizon for several years before 1933. Yet one hoped or wanted to think that the thuggery of his growing hordes of stormtroopers would never be allowed to attain supremacy in a civilised society like the Weimar republic, whatever its political and economic woes. The implications of what this rabble-rousing maniac stood for were so horrible as to make his rule unthinkable. Whatever Hitler promised to others, neither Communists nor Jews could be under any illusion that a Nazi regime would be hellish for them - because that is exactly what he had promised them.

Even as a young schoolboy I was aware of that. Time after time, I read in the newspaper of the riots and street battles in the bigger cities, notably in Berlin. It might involve the greenshirts of the Social-democrats, or the Communists, but invariably it implicated the brownshirts of the Nazis - and they were hardly ever brought to justice for disturbing the peace and law and order. Aschaffenburg was a relatively quiet backwater in all this churning political cesspool. Yet the hate was visibly there too, in the political meetings and assemblies, the incessant street marches and demonstrations and all the accompanying propaganda and publicity.

With Hitler at the helm, effects of antisemitism as official policy were soon felt in our family. For a start, uncle Alfred was sacked as a Jew from his academic position at Karlsruhe University, with no prospect of alternative livelihood in Germany. He emigrated virtually penniless to France, the only alternative country then open to him.

Papa was still tolerated in his judicial post, because he was a returned soldier. But he soon lost his numerous non-Jewish friends and social contacts, not only in legal circles but also elsewhere, including the small group of working men with whom he used to play cards one or two nights a week for relaxation at the local pub over a mug of beer. And if such people did not break off relationships as a matter of expediency and outright fear of the Nazis, then Papa and Mama themselves advised and urged them to do so to avoid being stigmatised as Jew-lovers.

Personal antisemitism was usually particularly virulent in small communities where everybody knew everybody else and thus Jews did not need a yellow patch to be known as such by all and sundry. In Schluechtern the situation became absolutely impossible for Oma and Opa during 1934, when Opa was denounced by somebody for having made improper sexual advances to a non-Jewish housemaid. It was an implausible allegation if you knew Opa's character, and an allegation hardly likely to be true when one considered Opa's age, at that time 67. But all that did not concern the local Nazi hooligans, who saw here a pretext for forcibly parading poor Opa stark naked through the main street of Schluechtern.

The upshot of this horrible episode was that Oma and Opa came to us in Aschaffenburg as refugees from Schluechtern. Provisional accommodation was found for them first in an attic and then in a small ground floor flat directly opposite ours in Jahnstrasse. Emulating Opa's poetic vein, I wrote a welcoming poem for them, in which I alluded to their makeshift accommodation with the following verse:

Als Sterne sie hoch oben thronen
Doch bald sie werden unten wohnen

(As stars they are enthroned up high
but soon they will dwell down below)

The property and remaining business in Schluechtern was of necessity sold at a ridiculously low price - a procedure which the Nazis fondly described as "aryanisation". With some furniture salvaged from Schluechtern, Oma and Opa then moved with us from Jahnstrasse to share in a bigger, 7-room flat near the main railway station. The street of our new joint abode, formerly known as Frohsinnstrasse (after a civic club of that name, meaning gaiety) had been renamed Adolf-Hitler-Strasse and our new flat was on the first floor at No. 26.

It has been said that if Hitler's father had stuck to his erstwhile surname of Schickelgruber, the history of the 20th century would have turned out different - one only needs to consider the laughable sound of a "Heil Schickelgruber!" salute. It is a fascinating speculation. Could we have found ourselves moving to Schickelgruberstrasse? I don't know. What amazed me as a child and what I still cannot really understand is how, at an aesthetic level, the sheer ugliness of the stormtroopers uniform and of the swastika symbol and flag did not turn off the German masses from the Nazis. Considering that the collective German mind had grown so sick that it could put up with, succumb to and endorse, however gradually, the sheer frenzy and hysterics of Hitler and his hordes, with all the accompanying ugliness, hooliganism and brutality, then except for the missing alliteration, "Heil Schickelgruber" may have served just as well as "Heil Hitler".

A great deal has been said and written about the antisemitic pre-war policies and deeds of the Nazi regime. But as far as I can make out, no systematic study has been undertaken to analyse and evaluate the ever-changing diabolical mix of officially sponsored antisemitic measures, condoned excesses and perfunctory or real limits on outlawing Jews so as to preserve a veneer of German law and order, respectability and civilisation, however fragile and transparent. In short, how graduated was the Nazis' antisemitic strip-tease before it fully revealed their naked ruthless ambition of annihilating every last Jew on earth? From that point of view, some of the incidents I can recall here may be quite indicative and revealing, much though they conform to the generally known framework of the Nazis' mounting persecution of the Jews.

After the sacking of Jews from public office - an officially decreed act - came the on-going propaganda campaign against buying from Jews, and to give it more effectiveness, an officially condoned organised boycott of all Jewish shops and stores throughout Germany. Although no Jewish business was legally forced to close on Saturday, 1st April 1933, the day nominated for the boycott, hardly anybody cared to defy it by trying to push past the stormtroopers who picketed the entrance to each Jewish shop. However, on the day my friend Rudi and I made a point of trying to enter a Jewish Electrical goods store in Adolf-Hitler-strasse. As expected by us, a uniformed stormtrooper barred our way, and the following dialogue ensued:

"Halt, you cannot shop here!"
"Why not?"
"Don't you realise this is a Jewish shop?"
"So what - we are Jews too".

At that, the perplexed brownshirt let us pass inside. Before we tired of this game, Rudi and I re-played it in abbreviated form at a Jewish draper's shop by walking up to the picket there and beckoning him aside with a leisurely handwave while assuring him "It's alright, we too are Jews". And the surprised stormtrooper meekly obliged. It has been suggested to me that this was an extremely dangerous stunt for us. But Rudi and I thought at the time that we perceived safety in the sheer ludicrousness of the situation.

Notwithstanding all the grimness of it, a similar ludicrousness arising later, after the proclamation of the so-called Nuremberg laws prohibiting marriage and sex between Jews and Gentiles, became quite a joke among the Jews of Aschaffenburg. It happened when a young local lawyer, whose looks gave him away as a Jew, was spotted in a park arm in arm with and kissing a strikingly blonde aryan type. Both were arrested and rushed off to the nearest police station to be charged with racial infamy. But when it came to taking down personal particulars, it was found that the blonde was just as Jewish as her lawyer friend, and the highly embarrassed Nazi officials released both with profound apologies.

Under their shabby cloak of legality, it suited the Nazis to direct the Jews to set up their own Winter Relief scheme. This conveniently absolved them from the moral duty to provide social welfare for Jews and from the indignity of soliciting Jewish support for Aryans. The separate Winter Relief device is just one notable Nazi example of isolating the Jews. But the climate of quasi-apartheid thus fostered could also be invoked to extract a grudging concession from the Nazis, as Papa and Mr Freund, head of the Jewish community, demonstrated when they jointly badgered the Nazi Lord Mayor of Aschaffenburg for a permit to establish a Jewish sports club. With Jews as an officially segregated entity of the population, and with the great stress on physical education and fitness inherent in Nazi ideology, Papa stubbornly and forcefully argued that the Nazis own logic demanded that Jews, banned from existing sports clubs, should have their own sports facility. When the mayor finally yielded, he stipulated that he should have the right to veto any application for membership. And in sheer annoyance at their persistence in pressing this claim, he promptly blackballed Papa and Annie, the youngest daughter of Mr Freund, from membership. Annie, a real champion at women's handball, was a great loss for the new Jewish sports club of Aschaffenburg. But she became a corresponding gain for the Jewish Hakoah sports club of Frankfurt which had already existed before 1933 and thus did not require a Nazi permit to set up.

This is not to suggest that any pre-existing Jewish institution enjoyed a degree of immunity from Nazi caprice. Thus when the Nazi party in Aschaffenburg looked for a better "Brown House", as they called their local headquarters in every town, they arranged to have the club house of Aschaffenburg's Bnei Brith Lodge sequestered for this purpose.

Of course the campaign against buying from Jews was an on-going process, gradually forcing Jewish retailers out of business. Apart from smearing Jewish shop windows with ugly crude

antisemitic graffiti - this being the unofficially condoned level of the campaign, at the official, "respectable" level more and more non-Jewish traders sported stickers on their shop windows proclaiming them as a "German business". Eventually the absence of such a sticker virtually proclaimed a shop as Jewish-owned.

However, as Goering's Four-Year Plan for German self-sufficiency got under way, resulting in the gradual depletion of quality ware from the shelves and inventories of non-Jewish retailers, the boycott of Jewish traders turned rather counter-productive. I cannot say how wide-spread this phenomenon was; for I have never encountered any mentioning of it in the writings about Nazi Germany. But at any rate, in Aschaffenburg and its environs it began to dawn on people disappointed with the deteriorating offerings of "German" shops that, thanks to the boycotts, there still remained much quality merchandise of the good old days lying unsold in the Jewish stores. Many former customers had also come to miss the good service they used to get from the typical Jewish shopkeeper. And so, for a short while, began an amazing revival of Jewish retail trade in Aschaffenburg, boosted notably by customers coming in from the rural Spessart areas. And this time, when the stormtroopers made an extra effort to turn shoppers away, especially from the larger Jewish department stores, they were pushed aside by the impatient country-folk demanding entry, and rioting developed in the very heart of town with the police impassively looking on. Needless to say, this small peasant revolt was not prompted by love of the Jews, but by love of the quality goods they still had for sale!

The tragic-comic climax of this trend came when the owners of the last surviving Jewish department store in Aschaffenburg eventually yielded to pressure to quit, on condition that they were allowed to have a three-day closing-down sale prominently pre-advertised in the local press. The result was truly amazing. The railways found it necessary to run special trains to bring in eager customers from the countryside, and the police had to bar traffic from the inner city with its narrow streets while the largely rural multitudes queued eagerly for what they knew was their last opportunity to buy from a store they trusted. On the very last day of the sale, as all the shelves went bare, even the most unsaleable "stickers" were snapped up by shoppers refusing to leave empty-handed after their long wait in the streets outside, whence the police had admitted them in successive groups. And when absolutely no merchandise was left to sell, they frantically bought coat hangers and any other loose shop fittings!

From early on in the Nazi regime a favourite ploy and pastime of the dreaded Gestapo was to raid homes for house searches. Political suspects of any persuasion were an obvious target. But when it came to the ransacking of a Jewish household, it was more likely just a fishing expedition, perhaps conducted quite at random. If such a search resulted in the discovery of anything as incriminating as weapons, ammunition, Marxist texts, anarchist or other seditious literature, it probably meant for the man of the house immediate arrest and despatch to Dachau or another concentration camp. Where none of this applied, the search would usually soon resolve itself into burrowing through book shelves, systematically snooping at author and title of every volume fingered, without bothering to replace it in its spot. If any book so examined was assessed as offensive to Nazism, because of its contents or perhaps just because the author was Jewish or

known to be hostile to Nazism, it was seized and likely to end up as fuel for a public or not so public book-burning Nazi bonfire.

While I was still in Germany, our household was subjected to two such raids. On both occasions a substantial quantity of books were seized. It was left to us to replace the remainder on their shelves. The intriguing part about this was that most of the books seized were really quite innocuous from a Nazi point of view; then again, some others which we would have expected to be confiscated were ignored. One heard similar stories from other Jewish households visited by the Gestapo, and the only explanation that makes sense is that the secret police snoopers were too illiterate for the task of examining a library, book by book.

At least that was the normal drill. Then one day the Gestapo came to search through the library of my uncle Willy in Frankfurt, and found themselves confronted by quite a large room, each wall lined with crowded bookshelves extending from floor to high ceiling, interrupted only by the openings for a window and a door. The two Gestapo men set to their snooping assignment with a will; but when after three hours of such labour they looked up and compared the heap of books they had gone through with the massive amount that still remained on the shelves and awaiting inspection, their hearts sank. They gave up in disgust and called it a day. Weeks later, when Mama was visiting her sister and brother-in-law, she was idly browsing through this selfsame library. More or less at random, she picked a book from the shelves and was astonished when several large bank notes fell out which had been hidden between the leaves some time before and completely forgotten. The mind boggles to think what would have happened, had the earlier Gestapo search not stopped short of this volume!

Himmler's SS provided the usual cadres of the Gestapo. But for its initial establishment it was found necessary to draft many existing plain-clothes police, including several with whom Papa in better days had enjoyed good working relations. When, on the occasion of the second Gestapo raid on our home, Papa was arrested and his study sealed, one such Gestapo officer told an apprehensive Mama in a quiet aside: "Don't worry, Mrs Kahn, you will have him back by tonight." And he was a good as his word. Meanwhile, during that day, Papa was put behind lock and key in the town's jail. As the turnkey led him to his appointed cell, he said, visibly embarrassed: "Gee, Mr County Court Councillor, I never would have thought the day would come when I have to lock YOU up!"

It was Papa's firm opinion that much of the Nazi success in preventing a dangerous backlash of public opinion against their regime depended not only on coercion, terror, brutalisation, censorship and lying propaganda, but also on keeping the citizenry perpetually stirred up and pre-occupied with "Klimbim" - anything that would divert people from sitting back and quietly reflecting. And that may well have been the idea behind the continual street marches by all sorts of Nazi groups, which to me seemed quite futile and pointless as their major activity, when it was redundant as political demonstration or military drill. But there were days when I could perceive a more positive brain-wash that went with the marching, like when the Hitler Youth sang

Though all may fall to pieces,
We shall march on,
For today we own Germany
And tomorrow the world.

And I shuddered at the mentality of the marching Brownshirts whenever they sang

Put the Jews,
Put the big-wigs,
Up against the wall

or that of the black-uniformed SS men every time they sang

When the Jewish blood spurts from the knife
Then things go twice as well.

Incredible and bizarre as it may seem, marching regimentation also became a major ingredient, albeit in a less blood-curdling way, for tourism, Nazi style, as sponsored by their "Strength through Joy" organisation (KdF). On any Sunday morning during summer, we could see from our windows how thousands of KdF tourists who had poured from special trains onto the station square were assembled into orderly columns and then, led by a uniformed brass band, were marched through town to see all the sights, before being led, hungry and sweating, into a big beer garden. Towards evening, their return for the railway trip home invariably contrasted rather oddly with the tidy regimentation of the morning. The dissonant notes of a very tipsy band would announce the approach of swaying dense hordes of loud, drunken tourists spilling all over the street as, brimful with Bavarian beer, they tottered back to the station. If the preposterous spectacle of so much massed drunken humanity had not been so funny, it would have been quite disgusting.

Of course all the marching and regimentation was also powerfully conducive to the cultural climate for the effective re-militarisation of Germany required by the Nazis. Though actually the country had never been quite as demilitarised as the Treaty of Versailles ostensibly intended and the Nazi and nationalist German whingers about it would have you believe. My own casual observations show that Britain and France had no right to be surprised at the quantity and quality of German rearmament and military tactics. But none are so blind as those who do not want to see.

Take Aschaffenburg as a ready example. Pre-war it had been the garrison town for a crack battalion of Bavarian chasseurs. Their barracks had become redundant for a permitted German army that the Versailles treaty reduced to 100,000 men. So these extensive military quarters were utilised for a battalion of gendarmerie who, under the guise of a different uniform, underwent the same sort of drill and training as the Army, except that on the odd occasion a few of them would provide token reinforcement to the traffic police by way of justifying their designation as gendarmerie. When Hitler unilaterally abrogated the disarmament provisions of the treaty of Versailles, I saw these gendarmerie forces exchange their shako helmets for the steel helmets and their frog-green uniforms for the "field-grey" uniforms of the German army and display the insignia

of the 87th Infantry Regiment on their epaulets. Multiply this sort of overnight transformation over many parts of Germany and it will be clear how the German army quadrupled in size in no time at all.

Then one night soon after, I heard subdued tramping noises on the street. And as I went to the window to investigate, there before me in the darkened street the whole of the 87th Infantry Regiment was quietly marching to the railway station. They were, we discovered next day, on their way to Mayence to play their part there in Hitler's remilitarisation of the Rhineland, leaving our town depleted of all its forces. But no matter, within a few days the 106th Infantry Regiment moved up from Munich to replenish Aschaffenburg's garrison with a vengeance. Because this regiment came in full three-battalion strength as compared with the single battalion of the 87th. And for good measure, the 15th Pioneer Battalion was added to the local garrison. In anticipation of all this extra soldiery there had already been massive and rapid public works undertaken to erect two or three additional army camps, each with the full panoply of modern permanent quarters, depots, barrack squares and parade grounds and any other infra-structure required.

Similarly the "surprise" Nazi air tactics of World War 2 were openly practised even before remilitarisation officially began. Glider plane flying had been a well-developed sport in Germany. As early as 1933, on a Sunday excursion to the "Wasserkuppe", a bare, windy mountain top in the Rhoen ranges where this sport flourished, I watched as time and again single engine civilian bi-planes took to the air, each with one or two manned gliders in tow which, once aloft, they released to cruise by themselves. Eight years later this technique was used to convey much of the Nazi invading force to Crete, making British naval superiority and protection of the island irrelevant.

In 1934, still before remilitarisation, I was among hundreds of thousands of spectators at an Aviation day display at Frankfurt airport, in which the famous Ernst Udet and other stunt fliers went through their turns and gyrations in the air. The climax of the performance, however, was the dropping of incendiary bombs onto a cardboard village erected for this purpose and ended with a mass descent of at least thirty parachutists. Five years later, and just two months before the outbreak of World War 2, I attended a British Empire Air Day display in Kent at Manston, a military aerodrome that was to have a critical role in the air battle of Britain. The display on this occasion showed various planes flying in small formations or demonstrating their manoeuvrability - all good stuff, to be sure, but not very exciting. So, along with every other spectator, I was expectantly looking forward to the last item of the day's program, advertised as parachuting. After what I had seen years earlier in Frankfurt, put on by an as yet "demilitarised" Germany, I had understandably high hopes of what the mighty Royal Air Force would come up with under this rubric. Imagine my disgust and disappointment when a solitary plane took to the air, circled the drome once and then dropped a single parachute supporting not a man but merely a big boot! What an anti-climax to Empire Air Day!

CHAPTER 7: REFLEXES

A fairly accurate index of the increasing nazification of German families was afforded to me in school as I observed the gradual growth in the number of my classmates who joined the Hitler Youth, as could be seen by the uniforms they wore to school on many occasions. When the stage was reached where just a few families stubbornly continued to resist the heavy social pressure for voluntary enrolment of their sons or daughters, Hitler Youth membership was made compulsory. This actually gave Rudy and me some relief. For until then we used to be absent from class on Saturday mornings to attend synagogue and then on Sunday mornings tried to make up by visiting a half-Jewish class mate and take notes from her on what we had missed. Not a very satisfactory arrangement at any stage, it seemed more and more inadequate as time went on. But when all non-Jews were absorbed in the Hitler Youth, the nazification process was carried a step further by abolishing all Saturday morning lessons in favour of Hitler Youth activity. Henceforth Rudy and I missed no further school lessons.

And ghastly as the experience was that made Opa and Oma abandon home and flee Schluechtern, for me it was a boon to have my beloved grandparents join us. Relations between them and my parents and me were always of a most harmonious nature, based on mutual high esteem as well as love. Musical and other cultural life in the Kahn household was enhanced by their presence, as was the joyful celebration of my barmitzvah on 5th September 1936. Also, under Opa's tutelage I learned to play chess, and by the use of his trusted old "Adler" typewriter I soon taught myself to become a fairly fast two-finger typist, a skill that has been very useful to me ever since.

But in view of subsequent events, it was probably just as well that Oma and Opa both passed away in 1937. Aged 66, Oma died on 11th June as a result of diabetes, emphysema and heart problems. With her death, Opa, by then 70 years old, seemed to lose all will to live. He was taken to Frankfurt where he died with much suffering from lung cancer on 26th October, after breast surgery had failed to help. When I last saw him, on his death bed, he was a truly piteous sight to behold - hollow-faced, the constant pain visible in his eyes, his breath evil-smelling and exhaled with a rattling sound. It is a moot point whether his cancer was brought on by smoking. To my knowledge, his nicotine consumption was confined to good cigars, limited to one per day at the most. Both Oma and Opa were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Aschaffenburg; but I was not allowed to attend the funeral of either and did not stand at their gravesides until 47 years later, on revisiting Aschaffenburg.

Mama, who had been greatly devoted to her mother, at first seemed to cope with her loss and grief; but under the impact of numerous handshakes and expressions of condolence extended to her at the end of the funeral proceedings, she was so overcome with emotion as to suffer another nervous breakdown. As a result, she spent again several months in a sanatorium before she fully recovered. This time, unlike a decade or so earlier, Papa took me on his weekly visits to her as soon as she began to show signs of recovery. The sanatorium in which she had been placed was situated at Lohr, a pretty township in the Spessart. Going there entailed for us a train ride of

perhaps three quarters of an hour, followed by an uphill walk of similar duration. But most of these visits were a harrowing experience for me, as poor Mama, who used to be quite corpulent, had gone very thin in face and body and did not seem to recognise me. And the sight of other sanatorium inmates,generally much more disturbed than Mama, was also most depressing.

In Mama's absence, Papa and I managed at home with the aid of our daily char, Mrs Metsch, a worthy housekeeper in her fifties - by this time Jews were prohibited from hiring domestics under 45 years of age! For our daily dinner at midday Papa and I in this period ate at Kulp's, the one Jewish restaurant in town. During the long summer school vacation, before Mama showed real signs of recovery, Papa took me to the lady who had looked after me as foster mother in Mama's absence ten years earlier. Miss Friedel Schloss, as she had then been, had in the meantime married and become Mrs Hahn, with a child of her own - a girl of about 8. The Hahns had set up home in Northeim, a little town near Goettingen. While at Northeim, I met other visiting Jewish children there and particularly made friends with one boy. As a result I was invited by his parents to visit them at their home in Hanover. The ensuing three day visit to that city was very enjoyable and afforded me much sightseeing. It was my only and furthest excursion ever into the Northern half of Germany.

With the demise of Oma and Opa, our flat had become too big and expensive for us. So upon return of Mama, we moved house again, this time into a four-roomed third-storey apartment vis-a-vis, at Adolf-Hitler-strasse 15. That was to be our last residence in Aschaffenburg.

Almost next door to us now was the dwelling of Rabbi Dr Fritz Bloch, the successor to Rabbi Dr Breuer, who had died in 1932. Since my entry to high school Rabbi Dr Bloch had taken over from Mr Schloss as far as my Jewish tuition was concerned, and classes were held in his flat. He was a wonderful teacher, in his early thirties and with a young family, who presented Judaism in an intellectually stimulating and challenging fashion. By his personal mode of living he also demonstrated to me for the first time that modern living and traditional Judaism were not incompatible. His was the first dwelling I ever saw where electric light was automatically switched on and off for Sabbath. More spectacular, though, was the fact that here was a bearded Jewish rabbi who regularly went skiing.

Papa became lay head ("parnes") of the Jewish community about 1937. As the Jewish populace of Aschaffenburg slowly diminished by a steady trickle of emigration, so it was replenished again by Jews from surrounding small settlements, shifting to town life with its relative anonymity to escape the more intense antisemitism rife in the rural areas, where everybody knew everybody else. Papa and the rabbi jointly initiated the setting up of a Jewish school and kindergarten in town, putting Mr Schloss at the head of a small teaching staff. There was an urgent need for such a school as most Jewish children were no longer admitted to non-Jewish schools. Although I was one of the few still admitted (because of Papa's war service), I dearly would have loved to switch over to the Jewish school; but it stopped one year short of my class level.

During the winter of 1937 - I think it was on 13th December - I had to go ice-skating with my school class. I say "had to go", because my skating ability was fairly modest and so I derived very limited enjoyment from this sport. The skating rink on this occasion was an elongated frozen lake, one of several in the Schoental gardens mentioned in Chapter 5. Its banks were lined with craggy

pieces of heavy rock, immediately behind which a fence of barbed wire had been erected to keep out unauthorised skaters.

In the course of my skating I decided to have a straight glide from one long end of the lake to the other. In doing so, I happened to pick up a back wind that drove me along without any need on my part to exert any muscle - in short, plain sailing. However, the wind rapidly increased in force and suddenly I noticed that other people had stopped skating whereas I was being driven forward by the fierce wind with ever increasing speed. I realised that I must stop somehow but could not do so, short of throwing myself to the ground, or rather ice, and this I lacked the gumption to do. Instead I foresaw with horror how I found myself helplessly driven full speed into the far end of the lake, hard against the rocks there and hurled headlong into the barbed wire fence beyond!

I must have looked a gory spectacle as I was lifted up and rushed to hospital. Luckily the cold weather froze and coagulated the blood on my face. But seven stitches had to be made to close a big gash above my right eye, plus two stitches immediately under the eye and three more stitches between my left nostril and upper lip. By now, little of this remains visible; but for a long time people thought my scars looked like those of duelling University students as Papa and uncle Alfred had been. Later on for many years the big scar above the right eye was clearly visible on some days, yet barely noticeable on others. So that occasionally people to whom my face was quite familiar would ask me in great surprise: Where did you suddenly get this scar? They usually took some convincing that I had it long before they ever knew me.

By 1938, Uli & Lore, my Frankfurt cousins, made ready to emigrate with their parents to the USA. Uncle Willy's specialist practice had shrunk as, like other Jewish medicos in Nazi Germany, he had been restricted to Jewish patients. Aunt Alma, a very practical and energetic woman, had recently undergone training in a special therapeutic form of Gymnastic, so as to fit herself for making a livelihood in the new world.

Papa had remarked in the past that for me there was no future any more in Germany; but as for himself and Mama he ought to stay while he still had a service pension whereas they would be destitute abroad, his own judicial training being useless outside Germany and he being too old to switch to any other occupation. When he spoke in such terms, I felt like saying: What about the danger to our lives here?" But somehow I refrained from expressing such fears. For I stupidly thought they would expose my cowardice and would make us all emotionally upset. Looking back now, I deeply regret not having voiced my forebodings, although they probably would not have swayed Papa.

But by the time the Franks left, Papa too had decided it was high time for all of us to try and migrate to the USA, pension or no pension. Uncle Alfred and with him uncle Willy, once he had settled in USA, were pledged to provide the necessary affidavits whereby they lodged monetary sureties guaranteeing our financial support in America, an essential condition for gaining admission as an immigrant. In the event, uncle Willy refused to furnish such guarantees in regard to Mama, because of the two mental breakdowns in her past. His refusal so outraged uncle Alfred that he cut off all connections with uncle Willy and aunt Alma for the next twenty years or so.

Towards the end of 1938 I was persuaded to join Bachad, the sole Zionist youth organisation established in our community, and was given the responsibility to conduct some sessions on

"Palestinography". I took my new responsibility very seriously and spent considerable time on preparing my initial session, which in the first instance required that I myself should do some study of the basic geography of the Promised Land. As the date for the session approached, I began to look forward to it as I felt that I was really well prepared for the occasion, with a bold map of Palestine I had devised for the purpose and building everything else in my delivery around it. The main classroom of our Jewish school, next door to the synagogue, was to be the venue - outside school hours, of course.

Alas, it was never to be and my somewhat belated Zionist youth activity came to an abrupt halt before it properly started. Because the night before the session was due has gone into History as Germany's Crystal night.

CHAPTER 8: POGROM

A huge nation-wide pogrom was let loose against all Jewry trapped under Hitler rule in the night between 9th and 10th November 1938. That night has become known as the Reich's Crystal Night - because of the immense amount of broken glass which marked its trail of destruction everywhere. But the broken glass was the least part of all the Nazi-instigated harm done.

This included the total destruction of nearly all synagogues in the land, in the majority of cases by setting them on fire; the smashing and looting of Jewish shops and stores and the wrecking of hundreds of Jewish residential houses. Moreover, during this night of horror and the ensuing day, 91 or more Jews were killed, many were very badly wounded, and some 20,000 were arrested.

At the time still numbering about 500, Aschaffenburg's Jewry was afflicted with its full share of these atrocities, with two shootings, one of them fatal and the other nearly fatal, the burning down of our beautiful synagogue, the breaking and looting of what Jewish shop windows still remained in town at this stage and including some which, unbeknownst to the Nazi hooligans, had already been "aryanised", i.e. sold under duress to non-Jews for a song. The Kulp kosher restaurant, where Papa and I had dined during Mama's illness, was broken into and completely wrecked. Fifty adult male Jews, selected from the more moneyed part of the community, were arrested or, as the Nazis liked to call it,"taken into protective custody". Thirty of those arrested were released after a day, either because they were returned servicemen of the 1914-18 war or because they were considered as medically not fit enough to endure the rigours of Dachau concentration camp, where the remaining twenty were sent. As elsewhere, those put into concentration camp on this occasion were individually released during the next few weeks or months either for heavy ransom to the Gestapo or, more likely, on condition that they quit Germany within days.

I do not remember by what means we became aware of all these terrible goings-on and how long it took us to do so. We had no telephone; Nazi controlled radio and newspapers gave only a very belated and minimal indication of what took place. But bad news travels fast, and by breakfast time on the morning of 10th November we knew of the destruction of our synagogue and that plenty of other evil tidings were in the offing. To me there seemed no sense in going to school that day; yet I was told to attend. Was the deliberate burning of our synagogue no acceptable excuse for wagging school? Or if it was, then for how long, for how many days? What would I do instead? Was still going to school a desperate attempt to salvage some sort of normalcy in our life? I don't know. But on the way to school I detoured to the vicinity of the synagogue which was hidden among some side alleys. Some barriers had been hastily thrown up to keep the public away from the ruins, which were still faintly smoking; but one could approach near enough to surmise the full extent of the destruction, which was total, with the cupola having crashed at an angle into the huge heap of debris that had been the outer walls. After a minute or two of staring at the appalling havoc, I continued on my way to school, walking now like a zombie, while the thought "synagogue burnt down, synagogue burnt down" dumbly kept repeating in my mind, to the virtual exclusion of anything else...

Although I was conditioned to rampant antisemitism and bearing up to it and its constant humiliations, I had somehow still hoped that all these vile excesses would stop short of the synagogue and Jewish clergy, as a mark of respectfulness accorded to religion, and in the historical tradition whereby houses of God had been inviolate and were treated as places of immunity and refuge, even in many primitive societies.

Of course such notions were foolish nonsense. For although there were quite a number of instances in history where some such immunity prevailed, they were the exceptions. The frequent desecration of Jewish graves and cemeteries known to take place was of itself enough to demonstrate that the traditional respect for the dead and for religious observance was only a thin cultural veneer that was easily broken.

If there was a trace of rationale in this rudely shattered naive hope of mine, then it manifested itself in the rather embarrassed and guilty silence which greeted us as Rudy and I entered the class room to take our seats next to each other on the left side of the front row. All day long there was

pointed avoidance of us, from teachers and fellow-students alike. And just as well as far as I was concerned, for I could not concentrate on anything the teachers said, as my mind kept repeating again and again "synagogue burnt, synagogue burnt..."

Thus the day's attendance had been just a waste of time. Yet, having gone that day, one went again to school the next day, for the same sort of perfunctory attendance. And, after a weekend break, again on the Monday. But came Tuesday morning, the 15th November, and class had just settled down to start, when the door opened slightly and our class teacher was discreetly called out, for reasons we knew not why, though we sensed something unusual was afoot. A moment later the classroom door half opened and the teacher beckoned by hand gestures to Rudy and me to pack up our things and come out. Now Rudy and I knew, as did the rest of the class, that we were no longer to attend this school. A half-hearted jeer went up from a minority of our erstwhile classmates as Rudy and I made for the door without as much as looking back. Actually both of us were relieved this pointless charade of further attendance by us was over. We were made to wait outside the principal's office while a last school report for each of us was finalised and handed to us. Then we were dismissed and jolly glad to leave the premises of our erstwhile alma mater.

In the intervening days we had become aware of all the other dire effects of the pogrom in Aschaffenburg. Mr Alfons Vogel, an elderly gentleman and philatelist who used to smoke good cigars while he showed me his impressive stamp collection and swapped stamps with me at some weekends, was abducted from his home by five SS-men. So too was Mr Ludwig Loewenthal, a cattle dealer and father of my friend Lothar Loewenthal. Both victims were dragged into the forest near our former dwelling in Gruenewaldstrasse, where each was put up against a tree, heaped with antisemitic abuse and then had several pistol shots fired at him, before being left heavily injured and bleeding. Mr Vogel, with five bullets in him, managed to drag himself to the edge of the forest where he was found after several hours and taken to hospital, but died there after a few days from the wounds received. Mr Loewenthal was eventually found at the spot where he was shot and also rushed to hospital. He was saved after undergoing an operation. After his recovery he managed to migrate to the USA.

Meanwhile we had also learned of the violence the pogrom had assumed in Mittelsinn, Papa's birth place. Fortunately uncle Joseph had been resettled recently into the Jewish Old Age home in Wuerzburg. But Nazi hooligans brought in from elsewhere and wielding axes smashed their way into the two-storied timber house with its walls of wooden tiles which was still the home of my uncle Moses and aunt Helen and two of their children, Martha and Manfred. Thoroughly terrified they all fled through the back door to their next-door gentile neighbours who temporarily hid them in their house while the frenzied mob raged and rampaged through the Kahn house, wildly smashing and plundering and recklessly tossing glass jars of home-made conserves and other goods into the street. Eventually the family was able to flee by train to Frankfurt. There, with the aid of Jewish welfare organisations they obtained a very small and austere abode and lived on in very precarious circumstances. But at least they managed to have my cousin Manfred sent to Switzerland with one of the first rescue transports for Jewish children which were organised from abroad in response to the pogrom emergency.

The event that triggered off all the pogrom outrages was the fatal shooting of Ernst von Rath, a junior German diplomat in Paris, by a desperate 17-year old Jewish lad named Herschel Grynspan who was actually trying to assassinate the German ambassador to France. The misguided shooting followed the deportation of Herschel's parents among some 15,000 Polish Jews resident in Germany across the Polish border a few days earlier. The Poles had refused to admit the deportees, whom they had just deprived of their Polish nationality on the pretext of their extended stay abroad. Sitting and suffering days on end in the open in the November cold of the Polish-German no-man's land, many old and infirm deportees died of exposure.

While few members of the public would have been aware of the appalling details of these deportations, the shooting of von Rath of course made headlines and was presented in the Nazi press as evidence of Jewish hostility to the German people at large. The assassination became the official excuse and pretext for all the outrages of the pogrom as the natural and understandable reaction of the German public. Though Hitler, in a confidential note to Goering at this time wrote:

> *"The public too knows to the last man that political actions like those of the 9th November are organised and executed by the Party, whether or not this is admitted. If in the course of one night all synagogues burn, then that must be somehow organised by the Party."*

In the light of the foregoing, it is interesting now to read what the Nazi press of 11th November 1938 had to say about the antisemitic excesses in Aschaffenburg:

> *REVOLT AT THE COWARDLY ASSASSINATION*
> *Understandable excitement of the populace*
> *The report of the demise of the German diplomat Ernst von Rath, the shocking details of his agonizing death, have let the waves of bitterness which pervade the German people since the cowardly shots of the Jewish murderer Grynszpan beat high, to the openly justified revolt against Jewry, which in its entirety shares the guilt in the turpitude. From all provinces of the Reich come reports of spontaneous demonstrations, of measures of retribution against Jewish buildings and shops. In Aschaffenburg too, the anger at the cowardly assassination led yesterday to anti-Jewish demonstrations. In understandable excitement the popular masses moved in front of Jewish shops, smashed the windows of the displays and demolished the shop fittings. In the early morning hours of Thursday the synagogue caught fire. The great edifice is burnt out. The great cupola is fallen down. The only too understandable revolt against the Jewish riff-raff, which has plunged the*

German people into untold misery, flared up time and again. A number of Jews were taken into protective custody.

For many weeks after the synagogue fire, the general public seemed to avoid the scene of the sacrilege, which was a small and slightly hidden side lane, little used though in the heart of town, and the fresh ruins just lay deserted and untouched. Time and again I wandered there and clambered among all the wreckage, in undisturbed solitude. And I remember how on one of these occasions I placed myself on the approximate spot where I must have stood when I received my barmitzvah sermon by the rabbi and made a solemn vow that as long as I live I would never forget this outrage.

The ruins were eventually cleared up late in February 1939. To mark that occasion, the hatefully gloating local Nazi press had this to say:

ONLY DEBRIS AND OLD IRON

With the final clearance of the Jew temple in Treibgasse, which began on Friday, at last this blemish on the panorama of Aschaffenburg disappears. In our picture we see in the foreground the heavy cupola which during the fire of the temple fell with much hubbub down below. This cupola used to look as if it consisted of pure copper. But not everything is copper which shines red... and so it now turns out during the demolition work that it is just a matter of common iron tin sheet. So even in the very own reservation of our Hebrews the sufficiently well known Jewish sleight of hand: false pretences and much bluff...

Actually the venom of the last paragraph betrays something of the great disappointment which the Nazis felt at the discovery that the cupola was not of copper. For they had anticipated to sell the metal at a tidy profit for the Nazi coffers. Like the huge amounts of compensation which was, by rights, due to Jewish communities who had usually insured their synagogues not only against fire but also against public riot and disturbance, all such compensation payments were, by special Nazi decree, confiscated by the government, officially as communal expiation money for the assassination of von Rath.

And yet far from satisfied with the millions of Reichsmark thus mulcted from its Jews, the greedy Nazi government also decreed that as individual expiation every Jew had to hand over all gold except their wedding rings or gold teeth, together with all precious stones and jewelry and most silverware. In our family these things included quite a number of heirlooms; but all we received in return for our valuables was an official receipt enumerating each item surrendered.

While the rioting, plundering, incendiarism and general destruction and violence of Crystal night was fomented and abetted from up high, odd snags did occur in all the savagery. Stormtroopers in Aschaffenburg received individual written instructions what to do in group assignments, and to

turn up in civvies and set the rioting going. But one of them turned up in full Nazi regalia and hastily had to be sent home to change. And when one group of stormtroopers smashed the show windows of a Jewish mens wear shop, a patrol man from a private security service appeared on the scene, arrested one of them and took him to police headquarters. It took the intervention of the local Standartenfuehrer (colonel in the brownshirt hierarchy) to have him set free again. The synagogue fire was started by one stormtrooper breaking into the building through a window and opening the door from the inside, to admit others. They collected anything combustible, including torah scrolls and set it on fire with the aid of petrol brought in, before shutting the door from the outside and departing. The fire so started spread only slowly. Eventually a passer-by noticed a weak glow from the flames and this led to a fire alarm. The fire brigade rushed to the scene but was prevented by a menacing crowd since gathered before the now brightly burning synagogue from doing its job. Only when the fire threatened to spread to adjacent buildings were they allowed to quench the flames.

Crystal night 1938 was but the ominous harbinger of the infinitely worse Holocaust 1939-45. Yet it also taught the Nazis never more to let a mob run riot in public; for in many places it took them days to restore order and control.

CHAPTER 9: EXODUS

Soon after Crystal Night, the Nazi rulers decreed that nearly every Jew was to adopt the additional given name "Israel", and nearly every Jewess the additional given name "Sarah". Exempted were only those who already had a given name included in an official schedule of names that were deemed to be clearly Jewish. The rather limited schedule included mostly Yiddish names and only a few Biblical names. So I became Robert Leo Israel Kahn, Papa became Meier Israel Kahn, and Mama Lilly Sylvia Sarah Kahn. In fact the only exempt member of our wider family was uncle Moses; whereas uncle Joseph was not exempted - probably in deference to Joseph Goebbels! Even today, my old birth certificate shows a Nazi stamp with swastika endorsing my name change to Robert Leo Israel Kahn with effect from 1st January 1939. For this bureaucratic chicanery the same fee was payable as for any voluntary name change, and it required those affected to change their customary signature. The whole episode was a mild foretaste of the yellow star that all Jews under Nazi sway were forced to wear as from 1942. Neither I nor, I imagine, anybody else fortunate enough to escape the clutches of the Nazis subsequent to such name change has ever bothered to undergo another official name change, but has just dropped the extra name. Yet if I wanted to, I suppose I could legitimately claim to hold the extra given name of Israel even today.

Dr Bloch, our rabbi, had travelled to Palestine during 1938 with a view to try and organise group resettlements there of willing Jews from Aschaffenburg and district, but to no avail. And after Crystal night he and his young family wisely did not return to Germany until after World War II. Meanwhile in Aschaffenburg Papa, as lay head of the Jewish community, and a few others succeeded in having the communal office on the first floor of the community's building next to the destroyed synagogue reopened soon after Crystal night. The place became a hive of activity for mutual help within the battered community and a clearing-house for emigration efforts. Early in spring 1939 permission was obtained to reopen the Jewish school on the ground floor of the building.

Having been expelled from high school, the immediate practical question for Rudi and myself became how we were to spend our time instead. Rudi was sent by his parents to attend an O.R.T. training centre in Frankfurt, to get there some semblance of an apprenticeship in turning and fitting. (O.R.T. was an American sponsored international Jewish organisation to train Jewish youngsters in various manual trade skills that would fit them for migration). In my case it was thought I lacked the necessary aptitude and inclination for this sort of training. Instead I concentrated on trying to learn some English, using for this purpose a popular self-teaching text titled "Englisch lernen ein Vergnuegen" ("Learning English a pleasure") and also a very good self-teaching kit called "Tausend Worte Englisch" ("A thousand words of English"). At the same time I earned some pocket money by working for two Jewish brothers who were still in the process of winding up their former business affairs and required some clerical help. They were so pleased with my efforts and the constructive initiative I put into the job, that they paid me about twice as much as what had been

agreed upon. I remember Papa was very thrilled - not because of the extra money as such, but because it indicated the quality of my work in what was my first ever paid employment.

Of course Rudi's ORT schooling and my beginner's study of English - Mama, though not Papa, had already been at it for a year or two - were all part of an effort to equip and prepare for life in another country. If the quest for emigration had been the ever-growing desire among Germany's Jews since the Nazis' usurpation of power, then Crystal night made it their all encompassing and increasingly desperate preoccupation and main concern, precisely as the Nazis wanted it.

But while pressing Jews to quit the fatherland, the Nazis simultaneously deprived them of the limited available means to do so, by placing ever heavier financial and material restrictions and ransoms on those departing. At the same time a world still reeling from the economic effects of the Great Depression usually required that immigrants should not create more unemployment in their new country by competing for scarce jobs. Excepting the few with skills in short supply, the only Jews to find refuge abroad were those with capital to create new jobs or at least enough to support themselves. With the Nazis curtailing such capital export, it would require assured private charity to find a new haven for most Jews seeking escape.

True, the USA still admitted immigrants and allowed them to compete on the general labour market, despite its own millions of unemployed. But rigid annual immigration quotas according to the migrant's country of birth meant that there were long queues for the German, Austrian and Polish quotas. The U.S. government would not countenance liberalising of these quotas, even though those for many other countries were not used up, nor would it bring forward the quotas for any future years to help the plight of German, Austrian and Polish Jews. And so Papa, Mama and myself ended up during 1937 with registration waiting number 18,281 or thereabouts at Stuttgart, one of the three U.S.Consulates General in Germany. It would take several years for this number to come up for processing, but it was our one desperate hope.

Crystal night did not result in any foreign government relaxing its economic immigration restrictions to help Jews under Nazi oppression. However, it shocked world public opinion sufficiently to do something to try and save at least some of the children involved. This led to the mobilisation of Jewish and non-Jewish charitable organisations in several countries. They procured private funds to temporarily support thousands of mostly teenage children and thus enable their admission pending more permanent settlement, maybe elsewhere, at some indeterminate future date.

Countries participating in this movement to save Jewish children included Switzerland, Holland, Belgium, France and Britain. As already briefly mentioned in chapter 8, my cousin Manfred gained a place on one of the "Kindertransports", as the special trains organised for this purpose came to be known. His transport found him refuge in Switzerland.

Naturally there was much competition for places on these Kindertransports, and to be selected entailed some intelligence testing and a medical examination. In my case it was assessed that I should have a thyroid operation before I medically passed muster. Papa was furious that our Jewish family doctor, an old friend of his, would not gloss over my goitre and thus jeopardised my chances of selection. However, I had the operation which was due to a goitre inherited from Oma and Mama.

Meanwhile Mama had enlisted the help of her cousin Dr Irma Weinberg, daughter of Opa's sister Recha in Frankfurt. Irma had migrated to Holland by finding professional employment in a large Jewish mental asylum near Apeldoorn. At Mama's instigation, Irma secured nominations for Kindertransport to Holland not only for me but also for my friends Rudi and Lotte Sternheimer. Imagine, how shattered and desperate we felt when at the last moment the nominations came to nought, as the 7000 places available for Holland were already fully taken up by others.

By now it was April 1939 and for several weeks we all felt utterly helpless, hopeless and trapped. Then, early in May, came unexpected relief. It seemed like a heavenly miracle when we received advice that places on a Kindertransport to England had been secured for the Sternheimer children and myself. The lucky break came through the good offices of Paul Phillip, cousin of the Sternheimer family and a friend of Papa. Paul had contrived to migrate to England in 1933 by establishing a small import agency for German toys in London. He was now a member in a suburban Jewish congregation at Finchley, which had set up its own little organisation to rescue some Jewish children. Paul's efforts had paralleled those of Mama's cousin Irma, in this instance with Dr Israel Porush, the congregation's young rabbi, who headed the committee and its selection of nominations. This was the same Dr Porush whom I was to meet again during the war in Sydney, where he had meanwhile become senior minister of the Great Synagogue, the leading rabbinical position in Australia.

In retrospect the seeming calamity of missing out on refuge places in Holland proved to be our salvation, as otherwise we three youngsters would have forfeited the later opportunity of refuge in England. Instead we would have been trapped once more by the Nazis when they invaded the Lowlands a year later.

Long as we had waited for the kindertransport opportunity, once it came, things had to happen fast. There was only a week and a half in which to equip me with three suits - my first ones ever with long trousers - and other clothing to fill the one suitcase of personal wear etc. that was my only permitted luggage and for which even then a thousand marks was payable as so-called Reich Escape Tax. This ransom was roughly equivalent to some three months of Papa's service pension and ate heavily into my parents' meagre savings.

To get my emigration papers required an official interview, for which Papa and I had to front up jointly at the local Gestapo headquarters. These were situated on the ground floor of Aschaffenburg's castle (a fact which at the end of the war prompted some of their newly liberated victims to set fire to the already bomb-damaged edifice, thus making its eventual restoration much more difficult).

The interviewing Gestapo officer was quite brusque and menacing in his routine questioning of us and at one stage nearly exploded when he noticed Papa whispering to me. He turned on me and yelled: "What did he say, now tell me what did he say!" I don't remember now what it was, though I doubt it was anything of real importance. I just looked at the official and then at Papa, wondering what to do. Papa looked at me and said calmly: "Just tell him what I said", which I then did. The Gestapo man was satisfied and quickly finished the interview, suddenly turning all civil and friendly.

Passover that year began a few days before our departure and I shall never forget the happiest and most memorable Seder which we had jointly with the Sternheimers at their home.

Commemorating the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt became ever so much more meaningful by being joined with the celebration of the impending exodus of us children from Nazi Germany.

Wednesday, 17th May was the momentous day of my departure. That morning I took farewell from dear Mama at home; for it was agreed all round that it would have been too much of an emotional wrench for her to see me off at the station, watching the train depart. Whereas Papa not only came to the train, but accompanied me to Frankfurt. There, at the main railway station a big special train stood waiting. It was the southern half of our kindertransport. The northern half, a similar train, set out from Berlin, to converge with ours on Hoek van Holland, There all their young passengers were to embark for England. As the big train started rolling out of the huge station hall, Papa and Karl Sternheimer, Rudi and Lotte's father, waved us goodbye from the platform and we leaned out of the window of our compartment that we shared with the Gunzenhaeuser sisters, the only two other Aschaffenburg children who made it with us on this Kindertransport.

Dear, wonderful Papa and Mama, how long will it be before we are reunited in the free world? Or shall I indeed ever see you again? Now there welled up in me all the tormenting thoughts which I had been able to suppress since the news of my impending liberation. Clearly, conditions for Jews still under the thrall of Hitler would continue to deteriorate one way or another, as they had done since 1933. It would be a frantic race now for our American immigration quota number to come up before Jewish existence in the evil Reich became completely impossible. Meanwhile, I knew, I dare not, must not despair, if only in justice to my beloved parents. For my rescue, I understood, was their dearest wish and if they too were to make it into the free world after all, I would have to be there ready and fit to support them in their later years.

With these reflections I calmed myself and restored my morale sufficiently to join in the cheerfully expectant and optimistic feeling that prevailed among my fellow travellers. However, the train had not gone very far yet when word was passed from compartment to compartment that we were no longer permitted to take with us abroad our ten Reichsmark - the pathetically measly amount of cash which the authorities had allowed each of us to carry in addition to our single and heavily ransomed suitcase of personal gear. Provision would be made for us to send the cash back to our parents. But at the same time it was rather pointedly suggested that we might see fit to make over the money to Zionist funds. I was appalled, furious - and skeptical. Could the Nazis really be bothered to stop at the very last moment these piddly amounts they had already approved? The over-hasty recommendation for us to pass the money to Zionist funds made me suspect that the whole thing might turn out to be a shabby and despicable manoeuvre for nothing more than some extra Zionist fund-raising.

But as I discussed this matter with the others in my compartment, it became clear to me that I could not afford to take a chance. If the whole thing was not a Zionist bluff, the Nazis were liable to search us at the border for hidden cash, and to be detained at the last moment for carrying a lousy ten marks would be the absolute end and perdition. Though just in case it was only a Zionist stratagem, the fundraisers should not get anything from me. Therefore I insisted on returning my money to my parents, whereas all the others donated theirs to the collection. (Later, in my first letter from Papa, he expressed surprise and puzzlement at having received back my ten marks.)

Amid these goings on and discussions I did not watch the passing picturesque Rhenish landscape as much as I normally would have, and it did not seem very long before I saw looming ahead the big twin Gothic cathedral spires which unmistakably told me that we had reached Cologne. This was already new territory for me and heralded our coming closer to the German frontier, even more so when we passed through Aachen. Soon after the train came to a halt at what proved to be the German border station with Holland on this line.

The blue uniforms of the red-capped station master and his two or three visible assistants were overshadowed and outnumbered by the black outfits of the gang of S.S. men who were spread out along the platform and awaited our arrival looking grim, cruel, aloof and contemptuous. Some patrolled the platform while others boarded the train for what seemed rather cursory examination. There was no suggestion of searching us for money or anything else; but the prolonged delay and all the toing and froing of the S.S. men made us nervous.

Finally, after perhaps half an hour, the train was allowed to proceed. And so we crossed the border into Holland and freedom. It was a most marvellous and exhilarating feeling and I had to pinch myself to make sure it was not just a dream. Even then, the whole Dutch landscape looked so flat and open. It took me a real effort of will to believe that a mere political borderline on the map worked seemingly like magic to halt the odious Nazi rule from spilling across from the other side of the frontier. After all, borderlines had already failed to do so in less open territory, such as the German frontiers with Austria and Czechoslovakia.

But these uneasy doubts and vague forebodings of what was to befall here within a year were set aside when our train stopped at Heerlen, the first Dutch railway station on our route. Here we were welcomed by each of us receiving a beautiful packed lunch that included, if I remember rightly, a big juicy orange, a luscious apple and sandwiches with lashings of butter and gorgeous Edam cheese. The lunches had been lovingly prepared for us by a Dutch Jewish organisation and the quality of the butter and cheese which we had not experienced under Goerings "Guns before Butter" policy illustrated and proved to me what I had learned in my school geography about the rich, superior dairy produce of the Dutch.

The joyful sense of liberation among us kept increasing as our kindertransport went steaming through the prosperous plains of Holland with their neat, friendly looking townships. We read the Dutch names and inscriptions we passed and marvelled how much of it we could understand or guess at, bringing home to us the affinity of the language to ours. In this exuberant mood and sense of discovery I wrote, all in mock Dutch, my first mail to Mama and Papa. It was an international reply postcard (postage prepaid in Germany) and instead of "Liebe Eltern" I remember starting it off with "Liebe Eldeern.." and going on in that vein.

On and on the train went, eventually skirting the great urban expanses of Utrecht and then Rotterdam, and I grew more expectant and impatient as we came closer to the coast and so to my first ever actual sight of the sea. I was eager to discover whether this would prove to be the memorable experience Mr Schloss, my Jewish teacher, had spoken of when he taught us the "bracha", the Jewish blessing, to be said on beholding the sea. "At first sight it will look to you like a huge wall", Mr Schloss had said. I had found this difficult to conceive and therefore to believe. But when finally the coastline came into our view, the event proved him to be right. And even today

I can still contrive to perceive the sea in this manner when I adopt a stance and attitude which no longer takes the familiar seaside panorama for granted.

On arrival at Hoek van Holland late in the afternoon, we found the big ferry steamer waiting which was to take us across the English Channel that night, and also the kindertransport train from Berlin. The two trainloads of "Kinder" made up most, if not all of the ferry's passengers on this occasion. On slowly filing aboard, each with our single suitcase, we were allotted our places for the night, two to each cabin under deck, before settling down to a big meal in the dining room upstairs. I have no recollection of the menu on this occasion; except that it confirmed to me what I had heard countless times, viz. that passengers at sea are very well fed.

Rudi and I shared a cabin and after a good night's sleep we were up early, packed up and on deck by six o'clock, long before breakfast, surveying the ship and the sea around it in the sharp fresh morning breeze, and exchanging polite "good morning"s with the officers and other crew we encountered. Our major objective was to witness the approach to the English coast and the small harbour of Harwich, where we were to disembark.

After docking and breakfast we were shepherded through the brief landing formalities onto a passenger platform at the adjacent railway station, Already from the ferry, I had discerned rows of goods trains, most of whose wagons seemed oddly short compared with those of the German railways. On each wagon and steam engine I could pick out the initials of one or another of the four British railway companies - LNER, which I knew to stand for London and North Eastern Railways, LMS for London Midland Scottish, the biggest of the four companies, GWR for the Great Western Railways and SR for Southern Railways, the smallest of the four. Knowing that Harwich was in LNER territory, I found it interesting to note the extensive intermingling of the wagons from the other three companies. It made me wonder when and how they sorted them out again.

Perhaps it was just as well to fall into such reveries, as we were left cooling our heels on the open station platform for quite a long time. The sun was shining and I began to feel very thirsty. Unable to spot a water tap anywhere, I accosted a solitary passer-by on the platform and asked him in my best halting English:

"Excuse me, can you tell me where is drinking water?"

The well-dressed Englishman looked at me thoughtfully for a moment, then apparently decided he too did not know the answer to that question. Instead he reached into his hip pocket, pressed a silver sixpence into my hand, pointed to the station refreshment room and walked off in the opposite direction. I was so surprised by this gesture, that I had difficulty in muttering an embarrassed "thank you" while he was still within earshot.

This innocent little episode left me quite downcast and depressed. Here was I, a penniless young refugee freshly landed on a foreign shore, and the first time I opened my mouth in the new environment, I inadvertently assumed the role of a street mendicant! It was a terrible and devastating sensation for the well brought up son of a highly respectable county court judge. At the same time I felt bound to honour the gentleman's kindness and generosity by doing what he intended me to do, though I did not really want to - go to the counter of the cafe and indulge in what for me was the extravagance of ordering a glass of lemonade, for which I was charged fourpence. Having

quenched my thirst I carefully pocketed the change and vowed to myself I would hang on to the two pennies acquired under such enormous emotional stress.

Not long thereafter, the special passenger train appeared, to take us from Harwich to London. From my window seat I took in the view of the Essex landscape, at first wide open; but as we approached the capital turning fairly rapidly into miles upon miles of seemingly interminable suburbs, as far as the eye would reach. The closer we got to the inner parts of London, the drearier, dirtier and more decrepit the rows and terraces of houses became. I had often seen photos and reports of Britain's miserable slums in the German press, but nothing that really prepared me for the appalling sights that now crowded in on me and which climaxed right outside Liverpool street Station, our terminus. I remember describing the dreadful slum scene just beyond the station as a "hell of crumbling brickwork" later in the first letter to my parents.

I think the kindertransport split up here into various components, according to sponsorships. But two or more busloads of us were spirited off to what was probably Woburn House, the co-ordinating Bloomsbury headquarters and nerve centre of the various British organisations involved in the rescue of Jews from the clutches of the Nazis. There, crowded into a stuffy and overheated large room, we were welcomed and briefly addressed in English by a Jewish lady whose words were largely wasted on me, either because of my limited grasp of English or, more likely, because I was distracted by her blatant cosmetics, which to one still accustomed to the old-fashioned, modest German way of unobtrusive lipstick and face powder, came perilously close to the facial make-up of a clown.

Eventually we were detailed into small groups for our respective final destinations. If I remember rightly it was at this stage that we were separated from Rudi's sister, who like other girls in the transport was taken into the home and individual care of some family. Whereas the boys were allotted to a number of contingents going to diverse group destinations arranged for them.

I was unprepared for the intense road traffic of London. And so, if the bus ride from Liverpool st station had struck me as perilous, then I found the private car ride which now took us to Victoria station positively hair-raising. But my nerves were quickly soothed in the station restaurant, where we were treated to tea and buttered toast. It was my first real experience of toasted white bread and of English style tea. Not realising that the Indian or Ceylonese teas prevalent in Britain were "quite a different cup of tea" from the Chinese teas to which I was accustomed from home, I had feared that the addition of milk would result in the same kind of soapy-tasting solution which I had rejected at home. Instead I discovered that without milk the strong potion put before me was so bitter with tannin as to make it only fit for tanning leather.

After these refreshments, Rudi and I together with a few other boys were put on a train that took us to Westgate-on-sea. In this small seaside town, just east of the large coastal resort of Margate, we were received at the station and taken to our new home for the time being, located barely a hundred yards off the beach. Our address was the San Remo Hotel, a small Jewish hotel of perhaps one-star rating and with a completely Jewish clientele of holiday-makers. Our quarters were not in the hotel proper, but in an adjacent building that had seen better days as an annexe or extension of the San Remo. Now it was converted into a refugee hostel for boys like us, of which it housed some eighty or ninety. It was an eminently sensible and suitable arrangement for all parties concerned. For

it conveniently afforded extra income to the San Remo management without incurring the heavy cost of refurbishing the annexe. At the same time it provided at moderate outlay by our sponsors, a quasi-Jewish environment for us in very congenial holiday surroundings in the fair weather corner of England, as this area was known.

A day or two after our arrival, I found myself late in the afternoon strolling alone along the fairly deserted beach promenade in the direction of Margate, when I became aware of the sound of many voices hollering and beheld their source - a bunch of twenty or more exuberant teenage lads making merry on the sands. Almost instinctively I stopped in my tracks. If this had been Germany, the prudent thing for me to do would have been to turn on my heels and take evasive action rather than expose myself to the hazard of being abused, menaced or otherwise molested and maybe beaten up as a Jew by young Nazi louts. But what am I afraid of, I asked myself. This is not Nazi Germany. This is free democratic England. These young people are not fellows who have been brutalised in the Hitler youth, nor do they even know that I am a Jew.

But still my legs would not carry me forward. This is ridiculous, I kept telling myself. In my heart I knew I had to fight and overcome this thing, which I now realise was a self-protective conditioned reflex built up in an environment of persecution. What was the use of being in free democratic England, I asked myself, if I could not overcome this fear. And so, finally, with an immense effort of willpower, I forced myself to walk past the boisterous youths. They took no particular notice of me.

And I realised it was only then I gained freedom from the Nazis psychologically as well as physically.

CHAPTER 10: WESTGATE

Our refugee hostel in the San Remo Hotel annexe was a joint venture of four organisations, coordinated by Woburn House in London, with each of the four sponsoring some of the teenagers temporarily housed in it. When Rudi and I arrived on the scene, all boys were under the control and leadership of Mr Otto Werner, who was assisted by his wife and Mr Corney. All three were non-Jews in their thirties. Mr Corney and Mrs Werner were English, Mr Werner was a political refugee from Hitler Germany. Despite his somewhat mercurial temperament, he was of pleasant personality, and his colleague Mr Corney was a particularly charming and likeable character. Both were veterans of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil war.

The lower floor of our two-storey annexe building was taken up with communal facilities such as kitchen and dining-hall, and the small dormitories making up the rest of the floor were inhabited by boys sponsored by the major one of the four organisations, the "Movement for the Care of Children". They had been transferred to Westgate from their erstwhile refuge, a former holiday camp at Dovercourt, near Harwich, where conditions were apparently somewhat less favourable than here at Westgate.

The upper floor contained dormitories and ablution facilities for the boys of the three other sponsoring bodies, which in many ways operated as one organisation, under the hegemony of Bnei Brith. The rooms had no heating, and during my first night in cool mid-May, it got so cold that I, being accustomed to the warmth of a German eiderdown feather-bed, found the couple of woollen blankets of indifferent quality that were provided instead woefully inadequate. The cold kept me awake all night, though I got up time and again to pile clothing out of my suitcase on top of the blankets to try and get warmer. It was to take me several weeks before I became gradually acclimatised to the rather Spartan blanket provision. Meanwhile the approach of the warmer season also helped.

Boys in the hostel originated from Vienna and from many parts of Germany, notably from Breslau, Berlin and Cologne. If I had been apprehensive how I, reared as an only child, would make out living in a community of teenagers, such fears were quickly dissipated as I found myself fitting in very well and naturally with what were generally very good youngsters. A particularly fine fellow of about my age turned out to be my namesake. His full name was Robert Ludwig Kahn and as he had arrived before me he inevitably became Robert L.Kahn I, and I became Robert L.Kahn II for postal purposes. We were the only namesakes in the hostel; but when we compared our ancestry to try and see whether there was any trace of relationship, improbable as that seemed, we were surprised to discover that there was far more likelihood that our respective mothers might be very distantly related!

Domestic routine resembled that of a boarding school. Except for laundry, which was collected weekly and washed by a commercial firm, we had to tidy our rooms, make our beds, and polish our shoes. Meals were prepared and served to each table, but we were regularly rostered for kitchen fatigues such as potato peeling and especially dishwashing and drying. Sometimes these kitchen duties also extended into the San Remo hotel proper.

The absence of featherbeds was just one of the new living conditions I had trouble to get used to. I had to sew on my own buttons and darn the holes in my socks, things which Mama had been trying to teach me but which I had spurned. I soon discovered that resorting to such easy shortcuts as pulling the holes in my socks together with a few stitches was unsatisfactory and hurt my toes, and that the wooden darning egg which Mama had insisted on including in my luggage together with assorted needles, yarns and darning wools was quite indispensable.

There were, to me, the novelties of English food. At the breakfast table I loved cereals such as Kelloggs' cornflakes, rice bubbles and shredded wheat but detested porridge. Kippers were tolerable. But hot meals at lunch or dinner were most days so stodgy as to amply confirm the international ill repute of English cookery that managed to turn perfectly good raw materials into quite unappetising dishes.

In my letters to Mama and Papa I commented adversely on some of the food we received. Perhaps it was an ungrateful and rotten thing to do, considering how they would gladly have put up with my diet if they could have gained my liberation from the Nazis into the bargain. But on the other hand they pleaded time and again to let them know everything I experienced and how I felt about it. This I did as best I could, not only because I knew it was my duty but also because I enjoyed writing to them. And they gave every indication that they were highly gratified by the quantity and quality of my letters, which were immensely important to them and served to sustain their morale in the conditions they had to endure.

We were encouraged by the hostel administration to write home to the extent that they paid the tuppence halfpenny postage for an overseas letter once a week. For anything above that we had to rely on international reply coupons or reply-paid postcards received from home, for pocket money there was none, nor could our parents send us any. Eventually Papa arranged for uncle Alfred and aunt Alma to take turns to send me a monthly dollar by letter. That proved a great help for me in Westgate and even more so later in London. Meanwhile Papa and Mama included in their letters an occasional block of chocolate, but the sending of parcels of other goods we missed was a rare and tricky matter, because of the immense bureaucratic rigmaroles involved at the Nazi German postal source and because most of the desirable things they might have been able to send were subject to much customs duty at the English destination which made them quite unaffordable to us.

The kitchen duties at Westgate I found rather burdensome; not so much because of their nature but because of the huge amounts of pots and crockery and cutlery to be dealt with, for hours on end. Worse luck, one of my rostered duty shifts coincided with the time my long-missed heart-throb, Rudi's sister Lotte, was to come by car for a brief visit. I had to move heaven and hell to be relieved from kitchen duty that day. Yet after Rudi and I had greeted Lotte and the adult trio who had brought her, it was decided to go for an excursion in their small car. This was okay by me; but in the event I had to be left behind as the car would not hold more than the driver and four passengers. I felt absolutely shattered with disappointment, not for missing an excursion, but for missing the rare afternoon with Lotte. Then on top of that to go back instead to dishwashing and pot scraping would have been really the pits. I thought I needed at least the afternoon off as a

consolation prize, but was later on severely reprimanded for not having reported back for duty when the cause for my leave of absence had disappeared.

Formal classes in English at the hostel were conducted for us almost every weekday morning for perhaps a couple of hours. Their effectiveness was limited, due to different standards of the pupils, antiquated teaching methods and aids, and the fact that outside the classes we continued to converse in German and rarely mingled with English folk that would have forced us to communicate in the new language as best we could. From that point of view Mr Werner encouraged us boys to try and acquire English girlfriends. But opportunities to do so were scarce, although every now and then a dance social was arranged. In my own case, my progress in English rested mainly on my self-teaching kit and on the study of daily newspapers. The newspaper method was and is particularly useful. It provides one with common vocabulary with much repetition or revision, yet without getting boring, because there is a natural incentive to try and understand, and many new words and usages are gleaned or guessed from context and expectation. During our English lessons Mr Werner certainly encouraged us to resort to the popular national dailies that in the main were provided from the hotel the day after their use there.

Of course I felt a natural affinity for newspapers, as an eager reader of them since my schooldays, and for years having cherished fond dreams and hopes of becoming a noted newspaper editor myself in later life. To that end I had already made a halting first effort by devising, at home, a little periodical of crossword and other puzzles plus a serial story, with its handful of copies circulating among parents and close friends only, all this gladly encouraged by Papa.

But now I perceived a real need and opportunity for a periodical to serve exclusively the inhabitants and affairs of our hostel. I had no difficulty in recruiting a couple of like-minded boys to form with me an editorial committee and staff, especially as I volunteered to do most of the writing and typing myself and required the others mainly for feeding me with news and other ideas for subject matter. The paper was to be in German, appearing once a fortnight, produced on a typewriter and published as a wall paper, that is to say each of its eight or so foolscap size pages - some typed in double column - fastened with drawing pins onto a large board displayed in a prominent place. Our hostel leaders agreed and made the necessary typewriter and stationery available for my use. Indeed the only initial problem was what to call the newspaper. Finally Hans Herzfeld, my main collaborator, hit on the idea of calling it "Die Heulboje" (The "Whistling Buoy"). This was an allusion to the whistling buoy, anchored two or three kilometres offshore from Westgate, whose continually penetrating foghorn was triggered into action by every onset of misty weather. In his introductory editorial, Hans Herzfeld explained that in its own way our paper intended to be just as nagging and admonitory. But in actual fact it developed into a paper largely filled with humorous and satiric comment on our hostel scene.

I was able to make four carbon copies of each typed page, with the original and first carbon copy going onto two separate display boards, one copy retained by myself after reading it out aloud to all and sundry at dinner time, and one copy for Hans Herzfeld. The remaining copy I posted to my parents, as a much appreciated supplement to my regular mail to them. Altogether, there were six issues of the "Heulboje". But after the fourth issue the intervals between publication lengthened, as we began to run short of suitable subject matter. I still regret that, unlike all the mail from my

parents, I did not preserve my own copy of each issue to this day, as they would have been a wonderful souvenir of my time in Westgate and would have provided valuable source material for this chapter. Instead, in an uncharacteristic fit of depression, I destroyed them at a later stage of my English sojourn.

During the first two months or so after Rudi's and my arrival at Westgate there continued the odd trickle of boys coming to or departing from the hostel, at any rate on our upper floor, and this eventually gave rise to a proposed general reshuffle of dormitory occupancies. We boys were to be given the chance to express our preferences with whom we would like to share, and Rudi and I both found ourselves on a small committee to sort this out. At my suggestion each boy was invited to submit to the committee a piece of paper bearing his name on top and below it in preferential order several names of boys he would be happy to have as room mates. Try as we might, we on the Committee found it impossible to satisfy everybody's preferences. In the end I discovered that by completely ignoring the preferences of three boys (whom nobody had included in his list) we could satisfy everybody else, thus giving the greatest happiness to the greatest number, as it were. We allocated dormitories accordingly, setting aside a three-room dormitory for the three isolates that had emerged from our sociogram exercise. As expected, the three chaps felt absolutely outraged, but the committee would not budge. And a week after the hostel leadership had endorsed our plan, we found to our pleasant surprise that the three isolates thus forced together had become quite good mates, and so everybody ended up satisfied.

For sport, we were taught to play rounders, which was also supposed to prepare us for cricket. But when we were taken to see a local cricket match, most of us could only watch in bewildered incomprehension and marvel at the seeming idleness and meaningless standing around of so many players. This is the kind of first impression cricket makes on many Continentals and has been tellingly described by, I think, Mark Twain. For my part, I maintained this prejudice from first impression until later in life my son's schoolboy enthusiasm for the game forced me to a re-appraisal.

Apart from rounders our only sport was swimming, and with a beautiful beach almost at our doorstep and plenty of good warm weather coming up there was lots of it. And then there were organised hikes and sightseeing excursions to such places as Ramsgate or Broadstairs. (One outing to Manston aerodrome has already been described at the end of chapter six). To nearby Margate we usually went on our own, i.e. in gangs of two or three, visiting the seaside and pier there and time and again "Dreamland", as the town's magnificent amusement park was called. Even with next to no money to spend, we still managed to have a great time there, admiring the attractions and speculating on what happened inside the various sideshows, especially one which we suspected to be little more than a facade for a huge brothel, judging by the constant parading of gaudy girls in scanty garb on the platform at the front entrance, and the amazingly large number of mysterious looking closed chambers at the rear of the stage. We would have dearly loved to understand what the barker on the platform spouted forth; but our beginner's English was not yet adequate to the task. On the other hand it required no competence in the language to get the drift of what we could observe en route to Dreamland.

All along the inland side of the beach promenade that ran from Westgate to Margate there stretched a well-kept lawn. On most sunny summer days couples by the score were to be seen

distributed over these grasslands, all prone and shamelessly copulating, oblivious to the many passers-by who seemed as unconcerned and taking as little notice as if these goings on were the most natural thing in the world (which, of course, they were in one sense). But it was a matter of much wonderment and discreet comment among us refugee lads, who would never have expected to behold such blatant wholesale promiscuity except perhaps among the reputedly naughty and degenerate French. One scene that truly amazed me was that of a couple clutching each other in joyful coitus while right next to them the parents of one were calmly laying out a picnic spread for the family. In all my life before or since I have never witnessed anything like these scenes anywhere else.

Well might one ask what marked out the meadows near Margate for so much public licentiousness. To be sure, we were told the town was a favourite venue for Britain's Labour Party and Tories to hold their annual conventions, where they debated and hammered out their political platforms and programs. Even so, who would have thought they would take grassroots democracy so literally?

Soon after my arrival in Westgate Mr Corney organised a choir among the boys with one of the senior lads from Dovercourt as the conductor. Frequent choir practices were held and I was among the bass voices. Our repertory ranged from English songs to liturgical Hebrew and modern Israeli tunes, but nothing German. We came to perform frequently before the guests of the San Remo hotel, and occasionally at other Westgate venues. Our performances earned so much applause and goodwill (perhaps even some cash?) that eventually in appreciation of our efforts Mr Corney took the choir in a busload to the beautiful city of Canterbury, where we were shown all the historical sights and lovely scenery, and were treated to an unforgettable river barge ride in which we had to duck our heads every so often as the waterway passed beneath old buildings as well as under low-slung bridges. Our tour culminated in a visit to Canterbury cathedral, where I first set eyes on the picturesque Dr Hewlett Johnson, the famous Red Dean of Canterbury, so described not because of the colour of his shoulder garb, as I used to think at first, but because of the colour of his political sympathies, of which he made no secret. I was to see him again a few years after World War II when he appeared as star turn and guest of Honour at a huge Nuclear Disarmament Rally in Melbourne.

A sub-dean, who was a personal friend of Mr Corney, guided us around the cathedral and up one of its spires which afforded from its top platform a commanding view over the whole Canterbury scene. Subsequently he led us into the crypt below the cathedral, and there among the resounding echo of the many groin arches we showed the sub-dean our thanks and appreciation by singing to him from our Jewish repertoire, in what we took to be a private performance. We had descended into one end of the crypt by a narrow staircase in the tower. But we left the crypt by a gateway that gently sloped upwards till it drew level with the cathedral ground floor. There, to our immense surprise, we found nearly all the current crop of cathedral attenders and sightseers had assembled, curious and lured on by the unfamiliar sound of our singing. And so we departed, feeling rather exalted at the thought of having made history by making, for a change, visitors to one of England's most famous churches listen to Hebrew melodies in its hallowed halls...

Back at Westgate Rudi and I were occasionally visited by Rabbi Dr Porush and his wife, who would take us for a little walk along the beach and inquire after our well-being. Their friendly interest and personal concern for our welfare made us feel good. But the rabbi's concern went further, in that he felt a more positively Jewish environment would be a boon for the boys. So when the Dovercourt boys departed with Messrs Werner and Corney about the end of July, he arranged for a new leadership for the rest of us under a refugee rabbi, Dr Emil Lichtigfeld.

I found our new head to be a very kindhearted and sympathetic man, and took an early instinctive liking to him. But somehow the new regime did not find favour with some of the boys who revolted against it, possibly because there was a bit more emphasis on Jewish religious ways, though not oppressively so. Others were indifferent to the change of leadership but easily led along by the rebels, especially as the rabbi was too gentle in his ways to curb them, and this was taken as a sign of ineffectiveness and weakness.

I could see the man was in trouble and as wilful disorder grew he gave indications that he was just about ready to throw in the towel and quit the job, something I would have hated to happen. But what could I do to stop the rot? Then I remembered I had the power of the Press. And so I wrote an impassioned leading article for the next issue of the Heulboje in defence of the rabbi. Under the heading "Es wird dunkel um Dr Lichtigfeld" (it is getting dark around Dr Lightfield) I defiantly stated my championship for the rabbi and exposed the hollowness, thoughtlessness and stupidity of the opposition to a man of such obvious goodness.

The fact that I openly went against the stream and wrote from a youngster's point of view rather than from a disapproving adult's was probably enough to sway some of the indifferent boys in my direction, and made others follow suit. The revolt then quickly fizzled out. When Papa read my leading article in the copy I sent him, he praised me in his next letter for my moral courage in deciding to speak up against the rebellious multitude. But for me it had been a simple matter. Damn it all, I liked the guy, so when I saw him in strife, I just resorted to my favourite weapon, "the pen", to battle on his behalf.

Meanwhile it turned out that the good rabbi, in his predicament, had turned to the Porushs for help or advice. This prompted another visit to Westgate by Rabbi and Mrs Porush, during which they pleaded with Rudi and me to show a good example to the other boys, and to enlist their sympathy by reminding them that Dr Lichtigfeld was a refugee like themselves. In response I told the Porushs that their intercession had come too late. I had already done my bit for Dr Lichtigfeld and in my estimate the crisis at the helm was now as good as over. As indeed it was.

In the event Rabbi Dr Lichtigfeld proved indeed to be a very good and benevolent leader who was to stand us in good stead as summer drew to an end and we were slated to move away from our Westgate holiday venue. We were to be sent to another refugee hostel prepared for us at Croydon, in the south of Greater London, and there was some suggestion that this could prove to be a stepping stone towards placing us soon into some form of paid employment, apprenticeship or traineeship, although our entry permits to Britain specifically prohibited our entering the British labour market. Of course such restrictions might conceivably change with the changing circumstances of the gathering war clouds. Right through the mounting political crisis we still

observed the regular daily passage overhead of the Lufthansa plane that, seemingly unconcerned and unaffected, carried our first class international mail between Britain and Germany.

As luck would have it, the war clouds came to a burst while we were on our way by bus to London on the fateful morning of 3rd September 1939. When we boarded our chartered bus after breakfast in Westgate, Britain was officially still at peace. By the time we reached Croydon, Chamberlain's reluctant ultimatum to Hitler had expired and as a result both Britain and France were once more at war with Germany. As we approached the capital city we found it covered and defended by a vast anti-aircraft network of steel rope suspended from hundreds of floating blimps dotting the sky but firmly anchored in the ground - London's famous balloon barrage. That night, as we provisionally bedded down in our new quarters, we were roused again by the wailing sirens of an air raid alarm. However, no enemy planes appeared and not long after we heard the reassuring steady blare of the "all clear". It was the only alert I experienced. When London's sirens heralded the actual approach of Goering's Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain, some ten months later, I was on my way to Australia. But that is a story for a later chapter.

During the last fortnight of peace both Rudi and I had reached the age of sixteen, and that was to bring us within the purview of the Aliens Classification Tribunals that were set up on the outbreak of war to sort out friend from foe among the foreigners resident in Britain. Rudi and I had shared the same experiences and fate since our first day at primary school, and the very closeness of our ages which made us classifiable aliens at virtually the same time seemed to bear this out once more. Yet the next chapter will show how the seemingly trivial difference of five days between our respective sixteenth birthdays - his on the 22nd August and mine on the 27th - made, by a quirk of fate, all the difference between our futures. A combination of war-time exigencies and geographical accidents were soon to separate our ways and have Rudi forcibly shipped to Canada whereas I was destined soon after to be deported to Australia.

CHAPTER 11: LONDON

Our new hostel in South Croydon occupied the premises of an abandoned small boarding school for girls. But the sprawling two-storey building and the generous grounds in which it sat were clearly those of a former stately mansion, whose interior and exterior architecture made no special concession to the functional requirements of a school. And whatever little adaptation had been made to serve the needs of schoolgirls left the Victorian standard of fittings, plumbing and heating as inefficient as it always had been and as splendidly obsolete as it had become with the years since it was built.

The number of us boys was now roughly halved from what it had been in Westgate, and instead of the staff resources of the San Remo hotel we had a couple of Jewish refugee women to attend to cooking, provisioning, etc. I do not recall that there was anyone else to look after our needs, except of course rabbi Dr Lichtigfeld, who was soon joined by his brother, a former lawyer.

As regards the outbreak of war, I was so besotted with Nazi propaganda I had absorbed in Germany that initially I thought Hitler will be finished in half a year at the most. If this sounds queer, let me explain: The Nazi propaganda to which I am referring is the constant hammering of the theme that the Western Allies, and notably Britain and France, were armed to the teeth while Germany had been forced to disarm. I did not suspect that Hitler's feverish rearmament since 1935 could match the combined reputed forces and resources of the Western Allies and their overseas dominions and colonies; and I thanked my lucky stars that I was born late enough to miss World War 1 and to be too young for military service in this new war, which would surely be well and truly over and won by the Allies before I reached the age of 18. Events soon dispelled my illusions.

My chief worry was the thought of my parents and other relatives still trapped in Nazi Germany. How would they be affected? What further anti-semitic oppression would they suffer under the pretext of war?

My worst fears in this regard were allayed a little, and left me with some small glimmer of hope for a while. Although with the onset of war, my regular weekly correspondence with Mama and Papa could not continue, it was not very long before it was resumed on a roughly fortnightly basis, when they started writing to Mama's cousin Irma Weinberg in Holland, who then relayed their letters to me, and made me operate similarly in reverse. In doing so, we all made sure that there was no geographical or other reference in the text of our letters that would suggest to any intercepting British or Nazi censorship that their true origin or destination lay in enemy territory beyond that of the ostensible neutral sender or recipient. I do not know how many of these letters were actually perused by military censors in Britain or Germany, and if so, whether they really hoodwinked the censors as to their true origin or destination. Perhaps the censors did not really care, as the contents were innocuous enough. At any rate, it looks as if all the letters via Irma reached their destination.

Such indirect correspondence continued until Hitler's invasion of the Lowlands in May 1940 brought it to an abrupt halt by eliminating this neutral channel for the flow of mail (and, in the process, tragically delivering poor Irma back into the clutches of the Nazis). Until then, at any rate, Mama's and Papa's letters made me surmise from their contents that my parents' circumstances had

not yet deteriorated to any alarming degree. They were still in their flat, although their furniture and other chattels were gradually reduced. Their daily life and routine seemed only marginally affected and changed from what it had been, judging by the way Mama described it in considerable detail.

Meanwhile in Croydon we boys found ourselves issued, like everybody else, with identity cards, ration cards and gas masks. The latter were to be carried in their little carton with string loop attached slung round neck or shoulder whenever we ventured outside, and to be kept handy at all other times. "Don't forget your gas mask, keep it on your lap!" admonished a regular advertising slide in cinemas, and another exhorted the audience: "In case of alarm, don't panic - remember you are British!" In the streets many shop and bank premises were being protected and half boarded up by walls of sandbags and had windows at least crisscrossed with paper strips. All these precautions to minimise damage from possible bombing were usually accompanied by signs defiantly and cheerfully proclaiming "BUSINESS AS USUAL". At night, of course, universal blackout in the open was the rule everywhere; but it was remarkable how quickly one became adjusted to that and the inconvenience it entailed.

Then for all those of us at the hostel who were over sixteen, there was our summons to an Aliens Classification Tribunal. Such tribunals were set up in every bailiwick under an appointed magistrate, whose task was to classify each male alien coming before him into one of three categories - A, B, or C. Those of enemy nationality were to be classified A and interned, those of allied or neutral nationality were to be classified C and left as free as before. That left classification B as a half-way house of limited freedom, which meant those so classified had to report in person to their local police station once a week and required police permission to leave their local area. This B category was intended as a precaution where internment seemed too harsh and unwarranted but where some residual element of suspicion remained.

Mostly still officially of German or Austrian nationality, we refugee boys were "technically" enemy aliens and thus liable to be interned under the rules, unless we individually gained recognition as "Refugee from Nazi oppression". This special status normally resulted in a "C" classification instead of an "A". Those appeared to be the general guidelines on which the tribunals operated, and we all felt confident of gaining "C" classification as obvious refugees from Nazi oppression.

However, in actual practice each magistrate who acted as a local classification tribunal had a great deal of personal discretion, at any rate when it came to deviating on the stringent side, and this could on occasions lead to unwarranted hardship. Thus the magistrate at our Croydon tribunal took it into his head that the security of London's airport at Croydon required that a close tab be maintained on all technically enemy aliens who were locally resident, even if of refugee status, so that at best they were given "B" classification. Years later I learned how Erwin Frenkel, a friend of mine with quite clear-cut and unimpeachable credentials as a refugee was given an "A" classification simply because he insulted the magistrate of his Tribunal. The magistrate, learning that Erwin was living at his girlfriend's, asked him whether he was her pimp. Outraged by this question, Erwin called the magistrate a dirty old man. Whereupon the magistrate said: "Young man, I shall teach you a lesson" and promptly classified him "A". Thus Erwin's answer nearly cost him his life. The arbitrarily vindictive classification accorded to him resulted not only in his immediate internment with a bunch

of Nazis and fascists, but also in his eventual deportation to Canada on the "Arandora Star" which was torpedoed and sunk in the Irish sea.

It took several weeks before the Croydon tribunal worked its way around to those just turned sixteen, and Rudi was in the first batch summoned from our hostel and had to settle for a B classification, purely because of the airport's proximity. The cut-off point for that batch must have been a birthdate between 23rd and 26th August 1923. Anyhow, by the time the magistrate of the Croydon tribunal was ready to look at my case, our hostel was closed down and I was no longer in Croydon. Instead I had to appear before a tribunal in Whitechapel, where I obtained refugee status and C classification as an open-and-shut case. Meanwhile, let me return to our two months sojourn at the Croydon hostel.

Obviously, our quasi-beachcombing days were a thing of the past. But there still was plenty of leisure time for us, and thanks to my monthly dollar from the American uncles and aunts, I had the modest financial means to sally into London, now so close at hand. For the outlay of one shilling I could obtain a ticket that allowed me to travel on any public transport of the great metropolis for a full day - train, tram, trolleybus, "tube" or metropolitan railway. And equipped with an excellent road map and transport map freely available, I found it no problem at all to traverse London at will. I used all the different public transport media. But my favourite mode of travel was the upper floor of the rumbling old double-decker trams, which from their usually vacant front window seats afforded me the best sightseeing while on the move.

My first target was a visit to Rita Davis and her family. Rita was the one English person I had got to know while still in Germany. About 20 years of age, she had spent some time in Aschaffenburg on an Anglo-German youth exchange scheme in 1936. During that time she was staying at the "Lufthof", a guest house and cafe attached to a small farm property just beyond Aschaffenburg, in the foothills of the Spessart. The Lufthof used to be a favourite destination for our Sunday afternoon walks, and we became very friendly with the proprietress, a widowed gentlewoman from North Germany, and her only son, a young man of about twenty, who was at the time staying on exchange with Rita's parents in London. Rita was introduced to us and enjoyed talking to us in German and to Oma, then still alive, in English.

The friendship thus formed with Rita continued after her return to London by way of occasional correspondence. And when I wrote to Rita from Croydon I immediately received, as I had hoped, an invitation to visit her and her parents at their home in Upper Bedford Square, a good Bloomsbury address in the West End of London. The visit meant a great deal to me. For it was my first personal social contact in England with an English family. And they were, in the most pleasant way, typical English middle-class types who made me very welcome with strong tea, buttered scones and cup cakes. I don't know or recall what Mr Davis' occupation was, but it transpired that Rita was working as a shorthand typist in the Ministry of Civil Aviation. I had to answer many questions about myself and my family and the Lufthof people. But what really stuck in my mind was when Mr Davis took me to their kitchen to proudly show me a souvenir Rita had brought them from Germany. There it hung on the wall: a big salami sausage, already well dried out and hard as tack. Clearly, the Davises had no intention whatever to slice it up and eat it at any stage. Somehow it made me think of all the salamis we boys had hankered for in Westgate and which Mr Werner

would not let us ask our parents to send, because of the prohibitive customs duties payable for them.

If I remember rightly, I did get around to a second visit to the Davises. But other people I looked up were my former teacher of religion, Mr Leo Schloss, who with his wife and daughter Judith had found refuge in England and now lived in a very small flat in Golders Green. And of course together with Rudi I visited Paul Philipp, both at his home in Finchley where we also met his wife, and at his business address, a poky little city office in the Barbican. Small as it was, the place was replete with a limited range of German toys he had imported and which now presumably gained in scarcity value. Though what he would do for a living once his peacetime stocks were exhausted remained to be seen.

During this time in Croydon we knew in a vague sort of way that the people at Bloomsbury house responsible for our care were trying, or going to try, to get us placed into some sort of employment, and we could not help wondering and speculating what sooner or later might befall in that regard. In discussing this problem and whether and how this could ever be squared with our own vocational ambitions, Rudi and I decided that we should not just leave our fate in the lap of the gods or of Bloomsbury House, but try our luck by writing some job applications ourselves, approximately in the direction of our own job ambitions and preferences, although we realised it was a rather long shot. Still, what harm could it do? At least we could console ourselves that we tried our level best to get or regain some mastery over our fate. And surely that was in keeping with the sort of ethos in which our dear parents had tried to raise us.

And so Rudi, trying for an apprenticeship in turning and fitting, in which he had received some rudimentary instruction at the ORT school in Frankfurt after our expulsion from the Gymnasium, wrote identical applications to each of the big car manufacturing firms.

For my part, I knew that my as yet very limited knowledge of English made it impossible to get a job as a cub reporter or cadet reporter at this stage. Instead I decided to try and get into journalism by the back door and obtain an apprenticeship in the printing trades in a big newspaper office as a backstop and stepping stone into the editorial side of the industry at some future date. And so I wrote my application to each of the great English national dailies - the "Times", "News Chronicle", "Daily Telegraph", "Daily Mail", "Daily Mirror", "Daily Herald" and "Daily Sketch" and also to the weekly "Jewish Chronicle".

Within a week or so, Rudi had a polite but negative reply from each of the car manufacturers. I had similar replies from Fleet street, each on beautifully embossed letterhead. The only paper that did not condescend to reply was the "Jewish Chronicle". But they had their comeuppance some thirty years later when they deemed it necessary to seek me out in Australia to make me their Melbourne correspondent.

Interestingly enough, one of the negative replies I received had a little rider attached. The "News Chronicle" wrote that while they could not offer me a job, one of their people, a Mr Burgess, would be glad to give me an interview. In accepting this invitation, I discovered in Mr Burgess one of the only two Englishmen I ever met whose German was so flawless and free of accent as not to give them away as Britons (I forget who the other one was). It would appear that the gentleman was an editorial specialist on matters German who welcomed the opportunity to quiz me for one and a half

hours on conditions in Nazi Germany and on my own experiences. I found this a very pleasant and stimulating interlude.

Unfortunately for me, the British Museum was closed for the duration of the war and most or all of its immense treasures had been evacuated for safety. Else I should have dearly loved to explore it, with ample time for that at my disposal.

Otherwise what stands out in my mind from my peregrinations around London in this period are visits to Hyde Park and especially the phenomenon of Speaker's Corner, and the strolls I loved to take along the Victoria Embankment, where I marvelled at the beautiful work of so many pavement artists and how they seemed quite reconciled to have all their diligent labours wiped out and washed away in the next rainfall. On my way there I loved riding the tram through the Kingsway subway. Though a much bigger thrill of that kind was to pass underneath the river Thames in a tram ride through the Rotherhithe tunnel or the other big tunnel that on the way back to Croydon lured me to detour via the London docks area.

But the Croydon episode was fairly short-lived. By early November many of the boys were dispersed into various jobs around Greater London or elsewhere and we lost contact with one another, except for occasional correspondence with a few, and that soon petered out.

It was at this time I had to part from Rudi. On the strength of his brief ORT training he was sent to a job with some engineering or metal firm in the docklands area of London or thereabouts and was given board and lodging at the home of a certain Rabbi Fertleman. There I managed to visit him briefly once or twice, before we were completely separated.

Rabbi Fertleman, who must have been a bachelor or a widower, for there was no female in his place, was a pudgy little man and in his lowly home, which accommodated perhaps half a dozen other boarders like Rudi, we met in a kitchen that served also as dining area and where masses of drip-drying laundry hung overhead as we sat around the long, rough-hewn kitchen table.

Several months later I heard from my Westgate namesake how he and his friend and companion had fared after leaving Croydon and how at one stage they had been put up in a ghastly place where there was washing hanging overhead in the kitchen and all over the place. "Was that at Rabbi Fertleman's?" I inquired. They confirmed that it was and expressed surprise how I knew. I laughed aloud and said "Well, it occurred to me that even in as big a city as London there would not be anywhere else to match Rabbi Fertleman and his kitchen drip-dries!"

Those of us boys who had not been placed into jobs when the Croydon hostel closed, were packed off to the Jewish Temporary Shelter in Whitechapel, a flop-house style refuge where we slept in double-bunk beds in large dormitories and where I had to keep all my things in my suitcase. I don't recall what the meals in the large dining room were like, except that on Friday night, to make things simple for the kitchen staff while at the same time giving the inmates a bit of a treat, they consisted simply of a large piece of gefilte fish followed by a big piece of yeasty fruitloaf resembling a German "Christmas Stollen". As gefilte fish is an acquired taste to which I had never yet been exposed and which I did not at all fancy, I gladly swapped mine for somebody else's piece of cake. I never had trouble finding takers and both parties to the exchange were highly satisfied with the deal they made.

During the four weeks at the shelter I had to front up once a week at Bloomsbury House to discuss any problems about my welfare with a certain Mr Rose and to receive half a crown of pocket money plus fourpence for the tram fares to take me to Bloomsbury House and back. But with plenty of time on my hands, I usually pocketed the tram fares and rather walked the hour and a half each way, between London's East End and West End. It was healthy exercise and also helped sightseeing. I was astounded to find many street signs and official notices in the East End appearing in Yiddish as well as in English and to discover elderly Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who had lived in Whitechapel anything between twenty-five and fifty years and yet spoke Yiddish only, with nary a word of English at their command. To discover that was almost enough to make me feel smug about my own modest progress in learning English.

On Sunday mornings I watched the cheap-jacks of Pettycoat Lane and their tricks and ruses in luring customers to buy. On one occasion I stopped at a booth selling quite a variety of shawls and scarfs. The Indian boothkeeper, seeing me look somewhat longingly at one of his pieces of merchandise, tried hard to persuade me to buy the blue scarf in question, priced at half a crown. Eventually I thought I could shake him off by telling him bluntly that this was much more money than I carried. How much HAVE you got, he inquired. I told him, truthfully, a shilling. Alright, you have it for a shilling, he said quietly. Although I realised that bargaining was far from uncommon at this market, I was so flabbergasted at this sudden drastic price cut, that I could not resist the purchase, which was indeed a bargain for me, even though it took all the little money I had on hand. Somehow this scarf stayed with me for many long years, and although I left it behind with luggage in England, it came back to me with my suitcase after the war in Australia.

On other occasions I might walk to the centre of London's Tower bridge and plant one leg on the northern half of the drawbridge and the other on the southern half, as they gently shook and vibrated under the burden of the heavy traffic passing across the half-inch gap between them.

One evening Walter Pollak, another lad at the shelter slightly older than myself, and nowadays a Melbourne architect, coaxed me with much effort to accompany him on a date, so I could relieve him of the girlfriend in tow of the girl he was to meet. It turned out a truly blind date for me, as in the severe London blackout I did not see the face of either of the two girls. Behind Walter and his girl my lady of the night and I trotted along in the pitch-black darkness near the Tower of London and apart from a few banalities we found next to nothing to say to each other. She seemed as dull and unimaginative as they come, and I was as yet far too callow and unsophisticated to turn our slightly ludicrous situation into a light conversation piece and thus to break the ice. When, overcome with curiosity I finally caught a momentary glimpse of her face in the light of a sheltered passageway, just before we parted, I was actually glad that I had been kept in the dark. Walter's partner did not look all that much better, but somehow he did not seem to mind. Perhaps he was guided by the old German dictum that "at night all cats are grey". As for myself, this futile little episode was my first blind date ever, and also my last one.

At the end of November I was briefed by Mr Rose at Bloomsbury House that I would be sent to Northampton, in the Midlands, where I would be given employment as a trainee leather finisher in a modern leather factory. This was not really an apprenticeship but still a trainee position - towards a semi-skilled occupation, as it turned out, and for which it had to be certified to the

Labour Exchange Office that no British candidate was available before I could be given the necessary work permit. In other words, a job no Briton wanted at the time. At that, I was still very lucky and privileged, because all the other dozen or so boys sent to Northampton about the same time ended up as laborers or trainees in hard and dirty foundry work, for equally little pay as myself.

I did not really know what to expect, but was told that Northampton was the place where most of Britain's shoes and boots were manufactured. When I told Rita Davis and her parents what was going to happen, they said I would have difficulty understanding the locals, whose dialect, they claimed, was nearly unintelligible to them. In the event I did not find it so at all. Perhaps my German ear was more attuned to the Northampton accent than that of a Londoner.

In a way I regretted having to leave London with all its immense variety and possibilities. Still, I thought, it would be a new experience to see some other part of Britain, and it was certainly high time for me to get away from the precarious existence and utter dependence on welfare at the Jewish Temporary Shelter and to get stuck into some work, training and earning at last...

CHAPTER 12: NORTHAMPTON

It was early in December 1939, when a lengthy train trip from London's huge Euston terminus took me to Northampton, an industrial centre in the Midlands, with a population of about 100,000 at the time. Presumably there was also a Jewish community in the place; because a local Jewish welfare bureau in the heart of town had been given to me as my first destination. But the officiating gentleman there who allocated me with one other new arrival to a place for board and lodging as well as to the pre-arranged job was the only Anglo-Jew I ever met in Northampton - except for the works manager at my place of employment. Somehow the question of a local synagogue or any other indigenous Jewish social life or contact never seemed to arise during my half year in the town.

My lodging was in a modest but nice and modern cottage in a northern suburb, with a middle-aged English couple by the name of Cullen. They were pleasant enough in their way, but the only remarkable thing about them was that Mr Cullen's face was somehow reminiscent of Popeye the Sailor, and Mrs Cullen was Welsh by origin and took delight in explaining and demonstrating to me how very different the language of Wales was from English. She had an appreciative audience in me, for at that time I found this fact quite amazing.

The fare and facilities at the Cullens were quite good; and so for me living there could have been alright - had it not been for the other chap who had been allocated with me to this address and to the same workplace, a most unpleasant individual by the name of Kurt Berger, with whom I had to share my room. He was in my age group, but of stronger build than myself, and if it had ever come to a fight between us, I am sure he would have flattened me in no time. Kurt came from East Germany but boasted that he was of Polish Jewish stock (though he did not speak Yiddish). Most of the time with me he was disagreeable, quarrelsome and sneering, and although I have always considered myself as a person who can get along with most people, and tried to humour him, I must confess I hated his guts. Regrettably, I found myself saddled with this fellow as my roommate for most of the time we were in Northampton, with no prospect of separation.

After a little while I realised that Kurt had an awful inferiority complex when he compared himself to me and that he tried to vent his resentment about this by making himself as nasty as he could. Without his close presence, life in Northampton would have been a great deal more pleasant for me. I am sure anyone else paired with Kurt would have found him equally obnoxious and he never made any effort to strike up a friendship or comradeship with anyone else available in our age group. At the same time, though, he would wax insanely jealous of me whenever any older person at work or elsewhere evinced feelers of interest, sociability or outright friendship towards both of us, and would accuse me of seeking their favour at his expense. Unpleasant and unwarranted as all this was, I felt I could not very well go to our welfare man and ask to be rid of Kurt by having one of us transferred to some alternative board and lodging on the grounds of incompatibility. So I learned to live with it and to find ways of distancing myself from Kurt whenever I could, till eventually we were transferred to a bigger and much older boarding house near the centre of town and owned by a couple named Muddiman. There at last I availed myself of the option to share a room with a different boy.

If I was unfortunate in the room mate I had inflicted on me, I was relatively lucky in the place of work to which we were both allotted - the leather factory of G.W.Pearce & Co. Just a few months before the outbreak of war this firm had shifted from its old, obsolescent workshops in the inner part of Northampton to a larger, spanking new production plant with all modern facilities expansively laid out in a generous parkland setting some two miles beyond the outer northern suburb of Weston Wavell, where the highway from Northampton to Kettering and Wellingborough gently undulated into a small valley. Architecturally, it was at the time easily the most modern and progressive factory in the area, from the trim office block to the serrated glass roofs spanning about an acre of production plant, all done in gleaming white.

Notwithstanding the vast amount of leather consumed in the many boot and shoe factories that made up most of Northampton's industry, G.W.Pearce & Co was not involved in this, but catered for a different market. The thousands of fresh or salted hides sent here from all parts of the globe to serve as raw material were largely those of goats and similar animals, and the fine finished leathers to which they were converted within these walls were rarely for shoe uppers but rather for handbags, wallets, purses and kindred articles. And although such output could hardly be considered as necessities in times of war, the firm's products ranked as an essential industry; because they found a ready market in America and thus earned precious dollars to pay for some of the war materials that had to be imported from across the Atlantic.

On our first day, Mr Pearce himself, the director and son of the firm's founder, showed us briefly through the whole factory. The induction tour gave me a bit of a shock at first when my tender nostrils were assailed by the overpowering horrible stench that pervaded the work halls from the piles of untreated hides and from the huge steaming vats in which they were being boiled in tanning solution. I could not imagine myself functioning in such an environment. And so I was relieved when I learned that these olfactory conditions obtained only in the tannery, whereas I was to be put to work in the finishing department. Yet it is amazing what one can get used to: After some weeks of employment I found I could traverse the tannery while hardly giving a second thought to the stink.

After any necessary depilatory treatment and tanning, the skins underwent various dyeing and drying processes before reaching the finishing department. Here it was not the sense of smell that was assailed but one's hearing, as scores of machines thundered and pummelled away unceasingly, drowning out the human voice and reducing any interpersonal communication to writing, sign language or lip-reading. One soon got used to the constant uproar, but the weekly amount of wax exuded by my ears as the body's natural defence of my eardrums against such fierce and ceaseless noise had to be seen to be believed.

A much more insidious effect of all these decibels was the gradual slowing of my mental responses - something that I did not really notice until after my employment at the factory ended half a year later. I was lucky it did end then, or else the impairment of my nervous system might have become permanent. As it was, it took me over a year to fully recover the speed of my mental reactions. I guess the perpetually pounding and banging racket slowly deadened or violated many of my synapses and it took many months for the damaged delicate axons or dendrites of the affected neurons to regrow.

The actual work to which Kurt and I were initially assigned was not on the machines but at the cutting tables. We were each given a big pair of clippers and the stand-up job consisted in using these to trim off the ragged ends of the freshly tanned and dyed skins before they underwent finishing treatment on one or several of the noisy machines. The foreman would place a pile of skins on the left side of my table, I would take one skin at a time, and go snip, snip, snip with the clippers in my right hand as I gradually turned the skin a full 360 degrees with my left hand before depositing it on a pile of trimmed skins on my right. These the foreman would clear at intervals and distribute to machinists, the while making entries of quantities etc. in his little black notebook.

After thus clipping away a few weeks, we were promoted to one or another of the noisy machines. Although used in one of several different finishing processes, all these machines were similar in design. Each had a work table sloping down and away from the machinist standing in front of it, who could raise or lower it by a foot pedal action. A heavy metal arm suspended over the table, and with a special roller the size of a small glass beaker as its business end, would continually swoop down upon the table in a pouncing, pawing motion that caused the roller to impress its mark as if in a swathe on the more distant half of the skin which the machinist's hands guided across the table top. Between one descent of the roller arm and the next, the machinist had to drag the skin one roller width further across the table so as to expose one half of the skin strip by strip or swathe by swathe to the roller action. The skin was then turned 180 degrees to apply the same procedure to what had been the nearer half of the skin. And after the skin had thus been treated vertically, the whole process was repeated cross-wise, that is to say horizontally. In this way it took approximately a minute to deal completely with one skin.

The great majority of these finishing machines had rollers with a glassy surface designed to give a glazing effect to the skins. Whereas my first machine had a smooth metal roller for a flat ironing result that compacted the grain of the leather. But my second machine had an almost opposite effect, the roller being grooved and thus cutting into the grain of the leather. By the time this treatment was given vertically and then horizontally, the skin had all the appearance of what is known as morocco leather.

It took less than an hour to become competent on this machining, which rated as semi-skilled work and for which we were classified as trainee fancy leather finishers. But Kurt and I were the only trainees or juniors in the whole plant, whereas our fellow workers ranged in age from the mid-twenties into the late fifties. The standard rate of pay at the time for the adults was fifty shillings a week, though most of them earned some extra through working at piece rates.

For us trainees the standard rate was exactly half of that - twenty-five shillings. For that, if memory serves me right, we worked a 45-hour week in five days, starting at 7 am and ending at 5 pm with an hour's break for lunch, and perhaps a few minutes pause for a cup of tea half-way through the morning and afternoon stint. Of the 25 shillings, twenty-one and sixpence went direct on board and lodging without going through my hands at all, and the weekly pay envelope contained only three and sixpence, for pocket money. However, this was supplemented by the Jewish welfare office with the cost of the bus fares to and from work.

In due course we were given the option of piece work, too, and this bumped up my weekly earnings usually to the princely sum of thirty shillings, all of the extra five shillings swelling my little

pay packet. I further enhanced my pocket money by saving the greater part of my bus fares, taking only the tuppenny red bus ride from the town centre to Weston Vale, but, except in bad weather, walking the two miles between that suburb and the factory instead of taking the sixpenny ride on the dearer green country bus on the route to Wellingborough. This was in keeping with the 'money through walking' tradition I had established on my London walks between Whitechapel and Bloomsbury house. But now it could involve a brisk march in the snow and cold before or during a winter sunrise. Actually I found all this movement on foot quite bracing to body and purse alike. I was no longer short of pocket money for my frugal needs and even contrived to save about 30 shillings during my half year at the factory - equivalent to a week's earnings on the job. Nowadays, these financial exigencies on my part may appear to have been as pathetic as they were resolute, even allowing for the stupendous inflation aggregate of the intervening half-century.

The board and lodging at twenty-one shillings and sixpence per week included on weekdays a cut lunch of two sandwiches, and I recall one fellow worker at the factory expressing himself adversely to Kurt about our landlady because on most days she used merely a thin smear of margarine and cheap fish paste as sandwich filling. The quality of the sandwiches did not vex me, but I often bought myself in town some luscious large Jaffa oranges at threepence each, and one of these was enough to considerably enhance the quality of my midday food ration. Moreover, I indulged almost daily in either a Mars bar or a two ounce Cadbury milk chocolate block purchased for twopence at the factory canteen or the local lolly shop.

I have no particular recollection about the breakfasts or dinners received as board, except that I always asked to have my helping of breakfast porridge, if any, served as raw oats. Muesli was not known in England at that time and hence my request was invariably regarded as a harmless eccentricity which the landlady did not mind to humour. The only other thing I do recall of these meals is that one evening my landlady invited me to join her at the local fish and chips shop and bar for dinner, but made me solemnly promise not to tell her husband, who was not due home in time for dinner. Later that evening, I received a similar invitation from the husband, who equally enjoined my silence to his wife. Man of honour that I am, I respected both confidences and enjoyed a double ration of fish and chips that night.

Another evening, landlord and landlady jointly took me to their local, the first and only English pub I ever visited. I liked the friendly social atmosphere there, including the dart playing, and nobody challenged my presence on grounds of age. But I got into a spot of embarrassment when I was presented with a pint schooner of "wallop". At home I had often had a few sips of Papa's almost daily mug of beer and had truly enjoyed the cool Bavarian brew. But this ultra-bitter dark ale, served tepid, I found quite undrinkable. After struggling with three or four sips of the stuff, I found it necessary to make my apologies and give up. To this day I cannot understand how Britons can endure such potions and enjoy them.

Beer was just one of the friendly and familiar things in life I found strange and unmanageable here. Another was crossword puzzles. Geoffrey Collings, a fellow-worker at the factory, befriended me and every so often he and his pretty wife invited me to their house. It turned out that Geoff was a crossword enthusiast and I told him how I had inherited a love of crossword puzzles from Papa but that I found English crosswords quite perplexing and incomprehensible, to a degree that could

not be attributed to my as yet limited command of English. The actual trouble was that every English crossword puzzle I encountered was of the cryptic clue type, for which there does not appear to be any German equivalent. To my untutored mind the clues just seemed stupidly cumbersome, and while Geoffrey went to a great deal of trouble to try and explain to me by examples how cryptic clues worked, my knowledge of English at that stage was much too pedestrian to let me appreciate the deliberately misleading double meanings and other tricks of the cryptic crossword compiler's trade. Quite a few years yet were to pass before I too became a cryptics addict, so much so that straight crosswords have become much too boring for me.

However, my knowledge of English had advanced sufficiently to make me assiduously follow the fortunes of the war in the newspapers. I particularly liked reading the Sunday newspapers. Because if the war was going bad for the Allies according to the weekday newspapers, as it usually was, you could always find consolation in the Sunday press, a British institution that believed in plying its readers with good, cheerful stories to brighten their weekends after a hard week's toil, and thus found always something encouraging to say about the war, such as reporting discontent and shortages in Nazi Germany, huge losses suffered by German troops for the sake of advancing a few kilometres, and the improvement in Allied positions by strategic retreats that shortened our front lines and over-extended the Nazis' supply lines, thus causing severe logistic problems for them.

However, at sea there were, apart from submarine warfare, occasional successes against Germany's surface fleet of pocket battleships. One of these, according to the Press, viz. the "Admiral Scheer", seemed to have gone completely into hiding and the Allies had not yet succeeded in finding out any details of its capacity and armaments etc. Therefore I got very excited when my room mate showed me a snapshot of the Scheer he had illicitly taken with his box camera pre-war when he saw the ship at anchor in Danzig. The photo was very clear but at the same time too small to discern any worthwhile details from it with the bare eye. Still, I thought, if intelligence units could make a powerful enlargement of the print, they might be able to gather some piece of vital information. So I urged the boy to send it to the authorities. He refused to do so but agreed to let me submit it instead. I duly posted the snapshot to the British Admiralty with a short note on what it was and how it came into my hands. Within a week I had it back with a brief acknowledgment slip from the Admiralty, but of course without any indication whether they had found it of any interest or use.

At Passover time that year - my first one away from home - Rabbi Dr Lichtigfeld fleetingly came back into my life. I do not recall the exact circumstances, but he seemed to be temporarily in charge of a small hostel for younger refugee children at Northampton and I was invited to join not only in the celebration of the Seder, but to help with its preparation. In the event the few of us who had to prepare things were kept so busy with the chores and logistics of it all, that we had to have our own little Seder after the young guests had finished and gone to their quarters. There was little in the way of food for them or us, except that there was any amount of matzo and the sweet red Passover wine was plentiful and superb. Our little hosts' seder did not start until midnight and after we finished it two hours later we stalked home through the night, singing loudly and cheerfully in the deserted streets.

About this time I got the notion that I was unlikely to make any further headway in the factory and the leather industry unless and until I obtained some theoretical formal training at the local technical college. The Jewish welfare man was sympathetic and cooperative and arranged for my attendance at classes two evenings per week and the payment of the fee involved. Having missed the first few lessons of the course and still having some battle with my English vocabulary, it was a rather desperate effort on my part and the cold nights trotting to and from the college could have been more agreeably spent. The lecturer clearly had some inkling of what I was up against and one night invited me during class to raise any question on things I could not quite understand and follow. But I could see he was rather appalled and aghast when, so encouraged, I responded by asking him the meaning of the word "dye", which cropped up dozens of times in every lesson. As luck would have it, I fell sick with German measles the following week, resulting in my missing out on one or two lessons, on top of those I had missed at the start, and that was the last straw to make me realise that I had better abandon the course.

Other things that I recall of those days are the rather primitive, archaic facilities of the old boarding houses in town, with their penny-fed gaslights, the awful bare stonewall kitchen in the cellar and the absence of any bathroom or shower, which meant a daily cat wash from a basin and looking forward to the weekly tub bath at the Municipal Bath chambers on Friday evening. In the English climate this was more tolerable than it would have been in Australia, and it was as yet in the normal way of life of many of the "labouring classes".

In retrospect, what made it all bearable was my young years and the sheer friendliness of the people with whom I came into contact, to some measure in the circle of friends of my landlady, Mrs Muddiman. They included several young women, one of whom, a cheerful buxom brunette who hailed from Bradford, would take me to the pictures in the best seats (one and sixpence) at her expense or sometimes on free tickets she could procure. Another one I recall was a somewhat myopic blonde in the khaki uniform and lisle stockings of the A.T.S. (the Auxiliary Territorial Service, i.e. Womens Army), unwed but with a little boy of three, who regularly called at the Muddimans and invariably asked me to take her home at night, a few blocks away. Then she would beckon me to come in, an invitation which I politely but firmly declined...

These and other women who gave much friendly attention to me and other refugee teenagers were seemingly so disposed by their inherent kindness and also by their loneliness with their own menfolk away at the war. Quite possibly some of these encounters could have ended in seduction, had I been so inclined. But perhaps I was still a bit too young for that, and in any case my heart and mind were nobly and chastely preoccupied with my thoughts and love for Lotte, for whom I yearned a great deal.

The loneliness of these and other women in Northampton was dramatically relieved after the fall of France when many thousands of servicemen evacuated from Dunkirk were brought to Northampton and billeted in every household there. They included a large number of Wallonic Belgians (who I thought looked rather Jewish) but especially many elements of the First Canadian division, big strapping fellows all. My boarding house was required to make room for half a dozen of them, and they fitted in very well with the regular occupants and provided much jollity and bonhomie.

But now - mid-May - all the Jewish refugees who had been classified as "B" class aliens, including my friend Rudi, were interned and refugees of German or Austrian nationality who had been classified "C" were henceforth subjected to the same restrictions as previously imposed on the "B" class refugees. And with masses of soldiers brought from Dunkirk into Northamptonshire, the whole region was declared a "protected area" from which technically enemy aliens like myself were to be banned.

I was glad, as it meant that I was to be sent back to London, where, I was told, I would be given a job in a firm making spectacle frames - a change I certainly did not mind. More important to me, though, was the prospect of meeting up again with my beloved Lotte, who had, I knew from Rudi, also moved to London some time earlier after her previous stay in the provinces.

The internment of Rudi along with all other "B" class aliens, swiftly led to his deportation to a Canadian internment camp. Like his earlier restrictions, now imposed on the likes of me, it was the result of the panic which resulted from the fifth column scare brought on by the events of the Blitzkrieg in the Lowlands and France. The very elements in British ruling circles who had once been flirting with the Nazis and who were inclined to antisemitism now tried to divert attention from their own disloyalty and to gain cheap kudos by displaying their pseudo-patriotic zeal in casting suspicion on those who had escaped from Hitler. Agitating inside and outside Parliament, they soon managed to whip up enough Press hysteria to lead the government to the internment of the B Class aliens.

The fear by the public that condoned these measures was understandable. Yet, calm observation and reflection would have shown that fifth columnists operated through less noticeable, less prominent people than those that stood out as refugees; that it was indeed a crucial part of their insidious technique that they must not arouse public attention.

CHAPTER 13: ARREST

If preparation for adult life is considered in the narrow conventional sense of formal education and the acquisition of vocational skills, then my half year in Northampton was a waste of time, except for my slowly improving facility in English. Although designated as "trainee leather finisher", I had really been just a factory hand engaged in a repetitive process.

But in the wider sense of education for life, it had not all been for nothing. The very repetitiousness of the work meant that I could do it automatically, that is to say virtually all by conditioned reflex, while my mind and thoughts could range far afield day-dreaming on any other subject. This helped to pass the time agreeably, without any sense of monotony or mental fatigue. And when I was put to piece work, time on the job really seemed to fly as I endeavoured to maximise my output before the factory siren called for a halt.

As I explained in the preceding chapter, it was a lucky thing for my well-being that I was made to leave the job before the deleterious effects on me of all that machine noise became irreversible. But to have undergone the personal experience of being a factory process worker long enough to savour it to the full added an important dimension to my understanding of modern industrial life and of "the working man". Though my ambition would always be for brain work, it added to my self-confidence in later years that I had served my term and dirtied my hands at a factory bench.

As the train was carrying me back to London, I might have speculated how my new job working on spectacle frames would compare with the leather processing just left. But I spent more time wondering how long it would be before I too would be interned. Because the Press campaign for the internment of ALL aliens of enemy nationality continued unabated even after the B class aliens had been apprehended.

In any case, I was to be given a brief holiday in London before there would be a move into spectacle frames or any other employment, while arrangements were still to be finalised; or so I was told.

For this interim period I was put up at a fairly large board and lodging house in Bayswater road, Paddington, in London's West End. Unlike the board and lodging facilities I knew from Northampton, run as sidelines by low-income householders, this was a professional establishment, where I shared a room with two other refugee lads similarly in transit. The room's window offered a vista onto the marshalling yards of Paddington station, London terminus of the Great Western Railway. It was an interesting view for me, as I had always been fascinated by the shunting of railway trains and the lay-out of tracks and switching points.

The first day after arrival back in London I spent exploring some of the nearer environment, including Hyde Park and Marble Arch, and made plans for looking up Lotte Sternheimer on the next day. I had her address which was in Stoke Newington N.W.16 and decided to walk there. Although it was a considerable distance - perhaps three hours - I would traverse a much shorter route than any afforded by public transport, according to my trusty map of London, and I should get a better knowledge of the capital in the process.

The walk turned out simpler and faster than I had expected; and when I hopefully appeared on the front porch of the house at Lotte's address and rang the bell, her landlady, a Mrs Phillips, opened the door. She welcomed me in when I explained who I was, and bade me wait, as Lotte was out and not expected back for an hour or so. Of course there had been no forewarning of my call. When Lotte eventually returned at afternoon tea time, she was not told anything either and sat down at the table, paying no attention at first to the stranger sitting opposite her. But when she looked up and recognised me, her surprise and joy were complete.

Clearly we had much to talk about. Eventually conversation turned to Rudi and his recent internment. I indicated that in the light of what the newspapers were now printing I expected to be overtaken by the same fate any day now, and that I had already sorted out what minor part of my belongings need to accompany me into such short-term confinement, as it should turn out to be. Mrs Phillips, a widow who seemed to treat Lotte much like a daughter, offered to take care of the rest of my luggage - my single medium-sized suitcase from Germany - for as long as necessary. I gratefully accepted Mrs Phillips' kind offer and on her advice decided to dispatch my case to her through "Carter Patterson", at that time London's leading and best known carting firm. In the event the case stayed in Mrs Phillips' good care till several months after the end of the war, when she faithfully shipped it to me in Melbourne.

At this stage I should perhaps explain how I viewed the question or prospect of my internment at the time. I guess I was very philosophical about it. Objectively seen, for reasons indicated at the end of the previous chapter, it was all unnecessary nonsense and a nuisance that hindered rather than helped the war effort. Still, in the light of what had happened recently in France and the Lowlands and Norway, British fears and suspicions about odd Nazi fifth column ring-ins among tens of thousands of genuine German and Austrian Jewish refugees in the land were understandable, even if misplaced. And those who advocated our wholesale internment at this stage argued only that we should be checked out once again - more thoroughly than done by the Aliens Classification Tribunals at the outset of the war. Then most if not all of us could be released again, and all this should not take very long.

Well, if by thus making assurance doubly sure, the fears about us by our British hosts could be finally laid at rest, let us co-operate in the process, I thought. After all, what is so terrible about a couple of months or so confined in a camp. On my understanding of it, civilian internment under the Geneva convention, at any rate in an ethical and democratic society like that of Britain, was likely to be a rather tame and civilized affair involving next to no real hardship save temporary deprivation of freedom to move outside the boundaries of a camp. So if it is to be done, let us get it done and over with, the sooner the better.

Had I but known at that stage what the reality of my internment was going to be like, I might have taken a somewhat less sanguine view of the prospect; but in hindsight it was possibly all for the best in the long run, and in any case for the moment ignorance was bliss.

As I parted from Lotte that evening, I did not suspect that the next time I would see her, she would be a grandmother and I a recent widower, who contrived to meet at my uncle Alfred's place in Florida during my sentimental journey round the globe in 1984.

When I got back to my lodging in Paddington sometime after dark, my roommates informed me that one of their friends occupying another room on the premises had been arrested that day and that they did not intend to hang around next morning but clear out bright and early, lest they too were to be taken into custody. So the authorities had now actually started to "intern the lot". I shrugged my shoulders and was not sure what my two roommates hoped to achieve. Did they really think they could elude arrest until this whole thing blew over, or were they just desperately trying to snatch a few more days of precious freedom and thus postpone the evil day before they too inevitably landed behind barbed wire?

I calmly went to sleep and when I woke up next morning about 7 o'clock, my roommates had already disappeared. Before going for breakfast, I finalised my packing, putting the few things I should need during internment into a cheap, small cardboard suitcase I had bought in Northampton, and locking up the rest in my regular suitcase, which I then took to the landlord's office where I arranged for its despatch to Mrs Phillips. Then I went for a leisurely breakfast and read the newspaper while waiting around to be interned, as I fully expected to be.

But when nothing had happened by ten o'clock, I figured this was not be the day on which I was to lose my freedom. So I decided to go instead for a nice walk in Hyde Park. It was certainly the weather for it. As I stepped outside and made ready to leave, I remember hesitating for a minute or two while trying to decide whether I should check up once more at the office about Carter Patterson's collection of my luggage. Was that really necessary? Probably not, I thought, and started to walk. Then I changed my mind again, thinking that the double check would not hurt, even if it was unnecessary (as it later turned out to be). It was a decision on a trivial subject. Yet if I had decided the other way, though it would not have made any difference whatever to the despatch of my luggage, it would have made a momentous difference to the rest of my life, as I was to find out before long. For I would not have been deported to Australia.

As I went back into the office, wanting to speak to the manager, he happened to be briefly absent and I was invited to wait for him. I was second in the queue; for there was already a well-dressed gentleman ahead of me, somewhat impatiently cooling his heels, it seemed. After a few minutes, the man thoughtfully looked at me and asked me for my name and who I was. Then he introduced himself to me as an inspector from Scotland Yard, who had come to arrest me and the other boys for internment. He requested me to make ready, but said he could leave the matter till tomorrow, if I found that necessary, though he would rather I came along with him now. He also told me that he saw the whole thing as nothing more than a routine formality and that he expected I would be released within a very short time. As for the other boys, he would certainly come for them tomorrow.

I told the inspector it did not matter to me. I was ready and prepared to go with him right away, as soon as I had confirmed my luggage carting arrangements. So he took me in his car to a police station and, after filling out papers there, on to Wellington Barracks. These were normally the London headquarters of the Grenadier Guards, but were to serve on this occasion as a collection point for me and other aliens now being rounded up for internment.

Before long, I and others delivered to Wellington Barracks were taken by the busload to Kempton Park, one of London's race courses, which had been converted to, or rather improvised

as, a transit camp for internees, the sort of thing which the Nazis under their Prisoner-of-war camp system would have described as a "Dulag", short for "Durchgangslager". I had never been to a racecourse before, nor have I ever attended a horse race since; but I was to be a reluctant temporary resident of several other racecourses before World War II came to an end.

At Kempton Park each busload of arrivals became a numbered group of about platoon size, with one member appointed as group leader, and all further disposition of us - for feeding, accommodation or movement elsewhere - was intended to occur in these group modules. Almost each day, one or more groups were taken away to some different and supposedly more lasting internment camp destination. My arrest had occurred on 2nd July. Among the new arrivals at Kempton Park next day I saw and greeted my two Paddington roommates, for whom my Scotland Yard man had got up and arrived extra early that morning. Their group disposition turned out such as to preclude their deportation to Australia. This demonstrated to me later that my rather trivial decision the previous morning to step into my landlord's office for a last check on the despatch of my luggage became the momentously decisive step to take me to the Antipodes.

There were two daily roll calls at Kempton Park and we were each given a spoon, tin plate, and tin pannikin to cope with our three meals a day. Breakfast consisted of tea with a thick slice of white bread and a dab of margarine and plum jam, and the evening meal was the same, except that a small cube of cheddar cheese replaced the jam. Lunch was a barely edible hotch-potch that might contain potatoes, soup, rice or dubious bits of meat. For sleeping we were given two blankets as cover and an old mattress on which to bed down on a concrete floor, closely alongside many others. Sanitary arrangements such as showers and water closets were largely out of order and filthy, and there was a lack of toilet paper. There was no canteen service where one might have tried to supplement the diet, which kept one hungry. Neither was there any contact with the outside world by mail going out or coming in, nor by way of receiving newspapers or listening to the radio.

But we were led to expect leaving this environment very soon, and true enough, after breakfast on the fourth of July my group and some others were put onto a special railway train that took us by devious routes through London and then north to Liverpool, where our train trip ended in the afternoon at the little suburban station of Huyton. From there we were marched under military escort to Huyton internment camp, one of the biggest in England.

What I first saw of the camp was its permanent section, which looked tolerably good. For it consisted of a large and nearly finished new building estate which had been fenced off, the houses being virtually complete albeit unfurnished; but most of them had bathrooms and water closets, though lacking hot water. However, this permanent part was already fully occupied, mostly by elderly internees. We instead had to go into the non-permanent part. Separated from the building estate by a barbed wire fence, this was a large meadow with hundreds of tents on it, each tent to house four internees. The tents had to be put up by ourselves and we also had to dig stormwater trenches around them. With intermittently rainy weather and no floor boards for the tents, conditions were very muddy and messy, damp and extremely uncomfortable.

Here in Huyton camp we were issued with straw palliasses instead of mattresses, again tin plate and pannikin and a spoon and knife. Quality and quantity of food were similar to what we had experienced in Kempton Park. At first I was disposed to envy the estate dwellers their superior

accommodation, but soon I began to feel sorry for them. As new arrivals we were eagerly quizzed by others for latest news of the outside world, especially of the war. These people had been cut off from all such news for weeks on end, with the wildest rumours flying about and in much dread of an imminent Nazi invasion. Small wonder, then, that suicides and attempted suicides by older inmates were almost daily occurrences, many of them having undergone ill-treatment in Nazi concentration camps before finding refuge in Britain. Now as we too were languishing behind barbed wire, isolated from the world outside, we new arrivals too felt progressively starved of all news.

Between roll calls, queuing up for meals or for the makeshift sanitary facilities, I spent idle time to stroll through the muddy paths of the compound and strike up acquaintance among fellow-internees, who included some very engaging characters in my own age group. There was hardly any facility and too much feeling of restlessness to settle down to anything else, such as reading. How long would this situation continue?

Conditions on the Isle of Man, where a great many internees were being held, were reputed to be better. Some expected or even hoped to be sent there from Huyton, although others were actually being brought back from there. The true overall situation was that all internment camps in the British Isles were being filled to overflowing and the government had decided to relieve the situation by deporting a great many of the inmates for internment overseas, in the Dominions.

Several shiploads had already been despatched to Canada. The latest of these, on the ill-fated liner "Arandora Star", had been torpedoed and sunk off the West Coast of Ireland by a German U-boat at 6 a.m. on 2nd July, just a few hours before my own internment began. Only about 200 of the 1500 internees aboard were rescued from drowning.

These deportation facts were unknown to us at Huyton, but two or three days after my arrival there the camp authorities called for volunteers to be shipped overseas. We were told this would in all probability mean Canada, although there was a remote possibility that transport would be to Australia instead. In either case, internment conditions would be much more liberal and favourable in the Dominions and could possibly lead to early release or at least restricted freedom there.

To volunteer or not to volunteer? It seemed a very important decision to make. But it did not take me long to decide in favour of volunteering, as did many other young people. A few days of internment in Britain had made me somehow far less optimistic about the prospect of an early release in Britain, and wartime conditions outside were in any case getting grimmer as time went on and Nazi invasion threatened. The journey overseas would mean some exposure to the U-boat menace, but hopefully this would be minimised by travelling in convoy under warship escort, or so we were led to believe. Australia, about which we knew very little, should prove at least as favourable as Britain. But the great main chance and really decisive factor was the prospect of Canada, next door to the USA where I aimed to go in any case. It would be a great step forward to my emigration there, I thought.

But life plays odd tricks. My decision did not matter. Had I not volunteered, I would still have been commandeered, as many others were when the number of volunteers fell short and all young people in the camp were conscripted to go overseas. The great expectation of going to Canada was a delusion. Even had the destination proved to be Canada, it would still have been a delusion, as

far as reaching the USA was concerned. Those who like my friend Rudi were deported to Canada ended up in camps tantalisingly close to the American border. Yet they all had to return to Britain before they could further their immigration to the USA. They found it just as difficult to obtain release as it was for those sent to Australia, and while the voyage to Canada was much shorter and less oppressive than the deportation to Australia turned out, living conditions inside the Canadian camps were considerably harsher than in the Australian internment camps.

However, such comparisons and reflections were as yet hidden in the future, and would only come to light in post-war years. Meanwhile we made ready for deportation: 1150 from Huyton, a similar number from other camps, mainly from the Isle of Man, and 444 "A" class internees - the majority of these Italians or known German Nazis or Nazi sympathisers, the rest Jews and other anti-Nazis undeservedly classified "A" and thus interned early in the war. An extraordinarily insensitive touch by the authorities was the enforced re-embarkation of the Arandora Star survivors - from the same wharf whence they had left on their disastrous journey ten days earlier!

All these internees, then, were the motley lot who were destined to enter into Australian history as 'the Dunera Boys'.

CHAPTER 14: DUNERA

Wednesday, 10th July 1940 dawned as the day when internees at Huyton who had agreed to be sent overseas would be deported. Britain had been my merciful and hospitable haven from the Nazis for some fourteen months. But of late I and many thousands of similar ilk had summarily been put behind barbed wire, for the time being bureaucratically classed suspect as potential dreaded Nazi fifth columnists. By breakfast time that Wednesday it became evident that not only the volunteers, but seemingly all of Huyton's hapless tent dwellers were under orders to pack up for overseas.

It took only minutes to bundle up the meagre personal effects carried along into captivity; then we stood around hours on end, idly waiting for the next move and wondering. Not till mid-afternoon came the order to march, under guard, back to Huyton railway station. Two special trains stood ready to take us by a slow and devious route right unto the wharf at Liverpool docks where a vessel for us was moored. Its anchorage was the same as had served for the ill-fated "Arandora Star" ten days earlier.

Here we could see what must have caused, or at least contributed to, the earlier long delay in setting out from Huyton camp. For there were lengthy queues ahead of us being directed up the gangway. As we were to learn later, they were internees procured for deportation from Lingfield camp and from the three camps on the Isle of Man.

Our ship was the H.M.T. "Dunera", an 11,197 tonner built three years earlier in Glasgow, specifically as a trooper to help rotate the far-flung garrisons of the British Empire. In fact the letters "H.M.T." stood for "Hired Military Transport". As such the Dunera was fitted out to carry 1157 troops under somewhat Spartan conditions on three levels below the main deck, while the superstructure contained sufficient cabins for 104 First Class and 100 Second class passengers, probably intended for the officers and for any wives and families permitted to accompany the military on their moves.

For the imminent voyage, the designed passenger facilities would serve well enough the officers and soldiers whose role was to act as guards. It was a different story for 2732 deportees to be compressed into the lower deck space built for less than half that number of soldiers. The treatment meted out to the deck dwellers during the voyage would not exactly help either. The figures do not take into account provision made for the ship's own crew, who were something else again: small in number, with lascars as deck hands, they were rarely visible to prisoners aboard. In short, the Dunera was still modern and adequate for its design purposes; but hardly so for its avowed mission this time.

On alighting from the trains, we were made to replenish the earlier long line-up of deportees who were gradually disappearing into the body of the ship under the watchful eyes of the armed soldiers that patrolled the pier. As, shuffling forward, my part of the queue reached the foot of the gangway which sloped alongside the Dunera up to its main deck, a warning message came back like a running fire from the line ahead of me to hide away all money, watches and other valuables. The

story was that anything of value discovered on us would be seized and pocketed by the soldiers who were waiting to receive us aboard and to body-search us.

I had on me and in my cardboard case no watch or valuables to worry about. What to do, though, with my laboriously hoarded little treasure, the pound or so I carried in a half-note and large silver in my pocket? I settled quickly on the simple ruse of rolling up the cash in the cuffs of my trousers.

But in thinking I had thus solved the imminent problem of getting my few modest and innocuous belongings safely past the searching soldiers, I was, like everybody else in line, due for a rude shock soon after reaching the main deck and the head of the queue. A small group of sergeants and armed privates, supervised by two officers, stood assembled near some tables, on one of which I was commanded to place my suitcase. There followed a quick rough body search which I passed without my money being discovered. Then, after a sergeant peremptorily ordered me to unlock my case or else have it prised open by bayonet, one of the soldiers quickly flicked through its contents of clothing and other personal necessities. As he failed to make a haul of anything tempting, I naturally expected to have it all handed back to me. Instead, to my great consternation, the case with everything in it was brusquely tossed aside, joining heaps of other and often half open pieces of luggage that I now perceived untidily strewn or piled everywhere on deck, obviously seized from my predecessors in the queue. And before I could argue or protest I was gruffly told to move on.

Even then I was one of the relatively lucky ones thus coming aboard. Hundreds upon hundreds of others were robbed of money, watches, fountain pens, rings or other jewelry and valuables, musical and other instruments etc. Worse still, a great many were deprived of important and irreplaceable documents and other papers, which the soldiers carelessly and contemptuously threw aside or overboard or wantonly tore up in sight of their pleading or protesting owners so as to spite and humiliate them. All this, and worse, was condoned and even abetted by the two supervising officers, who were quickly to reveal themselves as the two arch villains of the Dunera: Lt.Col. William Scott, the Commanding Officer of the guards, and his adjutant Lt. John O'Neill, a VC winner of the first world war. More of those two later.

After thus forfeiting our personal effects we were hustled in single file down stairs, passageways and entrances narrowed with barbed wire fencing in wooden frames. Eventually the contingent in which I happened to be moved reached what was designated 'Lower Deck Number Three' (which was about as low as one could get). There I was herded into one of the many parallel lengthy rows of mess tables and benches that stretched from both side walls towards the centre. These austere furniture fittings took up the greater part of the deck area but were suspended by metal rods from the ceiling rather than resting on legs. That left extra floor space to lie down on - an important consideration, as there was not nearly enough space to allow the stringing up of a hammock for each prisoner. Instead many were forced to spread their hammocks out on the floor below those swaying above them.

Actually the hammocks, and the two army blankets that came with each, were not issued until two days after departure. For sleeping in the meantime many like myself had to make do by sitting forward on the bench and burying the weary head in one's arms resting crossed on the table. Others roughed it by stretching out on the bare floor as best they could.

To me, of all the mass of humanity with which I was so closely penned together for the entire long drawn-out sea voyage, very few faces still come to mind as part of that hemmed in environment. Even among the twenty odd people that chanced to be my mess-table companions for the duration, I recall only my three immediate neighbours. I regret to say one of these, a middle-aged former commercial photographer from Berlin, singled me out early in the piece for his unwelcome, absurd and repulsive attentions. I recoiled from the effusive "protective" concern with which he clumsily tried to baby me and to cradle me in his arm when he would stretch out for rest on the floor. And it astounded me that this man could be so oblivious and insensitive or uncaring to branding himself by his demeanour towards me as an impudent homosexual lacking any discretion or self-control.

Yet in his less randy moments he won my respect as an accomplished photographer. For he had on him a collection of more than a hundred cigarette cards from Germany, which he would show with quiet pride if he sensed any skepticism about the professional past and credentials he claimed. Framed in gold, each little card depicted beautifully the captioned or autographed portrait of a different celebrated film star and in a corner credited the taking of the photo unmistakeably to his name. He must have summoned up all his cunning and resourcefulness to smuggle the deck of cards past the rapacious soldiery that had welcomed us aboard. And rightly so; if in the new world he was ever to recover the commercial goodwill, prestige and recognition for his cumulative camera work of which the Nazis had foully deprived him, this set of cigarette cards would prove to be priceless. For my part, having seen the work of his Berlin days made me unhesitatingly choose him eight years later to take the photo marking my official engagement to marry.

The other two close mess-table neighbours of my Dunera days whom I clearly recall are the brothers George and Paul Kaufmann, not much older than I and hailing from Vienna. Professing Catholics, their "Aryan" credentials were insufficient to pass muster as such in an Austria for which an earlier expatriate had lately made a successful take-over bid. Any physical resemblance between the brothers was not immediately obvious; and in character they seemed even more dissimilar. George, the elder of the two, was serene, outgoing and usually ready for you with a smile and friendly remark. By contrast Paul was taciturn, introvert, often frowning, even morose. Yet in another decade or so it would fall to Paul to become a congenial colleague of mine at work for several years and an esteemed personal friend for life. In retrospect I surmise that his unsociable ways aboard the ship indicate shock, disappointment and a self-protective shell against the unexpected tribulations of our Dunera captivity.

For me, and probably for most of the others imprisoned aboard, the greatest and most irksome hardship was to be continually cooped up below deck amid a multitude of others, with next to no space in which to move, no daylight and insufficient ventilation. With no change of clothing, and with inadequate, insufficient and most unhygienic latrines and washing facilities, it was difficult to get rid of people's body odours. They fouled what limited fresh air was blown in through the ventilation system, resulting in a persistently stale and sweaty atmosphere.

I was so appalled by the living conditions that I had to keep reminding myself it could be no more than eight to ten days before we reached Canada, when all the misery must surely come to an end. And I felt entitled to cling firmly to the hope of Canada, as that had been perceived by some

to be the direction in which the Dunera was sailing. Had I been told there and then that we were all condemned to an additional oppressive seven weeks at sea, I fear I would have given in to utter despair.

Imagine, therefore, how my spirits sank when eight days out at sea our deck leader, Mr Eppenstein, returned from a briefing of all deck leaders by the commandant and announced in a firm and ringing voice to all and sundry: "Das Reiseziel ist Australien!" (The destination is Australia).

To miss out on the prospect of Canada was bad enough. But the certainty of an extra seven weeks Dunera endurance was a great deal worse. Yet it is amazing how adaptable human nature can be. By now I was already conditioned and steeled enough to tell myself: "Well, I have survived one week of this misery; so I suppose I shall manage to endure the remaining seven weeks of it too." I am sure that the resilience of youth was a great help to me in all this.

Intermittent brief recourse to daylight and fresh air came with a daily exercise period of about fifteen to twenty-five minutes, but only when the ship was out at sea, with no land in sight. One deckload at a time, we were then taken to trot along, at a brisk pace and strung out in double file, for several rounds of the promenade deck, under the watchful eyes of the armed and life-jacketed guards, and with two soldiers each manning four Lewis guns at the ready and trained on us along the passage way from port and starboard fore and aft respectively.

But I was more intrigued by a heavier piece of armament which I perceived during our first exercise period: a solitary small ship's cannon mounted on a turntable that had been improvised on the poop deck. There it stood unmanned, clearly intended to help ward off - with what little prospect of success, one wondered - the importunities of enemy submarines or surface raiders rather than those of mutineering prisoners aboard.

I was able to reserve the necessary space and pair of hook fixtures for the hammock issued to me, as to others, late on the second day out at sea. My previous user experience of such a contrivance was limited to a net hammock strung up among trees in my grandparents' garden or in our own backyard at home. The robust canvas creation now before me looked more complicated but after a bit of trial and error I got it somehow strung into place. When I struggled into it for a night's rest and covered myself with the two blankets that came with it, I found it a great deal cosier than the garden hammock of yore, and its gentle swaying to the ship's movements soothed me like a baby being rocked to sleep in its cradle.

My sweet slumber came to a rude and nasty end about four o'clock in the morning, when the Dunera found itself pitching and tossing in a stormy Irish sea. It was then that a particularly strong heave of the ship uncovered a fault that had crept into my stringing up of the hammock, making it slip off its anchoring in one of the hooks and thus making me fall unceremoniously to the floorboards below.

I had barely recovered from the shock of this awakening, figured out what had happened and mentally registered the violent movements of the ship, when I also became aware of a swelling chorus of moans and groans from all over the deck, as nausea spread rapidly among my fellow-prisoners. Some started vomiting all over the place. One gushed out of his hammock and narrowly missed me as I lay prostate on the floor. Hastily I rose. My sea-legs were sturdy enough

to stop me feeling queasy because of the ship's heaving and rolling. But soon the sour stench that rose from the chundering multitude around me grew so overpowering as to make me seasick too.

Somehow I managed to totter upstairs and to restrain my own puking till I reached the latrines. The steady streams of sea water flushing the catchment channels which ran beneath the two long rows of seat holes were already teeming with floating vomit. Here I let go at last. I retched and retched till I felt completely hollow. Then I retreated to the adjacent washrooms where I discovered a young chap named Heinz Koppel to be the only other internee to be making use of one of the few shower compartments at this small hour of the morning. I quickly stripped myself and found badly needed relief and cleansing under the thin spray of moderately hot salt water from an activated douche.

My refreshing soak could not have been in progress more than half a minute when my ears were assailed by a tremendous bang that seemed to issue from the main deck overhead as if to envelop and pervade the entire Dunera. I was trying to conjecture the cause of this vehement report when it was followed by an eerily scratchy noise coming from below, as though of something scraping all along the keel of the ship, before it fizzled out. Shortly after there occurred another big bang, just like the earlier one.

Heinz Koppel and I looked non-plussed at each other. I did not give much thought to the scraping noise from below, perhaps sub-consciously attributing it to some jetsam brushing against the hull of the Dunera. As to those extra-loud and rather metallic bangs, my lame guess was that some of the deck hands were busy slamming down the hatches on the ship's cargo holds, though it puzzled me why they should do so at this time of the night. But what I said aloud to Heinz Koppel, by way of cracking a feeble joke, was: There is probably a U-boat attacking us, and what we heard was the ship's cannon being fired to chase it away."

Not till quite a few days later did I learn that my laboured attempt at humour had been much closer to the truth than my guess: That we had survived and listened to a U-boat attack upon the Dunera, with what we had heard so loudly being the sounds of two torpedoes exploding some distance beyond the Dunera, one of them having failed to detonate on making minimal contact with the ship (and hence the scraping noise), and the other having missed it completely. I hate to think how I would have felt, had I been aware of the attack while it was in progress. Yet the survivors of the Arandora Star who were held prisoner in the rear part of the Dunera had limited access to the main deck in a little cage and as a result were fully in the know at the time. What a nightmare it must have been for them to find themselves the helpless target of a U-boat attack after narrowly surviving the sinking of their prison ship only twelve days earlier! Small wonder that this time some of them tried to riot and break out in an attempt that was however quickly quelled by the guards.

Riots or no riots, there is little doubt that had a successful torpedo hit occurred, virtually all internees on the Dunera would have drowned like rats: There were no life jackets, few life boats and no life boat drill; exits from below deck were too small and deliberately narrowed and the soldiers were briefed (as some grimly warned internees) to make sure no prisoner would escape from the sinking ship alive.

It would appear that just as the stormy seas may have helped to make the two torpedoes miss their mark, so may some of the internees' luggage jettisoned by their guards have resulted in no

further torpedoes being let loose against the Dunera. At any rate, S.C.Clerque, the German U-boat commander who attacked the Dunera, claimed in his memoirs written after World War 2 that after the firing of the two torpedoes he thought he saw through his periscope people jumping overboard and had the impression a mutiny had broken out on the Dunera. He ceased firing and instead at nightfall sent a few of his sailors in rubber boats to pick up any survivors. But all they could find was a number of suitcases floating on the water. In them they discovered numerous letters written in German and mailed from Germany to civilian internees in prisoner-of-war camps in England. This convinced him, writes Clerque, that the Dunera was carrying mainly German prisoners-of-war. Anxious to prevent a repetition of the Arandora Star affair he then radioed a message to all other U-boats in the area that the Dunera carried mainly German P.O.Ws and therefore they should not attack the ship but escort it from the danger zone. And that is the probable reason why the Dunera and all its human cargo were preserved on our long and roundabout voyage to the Antipodes.

The Clerque account has never been corroborated from any other source, and in many quarters its authenticity is strongly doubted or denied outright. Yet it has the ring of truth about it and sounds a more likely reason for our marvellous escape from being miserably drowned at sea than any other explanation that comes to mind. Or, to quote an old Italian saying: If it is not true, then it is at least well invented!

CHAPTER 15: ODYSSEY

Compared to the pathetic short commons of Kempton Park and Huyton, the food rations provided for us on the Dunera were a great improvement, as the following sample menus for a typical week, recorded by a fellow-internee, will show: (per diem, one line each for breakfast, dinner, tea and supper)

WEDNESDAY, 14TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Grilled bacon & beans; Bread, butter, marmalade, tea.
Soup; Roast beef, peas, boiled potatoes; Stewed apricots & sago pudding.
Bread, butter, jam, tea.
Smoked fillet of fish, bread, butter, tea.
THURSDAY, 15TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Grilled sausages, mashed potatoes; bread, butter, marmalade, tea.
Irish stew, boiled potatoes; Stewed apples & custard.
Bread, butter, jam, fresh fruit, tea.
Cold pressed beef, sauce, bread, butter, cocoa.
FRIDAY, 16TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Liver saute; bread, butter, marmalade, tea.
Soup; Corned leg of pork, peas pudding, potatoes; blancmange, tinned fruit.
Bread, butter, jam, tea.
Lancashire Hot Pot; bread, butter, tea.
SATURDAY, 17TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Liver saute, bread, butter, marmalade, tea.
Soup; Roast beef, cabbage, boiled potatoes; Rice pudding & golden syrup.
Bread, butter,jam, tea, cheese & biscuits.
American Dry Hash; bread, butter, tea.
SUNDAY, 18TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Kippered herrings, bread, butter, marmalade, coffee.
Soup; Roast mutton, butter beans, boiled potatoes; Stewed figs, tapioca.
Bread, butter, jam, tea.
Grilled sausages, onion sauce, bread, butter, cocoa.
MONDAY, 19TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Grilled bacon & tomatoes; bread, butter, marmalade, tea.
Stewed steak with vegetables, mashed potatoes; Rice & raisin pudding.
Bread, butter, jam, tea.
Tinned herrings in tomato, bread, butter, tea.

TUESDAY, 20TH AUGUST:
Porridge; Smoked fillets of fish, bread, butter, marmalade, tea.
Soup; Roast beef, cabbage, boiled potatoes; Stewed apricots & custard.
Bread, butter, jam, tea.
Baked Macaroni Cheese with tomatoes, bread, butter, tea.

Thus, on paper, the meals looked respectable enough, although in quantity, quality, and variety, they still left much to be desired. Fresh plant food of any kind was rare, and every once in a while we were issued with a small swig of lime juice to avoid an outbreak of scurvy. It seems that the tea we drank was often dosed with sodium bromide to keep us sexually and otherwise quiet and rather sleepy during the long voyage. Perhaps the most telling point about our Dunera diet is this: By general consensus of the internees, to this day the most memorable and enjoyable meal they ever had in Australia remains their first one after disembarkation - the railway box lunch that was issued to each individual on the train trip to the internment camps inland. It comprised two corned beef sandwiches, a juicy apple and an orange, together with a large paper cup of milk coffee.

But the people on the Dunera for whom the food situation was really tough were several hundred Orthodox Jews among us internees who insisted on observing kashruth, the dietary restrictions of traditional Judaism. Grouping themselves together at separate kosher tables, they would not partake of meat, nor of dry biscuits or even of bread (unless all crust was removed first), because the bread and biscuits had been baked in tins greased with lard or other non-kosher animal fat. Their spiritual leader, Rabbi Dr Ehrentreu, gave dispensations to some in poor health to eat biscuits and he successfully interceded with the commandant to keep food provisioning for the Orthodox Jews separate.

But when Dr Ehrentreu complained about the seizure of religious vestments, prayer books and phylacteries confiscated by guards during periodic deck searches, Lt O'Neill threatened the little rabbi that he would hang him at the mast, swing him by his beard round the mast and throw him overboard. Threats and physical ill-treatment of various other internees, especially by Lt O'Neill and one of the sergeants nicknamed "The Lionhunter" were not at all uncommon, notably when O'Neill was in a drunken state or when any internee had the nerve to complain or protest about anything - usually about the confiscation or undisguised robbery of personal effects. To that end, guards throughout the long voyage staged frequent fishing expeditions among the few personal belongings the internees still possessed and had left in their cramped quarters while they were having their short spells of fresh air and exercise up on the promenade deck.

It would be wrong to say that each and every one of the soldiers that were our guards was guilty of the ill-treatment inflicted on us; but the culprits, even if in a minority, included the most influential elements from the commandant and his adjutant downwards.

For our part, we internees found it very difficult to understand the mentality of British army personnel ostensibly bitter about the Nazis who had overwhelmed them in Belgium and France and from whom they had narrowly escaped via Dunkirk. Why would such soldiers vent their spleen against Jewish refugees, who had even greater scores to settle with the Nazis? But if one remonstrated with the soldiers about that, they would say: If you are Nazis, you should be jailed, and even more so if you are Jews or other Germans for being disloyal to your country!

Was this the warped logic of boneheads employed as guards, or the glib and clumsy rationalisation for their vindictive and thieving behaviour towards us? From the shoulder flashes on their uniforms we could see how as a military unit they had been cobbled together from members of various British regiments such as the Royal Norfolks, Suffolks and the Queen's Own regiment and the British Pioneer Corps. Quite likely the troop contingent to serve as guards on the Dunera was used by these regiments as a convenient dumping ground for their own undesirables. Our guards were certainly not average British Tommies. Similarly one must suspect that officers such as Scott and O'Neill had become something of an embarrassment to their superiors for placement in commanding positions.

It is quite on the cards, that among such low-grade personnel a modicum of antisemitism, at least of the more genteel British variety, also figured in the treatment meted out to us. This might account for dismissing German-Jewish hostility to the Nazis as disloyalty to their country of birth. Similarly it would explain why Scott, in a written report revealed after the war, gave his personal views on the Jews he held prisoner by stating that they "can only be described as subversive liars, demanding and arrogant, and I have taken steps to bring them into my line of thought. They will quote any person from a Prime Minister to the President of the United States as personal references, and they are definitely not to be trusted in word or deed".

In reality, of course, the boot was on the other foot. Nobody was less to be trusted in word or deed than Scott, O'Neill and some other officers to whom many internees entrusted their valuables for safekeeping. The thirty-five thousand pounds sterling eventually paid by the British government as restitution money to internees who had been robbed by Scott, O'Neill & Co, and the court-martialling of Scott and several of his minions after their behaviour had been disclosed and had become a political scandal show that Scott had indeed ample reason to regard the Jews in his charge as subversive - to himself!

There were also people aboard who tried to help us - notably Lt Brooks, the ship's medical officer. And among the kitchen staff were men who could be trusted surreptitiously to purchase goods for us from the ship's canteen. Through such channels I obtained a toothbrush and a jar of dentifrice for myself, and a daily ration of two ounces of Cadbury milk chocolate or a Mars bar, at the same price of twopence which I used to pay in England. In this way I gradually used up my carefully hoarded little money treasure during the voyage. And so I came to land in Australia with a toothbrush and my last sixpence in my pocket, in the ragged and bedraggled clothes I stood up in as all the worldly goods or tangible assets I had left to my name.

The Dunera ploughed on through the Atlantic, at first getting fairly close to Canada. Then, after the captain opened his sealed orders, the ship veered in a great arc southward towards West Africa. Soon the climate started getting warmer and before long the troops guarding us changed from their rust-brown battle-dress and forage caps into tropical gear. In their light khaki shirts and shorts and wide-brimmed pith helmets they now looked to me less like soldiers and more like explorers on safari. As I passed them during our exercise periods on deck I often caught myself daydreaming of exotic African jungle where these safari types would act as tourist guides for us while we made first acquaintance with the Dark Continent.

Something related to these romantic reveries turned into feverish expectations when we approached the West African coast - first at Freetown, capital of Sierra Leone, then at Takoradi on the Gold Coast, nowadays renamed as Ghana. In both places we hoped to get a glimpse of picturesque, tropical Africa. To our chagrin these hopes were dashed. Because at all such times our daily exercise period was cancelled and we remained banished below deck. As a result I had barely ten seconds view of either coastline - through a single port-hole that had to be shared with many hundreds of other internees eagerly queuing for a look. Much the same thing happened at Capetown, with just a brief glance or two at the famous Table Mountain panorama. To be so unnecessarily shut off from such sights, for which my appetite had been whetted in geography lessons at school and from reading stories of adventures and exploration, to be so tantalisingly close to these coastal scenes and probably never to have another chance to revisit them! It says something of my youthful desires and endurance that for me this was a greater deprivation and frustration than anything else inflicted on us on this voyage. It really infuriated me; for I felt very strongly that as a small recompense for all the hardships we had to undergo at sea, we at least deserved some sightseeing from aboard ship - an innocent pleasure that would have given us much satisfaction, and at no cost to our captors.

It was this thirst of mine for new sights that also got me briefly into strife with our guards during one of our exercise periods after we had left Africa behind us. As we trotted along the promenade deck, barefoot and in double file under the watchful eyes of our guards, some unusual movement or stirring I espied in the water near the ship caught my attention. It made me forget myself enough to momentarily step out of line and go close to the rail so as to have a better view of this phenomenon. Immediately there were shouts and curses from the guards, with two of them rushing at me to put me back into line. They were afraid that I was trying to jump overboard, in much the same way in which a despairing elderly fellow-internee by the name of Jacob Weiss had committed suicide on the previous day.

Poor Mr Weiss! He had spent some twelve months in frantic endeavours to obtain immigration papers to Argentina, not only for himself but also for his family, whom he still hoped to extract from the Nazis' claws in Germany. Soldiers on the Dunera had found the precious immigration papers on him and had then torn them up, along with other documents, in front of his eyes. For many days after that Weiss was completely apathetic to everything and everybody around him. Then, in the end, he jumped overboard during an exercise period on deck. On the cry "Man overboard", the Dunera was briefly halted as futile attempts were made to find and rescue him.

Small wonder, then, that the guards were alarmed when they saw me approach the ship's rail on the day following this tragedy. Although I was roundly abused for my thoughtless misbehaviour, I felt strangely pleased and reassured. Because the incident demonstrated to me that, notwithstanding all the ill-treatment meted out to us and for whatever reason, our captors were actively concerned to deliver us safe and alive to Australia's shores. Considering all the circumstances, it was probably a combination of good luck and good management that only two other prisoners out of more than 2700 perished on the journey, both due to heart trouble, which in one case had been exacerbated in an ugly fist fight with a Nazi prisoner.

But if the guards tried to prevent us from killing ourselves, they were clearly not too much worried about keeping us free of injury. I mentioned previously in passing that we exercised barefoot. That resulted from an order given early during the journey, to prevent, it was said, excessive wear of the floorboards on the promenade deck. One day a drunken sergeant hurled an empty bottle onto the deck while exercising internees tramped past. Some were unable to dodge the scattered bits and pieces of broken glass on the floor and as a result incurred bad cuts on their bare feet.

You had to be among the unlucky minority to become a victim of incidents like that or of the instances of active brutality on the part of O'Neill and some of his henchmen. But as time went on, most internees came to suffer the cumulative deleterious consequences of the more passive ill treatment entailed in our cramped quarters, poor ventilation, appalling hygienic facilities, inadequate diet and insufficient exposure to the natural light of day - in short, living conditions so inferior as to gradually undermine the health and stamina of even the fittest amongst us. Small wonder, then, that the ship's hospital was soon overcrowded with patients, most of whom were suffering from acute dysentery, which was often quite debilitating. I personally held out against dysentery and hospitalisation until 26th August, the day before we reached Australian waters. The hospital had about 70 beds but was at that time holding perhaps twice that many patients and I was given a mattress to lie on the floor underneath one of the beds.

The next day, which happened to be my 17th birthday, we sighted land, and in the circumstances I could not have wished for a better birthday present than the first view of the Australian continent off Fremantle - a view this time unimpeded, and, more importantly holding out the prospect of a release from our hell ship before much longer. This was also underscored by the arrival aboard of a small group of Customs and Immigration officials who briefly inspected the hospital and other parts of the Dunera. They were clearly not too favourably impressed with what they saw. The ship itself never got really close to the coastline but anchored offshore. Within a day or two I was turfed out of hospital, as the only fever I still had was my feverish counting or estimating of the number of days before we would disembark. But although we briefly called at Port Melbourne, where the Nazi and Fascist prisoners were off-loaded, the rest of us were to sail to Sydney, and it was not until 6th of September that we were taken ashore.

In the preceding chapter I dealt in the main with the dramatic highlights of the Dunera episode in my life and in the present chapter so far with other salient features of this odyssey. But I have said virtually nothing as yet about how I filled in the many long waking hours below deck that were not taken up with eating and with looking after other bodily needs as best one could in the circumstances.

My recollections in that regard are rather hazy. There was not much reading matter and virtually no writing facility among us internees that had escaped our marauding guards, and only a few retained a pack of playing cards with which to while away the time. A few people contrived to make chessmen out of bits of stale bread and it was not too difficult to improvise a chessboard. But apart from much talk and discussion with fellow internees, and a lot of dozing and dreaming, the main activity and pastime was provided by the spontaneous burgeoning of numerous lecture and discussion groups on almost every conceivable kind of topic. Some of these groups became the

primitive fore-runners of more formal and better equipped classes later on in the internment camps - classes that were to be staffed by much the same lecturers and experts as now bobbed up aboard the Dunera. And we really had a great deal and variety of such talent among us, from many walks of life and academic disciplines. But of various groups I attended on a casual basis, the only one I still recall is one conducted by Egon Bruell, an Austrian engineer, who captivated his many young listeners with his vivid dissertations on fighting tactics in the streets and sewers of Vienna where militant social democrats battled it out with the Dollfuss regime when it bore down on the working classes in the early 1930ies.

No close or lasting associations arose for me from this kind of social and intellectual mingling aboard. But on the day we were due to disembark in Sydney, I spotted a pencilled notice stuck up on a pillar of our deck inviting any past or aspiring members of the Boy Scout movement to meet at a certain time and venue with a view to forming a Scout group who would stay and operate together in the camp or camps to which we were due to be taken.

This was right up my alley! From all that I had heard about the Boy Scouts in the past, I had often regretted never to have had an opportunity to join this movement. And now here was suddenly an unexpected chance to do so! When I presented myself at the designated time and spot, I was made very welcome by a group of perhaps two dozen or more people, most of them about my age or not much older. And a very congenial lot they appeared to me; so that I immediately felt quite at home with them. This first favourable impression of mine was to be confirmed over and over again throughout all the many months of my internment in Australia that followed and which made the long deprivation of freedom all so much more harmless and bearable for me than it would have been otherwise. The great camaraderie, good fellowship, and healthy self-discipline and purposefulness the group fostered among all its members did much to prevent me from letting myself go in the wider camp environment where the still remaining impetus of a sound upbringing at home would otherwise probably have petered out before long into a lassitude and slackness from which I might never have fully recovered.

Thus, in retrospect, the Rover Scout crew formed in camp from this group acted for me in an advanced way somewhat "in loco parentis", in the nicest manner possible. And I regard the joining of this group as by far the best thing that occurred to me on the Dunera.

CHAPTER 16: HAY

Throughout our Dunera voyage, every long mess table had its own set of crockery and cutlery, stored at the wall end of the table, and just one big tub full of hot water was provided per table for dishwashing after each meal. Clearly, each table's team of two rostered for this chore had to take great care to scrape all food scraps off every plate etc. before the wash, if the one lot of water was to have a chance to cleanse all the used mess gear. Almost daily some cutlery got lost in the process because it escaped being fished out of the murky dishwater before that was tipped into the ocean through a porthole. No replacement was made available for these losses, which steadily diminished our mess equipment. By the time we had our last meal aboard, everybody at my table was reduced to making do with one piece of cutlery, be it knife, fork or spoon. But at that stage we laughed at the shortage and nobody cared anymore; for we were already in Sydney harbour and eagerly awaiting disembarkation.

Yet even as the Dunera made its way through Sydney Heads and into Port Jackson, we were still so confined that I saw next to nothing of the scenery and glimpsed only a small section of the huge steel work of the famous harbour bridge as we passed beneath its mighty arch. By the time the Dunera docked at Pyrmont wharf, even the open-air vista was so hemmed in by a multitude of buildings, ships, trains, cranes and other paraphernalia as to preclude any view of the magnificent panorama of Sydney harbour.

Instead, as we emerged from below deck for the last time and into daylight, what caught my attention were the rows of soldiers armed with rifle and bayonet, neatly drawn up on the wharf to act as custodians of the arriving shipload of prisoners of war, that we were expected to be. In their picturesque broad-brimmed slouch hats, turned up at one side, and their dust-green uniforms and puttees that contrasted neatly with their ox-blood red polished boots, these Australian soldiers looked a fine body of men, and refreshingly different from our Dunera guards. One had to get fairly close to their weather-beaten faces before one realised that nearly all these serving men were of the older generation, in fact veterans of World War I. They had volunteered for war service again and were still fit for escort and guard duty. To that end they were formed into so-called garrison battalions.

A bevy of Army officers and civilian officials plus a few press photographers also stood about, watching as we disembarked in single file and were directed into the rather old-fashioned carriages of four waiting special trains. But the general public was barred from this landing scene. While the seats on each train filled up with internees, a few of the old soldiers joined each carriage-load as escorts. All this took place in a very calm and friendly atmosphere and to each and everyone of us the amiable free and easy manner of the "Diggers" contrasted most dramatically and favourably with what we had been exposed to from the "Tommies", even before these Aussies came to realise that we were not captive Nazis or Fascists but actually Jewish and other refugees very much on their side in the war, although we came as prisoners. The very acceptable railway lunch boxes and hot milk coffee handed out to us soon after the long train journey began helped to clinch the good feeling that was rapidly developing between us and our Australian guards.

I shared a compartment with some of my new scout mates. As our train started to move off the wharves, I expected to view from my window seat quite a bit of Sydney's urban scene. But all I recollect seeing is miles and miles of Redfern and other slummy industrial areas, reminiscent of those I had encountered back in Britain; except that in many spots rusty corrugated iron took the place here of crumbling old brickwork in Britain. It was not a very edifying first sight-seeing; and by the time these grim vistas completely disappeared, we were already well and truly into the Australian countryside. With the train gradually climbing into the forest land of the Blue Mountains, I could discern, even as night fell, the kind of bush landscape I now remembered having seen depicted in two photographic illustrations in my old Form IV Geography textbook in Germany. Such identification gave me a pleasant feeling of traveller's achievement - the kind I had been cheated of during our lengthy sea voyage.

The train journey hundreds of miles into the backblocks of New South Wales continued right through the night, with short pauses every once in a while for either a change-over or at least a re-tanking of railway engines at Goulburn and exotically named places such as Cootamundra, Junee and Narrandera. It was all a bit suggestive of the change of horses in the old stage-coach days. In principle it was of course the same sort of thing. After all that, journey's end seemed to me an odd anti-climax when in the dawning light of the next morning we discovered ourselves traversing wide open sparse grasslands, flat as a pancake and leading up to a destination named Hay, a bare name that seemed oddly out of character with those of the stopping places on the way there. A solitary old railway station building and one short sidetrack marked the spot for this final halt. Immediately beyond it our so far seemingly endless one-track railway line petered out in the sand - just like that, without even the landmark of a buffer stop, after all these hundreds of miles.

Not very far from the railhead and the small township beyond was our destination - two large encampments, both separately described by and ringed with three rows of barbed wire fencing and with heavy barbed wire entanglement between the two outer rows. Just beyond the outer barbed wire, and spaced at intervals loomed several watchtowers equipped with searchlights. Sole access to each encampment was via a heavy double gate. The two compounds, designated as Camp 7 and Camp 8, were separated by a corrugated iron wall, (presumably to preclude the view and so to prevent inmates signalling from one camp to the other) and by a group of huts which served as barracks for the garrison battalion from which guards for both camps were drawn. At least outwardly, the barracks looked similar to the buildings within the compounds.

The two camps were brand new, erected on the flat reddish clay soil that had formerly served as Hay's aerodrome. On our arrival they were not quite ready yet - especially Camp 8. And so we were all taken to Camp 7 while feverish building or finishing of camp huts continued all around us, and we had to improvise with accommodation designed for half our number. However, within a few days construction was sufficiently completed for half the internees, including our group of scouts, to move into Camp 8. As in Camp 7, housing consisted of 36 huts, each to accommodate 28 internees who were to sleep on straw palliasses in two rows of seven two-tiered bunks, and with three heavy woollen blankets per bunk. Numbered from 1 to 36, the huts contained no other furniture or furnishings, except brooms and buckets to keep the wooden floors clean. Hut No.10

was allotted to our scout group, with the small overflow of scouts taking up part of the adjacent Hut No 11.

Clustered into two groups of 18, the huts symmetrically flanked two large mess huts, each adjacent to other hutments for camp kitchens and food stores. Elsewhere in this central area were blocks or arrays of wash-basins, showers and latrines. Other hutments, some of which may have been erected subsequent to our arrival, housed communal facilities like a camp canteen, a medical hut and a dental station. The latter two were mainly staffed by qualified practitioners from among the internees, so that only patients needing hospitalisation had to be taken outside camp. In my own case I remember how one day, while I whittled at a piece of hard timber, the very sharp knife I used slipped and cut almost right through the tip of my left index finger. Bleeding profusely I was rushed to the medical hut where Dr Sonnenberg, one of the interned doctors doing duty, expertly stitched the nearly severed tip back into position. It healed together alright within a week or two, but left the fingertip numb for a very long time. For it took some ten years or more until the severed nerve grew together again. Had I been twenty or thirty years older it might never have done so.

The big mess huts, equipped with wooden tables and benches, also served other communal purposes between meals, such as musical and theatrical entertainment, lectures and formal school classes, playing cards, chess and other games, or sessions of the camp parliament. This was the democratic internal government of the camp, to which each hut sent its own chosen hut captain and deputy captain as representatives. At the head of the parliament were the camp leader and deputy leader who were the official spokesmen of the internees in dealings with the military and in any other official contacts with the outside world. These and various functional office bearers were all duly elected. There were a few other central huts or parts of huts to serve sundry purposes such as a library, bank and internal administration offices, quartermaster's store, and the like. But no additional special hut space was provided for religious services, Jewish or Christian.

So everything was housed and roofed - but only up to a point. To describe the climatic conditions that greeted us in Hay, I cannot do better than selectively quote from an account given by Rev. Walter Koenig, the Jesuit leader of the three percent of Roman Catholics among the internees:

> *'...Gradually the heat rose and the summer we feared began. The light cast bluish shadows. Strange mirages built up around us. Towards mid-day we clearly saw the Murrumbidgee overflow and with its blue waves play around trees on the river banks. Towards evening the mirage disappeared. Then suddenly ghostlike willy-willies whirled through the camp and subsided in the distance. Every morning flights of parrots with bright plumage came from the Murrumbidgee and flew screeching over our huts towards the unknown north. Above all there was the magic beauty of the sunsets: a glory of colour we have never seen since. We were speechless as we watched the spectacle. The sky flared with purple-red, gold, violet,*

green till the sun sank and the moon like a blood-red pane appeared on the horizon. Night fell quickly. The stars stood out against the deep black firmament like spheres of light, and above them the silver band of the Milky Way and the Southern Cross were aflame...
'...But the picture changed completely when the dust-storms from the hot Australian interior rushed forth with unimaginable fury and changed the day into pitch-black night. We had experience of them within a few days of our arrival. A hellish, burning wind started to blow, the feared north wind or Brick-layer", the "Samum" of the Australian desert. It became hot, very hot, 100 degrees and more. The air got darker. We were afraid a catastrophe was about to occur. Then the earth seemed to rise as if to fly away. Enormous masses of black top-soil and red sand suddenly filled the air, were torn in a whirl high into the air and were carried as we learnt later thousands of miles away. The fine sand penetrated our huts and was in everything, clothes, books and palliasses. The desert was advancing. We thought we would suffocate. Our hearts beat fast and our temples throbbed. At night we lay on the ground to get air. Only days later did the wind change; a refreshing downpour of rain flooded the camp and everything returned to what it had previously been: not a cloud in the sky, and our gaze was rested by the same magic picture of willy-willies, mirages, sunsets and stars until the next storm set in. Now there were only mosquitoes and snakes left to plague us. It's not surprising that not all of us got used to these hardships...'

Although not far from the camp and from the township of Hay, the Murrumbidgee river was not visible to us except in these frequent hazy mirages. In fact, except for the garrison barracks on the side of the camp gate, the vista in all directions was endless flat open country with sparse grass. To escape from the camp seemed a futile proposition likely to end only in starvation unless prevented by recapture. In this geographical solitude, the elaborate barbed wire fencing and watchtowers seemed an exaggerated effort to try and keep us together, as did the twice-daily roll calls.

Our personal isolation in this strange new continent to which we had so unexpectedly been banished was virtually complete, since hardly anybody in camp had any relative, friend or acquaintance in Australia. Institutional links with the world beyond the barbed wire were slow in coming, and in this regard the small minority of Catholics and other Christians were better served

than the Jewish majority, whose early contacts with representatives of the Jewish communities of Sydney and Melbourne seemed to lack some of the warmth and fraternal feeling we had envisaged.

Thus we were all rather miffed when, as first local Jewish contact, Mr Walter Brand, General Secretary of the Australian Jewish Welfare & Relief Society, came up from Sydney and told us not to expect anything from Sydney Jewry who had more than their hands full looking after all the poor Jewish refugees already in the country and on the dole. Compared with them, he said, we were much better off here in camp where we had an assured roof over our head and no worries where the next meal would be coming from. I am afraid Mr Brand was contemptuously laughed out of camp, although he made a token distribution of some toothpaste and cigarettes...

If the Brand psychology to make us feel happier with our lot misfired while we were labouring under a great sense of injustice at our internment, how much more was this the case when Rabbi Jacob Danglow appeared from Melbourne and gave a speech in which he told us bluntly that the British government could not be blamed for interning and deporting us, as it was quite likely that odd fifth columnists were to be found hidden in our ranks. And he refused point blank to help the 300 or so orthodox Jews of Camp 7 who asked for his intercession to be provided with facilities for kosher meat. The feelings in camp thus engendered about the Australian rabbinate were mollified by a subsequent visit from Rabbi Falk of Sydney who addressed us all most sympathetically, and even in Yiddish, and also negotiated successfully with the military authorities to make arrangements for the provision of kosher meat forthwith for those internees who observed kashruth. Unknown to us at the time, Rabbi Danglow later wrote to Prime Minister Menzies pleading for facilities where we could apply for release from internment; but there is no evidence that this had any real effect.

If only I had known at the time that Rabbi Dr Porush who had helped me to England was by now Chief Minister of Sydney's Great Synagogue and that Rabbi Falk was his Assistant Minister, I would have approached Rabbi Falk there and then and given him a message for Rabbi Dr Porush, who would then probably have come to visit me some time. As it was, however, I did not learn of Rabbi Porush's new Sydney appointment until several months later, when I happened to see him mentioned in a newspaper report. Thereupon I immediately wrote to him, care of the Great Synagogue in Sydney, and related what had brought me to Australia. Weeks and months passed without a reply, so that I could only surmise the good rabbi, being himself of foreign extraction, must have deemed it inexpedient to establish contact with a prisoner like myself and thus possibly compromising his own precarious standing as a loyal subject of the King, or his prominent public position.

But about two years later, with my newly acquired uniform and respectability as a member of His Majesty's Australian forces, I decided to write to the Porushs once more. This time I received an instant and most cordial reply. When on my next recreation leave I availed myself of their invitation to stay with them as their guest in Sydney, I was warmly welcomed and treated almost like a son. As I feared, they reproached me for not having written to them again after my first letter elicited no reply and I had to tell them what I had thought. They were quite emphatic that my first letter had not reached them and that they most certainly would have replied at once. It strains my credulity that the letter got lost in the mail and I am forced to conclude that military censorship stopped it. In that event a second letter by me from Hay would presumably have shared the same

fate. The really vicious part of this is that the censors did not return the letter to me or at least inform me of its disallowance. And if my blame of the censorship system seems unwarranted, then let me cite another instance that affected me personally and that illustrates the censors' bloody-mindedness more directly:

It was later during the war, and at a Jewish function in Melbourne, I invited a rather attractive young lady to dance with me. As we swirled around the floor and exchanged names, she identified me as the young man to whom she had written as part of a Melbourne Jewish group effort to initiate pen friendships with some of us during our internment and thus try to brighten our captivity. (She had picked my name to write to because I was listed occupationally as a student, and she too was a student). However, all such letters to initiate pen friendships were returned to the senders by the censors - with a note that internees were prohibited from receiving fan mail! Who knows what might have come of it, if such innocent pleasure had been permitted.

Whatever qualitative taboos the censorship may thus have imposed, there was no quantitative restriction on the amount of mail we were permitted to receive. As for outward mail, we were initially rationed to two letters per week. That restriction was lifted later, when we were theoretically released from internment by the British. In practice we remained prisoners because the Australians were stuck with us but denied us landing permits. Stubbornly refusing to have us as immigrants, their ruling politicians and bureaucrats could not think of any more imaginative or humane way out of their dilemma or impasse than to let us continue behind barbed wire, virtually on the same terms on which they had admitted us as prisoners to help Britain's war effort. The liberalisation of outward mail, and easing of the daily roll calls were the only concessions made to give some practical recognition and effect to our theoretical release. But in order to facilitate outward censorship both before and after this liberalisation, all letters sent by us had to be in English and either typed or written in capital block letters, all on official P.O.W. stationery and restricted to the 22 lines per letter this provided.

Obviously my first mail priority was to try and resume postal contact with Papa and Mama trapped in Nazi Germany. This was achieved directly, though agonisingly slowly. Next in importance was to resume postal contact with uncle Alfred and with aunt Alma and their respective families in the U.S.A. Through these American relatives I also achieved occasional indirect correspondence with my parents in a similar fashion as I had done in England via Holland, though letters in either direction took several months to reach their intended final destination.

Inevitably this indirect mail came to an end with America's entry into the war in December 1941. But however precarious and spasmodic such correspondence with Germany, it was of tremendous importance. It certified to me that dear Papa and Mama were still alive and hoping and it assured them that I was safely out of harm's way while England was being blitzed and under invasion threat and that I survived with relatively minor discomforts and deprivations in Australian captivity.

Due to the treatment accorded to us on the Dunera, nearly all of us arrived in Hay more or less in rags. Within days our luggage arrived, or rather the sorry and often muddled and messy remnants that were left of it after the wanton rifling and plunder it had undergone by our marauding guards aboard. It took much effort to sort out and to find the owners of each remaining piece of clothing and other item. Apart from my empty damaged suitcase all I retrieved was one pyjama jacket and my Bavarian-style deer-leather shorts. The latter made ideal camp wear and immediately after

release from internment were even more useful to me for clambering among the trees when I had to work as a seasonal fruit picker. My other clothing deficiencies, like those of my fellow-internees, were slowly relieved by gradual issues of military style flannel shirts and cotton underwear, giggle hats, blue denim jackets and trousers and reconditioned old army greatcoats roughly re-dyed in some ghastly plum-red to identify us as prisoners-of-war rather than as soldiers. For footwear we eventually received woollen army socks and heavy army boots. Some people improvised sandals or slippers or scuffs by cutting up discarded old car tyres which they managed to procure.

Having re-established regular correspondence with my relatives in the U.S.A. I soon received once again the occasional dollar in the mail, and also an odd parcel or two. In one of these aunt Lorraine sent me an absolutely first-rate heavy-duty pair of jeans, richly double-stitched and so much fortified with copper nails and staples as to be virtually indestructible. But it seemed the trouser legs badly needed to be shortened, as they were absurdly long. Indeed neither I nor my comrades in camp could comprehend why the manufacturers had made the legs about a third longer than normally required. As the extra length could not be cut off without ruining the whole garment, the only way out appeared to be to turn up outward the extra length, as indeed it was meant to be. But none of us realised this. At that time such jeans were still an American novelty which had not yet spread to Australia. Until a few years later the jean fashion penetrated this country, the high outward turn-up of the legs looked so unusual and absurd and grotesque that I would not be seen in these jeans even in the internment camp! Puzzled though I was by this queer piece of obviously expensive clothing, courtesy forbade me to criticise or query the purpose of its length in my letter of thanks. Therefore the cultural barrier as yet existing was not breached and made me miss out on much good wear and on becoming perhaps the Australian pace-setter of the latest American rustic style.

Apart from the odd dollar mailed to me from America, I made a little money in camp by making a lot of money. This is my way of saying that I found a job in the camp mint, where we manufactured our internal camp currency. For we were forbidden the use of normal money, except perhaps copper coins, that is to say pennies and halfpennies. Our own currency in Camp 8 consisted of paper slips imprinted with potato cuts of denominations underneath a picture of a camp hut, plus a rubber stamp of the camp treasurer's signature and a registration number stamp. (Over in camp 7 they contrived rather more elaborate and artistic camp currency that looked so much like real money as to alarm the authorities.) In addition to such camp money we also printed penny coupons issued in strips of a dozen and each exchangeable for a cup of coffee in the camp's cafe. These so-called "coffee vouchers" as well as the other currency printed on ordinary non-durable paper required continual withdrawal and re-printing and thus kept me and a couple of others steadily occupied.

For this clerical-type work I was paid a few shillings a week. People doing heavier or more disagreeable work received higher pay and the most disagreeable work in camp such as cleaning of gully traps or latrine duty was by far the most highly paid. The money for payment came in some cases from the military authorities who paid mainly for heavy labouring work done outside the camp and, for all I know, for some of the work done inside. But in the main these modest wages were financed from the profits of the camp canteen. Under the Geneva Convention, civilian internees and

officers, unlike other prisoners of war, were not to be compelled to work in captivity but to be provided with the option to work.

As far as I remember, the little money I received in this way or by collecting discarded soft-drink bottles and returning them to the canteen for a penny refund per bottle, was sufficient for my incidental needs. Usually I spent it on iced soft drinks, cups of coffee, chocolate, postage and a copy of the Sydney Telegraph newspaper on Saturday, which carried a good weekend supplement. Sydney daily newspapers were readily made available through the canteen, being flown into Hay from Sydney every morning. Except for extra fresh fruit, usually oranges and apples at a penny apiece, there was no incentive to supplement our food rations, which were the same as those for our guards. But we ate much better than they did, as the food in camp was prepared under the direction of skilled Continental chefs interned with us whereas the guards had in the main to rely on the old-style army cooks and on unimaginative, stodgy British-style cookery. In short, good raw foodstuff was there for all, but only the prisoners used it to best advantage.

There was, however, no equivalent to the soldiers' "wet canteen" in camp, where the sale of liquor was prohibited. The only access we had to alcohol was when a few enterprising scouts and others filled old glass jars with water, honey and raisins, then sealed and stored them away to let them ferment into a kind of mead. Such enterprises mostly misfired as the jars were often half-forgotten and during fermentation tended to explode.

Our hunger for news was generally limited to those of the war and other overseas or world events, with as yet little or no interest in news of the Australian scene. Thus radio news broadcasts relayed over a public loudspeaker system plus an occasional newspaper were quite adequate for my purposes and those of most other internees. We also had the "Boomerang", our camp newspaper published twice a week as a wall newspaper and devoted largely to our own affairs. It featured many cartoon drawings of a very high standard that offered often sardonic comment on our situation. Articles and news items appeared some in German and some in English, and occasionally I would write a little item too in German, as my English was still not up to scratch for this purpose and I still thought in German.

Only a minority of the internees spoke English fluently, but probably all could understand it quite well. All communication with the military and other authorities was in English; but among ourselves we usually conversed in German, though trying to improve our English. As a result, the camp culture became bilingual and led to the evolution of an Anglo-German mishmash or argot that depended for its components on the relative power of the two languages, and on the incidence of resourceful individuals coming up with expressions that captured the imagination of their fellow-internees.

So here we had two camps, each containing about a thousand internees of the same population sample, and each exposed to the same bilingual environment and influences. Yet each camp was strictly isolated from the other as far as the inmates were concerned. It seems to me that a magnificent and unique opportunity for scientific research in language development was missed here. A philologist recording, analysing and comparing the picturesque mixture of English and German spoken in each compound could have arrived at interesting and valuable findings on the dynamics of language evolution. Lingual differences between the two camps would have pointed to the effect of individuals, similarities towards more general influences at work.

The fact that among ourselves we more often than not spoke German (although spiked with many English expressions) showed, I suppose, an inevitable lack of self-discipline that refused to make the extra effort to speak English when the easier German satisfied the immediate purpose of communication.

This lassitude extended also to our scout group, though in other respects we mustered considerable self-discipline and invariably began each morning by rising early and doing half an hour of group gymnastics followed by a cold shower before roll-call and breakfast time. It made a healthy start and triggered off plenty of energy for the rest of the day. Some others in camp would sometimes laugh at these efforts of ours but that did not bother us and we realised that at heart they admired us for it.

Strictly speaking, all being 17 years or older, we were above boy-scout age and therefore formed a Rover Scout group. But the general spirit and much of the activities were not very different from those of the boy scouts, and we subjected ourselves to many of the customary proficiency tests of the scouts and held frequent sing-songs and occasional camp fires. I suppose the great thing about it all was the enhanced group feeling and sheer camaraderie, plus the consciousness that by our daily early morning discipline we maintained a healthy physical as well as mental standard. Later when we moved to Camp 2 near Tatura, Vic., we were also able to reach out to a local scout group. More of this in the next chapter.

As for our situation as internees, which was, after all, a milder civilian version of prisoners of war, it should be noted that ours was the last shipload of internees to be deported from Britain and that even while we were but half-way to Australia, the inevitable reaction against the internment of German and Austrian refugees won the day and those still in Britain started to be released in large batches. Had we not been dispatched overseas, all those now at Hay would likewise have been set free. Increasingly questions were raised in the House of Commons about our ill-treatment on the Dunera and about our release, resulting after a few months in the granting of "theoretical" release to us. That is to say, had we been back in Britain our release would have taken practical effect. But other wartime shipping priorities precluded our return.

When the question of releasing at least a few of us in Australia was raised in the House of Representatives at Canberra, reaction was generally apathetic or outright hostile. The Hon. Archie Cameron, notorious and rather eccentric Country Party member for the South Australian electorate of Barker, barked his attitude towards all Germans, whether Nazis or anti-Nazis, supporters of Hitler or his victims. "Such persons enjoy no rights whatever in enemy territory", he thundered, denouncing what he described as "the kid glove pansy method" of handling them. "Certain Jewish refugees also have been interned, and a lot of 'hot air' is being talked about them. I have heard talk of 'friendly aliens'. I do not know what a friendly alien is. I know that when my country is engaged in a life and death struggle with Germany and Italy, any man of German or Italian birth is an enemy alien. If he is friendly to this country, then he must be a traitor to his own, and I do not think it is our part to encourage treason."

Cameron's extraordinary attitude received no active support from other members, but one of my fellow internees, on reading Cameron's speech, wrote:

"Statements like this can only be excused if one considers that the maltreatment and humiliations to which we were subjected by the Nazis go beyond anything an Englishman could even imagine anybody to inflict on his own countrymen...

"Bearing this in mind I come to the conclusion that the majority of Englishmen are not fully aware of what internment means to us. They do not realise that every day they make us spend behind barbed wire is an insult to us. They do not realise that in suspecting us of Nazi sympathies they make no allowance for such things as honour and self-respect. To call us anti-German is no offence, to call us pro-German is. Maybe this is incomprehensible for anybody who has not himself been a victim of Nazi persecution...

"No one will believe that at a time when England was standing with her back to the wall, she sacrificed precious shipping space in order to send perfectly innocent people to the remotest corners of the world. There must have been some reason, and this suspicion is further aggravated through the fact that originally the scheme had been intended for dangerous Nazi prisoners and the first few shiploads did largely consist of such people...

"The principal point is that during all these months the Government has done practically nothing to rectify these initial offences against us. It is possible to regard the whole series of events last summer, wholesale internment, indiscriminate deportation, maltreatment on the Dunera, misinformation to the Australians as to our real status, as an unfortunate accumulation of individual blunders without any consistently hostile force behind them, blunders such as are bound to happen at a time of great political and military tension. 'Mistakes have been made' ... we have heard that so often and we are only too keen to accept such an explanation since it allays possible fears of more sinister motives.

"Moral rehabilitation is our principal need and we feel all the more justified in putting forward this claim as it can be fulfilled without sacrifice of money or shipping space, in fact without putting any strain on the war machine...An authoritative statement...would clear our record... It

would reassure those of us and of our friends in England, who, as a result of what happened to us, have begun to doubt whether Britain has the right to pose in this conflict as the champion of democracy, justice and tolerance".

I have, after some hesitation, included these two lengthy quotes in my memoirs because the first one epitomises the mentality of those hostile to our settlement in Australia, which was to crop up time and again throughout the war and in the first post-war years.

The second and even lengthier quote from a fellow internee will explain the ambivalent attitude most "Dunera boys" including myself have about the Dunera affair and its results. On the one hand we feel that all the hype and fuss about our treatment is unwarranted because our sufferings were quite trivial compared with those of the Jews who survived the Holocaust under the Nazis and their minions; and in the end most of us did, by and large, quite well out of exile to Australia, however involuntary and restricted for a start.

On the other hand, what the Nazis did to the likes of us is no excuse for the treatment meted out to us by some British and by some Australian authorities at some stages, and to profess to suspect us of Nazi sympathies or alternatively to regard us as despicable traitors to the Nazi cause is to add great insult to injury. This should explain the sense of grievance under which we laboured and why we felt somewhat sorry for ourselves.

However, the years mellowed us and any resentment of those days is long past and gone. The Dunera affair with all its consequences remains a very important turning point in my life; indeed it is quite on the cards that our Dunera voyage and its sequels gain as prominent a place in the history of Australia as the sailing of the Mayflower to Plymouth Rock did in the history of the United States of America. Yet the way I see it, in the overall scheme of things it is just an interesting and perhaps relatively adventurous and spectacular episode; but certainly neither the hub nor the highlight of my personal history.

CHAPTER 17: TATURA

If you have seen some of the celebrated feature films about Prisoner-of-War camps during World War II, such as "The Wooden Horse", or "The Great Escape", you will have a fair idea of the physical dimensions of P.O.W. and internment camps in Australia, which in their confinement aspects were similar to the Nazi-run camps depicted in such films.

Being confined within an area of a few acres for many months is not nearly as bad and claustrophobia inducing, I suppose, as doing time in a prison cell; still, essentially it is imprisonment. Perhaps in comparison it represents something like the difference between an aviary and a canary cage. Most birds are presumed to be reasonably happy and content within the wider bounds of the aviary, but the human mind seeks more freedom. In Hay the only opportunities we were afforded to go beyond the barbed wire boundaries were swimming parties to the nearby Murrumbidgee river and some working parties outside camp (always under guard escort, of course).

I have never been much of a swimmer, and one excursion to the rather rough and inconvenient bank of the muddy Murrumbidgee river selected for this sort of sally out of camp was more than enough for me, thank you. As for the outside working parties, heavy pick-and-shovel work under guard and for a pittance was not my cup of tea either and gave me a taste of slavery rather than of freedom. As far as I was concerned, like most of my fellow internees I preferred the relative freedoms obtaining within our severely circumscribed camp space.

Yet, as with all war prisoners, our thoughts were continually, if not continuously, on getting out and away. And where Allied P.O.Ws in Europe set up Escape committees planning to dig their way out of camp, we internees at Hay established a Legal committee, consisting mainly of trained lawyers and judges to hack our way through the ludicrous "red tape" that classified us as enemy aliens and had us tied up with still other specious reasons and pretexts to keep us imprisoned.

Constant efforts of the Legal committee, reinforced by a growing number of voices heard on our behalf in the British Press and House of Commons, eventually resulted in the Home Office appointing a special representative sent to Australia, to consider our plaints individually as well as summarily, and then to make suitable recommendations to the government.

The man selected for this important mission was Major Julian D. Layton, an eminently suitable choice for the job. In civilian life a distinguished Jewish banker and stockbroker in London, Layton had been very active and effective in bringing Jewish refugees to England and in looking after those held at the Kitchener camp. This former military camp had been set aside to harbour some 3500 Jews who were ex-concentration camp inmates from Dachau, Buchenwald, Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen etc. released by the Nazis on condition they cleared out of Germany without delay. By May 1940 these Jews found that their refugee camp located at Richborough, Kent had virtually become their internment camp and eventually 500 of them were to join us on the Dunera.

Major Layton arrived in Sydney on 24th March 1941. His priority task was to decide which of us ought to be released, who should be accepted into the British Pioneer Corps (a non-combatant labour corps of the British Army) and who else should be given scarce shipping berths back to Britain. Layton was also to facilitate the emigration of internees who obtained visas

to other countries. In effect this meant refugees now interned who, like myself, had been waiting in Britain for their turn to come for permanent admission to the USA under the prevailing American immigration quota restrictions.

It did not take Layton very long to establish that all internees at Camps 7 and 8 should be accorded release in principle or theory. That is to say, had we been back in Britain again, we would be set free, as were refugees interned since May 1940 who had not been deported to Canada or Australia. But scarce shipping space back to England was procured only for the initial 400 or eventually 1141 recruits to the British Pioneer Corps and a handful of others with badly needed skills to be used in key industries.

The dearth of passages back to England did not affect me personally, as I had no desire to return there, neither to join the Pioneer Corps nor otherwise. Had I successfully volunteered for the Pioneer Corps, I could easily have been among the doomed contingent of 47 sailing back who were drowned when their ship was torpedoed. They included Herbert "King Kong" Rosenthal, who had hailed from Frankfurt and had become a dear friend of mine during our time in Hay and Tatura. His tragic death upset me greatly.

Instead of joining the colours, as it were, and for which in any case I had not yet quite reached the minimum age of 18, I was more concerned with securing immigration to the USA. My parents and I had by now become eligible under the American quota waiting number system (described earlier in chapter 9). The necessary affidavits had been fully provided and the various requisite documents were lodged with the American Consulate General in Sydney, with copies sent to me - all thanks to the assiduous endeavours of my uncles and aunts in the USA.

Most disappointingly and frustratingly, any such efforts at immigration to the USA by myself and at least 800 others in captivity at Hay came to nought. The Americans would not issue our visas while we were internees (and who could blame them for that?) and to the bloody-minded Australian authorities of the day we were so undesirable as immigrants that they would not let us set foot in Sydney as free men, not even very temporarily, just long enough to gain our visas! By the time the good Major Layton might have been able to find a way out for us from this Catch 22 situation, the Americans, though not yet at war, had changed their policy and denied visas to anyone still having blood relations living under German rule.

Another task of Major Layton was to examine, evaluate and process compensation claims for money, valuables and other luggage losses incurred on the Dunera through the depredations of Scott, O'Neill and their merry men. In the end British authorities shelled out a total of 35,000 Pounds Sterling by way of settling such claims, not an inconsiderable sum in those days. But I was not among those who lodged claims. For I had been forced to leave Germany virtually without valuables, had certainly not acquired any in Britain, and had stored away all my better personal clothing and effects rather than take such with me into internment. True, my suitcase contents were almost a total loss that was of much inconvenience or even hardship to me. But to put a monetary value on all the missing articles for a deposition on oath or a statutory declaration that would stand up to petty-fogging legal scrutiny seemed too much of a bother to me for what little monetary return, if any, was likely to result from so much rigmarole and red tape.

Thus, notwithstanding the high hopes and expectations that attached to Major Layton in the eyes of all the refugees who had been deported on the Dunera, the only boon his mission brought me personally under his official terms of reference was to restore my good name by means of the theoretical release accorded to all of us who had been packed off to Hay.

But although his terms of reference afforded me and many others only this theoretical change, Layton achieved for everybody a much more tangible practical benefit that lay perhaps outside his official assignment. While on a visit to the camps at Hay he experienced a "willy-willy" and was advised to keep his mouth tightly closed till the awful whirlwind carrying sand from the desert had passed. I still remember how I had encountered my own first willy-willy at Hay without such forewarning and as a result had copped a mouthful of dust and grit that took me several frantic mouthwashes, rinses and gargles before I could chew again without gnashing my teeth on fine sand.

As for Major Layton, no sooner had his willy-willy passed and he could open his mouth again, he insisted on inspecting the camp kitchens and found everything in them covered with a thick layer of dust. He decided there and then that Hay was an unsuitable camp site for Europeans and therefore demanded from the authorities in Sydney to have us internees moved to Tatura, in the fruit-growing Goulburn valley. In that prosperous, fertile irrigation district of the State of Victoria there was another area which had been set aside for prisoner-of-war or internment camps, but in a much more salubrious climate. A few hundred people from camp 7 and 8 had already been transferred for health reasons to another camp at Orange, NSW, where a quasi-hospital compound had been established. In the course of May or June 1941 those of us still interned at Hay were moved in batches by train and then by covered motor lorry to the camp complex at Tatura. My address, until my release from internment in February 1942 was now Hut 10, Compound B, Camp No 2, Tatura, Vic. But neither during nor since internment did I ever set foot in the township of Tatura itself.

Although the geographic surroundings at Tatura looked different and friendlier, facilities inside the camp were similar to those in Hay. This may in part explain why looking back on it all, half a century later, I and other Dunera boys find it hard or impossible to remember whether some things or incidents of those times belong into the Tatura period or still to our Hay days. I seem to remember that my own move to Tatura occurred just a few days after Hitler started to invade Russia. All of us saw this as the great turning point of the war, when like Napoleon he had at last bitten off more than he could chew. Fortunately we were to be proved right in our expectations eventually; but it took a great deal longer than we expected in our wishful optimism, and also the eventual participation of the Americans on our side.

While still in Hay, I had tried to write to Lotte at her Stoke Newington address. Her landlady, Mrs Phillips, wrote back to say that Lotte had migrated to the USA. She did not have my friend's new address, nor any other clue of her whereabouts in that big country. Eventually I tracked down Lotte by enlisting, through my American relatives, the aid of an American-Jewish search bureau, who also were able to inform me that she had since americanised her name from Lotte Sternheimer to Lorraine Stern - which also happened to be the name of my uncle Alfred's wife. However when I hopefully and longingly wrote to Lorraine alias Lotte, I received a reply in which she clearly

indicated that she was having a jolly good time in the States and such a wonderful social whirl as to take up all her attention.

The letter's actual wording was quite unambiguously a signal from Lotte I should not waste my time hankering after her from my internment far away down under. Although I realised I had to give her credit for her candid, honest view and refusal to string me along, I felt terribly disappointed and hurt. In an effort to salvage my youthful pride and dignity, I am afraid I shot back a rather haughty or even catty letter, one that relieved my wounded feelings at the time but later made me feel quite ashamed. I guess it was all rather immature on my part and when I met Lorraine/Lotte some 44 years later I was relieved to note that she was very happy to see me and did not remember anything about such an exchange of letters, although she recalled much of the times we had been together in our youth.

There were several good musicians among us internees, professionals and amateurs, and in the main they were pianists or violinists, as one might expect. They helped to contribute to the musical and theatrical life of the camp, although I personally derived more musical pleasure and appreciation of classical music from regular Sunday morning recitals of records over the mess hut's loudspeaker system. The substantial collection of gramophone records was probably donated by the Australian Students' Christian Movement, as part of the many benefits in the way of educational books and materials etc. they so generously provided for us in camp. I think those Sunday recitals did a great deal to cultivate my growing love of classical music and I really looked forward to them.

But the most striking and unforgettable entertainments in camp were the varied theatrical performances put on from time to time. Theatricals as such are fairly commonplace in prisons and in P.O.W. camps. But ours were something out of the box, thanks to several professional actors and to quite a number of really gifted amateurs in our midst. Moreover, we had a few outstanding artistic craftsmen to rig up some of the finest stage scenery you could wish for. Of the various productions in Hay and Tatura the ones that stay in my mind as still memorable are "Journey's End", Goethe's "Faust" (Part I), and "Snowwhite and the seven Dwarfs", a political revue based on the fairy tale and later during our Army days revived and refurbished as "Sergeant Snowwhite". I am afraid both shows took rather violent liberties with the plot of the classical fairytale and had Hitler figuring as the wicked wolf strayed in from Little Red Riding Hood! On the other hand there was a most authentic production of "The Good Soldier Schwejk" which in acting virtuosity and in stagecraft was as superb as you could wish to find anywhere.

But there were two things that made camp life in Tatura quite different for me from that in Hay. The first of these was the contact established with the assistance of official channels of the Scout movement between our Rover Crew in camp and a local Scout troop who began to visit us from time to time for joint meetings. The camp authorities permitted us to meet our Scout visitors immediately outside the camp, sitting in a large circle as though around a camp fire, with our guards discreetly out of sight for the visit's hour-long duration. It was at one such meeting that our visitors sang for us "Waltzing Matilda" in what was to be my first acquaintance with that song. We responded with some German and Austrian Scout and folk songs which were equally novel for the local Scouts.

Credit for the organisation of these visits must be given to the Reverend Kyte, the visitors' Scoutmaster, who paved the way for the meetings between the two groups. It was he who explained most impressively to his charges that the internees they met were not Australia's enemies but innocent victims of wartime circumstances which were the result of the Nazi atrocities. Probably it was not all that easy to explain, seeing that the local Scouts were young and unsophisticated country lads. But thanks to his obvious sincerity and shining personal example, the good Rev. Kyte clearly and surely carried the day.

The other and really big change for me at Tatura was the greatly enhanced role of the Camp school. To be sure, many classes had already been held in Hay, although perhaps more elaborately so at Camp 7 than in our Camp 8, where they took more the form of Adult Education sessions. Of those, I had tried to attend some on German literature and others in Inorganic and Organic Chemistry for beginners. I say "tried to", as the German literature lectures were mainly about Rilke and his poetry which I soon decided I did not care for, despite its expert and enthusiastic exposition by Professor Dr Richard Ullmann. The Chemistry classes I saw at first as an opportunity to attempt catching up on a grossly neglected subject in my heavily arts-biassed secondary education. But I soon became irritated with the juggling of chemical formulas, so invitingly reminiscent of manipulating algebraic entities and yet so infuriatingly different, I thought. I guess the absence of practical experimental facilities did not exactly help either to make me feel more at home with chemistry. Very soon, then, I abandoned any effort at further formal education in Hay. But I can't say that I was at ease about it. Deep down inside me I had a nagging feeling I should clutch at any opportunity, however slender, to resume my formal education. For I was oppressively aware of its incompleteness and as a result how little chance I stood to land a job in due course, especially any job that would offer some satisfaction in interest and adequacy in pay.

Therefore I felt it was a "must" for me to enrol when the Camp school at Tatura soon after my arrival there commenced proper formal classes in perhaps a dozen different subjects available under the syllabus for the Victorian School Leaving Certificate examinations. These were subjects taught in Form V of High School, in those days the top form of secondary education. A pass in at least five such subjects, which had to include English, a mathematics subject and a foreign language, qualified one for Matriculation at Melbourne University, which was also recognised by the five universities then existing in the other Australian States.

Fortunately there was no shortage of capable and qualified teachers for these subjects among us internees. But the necessary resources in text and reference books and other teaching materials were provided for us thanks to the devoted work of the Australian Students Christian Movement (ASCM), which was also instrumental in securing the cooperation and liaison of Melbourne University and of the military authorities in facilitating the logistics of conducting recognised examinations under proper supervision behind barbed wire.

Notable among the helpers of the ASCM was their organising secretary in Melbourne, Miss Margaret Holmes, a wonderful person whose efforts in furthering our studies continued well beyond our period of internment. I must stress that all such help was cheerfully extended to us refugees without any ulterior motives whatsoever, missionary or otherwise, and was appreciated by all of us who benefited from it as true Christian love for one's fellow-man.

At that stage in my life I had no clear vocational aspirations, at least none that seemed to be practically feasible for me in a new country and in an adopted language. All I knew for sure was that Matriculation of some kind was a milestone and at least first target and stepping stone that I needed to reach to get anywhere worthwhile. Of the subjects made available for tuition I chose, within the prescribed Matric parameters, the following five as for me the most likely in which to reach a pass: English, Mathematics I, German, Latin and European History. Despite the lengthy interruption my schooling had suffered, the solid base of my Gymnasium education proved its value and in the space of half a year of admittedly intensive effort I made much headway - more than in a normal full school year.

When it came to the exams in November 1941, I obviously found German a pushover and my earlier grounding in Latin and History helped me to achieve the requisite standard in those subjects. In English, which comprised literature as well as expression, there were three literature questions to be answered from a fairly wide choice of textbooks. I felt reasonably well prepared for the English expression side, which comprised an essay and a precis, counting for 25 and 15 marks respectively. That left 20 marks each for the three literature questions to be answered. Our English class had been taught in only four of the choice of texts. I felt reasonably happy about my study of "Macbeth" and "Paradise Lost", but found the other two options we had been taught and which comprised Wordsworth and an assortment of minor English poetry really heavy going in the sense of having to write about them in any acceptable manner. My fears in that regard were confirmed in every way when I read the exam questions. As a last desperate ploy I resorted to looking at the questions relating to an alternative book we had not studied in class but which I had recently read for private pleasure - Rudyard Kipling's "Kim". This proved my salvation as one of the options on Kim was to write a continuation of the story plot as I imagined it. With the book still fresh in mind I found this quite easy to do. And that, I guess, saved me and clinched my pass in English.

I was less fortunate in Mathematics, although I had always been very good at it in Germany and had chosen the simplest of the four Maths subjects to study. What foxed me were the algebraic questions formulated as practical problems, which I had great difficulty in trying to convert to appropriate algorithms. In that respect my schooling in Germany as well as at Tatura left much to be desired. I had to sit for and repeat Maths I several times before I finally passed that exam and thus qualified for Matriculation.

As a full-time student at Tatura I had no longer time to earn a few shillings, but our internal camp administration helped me and other students by paying us a little pocket money as a social service or incentive to our study, and this was financed from profits of the camp canteen. In effect it was a form of government stipend or scholarship, having been authorised by the camp parliament.

After the Matric exams in November, the next big event for us was Pearl Harbour. With the entry of Japan into the war and the change to a Labor government about this time, the political climate changed in our favour inasmuch as Australia could no longer afford to disdain the use of willing and available manpower eager to help the war effort. And unlike their xenophobic predecessors, the Labor politicians now in control realised they had to pull the finger out and make some move to stop the waste and scandal of keeping us behind barbed wire, even at the risk of becoming stuck with us for good. And so, emulating at last the example of the mother country as

it usually was the Australian custom to do, they released a few of our people to work in key industries and offered the rest of us to serve in a labour company of the Australian Army, in a broadly similar way as those who had been recruited among us for the British Army's Pioneer Corps.

Immediately about 800 internees, ranging in age from 18 to some in their early fifties, volunteered for the Labour Company to be established. They included nearly all the remaining members of the Rover scout group and also a small contingent of so-called "Singapore men", the latter being refugees like ourselves who had not come on the Dunera but who had been interned in Singapore or Penang after Pearl Harbour but had been deported to Australia before the Japanese overran Malaysia.

For my part, I had considerable doubts and mixed feelings about joining up. On the one hand it would mean release from internment and ostensibly no danger to be used as cannon fodder, as it were. On the other hand the inevitable and to me rather odious regimentation of army life would mean that the freedom bought by joining up remained a much-restricted freedom. And though such restrictions were also the price to be paid for doing one's due share in helping the war effort against Hitler & Co., there was no denying that preventing us from joining the A.I.F. or indeed any other element of the Australian armed forces was not motivated by solicitude for our safety but indicated instead a residue of distrust towards us or perhaps simply a device for preventing us from qualifying for the same post-war benefits and preferences that were vouchsafed to other soldiers once the fighting was done. To mention this last motive may seem to be over-suspicious. But it was by no means far-fetched, as was clearly evident from objections to putting us into Army uniform at all that were openly voiced in some quarters. And while it would be good in a way to serve alongside my fellow-refugees, it was not so good for us all to be relegated to the seemingly inferior status of a separate unit in the labour corps, and in which we were disqualified from advancing beyond promotion to sergeant, much as coloured colonials of the British forces or Jews in the Prussian Army in which my grandfather had served (not that I would have expected to gain promotion anyhow).

On balance, then, I would have preferred not to join up. But to remain behind barbed wire while all my friends had joined up would make internment less tolerable than before. And I realised that I would torment myself by keeping asking, in Hamlet style, "To join or not to join?", and that eventually, with heavy heart, I would succumb and enlist after all. So I might as well save all that mental torture and stick with my mates right from the start. I admit it was not a very noble, heroic or idealistic way of signing up. But it did salve my conscience without giving me any illusions what to expect in the Forces.

There also were elements among the authorities who wanted to make quite sure that we should not have any illusions about our joining up, by issuing to each of us volunteers a duplicated memorandum for which we had to sign a receipt and in which they were at pains to point out that we should not imagine our service in the labour corps would entitle us to stay in Australia once the war was over. To which screed, I remember, my personal reaction was to exclaim a loud and contemptuous "Oh, yeah? We shall see about that when the time comes!" Much the same sentiment was rife among the others who volunteered, and although it is on record that this despicable

document represented policy still being pushed at the time when the decision to let us join up had been made, it was soon superseded and forgotten.

Our release from internment became effective early in February 1942. But before being clapped into uniform, we were required to go fruit picking in the Shepparton district for two months to help overcome the seasonal labour shortage there. During that time we were on the same sort of restricted freedom that was accorded to B class aliens in Britain or to as yet unnaturalised German and Austrian Jewish refugees resident in Australia during the war, that is to say report weekly to the local police station by personal appearance and do not travel beyond a ten mile radius from your residence without a special written police permit obtained in advance.

Following our release to go fruit picking and then to enlist in the Army only a few hundred refugees deported on the Dunera remained behind barbed wire. By and by, more were released, some to join the labour corps belatedly, but others to take up civil employment in whatever jobs were approved by the Australian Manpower authorities. In short, conditions for release in Australia were gradually liberalised, and it was felt that with the number of inmates so greatly diminished, it was hardly worthwhile to continue maintaining an internment camp compound for them; and yet they could not very well be thrown together with Nazi and Fascist prisoners.

In earlier days, whenever Major Layton visited Hay or Tatura, internees had sought him out and stood in long, anxious queues for individual interview, to plead their own cases for release. But now, with only a small hard residue of internees who did not try to be set free, the boot was on the other foot: Layton had to seek out these people to offer them freedom. Eventually it got that way with the last ones that when the major entered their camp hut to urge them to accept release, they jumped out of the window to avoid his entreaties. To be sure, such men had become mentally unbalanced in captivity and ended up in a psychiatric ward. But were they any crazier than the system that had interned them in the first place?

CHAPTER 18: HARVEST

My release from internment could be said to have occurred on February 4, 1942, when I was sent with hundreds of other volunteers - mostly young people, in their teens or twenties - from Tatura to go fruit picking in the nearby Shepparton area. The prosperous country town of Shepparton is the heart of Victoria's Goulburn valley irrigation district, with its numerous orchards developed mainly by repatriated ex-soldier settlers after World War I. A great part of their huge fruit harvest finds its way into the large co-operative cannery of the Shepparton Preserving Company, widely known by its SPC initials.

During World War II the canned produce of the SPC not only helped to feed Britain but also played a considerable part in supplying Australian and American forces fighting in New Guinea and in the Pacific. And it is just conceivable that some of the fresh fruit I and my comrades picked in the early autumn days of 1942 turned up later in canned form among the thousands of wooden boxes of fruit we were to stack or shift as soldiers in storing and loading operations at food depots or in railway yards.

At any rate, it was clearly no less important to provide labour to harvest fruit in the first place as to store and transport it later when it had been processed. By 1942 Australia's growing war effort had mopped up most if not all of the usual manpower reserves from which the seasonal work force for fruit picking could be drawn. Thus, seen from a national point of view, our preliminary deployment on fruit picking was not really at cross-purposes with our subsequent enlistment in an army labour corps.

So at Shepparton, that day, many orchardists congregated to recruit from among us teams of fruit-pickers varying in number anywhere from two to 15, depending on the size of their orchards and the imminent crops to be harvested. Presumably it was as much in the interest of the growers as in our own, that we pickers ganged together in friendship groups that had formed in the long months behind barbed wire. For my part, I teamed up with Ernie Levy, one of our scout group with whom I had grown particularly friendly, and as a team of two we ended up with a grower at Orrvale, near Shepparton East.

If I remember rightly, his name was McDonald, and like so many growers in Shepparton East and Orrvale he was a first or second generation Australian from Scotland. Our employment start coincided with the end of the school summer vacation, which had provided some high school students as pickers whom Ernie and I virtually succeeded, for they went back to town and school a few days after we started. Apart from the McDonald family, that left only Ernie and myself plus Bill Smith and Dave Nugent, two civil servants from the State Parliamentary House staff in Spring st, Melbourne, who were earning some extra cash by fruit picking during their annual holidays. After a week or so, those two were due to return to Melbourne, but before they departed they invited Ernie and me to look them up at Parliament House. "Just go in there and ask for Bill and Dave", they said. They were as good as their word, and when several months later we availed ourselves of their invitation, they showed us all over Parliament House, including not only the Upper and

Lower House session chambers in all their splendour, but also the extravagantly magnificent Parliamentary library.

Mr McDonald's fruit farm was one of the smaller ones in the Shepparton district. Even so, it occupied 32 acres of orchards devoted mainly to Packham pears and various types of peaches. There was also some planting of blood plums, which were our first picking assignment. I wished there had been more of those plums, as they grew on short trees that were easy to pick, not requiring the lugging around and climbing of ladders, as did the other crops. Habitual seasonal fruit-pickers could earn quite a reasonable income on piecework rates; but as novices at the game, we were paid the straight basic wage of four pounds twelve shillings for the standard 44-hour week then prevailing. On piece-work rates, paid by the case-full picked, we probably would have earned only half of that. Piece-work was also inequitable whenever the grower wanted us to pick a tree clean, that is to say, remove all the fruit from the tree, however hard to reach and in whatever state of ripening.

As pickers we were free to eat as much of the fresh fruit as we liked; but this prospect soon palled. By the end of the harvesting we felt that if we never partook of another plum, pear or peach in our lives, it would still be too soon! The sun shone warm and the flies and mosquitos abounded to plague us the while we toiled, and as far as I can recall there was hardly ever any rainfall to give us a break from our labours. So that the only spells we had during the working day were the lunch hour and a short tea break or smoke-oh half-way through the morning and through the afternoon, when Mr McDonald would chat with us, often reminiscing about his service overseas with the First A.I.F. in 1914-18. Before the schoolboy fruit-pickers left, they had counselled us: "Any time you want a longer tea break, get the old boy around to telling you how he won the Great War!" Their hint proved invaluable in doubling the duration of our tea breaks at the cost of listening to a slightly ego-tripping earbash.

Other than these tea-break tattles, there was no socialising with the McDonalds, who would never have us enter their trim home, set in the middle of their grounds, not even to use their toilets, for which they had not provided any alternative facilities other than to have us directly fertilise their orchards. For ablution facilities there was a cold shower cubicle and water tap rigged up, adjacent to our corrugated iron sleeping shed equipped with two camp stretchers for beds, a small primus cooker to warm our meals and a hurricane lamp to relieve the darkness. If we knocked at the McDonald's kitchen door, they would also keep a few perishable foodstuffs for us in their fridge, and the lady of the house would do a bit of food shopping for us if we gave her a list. Apparently this level of facilities for fruit-pickers was par for the course in the 'forties, although I doubt it would be regarded as acceptable nowadays. At the material level, we could put up with it fairly readily after the sort of amenities to which we had been conditioned in internment. What rankled with me more was the psychological factor, the inferior status it seemed to give us as people.

Physically for us the one real hardship was to have to start cooking in the evening after a really tiring day's work in the orchards. Ernie and I shared the chores by him doing all the cooking and me attending to the washing up etc. Sundays we could sleep late and attend to laundry and other domestic chores. The big day to look forward to was Saturday, when we would be off to Shepparton to look around, do our shopping and go to the matinee at the local cinema. I cannot recall any of the main features we saw, but it seemed as if for Ernie and me the chief attraction of the "flicks" were one or two supporting serials whose weekly episodes invariably ended in

cliff-hangers" in which we got as helplessly caught up as the juveniles sitting all around us. As for shopping, our needs were generally so modest that little of our basic wage earnings had to be expended. But on Ernie's advice I spent virtually two weeks wages on buying a Swiss "Omega" wristwatch for nine pounds. It was one of a few left in the local jeweller's shop, for the war had dried up the import of such goods. The shape and design of this timepiece was rather unattractive, but horologically it was a sound purchase and gave me faithful, reliable and trouble-free service for more than twenty years.

During at least one weekend in Shepparton, Ernie and I looked up Rev. Kyte, the scoutmaster who had visited us at Tatura. On this occasion we also met some members of his Scout troop again. But soon after Rev. Kyte transferred to another parish in Nyngan, NSW and that proved to be the end of our contact with him.

In the two months or so of our fruit-picking career we were farmed out a couple of times to another nearby grower for a week's stint, but during these periods we always returned for the night to our tin shack quarters at the McDonald property. My indestructible Bavarian "lederhosen" (deer leather shorts), virtually the one item of my luggage recovered by me from the "Dunera", proved to be a great boon and ideal wear for climbing among the fruit trees, but that was about the last use to which I could put them. During the next four-and-a-half years I was condemned to wear Army clothing and by the time I returned to civvy street I had grown out of those leather shorts. I do not know or remember who, if anybody, inherited them. By its very nature the unwashable deer leather had never been very pliable, and the grease and dust it had absorbed over five or more years of hard wear gave it a darkish sheen and a stiffness that allowed the shorts to stand up empty without collapsing.

As anticipated by the war cabinet, the pear and peach picking season in the Goulburn valley came to an end early in April, and we were readied to join the Army according to plan. To that end the Defence authorities foregathered us from our diverse orchardist employers into the central Victorian town of Bendigo. There we were confined for a day or two to the local racecourse, that had been improvised as or temporarily converted into an army camp. Then, on 7th April, Victorian Railways provided a special train to take us from Bendigo to Melbourne's Spencer street station, and on from there haltingly in stops and starts to Caulfield, where we alighted from our train to enter directly into, would you believe it, yet another racecourse which was looming large right outside the railway station.

I am no racegoer and have never attended a horserace in my life, nor am I likely to do so till my dying day. But if I have developed an aversion to racecourses, it can be attributed to my experiences at England's Kempton Park during my first days of internment, and to the time I was forced to spend at the say-so of the Australian Army first at Bendigo and then at Caulfield racecourse and later on even at Albury racecourse.

Normally, that is in peace-time, Caulfield is the second-ranking race track in Victoria and the arena for the celebrated Caulfield Cup. But at this stage of the war it had been turned into the recruiting depot of the Army's Southern Command, with fairly steady streams of new rookies passing through week after week. Somehow, amid all the comings and goings in the yards, we lined up for registration, in which I received Army number V377348 (mine was one of the first dozen

numbers allotted to our unit) and was then issued with a few items of uniform, such as forage cap and khaki shorts, mess kit, and a straw palliasse and blankets and allocated a spot for dossing down on the higher or middle reaches of the race course grandstand.

After an evening meal in a large mess hall set up beneath the grandstand we received leave passes for a few hours, and I took a train back to Flinders street station. There I did little more than stand "under the clocks", watch the swirling traffic and passers-by, and especially the many American marines and G.I.s on "liberty", as they called it. Recent newspaper reports had attested to their increasing arrivals in Australia. But this was my first sight of the Yanks, and after the best part of two years cooped up behind barbed wire, or of late in the countryside, I had my first savouring once more of city life and bustle. Eventually I took a brief stroll along Swanston St up to the Town Hall, before returning to the station and by train once more to Caulfield Reception Centre, as it was officially designated. There for my first night of what was to become an extended bivouac on the grandstand. Army life in earnest was due to start next day.

CHAPTER 19: LABOUR

"You'll be sorry!"

Thus the chorus of good-humoured taunts that greeted us from earlier contingents of Army recruits inside, as we first entered into the portals of Caulfield racecourse that afternoon of 7th April 1942, the birthdate of the 8th Labour Company of the Australian Army. Eventually the unit was redesignated as 8th Employment Company, A.M.F. The identifying shoulder colour patch which it shared with all the other Employment Companies of the A.M.F.'s Labour Corps consisted of a red square whose sides circumscribed and were bisected by the corners of a smaller, superimposed white square.

The first two or three days of our soldiering were taken up with the detailed routines of enlistment, such as signing up, undergoing a cursory medical examination, receiving uniforms and other army wear and kit, and having too some basic marching drill. But the issue of equipment stopped short of any armament, and in the ensuing four-and-a-half long years of my army service I was never to handle any piece of weaponry and "never heard a shot fired in anger", as the saying goes. Coming to think of it, I never heard any shot fired at all! As I recall it, throughout the war there was but one extraordinary occasion (its circumstances long forgotten) when some selected members of one platoon of the company were each given a rifle of sorts for a day or so. These firearms were, incredibly, long superseded carbines from the Boer war and barely adequate for playing soldiers or doing any drill. Perhaps the exercise was for some ceremonial purpose, or whatever, but it was only a one-day wonder.

In appearance and discipline we approximated regular soldiers, but training for warfare there was none. Yet in one respect we were treated like the most battle-hardened troops: in addition to normal army victuals we were given the additional rations accorded otherwise to Commandos only. For it was deemed that the heavy labouring work which was expected to be our usual lot would require the extra calories as much as did the special exertions entailed in Commando training and tactics.

Remote we were and remained from any battle zone and enemy action, and thus from hostilities and the associated hazards to life and limb. But the heavy physical toil and labour which was to constitute the hardship characteristic of our war service began within our first week in uniform and without any ado and preparation. It came as a real shock to me when with many others I found myself detailed for my first labouring assignment to Melbourne's Victoria docks, where several shiploads of cement were to be brought ashore. The story was that the cement had been sent previously for despatch to Singapore, but was now returned because that proud British bastion of the Far East had meekly surrendered to the Japanese before this cargo reached its destination. Amid clouds of grey dust swirling up from cement bags that consisted merely of several layers of packing paper which easily broke and busted, we were directed into dark ship holds where we each had to hump a heavy and unwieldy bag containing cement on back and shoulder and carry it onto the deck and out to the pier before returning for the next bag. This ordeal went on for several days - some of my fellow sufferers even worked night-shift on this - and it was for me the worst and

hardest labouring job I ever did in my life, and certainly the dirtiest, making me breathe cement dust and finding it all over my army giggle suit and underwear, and hard to remove.

Fortunately the usually much-maligned Australian wharf labourers or 'wharfies' came to our rescue. They threatened to go on strike at all ports of the nation unless our cheap coolie labour was removed from the docks forthwith. Of course, when these professional dock workers took over, they used cranes and sling loads, in which we were inexperienced, and so they found the task much less arduous and odious - as well as much more lucrative - than it had been for us.

The Army's reckless use of us as coolie labour persisted throughout the war. Apparently no thought was given to mechanize much of the constant loading, unloading and stacking operations which were our most frequent tasks. Whereas the American forces in the land would never attend

to their requirements of this kind without the widest possible use of forklifts and storage pellets. Only when, at the end of hostilities, the G.I.s returned home and left their mechanical forklifts and timber pellets behind at military disposal bargain rates, did Australian ordnance and supply depots adopt such equipment, which saved about 90% of the manpower previously required for storage operations. Even the general issue of heavy work gloves was not emulated from the Yanks until it was at long last realised that it paid off, by minimising manual injuries that swelled sick parades and thus reduced the cheap labour forces available.

In the first few months of our service, when Japanese air raids on Melbourne were still regarded as a possibility, some of our working parties were to be found digging zig-zagging shelter trenches in Melbourne's Domain, that is near Defence headquarters at Victoria barracks, and in the gardens of some Toorak mansions taken over by sundry military units and auxiliaries. Generally speaking, our labouring assignments were so widely dispersed over the metropolitan area that, being taken to and from work every day in the back of army lorries, we soon gained as good a knowledge of Greater Melbourne as the average taxi driver. However, it has to be remembered that in those days Melbourne was but half the size to which it has swollen since the war.

At later stages we were periodically required to serve in Albury or Tocumwal for several months at a time. These towns, on the border between New South Wales and Victoria, are the break-of-gauge points between the 4' 8.5" international railway gauge operative in New South Wales and the 5'3" broad gauge prevailing in Victoria (and otherwise characteristic of Ireland and Russia). At the time no parallel international gauge rail had been laid yet in Victoria to facilitate the direct, uninterrupted transport of interstate passengers and cargo; so that all trainloads of civilian and military supplies emanating from Victoria had to be laboriously transferred in the station yards of either Albury or Tocumwal, before they could be rail-freighted further northward.

Wodonga is the Victorian town facing Albury on the south side of the River Murray State border. A few miles along the road from Wodonga leading east to Bonegilla, the Army maintains an extensive ordnance depot at a place called Bandiana. This is strategically situated in the circumstances, so that spur tracks both from the Victorian and New South Welsh rail networks with their conflicting gauges can lead into the depot.

Although our posting to Albury was mostly for transposing military and civilian goods in the Albury rail-yards, some working parties went to Bandiana to help with the storage and stacking of armoured vehicle parts and equipment, notably caterpillar tracks for Bren gun carriers, of which there were veritable mountains. Came lunch time, and I would wolf down my food and sink exhausted on top of a heap of rusty tank tracks and within a minute be asleep in the warm midday sun, however hard and uncomfortable this unconventional bedding might be. So inured I became to such Spartan places of rest, that when I returned to Melbourne and was invited to spend a few days leave as the guest of some Jewish friends - the Arnhold family in Hawthorn - I could not fall asleep there the first night, simply because the sumptuous featherbed in their guest room was too soft and cosy for me by then! However, it does not take long to get used to comfort. By the second night I managed to enjoy in full the luxury of the featherbed.

At any one time, only one platoon of the 8th Employment Company would serve in Albury, as reinforcement to the 4th Employment Company usually stationed there. On these occasions we were at the mercy of the 4th Employment Company's cooks, who, not being professionals at culinary work, were not a patch on our cooks in the 8th and who, we rightly or wrongly suspected, traded away some of the better rations to local cafe proprietors in the town; so that some of our fellows reckoned they had to eat out and pay for a meal in town to obtain their rightful portions! Be that as it may, I do remember resorting frequently and heavily to the tomato sauce bottle to drown the flavour of the stews dished up to us in the mess hut at Albury.

Small wonder, then, that a favourite working party was the night shift squad sent to Albury railway station's passenger platform to transfer the luggage and cargo from the goods vans attached to the "Spirit of Progress". This train, then the pride of Victorian Railways, arrived nightly about midnight to let its passengers commute into the less glamorous New South Wales express which continued the journey onto Sydney. Not only were the contents of the luggage vans relatively easy

to handle, compared with our more usual loading assignments. What really attracted us was that the cooks of the Spirit of Progress' dining car, having reached journey's end for the night, did a lucrative trade by selling us the inevitable leftovers of their menu - generous chunks of hot roast turkey and other tasty morsels, packed into big paper bags, at one shilling per bag. Which made a cheap feast for us and a nice little side income for kitchen crew on the train.

Captain E.R. Broughton

The 4th Employment Company in Albury was made up of "friendly aliens" such as Greeks and Italians plus German and Austrian Jewish refugees like ourselves, but unlike us Australian residents. Somewhat similarly, the 6th Employment Company in Tocumwal comprised mainly resident Greeks and Polish Jews. The two companies were the charge of a Captain Walker and a Captain Richardson respectively, neither of whom bothered to hide their contempt for the men under their command.

As against that, our 8th Employment Company was recruited exclusively from ex-internees, mainly from England via the "Dunera", but with a sprinkling of Jewish refugees who had been interned with their families in Malaya and deported straight to Australia. We called them "Singapore

men", although quite a few of them had been resident in Penang or elsewhere in the Straits Settlements.

Yet what really differentiated the 8th Employment Company from the 6th and the 4th was its Commanding Officer, Captain E.R. Broughton. Of stocky build, tattooed and well into his fifties, Edward Renata Broughton was a New Zealander. His facial features and a brownish complexion attested to his predominantly Maori origin. At l6, by falsifying his age, he had enlisted in the New Zealand Mounted Rifles and served in the Boer War. During World War I he served with the Maori Battalion on Gallipoli, was mentioned in despatches and commissioned. Later he served in France and with a Russian regiment. In June 1940, he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces as a private, this time falsifying his age downwards. Discharged from the AIF a few months later he was made a captain in the Militia instead and in April eventually given command of the newly formed 8th Employment company. He was indeed a most remarkable and unusual person and officer. As has been said of him elsewhere:

> *His task was to weld an extraordinarily diverse assortment of German and Austrian refugees into an effective working unit. He not only achieved this; he also endeared himself to his men. He knew every member of the unit by name, and many of their personal histories. Keenly intelligent, well-read, endowed with a superb sense of humour, completely untainted by any racial prejudice, deeply interested in human beings, he did not only gain immediate respect and obedience, but also the love and affection of the unit. He hugely enjoyed to be at its head, learned and meticulously respected Jewish customs, and was immensely proud of the unit because of the splendid work it did, humbly unaware of the fact that it was only he who could have turned these people into willing manual labourers. For years after he had been retired from the Army he kept in touch with the boys like a benevolent father. He engaged in incessant publicity war on our behalf and fought hard to have our status changed, only to be booted out by the Army eventually... After we had been shoved around as flotsam and jetsam for years he managed to make us feel like human beings again. He was a scholar and a gentleman.*

Despite his great qualities and record, and although the 8th Employment Company was considerably larger than the 6th or 4th, Broughton was never promoted to major in his command, unlike Walker and Richardson in theirs or indeed Broughton's successor in 1944. The latter quickly revealed himself as a mean and petty little tyrant and son-of-a-bitch that could well hold his own with those other two.

To be sure, withal his merits even Captain Broughton took some time before he got on top of his job. And it was no help to him that of the three commissioned officers nominally under his command, at least two were virtually useless, and the first few weeks were a bit of a shambles in the way he failed to monitor the equitable allocation of rosters for rest days. These were riddled with abuse and favouritism, perpetrated by one of the middle-aged Singapore men who had insinuated himself into promotion to sergeant and had gained much personal control of the daily routine office work of the company.

In those early months while we were still camped at Caulfield racecourse - first on the exposed grandstand and then in tents in a car park adjacent to the course - rest days were a rare privilege and not regularly available every week. And there was no advance notice of them. Instead they were allotted at the early morning parade in much the same way as detailing to a working party after fall-out for the day's sick parade. Incredible as it may seem, it was my sorry lot to go the first three weeks without getting a single call out for rest day, although it seemed there were enough rest day calls made to give a weekly one to everybody, and I am sure there were some people who got one every five days or so.

With the constant exposure to unaccustomed heavy labour, usually in the open air and inclement late autumn weather, and with the continued deprivation of a rest day, which disappointed me more bitterly day after day, I felt that my physical resistance to the elements was steadily on the wane. I knew it would be useless to lodge an official complaint which would be fobbed off with specious excuses. My one recourse was to go on sick parade. Indeed I would have done so earlier except that I thought I would miss out on the long expected rest day. And of course, as luck would have it, my name was finally called out for rest day ten minutes after I had fallen out for sick parade! And so the long overdue rest day was actually forfeited when it belatedly came my way. The two or three days I gained instead in a makeshift Army hospital, boring and miserable as they were, at least gave me the rest I so badly needed to recuperate. Eventually the inequities in the allocation of rest days were ironed out, probably because we were made to work a regular six-day week like civilians. As time went on, I gradually got more hardened to and adept at the heavy labouring tasks, and so of course did most others in the company. Which soon led Captain Broughton to say confidently: "My boys can do it!" at every new work challenge put before us. It was a proud claim not echoed in the 4th and 6th company, some of whose Greek elements did not hesitate to go on strike if they thought demands made upon them were getting out of hand.

Yet even though I got more accustomed to the work, I soon experienced increasing difficulties in coping with it, mainly because I came to suffer from serious palpitations. By mid-1943 I found it unavoidable to go on sick parade with this complaint. The medical officer who briefly looked me over, wrote out a report slip which he instructed me to take to the company office. Somewhat non-plussed, but quite unsuspecting, I studied the report which diagnosed the nature of my symptoms in one word: 'Malingering'. Conscious of my as yet limited command of English, I innocently took this to be the medical name of some malady or disease of which I was blissfully ignorant. Little did I suspect that this one word incriminated me under Army rules and regulations!

At this critical juncture my guardian angel intervened in the guise of Dr Schatzki, who had served as our former camp leader in Tatura. Paul Schatzki, or "Pascha", as some of his younger friends

among us fondly called him, was at the time denied licence and registration as a medico, like other doctors who had qualified overseas but whose medical schools did not reciprocate recognition of Australian medical training. However, as a consolation prize Dr Schatzki was assigned as medical orderly to our company medical officer who had professed to examine me. "Pascha", being a heart specialist, could see I was not well and went after me, demanding to see the report slip I had been given. I was glad to show it to him, and he, scandalized by the M.O.'s verdict, immediately went to intercede and remonstrate with him on my behalf. By force of his personality and professional prestige he prevailed upon that horse doctor of an Army quack to retract the report and have me sent instead for a more expert and thorough medical check-up to Heidelberg General Military Hospital that same day.

Proper medical examination at Heidelberg resulted in my immediate hospitalisation there and then, and by next morning I was under the knife for a thyroid operation, the like of which I had undergone prior and preparatory to my emigration from Germany. The difference this time was that the growth removed in Germany had been visible as a moderate swelling in the throat, just below my Adam's apple. This time, however, the goitre had swollen in an inward, downward direction and, instead of being visible, pressed on the heart region, thus increasingly causing me palpitations.

All this was explained to me by the operating surgeon, a certain Major Ball, whom I came to see just once when he appeared at my bedside the day after the operation and briefly introduced himself in a very friendly fashion. (The only time I met him previously, in the operating theatre, I was already under narcosis). Mr Ball, who I gathered was a notable Melbourne specialist in this kind of surgery, confessed to me that even he was amazed at the extent of the growth that had come to light during my operation.

As is the case following a tonsillectomy, swallowing was a real torture after the thyroidectomy, and for a few days I fed on little else but ice cream, whose freezing temperature numbed the excruciating pain of ingesting anything, even my saliva. Nevertheless, the three weeks in hospital were by and large quite agreeable, as the nursing care was superb and I received plenty of visitors from my army mates and other friends. On top of it all came three weeks in "Stonnington", once upon a time the stately home and residence of Australia's Governor-General in Glenferrie rd, Malvern, in the days when Melbourne was still the seat of the Federal government. But now during the war this spacious mansion had been turned into a convalescent home for military patients. The ostensible purpose of my sojourn there was to let me gain lost weight by a regimen of six meals a day - breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and supper. Before the operation at Heidelberg I had always been fairly slim. It was only after the operation that my metabolism changed so that I gradually, over the years developed a tendency to run to fat.

When I eventually returned to duty, I was medically reclassified from A1 to B2, which was to restrict me to so-called "light duties", that is to say exempt me from the heavier lifting and carrying tasks that so often characterised our work. This certainly made army service more endurable and tolerable for me, although I cannot say that I ever actually liked Army life and routine.

What also made me dissatisfied and frustrated in my early Army days was that blind chance had me thrown together with a group of others with whom I felt I had nothing much in common except our overall fate. As individuals they had different backgrounds, education and interests from my

own. In short, I had become rather separated from my friends of internment days, who had ended up in another platoon of the 8th Employment company. In the companionship I was now forced into I began to feel alienated, unsure of myself, beginning to doubt my own standards. Perhaps late teenage had something to do with it too, as it often is a time of mental unrest and self doubt. At any rate, I felt I was going to seed and ought to do something about it, if I only knew what.

In this frame of mind, which beset me for several months, I found myself attracted to Pelmanism, an advertised correspondence course for mental self-improvement by sharpening one's will-power, memory, powers of observation, concentration, initiative and self-motivation. Offered to members of the forces at half the normal fee, the course proved a very worthwhile bargain and real boon for me. The ten correspondence lessons, each with its own set of written assignments and exercises were carefully monitored by a conscientious and sympathetic course director and they stimulated me and bucked me up no end. Indeed I could say the Pelman course marked an important turning point in my life; for it drove me on to do things which were to make all the difference to my vocational future, until then virtually non-existent.

This mental renaissance of mine, as it were, started with a new-found determination to try once more for a pass in Mathematics I. Three previous examination failures in this subject had prevented the completion of my School Leaving Certificate in other respects passed by me while I was still behind barbed wire in Tatura. This time - don't ask me how - I made the grade and therefore I had now completed all matriculation requirements.

I had thus qualified for entry to Melbourne University. Moreover, being in the Army, I now had available to me through the Army Education Service free-of-charge access to degree courses which lent themselves to correspondence training. With such incentive and with growing or re-discovered ambition, I enrolled for part-time correspondence training for a Bachelor of Arts degree, selecting as my major subjects German (because it would be easy for me), Philosophy (because it interested me) and a sub-major in English (as a bread-and-butter subject in case I were to become a teacher or journalist).

Taking on two subjects per annum, I had by the end of 1945 passed four subjects, or the equivalent of one year University training. This proved to be fortuitous. It turned out to be the one condition under which I could be officially regarded, at my age, as a genuine, proven University student whose academic training had been disrupted by his war service. That was the prerequisite for a three-year University scholarship with living allowance under the repatriation benefits made available to ex-servicemen. Moreover, it also carried a priority for discharge from the Army so as to avoid further disruption and delay of the University training. Otherwise, under the point system of staggered demobilization (to avoid economic dislocation by a sudden huge influx of ex-servicemen needing a job), my age, single status and the nature of my war service would have delayed my discharge a further year and instead of gaining civilian status in the nick of time for the academic year 1946, I would have remained condemned to another frustrating year in uniform, as some of my friends were.

Let me say here, too, that with the end of the war we were all impatient to obtain our discharge from the shackles of Army regimentation and servitude, for which we saw no longer any cogent military or patriotic need.

One of the minor facts of Army life and restrictions in wartime was the imposition of censorship on all our outgoing correspondence. Generally this was no real hardship as we were unlikely to write anything contravening security and all we were required to do was to post our mail in a special letter box in camp. However, once, in a fit of absentmindedness, I posted one of my University correspondence assignment in an ordinary letter box. I rather doubt whether this harmless piece of mail undermined national security and the successful prosecution of the war, nor did I become conscious of having avoided the prescribed mail box in this instance. But when my homework reached the University of Melbourne without the censorship okay on the envelope, the officious Director of Correspondence Studies, one A.K.Hunt, found nothing more urgent to do than to intercept my missive and redirect it to our Commanding Officer. I believe Captain Broughton would have let me off with a reprimand and warning. But the little bastard who had succeeded him by that time had me promptly charged with disobeying orders and without bothering to consider the mitigating circumstances of my case decided to make an example of me by inflicting the maximum punishment available for this heinous offence and summarily sentenced me to a fortnight's confinement to barracks (after hours of duty). This of itself would not have been all that hard to bear. The real sting was in the fact that the sentence, like any sentencing by an army court, automatically entailed forfeiture of proficiency pay for a full half year, that is to say sixpence per day off the daily pay rate of six shillings and sixpence! I felt really hard done by, and in a personal letter to the company sergeant major, who had acted as prosecutor in the case, I voiced the opinion that the powers-that-be should encourage rather than discourage and interfere with young privates trying to do the right thing by undertaking studies in their hours off duty!

Actually in a case of a quite different kind, I had already run up against our mail censorship under Captain Broughton. Greatly narked by the chronic cheap sneers and anti-refugee diatribes which characterised Melbourne's Yellow Press of those days as epitomised by the vile "Smith's Weekly", I had been provoked into writing a letter to that rag in which I voiced my righteous indignation at their constant poisonous sniping, and climaxed it with the following final sentence:

> *"..But the most fitting response to you comes from elsewhere. Thus, when I happened to pass your Flinders street premises last Sunday night, I could not help noticing that a big dog was pissing in your doorway."*

Several weeks after I had posted this letter, Captain Broughton, at the time in the company of Major Layton, told me that they had stopped the letter at the time, although they sympathised strongly with the sentiments expressed in it and found it very amusing. But they did not think it was appropriate to pass it. I believed then, as I still do now, nearly half a century later, that however well-meaning their intentions may have been, they had no right to stop this letter under Army censorship as such. If they really felt strongly that it was ill-advised, they should have tried to persuade me to withdraw it rather than to suppress it without my knowledge and agreement. Such a move was clearly an abuse of censorship powers, as no national security factors were involved.

By the time the war came to an end, our service in the Army had gained us immigration rights. But the same political backwoodsmen who had earlier unsuccessfully opposed our emancipation, as described in an earlier chapter, now objected with similar venom to the highly selective privilege

of free University training under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme being extended to me and the twenty other eligible members of the 8th Employment company who applied for this benefit. Their opposition was again fruitless, and I began to count the days it would take to obtain my accelerated discharge. I felt I could hardly wait.

Imagine, therefore, how dumbfounded I was when my application was disallowed - the only one out of the 21, although I was convinced that I had a particularly clear-cut case of entitlement under the officially published conditions; whereas two other, perhaps less obvious cases, whom I had to convince that they qualified before they applied, were accepted without any trouble whatever. No explanation for refusal of my application was offered. But I was so furious and disappointed that I insisted on making an official protest or appeal, although there was no ready avenue for such a step. My desperate persistence paid off, though; for my application was reviewed and granted, the previous refusal being blamed on nothing more than a simple clerical error!

By the time I had thus beaten bone-headed bureaucracy by sheer stubbornness, I was close to becoming a nervous wreck. The other twenty were already in the process of demobilization. Still, I should get out just in time for Orientation Week 1946 at Melbourne University. But as it turned out, my tribulations on the path to civilian freedom were not yet quite over, and I had one more nasty surprise and frustration to undergo.

The actual demobilization procedure, taking two full days, was rather more cumbersome than enlistment and thus proving that the Army was like Jail, i.e. easier to get into than to get out of. A big demobilisation camp had been established at Melbourne's Royal Park, through which all members of the forces being discharged in Victoria were processed, almost like going through a sausage machine. Bright and early in the morning of the first day in question, I turned up at the Royal Park tram stop, where I was to meet up with several other members of the 8th Employment Company likewise due for demobilization on that date, though I was the only one due to go on to University. We were all there in good time, save little Corporal Johnny Wood (alias Holzbauer), who as the senior ranking one of us was to bring the requisite discharge documents for all of us, as issued to him by Company Headquarters at Broadmeadows the previous evening.

Eventually and rather belatedly, Wood turned up, with a sheepish smile on his bespectacled face, but without the discharge papers. He had lost them! On the way out from Broadmeadows camp the previous evening, he had briefly stopped at a public telephone to make a private call. A quarter of an hour or so after making his call he suddenly realised that he had forgotten to pick up the big Manila envelope with the precious discharge papers in it which he had parked on a ledge in the telephone booth while he rang up. And by the time he hastened back to the telephone, the envelope had disappeared, irretrievably and without a trace. No papers, no discharge! There was nothing for it but for all of us to report back to camp and to settle down once more to frustrating Army routine to which we had already psychologically said goodbye. The lost papers never turned up and it took Army Red Tape another full week to make up new sets for us.

And so I got my discharge a week late, missing out on University Orientation Week and having to sail cold into my first lectures right on the first day of freedom. Still, liberation had come, just in the nick of time.

CHAPTER 20: ADOPTION

If I were asked when I actually decided to stay and settle in Melbourne or, for that matter, in Australia and make this the country of my adoption I would be hard put to arrive at a specific time or date. Perhaps it was a choice that crept up on me naturally, albeit gradually and unconsciously.

From the time I left Germany by "Kindertransport", it was my and my parents' explicit and fervent hope that we would eventually be reunited in U.S.A. not only with each other but also with the relatives who had preceded us there and were sponsoring our immigration application with their affidavits of support. Indeed my admission to Britain at the time seems to have been of an indefinite but nevertheless temporary nature only, and may have hinged in part on the prospect of my eventual re-emigration to America, though I shall never know for sure. Fact is that I saw England as a temporary haven only and my volunteering for deportation during internment - hopefully to Canada but in effect to Australia - as just another stepping-stone to the United States of America, the real promised land for me. A deviation from this attitude was out of question, certainly while for my parents there could still be a chance of rescue from Nazidom.

In that regard, the dreaded outbreak of war coming to pass, and with no prospect of an early Allied victory, struck me as tantamount to the death sentence being pronounced over Papa and Mama and other Jews still in Hitler's clutches, with execution liable to take place any time while they languished on death row, as it were. Yet with every letter that had still reached me, first via Holland, then via the relatives in New York and finally, and however rarely, through Prisoner-of-War mail or the International Red Cross, there flickered a faint hope, a frantic wishful thought that somehow they would succeed in surviving this nightmare.

For a short while in 1941 the faint flicker waxed to a flare when one of the rare letters to reach me from home reported unexpectedly that at last my parents' turn had come in the queue for U.S. immigration visas, and they were now trying to book passage from neutral Portugal to cross the Atlantic to New York. Alas, the wait for scarce shipping berths dragged on and on, to be overtaken by Pearl Harbour and America's consequential entry into the war, shutting off this last avenue of escape. Yet even as the first reports of the extermination camps and the Holocaust at large began to filter through in 1943 and 1944, I tried to cling to the notion that Papa and Mama might have been taken to the alleged relative safety of the Theresienstadt (Terezin) "show" ghetto. Who knows? Perhaps Papa's meritorious record for Germany in war and peace held a chance of their being spared, or even the fact that their son was now treated by the Allies like a Nazi prisoner!

The desperately pathetic and almost idiotic character of these wishful phantasies became all too clear as the full horror of the Holocaust dawned on us. And tacitly I knew in my heart much earlier my dear parents were irretrievably lost. For when I look back now, I can see myself since my release from internment behaving more and more as though I took it for granted that my future would be in Australia. And yet in one sense I never quite fully and explicitly faced Mama's and Papa's dreadful fate - until, by a letter in July 1946, aunt Lorraine and uncle Alfred gently broke the news to me that for several months already they had definite confirmation that both were deported to Auschwitz in May 1943. (A family friend serving with the American occupation forces had

checked up official records in Wuerzburg.) Then, and only then, did the enormity of this tragedy hit me so hard as to make me weep very bitterly and at great length.

Although their death removed any really compelling reason to persist with my intended migration to America, my advent in Australia essentially through the fortunes of war, as it were, was of itself hardly enough cause to opt for staying in this remote outpost of the globe as the solitary specimen and representative of all my surviving maternal and paternal relatives. My Army service as such, as described in the preceding chapter, gained me some of my entitlement to settle here. Not surprisingly, though, it did not of itself commend the place sufficiently to make me stay put.

The thraldom of the Employment company had coloured and overshadowed for me the four years of my enlistment. Yet, probably more so than in the case of soldiers on more "active" duty in combat zones, there still had remained for me some room for personal life, development and consciousness in the heavily circumscribed precious hours or days off duty - times when the much regimented army private could still be a private person and try to cultivate and maintain his own personal contacts and interests, the things that set him apart as a "mensch", a truly human being and individual.

In the political or residential sense, members of the 8th Employment Company rated as "aliens". And indeed I would feel and remain truly alienated in Australia unless I was able to become, over time, part of a social network in this country that went beyond the one of my army mates on whom I had been forced to rely since internment for a sense of belonging somewhere. Since the social framework of "The Eighth" was itself a collective alien entity, it could at best serve me as a moral support group to fall back on during the long quest to strike new roots here. But it could certainly not provide me with a sense of becoming and being an integral part of this antipodean society, that is to say naturalisation as a cultural process rather than the formal step to give the completion of that process its legal seal and official recognition.

Inasmuch as I remain ethnically and culturally Jewish, a significant part of finding acceptance in Australia had to be some entry to local Jewry and linkage to its social or communal life. For me, and probably for many others of my army mates, the first move in that direction occurred when our Commanding Officer, Captain Broughton, arranged for a "church parade" (as they call these things in the Forces) one Saturday morning, not long after we had enlisted and were still bivouacking at Caulfield Race Course. There were but a handful of habitual synagogue-goers among us. But with the powerful incentive of a rest-day after the parade, virtually all Jews volunteered and were then marched in regimental formation from the racecourse at Caulfield to St Kilda, up to and along a seemingly endless Alma road. Finally, past the Chapel street crossing, those who opted for a Liberal Jewish Service were fallen out to attend the Temple Beth Israel, whereas the rest of us marched on a little further to attend at Rabbi Danglow's St Kilda Synagogue in Charnwood Crescent. Once inside the synagogue we were dispersed, each soldier being ushered into a vacant pew next to a hospitable male congregant who would, after the service, bring him home to lunch as a family guest. I guess similar goings-on must have occurred at the Temple. We were as yet a welcome novelty to the community and (although we did not realise it at the time) a potential source of promising young Jewish single manpower to offset the marked chronic surplus of marriageable Jewish females over males obtaining in Melbourne.

The kind, bowler-hatted elderly gentleman who was to be my host that noon, a certain Mr Benjamin, was of old Anglo-Jewish stock; but his delicate facial features were less obviously Jewish than his meticulous observance of kashruth and the sabbath in his Westbury St household, comprising his benign spouse and a pallid, dreamily absent-minded daughter. She, a sole child, clearly of similar age as myself, evinced as little interest in me as I did in her. My impression that she had her own well-established circle of friends must have been correct; because a few years later I happened to rediscover her, tragically as the young war widow of some nice local Jewish lad who had enlisted to serve with the Australian forces overseas.

But on this Saturday afternoon my attention was more riveted on her papa and on the several framed Masonic certificates that graced the walls of mine host's dining room, testimonials to the various offices and titles that father Benjamin held in that fraternity over the years. In my effort to make suitable conversation I steered the topic to Freemasonry and expressed my long-standing amazement at the paradox: How could anybody be expected to join such an organisation which was so secretive as to refuse to let you know what it was all about before you were one of its members? In retrospect I am sure that legions of others must have raised the same question and that most members of the Craft are accustomed to cope with such skepticism. Anyhow, it made for animated table talk, even if it did not lead to anything further...

For me, a much more viable and significant entry to the local Jewish scene occurred soon after: When I was persuaded to join my friend Ernie and one or two others as Friday night guests of a certain Jewish family who just before the war had settled in East St Kilda. Like Ernie and like Leo Goldmann, a still earlier army and ex-internment guest of theirs, the people hailed from Cologne; but I had been assured that a Cologne background was quite immaterial for my invitation to the Krigsteins, who simply would like to meet some more members of our company.

Ernie had praised to the sky their warm hospitality. I confess that I in turn was enchanted from the very first moment with the cordial welcome they extended to us all. Indeed it was marvellous and almost uncanny how they gave one an instant feeling of fitting and belonging into their circle of family and good friends.

Not surprisingly, I became a fairly regular guest at the home of Chaim and Celia Krigstein and their two children, Sonja and Les. A Friday night with them was often looked forward to as the highlight of my week after six days laborious Army stint. To explain and illustrate this more vividly, let me quote the second half of the obituary on Chaim Krigstein which many years later I wrote and had published in the "Australian Jewish News":

> *'...But what made Chaim Krigstein so remarkable and unique in this country was the way in which he and his dear wife Celia with their daughter and son re-built their social life here.*
> *To enter the charmed circle of the Krigstein family was typically to appear as a new and eagerly expected guest at their ever hospitable Friday night table, side by side with other guests of longer standing, one of whom had most likely been encouraged to bring you along.*

There would be kiddush, semirot, bentshen and all over a long drawn out and wonderfully heimishe repast, richly interlaced with good cheer, much banter, animated comparison of Jewish traditions, jokes, reminiscences from Europe, songs, anecdotes, wisecracks and of course the new guest was quizzed like a celebrity from overseas at a TV interview. All this merriment zestfully led by an irrepressible Chaim Krigstein, obviously here in his real element.

It never failed. By the end of the evening the new guest felt so much at home as if he or she belonged there. After that, any family event of the Krigsteins was viewed like an occasion in your own family, and any significant step in your own life was somehow incomplete unless it was graced by the participation of the Krigsteins. If it was a simchah, as likely as not the 'at home' would be held at their home. And if you had relatives overseas, the Krigsteins would make every effort to look them up on their trips abroad.

And this is how so many Jewish arrivals from overseas during and after the war, notably some of "the boys from the Dunera and the Eighth Employment Company" first really came to feel at home in Melbourne.

No more fitting contribution to Australia could have been made by Chaim Krigstein, the man who but briefly preceded them as a new settler. What he gave of his worldly substance was generous to a fault. What he and his widow gave of themselves is the part that will never be forgotten.'

Right through the 1940ies the Krigsteins resided in their unassuming single-fronted brick villa at 5 Hammerdale Avenue, East St Kilda. Apart from kitchen, bathroom, toilet and laundry, the house comprised only two bedrooms of moderate size, so that their son Les had to sleep and study in a small bungalow erected for him and occupying much of the backyard. The middle part of the house was taken up by the lounge which doubled as dining room, though it was not big enough for you to swing a cat. Around the extension dining table one might expect to seat six to eight persons. But on a Friday or "yontef" night at the Krigsteins this was liable to reach up to a dozen, if not more, with perhaps a card table or two and collapsible chairs added on and spilling into the hallway. Nowadays a house like this would probably be considered suitable merely as a first home for a young couple just starting a family, and the number of guests as described here would be regarded

as somewhat outlandish. But the Krigsteins seemed to take it all in their stride and what crowding there was, only added to the wonderful overall sense of hospitality that pervaded the place.

It may not be an exaggeration to say that for some of us guests, cruelly deprived as we were of our own parents, Celia Krigstein served as a surrogate. With her kind, tender and deep concern for us and our well-being, and her abiding interest in our progress, she became a sort of mother figure whose approbation of our conduct we craved and valued. And I suspect we were all rather enchanted by her daughter, the charming and attractive 12-year-old Sonja, who naturally could count plenty of Jewish boys more in her age bracket among her admirers. For my part I felt that at 18 I must not allow myself to become clearly infatuated with this lovely girl. To stand revealed as an unsuccessful would-be "cradle-snatcher" might become embarrassing and make my position with the Krigsteins quite untenable - or so I thought. Before me I had the sorry example of Leo Goldmann, even older than I and admittedly somewhat dour in character, who made no secret of his love for the fair Sonja and who took his continual failure to win her affection so much to heart as to send him eventually overseas to America, never to return.

Chance or deliberately sought encounters with girls in my own age group became, not unnaturally in my situation, a major process by which my social contacts in both the Jewish and general community in Melbourne gradually widened and diversified. Regular organised dances were welcome, although I usually found it difficult and rather preposterous to decide from chatting to a casual dance partner whether there was enough common ground there to pursue the matter further. Certainly the several girls whom I dated from Sunday night dances at Carlton's Monash House proved to be boring and disappointing. For this I blamed their invariably Eastern European Jewish background which seemed to lack sufficient commonality with my German-Jewish upbringing. But Jewish single girls of German or Austrian background were as scarce as hens' teeth in Melbourne and those who were at least third-generation Australians apparently did not attend any public dance functions.

No such problem arose at the Dug-out, the Swanston St canteen for Australian and Allied forces, patriotically sponsored and run by the Myer Emporium and its staff as their voluntary contribution to the war effort. The many salesgirls who acted as hostesses would never decline a dance with you on the premises, for that was one of the rules of the house. But another firm rule, rigidly observed, was that they would always refuse to make a date with their dance partners, much to the disappointment in particular of the many American marines, G.I.s and sailors who frequented the place in search of female company. So what made me a regular visitor at the Dug-out were not the dancing girls but those who at the refreshments counter dished out rich, luscious icecream sundaes at bargain prices.

Though the best dances for me were those held almost every Wednesday night at the Communal Hall of Melbourne Synagogue, mainly for the benefit of the Eighth Employment Company, it seemed. I still feel grateful to the Jewish girls who were in regular attendance there and patriotically and cheerfully taught me my first dancing steps, undeterred by the heavy Army boots in which I pranced around.

It was probably some other dance, though I do not recall the venue, where I proudly and somewhat nervously scored my first date with a girl in Melbourne. She was a blonde trainee nurse,

her face as sweet as her first name Caramel - and she hailed from Albury. What enabled me to engage her interest was the story of my unconventional background and origin. But once the novelty of that wore off after the first couple of dates, she had enough of me. I was not really sorry to lose Caramel, as any date with her was extremely and frustratingly limited. The tight discipline at her training school, Richmond's Epworth Hospital, provided leave passes much more restricted in hours than those given to me by the Army. With that experience behind me I resolved never more to take up with another trainee or practising nurse.

That did not stop me, though, from briefly becoming involved a year later with yet another girl who was dealing with hospital patients. It happened while I was occupying a bed at Heidelberg General Military Hospital in 1943, recovering from the thyroid operation mentioned in the preceding chapter. During those war years it was quite the done thing for well-meaning patriotic groups and individuals to visit sick or wounded soldiers who in hospital might be lonely, far from home and their dear ones.

Thus during visiting hours one fine afternoon a shapely, petite brunette unexpectedly barged into the two-bed ward which I had all to myself, ostensibly to cheer me up with a bunch of flowers and a friendly chat, as she claimed to be doing regularly and off her own bat with other patients at Heidelberg. Her name was Josephine, if I remember rightly, and she was of French origin or descent. My un-Australian accent immediately betrayed to her my German background, whereupon she professed great interest and enthusiasm for learning German and even suggested I might be prepared to teach her the language. To that end she would keep in contact with me.

Just how soon she intended to do so I did not realise until the following morning, when the mail brought me a heavily perfumed letter from Josephine, on pale violet stationery in which she expressed her delight at having made my acquaintance. She was pretty, attractive, cheerful and intelligent, almost too good to be true, so how could I possibly refuse to give her German lessons, at which she looked like making quick progress. Or at least she would have done so, had she not spent the greater part of her time flirting with me and reclining lazily and temptingly over the unused vacant space on my bed. Who knows how readily I would have succumbed to her seductive wiles, notwithstanding my condition as a patient, had I not been cramped in my style by the simultaneous presence of Ernie and often also of other Army mates. These good friends regularly and faithfully trudged out by train and bus all along the cumbersome and time-consuming public transport route to Heidelberg Military hospital whenever they could isit me on their precious days off duty.

It was not all that long before I came to realise that Josephine's ingratiating manner to me was not for the purpose of keeping me available for her language lessons, and that the boot was really on the other foot; the lessons were her pretext to keep coming and seeing me. But I also learned that Josephine was married - to a very jealous Air Force officer stationed outside Melbourne and rarely at home. To make sure there would be no hanky-panky at our German lessons, her young brother-in-law was deputed by hubby to trundle along as chaperone. When Josephine owned up to me about the husband and the brother-in-law, asking if I would object to his coming along, I shrugged and said I didn't mind. At the same time I felt in retrospect mighty grateful to my Army friends for their unwitting help in keeping me on the narrow path of virtue and purity. Strange to say,

though, somehow the German lessons, by that time held at Stonnington where I was convalescing, soon petered out...

Of the sundry girls I dated during four years of Army service, perhaps the only one that left any lasting impression with me and may therefore warrant a mention in these despatches was one Pamela Phillips, she of the gorgeous Titian hair which cascaded in abundant crinkly curls over her broad shoulders. Pam was the only redhead I ever took up with, having met her at a YWCA dance into which I idly drifted one Sunday night in the city. Captain Phillips, her father, had lost his life in the Eighth Army, a battle casualty in North Africa, and Pam lived with her widowed mother in a spacious Punt road flat almost overlooking the Yarra from where that busy thoroughfare steeply descends towards the river.

Pamela

Mrs Phillips was a cheerful, jolly woman who looked much younger than her years. She and the jovial and affable "Hughie", her gentleman and family friend often in attendance when I called for Pam, made me always feel welcome. They immediately surmised that I came of good family and obviously approved of me for Pam to go out with. So much so that I was given the honour of partnering Pamela when she made her social debut at St Kilda Town Hall, although for the formal debutants' dance she had to be paired off with a young lad trained for this ritual and dressed up in the traditional black coat-and-tails and the stiff white shirt, which in their own way were as much a uniform as the one I wore. Still, the official debut photo shows me smiling though somewhat incongruous in my olive-drab Army tunic alongside the pristine white of Pam's costume.

All this happened towards the end of my Army life. To be chosen and okayed as the debutante's partner seems even to this day all the more remarkable to me when I think of the political opinions, decidedly Tory, so firmly espoused by Mrs Phillips and Hughie, and how I used to brazenly argue against them in my awakening political left-wing enthusiasm whenever the occasion offered over an invitation to afternoon tea at the Phillips home. Their good-natured tolerance of my youthful political spoutings seemed to be helped by the fact that they were very favourably impressed by my efforts to do university studies while off-duty.

Pamela's own political sympathies were decidedly pro-Labour and so afforded no real provocation for me to argue politics with her. Yet we found enough other topics to discuss on the occasions we went out together, often for day-long hikes in the bush country near Melbourne. We were still on good terms when we amicably parted after a few months. I guess both of us had reached a stage where we wanted to explore new friendships rather than intensify our relationship any further.

All the same, in pre-Pamela days I had frequently been conscious of a dearth of suitable female company, and thus I would sometimes wander, lonely as a cloud", in Melbourne's glorious Botanical Gardens. Those gardens have always struck me as a most suitably romantic place where to take a walk with one's lady-love, and on occasions I would secretly envy the young swains who were doing just that.

One sunny afternoon, as I sat all by myself and lost in thought in the Gardens and watched the world going by, a presentable looking gentleman, perhaps in his early thirties, parked himself on the far end of my bench. I did not take much notice of him at first; but before long he gave me an encouraging smile and started casually chatting to me. Even then I attached little significance to his presence, as I had already become quite accustomed to the easy friendly manner of the typical Australian, who opened up much more readily to the casual stranger than did his more restrained and reticent British counterpart. This one proved to be even more affable than the usual run, because after the first ten minutes or so he insisted on inviting me for afternoon tea at the lakeside cafeteria. Perhaps my uniform inspired him to such extra friendliness, I thought.

Before long he revealed to me that he was an actor by profession and living in his own little flat just off nearby Park St, South Yarra. But he also became unduly inquisitive about my Army existence. I began to wonder whether perhaps my uniform had prompted something much more sinister and dangerous than an innocent friendly overture. To be sure, it would be quite pathetic to see in me a repository of vital defence secrets. But after all, had we not been indoctrinated to be ever on our guard and cautioned that the sophisticated enemy agent nowadays is usually trained to collect the most trivial and seemingly inconsequential pieces of information which are then skilfully pieced together into a jigsaw pattern of important intelligence for the enemy?

The more I thought about this, the more suspicious I became of the man's attentions, so that I was no longer really surprised when he actually invited me to follow him into his flat. I readily agreed, grimly deciding in my own mind to enter the lion's den and discover for myself how he proposed to winkle out of me any trivia of potential military significance to which I might be privy. Only then would I go and notify the counter-espionage authorities of what he was up to. All of a sudden I became really curious, eager and impatient to see how this peculiar affair would shape up.

The denouement was not long in coming. We had only just sat down in his living room facing each other when he leaned over towards me, touched my knees and looked at me intently while he hoarsely whispered: "DO YOU REALISE WHAT LOVELY EYES YOU HAVE?"

At that I rose abruptly. For I suddenly seemed to remember a firm promise I had made to ring my girlfriend at this very hour to fix our next date. And with that pointed excuse on my lips I discreetly beat a hasty retreat through his front door, out into the fresh cool night.

CHAPTER 21: LODGINGS

The war had ended, at long last. Demobilisation, eventually achieved, had re-opened for me the American option. But inasmuch as my choice was now to migrate to the USA or to remain in Australia, I had by this time developed a clear-cut preference for staying and settling here.

America, with all its hustle and bustle, might be more go-ahead, cosmopolitan and pluralistic; but here the natives were friendly and easygoing, and though the culture was conformist, it had the saving grace to be patterned on the British model, for which I had a growing fondness and appreciation (much like the Hungarian-born writer George Mikes of "How to be an Alien" fame). What little antisemitism could be perceived in Australia was generally of a fairly primitive or naive kind, mostly recognisable as mere xenophobia focussing on Jews, for lack of other alien targets in an insular society with few non-British immigrants. Employment and other economic opportunities looked far more promising here, with less fierce competition, and the paucity of population offered the individual greater facility to make his unique mark and to come to count for something in this antipodean community.

So if permanent settlement in Australia can be described as my long-term objective at the time, then my medium-term objective was to gain suitable university qualifications with the financial aid of my Repatriation benefits, and my short-time objective was to gain naturalisation, which at that time in Australia still took the form of becoming a British subject with Australian citizenship. The medium and short-term objectives were of course important steps towards a successful achievement of the long-term objective.

Prerequisite for naturalisation was five years residence within the British Commonwealth, including at least one year in Australia. These were fair, commonsense requirements to try and ensure that the new would-be Australian had been exposed to sufficient acculturation to make him fit into his new homeland. In commonsense ways I had already satisfied these conditions, even if the period of my internment were to be discounted. But in a bureaucratic sense I had not yet done so, as I had never obtained an official permit for residence in this country. Consequently I had to formally apply for a landing permit, retrospectively, as it were, after having lived here without it, though not illegally, for four years plus one and a half years behind barbed wire. This being granted now without any more fuss or delay, I could then immediately apply for naturalisation. In those days, by the way, the applicant was also required to advertise in the public notice columns of two major metropolitan daily newspapers his intention to get naturalised, so that anyone who cared to could lodge an objection with the authorities. Newspaper cuttings of the requisite advertisements, which followed a certain standard formula of wording, had to be submitted with the other documents needed for the application.

While naturalisation was my successful short-term objective, the immediate and urgent aim, not quite so successful, was to secure a roof over my head - suitable living accommodation while I was studying. During my Army days in Melbourne I had followed the example of many comrades in the 8th Employment company by renting at various times a room in town in which to sleep rather than spend the nights in a flapping tent in Camp Pell, Parkville or in an almost equally uninviting barrack

hut way out in Broadmeadows camp (whenever stationed there). It meant considerable expense for rent out of my modest pay as a soldier, and required one to get up before day-break to reach camp for breakfast or at least in time for the parade thereafter. But such living out, for which leave passes were usually made available, added significantly to one's quality of life.

In Melbourne the problem of renting a room with minimum facilities during the war years was as nothing compared with that of renting a room with full living facilities in the immediate post-war years, a period of severe chronic housing shortage. And despite continued price control and rent control imposed by the government, the outlay on rent was a greater burden on my student's weekly living allowance of ú3/15/- than on my previous Army pay of ú2/5/6. For the soldier's pay was virtually available for discretionary spending and pocket money, since the Army provided all the essentials of food, clothing, medical care and accommodation.

My benefits under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, as it was called, or CRTS for short, comprised the payment of all university fees and prescribed textbooks and the weekly living allowance of three pounds ten shillings plus five shillings for fares. These benefits were available for three years full-time study for an approved degree course, subject to satisfactory progress year by year. The living allowance plus fares amounted to about a pound a week less than the basic wage, and would have meant gradually going into heavy debt, had I not been able, like other CRTS students, to supplement this income with earnings from vacation jobs and sometimes also from part-time work on Saturday mornings. Fortunately such employment was fairly easily available, and I shall have more to say about that later. But I also had to delve from time to time into my only capital or savings, which consisted of little else than my accumulated deferred Army pay of a few hundred pounds, made available to me as a lump sum on demobilisation.

By the time I finished studies and married, this capital had been reduced to one hundred pounds; but by its carefully gradual usage and by living very austerely I had been able to resist the lure of entering a three-year bond with the Education Department. Had I taken the bond, as other CRTS student teachers did, I could have lived much more comfortably during the last year of my student days, but would have been forced into a secondary teaching career which, by the time my studies ended, I had decided was not really the work for me. My life would have turned out very differently and probably much less happily, and I am glad I had the foresight to value the freedom of my later occupational choice sufficiently to reject the financial temptation of entering the bond.

But all this is jumping ahead a few years. For the moment, that is at the time of demobilisation, my dear friend Ernie Levy and I ganged together again, as we had done in fruit-picking days just before enlistment, but this time to share a room and "batch" together while we were students. Ernie had secured his accelerated discharge and CRTS scholarship to study Electrical Engineering at the Royal Melbourne Technical College while I was to pursue full-time the second and third year of my Arts degree at Melbourne University and follow this up with a post-graduate Diploma of Education to qualify as a secondary school teacher, with teaching subjects such as German, English and History, which figured in my studies for the Arts degree.

The idea of ganging together was sound enough, but the snag was to find suitable lodgings at a tolerable rental. To follow up vacancies advertised in newspaper was for many reasons impractical and futile in our case. Instead we went to "Anacortes", at that time the leading estate agency in town

for rental accommodation. The Anacortes people had doubts about being able to place us, at the sort of rental we could afford, but eventually came good with a referral to Mrs Fitton, a solitary middle-aged widow, who offered a vacant room for two in her home off Moreland rd, Moreland, a northern suburb between Brunswick and Coburg.

Mrs Fitton's house was in good condition and the room she offered us was quite adequate to serve as a bedroom-study for both of us, and we did not mind to abide by her ban on liquor and females. But what we did resent increasingly as the days and nights got cooler was the absence of any heating facility. There was no fireplace. Any other room heater, kerosene or electric, was taboo. It got so cold we even shivered when we sat in our winter coats and tried to study. Mrs Fitton calmed her conscience by allowing us to sit with her around her fireplace with its wood fire in her lounge. But this meant having to listen all the time to melancholy stories about her dear departed husband and how much she missed him since he died donkey's years ago. That made study even more impossible than when we froze in the cold of our room.

After three weeks of this we were desperate and went back to Anacortes, seeking alternative lodgings. The agency at first took a dim view of us seeking a change so soon after fixing us up. But when they realised whom they had given us as landlady they said "Ah, Mrs Fitton!" and adopted a much more sympathetic and understanding attitude, promising to try and help us. Apparently three weeks endurance of Mrs Fitton's rated as an excellent reference!

Fortunately our luck with accommodation was about to change. Two of our closest comrades still stuck in the 8th Employment company but aware of our housing predicament came to our rescue. They had secured for themselves a room in an old lodging house at 27 Fawkner street, South Yarra, where they had come to be on excellent terms with Mrs Spargo, their elderly landlady. So that when another room in the house became vacant at that time, Mrs Spargo readily gave it to Ernie and me on their recommendation.

These two friends of ours were Heinz Werner Margulies and Hans Joachim Blumenthal, but about this time or not much later there were to be some name changes, with Margulies becoming Margate, Hans Blumenthal turning into John Barlow, and my friend Ernie himself altering his surname to Lester. There were a great many others of the 8th Employment Company to anglicise their names as a part of their naturalisation or assimilation process or, as in Ernie's case, merely to avoid antisemitic job discrimination on the basis of an obviously Jewish name in their written job application. For my part, I would have contemplated a change of name only if I had thought it was too hard for Anglo-Saxons to spell or pronounce. This was clearly not the case and I had and have every sentimental reason to retain it and nothing to warrant the practical inconvenience and complications of a name change.

The move to Fawkner st, South Yarra was a happy one for Ernie and me. Our room at Mrs Spargo's had an old-fashioned fire-place and in the small backyard there was plenty of firewood which we only had to chop up to give us fuel to keep warm. The problem with heating at our new address did not relate to the room but to the water for a shower or bath. The only facility in that regard was a primitive chip heater to be stoked before every shower with paper and wood chips and kindling and then to be freshly lit - not always successfully! It was indeed a very off-putting operation. Fortunately I managed to minimise my use of the chip heater by taking my daily ablution,

whenever possible, in one of the well-appointed shower cabinets provided in the Students' Union House at Melbourne University.

In its necessarily frugal ways, ours was a happy and harmonious menage at Fawkner street which continued to deepen my friendship with my room mate. Ernie, exactly half a year older than I, had in his years at Cologne's eminent Jewish college undergone a typical "Oberrealschule" type of education with its emphasis on science and modern languages (French and English) whereas I had been exposed to the opposite extreme, the so-called "Humanistische Gymnasium" or classical grammar school with its over-emphasis on Latin and ancient Greek to the neglect of physics, chemistry and modern languages. As a result his and my schooling and vocational background, inclinations and interests were quite different. But perhaps just because of that, we seemed to complement each other extra well. Of our household chores Ernie preferred to do the cooking whereas I rather attended to the dishwashing, as we had done in our fruit-picking days. But food shopping was generally a joint effort, as was tidying up our room.

Immediately upon demobilisation I had purchased a new bicycle on which I rode to University from Moreland. How long I kept this up after moving to South Yarra, when it meant cycling through the city, I do not remember, though I clearly recall using the bike to advantage for outings with a girl friend. Another acquisition of mine was an old heavy, reconditioned office typewriter - the only kind available then without a special permit - to enable me to type my University assignments which otherwise would have been difficult to decipher on account of my atrocious handwriting.

Ernie, for his part, bought from a government disposals store at bargain price a very large radio set that had been ripped out of a decommissioned, scrapped bomber aircraft and that afforded him almost world-wide reception of shortwave broadcasts. He mounted this monster on a wooden board and attached to it an old alarm clock which I had bought during the war when nothing better was available to wake me up early to go back to camp in time for morning parade. The alarm clock had become really decrepit and I had no further use for it. But Ernie attached it to his radio by rigging up some Heath Robinson-type contraption of wires, connecting the clock hands with the radio set in such a fashion as to create what may well have been the first working radio alarm clock in Australia! But that was typically Ernie.

On occasions we would make up foursomes for hikes or similar outings with our respective current girl friends. They happened to be non-Jewish blondes whom we had come to know via Jewish friends and families. Though I think of more lasting significance was the mutual mental stimulation Ernie and I gave to each other in the way we discussed current political and other public affairs rather than love affairs. Such discussions were not always serious, as we both greatly enjoyed to engage in mental tomfoolery. One of our favourite pastimes was to ridicule concepts by literally translating them from English to German or from German to English, often with really droll results. Or we might speculate on the way things would turn out in different circumstances from those obtaining.

One day, for example, we asked ourselves what Australia would be like after a successful Communist revolution here. It was a scenario not only most improbable but in fact quite difficult to imagine. However, given the Russian model, one thing we thought we could be sure of was that many places and institutions in the land would be renamed. This idea lent itself to quite an amusing

mental game in which we tried to outdo each other with examples. Thus Hotel Menzies changed into Hotel Sharkey, Luna Park was re-styled as Lenin Park, Princes Bridge became Commissars Bridge, while the "Spirit of Progress" train became the "Spirit of Revolution". And instead of the Australian Constitutional League warning that the Communist Party was fomenting revolution, I suggested we would now have a Revolutionary League alleging that the Liberal Party threatened Australia with a constitution. But Ernie topped it all by renaming a well-known establishment at Werribee as the "Pigironbob State Sewerage Farm." -"Pig Iron Bob" was of course the abusive nickname bestowed upon the Tory prime minister Robert Menzies in 1938 for lifting the embargo on the export of scrap iron to militaristic, aggressive Japan. Later on such scrap supposedly came back to us in the bombs dropped by Japanese airmen on Australia during World War 2.

The notion had us both in paroxysms of laughter and inspired me to turn the whole exercise into an article for "Farrago", the Melbourne University student newspaper. There it appeared as a political satire in which a journalist from a capitalist country described his impressions as a tourist in Soviet Australia, mocking the then fashionable tendentious stories of Western journalists about their travels behind the Iron Curtain.

This exuberant intellectual lark may have had quite portentous consequences for me in the long run. It set me off on writing, over a period, various other pieces of political satire to appear under my by-line in Farrago" and resulted eventually in my being urged to join the Communist Party Branch of the university - an invitation by Stephen Murray-Smith, the Branch President (who was also President of the University Labor Club) that I politely declined. Notwithstanding my "progressive" and socialist political sympathies of those days I very firmly believed that the adherence to a Party Line discipline, especially in the Communist party, would stifle any satirical inspiration. But what really came to count in the longer run was the fact that my occasional contributions to "Farrago" made a more favourable impression on one of my University lecturers than my performance in his subject. This will become evident in the next chapter.

Ernie's political views were much the same as mine or very similar, and we cheerfully participated in Labor Club camps during vacation and marched in the Labor Club contingents of the annual Labor Day street parades while we were students. So much for our political creeds. On the religious side I had come from a very lax Jewish home and retained a vague adherence to a conservative kind of Judaism and a fairly firm belief in a personal God, which I thought defensible by rational argument rather than trusting faith, although I had never gone into this very deeply or critically.

Ernie, on the other hand, had been reared in a strictly traditional Jewish household, whose rigid observances he found so oppressive as to be counterproductive by making him revolt and turn militantly atheist in outlook.

In discussing these views, Ernie prevailed on me to read "The Martyrdom of Man", by Winwood Reade. This absorbing rationalist classic, written as a vivid prose epic, made a tremendous impression on me (as it has done on many others in its time) and has been probably more influential on me than any other single book in my life. Its immediate effect on me was rather painful, as it forced me to realise that theistic views I had held were not tenable if I wanted to retain

my intellectual honesty. It took me a week or two before I could really adjust and reconcile myself to the loss and mental upheaval entailed in abandoning the comfortable belief in a personal God.

I suppose that without Ernie's influence I would never have come across this important book. And I have often wondered how much longer it would have taken me in that case to become an agnostic, as I now think I was destined to become anyhow, sooner or later.

But these were not the only matters of religion to be noted at 27 Fawkner street. The room between ours and our two comrades was tenanted by a screwy elderly spinster who filled up her abode with old newspapers and a persistent stench of sulphur, for whatever obscure reasons or beliefs. She was eventually succeeded by Mr Carthew, a confirmed bachelor in his forties, who, though he got rid of the old papers and the sulphur, retained a firm belief in the sulphur and brimstone of eternal hell-fire, as he was a devout protestant fundamentalist. He also had a touching faith in the salubrious properties of "Quicbrew", a local brand name for malt coffee. 'Quicbrew Carthew', as we referred to him, was a friendly enough gent. But I have to confess that we wickedly caused him great mental distress during the annual season of goodwill when we posted him a humorous greeting card with wishes for a "helluva good Christmas" and which featured several gaily cavorting red devils.

Ah, yes, all the mischief that goes with religion! A much more grievous victim than 'Quicbrew' was our jolly landlady. Of good Irish-Catholic stock, Mrs Spargo had undergone a mixed marriage, in which she had to solemnly promise her protestant husband that their children would not be brought up as Catholics, as the Church demanded to allow the marriage. What was the good woman to do? On her priest's incessant urgings she sent the children to religious instruction on the sly, and when her husband discovered this, as he was bound to do sooner or later, he left poor Mrs Spargo, never to return, and she had to rear her son and two daughters all by herself. By the time we appeared on the scene, the son had become a successful TV producer and had a family of his own. But of the two daughters one had two boys out of wedlock from an erratic good-for-nothing father who drank and often abused and ill-treated her, while failing to give financial support. The other daughter had turned into an alcoholic slut and prostitute. We boys could only marvel how cheerful Mrs Spargo and her daughters remained and how aloof her son kept from his mother and sisters.

We did not see all that much of the daughters. Edna, the one with the kids, had the use of the front room in the house but was not there much of the time, and the boys' father called only spasmodically. The other daughter spent most of her time in Sydney. We four ex-Army tenants were on cordial terms with the three Spargo women and old Mrs Spargo gladly condoned us bringing our girl friends into the house and having our occasional modest little parties.

This was all very good and convenient for us while it lasted. But after a year or so to the mutual satisfaction of landlady and tenants it all had to end, as Mrs Spargo had to abandon her own tenancy of the house due to health reasons. In the quest for alternative accommodation the four of us scattered to the winds, as it were, and I found myself having to make do with a small shack at the back of tailor's premises in Punt road. This was barely passable in the summer weather at the time, but I hated to think what it would be like in winter. Luckily, by the time the cooler weather set in, I had somehow found an alternative in East St Kilda.

My new abode was a little bungalow, one of two set in the grassed backyard of a big, old lodging house at 10 Fulton st, off Westbury street. Mr Czerny, the owner, was a Jewish widower who lived in the two-story building with his two teenage sons, but the greater part of the premises was occupied by diverse couples or single persons, all being Jewish refugees of usually fairly recent immigration vintage. Each tenant party had their own very small kitchenette spot and shared in the use of the several toilets and bathrooms in the house. As an outdoor tenant I likewise had the indoor use of a toilet and bathroom, but no kitchenette facilities.

It is amazing how many different Jewish immigrants over the early postwar years passed as tenants through the indoor premises at this address. As for me, I had to make do with the bungalow till and through the end of my student days. Yet later in these memoirs it will become apparent how this humble hovel became the first stepping-stone towards my eventual permanent house and home in South Oakleigh.

CHAPTER 22: VARSITY

Getting accustomed to the academic way of life was not difficult. Two prior years as an external part-time correspondence student under the auspices of the Army Education Service helped to ease me into Melbourne's university. The new thing now was actual attendance at lectures and tutorials. This I observed religiously throughout.

I was less conscientious, perhaps, when it came to taking notes at lectures and to engaging in recommended extra reading additional to the firmly prescribed text and reference books. For that there was plenty of excuse, as I could never combine note-taking and understanding the lecturer's reasoning at the same time. In any case, my handwriting was so weak and bad that I was more often than not unable to decipher my hasty scribbles of extensive notes. Here I remember one of my fellow students, a clergyman who usually sat next to me during classes in Logic. I could only marvel at his amazing facility in taking copious legible notes. But when asked, he confessed to me that he had to concentrate so much on getting the words down that the lectures became for him pure dictation sessions, so that in fact he had to rely on later study of his notes to have any real idea of what the lecturer's dissertation meant. By contrast, I, by entirely concentrating on intelligent listening, understood the drift of the lecturer's exposition right away, even if afterwards some of it faded a bit without adequate notes to refresh the memory.

In later years it became increasingly recognised by faculties that they ought to minimise the students' need to write in class by issuing suitable notes themselves. Stencilled notes which university teachers were wont to issue even in my time rarely if ever covered or summarised their lectures. The issued notes were rather supplementary material not available in book form or that the lecturer had insufficient time to include in addressing the class. But I still think it was unrealistic and unfair to expect perhaps hundreds of students to cover supplementary readings from reference books which were typically unavailable except as one, two or three copies spread over different University or public libraries. The time wasted in mostly futile attempts to chase up such references for at best a brief, hurried loan could surely be better spent in coping with the general study load and with pressing assignments. Not surprisingly, some of my assignment efforts, especially in second year English, drew the lecturer's written comment of "Insufficient evidence of reading".

Nevertheless, I battled successfully through my Bachelor of Arts course; and where I lacked in one or another subject in giving convincing evidence of extra reading by regurgitating comments and interpretations of sundry reference authors (with carefully documented attributions!), I endeavoured to atone and compensate by my own obvious efforts at original thinking about the topic. In other respects, though, while some of the "crits" appended by lecturers to my assignments seemed harsh to me at the time, they began to look remarkably gentle when I re-read them many years later! Perhaps this reflects that the main thing I gradually gained from these very academic studies was to become more self-critical. That, combined with a cultivation and indeed passion for the search for truth, impartiality and objectivity, however unpleasant and upsetting the findings might turn out to be, are the principal values and habits I derived from my Arts degree studies. However, looking at my later career I must also subscribe to the bon mot that the value of an Arts degree is

that it enables you to enjoy life even without the things it prevents you from getting (a dig at the relatively low status of an Arts degree as a "meal-ticket" compared with most other degrees).

Most of the classes I attended were unusually large for those days, being swollen by the bank-up of repatriation beneficiaries like myself who also bumped up the typical average age (and mental maturity and seriousness) of students. However, as post-war pupils came to stay at school longer and university enrolments kept growing, what had been record sizes of Australian university classes in my time quickly became the norm and led on to the proliferation of universities.

Despite - or perhaps because of - the largeness and the average maturity of classes, I found that at the first session with any professor or lecturer there was always a great reluctance and shyness on the part of my fellow students to avail themselves of the invitation to ask questions, seemingly for fear of making fools of themselves. As for me, I had no such qualms and was usually the first to pop a question or comment during the period set aside for discussion. This earned me the early attention of the instructors as well as their obvious feeling of gratitude for breaking the ice. Also it was a relief for my fellow students who then forgot their initial hesitation. This kind of initiative was and remains a streak in me which I inherited from my father and that had gained him his nickname "Kebes" (see chapter 5 above).

Even as I was still undergoing my final year studies for the Arts degree, I eagerly looked forward to the post-graduate Dip. Ed. course, whose notice boards in the adjacent Faculty of Education I passed daily. The messages on those boards always looked inviting to me, promising of a kind of study that I would find congenial and not very difficult at all.

In the event my expectations were largely borne out, as I readily reached Honours standard in all the theoretical subjects of the course. But it came as a rude and painful shock to me when despite my most prolonged and strenuous efforts I did not succeed in reaching a satisfactory pass level in practical teaching.

Celia Krigstein Sonja Krigstein

I suspect I made history as the first student of the course to fail practical teaching although gaining honours in all theory subjects! There are contributory technical reasons for this which it would be too tedious to dwell on here. I had been drawn to teaching because I had correctly

considered myself to have a knack for explaining concepts and ideas to others which was also reflected in my prepared lesson plans. But now I made the nasty discovery that teaching an individual pupil was one thing; whereas to keep on top of a whole class at a time and to maintain class control and discipline was dramatically different. It often overtaxed my span of simultaneous attention. This lack of capacity would be overcome after longer practice, as my instructors tried to assure and console me. Nevertheless the experience gave me a negative slant on the class teaching of youngsters as predominantly a task akin to lion-taming. And that was more than I had bargained for. As if to rub salt into my wounds, I failed the last theoretical examination (in the extra honours subject of Comparative Education) when I turned up for it in the afternoon of the appointed day and was told it had taken place at the morning session! I was not allowed to sit for the same paper (for which I had felt well prepared) or to get another paper set instead.

Notwithstanding this final temporary set-back, and the austerity of living on the CRTS allowance, the three years spent at Melbourne University were a happy period in my life. What I lacked in creature comforts was more than compensated by the intellectual interest and challenge of those days and the mental stimulation thus generated. Some of this undoubtedly came for me from the extra-curricular activities sponsored by the student clubs and societies which gave University life its real zest and flavour.

Among such boons were the invited lunchtime speakers, typically drawn from State and Federal politicians, trade union leaders and others prominent in topical controversies and public affairs, interspersed with other personalities, even from abroad. Among the notabilities I thus came to face I recall Robert G. Menzies during his time as leader of the Federal Opposition; Moshe Sharett, after his service as Israel's Foreign Minister and Prime Minister; Eamon de Valera, the long-standing Irish leader, and Chico Marx, last of the famous Marx brothers.

Writing about this some four-and-a-half decades later, I surmise that prominent public speakers at extra-curricular lunchtime gatherings are still a characteristic part of the University scene here and throughout Anglo-Saxon academia. But I regret and deplore that they have lost much of their real point, purpose and attraction. In the early post-war years speakers at such meetings received a good hearing. Opposition to their views was expressed spiritedly and pointedly, albeit mainly in ensuing question time or by a few well-placed witty interjections during their address. In short, the decencies and discipline of something like parliamentary standing orders were usually observed and honoured, to the benefit, edification and intellectual enjoyment of all present and concerned. Nowadays, on the other hand, one finds all too often that such meetings are largely spoiled or wrecked outright by the loutish antics of the speaker's opponents who boo or shout him down and prevent his views from being heard altogether. No sensible serious questioning and examination of viewpoints and ideas is possible in such circumstances and it escapes me what students who condone or actively indulge in such behaviour see as the real purpose of a university. Surely even they must realise that their simplistic agitation and hostility can be expressed more persuasively elsewhere!

During 1948, my Dip.Ed. year, time before and between terms was usurped by supervised extra practice, which was mandatory for those student teachers who like myself lacked prior teaching experience. But during 1946 and 1947, the manner of spending vacations between terms and

between academic years was at my own discretion. Broadly and in theory, the choice was between holidaying, private study and extra reading for my Arts subjects or going out for vacation jobs to supplement the very austere living allowance of my scholarship. Almost inevitably, the decision came down to vacation jobs, an option fully condoned by the scholarship authorities. Luckily in Australia those were times of high employment, so that temporary run-of-the-mill jobs were not too hard to come by - at least with the aid of the University Appointments Board, of which I made full use.

The first time I used the Board's special services for vacation employment, I found myself in a fairly long queue of students hopeful of temporary work with the Commonwealth Department of Civil Aviation to help provide ancillary services while it hosted an International Civil Aviation Conference then due to take place in Melbourne. Just for once, and to my delighted surprise, studies in Arts proved a considerable advantage compared with other faculties. For the first thing to occur was a call for students doing English to step out of the queue. I was the only one to do so. As a result I was the first candidate to be allocated a position. It happened to be the only sweet and congenial job among the dozen or more offered for the duration of the conference, and that was to help out in the Public Relations Office of the Department by chasing up all the Australian press cuttings relating to the conference and other aviation matters. All the other ICAO jobs given to students were either to run off thousands of conference documents on icky-sticky black stencil duplicators or to collate and staple the voluminous documents thus produced. For this purpose, and the same rate of pay as received by me, these other students stood and slaved under artificial light in a large and uninviting basement whereas I sat in a friendly airy office at Almora House, in the Western part of Melbourne's Little Collins st and over and above my agreeable and quite interesting chore I observed and learned a great deal about Public Relations.

My boss, Mr Alf Heintz, an ex-Airforce type of World War II like so many others in DCA at the time, was the Department's Public Relations Officer, with direct access to Sir Richard Williams, the Director General of Civil Aviation. In his own field of public relations Mr Heintz ruled supreme and firmly laid down that nobody in the Department but himself was to make any statements to the Press which according to him was always out to trick, trap and criticise the Department and thus to embarrass also the government of the day. In this view he was presumably correct, for the Press sees itself as the self-appointed watchdog of our democracy.

Heintz was a real professional at his trade, one of the first few in Australia. For at the time so-called Public Relations was still a novel concept, although this new-fangled occupation soon mushroomed to other major organisations. Meanwhile, however, we all had to learn the subtle but important differences between the new public relations and the old-fashioned publicity, propaganda and advertising functions that were their less enlightened and less sophisticated forerunners!

Along with my press-cuttings stint I gained a ringside view of this modern corporate arena. But it also turned my thoughts for the first time in my life to the real possibility of finding eventual employment in the governmental side of the civil service - a notion that somehow had never occurred to me previously but which henceforth was to figure increasingly in my considerations and options for finding a suitable livelihood and vocation.

Yet the thought of a possible career with the government palled for a while when my next vacation placement took me into the Federal Taxation office, at that time still in its large grey granite pile in Lonsdale st, since taken over by the Victorian State bureaucracy. Here, under the supervision of a Mr Cade, I was entrusted with the task of readying for issue so-called Final Demands for Income tax, ominously headed as such in red print, which threatened tardy payers of their fiscal obligations with the unwholesome consequences of continued waywardness. To get the job I had to give a solemn undertaking that I would also work at it two evenings of overtime each week. This I did not mind at all as it would give me considerable extra pay at time-and-a-half penalty rates plus a dinner allowance. The only snag or difficulty I encountered was that almost daily I had to be warned to work more slowly than I did, else I would run out of work even before the end of the normal working day. As I was still expected to keep looking busy, this took a real effort and made the days more boring and slow to pass, turning me much against my will into a real clock-watcher on the job. This experience seemed to confirm all the prevailing prejudice against public service employment and when to my amazement at the end of this vacation employment I was, on the strength of it, offered and urged to accept permanent employment in the Taxation Office forthwith I found the situation truly grotesque.

A more wholesome holidays job came my way during the next long vacation, when I worked as an auxiliary postman during the Christmas peak of delivering letters. After having accompanied them on their rounds a few times, I had to relieve each of two regular posties of a third of their delivery rounds in the Brighton area of suburban Melbourne, but both did the prior sorting of the mail I had to distribute, then still a twice daily delivery round and once on Saturdays. The work started bright and early in the morning and by the end of the day the soles of my feet were really sore and hurting, at least during the first week or two. Yet it was great exercise and earned me overtime and even some extra money by way of Xmas tips received, although I was not the regular postie. I was lucky too in that there were no rainy days that December. When it was all over by Xmas, friends marvelled how sun-tanned I looked and wanted to know where I had spent a wonderful beach holiday!

All my vacation jobs had been full-time and invariably within the Commonwealth Public Service. But occasionally during terms I had periods of part-time employment in private enterprise, boosting the sales staff to cope with the Saturday morning peak of customers in large city stores. Sometimes this was at Coles in their store in the heart of Bourke street; but more often right opposite at Myer's Emporium. At Coles it was straight "counter-jumping", where the customers made their buying decision unaided. At Myers, on the other hand, I would often be consulted on the purchase of neckties and even handkerchiefs. It became more difficult, challenging and interesting when I was posted to the men's wear department to sell overcoats for rain or winter weather, a process in which I really had to learn more about the merchandise and also acquired a great deal of insight into sales psychology and the various types of attitude encountered among prospective customers.

Typically three hours of selling on a Saturday morning would nett me fifteen shillings, certainly not a princely sum but quite a useful adjunct to the CRTS weekly living allowance of four pounds and ten shillings. Moreover, the work at Myer's, however part-time, also entitled me to the store's

five percent staff concession on all non-food purchases. The real usefulness of this shilling in the pound concession lay in the great variety of goods to be had at Myers.

Circumspect as I had to be in managing my finances, I tried to be even more so to offset an occasional extravagance. Thus when I was due to visit Sydney to accept a holiday invitation from Rabbi and Mrs Porush, I decided to go by air one way, simply for the sake of experiencing the sensation of flying for the first time in my life. Knowing how expensive meals in a railway diner are, I figured that a meal in the air must be even more so (by analogy with airmail postage compared to surface mail postage), and so I was determined that on no account would I raise my swollen travel expenses still further by buying food on the plane. Unfortunately I forgot to provide myself with food for the trip and when the plane took off at lunchtime, though giving me the thrill of my first rise into the air, it also left me roaring hungry, especially when the air hostesses started to bring around most delicious looking trays of food and placed one before each of my fellow-passengers, none of whom seemed to mind the cost of this. The hostesses were quite puzzled and incredulous that I firmly declined the offer of food. This was quite an effort for me, but I was too shy and ashamed to inquire about the cost of it and then to have to confess that I found it too expensive. In the end I asked reluctantly for a bottle of Coca-cola, for which I was charged the usual threepence, and which did not really help me at all to stave off my feelings of hunger, while everybody around me had a wonderful meal for which they paid nothing extra at all. Oddly enough, none of the plentiful and frantically competitive publicity and advertising of Australia's two internal airlines had bothered to mention that fares included meals.

Nor did I become aware of this until my next flight, later that year from Devonport to Melbourne. I was returning from a student teaching round in a Tasmanian Area school and decided to incur the extra cost of flying rather than to repeat the sort of night I had experienced on the ferry ride from Melbourne to Devonport, when the stormy waters of Bass strait tossed the ship so as to roll me to and fro in my bunk every few seconds. I had not been sea-sick then, but the continual gravity-induced movement of my body had made sleep quite impossible and had made me hanker for the hammock in which I had swayed through the nights of my Dunera voyage.

This time in the air I felt I had to order a meal, and hang the expense. I nervously asked a fellow student travelling with me what the extra impost might be. Only then I learned, to my delighted surprise and relief, that my air ticket was also my meal ticket.

Mozelle

CHAPTER 23: MOZELLE

It was in my second year at University that Mozelle began to enter and figure in my life and existence. But before I try to relate how this came about and developed, it would probably help to say something about her Indian origin and her background, so different from my own.

Except for the so-called Cochin Jews and the Bene Israel, small groups whose Jewish origins are ancient and obscure, the Jews of India are mostly Sephardim who drifted from Baghdad to Bombay and Calcutta, where many found work in the textile industry. Following Indian and Israeli independence after World War II, most of the Jews of India went on aliyah.

Mozelle came from such a Sephardi family, and her face bore the handsome features so prevalent among Sephardim, although her surname - Ashkenazi - suggested that at least one of her forebears was of different lineage. The second-youngest of two brothers and three sisters, she was born and grew up in Byculla, a suburb which was for the Jews of Bombay what Caulfield is for the Jews of Melbourne. The parents were orthodox Jews and her upbringing could be described as strait-laced Victorian.

Mozelle's mother, who spoke only Arabic, reached Bombay from Baghdad not long before her marriage to the father, who was an employee and prospective partner in a printing business in Bombay. Not long after his death at the age of 62, it devolved upon Mozelle to support from her earnings as a trained teacher her mother and the younger two of her siblings. Isaac, the younger brother, was still at school trying to study engineering and her sister Rachel forsook her intended training as a nurse to take on the role of cook and housemaid in lieu of the two domestics the family could afford to employ in her father's lifetime. Lily and Shalom, her eldest sister and brother, were married with their own families to look after.

When India became independent, Mozelle and Rachel migrated to Australia, to be followed soon after by their brother Shalom. The intention was to try and re-establish the family in this country or, failing that, to proceed to Israel. For a few months, the two girls temporised in Fremantle, where they had set foot in Australia, working in a commercial laundry until the time was ripe for Mozelle to commence teaching Mathematics at Frensham, a fashionable girls college near Bowral, NSW. It was a period of chronic teacher shortages in the land and the job had been promised to Mozelle while she was still in India. Rachel too was accommodated to give general domestic help at the college.

Frensham was a well-equipped Anglican boarding school in a beautiful hilly rural woodland setting. But the pupils were for the most part pampered daughters of the landed gentry, often from broken homes. Mozelle did not relish the disciplinary problems this created, and the scenic environment failed to compensate her for the isolation from Jewish life and contacts. The two sisters sought relief by vacationing in Sydney. There they met Rabbi and Mrs Porush, who always sought out Jewish newcomers. Yet when the two girls decided they had enough of Frensham, they went instead to Melbourne, where the Jewish social scene was reputed to be warmer and more inviting to new arrivals than in Sydney.

After having to contend with the spoiled brats of Frensham - so different from the meek, obedient schoolgirls she had enjoyed teaching in Bombay - Mozelle sought a break from teaching. Instead both sisters found clerical employment at Melbourne's Myer Emporium. Mozelle took a typing course at night school and worked as an invoice typist, where meticulous accuracy was more important than typing speed. The pay was very modest but at least Myers had a fine reputation for the way they treated their staff.

"Oh, you must meet these two Indian girls", Gerda Kempe said to me, enthusing about her latest discovery. Gerda and I went for occasional walks and talks in those days, and that was the extent of our mutual friendly relations and interest. (She eventually married her Perth cousin Claude Schwarz, who became a cantor and reverend at Liberal Jewish temples in Sydney and later in Melbourne.)

I can't say I was all that intrigued, but Gerda kept on to me about those Indian girls of hers. Then, one fine day when I called at her parents' home in St Kilda's Charnwood Crescent to take her for a stroll, Gerda was out on a brief errand and I was left waiting on the front porch. But already similarly waiting, I discovered, were two somewhat exotic looking damsels of pleasant appearance. "Aha, these must be the two Indians she is so insistent about", I surmised, though the slightly taller of the two looked to me more Italian, and the shorter, younger one I felt could have passed as a Southern Russian or perhaps as a gipsy.

Gerda arrived back within a few minutes and performed mutual introductions. But the girls were shy and uncommunicative. It was clearly hopeless for any real conversation to spring up. Anyhow, the situation was cut short when Gerda, in a few words, briefed them to meet up with her at a later date and they departed quickly and looking relieved.

I do not know in what manner Gerda had first encountered them. But, seeing the good-hearted and caring person she was, she immediately took these lonesome strangers under her wing and made it her business to expose them throughout her own circle of friends.

For the next few months Mozelle and Rachel were always there whenever I met Gerda together with the small clique of other young Jewish singles who had ganged up that summer for joint hikes, bush walks or beach outings. And somehow I was always paired off with Mozelle, though neither she nor I knew why. She was still as taciturn as at our first encounter, and unless an oppressive silence was to take over, I realised that the onus was and remained very much on me to keep conversation between us going and bubbling along. I tried to be as interesting and amusing as I could be, and although her responses remained minimal, I felt I had her at least mildly entertained rather than bored. In the circumstances I considered this as reasonably successful. Though the strain began to tell on me, and I was not sorry when these group excursions petered out.

This short and rather superficial passing phase might have been the end of it; for after all that reticence of hers I had no cause to give further thought to Mozelle at the time. However, at a later date I attended a Sunday night dance at Samuel Myers Hall. As luck would have it, the crowd in attendance were all strangers to me and struck me as a singularly uncongenial lot, at least from my point of view. Reluctantly I decided that the evening was a complete waste and washout. It was too late to go elsewhere that Sunday night. I would be better off making for home in my little bungalow.

Just then, however, I spotted Mozelle, sitting alone and slightly forlorn like a wallflower. To me she was such a glorious, wonderful contrast to the rest of the mob that I immediately made a beeline for her. And Mozelle, discovering me the same moment, reacted similarly and her face lit up with delight. It turned out she was feeling the same way about the other dancers as I did. Needless to say, we stayed on and for the rest of the evening happily kept dancing with each other, except when we paused to go outside and started to kiss for the first time. Of course I walked her home that night to the doorway of her lodging house off Fitzroy st, St Kilda and began to date her.

There was nothing unusual or unconventional about our ensuing weekly dates. Mozelle clearly had no other young man to take her out and with both of us far from home and relatively lonely, I liked her enough to "go steady" with her for the time being and see how things would pan out as we got to know each other better.

This attitude of mine was not quite as mutual as I assumed. There was usually a little hesitation before she agreed to our next date. I did not see anything significant in that, attributing it to her virginal modesty and "Victorian" upbringing. Later - much later - I was to learn that she had wanted to discontinue our dates but did not have the courage to tell me so to my face. Eventually she thought of a way out of her predicament. She told me that for the moment she was not sure when she was free, but if I were to ring her at work the following Wednesday (there was no telephone where she lived) she would let me know when we could meet next. She figured it would be much easier and less embarrassing to refuse another date by phone.

This little stratagem might well have worked. Because if she had thus turned me down, I am sure that would have been the end of Mozelle, as far as I was concerned. For at that stage I would have shrugged her off and simply looked elsewhere for suitable female companionship.

But a seemingly trivial quirk of fate intervened to keep her together with me - for the rest of her life, as it turned out: On the Wednesday I happened to be in the city, and walking near Myers Emporium brought to mind that I was due to telephone Mozelle about this time regarding our next date. Being so close to where she was, it seemed silly to ring: I might as well go up to the office where she worked and see her in person. No sooner thought than done. But dear Mozelle was quite undone, for I had unwittingly frustrated her little plan! Once again she could not deny me to my face. After that, she never tried again to get rid of me. And I believe that by then she was becoming reconciled to having me around.

The fact was that I had caught her on the rebound, for she had fancied herself in love with another Jewish young man, several years older than I, who was a physics lecturer at a technical college but who, except for occasional playful flirtation had never taken any real interest in her or tried to date her. She was quite candid about this, yet also confessed that she could not get him out of her mind. As for me, she quite liked me and actually grew very fond of me; but that was all. Yet even though she kept emphasising that she was not in love with me, she became very possessive and waxed jealous about the slightest sign of any real or imagined interest I showed or attention I paid to any other girl. This made things sometimes difficult for me. While I regarded Mozelle as facially more beautiful than any other girl we encountered, I still cherished my male prerogative of assessing the looks of such others, although in practice this amounted to no more than mentally drawing comparisons in Mozelle's favour. However, I realised that she was much too diffident

about herself and too suspicious of me to be thus reassured. So I did not even try to defend myself and instead stood accused now and then of the wandering eye.

There was much that Mozelle had to get used to. She had brought with her from India some primitive superstitions - such as a fear of the evil eye or a refusal to eat double bananas, i.e. two bananas under the one skin, lest she might mother twin babies.

But in other ways she regarded most Continental Jews as uncouth and their languages such as German, Yiddish, Polish or Russian as atrociously guttural. "It all sounds like khatsh-khutsh to me", she would say, and, in conversation with me she often referred disapprovingly to "you khatsh-khutsh people". I realised that this was exactly the same reaction which made the ancient Greeks refer to foreigners as "barbarians" because the foreign languages sounded to them something like "barbar". Me she regarded from the outset as something of an honourable exception to Continental uncouthness and guttural speech, or else she would presumably not have had me squiring her but sent me packing quick and lively.

Before very long, though, Mozelle grew accustomed to my Continental comrades, friends and acquaintances and began to see and appreciate their virtues and good points. (I must confess that a year later I somewhat similarly had to get used at work to hearing Yiddish which, though I mainly

understood it, sounded at first to my unaccustomed, "Yekke"[1] ear like a debased version of German and a quasi-pidgin corruption of the language).

As time went on, the manifold cultural differences between us paled into insignificance and seemed merely superficial when compared with the growing commonality in outlook and preferences we began to discover in each other. So that soon we reached the stage where we wanted to marry.

In my own mind, 25 had for years already seemed like the right or preferable age for me to marry, and with my 25th birthday looming up I suggested, and Mozelle agreed, that we make that also the date of our official engagement. That day, being a Friday, I planned, as so often before, to spend the evening of it as the traditional Erev Shabbat with my very good friends the Krigstein family and to get their approval to bring along this time two new guests - Mozelle and Rachel - of whose existence I had never let on to the Krigsteins previously.

As I had hoped and expected, the girls received the usual great Krigstein welcome extended to new visitors, and I felt that the rather jolly atmosphere thus generated would be the perfect time and setting for me to announce my engagement. I was not wrong in this; except that as soon as I disclosed that my real purpose in bringing along the new guests was to let our hosts be the first to meet my new fiancee, they rushed in their enthusiasm to congratulate Rachel, taking for granted that she was the girl of my choice. But it took only a moment for me to correct the misunderstanding and the incident was so innocent in nature as to cause only the most fleeting momentary embarrassment.

In the event, the Krigsteins insisted on making and sponsoring an "at home" reception for us on their premises at which all their own relatives, friends and acquaintances were to join in as well as the smaller number we could have attracted on our own for such an occasion. And when it came to our wedding eleven months later at St Kilda Synagogue, Sonja Krigstein officiated as Mozelle's bridesmaid and Mr Krigstein gave her away. (My best man of course was Ernie Lester)

Whatever reservations Mozelle might have had about me, her trust in me was total as it became obvious to her how completely I trusted her. Her one falsehood to me was about her age, which for years she made out to be less than mine and which her looks did not belie until her tragic terminal disease. I am actually grateful for that single lie of hers.

[1]The nickname for ex-German Jews who primly stood out from other pre-war Zionist pioneers by persisting in wearing their jacket (Yiddish: "yekke") even in Palestine's sub-tropical heat. The term carries some connotation of habitual pedantic German orderliness.

For such was my stupid narrow-mindedness then in such matters that, had I known she was a year older than myself, I would never have married her! And in retrospect I believe that would indeed have been a great pity for both of us...

CHAPTER 24: ABODE

The engagement was meant to be brief. We intended to wed as soon as acceptable married accommodation could be found. Geographically this should be not too far out in the suburbs, preferably south of the river Yarra that bisects Melbourne, and within walking distance of rail transport. Perhaps typical of other impecunious young newly-weds in those early postwar years in Australia, we regarded our minimum needs in married quarters as a fair-sized furnished double bed-sitting room, ancillary facilities for cooking, and access to a toilet, laundry and a bathroom with hot shower. We wanted to have children, but would obviously not try to raise a family until later on, when we should be able to afford something bigger and better.

Both of us had already experienced difficulty in finding barely tolerable single accommodation within our means. We realised that an abode for a couple would be even harder to obtain during the acute housing shortage that beset the nation and that seems to arise in every society as an aftermath of war. Even so, with the optimism and wishful thinking of the young, we expected to be fixed up within a month or so, or at any rate within two months. Actually, it took ten and a half months of continual frustration and disappointment before we were enabled to live under the same roof and thus could proceed to get married.

Our combined cash resources amounted to a mere two hundred pounds. Half of this comprised Mozelle's diligent savings out of her wages. The other half was the residue of the puny capital with which I had begun civilian life in Australia: my Army deferred pay, carefully husbanded, yet sadly depleted by the need to supplement from time to time my income as a student. We were essentially on our own, neither of us having family or anybody else to lean on for loans or other financial help.

Clearly, our quest for something suitable to rent was problematic. That success in this eluded us so long was certainly not for lack of constant trying. Early on most weekdays, and certainly every Wednesday and Saturday, we perused the relevant classified ads of the Melbourne "Age" for anything that might meet our needs. We were soon to discover that the rare suitable offerings were snapped up by seven o'clock in the morning. Whenever a place remained vacant any later in the day, you could bet there was something really wrong with it. By 6 a.m. at the latest one could find outside the venue a small queue of home seekers waiting for the time the landlord was ready to interview prospective tenants.

Estate agents were no help. Such vacancies as were advertised appeared with few exceptions only in Saturday's paper. To have a real chance at these, it became a matter of fronting up at the "Age" office at Friday midnight to obtain the earliest possible copy of Saturday morning's paper, feverishly scanning the "TO LET" columns and then rushing out to the suburbs to be the first to queue, for a night watch, as it were, outside the place which as advertised seemed the most promising for our purposes. On occasion we even split forces, and I can recall one night when Mozelle queued at an address along St Kilda beach while I did a similar stint outside a house in Hawthorn. All to no avail.

At one stage we tried to take up quarters in Malvern, with a lonely elderly widow. Apparently she had never let her one spare room previously. Room and rental were quite reasonable. The snag

was that the old girl would not let us use her toilet. She reckoned we could relieve nature in her garden! Most reluctantly and very much against our better judgment, we yet felt desperate enough by that time to accept such constraint. But after a day of this we decided it was not really for us to keep fertilising her horticulture in this manner.

On another occasion we thought we had not done too badly in finding a room in a lodging house in St Kilda's Charnwood road. Yet after half an hour on the premises we found the constant and all-pervading pungent stale smell of boiled cabbage emanating from the kitchen so overpowering that we grabbed our bags and sneaked out of the place before the landlord could stop us and demand payment.

In the end it was Mr Czerny who came to our rescue. He, of course, was my landlord at 10 Fulton st, East St Kilda where I was renting a poky furnished bungalow in the backyard since the last couple of years. Realising my plight, he offered me a room with a fractional kitchenette when at last a vacancy arose within his lodging house. Relieved and grateful, Mozelle and I accepted with alacrity. I don't know and hate to think how much longer we would have had to search otherwise. The bed and furniture were cheap and worn odd second-hand pieces, but the weekly rent was an affordable thirty-two shillings and sixpence a week, at a time when I earned seven pounds and Mozelle even less. This way, we at least could save money towards a better home, despite our very modest income.

And so we got married at last on the 7th July 1949 at St Kilda Synagogue. I would have liked to have had the ceremony performed by Rabbi Dr Porush, who knew both of us from way back. But as he could not come from Sydney to Melbourne for the occasion, I called on an ex-Dunera man, Rabbi Hans Blumenthal, to officiate. I came to regret the substitute. He left me far from happy - in fact furious - about several pointed disagreeable remarks he chose to make about me in his wedding sermon. They were quite out of place and in bad taste, although perhaps well-intended. But that was typically Rabbi Blumenthal, as I was to find out by and by. It was the sort of thing that contributed to his growing unpopularity in many circles and made him his own worst enemy.

Another thing that misfired at the ceremony was the musical accompaniment, which was to have been provided by Erwin Frenkel, likewise an ex-Dunera man. But somehow, for reasons that still escape me, the synagogue's organ, used only at weddings, remained under lock and key, as we discovered only at the last moment. In this sudden crisis there came unexpected emergency relief thanks to a wonderful and remarkable personality, Dr Hans Ruskin (who soon became a great friend of mine). Unsolicited and unhesitatingly Hans stepped into the breach by personally singing in his clear baritone all the required religious tunes. His fervent vocal solos pervaded the wide open space of the synagogue interior, effectively enough to substitute for the missing instrumental rendition of the wedding liturgy.

Mrs Maylin, an elderly Jewish lady living by herself and befriending Mozelle since she came to Melbourne, had provided refreshments for the fifty or sixty people attending the wedding rites in the synagogue's board room immediately after the ceremony. Despite my strong protests, the bride had insisted on abiding by Rabbi Blumenthal's instruction to fast the full twenty-four hours before the marriage was solemnised. Now the poor girl was so weak and ravenous that she could hardly wait to get at the attractive table-spread laid out for the reception. Unfortunately this shows up in

the one group photo taken of the assembled guests, where she stares at the camera with food still bulging one of her cheeks. It is difficult to know who was in a greater hurry, poor Mozelle in her hunger or the photographer eager to rush off to another job. It was that sort of wedding.

With the comestibles consumed, everybody else quickly dispersed and Mozelle and I, left to our own devices, walked off in the late wintry afternoon to our lodging house, not far away, where we changed into street clothes before taking a short tram-ride to Acland street, St Kilda for a quiet, simple cafe meal by ourselves, consisting of a couple of Frankfurts each, garnished with a helping of fried potatoes and sauerkraut. Thus fortified we repaired to our bed-sitter for what was to turn out a rather unromantic night, with peace and privacy from busybody next-door tenants long in coming. Neither were the sagging old mattress of our double bed and the cold July weather particularly conducive to that first wedded, bedded bliss. Little wonder, then, that our marriage did not get truly consummated till after our escape next morning to our week-long honeymoon in the hills, at the Mount Dandenong Hotel in Olinda.

With the honeymoon over, we learned to live as best we could in our shabby bed-sitter tenancy, trying to make do on my wages while adding Mozelle's to our savings. Our indulgences were modest, yet enough to give us a modicum of fun and enjoyment. Most Saturday nights we went to "the flicks", usually back stalls at one of the two local cinemas, and for our annual vacation Mozelle discovered a rare opportunity in the hill country north-east of Melbourne: "Meyerlloyd", a holiday guest-house newly opened as an off-shoot of the dominant Meyer Chalet at Warburton, and perhaps a mile down the road from it, was for a short time offering excellent bargain rates as a means of becoming known in the tourist trade. The food was as good as at the Chalet itself and we were admitted to the dances and other entertainments at the parent establishment without incurring the much higher tariffs for eating and sleeping in its sprawling old premises.

These leisure breaks in the Australian bush country at Olinda and Warburton were pleasant in their way. But at the same time they made us all the more conscious of the hurdles in improving our regular living conditions. Naturally our ambition was to rent a nice flat where we might work and hope to achieve eventually something approximating the life-style to which we had been accustomed in our youth.

I am not sure what it was like in Australia at the time. But in pre-war Germany, and mostly elsewhere likewise, the notion of actually living in a house of one's own was an extravagant pipe dream unless you were a farmer or established business proprietor or had otherwise substantial capital or independent means. Mozelle's family and all my relatives had fitted into this generalisation and at first I was convinced that we too were bound and fated to belong to the renting classes. To buy outright a home of our own seemed a reckless proposition, a desperate financial gamble sure to fail - in short: quite out of the question for Mozelle and me.

Yet before long, the stark realities of the situation forced me to change my views completely. The acute post-war housing shortage, coupled with the government-imposed rent control, had resulted in a black market in Australian cities whereby it became virtually impossible to rent a flat or house without paying quite substantial key money, as it came to be called, the price exacted for the front-door key to the property. That is why I mentioned that estate agents were no help to us. For they invariably facilitated key money transactions, allowing themselves to become the willing

instruments for thus circumventing the letter and spirit of the government's rent control laws. And who knows, the entire market for rental accommodation might have suffocated and collapsed without the use of the key money subterfuge. Most landlords would have refused to let their properties without this lump payment to compensate for the marginal income foregone by rent-restriction.

For my part, I could not help realising that the key money demanded was usually so hefty as to rival the amount of deposit required for the purchase of a home, and that the monthly rental might well be enough to cover the instalments payable for a housing loan. In such circumstances buying was no more onerous or risky than renting, and certainly more rewarding. Therefore our aim resolved itself into saving enough for a deposit on the purchase of a home rather than for key money to rent one. The financial risks previously perceived in this did no longer act as a deterrent, as they had to be incurred in any case. If we were to come to grief, then "we might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a goat".

Existing houses for sale with vacant possession in established suburbs were scarce, mostly obsolescent or decrepit and in any case too expensive. Even if the required deposit on such places had been within our reach, bank, building society and similar conventional long-term finance was available only for the construction of new homes. So in practice our objective boiled down to saving a sufficient down-payment on a modest new home to be erected on one of the new housing estates springing up on the fringes of suburban Melbourne, where perhaps the cost of land was not yet prohibitive, or so one hoped. Yet prices of land, labour and materials kept rising and although our savings rose too, they never quite caught up with the deposit gap. This was also due to the ultra-conservative valuation by the banks in granting mortgage loans.

One day I was attracted by an advertisement for new houses being built in Bentleigh, fairly close to the railway station of that name, and looking a bit less pricey than usual. As luck would have it, only a week earlier Mozelle and I had for the first time ventured into that suburb to visit some new acquaintances and had found the area quite congenial. The new housing estate, offering dozens of weatherboard houses at various stages of being "spec-built", came up to our expectations, except that invariably the required ready cash was still a few hundred pounds beyond us.

Would we ever catch up with the deposit required by the conventional lenders? I felt it was high time to consider seriously the so-called Spencer Jackson scheme. Under the slogan "First secure the land!" it tantalisingly beckoned to us time and again from prominent newspaper advertisements which sounded very plausible. Actually the scheme was a clever stratagem for selling life insurance. An insurance company offered the amount insured as the amount of housing loan it would make available. What made such a loan more attractive than a bank loan was the liberal valuation used by the company in determining the loan limit and the consequently lower down-payment required to meet the difference from the total price of the property.

I would have gone into the possibilities of this scheme much earlier, except that invariably anybody to whom I mentioned it, warned me off it. But what intrigued and irritated me was that nobody could give me any tangible reason why. Mozelle kept saying that I was not a business man and must get guidance by more experienced people. I turned to our friend Mr Krigstein, an

experienced and fairly successful entrepreneur. Again the story was the same. He could not substantiate his warning against the scheme.

So when at this time the Spencer Jackson people also started to promote sales in the area to the east of Bentleigh railway station, I was determined to look into their proposition more closely and actively. One of their salesmen picked me up at home and drove me in his car to the acreage they were currently selling. My expectations rose as we reached Bentleigh station. But I must admit that disappointment set in and increased as he drove further and further east along Centre rd, well beyond easy walking distance from the station. The trip ended at a sandy tract of erstwhile market garden land where he offered me one of several staked out building blocks. The tract was the future Connie street and the building block, marked as lot 25, was to become house number ten in that street and our permanent home.

I was forced to realise that I would not find anything closer to direct rail transport to town and yet within our financial means. At least the block was close to a feeder bus service and to budding local facilities, and the site itself looked quite in order, as far as I could make out. In principle I felt perhaps a bit of a dupe to agree to the very first piece of land being offered without considering alternative blocks. But I really could not see that any of the dozen or so other available blocks, all the same size and price, were any better (in fact some were clearly worse), and so I tentatively or provisionally accepted this first block offered. The piece of land was reserved for me, giving me a fortnight to decide whether to clinch the deal, in which case its price - 195 pounds for a block of 50 foot frontage and 135 foot depth - had then to be paid in full.

The first thing to establish now was whether Mozelle would be similarly agreeable in principle to settle on this site. She had, understandably, become wearied of trudging around with me to all the likely and unlikely prospects to be looked at, and our consequent arrangement was that she would only look at any place after I had judged it suitable for our needs and means.

Mozelle's initial reaction on visiting the site turned out to be exactly as I had feared it would be, although I had tried to prepare her for the cultural-geographical shock. She was appalled at the notion of being so far out "in the sticks", but more specifically so remote, it seemed, from any established Jewish life. It was, as if she wanted to say (and had she known Yiddish instead of being a Sephardi, she probably WOULD have said it), reproachfully: "Is this a place for Yiddishe kinder?" But all I could do in response was to shrug my shoulders and say: "Yes, I know, but it cannot be helped. Better for us to have a decent home out here than to slum it in St Kilda!" And so, however reluctantly, she bowed to my judgment and like myself reconciled herself to the idea of deserting the inner suburbs. At least the air was purer and fresher in these parts than closer to the city (at any rate it still was so in those mid-century days, before a great deal more housing development and motorisation of the populace ensued). We were also quite favourably impressed by a preview of the house to be built, a virtual replica already having been erected and inhabited in nearby Mackie road. Mr & Mrs Terry Kirby, its affable owners, were perfectly happy to show it to us, all the more so when they learned that like themselves Mozelle had lived in India before coming to Australia. Here, then, were our very first friendly future neighbours. What neither of us foresaw was that within a year or two we would discover a great many fellow-Jews settled in nearby areas, more than we had personally known in and around St Kilda. But what we also did

not expect was that it would take twenty-three years before our land became sewered, although most new housing developments around us and much further out and later established achieved this important infrastructure much sooner.

Anyhow, having accepted lot 25 in principle, the next thing to do was to check the proposed contract whereby the land, once purchased, would become part of our deposit for the loan to be granted. To that end I got Mr Krigstein to take me to his own trusted solicitor, Mr Maurice Cohen, for expert legal advice. As soon as Mr Cohen heard Spencer Jackson mentioned, he too wanted to steer clear of the deal, without bothering to go into the details. But I challenged him to tell me what was wrong with the company or the scheme and he had to admit that he had nothing definite to go by, only a widely held poor reputation. I said I had looked at the proposed contract and could not see anything wrong with it. He, as a lawyer, should not just go on rumour but should at least look critically at the contract and bring his legal expertise to bear on finding faults with it. After all, that is why I had come to consult him. After he had done so somewhat reluctantly, Mr Cohen grudgingly admitted that the terms of the contract seemed sound enough, except for a couple of minor flaws or omissions which he thought he could take up with the company for correction.

The solicitor secured the desired amendments to the contract - they related to the expressed inclusion of fencing and concrete pathways in the building specifications instead of relying on a verbal promise or perhaps implied undertaking to that effect. After the usual conveyancing checks the deal comprising the land transaction, the contract to build the house according to the standard blue-print and at a fixed price, and the entering of a 25-year life insurance policy to the value of the 25-year mortgage to be provided were all completed and signed and sealed in August 1950. But it was to take a full nine months before building was completed and we could move in.

Mozelle and I had counted and budgeted on having some money left for initial furnishing of the house after we had paid the required deposit. It turned out, however, that the insurance policy entitling us to the housing loan had to be in force for at least three years before the loan became available. This legal obstacle could be and was overcome by paying three years insurance premiums in advance instead of merely one year's. The money for the two years extra premium used up all we had set aside for furniture, for which we had to save again during the nine months before the house was ready.

We had just managed by the skin of our teeth to get the contract, and I am very glad and proud that I did not permit myself to be discouraged and delayed by the misgivings expressed about Spencer Jackson, nor by the well-meant but misguided advice of an elderly real-estate agent who warned me that all real estate at the time was wildly over-priced and overvalued and would soon come down with a mighty crash. In the event the opposite came true: soon after we signed, the contract prices of land and building costs started to rise much more steeply than before and I would not have had a chance for many years, if ever, to catch up with them.

Here I must also mention that under the terms of our contract the interest rate on the loan was to stay at four and a half per cent per annum. The company had made a great play of this condition, but I had cynically regarded it as nothing more than a sales gimmick, as four and a half percent had been the prevailing housing interest rate for a great many years. Yet with the onset of greater inflation the ruling mortgage interest rates soon and suddenly were on the up and up. Even now,

forty-odd years later, they remain still considerably higher than at the time. Thus what I had regarded as a gimmick turned out to be the most valuable clause of our contract. The annual premiums of the life insurance were in effect the repayment of the loan principal, but did not diminish the interest payments, because the loan as such was paid only when the policy matured. But on the other hand, since life insurance payments were tax-deductible at the time, paying off the house in effect became an income-tax deduction. When the policy matured after twenty-five years, I received the clear title deed to the house but money-wise only the accrued policy bonuses.

With the interest rate on the loan remaining so much lower than ruling loan rates, there was no incentive to pay off the loan faster, although I could easily have done so. All in all, it had turned out a very good scheme for me. The poor reputation of Spencer Jackson at the time was due to two reasons, as I learned eventually. One was the low insurance bonuses paid, the other was the high-pressure sales tactics of some of the company's salesmen. At the time I dealt with the company, these matters were already on the mend. The offending salesmen had been sacked and the insurance management was being reformed. But once it has sinned, it takes a firm a long time to live down its poor reputation. Yet, except for War Service Homes finance, for which I did not qualify, I have never heard of another housing deal in Australia offering a similar level of advantages.

CHAPTER 25: JOURNALIST

Had there been no Hitler and Nazism to subvert and overthrow the Weimar republic, then in our family Papa would most likely have attained considerably higher status in the German judiciary and I would have been encouraged and indeed inspired to emulate him. The enormous respect, prestige and almost veneration that already attached to his office would have made this nearly inevitable. Educationally I had certainly been steered into the sort of grammar school whose classical subjects and disciplines would suitably groom me for studying Law.

And yet, who knows? I might just as well have struck out into journalism as a career. Both in primary and secondary school I had shown much talent and feeling for language. Consistent success in essay composition, as mentioned in chapter 5, had given me much joy, pride and satisfaction in writing. From there to an interest in journalism was but a short step.

Yet what really sparked my boyhood dream and ambition to become a newspaperman - reporter and eventually editor - was my reading of a gorgeously droll, satirical short story by Mark Twain, titled "Journalism in Tennessee". This lively piece lampoons the aggressive, abusive small-town journalism of the old Wild West and the gun play to which it gave rise. Perhaps an odd way thus to fall in love with newspaper work. But somehow, almost perversely, it implanted in me a romantic, glamorous vision of the role and influence of an editor of which I was never to be completely cured. Ever since, there had been the occasional youthful dabblings at journalism on my part, to which I have adverted in earlier chapters.

So much for the social and psychological background to my vocational motivation. But in the foreground as I finished my University years was my complete disillusionment with teaching as a career option and the immediate need to find an alternative and more suitable occupational opening.

My thoughts turned to the civil service and to happy memories of working in the Public Relations office of the Civil Aviation Department during an academic summer vacation. This, I decided, would be the obvious first choice in my case to try for more durable employment.

My luck was in. Alf Heintz, the P.R.O., still remembered me, and apparently favourably enough to offer me re-employment when I explained the reason for my visit. In those days there was still some post-war shortage of recruits, especially graduates, to the Commonwealth Service and the usual lengthy red tape relating to appointments could be largely waived in the case of engagement for low-grade non-permanent positions. Within days I started as a temporary base grade clerk in his section.

For a start, my duties were much the same as in days gone by. In the main they were to look after the multitude of press cuttings relating to airline politics and other aviation matters which I either gleaned directly from the major metropolitan dailies or which were gathered from all over Australia by subscription to a professional press cutting service.

It was a reasonably interesting chore. But before long Mr Heintz set me a more challenging task: to draft a Departmental press release reporting on ongoing development work at the future Moorabbin airport, where couch grass was being planted at that stage to prevent the soil of the intended landing field from blowing away in the wind. I did not know it then, but before I was much

older I would be desperately battling, year in and year out, in the front garden and backyard of my own home in a diametrically opposite endeavour: to get rid of masses of couch grass that kept infesting it. But on the present occasion I was provided with a Departmental car, chauffeur and photographer to take me out to the Moorabbin site so as to obtain an authentic picture and impression of the deliberate cultivation of this prolific and tenacious weedy grass as a cheap surfacing material for an airfield earmarked for light aircraft only whose wheel marks would not churn it up.

I did my level best in writing up the story, covering all the essential relevant points carefully arranged into an introduction, highlight and conclusion. But my boss was far from satisfied, even after I made some minor changes. He did not find fault with the grammar, spelling, vocabulary or the scope and nature of the contents. But the structure of the report was dead wrong. He quickly rewrote my draft by boldly leading off with the major points and letting the rest follow in almost pell-mell sequence, or so it seemed. I had to admit that in his version the story had gained life and interest, but I felt he had unfairly cheated by "falling with the door into the house", violating all the rules of composition which had been drilled into me in my school days.

Much the same happened with a second reporting assignment he set me, but whose subject I no longer remember. Yet neither Alf Heintz nor anybody else ever pointed out to me in so many words that in newspaper reporting these rules of composition are most of the time invalid and deliberately turned upside down, and for very good and cogent reasons. And I was too immature or innocent to figure this out for myself from the practical demonstrations he gave me and so to unlearn, or rather set aside, what had been drilled into me in my school days. At that stage I also seemed to need a theoretical explanation to justify the drastic difference. I never had the benefit of a formal course in journalism, which I am sure would have dealt with this matter. Yet I should have woken up to the technique of reportage from the countless newspaper stories I read day by day. Instead I took those for granted without ever analysing them by their structure. So it required a few months of regular working in a reporting capacity before the penny dropped and I saw the light.

But before this could happen, Alf Heintz had regretfully concluded (and who could blame him?) that I was not really cut out for the sort of work he had in mind for me. And so he arranged to have me transferred from Public Relations to the External Relations section of the Department. There I was to become familiar with all the diplomatic haggling and bargaining that took place between Australia and other nations in competing for air traffic to and from abroad. My job was to keep tab on the text of every existing bilateral and multilateral air transport agreement concluded between Australia and other countries, and to note the similarities and differences in the clauses of such treaties, dealing with the specific matters they usually encompassed. Not a terribly exciting affair, but it gave me an understanding of what the important issues were that counted in the diplomacy of international civil aviation.

During this period I also lodged an application for permanent appointment that for a start would probably land me in some quite different and unpredictable area and Department of the Commonwealth Public Service. But most permanent appointments took many months to come through, whether it was because of lengthy security checks on candidates or for any other reasons,

I would not know, and much could happen in the interval to change the course of events. - One momentous thing that happened in my case was that Mozelle and I married at this time.

Another significant development for me was that I became aware of a vacancy for the Assistant Editorship of the Jewish Herald, the smaller of the two English-language weeklies which competed for Australia's readership on matters of Jewish concern and interest. I saw this as my first real chance to break into full-time professional journalism and enlisted the help of Rabbi Porush who wrote me a glowing personal reference to support my written application. The rabbi's recommendation virtually dispensed with the requirement of a personal interview and I was offered the post on half a year's probation.

I was thrilled with the success of my application. In my own mind I felt confident that, although still a novice at the game, I should be able to do the job. And yet the "probation" bit made me nervous. If my performance did not measure up to what was expected, then I would have sacrificed fairly safe run-of-the-mill employment for a better position I could not sustain and thus fall between two chairs, as it were. - After several days of agonising over a decision, I thanked Reuben Havin, the owner/editor of the Jewish Herald, for his appointment offer but explained that the probationary stipulation did not give me the job security I felt I already had and valued.

In retrospect I know that I need have had no fear about failing the probation. But what is more important and significant is my lack of common sense in this case. Even without the wisdom of hindsight I should have realised at the time that the probation as such was really irrelevant. If I did not perform alright, then I could be fired anyhow!

I was still nursing some regrets at having to play it so safe a fortnight later, when another opportunity arose. The Assistant Editorship at the other bigger rival weekly, the Australian Jewish News, was offered to me on a platter, as it were, and before I even knew that it was vacant. There was no nonsense about a probationary period this time and so I accepted with alacrity. The weekly pay, ten pounds after tax, same as at the Jewish Herald, was no fortune but about three pounds more than what I was getting as a temporary base grade clerk. Anyhow, the more important thing was that it was the sort of job I really wanted and felt cut out for.

What is more, quite recently I had happened to meet Mannie Oderberg, the Chief Editor of the paper, during a Sunday afternoon social visit to Rabbi Blumenthal, and I had taken an instant and instinctive liking to the man, because in table conversation we "clicked" and seemed spontaneously on the same wavelength. At the time it seemed no more than a very pleasant, agreeable encounter, although I hoped to meet him again, perhaps on similar occasions. But now the quite unexpected prospect of having him as my new boss really excited me joyfully and was an important extra reason for my taking on the job.

Much later I was to learn how the post came to be offered to me: At the time there were few if any potential candidates who would have the desired mix of background, education, ability and interest in the work - especially at the modest pay and advancement prospects offered. (Nothing much had changed in that regard when I quit the job two years later). In casting about for a suitable appointee, Mannie Oderberg sought the help of his namesake Mannie Gelman, a senior lecturer in the faculty of Education at Melbourne University, who might perhaps know of a recent Jewish graduate likely to fill the bill. This turned out to be the same Mr Gelman who, along with one or two

other Faculty staff people, had failed me the year before in Practical Teaching. Unlike the other examiners, who consoled me that with continued practice I would soon pass the subject, Mr Gelman had advised me to opt for some different career. Clearly he was much more favourably impressed with the articles that had appeared from time to time under my by-line in "Farrago", the Melbourne University student weekly; for he strongly recommended me to Mannie Oderberg as the kind of person he was looking for. - It took only a short telephone call to notify my acceptance and clinch my new appointment. By mutual arrangement and agreement it was to commence within a week or two.

I remember arriving at my new place of employment in Faraday st, Carlton, full of high hope and excitement to begin my work as a journalist. But the start was an anti-climax. Disappointingly, no congenial Mannie Oderberg appeared on the scene to greet me - he happened to be away on vacation. Instead I found myself unexpectedly in the presence of a rather unprepossessing, uncouth character who, to my amazement and slight consternation turned out to be none other than Tony Rubinstein, owner and manager of the Jewish News and of York Press, its printery and publishing firm. Not that I had given the matter any thought. But I would never have imagined that the fellow could pass as a "press baron", even if his baronetcy was only a puny one and restricted to a Jewish community of corresponding size.

To identify this person as Mannie Oderberg's boss and thus also as my own was no great cause for enthusiasm. No doubt the feeling was mutual. In his own mocking attitude and in his skeptical and suspicious questioning of me on that first morning he went out of his way to demonstrate that my appointment to the paper was not his choice but purely the whimsy of the editor. As time went on and we became more accustomed to each other I began to realise that Tony's initial behaviour toward me stemmed possibly from the general prejudice and distrust or antipathy of the former Bialystoker Jew that he was for the "yekke", the ex-German Jew, to be suspected of affecting superior or supercilious airs in his dealings with the Ostjude", the Yiddish-speaking co-religionist from Eastern Europe.

Anyhow, in Mannie Oderberg's absence on leave, editorial direction was temporarily in the hands of my old Army mate Erwin Frenkel, who was my immediate predecessor as Assistant Editor but who was still serving out his notice period in quitting the job. On this my first day Erwin had me busy most of the time on proof reading - spotting and correcting the typographical errors in the galley proofs for the Melbourne and Sydney editions of the Jewish News and later quickly checking the page proofs to see that the linotypists had effected the corrections which in the galley proofs I had marked to be made. It was the first Monday in the month, so that evening I was to attend and report upon the monthly gathering of the Board of Deputies, the roof organisation and virtual parliament of the Victorian Jewish community.

Thus in the first twenty-four hours of my new appointment I had already a taste of my most time-consuming new duties: nearly all the proof-reading for the two editions and reporting all the more noteworthy Jewish communal gatherings - of which the Board of Deputies was the most important. By the time Erwin had served his notice period and left, and Mannie returned from his vacation, I had also sampled much of the other work that was to come my way, such as selecting, editing and sub-editing news items, feature articles, reports, letters, etc. for publication.

Soon I wrote occasional feature articles on my own initiative and with Mannie's encouragement inaugurated my own regular personal column "Here and There with Robert Kahn". It consisted of short snippets and tit-bits which I tried, whenever possible, to make more interesting by adding some spicy comment or little sting at the end. Before long, I was a known identity in and of the paper. My journalistic impact in the Jewish community of Melbourne must have been more than ephemeral. I was quite amazed and could not help feeling flattered to find that people kept asking me whether I was still writing for the Jewish News - ten and twenty years after I had desisted from doing so!

All this, plus the deepening friendship with Mannie Oderberg on and off the job gave me much job satisfaction and happiness. The diversity of action was much greater than I would have experienced in a more specialised groove at a larger newspaper. My work also came to include occasional leader writing and deputising for Mannie as chief editor.

Truly, that journalistic dream and vision of mine which Mark Twain's Wild West satire had helped to evoke was being realised, giving me continually new experience and increasing skill and making me look forward to the start of each working day. And with each issue of the Jewish News my own well-defined work achievement - good or not so good - for the week gone by stared me in the face, black on white. That, incidentally, was a great boon which I was often to miss in later years as a bureaucrat, when my work contribution would most of the time be submerged, mingled and obscured in team efforts with colleagues, and all too frequently serve questionable public service schemes and projects. In short, I really liked my work at the Jewish News and revelled in it. So much so, that I could even ignore the appalling physical surroundings and conditions, which must be classed as Dickensian.

Our little press baron never interfered with our editorial policy, which was a relief. He seemed too indifferent for that and preoccupied with selling advertising space in the paper, at which he was very capable. So much so that he DID interfere with his editors after all - by often forcing us to surrender vital editorial space to accommodate extra advertising. We would accuse him then of being a Philistine and degrading the Jewish News into a suburban advertising rag in which editorial matter constituted little more than incidental fillers. Tony's retort would be that even the mighty Melbourne Herald, at that time the dominant newspaper in the State, only managed to appear on the back of Myer Emporium's advertising!

Such tugs-of-war, I am led to believe, are not uncommon in newspaper offices. In principle they are similar to commercial breaks on radio and TV vying for time with the programs they interrupt. - Tony would also point out that a large component of Jewish News advertising was of a social nature and therefore ranking with non-advertising matter in news value.

I learned to live with the chronic battle for editorial space. What I found progressively harder to put up with, though, was my rate of pay. This was lower than for any member of the printing staff, who, unlike myself, also earned extra money for overtime, and penalty rates. Whereas my reporting work at night, though required for the job, was unpaid, except for costs incurred in fares. The only pay increases to look forward to were the statutory quarterly cost-of-living adjustments in the basic wage, at that time usually of the order of ten shillings per week, to compensate in part at least for the ravages of creeping inflation.

The printing staff's wages and conditions were protected by the industrial award gained for them by their trade union. But the Australian Journalists Association which had attained commensurate conditions for journalists on larger newspapers and periodicals could, in those days, not be persuaded to negotiate an award that would be applicable for a smallish newspaper like the Jewish News. I have always been a strong believer in trade unionism. Like Mannie Oderberg I would have liked to sport in my buttonhole the pretty and prestigious AJA membership badge which sometimes afforded admission to events not so readily accessible to the general public. But as a matter of principle as much as a matter of economics I refused to pay membership fee to a union-type organisation that would not lift a finger to stop me being exploited by my employer!

Every once in a while I would go to Tony Rubinstein to ask for a pay rise. But I was invariably fobbed off - usually with the story of the precarious financial position of the Jewish News and York Press: They were an under-capitalised venture that for its heavy bank loans needed the collateral of another business, that of Tony's brother Leslie. When that firm went bankrupt Tony had to take over from Leslie, and the bank demanded much quicker reduction of the newspaper's heavy overdraft. Once that was achieved, Tony held out, we journalists would be paid more adequately.

The story of the financial plight was true enough and sufficient for Mannie to be appeased or consoled. But for my part I failed to see why, of all people, we few scribes should be the ones to carry all the financial burden of the firm, just because there was no industrial award to protect us. Tony and his elder brother Yitzhak, who worked on the Yiddish supplement of the Jewish News, did not seem to be underpaid, even if they were not wallowing in luxury, and clearly their equity in the enterprise was steadily and respectably increasing the more they assuaged the pressing bank creditors of the firm.

At home Mozelle was continually nagging me to leave the job and return to the safer and sounder conditions of the Commonwealth Public Service while I still could. This possibility, I realised, would diminish as I got older. Moreover, I knew that already at my age and without shorthand skill the Jewish News was no stepping-stone for me to other newspapers. Though I really would have preferred to remain with the Jewish News I had to ask myself how long I could afford to wait for Tony's vague promises to come good, and whether they were worth any credence at all. His easy way out to exploit his few unprotected journalists was not exactly confidence inspiring, and while I as a comparative newcomer with barely two years of service had relatively little claim for better pay during his financial predicament, the value of my long-term prospects could even then be assessed by seeing how he treated Mannie, who had been his chief editor since the early days of the Great Depression and had creditably worked up the paper editorially from an insignificant rag to its leading status in the Jewish community. To discover that Mannie, after all that, was drawing merely ten shillings a week more than myself, did truly shock me as outrageous. It forced me to realise that the promises by the boss of future increases were so much pie in the sky. Tony's feeble excuse that Mannie as a confirmed bachelor did not need to be paid more was not only completely irrelevant but a colossal chutzpah to boot.

Exerting pressure by some kind of strike action was not really feasible. But if I were to stay at the paper, as I wanted to, clearly something equally drastic would have to be done. Egged on by Mozelle, I began to look for an alternative opening elsewhere. As a university graduate I went to

the Higher Appointments office of the Commonwealth Employment Service, largely with a view to find once again an opening in the civil service, and was offered a permanent appointment in their own Department of Labour and National Service. My starting salary was to be virtually the same as what I was then getting at the Jewish News, but with much earlier and more definite prospects of incrementation and eventual promotion. I understood that at least for some time I might have to take pot luck on job interest.

Thus assured of a viable employment alternative, I went back to the Jewish News to ask yet once more for a rise. Only this time I made it clear that unless Tony acceded to my demands there and then, I would give notice to quit. It happened to be the end of the financial year and as luck would have it, I learned that for once Tony had actually taken that occasion to give of his own accord a one pound increase to each of his editorial staff. But when he saw that this was too little too late in my case and that I really meant business this time he asked me to tell him what was the absolute minimum for which I would settle. And like a fool I told him, there and then: three pounds and not a penny less. He suggested we split the difference and agree on a two pound rise. But I was adamant and so was he, and thus I gave him a fortnight's notice and accepted the Public Service job offer.

It was a decision arrived at with mutual regret, for he would have liked to retain my services just as I would have liked to remain in the job. And years later he confessed to me that he had not really considered my demand as unreasonable. But it went against his grain to cave in totally. "Then you should not have asked me for my MINIMUM demand but for how much of a rise I wanted. I was certainly not settling for less than my absolute minimum", I said. Nowadays I realise that I had been negotiating like a Japanese and that I should on no account have started bargaining without allowing some leeway for making a concession on my side.

Actually I had offered him as an alternative that instead of an outright salary rise he should pay me overtime and penalty rates for all the night work I did. But he said that was "not nice" for a staff employee. To which I remarked that it was cool comfort to be a member of so-called staff without getting staff-like pay.

A week had elapsed since I quit my job at the Jewish News. Then - shock, horror - my Monday morning newspaper told me in big front-page banner headline that 10,000 public servants were to be sacked forthwith. It was an unheard of thing. Thus far, the Commonwealth Public Service had grown like topsy, year after year since the war. Now, seemingly out of the blue and in a quite unprecedented economy measure the Federal government decided in one bold move to summarily retrench ten thousand of its employees.

My heart sank. Just my luck, I thought. I would be sure for the chop, on the principle of last in first out. Yet to my great surprise and immense relief I was not retrenched. Much of the cut in staff became a paper cut, by cancelling large numbers of as yet vacant positions rather than dismissing actual bodies. For the rest, the axe fell on temporary staff, whereas I had been taken on as part of the permanent establishment of the service. In fact, instead of receiving my dismissal notice I was instructed to deliver a batch of such notices to another office!

At least equally surprised as myself at my lucky escape from retrenchment was Tony Rubinstein. As he later told me himself, when he saw the story in the papers, he gleefully expected me to come

crawling back for my job - and would have taken me on again out of the goodness of his heart, to be sure, but no doubt on his own terms. And in such circumstances I could never have asked for a rise again but would have had to depend forever on his own pleasure and favour to grant it.

The notion that I could have been retrenched within a week really tickled his fancy and captured his imagination. Henceforth, whenever we met, he would always greet me sardonically as "one of the ten thousand".

A few years after all this I happened to meet Tony at a large social reception where he and I were thrown together at the same dinner table. And also ending up at the same table was Sol Solomon, who for some time had been my section leader in the Labour Department but had since advanced to considerably higher things. It was obvious that the two men did not know each other and so it fell to me make introductions. The coincidence was too great to be missed and turning to Tony while pointing to Sol I announced with a flourish and considerable relish: "My old boss, please meet my new boss!"

Tony's face fell. He seemed almost stunned with amazement. Taking a closer look at Sol, he stammered: "You? Are you also one of the ten thousand?"

I broke into loud laughter at such idiocy, the while Sol Solomon stared back at Tony, completely non-plussed, perplexed and bewildered...

CHAPTER 26: CIVIL SERVICE

I had reluctantly quit the "Jewish News" in favour of trying to make, somewhat belatedly, a career in the Commonwealth Public Service.

But it did not really mean the end of all journalism for me. Before long, I was invited to do casual reporting for the Jewish News at night and encouraged to submit occasional feature articles written on my own initiative. It became a modestly lucrative hobby usefully supplementing my civil service salary, at a time when expenses of a young family were rising. And because I did treat it as a hobby rather than just a night-time job, I often spent excessive time on turning routine reports into interesting items by looking for unusual angles to highlight - by no means an easy task. Mozelle used to remonstrate with me why I made such special time-consuming efforts for no commensurate reward in pay.

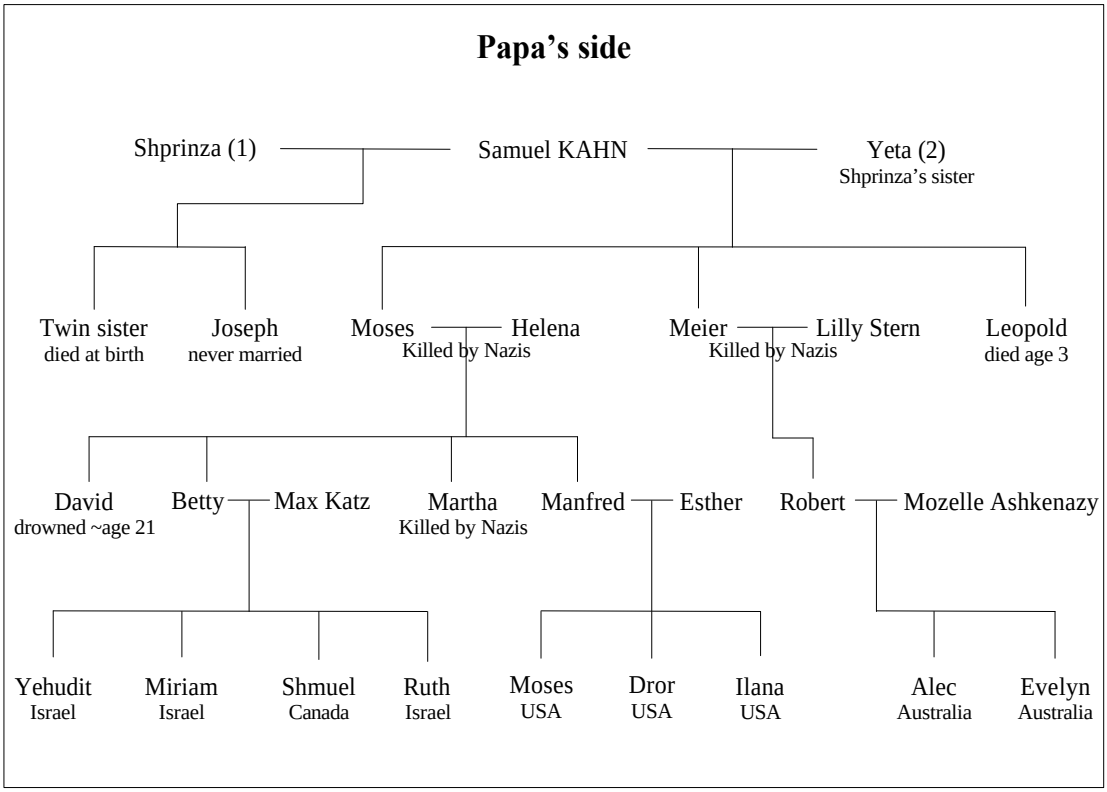
But before long such labour of love paid unexpected dividends. The organizations - always keen and hungry for good publicity - whose rather routine and fairly dull meetings I managed to turn into unexpectedly interesting reading, appreciated my efforts in that direction which they knew was more than they had a right to expect. It occurred to them that I would be the sort of person they could use for writing their publicity for fund-raising appeals. At first I took a lot of persuasion to accept such commissions, which I regarded as hackwork; but gradually I began to perceive that they had their own professional challenge. I guess I was sliding from journalism into publicity and public relations and began to see and understand how so many journalists drifted into that kind of work.

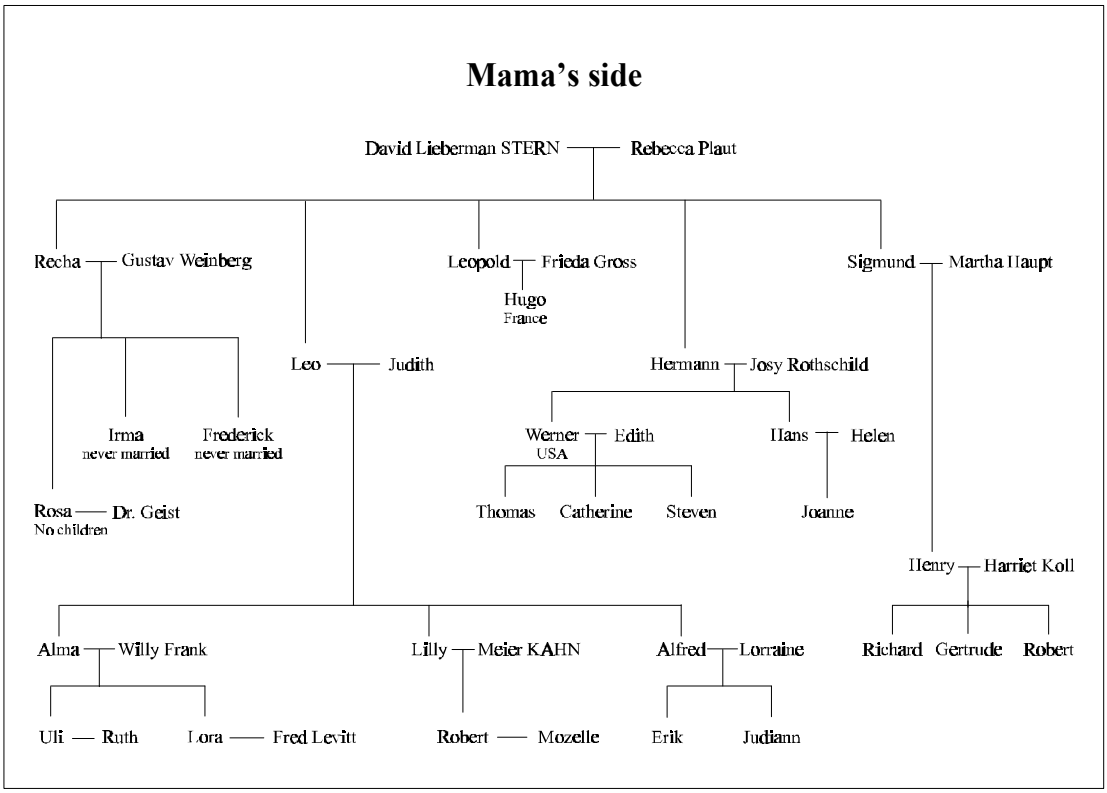
Eventually I arrived at a most amicable agreement and arrangement with one of my main publicity "clients" - Mount Scopus College - whereby I became their honorary Publicity and Public Relations officer (with a non-voting seat on their Board of Governors) and they accepted my son and daughter as pupils at the school without my having to pay the rather hefty tuition fees.- Strange, perhaps, how out of a few hours of extra effort in burning the midnight oil on news report writing there grew an expensive first-rate Jewish and secular education for my children which I could never have afforded otherwise!

Nevertheless all my journalistic efforts now were in the realm of sheer "moonlighting". Whereas my regular occupation entered an altogether different phase that was to take up all of the next 38 years - in effect the whole remainder of my working life. This was to be a permanent officer of the Commonwealth Public Service.

It was a chequered career on which I look back with mixed feelings. There were plenty of disappointments and frustrations, especially in regard to gaining advancement and promotion. Yet they were offset by interesting and often challenging work, and the variety of duties and assignments that came my way.

Family Tree


Papa's side
Shprinza (1)
Samuel KAHN
Yeta (2)
Shprinza's sister
Twin sister
died at birth
Joseph
never married
Moses
Killed by Nazis
Helena
Killed by Nazis
Meier
Killed by Nazis
Lilly Stern
Killed by Nazis
Leopold
died age 3
David
drowned ~age 21
Betty
Max Katz
Martha
Killed by Nazis
Manfred
Esther
Robert
Mozelle Ashkenazy
Yehudit
Israel
Miriam
Israel
Shmuel
Canada
Ruth
Israel
Moses
USA
Dror
USA
Ilana
USA
Alec
Australia
Evelyn
Australia


Mama's side
David Lieberman STERN
Rebecca Plaut
Recha
Gustav Weinberg
Leopold
Frieda Gross
Hugo
France
Sigmund
Martha Haupt
Leo
Judith
Hermann
Josy Rothschild
Irma
never married
Frederick
never married
Werner
USA
Edith
Hans
Helen
Rosa
No children
Dr. Geist
Thomas
Catherine
Steven
Joanne
Henry
Harriet Koll
Alma
Willy Frank
Lilly
Meier KAHN
Alfred
Lorraine
Richard
Gertrude
Robert
Uli
Ruth
Lora
Fred Levitt
Robert
Mozelle
Erik
Judiann