



Neumarkt - Fürth - Riga - USA

by *Ernest Haas*

Dedication

By writing my family's history, I, the only Neumarkt Jewish survivor of the Holocaust and its death camps, hope to honor the memory of my dear sister Ilse Margot Haas, my beloved parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and the rest of the community of Neumarkt Jews. I humbly hope that this memoir honors them as they should be.



My sister Ilse Margot and me, approximately 1927/28
(photo: private)

Neumarkt

My very early years in Neumarkt in the Bavarian district of *Oberpfalz* (Upper Palatinate) were the same as all children's until *Machtergreifung* (seizure of power by the Nazis) on January 30, 1933. I was born on June 1, 1925 in Neumarkt. My family consisted of my father

Semi Haas, born on May 13, 1889 in Sulzbürg (Upper Palatinate), my mother Frieda Haas, nee Steinberger, born October 22, 1893 in Colmberg near Ansbach (Bavarian district of Central Franconia), my sister Ilse Margot, born on March 1, 1924 in Neumarkt, and my younger brother Walter, born on April 1, 1927.

We were born when my family lived in a house Am Schlossweiher. We moved when I was approximately four years old to Obere Marktstraße 39, later renamed Adolf-Hitler-Straße. Next to us on Am Schlossweiher lived a Christian family Huber. We were very close and I remember that I always called the lady *Huber-Mutti*. She liked us children a lot and still came to see us in our new house till about 1934/35 when it became unwise to socialize with Jews.

I started *Kindergarten* at a very early age. It was a Catholic school with nuns as teachers located near the *Stadtpfarrkirche* (parsonage church). I remember the first day I had to go to the toilet. It was very dark there and I was scared and crying. The nun was very kind and called my sister Ilse who took me.

I have very fond memories of my sister Ilse from an early age on. Ilse was very vivacious with a love of life. I still remember when she ran down at the entrance to the *Stadtpark* (municipal park) and broke her leg.



Ilse Margot and Hermann Baruch, September 4, 1937. Hermann was approximately the same age as my sister. His father Kurt and his grandfather Adolf had a *Herrenkonfektion* (ready-made clothing for men) store in Obere Marktstraße. Hermann, an only child, and his parents perished in the Holocaust.

(photo: private)

I started regular school in Colmberg near Ansbach. The reason I went there was that my cousin Else Wittelshöfer wanted to go to a *Realschule* (junior high school). Since Colmberg with its 700 inhabitants did not have one, she came to live with us. A few years earlier, Else's brother Fritz, her only sibling, had died of leukemia at age 5. There was a great void in her family and I was asked if I would live for a while with her parents, her mother being my mother's sister, which I did for one or two years. Then I got *Heimweh* (homesickness) and went back to Neumarkt. This occurred after January 30, 1933 when Hitler came to power.

When I returned I found out that my father and other Jewish men in Neumarkt were arrested right after January and *in Schutzhaft genommen* (taken into protective custody). Also our house and others were searched for weapons!!! One of the arrested men was Manny Hahn, the son of Marcus Hahn. Two of his brothers fell in World War I. Manny was a widower with two young girls. They all were eventually killed in the Holocaust and his brother Julius was also murdered.

Hatred of Jews started to flourish. The teacher I had in Colmberg was a Nazi and encouraged the other children to beat me up. I was the only Jewish kid. He once asked the other kids if he should give the Jew-boy a few *tüchtig hinten drauf* (stoutly on his behind) which he did for no reason but his hatred. This may have hastened my wanting to return to Neumarkt.

I then went to the Protestant school in the *Bahnhofstraße*. I had *Oberlehrer* (head teacher) Bock, a very decent person. My sister in the meantime had started her schooling at the *Mädchen-Lyceum* (girls' high school) in Neumarkt. The nuns were very nice to her and she used to bring bookmarks home imprinted with *Bien* (*well done* in French) as awards. Till the time we moved to Fürth, she still would visit nuns in the *Kloster* (nunnery) on Mariahilfsberg.

Nazi persecution started first slowly but accelerated then quite quickly. I remember that for a year or two I still played not just with Jewish kids my age but also with Christian. I remember two, especially *Apotheker* (pharmacist) *Heinz*. His grandfather owned the *Stadtapotheke* (town's pharmacy) at Oberer Markt square. The father of *Express Hans* was *Zweiter Direktor* (deputy director) of the *Express-Fabrik* which was the oldest bicycle factory on the European continent. Incidentally it has been founded by a Jewish family Goldschmidt who originally ran a *Eisenwarenhandlung* (hardware store) in Obere Marktstraße. Somebody told me that Hans after World War II worked for *Dehn & Söhne* company across the street from us.

SA Storm Troopers were now frequently posted in front of Jewish owned stores to prevent people from entering. They also intimidated Christian stores into not serving Jews by painting *Judenknecht* (Jews' footman) on the sidewalk in front like at *Friseur* (barber) Bogner. Other Nazis grew more and more violent. A Nazi by the last name of Peter owned a store on the

Obere Marktstraße. One day a Jewish boy named Schülein looked into his *Schaufenster* (shop window). Peter came out and beat him up saying: *You Judenbengel* (Jewish rascal), *don't you look into my window!*

Wally Hans (Hans was her married name), a Christian woman, used to sometimes take me to the *Stadtpfarrkirche* which I liked especially on *Weihnachten* (Christmas) but could not do it anymore.

Around this time (1937/38) Hitler had ordered only *Gemeinschaftsschulen* (non-denominational schools instead of Protestant or Catholic). I went now to a former Catholic School near the *Stadtpfarrkirche*. I lost my decent teacher *Herr Bock*. My new teacher was a violent Nazi who instigated the other kids to wait for me after school to fetch me and beat me up which now happened several times a week.

Life for the whole family had become more and more difficult in Neumarkt. Several times a week SA used to march by our house singing *Hängt die Juden! Stellt die Bonzen an die Wand!* (Hang the Jews! Shoot the capitalists!) or *Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt* (When Jewish blood splatters from the knife). My father was a *Frontkämpfer und Schwerekriegsbeschädigter* (disabled combat veteran) of World War I. He had received a *Lungenschuss* (shot in the lungs) and was entitled to a pension which for patriotic reasons he had declined. I still remember when a major from the *Wehrkreisamt* (office of the military district) Neumarkt told my father: *Aber Haas, warum machen Sie sich denn Sorgen? Sie sind Frontkämpfer und Schwerekriegsbeschädigter!* (Mr. Haas, why do you worry? You are a disabled combat veteran!) But by now his prior service to the country had no meaning.

My grandfather Seligman Haas who was *Zweiter Bürgermeister* (deputy mayor) and *Ehrenbürger* (honorary citizen) of the small town of Sulzbürg was deported in 1943 to his death. According to a booklet of the *Heimatmuseum* (municipal museum) Sulzbürg my father's only brother received the *Eiserne Kreuz erster Klasse* (Iron Cross First Class). He was deported in 1943 to his death. My father's only sister Rosa was deported in 1943 with her husband, also a *Frontkämpfer*, to their death.

My mother Frieda, nee Steinberger, from Colmberg in Central Franconia was the youngest of eleven children. Her brother Daniel escaped Germany in 1938/39 to the United States. He had been a lieutenant in World War I. Her brother Sigfried in Würzburg (Lower Franconia) had been a *Oberfeldwebel* (first sergeant) in World War I and was deported in the same transport with us to Riga and killed. Her brother Jakob had been a *Hauptfeldwebel* (sergeant major) and was deported with us from Fürth and killed in Riga. Her sister Lina, her husband and her daughter Herta from Fürth / Zirndorf were deported with us and killed in Riga. Her sister

Sofie Frank and her husband Ludwig who was *schwerkriegsbeschädigt (taub)* (deaf since being severely wounded in the war) were deported to Theresienstadt and survived. Her sister Ida and her husband Rudolf Wittelshöfer were deported from Munich and killed. Her brother Justin died of a heart attack while being loaded onto a train for deportation to the East in October, 1941 in Munich. Her brother Emil, severely wounded in World War I, later died from his injuries. Her sister Minna died a natural death around 1930. Her brother Louis also died a natural death in 1932. He had two daughters, *Mischlinge (mongrels in the Nazi's wording)* who survived.

In the meantime things went from bad to worse. Jews were not allowed to wear *Auszeichnungen* (badges of honor) for service in the war. They were *verboten* to go to a park and squeezed out of their businesses or professions. My Nazi teacher would continue to increase his instigation for other kids to beat me as soon as we left the school building. My sister and brother were somewhat better off. The nuns who still taught my sister were kind to her and my brother's teacher was not a Nazi rabble rouser.

Sometime, I think that it was in 1937, we had another major harassment. Officers from the *Kriminalpolizei* (police department) in Regensburg, the district capital, came to our house and went from attic to cellar to look - for what??? One of them was a bit more decent. When he was alone with my mother he told her that a letter from a young girl (I believe her name was Wassermann) to my sister Ilse had been intercepted. She and her family had recently left Neumarkt for Palestine and she wrote how much better life was there. The officer said most probably my sister (13 years old then) was spreading anti-German propaganda. They did not find anything and left.

It was then in late 1937 or early 1938 when my parents decided that we could no longer live in Neumarkt. We had a so called affidavit from a relative to go to the United States but our quota number was very high. We also had applied to go to Palestine but the British White Paper severely limited immigration. In May of 1938 a friend of mine, Fritz Neustädter, and his parents left for the United States. Fritz was an only child. He and my brother Walter are the only Jews formerly from Neumarkt that I am aware of who are still alive, both of whom left before the deportations started. Fritz became a professor at Harvard and MIT. We are in touch on a weekly basis. His father had lived for a while in South Africa and had the South African citizenship but had difficulty getting there because in World War I he had returned to Germany and joined the German army.

Remembrance in Neumarkt

I have a booklet *Das erste halbe Jahrhundert der Israelitischen Kulturgemeinde Neumarkt (Opf.)* (The first fifty years of the Jewish congregation in Neumarkt, Upper Palatinate) printed by J.M. Boegl in 1919 which contains the names of 10 Jews from Neumarkt who gave their lives in World War I. A book to the memory of Jews who gave their lives in World War I, printed I believe in 1927 with an introduction by former General Field Marshall and then the Reich's President Paul von Hindenburg, even lists 11 men from Neumarkt.

Kurt Romstock, former *Oberbürgermeister* (lord mayor) of Neumarkt, published a number of books about the history of Neumarkt. He deleted the names of Jews from the list of fallen soldiers of World War I. He also built a new monument with all the names and again left out the names of the Jews. Some German towns and cities even included Holocaust victims on such a monument.

My friend Fritz Neustädter and I wrote to Romstock and got only nasty answers. Two people I met in New York wanted to be of help. One was Beate Klarsfeld who is a Protestant and corresponded with the Protestant *Pfarrer* (parson) in Neumarkt who tried hard to help but I do not know if he had success. I have some correspondence about this matter. Another gentleman I met was Vice Chairman of *Axel Springer Verlag* (publishing house). He wrote from Berlin to Romstock but basically got a reply of not to bother him or to let bygones be bygones. I still have a *Springer* letter. Romstock if not an outright Nazi was certainly a strong Nazi sympathizer. After the Romstock disillusionment, I personally had no more direct contact with Neumarkt till a letter from the *Ostendorfer Gymnasium* (high school) in which three young students with the encouragement of their religion teacher Herr Enzenberger inquired about the fate of my sister of blessed memory. They are thankfully exploring a shameful chapter of history. After almost 65 years of silence the tragic story of the Jews of Neumarkt finally is being told.

Fürth

In the summer of 1938 we moved to Fürth and I did not see Neumarkt again till late 1945. Fürth had a larger Jewish community, a Jewish school and nine synagogues. Anti-Semitism in Fürth was much less violent than in Neumarkt and the Jewish school in a way provided a sheltered environment. It was a considerable improvement.

In the summer of 1938 my brother and I spent our last vacation in Colmberg. My grandparents on my mother's side had died but their house and farm were still there and three siblings of my mother and their families lived there. None of them survived the Holocaust.

Nazi persecution of Jews went now rapidly forward. Sometime in early fall of 1938 Jews had to bring their radios to the Gestapo office to further isolate them from the world.

Then came November 9, 1938. My father was visiting my grandfather, then aged 77, in Neumarkt. He was arrested there and shipped to Dachau. In Fürth 7 synagogues were burned on November 9 and many Jews were rounded up and beaten. Jews rounded up were taken to the *Berolzheimerianum*, a social center donated to the city of Fürth by the Jewish family Berolzheimer who had emigrated from Fürth to the United States many years earlier. In that center the Jews were abused. Still remaining Jewish stores and property were destroyed.

One Christian neighbor warned us and told us perhaps we should leave our apartment. My mother, brother, sister and I walked aimlessly in the Fürth countryside to avoid the pogrom. Eventually, towards dark, we walked to our apartment and found out that nobody had come to look for us.

Now we worried about my Dad. It took us days to find out that he was shipped to Dachau. It was a nerve racking time, a mother alone with a 14, 13, and 11 year-old. Perhaps a week later, a Jewish woman in Fürth received an urn from Dachau concentration camp with ashes of her husband. As the cause of his death it was stated *auf der Flucht erschossen* (shot when trying to flee). I knew the man. He would never have tried to flee because it was as useless as if I tried to swim the English Channel. Luckily my father came home after about three weeks.

Around 1940 the Jewish school in Fürth was closed and I had to go to a Jewish school in Nuremberg in the Obere Kanalstraße. My bike had been taken away from me and I was not allowed to use the trolley. I had to go to the local Gestapo office in Fürth to get a permit to use the railroad. There was a local stop between Fürth and Nuremberg near Obere Kanalstraße. I saw the local head of the Gestapo. His name was Kandel. I was utterly frightened but I got the permit. After the war I often wondered what happened to Kandel's daughter who had Down Syndrome and was retarded. Did he send her to her death as was instituted by the Nazi *euthanasia* program?

My parents were now trying to save us kids. My sister went to a *Hachschara* which was an agricultural establishment to prepare students to go to Palestine but too many people applied for too few spaces and so she came back home. In 1941 an opportunity presented itself for my brother to go with a *Kindertransport* (children's transport) to the United States. Only kids under 16 were allowed to leave since the Nazis said the older ones will join the enemy armies. He left on August 9, 1941 via Portugal to the United States at age 14. To send a child away at age 14 caused bitter tears in our family. My father got permission to travel with my brother to Berlin where the *Kindertransport* originated. The strain was tremendous but my parents

wanted to save my brother. By that time we all had to wear the Jewish Star and add Israel or Sara to our regular names. We were a marked people. About a year or two earlier we had to deliver all our silverware and jewelry to the Gestapo except for *Eheringe* (wedding rings).

Riga

On November 23, 1941 we were notified that we were to be deported to the East on November 27. A last postcard was sent by us to my brother in the United States. On November 27 a truck came to the front of our house. A SS man in black uniform with a rifle was on the back. We were loaded on it. Our apartment was sealed and I found out later that all our belongings were auctioned off. The truck brought us to the Langwasser encampment on the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg. A few days later we were loaded on trains with SS guards and left for an unknown destination. According to Gestapo records more than 1000 persons were deported.

On December 2, 1941 we arrived at a railroad siding and found out that we were outside of Riga, the capital of Latvia. A contingent of SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*, security service) and Latvian SS greeted us and marched us to our first camp: Jungfernhof. The *Kommandant* was a *Unterscharführer* (sergeant) by the name of Seck. He made his intention very clear from the start: He told us that he already had killed thousands of Jews and that to kill a few more or less did not matter to him. He already had shot one, a young man from Fürth on the way to Jungfernhof who supposedly did not walk fast enough. In October and November the SD and Latvian SS had already shot 30 - 40,000 Latvian Jews and a transport from Berlin with about 1000 Jews.

Life in Jungfernhof was terrible, always hungry and cold (winter 1941/42). Several more transports (approximately 1000 people each) arrived in Jungfernhof from Stuttgart, Vienna and Hamburg so by the end of December 1941, close to 4000 people were in camp. The few barracks were overcrowded and Seck had ordered that the large latrine was to serve both men and women, very degrading. The Nazis had a solution: All the elderly, all children and people unfit to work were shot on March 26, 1942. I knew many of the people. One was a little girl who lived on our floor in Fürth named Maria Stein, age approximately 11. She was a very sweet kid.

An incident which occurred in the railroad freight yards of Riga named Skirotava approximately December 1941 or maybe January 1942 is often on my mind and I sometimes have dreams about it. We were working unloading freight cars in Skirotava. Next to us worked a contingent of Russian prisoners of war. They were guarded by *Wehrmacht* soldiers while we

were guarded by Latvian SS. The Russians looked very emaciated while the *Wehrmacht* guards were just eating. One of the guards called out to a young Russian: *Russki, willst du eine Scheibe Brot, dann komm her!* (Russkie, come here if you want a slice of bread!) He threw the bread to a very young looking prisoner who lurched forward to catch it. The guard picked up his rifle and shot the Russian in the head, the blood scattering all over. He yelled at the other prisoners: *Das wird euch lehren nicht aus der Reihe zu treten!* (This will teach you not to step out of line!) The comrades of the guard laughed like this was the funniest occurrence. I was shocked. I had thought that years of propaganda had created an unbelievable atmosphere of hate against Jews, but nothing like it against Russians.

In the meantime we endured beatings and killings. On July 4, 1942 most of the remnants of Jungfernhof were loaded on trucks. We did not know whether we all would be shot or what other destination we would be sent to. We were shipped, however, to the ghetto which was an old section of Riga in the *Moskauer Vorstadt* (Muscovite Suburb). It actually was an improvement since now my family, father, mother, Ilse and I lived together. We were in one small room in an old little building in Moskauer Straße 21 but we were together for the first time since Fürth. I understand that we were brought there to be close to places where the Nazis could use Jewish slave labor. I was assigned to a *Kommando SS Kraftfahrzeugwerkstätte* (labor detail at the SS vehicle repair shop), also called for its location *SS Vairogs*. My mother and sister worked in various *Kommandos*. Ilse then was sent to *Kasernierung Torf* (encampment to dig up peat). So we were really together on and off. We were working either 6 ½ or 7 days a week and always hungry. I remember that at times I worked with a young man my age named Robert Fischer from Vienna and always having hunger pains, he would constantly talk about Viennese cooking.

People were always being shot and killed or hanged and beaten. One young girl was hanged because she supposedly had a relationship with a *Wehrmacht* soldier at an *Arbeitskommando* and the announcement said the soldier would be transferred to the front. Yet the commander of the ghetto, *Obersturmführer* (first lieutenant) Krause was sleeping with a young Jewish woman from Vienna for at least a year. I understand he was from Breslau and married.

The worst of the lot was *Sturmbannführer* (major) Dr. Lange from Mannheim, head of *SD und Sicherheitspolizei Lettland* (security service and security police in Latvia). He was a most cruel and terrible sadist who was often accompanied by his adjutant *Untersturmführer* (second lieutenant) Maiwald. Other SS men told about his exploitations in the yard of the *Zentralgefängnis* (central prison) in Riga after which he killed the Jews whom he had abused. Many Fridays he would go to camp Salaspils to have Jews whipped to death or hanged.

One of my co-workers at *SS Vairogs* was a young Latvian Jew in his late twenties named Mark Zahl. He had studied engineering in Berlin. Both his parents were physicians and both committed suicide when the Nazis marched into Riga. He knew one of the Latvian Christian workers at *Vairogs* and occasionally got some bread from him. He would sometimes give me a slice of bread which was worth more than gold to me.

In the summer of 1943 the Gestapo decided to dissolve the Riga ghetto, so being with my parents a good part during that time ended. My father was shipped out to KZ Kaiserwald first. I followed him to Kaiserwald on September 28, 1943. My sister was at the time at *Kasernierung Torf*. Kaiserwald was commanded by *Sturmbannführer* (major) Sauer and besides the SS contingent there were a few dozen German *Aryan* inmates, mostly *Berufsverbrecher* (notorious criminals). The *welcoming night* was what the SS called *Walpurgisnacht* (Walpurgis night): They made the incoming Jews run around in the barracks and beat them till they were bloody.

I was now with my father. My mother stayed in the ghetto for a few more months after which she was shipped to camp Strasdenhof and my sister eventually got to Strasdenhof also. I saw my mother once more in the Riga ghetto. One of the SS people at *Vairogs* was *Rottenführer* (private first class) Pirasch from Upper Silesia. Pirasch used to pick up car parts in various depots. At times he would take one of us slave laborers along if there was heavy lifting to be done. I had one treasure left: a silver pocket watch inscribed with my uncle's name Emil who had died years earlier. I had received it as a gift from the family and hidden it during camp time. I told Pirasch about it and that he could shoot me for having it or I could give it to him if he would take me to see my mother in the ghetto. He chose to take me and that was when I saw my mother for the last time.

Soon afterward my mother came to Strasdenhof and so did my sister. On April 10, 1944 I saw my sister for the last time. Our *Kommando* passed Strasdenhof and I saw my sister at the barbed wire fence. She saw me and we waved to each other. That was it.

Another major event in my life occurred in the spring of 1944. I was in Kaiserwald and some prisoners came on a detail from Strasdenhof. One had something for me given to him by my mother. It was like a white handkerchief sewed together with my name written on it. It contained two slices of bread. I gave the bearer one slice for being honest and delivering it to me. I had very strong emotions about it since we received one slice every night. It meant that my mother did not eat her ration two nights in order to send this to me, a sacrifice only a mother could make. I have this little *sack* now encased in Lucite. My name has faded and is almost impossible to read. It is one of my greatest treasures.

On August 3, 1944 my mother was killed. I was in the KZ Kaiserwald and worked in the SS *Kraftfahrzeugwerkstätte* (car repair workshop) Riga. Already early in the morning another fellow inmate came over to me. I am pretty certain his name was Wolf, he was from Lübeck, Germany and had come to Riga with the Hamburg transport. He was about the same age as I and had at one time or the other told me that he was *halbarisch* (*half-Aryan*) but had told me that the Hamburg Gestapo had also deported *Mischehen* (intermarried couples) and *Mischlinge* (their offspring). An SS man had just told him: *Some Jews will go today as smoke to heaven*. They had brought black trucks (gas wagons) to camp Strasdenhof to kill all Jews over age 30 or 35 and they will then be burned. The same day my mother's sister Lina, her husband Sigfried and their daughter were also killed and a few days later my uncles Sigfried and Jakob.

Obviously I knew my mother was there and had thought of ending my life right there and then. Back in camp I cried all night. I knew that my father, my sister and also my younger brother in the USA were alive which prevented me from doing it. Perhaps I should try to stay alive. Incidentally the young man, Wolf died a couple of weeks after liberation of typhus. He was about 20.

I never have talked about this day but if I and the few other remaining survivors keep such memories in and do not tell of the depth of these atrocities the world may forget. Of the more than 1200 days I spent in KZ there were unfortunately many such occurrences.

At that time the Russians were getting closer to Riga and within a few weeks my sister was shipped by ship from Riga to Danzig and from there by barge to KZ Stutthof. Records of Stutthof show that she got there. On September 27, 1944 I was shipped on the same route to Stutthof. After getting there I could not find any trace of my sister. Was she already murdered or shipped somewhere else? On October 23 we were taken to the *Außenlager* (branch camp) Burggraben. We worked seven days a week at a submarine dockyard in Danzig / Gotenhafen, actually at night from about 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.

The Russians were getting closer to Danzig and we were shipped back to the Stutthof main camp. From there we went on a *death march* west. We were not only guarded by SS but also by *Kriegsmarine* (sailors). Anybody who could not keep up with the tempo of the march was just shot. At night we 'slept' in open fields and many froze to death. It was either the end of January or February 1945. We ended up in a camp Rieben in Pomerania where the Nazis just wanted to work and starve us to death. We were building antitank traps. I saw some of the guys eat raw potato peels on the field. Most of us now got typhus as did I.

The first week of March the SS ordered all who could march to get out of the barracks to march away from the Russians. The commandant said sarcastically: *Sie wollen doch nicht in die Hände der Kommunisten fallen?* (You don't want to be captured by the communists, do you?) By this time I could not move anymore and just was lying on the barracks' floor awaiting death. One of the people who marched away was a young man about my age Edwin Ellern-Eichmann from Fürth. A few weeks later we found out that they all were shot in the woods nearby. I believe there were about 2700. Most probably the SS believed that the remaining ones were already $\frac{3}{4}$ dead so there was no need to bother with them.

A few days later, it was March 11, 1945, the Russians liberated the camps. We now got food and very limited medical care but I survived weighing 80 pounds. A number of people died the first couple of weeks after liberation from eating food which their system was unable to handle.

The Russians emptied the camp and insisted that the local German farmers take us in and feed us. My friend Kurt Spangenthal from Kassel and I were lucky because we ended up with a family Peesch, house #1 in Gnewin (Lauenburg county in Pomerania). The woman was very kind and fed us in luxury. She was a Jehovah's Witness and spent four years in Nazi jail for helping a Polish prisoner of war. After I got back to Fürth I wanted to get in touch with the Peesch family but was told that the Poles had chased all Germans out of the area which had now become Polish.

Returning to Fürth

When the war ended in May Kurt Spangenthal and I decided to make our way back to Germany. My father was dead but I was hoping if I would return to Fürth, my sister would try to do the same. On top of freight trains we got to Berlin then only occupied by the Russians. Upon inquiring we found a reopened Jewish institution, the former Jewish hospital at Iransche Straße 2. Kurt found his sister Ruth in Berlin. She was in a different city district and after a three hour walk (the subway and other public transportation was not functioning) there was a very emotional reunion.

After several more weeks in Berlin I wanted to leave to get back to Fürth hoping to find my sister. It was a slow and difficult journey via Leipzig and other towns to the border between the Russian and American occupation zone. I was perhaps 10 days at the border before being allowed to cross. Transportation in the American sector was better and I got to Fürth on of July 24, 1945. The house I had lived in was severely damaged. The municipality of Fürth gave 8 survivors, including me, from Nuremberg, Fürth and Würzburg a one bedroom apart-

ment. It was crowded but obviously paradise compared to where we came from. The apartment, I believe, belonged to a Nazi who I understood had also a country house.

My brother who by now was in the American Air Force and stationed outside of Vienna came to Fürth and we were reunited. In vain I waited for my sister Ilse. I never found out her final fate.

I went to Neumarkt where there was a lot of destruction, including Obere Marktstraße 39 where we had lived. I had found out that no Jews but myself had survived the deportations and this included my grandfather and uncle Albert both of whom were deported after us. I went to look for Wally and her husband who had been true friends during most difficult times. The house she had lived in near the *Stadtpfarrkirche* was destroyed and neighbors told me that they were residing in a small village near Neumarkt but were not sure exactly where. To my pleasant surprise, Mr. Hans showed up in Fürth a week later with food and insisting that I come back with him and that Wally was waiting for me, which I did. She made some of my favorite dishes because she said she wanted to put some weight back on me. I was surprised (maybe I should not have been) when she told me that there were ardent Nazis in the village and told me not to tell anybody that I was Jewish. Obviously I followed her advice. We kept in touch for quite a while. Mr. Hans had been on the Russian front. They had no children. She was an extremely devout Catholic and I often had gone to church with her.

I also visited Colmberg where my mother came from and where I had spent a school year and many summer vacations. Anna Hahn, a woman who had worked for my grandparents, lived there and I stayed several days with her. She loved us kids and had visited us in Neumarkt since her family lived somewhere near Parsberg in Upper Palatinate. She had no children at that time and I had visited her many times in her house in Colmberg during my vacations. Her husband was *Ortsgruppenleiter* (head of the local Nazi party branch) but it did not seem to bother him till 1933 when he stopped his friendship with Jews. I remember maybe in 1931 or 1932 during the *Kirchweihfest* (parish fair) he took me for rides and bought me a toy. When he took me he was wearing his SA uniform but since I was just 5 or 6 years old I was not bothered by it nor did he seem to be. He was still in British custody as a prisoner of war in late 1945 and Anna was afraid that his Nazi party affiliation may have caused a delay in his getting released but I did not know.

Through a friend of my father I got a position as *Praktikant* (trainee) at the AEG plant in Nuremberg. I had, however, a very strong desire to leave Germany. I felt we were chased out of our homes and most of my family was murdered. I also had the feeling that 12 years of Nazi propaganda had done its job. My opinion was that a lot of people were more hateful towards Jews in 1945 than during the early Hitler years. I remember speaking to a stranger in

Jews in 1945 than during the early Hitler years. I remember speaking to a stranger in Nuremberg during the war crimes trial in October / November 1945 and he said to me as follows: *Das einzige, was der Führer falsch gemacht hat, ist, dass er den Krieg verloren hat.* (The only thing the Fuehrer did wrong is that he lost the war.)

USA

In July of 1946 I sailed to America. I received \$ 10 from an organization which could not last too long. My brother was still in the United States Air Force near Vienna and life was very hard for me. Strangers took me in and I paid \$ 10 per week which I am sure was less than their cost for food and lodging. My first job was \$ 12 per week which left me less than \$ 2 (after social security taxes) for subway, then 5 cents per ride, and other things. They treated me like part of the family. They did not understand German and my English was kind of poor.

Soon I got a job for \$ 18 per week, great! I stayed with this family till 1953 and am still close to them. The father died and the mother is now 92 and the little girl who was 6 when I came is now 64. In 1958 I met my wife, an American born romance language teacher. We married in 1959, have 3 sons and 2 grandchildren. My granddaughter, 11 years old, is named Margot in memory of my sister. Now I have a little Margot.



My granddaughter Margot, age 14, named in memory of my sister, April 2008
(photo: private)

In the meantime I had worked very hard, at times as much as 70 hours a week, for a number of companies and became a senior executive. In the late 1970s I was voted as director of a

bank in New York and also a member of boards of some charitable organizations. In 1980 I was voted as a member of the Health Advisory Council of the Columbia Presbyterian Hospital and also to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Columbia University. I am also a member of the cancer, brain sciences and translational committees (translational means to translate research to treatment). One of the scientist participants of the brain science committee is neurologist Professor Eric Kandel, a Viennese born Jew, who won the Nobel Prize in medicine a few years ago. Dr. Kandel told me that after winning the prize he received a call from the President of Austria congratulating him and mentioning that if he still would live in Vienna, an Austrian would be the recipient of the Nobel Prize. Eric who came to the United States in 1939 at the age of eleven said to the President that they did not want to leave but they were driven out. Imagine how much talent was driven out and worse how much was murdered. By doing this charity work during my retirement years I want to give something positive to society.

Incidentally, my middle son Michael spent a semester in Münster with his undergraduate school, Vassar College. He wanted to find my roots and he went to Neumarkt. Unfortunately there was nobody there he could converse with.

My life here has certainly had many ups and downs. My tragic experiences will always stay with me and will weigh heavily on me. Its effect is even felt by my wife and children. I often wonder why humans could be so extremely cruel and inhumane to fellow human beings.

Perpetrators and victims

I just want to touch on the behaviors of the SS and SD that I came in contact with: Dr. Lange from Mannheim, head of the SD and security police in Latvia, a brutal and willing killer who was a participant at the *Wannseekonferenz*. *Untersturmführer* (second lieutenant) Gassert from the Stuttgart area, always ready to follow orders. *SS Oberwerkmeister* (chief foreman) Walter Naas from Cologne, a sadistic individual with no strong political orientation. I felt he would have no problem going to any winning side. *Obersturmführer* (first lieutenant) Krause from Breslau, a very willing executioner and sadist as was *Untersturmführer* Seck. *Rottenführer* Pirasch, a willing *Mitläufer* (follower of the crowd). *SS Mann* (private) Paulsen from Schleswig-Holstein, a good Nazi and sadist. *Untersturmführer* Datum from Frankfurt / Main, a beneficiary of the system. *SS Mann* Nielsen from Schleswig-Holstein was not sure if everything the SS did was right. He was willing to liquidate Polish Jews in the Warsaw ghetto but maybe some doubts crept in about the brutality when he worked in close proximity to Jews at *SS Vairogs* and perhaps saw us as human beings. One SS man, Hans Mehl, I felt was uncom-

comfortable with what was done with the Jews and kept himself away from beatings and killings. I tried to find him in 1945 in his hometown of Berlin but was unable to locate him since I would have helped him if I could. One Latvian SS man at *SS Vairogs* actually went AWOL (absent without official leave) because he was so appalled. He was caught and tortured to death by the SD. It was this Latvian man who told my Latvian Jewish friend Mark Zahl about some of the terrible atrocities which took place in the yard of the *Zentralgefängnis* and in the woods where the Jews were shot and a German SS man threw babies in the air for *target practice*.

I mentioned Manny Hahn and besides two daughters he also had a son named Max who was about one year older than I. He was also murdered.

I also mentioned our friend Wally Hans. I believe her husband's name was Karl Hans.

There are many more memories that come back to me, some more vivid than others. However, I was anxious to get this story on paper. I think this abbreviated history will give a picture of my family and the other Jewish victims during those terrible times.

It was a brutal regime with many willing participants and too few reluctant to participate which I was able to observe.

November 2009

Ernest Haas

Epilogue 2010

As this year's *Yom Hashoah* approached, I realized that much of what happened in the *Lager* (camps) is not being told by those who suffered there and the few who survived (fewer and fewer as each day passes). People who didn't actually experience the horrors, cannot fathom the depth of the brutality and this aspect must be told. Although I have hesitated relating this, I felt I must do so now to counter the deniers and add to the actual history.

As a young boy it was obviously the beatings and harassment in Neumarkt which started in 1933 and accelerated rapidly. Then came November 9, 1938 and my father was taken to Dachau. The worst came with the deportation in November 1941. I saw the extreme brutality by November 1941 in Langwasser when some of the Jews were severely beaten. The march from the freight station in Riga to Jungfernhof when Seck shot a Jewish boy from Fürth. Seck was an extreme sadist. I remember when a man was caught trying to barter some personal items for food (we were always hungry). He tied him up naked and beat him so severely that the man died within hours.

Another time, I was standing a few feet from murder. I was clearing snow from a path behind the *Great Barrack*. Out came Seck with either 5 or 6 elderly men. They most probably had gone inside to warm up from the bitter cold. One I was pretty sure was Mr. Kohn from Nuremberg. Seck lined them up and shot them one by one. I thought I would perhaps be next but he yelled at me: *Weitermachen!* (continue).

Not much later another man (Mr. Kaufmann from Nuremberg) was caught and we all had to watch him being hanged.

Another time we were shoveling snow in *Kommando Schapiro* (a labor detail named after a Jew from Bamberg). Seck came upon us and yelled that we were lazy and working too slow. He made us lie down face down and beat all of us with his cane which he always carried.

Then came *Aktion Dünamünde* when all of the elderly and all children from Jungfernhof were shot.

The most severe and bloodiest beating I ever received was on *Simchat Torah* holiday 1942. I had a hole in my shoe (my only pair) and tried to fix it. SS *Oberwerkmeister* and sadist Walter Naas from Cologne beat me till the blood was running all over me.

I remember the day in August 1944 when my mother was murdered and the Nazis murdered her sister, Lina Weinstein, Lina's husband, Sigfried and their daughter, Herta (all from Zirndorf). A couple of weeks later two of my mother's brothers, Sigfried and Jakob Steinberger, were murdered.

I still remember vividly the boat trip from Riga to Danzig. Ludwig Willner (Fürth) told us that it was Yom Kippur. The SS made sure that we fasted and we received no food during the trip approximately for three days.

Stutthof itself was hell on earth: the beatings, the everyday murders and constant hunger, a paradise for the sadists of the SS.

Actually I could relate horrors for each of the days I spent there. I cannot forget even if I try.

April 13, 2010, updated February 2012

Ernest Haas

edited by *Gerhard Jochem*

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