



Hilde Hines: In Hinesight

The autobiography Hilde Hines self-published in 2006 (ISBN 0-646-46944-4, 293 pages, ill.) is a mirror of 20th century's German-Jewish history: Born to the well-off Guckenheimer family in Nuremberg during World War I in 1917, she spent a careless childhood and youth until the untimely death of her father in 1935. Both this and the rise of Nazism changed her life dramatically. In 1938 she married Gustav Heinsfurter a young salesman also from Nuremberg. Soon the young couple became convinced that they could not go on in Germany and left for Holland the same year. With the financial support of an Australian citizen they came to Adelaide, the capital of South Australia, in January 1940. For Hilde this meant a separation from her beloved mother and her older sister Gogo who had to stay in England during the war.



Her husband Gustav, by now Gus Hines, was an able and versatile trader who reckoned the opportunities created by the war effort for trading scrap metals. He successfully established himself and his family in business and social life: The Hineses became respected and active members of the society, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Even after the tragedy of the Holocaust and their dispersion around the world this combination of luck and hard work made the Hines family, their relatives and friends a closely knitted, almost global network, as Hilde describes the development.

Hilde Hines died on 3 February 2007, only two days after her book was officially launched.

In 2003 I had the pleasure to meet Hilde who accompanied her cousins Susan Sinclair and Eric Yondorf to the "Nürnberg Zeitzeugengespräch" (Nuremberg eyewitness panel) which I had organized. My personal memory of her is of a most uncomplicated and astonishingly energetic lady who easily made friends with people on her wavelength. Not only to them, but to everyone who wants to read the clear-sighted accounts of a remarkable woman's life between opposite corners of the world, her book is worth reading.

Gerhard Jochem

Exemplary Quotations from “In Hindsight”

The misplaced loyalty of German Jews

In Eastern Europe in the so-called *shtetl*, Jews lived very Jewish lives, separate from the rest of the population. They usually spoke Yiddish at home, had their own distinct lifestyle and did not readily assimilate with their neighbours. Not so in Germany. The majority of German Jews, especially those who lived in the west and south of Germany, had roots going back hundreds of years and felt that they were Germans who happened to be of the Jewish religion.

Certainly there were persecutions. Jews in Germany had to leave some of the big cities and their numbers were often restricted in any one place, by the use of the *Matrikel* [registry]. Yet German was spoken exclusively among German Jews and German characteristics and manners were predominant. Their emancipation had started in France about the time of Napoleon, who proclaimed that Jews could remain Jews in their homes but had to become Frenchmen in the street. Special laws were still prevalent in certain places in Germany until the middle of the 19th century, but given these legal restrictions, Jews were comparatively well settled.

In the second part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Jews became more assimilated and felt safe in their role as German citizens. On a personal level I lost as many cousins fighting for the Kaiser in the First World War as were later killed under Nazi rule in the gas chambers. One of the reasons why many German Jews did not leave Germany after 1933 was that they felt so much a part of the German people and thought that Hitler and his peers were just a temporary deviation which must pass quickly. This was one of the great tragedies of my father’s generation. [...]

We were taught *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* at school and at home. Our Judaism was only marginal, in the same way as religion was to our Catholic or Protestant school friends. This was the major difference between our times and the centuries before. The Enlightenment demanded that Judaism became a religion, not a way of life anymore. We obeyed and became *deutsche Staatsbürger israelitischen Glaubens* (German citizens of Jewish persuasion).

But almost overnight everything changed. We became oppressed and started to fear and then detest not only our oppressors but also that part of ourselves which was akin to them. We felt deeply ashamed, for our oppressors and for us, for having believed in Germany and been part of it. We were people without a country long before we were declared ‘stateless’.

Many books have been written about life in Germany during the Hitler period so I will not repeat that information here. One can understand that it was dangerous for Germans to effectively resist their elected leaders, but what hurt most, and in retrospect seems almost incredible, was that the majority of the population cooperated with the anti-Jewish Nazi regime. There were some decent Germans who kept contact with their Jewish friends. Amongst them were my two girlfriends, Gretel and Waltrud, but they were in the minority. The majority wholeheartedly cooperated with the regime.

After the war, most people denied knowledge of the atrocities. *No one was there and nobody saw it* is the title of one book. But everyone knew. In November 1938, at the time of *Kristallnacht* (the anti-Semite pogrom in Germany), the German people saw what was happening to the Jews in the streets of all the cities. But no one objected. It was harder for Germans to resist their elected government than it was, for instance, for the Dutch who were invaded and occupied. The spitefulness and cruelty which so many Germans showed are totally incomprehensible.

There were many restaurants and cafés in Nuremberg to which Jews could not go, and this also applied to theatres. Even picture theatres were out of bounds. Townships, parks and vil-

lages which had signs stating *judenrein*, free of Jews, were out of bounds. Germany made life impossible with every conceivable restriction. At the same time, however, Jewish cultural life became more intense. Activities such as lectures and concerts were held regularly at the synagogue.

People often ask, "Why didn't Jews leave Germany much earlier?" All European countries had restrictions for refugees. Australian permits, for example, were almost impossible to obtain and only certain trades were permitted to even apply. So it was a double bind. Other countries didn't really want any refugees. When people finally endeavoured to arrange to emigrate, the German bureaucracy placed many difficulties and problems in their way. The bloody-mindedness of the officials, their dirty laughter and the way they treated Jews were unbelievable. Jews were to be humiliated and made to feel like dirt at all times and people came away in tears after a visit to an office. It became increasingly rare to meet a decent German.

(p. 81 - 84)

Australians, refugees and the war in Europe

Looking back on our early letters from Australia I now see that they all sound optimistic. There were various reasons for that. First and foremost, we did not want to worry the family in England, knowing they had enough to cope with and life in London was not easy (obviously much harder and more dangerous than ours). Furthermore, we understood that most letters were opened and read by the censor so we felt that we had to show what loyal and obedient new citizens we were and we decided not to write anything that could be construed as critical of our new country and life but, quite frankly, conditions in Australia were tough.

Australia at that time was not an immigrant country and we were not really welcomed but were only there under sufferance. Even the local community wanted us to be as unobtrusive as possible and there was little understanding of the position of refugees. Of course one only spoke English, especially in public, but it was hurtful to be asked not to wear the clothes that we brought from Europe because they looked different. Nobody considered that we did not have the money to buy new clothes such as short coats in the Australian style, or Australian kit bags instead of our briefcases.

Furthermore, even the urgency of people leaving Europe was not understood. I remember a conversation we had in 1940 with Mark Haines, the President of the Jewish Welfare Society. Small numbers of migrants had been arriving for some years. He complained that a migrant had arrived whose profession was noted as shoemaker. Mark Haines managed to get him a job with a cobbler but it was soon evident that the young man had very limited knowledge of the shoemaker's trade. We explained that to be eligible for a permit to Australia a person had to have a certain trade; that this permit was a precious piece of paper and that people therefore took a short course in whatever trade they could so that they acquired a certificate and were then able to apply. We told him that for this reason, they did not complete a full apprenticeship of two or three years to learn the trade thoroughly. This was an eye-opener to the man who had been in charge of all migrant absorption into the Jewish Community for the last few years.

People who came to Australia through the Jewish organisations situated at Woburn House in London were given 50 pounds sterling as 'landing money' which they had to show to the Australian authorities on arrival. They were usually told in England that this money was to be for emergency help. However, on arrival in Port Adelaide, the Welfare Society promptly collected it. Fortunately we had not required the help of any committee and therefore we were not committed to anyone.

The biggest difference between life now and the earlier period of our life in Australia was communication. Letters from England took weeks and there was hardly any news from other parts of the world. We had no news from relatives and friends and we did not have any idea of what was happening in Europe. Before we left Europe there were already concentration camps, such as Dachau where people were already dying, but they were not actually death camps. We were not aware of the atrocities committed in Auschwitz and other extermination camps. It was not until much later that these ghastly activities and the extent of the Nazis' crimes became known to us.

Though mail was slow and the reports from Europe took time to filter to Adelaide, the lack of understanding of the situation in war-torn Europe and particularly the conditions for Jews was difficult to comprehend. I remember a non-Jewish friend of ours asking how much of the newspaper stories he read from time to time were true. When I told him that every bit was true and it was only a small part of what was actually taking place in Europe, he didn't really believe me.

The position of migrant doctors was also a difficult one. They had to study again for about three years and re-take exams. Exceptions were made for those who had studied in Scotland or Italy, as they were countries with whom Australia had reciprocal arrangements. I remember a few of the stories and would like to relate them here:

Dr Jacob (Kuba) Zimmet was amongst those who had to study and he and a few others were working at the same time, making leather belts and purses to keep their families alive. His wife Anne Zimmet told me the story of how they lived in one room with a baby, Rena, and she had to take the baby for long walks when Kuba had to study and needed quiet.

Dr Flaum, a cardiac specialist, presented for his oral examination and answered all questions fully and without difficulty.

"How is it that you know so much about this subject?" the examiner asked him.

"Because I wrote the textbook!" answered Dr Flaum.

Dr Bernie Freudenthal, who was a doctor and dentist, came from Shanghai. He was told that he could only practise in Queensland, in the most outlying areas. After fighting the bureaucracy for a long time he was finally able to live and practise in Adelaide.

Both Dr Charles Helman and Dr Lou Levy had luckily studied in Italy and therefore were accepted. They had joined the Australian army and only settled in South Australia after the war.

(p. 144 - 147)

At the beginning of 2003 we celebrated Gogo's 90th birthday. Later in the year, there was a special meeting arranged by the City of Nuremberg. It was a *Zeitzeugentreffen*, a time witnesses meeting. My cousins Eric Yondorf, Susan Sinclair and a few others were invited. Eric suggested that I might also enjoy participating.

It certainly was worth seeing how this city of our birth was trying to educate the younger generation about the events of the Hitler period. We met with the Lord Mayor and many other dignitaries and saw a great deal. Many memories flooded through our minds. There are many things one has to try and understand but we will never forgive or forget.

(p. 282)



Hilde Hines 2003 in Nuremberg
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

Looking back on my life, which began in Germany, I could never have imagined the path it would take. Hitler forced Gus and me on a journey, one which we did not want. Our family was torn apart for many years and we lost many friends and relatives during the Holocaust. We were fortunate to have landed in Australia and at a time when, with initiative and hard work, we could make a go of it. Now our family is spread around the globe, but with planes and computers, we stay close. Our family is bound together by a shared history: the fact that Gus and I were Jews in Germany when Hitler was in power, yet we were among the fortunate few who managed to escape and survive.

(p. 284)

[Index*](#)

[Home*](#)