

My Story

by

Mr. Ernest Lorch



Young Ernst Lorch (first from the right) 1932 in a group of Jewish children from Nuremberg. The other kids are (from left to right): Kurt Schoenberg, Ernst Goldschmidt, Lisa Oppenheimer, Eva Oppenheimer, Heinz Goldschmidt, Gertie Schoenberg, Fritz Goldschmidt and Suse Oppenheimer

(Photo: Mrs. Susan E. Sinclair)

I was asked to write down my life's story. This is it, for those who want to know:

Grandparents and Parents

What I value most is family, our history and the success of our children and grandchildren. So let me begin with my grandparents: Emil Lorch was born in Mainz on July 9, 1853. On June 30, 1890 he married Pauline Schwarz, born in Egenhausen on July 22, 1868. They had two boys, Fritz and Max. My father is Fritz, born June 7, 1891, who married my mother on October 6, 1920. She was born Alice Eckmann in Eisenach (Thuringia). I am their only child.

Grandfather Emil started his jewelry business in Nuremberg immediately after he moved there on February 27, 1889. He was granted the title “Hofjuwelier” (jeweler to the court) by the King of Prussia who was the German Kaiser at the same time and the Queen of Italy, which was a source of great pride to him and my father who succeeded him in the business after my grandfather Emil had died on October 23, 1931.



Fritz Lorch in front of his jewelry store
(Photo: Mr. Ernest Lorch)

Childhood

I was born in May 1923 and since it was a period of inflation and a shortage of housing, we resided in an apartment behind the Plärrer, a square near the city wall. Around 1925 or 1926 we moved to the Bayreuther Straße 6, together with my “Kinderschwester” (nanny) and our cook. I soon attended the Laufertorschule, which was an all boys grade school. In 1933 we moved to Emilienstrasse 3, which was a modern apartment with steam heat and running hot water and near the fancy Prinzregentenufer street. I attended the Dürer-Oberrealschule at the Marientor, until the school was moved elsewhere. I was the only Jewish kid in the entire school. Did I feel anti-Semitism at that time? Not that I recall. Yes, some boys stayed away, but there was no obvious harassment. I recall a normal childhood, playing with my friends, bicycling, enjoying a lot of sports and spending time with my parents. I particularly remember outings to the Fränkische Schweiz and spending weekends there with many of our good friends. However, in 1937 more anti-Jewish laws were passed that saw to it that all schools were “judenrein” and I began to attend the Goldschmidtschule in Berlin, which was a boy / girl school, sponsored by Cambridge University. I was there to learn English and I lived in a residential house. This lasted until November 10, 1938.

Religion

Our family was not religiously observant, but we sometimes attended services Fridays and / or Saturdays, but definitely went on the High Holidays. Our store was closed for those. I was Bar Mitzvah and we belonged to the Reform Synagogue. Our son and all of our granddaughters are Bar or Bat Mitzvah, respectively, to continue the tradition. My wife Ellen and I have always been active in the Jewish Community, involved with the Jewish Federation and many of the Jewish agencies, as well as community agencies at large. Both of us are actively volunteering and serving as officers and presidents of various boards.

“Kristallnacht”

That fatal day of November 10 was a day of many disturbances and political turmoil, so when a phone call came from Nuremberg, very early in the morning, for me to come home because my father was very sick, I had a premonition of trouble. Early on November 10, I was put in a taxi and drove to the railroad station, past burning synagogues and trashed houses. It was very early and unnaturally quiet in Berlin. I took the train, sitting all by myself in the compartment and worried. Arriving in Nuremberg Central Station I was met by a friend of ours and my worst fears were confirmed. My father, then all of 47 years old, had been killed during the night. He was in the Jewish Hospital in Fürth for a repair of a broad and old scar, a cosmetic type of repair and according to rumors, all the patients were removed from their beds, lined up outside and what happened then, I do not know. He was returned to us in a sealed casket, with orders it could not be opened. The next day I stood in the cemetery, by myself, my mother wouldn't go and we buried my father. Just the gravediggers and I.



Fritz Lorch in his store
(Photo: Mr. Ernest Lorch)

Our apartment was trashed, the furniture overturned, the upholstery slashed and glass everywhere. There was this sense of fear of what could come next. All the men were arrested, there were only women and children, and all of them scared. Of the next few weeks I have no recollection at all. It must have been the trauma.

Emigration and the Holocaust

In April 1939 my mother and I left Germany. We had gotten a visa to America through the efforts of a school friend of my father's who yearly visited his mother in Nuremberg. He had urged my parents to leave Germany as soon as possible, starting in 1935. Business was good, there was at least financial security of sorts and only the unknown in America. So they braved it out, hoping Hitler would disappear as many tyrants before him had. That proved to be a big mistake. In a way my mother and I were lucky. Worse was to come for Jews in Germany. My grandmother Paula did not wish to go to Israel to join her other son, saying she was too old to move. She was shipped to Theresienstadt in September 1942 and died there on December 8, 1942. She was a proud, conservative woman, who did not want to make changes in her life.

Nobody guessed even then what was to come. To this day, I cannot understand nor comprehend that the German people, educated, cultured and in many ways enlightened, could fall to such depths and depravity. Yes, I know that it was not all of them, but too many remained silent in the face of wrongdoing and became part of that crime. It is for that very reason that I came to Nuremberg this past May 2003. I am glad that I went, because I met many good people who understood that history and I am grateful to Gerhard Jochem, his co-workers, Susanne Rieger, the City of Nuremberg and the Lord Mayor, for their kindness and unflagging interest.

Before immigrating to America, we were permitted to pack up our belongings and those things that we had not been ordered to deliver to the "Leihamt" (municipal pawnbroker office), like silver, jewelry and other valuables. Most of our bank accounts had been closed and confiscated. All that was done legally by Nazi law. We packed furniture and china and some sentimental items. One good thing I do remember: A guard was posted in the apartment to watch that nothing valuable was smuggled out in the packing cases. That man gave us to understand that he had sympathy for us and he did not check carefully.

The journey to New York, on a German ship in First Class, was the last touch of luxury for a long time. We left Germany with no money and only our few belongings in a suitcase.

In the USA

In New York we were met by our sponsors in a limousine with a chauffeur and taken to a rooming house. At least we saw how the other half lives.

My mother had no skills and had never worked and I was a kid. Both of us were given jobs, I, in the office as a stock boy and my mother as a sewing machine operator in a glove factory. We made 25 cents an hour or \$ 10,- per week. That was enough to get by, find an apartment and manage. I went to high school at night and graduated. Then went on to a needle trades school until I discovered that this was not my thing.

Military Service

We had arrived in New York in April of 1939. By December 1942, I was in the US Army, had basic military training and by April 1943 found myself in North Africa. Rommel's army was defeated by then and we were stationed in the hot and bare desert near Tunis, where it was 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, where there was shade. I was most fortunate in meeting a Major who was recruiting German speakers to serve in the Intelligence Service. Obviously, there were not too many of those hanging around Tunis. That was the beginning of a very interesting army career and probably saved my life, as well. I transferred to Algiers, which was HQ, Allied Command, and was attached to a British unit for training. We interrogated flyers shot down of the Mediterranean, as well as naval officers and assorted troops, we held in a prison camp.

In July 1944, after the invasion in Normandy, we transferred to Italy where we had little to do except sightseeing the Amalfi Coast. After the landing in Southern France, our unit moved to Marseilles and later up to northern France, doing the same sort of duty. We spent the winter of 1944 and the Battle of the Bulge in Reims, interrogating the jeep parties that had infiltrated our lines. In spring and the war almost over, we got a call to drive to Spa in Belgium.



Chateau at Spa (Belgium) where the prominent German prisoners of war were held, April / May 1945
(Photo: Mr. Ernest Lorch)



Ernest Lorch (first from the right) and some of the prisoners at Spa: von Papen (first from the left), Horty (third from the left), Darré (fourth from the left). The second man from the right is an American major.
(Photo: Mr. Ernest Lorch)

Our new quarters were a fabulous and luxurious castle, once owned by the German Kaiser and lately used by Generals Montgomery and Eisenhower to direct the advances into Germany. Nice Place. Our prisoners were of a special kind also: the Nazi high command and politicians, who had surrendered to the US Army when the war was over. They were Hermann Göring, Wirtschaftsminister (secretary of economics) Darré, Horthy, Regent of Hungary and von Papen, who once was Reich's chancellor of the Weimar Republic, before he joined Hitler's government in 1933. It was our job to talk to them and to translate documents. In May 1945, all of us, intelligence personnel and prisoners and guards, moved to the town of Mondorf in Luxembourg, where we held all the rest of the war criminals, destined for trial in Nuremberg.



Prison compound at Mondorf (Luxembourg) where Ernest Lorch was on duty from May until August 1945

(Photo: Mr. Ernest Lorch)

In August I was given the assignment to lead the convoy of all of our 22 war crimes prisoners to deliver them to the tribunal in Nuremberg. I handed them over to the Sergeant of the Guard at the Palace of Justice. Three years of war, six years since I emigrated Germany and here I am permitted to deliver these terrible people to justice for their crimes. Perhaps there is such a thing as justice, after all.

Becoming a Family and Business Man

The war was over and it was time to go back home. Christmas 1945 I arrived back in the United States. The first person I met, after I was discharged from the service, was my Ellen. We had corresponded throughout the war. We had originally met on July 4, 1942 and dated before I left for the army. It was not yet a romance then, but when I came back, we hit it off immediately. Our families seemed to approve also and we agreed to get married some time when possible. First I needed to settle down and make a living. Ellen had graduated college and was getting a job as an assistant buyer at Gertz in Jamaica. I headed for Indianapolis, where I found employment as a buyer-in-training and to Indiana University at night.

I need to explain how I got to Indianapolis. During the war friends had introduced my mother to a man in Indianapolis and she married him. He was Mike Hirschfeld, who also came from Germany. There was no reason for me to stay in New York, since we had no family there.

To earn more money, I started out on my own, representing apparel companies in the children's wear business. That's what I did for the next 45 years, retiring in 1993. I liked running my own company and luckily, I had good companies to represent and enjoyed working with our local and national trade associations and trade shows, being active in the administration and eventually ending up as President.

My Family Today

Ellen and I have two children, Kenneth and Karin. Both are married with two girls each, our four granddaughters. Our daughter Karin is a social worker and has a degree in nursing home administration and a master's degree in social work. She now lives in Seattle, Washington, with her husband Dick, a terrific guy. Ken is a practicing attorney and CPA with a good-sized firm in Chicago. He is married to Susan, who is a schoolteacher. All of them are doing well and we are proud of them.

Ellen and I are now married for 56 years. I never had any reason to regret it. It was love at first sight and now, all these many years later, it is still that. Guess that's luck. We had a difficult start getting established and make money, but stuck to it and here we are, proof that one can make it in the United States with hard work.



Ernest and Ellen Lorch in 2003

(Photo: Susanne Rieger)

Indianapolis, June 2003

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