



# Memories of my Youth in Nuremberg and the Melanchthon-Gymnasium

by

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Julie and Otto Rosenthal in the garden of "Villa Maria" in Streitberg, 1921

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

## My Parents: My Mother



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Silhouette of Julie Rosenthal, née Metzger (ca. 1920)

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

My mother Dr. Julie Loewenthal-Rosenthal (1897 - 1987) was the daughter of the industrialist Otto Metzger, owner of the wine distillery Metzger und Boehm in Moegeldorf, Laufamholzstrasse 9, and his wife Rosalie, née Jung.

After 10 years at the municipal high school for girls located on Frauentorgraben, she visited the Realgymnasium for girls, where she received her matriculation certificate in 1918. Then she started studying history of art at the University of Munich, but intercepted her studies in 1921, when she married the chemist Dr. Otto Rosenthal (1881 - 1924).

## **My Father**



**Dr. Otto Rosenthal in November 1918**

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

My father was the son of the merchant Jakob Rosenthal, from whom I got my first name, and his wife Lina, née Schloss. He was the owner of a textile shop on Gostenhofer Hauptstrasse 29. My father was the founder of the "Chemical Works Nuernberg-Wetzendorf", where a synthetic glue invented by him, was produced. During World War One he was a sergeant in the 8<sup>th</sup> Royal Bavarian Field Artillery Regiment, then first was promoted to Lieutenant and at war's end to the rank of First Lieutenant. He was decorated with the Iron Cross second and first class.

During his prolonged stay at the front he contracted a disease, which led to his early death in 1924. I was recognized as a war orphan and got a monthly subsistence from the government till our emigration.

## **The Scandal at my Father's Funeral**

My father's funeral had an anti-Semitic aftermath: In the presence of the uniformed members of the league of the former comrades of his regiment and their flag Rabbi Dr. Isaak Heilbronn mentioned the military career of my father as a response to the vile attacks of General Ludendorff on the "shirking" of German Jews in the war before the Munich court of law (the trial of Hitler and Ludendorff because of their attempted revolution in 1923 took place at this time). Since the rabbi had talked "politics" at the ceremony, the presidency of the league decided that no official participation in closed units with the flag at burials of Jewish comrades should be permitted in the future but private participation was left optional. As the Jewish members of the league even were refused to protest, all of them resigned from the league spontaneously.

It was symptomatic for the atmosphere in the post war period, that this incident was never mentioned in the family. 76 years (!) later, during inquiries for my Ph.D. (my thesis was "The Counting of the Jews by the German Army in World War One and its later Consequences") I read about this case in one of the Jewish newspapers of the time. The news item contained the place, the date and the decision of the league, but not the name of the deceased. The verification came later upon my investigation at the Municipal Archives of Nuremberg, when Gerhard Jochem supplied a copy of the "Nuernberg-Fuerther Israelitisches Gemeindeblatt" (newsletter of the Jewish communities in Nuremberg and Fuerth) from May 1925 with all the details. I have then included this personal item in my dissertation under the heading of the relations between German veterans leagues and their Jewish members.

## **The Life of my Mother as a Widow**



**Dr. Julie Rosenthal working at Nuremberg City Archives (ca. 1930)**

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

After the death of my father my mother continued her academic studies. She received her Ph.D. at the university of Erlangen in 1930. The thesis of her dissertation was "The Augustine Monastery in Nuremberg". Already during her studies she became an employee of the Municipal Archives in Nuremberg under the administration of Dr. Emil Reicke whose help for her studies she appreciates in the preface of her dissertation. Later she became a free lancing journalist, writing mostly critiques of cultural events in the city like exhibitions, fashion

shows, movies etc., which were published in the newspaper "8 Uhr Blatt - Abendzeitung". The editor of this paper, Wolf Rettich-Haidyll, was an acquaintance of her.



**Visitors and staff at Nuremberg City Archives. Dr. Rosenthal is the 5<sup>th</sup> from the left (clipping from a magazine, ca. 1930)**

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

I still have lively reminiscences of this time: I visited her quite often in the Stadtarchiv on Egidienplatz. I also remember her well, sitting endless hours in front of her typewriter. Since she had little patience for a certain kind of movies she was asked to write about, she sent me sometimes to the cinema "Neue Bilderbuehne" in the Bucher Strasse. There I watched Charlie Chaplin or Pat and Patachon with never ending delight and told her all about it, when I came home. Then she began her critique with the words: "My little boy just returned quite enthusiastically from the 'Bilderbuehne' and reports to me ..." Naturally the events of January 1933 caused an abrupt end of her journalistic career.

## **Second Marriage and Emigration**



**The Loewenthal-Rosenthal family in Bad Kissingen, 1937**

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

In 1931 my mother married the lawyer Dr. Alfons Loewenthal (1897 - 1984). My sister Barbara Chen, since many years member of the Kibbutz Tel Katzir on the shore of Lake Tiberias, was born in 1934. My stepfather was a veteran Zionist and vice president of the Zionist organization in Nuremberg.

It became understood quite soon that immigration to Palestine was imminent, but was realized only in 1939. Influenced by the spirit in my parents' home I soon joined the Zionist-Socialistic youth movement "Habonim" and also learned Hebrew intensively.

## **My Mother's Talents and her Work in Israel**

My mother was an extraordinarily creative personality. She had very skilful hands and after secondary school she tried her luck at the school for arts and crafts in Nuremberg. But soon she became aware that her real talents were more on the literary side. Therefore she decided to choose academic studies of the history of arts. Nevertheless she never gave up painting, drawing and modeling. Her pictures and clay figures ornate the apartments of her children to this very day. She was also a gifted poet. She used to contribute her very amusing humorous rhymes to every family festivity. In my earlier days I had to learn them by heart and recite them in front of the assembled audience. She was also a very good letter writer. In the 1980s my wife and I spent 3 years in the Philippines for the UN. She supplied us with weekly, sometimes very witty reports about the events at home.



**Dr. Julie Loewenthal-Rosenthal with great-granddaughter Ronnie and her handmade puppets in K'far Saba parental home, 1987**

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

On Pesach 1939 the family settled down in Tel Aviv. As her husband began to prepare himself for the Palestinian law examinations, my mother took care of the family needs in these rather difficult times. She made puppet heads out of papier-mâché, sewed suitable dresses and sold her products successfully to shops in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

Many years later, in the parental home in K'far Saba, she kept the inhabitants of the invalids section occupied with simple works of textile and clay.

All of a sudden, just before her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday she passed away.

## **The Melanchthon-Gymnasium**

After reading the extensive memories of Ludwig Berlin, who was in a class senior to me, I wish to contribute some of my own experience to the general picture of the time.

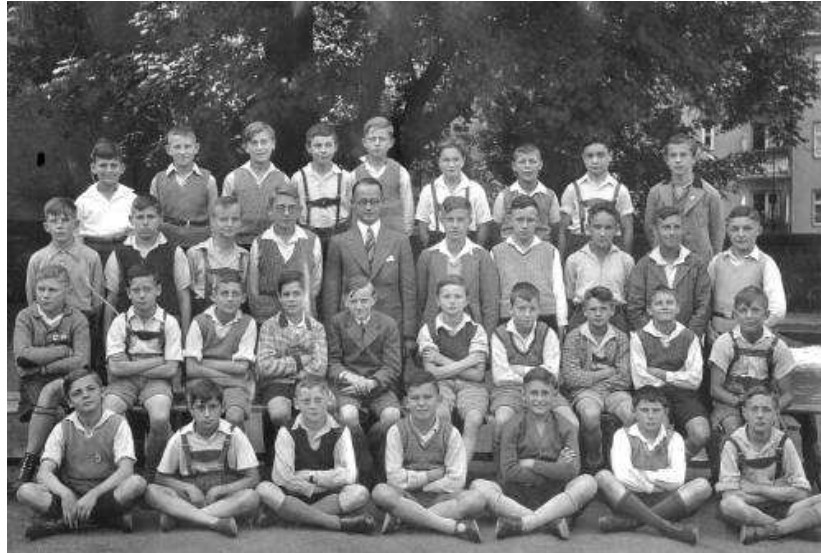
### **My first School Year (1932/33)**

At the beginning of my first school year on Easter 1932 anti-Semitism was not yet perceptible. Still we few Jews found ourselves on the very first day and took our seats side by side. But already in the following year we were placed in the last row close to the wall. The 3 parallel classes of the year were divided by denominations: In A and B were the Protestants, C was mixed – Protestants, Catholics and Jews. The Catholics were the dominant element in our class, most of them belonged to the Catholic youth movement and therefore were not influenced by the Nazis yet. But January 30 caused immediate change in the Gymnasium. Soon thereafter a festivity took place, for which the carrying of party insignia was allowed for the first time. All teachers, who were members of the Nazi Party showed up in SA- or SS-uniforms or at least wore the party badge. It was an incredible shock, especially for the Jewish pupils as there were quite a lot of them.

### **"Racial Education"**

Also new subjects were introduced in the curriculum. Assessor Friedrich Hufnagel, whom we did not know, gave us the first lesson in "racial education". After he had explained at length the various racial types, he began analyzing a few pupils of the class. At the end the boys pointed at me and asked his opinion about me. I stood on a podium. First a ruler was put on my nose to confirm its straightness. Then the distance between the ears and the head as well as the whole shape of my skull were measured exactly. Finally came the conclusion: Despite my dark hair I was a typically "Aryan" type. The teacher did not understand the stormy laughter of the whole class, but luckily the bell - deus ex machina - rang and the embarrassing scene came to its end.

We were soon exempted from these lessons by government order. Later the law of the "Gleichschaltung" (plain formation) of the schools was issued. All Jewish pupils were transferred to Jewish schools. Only children of frontline soldiers were exempted. We, the three Jews of class 2c, were permitted to stay on, as our fathers had fought in the war.



The class of 1934 with head teacher A. Hurler. The Jewish boys in the class were: Heinz Lichtenstein (top row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from the right), after his emigration Prof. Hugh Lytton of Calgary (Canada), deceased in 2002; Hans Dirnbach (top row, 1<sup>st</sup> from the left) who emigrated to Yugoslavia in 1934, fate unknown; Heiner Rosenthal (2<sup>nd</sup> row from the bottom, 4<sup>th</sup> from the left).

(Photo: Jacob Rosenthal)

## The Excursion of the Class

Later on the new spirit became more noticeable between the pupils. We felt that on one of the excursions of the class, whose aim was the visit of a farm, "in order to strengthen the bond with the soil" as the order of the Ministry of Education said. While the tutor of the class, Dr. Konrad Heissner, ate lunch with the farmer, we Jews were caught by the majority of the class and chained to the empty kennels. Then the crowd stood around and made fun of us. When Dr. Heissner returned, he had freed us immediately. On the way home he ordered us to stay close to him.

This traumatic experience has remained in my memory ever since, though in retrospect it may be considered more as a prank of eleven year old boys than an anti-Semitic "pogrom".

## The Paradoxes of School Life

As Ludwig Berlin rightly states, the treatment from the directorate and the teachers was correct, but in the class we were completely isolated. Sometimes one of the few fanatic Nazis uttered an anti-Semitic remark, but this was hardly noticed by the others.

Quite a few paradoxical things occurred. As we, the Jewish pupils, observed the Sabbath and did not write on Saturdays - I had a religious phase after my Bar Mitzvah, which I relinquished later, the others came from orthodox homes - no examinations were written in class C on Saturdays - till we were more or less politely expelled in 1938!!

I also remember an incident with our tutor in the 5<sup>th</sup> class. This Dr. Wilhelm Roll was a prominent Nazi and a notorious anti-Semite. On official festivities he used to make his fanatical speeches. In his Latin tests quotations of "Dux noster" ("our leader") had to be translated.

But the worst was history. I still remember one lesson, when he stood in front of the class with a hatred torn face, lecturing us in his usual style about "Jewish black marketers" in the second German Empire. In the middle of this anti-Semitic outpouring there was a knock at the door and the "Pedell" (janitor) brought a circular. Dr. Roll interrupted his tirade, turned his gaze towards the Jewish bank which he ignored in general, lowered his voice a few octaves and announced that "the Israelitic pupils are exempted from school during the forthcoming feast of Tabernacles". Then he signed the circular, greeted the janitor with "Heil Hitler" and continued his tirade.

## **The Melanchthon-Gymnasium becomes "free of Jews"**

The end came in spring of 1938. The tutor of the following year, Dr. Joseph Hoeflinger, another stout Nazi, summoned us during intermission in the schoolyard and informed us that it was intended to make the school "judenrein" ("free of Jews") in the forthcoming year. He suggested that our parents enrol us in an institute with more "comrades of our faith".

After that our teacher of religion, the aforementioned Rabbi Dr. Isaak Heilbronn, tried to have us transferred to the New Humanistic Gymnasium near the Koenigstor (King's Gate), whose rector he knew. Naturally under the given circumstances this was not possible, but I have never forgotten this courageous move.

My parents removed me immediately and I spent my last school year in Germany in the Gymnasium of the Jewish community in Berlin. I had to switch from humanistic to the realistic curriculum, but this year in a Jewish school was one of the most impressive memories of my whole youth, despite the November pogrom.

## **Back in Nuremberg**

62 years later my wife and I were guests of the City of Nuremberg. Upon my request we were invited to visit the Melanchthon-Gymnasium. It was an exciting event to return to the places of my youth. I was pleasantly surprised by the many modern changes. Also I am obliged to Mr. Bock the history teacher, who arranged a meeting with the students of the upper classes.

The students had many questions and I enjoyed the dialog with another German generation. But there was not much knowledge about German-Jewish history. During the visit I was asked, if it is true that the Melanchthon-Gymnasium was "an island of humanism in the brown ocean of the Third Reich". This question was an immense surprise for me. I explained to my audience, that the school was made "judenrein" already in spring 1938, long before the order of the law. But if there was any kind of opposition between the teaching staff is beyond my knowledge.

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