



Commercial Counselor Ludwig Rosenzweig, Nuremberg

(25.3.1861 in Nuremberg - 29.10.1943 in Glarus, Switzerland)

In the “Reminiscences of Ludwig Rosenzweig” his grandson, Mr. Eric G. Yondorf, not only describes the personality and achievements of the former President of Nuremberg’s Israelite Congregation, but also paints a colorful picture of the families and the community of that time which allows deep insights into the destroyed world of Jewish life in this city before 1945. In addition, the text is enriched by photos and family documents in the possession of the author.

rijo wants to thank Mr. Yondorf for his readiness to cooperate, the provision of the material and particularly for the difficult translations of the German sources in a charming, but old fashioned style into English. We hope for many readers of his interesting, amusing and touching contribution to our series of biographies so that Commercial Counselor Ludwig Rosenzweig will be remembered particularly in his native country which persecuted and expelled him.

rijo

Reminiscences of Ludwig Rosenzweig

By his Grandson

Eric G. Yondorf

A commanding figure, my grandfather Ludwig Rosenzweig stood some six feet tall. His bald head, trim mustache and ever-present pince-nez gave him a very distinguished look. In delightful contrast, his beloved wife Mathilde, nee. Guckenheimer, was much shorter and a bit rotund. Both were born in the walled inner city of Nuremberg, just a few blocks apart, he on March 25 1861, she on September 27, 1870. Not surprisingly, the fathers of both were hop-merchants, since Nuremberg was a world center of hop trading at that time and much of the hop business was in Jewish hands. Married on May 26, 1891, the two were destined to live through 52 happy years in sometimes tempestuous times. Ludwig had an older sister and two unmarried nephews locally as well as three nieces who had married out of town. An older brother had moved away during the 1880s, probably to America, and was not heard from again.

My grandfather was received very warmly into the Guckenheimer family which included three sisters-in-law, four brothers-in-law, their spouses and children. The Guckenheimers had two things in common: they loved good food and delighted in each others company. With his friendly intelligence, his sense of humor and his success in business and public life, Ludwig soon became the virtual head of this extended clan.



Ludwig Rosenzweig in the year 1936

It was difficult to imagine the Rosenzweig-Guckenheimer family without nicknames. Ludwig among us simply was “Us” [vowel ‘u’ sounds as in ‘book’], probably derived from the baby talk of his son Fritz (born 8.6.1894) who for reasons unknown to me was called “Icker” by all. My brother and I were “die Mistfinken” which could be elegantly translated as “Barn Yard Finches”. My mother had two first cousins named Sophie; this caused no confusion since their life-long nicknames were “Gogo” and “Gockel”. Special family occasions were happily celebrated, often with humorous verses or song parodies.

I myself was born on April 1, 1922 in the Rosenzweigs’ large late 19th century flat on Marienplatz 7 as the second son of Emil Jondorf (12.15.1884) and Fanny Rosenzweig-Jondorf (2.16.1897). My brother Walter had preceded me on October 2, 1920. My parents lived with the Rosenzweigs after their marriage on August 10, 1919, as it was difficult to find a suitable dwelling so shortly after the lost war, and the ensuing inflation did not simplify the search. Not until the summer of 1926 did my parents find an apartment to their liking on Veillodterstraße 33. In any event, my life started in a very warm nest even though one would have to allow that the years on Marienplatz might not always have been very easy on my father. Imagine a household with grandparents, parents, two small children, nurse-maid, cook, periodic cleaning lady, laundry woman and ironing lady, supplemented every morning by grandmother’s hairdresser!



Fritz "Icker" Rosenzweig (1915)



Emil and Fanny Jondorf, behind them Stephan Guckenheimer, Mathilde Rosenzweig's oldest brother (1938)

As fate would have it, my mother's older brother Fritz had been killed on April 1, 1918, after almost four years of service on the western front in France. He had been a very promising student of law at Heidelberg University when he volunteered for war duty, and was, one might say, the apple of his parents' eyes. Fanny played a more subordinate role in that household. His death came as a terrible shock. It placed Fanny in a difficult situation. In no way could she replace her bright and charming brother, but all of a sudden she was the only, deeply beloved child.

Luckily, the arrival of two grand children (a third, Herbert, died shortly after his birth in 1926 of a birth defect) brought comfort and hope into my grandparents' house, and for Walter and me an unforgettable relationship to Ludwig and Mathilde Rosenzweig. As an independent businessman, my grandfather could set his own working hours while we were young, and although he had many civic obligations as well, he always managed to find a bit of quality time to spend with us. There were frequent Sunday excursions into the environs of Nuremberg where under his guidance we visited important sites and architectural monuments and learned their historic significance. Never will I forget picnicking at the "Alte Veste" (Old Fort) near

Fürth where the famous Imperial Field Marshal Wallenstein had an encampment during the 30 Years War!

Our parents often came along, as well as old friends of the Rosenzweigs so that lunch time conversations in one of the typical outdoor restaurants could become mighty interesting. We got out of the city by streetcar, bus or train to explore the scenic Franconian hinterland. My grandparents never owned an automobile. In addition to such forays, there were visits to museums or stage performances which served to widen our cultural horizons. Such outings were naturally enhanced by refreshments at a milk bar or coffee shop.

After we started school, we had lunch every Wednesday (school free afternoon) at the Rosenzweigs where our favorite dishes would be served. We ate at a leisurely pace and talked a lot. We were asked about our progress at school, discussed current events (at a level we could comprehend), heard about aspects of the hop business and of happenings in the Jewish world, since Grandfather was the President of the Nuremberg Jewish Community since 1926. He often amused us with tales of business trips into the hop regions of Bohemia and Galicia in the days of the old Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and surprised us with his memory for classic quotes from his Latin studies at the Realgymnasium many, many years before. At the end of a meal, he loved to smoke his favorite cigar, a long, thin, strongly aromatic "Virginia" with genuine straw mouthpiece which, after intensive pleading, we were often allowed to light.

Wednesday afternoons were devoted to the "Wellingtoners", an exclusive group named for the Duke of Wellington whose successes in military and political affairs Grandfather had much admired; it consisted of Grandpa, our nurse-maid Louise Wegerer, Walter and myself. We sought for adventures in the city: perhaps an exciting film or a visit to a coffee house with dance music; Dutzendteich, a rowing lake, and the airport were favorite destinations as was the "Kaiserpanorama", a stereopticon with travel slides in the old Toll House. We would chat over ice cream and pastries, and learn something about Nobel Prizes and Einstein, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing or Martin Buber and would possibly absorb a bit of worldly wisdom, too.

My grandparents always loved to travel. Around 1905 they journeyed with their friends, the Josephthals, to Constantinople. I think that bespeaks a certain love of adventure! Later on, Cannes and San Remo as well as Florence and Rome became favorite destinations. We grandchildren and Mama were taken along sometimes to more modest places. My Father was traveling on business a lot and could not always come with us. Joined vacations in Innsbruck, Igls, Garmisch, Bad Reichenhall and Bolzano remain unforgettable for me to this day. We looked at old castles, visited art galleries and armories, admired magnificent churches, tried out every cable car and mountain railway in reach, walked along breath-taking trails and took in the beauties of nature. Here, too, good eating played an important role: after all, one had to try out the local culinary delights!



“The Barn Yard Finches” in 1922: Walter Jondorf and the author lying on his back

How should I describe Ludwig Rosenzweig, the man, as I remember him from my youth? He seemed friendly and accommodating, tending to keep his cool. He spoke in a low voice, slowly and thoughtfully. When he was trying to explain or resolve something he tended to use the Socratic method of discussion to bring all relevant details into play. This he did with tact and good humor. What were some negative aspects of this personality? He suffered fools poorly, and he was at times more sarcastic than circumstances called for. This could lead to animosities at times, even within the family. But he never carried grudges very long.

The Nazi access to power in 1933 did not bring many changes in our family life at first. Gradually, one had to be more careful in the choice of Sunday outings (more and more destinations posted JEWS NOT WANTED signs), was occasionally exposed to taunting anti-Semitic remarks in public places, and became ever more aware of the uncertainty of a Jewish future in Germany. In spite of these gathering clouds, my grandparents moved from the much too large, old-fashioned apartment on Marienplatz into a modern, very comfortable flat on Laufertorgraben 6. There, Grandfather's large library became for Walter and me a place of refuge and discovery. In Nuremberg, at the time, there were no readily accessible public neighborhood libraries. We delighted in browsing through art books, historical tomes, samples of classical literature and a variety of reference works. A highlight of the new apartment was the “Salon”, decorated in green and gold, furnished with rococo chairs, inlaid Turkish side tables and display cases of collectibles, the whole lit by a crystal chandelier.

My father was in favor of leaving Germany early on; my mother was very reluctant, mostly because she was very much attached to her parents. Grandfather was increasingly occupied with the affairs of the Jewish Community, especially with its social service and charitable institutions, which increased in importance as the oppressive effects of Nazi restrictions became more and more serious.



Marienplatz 7 in 1925: The apartment of the Rosenzweigs occupied the third floor

My grandmother, too, was much involved in Jewish charities. Now and then, we grandsons were taken along on shopping expeditions on behalf of the Jewish orphans which often included a visit to Nuremberg's largest toy shop - Nirvana for us! Grandfather was dismissed from his position as President of the German Hop-Trading Organization shortly after the Nazi takeover. But a short time later he was elected to the "Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland" [National Representation of Jews in Germany] to which he belonged until August of 1939. In 1936, he had liquidated his hop-business, mostly for reasons of age. Like many others Grandfather thought that emigration was a sensible idea for the younger generation, but not one that would make good sense for him and Mathilde. What were those in power likely to do to retired people?

The "Wellington Afternoons" continued as before; my brother and I now were students at the Realgymnasium [a classical high school] as Grandpa had been before us. Then, like a clap of thunder, came the "Nuremberg Laws", a codex of anti-Jewish regulations, according to which Louise had to leave our household by the end of 1935. From this time on, my father pursued his thoughts of emigration much more seriously; but he and his brother, Fritz, were the owners of two businesses, G. Jondorf and Elektronoris, which they wanted to sell at a fair price prior to finalizing plans of departure - a difficult proposition under the prevailing circumstances. In this atmosphere, my father decided to send Walter to a boarding school in French Switzerland for the time being, and then to find temporary homes for us with American relatives. To accomplish this, we all would need American affidavits, i.e. guarantees by a U.S. citizen that none of us would become public burdens in the United States after our immigration. Once these were in hand, one could apply for a quota number at the nearest American Consulate which would eventually lead to the issuance of an American Visa. This process worked fairly quickly in 1937 so that my brother was able to emigrate to Chicago in the fall of that year.

My grandparents were sad, but altogether understanding. My own emigration was to be delayed until I had finished my sixth year in high school. I did have a quota number by then, but no idea when it might be called up. As a result, I started an internship as a machinist in my father's factory in April of 1938.

Although our family was very liberal in its religious practices, the Jondorfs, Guckenheimers and Rosenzweigs had maintained the old Jewish tradition of Friday evening family meals. As a result we would get together rather regularly at one house or another in a larger circle of relatives which, however, began to shrink noticeably as time went on. During lively conversations at the dinner table, I became more and more aware to what extent Ludwig Rosenzweig aided friends and relatives either through the social service institutions of the Jewish community or with private means in order to facilitate their emigration or to ease their increasingly difficult existence in Germany.

On the early morning of November 10, 1938 I rode the street car to work as usual. Once there, I was informed by a dyed- in-the-wool National-Socialist co-worker, that many of the Jewish shops downtown had been ransacked during the night; he also asked if anything had happened at our apartment. I told him that I was aware of nothing; but I promptly called my mother at home who informed me that that my 77 year old grandfather had been arrested during the night, and the apartments of my Uncle Fritz (a disabled war veteran) and my widowed Aunt Helen had been roughly searched by storm troopers, and considerable damage had been done to furnishings. A short time later, a functionary of the German Labor Front appeared in my father's office. He immediately called all 4 Jewish employees together in order to inform them that they were banned from the premises from that moment on. My father and uncle were told that they had to sell the factory to a Mr. Proeschold, with whom talks about a sale had been going on for years, for a ridiculously low price determined by the Labor Front. My father was allowed into the factory his father had founded and built only for the formalities involved in the forced sale.



Mathilde Rosenzweig, née Guckenheimer, in the year 1936

My mother was naturally much worried about her mother and father and went to her parents' apartment on Laufertorgraben as soon as possible. It was decided that my father and I should also spend the following night with Grandma, partially as a comfort to her, and partially in order not to be found in our untouched apartment should there be a resumption of residential raids. My grandmother at that time had a very plucky, somewhat older Jewish housekeeper who had been forced to leave her home in the surrounding countryside. She immediately volunteered to go to police headquarter the next day to discover the fate of Ludwig Rosenzweig. There she was told that he was in protective custody, and that she could return in the morning

to bring a few toiletries and such to make him more comfortable. We spent another worried night at the Rosenzweigs. If I remember correctly, Ludwig returned from prison the following day in surprisingly good shape. I do believe, however, that from the "Reichskristallnacht" (Night of the Broken Glass) on he was prepared to leave Germany - if only there were a place to go.

In the meantime, my American quota number was called and I was able to leave Germany from Bremerhaven on December 16, 1938 after an incredible amount of bureaucratic dicker-ing, and the payment of 6500 RM for the privilege of taking books, clothing, a bicycle and a typewriter out of the country.

The Christmas decorations in Bremen were bright and festive, as if there never had been a "Kristallnacht"; only some boarded up shop windows remained as silent reminders. Taking leave from my grandparents was very hard in view of the likelihood that we would never see each other again. In my luggage was their old "Great Brockhaus Encyclopedia" one of my favorite objects for browsing in earlier, happier years.

My parents now doubled their own efforts towards emigration to America; but their quota numbers were sky-high, and Germany became evermore threatening toward Czechoslovakia. How much longer was peace likely to last? Their major efforts shifted towards finding a temporary refuge somewhere abroad: their passports show consular stamps from Bolivia, Chile, Brazil and England. On July 11, 1939, my parents obtained a transit visa for England. After much running around to wind up their affairs in Nuremberg, they actually arrived in Harwich on August 29, 1939. World War II started on September 1. Until their emigration to America from Liverpool on May 16, 1940, my parents lived in Penarth, Wales not far from cousins who had settled in Britain somewhat earlier.

In the course of 1939, my grandfather was given the opportunity to retire to Switzerland on a small stipend made available by the Hamburg Warburgs (an important banking family) in appreciation of his work on the "Reichsvertretung" where he was closely associated with one of the Warburg brothers. It took some time to get his departure squared with the authorities, but it seems that the Rosenzweigs were able to settle down at the Hotel "Glarner Hof" in Glarus on June 19, 1940. There they lived rather happily and in relatively good health until the death of my grandfather of pneumonia on October 23, 1943. He was buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Zurich. My Grandmother continued to reside at the "Glarner Hof" until her own emigration to Chicago in March of 1946. She lived contentedly with my parents for five more years and died peacefully on March 17, 1951.

All during the war, my grandparents attempted to correspond with their ever more widely spread circle of friends and relatives; easier said than done. Many letters were lost or under-way for months. As deportations of Jews to camps and ghettos in the East became more frequent from all parts of occupied Europe many contacts ceased. And here they sat, helpless to help, in their safe haven no more than fifty miles from the land of horror. They had no notion of how bad the situation in Germany truly was and how many members of their circle were to perish in the Holocaust.

We must be grateful that the Rosenzweigs could be saved at the last moment. To this day I am reminded of the wonderful times we spent in my grandparents' home by a few small collectibles which Grandma brought over with her; they are now proudly displayed in my own library.



Congratulations of the Israelite Congregation to Ludwig Rosenzweig for his 70th birthday on March 25, 1931

Chicago, in October 2001

Translated Documents

Correspondence upon the resignation of Ludwig Rosenzweig as President of the Jewish Congregation in Nuremberg, translated by Mr. Eric Yondorf

Ludwig Rosenzweig's letter of resignation to the Israelite Congregation Nuremberg

Nuremberg, August 24, 1939

To the
Administration of the
Israelite Congregation
Nuremberg

I have spent a lifetime in the services of the Congregation and of German Jewry.

I believe I have remained at my post to the last moment. At this time, however, the well known higher powers are forcing me to emigrate and to relinquish my office, which I now place at your disposal.

I beg you to refrain from any gestures of thanks; I feel rewarded in the knowledge that during my many years in office I have been able to cause and to achieve some good for our Congregation and its members.

On the other hand, I owe you, Members of the Board, my deeply felt gratitude for your tireless cooperation which enabled me to fulfill my tasks. I beg you to extend my thanks to all the officers and employees of our Congregation.

In spite of various difficulties and disappointments which have caused me many a sleepless night, I find taking leave from you and the Congregation extraordinarily difficult.

I shall refrain from pursuing the sentimental inclination of expressing wishes for the future wellbeing of our Congregation. Its fate cannot be influenced by good wishes; it rests in God's gracious hand.

With this letter I take the liberty to deliver to you my portrait not out of vanity, as you can well imagine, but to continue a tradition that has been alive in our Congregation since the times of Josephthal [Gustav Josephthal, early president].

You should see in the picture merely the "unknown Parnes [president]" - much like the "unknown soldier" - who like all Parnosim [plural of Parnes] has given his life for Jewry, albeit only in the mental sense, the leading figure during the most difficult time that ever has come over our Congregation.

Farewell and my sincere greetings

yours
L. Rosenzweig

Reply by the Administration of the Congregation

September 18, 1939

Commercial Counselor
Ludwig Rosenzweig
Nuremberg

Most honored Mr. Commercial Counselor!

With your letter of August 24, 1939, you have submitted to the Board of the Jewish Community your resignation from the office of President because of your impending emigration.

We need not stress how much your leadership abilities will be missed in these difficult times. For three decades - a whole generation - you have belonged to the administration of the Community, and it would not be possible to adequately praise your work and your successes in the confines of this letter. But this much can be emphasized: your abilities, your zeal for work, your sure judgement - all far above average - made their mark from the very beginning. It was entirely as a result of your personality that you were able to attain a leading position within the administration early on, and that you ascended to the top position of President of the Community in 1926 after the passing of Confidential Counselor Held of blessed memory.

For 13 years you have led our congregation and steered it safely through the uncertainties of an ever more difficult time.

You stressed in your leave-taking letter of August 24 that you had sacrificed your life - in an abstract sense - to the wellbeing of the Jewish community; there is no one among us who - touched and moved at the same time - would not concur with these words.

Nothing happened in our community for which you did not show personal concern. It is to your credit that we have institutions whose activities have been a blessing; due to your balanced and conciliatory nature peace has prevailed in our community. It was your personality which for decades put its stamp upon our communal life and set its goals and direction.

In our hearts here, and in those of the members of our community spread all over the world, gratitude lives on for your unforgettable work and for your personal commitment.

With our thanks to you, most honored Mr. Commercial Counselor, we wish to include our sincere thanks to your wife who with great understanding enabled you to devote your time and your whole person to your difficult tasks.

To our thanks we add this request: maintain the connection with us as time goes on. You have modestly declined to follow the tradition of accepting the President Emeritus position which was offered to you. But we ask you to participate in our work, when your time permits, and to assist us with your proven counsel in facilitating our difficult work.

Finally, we wish to join to our thanks a prayer to the benign destiny that may bring a happy retirement to you and your most honored wife.

With sincerest respect

The Board of the Jewish Community
[signed] Katzenberger

Letter from the Association of Bavarian Jewish Congregations

Munich, September 3, 1939

Highly Honored Mr. Commercial Counselor,

With profound sadness have we received the news, that you are about to relinquish your position in your Congregation and our Association, and will take leave from us [to emigrate].

With this external act, we are starkly confronted by the monstrousness of our time, and we witness the demise of a creation [the Jewish organizational structures] that was built up with so much love and work, and which should have deserved an honorable place in the history of German Jews. In the flow of historic development, none of man's works are forever. One force, however is indestructible: good will and moral power which stand above mundane events, and whose influence will continue through time until conditions will be ripe for rebuilding.

And so we can say that your personality, your work, and your ethos will be forever linked with your Congregation and the Congregations of Bavaria and will carry on the name of our organization, even though its public activity will be ended.

We, your coworkers, would like to express our sincerest thanks for all that you have been to our work, and to us personally. We know, that time and place cannot loosen our feelings of closeness, and, come what may, we would like to maintain our ties with you.

In hearty admiration and gratitude

yours
[signed] Dr. Neumeyer

Letter from the Federal Association of Jews in Germany

[September 1939]

Federal Association of Jews in Germany, Berlin-Charlottenburg

Mr. Commercial Counselor
Ludwig Rosenzweig
Nuremberg

Very honored, dear Mr. Commercial Counselor,

Many thanks for your letter of August 28. We are truly happy that we could make a small contribution to fulfill the wish you were pursuing.

We have the sincere desire to express to you once again how truly grateful we are to you. You have worked tirelessly for your Congregation in tranquil times, and you have manned your post bravely and steadfastly in difficult days; yet you have always looked beyond the needs of your Congregation and had an understanding for the tasks and problems of Jewish totality.

At all times we could truly consider you one of us, could put our confidence in you, expect your assistance, and trust in your good counsel.

Our sincere wishes for you bespeak our warmest gratitude. May good days come to you.

With sincere greetings

THE FEDERAL ASSOCIATION OF JEWS IN GERMANY
[signed] Dr. Hirsch [signed] Dr. Baeck



Ludwig Rosenzweig's grave at Zurich's Jewish cemetery with his great-grandchildren Miriam and David, May 1983

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