

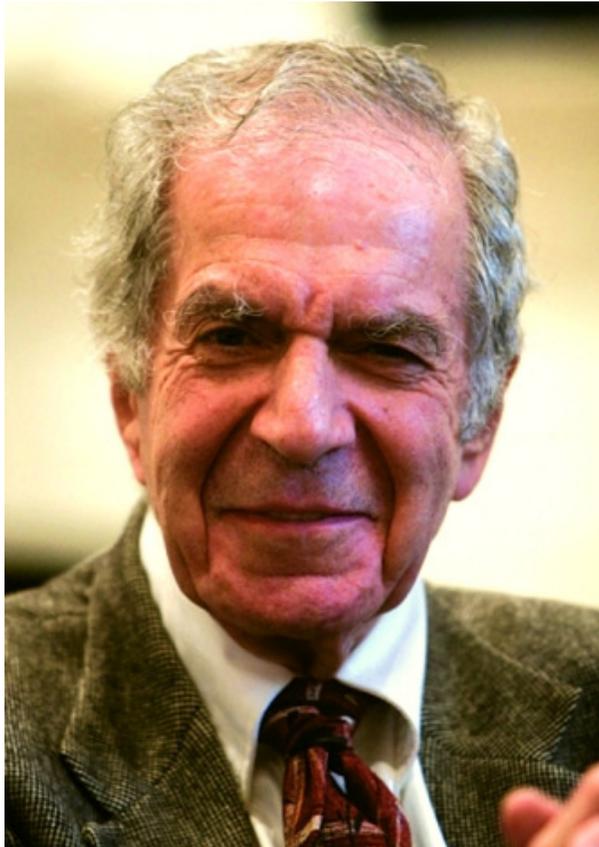


# Personal recollections of Claude Frank

(Dec. 24, 1925 Nuremberg - Dec. 27, 2014 NYC)

by

*Lore Strauss*



(Photo: Lore Strauss)

Our families were always close: Already our grandparents were friends, Claude's father was hired by my grandfather right out of law school; our parents were friends. Claude's brother Peter was my age and Claude was a year older than my brother.

Fast forward to 1938: Claude's mother Irma went to Paris with him and her sister Ella and her daughter Ruth from Frankfurt. By then Ella's husband had died (a natural death, as far as I remember) back in Frankfurt and Lutz and Irma were divorced for quite a while already, but an extremely friendly divorce and Lutz was in Belgium with Peter.

I came to Paris later, in the last days of 1938, with my brother and grandmother (mother's mother); my father was there already since summer. We lived in an awful furnished apartment until my mother came in the spring of 1939. She had stayed back in Nuremberg with my father's sister who was still in the Jewish hospital in Fürth, trying to heal after an attack during *Kristallnacht* on November 9, 1938 when her husband was killed. Later, after they had been in Africa in the French *Legion Etrangere*, her two sons landed in Auschwitz.

Eventually we (my parents, brother, grandmother and Aunt Emily) moved to the building the Franks lived in. They were in the old low part, we in the new high-rise part in Neuilly, right next to the Bois de Boulogne and the Seine. Not bad, beautiful. We four kids spent a lot of time together, it was great. I played the violin, so we often played together, Claude and I.

Came the time I joined a very well known youth orchestra. You had to be accepted by the director, a woman - no tapes then. One had to audition for the *directrice* and bring one's accompanist. Of course, I brought Claude. We had been practicing a Schubert sonata. It went very well and I was accepted. She couldn't get over how well Claude played but could not use him in her orchestra.

All went more or less well, except that my father was interned by the French in Paris as a foreign Jew with thousands more, and Aunt and Grandmother also, but they were shipped somewhere in the middle of the country. That left the four kids and assorted mothers until June 10, 1940 when the Germans marched into Paris. Our escape is a whole story by itself.

Eventually we all landed in Southern France, Carcassone, where we split up, tears running. Claude had a teenage crush on me, my brother on Ruth, it was all very sad. They continued, walked over the border in the Pyrenees to Portugal and then Spain and got passage to NY because some important people there in a hotel realized that someone who played the piano the way Claude did needed to get passage to the USA.

And that's how they got here. Claude then studied with Schnabel and Serkin and they moved to West 92<sup>nd</sup> Street. By the time we came to NYC (not all of us at the same time - my brother, grandmother and I got our papers first), my brother George moved in with the Franks. By then Claude had a teaching job at Bennington, a well known college in Vermont, and commuted weekly. I am talking now 1947. We spent quite a bit of time together: They had a nice apartment, Claude's mother Irma and her sister Ella were fantastic cooks and it was a place to go to. Claude did many concerts, also chamber music, and after every concert there was open house on 92<sup>nd</sup> Street where you met the most famous musicians, conductors and youngsters on their way.

Claude met his wife Lilian at Marlboro, the famous music camp for adult musicians where the most famous and some not yet that famous spent time playing and learning. It is in Vermont, was started and run by Rudolf Serkin and still exists - concerts for the public every weekend, all summer.

Lilian and Claude got married, had Pamela who became a very well known violinist and was brought up as much by her grandmother Irma and her sister Ella who had by then moved from 92<sup>nd</sup> Street to West End Avenue, just a few blocks from Claude and Lilian. Claude was incredibly proud of Pam and they were extremely close.

Claude didn't just play the piano well, he was a musician through and through and extremely intelligent. There was not a subject he couldn't discuss. He was well informed of the day-to-day news. And a lot of joking!

For the past 30 years or so Thanksgiving has been celebrated at our house, always with about 22 people, family and friends, always the Franks, of course, and after dinner music by everyone who could play the piano, Lilian, Claude and two of my children (the other two played trumpet and violin respectively). Mistakes didn't matter, Claude always praised them. First the kids and guests, who ever wanted to, and then Lilian and Claude, sometime four-hand.

I remember the year my two kids played a four-hand piece and between movements they changed places on the piano bench. Ever since Claude did that also, calling it the *Strauss-change*. He could be very funny, very understanding and is totally irreplaceable.

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