

MY GERMAN CHILDHOOD

By Peter Stern

When writing a history, even a personal history, it would be assumed that there is a starting point where it all began, the important moment. I wish it were so. My memory starts, and then seems to run on like a movie. I can't say that I remember anything before having moved to Marine Strasse #1, near the Bahnhof in Nurnberg. I believe it was in my third year of life that we moved there.

My family consisted of my mother, Karolina, my father, Artur, and my younger brother, Sam. My brother was born in Furt in January, 1939 and I was born in March of 1936. We shared this house with at least three or four other families. The house had one kitchen to be shared by all these people. None of the families were related.

One of my vivid memories of the surroundings of the house is of the many marching soldiers: it seemed there was always a troop of soldiers playing a marching song. The multitudes of color in the uniforms was also something that intrigued me.

One time, walking to house with my father, we were stoned by some young boys not much older than I was. I remember standing in the street and wondering why my father did not chase the boys or why people were just looking at us. Although I am sure that the children must have been yelling at us as well, the memory is like a silent movie with emotions, rather than words, as the captions.

There were other incidents, which pointed to the fact that I was different, yet I did not know that until later. Both instances involved some stealth. I remember my mother taking me to the doctor's office, or rather the hall of a building, waiting until the doctor took us into the office. He removed my tonsils and we walked home. The second incident occurred in Erlangen, the home of my grandparents. My mother's uncle and I waited at the side entrance of a movie house until we were let in. The show had started. I don't remember the movie, or if there was one, but I do remember the newsreel. It was full of tanks in combat and marching soldiers.

The anxieties that existed and that I remember were all given to me by the other people in the house, not by my parents. A woman who lived in a room in the house with her daughter and granddaughter kept asking what was to become of us, hugging and clutching all of us children. Another frightful time was when a man came and we had to show him all we owned. All the cupboards were opened; he was shown everything. My mother kept asking me to keep my brother quiet. This was the cataloging of our personal properties prior to our forced evacuation to the newly conquered East.

The deportation came in parts. Most of the people in the house, including the girl from across the hall, were taken away by police vans. I remember being anxious and very jealous and sad about having my special friend leave. On the cold November day when we were picked up I was no longer excited. I was just scared and remember clutching my parents. It was just as scary as an air raid that had occurred not too long before our departure. It was all so new, and everyone, even the adults, seemed afraid.

For some days we stayed at a barracks-like building where innumerable folding chairs were stacked. This was the first time that I realized that my father was someone special. The German officers were friendly toward him as opposed to how some of the

other people were addressed. Many of the people seemed to ask for his advice at the waiting station and on the train to Latvia.

The ride to Latvia was long and crowded, yet done in a degree of comfort that was not to be believed, compared to subsequent trips. My family was crowded into a compartment with another family of four. Considering all the baggage, there was hardly room to move, but nonetheless was not too uncomfortable. One of the children received insulin shots. This was a constant source of embarrassment to her (she must have been about twelve years old) and a worry to her parents about what would happen when there was no more medicine.

At the end of this trip, as we were walking through a snowy road to another detention camp, a woman in front of us started to stagger, lost her underwear and fur stole, and fell. Since we were right behind her, my mother cradled her until she died. My father was on a truck with all the luggage and came by later to help carry off the body. It was the first of many bodies.

The holding camp was an open space bordered by a frozen body of water. I don't remember any fences. The buildings were small for the number of people who were crowded into them, and did not have any inside plumbing. This is impressed on my memory because one evening all of the children had to stay outside and bring water in all kinds of containers which was then used to clean a young woman who had fallen into the cesspool.

If the camp had no fences, it had soldiers patrolling the area with rifles. The first shots I heard also occurred at this camp. The children all played at a small hill near the frozen lake (river?) I remember looking across this water and seeing two animals. When all of us children started to point to them, one of the guards fired at them. He told us they were wolves.

At the beginning of 1942 we were transferred to the ghetto at Riga. We, and all of our goods were moved by truck. The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and was full of people. The people on the streets were always surprised at finding each other.

The room that we lived in was small, narrow, with one window, and could only be reached by walking through another room which was as crowded as the one we were in. I do not remember how many people lived in those rooms but there were no children other than my brother and me.

My most prevailing impressions of the ghetto are my always being cold, and my view out of the ghetto through that single window which overlooked a street outside the fence. I can still see trucks filled with people and goods being moved. I don't know how, but I knew then that it was not good for those people.

In the spring of 1942 we were transferred to a building outside the ghetto, with no fences. This was a small apartment building with a central, well lighted (sunny?) staircase and community rooms near the lower stairwell. My family had two small rooms on the top floor.

This is where I tried to learn my ABC's. I remember, as we were moving into this house, trying to get my parents to listen to me recite my letters. I was six years old. We stayed there for many months. It was here that I first learned what fear and death really were, yet it was also a place where I learned about music, birth, playing and inferred power.

One of the prisoners, a Latvian, was a violinist who would occasionally play for all of us. He also cared for a stray cat. One day she gave birth to a litter on his bed. Besides my brother, there were two other children there. One was a retarded boy and the other a German boy whose father may have been in charge of the area. It was in his father's presence (I remember the boots) that we witnessed some chicks being hatched under lights. I remember being told that I had to be careful not to hurt this boy. The retarded boy once received a beating from one of the prisoners for not being careful when playing with the German boy.

This place was filled with clothing that was being sorted. The clothing was placed into piles in terms of usage: men's winter clothing, girls' dresses, etc. It was on one of these piles that I found a Jack-in-the-box type clown doll that I knew belonged to my special friend from Nurnberg. I remember running up this sunlit stairwell crying, in total despair.

At this time, I believe, my father was in charge of fixing cars with his group of students. (When my father could no longer run his garage in Nurnberg he had taught auto mechanics at the Jewish School until that too was stopped.) The students were all boys whom he had taught, and he was placed in charge of them. I remember the people in this house being very afraid for one of the boys who had been called by the SS. The waiting, which seemed to last forever, ended when he returned, saying that he had had to do some "ass kissing." It was many years later that I realized he may not have been talking in a literal sense.

Most of the time here I spent playing with cards. I would pass endless hours building card houses or cutting out the figures from the cards. It is only as I write this that I realize where this endless supply of cards came from.

During the same year we were again moved, this time to an enclosed garage in Riga. It was a courtyard and we again lived in two rooms, next door to a German officer and his family, who was probably in charge of the facility. My brother and I played with the officer's son and my brother once received a beating from one of the students because he and the German boy were trying to start one of the cars. I have only two other memories of this place: one is of standing at the "gate" of the compound and watching a bunch of schoolchildren hitching a ride on a horse cart, and feeling envious; the other is of one day when we were eating. The officer came in to talk to my father and admired the silver spoons we still had. He waited while my mother washed them and then took them with him.

At the start of 1943 we were again transferred, this time deep into Russia. My father and his group of students were to work on vehicles from the front. His family was to be shot if any of the boys tried to escape. A stand of trees separated the houses we stayed in from the Russian houses. I don't remember where the boys slept, but I do remember that we all ate together in a fairly large room. I think my mother cooked for everyone. When we first arrived there were two people who helped to move everything and who always seemed to be around, smoking newspaper cigarettes. They wore a strange brown uniform with a small military cap, the likes of which I would not see again until after the war. They were Russian traitors.

The place was full of German soldiers who treated my brother and me as toys, and as much as possible in a situation like this, spoiled us. I know I was terribly saddened when one of the soldiers I knew was brought back wounded from a night skirmish. I

remember waking up one night to the sound of gunfire. My mother remembered this as an everyday thing that my brother and I slept through.

The surrounding area, a small distance from the village, was a network of fields with a stand of trees. The fields were full of flowers and toads. I would try to rescue the toads, which had jumped into fence postholes. It was in this field that my father and I stood while he told me something which was quite serious. I do not remember the subject, but I remember the solemnity.

In the small woods separating the two groups of houses was a large hollow tree in which my brother and I played constantly. It was near this tree, one dark day, that I was approached by a Russian boy who beckoned me to come to another tree. When I finally did approach, he tried to give me some loaves of bread and tomatoes. I was so afraid, of what I cannot recall, that I refused the offer and ran back to the house.

I have no recollection of my father and some of the workers being shipped out; this has all been told to me. They were sent to a Russian city to try to fix a damaged transformer. While they were there, the Russians counterattacked my father, at great risk, rescued one of the German officers. To the best of my understanding, it was this officer who later repaid the debt by setting up a chain of events that would eventually spare the lives of my mother and brother and me.

In October we were shipped back to Riga. The boys were returned to the ghetto and we were put into the civil prison. The prison building was three stories high with cells on the perimeter of the building. The center of the building had screens on each floor to prevent people from jumping down. We were jammed into one of these small cells.

The cell had two small beds and a slop bucket, which was emptied once a day by my father. I do not remember what the sleeping arrangements were. I recall making whole armadas of paper boats out of toilet paper. My parents told Sam and me stories for most of the day, trying to entertain us.

One of the things I liked to do was watch the prisoners walking in circles in the exercise yard, something that I remember doing with my father and brother. One day a German officer came to the cell to tell us that if the wall guards saw a face at the window again they were instructed to shoot. I don't think my mother ever left the cell.

There were two trusties who would let my brother and me help to distribute some meals, and once we were allowed to crawl on the suicide screen. (It was at this time that my parents were offered the right to be "Aryans" if they gave up their children. Our mother did not tell this to my brother and me until well after the war.)

Some time before we left this prison we were transferred to one of the cells on the first floor. I don't know how long we stayed in this room, if it was for days or only a few hours. Yet I remember the fear that I felt in that dark green cell. It had one weak light bulb and no windows, and the walls, some of which I think were made of wood, were full of scratched names and dates. My parents read them aloud. They may have added theirs. I don't believe they had any idea of what might happen next.

I don't recall the start of the trip or if we traveled by day, but I remember spending many nights on the back of a truck under a lot of clothing and blankets. Every time we came to a guard station we had to be very quiet. The ride was cold, long and memorable because of the beautiful views of the stars. I don't know the name of the town in Germany we arrived in but I know the convoy of cars and trucks stopped at many

different buildings. This was the first time I saw women in evening clothes. The building where we finally found whoever it was, had a large hallway as an entrance and was well lit. We could hear music from within the building. The officer came out with two women, both in long gowns. I was very impressed.

We were brought to a courtroom where I remember being yelled at by the judge. The judge yelled at my father for what seemed a very long time. The last memory I have of my father is his asking permission to hold us. My brother, mother and I were transferred to a cell without any walls, just bars. This is the first time I saw my mother cry. She received a note from my father who had bribed a guard with his wedding ring. From here we were transferred to Ravensbruck. This occurred in January 1944.

Ravensbruck was a camp surrounded by stonewalls that had gun holes facing towards the inmates. To the right of the main entrance were the kitchen, offices and bathhouse. This was a brick building. All the others were wooden barracks. To the left of the main entrance was the infirmary, which was in turn fenced in with barbed wire. In front of this was the “parade grounds.” On the extreme right of the parade grounds there was another guarded gate, which led to a smaller cluster of barracks.

The barracks were filled to overflowing with people and to the best of my recollection were segregated according to the type of prisoners. The camp was filled with political and criminal prisoners, as well as the “*undermenschens*” such as the Jews and the Gypsies. I believe all the Jewish women, who came from Poland and Holland, and their children, were in one or two of the buildings.

The barracks were packed with straw-filled wooden bunks. My mother, brother and I shared the bottom of two bunks with a woman who had three children. One of the other children and I had our heads at the foot of the beds and were under constant orders from our mothers not to kick during the night. It was in these barracks and bunks that the children spent most of the day. The women were working as field laborers much of the time. I remember my mother once smuggled us some carrots.

The women would line up early in the morning and march out to work. Many times we would witness the physical abuse of the prisoners by the female guards. The fact that I was “German” made me the recipient of some of the same treatment from some of the other kids. I can recall two occasions from this period: at some point during the summer, all the children were outside and the women were not out working; a woman in uniform came into the area and asked if anyone had child care experience. A Dutch woman and my mother both claimed they had, and, although neither really did, this became their duty during the day. I don’t know if this lasted beyond the warm weather because I can only recall the outside activity occurring during this time.

The playground was in the corner of the camp which was diagonally opposite the entrance of the camp. This corner also had a gate, which was opened occasionally, when a guard would return the one ball that we had, which we had kicked over the wall.

Most of the time we were completely bored. We all talked and learned from each other and were old before we were children. I think we talked more about what was happening than our mothers did. The first literary discussion I ever heard was between my mother and some other women discussing *Gone With The Wind*.

The most boring times were when the entire camp would have to stand *Appel*. Whenever there was an air raid alarm, all the prisoners would have to stand silently for hours on end. Most of them seemed to be at night, and in the cold. I remember once the

camp commandant gave some candy to a set of twins (four-year-olds?) At the next *Appel*, when these children ran to get some more candy, we all gasped at their foolishness. We would not have been surprised had there been shots from the wall guards.

The many different types of people in the camp offered all of us the opportunity of learning other languages. The ease of communicating with the Dutch makes me believe that most were Germans who had moved to the Netherlands from Germany. The one contact I remember with the Gypsies was when one of them read my palm and promised that I would have a long life. Although we all laughed, I still carry that prophecy as one of my few superstitions. There was also the occasion when one of the criminal prisoners, a prostitute, was leaving and promised to send us all packages.

I do remember receiving one package. As incomprehensible as it may seem, I believe it came from my mother's relatives in Atlanta, Georgia, via the Red Cross. I cannot think that anyone in Germany would send anything to the concentration camp. I remember only two of the things in the package: a hair brush and prunes. My mother doled these out, trying to make them last.

When my father died, in May, 1944, and my mother was notified, she was distraught enough that I was able to ask for a second prune and get it. I remember sitting in the dirt in front of the barracks, drawing in the sand and feeling guilty about getting the extra prune and not feeling sad about my father.

Food was important. I remember guarding my brother's and my metal bowl of potato peel soup. Once I fought with a woman who was trying to take the piece of bread my mother had given me. Since the bread was wrapped in cloth I assume it was for lunch. I don't think there was a special place for eating but we were served from kettles in the barracks.

There was a special place for bathing. The barracks had toilets and sinks, which were always crowded and stank. Periodically we would all go to the bathhouse. This was a large room which had pipes running overhead. The water just seemed to come from these pipes. I remember some talk even then, that there were places where people were gassed. This large room had two small taps at the end. Somehow my mother and one of her friends were able to have access to them, and truly bathed six children and themselves in these small squares. These periodic communal baths created problems for some of the people. Some women complained about the maturity of two of the boys because they were getting pubic hair and they were then sent to the men's section of the camp. Both boys feigned illness for as long as they could before they were separated from their mothers.

During the fall of the year my body was covered with painful blisters which would break and cause my clothing to stick to my body. At the same time, a very large swelling developed on the left side of my neck. This too was painful when pressed. My mother took me to the infirmary where an inmate doctor probed my neck. I was then taken into the next room, had a mask placed on my face, and was asked to count. My mother told me that I screamed when the incision was made. After the operation I was put in the infirmary for a few days.

Soon after I was released, all the prisoners were made to walk by an SS officer, who literally used a wave of the hand to say who would stay and who would leave the camp. The people who were pulled out were the older and sick women. Because of my operation, my mother had wrapped my neck so that both sides looked the same and my

bandages did not show. When we were “passed” (as I believe all the children were) to stay in the camp, we walked between an outside wall and the barracks. Many of the adults cheered and cried; most of the children were subdued.

For reasons I cannot fathom, a boy my age and I sneaked out of the unguarded gate of the camp into the adjacent one. We immediately ran into the first barrack where we discovered many of the people who had been taken from the main camp. (This must have been at least a month after the line up.) While we were there, a woman officer who owned a white “Spitzer” dog made her appearance, and my friend and I were hidden under the beds until she left the area. When we returned through the gate, a soldier who was now guarding it just smiled at us and let us through the gate.

At this time male prisoners appeared in the camp to erect a large tent at the edge of the parade ground. All of the children kept badgering the men for information concerning the two boys who had been transferred. The answers were positive but not reassuring. When the tent was completed, new prisoners arrived. Their filthy, gaunt condition made us seem healthy in comparison. These were Jews who had come from the East.

In the beginning of 1945 the camp was to be emptied and we were to be moved. On a very clear, cold day people were just being formed into groups to be transported. (If there was a system I was not aware of it.) My brother and I went outside the barrack and milled around with many of the prisoners. He and I were separated and I went back into the barrack where my mother was in a state of great agitation, not knowing where we were. She knew we were not going in the first shipment and was afraid we had been taken. When we located my brother she hit us both, I think for the first time in our lives.

When we finally left, two weeks later, we were walked to a train siding and packed into freight cars. The cars were cold, crowded and dark. The trip seemed to take a long time and was very hard on all of us. The stench of people relieving themselves in the car was overpowering. Some people died during the trip.

When we arrived at Bergen-Belsen the weather was wet and gray. We were marched through muddy roads into the camp. This camp was surrounded by barbed wire. As I remember, we had to move through two sets of barbed wire gates before we got to the new barracks. These barracks were smaller than the ones in Ravensbruck and had a hallway running the length of the building with two long rooms on either side of the hallway. There were no beds; we just used the floor along the wall with our feet pointing towards the middle. There was no space between people. The building had been filled with the first load of people from Ravensbruck.

The front of the building had a small room which was occupied by the women prisoners who were in charge of the building and the distribution of food and water. I only remember seeing German guards when we arrived at the camp.

I did not eat anything for quite some time after we arrived. I remember my mother and brother trying to make me eat the watery soup. However, it was they who contracted typhus and had to be nursed by me. When they became ill we were no longer being given food or water; all that the head prisoners did was occasionally come and remove some of the bodies from the building.

One day, in order to get drinking water, I went to another barrack where I knew the head prisoner. It was a warm spring day and I had to walk through a room full of women who were begging me for the water I carried. I had to push away their arms to get

out of that sun-drenched, stinking room. Of all the images I carry with me of the war, that beautifully lighted, horrible room is one of the most vivid.

The fact that all this might end positively came to me one day when I was outside the building and a large formation of airplanes flew overhead. I started to run into the building to get ready for *Appel*, when one of the women told me they were friendly, and there would be no more *Appels*. I was also outside when we saw the first British tank (half track) come across a small square. We all yelled. This was April 15, 1945.

The soldiers came through the building handing out whatever they had in terms of food (poison to our starved bodies.) They also removed the bodies of the dead. A woman across the aisle from us died the next day, after the long-dead body of her son was removed.

Some time before we were moved out of these buildings, I and another boy walked through the now open camp. People in their striped clothing just kept walking and looking. Every building had piles of bodies in front of it. Some little shacks were filled with shoes, and one with a big stack of tires. The bodies were thrown into trucks and put into mass graves which were dug in those first days, finally getting rid of the stench.

We were moved to buildings that had been occupied by the German soldiers. The rifle racks were in the hall. We were in a large room with perhaps eight to ten women, none of whom we knew, and no other children. My brother and I came in one afternoon to find our mother in bed, yelling at some of the women. When we came in, she pulled us aside and told us not to trust the Polish women. She was totally incoherent. My brother and I went in front of the building where I started to cry uncontrollably; my brother joined in. I don't know how long we stood there crying. We were moved to a smaller, almost private room. It may have been because of this incident.

I too felt that people could not be trusted. One day two English soldiers, one female, took us for a ride to go shooting. (The soldiers were always taking us and the other children everywhere.) As we were driving along in the car I became more and more certain that we were being taken out to be shot. By the time we got to our destination I was very worried and started to whimper. By the time the woman came back from somewhere in the woods, I was bawling. All I asked for was to go back. Sam tried to bribe me with some chocolate. When we got back to the camp I had a fever. I still believe it was fear-induced.

After our liberation from Bergen-Belsen by the British forces, we were transported back to Nurnberg in the fall of 1945. There we stayed at a building on Wieland Strasse which had been a home for the Jewish elderly before the war. It was now filled with the Nurnberg survivors. Most of them were old people; they had been in the "show" concentration camps which had been put on display for the Red Cross to show that the Germans were acting properly. The year that my mother, brother and I spent in the home was a time for physical healing. I don't know if there ever has been a complete emotional healing for any survivors.

In preparation for emigrating to the US we moved to a displaced persons camp in Munich. After a while, perhaps two months, we moved to another camp in Bremen. We departed from there on January 7, 1947, on the troop transport the *Merry Marlin*. After a storm-tossed crossing we arrived in New York on the 27th of the month. However, my family could not disembark for another week. I had some spots on my lungs and we had to stay on Ellis Island until it was decided that we could land. This was a difficult time

for my mother since she knew that there would be no life for us in Germany if we were rejected by the US.

My two uncles, brothers of my mother, Martin and Willie Uhlfelder, were there to meet us. Martin had escaped to England the day before Germany attacked Poland, and had been transported to Canada, while Willie had emigrated in 1933, at age eighteen, and after serving in the American army was now married and living in Florida. A wealthy cousin of my mother's, from Atlanta, who had sponsored us and promised to start us off in America, could no longer have us in Georgia. She and her family had run out of either time or energy or desire; I really don't know. Our family did always question what our lives would have been like had we gone to Atlanta. I feel it was best we did not go, for we would always have had to be beholden to that family.

Within a week of landing, my brother and my mother roomed with a cousin in Queens, New York, and I went off to Florida with my uncle. On the ride to Florida he met a couple who hired my mother as a live-in maid when they returned to New York City. My brother stayed with the cousin and started first grade in Queens.

I started fifth grade in Florida but could not handle the work and was placed back in second grade. The many adjustments that I had to make made it an emotionally difficult time for me. Their first child and the startup of his business distracted both my uncle and aunt, so that there was little time for an eleven year old boy. I returned to New York at the end of May. Another emotional aspect of my stay in Florida was the legal segregation of the black population; I felt there wasn't much difference between my new home and the old.

That first summer in the city we moved into a tiny furnished apartment on 23rd Street. At this time my mother married our stepfather, David Schneebalg, who had come into our lives in Nurnberg. He had returned in 1945 after spending the war in the Russian army. My mother continued working as a domestic and my stepfather worked as a shipping clerk, and later, warehouse manager.

We stayed on 23rd Street for three years. During that time I skipped grades until I was in the age appropriate class. However, I was neither emotionally nor academically ready to go to high school. Because of a poor school record, bad guidance, and misconceptions about the educational system, I ended up going to a vocational high school where I was trained to be a refrigeration mechanic. I never practiced the trade. Although Murray Hill Vocational was not a place of scholarship, it was for me, a place of learning and healing. Although it was a small school, it had students who were from different parts of the city and from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Most importantly, they were non-judgemental and inclusive. This was the place of my Americanization.

After graduation in 1954 I went to a junior college. Because of my academic background, it took me an extra semester to graduate as a mechanical technician. After a year's work at the Brooklyn Navy Yard I went to the University of Missouri and received a degree in metallurgical engineering. Sam took a more conventional educational route: He went to Stuyvesant (a prestigious high school for future scientists) City College, Johns Hopkins and the University of Miami, and ended up with a PhD in biology. He retired from Boston University in 2001.

For whatever reasons, the help we expected when we arrived did not materialize, and our life was hard and financially precarious. Our parents worked at difficult jobs all

their working lives. Much of my brother's and my educational success can be credited to their support, and the opportunity of public education. It should also be said that my parents accepted the past but did not dwell on the horrors and losses of their lives.

Our religious life was minimal at best. Both Sam and I attended Hebrew school and became Bar Mitzvahs. We would go to temple on the occasional Sabbath and the High Holy Days. Our home was not kosher, but we did observe Passover and other holy days. As time passed, our religious observances dwindled away. I do not feel that religion has been a factor in my life.

My wife Julie and I have two boys, Joseph and William. Both sons graduated from college and have left the nest. Joseph has started his own family. Although my children are aware of my background, I believe that, based on their social concerns, it has been a positive influence on their lives. My wife, a first-generation American whose parents came from Russia as children at the turn of the century, is the glue that has strengthened this family. She has always been able to see the complete picture. It is because of her insight and strength that I was able to switch careers from engineering to teaching. After ten years of engineering and nearly thirty of teaching, I am now happily retired.

In writing these memories I am again impressed by my good fortune to have survived. Yet the more I learn of World War II, and the older I get, the more aware I am of the courage and strength of my parents, and the actions of individuals who risked something to help us.

Perhaps those guards in Ravensbruck risked nothing, yet I remember the fact that the ball was returned and we were given a smile, as a positive experience. The risk that the Russian boy and his family went to, in offering us some food, was much more real, as was the kindness of the trustees in the Riga prison. Above all, the risk taken by that German officer, in arranging to smuggle us back into Germany in order to give us a better chance at surviving the slaughter of the Jews, was by far the most incomprehensible act, considering how easy it would have been for him not to have done anything.

The question that is always out there, whether it is voiced or not, is how did my experiences influence my life? It is an imponderable question. Obviously, if the war had not occurred, we would not be here speaking of the horrors that happened to all of us. Since it did happen, was it nature or nurture that made me who I am? I believe that it has been that love that I have experienced in my families.

Whenever I have spoken to groups about my life, I stress the importance of family, community, love and luck. These are the factors that have made my life the positive experience that it has been. Working on the first few may influence the last.