

I, Mrs. Nathan Winkler, was born in a small city in Westphalia Germany, the second child of my parents, who had one son and two more daughters. My Father as well as his Father and Grandfather were natives of Germany.¹ The same is true of my Mother's family.

My Father served in the Armed Forces of Germany. I attended the Jewish Elementary School until I was 10 years old. Then my parents sent me to a private high school. As a language, I took French.

I got married in 1919 after World War I.² My husband, Moritz Metzger, had been drafted when he was nineteen years old into the guard artillery to serve in an Elite Regiment for Kaiser Wilhelm II. He had to be a particular height and be good looking. He served his country in WWI for four years.³

We moved to Düsseldorf, Rhineland, where I gave birth to two girls.⁴ After seven years we moved back to Westphalia, to a town with a population of 30-40,000.⁵ After Adolph Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, our future did not look too good, but we never thought that things would happen as they did. We lived under constant pressure for almost fifteen years. We suffered only because we were Jews.

In 1941 the NSDAP, the National Socialist German Party, ordered that all people of Jewish faith had to wear the yellow Star of David on every dress or coat. We were not allowed to walk on the sidewalk but had to walk on the edge of the street. The order was given we should not speak to any other citizens. Our ration of food was much smaller than those of the other citizens. We could not enter a store except on Monday between one and two o'clock. We were not entitled to get fresh fruit or fish.

One day Adolph Hitler gave the order that all disabled people, regardless of faith, should be killed. His motto was "who can not work should not eat." In this way, almost 30,000 people in institutions or in private homes were killed. The next day the family received a letter "your son or daughter died of pneumonia." It was only one half a percent of Jewish people. The Bishop of the City of Munster spoke against this.⁶ After he had spoken, the NSDAP wanted to arrest him but he said "Just a moment." He put on his purple Miter and

¹ Many of the Jews in Ahlen were named Spiegel and related. Mordechai Spiegel was allowed to settle in Westphalia by writ from Napoleon.

² Selma was the only child in her family to marry.

³ Moritz served on the French front and was about to be sent East, when he was saved by the armistice.

⁴ Laura was born December 13, 1920 and Eva was born January 28, 1926.

⁵ Rheine.

⁶ Three speeches at St. Lamberti Church in Muenster, Summer of 1941.

skullcap and they did not have the nerve to arrest him. Munster at that time had 100,000 people, three quarters of them Catholic.

We had sent our daughter Laura to high school. Two more Jewish girls attended the same school, but those two girls were dismissed. Laura could stay because her Father was a distinguished war veteran. The girls in her class had to belong to the Hitler Youth and were afraid to talk to her. My child stayed in the corner all by herself. Then she came home and said to me "mother, please take me out of school." The next day I gave her a letter for dismissal. Her teacher did not accept it and asked me to come to the school. She said to me, you should not take your daughter out of school. When I told her the reason, she agreed and offered to give our daughter private lessons, but I told the teacher that I would not risk her position, if anyone should find out. From then on we sent our daughter to school to a Berufsschule to learn the family business.⁷

One Friday evening, Laura came home crying. When I asked her "Laura, why are you crying." she told me she was sent to the post office to get the mail for the business when an eighteen year-old boy spit in her face. "Mother, I cannot live in this country any longer. Please write to New York to my cousin Kathe and ask her if she can swear out the affidavit so that I can go to the USA." I might explain here, that you only can enter the USA under a special quota and when a blood relative makes a sworn affidavit. The reason for this was you have to be in the country five years before you get your citizenship and should you be without work, you fall back on the person who had made out the paper.

I wrote to my niece to ask her if she could make the affidavit. After three months, in September,⁸ we received the letter from America that my niece, Laura's cousin, would make out the paper.⁹ The following year, Laura went by boat to America. My husband took her to Hamburg. It was a sad good-by for all of us.¹⁰

The year went by and the situation got worse for us. We tried to get our papers, even to South America, and we were swindled out of lots of money

⁷ Selma and Moritz owned a shop in Rheine that sold china and glassware. Laura was apprenticed to the Anschels.

⁸ 1937.

⁹ This was Kathe Katz –nee Metzger, a first cousin to Laura.

¹⁰ Moritz felt he would never see his daughter again, and he was right. Laura arrived in New York in March of 1938. At first, she stayed in Brooklyn with Kathe and Jack. Laura spoke of Kathe's mother or mother-in-law. While Laura was not fond of this woman, Laura respected her for her persistent efforts to bring over as many German Jews as she could by this form of sponsorship.

without any progress.¹¹ In the meantime, my husband's business failed¹² and we were ordered out of our apartment to live in a Jewish house.¹³

My husband had to do hard labor. He left the house at six o'clock in the morning and returned at six o'clock in the evening.¹⁴ Eva could not stay at her school any longer.¹⁵ We had to send her thirty minutes by train to a Jewish School. In the summertime, I could not go out into the street after four o'clock in the afternoon.

The summer was hard.¹⁶ We lived in two rooms. We could not open a window. The planes from England attacked every night. Ours was a border town.¹⁷ We were not allowed to go in the cellar.¹⁸

The ninth of November¹⁹ always brings bad memories back to me. It was then that Adolph Hitler gave the order to destroy all Jewish stores, demolish all Jewish houses, businesses, doctors, lawyers, etc.²⁰ Our apartment was so demolished, we fled with the family on the first floor under police watch in a car that was sent for us to a small village where we spent six days.²¹ Our landlady, who was seventy years old, died that evening of a heart attack. We buried her when we returned.²² I called my Mother and family²³ who were also homeless and taken in by friends.

After the ninth of November, all Jewish homes or real estate had to be sold, but at only one-third of their price. The money went to the bank; only a certain

¹¹ Laura worked as a housekeeper and borrowed money from her employer—the Schoen's. She was supposed to get documents for transit to Uruguay, but no papers were ever issued. Laura struggled to repay the money and still had no solution for her family's worsening situation.

¹² Due to the boycott of Jewish-owned businesses that began in April, 1933.

¹³ The Anshel house still stands in Rheine.

¹⁴ They were paving streets with the headstones from the Jewish cemetery in Rheine. These were taken up years later and the cemetery was restored and re-consecrated, by virtue of the dedication of Gertrud Althoff, currently of Munster.

¹⁵ The only Jewish teacher was no longer allowed to live in Rheine after 1933.

¹⁶ 1941.

¹⁷ The first bombardment took place on a Sunday morning in 1940. Rheine was on a flight path from London to Berlin. It had important railway, road and canal junctions and it was near two military airports.

¹⁸ There was a community air-raid shelter that was off-limits to Jews.

¹⁹ "Kristallnacht," November 9, 1938.

²⁰ ...and synagogues.

²¹ This family was Emil Salomon and his wife Betty (nee Scheuer) and their children Ernst and Eva. They fled to the village of Metelen.

²² This woman must have been Julie Reinhaus, age 79, who died when she tried to escape by jumping into a garden from the first floor balcony of the building.

²³ They lived in Ahlen, which was more charged with anti-Semitism than the industrial town of Rheine.

amount could be taken out of your account each month for living expenses. My Mother's house was demolished and my relatives were ordered to leave the city in two days. I went to my hometown to help my family pack. We spent a horrible night and the NSDAP did not let us sleep for even an hour.

The next morning, we took three cars and went to the train station so they could take the express train to Berlin. I went back to my home, in the opposite direction. We sent Eva to high school in Berlin. She would stay with my Mother and family.²⁴

Jewish people were not allowed to use a train without permit of the Gestapo. The Gestapo already had sent people to concentration camp and Eva was concerned that she could be deported if she stayed in Berlin. She went to the Gestapo and asked for permission to go home, saying her Father was very sick. The man gave her the permission and she came home.

In November, my sister called from Berlin and told me that they had gotten the order to go to a camp. She asked whether we would join them. We had no telephone anymore, so I went across the street and asked my Husband. He said "No, not one minute earlier than we are called" and I told her "no." This was the last time I heard from my family. Two weeks later the Gestapo came and told us to get ready for concentration camp.²⁵

I packed warm clothes and underwear and took food for three to four days, as we would not get anything to eat on the trip. I might say here that everybody loves his home and room, even when home is only two rooms. On the eleventh of December, 1941, two Gestapo men came to the house. We were five families in one home. We were allowed to pack 100 kilograms of goods in gunnysacks. We wore three sets of underwear. On my table, I had a white tablecloth with a candle and the memory book inscribed by General Hindenburg to the veterans: "You can be sure of the thanks of the Country." We went downstairs. We joined forty-two people and were taken by bus to Munster, Westphalia, forty miles from our home town.

We arrived in Munster in the afternoon. We were taken to a restaurant in Munster, close to the railroad freight station.²⁶ This restaurant had a large dining hall floor and we entered the room with 500-600 people—most middle-

²⁴ I don't know how long Eva attended school in Berlin, but it went on for more time than it would seem from this account. Sometime after she came to United States (1948) she was shocked to meet a man who "knew" her by her looks—black braids, school uniform—and routes in Berlin. This man was apparently a U.S. Agent in Berlin and routinely observed her during this time.

²⁵ Selma uses the term "concentration camp." They were probably instructed to report for "evacuation camp," the euphemism of the day.

²⁶ An inn known as Gertrudenhof.

aged couples with their children and babies. The floor was covered with straw and this was our bed for the night.

During the next day more Jewish people arrived until we were 1000 people. At ten o'clock at night, we were loaded into an unheated train. It was cold, below zero, and dark. It was December thirteenth.²⁷ The SS men began to hit lots of people with clubs. We realized then that our future was very dark.

My husband, Eva and I held each other by the hand so we would not get separated. As I mentioned before, we had packed our belongings in sacks, but they were taken in a separate car. When we arrived in Berlin after traveling day and night, the personnel of the train was changed and we learned then that the freight car was disconnected; we had lost every thing. We were not supposed to open a window during this time. The doors were locked. Ten people in a small car gave themselves a little warmth. As tired as everybody was, I think no one slept.

Our feet were swollen from the long time sitting. We traveled another day and night to Konigsberg, in East Prussia, so we could get coal for the train. There, one man escaped. After another day and night we arrived outside Riga, Latvia. It was bitter cold. We had not had a hot meal or drink for four days. The snow was twenty inches high. We were exhausted. It was twenty to twenty-five below zero. We were put in to lines of ten people. Our transport was flanked by the Waffen SS, with loaded bayonets. Lots of people fell down and many broke arms or legs; the SS was very rough on everyone. I don't know if everyone made it to the ghetto. I thought the trip was endless. It was almost dark when we arrived at the Ghetto camp.

One transport from Cologne had arrived two days before us. Inside at the gate stood Jewish people with cups of hot coffee. We thanked the Lord that, in this bitter condition, we had people who cared for us and gave us a warm drink. Then we were ordered ten people to one room. The house had belonged to a Latvian Jewish family. We learned then that all Jewish women and children in Riga were killed. When we entered the room, we were horrified. There was blood all over the walls and floor but there was no time to think about that. We had to get busy, clean up the room and find a place on the floor to sleep. As horrified as we were, we slept the whole night. We were exhausted.

For the next three days we did not get any food ration; we lived from what we had left, which was not much. Later, we received two slices of bread and one spoon of sugar per person and from nature, frozen potatoes. Later still, our

²⁷ This was Laura's twenty-first birthday. Eva would turn sixteen in another month, January 26, 1942.

ration was supplemented with a small portion of horsemeat. Each person got maybe a fifth of a pound of the meat and a slice of margarine.

One day we received some small sardines. Worms were crawling out of them. Eva saw this and started crying. She said "Mama, what do they do to us." But I said "Eva, do not cry. I will not eat or prepare them." I threw them out.

My husband had to go to work for the SS. He was taken by truck. I worked for the Army and had to go by six a.m. on foot. We had to sort the uniforms that came back from the front. It was not a nice job, but it was indoors and warm. The Commander of the Army had pity on us and gave us, as an extra ration, a warm dish of soup that was very good. That meant a lot to us.

One day the SS Commandant gave the order that all women who were pregnant had to go to the river²⁸ to a one room hospital. There an abortion was performed on each one. Thankfully no one died of it. Some were six to eight months pregnant. I might tell here our camp at this time had fifteen to eighteen thousand people from all parts of Germany.

One evening, my husband came home from work and was very silent. When I asked him what the matter was, he told me that the people on the November transport that included my mother, brother and two sisters were killed immediately; the train was put under gas. I was heartbroken, but it was better this way. One thousand people from Berlin were killed in this way.

This so-called hospital in our camp was always filled with ten to twenty people. Every evening the Commandant ordered "I don't want to see these people any more." The Doctor had to give them an overdose of insulin. The next morning they were dead. Sometimes the ground in the yard of the camp was frozen so deep that they used dynamite to open the ground to bury them.²⁹

One day when we stood on call we were told that all older people and children would be sent to Dunaburg (Dvinsk) for easy work so that the older could make a living for the children. Lots of younger ones went with their parents. All others had to go to work, so the camp was empty. Around ten o'clock large trucks arrived at the gate of the camp and were loaded with fifty people. As the driver drove, he also fed gas into the compartment so the people were killed. A thousand people were killed in this action. Several soldiers told us what happened. We had no idea.

I myself lost forty-five close relatives—cousins, their wives and children—in this action. Later on, I found out that two nephews of mine had to bury the dead.

²⁸ Dvina.

²⁹ This Doctor was tried by the Russians for war crimes and shot after the war.

They had to swear never to tell anybody what they were forced to do. They worked in a detail with fifty-eight other men and buried their own parents. They lived in a cave for two weeks, before they were allowed to return to the camp. Thank the Lord both men are living today in the USA.³⁰

After several months, Eva was separated from us. We were heartbroken but there was nothing that we could do. Eva was sent to repair boats for the marine forces. My husband and I were sent to Dunaburg. The name Dunaburg frightened us, but it was a military place. We had to work hard. We lived in a large unfinished schoolhouse, men on one side, and women on the other. We heard that Eva was OK. She smuggled a letter to us and also two hundred Marks. I was so happy I called a man to the gate and had him call my husband, which he did. When I saw my husband I gave him the money and told him to buy bread the next day when he went to work. He did this and got two loaves of bread. I ate a half and left a loaf and a half for my husband, as he was very hungry.

After six weeks, my husband and I, as well as five hundred more inmates were sent to Dundangen on the Baltic Sea. It was winter and it was bitter, bitter cold—forty to forty-five below zero. We were put in tenements; twenty women together, the ground covered with straw. Everyone was given a paper sack to sleep in. These are what they used to bury the soldiers.

We saw our husbands only in the morning when we stood on call to be counted. Very often I was glad that Eva was not with us to hear the vulgar language we ladies were called, or when the Commandant would hit the men with clubs. He had the name "The eiserne Gustav" (Iron Gustav) and he was especially rough.

We all wore our prison uniform day and night and long underwear to keep us warm. One morning, eight women were chosen to go to a separate command. When we arrived, we had to saw lumber for a bakery that baked the bread for the soldiers and for us. We had to do this in an open garage. After maybe two hours the officer on duty came out and saw us. He said "Are you ladies hungry." I said "Yes sir." He went inside and after a little while came out and gave each of us half a bread. He said to me "you speak a good German, where are you from." I answered "Sir, I was born in a small town in Westphalia. You surely would not know the town." He asked me to tell him the name and I did. He said "that is the town³¹ where I learned to bake the pumpernickel." When I

³⁰ This account was written in the mid 1960's. The two nephews were included in a group of one thousand prisoners requested by Sweden. They went to Philadelphia where Selma located them after she came to the US. I believe they were Metzgers.

³¹ Ahlen.

said the name Henser he said yes, that was the name of the baker who taught him.

At four o'clock we had to leave. The officer gave every lady one bread. We were so happy. The next day when we returned he ordered two ladies for inside work. Naturally, I was chosen. We had to peel potatoes for the kitchen. The chef gave us each a full plate to take home to camp and we also ate in the kitchen.³² He also gave us a glass of milk. It was maybe two hundred feet from the bakery. We went to the bakery and received our bread and went home. The cook was a nineteen-year old Hungarian. He had worked for a Jewish family and they had been generous with him. He had no idea what the Nazis were doing when he was recruited by them to work for the German army.

One day when I came home from work I heard that a hundred men were taken for another command including my husband. I was heartbroken. Here I was all alone in the world, but the will to live is so strong. Now I could support him with bread and soup and I heard that his Commandant was bad. I managed to send him bread as this little camp (he was in) got portions from ours. I could not eat all the bread I had. I sent two breads for my husband and two breads to the man who would take it to him. Also I had eight to ten men every morning coming to our tenement and I would cut the bread in slices for them. I also gave bread to my lady companions. One day the cook took sick. I cooked the soup for the soldiers. They were very surprised that the soup was so good but the cook gave out the ration and nobody ever found out that I was the cook that day.

One day the Commandant gave the order that all people who brought in bread had to give it to the hospital. I had one bread that I had to deliver to a sister of someone in camp. I did not give this up. When they found it, the guard took it and hit me with his bayonet. At that time it hurt me, but I didn't pay attention. Later, when I lived in the U.S., I was asked about the internal scarring several times when I had x-rays. All of a sudden I remembered the incident. It shows a scar inside.³³

I also lost my bread detail. I must mention here I had black hair with a white streak on the part and when the officer heard that I lost my job he asked where is the lady with the black hair and the white stripe in the middle. He sent a bread to me after that. The command didn't continue. I went on to another job but we did not have any way to get something to eat.

³² There are two terms in the original text I cannot quite make out here.

³³ In the 1950's, Selma had a large cyst removed from her spleen. She believed this might have been the result of this injury.

One day I returned from work and somebody said "That is your husband they just brought in on a stretcher." I said "No, my husband was a tall man." He had lost weight but I would have never recognized him. It was after six o'clock. The Commandant was not expected at this time, so I asked permission to see my husband.³⁴ He was lying in a bed on straw; his whole body was covered with boils and with body lice crawling all over him. Only a sheet covered him. I think he was not eighty pounds. He wanted to give me his bread. He said "I cannot eat, but please my dear, if you can, see if you can get me a cigarette." He did not ask about his two girls.

The next day I went to see every one and asked for a cigarette. Two friends gave me two cigarettes. I also got a bottle of soda water. I asked our Jewish foreman if I could stay a half day in camp with my husband and he gave me permission to do so. When I entered the room I told my husband to be careful, if the Commandant comes in and sees you smoking or me here he will hit both of us. He said he is not here and he smoked. I left around eleven thirty and told the foreman that I would visit again after five o'clock. But around twelve o'clock he came and said your husband died. When I asked if I could see him he said "We buried him already."

I was all alone in the world. The only thing I was thinking about was my daughter Eva. I was not concerned about Laura. We had sent her to the USA in 1938. I must mention here that you don't feel your sorrow as much as when you live a normal life. We had no blood in us and I will tell here that you don't feel with your heart but with your blood. None of the women or girls was menstruating. All the horrible names and treatments [did not] affect us as in normal times.

Then came the order that all women and girls had to have their hair shaved with a razor. One lady started crying. I asked her "Why are you crying?" She was my age. She said "When I think of your Eva who has such beautiful hair I must cry."³⁵ We had to wear a shroud so that the outside people who would see us when we were led to work would not see [our heads shaved.] I must say, I have never thought that a woman looks so ugly as she does without hair. The men had half their head shaved, like prisoners.

Maybe six to eight weeks after my husband died, the order came that we had to move again. We never read a newspaper or heard anything about the war but we were thinking the Russians must be coming closer. We marched, first the men and after them, the women. We went maybe two miles when a man came to me and said "Under the three trees we buried your husband." I stood silently for a moment and then went on.

³⁴ Permission was granted by the Jewish foreman of the barracks.

³⁵ Selma, Eva and Laura had thick, curly black hair.

It was summer time and the sun was shining hard. We were all thirsty. We saw a water-well and the men went a little out of control, wanting to get the water, but the Commandant and the Guards hit the men with clubs and bayonets. We went on marching. It was then that I said to my companion, Emma, I thank the Lord that my husband is dead, that he has not got to suffer through this torture.³⁶

After we had marched maybe ten miles we stopped. The older men who could not work were put on a flat wagon. The wagon was pulled by six to eight young men. Every ten to fifteen minutes we had to stop. The guards and the Commandant shot the men on the wagon and also the boys who pulled the wagon. This went on seven to eight times. We always heard the shots.

We marched for several days and spent the night in the open fields. As warm as the days were, it was cold during the nights. But we had a blanket with us. Then we were put in bombed-out houses for several weeks. We didn't go to work. Our ration was very small.

One day we were taken by train to the Polish corridor of Danzig. I remember that at night the train locomotive was out of order and the train was shaking; it was a terrible trip. After several hours, we arrived in Danzig. We were unloaded and went to the concentration camp Stutthof. It was then that I saw for the first time SS women with whips and clubs. We were around 5000 people. We were not allowed to speak. Next to me stood a command of men and I whispered "Have you by any chance seen Eva Metzger?" A man said "Yes, she came with us this morning." I was overjoyed. Then we were driven like animals into the barracks, separated from the men. As tired as I was, I could not sleep that night. I was so anxious to see my child whom I had not seen for eighteen months. I must tell you this camp—the Stutthof—was equipped with all the modern facilities to kill—gas chamber and crematorium. At night we smelled the terrible smell of bodies burning.

The next morning after we had arrived in the Stutthof, we had to stay on call to be counted. We were 5000 women. After this, I went to the fence and asked a girl whether she had seen Eva Metzger. She said "Yes, she is with me. I will call her." I must say here, it was like a wonder from heaven. Here was a concentration camp of 50-60,000 inmates and my daughter was only separated by a wire. Five minutes later, I saw Eva. She said to me "Mama, you have to crawl under the wire. You are with too many old ladies." I told her I was afraid to do it. The fence was not electrified but the guard went back and forth with a

³⁶ Emma Simmons was Selma's friend during this time. Emma was able to get rations on this journey from her husband and shared them with Selma. This is the summer of 1944.

loaded bayonet. Another lady saw her daughter and she said, "If you go over to your child, my child will come over to me and nobody will know—the numbers are right." I did it. The guard walked away and we went together. After so long a time we were reunited. Eva did not ask about her father. She told me she had a feeling that her father was not alive.

Eva told me the same day, "Mama, never raise your hand when they call for ladies to do light work. Every evening twenty to thirty women were called. They were never seen again." They went to the gas chamber. As I said before, I was with 5000 ladies when I came to the camp. I never saw any of them again. They went to the gas chamber.³⁷

Eva and I spent two weeks in this horrible camp. There were more than three or four days that we did not get our ration, so we were even more hungry than usual. One day our barrack was to stay on call for work. We had to build a highway. We had to appear for eight SS officers nude, without even shoes. Eva told me "When he asks you how old you are you say thirty-five." At that time I was forty-nine years old. I might say I always looked younger than I was. Eva was eighteen. We walked like models. When the officer asked me how old I said "Thirty-five." He pointed to the right. The right meant work. To the left was the gas chamber. Eva was directly behind me. She was not even asked her age. It was heart breaking to see an older mother who wanted to go with her daughter. The SS hit her and brought her to the other side again.

We were sent to Sofienwald to build highways. We were put in lumber barracks: five-hundred ladies with two SS women. We slept on the ground that was covered with straw, twenty women in one barrack. Each got a blanket. There was no space to turn around. We ate our meal sitting on the edge of the bed. Thirty-five inches of space in front there was a small board where we could sit to eat. We received two slices of bread and a soup made from unpeeled potatoes and cabbage or beet greens. More of the time it was very thin. When we were lucky, we found a piece of horsemeat in it.

We worked for a private company and the foreman let us dig out potatoes to have them bake in a fire we made. The company was called the Todd Corporation. They manufactured heavy shoes. I sat on the ground. There were sometimes rainy days when we could not go to work.

Eva always sang for the SS women. The SS women were eighteen to twenty years old. Eva was very weak. When I went out to get her rations, the SS

³⁷ This would have included Emma Simmons.

women asked me how is Peter—that was the nickname they gave her.³⁸ They liked her and in the evenings she sang folksongs for them. They always told the forewoman to give Eva a good piece of bread. That helped us. Eva never ate it all herself but gave me half of it. I saved it for a special occasion. Eva was also very well liked by our Jewish ladies.

The winter came again and we had to move again as the Russians came closer. But every time we moved our conditions got worse. They put us in an unfinished house. We didn't have to go to work. It was cold and the snow was eight to ten inches high. We lived in a basement with bunk beds. I think soldiers had lived in there before. They put four ladies in one bed, head to foot. It was then that Eva took sick: yellow jaundice. She was yellow all over. Two of the other ladies were like this also. I did not turn yellow.

When I went for soup and told the lady Eva was sick, she gave me a big piece of horse meat, a heavy soup and four to five tablespoons of sugar. When you have jaundice you cannot eat. You feel miserable but sugar gives you energy. In the morning, we went out to get some snow to wash ourselves in as we had no water. We had no sanitation and started to get lice in our hair and on our bodies. They bothered us terribly. One evening the order came to go upstairs to get counted for moving again. I said to Eva you better come upstairs with me. I can carry you if you are not strong enough. One lady who heard me said to me you are a terrible mother. I have two girls but I stay here with my girls. I told her you do with your daughters what you think is right. I took Eva. She put her arms around my neck and I dragged her up the ladder to go to the unfinished first floor.

When the SS women saw Eva they told her "don't stay here; you have to go with us." Our trip was delayed, as the snow got worse in the meantime. Eva recovered and went to work for the SS for five days, packing things together. She got herself two blankets and came home with them. A lady from Vienna made two pair of pants from them so we were warm when we had to move. In the meantime, it got warmer and we left. I sewed the pants together. I borrowed the needle for one slice of bread. I had no thread so I opened my coat that I had worn for two years.

When we left, seventy-nine ladies were not counted and left behind. We marched maybe five to six miles at the time without guards. We did not know it, but the Commandant and the guards shot all seventy-nine ladies. One lady was from my hometown.

³⁸ They called her Schwarzer Peter because she had black hair that was just starting to grow back in, so she looked like a boy.

We marched the whole night. Eva got sick with dysentery. I asked the commandant to let us wait so that she could do her business. He did not. We saw then the Army fleeing on the highway. We walked over unplowed fields. We had nothing to eat, no baggage could reach us. We were so hungry.

We saw some soldiers giving their horses oats. I asked one—please give us a little from it. He did it. He also was hungry. Bits of sugar beets in the oats gave us energy. I don't know how but we made it. We were driven in a cattle shelter with nothing to eat or to drink. One woman wanted to give us a warm drink but was frightened away from this mercy by her neighbors.

Then we heard cannons. I said to Eva, now they send flyers and bombs and we will be killed all together. Eva said "No mother, these are no bombs. These are cannon. The Russians are coming." Around nine o'clock, the Russian army arrived. We were liberated. Our guards around the shelter were shot. It was March tenth. At noontime, the Russians cooked a good meal and we ate. But most, including Eva, got typhus. I took six ladies and myself to Lauenberg to a hospital.

I forgot, from the first move we made, the German army SS burned everything we had built. I even saw the bakery burning. We were not to look back. I was thinking of Lot's wife, who was turned to a pillar of salt.

EPILOGUE³⁹

Once Eva and Selma were healthy enough to move, the Russians tried to convince them to come to Russia. Eva explained that they had to go back to their home in Germany to find out if anyone else survived the war. Then they would come back to Russia. Eva and Selma traveled together across war-torn Germany to return to their home in Rheine. Their gentile neighbors, who had been good to them during the difficult days before the war—keeping them in fresh fish once there was no Kosher meat to be had—had also suffered during the war, having lost a son in the Army. Selma and Eva had rights to return to their old apartment and did so. They also had better rations than the neighbor family and shared with them.

England occupied Westphalia after the war. Eva befriended an English soldier who was Jewish. His wife had a cousin in America. Through this connection they posted a listing in one of the Yiddish newspapers in New York City to try to find Laura. By this time, Laura had become an American citizen and had left New York City to work at Fox's Department store in Hartford, Connecticut. A friend of Laura's from New York called her and read her the ad—was this her family? Laura began corresponding with them through the soldier's wife in

³⁹ These are bits of information I recall Eva, Laura and Selma telling me.

England. Laura sent goods like food and warm clothing through this channel as well, until Eva suggested that she send nylons and cigarettes instead—items of high value on the black market that would enable them to get what they needed with less shipping cost.

Selma was able to immigrate in 1947, as a first degree relation of a citizen. By this time, Laura was living in Manhattan again. Eva didn't arrive until 1948, through the intercession of HIAS. The family celebrated Eva's arrival with a Schwarzwald Kirsch Torte—Eva's favorite.

Laura took a job transfer to Fort Worth Texas to spare Selma the cold winters in New York. The three women lived in small quarters together, since housing was hard to come by. Selma kept house for the two girls while they worked during the day. Selma, always charming and attractive for her age, married first—a big surprise to her two eligible daughters. She made a good home with Nathan Winkler, a Jewish widower and merchant from Fort Stockton, Texas. She enjoyed the small town warmth and his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. She loved the role of merchant's wife and enjoyed working in Winkler's, the clothing store Nathan founded.

Selma had a number of very serious health problems in the 1950's related to her experience during the war. For the last twenty-five years of her life, she was healthy and active. She did all manner of needlecraft with great skill and prodigious output. Nathan taught her to invest in the stock market. She loved following her investments and was very successful. She delighted in the fierce West Texas sun and grew watermelon and roses there.

In the mid-1970's, when Nathan passed away, Selma came to live with my Mother and Father in suburban San Francisco. Eva had come to San Francisco in the late 1950's from Los Angeles and my family left Chicago for the Bay area in 1968.

Selma had a first cousin who lived in San Francisco; Frieda Spiegel. Frieda fled her home in Ahlen for England before the war; she was treated as an enemy alien. Most of her family was killed; she joined her brother Philip in San Francisco. The two old women enjoyed talking about the stock market and family memories from Ahlen.

Selma was esteemed as Grandmother, Mother, Mother-in-law and friend and she particularly enjoyed her role as family sage. She died in 1989 at the age of 94 and is missed by all who knew her.