

HOW I LEFT GERMANY

Al Engel

I was born as a baby in 1927 at my parents' apartment in Munich, Germany. We were poor, but honest. Well, maybe not so honest, but certainly poor. My father had been discharged from the German army at the end of World War I (the "War to end all Wars", ha, ha) while my mother, who had been waiting for him for something like 5 years, was more than anxious to get hitched. She was one of five siblings of poor, but honest owners of a fur business in Munich. Well, maybe not so honest, but certainly poor. She had, at the age of 18, been sent off to work for a large fabric store, where she met my father, who worked there also. His family, however, was very well off financially, but felt he should learn a trade (why fabrics? I never found out). After they were reunited, there was a period during which it became necessary to get various bureaucratic items in order, and they were happily married in May 1925. My mother later on hinted to me that my father wanted no children, but somehow she "fooled" him and I was conceived anyhow. That was my glorious beginning, and I was thrown very quickly into the Depression of the 1920's and 1930's during which my father's family lost all their money and my parents lost their business. We were forced to leave the nice apartment that we rented and moved to a much cheaper and less desirable place in a poorer part of town.

My parents still practiced being furriers, but the business was run from the apartment living room while a big part of the kitchen became the workshop, as well as my bedroom. Since there was no central heat in the apartment house, each room had a coal stove and had to be individually heated. That proved to be much too expensive and so our winter headquarters became the kitchen which had a large coal stove that could be used for cooking as well as heat. My parents never produced any new fur pieces, but limited themselves strictly to repairing older fur coats and jackets. The business was very poor at first, so poor in fact that in the summer of 1932 my mother and I walked every day to a soup kitchen to receive some free food because we didn't have enough money to buy any. Of course, this was not so unusual because the economic failure extended all through Europe and the USA. Soup kitchens became an international symbol of the failure of the post-war economy on a world-wide scale. Surely I was unaware of such subtleties at the age of 5, but I did see many of my local friends sit down to better meals than we had. My mother's favorite expression when I complained about the life we were leading was that "...it will get better soon."

Well, she turned out to be right for the wrong reasons. At the time, Germany was governed under the so-called Weimar Republic which replaced the Emperor after WW I. On paper, it was a good democratic system, but with both the Communists and the Nazis (Hitler's so-called party) engaged in nightly street brawls while bringing political pressure on the center-of-the-road majority Social Democrats, it was not to last too long. In January 1933, following an election of the German legislature ("Reichstag") in which the Nazis received a few increased votes over the previous government, Hitler and his followers pushed through a re-organization of the government in which Hitler became the Chancellor, the actual head of government under the President, a relatively incapable and old WW I general named Hindenburg. The public, already suffering under the depression described above, felt that perhaps a change in the governing party might bring about an improvement of the economy. Even my parents supported the change. They, as well as the rest of the world, did not appreciate the horrors Hitler would bring.

So who was Hitler? He was born in a small town in Austria adjacent to the German border and became a member of the Austrian Army which was allied with the Germans in WW I. After suffering through the German defeat by the combined Allied Armies of Britain, France, Russia, and the US (among many other smaller countries), Adolf Hitler moved to Germany to study art and in Munich (my hometown) he started his Nazi party and began to publish his newspaper. For a variety of rather hair-brained reasons, he held a large number of people responsible for the German loss of the war, particularly the Jews, whom he regarded as traitors and profiteers. His hatred was based on a generations-old idea, strongly supported in Catholic Austria, that the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. Starting with the early days of the 20th century, and the subsequent takeover of the Russian government by the Communist party in which a good number of Jews was active, a widespread growth of anti-Jewish feeling had begun in Europe. This so-called "anti-semitism" was an attractive idea to many people who had seen little improvement in their economic conditions after the war, while at the same time German Jews, for the first time in their long existence in Germany, felt economically and socially liberated and had begun to claim their rightful places

in German government and politics, as well as business and the arts. Hitler who was impoverished after his discharge from the army and found no profitable work, tried to sell his watercolor paintings with little success, and so it was convenient and generally acceptable to blame the Jews for his and the country's misfortune. He concentrated his time on holding impassioned speeches emphasizing his slanted ideas about why Germany lost the war and why now the economy was not improving. He had somehow become a fascinating speaker who could hold the interest of an audience and even find some support for his cause. As his reputation grew, he became more and more of a rabble rouser and his attacks on the Jews became increasingly harsh and won him the support of a good many down-and-out veterans who felt it easy to blame a group which they didn't like in the first place for their poverty. This development led to the so-called beer-hall putsch. During the first week of November 1923, Hitler and many of his adherents met in a well known beer cellar and after much shouting and disputation, the group decided to march on the headquarters of the Bavarian state government on the other side of Munich from the meeting place. The initial thought was just to demand some payment for the veterans, but once the march was underway, the mood changed and the group decided to take over the government.

News of the march had reached the government officials and a sizable group of home defense soldiers were ordered to assemble in front of the government buildings. When Hitler's motley band arrived at their goal, the officer commanding the home defense ordered them to stop. Several of the more brave veterans refused to stop and kept marching toward the soldiers. Someone gave the order to fire and the first volley of bullets killed sixteen of the group. Hitler, who had placed himself in the center of the gang so as not to expose himself received a minor wound in the arm and he immediately fled the scene. For all practical purposes, the coup was over. As a footnote to this whole adventure, it is interesting to find that later, after Hitler had achieved his aim as leader of all of Germany, the date of this attempt to capture the Bavarian government, November 9, became a national holiday. The 16 fallen "heroes" were placed in large black metal coffins and left in the open air in the middle of two "Greek" temples, eight to each one, in one of the main squares of the city near what used to be the Home Residence of the Bavarian kings. An SS honor guard in black uniforms stood in each temple 24 hours a day, the year round. My father, who had been an excellent soccer player in his younger years, personally knew one of the fallen Nazis. This one had been a minor league player. My father heard of the shooting, of course, and decided to call on the "hero's" wife to express his condolences. The wife said "Never mind, I am glad that drunk dog is dead!" So much for Nazi heroes.

Hitler was tracked down after the failed putsch and sentenced to several years in prison for his mutinous action. It was while in prison that Hitler found the time and the relative peace to write his book, "Mein Kampf" (My Battle) which was part autobiography and mainly a diatribe against the Jews and their allies for causing Germany to lose the war. In his writing he also presented his so-called racial theories which consisted of a breakdown of Germany's population into pure "Arians", a race of mostly blond blue-eyed people derived from the early uncivilized tribes that had settled Germany, and all others as lesser races with particular emphasis on Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and a large variety of different people, all of whom were called "Non-Arian". His main postulate was that the lesser races had diluted the pure German blood and thereby built up a secondary lesser race which had been instrumental in losing the war. (Incidentally, this theory was not as dumb as it sounds because at that time, bloodlines were confused with what we today consider to be a function of genes. There is no particular set of genes that differentiates between races, except skin color). In any case, the book was widely read and won Hitler a fair number of adherents, so that when he was released from prison, he was able to establish his Nazi party as a separate political entity that was able to get its name on election ballots and to establish a Nazi presence in the various legislatures.

So it happened that Hitler became the leader of Germany in January 1933 and, given the bad economic conditions Germans suffered under, there was a general feeling even among some Jews that his anti-Jewish diatribe was only a passing phase and once established, Hitler would possibly bring some prosperity to Germany. One way he was able to establish himself was by getting some of his Nazi bullies to set fire to the Reichstag Building in Berlin (equivalent to the US Capitol in Washington). After the fire was extinguished, Hitler claimed that he had proof that it had been started by the Communists and demanded from President Hindenburg that he be named full-time chancellor with no restrictions on his ability to govern Germany. In this capacity, he at once dissolved the Reichstag and began to govern by decree, meaning that he made laws without any restriction by an elected body.....in other words, he became a

dictator with no limits to his power.

All this was accomplished in a couple of weeks in open view of the rest of the world where there were a few murmurs of objection, but no one was willing to do anything to stop this takeover of the German Government by a bunch of drunks and bullies. Their activities soon became apparent: There was a gigantic book burning feast in the middle of Berlin where all books written by Jews and/or communists, as well as any author considered by the Nazis as unfavorable to their ideas, were thrown into an open bon-fire. Jewish businesses were attacked, or had the word "Jude" (Jew) painted on their windows. It took a little longer to make lives of Jews more miserable. In the so-called Racial Laws passed in Nuremberg in the Summer of 1936, any physical contact between Jews and non-Jews was prohibited. This meant that I was no longer permitted to swim in a public pool and had to leave the mixed public school I attended and move to an all Jewish school run by the orthodox Jewish community in Munich. In some ways this was worse than the regular public school where I was periodically challenged to fights, but that was OK with me because I was a pugnacious little stinker who never shied away from a good fight. By contrast, in the Jewish school I was often called names because I did not have an orthodox upbringing and so was not very familiar with a large part of Jewish practices and rituals. We WERE practicing Jews, observed all the normal holidays, and my father and I attended a synagogue every Friday evening. But we did not observe the daily ritual prayer every morning, nor did we attend the Saturday morning services. Most important, we did not observe kosher cooking. I ate ham and bacon with relish and my mother's cooking was very traditional German, not what is generally considered Jewish cuisine.

Besides some of the more offensive regulations, we were not particularly bothered by the Nazis or their rules. Where my mother was correct in saying "things will get better soon" was that, indeed, the German economy greatly improved when, unbeknownst to most people, Hitler built up the German army and its equipment. For example, warplanes and tanks were being constructed in places where strangers were never permitted to go. All this activity was forbidden by the WW I peace treaty. If the former enemies of Germany were aware of this work, they chose to ignore it.

As a result, many more people were finding jobs than had been the case before, and so the economy improved. People had more money to spend and although the taxes were high (the newspapers stated that the money was needed for the poor) to pay for all the war materiel being built, there was still a lot more spending money around than earlier. Some of the more well off women discovered that their fur coats needed a little work done on them, and so my parents also found their income rising with more business. In the winters they got little sleep by working late into the nights. I also participated in a very limited way and did do some of the jobs for which I was qualified. In addition, I did a fair amount of "cooking". This meant that I would run to my mother every 3 minutes to ask "what do I do now?" Later in life, these cooking lessons helped me a great deal.

So our lives improved economically, but the various anti-Jewish decrees issued by the government became more and more restrictive. My parents and all the other relatives began discussions about leaving Germany just to have a less dangerous and unhappy life. One of my aunts had sister who was married to a Swedish man and had decided to move to Sweden with him. Strange as it now seems, this minor detail made it possible ultimately for most of my family to survive the "holocaust". The first step was that my aunt and uncle, my mother's brother, and their son moved to Sweden to stay with the Swedish relatives. From there, they applied for a visa to enter the US. While this was a very difficult and slow process for Germans (Jews or non-Jews) because the US Government did not want a lot of relatively poor refugees arriving the country and taking scarce jobs away from the American people, it was easier if you were a famous academic (for example, Albert Einstein) or some other celebrity. However, people from other European nations except for Germany and Austria were generally welcomed. So it was that my aunt and uncle and cousin obtained their visa to enter the US rather easily and settled in New York City. My uncle, who had also been a furrier in Europe, found a job with a company that made new fur coats. He had to work very hard, but made a fairly good salary. We didn't know it at the time, but that became the last stepping stone for our ultimate escape from the Nazis.

Once we found out about my uncle's success, we also applied for entry permission to the US, but it soon became clear that this might take a long time. We were issued a number by the US State Department and

told that when our number came up, we MIGHT receive an entry permit. The trouble was that the total number of permits in any given period was set by law, and it was disappointingly small. So we knew we had to wait.

We filed the application in the summer of 1936 and hoped. Meanwhile, the Nazi party became ever more powerful to the extent that it controlled virtually all aspects of life in Germany. The so-called "racial laws" became increasingly restrictive; there was a great deal of detail as to "Who is a Jew?" The amount of Jewish blood determined your status. So, if your parents had converted to Catholicism, for example, and you had been raised a Catholic, it didn't matter....you were a Jew! In fact, if one of your great-grandparents was Jewish, you were designated a "half-Jew". If you were Christian and married a Jewish spouse, your freedom of life was heavily circumscribed. There were things you could and could not do. All the details were clearly spelled out for all the various classifications. Later it was found that all this time, Hitler had begun preparations for war, and all the employees of the government were kept very busy for this coming adventure. Still, a significant number of bureaucrats were assigned to make all kinds of painstakingly small regulations about Jews, and worrying about enforcing these rules. Still, for my parents and me, that summer of 1936 was pleasant and uneventful. We now had even enough money to take a short vacation in Austria, which had become annexed to Germany the previous spring.

So things seemed relatively stable. Little did we know what was in the wind for us. On November 9, 1940, a young Jewish man (no one ever knew what was in his mind) shot and killed a minor German official at the German embassy in Paris. It was treated by the media in Germany as if Hitler himself had been murdered, or as if the Jews world wide had begun war against the Nazis. We did not know anything about the killing and had gone to bed after having seen an American movie that day. Our door bell rang at about 5 a.m. Since the entrance to our apartment house was kept locked. It was usually my job to find out who had rung and then to go down one flight of stairs to open the door. It was easy for me to open a front window of the apartment and call down to ask who had rung. In this case, the reply was quick in coming. "Gestapo. Open at once!" I almost fell out of the window. The word Gestapo was an acronym for the secret political police. We all knew what that meant. When they came to your house, someone would be arrested! To this day I do not know how I managed to go down the stairs in my pajamas. When I opened the door, I am not sure what I expected. Certainly somebody in uniform or with weapons drawn. Instead, there were two fairly ordinary looking men wearing raincoats and hats. They asked me to lead them up to our apartment. By that time, my parents were awake and dressed in bath robes

They said to my father, "Are you Harry Engel?" and when he replied in the affirmative, they told him to get dressed and go with them. My mother immediately started to yell and asked what he had done. They very politely answered that they had no idea. They just had been sent to bring my father to their headquarters. At that, I started to cry because my fears suddenly came together when I realized what was happening. One of the two patted me on the head and said, "Don't worry, your dad will be back soon." I realized that the Gestapo headquarters were just two blocks from our house and I began to hope that all was OK. My father asked if he needed to pack anything and was told that he didn't need anything. Again, that seemed to be a hopeful sign. As soon as he was dressed, off they went. My mother hugged me and we both broke into tears, not knowing what was happening.

Soon, the telephone began to ring. My uncle, Joseph Kahn, had just been arrested. Then several friends called telling us the same thing. All kinds of rumors abounded, but except for the Paris shooting, no one knew anything. Next thing, we heard that our large synagogue was burning. No firemen were seen there, and it was just left to burn down. Finally, we went down on the street and found a number of store windows broken, all Jewish stores. Later, this time was called the "Kristall Nacht" or night of broken glass. It turned out that the same things were happening in all the cities throughout Germany. Later, the newspaper said that what happened was the fury of German citizens at the Paris shooting, but it was clear that all the action was conducted mainly by uniformed Nazi bullies. The arrests of Jewish men was somewhat spotty. Some people were warned and went into hiding for a while. Others were simply left alone. (My cousin Fritz was called by a friend and warned. At the time he was 16 years old. He told his parents not to worry about him and disappeared. No one heard from him until after WW II when he contacted us through the Red Cross. It turned out that somehow he managed to get to Yugoslavia and joined the army there and fought against the Germans. At the end of the war, he had become a captain and went to Germany to see if

any of our relatives were still alive. His parents and older sister had all perished in one of the camps. Everyone else who didn't get out of Europe was dead. He ultimately married a Yugoslav woman and we lost touch with each other, but I think he had a good life. He was not interested in coming to the US. My uncle, Friedrich, whose wife had died earlier escaped to Holland with his two daughters, my favorite cousins, and they were caught by the Germans and disappeared.)

We had no information as to what had happened to my father. Of course, he did not come back for what seemed a long time. We finally heard that all the men from Munich were taken to the infamous camp in Dachau, a small town outside Munich which had been used since Hitler's rise to power for holding political prisoners. From among our various friends, word got out after a while that a few men were released and returned home. It became clear later that the Nazis had not yet arrived with any plan as to what to do with all these Jews. So gradually they were let go.

Those released were put on a train in Dachau and sent home. Once my mother heard of this, she decided that we should wait every evening for the 6:30 train to arrive. It was an unusually cold November and we stood shivering in the drafty station typical of European stations built for smoky steam engines. My mother became increasingly worried that something really awful had happened to my father. In retrospect, it seemed like an eternity that we were standing in that station. My mother asked any of the men who looked as if they had been in the camp, if they had known my father. It was easy to tell who they were because they all had shaved heads. But we got no news. Finally, on December 13, he emerged from the steam of the engine (like a bad English movie). He lost a lot of weight. He was always small, 5 foot 1 inch and weighing about 125 pounds. But without his hair and his starved looking face, he looked terrible. We all broke out crying simultaneously and stood on that cold platform huddled together. From November 10 to December 13 is a little less than five weeks, but for my mother and me it seemed an eternity.

When my father finally was able to talk without crying, he told us a little of what had happened in the camp. The first day they were given a thin striped uniform no heavier than pajamas. Then they were lined up in a courtyard by armed guards and told to stand and not move. Anyone who took a step away from his spot was beaten badly right then and there. There was no food for several hours. A number of the older men fainted. They were left where they fell and no one was allowed to help them. At the time my father was 46 years old and in pretty good shape. So he was able to stand these conditions. But he, too, felt close to fainting. Finally, after about 7 or 8 hour, they were permitted to go into their unheated huts and given a thin soup to eat. The bunks were stacked three high with thin blankets and mattresses. So the nights were long and often sleepless. The next day after a skimpy breakfast, the whole exercise was repeated. There were no breaks or relief. The only thing that kept all of the men going was the realization that a few were let go every day. So there was hope. When his name was called, my father could hardly believe it.

When he was finally able to see a doctor, he was told that he developed pleurisy, a disease reminiscent of pneumonia, which caused a bad cough, but eventually cleared up. I think the main damage was mental. A man who had never retreated from making decisions or undertaking a new job, suddenly became afraid of everything. Over the years this condition improved somewhat, but never cleared up completely.

Now what? My school had been burned down and there was no new school to go to. My parents' business had been closed by order of the Gestapo (even though some of the old customers still came around). One day an extremely well dressed lady came to the apartment and was stopped by the police. She became outraged and said that her husband was a colonel in the army and she was here to reclaim her fur coat which my parents had repaired. The police man shrugged and let her pass. She paid double the price my father had asked and said she would come again. This was an example of what happened everywhere when the business had been honest and not overly expensive.....many customers sneaked back to continue their previous shopping, if at all possible.

My father found a job with the Jewish community center. Because of the arrests and burning of buildings, many Jews were homeless and the community made it their job to find housing for such people. My father who knew his way around the city and knew a lot of persons was able to supply some help for such people.

Little did we know then that we would also have to make use of his facilities. During the following June we were informed by the Munich government that, because we had a relatively large apartment, we would be required to move into ONE ROOM while the rest of the apartment, including the kitchen, would be given to a deserving citizen. Two days later, this new couple arrived. Their appearance did little to make us happy. The man was a butcher and he looked the part. Not very tall, but thick everywhere, sporting a not too clean drooping mustache. His wife matched him in size and gave off a very sour odor. The butcher informed us that he was taking over the apartment and we had to pay him rent for our one room and use of the bathroom. We moved as much of our furniture into the living room which we decided to use because it was the largest room. We bought an electric hotplate for cooking and managed as best we could. We stayed away from the butcher as much as possible. He was frequently out at nights to attend Nazi party functions while wearing full Nazi uniform.

One noon in December 1939, my mother was fixing lunch for us when the butcher came into our room and demanded his rent, which in fact was quite high. My mother said that she had already paid him for the month. Didn't he remember? "You lying Jewish cow", he screamed and slapped her across the face so hard that fell to the floor. I stood there full of fury, unable to do anything. But I shall never forget that scene. My mother limped to get her purse and paid that filthy pig the rent for the second time. He had probably expected what we actually did. We moved out and he had the whole apartment to himself and his fat wife. We, in turn, moved in with my Aunt Tony and my cousin Inge. Her father, Uncle Hugo, had been left alone during the earlier arrests because he was a Polish citizen, but when Germany attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, he had been arrested as an enemy alien. He was never released and died in one of the camps.

Now life changed again. We were in a large apartment in an entirely different neighborhood and living with my aunt and cousin who were overly nice to us, but we were dependant on them for everything. Also, with the start of the war life generally took a turn for the worse. Virtually everything was rationed. We were issued ration cards for all food items. Ours had big red letters J on every stamp. This was meant to warn store owners to cut back on what they sold to Jews. For people like my mother, who was always on good terms with merchants, it often had the opposite effect of what was expected. She often managed to get an extra half pound of butter compared to what everyone else got.

As to the war, we of course kept track of what "our troops" were doing in Poland (I was still a good German boy after all we had happen to us). I had a map of Poland on the wall in our room and carefully marked the advances of the German army. Every few nights, there was an air raid alarm, and with pounding heart I went to the basement with my parents and everyone else in the building, listening for the sound of bombs. But thank goodness they never came until we were long gone.

Finally, the Nazis had one more crack at us. On the first anniversary of the Kristall Nacht, November 9, 1939, the Gestapo men came once more late in the evening. They examined the apartment and carefully looked at my map on the wall. When I told them I was keeping track of our troops, one of the two patted me on the head and said that I was a good kid. Finally they told us that they were there to confiscate our radio. I do not know how we might have used the radio to send messages to the French or British. It was just another frightening experience, perhaps to encourage us to leave the country. God knows, that is just what we wanted to do.

I am finally coming to the end of the tale. In January 1940, the letter from the US arrived telling us that our number for a visa to the US had arrived and we were to report to the American consulate in the city of Stuttgart, about 2 hours by train from Munich. The letter stated that my Uncle Ferdinand, who by then was a practicing fur maker in New York, had guaranteed to be responsible for us if and when we were to arrive in the United States. Again, as I said before, there was fear that we either a) would deprive a good American of a job, or b) become dependent on the government for welfare. Both these possibilities were anathema to the US authorities.

So, about the 15th of February, we set off for Stuttgart. My father had found us a cheap hotel where we checked in the day before our appointment. Many people had given us advice on what to say when we were questioned. If my parents were asked what they intended to do in America, they were to reply that

"my brother will take care of us." Where do we expect to live? Why, with my brother. And so on. It was a very cold winter so that when we got up in the morning in the hotel, the wash water in a pitcher was frozen solid. (There were no bathrooms with running hot or cold water). I cannot remember eating anything or how we got to the consulate. My heart was beating so hard that I thought everyone must hear it. We showed our letter and were told to wait, and then we were called into a separate room where we were examined by a doctor. Then, we were sent, again separately, to another room where we were questioned, almost exactly as we had been warned. All the employees at the consulate were German, presumably so they could talk to us clearly. But without exception, they were as unpleasant and nasty as possible. So what! At the end of the day, they stamped our new passports (again with a big red J on it) with the most valuable thing we could have had: A visa to the United States!

Now the rat race really started. We had to list every item we were taking with us, which wasn't much, to submit to the German authorities just so we wouldn't take anything of potential high value with us. But on top of everything, we had to pay taxes on the stuff. Happily, my dear uncle had bought ship tickets for us to go from Genoa, Italy, to New York on an American ship. The US was no longer accepting German money and so the tickets had to be paid for in dollars. Fortunately for us, Italy had not yet joined Germany in the war. That came about 5 months later. If it had not been for that, we would have had a very hard time going anywhere. In fact, we would have ended up in some extermination camp. Thank goodness, no one knew about those yet. The Germans hadn't thought that through until later.

After finally getting German permission to leave, we boarded a train leaving Munich about 10 o'clock at night and bound for Genoa. One more fright was waiting for me. When we reached the Italian border, more Gestapo types came through the train and took our passports to make sure we were legal. They were gone for what seemed to me a long time; I was certain that they were just waiting to send us back on the next train. But finally one came back with our passports, and with one final "Heil Hitler!" he was gone and the train moved slowly (much too slowly for me) across the border.

From then on, it was all down hill. We arrived in Genoa on what turned out to be a beautiful bright clear morning. The February sun seemed much brighter and warmer than it had in Munich. We were met by an old friend of my father who took us to a restaurant where I ate the best spaghetti I had ever had, before or since. I suddenly realized that the meager war time diet in Germany had really left me hungry. At age 13 (actually my birthday was on the ship) I was 4 feet 7 inches and looked like a little kid. As it was, we spent 2 days looking around the city and I have no recollection of any of this. I just wanted to get on that boat and be gone. We finally did. The ship, the SS Manhattan, was a marvelously luxurious home for us for the next 10 days. The food was outstanding and plentiful. The only trouble was that my mother and I became sea-sick before we were out of sight of Italy. We had the most violent heaves so that I thought my insides were coming out. My father, on the other hand, went to every meal and came back telling us about the great food he had eaten, which made us even more sick again.

After two days, we arrived in Gibraltar, where a boat flying the British flag tied up along side the ship. Several very snazzy looking officers came aboard and we went through another examination of the passports and ourselves. With our shabby and emaciated looks we did not appear to be a threat to the British Empire and we passed. It was a nice day because the ship lay still and we could actually eat and keep it down. Unfortunately, this condition didn't last in the Atlantic. On top of the sea sickness, we had repeated evacuation drills, putting on life preservers and gathering around the proper life boat. There was a lot of talk about possible German submarines. But the ship had large American flags painted on both sides, and at night they were illuminated by bright lights.

As I became used to the ship's motion and learned my way around the place, life became a lot better. But then disturbing news arrived. Germany had invaded Norway and Holland without getting much resistance. It seemed that we might never be far enough away from Germany to be really safe. Still, we finally finished the crossing and the sight of New York from the harbor was one I shall never forget. It still stirs me every time I see it. We did not go through Ellis Island. It was no longer operating. Rather, immigration officers came on board while we were floating very close to the Statue of Liberty and again perused our papers. It was February 15, 1940. I will never forget that day. As we approached the pier on the west side of Manhattan, the sun came out and I remember looking down at the crowd of people who had come to

meet the boat. I remember mostly all the colors, of dresses and women's hats, of children in bright clothing, of yellow taxis. I don't recall ever having seen such a lovely scene.

My aunt and uncle were there at the gang plank to greet us. I don't remember crying, but everybody else seemed to be in tears. The exhilarating feeling to be away from constant danger and worry was truly getting to me. When we drove to our relative's apartment, which was on the top floor of a tall building, I had a clear view out the window of the Stars and Stripes flying on a flagpole a few blocks away. Today, this sounds corny to most people, but at the time it was the most glorious sight I had ever seen.

The End