



THE STOLPERSTEINE STONES HONORING THE VICTOR FAMILY IN HEILBRONN ON JUNE 29 Photo courtesy Hannah Goldrich

So began Goldrich's remarks, and so began the Victor family's journey.

Later in 1935 Jews were barred from serving in the German military, and the Nuremberg Laws were enacted under which Jewish people were no longer considered German citizens. The following year saw Jewish doctors banned from practicing in German institutions and the opening of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, among other indignities. The Buchenwald concentration camp opened in 1937.

The pure hatred of Jews in Germany had been evident throughout the early 1930s, as German author Hans Franke noted in his 1963 book *The History and the Fate of the Jews in Heilbronn*. There were boycotts of Jewish shops and businesses, public burnings of books written by Jews, public insults hurled at Jews and violent assaults on Jewish people.

Of a terrorizing incident in 1931, Franke recounted that "students occupied all of the entrances to the Berlin University and assaulted all of the students who looked Jewish, quite a few of whom had to be taken to the hospital. Although this attack went on for some hours, the president of the university made no effort to contact the police!"

And of the boycotts, Franke wrote: "It can be shown statistically that before 1933 this insidious boycott was already severely affecting the Jewish population. Because of this boycott, unemployment rose at a faster than average rate, particularly among the Jewish intelligentsia. Also, Jewish shopkeepers became poorer and already were being cut off from their means of support."

Max Victor — an economics professor with a Ph.D. from Heidelberg University — was clearly among the intelligentsia. He was forced out of his teaching position and had to find work anywhere he could. There was nowhere left to turn in 1937, so he left for the U.S. to begin the process of obtaining visas for the family (he had a sister in New York City) while Trude, Ursula and Hannah traveled to Switzerland, where Max had set up a Swiss bank account.

That would not be a simple process. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., notes that between 1938 and 1941, "U.S. law allowed only 27,370 immigration visas per year to be issued to people born in Germany or Austria. If you wanted to present your paperwork and be interviewed by the U.S. consulate in the hope of getting a visa, you needed to register and join the waiting list."

The Victor family reunited in Amsterdam in the spring of 1937, then moved to Ardenhault, Holland. From there, it moved to Chipstead, in Surrey County, England, in 1939.

Between the Holland and English dates — "The fateful year of 1938," as Franke put it — there was *Kristallnacht* Nov. 9 and 10. It was the state's response to the assassination in Paris of German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish Jew.

The Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles notes that 200 synagogues were destroyed, 7,500 shops were looted and 30,000 male Jews were sent to concentration camps during the two-day rampage. The riot was supposed to look like an unplanned outburst of anger toward the Jewish people. "In reality, *Kristallnacht* was state-sponsored vandalism and arson," responds the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Nazi leaders actively coordinated it with Adolf Hitler's support."

The Victor family was away from that, but it had a voyage to Cuba in 1940 aboard the *SS Orduna* to worry about. It was not a given that the family or other passengers would step foot in Havana.

In 1939 the German liner *MS St. Louis* set sail from Hamburg, Germany, to Cuba with 937 passengers, almost all of them Jewish. The passengers learned upon their arrival that the Cuban government had canceled visas for all the passengers and were demanding a \$1 million ransom to disembark.

This was the "Voyage of the Damned," a voyage made famous by a 1974 book of the same name by authors Max Morgan-Witts and Gordon Thomas and made into a 1976 movie, also with the same name.

The Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, Illinois, explains in its current exhibit that the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) attempted to negotiate with the Cuban government, but it backed away for fear that "paying would encourage other regimes."

"The ship's sympathetic captain delayed returning to Germany, sailing towards Florida while the JDC appealed to the U.S. and other governments. America refused to relax its immigration quotas."

Great Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands each admitted a percentage of passengers upon the ship's return to Europe. Still, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum notes that 254 passengers on the *St. Louis* were killed in the Holocaust.

The *SS Orduna* did not have the problems of the *St. Louis*,

but the Victor family was interned at a detention camp named Tiscornia. According to the German American Internee Coalition, the Cuban government (in cooperation with the U.S. government that helped pay for the program) interned 114 Germans, 350 Japanese and 13 Italian Cuban resident aliens at the camp during World War II.

"That was a completely foreign land," Goldrich says, but adds with a chuckle that her sister Ursula did develop a taste for avocados during the two-week stay.

Upon release from the detention camp, the Victor family went to Santiago de los Caballeros in the Dominican Republic. Victor spoke fluent Spanish, and the family settled for nine months.

"It was not torture," Goldrich says of the time in the Dominican Republic. "It was pretty good."

Finally, in April 1941, visas were issued for the Victor family and they set sail to New York City via Puerto Rico. They would settle first in the Kew Gardens section of Queens, New York, then in Westchester County, and they would go on to productive lives.

LIFE IN THE U.S.

In 2004 the *Hannah Goldrich 50 Year Jewelry Retrospective* was held at the late and lamented Jacobs Gallery in Eugene. She told Eugene poet Maxine Scates in an introductory artist statement that Holocaust-era refugees often became artists "because it's a way of being remembered — your work will exist even if you don't." She added that "I want my work to last forever, to be passed down through the generations."

Almost 20 years later, nothing has changed for Goldrich on that front. She smiles at the thought. "I see my work all over, all the time," she says. "I see ears before I see faces."

Goldrich did not set out to become a jeweler. She graduated from Antioch College in Ohio, a private liberal arts school, and later earned a master's in secondary education at Harvard, but the art of jewelry making was too much of a pull to ignore.

While jewelry making was not in the family's history, art itself certainly was. Max Victor would retire from the leather business in the U.S. and spend the remaining 13 years of his life painting before dying at age 83, and Goldrich fondly recalls visiting art galleries and museums with her father as a young girl.

"His love was art and he was an art collector," Goldrich says.

Trude Victor was a gymnast in Germany, and in the U.S. she worked in physical therapy, primarily with children diagnosed with cerebral palsy, and lived to age 99. Ursula Victor Santer would go on to earn a Ph.D. in microbiology at Yale University. She died of cancer in 2003 at age 70.

Neither the parents nor the Jewish community they lived in spoke much of the war, the Holocaust or of being exiled, Goldrich says. "Everybody knew," she points out, and everyone had to rebuild.

"They managed to have very good lives, which they deserved," Goldrich says of her parents. "In retrospect, it was hard for them, but they were exceptional people."

Two of many exceptional people, notes Rabbi Ruhi Sophia. Ruhi Sophia recently officiated the memorial service of a 101-year-old Jewish woman who came to the U.S. from Europe in 1941 as a 17-year-old girl.

"There were survivors who didn't tell their stories," says Sophia, who uses the biblical Hebrew word *Sho'ah* (catastrophe) rather than the English word Holocaust (derived from the Greek *holokauston*, a translation of the Hebrew word *'olah*, meaning a burnt sacrifice offered whole to God). "As we lose them to old age, it's important to remember that the *Sho'ah* was perpetuated by humans against other humans." While the *Sho'ah* can be seen as an event that came out of nowhere, Ruhi Sophia adds, "Any society can be susceptible."

Goldrich echoed that sentiment June 29 in her prepared remarks in Heilbronn.

"The displays in many museums, the Holocaust, memorials and now the *Stolpersteine* project are a model for the horrendous costs of war," she said. "Our country could learn from these efforts for our blunders."

Zikhrono livrakha. May the memory of those lost to the Holocaust or exiled in World War II be a blessing. ■