Beyond the Yellow Star to America

Inge Auerbacher

With photographs from the author's collection

Royal Fireworks Press
UNIONVILLE, NEW YORK

Copyright © 1995, 2023
Royal Fireworks Online Learning, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.

Royal Fireworks Press
P.O. Box 399
41 First Avenue
Unionville, NY 10988-0399
(845) 726-4444
fax: (845) 726-3824
email: mail@rfwp.com
website: rfwp.com

ISBN: 978-1-63856-111-8

Publisher: Dr. T.M. Kemnitz
Editor: Jennifer Ault
Book and Cover Designer: Kerri Ann Ruhl
Cover photo courtesy of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Printed and bound in Unionville, New York,
at the Royal Fireworks facility. 14jy23

local 363

I dedicate this book to:

My beloved parents, whose healing touch
nursed me back to good health and gave me life

America, the country that gave me safety, love,
respect, and a chance to make my dreams come true

All immigrants who continue both to bring
and to find heart, imagination, and energy
in their adopted American homeland

'Miracle Ship' Comes In

Dazed Hitler Victims Show Solemn Joy

Another "miracle ship" came to port today, its cargo of 661 refugees still dazed by the wonder of their survival of the years of horror under Hitler.

There were no cries of joy, no cheers, no singing as the S. S. Marine Perch, second ship carrying quota immigrants to arrive since war's end, docked at 12:30 at Pier 90, North River.

A cathedral hush lay like mist over the scene as the new Americans started down the gangway, their lean faces taut, half-hopeful. There was quiet, too, among more than a thousand anxious relatives and friends lining a long aisle inside the building. Banners, bearing the names of refugees they sought, bobbed above their heads.

A loud speaker called out the name of each passenger and a friend or relative came forward. Then the refugee, head bowed shyly, walked down the aisle past rows of friendly faces, and there was applause.

From the New York Post, *May 24, 1946*

Contents

Chapter One: The Homecoming 5
Chapter Two: Out of the Storm 29
Chapter Three: Into the Sunlight 43
Chapter Four: A Different Life 48
Chapter Five: A Visit with Uncle Max 51
Chapter Six: Changing Ways 56
Chapter Seven: A New Home 61
Chapter Eight: Another Prison 68
Chapter Nine: We Are All the Same 72
Chapter Ten: A Second Chance 81
Chapter Eleven: Sunshine Cottage Days 84
Chapter Twelve: Rules, Regulations, and Privileges 96
Chapter Thirteen: God Hears Everywhere 108
Chapter Fourteen: Love Conquers All 113
Chapter Fifteen: Brooklyn Is My Home 121
Chapter Sixteen: Picking Up the Pieces 143
Chapter Seventeen: Finally Our Own House 159
Chapter Eighteen: Boarders 163
Chapter Nineteen: They Shoot Horses 172
Chapter Twenty: The Return 184
Chapter Twenty-One: Beyond the Yellow Star 193
Acknowledgments 201
About the Author 204

U. S. Consulate General, Stuttgart, Germany

Date May 6, 1946

1. This is to certify that Inge Lise AUERBACHER (name in full), born at German (country), Kippenheim (town), Baden (district), on 31st (day) of December (month), 1934 (year), Female (sex), Single (marital status), (given & maiden name of wife), intends to immigrate to United States

2. ~~He~~ (she) will be accompanied by Berthold AUERBACHER, born June 13, 1898, at Kippenheim, Germany, (father) German
Regina AUERBACHER, born August 1st, 1905 at Jebenhausen, Germany, (mother) German

(Here list all family members by name, birthplace & date, together with citizenship of each)

3. ~~His~~ (her) occupation is Child

4. DESCRIPTION

Height 4 ft. 11 in.

Hair Dk. Br. Eyes Brown

Distinguishing marks or features:

None

Inge Lise Auerbacher

Berthold Auerbacher (Signature) of father

5. ~~He~~ (she) solemnly declares that he has never committed nor has he been convicted of any crime except as follows No Exceptions

6. He is unable to produce birth certificate, marriage license, divorce papers and/or police record for the following reason(s)

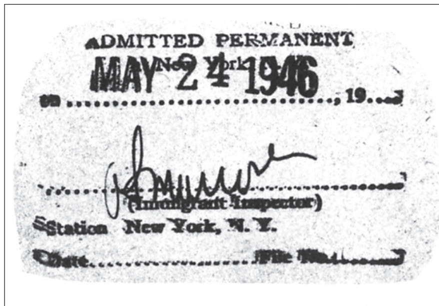
I hereby certify, to the best of my knowledge and belief, that the above statements, photograph and description of are true and correct.

Berthold Auerbacher Signature of applicant's father

J.T. Rogers (Signature of consul)

May 6, 1946 (Date)

Certificate of identity in lieu of passport



Official stamp upon arrival in America, May 24, 1946

CHAPTER ONE

The Homecoming

Spring is my favorite season. Wonderful things happen to me in the spring. Even the sound of the word is filled with energy and hope. The milestones of my childhood happened in the spring.

I will never forget the spring of 1945. I was ten years old. It was when my parents and I were liberated by the Soviet army from Terezin, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia where we'd been imprisoned for three years, between 1942 and 1945, because we were Jewish. From 1941 to 1945, a total of 140,000 Jewish people were sent to Terezin; 88,000 of them were shipped from there to the killing centers to the east, and 35,000 died of malnutrition or disease in Terezin. We three had survived the dark days of horror that had enveloped a continent—the brutal force of Nazism, which had threatened to spread throughout the world and destroy it. That awful power had finally been defeated by the Allied armies of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union.

In all, World War II consumed fifty million lives. Among that total were eleven million people who had been declared "enemies" of Nazi Germany. They were murdered by Adolf Hitler's henchmen through starvation, gassing, slave labor, and other methods of torture and cruelty. Six million of them were Jews. Two-thirds of the total Jewish population of Europe was killed. That dreadful period is now called the Holocaust.

In the spring of 1945, air-raid sirens were no longer screaming their warning of the impending danger of falling bombs from the skies in Europe, but the war still raged in Japan. So President Truman of the United States, after much soul-searching, ordered the first use of atomic bombs. They were dropped on two Japanese cities: Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They killed tens of thousands of people outright, maimed countless others, and produced unimaginable destruction. Soon afterward, on September 2, 1945, Japan surrendered. After six long years, World War II was finally over.

The world sighed deeply. “Thank God it’s over!” Flowers bloomed brighter colors, birds chirped with hardier throats, and even raindrops had a gentler touch. It seemed that nature itself felt liberated.

I had survived, but many of my friends had their innocent young lives snuffed out because they were Jews. One and a half million Jewish children were killed in the Holocaust.

I tore the yellow Star of David with the word *Jude*, meaning Jew in German, off of my clothes on May 8, 1945, when Terezin was liberated. Jews in Germany had been ordered on September l, 1941, to sew this symbol onto their clothes as a distinguishing mark, and that badge of shame had branded me for four years as an outcast to society. Now I felt tremendous relief. I was reborn. May 8th became my second birthday.

A few weeks after our liberation, a bus arrived to pick up the small group of survivors from the state of Wuerttemberg. Out of

our original transport of about 1,200 people, there were only a few left. My mother, my father, and I were among that tiny group.

We arrived with little clothing and no money to a war-ravaged Germany, the country of our birth. It had been my family's home for hundreds of years. We were taken to the displaced persons' camp in Stuttgart, a temporary facility that had been prepared to house returning Jewish refugees. I did not meet any other children in that large building, and I felt lonely surrounded only by adults.

After only a week in that camp, I overheard my parents' conversation about leaving. "We must try to begin a new life again," Papa whispered to Mama. Papa was always the one with hope, even during the darkest days of our imprisonment. There had been constant rumors of our deportation to another camp to the east, where conditions were presumed to be worse, but Papa would try to calm our fears. "Don't worry. We'll get through this," he would say. But sometimes, when the hunger pangs became too strong, those words were not convincing.

I was happy with my parents' decision to leave the displaced persons' camp, where everyone looked so sad and where people were quick to argue with one another. Everyone was on edge. They often cried and spoke about missing members of their families. They had little hope of finding anyone alive. They made me uneasy.

The one good thing about the camp is that we were given an ample supply of food, and each dish tasted like the best one I had ever eaten. I always asked for second helpings, even though I felt full. I watched others do the same. Food was still a luxury to us.

I felt that by overeating, I could stockpile the food, just in case conditions suddenly changed. I had grown quite a bit during my three years at Terezin, and I looked thin for my height.

When the day of our departure from that first temporary home finally arrived, I was excited and relieved. I wanted to leave the past behind and just be a normal child again. The three of us held on to one another as we walked out the door. My heart was racing, and I suddenly felt anxious. My throat was dry, and I had trouble swallowing. I was breathing quickly. *I hope this isn't a joke,* I thought, *and that the Nazis haven't returned to take us back to Terezin and kill us.*

As soon as those thoughts came, I tried hard to block them out. *No! I'm free now,* I told myself. I looked at my parents. Their faces seemed to show fright as well. Were the same thoughts crossing their minds? I held my doll Marlene tightly in my arms and whispered to her, "Don't worry. We're safe now." She had been a gift from my grandmother when I was two years old, and she was my most prized possession. I had protested loudly when a Nazi guard had tried to take her from me. When I'd arrived at Terezin, I was allowed to keep only Marlene and the clothes I wore. From that point on, I had promised Marlene that I would always try to protect her. It was she to whom I turned when I felt sad, she who heard my sobs and felt my tears.

In the refugee camp, we still wore the same shabby clothes that had been issued to us at Terezin. Papa had been somewhat overweight before our imprisonment, but now his face looked thin, and his clothes hung loosely on him. His dark brown eyes

had always sparkled; now they looked empty and sad. He had lost most of the hair on his head, and his cheekbones protruded from his previously full, round face. He walked slowly, as if he had to wait to replenish his energy after each step. Mama had also lost weight, and her forehead was creased with worry lines. At Terezin, she had worked hard as a nurse, taking care of the ill and elderly female inmates.

We left the displaced persons' camp in Stuttgart, but we didn't return to live in Kippenheim, the village in southern Germany that was both my father's birthplace and my own. Instead we chose Jebenhausen, my mother's hometown, a village of a thousand inhabitants located a few hundred miles away. Jebenhausen was familiar to me because we had lived with my maternal grandparents in 1939.

When we'd arrived there six years earlier, my grandparents had been the only remaining Jewish family in the village. Grandpa had made his living by buying and selling cattle, an occupation practiced by many Jews in southern Germany. Papa's father had also been a cattle dealer, and he'd bought and sold skins and hides. Both families had owned large houses and belonged to the middle class, but Papa's parents had died a few years before his marriage to Mama.

I had been happy living in Jebenhausen. Although they knew I was Jewish, the Christian children there had treated me with kindness, which was significant because Hitler's venom of anti-Jewish propaganda was rapidly spreading throughout Germany.

Our stay in Jebenhausen before the war was meant to be short. We'd sold our house in Kippenheim for a low price and had packed our belongings. Our plan was to leave Germany when the situation became too threatening for Jews. Our destination was either Brazil or the United States. Two of Papa's four sisters and their families had found their way to Brazil. Mama's only brother and wife had left for the United States. But Papa hesitated in making plans for our departure. He was patriotic and loved the country of his birth, and he assumed that nothing terrible would happen to us because of his military service and his loyalty to Germany. He had been a soldier in the German army in World War I. He was only eighteen years old when an enemy bullet tore through his right shoulder and wounded him badly. Later, he was decorated with the Iron Cross for his bravery in his service to his country.

"These times will change," he reassured us when Mama pressed him for a decision to leave. "All of this will blow over soon. Hitler is crazy, and the German people will see that."

Grandpa had died soon after our arrival in Jebenhausen from effects of the mistreatment he'd suffered during his short stay in the Dachau concentration camp in Germany in November of 1938. He'd been taken during *Kristallnacht*, or "The Night of Broken Glass"—the purge against the Jews that had heralded the beginning of the Holocaust. Papa had also spent a short time in Dachau, and his textile business had been taken from him by the Nazis earlier that year. It was only after these events that Papa decided that we had to leave Germany. He realized that the Nazis

would have no consideration for any Jew, even if that Jew was a decorated, disabled war veteran. But all of my parents' efforts to leave Germany failed when the doors to the free world closed. We were forced to endure the brutality of the Nazi regime.

Our decision to return to Jebenhausen after our incarceration was based on our hopes of finding Grandma there. She had been deported at the end of 1941 to the Riga concentration camp in Latvia. I remember crying myself to sleep every night, covering my head with my warm down comforter, hoping that it would block out the sound of my sobs so my parents couldn't hear me. They were both on edge, and I didn't want to make them feel worse. I missed Grandma so much! I prayed for her safe return every night. But it was not to be.

Soon after Grandma's deportation, one of the townspeople from Jebenhausen came to our house late at night with the news that he'd just come from Riga, where he was stationed as a soldier. He was not wearing his army uniform, and he seemed to be in a rush. He spoke quickly, without any emotion. "I saw your mother binding straw," he said.

Our hearts jumped. Mama was full of questions. "Did you speak to her? How did she look?"

The man bowed his head and continued to speak in a whisper. We were not prepared for what was to follow. "They're all dead! They shot most of them in a forest near the camp. Older inmates and children had no chance for survival. That's what I heard from another soldier." He didn't wait for our response. He left, shutting the door behind him.

For a moment, my parents remained silent and motionless in disbelief. Then the words sank in, and I saw Papa put his arm around Mama. He told me to leave the room, but I remained standing behind the door. I heard loud sobs. Mama was crying hysterically. I heard her say, “It can’t be true! She must still be alive! Only animals are shot, not decent human beings!”

I touched my face; it was wet with tears. I always got sick to my stomach when I was scared or nervous. Now that same awful feeling came over me. “Oh God,” I prayed quietly, “please don’t let me get sick. I have to be strong for Mama. God, please don’t let this horrible story be true. Bring Grandma back to us.” Then I ran to the bathroom and threw up.

Mama soon knew that there was something wrong with me because when she called me, there was no response. She found me in the bathroom. “You poor child,” she said softly. She stroked my hair and took me in her arms. It felt safe to be cradled in her warm embrace. I wanted to stay there forever. There, no one would dare to hurt me. I remained in her arms for a long time.

Mama didn’t want to accept the truth that Grandma hadn’t survived the war. “Miracles do happen. There’s always a chance that the stories are untrue,” she kept repeating.

Now, with hope still in our hearts, we took the train from Stuttgart to Goeppingen, a larger town near Jebenhausen. From there, because there was no bus service, we walked the two miles to Jebenhausen. Mama recognized several people during our walk. Some of them just stared at us; others greeted us with surprised looks. “You’re still alive! We thought you were dead like the

rest of the Jews!" They looked at the three of us in disbelief. One man said, "Even the child is still alive! I haven't seen any children come back around here. How did you manage this miracle?"

Papa answered, "It was luck, fate, chance—whatever you want to call it. During the last selection at Terezin for the death camp at Auschwitz, a red circle was drawn around our names. That's the only reason we're here today. There was nothing we could do to prevent our deportation—no bribe, nothing! But someone drew that circle. Imagine: one red circle could determine whether you lived or died."

I looked at Papa. He was breathing heavily. His cheeks were crimson, and there were tears in his eyes. His body trembled. I had never before seen him in such a state.

At last we found ourselves approaching my grandparents' house. When Grandma was deported to Riga, her house was taken from us, and we were ordered to move into the Jewish houses in Goeppingen. A Christian family had received permission to occupy Grandma's house. Now when we knocked on the door, it was not Grandma who greeted us. We knew then that we had to accept the terrible truth that Grandma had not survived.

The new owners prepared a room for us, and we stayed in the house with them. They and the other villagers of Jebenhausen treated us with kindness, but after a few weeks, we decided to leave. We moved to Goeppingen, a town with a population of about 50,000, to try to begin the slow process of rebuilding our lives.

With the help of the mayor and the American armed forces command stationed in Goeppingen, we found a spacious apartment in Goeppingen. It had belonged to a prosperous Jewish family that had been killed. We didn't have any of our own belongings to put in it. All of our possessions had been taken from us before our deportation to the concentration camp. My parents' bedroom set was located in a former SS officer's home, and it took much convincing before it was returned to us. My room was furnished with a bed, a dresser with large mirror, and a night table. Mama made it look cheerful by hanging some pictures on the wall.

I woke up slowly that first morning in our new apartment. The bed was large, with white sheets, a light comforter, and a huge pillow. I felt as if I was floating on a big white cloud. Was I still dreaming? Mama had left the window partially open, and a soft summer breeze gently lifted the fluffy white curtains. Sunlight flooded the room.

What time is it? It must be awfully late, I thought. I felt as though I had slept for days. I could hear the sound of an automobile coming from the street, and I wondered if it was an army truck. The American soldiers drove fast, and their cars made a lot of noise. Maybe they wanted to show off their power as victors. They always seemed to be in a hurry. But why? The war in Europe was over. Where were they rushing to?

I blinked my eyes and took a deep breath. The air tasted clean and fresh. Terezin had been so different, with its overcrowded, dingy, foul-smelling rooms. There, we had slept on the floor or, if

we were lucky, on double- or triple-deck bunk beds. Now I was getting to sleep in my own soft bed.

I got out of bed and stood in front of the mirror. The reflection I saw was fuzzy. I quickly looked for my glasses and put them on, and the reflected image became clear. It was the first time in three years that I'd been able to study the face looking back at me. Mama had managed to save a small pocket mirror during our stay in Terezin; it had been considered a luxury. She'd let me borrow it at times, always insisting that I handle it with care. But that mirror was so small that it was difficult to see my whole face in it.

I stared at myself in the mirror for a long time. My face was not beautiful, but it wasn't ugly either. It was framed by my curly, dark brown hair. My sight had not improved, and glasses were still in order. I always hated those glasses and thought they made me look unattractive. But in general, I saw nothing out of the ordinary in my reflection. The Christian children didn't look any better. Some of them wore glasses, too, and had dark hair like I did. *Then why,* I wondered, *was there so much hatred directed at me during those awful years?*

I remembered looking at posters on my way to school before being sent to Terezin. They showed ugly pictures of Jewish people, depicting them as criminals with curly hair, beady eyes, and long, hooked noses. Those posters had made me angry. I was six years old, and my reading skills were still poor, but I'd been able to read the slogans at the bottom of each poster: "These are Jews. They are your enemy!" But I didn't look like that, and neither did my parents or any of our friends. I thought that the

Christians must have different eyes to make Jews look so terrible to them. Then I recalled my best friend Elisabeth, who was a Christian. She'd never told me that I looked like a monster.

I didn't look like the people in the posters. *They're lying!* I thought. From then on, I walked quickly past those posters and avoided looking at them. I hoped that other people would ignore them, too. If no one acknowledged them, then it would be as if the posters didn't exist; then they couldn't hurt us. But to my disappointment, that didn't happen. Children heckled and taunted me on my way to school. They pointed to the yellow star sewn onto my clothes and yelled, "You're a dirty Jew!"

I moved away from the mirror, shrugged my shoulders, and sighed. *People are strange. One day they hate you because you're a Jew; the next day they want to be your friend because you're a Jew.* In post-war Germany, people were eager to "prove" that they had never supported Hitler's efforts by befriending Jews.

I took a walk after lunch to investigate my new surroundings. Our five-room apartment was on the ground floor of a two-family house on Fruehlingstrasse—"Spring Street" in German. I thought, *What an appropriate street name for our new home!* Farther down the street were some bombed-out houses. The front of one had been blown away. It looked like an open wound, with its exposed steel girders. It was easy to identify some of the rooms. In one, the kitchen stove was still intact. In another, all of the structures of a bathroom were visible. Pictures hung at an angle in what must have been the living or dining room. A few of the rooms still had colorful wallpaper on their remaining walls.

I saw buildings hollowed to shells and deep craters where homes had once stood. Bombs and explosions had burned and crumbled the structures to their foundations. *How odd,* I thought, *that part of the street wasn't touched by the war, while the other half was completely destroyed.* Even with the destruction I saw, however, Goeppingen was not as severely damaged as many other German cities. I was surprised that the Allies hadn't targeted its factories, even though many of them must have been involved in the war effort.

What could have gone through the minds of the airplane pilots as they discharged their cargo of deadly bombs? Surely many of them had children and families and were not born murderers; they were good and decent human beings. How awful that in war, killing and destruction had become a mere job to be completed!

Seeing the ruined houses caused a strange, gnawing sensation in the pit of my stomach. It must have been frightening to sit in the air-raid shelter in the basement of one of the houses, hoping and praying for safety. Then a bomb had hit the house and had set it aflame, crushing the family below with crumbling concrete and steel. Had anyone survived? Where were those people now? I felt sorry for them. I also felt angry. At the start of the war, Germany was one of the most advanced industrialized and cultured countries in the world. Why had the German people blindly followed a madman like Hitler into a war that had brought so much pain and destruction to so many people? How could so many seemingly good people become so evil? But I was a child. I had no answers.

“The German people deserved this destruction,” I hissed to myself. “No punishment is enough for the evil that they brought on all of us.” But as soon as these words crossed my lips, a warning voice rose in me. *How dare you think such thoughts! Feel ashamed! Your parents didn’t instill such ideas in you! They’ve always taught that when you wish bad things for others, those wishes can come back to hurt you.*

How did my parents feel about the Germans? They never discussed it with me. I never heard them speak about any bad feelings they had for the German people or what they might want to do to make them pay for their crimes. I remember hearing survivors in the displaced persons’ camp screaming, “They must be punished for their crimes! They’re murderers! They should all die!” Then tears would roll down their faces as they whispered, “Where is Mama, Papa, my children? Oh God, what have they done to them?” But I never saw that kind of behavior from my parents.

Since our return from Terezin, I can recall only one incident when Mama showed her feelings toward the Germans. It was on the first morning after our arrival in Jebenhausen. We were awakened by the loud clatter of a woman pulling a milk cart through the village. She stopped in front of my grandparents’ house. We looked out the window and saw women from the village surrounding the cart. Each one held a small, empty metal can, which the milk cart woman filled with precious milk from the spout of a larger can.

Mama hesitated. She had no money to pay for milk, but Papa encouraged her to go and get her share. He said, "Necessity makes you strong." So Mama heeded his advice and joined the crowd of women at the milk cart. The owner of the cart remembered her and offered to give her the milk without payment. Mama thanked her over and over again, but she was embarrassed. Tears filled her eyes as she promised to repay the milk cart woman as soon as we had some money.

"Please forget it," replied the woman, wiping her wet hands on her apron. "Just accept it as a small gift for your little girl." Her round face glowed with warmth, and she smiled a broad smile that revealed a missing front tooth.

At that moment, a woman ran up to Mama. She wanted to greet her and shake hands with her. She was a former neighbor who had been active in the Nazi Party and had become especially hateful toward Jews. She was smiling and friendly, as if nothing bad had happened. Mama looked straight at her and spoke in a steady voice that all of the women could hear: "You didn't know us in those dark days. You may be in full view to me now, but my eyes don't see you. I have no use for the likes of you! I will not shake your hand!" All eyes followed Mama as she walked back into our house.

I continued my exploration of the neighborhood. Farther down the road, I saw six children playing on a mountain of rubble from the charred ruins of bombed houses. They stopped their play as I came closer and looked at me with curiosity. They came nearer and surrounded me. At first we stared at one another, but

soon one of the girls broke the silence. “You must be new here. Where do you live?” she asked.

Before I could answer, the others began asking questions of their own. “What’s your name?” “How old are you?” “Where did you come from?”

I shyly answered some of the questions but avoided others. I didn’t reveal to them that I’d recently been liberated from a concentration camp and that I was Jewish. I had been cautioned by my parents before the war to avoid revealing my Jewish identity to strangers. Even though things were different now, I still felt fearful. The answers I gave were enough to satisfy the children’s curiosity.

I had promised my parents that I’d be home by five o’clock, and I told the children this. They invited me to join them the following day. I was happy that they liked me, but I wondered, *Would they still like me if they knew I’m Jewish?* Surely some of them had been taught by their parents and teachers to hate Jews. Perhaps a few of them had even mistreated Jewish children.

I missed having Jewish friends; with them I could be more open. But I was one of the few Jewish children to survive, so finding Jewish friends my age was extremely difficult. And in that town, it was impossible.

That evening, my parents invited some Jewish-American soldiers to the house for dinner. Our home soon became a haven for them. They were always generous with gifts of food from their army rations, which included packages of coffee and chocolates.

Food shortages lasted long after the war was over. Most stores had few goods to sell. Coffee and any kind of sweets were a luxury.

The next morning I joined the children. I was happy to make new friends, and I began to trust them. The two-mile distance between Goeppingen and Jebenhausen was too far to keep up a close friendship with Elisabeth, who was a year younger than I. We had been the best of friends before my deportation to the camp, even though it was forbidden for Christians to associate with Jews. Our mothers had been neighbors when they were growing up in Jebenhausen. Elisabeth was the first child I turned to after my return from the camp. We discovered that we still had things in common, although our lives had been touched by different fates. We promised to stay friends for life.

Now, however, I got up early every morning to meet with my new friends. We played hide and seek for hours. Woe to the child who had the unfortunate task of finding the others! Our favorite hiding places were in the bushes of a small park near my home and behind the houses. The sidewalks were covered with our chalk hopscotch patterns. Our games went on for hours, until our mothers called us in for meals. Then it was off again until dusk.

Sometimes we copied the adults and picked up partially smoked cigarettes from the street that had been discarded by frivolous American soldiers. Some of the children had watched their fathers fashion this tobacco into new cigarettes. You had to have special cigarette paper to do it. You carefully placed the tobacco on the paper, rolled it into a tube, and then licked the

paper to seal it. We collected enough tobacco to produce one cigarette. One of the boys provided us with the paper; he never told us how he got it. We took turns smoking, feeling grown up as we passed the cigarette around. Doing it in secret made it seem important.

At first I was afraid to bring the cigarette to my lips, but I watched the others and soon learned the trick to it. I didn't want to be left out and laughed at for not joining the group. I always drew quickly on the cigarette when my turn came and immediately blew the smoke out of my mouth without even tasting it. I was afraid of what my mother would say if she detected it on my breath.

Throughout this time, it was hard for me to believe that my newfound freedom was real. Would I wake up one day to find myself back in the concentration camp? Was it all right to act like my new friends—to laugh, run, and act silly sometimes without feeling guilty? Was it safe to be a child again? Would this new life be gone tomorrow? Many mornings I woke up surprised to find myself still in my own bed in my own room.

As time went on, I began to believe that my good luck would not change—that people would no longer treat me badly because I was Jewish. I could never understand why the Jews were the focus of so much hatred. I knew that Mama and Papa were decent people and never brought any harm to anyone.

Papa had his own wholesale and retail textile business before we were branded enemies of the German state. It had been taken from him in 1939 because of our Jewish heritage. Now he wanted to resume his business, but he had no funds to buy goods. He

visited some of the textile mills and met with their directors. They greeted him warmly and remembered him as a good and honest customer. Some of them had shady pasts and had been members of the Nazi Party, but it was now fashionable to deal with Jewish survivors who might come in handy to vouch for their good reputation. Many of the factory owners wanted to befriend us and invited us to lavish parties in their luxurious houses. My parents took me along to many of them. Some of the houses looked like small castles and were surrounded by large gardens. How different our lives were!

Most of the factories had few goods to sell because the war had interrupted their production. Raw materials were hard to get; everything had been invested in the war effort. Papa received a roll of sheet material from one factory. He was overjoyed that he had been given credit, and he brought the material home on the back of his bicycle.

My parents set up one of the rooms of our apartment as an office and stockroom. They furnished it with a large cutting table, a desk, and shelves. Mama worked as the secretary and bookkeeper for the new business. The retail store owners were hungry for goods, and word soon spread that Papa had some items for sale. I remember the arrival of a truckload of blankets. They felt rough, but the store owners fought and offered bribes of eggs and chickens to get their share from Papa. The business grew quickly, and Papa's fortune improved.

One day Papa surprised us with a large black car. It was a Mercedes, but it looked peculiar because it had a stove-like

contraption in the rear. Gasoline was almost impossible to come by, so all of the cars and trucks were equipped with a kind of stove for charcoal or wood. The combustion of that fuel powered the car. This new method, however, was not a reliable source of energy. Papa came home late many nights because the car's system got clogged. How lucky the American soldiers were, with their endless supply of gasoline!

I never wanted the summer of 1945 to end. It felt special to be ten years old, enjoying the freedom that had been denied me for so much of my early childhood. My new friends also felt relieved to be rid of the strains of war. Now I could run around with them as much as I wanted. In the concentration camp, Mama had warned me constantly not to use up my energy because there wasn't enough food to stop the noises coming from my empty stomach. Now I knew that my hunger pangs would be stilled with the delicious meals prepared by Mama and Mrs. Eckert, our newly appointed maid.

My parents also hired a private tutor to help me catch up with the lost years of school. It was an almost impossible task for Miss Mann, a kind and patient elderly woman. I hadn't even completed first grade when the Jewish school in Stuttgart, an hour's train ride from where we lived, had been forced to close. After that, there had been only one school in the state of Wuerttemberg that Jewish children were allowed to attend. Miss Mann had a great deal to teach me. Unfortunately, my mind was not on schoolwork but on playing with my friends.

When school opened again, I was enrolled in the fifth grade, with the provision that I would also attend some fourth-grade classes. There were few textbooks available. Many of the books printed during the war years were filled with Nazi propaganda and could no longer be used. Each book that we did have had to be shared by at least two children. This often made homework hard to complete. I had some difficulty keeping up with my studies, especially in arithmetic. The class was up to fractions, but I had barely mastered addition and subtraction. I was not happy at school, although the children were friendly. Our teacher, Miss Neumeister, was strict and demanded perfection.

Although I didn't like school, I must confess that I enjoyed the attention and preferential treatment that people gave me for having survived the Holocaust. It was obvious to me that everyone was trying hard to make me feel at home again. My classmates often let me keep our shared schoolbooks longer, even though they knew it could jeopardize their own grades. They also let me win at games, overlooking my clumsiness and errors. I desperately wanted to believe in their sincerity, but I wondered if they'd been instructed by their parents to be extra nice to the Jewish girl and not draw attention to their own dark pasts.

On the other hand, I didn't want anyone to feel sorry for me or to treat me better because I was the little girl who had survived the horrors of a concentration camp. What I really wanted was to be accepted for the person I was.

The war hadn't altered my relationship with my parents. Because I was an only child, I remained the center of their

attention and their lives. Papa had always been strict with me, and that didn't change. He had grown up in a large family where the motto was "Spare the rod, spoil the child." In typical German fashion, children had to be submissive at all times or be the object of reprisal from their parents. Papa was quick-tempered and never hesitated to raise his voice to correct my behavior, but he was also good at giving me pep talks when I needed them.

In contrast, Mama had a mild temper and always tried to smooth out my run-ins with my father. After the war, she became even more protective. She always had to know my whereabouts, fearing that something terrible could happen and that we would be separated. She encouraged me to have little talks with her, during which she questioned me about my relationships with my new friends and advised me not to get into trouble and call attention to myself. These talks often angered me. I felt that I was being restrained again, even though in my heart I knew that both of my parents were only interested in my welfare. They wanted me to grow up and become a decent and respected human being.

Despite the successes of our new life, my parents decided to part from Germany and its cruel past. They believed that there was no future for me there. So one year after our liberation from the concentration camp, we were on the move again. We were given the opportunity to emigrate to the United States on the second boat of displaced persons leaving Germany after the war. I felt relieved. I was not unhappy to leave Germany.