

**German  
Resistance  
Memorial Center**



**Franz Michalski**

**When the Gestapo  
Rang the Doorbell...**



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**A “Mixed Marriage” Family and their Helpers**

Epilogue by Barbara Schieb

Translated by Peter Michalski and Milena Michalski

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## **Introduction**

Yet another account from the Third Reich, yet one more hike from 1933 to 1945 — why? Because no two human fates are the same. During the time of National Socialism, millions of people were ostracised, persecuted and murdered. Only some few thousand tried to help those stripped of all rights. But every one of these tales of salvation is unique.

I also want to tell the story of people we met in those years, of good people and evil ones, of dire incidents as well as happy coincidences. I wish to remember them, our silent heroes, because to the end of their days they never boasted about their life-endangering deeds. They need to remain in our memory as role models and to show us that even in the worst of times people can help others if they possess courage, wisdom and brotherly love: the policeman friend, the motherly nanny, the fearless colleague, the changeable partisan leader, the hotel owners who pretended to be blind and simple-minded.

I want to give testimony to someone without whose calm and circumspection, without whose selflessly devoted bravery and organizational skills we would certainly not have lived to see the end of the war — my father. I shall give an account of my mother and of my little brother. And of myself. By the time it was all over I was ten years old.



◀  
My Catholic grandmother,  
Hedwig Michalski, in the 1930s

### **My Roman Catholic Family, my Father's Family**

Both my paternal grandparents were born shortly after the formation of the *Deutsches Reich*, the German Empire, in 1871, and were keen to leave the provincial narrowness of their Silesian villages behind them. The eve of the 20th century was filled with optimistic expectation and both of them looked forward to a life of economic security as well as variety in Breslau. The Silesian capital had risen quickly in the fledgling *Kaiserreich* to become metropolis of Germany's east, its economy flourishing and its arts and sciences carrying the gleaming reputation of the city far beyond the realm's borders.

Hedwig Glied, born 15 October 1867 in Kunersdorf, had qualified as a cook in her youth. Franz Michalski, who was born in Ratibor on 20 October 1869, came to Breslau as a shoemaker journeyman and soon after acquired the title of master shoemaker. Following their marriage in around 1900, they moved into a spacious apartment in a middle-class part of town at Hohenzollernstrasse 72, a short distance from the centre. Both followed their respective trades and did so successfully. One room of the apartment had been set aside as a workshop where Franz produced made-to-measure shoes as a self-employed craftsman, while Hedwig prepared festive banquets in her clients' homes as a freelance chef. Their four children were born between



◀ Richard Michalski's second wife Grete, with the children in Salzgitter in 1950. From left to right: Dieter, Gisela, Dora and Klaus Michalski

▶ Frieda Signus in the 1930s  
Paul Signus in the 1930  
Both from the private possessions of Gisela Signus, Verden

1902 and 1909: Frieda in 1902, Richard in 1903, Lucy in 1904, and Herbert, who was to be my father, in 1909. All of them were baptized in the Roman Catholic faith. Once my grandmother became a mother she took on fewer jobs. However, even after that she continued regularly to prepare wedding and communion meals as far as it was possible to do so without neglecting the children.

As usual in those days, a goodly portion of the capital acquired by then was invested in the education of the elder son. Richard was permitted to attend the *Gymnasium* (grammar school) and, following the *Abitur* (qualifying for admission to a university), studied medicine in his home town. He became a general practitioner and managed, while still quite young, to open a practice of his own in Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse and become very well regarded. In the mid-1930s he married Dorothea Lorke (1898-1948), a widow who brought her three children, Eva, Hans and Heinz, into the marriage. Richard became a responsible and good father to his stepchildren. Dorothea bore him three children, too, in Breslau: Klaus in 1939, Dieter in 1940 and Dora in 1941.

Frieda married Paul Signus, a Protestant, in the early 1920s. Their children, Irmgard, born 1925, and Horst, born 1928, were christened in the Protestant faith. Paul Signus was successful as a self-employed sales representative for pharmaceutical products in Breslau. Frieda Signus was a housewife, equally renowned for her cooking and baking skills. Paul, her husband, was killed on 1 September 1939, the very first day of the invasion of Poland by the



German Wehrmacht (army). This meant that Frieda had to look after their children on her own, although with the support of Richard and Herbert, her brothers. As the son of one of the first soldiers to die, Horst was nominated for a place at *Napola*, the *Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalt* (Institute for National-Political Education). Frieda was glad that her son's education was being provided for. Horst became a boarder at the *Napola* in the city of Graz.

Lucy got married in the mid-1920s in Berlin to Wilhelm Vorpahl. He had fought and lost a leg in World War I. They lived in Berlin-Neukölln where their son, Wolfgang, was born in 1927. Shortly after his birth Lucy became seriously ill with arthritis. Her hands and feet became deformed and later changed to such an extent that her ability to walk and to grasp was severely impaired. The couple separated in 1933, and Lucy moved with Wolfgang back to Breslau where they lived with her parents at Hohenzollernstrasse. However, Wolfgang always kept in touch with his father. Lucy worked as a switchboard operator at the *Landwirtschaftliche Hauptgenossenschaft* (Central Agricultural Co-Operative) in Schweidnitzer Strasse. My parents supported her financially and looked after Wolfgang. They often invited him to our home in Görlitz. He too gained entry into a *Napola*, thanks to the family connections. He attended that institution in Potsdam.

The family were Roman Catholics but Catholicism did not play a dominant role within the family, although Richard – together with his best friend, Alfons Thienelt – was for many years a passionate altar boy. The four Michalski

siblings got on well. They were mindful of one another and supported each other. After the death of Franz, their father, on Good Friday 1934 they jointly looked after their mother, Hedwig.

### **My Jewish Family, My Mother's Family**

My maternal grandparents came from Jewish Breslau families who felt themselves to be on an equal footing with their predominantly Protestant or Catholic fellow citizens. Christians belonged as much to the circle of acquaintances of these families as did orthodox and reformed Jews. Tolerance and openness meant more to them than merely being the precondition for their commercial success. They would, however, never have dreamt of letting themselves be baptized or of leading orthodox Jewish lives. Their Jewishness had hardly anything to do with religion but a lot to do with tradition. The very being of each and everyone of them, the feeling of a shared identity of that stratum of Breslau society, were shaped by the liberal yet solidly structured family and communal lives of their parents and forbears. It was "among our people" that they had their true friends. They held the rabbi in high esteem on account of his wide-ranging education, and on high holidays they gathered in the synagogue to enjoy the cantor's singing.

The families from which my grandparents hailed were not rich. But they were financially sound and had good commercial contacts. It was this that enabled them to make a little more money from their commercial activities than was necessary to keep up standards within their bourgeois framework. The surplus, or a part thereof, was available to the wives for their social engagement. It was customary at the time for better-off Jewish ladies to form a circle which paid money into, and administered, a welfare fund. The fund financed bursaries for students, sponsored the training of young opera singers – Joseph Schmidt for example – or supported community members in need, as well as Jewish nursing.

My grandfather, Berthold Brann, born in Breslau on 18 April 1868, was a successful draper by the time he married Helene Hahn in 1905. People in Breslau got married late at the turn of the century. My father's parents were in their early thirties, and when my mother's parents tied the knot Helene was already thirty and Berthold even thirty seven years old. The sons of Jewish families were supposed to "make something of themselves" before starting families of their own, usually after a lengthy engagement. And the fathers of brides were keen to make sure their daughters would enter well-ordered circumstances before releasing them from their care and protection at home.

Helene and Berthold Brann lived in Hohenzollernstrasse 69, just a few doors away from the home of the Michalski family. Berthold worked as Silesia

agent for well-known weaving and textile mills from Krefeld and Britain, with the majority of his regular customers based in Breslau. His office was situated in the city centre as were the businesses of most of his clientele. This was handy for his frequent visits to customers. Customers from out of town were dealt with by correspondence, with the telephone a later addition. As far as staff was concerned, all Berthold needed was a secretary and a clerk. Occasionally he would take on some young man from his ranks of relatives or friends as an intern. He did this more as a favour rather than really requiring additional help at work.

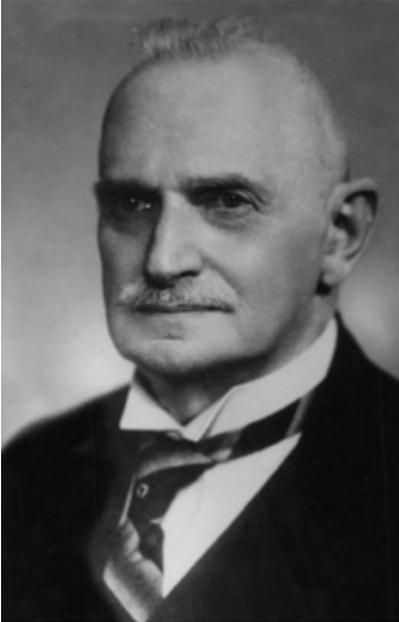
Helene Hahn, my grandmother, was born on 27 February 1875. Coming from a family which would be called modern even by today's standards, she tried to educate her daughters in the same way. Clara was born on 4 August 1907 in Breslau where, too, Lilli, my mother, was born on 21 August 1910. Helene loved her husband, and the two girls their father, yet always saw themselves as autonomous personalities. It was taken for granted that once they left school they would take up vocational training.

Helene Brann died at the early age of forty two in the war year of 1917. Clara and Lilli, ten and seven years old at the time, always remembered her as a loving and cheerful mother and a beautiful and elegant lady. It appears that Lilli, the younger of the two, found it even harder than her sister Clärchen, the elder by three years, to cope with the pain of the early loss of their mother. Lilli was a quiet child who even years after their mother's death sought consolation in her father, while recognizing how much of a solace she was to him in her devotion. Whenever she allowed herself to be drawn into exuberance and high-spirited pranks by her sister she subsequently – and mostly unnecessarily – felt bad and regretted it, whereas Clärchen was already setting up the next amusement.

It was difficult to recover from the blow that fate had dealt the Branns. An impoverished distant relative, Liesbeth Landau, came into the family, to look after the girls and to run the household. She was fifty four years old at the time and never managed to fulfill the role of mother. Clärchen and Lilli did not get on well with her. Naturally, this led to tensions, which Liesbeth endured but which often made their father escape into spells of faintness. Once Clara and Lilli were grown up my grandfather married Liesbeth – out of gratitude.

As young girls Lilli, my mother, and my *Tante* (aunt) Clärchen used to help their father in his office in the secretary's absence. Clara did so more often than her younger sister, Lilli. But both enjoyed doing it. They loved being together with their warm-hearted, sensitive father in the sober and slightly dusty premises.

It was not very far from the family home in Hohenzollernstrasse 69 to the office in the centre of Breslau. You could walk, which proved a great advantage particularly at the time of the inflation. When inflation reached the zenith of madness in 1923, with money dropping in value several times a day,



◀  
My grandfather,  
Berthold Brann, around 1930

my grandfather's work consisted less of selling his wares and more of being quick to cash his invoices. He would phone home every few hours for one of his daughters to come running to the office, take a bundle of banknotes and dash to buy bread or whatever else they happened to need before prices shot up even further.

Berthold Brann presided well over the household, however he also tyrannized his family. He had lived with his parents right up to his marriage, aged 37. Even in his fourth decade his mother still continued to anticipate his every wish, just as she had when Bertie was a four-year old boy. She thus turned her son into an egocentric, accustomed to his nearest and dearest striving for his wellbeing above all else. He responded to adversities from the outside world, in business for instance, with bouts of sickness. When Berthold fell ill all of a sudden, when his horror at a perceived arbitrary decision by his wife or one of his daughters brought him to the brink of a heart attack, they had no choice but to give in to his will to avoid a catastrophe. Thus he forced his will through even in matters of no significance; he would prevent his daughter Clärchen from going dancing with a young man, for example, by fainting. Looking back, both daughters smiled about their grandmother's subsmissiveness and "*Affenliebe*" (excessively doting love) when they later told us about it.

The National Socialists changed everything. They turned my grandfather — who until then had been Jewish merely on paper — into a proud Jew, and made a man out of the mummy's boy. In 1933, the world stopped revolving around him alone. His self-pity and hysteria gave way to courage and consideration. Being persecuted himself, he helped other persecuted Jews of his community with money and food.

Berthold Brann decided in 1942 that he would not allow himself to be ordered on to a transport. All he was prepared to accept was eviction from the apartment at Hohenzollernstrasse 69, where he had lived all his life, where his daughters had grown up and where his beloved wife, Helene, had died in 1917. Around 1941 he and his second wife, Liesbeth, were moved into a dark, small flat at Neue Graupenstrasse 7 in one of the *Judenhäuser* (Jew houses) installed by the *Gauleitung* (leadership of the NS district administration). More and more often we went round to see the two of them, bringing food, soap and other daily necessities which they, like all other Jews, were increasingly deprived of. Berthold became ever quieter, ever more serious and his voice ever more lowered. Right until the end, however, he enjoyed my sitting quite close to him and listening to his fairytales, his arm around my shoulders. My memories of Grandfather Berthold and of Liesbeth are very much alive. He was an exceedingly loving grandfather, and when he sat me on his lap there were two things I was particularly fond of: his artfully cultivated goatee, as white as the hair on his head, and the faint smell of cigars which was always about him. The relationship between my mother and her father had become very intimate during the last years. They shared and kept all secrets and developed a code of their own.

He was one of the last Breslau Jews not yet deported to Theresienstadt (Terezin) or Riga by the time his life ended on 6 July 1942 at the age of seventy four. Whether my grandfather died by his own hand is a question which my mother, his daughter, was not allowed to answer. Half a year after Berthold's death Liesbeth Brann, then seventy nine years old, was taken to the collection camp Riebnig near Brieg. On 4 March 1942 she was transported to Auschwitz, the extermination camp from which she was never to return.

### **The Wider Circle of Jewish Relatives**

Motivated by gratitude, my grandfather had accepted "Kullu" Landau, Liesbeth's slightly feeble-minded brother, as a member of our household from 1917 onwards. I never learnt his proper first name. He did not actually live with the Branns but would always join them for supper, and every evening Liesbeth would hand him packed meals for next day's breakfast and lunch. Berthold also covered the rest of Kullu's living expenses.

Kullu was an elderly gentleman, forever in a good mood, whom the girls, Clärchen and Lilli, treasured as a playmate. The loved him and laughed about him even when he drove his sister to despair; when, for instance, he pulled a small pair of scissors from his jacket pocket during supper and cut inlay soles out of his trouser legs at thigh level because he feared he might get cold feet on the way home. Or when he peeled dessert apples with such skill that the peel formed curly garlands which he smilingly used to decorate the breast pocket of his jacket.

Once the girls were older they admired his genius. He knew both parts of Goethe's "Faust" by heart as he did the complete timetable of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn* (Germany's railway system). He was capable of mentally "browsing" these works and recite on demand any scene or train connection requested. But he gave rise to worries too. He liked standing in the middle of the road in order to fight the oncoming tram with his umbrella. The Branns were frequently called to the hospital's accident and emergency unit. The last of those battles occurred in the early Thirties. It ended in his ultimate defeat.

Helene, my grandmother, had two sisters, Jenny and Gertrud, the latter called Trude. According to my mother, Aunt Jenny had been married to a wealthy shoe manufacturer and lived in a sumptuous villa in Berlin-Schlachtensee. Aunt Jenny was widowed young and subsequently spent her life mainly travelling the length and breadth of Europe. Ultimately she managed to save only a small fraction of her wealth from the hands of the National Socialists, but it sufficed at least to enable her and her sister Trude, a spinster, to live in hotels in Switzerland until their deaths in the 1950s. In common with many natives of Breslau, Helene's brother, Alfred Hahn, was drawn to the capital of the Reich. He and his family lived in Berlin-Wilmersdorf. I never knew him but my mother told me that he was deported, together with his wife, daughter and son-in-law.

Among the few family papers rescued there is a letter to my mother, written by Sophie Hahn on 25 November 1941. Sophie Hahn née Haberkorn, Helene's aunt, born 1855 in the Silesian town of Neisse (Nysa), was the widow of Julius Hahn and lived in Breslau. She reported to my mother, her great-niece: "The transport is said to have gone; and with it any prospect of reunion." It is possible that this referred to her relation, Berta Haberkorn (born in 1881) who was deported on that day from Breslau to Kowno, and murdered.

People knew the fate which awaited them but it sounds like something harmless when Sophie remarks in the same letter: "I believe that the enclosed is more safely kept by you than by me. One never knows what else might still happen." The attachment was her Last Will (p. 82 doc. 1), drafted 25 November 1941, which named my brother, Peter, and me, her two great-great-nephews, as the sole beneficiaries. The two of us were the youngest members of the large Hahn/Brann family who, she hoped, would survive. In

truth, the state had long ago stolen her fortune. On 24 September 1942 it also took her life, in Theresienstadt, where Sophie Hahn had been deported to from Breslau on 30 August 1942, aged eighty seven.

Only three members of the Hahns and Branns survived the regime of the National Socialists, in addition to my mother: her two aunts, Jenny Blume and Gertrud Hahn, as well as her sister, Clara Werner.

### Clara “Clärchen” Brann, My Mother’s Sister

Clärchen, born 4 August 1907 in Breslau as Clara Edith Brann, turned into a vivacious child, into a teenager with a penchant for biting sarcasm and into a “somewhat man-mad” young girl, according to a slightly critical description by her father, who tended to exaggerate. She attended the Lyceum and accompanied her wealthy Aunt Jenny on extended journeys to places such Baden-Baden or Venice.



Jenny Blume (centre) with her nieces, Clara (left) and Lilli on the beach at Sellin/Rügen. The photo was taken on 4 August 1922, Clara’s 15th birthday, and sent to Berthold Brann as a postcard.





◀  
Claire and George Werner,  
London, 1950

In Breslau, Clärchen kept herself busy in various ways and occasionally worked for lengthier spells in her father's office. She had a large circle of friends and acquaintances. The Roaring Twenties truly happened for her. And of all people it was she, the seemingly most superficial and most frivolous of the family, who was most sensitive to the terrible magnitude of the coming danger. She changed her life. Half a year after Hitler's accession to power she began a period of commercial training at the age of twenty six and endeavoured to learn English. She worked as a clerk in Fritz Schmoschever's grocery store until mid-March 1938, after which date the company was "aryanised". She immediately prepared to emigrate and on 16 September of that year she set foot on to British soil. From then on England was to be her home, although she was granted British citizenship only after the war, on 1 July 1949.

Britain took in many refugees from the *Deutsches Reich* and those rescued have been grateful to Britain. Only a small number of them, however, were able to continue life in their new homeland at the standard they had been accustomed to. The safety of survival had to be paid for by social comedown; that was true for many, and it proved true for my aunt far beyond the measure of Clärchen's expectations. She eked out a living as a cleaner, a maid and a factory worker at a conveyor belt during the pre-war and war years in London. In addition, the convivial person she was felt immensely lonely in the gigantic city of London despite a few noncommittal acquaintanceships with

other refugees. As a rule, the people of London did not desire any contact with foreigners, least of all with refugees from Germany, a country with which they were at war.

This changed slowly after the war. Londoners became more relaxed. The immigrants mutated into naturalised citizens and shed their feelings of inferiority. People became closer to each other, including the new Britons among themselves. Many of the surviving singles or widowed refugees got married. My aunt among them. In 1946 she married Dr. Siegfried Fuchs, a former lawyer from Breslau, in London. Fuchs was an educated and highly sensitive Jew. He belonged to those particularly unlucky emigrants who realised, to an ever more horrifying degree after the end of the fight against National Socialism, all they had lost forever, fell into deeper and deeper depression and finally committed suicide. He died in 1949.

In 1950 Clärchen married a second time. It was her husband's second marriage, too. Georg Samuel Werner from Breslau, born 1903 in Krotoschin near Posen (Poznan) had to live with grieving for his family whom he had "temporarily" left back in Breslau. He never learnt when and where his wife and his thirteen-year old daughter were murdered.

"George" and Clärchen led a good marriage. They were forty seven and forty three years old respectively when they got married and they offered support to each other, especially in battling their memories. Georg Werner died in 1972, aged sixty nine. He died from the long-term effects of having been tortured repeatedly in Silesia before fleeing to Britain. My aunt could not cope with the loss. She survived her husband by more than twenty years, until 1995. But she missed the balance he had given her and without it lacked any protection against the ghosts of the past. Clärchen's life ended in insecurity and depression. She was laid to rest in London.

### **My Parents, Herbert Michalski and Lilli Brann**

Herbert and Lilli had known each other from childhood. They lived in the same street: he at Hohenzollernstrasse 72, she diagonally across the road at No. 69. As children they had not had much contact, the families knew each other as neighbours.

Because little Herbert did not want to stay at home without his siblings he followed them to school daily, making a nuisance of himself until he was allowed to sit in class quietly. Over time teachers and pupils had grown so used to him that his starting school properly at Easter 1915, aged five, happened almost by itself. At the age of thirteen he had eight school years behind him and an apprenticeship contract in his pocket. During the next three years he learnt the trade of a grain merchant at the Jewish wholesale business

of Lipschütz & Peiser in Breslau. This coincided with the era of the great inflation and subsequent deflation. Economic catastrophe followed upon economic catastrophe and the only companies able to survive were the ones whose staff worked exceptionally hard and consistently. With the exception of high Jewish holidays, Herbert's only time off during his apprenticeship were Sunday afternoons. Being a liberal-minded Catholic, it was a matter of course for him to respect his employers' Jewish rules.

After his apprenticeship Herbert found a good position as a dispatcher in the cereals department of the Central Agricultural Co-Operative in the district town of Oels, thirty kilometres from Breslau, near the villages from which his parents hailed. He enjoyed his work. It entailed frequent travelling. The co-operative recorded the agricultural produce of Upper Silesia as well as the district of Posen, and its connections extended westwards as far as Görlitz in Lower Silesia. Herbert negotiated with farmers and rural dealers, and his successes were all the greater the better he knew how to talk with them in their local dialect. This ability, to respond to diverse people's individual mentality, even down to the melody of their regional speech, was the capital he accumulated while working for the co-operative and which was, one day, to save his life and that of his family.

The economic crisis of 1929/30 forced constraints upon the co-operative, including cutting back on salaries. Herbert had fancied the idea of going it alone for quite some time. The economic problems provided the impetus to leave Oels and return to Breslau. He prepared for his future as a self-employed salesman by working as an employee at his brother-in-law Paul Signus' commercial agency for chemical-pharmaceutical products. The most important of the manufacturers they represented was the Berlin company Hans Schwarzkopf.

Herbert rode his motorbike from place to place all over Silesia visiting customers, and was welcomed everywhere as Paul Signus' "young man". He continued to pursue his dream of becoming his own boss. He managed to strengthen his relationship with clients, particularly in Lower Silesia, and he tied up contacts with manufacturers of chemical-pharmaceutical products. In November 1933 he was finally able to start a commercial agency of his own in Görlitz. From there he sold products from a variety of manufacturers, including Hans Schwarzkopf, to the pharmacies, chemists and hair salons of Lower Silesia. Despite of spending a lot of time away from it Herbert regarded Breslau as his home. His family had meanwhile moved to Gutenbergstrasse 4, not far from their old apartment. This is where he began looking for a spouse.

Lilli, born in 1910, attended the Lyceum, followed by a business school. She learnt shorthand and typing, business calculation and all the other basic skills necessary for managing an office. Taking it in turns with Clärchen, Lilli helped out in their father's company whenever the need arose, and she



◀ Lilli (top) and Clara Brann on a beach in the summer of 1923

accompanied their aunt Jenny on her journeys, some of the time together with Clärchen, at others on her own. Those trips, which sometimes went on for several weeks, were the most beautiful and easygoing times in my mother's years as a young girl, who badly missed her own mother who had died so young.

Lilli's range of friends and acquaintances in Breslau was nothing as extensive as Clärchen's. Lilli moved among small, quiet groups. She also found her first and unusually intense love there, in the person of David Hirsch. When this love shattered, because the young man married another girl from their mutual circle of friends – and later went to Palestine with her – it seemed like the end of the world to Lilli. It was the next great blow fate dealt her after the death of her mother.

Initially the neighbouring children at Hohenzollernstrasse did not pay much attention to each other but, once more grown up, the blond Michalski brothers would do anything to impress the young girls, especially the “racy” ones from the Jewish families. Richard sped up and down the streets in his sporty open-top roadster and Herbert hurtled, elegantly as he thought, around the neighbourhood on his motorbike. The young ladies, Lilli and her girl friends would occasionally ride along – for a nibble at the Italian ice cream parlour on Tauentzienplatz, to a five-o'clock tea dance at the hotel Savoy, or to the leafy river banks of the Oder. Soon Herbert kept his pillion seat reserved for Lilli's exclusive use and she enjoyed being given rides by him. The thought of who



▲  
Gertrud Hahn with her nieces, Lilli (left) and Clara,  
at an unknown location, 1926

his daughter was spending time with made Berthold, my grandfather, suffer agonies. Not because he might have rejected the Catholic in Herbert. It was the motor-cyclist that frightened him. He forbade his daughter to ride along, and Lilli called off any dates with Herbert whenever Berthold had one of his fainting fits. Supplications by Herbert in the form of visits to the Brann household had no effect whatsoever. Berthold let it be known that he was not available.

It was Lilli's brief, but for her impetuous, affair with David Hirsch which brought this quaint power play to an end. Following its abrupt end, Berthold became genuinely worried about his broken daughter. Herbert had never ceased to remind the Branns of his existence by dropping by briefly every so often to pay his respects to the family. Berthold Brann now called Herbert in, imploring him to wait for Lilli patiently, even if it might take months. It took almost a year before she recognized in Herbert her man for life.

By that time, the National Socialists had come to power. There was hardly a Jew who foresaw the mass murder but they all knew that an ominous period of Jew hatred had begun. In contrast to past times numerous non-religious Jews now converted to Christianity.

After her engagement Lilli gave in to Herbert's urging and her father's persuasion to register for religious instructions into the Roman Catholic faith, which was a prerequisite for acceptance into the church. One of the reasons she decided to do so was to reassure her parents-in-law. Hedwig and Franz



▲  
Herbert Michalski  
around 1943



▲  
Lilli Brann in front of Herbert Michalski's car  
on an excursion in October 1933

Michalski viewed the idea of their son marrying a Jewess with great anxiety in the light of the new balance of power in the Deutsches Reich.

Thus Lilli Brann, the non-religious Jewess, became Lilli Michalski, the non-religious Roman Catholic. She shed no tears over the loss of the Jewish faith. But once she ceased to be part of it she revered Judaism as the embodiment of tolerance and humanity. Before belonging “to the church” she had been indifferent towards Christianity. If anything Lilli found the priests in their strange garb and the holy mass, as much as she had watched its rite from the outside, rather appealing. The religious instruction, however, introduced her to a Catholicism which she took to be dictatorial, arrogant and insincere. She regarded her conversion into the Catholic church as a rational, reasonable decision under the political circumstances. But as the years went by she felt more and more ashamed of that rationality.

On 12 December 1933, my parents got married in Breslau, both at the registry office and in church (p. 83 & 84 docs. 2 & 3). The church wedding took place at St. Corpus-Christi-Kirche. The witness was my uncle Richard, Herbert's brother. Everyone was cheerful and full of optimism, in spite of everything. No one could anticipate the horrors to come – neither the young couple the impending deportations, nor the uncle the crazy war at the end of which he, Richard Michalski, would be the only medical doctor among the roughly 170,000 defenceless, starving, sick and dulled German inhabitants left in Breslau.



Lilli Michalski with Franz in Görlitz around the turn of the year 1934/35

Straight after marrying, Lilli and Herbert moved into their Hartmannstrasse flat in Görlitz, not far from Wilhelmplatz. The office had been opened at the same address a month earlier. They moved once more, two years later, to Jakobstrasse 9, where the apartment was more comfortable and larger. In particular, it offered space for the growing office and was even closer to the grand Wilhelmplatz.

Life in Görlitz was agreeable for the young couple. They led a harmonious marriage. Herbert enjoyed his field work and the overland car journeys it entailed. Lilli was the soul of the business. It afforded her the opportunity to apply what she had learnt at the business school to a far larger extent even than had been possible at her father's company. She dealt with the clerical side, ordered goods, saw to sales deliveries. She was "the office" and felt good being it. The modest commercial agency did well from the outset. The clients welcomed Herbert's visits and they, as well as the suppliers, appreciated Lilli's efficient and correct ways of working. The commission payments flowed in plentifully.

On 17 October 1934 my mother gave birth to me at the Carolus hospital in Görlitz. I was given a Catholic baptism and christened Franz Paul Michalski. My parents had chosen the name after my paternal grandfather who had died on Good Friday, 30 May 1934.

Since Lilli was keen to continue working in Herbert's firm she employed someone to help with the baby and around the home. Erna Scharf joined



Lilli Michalski with Franz on the bonnet of the car, Görlitz, 1935

the household. She soon felt at home in our small family, all the more as her maid's room was the first time in her life that she had a space to herself. Erna was not yet eighteen when she took up her position and Ernst Scharf, her father, had made Herbert promise to look after her not only as good employer but also to watch over her in her spare time like a father. Over the next few years, Erna became Herbert's ever diligent and eager pupil, Lilli's intimate companion, cooking together or labouring over the laundry, and my motherly and forever cheerful "auntie".

Ernst Scharf, a glassblower, had good reasons for choosing us as the family with whom he would allow his daughter to take up employment: because of the "mixed marriage" he could be certain that Erna would not end up in a family of National Socialists. Being a communist, Ernst Scharf was a convinced opponent of the regime. Together with some friends, he had distributed anti-fascist pamphlets from Czechoslovakia in Görlitz. For a time, they remained undiscovered but eventually the group was arrested following a betrayal. Ernst Scharf spent a year in agonizing solitary confinement in a cell of the Görlitz law courts in 1937/38. On release he could no longer find employment at the glassblowing works or anywhere else, having been categorized as a *Volksschädling* (parasite to the people's body). He did, however, succeed in leasing a small farm, which he managed together with his wife and Erna's sister, Else, in the Königshain mountains, in Thiemendorf, in the county of Görlitz. He had to be on his guard, constantly



The Scharf family, pictured in a photographic studio in Görlitz, around 1938.

From right to left: Heinz Scharf, the son, his wife Liesbeth, the daughters Else and Erna, Ernst Scharf, the father; in front: Ida Scharf, the mother



▲ Herbert and Franz Michalski in Görlitz, summer 1938



▲ Franz Michalski on Wilhelmsplatz, Görlitz, autumn 1938



▲ Lilli Michalski (left) with Franz and Erna Scharf on an excursion, 1939

assuming he was under surveillance and, during the next few years he was visited by the Gestapo time and again.

But he never stopped helping comrades who had gone underground or others persecuted for political reasons. Later, during the war, Ernst and his wife were even so courageous as to provide food and drink to escaped POWs, Poles and Russians, and to calm the panic-stricken wretches in their kitchen. Most of those fleeing were caught in the surrounding woods of the small mountain range before the day was out and shot.

Most people in Germany were still rather carefree in the mid-Thirties when looking to the future. Erna was a cheerful girl. Thanks to her common sense she would find humour even in some seemingly rather serious situations and could be quite cheeky at times. This made Erna Scharf an ideal member of the Michalski household since a pronounced penchant for irony was part of Lilli's nature and Herbert loved laughter. They were doing fine in those days.

My own, probably first, memory sets in a bit later, in the spring of 1938, when I was three and a half: Erna had every Sunday afternoon off and sometimes went dancing in the restaurant on Landeskronen, the local Görlitz mountain. She took me along, out of good will and possibly also at my mother's bidding. And she did it again and again, despite my frequently running onto the dance floor and trying to push Erna's dancing partner away from her while shouting loudly: "ME, I am going to marry Erna!"

### **Robbed of our Livelihood, 1938**

My father's success in business aroused ever more envy. Rivals attempting to impede the rise of a competitor and, if possible, reverse it has always been part of business life. They try to achieve this by changing their offers, reducing prices, increasing their personal engagement. That is an arduous task, success comes only slowly and sometimes never. In a police state it is possible to do away with such efforts. Where informing on, and denouncing, people is rewarded by the authorities, one can get rid of inconvenient people by blackening their names.

On their visits to customers, Herbert's competitors would drop the odd remark about his Jewish wife. They calculated that the boycott of Jewish businesses, demanded by the state, would make it appear advisable to customers to place their orders with suppliers other than those represented by my father. They were mistaken however. Most of the chemists, hair salons and pharmacists of Lower Silesia wanted to go on buying their shampoos, toothpastes, liqueur essences and prepared baby foods via Herbert Michalski. They let Herbert know what his competitors were up to. There were exceptions, of course. Active members of the party, members of the

*Sturmabteilung*, the SA (armed and uniformed branch of the NSDAP), were to be found among “our” customers too. They turned away from my father, and their number increased the more the regime settled in.

Lilli’s and Herbert’s cheerfulness waned more and more. Fear of what might be coming began to seep into family life. For the time being they were less anxious about themselves, rather, they were afraid that the manufacturers might become dissatisfied with Herbert Michalski, their sales representative in Görlitz, due to the continuing decline in turnover. Then, in the year 1938, came the blow under which Herbert’s commercial agency collapsed. After the war, on 22 April 1947, Hans Schwarzkopf, the Berlin company which had once been the main pillar supporting Herbert’s livelihood, affirmed under penalty of perjury:

“We hereby confirm that on 31 December 1938 Herr Herbert Michalski had to give up, without any compensation, the commercial representation of our company in the region of Lower Silesia which he had held since November 1933. This resulted from the fact that his wife is a *Volljude* (NS terminology for a person with at least three Jewish grandparents) and several of our customers in the district of Görlitz at the time demanded Herr M.’s dismissal on those grounds. When we nevertheless allowed Herr Michalski to remain as our sales representative, Walter Neumann, a chemist of Briesnitzer Str., Görlitz, appeared in our business premises one day, challenging us emphatically to withdraw our sales representation from Herr Michalski. Herr Neumann even went so far as to put pressure on us with the remark that he would denounce us in the then (party) newspaper ‘*Der Stürmer*’ unless we acceded to his present demand to take the sales representation away from Herr Michalski.”

What this statutory declaration does not mention is that Schwarzkopf had suggested to my father to divorce my mother – officially at least – as a way of saving his sales representation.

The products of other manufacturers represented by my father in Lower Silesia had complemented his range of stock on offer nicely, but they were in no way able to cover the maintenance costs of both the family and the sales agency. Moreover, it was only a matter of time before those companies too would be pressurized into cancelling Herbert’s contract of sales representation. Consequently Herbert had no alternative but to hand over all of his sales representations, not only Schwarzkopf’s, to his successor, Bernhard Baron, a member of the National Socialist Schutzstaffel, the SS (p. 84 doc. 4). My father received no compensation, neither for the lesser representations nor for his main representation, Schwarzkopf.

The Schwarzkopf company believed at the time that it could not act differently. Several of its competitors in Schwarzkopf’s industrial sector had already been forced to the brink of ruin in 1938 by race hate campaigns by “*Der Stürmer*”, foremost among them Beiersdorf, the large chemical concern



Herbert, Lilli and Franz on an excursion, 1939

in Hamburg. However, Willi Weber, Schwarzkopf's commercial head, urged the proprietors not to drop my father. The company offered him a position as an employee in the sales management department at their Berlin headquarters. Herbert had no choice but to accept, although his income forthwith was to be substantially less than his earnings as a sales representative had been.

Immediately after the November pogroms of 1938, when my parents had come to fear more and more for their professional and civil survival, and two months had gone by since my aunt Clärchen had emigrated to Britain, my parents made preparations for our own emigration. Through Richard's connections to Catholic channels, of which we know nothing today, they received organisational help. The destination was to be a town in the southern Brazilian state of Santa Catarina by the name of Blumenau, mainly inhabited by Germans and the descendants of Germans. It was a centre of the textile industry and, as we now know, of fanatical Brazilian-German National Socialists. My parents pursued their preparations for emigration without enthusiasm, as a likely necessary evil. Berthold despaired, in fear of losing his grandson too, in addition to his second daughter. Hedwig tried to persuade Herbert to stay put in the expectation that things might "not get that bad". Only my uncle Richard advised urgently: "Go while it is still possible."

It was a time of agonizing uncertainty. Because my parents could not know whether their application for Brazilian entry visas would be successful, whether they would be able to find a passage on a ship at the right moment,

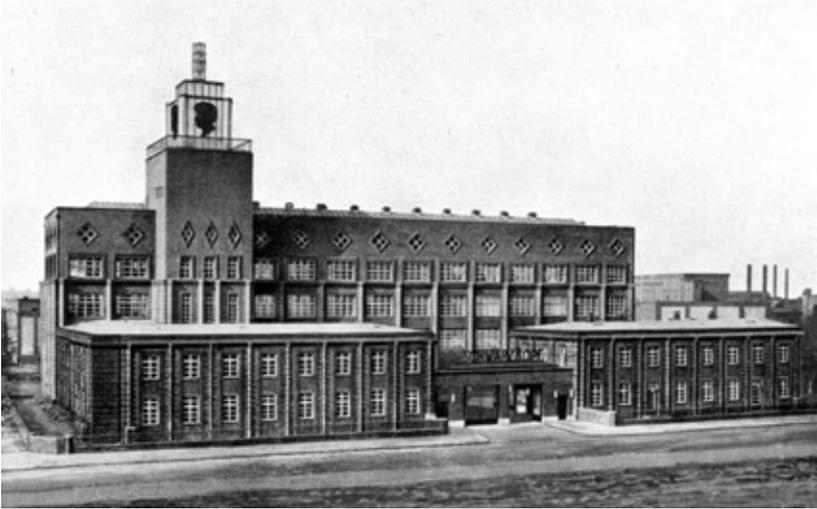


◀ Lilli (right) with Franz (centre) and Herbert's mother Hedwig in Breslau, 1939/40

and which of their possessions they would be allowed to take on board, they were forced to behave, in spite of their preparations for emigration, as if we were going to remain in Breslau. When, at last, in the spring of 1939, they held in their hands visas as well as tickets, they were emotionally so strongly fixated on staying that they committed what they already very soon afterwards regarded as the biggest mistake of their lives. They allowed the steamer to leave Bremerhaven for South America without the Michalski family.

### **Our Separated Family, 1939 to 1944**

At the beginning of 1939 Herbert rented a five-room apartment for us in Breslau, not far from Hedwig Michalski's and Berthold Brann's flats. It just so happened that our address was No. 29 *Strasse der SA*, previously *Kaiser-Wilhelmstrasse*, corner of *Goethestrasse*. On account of his work at the *Schwarzkopf* company in Berlin my father took a cheap furnished room in *Dragonerstrasse* near Berlin's *Alexanderplatz*. He believed my mother and I would be safer in Breslau. Herbert's thinking behind that was that in the event of an emergency we might be able to find protection by moving in with his mother or with the families of his siblings Frieda, Lucy and Richard. Erna did not accompany us. She remained in *Görlitz* and worked in the state-owned company manufacturing train carriages.



▲  
Schwarzkopf company headquarters in Berlin-Tempelhof, around 1930

Meanwhile, my father had taken up his position with Schwarzkopf in Alboinstrasse in Berlin-Tempelhof on 1 February 1939. He was to have little direct contact with the customers, as a matter of precaution. His main task was to obtain goods which were becoming more and more scarce, such as fuel for the company's vehicles or bottles of glass and packaging materials. To do so he travelled all over the German Reich, which by then also included Austria and, a little later, the occupied countries. He visited us in Breslau only at weekends, and by no means every weekend.

Back in Breslau, Lilli and the children – by now there were two of us – became increasingly exposed to the state-imposed anti-Semitism. Having become a Catholic and withdrawing from the Jewish religious community did not protect her from being classified officially as a “*Volljüdin*”. We children, were “*Mischlinge 1. Grades*”, first degree mixed race.

My mother's anguish caused by Herbert's absence was made worse by the growing amount of harassment both by the authorities and private individuals:

- Every German Jew was obliged to apply for an identity card with a yellow letter “J” printed inside, by 31 December 1938. As my mother was Jewish she should have done it at the authorities in Görlitz. She omitted to do so, however. She may have thought the regulation did not apply to her because of her “Aryan” husband. But it did come to

light, in the course of moving to Breslau – which entailed deregistering and registering with the Görlitz and Breslau authorities. My mother received a written summons to apply for the new ID card. She ignored that summons and obeyed in March 1939 only after having to accept a penalty notice amounting to 52.50 Reichsmark “or ten days imprisonment” (p. 85 doc. 5).

- Shopping for food became ever more of a torture for my mother. She was always served last at the corner dairy even if she had entered long before any other customer. I also remember the butcher where we had initially always been served courteously, with Lilli and the lady shop-owner exchanging pleasantries and me often being treated to a free sausage. Soon, though, my mother would be left standing at the counter ignored there too, while all the other customers were given preference, even those who had come in long after us, and it was only once there was no-one else left in the shop that the owner or an employee would, stony-faced, command my mother by a silent nod to state what we wanted.

I, being a child, was, however, treated “normally” there, as well as at the baker’s, the greengrocer’s, and at the dairy. As a result, I eventually became the one who did the food shopping on my own, and consequently I also became the only one who knew my way around the ration cards and their use which could on occasion be rather tricky. Sometimes I could sense pity from the shop assistant, behind the “normal” treatment, particularly in later years when I stepped into a shop hand in hand with Peter, my two or three-year old brother.

- In spite of my mother no longer working in Breslau another girl was to be taken on to replace Erna as a home help. It took more than a little time for my parents to come to terms with their decline from a well-to-do business household. Lilli employed one young girl after another, only to dismiss all of them after a few weeks, sometimes after only a few days. The girls were insolent, not punctual, and lazy. They “didn’t have to put up with anything from Jews.” Some used to steal and when my mother took them to task their response was: “Why don’t you go to the police. We’ll just see whom they are going to believe more, a *BDM* girl (member of the *Bund Deutscher Mädels*, League of German Girls, party youth organization) or a Jewess!” In the end she resigned herself and gave up looking.

The name Wangerooge relates to one of my happy pre-war memories. As a little boy I suffered from a chronic and often painful inflammation of the middle ear. Following my Uncle Richard’s medical advice, my parents entrusted me to the care of “Meeresstern”, a Catholic children’s convalescence home on



▲ Franz Michalski (third from left) with a group of children on the island of Wangerooge in the summer of 1938

the North Sea island of Wangerooge, for three months each in the summers of 1938 and 1939. I liked it there and remember the young nuns' loving care. The illness never reappeared after my second stay by the North Sea.

There are two events from that time which I remember particularly vividly even today: one windy but sunny day, our children's group was playing with the nuns on the lawn in the home's front garden. We were standing and sitting close to the lattice fence separating the grounds from the path. Suddenly a horse-drawn truck came hurtling down the sandy path towards us. Half seated, half standing, the driver on the coach box tried in vain to stop or at least quieten down the runaway horse. The nuns just about managed to push us children hurriedly out of the way before the long side of the vehicle grazed the wooden fence with such force that the planks crashed down noisily on top of each other. The coachman jumped from the careering coach, hurting himself badly. The horse and cart came to a halt some distance from "Meeresstern".

Towards the end of August 1939 my parents collected me in the DKW saloon car from my second sojourn on Wangerooge. The distance between the North Sea and Breslau is quite considerable and it was a lengthy car journey. On this occasion, however, the drive took even twice as long as an infinite number of military vehicles were travelling in the same direction – eastward. Still today, I can hear my parents talking of war and relive how depressed their mood was throughout the entire journey. I had the distinct sense we were under threat.



▲ Franz Michalski (first from left) on the island of Wangerooge, summer 1938

And then the first day of September arrived. It was a sunny late summer's day. I recall that my mother and I wanted to have our meal on the balcony as the weather was so beautiful. But we had to witness some endless Wehrmacht column, marching with big guns among their weaponry, march through Breslau down the grand boulevard below us. My mother wept and wept, and I, not quite five years old, had to watch her crying fit utterly helplessly. I suspect that this event was to blame for setting off my severe, albeit temporary, eating disorder. I have always associated it with the beginning of the war.

I overheard many extremely heated discussions between my parents during the following weeks and months on weekends my father spent at home. During the week, when my mother was alone with me, I often found her in a depressed and irritable mood. Of course I did not understand the reason, but I felt guilty and did not know why. That is when I stopped eating.

At mealtimes, in the morning, at lunchtime and in the evening, my mother urged me – at first coaxing tenderly and then with angry severity – to eat the slice of bread and jam, the potato soap or the cheese sandwich, but I could not manage more than the smallest morsels. She was worried, of course, and not knowing what else to do she left me on my own in a room with a plateful

of sandwiches. I was not allowed to leave the room before I had eaten it all. Either I was stubborn and stayed dully sitting in front of the plate with the sandwiches until my mother lost patience, came into the room and, full of anger, conceded defeat on this one occasion. Or I hid the sandwiches in the drawer of the sewing machine as well as under the carpet. Coming out of the room with the plate empty I was greeted with praise and joy. But when my deed was discovered, sometimes days later, utterly withdrawing into myself was all I could do to protect myself before the fury of the grown-ups, my mother's fury, that of my father on one of his home weekends and the not-quite-genuine anger of Uncle Richard, whom my mother would occasionally telephone for help, complaining: "I just can't manage the boy". Admittedly they did not look appetizing, those *Weisskäse* sandwiches discovered under the carpet. *Weisskäse* is the Silesian word for quark, a kind of cottage cheese.

I do have fond memories of our early time in Breslau, the winter and the spring of 1939, a time when I ate cheerfully and happily – *Griesbrei* (semolina) or warm vanilla pudding sitting in the bath tub, a Viennese sausage in the butcher's – a present from the lady butcher, half a bread roll with red *Schmierwurst* (sausage spread) from a glass drawer at the vending-machine restaurant on Tauentzienplatz or the fruit salad in the Italian patisserie on the same square.

In the autumn of 1939, aged five, I joined a Catholic nursery in Breslau. The sisters in their nun's coifs were kind to all the children and played with them. I alone was left standing in a corner by myself, seemingly unnoticed by them, until I began to defend myself against the other children's thumps and jostles. Then the nuns hit me on the back of the head and pulled me away by my arms. Shaking me, they scolded me: "You Jew lout you do not hit our children!"

That is how I first got to know anti-Semitism.

My mother noticed my dislike of the nursery of course. But if at all, she could only guess at the reason, for I certainly never told her. I had had to overhear so many of my parents' discussions, had lived through so many hours of despair on my mother's part, that I felt there was something in my family over which I ought to have a bad conscience and which caused particular grief to my mother.

She took me to nursery in the mornings and picked me up again at lunchtime. Every day we walked past a monastery building whose cell windows facing the street were barred. All of a sudden, in the early summer of 1940, I loved going to nursery. Why? Because the monastery had been turned into a camp for French prisoners of war. The POWs let in air and sunshine and clustered like zoo animals around the ground level windows. My own impression of them was one of jollity, and when they wolf-whistled after us appreciatively I was proud of my mother and myself. Lilli would furtively hand out cigarettes to the prisoners. And even when my mother no



◀ Franz Michalski sitting on his father's desk in the Breslau apartment, January 1941

longer accompanied me daily to the nursery I would always be greeted on my way with a big hello from the French soldiers.

A memory which is on the one hand funny, yet also highlights the influence of propaganda on the other, dates from that time. An upright piano stood in our living room, the so-called *Herrenzimmer*, and it was my mother's ambition for me to become a good keyboard player some day. Aged five, I began having lessons, and over several months a female teacher struggled valiantly to impart to me the rudiments of piano playing. I found the exercises boring, and the lessons as well as the teacher annoying. What I did enjoy, though, was following my modest musical imagination and thinking up little melodies. These won praise from the teacher. I even made up some nice, so my teacher thought, lyrics to go with one of the little tunes. I was proud of that song and came out with it, singing loudly, at a small family gathering, as a surprise. And what a surprise: I received a spontaneous clip around the ear from my mother, and the piano teacher was dismissed instantly. The song was a childish, naïve hymn in praise of Hitler.

Yet by no means did my mother give up on her goal. She found another teacher for me to torment myself with anew. One day that lady let us know she would be unable to come for the time being because she had broken her leg. Hearing the news, I performed such a jig of joy that even my mother lost her enthusiasm for my piano playing.



◀  
Lilli Michalski with Peter,  
born in November 1940,  
Breslau, early 1941

Early in 1940 my father was drafted into the *Wehrmacht*. Following basic training he was deployed as a driver. After the defeat of France in June 1940 he was stationed in Paris. A year later he was given to understand that he would be promoted into the ranks of NCOs on condition that he prove his loyalty to “*Führer und Reich*” by divorcing his wife. In June 1941 he was dishonourably discharged from the army on account of his “non-Aryan” wife. That turned out to be lucky for him, for soon afterwards his unit was redeployed to the Eastern front. Whenever Herbert subsequently enquired about erstwhile comrades the reply that came back was: “Killed in action at Stalingrad.” (p. 85 doc. 6)

In later life Herbert looked back on his time in the military not without fondness. He had made friends among his comrades, especially those who were also married to Jewesses. And the home leaves of one or two weeks each granted him and Lilli more time together than the short visits from Berlin once in a while. Those weeks afforded my parents a brief period of modest happiness once more.

An event which brought us great happiness happened on 21 November 1940 – the birth of my brother, Peter! He too was baptized in the Roman Catholic faith and given the names Peter and Hans. My parents called the little one Pittchen, a diminutive. With his early habit of cheerful and persistent laughter he embodied for them the confidence that times would change: “By the time Pittchen is called Peter the nightmare will have ended.”



▲ Peter in the “sports car”, next to him Hasso, the dog, Breslau in the spring of 1942

I am six years older than my brother and as soon as he had “got over the worst” my mother transferred part of the responsibility for him over to me. It came easy to me to behave cheerfully with the cheerful boy, to fall in laughing with his shrill shrieks while he was playing in high-spirits, to frolic around on the floor, under the table or bed with him and Hasso, our large dog, the three of us. I was fond of taking my brother outside in his push chair, which we called “*Sportwagen*” (sports car) at the time, and he accompanied me to the food stores, faithfully holding my hand.

Opposite our apartment block, on the corner of Strasse der SA and Goethestrasse, there stood a large bank building. Leading up to the house was an impressive half-moon shaped vaulted drive which was virtually never used by a car. That was the place where I could indulge my passion, which was roller-skating. Pittchen was sitting on the low wall of the drive and laughing with appreciation as I rolled at speed down one half of the drive. And then he laughed gloatingly as I laboriously worked my way back up the other half. There was only one thing which made my brother cross with me, which was me catching him out as he crept into the kitchen, nicked a raw potato, squatted comfortably in a corner and proceeded to munch it delightedly, peeled or unpeeled. My mother had impressed upon me, with reference to Pittchen’s favourite piece of food, that it was dangerous to eat potatoes raw.

At the age of two to three he liked to join me “walking Hasso”. Hasso was our guard dog, a rather large Airedale terrier. He was the successor to a small



▲ Lilli Michalski walking Hasso in Breslau, winter 1942

wire fox terrier which had added charm to my parents' walks in Görlitz. Hasso was meant to protect my mother and us boys from being attacked. He was strong, but playful and good natured and would probably not have been much protection. He was never put to the test, though. And when Hasso might have been confronted by a serious challenge he was not with us any more because mixed-marriage households were by then no longer permitted to keep pets.

My mother became more and more reluctant to leave the house with Hasso. People who knew who she was, neighbours who were pleased that Jews were now forbidden to keep dogs, treated her with hostility, insulting and abusing her.

Hasso was a friend and playmate to me indoors but, at eight, I could control him outdoors on the lead only until he began to race the tram, barking loudly. I tried, in vain, to hold on to the fully stretched lead with my right hand and with my left not to let go of my brother. Peter and I always had to wait a long while before Hasso came trotting back to us, dragging the lead behind him and with a visibly bad conscience. I did not grieve for him when my parents had to hand in the dog in February 1942. My cousins, Irmgard and Horst, however, missed him. They were the children of my aunt Frieda, the elder of my father's sisters. The dog had been one of the reasons why Irmgard, aged around 17 in 1941/42, and Horst, about 14 years old, liked to visit us. They played and romped with him, walked him on the road or took him to the *Südpark*, a public garden, and they brought much laughter into our home.



▲ The siblings Irmgard and Horst Signus – Horst wearing the Napola uniform – in Breslau, 1940s  
Both from the private possession of Gisela Signus, Verden



▲ Horst Signus dressed as a girl in his sister's clothes on the balcony of the Breslau apartment, around 1943

They laughed a lot about themselves and each other, and what amused them most was the absurdity that they were visiting us dressed in their *BDM* and *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler youth organization) uniforms. My mother did not find it easy to join in their laughter. One day, however, Horst managed to seduce his aunt Lilli into a fit of hearty and prolonged laughter. He had come on his own but bringing his sister along nevertheless: He had turned himself so convincingly deceptively into the *BDM* girl Irmgard, not least with the help of two tennis balls, that we only recognized him by his laughter which he just could not hold back, and neither could my mother.

In the autumn of 1941 I became a pupil at the nearest primary school. I did not experience any anti-Semitism in class. It is true that the teacher used a cane to hit me on the palm of my hands or on the buttocks if I was deficient in my command of the alphabet or the times table and it really hurt a lot every time, but my "Aryan" classmates suffered the very same fate.

After his dismissal from the army in June 1941, my father resumed work in Berlin. He did, however, change his address, moving into a beautiful furnished room close to Kurfürstendamm, in Paula Ehrenreich's apartment in Mommsenstrasse 69. Now the main focus of his job, even more so than before his time as a soldier, lay in the acquisition of fuel. To enable him to do so he was given an official warrant (p. 86 doc. 7) which allowed him to travel through the entire Reich even in wartime. Cautiously he began, both in Berlin and on his journeys, to create a network of



◀  
Herbert Michalski  
with his sons  
in the summer of 1941

acquaintance with people who had made themselves known to him as anti-fascists.

Gerda Mez, a colleague at Schwarzkopf, was one of them. Herbert had come to know her at the company's headquarters before the war. He sensed her hatred of the National Socialists. Gerda Mez worked in Schwarzkopf's sales department in Berlin. Her Jewish fiancé, Julius Gerson, believed that life for him would be safer in the Free State of Danzig. When he moved there in 1938 Gerda had herself transferred to Danzig too. But Gerson felt under threat from the danger there too. In 1939 an opportunity to escape to Palestine presented itself to him. It was not possible for Gerda to accompany him straight away, and after the outbreak of the war it was no longer possible for her to follow her beloved. The National Socialists had destroyed her happiness but not broken her courage. The twenty-seven-year old was determined to fight the regime.

While travelling the country to locate sources of fuel to buy, he also met an anti-Nazi married couple by the name of Muth and their son-in-law, Marquis de Respaldizza, a somewhat dazzling personality. His parents-in-law were not the only ones to doubt the authenticity of his French title of nobility. They only agreed to his marrying their young daughter because she was pregnant. My parents' impression, at least, was that this approximately thirty five year old man with sleek black hair and a pencil-thin moustache had possibly near-conned his way by marriage into the Muth family – leaseholders of a castle,



◀  
Gerda Mez (left)  
with her sister Luzie  
in Berlin, 1935

From the private  
possession of  
Dr. Lutz Mez, Berlin

Schloss Poppendorf, in the border triangle of Austria, Hungary and Slovenia. The Muths had run a toothpaste factory in Berlin. After that had fallen victim to the bombs they had managed to lease the castle near Gleichenberg, about sixty kilometres from the city of Graz, as a place to live and to continue production. Herbert already knew another branch of the Muth family from his Görlitz days. Being Jehova's Witnesses, they had a very detached attitude regarding the NS regime, and Herbert trusted them.

My schooling came to an abrupt end in the middle of my second year of primary school. From the beginning of 1943, as a "*Mischling*", I was no longer allowed to go to school. In his own school days 20 years previously, my father had received particular attention from his form teacher, Herr Fiedler, and they had continued to remain loosely in touch ever since. Fiedler, by now an elderly gentleman, lived in the neighbourhood. He was prepared to tutor me privately in his dark flat full of dusty books and stuffed birds. Neither he nor his wife seemed to mind that by doing so he might compromise himself in the eyes of their fellow residents as well as the block warden, the party official responsible for the building. But neither did he appear much bothered about my academic education. Instead of teaching me he explained to me all about his butterfly collection; but mainly he would encourage me to talk, to talk about what made my life more beautiful, roller skating for instance or growing a tiny oak tree on my parents' balcony. Sometimes, with tears in his eyes and not looking at



◀  
Richard Michalski,  
around 1950

me but rather at his wife standing bent beside his wing chair, the old man mumbled: „Boy, I'll tell you now, I hope you may survive what is about to come.“

My mother worried very much about me, about my education, about my missing sports lessons, about how to keep me occupied during the interminable „leisure time“. She tried to fulfill the teacher's role in the subjects of mathematics and writing and she enrolled me in a private gymnastics and ballet school. The school occupied the first floor of a magnificent building from the Wilhelminian era (i.e. the turn of the last century) on Hindenburgplatz, quite close to our apartment. The gymnastics teacher was loud and indifferent but she did not treat me unkindly. I was the only boy among a large group of girls. I went a few times, for my mother's sake. But I could not endure it for long – the sniggering of the girls, the embarrassment of having to change in their midst, a certain amount of whispering as well as – real or imagined – anti-semitic innuendos.

My mother often sent me to visit Auntie Lucy, my father's second sister, at her work place, which was the central agricultural co-operative in Schweidnitzer Strasse, twenty minutes on foot from us. Lucy worked there as the telephone operator, and sometimes I would be allowed to put incoming calls through to the required employee by replugging the cables on the switchboard according to Lucy's instructions. Auntie Lucy and I got on well and we shared a weakness for raw *Sauerkraut* (pickled cabbage). Almost

every single lunchtime Lucy ate out of a canteen brought from home, cold, raw *Sauerkraut* into which she had added a cut up an apple. She shared that lunch with me on my visits.

It was thanks to Mr Wudke, the director, that I was permitted to spend so much time, so frequently, in the co-operative's telephone exchange, not only because he was fond of his staff member Lucy Vorpahl but also because he had been my father's superior at the co-operative in Oels in the late 1920s.

Every so often Erna Scharf came to visit us from Görlitz. On those occasions she stayed with us and paid daily visits to her sister, Else, at a Breslau mental home where she was a patient. Else Scharf had been living at the farm in Thiemendorf with her parents. Her fiancé was killed in Poland. Unable to cope with that loss, she escaped into mental derangement and was committed to the mental institution in Breslau. My mother and I visited her on Sundays, bringing her supplementary food. She survived the period at the mental home. Very much later, after the war, Else made another attempt at leading a normal life. She married a local man from Thiemendorf and bore him children. In the end, however, her memories defeated her, she capitulated and died by her own hand.

My mother cheered up whenever Erna came to visit us in Breslau. For Erna chased away the loneliness. Lilli's social contacts had shrunk to a small circle of relatives: Berthold, her father, and his wife, Liesbeth, Herbert's mother, Hedwig, and his siblings, Frieda, Lucy, and Richard with their families. Loneliness enveloped the racially persecuted, who went out of their way even to avoid each other, possibly so that they would not have to deal with other people's suffering on top of their own.

Eva Parik was the only one with whom friendly ties were to evolve. She was also Jewish and married to a Christian, Ferry from Prague. They had a son, Jan, who was two years my junior. We were close neighbours, they only lived two doors from us. Lilli and Eva Parik met often. Occasionally the couples sat together, and we three children played together - Jan, the much younger Pittchen, and I.

The Pariks and the Michalskis had much to talk about in Breslau in 1942 and 1943. About ID cards for Jews, which they did not show; about yellow stars which they did not wear; about the requirement to register with the job centre for Jews which they did not meet. Another thing they had in common was suffering discrimination over food allocation. Everyone had to collect their ration card in person from the „*Sonderstelle für Juden*“ (special office for Jews). The so-called Jewish households were excluded from the occasional special rations for the inhabitants of Breslau. Radio sets had to be handed in. The telephone was cut off – this happened in 1940 to all homes where Jews were in the majority, later to the „*Mischehen*“ (mixed marriage) homes too. The husbands had to present themselves at the Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei*, Secret State Police) ever more frequently, where they were put under pressure to divorce their Jewish wives.

The Parik family finally survived in the Czechoslovak underground and remained in Prague until the end of the “Prague Spring”. Jan became a photographer and was already internationally successful by then.

Electricity and gas supplies were reduced to a minimum. On 25 January 1943, Dr. Georg “Israel” Kohn and Fritz “Israel” Lasch, the pitiable men imposed by the *Gauleitung* to head the *Bezirksstelle Schlesien* (District Authority Silesia) of the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Reich Federation of Jews in Germany), wrote to my parents:

“As an attachment we are sending you a circular issued at the instigation of our supervisory authority, the control centre Breslau of the Geheime Staatspolizei, re: restrictions of the gas and electricity access for Jewish households, noting that according to the express orders of the NSDAP Gauleitung Lower Silesia this circular applies to all households numbering among their members one fully Jewish person in the sense of the legal definition, and consequently also to your household.” (p. 86 doc. 8)

The circular “re: reduction in the consumption of gas and electricity” makes no less a bureaucratic read than the accompanying letter above. But among other things it states in no uncertain terms:

“c) In order to save cooking gas, every household has immediately to prepare cooking boxes by stuffing them with straw and other materials. It is urgently recommended to obtain hot food once a day through the *Gemeinschaftsspeisung* [community feeding centre] Neue Graupenstr. 1-4 (*Kameradenspeisung*) [comrade feeding] and to keep that food warm in the cooking box.

d) Every apartment is required to create a communal day room in which all inmates of the apartment have to stay until going to bed and which is the only one where the use of electric light (most sparingly, of course) is permitted until 8 pm.” (p. 87 & 88 doc. 9)

The comrade feeding centre, incidentally, was in one of the *Judenhäuser* in Neue Graupenstrasse, not far from the house in which Lilli’s father Berthold died.

On 27th December 1943, a letter arrived from the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden*, bearing the signature of Erwin “Israel” Ludnowsky. Dr. Georg Kohn und Fritz Lasch had been carried off to a concentration camp by then.

“At the behest of the *Gauleitung* I request you to inform the *Wohnungs- und Liegenschaftsamt* (Quartiersamt) [Housing and Real Estate Authority (Billeting Authority)] Breslau, Junkernstr., in case the billeting office should sequester rooms in your apartment, that you are living in a *privilegierte Mischehe* (privileged mixed marriage) and that a sequestration cannot take place because the apartment has been allocated to you by the *Gauleitung*.” (p. 89 doc. 10)

In fact, the flat had been inspected and sequestered by the *Gauleitung* long ago. We were only granted continued use on a temporary basis. The

reason we had been allowed to go on living there at all may have been the fact that there was no housing shortage in Breslau as the city had largely been spared any bombing raids so far. Air-raid warnings were sounded occasionally though, and in those cases, mostly in the middle of the night, we had to hurry down to the air-raid shelter in the basement of the building, holding on to a permanently readily packed suitcase, and, sitting tightly clustered on a bench between our neighbours and those from the house next door, wait for the all-clear. Frequently the all-clear came soon and it appeared to be another case of false alarm. However, sometimes incendiary bombs did actually fall. One or two residents from our house would then run up to the loft to check whether we had been hit. I ran along and remember that once I discovered one of those oblong, fin-tailed fire bombs and stuck it in a bucket of sand which had always been standing there in preparation.

Any time spent in the bomb shelter was even more uncomfortable for us than for the others. We felt the neighbours were looking at us askance and believed ourselves to be the subjects of their whispered conversations. After I had rendered the incendiary bomb harmless I received disconcerting praise from the neighbours: "That someone like you ..."

### **The Persecution of Our Family until 1944**

Alfons Thienelt, the Policeman

The index cards and files concerning Jews who were to be evicted from their flats and lastly deported were kept by, among others, conscripted policemen. One such was Alfons Thienelt, a tailor by profession in his private life. He had a lame leg and was therefore not drafted into the *Wehrmacht* but conscripted to do clerical police work. He detested the National Socialists and of all things it was deskwork for the Gestapo that he was given to do. That way, however, he became one of our life savers.

Alfons Thienelt shared his political views with my uncle, Richard, who despised the National Socialists not only because of my mother. The two of them had been friends since childhood and had both served as altar boys in their Catholic church. They were in their mid-thirties when the war started. There was a work-related connection between them too during the war, on top of their friendship – the police. My uncle was a registered doctor. In addition, he was conscripted as a police doctor.

Alfons Thienelt helped us time and again by letting our file disappear and slipping our family's index cards to the back of the drawer. In the spring of 1943 – my brother was two and a half and I was eight years old – Thienelt advised my parents to make preparations for having to go on a "spontaneous" journey at a short notice for a few days. My mother took Peter



◀ Peter and Franz,  
the brothers, 1943

and me quickly to a children's home run by the Ursulines in Schreiberhau in the Riesengebirge mountain range. My parents believed us to be placed there safely for quite some time and thus to have gained for themselves the "freedom" necessary to escape.

We children may have been safe with the Ursulines. But the pious nuns terrorised us "*Judenlümme!*" (Jew louts). We were dealt thumps and clouts, were shoved, bumped and sworn at, had to endure anti-Semitic insults and were also deprived of food. What brought this kind of harassment on must have been so banal that I cannot recollect a single incident. There was one event, however, which was significant indeed, with particularly unpleasant consequences. During one of the nuns' fits of fury I fled from the house, together with my brother. I was going to run with him to the train station, without money, without tickets. Two young nuns caught up with us, still in the grounds of the children's home, and dragged Peter and me back. As a punishment I was ordered to write a letter to my parents informing them of my "outrageous" behaviour. Instead, I used the letter to describe what had actually happened as well as the maltreatment; being too afraid to hand the letter in I tore it into tiny pieces and threw it in the wastepaper basket. After that, I wrote a brief text on a postcard to our mother. It was my cry for help and rescue, couched in seemingly harmless words which our mother had taught me as a code in cases of emergency.

Those pious nursing sisters glued the shreds from the wastepaper basket

together like a puzzle and came down on me like a ton of bricks. They did, however, send off the postcard and my mother came at once to take us back to Breslau. Because we had the feeling we were being followed we did not travel straight home but changed trains more than once, in Warmbrunn for instance. (p. 89 doc. 11, Lilli's postal ID)

The imminent danger, Alfons Thienelt informed us, had passed in Breslau and therefore the family was able to stay at home for the time being. In the autumn of 1943 however, Thienelt again sent a "trouble brewing" signal via Richard. A *Sonderaktion* (special action) had been announced internally which was to include children from so-called *Mischehen* too. Lilli hurriedly packed two small suitcases with the barest necessities. Herbert came by train from his place of work in Berlin to collect my mother, my brother and me. So as not to endanger my father in Mommsenstrasse, Lilli, Pittchen and I slept for the next three months in a succession of frequently changing small hotels and bed and breakfast pensions in Berlin, establishments as inconspicuous as possible and mainly located around Alexanderplatz. Daytimes were predominantly spent on crowded streets, at train stations such as the lively Anhalter Bahnhof, and in beery pub-like restaurants, at Aschinger for example. On very rare occasions my father was able to take the risk of letting us join him at the company's premises in Tempelhof. Once there, we children were treated to cake and hot chocolate, prepared by a friendly secretary.

The "old" Frau Schwarzkopf paid us secret visits at our hotel, bringing sweets. Martha Schwarzkopf was the mother of the three Schwarzkopf sons who headed the company. She had run the company following the death in 1921 of its founder, Hans Schwarzkopf, her husband, until their sons took over. Lilli and Martha Schwarzkopf had had a good relationship since the Görlitz days.

During advent, the Schwarzkopf company organised a Christmas party for the employees' children. I remember a factory hall turned into a party hall, a giant Christmas tree decorated with lots of tinsel and small candles, and a long packing table offering gaily coloured paper plates full of gingerbread and marzipan potatoes. I recall many, many children sitting on office chairs along the large table, and I still see before my mind's eye Father Christmas handing out presents from a sack to all the children – toy cannons and tanks made of sheet metal, leaden war ships, and papier mâché soldiers. Father Christmas was friendly but he wore neither a beard nor a red cloak; instead he was wearing a uniform which was black and en vogue in those days: the uniform of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*)!

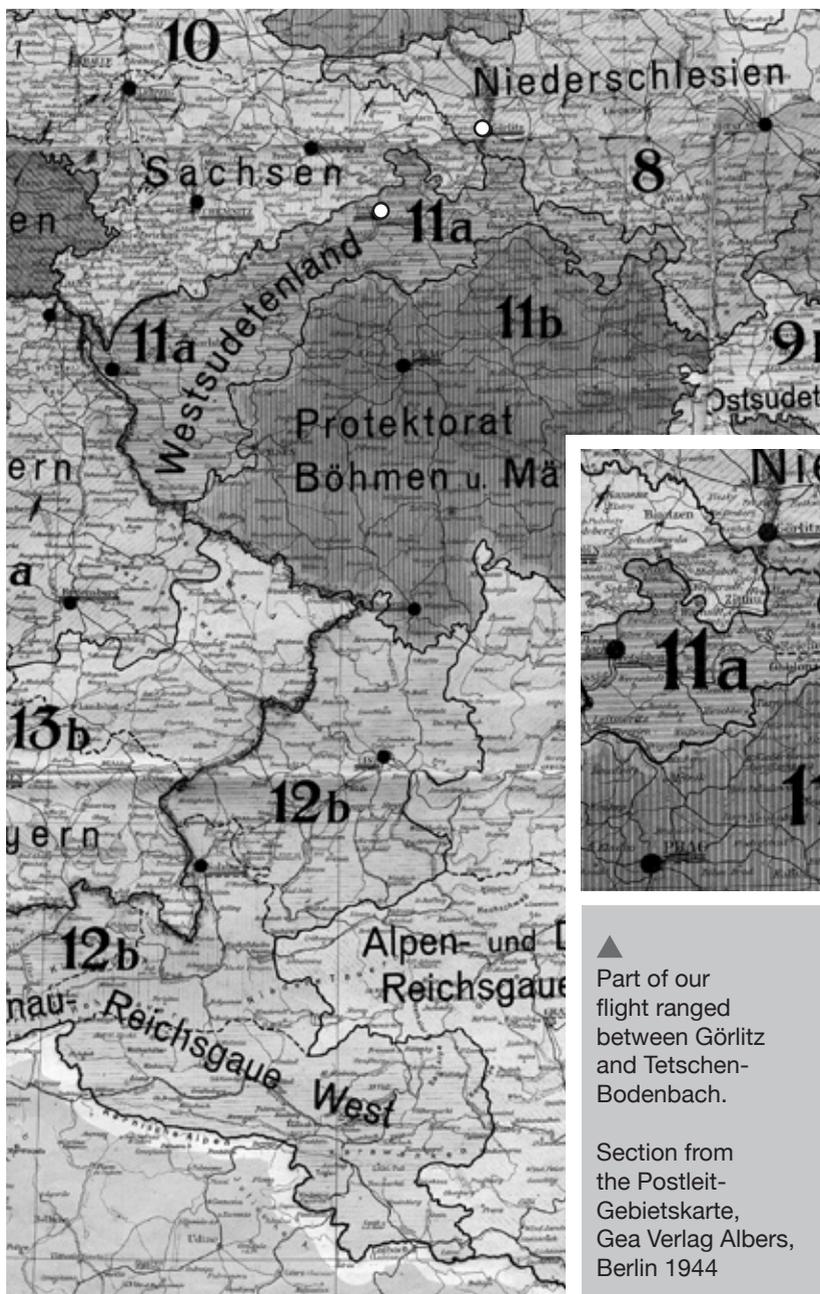
Altogether it was three dreadful months, months of fear, of boredom, of wandering around aimlessly in wet and cold weather, and not least of hunger. The last of the ration stamps hoarded back in Breslau for precisely such an emergency had just been used up when Alfons Thienelt sent the all-clear for

this time, again via Richard. The end of the year 1943 saw us back in our Breslau apartment. Straight away, my parents made preparations for the final steps into illegality. Herbert gained approval from his employer, Schwarzkopf, for the use of an external company warehouse in Naumburg on the river Queis in Lower Silesia (about 120 kilometres west of Breslau). Lilli spent months packing one crate after the other, each being collected separately by the trustworthy Breslau freight forwarding company of Johann Bolt and taken to Naumburg. The crates contained the bulk of our household effects, from Lilli's fur coats and silver cutlery to my roller skates and Pittchen's cot. There were ten large crates in all. The warehouse was full up after the seventh crate because Herbert's DKW car was also to be hidden in Naumburg to await better days. The same freight company took the remaining three crates to Thiemendorf near Görlitz: Two were put up in the barn of the farmer Ernst Scharf, our friend and Erna's father, while the last one was stowed in the flour store of master baker Kurt Mühle, a friend of Scharf's.

For weeks I remained utterly oblivious of the upheaval caused by the all that packing and carting off, for I was not at home. Lucy, my aunt, was chronically ill. Ever since the birth of her son, Wolfgang, in 1926, she had been suffering from increasingly serious arthritis in her hands and feet. Early in 1944 she had been prescribed a course of treatment at a sanatorium in Krummhübel, a small mountain town and spa high up in the Riesengebirge, near the Schneekoppe mountain. As I was not going to school anyway *Tante* Lucy took me along and thus I happened to spend some glorious winter weeks on the mountains with my aunt. One part of "our" sanatorium as well as several of the surrounding houses served as military hospitals. The patients were soldiers in the last stages of recovery from their wounds. Some of them were very young men who could have been my older brothers or cousins and who felt healthy enough already to build giant snowmen, to fight exuberant snowball battles and to race to the valley on toboggans or skis. They let me take part in everything and if there was skiing there would always be some chap who would stand me on his skis in front of him and hold on to me until both of us fell into the snow laughing loudly.

In the afternoons, when it became cold and dark, the young soldiers would take me along to their room. There was much laughter and monkeying around. Sometimes they played board games and I was allowed to join in. Or one of them would play the mouth organ and others would sing along. Afterwards, as we were saying good night, they would always give me a lump of army bread which particularly pleased Aunt Lucy, since it was noticeable in the sanatorium too that food was being rationed.

Once I was back home I helped my mother with the packing of the crates, of course. Some of the items being packed were the strangest of things such as the cast iron stand and the gleaming sheet metal tip of the Christmas tree, but also a large number of my books. In the last of the Breslau years I read a great many books from our shelves as I had so much time on my hands.



▲ Part of our flight ranged between Görlitz and Tetschen-Bodenbach.

Section from the Postleit-Gebietskarte, Gea Verlag Albers, Berlin 1944

First it was fairytales, preferably by Hans Christian Andersen and Wilhelm Hauff. Later my main reading matter, curiously, consisted mainly of books promoted by NS propaganda: "*Als ich noch ein Waldbauernbub war*" by Peter Rosegger, *Kapitän* Günther Prien's account of "Scapa Flow", books about the fight of Irish rebels against England for an Irish Free State, books about the Boer Wars, about the Great Trek and the Orange Free State, about the founding of the Transvaal and about Paul Kruger (who was fictionalised in a German biographical film of 1941 as Ohm Krüger). I cannot explain today whether it was my father or my mother who had bought those books. At the time reading them gave me a great deal of pleasure.

### **In Hiding, from October 1944 to May 1945**

In October the knocks came blow upon blow. Now was the moment for which my parents had been preparing so long, the time to go into hiding. Our family was not to be torn apart. Lilli, in Breslau, was sent the latest of several induction orders to forced labour (p. 90 doc. 12). Herbert, in Berlin, had ignored his second equivalent order (p. 91 doc. 13). The police were looking for him, he had to disappear. Lilli, too, did not obey the authority's order.

In mid-October 1944 Alfons Thienelt reported the highest stage of alarm to my Onkel Richard. He was no longer able to create a delay of any sort. There were hardly any index cards left behind which to hide ours. This was his warning: "Your relatives will be taken by the Gestapo on 17 October at around 15:30 hours."

Our apartment was situated in a corner block of flats and had two staircases and two entrances, the main entrance and the back door behind the kitchen for the maid. 17 October 1944, a Tuesday, was my tenth birthday. As a cover-up, my mother laid the table with cake, burning candles and hot chocolate, the ingredients for which she had saved up in advance. When the Gestapo rang the bell at the front door we raced down the stairs to the street through the other exit and ran to Breslau central station nearby. The birthday table and that warm cocoa fooled our hunters for a time, which gave us the lead we had hoped for. Gerda Mez was waiting for us at the station, as planned by my father. The journey was to take us to the hiding place which Herbert had prepared for us.

Because my father could not take the risk of travelling to Breslau to collect us Gerda Mez had offered to step in, despite risking her own life by doing so. As well as the passengers' tickets checks there were also always ID checks on the trains. The hunt for deserters and co-conspirators of the failed assassination attempt against Hitler on 20 July 1944 made it even



▲ Central station, Breslau, postcard around 1935  
Collection Dr. Alfred Gottwaldt, Berlin

more dangerous for Jews, who in any case had been banned from using trains. Gerda Mez had come by railway from Berlin to Breslau and was now accompanying us on the train to Austria. At the same time my father took the train from Berlin to get to the pre-arranged meeting point at *Schloss* (castle) Poppendorf in Styria. He used his Schwarzkopf company's travel permit to make his escape.

Had it not been for Gerda Mez' help we would not have been able to complete the journey without being discovered. The train was overcrowded. Hour after hour, Lilli stood with us children in the aisle, pressed in right next to Gerda. *Feldgendarmen*, military policemen, climbed aboard on the way and checked the travellers' identity papers. Under no circumstances should Lilli produce her ID card with the letter "J". When it was Gerda's turn she presented her passport which distinctly showed her broad face, framed by blond hair. But, in line with the fashion of the time, she – like Lilli – wore a headscarf, knotted under her chin. After getting her passport back from the military policeman she slipped the document to my mother without it being noticed in the throng. Neither of the two *Feldgendarmen* checking the papers cottoned on to the deception. Because of the headscarf they did not recognize that dark-haired Lilli with her slim face could not possibly be the same person as the one in the photograph in Gerda's passport. And it seems they did not read the names in the multitude of ID cards and passports they had to check that day. (p. 92 doc. 14)

At the snow-covered Feldbach station in Styria my father awaited us with a horse-drawn sleigh. Gerda returned to Berlin at once. It would not have been on to be missing from her place of work.

The driver of the sleigh was the Marquis de Respaldizza. He greeted my mother with a perfect kiss on the hand. I felt as if in a fairytale. That impression, however, lasted only a short while. For no discernible reason Respaldizza had not been drafted either into military or police service. Every few days he would go by train from Feldbach to Graz or Vienna on some sort of business. Later on we noticed him at Poppendorf spending the winter days, comfortably dressed in a long fur coat, shiny leather boots and a bushy fur cap, gliding seemingly aimlessly and somewhat dreamily through the wooded slopes and valleys on a horse-drawn sleigh.

Once darkness fell, Respaldizza became a changed man. Night after night he led his men and women as a leader of Yugoslav partisans into battle with the German occupiers. His young wife and her parents supported the activities of the resistance. The basement of the castle became the partisan group's operations centre and a nursing station for injured comrades. The group consisted of thirty to forty members. At daytime they were farmers, postmen or policemen; they hailed mainly from the Slovenian borderlands which had been incorporated into the Third Reich under the name of "Südsteiermark". Others were Hungarians and Germans. The Germans in the Poppendorf vault were in regular radio contact with a British control centre. They were students, all of them came from Hamburg, and they were controlled from New York via London; their controller was Max Brauer who had been chased out of office as the SPD (Social Democrat) mayor of Altona in 1933 and was to become First Mayor of Hamburg after the war.

Because *Schloss* Poppendorf was so close to the border with Hungary and particularly to the partisan-"infested" *Südsteiermark* there were almost daily checks by the Gestapo, Wehrmacht or SS. Yet the building was so vast and labyrinthine that we as well as the other charges under Respaldizza's protection were always able to withdraw to safe hideouts. At Poppendorf one was – still – relatively safe. But we did have to endure hunger and cold. There was practically nothing to eat and nothing to heat with. At night, engaged in their partisan activities, Respaldizza's people would be slipped something edible by Slovenian peasants. That, however, was hardly enough for the large group and the Muth family, and now there were the four of us from Breslau too who needed feeding. In November it turned very cold. At night time the thermometer already fell far below zero degrees Celsius and even during the day the weak November sun was unable to warm up the vast rooms of the castle. The stoves could not be used due to the lack of heating materials. Respaldizza's infant cried day and night. The baby was hungry. Even when she had managed to get some milk and pap, the mother could not feed her child by morning as the food had frozen, and often there was no fuel to be had anywhere to re-heat it. It became Peter's and my daily job in the mornings

to thaw the bottle with our body heat. This would often take us until well into late morning.

On the first morning of our living in hiding my father walked with me around the wide-spread snow-covered castle grounds. He struggled to do what he had obviously decided to do – which was to explain our situation and to give me details about how and why it had come about. Towards the end I felt his relief that he “had got it out” and that I had listened to his words attentively and quietly. When he asked me whether I had understood I responded with the reply which he repeated, still full of astonishment, to my mother after our return to the castle and which horrified her: “Actually, he knew all along.”

Richard was now trying energetically, as we learnt later, to finally get for his brother’s family the support of the Catholic church in Breslau, which he had requested so many times already. It was in vain. All he got was a completely useless “pastoral reference”, handed to him for us on 7 November 1944 (p. 92 doc. 16). When the torrent of events had already swept our family into the abyss the church threw us a blade of straw:

“Upon inspection of the relevant papers I hereby confirm that Herr Herbert Michalski is a Roman Catholic, that Frau Lilli Michalski, née Braun (sic!), was received into the Catholic church on 9 December 1933, that the couple were married in church on 12 December 1933, and that their two sons have been given the holy baptism. The participation in the life of the church is evidenced by the son Franz having received first holy communion. We can also recommend the family beyond this as Christians loyal to the church.”

The partisans’ casualties were mounting, searches of the castle were increasing in frequency, Respaldizza and his group feared betrayal. No-one at *Schloss Poppendorf* could feel safe any longer. My parents were forced to decide to leave that refuge, without any prospect of a new one. They feared that on the territory of the *Reich* they would soon be captured. If anywhere it would be the partisan area which offered the greatest hope of remaining undetected. So that was where they had to hide. But they would not be able to stay in one place, and it was impossible that this would work out if the children were with them. They took the risk to travel with Peter and me to Thiemendorf near Görlitz where Erna and her parents took us into their care, regardless of the danger this put them in.

As soon as we arrived, Ida Scharf, Erna’s mother, took care of us in the kitchen, so that I did not directly witness the dramatic scene which Erna told me about only much later. My mother implored Erna to raise Peter and me like a mother in case she, Lilli, were unable to come back. Erna would have done so anyway, without Lilli’s express pleading.

Our parents returned to Poppendorf the same day. How they managed that journey successfully I will never know. They took it upon themselves to lead a nomadic life underground. They walked as far as possible out of Styria,



▲ Ernst Scharf (left) tending his field in Thiemendorf with an ox, around 1940. From the private possession of Christel Raack, Tübingen

following the course of the river Drau/Drava. They were aiming for areas which were mainly held by the Yugoslav partisans already. As a precaution they took care to stay only rarely in towns such as Marburg an der Drau/Maribor or larger villages.

A year later, after the war, when the matter of recognition as “*Opfer des Faschismus*” (victims of fascism) arose, my mother described this part of their flight in a letter to the municipality of the city of Berlin as follows:

“Roaming about in this way, we had to endure much suffering and deprivation, hunger and cold, in constant fear of being caught by patrols of the SS or gendarmerie or army. We lived without ration cards and without any registration whatsoever. Often, the situation was desperate. Come rain or shine we wandered about along country roads in the Drau area, begging, often eating nothing but roots dropped by farmers on the way. Aided by another Jew also living in hiding we came to know a Slovenian married couple in Pettau who would occasionally prepare a warm meal for us. The couple could not take us in, because of the danger from the SS. That danger was very great because of the partisan activity. In Marburg too, we found Serbs, Slovenes and Italians, anti-fascists all of them, who helped us. Otherwise we would have died of hunger and cold.”

At the end of January, Lilli and Herbert found shelter in Maria Antontschitsch’s home at Adolf-Hitler-Platz 24 in Marburg a. d. Drau, and



◀  
The farm of the  
Scharf family  
in Thiendorf  
around 1940

From the private  
possession of  
Christel Raack,  
Tübingen

on 27 January 1945 they dared to have themselves and even us, their absent children, registered at the police station's registration office, as bombed-out refugees from Berlin, sub-tenants of Frau Antontschitsch. (p. 93 doc. 16) However, just a few days later they had to go into hiding once more, again without knowing what to live of, where to sleep at night.

Lilli and Herbert bore this way of living for about ten weeks. Then they gave up any hope of finding a permanent hideout in the relative safety of the partisan area. Exhausted, they now took up an offer which Gerda Mez had made them in case of the most extreme emergency: to take refuge in her hotel room in Tetschen-Bodenbach on the river Elbe where Gerda was living at that time. On account of the air attacks on Berlin, Schwarzkopf had moved part of their production to the *sudetendeutsche* town of Tetschen-Bodenbach. Schwarzkopf maintained rooms at the hotel "Zur Post" on the market square in Tetschen for those Berlin employees who had to travel regularly on business to the *Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren* (Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia). Gerda Mez and Willy Weber belonged to that group of people.

Meanwhile, we children were no longer safe from the grasp of the Gestapo in Thiendorf – as our parents were informed by circuitous routes. On top of which we were putting our host parents in ever greater peril. Until February 1945, our life had been good in Thiendorf. We were in the care of the amiable Scharf family; we were not freezing, were fed regularly and did not



▲ The Scharf family, 1944: from left to right:  
Erna's husband Herbert Raack with Erna, Else Scharf as well as  
the parents, Ida and Ernst Scharf, in Thiemendorf, 1944

have to hide from any strangers that might turn up. Whenever the Scharfs were asked about the boys they proffered the information that we were children from Breslau who were there to recuperate from the bomb attacks.

As a ten-year old, I was familiar with all of the Scharfs as well as with the rest of the village, and the villagers of Thiemendorf knew me. For the last three years I had always spent six weeks of the summer holidays on the farm and felt very cosy there. This time however, I did not feel happy in Thiemendorf, in spite of the snugness. Worries about our parents became ever more pressing. And Peter, only four years old, to whom the Scharf family and the entire environment were alien, was mostly so depressed in Thiemendorf that he unlearnt his famous laughter. He pined for his mother.

For me, though, there were enjoyable hours too during that hiding time in this rural environment, such as when milking the cows, making butter, cleaning out the stable, chaffing root vegetables and feeding the cattle. Or at Christmas, when I and Peter, in the guise of *Knecht Ruprecht* and his helper and carrying a sack, went from door to door on the orders of various farmers and handed children small presents which their parents had previously given us for that purpose.

At the beginning of February 1945 the Scharfs had to send word to Marburg/Maribor in secret ways that our safety in Thiemendorf was diminishing sharply. The neighbours were asking why I was not going to

school. As Germany's military situation deteriorated on all fronts, there were increasing incidents of troops deserting, of political refugees going into hiding, of prisoners of war staging break-outs. Searches by Gestapo and *Feldgendarmen* of houses, barns and stables, were becoming ever more frequent, particularly in the case of erstwhile "*Reichsfeinde*" (enemies of the Reich) like Ernst Scharf.

Once again evading all controls, Lilli and Herbert reached the small train station of Arnsdorf in the district of Görlitz on 12 February 1945. Walking from the station to Thiemendorf, they collected us children from Thiemendorf in a cloak-and-dagger operation and travelled from Arnsdorf via Görlitz and Dresden to Tetschen-Bodenbach, in constant fear of checks. It became a journey into chaos, and in chaos there are no checks. As the train puffed into Dresden the air-raid sirens were howling. Getting off on to the platform we could already hear a succession of bomb blasts. The masses ran in rising panic towards a bunker in front of the station. No sooner had you got there than you felt the whole earth shake. The date was 13 February 1945. On that day and the next, the city of Dresden went under in a hail of bombs. Lilli, Herbert and we, their sons, sat crammed in the station's air-raid shelter.

Later on we learnt that two of our relatives from Breslau had also been sitting in an air-raid shelter in Dresden. As a seventy seven-year-old woman my grandmother, Hedwig, had had to flee the burning city of Breslau in February 1945 together with Lucy, her disabled daughter who had difficulty walking and suffered from severe arthritis in her hands and feet. The flood of the fleeing populace carried them to Dresden where they arrived on 13 February 1945. All of us survived the inferno. But neither knew of the others' presence.

After the all-clear, people leaving the shelter had to climb over burning and acridly smouldering rubble. The fires blazing all around created a storm which heated up the February air in a hellish manner. Everywhere there was moaning and groaning, injured people and dead bodies. The train heading for Tetschen-Bodenbach was still standing on the tracks, but it was burnt out. Here and there, smoke rose up, men were extinguishing the last embers. The carriages formed the skeleton of a train, and their insides held the charred bodies of passengers unable to save themselves from the fire bombs.

Train services resumed at once on other tracks, in order to get as many people as possible quickly out of the burning city. Our family continued the journey without being bothered by checks. While the train was travelling along the picturesque bank of the river Elbe through the Elbsandstein mountain range, all the passengers lay prone on the floor or sought cover under the compartment benches. Low-flying aircraft were attacking the train and aiming machine-gun salvos through the train windows.

Horst Schneider, the owner of the hotel "Zur Post" at Adolf-Hitler-Platz 82 in Tetschen was no National Socialist. For as long as he judged the risk



▲ Branch works of the Schwarzkopf company in Tetschen-Bodenbach around 1930

tolerable he kept both eyes shut and just did not notice the family of four who were spending the nights since 14 February 1945 in one room together with Gerda Mez, his regular guest. Schwarzkopf had recently transferred Gerda to Tetschen for the duration.

Sharing her hotel room, fortunately a large double room, with the four Michalskis did not only endanger her, it also meant emotional stress, for her as well as for her “guests” – and the more so, the longer the situation continued. Fierce arguments broke out between her and Lilli whose nerves were totally shattered. In spite of that, Gerda Mez did not withdraw her protection from us.

After a fortnight, hotel owner Schneider found himself compelled by Gestapo and military checks to ask Herbert to choose between leaving with his family or presenting him with a police registration. As he had done in January in Marburg, Herbert dared to register the family with the Tetschen registration office as evacuees from Berlin. (p. 93 doc. 17) I have no idea what papers he showed the clerks as proof. But it did happen, on 5 March 1945.

Registration with the police did not, however, mean that we would receive ration cards from now on. That would have required a degree of bureaucracy, which would have put our family’s lives in danger. We had no choice but to go on living without ration cards. Gerda helped wherever she could. Of course, she was not able to fill our four stomachs from her own single-person ration.

But she did ask Schwarzkopf colleagues in Tetschen-Bodenbach to help. Herbert, too, approached colleagues whom he knew to be trustworthy. He met them in secluded places, offering services in return for food stamps. One of these return services took him to Prague at Easter 1945. There he ran into a check for identity cards and service records and ended up in the Gestapo prison. As a precaution, he had not taken along any documentation whatsoever on his journey to Prague and he was thus able, in Gestapo interviews lasting hours, to give a made-up name and maintain that he was an Austrian from Vienna. Knowing his way around Vienna, he gave the name of an existing address in the 23rd district, and he was lucky in that one of the men interviewing him happened to know the road and house number. What saved Herbert was his gift for linguistic melody and dialects which he had discovered and developed as a young man during his time with the cooperative in Oels. He knew Vienna and the Viennese manner of speaking from his business trips there as a fuel buyer for Schwarzkopf.

Herbert was released the next day. He knew that his wife would be extremely anxious, as she had expected him back the previous evening. He nevertheless allowed that day and one night and almost all of the following day to pass before taking a train to Tetschen. He had to reassure himself first that he was not being followed. My mother had collapsed meanwhile. Two days and nights without news from my father, that could mean nothing but the worst. She fell into despair and hysteria. She shouted out loud what, so far, she had only whispered into Herbert's ear, at night, when the others appeared to be asleep: Suicide! Killing herself and "taking" the little one with her, that was her *idée fixe* in those hours. Aged ten, Franz, was so grown up (in her words) that with luck he would be able to struggle along on his own.

Gerda and I succeeded only temporarily in calming Lilli down a little. In the end, Gerda had to leave the hotel room to go to work. Lilli used her absence to pull Herbert's suitcase from under the bed and take out the pistol which Herbert had had in his luggage since the Poppendorf days "in case the worst came to the worst". Knowing about the gun, I jumped on Lilli and managed to be a fraction of a second quicker in grasping the weapon than she was. My mother did not want to fight me. She remained sitting on the floor in front of the bed, crying silently to herself. Four year-old Peter sat in a corner of the room, intimidated, a small heap of miserable toys in front of him. I tried to stabilize Lilli's emotional state by continuing to talk "sense" to her.

Yet I only appeared to be successful. Once darkness had fallen outside, Lilli suddenly dressed herself and Peter in their coats – an absurdity in light of what she was planning to do – picked up Peter in the greatest haste and ran from the house. I jumped after them and saw my mother run across the market place towards the river Elbe. The Elbe was swollen with high water. It was the time of snowmelt. The current was strong. Ice-floes, crunching against one another, were drifting at high speed past the bank. I reached the stone-walled embankment at the same time as Lilli. Now I did fight with her



◀  
Gerda Mez with  
her nephew, Lutz,  
in Tetschen-  
Bodenbach  
April 1945

after all – for my brother. After I had pulled him free from her, she let herself be led back to the hotel wordlessly and fatalistically. She would not leave the little one alive without her protection.

A few days after Herbert's return from Prague Luzie Mez, Gerda's sister, stood in front of our hotel room door with little Lutz. Her friend had brought her to Tetschen from bombed-out Berlin to entrust her and their child into Gerda's care. He, a member of the SS, returned to his unit at once. He never betrayed the people he had seen in Gerda's room.

It was obvious that we could not stay and that Herbert had to find a new refuge. For a few more nights, all seven of us shared that one room, then we moved to a double room at the hotel "Hetschel" in Herrnskretsch. Herrnskretsch is a holiday resort, picturesquely located at the spot where the creek Kamnitz flows into the Elbe. The Elbsandsteingebirge mountain range, cut by deep gorges, reaches right down to the riverside road which leads to Tetschen-Bodenbach, twelve kilometres upstream. The frontier with Schmilka, the first Elbe village on the German side, is just a few hundred metres from Herrnskretsch. The railway line runs on the other side of the Elbe. Diagonally across from Herrnskretsch is the Saxon train station of Schöna. A shuttle ferry service operates between Herrnskretsch and the "*reichsdeutsche*" side of the river. Nowadays, these places have different names: Herrnskretsch became Hřensko and Tetschen-Bodenbach is called Děčín-Podmokly.

Lilli calmed down somewhat in Herrnskretschchen. The place was sleepy and attracted much less police and military observation than the lively district town of Tetschen-Bodenbach. The weather contributed to the improving mood. The spring of 1945 was particularly beautiful and announced itself very early. Whereas, winter day after winter day, we had had to roam the streets of Tetschen and of Bodenbach on the other side of the Elbe, the family was now able to escape the prying eyes of the people of Herrnskretschchen by hiking through the woods and gorges in glorious weather.

For me, not every day in Tetschen was without distraction and relaxation. I had found a playmate in the street. My parents allowed me to leave them during the daytime and go and see the boy from Tetschen. His parents owned a lemonade factory which had gone out of business by then. His father was fighting in the war. His mother did not mind the two boys whiling away their time in the manufacturing halls and the storage sheds, playing and drinking vast quantities of green woodruff sherbet. In Herrnskretschchen too, I was able to absent myself from the family for several hours a day. I had become friends with the son of a saw miller there and played with him between piles of planks and heaps of wood shavings. I was often allowed to take Peter along to the saw mill which had ceased working shortly before the end of the war. He had to be the prisoner when we played cops and robbers.

As for food, the situation had deteriorated even further. It became almost impossible for Herbert to organize food stamps from Herrnskretschchen. But we always managed to get hold of a little pastry at least, either "*Buchteln*" sprinkled with icing sugar from the bakery, or half an army loaf from passing soldiers who were quite obviously expecting the end of the war to be near. Once more everything seemed to have been in vain when, one morning at the crack of dawn, there was a thunder-like rap on the door of our room. A military police patrol was looking for men in hiding for the *Volkssturm* ("People's Storm" militia), Hitler's last stand against the Russians. Trembling all over, Lilli opened the door. "There is no man here", she maintained. One of the men in uniform used his machine gun to point at Herbert who was lying in bed: "And what is that?" Lilli, in shock: "But why, that is my husband." Under guard, Herbert had to put on some basic clothes before he was taken away. An hour later he was back, pale and sweaty. One more time he had managed to talk his way out, if only by a hair's breadth.

## **8 May 1945**

8 May 1945 was like a day at the height of summer. The sun beat down so hot from a cloudless sky that a tarmac smell rose from the tarred planks of the ferry landing stage. The dull sound of cannon fire came rolling across the

mountains, as it had the past day or two, only slightly louder now. No one was surprised any more when the war ended that day. The news of Hitler's suicide on 30 April and of the fall of Berlin on 2 May, had reached even the farthest village. But nonetheless, the vehemence of the downfall which awoke remote Herrnskretschén from its sleep on 8 May, shook everyone to the core.

As if a dam had been breached, all at once a never-ending roaring torrent came flooding the embankment road from the direction of Tetschen. Instead of water, this flash flood which overran Herrnskretschén in wave after wave consisted of human beings. People on foot, people in dangerously overcrowded cars, people hanging in and over the sides of lorries like fat bunches of grapes, people in groups of four or five clinging on to motor cycles with sidecars, two or three people to every bicycle, people on horse traps, and people riding horses. The panicking masses had but one aim – the ferry to take them to the other side of the river. There, on the Saxon bank of the Elbe, American occupying troops were said to be marching in at this very hour, while the allegedly murderous Bolsheviks behind the backs of the fleeing crowds were hurrying forward.

The small ferryboat was quickly overcrowded. She took her human cargo to the bank opposite and returned slowly, struggling against the current. Thousands came running, jumped from the cars, abandoned the motor bikes, dropped the bikes, let the horses go. Everyone was shouting, pressing on to the landing stage in agitated expectation of the little ship's return. The landing stage could not withstand the stampede, it collapsed, and the men falling into the water with it, started swimming straight away in order to reach the other side. Countless numbers of those crowding the river bank tore off their uniforms and jumped after their comrades; not to save them from drowning but because they too saw their salvation in swimming across. In the *Elbstandsteingebirge* mountain range, the Elbe has vortices and a powerful current. It dragged the swimmers quickly away northwards. No-one in Herrnskretschén saw even a single one of them climb up the bank on the other side of the river.

Those still crowding in from the south would have paid less attention to the people in the water than to the many soldiers and SS men right in front of them who were taking off their uniforms at maximum speed. The result was that suddenly everybody, several thousand men, were taking off their clothing, stripping down to their underwear, wherever they just happened to have stopped in the crowd, and left the stuff lying in the road. From private to top-ranking officer, they assumed in their panic that they could thus make themselves unrecognizable should they be taken prisoner by the Russians. When, at around noon, the Red Army arrived, followed by Czechoslovak and Polish units, all of the *Wehrmacht* troops and SS men had vanished. Any who had not managed to get on the ferry and had not wished to swim, escaped into the mountains and hid in rock caves. During the next days, the Czechs pursued everyone. They shot on the spot whomever they tracked down. The

shots could be heard in Herrnskretschén. The elder brother of my playmate from the saw mill, a very young SS member who had had a leg amputated, also met his death in front of his cave hide-out, not far from his parents' house.

The people of Herrnskretschén used the brief lull between the end of the mass flight and the entry of the Russians to gather from the road anything that might come in handy. Uniforms and the heaps of rifles, revolvers and machine guns lying around were not in demand, but boots and canteens, bread, tins and cigarettes were most desirable. As far as possible, the horses were caught. I picked up a men's red bicycle with wide white tyres from the road. I received a spontaneous slap in the face from my father as punishment for this act of looting but was then after all allowed to put the bike somewhere safe behind the hotel.

My father prepared for the arrival of the occupiers. A rutted rock face rose up high immediately behind the hotel. You could touch it through the open bathroom window. Herbert let his pistol slip into a crevice. He then sealed the crevice with a piece of the same rock. The weapon may still be there even today. After that he got papers ready which could prove our persecution, in particular Lilli's ID card with the letter "J". He took off his gold wrist watch and asked me to lend him his less precious watch.

The Russian invasion was not yet complete when Herbert eagerly walked towards them with me, his ten-year old son. In among the all-terrain vehicles of the slowly progressing military he was looking for the group which he presumed were the unit's commanding officers. As soon as everything had come to a halt, he stepped forward and began a long speech in German which he complemented by a few words in Polish. But even words like anti-fascist and Jewess did not produce any understanding on the part of the listeners. The papers he proffered were taken off him but only to be thrown into the air at once. I picked them up again and had not understood why my father had made that speech. Two soldiers stepped up to him and demanded his watch. When he refused angrily – "it is mine. I am anti-fascist" – one soldier hit him in the stomach with the butt of his rifle. While Herbert writhed in pain the other soldier took hold of his arm and, with a well-trained grip, undid the watch-strap. I got my next watch six years later.

This first experience of these new times was to be symptomatic for the coming weeks. In Czechoslovakia, no distinction was made between persecuted and other Germans. For the Czechs there was only one kind of German, and that sort was hated. But still, the family was better off than most during their remaining weeks in Herrnskretschén. A Jewish couple from Łódź had arrived with the Polish troops. Both wore majors' uniforms and served as doctors in the army. They were fluent in German and met my parents for evenings together at the hotel, bringing vodka and coffee. They also brought food, especially tins of fat pork which was a delicacy at the time.

My parents were able to talk to them about what had happened to us and were understood.

Soon the Germans were expelled from Czechoslovakia. On 30 May 1945 Herbert, pointing out the family's past, pleaded with the chairman of the district administration of Děčín Podmokly for an extension of the permit to remain by four weeks. His intention was to leave Lilli and their sons in Herrnskretsch, while he would use that time to travel to Breslau on his own "in order to secure some living accommodation so that I could then bring back my family with my remaining belongings". (p. 94 doc. 18) The request was turned down instantly. The following day, 31 May 1945, our family had to leave Czechoslovakia.

Hitler, his cronies and the mass of "*Volksgenossen*" (literally: Peoples' comrades) had made a "*Jüdin*" (Jewess) out of my mother, a "*Judenversippten*" (someone closely related to Jews) out of my father and "*Halbjuden*" (half-Jews) out of my brother and me. We were humiliated and harassed as "*nichtarisch*" (non-Aryan). Ultimately the German state wanted to annihilate us. On 31 May 1945 The Czechs made us Germans again. This is not how we had envisaged the start of the new life.

The people whom we honour as "*Stille Helden*" (Silent Heroes) saved our lives. In addition, they preserved our dignity and helped us keep our self-esteem. And by their actions, just by being there, they never let us doubt, even in the worst of days, that being German can also mean to be humane.

### **The Long March to Berlin**

Despite the hot weather — the thermometer read 30 degrees Celsius — we all put on several layers of shirts, trousers, pullovers and jackets on top of each other. Herbert took the rubber tyres off my bicycle as a precaution against the bike being stolen. The miserable remainder of what we owned, such as washing utensils, a few cloths and something edible, was packed in a suitcase and tied on to the luggage rack of the bike. Peter sat on the saddle, his little legs dangling, and Herbert pushed the bike across the nearby border into Germany with Lilli and me at his side. Our destination was Görlitz. Perhaps it might be possible to resume something of the olden days there. Two and a half weeks is how long it took to walk the distance which, including a few detours, amounted to about 150 kilometres. Most of the detours were due to bridges having been blown up.

It was a hunger march. Floods of refugees were rolling in all directions through southern Saxonia and the Lausitz. Germans were being driven out of Bohemia and marched northwards. Silesians had to leave their

homeland and were trekking west. No-one had enough to eat. There were many who had nothing. The inhabitants of the villages and towns through which these processions of misery dragged themselves could not be begged for anything any more. They had hardly enough to feed themselves. In the evenings, the refugees looked for places to lie down in schools and gymnasia which the local administrations had allocated to those passing through. The hygiene situation in the dormitories, the washing stations and the toilets was so catastrophic that quite a few people caught infections from which they died soon after in a classroom or on a country road. In some localities the authorities were able to run field kitchens with the support of the occupying forces. The queues in front of the so-called goulash cannons were so long that there was never enough for everybody. People fell, dying, in the queues.

Soviet military units were also on the move all over the place. Regiments were being switched between locations. As far as their food supplies were concerned they were self-sufficient. They carried everything with them, even dairy cows. At night, they put up tents as bivouacs; sometimes near a school where we had found shelter. If that happened Herbert would take Peter by the hand and go with me over to the Russians and ask for milk. Whenever there were women serving in the unit we would always get milk, sometimes even three or four boiled potatoes as well and a handful of salt. There was plenty of salt around, but only of the red, denatured variety used for feeding animals or on icy road surfaces.

The closer our family came to Görlitz, the more helpful people Herbert found – his former customers. They were pleased to share with him and his family what little they had. Lilli and Herbert could not pay back their benefactors, not even with their multiple layers of clothes. The way had been so arduous, the heat so great, that the bulk of it had been taken off, mostly given away, along the way.

Sitting on the bicycle saddle without his little legs being supported by the pedals soon became painful for Peter. Neither could he, aged four, cope with walking along the country roads for hours on end. Lilli was too weak to be able to carry Peter, even Herbert did not have the strength to do so for long. At those times I would push the bike, whose tyre-less wooden wheel rims were by then frayed like brushes.

On one occasion though, Lilli was carrying Peter when a group of uniformed Cossacks on horseback overtook us galloping at speed and one of the passing horsemen, jeering loudly, bent down over Lilli. Hooting with joy, he plucked the little boy from her arms, sat him in front of him on the horse and chased after his comrades. Lilli was not the only one whose heart nearly stopped. Was this a case of kidnapping or just a terrible prank? As quickly as they could in all their exhaustion, Lilli, Herbert and I, carrying the bike, ran after the Cossacks who had disappeared round a bend in the road.

With tears of relief, Lilli was able to clasp her son in her arms again beyond the bend. The riders had been waiting there laughing and enjoying the lark hugely, as did their co-rider Peter.

The provisional municipal administration of Görlitz installed by the Russians treated Lilli and Herbert with courtesy. They allocated them the deserted apartment of an SS doctor, where Peter and I found ourselves in an immense nursery, which looked like the inside of a toy shop. It would have been fine by us, the children — and by Lilli — for the family to remain in Görlitz. (p. 94 doc. 19)

Not by Herbert, however. Only a few days after our arrival in Görlitz the Russians wanted to make him mayor of Görlitz. He turned them down because it was subject to the condition that he join the Communist Party. As a victim of persecution by the National Socialist regime Herbert was not opposed to the communists. Just the reverse: he had felt them to be allies for the past twelve years. But he had vowed never to join a political party, even if membership might carry with it privileges. It was clear to Herbert that, under the new conditions, it could be dangerous to be regarded as an anti-communist. Therefore, he decided it was unavoidable that he and his family took to the road one more time. As Breslau was lost, Berlin offered itself as a goal. In those days, Berlin appeared enticing, because there were rumours to be heard about a forthcoming division into a Soviet and three western sectors, with the important additional information that there would be 300 grams of bread a day for every inhabitant in the western sectors.

On 22 June 1945 Herbert got himself a pass from the municipal administration of Görlitz, confirming in Russian and German that he was “entitled to travel from Görlitz to Thiemendorf and back with wife and 2 children. Purpose: To collect belongings”. (p. 95 doc. 20)

Nothing but shreds remained of our stored crates. Thiemendorf had been looted. Yet the Scharf family survived the NS era as well as the occupation by the Red Army. Their house, stable and barn, the bakery - the entire village had been ransacked. The surviving villagers were even worse off than the people in Görlitz. In the leftovers of our crates we found a few family photographs which had been worthless to the plunderers.

We did not return to Görlitz but set out on our march north through the Upper and Lower Lausitz, through the Spreewald forest and through the sands of Mark Brandenburg. The 200 kilometres to Berlin took us twelve days. We reached our goal in the evening of 4 July 1945. It was the day the western allies took over their Berlin sectors from the Soviets. The conditions under which we dragged ourselves in the direction of Berlin were not one iota better than those on the march from Herrnskretschchen to Görlitz. They became even worse, for Peter was unable to cope already by day two. He could no longer walk nor sit on the bicycle saddle. The extent of his malnourishment had become life-threatening. Herbert was unable to get hold of more or

better food than on the way to Görlitz. Some days, the family had nothing but a handful of cherries, still green, which Herbert and I had hastily stolen in passing from some front garden. On leaving the area which Herbert had used to cover commercially, there were fewer and fewer people whom he knew from the past.

It was in Cottbus that Herbert found his last helper – a chemist. That man dug out from his basement planks, small wheels, nails, screws and rods, and the two of them together used those materials to construct a small cart into which Peter was bedded. We had long agreed amongst ourselves to give anything edible to Peter first and make do with the rest, if any were left. That saved the little one from total collapse. But the hand-drawn little cart proved equally life-saving. With tremendous effort, we plodded on under the burning June sun. Herbert and I took it in turns to push the bike while the other pulled the cart, Lilli needing all her strength just to keep herself upright.

We followed a dead train line, hoping that eventually there might be a train after all. At last we reached a station, far outside a village, which was besieged by countless waiting refugees. A rumour went round that a train would be coming from the south. We joined these people. The waiting went on for days. It was almost impossible to get hold of food in the distant village. Also, no one dared to stay away from the tracks for any length of time. Everybody was afraid to miss the train. Nights, too, people slept within the station precinct.

One day around noon, the train did actually arrive. It was already overcrowded but the engine driver stopped his wheezing locomotive. Shouting, the crowd stormed the carriages, clawing at the open windows from the outside as something to hold on to when standing on the running board. There were even people standing on the couplings between the carriages. There was no question of money or tickets. The engine driver let the people climb on to the train however and wherever they wanted. Even the roofs of the carriages were quickly occupied. Herbert talked to the driver. The bicycle and the hand-cart landed high up on the tender which was loaded with coal. My mother and I and my father with Peter in his arms looked for, and found, a place on the outside of the engine where we could stand and hold on.

The journey lasted all of thirty kilometres before the rails ended in a shell-hole. But the travellers were glad that the journey had ended. Hot steam had scalded their skin, flying sparks had stung their faces and their hands, clawing at the sides of the engine, like needles. Their clothes had become fine-meshed sieves along the way.

For the last two days we marched on what had been the now ruined *Autobahn* (motorway). Here too, we came upon shell-holes. When we entered the city at long last on 4 July 1945 in Berlin-Grünau, the evening curfew, during which everyone without special permission had to keep away from

the streets until the next morning, had just begun. A policeman took us to his station. He and his colleagues felt sorry for the bedraggled four of us, and they made things as comfortable as possible for us overnight at the police station. They chatted warmly to Peter. One policeman gave him his supper, a liver-sausage sandwich. That evening, the little one laughed again, for the very first time since the Görlitz nursery. And, to Lilli's horror, in his state of happy relaxation he soiled his trousers for the first time in a year.

The following day, it was still a long way from Grünau to Charlottenburg. It led us through endless areas of rubble and ruins and sometimes past corpses of people strung up. The dead bore placards round their necks, all of them spelling out the same sentence: *"Ich bin ein Nazischwein"* ("I am a Nazi swine").

### **My Silent Heroes**

The story of our rescue is dedicated to the memory of our courageous helpers:

**Alfons Thienelt**, policeman  
**Erna Scharf**, married name Raack, nanny  
**Gerda Mez**, colleague  
**Marquis de Respaldizza**, partisan  
**Horst Schneider**, hotel owner  
**Herr Hetschel**, hotel owner

They are my Silent Heroes.

## Epilogue

By Barbara Schieb

The return to ruined Berlin meant the end of persecution for the Michalski family. But the new beginning was hard. The shortage of food and housing affected everyone, including too those who had suffered during the NS dictatorship. Initially Herbert, Lilli, Franz and Peter lived in Mommsenstraße in Berlin-Charlottenburg, from September 1945 they were able to move to a three-and-a-half room apartment at Volkspark in Wilmersdorf.<sup>1</sup> They had already made an application to be recognized as “*Opfer des Faschismus*” (Victims of Fascism) and been granted that recognition by the Berlin Magistrate in the summer.<sup>2</sup>

Franz attended the *Gymnasium* (senior school) in Joachimsthaler Straße until 1946, thereafter the Canisius-Kolleg, a Catholic school at Tiergarten, until 1949. Peter was given a place in the Finkenkrug children’s home in Falkensee near Berlin where he regained his strength. From 1946 onwards he attended the 3. Wilmersdorfer Volksschule (primary school). Herbert Michalski had been able to resume his previous position at the Schwarzkopf company as buyer of fuel, raw materials and packaging materials. The sons remember that their father was one of the first to own a private car after 1945.

The Berlin Blockade of 1948/49 was an alarming Cold War event, and the Michalski couple now wished to leave Germany once and for all. Herbert actively explored possibilities of emigrating to Canada, the United States or Australia, without success however. But they wanted at least to turn their backs on Berlin and move over to Western Germany. The Schwarzkopf company transferred to Herbert the sales representation for North-Rhine Westphalia and consequently the family moved to Wuppertal, where Herbert began working on 1 October 1949. Lilli looked after the office, and the sons were sent to separate boarding schools. Franz and Peter were not particularly happy about that solution. Yet the Schwarzkopf company restructured their organisation a mere four years later in a way which no longer required any sales representatives. Herbert Michalski had to give up his work in Wuppertal.

Following the Blockade, the Schwarzkopf company had moved to Hamburg. Herbert was given a position there in the management of the sales force. At the beginning of 1953 the family followed him to Hamburg and both sons returned to the parental home. Lilli stopped working. Yet Herbert was not

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**1** All the information contained in the following section was provided by Franz and Peter Michalski: Emails of 11/02/2013 from Franz and Peter Michalski.

**2** OdF-File Herbert Michalski, Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), C Rep. 118-01, No.5837. Lilli Michalski’s red OdF pass is in the private possession of Franz Michalski; see doc. 22, illustration p.97.

satisfied with the Schwarzkopf company and began looking for alternatives. He found a position to his satisfaction within the cosmetics and hygiene goods company of Carl Hahn of Düsseldorf, again in sales management. In 1963 he was able to realize his dream of owning a house, in a suburb of Düsseldorf. This necessitated another removal. Lilli did not feel happy there, though. She had grown to feel at home in Hamburg, not least because that was where Franz had married Petra Ulrich in 1960 and where her first grandson, Wenzel, was born.

Lilli fell ill with cancer and died in 1966, aged 56, in Düsseldorf. Herbert sold the house and entered another marriage which, however, did not last long. After his retirement he lived in Bergisches Land, indulging in his passion – travel. He died in 1993 at the age of 83 in Bergisch-Gladbach.

In the mid-1950s Franz Michalski attended a drama school Hamburg but eventually decided on a commercial apprenticeship which he completed in 1957 in Hamburg. He continued to work in Hamburg, where his two sons, Wenzel and Daniel were born in 1962 and 1965, until the end of the 1960s. In 1969 the family moved to Baden-Württemberg where he worked as managing director of one of the companies of the Boehringer Mannheim-Gruppe. On his retirement in 1993 he moved back to Berlin with Petra, his wife.

Peter Michalski attended a Catholic *Gymnasium* in Hamburg until 1959 and subsequently began a commercial apprenticeship, with a company importing and exporting grain and feedstuff, which he completed in 1962. In 1961 he married Dušanka Dinić, a Serb. Their daughter, Milena, was born in 1966. He continued to work in Hamburg until 1964, when he entered a traineeship in the foreign news service of the publishing house Axel Springer Verlag followed by a period as an editor in Hamburg until 1967. In 1968 he joined Axel Springer's London bureau which he later headed from 1984 to 2006. Nowadays he is a freelance journalist living in London with his wife.

All four of the Michalskis have always been aware of the story of their survival, yet they never made any mention of it to anyone outside the family. None of them ever achieved a clear-cut attitude towards any religion. Lilli remained a baptized Catholic but did not practise that faith. Herbert experienced phases of being a convinced Catholic, which was why he insisted on his sons attending Catholic schools. According to his sons, he died an atheist however. Franz and Peter Michalski have today cut any ties to religion.

On 14 September 2006 Petra and Franz Michalski attended a function at the *Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand* where an American, Evy Woods, née Goldstein,<sup>3</sup> gave a talk about her experience as a Jewish girl gone underground during the NS era in Germany. The witness spoke not only of her

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**3** Her fate is being told in the story "Netzwerk der Hilfe" (Network of Help) at the media table of the Gedenkstätte Stille Helden. Martina Voigt, Grüße von "Ferdinand". Elisabeth Abeggs vielfältiger Einsatz für Verfolgte, in: Beate Kosmala/Claudia Schoppmann (Hrsg.), Sie blieben unsichtbar. Zeugnisse aus den Jahren 1941 bis 1945, Berlin 2006, pp. 104-115.

memory of the many stations and lodgings, of the helpers and the various fearful situations but also of how difficult it was for her and her mother post-war to find a way into a „normal“ life. She told, too, of the anti-semitism of the early post-war years in Germany, and that issue was the trigger for Franz to get up in the audience and call out: „You’re telling me!“ Whereupon Frau Dr. Claudia Schoppmann asked: „Have you just outed yourself?“ „I myself was a child gone underground,“ Herr Michalski confirmed.

That evening was the first time he ever spoke in public about the story of his survival during the NS era. We subsequently engaged in personal contact with him and learnt that, actually, he had written the story down quite a while ago. Putting pen to paper had been instigated by Milena, his niece, whose father, Peter Michalski, remembered very little of the time of persecution. She asked her uncle to write down the history of the family during the NS era in order for the memory not to get lost. Franz Michalski had fulfilled that request in 1994. It was the year he became 60 years old and, within the course of a few weeks, he wrote down the events from the NS period which resulted in the survival of his family.

That manuscript constitutes the basis of the present publication. Franz Michalski drew on some documents in the family’s possession which have been preserved presumably because his parents kept them by their side during their time underground.<sup>4</sup> His memories are a further source. It might be assumed that a child of ten could not remember the highly complex correlations with such precision. Yet Franz Michalski tells of a dramatic event which has remained ingrained in his memory: In the autumn of 1945 all the family members had eaten poisonous mushrooms and Lilli believed she would have to die that very evening. In what she presumed to be the last hours of her life she told her elder son the entire story of their persecution during the NS era, of their going underground, of their helpers, and of the arduous survival. In the course of that evening Franz understood his own experiences and became able to relate and collate the things he had experienced. Later on all members of the family talked on and off about one or the other detail of their survival but never again was the whole story narrated as comprehensively as in that autumn night.

The contact with Franz Michalski enabled us to dedicate one of the show-cases in the *Gedenkstätte Stille Helden*, opened in 2008, to the story of the rescue of Lilli Michalski and her family.<sup>5</sup> It exemplifies the histories of

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- 4 I have been keeping in touch with Petra and Franz Michalski regularly since September 2006. Much of the information contained in this publication goes back to conversations which took place on a variety of occasions. Therefore, I do not denote the specific sources of these conversations.
- 5 Catalogue Gedenkstätte Stille Helden. *Widerstand gegen die Judenverfolgung*, hrsg. von der Gedenkstätte Stille Helden in der Stiftung Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand, 2. überarbeitete Aufl., Berlin 2009, pp. 108-111.

persecution and survival of “*Mischehen*” (mixed marriages) and “*Mischlinge*” (people of mixed race).

The origin of the Michalski and Brann families are to be found in Breslau. That is where the parents of Franz and Peter Michalski grew up and received their education and training. They married in December 1933, barely a year after Hitler’s rise to power, by which time the first statutory measures against Jews had already been enacted. Marriage between Jews and non-Jews were still permitted, however. Herbert Michalski belonged to the small number of contemporary German non-Jews to whom religious and racial prejudice was something alien. He loved his wife and had made up his mind, in spite of the impending drawbacks and despite the difficulties which were to be feared, to make it possible for his family to lead an orderly and happy life. He held on to this goal tenaciously, even though he was conscious of having to expose himself to great dangers in order to protect his wife and children. Even after Lilli’s conversion to Catholicism it was evident, the latest by the enactment of the “*Nürnberger Rassegesetze*” (Nuremberg Racial Laws) in 1935, that her status in “race law” as a Jewess would remain unchanged.<sup>6</sup> However, as Herbert’s sales representation in Görlitz continued to flourish they found it difficult to decide in favour of emigration. They did recognize the signs of the times but presumed themselves not to be directly affected. It was only once the businesses of Jewish ownership were being “Aryanised”<sup>7</sup> after the pogrom of 9 November 1938 that those of the Christian partner in a *Mischehe* was no longer safe either. Arbitrariness became the rule, as Herbert Michalski too had to experience by the quickly enforced surrender of his Görlitz sales representation.<sup>8</sup> At this point, the behaviour patterns of a large company such as Schwarzkopf and their tendency towards adapta-

6 How widely the treatment of Jewesses married to non-Jews in so-called mixed marriages varied from case to case is shown in Wolfgang Benz, *Überleben im Untergrund. Zwischen “Ariern” und “Nichtariern”*, in: ders. (Hrsg.), *Die Juden in Deutschland 1933-1945. Leben unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft*, 4. Aufl., Munich 1966, pp. 684-690.

7 1. Verordnung zur Ausschaltung der Juden aus dem deutschen Wirtschaftsleben vom 12. November 1938 (First decree towards the elimination of Jews from Germany’s economic life, dated 12 November 1938; Joseph Walk, *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden im NS-Staat*, Heidelberg 1996, p. 254.

8 The regulations regarding the non-Jewish partners of a *Mischehe* and their businesses were not unequivocal. During the pogrom of November 1938 anything called “Jewish” was regarded as such. Already on the occasion of the boycott of 1 April 1933 the rule of thumb had been: “If in the case of the proprietors of a business the husband is a Jew and the wife a Christian or the other way round, then that business is classified as Jewish.” Victor Klemperer, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten. Tagebücher 1933-1945*, hrsg. von Walter Nowojski unter Mitarbeit von Hadwig Klemperer, Berlin 1995, entry 31.3.1933, p. 16.

tion become visible to the outside observer. In addition, there were the close structures of a smaller town like Görlitz.<sup>9</sup> Herbert and his family would most likely not have had a single moment of peace any more.

By that time, if not sooner, Herbert and Lilli knew that both of them – albeit in different ways – belonged to the persecuted. The idea of leaving Germany was one option which they pondered and pursued organisationally. It is not possible for us today to reconstruct in details of which Catholic organisations were contacted by Herbert's brother, Richard.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the Michalski family did not leave Germany in the spring of 1939 after all had a number of reasons. The most important is likely to have been Lilli's concern for her father. As Clara, her sister, had just emigrated to London she did not want to leave him behind on his own.

Other family members had already turned their backs on Germany: Lilli's aunts, Jenny Blume and Gertrud Hahn, born 1867 and 1879 in Breslau respectively, had been travelling for years. They had cared for their nieces, Clara and Lilli, after the early death of Helene, their sister. On her marriage in 1898 Jenny Blume had become a British national<sup>11</sup> and as a consequence had few problems during the NS era – either regarding travelling or the anti-Jewish laws. She and her sister, Gertrud, settled permanently in Lausanne, Switzerland, from where they upheld contact with Breslau for as long as possible. Jenny Blume was a wealthy lady entitled to sundry payments of mortgage interest from Germany and, following the outbreak of the war, she kept up for years an exchange of letters with the foreign exchange office of the Chief Finance President of Berlin-Brandenburg. Because of her British citizenship no action could be taken against her, in contrast to her sister, Gertrud Hahn, who lost her citizenship and whose fortune was expropriated in favour of the *Reich* according to the regulation No.11 of the *Reichsbürgergesetz* (*Reich* Citizen Law) of 25 November 1941.<sup>12</sup>

Herbert Michalski was energetic and agile. He always knew what to do. His virtually inexhaustible energy sprang from his good relationship with his

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9 Christoph Kreuzmüller/Ingo Loose/Benno Nietzel, *Nazi Persecution and Strategies for Survival. Jewish Business in Berlin, Frankfurt am Main and Breslau 1933-1942*, in: *Yad Vashem Studies* 39 (2011) 1, pp. 31-70, esp. pp. 33, 48 f.

10 Lutz-Eugen Reutter, *Katholische Kirche als Fluchthelfer im Dritten Reich*, Recklinghausen/Hamburg 1971, ch. V "Brasilaktion", p. 141ff.  
This though mainly describes the failure of the majority of the efforts after the outbreak of the war on 1 September 1939.

11 Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv (BLHA), Oberfinanzpräsident Berlin-Brandenburg, Rep. 36A, G324/0, French translation of 27 May 1942 of the marriage certificate (10 May 1898) Jenny Hahn and the Briton Bernhard Blume, unpaginated.

12 Walk, *Das Sonderrecht für die Juden*, p. 357, and BLHA, Oberfinanzpräsident Berlin-Brandenburg, Rep.36A, H466, G4146 and Rep.36A II, 13513, sheets. 7, 9 and 12.

parents and siblings who stood by him, his wife and the children without reservation. He could rely in particular on his brother, Richard (1903-1985), and equally on Hedwig (1867-1949), his mother, as well as his sisters, Frieda Signus (1902-1978) and Lucy Vorpahl (1904-1970). What might be expected to go without saying was often enough the cause of problems and even strife within families. Many a “mixed” marriage between Jews and non-Jews broke down after 1933 under the pressures of persecution and stigmatisation.<sup>13</sup> Other marriages survived just because of the persecution assailing them from the outside as the non-Jewish partner surmised that the Jewish partner would enjoy a degree of protection by dint of the “*Mischehe*”.<sup>14</sup> Not every relationship between the non-Jewish partner and his or her Christian family went as well as in the case of Herbert Michalski. It was indeed a stroke of luck, therefore, that at the beginning of 1939 Lilli moved back to Breslau with Franz, into the vicinity of the Michalskis and Branns. Even though, on pain of a penalty fine, she had to apply for a stigmatising identity card with the embossed “J”, Lilli did not feel fully part of the persecuted Breslau Jews. Franz Michalski has given an emphatic description of Lilli’s dichotomy towards her religion of origin and her acquired Catholicism. She did belong to the persecuted Jews but she was not threatened to the same extent as Berthold Brann (born 18 April 1868), her father, who, it is to be supposed, committed suicide on 14 July 1942 in the face of the impending deportation, or as her stepmother, Liesbeth Brann, who was deported from Riebzig to Auschwitz on 4 March 1943, or as Clara, her elder sister by three years, who managed to emigrate in September 1938 in the nick of time. It was only fairly recently that the gaze of historical research turned to the history of the persecution of *Mischehen* and *Mischlinge*.<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to make a valid generalisation, because there were regional differences in treatment by the NS authorities.<sup>16</sup> Every individual story followed a course of its

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**13** There are no relevant statistics. The number of “*Mischehen*” in the German Reich decreased from an estimated 35.000 in the year 1932 to 20.454 in the year 1939 but this was due to divorce and emigration. Beate Meyer, “Jüdische Mischlinge”. Rassenpolitik und Verfolgungserfahrung 1933-1945, Hamburg 1999, p. 25.

**14** Ursula Büttner, „Wohl dem, der auf die Seite der Leidenden gehört” (Good for him who belongs to the side of those who suffer). Der Untergang des Dichters Jochen Klepper mit seinen jüdisch-christlichen Angehörigen, in: dies./Martin Greschat, Die verlassenen Kinder der Kirche. Der Umgang mit Christen jüdischer Herkunft im “Dritten Reich”, Göttingen 1998, pp. 123-149, esp. p. 126 ff.

**15** Ursula Büttner, Die Not der Juden teilen. Christlich-jüdische Familien im Dritten Reich. Beispiel und Zeugnis des Schriftstellers Robert Brendel, Hamburg 1988. Robert Brendel was the “Aryan” part of the family, his wife Xenia was Jewish. Their children were “*Mischlinge*”. The large number of preserved letters, published there, offer deep insight into that family’s existential anxieties.

**16** Meyer, “Jüdische Mischlinge”, p. 15, focuses on the region of Hamburg. See also Kerstin Meiring, Die Christlich-Jüdische Mischehe in Deutschland 1840-1933, Hamburg 1998, pp. 86-91.

own, and the story of the Michalski family likewise has many peculiarities. By NS definition the marriage belonged to the “privileged *Mischehen*”.<sup>17</sup> Lilli had received a Catholic baptism but was considered a Jewess. Herbert, a non-Jew, headed the household and was therefore regarded as the more important partner in the marriage. The children, Franz and Peter, having been baptized in the Catholic faith, were first degree “*Mischlinge*”. With hindsight we know that this group of persons would likely have survived even without going underground. The perception of the danger by those concerned was, however, totally different. The deportations began in the autumn of 1941 and from that moment onwards they did not know what was going to happen to them. Utter insecurity also shaped the life of the Michalski family between 1941 and 1945. For instance, Lilli was in doubt whether it would be advisable to wear the Jewish star since many Breslau acquaintances knew that she was Jewish. There was no legal obligation for her to do so. Lilli could discuss this only with her sole confidante, Eva Parik<sup>18</sup>, who also lived in a “*Mischehe*”. Franz never saw his mother with a Jewish star, and he imagines today that she must have thought long and hard every time she went outside. The last major deportation transport, of 1.404 Jews, had left Breslau on 4 March 1943 heading for Auschwitz, after the “*Fabrik-Aktion*”.<sup>19</sup> That left about 200 Jews in “*Mischehen*” still living in the city.<sup>20</sup> This, presumably, was the reason why Alfons Thienelt, the policeman who is supposed to have worked in the *Judenreferat* (Jews Section) of the Breslau state police headquarters, found it almost impossible to continue allowing the index cards of the Michalski family to disappear behind all the other file cards. Today, Franz Michalski can only surmise how much his parents knew in 1944 of the Jews being murdered. They had lived through the deportation of the Breslau Jews, of Lilli’s relatives, and the death of her father. No sign of life was received from the deported relatives. This made them so suspicious that Herbert Michalski made preparations to evade any future orders from the authorities. Thus the forced labour instructions to Lilli in Breslau, as well as to Herbert in Berlin, in mid-October 1944 were the ultimate signal for the whole

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**17** Beate Meyer, “Jüdische Mischlinge”, p. 30.

**18** In the 1939 census Eva Parik, née Caspari, born 5 September 1905 in Breslau, was listed as “*Volljüdin*” and her son, Jan Parik, born 25 May 1936 in Breslau, as “*Mischling*”. They lived at No. 21, Straße der SA, Breslau, Bundesarchiv (BArch) R 1509, Volkszählung.

**19** Alfred Gottwald/Diana Schulle, Die “Judendeportationen” aus dem Deutschen Reich 1941-1945, Wiesbaden 2005, p. 457.

**20** Katharina Friedla, Ego-Dokumente als Quelle zu Lebenswelten der Breslauer Juden, [www.bkge.de/download/Friedla\\_Egodokumente.pdf](http://www.bkge.de/download/Friedla_Egodokumente.pdf), p. 10 92.7.2013). The same number is given by Karla Wolff in her memoirs: Ich blieb zurück. Erinnerungen an Breslau und Israel, Berlin 2012, p. 83.

family to go underground. Admittedly, this happened comparatively late,<sup>21</sup> but every day of the preceding 18 months had already been full of imponderabilities. Lilli's "provisional going underground" with her two sons between October and December 1943 demonstrates their utter uncertainty concerning her future and her expected imminent deportation. That uncertainty was a hallmark of everyone concerned from a "mixed" family. It was much more pronounced than in the case of "*Volljuden*" who knew pretty clearly what was in store for them, and who banded together closely in the Jewish communities and developed a strong sense of a common bond. Lilli witnessed this in her father who presumably supported the newly created Jewish self-help organisations, such as the *Winterhilfe* (Winter Help).<sup>22</sup>

Lilli Michalski was listed in the Jewish congregation of Breslau as a member who had seceded which meant that her details were on the *Gestapo* files. She felt as little sense of belonging to the Jewish congregation, however, as she did to the Catholic church. Lilli and Herbert did not cherish their Catholic religion, either in mainly Protestant Görlitz or in multi-faith Breslau. No attempt at contact, let alone offer of help, was made by the Catholic church congregation. When, in November 1944, Herbert's brother, Richard, approached the Catholic church asking for support for his brother, he was not referred to the competent body but palmed off with a meaningless reference from the Catholic pastoral curacy.<sup>23</sup> This way, the Michalski family never learnt that the Catholic church did in fact keep a small point of contact for "Jewish Christians". They knew nothing of Gabriele Countess Magnis in Beuthen who assisted the "non-Aryans" of the diocese of Breslau who had been baptized as Catholics.<sup>24</sup> Those affected in Breslau never learnt of the work she did, presumably because she was active in Beuthen.

Herbert saw self-help as the only way, given that the Jewish communities were forced to act as performing agents of the NS authorities more and

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**21** As a rule, Jews who were not protected by a "*Mischehe*" had to go underground the latest by the time of the *Fabrik-Aktion* on 27 February 1943. Wolfgang Benz, *Überleben im Untergrund*, in: ders. (Hrsg.), *Die Juden in Deutschland 1933-1945*, pp. 660-674, here p. 661.

**22** Roughly half of the Breslau Jews had to rely on donations from the *Jüdische Winterhilfe* in 1936. Eberhard Jäckel/Peter Longerich/Julius Schoeps (Hrsg.), *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, vol. 1, entry Breslau, p. 240.

**23** See document 15, bottom, p. 92.

**24** Jana Leichsenring, Gabriele Gräfin Magnis – Sonderbeauftragte Kardinal Bertrams für die Betreuung der katholischen "Nichtarier" Oberschlesiens: Auftrag – Grenzüberschreitung – Widerstand?, Stuttgart 2000.

more,<sup>25</sup> and in the Catholic church there were only a few individuals who took an interest in the fate of the Jews or “*Mischehen*”.<sup>26</sup>

Franz Michalski describes the importance of talking to Eva and Ferry Parik, the married couple with whom they were friends. People who shared the same situation were almost the only ones who could be trusted.<sup>27</sup> The loneliness of those families must have been unimaginable. Herbert’s family and the Pariks were the only ones who knew of the four Michalskis going underground.<sup>28</sup>

Single-handedly organising how to survive proved all the more difficult as often more than one person had to be confided in to go underground. Franz Michalski relates how strategically his father proceeded from the start of his employment with Schwarzkopf at the beginning of 1939, in order to establish links with people who appeared helpful in terms of shelter and other resources.

Alfons Thienelt, a tailor and Richard’s school mate, was one such trustworthy person in Breslau. As a policeman he was in an important position, from where he could help with information of vital importance. Thienelt was made aware of imminent actions against Jews and “*Mischehen*” and always passed on warnings in good time to his friend, Richard Michalski. What is not known is whether he knew the destinations of the deportations. Even if he did not know where the trains were heading, he did disapprove of the contemptuously inhuman ways in which his agency deprived the Jews of Breslau of their rights, quartered them in barracks and then shipped them in large transports to places unknown.

What would have happened to Alfons Thienelt if colleagues or superiors at the Breslau state police headquarters had found out that he was not keeping official secrets to himself? We can only speculate as to how much significance would have been accorded such a “betrayal of secrets” within the Breslau *Gestapo*. If Thienelt had been reported or denounced he would have had to face a trial, at the end of which he would have been found guilty

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**25** Beate Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung. Die Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland zwischen Hoffnung, Zwang, Selbstbehauptung und Verstrickung (1939-1945)* Hamburg 2012; the chapter “Die Bezirksstellen” contains a small number of details concerning the Bezirksstelle Breslau, pp. 251-263, esp. p. 258 f.

**26** Dr. Margarete Sommer, for instance, who headed the aid centre of the Episcopalian ordinariate for baptized Jews in Berlin. Jana Leichsenring, *Die katholische Kirche und “ihre” Juden. Das “Hilfswerk beim Bischöflichen Ordinariat Berlin” 1938-1945*, Berlin 2007, pp. 270-282.

**27** Franz and Peter Michalski have tried in vain in the last few years to renew the contact they had had in the 1960s with Jan Parik, the photographer and resident of Prague.

**28** The Grabowskis, another Breslau *Mischfamilie*, also went underground in the autumn of 1944. See Wolff, *Ich blieb zurück*, pp. 97-113.

of “treachery” or some other offence.<sup>29</sup> But he acted with such caution that he did not make himself conspicuous. He belonged to the small number of people who performed their acts of resistance within the structures of power, by passing on information.<sup>30</sup> He was fully conscious of what he was doing and he had decided on this manner of helping because he saw in his place of work some scope for action, and because he wanted to come to the aid of the four people whom he knew personally.

Erna Scharf, subsequently Raack (1916-2003), the maid and nanny who joined the Michalskis in 1934 at the age of 18, felt at home with them. She developed profound human ties with the family because Herbert and Lilli treated her with respect and Franz, her charge, grew close to her heart. As an opponent of the regime, Ernst Scharf, her father, appreciated her working in a household opposed to the NS government. The employer-employee relationship thus developed into a relationship of deep trust. Erna and her parents rejected any idea of her contact with the Jewess Lilli being possibly detrimental to her. Erna continued to cultivate that friendship after the family’s departure from Görlitz and visited the Michalskis also in Breslau where her sister Else, who had fallen ill, had by then been transferred to a clinic. From 1942 onwards, Erna took Franz to Thiemendorf every year for his summer holidays so as to make life easier for Lilli. When the family was threatened by mortal danger in the autumn of 1944, Erna and her parents took the two brothers into their care in November 1944. Earlier, they had helped to store part of their household effects from Breslau in Thiemendorf. They did so as a matter of course without any discussion whatsoever.

Ida and Ernst Scharf, the parents, managed the farm in Thiemendorf together with their daughter, Else, while Erna worked in *Görlitzer Waggonbaufabrik* (a company manufacturing train carriages). Erna married Herbert Raack in April 1943. In July 1943 she gave birth to her son, Karl-Heinz. The Scharfs offering the Michalski family to take in their sons illegally cannot be rated highly enough against this background. Erna Raack and her parents knew precisely the risk they were prepared to take: Ernst Scharf had spent time in prison<sup>31</sup> in 1937/38 and thus had first-hand experience of what it meant to become active against the NS state. After his release from jail he became a self-employed farmer in the hope of evading observation in that way. He had

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**29** Only very few men in the police or Gestapo structures acted the way Thienelt did. Not a single case of a resistant policemen having been tried has come to light so far. Deutsche Hochschule der Polizei/Florian Dierl u.a. (Hrsg.), *Ordnung und Vernichtung. Die Polizei im NS-Staat*, Dresden 2011, pp. 260-279.

**30** Bernward Dörner, *Die Deutschen und der Holocaust. Was niemand wissen wollte, aber jeder wissen konnte*, Berlin 2007, ch. Individuelles und gesellschaftliches Wissen, pp. 301-416.

**31** He was imprisoned in the Görlitz court jail. Ernst Scharf, “Politischer Tätigkeitsbericht” of 29.01.1952, Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden, Bestand 11430, Bezirkstag/Rat des Bezirkes Dresden, VdN-Akten No. 8235, sh. 3.

not changed his mind about the regime but he now kept it to himself. When Franz and Peter were with the Scharfs it must have been very stressful for Erna that she was not really able to calm four-year-old Peter down. Erna knew that the little boy could not develop the same trusting relationship as Franz had with her. Therefore it was Franz who became the most important person of reference for his younger brother. Next to the daily task of keeping the two boys occupied and distracting them from their grief, all members of the family had to be careful in their choice of words and, furthermore, be on permanent look-out for any changes in their environment. They had developed a special sort of sensitivity for dangerous situations and relayed a message to the Michalski parents in the first half of February 1945, when they feared that the discovery of the identity of the two boys would only be a matter of time. All too frequently the *Feldgendarme* passed by the farm, looking for deserters. Erna took very seriously her promise to the Michalski parents that in the worst case she would raise the two boys herself. Franz and Peter would have come to harm as well if the Scharfs had been found out. Erna was therefore acting responsibly in signalling to Lilli and Herbert, early in February 1945, that the children were no longer safe with her. When the Michalski family passed through Thiemendorf in June 1945, after the end of the war, they were actually on their way to Breslau. It was only in Görlitz that they learnt they could not return to their erstwhile home. The Scharf/Raack family was happy that all four Michalskis had survived. They had not been able to rescue the contents of the stored chests, with the exception of some photographs, which were of no importance for the plunderers. A selection is shown here. Lilli and Herbert, for their part, were pleased that the Scharf family had come through the NS era and the end of the war. Only later did the Michalskis learn that Karl-Heinz, Erna's two-year-old son, had died in July 1945 from contaminated medication. Erna gave birth to her second son, Helmut, in 1948. Christel, who subsequently became his wife, entered the household in the 1960s, and Erna became a substitute mother to her, as Christel had lost her birth mother at the age of nine. With the Raack family able to leave the GDR and moving to Tübingen in 1984, their contact with the Michalski family, who were also living in the Federal Republic, intensified again. Franz Michalski has always regarded Erna as his foster-mother who saved his life and the lives of his family. For a long time, because Erna never spoke much about her help to the Michalski family at home, her own family had no idea of the dangers to which Erna Raack and the Scharf family had exposed themselves at the time.<sup>32</sup> Erna Raack is a typical "Silent Heroine" who doubtless would have said that it went without saying for her and her family to take in the two boys. Beginning in 1939, Herbert Michalski looked out for people within the Schwarzkopf company who could be trusted both on a human level and

.....  
**32** Information from Christel Raack in various telephone conversations between the years 2008 and 2013.

politically. Among the Berlin colleagues, one of his longer standing acquaintances was Gerda Mez (1911-2002), a single woman working for Schwarzkopf as a “hair specialist”. She and her sister Luzie, the elder by four years, had grown up in Berlin. Gerda was slightly disabled since birth by a deformation of her hands.<sup>33</sup> She had to learn early in life what it meant to be different from the majority. It is conceivable that this made her develop a keener awareness of injustice and wrongdoing. Born in Offenbach in 1911, she grew up in Berlin and began an apprenticeship as a tailor at the age of 16. However, she did not complete it but worked as a model at the Grosses Schauspielhaus theatre from 1929 until 1933.<sup>34</sup> From 1934 onwards she worked for the Schwarzkopf company without interruption. She had told Herbert Michalski of her problems with her Jewish friend Julius Gerson who came from a textile family firm in Berlin and was at that time living in Danzig, because he hoped that in the Free State he stood a better chance of evading the anti-Jewish persecutions. His intention was to emigrate to Palestine from there.<sup>35</sup> Gerda Mez had herself relocated to Danzig to be close to her friend. She cultivated friendships with several Jews and continued to do so matter-of-factly also after 1933.<sup>36</sup>

These circumstances led to the development of a collegiality within the Berlin headquarters of Schwarzkopf between Herbert Michalski and Gerda Mez, which included conversations about private worries as well as an exchange of views about their shared oppositional attitude towards the NS state. It is to be assumed that Gerda Mez consciously registered all further restrictions against Jews in Germany. Herbert trusted her to such an extent that he later discussed his plans with her before the family was actually forced to go underground. On 17 October 1944 Gerda at once travelled from Berlin to Breslau, as agreed with Herbert Michalski, met Lilli and the two boys at the station and travelled on with them to Feldbach in Austria. She protected Lilli by presenting her passport whenever their papers were checked. She knew that it was of vital importance to accompany Lilli, Franz and Peter safely to their destination. When she herself moved from Berlin to Tetschen-Bodenbach with her part of the company in early 1945 she continued to keep her friends in the underground in mind. Lines of communication existed between her and Herbert Michalski, of which Franz knew nothing. This is why even today it is unclear by which means those persecuted kept in touch with their helper. There can be no doubt, however, that Herbert and Lilli knew Gerda Mez would shelter them in her hotel room.

.....  
**33** Information from Franz Michalski and Gerda Mez’ nephew, Dr. Lutz Mez.

**34** This information is based on the *Arbeitsbuch* (work book) of Gerda Mez which details her career history and places of employment, p. 3 ff. Private possession Dr. Lutz Mez, Berlin.

**35** By the time of the census of May 1939 he had already left Germany, BArch R 1509, Volkszählung.

**36** Conversation Dr. Lutz Mez with the author, 8 May 2013.

The journeys which Lilli and Herbert Michalski went on in November 1944 from Feldbach to Görlitz and then on into the Yugoslav partisan area, only to return, in February 1945, to Görlitz, Dresden and Tetschen, were undertaken without the protection of false papers. Presumably, Herbert Michalski took the risk of using trains with nothing but his valid papers, i.e. his “Aryan” identity card (doc. 6, p. 85) and his travel permit for the Schwarzkopf company. He is sure to have made up one of the clever stories he always managed to tell convincingly so as to explain to any inspectors why his wife and children were with him. The story of his arrest in Prague shows that he was very smart.<sup>37</sup> In the summer of 1945 he stated, concerning the arrest and escape: “On 28.3.45 I was arrested by the Gestapo at Moldau Station in Prague in the course of a raid for not belonging to the Volkssturm. But I managed to con my way out of the rooms of the chief of the Security Police to freedom again.”<sup>38</sup>

The eight weeks between February and April 1945, during which the family lived in Gerda Mez’ room, put an unimaginable strain on all of them. Gerda Mez possessed the strength to master the problems of living together in the narrowest of spaces, in spite of all the conflicts. Lilli Michalski hit the limits of her resilience in those weeks. The most dramatic moment of that period occurred at the end of March 1945 when Herbert failed to return from Prague. Suicide as a way to end the misery of life in illegality was one option of *ultima ratio* in the minds of all Jews who had gone underground.<sup>39</sup> Lilli’s ten-year-old son saved her from that last step – most likely a unique event in the history of persecution and one hardly ever portrayed. Jewish partners in *Mischehen* and “*Mischlinge*” were frequently plagued by feelings of guilt. The state of their psyche was different from that of those who were persecuted as “*Volljuden*”.<sup>40</sup>

.....  
**37** According to Franz Michalski’s memory his father had, as a precaution, not taken his papers along on this trip. This leads to the conclusion that he normally had them with him and used them too.

**38** OdF (Victim of fascism) file Herbert Michalski, LAB, C Rep. 118-01, no. 5837, sh. 2.

**39** It is not possible to establish how many suicides were committed underground. Anita and Renate Lasker intended to lay their hands on poison in case of emergency: Peter Schneider, “Und wenn wir nur eine Stunde gewinnen...” Wie ein jüdischer Musiker die Nazi-Jahre überlebte, Berlin 2001, p. 52 ff. Anita Lasker, Ihr sollt die Wahrheit erben. Die Cellistin von Auschwitz. Erinnerungen, Reinbek 2000, p. 73 f. Julius Friede always kept chopped up Veronal on his person: Eugen Herman-Friede, Für Freudensprünge keine Zeit, Berlin 1991, p. 109. The suicide of Margarethe Wilhelm during her illegality is narrated by Elisabeth Hofacker: Menschen auf dem Prüfstand. Eine Berliner Familie im Widerstand gegen die Judenverfolgung. Herausgegeben von Claudia Schoppmann (Publikationen der Gedenkstätte Stille Helden, vol. 2), Berlin 2013, pp. 72-74.

**40** Meyer, “Jüdische Mischlinge”, S. 356 ff.

Lilli Michalski believed that Herbert and the boys would be able to lead a better life, one less burdened by her, if she were not alive any longer. Presumably, Herbert had always been able to disabuse her of that thought time and again. When he did not return at the agreed time Lilli saw no hope any more.

The Michalski family survived. Herbert and Lilli tried after 1945 to pick up the threads of their earlier lives, and they managed to do so. Franz and Peter Michalski were successful in their careers and able to have families of their own.

Yet it was only in connection with the *Gedenkstätte Stille Helden* that Franz became aware of the fact that the story of the Michalski family is of significance beyond the immediate family. Over the years he felt the urgency to tell of “his” helpers and he does so, together with his wife, at the *Gedenkstätte* in front of school classes and other groups. He succeeds in conveying convincingly the strength of the personalities of Erna Scharf, the nanny, and of Gerda Mez, the colleague, and the differing motives which induced them to help. They never ever boasted of what they had done but they were doubtless glad and proud for the rest of their lives that their actions had been successful.

The key figure in the centre of this story is Herbert Michalski who stood between the “Aryan” world and the world of the persecuted. He knew from the very beginning that he had to mobilize all his powers and possibilities to ensure that his wife, his children and he himself would be able to survive. Being self-employed, it was part of his “nature” to always keep himself informed, make instant decisions and proactively engineer matters in such a way that they were wise and feasible at any moment. He steadfastly and courageously rejected the suggestion of the *Gestapo* to separate from his wife. “It then went on like that [...] with having to hand in the radios, the telephone connection being cut off, summons to the *Gestapo* where I was asked whether I might already have considered the idea of divorce. When I abruptly said no and declined to, but mentioned the idea of emigration, the *Gestapo* man involved said that this was out of the question and was not desired.”<sup>41</sup> Herbert Michalski acted out of love for his wife and children, out of revulsion at his country’s dehumanizing laws and in the solid conviction that with cleverness he would succeed in protecting his family from the clutches of the *Gestapo* and the NS bureaucracy. His strenuous endeavours were successful because his actions, jointly undertaken with other courageous allies, worked out the way he had envisaged.

.....  
41 Lebenslauf (C.V.) Herbert Michalski, OdF file Herbert Michalski, LAB, C Rep. 118-01, no. 5837, sh. 4.

It was a matter of great importance to Franz and Peter Michalski to obtain posthumous honours for their helpers by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. On 29 October 2012 Yad Vashem decided to recognize Gerda Mez and Erna Raack as well as her parents, Ida and Ernst Scharf, as “Righteous Among the Nations”. The solemn ceremony took place in Berlin on 17 September 2013 in the presence of all family members alive today.

Mein Testament

zu meinen Erben setze ich zu gleichen  
Teilen die Minderjährigen:

und Franz Michalsky geb. 17. 10. 1934  
Peter Michalsky geb. 21. 11. 1940  
Beide zur Zeit wohnhaft in Breslau  
Amte der S. St. 29  
lin.

Breslau den 25. November 1941

Frau Sophie Sara. Hahn geb. Haberkorn  
Breslau 5. Gartenstr 10 III S. Schindler.

**Bescheinigung der Aufnahme**  
**in die römisch-katholische Kirche**

Herr  
Frau Lily Brann  
Fräulein

geboren 21. August 1910 in Breslau

wohnhaft Neue Graupenstr. 7.

ist heute von mir in die römisch-katholische Kirche  
aufgenommen worden. Die Taufe wurde ~~bedingungs-~~  
~~waise~~ <sup>absolut</sup> gespendet. Die Vollmacht wurde vom erzbischöf-  
lichen Ordinariat erteilt am 16. Januar 1931

unter Nr. 1362  
Taufpatin : Frau Dorothea Lorke, Breslau  
Gottschallstr. 24

Breslau 13, den 9. Dezember 1933  
Gabitstraße 16



*P. Th. Richardt S.J.*

1000, III. 31.

- 2 Certificate of Lilli Brann's acceptance into the Roman Catholic church dated 9 December 1933. Gabitzstraße 16 was the address of the Carolus church which was administered by the Jesuits (see p. 19)

**Standesamt Breslau IV,**  
 Seifensiegler Nr. 1032, Postamt 6, Königsplatz 2

**D.**

Gültig nur zum Zwecke der Trauung. (§ 82 des Gesetzes vom 6. Februar 1875.)

**Bescheinigung der Eheschließung.**

Zwischen dem Kaufmann *Herbert Franz Michalski*  
 wohnhaft in Breslau  
 und der Lilli Rufe Kraus  
 wohnhaft in Breslau

ist vor dem unterzeichneten Standesbeamten heute die Ehe geschlossen worden.

Breslau am 12. Dezember 1933.

Der Standesbeamte.  
*[Signature]*



Warnung: Zur Verbindlichk. über die Forderung des Verzeichnisses und die Erfüllung vom 6. Februar 1875 bestimmt im § 82: „Die rechtlichen Verpflichtungen in Beziehung auf Trauung werden durch dieses Gesetz nicht berührt.“

3 Marriage certificate of Lilli and Herbert Michalski, issued on 12 December 1933 by the registry office (see p. 19)

**Der Oberbürgermeister.**

**Steueramt**                      Görlitz, den 26. 4. 1939  
 Gefch.-Zch. 9441

**Bescheinigung.**

Es wird hiermit bescheinigt, daß

Herr *Herbert Michalski*  
 Frau *[Signature]*

am 1. 1. 1939 das Gewerbe abgemeldet hat.



Im Auftrage  
*[Signature]*

Gebührenfrei.

94.77.1000.3.39.

4 Certificate of deregistration of Herbert Michalski's business, issued on 26 April 1939 by the Görlitz tax authority (see p. 25)



5 Jewish identity card Lilli Recha Michalski, issued in Breslau on 11 April 1939 (see p. 29)



6 Identity card of Herbert Michalski, merchant, issued in Breslau on 9 July 1941 (see p. 34)

**Betriebsberechtigungsschein.**

Herr Herbert Michalski  
wurde in der Zeit vom 1. 4. 43  
bis 29. 4. 43 194 durch  
Staffelf. Wielsch. Lehrsch. Nr. L. #66  
auf Anthrazit- u. Holzgas Generatoren  
mit Erfolg  
ausgebildet. Er ist befähigt,  
Anthrazit- u. Holzgas Generator-Fahrzeuge  
zu warten und zu fahren.  
, den 6. 5. 43 194  
**NSKK.**  
**Motorgruppe Berlin**  
*[Signature]*  
**Beigadeführer u. Stellv.**  
**Führer der Motorgruppe**  
Gilt nur in Verbindung mit dem Führerschein.



7  
Operational qualification certificate entitling Herbert Michalski to run and maintain vehicles driven by anthracite and wood gas generators, Berlin 6 May 1943 (see p. 37)

A b s c h r i f t

Btr: Beschränkung des Gas- und Strombezuges

In der Anlage übersenden wir Ihnen ein auf Veranlassung unserer Aufsichtsbehörde, der Geheimen Staatspolizei-Leitstelle Breslau herausgegebenes Rundschreiben betr. Beschränkung des Gas- und Strombezuges für jüdische Haushaltungen mit dem Bemerkten, dass dieses Rundschreiben lt. ausdrücklicher Anweisung der Gauleitung der NSDAP Niederschlesien für alle Haushaltungen, denen eine volljüdische Person im Sinne der gesetzlichen Bestimmung angehört, gilt, also auch für Ihren Haushalt.

Bezirksstelle SCHLESIEN  
der  
REICHSVEREINIGUNG DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND  
Verwaltungsstelle Breslau

gez: Dr. Georg Israel Kohn  
Breslau, den 25. Januar 1943

gez: Fritz Israel Lasch

*Rechtsanwalt des Oberlandesgerichtes  
mit Befehl  
Fritz Winkler*



8 Communication from the Silesian district office of the Reichsvereinigung about the supply of gas and electricity, Breslau 25 January 1943 (see p. 42)

Zur besonderen Beachtung

Betr. Einsparung von Gas- und Stromverbrauch :

Auf aufsichtsbehördliche Anordnung und entsprechend einer Mitteilung der Stadtwerke Breslau wird Folgendes bekanntgegeben :

- 1) Mit Wirkung ab 1.12.1942 dürfen jüdische Wohnungen nur noch folgende Mengen an Strom und Gas monatlich verbrauchen :

a) Strom

Für Haushaltungen mit	1 Person	5 kw-Stunden
" " "	2 Personen	8 "
" " "	3 "	8 1/2 "
" " "	4 "	9 "
" " "	5 "	9 1/2 "
" " "	6 "	10 "
" " "	7 " und mehr	12 "

b) Gas

Für Haushaltungen mit	1 Person	8 cbm
" " "	2 Personen	12 "
" " "	3 "	16 "
" " "	4 "	20 "
" " "	5 "	24 "
" " "	6 "	28 "
" " "	7 " und mehr	31 "

- 2) Ein Mehrverbrauch an Gas und Strom hat den sofortigen Entzug der Lieferung zur Folge.
- 3) Zur Durchführung dieser Sparmassnahmen sind folgende Anordnungen getroffen :
- Es darf keine Lampe über 25 Watt verwendet werden. In Schlafzimmern, Toiletten und Nebenräumen dürfen nur 15 Watt-Lampen verwendet werden. Stärkere Birnen sind sofort auszutauschen, wobei darauf zu achten ist, dass neue nicht mattierte Lampen verwendet werden, die in den Geschäften erhältlich sind.
  - In Korridoren, Treppenhäusern, Fluren usw. dürfen nur die allernotwendigsten, möglichst schwachen, Lampen verwendet werden.
  - Zur Einsparung an Kochgas sind in allen Haushaltungen Kochkisten durch Auspolsterung von Kisten mit Stroh und anderem Material sofort herzurichten. Es wird dringend empfohlen, einmal täglich warmes Essen durch die Gemeinschaftsspeisung Neue Graubenstr. 3/4 (Kameradenspeisung) zu beziehen und dieses Essen in der Kochkiste warm aufzubewahren.
  - In jeder Wohnung ist ein gemeinschaftlicher Aufenthaltsraum einzurichten, in dem sich alle Inwoner der Wohnung bis zum Schlafengehen aufzuhalten haben, und in dem ausschliesslich Licht (natürlich in sparsamsten Umfange) bis 20 Uhr gebrannt werden darf.

e)

9 Instructions by the Silesian district office of the *Reichsvereinigung* concerning the reduced entitlement to the use of gas and electricity, Breslau 4 December 1942 (see p.42)

- e) Alle Haushaltungsvorstände haben sofort unserer Grundstücksverwaltung eine Meldung über die Zahl der Räume der Wohnung und der untergebrachten Personen zu erstatten. Die Meldung muss spätestens am 8.12.1942 bei uns eingegangen sein und zwar nach folgendem Schema :

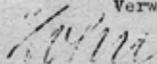
" Wohnung Weiss, Augustastr. 79, II lks.  
bestehend aus...Zimmern, Küche, Bad  
6 Personen. "

Eine verspätete Abgabe hat behördliche Bestrafung zur Folge.

- f) Weitere Ratschläge für die Einsparung von Gas und Licht werden von unserer Grundstücksverwaltung noch erteilt werden. Dieser wird in Kürze eine besondere Beratungsstelle eingegliedert werden, über deren Tätigkeit noch Näheres am "Schwarzen Bret" bekannt gegeben wird.
- 4) Es wird nachdrücklichst darauf hingewiesen, dass mit behördlich Kontrollmassnahmen zu rechnen ist. Werden bei diesen Verstösse festgestellt, so ist mit schärfsten behördlichen Massnahmen zu rechnen.
- 5) Für jede Wohnung wird ein Vertrauensmann bestimmt werden, der der Behörde und uns gegenüber dafür verantwortlich ist, dass mit Gas und Strom sparsam gewirtschaftet und die angegebenen Grundsätze über Einsparungen sofort und schärfstens durchgeführt werden.
- 6) In diesem Zusammenhang bemerken wir, dass die Dienststunden in der Gemeinde auf behördliche Weisung von Montag bis Sonnabend auf 7 - 16 Uhr festgesetzt sind.

Es wird nochmals darauf hingewiesen, dass die Innehaltung der angegebenen Grundsätze nicht nur im eigenen Interesse, sondern auch im Interesse der jüdischen Allgemeinheit unbedingt erforderlich ist und dass alle Verstösse schärfstens geahndet werden.

BEZIRKSSTELLE SCHLESSEN  
DER  
REICHSV. REINIGUNG DER JUDEN IN DEUTSCHLAND  
Verwaltungsstelle Breslau

  
DR. GEORG ISRAEL KOHN

  
FRITZ ISRAEL LASCH

Breslau, den 4. Dezember 1942  
Ta/P.

Erwin Israel Ludnowsky

Breslau, den 27. Dezember 1943  
Willmannstr. 1/3  
Fernruf: 216 12

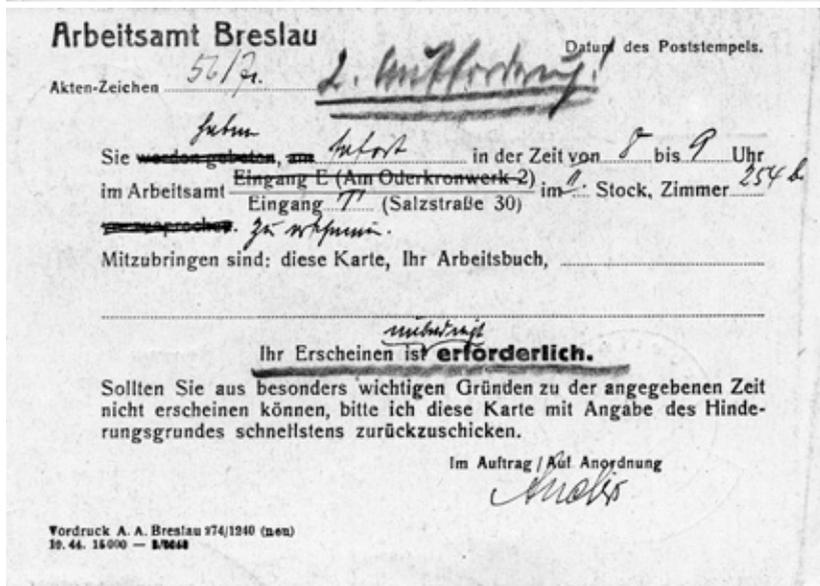
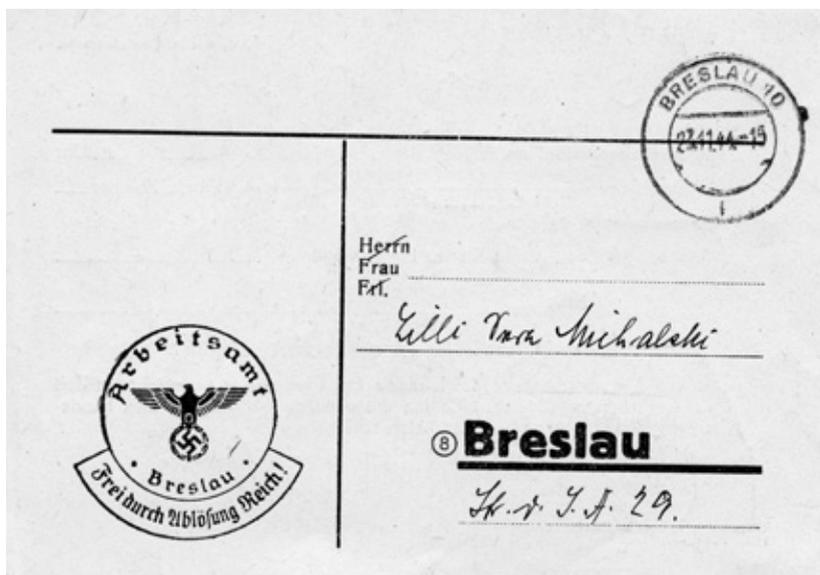
Auf Veranlassung der Gauleitung ersuche ich Sie, dem Wohnungs- und Liegenschaftsamt (Quartieramt) Breslau, Junkerstr., für den Fall, dass das Quartieramt Räume Ihrer Wohnung beschlagnahmen sollte, mitzuteilen, dass Sie in privilegierter Mischehe leben und eine Beschlagnahme nicht erfolgen kann, da Ihnen die Wohnung von der Gauleitung zugewiesen worden ist.

  
(Erwin Israel Ludnowsky)

10 Letter from Erwin Ludowsky dated 27 December 1943 (see p. 42)



11 Lilli Michalski's postal identity card, issued on 21 August 1943 in Breslau. It lacks her enforced Jewish middle name. It is not known who added when the word *Jüdin* (Jewess) in indelible pencil all over the right hand side, since when she could no longer use the document. (see p. 45)



12 Postcard with 2nd summons from the Breslau Labour Bureau for Lilli Michalski, dated 23 November 1944 (see p. 48)



Aktenzeichen: *II 2 c* BERLIN C 2, den *17. Oktober 44*  
 Berufsgruppe: ..... Fernr.: .....  
 Hausanschluß: .....

Sie werden gebeten, mit dieser Karte  
 — Montag bis Freitag zwischen ..... und ..... Uhr — \*)  
 — am *23. 10. 44* in der Zeit von *8* bis *9* Uhr — \*)  
 im Arbeitsamt Berlin *VSH, Rinkufer 9*

Zimmer-Nr.: ..... — vorzusprechen — anzurufen — \*)  
 Fahrtkosten oder Verdienstausfall können nicht erstattet werden.  
 Vorzulegen sind: *Arbeitsbuch*

Im Interesse einer reibungslosen Abfertigung wird gebeten, die  
 angegebene Zeit genau einzuhalten. Um 13 Uhr bzw. Sonnabends  
 um 11 Uhr wird das Dienstgebäude für den Publikumsverkehr  
 geschlossen.  
 \*) Nichtzutreffendes streichen!

II A — 482 — 50.000 VIII. 44. C/2277

*Stömg*

13 Postcard from the Berlin Labour Bureau with summons for Herbert Michalski, dated 17 October 1944 (see p. 48)

 <p>Unterschrift des Passinhabers <i>Gerda Mez</i></p> <p>Es wird hiermit bescheinigt, daß der Inhaber die durch das oberrheinende Lichtbild dargestellte Person ist und die darunter befindliche Unterschrift eigenhändig vollzogen hat.</p> <p><i>Berlin-Wilmersdorf</i> den 4. April 1939 <i>Seelmann</i></p>	<p>PERSONENBESCHREIBUNG</p> <p>Beruf <i>Haar-Modenspezialistin</i></p> <p>Geburtsort <i>Hanbach a. d. Rh.</i></p> <p>Geburtsdag <i>2. 9. 11.</i></p> <p>Wohnort <i>Berlin-Wilmersdorf</i></p> <p>Gestalt <i>gräß.</i></p> <p>Gesicht <i>oval</i></p> <p>Farbe der Augen <i>blau</i></p> <p>Farbe des Haares <i>blond</i></p> <p>Besond. Kennzeichen <i>keine</i></p>											
	<p>K-E-N-D-T-R</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Nr.</th> <th>Name</th> <th>Alter</th> <th>Geschlecht</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> <tr> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> <td> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Nr.	Name	Alter	Geschlecht							
Nr.	Name	Alter	Geschlecht									

14 Travel passport Gerda Mez, issued on 4 April 1939 in Berlin. Private collection Dr. Lutz Mez, Berlin (see p. 49)

**Seelsorgerzeugnis**  
=====

Nach Einsichtnahme in die entsprechenden Unterlagen bescheinige ich, daß Herr Herbert M i c h a l s k i katholisch ist, daß Frau Lilly M i c h a l s k i geb. Braun am 9. Dezember 1933 in die katholische Kirche aufgenommen wurde, daß die Eheleute am 12. Dezember 1933 kirchlich getraut worden sind und ihre beiden Söhne die hl. Taufe empfangen haben.

Die Teilnahme am kirchlichen Leben kennzeichnet der Empfang der ersten hl. Kommunion durch den Sohn Franz. Auch darüber hinaus können wir die Familie als kirchentreue Christen empfehlen. .

B r e s l a u den 7. November 1944.

*J. A. Seelme*  
Kuratus.



15 Pastoral testimony of 7 November 1944 for the Michalski family, issued by the Breslau pastoral curacy of the Jesuits (see p. 51)



P o t v r z e n í :

Pan M i c h a l s k i Herbert narozený dne 5.11.1909  
 paní " ~~M~~illi narozená 21.8. 1910  
 pan " Franz narozený 17.10.1934  
 pan " Petr " 21.12.1940

celé rodině povoluje se prodloužení pobytu ve zdejším městě do  
 15.června 1945 s nárokem na potravinové lístky.

Paní a syn ~~Michalski~~ové jsou Israelského původu.

V Podmöklech dne 31.kvčtna 1945.

Pobyt se prodlužuje do 16. června

Vítek Václav



- 18 Application of food allocation for the four Michalskis,  
 dated 31 May 1945 (see p.62)

Stadtverwaltung Görlitz  
 Wohlfahrtsamt

### Vorläufige Wohnungszuweisung

Herr | *Robert Michalski*  
 Frau |  
 Frl. |

mit Personenzahl 4

bisherige Wohnung *Johannastr. 12* *Wohnung*

Anzahl der Zimmer \_\_\_\_\_

Wohnung verloren durch *Verkauf*

wird eingewiesen in *Augustastr. 25*

Görlitz, den *8. Juni* 1945



Wohnungsamt

I.A. *Udo Fren*

- 19 Temporary allocation of the apartment at Augustastraße 25  
 by the municipal administration of Görlitz to the Michalski family,  
 dated 8 June 1945 (see p. 64)

Городская Управа Герлиц

Герлиц, 22. Juni 1945.

ПРОПУСКНОЕ СВИДЕТЕЛЬСТВО

Гражданин Михалки, Герберт его супруги  
Гражданка  
Год рождения 5.11.09 в Бреслау 12 ред. жонан

дано разрешение на выезд из города Герлиц

в город Тхиенендорф туда и обратно.

Причина выезда расужагой за багажом

22 Juni 1945 1945 г.  
Число и Месяц



Городская Управа Герлиц

*Handwritten signature*

Stadtverwaltung Görlitz

Görlitz, 22. Juni 1945

Passierschein

Herr / Frau Herbert Michalski mit Frau u. 2 Kindern

geboren am 5.11.09 in Breslau

ist berechtigt, sich von Görlitz nach Thienendorf

und zurück zu begeben.

Ursache: Sachen abholen



Stadtverwaltung Görlitz

L.A.:

*Handwritten signature*

20 Laissez passer of 22 June 1945 in Russian and German (see p. 64)

Anlage zu G. Nr. 778

Willy Weber  
Berlin - Dahlem  
Bitterstrasse 20a

Herr Herbert Michalski, Berlin - Charlottenburg  
Mommsenstrasse 69 ist mir seit etwa 13 Jahren bekannt. Ich bin auch  
bestens darüber informiert, dass seine Einstellung stets antifaschistisch  
war und dass Herr Michalski wegen der in diesem Zusammenhang im ver-  
gangenen Jahr stattgefundenen Verfolgung seinen Arbeitsplatz bei der  
Firma Hans Schwarzkopf, Chemische Fabrik, Berlin-Tempelhof verliess und  
mit seiner Familie die Flucht ergriff, um dem Zugriff der Behörden zu  
entgehen.

Berlin, ~~Dahlem~~, den 17. Juli 1945

Willy Weber

21 Attestation by Schwarzkopf managing director Willy Weber, dated 17 July 1945, concerning Herbert Michalski's going underground (see p. 67)



22 Pass identifying Lilli Michalski as an “Opfer des Faschismus” (victim of fascism), issued on 27 August 1946 in Berlin (see p. 67)

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Peter (left) and Franz, the brothers, 1943

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