

## TALES OF OUR PARENTS

Lea Sachsendorfer:

### THE GOAT THIEF

The Jews of south Germany were strict about the agricultural laws of the Torah. A first born animal (bechor) was never slaughtered or used for farm labor but had to be fed as long as it lived. Therefore Jews generally sold animals expecting their first child so they would not have to deal with the first-born

Despite these precautions my great grandfather Mendel Zeilberger (Lea's father) once had a bechor which he had to take care of. This was well known to everyone in Ermershausen. One day (as he came home from shul?) he saw that the goat (Bock) was missing. An investigation discovered that the thief was a Gentile hired man. When the case came to court, the hired man claimed he was doing Mendel Zeilberger a favor since the goat was a useless expense to him. The judge asked my great grandfather if it was true that his religion forbade him to make use of the goat. When he said that it was, the judge dismissed the case and let the hired man go free. A few days later Mendel heard a knock on his door at night. "Here Mendel I'm bringing you back the chain." The hired man returned the chain which had been used to tie up the goat. If he had been caught with it he would have been convicted of stealing an object of value. After this incident everyone in town called the hired man "Der Bocksdieb" [the goat thief]

### THE PILGRIMAGE

Ermershausen was a mainly Protestant village. Near Ermershausen in the Catholic village of Konnersreuth lived a peasant women named Therese Neumann. Every year (during the 1920s) in the season before Easter she would have stigmata (bleeding of the face) in memory of the death of Jesus. Catholic pilgrims would go on foot to see this "miracle." One day the teacher of the public school remarked about these pilgrims "Wir Protestanten und Juden glauben nicht daran" [We Protestants and Jews don't believe in that]

### TOO HONEST

My grandfather's brother Simon Sachsendorfer had a reputation for telling the truth. In Germany marriages were arranged between families and a dowry given by the bride's family. At Simon's engagement party someone said "Du hätt'st sie auch ohne Nedinje genommen" [You would have married her without the dowry]. He answered hesitatingly "well..."

My grandfather's sister Mathilde was sickly and not considered a good catch. A match was arranged with Siegmund [?] Rohrbach of Heidenheim. When she met him she was hesitant about the match. Her brother[s?] said: "Schlemielte, besinnst dich?" [You shlemil, you're hesitant!?] [meaning you think you can get a better match?]

### SMALL ACTS OF RESISTANCE TO THE NAZIS

My grandmother Lea Sachsendorfer was a strong-willed woman. She resisted Nazi demands in various ways. Once the Sachsendorfer business was owed some money by a government office [in Thüringen]. My grandmother went to the office and they told her that she was correct and they would send her the money. She answered that she would not leave the office until they gave her the money in her hands.

Before the Jews lost their citizenship in 1935, the local Nazis would enjoy marching the Jews down to the polling place and forcing them to vote for the Nazis. By then there were no more secret ballots. One time my grandmother made believe she was marking the ballot but instead left it blank and turned in an invalid vote.

In Kristallnacht the Nazi mobs destroyed most of the furniture in my grandparents' house and broke all the windows. The family closed all the shutters to cover the broken windows. When the Nazi policeman came by he said "Macht auf euere Löcher [Open up your holes]" Lea answered back "Mir sehn genug" [We see plenty]

The Nazis also came by to arrest her son Max who was then 14. "Da ist noch ein Judenjunge da" [There's a Jewboy here too]. She answered "Leave him alone he's only a child" [ein Kind].

The Nazis also came around after Kristallnacht to take my uncle Max's stamp collection. Rather than let it fall into their hands my grandmother destroyed it. [Burned it? Threw it out?]

The Nazis also stole all the Jews' money in Kristallnacht. The Sachsendorfers had gotten some money from the sale of their house and had hidden the cash in a sled which they hung in their barn. The Nazis didn't find it but did find the family strong box [Kassetten] which was empty. Some time after Kristallnacht the Nazi mayor of Ermershausen Bornkessel called my uncle Max to the town hall and returned the empty cash box to him. "Don't let anyone rob you on the way home." He called out sarcastically.

### KRISTALLNACHT IN ERMERSHAUSEN

My grandmother only told the story of Kristallnacht once in my presence. It was an evening when our neighbor Mrs. Hesselson came to our apartment on one of her frequent visits. (One other time she mentioned that she and Mrs. Fitzames, an elderly Armenian woman who lived one flight down in the apartment house had compared their

stories of persecution and found similarities. One detail I remember was several families being crowded into one house)

When the Nazis arrived [I'm not sure if this was before or after the men were arrested], the Jewish women all hid in a field. The Nazis went from house to house smashing furniture. Hedwig Friesner said "That's my Buffet [china closet] that just crashed." The Nazis left the furniture in one room untouched. In some houses "not ours" they also cut open the pillows and feather beds. They tore up the picture of our great-grandmother Jettchen Weil. The picture of her husband Mendel Zeilberger, which hung in my parents' living room, had a sword mark where the Nazis tried to destroy it.

After the death of Tante Selma in 1937, my grandparents had moved in with Uncle Simon in house number #3. When the Nazis came to wreck their house (house # 50?) their neighbor Mr. Schubert came out and said "How can you do this? This is a civilized country" They told him "get back in your house or we'll shoot you." [When I visited Ermershausen around the year 2000, Mr. and Mrs Franz who now live in the ancestral Zeilberger house (#31) told me that it was her father Mr. Hertlein who turned on the light in his house and was warned by the Nazis. Mr. Franz also considered Schubert "ein gefährlicher Nazi" [a real bad Nazi]. Certainly not what my grandmother reported.]

The Jewish women eventually fled to the town of Heldburg across the Thuringen border where they hid in a basement. At that time they thought the outbreak was a local one confined to Ermershausen.

Meanwhile [?] the Jewish men were rounded up by the police. One Jewish man who waved to the column of arrested men was caught and taken along as well. The Nazis destroyed the synagogue and took the Torah scrolls [and prayer books?] to a field outside of town. Mayor Bornkessel tried to force the Jews to burn the Torah scrolls themselves. When one of the Jewish men's hands [I believe his name was Adolf] began to tremble, Bornkessel said "Can't you do anything right?" He then proceeded to burn the Torahs himself. Later the Jewish men were taken to Hofheim where they were put in jail. My grandfather and his brother Simon were among those arrested. [Much later I was sent a copy of the Gestapo interrogation file of my grandfather after Kristallnacht]

#### MENDEL ZEILBERGER AND HIS MOTHER

Mendel Zeilberger's mother Sara Levi was from the far-off village of Berfa in Hesse-Kassel. She worked as a domestic [in the home of the Jewish doctor?] in Ermershausen and met Kusel Zeilberger whom she married. Mendel told his children that when he was about eight years old, his mother took him on foot across the Rhön mountains to visit her relatives in Hesse.

LEHRER KISSINGER

In South German villages one man was hired to perform all Jewish religious functions. He was simultaneously the cantor, Hebrew teacher and shochet [ritual slaughterer of animals]. For many years the Lehrer in Ermershausen was David Kissinger, the grandfather of the later American secretary of state Henry Kissinger. Lehrer Kissinger married a local woman [Ce]lina Zeilberger the sister of my great grandfather Mendel. She died young in 1905 and he remained a widower for over forty years. He managed to escape the Nazis and died in his late 80s in Sweden. His son Louis (the father of Henry) was a cousin and close friend of my grandmother Lea all her life. Lehrer Kissinger was both the teacher of his niece (my grandmother) Lea Zeilberger and of her children including my mother Yette Sachsendorfer. He retired around 1930. Outside of class my mother called her teacher Onkel Kissinger [Uncle Kissinger] and in school she called him Onkel Lehrer [Uncle teacher].

#### MENDEL ZEILBERGER

My great-grandfather Mendel was a formidable character. We were often intimidated by his sharp gaze as he looked out from his portrait in our living room. He was a successful businessman who was the richest man in Ermershausen. He owned a number of houses in the town. When he died in 1915 he is said to have left 250,000 Marks. [Our family fortune was lost in the German inflation of 1923].

Mendel was deeply in love with his wife Jettchen nee Weil. When she died in 1914 [of cancer?] at the age of 56 he was inconsolable. He died within a year. One of the things that hastened his death was his piety. Despite doctor's orders he followed the hallowed German Jewish custom of standing up all day during the Yom Kippur service [which had no break like it does in America]. He died from complications of this action at the age of 58.

#### IN TIME FOR SHUL?

People would determine whether it was time to go to services by watching my two great grandfathers. Meyer lived in house # 3 far away from the synagogue and Mendel lived in #31 just across the street from the synagogue. "Der Meyer geht in Schul" [or geht schulen?] [Meyer is going to synagogue] we still have plenty of time. "Der Mendel geht schulen [or in Schul] we'd better hurry.

#### MEYER SACHSENDORFER AND THE TRAIN

It was customary in most towns with a Jewish community to have one or two Jews on the town council. My great grandfather Meyer was one such council member. The council was debating whether to have the railroad line come to Ermershausen. Meyer got up and spoke against the railroad, saying it would ruin the peace and quiet of the village. He convinced the council and the railroad line from Bamberg ended in the

neighboring village of Maroldsweisach. [This goes against the usual assumption that Jews were big champions of innovations like the railroad]

### HELENE IN HER OLD AGE

Helene Sachsendorfer lived to be very old by the standards of the time. When she died in 1934 she was close to 87 years old. [Our family has a picture of Helene with her two granddaughters Selma and my mother on Helene's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1928. I was also sent a copy of the report in the local newspaper, two weeks after Hitler came to power [!]] of her 85<sup>th</sup> birthday.]

In her last years her physical and mental powers began to wane. She lost her eyesight and was virtually blind (though it was said she always knew if a chicken was missing from her yard). She would tell her granddaughters: Ich sich euch net aber ihr seid schön geputzt" [I can't see you but your dressed nicely]

She also used to say: "Hitler is e Schitler" [Hitler has the shakes]

When her very old brother visited her from Demmelsdorf, the two would recite an old poem together at length. It began Halte reinlich deine Zimmer [Keep your rooms clean]

### EMIGRATION

The story of the emigration of my mother's family stretches over several generations. It begins with the brother [?] of my great grandmother Helena Sachsendorfer nee Landenberger. Once he got into a fight at a dance and the judge gave him the choice of jail or going to America. He chose America. [My mother told a different version in which he either had a gentile girl friend or got a girl pregnant and his father threw him out of the house]. In any case he came to his newly married sister Helena [This means the story took place around 1870] and borrowed money for the trip which she gave him without her husband's knowledge. He settled in Chicago where he initially suffered great hardships. Eventually, though he made his fortune in the clothing business and changed his name to Harry Berger. [I think he may have converted to Christianity or Christian Science]. When he was already wealthy he returned to Germany and visited his sister. In gratitude for her help he offered to take one of her sons to America with him.

Eventually my grandfather's brother Max [later Max Sachs] came to America. He too became wealthy and lived on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago. He married Aunt Florence nee Freund. Later the Sachsés sponsored many of the members of the family who were trying to get out of Nazi Germany (both before and after Max's death in 1937).

The first member of the immediate family to leave Germany was my Uncle Willy Sachsendorfer who left in 1930 along with his cousin Justin Zimmermann. Willy was about 18 when he left. I assume he couldn't get work in Germany and left to seek his fortune in America. In [the summer of?] 1934 my grandparents sent their two daughters to New York to follow their brother. My mother was 20 at the time and her sister Selma

was 18. They both got domestic jobs in America and saved a little money to help bring their parents over. When my mother left Germany other Jews in Ermershausen said to my grandmother: “Why are you sending your daughters away? Who’s going to take care of you in your old age?”

My grandparents remained in Ermershausen with their youngest son Max [born 1924]. They must have been planning their emigration before Kristallnacht because some of their furniture had just been purchased in Bamberg and was not at their home when most of the rest of their furniture was destroyed by the Nazi mob. My grandparents planned to leave Germany in February 1939 along with their son Max. [Even as late as their emigration one of the Ermershausen Jews said to them “Why are you leaving here? You’ll never have it as good as you had it here”] They were able to come outside the quota, because their oldest son Willy was already a US citizen. Unfortunately 14 ½ year old Max had some sort of lung problem [a positive tuberculosis x-ray?] and was not allowed to travel with his parents. He remained behind alone for several months. His picture was cut out of David and Lea Sachsendorfer’s passport and he had to apply for his own passport. He eventually got to America in July [?] 1939. Tragically he would be killed in action in September 1944 as an American soldier shortly after his twentieth birthday.

#### SELMA SACHSENDORFER’S DEATH

Simon Sachsendorfer’s wife Selma was an independent and somewhat eccentric woman who was also very pious. In 1937 she went out to one of the fields owned by the family to see to some agricultural chore. On the way back to town she hitched a ride with a non-Jewish driver. [This was already considered risky by most other Jews of the town]. There are various versions of what happened next. The version told by my mother and grandmother states: As they were coming into Ermershausen the driver of the car decided to have some fun with the Jewish woman. He refused to stop in town to let her off. She then tried to get out of the moving car. Her long dress caught on the wheels of the car and she was dragged to her death. The driver of the car came to her funeral at the Ermershausen Jewish cemetery. The Jews interpreted this as an attempt to intimidate the Jews and prevent them from making any statements incriminating him in Selma’s death. Selma’s tombstone is the latest one in the Ermershausen Jewish cemetery. The last burial took place in 1940 but no tombstone was erected.

#### MAX SACHSENDORFER AS A LITTLE BOY

I remember a few stories my grandmother told me about her youngest son’s “cute sayings.” One involves the Ermershausen mikve. My grandmother didn’t tell him the real reason women went to the mikve [to immerse themselves after their menstrual period]. Instead she told him the women went there to wash their aprons [Schürzen]. One day he

used some salty language in expressing his surprise at how long it took the women to wash their aprons.

On another occasion Max overheard a fight between two young non-Jewish lovers. He asked his mother why someone would call some else a watch [Uhr]. The boy had called his girlfriend 'eine Uhre' [Actually he had called her eine Hure (a whore)]

### MAX SACHSENDORFER'S DEATH

Max Sachsendorfer was my grandparents' youngest (and I suspect favorite) child. After many difficulties he came to America in 1939 around the time of his 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. He entered JHS 115 where he did very well. He also seems to have been very popular. On the recommendation of the principal my grandparents sent Max to Haaren High in midtown Manhattan which they were told was as school for the gifted [was it true?]. He graduated high school and planned to enter college but was drafted into the US Army. He changed his name to Max D. Sachs. He was sent to fight in Italy and one of his last gifts to his parents was an ashtray he sent back from Rome. This remained a treasured family possession for many years (until it was broken during the shiva period for my mother in 2004).

In September 1944 Max was missing in action (I believe in Southern France). He was killed two days after Yom Kippur but this fact was not yet known. Meanwhile the holiday of Simchas Torah came and Max remained missing. On Simchas Torah it was customary for people (especially men and boys) to play pranks, drink and make merry. My grandmother whose son was missing was very upset by this. Eventually the report came that Max had been killed and buried in a military cemetery in St Juan in France. Later my grandmother's best friend Emma Heinemann who lived near Lyon, France, sent pictures of Max's grave. In 1948 [?] Max's body was brought to the United States and reburied in the Cedar Park Jewish cemetery. His parents David and Lea Sachsendorfer are buried only a few graves away from his. My mother was pregnant with me when he died. My middle names in both English and Hebrew [Mark and Menachem] are taken from his names.

My grandmother was inconsolable after the death of her youngest son. Even though she was very pious and attended the synagogue every Shabbos, she never went to the synagogue on Simchas Torah again. A drawer with my uncle's possessions in the old dresser kept in the hall (and later living room) was never opened. Everything referring to Max (whom my grandmother always called "unser Max" in contrast to my father Max Lowenstein) was kept hidden in this drawer and never mentioned to the grandchildren. I must have peaked into the drawer a few times without my mother's knowledge. It was not opened and made "public" till after her death in 2004.

SHEITELS

When my Sachsendorfer grandparents got married, my grandmother Lea, like many of the women of her generation, did not wear a marriage wig. Soon thereafter World War I broke out. During the war the Jewish women of Ermershausen made an oath (Gelübde) that if their husbands came back safely from the war they would wear sheitels (marriage wigs). This became the practice of most married women in Ermershausen after the war. My grandmother Lea wore a Sheitel until she died. When she came to America some people must not have considered the wig a proper head cover for the synagogue [though my grandmother's brown sheitel never looked like natural hair to me]

My grandmother always wore a hat over her sheitel to attend the synagogue on Shabbos

#### OMA'S INDEPENDENCE AS A TEENAGER

My grandmother's father Mendel Zeilberger gave her a huge amount of freedom. When she was a teenager he sent her to another town to supervise the harvest. She did not want to travel (and stay overnight in a strange town), but he insisted she do so. She often went to other towns to deliver meat and sometimes encountered antisemitism. [They'd make fun of a Jewish accent and say: Jou Sara wo gehst du hin? Hoste Flaasch? (Yeah Sarah, where are you going? Have you got meat?)]

#### LOCAL ERMERSHAUSEN CUSTOMS

My grandmother used to tell me all about the customs of Ermershausen.

#### WHY OMA DIDN'T BECOME A TEACHER

My grandmother was an excellent student. She would have liked to become a teacher. However, Bavarian law of the time did not permit female teachers to marry. She was unwilling to sacrifice family life for a career.

#### HONEYMOON IN MUNICH

When my grandparents married in 1911 they went on their honeymoon to Munich. While there they saw the opera "Salome," which was considered extremely risque at the time. [My great-grandfather Mendel was a fan of Wagner's music and went to Bayreuth to see Wagner operas several times]

#### HOW OUR GRANDPARENTS MET

In the early twentieth century most Jewish marriages in Germany were arranged. My grandparents were an exception. They both lived in Ermershausen and fell in love. My grandfather was ten years older than my grandmother. They "went together" for quite a long time. One New Year's eve [?] a group of young people started to talk about the future. They said "Well, next year Lea and David will still be going together." My



grandmother said “Maybe.” Soon after this my grandfather proposed marriage. (He was 33 and she was 23).

#### SARA RIVKA RAHEL AND LEA

My great grandparents had four daughters. The oldest was named Lea, then came Sara, Rosa and Ida. (Rosa’s Hebrew name was Rivka[?] and Ida’s was Rahel[?]. So he had daughters named after each of the matriarchs. The Gentiles told Rosa and Ida that they were the lucky ones since they didn’t have Jewish given names. Later Sara changed her name to Selma [?]. My grandmother was the only one who used only her Hebrew name. Unlike the girls, the boys were not given only Hebrew first names. The oldest child was a boy who was named Felix. His father Mendel Zeilberger liked to call him Felix Mendelssohn [son of Mendel, like the name of the composer]. Felix died of diphtheria at the age of six. The younger son was Leopold [Hebrew name Elieser] who was named for his ancestor Lazarus [Lase].

#### AUNT ROSA’S MARRIAGE

My Aunt Rosa and Uncle Julius were a handsome couple. When Uncle Julius came to ask for Rosa’s hand the non-Jews said to Rosa “Den nimmste. Er sieht net aus wie e Jud un net wie e Christ.” [Marry him. He doesn’t look like a Jew or like a Christian]

#### CHRISTIANS AT UNCLE LEOPOLD’S WEDDING

Most Jewish weddings were not held in the village but took place in a larger town. The marriage of my grandmother’s brother Leopold Zeilberger to Sophie Herrmann was an exception. (early 1920s) Leopold’s sister Rosa was already married to Sophie’s brother Julius Herrmann of Reckendorf. The wedding took place in the synagogue in Ermershausen. A Jewish wedding was a rarity in the village. The Gentiles came to the women’s balcony of the synagogue for the wedding. In their curiosity they leaned over each other to see the wedding taking place on the ground floor.

#### DOING CROSSWORD PUZZLES WITH OMA

One of my happy memories about my grandmother was doing the crossword puzzle in the Aufbau together. I must have learned a lot of German from it. I certainly learned the words Waagrecht and Senkrecht [Across and down]

#### OMA AGAINST THE VIETNAM WAR

Because she had never gotten over the loss of her youngest son in World War II, my grandmother was very much against war. At the time of the Vietnam War, her oldest grandsons (me, Marvin and Howard) were all of military age. She was strongly against the Vietnam War and spoke out against it. She liked to watch “counter-cultural”

television programs which opposed the war [like the Smothers Brothers]. She always said “If they had sons they’d be against the war.”

### VISITING THE KISSINGERS

My grandmother was very close to her first cousin Louis Kissinger and his wife Paula (Henry’s parents). Louis was only one year older than my grandmother. The Kissingers lived on Fort Washington Avenue and 187 Street near the top of a long staircase. They Kissingers and my grandparents often exchanged visits. We often went to their apartment on Shabbos afternoon. It always struck me that the Kissingers were different from all the other members of my grandparents’ generation because they were the only ones who only spoke English.

I had a special plate with a flower design on it. My grandmother would feed me mashed bananas from it. To get me to eat she would say we were visiting the Kissingers and climbing the huge staircase. “Now we’re climbing the first step” she’d say and feed me a mouthful.

### OMA AND GREATER ISRAEL

My grandmother was a great supporter of Israel from its founding. She also kept up with the news through the newspaper and television. I was always a “dove” about Israel. Among the many soliciting letters from charities which Oma got was one from the Committee for Eretz Yisrael hashlema. She asked me what it meant and I translated it [deliberately provocatively] as Gross-Israel [equivalent to the Nazis’ Grossdeutschland “greater Germany]. A look of disgust came over my grandmother’s faces and she said “they better change their slogan”

### UNCLE SIMON (LEDAVID BARUCH)

Uncle Simon was my grandfather David’s older brother. They were partners in business. The Jews of Ermershausen had a little ditty they sung to the tune of Ledavid Baruch (the hymn sung before Maariv on Saturday night):

Dovid Boruch Adonoy Tzuri

Der David Kauft die Ochsen under der Simon kauft die Küh’

[David buys the oxen and Simon buys the cows] [or is it the other way around?]

Simon was very tall (about 6’5”). He served in the Ulans –an elite Bavarian army unit and was often visited by old army buddies. My grandmother said they were all very good looking. He and his wife Selma had no children. She was somewhat eccentric. Supposedly on Rumpelnacht [the night after Pesach when the Passover dishes were put in storage], she threw one box down the stairs so it would rumpel [clatter].

After she was killed in an auto accident in 1937, my grandparents moved in with him. After they left he was eventually forced into one of the two houses in Ermershausen

where the Jews were concentrated after the outbreak of World War II. Since he was elderly and a war veteran, he was not deported to Poland with the other Ermershausen Jews in early 1942 but was sent to the ghetto of Theresienstadt where he died in 1943.

### OMA AND ISRAEL BONDS

My grandmother was an early supporter of Israel and she bought a few Israeli bonds in the first series issued. About 15 years later, [around 1965?] she was invited by the Israeli consulate to a reception honoring the early bond purchasers. At the reception she was engaged in friendly conversation with the gentleman seated next to her. Then the consul called the gentleman forward to honor him for buying \$100,000 worth of bonds

### I DON'T SPEAK YIDDISH

Lea Sachsendorfer was quite dark and always wore a marriage wig. She looked like a typical pious Jewish woman. Often people would come up to her on the street and begin talking to her in Yiddish since she certainly looked Jewish. She would then politely tell them she was sorry but she didn't speak Yiddish—only German. Sometimes people tried to talk to her in Italian or Greek because she looked “Mediterranean”

### OMA AND WIEDERGUTMACHUNG

A few years after World War II, West Germany passed a law restoring all real estate to Jews who had been forced to sell their properties for next to nothing. My grandparents got back their farmland and the houses in which family members had lived. In 1939 and thereafter these properties had been acquired by the worst Nazis in Ermershausen. The JRSO [Jewish Restitution Successor Organization], which managed the Jewish properties, happily allowed the ex-Nazis to rent the farmland they had been using. My grandmother would have none of that. She insisted that all the Nazis be evicted from the family land and houses and that the properties be sold to people who had been decent. She carried on an extensive correspondence about these properties both through her restitution lawyer [her cousin Leopold Landenberger] and on her own. Many Ermershausen farmers wrote to my grandparents “Dear neighbors Lea and David,” asking to buy or rent their land. Although the correspondence was carried out in my grandfather's name, it was all written in my grandmother's handwriting. [Many of these letters are still preserved in our family papers]. After much negotiation and letter writing, she managed to get the Nazis off her property and to sell the properties to people she approved of.

Some of the ex-Nazis (and even non-Nazi peasants) showed lack of understanding. After all they had already “paid for” the properties [to the Nazi government]. Why should they have to pay again? The dentist Schulz, whose wife was a leading Ermershausen Nazi was particularly incensed that he had to move out of his large

house [#3]. When they moved out, the Schulzes graffitied the house with the words “Du sollst nicht stehlen” [Thou shalt not steal]. In their eyes the house was rightfully there’s no matter what the legal Jewish owners thought.

### OMA’S JOB AND COMMUTING

As long as I can remember my grandmother Lea worked outside the home (in addition to doing much of the cooking, baking and cleaning in the family. My mother took care of the children and did not take a job, partly because my father insisted she remain at home.

Oma worked in a hairnet factory. I once visited her there. She worked with a huge wooden roll of hairnet material. The individual hairnets came off the roll and she tied them to finish them. She worked very fast. She was paid at a piecework rate of something like 23 cents a gross (=144). She worked about 6 hours a day at this job, finally giving it up when she had a heart attack at the age of 76 [?]. Even though her income was small, she was proud of the financial independence the job gave her. Besides paying the rent, she spent most of her income buying presents for her grandchildren.

The workers in the factory were almost all women, divided about equally between elderly German Jews and non-Jewish women many of them Hispanic. Even though my grandmother rarely gossiped with the other women, she was respected by them all. She always got birthday cards and presents [?] from the “Tru-Fit girls.” One of her co-workers Bella Freitas [?] sometimes visited her at home. My mother didn’t trust Bella because she wasn’t Jewish.

Oma had various employers and workplaces during her work “career”. For years she worked for Lichtenstaetter somewhere around 160<sup>th</sup> Street. [I vaguely remember when he died]. She also worked for a Czech Jew named Wernsdorf. For some time she worked near Washington Square around 8<sup>th</sup> street. Then for a few years she worked in Closter, New Jersey. She went to all of her jobs on the bus. When I was very young I remember waiting for her on Amsterdam Avenue as she came home on the trolley.

### OMA’S LITTLE NOTEBOOKS

My grandmother always kept a little notebook, usually in a pocket size spiral notebook. In the notebook she would write down (in pen or pencil) every item of income and expense down to the smallest amount every day. Several of the notebooks were still in my mother’s apartment when she died.

### OMA’S RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE AND PRAYER

My grandmother was a very pious woman, but her traditional practice did not always agree with the halacha preached by rabbis. Every day she said her prayers in Hebrew from her prayer book sitting in the living room. Even though she had no minyan

she would get up and bow at borechu. She also regularly read from Stunden der Andacht , her book of women's prayers in German [Later on my mother also used Stunden der Andacht]. She wore a sheitel. She made sure the house was thoroughly cleaned for Pesach and she cooked up a storm. We were always surprised that she and my mother usually fell asleep at the Seder. On Shabbos the only things she carried to shul were her keys and her handkerchief (unlike Aunt Rosa she did not think it necessary to tie her handkerchief around her wrist). On Yom Kippur she didn't carry anything.

When we were teenagers and started coming home from Hebrew school or youth group with new Chumras (stringencies), usually with regard to how dishes were washed or food heated up on Shabbos, she would react skeptically. She usually had one of two answers: "Let the rabbi come here and wash the dishes" or "My father (Mendel Zeilberger whom she adored) was a religious man (frommer Mann) and he didn't do that."

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE WEIL FAMILY NAME

In the early eighteen hundreds Jews were required by law to take permanent family names. According to the family story one of my grandmother's ancestors came to the government office after the deadline [?]. When asked why he had arrived late he said "Ich habe mich verweilt" [I lingered]. Thereupon he was given the name Weil.

#### MY GRANDMOTHER'S BEDTIME SONGS

I was grandma Lea's first grandchild and was very much her favorite. Every now and then she would make a mistake and call me Willy [her oldest son].

Very often she would sing me to sleep in her high pitched voice. The songs were a selection of German folk songs and a few local dialect songs. Some of the songs were funny. I especially remember the one that went [in dialect]: "S'war emal e gleiner Mann/ He Ju He/ S'war emal e gleiner Mann/ He Ju He/ Grosse Frau wollt er ham'/ Hai diddle diddle dum dum dum/ Grosse Frau wollt er ham/ Hopsasasa" [The refrains are mostly nonsense syllables, the song is about a little man and his great big wife who terrorized him].

Other favorites in her repertoire were "In Lauterbach hab'ich mein Strüpf verloren" [I lost my socks in Lauterbach], "Fuchs du hast die Gans gestohlen" [Fox, you stole the goose], "Hänschen Klein" [Little Hans – a story about a boy who goes into the world to seek his fortune], The Bird's Wedding [which began "Ein Vogel wollte Hochzeit machen in dem grünen Walde].

She [and other members of the family] also loved to play games with toddlers accompanied by rhymes. In "Hoppe, Hoppe Reiter" the child was bounced up and down on the adult's knees. In "woll'n mer emal ein Gäullein b'schlagen" the adult pretended to

shoe a horse. After he had hammered in one nail too many he tickled the arches of the baby's feet to pull it out. The baby always laughed.