

# Edgar's Story





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*cover photo - Max and Edgar 1928*

# INTRODUCTION

Some time ago, my daughter Linda Duke of Sudbury, Massachusetts, mentioned to me that somebody should document my family's experiences escaping from Hitler's murderers. I filed that conversation in some remote cranny of my brain and eventually forgot about it. Lo and behold, a few weeks later I received from her one of many drafts for proofreading. And thus started a period of constant nagging for not complying fast enough with her perceived ideas of urgency of completion. In the meantime, Linda consulted with her sister Susan Pinkus of Deerfield, Illinois, who remembered things I had mentioned in conversations throughout the years, and with my sister Mirjam Halpern who lives in Israel and who supplied many important details that a teenage boy never noticed. Linda also got her husband Randy to take time off from his far more important chores to create the graphics and help with the creation of the physical document in your hands.

My sincerest thanks to Randy, Susan, and Mirjam for their input. My eternal gratitude to my parents for their bravery and ingenuity in keeping their family one step ahead of the murderous Nazi hordes. And above all, a thousand thanks and all my love to Linda, the author of the following narrative.

Edgar Rose, October 2013



# Essen, Germany 1926 - 1933



Edgar's parents, Max Rose and Irene (Linker) Rose, were born in northern Hungary, in what nowadays is called the Republic of Slovakia. Irene came from Spišská Stará Ves which means the Old Village of the Spiš. (Spiš is a region in northern Slovakia near the Tatra Mountains.) Max came from a small village named Gibel which was near there.

Max and Irene were married right after World War I in 1918. They were the first Jews in that part of the country to marry after the war. Max wanted to go into business for himself. They decided that a reasonably large town in Germany would have more opportunities for him so immediately after the wedding they moved to Essen, Germany. Essen is in the Ruhr Valley in western Germany near Düsseldorf. In 1811, Friedrich Krupp founded Germany's first cast-steel factory in Essen. Over the years, the company expanded by buying coal mines, iron works, and ore deposits. During World War I, it became known for its manufacture of Big Bertha guns. After the war, however, the Treaty of Versailles prohibited the company from manufacturing weapons. Instead it began making train and agricultural equipment. Because of this company, Essen's population grew significantly during the 19th century.



*Max and Irene in about 1920.*

Max opened a furniture store there. Edgar was born in Essen on September 17, 1926, on his mother's twenty-sixth birthday. His sister Mirjam was born on July 14, 1928. During Edgar's early childhood years, the family had a nice life. Max was quite successful. Edgar and Mirjam had a governess. Max didn't drive and was able to hire a chauffeur. The family was part of the larger community, both Jewish and non-Jewish.



*Mirjam and Edgar*

Edgar was quite precocious and taught himself to read when he was about five years old. When he told his parents, they did not believe him. They gave him something to read, which he did, but they thought he might just have memorized it. They then gave him a fresh newspaper to read, which he was able to do. He went to kindergarten in Essen, possibly to a private school, although he doesn't remember for sure.

Edgar first experienced the effect of Hitler, who came to power in the spring of 1933, while living in Essen. Hitler came to power in a country that was a democracy just like the United States. It had a similar constitution and the Jews lived as equals there for several generations. During WWI, German Jews fought in the army to defend Germany, which they considered to be their country also. Many Jews in Germany were successful and were accepted by the Germans as artists, doctors, businessmen, and in all kinds of endeavors just like in the United States.

Hitler and his party, the National Socialists, took over in 1933 through an open election. Hitler was sworn in as Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Throughout his campaign, Hitler and his party stated that Germany was on the verge of a Communist takeover. They maintained that the only way to stop this takeover was to pass the Enabling Act. The Enabling Act would give the chancellor the power to pass laws without the involvement of the Reichstag (parliament). The Enabling Act was supposed to be passed only in times of extreme emergency. On February 27, 1933, the Reichstag building in Berlin was set on fire. The Nazis immediately blamed the Communists. This helped the Enabling Act pass and in March 1933 Hitler became the dictator of Germany.

Many Germans were quite unhappy about this. Some of them fought back. Some escaped from Germany at that time because they knew that they would be hunted down by the Nazis and killed or imprisoned. Shortly after Hitler took power, the Nazis started actions against Jewish businesses and against Jewish intellectuals. For example, there were musicians, professors, and others who were dismissed from their jobs. Signs appeared on Jewish businesses saying, "This store is owned by a Jew. Germans, do not shop here." Some of the signs were much worse. Max's store was one of those spray-painted.

In addition, the Nazis could enter any Jewish store and take whatever they wanted without paying for it. Max understood that he could not continue in business that way because he was losing a lot of money. He hoped that the situation would end fairly quickly.



*Sample signs from the Essen Museum. Left translates to "Germans don't buy from Jews." Right translates to "The father of Jews is the devil."*

In September 1933, Edgar was to start first grade in a public school. In those days it was customary in Germany for parents who were proud of their child starting school to take the child to a professional photographer to have a picture taken. Edgar's parents took him to have his picture taken, too.



*Edgar before first day of school -  
September 1933  
The blackboard says, "Mein erster  
Schultag (my first school day)."*

When Edgar and Irene got to the school, though, there were two men in brown uniforms. They asked Irene for Edgar's papers. Irene pulled them out and handed them to one of the men.

After looking at them, the man said, "You are Jews, aren't you?"

"Yes," Irene said.

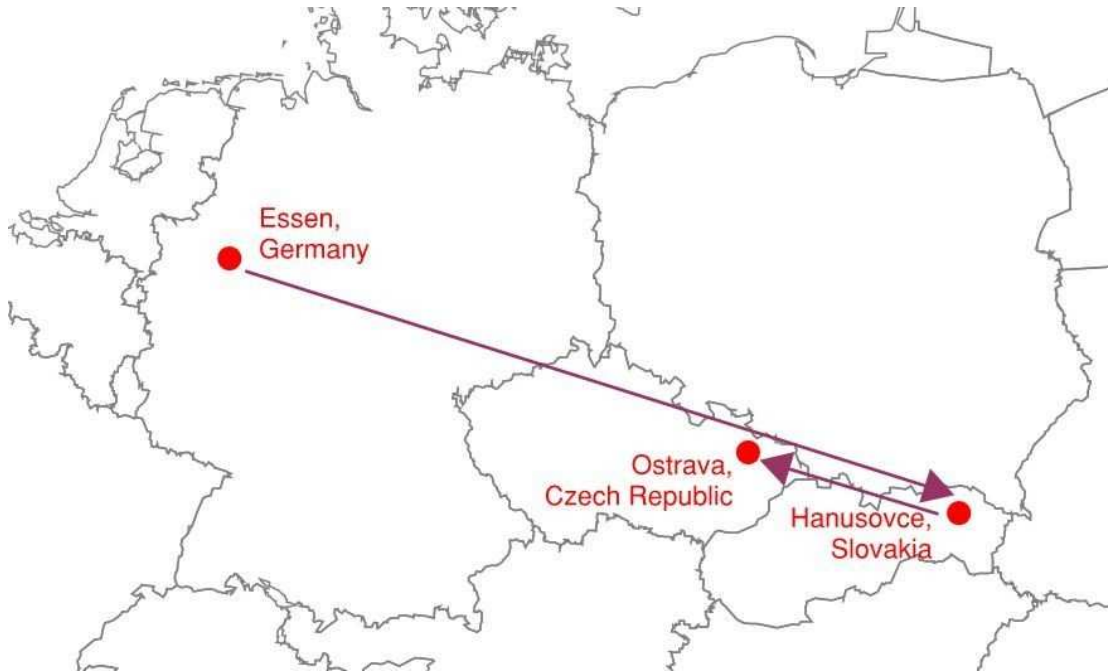
"No, you cannot go in. Your son cannot go to school here. This school is only for Germans."

"Yes, but we are Germans," Irene said.

"Jews are not Germans," he replied. "They are animals. There is no school for Jews."

When Max heard about this that evening, he decided it was time for the family to leave Germany. Little did he foresee what would happen 4...6...8 years later.

## Czechoslovakia 1933 - 1940



Edgar, Irene, and Mirjam moved to the neighboring country of Czechoslovakia (which is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia). They lived with Max's mother in a small village in Slovakia called Hanušovce for several months. This was very difficult for them. Max was not with them. Edgar and Mirjam did not speak Slovak or Czech. The village was also very primitive with no running water or electricity – very different from what they were used to in Essen. Edgar's grandmother owned a small general goods store there.

Although he spoke no Slovak or Czech, Edgar went to the local village school where he began to learn Slovak fairly quickly. (Slovak and Czech are very similar Slavic languages, although there are slight differences between many of the words.) He was an outsider at the school, though. For example, in Czechoslovakia one custom was to give Christmas presents on Saint Nicholas Day, which is December 6, instead of on Christmas Day. When Edgar went to school the day after Saint Nicholas Day, his teacher asked the children about their presents. When it was Edgar's turn, the teacher pointed to him and said, "He is a Jew. They do not get presents." Edgar said that the teacher had not done this with any evil intent on her part, but was just pointing out that he was different from the others, which Edgar felt very keenly. He was the only Jew in the



class. (Edgar would not be surprised if his grandmother's family were the only Jews in all of this small village.)

Max stayed in Essen for about another year. When he realized that the situation was not improving, he got a job in Moravska Ostrava, which was a very industrialized city in the Moravia part of Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). It also had a large Jewish population. The company Max worked for bought and sold intestines that were used for the casings of sausages. His job required him to travel to Turkey frequently to buy those intestines. Irene, Edgar, and Mirjam moved to Ostrava to join Max. Life here was much more like the life they had known in Essen before the Nazis.

The family thought they would be safe now. Edgar went to a Jewish grade school in Ostrava where the teacher was very understanding and spoke some German. (In central as well as many other parts of Europe, German was the lingua franca, common language, spoken among the Jews. This contrasts with the Jews in Eastern European countries such as Poland and Russia whose lingua franca was Yiddish.) By the second year Edgar was speaking Czech quite fluently and had made a few friends.



*Building where Edgar's family lived in Ostrava. In the same building were relatives whose last name was Steier. Szeren Steier's older brother was married to Irene's older sister, who was also named Szeren. Edgar's family and the Steiers became very close friends. (Photo taken in 2008.)*

In Czechoslovakia the family had a pretty nice life. Edgar even got into some typical young boy mischief. For example, once the family was visiting Hanušovce. As there was no running water, there was a well. Edgar was curious about the well and started looking down into it, leaning over more and more. He lost his balance and, just

as he was about to fall into the very deep well, he managed to grab the rope for the bucket and pull himself up. He learned to be much more careful after that.

Edgar finished grade school and started in the gymnasium, which is similar to U.S. junior and senior high school. There he demonstrated his entrepreneurship. In the gymnasium there would be a play once a year. Tickets for the play were sold in books of ten tickets. Sales were not going as well as the teachers hoped. The teachers decided that if a child did something wrong, he would have to buy a book of ten tickets as punishment. Pretty soon various children had these books. Edgar decided to buy them from the children at a discounted price, go to the local merchants, and sell the tickets. In this way Edgar made a bit of spending money.

Occasionally, Edgar continued to be mischievous. For example, he learned from an article in the children's section of a newspaper how to make a small electric motor operated by a battery. One day he brought it to school and put it under the podium where the teacher stood. He ran the wire through the cracks in the floorboards from the teacher's podium to his desk where he had a switch. Every now and then he would turn it on and the motor made a rather loud buzzing sound. Finally the teacher found the source of the noise and Edgar was sent to see the principal.

A little later Edgar learned how to make very nice sling shots, so he made a few of them and sold them to other children. One day, when Edgar's class had a substitute teacher, the class got a bit wild and started shooting little pieces of paper at the blackboard. That was not very popular with the substitute teacher and got him very much annoyed. The teacher didn't know what to do about it, so he left the class.

Another time Edgar found that the wristwatch he had had a bevel (the metal ring around the crystal) which was a flat round ring and, when the sun hit it right, it would project a round white ring onto the wall or wherever you wanted to project it. As he was sitting one day being somewhat bored by the teacher, Edgar decided to reflect this at the blackboard and, of course, he just had to move his arm and his wrist a tiny amount and the reflection would disappear. The teacher never caught Edgar at that, but as he was writing on the blackboard Edgar would have this reflection going up and down right next to the teacher's hand in which he held the chalk. The children would see it and giggle and chuckle. That was one of the more successful pranks.

Edgar had started playing the piano in Germany when he was five years old because his parents discovered he had an ear for music. If they took him to a show, for example, he would be humming some of the tunes after the show. Of course, these lessons did not last long in Germany. After being in Czechoslovakia for a while, his parents decided he should start music lessons again. The piano teacher they found was also a cellist so Edgar started taking both piano and cello lessons. In the school play he even played a cello solo.





*Ostrava Opera House where Edgar saw his first opera, *The Bartered Bride* by Smetana, in approximately 1938. (Photos taken in 2008.)*

Unfortunately, Edgar's life did not continue in this way. In March 1939, the German troops occupied Bohemia and Moravia. His sister Mirjam recalls the event by saying, "We were at home when we heard the tanks outside in the street. I will never forget the fright that we all felt. We couldn't sleep the whole night and were afraid of what would happen to us in the future."

Edgar, Mirjam, and Irene were once again in the clutches of the Germans. Max was in Turkey on business at the time and didn't return, so Irene was alone with the two children. Edgar was twelve years old and Mirjam was ten.

The Germans did not waste too much time. Soon after the Germans entered Ostrava, life for the family changed completely. The company where Max worked was dissolved. The owner of the company was a Jew and fled to England. Jews had to register. The Jewish school and temples were closed. (Although Edgar does not remember this, most of the temples in Ostrava and the surrounding suburbs were set on fire by the Nazis.) All Jewish owned stores were confiscated and Jews were ordered to give the Nazis their valuables such as jewelry and radios. The Nazis also started to recruit young Jews for working camps.

On October 17, 1939, the Nazis issued the order that all Jewish men, ages fourteen and up, had to report to the building that was Ostrava's former riding school. That evening they were taken out to the railroad yards and loaded into train cars, cattle cars, and were shipped off to what they called at that time "Retraining Camps" in Zarzecze, Poland. There they were forced to build a labor camp called Nisko nad Lanem. In fact, the Ostrava community was also forced to supply the materials and money to build this camp. About 1200 Jews were in this transport. It was the first transport of the Holocaust.

Edgar's family was lucky. Since Max was still in Turkey, he escaped transport. Edgar was not yet fourteen and therefore he, too, escaped the deportation.

The Germans left a few old Jewish men to take care of whatever business the Germans might have with the Jewish population. The morning after the transport, they put out a call for all the young Jewish boys from about age eleven to age fourteen to report to the Jewish center. From there they were taken by bus to the railroad yard to clean up any pieces of paper or other items the men had dropped in the railroad yards while being loaded into the cattle cars. This is one memory that remains vividly in Edgar's mind. In fact, whenever he visits Yad Vashem and sees the railroad car on a trestle which is broken off, he is reminded of being at the railroad yards in Ostrava and all the men who were taken from there.



*Railroad Car at Yad Vashem  
(Photo taken in 1997.)*

At the time, though, Edgar did not really worry about the transport. The "official" story was that everyone was needed to help the war efforts since Germany was at war. These men were supposedly being retrained to be more useful to Germany. (This was several years before the murder camps.) Being a child still, Edgar assumed that Max would take care of the family as fathers do. Since Max was in Turkey, Edgar also did not worry about Max being on a future transport and assumed that his father would deal with any problems that might arise.

It was now time for Edgar to become a Bar Mitzvah. He had gotten some training from the rabbi to prepare. Because of the transport of the Jewish men to Poland, though, by the time Edgar was to become a Bar Mitzvah there were only a few very old, sickly Jewish men in Ostrava who could form a minyan for the service. (A minyan is a group of at least ten Jewish adults. In those days, the adults had to be male.) The service also had to be held in secret. One night, after the stores had closed for the day, Irene went to a shopkeeper with whom she had done business for many years. She pleaded with him to sell her a suit for Edgar to wear. He agreed.

Edgar and the men forming the minyan had to sneak into what had been the Jewish school. His mother could not attend because of the need for secrecy. His father was still in Turkey. However, there Edgar did become a Bar Mitzvah. He received a tallit and tefillin. At the time Edgar was quite religious and would put his tefillin on regularly up until the time when his family had to escape from Ostrava.

Shortly after the Germans occupied Moravia and Bohemia, they instituted the ration system for food. While the rations for the non-Jewish Czechs were small, the food allowed for Jews was even less. Irene somehow managed to obtain enough food to feed herself and her two children, but just barely. By now Edgar was a growing boy. Whereas in the past he really didn't eat too much, now he had an appetite. Every few days he would go to the food program that they had in the Jewish community so that he could get some food in addition to what Irene was able to scrounge up for the family.

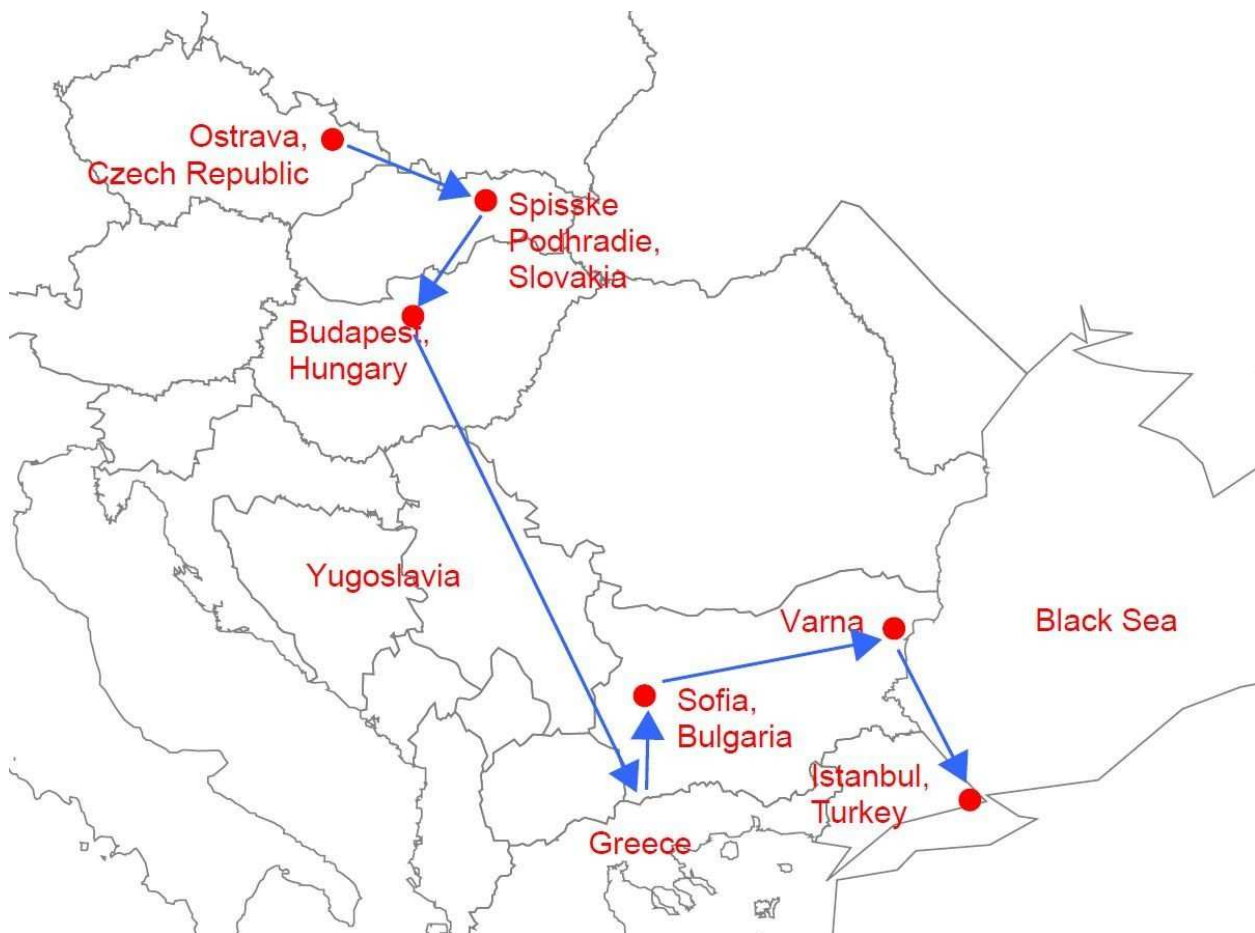
For Passover in 1940, Irene learned to make wine from raisins, so they had very primitive wine for their seder. At age fourteen, Edgar was the only "adult" male in the family (with Max still in Turkey) so he led his first seder.

After the German invasion, Edgar did not really feel too much change towards him on the part of the non-Jewish friends he had made in the gymnasium. In most cases the Czechs were anti-German and resented the Germans who had marched into their country and were taking away their liberties. In fact, Edgar and his friends (many of whom were not Jewish) would often go to a field or open space to play soccer. In September 1939, they were out in a meadow and heard booms on and off. They were coming from German batteries shooting at a lone Polish airplane. As it turns out, this is when the Germans had just invaded Poland.

Although he did not encounter problems from his non-Jewish friends, Edgar was certainly aware of the dangers of the Hitler Youth. (The Hitler Youth was a paramilitary Nazi organization for boys aged fourteen to eighteen.) In the spring of 1939, Edgar was still at the gymnasium and had to walk quite a number of blocks to get home from school. He was always on the lookout for any members of the Hitler Youth, who were easily identifiable by their uniforms. If Edgar saw them coming, he would immediately try to inconspicuously cross the street and disappear into a doorway because he was afraid of being beaten up or otherwise accosted by those Nazis.

In the fall of 1939, Edgar could no longer continue at the gymnasium because, as had happened in Essen, the Germans would not allow Jews to attend school. He also had to stop his music lessons. The best course for Edgar's family would be to once again escape to another country.

## Leaving Czechoslovakia 1940



In the meantime, Max learned about the transport from Ostrava and knew that he could not return to Czechoslovakia. Instead he worked from Istanbul for about a year (using his business contacts in Czechoslovakia) to obtain false passports for Irene, Edgar, and Mirjam with the hope that they would be able to join him in Turkey. Mirjam recalls that during this time, although Irene never complained to her or Edgar since they were children, Irene was in a very difficult situation. She had no money, no jewels, or anything else to sell.

Mirjam also recalls that leaving was difficult. After some time, Irene was able to convince the Nazis to deport her, Mirjam, and Edgar to Slovakia where her sister lived. (The Germans had split Czechoslovakia into two countries. One was the Czech Protectorate which was Bohemia and Moravia and included Ostrava. It was called the Czech Protectorate because supposedly the Germans were protecting the Czechs from "evils" they would otherwise face. The other was the "Free" Republic of Slovakia which

was free in name only. It was ruled by a German puppet, a priest by the name of Tiso, who was very anti-semitic.) Irene had a cabinet with a false bottom which she sent to her sister in Slovakia. In it she had items such as Edgar's stamp collection. These were later stolen by the Slovaks after Irene's sister's family was sent to concentration (murder) camps.

Irene, Edgar, and Mirjam could not travel by themselves and were accompanied on the train by a Nazi soldier to make sure they actually left the country. The soldier told Irene, "Sara (that was the common name for all Jewish women), you know that we are going to kill all the Jews." He even told her that they were building extermination camps.

Edgar and his family left the Czech Protectorate and entered Slovakia. They traveled to Spišské Podhradie where Irene's sister lived. Her husband was doing well financially so at least Irene, Edgar, and Mirjam were not a burden. Edgar and Mirjam did not go to school and helped where they could. Mirjam said, "I do not remember details as we never spoke with my mother about this period."

Edgar does remember going to a temple in Spišské Podhradie once. It probably was the one which was included in an article about Slovakia in the April/May 2013 Hadassah Magazine. According to Ruth Ellen Gruber, the article's author, the interior of the synagogue is being restored and will be used as a cultural center. An exhibit of Judaica is planned for the women's gallery.

Edgar, Irene, and Mirjam stayed in Spišské Podhradie for a few months until they finally got the necessary visas to travel by train to Budapest. The visas, of course, had to match their false passports. Edgar was not aware of the arrangements being made until they actually had all the paperwork and were ready to leave. It would have been too risky for Irene to tell Edgar and Mirjam in case, as children, they slipped and said something to the wrong person. And, of course, as children they did not think to ask about what would happen next.

The family had to travel as Christians. The passports for Edgar and Irene had their actual names since both Edgar and Irene Rose could pass as Christian names. Mirjam, though, was considered too biblical so her passport listed her name as Maria Rose. For a few days before they were to leave, the family had to practice calling her Maria so that they would not slip up along the way and use the Jewish sounding name which she had used all her life. This made them very nervous. (Mirjam did not actually change her name back to Mirjam from Maria until she was eighteen years old.)

Since the family was supposedly traveling as Catholics on a vacation, they had to leave almost everything behind – not just items of Judaica such as Edgar's tallit and tefillin (which he was used to wearing every day since he became a Bar Mitzvah), but also everything else which one would not normally take along for a vacation. They began their journey by taking a train to Budapest, Hungary.

Edgar, Irene, and Mirjam spent a few days in Budapest with their relatives, the

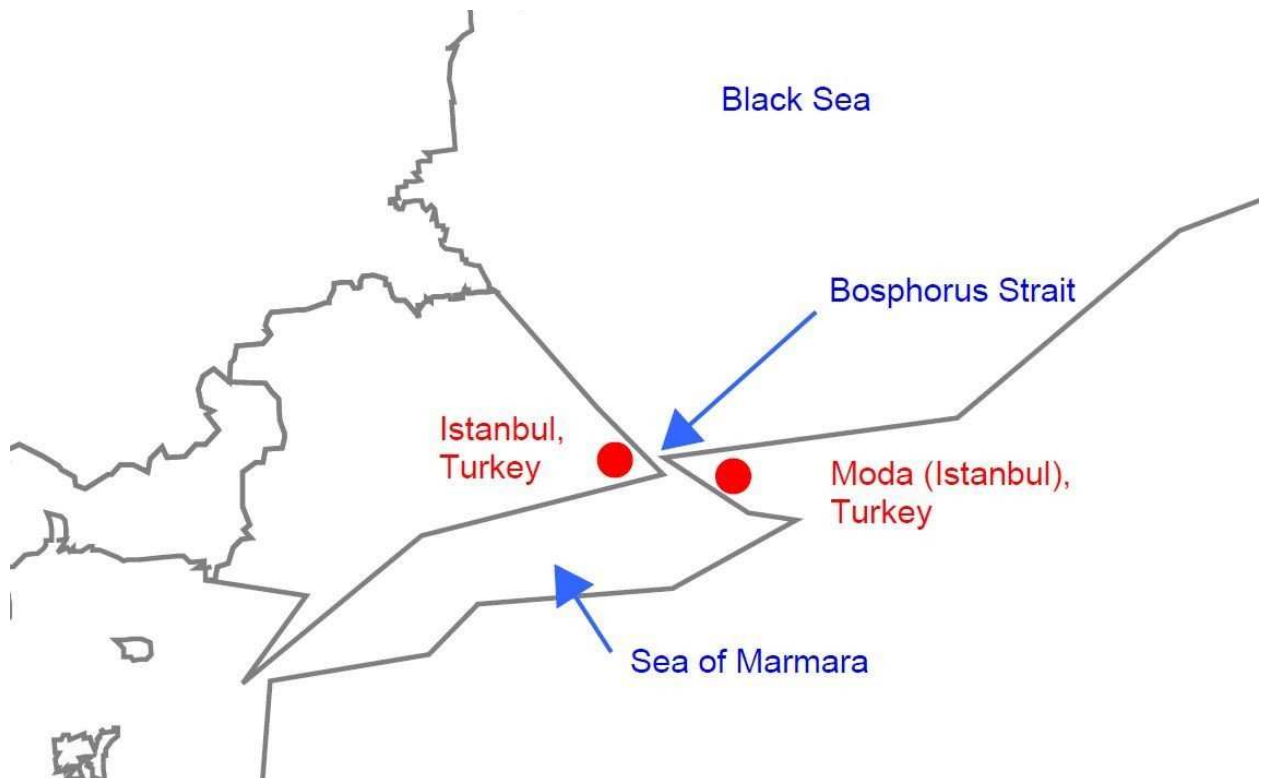
Steiers. (The Steiers had escaped from Ostrava to Budapest a few months earlier.) They then boarded a train which was to take them to Istanbul.

To get to Istanbul one had to pass through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Then one had to travel about sixty miles through Greece. When the train arrived at the Bulgarian-Greek border, however, they found that there had been a flood the night before and the bridge they needed to cross had been washed away. The train was stuck in a tiny village for about a day or so. Edgar, Irene, and Mirjam were hosted by a Bulgarian family who lived in very primitive conditions. For example, they burned almond shells in the stove which heated the room in order to stay warm. Finally, the train was able to turn around and get back to Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria. From there the family had to make other arrangements to get to Turkey.

Max was able to arrange passage for his family on a Russian passenger ship that would go on the Black Sea from Varna to Istanbul. It was winter and a terrible storm was raging. When they got to Varna and checked into a hotel, Irene checked with the shipping company and was told that it was possible the ship would not be able to make it into port in Varna and might have to bypass the stop. That obviously was very bad news, especially because the Germans were now moving into Hungary which Edgar, his mother, and sister had just left a few days earlier. The Germans were also moving into Romania. Edgar and his family wanted to leave Bulgaria before the Germans invaded there as well.

The next morning, to their great relief, they found that the ship had docked in Varna. They were able to board the ship, but the passage was very rough. In fact, the Black Sea was so rough that the first morning out only about seven or eight passengers of the 600 or so on board were in the dining room for breakfast. Everyone else was too seasick to eat. Edgar was one of those unaffected by seasickness and recalls having a fantastic breakfast. In fact, he still remembers the large sardines he had that morning. Edgar especially appreciated the breakfast after having had such limited food under the Germans. The ship entered the Bosphorus and docked in the harbor. The trip from Budapest, which was supposed to have taken two or three days, had taken over a week and the uncertainty had been quite frightening. During the journey, Irene, Edgar, and Mirjam had worried about anyone approaching them. They also had watched everything they said very carefully, including remembering that Mirjam's papers called her Maria. Now, though, Edgar, Irene, and Mirjam were finally reunited with Max.

## Istanbul 1940-1947



Edgar and his family were safe in Istanbul and starting over once again. The Germans marched as far as the Bulgarian-Turkish border, but they did not enter Turkey at the time. Edgar later found out that the Germans were planning to occupy Turkey after a successful conclusion of their campaign in North Africa. They planned to march through Turkey and Egypt into the Middle East where they wanted the oil. Fortunately, though, the British defeated them at El Alamein in North Africa, so the Germans never made it to the Middle East oil fields or to Turkey.

Edgar and his family lived through the remainder of the war in Turkey. They lived in the apartment of a man whose wife was in Czechoslovakia and could not escape. There was no privacy and Irene resented it very much. Overall, though, the family's life was almost normal now. Mirjam recalls that she felt safe in Turkey and wasn't afraid anymore. In fact her daughter is named Leyla, which is a Turkish name. The name reflects Mirjam's gratitude to the country for providing safety for her family.





*Edgar's family lived in the third building from the left.  
(Photo taken in 2001.)*

When Edgar first arrived in Turkey, he spoke only German and Czech. Edgar's parents decided that the best place for Edgar to go to school would be Robert College, which was started by American missionaries in 1863. They chose that school because Edgar had always shown interest in taking apart objects to see how they worked. Irene and Max thought Edgar might enjoy a career in engineering. (An example of Edgar's interest in engineering was with his first camera, a Zeiss Contax III, the first camera with a built-in exposure meter. After receiving the camera, Edgar very carefully disassembled it to see what was inside. There was one screw that Edgar had trouble with for three days. It wouldn't come out. Finally Edgar started turning the screw in the direction that normally would tighten it up and sure enough it started coming out. It was the one screw that had a left-hand thread rather than the normal right-hand thread. Edgar was very happy when he finally figured that out.)

Robert College had a very high reputation as an engineering school throughout the entire Near/Middle East. As Edgar knew no English, he had to learn English in less than six months. He also learned to speak some Turkish. Since the common international language in that part of the world was then French, Edgar got private lessons in that language as well. The next fall he enrolled at Robert College where he finished high school and then stayed to get his bachelor's degree. Although Edgar could have lived at school, Max and Irene preferred that he live at home. Every morning Edgar would take the streetcar about halfway up the Bosphorus to school.





*Main Quad at Robert College*

*(Photos taken in 2001.)*



*Music room at Robert College  
where Edgar was a member of  
the Music Club.*

After Edgar had been in Turkey for about a year or so, Max decided that Edgar needed more exposure to the water, so Edgar taught himself to swim. Max also bought Edgar a boat, a combination of a rowboat and sailboat like many of the boats that the commercial fishermen there used. (Since it was during the war it was not possible to get stamps for gasoline and use motorboats.) Edgar taught himself to sail from books and really fell in love with that activity. During the summer vacation he would spend more waking hours on his sailboat than on solid ground.

Edgar and a friend named Hans Thilmany were sailing just south of Istanbul along the European shore of the Sea of Marmara one day. They could see an army tank on shore. The men at the tank hailed Edgar and Hans to come to shore so they could check out who the boys were and what they were doing. Because Edgar and Hans did not want to answer questions from the military, they decided to sail away from the men rather than heading towards shore. The soldiers started shooting at the sailboat, but Edgar and Hans escaped unharmed.

One day in 1942, on his daily commute to Robert College, Edgar saw a rusty ship anchored in the Bosphorus. He found out that there were some immigrants on the ship. They had escaped from Romania and were headed for Palestine, but the British wouldn't allow them into Palestine. The ship was anchored in the Bosphorus for several months while negotiations were taking place to allow these refugees to enter Palestine. The negotiations were unsuccessful, however, as the British wouldn't bend. The refugees were forced to go back to the Black Sea. The ship was not seen from Turkey again. According to one of the reports Edgar heard at the time, a Russian torpedo sank the ship. It was reported that everybody on the ship, several hundred Jews, perished. Seeing the ship anchored in the Bosphorus, which is only about a mile wide, and

seeing that there were people aboard is one experience that Edgar says he will never forget. (More information on this ship which was called the Struma is included later.)

Unlike in Germany and Czechoslovakia where Edgar and his family had faced discrimination because they were Jews, in Turkey Edgar felt that the people did not care that they were Jewish. Instead, Edgar faced discrimination because he was a "yabancı", foreigner. (Mirjam, though, recalls that most of the people in Turkey thought the family were Christians and, despite the fact that they did celebrate some Jewish holidays, only a few very good friends knew they were Jewish.)

Being a foreigner in Turkey was an interesting situation. Atatürk, the founder and first president of Turkey, was particularly welcoming to foreigners. In 1933, when Hitler came to power, Atatürk issued an open invitation to quite a number of German intellectuals, both Jewish and anti-Nazi non-Jews, to come to Turkey and teach in Istanbul at the university or practice their professions in Turkey. His purpose in that was to bring up the total intellectual level of Turkey and bring the country into the European cultural sphere.

At the same time, however, foreigners were closely watched. This was true for both Jewish and non-Jewish foreigners. This was partly because of concern that some of these foreigners might be Nazi sympathizers, as a lot of espionage was taking place through border countries such as Turkey. Edgar, for example, told the following story about two young fellows he met in Turkey who claimed that they had escaped from the Nazis. Edgar said, "We had them over to the house a few times and they did some sailing with me. My parents were never quite sure whether they were really immigrants or whether they were undercover Nazis. And that was the big problem when you were living under those circumstances. You met some people and you never knew whether they were on the level or whether they were really working for the other side. There was no easy way to tell, either. And even if they claimed they were Jews, it really didn't mean much."

Edgar described the situation in Turkey by saying, "The police department had a separate section set up for foreigners. The responsibility of that section was to control the foreigners living in Istanbul and know at every point in time where those foreigners were. So we had to register with them. My father already was registered. And we had a policeman attached to us who was our contact with the police department and through whom everything was shuffled. Everything was completely on the up and up, but Turkey, being a Middle Eastern country, had special rules which my father of course knew. The policeman attached to us was also getting a monthly stipend from my father and that helped immensely in smoothing things out. For example, if you did not spend your night in your apartment, you went on a trip or some place, you had to first of all register with that section of the police department and get permission from them.

"We spent every summer in a rented house in Moda, a small suburb of Istanbul on the Asiatic shore of the Marmara Sea. It made it much more pleasant. That is also where I had my sailboat.



*Edgar (on right) with his friend Laci Gruen*

*Edgar on the Bay of Moda*

"My mother, sister, and I would move to Moda for the summer. Every night my father would take the shuttle boat and come across there and the next morning go back to the office. Sometimes, though, he would decide to stay in his office longer and would instead stay overnight in our apartment in Istanbul. In theory he would have had to get permission to change his plans. Instead he would just call up our friendly policeman, tell him, and that was that. If, for some reason, he couldn't reach the policeman, he would call him the next morning and the policeman would take care of all the paperwork and whatever had to be done. It worked out quite well."

Max was still in the import/export business and was continuing to do business with Slovakia. His exports there included sheep pelts which were used to make fur coats for women. In some of these shipments, he would hide ammunition to be used by the Slovak partisans for an uprising against the Germans the last year or two before the end of the war. In fact, one of the reasons Max did not always go to Moda in the

evenings when Irene, Edgar, and Mirjam were there was so that he could have meetings with people working on smuggling the ammunition into Slovakia. There was one non-Jewish man named Josef Špata who was nominally the representative of the Slovak Importing Company. He came to Turkey on company business, but was secretly working with the partisans. He would often come to Edgar's home. Max was also very active in helping the few refugees who were able to escape to Turkey and wanted to go to Palestine. Edgar and Mirjam were not aware of these underground activities until after the war because Max and Irene were afraid the children might inadvertently say something that would compromise the family's safety. When Edgar learned about Max's activities he was, of course, very proud of what Max had done.



*Edgar, family friend, Irene, Max, Josef Špata, Mirjam*

Another problem Edgar's family faced in Turkey was that they were Ashkenazi – Jews from Europe. In Turkey virtually all of the Jews were Sephardi. Their families had come to Turkey after the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 in response to a generous invitation by the Ottoman ruler Sultan Bayezid II or Bayezid the Just. There was only a very tiny Ashkenazi community. Although there was no antagonism between the two groups, they stayed pretty separate from each other. Because of this and also not knowing what would happen in their lives next, Edgar's family went to temple only once a year on the high holidays. They still celebrated Chanukah and Passover, but otherwise were not overly observant. This was very different from when Edgar became a Bar Mitzvah and regularly put on tefillin.



*Photos of Ashkenazi Temple  
(Photos taken in 2001.)*





Being a teenager, Edgar was shielded from much that was going on in Europe during the remainder of the war. Overall, his life in Turkey was pretty good. In 1947, after earning his bachelor's degree at Robert College, Edgar decided to go to the United States to get his master's degree at MIT. (Robert College did not have a master's program.)



*Family Photo from the 1940s: Irene, Edgar, Max, Mirjam*

## The Rest of Edgar's Family

As Edgar said during a presentation to students at Gann Academy on April 8, 2013, "I was very fortunate, very lucky. I never did go to any of those concentration camps or to the murder camps. By the way, I want to point out that people refer to some of these camps as concentration camps or extermination camps. Those are not correct designations. They were, as the Germans themselves admitted, murder camps. They were specifically built to murder, as quickly and as efficiently as possible, as many Jews as they could possibly murder. They wanted to murder millions of us. They managed to murder six million. And they wanted to take as little time as possible to achieve that terrible goal. They were murder camps."

Mirjam recalls how happy the family was when the end of the war was declared in 1945. Gradually, though, they started to get the horrible news of all the family members who had been murdered. Edgar recalls that the fate of his relatives "was not a subject of frequent discussion. It was probably a progressive realization. The general feeling was that one would want to leave that sort of thing alone, being a very unpleasant memory. But I do know that I found out about some of the people from those relatives who survived."

Max had five brothers and one sister. His brother Simon died in 1938 in a car accident unrelated to the war. Matylda and Judita, his two daughters, were also killed in the accident, along with Simon's wife. Of the remaining siblings, only his sister Regina (Rezi) survived the war. She and her son Zoltan assumed non-Jewish identities and lived through the war in Czechoslovakia. Regina's husband, however, was murdered by the Nazis. Zoltan eventually settled in Israel. Max's other four brothers (Franz, David, Armin, and Benjamin) were murdered by the Nazis, as were Armin's two children (who died in Majdanek and Auschwitz), David's two children (in Auschwitz), and one of Franz's children (in Auschwitz). Besides Max's family, Regina, and Zoltan, the only other family member who survived the Nazis was Max's niece Edith (who lived through her time at Theresienstadt). After the war she married and lived for a while in Prague. Eventually her family was able to escape from Communist Czechoslovakia to Vienna, where Max and Irene were then living. Max helped them a great deal and eventually they were able to immigrate to Australia where they had/have a very nice life. Max's mother Helene (Leah) Offenbergs died during this time as well, possibly in a murder camp.

Irene had three siblings. The older brother Miksha may have died before the war. Morton, who was a few years younger than Miksha, had moved to the United States after World War I. Her sister Szeren was not so lucky, however. Her husband

Fried owned the main restaurant and a brick factory in Spišské Podhradie. He was quite entrepreneurial and had gone to the United States for some time in the 1920's. Unfortunately, after making some money in the United States, he returned to Spišské Podhradie and bought a sizeable brick manufacturing business. He was doing quite well until the Nazis came to power. Both Szeren and her husband were murdered by the Nazis. Their daughter Valerie was murdered in Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of 27. Their son Oscar (Ossi) was murdered in 1943 at Majdanek. He was 19 years old. (Oscar looked a lot like Edgar. In fact, one of Oscar's classmates mistook Edgar for Oscar when Edgar visited Spišské Podhradie one summer.) Elsa, their oldest daughter, had married a Romanian and managed to survive the war in Romania. Judith, their youngest daughter, also survived in a murder camp. Both Elsa and Judith later moved to Montreal, Canada. Judith eventually settled in Toronto with her husband and three daughters. Irene's father Leo died in 1940 and was probably murdered by the Nazis.

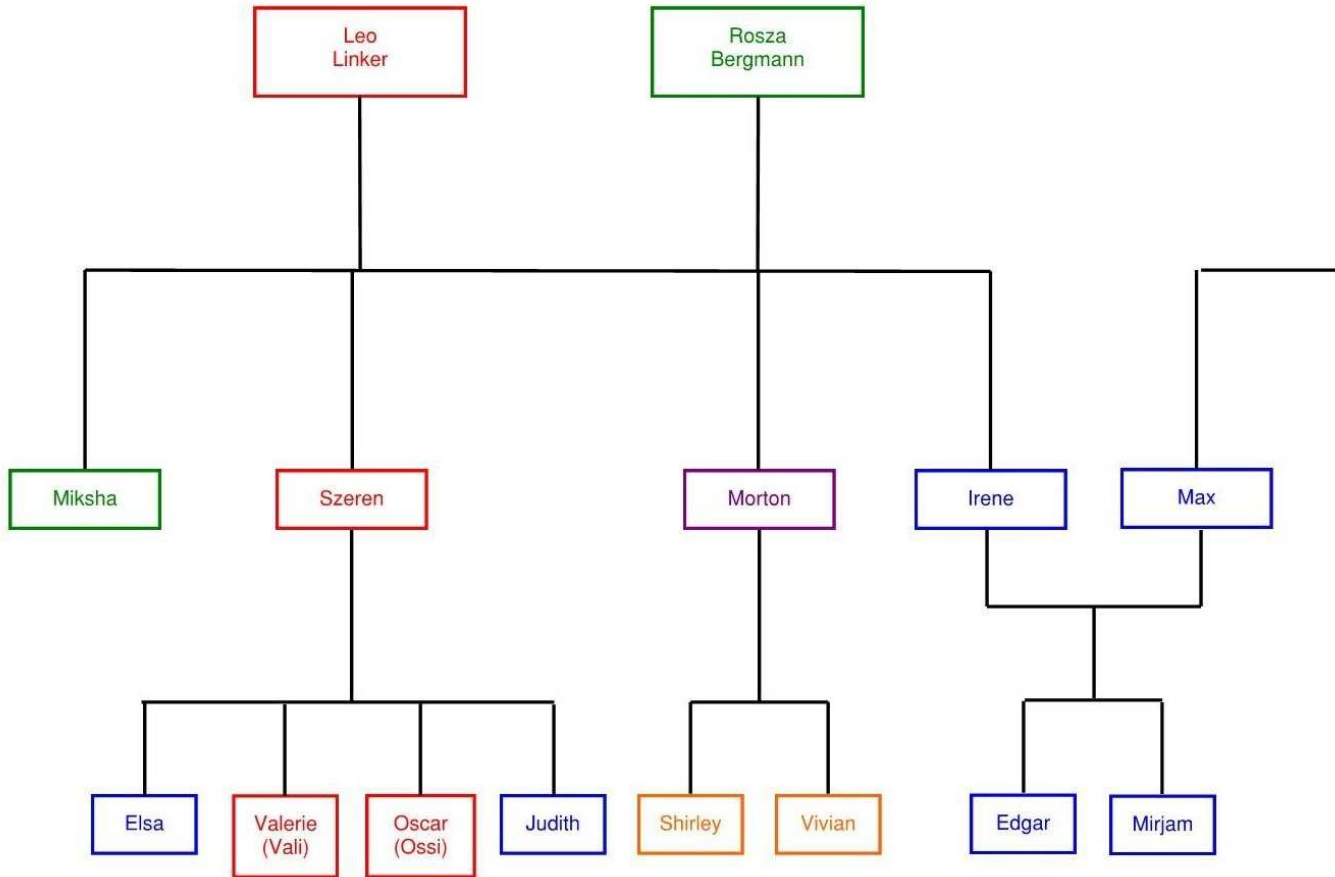


*Irene's Family*  
*Standing: Morton, Miksha*  
*Sitting: Szeren, Leo, Irene*

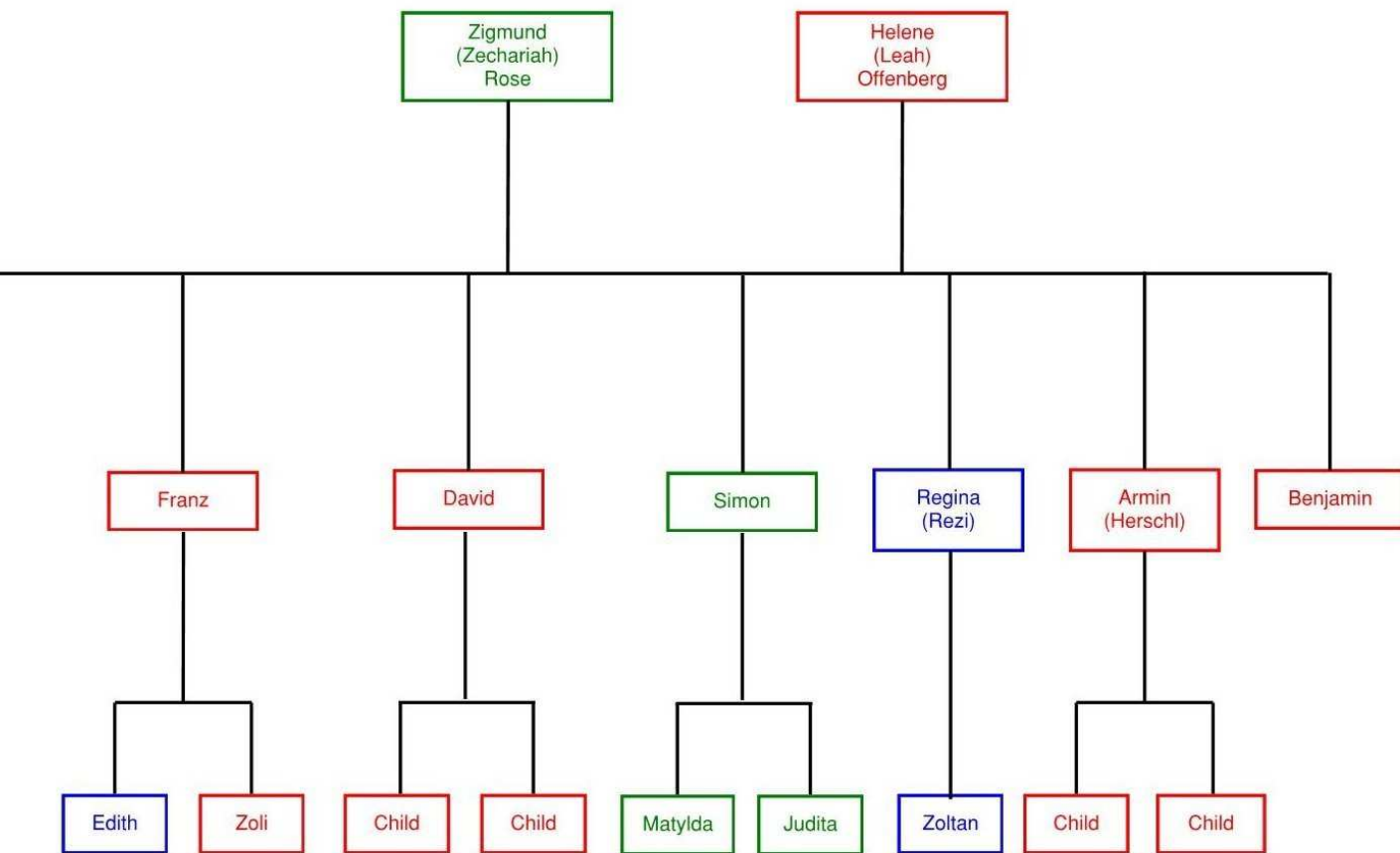


When Edgar was asked why more of his family didn't try to leave Slovakia, particularly after the deportation in Ostrava in 1939, he replied, "They were in Slovakia which was a separate republic. The head of it was a German puppet, but it was a separate country. So they presumably assumed that they would be safe there. No one expected the Nazis to get that far. But the other problem was, even if they wanted to leave, where would they go? Nobody wanted to accept them. You had to find some country that was willing to accept the Jews. The United States didn't accept many. In order to be accepted, you had to have some relatives in the United States who were willing to vouch for you and put down some financial assurance that you would not be a burden to the country. Beyond that there was also a quota involved. The United States turned back some ships that came to its shores and wouldn't let the passengers disembark because the quota for immigrants for that year had been filled. Some of the Jews, such as Dorrit Friedlander, a good friend of mine, ended up with her family in Cuba. Some ended up in Haiti or Santa Domingo or a few other South American countries. Now, for somebody coming from central Europe and from a highly cultured country and having a profession, ending up in a place like Cuba which was quite primitive and having no job or means to sustain themselves and feed their family was very, very difficult. Also, there were no concentration camps murdering Jews until around 1941 or so. By then leaving was usually not possible."

# Family Tree



Color Key
Died Before World War II
Murdered by Nazis
Survived War
Left Europe before World War II
Born in the United States



## After the War

In 1947, Edgar left Turkey to study at MIT. He chose to study in the United States because undergraduate curriculum in the United States was similar to that at Robert College whereas the curriculum at European universities would have been different. By studying in the United States, Edgar did not have to take additional math classes, for example, that would have been required for a master's program in Europe. At the time, Edgar planned to return to Europe after his studies. Czechoslovakia, for example, had important textile and engine industries and, before World War II, had two automobile manufacturers. Thus Edgar felt there would be good opportunities for him in Europe once he obtained his master's degree. On the way to the United States, he stopped briefly in Slovakia and saw his cousin Edith who had survived the war and was pregnant. In fact, her daughter Eva was born the next day.

Mirjam left Turkey in 1949 to study hotel management in Switzerland. There she met her future husband Paul Halpern. They settled first in Colombia where their two children Mike and Leyla were born. Later Paul's company transferred him to Caracas, Venezuela, where they lived for about forty years. In the 1970s, Mike and Leyla both immigrated to Israel. After Paul retired, Mirjam and Paul immigrated to Israel as well.

In the mid-1950's, Irene and Max left Turkey to move to Vienna, Austria. Although there was still a lot of anti-semitism in Vienna, they missed the Western European culture and preferred a country where they would not need to learn yet another language. Because they had been born in and been citizens of Slovakia (which at the time had been part of the Austrian-Hungarian empire), they were able to enter Austria when many countries would not accept immigrants. They could not return to Slovakia as it was then a communist country. They remained in Vienna the rest of their lives and are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Vienna.



Although Edgar had originally planned to return to Europe and start his career, he was so happy that he was treated like an equal in the United States (for the first time in his life) that he decided to stay. On January 31, 1954, he married Nettie Kardon. On November 29, 1954, Edgar became a U.S. citizen. He and Nettie had two daughters. Linda was born in 1954 and Susan in 1958. Edgar has lived in Massachusetts; Oshkosh, Wisconsin; Teaneck, New Jersey; and, since 1967, in Glencoe, Illinois. His career culminated as Vice President of Engineering for Outboard Marine Corporation.



*January 31, 1954  
Edgar and Nettie*



*Austria 1967  
Linda, Irene, Susan, Max, Nettie, Edgar*

For many years, Edgar would not speak much about his experiences during World War II. In 1998, at a program at the temple with his grandson Elliot, grandparents were asked to mention something about what their life was like when they were about thirteen years old. Edgar spoke about the deportation of the Jews from Ostrava and having to clean up what they dropped. Around that time he also mentioned putting on tefillin every day before he left for Turkey. In 2003, he asked his daughter Linda to record him telling his story. When he finished he said, "There are probably more things that I should remember about that time, or that I once knew, but you try to forget these things and look to what will happen in the future because the past is too painful. It's a defensive mechanism for your mind."

Edgar has returned to Germany on business a number of times since the war. In the late 1950's, he was in Stuttgart on a business trip and was being driven around by two German business contacts. One of them had a wartime injury and limped a bit. At one point they were driving through a small tunnel when this man explained that during the war they had some machines in the tunnel manufacturing munitions. He then showed Edgar some areas which had been destroyed by Allied bombers and mentioned that a number of people in Stuttgart were killed during the bombing. Edgar responded, "That's very sad. But tell me....who started the war?" The man was quiet for a bit and then changed the subject. The man remained friendly towards Edgar, however, and even took him to a concert that evening. He probably had no idea that Edgar was Jewish.

In general, though, Edgar said that he didn't think too much about the war when he was in Germany. He was more concerned about the U.S. business he represented and what he could accomplish there. He also was an American citizen by then and viewed himself as such. He actually had never felt particularly attached to Germany as he had left there at such a young age and his parents were not German. As the years went on, of course, the Germans Edgar met while visiting on business or pleasure were too young to have been Nazis and therefore could not be held accountable for what had happened.

Edgar does remember having very strong feelings one day when he and Mirjam finally visited Essen in 2008. There was one area in the center of town with a very nice park and new, modern buildings surrounding it. All of a sudden Edgar felt himself smiling and realized why. This very nice area was rebuilt after the war because the Allies had completely destroyed the area when they bombed Germany. It made Edgar happy to think about the United States bombing Germany and killing so many Nazis.

Edgar greatly appreciates the opportunities he has had in the United States. During a presentation at the Gann Academy in Waltham, MA in 2013 Edgar said, "After about a year in the U.S., I was wondering why...here I was living all by myself in a foreign country (my parents and sister were still in Turkey)...why was I feeling so happy and comfortable? I couldn't quite understand this. And then I realized that the U.S. was the first country in which I was treated as an equal. And that's something you cannot take for granted. As Jews in this day and age (in the United States), if you do find discrimination, and there is some, it is miniscule and it is something that other people are exposed to also for other reasons."

This is a subject that's very important to Edgar, who understands that being treated as an equal makes a very big difference in your lifestyle and enjoyment of life. During the presentation in 2013, he continued, "Believe me...this is something you should always treasure and watch out for. Before I came to the U.S., I lived in three different countries. When I first came to the U.S., my accent was much heavier than it is

now. But I found that people always treated me here as an equal, irrespective of my religious background and my foreign birth. I've had a number of examples of that, not just in my professional life, but also through an organization I belong to (American Power Boat Association). This organization has a lot of non-intellectual members (and members from places without very large Jewish populations). And most of those people do know that I am a Jew, but they even elected me for two terms, the maximum allowed, as president of their organization. There are very, very few Jews in that organization. Out of 8,000 members, there might perhaps be five. For me, personally, that was always very important: the fact that I could live here as anybody else."

The other lesson which Edgar feels is very important is that what happened in Germany could also happen in the United States. Edgar said, "Germany before Hitler was a country that was just as democratic, and more democratic in some ways, as the United States. It was tolerant and accepted Jews as equals. But under the sway of a democratically elected demagogue the Holocaust happened there so it can happen here. You don't have to be paranoid about it, but you should be cognizant of it and keep it in mind. The freedom we have in this country is a right that you have to preserve. Appreciate it, work on it, and make sure that it always stays this way."

# Essen, Germany After Edgar's Family Left

In 1933, there were approximately 5000 Jews living in Essen. This number dropped to 1636 by May 17, 1939. With further deportations, only 527 Jews were still there to receive ration cards in 1942. They were confined to the Holbeckshof camp in Essen-Steele and then deported to murder camps. In April 1944, 39 Jews remained in Essen. Labor shortages in the Krupp factory resulted in 520 young Jews being sent to Essen in the fall of 1944, but many of these later died in Bergen-Belsen. About 100 survivors returned after the war. As of 2003 this number had grown to about 667, largely due to immigration from the former Soviet Union.

The inside of the Alte Synagoge (Old Synagogue) in Essen, built in 1913, was destroyed by the Nazis on Kristallnacht, November 9-10, 1938. In 1949, two commemorative tablets were put on the building, reading in part, "More than 2500 Essen Jews had to lose their lives in 1933-1945." (After much criticism, in 1981 this wording was changed to indicate that these Jews were murdered by the Nazis.) In 1959 the few Jews in Essen built a much smaller synagogue. That same year, the city of Essen acquired the Alte Synagoge and transformed it into a museum for industrial design. This resulted in the destruction/covering of anything remaining as an indication that the building had been a synagogue. After a fire in the building in 1979 which damaged the industrial exhibition, the city council decided to return this historic building to its earlier function. With government financing, the building was reconstructed to become a meeting place for those interested in Jewish culture and religion. It contains an exhibit with information about the unjust persecution of the Jews during the Nazi era.



*Alte Synagoge  
(Photo taken in 2008.)*





*Inside of Alte Synagoge  
(Photos taken in 2008.)*



*Photo from museum's exhibit  
of Alte Synagoge as it was  
before World War II.*

# Ostrava, Czech Republic After Edgar's Family Left

After the men had been deported to Nisko nad Sanem in 1939, they were allowed to write letters home. The men knew that these letters would be censored so they tried to put the best possible spin on what they wrote and made it sound as if they really were retraining. At the end of March 1940, the Nazis decided to stop construction work and dissolve the camp. About half the men deported from Ostrava returned to the city. (The rest were driven eastward into the Soviet Union where most later died.) Most of those who returned to Ostrava, as well as the other Jews still in the city, were transported to Theresienstadt in September 1942 and were murdered in the gas chambers in Auschwitz.

When Mirjam left Ostrava, she kept in contact with her best friend whose name was Lya. One day, though, she got a post card stamped "ausgeliefert" (delivered, i.e. the recipient has been delivered to one of the murder camps). Mirjam later learned that all her friends from Ostrava had been murdered.

After the war, a small Jewish community was reestablished in Ostrava. This included Jews who left land ruled by the Soviets and chose instead to settle in Czechoslovakia. The few Jews who are still in Ostrava today are mainly elderly survivors of the Holocaust. There are memorials at the site of the former Jewish school in Ostrava and also at the former Jewish cemetery.



*Site of Former Jewish School  
(Photo taken in 2008.)*



*Former Jewish Cemetery*

*The plaque reads, "To remember the Jews of Ostrava who were murdered at the hands of the Nazis in 1939-1945."*

*(Photos taken in 2008.)*





# The Struma

The Struma is the ship that Edgar saw docked in Istanbul. It had been chartered to take Jewish Romanian refugees to Palestine. Although the refugees had paid extremely large amounts of money for passage, they were not allowed to see the ship in advance and, when they boarded, found that it was in terrible condition. The Struma left Constanta, Romania on December 12, 1941, carrying about 780 refugees as well as ten crew members. The plan was for the ship to travel to Istanbul where visas to enter Palestine were to be waiting for the refugees. After obtaining these visas, the Struma and her passengers would continue to Palestine.

The Struma's diesel engine was not working, however, so a tugboat towed it to sea. When the engine could not be started, the tugboat's crew returned the next day and agreed to fix the engine but only if the passengers paid them. After paying for their trip, however, and having many of their possessions taken by the Romanians when boarding, they had no money left. They gave the crew their wedding rings and the engine was fixed. Two days later, however, the engine died again and the ship was towed into the Bosphorus and docked in Istanbul.

The ship remained in Istanbul for ten weeks while mechanics tried to repair her engine and negotiations took place to allow the refugees to enter Palestine. The British refused and the Turkish government allowed only nine passengers to disembark in Istanbul. (One worked for the same company as a wealthy American who was stationed in Istanbul and who used his connections to free his co-worker and the co-worker's wife and son. Five other passengers, who were in possession of valid, but expired, visas for Palestine, were also finally allowed to continue by land to Palestine. The last passenger, a woman who had a miscarriage while the Struma was docked in Istanbul, was taken to a Turkish hospital, but her husband was not allowed to accompany her.) While the Struma was docked, the refugees lived in horrible conditions. The ship was very overcrowded, had poor sanitation, and virtually no medicine. The Jewish community in Istanbul helped supply food and water for the refugees but there was very little.

On February 23, 1942, Turkish police boarded the ship despite resistance from the passengers and towed the Struma into the Black Sea. Despite the work of Turkish mechanics while the ship was docked, the Struma's engine still would not start. As the ship was being towed, passengers hung signs over the side in English and Hebrew which said, "Save us." The Turkish authorities left the Struma drifting about 10 miles north of the Bosphorus.

The next day the Struma was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine. Of the almost 800 people on board, including over 100 children, only one survived. This was a

nineteen year old man named David Stoliar. He remained in the water all night before he was spotted and rescued. (A number of refugees survived the initial blast but either drowned or died of hypothermia when no one came to help them.) There are memorials in both Holon, Israel, and Ashdod, Israel, for victims of the Struma disaster.







