

Cameos of German and Central European Jewish Refugees at HTBE, taken from eulogy notes of Rabbi Norbert Weinberg

Mitteleuropa, Central Europe, is a concept describing the common cultural features of German speaking countries, or countries that had come under the control of either the German or the Austro-Hungarian Empires in the 1800's. That covered such disparate regions as Switzerland from the west to the Balkans and the Baltic regions, as well as western Ukraine.

Thea Kamm . June 27, 1901- Jan 16, 1994

Thea Kamm was born in Bunzlau, in Silesia, then a part of the German empire in its heyday in 1901. She had one brother, Herman Ruppin, and she worked for him in his business when she was a young adult and then saw the rise of Hitler to power and the beginnings of the destruction of European Jewry. In the aftermath of Kristallnacht, she was able to get an entry visa to England. where she supported herself in the clothing business. Her brother was able to spirit his son John Ruppin, out of Germany shortly afterwards on the last Kindertransport. Thea lost her brother to the Nazis, and her nephew John was then her only surviving relative. Thea was able to visit with John, who grew up in a youth home, watch him grow, and she kept close contact with him in the years that followed. In 1954, she came to the United States, where she married Ernst Kamm, who was also a refugee from Germany and a distant relative. They were married for over 20 years until he died in 1976.

Alfred Sigfried Muenzer . Nov 13, 1904- Sept 21,1992

He was born in Brandenburg, Germany, son of Louis and Bertha. He married his beloved " Trudchen" , his Gertrude, in 1929. They spent the next 63 years together, a true achievement in our day. They set up household in Leipzig, where he managed sales in a Department store - all fine and good, and a good future awaited them, till Hitler came to power, and destroyed Jewish life in Germany and Europe. Alfred was devoted and dedicated to his wife, and to their daughter, Ingrid Dorthy Lerman, and he sacrificed all to save family .He succeeded in getting them out, almost in the last minute, to the Dominican republic. Irony that they were befriended there by a couple who were members of my previous congregation, John and Katie Steiber. By 1946, they settled in LA. He had to work hard, even here, and had to overcome stereotype of Jew. He was the first Jew ever hired by Wilson Sporting Goods, and he managed their warehouse. He gave of himself, in the last years, as a volunteer at Cedars-Sinai for 10 years.

Abe Silverberg. 1901-1993

He was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1901, and he would have been 92 next week. He was the child of devout parents who were open to the new world of the 20th century unfolding. As a teenager, he began working in a print shop--he had the opportunity to know the greatest of the Yiddish writers who came in to have their works printed--Scholem Asch, Yitzhak Leib Peretz, Scholem Aleichem, Mendele Mocher Seforim--the flower of Jewish literary creativity of the turn of the century--as well as the later giant, his contemporary, I. J. Singer. This early experience shaped him and guided him in later life. In the immediate aftermath of World War I, it was clear that Poland was no place for a young Jew-- he made his way to Germany, and became a student at the University of Heidelberg. His pride and pleasure in that period was to have worked for Prof. Pik, who had been the Kaiser's librarian. America beacons to him, and he made his way, via Canada, to Chicago while he was in his early 20's. His wide experience and education, both Jewish and general, brought him into Yiddish journalism for the Forwards and the Jewish Courier. I recall his showing me a photograph in a Yiddish newspaper of him greeting Shalom

Schwartzbard, the young man who had avenged the death of thousands of Jews in the Ukraine by killing the chief progromchik, Petlyura. He got to know the ins and outs of Chicago , and knew well the power bosses of the city. In 1928, he married Hazel Sherman, whom he had met at a dance. He was a good dancer, swept her off her feet, and kept on doing so for 65 years. He was always looking to surprise her--a few years ago, he suffered a bad fall, because he took the steep climb from his house to the neighboring hotel to order a special dinner, and when Hazel came home from the hospital not long ago, he went out of his way to find cake and flowers to greet her at the door. As he and Hazel set out to raise their family, he moved from journalism to the field he knew well, type-setting. In 1950, the two had enough of Chicago's dreadful winters, and headed to Los Angeles, a warmer clime, and a new profession as a building contractor. He himself was no carpenter or builder, but he could charm the bird off a tree and get the best subcontractors to work for him.

Otto W. Sobelsohn 1906- Feb 10, 1993

Otto believed in wisdom, both Jewish wisdom and general wisdom, and he imbued it in his family, and he used it well in his business life. He came from Tarnopol , where he was born, to Vienna, when he was a teenager to join his brother, who was already there. Vienna the was a golden gate of opportunity, both politically, educationally, and economically, for Jews from eastern Europe.. He was always an entrepreneur, an energetic man, and soon began a successful wholesale business in medical products. In 1936 a young and beautiful lady, Helen, came to Vienna for vacation , to get away from the ugly atmosphere of her native Germany, under Nazi domination. She captured Otto's heart, he married her and soon, opened another business just for her--a cosmetics store--For a short time, it was a smash--the finest of Vienna came to buy. I spoke of storms in life. That Vienna, city of *gemütlichkeit* and so open for Jews turned into a nightmare with the Anschluss, the takeover by Nazi Germany. Dreams were smashed, hopes dashed to the ground. Otto was among the first rounded up, released because of a lucky inside connection--warned to flee or end up in Dachau. Otto and Helen abandoned everything--business, home, furnishing, escaped to Luxembourg. This was their last contact with so many of their family and friends who did not get out in time. Thanks to a relative in America, they were able to escape Luxembourg just as heavy fighting began to break out, and got to New York, to join his older sister . Otto quickly rebounded from disaster and was able to return to the wholesale of pharmaceuticals again. Just as he had been helped by family, so he , in turn, brought to these shores, his cousin, Leo Sperling. As he settled down in this land of peace, he and Helen were blessed with a son, Bernard, who was the apple of their eye. I recall Otto telling me just last year, when he was recovering from an operation, of his pride in his son's Jewish learning--he had sought the best opportunity for Jewish study for him in New York, and later in Los Angeles, encouraging him to continue his Jewish involvement, even to the point of actually beginning Rabbinic studies. Otto took great pride in his grandchildren, Daniel and David, the two sons of Bernard and his wife Ruth. Otto prized general learning, as he studied avidly anything dealing with history, could recall the dates of any significant event, loved to discuss history with his grandchildren.

Otto was a deeply loyal Jew. He looked for the best Jewish education for his son, as I said, and belonged to two synagogues, Hollywood Temple Beth El and Beth Israel. As long as he was well, he was a regular in our ranks on Shabbat morning. No matter how ill he felt, he made sure to daven every day, with his price-less siddur, a German edition dating to 1839. No new edition could replace this very special siddur.

Erna Levy March 2, 1911 - April 9, 1993

Erna Levy was in small town in Germany , Niederkirchen, near the French border. Small, tight knit Jewish community of merchants and cattle traders. everyone knew everyone else, as Erna knew Sylvan Levy, a young businessmsn. Did not pay much attention to each other till she flowered as a young woman, and Sylvan began to pay attention to her. In 1933, they married and hoped to start a normal, peaceful life, as

everyone would expect. In that year, however, Hitler had taken over power, and changed the face of Germany. By 1935, the Levy's were fortunate to leave to France, and settled on the other side of the border. It was here that their first daughter, Josie was born. Erna was ever supportive of her family, and managed to cross regularly back and forth to her home town, to help care for her mother, then deathly ill, and to arrange for the safe escape of her brother, Eric to America. After her mother's death, Erna also succeeded in smuggling her father out of Germany just before the outbreak of the war. Soon, as the war broke out, all the people in their region, just sitting on the Maginot line, were evacuated--The Levy's spent the rest of the war in southern France. Here, Erna's resourcefulness helped save the family. They settled in a French village, Sarreguemines, and it was known to the natives that these were Jews, yet, by her friendly personality and charm, the natives showed, in turn compassion, and helped protect the Levy family. This trait, of putting other people first, of always caring for others even at her own loss, a trait which remained with her throughout her life, surely helped them in this time of great danger. The only way to protect their daughter was to entrust her in a convent. They relied on the good intentions of the head nun, who herself supported the resistance. They were able to keep in touch with her and went through the agony of watching her live as a Catholic in order to be able to survive. Her experience made her dedicated to Judaism and the Jewish people and forced her to come to grips with what had happened to Germany under Nazism, to try to understand how seductive its appeal was. She learned from it a deep sense of tolerance for the underdog. After the war, they immediately began reestablishing themselves as a family, and Erna put in her efforts to help reestablish the Jewish community in that region. In 1947, they were able to get to the US, and settled immediately in Los Angeles, where her brother had settled before them. Here, they had to start up once again, for their third move as refugees. They had their second child, Mark, in this country. Erna and Sylvan worked closely together as he opened up a laundromat of his own. When he sold it to work for a manufacturer, Erna went to become secretary to the Huntington Park Hebrew Congregation. She had great satisfaction from her children--she enjoyed their creativity and originality, which Josie showed in writing, and Mark in art. She herself was an artist in the kitchen and the garden. She was later to truly enjoy watching her grandson, Geoffrey, born to Josie and Edwin Martin, grow, for only then did she have the leisure and peace to finally enjoy a child fully. She loved the opportunity to bring the family together, especially at holidays. When her son, Mark, was able to fly down from Santa Cruz, that too was a holiday for her. Both she and Sylvan were active in synagogue life, first in Huntington Park, and then at Hollywood Temple Beth El. She took an active part in Hadassah, as a life time member, as well as Bnai Brith and ORT.

Albert Winkler was born in Ungvar, 91 years ago, on March 20, 1912, while it was still part of the relic of the middle ages, the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His older brother, David Winkler, is here today, and a surviving sister, Louise Price, resides in New York. Within two years, the first world war would break out, and destroy that seemingly tranquil and secure world. After his Bar Mitzvah, he had to begin to fend for himself-- he learned the trade of plumbing, and supported himself. He joined the army of the new country of Czechoslovakia, a country which disappeared twice since then. Like so many, he believed that this world was the future, and he married Rosa with the hopes of establishing a family. As with World War I, so now, his world was torn up again-- all those hopes were dashed when Chamberlain betrayed Czechoslovakia, and Hitler's armies entered. He could not save his wife, Rosa, who became a victim of Hitler, but he was able, finally to escape Czechoslovakia and escape to England. There he enlisted in the British army in order to fight the Nazis. After the war, returned to Czechoslovakia and to Prague. The property he had left behind had been taken over and he had to struggle to get it back. Began to establish self well in Prague, to make up for what he had lost--but, soon the communists took over, and he once again left, back to England. In 1965, he came from England to New York, and in 1970, came out to Los Angeles. He also married again, this time to Margaret, with whom he spent the next 25 years in marriage, until her death. He became active at Hollywood Temple Beth El--in particular, with the chapel. He was a man of maasim tovim--doing good and zedakah in modesty, without fanfare. He served as the building manager, and also volunteered his skills as a plumber for the Temple he so dearly loved. He too, in turned was very dear to those of the daily minyan. He was always at the chapel, morning and evening--

was always ready and eager to help out in any way he could, at Bingo every Tuesday. He saw to it that some of the good luck he had won in this country would be shared in his will with his synagogue, and with other organizations, here and in Israel.

Egon Hochberg . April 16,1908- March 23, 1994

Egon was born in Vienna, capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire It was the second day Pesah, and the irony, that we officiate today, second day Pesah. Worked as teenager as a salesman in his father's business, but as he entered his twenties, Hitler entered Vienna. Egon made his way out, was fortunate to obtain a Visa to Shanghai. With this , he made his way to America, out to Cuba, and back to the United States thanks to HIAS and affidavits from friends. Here could finally savor the taste of freedom. He came here to the southern Californai area, and first settled in Oxnard, where he worked at a furniture store for a short while, and then entered the armed forces to serve in the war.After his period of service, he went back to Los Angeles, where he worked in a sportswear factory, and this remained his palce of employ until his retirement. He had been married to Edith Blumenthal, and from that marriage had a daughter, Carol. Through her and her husband, Donald George, he also had the pleasure of a grandson, Jamie.

He was fortunate to meet Hilda Louis, a fellow refugee form Hitler from Magdeburg in Germany. She had come to these shores in 1940, and was able to get her parents out of Germany and to the States as well. The two were able to share in many activities together as they found leisure time in these last years.

Both have been loyal assistants at Bingo at our Temple every Tuesday evening, and they would travel extensively. Egon was never one to sit back. Even when he retired, he kept on working. I just learned, through Hilda, of a wonderful project he was engaged in--through the Jewish Federation,--called Home Secure. He would go the homes of our elderly citizens and install grab-bars, safety locks, peep-holes, and other such devices to enhance the safety and security of our elderly. He kept on actively until he took ill just this last January. He was also an avid reader, especially eager to keep au courant on political affairs.

Gussie Lippel

It is a matter of personal curiosity that the paths in this family seem to have crossed mine several times over. Gussie was born in 1909 to Babette & Jacob Hamburg in Dolina, then Austro-Hungary. It was the same town as my father's, there were only 2,000 Jews in that town, and she was only a few years younger, so it was quite probable that they either knew each other or had friends in common. Her parents were very devout Jews, as was the nature of that town. Even the town apikores, and there was one, didn't dare open the front door of his shop on Shabbes. Her grandfather looked after her in those early formative years, and from him and the community she had learned the love of Jewish life and heritage that stayed with her to the end. After World War I, that part of Europe was ceded to Poland, which was less friendly to Jews than the Austrian empire had been. At sixteen she went to Cologne, Germany, where an uncle gave her work in his store. It was a good time for Jews in Germany, when they were fully entitled to all civil rights in the Weimar Republic. When she was 20, a young man , Julius Lippel, a contractor for a tractor company, came to visit. The visit turned into love and in 1931 they married and settled in Dusseldorf. The first child , Berthold, was born in 1932, a just then, the Jewish dream turned into a nightmare, as Hitler came to power.Barbara was born in 1937, and, after Kristallnacht, after the persecution in Germany became unbearable, Julius was able to leave first, to Belgium, then in 1940, he spirited out the rest of the family. They spent the war in labor camps,then in the city, sometimes in hiding, sometimes in the open in the area of Brussels, wearing the yellow badge, covering it where possible. The only way to save their children was to place them for safekeeping, Barbara in a Catholic orphanage, Bert in a Christian Boys School. As the war ended, they reunited but

even then, survival was a struggle, as Belgium would not allow the refugees the right to work. Fortunately, Julius' father, Max, had gotten to the US before the war. He and other relatives sponsored Gussie and Julius, and they came to this country in 1949. They settled in New York, where Gussie worked at the Barracini candy store. They were able to begin life anew, and support and educate their children. Bert studied electric engineering at MIT, Barbara, nursing at Bellevue.

Edith Feuerstein. June 18, 1913, April 11, 1996

Born on June 18, 1913, in Gablonc, the Czech region of then Austrian Empire. She and one brother, since deceased, the children of Ida and Osias Orgell. With the troubles of World War I that broke out, family moved to Vienna, a refuge for so many Jews from the outer regions of the empire. Their household- loyal Jewish tradition, yet open to the new currents of the world- parents gave her a happy childhood, and a strong education, through gymnasia, high school, but in Europe, equivalent of college. As a young woman, very intelligent, independent minded for her times. Travelled with her friends widely throughout Europe, especially in Italy, favorite vacation place. Father's work in import- export brought him to England- the winds of war were beginning to be heard as Hitler rearmed and built up German military might and prepared the takeover of Austria. In England, he arranged for exit visas for his family to come to England, and Edith went there, while her brother was able to get to Canada. However, Edith's mother refused to abandon her Vienna, not aware of what nightmare awaited the Jews of Europe. By miracle, her mother was able to survive the horror of the Nazis by spending the war in hiding, and afterwards, was reunited with her family. At the same time, a fellow Viennese, Jacob Feuerstein, escaped to Belgium. There, he was offered refuge in Britain in exchange for volunteering in the British army. This brought him to England. One evening he was on leave from his base, when he attended a gathering of Austrian refugees. It was there that he and Edith met. It was the London blitz and his military commander that brought them together however. She hoped to be able to get to Exeter, where he was stationed to avoid the Blitz, but his commander would grant her a pass to move--only if she married him. This was the best order a military officer ever gave, and they married and remained loyal and deeply devoted to each other for 56 years. She was for Jacob the very best that he could wish for. There, during the war years, their daughter, Vivian was born, and Edith turned her efforts to raising her in those difficult years and in the period of rebuilding that followed. She was always a loving, caring, and supportive mother, encouraging her daughter to do what she believed was right. In 1953, they were able to get visas to come to the United States and try their fortunes here. They settled in Brooklyn, where Jacob worked as a dress cutter, and Edith began to work in cosmetics. When Vivian finished high school, they came out to Los Angeles, and Edith continued work in cosmetics sales with department stores here, till she retired in 1970. Edith was a world-wise woman, always well read, forming strong opinions on the basis of her reading and self-learning. To those who got to know her, she was lively, outgoing, friendly. When Vivian married Lou Versace, who had two sons of his own, she gained a set of grandsons, Marco and Nikko. Marco and Nikko both speak German, and whenever they would come for a visit, she had an opportunity to speak fluently in her native German. Her health deteriorated in these last years, but the loyalty that Edith and Jacob had developed over the years grew stronger. Jacob took care of her in the last years-- she was worried for him that he was straining himself for her, and his prayer was to live long enough to be able to care for her. Jacob is still here with us, having himself just recovered from surgery, but indeed he was able to look after her to the end.

Jacob Feuerstein D. Oct. 10/4/96

(husband of the aforementioned Edith)

Jacob Feuerstein was born 93 years ago in an east European shtetl, the remnant of the Austro-Hungarian empire, when airplanes were just toys of sticks and cloth. They moved to Vienna, where he grew up in a religious and harmonious household with his two older brothers and one sister. As they grew up, they would work and share their earnings with their parents to keep up their part in support of the household. During his youth, he was outgoing and friendly, and an avid soccer player. He loved the game so much, that even when he lost two front teeth in a game, he didn't let that stop him. After the invasion and takeover of Austria by Hitler, Jacob was able to escape to Belgium. There, he volunteered to join the British army, which finally brought him to England and safety. His parents, unfortunately, were not able to leave, and perished under the Nazis. He, and other refugees like him, were given odd jobs to do around the base, at Otracombe, near Dover. First he served in the officer's mess, and then, he became a welder, preparing tanks for the invasion at Normandie. One evening he was on leave from his base, when he attended a gathering of Austrian refugees. It was there that he and Edith met. Edith, too, had been born in then defunct Austrian Empire, and had likewise grown up in Vienna. Her father, who had been in the import-export business, had been able to get her and her brother into England, away from the grasp of Hitler. It was the London blitz and his military commander that brought them together however. She hoped to be able to get to Exeter, where he was stationed to avoid the Blitz, but his commander would grant her a pass to move--only if she married him. This was the best order a military officer ever gave, and they married in October of 1940 and remained loyal and deeply devoted to each other for 56 years until she passed away just this past April. She was for Jacob the very best that he could wish for. There, during the war years, their daughter, Vivienne was born in November. In 1952, they were able to get visas to come to the United States and try their fortunes here. Jacob found his brother David once again and they settled in Brooklyn. He found work as best he could, as a dress cutter, and then making ice cream. It was cold and tiring work, but he never complained. When Vivian finished high school, they came out to Los Angeles. Here Vivienne was accepted to UCLA, which made her father very proud. In Los Angeles, he was able to find work in his area of skill, as a dress cutter, which he continued till he retired at the age of 72. As Vivienne told me, "There are many who will miss Jack because he was one of a kind. They don't make them like that any more. He was a simple man, who never asked for much, but gave so much of himself and loved life, his wife and his daughter. Jacob carried himself with tremendous grace in his old age. I remember once walking along side him on the way to the Synagogue, Hollywood Temple Beth El, which he attended regularly. I had trouble keeping up with his vigorous pace, and I wish I could walk as erect now, as he did in his 90's. When Edith's health deteriorated, Jacob took care of her in the last years-- she was worried for him that he was straining himself for her, and his prayer was to live long enough to be able to care for her. His prayer was answered. Last spring, he was operated on for cancer, and recovered from surgery, only to lose his beloved wife that week. He stood at the funeral, tall and erect, and no one could have guessed that he himself had just recovered from surgery.