

Some biographical notes by Nelli Bar-Wieghardt:

### **Up the Mountain and Against the Stream**

My mother and I had just changed trains in Zurich, on our way to the Engadin where my sister had to live for many years for health reasons. She was not yet 13, so my grand-mother was staying with her in a small pension in St. Moritz.

It was the second of August 1914, and I was ten. This new train which was to take us to Chur, the capital of the canton of Grison, was surprisingly empty. I enjoyed being able to dash from one side of the large car to the other in order not to miss a single waterfall or amazing rock formation. Even though I had made this trip already many times, the excitement never faded. (Even today, almost 80 years later it's still the same). When the train was filled with tourists I couldn't run from side to side quite as easily.

In Chur we either changed trains again or the train was shortened and a second engine added, to make the steep climb to the high altitude possible. Now my mother and I found ourselves the only passengers in the large non-smoker car. The first stop was a crossing point, where our train met the one coming down from the Engadin bound for Zurich. That train was filled to capacity and more. In fact it was so crowded that people were standing in the aisles.

Those near the window gesticulated excitedly. I was at our window and my mother joined me. The people on the other train shouted to my mother: "It's going to be war ! how can you go up into the mountains - it's going to be war ! we all are going back home as fast as possible because God knows what might happen. All the hotels are closed, you won't be able to stay anywhere. It's absolutely crazy to go on ! "

Everybody said the same thing in different languages. My mother was quiet for a moment, then she shouted back: " I'm on my way to see my daughter and I'm going to continue no matter what ".

So we did and found my sister and grandmother safe and sound in the little pension where they had

lived for almost 2 years. There was plenty of room for us, also - in fact the owner was happy we came. While the big hotels indeed were already closed or in the process of closing.

It was true, the war had started.

### **What Next?**

In 1919 when I graduated from high school (a girls' lyceum) in Cologne I wanted to enter art school at once. But as I was not quite 16, my mother thought I was a little young to be among those "wild" artists.

I had two other fields in mind: teaching or agriculture. So, not to waste time, I enrolled in a course for kindergarten teachers. There, unexpectedly, we had an art teacher who was herself an exhibiting artist and an inspiring teacher. In our second year she obtained some clay for our group of eight. This was 1921 when everything was hard to find, so this was special. When I got my hands into clay for the first time in my life, I was fascinated. But soon the small amount was exhausted. Where to get some more?

I knew that in Frechen, a small town near Cologne, several plants made large clay ducts for sewers. Nearby were large clay pits, but those were, of course, inaccessible to us. After some thinking I persuaded Toni, a fellow student, to come with me on an expedition to get clay. As we didn't know anybody with a car we set out early one morning with my big doll carriage to walk to Frechen, a long walk -- maybe two and a half hours. We reached Frechen about 10, I guess.

When we saw a plant with huge pipes piled all around, we went in timidly. The workers were very nice to us. They showed us the whole production and the immense kilns, each as big as a small house.

" Could we buy some clay?"

" Of course you can have clay free of charge because your buggy won't hold more than 50 pounds - a crumb in a place like this."

We were elated! After thanks all around, we loaded our 50-pound loaf of clay into the buggy, quickly ate our sandwich and apple, and started on the way back home. In about 20 minutes the doll buggy began to wobble and make strange noises. A few more steps and it collapsed completely under the weight of the clay. What now??

My mother would surely find a solution. So I went in search of a telephone while Toni guarded our precious clay. Not too far away in a small inn I was able to call mother. Of course she had a good idea. The owner of the little grocery store where she was a steady customer had a horse and wagon. She'd try to hire that to rescue us. I waited near the phone for her return call. It worked. One of the grocer's sons would pick us up.

Relieved I returned to Toni and after about an hour and a half, the grocer's hunchbacked son appeared. We were glad to see him, although I had hoped his handsome younger brother would come. We packed the broken buggy, the loaf of clay, and ourselves into the wagon and rode home in style.

Of course the "free" clay became quite expensive in the end, but it was worth it. Our art teacher praised us for taking the initiative and our fellow students appreciated the clay.

For me it was a turning point. It gave me a chance to do more three-dimensional work. Now I knew that I wanted to become a sculptor and nothing else. After graduating from the kindergarten course, I got myself apprenticed to a sculptor in a nearby suburb and by the next spring I entered art school as a sculpture student.

### **The Canoe Ride**

In the early twenties, shortly after my sister had returned from eight years living in the Engadine (a high-altitude valley in Switzerland), our cousin Rudi invited her to a canoe ride on the Rhine. Grete was about 20 at that time, he quite a bit older. She was elated, but our mother was reluctant to give her permission. Grete had never learned to swim since at that time swimming was considered dangerous for asthma sufferers. But Rudi had never had an accident and promised to provide Grete with a swim vest. And since she wanted so badly to go, our mother finally agreed.

So, on a beautiful summer day, Grete went canoeing. She was intensely happy to be so close to her beloved river. But that river can be treacherous, and somehow they got into a whirlpool and the tiny boat capsized. Grete was swept underneath. She was sure she'd drown, and she faced it calmly. But Rudi, an excellent

swimmer, got her out from under and safely to the boathouse. There she was dried and warmed. And when her clothes were dry, Rudi took her home. I guess both were scared to face our mother. Later Grete told me about her experience. She remembered thinking: "If I drown, Nelli will never be allowed to go canoeing." This thought was typical of her love and concern. She didn't realize that nobody would ever ask me anyhow, even though I was a passionate swimmer.

### **My Most Memorable Monday Morning**

On a Monday morning, late in April 1924, shortly before I turned 20, I started Art School in Cologne. I always wanted to become an artist, but my serious training was delayed because right after High School I first went to a Kindergarten Seminar. Only after I had graduated from that, did I apply to Art School. Those years in the Seminar were not lost, though, because there I had encountered my first good art teacher. Herself an artist, she made me aware of the Three-dimensional. Now I knew I wanted to be a sculptor.

As a freshman I had to take drawing, painting, and anatomy besides my time in the sculptor studio. The very first class on my schedule was life-drawing in the Zoo with professor Bernardelli. We were to meet that Monday at 9 a.m. at the Zoo with sketch pads, charcoal, pen and pencils, etca. I had never sketched a moving animal, had only attended a short evening course with people as models. They stood completely still. These animals were constantly moving - where could one start ?

Professor Bernardelli was quite short for a man, but awe-inspiring and very demanding. A man of few words, (usually sharply critical) he was of little help to me, so bewildered and lost. Actually, I was very familiar with the Zoo because my grandmother had been a founding member and maybe also a trustee of the Zoo. Therefore my sister and I, as children, were allowed to walk in the park with Tony, the old, gentle Chimpanzee lady. It was such a thrill to feel her rough little hands in ours. Tony's warder came along, carrying her wool shawl because she was sensitive to the slightest change in temperature.

But now Tony didn't live anymore and I was supposed to produce several good drawings within the next three hours. I started and erased, started and erased : wouldn't any animal hold still for a while, so that I could at least get a start ? ? Then a blond, slender fellow-student saw my helplessness and came to see me. He was a little older and obviously very experienced in drawing and painting. He suggested that I start with an animal that moved slowly or hardly at all, like the turtles. We went together to the reptil house and he showed me how to start. From then on he became my teacher in the Zoo, much more than the professor, and he also became the most important person in my life : my life-long companion and my husband.

### **In the 15 th. Arrondissement**

Most of our seven years in Paris we lived very frugally in the 15 th. arrondissement. That's in the south-eastern part of Paris, straight south of the famous Mont Parnasse. It's populated mostly by blue-collar workers with a sprinkling of a few artists and writers. At the southern edge of the quartier are the " abattoirs ", the stockyards, and when the wind comes from the south you can tell it.

But the Porte Versailles is also in this quartier and going out that way Versailles isn't far. At the entrance of the Villa Chauvelot, the deadend street where we had our studio. was the house where Malvina Hoffman, the American sculptor from Chicago, had lived in the twenties. But she left when the depression hit, and we lived in the middle of the block, in # 8.

It was the spring of 1933, at the beginning of Hitler's regime in Germany. Several of our artist friends came to Paris as refugees, and some even stayed with us in cramped quarters until they found equally cheap places of their own.

As soon as Hitler came to power, Paul got the idea we should get married to protect me from any harassment because of my Jewish background (actually it didn't work that way at all, I rather brought him into danger). But after being lovers for 8 years, I was very reluctant. In my view a marriage licence wasn't necessary for a lasting relationship. That is still my opinion. But in the end I gave in.

After we had secured all the required papers, we registered at the Mairie of the 15 th. arrondissement to be married, I think the 3 rd. of June, 1933.

We were advised to bring two witnesses. We could have asked our good friends Kurt and Simone or Bob and Herthie, but I was too embarrassed to admit to them that we considered this step into bourgeois life. So - whom could we ask ? One of our neighbours around the corner was M. Jaques, a cabdriver. Maybe he and his wife would be our witnesses if we paid for this time and invited them to lunch afterward. M. Jaques was pleased to do it and his nice wife also agreed.

He drove us all to the mairie. Then we sat on benches for a while among lots of other couples, some of them in wedding finery, till our names were called. After a few signatures in a booklet, called : "Carnet de famille ", we were officially married. Then the four of us had lunch at a workman's bistro near our house, where the steaks usually were horsemeat. That was perfectly alright as long as the wine was good, which it was. After lunch we thanked them, and they thanked us and we all went home.

But it took me several days to muster the courage to tell our friends. It felt like a betrayal of our convictions. Yet we never regretted it.

### **What to do with a hole - in a table or in a wall**

When Paul and I arrived in Portugal, in April 1934, On a train from Paris, with a short stop-over in Madrid to see the Prado Museum, we stayed at my aunt Laura's house for about a week. She had invited us to live in her country house in Serpa for the summer, and we stayed five months, painting and sculpting. Now spring was just starting. Out in the sun it was warm, but the houses, built to keep cool in summer, were very chilly. We wore layers of sweaters and still were grateful for the trays of hot embers that were placed under the table at mealtime. And how ingeniously this source of warmth was being used ! The top of the dining room table was full of holes, about 1/2 inch in diameter, so that the large tray of embers would not only warm our feet, but also the food on the table.

I had studied Portuguese during the winter on

my own. Since I had been to Portugal twice before, I had some idea of the pronunciation. Laura, well educated far beyond the usual Portuguese female of her generation, was fluent in French and English, with enough German even to get along when travelling. So she was very helpful in improving my Portuguese. After about a week in Lisbon, she felt I would be able to keep house by myself in so remote a place as her old hometown where nobody spoke anything but Portuguese. So we were off to the south, to Serpa. Laura came along to introduce us to life there and to her friends. This was another world ! Southern Portugal had been under Sarazene rule for a long time and the moorish influence was still evident everywhere. Laura's house was no exception. A low, white-washed brick building, built around a courtyard with a well and pump in the center. To have our own water supply was a real luxury in this small rural town of about 7000, where most women had to go to the public fountain with a clay vessel balanced on their heads to get the daily water supply. The one room I remember well was the kitchen, a bright square space that also served as dining room. A large fireplace in the center of one wall was for cooking. There was a large copper kettle hanging over it for heating water, It could be replaced with another for cooking soups and stews.

Early in the morning after we arrived, before 6 a.m., we went to the market in the center square to buy food. There was everything one needed. But because after sunrise it quickly got hot, the market closed at 7. There was no refrigeration and vegetables would wilt, fish, meat and poultry would spoil. Actually, any left-over fish was thrown away - or maybe given to the pigs. We bought fresh vegetables, a chicken, and some small fish, like large sardines. Of course Laura's maid carried it all. Later I carried all myself, of course.

When we got home I wondered what we'd do with the different items. First a wonderful salad, prepared with a vinigrette of olive oil, lemon and herbs. The chicken went into the stewpot over the fireplace together with certain vegetables. The little fish were cleaned to be

ready for frying. Frying ? ? How could that be done ?

Now Laura showed me that 6 or 8 bricks were missing in one wall. She went to the fireplace where the stew was bubbling softly, sending out whiffs of tantalizing flavor. There was a small longhandeld shovel hanging near the fireplace. With this Laura took some embers from the fireplace and brought them to the hole in the wall. This was repeated untill there was a nice bed of embers. Now she placed a small four-footed grill over the glowing embers, took a frying pan off a hook on the wall, added some olive oil and placed it on the grill. Within minutes the oil was hot and the fish went in, quickly frying on one side, then the other. At last a big bunch of parsley, stems and all, was thrown into the pan. The fish was pushed to one side, so that the parsley could get crisp. Voilà - delicious first course was ready, while the stew continued to cook slowly.

This hole in the wall would become my favorite cooking place for small amounts of food when Paul and I were by ourselves.

## **The Escape**

In the early morning hours of April 8, 1940, Paul and I listened to the radio with anxiety. We may not have slept much that night, because we had heard the news of the Nazi invasion of Denmark and their approaching Norway, unthinkable, but a fact. During the night we reviewed our options. When the news at 5 a.m. confirmed that the entrance to Oslo Fjord had been bombed, Paul's mind was made up and, trusting this unfailing good judgement, I agreed : we should leave at once.

We were certain that the Allies, and particularly England, would not tolerate Hitler in Norway and would force the Nazies out in a few days. So, by 8 a.m. we had packed our rucksacks, also took the "emergency bag" that was always at the ready, our passports, bankbook, and whatever money we had in the house, dressed very warmly because nearby there was still snow on the ground, and brought our keys to our good friends, Karl and Dagny Eide. They lived in the same appartment complex, just in the next building. We said good-by like going on a hiking trip, thinking we'd be back in a week or so.



We started walking north, but I don't remember how far we got the first day. At nightfall, I think it was that first night, we were deep in the woods in a mountainous area. We had crossed several patches of snow, but this place seemed fairly dry, there was a clearing with a woodcutters cabin. It was completely empty, but it was a shelter. Paul cut some pine branches from nearby trees, to serve as a mattress and we were tired enough to sleep quite well. The next day we headed north-east. We came through some villages, and once when we were walking on a highway, a norwegian army truck with young soldiers stopped and they offered us a ride. That was a great help, but only for a short distance. The soldiers gave us the latest news, though, and they were not good. By night we were in a village and talked with somebody - I don't remember whether man or woman, - who offered to take us to the school-teacher to ask him to let us sleep on the floor in the little school house. The young teacher agreed at once, and it was much better than in the woods because the nights were still very cold. There was a detailed map of the area on the wall and Paul copied it on his drawing pad to help us finding the way to the swedish border. In the meantime we had heard that the Nazies were already past Oslo, heading north. Now it was clear to us that we should try to get into Sweden.

The next night, after another day of walking, we slept again in the woods. Then we walked all day with the help of our map. That was the most arduous day so far. When we came to a larger village I could hardly walk anymore and only Paul's willpower kept me on my feet. There we met a young boy, maybe 12 or so, and he led us to a farmhouse, because we had heard that these people were expecting somebody from Oslo to come that night - and we certainly were the right people! This was the most unexpected good luck. The farmer and his wife thought that their relatives from Oslo would come to refuge with them. But since, at this late hour, they hadn't arrived yet, we would be welcome to stay overnight in their stead. The motherly wife instisted that we eat before retiring - and we were hungry! Then we were shown into a lovely guestroom with a clean warm bed. We could hardly believe it - we must be living a fairy tale ! And the next morning it continued in true fairy tale fashion.

Our hosts wanted us to stay with them : "...untill Norway is liberated, in one or two weeks ". But Paul knew better. We had heard on the radio that the King had fled north and that Elvrum had been bombed just a few hours after he had slept there on his flight. So we didn't want to stay.

Our hostess cooked a wonderful breakfast for us and stuffed our rucksacks with everything edible she could find that would travel well. Hearty bread, cheese, sausage and fruit. How difficult to leave this warm and hospitable family to go again into the cold un-known. But Paul's intuition proved right again. This was an ore mining area with steel plants not far away. Within a week it was a prime target for the invaders. Also we explained to our hosts that they would be in big trouble if the Nazies came and found us there. So, right after breakfast we were off in the direction Sweden. I still regret that we didn't take their adress so that we could have sent them some CARE packages after the war.

The next night, I think, we reached Lillehammer, a wellknown tourist town and a historic place. But now it had the atmosphere of war. Elvrum is not far and they had seen the bombers flying there. We walked into the town with the hope of finding another school that would let us sleep there. It was almost dark and suddenly the bomb-alert sounded. Everybody was chased from the streets into air-raid shelters. And that's where we were going to spend the night. The warden in the shelter came to talk to us right away since we were the only people in there he didn't know. Towards morning the all-clear sounded. Then a messenger arrived and the warden told us that Sigrid Unset, the famous writer, wanted to talk with us. She had become a catholic and had given shelter to a german priest who had been active in the " Zentrum Partei " the political party of catholics in Germany. She felt that he was in danger in Lillehammer, and would we not take him along into Sweden. He spoke no norwegian and couldn't possibly make it on his own. Of course we agreed and then started out as a party of three to walk towards Sweden. After a while we met a rickety bus - some buses still tried to run locally - and our priest, older than we and quite rotund, wanted to save himself some walking and insisted of boarding this bus in the direction Elvrum. We rather relied on our feet and kept on walking in the same direction, using some shortcuts. Shortly

before Elvrum we saw the bus, stranded on the highway and all the passengers standing around, our priest among them. We persuaded him to come along with us again, through Elvrum and to the Swedish border.

When we entered Elvrum, or rather what had been Elvrum a few days ago, we gasped. Nothing was standing except a few chimneys here and there, pointing like accusing fingers to the sky. The town was completely destroyed.

Paul, who had been wounded in France in World-War I, said that even in that horrible war he had not seen such devastation. Some rubble was still smoking. All of this because the Nazis hoped to catch the king there. Or maybe as a warning to other places where the king might stay. Luckily he escaped to England. Actually, on the road to Lillehammer the day before, and also today, German bombers were flying overhead several times and we ducked into ditches.

But then, at last, that evening we reached the Swedish border with our priest in tow. The border guard was prepared for refugees, of which we were about the first to come along at this point of entry. The Swedish king had decreed to let all refugees in, but bring them to a kind of assembly camp where we could be sorted out, because the Swedes were very concerned not to let Nazis or Communists enter the country under the pretext of being refugees. (Hitler and Stalin were friends at that time). In Norway the fifth column, known as "Quislings" after their leader, had proven dangerously treacherous. So, for the night we had to stay in the border barracks, sleeping on our coats on the wooden floor. We didn't get much rest, but at least I think, the place was heated, because I don't remember being especially cold.

The next morning a small bus appeared with two policemen on board, to take the three of us to the camp. About noontime, I think, we stopped at another border crossing and picked up a few more refugees. It was late afternoon when we arrived at our destination. That was a small, very simple resort, operated by the government for blue-collar workers on a medical vacation. There were hot mineral springs. Now, in mid-April, it was not open for the season yet, but had quickly been staffed to receive the refugees. We were housed in small cottages where couples had a room for themselves,

while single people had to double up, except our priest who was allowed a single room. The mineral baths were not in operation yet, but we could use the bathhouses for plain baths and also for washing clothes. Our rooms had oldfashioned washstands, no running water. Food was served in a large dining room, filled beyond capacity at every meal. I volunteered at once to help in the kitchen and as a waitress. In the kitchen I was needed only once in a while for cleaning vegetables, but I helped to serve almost every meal in the crowded dining room. Being thin and limber, I could negotiate the small spaces between the tables better than the larger swedish women. As a reward, I guess, I was allowed to telephone with our Swedish friends several times, free of charge, in order to get us released soon. Once there came a large truck, equipped like a drugstore, where we could buy toothpaste, soap, cigarettes, chocolate, etc. That truck ran out of supplies soon with so many people having been deprived of these things for several weeks.

After three weeks at the camp, Paul and I, our priest, and another young man were the first to be allowed to leave because our Swedish friends had vouched for us. On the train to Stockholm the priest told us that he would be staying in a small convent in Stocksund, a suburb up the hill above Stockholm. Strangely, that was our destination also, because an uncle of mine and his wife were living there at that time and had arranged for a furnished room nearby. Now our priest wanted to show his gratitude for taking him under our wing ( while at camp I had washed his clothes and mended his socks ) and invited us to come to see him the next day. The convent was one tram-stop above ours, so that was easy. We went to see him the next day around tea-time as we had promised. He introduced us to the Mother Superior, telling her about us. When she heard that we knew something about gardening, she hired us on the spot to start a vegetable garden and take care in general of the large parklike property. Luckily the king had just decreed that all refugees from Norway and Denmark would be allowed to work in Sweden.

So we were able to start the very next day. The nuns were so nice to us. Particularly one very young from Holland who was worried about her own family. They thought that we "looked so thin" and

fed us five meals a day. We accepted gratefully because the food in the camp had been adequate, but no more. Of course our salary was small, just enough for the tramfare and rent, but with all the good food we didn't need anything else.

We worked very hard at our job, sustained by being appreciated. One day I had to trim a hedge. It was a long hedge and the shears were quite heavy, but I kept on working, pleased with the results. That night my arms felt like falling off. But the next day I was able to go back to work. On sundays we often went to museums and Galleries. Shortly before the war Paul had a show of watercolors at the Gallery "Faerg og Form" in Stockholm. Now they wanted to keep the unsold pieces for a while hoping to sell some more. (These unsold paintings returned to me 38 years later, when friends in Evanston went to visit their swedish relatives. They found the Gallery even though it had a new owner and had moved twice. Miraculously a package with Paul's name was found in the basement. Nobody knew anymore who Paul was or where we lived, but the paintings were in the package and our friends brought them to me - an emotional re-union because Paul had died 9 years before.)

Whenever we needed to go to the U.S. consulate or do other errands connected with our trip, we would get a day off. On one of these visits to Stockholm we watched the news roll by on top of a newspaper building. France had fallen, Paris had surrendered, the Nazis were in control and no sign that Hitler could be defeated. We were crushed - I think I cried. Once in a while I would work on a Sunday cleaning house for a family in Stocksund to make a little more money. In the meantime the grounds of the convent looked pretty good and the vegetables did well, also.

There was a beautiful old villa on the property where the nuns operated a kind of half-way house for recovered mental patients to stay there with their families before returning to everyday life. These families enjoyed the well-kept grounds, and some were even interested to see the vegetables grow. That vegetable garden was our special joy, it was doing so well. By the time we left for Moscow and beyond, in early July, there was already much to be harvested.

Strangely, I can't recall at all our feelings when we left Sweden. I don't even remember our saying good-bye to the nuns, our friends, nor my aunt and uncle in Stocksund. Yet, it must have been with a mixture of regret and excited anticipation, tempered by the fear that something still might go wrong.

So far this narrative gives just the dry facts, evoding to touch the emotional side.

We left Oslo in the belief that we'd be back soon. Everything we owned was in that little flat. All of Paul's paintings and painting equipment, also my sculptures. All our clothes, skis and simple, but adequate furnishings. Yet, also a secretary from my great-grandmother and a sewing table from my grandmother and, above all, lots of books. (The two heirlooms, some books, paintings and sculptures, miraculously, found the way to us after the war, thanks to Karl Eide.) Everyday during our escape we realized more and more clearly that we would never be back and probably never see any of our belongings again. Of course, our friends, the Eides, had our key and they would probably try to save some of it. Our rent was paid til May and we trusted that Karl Eide, a seasoned businessman (and sunday painter ) would do the right thing - and he did. But the uncertainty and danger we were facing, not to mention the exhaustion, cold and fear during the week until we reached Sweden, was almost beyond description. Only Paul's good judgement and his steadiness pulled us through.

Once in Stockholm and able to work, we got immediately in contact with the U.S. consulate in the hope that our visas would reach us soon, maybe by diplomatic pouch from Oslo. But communications were completely cut off at the moment, so the U.S. consul advised us to get as close as possible to the United States and wait for our visas there. Now we had to find a way to do that. During that time no country wanted to give anybody a transit visa without a permanent visa at the end. But how could we get that? We tried this and that it seemed hopeless. Finally Paul's sister-in-law got us in contact with a distant relative of hers, Ragnar Schlyter, who represented Haiti in Sweden. Through him we got a permanent visa to Haiti and that enabled us to get all the required transit visas: Russia, Japan and Panama. By giving our savings book as security we now were able to borrow just enough money to

buy our third class tickets to Moscow, through Siberia, to Japan and over the Pacific to Panama. There, we hoped, our U.S. visas would catch up with us and we then would be able to avoid going on to Haiti. By prolonging our stay in Panama, this is the way it worked out in the end.

P.S.

We've been asked : didn't the Norwegians fight back ? Of course they did, and died, too. But Norway was a completely peace-oriented country, and their small, in-experienced army who never expected to fight a war, was no match to Hitlers super-mechanized, war-trained forces. Even the Allied couldn't do it without U.S. help. Several months after we had first met her in the bomb-shelter in Lillehammer, we met Sigrid Undset on the street in Kobe. She also was on her way to the United States (but equipped with a visa ! ) There we learned that her son had been killed in action.

### **Third Class Through Siberia**

In the spring of 1940 the war in Europe erupted with renewed fury. The Nazis invaded Denmark and Norway in early April, the Netherlands, Belgium and a France a little later. Many people, who had fled to these countries because of Hitler, were trapped. Paul and I were among those in Norway. We fled to Sweden, and after about two month, on the good advise of the U.S. consul in Stockholm, we tried to make our way close to the United States. For two years already we had applied for visas, and our number was to come up within a week when the invasion came. So we had to find a country that would let us stay for the short time it would take to receive our entry visas to the United States. The one country willing to take us was Haiti. But on the way there we were allowed four weeks in Panama. We hoped that our visas would reach us there to save us the detour via Haiti. In the end that was the way it worked out, but we didn't know that when we left Stockholm on the way to Moscow - the first stop on our journey. Friends in Sweden loaned us the money for the trip, just enough for 3rd.class tickets. In Sweden we had been able to earn our living by working as gardeners in a small convent above Stockholm. We got very good food there, but only little money, so we had to accept that loan.

When traveling in the Soviet Union one had to buy an Intourist ticket-booklet in advance. Besides the trainfare, every night in a hotel and every meal had a separate ticket. Since Russia had just occupied Riga, we had to fly from Stockholm to Moscow, (our first flight ever), on a tiny twelve seater plane. As soon as we landed we were in the hands of an Intourist guide. When we were installed in a hotel for the night, four to a room, we found that we were part of a group of about 40 people, almost all Europeans, just two Americans. The Siberian Express that was to take us to Vladivostok went only twice a week, so we had to wait for its departure. I think we stayed in Moscow for two days. We were taken sight-seeing in groups according to our interests. Paul and I had the good fortune to spend several hours in a famous collection of con-temporary art, still housed in the elegant small palais of the count who had collected the paintings. We also visited the Kremlin and other museums, and walked through the city, always in the company of a young woman guide and two British engineers from our group who were interested in the same things we were. Then, one evening we could board the train. Paul and I had so little luggage that it was easy, but one of our group, the Swedish actress Signe Hasso, on her way to Hollywood, lost some of her suitcases. That was not discovered until we were well on the way, but our guide for the trip, a student fluent in all major languages, was able to arrange for the bags to follow on the next train a few days later.

Ours was a very long train. Second and first class were at the head, not far behind the engine, then came the dining car, then all the third class, car after car after car, filled with Russian travellers, and finally, at the very end, our car. Paul and I were installed in the next to last compartment, together with a Swedish woman. In the very last compartment were the two English engineers, a middle-aged American, who had been on a visit to relatives in Norway when the invasion came, and a 19 year old American seaman from the merchant-marine who had been torpedoed off the coast of Norway. We seven were the only non-russians in third class.

Already at our first meal, though, we learned that "third class" referred only to the actual train accomodation. In all other respects we were treated like the other non-russians. So, we were invited to



take our meals with the first class passengers, all from our group. We were served first, ahead of the many hundreds of Russians, who would be allowed in the dining car only after the 40 of us had finished. We from the last car, had to push our way through the corridors of car after car packed with people - it seemed like thousands. Only 6 of our little group could go to the dining room, though, because the young seaman hadn't had the money to buy meal tickets. But we found a way out. The meals were very simple, but plentiful and there was always enough black-bread, cold cuts, sour cream and cranberry-sauce on the tables to supplement the mono-tonous menu. So, the six of us would make sandwiches of whatever we could get and pack our pockets and bags full to bring some nourishment to our hungry young companion. Hot tea was always available free of charge from our conductor, a very friendly young Russian who served, I think, only the two last cars and looked after us like a mother, even though we could converse only in sign-language, except for the few words of Russian we were learning during the trip. Of course there also was our multilingual guide who would come around periodically to check whether we were alright and had everything we needed, also translate to our conductor if necessary and teach us a few more words of Russian. Most of his time he spent, of course, with the first and second class passengers and was successful in re-uniting Signe Hasso with her luggage in Vladivostok, and it was obvious that he had a crush on her.

The first two days and nights we rode through rather industrial districts, stopping in several cities like Nijni-Novgorod and others, and it was not too interesting. Each of us had a corner seat in a compartment for six during the day. Since we were only three in our compartment, one corner was free and some-times during the day one or two people were allowed to sit with us between local stops. For the night two boards were lowered from the upper walls to serve as bunkbeds, so that four people could stretch out, 2 on the lower benches, 2 on the bunks. Under the seats was storage space for the mattresses and pillows, maybe even blankets. That I don't remember because I spent the nights standing in the corridor. I am very allergic to insect bites and no sooner had I tried to lie down the first night, when I knew that there were bedbugs (whose acquaintance I had made on our first night in Paris nine years

earlier). Even though I had several boxes of insect powder, which had served us and our room mates in Moscow very well, I didn't feel safe and rather watched the summer-twilight of the northern sky at the corridor window. When the mattresses were put away, I'd dust our benches with the insect powder and could cat-nap off and on during the day. Then I realized we were lucky to be in third class and not in the oversuffed 1st. or 2nd., where the threat of bugs was there all day as well. As we rode on, the landscape became more interesting and soon after Tomsk we were in Siberia. Summers are short there, but intense - and it was the beginning of July.

The white nights during mid-summer produce flowers and small fruits rapidly. We could hardly believe the masses of irises in incredibly varied colors. From the purest white, soft cream, subtle Naples-Yellow, to brighter and brighter orange and reds, and blues and glowing purple and then purples so dark they were almost black. In the near distance were small clumps of thin birch trees, probably the only trees that could grow in this poor soil and harsh climate. And even they could not develop to a substantial thickness. Besides the abundant irises in the meadows and along the small streams, the banks along the railroad were covered with lovely little wildflowers and wild strawberries. Our train stopped quite frequently out in the open. Sometimes it was a bypass point and we had to wait for a train from the opposite direction before we could continue our journey on this one-track line. Other times we could not see any reason for the stops, but more and more often some Russians from the adjoining compartments of our car - mostly the younger men - would jump from the train at a stop, scramble up the embankment and return with little bouquets of wildflowers or handfuls of fragrant strawberries. Strangely, though, the train would start again, slowly, but without as much as warning whistle. When we passed our Russian fellow passengers on the way to the dining car, we saw many compartments decorated with fresh flowers in teaglasses or mugs. After all, these small spaces were our home for 10 days and they certainly could stand some cheering up. Soon one stop, when we saw our neighbors jump out of the car and scrambling up the flowering embankment, Paul decided he wanted to bring me a bouquet also, and maybe even some berries. Before I knew, he was out and up the step

embankment, and way up, higher than the others and he started picking, completely absorbed in the abundance of color and fragrance. It was only minutes, when I saw the other men racing down - and already the train started. I shouted in panic, Paul finally straightened up, realized that the train was moving, and ran down. Luckily our nice conductor had observed it all and stood at the open car door - the very last one on this immense train - ready for action. Paul, a good athlete, ran and jumped while our conductor hung himself out as far as he could, holding on to the handgrip, and succeeded in pulling Paul into the train. Probably only seconds had elapsed, but for me it was an eternity and my heart almost had stood still. In my mind I saw Paul in this wilderness, without a passport or money nor knowledge of the language and no train passing by for several days! Probably our conductor would have pulled the emergency brake if he hadn't been able to get hold of Paul's hand, but that didn't occur to me until much later. Those moments of anxiety were like a lifetime and etched into my mind for the rest of my life.

Shortly after this episode our train made a real stop at a village, where two tall oung men joined the three of us in our compartment. They were to get off at the next stop, a few hours later. That stop was Byrobidjan, a new jewish settlement. Since they spoke jiddisch, which is related to the ancient german language, we could converse with each other in a fashion, and they were really funny, maybe a little drunk. They tried to persuade us to come with them to live in Byrobidjan : "What do you want to go to America for? It's much nicer here" (in Siberia !!!). Of course it was just a joke. I didn't mention yet that there was one man on the train who would pass by off and on, obviously an official. He wore a hat while no one else did in this heat. He was a kind of supervisor, but spoke only russian, so that he needed our student guide to translate if he wanted to talk with us. We seven called him "the commissar". When the two young Jews had come to our compartment, the "commissar" came in to talk with them a few times, just friendly talk, it seemed. Soon after his last visit our young companions were at their destination and under handshaking and waving left the train. Not long after they had gotten off, the commissar passed through again, perhaps to check whether they had gotten off where they were supposed to.

But this time he was without his hat and looking in all compartments and in every corner, obviously for something missing; his hat. He must have left it on our bench when he was there before, talking to the young men. A hat was a very valuable item in the Russia of 1940, a symbol of wealth and status. Somehow our young friends must have succeeded in spiriting that hat away, probably to be sold or bartered for a bottle of vodka in the next village. After that our "commissar" was hatless like everyone else, and much of his authority had gone with it.

Soon the landscape became very beautiful and one early morning, between 3 and 4 a.m., we were passing lake Baikal. The sun was up and made the mist over the lake shimmer mysteriously. Now we were not far from our destination and we arrived in Vladivostoc without any other incidents.

But here are some footnotes:

Our roommates in the hotel in Moscow ( on 4 mattresses on the floor ) were Fritz and Tilde Schlenk, a young German half-jewish couple (like we ). They had their U.S.A.-visas and would be in the United States long before us. He was a scientist, very much in demand here then. They settled near Chicago since he joined Argonne Laboratory, and when we moved to the Chicago area we saw them again, many years after our train ride together (but they in the 2nd. class).

Another footnote: about the "commissar" - In the compartment next to ours on the right, was a Russian family with a daughter of about 20. One afternoon, when it was particularly hot and sticky, she passed out. I happened to be in the corridor and saw it, and quickly got some Eau de Cologne that friends had given me for the trip, doused a hankie with it and let the girl breath this. It really helped, but at that moment the commissar passed by, motioned me away and scolded the Russian family for accepting help from a non-russian, thus admitting weekness or inadequacy. At least that was our interpretation. Our stay in Vladivostoc was short but memorable. More about that later.

### **Vladiwostoc:**

When we, the 40 non-russian passengers on the Transsiberian Express, arrived in Vladivostoc on

a hot day in July 1940, we were soon installed in a simple but clean hotel. The next morning we were to go our separate ways. Most of our group were bound for North or South America, but one young English couple with a small baby and the two British engineers who had been part of our small group in third class, hoped to get to England inspite of U-boats in the Atlantic. (They may have ended up in Canada.) A few people had China for their destination. Shanghai at that time seemed very attractive to refugees from Hitler. The rest of us were to get a boat that would take us along the Korean coast to Tsuruga, the northern-most port of Japan. From there people would go their own ways. The next morning when we were all gathered for breakfast, our guide announced that our boat was delayed by several days and that we had to wait for it here in Vladivostoc. - - Instant panic!!! All our Intourist tickets had been used up with this breakfast. Since every night in a hotel and every meal was paid for in advance, carefully counted day by day, there was no room for delays. Nobody had any russian money - that was not permitted, and some, like the young American seaman and Paul and I, had not a dime to spare, just our tickets and a minimum. What would happen to us? Maybe we would all end up in jail? But then our guide continued that we should meet again at noon because he would try to work something out by then. In the meantime, though, we could not leave the hotel because Vladivostoc was a military port and there was a war on. (At that time Stalin and Hitler were still buddies). In the hotel, Paul and I had a tiny basement room all to ourselves and it had a window, protected by an iron grill, yet we were able to look out to the street on pavement level and we used the hours til noon drawing the people passing by. Everybody was nervous when we met at noon. Finally we were all together and our guide appeared - - all smiles! He announced that he had been able to convince the authorities that we had come into this situation through no fault of ours. It was decided that we all would be guests of the Soviet Union until our boat would come in. Room and board, with excellent meals (quite a change from the simple fare on the train,) and even entertainment, would be paid by the state. As a starter we were invited to a performance of a famous Chinese-Russian circus that evening. A big round of applaus followed that speech and relief and excitement filled the room. There was one

condition, though, we could not leave the hotel except in a group and with a guide.

But now, being assured of our immediate future, we could enjoy the good dinner and the really extraordinary circus, with stupendous gymnasts and hair-raising bear acts. Our guide, too, was happy because he could escort Signe Hasso to the circus and enjoy her company all evening. On the third morning our boat had come in and we could leave, looking to the future with more confidence because of this experience.

### **Across the Pacific and Beyond.**

In mid-July 1940 Paul and I left Sweden to start the next part of our Odysee: via Moscow - across Siberia - to Japan and Panama. I have already told about our trip from Moscow to Vladivostok. We sailed from that Russian port along the Korean coast to Tsuruga, the most northern port of Japan. On our boat were mostly Asian people, but among the few non-Asians was a young English couple with a baby boy, maybe 4 months old. The parents carried him in a basket between them. This fair, blue eyed little creature became the center of attention when we landed in Tsuruga. All Japanese women in sight gathered around the young family, wanted to touch the baby and wanted to know all about him.

Paul and I boarded the next train to Kobe, from where we were supposed to leave 4 days later on a Japanese boat to take us over the Pacific. When we arrived in Kobe after a very fast 8 hour ride, we stood on the platform with our shabby luggage not knowing what to do. Just then a distinguished looking middle-aged man in a white linen suit approached us. He was an American clergyman, a Dr. Meyers, who had just brought his wife and daughter to the train into the cooler mountains. He had at once recognized us for what we were: completely bewildered refugees. When he learned that we didn't know where to stay, he brought us to a little pension for students, operated by his church. A Japanese couple who spoke English were the houseparents there.

I think it was a Friday, because Dr. Meyers invited us to his church for Sunday morning. Of course we went out of courtesy to him, but I don't remember anything except that it was very hot and we were

given a fan. Everybody, we included, used those fans constantly. We had landed into a heatwave - it was 100½ plus ! The morning after we arrived in Kobe we saw the norwegian consul who lived near our pension, walking by, clad in shorts and sandals, nothing else except for a small towel around his neck to catch the persperation. This attire amazed us, but we would have liked to do the same.

After checking in at the travel agent where we found out that our ship was delayed in India and might be as much as 10 days late, we walked through the street markets and saw many astonishing things, like crickets in little wooden cages to hang in windows. For pennies we bought a few sketch-books, opening like accordions, and for 0,10 cts. a 1904 English-German dictionary that I still have. We went to the ancient city of Kioto to see the famous temples there. We also wanted to see Nara. But even though we had taken a lot of protective shots before starting out from Stockholm, one had been missed. I think it was typhoid or yellow fever. Without that shot we wouldn't be allowed to continue our trip. We both had a violent reaction, maybe intensified by the heat, and came down with a high fever. That made our trip to Nara impossible, since by the time we had recovered, our boat finally arrived.

A few glimpses from those 12 days in Kobe:

1. We had to get some cooler clothing. Particularly Paul, with his heavy tweeds, right for Norway, but impossible in this 100 - 105ø heat. So we went to a big Department Store to get something more comfortable. This store was airconditioned, a new experience, and really cool, almost cold. That was such a pleasure that we stayed for hours, having lunch in the Cafeteria on the 4 th. floor, also something new, including the food. When we finally left, in the afternoon, and went out into the street, the heat hit us like a wall of fire. We gasped for air and I had the sensation of being thrown to the pavement. It took us several minutes to get over this shock.

2. As I have mentioned already, one day on the street we met Sigrid Undset again and heard from her that her son who had been in the Norwegian army, had been killed in action. She was on her way to the United States also, but of course had a visa and went straight on, while we had to go to Panama first to

wait for our visa.

3. At night we often had a "floor show", which was particularly welcome and entertaining while we were in bed with the fever. It was a tiny gray mouse with enormous ears, a real acrobat. Somehow it got up to the curtain rod and performed a most amusing dance routine up there.

The ship we were boarding was a very old German vessel, part passenger, part cargo. She had been given to the Japanese after World-War 1, as reparation. Japan had been on the side of the Allies in W.W.1, which I had forgotten. It was a small boat as an "Ocean Liner", but comfortable enough. We were in second class, which meant that Paul shared a cabin with three other men, and I with three other women. Two of them were a mother-daughter team, also German refugees, bound for Lima, Peru. The third was a teacher, about my age, from Wilmette, Illinois, Marian Thayer, who had been teaching English in the Japanese school where the crown prince was educated. She had been called back home because her father was terminally ill. Later, when we were called to the Art Institute, she was of great help to us, particularly when we moved to Wilmette. Now, on the boat, she helped Paul with his English studies. And we became good friends. Also on the boat, but in first class, were Fritz und Tilde Schlenk whom we had met already in Moscow, and who had made the trip to Vladivostok with us. I think they boarded our ship when we stopped in Yokohama, before heading out to the Pacific.

The food on this unpretentious ship was very good, and the menus, written in English, obviously by a Japanese, were a source of delighted conversation. I remember one item : "Baked Spring of Chicken". One of our table companions - we were seated at long simple tables - was a catholic priest, slender and bearded, called Father Walters. He had an important birthday, maybe 75, during the crossing, and the captain and crew arranged a very nice party for him. The all-Japanese crew included two young doctors, one of them had studied in Heidelberg. We had the opportunity to test his skills when Paul came down with a strepped throat after our stop in Hawaii. We stayed in port there for two days, I think. Most passengers went on land sightseeing, but Paul and I could not get off because we didn't



have a U.S. visa. That was no hardship however, because colorful visitors and vendors came on board. Paul was busy sketching all the interesting types of people, and one of our fellow passengers brought us the most luscious pineapple I ever ate, cost: one quarter ! This passenger, a middle aged American lady, gave me an old sundress of hers. I quickly got busy sewing to make it fit we. That came in handy when we were sailing south. I wished I'd had it already in Japan!

After we left Hawai we ran into bad weather, though. We had taken on some new passengers and cargo. One more man was put into Paul's cabin. Paul, of course, offered the newcomer his bunkbed and slept on the couch below the porthole. During one night when the waves were high, one hit that porthole. It may not have been tightly closed - anyway, Paul got drenched. He didn't want to disturb the others, so he stayed put under the wet sheets. About two days later he came down with a high fever and strepped throat. That's when we got acquainted with the two doctors. The older one, who had studied in Heidelberg, was really excellent and got Paul well enough to stand on deck when we landed in San Francisco and the U.S. inspectors came on board to check whether there were any sick people on board. After that inspection, the passengers bound for San Francisco were allowed to leave. Later, in San Diego, people could disembark without further formalities. We, of course, could not set foot yet on American soil, but with our transit visas to Panama we were able to go on land in Mexico and Nicaragua. In Mexico it was the small port of Monterey. Our ship ankered there for two days and we went ashore. There was a small shark-protected beach where we could swim, and for the first time we saw pelicans outside a zoo. They were all around us, diving for fish and bobbing in the gentle waves. The sand glittered like gold and some of it stuck even to our skin. Later, back on board we learned that it was a kind of isinglass mixed with the sand that made it appear so golden.

Another first for us: to see corn on the cob being roasted on the street, with the leaves still on to protect the corn from burning and keep it juicy.

At one stop in Nicaragua we could go ashore in the early evening and stay late to see the amazing

fireworks in honor of their national holiday. People in colorful costumes carried fireworks on their backs and as they danced about in the large open park, the fireworks exploded one by one. It was exciting, but also somewhat scary. At the many short stops we made along the coast, we loaded and unloaded some cargo, and a few new passengers had joined us as well. Most of the Americans had left in San Francisco or San Diego, so there were fewer passengers. After San Diego a small canvass swimming pool was installed on the upper deck. Paul went swimming in his trunks, while I wore a makeshift two-piece affair made out of that old sundress I had been given.

After Nicaragua we were soon in Panama. There a young cousin of mine, Hans J., had found a room for us. As mathematician and statistician he was employed by the Panamanian government to help with the 1940 census. Our landlords were also refugees and our room was very nice. The upper part of the walls was open to let the air flow through - - this was already the tropics. Our first priority was to see the American consul, so he could request for our visas to be sent to him as soon as they came through. We hoped that would be before our transit visas of 4 weeks ran out. That wasn't going to be. It took another 7 weeks to get our visas, the magic key to open the United States for us.

During those 7 weeks we really had to keep our pennies together, since we had not counted on such a long wait. Luckily bananas were very cheap, nourishing, and came in different varieties. One highpoint was when Hans J. invited us to see a new movie, called: "Gone with the wind"!

A few glimpses from Panama:

1. We walked all over the city and one time we saw an interesting statue in the center of a small park. I walked all around it and almost ran into another person, a middle-aged American lady. Immediately she started a conversation, and within minutes I heard her life story. Of course she was also curious about us. Paul was sitting nearby, sketching. I was amazed at such intimate talk with a complete stranger. To this day it's difficult for me to talk to strangers anything more than a few polite words, usually about the weather.

2. After about 4 weeks in Panama we were already running out of funds, because we hadn't anticipated such a long stay. So I cabled my cousin Robert in New York, who had given us the affidavit, to help us out. The answer came fast, also by cable, but I had to go to a bank to translate that into cash. A bank where they spoke English was on one side of a little square with benches and playing children. There was no point in Paul coming in with me, so I just took his passport along together with mine and went inside, while Paul settled on a bench, sketching the playing children. It probably took me 15-20 minutes to complete the transaction and when I came out Paul was gone! I walked all around the square and with my limited Spanish I tried to find a clue - to no avail. Finally, finally, I saw Paul coming on one of the streets leading into the square, on the side of a policeman. I ran towards them, relieved and concerned at the same time. The policeman spoke no English, but this much became clear : we should come with him to headquarters, where one officer spoke English, so we could explain our situation. The gist of the matter was this: with a war on, the Canal-Zone was deemed a very vulnerable place, and a person sketching in a park, without a passport, was highly suspicious. Even if he only sketched children. With my appearance and our passports all was quickly cleared up and the English speaking officer wished us luck when we left.

Then, after 7 weeks of waiting and hoping, we finally got our visas and went by train along the Panama canal to board the boat that would take us to New York. It was so-called Banana Boat of the United Fruit Line.

Our main cargo were indeed bananas, but there were also about 12 passengers. Although this was a cargo ship, the women dressed for dinner and I felt acutely that my wardrobe was totally inadequate. But we felt elated and happy, so that didn't matter too much.

When we saw the Statue of Liberty emerging out of the morning mist, it was a moment of intense emotion, and I know I cried – I don't remember about Paul. Then we landed, and my cousins Robert and Audrey were there and all went so well. It was November 17, 1940. Seven months of uncertainty, fear and hope had come to an end.

## **Our First Year in the United States**

If I was a good storyteller I could do this a lot better, but I'll try.

We arrived in New York harbour on a "Banana Boat" from Panama where we finally had received our entry visas to the United States, that had been waylaid when the Nazis invaded Norway.

It was a mild day, this November 17, 1940, and for us the end of a seven- month journey. My american cousin Robert and his wife Audrey who had signed the affidavit that made our visas possible, were at the quai and we spent our first few days at their rented summer cottage on the Long Island seashore. A few memorable moments of those days : my cousins' little dog Penny fell immediately in love with Paul, which made us all the more welcome. The next day was a really hot Indian-summer day and Paul got the worst sunburn of his life - and that on November 18 ! Next: Audrey was bothered by a mouse, or mice, in the kitchen. Paul, practical and inventive, asked for some broken glass, pushed the bits into the mousehole, sealing it off tightly - and that was the end of the mouse-visits.

The next day, I think, we left the island and moved to a furnished room that Robert had rented for us. It was in a pleasant suburban neighborhood in Rego Park, where many recent immigrants from central Europe lived at that time. The subway was nearby, so the next morning we went into the city to register with one of the refugee agencies to try to find work. That was not so easy because it was still the end of the depression era. But the director of the agency referred us to the American Friends Service Committee because she knew that they had just started a course for people in our situation who were interested in teaching. The director of that course was Francis Bosworth, "Boz" for short. Our meeting, the next day, started a lifelong friendship. Boz, the most charismatic and persuasive person I ever met, succeeded in getting some of his friends, most of them College Professors, to volunteer their time to teach various subjects - from English grammar to American history, literature and music. We met twice a week, I think, and had to do

homework, too. Besides we had field trips to inner-city schools and settlement houses.

The Quaker community was most hospitable. They invited the group to teaparties in their homes where we met "real native Americans". At one of those parties I met a young woman sculptor, Jo Jenks. She offered me to share her studio in exchange for my teaching her plaster casting. That was a real break for me. I did several sculptures there and was able to cast some portraits I did on commission. I also started teaching ceramics at the Henry-street settlement house. On the side I was a "cleaning lady" once a week in our neighborhood, while Paul was busy painting designs on handwoven waste baskets, imported from the Orient. We thought it a shame to "embellish" those beautiful baskets, but they didn't sell well, and the importer, my cousin's boss, felt that some colorful design might help. That obviously was so, because every week we got a stack of maybe 100 baskets to paint. I'm surprised that our landlady didn't object to this "cottage industry".

Meantime my cleaning job gave me some valuable introduction into American life. One glimpse of that: my job was in the apartment of a doctor. Both he and his wife were of Italian descent and the lady was extatic when she heard that I had been to Florence, Venise, Verona and Milano. She had never been to Italy. Now when cleaning a house it was quite obvious to me that the windows were part of it, so, one day I proceeded to clean the windows. The apartment was on the 6th. floor. As I was cleaning the windows inside and out, I was surprised when on the opposite windows women appeared, one after another, pointing at me and talking to each other as I was perched on the windowsill, leaning way out to reach all the corners of the windows. When I mentioned this to an American friend the next day, she almost fainted laughing: no cleaning lady in New York ever did windows, not even at street level - - on the 6th. floor it's madnee! The lady I worked for (at 40 cents a n hour) hadn't said a word, but after that I didn't do another window for her.

After a few months into the course, Boz, always thinking of unusual things, introduced Paul and me to Mrs. Warburg, grande dame of th 5th. Avenue. Not only did she buy some of Paul's drawings, but she also invited us for tea at her appartment. We were so

innocent, that we found that quite natural but when we entered the place we were stunned by so much elegance and wealth. At tea a uniformed maid served tiny sandwiches, some of them rolled up with white asparagus inside, which impressed me greatly. The parties we were invited to with the study group were always in lovely homes with good paintings and grand pianos, etc., but this was at a different level.

Not long after this visit, in May, the course was over and we were eager to leave New York and start our real American life. We had two options: An offer to work as a couple on the estate of a professor of Art History at Yale, or join a small group of artists and artisans in a hostel in a small village in Massachusetts where we could concentrate on our artwork. The job in Connecticut was tempting, because we would earn 75,- a month (together) which seemed like a fortune then, and have room and board also. It would be just a try and either side could terminate the agreement without hard feelings. So, we took this job. With the other option to fall back on. We had a nice little apartment all to ourselves. I was to cook and to take care of all kitchen work, while Paul was to work outside. It was a large family: the parents, three grown children, two younger children, a companion (a young German woman who was very helpful to us) and a beautiful St. Bernhard dog. A cleaning woman came several times a week to clean and wash, but I was responsible for the kitchen. This was a sprawling old country home, the large kitchen had a coalburning stove and just a small gas burner on a table for quick coffee making. I had to learn fast to cook and bake on a coal range, to bank the fire at night, so I could revive it quickly in the morning. Last thing was to set the breakfast table for eight, with three dishes, two glasses, and cups and saucers for each person. A lot of dishes ! and dishwashing, of course, by hand with water heated on the stove. Lunch was easy because only the younger children, a boy and a girl, and the companion would usually be there. It was a light meal and very informal, but dinner was a major event. The professor ate at his club the first nights until the lady of the house had assured herself of my cooking skills. They seemed alright - - the family also liked my baking and my homemade everything. But the outside work was too hard on Paul, at that time a very slight person, and it was a little too much for me, too. So, after a month we

decided to quit and during the next two weeks I baked and baked to fill every cookie jar in the house before leaving.

One powerful memory from that time: on one of our days off, we went to the chapel at Yale University where Picasso's painting "Guernica" was housed for the time being. We had seen that painting in 1938 when the paint was still wet on it. It was hanging in the Spanish Pavillon at the World Fair in Paris. Seeing it now, with the war raging in Europe, Paris under Nazi occupation, and my parents trapped in occupied Denmark, the power of this painting was almost too much. Later, of course, we saw it at the MOMA, and more recently I saw it again in Madrid where it has been returned. Every time it has been deeply moving, but the impact it had on us that time in New Haven was overwhelming. We stood in awe, shivered and cried.

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Now our second option became reality when Reverend Carl Sangree and his wife picked us up in Connecticut, to take us to Cummington, Massachusetts, where Dr. Sangree was the minister of the only church for the village and surrounding farms, a small, white-painted congregational church. We were to live at the Refugee-Hostel that the Sangrees had founded, donating a lovely old house to be the home and workplace for 7 - 8 artists and artisans, all refugees from central Europe. As far as I remember two couples from Vienna and one man from Germany were our companions in the little red house. Besides our bedroom we were given the spacious barn with a wood-burning belly-stove as our studio, and since it was still June, Paul and I started at once to plant a vegetable garden in the backyard to provide some of our food. The hostel was supported by the Congregational Service Committee and all housework was shared by the residents. But our main effort went into our artistic endeavour. Paul and I worked with great intensity, as though some stored-up creative force was driving us. By fall we had produced enough work to think of exhibiting. Carl Sangree may have been only the minister of a small country church, but his vision and interests went far beyond. Probably not more than ten years older than Paul, he had travelled widely, was interested in all the arts, and was more of a teacher than a preacher. He worked with great skill to promote the artists at the hostel, and

succeeded in arranging the first exhibition for Paul and me in this country. That was to be early in December at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

Some glimpses from this time: Paul had several private students and then was asked to teach all painting classes at the "Cummington School in the Hills", a noted summer academy that still exists as an artist retreat. I earned some pocket money in September picking apples in one of the big orchards. One day I met a young woman I knew quite well on the street. The day before I had been asked to come to a bridal shower for her. I didn't really know what a "Shower" meant, but was told to bring a little gift. (I think I choose a small painting of Paul's). So, when I met Sis, I said that I was looking forward to seeing her the next day at her shower. She flushed with embarrassment, put her finger on her lips and said : "please don't tell anybody that you told me about the shower. That's supposed to be a surprise and it would spoil it for everybody if I wasn't completely surprised". I had never heard of surprise parties before - so that was another lesson in "Americana".

One very cold and rainy November night, about 3 a.m., we heard great commotion outside, then the call " Fire, Fire ", and a knock on the door. "Every able-bodied man to help in the fire brigade" (no fire engine yet at that time, I heard they have one now.) So Paul, the youngest of the hostel group, quickly dressed as warm as he could and off he went. The fire was on one of the farms in the hills, and the barn burnt down, but the animals and the main house could be saved. It was many hours later before Paul came home, drenched and cold. That day people stopped me where-ever I went, to tell me how wonderful Paul had been, how he had organized the water operation with buckets from hand to hand, and how tireless he had worked, drenched as he was by the rain and swapping water. "He was the best of all the men".

Then came Thanksgiving, the most American of all holidays. This was already our second one. The year before, we had arrived in New York only about ten days earlier, my cousin Robert's younger sister invited us to her small bachelot flat. She served chicken legs and cranberry sauce and it was a memorable feast ! Now, in Cummington, the whole hostel group was invited at the Sangrees, and Paul and I tasted turkey



for the first time. Of course, we three "hostel-women" had also cooked or baked something to add to the good things on the table. The next Thanksgiving we invited the Sangrees to the hostel, and in 1943 Paul and I had already moved to Philadelphia to teach at the Friend's Neighborhood Guild.

But now was still 1941 and we were feverishly working to get the last things ready for our show, which was to open Friday, December 5. We got ready on time and the show opened at the Berkshire Museum, just three weeks more than a year after we had arrived in the United States. For us this was a tremendous event. Many people came to the opening, the newspaper brought a long article (I still have a clipping), and quite a few things were sold. The response was far beyond our expectation !

But two days later, December 7, the devastating news of Pearl Harbour. The United States was at war, and overnight we became, what was officially called "Enemy Aliens", because we were not citizens yet and still had German passports.

So ended our first year in the U.S.A.

### **In The Berkshires**

On November 17, 1940, my husband Paul and I arrived in New York after a seven-month journey. We lived there until May 1941 having various jobs and attending a course offered by the AFSC, directed by Francis Bosworth ("Boz," Foulkeways 1975-1983), for refugees from Europe, mostly actors and musicians interested in teaching.

The course over in May, we accepted an invitation by Dr. Carl Sangree to live and work in a hostel for refugee-artists and artisans in Cummington, a small town in the Berkshires. This hostel was the brainchild of Dr. Sangree and his wife, who had donated her "Little Red House." Dr. Sangree was the minister of the only church there, Congregational, a small white wooden building.

In the hostel we joined two couples from Vienna and a journalist from Frankfurt, turned woodworker. The large barn in back was to be our studio. It was a wonderful place with a potbelly stove, very important in those cold, long Berkshire winters. But now it was

the beginning of June, so Paul and I started a vegetable garden on the ground between the house and our studio.

Everyone did their creative work and for cleaning and cooking all residents took turns. Paul and I worked with great enthusiasm in these favorable surroundings. Paul had some private students and soon was asked to teach painting at the "Playhouse in the Hills," a summer academy founded by a music teacher from nearby Smith College.

Early in September, I and another hostel resident earned some pocket money picking apples in a large orchard. Later in September we experienced our first country fair. Although small, Cummington had famous Fairs on immense Fairgrounds. There were horse, cow and pig auctions and pulling contests. And, of course, homemade preserves, pies and hooked rugs. Paul painted many paintings of this colorful scene. Shortly after the Fair it got colder.

Once on a very cold, rainy night, we were awakened by commotion outside at 3 a.m. and the shout, "Fire, fire -- all able bodied men come with us!" Paul quickly dressed as warm as possible and went with the group to save the endangered farm on a nearby hill. Hours later he returned cold and drenched by the rain and sopping water. There was no fire engine then. (Now they have one.) The next day people stopped me on the street to tell me how wonderful Paul had been, organizing for the water buckets to go smoothly from hand to hand, and how quick he was. The animals were all saved and the main house also -- only the barn burned down. After that we really were accepted in the community.

Then came Thanksgiving, the most American of holidays. All Hostel people were invited at the Sangrees'. There Paul and I tasted our first turkey with cranberry sauce and all the trimmings. Of course, we three Hostel women brought some homemade desserts. And the next year we invited the Sangrees to "The Little Red House." A few years later we were able to invite students for Thanksgiving to our home near Chicago.

During the summer and fall we had worked with great devotion in our studio and had created enough work for an exhibit. Dr. Sangree may have been only a country minister with a small church, but he had

traveled widely and had great interest in art. He also was very persuasive and successful in promoting the Hostel people. He arranged a show for Paul and me at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield. By practically working day and night (framing, etc.), we were able to hang the show in time for the opening on December 5, 1941. The opening went surprisingly well. Many things were sold, and the newspaper wrote a long article.

But then, on Sunday, December 7, came the devastating news of Pearl Harbor and the United States was at war. That made us "enemy aliens" because we were not citizens yet and had German passports, even though we had left Europe because of Hitler. But our Cummington friends stood by the Hostel people, and our life there continued in harmony.

Once there was a particularly cold spell and our water pipes froze. There was no basement under the house, only a crawl space where the frozen pipes were. Dr. Sangree, Paul and I (the youngest and most limber), went down there to try to defrost the pipes. We still used flat irons (no electric ones yet). Those were heated on the stove and handed down to us. I could crawl closest to the pipes, and with the hot irons one after another, it worked. With the pipes unfrozen, all the men got busy packing straw around the house so this should not happen again.

One summer we moved to a little hut, called the "Honey House" because maple sugar had been made there. It belonged to the property of Miss A. who took summer guests in her big house. We had a kerosene lamp and kerosene stove for cooking. For water we had to go to the big house. We also had a big tub on our back porch to collect rain water for washing.

Several times Miss A. took us blueberry picking in her Model T Ford. We went to a hillside full of blueberry bushes, three kinds: Some grew low on the ground, some were about two feet high, and some were five to six feet high. We had only known the groundgrowing kind. We always returned with a rich harvest.

With no electricity at the Honey House, we dug a hole in the ground on a shady spot, buried a coffee can to keep small amounts of food cool. Somehow Paul got the use of an old bike. That made it easier for him to

get to his classes at the Playhouse on the opposite hill. Even though he had to push it uphill. In the valley was a small stream where, many years ago, they had made whet stones. There I found some very good stones for sharpening sculpture tools (and knives).

Some summer guests came year after year, and we became very friendly with a family from Pottstown, PA. Their twelve-year-old daughter often came to our studio because she liked to paint also. They always brought their cat along, a golden Persian, and every summer she had kittens. We fell in love with one of them with long silky hair and a golden stripe on her back. As soon as she was weaned, she came to us. When we lived in the Honey House, she learned to climb trees. She loved the outdoors, but we had to watch her closely because a fox came visiting regularly. Chucky was still a baby and would have been a tasty meal. When we moved, she came along, of course, and lived to be 16 ½.

The village had only one small store that also served as post office. They only carried dry goods and staples, nothing fresh. For that we had to go to Pittsfield, twentyfive miles away. Because of the war, only clergymen, doctors and plumbers got enough gas for their cars. So, when Dr. Sangree went shopping, he took one of the Hostel people along. That was a treat, and we took turns. Some summer night we were invited to Tanglewood where we heard Kousevitzki conducting the Boston Symphony.

Our last winter in the Berkshires we lived in Pittsfield, in the city garage of a friend, heated with a big oil stove. Paul assembled the Sunday papers for his agency and I was a part-time nanny for their three children. We also taught several classes at the Museum.

In the fall of 1943, Boz, with whom we had stayed in close contact, asked us to start an art department at the Friends' Neighborhood Guild in Philadelphia. That was a great opportunity and we accepted eagerly. Even though we left the Berkshires with regret. But many paintings and sculptures (and Chucky) kept the memory alive.