

Henry Landman's Biography

By his friend Gernot Römer Henry is described as an open minded and communicative person, who is "fröhlich eigentlich immer." Via telephone I was also able to get to know a talkative, friendly man, who was glad to share his memories with me.

Experiences With Anti-Semitism



Heinz, Johanna, Regina and Irma, from the left, about 1930

Henry Landman was born on June 12th in 1920 in Augsburg as Heinz Landmann. He changed his name in the US; in this text he is also called Heinz until he arrives in the US, in order to point out the departure. His father Joseph Landmann (1895-1964) had a furrier shop, his mother Regina (1891-1955), was a housewife. In 1921(-70) Johanna and in 1923(-85) Irma, Heinz' younger sisters were born.

The siblings grew up in the 1920s in Augsburg, in a time when anti-Semitism involved more and more people. Although neither Heinz nor the other two were aware of that fact then. Heinz could not

understand the difference between German Gentiles and German Jews. The only distinction he saw, was that his family went to the Synagogue and other families to the church. One incidence which happened just before starting school [about 1926!], puzzled him:

"I remember my parents telling me on that first day of school I would have to identify myself in class. The teacher would be asking all the children for their names, their addresses and their religion. It was just a formality, and not to be alarmed; but my parents then told me that "we" had to be careful how we identified ourselves. "We" were Jews but we had to be very discreet as to who heard that word. Somehow the sound of the word "Jew" was to be kept quiet outside of the Jewish community. Still, I needed to have some identity when the teacher asked for my name and religion. We would not lie; we were proud to be Jews. A clever solution was found to this dilemma. The few of us who were Jewish were told to call ourselves "Mosaics" or "Israelitic" [...] This made no sense to me, but if my parents wanted this I would comply. Today, I understand that these were code words accepted by all adults." (López, p.28)

But of course these code words could later guard neither him and nor the other Jews.

In the Real gymnasium, which Heinz attended from 1931-35, he had six Jewish classmates. One day a teacher called one of them to the front, branded him as a typical Jew and warned the class against contact with such persons. Due to such discrimination one after another the Jews were frozen out. Heinz left, too, and went to Vocational school from 1935 onwards, where he was apprenticed as a furrier. There was the same anti-Semitic attitude. For example two class pictures were taken, one with everybody on it, the other one without the Jewish classmates.

Heinz has always loved to play sports, especially tennis and soccer, and has won many championships. Nowadays at the age of 84 he still plays tennis a few times a week. In that time of disintegration and isolation, after Hitler's capture of power, the facilities of the *Private Tennisgesellschaft Augsburg*¹ became a focal point for the young Jews especially. Heinz met most of his friends while doing sports in his hometown; with some of these he is in contact even today.

"Reichskristallnacht" And The Incarceration In The KZ Dachau

Heinz and Joseph were both arrested during "Reichskristallnacht". At 5am on the 10th of November in 1938 Heinz, his parents and his aunt Minna were woken up by tumultuous ringing. Civilians dressed in green lodencoats arrested Heinz and brought him to the police station and then to prison. Like him, his family did not understand why they had come for him. So his father prepared to consult his lawyer, the famous Mr. Rieser, but he did not get that far, he was apprehended from the streets. Joseph and Heinz met again that night, on the bus to the concentration camp Dachau, along with many other male Jews. They were allowed to smoke on the bus, but no one did. Everybody was too occupied with trying to catch some point of orientation, but "the truth was that each one of us secretly

¹ *Private Tennisgesellschaft Augsburg* = "Private Tennis Association Augsburg"

knew our destination but no one dared to utter the word.”(López, p.71) On the way there all the truths and half-truths Heinz had ever heard about the concentration camp whirled through his head. The prisoner’s assumption was right, they arrived in Dachau, simultaneously to other busses. In front of the bus doors SS men had formed a corridor, through which each prisoner had to pass, while they beat and hit them and spited at them. Henry describes:



Joseph

“The shouts yelled at me were lost as I concentrated on running as straight and fast as I could. There had never been a race like this in all my life. All the trophies, all the awards would pale next to mere survival. That would be my trophy.” (López, p.74)

After their arrival the prisoners had to line up in front of the administration building and stand there for hours waiting for the briefing. Nobody wore suitable clothes for a cold day in November.

When the men were finally questioned, the *Sturmbannführer* picked Heinz for special attention as he was the youngest and smallest of all the Augsburgers:

“Do you know where you are,’ he continued. [...] ‘Yes, Herr Sturmbannführer! At the concentration camp Dachau.’ ‘Have you heard of this place before,’ he asked nonchalantly. ‘Yes, Herr Sturmbannführer!’ I quickly said and just as quickly realized that I had made a terrible mistake. He had trapped me, either deliberately or by luck – but I was trapped. ‘Ah! I see.’ he paused for a moment. ‘And, tell me, what did you hear about it.’ [...] ‘I heard it was a concentration camp, Herr Sturmbannführer!’ [...] ‘Did you say goodbye to your mother?’ [...] ‘Yes, Herr Sturmbannführer.’ [...] ‘Do you know that you are going to be shot?’ he asked me trying to take me by surprise. [...] ‘Yes, Sir.’” (López, p.79)

Heinz was then ordered to stand at a wall and wait to be shot; every minute felt like an hour. Luckily the SS man departed without returning, so that Heinz could go back into line and was saved.

Until today Henry very well remembers the sadistic procedures, the SS had prepared for all newcomers to humiliate, pain and scare them from the very beginning of their imprisonment.

Their days consisted of standing in attention for hours or senseless work. Often they had to pick up the stones from the streets between the barracks; soon those turned “smooth and sandy”. (López, p.94)

They had to live on a revolting diet of raw herring and potatoes.

“An interesting note on Dachau took place after I was there a few days. One of the prisoners needed help with the kettle and asked me to help him in the kitchen. [...] I had expected a deficient, plain, simple and inadequate place. It would be logical to expect the kitchen to match the rest of Dachau. To my amazement, the kitchen rivalled the best available in a good hotel. [...] Ironically, in these wonderful facilities, the most meager meals were being prepared.” López,, p.95

Until the end of 1938 151 men had lost their lives².

To see so many men die was an everyday psychological torture. At last Joseph and Heinz could watch out for each other, father and son, and hope that Regina and the two sisters were safe.

After about one and a half weeks Joseph was taken away. Heinz found out later that Joseph had been freed, because he was the chairman of the *Private Tennisgesellschaft Augsburg*. Through that he had qualified as an “official Jew”, who was to sign the papers for confiscating Jewish property. Now he was also able to work hard for the release of Heinz. But with their Polish quota number 1545 they would have had to wait another three years maybe until they could have left for the US. In a coincidence

Joseph then found out, that his birthplace Saslow had been Russian in his year of birth 1895. Immediately his number was changed from 1545 to 56 A on the Russian quota list. This meant that it



Irma, Joseph, Regina, Heinz and Johanna, from the right, 1938

² Stanislav Zámečník, *Das War Dachau*, Stiftung Comité International de Dachau, Luxemburg, 2002, p.105

was only months until they could immigrate. As a result Heinz was freed, too, as with the help of an English lawyer Joseph was able to get a transit visa for Heinz to go to England.



Regina

Immigration to America

Shortly after the warm welcome at home when arriving from Dachau, the date for his father's physical exam was arranged. As a heart murmur was diagnosed, the Consul decided that Joseph had to leave on his own first and establish himself in a job, before the family could follow.

One month after his father had left for America in February 1939, Heinz went to England. He travelled in very new and expensive clothes, as this was the only valuables the SS would not confiscate on the way.

In the first days the worst thing in England was the loneliness and not being able to dream of a home. Communicating was troublesome, because he spoke almost no English back then. Nevertheless this time stayed positively in his mind:

"Later, I would remark, over and over, how pleasant the English had been to me. Their courtesies extended from the sales clerks to the police, to the Bobbies who would escort you when you were lost. I shall never thank them enough". (Lopez, p. 128)

Mr. Aukin the lawyer, who had taken care of his transit visa, also procured him a work permit, and found a furrier, who took Heinz on. This provided some income beside the 30 Shilling weekly Joseph had deposited for him at the immigration department on his way to America. Despite that, he led a Spartan life. But he kept on playing tennis all the same. When war broke out he became an "enemy alien", which means that he had to register with the police periodically and that he was only allowed to leave London on special permission.

Because his father had obtained the necessary job in New York in the meanwhile; Heinz now had to manage to get hold of a ticket on one of the overcrowded ships leaving for America. He finally arrived there in November 1939.

His mother and sisters had emigrated shortly before on one of the last ships leaving Germany. With only ten Reichs mark per person and just a few of their belongings. The fur factory had been sold for less than its true value to Aryans. Proceeds and savings had to stay on a blocked account.

In New York the Landmans had to start all over again. They lived in Washington Heights, about which Henry states:

"[It] seemed like all of Europe had come to Washington Heights and carved out a piece for themselves." (López, p.153) And only a few months later "We loved W.H. It was safe and comfortable. [...] It didn't matter when I came home from a date, I never felt that I was in danger". (López, p.159)

On its streets Yidish, Polish and German was spoken, so it was quite easy to accustom with all the familiar habits surrounding them. Although it was unavoidable to notice the Bundt movement (a German American anti-Semitic organisation), very active in Yorkville (a district of NY, with a high German population), as well, it seemed far enough to feel secure.

Some friends supported the Landmans by lending them money and so they were able to inaugurate their business on 7th avenue. Joan (Johanna has also changed her name in America) and Henry supported their father, while Irma was still attending school. In 1941 they had already become well established and known in the fur business.

This was also Heinz second year in America and he already seemed to have felt quite at home. He states:

"I suppose I had begun the process of blocking out the painful memories. [...] I dressed like an American; and, outside my home, I ate like one". (Lopez, p. 161)



Henry

On the 27th of January in 1943 he received his call up and became a soldier. Four months later he adopted the US citizenship. After two years of fighting, Henry as part of the third infantry division



Henry as soldier

entered Augsburg on April the 28th of 1945. Once a beautiful town Augsburg was in ruins. This had been his hometown but now he felt like a stranger, there was almost no one he knew and everything had utterly changed. Henry remembered some friends of his parents, ones he could still trust, who supported their Jewish friends as much as they could. They handed him over a suitcase; it contained money, clothes of his aunt Minna and a letter to her daughter, who had also immigrated to the US. His aunt had been deported to Auschwitz in March 1943. The advance led the third division to the concentration camp Dachau, but Henry could not bear to go there. In Munich Henry again searched for persons he loved once. Although it still said Landmann on the bell-board, the young women opening the door, had never heard of the name; his grandparents had also been deported and gassed to death. After these horrible experiences

Henry went back to America in late summer.

Life In America

In 1947 Henry Landman and Lisa Öttinger were married. Lisa was born in 1927 in Nuremberg; she and her family also had to escape from the Nazis. In 1949 and in 1952 their sons Robert and Richard were born.

Nowadays Lisa and Henry live in Queens; Henry is pensioner. He has given up his father's firm. Their sons have grown up and founded their own families.

Henry has not lost sight of his friends from Augsburg for his whole life. With those



Lisa shortly before marrying

who emigrated to New York he has met quite often and anyone coming to the city was welcome to stay with the Landmans, as it had been tradition in Joseph's and Regina's house, too. Henry also organised two big reunions: in 1988 he invited eighty former Augsburgers and a few years later again forty of them. Due to this and because of his cellar being full of keepsakes, his friends call him *Augsburger Bürgermeister im Exil*.³ This might lead one to the conclusion that he still feels like an *Augsburger*; when asked he neither says yes nor no, but explains:



The Landmans today: Else (Lisa's mother), Rick, Lisa, Bob, Bonnie (Bob's wife), Jaimee, Darra, Michael (their children) and Henry, from the left

“Ich wollte, Hitler wäre nie gekommen und ich wäre unter normalen Umständen in Augsburg aufgewachsen. Mir und allen Juden wäre viel erspart geblieben.”

My name is Veronika Stumpf, I wrote this biography and used it for my *“Facharbeit”* in English. On the Internet I stumbled across a homepage of Rick Landman (www.geocities.com/Vienna/Strasse/5960/landmn.html), on which he writes about his father Henry, who has been to Dachau. Luckily, Henry agreed to participate in the project. Here I also found all the pictures I used. Further I read through a number of articles about Henry by Gernot Römer. (Gernot Römer, *Wir Haben Uns Gewehrt – Wie Juden Aus Schwaben Gegen Hitler Kämpften Und Wie Christen Juden Halfen*, Presse-Druck-und-Verlag-GmbH, Augsburg, 1995, p.87-101; *Die Ausreibung Der Juden Aus Schwaben – Schicksale Nach 1933* In Berichten, Dokumenten, Zahlen Und Bildern, Presse-Druck-und-Verlag-GmbH, Augsburg, 1987, p.219-227) I kept in contact with Rick, too, and phoned Henry in order to have my remaining questions answered. I was also able to get to know Gernot Römer and talk to him about Henry. He lent a biography of Henry Landman to me. (Ralph I. López, *A Return Home – The Henry Landman Story*, manuscript, 1992)

Munich, February, 15th, 2004

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³ *Augsburg's Bürgermeister im Exil* = Augsburg's major in exile