

CHAPTER 39

JANUARY 12, 1944 - OFF TO THE U.S.

We took a plane for Miami, and our immigration procedure and examination by the immigration officers was smooth and there was no difficulty. I was pleased to be told that my English was quite good. After a stay of two days in Miami, where we visited our good friend Mrs. Else Wagner and where I met for the first time Mr. Spielmann, we took the train for New York, where Hedy had already a nice furnished apartment prepared for all of us at 408 Garfield Place in Brooklyn. I was overwhelmed already in Miami and then again in New York by the entirely different world, into which we had come, the enormous buildings, the well regulated traffic, the clean streets, etc.

When we arrived in New York, Hedy had a job. She had to paint ties, which were modern at that time, and she had to leave early in the morning and came home late in the afternoon when it was already dark. Johanna went to a public school, only a few blocks from our home, and I had to pick her up every day after school. Francis was at that time already 13 years old and we thought it would be nice for him to be put into the Ethical Culture school. We had already become members of the Brooklyn Ethical Culture Society, were introduced there by Mr. David Freudenthal and had attended a meet-

ing there, had met the leader, Dr. Henry Neuman and many members, some of whom later became our friends.

The Ethical Culture movement was known to me through Hedy, who in turn learned about it when she was in New York before she came to Cuba, through Mr. and Mrs. Rosen, who were very active members and had taken Hedy to meetings. What I soon learned was that it was a kind of religious movement, started in 1876 by Dr. Felix Adler. It was rather an inter-religious movement, accepting all good axioms of other religions, from Confucius, Buddha, Moses, and the prophets, to Christianity. There is no belief in God, in any dogma, nor in life after death. Its aim is "to assert the supreme importance of the ethical factor in all relations of life, personal, social, national, and international, apart from any theological or metaphysical considerations." Members of the society may have other religious affiliations if they wish. Much emphasis is placed upon education, belief in human beings, the belief in the spiritual nature of men, faith in truth.

We became very active members of the Ethical Society and still belong to it, 34 years till now. We enjoyed through all these years the meetings and lectures, many of them given by important men, and were tied to the society by friendship to many of the members. Hedy was for many years president of the Women's Club, later named Women's Conference of the Society for Ethical Culture, and I was for years a member of the board.

I said before that we thought, after we came to New York, that it would be nice if Francis would be put into the Ethical Culture school. But Mrs. Neuman, the director of that school, thought that Francis was too advanced and should start with a

high school. She got in touch with Mr. Mason, who was director of the Lincoln High School, and Francis was immediately accepted. The school was near Coney Island and he had to travel there every day by subway, which was not too difficult a problem.

I had to start to prepare myself for the State Board examination, which consisted of two parts, an English language examination and an examination of medical subjects. I went to work on that with great zeal, started at first to take English courses, which I attended about three times a week, learned also from a grammar book, and also learned a lot by reading the New York Times. I was most of the time alone at home, when Hedy and the children were away, and besides studying had to take care of cleaning the apartment, shopping, picking Johanna up from school, etc.

The English courses which I attended were very helpful and my English improved quite rapidly. I had mentioned before already that I had started to learn English as a young boy of 14 or 15, before the First World War, and later, after that war, when I met Hedy, who was taking English lessons with a lovely old lady, Miss Butterworth, I started soon also to take English lessons with her and continued for some time. When I left Vienna and went to Cuba, I took along an English-German grammar, an English-German dictionary, and an English novel "Ships that passed in the night", which Hedy had given me. That book was very helpful. When I started to read it, I had to look up almost every word in the dictionary, and it took an hour if not more to translate the first four lines of that book. The next day, I could already advance faster and

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I read about half a page in an hour. Some words, the meaning of which I could not remember, I wrote down on a piece of paper. Next, I could already read and understand about 2 pages in one or two hours, and advanced then faster and faster in that book, till I finished it in about a month. I still have that book. Besides reading that book, I studied the grammar and advanced each day by a half or whole chapter, but always repeating the previous chapters, always covering either the English words and naming the meaning in German, or covering the German words and naming them when reading the English words. I did that systematically and acquired in this way a constantly growing wealth of words. I did all that, while I was in Cuba. I also was lucky when I lived on the Malecon in Havana to have a neighbor in the room next to mine, who had come to Havana to improve his Spanish, sent there on a grant from a college. This young man helped me very much with my English studies by conversing with me in English, correcting wrong expressions. I also had to read aloud from English books or newspapers and he corrected my pronunciation. We were together for a few months till about the time, when Hedy and Johanna arrived in Cuba. I am explaining all that to show that I had some preliminary knowledge of English when I came to the United States, so that I could advance rapidly and prepare myself for the English examination, which I took in May 1944 and passed.

Now came the more difficult part, the study of the different subjects of medicine, anatomy, internal medicine, bacteriology etc. It was terribly difficult in the beginning, since new words appeared, which I had not heard before, like the word thigh or palsy and great many others, and I advanced slowly.

I attended classes, given by a Dr. Hirschfeld, a practicing oto-rhino-laryngologist, had to go three times a week to his office on Central Park West, where about 20 doctors, perhaps more, congregated for 2 or 3 hours. He was an excellent teacher, gave us type-written papers for each of the 8 subjects of the examinations, which simplified the studying greatly. This went on for 3 months. I studied day and night till well after midnight. I learned better at night, when everybody was sleeping. Once there was an earthquake in New York. I was standing, with a book in my hands, when the pieces of glass, hanging from a candelabre in the center of the room, started to clink. There was a piano next to me and I thought I could crawl beneath it, if the situation should become dangerous. But first, I woke Hedy up and she was indignant that I woke her up. Nothing happened then, but the newspapers wrote a lot about it the next day. There was only minor damage in some houses, cracks, nothing more. Hedy's reaction reminded me of a story often told in her parents home. There was once an earthquake in Vienna, and Hedy's mother woke up and told her husband to be quiet and ^{not} to move about in the bed, whereupon he told her: "You blame me even for an earthquake."

Hedy had a hard time, while I studied for my examination, having to leave very early every morning and to travel in the crowded subway to Manhattan for work, and, after coming home, to prepare the dinner for us. She even brought homework with her, boxes with ties, which she painted after dinner. That painting was done with little paper bags, filled with paint of a pasty consistency. The tip of the paper bag had to be cut off, a tiny little piece only, and on squeezing of the

bag a little bit of paint came out. There were designs printed on the ties, so that it was relatively easy to draw the lines along the printed lines, thus completing nice pictures in different colors, like flowers, sailboats, etc. I helped her with the painting, also Francis. The paint dried quite fast and in the morning she took the ties along. It was wonderful how Hedy managed to do that work and supported the family. But we got also some support from a refugee relief organization. When business got bad and she lost her job, we got a little more support. This way I could continue studying and prepare myself for the examination. I had it better than other doctors, who took on jobs in hospitals to earn money and studied in the evening and on days when they were free. I knew some, who were already 3 or 4 years in the country, had taken the examination once or twice and had failed. It was only possible to take the examination 3 times. After failing 3 times, one could not take the examination anymore. That happened to quite a few people. That is why I studied so hard, as I wanted to pass the examination the first time. When we had visitors, which happened many times, since we had a lot of friends, I asked Hedy to take them to the nearby Prospect Park, so that I could continue with my studies. On weekends, Hedy took the children out on little excursions, so that I could stay home and study.

Nearby, in the next house, lived our best friends, Mr. and Mrs. Glueck, whom we saw very often, almost daily. They were the ones who had helped Hedy find the apartment. They were at the end in an old-age home, died a few years ago, first he, Bernhard, 93 years old, and then she, Ethel, about

90 years old, and their niece, Mrs. Hedy Glueckselig, who has an antique store, is still one of our best friends, a good soul.

There came the time of my examination on October 1st, and I studied at the end all night and slept only one or two hours. Dr. Hirschfeld, our tutor, told me that I was very well prepared, the best in the whole group. The examinations were in writing, starting in the morning at 9 and ending at 12 noon, and then starting again at 1 P.M. and ending at 4. Each day 2 subjects for 4 days. Each time when I came home in the late afternoon, I could say that I was sure I had passed the examination. After sleeping for 1 hour, I started again to study, ending at 6 in the morning, sleeping then for one hour and then getting up to take the subway to Manhattan, to get there in time before 9 o'clock. That went on for 4 days. After coming home on the 4th day, I went to bed and slept for almost 2 days, completely exhausted.

I forgot to mention that for the first summer Francis had gone to a camp in Pennsylvania for a few weeks. It was not a very good camp, especially concerning the food, but he seemed to have liked it.

During that summer Hedy had to go again to Washington for a hearing on behalf of Lisa and Paul, regarding their immigration visas. I was left behind to take care of the children. She returned the same or the next day. She was again successful and a short time later Lisa and Paul received their immigration visas in Havana and arrived later in New York, settled down in a small apartment in Manhattan, and both soon got jobs and worked.

When the new school year started, Francis had decided to

switch to Erasmus High School, since it was easier to reach and he did not like Lincoln High School too much. Johanna continued to attend the school on 2nd Street between 7th and 6th Avenues. I soon started to work, got a job as an intern in Crown Hights Hospital. It was a difficult job, since I did not only have to take care of a great number of patients, many of them post-operative cases, but had also to give anesthetics in the operating room. They did not have anesthetists at that time and they used for anesthesia nitrous oxide with an apparatus, which was quite complicated and new to me. I had to sleep often in the hospital, when I was on night duty. All that I did not like too much.

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
BUREAU OF QUALIFYING CERTIFICATES AND PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATIONS
ALBANY 1

DEC 13 1944

Dr. Adolph Mechner
308 Garfield Place
Brooklyn, New York

Dear Doctor:

The Secretary of the State Board of Medical Examiners reports that you have passed the subjects of the licensing examination. Ratings of accepted papers are not given.

A license will be forwarded to you as soon as possible.

A candidate does not acquire the right to practise in this State until he has received his license and registered it in the county clerk's office of the county in which he intends to begin his practice. He must also register biennially with this Department. Application for biennial registration should be addressed to the Bureau of Professional Registration, State Education Department, Albany 1, N. Y.

Very truly yours

H. L. FIELD

Chief