

Interview with Lisa.

I was born on January 3rd, 1904, one day after my father's birthday, quasi as a birthday present for him. The only thing that was not perfect was that everybody was disappointed, since there was already a girl and everybody had expected a boy. All the aunts and uncles were disappointed. My mother who was very young, had now two girls and with a difference in age of only one year and $1\frac{1}{2}$ months. But, nevertheless, I grew up, and after finishing the public school, I went to the same lyceum as Hedy, the Beamtentochter Lyceum, for another 6 years. It was not very easy to be admitted to that school, since they took only girls of high government employees, and, of course, we had to pay tuition fees. We learned there two foreign languages, French and English. It was in a certain way a waste of time to study there, because afterwards you could not continue studying at a University without having studied Latin. After I finished with the lyceum, I really did not know what to do. I was at home. I was then 17 in the year 1921. I don't remember what I did afterwards. I remember Hedy's and Adolph's wedding, which was in 1928. In 1929 I went to Paris to study French and stayed there for one year, lived in a little hotel near my relatives, uncle Otto and his family in Rue Lafayette. The school was the Alliance Francaise, a special school for people from foreign countries, and at the end of the course you had to take a test.

When I came back to Vienna, I started to teach French. I had quite a lot of pupils. Then my cousins Suzanne and Raymond wanted me to come back to Paris and I went there for a second time, but this time I stayed there only for 3 months and I stayed mostly

at their summer home on the Plateau d'Avron.

When I came back, I went to a Hotel School in Vienna, a very good school and I would have been able to work in any hotel and I tried to get a position, and just at that time it was more and more difficult for Jewish people to get a position in a hotel. There was the Nazi regime in Germany and the tourists who came to Austria were mostly Germans and they did not want Jewish people in the hotels. Besides, at that time, there was great tension between Austria and Germany, and the Germans had instituted a charge of 1000 marks on Germans desiring to visit Austria, thereby completely ruining the Austrian tourist business.

After the invasion of Austria by the Nazis things got bad and many people left the country. I had a special experience once. I was standing at the streetcar station, across the home where we lived, waiting for a streetcar, when two Nazis with the swastika bands on their arms came over to me and asked me to go with them to wash floors in the train station Nordwestbahnhof. I refused, said that I can not go now, that I was in a hurry, since I had to go to a lawyer. I had the courage to resist, because I was sure, since my parents were looking out of the window; and I don't know what my father would have done, if he would have seen me going with these two men. So, it helped, the streetcar came, and I went with the streetcar and escaped this ordeal. Soon afterwards my cousins in Paris succeeded in getting a visa for me to come to France.

One day, I went to the French consulate and there were 20 people or 30 waiting on line, and a man came out and said: "I am sorry, I have only one visa". And this one was for me. I was very happy, but I felt bad to go in and let all these people disappointed

standing there in the street. I packed then my things; my father had to go and get all kind of papers for me, to show that he and I had payed all our taxes. People told me to go to France through Germany, because people were much nicer there than on the Swiss frontier.

So, I left on the 30th of May, 1938, and I had a very good trip and arrived in Paris. Before I had left, I had tried to learn different things so that I could earn money, and I learned to make belts, and I made quite a few belts at home and sold them later, had brought them along from Vienna. They were made from strings, beautiful strings in all colors. So, I tried to earn some money with that, but my parents also sent me some money in form of retour-stamps and I got a whole package of these stamps and my cousins in Tchechoslovakia sent me also some money. I lived in the house of my aunt and I did not need much money. This was quite allright, till Adolph came with Francis.

Francis made things a little difficult. Adolph stayed only for 14 days, till he left for St. Nazaire to take the boat for Havana, Cuba. The plan, discussed at length over the phone, was that Francis would stay only for a short time afterwards, till Hedy would have gotten the American visa and would then pass through Paris with Johanna and pick up Francis. After Adolph left, Suzanne told me once that things would not work out since aunt Louise was very nervous. She had always tried to teach Nicole who was so severely mentally retarded to read and write and there was now Francis, 7 years old, who was so highly intelligent and could read and write. Aunt Louise got very irritated, screamed at Nicole and was very upset. Aunt Louise did not say anything, but Suzanne told me, after Adolph left, that it was not good for

aunt Louise and Nicole that Francis should stay there. I then got the idea to move after I got in touch with Fritzi Zimmermann, and we rented together an apartment in Robinson, a suburb to the north of Paris. It was a new house and it was quite a nice apartment. We were living there together for quite a while, it was very agreeable, and Francis went to school there. I earned some money with the belts. But Fritzi was pregnant and gave birth, but it was a stillbirth. Soon afterwards, Leo Zimmermann got a position in Caen and they moved to Caen.

I had to move, of course, and they had friends whose name was Wurmfeld, who lived in the Rue d'Atlas, and they got me a one-room apartment with a tiny kitchen and a bathroom. Francis went there again to school which was just around the corner. There we lived now, and at the end of the year at New Years day Suzanne invited me to a party. I brought Francis to my aunt on the Plateau, so that he could spend the night there. And that was the evening when I met Paul. From then on, we met more or less often, we went out sometimes, they came to our apartment and I cooked dinner for them, Suzanne and her friend and Paul. Often we went for dinner to the Plateau on weekends.

All the time, I tried to get a permit, which was necessary to stay in Paris. When the summer came, I sent Francis to Le Touquet - Paris Plage on the Canal de la Manche, south of Boulogne. A brother of Mr. Wurmfeld and his wife had an apartment there and they took care of children. I had to pay very little for Francis, because I had recommended to them a little girl, and they had other children who paid quite well.

In the meantime, I got money from my relatives in Tchechoslovakia and from my parents. They sent me from Tchechoslovakia

not only money, they sent me sausages and ham, which Paul sold. It was Minny Feldmann, nee Landler, and her husband. They sent it quite often and so I had money. When Tchechoslovakia was taken over by the Nazis, this came to an end. But Raymond, who was on a business trip, phoned me and told me that from now on I will work for him in his business, even if I had no permit to work. He had a place where he made custom-jewellery. I started to work there and I was told that when somebody came in I should immediately stop working and just sit there. All the employees there knew it and signaled me when somebody rang the bell and came in.

When the war broke out, I had to leave Paris. Raymond's wife, Lucy, who came from Reims, had friends there who had a shoe store, and they made arrangements for me to go there and work in their shoe store for a long, long time, a few months, and in the meantime Francis stayed in Le Touquet. Raymond and Suzanne wrote to me that it was too difficult for me to take care of Francis and that there was an organization, called OSE, which took care of children of doctors. At that time I got some money from that organization, about 100 francs a month, for Francis as support. They kept writing about it and I told them that under no circumstances would I agree to that, that they could not do that to him, since he was away from his parents, and that I will join him. Suzanne wanted me to give Francis to this organization, so that I would be free and that it would be easier for me. There were many children with that organization and very well taken care of, and they perhaps survived the Nazi terror. So, I said "no". I was very upset about this whole thing, and Raymond came to Reims and he calmed me down. They said they were afraid that I would commit suicide, if they took Francis away from me, and he assured

me that they would not do it. Soon afterwards I got my permit, called recipicé. I did not get one, I got two suddenly. So, now I was free to travel and I went right away to Le Touquet. I lived for a while with the Wurmfields, the war had broken out already, and then I got my own little apartment, since I had gotten some money from Ernst Husserl and Maurice Ziegler.

The war had broken out on September 3rd, 1939, but there was calm on the western front. The Germans were busy in the East with the invasion of Poland, then with the invasion of Denmark and Norway. We had during that time a very quiet and pleasant life, and everybody thought that the war was not bad and that it will finish soon, and they were not angry with the Germans. But on the 8th of May, 1940, suddenly the first bombs fell. Francis was sleeping upstairs and he woke up and came down. I was standing at the window and my knees were shaking, and Francis asked me why my knees were shaking and I told him that it was cold. I was ashamed to tell him that I was afraid.

Now, there was the question what to do, how to leave. That was the time when the the Germans had invaded Belgium, Holland, and Luxemburgh, which had started on May 10th. Some people left, whoever could, but I could not find anybody who could take us along. Once, there came a truck with Belgian people and I asked them, whether I could sit there with Francis and they agreed, and I was sitting at the end of the truck, with my back to the driver, and Francis was sitting on my lap, and I had a string and tied Francis to myself. So, we were riding and riding, and it was a terrible thing to see, English soldiers were coming this way, Belgian soldiers were going this way, whole regiments were walking in different directions, refugees were walking.

Finally we came into a forest, where we stayed. We had nothing to eat with us. The people took out some potatoes from the field and boiled them, made a fire and baked them, and gave us some potatoes too. Francis was sitting and looked up, as there were airplanes over us fighting, and Francis sat down and made a picture of it. The next morning, the Belgian people came to us and said that they could not go any further, since the Germans were already here. When Francis heard this, he started to cry bitterly. He was sitting on my lap and said: "Lisa, tell me it is not true, tell me it is not true, may be this are Dutch soldiers". People started to shout at me, how I dared to come with a child this way. But the Belgians took us back on the same truck, not all the way. At a village Etaples they let us out, and there was an inn and I went there and asked whether I could sleep there. She said no, she had no room. But she saw that I was so desperate and said that some people will leave today and I can get the room, but that she could not give me fresh bed sheets, and that we had to sleep as it is. Then we were sitting down and they brought us something to eat, and we could not eat, because it was very fat.

At the table, next to us, there were some Viennese soldiers sitting and I told Francis: "You don't talk German, you don't understand it", and it was very hard for us. The whole area was already occupied by the Germans. One man said to another one: "How many miles do you think it is to the Stephansplatz (in Vienna) from here?". And we were sitting there and one soldier turned to me and said: "Miss, why do you have such sad eyes, why do you look so sad?" in German. And I did not react. Then we went up to the room. The next day, there was an officer there sitting in a car and the people came to him and they asked: "Can we go there, is

it occupied?". And he did not understand and I went there and said that I understand some German, and I was the interpreter then.

We then started to walk, I with the little valise and I took it on my shoulder and we walked towards Le Touquet which was quite far. And there came a soldier and asked where we were going, and I told him and he said that we can't go there, because they are fighting there. "It is the zone rouge"; he told me "you have to go some other way". So, we went back, and some people said "You can get some bread, but you have to show your identification card". That we could not do, so I could not get any bread. And so, we were walking and walking, and there came a little carriage with milk, and I asked the man to take us along and he took us.

Finally, we arrived in Le Touquet and we went to our apartment, and it was completely empty, everything was taken. I had beautiful bed sheets, which aunt Louise had given me, I had so many cans with food, which people had given me before they left. And now, I had absolutely nothing. The landlady had taken everything, I know it. She was a mean person. She told me I could not live there anymore, but I stayed there anyway and then somebody came to me and said that I had dropped something, a card d'identite or a recipie. She had found it, and she came to my place and told me that she knows a Viennese man and she was in love with him, and he writes her letters and she answers him. But he does not know French and she does not know German, and she asked me whether I would be willing to translate. This was Mrs. Roi, the bride of a very, very rich banker. So, I started to write love letters for her, and there was also a Mr. Baer who had come to Le Touquet. And he told me that there was somebody, a Belgian

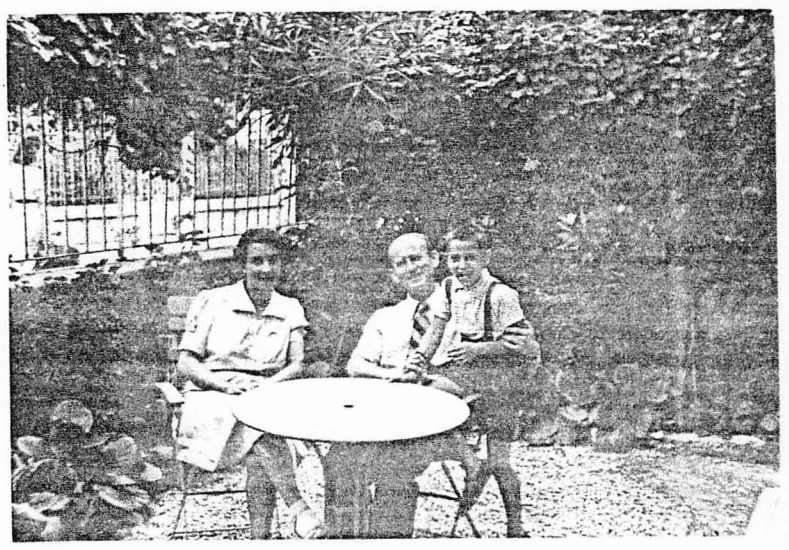
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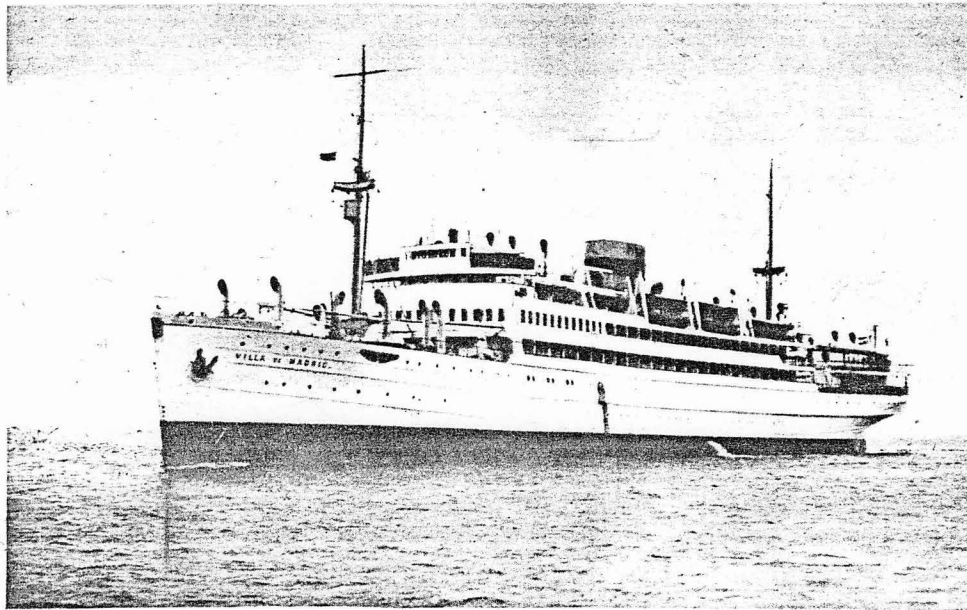


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Francis with Lisa and Paul in Nice, France



The boat "Villa de Madrid", bringing Lisa and Francis to Cuba

PAPA



MAMA

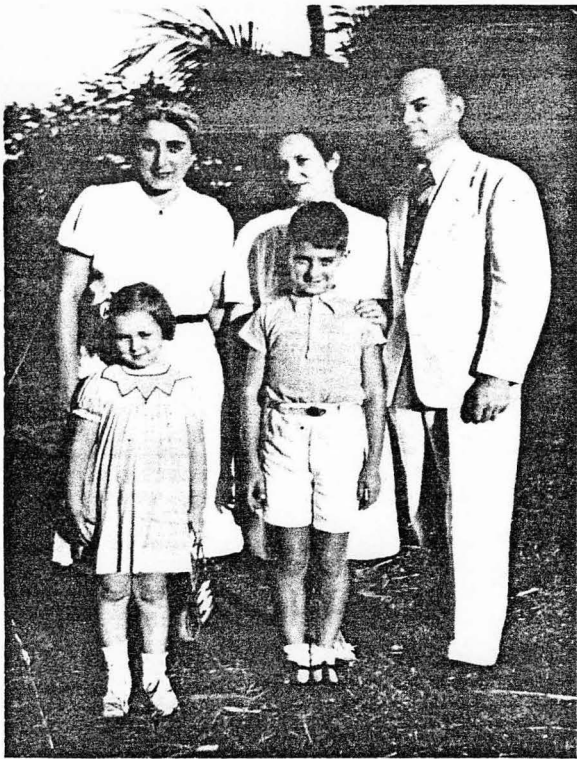


FRANZO

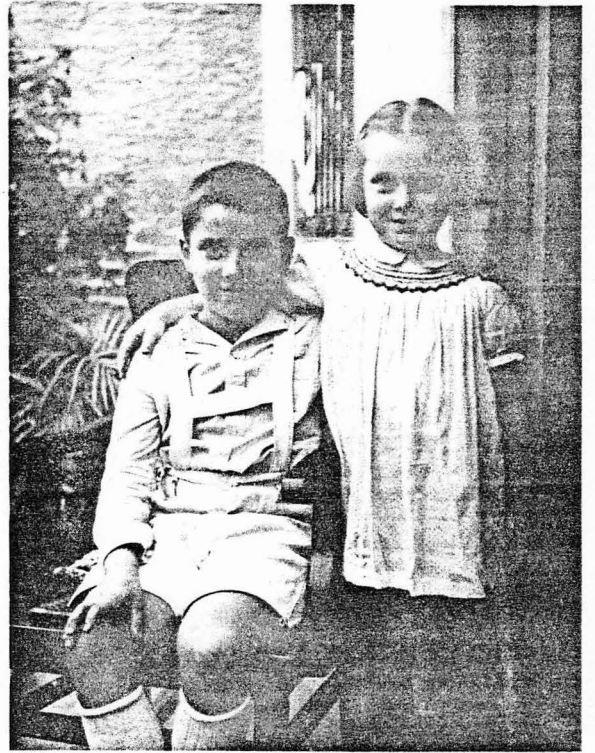


JUANITA





R.to l: Adolph, Hedy, Lisa,
Francis and Johanna

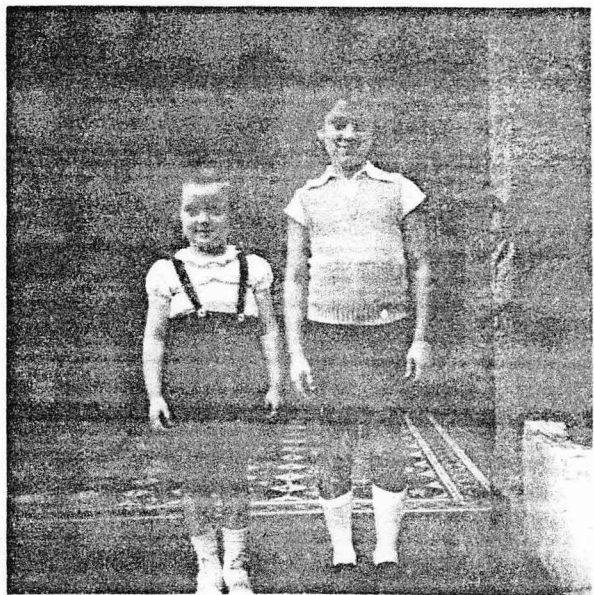
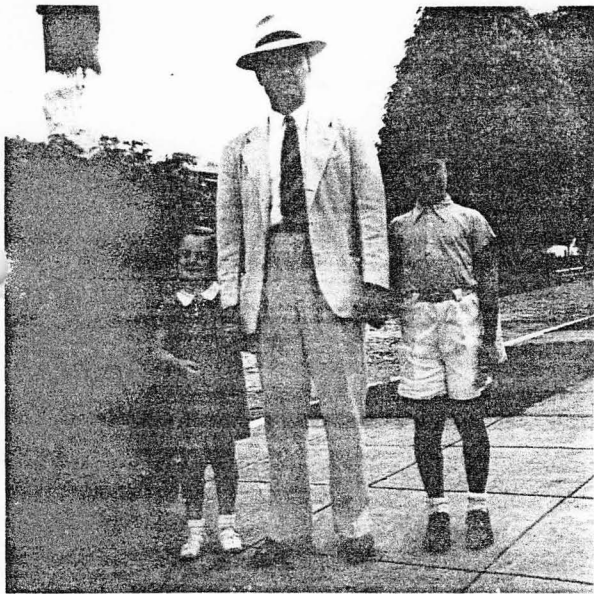
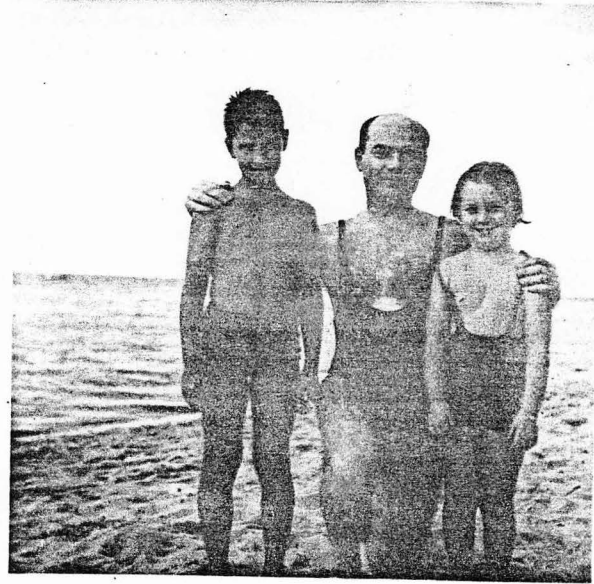


Francis and Johanna



Oct. 1941







Lisa, Mr.Klinger, Hedy
Francis and Johanna



1942

TERESITA



man, who looks for somebody who speaks French and German. And I went to him and he engaged me and I was selling cigarettes and cigars to the German soldiers. I earned quite a lot of money at that time, he paid me very well and he was selling watches too and every time when somebody came and bought a watch, he gave me some percentage. And I made a good business and the Germans came in and talked to me and I told them that I was here since a long time and that I am engaged to a French soldier, something like that. But one officer came always when I was sitting there on the chair. Once, one man tried to get fresh with me and he threw him right away out. And he must have known what my situation was and one day he told me not to go out in the street because they are asking people for all the papers in the street today and that I should stay in today.

Once I was walking in the street and a beautiful car with German soldiers stopped and one man said: "The moon is full, tomorrow we are going to England". That was true, that was the day they had tried to invade England.

One day, somebody called in the street that all Tchechs, and Jews, and Polish people should come to the commissariat and give their names. At that time, I was very friendly with Mrs. Roi and her children, and they had some servants and they were Polish girls. So, Mr. Roi decided that we should not stay there any longer and he would take two cars and leave. So, Mr. Baer was driving one car and Mr. Roi was driving the other car, and early in the morning we all left Le Touquet toward the South. It was a beautiful drive. We went through Rouen. I remember, on the way Mr. Roi bought some eggs and for the first time I ate them raw. It was delicious, they were very fresh eggs. Mr. Roi had

a house there in a village La Bernerie, on the beach on the Atlantic Ocean, not far from Brest.

At that time I was completely separated from Paul. I did not hear from him anymore. Before I went away from Paris, Paul had gone to Nice. But, unfortunately, he went back to Paris, but I was not there anymore. He was taken into a kind of concentration camp, on a race track, where they put them before they sent them to different places, and he was sent to camp Milady-Man. From there he was still in contact with me, he wrote to me to Le Touquet-Paris Plage, and, in fact, I got in Paris Plage the permission to visit him with Francis, just before the war broke out. And Hedy had written to us in Paris Plage that I can go to Calais to get the visa for Francis. I went to the police and asked for the permission to go to Calais. They told me that I can go there, they can give me the permission, but there are no bridges anymore, you can't go there anymore. That was before we fled from there. Nearby, where Mr. Roi had his house, there was an empty house, and he put us in there, me and Francis. It was very nice there, Francis was happy, he had a wonderful time, he went fishing all the time, and he ate snails. There was no school there.

We did not know what to do now. One day, Mrs. Roi came over and told us we should go to the priest, he will make you Catholics and you will not be Jewish anymore. But I knew that that would not help anymore with the Nazis, and I didn't do it, and then, when we heard that the Nazis are coming nearer and nearer, one day I took Francis and we went to Paris by train.

In Paris we went to Jaques Ziegler and he said that Francis can stay with him, but that I could go to a hotel nearby, he would not dare to take me in. He was afraid. I went to Lucy's apart-

ment, because she was not there, so I stayed in her apartment. I stayed there only a very short time, because I tried to get a permit to go to the unoccupied zone, to Vichy. Somebody had given me the key to Lucy's apartment. I did not get in contact with Suzanne, because I did not know where she was, as she was already "under-ground". Maybe, I talked by phone with aunt Louise, who was on the Plateau, I don't remember. But she told me where the key to Lucy's apartment was.

I got the information that I had to be very early, at 4 o'clock in the morning, at the German commissariat to get in, or whatever that office was called, where they give the permits to go to the un-occupied zone. And I went there and there was already a very long line of waiting people. I went to the door and there was a French gendarm, and I spoke to him in French and told him that he should have pity with me, because I am completely lost, since I am here with a child and the father of the child had left for the un-occupied zone and I have nothing to live on. And he let me go in. Somebody had told me, when you are inside you ask for a certain gentleman, whose name I had on a piece of paper. So, I went before that man, and I asked him in German whether I could talk to Mr. so and so, and he asked me what I want. And I told him the same story, that I am here with my child and that my husband had left me, and that I want to find him in the un-occupied zone. In a second he wrote me the paper, and he said you can have so and so much money, and you can go. So, I went to the station with Francis, and we left. Before that, I said good-bye to Jaques, and I told him to come too. But he said that he had to stay there, Baron Rothschild is there, and he will help me. There I will be lost. I told him to try to come. But he said "no".

In the train, it was very disagreeable, as the German soldiers asked where we lived and what I did. But finally we arrived in Vichy and Lucy was there. The whole Alliance Israelite had moved to Vichy and so Lucy was there. The moment we arrived in Vichy, they gave me something like 500 francs, and I rented a room in a little hotel. There Francis got the measles. He was very, very sick. He had very high fever, I had to sleep in the same bed with him, and it was so bitter cold in Vichy that winter. Vichy was not prepared for a cold winter, there were no windows, there were doors, which did not close well and cold air came in between the door and the floor. During the day, I was sitting near him, and it was so cold that I got chilblains on my feet. I was always glad to lie down with him in his bed. I remember that he said in his fever that he saw grandma - he said it in German: Grossmama - that she was riding on a stick: "I see her, she is riding on a stick, she is coming here". He was supposed to be in a hospital, because he had a contagious disease, and he was in a hotel. This was another fight I had to do; I did not want them to do this to him. I had a doctor, a lady-doctor, and I explained it to her that they could not do this, that this child will never get well, if he gets this shock now, to be separated from me. So, she understood, and she did not report the case.

And we had nothing to eat. They sent us up something that we could not eat. There was nothing to eat in Vichy. Luckily, we got a prescription for milk, and I had a friend, Ilse Roth, and she sent me something from the country, and Lucy brought me also something, and friends of hers. So, he got well again, and at that time I started to correspond with Paul again, who was in Nice. Before, when I was still in Le Touquet, I could write to

Paul. There were printed postcards and you could write only by finishing a printed sentence, for instance: "I am here, how are you?" I sent him these printed postcards, and he sent me printed postcards. This was the correspondence that was allowed between people in the occupied zone and those who were in the un-occupied zone. This was done through Suzanne. Then, when I was in Vichy, I could already write regularly to Paul. But I could not go to Nice, because the Department, where Nice was, was closed, and we were not allowed to go there. Every Department in France had its own regulations.

But then it was opened and the moment they opened it, I took a train and I went to join Paul in Nice, passing through Lyon, where I met a brother-in-law of Lucy, a Mr. Werdenschlag, whom I knew very well. He came to the station and I went out of the train, he kissed me, and we talked for a while. In Nice, we first went to a hotel, but then I moved into Paul's apartment in the Rue Gloria No. 5.

Then there came one day a visa for Francis for Cuba, through the intervention of Adolph. We had to go to the Cuban consulate in Cannes. But I got it only for Francis, and I was supposed to look for somebody to take him along to Cuba, and we were looking and looking. Once, there was a couple, about to leave for Cuba, and we got in contact with them, but they refused. They did not want to take the responsibility, since it was such a terrible trip through Spain and Portugal. I wrote Adolph that there was no possibility to find somebody, who would take Francis along. We asked also the Jewish Committee, whether they could do anything about it, but they refused.

Then Adolph, luckily, succeeded - he described the amazing

himself - in getting visas for both, Francis and me, which were sent by telegram to Cannes, and we went there and got the visas. The trouble was that I had no passport. But, luckily, they put the visa on my recépissé. While we were in Nice, we had a pretty good time. Francis went swimming on the beach, and he went to school there. We came to Nice in February 1941 and stayed till September 1941.

The fare for the boat was paid by a committee. When we left France, we had trouble on the frontier, because our baggage was not there, and we had to sleep over. Then the baggage came the next day. The place on the Spanish frontier was Pau, a famous spa, famous through the story of Bernadette. We went straight south in Spain and had to change trains in Saragossa. That was a most terrible experience. When the train came, it was over-filled, the people were sitting on the roofs and outside on the stairs. And suddenly somebody screamed: "They are putting on new cars" and I was running to these cars. I could not run, I had the valises. I was crying: "Help me, help me" and finally a man came and he carried the valises and we were running. We never got a seat, but we got in and Francis could sit on the valises. From there we went to Madrid, where we wanted to stay over night. Nevertheless, when we arrived, I took a taxi and we drove to the Prado Museum. When we got there, it was closed already. And I said that I can't be in Madrid without having been in the Prado Museum. We went back to the hotel, and we slept two or three hours. We didn't even stay over night. People in Marseille had told us to rent a room in a hotel just to sleep in the afternoon, to rest. And then, in Madrid, we took a train to Portugal. And what I remember about this trip were only the cork-trees.

In Lisbon, we went to the Hicem. I met there Mr. Reder. He heard that I gave the names Elise Rosegg and Franz Mechner. When he heard the name Mechner, he came to me and asked me, whether I happened to know a Dr. Adolph Mechner. I said: "Yes, this is his son". So, that was a lucky thing, because on the boat he brought Francis something to eat, every day. On the boat, we had nothing to eat. Mr. Reder was in prison in Spain, I don't know why, they found a letter on him, or so. His head was shorn, and he and his wife, both, were very upset and sick, and they let them stay in the second class. So, they got something to eat, but we were not even in the tourist class but down there on the bottom of the boat, on wooden plank-beds. Somebody had told us in Lisbon that we should buy beach chairs, and that we did, and some chocolate. I sent a package with chocolate to my parents from Lisbon.

I had met a man in Lisbon, who was Greek, and he was very helpful. He took us to a rooming-house, and I rented a room there. Francis was very sick, with high fever, and I put him to bed there, and had to leave. We had missed the boat, which we were supposed to take, because in Marseille it took long to get the papers, and we had to sleep over on the Spanish frontier on account of the missing baggage. But that was not a bad thing, because we went with a boat, which went the next day and that was the "Villa de Madrid". We did not sleep down in the lowest part of the boat, but all the time on upper deck on our beach chairs.

Francis got very sick and felt better on the upper deck. I found out that there was a wash-room, where you could wash, and I also found out that the marines had a shower-room. So, at 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning, I went with Francis, and we took a wonderful shower in the morning, and then went back to our deck-chairs.

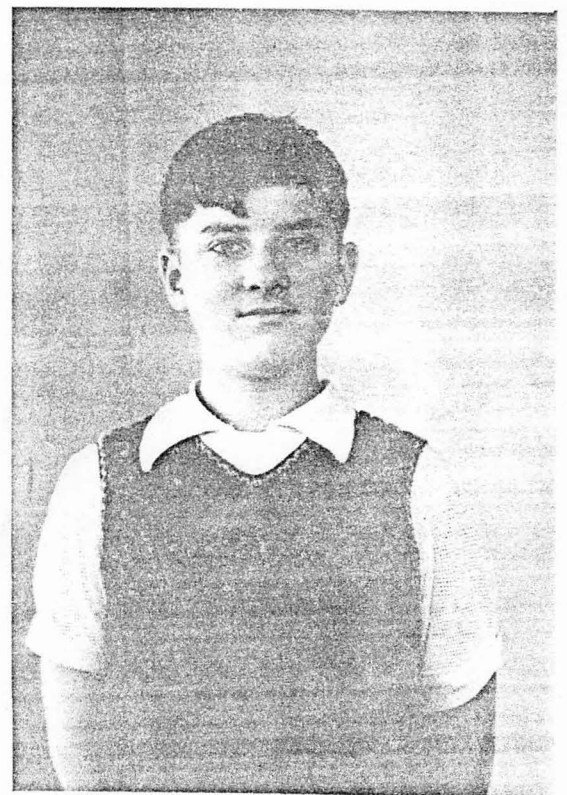
The sea was very calm, and soon Francis was not sea-sick anymore, and we never had a storm. He was very upset and he cried, when he said that we are leaving the land, and that Paul was not there. But the rest of our voyage was rather nice, and we arrived well in Havana.



Adolph and Francis



Lisa and Francis Jan. 30, 1944



Lisa, Paul, and Francis.

