

CHAPTER 24  
A SPARK OF GOOD LUCK.

But we had luck too. One day, I met a colleague, a lady doctor, in the street. She told me that she had heard that one can get a permit for Cuba easily. One had to deposit \$ 500.- per person and that was all that was required. It sounded incredible, but I found out that that was true. I had no money in a foreign country. I had taken out all the money that I had in the savings bank, before the Nazis came, and kept it at home. I had succeeded in getting out 400 dollars to Sweden. That was all. But I was lucky again. An uncle of Hedy's, Dr. Josef Feingold, came to our rescue from Paris. He was the father of John and Erich Forster. How he got to Paris is quite an interesting story. He had always lived in Vienna. One day, about 3 months after the Nazis had occupied Austria, he found in his basement 2 paintings, which he had bought many years ago. When he look-

ed closer at them, he found that they were signed by Adolf Hitler. Hitler's profession<sup>years back</sup> was hanging wallpapers. He also painted postcards with water colors, which he sold in coffee houses, going from table to table. He must have tried to paint larger paintings, probably in water colors, and they were probably copies from old postcards. Anyway, Dr. Feingold found in his cellar two paintings, signed by Adolf Hitler. He knew, of course, right away that these two paintings could be of great help to him, and he went to an important Nazi functionary, whom he knew, to tell him about it, and there was great excitement. Soon people arrived to look at the paintings, and things started rolling. He was invited to see important people and he was soon asked, whether he needs some help. Of course, he needed help. He wanted to emigrate to France with his family. And soon he got the passports with visas for himself, his wife, and Erich, and soon they travelled to Paris. It so happened that they had obtained permits for Cuba, by depositing \$ 500.- for each of them, and also tickets for the trip by boat with the French Line, the boat "Flandre", which was to sail from St. Nazaire on the 14th of October, 1938. But they changed their minds and decided to stay in France and and not to go to Cuba. And now they offered us in a letter to transfer the money for our trip to Cuba to us, under the condition that I pay it out to their son John Forster, who was still in Vienna, and had made preparations to go with his wife Stella to India. We accepted his offer immediately.

We now changed our plans for the emigration and decided that I would go with Francis to Paris and after our arrival there I would go to the French Line, cancel the trip to Cuba



Jan. 1, 1938



Dr. Benjamin Ziegler



Klementine Ziegler (aunt Klemi)



March 1938 Augarten



Summer 1938

for Francis, and he would be left with Lisa. This plan was the result of many deliberations. We wanted to have Francis out of that country. We thought that he was in danger there. It had happened that a Nazi had entered a classroom in a school and had beaten up Jewish children. Hedy especially was hysterical about it, wanted to save his life. Then we thought that the climate in Cuba was very bad. We had read that drinking water had to be bought in bottles. And finally, we speculated that, since we had a good affidavit, she could soon get the visas for herself and the children and go to the United States, on the way stop in Paris and pick up Francis. In the meantime, she could stay a little longer with her parents. And there was something else. We had decided to have all our possessions transported to the United States, and that Hedy would stay in Vienna till the movers had packed everything into the liftvan, to be transported via Hamburg to New York. I had paid for the transportation of the liftvan the full amount in advance, had prepared a list of everything that would go into the liftvan, All that was an enormous job, and I worked on it many evenings till late in the night. All that, while I was still practicing, as patients were still coming, the same as before, and I still had to make house calls. And I had to procure the passports, which meant standing in line at the different offices, for many hours. I hardly moved away from the typewriter, arranging all kinds of things. There was no end to it. There was little time for reflections, for sitting together and talking about the sad things that have happened to us, the loss of everything we had achieved in hard work, put together for many, many years. Everything crushed, the family, the home, the profession.

And all the time the fear that they may come and take me away. When we heard the door bell ring, late in the evening or early in the morning, our hearts started to beat faster. They ususally came early in the morning to pick up people. I was all the time expecting it. When I went to bed, I told Hedy what to do, should it happen. I had a list of people prepared, whom she should call, people who perhaps would help to get me out. Once I had called Mr. Aladar von Duda, the man whose life I had saved about 9 years before. I could not reach him and he did not call me back. Was probably afraid to call a Jew. Was perhaps himself in danger, as a former minister in the cabinet of chancellor Seipel.

I also had to make arrangements with the Serotherapeutic Institute before I left. The director Csonka had fled, and one of the employees, who had worked there in a lower position, as a bookkeeper or something like that, had become manager, and I had to negotiate with him. He agreed that he would pay my royalties to Hedy, while I was away. He was in general quite friendly and cooperative. I had asked him to give me a good amount of the snake venom to take along with me to Cuba. He agreed and I had to come again to get the material. I was astonished, when he gave me then a round metal box, about 4 inches in diameter and about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, which was filled with a white powder. He explained that the powder contained a well measured amount of snake venom, and that they always prepared it that way, to simplify the process of making the snake venom ointment. He said that one gramme of that powder, diluted in distilled water, was the amount that goes into a 5-gramme tube of ointment. He did not tell me the number

of mouse units of snake venom that went into a 5-gramme tube of ointment and I did not ask him that question, since I knew that he would not answer it, as they had kept it to themselves as a secret. But I was confident that I would be able to find it out myself, and I was quite satisfied that he had given me that powder.

I am attaching here two letters, which I had received in those days. The first one was not dated, but arrived some time in April 1938, and here is the translation into English:

"The Leader of Physicians of the Country Deutsch Oesterreich  
Vienna I., Weiburggasse 10/12. Tel. R-25-5-65

To Dr. Mechner Adolf, Vienna II., Taborstrasse 64.

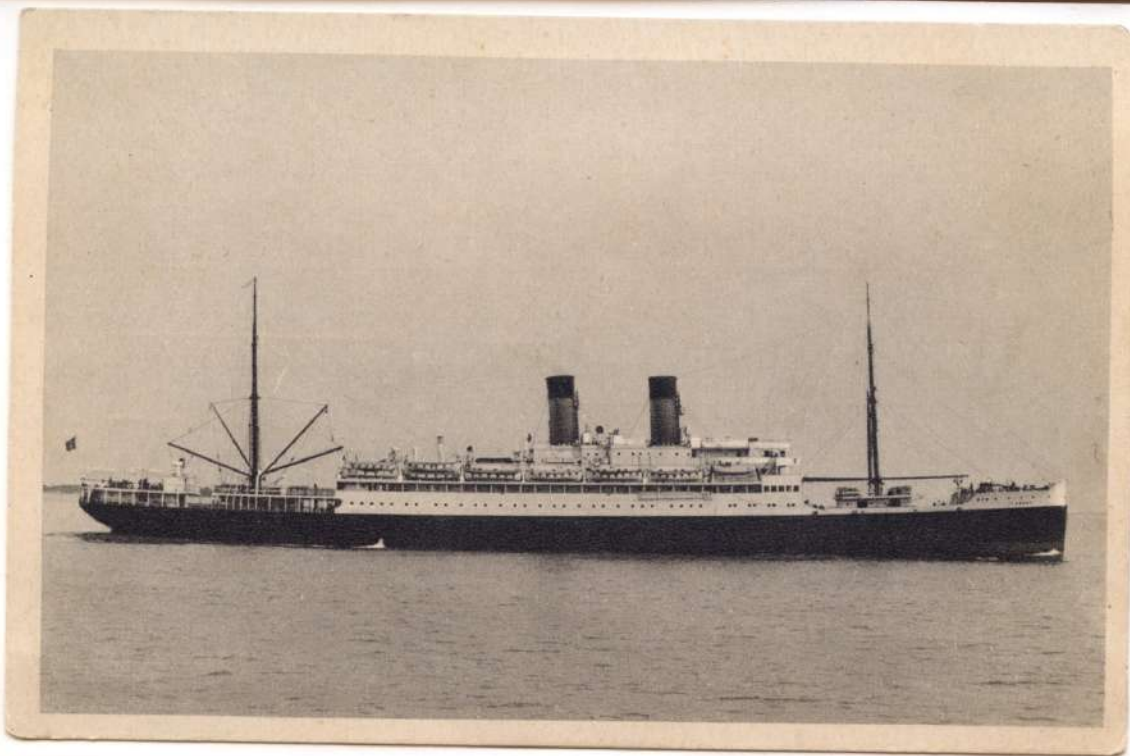
Since within a short time Jewish physicians will be dismissed from the Kassen-practice (sick fund), I want to give some of them the opportunity to give up their offices, equipment, and instruments at a price, which will be stipulated by experts, designated by me. Your practice should be taken over immediately. I am expecting your offer before May 28 of this year.

P.S. The answer is to be directed  
to the N.S. League of Physicians,  
District Vienna I., (Weihburggasse  
10/12)

The Country-Leader of  
the League of Physicians:

Dr. Kauffmann eth."

I never sent an answer to that letter, ignored it. Perhaps I did not realize at that time, how serious the situation was.



The "Flandre".



L. to r.: Lisa, Francis, Suzanne,  
Nicole, Lucy.



L. to r.: Nicole, Suzanne,  
aunt Louise, Raymond,  
Lisa, Francis, Lucy.

# ARBEITER-KRANKENVERSICHERUNGSKASSE WIEN

FERNSPRECHER U-21-5-60 SERIE

I., WIPPLINGERSTRASSE 28

FERNSPRECHER U-21-5-60 SERIE

PB Nr. - /38/Smi/Sch.

Bei Zuschriften unbedingt anführen.

WIEN, 27. Juli 1938.

Herrn

Dr. Adolf M e c h n e r ,

W i e n .

Unter Bezugnahme auf die Kundmachung des Herrn Reichsstatthalters vom 4. Juni 1938, betreffend die Neuordnung des österreichischen Berufsbeamtentums, GBl. Nr. 160, werden Sie hie mit in Kenntnis gesetzt, daß auf Grund der Entscheidung des Untersuchungsausschusses Ihre Tätigkeit als Sprengel(Fach)-arzt unserer Kasse mit 31. J u l i 1938 durch fristlose Entlassung gemäß § 8 dieser Verordnung beendet wird, da auf Sie die Voraussetzungen des § 3 der zitierten Kundmachung zutreffen.

Durch diese fristlose Entlassung entfällt jede weitere Entschädigung.

Vorstehende Entscheidung ist gemäß § 12, Abs.5 der obzitierten Kundmachung endgültig; der Bundesgerichtshof oder die ordentlichen Gerichte können nicht angerufen werden.

Die von Ihnen eingezahlten Pensionsfondsbeiträge werden gemäß § 43, Abs.1, der Bezugsordnung zurückerstattet.

Eingeschrieben.

Arbeiter-Krankenversicherungskasse Wien

Der Direktor Stellvertreter: v.

Der kommissarische Leiter:

*J. Altmann*  
*W. G. G. G.*



And here is the second letter and the translation into English:

"Workers Sick Fund, Vienna, I., Wipplingerstrasse 28.

Vienna, 27th of July, 1938

To: Dr. Adolph Mechner, Vienna.

Referring to the announcement of the governor of June 4th, 1938, regarding the reorganization of the Austrian profession, GBL No. 160, you are herewith notified on account of the decision of the investigations committee that your employment as a district physician of our Workers Sick Fund will be terminated on July 31, 1938 by immediate dismissal, since the stipulations of paragraph 8 of the publication apply to you.

On account of this immediate dismissal there will be no further indemnification.

This decision is in accordance with paragraph 12, part 5, of the above cited announcement definitive. The courts can not be called on to intervene

The pension payments, which you have paid in, will be refunded in accordance with paragraph 43, part 1, of the regulations.

Workers Sick Fund

Registered.

The Representative  
The commissary leader  
(signed) (signed)

In another letter, which I don't have anymore or can not find, I was notified that I will not be allowed to practice medicine after September 30, 1938.

This was the day, as will be seen later, when I left Vienna.

The day of our departure came closer. I did not have the time to pack our baggage, had to leave that to Hedy. Only important papers, documents, I had to select myself, also some instruments, which I thought I could use in the emigration and I was so right. Before we left, I went to my tailor and had him make three white suits for me for the tropical climate. I had forgotten to order a new tuxedo in time, and left without it, but it was sent to me to my address in Paris and it arrived in time, before I left for Cuba, as I needed it on the boat, as a first class passenger. Fortunately, we had our passports already, for quite some time, and only Francis's name and picture had to be added to my passport, which was relatively easy. Unnecessary to say that I left a good amount of money with Hedy.

The only thing I did not have yet, were the tickets for the boat. The French Line had an office in Vienna, near the opera building, and they were advised from Paris by telegraph and letter to write out the tickets for the boat "Flandre" for me and Francis. But they made it difficult for me, postponed it for another day, each time I went there.

The night before I left, I had taken a big trunk, packed with my belongings, to the train station, to have the contents inspected, so that it would go with the train the next day with me. Everything was in order.

I went the next day early in the morning to the French Line, hoping to get the tickets fast. But I soon saw that I had there to deal with two very difficult people, a middle-aged man with a swastika in his lapel and a young woman. The man told me that he was against it that I go to Cuba, and

things like that. He then asked me to come back in an hour, and said that he will write out the tickets in the meantime. When I came back, it was again the same situation, that man trying to convince me that I should not go to Cuba. I then got very angry and shouted at them and said that they will be responsible for the consequences, since my baggage was already in that train, and that I will sue them and denounce them at the French Line. That had an effect, and in a few minutes I had the tickets. To my amazement, I saw this young woman from the French Line in the train to Paris. I still don't know why they did not want to write out the tickets for me and Francis for the boat.

I rushed home by taxi, had just time to say good-bye to everybody and to pick up Francis and two valises. It was a heart-breaking scene, when they all, my inlaws, Hedy, and aunt Klemi stood there on the sidewalk, while we jumped into a taxi and went off, waving our handkerchiefs in the air. We arrived just in time at the train station Westbahnhof, about 5 minutes before the train left. My uncle Martin Sobel and aunt Clara were there to bid fare well to us. I could hardly say a few words to them, as the train had started to move.

We had a relatively nice ride in a first-class coupe, with fine upholstered seats, and since we were alone there, we sat at the window across each other, with a little board between us. I soon started to read books to Francis, and in general rested after the hectic hours that preceded our trip.

I was, of course, worried that something may go wrong

at the border. After an hour or two, in one of the stations, a high German officer joined us in the coupe, later a few more people. In the evening the train reached Munich and there was an enormous crowd of people at the station, shouting, applauding, and singing. It was the 30th of September, 1938, the infamous day of Munich, when Hitler, Mussolini, Neville Chamberlain, and Daladier had met there and agreed to sacrifice Tchechoslovakia, to cede the Sudetenland to Germany. At that moment, when we arrived at the station, Hitler took leave of Mussolini. Daladier must have been in the same train with us, going back to Paris. He must have worried, what kind of reception the French people would give him. We saw it right after our arrival in Paris, since our way took us to the Champs Eliseé. He probably had not expected it, but he got a triumphal reception, with enormous masses of people applauding and shouting. Daladier was surprised, as we later read in the newspapers. We happened to see and hear it from our car.

After Munich, near the German border, I saw woods and I told Francis: "You know where we are now? We are in the Schwarzwald." And he said with a loud voice: "In the Schwarzwald? That is where the Danube arises." The German officer and some other people in the coupé smiled. We came close to Kehl, the German border town on the Rhein, across Strassbourg. An inspection officer came and I felt my heart beat in my neck. He demanded to see the passport and the paper, which was called "Steuerunbedenklichkeitsbescheinigung", which showed that I did not owe any taxes. Another man examined our valises. Everything was found in good order and

they left. When we crossed the bridge over the Rhine, a stone fell from my heart. I did not sleep much that night, was too excited. In the morning, I was all the time at the window, looking at the French landscape.