

## Chapter Six

1933

One day in April 1933 Hermann had a rude awakening when he was called into the office of the Vice-President [the President was away] and was told that he was to resign with immediate effect. Apparently he was regarded as a half-Jew because his father was born as a Jew and was only later baptised. I am not sure that this made any difference to Hitler and his hangmen but fact is that members of the SS had been in the office and informed this apparently rather timid man that he must dismiss Dr Loening immediately. They threatened that were he to refuse to do so the crowd in the street below would not know themselves and would storm the building. It is highly unlikely that there was a crowd in the street below but the man was sufficiently frightened to follow the demand.

Just how Hermann left the building and his office where he had worked so many years we don't know and it is perhaps irrelevant in comparison to the many repercussions that followed. Eva told me years later when it became important that I should know the true situation, that he arrived home at 11 o'clock in the morning and told her that he had been asked to leave! For someone who had never come home till late it was quite shattering.

We can only guess as to how many discussions and considerations took place after that. I don't think he considered staying in Germany even though he loved the country dearly and might have felt obliged to fight the regime. His brother Otto remained in Germany but he and his family, like the relatives in the *Carmerstrasse*, had a very unhappy time. No doubt Hermann had already heard of enough incidents which showed just how Hitler and his men were dealing with Jews and non-Aryans. We must not forget that he was at that time very nearly 50, an academic and so totally unsuited for practical work of any kind. I don't think he had ever handled a hammer, he didn't know how to garden, and what was to be most important in a country outside Europe, he did not know how to drive a car. I am sure though that these considerations did not deter him from taking the decision to emigrate.

His knowledge of English was such that at that time he could barely carry on a conversation in English so it would have probably been advantageous to think of

countries where German was still used. Among the suggestions were Chile as well as Tanganyika, which had been a German colony before 1918. One suggestion came from Eva's uncle, Willi Schwedler, Luise's brother who lived in Berlin where he ran a news agency *Transocean*. He had two daughters living in Chile and after 1918 a number of German soldiers immigrated to Chile. Another contact that Willi had was with a publisher in Windhoek, in the country today known as Namibia. This man was responsible for publishing the German newspaper in that town. So Hermann decided to investigate the possibility of making a living there and left Berlin, presumably in August 1933. He set sail on the German steamship *Usambara* for Walvis Bay, the harbour town of the country then known as South West Africa.

Eva stayed in Berlin and had the unenviable task of having to pack up and sell the house. She also took some dressmaking and typing lessons both of which were to prove very useful in future years.

Marie was sent to England where she stayed with a Quaker family in Saffron Walden in Essex. A close family friend knew about an exchange scheme of pupils and organised for her to be able to go there. Her letters from there reveal her happy nature and the serenity with which the twelve-year-old child accepted the whole situation. I think she was probably extremely fortunate in that she was with a very kind and loving family. Occasional letters from the hostess told Eva what a lovely child she was and assured Eva that Marie was no trouble. She was there throughout the summer holidays of 1933 and went to the seaside with the English family. That seaside holiday was a bit of a disappointment to her because it was not like the Danish and other North Sea beaches at the resorts that she had experienced on family holidays in previous years. Once the autumn term started she attended school there and suddenly had to adopt cursive writing apart from having to think in English. All of this she cheerfully took in her stride and wrote to tell her mother about her life there. She wrote to her grandmother in Polanowitz, where she knew her siblings to be, that since she had arrived in England she had not had a single unhappy day. Letters from both parents assured her that they knew her to be their sensible, big girl, but this child was only just turning thirteen while there. Even the idea of having to celebrate her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday away from the family did not upset her. Judging by her letters she enjoyed the birthday and got used to classes at school.

She was a bit concerned that she was getting too fat and seems to remember that they ate only white bread swimming in butter. Although there must have been normal meals there would have been no meat as Quakers are vegetarians. There were some references to her hair not being what it used to be.

She eventually joined the family in November at Southampton harbour aboard the *Adolf Woermann*, the steamship that took us all to our new country. Eva was a bit shocked when she saw her daughter who had grown quite a bit and had indeed put on a lot of weight, but it was her long fair hair that had the appearance of a bird's nest that shocked the mother most of all. Eva thought it was quite impossible to comb it out so it would be the most sensible thing to cut it. The hairdresser on board refused to cut such lovely long hair and on a quiet afternoon Eva found her child and the hairdresser both in tears as he battled to disentangle this bird's nest! However, he succeeded and she was to wear the long plaits - and once she was confirmed pinned up - till she went to Stellenbosch University in 1939. There she had it cut short but in Windhoek she and I became well known for our long plaits, which were pronounced beautiful.

Back to the summer of 1933: Walter and I were sent to Polanowitz in the company of an aunt - *Tante Willa*, who was a war widow, a sister-in-law of Desi Wegener, from the *Carmenstrasse*. Her daughter Ammeli accompanied us as well. The one memory I have of the train journey is that Ammeli took my new spectacles and cleaned them on her petticoat. This memory means that I had been taken to an eye specialist and was given my first pair of glasses before we left.



*Wolfram and Barbara Kienitz, Luise Loening, Malte Kienitz, Walter Loening*

Walter and I have only vague memories of those weeks in Polanowitz but we were probably anxious about our mother. Our cousins especially the Kienitz children, Wolfram, Malte and Barbara were there with us for some time. Their father took the photo of us sitting on the steps of the back entrance.

My clearest memory is Eva arriving there sometime in October - it must have been after the 10<sup>th</sup>, her birthday, because I had a drawing ready for her as a birthday gift. For her a few days of relaxation followed. A photograph of the time showed her on a horse, having gone riding with her brother, Hans. The days before she came to have this short respite in Polanowitz must have been harrowing: she had to pack up the house, sell the furniture and try to sell the house. She had to face parting from many friends and told Marie of having to hand over the dog, *Schwamm*, to his new owners, a parting she felt as a very definite end to life in Germany.

There was a family event as Konrad's baby daughter, Birgit, was baptised and for the occasion we rode by coach to *Lojewo*, where we saw the cousins, Rosemarie, Jürgen and Dieter. We can only hazard a guess as to how dreadful these days must have been for Eva - knowing that it was going to be a long time, if ever, that she would see her home again. But no doubt she and all the family were stoical about it, because it was not in the family to be sentimental.

Together with us two children Eva travelled back to Berlin in early November and on to Utrecht where we met *Tante* Anna Heilbronner, Hermann's sister. For her too it must have been a hard decision: to join the family on their voyage to Africa at the request of her brother. His idea was that she would assist Eva with housework. Unfortunately she was as impractical as her brother and thus was much more of a bother to Eva, although she did much sorting of the laundry, darned socks and mended clothes. Coming with us did mean giving up her comfortable life in her apartment in Utrecht.

We embarked in Rotterdam, but prior to that we spent a day or two in Utrecht as *Tante* Anna was saying good-bye to her friends there before we sailed. It must have been quite exciting for us young children but the memory has gone. On board we were joined by Ernst Rudolf - he was always known by his full name. What moved him to come and join the family in this new adventure? With his PhD in chemistry he could have remained and find any employment had he wanted to stay in the country. Although he did not have any Jewish ancestors there is no doubt that he would not have thought much of the Hitler regime. His affection for Eva as well as a dislike of what was happening in Germany

probably made his decision to throw his lot in with the family quite easy. He had helped and supported Eva in Lankwitz with many practical considerations as to what should be packed, what was to be disposed, what to put into storage etc.

Except for seasickness that affected Marie, *Tante* Anna and me one incident on board ship that could have ended in tragedy had it not been for the bravery and resourcefulness of Ernst Rudolf. Walter, not quite five years old, decided to explore and was seen on the sail that covered the hold. Just how he got there no one knows. Had any one called him he might very easily slid straight into the Atlantic Ocean. So Ernst Rudolf very carefully crawled towards the child who was unaware of the panic he was causing and somehow managed to grab the boy and bring him back to his mother. Take into consideration this man's considerable size and the danger into which he was putting himself and you realise that this was not an easy feat.

Crossing the equator, fancy dress parades and other events shortened the time on board ship and both Walter and I celebrated our birthdays during that voyage. On Walter's birthday we were taken to the captain as a treat and Walter was allowed to steer the ship!

The day of arrival in Walvis Bay was 16 December.

