

Chapter Three

HÄNDELSTRASSE 28

An impressive list of distinctions introduces a little booklet printed as an obituary in honour of Edgar Loening, our paternal grandfather. He was the eldest son of Zacharias Löwenthal, later to be known as Carl Friedrich Loening - the firebrand, enthusiastic publisher of Frankfurt.

He was born in Paris in 1843 at a time when his father's first attempt of publishing the literature of the 'Young Germany' had come to an end. Only a few months later the family moved to Frankfurt and the publishing house of *Rütten & Loening* came into existence although, as described in Chapter One, it was not to have that name for another nine years. By then his parents, and thus Edgar, had adopted the name of Loening, and having been baptised, had become members of the Lutheran Church.

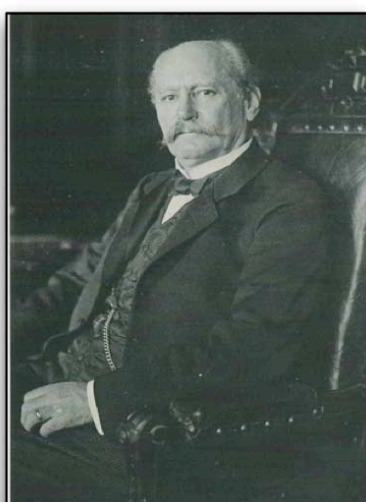
Edgar's early years would have been a bit unsettled as the family was forced to move the home several times. If, however, we believe what has been told of his sister Lili's early life it seems that the family life was happy and that the children lived a sheltered life. In that case credit must surely go to the mother, Anna, the grandmother whom Hermann, Edgar's youngest son (our father), fondly remembered in his brief autobiography and who died in Edgar's home in Halle in 1892. [See Appendix B]

According to the obituary Edgar attended a gymnasium, i.e. a high school, in Frankfurt for six years and then proceeded to study jurisprudence at the universities of Heidelberg, Bonn and Leipzig and was awarded his PhD in 1867. He was called to an administrative post in Alsace, a German province on the French border, during the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and after the war accepted an appointment as a professor extraordinary in Strasbourg, capital city of Alsace, in 1872.

I am only guessing that at this time, when he had his first academic appointment, he brought home his wife, Marie Wussowitz - they were married in Frankfurt on 4 March 1874. Their eldest child, a daughter, Anna, was born 2 July 1875 in Strasbourg. A year or two later, in 1877, Edgar moved his family to Dorpat in the far north. [I looked it up and found it in Estonia, until recently part of the USSR. In late 19th century before the Russian revolution, I suppose it was an independent country.

As he accepted an ordinary professorship in this city there must have been a university there - presumably German speaking.]

After six years, in 1883, Edgar accepted an appointment as professor in Rostock on the Baltic Sea. In June 1885 Hermann, the youngest son, was born there. Two older sons, Karl on 14 July 1877 and Otto on 29 February 1880, were born in Dorpat. A year after Hermann's birth the family made their final move - this time to Halle in central Germany. There Edgar and Marie established their home in the *Händelstrasse* 28 which is the same house that Hermann describes a little in his autobiography.



*Professor Edgar
Loening*

Here Edgar became Professor of Public as well as Ecumenical and International Law. By this time he had also achieved a doctorate in Philosophy and was awarded an honorary one in Divinity. During his lifetime he was appointed Privy Councillor to the King of Prussia and Councillor of State to the King of Russia [possibly while in Dorpat?] and he was nominated to become a member of the *Herrenhaus* - I guess an equivalent to the House of Lords in Britain.

From all the awards and honours it is obvious that he was a very learned man and the impressive list of books written by him in addition to many articles published in various journals show that he did much to further the study of his subject or subjects.

At the funeral service on 19 February 1919 the minister who led the service praised first of all his vast knowledge and learnedness, his rich experiences, but also his lively interest in the fine arts and his friendly social manner. Over and above that he told of the many people who had their personal lives enriched by having had a closer relationship with him. There seems to be little doubt that he was a well-respected and popular member of the jurisprudence faculty and it was emphasised that many enjoyed listening to him when he lectured, while for him lecturing was always a joy, never a burden.

The life in the home was possibly much like that of his sister's home in the *Carmenstrasse* in Berlin. In the obituary the minister stressed the extremely happy marriage and spoke of the home as 'a house in the sun'. Mention was made of the hospitality that many enjoyed in the home. We need only think of the twenty-four piece set silver cutlery, the Meissner porcelain dinner services, some of which still exists, as well as the large linen tablecloths to realise that it was a very active social life. University vacations allowed the couple to make some extensive journeys as Hermann described in his autobiography.



No doubt the 1st World War cast a shadow over this happy home and the minister made mention of this by saying that only shortly before his rather unexpected death Edgar had spoken of his fears of the future of the German nation. If it had not been for his wife's constant encouragement he would have become very depressed. As he died early in 1919 he was not to experience all that lay ahead for the defeated Germany in the next few years. And he certainly was spared the fate that Lili, his sister, experienced once the Hitler regime started the Jewish witch-hunt. It was his children and grandchildren who had to bear the brunt of that.

Anna

It is sad that the only daughter of this happy home had such an unhappy life. I have no idea what the education of a girl would have been like in this cultured home but I know that she was very well read and knowledgeable. The sadness of her life was her marriage to Karl Heilbronner, a psychiatrist, in 1902. He did not admit to her before the marriage that he was suffering from an incurable disease, which would mean an early death for him. Under the circumstances he felt that it would be unwise to start a family. That this coloured her future life is almost certain. After their marriage the couple moved to Utrecht in Holland where he had an appointment at the university. This meant that Anna made life-long friends in that Dutch city. When her husband died after ten years of marriage she moved back to Halle and was there to support her mother when Edgar died. Once mother Marie had died around 1930 Anna moved back to Utrecht where she received a pension and had many close friends.

When Hermann decided to leave Germany in 1933 he asked his sister to accompany the family to come and live with us in Windhoek. It was not to be a happy experience for Anna. The climate, the large, and yet somewhat impractical, house as well as the life style were all so very different from both the cultured home in Halle or her life in Utrecht. She returned to Utrecht in 1937 and when we were in Europe in 1939 we visited her and spent a few days with her in her apartment. I think she probably lived a quiet life and shared many experiences with her life-long friend, a woman doctor. The war years must have been dreadful but she survived till she died in 1961 - a little disappointed that Walter's fourth child was another girl. Her hope that the Loening family name should be perpetuated was not to be realised.

Karl

The eldest son, Karl, became a doctor and as such made a name for himself as he invented the gastroscope• –an instrument doctors use to investigate the contents of a patient's stomach. He married Susanne Brode [one of my godmothers] in 1906. They lived in Halle in a house in the *Burgstrasse*. As they had no children of their own they adopted a little girl, Margarete, known as Gretchen. (She appears in the family photograph taken at Hänschen's baptism) [p.25] and looks to be about a year older than Marie so presumed date of birth 1919.) Gretchen was married and had two boys around 1939 - 1941. She died very young leaving her husband and the little boys - Peter and Ulrich Blaskoda. Her mother cared for the children until she died in 1950 at the age of 88. Karl himself died young - later than 1922 as he also appears on the photograph of Hänschen's baptism.

Our mother told us about his sense of humour and how he used to tease his lovely wife. He died of a kidney disease and could predict the date of his death fairly accurately as he made an entry in a diary for her asking her not to wear black for his funeral.

Otto

Again I know little about this uncle but at least I have some memory of him. He must

• Walter found this reference in the SA Medical Journal *Geneeskunde*

have studied law and as far as I know he became a judge. He was married to Käthe Goetze in 1909. They lived in Berlin. Their house was in the *Schillerstrasse*, Lichterfelde. It was within walking distance from our house in Lankwitz. They had three children - Lotte born 17 May 1910, Edgar born 15 August 1911 and Hans, always known as Hänschen, who was born in 1921.

After Hänschen's birth Käthe suffered from manic depression, which seriously affected her mind. Although there were times when she was quite normal the atmosphere in the house was always a little oppressive. That is how I remember it from our visit in 1939.

During the war the house was bombed and Otto and Käthe were invited to move in with the cousins, particularly Nanna von Gierke, in the *Carmerstrasse*. When this house was bombed in 1944 they moved to Halle to the house in the *Händelstrasse* where they both died. They, together with Otto's surviving siblings, were owners of the house and there was an income from that. Both our father and his sister Anna also received a small amount of interest before the war. It is this house that was bought by the German government several years ago and from which we three Loening children were granted an inheritance recently.

Lotte

The eldest child Lotte was a temperamental creature and there were frequent bursts of temper, which resulted her rushing out of the room 'howling'. She was interested in the theatre and found a career designing theatre costumes. During the war she met a man and they had a child, it appears illegitimately. When, during this terrible time in war-torn Germany she sought shelter with her parents in Halle, it appears that her brother Edgar made it clear that the father of the child was not welcome. When the man left the house Lotte followed him with her child and allegedly Otto said she was the only 'decent Loening' alive. Some time after the war Lotte and this man were married and were able to establish a home for their daughter. Lotte's health was not very good. We had some slight contact with her when a couple, who cared for her, was visiting South Africa a few years ago, but she died in 1987.

Sadly the relationship between Lotte and her brother Edgar was such an unhappy one

that the daughter, Gretel, did not have any contact with her uncle. She herself is married and lives in Erlangen. When Walter contacted her in 2001 she was unaware of the fact that her uncle had died eighteen months earlier, but it is she who alerted Walter to the fact that we as descendants of [Prof] Edgar Loening were entitled to some money from the *Händelstrasse* house in Halle as she had already received a portion of it.

Edgar

Otto's elder son, born in 1911, was extremely ill as a young child. He had septic arthritis and in those days before penicillin, surgery was the only solution. He spent many weeks in hospital and was forever grateful that his young aunt Eva visited him there. Many, many years later he still remarked on those visits and how much he appreciated them. Marie remembers these visits, bringing him chocolate. The illness left him with a stiff hip and a permanent, very prominent limp. This badly affected him and his attitude to life as well a possible future career. He was unemployed when we were in Berlin in 1939 and was living with his parents. I have memories of how he took me sightseeing in Berlin while my mother and Walter were visiting specialists there. I was old enough then to realise the tense atmosphere in pre-war Germany and how bitter he felt about the Hitler regime. Nonetheless I cherish the memory and appreciate special attention I was given in those few days.

As a result of Edgar's disability he was not fit for military service and his non-Aryan background prevented him from finding suitable employment. He found some happiness as he married during the war and they had a little girl. Sadly this child died - of natural causes but no doubt malnutrition in those difficult years can be blamed for her early death. The wife, known as Erni, died in the 1960s. They lived in Hamburg where he himself found employment as a director in a theatre. When I visited Edgar in 1979 he was living in retirement in an apartment, which was filled with relics of the two households. He died alone aged 91 after an operation in 2000.

Hans

Although the birth of this younger son was said to cause his mother's illness he himself was a child of joy and in his short life would have given his family much pleasure. Perhaps because of his mother's illness he spent much time in the Lankwitz

home of Eva and Hermann and was often with his cousin Marie. Our departure in 1933 must have been very sad for them both and he wrote her many letters. The most remarkable thing about his letters was the illustrations. He must have enjoyed drawing and he gave expression to much of what he wanted to tell in these drawings. Unlike Edgar who was tall with dark hair and brown eyes, Hänschen was of quite a small build, fair-haired and blue-eyed which apparently was good enough for Hitler's army. When we were there in 1939 he was doing his compulsory military service and came home for a day. He told of the newspaper he had to stuff into his boots, as he could not find any small enough to fit him. During the war he was of help to the Gierke family of the *Carmerstrasse*.

This anecdote gives us an indication of just how dreadful the situation was for members of the non-Aryan family. Nanna von Gierke was not feeling well and her sister, Desi Wegener, was with her and asked a doctor [a woman] who had attended to the family for many years to come see her. That woman refused to come stating that she could no longer attend a non-Aryan. Eventually Desi got a script from another doctor and the medication had to be collected. It would have been inadvisable to go to any nearby chemist where the family was known. Hänschen was home with his parents so he offered to go a part of Berlin where the name was not known.



The assembled family on the occasion of Hänschen's baptism: We can see Hermann Loening standing behind his mother, Grossmama Marie Loening as she is holding Hänschen; Edgar and Lotte Loening with their mother Käthe between them and Otto Loening next to his family. Karl Loening sits behind his wife Susanne who has her daughter Gretchen next to her. Eva Loening has her daughter Marie on her lap and Anna Heilbronner (Loening) is on the left.

Hänschen was killed on the Eastern front soon after that in 1943. A sad end to a life that had shown so much promise.