

Gerhard Gershon "Jerry" Heimann - Out of the Holocaust-- to the Shanghai Ghetto
with Lotte Grünfeld Heimann

Gerhard Gershon "Jerry" Heimann, born on September 29, 1921, in Berlin, Germany dramatically describes his 90 year saga. With his sister-in-law, Lotte Grünfeld Heimann by his side, Gerhard details the personal and political factors that enabled him to save himself and his family from the ravages of the holocaust. His loyalty and altruism were the determining qualities that kept his immediate and extended family alive and intact.

Even as a young child Gerhard learned to be a support to his family in the upholstery business. He delivered sofas on his back to customers living the the Moabit section of their shop on Perlebergerstrasse 50.

By December 1938, following the events of Kristalnacht, the elders of the family gathered as a Familienrat and determined that the then 17 year old Gerhard must be salvaged by sending him across the boarder to Holland. When Gerhard arrived to Nymegen, Holland without a visa, he encountered a Nazi boarder guard. Gerhard realized he might be shot and his parents had already endured too much suffering through the murder of his older sister, Ilse. So he returned to Berlin, and hitched his cart to parents wagon. "Whatever happens to them-will happen to me."

Gerhard's good fortune came by way of his sister-in-law, Lotte Grünfeld Heimann, his brother Kurt's wife. Lotte took the initiative to petition the Japanese embassy in Berlin for 5 VISA's - Kurt, Lotte, Gerhard and his parents, Illes and Jetka Heimann, to find refuge in Shanghai, China, in the Honku section, that was controlled by Japan. They left Berlin, on September 16, 1940, by train on the Siberian route through Lithuania, Russia, and Manchuria. One month later, in October 1940, Germany closed any escape routes for Jews.

Arriving in the Shanghai Ghetto, the family was housed in barracks, tight quarters where they were exposed to tropical diseases, starvation, poor sanitation, and daily bombings. "One thing we didn't have in Shanghai was depression. We were in survival mode. You saw one person after another die," explained Gerhard.

"Adversity was the best education," explained Gerhard. He found work in the French Concession of Shanghai in an alcohol factory and supplemented the meager rice rations on which the family would otherwise have to subsist.

The Joint Distribution Committee set up in Shanghai after WWII to help relocate "Stateless Jewish Refugees". Gerhard was told he could come to the USA. Gerhard's parents were only allowed entry to Israel. Gerhard said, "I made a promise to my parents that if they left Germany with me I would always support them." So Gerhard and his parents sailed from Shanghai on an Italian ship from Shanghai, to Haifa, Israel on December 31, 1948.

As a pioneer in Israel, Gerhard worked hard and supported his parents, as a plumber laying the first water pipes on Dizengoff Street. They were surrounded by a very loving extended family. But in 1953, Gerhard and his parents came to Denver, Colorado to join his brother Kurt, sister-in-law Lotte, nephew Manfred and later his niece Giselle (Gigi) Heimann. Gerhard married, worked hard and thrived in the Colorado Rockies.

"Our survival could be attributed to a combination of luck and miracles," insisted Gerhard. He was too unassuming to suggest that his personal heroism was the key factor that helped to bring his family -Out of the Holocaust.

By Giselle Heimann Ratain
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