

How My Mother Saved My Father and We Escaped Germany – Ephraim Sales

My father was born in Poland, migrated to Berlin, Germany for business opportunities when he was nineteen and had his last name changed from Sales to Salles as a result of misspelling by a border guard. He was drafted and fought for Germany in World War I. He aimed to shoot at mice or squirrels, not people. One day, he came down with malaria and was hospitalized as a soldier and awoke in a room with corpses. They had assumed he died, and he walked out.

At the end of World War I, he left for better business opportunities to Berlin, Germany, the most civilized city and country in the world, where people like the following lived: Beethoven, Brahms, Sigmund Freud, Albert Einstein, Frederick Goethe, Wolfgang Mozart, etc. It has the best universities in the world, best scientist at the time and industrious people lived there. My mother was also born in Poland and separately migrated to Berlin. My father met my mother in Berlin and married her. Then my parents had two daughters, first Miriam and then Cilly, about eight and six years older than I am. Then in 1929, a boy was born and it was me.

Then Hitler rose to power and under Hitler I could never become a German citizen despite the fact my father fought for Germany in World War I and I was born in Germany. I could never become a German citizen.

In the summer in 1938, I was then 9 years old. My parents had two Jewish bookstores in Berlin. A friendly police man came in to my father's bookstore one day in 1938 and told him that at 1:00 a.m. that night, all male Jews of Polish origin would be rounded up and put in trains to be brought back to Poland. My father did not believe him as there were many, many people like that in Berlin. Sure enough, they came. Several Gestapo members arrived and took my father away to ship him back to Poland. The next morning, my mother had her wits about her and she ran to the American Embassy. Her goal was to obtain written confirmation that we were expecting to leave Germany shortly, maybe in several weeks for the U.S. She spoke to someone in charge and asked for this verification that we have been waiting two years to leave Berlin for the U.S. My father's brother at the time was living in Lynn, Massachusetts with his family and had sent papers for us to migrate about two years earlier. The U.S. official in Berlin's response was that he cannot do this.

My mother then saw some blank envelopes with U.S. letterhead laying on the counter. The envelopes were unused, so she grabbed an envelope and put it in her purse. Then she headed for the Berlin police station, which was next to the railroad station. When she arrived there she saw a multitude of women, with coats, blankets, food, and supplies waiting to give them to their departing husbands. Since my mother knew Berlin well, having lived there for many years, she knew the path to the trains. She arrived at the train station in several minutes and started looking for my father. Soon she saw where he was, and so she approached a German policeman who was there and said to him that we were expecting to leave Germany in several weeks for the U.S.A. and she had a letter from the U.S. embassy confirming this, and she showed him the envelope from the U.S. embassy. The German policeman said, "Go take your husband and leave now!" We left!

My mother saved my father's life! We did get our papers allowing us to leave several weeks later and we left Germany for the U.S. The trains that took thousands of Polish born Jews to Poland were not allowed to enter Poland, so they sat at the border and God knows what happened to them.



We left Germany in early December by train through France, and stayed in England for a month, and then left for the U.S. and arrived in the U/S? early February, 1939.