

Danger, Loss and Survival: Ruth Zweig's Immigration to the USA

by Vivian Mackey

My mother was born **Ruth Lisa Gans on 9/19/1919** in Mannheim, Germany. She was a true family person, jovial, and a great joke teller! She loved the ocean, languages, and playing Scrabble. She was the daughter of Maurice and Bella (Schuster) Gans, and sister to Werner Gans, who was four years younger. Her father had a successful supply company.

The persecution started with words, misinformation, name calling and hatred toward the Jewish people, gypsies, the mentally and physically challenged (called "unfit cripples") in 1931. There was talk about creating a "super race" and later a "master race". Then the anti-Jewish laws were created. In 1935, it became intolerable for Ruth and Werner in school. No gentiles (non-Jewish people) were allowed to work for Jewish people. Therefore, employees of a Jewish-owned company or Jewish household help were not allowed to work for them. Many times Maurice was arrested for made-up misdemeanors. They were watched all the time. The Gestapo perpetrated schemes against them to acquire their successful business.

It became impossible for them to stay, so they made the decision to leave with whatever they could take as quickly as possible. They were not allowed to take any money, jewelry, art or anything of value. They could pack only two crates with some furniture under the watchful eye of the Gestapo guard placed in their

home. Later, when they received the furniture, it had been torn open by Gestapo looking for hidden valuables. Eventually, they left with the equivalent of \$10.

My mother, Ruth, at the age of 19, left for Lugano, Switzerland where she married Dr. Carlo Ghioldi, a biochemist, whom she had met when she was 17. After many traumatic incidents, her parents finally left Germany, first to attend her wedding and then immediately thereafter they fled to Cuba where they were allowed to wait for a sponsorship and visas to the United States of America!

This process took years. From Cuba, Werner (then 15) was sent to strangers in Sharon, Massachusetts, to continue his education. These kind people opened their home to a Jewish boy who could no longer stay in school in Europe. Upon graduation from Sharon High School, Werner joined the United States Army in counter-intelligence as a translator. He became a member of the famous "Richie Boys."

After the marriage, Ruth and her new husband, Carlo, moved to Milan, Italy, where he was employed as a biochemist. Ruth was 20 years old when their son, Emilio, was born. In 1943, German troops occupied central and northern Italy. German authorities rounded up Jews in the major cities. At the same time, Ruth's husband, Carlo, was diagnosed with an inoperable, malignant brain tumor. During this time, they were hiding and accessing bomb shelters during the air raids. She dealt with the care of her dying husband, baby, air raids and hiding. Carlo died of his terminal illness within 3 months. He died an agonizing death which

Emilio witnessed at a most impressionable age, scarring him for life. Widowed during the war at the age of 24 and Jewish, she could not get ration stamps for food and therefore went to farmers on her bike to beg for a few eggs and carrots which she cooked for her son, sacrificing her portions. She could never collect any money or death benefits on her husband's insurance policy or they would have been captured by the Gestapo.

In 1943, with the little bit of money she had left, Ruth hired a farmer to carry Emilio (then 4) and guide her in the dark of night through the forest, climbing over the mountains as far as the Swiss border. She carried a single suitcase on her back using her arms to hold back brush and pulled on big limbs to get up the mountains. The guide left her before the border with instructions for which way to hike to the nearest Red Cross camp. She never forgot when the two of them arrived being greeted with hot chocolate!

In Switzerland, they remained in a refugee camp for months. Later, they would be allowed to stay with a relative in Switzerland until the war was over. Ruth's brother, Werner, who had served in the United States military then went to Washington, D. C. to expedite the process of getting the proper paperwork and visas for his sister and nephew to immigrate to the United States.

In 1946, they arrived in Boston with nothing and not speaking English. She lived in a tiny apartment with her parents and brother thankful to be alive! In 1947, she met my father, Helmut Zweig, at the Immigrant Mutual Aid Society (IMAS) in Boston. In 1947, Ruth and Harry were married and I was born in 1949.

My Father's escape involved completely different challenges and circumstances. Born in 1906 in Berlin, he was the oldest of Rosa and Moritz (Blank) Zweig's five children. Of his immediate family, his three sisters, Herta, Frances, and Sella survived also with harrowing stories and relocations to France, United States and Israel respectively. Both his parents died in the Dachau Concentration Camp and his fourth sister, Erna, her husband and baby, son, were executed.

My father would never talk about the atrocities. He had been a professional musician who played five instruments in Europe, but in the United States, he never picked up a musical instrument! When I was five years old, we moved to a suburb of Boston. It was a generally Christian community where I felt the prejudices of other children.

I emphasized the date Ruth was born since later in life, after her children and grandchildren were born, she felt that everything significant and good that happened in her life had a number "9" in it! After all she endured and suffered in her lifetime, she remained optimistic, open minded, accepting, non-judgmental, charitable, most loving and kind. Ruth lived to be 100 years old.

Ruth Zweig



Vivian Mackey

