

Stuttgart

1. My Childhood Memories

We moved to Stuttgart from Leipzig, where I was born, when my father died in May, 1934. At that time, I was seven years old. My memories of Stuttgart revolve around the worlds of my environment at the time: school and family.

My mother chose to send me to the Jewish School, in Hospitalstrasse. My memories of my time there are extremely happy. I loved my teachers, my fellow students and learning, both Hebrew and German subjects. I remember especially the lovely songs we used to sing, such as, for example "Schneewitchen über den Bergen", as well as our hiking outings in spring and our wonderful gymnastics classes. I was very much attracted to the Orthodox observances of the Jewish religion, although my own family did not observe many of the rituals, and a special friendship developed between me and one of my teachers, Fräulein Herz, because she took me to the home of her rabbi on Friday evenings to welcome in the Sabbath. This was a happy gathering of people who shared the evening meal, the blessings and many wonderful songs.

My other memories center around my family. My mother had many aunts, uncles and cousins, most of whom lived in Stuttgart or on its outskirts. We always visited them on weekends, especially my mother's favorite aunt, Aunt Sofie. With her, we children would walk in the lovely woods on Saturday afternoons, enjoying the soft pine needles underfoot and delighting in picking the berries and mushrooms that were so many additional treasures to discover and savour. After the walk, we would go back to Tante Sofie's house for cake and hot chocolate.

I also used to get accordion lessons and I enjoyed them very much, too, as well as the annual concerts that my teacher's students gave, both as an orchestra and as soloists. My accordion was my one good friend from Germany that I was allowed to take with me when I had to leave and I was happy that it permitted me to express my feelings of homesickness when I played the beautiful music that we used to play and sing in Stuttgart.

2. How and When I Left Stuttgart

On November 9, 1938, I went to school, as usual. I used to go there by myself with the streetcar. When I got to Hospitalstrasse, there were people standing in the street looking at the burning synagogue, which was right next door to our school. They told me to go home, because there would be no school that day. Our school was destroyed too, together with the synagogue and after that we had classes in makeshift quarters, which I really don't remember. However, this event decided my mother to send her children away from Germany, since she herself could not get permission from the authorities to leave together with us. She decided to avail herself of the generosity of the British government, who had agreed to accept European Jewish children, whose lives were evidently endangered by the Nazi government. Through friends she found two families in Manchester, England, who agreed to adopt my brother and me until such time as my mother would be able to join us again. Accordingly, my brother and I joined a children's transport that left by train from Frankfurt to Hook of Holland. From there we embarked on an overnight boat to Harwich, England and then took another train to London. There we were assembled in a big hall, where my adoptive parents were already waiting for us. They hugged us and took us into their car to start the journey north, to Manchester. It was overwhelming to be surrounded by a foreign language and, having had only one year of English in school, I could only understand my guardians if they spoke very slowly and addressed me in particular. I thought surely they would get tired of speaking this strange and difficult language, English, and would be forced to relapse into the comfortable German language! Somehow, they did not feel the need to do that and gradually I became more comfortable with the rhythm of their speech and learnt more of their vocabulary.

3. My Impressions and Feelings About Stuttgart To-Day

Throughout my life I have carried with me the happy and harmonious memories of my childhood in Stuttgart. It has been a great sorrow for me that I could not continue my life in that beautiful city, where the only non-Jewish person I knew also happened to be a very kind person. She used to work in our home and I have remained in touch with her and her children and grandchildren throughout the years. Visiting Stuttgart to-day is like visiting an old, dear friend. So many memories and emotions are connected with all its beautiful hills and streets and buildings. And yet I am an outsider now. All those who made up my little world within Stuttgart (with the exception of my German friends) are scattered throughout the world. Our school and our synagogue, though rebuilt, are different now. Of course, life always changes and people change, but I cannot help being very sad that such a beautiful community was destroyed and that so many lives were shattered and bonds torn apart, even among those who escaped with their lives.

I am very grateful to the city of Stuttgart for its generous invitation to us and for its reception of us. They gave us a wonderful opportunity to rediscover each other -- since several of us former Jewish School students were in this group -- and also to discover more about the Jewish community of which we had been a part but with the scope of whose activities we were not familiar, having been children when we left Stuttgart.

I was deeply touched by the kindness and solicitude of the German people we met during our stay and I appreciated the opportunity to learn about the life and thoughts of to-day's Stuttgart inhabitants by meeting with high school students and visiting an old age home. Of course, I enjoyed seeing the beautiful castles and landscapes and attending the opera, the variété and the many wonderful receptions.

4. My Message to the Next Generation

Unfortunately, we cannot change the past. However, looking at past behavior can serve as a guide to avoiding past mistakes. I feel that there are certain attitudes which can help to prevent man's cruelty to man and I would identify them as follows:

- We must take responsibility for our own life and actions. It is wrong to make others a scapegoat for the difficulties we may encounter.
- We must understand that there are many different cultures and ways of life -- just as there are many different languages, religions and peoples. All are expressions of life in its manifold forms and we are never going to be able to be objective, if we take it upon ourselves to evaluate which is better and which is worse.
- The age-old golden rule -- never do unto others what you would not want them to do unto you -- has not lost its relevance. It should guide our conduct.