
He wrote:

[... They tortured us until everything we owned, even most of our clothing, had been stolen....]

In winter of 2002 we took a trip to the concentration camp at Dachau. This way we were able to get a better picture of what life must have been like there, in the bitter cold, with little to no clothing.

After a few weeks, the two men are able to go back to Gunzenhausen. The family leaves town in January of 1939. All the children, except for Joel Fredi, are still in Germany at this point.

The Years in Frankfurt

Until now, nothing was known about the time in the Hessish city. We are able to get some information out of the letters that father Sigmund sent to his son Joel Fredi, in America.

The Situation in Frankfurt is tense, since they don't know when and how they will be able to emigrate. Their only hope of emigration to the US is their son Joel Fredi.

About 30 letters addressed to Fred from his father were sent to St. Louis, each one is asking him to stand surely for the family's emigration. Every single method of escaping is debated.

{...Now my dear Fred, let me tell you about the Cuba trip that didn't work out. After securing boat passes I discovered that they are no longer allowing us Jews to go to Cuba. Even the steamboat „St. Louis“ headed to Cuba with 975 Jews on board was not allowed to dock there, as I have been informed...}

"{... So now I have again received the assurance from the Konsulade de la Republica o del Uruquaj in Paris, that if I turn in my passport... medical records, certificate of conduct, and four wallet photographs to the consulate mentioned above, then I will receive the immigration permission...

Dear Kurt has sent me a writing from the Help organization in Munich, in which he is asked to sign up for emigration to Australia as a qualified craftsman.....Kurt registered himself in the meantime. Do you, dear Fred, think I should go there, with our dear family, as well?.....Australia is very far away from where you are living, my dear boy, and a reunion would be postponed even longer. But if there is no other possibility, I would even grab this...}“

„{...Brazil has been closed to immigrants once again, but I have heard that Venezuela as well as Argentina and Chile have reopened for them. Have you, my dear Fred, been able to get the \$700 up to \$1100 for our immigration and have you had any success? There is a rumour going around here, that the Jewish association ‚Aguda‘ has spoken to the president about making it easier for German Jews to immigrate...}“

{...I am awaiting the original letters of your good friend, that would like to help us make our emigration easier...
I went to my former English teacher today (bet you can't believe your old father is still interested in foreign languages at his age) and had him write a letter intended for Mrs Saenger...I sent this letter directly to Irene in Berlin. She shall sign it with her own name and send it on to Mrs, Saenger. Please, my dear Fred, speak to Mrs. Saenger when you get a chance, and tell her that she can help quicken and simplify our immigration. Our thousand thanks goes out to this good-hearted woman in advance...
Did you speak to my friend Bergmann (Sichlinger Straße) about our emigration yet? Why don't you ask my friend Adolf about this matter? You see my son, an extra payment would surely hasten our emigration....After all, you have been in the country for 4 years now, and have surely made many good friends by now. With a little help I'm sure you could fulfil our greatest wish...}

{...In 14 day, on August 15th (1941), my permission to stay will be cancelled again. I must request more time at the Gestapo. I hope I am successful, I seem to have new worries every day. It is a constant chase, so you can never really find peace of mind. Well, my dear Fred, be ready for

a result in our quest for emigrations/ immigration, because we cannot stay here longer, and I don't want to go back to where I was, if this is, in any way, possible.

Dear Irene is leaving her post on the 1st, tomorrow, and coming back here from Munich to sort out her things.... Irene now has two posts in England in view. She plans to stay there until she can get permission to go to the US....}

In every letter that Sigmund wrote to his son, he pleads with him to find a way to make the family's emigration to the USA possible. But because of constant complications, it never worked out. As you can see, he did inform himself of all possibilities.

But this task was apparently not easy for Fred. He did, in fact, get enough money together, with some help from friends, but the situation in the US in 1939 was anything other than good. There were ca. 10 million out of work, so the government had to put a hold on immigration. There was a specific number of people allowed to come into the country every year. Each of these persons had to prove they had a person who could pay for their trip and stay, so they would not become a burden to the government. And so it came that all Jews had to register at the consulate as soon as they had found an American who would pay.

There they received an immigration number, a so called quota.

Because of this, many Jews tried to find countries in which they could stay until it was their turn to emigrate to the US. Proof for this is the number of Jewish residents of Gunzenhausen that went to south Rhodesia or Argentina.

The letter also report the places of stay and the different activities of the family members.

{...We received good news from dear Kurt and dear Grandfather, who celebrated his 84th birthday on the 15th of November from Munich. Kurt still has work, thank goodness, and was able to..... give us 20 RM for Chanukah. This was a kind gesture.

Dear Irene, who awaits her departure in several months from Stuttgart at the American consulate, has taken a position for a Dr. Levi. Irene comes home every night, she

sleeps at home, and earns 20 RM a month, with everything for free..... Werner is still a carpenter, working in learning workshops. He is very happy with his choice of profession and has a good relationship with his manager...}

{... Dear Werner has been promoted. He took part in a workshop test 14 days ago and scored the best out of 200 students! He scored 100 points out of 100 possible, a very good grade..... After my three month long ...course in welding was finished, I started working at the shifting market garden on the grounds of an Israeli graveyard. I leave the house every morning at 6 o'clock....It's hard work but it's very healthy...Dear mother always has enough housework to do. She is happy when everyone comes together in the evening.... Werner comes home for lunch for half an hour every day, and Irene never comes home before 7.... }

{...Dear Werner must work at the brickworks, but he likes it just fine and earns good money. I myself am still working at the marked garden and earn 30 RM a week.....}

{...Dear grandfather is being taken good care of in a nursing home in Munich. He has everything he needs. Irene and Kurt visit him once a week, and he writes us satisfied letters....}

When you read these letters, you get the feeling the life in Frankfurt and Munich was relatively easy.

Werner was able to train as a carpenter, which we would not



have thought possible at this time. Kurt worked as a gardener and Irene travelled back and forth between Frankfurt und Munich as a house maid. Later she had to go to Berlin to work in a big firm: Siemens.

Sigmund probably has to do lowly unskilled work, but we never heard a single complaint. Everything is healthy and happy. Of course we can imagine why the letters were written this way. Mr Dottenheimer was afraid of censors

and repressions. He hoped Fred would have informed himself of the Jews' situation in Germany through the news and recognize the seriousness of the situation.

We learned, for the first time, from these letters, that the family had contact to Sigmund's sister, Frieda Strauß, and to her son Martin. On December 31st 1931 Sigmund writes:

{...My dear Martin, my dears,

Dear Fred has informed me that you have not been feeling well, but I surely hope you are feeling better now.....

Irene was not able to leave Germany, even with her permit, so now she has also drawn a number for the USA. Now she has to wait her turn (14700), just like Kurt. This does not takes as long as we suspected, the number 14000 are being checked at the consulate in Stuttgart right now. Aunt Frieda, Werner and I have numbers over 27000, so we will have to look for a country where we can wait until our turn comes along. I have heard that Venezuela and Paraguay are open to emigrants..... Why don't you ask dear Martin what the living conditions are like there, dear Fred will pay for our emigration. The good boy is trying every possibility and spending time and money in order to bring us closer. Well then, my dear Martin, don't forget to ask about Venezuela and Paraguay and let me know as soon as possible....}

{....Grandfather now knows about Frieda's death. Ferner says that he plans to go to St. Louis for ca. 4 weeks at the beginning of September, and hopes to be able to talk to you then. If you should come together, I ask you my dear Fred, to pay good attention to dear Martin. He is a very good boy and he deserves to be treated well. After all, you owe him enormous gratitude.....}

We see that relatives from Bismarckstraße 7 now live in the USA, so they either left Palestine or have never been there. Frieda dies in California. Her son, Martin, appears to have had contact to Fred. From the father's admonition, we take that Martin might have paid for Fred's immigration.

{...Now let us turn to the real reason I have written to you today, my dear Fred. Another year has passed, a year in which we were neither able to speak with nor see each other. What should I wish for you on your day of honour? I hope.... God hears my plea that all your hopes and wishes may be granted.

May the Lord protect you, bless you with his love, and give you happiness and health. I hope the day I will be able to give you my blessings is not all too far off. We still have many happy years of family togetherness to enjoy..... Please good news soon. I send you my love and an extra birthday-kiss. I love you and think of you often....}

The hopes of Sigmund Dottenheimer and his family are not granted. After the middle of the year, 1941, no more letters arrived in St. Louis.



Although Irene's large suitcase was sent to Antwerp, something kept her from her departure. The suitcase, that had been insured with 1000 RM was bombed, and the young woman was taken away to a concentration camp. It is unknown to which concentration camp she was deported. We must assume that this happened before the inevitable solution was found for the „Jews Question“.

Irene Dottenheimer

Heinrich Dottenheimer dies in the concentration camp in Theresienstadt at the age of 88.

Sigmund Dottenheimer and his wife Frieda are imprisoned in the concentration camp in Auschwitz.

Werner Dottenheimer dies at the age of 19 in the concentration camp in Majdanek.

Kurt and Irene Dottenheimer are declared dead in 1945, since no one knows what happened to them.