



My Journey ***From Berlin to Newport Beach***

How a Teenage Immigrant Achieved the American Dream

500

Newport Center Drive

Mariman & Co,

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CHAPTER 1

BERLIN GERMANY

The Early Years

At the end of World War II on September 2nd, 1945, conditions in Berlin, Germany were terrible. Much of the city devastation resulted in vast piles of rubble. Prior to the war, much of the population lived in large, multi-story apartment blocks. Some 600,000 apartments were destroyed. Only 2.8 million of the city's original population of 4.3 million still lived in the city. Many were killed in the Allied bombing. Most of the missing people had fled the city.

There were severe food shortages. Water mains and sewage systems were destroyed. Disease was rampant and sewage everywhere. The stench was terrible. Rail links with the countryside and rest of Germany were destroyed. Those who survived had no way of making a living. Factories were destroyed. Shops were closed because goods were unavailable. Food was the most immediate problem, but housing, because of all the destruction, was also a huge problem. Life in the city became never-ending hunger, disease, housing shortages, unemployment, and abject poverty. The Allies hired mostly women to begin to clear away the rubble. But even among the rubble, children were seen playing in the ruins. The situation became even worse as the first post-War winter approached. Families could live in damaged homes during the summer. During the winter however, living in homes with holes in the walls, and without coal, was a different matter.

I was about eight years old living in Berlin, when my mom received a telegram from my father, Franz Kalbas, who was living in Vienna, and reassuring us everything was going to be fine. My mom and I traveled via train to Vienna, which was a major ordeal, because back in those days, Russians surrounded Berlin. We could have traveled by air, but it was too expensive.



Rudy's grandfather in 1940.

I remember my grandfather stuffing some money in a liverwurst sausage he gave us for the trip. The East German police came to the station outside of Berlin and entered our train car to search passengers. They looked at the sausage, where my mom's entire life savings were hidden inside.

The two East German police officers looked at each other and said, "What should we do with this sausage?" The officer banged it against his forearm while looking at my mom, who was struggling to not look alarmed, knowing all her money was in there. Thinking it was a plain old sausage one of the policemen declared, "Let's just leave the sausage here. What are we going to do with it?" I can remember the look of relief on my mom's face.

My father met us at the Vienna train station. This was the very first time I remember seeing my father. Previously, I never knew him. He was a military officer in the German army, and during WWII, he was stationed away from my mom and me. After he met up with us, he temporarily placed us in a boarding house with about 50 to 60 beds. We stayed there for several weeks. The living conditions, being communal, were obviously challenging

to say the least. There were no showers. My mom and I went to the public bath house, paid an entrance fee, and after my mom had taken her bath, I used the same water and tub for my bath. Temporarily, mom enrolled me in the local school.

After the first week or so, my father's brother visited us and desired to tell my mom the truth about my father, who lived on the outskirts of Vienna, in Linz. He escorted mom to where my father was living so she could witness what her husband was up to. They took the train to the outskirts of town where my father's 4th floor apartment was located, knocked on the door, and a woman opened the door. He said, "I am Franz's brother, and this is his wife." My mom explained she was there to see Franz, my father, but before he came out, the woman said she had 3 boys from a prior marriage and a fourth boy would be too many. "I don't need another boy to raise". However, if I had been a girl, she would probably welcome her to the household. She had assumed that the purpose of the visit was to pawn me off to my father, which of course, was the last thing on my mom's mind.

Of course, the shock of my father having another family was overwhelming for my mom. When my father finally came to the door you can imagine the pandemonium that ensued; it was a fiasco. Fortunately, I was not present when all this took place. After the visit, my mom was most distraught to learn her husband had abandoned his wife for another woman. My uncle liked my mom and wanted her to know the truth. Even so, mom was determined to save her marriage and desperately tried to coax her husband to reunite with us. Mom got a job and attempted to save her marriage. Her first job was attending to two Doberman dogs owned by a neighboring family, but she could not control the dogs on walks. Later she became a caregiver to an old man, and we moved into his house. I can remember waking up in the night and hearing the gentleman peeing into a night pan, a sound I will never forget. My mom attempted to mend fences with my father for almost a year, to no avail. Reuniting as a family was not to be.

My grandfather (Opa), Albert Wiedeman, mom's father, was always the anchor in our little family. My grandfather coaxed my mom back to Berlin, in 1949. He said he had good news for us. We flew back to Berlin, whereupon my grandfather informed us he repurchased the little grocery store he had previously owned prior to WWII, including living quarters in

the back. I vividly remember milk being delivered to the store at 2:00AM in big metal canisters, because of the noise it created awakened me. My mom worked in the store with her mother and father. The store provided income and a place for my mom and me to live. I vividly remember my mom telling me she had managed to bring home all the savings my grandfather stuffed in the sausage when we left Berlin. Her life's savings were intact. Looking back, my mom instilled in me the importance of saving money, but more importantly, to keep your savings growing.



Grandfather's delicatessen store in 1951.

Prior to evacuating Berlin to the countryside, I was enrolled in the local school beginning in first grade. (On the first day of school, the custom was to bring a gift for the teacher). When we left the city, I was in third grade and did not attend school for about one year. However, shortly after arriving back in Berlin, my mom enrolled me in a school for fifth, sixth, & seventh grades. As I remember, the school was three, maybe four stories tall, and was an all-boys school. It took me 20 minutes to walk to school. Homework was assigned up the wazoo! Discipline was evident in the classroom. When

the teacher walked into the classroom, there was to be immediate silence. Student conduct in the classroom showed total respect for the teacher. Class schedule included Saturdays, from 8am to 1pm.



Rudy age 5, in Berlin 1946.

The school curriculum had 3 career pathways. Testing occurred during sixth grade, and depending on your scholastic standing, you had three career paths to choose from: the practical path (trade), the technical path (engineer/science), or the PHD path (doctor/lawyer). I qualified for the technical path. The school day began at 8:00AM and ended at 3PM. The curriculum consisted of class in the mornings, with lab & testing in the afternoon, six days a week.

A homeroom was assigned to all students, along with a home room teacher. My classmates and I stayed all year in the homeroom classroom,

with teachers specializing in various subjects visiting every hour throughout the school day. Each teacher had maybe two or three books for the whole class, which were shared among 35 students. Typically, two students were assigned a few chapters in the book for homework, learned the subject matter, and then were required to share for 20 minutes what they learned in front of the class, answering student questions. Participatory student learning was standard classroom practice. The teacher would grade our presentation, including how we answered the questions asked by the rest of the class.

School days were long. We had plenty of assigned daily homework. I woke up around 6:30AM, readied myself for school, walking each morning about 20 minutes with all the other students, to school. It was a privilege to own a bike, but bikes were scarce. My friends and I never owned a bike. I don't remember many of my fellow students riding a bike to school, either.

After school I often played soccer in the streets or in a vacant lot cleared of the war rubble. There were no organized school sports' programs. When not playing soccer, I would occasionally be asked to help in the store after school, as well.

Usually, on Sunday afternoon my grandfather would take us to the Spree River on the outskirts of the city in his little second-hand Adler car. At the river there was entertainment, dancing, and music. During the summer, my grandfather treated us to coffee cake and a nice lunch. During the winter months, I traveled with a couple of buddies, via the subway, to go sledding or ice skating on skates fastened to our shoes. Christmas was a big event in Germany. We exchanged presents on Christmas Eve. I received one present from my mom and one from my grandfather.

During the beginning of my eighth grade year in school (I was 13, almost 14 years old), my mom became friends with a store customer who was excited about immigrating to the state of Oregon, in the USA. The family had two children, and promised to correspond after arriving in Oregon. Upon their arrival, this family met a gentleman named Frank Carmody, who worked for the railroad, and had an interest in marrying a German woman. Neither Frank Carmody nor my mom could speak each other's language, so a young 18-year-old girl, a customer at the store, transcribed my mom's letters from German to English, for Frank Carmody and vice versa. My mom corresponded with Frank, exchanging letters and pictures for about six to nine months, culminating in a long-distance

marriage proposal. Frank sponsored our immigration to America, to Portland, Oregon.



My mom at 20 years old in 1934.

The decision to leave her native Germany, was not an easy decision for my mom. In fact, she nearly decided against leaving Berlin. Quite frankly, she agonized over whether she should travel to a strange country with only her son. The uncertainty caused her to break out with a case of shingles, which compounded the situation. When mom's case of nerves subsided, her shingles began to heal. Soon after, my grandfather shared with my mom that he had an opportunity to immigrate to Nebraska in the late 1930's before World War II began. A school chum of his sent him a ticket, but he got cold feet and didn't go. He chose to stay in Berlin, a decision he always regretted. He strongly encouraged my mom to immigrate to Oregon and start a new life. He said, "do it for Rudy".

It was a big decision to move from the comfort of the store and adjacent living quarters. Our apartment consisted of a private one and a half bedroom with shared toilet (you brought your own soap and toilet paper), wash basin, small kitchen, and living area. Again, like in Vienna, we had no bathing facilities at the store. We would go to a bathhouse once a week that had eight private baths, where my mom would bathe, and then I would take

my turn, and again, use the same bath water. It was a daunting and bold decision, moving to an unfamiliar foreign country, speaking no English. Moving to America, the land of opportunity, changed my life.

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