

The Miraculous Liberation of the Jewish Prisoner Dr. Adolf Katzenellenbogen from the Dachau Camp

When Adolf Katzenellenbogen, who had been taken from Konstanz, Germany, to the Dachau concentration camp after Pogrom Night (originally known as “Kristallnacht, the Night of the Broken Glass”) on November 9, 1938, was released after about three weeks, a small miracle had happened. That is because the release of this Konstanz art historian – an act that saved his life – occurred through a chance encounter of his wife, Elisabeth, née Holzheu, with the SS-officer Bauer. Bauer gave the Dachau camp as his work address.¹

There were several unusual circumstances about this release. For one thing, it was initiated by a member of the “Schutz-Staffel (SS)”, i.e., the combat unit of the Nazi regime whose ideological objective was the “elimination of all racial-biologically inferior elements”.² And in this ideology, the Jews were considered inferior, “subhuman”. It was also unusual that this act of liberation was carried out in secret. The prisoner did not leave the camp with a regular certificate of departure, but was dumped from a large limousine onto a Munich street under cover of night. The timing was also a surprise. In general, the Jewish men interned after Pogrom Night were held captive in the camp for six to eight weeks. Thus, Adolf’s three-week detention period from November 11 to December 1 was relatively short. Such a “privilege” was normally granted only to the so-called “protected prisoners”, who had distinguished themselves as front-line fighters with exceptional bravery during World War I.

When the Gestapo men arrested Adolf on the evening of November 11 in his house at Ruppanerstrasse 13 in Konstanz and took him away, they did not tell his astonished wife where they were taking her husband. It was only several days later that Elisabeth found out that her husband, just like most Jewish men in south-west Germany had been taken to the Dachau concentration camp. It was then that the desperate woman, who had given birth to their daughter just over a year earlier, decided to go to Dachau to get her husband out of the camp and return to Konstanz with him. Given the strict security of the camp complex at the time, this plan can only be seen as a hopeless endeavor. Relatives of prisoners did not get into the camp unannounced. And the biggest obstacle was that Elisabeth could not name a single person from local or regional Nazi Party circles who could advocate for her cause.

On the train trip from Konstanz to Munich, Elisabeth must have realized that she had no chance of seeing her husband. She broke out in tears. Noticing this, an officer who was

¹ The author’s research did not produce any evidence of a Sturmabführer Bauer in the Dachau camp at the time in question. The officer may have given incorrect information about himself or his place of work for personal safety.

² Confession of a high-ranking SS leader to Eugen Kogon, quoted in Eugen Kogon, “Der SS Staat”, 13th ed., Heyne-Verlag, Munich 1983, p. 42.

traveling on the same train with her, asked her why she was in such distress. Elisabeth explained her situation. The officer, who had introduced himself as Sturmbannführer (a Nazi Party paramilitary rank equivalent to Major) Bauer, promised her that he would look into getting the prisoner released. He needed only an address where the prisoner was to be taken. Elisabeth named the house of her relatives, the Albert family, at Dunantstrasse 8 in Munich, a quiet side street near the English Garden.



Dunantstr. 8, Munich, Source

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Dunantstraße+8+80805+München>

The witness of that evening's incident, the young daughter of the Albert family, later described it in a letter to John Katzenellenbogen, as follows:³

“Your mother drove straight from the train station to Dunantstraße and now we waited with concern and hope for what was to come. At dusk, a large, black Mercedes actually drove up and stopped for a moment. A man fell out of the door onto the street and the car sped away. My father, your mother and our Rosa rushed into the street, picked up the sick man and dragged him into the house as quickly as possible.”

Officer Bauer had kept his word. Ironically, he had done so as a member of the self-proclaimed “master race” that denied Jews the right to exist in the German Reich. What had prompted the Sturmbannführer to do this?

Was it pity for the desperate fellow traveler? Or may it have been a silent protest against the inhumane treatment of the Jewish prisoner by the guards in the Dachau camp? The Sturmbannführer's real motive remains a mystery; all attempts by the Katzenellenbogen family to clarify this issue have failed, and even after the war they were unable to establish contact with the SS man. Rumors circulated, however, that Bauer had released

³ Letter from Tita StremLOW to Adolf's son John Katzenellenbogen (JK) of April 14, 1998, private archive JK.

Jewish prisoners several times, which caused him considerable problems with his superiors.⁴

Saved in Switzerland

Adolf's problems were by no means over with his release in Munich. He had been in good health when he was arrested in Konstanz on November 9, had been brought to the Dachau camp. When he was set free in Munich three weeks later on December 1, however, he was severely emaciated and very ill. An early diagnosis confirmed life-threatening pleurisy and pneumonia, combined with significant circulatory problems and a high fever. The brutal prison conditions – starvation for the first three days and standing outside for long roll-calls in the most adverse weather⁵ – had ruined Adolf's health.



Roll call in Dachau, Source

<https://www.kz.gedenkstaette-dachau.de/historischer-ort/kz-dachau-1933-1945>

Immediate medical treatment on site in Munich was out of the question, whether outpatient or inpatient. The risk of the secret release being discovered was too great for both the helpers and the former prisoner himself.

Elisabeth organized a transport of her severely ill husband by car to their Konstanz apartment. But medical care was also a problem in Konstanz. Inpatient treatment in a specialized clinic was not possible because no Jewish patients were admitted to the municipal hospital in Konstanz, yet there was no Jewish clinic in the area. But in her

⁴ “Family history discussion with John Katzenellenbogen” meeting minutes 2016 (undated).

⁵ Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen, affidavit of June 25, 1966, Freiburg State Archives, F 196/4382, vol. 2.

moment of need, Elisabeth managed to find a doctor who was willing to treat her ailing husband at home. It was the internist, Dr. Hans-Werner Langendorff, himself a half-Jew, who had had been forced to quit his position as director of the Konstanz Clinic due to malicious slander.⁶

It soon became clear, however, that the patient's condition was critical and urgently required an operation in a hospital. Fortunately they were able to arrange admission to a Swiss hospital, the Kantonspital Winterthur. On January 6, 1939, after completing the exit formalities from Germany the seriously ill Adolf was admitted and his operation took place the very next day. Entry into Switzerland was made possible not only for the patient, but also for his wife and young daughter Ruth, through the efforts and significant support of one of the Reinhart brothers⁷, a member of the prominent Winterthur family of entrepreneurs, who were known for their patronage, especially for persecuted Jewish artists. It was probably also helpful that Elisabeth, who came from a Zurich family of manufacturers, had an established relationship with the Reinhart family.

With the move to Switzerland, the small Katzenellenbogen family turned their backs on Germany, which had become inhospitable to them, for many years. The family did not return to their old homeland until sometime after the six years of the Nazi regime that still remained. From Switzerland they eventually were able to reach the USA which offered them more security. For Adolf, who was considered a "full Jew" by the Nazis, this was a logical step because it saved his life; yet he was not able to stay in Switzerland permanently, because the family had received only a temporary residence permit. During the so-called "Final Solution to the Jewish Question", which was pursued in full force as of the fall of 1941, his life would have been in constant danger in Germany, as well as in most other European countries.

The family, however, could not make the crossing to the USA together. Whereas Adolf was fortunate enough to immigrate to the USA in the fall of 1939, it took almost two more years before his wife and daughter were able to follow him.

The time before persecution

Adolf Katzenellenbogen was born into a wealthy Frankfurt/Main family on August 19, 1901. His father, Albert, was a bank manager at the Commerzbank with supervisory board positions in several larger banks and industrial companies. His mother Cornelia, née Doctor, came from a long-established Frankfurt family; Adolf also had two sisters, Gretel and Martha. Cornelia and the couple's three children converted to Protestantism in 1918. This action did not, however, protect every member of the family from Nazi persecution later on, as the racial laws, enforced in 1935, were based on the religious affiliation of the grandparents. And in that regard, the Jewish identity of the Katzenellenbogen family was dominant.

⁶ Article "Südkurier" Konstanz of November 23, 1945, Konstanz City Archives, personal files.

⁷ B. Stark, Y. Hildwein "Dem See treu", Karl Einhart (1884-1967) und seine Weggefährten, Konstanz 2017, p. 20. The authors name Werner Reinhart, the patron of music arts, as a helper. In addition the JK family believe that Oskar Reinhart, well-known art collector, may also have provided assistance.

Adolf first studied law receiving a doctorate in Gießen in 1924. After a short period of work providing legal advice in various companies, he began studying art history. He had developed a great love for this subject early on. He completed his studies in Leipzig and Hamburg and in 1933 received his doctorate in Hamburg under the direction of the renowned art historian Erwin Panofsky. Around 1930, while studying art history in Leipzig, Adolf met his future wife Elisabeth Holzheu at evening events, so-called soirees, organized by his relatives, his uncle, the economics historian Alfred Doren and his wife. Elisabeth, born in Zurich, Switzerland, on December 7, 1904, was the daughter of a furniture manufacturer – and she was not Jewish. She was studying piano in Leipzig.

On these evenings, Elisabeth and Adolf met many famous members of the German cultural scene. The Jewish and non-Jewish guests exemplified the oft-praised German-Jewish symbiosis in the Weimar Republic. The encounters with such world-famous artists as the pianist Arthur Schnabel, the conductor Otto Klemperer and the composer Ernst Krenek were of particular interest to Elisabeth as a music student. (See illustration with dedication).⁸ Another prominent artist who later taught her in his master classes in Paris was the pianist Robert Casadesus.

Adolf also felt exceptionally comfortable in the circle of society's acclaimed people and he documented this with thanks in the guest book. Many of the guests, who became ostracized by the Nazis after 1933 because of their Jewish faith or whose art was deemed "degenerate", later emigrated.

After moving to the University of Hamburg, Adolf continued his studies with the noted Erwin Panofsky, who not only became Adolf's doctoral supervisor in 1933, but also his mentor in professional advancement. Very importantly, Panofsky later helped Adolf escape from Nazi persecution.

⁸ Private archive JK

Bei klarem Licht und freundlichem Wind
 Das Schöpfen des Lebens die Arbeit bestet,
 Zu großer Arbeit das Meer gerichtet,
 Verkant so den Komatzenen geschwind,
 Wo es jahrelang tonlos beschicht gelogen,
 Ruhig sich reistend zu neuen Tagen
 Wenn es nun dransum bligt und stürmt,
 Brauchel es sich nicht zu sorgen,
 Denn was ist, dass ein schöner Morgen
 Dem Vater folgt, das sich drohtent türmt
 Und dass ein Hafen gestürzt
 Es aufzunehmen ist bereit

 In Dankbarkeit
 Adolf
 18 Oktober 1938

O+o Klemperer 9. 1. 30
 mit herzlichem Dank für einen
 so harmonischen Abend.

 Adolf Katzenellenbogen
 Justus-Claire-Klein
 Kurt Wagner
 Louis Brändel
 David Holten

Prominent guests at A. Dorn and dedication by A. Katzenellenbogen (Source: private archive JK)

The Years in Konstanz (1935 – 1938)

The teaching bans imposed by the Nazis on Jewish academicians as of 1933 also affected the newly graduated art historian Adolf Katzenellenbogen. Because of that, he and Elisabeth Holzheu, who had become a married couple, decided to build their own home in Konstanz on the border of Switzerland, Elisabeth's country of origin. Financial support from both sets of parents made it possible for the young couple to buy a beautiful piece of property and to lead a life free of financial worries. Without a permanent position, Adolf could not manage to pursue private research for several years. He firmly believed that the rule of the Nazi regime would not last long. As a non-Jew and a Swiss citizen, Elisabeth had the chance to give piano lessons at the Swiss music school in Winterthur.

In hindsight, it may seem hard to explain why the couple was looking for a home in Konstanz. Neither of them had previously established any relationship with this city or any residents. The planning for the house construction was also started at a time when it was still possible to leave the increasingly anti-semitic Germany without problems. In addition, Elisabeth's affiliation with Switzerland gave her a good reason to take up residence there.

Since the relatives were also unable to provide an explanation, it can only be assumed that Konstanz was chosen as the new residence for several reasons – for one thing, both partners saw their professional future in Germany, for another, the border town seemed to

offer the chance to travel quickly to the safe haven of Switzerland, and finally, the charming surroundings of the city on the lake promised a fine quality of life.

For the construction of their home, the couple did not choose the part of the city on the left bank of the Rhine, which was preferred by the Jewish population, but the Allmannsdorf district on the right bank. In this district, which had retained its original village character, Adolf and Elisabeth acquired a building site with a view of Lake Konstanz – on the quiet Ruppanerstrasse 13. That made Adolf the only person of Jewish background among the inhabitants of Allmannsdorf in the 1930s. They built a 6-room 133 square meter house on a 1,000 square meter property.⁹ This also included a garage for Elisabeth's car.



House on Ruppanerstrasse 13, entrance with garage; Adolf and mother Cornelia Katzenellenbogen go into the house (Source: private archive JK)

The move into the new house is registered in the Konstanz residents' register on October 8, 1935. The move into the new house had been delayed, apparently, as the couple had moved to Konstanz in May, 1935. In the meantime, they were registered at the Konstanz addresses Bahnhofplatz 6 and Hebelstrasse 4 and 6.

⁹ Notice of the Konstanz tax office of September 15, 1951, Freiburg State Archives F196/4382, vol. 1.



Wedding of Adolf and Elisabeth in Zurich, Sept., 1935 (private archive JK)

The newly married couple Adolf and Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen lived in seclusion in their new home.¹⁰ They had hardly any contact with other members of the relatively large Jewish community that had settled on the left bank of the Rhine in the old town of Konstanz. At that time, Adolf was the only resident of Jewish descent in Allmannsdorf, a district with a strong following of ruling Nazi party. Contacts between the new residents were limited to occasional visits with their immediate neighbors on Ruppenstrasse. Other than that, they often had visits from parents and relatives.

¹⁰ Statement of the neighbor and witness Peter Mändlen in conversation with the author on May 2, 2022.



**In the garden at Ruppennerstrasse, Adolf (second from left) father Albert (far right)
(Source: private archive JK)**

Elisabeth, the professional pianist, worked as a piano teacher at the Winterthur music school. She drove her own car from Konstanz and the convenience of the local border traffic allowed for a smooth trip to Switzerland. The car, however, aroused attention. Not only was it one of the very few privately owned vehicles in Allmannsdorf, the BMW 303 was also state-of-the-art with a six-cylinder engine and a striking yellow paint job.

The first child, daughter Ruth, was born in Konstanz on April 8, 1937. In the meantime, the conditions for the Jewish population had continued to deteriorate; the daily discriminations, pertaining to grocery shopping, store hours, recreation facilities and school life, steadily increased. The Katzenellenbogens, as a half-Jewish family, now tried to escape this hostile environment by emigrating to neighboring Switzerland. Elisabeth was Swiss before her marriage, she worked in Switzerland and, another important factor – she was able to name supportive parents and relatives there.



A 1930s BMW 303 (photograph licensed by Debbie Newhouse, Los Angeles, CA, USA)

The couple submitted an application for a residence permit in Winterthur to the Canton (State) Immigration Police in Zurich on May 10 and again on May 27, 1938. The applicants certainly did not expect to be rejected by federal government authorities and the Winterthur municipality. The original application was rejected by the Federal Police in Bern; that was followed by a rejection by the Winterthur Control Bureau of the Immigration Police of the “reconsideration request” on July 7, which Adolf had submitted on May 27, 1938.¹¹ As in many other cases, the refusal to allow people persecuted by the Nazi regime to stay in Switzerland was justified with the argument of “foreign infiltration” – an argument in which the fear of economic disadvantages ultimately superseded the humanitarian considerations. In the case of Elisabeth, who had grown up in Switzerland, the following assessment by the control office must be deemed cynical:

“The marriage took place on ... at a time when the Swiss woman should have known the consequences of marrying a non-Aryan, who has to live in Germany”¹²

The fact that, at the same time as the Winterthur Control Bureau rejected this admission application, representatives of the most important countries of the Evian conference in nearby Évian on Lake Geneva also refused to be more generous in their acceptance of the

¹¹ Report of the Winterthur control office to the Winterthur city council of July 7, 1938, source: private archive JK.

¹² *ibid*

rapidly increasing number of Jewish refugees, was a noteworthy, if unintended, coincidence of moral failure.

So it happened that just a few months later on November 9 of the same year, following the assassination attempt by the Jew Herschel Grynszpan on the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris, that Adolf Katzenellenbogen and most of the Jewish men in Germany were placed in “protective custody”. The Jews living in the Baden region were sent to the Dachau concentration camp in Bavaria. Adolf was brought into Dachau on November 11, 1938 and was given the prisoner number 22114. The damage to his health from this internment would stay with him for the rest of his life.



Deportation of Jewish men in Baden Nov. 9/10, 1938 (Source: <https://www.kz/gedenkstaette-dachau.de/historischer-ort/kz-dachau-1933-1945>)

Seit No. Zettel	Name, Ubrname	Art	geb. Ort	geb. Ort	Platz nummer	Abtransport	Peruf	Abtransport + Anst.
11-02	Julius Stein	Abt.	1870-10	Alt. Ostbay	1	-	1	Katzenellenbogen
11-03	Luigi		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-04	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-05	Josef		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-06	Josef		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-07	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-08	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-09	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-10	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-11	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-12	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-13	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-14	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-15	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-16	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-17	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-18	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-19	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-20	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-21	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-22	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-23	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-24	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-25	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-26	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-27	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-28	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-29	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen
11-30	Anton		1870-11	Italien				Katzenellenbogen

Camp book at Dachau Concentration Camp with entry of Adolf Katzenellenbogen, line 8, camp number 22114 (Source: Dachau Camp Memorial)

Emigration and career in the USA

It was only when Adolf Katzenellenbogen became seriously ill and was at death's door, that the humanitarian conscience of the Swiss authorities prevailed, thanks to the help of the influential industrialist family Reinhart in Winterthur. As previously described, Adolf (per ambulance), Elisabeth and little Ruth were able to travel to Winterthur in January 1939. They did not receive an immigration permit, however, but only a temporary residence allowance with the standard requirement that they undertake efforts to emigrate to another country.

In the following months, Adolf recovered sufficiently from the emergency lung operation so that he was able to travel to England in the early summer and, at the invitation of the Warburg Institute in London, publish academic works on the history of medieval art.

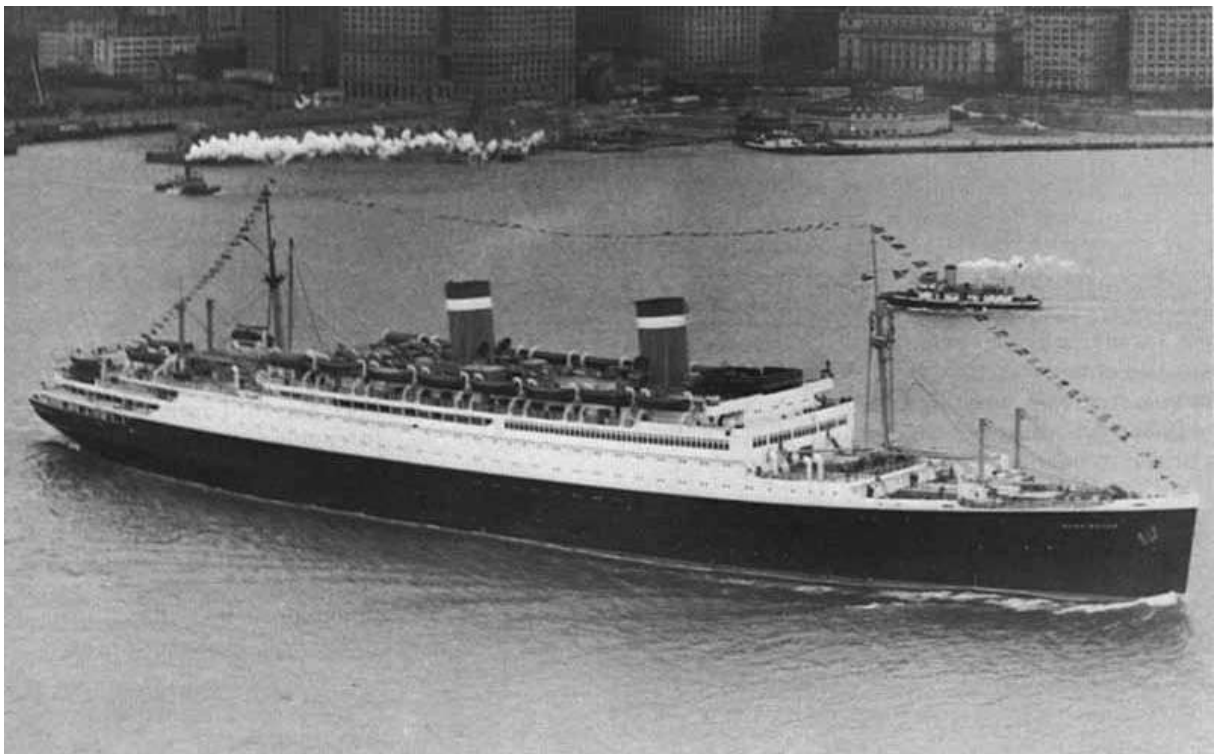


Adolf Katzenellenbogen visibly marked by the concentration camp imprisonment, Winterthur 1939 (Source: private archive JK)

In June 1939, they sold their abandoned house on Ruppenstrasse in Konstanz. Elisabeth served as the seller and Berta Einhart, the wife of the Lake Konstanz painter Karl Einhart, signed the purchase contract as the buyer. The sponsor in the background, however, was Norbert Jaques, Berta Einhart's brother. The payment of the purchase price of 30,000 Reichsmark (RM) which represented a fair value even in the difficult negotiating position

for the Katzenellenbogen couple at the time, was loaned for 10 years with an interest rate of 3%.¹³

At the same time in June, 1939, Adolf received an invitation from his doctoral supervisor Erwin Panofsky to undertake a lecture tour in the USA. Panofsky had emigrated to the USA years earlier and was holding a teaching position at Princeton University since 1935. The American consulate in Zurich issued a visitor's visa for Adolf. He began his trip from Winterthur on August 24, 1939 and made the crossing with the luxury liner "SS Washington" from the French port of Le Havre.¹⁴ Adolf Katzenellenbogen is number 164 on the passenger list. It just so happened that the ship docked in New York on August 31, 1939. This was the last day before the outbreak of World War II in Europe, triggered by Hitler's invasion in Poland.



Luxury liner SS Washington against the backdrop on New York City
(Source: <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Washington>)

As happy as Adolf was to have now reached the USA, the destination of dreams for many persecuted Jews in Europe, he soon had to deal with apprehensions about the outbreak of war. The visitor's visa was valid for only a short time, after which he would have to travel back. But the ocean route for the planned return journey had become much more dangerous because of the threat of attacks on the seas by the warring countries.

A stroke of luck came to his aid; on the last stop on his lecture tour at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY, he was offered a substitute position for a seriously ill professor in the

¹³ B. Stark, Y. Hildwein, Dem See treu, loc.cit., p. 20, footnote 67.

¹⁴ Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen, affidavit, loc.

Department of Art History. That allowed him to extend his visitor's visa several times. The price he had to pay for his security was the ongoing separation from his wife Elisabeth and daughter Ruth; they were, however, able to continue living in Switzerland unmolested by the Nazi regime.



**Vassar College main building in Poughkeepsie, NY
(Source: Internet, Vassar College, BMCE Cuny.edu)**

It was not until April 1941 that Adolf was able to enter the USA with a regular immigration visa. It was a somewhat complicated procedure, as the application for immigration papers had to be done at a US consulate abroad and issued there. Cuba was the only choice, because it was one of the few countries that still had some openings in the emigration quotas for the USA. To make this possible, Adolf first traveled from the USA to Cuba on the steamer "Orient" and then re-immigrated to the USA with the entry visa issued by the US consulate in Havana.

The permanent residence permit associated with the immigrant visa now made it possible for Adolf to apply for permission for his wife and daughter to enter the USA. Unlike two years earlier, when it was relatively easy for Adolf to obtain a visitor's visa because American academicians, themselves German refugees, requested that he, their German colleague, come for a visit, the emigration of Elisabeth and Ruth was much more difficult. The visa application Elisabeth had submitted to the American embassy in Switzerland had a high, thus unfavorable, waiting number. Another difficulty was that in the summer of 1941, in the third year of the war with the start of the German Wehrmacht's campaign against Russia, the wave of European refugees from Europe

persecuted by the Nazi regime continued to rise. It was the Jewish refugees, in particular, who sought protection in North and South American countries. In addition, the naval war in the Atlantic made the crossings dangerous undertakings, so that the number of ship crossings had become very limited.

With luck and good connections, the obstacles were overcome. Influential friends in Switzerland, probably the Reinhart family again,¹⁵ helped the visa application to get a higher priority and for the departure, secured a passage for mother and daughter on the steamer “Ciudad de Sevilla”, which left the port of Barcelona on August 1, 1941 for New York. The Nazis were in control of these ships and demanded payment for first class accommodations in US dollars; the actual accommodations were very far from first class! As a protective measure against submarine attacks, large illuminated signs identifying it as a Spanish ship were displayed on both sides of the ship. After a journey of almost three weeks, the ship reached New York harbor on August 20, 1941.¹⁶ The departure took place in the nick of time; a little later in October of that year, the rulers in Germany issued a complete ban on European Jews leaving the country for overseas.



Adolf greets Elisabeth and daughter Ruth upon their arrival in New York, August 1941 (Source: private archive JK)

¹⁵ Family history discussion with John Katzenellenbogen.

¹⁶ Escape routes across the Iberian peninsula, <https://juedische-emigration.de/de/emigration/away-routes>

The little family, now reunited, settled in Poughkeepsie – a good 75 miles north of New York – where Adolf worked. The joy of the reunion was marred, however, by the news that Adolf's mother had died a few months earlier in April, 1941, as a result of a stroke and suffering from the humiliation the persecution. It is not known how and when Adolf, who at just that time managed to immigrate legally to the USA, learned of his mother's death.

Professionally, Adolf was now secure with a long-term teaching position in the Faculty of Art History at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie. It is there that he and Elisabeth met a mutual acquaintance from their student days in Leipzig. The composer Ernst Krenek, whose music was considered "degenerate" by the Nazis and was not allowed to be performed in Germany, was appointed professor at the music faculty of Vassar College after emigrating to the USA. He taught there from 1939 to 1942. As already mentioned, Krenek had also been a guest at the soirees at the Doren's house in Leipzig in the 1920's. His signature is on the page of the Doren's guestbook.

In August 1942, when the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" in Europe had reached its horrific climax, Adolf's father fell victim to the Holocaust. The almost 80-year old Albert Katzenellenbogen, who had been sent to a so-called "Judenhaus", was deported from Frankfurt to the Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia on August 18 and from there to the Maly Trostinez extermination camp near Minsk, Belarus. He was killed there on August 25, 1942.

Adolf and his family, living far away from the war in Europe, found out about this loss and the circumstances of his father's death only after the war through investigations and notifications from the Red Cross.

For the next few years, the family lived in Poughkeepsie, a safe distance from the war and protected from the agents of the "Final Solution". In May 1944, Adolf and Elisabeth became the parents of a second child, son John.

The family continued to live in Poughkeepsie for many years even after the war, where Adolf did research and taught art history at Vassar College. It was only in 1946 that the family was able to have some of the valuable household effects sent to them – items they had been stored in Winterthur when they emigrated.

In 1958, Adolf received a full professorship in medieval art history at the renowned Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

As great as his distance was from the terrible events of the war and from the crimes of the German rulers – which had made life in the USA possible – the after-effects of the harsh conditions in the Dachau camp in 1938 accompanied Adolf throughout his life. He continued to be at risk from the long disease from which he had painstakingly recovered.

His pneumonia broke out again in January 1946 and later in 1952, from which he never fully recovered.¹⁷

Adolf died at the age of 63 on September 30, 1964.

Epilogue

In 1950, Adolf submitted the first application for compensation and restitution to the Baden Office for Compensation in Freiburg. The advocacy of the claim was taken over by his brother-in-law, Dr. Erich Berndt, a lawyer living in Frankfurt/Main. Requested was compensation for the material damages the family had suffered as a result of the persecution policies of the Nazi rulers. Compensation in the amount of 134,000 RM was stated for the forced fees of the Reich Flight Tax, for the Jewish property tax and for the export of household items.

As is well known, the review and settlement of the reparation procedures by the state offices in Germany extended over a long period of time, so that applicants often did not live to see their claims reimbursed.

This was also the case with Adolf Katzenellenbogen. It was not until 1968 and 1970, when Adolf had been dead at least four years, that the Baden-Württemberg State Office responsible for restitution, passed resolutions awarding compensation for damage to professional advancement and assets. Elisabeth, as her husband's widow and sole heir, received the restitution.

Yet no compensation was granted for the deprivation of liberty and for the damages to his health that he suffered as a result of the forced imprisonment in the Dachau camp in 1938. The reason for this comes across as cynical: only those prisoners who had stayed in Dachau for at least 30 days were entitled to compensation. Adolf's "residence time" of 21 days did not meet this requirement.¹⁸ The fact that "only" 21 days of imprisonment was enough to put prisoner Adolf Katzenellenbogen within a hair's breadth of death's door and to compromise his health for the rest of his life, was completely ignored in the assessment of his imprisonment.

Regardless of what and how much was reimbursed, full reparation for the injustices suffered by those affected by them cannot in any case be made for the injustices by those affected by them. The reparation paid is no more than a symbolic gesture with which the state's compensation office acknowledges the guilt of the preceding Nazi authority, as its legal successor.

Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen survived her husband by more than twenty years. She died in Baltimore in February 5, 1987.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen, affidavit.

¹⁸ Compensation file F1 196/1-4382/2.

Elisabeth remained active as a piano teacher in the USA, including at the renowned Peabody Conservatory at Johns Hopkins University. She also performed as a concert pianist. An album of six sonatas by C.P.E. Bach was released by Apple and Amazon in 2010. She was a good friend with the well-known German-American concert pianist Grete Sultan, a Jew from Berlin, who had also fled to the USA in 1941.



Elisabeth Katzenellenbogen at the piano (Source: private archive JK)

Daughter Ruth, who was married to Frances Clemens, died in Towson, Maryland at the age of 77 on October 15, 2014. She worked as an administrator for the Baltimore Public Schools.

Like his father, son John embarked on an academic career. He is Professor of Chemistry at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His research centers on developing drugs for the treatment of breast cancer and prostate cancer. John is married to Professor Benita Schulman and has two daughters.

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Author: Hans-Hermann Seiffert (August 2022)

Translator from German: Uta Allers (September 2022)