From Siegel to Sinclair: The story of a Jewish family in our times

by

H. Peter Sinclair

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Introduction

The term "Half a Century Ago" does not sound remote when related to events in ones own life. My memories of this period remain vividly in my mind and cover the life of our Jewish family in Nazi Germany, in the 1930s. A record should exist of our experiences as German Jews before, during and after Hitler's "Third Reich". Future generations may wonder why Hugh Peter Sinclair has a Scottish name but no Scottish ancestors or relatives.

The Siegels at the beginning of the 1930s in Walchensee
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

The Siegels in Germany

Our family - my father, Dr. Michael Siegel, my mother Mathilde (Tilde for short), my sister Maria Beate and I, Hans Peter, - led an ordinary German Jewish middle class life in Munich. I have traced my paternal roots back to the middle of the 18th century in Lower Franconia. We lived in a modest 3-bedroom apartment in Possartstraße 10, in the Bogenhausen district of Munich, where I was born in February 1921. My father and his cousin Dr. Julius Siegel were the senior partners in the renowned law firm *Kanzlei Siegel*, founded in the 1890s in Munich by my father's uncle, Leopold Siegel, a King's Counsel. The law firm was well-known and professionally highly thought of, with Jewish as well as many non-Jewish clients, including members of the Royal Wittelsbacher Family, who became family friends.

My father, the first of seven siblings, was brought up in the atmosphere of an orthodox German Jewish family. However, as a student he opted for the life style of Liberal Judaism, as being more in keeping with conditions in modern Germany. He was an active and prominent member of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in Munich. In short, he was a typical German Jew, proud of his nationality but also conscious of being an observing Jew. Last but not least, my father was a good all-round sportsman, a keen mountaineer, horseman, skier, and tennis player.

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The *Häusl*

Both my parents loved walking, hiking, cycling and life in the country. In 1926 they decided to build a small family size log cabin which we called our *Häusl*, in the village of *Dorf* Walchensee in Upper Bavaria. My father became a popular figure there, where life revolved around a couple of farms, a hotel and the usual ancillary local trades and facilities. He was happy to give free legal advice to anyone in need. In the early years I used to attend the local village school for a month or so in the summer, because my mother, sister and the maid arrived in Walchensee in early June, prior to the official Munich school holidays, to enable us to spend as much time as possible in the country. My father joined us for 2 weeks in August and sometimes also managed to squeeze in a long weekend.

The *Häusl* in Walchensee
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

Up to 1936 we travelled by train from Munich to Kochel and then by Post bus to Walchensee. I have vivid memories of the gleaming steam locomotive on the *Isartalbahn* and the carbide gas burning lamps in the wagons, which had wooden benches.

My father bought an *Opel Olympia* car in 1936, which my parents were able to use only until *Kristallnacht* in November 1938. The holding of driving licences by Jews was legally withdrawn in December 1938.

Unfortunately, Dorf Walchensee also had its own ‘dedicated’ Nazi, a Mr. B, owner of a small café with the same name. This man was quite happy to consult my father at various times on legal matters prior to 1933, but soon after the Nazis had assumed power his behaviour changed dramatically. On one occasion he actually spat in my father’s face. But that was not

all: sometime in 1937 or 1938 a notice was nailed to the door of the *Häusl*, which said that if we dared to open the door, the *Häusl* would be blown sky high, together with us.

My parents had no desire to test the validity of this claim but came to the conclusion that this marked the end of their Walchensee dream. My father was required to complete the customary compulsory sale of the property in 1939 to an "Aryan". The purchaser, whom my father knew personally, behaved impeccably throughout. After the war, he offered to pay my father the difference between the real value of the *Häusl* and the derisory amount he paid for the property in 1939. My father declined the offer.

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Nymphenburg

The law firm Siegel had represented the famous Nymphenburg porcelain manufacturer in all legal matters since the 1890s. My parents knew the then owners, the family Bäuml, very well. It was customary for my parents to receive an annual Christmas present in the form of a highly prized Nymphenburg porcelain figurine. These were kept and displayed at home in a large glass cabinet.

Just prior to my parents' emigration to Peru in August 1940, they entrusted their Nymphenburg collection to a non-Jewish acquaintance for safe keeping. When my father contacted this gentleman on one of his first visits to Munich after the war, this person was unfortunately unable to remember anything about a Nymphenburg porcelain collection! My parents left it at that; after all, they had been able to save their lives! Some years later, when my father's friend, Curt Bäuml, enquired about the Nymphenburg collection, my father told him the sad tale.

Without telling my parents anything, Curt Bäuml arranged to reconstruct and pack a duplicate collection for shipment to Peru, based on pre-war records still in existence at the factory. My parents were speechless and greatly moved by this extraordinary gesture of kindness and compassion.

March 1933

My father was a born optimist and idealist, who, in early 1933, held the sincere belief that Hitler and his regime were a transitory phenomenon and would soon be remembered as an aberration in German political history. However, even as early as March 1933, plate glass windows of some Jewish owned shops and stores in Munich, known as the "Capital of the (Nazi) Movement", were smashed by the Nazis. The owner of one such store was Max Uhlfelder, the founder and owner of the popular *Kaufhaus Uhlfelder* in the Rosental. Uhlfelder himself was taken into "protective custody" in the notorious Dachau concentration camp, an arrest, which at that time, was still illegal.

My father, as Max Uhlfelder's attorney, made an appointment at the Munich Police Headquarters in order to lodge a complaint about the illegal detention of his client. The Chief of Police at that time was the iniquitous Heinrich Himmler, who had recruited SA and SS "strong men" to perform the duties of what was euphemistically described as "auxiliary police". At the Police HQ my father was shown into a room where he was mercilessly and ruthlessly beaten up by such an SA gang. He lost several of his front teeth, and also received a perforated ear drum. Following this physical assault, his trouser legs (pants) were cut off at the knee and he was marched, barefoot and bleeding through the town centre of Munich,

flanked on his left and right by these same and now rifle-carrying SA thugs. A board had also been hung around my father's neck with the words: *Ich bin Jude, aber ich will mich nie mehr bei der Polizei beschweren* (I am a Jew but I will never again complain to the police).

A freelance photographer, by the name of Heinrich Sanden, took two photographs of this incident. As no German newspaper would have dared publish such photographs at that time, he arranged to have the negatives shipped as quickly as possible to the USA. These well-known photographs were repeatedly published throughout the world and are still used today in school textbooks, history books, newspapers, TV as well as on the Internet.

This outrage against a completely innocent man, who only went about doing his duty for his client, would have persuaded most men to emigrate forthwith. However, my father, in spite of what had happened to him still believed that it was his duty as a citizen and as a lawyer to stay and help others.

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My time at school

The serious side of life begins: year 1 in the Gebeleschule 1927
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

Peter Siegel left in front of the teacher, Fräulein Winter, on the right his longtime friend Gustl Schuster
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

I was almost exactly 12 years old in March 1933. Following a normal four years at the State elementary school (*Gebeleschule*) I was enrolled at the *Wilhelmsgymnasium*, a State grammar school. Around this time a new Nazi law banned children of German Jews to continue attending these schools if their fathers had not been front line soldiers during the First World War.

My father lost the thumb on his right hand as a small boy, following an accident with machinery on his father's farm. Consequently he was declared medically unfit to serve in the army because of his inability to hold a rifle. Instead, during the winter months, my father served as

an army skiing instructor to the Bavarian army's *Jungsturmregiment* with the rank of an officer.

After leaving the Gymnasium because my father had not done front line military service, I became a day student for the next 5 years in a privately owned and run college, the *Höhere Handelsschule der Hansaheime*, up to university entrance examination standard. My recollections of the years at this school are mainly of unhappy ones: Jewish boys had to sit in the last row of desks. Most of my examination results, especially in German, were invariably marked "adequate", irrespective of merit. The masters, particularly the younger ones, at best ignored the existence of the Jewish students, and anti-Semitic comments were quite normal. Most of my fellow students, with a few notable exceptions, were members of the Hitler Youth movement, who dispensed frequent insults and the occasional kick. But what was much more hurtful and intended to be humiliating was not only the attitude and the bullying from non-Jewish class mates but the daily obligatory routine in class of having to greet the masters with an outstretched right arm and mouthing *Heil Hitler*.

I do not remember political discussions at home, nor any mention of particular anti-Semitic outrages for two reasons: firstly my parents obviously wanted to protect my younger sister and me by not upsetting us and, secondly, because of their fear of the living room or the telephone having been bugged.

Apprenticeship

My parents reached the conclusion in 1937 that it was imperative for me to learn a trade, useful throughout the world. A university education in Germany was now no longer an option for me as a Jew. My own motivations and aptitudes seemed to be more in line with practical matters rather than follow an academic career. My father suggested the brewing industry. Since I had little or no idea at this stage what I really wanted to do in life, his idea was warmly welcomed by me.

My interests were predominantly in technical things and sport. For example I built numerous radio crystal receivers and I enjoyed generating electricity with a miniature steam engine and a generator, from which wires led to a small electric flash light bulb. I remember having great fun with a chemistry set. My wish for an electric train set was, unfortunately, never fulfilled.

To bridge the gap between the end of college and the start of a brewery apprenticeship, I spent the months of May to October 1937 in the repair section of a radio retailer. This gave me a welcome insight into the workings and functions of the different radio valves used in those days.

Kaltenberg

I started my year long and very interesting apprenticeship as a brewer in the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg* on 1st November 1937.

The owners of the brewery, the Jewish family Schülein from Munich, were well-known to me through their long standing friendship with my parents. However, from the moment I started to work as an apprentice in the brewery, I was treated exactly like all the other employees. I was, therefore, never invited to the private residence in the castle of *Kommerzienrat* Joseph

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Schülein. I had my own completely separate room, high up in the castle's tower, with a superb view of the surrounding countryside.

Kaltenberg 1938: View of the countryside from my room in the castle's tower
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

Two of my fellow workers in front of the *Bräustüberl* in Kaltenberg - 1938
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

Work started at 6 am, with a break for breakfast at 8 o'clock and the midday meal at noon. The working day finished at 4 pm. My first job was to operate the bottle labelling machine. The bottles, having been thoroughly machine washed and hand inspected by two ladies, were then placed into the rotating beer filling machine, operated by a male colleague, who also had to snap close each bottle by hand. He then placed the bottle on a table between the filling machine and the labelling machine. The next employee, in this case myself, had to pick up each bottle from this adjoining table and place it in the appropriate position on the rotating labelling machine. The containers for glue and labels had to be monitored and refilled from time to time. The labelled bottles then had to be taken off the machine and placed into a large wooden crate - I think 2 dozen x ½ litre bottles per crate. The heavy full crate had to be pushed through an opening in the wall into the cold bottle storage section.

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It all sounds so easy, and it really was, but not on the first day! In the bottle storage section another colleague had to lift the heavy wooden crates all day long from floor level to shoulder height to create stacks of crates. Excellent training for weightlifting!

Some weeks later I was moved to the barrel washing and inspection section. Each wooden barrel had to be individually placed onto the belt driven machine where it was cleaned internally with high pressure water jets and externally scrubbed with heavy duty brushes. The barrel was then carefully inspected by hand with a waterproof electric light tube inserted through the tap hole to check the soundness and cleanliness of the inside pitch coating. This process was followed by taking a wooden bung, which had to be placed into the tap hole. The bung was then given a hard blow with a very heavy iron mallet. This mallet appeared to be really weighty in the first week, but by the end of my year's apprenticeship, I considered a day in the barrel washing section as one of the less strenuous jobs in the brewery!

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The brew house in the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg* in 1938
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

And so I went from section to section: the barley drying floor, the brew house, the primary fermentation tanks, the colossal secondary fermentation oak barrels in the cellar, and to the ordinary barrel filling section. The cleaning of the huge fermentation oak barrels was a little claustrophobic, because one had to crawl and squeeze into the barrel through a small front opening, barely big enough for a man. Obviously, it was totally dark inside. Once inside, a waterproof electric light and a water hose was pushed through the opening so that the inside pitch coating could be thoroughly scrubbed and cleaned.

No doubt, by far the hardest and least popular job in the brewery entailed the cleaning of the hot and dusty barley roasting steel floor, above the oak embers. Sucking a lemon was one way to keep on working!

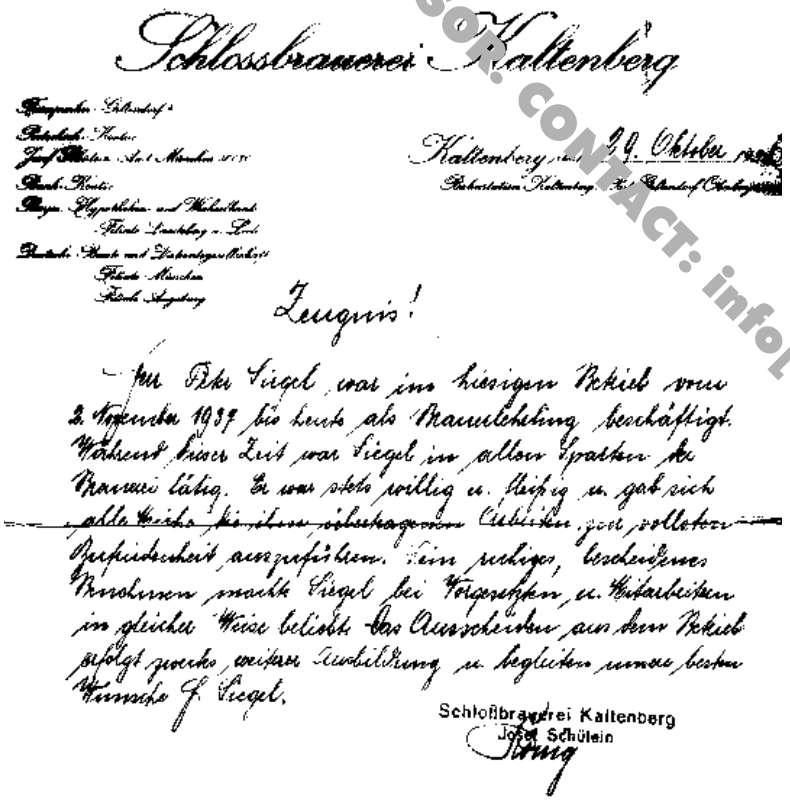
To my regret I had nothing to do with the horses, which were in daily use to pull the heavily laden drays on local runs to nearby village pubs to supply crates of bottles and barrels of beer.

In the summer, at weekends, I would from time to time cycle from Kaltenberg to Munich and return on Sunday evenings by train.

I look back upon my year in the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg* with a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure. I remember the thrill I felt when I drew my first weekly pay packet of (I believe)

25 Marks. My wife, daughter, son and I visited Kaltenberg for the first time after the war in 1965. The master brewer, Herr König, received us most warmly. He was the son of the then master brewer during my year there in 1937/38 and he looked exactly as I had remembered his father! We were taken on a complete tour of the brewery. The prevailing smells remained absolutely unchanged but now most other things were very different indeed!

Visit to Kaltenberg in 2000
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)



Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg

Kaltenberg, 29. Oktober

Zeugnis!

Herr Fritz Siegel war ins hiesigen Betrieb vom 2. November 1937 bis heute als Brauerlehrling beschäftigt. Während dieser Zeit war Siegel im allen Sparten der Brauerei tätig. Er war stets willig u. fleißig u. gab sich alle Mühe die ihm übertragenen Arbeiten gut vollzogen Zufriedenheit auszuführen. Sein ruhiges, bescheidenes Benehmen machte Siegel bei Vorgesetzten u. Mitarbeitern in gleicher Weise beliebt. Der Ausscheidung aus dem Betrieb erfolgt zwecks weiterer Ausbildung zu begleiten wünsche bestens Fritz Siegel.

Schloßbrauerei Kaltenberg
Josef Schülein

Reference from the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg* for H.P. Siegel
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

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The problems experienced by my parents

During the time I was working in the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg*, my parents were trying to secure a visa to enable the whole family to emigrate to the USA. This entailed lengthy procedures because after lodging a visa application, which had to be accompanied an affidavit (sponsorship) from an American citizen, the American immigration authorities issued a "quota number". This quota number gave an indication how long one was likely to have to wait before the granting of the visa itself. A fixed and only relatively small number of visas for Jews from Germany was granted annually and our quota number meant a wait of years!

A would-be emigrant had not only to comply with a multitude of mind-boggling bureaucratic obstacles, but the Nazi government also made emigration conditional on retaining the emigrant's assets in a "blocked" *Reichsmark* account. This made him a virtually penniless refugee. Many countries had at this time imposed very restrictive immigration policies, mainly due to the then prevailing world-wide economic recession. Already in those days no government wanted refugees who would be likely to need financial support from the host country.

There was another stark problem that my father had to face: What kind of work could he do, following emigration, as head of the family? He was a German lawyer, he knew German law and he had an excellent command of his mother tongue - none of which would be of much use to him in any other country!

The *Kristallnacht*

Immediately after my year's apprenticeship at the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg* I began studies on 2nd November 1938 in the privately owned brewery college Dr. Doemens & Dr. Heller in Schwabing, Munich. My father also spoke of subsequent additional studies at the well-known brewery college in Weihenstephan, leading to an eventual diploma as a Master Brewer. But the events of *Kristallnacht* on 9th November 1938 and the following developments changed all that forever.

That morning my father left the apartment shortly before 7 am to walk to his office as usual. My mother took a telephone call shortly after he had left from a person who refused to give his name. This person told her that appalling things were about to happen to the Jews in Munich. He also told her to get herself and the family out of town as fast as possible. My mother took this warning to heart. She, my 13 year old sister and I drove in our car to my father's office. He flatly refused to be intimidated and wanted to know absolutely nothing about taking flight! My mother, in tears by then, finally managed to persuade my father to take the warning seriously.

It was decided that I should attend college, whereas my parents and my sister would continue in the car to visit their friends, the family Schülein, in the *Schlossbrauerei Kaltenberg*. Before leaving my father gave me 50 Marks, just in case I should need money!

I went home for lunch, as normal, after the morning's lectures at the college. Our very frightened maid told me that the Gestapo had twice called during the morning to arrest my father and me. She pleaded with me to leave the apartment as quickly a possible via the back staircase. As I later discovered, this turned out to have been sound advice because the Gestapo reappeared at the front door almost immediately afterwards. I bought some food somewhere and returned to the college for the afternoon lessons.

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College finished at 4 pm but I dared not go home. So I telephoned the maid, only to be told by her that my parents had not returned and I should not come home. Considering my options I decided to follow my parents, took a tram to the main railway station and bought a ticket to Kaltenberg. I arrived at the brewery in darkness, some 2 hours later. My parents had meanwhile departed again and nobody could tell me where they had gone. In addition, I learnt that after my parents had left, the Gestapo had also been in Kaltenberg to arrest Dr. Fritz Schülein. It made no sense to stay there.

I returned to the railway station. It seemed ages before there was a train back to Munich. I did not want to be arrested by the Gestapo, I did not want to go back to the apartment and I did not know where my parents were. On reaching Munich, I decided to go to my elderly grandmother's apartment in the Reitmorstraße, about 20 minutes walk from the station. By that time it was shortly after midnight. Her road was totally deserted. I rang the bell of my grandmother's ground floor apartment - and it was my mother who pulled me quickly through the open front door.

She told me that all the day and evening, two SA men had first called and then stood guard outside the house to arrest my two uncles. These had in the first instance made their escape over the dividing wall between their and the house next door, to find refuge with some non-Jewish friends in the neighbourhood. It seems that by midnight the SA men had decided that they had wasted enough time and left, having spent many futile, cold and boring hours just hanging around all day and half the night. And after they had made their decision to depart, I arrived!

My mother explained that my father had decided to travel to Luxembourg by train, where one of his sisters lived. From there he also went to London to visit friends, who actually tried to persuade him to stay. He had a valid German passport and experienced no problems at the German border. My mother, sister and I stayed at my grandmother's for another day. By then the wholesale arrests, assaults and transport of Jewish men and teenagers to the Dachau concentration camp, the senseless and wanton destruction and looting of Jewish homes and shops, the burning and desecration of synagogues had taken its full course, not only in Munich but also throughout Germany. After pressure had been brought to bear on my mother by the Gestapo for my father to return, he arrived back at home about 2 weeks later, again without any difficulties at the German border.

My emigration

A continued attendance of the brewery college was now out of the question. My parents faced a difficult and immediate problem: How to get my four years younger sister and me out of Germany as quickly as possible?

With the assistance of former Munich friends, now living in London, my father succeeded in lodging a £ 100 Sterling deposit by way of a guarantee with the "Jewish Refugee Committee" in London. This guarantee was sufficient to allow the Home Office to issue a visa allowing me "leave to land on condition that the holder will emigrate from the United Kingdom on completion of his training".

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Identity card of H.P. Siegel
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

Peter's departure from Munich, to the right his father
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

My train departed from the Munich Main Railway Station at midnight on the 21st March 1939 for Hoek van Holland. My parents gave me the customary Jewish blessing. The train steamed out of the station, my mother cried and an uncle took a photograph. For me it appeared more like the beginning of an adventure, a new beginning, rather than a sad and emotional goodbye. I have to admit that the thought that I might never see my parents, sister, grandmother, aunts or uncles ever again hardly entered my mind at that precise moment. I had 2 suitcases, the permitted 10 Marks and a visa for England - a new life beckoned.

Three months later, my sister, aged just 14, came alone to England with one of the *Kinder-transport* (children's transports) trains. She had been sponsored by an elderly English non-Jewish widow. She first attended a good local private school in Kent and subsequently studied modern languages at the University of London. But that is another story.

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In England

On 22nd March 1939 I was met on arrival in Liverpool Street railway station in London by friends of my parents, who had emigrated from Munich to England in 1933 and who had already become naturalised British citizens. After spending a week or so in their home, I rented a room in a boarding house in the Bloomsbury area and got a job as a clerical assistant at the nearby "Jewish Refugee Committee" in "Bloomsbury House". My weekly pay was £ 1.00 (£ 1.00 = 20 shillings = 240 pence in those days). And £ 1 went a long way!

I had to fend for myself. My room contained a bed, a table, two chairs, a small gas ring for cooking, a gas fire and a gas meter. The weekly rent was 11 shillings. My favourite 'meal' consisted of a tin of pineapple cubes with cream, which could not be called a 'balanced diet'. A month or so later I accepted the offer of a job as a trainee cinema projectionist in Liverpool. This turned out to have been a big mistake. I learnt nothing and the cinema was more like a 'flea pit' in one of the city's poorest districts. I decided I had to return to London. The complication was that I had insufficient funds to enable me to buy the necessary railway ticket. My worries disappeared when my father managed to mail me the return ticket. On the 18th August 1939 I was more than happy to be back in my room in the boarding house and equally pleased to be back in my job at the "Jewish Refugee Committee".

On 3rd September 1939 WW2 broke out, just two weeks after my return from Liverpool. As a German national, I became an "enemy alien" overnight. Like all refugees, I had to appear before a police tribunal shortly afterwards. The tribunal had the task to establish whether I was a genuine refugee from Nazi Germany. I had no difficulty in proving my credentials with the help of my father's well-known March 1933 photograph, which had received world-wide circulation.

Summer 1940

The prevailing political mood in England changed dramatically with the fall of France in June 1940. The British government decided to intern all "enemy aliens" as rapidly as possible. Understandably, there was considerable anxiety and concern about the presence of German spies. It was not long before most of my male refugee friends and acquaintances from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia found themselves securely locked up in various barbed wire enclosed camps, guarded by the army. A number of these genuine Jewish refugee internees were subsequently shipped under very unpleasant conditions to Canada and Australia.

I too expected a visit from the police any day. As anticipated, they came for me in the office at the "Jewish Refugee Committee". When saying my farewells, the president of the organisation, whom I knew, happened to be passing and wanted to know where I was going. When I told him, he asked the 2 police officers to accompany him to his office. After a short while he reappeared and the two policemen walked straight past me. The president told me that he had spoken on the telephone with a Minister of State at the Home Office and that I would not be interned now. Extraordinary coincidences happen in life from time to time.

In July 1940, aged 19, another radical and pivotal change in my life took place. I volunteered to join the British Army. At that time German, Austrian and Czech born Jewish refugees had their first chance to volunteer to join the British Army, initially limited to service in the "Pioneer Corps". This Regiment was in the main involved with construction work of every description, for military establishments. Another of the recruits at the same time was a Jewish

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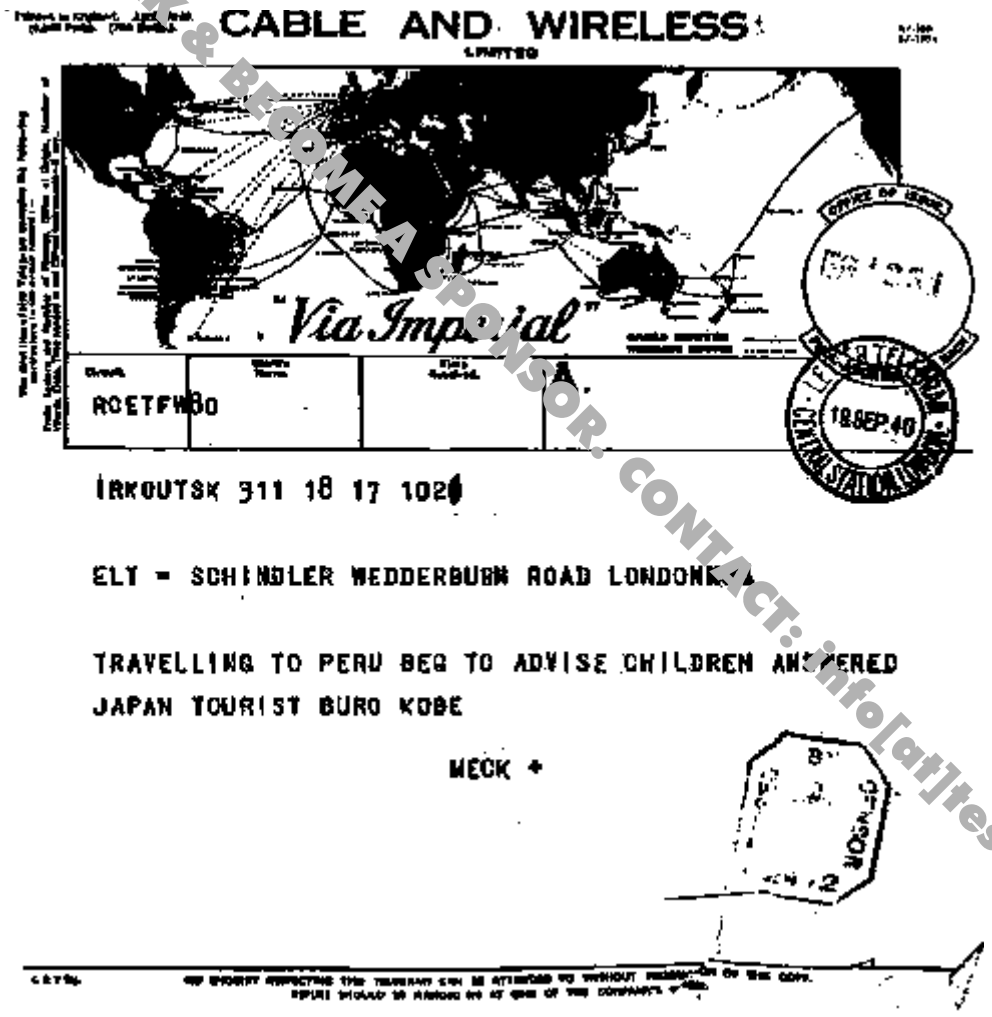
fellow, almost the same age, born in Kochel (very near Walchensee), who, years later, was "Best Man" at my wedding and who is still a good friend today, after more than 60 years.

The fate of my parents and relatives

From the onset of the war there was no longer any possibility to communicate directly with my parents in Munich, since all telephone and postal services had been severed. However, I was still able to get periodic news from them, and vice versa, through members of our family in the USA. I knew that they were physically well, and still in Munich.

In September 1940, I was stationed in Ilfracombe (Devon) a new recruit in the "Pioneer Corps". One day I received a letter from friends of my parents in London. The envelope contained a telegram, sent from Irkoutsk (Siberia), addressed to these friends. I read the 13 words over and over again, with utter incredulity: "TRAVELLING TO PERU BEG TO ADVISE CHILDREN ANSWERED JAPAN TOURIST BURO KOBE MECK +".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TRAVELLING TO PERU BEG TO ADVISE CHILDREN ANSWERED
JAPAN TOURIST BURO KOBE

MECK +

The telegram
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

It is well nigh impossible to describe my feelings of relief and elation when I held this piece of paper in my hand. My first reaction was to call my sister on the telephone to tell her the incredible news. It was only years later that I was able to learn from my parents the huge problems they had to face and the enormous difficulties they had to overcome, to enable them

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to emigrate from Germany at that time in 1940, a year after the war had started. My mother kept a diary in which she described their extraordinary journey. They left Berlin on the 8th September 1940 on board the Trans-Siberian Express train. This was only possible during the brief existence of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty. Their journey took them via Moscow, Omsk, Siberia, Korea to Busan and from there by boat to Kobe in Japan. From there followed the long crossing of the Pacific Ocean to Los Angeles, USA. There my parents were greeted during a brief stop-over with great emotion by one of my father's brothers and his family. They had been able to emigrate to the USA a year or so earlier. My parents' voyage continued along the coast, past Mexico, down to Callao, Peru. It took 2 months from Berlin to Callao, which took them literally halfway around the world, mostly travelling in an easterly direction.

My parents were fortunately able to save themselves at the very last moment, but we lost members of our immediate family in the notorious concentration camps of Auschwitz and Theresienstadt. On my mother's side it was my elderly widowed grandmother together with her eldest son, a bachelor, who had been awarded the "Iron Cross" decoration for bravery in the First World War, where he was severely wounded. I also lost an aunt, my father's youngest sister, first deported and then murdered by the Nazis in Riga.

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Military service in India

In the spring of 1943 it became at long last possible for the refugees in the "Pioneer Corps" to enlist in fighting units of the British armed services. This is how Hans Peter Siegel became Hugh Peter Sinclair when I joined the "Royal Tank Regiment".

The SS Strathmore
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair by courtesy of QFT Photography Ltd)

In November that year we were issued with tropical kit and embarked on a troopship in Scotland. The vessel, the SS Strathmore, a medium sized coal fired passenger steamer in better times, now held 5,000 men in the ship's holds, packed like sardines in a tin can. Our destination was a military secret and we thought of Egypt and North Africa. There were very many sea-sick soldiers aboard, after having been at sea for a most uncomfortable and extremely miserable 8 weeks or so. The sanitary conditions aboard were indescribably basic. We zigzagged as part of a large convoy across very rough and stormy seas, first in the Bay of Biscay, then in the Atlantic. The sea in the Mediterranean was fortunately smoother. We sailed

through the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and then across the Indian Ocean before docking in Bombay, India. It was January 1944 and it was very hot. It felt good to have solid ground under our feet again!

On board my troopship to India 1943/44
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

In the port of Aden 1944
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

I remember a particular event during the long voyage: We had been at sea for more than a month when the ship arrived in the port of Aden early January 1944. It was extremely hot. Coal and water were required for the ship as well as provisions for around 4,000 soldiers. As soon as anchor was dropped, swarms of Arabian boats, laden with souvenirs from the souk, surrounded the Strathmore but business was bad as most of us had very little money.

Our first destination in India was the garrison town of Poona for acclimatisation and more tank training. Unfortunately, I succumbed to a liver infection and spent some time in the local military hospital. As a result of my illness I was medically downgraded. Meanwhile all my friends had been posted to Burma to join the 14th Army, to fight against the Japanese. I was eventually transferred to GHQ New Delhi, where I worked in the offices of the Adjutant General's Branch until August 1946.

The war against Germany and Japan had now come to an end and I started my return voyage to England, again through the Suez Canal, but this time in considerably better accommodation

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and greater comfort compared with conditions three years earlier in the opposite direction. My six years service in H.M. Forces was drawing to a close.

H.P. Sinclair as British soldier in India
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

I was now 25 years old but had received neither a wide-ranging education nor had I qualified for an occupation. But in GHQ New Delhi I became familiar with organisational functions.

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An unexpected reunion

I would like to recall one particular happy event during my 3 years in India: I had earlier referred to the professional relationship my father had with the Uhlfelder family in Munich. In fact we also had social contacts with them and I had a particularly soft spot for their good looking daughter Anni, who was the same age as myself. From time to time, whilst we were still at school, we went to the movies together.

I was aware of the fact that the Uhlfelders had emigrated to India following *Kristallnacht*, but had no other information. When I arrived in Poona in January 1944, I wondered how to make contact with them, and with Anni in particular! I decided to write a letter to them, which I mailed to the Aliens Department of the Bombay police HQ with the request for the enclosed letter to the Uhlfelders please be forwarded to them. I thought this was worth at least a try!

Within a week or two, and to my delight, I received an enthusiastic reply from the Uhlfelders, who actually lived in Bombay. Anni had meanwhile married a Mr. L. and had a new baby. Mr. and Mrs. Uhlfelder, together with their son, lived in a nice apartment in the Churchgate Reclamation district of Bombay. During my brief period in Poona, only a couple of hours by train from Bombay, I was made their welcome guest on two or three occasions.

Back in Europe

The Jewish refugees serving in the British Armed Forces had remained "stateless" since the "Third Reich" had officially deprived them in 1942 of their German nationality. Following my return from India, still in uniform and "on discharge leave" from the army, I was obliged to report to a local police station in London, to register as a stateless foreigner. The police sergeant who took my particulars shook his head in amazement. My British citizenship was largely a formality but it took another few months before I received my naturalisation docu-

ment from the Home Office in London. In the USA this matter was perhaps handled more delicately: Every soldier serving in the US Army automatically became a US citizen upon enlistment.

My first job in civilian life was as a junior executive with a firm of bakery machinery manufacturers. It was one of my tasks to demonstrate these machines to potential customers. For this reason I flew to Geneva in Switzerland in September 1947.

Having completed the demonstration in Geneva, I had arranged to take a 7 day vacation in a small hotel located directly on the shores of Lake Lucerne, where I enjoyed swimming every day from a large wooden raft anchored immediately in front of the hotel. I had, of course, no idea that all the hotel's effluent and sewage was piped untreated into the lake, which was not unusual in those days. Coincidentally, the last major poliomyelitis outbreak in Europe had occurred at this time. Two weeks after my return to London I was rushed semiconscious to hospital with acute poliomyelitis - my whole body felt as if "on fire". When I woke up I could not move - I was almost totally paralysed. All I could think of was President Roosevelt!

After some days my girlfriend Susan was allowed to visit me every day. We had earlier become unofficially engaged to be married. Now I found myself in hospital, almost completely paralysed, almost penniless and fairly desperate. Without any doubt, it was Susan who helped me with her love and devotion to produce the will, the energy and the determination I needed to overcome this massive set-back, in the hope and firm belief that we would get married.

I received intensive daily hydro- and physiotherapy and was finally able to leave hospital after 7 long months, with callipers on both legs and a crutch under each arm. Walking was painfully slow and very tiring. A long spell of hard work in rehabilitation followed.

I married Susan, who was born in Nuremberg (Germany), in March 1949. At that point I was able to resume work as office manager with a firm of spectacle frame manufacturers, whilst Susan had a job as secretary with a large international chemical manufacturer. Our combined weekly income was sufficient to pay the rent for our apartment, food and transport to and from our respective places of work. We were very happy indeed and thankful to have our own home.

The life of my parents in Peru

My parents had a very difficult time after their virtually penniless arrival in Peru, both from a health as well as financial point of view.

My mother, then aged 47 years old, taught German in a Convent school, St. Ursula, whilst my father, aged 58, tried his hand for a while as an assistant in a Lima bookstore. As he admitted later, he was not very successful because he was much more adept in reading than selling. He also worked briefly in a Lima lawyer's office but felt thoroughly ill at ease under a legal system and customs which were poles apart from what he had been taught at University and practised for three decades in Germany. The rigours of German law were neither appreciated nor appropriate in Peru. However, as the Lima correspondent for the Jewish Agency, he developed his skills as a reporter on Jewish affairs in Peru, an activity at which he excelled and which he thoroughly enjoyed. My mother was artistically very gifted and had studied painting, drawing, making woodcuts and book binding at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Munich, the premier local College of Art. She continued with all of these activities in Peru.

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Woodcut by Tilde Siegel
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

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Lima had a relatively small German-Jewish Community, of which my parents were members from the moment of their arrival in Peru. Sometime later, the local rabbi of this community died and a new appointment became necessary. My father had been brought up in a strictly orthodox German-Jewish home and had pursued a very keen lifelong interest in Hebrew, Jewish religion, Jewish history and always strongly supported Israel. At the same time he had long ago felt that the strict customs and orthodox practices were not for him, living and working as a 20th century Jew in Germany. So he turned to liberal Judaism at the turn of the last century, whilst retaining his full identity as a committed Jew. And so it came about that the post of rabbi for this German Jewish community in Lima was offered to my father, which he accepted on the basis that an intellectual and well read liberal Jew can make as good a rabbi as a rather younger person who had studied for a number of years and had more recently been ordained via a seminary. My father greatly enjoyed teaching Judaism in all its aspects to the young generation, who held him in great esteem. He held the weekly Friday evening and Sabbath morning services, taught bar-mitzvah boys and blessed bridal couples. Conducting of burial rites was part of the work. His successor, a fully qualified rabbi was eventually appointed in the late 1950s, when my father became once more extremely busy with legal work for his fellow refugees and restitution matters in Germany. His portrait now hangs on the wall of the Jewish community centre in Lima.

His new legal activity started to take off after my father was readmitted as a practising lawyer at the Bavarian Courts in 1953, notwithstanding his residency in Peru and not in Germany. At the age of 71 he was very happy to once again being able to use his old skills and legal expertise. His clients were German Jewish refugees, many in Peru, some in other Latin American countries and also some in the USA, whom he represented in restitution claims before German authorities and courts. In spite of his advanced years he was very successful in his efforts. In addition, he was now frequently consulted by the German Embassy in Lima on matters of German and Peruvian law. In 1971, on the occasion of his 89th birthday, he was awarded the *Große Verdienstkreuz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Grand Cross of Merit of the German Republic) “in recognition of his exceptional services to the State and People”.

While this was one of the proudest moments of his distinguished life, he accepted the honour on behalf of the whole German Jewish community in Lima. He would so have liked to share this moment with his wife of over fifty years, but my mother had sadly died the year before. My father reached the age of 96.

My wife and I visited Lima only three or four times, whereas my parents travelled annually to the UK and Germany, initially alternatively but both together in later years. Until sometime in the mid-1960s they travelled by ship from Callao, Peru to Plymouth or Liverpool in England, via the Panama Canal. They had thus completed the circumnavigation of the globe since they had left Germany in 1940, travelling East throughout. Subsequently they were, of course, able to fly from Lima to London.

One of the very sad consequences of my parents' living in Peru was the difficulty in communicating meaningfully with their grandchildren. The obvious language barrier was one thing, but their inability to involve themselves in the lives of their English born grandchildren was another. Unfortunately, seeing them only briefly once a year and during school term time at that, did not and could not create the necessary atmosphere and background to engender a close grandparents - grandchildren relationship.

I have to admit that I too felt that an almost unbridgeable estrangement had developed between my parents and myself from the time of my emigration in 1939 to the time my mother visited me in hospital in 1948 for the first time after the war. When I left Munich I was a rather immature teenager. Nine whole years had passed during which I had grown up and had to make my own decisions in all sorts of likely or unlikely circumstances. For my parents I had remained "a boy". And that made the establishment of an adult parental relationship quite difficult, the more so as we were only 'under one roof' for very brief periods, at best only once a year.

One also needs to bear in mind the particular circumstances of our lives: Throughout all these years the only means of communication were letters, often months old. During 6 years of this period I was a soldier in the UK and in India. My parents' social life in Peru changed in a different way because they remained German-Jewish émigrés in Peru. The overwhelming majority German-Jewish refugees in the UK regarded England as their adopted country and would not consider speaking German in public places, especially not after the outbreak of the war. Most also did their best to speak English in their own homes. On the other side of the Atlantic most refugees maintained relationships primarily with other refugees and continued speaking German. Close social contacts rarely extended to non-Jewish Peruvians, Brazilians or Americans, whereas in England many refugees found new friendships amongst their English neighbours and work colleagues. In England we remained amongst Europeans, whereas refugees who emigrated across the Oceans also remained Europeans at heart and therefore naturally preferred like-minded European contacts and relationships.

Both my sister and I are very much aware that we were blessed in that our parents could escape from Nazi Germany at the very last moment and that we were able to reunite as a family from time to time. This almost amounted to a miracle, not shared by the great majority of refugee children who were sent abroad by their parents to an uncertain future on their own.

My further working life

In April 1951 I applied for and was accepted as a junior executive in the London Bureau of a large privately owned South American based organisation, primarily engaged in mining and

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smelting of non-ferrous metals and minerals. An important part of this Group's international activities included also a world-wide network of sales offices, trading additionally in chemicals and acting as purchasing agents for the South American partners. I was fairly well informed about this Group because their Lima office often chartered cargo space on vessels to ship Peruvian and Bolivian mined minerals to European smelters. The ships in question carried not only cargo but also had cabins for 12 passengers. It was largely due to the Group's Lima office having this shipping connection that it was possible for my parents to sail annually from and back to Peru.

I liked and enjoyed the work very much and I acquired interesting specialised expertise in minerals and metals, useful knowledge also in everyday life. After seven years I became Joint Managing Director and three years later Chairman and Managing Director of the London Office.

Many of my business travels extended beyond Europe, to China, the Soviet Union and, of course, South and North America. During the last 8 years of my work, from 1976 onwards, I travelled mainly in the company of my wife, which made these business trips far more enjoyable.

I scarcely noticed the effects of my 1947 poliomyelitis episode during my working life, but a heart attack in 1976 led to a three months unforeseen break in my hectic working schedule.

An interesting new activity, the setting up and the organising of a specialised international conference, developed from an idea I had in 1978. My particular field of work included the marketing of Tungsten ores, mined primarily in China, the then Soviet Union, Australia, the Far East, South America and Europe. I represented our Brazilian Tungsten mining company on a trade organisation of global Tungsten producers. At one of our meetings in 1978 I suggested the possibility of creating an international forum for producers, consumers and traders alike to discuss aspects of exploration, mining, refining, marketing and usage of this important metal. This concept was immediately welcomed enthusiastically by all sides of industry and I was promptly appointed as Chairman of the Organising Committee of the "International Tungsten Industry Association".

The first symposium took place in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1979 and was attended by almost 300 delegates representing 150 companies from 32 countries. It was an outstanding success. Further conferences took place every 3 years and my next two symposia were held in San Francisco in 1982, followed by Madrid in 1985. It gives me immense satisfaction to know that more than 20 years after the first symposium held in Stockholm, these international conferences continue to take place regularly in various parts of the world.

In December 1985 I decided to opt for (so-called) retirement after 33 very fulfilling and successful years with the Group. The after-effects of my 1947 polio episode were beginning to make themselves felt rather negatively. It is sad to record that the Group ceased to exist as such after 1989, because the mines and smelters in South America were sold to competitors. The dynasty who founded the Group in 1911 in Chile had vanished.

The (busy) retirement

From the onset of my retirement I found myself to be busier than ever: I am a member of the executive committee of a local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) - a nation-wide organisation in the UK providing expert free and confidential advice to anyone in need. I also served for 5 years as the Chairman of the executive committee.

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10th anniversary gathering of Harrow U3A
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

I learnt to use a computer, thanks largely to our son, who is a specialist in this field. I also started to take an active interest in genealogy and now list some 800 or more members of our extended families on a special computer software programme. This is an ongoing project, with an ever widening family circle.

In 1991 I became actively involved with the "University of the Third Age" (U3A), an educational, charitable organisation for local men and women who are no longer in full-time employment. I was a founder member of Harrow U3A and held the position of founder Chairman of the Management Committee for more than 5 years. I was then elected as Life President. We now have around 1350 members. Throughout the UK the U3A has about 120,000 members in more than 400 local Groups like Harrow U3A. We have our own Harrow U3A Web Site which I created and for which I am the webmaster. I also work on other U3A projects on a national basis.

The Sinclairs

Susan and I have two great children - Monica born in February 1952 and Jonathan born in March 1956. Monica and her husband Brian live in Atlanta, GA, with their two girls Amy and Helen. Being able to communicate by email and having weekly telephone conversations ensures that we are all informed of each others activities and lives. Jonathan is married to Alison. They also have two kids, James and Olivia and they live only a few miles from our home.

Susan and I are deeply grateful for all the good and positive things in our lives, denied to many others from similar backgrounds.

My beloved wife Susan died after a complicated heart surgery in September 2006.

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Peter and Susan Sinclair
(Photo: Mr. H.P. Sinclair)

London, January 20[illegible]

H. Peter Sinclair

The author deceased on April 27, 2010

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