



It is always going up and down

To Margot Astruck at her 90th birthday

With this realistic and optimistic saying, the Nuremberg born Margot Astruck summarizes the experience of her life of now 90 years, spent in six different countries and on three continents. Her special birthday, which she was able to celebrate in Munich in October 2008, together with her son, her daughter-in-law and her many friends, gives us the opportunity to show, as a tribute to this very remarkable woman, in a few lines, the many stations of her eventful biography.



**A curious look into a new world: Margot as a baby
in 1918**
(photo: private)



Margot 90 years later at her birthday party 2008
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

I will not die in this little village!

At the age of fourteen, Margot received a slap in her face - left and right - for the playful saying: *I will not die in this little village!* Gertraud Astruck, with indignation, countered her uncouth daughter: *You have no idea how beautiful Nuremberg is!* In view of what happened in Nuremberg and Germany only a few years later, both statements made during this discussion got a totally different meaning. It did not take very long before a further stay in this really pretty city meant danger of life and even the proud Nuremberg citizen Gertraud Astruck had to go away. At that moment not only the world of the Astruck family disintegrated. Germany

said goodbye to the community of civilized people and for further twelve years lived in a murderous and suicidal dream of superiority and world dominion.

A well cared for childhood

Mrs. Astruck speaks about the *good old times* without sentimentality and in her own globally experienced and charming way, a mixture of languages and dialects, now and then showing her undeniable Nuremberg *inheritance*.



Business card of the Astruck company
(photo: private)

Born just before the end of the First World War, this first of two children by the factory-owning couple Siegfried and Gertraud Astruck seemed destined for a positive and shining future within the better part of the Nuremberg society. The well admired father (*he was outstanding in everything*) managed to guide the *Nürnberger Schildpatt- & Hornwarenfabrik Gustav Astruck* (Nuremberg tortoise shell and horn ware manufacture Gustav Astruck) located at Bahnhofsplatz 6 through all the economic turbulences of the Weimar Republic and took care that his daughter, already at a young age, was introduced into the Nuremberg society. For her twelfth birthday he arranged a party at the *Künstlerhaus* (artists' club) at the Königstor of which the guests of those times are still speaking about. The 120 invited children had eight *Merry Andrew and Jock Pudding* theater stalls and a whole army of kindergarten ladies at their service.



Margot (left, with crown) and her guests at a carnival party
(photo: private)



Christmas 1931 with girlfriends: Margot right, sitting on the floor
(photo: private)

With a sternly watching statue of Bismarck looking from the other side of the street into the children's room at Prinzregentenufer 13, Margot and her younger brother grew up in prosperous and comfortable surroundings: a nanny, a holiday home in Lauf where the family stayed during summer, skiing holidays in the Alps, Christmas festivities, a very opulent happening in the Astruck household as the 2nd Christmas day coincided with father's birthday and the wedding day of the parents, as well as private teachers, all these amenities were given to her because of family origin.



Skiing in Rottach 1933: Margot sitting at the right (with "x")
(photo: private)



The family home at Prinzregentenufer 13
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

If it had not been for her weight problems, which her mother believed she had to fight with radical periods of abstinence. The obstinate daughter avoided these dire measures by slipping

into the kitchen at every possible occasion in order to receive under very secretive circumstances an extra helping of her favorite dish of fried potatoes from the compassionate cook. Also during her years at school, this feeling of hunger - as by her own words - remained a permanent companion. She gathered huge debts buying sweets from the concierge at the *Labenwolflyzeum* (*Labenwolf* girls' high school) and later from his colleagues at the girls' high school in the Findelgasse, debts which her uncle, who lived in England, silently redeemed during his visits to Nuremberg. For obvious reasons, the not that enthusiastic student preferred to do her homework at the house of her schoolmate Gretel Speckhart, whose father owned a bakery at the Weißer Turm (White Tower, part of the medieval fortification of the city).

Astruck family life under Hitler



1931 at the girls' high school in Findelgasse: Margot 2nd row from below, 2nd from right
(photo: private)

Beginning on 30th January 1933 dark shadows fell on Margot's up till now very orderly life as an *upper class daughter*. Only a few months later she saw with her own eyes that the hate propaganda by the Nazis were not only mere threats. Streicher did not hesitate to arrest in the schoolyard and in front of the students of the Frauentorgraben-Findelgasse school their beloved director Dr. Uhlemayr. Uhlemayr never returned, his successor Dr. Anton Lämmermeyr, as per Mrs. Astruck, was a hundred percent Nazi, his wife was in the party's women's organization, they also had a blond daughter and all of them shouted *Sieg Heil!* Today it sounds very distant when Mrs. Astruck recounts her experiences during the Nazi era in Nuremberg, as if she is talking about a movie, which she saw in the past. Shortly after the Nazis grabbed power, the family moved to the Pirckheimerstraße, where father Astruck, as a partici-

part in the First World War, felt more secure near the *Reichswehrkommandantur* (headquarters of the military district).



Pirckheimerstraße 9, living quarters of the Astrucks since 1933
(photo: private)

The Astrucks followed the events of the *Röhm Putsch* in summer 1934 on the radio like listening to a crime story. The family left the city during the annual party gatherings. The infamous *Nuremberg Laws* only influenced daily life as mother now had to look for a new *Aryan* housemaid over 45 years of age.

Margot left high school in 1935. In his report for the next school year, Nazi Dr. Lämmermeyr boasted that his school had now been purged of all Jews. The Astrucks sent their children abroad to Switzerland and England, they themselves held out in Nuremberg. Mrs. Astruck still remembers her father saying that he will survive Hitler at his desk at the *Bahnhofplatz*. *We all made the mistake not to have read "Mein Kampf", everything was written in this book. But who did read it, nobody!*



Father Siegfried Astruck before emigration
(photo: private)



With love, your mum 1.11.1937. Inscription on the back of this photo of Trude Astruck
(photo: private)

Following the *Kristallnacht* Siegfried Astruck, together with another 81 Jewish businessmen and academics, was arrested and sent to the Dachau concentration camp; it took the family further five weeks to have him set free. He never talked about what he had to endure there, but his consequences were final: As fast as possible, the parents fled to their children in England where the Astruck fashion company had an affiliated branch. In spite of their own existential problems, only getting worse after the beginning of the war, as the English treated the Jewish refugees from Germany paradoxically as enemy aliens, Siegfried Astruck and his brothers tried to help other Nuremberg citizens to emigrate. The owners of the Kohn Bank still remain very much in Mrs. Astruck's memory. *We would have gotten them out, but they did not want to leave.* Martin and Dr. Richard Kohn were deported in November 1941 from Nuremberg to Riga and murdered.

Make the best of it!



With father and brother 1943 at the Pacific ocean beach in Peru
(photo: private)

In 1940 the Astrucks followed their mother's brothers to Peru. Margot did not speak one word of Spanish, but her knowledge of English turned out to be a *sack full of gold*. As per her father's slogan *make the best of it!* the family built a new existence. Siegfried Astruck, in spite of his 59 years, started a firm for plastics in Lima, which he directed successfully until his death in 1952. In this city in the Andes mountains, father and daughter - mother had already died two years after her arrival in South America - sat together during many long nights and he told her the stories of their lost fatherland and home in Nuremberg, especially about the

exclusive circles of his club, where the upper class Jewish society spent their leisure time together in many pleasant, social gatherings.

Her own family



Margot and Archie 1944

(photo: private)

In 1945 in Buenos Aires, Margot married her husband, who was born in Hamburg. En route to her fiancé in Argentina she got stuck in Uruguay, as she, just before the end of the war, German born and in spite of a Peruvian passport, was not allowed to enter. Mrs. Astruck's commentary: *You cannot get rid of Nuremberg*. On hidden paths, the soon to be married finally joined and one year later their son Ron was born.



Mother and son in Argentina 1949

(photo: private)

But also here, the easy life of the entrepreneurial family (the husband managed a nationwide well known pudding firm) did not last long. Under the socialist president Peron and his successors, the economic and political situation of the country deteriorated in such a way that husband Archie decided in 1954 to go to the USA. His wife went with him: *You just follow the leader*.

A new beginning in California



As secretary in California 1955

(photo: private)

Again a new beginning for Margot Astruck, this time in California: She taught German and found employment as a secretary in a company for measuring instruments. Her husband first took a job as driver for the consul-general of Canada, but the non-existent knowledge of the surroundings and whereabouts by the Argentinean immigrant and the foreign diplomat regularly caused many erroneous rides for both men. Finally he founded again his own firm *Continental Maintenance*, an office cleaning service. The secret to the success of the company, as told by Mrs. Astruck without any hesitation: *We had a German accent and because being German guarantees cleanliness, it was good business.*

Return to Germany

In 1973, one year before the passing away of her husband, the couple decided to move again to Germany, a step which astonished and could not be understood by many of their friends. As with all the other changes in her life, the vivacious lady takes the reactions of her friends with utter composure: *My husband said: Just let them grumble, we always did what we wanted to do. We thought that when we don't go to Germany, although we would like to, we do not punish the Germans, we only punish ourselves.* After moving their acquaintances visited them and had to admit that they had made the right decision.

Nuremberg did not suit Mrs. Astruck as the place to live and thus the prophecy of 76 years ago for which she received the two slaps fulfilled itself. Her motive, however, was not the rejection of her former hometown nor of its inhabitants. In view of her partly forced, partly voluntary mobile life, the question props up what she considers to be her *homeland*: *Nowhere, everywhere, where I am happy, she counters with a smile. I do not mourn anything, I go walking in Nuremberg at the Prinzregentenufer or through the Pirckheimerstraße, look at all the*

changes, but live there? I would not know how, why and where, I mean all, the connections for example my schoolmates, are gone.

Another decampment



Margot (right) with friends during skiing holidays, left Ilse Steinlein
(photo: private)



Ilse and Margot 2007 in Bad Griesbach
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

She is still in contact with one of her friends of her early days in Nuremberg, Ilse Steinlein, who now also lives in the USA. Both ladies often speak on the phone and, as Margot Astruck five years ago decided again for a change of address, now also meet regularly. Returning to Munich after holidays in the USA she surprised her acquaintances with the information that she will move to America to be near to her son and daughter-in-law. As always, resolute and energetic, she followed her plan, but her friends are happy, that since that date, she packs her bags and returns to Germany every year for a few weeks.

In 2008, a special occasion made her cross the Atlantic: accompanied by son and daughter-in-law Margot she traveled to Munich to celebrate with many distinguished guests the day the story of her life began.



The organizers of a successful birthday party: son Ron and friend Lorle
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

The principal person talked to all her friends, as was necessary, in German, English or Spanish. History became alive again, names floated through the room, souvenirs of things which happened - *up and down* - and people who played their roles in Margot Astruck's biography. Experience and her own character formed a personality, well appreciated by her environment: positive towards life, unsentimental and distinguished. The wish that there should be more women of her stature is countered by her uniqueness.



Margot Astruck with daughter-in-law Cynthia and son Ron in Munich 2008
(photo: Susanne Rieger)

Margot Astruck passed away on May 23, 2011.

written by Susanne Rieger, translated by Ernst O. Krakenberger

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