

- ELSPETH (ROGERS) CHERNIAVSKY, wife of pianist JAN CHERNIAVSKY
TO MARY ISABELLA ROGERS

Letter #1

May 29, 1938

Budapest

Dear Mother:

I scarcely know where to begin or how to tell you what we have been doing for this last week. It was like a mad-house in Vienna and we began to feel, after a few days that we were losing our senses too. From Munich we got to Vienna rather late in the evening as we had some trouble with the motor. We went to several hotels but all were filled up with military and Germans. You certainly don't see any English or Americans as before, specially at this time of the year when it is lovely in Vienna. We finally got a room in the Graben Hotel and they had beds there also in the bathrooms. We went immediately to Karl's flat for dinner. We sat talking until 1 A.M.. Of course we talk only about what is happening to them and what they can do. So far Karl has not been molested - except that they came to take him to wash the streets, but luckily he was out at the time. He goes to his office for a few hours every day, but there is nothing to do there - except perhaps some family affairs - as Jewish lawyers are not allowed to do anything much. But Karl says he can't sit at home all day, waiting for the police to come, so he goes to his office. Of course his motor was taken away at once and it is no more in the garage where he kept it, but Karl still has to pay the garage for oil and washing and storage and he doesn't dare to say anything or he would be put into prison. It is possible that because he fought all through the war that they may leave him alone, but he does not believe it will be possible. Of course even to be left alone is not much pleasure. Every Aryan in Vienna must wear a swastika. Those that haven't - and a Jew would be imprisoned if he wore one - cannot go to any concert - opera - or in fact any public place. There are two coffee houses in Vienna where apparently it is possible for Jews to go - and one day we met Alfred & Karl - but in a dark corner inside. Alfred looks terrible and he has Veronal in his pocket all the time. He was urging Karl that it was the best solution. I really think it is myself. You don't really need to look at a person's lapel to see whether he wears a swastika or not, his miserable face is usually enough. All foreigners wear their flags, but I took great pleasure in not. I was hoping I should be asked to wash the streets, but (un)fortunately the worst part of that mob violence is over. It was mostly done by the Austrian Nazis - those who had been in prison and got out under the amnesty - or those who have been in exile in Germany now for some years. They were the ones who led a real reign of terror, but then the German police put down all that because of course they didn't want such things to be seen on the streets, but their terrorizing is more subtle and secret and everyone lives in daily fear. To Mrs. Strakosch they came to her bedroom at 1:30 in the morning to wash the streets but she gave them money and they left her alone, then they wanted to go up to the grandchildren's room and she gave them more money and they left them

alone. But not all were so lucky. Lili Bettelheim, for eight hours, had to clean lavatories with her hands, to pick up dirt on the floor and even more unspeakable things - with her teeth and all the time not be allowed to go to the lav herself.

Rose Lemberger was in prison for 3 weeks with 4 other women in a one-roomed cell and her son is still in prison - after 6 weeks - all because when some military people occupied their house of flats they enquired whether they would be paying rent. Rose L. was allowed out only when she signed a paper saying she would give all her money and properties to them. She was then automatically expelled from Austria and through the Society of Friends and her son in England, got a permit to go and stay there, but in the meantime there is a new law (they come out every day) and the passport she got is no good. Everything is so upside down that no one really knows anything.

We went to see Hutterstrasse the Bosendorfer people - who are Aryans and were Nazi minded because they thought it would be better for business. But he says he is nearly out of his mind. He works from morning till night and doesn't sell one piano. There are so many laws and regulations that everyone is frightened of making a mistake as it means going to prison. He was horrified of course at what was happening to the Jews. Hitlers photograph is everywhere until it stinks and swastikas covering everything. Streichers paper, Des Sturmer on sale at every corner and the pictures in it make you sick. I walk for blocks to look for a shop that is not marked "Aericshes Jeshäft". Most of the Jewish owned shops have been expropriated of course but a few are left and such miserable people inside. They look absolutely trapped and hunted. Jan asked for some man in one shop - "oh yes he is lucky, he committed suicide yesterday". He had invented some gadget and made quite a lot of money.

We went to see poor Mrs. Dub. She had a small pension 800 sch. from the newspaper her husband worked for all his life. The first month it was cut down to 400. This month she was told she would have none. Her daughter gives English lessons for a few shillings. It was awful to go and see her (or anyone for that matter) but when in good times they have all been so kind to us it would be beastly not to and I must say they all say, and Karl particularly, how much they appreciate our having taken the trouble to come and see them. We can't do anything much, it is true, but we can talk over prospects and perhaps some suggestions. Mrs. Dub said her Christian friends had been very kind and it seemed very pathetic when she said "My postman is so nice to me and my maid, as they say I was also thoughtful of them." The poor thing was crying of course and she begged us to come and see her again before we go and said "I promise not to cry, if you come next time". It was like going from one death bed scene

to another, some had lost everything already and felt the worst was over and those that hadn't waited for it to come.

We went to see the Strakosches. Their factory has been taken away. At least bought from them for such a small sum it was practically taken and they have lost everything - even jewellery and house and cars, etc. One daughter was luckily in Switzerland with her husband but her 2 yr. old son was with his grandmother and for the last 10 weeks they have been trying to get a passport for him to go to his parents, and Mrs. S. was very glad that day because they had at last got one. The other daughter and her husband are going to England with their 3 children. He had a chocolate factory and they intend to take a cottage in the country and begin again in their kitchen! Mrs. S. will go with them and help to look after the children and the house - and they were tremendously wealthy! Her butler was still with her and wants to go with them. I think he has been there about 35 years. Georg Strakosch was in prison too and his wife whom I always thought quite beastly, was true to her colours and immediately left him and went to America and never replied to any letters - so he is quite desperate. I think Hanns S.'s sister wrote to Forrie from Switzerland about Vancouver.

Of course everyone asks us about Vancouver - if we came from anywhere else it would be the same. It is terribly cruel to say, I'm afraid you would have no chance and besides it is almost impossible to get in. We try to think of other places where living would be cheaper and where there would be more opportunities. But the trouble now - where to go? Who wants them?

Then we went to see Prof. Hirsch. Of course they don't let him go anymore to the clinic except when they send for him for a special operation. His Aryan patients also say they are frightened to come to him. (In Germany they go at night time.) While we were there, the daughter went out to meet friends somewhere, and after sometime there was a telephone call to know why she hadn't arrived. As soon as you are late for an appointment everyone worries! Prof. Haas came in - he is a well known orthopedic man and we had the usual dismal talk and discussed the possibilities of every country. Jan is a walking atlas and full of geographical information.

After having tea there we went on to the Hupka's, left our car with G.B. licence on a side street, as Pepi had been visited by the police for having had a foreign caller a short time ago. We went into the front room as usual, but Pepi said we must all go

into his back study as no one could hear us talking there. We sat around like conspirators, then tried to get the radio news from Strassbourg but there was too much interference. The Viennese papers are not worth reading. Naturally Karl was so depressed and said he hadn't taken his nerve medicine that day. Trauti went off and cried several times. We waited for the Hirsches to come and finally at 10:30 Pepi telephoned to them. They had been visited by the S.S. in the meantime and were quite shaken as what was to happen. Apparently he had been given some books on Socialism by some of his patients and so they thought that they had better burn them, but one book was not quite burnt up. Their chauffeur happened to find it and took it to the police - now they are waiting to see what is going to happen next. Incidentally their car was also taken even tho he is a doctor, and they are forced to keep this same chauffeur living in a part of the house and pay him just the same. I must say that evening got more on my nerves than any other. When the Hirsches left, Pepi wouldn't let us go out altogether because that is not a good idea. A man Jan played bridge with had 2 tables of bridge in his flat - for something to do and he was arrested as they said it was a communist gathering! So we crept out later, like criminals and even in our hotel room we began to whisper to each other. The only one who seemed to be normal, and yet he seemed also quite mad to be telling jokes about the regime - was Ernst - Gaby's brother. There are so many I forget, but one asked - Are you an Aryan or do you learn English? If two Germans bump into each other in the streets and they don't say excuse me - but, "Prosit" because their clothes are mostly made of glass - and such jokes which I forget the Viennese will always think of, even in such desperate times.

The streets are full of soldiers and lorries and marching "jirgend" of every description. You have to go into the street or else get knocked off the sidewalk. We heard that British people needed visas and as we were coming to Budapest and going back to Vienna, we went to enquire at the British Consulate. There were about a hundred people waiting to get permits to go to England. We went back in the afternoon and they told us to go to the Police in Vienna. Outside the station there was a mob, and people were struggling to come out and outside fighting to get in. Jan got near the policeman at the door. He was an angry fellow anyhow and I got lost behind, but all at once the policeman exploded with rage and hit the one nearest which was Jan and pushed us all back into the street. (We gave up the fight and spent the morning here in B.P. waiting at the German Consulate for it - only to find that the colonies and 1/2 Ireland don't need it. We met there a white haired English woman who told us the English Consulate here had advised her to go back through Jugoslavia as he himself was going to do. But I think that is exaggerated.) Of course we get the English papers

so late and sometimes not at all that we don't know what's going on half the time. In fact, I had thought it would be nice to go back by Prague and see what's going on!

It was like heaven to come here - the house is lovely and Otto Bettelheim so kind. Jan brought messages from Karl to Otto - because Otto cannot go to Vienna and all the letters are opened and telephoned conversations listened to. Hungary is absolutely closed to any Austrian Jews and it is wretched to think that Karl has really a lot of money here and it is useless. Otto himself expects anything to happen in Budapest and everyone here says that these are very critical days. It seems sad, in this nice house, that Hanns should have given up so much and perhaps gone away forever. Otto and Greta are quite miserable living in it alone and never know but what next week the same thing may happen here to the Jews. They are all expecting trouble anytime.

We have a lovely room opening on to the garden and marvellous bathrooms and many hand maidens and very much good food and wine. It also seems to be quite crazy after Vienna. I don't think we can even feel quite the same again and certainly never forget this. I would be a worm if I ever complained about anything again. I just wish a few more people could see these things. To read leaves ones feeling sorry but still quite cold-blooded about such things - but to see and talk to all these people makes you shudder and think that we should never mind anything, as long as we are free and have enough to eat and exist.

I hope the solution for Trauti will be possible. I hope to get her into one of the Nursery Training Colleges in England and after a year's training I think she can take a position and work as the demand is not equal to the supply of these nurses and so they will take foreigners. Karl luckily has some money in England but I feel as if I should whisper this. (It is 5 years for not announcing any foreign money.) In fact, all our friends begged me not to mention their names or anything they had told me and I think it would be just as well. Trauti complicates plans somewhat, as I am not a bit fond of her but one can't help feeling terribly sorry for her just now - specially as Karl talks suicide all the time. You can imagine even if we do get her permit to study and work in England and her permit to leave, which is not easy, that it will be pretty awful for her to say goodbye to Karl and not know when she will see him again if at all. If Karl has somewhere he can go to, then he will go to the Police and ask for a permit to get out which he may get if he gives up all his money, for which he gets a tenth back again. Jan thinks if we could get him into B. Aires, that he could live there longer on his money than anywhere else and there are lots of Germans and Austrians already there and the climate is nice. But what he will be able to do there I don't know - but in the meantime

he would have enough to live on for about 5-6 years. But anyhow all this is just talk, as we don't know where we can get him into.

We went to see the C.P.R. man and he gave us quite a lot of information on the subject. Of course I can't give an affidavit for Karl as I'm not in Canada but also we think it would be difficult for him in Vancouver. His money would not last so long. It is very cruel to have to discuss it this way. Of course he says if I gave the affidavit, that it would be only a form and I would never be responsible and also of course if we were in our own house I would ask him to come to us. It is all so very difficult and Karl, a man of 51 with a profession of a lawyer, the worst thing he could be! I said he should be a photographer and sell postcards. Sometimes he laughs but most of the time he talks about suicide.

I shall be glad if we settle Trauti in England and let her become independent. Karl knows how difficult she is and discussed her with me. She is yet another of his worries. We went to see Gaby's parents and they fell on my neck over this idea for Tranti (which was really Mary's inspirations). They are so nice and gentle, it is maddening to think how they were also treated. They went together one day to the bank to get out some papers and on coming out of the safety deposit place, they were invited into a motor and to the police station where they were kept and questioned all day and finally had to sign over their papers! They also have a pension from the newspaper and Karl is frightened that they will also lose it. The old man said "For us we don't mind very much, we have enough to eat and I am very happy to stay at home and read the Bible." But what a life! To go nowhere and be sneered at in the streets. We took Karl and Trauti out for a drive in the Vienna Wald. They hadn't been anywhere of course and on the way back we stopped at Marcel to see their onetime country house. Jan and Karl looked through the garden gates to where they used to bicycle, etc. Jan used to stay with them when he was a little boy. It was really very sad how we are staying here for the weekend and will go back on Monday. I hope only for a few days in Vienna. It will be hard to say goodbye and Karl is trying to get us to stay longer. Jan must see Weigl and Berta Johans too - but he had put off these visits as being the worst of all. They were in bad circumstances before and so now?

I am sure you will think me quite mad if I ask you not to repeat all these names I have mentioned to you - but such unheard of things have happened and stories been repeated and people have got into trouble, that it really is best. I am quite dreading to go back again on Monday. It is like seeing people drowning slowly (only I think that is too humane a way to describe it) and not doing much to help them. I will write next

time from Dieppe - we hope to be there about June 4. We are going back by Nurenberg (we may see Pline's brother in England) but I think our chief idea is to get out of Germany as quickly as possible. It is such a shame - the country looks so beautiful - specially around Salzburg and Vienna couldn't look more so just now, except for all the filthy swastikas and Hitler in different poses. Karl says the chief industry in Wien now is taking out flag poles and putting them in again for any high German visiting official. On those days the whole city is covered up with flags.

I expect Pline knows the violinist Fenermann? It is true he is not a very charming person, but could you believe that he was made to wash the streets with an acid which burnt into his fingers? I meant to write again after being in Konigsfeld but it seems such a long time ago now since we were there. The old lady is so sweet and was very pleased to see us. I enclose her note of farewell. Margaret will laugh at the words "dear voices" of me and Jan, but it is a shame to laugh as she is such a dear old lady. Her daughter Anny and Prof. Weigl were delighted when Jan told Prof. W.'s son, Fortunatus (what irony) a few home truths about Germany. It is extraordinary that tho he is Jewish and because of that cannot work, etc. - he is still fervently patriotic. He was once a member of the Nazi party even! He cannot see that they are misguided in any way and we had some tremendous arguments over colonies, etc. I don't think under those circumstances that he would make a good settler in any other country. But he is a nice boy inspite of what we think are his mad ideas. He is certainly a German first and always. We were able to give them quite a lot of news of what has happened in the world. I wonder how long all these people can stand it. There was a big gathering of soldiers in Munich and one sees mostly air force uniforms. Here we are being practically killed with kindness. We have wonderful meals and then a table of snacks and Hungarian wine is wheeled in to fortify ourselves before we go out. Otto and Greta don't seem to be able to do enough for us and I feel embarrassed by their kindness. They are really very depressed because they can't do anything to help their relations in Vienna and all are frightened that this place will be the next where Germany's insidious propaganda has worked so well, it is becoming too strong not to break out.

Mary and Alix said to be sure to write to them how we find things but after telling you all these things I haven't the heart or inclination to repeat them all again. But I can't get any of it out of my mind. Greta and Otto want us to stay longer but we shall go on Monday and get away as quickly as possible from Vienna. That will be difficult as we have promised to see all these people all over again and it will not be pleasant to say goodbye, knowing we shall certainly never come back there again and whether we will ever see them again.

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Well, I think I must have exhausted your patience in reading all this and I am afraid it is rather a jumbled account as I have been scribbling in haste.

With love E.

Children: The other participants of 1938

Magdalena M. Wrobel, Ph.D. - Leo Baeck Institute-New York|Berlin

For many decades, children have been treated as passive participants of the history and therefore not subject to scholarly research. Their presence in historical events was often ascribed to random luck, so children's roles were treated on the margins of the historical narrative. In recent years, this perspective has changed. Children's experiences have an important part analyzing the historical events including the Holocaust, forced migration, and the persecution of minorities, just to name a few.

In the history of the Jews of Germany and Austria, 1938 is often referred to as the "point of no return." Subsequent dramatic events marked the year as the last moment for possible escape from the Nazi regime. When writing about children in 1938, for years the historiography exclusively concentrated on *Kindertransporten*, which was indeed one of the most dramatic moments of the year. Realizing that the escape from the Nazi regime will not be possible for the entire family, parents of 10,000 children from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia succeeded to send their offspring to England to protect them from the growing persecution and what soon became planned annihilation.

Beyond examining *Kindertansporten*, by looking more closely at using the personal stories gathered in the archives of Leo Baeck Institute-New York|Berlin (LBI) and made accessible to the public online through LBI's *1938Projekt*, the children's perspectives of 1938 are revealed. It becomes clear that children were curious and insightful observers of the events over the entire year, participated in the decision making of the family and coped in their own way with the stress related to emigration and the omnipresent socio-political tension.

Herbert Freeman from Frankfurt/ Main was only 12 years old, when his US-visa application was rejected because he was falsely diagnosed as "tuberculosis carrier". While his father, Leo Friedmann, immigrated to the United States already in 1936, Herbert, his mother, and his brother planned to follow him in late 1937. Instead, Herbert was sent alone to Switzerland, while the mother and brother joined the father. The time of separation resulted in fruitful correspondence exchanged between both sides of the ocean. Despite his young age, Herbert shows witty insight into the mentality of his family. In one letter from January 1938, Herbert writes: "Does Papa remember the 'dung beetle', when Mr. M. said that he would never leave Germany and that a 'Jewish Colony' should be built in Germany? Apparently, he has been having second thoughts. The first proof was that he took his son out of the Kaiser Friedrich Gymnasium, and the second that he is sending his son to America." Using sarcasm, Herbert aptly points to the sad reality of German Jews, in which fully assimilated members of the society were forced to abandon their strong faith in Germany as a country and eventually leave the country.

Monica Dugot

My family is from part of a world that no longer exists. Vienna, Cracow other places in Central Europe - there are still cities with those names but those names are all that remains of what Stefan Zweig referred to as a world of yesterday. My maternal grandparents and my mother lived Vienna and like others were separated from their homes and their lives following the Anschluss.

When I was growing up, my parents sometimes spoke of what had happened but how could I as a child really grasp the magnitude of what they had been through or what had been lost. As fragments of memory and vague recollections it was all intangible to me.

I remember my grandparents' New York City apartment jam-packed with objects, reminders of that other time and place. What I also remember was a bridge table in the kitchen piled high with paper. These papers were in fact records of what my family had lost in Vienna, papers painstakingly trying to document their old life in Vienna, their home, the paintings on their walls, their books.

Today I work in restitution, looking at the theft and movement of art during the Nazi-era. It may not have been what I had planned to do in college and law school but it feels predestined.

I'm fortunate that in my working life I get to put wrongs right, to help at least some individuals win back their family heritage that was stolen from them. To do so, they must often battle against a world that prefers to move on and accept the status quo rather than try to undo the theft and the displacement of the individuals' heritage.

My grandfather set up an antique shop on the East Side of Manhattan soon after he arrived to the United States from Vienna via Paris. He collected beautiful antiques from a world gone by. That was his way of making sure that the world that he loved so much and that he had been such a part of would not be forgotten. And to surround himself with these objects even in his own home making manifest that stack of papers on the bridge table.

This vast looting of objects by the Nazis was not just greed or aimed to asset strip Jews in Germany and occupied countries, this looting wasn't a sideshow to the main genocide but was very much a part of it. It sought to wipe out a collective culture; like any act of cultural

destruction, this looting was to raise identity and individuality to the ground and disconnect people from their roots.

By stealing art and possessions and laundering it through the Nazis' looting machine, ownership was for the most part eradicated, names became uncoupled from objects, artworks were passed on hand to hand, dealer to dealer, and with no physical documentation, any sense of ownership was lost. Complicity or amnesia about former owners became the norm for many works post-war. Through research into provenance and restitution, we acknowledge original owners' existence, we put them back into the history and recount the true story of an object's history.

It's a victory against a Nazi regime that robbed us of so much, it makes the six million lost not just a number but gives names and stories back to families. Importantly, it helps children of survivors turn from victims into protagonists and gives them power to take control of how their history is written.

My work helps me understand part of a history I didn't know. The fragments of memory I heard as a child have become part of a much larger story. By reconnecting objects with their rightful owners, we are acknowledging the owners' existence, and therefore what the Nazis' tried so desperately to take away - the citizenship and the humanity of those people and their descendants.

It turns out that the apple hasn't fallen too far from the tree, I am my grandfather's granddaughter and my work, like his antique shop, is a little piece of making sure that no one forgets.

Also other children used correspondence as a tool to participate in the ongoing events. Since the annexation of Austria in March 1938, Martha and Fritz Feldstein from Vienna were desperately looking for relatives abroad who would agree to issue affidavits required for obtaining a visa to another country. When the situation got desperate after the November Pogrom, the Feldstein family received a letter from their relatives in Los Angeles who promised to help. Since their daughter, 11-year-old Gerda, fully participated in the family conversations about emigration, she decided to write and thank personally her aunt and uncle in the United States (original letter): "I am very happy (that) to hear, that you will help us to come to America." Gerda even made plans to befriend her cousins (original letter): "I hope, that your dear children are in the same age, as I am and I shall got good friends." As much as Gerda tried to be polite, her letter reflected the sense of relief and obligation felt by the entire Feldstein family in Vienna.

Analyzing personal stories from 1938, one can see that children's emotional involvement in the family struggles almost matched the practical efforts of the adults. Reactions of children also often exposed hidden tensions and stress sensed by the entire family. However, while parents might have felt restricted to reveal their emotions, children disclosed their feelings more openly.

Zürich den 12. I. 38.

Meine Lieben!

Ich erhielt Eure lieben Briefe. (es waren zwei) und freute mich sehr damit. Die Zeit rückt immer näher dem Zeitpunkt an dem ich wieder auf das Konsulat muss. Hoffentlich klappt es diesmal. Heute habe ich Schulfrei. Deshalb habe ich mich hingesetzt um endlich meine Korrespondenz zu erledigen. Gestern Nachmittag war ich bei Loeb's eingeladen zu Kaffee und Kuchen. Es war sehr schön.

Bei uns ist es jetzt etwas wärmer geworden. (über Null) Dafür sagt man jetzt "keinen Hund hinaus" Ein entsetzlicher Matsch hat den Schnee abgelöst. Auf der Eisbahn kann man Paddelboot fahren. Ich habe mir jetzt wieder angewöhnt statt zwei schwere nur einen leichten Pullover zu tragen. Den Pullover den ihr mir durch Schw. Milla Beck geschickt hattet kann ich sehr gut gebrauchen. Er ist schön warm. Wann kommt Hans Mayer nach New York? Bleibt er dann dort? Kommen seine Eltern nach? Erinnerst Papa sich noch an den "Mistkäfer" & wo Herr M. sagte, dass er

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niemals aus Deutschland heraus ginge und in Deutschland eine "Judenkolonie" gebaut werden sollte. Scheinbar hat er sich jetzt anders überlegt. Der erste Beweis war, dass seinen Sohn aus dem Kaiser Friedrich-Gymnasium A heraus tat, und der 2., dass er seinen Sohn nach Amerika schickt. Wie gefällt es Henry in der Schule? Hier sind die Schulen ganz anders. Die Schule beginnt jeden Morgen um 8 Uhr und hört um 12 Uhr auf. Beginnt wieder um 2-3-4-oder 5 Uhr. In Aufsätzen bin ich einer der besten. Wie geht es Tante Lola? Wie Ylde und Lore? Haben sie eine gute Überfahrt gehabt? Wie gefällt ihnen New York? Können sie schon viel Englisch? Das Wetter ist "crazy". Während ich hier sitze und dies schreibe, schlagen Regentropfen an das Fenster. Wenige Stunden vorher schneite es noch. Um $\frac{1}{2} 6$ ist schon dunkel. Um $\frac{1}{2} 9/9$ gehe ich ins Bett und schlafe bis $\frac{1}{2} 7$. Das untenstehende Bild zeigt meinen Umfang an.

Viele Grüsse und Küsse

Euer Herbert



Mein Gesicht
2000000000
wird verflie-
nert.

Beste Grüsse G. Heulemann



Kaenna, 20. VIII. 38

My dear aunt and uncle!
I was very happy [that] to hear,
that you will help us to come
to America. I hope, that your
dear children are in the same
age, as I am and I shall get
good friends. I thank you