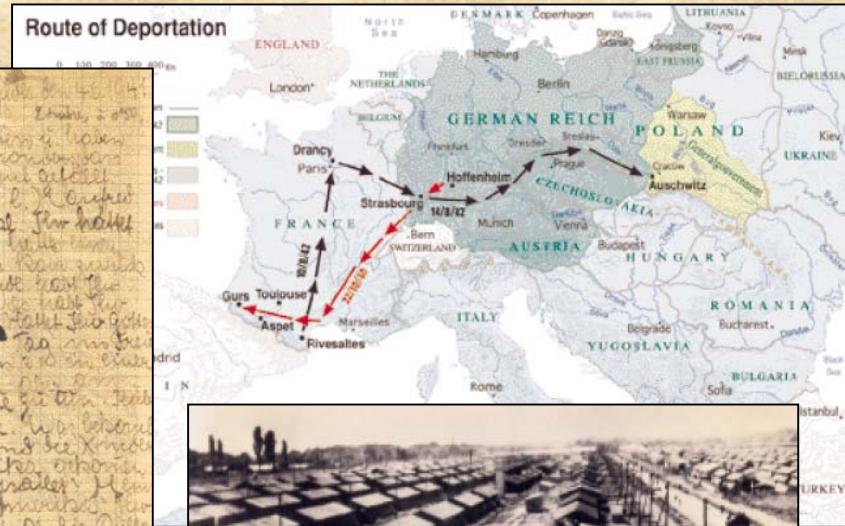
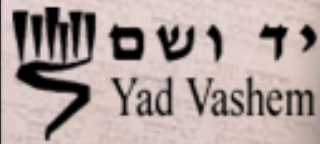


# Are The Trees in Bloom Over There?



*Handwritten text in Yiddish, likely a diary entry or letter, describing the conditions of life in the Warsaw Ghetto. The text is written on a grid of graph paper.*





## Opening:

**Fred:** Our readers are no doubt familiar with the subject of the Holocaust from school, from books, and from the media. So why do we feel it necessary to expand on the topic beyond our personal memories? **First, because these events and our response to them have shaped our lives and our worldview. Second, because anti-Semitism and intolerance of others are still prevalent.** Innocent people are still being killed out of bigotry and hatred of what is foreign or different, or because of religious differences.

Today, as parents, it's very difficult to describe **the inner strength that a mother needs** to write a final letter to her little children when she knows that she will probably never see them again.

Now we are adults. We have children of our own. When we re-read the letters your parents wrote in the concentration camps, we see **a different picture** – we see a family.

They wrote of their memories, their everyday struggles in the camps.

## German-Jew



1) We were born in the small village of Hoffenheim in Baden, southwest Germany. Everything is **leafy and green.**

Mother's name was **Mathilde**, but she was known as Hilde. Father's name was **Karl...**

As far as I know, Father's schooling was limited to the elementary level.



**Hoffenheim**

## German-Jew



2) I remember Mother had very long brown hair, which she gathered up in a bun.

I think she was better educated than father. She played the zither...

**Father was a soldier during World War I.** I remember his stories about fighting in the war.

I remember sitting on Father's lap on the Sabbath while he told me stories...the family cozily together, reminds me of Mother playing on the zither and singing the famous **German song, Lorelei.**

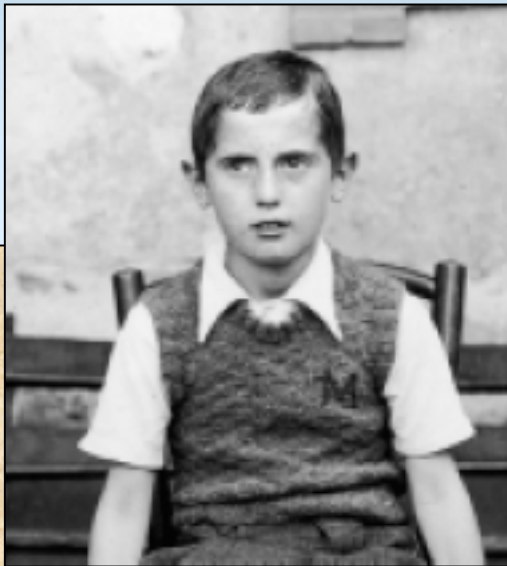


**Our parents, Mathilde and Karl, 1927**

## German-Jew



3) Mother gave me a very Germanic name – **Manfred**. When I asked why she chose that name, she replied that it was very popular. When she was young she heard a neighbor calling her son from the window... Manfred. She liked the sound.



**Heinz Mayer**



**Manfred Mayer, ID card, 1938**

# German-Jew

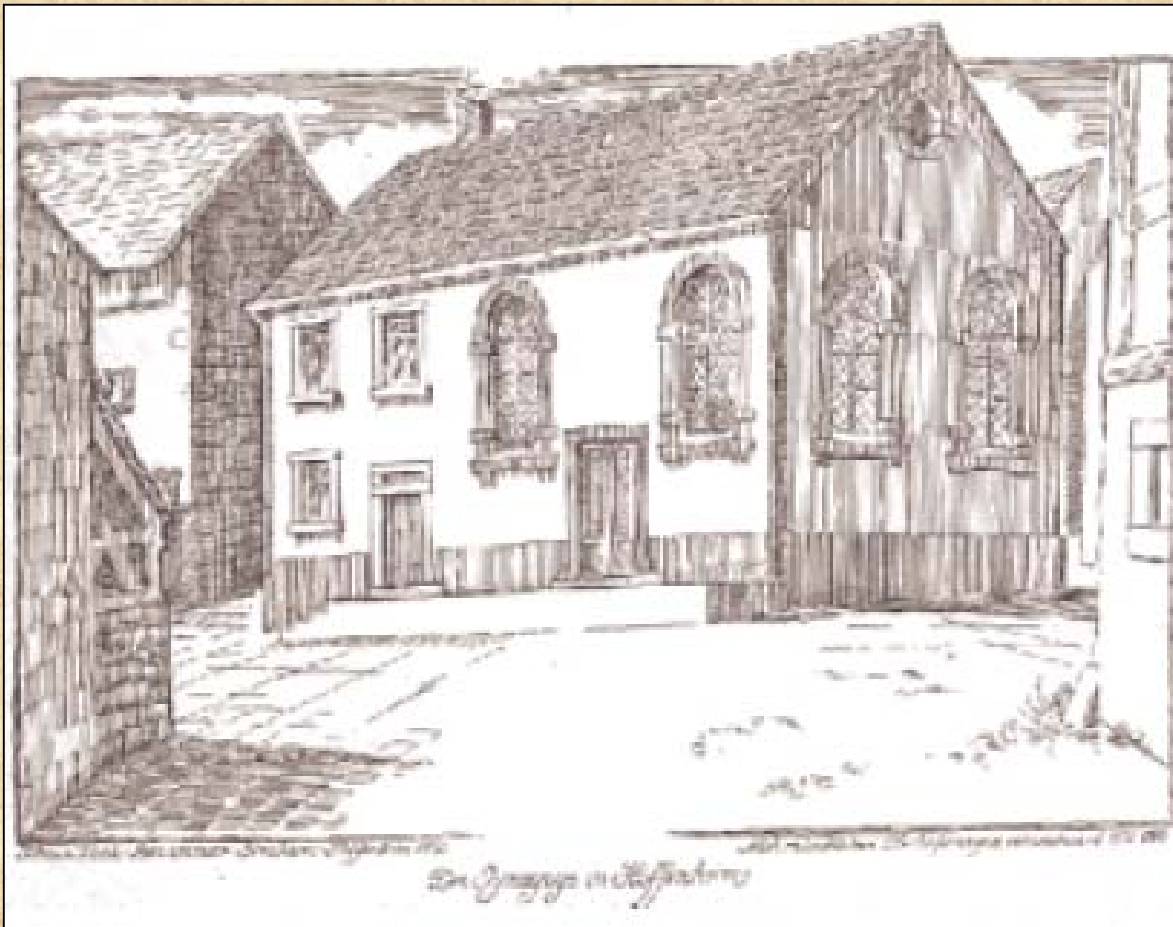
יד ושם  
Yad Vashem



## 4) **Father was the part-time cantor to the shrinking community.**

There were only about 40 Jewish people in the community.

I remember Father leading the congregation in prayer during Friday evening and Sabbath day services.



**Hoffenheim Synagogue, drawing from memory, 1990**

# Changing Times: The Nazis Come to Power



1) In the early years, we would **visit with the neighbors** before it became too risky for them to associate with us.

2) On hot days we kids paddled in the cool water, but when “our enemies” spotted us it was an open invitation, everyone yelling **“drown the Jew boys”**. They would jump on me and hold my head under water...



**Heinz and Manfred in Hoffenheim**

# Changing Times: The Nazis Come to Power



3) Walking to school was **never pleasant**. It was always a **harrowing experience**. German children were constantly indoctrinated and exposed to Nazi **propaganda**. They were brainwashed – their heads were filled with **anti-Semitic** ideas and racist attitudes. That’s how the **Hitler Youth** came into being...**I do not recall a single incident where an adult, witnessing this daily bullying, tried to prevent the other kids from beating me up.**



**Three-year-old Heinz Mayer in Hoffenheim (front row, seventh from left)**

4) **In May 1937, the Ministry of Education forbade Jewish children to attend public schools.** This was one of the many restrictions imposed on the Jewish community... after spending one year, first grade, in the village elementary school, I then had to attend a Jewish school in Heidelberg, some 20 kilometers away. I had to cover the distance by train every day...Best of all, on the train I was **anonymous** – nobody knew who I was. **From the time I got on nobody knew I was Jewish! Nobody beat me up, no one bothered me!** In those days people didn’t greet one another by saying “Good Morning” but raised their right arm with the words **“Heil Hitler”**. I unhesitatingly did the same. For that moment I, too, belonged!

# Kristallnacht Pogrom



1) On the morning of November 9, 1938... as I hurried home from the train station, I saw Mother pushing a cart piled high with **clothes and bedding**. In reply to my question she explained that they were **destroying the synagogue** and the adjacent apartment. **Furniture and household objects** lay scattered in the street. Some local Nazis – including those who had been *in school with my father*, his comrades-in arms during the First world War – **were standing up above, on the roof, which they were busy dismantling with great enthusiasm. The pleasure with which they applied themselves to their work was painful to see.**



**Munich, Bavaria, Germany, 1938, Ohel Ya'akov Synagogue, After a Pogrom**

# Kristallnacht Pogrom



Name: M A Y E R, Karl	
Da.Nr.: 20647 Sch. J.	
BD: 29.9.94 BP: Frankfurth a. MNat: deutsch	
Zugang: 11.11.38	Zugangsbuch des KL. Dachau
	GCC 3/61 IA/2

Record of Karl Mayer's imprisonment in Dachau.

2) At the end of a full day of riots, Father was taken from us and **imprisoned in Dachau** concentration camp for a month. He was released earlier than others because of **“concessions”** made to German veterans of World War I!

# Unknown Destination



1) The German army invaded France in **May, 1940**.

2) On **October 22, 1940**, a new and terrifying element entered our lives. At eight in the morning, two members of the Gestapo... instructed us to be prepared to **leave within two hours**. We were permitted to take up to fifty kilograms of personal effects per adult and thirty per child, and one hundred marks each. That's all the information we received – they **didn't reveal our destination and they certainly didn't explain why it had become necessary for us to leave our home**.



# Unknown Destination



3) All the Jews of Hoffenheim were deported that same day. **I remember Father shouting, “Is this why I fought in the war?”** I distinctly remember him (father) taking out his distinguished service awards, including the Iron Cross, and angrily throwing them at the feet of the Gestapo. **They were embarrassed and remained silent.**

# Gurs Transit Camp

1) We were in a place surrounded by barbed wire, with lots of wooden barracks. Upon arrival, men and women were separated. The younger children were permitted to remain with their mothers, so we stayed with Mother. **Winter. Rain, wind, damp and cold...the barracks they put us in were completely bare.** That first night we didn't even have straw to sleep on. **It was a far cry from home,** from more or less normal lives, to this entirely new reality; the contrast was so stark that **we were all in shock.**



**Gurs Detention Camp, France**

2) When the two of us...went outside in the morning, we immediately **sank into the mud,** because the entire swamp was built on **swampland.** There were no sidewalks, no pavement or vegetation – just a sea of **squelching mud.** I do not exaggerate when I say that it came **up to my knees,** and it was hard work dragging out anyone who had the misfortune to fall in. **The mud was a severe hindrance, especially for the old people, who found it almost impossible to get to the toilet facilities. Everyone who survived clearly remembers the mud of Gurs.**

# The Separation



1) We kids didn't know that various people and organizations were trying to get children out of the camp.

**One day, our parents told us they had given their permission for us to be taken from the camp** – together with other children – to a children's home somewhere in France. They explained that **it would be better for us**, because camp conditions were intolerable. We don't remember how we felt or how we reacted to this news.

I remember Father **lifting me into the truck and gazing into my eyes. We didn't have a chance to say goodbye to Mother** because the truck didn't wait, but I can still see her standing on the wooden bridge and waving as the truck passed.

2) **We keep asking ourselves how they found the inner strength to send their sons, twelve and not yet nine, into the unknown.** Their bravery seems all the greater when we consider that they were in the minority – most of the parents, unable to foresee what lay ahead, refused to part with their children. All of them perished in Auschwitz.

# Life in Hiding as Reflected in the Letters



## 1) Letter #13

Rivesaltes, August 1941

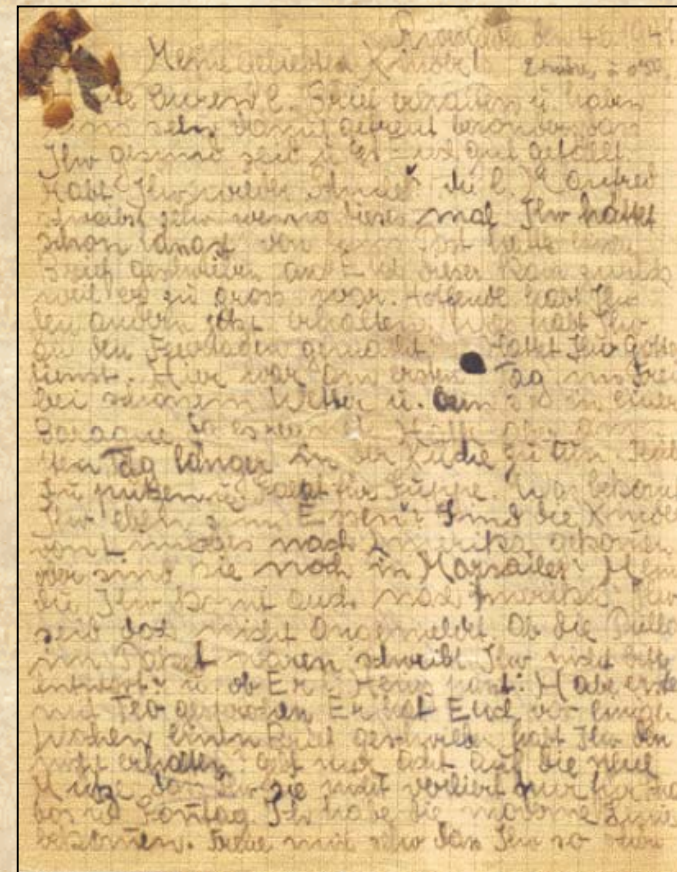
Dearest Children,

**We were very happy to receive your letter.** I was especially happy to read that **you are well**, because that's really the most important thing. Did you get the letter where I wrote that **Father was taken** from here with more than 100 other men? Three weeks have passed and I still haven't heard from him. They say they were taken to work. What do I say to this? **If only we knew where they were...** What do you get to eat? **Do you get cooked meals like you had at home?** We get watery vegetable soup, sometimes with potatoes....

Lately I have been **suffering quite badly from diarrhea.** In the photograph you sent your face looks thin, Manfred, and is Heinz's neck swollen?

Regards and kisses from your Mother, who loves you with all her heart.

They just brought your passport photos, you look well. Why do you need them? **Are you going away?** (p.116)



Letter written by Mother from Rivesaltes camp, June 4, 1941. Dried flower in upper left corner.

## Life in Hiding as Reflected in the Letters



2) [segments from the letters]

*We received your letters together with the Hanukkah gifts... My diarrhea is getting better... Best wishes for your birthday and **bar mitzvah**. Today your letter arrived (of January 26<sup>th</sup>) and we were happy to read that you are healthy and **to learn about your school reports**. I see, Heinz, that you enjoy school. Can you send us anything?*

*I must take care of myself because I get **diarrhea** very easily [the next few words were erased by the censor]. What do you get to eat? What has Heinz done with all **the shoes I gave him**? If the shoes are small on him, send them here and I'll sell them. How can it be that you don't have boots? What is your shoe size? **How are your socks, I'm sure they're torn by now**?!*

*Now, about your Jewish names: **Manfred is Maier** bar Kalonymous, and **Heinz is Menachem** bar Kalonymous. Write them down.*



**The children of Aspet, 1942. Heinz is in the front row, seventh from left. Manfred is in the back row, extreme left.**

# Life in Hiding: The Last Letter



3) Letter #29

*My dear children,*

*Just a few lines before we leave – I don't know where we're going. We don't in the least regret leaving you behind, you are safer where you are. Perhaps you'll hear everything.*

*Be well. All the best and kisses from your Mother.*

*Dear Manfred and Heinz, be good to one another – that's my greatest concern.*

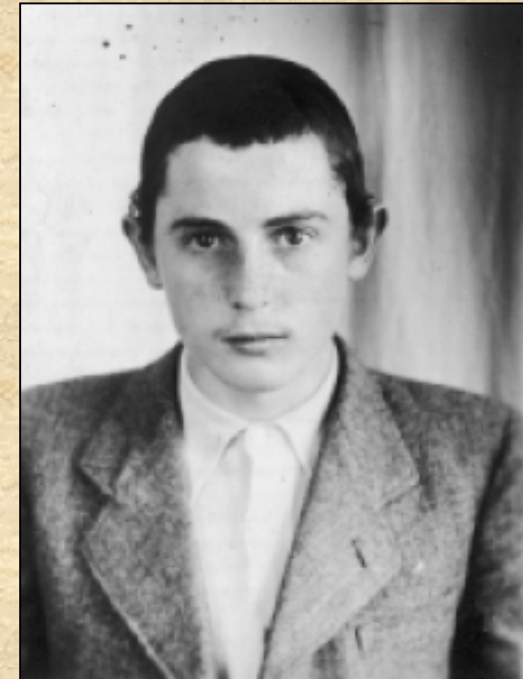


# The Brothers Separate Again



1) **Menachem/Heinz:** [After the war was over, and after a few years of being separated] Manfred tried to persuade me to join him [going to the United States], but I refused, insisting that **I wanted to go to Palestine**. I was fourteen at the time, and very much influenced by my teachers and counselors, so I don't think this was an independent decision on my part.

Sometimes **I ask myself what right they had to separate two brothers**, the only survivors of one whole family?...**That's how my fate was decided**...Sometimes we control events and make choices, but most of the time it only seems that way, because our actions are dictated by circumstances over which we have no control.



Heinz in Montreux, where he studied at Etz Haim Yeshiva before making Aliya, 1947

# The Brothers Separate Again

יד ושם  
Yad Vashem



Manfred A.K.A. Marcel (front row, center) with a group of Jewish Scouts, hiding in the forests of southern France

2) **Fred [16 years old]:** On the way to [the United States] I wondered **why I had not chosen to go to Palestine?** After all, I had been exposed... to my Jewish cultural heritage and many people had chosen to make their lives there.

Frankly, I am not sure exactly how my thinking evolved. I was multifaceted. **Foremost was a feeling had grown in me over the years that being Jewish was not healthy.**

# The Destination



1) **Menahem:** In my opinion, Manfred's flight did not end when he crossed the ocean. I think his **choice of career**, as a space engineer, also represents a kind of flight, as far as possible, to outer space...

For several years, in addition to my daily routine, **I studied toward a teaching diploma in natural sciences.** I attended classes two evenings a week at the School of Biology in Haifa. Twice each week I walked five kilometers down the hill to the old Haifa road where I caught a bus to the school.

**Fred:** Within days Mr. Heumann asked me what I wanted to become. I said I didn't know yet, but that I was hoping to go to high school. He said, "Nonsense, you are going to be a butcher." I said **I certainly did not want to be a butcher...** I worked at the machine shop from eight to five, then **traveled to school by subway and bus to study** from six to ten...I graduated on August 1, 1952, fourth in a class of twenty-five.

