

Leonhard Wohl was born on 2nd May 1886 in Bublitz. His wife Clara Wohl, née Jacobi, was born on 1st May 1894 in Naugard. Bublitz and Naugard were small towns in Pomerania, roughly midway between Stettin and Danzig; they are now in Poland.

This brief memoir of Leonhard and Clara has been put together by their daughter Eva's children, Peter Urbach and Lesley Urbach, on the occasion of the laying of a Stolperstein at the address in Berlin from where they were deported in early 1943 to their deaths in Auschwitz. Through their efforts, Leonhard and Clara's four daughters found refuge from the Nazis, three of them in England and one in Argentina. Rescued in a 1938 Kindertransport from Berlin, Eva married Arnold Urbach in 1943; she lived until 2010. These notes are based on a number of sources: the interviews that Eva and her sister Ursula recorded in 1997 under the auspices of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation; a brief account of her life in Germany that Eva wrote in 2007; letters, mainly those written by Leonhard and Clara during the Second World War; the Gedenkbuch des Bundesarchivs für die Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung in Deutschland (1933-1945); and stories that the authors remember hearing from their mother and aunts.

Leonhard had been married before, to Erna Margoniner. We may surmise that they married in 1910, as their first child, Ilse, was born in May 1911.

Leonhard had been conscripted into the German army by 1908. During the First World War, he served for two years on the Eastern Front and then for two years on the Western Front. Postcards that Leonhard wrote to his wife at the end of 1915 from the Front indicate his rank as corporal (Unteroffizier). In 1916 he was awarded the Iron Cross, First Class. Ilse recorded that her parents had brought her up to be a German patriot, so much so, that at the age of 15, in 1926, she wrote an idealistic poem on the subject of war that concluded with the words: "Reich' die schwarz-rot-goldene Fahne mir/Mit diesem Zeichen siegen wir !"

After the War, Leonhard returned to civilian life and Erna soon gave birth to a second child, Käte, in December 1919. But the following year Erna died through complications arising from another pregnancy. Leonhard remarried in 1921 or 1922. His new wife, Clara, gave him two daughters: Eva, in December 1922, and Ursula, known in the family as 'Ulli,' in November 1925. Clara brought up Käte with her own children, while Ilse lived from about 1924 with Clara's mother and brother in the seaside town of Kolberg.

Leonhard was the seventh of 10 children (5 girls and 5 boys), who formed a close-knit family group, despite some of them being dispersed in various parts of the country. He and his elder brother Alex, being the senior boys, took over the family business from their father, Gustav Wohl (d. 1902). The business, which dealt in corn and other agricultural products, traded under the name M. Wohl, after its founder, Gustav's father, Moses Wohl (1811-1894), who had come to Bublitz from Poland. The business comprised a shop, which occupied a prominent position on the town's market square, facing an imposing statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I; a warehouse behind the shop; and several farms in the surrounding countryside. In the spring, farmers would buy fertilisers on credit, and repay their debt in the autumn when they sold their produce to the business. After the harvest, lorry-loads of potatoes would be sent all over Germany.

Alex's family occupied the floors above the shop, while Leonhard and Clara and their children lived first in one, then in another rented flat on the opposite side of the square. Some time after 1933, they moved to a house nearby that they owned. The business had prospered and the family enjoyed the trappings of a middle-class style of life – domestic servants, including a chauffeur for their 'Opel' car, and about eight staff for the business. There were summer vacations for Leonhard and Clara in Bornholm and in Marienbad, while the three girls holidayed with their grandmother in Kolberg.

The Jewish community of Bublitz comprised no more than sixty souls; it had a synagogue and employed a Cantor. The Wohls were closely involved in the community and seem to have been moderately pious and moderately observant. They celebrated the more important Jewish festivals and attended the weekly synagogue services. Leonhard had special responsibility for the care of the Jewish cemetery (now demolished).

Leonhard was irrepressibly good-humoured. He loved to play cards, especially the game of Skat. He was indulgent towards his children and would entertain them with comical stories, and tales of youthful mischief and the practical jokes he had played as a boy on neighbours, which he immortalised for them in doggerel verses. Clara was more serious, more practical and stricter: "Our father spoiled us, while our mother brought us up." Before her marriage, Clara had been a schoolteacher. As well as running the household, she exercised her skills as a needle-woman, and took an interest in women's politics.

The children remembered an idyllically happy childhood. But the end of January 1933 marked the end of their comfortable existence. Eva Wohl recorded: "My father, mother, uncle, aunt and two friends had gathered at my

aunt's flat to listen to the wireless and await the election results. We were in a state of great anxiety and the adults were horrified at the result. I remember them saying: 'It can't last long.'

But in fact everything changed after Hitler's election as Chancellor. The Wohl children were immediately isolated by their teachers and shunned by fellow pupils at their school (which was named, incidentally, after the noted nationalist and anti-semitic, Ernst Moritz Arndt); other children spat at them in the street; they were excluded from recreations such as the gymnasium, the cinema, and the swimming pool and were refused further lessons by their piano teacher. They were no longer permitted domestic servants. And M. Wohl was boycotted by much of the local population.

Eva remembered an occasion, in 1934 or 1935, when a young cousin, a boy of around five or six years of age, who had no idea of its significance as the National Socialists' anthem, was heard from the street attempting to play the Horst Wessel song on the piano. Local Nazis were scandalised. As retribution they forced all the Jewish businesses of the town to close for a week, and stationed one of their number in front of each with a placard bearing the slogan: Die Juden sind unser Unglück. Leonhard, who could scarcely believe what was happening and knew the uniformed young man who was standing guard outside his shop went out by a side door to offer him a chair to sit down on. This was not the time for irony. "A short time later a more senior Nazi, who had seen what had happened, charged into the shop and screamed at my father. I remember one thing he said: "If you do anything like that again, we will make sure that your Jewish blood will spurt up to the heavens."

In April 1937 Eva left Bublitz for Berlin, where she attended a Jewish commercial school; and the following year, against her parents' wishes, she took a job that enabled her to learn dressmaking. Ilse emigrated to Uruguay (and from there later on to Argentina) in December 1938 with her husband and her seven-year old son, Walter. Leonhard, Clara, Ulli and Käte moved to Berlin in January 1938, the family business having been sold, under duress, the previous year. They were almost the last Jews to leave the town. The capital city offered anonymity, and proximity to foreign embassies. They were living in a flat at 55 Hohenzollendamm, Grunewald, in November 1938.

On the evening of Wednesday, 9th November – Kristallnacht – Leonhard and his brother Oscar were visiting another brother, Siegfried. Siegfried's young son, Gerhard, was playing in the street when a Gestapo man approached and asked if his father was at home. He replied that he was, and so were two of his brothers. Leonhard and Oscar were both immediately arrested and taken to a police station at Potsdam. (Siegfried was spared that fate on this occasion, as he was ill in bed, but in January 1942 he was deported with his wife, their son and their daughter to the Riga ghetto, where they are presumed to have been killed.)

Eva remembered: "I was at home on Kristallnacht with my sisters Ulli and Käte. Either in the evening or on the following morning (I can't exactly remember which) we had a telephone call from a woman, who was clearly trying to disguise her voice – she seemed to be speaking through a handkerchief. She was the wife of the police inspector at Potsdam who by a remarkable coincidence had served with my father in the First World War. She told me to come to Potsdam and to bring my father his personal things and some biscuits (he needed to eat regularly because of a stomach ulcer). In the morning I went to buy the biscuits. I then set out for Potsdam carrying the biscuits, shaving equipment, etc., in an attaché case. The train journey was very frightening for me. When I arrived in Potsdam I asked some small children to direct me to the police station (I didn't dare ask an adult). At the station, I was not permitted to see my father. A policeman simply took my bag and told me to go back home. My father was released after a few days. But my uncle continued to be detained."

Ulli recalled that Leonhard had said that his war comrade would abuse and manhandle him in front of the other policemen, then apologise privately. Leonhard's brother was less fortunate. From Potsdam he was sent to the concentration camp at Dachau. Ulli recalls seeing him on his return from there dressed in rags and almost unrecognisable. But Oscar was fortunate a short while later, and before the War started, to reach the United States with his wife.

Leonhard's eldest sister, Marta, died of liver cancer on Kristallnacht, after long suffering. Clara's mother, Flora, who had suffered a stroke two days earlier, also died that night in Berlin.

After Kristallnacht, Leonhard and Clara secured a place for Ulli and Eva on a Kindertransport which left for England on 14th December 1938. This was five days after Eva's 16th birthday, which would have disqualified her had it not been for Clara's influence with the Jewish Women's organisation (Der Jüdischer Frauenbund) of which she was a member. Clara also got her way in resisting the organisers' plan to send the sisters to different countries – she was determined that they should not be separated. Perhaps the fact that Leonhard paid for two other children to join the Transport helped her case. We often heard described the heartbreaking scene at the

packed railway station in Berlin as Ulli and Eva boarded the train, and as their parents, scarcely able to speak through their tears, bade them farewell for the last time.

Käte, who was three years too old to be accepted on a Kindertransport, managed to reach England on a domestic visa in February 1939.

Leonhard and Clara had obtained visas for Chile and had sent ahead two or three large trunks full of their possessions in readiness to set sail in a German boat either on, or a few days after, 3rd September 1939. But the outbreak of the War prevented the boat from leaving. They began to learn Spanish and continued to try to get away, making detailed arrangements to depart for South America in December 1940, and then again in early 1941. Both arrangements fell through. Though frustrated at every turn, their letters were not generally self-pitying. But now Clara became fatalistic: "Geld futsch und Hoffnung begraben und wir wissen nicht was werden soll."

Leonhard's brother Alex died of natural causes around this time in Stolp, in Pomerania; his sisters Betty and Rosa, who were married to two brothers, Salo and Max Loewy, were both deported in October 1941 to the Łódź Ghetto. From there they were sent to Chelmno extermination camp on 4th May 1942 and were murdered on that date.

Leonhard and Clara moved on 1st April 1939 about three kilometres from Hohenzollendamm to one room in a pension at 5 Jenaer Straße, where they were boarders of Klara and Wilhelm Heilbrun. The Heilbruns were deported to Auschwitz on the same day as the Wohls. Letters indicate that Leonhard and Clara lived a few streets away at 35 Landshuter Straße from at least August 1941. They were still living there on 8th October 1942, the date of the last letter we have from them, and this is also the address given for them on the deportation list for 19th February 1943. German records suggest that they were deported from 5 Jenaer Straße, the pension where they had stayed in 1939.

Leonhard had four brothers and five sisters. Seven of the Wohl siblings were murdered in the Holocaust, as well as five of their spouses (one other spouse seems to have committed suicide), and six of their children (see Appendix below). Clara's first cousin Herbert Lewin (stage name: Nivelli) was deported with his family from Prague, first to the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and then in July 1944 to Auschwitz; his wife, Gerda, and their young son, Peter, were both murdered shortly after their arrival there; his mother Elise (Clara's aunt and sister to Flora) also died in Auschwitz. Herbert saved his own life by gratifying the Auschwitz camp guards with conjuring tricks. Clara's only brother, Walter, who practised as a paediatrician in Kolberg, escaped with his wife and child to Ecuador before the start of the War.

The last poem that Ilse had from Leonhard was composed for his children. It is undated. It describes the exhausting shuttling back-and-forth from embassy to embassy, the hour-long waits at consulates, and the forms that had to be filled out. All to no purpose. Meanwhile their money is rapidly running out; it might last a year longer, provided they are frugal. The poem concludes:

Ihr wisst, liebe Leser, und koennt es verstehen:  
Den Sof ['the end'], den Sof, den Sof moechte ich seh'n.

Leonhard and Clara were deported to Auschwitz on 19th February 1943. Der 'Sof'\* must have come soon after.

Written by Peter Urbach and Lesley Urbach\*, March 2014

\* The word 'Sof,' pronounced with a soft first letter, is a Hebrew word that is absorbed into Yiddish.

\*\* The authors were assisted by Michael Parker, grandson of Fritz Lewin (later, 'Freddy Parker'), brother of Herbert Lewin.

## APPENDIX

The Wohl siblings in birth order

Marta (married to Dr Jean Nordon), b. 1877: died naturally on Kristallnacht. Their son Max (b. 1903) was imprisoned from 10th November 1938 at Buchenwald concentration camp, and deported with his wife, Lotte (b. 1910), from Berlin on 19th February 1943 to Auschwitz extermination camp. Their eldest child, Dora, emigrated before the War to Australia. Their middle child, Martin, left Germany before the War.

Betty (married to Salo Loewy), b. 1878: deported from Berlin to Łódź ghetto 27th/29th October 1941, thence to Chelmno extermination camp, where she was killed on 4th May 1942, the day of her arrival. We have no record of Salo Loewy.

Grete (married to a cousin, Adolf Wohl), b. 1879: deported with Adolf on 12th January 1940 to Piaski ghetto. Their daughter was deported from Frankfurt-am-Main 24th/26th September 1942.

Clara escaped to Brazil before the War, her husband, Georg Manasse, having previously died naturally.

Alex, died naturally in 1940 or 1941. His wife Marta, née Konitzer, was deported in July 1942, probably from Berlin, to a place unknown.

Rosa (married to Max Leowy), b. 1884: deported from Berlin to Łódź ghetto 27th/29th October 1941, thence to Chelmno extermination camp, where she was killed on 4th May 1942, the day of her arrival. A Max Leowy, b. 1883 in Chelmno, West Prussia, is recorded as having committed suicide in Berlin on 29th October 1942.

Leonhard (married to Clara, née Jacobi), b. 1886: deported with Clara from Berlin on 19th February 1943 to Auschwitz extermination camp. Their daughters Ilse (1911-2003), Käte (1919-2008), Eva (1922-2010), and Ursula (1925-2004) left Germany before the War.

Siegfried (married to Erna, née Lipper), b. 1889: deported from Berlin on 13th January 1942 to Riga ghetto, together with his wife, their daughter, Inge (b. 1924), and their son, Gerhard (b. 1928). Inge's death is recorded at Jungfernhof concentration camp, Riga. Erna was sent from Riga on 4th August 1944 to Stutthof concentration camp.

Oscar (married to Johanna ('Haenschen')): escaped to USA before the start of the War.

Max (married to Hannah, née Lipper), b. 1895: deported from Berlin on 4th March 1943 to Auschwitz extermination camp. Hannah had been deported on 1st March 1943 with her son Peter (b. 1926) to Auschwitz extermination camp. There was another son, whose name Eva Wohl could not recall but who she believed to have perished. This was probably Horst, who was born in 1930 in the same town as Peter was born, namely, Köslin, Pomerania. Horst was deported from Berlin to Auschwitz, presumably with his father, on 4th March 1943.

Lesley Urbach

My brother, Peter and I live in London. The C is my middle name and our family name is Urbach. The Stolpersteine are for our mother's parents. They came from a small town in Pomerania called Bublitz which is now part of Poland where they ran a successful flour and grain business. They left Bublitz in early 1938. They moved to several places in Berlin as far as I understand. So I don't know how long they had been at this address. My mother and sister left for England on the Kindertransport, another got to England on a domestic visa and another sister went with her husband and son to Uruguay. Its hard to imagine how my grandparents must have felt with all their daughters gone but at least they survived.