

MY GRANDMOTHER'S STORY: A STUDY OF POST-HOLOCAUST IDENTITY

by

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“I leave this for you, Martina, to help you with our book.”

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Introduction

In April 1937 at the tender age of thirteen, Margot Pelzel fled Berlin, Germany. Along with her brother and parents, Margot immigrated to Montevideo, Uruguay, when the threat of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) became too great. Before her death in 2008, she frequently told stories of her life in Berlin and always spoke with her granddaughters about writing a book to relay her family's story. Margot was a Jew, an immigrant, and my grandmother.

Three years after Margot's death, I unearthed over 750 family letters at her home in Montevideo. The letters cover the years from 1936 to 2008, ranging in format from short notes by Margot to long descriptions by members of her family and friends, in topics from quotidian events to the trials of surviving under the Nazis, in language from German to Hebrew and Spanish, and in style from handwriting in Sütterlin, the German script, to using conventional writing and typing. The letters were in five boxes, unorganized, and in poor condition. I spent two months cataloguing them by author, date, and topic. I divided the documents, which included death certificates, proofs of work, tax returns, receipts, etc., according to the persons to which they pertained and the date they had been written. After archiving the material, scanning the letters, and selecting the crucial dates for recreating her migration (1937-1948), I began transcribing the more illegible ones of the period. My goal was to reconstruct her life and write the story of her life as she had wanted to do herself.

The first obstacle I faced was Sütterlin, which I learned to write and read. After transcribing the majority of the letters that were in the worst condition, I translated those that provided useful information for reconstructing Margot's life in Germany. I limited the scope to letters that were connected to family, friends, or acquaintances and related in some way to her

migration, which eliminated a tenth of the material. I analyzed the rest of the letters and compared the information to the three narrations that I received from Margot in the early 2000s. The narrations described her last day in Berlin, the journey on the ship, and the life of her best friend in Berlin. In addition, I used a twenty-page descriptive narration that Margot had sent to the Prenzlauer Berg Museum in 1997. In these pages, she portrayed the neighborhood in the 1930s with street-by-street accounts of stores, owners, and residents. This incredibly detailed work attests to Margot's memory and provides further credibility to the other stories and recollections that I use in my work. This aspect is crucial, since I rely on her narrations to supplement the information found in the letters that pertain to the time in question. Furthermore, a family tree, two diaries, and entries in a notebook from 1946 complete some of the missing information in her narrative and corroborate facts in the later accounts of her early life. In order to fully understand Margot's first decades in Montevideo, I interviewed Trude Stern, Erico Stern, and Hanne Blitzer, three of the German Jews in Margot's original group of tight friends in Uruguay. Interviews with Margot's daughters, my aunt Marianne and my mother Irene Kaufmann, enriched my account of the Margot's latter decades.

In March 2013, I lived in Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, for a month. Margot's friends inquired from Uruguay about my feelings and reactions when speaking to Germans. Their questions suggested that I should feel uncomfortable walking those streets and dealing with Germans. Instead, beginning with my first experiences in the city, I felt surprisingly at home there. How could I feel at home in the land of the people who murdered almost all of my grandmother's family? The stores, the clothes, the foods, the music, and the inside of the houses all reminded me of the environment in which I grew up at my grandmother's house in Montevideo. Almost

78 years after she was forced to leave that neighborhood, I walked the streets using her hand-drawn map for guidance, and everything around me felt extremely familiar.

While in Berlin, I continued my work on Margot's letters. One of the letters included Hanna Rosenthal's contact information; she had been my grandmother's childhood friend in Berlin. The Rosenthal and Pelzel families had been close, but after the Pelzels migrated in 1937, the two women never lived in the same city again. In search of answers, I called the number with little hope. However, Hanna answered and quickly identified me as Margot's granddaughter after I asked for "Hannele," which was the name by which only her close family and friends called her when she was young. She knew that Margot was the last living member of that group. After informing her of my grandmother's death and my research project, Hanna invited me to visit her at her home. After our first conversation, I quickly realized that the connection between "Hannele" and Margot in the late 1990s and early 2000s had been as strong as, if not stronger than, in 1937. This realization shifted my focus from simply reconstructing her story to exploring deeper the conscious and unconscious choices that helped Margot stay connected to her life in Berlin.

How did Margot maintain such strong ties spanning decades? How did she nurture the bonds to a place and friends to the extent that her granddaughter, who had never visited Prenzlauer Berg, felt at home walking through its streets? How did Margot, unlike her friend Hanne Blitzer in Montevideo, raise a family that felt compelled to learn German instead of denouncing it? How did she create an environment that encouraged me to focus my studies on German and move to Germany for six months? Primarily, I became interested in how one woman, after losing the majority of her family, her friends, her home, and all that she knew, remained loyal to her German Jewish roots. Therefore, this thesis will examine the aspects of

Margot's German Jewish identity to which she remained loyal after relocating to Uruguay and the aspects of her life in Montevideo that facilitated the preservation of these strong ties.

The issue of identity, specifically German Jewish identity, is one of the major themes of my work and has been exhaustively studied by scholars over the decades going back to the eighteenth century. The question of how this specific community identified itself and how others viewed it has been historically incredibly complex. This concept of "German Jewish identity" became increasingly problematic after Moses Mendelssohn's reformation of Judaism in Germany during the eighteenth century. At the beginning of that century, Jews only identified with the Jewish community and hardly had any connection to the people and culture outside of that community.¹ The majority of Eastern Jews spoke Yiddish, wrote with Hebrew letters, and did not master the German language.² With Mendelssohn's help, the *Haskalah* led the Jewish community, which had not been "intellectually inclined," out of their self-constructed cultural ghetto and revealed that "a Jew could be [a] philosopher, aesthete, even a Prussian patriot."³ The process of embracing the German language, literature, theater, and arts continued to spread during the nineteenth century, although at that time in the German territories, a nation was considered a group that shared language and culture. Therefore, Jews were seen as a separate nation within the country that could not be truly patriotic or loyal to Prussia and the other German states.⁴ Jews' persistent attempts to be accepted as Germans resulted in numerous conversions and a widespread secularization within Judaism. Many Jews, who had fought in

¹ Michael A. Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew: Jewish Identity and European Culture in Germany, 1749-*

² "Moses Mendelssohn," *Jüdische Geschichte und Kultur*, accessed January 23, 2013, <http://www.judentum-projekt.de/persoenlichkeiten/geschichte/mendelssohn/index.html>

³ Meyer, *The Origins of the Modern Jew*, 18.

⁴ Friedrich Hertz, *Wesen und Werden der Nation, Jahrbuch für Soziologie* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1927), 28.

1813 during the *Befreiungskriege*, identified themselves as Germans even though others did not.⁵ As Rabbi Dr. Meyer Kayserling wrote, “The *Vaterland* belongs to me as much as it belongs to any other. On German soil, says the German Jew, stood my cradle, in the Germany ground rest my parents, the German language is my mother tongue, the German culturalization is also mine, the German genius is the one that has nurtured my spirit since its first awakening.”⁶ His words resonated with many German Jews. Although some Germans tried to deny the “Germanness” of the Jews, due to the constant change in geographic borders, defining a German identity was still problematic. As Jews struggled to define their identity within the country, the country itself struggled to define a unified German identity that superseded the existing regional identities. Over the years, *Kultur*, which historian David Blackbourn writes “denoted superior German accomplishments in scholarship and the arts,”⁷ became the most constant bond holding the nation together, and Jews wholeheartedly embraced the cultural identity of Germany.⁸

The Pelzel family exemplifies this sense of German cultural identity, but an analysis of its life reveals the presence of a strong connection with the Jewish community, as well. Michael Meyer explains this phenomenon: “For the Jew in the modern world, Jewishness form[ed] only a portion of his total identity [...] By calling himself a Jew he expresse[d] only one of multiple loyalties.”⁹ Margot’s multiple loyalties favored the creation and maintenance of sociocultural connections between her country of origin, Germany, her country of adoption, Uruguay, and her

⁵ Deborah Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) 162.

⁶ Meyer Kayserling, *Die Juden als Patrioten ein Vortrag gehalten in den Vereinen für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur in Berlin und Leipzig am 18. und 20. Januar, 1898*, (Berlin: Ulbert Katz, 1898), 11. “Das Vaterland gehört mir so gut wie jedem Andern. Auf deutscher Erde, spricht der deutsche Jude, stand meine Wiege, in deutschem Boden ruhen meine Eltern, die deutsche Sprache ist meine Muttersprache, die deutsche Bildung auch die meinige, der deutsche Genius ist es, der meinen Geist genährt von seinem ersten Erwachen an.”

⁷ David Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2003) 293.

⁸ Hertz, *How Jews Became Germans*, 203.

⁹ Meyer, *The Origin of the Modern Jew*, 8.

religion, Judaism, that resulted in a new sense of identity. In order to analyze the different dimensions of her identity, I use several social indicators such as, language, cultural habits, collective practices, contact with other ethnic groups, and educational goals. I also examine the idea of a “home” and the feeling of belonging, in order to further reveal with whom Margot identified. These indicators not only uncover the components of Margot’s German Jewish identity, which transcended the effects of the Nazi regime, and the aspects of her life in Montevideo, which nurtured this preservation, but also the adoption of a partial Uruguayan identity. This is especially seen in the later decades of her life, as Margot was able to incorporate elements of her life in Germany into her everyday Uruguayan life.

Today, scholars refer to this phenomenon of migrants leading lives encompassing multiple identities as transnationalism. The term also refers to the process of constructing and actively maintaining sociocultural connections across borders that combine two or more societies which the migrant identifies as “home.”¹⁰ Experts claim that the “new migrant who, because of travel by air and communication by telephone and fax, can actively participate in both donor and recipient societies,” is responsible for this new phenomenon.¹¹ Although my work focuses on an old-type migrant, Margot, who did not enjoy the benefits of ease of travel and communication, it reveals an early case of a transnational identity that resulted from her forced migration out of Germany.

In order to analyze Margot’s migration, I use Andreas Demuth’s *Four-Phase Model of Migration* that focuses on (1) the phase before and when the migration starts, (2) that of the

¹⁰ Glick Schiler, N., L. Basch, and C. Blanc-Szanton. *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: New York Academy of Science, 1992),

¹¹ Paul Kutsche. “A Review of Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered,” *American Anthropologist* 97 (1995):402-402.

actual journey, (3) that of the migrant's arrival, and (4) the phase of reflection and development that the migrant has once in the new location.¹² This method allows me to introduce Margot's life before the immigration, highlighting the aspects of her life in Berlin that made a permanent mark on her (Chapter 1). The second and third chapters provide background on the changes seen in Berlin during the early 1930s and examine the effects of the Nazi regime on Margot's life in Prenzlauer Berg. These three chapters correspond to Demuth's first phase of migration. My fourth chapter addresses the phase of the actual journey from Prenzlauer Berg to Montevideo and examines the final bureaucratic processes that the family had to finish before leaving Germany. The family's arrival and first steps of building a life in Montevideo are discussed in chapter five and reveal the groundwork for a life that nurtured Margot's ties to her two homes. The sixth chapter deals with the phase of reflection and development in her life, which addresses Margot's important and conscious decisions about her own identity. The final chapter analyzes Margot's identity and the components of her life in Montevideo that allowed her to maintain a transnational identity. The *Four-Phase Model of Migration* enables me to compare and contrast her lives in Berlin and in Montevideo to further uncover overlapping segments of life that she transported after her migration. After much research on her life, I believe that I have resolved the majority of the questions that led me to this project and have shed some light on the primary questions: To what extent did Margot embody a German Jewish identity? How was she able to maintain this identity after leaving Berlin at the young age of thirteen in spite of the shortcomings in communication prior to the age of the Internet, smartphones, and social media?

¹² Biko Agozino. *Theoretical and methodological issues in migration research: interdisciplinary, intergenerational and international perspectives*. (Hants, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2000), 36.

Prenzlauer Berg before the Nazis

To analyze how Margot Pelzel constructed and maintained sociocultural connections across geographic borders, one must first isolate the values and components of her life that she found worthy of preservation. In order to highlight these components, I explore three crucial aspects of her life in Prenzlauer Berg: the community, the culture, and her family. By examining these three aspects of her life, one sees the values and lessons that were instilled in her by the time she was thirteen and that she later nurtured in Montevideo.

Margot was born on March 28, 1924 in Berlin, Germany. Berlin had become the capital of the new nation state in 1871 after Germany was united. Prior to the unification, the city had been the “moderately-sized provincial Prussian capital” primarily consisting of land-owning families and the military.¹³ The unification of the twenty-five German principalities, however, ushered in the ‘founding years’ (Gründerzeit), or the years of growth, urbanization, and industrialization for Germany, which brought a wave of newcomers to Berlin from distant parts of Germany, like East Prussia, but also from Russia.¹⁴ There was also a large influx of Polish immigrants, including a large number of Polish Jews, and Italians.¹⁵ Between 1850 and 1900, the population of Berlin skyrocketed from 250,000 to 2 million.¹⁶

The rising population created a shortage of land and housing, which forced the city to annex outlying territories and incorporate the new districts of Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Tempelhof, Friedrichshain, Wedding, and Prenzlauer Berg.¹⁷ Prenzlauer Berg, located in the northeast of Berlin, was the neighborhood where Margot Pelzel was born and where the Pelzel/Garbatti

¹³ Jennifer R. Wilz, “Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin, 1870-Present: A Neighborhood on the Fringe of Germany” (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 2008),1.

¹⁴ William W. Hagan, *Germany History in Modern Times: Four Lives of the Nation*,(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 145.

¹⁵ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 68.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 1.

families resided.¹⁸ Until the annexation in 1871, Prenzlauer Berg had been known for its open spaces, windmills, a few breweries, and some beer gardens.¹⁹ The construction of new housing facilities mirrored the construction of the new German Empire. According to scholar Jennifer Wilz, the goal for the new capital was to transform itself into a “glorious, imperial European-style city.” James Hobrecht was the urban planner hired to turn the open territory into efficiently designed neighborhoods that would provide housing for the rising population without sacrificing the goal of transforming Berlin into a European city.²⁰

James Hobrecht’s design included primarily “five-story tenement buildings” that were disguised by grand and modern façades and had shops on the ground level.²¹ These rental barracks (*Mietskasernen*) gave the illusion of wealth and covered up the existing poverty.²² Internal courtyards defined the layout of these buildings and allowed the wealthy to live in the visible apartments with the modern façade facing the avenues of Prenzlauer Berg, while simultaneously hiding the working class families in small, dark apartments in the back.²³ Hobrecht assured the city administrators that his design would help avoid a class division in the city and, as Wilz points out, it “would create an economic mix that would be socially stabilizing.”²⁴ However, the tenants in the hidden, smaller apartments often lived without proper sanitary conditions, sharing one toilet per floor, which could include up to ten flats.²⁵ These apartments were commonly overcrowded and used coal-burning ovens for heating, often becoming a health hazard due to poor ventilation. Furthermore, the lax regulations concerning

¹⁸ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

¹⁹ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 18.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 28.

²¹ Myron Levin, “Government Policy, the Local State, and Gentrification: the Case of Prenzlauer Berg (Berlin)”, *Journal of Urban Affairs* 1 (2004): 92.

²² Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 24.

²³ Linda Mitrojorgji, “Urban Regeneration in Berlin, Germany: New Approaches at the Neighborhood Level” (Master’s Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2003), 11.

²⁴ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 29.

²⁵ Mitrojorgji, “Urban Regeneration in Berlin,” 92.

the building of apartment blocks in Prenzlauer Berg led to overcrowded apartments and congested streets.²⁶

Nonetheless the *Mietskasernen* were rapidly filled by newcomers to the city and created a diverse culture. In the 1880s the population settling in the neighborhood included immigrants from Eastern Prussia, Italy, Slovakia, and Poland. Each population contributed to the unique culture that formed amidst the crowded neighborhood. The Italians “adorned the city with many new buildings and churches” and shared their cuisine, as many Italian families owned small restaurants. However, when Italy became an enemy during World War I, the Italians were forced to leave.²⁷ Another group that was forced out of the new Prenzlauer Berg were the Slovaks who were ostracized for isolating themselves and only speaking Hungarian.²⁸ The Polish population that settled in Prenzlauer Berg included many Jews. Wilz claims that, “the Jewish immigrants identified more strongly with German-speaking Berliners than with their former Polish-speaking neighbors,”²⁹ which resulted in them being viewed as more willing to assimilate. This aspect of the community also meant that they were tolerated better by the rest of the community than other groups. This population of Polish Jews, who spoke German and lived in Prenzlauer Berg, belonged primarily to the lower-middle or middle class. This contrasted with the Jews who moved to the *Scheuenenviertel*, a neighborhood in Northern Mitte, were poorer, and continued to speak Polish and Yiddish.³⁰ This population was significantly more observant of religious practices, traditional dress, and dietary rules than the Jews in Prenzlauer Berg.³¹

²⁶ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 65.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 67.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 84.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 68.

³⁰ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 69

³¹ *ibid.*, 69.

Prenzlauer Berg's population was also religiously diverse. Sixty-five percent of the population was Lutheran, ten percent was Catholic, eight percent was Jewish, and around fifteen percent did not associate with any religion.³² The demographics changed over the years as communities were forced out of the country, but in 1925, there were 173,000 Jewish residents in Berlin, a 20 percent increase since 1914.³³ However, Jews remained a minority in Prenzlauer Berg representing only 10 percent of the neighborhood.³⁴ Although a minority, this population was known specifically for its economic success, integration, and cultural identification with Germany.³⁵

Margot Pelzel's family was part of this integrated Jewish immigrant population in Prenzlauer Berg. Her mother, Hedwig Pelzel, nee Garbatti (1897 - 1950), was born in Berlin to Abraham Moritz Adolf Garbatti (1865-1923), who had moved to Berlin from Bialystok, Russia, in 1870 with his divorced mother, Malke Flock, also known as *Bobe Malke* (1847-1937), and to Henriette Simonsohn (1870-1942), who was from Königsberg, Prussia.³⁶ Hedwig married Max Pelzel (1888-1964) in 1921. He had immigrated to Berlin after World War I from Stebne, Poland, which had been part of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy until 1918. Since 1903, the Garbatti family had resided in a fourth-floor apartment at 75 *Weißburger Straße* (nowadays *Kollwitzstrasse*) in a typical Prenzlauer Berg apartment building. When Margot was born on March 28, 1924, Henriette was already a widow, and due to the housing shortage, she had opened her apartment to her bedridden mother-in-law, Bobe Malke, the Pelzel family (which

³² Wilz, "Prenzlauer Berg," 12.

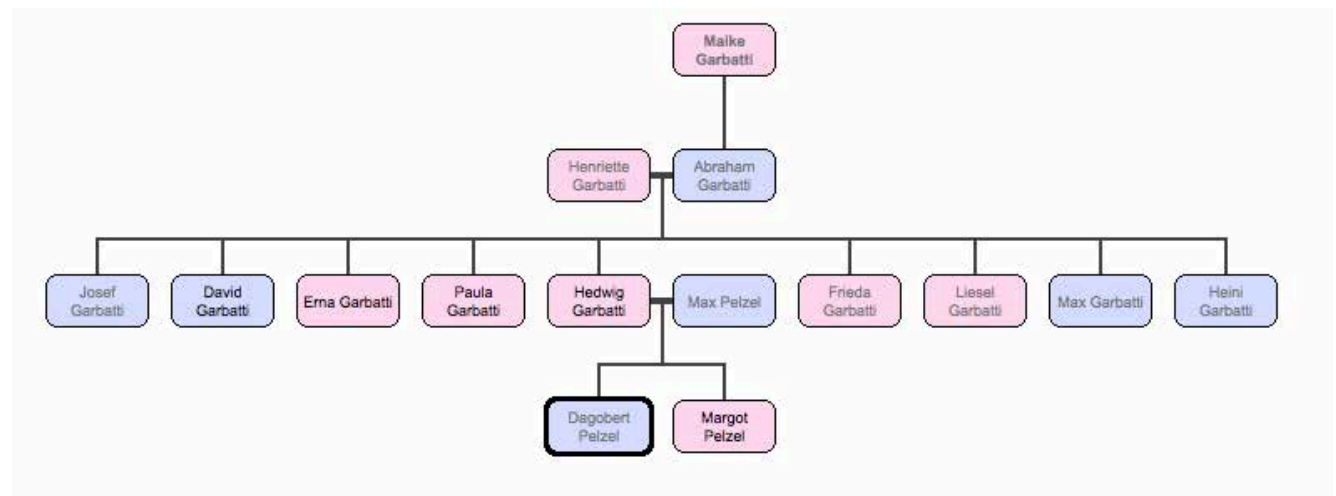
³³ Irene Diekmann, *Juden in Berlin: Bilder, Dokumente, Selbstzeugnisse*, (Leipzig: Henschel Verlag, 2009), 117.

³⁴ Wilz, "Prenzlauer Berg," 85.

³⁵ Wilz, "Prenzlauer Berg," 69.

³⁶ Margot Pelzel, *Arbol Genealogico*, 1990.

included Hedwig, Max, and their son Dagobert (1922-1971), and her unmarried children: Max, Heini, Frieda, and Liesel.³⁷



Margot's descriptions of her apartment suggest that her family resided in the front part of the building. The spacious and luminous apartment had several windows facing the street with views of the Jewish cemetery on *Schönhauser Allee* and looking onto *Prenzlauer Allee*, both major streets in the neighborhood. Max and Hedwig had a bedroom and a kitchen to themselves, a luxury that would not have been available to an apartment in the inner courtyard.³⁸ On the ground level, the building housed a bedding shop, *Bettfedern Hennig*. Left of its display window one could see the door that opened to the central courtyard. In this area the owners of the building and the factory housed in the back of the courtyard parked a hand-pulled carriage and a horse-pulled carriage along with its horse, Max. The owners had a servant named Kalle, who took care of Max and sometimes allowed the children, Margot included, to play with the carriages.³⁹ The common area of the courtyards created an opportunity for the residents to

³⁷ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelto, circa 2003.

³⁸ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

³⁹ *ibid.*

interact across ethnicities, religions, and social statuses, and created, as Wilz points out, “sociability in the neighborhood.”⁴⁰

This sociability exposed Margot to one of the three most influential aspects of her life: community. The sociability, partially caused by the common overcrowded living conditions, helped create a sense of community within the diverse neighborhood that impacted Margot from a young age. Due to the lack of living space, the courtyards, *Wörtherplatz*, and the streets became the primary playgrounds for the children in the neighborhood. Margot, for example, wrote about playing hide and seek, robbers and princesses, tag, and marbles on the street with all of the children, Jewish and gentile. The adults, on the other hand, congregated in an equally inclusive manner in the neighborhood pubs, bakeries, and bathhouses to discuss quotidian events, current issues, and culture.⁴¹ This coexistence among the highly diverse population stimulated both assimilation and secularization amongst the Jews, which was noticeable in the Pelzel family, as well. Religion had been a monumental part of Hedwig’s childhood; her late father Adolf had been a rabbi. She was raised in an Orthodox household and continued to follow the kosher dietary laws after Margot and Dagobert were born, but she did not require the children to follow the laws when outside the house. According to Margot, the family slowly transitioned to only attending the synagogue on holidays, and religion became an excuse to bring family members together.⁴² Alice Silbermann wrote a similar account of her own family noting that, “the old traditions were still alive, but were taken less and less seriously by each generation [...] We were Jewish but not very religious; we only went to the New Synagogue on *Oranienburger*

⁴⁰ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 7.

⁴¹ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁴² Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

Straße for the high holidays.”⁴³ Silvia Facal Santiago calls this lifestyle the “three-day Jew” (“drei Tage Jude”), who only celebrated Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Hanukkah, and sometimes even Christmas, while for the rest of the year led a secular life.⁴⁴ This secularization was a direct consequence of the extreme assimilation of the Jewish community. The assimilation was a result of the Jewish struggle for recognition by the national authorities that dated back to the eighteenth century.⁴⁵

As a result, religiosity was not displayed openly and religion was not a topic for the common spaces of Prenzlauer Berg. According to Margot, the only difference among the children with whom she played was that the Jewish children went to the synagogue on *Rykestraße*, while the Christian children went to the *Segenskirche*, at the corner of *Wörther Straße* and *Schönhauser Allee*. The relationship was so normal that the children celebrated each other’s holidays without thinking twice about it. On winter evenings, Margot sang along to the Christmas carols she heard outside on the cold and snowy roads lit only by Christmas trees. The Garbatti and Pelzel families also frequented the Christmas markets during winter, and the Christian families did not avoid Jewish stores where they purchased special delicacies. The coexistence was normal, and religion was not an issue.

Wilz asserts that the combinations of a diverse population and a neighborhood designed to include a plethora of common spaces created a “community-oriented place” with “an atmosphere that suggest[ed] both that no one and everyone belong[ed] there.”⁴⁶ The relationships between the Pelzels and their neighbors exemplify this idea. Although the family

⁴³ Gisela Reller, *Leben mit der Erinnerung: jüdische Geschichte in Prenzlauer Berg*. (Berlin: Ed. Hentrich, 1997), 12.

⁴⁴ Silvia Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay: Vida de los judíos alemanes en Uruguay*, (Montevideo: Fundacion de Cultura Universitaria, 2006), 25.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25

⁴⁶ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 12.

lived in harmony with its co-inhabitants, Margot ultimately believed that, while the family itself felt “German,” its surrounding community still saw the Pelzels as the Other. When revisiting this topic in 1998, Margot was confident in this belief but could not determine whether this was due to their religious affiliation, their Polish roots, or both.⁴⁷ Additionally, the Jews contributed to the differentiation by creating Jewish organizations that strengthened the feeling of Otherness by excluding the gentile population.

The Jewish community in Prenzlauer Berg, though integrated, also had an infrastructure that took care of its own members. There were four Jewish religious schools; a synagogue on *Rykestraße*; a Jewish community center for the elderly; the Jewish orphanage, *Baruch Auerbach'sche Waisenhaus*; the *Chewra kadisha-Adass Jiroeel* hospice care center; the Committee to Support the Jewish Deaf in Germany; and the ‘Zion’ City Mission-Union.⁴⁸ Margot attended one of the schools, the *Jüdische Mädchen-Volksschule*, and her brother attended the *Knaben-Volksschule der jüdischen Gemeinde*. According to Margot, there were camps for Jewish children which allowed them to travel to popular spots all over the country during vacations.⁴⁹ Margot loved nature and during the summer attended several day camps to Weissensee, Wannsee, or the Wulheide. These days began at the train station, where the children departed as a group towards the specific recreational spot, and ended at night at the same station. For recreation throughout the year, the young Jewish community had the *Makabi Hazair*, the Jewish scout association, which offered Zionist education and healthy recreational activities. Even though these schools and organizations were Jewish, they were highly secular only

⁴⁷ Margot Pelzel to Lorchon Samuel, Feb 2, 1998.

⁴⁸ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 87.

⁴⁹ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, 2003.

discussing topics related to Judaism when focusing on history and culture. Religion was to be pursued at home in the best tradition of Moses Mendelssohn's ideal.⁵⁰

The Jewish infrastructure in Prenzlauer Berg also promoted close relationships between the Jewish families. The Pelzels, for example, were close with several Jewish families to the extent that Margot referred to many of these people as *Tante* (aunt) or *Onkel* (uncle).⁵¹ *Tante* Edith, *Onkel* Bernhard, and their daughters Gina and Hanna, the latter being Margot's best friend were one example. Unlike the Pelzels, the Rosenthals had deep roots in the city and did not identify themselves as immigrants, since they had lived in Berlin since the 1700s. The family had moved to Prenzlauer Berg when Bernhard decided to open a restaurant in their house on *Prenzlauer Straße*.⁵² The two families provided support to each other whenever possible and created an extended network of assistance. For example, when the Pelzel family needed financial help, Bernhard asked Hedwig to assist with the baking at the restaurant and Margot and Dagobert to assist with deliveries. In one instance, *Tante* Edith relied on Hedwig to teach Hanna to eat a variety of foods by sending her to live with the Pelzels for a week. In exchange, Margot was able to live with the Rosenthals and enjoy Hanna's extravagant toys, which the Pelzel family could not afford.⁵³ Although not wealthy, the Rosenthal family provided the Pelzels with financial assistance when necessary, because they were aware that due to his status as an immigrant, Max did not have a work permit.⁵⁴ Since Max was limited to working illegally, he relied on other Jewish businessmen to find employment. Due to the economic conditions of Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Max was often only able to maintain a job for a couple of months. Among his many jobs, he worked as a salesman at a lampshade factory

⁵⁰ Margot to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁵¹ Margot to Martina, 2003.

⁵² Margot Pelzel Edith Rosenthal, November 11, 1961

⁵³ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

owned by a Jew and as an electrician at a heating and cooking appliance shop that was also owned by a Jew.⁵⁵ In April 1933, due to the lack of income, Hedwig began working as a seamstress for the Jewish-owned factory, *Birenhak & Sohn: Berufs- und Sport- Bekleidung*, where she continued to work until December 1936.⁵⁶ The bond between these Jewish families ingrained in Margot early in her life the importance of community and camaraderie in life.

Another influential aspect in Margot's life in Prenzlauer Berg was German *Kultur*. As aforementioned, the term *Kultur* "denoted superior German accomplishments in scholarship and the arts."⁵⁷ The canon of *Kultur* included, for example, classical music pieces by Johannes Brahms, novels by Theodor Fontane or Thomas Mann, dramas by Gerhart Hauptmann, and operas by Richard Wagner.⁵⁸ Margot's years in Berlin instilled in her an appreciation for learning and exposed her to this cultural canon. Although the Garbatti and Pelzel families were not wealthy and could not afford to attend cultural events regularly, the adults encouraged the young to constantly pursue scholarship and culture.⁵⁹

Margot's grandfather, Rabbi Adolf Garbatti, had sought out this German scholarship immediately after arriving in Berlin in 1870 by attending the *Königlichen Friedrich Wilhelm-Universität zu Berlin* and obtaining a doctorate in Philosophy and Oriental Languages. His mother, *Bobe Malke*, had continuously encouraged the pursuit of knowledge and transmitted this value also to her great-grandchildren, Dagobert and Margot. *Bobe Malke*, who was bedridden during the years when Margot was in Berlin, was perceived as the "saint" in the family and her wisdom was respected all around. Since her great-grandchildren were responsible for attending to her physical needs, she provided in return biblical stories and discussions about the topics that

⁵⁵ Max Pelzel, Proof of Work, 1935.

⁵⁶ Max Pelzel, Proof of Work, 1936.

⁵⁷ Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918*, 293.

⁵⁸ Blackbourn, *History of Germany, 1780-1918*, 294.

⁵⁹ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

the children learned at school. Margot later mentioned *Bobe* Malke as a fundamental reason for her appreciation of learning and attributed her excitement for every school subject to the awareness that a discussion with *Bobe* Malke would follow in the afternoon. Margot wrote, “other children dreaded school, but I was excited about every subject and everything intrigued me.”⁶⁰

Bobe Malke encouraged learning, whereas the rest of the family directed Margot’s focus elsewhere. As the daughter of two hardworking parents, Margot was expected not only to attend school but also to help deliver lunches at the Rosenthal restaurant, to participate in certain activities (like *Makabi Hazair*), to refrain from troubling her parents, and to go to bed promptly at the designated time. According to Margot, all children knew above all to obey their parents and remain silent unless addressed. However, there were specific instances in which Margot deviated from these expectations in order to pursue her love of learning.⁶¹ When working at the Rosenthal restaurant, for example, she would often run away and hide for hours in Hanna’s book nook in her bedroom and read books by German writer Karl May. Hanna’s bookcase was packed with all of the children’s books one could imagine and served as Margot’s private library. She was allowed to take books home and there she hid in her closet after her bedtime devouring their pages. Although her parents did not condone this kind of disobedience, Margot’s parents encouraged and praised her thirst for knowledge and culture.⁶²

Margot’s most prized possession from her childhood was a *Poesiealbum* that she received for her birthday in 1934 and remained under lock and key at her house in Montevideo until her death in 2008. *Poesiealben* or *Stammbücher* had been common in Germany since the sixteenth century and functioned at times as records of history, art, and literature of their epoch. The

⁶⁰ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

⁶¹ Margot Pelzel to Atje Kahl, March 31, 1998

⁶² Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, February, 17, 2003.

friends, classmates, and family members of the *Poesiealbum*'s owner included drawings, poetry, messages, verses, and wishes in the pages of this book. Many of the verses and poems were well-known works dealing with friendship and love.⁶³ Margot's *Poesiealbum*, written in Sütterlin, includes entries from her parents, friends, and cousins between April 1934 and March 1937. The messages in this book are not petty notes, even though the majority of the writers were ten-year-olds. They reveal a high appreciation for poetry and incredible attention to detail, as the following examples show:

*Rosen, Tulpen, Nelken
alle drei verwelken,
Stahl und Eisen bricht
aber unser Freundschaft nicht.
Zum Andenken
Deine,
Anna
Berlin, 1934⁶⁴*

*Gab' frohen Mut,
du stehst in Gottes Gut
sei treu und wahr, Gott sieht dich immerdar!
Tu' deine Pflicht
und Gott verläßt dich nicht

Berlin 25.3.34
Zum Freundlichen Andenken
Dein Bruder
Dagobert, Bubi*

Margot also engaged in activities that emphasized culture with her cousins and the neighborhood children. Groups attended the *L.S.P Kino*, a cinema close to Margot's house, almost every Sunday. A board on the door of the movie hall displayed the showings, such as silent films with Rom Mix, Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, and Pat and Patachon. Margot and her friends spent entire afternoons watching all the children's movies and would then sneak into the adult talkies with Sepp Rist, Luis Trenker, Carl Ludwig Diehl, and Hans Albers, among others. Following their adventures at the movies, the children walked to nearby shops where they purchased posters and postcards with their favorite actors.⁶⁵ Margot was fascinated with Shirley

⁶³ Waltraud and Heinz Freiberger, *Gästebuch und Poesiealbum: Witzig und originell: Der passende Spruch für jeden Anlass* (Baden-Baden: Humbolt Verlags GmbH, 2004), 46.

⁶⁴ Margot Pelzel, *Poesiealbum*.

⁶⁵ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotel, 2003.

Temple and collected her pictures, along with those of other actors, in a journal. This journal also held tickets, programs, and autographs from the concerts and plays she attended and treasured.⁶⁶

Since the family was not wealthy, Margot was not able to attend such events frequently, but the occasional performance was recorded in her journal and became the topic of conversation among her family and friends. In order to supplement the insufficient number of performances, Margot frequented the neighborhood's music store, where she sat and listened in amazement as the storeowner played the recorder. Although the family struggled to make ends meet, her parents chose not to sacrifice their daughter's cultural upbringing, and once she was old enough to play, they purchased Margot's first recorder from this man.⁶⁷

The strong emphasis on culture and learning mirrors Wilz' idea that the "Jewish community saw itself as [...] cultural or intellectual heirs of the values of modern Germany."⁶⁸ As mentioned above, cultural identity was a unifying factor within Germany and provided the sense of identity that fluctuating geographical borders had made near impossible. The Garbatti and Pelzel family instilled this sense of responsibility as "heirs" of the German culture upon Margot, and by her thirteenth year, the importance of *Kultur* was already ingrained in her and represented a strong component of her identity.

The importance of family and responsibility to family is the third major component of Margot's life in Berlin that she later incorporated and preserved after moving to Montevideo. As already discussed, the family played a critical role in encouraging Margot to appreciate *Kultur*, but above all, family mattered most. By analyzing the actions of the Garbatti and Pelzel families one can see this high regard for family as it is unfolded in daily life.

⁶⁶ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁶⁷ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁶⁸ Wilz, "*Prenzlauer Berg*," 92.

During Margot's first years, the Pelzels were not economically stable enough to afford a residence of their own. Therefore, Hedwig's mother, Henriette, invited them into the *Weißburger Straße* apartment. Although the apartment was overcrowded with four of Henriette's children, family came first, and they accommodated one another to make the conditions work. The apartment was not simply a home open to all who needed one, but it was the center of the family's social life. The family did not only include the nine Garbatti children, their spouses, and their children but also close friends of the family like the Rosenthals. By the time Margot was seven, the house had hosted two weddings: her aunt Frieda's to Felix Wilk in 1930 and her aunt Liesel's to Heinrich Batist in 1931. Though young, Margot never forgot these special moments or their details. She remembered the long tables, the music, the speeches, the food, which a friend of her parents' cooked, the guests, the poems and songs that her cousin Adi and she performed, and the praises they received, but above all, she remembered how her family filled the house with love.⁶⁹ These memories of celebrations surrounded by family surely reinforced the idea that family came first, an idea that would later play a large role in shaping Margot's philosophy of life in Montevideo.

By 1932, two of Margot's uncles and three of her aunts had left the apartment; the Pelzels themselves had moved to an apartment of their own on *41 Wörther Straße*; and Henriette had moved in with two of her sons. Since *Bobe* Malke insisted on staying with Hedwig, the Pelzels welcomed the bed-ridden widow into their home and assumed all of the responsibilities associated with her. They also welcomed Hedwig's sister, Erna, and her seven-year-old son Adi, who had come to Berlin for a visit from Uruguay and decided to stay after Erna's husband, Michael Rosenberg, had been killed in an accident in Montevideo.⁷⁰ Although the other Garbatti

⁶⁹ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁷⁰ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

sisters did not live with the Pelzels, Hedwig was close to the three of them: Frieda Wilk, Lisel Batist, and Paula Prager. This also resulted in strong connections between Margot, her aunts, and her cousins, which were preserved after the Pelzels' migration to Montevideo. Margot was especially close to the Wilk family, which included Frieda's husband Felix and daughter Taly and Felix's brother Curt and sister Lucie. The family ties between the Garbattis superseded the realms of the nuclear family and continued to expand until 1937.⁷¹ Her life, which Margot described as "full of family life, as it should be, with both joy and sorrow," made her aware at a young age of the rewards and responsibilities associated with family.⁷²

To conclude, all of the aforementioned components of Margot's life in Prenzlauer Berg worked together to instill in her the values that later led her to maintain sociocultural ties with her place of origin. The community allowed her to identify with both the Jews and the German gentiles surrounding her; the *Kultur* present in Berlin instilled in her a profound appreciation for scholarship, literature, music, cinema, and the arts; and her family revealed to her its instrumental role in maintaining heritage and providing support. As the environment in Prenzlauer Berg began to change after 1933, Margot began to cling to the identity resulting from these components.

⁷¹ Willy Standhagen to Erna Garbatti, 1937.

⁷² Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

The Forces at Play

To analyze Margot's migration story, one must also understand the political forces that were at play during her years in Berlin. Parallel to the harmonious life that Margot remembered and cherished, a political movement was rising in Germany partly unnoticed by her due to her sheltered life and her young age. Just nine months after Margot's birth, on December 20th, 1924, Adolf Hitler had been released from the Landsberg Prison, following his failed coup d'état in Munich in 1923. Ten years later, on the morning of January 30th, 1933 at 11:30, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed him Chancellor.⁷³

After Hitler's inauguration, uniformed *Sturmabteilung* (SA) and *Schutzstaffel* (SS) men began a "campaign of terror" throughout Germany targeting Communists, Social Democrats, and Jews.⁷⁴ During the first week, SA men distributed brochures on the *Kurfürstendamm* and the *Tauentzienstraße*. The brochures were written by a National Socialist author named Johann von Leers and proclaimed "the demand of the hour: Jews out!"⁷⁵ On February 23rd, SA members entered an art school in Berlin-Schöneberg, interrupted an exam, and pulled out Jewish and Marxist professors. Any student who attempted to oppose them was beaten.⁷⁶ The reports of random acts of violence against "Jewish looking" people on the streets of Berlin escalated, and this rising danger resulted in the strengthening of bonds among members of the Jewish community.⁷⁷ In early March, parts of Berlin-Mitte were raided, and Jews were arrested and taken to "wild concentration camps."⁷⁸ These camps served as "arrest, interrogation, and torture

⁷³ Hagan, *German History in Modern Times*, 284.

⁷⁴ Michael A. Meyer, *German Jewish History in Modern Times: Volume 4 Renewal and Destruction: 1918-1945*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 198.

⁷⁵ Wolf Gruner, *Judenverfolgung in Berlin 1933-1945 eine Chronologie der Behördenmassnahmen in der Reichshauptstadt* (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2009), 54. -- *die Forderung der Stunde: Juden raus!*

⁷⁶ *ibid.* 54

⁷⁷ Meyer, *German Jewish History in Modern Times*, 71.

⁷⁸ Meyer, *German Jewish History in Modern Times*, 53.

centers” run by the SA between 1933 and 1934.⁷⁹ Margot mentioned one of these camps, a water tower in Prenzlauer Berg, where her uncle Heini was imprisoned, because he refused to lend money to an SA man, who was looking to make a bet.⁸⁰ This tower was called the *Turm des Schreckens*, Tower of Terror, and the SA brought political prisoners from the surrounding areas here. Although the screams from the torture chambers could be heard, the neighborhood “observed in silence,” as residents claimed, that “Prenzlauer Berg was free of this [Nazi] evil.”⁸¹

However, the neighborhood had witnessed the violence associated with the Nazis prior to Hitler’s inauguration in 1933, because fights between SA men and communists had been common, especially around the *Helmholzplatz*, on the corner of *Lychener Strasse* and *Ramerstrasse*, where the SA pub was located.⁸² On July 31, 1935, the *Amt für Volkswohlfahrt der NSDAP/Kreis Prenzlauer Berg* (Office for People’s Welfare of the NSDAP in Prenzlauer Berg) threatened the underprivileged residents of Prenzlauer Berg, who received support from the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (National Socialist People’s Welfare), with a proclamation that stated that those who continued to purchase daily provisions from shops owned by Jews would lose all support.⁸³

The Jews in the neighborhood were also affected by the changes in the national laws during these years. The removal of citizenship rights for Jews began on July 14, 1933, when the “Law on the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service” rescinded all naturalizations of Eastern European Jews that had taken place between November 9, 1918 and January 30, 1933.⁸⁴ Furthermore, on September 15, 1935, the “Nuremberg Laws,” which included the “Law for the

⁷⁹ Richard Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 288.

⁸⁰ Margot Pelzel to the Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁸¹ Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 43-44.

⁸² Wilz, “*Prenzlauer Berg*,” 42.

⁸³ Gruner, *Judenverfolgung in Berlin 1933-1945*, 57.

⁸⁴ Klaus Hesse et al., *Topography of Terror* (Berlin: Stiftung Topographie des Terrors, 2010), 216.

Protection of German Blood and German Honor” and the “Reich Citizenship Law” were passed.⁸⁵ The first stated that “marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden.” This law also forbade Jews to employ female personnel of German blood, to display the Reich and national flag, or to display the Jewish colors.⁸⁶ The “Reich Citizenship Law” stated that, “a citizen of the Reich [was] that subject only who [was] of German or kindred blood and who, through his conduct, show[ed] that he [was] both desirous and fit to serve the German people and the Reich faithfully.”⁸⁷ The first regulation under this law provided the definition for what the NSDAP considered a Jew and stripped this population of its German citizenship. Article 5 read as follows:

1. A Jew is anyone who is descended from at least three grandparents who are racially full Jews. [...]

*2. A Jew is also one who is descended from two full Jewish parents, if (a) he belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time this law was issued, or joined the community later, (b) he was married to a Jewish person, at the time the law was issued, or married one subsequently, (c) he is the offspring of a marriage with a Jew, in the sense of Section I, which was contracted after the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honor became effective, (d) he is the offspring of an extramarital relationship with a Jew, according to Section I, and will be born out of wedlock after July 31, 1936.*⁸⁸

In addition to the loss of citizenship, the Jews continued to face violent attacks against their community almost daily, and Prenzlauer Berg was no exception.

Many, however, believed that the danger was temporary, because they expected the NSDAP regime to dissolve quickly as many previous governments of the Weimar Republic had done.⁸⁹ Beginning in winter 1935, there was a decrease in the attacks that made many feel like the worst was behind them, but the real cause for the brief period of calm were the 1936 Olympic

⁸⁵ Klaus Hesse et al., *Topography of Terror*, 216.

⁸⁶ Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honors (September 15, 1935)
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurmlaw2.html>

⁸⁷ The Reich Citizenship Law (September 15, 1935)
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurmlaw3.html>

⁸⁸ The Reich Citizenship Law: First Regulation (November 14, 1935)
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/nurmlaw4.html>

⁸⁹ Hagan, *German History in Modern Times*, 328.

games in Berlin.⁹⁰ The authorities had agreed that visible signs of the persecution of Jews “would alienate foreign visitors,” as a consequence of which the anti-Jewish signs and attacks diminished. After the Olympics, however, the attacks returned and increased at an accelerated pace.⁹¹ This return of insecurity served for many, including the Pelzel family, as a sign that the danger was not disappearing.

⁹⁰ Hagan, *German History in Modern Times*, 206.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 214.

The End of Harmony

"Over time, people began to realize that Hitler was to be taken seriously. In the beginning, it was thought that he would not last long, but then people [Jews] started being affected. People [some Germans] cheered for him and revered him. It was incomprehensible. I was just a kid back then and I could not understand it."⁹²

Margot's accounts of the 1930s in Prenzlauer Berg reveal a child's slow realization of the dangers that surrounded her. Although the changes became noticeable in Berlin immediately after Hitler's appointment, Margot wrote that she did not notice changes until 1934.⁹³ This fact could be a result of memory loss, since she did not write this report until 1997, or of the partial knowledge she had at the time, given her young age and sheltered existence amidst her family and community. Margot also wrote, "it was our parents who protected us and worried and feared for us."⁹⁴ Although there is some discrepancy concerning dates, and she did not specify other dates when recounting specific encounters with the effects of the Nazi takeover, she did provide extremely detailed accounts of the various events and changes that impacted her. The lack of dates does not allow for a chronological analysis of all of the changes that the family experienced, but I use key historical events to dictate the years where such episodes could have occurred.

Margot's first observations are of the flags with swastikas that appeared and were seen leading the numerous marches. She wrote, "everyone began to march; the Reichsbanner marched, the Communists marched, and the SA marched." Since Margot mentioned both the Communist and the Reichsbanner marching, the marches she described must have occurred prior to Hitler's inauguration in 1933, since after the Nazis came to power, both of these organizations

⁹² Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotel, 2003.

were suppressed.⁹⁵ Brown uniforms slowly became a permanent presence in Prenzlauer Berg, and the children, who once ran barefoot, began to wear boots and Hitler Youth uniforms.⁹⁶ The marches were impossible to escape, because they took place right outside Margot's doorsteps. The little boys with the big drums appeared first and the trumpets followed with the various flags that had to be met with a raised hand. In order to avoid saluting the Nazi flag, Margot and Dagobert always managed to be tying their shoes or have both arms occupied when the flag passed. Margot was never able to forget the rhythms played by the children on the drums or the songs sung at these marches. She claimed that the Jews knew the songs as well as, or even better, than the Nazis, since they affected them more than the singers. After hearing these words a million times outside her door, Margot could have never forgotten the lyrics, "... and when the Jewish blood squirts from the knife, then it's even better..."⁹⁷

Unlike the marches, Margot was able to avoid hearing Hitler's speeches and claimed that she never heard his voice. Although it was mandatory for everyone to listen to these speeches, the Jewish schools sent the children home early, in order to assure that they would not be caught on the street and brutalized during a speech. If one was caught on the street during Hitler's speeches, one had to stand and listen to them on the spot. The Jewish community in Berlin began to implement policies like the one mentioned above to protect the children for as long as possible from witnessing the Nazi regime.⁹⁸

Margot first realized the seriousness of the situation after an episode that involved a girl of her age, who lived in the same building and had walked home from school with her daily. On their walks they often observed the people passing by and guessed whether they were Jewish or

⁹⁵ Klaus Hesse et al., *Topography of Terror*, 218.

⁹⁶ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* – "und wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt, dann geht's nochmal so gut..."

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

not. On that specific day, Margot pointed out a lady, whom she knew, and assured her friend that the woman was Jewish, too. That instant the girl looked at Margot and asked her if she was Jewish. As the girl realized that the answer was “yes,” she quickly responded, “then I cannot walk with you [anymore].” These were the last words Margot heard from her, as the girl walked away and never greeted Margot again.⁹⁹ This instance highlights the emerging tendencies of isolating the Jews from the gentiles. Since Margot had seen the “game” of guessing as an innocent source of entertainment during their previous walks home, it is clear that the differentiation had been normal and not usually malicious. The effect of this specific encounter in Margot’s life reveals the exact moment when she realized the change of what motivated the differentiation between Jew and gentile and the degree to which Nazi ideology had penetrated into the youth of Prenzlauer Berg.

On another occasion, Margot, Dagobert, and other Jewish children were watching another group of children play on the street. They had always played with others in the neighborhood; therefore, Dagobert proceeded to ask the group to join them. As he walked towards the children, one of the Jewish girls in his group grabbed him and said, “are you crazy, that is a Nazi!”¹⁰⁰ Fear took hold of both the Jewish and the gentile children, as each group knew it was not to play with the other.¹⁰¹ This episode highlights the segregation that took place even among the children.

Although they had previously played together, the fear of each other began to take hold of them.

Margot’s interactions with Christian children extended outside the neighborhood and had included day camps at the Wulheide colony. There the children spent the days together singing the same songs, learning the same dances, and eating the same foods. Margot remembered the harmony of the day camps changing suddenly due to what became a repeated episode at the train

⁹⁹ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

¹⁰⁰ *Bist du verrückt, das ist doch ein Nazi!*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

station. As the children arrived at the train station in Berlin, the Jewish children faced crowds that would throw rocks at them, yell, and sing this song:

*"Throw them out, the whole bunch of Jews.
Throw them out from our German country,
Throw them out and send them to Jerusalem
Yes, we will, yes, we will not let ourselves be seduced by Jews!"*¹⁰²

The group faced this scene every morning for the four weeks that they attended camp.¹⁰³ The evidences of anti-Semitism were also present within the entirely Jewish organizations, like the *Makabi Hazair*. Margot remembered that during their weekly meetings a Gestapo officer began to attend and stood in the back of the room taking notes of all the discussions. Margot wrote, "we got used to his presence, as we got used to so much."¹⁰⁴

In addition to the aforementioned personal encounters with anti-Semitism, Margot began to notice the changes that flooded Prenzlauer Berg. The newspaper stands on the street corners, where there had once stood dispensers with pamphlets containing the latest news, were stocked with *der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher's weekly anti-Semitic newspaper full of caricatures of Jews. The neighborhood pubs posted on their windows signs that read, "Jews and dogs not allowed to enter," and the benches on the squares were segregated so that some read "only for Jews." Margot's great aunt Clara, who owned a store in Berlin, was forced to close her business due to the boycott of Jewish stores and repeating acts of vandalism that labeled the façade of the building with the word *Jude*.¹⁰⁵

As more and more aspects of her life underwent changes, Margot drew on the ones that gave her strength: her family, the community, and the ultimate counterpart to the Nazi ideology:

¹⁰² Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997. - *Schmeißt sie raus die Judenbande. Schmeißt sie raus aus unserm deutschen Lande, schmeißt sie raus und schickt sie nach Jerusalem. Ja, wir lassen, ja, wir lassen uns von Juden nicht verführen!*

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997. -- *Juden und Hunden ist der Eintritt nicht gestattet, nur für Juden.*

Kultur. As their homeland changed, the Pelzel family clung to their old lives in an attempt to preserve what they had until the storm of the regime passed. In the Pelzel house there continued to be no talk of Jew or non-Jew. Margot did not even know if the other tenants living in the building were Jews. Yet after the aforementioned incidents, the family became more cautious with what they said and apprehensive of everything and everyone. This fear spread not just among Jewish parents, but also among gentiles not yet fully convinced of the National Socialist message, because in the Hitler Youth children were encouraged to spy on their families and report any suspicious acts committed by their parents.¹⁰⁶ These “spies” further concerned the Pelzel family, because Max, due to his Polish citizenship, could only work illegally. Due to his Aryan appearance, he was seldom questioned during most of his encounters with Nazis, but a knowledgeable neighbor was a dangerous one. The anxiety within the family increased in 1935, when Max was called to the *Bezirksamt* and was told that due to the air-raid drills taking place in Berlin they were in need of wardens for the fly zones, and he had been appointed as one of them. Max surprised the officer by declining what was considered an honorable post and informing him that he was "non-Aryan." The officer was confused and apologized for his mistake, but the Pelzel family remained concerned due to the added attention that this incident brought to the family.¹⁰⁷

Margot was aware of the fear amongst the Jewish community and learned to live in secret. The sudden absence of children in school or people in the neighborhood soon became an everyday occurrence, but no one ever spoke of it. Silence was essential, because any information reaching a “spy” for the state could jeopardize the family’s plans. The number of students in her classroom continually decreased; groups of young people fled to Palestine; and Margot’s visits to

¹⁰⁶ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

the train station to send off friends became more and more frequent. Margot described the scenes at the train station in 1997 and wrote, “we stood there and cried; we knew that we would not see each other again.”¹⁰⁸ The future remained uncertain, but as these cases increased there was seldom hope for the families’ returns.

The increase in emigrations, the consequences of the *Nuremberg Laws*, and the changes in the neighborhood led Max to the decision to flee as well. In 1935, he is reported to have said to the family, “we can stay until the Olympics, then we must go.”¹⁰⁹ As the attacks on Jews returned after the Olympic Games, the family began their search for a new home.¹¹⁰ Between 1935 and 1936 the Nazis encouraged emigration as a way to achieve the “territorial final solution.”¹¹¹ Jewish organizations like the Palestine Office, the Central Office for Jewish Emigration Relief, and the Aid Society of Jews in Germany provided advice concerning visas and financial aid. The first step was deciding where to go. Whether one was rich or poor, one needed a visa and an “affidavit,” which was a document from someone, usually a distant relative, in the chosen country guaranteeing financial support to the potential immigrant. It was not a simple process.¹¹² The United States, for example, had a German-Austrian quota of 27,000 people per year dating back to the 1880s, and the waiting list was never-ending.¹¹³

The research on immigration possibilities began and quickly led Max to Uruguay. Hedwig’s sister, Erna Rosenberg (nee Garbatti), had followed her husband Michael Rosenberg to

¹⁰⁸ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

¹⁰⁹ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997. – “bis zur Olympiade können wir bleiben, dann müssen wir ‘raus!’”

¹¹⁰ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

¹¹¹ Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 70.

¹¹² *ibid.*, 71.

¹¹³ “German Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (last updated June 10, 2013) <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468>

Uruguay in 1922.¹¹⁴ In the early 1920s there were several German factories that had opened in Montevideo, and there was also a large group of Germans from Berlin who had moved there to work in agriculture.¹¹⁵ In 1924 Erna had returned to Berlin with her newborn son, Alfred or Adi Rosenberg, to mourn her father's death alongside the rest of the family. During their visit, Erna's husband was killed in an accident in Montevideo and Erna decided to stay in Berlin. Margot's cousin Adi had Uruguayan citizenship and, upon inquiries at the Uruguayan consulate, Erna found out that due to his citizenship, the government in Uruguay would allow both to return to Uruguay without a visa. The two departed in 1935, while Max was still looking for possibilities to get the Pelzel family out of Germany. Erna was to make her own inquiries in Montevideo to find out how they could potentially join them.¹¹⁶

During this time the Pelzel family tried to lead normal lives, attended the cultural events still open to them, and surrounded themselves with family and friends. In November 1935, the Garbatti and Pelzel family came together for a final gathering. Dagobert celebrated his Bar Mitzvah with a great feast prepared by Hedwig. She invited all of the friends and relatives and had the ceremony in the morning in the Old Synagogue on *Heyterreuter Straße*. At night after a full day of celebrations, approximately 70 family members (all those who were still in Berlin) congregated at the Pelzel residence.¹¹⁷ These gatherings became some of Margot's fondest memories and represented her last recollections of her family together as a whole.

Margot's great aunt Claire and her husband Michael were the first to follow Erna out of the country. After their store was attacked, they drove to Czechoslovakia and secretly obtained a transit visa to Paraguay. Once in Paraguay, they traveled to Uruguay, where they legalized their

¹¹⁴ Margot Pelzel, Family notes, May 1975.

¹¹⁵ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 102.

¹¹⁶ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

arrival. Unlike them, however, the rest of the family struggled to find a place of exile with little results.¹¹⁸ Max's first choice as a destination was Palestine. As a member of the *Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland* he hoped to find connections that would facilitate the process. However, Hedwig's fear of Arabs did not allow this to be an option. The next possibility was to flee to Argentina, and the Pelzels were assigned to a group in the Baron Hirsch agricultural colony there. Margot did not disclose details of the process the family had to go through to be assigned to a colony, but it is likely that due to her age she was not informed of such details.¹¹⁹ The agricultural colonies were created during the nineteenth century by the Jewish Colonization Association of Paris, which was an organization founded by German philanthropist Baron Moritz von Hirsch to create settlements in Argentina for Russian Jewish refugees. During the Nazi dictatorship, these colonies opened their doors to Jews looking for a safe haven.¹²⁰ The Pelzel family stood in line for hours at the office of the *Hilfsverein*, which advised and sometimes provided financial assistance to those Jews looking to emigrate, and finalized all the details and obtained a date of departure. However, it was suddenly announced that the men would have to go first. Margot remembered that Max immediately cancelled their plans and said, "either all together or no one."¹²¹

The last glimmer of hope was Uruguay. As soon as Erna arrived in Montevideo, she began investigating the possibility of bringing her sister Hedwig and the rest of the Garbatti family into her new country. Her findings made it clear that in order to enter Uruguay, a family needed a *llamada* (invitation from the government to relocate to Uruguay), a large sum of money deposited in the national bank, or a contract of employment to prove to the government that it

¹¹⁸Margot Pelzel to Martina, 2003.

¹¹⁹Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

¹²⁰Agricultural Colonies in the Argentine Republic, Jewish Encyclopedia, (accessed March 24, 2013), <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/905-agricultural-colonies-in-the-argentine-republic-argentina>

¹²¹Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003. *Entweder alle zusammen oder keiner!*

would not be a burden to the state.¹²² Since the family did not have the money to deposit in the national bank, they had to find another option. The process was slow, but Erna finally obtained a fake proof of employment for Max. Although it was fictitious, it was accepted as valid and set the process of emigration in motion. The first step for the family was to complete an application for emigration with the Uruguayan consulate. When the Pelzels received a postcard signed by Mr. Herrmann from the Uruguayan consulate, they knew that their application had been accepted, that they would be granted a visa, and that their emigration to Montevideo had been secured.¹²³ This postcard also informed the family of their next step: reporting to the Uruguayan consulate in Berlin 14 days before their departure.



Post card received by the Pelzel family from the Uruguayan Consulate. In the possession of the author.

In order to emigrate, the Pelzel family had to acquire an *Unbedenklichkeitsbescheinigung*, a tax clearance certificate, from the national authorities stating that they had paid the *Reichsfluchsteuer* (tax for fleeing the Reich) and any other required taxes.¹²⁴ This tax had been set at twenty-five percent of all assets in 1931, but in 1934 as Jewish immigration rose, the level of excluded property was lowered causing the amount of total tax to increase. In order to assure that all persons fleeing the country paid the designated amounts, the

¹²² Margot Pelzel to Edith Rosenthal, September 7, 1947.

¹²³ *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Gisela Holfter, *German-Speaking Exiles in Ireland: 1933-1945*, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2006), 151.

Gestapo received reports from the *Reichpost* (the Reich Postal Services) concerning address changes, from notaries concerning the sale of real estate, and from life insurance companies concerning cancelled life insurance policies.¹²⁵ Margot specifically remembered the day her father had to pick up the *Unbedenklichkeitsbescheinigung* and claimed it was one of the most horrific parts of the process. He had to obtain the clearance certificate from the Gestapo at its headquarters in the *Prinz-Albrecht Straße*. Margot remembered that when he returned, Max was so tired and stressed that he fainted.

After obtaining the necessary paperwork, the family accelerated the preparations for departure. Margot never specified details about who helped fund the procedures before their departure and the actual journey to Montevideo, but it is likely that the source of capital was Hannele's father, Bernhard Rosenthal, who provided several other families with the necessary funds. The *Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden* assisted families, like the Pelzels, by funding and offering vocational training and foreign language classes that would prepare them for life in their new location.¹²⁶ Max attended several Spanish classes, and although Margot did not specify which organization hosted them, it is likely that it was the *Reichsvertretung der deutschen Juden*. In addition, the Pelzels proceeded to sell the furniture, pack a few suitcases for the trip, pack the rest of their belongings into boxes, ship the boxes to Hamburg, and abandon their apartment.¹²⁷ The government's restrictions on foreign exchange did not allow the family to retain the proceeds from the furniture and other belongings they sold. Instead, the money was to be placed in frozen accounts that were guarantors for further tax payments.¹²⁸ For fear of further obstacles or financial repercussions, Max simply stopped paying rent for the apartment in which the family

¹²⁵ Gerald D. Feldman, "Confiscation of Jewish Assets, and the Holocaust," (Paper presented at Symposium by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C., 2003), 12.

¹²⁶ Meyer, *German Jewish History in Modern Times*

¹²⁷ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997.

¹²⁸ Gerald D. Feldman, "Confiscation of Jewish Assets, and the Holocaust," 12.

lived in order to be kicked out by the owner. In this way, he did not have to inform his landlord of his next address and was able to proceed without complications. However, the process did not go as smoothly as expected.¹²⁹

Margot remembered the day of the encounter between Max and the German landlord because she heard a loud crashing noise from the room where the two met. When Hedwig asked Max about the noise, he admitted to having hit the landlord, which had sent him flying over the desk into a chair. Max, a highly respected man in the community, had been so offended by the landlord calling him a "dirty Jew" that he had lost his temper and had settled the situation by force. At that moment, the entire family, but especially Max, was terrified that the incident would prevent the family from leaving. Luckily, it bore no further consequences.¹³⁰

A week before their departure, the family left the apartment and went to live in different locations. Bobe Malke went to live with her daughter-in-law Henriette permanently; Margot moved in with her friend Ulla; Dagobert stayed with uncle Heine; and Hedwig and Max stayed with Margot's great-aunt Thekla. In March 1937, the family celebrated Bobe Malke's ninetieth birthday. This was to be the last time that the Garbatti and the Pelzel families celebrated anything together. Margot was not allowed to say farewell to Bobe Malke, but was instead told to set her alarm for the morning of March 30th and to be at the *Lehrter* train station at eight o'clock sharp.¹³¹

When Margot arrived at the station, the platform was filled with family members and friends. It was a scene that had become normal, because almost every week someone departed. The Pelzels got on the train to Hamburg. Margot remembered that Hedwig sobbed, and Max was silent. She herself had been silent and contained until she tried to shake hands with her friend

¹²⁹ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, *Ultimos días en Berlín*, 2002.

¹³⁰ *ibid.* – *dreckiger Jude*

¹³¹ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, *Ultimos días en Berlín*, 2002

Ulla, and an aunt stuck her hand in between them. When the train began moving, Margot could no longer shake hands with Ulla, and she finally realized what was about to happen. Dagobert, embarrassed to be seen with Margot crying, insisted that she, "stop crying!"¹³² These were the last moments that the Pelzel family had in Berlin. They believed that they were leaving their family, their community, and their culture forever. The next weeks served as a transition from the life they knew to the life they were forced to live.

¹³² Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, *Ultimos dias en Berlin*, 2002.—hör doch auf zu heulen!

Middle Ground: The Journey to a New Life

As mentioned earlier, according to Andreas Demuth's *Four-Phase Model of Migration*, the second phase of migration is the journey itself. The Pelzel family traveled on a train to Hamburg, where Max's cousin Mucke Krauthammer received them with his wife Pepi. Together the six loaded the Pelzels' suitcases at the train station and took a taxi to their house at 5 *Grindelberg*, where Mucke and Pepi's children, Marion and Manfred, awaited their arrival. The family had previously lived for two years in Berlin, and the kids knew each other well. Marion was 13 years old, Margot's age, and Manfred was 8 years old. The Pelzels were only able to stay for a few minutes, before departing again to finish the remaining paperwork for their emigration. Margot vividly remembered their trip to the Uruguayan consulate, because a doctor had to check the family and confirm their health was up to par with the regulations for immigration of the Uruguayan government. Margot, who suffered from chronic conjunctivitis, worried that her condition would jeopardize the family's chances. However, the doctor only pointed out the situation and said, "you guys will have issues with this."¹³³ After the Uruguayan consulate, the family went to the bank, where they stood in line with those who would be passengers with them on the ship and would go through the same bureaucratic processes as they did. The next stop was the customs office, where they took their six huge boxes and the suitcases that would travel with them to Montevideo. Margot and Dagobert waited for Max in the lobby of the building and played with a paternoster, throwing paper on one side and waiting for its return on the other. After Max returned and assured them that everything was ready for their departure, they returned to the Krauthammers, where the adults talked until late at night while Marion showed Margot her

¹³³ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, Hamburgo, 2003. *Ustedes van a tener problemas con esto*

collection of Shirley Temple pictures. The Pelzels spent the night in Mucke and Pepi's bedroom, while the Krauthammer family slept together in the children's room.¹³⁴

The next morning the family awoke early and rode to the port, where they said their final farewell to the Krauthammers. The Pelzels then proceeded to a "floating office," where officers checked all of their documents and purses to make sure that they did not hide any money, since they were only allowed to take ten Reichsmarks per person. Margot remembered that in order to avoid problems her mother made her give up a new four Pfennig coin that she wanted to save. After all the checkpoints, they entered a large hall, where all the passengers for the *Groix de Chargeur Reunis* waited. Before they could board the small boat that would take them to the ship, the family heard "Mr. Max Pelzel, please!" come over the loudspeaker. Margot remembered Max turning pale and thinking that someone had done something to impede them from leaving. She wrote in 2003, "one must remember that we weren't going on a trip for fun, we were fleeing from the Nazis, and someone could have tried to prevent it."¹³⁵ Max replied, "I am here," and a worker came to him and gave him a letter. A friend had sent them her final goodbyes in a letter, but although Margot recognized the good intention behind the gesture, she wrote that it was not worth the fright.¹³⁶

The ship was anchored at 100 meters in the middle of the Alster River.¹³⁷ This ship made two round trip voyages from Hamburg to Buenos Aires, and Margot was on one of them.¹³⁸ In the back of the ship, Margot remembered a simple table set up, where immigration workers checked documents, doctors checked the passengers' eyes, and crew members directed families

¹³⁴ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, Hamburgo, 2003.

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, Barco, 2003.-- *Herr Max Pelzel, bitte! ich bin hier*

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ "Chargeurs Réunis," Maritime Timetables, accessed April 22, 2013, <http://www.timetableimages.com/maritime/images/cr.htm>

to their cabins. Margot wrote that due to the small number of cabins and the large number of people that traveled on their own, the crew members grouped strangers together and sometimes split up families in order to host men and women separately. The Pelzels were worried that this would occur to them, but they were lucky and received a six-person cabin, Cabin 117, that the four of them did not share with anyone. The cabin was located on the lowest deck, because the family was traveling in third class A. First and second class were on the upper levels and were luxurious. The passengers in the lower classes did not have access to these classes, but the passengers in the upper classes could come down to the lower decks.¹³⁹ The dining hall had specific meal times for each of the classes and offered tables for ten people, chairs that were screwed into the floor, and a buffet.¹⁴⁰

After boarding the ship, Margot took it upon herself to walk around the ship and explore her new surroundings. The first thing she observed were the people, because she wanted to find out what types of people were traveling with her and where they were headed. She wrote in later years that only a few people were going to Montevideo, while the majority was traveling to Brazil and Argentina. One of the people who caught her attention while inspecting the passengers was a young man around her age dressed in full suit. She wrote later that at that time this was not customary in her entourage as boys and men wore shorts or Knickerbockers, pants that ended below the knee so as to allow the nice socks worn with them to be visible. She noted that later in Uruguay these pants were called “bombachas,” and the boys were embarrassed to wear them, as it made them stand out and turned them into the laughing stock of the other kids. She said that her father wore those pants too and that they were strange, but at least they were European, and in his eyes that made up for the embarrassment of being singled out in public

¹³⁹ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

when wearing them. The young man she noticed was Herbert Frankenstein, and he traveled with his parents and his older brother, Ulli, in second class. He carried a doll along that he had bought for his cousin in Montevideo, who later became the first friend Margot had in Uruguay. The Frankensteins befriended the Pelzels and later brought them food from the upper levels, such as croissants and fruit that were not served to the third class.¹⁴¹

On the day of departure, little by little, people retired to their cabins. The Pelzels brought their suitcases to their cabin, piled them on top of each other on the empty beds, and laid down to rest. The only places to sit in the cabin were the lower bunk beds where one had to bend down to avoid hitting one's head. The dinner on the ship was the family's first meal on that day. Soon after dinner, the whole ship turned silent as all the tired passengers headed to bed. Margot remembered hearing the sailors yelling at each other, but she could not understand them because they spoke French. It was dark and quiet, and suddenly the Pelzels heard a weird noise, one to which they would later become accustomed. Max turned to his wife and said, "Hede, do you hear? We are leaving!" And they both let out a sigh of relief as their five-week journey to Montevideo began. It was April 1, 1937.¹⁴² Historian Silvia Facal Santiago, who is a specialist on German Jewish immigration to Uruguay, states that the long trip ahead of them served for many immigrants as "a chance to bid farewell to the country of their childhood and youth that they were to leave forever, and prepare mentally to face the new life in Uruguay."¹⁴³ However, during the five weeks at sea, the Pelzels congregated with other Germans-Jews and perhaps used the familiarity of the people surrounding them to postpone the shock of the move until their arrival in Montevideo.

¹⁴¹ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotelo, 2003.

¹⁴² *ibid.* *Hede[Hedwig], hörst Du? Wir fahren!*

¹⁴³ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 96.

A New Life: Arriving to Montevideo

The third phase of Andreas Demuth's *Four-Phase Model of Migration* is the arrival in the new (home)land and the process of laying down the groundwork for a new life, that in this case helped nurture Margot's transnational identity. The Pelzel family anchored at the harbor in Montevideo on May 4, 1937, after 34 days at sea.¹⁴⁴ Families, like the Pelzels, arrived in what was for them a land of unknown. Even though some immigrants had family or friends in Montevideo, their previous knowledge of Uruguay was limited.¹⁴⁵ Instead of finding a jungle, monkeys, and Indians, like some expected of a country in South America, they found a "typical and normal city like any in Germany."¹⁴⁶

Margot's great-aunt Clara, aunt Erna, and cousin Adi greeted the Pelzels at the port. A man, Don Jose, helped load their suitcases and trunks into a truck and took them to a house, where Erna and Adi rented a room. Erna welcomed the family to her home with a jar of *dulce de leche*, which was the first Uruguayan product Margot tasted. The Pelzels rented a room in this same house and lived there for their first few weeks in Montevideo. The family started their lives in Montevideo with three beds, one table, four chairs, and a small chest of drawers.¹⁴⁷

Margot described Montevideo as "a beautiful city" much like Berlin, but with a beach and no underground train system.¹⁴⁸ After a couple of years of living in the city, she was still impressed by the broad avenues, the beaches, the palm trees along the streets, the plethora of green, the family homes, and the living situation of the city's poorest inhabitants.¹⁴⁹ The huge gap between the dwelling conditions of the upper and middle class and the lower class made a

¹⁴⁴ Margot Pelzel to Martina Coteló, El Barco 1, March 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 94.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.* 95 – interview with Franz Opperheimer

¹⁴⁷ M and raving about

¹⁴⁸ Margot Pelzel to Prenzlauer Berg Museum, 1997

¹⁴⁹ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1939, Montevideo

stark impression on Margot. She described the neighborhoods of the lower class as areas saturated with dirty and half-falling, makeshift houses, where children ran around in rags and without shoes. In one letter she points out how one would never witness such sights in Berlin.¹⁵⁰ At the same time, the wealth in the city was also striking to her. She was unimpressed by the modern houses in Montevideo, but the old houses that were scattered throughout the city and kept up by the wealthy did impress her. Margot lauded the amount of green surrounding each house, especially since she had never seen a house with a front and backyard before arriving in Montevideo.¹⁵¹ In a letter to her school friend Ursula Werner, she pointed out the similarities between the layouts of the older Uruguayan houses and the buildings in Prenzlauer Berg. The most striking similarity was the *patio*, which resembled the *Hof*, or courtyard, found in the apartment buildings in Prenzlauer Berg. This, Margot wrote, reminded her of home.¹⁵²

According to data from the *Direccion Nacional de Migracion* in Uruguay, approximately 4,042 Jews with German passports arrived in Uruguay between 1933 and 1942. For 1937, the year when the Pelzel family arrived, records indicate that 482 German Jews entered the country.¹⁵³ However, both of these numbers lack consideration for the Jews who had lost their German citizenship as a result of the Nuremberg Laws. They also exclude immigrants, who like Margot, were born in Germany and identified themselves as Germans, but were not legally Germans, because they were born to foreign parents. According to the list of passengers from the ships provided by the *Direccion Naccional de Migracion*, taking into account Jews in both of these categories, the approximate number of “German Jews” that arrived in Uruguay between 1933 and 1942 is 6,000. About 334 of these Jews made the long journey from Germany to

¹⁵⁰ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1939, Montevideo.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1937, Montevideo.

¹⁵³ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 67.

Uruguay but went uncounted because they did not possess German citizenship¹⁵⁴; Margot was among them.

The Jews who arrived during these years found an existing Jewish population in Montevideo, which was divided into *kehilots* (communities). Jews had lived in Montevideo at least since 1878, but the first official *kehila* was organized only after World War I.¹⁵⁵ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the population increased due to an inflow of Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Hungarian-speaking Jews.¹⁵⁶ The first *kehila* to form in Montevideo was made up of Sephardi Jews, who had arrived after World War I from various territories of the Ottoman Empire, which they abandoned due to the unstable social conditions in the new Turkish state and its introduction of mandatory military service for all its inhabitants. In Montevideo, these immigrants worked mostly in the textile industry. The Ashkenazi Jews made up 60% of Montevideo's Jewish population, had come from Eastern Europe mostly between 1881 and 1914, and belonged primarily to the lower class.¹⁵⁷ This *keilah* brought to Montevideo the Yiddish language, their religious traditions, and their craftsmanship. This part of the population worked as carpenters, tailors, clock makers, and door-to-door salesmen.¹⁵⁸ The third *keilah* in Montevideo was made up of Hungarian-speaking Jews, who arrived in Uruguay between 1926 and 1930. After the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of World War I and the formation of many nation states to succeed the empire, the Jews lost the majority of their previous rights and became the scapegoats for any problems of the newly founded states. Consequently, many left these states in search of a better fate and Uruguay became one of their

¹⁵⁴ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 67.

¹⁵⁵ Teresa Porzecanski, *Historias de vida de inmigrantes judios al Uruguay*, (Montevideo: Kehilá Israelita del Uruguay, 1986), 10.

¹⁵⁶ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 96.

¹⁵⁷ Porzecanski, *Inmigrantes judios al Uruguay*, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 98-99.

destinations. All three *kehilots* were made up primarily of people who were able to find means of subsistence in Montevideo.¹⁵⁹

The large immigrant population in Montevideo was linked to the changes in immigration laws, which the Uruguayan government had promoted since the late nineteenth century as a means to recruit laborers for its working class. On June 19, 1890, Law 2096 passed, encouraging Uruguayan consuls around the world to invest in populations interested in moving to Uruguay by offering monetary settlements as advances to pay for the trip and the initial expenses.¹⁶⁰ The result was a large influx of young foreigners, who by 1908 made up 18% of the country's population.¹⁶¹

The Jews who chose Uruguay as their destination when escaping the Nazis, were not subject to these open immigration laws. Between 1932 and 1942, Uruguay halted immigration, due to a growing sense of nationalism and the worldwide economic crisis of 1929. Law 8868 of 1932 suspended Law 2096 of 1890 and regulated the entrance of foreigners, even those who already had a national citizenship card.¹⁶² The law banned entrance for those with a criminal record or those fleeing a country for criminal reasons:

Entry to the country shall not be admitted to aliens, even those holding national naturalization documents, should any of the following cases apply: A) Those who have been sentenced for ordinary crimes and offenses punishable under the laws of the Republic and committed in the country of origin or any other, and provided, upon the serving of the sentence, a term of over half the term fixed for the corresponding statute barred sentence has not elapsed. [...] B) Crooks and vagrants, habitual drug addicts and drunkards. Those expelled from any country by virtue of public safety regulations or executive decrees authorized by the laws of the nation, with the exception of those expulsions due to political reasons.¹⁶³

It also added an article that banned the entrance of any foreigner who did not have proof of monetary resources sufficient for a year (estimated at 600 pesos) until August 1933. On

¹⁵⁹ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁰ Porzecanski, *Inmigrantes judios al Uruguay*, 17.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶² Porzecanski, *Inmigrantes judios al Uruguay*, 21.

¹⁶³ Ley 8868, Artículo 1, 1932, Montevideo.

January 24, 1934, the law was amended to stipulate that the amount had to be deposited in the *Banco de la República* and could not be withdrawn, except for monthly 50 pesos rations.¹⁶⁴ On October 13, 1936, another restrictive immigration law called *Ley de indeseables* (Law of the Undesirables) or Law 9604 was passed to avoid a large influx of Spaniards after the start of their civil war. This change also closed the door to many Jews who were trying to escape the Nazi regime early, because it banned entrance to:¹⁶⁵

Those who do not hold a consular certificate issued by a Career Consul in the place of the alien's usual residence. Said document shall expressly state the holders' dissociation from all types of social or political organizations which upon the use of violence are likely to destroy the foundations of nationality [...]. Those who do not hold an industry, profession, trade, art or resources to enable them, together with their relatives, to live in the country on their own, without posing a social burden.¹⁶⁶

These restrictions played a large role in the lives of families seeking shelter from the Nazis, including the Pelzel family. In order to overcome their lack of funds, Erna had obtained the false proof of employment that helped them get the documents from the Uruguayan consulate in Germany. The restriction on health, as aforementioned, weighed heavily on Margot due to her chronic conjunctivitis.¹⁶⁷

The Pelzels' connection, Erna, assured that they were able to arrive in Montevideo without problems and had guidance starting their life. The government continued to amend the laws after the Pelzels' arrival, but there was already a significant German Jewish population that had made it past the new restrictive legislation and had settled in the country.

The previous immigration policies also allowed a large population of German gentiles to relocate to Uruguay during the nineteenth century. The majority arrived in Montevideo between

¹⁶⁴ Siliva Facal Santiago, "Política inmigratoria de puertas cerradas. Uruguay frente a la llegada de refugiados españoles republicanos y judíos alemanes," *Revista Complutense de Historia de America*, 2002, 174.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 176.

¹⁶⁶ Ley 9604, 1936, Montevideo.

¹⁶⁷ Margot Pelzel to Edith Rosenthal, October 19, 1947.

the 1850s and the 1920s.¹⁶⁸ These Germans, who chose to a large extent to live in rural areas of Uruguay, worked primarily in agriculture. After the 1848 revolution in the German territories, a large number of Berliners settled in Uruguay to work in the fields, and in 1875 they founded the *Nueva Berlin* colony in Montevideo. By 1885, there were approximately 2,125 of these Germans in Uruguay, who worked in agriculture, livestock, meat and beer industries.¹⁶⁹ The industrialization of Montevideo and the extensive German-Uruguayan ties continued to attract Germans to the city and in 1926, there was another influx of around 1,278 Germans to Montevideo. Many, like Erna's husband, had come to Uruguay to work in German companies, such as Bayer and BASF, which had opened branches in Uruguay. One example was *La Transatlántica*, which was a German company that purchased two tramlines in Uruguay and paired with a British company, providing employment to over 5,000 by the mid-1920s.¹⁷⁰ There was also a German presence in larger projects like the construction of a hydro-electrical plant on Uruguay's Rio Negro in 1936.¹⁷¹ These partnerships with Germany provided a steady flow of German immigrants, and this population created the *Colonia Alemana* (German colony) in Montevideo in the early 1930s.¹⁷²

The majority of these groups were supporters of the Nazi movement by the late 1930s¹⁷³ when Margot and her cohort of immigrants arrived in Uruguay and came in contact with them. During the rise of the NSDAP in Germany, there had also been a rise in Nazi organizations in Uruguay.¹⁷⁴ The first was a part of the NSDAP's *Auslandsorganisation* (Organization for the Exterior), which published the *Deutsche Wacht* (the German Guard), a newspaper that brought

¹⁶⁸ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 102.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 103.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Henry John Finch, *A Political Economy of Uruguay since 1870*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 204.

¹⁷¹ Finch, *A Political Economy of Uruguay*, 217.

¹⁷² Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 103.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

together and solidified that Nazi group within the German colony in Uruguay.¹⁷⁵ The primary objective of the NSDAP in Uruguay was to infiltrate all the institutions associated with the existing *colonia Alemana*. The most important institutions were the *Club Aleman*, which was the cultural center of the wealthy German community, and the *Deutsche Schule*, the school for the children of wealthy German immigrants to Montevideo. The gatherings at the *Club Aleman* fostered and taught the ideology of the NSDAP and banned German Jews from participating in any of its activities. The *Deutsche Schule* implemented the teachings of the Nazi ideology, fired anti-Nazi teachers and administrators, banned the enrollment of German Jews, and displayed flags with swastikas at all of its events.¹⁷⁶ The NSDAP also used the media to infiltrate the houses of Germans by offering a German hour on three different radio stations. The broadcast highlighted the claim that “Jews were communists and the economic rivals of the German economic and social realms.”¹⁷⁷ As attested by Facal Santiago’s research, the media achieved its goal, but the presence of these groups only appears as a side note in Margot’s accounts of her life in Uruguay both in her letters at the time and the later narrations and reflections. The only instance in which Margot mentioned the presence of Nazis in Uruguay involved the bakery *El Oro del Rin*, which was owned by a German family and displayed pictures of Hitler behind the counter.¹⁷⁸ A sign on the window read, “*Jews are not welcome*,” and inside, one typically found the Nazi leaders of the *colonia Alemana* discussing politics.¹⁷⁹

The absence of Nazis in Montevideo from Margot’s accounts could be a result of the community within which the Pelzel family lived. The initial difficulties of setting up house and starting a new life created a sense of community amongst the recent immigrants that shielded

¹⁷⁵ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 103.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 105.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 106.

¹⁷⁸ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1939.

¹⁷⁹ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 106.

many from the Nazi forces in the city. The support from the existing German Jews mirrored in many ways the assistance that the German Jewish infrastructure had offered families back in Germany. The first obstacles for the new immigrants were finding housing and a steady job.

Several organizations aided refugees who did not have family or friends in Uruguay to begin their new lives. On the one hand, there were the three existing *kehilots* that had created separate community institutions, synagogues, schools, newspapers, and other resources to help facilitate the transition process for any new immigrants from their specific area of origin.¹⁸⁰

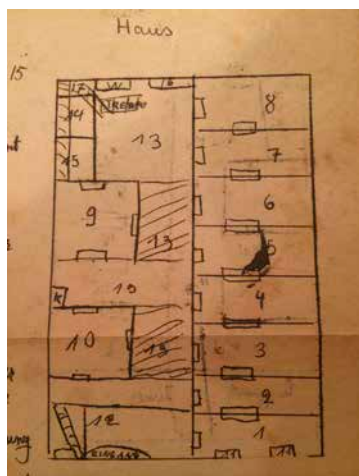
There were also other more general institutions. The *Centro Social Israelita* and the *Comite de Frente Unido contra el Fascismo y Antisemitismo en Alemania* were the two largest organizations that focused on raising funds to assist the refugees. The *Centro Comercial e Industrial Israelita del Uruguay* was a Zionist group that worked to advise the refugees on business and economic opportunities. The *Comité contra las Persecuciones de los Israelitas Alemanes* also helped spread awareness about dangers for Jews in Uruguay by publishing the *Voz Hebrea* (Hebrew Voice), a newspaper that also promoted the boycotting of German goods. This publication also distributed information about anti-Semitic groups within Uruguay who could pose a threat to the community.¹⁸¹ This infrastructure reinforced the loyalties to the German Jewish community, much like the Jewish organizations in Prenzlauer Berg had reinforced the loyalties to the Jewish community.

While emotionally and institutionally the ties among German Jews were strong, geographically the community was spread out throughout the city. The Pelzel family's first home after their temporary room at Erna's house was located at *1328 Calle Durazno*, where they rented a room in the shared house. The building was located in the neighborhood of *el Centro*,

¹⁸⁰ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*,. 98-99.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, 100.

five blocks from one of the city's main streets, *18 de Julio*. Margot described it in a letter to Ursula Werner in 1939 as “almost exclusively a business street. It has many high-rises that are approximately 10 stories high.”¹⁸²



Layout of 1328 Calle Durazno by Margot Pelzel¹⁸³

According to Facal, eighty-two percent of the German Jews who arrived in Montevideo lived, during their first months, in one of the following neighborhoods: *Ciudad Vieja*, *el Centro*, or *Pocitos*.¹⁸⁴ These three neighborhoods had a plethora of guesthouses and hotels, which made them appealing to the new immigrants. However, it is essential to recognize that these neighborhoods were not the equivalent to “Little Italy” or “Chinatown” in large cities in the United States. They were simply temporary refuges for the newly arrived immigrants. As the immigrants found jobs, they moved to different neighborhoods and never founded a “Little Jewish-Germany.” The exposure to Uruguayan gentiles in the neighborhoods also fostered

¹⁸² Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1939, Montevideo. - Die 18 de Julio ist fast ausschliesslich Geschäftsstrasse. Hat sehr viele Hochhäuser 10 Stockw. ungefähr.

¹⁸³ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1939.

¹⁸⁴ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 136.

connections and ultimately a sense of loyalty to the citizens of the host country that had saved them from the Nazi terror.¹⁸⁵

After finding housing, an immigrant's next concern was finding an income for oneself or one's family. Over 70% of the immigrants were of legal working age according to the Uruguayan law, but the majority of the German Jews did not speak Spanish and were therefore limited in their options for employment.¹⁸⁶ Additionally, Uruguay was still suffering from the global economic downturn of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Jobs were scarce. These economic conditions led not only to the reformed immigration policies mentioned above, but also to the passing in 1934 of *El Código del Niño*, which prohibited youth under the age of 14 from working. To aid its people, the government invested in community projects that provided employment to the increasing number of unemployed.¹⁸⁷ However, because of the language barrier, the new immigrants could not qualify for the positions generated. There were available positions for immigrants in agriculture, in some industries (textiles, metals, and agricultural and cattle), and in the service industry.¹⁸⁸

Once again, much like in Prenzlauer Berg, the German Jews, who did not have a legal permit to work, depended on the German Jewish community for assistance. Common options for the newly arrived refugees were to work for other German Jews who had opened small stores or become traveling salesmen for a German Jewish merchant. Another path was opening a small neighborhood grocery store or selling ice cream on the beaches of Montevideo. Not even highly qualified people such as lawyers or doctors were spared from accepting such menial jobs, if they

¹⁸⁵ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 136.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 139.

¹⁸⁷ Benjamín Nahum, *Manual de Historia del Uruguay: Tomo II 1903-1990*, (Montevideo:Ediciones de la Banda Oriental,2000), 167.

¹⁸⁸ Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*,139.

did not speak the language or have the necessary connections.¹⁸⁹ This reliance on the German Jews for employment reinforced the loyalties to the German Jewish community, much like in Prenzlauer Berg, Max's reliance on Jews for employment had enforced the loyalties to the Jewish community.

Max's search for work began the day after the family's arrival in Montevideo. Although he had taken Spanish classes in Berlin, his knowledge was insufficient and posed great difficulties to his search for employment.¹⁹⁰ Even though the family entered Uruguay with proof of work, the paperwork was fake and did not come with a guarantee for work. Before the family's arrival to Montevideo, Erna tried to find jobs for Max and Hedwig, but to no avail.¹⁹¹ Eventually, Max found work in a light bulb factory owned by a German Jew and worked there until October 1938. Since the stress of the move had left Hedwig in poor health, and the family needed more income, the children had to help.¹⁹²

Max earned approximately 70 *centesimos* (.70 pesos) per day, but since the monthly rent was 13 pesos, his income was not enough.¹⁹³ Dagobert (16) started working as an electrician at one of the largest phone companies in Montevideo, while Margot (14) found work at a German Jewish *Kinderheim* funded by the JOINT.¹⁹⁴ The *Kinderheim* was part of the German Jewish infrastructure and provided an opportunity for parents to work during the day, because it offered affordable childcare for the community. Margot loved working with the children. Although she was not able to pursue her own passion for learning, she taught the children German fairy tales,

¹⁸⁹ Hanne Blitzer, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 3, 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Margot Pelzel to Antje Kahl, March 31, 1998.

¹⁹¹ Margot Pelzel Edith Rosenthal, November 11, 1961

¹⁹² Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, February 1997.

¹⁹³ Margot Pelzel to Antje Kahl, March 31, 1998.

¹⁹⁴ JOINT, or the *American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee* was founded in 1914 to raise capital to support Jews in eastern Europe during World War I. Between 1933 and 1939, the organization helped more than 190,000 Jews leave Germany, and was present in Uruguay and other Latin American countries to provide support for many refugees who relocated to the region during the NSDAP regime. (<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005367>)

lullabies, and children's games that she had learned in Berlin, thus reinforcing her own indebtedness to German culture.¹⁹⁵ The exclusively German Jewish attendance at the *Kinderheim*, also helped her maintain her German language skills without pressure to learn Spanish quickly. However, learning Spanish was central to both Dagobert and Margot.¹⁹⁶ In March 1937, Margot received a pocket *Metoula Sprachführer* from her parents that outlined the rules of the Spanish language, and she always carried a small notebook in which she wrote Spanish vocabulary and its German counterparts.¹⁹⁷ In a letter that Margot wrote to Ursula Werner in 1938, she stated her constant efforts to learn and better her Spanish.¹⁹⁸ Her rapid advances in the language are clear when examining a letter she wrote to Ursula in 1939. In the three-page-letter, she wrote various expressions and words in Spanish, claiming that she did not know or remember their German equivalents and struggled explaining them to her friend.¹⁹⁹ The use of Spanish in her letters in German continued to increase over the years.

Life in Montevideo continued to be challenging for the Pelzel family even after the initial phase. There was little job security in the factories, and in October 1938, for unknown reasons, Max had to find new employment and ended up working at *Carmeta*, a factory related in some manner to telegraphs.²⁰⁰ On the weekends, Max also sold candy at Montevideo's main stadium during the soccer games.²⁰¹ The volatility of the job market led Max and Hedwig to conceive a new plan. Hedwig's aunt, Clara Glasberg, who had also relocated to Uruguay with her husband, was thriving after opening a laundromat in Montevideo, and this encouraged the Pelzel family to

¹⁹⁵ Margot Pelzel to Hannele Rosenthal, August 2, 1946.

¹⁹⁶ Margot Pelzel to Antje Kahl, March 31, 1998.

¹⁹⁷ *Metoula Sprachführer*, 1937

¹⁹⁸ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 28, 1938.

¹⁹⁹ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6, 1939.

²⁰⁰ Max Pelzel, Proof of Work by Carmeta, May 9th, 1963.

²⁰¹ Marianne Kaufmann, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 15, 2011.

open a business.²⁰² They bought a small *lecheria* (grocery store selling primarily dairy products) called *America* at *1493 Cerro Largo* in *el Centro*, which was not a primarily German Jewish neighborhood. They signed the contract on January 2, 1939, and opened the store a month later.²⁰³ The family moved in the back of the store at *1483 Cerro Largo* so that the front room was the grocery store and the back the family quarters.²⁰⁴ Max and Hedwig worked daily from six in the morning until eleven at night, which forced Margot to take care of the house after work at the *Kinderheim*.²⁰⁵ During their long weeks, the family always found time for relaxation with German Jewish friends at their *Kaffeeklatsch*, which was held at the home of a different family each week. The host baked a cake, which required visiting the local bakery and using the owner's oven, and provided coffee.²⁰⁶

In March 1939 the family dynamics changed when Hedwig had to undergo an appendectomy and spent two months in the *Hospital Pasteur*, a public hospital in Montevideo. She never fully recovered, remaining weak and in constant pain.²⁰⁷ During that time, Dagobert and Margot's German Jewish friends helped Max make the deliveries for the grocery store, providing yet another example of mutual help within the German Jewish community.²⁰⁸ A year after Hedwig's illness, Margot had to find another job to earn more money for the family. A German Jewish businessman, Rodolfo Hirschfeld, offered Margot a position as his bookkeeper. Even though it was not her dream job, she was thankful for the opportunity to take a stenography

²⁰² Margot Pelzel Edith Rosenthal, November 11, 1961

²⁰³ Contract for the sale of La Lecheria, January 2nd, 1939.

²⁰⁴ Irene Kaufmann, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, May 20, 2011.

²⁰⁵ Margot Pelzel Edith Rosenthal, November 11, 1961

²⁰⁶ Margot Pelzel to Antje Kahl, March 31, 1998.

²⁰⁷ Hedwig Pelzel to Liesl Batist, April 23, 1939.

²⁰⁸ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 6th, 1939.

course to prepare for the job. Hirschfeld also taught Margot all the necessary skills to work as a bookkeeper, which continued to be her profession until her retirement in the early 2000s.²⁰⁹

The need for income and the language barrier prevented Margot from officially pursuing her love for learning in the public schools in Montevideo. The *Deutsche Schule* was out of reach for the family for economic reasons and because it had banned the enrollment of German Jewish children. In order to overcome the lack of education, some of the German Jewish youth in Montevideo set up study groups that mirrored the early salons of late eighteenth century Berlin that were led by women like Henriette Hertz.²¹⁰ The young women and men in Montevideo met each week in a different household and were led into discussions by a different member of the group. Margot was one of the youngest members in the group, which was made up of German Jews ranging in ages from 14 (Margot) to early 20s. The weekly meetings covered subjects such as German literature, art, film, and music. Each week, the meetings started with a snack of German pastries and sandwiches, followed by a presentation on a subject familiar to the speaker, for example a piece of literature, a composer, or a film. After the lecture, the discussions led to deeper considerations on the topic and to further lectures. This group provided Margot with an opportunity to further her education and broaden her knowledge of the culture in which she had been raised until her move to Uruguay.²¹¹ Although she did not obtain a formal education in Montevideo, the study group allowed her to still have what the friends of one of her daughters described as a “noticeably stronger cultural background than any other normal Uruguayan.”²¹²

²⁰⁹ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, November 26, 1997.

²¹⁰ Diekman, *Juden in Berlin*, 91.

²¹¹ Hanne Blitzer, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 3, 2011.

²¹² Marianne Kaufmann, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 15, 2011.

Margot attended drawing lessons at a studio in Montevideo, when time permitted, and had an appreciation for classical music, but more modern genres like jazz were not to her taste.²¹³ Recurrent topics of Margot's letters over the years included concerts, movies, plays, and operas. Although during the years of Hitler's regime communication with her family and friends in Berlin was scarce, the discussions through the letters never ceased and revolved often around her cultural discoveries. For example, on July 28, 1938, Margot wrote to her friend Ursula Werner about a film that they had both seen and attempted to rationalize the screenwriter's choice to kill the mother in the story. She acknowledged the fact that Ursula could no longer attend the movie theater in Berlin, but her letter made it clear that it was a response to an ongoing conversation between them about a film they had seen together. Margot shared with her friend details about the newly released films that were out of Ursula's reach, describing films like *Marie Antoinette* featuring Norma Shearer and raving about actresses of their age like Judy Garland and Diana Durbin.²¹⁴ In a letter from 1939 that Ursula never received, Margot discussed the movie theater outings with her German Jewish friend Dina. These outings took place every Sunday like they had in Prenzlauer Berg. Although the Pelzel family was not wealthy, Margot continually attended cultural events available in the city to the best of her ability.²¹⁵ As she grew older, she and her study group purchased season tickets every year to the National orchestra, and each Saturday night the group attended the performances and met to discuss the pieces. Erico Stern, who was also a refugee from Berlin and later became renowned in the world of classical music in Uruguay, led these discussions and further exposed Margot to the culture and history of classical music.²¹⁶

²¹³ Margot Pelzel to Rita Kohn, June 24, 1948.

²¹⁴ Margot Pelzel to Ursula Werner, July 28th, 1938.

²¹⁵ Margot Pelzel, Tagebuch, August 31, 1946.

²¹⁶ Irene Kaufmann, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, May 20, 2011.

The members of the study group also belonged to the *Nueva Congregación Israelita del Uruguay* (New Israelite Congregation of Uruguay, or NCI), which had been founded in 1936. This was a congregation created for German-speaking Jews, which had held its first service for only 10-30 people, and had later grown in membership as the number of refugees had risen.²¹⁷ Fritz Winter, the *NCI's* rabbi, conducted the services entirely in German and did so until he retired in 1984.²¹⁸ The organization also managed the *Kinderheim*, where Margot worked. By 1940, the *NCI* enlisted between 1,400 and 1,500 families as members.²¹⁹

In 1939, some of the men who belonged to the *NCI* and also attended the study group with Margot, founded *Macabbi*. One of these men was Günter Kaufman, whom Margot married in 1952. *Macabbi* was a club for German Jews that focused on physical activities, outdoor activities, Zionism, and Jewish education.²²⁰ In the early 1940s, Margot became a group leader for 15-17-year olds. Her role was to share her knowledge about Judaism and Zionism with the girls. Margot was very passionate about the Zionist movements and proudly shared that her grandfather had been a friend of Theodor Herzl, the founder of the political Zionist movement.²²¹ She devoted a lot of her time to studying about Palestine, and while in her twenties seriously considered moving to there. In 1998, she claimed that her only reasons for staying in Uruguay were her mother's refusal to condone her move and her mother's poor health.²²² However, through her engagement with *Macabbi* she was able to pursue her Zionism and to share her knowledge with the younger generations of German Jews. Within the community, both the *NCI*

²¹⁷ "Breve historia de la NCI," NCI, accessed March 21, 2013.
http://www.nci.org.uy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4:breve-historia-de-la-nci&catid=35:nosotros

²¹⁸ "Rabino Dr. Fritz Winter," NCI, accessed March 21, 2013,
http://www.nci.org.uy/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=365:rabino-dr-fritz-winter-zl&catid=112:rabinos-y-jazanim-anteriores&Itemid=32

²¹⁹ Silvia Facal Santiago, *Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland, Shalom Uruguay*, 151.

²²⁰ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, October 23, 1998.

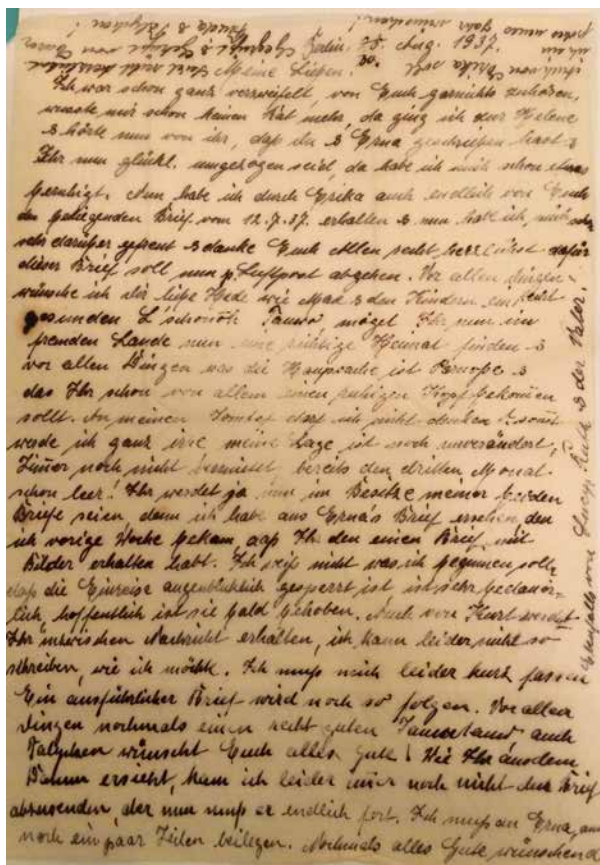
²²¹ Margot Pelzel to Antje Kahl, March 31, 1998

²²² Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, February 2, 1998.

and *Macabbi* served as spaces where German Jews could nurture their traditions, language, and culture.

Another aspect of life in Montevideo that helped Margot reinforce the ties to her childhood in Prenzlauer Berg was the correspondence with her family. Although the family's financial woes made correspondence a struggle, Margot made it a priority, always finding enough time and money to stay connected. The letters were of such importance to her that she saved not only the ones she received, but also made copies of many of those that she sent.

During the first years in Uruguay, the Pelzels corresponded mostly with their family friend Erika and their aunt Frieda and daughter Taly, who all stayed in Berlin. Frieda updated the



Pelzel family on the whereabouts of Hedwig's mother Henriette, grandmother Bobe Malke, and any family or friends that had remained in Berlin. The letters were also full of quotidian details and discussions of works of art.

Surprising to a post-Holocaust reader, the letters lack negative descriptions of the life under the Nazis and complains or plights for pity. Each letter was opened and closed with formal greetings and adhered to the customary etiquette for writing letters, first inquiring about the Pelzels' life in Montevideo and then reporting

on the Garbatti family in Berlin or any other topic mentioned above. Although paper and stamps became scarce in Berlin, Frieda and Erika continued to write, but they made sure that every inch

of paper was fully utilized, which sometimes resulted in sentences wrapping around the paper in four different directions. The format and tone of the letters remained unchanged until the last letter arrived from Berlin on March 4, 1940.

The correspondence from the first ten to fifteen years in Montevideo furthermore includes letters written by Margot's parents, her aunt Erna, and her brother Dagobert. The writers and recipients shift after 1940 from the family who stayed in Berlin to family members who escaped to Shanghai, Palestine, and Colombia. This correspondence focused to a large extent on the years in Prenzlauer Berg and further reinforced Margot's memories of her lost home. The combination of these memories of her Berlin childhood and the life in the newly created community in Montevideo, which focused greatly on German Jewish culture, nurtured Margot's German Jewish identity by providing constant reminders of the language and culture she had left behind.

A Stranger at Home and Abroad

The fourth phase of the *Four-Phase Model of Migration* deals with the development and reflection of the migrant once settled in the new location. In Margot's life this stage involved starting her own family, determining the values that she would instill in her daughters, revisiting her place of origin for the first time, reflecting on her own sense of belonging, and reconstructing her family's history for future generations. During this stage she continues to foster her German Jewish identity but also develops a sense of her Uruguayness.

Throughout the 1940s, Margot's study group continued to meet and morphed into weekly discussions or cultural outings. In the late 1940s, the more mature members turned the group into a *Lesezirkel*, a group that met once a week to read German literature out loud.²²³ They continued to speak German and read the literature, such as Goethe's *Faust*, Theodor Herzl's *Tagebuch*, and poetry by Heinrich Heine, which they would have been exposed to if they had remained in Germany.²²⁴ The gatherings reinforced the ties to their country of origin and allowed them to explore a culture to which they would not have otherwise been exposed. Many of the participants began to marry one another in the 1950s, and Margot was no exception. Günter Josef Kaufmann was an only child, who had been born on May 3, 1922, in Warendorf, Germany. The Kaufmann family had arrived in Montevideo in 1939, and Günter had become involved both with the *NCI* and the *Maccabi* group.²²⁵ On June 13, 1952, Margot and Günter were married at the *NCI* synagogue amongst members of the German Jewish community.

The couple moved to a house and invited Max to move in with them. Günter took over the Pelzel residence and grocery store on *Cerro Largo* and used it as the new office for *La Segura*, the plumbing business he opened. Max worked as the bookkeeper for the business until

²²³ Trude Stern, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 2, 2011.

²²⁴ Margot Pelzel, *Tagebuch*, August 19th, 1948.

²²⁵ Margot Pelzel to Martina and Maia Coteló, 2005.

his death in 1964, when Margot took over his position until her retirement in the early 2000s. Many of the employees and the clientele of *La Segura* were Uruguayan, which provided Günter and Margot with great exposure to the language, customs, and culture of Uruguay. Günter became an avid fan of the Uruguayan soccer team *Peñarol* and began attending numerous games with his Uruguayan gentile friends.²²⁶

On June 13, 1955, Margot and Günter had their first daughter, Marianne. Much like other members of the *Lesezirkel*, the Kaufmanns raised her speaking only German. By the late 1950s, the majority of the members of the *Lesezirkel* were too preoccupied with child rearing, so the meetings stopped. Instead, some of them began to meet for *asados*, which is a typical Uruguayan tradition of socializing outdoors while barbecuing. Here they discussed culture and raised their children together.²²⁷ On February 5, 1957, the Kaufmanns built a four-story house two blocks from the beach at *Uspallata 1423* in the neighborhood of *Punta Gorda*. When the couple moved in, the house was one of the only ones on the street, but soon the neighborhood was populated with countless families of Uruguayan gentiles, who became the guests at many of the Kaufmanns' *asados*.²²⁸ Margot lived in this house until her death in 2008.

In 1961, after 24 years of living in Uruguay, Margot, Günter, and three of the original couples from the *Lesezirkel*, Martin and Hanne Blitzer, Julio and Clarita Goldenberg, and Doris and Helmut Stern, traveled together back to Europe. Over the years, these couples had united to explore various aspects of *Kultur*, i.e. music, literature, art, and film, and through their studies had maintained a close connection to Germany. In a joint travel journal, the couples documented their journey and their feelings vis-à-vis the things and situations they encountered during their

²²⁶ Margot Pelzel, *Genealogia de la familia Pelzel*, 1993.

²²⁷ Hanne Blitzer, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 3, 2011.

²²⁸ Margot Pelzel, *Genealogia de la familia Pelzel*, 1993.

trip. Their entries revealed realizations about the unnoticed changes that had occurred in their identity.

The preparation for the trip began months in advance and involved researching and locating long lost friends and family members, making arrangements for the children, who stayed in Montevideo, securing flights and hotels, and finalizing the logistics. Margot's children, Marianne and Irene (born on April 15, 1958), stayed in Montevideo with Max. On June 28, 1961 the couples boarded a KLM flight that took them from Montevideo to Amsterdam via São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Recife, and Lisbon. From Amsterdam the group took another airplane to Frankfurt, where they purchased a van. They drove the van to Rome, where they sold the van on August 16th before flying to Israel. Their itinerary included Hamburg, Berlin, Nuremberg, Munich, Zürich, Venice, Florence, Rome, Tel Aviv, and Paris.²²⁹

Margot's thoughts and feelings are carefully depicted both in the group's travel journal and in a letter that she wrote from Berlin to Erico Stern on July 21, 1961. The group had spent most of July visiting Frankfurt, Bonn, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Münster, Amsterdam, and Hamburg. As they drove from city to city, she wrote to Erico that little seemed worth mentioning, as everything looked the same; the small towns still stood with their pretty houses and narrow streets, while "the Rheine still flows quietly on its way."²³⁰ In Düsseldorf, Margot discovered her husband's hometown, his neighborhood, and his school. During their stay, they had to deliver a letter from their friend Helmut to a man named Esser. After locating him, the couple discovered that he had attended the same school as Günter and had been in the classroom across the hall from him throughout their schooling. Shortly after meeting him, Esser invited them into his house, offered them food, and played music for them. Margot wrote of this event emphasizing

²²⁹ Margot Pelzel, *Diario de viajes*, 1961.

²³⁰ Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern, July 21, 1961.

their appreciation for the music that he had shared with them inside his home. She also highlighted her appreciation for the fact that her husband's homecoming was positive and even included aspects of the culture she had missed. As the group reached Hamburg, Margot wrote that she allowed her memory to guide her and found 5 *Grindelberg*, where she had spent her last night in Germany almost twenty-five years prior.²³¹

After years of living amongst a tightly knit German Jewish community that heavily focused on attempting to maintain German *Kultur*, the couples chose to spend the majority of their time in Germany attending cultural events. In Düsseldorf, for example, they went to the theater and saw Kay Lorentz's *Kommödchen*. In Hamburg, they watched Ursula Sieg's "*Hurra für Gina*," and in Amsterdam they visited the *Rijksmuseum*, of whose incredible Rembrandt pieces Margot wrote in awe.²³² Her commentaries on these cultural events featured prominently in both her letter to Erico and her entries in the group's travel journal. Margot's only laments, prior to arriving in Berlin, were about missing a performance of *The Marriage of Figaro* and a Van Gogh exhibit during her days in Amsterdam.²³³

Once Margot arrived in Berlin, however, the laments became about what she faced in Berlin. As they arrived in the middle of the night, in the divided city, Margot had to face the changes immediately. In order to cross the border into Communist-controlled East Berlin, where Prenzlauer Berg was, the couples had to purchase a visa and endure an uncomfortable encounter with a disgruntled border control officer. It is significant to acknowledge that the couples arrived in Berlin during a crucial time in its history, the Berlin Crisis of 1961. Since Berlin had become one of the main routes of escape for East Germans, the East German state monitored its borders heavily, particularly the inner-city border running through the middle of city. After the

²³¹ Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern, July 21st, 1961.

²³² Margot Pelzel, *Diario de viajes*, 1961.

²³³ Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern, July 21, 1961.

distressing experiences at the border, the couples finally entered East Berlin on July 17th, 1961. This proved to be exactly 27 days before the East took drastic measures to curb illegal emigration to the West by building the Berlin Wall.

“The differences between the East and the West are like night and day. Even though it was night, the streets were creepy, and we went hours without seeing a light. I’m not sure whether there were houses, because one could not see anything,” Margot wrote to Erico in her letter. She promised that she would refrain from passing judgment until she experienced the whole city, but even after the visit, she admitted that the entire group felt the same way: Berlin was a lifeless city. She claimed that in the Western sector even though people dressed well, filled up coffee shops, and went through the motions of life, nothing seemed normal and everything was depressing.²³⁴

In the Eastern sector, she attempted to find a hint of the city she remembered by attending a performance at the *Theater am Schiffbauerdamm* now renamed *Berliner Ensemble*, after its reopening in 1949 under the guidance of Bertolt Brecht and his wife Helene Weigl. The performance was Brecht’s *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* (*Fear and Misery of the Third Reich*), which he had written while exiled in Denmark, hoping to use the 24 sketches depicting life under the Nazis to “provoke the members of the audience into critical reflection.”²³⁵ Even though Margot felt that the piece fit perfectly with the time and conditions in the East, she was shocked that the audience remained unresponsive and afraid to clap or show emotions. The group found the mood of the spectators to be frightening and felt like outsiders.²³⁶

²³⁴ Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern, July 21, 1961.

²³⁵ Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Spinchorn, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 441.

²³⁶ Margot Pelzel, *Diario de viajes*, 1961.

As the group left the theater, the crowd startled them further by hurrying off quietly, refraining from discussing the play, and whispering amongst themselves. At that moment, Margot was confronted with both the changes in the place she called home and her changed identity, which revealed itself richer than merely that of a German Jewish émigré. She wrote on that day, “We, ‘South-Americans’ have learned, thank God, to discuss uninhibitedly, which is not to say that one has to yell, but we are hardly concerned if anyone [else] is listening or not; and we can also laugh, which doesn't seem to happen very often here.”²³⁷ The lines illustrate that she was finally forced to see the change in herself and to acknowledge that she was an outsider in a place in which she had referred as her home. The distinction of the group as “us” and of the Germans as “they” further isolated her and showed that, while in what they referred to as their *Heimat*, they felt like tourists and did not identify themselves as Germans. She further set herself and her group apart from the Germans by often criticizing the sizes and fashion styles of German women. Margot also wrote that the Germans and Europeans in general saw them as South Americans traveling through Europe, and although she discredited this statement before arriving in Berlin, once in the city, she herself called the couples South Americans.²³⁸

Amidst this realization, Margot continued to trace her past and visited her childhood friend Erika, who was living in East Berlin. During the darkest years for Margot’s family, Erika had remained in contact and provided the family with updates on surviving relatives. Margot’s childhood stories were her most cherished possessions, and judging from her comments prior to meeting Erika, she expected the reunion to be a joyous event full of reminiscing about old times. Instead, her recollections reveal a saddened Margot who was disturbed by the insight she

²³⁷ Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern, July 21, 1961: Wir ‘Süd-Amerikaner’ haben es ja G.s.D. gelernt, uns ungeniert zu unterhalten, was nicht besagenwill, dass man unbedingt schreien muss, aber es kümmert uns doch kaum, ob jemand zuhört oder nicht, und auch können wir lachen und hier wird scheinbar nur wenig gelacht.

²³⁸ Margot Pelzel, *Diario de viajes*, 1961.

obtained into Erika's life in East Berlin. Erika had lived with her 80-year-old mother in the same house for 25 years. The house had not been repaired or renovated, because all changes had to go through the government. The government rationed potatoes, butter, and other necessary goods and only allowed 80 squared-meters of living space per person. Margot's astonishment was obvious as she showed history repeating itself with the government nationalizing private businesses, refusing to compensate prior owners, limiting resources, and banning newspapers and radio stations from the West. Margot had hoped to return to the home of her memories, her home before the Nazis. Instead, she returned and saw her home still plagued by an authoritarian regime much like the one from which she had run away.

She walked through her neighborhood guided by her memories, and she was horrified. Everything was untouched. The things that had been destroyed during the Nazi dictatorship and the war were still destroyed, and the things that had survived were torn and deteriorated. She found places she recalled as bustling with life and businesses now depraved and abandoned. Her neat, lively, and beautiful streets had turned into a nightmare. As she reflected on what she faced, she reminded Erico of how much she had wanted to see Berlin again, but she sadly wrote that what she found was so depressive and oppressive that it only made her want to get out of there. After walking through her home city, she wrote, "I feel like a ghost walking through a ghost city."²³⁹ Suddenly, it became clear to her that her memories were mere recollections of times and places long gone.²⁴⁰

After Berlin the trip continued to Austria, Italy, and finally Israel. In Israel, Margot was able to reconnect with her father's brother, Moses, Hannele's sister Gina, her friend Ursula Werner, and many others. After the shock that Margot experienced in Berlin, the reunions in

²³⁹ Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern July 21, 1961. -- *Ich kam mir vor wie ein Geist in einer Geisterstadt*.

²⁴⁰ Margot Pelzel, *Diario de viajes*, 1961.

Israel helped reinforced the connections that she had to her *Heimat*, which was no longer a physical location.²⁴¹ Although Margot's trip to Germany forced her to admit to the disappearance of the physical "home," she cherished the plethora of cultural events she was able to attend during the trip. The reunions with friends and family members strengthened her connection to the German Jewish heritage that had been passed on to her since her childhood despite her disappointment with the two German societies of the early 1960s. These conflicting forces further complicated the question of identity as Margot realized that she identified with Germany while in Uruguay and with Uruguay while in Germany.²⁴² Her conflicting transnational identity with multiple loyalties to her different "homes" was further described in 1998, when she wrote to her friend Lorchen Samuel:

I believe that even after 60 years I am still a visitor here and I will always be considered at least a foreigner. But when I am somewhere else, I consider Montevideo my home. [...] Maybe those Jews who were born here feel at home here, even if they are part of Jewish organizations, as we felt at home in Germany until we were told that it was not our country. And by the way, my father was also Polish [...] and even though my mother and all of her siblings were born in Berlin, we were seen as Polish. Ridiculous, I do not speak a word of Polish. [...] In any event, no one would believe that I am Uruguayan, were I to claim that, due to my laughable Yekke accent.²⁴³

Margot also nurtured this transnational identity through her children, who were raised speaking German. However, the Kaufmanns did hire the Uruguayan nanny who had raised Günter in Montevideo to help them out, and she exposed Marianne and Irene to both the Spanish language and the Uruguayan cuisine.²⁴⁴ The girls attended both Uruguayan public schools in Spanish and the *Ivria* Institute, which was a half-day school founded by the *NCI* to provide a

²⁴¹ Margot Pelzel, *Diario de viajes*, 1961.

²⁴² Margot Pelzel to Erico Stern, July 21, 1961.

²⁴³ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, Feb 2, 1998. -- Ich glaube, auch nach 60 Jahren bin ich hier noch zu Besuch und ich werde immer meistens als Ausländerin betrachtet. Aber wenn ich woanders bin, betrachte ich Montevideo als mein Zuhause. [...] Vielleicht, diejenigen Juden, die schon hier geboren sind, wenn sie auch in jüdischen Organisationen mitmachen, fühlen sich hier zu hause, so wie wir uns damals in Deutschland zuhause fühlten bis man uns sagte dass das nicht unser Land sei. Und übrigens, mein Vater war auch Pole [...] und obwohl meine Mutter und alle ihre Geschwister in Berlin geboren war, galten wir alle als Polen. Lächerlich, ich kannte kein Wort Polnisch. [...] Sowieso würde mir nie jemand glauben, dass ich Uruguayerin bin, wollte ich das behaupten, alles wegen meinem lächerlichen jäckischen Akzent.

²⁴⁴ Hanne Blitzer, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 3, 2011.

Jewish education to supplement the public one for children of former refugees. During Jewish holidays the Kaufmanns and the other families from the *Lesenzirkel* attended the *NCI* synagogue, where, as previously stated, the service continued to be in German until 1984, so that forty-seven years after her migration, Margot continued having an active relation to the German language. In order to maintain their children's German proficiency as well, the Kaufmanns sent them to weekly tutoring sessions and ensured that they listened to the daily radio program broadcasted in German by the Uruguayan broadcast company. Since Günter's mother, who visited the family every weekend, had never learned Spanish, the girls had to speak German within the house to be able to communicate with her.²⁴⁵

At home, the girls were not only exposed to the German language, but also German *Kultur* and the stories of Margot's childhood in Berlin. During their early years, Marianne and Irene heard stories of Margot's family in Berlin and became familiar with names of people they would never meet. They learned German nursery rhymes and listened to recordings in German of fairy tales by Hans Christian Anderson and the brothers Grimm. Margot also encouraged her daughters to pursue the arts and exposed them at home not only to the harmonica and the recorder, but also to a variety of traditional German children's songs, which Irene and Marianne sang with her in three-part harmony daily on their way to and from school. On weekends, the girls spent Sunday mornings by the record player listening to classical pieces by Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, or Franck, who were Margot's favorite composers.²⁴⁶

Outside the home, the children were involved in countless cultural activities. As Margot wrote in 1966, her children and all the children of her German Jewish friends took lessons, sang,

²⁴⁵ Marianne Kaufmann, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 15, 2011.

²⁴⁶ Irene Kaufmann, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, May 20, 2011.

and received the education of which her generation had been deprived.²⁴⁷ Once a week, Marianne and Irene had piano lessons and took classes at an art studio, where Margot herself also painted. These activities involved many contacts outside of the German Jewish community and were the source of many strong friendships between Margot and Uruguayan gentiles²⁴⁸. Choir became a crucial part of the girls' life early on as well, and they became involved with a choir that sang on Sundays at different Catholic churches in Montevideo. Margot opened her house to the choir group for gatherings or rehearsals on a weekly basis and the members often joined the Kaufmann family for Jewish festivities. The family was also always invited to attend the performances at the churches on Sundays. Even though these activities took place outside of the German Jewish community that had been so important for Margot's own education, they provided the desired exposure to *Kultur* that Margot considered above all else important for her children.²⁴⁹

Although as an adult Irene remembers that Margot always differentiated between "us" (the Kaufmann family) and "them"(the Uruguayans), she did not in any way attempt to isolate her daughters from the gentile Uruguayans surrounding the family. Instead, Margot became connected and involved with her Uruguayan neighbors. During Jewish holidays, she invited the neighbors to participate and learn about her and her family's faith and traditions. At the same time, Margot respected and even partook in Christian holiday celebrations going even as far as to dress up as Santa Claus for the block one year.²⁵⁰ These relationships encouraged the adoption of many Uruguayan traditions and customs. Margot, for example, began to frequent the parades for carnival (*desfiles de carnaval*), which are a typical aspect of Uruguayan culture. She reflected

²⁴⁷ Margot Pelzel to Eva Wolf, September 1966.

²⁴⁸ Irene Kaufmann, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, May 20, 2011.

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*

²⁵⁰ Irene Kaufmann, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, May 20, 2011.

upon her adopted traits in a letter to Lorchen in 1998, where she pointed out how much more open she had become while in Uruguay. She was no longer distant when meeting someone new and instead always went in for the normal kiss on the cheek. She adopted the informal nature of Uruguayans and raised her children with these standards.²⁵¹ The friendships amongst neighbors mirrored those that the Garbatti family had sought in Prenzlauer Berg before the Nazi regime and fostered the same acceptance that Margot remembered from her childhood. Much like she had identified with German philosophy of life in the environment of Prenzlauer Berg, she was able to form a community within the *Punta Gorda* that allowed her to feel Uruguayan as well.

This community also provided Margot with opportunities to share and keep alive her family's story, since she had lost her family in Germany and her family in Uruguay had also passed early in her life. Her aunt Erna, who had helped the Pelzels come to Uruguay, had lived a lonely life in Montevideo and suffered repeatedly from long illnesses, eventually dying in 1944.²⁵² Adi, Erna's son, moved in with the Pelzel family after her death and left for Israel in June 1948.²⁵³ During his time in Israel, he located Ursula Werner, Margot's friend from Berlin.²⁵⁴ He lived in Israel for two years and then grew tired of the weather there and returned to Montevideo ill with malaria. Later he moved to Buenos Aires and began working at a travel agency.²⁵⁵ After his move, the Pelzel family never heard from him again, even though Margot tried to no avail for years to locate him.²⁵⁶ In 1950, Margot lost her mother, Hedwig, who died from complications with high blood pressure at the early age of 53.²⁵⁷ In 1964, Max, who had been sick for a year, made a surprising recovery and traveled for two weeks to Germany and

²⁵¹ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, 1998.

²⁵² Margot Pelzel to Edith Rosenthal, October 19, 1947.

²⁵³ Adi Rosenberg to Margot Pelzel, June 20th, 1948.

²⁵⁴ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, November 26, 1997.

²⁵⁵ Margot Pelzel, *Genealogia de la familia Pelzel*, 1993.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Margot Pelzel, *Genealogia de la familia Pelzel*, 1993.

another two to Israel. Since Margot had to stay at home with her daughters, Günter accompanied Max as he returned to Germany and visited his brother Moses in Israel.²⁵⁸ Max traveled as a “stateless” person as indicated by his travel documents.²⁵⁹ When the two returned from the trip, Max was in poor health. He died from heart failure in Dagobert’s arms on June 5, 1964.²⁶⁰ Margot and her brother were thus left as the sole survivors of the Pelzel family.²⁶¹ On December 5, 1969, Günter moved out of the house, leaving Margot alone to raise the children.²⁶² In July 1970, Dagobert had heart bypass surgery and less than a year later, on April 17, 1971, Margot received a call that he had suffered a fatal heart attack while at a movie theater.²⁶³ At the age of 47 she suddenly became the “last witness” to her family’s story.

She assumed the role of memory keeper by piecing together her history for others and by continuing her search for lost family members. In 1998, through an article in the *Berliner Aktuell*, she found a man, who possessed information concerning her aunt Frieda Wilk and cousin Taly, who had not been in contact with the Pelzels since 1940. She wrote to the publisher of the *Berliner Aktuell*, Roland Hentzschel, and through him found that on December 14, 1942, her two relatives had been on the 25th transport to Riga, the Latvian capital at the time under German control since July 1941. The Germans had established a ghetto there and in December 1941 shot around 26,000 Jews from Riga. Around 20,000 Jews from Germany and Austria were deported in 1941 to this ghetto and kept in the “German ghetto,” which was separate from the “Latvian ghetto.” Both the German and Latvian ghettos in Riga closed in 1943, and the living

²⁵⁸ Margot Pelzel to Boris Kastel and Eva Rothschild, August 11, 1964.

²⁵⁹ Max Pelzel, International E/D Card.

²⁶⁰ Margot Pelzel to Boris Kastel and Eva Rothschild, August 11, 1964.

²⁶¹ Irene Kaufmann, interview by author, Oxford, Mississippi, May 20, 2011.

²⁶² Irene Kaufmann, *Diario*, 1969.

²⁶³ Margot Pelzel, *Genealogia de la familia Pelzel*, 1993.

inmates were sent to the nearby Kaiserwald concentration camp.²⁶⁴ Frieda and Taly had been reported dead before that occurred. One of the largest missing pieces to her history equaled the whereabouts of her aunt Liesel, uncle Heinrich, and their daughters Susi and Reni Batist. She only knew that they had been deported to Poland in 1938, but Margot never found any other details. The unanswered questions led her to the discovery of many lost friends, but the missing pieces continued to haunt her.²⁶⁵

The later stages of Margot's life in Uruguay led her to an identity crisis but also reinforced the importance of maintaining her ties to Germany. Although accused by friends once of "living in the past,"²⁶⁶ Margot wrote that her family was the reason for her constant, conscious attempts to stay connected with her past. She reiterated that she had lived a life past Prenzlauer Berg, and her ties were not linked to nostalgia but to the knowledge that in order to keep her ancestors' stories alive, she had to remember. During this stage in her life, she was forced to accept that she no longer identified with one specific country and was instead "stuck in the middle."²⁶⁷ However, instead of assimilating completely in Uruguay to avoid this displacement, she saw herself as the "last witness" and believed that her relentless efforts to raise her daughters in an environment that mirrored her own childhood and to transmit the same values to her granddaughters were necessary to share her family's legacy.

²⁶⁴ "Riga," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed September 21, 2013, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005463>

²⁶⁵ Margot Pelzel to Martina Cotel, 2003.

²⁶⁶ Lorchen Samuel to Margot Pelzel, 1998.

²⁶⁷ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, 1998.

Staying Connected

In 1998, Margot wrote that “what one learns during childhood remains forever fundamental,” and her life embodied this belief as exemplified by close examination of Margot’s migration.²⁶⁸ Although she left Germany at the age of thirteen, Margot never abandoned her roots — valuing and honoring them until her death. Upon her arrival in Montevideo, she attempted to recreate her life in Prenzlauer Berg. She pursued the arts, played the recorder, attended the movies with friends on the same day of the week that she had in Germany, surrounded herself with the little family she had, and made her parents and brother her first priority. As an adult, she raised her family with the same values that her family had instilled in her during her years in Berlin. As a result, her daughters grew up in an environment that nurtured *Kultur*, encouraged acceptance, and valued family above all. Much like in Prenzlauer Berg, Margot exposed her daughters to a diverse neighborhood and welcomed all neighbors into her home, creating an environment that educated her daughters about inclusiveness and diversity.

Because of her steadfast loyalty to her childhood home, Margot was able to preserve aspects of her German Jewish identity: language, appreciation for knowledge, and above all *Kultur*. However, Margot’s contact with the Uruguayan community created countless bonds to this society. While she used the relationships with Uruguayan gentiles to share her story and educate them about German *Kultur*, she also absorbed aspects of the Uruguayan lifestyle and confessed often to identifying with her host country. She was known for organizing *asados* for the neighbors and friends, for leading groups to watch the parades during *carnaval*, and for joining in during the neighborhood Christmas festivities. At the same time, she was attentive to Uruguayan politics and received two national newspapers daily in order to stay informed about the country. She adopted the lifestyle of a Montevidean, spending the majority of her day in her

²⁶⁸ Margot Pelzel to Antje Kahl, March 31, 1998.

yard or at the beach and attending the *ferias*, street markets, every weekend.²⁶⁹ The everyday exposure to Uruguayan traditions and customs resulted in her adoption of these: informal language, hugs and kisses as greetings, and, as she noticed, laughing more. By the end of her life these relationships and lifestyle became her own, and she identified herself with the country that had saved her family. An analysis of her life reveals four facilitators that allowed Margot to nurture her connections to Germany while creating ties to Uruguay. These facilitators were her correspondence with family members, the community in Montevideo, the news media, and her descendants.

After the Pelzels' migration, Margot stayed close to those who were "first in her life" by writing letters. Corresponding with loved ones helped Margot stay connected with her German Jewish identity and provided a constant reinforcement of her language proficiency, her memory, and her cultural aptitude. Although the Pelzel family sometimes struggled financially, they continued to invest in paper and postage stamps as these connections were their most valued possessions. By mid-1940, several letters began arriving from new locations: Colombia, Argentina, China, Australia, Israel, and the United States. Margot continued writing and saved every letter. The correspondence continued until her death in 2008.

The network she had around the world only shared 13 years of life together in their place of origin, but their experiences bound them forever. Margot, who after 1971 was the only one left in Montevideo from her childhood in Prenzlauer Berg, relied on the people from her childhood, who were scattered around the world, to find understanding and camaraderie. Some relationships lasted through letters for over 50 years, and even though over 30 letters were exchanged between some friends, Germany continued to be the major topic of conversation.

²⁶⁹ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, February 2, 1998.

Margot tried reminding her friends and family of events that occurred during her thirteen years in Germany, but after 1950 many of her friends avoided discussing the past. Margot insisted on reliving their childhood through letters and reiterated often that it had, “little to do with ‘nostalgia’ and all to do with keeping the story for my granddaughters.”²⁷⁰ Margot saved all the letters and used them to fill in gaps of her memory when narrating her stories to her granddaughters or audiences such as the Prenzlauer Berg Museum in 1997.

The correspondence also encouraged appreciation for *Kultur*, since even in especially dire times, the letters arriving from Berlin always included opinions and discussions over the films, concerts, or literary pieces. This contact also stimulated Margot’s devotion to the pursuit of knowledge and culture, because it united her with her family and friends around the world. Margot learned this appreciation of culture in Berlin, and even though once in Montevideo, the living conditions forced her to give up formal education for work, she used every opportunity available to maintain her cultural aptitude. During her first years in Uruguay, Margot spent her nights breaking curfews and hiding in the closet with a flashlight in order to read books by German authors. Her outings with friends to concerts, plays, and operas were the highlights in her weeks. *Kultur* also provided her with topics to discuss in her correspondence with her family and friends spread around the world.

Margot also created and maintained sociocultural ties across geographic boundaries through the community she had in Uruguay. For almost twenty years, Margot was exclusively exposed to the German Jewish community, based on a common language, mutual support, and a shared appreciation for culture and knowledge. This micro-community afforded her the opportunity to continue living among those who related to the same aspects of life as she did. Since she was not able to attend school in Montevideo, Margot relied on her German Jewish

²⁷⁰ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, October 23, 1998.

study group to enhance her knowledge and explore more complex aspects of classical music and its composers, German literature, art, opera, theater, and film. To Margot, culture meant more than religious affiliation, and this belief is evident in a 1998 letter in which she talked about her Uruguayan son-in-law: “[He] is not Jewish, but he achieves the highest level of culture, which is fundamental to me.”²⁷¹

The German Jewish community also provided an environment that encouraged maintaining the German language as the main methods of communication and allowed Margot to retain her level of proficiency until her death. The infrastructure that the German Jews created in Montevideo afforded members sufficient support, which made looking outside the community unnecessary. Until her children were born, Margot did not step out into the Uruguayan society, because she could obtain the necessities (culture, education, work, and friendship) from the German Jewish microstructure. In the mid-1950s, her exposure to members of the Uruguayan community increased drastically. Her close relationships with her neighbors, her husband’s business, the children’s friends at the public schools, the children’s tight choir groups, and the children’s other activities allowed Margot to leave the German Jewish sphere and reap the benefits of her host culture. She particularly admired the openness of the people, who never laughed at her, or any other foreigner, for making mistakes in the language or having an accent. She also raved about their eagerness to hear about her life in Germany and their interest in learning about her religious festivities and beliefs. She often invited these friends to her house and exposed them to her culture, music, cuisine, customs, religion, and family history. Margot reinforced her memories of Germany when she opened her home to non-German Jews and shared her story. When she could not recall certain details of her history, Margot relied on

²⁷¹ Margot Pelzel to Lorchen Samuel, July 16, 1998.

newspapers and magazines, which not only updated her on the current situation in Germany but also reported on Holocaust survivors around the world.

The largest missing pieces in Margot's stories included family members and friends who disappeared after the Pelzels left Berlin. Around 1944, the family began to locate some lost friends and family around the world with the help of the *Aufbau* publication. The *Aufbau* was a newspaper in German published in New York City, and between September 1, 1944 and September 27, 1946, it released lists of 33,557 Jewish Holocaust survivors in Europe.²⁷² The information was not always complete, and sometimes it only included the name and the post-war location of the survivor, which meant that Margot had to continue reading the news and researching to find more details on the survivors. By 1946 the Pelzels had located their friends: Edith Rosenthal, Lorchen Samuel, and Erika (last name unknown), Max's brother Moses in Israel, and Hedwig's brother Heine in Shanghai. These resurfacing members of their Prenzlauer Berg family solidified the connections that Margot had to her home. Therefore, she continued to respond to any publication that asked for information on Prenzlauer Berg in hopes of gaining more information in return. Margot received the *Berliner Aktuell* publication until her death and with its help was able to find many of her classmates from Berlin. Each rekindled friendship involved exchanges of stories, memories, and names that brought Margot closer to her childhood and increased the connections to that life. However, these resources also provided some horrible details on the fates of less fortunate family members, like her grandmother Henriette, her aunt Frieda, and her cousin Taly. The developments and grim discoveries solidified Margot's sense of responsibility as a survivor also due to her high regard for heritage. She knew that her history could end with her.

²⁷² "Aufbau Database," Jewish Gen, accessed March 2013, <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/holocaust/aufbau.htm>

The last factor that helped Margot maintain her sociocultural connections was her descendants. As early as 1971, Margot was the only remaining member of the Pelzel and Garbitti family and referred to herself as the “last witness.” She had lost her home at 13 and began working at 14. She later lost her mother at 27, her father at 40, and her brother at 47, which means that she lived 37 years in Uruguay as the sole member of the family. Her sense of responsibility encouraged her to pass on what she had learned to her daughters so that they could reap the benefits she had enjoyed in pre-Nazi Berlin. She raised her children with the same appreciation for family and culture that she had. She attended all of her daughters’ lessons, concerts, and fieldtrips, and she was always present in their lives. She raised Marianne and Irene with the language, the stories, the culture, and the knowledge of her past. Her openness concerning her childhood continually provided chances to discuss, research, and remember those 13 years and reinforce the sociocultural ties between her homes.

As I was growing up, she encouraged me to learn German and even sat down with a small chalkboard on weekends to teach me. When I decided to pursue German in high school, Margot was enthusiastic, whereas her friend Hanne Blitzer questioned why I would ever want to learn “their” language.²⁷³ For Margot it was never their language, because the Nazis were never able to take it away from her. She was able to look past the horrific acts of the Nazi regime in order to salvage her family’s heritage and history.

Passing on her family’s story was of paramount importance to Margot. After retelling every story to my sister and me numerous times, she set a goal to be reached with my help: to write a book about her story for future generations. She began by writing the introduction, which read: “After me, there will be no one who to ask the questions about what happened to our family, what happened during those years in those places that were so special to me. All I can do

²⁷³ Hanne Blitzer, interview by author, Montevideo, Uruguay, July 3, 2011.

is write down my memories, so that if one day you want to know something about our family, you might find the answer, or at least hints to help you figure it out.”²⁷⁴ Margot died before she could achieve her goal, but she left behind letters, documents, and other resources that would allow me to make sure that all of her work over the years had not been in vain. She had also transmitted to me the sense of responsibility that would see me through the process of writing so that even though the Nazis had succeeded in taking her innocence and splintering her family and friends, they could not take her memories, her culture, or her story.

Our earlier conception of immigrant and migrant no longer suffice. The word immigrant evokes images of permanent rupture, of the uprooted, the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture. Now, a new kind of migrating population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social focus. [...] We call this new conceptualization, “transnationalism,” and describe the new type of migrants as transmigrants.²⁷⁵

This new concept is currently used to describe the immigrant or “transmigrant” of this generation that reaps the benefits of Internet, smartphones, and social media and is able to easily maintain sociocultural connections across geographic borders. Margot Pelzel was able to achieve “transnationalism” without the benefits of our age of technology, due to the four aforementioned facilitators, and as a result she adopted what I refer to as a transnational identity. The maintenance of networks and patterns of life that encompassed both her life in Germany and Uruguay transformed the way in which she identified herself and also how others identified her. As she held to her German Jewish identity, she felt and was perceived as an “outsider” in Montevideo, but as she adopted aspects of a Uruguayan identity, she felt and was seen as an

²⁷⁴ Margot Pelzel to Martina and Maia Coteló, *Last Witness*, 1997.

²⁷⁵ Glick Schiler, N., L. Basch, and C. Blanc-Szanton, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*, 1.

“outsider” in Berlin. Her transnational identity displaced her in a sense, but it also bound her, her daughters, and her granddaughters to both of the places she refers to as “home.”

Margot created networks and shared numerous activities in Montevideo with Uruguayan gentiles during the second half of her life, and due to these connections, she began to refer to Montevideo as her home. Simultaneously, she maintained the networks and activities associated with Germany, which kept her connected to that country. Since Margot was not able to maintain constant contact with her country of origin, as migrants can now, she used the four facilitators to nurture those connections. Her activities within the German Jewish community in Montevideo and the networks that resulted from her correspondence reinforced the German Jewish identity. Margot passed on this sense of a transnational identity to her daughters and granddaughters. Over 75 years after Margot’s migration, her daughters and granddaughters recognize, much like Margot, Montevideo as their home, but the ties to Germany remain prevalent enough that her four descendants find mentioning their German heritage crucial when speaking of their place of origin.

Epilogue

But do you know this idea of the imaginary homeland? Once you set out from shore on your little boat, once you embark, you'll never truly be at home again. What you've left behind exists only in your memory, and your ideal place becomes some strange imaginary concoction of all you've left behind at every stop.²⁷⁶

My grandmother achieved what many of my contemporaries would consider the impossible. Without phones, emails, Internet, or low-fare plane tickets, she salvaged her connection to her family, her culture, and her place of origin. She salvaged her heritage for us, her family. She shared with us the home that only survived in her memory. After her forced migration in 1937, she maintained and constructed sociocultural connections across geographical borders that kept her tied to both her place of origin and her new “home” in Montevideo, and, therefore, allowed me to grow up with both. When my family migrated from Uruguay to the United States, I realized the extent of her influence. It was clear that I was a foreigner, but from where? When asked about my origins, I would answer, “I was born in Uruguay, but I have German citizenship, because my grandparents were German.” I soon realized that the majority of the people asking were not interested in what my passport said, but for some reason I found that detail crucial to my identity. I had never been to Germany, I did not speak German, and my knowledge of German history was minimal, but I found my “Germanness” worthy of noting when meeting complete strangers.

After my extensive analysis of Margot's life, I have concluded that her conscious and unconscious decisions while in Montevideo rescued that piece of me. Friends of Margot's, who also relocated to Uruguay, raised grandchildren who do not associate with Germany and who are unknowledgeable regarding the origin of their grandparents' struggles. Avoiding talk of Germany, these grandparents moved to Montevideo as teenagers and never looked back. Cutting

²⁷⁶ Claire Messud, *The Woman Upstairs*, (New York: Random House Inc., 2013), 107.

connections with people from their past and neglecting their childhood memories, these grandparents whittled their beginnings in Germany down to this: They left Germany because of the Nazis. Because of Margot, I always knew better and wanted to learn more. Her decisions to write and preserve letters, maintain relationships across continents, save old documents, and stay connected to the German Jewish community in Montevideo allowed me to continue to salvage her story even after her death.

Living in an age when technology makes communication across geographic borders effortless and instant, it is easy to lose appreciation for how challenging it was to maintain these connections in the past. Despite technological advances and easy, physical access across geographical borders, I have little to no contact with my childhood friends, yet I still claim two homes: Montevideo, Uruguay and Oxford, Mississippi. It has only been thirteen years since my family's move from Uruguay to the United States, but because of Margot, I know that I cannot rely on only my memories. Memories blur, fade, change, and disappear. My analysis of Margot's story presents how crucial it is, even in today's world, for immigrants to make conscious decisions to maintain the connections between two homes. Our home—physical and abstract—mark our identities.

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