

ABSTRACT

Otto and Hilde's Journey to Waco, Texas: A Narrative of Migration in the 1930's

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This Honor Thesis builds on archival materials at Baylor University, providing a cohesive narrative of the Rosenfeld-Levy family, which offers insights into the migration process during the 1930s. Otto and Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld were a Jewish couple that immigrated to America during Hitler's reign of power and built a rare foods business in Waco. Their story mirrors the pain and discrimination that hundreds of thousands of other Jews faced during this time period. Their immigration into America proved almost impossible until Mr. Mailander, a local rabbi in Waco, sponsored their immigration. Upon arriving in America, the Rosenfeld-Levys relied solely on the help of others as they traveled from New York to Waco, and survived on insufficient jobs until Otto and Hilde opened their grocery store. This store became the O&H Rare Foods store, which attracted people from all over Texas and became a landmark within Waco. They committed their lives to the store, spending 50 years working nonstop until they retired. Their life story provides Waco with a story of success from humble beginnings.

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OTTO AND HILDE'S JOURNEY TO WACO, TEXAS: A NARRATIVE OF
MIGRATION IN THE 1930S

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PREFACE

The main purpose of this thesis is to create a cohesive narrative of Otto and Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, which can serve as the backbone for further research on them in the future. As of now, only short articles have been posted on Otto and Hilde, and no comprehensive story exists to date. The use of archival material and interviews provides a basis to make deeper connections from their story with the rest of immigration occurring throughout the 1930s, and supplies readers with more information about Waco's history.

The story of the Levy-Rosenfelds and their migration to the United States has a personal appeal due to its connection to my background. Being from Kaiserslautern, Germany, their story mentions places and moments in history that were placed just miles away from my hometown and motivated me to find more answers about the place I call home. It also reaches out to my curiosity concerning the history of Waco, and the way of life before my time at Baylor. As I ventured into the background research, and their lives at the Texas Collection, I was astounded by their story, and the unique perspective their experiences offer about Nazi Germany and Waco. It makes the stories of the Jewish plight more personable, and their journey to America more intriguing. Despite their losses, they persisted and eventually succeeded in Waco. Their efforts to survive in Waco produced an establishment that had a larger personal impact than most companies and businesses we see today. The story is one of oppression, loss, and sacrifice, but also one of love, success, and the building of a unique relationship between Hilde and Otto Levy-Rosenfeld.

This thesis uses information from Otto and Hilde's interview in 1993, as well as newly archived material from The Texas Collection. The Texas Collection held personal documents found at O&H Rare Foods and at Otto and Hilde's home. This material made each statement found in the thesis more realistic, as each document shared a piece of their actual lives. It contains pamphlets, letters, a customer ledger, bank statements, photos and newspaper article clippings. It also confirmed the many dates and facts found in the Levy-Rosenfeld interview. Outside knowledge came from many books, and web articles about the historical developments impacting Jews abroad during this time period. The background research covered immigration of Jews back in the 1800s, how Jews were treated during the 1930s, and the stories of other Jews to gauge the uniqueness of the Levy-Rosenfeld story. All this combined with the interview was able to create the most comprehensive story of them to date.

The process of writing this thesis involved much continual feedback from both my director and my trusted friends. While the Levy-Rosenfeld story contains many tantalizing tangents that could each grow into their own idea, my editors kept me focused on the main points I wanted to concentrate on in their tale. As the pages grew, I learned and improved my handling of larger documents, how to write an outline, found patterns in my wording, strived to find a viable voice, and made writing a new and exciting subject for myself. While this thesis is just the beginning of my foray into writing academically, it has become an inspiration to improve myself and reveal just what could be possible as one can adapt and change their writing style and technique. I plan to continue to write and develop my understanding of humanities and writing, in general, to become more well-rounded and prove to myself how much fun learning can be.

CHAPTER ONE

Migration Patterns from Nazi Germany & Otto and Hilde's Background

Otto and Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld were Jewish-German citizens that grew up and married each other in Germany and stayed there until their departure in 1938. Throughout this time, they experienced and lived through events that led up to the rise of the Nazi Party and the resulting consequences felt by German Jewry. The plight of the German-Jewish people during that time period heavily influenced Jewish people's decisions in leaving Germany and taking their chances in America and other countries. Many factors such as political shifts in power in the U.S. and Europe dictated the movement of more than 360,000 Jews out of Germany and into other countries over the course of 8 years from 1933-1940.¹ Understanding the perspective of the German Jews as time elapsed helps illustrate the origins of Otto and Hilde's experiences, which affected them through their immigration into Waco, Texas and beyond.

Otto and Hilde's Historical Background

Otto Levy was born on April 18, 1907, in Illingen, Saar to Johanna and Otto Levy, who worked in the cattle industry, dealing with other farmers.² Otto had three siblings: his younger brother Max, his older sister Hertha, and his younger sister Rae.

¹ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "German Jewish Refugees 1933-1939," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Accessed 14 January 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468>.

² While the Saarland is known for its fertile soil for agriculture, less fertile highlands throughout the Saarland would usually focus on stock farming, which had more success in these regions.

During World War One, Otto's father served in the German military near the Russian border from 1915-1918, until he was wounded. During this time, Otto remembers being forced into hiding in a basement, as planes might bomb the town as the German "Big Bertha" cannons roared about 50 miles from his house. Despite this rather turbulent upbringing, Otto describes himself as living a normal childhood in Germany.³

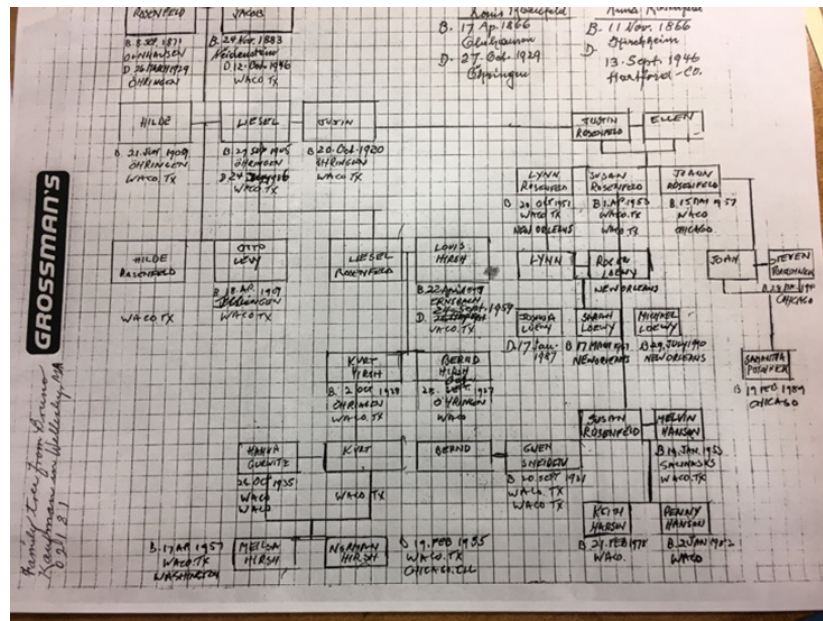


Figure 1: Family Tree for Otto and Hilde's Families⁴

Otto received only a partial education for eight years at his local synagogue before working at a department store internship for three years. His chief duties entailed sweeping the floor, shoveling coal and washing windows until he began to work in sales in his third year. The pay was about five dollars a month for the first year, or \$68 in today's currency, increasing to ten dollars a month for the next year and so forth.⁵ Otto's

³Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, interview by Rebecca Sharpless, *Levy Interview No. 1*, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, August 18, 1993, 8.

⁴ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Family Tree, Box 1, Folder 2, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

⁵ United States Department of Labor, "CPI Inflation Calculator," *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, Accessed March 2, 2017, <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/05/>.

parents had decided to place Otto in the internship because the department store business was becoming extremely popular at the time. When he was nineteen, Otto left home to work in Cologne for an old friend in 1926 for about a year. He learned how to be a successful salesman there, and from there moved to Esslingen am Neckar to work at a glove-manufacturing business known as *Haug und Wild* for 10 years. In the first year, Otto helped produce the gloves, but within a year asked his boss for a position as a traveling salesman. In his first deal, he sold an entire week's production of gloves to a dealer in Ulm and quickly became popular with his boss. His boss decided to let him keep his new position, where he would travel by train all around Germany to sell the company's product. Within the years he worked there, he was the only person needed to sell the entire company's merchandise. In 1936, his boss decided to offer Otto a partnership with him and his company. However, Otto had to decline this offer, since he was already planning on leaving Germany to immigrate to America.

Hilde Rosenfeld was born on June 21, 1909, in Oehringen, a small town known for its fruit in the state of Baden-Württemberg. She too grew up with a father in the cattle business. She had an older sister named Liesel, and a younger brother named Justin. Liesel would eventually marry a good neighbor by the name of Mr. Hirsch and would be an important couple in Otto and Hilde's life. When World War I began, her father's old age prevented him from being drafted into the military, and he was unable to maintain his cattle business. Her mother worked hard as a bookkeeper for farmers and small businesses, providing her with some income to help sustain the family. Hilde had a more extensive education than Otto, attending the private all-girls school named Schwäbisch Hall as a child. Later, she attended a business school in Heilbronn called

Minerva School.⁶ Around this time period, from 1921-1924, Germany experienced massive inflation.⁷ The inflation made money almost worthless, to the point where Hilde remembers being given 50 million marks just to buy lunch in school. Hilde's parent's lack of equity left them with nothing, and Hilde had to begin work after her father passed away in 1929. For 4 months, Hilde worked for a firm that harvested prunes to make schnapps, which gave her enough money to travel around Germany. Both of her parents had wanted their children to travel, so they could experience the culture and education that larger cities could offer. Hilde thus traveled to Frankfurt, Cologne, and Essen to enhance her education outside of their small town. Eventually, she met Mr. Kaufman, a real estate agent in their congregation who worked with barons and princes on land settlement disputes. He asked Hilde if she was willing to take a position as his secretary.



Figure 2: Passport Photos of Otto and Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld⁸

Otto and Hilde both grew up in practicing Jewish families. Their families went to synagogue, kept a kosher kitchen, and participated in many of the Jewish religious and

⁶ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 1, 14.

⁷ Adam Fergusson, *When Money Dies* (United States: William Kimber & Co. Ltd., 1975), 10.

⁸ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Passport Photos, Box 1, Folder 1, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

social rituals.⁹ The only difference was that Otto's family adhered more strictly to tradition than did Hilde's family. While they were growing up, Otto and Hilde do not recall any form of discrimination towards them based on their religion.¹⁰ As children, Otto and Hilde had many Jewish and Gentile friends. It was not until 1933 that Hilde and Otto began facing discrimination based on their heritage.

Historical Background to Hitler's Rise to Power

At the end of the First World War in 1918, Germany lay defeated and the Allies imposed severe war reparations and restrictions on Germany. The Weimar Republic was one of the first continental attempts to establish a parliamentary democracy after the Kaiser was removed from the empire. Before the war, Wilhelm II had been the residing German *Kaiser* or emperor. He fled to the Netherlands by the end of the war, leaving the German empire without a leader. The Weimar Republic was the government from 1919 to 1933 that compensated for the loss of the Kaiser. The Republic took its name from Weimar because Weimar was the city that hosted the national assembly and where a new constitution for Germany was drafted.

At the beginning of the Weimar Republic, Jews were becoming a declining minority demographically and economically.¹¹ The birth rate of Jews had been slowing down since 1880, due to the intensified urbanization throughout the period. Two-thirds of these Jews lived in urban areas, with the majority in Berlin. In addition, continued

⁹Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 1, 26.

¹⁰ Ibid, Pg 8.

¹¹ Avraham Barkai, *From Boycott to Annihilation: The Economic Struggle of German Jews, 1933-1943* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 1.

emigration out of Germany by the younger population leading up to 1933 led to an overaging of the Jewish population. From 1925 to 1933, the population over 40 jumped from 28% to 33%.¹² Most Jewish citizens were involved in the commercial sector, specifically in the retail section. This trend had shown very little change since 1907.¹³ Many Jews in the industry sector maintained open retail outlets or had positions in the sales departments of larger firms.¹⁴ The majority of Jews were listed as self-employed.¹⁵ In 1910, the population of Jews in Germany was approximately 535,000 and was 525,000 by 1933, just 1% of the total population.¹⁶

Due to the leadership void left behind by Wilhelm II, foreign relations changed since the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles, and due to increased poverty from inflation starting in 1921, Germans grew bitter towards the Weimar Republic because of its perceived lack of action to resist these changes. Many felt that Germany would never recover from World War I and the damage inflicted by the treaty of Versailles to the German economy and government. Germany had to accept full blame for the war and pay war reparations, equivalent to \$442 billion by today's standards.¹⁷ Furthermore, it was forced to disarm its military and give up substantial territorial areas to neighboring countries. The German people remained bitter towards these issues, as they perceived themselves as victims of ill will from victorious countries. In addition, they felt

¹² Ibid, 2.

¹³ Ibid, 2.

¹⁴ Ibid, 2.

¹⁵ Ibid, 2.

¹⁶ Ibid, 1.

¹⁷ United States Department of Labor, "CPI Inflation Calculator."

abandoned by their government, as the Weimar Republic was perceived as a weak government for accepting these terms. These feelings festered until the 1930s when Adolf Hitler was announced as Chancellor.

Because Otto and Hilde were not very politically active in the early parts of their life, they did not notice or become aware of Hitler or the Nazi Party until 1933, despite Hitler's political activity since 1920. Hitler was instrumental in the formation of the National Socialist German Worker's Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* – the NSDAP). The party had formerly been known as the German Worker's Party, was founded in 1920 by Anton Drexler, and espoused initially a nationalist, anti-big business stance. It was not until the 1930s that the party explicitly embraced anti-Semitic views. From the start, however, the Nazi Party used scientific racism to justify an ideal community consisting of “racially desirable” Germans.

Adolf Hitler became the leader of the NSDAP in 1921 and began to solidify his political standing and influence. He blamed the Jews and the Weimar Republic for the grievances and suffering of Germany after World War I and called for a unified Germany that would end the poverty and decline of the nation. Hitler attempted a coup on the Weimar Republic in 1923, known as the Beer Hall Putsch. He marched in Munich with thousands of other men and attempted to seize the city's center. The coup failed, and Hitler was charged with treason and imprisoned. However, Hitler's act became widely publicized, which gave more attention to his ideas. Within nine months, Hitler was released from prison. The Great Depression continued to undermine the Weimar Republic. Hitler used these grievances to his advantage as he rose to power. In 1932, the Nazi party took the majority of seats in Parliament, and Hitler ran for president.

Although he lost, his popularity as a candidate only kept growing, and the new President Hindenburg appointed Hitler as the new Chancellor on January 30, 1933.¹⁸ While the German President is only a figure in the government that represents the public and has no real power, he elects the chancellor based on election results, who is the figure of power in the executive government.

The Nazi Party's Oppression of the German Jewish Population

In the beginning months of Hitler's reign as Chancellor, Jewish citizens quickly came to face increased levels of hate crimes. Violence against Jews had begun even before Hitler was elected, due to the battle between the NSDAP and communist parties as they vied for control of the state. With the advent of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, or storm detachment), the police now worked for the SA, who patrolled the streets with rifles. Most Jews felt scared to report anything to the authorities, now that the police force could not be trusted, as the police were part of an ever-growing anti-Semitic government. The violence began against the *Ostjuden*, or Jews from Eastern Europe. These Jews adhered strictly to their beliefs and were easily recognizable based on their attire. This made it simple to mobilize xenophobic animosity towards them.¹⁹ By March of 1933, signs began to appear on store windows, encouraging Germans to only buy at German stores and stating that Jews were not wanted in these areas. Soon, benches, cinemas, and other public places began to sport such signs.

¹⁸ William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 130-131.

¹⁹ Barkai 1989,14.

On April 1, 1933, an organized boycott by the NSDAP party effectively blocked access to Jewish products, businesses, lawyers, and doctors. The boycott was officially announced as a defensive measure against the “atrocities propaganda” spread by Jewish organizations. However, there was no context to this attack, as many Jewish presses were cautious at best in their viewings and publications at this time. The real intention of the boycott was to allow non-Jewish competitors to succeed over the Jewish establishments. On that day, Hitler Youth and SA stood in front of stores to prevent others from entering. Those who did enter were photographed and stamped, to be displayed in the local paper the next day. As the boycott continued, some were smeared with vulgar words, and some were smashed in, with the store left plundered. While many non-Jewish Germans were elated to begin their attack against the Jewish people, others decided to fight back and go to Jewish stores specifically to reassure the store owners. However, the majority remained indifferent to the act or even enjoyed it. This boycott was the first successful organized act against the Jews that tightened the screw of economic discrimination.

Hitler continued to gain control of the German people through manipulation of media and education. One such example is the Hitler Youth, which dated back to 1923, had over 100,000 members by 1933, and grew as other youth movements were banned in Germany. By 1936, membership increased to 4 million. The youth movement indoctrinated children to follow Nazi ideology and trained them for the Storm Trooper group, or SA, but eventually also included activities that resembled military training in hopes of creating soldiers faithful to the Nazi cause. In 1933, Hitler Youth members encouraged increasingly hostile boycotting of Jewish stores and led riots targeting Jewish

stores. Propaganda was rapidly produced, defaming the large Jewish firms for purported corruption. Although their size protected them from violence, smaller Jewish-owned shops were not sheltered from the brutality either. These events began to make German Jews question the connection between their ethnic identity and citizenship, as many suddenly felt that they were not wanted in Germany anymore. When German Jewry attempted to contact American Jewry for support in protesting the movement against the Jews, the German government took this as an act of rebellion and intensified its efforts to boycott Jewish-owned stores.²⁰ The month of October 1933 not only displayed the Nazi attitude toward Jewish citizens but also showed the non-Jewish population beginning to unite through the use of propaganda.

One week after April 1, the Law for the Reestablishment of the Professional Civil Service was enacted. It forced civil servants of non-Aryan origin to retire immediately. It obliged all civil servants, including lawyers and physicians, to prove their Aryan descent, lest they be legally excluded. However, the definition of non-Aryan was difficult to establish. The Association of Jewish War Veterans was able to directly convince President Hindenburg to intervene and limit the scope of the law. Anyone connected to these veterans by blood would be exempted from this law, which surprisingly included a great number of the German Jews. While the immediate impact of this law was minor, it began to encourage others to attempt to oust Jewish people from their jobs. By 1935, the Reich Citizenship Law directly forced Jewish civil servants from their positions.

²⁰ Ibid, 17.

Otto and Hilde were directly affected by the consequences of the sudden political shift in power. Many stores and services began to close their doors to known Jewish customers. This made Jewish people limit their interactions with one another. However, the most difficult change for both Otto and Hilde was the loss of friends who were afraid of becoming affiliated with Jews. Hilde speaks of being popular when she was young, and then suddenly understanding that she was a danger to others, because her close friends would only come at night to visit, for fear that neighbors would see.²¹ Otto remembers losing a specific friend who refused to talk to him and only later whistled to him from across the street, which Otto took as, "I got you in my heart, but I can't talk to you anymore."²² Otto's father was unable to sustain his family due to other farmers refusing to deal with him, and so Otto and his sisters Hertha and Rae took it upon themselves to take care of the family financially. Otto's brother Max lived at home but was not capable of earning enough income for the family.

Hilde frequently talked about the paranoia she felt when the doorbell or telephone rang, knowing that it could possibly be the Gestapo coming to take her away. The Gestapo was formed on April 26, 1933, by Hermann Göring, combining several service police agencies of Prussia into one. The group was given the right to investigate any cases of treason, sabotage, and dissenting viewpoints in Germany, and in 1936 was granted the ability to imprison people *carte blanche*, or without judicial review. The Gestapo quickly suppressed or incarcerated political opponents of the Nazi Party, and

²¹ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 1, 48.

²²Ibid, 43. Additionally, Hilde and Otto still did not have a native mastery of English at the time of the interview, so some grammatical errors may be found in this source and other direct quotes.

carefully kept any dissenting viewpoints under close observation. Thus, Otto's and Hilde's families stayed away from synagogues during this time.²³ While it was possible to still go to the temple in their towns, Otto's and Hilde's families agreed that it was too risky, as the Gestapo could arrest one at any time. On November 9, 1938, most synagogues in Germany were destroyed during Kristallnacht, as part of a large pogrom that also demolished most Jewish-owned businesses and homes.

Financial pressures resulting from Anti-Semitic laws made it difficult to survive in Germany. While Otto's success allowed him to support his family in 1933, his father was unable to work anymore due to his official branded status as a Jew. Otto was forced to leave his parents and his sister in Germany as he immigrated to America in 1938. Due to debt and lack of substantial income, his family was evicted from its three-story house and sent to live in government houses in 1940.

Jews witnessed the propaganda against them and Nazi soldiers marching in formation into towns. However, many Jews believed that the anti-Semitism would not advance any further than the small riots and boycotts. Hilde remembers her uncle watching the Nazis march outside his window, and saying, "What you worry? They cannot exist. They cannot get nowhere."²⁴ Despite these early problems, according to Hilde, many Jews felt comfortable staying in Germany, and most were still financially stable enough to support themselves. Many older Jewish people still felt connected to Germany, especially because many were veterans and had fought for their adopted

²³ Otto and Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, interview by Rebecca Sharpless, *Levy Interview No. 2*, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, August 25, 1993, 10.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 45-46.

country during World War I. In fact, one of the original goals of Nazi Germany was to force the Jewish people to emigrate out of Germany. However, Jews suffered a heavy emigration tax and were prevented from withdrawing all their money from the German banks. There was an immediate increase in the emigration out of Germany, up to about 37,000 in 1933.²⁵ This was a substantial increase to the steady decline of about 6,000 Jews per year since 1925. Most of those who immigrated were leaving because they were politically active in the German government, not because of the anti-Semitic views prevalent since 1933. Most of this initial wave of immigrants moved to neighboring countries such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Despite this, most were recaptured in 1940 during Germany's conquest of its neighboring countries. In addition, most of these emigrating people were young adults, around 20-30 years old, who had little to no traditional ties to Germany. The older and more influential Jewish population stayed in Germany due to their ability to survive the increasing financial and social pressures, and their ties to Germany from World War I. There were others who simply read the signs of the times, and decided to emigrate. Both Otto and Hilde had not met each other in 1933 and were unable to emigrate until after their marriage in 1938.

Hilde and Otto were part of an increasing number of Jews deciding to leave Germany. The number of emigrants leaving Germany remained steady until 1934. During 1934, the United States, Britain, and the rest of Europe cut off access to their countries using strict immigration laws. In addition, the political furor of 1933 had died down, making it seem viable to live on in Germany. However, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 were enacted prohibited German Jews from citizenship within the Reich. Despite

²⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "German Jewish Refugees 1933-1939."

these decrees, the rates of emigres did not increase significantly during these years. Many Jews at the time felt a degree of predictability and hope within the status quo. Most of the immigrants who left during the thirties moved to Palestine. Zionism was their frequent inspiration, especially robust since the rise of Hitler in Germany. The basic idea was for Jews to emigrate from their countries of assimilation to a nation of their own abroad. The majority of these newcomers were the elite religious who wanted to help establish and build Israel. South America was another continent that accepted Jewish immigrants, due to more relaxed immigration policies than those of Britain or America. Even places such as Shanghai became popular destinations, despite the distance and cultural differences Shanghai had compared to their German home. This continual shifting of political choices made it difficult to know how to react to the current trends.

What was the situation in the United States? In 1924, the Immigration Act set forth a quota system that granted residency depending on an immigrant's country of birth. However, this meant that many immigrants had to wait for years on a list until they were given a spot. After the Great Depression in 1929, President Herbert Hoover decided that all immigrants had to prove they would not become "public charge", i.e. be unable to support themselves financially.²⁶ Later in July of 1938, President Roosevelt established stricter laws for immigrants to enter the United States, such as health checks on all immigrants. It was so strict that throughout the 1930s, despite lowered immigration quotas, the U.S. quota was never met fully except in 1939. The economic fear, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism that was appearing throughout the United States kept the

²⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "United States Policy and its Impact on European Jews," *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Accessed 17th January 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007652>.

quotas from being filled, despite the thousands of German-Jewish applicants desperately seeking refuge. By 1940, when European political tension was running high, America feared that Germany was attempting to send spies into America, disguised as refugees.²⁷ Thus, each refugee was thoroughly scanned, which made it only harder to enter the United States.

Jewish emigration from Germany suddenly doubled from about 40,000 in 1933 to 80,000 in 1939. This was due to increased assaults on Jews and the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. During this “Night of Broken Glass,” German troops plundered and destroyed Jewish synagogues, homes, and businesses on November 9-10, 1938. The violence was instigated primarily by Nazi Party officials and Hitler Youth. By the end, over 250 temples had been destroyed, and 7,500 Jewish businesses had been plundered or confiscated. At least 91 Jewish lives were claimed by Kristallnacht, and up to 30,000 Jewish males were arrested and taken to concentration camps. The whole event erupted due to a public outcry over the assassination of Ernst von Rath, a German embassy official in Paris who was shot by a young Polish Jew named Herschel Grynszpan. In addition, the Nazis had increased their attempts to financially subdue the Jewish population by seizing Jewish-owned businesses. These businesses were then reopened under the control of Aryan owners.

²⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

Otto's and Hilde's Migration to Waco, Texas

Otto's and Hilde's fate was permanently changed when the Nazis forced political enemies and Jews out of their homes and instigated a mass emigration out of Germany. Other countries such as America responded to this crisis with tighter immigration laws due to xenophobia and economic fear, reducing the chances of successful immigration worldwide. Otto and Hilde met in 1933 in unlikely circumstances, thanks to the brief imprisonment of Mr. Kaufman and his decision to keep Hilde close to him in Stuttgart. Hilde met Otto there and quickly fell in love. Although the need to leave Germany became more apparent, Otto and Hilde found it nearly impossible to immigrate to America without a sponsor. They were lucky to come into contact with Mr. Fred Mailander, a local rabbi in Waco, who was willing to sign an affidavit for them and to write a letter to the American immigration consul in Germany on their behalf. This played a pivotal role in reducing the wait time for their application assessment and eventual acceptance. After a physical examination, the Levy-Rosenfelds packed their things and sailed from Hamburg to New York. Once in New York, they received assistance from the Jewish Helps Committee, which gave them tickets to travel to Waco. The migration of the Levy-Rosenfelds was made possible by people who extended compassion to them, which gives a unique perspective on refugee immigration.

Hilde Rosenfeld and Otto Levy Get Married; Jewish Emigration Begins

On March 18, 1933, some twenty Jews were arrested by the Nazis in Oehringen and transported to Heilbronn at around 3 AM.²⁸ Among them was Mr. Kaufman, Hilde's employer. He was an older man who worked real estate for influential clients such as barons and princes and known for his generosity to those around him. He and his wife had only one daughter, already married to a lawyer. While the reason for the relocation of these twenty Jewish Germans to Heilbronn is unknown, the Gestapo had already begun to incarcerate perceived political opponents of the Nazis. Although Mr. Kaufman was not a politically active figure, he had dealings with wealthy and influential people, which made him a target of the Nazi Party. When Hilde realized that he had been taken, she visited him in jail to help him out. However, the Nazi guards refused to leave but rather listened in on Hilde and Mr. Kaufman's conversation.²⁹ During the discussion, Mr. Kaufman wrote some of his clients' information on toilet paper and told Hilde to contact them for help. No one came to his aid. After about five days, the Gestapo decided to release Mr. Kaufman, probably because Mr. Kaufman had nothing to offer the Nazis. After staying the night in Heilbronn with his niece, he called Hilde to ask her to gather his holdings and flee with him and his wife to Switzerland. Upon hearing about this plan from her, Hilde's family prevented her from leaving with Mr. Kaufman. They needed Hilde to help take care of the house, due to the recent death of her father and were also not fond of Mr. Kaufman. She decided to only gather and give him his holdings, but when she arrived in Heilbronn to meet him, the Nazis were already there waiting for her.

²⁸ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 1, 48.

²⁹ Ibid, 49.

It turned out the telephone conversation that Hilde had with Mr. Kaufman had been bugged; even Mr. Kaufman's chauffeur who had taken her there was part of the Gestapo.³⁰

After being held in Heilbronn for three days, Mr. Kaufman and Hilde decided not to go back to Oehringen, and instead stayed in Stuttgart. Mr. Kaufman had nephews who were prominent lawyers and who had a nice apartment to offer to Hilde and the Kaufmans. She continued to be his secretary while she lived there, and engaged in sports in her free time, going to the Jewish athletic club on Wednesdays. She was getting tired of being around older people like Mr. Kaufman and began to explore Stuttgart. One Sunday, a friend called her to ask if she would like to attend a soccer match with her. However, Jews had to attend matches on their own soccer field, such as the one at the athletic club. She accepted the request, and after the game, they decided to go to a coffee house, where Hilde was first introduced to Otto Levy. At the time, Otto was working for a glove manufacturing business in Esslingen am Neckar, and he would frequently travel to Stuttgart by train to sell their products. Hilde describes him as handsome: all the girls "runned after him."³¹ After some time at the coffeehouse, he walked over to her and said he liked her dress and asked her if she wanted to dance later that night, but she declined as she was not allowed to go out two nights in a row (she had been out the previous night as well). She eventually saw him again at the athletic club the next week, and they soon went on their first date. This night marks the beginning of their relationship, and within the week they began dating for around two and a half years. Their dates focused mainly

³⁰Ibid, 50.

³¹ Ibid, 52.

on going to the athletic club to either play sports or watch the high and broad jump. On rainy days, they would go to the opera house to watch concerts and drama. If their friends were not around, Otto and Hilde enjoyed bowling together.

After two and a half years, Otto and Hilde got engaged and were married in May 1937. The wedding was performed in Mannheim to enable both of their families to meet together. It was also where they found a rabbi willing to officiate the ceremony. This marriage was put together secretly and hastily, with only 30 guests. Had the wedding been made known to the Gestapo, the Jews at the wedding could have been rounded up. The Nuremberg Laws, which were established in 1935, delineated many Nazi ideologies, especially against those who were not “Aryan.” Because of this, most Jews were no longer considered citizens of Germany and had most of their political rights taken away. On October 18, 1935, the “Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German People” was passed that required all marriage partners to be “fit”. This meant that anyone who suffered from hereditary diseases or contagious diseases was refused a license to marry. Later, in November, this was extended to anyone who could produce “racially suspect” offspring.³² Such measures would make it extremely difficult for Otto and Hilde to gain official license to marry. However, they were in love and felt that it was worth the risk.

By 1936, most Jews were already banned from parks, restaurants, swimming pools, and other places where a wedding could be held. Because the local venues no longer allowed Jews, they decided to have it in the Jewish clubhouse, which had hardly

³² United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Nuremberg Race Laws,” *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, Accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007695>.

any activity at this point. Because they could not afford anything for the wedding, they simply changed into their best clothes in the attic of the clubhouse. For their honeymoon, the couple opted to keep things fairly local, traveling through the Black Forest all the way down the *Titisee* lake into Switzerland. When they came back, they moved into their apartment on *Sandstrasse* Number Eleven in Stuttgart.

Mr. Mailander Helps the Levy-Rosenfelds

In March of 1937, Hilde and Otto rented an apartment in Stuttgart, just before their wedding two months later. Although Hilde was no longer working for Mr. Kaufman, Otto was still working for *Haug und Wild*, the glove manufacturing business. When Hilde saw the ad in the newspaper for this apartment, she had to ask if the manager of the apartment was okay with her Jewish background. The owner agreed, and she decided to pick a middle floor in the apartment complex, because she felt safer on a middle floor than anywhere else, especially since Otto was usually not around. This proved to be reasonable because Hilde was reported by the neighbors upstairs for owning and using a radio. By this time, Jews were forbidden from operating any electrical equipment, including radios.³³ While no consequences came from it, it describes the hostile environment in which the Levy-Rosenfelds were living.

³³ Dean Pashalidis, "The Nazi Party's Restrictions on Jews, 1933-39," *Time Toast*, Accessed April 27, 2017, <https://www.timetoast.com/timelines/the-nazi-party-s-restrictions-on-jews-1933-39>.

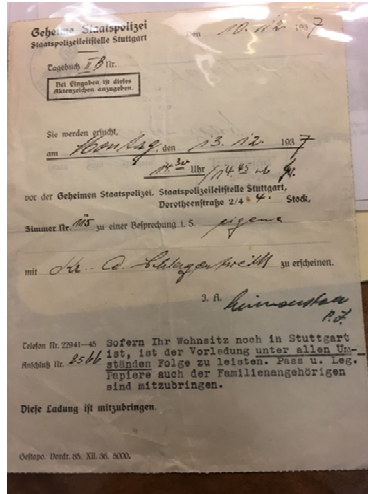


Figure 3: Nazi Document for Summoning of Levy-Rosenfelds for Radio Incident³⁴

Within the apartment complex, she met Gretel Weiser, the next door neighbor. Gretel became friends with Hilde and came over late at night to complain about her husband. She also talked occasionally about Mr. Fred Mailander and his great charity to those in need. He was a rabbi living at 2300 Austin Street in Waco and gave food to those in need during World War I. Mrs. Weiser had just arrived in Germany when World War I began and had received some of his help, so she was very grateful for him. She was also Mr. Mailander's distant second cousin. Mr. Mailander eventually became one of the most important figures in helping Otto and Hilde emigrate out of Germany.

It was Gretel Weiser's husband who convinced Otto Levy that escape from Germany was possible. One day Mr. Weiser revealed to the Levys that a Jewish World War I invalid had been fired from a German bank, most likely due to his race. This served as an ominous signal, as previous laws usually exempted Jewish veterans from

³⁴ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, SS Nazi Summon Form, Box 1, Folder 2, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

these rulings. This meant that before long there would be nothing to stop Otto from getting fired himself. As much as Otto wanted to leave, he had no one to turn to for help. Mrs. Weiser decided to write a letter to Mr. Mailander to ask if he was willing to sponsor the travel of Otto and Hilde. This was quite a dangerous risk since it was known that the Gestapo were keeping close tabs on all communication, and such a letter could lead to their arrest. Mrs. Levy took decided to take the precaution of sending the letter from outside of town in hopes that the Nazis would not intercept it.

Otto and Hilde never wanted to go to Israel, South America, or anywhere else besides the United States. This was because they knew no one to help them establish themselves in these countries. Most of Otto's and Hilde's friends had already left in 1934, moving to areas in South America such as Chile, Brazil, and Argentina. Even Otto's sister Rae had left for Portugal in 1933. Their friends' plan had been to move to one of these countries, then to seek asylum in America, which took some of them 13 years. The reason Otto and Hilde did not join them in order to protect their families from the Nazis until they realized they could no longer maintain their families with their support.³⁵

Despite their lack of connections, their impression of America was very positive. While Otto and Hilde did not know anyone in the United States, they had great expectations for the opportunities that the United States could provide them. Otto had a firm belief that he would be able to find a job working in the glove manufacturing business in Waco, or New York, and survive until he could help the rest of his family over to join him.

³⁵ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 66.

While they waited for Mr. Mailander's reply, the rest of Otto's and Hilde's families determined it was time to escape Germany as well. Otto's younger brother Max Levy was the first of his family to begin immigration to America. He left Germany in 1937 and was sponsored by his Aunt Pauline Rose who was living in Cleveland, Ohio at the time.³⁶ She signed affidavits for about forty people into America. However, she was in her eighties and had already helped so many other refugees that the American consulate limited the number of refugees she could sponsor. This is why Otto and Hilde were unable to obtain critical sponsorship from Pauline. The next to leave Germany was Justin, Hilde's brother. The family had decided that Justin should attempt to establish himself in America, specifically in New York in March of 1938. He used the affidavit from Liesel's husband Mr. Hirsch's niece, who had established herself in America. It was easier to get one person into America than attempt to move the whole family there at once. One morning the family sent him sent to Hamburg to get on the boat to America. In the oral history memoir interview, Hilde shared an endearing memory of Justin crying that morning, holding onto his feather bed and saying "Mother, why do you send me away?"³⁷ His mother responded with, "You got to help us all break the way to start for us a new life and you got to help us."³⁸

While Hilde was at home tending to her mother in Oehringen, Otto called Hilde from Stuttgart to tell her the news that Mr. Mailander would be happy to assist them to move to America. Obtaining support from someone inside America during this time

³⁶ Ibid, 71-72.

³⁷ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 1, 55.

³⁸ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 75.

period was essential in their successful immigration to the US. Jewish people would require some contacts to help them through the process; however, most German Jews used contacts from Europe for a recommendation. The fact that Otto and Hilde got an American to recommend them for entry into the country reduced the wait on their application by about 6 months.³⁹ Mr. Mailander wrote a letter to the American consul in Germany, who responded by allowing them to be reviewed earlier than expected. Without that letter, it could have taken up to 2 years to review the application, and by 1940 their chances of successful immigration into America would have been much lower.⁴⁰

When Hilde and Otto heard the news, they began to look into where to go in America. Their belief was that if they were going to be successful in their immigration to America, it would make sense to move to Waco where the Mailanders lived. With Waco's population of only 55,000, their dream of living in a larger city seemed to be put on the backburner. However, the presence of Baylor University had an impact on the decision to move to Waco in America. Hilde describes the university: "When we heard of this education, it was a great relief..."⁴¹ Since Otto and Hilde firmly believed that higher education brought culture to a city, Baylor became a place that they came to appreciate.

Before Otto and Hilde could be given clearance to immigrate to America, they had to go through a physical examination. This part of the application was put in place

³⁹ Ibid, 92.

⁴⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "United States Policy and its Impact on European Jews."

⁴¹ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 1, 56.

by President Roosevelt as a further measure to allow only “fit” immigrants into America. The Great Depression had left America on its back foot, and soon economic fear left the public worried about how refugees might affect them. Otto and Hilde were examined by American doctors in Germany to check for any serious issues that might put a burden on the American economy. After eight doctors had examined Hilde, they found that she had a heart problem, which meant that she would be denied entrance into America. After much pleading by both Otto and Hilde, the doctors decided to allow Hilde to join Otto on his way to the United States. If they had not allowed Hilde to go with Otto, it is most likely that Otto would have stayed in Germany under Nazi rule with the rest of their two families. As they prepared to go to America, packing their bags, they became worried that they might never see their families again. They traveled to Hamburg to sail on the *Manhattan* for nine days, traveling to Le Havre, Southampton, and finally New York.

The Movement of Otto and Hilde from New York City to Waco, Texas

Otto and Hilde arrived in New York in June of 1938, just five months after Hilde’s brother Justin had arrived in New York.⁴² They met up with Mr. Hirsch’s niece and Justin when they arrived. Mr. Hirsch was Hilde’s sister’s husband, who was an old neighbor of theirs. After staying in New York for a week with Justin, their plan was to move to Cleveland, Ohio to see Max, Otto’s brother, and finally travel down to Waco, Texas. Justin had continuously said that New York was not a great place to stay for long, and that was true for many Jews. New York was a place where many had to earn their way to survive, working in sweatshops for \$1.50 a day, and having to spend evenings in

⁴² Ibid, 57.

English classes.⁴³ For Justin, the problem was the lack of a future in New York, as even Mr. Hirsch, who was very prominent in the horse and cattle business, was reduced to washing dishes at the World's Fair.⁴⁴ In addition, Otto and Hilde were able to ship a 5-room furniture set from Germany, which was on its way to Waco. Even as Otto would continually think that New York was impressive, Justin would continually say that the goal was for all the family to join them in Texas. Compared to other Jewish migrations in the U.S., this was a unique path, as many had decided to reside in either Chicago or New York.

When Otto and Hilde arrived in New York, they had only had \$18 on them. Up until 1941, the German government officially encouraged emigration. However, by 1938, the German government had put in place a crippling emigration tax, which included restricting how much money could be transferred from German banks.⁴⁵ This meant that Otto and Hilde had to leave behind most of their savings and could never retrieve them. Otto talks about how that money could have easily been spent in one night on that boat.⁴⁶ As such, they had no way of buying any tickets to travel. They sought help from the Jewish Helps Committee, which was an organization designed to help Jews in need. The Helps Committee loaned them money to buy their tickets for the move to Waco. This was the first time that Otto and Hilde interacted with the United Jewish Appeal, and they were very thankful for their cause, donating money back to the

⁴³ Walter Laqueur, "Generation Exodus: The Fate of Young Jewish Refugees from Nazi Germany" (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2001), 136.

⁴⁴ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 76.

⁴⁵ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "German Jewish Refugees, 1933-1939."

⁴⁶ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 89.

organization over the years. After staying a week with Max to check up on him, they took the train down to Texas.

Otto and Hilde rode the Katy train from Cleveland, Ohio for two days and disembarked in Waco, Texas on August 17. The first thing they remember seeing upon arrival was Mr. Mailander's factory. They recall in his headline of the letter he sent them seeing an image of a factory next to a train station and knew immediately that it was Mr. Mailander's factory. When they got off the train, Mr. Mailander and 10 other salutes consisting of people from the Jewish sisterhood and council in Temple, Texas, awaited Otto and Hilde, and Mr. Mailander kissed them both, saying "Welcome." Otto and Hilde were overjoyed at meeting the man that saved their lives. Hilde remembers writing to her sister about Texas and the people, describing it so: "The skies are gorgeous, and the people are so wonderful."⁴⁷ Her sister responded with, "I cannot read her letters anymore, It's just unbelievable," because she could not imagine how great the support was for them.⁴⁸ They distinctly remember being offered continuous support for the first year in Waco being invited for example to homes every Saturday and Sunday.

Otto and Hilde ended up staying with Mr. Mailander for a couple of nights, after which the Jewish council asked Dr. Block to take care of them on 2100 Washington Street as they waited for their furniture to arrive, which was due in a couple of weeks.⁴⁹ However, at this time Hitler had called back all the boats from America, including the ones that held their furniture, and Otto and Hilde believed they would never receive their

⁴⁷ Ibid, 94.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 94.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 97.

furniture. Eventually, the boats were sent out from Germany, and their furniture arrived in October of that year, making Otto and Hilde stay with Dr. Block for two months total. Otto and Hilde felt terribly sorry for the burden they placed on Dr. Block, to house and feed them during that time.

When they finally received their belongings, they decided to rent a 6-room apartment in Waco on 2300 Washington Avenue, because they could fill it with furniture.⁵⁰ This was quite a surprise to the Waco residents, as most immigrants usually only owned a sack on their shoulder when coming to Waco.⁵¹ In fact, Waco had not seen any German immigrants in 30 years. Their furniture consisted of a piano and violin, two sets of bedroom furniture, and a pair of skis. The majority of this furniture was provided by Hilde's mother, who had given all the linen and silverware and dishes. The apartment was full of rats when they moved in, making Hilde more apprehensive about moving in. She said, "I escaped the Nazis, but I'm not moving in where the rats are."⁵²

Otto's and Hilde's Families

By April 1939, the rest of Hilde family was able to leave Germany on the *Washington*. After Max and Justin, Hilde's mother was the first to obtain an affidavit. She arrived March 4, 1939, and stayed with Justin in New York. Next came the Hirsch couple, or Hilde's sister Liesel and her husband. Justin was able to convince Mr. Hirsch's cousin Bernd to sponsor them. The affidavit for Hilde's mother was difficult to

⁵⁰ Ibid, 98.

⁵¹ Ibid, 95.

⁵² Ibid, 99.

obtain before because Bernd was still young and did not want the responsibility of giving out an affidavit. They set sail on the *Washington* on April 4, 1939.

Otto's sister Rae arrived in America in 1941, on one of the last boats coming to America. She did this by leaving Germany early in 1933 to live in Spain before deciding to finally come to America in 1941. She stayed with Otto's brother Max for a while, until he decided to join the army. After that, she moved to Texas and stayed with Otto and Hilde.

Otto's parents were unable to make it to America because Otto and Hilde were unable to find anybody with the means to write an affidavit or the funds to certify it. Otto and Hilde were unable to procure the affidavit themselves because they had to wait five years with good standing before they could attain citizenship. The funds were necessary to guarantee the safety of the immigrants in case of any fines they might incur. It was a massive responsibility that the Levy-Rosenfelds could not take on at the time. In addition, it was more difficult to obtain affidavits for people over 30 years of age. The immigration rules were extremely cautious concerning diseases, hence the doctor exams before admission to America. The other affidavits could usually not be paid for up front, which meant that most immigrants had to borrow money and convince others to take that responsibility. Affidavits at the time also cost money to sign, up to several thousand dollars. That amounts to around \$43,000 in today's currency. Otto and Hilde were heartbroken, but still unable to bring Otto's parents to America.

Otto's parents were taken to an internment camp in 1940. The concentration camps had been put to use since 1933, almost directly after Hitler was announced as

Chancellor.⁵³ Initially used for political opponents, the SS had broadened their uses to hold Jews, “Gypsies,” homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other persons they deemed “asocial elements.” Otto’s parents had lost their three-story home due to harsh taxes levied upon them, and were taken to the Pyrenees in France to *Camp de Gurs*. This particular camp was built in 1939 by the French government to initially hold refugees from Spain after the Spanish Civil War. However, once Germany began to occupy the southwestern region of France, the camp was then used as an internment camp for the Jews. Otto and Hilde did whatever they could to try to contact them. They would send food from Losavio, a store which had the most European-like food. However, Otto’s parents never received any of the packages. Otto’s father died in April in 1941, and his mother in September 1942 due to the poor living conditions of the camp.⁵⁴

Otto’s sister Hertha and her husband were taken along with their children Robert and Inge to Auschwitz near the end of 1940. Auschwitz was one of the largest networks of concentration and extermination camps built in contemporary Poland. At least 1.1 million people died here, being gassed with Zyklon B pesticide, including Hertha, Robert, and Inge⁵⁵. Inge was only 8 years old. When Otto and Hilde had heard of the tragedy, they were unable to talk or relate to others about what had happened. Hilde and Otto received letters describing their horrible condition before they died and were completely torn down by these events. Otto and Hilde felt that many in Waco did not want to know about their tragedies. Hilde said that “before we even say anything they shut us up. They

⁵³ Richard Evans, “The Coming of the Third Reich” (United States: Penguin Group, 2003), 334-335.

⁵⁴ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 128.

⁵⁵ Georges Wellers, “Essai de détermination du nombre de morts au camp d’Auschwitz,” *Le Monde Juif*, (October-December, 1983).

wouldn't know nothing. That in a way they want to know it and the other way they wouldn't have the responsibility.”⁵⁶



Figure 4: Photo of Inge, Hilde's Niece⁵⁷

While Otto and Hilde finally arrived in Waco and encountered wonderful people, their start was not easy, as Otto had a hard time finding a job. After many odd jobs, Hilde was able to acquire a store and build into what became the famous O&H Rare Foods. Both tended to their grocery store, building their whole lives around it until their retirement.

⁵⁶ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 86.

⁵⁷ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Photo of Niece, Box 1, Folder 2, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

CHAPTER THREE

LIFE AFTER MIGRATION, AND THE SUCCESS OF O&H RARE FOODS

Otto and Hilde had come to Waco with the hopes of finding work and establishing themselves so that the rest of their families could join them. This was no easy task, as Otto and Hilde continually struggled to find their niche within the Waco community. Eventually, they took the risk of renting an empty grocery store, which they decided to christen O&H Rare Foods. This store became the backbone of their lives as it became increasingly popular in Waco and greater Texas. It was destroyed in a giant tornado, rebuilt, and finally closed after 49 years.

When Otto and Hilde arrived in Waco, they had difficulty finding jobs. Mr. Levy tried to speak to Mr. Mailander about acquiring a job at his factory, but Mr. Mailander declined his offer. Mr. Mailander had suffered heavily during the Great Depression and had already dropped 75% of his employees.⁵⁸ In addition, neither Otto nor Hilde knew any English or Yiddish. Only Mr. Mailander knew a little German and could hold a basic conversation with them. The only other German immigrants were the Archenhold family, who were the last German immigrants to have moved to Waco about 30-40 years beforehand.⁵⁹ This barrier, combined with the people's disinterest in their situation, it was very difficult to speak to anyone about their troubles. One day Hilde called the

⁵⁸ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 93.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 97.

Archenhold family out of desperation, saying “There is no way that we are ever can get a job in Waco,” but to her dismay, nothing came out of the phone call.⁶⁰

Otto eventually found a job with Mrs. Lester Levy, a good friend, shoveling bread at Rainbo bakery. He worked there for six months, between the crushing hours of 4 PM and 4 AM, and made only 14 dollars a week, which was just enough to buy the groceries needed to survive. After work, he would set up an appointment at 4 AM to learn English with a rabbi named Dr. Macht. During this time Otto recalls losing a lot of weight, due to his lack of sleep, and not being accustomed to the hot weather of Texas. Meanwhile, Mrs. Levy was making luncheon sets and embroideries to sell to the other Jewish ladies at the Rodef Shalom Temple in Temple, Texas for 50 cents apiece. Yet they still had to rent out their spare bedroom to help pay for their expenses. Otto and Hilde became very flexible in their working habits in order to survive.

After six months of working at Rainbo bakery, Otto Levy was offered a position in a glove manufacturing business in Richmond, Virginia for a Mr. Hessberg. One of the Sangers, a family in Waco, had promised Otto a position there, and Otto decided it might be worth the effort to drive there and get a more suitable job.⁶¹ He found a ride and stayed in Virginia for two months. Despite Otto’s experience with selling gloves, he found it difficult to sew, cut leather, and overall make the gloves themselves. After two months of trying out this new job, Otto considered moving to Virginia and asked Hilde to borrow some money to move the furniture to Virginia. At this point, the Hirsches and the rest of Hilde’s family had already planned to bring their furniture like Otto and Hilde to

⁶⁰ Ibid, 97.

⁶¹ Ibid, 102.

Waco, but this decision to move to Virginia could cause that plan to fail. Otto decided it was probably best to stay in Waco, partially due to Justin's continual encouragement to live there. Hilde had written a letter to Justin, saying "We cannot find a job in Waco, Texas, not for much. We've got to come back to New York." Justin replied with "You stay in Texas, and we all will follow you. Promise."⁶²

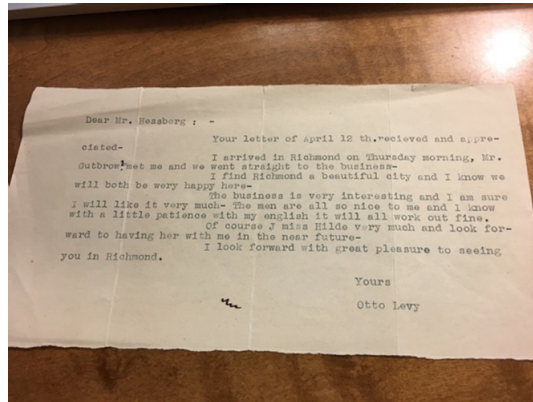


Figure 5: Letter to Mr. Hessberg Discussing His Time in Richmond⁶³

Otto came back to Waco, and eventually found another job at a laundry and cleaner, on 26th St. and Bosque Blvd. Otto was now making over 20 dollars a week and began to feel more comfortable with his living situation. However, after 8 weeks, the business literally went up in flames, and Otto was left trying to find another job. Even so, Otto and Hilde were ready to do any job in order to survive. They had already accepted the change from being successful to shoveling bread and doing laundry for a living. Hilde describes their work ethic as "You had to accept to you were ready to knock stones, whatever it is in this country."⁶⁴ Hilde later found work at a store called Mangel's, which

⁶² Ibid, 76.

⁶³ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Letter to Mr. Hessberg, April 12, 1939, Box 1, Folder 1, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 107.

was a lingerie store. She spent her time taking inventory and doing what she could to sell their products, despite not speaking much English except for phrases like “Isn’t it beautiful?” or “Isn’t it lovely?”⁶⁵

By the 4th of July in 1939, the Hirsches moved to Waco, and Otto decided the best that plan of action was to work with Mr. Hirsch in the cattle business. Mr. Hirsch was excited to get back into the cattle business, considering he had been a dishwasher in New York for some time now. The Levy-Rosenfelds and Hirsches sold their Leica cameras to help jumpstart him into the cattle business. Mr. Hirsch bought a used Plymouth car, and a trailer for the Hilde and Otto to stay in. When Mr. Hirsch was in Germany, he had been a successful cattle dealer who owned a sports car with a chauffeur. He loved driving his car everywhere and offered his trailer to Otto and Hilde. They decided to live with the Hirsches around Waco for about three months until Hilde demolished the trailer and car. Upon trying to drive back home to their apartment, Hilde, not understanding how to drive a manual accidentally drove into the kitchen of their trailer. Thus the Levys could no longer stay with the Hirsches, and they were back to their apartment.

In March of 1941, Hilde found the store that would eventually grow to O&H Food Store. Carrie Godshaw, one of Hilde’s friends in Waco, had seen Hilde at a funeral one day and asked her if she would like to rent her grocery store at 712 South Eleventh Street. Hilde decided to accept the offer, but when she went to see the store, she realized it needed a lot of work. The store was completely empty when Hilde arrived, and the store did not have a good reputation. She borrowed \$54.50 from Cooper’s Wholesale Grocery to stock her store with peas, coffee, sugar, flour, Vaseline, snuff, and other

⁶⁵ Ibid, 111.

essentials. Her good friend Mrs. Lester Levy helped her supply the store, as Hilde was still unable to speak English. Eventually, as they began selling goods, they were able to purchase more inventory until they were fully stocked. However, the Levys themselves earned very little for their work, as Hilde describes it: “you had to crawl before you walked.”⁶⁶ They worked around the clock, from 7:30 AM to 7:30 at night, eventually bumping it to 11 at night starting in 1941, 7 days a week. After discussing the idea with Mr. Robert Levy, Mrs. Lester Levy’s husband, thought it best to name it O&H Food Store, which became the permanent name for the store. Unfortunately, Hilde had heart trouble for seven weeks just after she started the store, so Otto decided to take over during this period. Once she got better, they decided it would be better if they both worked at the store, since the cattle business proved too unreliable and did not have the same reputation as it did in Germany.

The greatest strength of the store was that they serviced a lot of people from out of town. They initially offered hearty products such as pork chops, bacon, and snuff to the black locals, but eventually expanded to buying from more stores such as Million Item Wholesale, King, and Genecov, and Cooper Wholesale to stock as much variety as possible. These were still local wholesale stores in Waco that supplied the Levy-Rosenfelds’ store with staple goods such as sugar, flour, and meats. In addition, their store was at a major crossroads, where many people passed through. People traveling from Marlin, LaSalle, Groesbeck, and Temple would have an opportunity to pass by. The way they did business was also very attractive to the locals. The store had a familial charm to it, making certain that nobody felt out of place there. Otto and Hilde greeted

⁶⁶ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, interview by Rebecca Sharpless, *Levy Interview No. 3*, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, September 1, 1993, 139.

customers even before they asked for assistance, and loved to talk with them. Later on, most employees they hired such as cooks or other assistants stayed for 15 years or more, so regulars felt very comfortable at the store. As Hilde and Otto became more acquainted with the store, they decided to rent and move into the house next door so they could easily manage their store. They spent more time in the store than they did in their home.

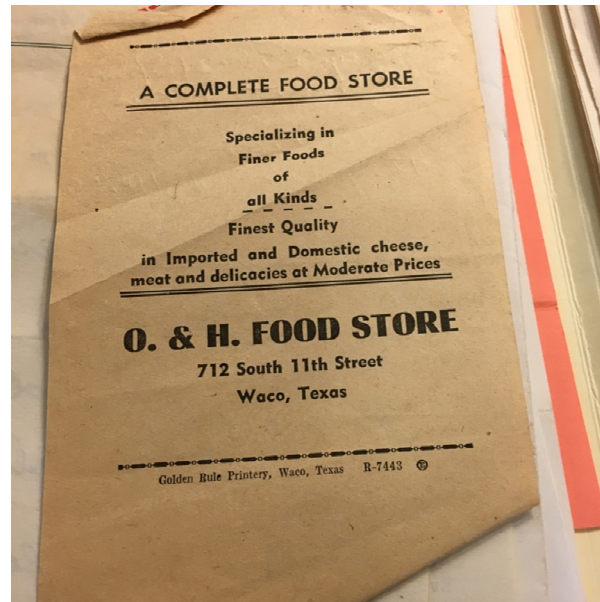


Figure 6: Ad for O&H Food Store⁶⁷

Otto and Hilde's treatment in Germany made them sympathize with the black locals, who at this time were segregated in America. They had never seen blacks in Germany, and at first did not know how to react. However, Hilde soon drew comparisons between her experiences in Germany and how blacks were being treated. Hilde said "In a way I didn't like it. They were human beings. Why should they be

⁶⁷ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, O&H Food Store Ad, Box 1, Folder 4, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

handled different than we are? And it reminds me in a way also that I couldn't sit in Germany where I wanted to sit. It didn't give me the happy feelings.”⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Otto and Hilde had become members of the Temple Rodef Shalom. Jewish people had begun to immigrate to Waco from the east coast as early as 1826.⁶⁹ The temple was founded by 40 Jewish families and one with which Mr. Mailander was associated.⁷⁰ Otto and Hilde had felt less connected with the only other Jewish congregation in Waco, Agudath Jacob. Otto's good friend Dr. Macht, who was his English teacher and worked for Mr. Mailander, also went to Rodef Shalom. Otto and Hilde felt that Agudath Jacob was much more traditional than Temple Rodef Shalom, as Agudath Jacob required the use of yarmulkes and prayer shawls, while Temple Rodef Shalom was more casual on Jewish traditions. However, Otto and Hilde never seemed to mind the differences between the newer American practices and the more orthodox practices found in Europe. Because of their work on the store, they were unable to rest on the Sabbath and went to Temple Rodef Shalom every Friday night.⁷¹ This schedule became much more prominent while they began their new store on 25th Street. They had given back to the temple by providing kosher meats, as did the previous store before them, as well as providing catering service throughout the 1970s.

⁶⁸ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 2, 119.

⁶⁹ Marc Lee Raphael, “The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America” (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008,) 48.

⁷⁰ Prisca Bird, “Temple Rodef Shalom,” *Waco History*, Accessed February 25, 2017, <http://wacohistory.org/items/show/17>.

⁷¹ Levy-Rosenfeld, Otto and Hilde, interview by Rebecca Sharpless, *Levy Interview No. 4*, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, September 8, 1993, 276.

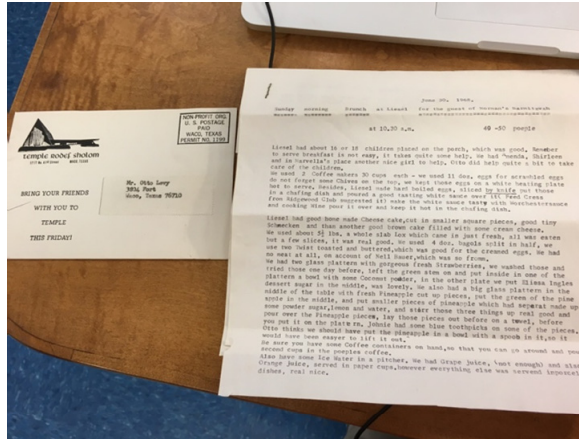


Figure 7: Description of Bar Mitzvah Catering in 1968⁷²

During World War II, Otto and Hilde were faced with the problem of shortages in their store. At this time, almost everything was in short supply, especially bacon, Crisco, and even toilet paper. Luckily, their friend Mr. Nathan Levy happened to own a whole foods store in Marlin and ensured that Otto and Hilde were always able to get the supplies they needed to continue stocking their business. In fact, a lot of the problems they faced during their time in Waco were resolved with the help of others. When Hilde had her heart issues, a friend by the name of Mr. Sanger was at the store and got word of Hilde's condition. He asked Otto if he could come over to help, and soon enough was supplying fans for Hilde during the summer heat. He also would come by to fix plumbing and other house-related issues. This type of hospitality expressed by local Wacoans was something very unique that Otto and Hilde had never received during their time in Germany.

In 1942, Otto and Hilde were able to strike a big deal with a cheese company in Wisconsin. While researching new merchandise, they had come across an address of Joe

⁷² Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Rodef Shalom Catering Description, June 30, 1968, Box 1, Folder 4, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

Weil, the owner of a wholesale cheese warehouse, which they immediately believed to be one of Otto's friends from back in Germany. When they called, their suspicion turned out to be true, and Otto asked him if he was willing to distribute to their store, which Joe indeed was. Otto would buy up to 480 pounds of cheese, of many different varieties. They eventually came across a unique cheese, which they named the O&H Special, which became quite popular. They had also purchased a refrigerator truck that helped them store their dairy products. The great variety of cheeses they offered was a foreshadowing of their movement into the specialty food business.

In 1946, Otto and Hilde were able to purchase a black Pontiac, and decided to drive to Chicago. They got acquainted with other successful German refugee merchants, which was a huge improvement to their situation, considering they still could barely speak English. Because of these new connections in Chicago, they were always able to learn about the new merchandise they could sell, and learn more about the products they were selling. Their connections brought kosher meats to their store as well, which was a major success in the area, as the previous owner sold kosher meats. At one point, Max Reese, part of the Reese Finer Foods Company, called Otto asking if they could mass-produce a sample they had sent to him.⁷³ Otto was able to flex his salesmanship at the grocery store, while Hilde was able to do bookkeeping of the store.

It was around 1950 that Otto and Hilde decided to change the direction of their store's products. They began moving into the specialty food business, buying more exotic brands and names of foods to stock their shelves. They began moving into more European cured meats such as liverwurst, bratwursts, braunschweiger, and head cheeses

⁷³ Ibid, 113.

they had found in Wisconsin. 1950 also marked the year that Otto and Hilde, as well as the rest of Hilde's family, began to attend Waco High to learn English and learn how to drive.

In 1948, Otto and Hilde traveled to New York City to attend the first ever Fancy Food Show. This biannual gathering was a place for distributors to show off their new exotic products. They had received word about it through Joe Weil and a magazine they had subscribed to in Chicago. There they managed to make contacts and learn more about new products they could sell in Waco. Otto and Hilde noticed that most of the distributors were German refugees, which allowed them easy and wider access to potential deals.⁷⁴ They also got in contact with Italian, Chinese, German, French, and Japanese specialty manufacturers. After their first trip to the Fancy Food Show, Otto and Hilde traveled twice a year for 33 years straight to New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles following the Fancy Food show to maintain their edge on new merchandise. It was very expensive to attend these food shows, but Otto and Hilde were willing to work hard to satisfy their customers and build their store's reputation.

When they came back from the Fancy Food Show, Otto and Hilde sized up the competition. The only other fancy food store in Waco was Losavio, the store from which Otto had bought food for his parents while they were in the internment camps. For a couple of years, Otto and Hilde worked hard to outcompete the store, until one day the owner of Losavio died of old age. Since the owner's nephew did not want to take over the store, it was eventually shut down, which gave Otto and Hilde the chance to be the only providers of exotic foods in Waco.

⁷⁴ Levy-Rosenfeld, Levy Interview No. 3, 154.

On May 11, 1953, the O&H Food Store was destroyed by a great tornado. On that day, Otto and Hilde were working the shop, and when warned by customers of a tornado, had no idea what a tornado was. When the tornado hit, they were still in the store. The roof and door were ripped off their hinges, and in a matter of seconds, Otto and Hilde had lost everything in their entire store. Their store assistants yelled to hide under the table, and other than suffering some small wounds, they were unscathed. Their house had some expensive windows broken but was otherwise still standing. They were lucky because the tornado took 123 lives that day. Hilde vividly recalls the experiences as one reminding her of the power of God. “It gives you to think about it, that somebody’s over you, which has so much more might and strength. We couldn’t believe it, that anything like this will never have been experienced in Europe.”⁷⁵ To make matters worse, it rained for the next week, ruining the goods in their store room.

For four months, Otto and Hilde were out of business. They were desperate to find a new location to build on, and after a while their friends came to the rescue. A friend of theirs named Dr. Aubrey Goodman asked what he could do to help, and Hilde asked him if he would help them find a new place for their store. Most other locations were too costly to remodel, and Hilde was planning to place their store just across from where the old store had been. Dr. Goodman asked if she would like to expand and move to 25th Street, but Hilde worried that a lease might not be available in such a prime location. It turned out that a café there had no lease, as its owners were behind on their rent, so the landlord there offered the lot to Hilde. The Waco community paid 20% of the

⁷⁵ Ibid, 168.

store's cost for Otto and Hilde, and very soon the couple was back in business, and ready to begin a new phase of their store: O&H Rare Foods.

In 1954, Otto and Hilde became more comfortable as they stocked their new store at 111 N. 25th Street, moved into their new house on Fort Street, and made prospective deals with distributors in Los Angeles. By this time, they decided to drop most of the staple foods they had begun with, such as flour, sugar, milk, and eggs, and stick strictly to more exclusive and exotic products. They reduced their hours from 8 AM to 6:30 PM. Their first step in stocking unique products was to continue to branch out in the cheese market. By 1955, Otto and Hilde offered more than 200 different kinds of cheeses to customers. Their selection consisted of French Brie, Roquefort, English Stilton, Camembert, Gruyère, a wide Swiss selection and even caviar cheese. While at first, their new cheeses were not as popular, they were able to educate the state of Texas with their exotic products.

In a time when large malls did not exist, their store grew intensely popular with those in Waco and abroad. They had better trade and access, and their new products made customers curious about the different things they could find in the store. Almost 40% of their customers were from out of town.⁷⁶ At the same time, they worked to bring in artichokes, English preserves from Oregon, and even chocolate-covered ants and rattlesnake meat.⁷⁷ Near the front of the store, they featured dolmades, olives from Spain, caviar, horseradish-flavored mayonnaise, truffles, exclusive teas from England, gummi bears, and chocolates, most of which were exclusive to O&H Rare Foods. In the back,

⁷⁶ Ibid, 159.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 140.

they would have gifts, clothes, meats, and food trays. These food trays were intensely popular until 1970, consisting of assorted foods which ranged from \$3 to \$25 dollars. Some of these arrangements contained tuna fish, crab meat, and caviar; others offered classy combinations of cheeses, preserves, and even cheese straws for cocktails. Other gifts commonly purchased by customers included cooking utensils, spices, gift baskets, coffee, mints, and Bahlsen cookies from Germany and Norway. These were just a few of the novelty goods enjoyed by Wacoans and other Texans from abroad. At Christmas time, people would buy up to \$2,000 worth of these goodies, keeping Otto and Hilde busy working until 2 AM and selling up to 70 trays a day.⁷⁸ By 1970, they noticed that people had become lazier, so they adapted to the times, making sandwiches to give their customers more convenience.



Figure 8: Otto Levy in Action On 25th Street⁷⁹

After 50 years of service to Waco, Otto and Hilde had time to look back upon their business and how it had impacted them. For starters, the relationship between them has gotten much closer in a unique way. Hilde describes it as “to work together, it’s

⁷⁸ Ibid, 197.

⁷⁹ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Otto on 25th Street, Box 2, Folder 2, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

certainly not easy for a husband and wife to work together. It's wonderful when you come home and the husband greeted you and is so glad to see you home."⁸⁰ They saw their store compete with stores in Dallas and Austin, and even HEB until the 1970s. HEB even began selling fancy food trays in their stores. Otto and Levy always felt that their small store had a touch that could outdo other larger stores and that they were more experienced in the industry itself. They wished that they would have done some more advertising, as a way to help the store grow into something greater, but there was also a sense that word of mouth brought a stronger presence than a newspaper advertisement. Their favorite moments of their lives centered on the challenge posed by the tornado and the might of it, but also on the wonderful customers they were able to get to know over the years. The Temple Rodef Shalom played a tremendous role in the Levy's lives. Hilde describes it as "without the temple, without religion it's no life... you believe in the Bible and we believe in our religion and without it, you have nothing to lean on."⁸¹

In 1990, Otto and Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld retired the O&H Rare Foods Store, due to Otto's declining health. They decided it was time to move on and given the store to John and Linda Peters, assistants to the store who had also worked with the Levys for 40 years. However, the O&H Rare Foods would be officially closed on July 31st, 1998. KWTX Broadcasting received word of their retirement and gave them a public honoring on their channel. Their retirement hit the front lines of the newspaper, and Otto and Hilde received massive amounts of letters to commemorate them for their continuous service,

⁸⁰ Levy-Rosenfeld, *Levy Interview No. 4*, 240.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 276.

express sadness for their departure from their store, and extend blessings on what they deserved most: a vacation.

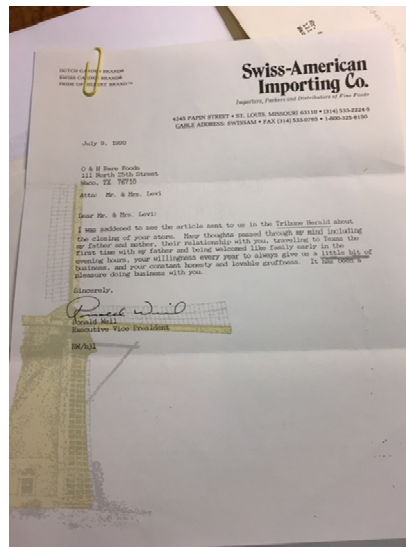


Figure 9: Letter from Cheese Distributor Honoring Their Retirement⁸²

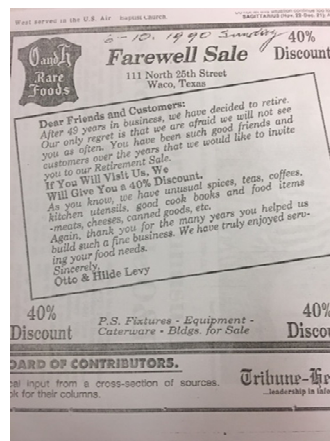


Figure 10: Farewell Sale Ad in Tribune-Herald⁸³

Otto passed away on May 25th, 1997. He was buried in Rodef Sholom Cemetery just 2 days after, with his wife and family there at his funeral. The Hirsches, Justin

⁸² Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Swiss-American Importing Co. Letter, Box 1, Folder 4, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

⁸³ Otto & Hilde Levy-Rosenfeld, Farewell Sale Ad, Box 1, Folder 4, The Texas Collection, Baylor University, October 13, 2016.

Rosenfeld, Rae Levin, nephews, nieces, and even co-workers John Peters the new O&H store owner gathered around to note his passing. Hilde passed away on June 11, 2006, and was buried next to Otto.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION: FINAL THOUGHTS & FUTURE WORK

From their time in Germany, Otto and Hilde went through much that ultimately led to their success in Waco. While neither received a higher education despite their desire to, they both worked to improve their financial situation, took care of their families in their time of need, and ventured out to the unknown state of Texas. Otto's adaptability as a salesman allowed him to find purpose easily selling food instead of the gloves he'd been so known for in Germany. Hilde's time in business school showed in her bookkeeping and inventory skills that helped in the success of the store. In the end, both Otto and Hilde used their individual masteries in the service industry to the best of their ability, while also continually adapting their lifestyles to face the problems of each new day. They were unafraid to take risks and were always searching for new opportunities to improve their situation, both in Germany and in America. Otto and Hilde would consider every life event as an opportunity saying, "you've got to steal with your eyes."⁸⁴

What makes their story so insightful is their unique choices and outlooks concerning marriage, migration, and loss. Otto and Hilde Levy got married at a time when their basic rights were at stake, and yet still their reasoning and motivation for their marriage came down to love. In their interview, they never seem to express hate towards the events in their lives, even when Otto's parents were unable to immigrate to America. Even when remembering the great tornado of Waco, they recall that moment as a

⁸⁴ Levy, Levy Interview No. 1, 37.

reminder of the power of God, and how it took them in the right direction towards making the store and their lives even better. Their story is one that faith being tested and overcoming obstacles stemming from the ability to live on and become better from the experience.

While looking into their own individual lives and experiences, much of this thesis brings into question larger themes too broad to be considered within it. While more research could dwell on the lifestyle of Jews in Nazi Germany, there is already a wide assortment of books and journals that publicize that information as seen in Chapter 1. However, the migration of the Hilde and Otto in Chapter 2 only covers a portion of migration in the 1930s. Reports of Jewish-Germans migrating to South America, Israel, Britain, neighboring countries, and even to China exist that bring further answers of how Jewish life propagated in those countries. Each migration story would be influenced by a country's immigration policies, cultural mores and laws, xenophobia, and financial stability during this time, especially after the Great Depression.

Otto and Hilde's story can also be insightful within the American frame. While their story can be viewed within the international scope, a detailed account of their story in America raises questions about migration experience within America. The immigration study to America by Otto and Hilde Levy can also be viewed on a national scale. The movement of Jewish people to Texas can be further explored, along with other states and how the American Jewry sought to cover the needs of those with varying backgrounds. The American Jewry must have been impacted and redeveloped as tens of thousands of refugee German Jews entered the country and became established within it. As Jews continue to expand into America, their faiths adapted to the laws of the country,

which allowed open reign of different traditions and cultures to be free in otherwise orthodox Europe.

The refugee crisis of the 1930s allowed European Jews to shape the cultural changes moving throughout America in the 1950s and 60s. Otto and Hilde worked with black locals, and their impression of them during a time of segregation in America was one of compassion and understanding. It would be great to further explore this idea, and how American Jewry and German Jewry reacted upon experiencing American segregation. The most interesting expansion on the topic of Otto's and Hilde's story is the success of their store, which began by taking risks and moving into an exotic foods store. Their reach into this field could not be done without their contacts in Chicago, and success in meeting other German refugees in the business. This calls into question how many German refugees got into the food industry, and the interactions Otto and Hilde must have had with other refugees in big cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. How was the bond between refugee and refugee, and their opinions on their current situation? These questions could not only answer more about the socioeconomic rise of Jews in the United States but how the industry was impacted by the German-Jewish migration as a whole. Otto and Hilde also somehow influenced the Waco Symphony, and it should be further researched in their contribution to Waco.

One of the projects this thesis hopes to complete is to give credit to the Otto and Hilde, and their service to Waco and its history. It would be fitting to build a plaque to honor the location of their store on 25th street for the achievements Otto and Hilde were able to accomplish in their lifetime. In addition, this thesis hopes to build a *Stolperstein* for their families, for those who were unable to escape the Nazi terror. The *Stolperstein*,

which literally means “stumbling stone”, is a small rock inscribed with the names and life dates of victims of the Nazi persecution.⁸⁵ An initial search reveals that Otto’s and Hilde’s parents, nor their other relatives have been commemorated by this project, and the author plans to go to their hometown in Illigen and Ochringen, Germany and sponsor a *Stolperstein* to be put in place at their old addresses.

⁸⁵ Gunter Demnig, “Stolpersteine,” Accessed April 23, 2017, <http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/>.

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