

HELLA AND FRANK ROUBICEK

Frank survived the Lodz ghetto and several forced labor and concentration camps.

Hella was a passenger on the ill-fated German liner SS St. Louis that was turned back from Cuba and the United States and forced to return to Europe.

“Bitter war experiences have taught me how to appreciate the basic values of life and to fully appreciate the good things it has to offer.

Frank Roubicek was born in Prague in 1911. He was educated there was an attorney until the Nazis invaded in 1939. In 1941, Frank’s family was deported to the ghetto in Lodz, Poland where living conditions were brutal. The food rations were barely enough to survive, epidemics broke out and many died as they awaited deportation.

Near collapse, Frank was sent to work in an ammunition factory in Czestochowa. When it was evacuated, Frank was shipped in a crowded cattle car to Buchenwald. He was sent next to Rehmsdorf where he survived merciless treatment by the guards. As the Allied troops advanced, the camp was evacuated. Those who survived but were unable to walk were shot by the guards. Those remaining were forced on a death march to Theresienstadt where Frank collapsed.

Frank was liberated in April 1945 by Russian troops. He was the only one of his family who survived. Of the 5,000 Jews from Prague who were sent to Lodz only about 240 returned after the war. Frank worked in the legal department Ministry of Social Welfare in Prague. After the Communist takeover he escaped to Vienna in 1951

Hella Roubicek (née Lövinsohn) was born in Frankfurt/Oder, Germany in 1926, where her father worked as a doctor. In 1939, the Gestapo rounded up all the Jewish men. One of the police officers, a neighbor, pulled her father out of the line-up, probably saving his life. The Gestapo, however, gave him an ultimatum: leave Germany within two months or be taken, like the others, to a concentration camp.

It was extremely difficult to find a country of asylum, the only options at that time were Shanghai and Cuba. Hella’s mother managed to find a sponsor and the necessary funds and six weeks later her father was on his way to Havana. Hella and her mother were waiting for exit permission to join him when, a special one-way trip to Havana was announced by a German cruise line. The SS St. Louis was scheduled to sail May 13, 1939, with nine hundred thirty-five refugees on board. Hella and her mother were among them.

But when the ship anchored outside the Havana harbor, the passengers learned that their entry permits would not be honored. After agonizing negotiations, the St Louis was ordered out of

Cuban waters and sailed to an area off the Florida coast. The US also denied landing even though the majority of passengers held affidavits, making them eligible for immigration. The ship was turned back to Europe and the ship's captain He vowed to do everything in his power not to take them back to Germany. Telegrams went to countries all over the world. Finally, England, France, Holland and Belgium granted the waiting passengers asylum.

Hella and her mother went ashore in Belgium five weeks after setting out on their voyage. They managed to obtain visas and were able to immigrate to the US in 1940 before the German invasion. Most of the other passengers who had been on the ship including Hella's grandmother and aunt could not leave Europe in time and were killed by the Nazis.

Frank and Hella were married in 1959. They lived and raised a family in Berkeley California, where Frank owned a business in nutritional supplements and Hella worked as a language teacher.