

Saga of Else and Abraham Gutmann

Prominent among the survivors who ended up in France at the end of the War were my great-aunt Else (or Els) and great-uncle Abraham Gutmann. Their story of endurance is primarily due to the intrepid nature of Els. As a young woman she studied sewing in Paris and learned French. These skills would help the elderly couple immensely as the tragedy of their victimhood unfolded.

Els and Abraham had been deported to Camp de Gurs in October 1940 and were held in several other encampments near the foothills of the Pyrénées. Her odyssey is detailed in a diary (shown in the copy on page 293), the content transcribed in the following:

Ich war vom 20. Oktober 1940 bis 6. August 1946 in folgenden Lagern und Hospizen in Südfrankreich

Vom 22.10.1940 bis März 1942 im Lager Camp de Gurs, Basses Pyrénées, France

Von März 1942 bis September 1942 unter Stacheldraht im Lager Camp Récébédou, Haute Garonne bei Toulouse

Von September 1942 bis August 1944 im Lager Noé, Haute Garonne bei Toulouse unter Stacheldraht. Während dieser Zeit war an Typhus erkrankt und kam vom Camp de Noé nach Toulouse ins Hospice de la Grave (Haute Garonne), Salle de Détenue (Gefängnissaal)

Von August 1944 bis Oktober 1945 war in Buis les Baronnies, Drôme Frankreich. Das war durch hohe Mauern gesichert. Durfte nicht ausgehen und musste mich jeden 2. Tag beim Bürgermeister melden.

Von Oktober 1945 bis August 1946 war ich in dem Hospice Saint-Sauveur Aile du Perron Saint-Marcellin, Isère, France und Hospice St. Laurent-du-Pont, Isère, France. Beide Hospice waren durch hohe Mauern und Tore gesichert. Durfte mich nur innerhalb der Mauern aufhalten und jeden 3. Tag im erstgenannten beim Bürgermeister des Dorfes im letztgenannten beim Direktor melden.

As indicated above, Els recorded her status at various internment camps, hospitals, *hospices* [monasteries] and places of refuge during the period October 20, 1940 through August 6, 1946. It is presumed that husband Abraham followed the same path as Els.

From October 22 until March 1942, she was incarcerated in Camp de Gurs. From March 1942 until September 1942, she was enclosed within the barbed wire of Camp Récébédou. From September 1942 until August 1944, she was held behind the barbed wire of Camp Noé. At this time she became afflicted with typhus and ended up in a prisoners' ward at the Hospital de la Grave in Toulouse.

From August 1944 until October 1945, Els was behind a towering stonewall and secured gate at Buis les Baronnies in the south of France. She was unable to freely leave this place and had to report to the local official every two days.

Her final days in France occurred between October 1945 and August 1946 at which time she was at the *hospice* Saint-Sauveur Aile du Perron and *hospice* St Laurent-du-Pont, both locations maintained by religious orders and secured within high walls and gates. Els was restricted to the premises of these *hospices* and had to report to local officials every three days.¹

From other direct testimony, both Abraham and Els suffered from typhus, which was rampant in the camps. Thus, when the deportations to Drancy and Auschwitz began in mid-1942, both were in a

¹ The odyssey of Else and Abraham Gutmann is captured in the book: Angerbauer, Wolfram and Frank, Hans Georg, *Jüdische Gemeinden in Kreis und Stadt Heilbronn, Band 1*, published by Landkreis Heilbronn, 1986.

hospital and escaped immediate selection. Strange as it may seem today, the very fact that they were sickly kept them alive and they were able to remain in the southern part of France for the duration of the war.

Towards the end of their ordeal in France, they found themselves protected by the walls of a monastery, which prompted Els to later repeat, “One should not pray to G-d, rather to the Nuns and Sisters.” Els found work with a local farmer and thereby obtained food for herself and Abraham, who was then seventy-five years old.

After the war ended, Abraham and Els opted to return to Berwangen in order to reclaim their house and restart their life. Upon arrival, the word quickly went around the town in the local dialect, “*Die Jude-Els isch wieder da*” [The Jewess Els is here again]. The recorded date of their return was 9 August 1946. The great irony was the notation on their residence permit showing their country of origin to be France!

Great-uncle Abraham Gutmann died on March 13, 1948 and was buried in Berwangen. Els received a compassionate letter of sympathy from Protestant Minister Hermann Maas who apparently had been in touch with the Gutmanns after their return to Berwangen.² [see pages 294, 295 and 296]



² The relationship of Minister Hermann Maas to the Jewish community was described in Chapter Thirteen. The grave of Abraham is in the Jewish cemetery of Berwangen.



**Else Gutmann with her dog and friends after
World War II**



**Else Gutmann with neighbor in front of the
Vollweiler home after World War II**

Von nun zum 20. Oktober 1940 bis 6. August 1946
in folgenden Lager in Haospice in Frankreich.

Vom 23. 10. 1940 bis März 1942 im Lager
Camp de Jüvis
Basses Pyrenées France.
Von März 1942 bis September 1942 im Lager
Camp Rieubié de.
Ht. Garonne d/ Toulouse
im Lager
Von Sept. 1942 bis August 1944 im Lager Noé.
Ht. Garonne d/ Toulouse
im Lager
während dieser Zeit von au Gy (Lager) entlassen d. Kamer
vom Lager d. Noé nach Toulouse transportiert ins Gefängnis
in Haospice de la Garce. Salle de Detenu
Gefängnis lokal.

am 1. April 1945
1945 07.6.01.88
mit dem Kopf

Vom August 1944 bis Oktober 1945 war
in Buis les Baronnies. Drome Frankreich
Das war durch zwei hohe Mauern gesichert
und die nicht ausgehen in nicht auf jeden Abend
Tag kein Bürgermeister mit dem
Von Oktober 1945. bis August 1946 war ich
in dem Haospice.
St. Laurent de la Penne
St. Marcelin
Touze
France.
Haospice
St. Laurent-du-Pont.
Touze France
Die Haospice waren durch
zwei Mauern in Touze gesichert
durch die nicht nur innerhalb der Mauern aufhalten
in. jeden 3ten Tag einen Bürgermeister
in erregten den beiden Bürgermeister also Tages
in letztgenannten Louis Direktor.

Handwritten Diary of Else Gutmann

The righteous are in G-ds hand and nothing shall cause them anguish

Dear Frau Gutmann:

I convey to you my belated sympathy on your dear husbands passing of which you informed me in your kind letter.

To now be separated from each other, especially after having endured such heartbreaking times together, and G-d willing were able to endure, makes it especially grievous.

But now the dear Patriarch was able to close his eyes in his own home and in your arms. And I was so gratified to have been somewhat helpful in making it possible to bring him to his rest according to the traditions of the Jewish religion.

Thus the prayers recited in the Minyan accompany the deceased to eternity and into the outstretched arms of his forefathers.

Just now I had a request from a young immigrant from England who wished to have an appropriate religious inscription engraved on the tombstone of her blessed father who died here ten years ago. I designed the following inscription:

Peh Nun: Hier ruht

(The name of the deceased)

Lischutecha Karoti Adonai

Lord, I await your salvation, (from 5. Moses)

May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life.

I suggest all of this for your dear husband as well.

I would be happy to welcome you here. I live on Beethovenstraße (Line 2 to Kapellenweg, then Richard-Wagner-Straße, and then Beethovenstraße), 3 minutes from the stop.

Please let me know, possibly by telephone.

G-d bless you! Heartfelt greetings, your Dr. Hermann Maas.

Translation of Letter from Minister Hermann Maas to Else Gutmann

Die gerechten Seelen sind in G-ttes Hand – Und keine Qual rühret Sie an.

Liebe Frau Gutmann,

So sage ich Ihnen nachträglich noch mein herzlichstes Beileid zum Heimgang Ihres lieben Mannes nachdem Sie mir so lieb geschrieben haben.

Das voneinander Scheiden ist nach dem vielen furchtbaren Herzeleid, das Sie mit – einander tragen mussten und G-tt sein Dank überstehen durften, besonders wehmütig.

Aber nun hat der liebe Patriarch daheim die Augen schließen dürfen und in Ihren Armen. Und ich habe so herzlich gerne ein wenig geholfen, dass er nach dem Ritus der jüdischen Religion bestattet werden konnte.

So haben die Gebete der Minjan den lieben Ehrwürdigen heim begleitet und der Väter Arme sind aufgetan für ihn.

Diese Tage bat mich eine junge Emigrantin von England, ich möchte doch auf ihres seligen Vaters Grabstein, er starb vor 10 Jahren hier – eine fromme hebräische Inschrift aussuchen und eingravieren lassen. Ich entwarf folgende Inschrift:

Peh Nun: Hier ruht

Der Namen der Grabinschrift

Lischutecha Karoti Adonai

Herr ich warte auf dein Heil (aus 5. Mosche)

Es sei seine Seele eingebunden ins Bündel des Lebens.

Das alles erbitte ich auch Ihrem lieben Mann.

Wenn Sie kommen freue ich mich sehr. Ich wohne Beethovenstraße (Linie 2 bis Kapellenweg, dann Richard-Wagner-Straße und dann Beethovenstraße, 3 min von der Haltestelle.

Bitte melden Sie sich an, eventuell telefonisch.

G-tt segne Sie! Herzlichst grüsst Sie Ihr Dr. Hermann Maas

Transcription of Letter from Minister Hermann Maas to Else Gutmann

In the spring of 1952, just before Passover, I visited the then widow Els. I was in Eppingen for my first trip back since our 1937 departure. After stopping at the Jewish cemetery of Eppingen, taking some photos of our former home and the empty lot where the synagogue once stood, I took a taxi to nearby Berwangen. Upon arriving at this tiny town, I asked the first person I saw on the street where the Vollweiler house was.

Els was standing in front of her house, waiting for me. I had brought her some food items since I knew that she was living on meager rations. She welcomed me to her old farmhouse, the typical dwelling place of the community. On the ground floor, there was a small area for stalls, empty at this time but able to accommodate farm animals, including the usual chickens. The living quarters on the first floor consisted of a room and a kitchen area. There was no indoor

Els served a lovely meal, using her best and linen napkins, as well as her china and cutlery. welcome guest, her first glimpse of family since wanted to understand why she chose to remain the poverty and living among the folks who had answer was simple. "Where would I go, I would and here I at least have a house." She had a brother but did not have much contact with him; apparently, he had not taken the persuade her to leave Germany.

It was difficult for me to leave two days immediately become attached. I was family, which missed. I gave her a modest gift and sorrowfully left to continue my journey.

My second visit to Els in Berwangen was in the late sixties with my wife Phoebe. We had a similar experience to my earlier stay, including an overnight with Els offering us her bed. It was rather cold and Els heated our sheets by placing a hot water flask in the bed. A chamber pot was put beneath the bed in case of a nighttime need. This was Phoebe's first encounter with such an old fashion way of life and she accepted it in good spirits.

The night was very cold but the down-filled covers provided great warmth and incredible comfort. In the morning, Els prepared a tub bath in the kitchen for a somewhat embarrassed Phoebe. It was just like in the pioneering days. Phoebe sat in a large metal tub and Els poured heated water over her body.

Els served us a sumptuous, home-cooked meal, again using her best china and cutlery. Phoebe remembers the slices of finely decorated butter with floral patterns. While the outside of the house had a neglected look, the living quarters had an aura of elegance, with hand-stitched curtains and lace covered side-tables, undoubtedly all created by Els. We had a memorable stay in Berwangen and left *Tante* Els with much sorrow and love.

Els went to Karlsruhe now and then to attend services at a synagogue. She took responsibility for maintaining the hundred or so Jewish graves at Berwangen. Els had a heart attack and passed away at a hospital in Sinsheim on March 26, 1974. She was the last living Jew in Berwangen.

Many years later, in the summer of 1996, Phoebe and I visited Berwangen again. We drove through the town expecting to find the Vollweiler house. After a few twists and turns, we did indeed come to a location where the ruins of the synagogue once stood, replaced now by a complex of two garages. We asked two nearby gossiping women if the house next to the garages was that of Els Gutmann and they said that it was.



bedroom, living plumbing.

lace tablecloth I was a most before the war. I there, enduring rejected her. Her have nothing, in New Zealand

initiative to

later. We had she desperately

During conversation with one of these neighbor women, we were told that a Turkish family now occupied the house but that they were currently away on a vacation. We were also told that the house was in the process of being taken down and replaced. The neighbor had been a friend of Els and told us how she had once helped her when she fell and injured a leg. This woman had a key to the house. She would not let us go upstairs but she did allow us to peek through the entryway and we saw that the ground-floor barn and storage area was in complete disarray.