

Pascale Hugues

Hannah's Dress

Berlin 1904–2014



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For Kaspar and Taddeo – the street of your childhood

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Berlin 1904–2014

Translated by C. Jon Delogu

With passages from the German translated by Nick Somers

polity

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My street in 1915. When it was built in 1904, my street was still on the outskirts of Berlin proper in a purely residential neighbourhood. As the capital grows, it in effect comes to be a part of the enlarged city centre.



‘Schmuckplatz’. My street is intersected by this ‘jewellery square’ – a purely decorative open area composed of large geometrical forms. This layout stands in sharp contrast to the cramped atmosphere of the older Berlin centre.



The parade of the Master Bakers of Schöneberg, 8 May 1911. My street has none of the pretensions of the large prestigious avenues. This is the only photo I ever found that shows it being host to a particular civic event. An extraordinary spectacle in a street ordinarily so calm.



The first occupants. Lilli Ernsthaft and her mother at the window of their flat at number 3 in the 1920s. Lilli spent seventy-nine years at this same address. She was the last survivor of the perfectly assimilated Jewish-German bourgeoisie that moved into my street at the beginning of the century.



**Heinrich and Lilli Ernsthaft
with their son Harry in**

1925. A simple love story. They met at the home of friends and then later each morning at a tram stop of line number 62. Lilli was a stenographer-typist. Heinrich was a businessman. On their way to work they fell in love.



An invitation at the Kutschera's. On the left, Karl Kutschera and his children Gert and Karin; on the right, Heinrich and Lilli Ernsthaft. Lilli Ernsthaft enjoyed talking about her worldly social network in the years before Hitler came to power.



On the steps of Schöneberg City Hall: Herbert and Klara Fiegel, the parents of Miriam Blumenreich, accompanied by their witnesses on their wedding day in 1929. The young couple would move into the home of Klara's parents at number 3, the same building where Lilli and Heinrich Ernsthaft lived.



Klara was a kindergarten teacher. Her school was located on the ground floor of the building where her parents lived. The whole street was sad when she got married since she soon stopped working so as to have children of her own.



Miriam and her mother Klara shortly before their emigration to Palestine.



Miriam Blumenreich today at the front gate to her home in Kiryat Bialik, near Haifa. As soon as we met, Miriam Blumenreich wanted to make sure I knew that 'We weren't just anybody in our Berlin street! My father was a doctor twice over with degrees in political science and law!' She wanted to restore to her father the honour he once had before his life took a different turn.



Jochanan Beer on the boat taking him from Trieste to Haifa.

Jochanan lived with his grandparents at number 19 in my street. After their grandson left for Palestine, Martha and Gustav Beer were expelled from their flat, which was given over to 'Germans of the Aryan race', and they were deported to Theresienstadt.



Hans-Hugo Rothkugel, today John Ron, on his first day at primary school. When he speaks about his childhood John slides into German. He remembers the smells of his street – the scent of the steam-iron at the dry cleaners of Frau Kubeth, or the scent of vanilla in the shop of the waffle-maker at the end of the street.



From left to right: The maternal grandmother of Hans-Hugo, his parents Leon and Irma Rothkugel, and his uncle Rudolf.

Leon Rothkugel is hardly conscious of being Jewish. He's the eccentric bourgeois son of Albert Rothkugel, an executive in one of the largest private Jewish banks that financed the Franco-Prussian war of Chancellor Bismarck.



Paul (third from the left), the brother of Hans-Hugo, with some of his kibbutz friends. In the spring of 1942, Paul drowns. Hans-Hugo never tells his mother about this accident. She had stayed in Berlin, taking solace in the belief that her children were safe and sound in Palestine. She only outlived her son by a few months and would die during her deportation in December 1942.



Hans-Hugo alias John Ron in 1950. This serious young man with his spectacles and neatly greased hair has only one dream – to discover Paris. He wins a scholarship to study meteorology for one year at the Sorbonne.



John Ron in Berkeley with Ping, his personal assistant. Latterly, Hans-Hugo Rothkugel went by the name of John Ron – an English first name and a Hebrew last name. He spent his last thirty years in a small council flat for the elderly in California.



Hannah Kroner and her parents at the beach on the Baltic Sea in 1922.



Hannah and her friend Susanne. In fact, it was their mothers who decided everything. After assuring themselves that the girls were both well brought up, from the same social milieu, and wore white socks and well-polished shoes, Frau Kroner and Frau Wachsner introduced themselves at the entrance to their children's school. 'Would you like our children to be friends?'



Hannah in New York in 1941.

When Hannah and Susanne are no longer allowed to attend school because they are Jewish, they are advised to learn a trade that will be useful for when they emigrate to the United States. Hannah chooses to become a dancer and dance teacher. Susanne takes sewing lessons.



Hannah at her dance school a few years ago.

In 1947, Hannah opens the Kroner School of Dance on Long Island. There, no one knows the founder's origins. Hannah and her husband never thought it necessary to explain that they were German Jews.



Liselotte Bickenbach at her office. At a young age, Liselotte tries to escape from her rigid and oppressive childhood home. In Berlin she lands a job as a secretary within the High Command of the German army.



A radiant Liselotte Bickenbach before the war on the beach at Swinemünde. And as a sad-eyed war-widow in the 1960s in Hagen. What happened between these two photos?



Assistant Captain Wilhelm Wagner. Liselotte's husband, an aeronautical engineer and test pilot, is stationed on an airbase north of Berlin. Liselotte's happy life is dashed on 17 September 1944, two days before her second wedding anniversary. On a test flight, Wilhelm Wagner is killed when his plane falls from the grey late afternoon sky and crashes to the ground.



Joachim Bickenbach and his mother Liselotte. Joachim is a child with no father, like many others. At school, when the teacher calls the roll and asks the profession of the father, half of the boys answer, 'Dead'.



My street after the war. Of the thirty blocks of flats on my street, only eight are lightly damaged and inhabitable.



A few days of family leave. Wilhelm and Annaliese Krüger move into number 19 in 1936. Wilhelm is a cutlery salesman. During the war, he's called up and sent to the Russian front.



Annaliese and her daughter Ursula.



The Krüger's flat. Every night the air raids risk destroying the building. Annaliese has pictures taken of each room to at least have a memory of her furniture. The dining room (top) and the den (bottom) where one sees an ornate clock and to the left a plaster bust of Hitler. In another picture is the bathroom with its tub permanently filled with water – a precaution in case of fire.



Tangerine Dream in 1972 in Los Angeles. From left to right: Chris Franke, Peter Baumann and Edgar Froese.



David Bowie in Berlin in the summer of 1976. He lived in Berlin until 1978. The Thin White Duke wants to escape the limelight and get unhooked from cocaine. He no doubt found in my street the sanatorium atmosphere he was eagerly looking for.