

Me in Guayaquil, Ecuador, 1951-1960

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Jerusalem, September 9, 2008

This memoir of his early years in Ecuador was recently provided by Gabriel Alexander. His mother Miryam (Lotte) Alexander is the daughter of Fred (Aschkenes) Artmann, (his first name was Siegfried, and later he changed his last name also). Fred was the youngest brother of Hanna Aschkenes, the mother of Wolf Pollak, Henry Pollak's father.

So, Miryam is a cousin of Wolf, which makes Gaby a first cousin of Henry, twice removed, or something like that!

After the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany in 1938, Fred's emigration visa came through well before that of his wife Flora, and he left early for Cuba before being able to come to the US. Although Fred eventually sent Flora transportation and a visa, she gave it away and chose to remain in Austria. She died in a Nazi concentration camp.

Gaby now lives in Israel. He learned German, Spanish, and Hebrew, in that order.
Maybe more.

Some days after my 9th birthday party in July 1960 we left Guayaquil, Ecuador, on our way "back" to Israel. How come "back"? My brother Michael Benjamin and I were born in Ecuador. On the morning of Tuesday, 17th of July 1951, I decided that I had enough of my mother's warmth and made it clear to her that I'm leaving her forever. Mother, Miriam Charlotte, so she told me later, was alone at home, with little if any knowledge of the local Spanish language. How my father, Aharon Werner, who nicknamed himself Alex, was informed about my decision, I don't know. In those days the public telephone communication system in Guayaquil wasn't too efficient. Mother made her way alone to the hospital on foot. As far as I can judge after more than 57 years of life, she was OK and arrived on time. About noon she gave birth to me, whom my father called the first Israeli born in Ecuador.

"La Maternidad," the Hospital, which had a dreadful smell (maybe from intensive disinfectants they had to use there which I hated always when I was taken there to visit newcomers) was a big building which served exclusively for deliveries. Women lay in different categories according to the money their families could pay. Mother, as maybe most of the Jewish women, was hospitalized in "especial;" meaning she had a room of her own which made her very lonely and bored. Grandfather Bruno paid the bill. How long did she stay there? Maybe a week, maybe less. To visit mothers at La Maternidad had its own procedure. After entering the building and suffering the smell, one used to go up one floor, along some corridors with the view of a patio with a nice garden. I always hoped I'd be able to meet another kid to talk and play with, have the needed nerve to behave "nicely" as long as the women talk their endless stuff, and say how "sweet" the little baby looks that one could view for a few seconds from the window of the newborn room. The baby was wrapped in diapers and usually seemed to me not cute but too little and fragile.

Some years later I asked my mother why they decided to call me Gabriel Eitan? "Jekkes," that is, Jews from German or Austrian origin, often gave their children two names. Why they had chosen "Eitan" I really don't know or remember. Gabriel was chosen instead of Gershon. My grandfather, father of Father, who was murdered 1943 in Auschwitz, was named Gerhard. Parents decided that "Gershon" could be an appropriate translation of "Gerhard" to Hebrew. But mother thought it's not a nice name, beside she once had a boyfriend named Gershon whom she didn't want to be reminded of. So they decided to keep at least the "G" and call me "Gabriel". In far away Guayaquil, Mother liked to read Ben-Gavriel's books (Mosche Jaakov Ben Gavriel born as Eugen Hoeflich). Ben Gavriel was a German author who lived most of his life in Jerusalem and whom she knew. His house was in downtown Jerusalem and serves to-day as a very fancy restaurant. Once my parents told me, "You see the old man in the entrance of this house, that is Ben-Gavriel." So maybe I even saw him and remember him.

On January 12, 1957, a Sunday afternoon, when my brother Michael Benjamin, decided it's time to check what the world looks like, matters were somehow different. I was around and do remember very well, that both parents lost some of their temper when Father took Mother with our car again to the Maternidad. Meanwhile communication had been modernized (our private telephone number was 12398) and they informed my grandmother Lilly, mother of my father, by phone, that they are on their way.

It was late afternoon and my father said I can't stay at the hospital's waiting room till it will be over. In those days fathers stayed outside the delivery room and were not allowed to attend their wives giving birth to their children. He took me home where my grandmother took care of me and then he returned to the hospital. Next morning he came into my room, smiling from ear to ear saying, "Now you have a brother." I was somehow disappointed and thought, I should have insisted on staying at the hospital and see to it that matters might have developed according to my wishes: I wanted a sister. One boy in the family should be enough, I thought. Besides, one of my friends, Freddy, had a sister, Peggy, whom I liked very much.

Again I don't remember or knew at all, why my parents decided to call my brother Benjamin as his second name. I do remember very well, that when my father and I came to visit my mother at the hospital, they had a long talk, what name to give that little baby who was lying beside my mother's bed and they said is my brother. My idea was that the baby doesn't look great and even doesn't open his eyes. After some deliberation they decided Michael, because of the three angels that visited Abraham - Gabriel, Michael and Raphael. Sorry, but Raphael was never produced. I do believe, that now in old age, my mother feels sorry that she wasn't interested in more children.

So my brother was called Michael and we called him Micky. When I told my friends that mother gave birth to a brother and saw how they appreciated it, I agreed with my parents, that they were right and a boy is better than a girl. A boy has the potential of being a good playmate. Girls are a problem in this respect. Well, they are nice and interesting, and later, when you grow up, I thought, you should choose one of them to be your wife and get married to her, what I haven't done till this day. But till that happens, girls have different interests in life. I didn't care to play with their dolls. Cars and airplanes were better. But too often they got insulted for no reason, began to cry, demanded to leave my room which was packed with toys and run to their mother or asked my mother to take them home. So, very quickly, I accepted Michael, "my little brother," and was very proud of him.

Years later Michael told us he didn't like his nick name Micky. Now everybody calls him Michael and just my parents stick to the old version. Eventually, almost nobody calls me Gabriel, surely not Eitan. I'm known as Gaby. When the Hebrew University of Jerusalem informed me that my dissertation was accepted and I was given officially the title "Doctor," I thought it is time to get rid of "Gaby." Dr. Gabriel E. Alexander would also go better with my job, head of the History Institute of the Jewish National Fund. But it didn't work out. Gaby stuck to me, and I gave up very quickly that fight; nick names are very common in Israel. If Benjamin Netanyahu promotes "Bibi," Gaby is OK with me. Just in German I insist on Gabriel, since Gaby in that language is a female name.

Still, one would ask, why didn't my parents order an ambulance on that Sunday afternoon in 1957? As far as I remember, the first ambulance I heard and saw was in 1959, when we visited Israel. I believe, there were no ambulances in Guayaquil in the 50's, but maybe I'm wrong. Medical emergency services didn't exist for sure. On one of the evenings at the Jewish community center, where we used to spend long hours, a senior member got a heart attack. Well, I didn't understand that that was his problem, but was very much surprised to see that the grandfather of one of my friends throws up in public; that was a children problem not for the grown-ups. So the men, maybe also my father, who was involved in that affair too, called a taxi who took the old man to the hospital. Maybe they didn't have ambulances there, but they indeed had good doctors. The man recovered and died years later in old age. I also wouldn't sit here now and write my childhood memories if they hadn't had good doctors. Mother said very often, she is sorry for every minute she had to spend in Guayaquil, but one aspect of life was OK, they had very good doctors.

How come I wrote above, some days after my 9th birthday party in July 1960 "we", meaning father, mother, my brother Michael and I, left Guayaquil, Ecuador? Why was I and my brother born there at all? It's because of my grandmother, Lilly Cohn. She came to Ecuador sometime around 1940. She didn't arrive alone. Her second husband, Bruno Moritz, came with her; maybe he would have said, she came with him. In any case, they arrived together. Why did they come to Ecuador? Not because they thought it was the Promised Land. Not at all. In the mid 30's grandmother divorced Grandfather, my father's father, Gerhard. Their marriage wasn't very successful, although it seems to me from documents I found recently, that he was very fond of her forever.

After Hitler came to power Grandfather and Grandmother decided to send their only son, my father, to Palestine/Eretz Israel. In 1934, when that happened, he was 11 years of age. Grandmother told me the main reason for the divorce was my grandfather's refusal to leave Germany, although he had few opportunities to do so. Could be true. Grandmother and Grandfather lived separately in Berlin in the 30's. In Berlin she met Bruno Moritz, whom she knew before. He divorced his non-Jewish wife and together, he and Grandmother Lilly took the opportunity to leave Berlin for London, maybe 1939, anyhow before World War II broke out. Bruno was a business man; Father says he sold insurance in Germany, and

also an international chess player. In 1939 he got a fake invitation to a chess competition in London; he and his newly married second wife grabbed the opportunity and left the Third Reich. She kept saying, during the immigration the Germans robbed her of all her family possessions.

In London they had no real legal status, made a very poor living out of nothing, selling commodities at underground train stations and being supported by Jewish refugee organizations. The possible German invasion to Great Britain, and being declared as alien citizens after the breakout of war between Germany and the UK, convinced them to accept HICEM's (HICEM is an acronym of HIAS - Hebrew Immigration Aid Society and ICA - Jewish Colonization Association) offer to get immigration visas to Ecuador. HICEM also paid for the voyage. Ecuador was one of the very few countries around the world at that time that accepted European immigrants, including Jews. It is a very special historical fact that isn't stressed fairly in the history of mankind and the Holocaust.

Grandmother Lilly, whom we called Oma and other people called Oma Lilly, and I for the first years of my life, and Grandfather Bruno arrived with almost nothing in Guayaquil in 1940, and decided to stay there. Most of the Jews who arrived during those years in Ecuador fled Guayaquil as soon as possible, usually to Quito. Guayaquil is the port city of Ecuador, situated inland on the banks of the river Guayas, enjoyed a vivid atmosphere, had some economic activity which enabled immigrants to manage somehow, but experiences a very hot and humid tropical climate. Quito is the capital of Ecuador, an old Spanish colonial city some 2,850 meters above sea level, situated in a beautiful valley on the slopes of the Pichincha, one of the active volcanoes of the high Andes mountains whose peaks are covered with eternal snow, although the country is situated, as one can understand from its name, on the Equator. That meant, for European immigrants, all year round excellent weather, but thin air. Everything goes slowly, slowly, up there. For the Jews, who mostly came from central Europe, Quito was the optimal choice in Ecuador, yet in the first years it wasn't easy to make a living there.

Very soon after arriving in Guayaquil, Bruno Moritz established a book shop. He imported German books for the immigrants and academic publications for the local intelligencia, lawyers, doctors and lecturers at Guayaquil's universities. He got to know his first Ecuadorian customers thanks to his chess knowledge. The members at the local chess club were very happy to get a player of international status. That was the beginning of "Libreria Cientifica," a bookstore chain, which, according to internet information, still exists to-day. Father was asked by his mother to join her in Guayaquil. In 1950 he was ready to do so, after he fought for the independence of the State of Israel and married my mother, in 1947, in Jerusalem.

My grandparent's plan to bring over their children went OK but at the last minute a problem developed. Some weeks before leaving Jerusalem my mother got pregnant with me, so she made the whole journey from Jerusalem to Guayaquil in horrible travel conditions together with me. She still keeps telling me, it's a wonder she gave birth to me at all. I thought, she says, they will throw me into the ocean, as I saw at the movies that they throw corpses from ships on the high seas. When upon arrival in Guayaquil mother told her husband's mother (Grandmother Lilly) she was pregnant. Her answer was, under the Jewish immigrants one could find good doctors who could perform a safe abortion; maybe she talked out of personal experience. A few days later she took her to a maternity doctor who later also delivered my brother.

I remember very well Dr. Serano, who wasn't young anymore, who my mother said, never got an official doctor title from any medicine faculty in the world, not even from that in Guayaquil, but had more experience and knowledge than many "real doctors." Mother knew what she was talking about. In Jerusalem she was trained as newborn nurse and worked for a few months at the Hadassah Hospital. I was sitting before my mother's room in the hospital a few days after my brother was born, waiting, together with other women for the doctor's visit to be over so we would be let in again into my mother's room. Dr. Serano came out and told one of the mothers, it's time she should get another baby; he would be happy to help her again with the delivery. "You know," he said to her, "till today I haven't lost even one child."

Eventually, life in Guayaquil for a bunch of Jewish Gringos and their children wasn't so bad in the 50's. All in all, they made up some 350 souls. For some special occasions, the Jewish local leaders used to invite also the "non-full Jews" who were living there, for some reason or other, or Jews that arrived in the country before the "mass" immigration from Europe after 1933 who had mostly assimilated totally into the local elite. In the Jewish community they were called, "die Kolonial Truppen," the colonial troops. In Quito, there was a bigger community, of about 2,500 Jewish souls. Jewish life was very intensive. As usual, under Jews, one community organization wasn't enough. In the late 40's the Jews in Guayaquil had split themselves into two different organizations -- "Centro Israelita," which was Zionist and whose members we were, and "Beneficencia Israelita" which was not Zionist. Everyone in the Jewish community called the

Jewish center - "Der Klub," the club. Since most of the Jews arrived from central Europe, meaning Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, fewer from Hungary, Rumania, Poland and Italy, the "official" Jewish language in Ecuador was German. That is why I know German, and very little Spanish.

What did the Jews at their community center do? The grown-ups played cards: mainly poker; grandmothers played canasta; mothers gossiped; children played and were bored. The first Klub was housed on the main avenue of Guayaquil - "Avenida 9 de octubre", on the corner of the Malecon, viewing La Rotonda, were the statues of Bolivar and San Martin stand, on the banks of the Guayas, a vast river whose waters were always dark grey, if not brown. They had an awful smell, since the city sewer flowed into it also. Before the Jewish community rented the place it served as the American Consulate. Later, the Klub moved to a villa, more in the suburbs. The rooms were modest and crowded but the house had a nice garden in which a swimming pool was built. We kids liked the garden and the swimming pool. Later rather than sooner, the grow-ups decided that one has to take care of the Jewish education of the children. So they imported a teacher from Israel.

Moshe Rubin arrived sometime around 1958 and told his welcomers at the airport that he has a little problem. He can't stay, unless they immediately provide for the coming of his girlfriend Rama, whom he insists on marrying. The bunch of Jews, who didn't know how they were going to pay the salary of Moshe and almost didn't come up with the needed funds to pay for his airplane ticket from Israel to Guayaquil, now had to find the needed funds to bring over his future wife. Somehow they did it. Moshe married Rama in Guayaquil; it was a big Jewish marriage after many years that such an event hadn't taken place in that city.

Moshe was our teacher at the Klub. He taught us Hebrew songs, made us perform during Jewish Holidays, told us stories about Israel, and his main success was to teach us the Bible. Moshe was not religious but thought the Bible is the basis of any knowledge about the Jewish People, their history and values. He sat with a Hebrew Bible and verse by verse translated it into Spanish. Spanish translations that my father offered him from the Libreria weren't good enough for him. Children couldn't understand the sophisticated Spanish language, and the sense was too Catholic. When I came to Jerusalem, teachers were amazed about my Bible knowledge. Besides, Father brought me from the Libreria a big children's book which told the main Bible stories and was illustrated with bigger and smaller pictures. Genesis, Abraham, King David etc. There was one page I always skipped. It showed Prophet Samuel appearing from the other world before King Saul; it made me very afraid.

Moshe and Rama's apartment was a walking distance from ours. I had to go just a few blocks from one to the other, through one of the most stinking streets of Guayaquil. I did it almost every Sunday afternoon. Grandmother Lilly was totally shocked when she found out for the first time that I wander alone as an 8-year old boy through Guayaquil's streets. I saw no problem with it and have to admit that never, ever, did someone do me any harm. With Moshe and Rama we went together to the Klub, usually on a city bus. The first time I was very surprised: Bus? Respectable people in Guayaquil don't ride a city bus. If one needed to go from one place to the other and had no car, a taxi should be hired. My amazement even grew when I saw and heard Moshe talking daily stuff with the local people, as equals, as if they were "one of us." The "simple people" should and knew their place and we, "the better people" knew ours, and no one had to mix that up.

What did it mean to live in Guayaquil in the 50's? Men were busy in their business. Father built up the Libreria Cientifica. One day, sometime around 1956, Bruno, the husband of Oma, disappeared. Well, he said, he goes on a business trip to Germany. In those days Jews usually didn't visit Germany. From Germany he wrote grandmother that he asks to divorce her since he wants to remarry his former non-Jewish wife. Grandmother, who knew very well that he used to doublecross her with different women, had a nervous breakdown. Later she accepted his decision and they were officially divorced. According to the civil law in Ecuador, a divorced woman is named according to her maiden name. In her case Moritz as well as Alexander were erased and Grandmother's name was changed to Lilly Cohn. At this point, ownership of the Libreria Cientifica was split in three parts: Bruno Moritz got one third, Grandmother Lilly one third and Father also one third. Bruno informed the other owners he will stay in Germany as long as my parents stay in Guayaquil.

In the usually very unstable political system in Ecuador the fifties were outstandingly quiet. Presidents were elected in fully democratic procedures, no revolutions took place, the country's economic activity went very much OK. My parents used to tell me, "You," meaning me, "have the privilege of growing up in a very rich country where most of the people are very poor."

Poor they were, indeed. Guayaquil with its 300,000 and something inhabitants eventually became one big slum. Worst

of all were the rainy months, January till May. Rain came down usually in "aguaseros," storms of a few hours in which great quantities of water came down and turned the city into one big swamp. It became even more humid than usually and that brought into the city vast numbers of "cucarachas" and "grillos," different types of cockroaches. They were everywhere and made a hell of a noise. One tried to fight them with DDT. Yet, when one was murdered, tens came to his funeral. They enjoyed the city life, mainly its lights during night hours, and people understood who is more powerful.

During the years we lived in Guayaquil we moved twice, meaning I stayed at three different apartments in the downtown area. Ours were nice apartment houses but all around stood more simple houses. Not too far away stood the "covachas," bamboo, cardboard, wood houses, in which the poor lived. The poor also didn't mind living in the streets. Worst of all were the poor children, running around barefooted, babies often totally naked, pale from sickness and malnutrition, begging, begging, begging. There were always more beggars. And there were always more handicapped and cripples, often in awfully neglected conditions, terribly abused as helpless beggars.

When I entered school in Jerusalem in 1960, the teacher told me I should be careful and not to show off my family wealth (I hadn't noticed they had any), since there were also poor children in the class. I totally rejected her point of view. Well, there were kids in the class that had less than I, whose parents can offer them less than mine can give me. But they are surely not poor kids. I know from Guayaquil what poor kids are. Those are kids that have absolutely nothing, or even less than that.

Mother was usually home, as most other mothers. There was also a maid who lived with us called simply "la muchacha," the girl. She was always on duty except on Sundays, when she had a day off. During the last two to three years or more, that was Julia, who became part of the family. The previous maids usually ended up in unhappy circumstances. They disappeared one day, my father had to throw them out because my mother couldn't stand them anymore or they were accused of some minor thefts. There was one whom my mother found out was a drug addict and another, or was it the same woman, tried to commit suicide. That was not a simple affair. I remember a very big drama between my father and the father of that woman. I assume it was terminated with some extra money. With all my appreciation and respect for Ecuador and what that Republic has done helping Jews during World War II when most nations on the globe acted shamefully, to say the least, I got the impression, as a child growing up in Guayaquil, there is nothing that money couldn't buy.

I grew up at home with Mother and most of what I knew about other kids was from the visits at the Jewish community center. There were also the children birthday parties. That was one of the main events in our life over there. There were a bunch of children, so every now and then a birthday party took place. It had its procedure. The kids were brought by the mothers or maids who stayed in one room, maids with other family maids, and the kids played in another room. That was OK. Then they made us eat the birthday cake. I hated it. I didn't like to eat them, surely not cream cakes (still don't like them today); chocolate cakes were OK with me, but those were rare. So I didn't ate the cakes. Then they made us play "musical chairs". Later, homemade 8mm family movies, as well as cartoons and a magician performance were added. When the whole apartment or house of the birthday child was in a complete mess, the husbands arrived to take their dear ones home. That also took time since they first wanted to gossip and get something to eat, usually from the birthday cake. When the children were crying, the mothers exhausted and the men had their portion, everyone went home happy and content, till the next birthday party.

One day mother decided that enough is enough and took me to the kindergarten. In the beginning I didn't like it at all. I made such a big fuss that the kindergarten teacher gave up the fight and sent me back home. But some time later I was taken again to the same kindergarten and liked it very much. Mrs. Lempke was a real German kindergarten teacher who knew her ways very well in all of Pestalozzi's theories and methods. We children liked her very much and called her Mrs. Lenky; for us 4-5 year old kids to pronounce "Lempke" was impossible. Mrs. Lenky had her kindergarten with some 30 children on the roof floor of an office building in downtown Guayaquil. All the gringos who could afford it and some of the local secular elite sent their offsprings to Mrs. Lempke's kindergarten. In the morning, children were brought to the kindergarten by their parents or maids. At noon, when the activity was over, we marched in pairs from the roof floor down, some 4-5 floors, (there was no elevator), and waited in the building entrance to be picked up. My parents decided which of them would come to take me home. Yes, it happened, that my father, being busy with his business, forgot. Usually that ended in a very big scandal. Parents were angry at each other and I was crying.

Mrs. Lenky made us play, dance, sing, told us nice stories (Grim Brothers horror fairy tales were a major part in them) and made us children very happy. She had a few grownup sons who sometimes joined the fun. Once, Mrs. Lenky got sick. That was not good. Her assistants replaced her, maybe even her husband, whom we knew. The Lempke family

lived on the roof floor as well, besides the kindergarten rooms. Every now and then Mr. Lempke came and talked what he had to talk about with his wife, in German of course.

I knew German. I knew Spanish. Good question, who taught me Spanish? Surely not my mother. Eventually I was sure that everyone knows two languages since I got the impression that all the kids know two languages. One they talk with their parents, among the Jews it usually was German, but there were also others that talked English and some stuff I couldn't make out. We kids talked one to another in Spanish. Even Julia the maid, had two languages: Spanish, which she talked with us, and Quichua, one of Ecuador's Indigenous languages, which she used to talk with her parents when they came to visit her. So I divided the languages into two different categories. One was the "street language," meaning Spanish; the other was the "other language," in our case German. Once I asked my mother, "You know those people, (meaning the Ecuadorians), who always talk Spanish in the streets, what is their other language?" It was very hard for me to explain that. I assume they said, "When you grow up, you will find out; you will learn." Not a clever reply, which parents shouldn't use. Children are not stupid, and if they want to know something they have no desire to wait "till they will grow up."

Guayaquil is situated in the southern part of the globe, so the main activity goes from May till December. That was called the cooler period. Mother kept saying ten years she waited for the "cooler period" that never arrived. During January till April it becomes so hot that anyone who can, would flee the place. In May, when the kindergarten activity began, Mrs. Lenky decided about the children's production that will take place at the end of the year, meaning around Christmas. Seems to me the first theme was fairy tales; the second one, the year following, which was my last year in the kindergarten, it was Noah's Ark. Every child had a role in that vast, yearly production which one of my parent's friends nicknamed, Mrs. Lempke's Royal Shakespeare Festival. We rehearsed the production all year long. Every kid had to disguise himself according to Mrs. Lenky's instructions, which were a big headaches for the parents. They got a drawing or a photo, what the child should look like. No excuses whatsoever were accepted. Some time before the first production I had to take part in, I had injured my right arm; the arm was in plaster because of a dislocation. Mrs. Lempke wasn't impressed. The show had to go on, and I performed my role as all the other kids.

Sometime around Christmas evening, all parents of the kids were invited to the Lempkes' roof floor to watch the production. With my plastered arm I was dressed as We-Willy-Winkie. Towards the show's end, the yearly highlight number occurred. The kindergarten bell rang, someone opened the door and Santa Claus entered the packed roof floor. Whoooo. He had a long white beard, and wore, in the tropical heat of Guayaquil, a full Santa Claus outfit. Santa Claus greeted all people, and said, before he'll give every kid his present (well, it seemed to me I knew those presents from father's bookstore) one of the kids had to sing him a song. No one had the guts to stand up. I understood the desperate situation and approach Santa Claus. My mother almost fainted; Father stood up to commemorate the historic moment with his photography equipment; Grandmother Lilly and Grandfather Bruno couldn't have been more proud. The kid speaks almost no language (I was something like 4 or 5), he can't sing, isn't able to learn by heart any text (true, can't do it yet today), now what will happen? No problem for me. I sang with Santa Claus my part, "Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are." No doubt, what counts are not the child's talents but the teacher's abilities; Mrs. Lempke knew very well her profession. The evening was rescued. I was very pleased and happy, Jewish not Jewish, who cares, I have met Santa Claus. Alas, one day my parents told me during a family discussion, "You meeting Santa Claus? You mean the event at Mrs. Lenky's party? Never. That was Mr. Lempke, he was disguised as Santa Claus." I was very annoyed by that. For years I refused to accept it.

Actually, that wasn't my first performance. I lost stage-fright when I was something a little over one year old. At the Klub they decided to organize a children Party for Chanukah and the "goyish" New Year. One of the main numbers was to put me and Dina on the stage. Me, barefoot, almost naked, dressed just with a diaper, represent the new year, and little Dina who was 4 or 5 years older than myself, the old year. It's for psychologist to analyze how come I can remember the event. Yes, they took a photo which is kept somewhere in the family archives together with the program which notes my name together with that of Dina. Yet, I do remember the occurrence on the stage, mainly an older man glancing and smiling behind his projector aiming the spot light on Dina and me.

Yes, there was also the next production of Mrs. Lempke, one year later, that one with Noah's Ark. This time I had to disguised myself as a donkey. Didn't like the idea too much, but when Mrs. Lenky gave an order, the order had to be followed. Meanwhile, my mother was highly pregnant with my brother. The idea of walking up all the 4 or 5 floors to the Lempkes didn't suit her in her late eight month of pregnancy. But it was impossible not to do it. There was an immense tension at home during the critical afternoon hours. Wearing a donkey disguise in Guayaquil's humid, hot, evening climate wasn't pleasant. When I got excited two things happened always together: I got a very high fever and I

threw up. They both happened. Father said it is too much to take. Mother is very much pregnant and he doesn't know how she'll make her way up to the kindergarten; I'm sick and the donkey disguise is horrible, besides he doesn't like parties and masses. Who has to see again all those "goyim" and Jews? But we made it. We enjoyed it. It was perfect, as always.

Besides birthday parties and the activity at the Jewish community center there was one more major happening for us in Guayaquil. There was Playas, (beaches) nowadays officially named General Villamil. As noted earlier, Guayaquil is located inland. To go to the Pacific Ocean took almost two hours by car. Playas is located some 100 km south-west from Guayaquil. Eventually, the main ocean shore residence for Guayaquil became and still is Salinas. But the Jewish immigrants from central Europe were not allowed to go to Salinas during the war years. The Americans established a military marine base there and the area was under military supervision. So the Jews, and other immigrants, went to Playas, which was a poor little fishing village with fantastic sea shores. Some rich people from Guayaquil built their week-end houses there. In the early 50's a luxury Humboldt Hotel was erected above the beautiful ocean shores.

Every now and then, the greater part of the Jewish community of Guayaquil moved for the weekend to the Humboldt at Playas. The accommodations were very nice; it was less hot and humid than in Guayaquil, the atmosphere was very relaxing. They served a very good "seviches de camarones," meaning a shrimp cocktail, but all the other food was between bad and awful. For me, a bad eater in any case, a catastrophe, except for two dishes: noodles and "conchas," shells.

It happened often that we came just for the day to Playas; sometimes we stayed a few days. Mothers met and told one another all the latest news; fathers talked business, and grandmothers played canasta. During morning hours everyone was at the beach. Then came the big fight about lunch, bad service, bad food. After a nap, the grownups met again for tea or coffee. The main language one could hear on Humboldt's terrace was German. After supper, kids went to sleep and grownups had their dance and meeting. Non-Jews got drunk, Jews drank mineral water and played poker.

Playas also had a casino, with roulette games. That fascinated me. I was very angry and disappointed when authorities prevented the entrance of kids into the playing hall, which happened later. As a little kid I could accompany Father when he was playing there; there was also Martha, Grandmother's friend, who liked me very much, and gave me "fichas," meaning chips, to put on the roulette table. The teller shouted "Nada mas," no more, and took all the plastic chips with his ruler to the cashier. I loved the noise, mainly when there were many gamblers. There was no square bed or table cloth that couldn't be turned into a roulette table. In 1980 I visited Las Vegas for few days, saw again the roulette tables and couldn't stand the idea of throwing away one's money in a stupid gambling game. Yes, meanwhile I learned how hard it was to earn some extra money.

It happened one time that I stayed with Mother, sometimes also Grandmother Lilly, later also my brother Michael in Playas, and Father went back to Guayaquil for business. There wasn't much to do at Playas. In the middle of the village there was a little piazza with run-down wooden houses. That was also where the main church stood. Most houses were not much more than better or worse covachas. An old German-speaking immigrant woman had her little shop on the square where she sold the vacationers stuff they forgot at home - soap, razors, swimsuits, some toys for the children. We bought a shovel there with which I liked to build my roads and airports in Humboldt's sand.

One can't imagine today the situation at the time. Almost no telephone communication existed between Guayaquil and Playas; maybe you could have sent a telegram, hoping it would arrive in time. But people thought, what can happen? But, if something did happen it was a problem. Myself and my brother knew how to get sick, and very often. One could find a doctor in Playas if one of the doctors of Guayaquil who had a week-end house was there. But how and where was it possible to buy the needed medicine? Once father made the whole way from Playas to Guayaquil and back just to bring the medicine the doctor ordered for my ailing brother Michael.

Another vacation destination for us from Guayaquil was Quito. There were flights between the two cities, with some DC-3 airplanes. If you had the right connections and the needed money, one could also join one of Panagra's international flights from the USA to South America with a DC-6, which made a stop at Quito and Guayaquil as well. The flight took around one hour, and was everything but pleasant. The airplanes had to go up into the Andes, flying near the peaks, find the valley of Quito, go down and not miss the short airport of Ecuador's capital. All that could be done just during daytime, since in the early afternoon hours Quito was covered with heavy clouds. No airplane could make a landing in such conditions in the 50's and on its way not to hit the Pichincha or some other of Andes' peaks. And that happened, not too often, never on Panagra's flights, but it wasn't unusual.

After arriving in Quito, usually in the early afternoon hours, one went directly to the hotel. The elevation difference between Guayaquil and Quito and the thin air up there, made people very tired and sometimes dizzy. After a good night's sleep one could enjoy a beautiful stay. We did it often; I joined my father on his business trips a few times, or I was sent there with my mother, and Father joined us later. Mother liked Quito, it was clean and not dirty and smelly as Guayaquil. It had beautiful scenery and wonderful air. Many of the kids in Guayaquil got allergic asthma. When I was about one year old, I got so sick that the doctor recommended my mother should take me for few weeks to Quito to recover. We had a nice time, as always, up there.

Later, the Guayaquil – Quito road was improved. My father made the trip few times with the car, which had to be adjusted before leaving Guayaquil for the thin air, mainly for the way up, since that went, at some point, above the tree growth boundary. Once, all of us, including my brother Michael, joined the trip, and we made it up and down through the jungles and along the very narrow unpaved roads with very deep abysses. The road was marked with numerous crosses for all the people who had been killed in some accidents along it. In the late fifties the trip took about 10-12 hours. We left Guayaquil in the very early dawn hours, and arrived in Quito in the late afternoon, again before the city sank into deep mist, so we still could find our way to the hotel's beds.

When father joined us in Quito we never were without a car, even before he dared to drive the road up to Quito by himself. In Quito the Libreria Cientifica had a branch; the branch had a car which was given to my father when he was there for business or vacation with his family. We used the car to make excursion to Quito's wonderful surroundings. We went to the Equator, visited churches and monasteries, saw how the Indios live in their huts and try to sell their beautiful handicrafts. Indios also came to Guayaquil to sell their handicrafts, mainly carpets and shawls. Mother liked them very much. One day she asked an Indio who was trying to sell his carpet on the street to come up to our apartment. The carpet he offered was too little; she wanted the same kind but bigger. "No problem," said the man, "I'll make one for you. You'll pay me something on account; the rest I'll come and pick up after I'll send you the carpet by the train to Guayaquil." Mother agreed. When she told the story to her friends, they said, "You'll never get rid of your Israeli naivete. He took your money, and you'll never see him again." But they were wrong. Some time later my father was asked to come to the railroad office to pick up the carpet and the Indio man came later to get his money.

Being born in July created a problem, when should I be sent to school? In May 1957 I was not yet six years old, too young for school, but maybe too old to stay another year with Mrs. Lempke. There were two relevant alternatives - the American School, which was more snobbish and more demanding, and there was "Escuela Moderna" of Mrs. Muriagli. Both schools taught according to two systems: half day the American one and half day the Ecuadorian one. Father knew very well the managers of both schools, since he sold them the school books. Manager of the American School said I'm too young and he wouldn't like to see me there. So Mrs. Muriagli was asked. She said she would test me. Father took me to the school which was located in an old fire brigade house. I remember very well the classroom; it served as the third classroom in which I later studied. Some lady sat with me for a while, talked and tested me. Most of her questions I didn't understand. So the decision was that I'm too young. But Mrs. Muriagli was an important customer of my father's bookstore, so she said, one could try and I was sent in May 1957 to that school.

Eventually, I made the change quite well. Not all the kids were new faces for me. Some I knew from Mrs. Lenky's kindergarten. Learning could have been interesting if they wouldn't have asked me to learn how to read and write. So long as they were just playing around with us, again some 30 kids, girls and boys in one class, it went OK. I even was classified as one of the better pupils. In the first weeks, teachers, all women, were fond of me. But they informed my parents that usually in the morning hours I seem to be very tired and uninterested in what went on in class. Nothing changed till today. I'm not a morning person, not at all.

Then they began with the reading and writing and even asked me to make arithmetic calculations not by adding the numbers the teacher wrote on the blackboard, that went more or less OK, but by reading and analyzing some written questions, who knows what they should have meant. For me "B" and "b" and "D" and "d" and "P" and "p" looked almost the same. Yes, I was, it seems, still am, dyslexic. In 1957, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, who knew about that? "They" meaning the teachers, parents, grownup, etc., decided, either I'm stupid or, in any case, too childish, interested in playing but not in classes and books, a shame for the family and for the Jewish people. Later, when dyslexia was an identified problem, I had almost completed high school studies successfully in Jerusalem. I used to say, if that problem would have been diagnosed in Israel, they would have helped me or sent me directly to a special school for retarded kids.

Those alternatives didn't exist in Guayaquil, surely not the second one. So, one had to wait till the second part of my

studies in the third grade when I finally found my way into reading and somehow writing Spanish, and even English. When the teacher read one of my exams after the "turning point," she checked again and again, questioning if I hadn't copied the answer of some other pupil that was sitting beside me. Comparing the answers she found out it had to be my own work, and asked me to come forward to the blackboard. We were not on the best terms, meaning me and that woman teacher, which was at that point responsible for the subjects that were thought in Spanish.

The test dealt with the history of Guayaquil, which at that point hadn't interested me very much. There was a school book in which we had to read some pages and were tested later. I sat at home, read it, partly with my father, understood the content, and answered the questions. Handing back the test, the teacher stated before the class, "You should know and take an example from Gaby; this time he wrote one of the best tests." Proud and happy I went home and showed it to my parents. Mother said, "Well, well. That just proves, if you want to, you can. But, that isn't enough, besides, who cares about the ridiculous history of Guayaquil. Sorry, you have to study this history at all, it isn't your history."

Parents always make matters more interesting than needed for their children. When I was finally again classified as one of the better pupils in class they decided to return to Israel, and here the whole ordeal began again with Hebrew.

Being the son of "Señor Alexander, el jefe general de la Libreria Cientifica," meaning the son of Mr. Alexander, the manager of the Libreria Cientifica, had its advantages also during the years when I was not such a good pupil, meaning, they, the teachers and other kids, didn't play around with me too much; everything had its limits, since my father was etc. etc. Father used to spend his free time with his hobbies - stamp collecting (still does) and riding his little motor boat. That was not for my mother; she, one might say, hated it. But it was very much OK with me, to join Father in his motor boat riding. The boat was kept at the Estero de Salado, a huge estuary of sea water in the surroundings of Guayaquil. Saturday afternoons, after Father closed the bookstore, and Sundays, we went fishing. In those days the Salado was full of fishes, little and big ones. Father liked to fish them, but we didn't like to eat them, surely not me, who ate very badly. So the fishes were given to the family who kept an eye on the motor boats, or the maids of my grandmother who had a red haired cat, Mimi, which I disliked.

One weekend afternoon my father caught a really big fish. I thought it was bigger than my father himself. The fish withstood a very hard and long fight till my father succeeded in pulling him out of the water and kill him. I was very proud. That is a really strong father! Well, what could we do with the poor, dead, big fish? We gave it to the family which lived at the entrance of our apartment building and should have taken care of its maintenance. They were living down there, father, mother and many, many kids; the woman was always pregnant. They wore my old clothes and played with my old toys. The fish would help them.

On Monday when I came to class, the teacher asked the kids if someone experienced something special during weekend. The idea was, she, together with the kids, will write on the blackboard something like a newspaper story. Yes, said the son of Señor Alexander, jefe general of, etc. etc. I and my father, who owns a motorboat on the Salado, fished together and caught a huge fish. "Good idea," said the teacher, "that's really outstanding news." She knew very well that at that point me and writing didn't combine to well. So, all the kids were asked to join the project; I was asked to tell the details. But, we couldn't make up the end. "You mean," she said, "you gave the fish to the family that lives in the entrance of your building?" That didn't sound good at all in a school to which the better families of Guayaquil sent their children. So, she decided, we will change the end. "Your family ate the fish and you gave your cat its leftovers." Cat? We don't have a cat; Grandmother has one, but Mother didn't want to bother her. The teacher ended the story as she suggested and ordered all the kids to copy it from the blackboard. I learned from that event never to trust newspapers stories.

Besides the general smell, heat, humidity, poverty, cucarachas and grillos, Guayaquil had, still has but we are not there anymore, another main problem - earthquakes. From time to time, the building trembled and shivered and made almost everyone afraid. Not me. I thought it great fun when the building began to shiver and tried to walk during those minutes, which wasn't always simple and possible. Maids or teachers at school used to kneel down and say some Catholic prayer. If father was at home he used to grab us, Mother, my brother Michael and me, and put us under a door frame; no one was allowed to run down the stairwell. It was taken as the most dangerous act one could do during such circumstances. My mother used to tell that during the first time she experienced an earthquake in Guayaquil and ran towards the stairwell the maid yelled, "Señora, no se baja; Mrs., don't go down!"

I don't remember that ever anything serious happened during does earthquakes. It could have happened that some painting fell from the wall or a piece of furniture collapsed, but there never, ever was a crack in the walls or some serious damage. They knew how to build their houses and buildings. But, that earthquake feeling stays with one forever.

Earthquakes are rare in Jerusalem, and so far, if they took place at all, they were not serious. But, I'm always one of the first to notice them, and usually stay very calm.

One night I awoke hearing strange noises from the street. Avenida 10 de Agosto, on which we lived, was, during night hours, usually very calm. It would have been sometime during 1959. My room was located towards the back; there was a yard in which a poor wooden house stood. It happened that I had problem sleeping because of endless fiestas that the family who lived in the wooden house arranged for their friends. During those fiestas, which could last several days, they used to turn the music on their radio very loud and get drunk. The noises I heard during that night were not familiar. People were shouting on the street and running. I was surprised to not find my parents at home, who, in the early evening hours, had left to meet some friends. Julia the maid was standing at the window from which one could view the street and tried to calm me. I was trembling and lost control.

Already some days before I got the impression that something was going wrong. During a birthday party in an apartment on the Parke Centenario, the main park on the Avenida 9 de Octubre, unrest developed among the guests when suddenly armored vehicles appeared. On the way back from school our bus was hit with stones. Some streets in downtown Guayaquil were declared unsafe and one was not supposed to walk through them. Students demonstrated and caused unrest and riots.

Somehow mother was came home and later father came back after he succeeded in buying the first transistor radio we possessed. We tried to become informed through the radio. There was also Ruth, mother's friend, who lived on the Avenida 9 de Octubre, who was always very well informed about everything and everyone in the city since her family owned the main supermarket in town, Supermerkado el Rosado.

Why and how the student unrest developed, I don't know. It went on for a few days. One night they plundered the city's pawnshop which was situated not far from where we lived. I remember people running away with whatever they could grab. In the worst night, when soldiers were sent into the city to fight the mob, shooting went on right under our windows, with corpses left lying in the street. That was the only shooting I have ever experienced nearby during my whole life, despite serving in the Israeli Army and living through terror activities in Jerusalem. At some point the authorities had put the city under total curfew and terminated the "festivals." My memory kept this traumatic experience. It was and still is for me very problematic to take part in demonstrations, including those of "Shalom Achsav," Peace Now Movement, or even to hear loud talking on the streets during night hours.

As the Jewish people of Guayaquil settled down they began to take trips abroad, usually to Miami and New York. We did it twice. Once in winter 1956, before my brother was born and the second time in winter 1958 when my brother was one year old. Both vacations began disastrously. When it was winter in the northern part of the globe, it was summer in Guayaquil, which meant, as mentioned above, everyone who could, fled the city. My parents had very good friends from Jerusalem, Walter and Esther, who in 1948 left for New York. They lived in their little house on Long Island with their two children, their son Danny was almost my age, and his younger sister Judy. In 1956 it was decided that after I'd finished my studies with Mrs. Lenky, we will spend a few weeks in New York. On the way to New York, we'll have a beautiful vacation in one of the most luxurious hotels in Miami.

During my last days with Mrs. Lenky I noticed that I had a strange wound on my left knee. We drove to Guayaquil's airport one evening and took Panagra's flight to North America. We arrived in Miami in the early morning. Immigration and customs were done at Miami's International Airport. From his business at the Libreria, Father knew the American General Consul in Guayaquil to whom he applied to get the needed tourist visas to the USA for his family. The Consul informed him that American authorities have information about some political activities of my grandfather, father of my mother, who made it to New York in the early 40's but later left to Australia, and that my mother had applied for an immigration visa in the 30's. After the so-called "Anschluss," the annexation of Austria to Germany by the Nazis in March 1938, mother's parents had applied for immigration visas to the USA. The quota number they received was too high and the family fell apart, which led to the murder of my grandmother, mother of my mother, in Belzec, Poland, in May 1942.

In the morning hours of February 1956, Father, Mother and I were sitting in the immigration hall at Miami's International Airport waiting to be called by the immigration officer of the United States of America. One can imagine my parent's feelings during those moments, but all went well. From the airport we went to the hotel. The hotel had a nice pool, which I tried to use, although most guests thought it was too cold. The hotel also had many Jewish guests who invited my father to the hotel's synagogue. Father and synagogues usually don't combine. My parents took walks around the city.

Mother wanted a photo camera; Kodak came out with a new "box" which she liked very much. At the shop they also sold TV sets; I was fascinated to view, for the first time in my life, all those faces on the screens, all shown at the same time. But, the pain in my knee grew worse. Some time later, I wasn't able to walk anymore and really felt sick. It was clear that something had to be done in unknown Miami.

Father looked for a pharmacy with a Jewish name. They gave him an address of a nearby Jewish doctor. I remember they had a nice little rocking chair for children in the waiting room; maybe it was a children's doctor whom they had sent us to, maybe he was just a "regular" doctor. The doctor checked me, and said the knee had a very bad and serious infection which has to be treated as soon as possible at a hospital. That made my parents very afraid, to put me in a hospital in a totally foreign city, so they asked for 24 hours to consider the situation. We arrived at the doctor's the next day, the situation wasn't better, maybe worse. The brother of the first doctor checked me and said, he would take the risk and operate on me in the clinic immediately. He opened the infected knee, cleaned out the abscess, injected Penicillin, gave doses of Sulfa, and sent the family to the hotel. It should be OK, he said to my parents, "But, because of the operation and the infection, the nerve system might have been damaged; the kid won't be able to bend his knee, maybe forever. If needed, consult a doctor as soon as possible in New York." Nice program for a vacation in the States.

I remember lying in the hotel's bed, being very exhausted from the operation and being attended by my parents. The day afterwards, or maybe one day more, we left for New York. I felt better and regained my usual good mood. Flying was always interesting for me. Father used the few hours flying time to assemble a Revell airplane he bought in Miami, and maybe also drank too many whiskies which you got free on the plane in those remote days. The Revell airplane fascinated other men on the flight also. I assume the stewardesses spoiled me. In the 50's, flying was a luxury event. One used to get dressed up for it, wearing better clothes. But one also sat cramped in the airplane passenger cabins that were very noisy and felt every little turbulence during flight. Worst of everything was the climbing up and getting down of the airplane; you could lose your guts and the ears became totally stuffed.

We arrived in New York, were greeted by Walter and Esther who took us to their home. Next morning Danny came into our bed room; my English was almost nil but I found interest in his toys. So I stepped down from bed, kneeled on the floor on the bandaged knee. It was well again.

Some weeks later we took the plane back to Guayaquil. Such flights took some 12 hours or more, with many stops on its way. A DC-6 couldn't stay in the air too long without refueling. At the airport of Panama City a friend of mine from Mrs. Lenky's kindergarten entered the passenger cabin. That was Christobelchen. His parents were also from Germany, came to Guayaquil due to World War II, my parents knew them, everyone in the Jewish community knew them, but they were not part of the tribe. Maybe they had some Jewish origin but were Christians, as the name of their son hinted. Christobelchen had a bunch of sisters, but was the oldest boy in the family. At the kindergarten we didn't like him very much; I don't remember why.

When classes began after the vacation in New York, I expected to meet Christobelchen, whom I saw on the flight to Guayaquil. Alas, Christobelchen didn't appear. Some time later, Mother and I went to Guayaquil's airport to meet Father who came back from one of his business trips to Quito. Christobelchen's mother was there, together with his sisters expecting Christobelchen father's who also came back from somewhere. But Christobelchen wasn't there. I remember how Christobelchen's mother's was glaring at me, but I didn't have the guts to ask her where Christobelchen was. Where had he disappeared to? At some point I asked Mother, "Where is he?"

"Well," Mother said, "that is a very sad story. Christobelchen died." OK, he died, so where is he now? Julia, the maid, said something about Christobelchen being now an angel with God. She meant to help but that didn't go well with our values. Mother changed that message and said, "You know, when we go to the airport we use to pass the "cuidad blanca, the big white cemetery of Guayaquil. Somewhere there is also Christobelchen." OK, but still, where is he? I assume that at that point came the usual reply, when you will grow up, etc. etc. Yes, it took me some time to understand, that not too many days after we came back from Panama together on the Panagra flight, Christobelchen got, if I'm not mistaken, Polio, and nothing helped, and he died. To avoid the Polio curse all of us got the vaccination during our next vacation in New York.

In winter 1958 my parents decided to do it again. Michael my brother was one year old. All were packed into the airplane to New York. Customs and immigration were again at Miami. Mother phoned Esther to tell her that this time everything went OK; we'll meet soon in New York. I remember very well mother standing by a public phone being very surprised about Esther's answer. Her friend in New York recommended for us not to go on with the flight. "We," she

tried to convince mother, "have an awful blizzard, stay were you are! Enjoy Miami after what had happened during your previous vacation. You wouldn't be able to land or then get from the airport to Long Island."

Mother decided that the pilots ought to know better and we returned to the parked plane. At some point I felt the airplane is circling. I looked through the window, I always try to sit beside the windows, and saw planes above and under me and thought the view fantastic. Airplanes were my greatest interest in life. No doubt I would have become a civil pilot if my ancestors wouldn't have given me color-blindness to inherit.

The pilots couldn't make it to New York. It wasn't easy for the passengers, some of them were cramped in the DC-6 already for more than 24 hours, all the way from Santiago de Chile and even Buenos Aires up to North America. The navy base airport at Norfolk, Virginia, became our alternate destination. My brother, one year old, my self 5 or 6 years old, Mother who doesn't like to fly in airplanes and Father, who has been known to lose his temper from time to time. Nobody knew what would come next, except that the plane got enough fuel go to on with its flight to New York. Late at night we landed in New York, with no food and the heating system in the plane turned off to save energy since there was a very long line till the passengers could disembark. Some planes landed with the last drop of fuel and had to be pushed to the terminal at Idlewild International Airport (later renamed JFK), in New York. The terminal was nothing more than a big, rundown barracks. New York didn't offer many international flights at that time. The first big airport building, which later became Terminal 1, was under construction. Some time later we visited it and went up its tower from which I have viewed, for the first time in my life, an EL AL airplane waiting to go back to Israel.

Father hired the first Jewish taxi driver he could find, which wasn't a simple task at all. The guy kept saying it took him a few hours to shovel out his car from the heavy snow. He did good business that night driving us from Idlewild to our relative's house on Long Island for the fantastic sum, in those days, of 100 US Dollars in cash. He wasn't able to drop us in front of Walter and Esther's house; we had to do the rest on foot from the highway. Snow was higher than I was. They had me carry some bags which made it even harder. I don't think we had our suitcases with us; Walter and father drove to the airport some days later to get them. Mother was sure I'd get sick coming from Guayaquil's tropic climate directly into New York's polar cold. It didn't happen. New York was always a great experience. I wouldn't have been too sorry if my parents would have decided to move from Guayaquil to New York, and I had the fantastic thought of joining Danny, Esther and Walter's son, at his school.

Mother had many relatives in New York, all family members who fled Europe before the Holocaust. On our first visit we were invited to a family party at someone's home in Manhattan. The occasion had to do something with uncle Sam. Uncle Sam was the first who left Europe (Vienna) in the early 20's of the 20th century because he was fed up with his family there. America offered better prospects for a good living. Nobody cared too much about Sam's fate till Hitler came to Vienna. Then relatives remembered Sam and asked to be helped. Sam was an amateur painter. I posses some of his paintings, in his primitive style. One of them had to be cleaned and restored recently. The restorer expressed his wish to buy it for his private collection. No chance.

At some point during the party in Manhattan in 1956 I was asked to enter a nearby room in which uncle Sam was sitting. He was very sick. Totally white, pale, smiling towards me, maybe he said something. He was sitting there, "on borrowed time." Being so young I understood that that man should be very, very old, maybe as old as one of the seven dwarfs in Walt Disney's Snow White picture, which I hadn't seen. I disliked movies, was afraid, the name Charlie Chaplin made me run away whenever they showed one of his pictures at a birthday party, but I had a big Snow White children's book and heard the songs countless times. They were some of Mrs. Lenky's favorites. Father sold little yellow records from which one could hear the dwarfs singing 'Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho,' on their way back home from a day's work.

The party itself was one big nuisance for me. Horrible. Many grown ups, no kids my age, no toys, nothing to do. And all the time these strange big people, who knows from were they appeared, talking, talking, talking and one just hears I should behave nicely. Maybe they also offered me some cake; but I didn't like cakes and can do very well without them to this day. Still someone thought I'll be bored in those circumstances, so they bought me a puzzle but forgot to get the information right about my age. I couldn't do it, but was happy to keep it for years later. It seems to me, that in due time my brother Michael liked to do it. At the party there was also a Michael, the son of my mother's cousin Reynold, who is a few years older than I. He showed courage and played with me, which impressed me, otherwise I would have forgotten that event.

When we visited New York in 1958, Reynold came on a certain Sunday, picked us up, Mother, Michael my brother and me. Father had already left before us to return to Guayaquil to the Libreria, since his mother also had to come to New

York for some medical procedure. Reynold took us in his very big luxury car to their house in New Rochelle. It was a big black something car, that made Danny, the son of Walter and Esther, envy me who had the privilege to take a ride in it. Meta, Reynold's wife, had a big warm heart who liked to help people. She indeed was a social institution. But, she also knew how to be stubborn and thought that what she knows is the whole truth in the world. That led immediately to a certain tenseness between me and her, since she insisted I should eat what she had prepared although I was at that point still a bad eater and found no interest in her food.

Then the telephone rang and Meta said, "There is no Miriam at this number to talk to." I heard the grown-ups talking, talking, talking, and didn't interfere into the conversation, although I understood that Esther called to talk with mother. After Esther called again, maybe that time she asked to talk to Mrs. Alexander. Meta said, in her not too low voice, "Haven't known that you Lotte (that's how mother was called in Vienna) changed your name to Miriam; why have you done it and not informed me? In any case, Lotte suits you better than Miriam, which sounds like a Christian name." Full stop, new paragraph. It never made sense to argue with Meta.

Father had to pay, not just for the wellbeing of his family but also to help my mother's relatives in need. There was her cousin in Vienna and her family, who from time to time got some money from us and also some of our used clothes. There was also Aunt Kaethe. Kaethe made it also to the States and at that point of her life was living in Los Angeles. Mother wanted to see her, since she helped to rescue her in 1939 to Brussels and later to send her to Palestine/Eretz Israel. Father paid for the ticket and Kaethe flew, not exactly for the first time in her life, but almost, from Los Angeles to New York; till then she used to go, if at all, by train. All the family drove to the airport to meet Aunt Kaethe.

Kaethe impressed me, and contrary to my usual attitude, I expressed my wish to spend a day with her in Manhattan. Mother liked the idea. It would give her few hours freedom from me, which she could use to see some department stores and talk with her cousin Ruth who also lived with her family in Manhattan. Kaethe took me to Central Park where they had an area with carousels. I liked those things very much. Go around and around, hear the nice music, again and again. Kaethe liked them less. She was afraid to let me go alone, which I thought very strange. Grownups usually just kept their eye on me, waved when I passed them, but they didn't come with me on the carousels. She did, but very quickly got awfully dizzy and sick. They had to stop the machine and let her off. I went on and had a great time. Years later she told me what went wrong, and why she insisted to stay on the carousel. She was afraid someone would kidnap me, what happened in those days from time to time. Grownups always used to tell me, never ever go with strangers; don't be nice to strangers. That's what I keep telling my car, don't go with strangers since I'm afraid they'll steal you. I'm sure that machines also have a soul. Think about your PC when it gets one of its moods or your car, when it makes it clear, it has to see a doctor.

When weather was OK and Esther agreed, she took care of Michael my brother while Mother and I went to Manhattan. I didn't have much to do. Danny was in school, weather wasn't always good, so I couldn't play in the yard but had to spend the time inside the house or go with Mother someplace. In Manhattan the main aim was to do some shopping at Macy's or Gimble's. Part of the trip was made on the Underground. That was not too easy for Mother since she was afraid we'd miss the right station or go in the wrong direction. For me, shopping at Macy's or Gimble's wasn't very exciting. When mother disappeared to try on some dresses she was interested in buying, I took the opportunity to enjoy my independence and inspect the department store. Usually it didn't take too long before my wandering around alone was noticed by one of the saleswomen who tried to find out where my mother was. My English was poor those days, and no one really knew Spanish in New York, so they made an announcement saying a cute little boy named Gaby got lost, his mother is asked to come to so and so. I remember my mother's face when she came, very angry and ashamed to pick me up. Who was to be blamed? Me. "It really is impossible to leave you alone even a few minutes. I don't know what I'll do with you!" I knew by heart those phrases, the threats afterwards and the best reaction - to ignore them.

Still there was one place where I didn't get bored or to try my independence marches. It was the post office. Mother used to go there to write her endless letters and send them away. That took time. I found out that they have a post office box there which you have to open to throw your mail in. My self-appointed job was to grip the handle so the people can throw their mail into the box. I had my fun with it.

In 1958 we stayed for few months in New York with Walter and Esther, maybe too long. Their house wasn't very big, so they were surely happy to drive Mother, my brother Michael and me to the airport, and maybe even make sure we got on the plane to Guayaquil.

In winter 1959 my parents decided to do the incredible - take a vacation in Israel. Besides running away from

Guayaquils' heat and meet again their friends whom they left in 1950, they thought to check if they should return to Jerusalem. From my first moment on Earth I heard from both of them, maybe from Mother more than Father, "We are in Guayaquil, but not to stay forever." When we should go/return to Israel, was an open question. Not to stay in Guayaquil was the common standpoint of most of the members in the local Jewish community. In the second part of the 50's, a trend began of Jew leaving the country, usually to the USA. After coming back from Israel, my parents were convinced, it really is high time to do it, and go back.

Did I like the idea? I don't know. When you are 8-9 years of age, you usually do what your parents say, and usually what they say and do is right and ought to be done. I assume that one of the reasons that made the Jews in Ecuador in those days pack their bags was Fidel Castro. They were afraid that, if a communist takeover could happen anywhere, surely it was in Ecuador. The fact is, at the end of the 50's and beginning of the 60's, the greater part of the Jewish community in Ecuador left the country. Father almost experienced Castro's takeover in Havana. He was on a business trip there, one week before Batista fled the country. But, he kept saying, that his main reason for calling back Bruno Moritz, the ex-husband of Grandmother Lilly, to take over the Libreria, was my growing up. Guayaquil was no place to raise children; sooner or later you had to send them away, usually to the USA.

The timetable was set so that I could be accepted in school in Jerusalem, which begins in September. We arrived in Israel in the beginning of October 1960, which was OK, since during September the Jewish High Holy Days were celebrated, which meant, no school. We left Guayaquil a few days after Bruno Moritz returned from Germany, and my 9th birthday. A farewell party was celebrated at the Klub, not at our apartment which was at that point almost totally dismantled. The taxi drove us to the airport in the middle of the night where we got on a KLM flight to Europe. Lisbon was our first destination. The airplane took off from Guayaquil's airport, I sat, as usual, besides a window, feeling a chapter of my life terminated. I was sure that it is very doubtful if I'll ever see this city again, which my parents tried all the years not to appreciate, although in some ways it spoiled me and hasn't done me any harm.

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