

The Story of the Klaber Family

by Herbert Klaber

It started with the son of Abraham Klaber, who lived in the town of Embken, Germany. I believe he was married twice. Together they had 10 children, 3 sons and 7 daughters. My father, born on the 3rd of December, 1874, was named Max.

He used to tell us stories from his youth. Among those he told us about, the time he was riding a bicycle. He was speeding down a small hill and ended up landing against a tree. He was only a young man losing all of teeth. I remember that Papa had false teeth all through his life.

Max Klaber went to a Hebrew school in that small town. Later on in his life he became a traveling salesman. On one of his travels Max met a beautiful lady in a small town by the name of Raesfeld. Max fell in love with Regina Rosenbaum, and they got married at the end of the 19th century. The young couple moved into a small house in the town called Borken.

On July 20, 1902, their first child was born and they called the baby Erna. The second child was born in September, 1904. Everybody used to call him Willi. Betti was born in 1907. Albert came into this world in 1909. The next son was name Erich. He was born in 1914. That was the time when World War I started. My father (Max Klaber) volunteered to join the German Army as a medic. During 4 ½ years near the western front he saw many dead and wounded soldiers. At that time Regina (my mother) and Erna and Willi took care of the Oil Business. The youngest son (me) was born on March 19, 1920.

I remember when I was 2 years old, my father built a new house on the Gemener Strasse, on the border between Gemen and Borken. I started to cry and said "I don't want to move, but want to stay in our old house." How does one remember such minor things. Our family at that time lived a comfortable life. My father together with my brothers Willi and Albert built a great business. They were representatives of the Standard Oil Company.

From my sixth year of age I went to the Jewish Hebrew School in Borken. This was a small school with about 25 children. At the age of 10 years we went to a High School. Those were some of the best times of our Family and me. We belonged to a Synagogue in Gemen. It was an Orthodox place with a cantor, who had a beautiful voice. The Rabbi lived in nearby Borken. The Cantor by the name of Safra taught me my sidra and Haftarah for my Bar Mitzvah.

That could have been a wonderful event, but the date was April 1st, 1933. Adolf Hitler had been Chancellor of Germany since January. On this day the boycott of all Jewish businesses began. Brownshirts were marching and made life for the Jews miserable. This was the beginning of the Holocaust!!

Our beautiful Synagogue in Gemen was at the Kristallnacht on November 9th, 1938, totally burned to the ground. In the year 1934 I was thrown out of the Gymnasium (High School) because of the law against the Jews by the Nazis.

The Klaber family was known to be great in several sport activities. My father Max had won in June, 1895, the first place on the horizontal bar at a state competition in Zuelpich, Germany. I still have a beautiful, large document from that time. My brother Willi, who used to belong to a club called "Deutsche Turnerschaft" was the State Champion in gymnastics. He was also one of the founders of that club. After the Nazis came to power in Germany and they invented the laws against all Jewish people, Willi was eliminated from the "Aryan clubs" just like every Jewish man, woman and child.

On the 9th of November, 1938, the night of the "Kristall Nacht", things for Jews in Germany became monstrous. Many Jews were arrested, thrown into concentration camps, etc. The owners of our wonderful business (my father, my brother Willi and Albert) were forced to sell to a Nazi. They were thrown into jail.

At this time I lived with a family Bowman in Winterswyk, Holland. Since 1937 I was enrolled in a so called Ambachtschool (trade school). Since we used to live near the border of Holland, I used to come home with my bicycle for Friday nights and then return to W. on Sundays. That weekend I stayed with the family in Winterswyk.

A cousin of us had a furniture business in Amsterdam. He sent a truck to a farmer near the German border to bring my brothers Willi and Albert into Holland. They were later like illegal aliens in Holland internment. I was a student in Holland and thus legal. My sister Erna and sister-in-law Hilde also ended up in Amsterdam.

Willi and Hilde were very lucky to have good friends in America. They came by ship from Rotterdam to New York in 1939. My sister Erna was at that time in camp Westerbork. Holland was invaded by Germany in May, 1940.

After I finished the school in Winterswyk I tried to get a job in Holland. Since I was from Germany and there were many unemployed people in Holland, there was only one way for me to make some kind of living. I went to work for the farmer Van Arrogan in Varsseveld, Holland.

It is April, 1945 in the village of Varsseveld, Holland.

On the farm of Drickes Lievestro is joy and happiness. We are liberated by the First Canadian Army. Hundreds of tanks with smiling soldiers are being greeted by the people of the village of Varssefeld. After having been hidden for more than 2 years inside that farm, everybody including Jews are able to walk free on the streets of Holland again.

The first thing I did was finding Frieda, Max and Ernst Rosenbaum in Varsseveld. They are my closest relative in that village. Hugging and kissing each other and celebrating that wonderful occasion.

The Rosenbaums were able to return to their home. They asked me to stay with them for the time being, I did not know yet what happened to my parents. Only much later I found out that they were transported by the Nazis from our hometown (Borken, Germany) to the concentration camp Theresienstadt.

From Varsseveld I went to the town of Winterswyk, Holland. I wanted to find out what happened to the Jewish people there. From 1937 to 1939 I had gone to a trade school there. I lived with a family Bowman in those years. That family and most of my Jewish friends had been sent east to an unknown destination (later known as KZ).

At a Red Cross information location I saw a publication of people that had returned from a camp. Among those I saw the name of Erna Elkan. I was glad to see the name of my sister. She was with many returnees in Venlo, Holland. Since there was no other transportation in Holland, I saw that many British Soldiers with their trucks (Lorries cut down) picked up people, who were trying to find their friends or relatives. There were so many people like that.

I went with a friendly English soldier, who was on his way toward Venlo. This was south from where I was located. We went through the towns of Arnhem, Mymegan, etc. These were the towns where the heavy fighting between the British and the Nazis took place. Today we know about the movie "A Bridge Too Far". One could see the heavy fighting that must have taken place there. Dead cows were still lying in the meadows, trees down to nothing, houses like a heap of ruin, and no living soul anywhere. I had seen Arnhem before the war. It was such a beautiful city. Peace is always better than war.

When we finally reached Venlo in the south of Holland, and finally to the refugee camp where I met my sister Erna lying on a mattress tired and weak but happy to see me. She introduced me as "this is my little brother Herbert". I was 25 years and my sister Erna was 18 years older than I.

A few years later, Erna and I and two brothers by the names of Herman and Albert Salomon and their nephew Willi Loewenberg moved into their house in Borculo. Willi came out of Auschwitz weighing about 70 pounds. He and I became close friends.

It is the year 1945 (the World War 2) had finally ended. People from everywhere started to find relatives and friends.

I heard from my sister Erna about the terrible things that happened in concentration camps. I was lucky to be alive, thanks to the family Liestro in Varsseveld, who not only saved my life, but 12 Jewish Lives, who were living through these terrible years on their farm.

I moved in with my sister Erna, who ran a household in the house of the Salomon Family. There were Herman and Albert Salomon and their nephew Willi Loewenberg and Erna and I. There was a family Elzas in that town (Borculo). They had a Parchment factory. I got a job in their office as a bookkeeper. The Elzas family emigrated later to Ireland.

I was in contact with my brothers Willi and Erich, who had lived in Chicago since 1939. Willi was married to his wife Hilde. They already were married in Germany in 1937. Erich was married in Germany to his wife Doris. They had one daughter at that time. Hilde and Willi had 2 boys (twins).

As soon as the American Consulate opened up in Rotterdam I applied for emigration to the USA in December 1945. After Willi and Erich got an affidavit for me I finally was able to get a ticket for a ship by the name of Noordam.

The ship left Rotterdam on December 6, 1946 with Herbert Klaber on board. There was a heavy storm going through the British Channel. Many people got seasick. I was lucky to feel sick only about one day. The trip from Rotterdam until we arrived in Hoboken, New Jersey took 9 days. I did not realize before how large the Atlantic Ocean is.

I met several people of Dutch descent, who were going to sell Tulip Bulbs in the USA. They were used to drinking gin out of a waterglass. I thought if I would go along with their drinking I would become good friends with these young Dutch men.

Finally we came close to seeing the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. I was in such a good mood, that I thought I was seeing TWO of them. I will never forget it.

After we got off the ship and going through the formal inspection, etc., I saw from a distance that my aunt Nelly and niece Hertha were standing behind a railing. They came to make me feel welcome in America. They made me feel welcome as friends of theirs in New York. They showed me the great city of NY. It happened to be the 16th of December and New York was in a Christmas mood. Among all the skyscrapers and the

traffic of the City. Can you imagine a greenhorn like me. I will never forget when they took me to see the Rockefeller Center and the Christmas show with the Rockettes etc. That was 1946.

After 2 days in NY I went by train to Chicago. 16 hours by train. I got off the train and expected my brothers to pick me up at the Union Station in Chicago. I did not see my brothers Willi and Erich. I thought I could find the house where Hilde and Willi lived. So I got on a bus and gave the address to the driver. In the meantime my brothers were looking for me at Union Station. Suddenly they got a loudspeaker saying "Willi and Erich please come to a phone. Herbert had arrived at Hilde's and Willi's home. I guess, Herbert was never very patient.

Herbert Klaber has come to Chicago, Illinois on December 16, 1946.

Willi and Hilde and their sons Michael and Martin as well as Erich and Doris Klaber were very happy to see me after the end of World War 2. The last time we had seen each other was in Holland somewhere in 1939.

My first impression here in the USA was that my relatives had their own refrigerator. The first few weeks I stayed with Hilde, Willi and their 2 sons, who were twins. They were born in 1942. I remember that date, because that was the day when the German Nazis invaded Russia.

At the time (in December 1946) I did not know the English language. I learned mostly by going to see the movies. I also became the baby sitter for Michael and Martin. They made understand their 4 year old way of saying the words in English.

Hilde found out one day, that there was a family by the name of Goldschmidt, who had come to the USA from Germany before the war. They had what you may call a Pension. I went to talk to them and they were willing to take me in as a boarder. Mrs. Goldschmidt did all the cooking and I got my own little bedroom.

I had gotten a job in a company that manufactured briefcases. My salary was \$40 per week. For room and board I paid \$20. There were 4 or 5 other boarders at the Goldschmidt house on 53rd street on the south side of Chicago.

At that time I joined a soccer team by the name of Hakoah. My brother had been a member there for many years. He was well known among the Jews in Chicago. We used to play soccer at many stadiums around Chicago. In the year 1947 Hakoah became the city champions. We used to play indoors during the wintertime. Soccer was not too well known in the USA. Most of the players in those years came from Europe.

At one of those games at the Chicago Avenue Armory I met my future wife Marcia. On our team was a player by the name of Larry Shelton. He introduced me to Marcia Becker, who invited me to her house on 928 Winona on the north side of Chicago.

Since I lived on 53rd street on the south side and I did not have a car at the time, I had to travel by bus or by the Illinois Central Railroad. I had to take that from Randolph Street downtown to go south. On Saturday nights those trains ran only every hour. I had to wait in a waiting room. That was usually very lonely, but safe. Not to be advised nowadays.

I learned electronics at the American Television School on Broadway, not far from the house where Marcia lived at that time.

We got married March 16, 1953 at a hotel near Lincoln Park.