

Max Uri

Max Uri
Vienna
Austria
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Max Uri lives with his wife Fritzi in a beautiful, modern apartment in the 19th district. He invites me into the apartment, which is filled with family photos - old and new in lovingly chosen frames - that allude to a strong family connection. Max Uri has thick white hair. After telephoning his son to make sure that he also knows the woman who had suggested to me that I interview him, he tells me his family story - through both laughter and tears - which is closely connected to the city of Vienna.

Max Uri died in 2009.

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My Family History

My grandfather on my father's side was called Lazar - Jewish, Luzer - Uri. He was born on February 17, 1865, in Bercza, Galicia and worked as a tradesman. In 1882 he married my then 15-year old grandmother Regina - Jewish, Rivke - who they called Rifka and was born November 15, 1869 in Galicia, in Glogow. My grandmother was born a Zuker; her father was called Israel Moses Zuker and her mother, Gruene Zuker, born Schlanger. Grandmother had a sister called Anna who lived in America. Both grandfather and grandmother came from strictly Orthodox families.

My grandparents got married for the first time in Galicia and on August 17, 1888, grandmother had her first child, my Aunt Frieda. Four years later, 1890, my father Osias - Jewish, Abraham Schia - was born in Glogow.

My grandfather was a clever man and saw that he couldn't be as successful in Galicia as he could in Vienna. So in 1893 my family relocated from Glogow to Vienna. In order to legalize their marriage, my parents were married a second time on October 7, 1896 in the Viennese city temple of the Jewish Religious Community on Seitenstetten-Gasse. Their first apartment was located in the 1st district, at Juden-Gasse Nr. 4. Later they moved to Salvator-Gasse 10.

Grandfather was a tall, good-looking, pious, strictly Orthodox man with a beard and side curls that he wore behind his ears. Grandmother kept a kosher household, wore a sheitl [Orthodox Jewish women hide their hair beneath a wig], and kept her hair cut short beneath the sheitl.

Starting in 1894 Grandfather owned a clothing production factory called “Lazar Uri” on Juden-Gasse at the corner of Hoher Markt. He received large orders from the army and became the Austria-Hungary high supplier for uniforms. It was passed on to me that whenever he went to the War Ministry to pick up a new order he did not remove his head covering, which he wore as a pious Jew. His appearance was respected and he was never asked for his signature by the officials. My grandfather was so well respected that his handshake was enough. After some time he also opened a men’s clothing store and regularly went to the country to get orders from the farmers.

In Vienna my grandmother had six more children: Hermann, David, Alexander, Rosa, Isak, and Jakob.

Back then a husband received his wife’s dowry at the wedding. When my Aunt Frieda, my father’s oldest sister, got married, her husband disappeared on their wedding night with the dowry. Just imagine the shame for Aunt Frieda and the whole Uri family! All of Vienna was probably laughing; the Uri name was well known in Vienna. She needed to find a new husband quickly – and that was Moses Zwick. Moses Zwick, a good-looking snob, agreed on one condition: he will only marry Aunt Frieda if they bring him into the business as co-partner.

First my family sent him to the Uri brothers. In 1910 my grandfather had handed over the “Lazar Uri” business to his sons Hermann, Isak, and Jakob. The name was then changed to “Uri Brothers.” The business moved to the Ankerhof at Hohen Markt (1st district). I think Moses Zwick was only at “Uri Brothers” for two months, since my father’s brothers wanted to be rid of Moses Zwick after two months. That’s how Moses Zwick became partners with my father who had worked in my grandfather’s business for the first years but was self-employed by then.

My grandmother went to my father and pleaded with him to make Zwick a partner in his business. My father was a good son and grandmother was a saint to him, so he couldn’t refuse her plea. Moses Zwick was satisfied and married Aunt Frieda. Aunt Frieda and Uncle Moses had four children: Paul, Fanni, Blanka, and Edith.

My Uncle Hermann – Jewish, Hirsch – Uri was born on July 30, 1893 in Vienna and was co-owner of “Uri Brothers.” He married Helene and they had two sons, Norbert and Max. Norbert was one year older than me, and Max was exactly three years younger than me to the day. Every Sunday Max and I went to the soccer match together. They all immigrated to England in 1938 and lived in London.

Uncle Hermann was working in the diamond trade in London and was very well respected. Norbert was a nuclear scientist and died very young. I never learned why died. He was married and had a son named David. Max also died very young from a sickness; he wasn’t married yet and didn’t have any children. After the war I was often in London with my father-in-law at auctions with our furs and visited Uncle Hermann.

When Aunt Helene died Uncle Hermann said to me: “Maxl, there’s only one thing I ask of dear God and that’s when I must go, that I go quickly.” And then I heard that he went to a customer one day

and that afternoon wasn't feeling well. That was in the 1960s. His friends said he should go to the hospital and get looked at. At one o'clock Uncle Hermann went to the hospital and at 5 o'clock he was gone. His wish came true. They say in Judaism: He died like a Zaddik [saint].

Uncle David was born in Vienna. He was a Zionist and in 1920 went with my Uncle Alexander, who was also a Zionist, to the kibbutz Daganian Alef in Palestine. That was a kibbutz from the socialist Shomer Hatzair. He was sent to America and to England to study poultry farming, built up poultry farming in Palestine, and wrote textbooks about it. In the kibbutz he married Sara who was nine years older than him. Uncle David and Aunt Sara had three children: Chava, Rachel, and Elazar. Chava was married and had two children; Rachel remained childless and Elazar became the father of three boys. He lives in Tel Aviv and is around 73 years old. When Aunt Sara died he remarried. His second wife was named Anja and they lived in Tel Aviv. Uncle David died in the 1940s.

In Vienna my Uncle Alexander was with the Imperial Tyrolean Rifle Regiment (Tiroler Kaiserjäger) and 4th Infantry Regiment (Deutschmeister). That was a special battalion. He and Uncle David were religious, but not as religious as grandfather would have wanted. Every Friday in the kibbutz there was a campfire and everyone sat comfortably around it and talked or danced the Hora. That's when my Uncle Alexander suddenly heard a voice that spoke to him: "Alexander, you are not on the right path, take the path that your ancestors took." Uncle Alexander knew exactly what that meant.

Shortly thereafter he was sent from the kibbutz to Jerusalem to do outdoor work and never returned. From that point forward he lived in a very pious community and became strictly Orthodox. He met his wife Tova, who was just as Orthodox as he was, and they had eleven children whom they lived with in a two-room apartment. When my father, may he rest in peace, was still alive he regularly sent him money.

My uncle worked for 60 years as an accountant at the Shaare Zedek hospital in Jerusalem. When he retired they needed four people to take over his job because he was so hard working. During those 60 years he wasn't absent a single day and one day I said to him: "Uncle, how is this even possible, you've never had a cold, you've never had a fever?" he replied: "Even when I had a fever I went to the hospital. It was my duty to serve the people there." And I asked: "Uncle, how can one live with eleven children in a two-room apartment?" And Uncle replied: "One part sleeps and the other part takes care of the laundry and vice versa."

Uncle Alexander was never dissatisfied with his life. Despite poverty he was always happy and funny and grateful for everything. His wife Tova was also a sweet-natured person. Uncle went to temple every day and prayed and every day he went to the mikvah (ritual bath) and washed himself with cold water. I am still in contact with some of his children. All of his children remain very Orthodox. Uncle Alexander died in Jerusalem at the age of 92.

Aunt Rose was married to Uncle Max. They lived in the 6th district, on Gumpendorfer-Strasse, and had a leather business with suitcases and bags at market that was also in the 6th district. They had two children: Betti and Erna. In 1938 the business was aryanized, Uncle Max was arrested and deported to the Dachau concentration camp (Germany), and afterwards to the Buchenwald concentration camp (Germany). Since my Uncle Jakob was living in London at this time, he arranged for the family an entry permit to England. It was because of this entry permit that Uncle

Max was released from the Buchenwald concentration camp and could escape to England.

Aunt Rose and her daughters immigrated to the USA, to New York. Uncle Max also immigrated onward to New York. Because Uncle Max was Polish by birth, a Polish immigrant group in New York helped him get a kiosk. At this kiosk he and the whole family sold coffee and such things and things were going relatively well for him. Uncle Max later founded a textile business in New York.

Uncle Max and Aunt Rose died in New York. When we went to America 1952 Uncle Max was already dead; Aunt Rose died at the end of the 1950s. Erna was married and had two sons. She died three or four years ago. Betti has three sons and lives in New York.

Uncle Isak was born in Vienna on 11 February, 1902. He was also an owner of "Uri Brothers." In 1938 he escaped to Palestine and married his wife Batya very late. They didn't have any children. In Tel Aviv he bought a house from the money he got from selling "Uri Brothers" just in time. He also had the equipment from the business on Juden-Gasse transported to Palestine by ship. They were very modern machines but unfortunately they got damp and rusted and had to be thrown away. Uncle Isi rented out the house and he and his wife lived from the money. Uncle Isi died in the 1950s.

My Uncle Jakob was the youngest son and the funniest. He always had a lot of friends and on Friday evening, on Shabbat, when the candles were lit and grandfather recited the Kiddush over the wine, proclaiming the sacredness of the holy day, his friends were already shouting outside on the street and Uncle Jakob would say: "Oy, I don't feel well, oy, I don't feel well!" My grandmother, who was very clever, would then say: "Jankele, go out to the street and get a little air." When he heard this he was already dressed and ran down to his friends and they would go together to the Heurigen (wine tavern). Jakob immigrated to London, married Ilse, and they had a son named David. Uncle Jakob worked in trade and sold products for various firms. David is around 50-years old today and lives in London.

Of course, all of my grandparent's sons had to go to cheder [religious school] when they turned four, where they learned to read Hebrew. Uncle Hermann told me that once, instead of going to cheder, he had played with marbles with his friends on the street. My Uncle was suddenly hit with a cane. Grandfather, who always walked around with a cane – even though he didn't need it to walk – dealt him a blow. Frightened, Uncle looked up: "Instead of going to cheder you play here with marbles?" My Uncle dropped everything immediately and ran into the cheder.

I remember that it was always very lively at my grandparent's apartment as long as grandfather wasn't home. When he came through the door there was immediately dead silence. All of his children had an unheard of respect for him. At my grandparent's house you only spoke in the third person: "Father wants, mother wants." To speak informally to your parents was not allowed.

I can still remember my grandfather. He died in Vienna on June 27, 1925 in the Löw Sanatorium on Mariannen-Gasse in the 9th district – I was just four years old at the time. He was never funny and always had a very serious face. I even remember that we observed the Seder (The Seder is the start of Jewish holiday of Passover when the community or family remembers the exodus from Egypt) at my grandparents and that I, as the youngest said, "'Ma nishtane..." and the youngest uncle, Jakob, who was always so funny, made some kind of incidental remarks. My grandfather just

gave a look and he was immediately quiet. Grandfather had a chair that he always sat in and even after he died no one ever sat in this chair. Even so, I think there was a good relationship between the kids and grandfather.

Even when grandfather was no longer alive, the family still met at grandmother's every Saturday. My parents, my sisters, my brother, and I were there, along with the uncles, aunts, and cousins. There was always a light meal. Grandmother was a very good baker and we ate cakes and Kipferl rolls, and played hide-and-seek. My Aunt Rosa Roth took whatever was left over from the baked goods home, as they weren't very well off.

On Sundays, or when the sun was shining, we often met up with grandmother in Kai Park on the Danube Canal not far from Salvator-Gasse. It was a very beautiful park that no longer exists today. There were also a couple of stands in the park and grandmother always bought each one of us a coconut stick, which we really, really loved.

The apartment on Salvator-Gasse had five rooms. After grandfather's death, grandmother lived there together with Uncle Isi and Uncle Jakob, the youngest son. Once one of grandmother's nieces from Poland also lived with her. I think she was supposed to get married in Vienna and to give Grandmother a little assistance, but I was later told that this niece would spend all day in bed and call out, "Aunt, can you bring me a coffee in bed?" And Grandmother ran back and forth and attended to her instead of having her relieve Grandmother of a little work. I don't know who exactly this niece was. In any case, the niece went back to Poland unmarried.

My grandfather on my mother's side was called Abraham Bachmann and lived in the city of Sambor near Stryi. That was in Galicia and is located today in Ukraine. Sambor wasn't a big city, but it was also no village – rather a larger, rural place, where mostly Jewish families lived. When my mother and I visited my grandparents we would take the train from Vienna, but I can't remember how long the trip took.

I don't know what my grandmother's name was. I know that a niece also lived with my grandparents, but I don't know who the niece was. In Sambor, Grandfather owned a business that sold all kinds of goods. I was often with my mother for a visit with my grandparents; we would usually stay for three or four weeks. By our Viennese standards, my grandparents, who were also very pious, lived very primitively. For example the toilet was outside and not in the apartment.

It was especially exciting for me that my mother's brother, my Uncle Bernhard, owned a sawmill and on some mornings took me with him on his horse-drawn buggy and let me drive. Uncle Bernhard was married and had a child. I also remember that gypsies would come to the houses with a bear that they brought along with them. The gypsies would play music and the bear would dance along, after which they collected money. All of the relatives that lived there were murdered in 1941 after the German invasion of Poland: my grandparents, my Uncle Bernhard, his wife and their child.

I don't know where my parents met. I do know that it was through a shidduch, a matchmaker, since back then you didn't just meet someone and marry out of love. Everything was arranged. I think my parents married in Vienna, but they could have also been married in Galicia and again in Vienna, as there was only ritual marriage in Galicia. My sisters Edith and Cäcillie, Cilli for short, are

twins and we born on October 19th, 1916. By that point my father wasn't working anymore for grandfather's business; he was already self-employed. I think my father was in the Austria-Hungary military for a short time during the First World War. When he got back, he became self-employed because he had always wanted to be self-employed. Of course, he didn't have a lot of money, but all the people he knew in the trade said to him: "Mr. Uri, if you need something, we will give you what you want. We know that you'll pay."

My father's business was located in the 2nd district, Ober-Donau-Strasse 49; that's the corner at Tabor-Strasse. It was a large shop with men's ready-to-wear clothing. My father had 20 employees, including cutters, since clothes were cut and assembled there. They were mostly young Jewish men. The employees often went to the *Strombad*, a pool situated directly in the Danube Canal, during their lunch break. We had a giant storeroom with the rolls of fabric and I remember that if they also went out in the evenings they were often too tired to go home afterwards and would make up a bed with the rolls of fabric. I know that because they told me.

My father was well liked and very successful and then the whole thing with his sister Frieda happened and he had to make Moses Zwick his co-partner. Moses Zwick was not good for the business; he was a snob and only cared about himself and if he was ever in the shop he fought with the customers, made stupid jokes, and didn't get along with the other employees. He wasn't any good for my Aunt or for my father, who had to work a lot. As long as my father was alive, the customers at my father's shop remained loyal.

My Childhood

I was born in Vienna on February 28th, 1921. At the time my parents were living in the 1st district, at Salvator-Gasse 10. There were three staircases in the building: my grandparents lived above the first and we lived above the third. All four children, my twin sisters, me, and my brother Ludwig, who was born on November 7th, 1926, were born in this apartment since my mother didn't want to deliver her children in a hospital. I can remember when Ludwig was born and I heard the baby's screams from the room and my father said to me: "Maxl, you aren't worth anything now, now we have another boy." But he was just saying that; he was very fond of me.

Later we moved to Biber-Strasse 14. Biber-Strasse was located across from the postal savings bank. Our apartment had five rooms plus side rooms, and we had a mother's helper and a cook. Both of them lived with us. Every day the cook went for a walk with us children in the city park, as there was both a small and a large playground there. I was a poor eater, but my mother forced me to eat. In the afternoon I always had to eat two buttered rolls. We lived on the mezzanine and below us was a store that had two signs out front that I would always throw my rolls between and then say to the cook: "Johanna, I've finished eating!" My siblings were fairly fat; I was the only thin one.

My sisters and I often fought. The doors at Biber-Strasse had frosted glass panes and once when I was chasing one of my sisters a pane broke and I hurt my arm, which began to bleed profusely. I ran to the first-aid post that was located next to the Urania. They took the glass splinters out of my arm and gave me a giant bandage. I still have a scar today. My mother was always hysterical whenever anyone broke anything and when I got home my brother yelled: "Watch out, mom is standing behind with the carpet beater!" I went in so that my mother would see my arm first and

she cried in fear: "What happened, what happened?"

At the age of five I learned the Aleph-Bet with a private tutor. I had religion lessons once a week starting in the first grade at primary school. Every Saturday we met with the religion teacher at Rudolfsplatz and went together, in two rows, to temple at Seitenstetten-Gasse for children's services.

After primary school I went to High School on Sperl-Gasse. Most of the children at this school were Jewish. During the High Holidays, on Rosh Hashana [Jewish New Year] and Yom Kippur [Jewish day of redemption; the most important Jewish holiday], the whole school was closed, since it wouldn't have been worthwhile to keep the school open for the few non-Jewish students.

On November 18th, 1931 my father died of exhaustion. Because he had been running his business all by himself, he was working day and night, as well as on holidays. Nevertheless he died unexpectedly. My mother took over a large portion of the work in the shop, but because of Moses Zwick's unpleasant behavior, many of the customers left our business. In 1934 or 1935 my mother and Moses Zwick could no longer maintain the large shop and moved into a smaller shop on Marc-Aurel-Strasse.

We had a Jewish lawyer – he was called Plaschkes – who was a Zionist and said to my mother: "Mrs. Uri, sell your share of the business and go with your children to Palestine, go with your children to Palestine." My mother was just about to when my grandmother came and said, "Mina, I beg you, don't go, stay here!" Grandmother knew that had my mother left Zwick alone with the business, there would have been no more business after two months, and so my mother stayed.

My mother went regularly with us children to a summer resort. We were together in Bad Aussee, Bad Ischl, in Grado, Abbazia, where we rode bikes and had a wonderful vacation together. When my sisters were older they went to the summer resorts alone and my mother went with my brother Ludwig and me. But of course we only went to kosher hotels. When my mother went on vacation with us, Moses Zwick took over the shop and when she got back, he could travel.

I was an average student at school, but I was always very popular with my teachers and classmates. After my fourth year of High School I went to the commercial academy at Karlsplatz. That had partly to do with the fact that I was to take over the business some day. There was a large class with about 60 students at the commercial academy. Out of 60 students, about eight were Jewish and the rest were at this point illegal Nazis. Nonetheless I got along well with them. They would even come up to me and say: "Look Maxl, here is our membership register, we are illegal Nazis, if you report us we'll be locked up." They weren't dangerous; they were always very decent to me.

Of the few Jewish students, maybe three or four were religious. The rest were just Jews, and that's all. Of course I didn't go to school on Rosh Hashana and the next day the class teacher– Binder was his name – a tall, good-looking guy, came up to me and said: "Uri, come here. Where were you on Monday?" "Professor, we had a holiday." "Holiday," he said, "you cut class; you went for a walk. All the others were here and you're telling me you had a holiday?" He didn't believe me and made an incredible racket. "Maxl, I'll sort it out for you, you can count on it!" He went to the Jewish students and said, "If you come to school tomorrow, you'll get a thrashing that you won't forget for as long

as you live." From that point forward, no Jewish student from my class went to school on Yom Kippur and Mr. Binder was satisfied.

My family was always of a Zionist mindset but I wasn't in any Zionist organization. My mother only let me join a very pious organization called Aguda. They were simply pious with absolutely no socialist attitude. All of the pious would say that you could only go to Palestine after the arrival of the messiah. I went to the organization two or three times a month. But I was a member of Hakoah, of course. I even won second place for Hakoah in the 1,500-meter run at the Austrian championships.

My sisters attended the Jewish girls' High School in the 2nd district, on Novara Gasse. They were very devout, more devout than me, but at school they met a girl named Nussbaum who was very leftwing. And this girl, I think, had a strong communist influence on my sisters. Once they hid illegal pamphlets in our apartment because they thought they would be safe in such an upscale neighborhood. I found the pamphlets in the piano, said nothing, and immediately burned them. A few days later the police came by and searched our apartment. We were really scared but they didn't find anything. After they left my sisters ran to the piano, opened it, and saw that the pamphlets were gone and said to me: "There was something in there, where is it?" "I burned the pamphlets." They were horribly angry with me and said, "You know, the only thing you can ever be is a snitch!"

My wife and I had already met as children. We spent the summer together at a Jewish youth camp in Breitenstein am Semmerring. It was a kosher children's camp for parents and children. That's where I saw my wife for the first time. "Who's that?" I said to my friend Leo and Leo said, "leave it, she's one of the children!" We were already 15-years old at the time and were considered adults. The following summer my mother was with my brother and me in Abbazia at a summer resort. There I met my wife and her mother at the kosher hotel and from that point forward we started going out together. We would then meet regularly, usually on Kärntner-Strasse at the "Sirk Ecke" across from the opera, and go for a walk. The "Sirk Ecke" was named after a store and was a well-known meeting point. Our rendezvous were always illegal, as her parents couldn't find out that she was going out with a boy. Setting a date with her on the telephone was always fraught with obstacles since she wasn't allowed to receive calls. If I called and her mother answered the phone I always hung up quickly. If I called and the maid answered I would ask, "is Mr. Haber at home?" If she said, "No, he is at the office," I would ask, "is Mrs. Haber available?" If she also said no to that I would ask, "can I speak to the daughter?" That's how it was. My mother knew, however, that I was meeting with Fritzi.

My wife, Frieda (Fritzi) Haber, was born in Klagenfurt on June 13th, 1923 as the daughter of Max and Berta Haber. Max Haber's family partly lived in Galicia and was partly settled in Vienna. My father-in-law built up a fur trade in Innsbruck after his time in the Austro-Hungarian Army. In 1922 in Villach he married Berta, born Linker, whose father was a fur trader. They lived in Klagenfurt before they came to Vienna. After the wedding and the birth of their daughter, Frieda, they moved to Vienna and in Vienna Trude, my wife's sister, was born.

My father-in-law dealt primarily in greige goods: untreated foxes, untreated rabbits, untreated muskrats, deer, and so on. Rabbit fur was mostly imported to America. A much finer felt was made from the rabbit hair there and at that time in America animal felt was in high demand. He opened

his business in Vienna 82 years ago, at Veronika-Gasse 1 in the 16th district. The business is still there; my son Robert took it over.

During the War

My wife attended the commercial academy for a year, then Hitler came and she wasn't allowed to go to school anymore.

Starting in 1937 I went to the trade school on Mollard-Gasse in the 6th district, which still exists today. I can still remember the German invasion of Austria in March 1938 well. We were living in a very nice area and in the evening we heard Schuschnig's [Federal Chancellor 1934-1938] resignation on the radio. We turned off the light in the apartment; it was very dark. Not far from our apartment, on Doktor Karl Lueger Platz, a mob was raging against the Jews.

At the beginning of April 1939 I had to leave the trade school; as a Jew I wasn't allowed to continue studying. And one day my girlfriend Fritzi wasn't there anymore. Back then, in that situation, you couldn't tell anyone about exiting, not even your closest relatives, because of the risk of being imprisoned.

In May 1938 Fritzi's father was deported to the Dachau concentration camp and from Dachau to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Her mother succeeded in getting the family an exit permit for Palestine. Because of this, my father-in-law was released from the concentration camp, but on the exact day that the certificate to Palestine expired. At his release he needed to agree that he would leave Austria in the next 48 hours, otherwise they would arrest him and deport him to the concentration camp again. During the night my mother-in-law ran to the British consulate and kept ringing the doorbell. She succeeded in calling the Ambassador; he came and she told her story and the British Consulate extended the entry to Palestine. So they left Austria and my connection to Fritzi was cut off.

My classmates asked me: "Maxl, what will you do now?" I said: "I don't know exactly, but I think I'll go to Palestine." Then they said: "Maxl, don't go away, you're a great Jew!" And I said: "I'm a great Jew to you, but for the others I'm Jewish swine." One day I met my former classmate Emil on the street. He was an illegal Nazi. Horrified, he said: "Maxl, what are you doing on the street?" "I'm taking a little walk." "Don't you know?" He asked. "What am I supposed to know?" "They're arresting all the Jews again!" "Thank you, Emil, then I'll get back home quickly." But Emil said: "It's too dangerous for you to go home alone; I'll accompany you." I told him I didn't want to cause him any trouble, because he was wearing the illegal insignia and it would surely inconvenience him if someone saw him with a Jew on the street. But Emil was not to be talked out of accompanying me home.

After I was already in Palestine I continued correspondence for while with my former classmates, the illegal Nazis, until one would write that he was starting his work service. After which I wouldn't receive any more letters and except for two, three classmates that I met again after the war, they were all killed.

The Uri Brothers sold their storeroom, gave up the business, and immigrated with grandmother to Palestine. We were one of the Jewish businesses that, for a long time, wasn't under management by a temporary administration and the Uri Brothers had said to Moses Zwick: "Moses sell, sell!" But

Moses Zwick answered: "I am not selling. Hitler is going to fail."

Big department stores came, for example the "Staffa." Back then they badly needed breeches – those were pants with puttees up to the knees. The SS and the SA wore those pants, and the material costs for one pair of pants was 20 shillings, and they wanted to pay 17 shillings and would have bought a lot of material from my Uncle. But he told them he wouldn't give away the material for 17 shillings. And again my uncles said: "Moses, sell, sell!"

On November 10th, during the pogrom night, three SS men entered the store and said to my uncle: "Hand over the shop keys!" Moses Zwick did not want to give away the shop keys. They knocked out all of his teeth, took the keys from him, and he wasn't allowed to enter the store again. That was the end of "Uri & Zwick." If we had sold everything we would have gotten 60,000 German marks and in exchange bought a capitalist certificate in Palestine for 1,000 English pounds and the whole family would have been saved.

Moses Zwick escaped to London – he already had cancer – but implored his wife, my Aunt Frieda, not to leave and to take care of their house on Obere-Donau-Strasse. Edith and Blanka Zwick were saved by a Kindertransport to England. They then immigrated further to America. Blanka recently passed away and Edith is living in the USA. Paul Zwick studied medicine in Vienna, also fled to America and worked as a doctor in Rochester. He was married and had two daughters who live in New York. My cousin, Fanny Zwick, was somewhat sickly and stayed with Aunt Frieda in Vienna. Both were murdered in Treblinka [On February 19th, 1941 they were both deported to Kielce in Poland and murdered. Source: DÖW Database]. Moses Zwick died of cancer in London shortly thereafter.

On November 10th, 1938 I was arrested and detained in the 9th district in a riding school on Pramer-Gasse with around a thousand other Jews, some of whom had been taken from their homes in pajamas or undergarments. Around 3 in the morning those under 18 and over 60 years of age were allowed to go home. A mob had gathered outside and was waiting for us. A high-ranking police officer was prepared to protect us, but only for as long as it took him to count to ten. I ran, which luckily was easy for me as an athlete. That night my mother had hidden herself with my sisters and brother at her sister-in-law's, my Aunt Rosa Roth.

We struggled to get out of Vienna. After the pogrom night taxes were imposed on Jews, such as the Reich Flight Tax and the *Judenvermögensabgabe* (transfer of Jewish property). We then had tax debt that never before had and our business was also taken from us. Because you needed to be debt-free in order to get a passport, the official at the Gestapo said to my mother: "You know what Mrs. Uri, I'll give your children passports, but you stay here as a deposit." My mother would have loved to go to America, but I was a Zionist and wanted to go to Palestine and managed to get the entry to Palestine. My mother still had the money to pay for me to study at the agricultural college "Mikve Israel" near Tel Aviv.

Earlier I had taken a retraining course as a hairdresser in Vienna. My brother was still a child – he was just 12-years old in 1938 – and was saved with a Kindertransport to England. My sisters received a "Permit" – permission to go to England and work as servants. So they were also saved. In March 1939 I finally left Vienna with ten Reichsmark in my pocket, as it wasn't allowed to take more if your destination was Palestine.

Our mother stayed behind in Vienna with her old passport and after she wasn't able to get a new passport, hid herself on a collier under some coal and rode along the Danube, and then the Main, until she reached Belgium where her cousin Regina lived. A few months later Hitler marched into Belgium. My mother fled further into France where she was arrested and interned in the Gurs camp. There she met acquaintances from Vienna who had managed to smuggle illegal money into France and with the money were able to pay a guide for the escape from the camp, over the Pyrenees, and into Spain. My mother begged them to take her along, but the acquaintances from Vienna refused – it would be impossible, my mother was too old.

During the night she heard her acquaintances preparing for their escape and so my mother got ready as well. When they left the camp, my mother snuck along behind them. She snuck along behind them up and down over the Pyrenees and that's how she illegally entered Spain. I don't know how she got to Portugal, in any case she went to the German Consulate in Portugal – since there was no longer an Austrian one – and there was a nice official there, a Nazi of course, but he issued my mother a new passport. My mother waited with this passport until the affidavit came from her Aunt Anna, her mother's sister who had already been living in New York for a while. Then she took a ship to New York. My mother was always a rather comfortable person and to this day I am still filled with admiration and amazement over her escape.

My brother lived in with a nice family in England, went to school, and immigrated to New York after the war. He moved in with my mother, studied medicine, and became a doctor. My sisters also immigrated onwards to America.

At Mikve Israel

On the first day at Mikve Israel the director gave us the day off so that we could visit our relatives living in Palestine. I wanted to visit my Uncle David who was living in Tel Aviv – that was the uncle who had built up the poultry farm – and so I walked to Tel Aviv, as Mikve Israel wasn't far from Tel Aviv. And just as I am walking down the street, I all of a sudden see Fritz, my girlfriend from Vienna. I still know perfectly well, she was holding a bottle and when she saw me, she dropped it and it broke. I always say: It was God's intention that we two should get married. She was attending millinery-training courses because she didn't want to go to a school and invited me home with her. That amazed me since in Vienna we were always having to meet in secret, but she said: "Everything is different here." We then started meeting regularly and I also met her father.

I went to school at Mikve Israel, had lessons in chemistry, mechanics, chicken farming, and much more, everything that you need for farming. There were quite a lot of Austrians in my class, a lot from Vienna, but also a lot of Germans. I specialized in cattle farming and vegetables. When I worked in the cow stalls I would be woken up at 3am to milk the cows.

At Mikve Israel it worked to my benefit that I had done a hairdresser's course in Vienna. I was able to cut my classmates' hair and earn a little extra money. Even in Vienna I was able to earn a little extra money with my friend, who had also attended the hairdresser's course, by cutting the students' hair after school. My grandmother lived in Tel Aviv with Uncle David and his family. In Vienna she would get her hair cut by Uncle Isi, in Tel Aviv I took over the job. "When you cut my hair, it's a pleasure. When Isi cut my hair, he would rip half of it out," my grandmother said. My grandmother wasn't unhappy in Palestine. She said: "If God wants it this way, then so it shall be."

She was incorporated into the family and all holidays were celebrated at Uncle David's. My grandmother died in 1941 in Tel Aviv.

In the early years at Mikve Israel I signed up for Haganah. I was trained at Haganah and after two-and-a-half years, just before I finished at the agricultural college, the order suddenly came that we needed to sign up with the military, because the Germans were already in Alexandria and the English knew that we had excellent training with Haganah. The English went to the high-ranking Haganah officers and said that the situation was critical and it would take a long time to get the English military to Palestine. They needed trained people, since they hadn't prepared for war at all. So our superiors told us that we needed to join the English military. We asked to postpone it a few months so we could still receive our diplomas. But the director gave them to us anyway, despite those missing months.

From May 8th, 1941 I was a soldier in the English Army in Palestine. I went to the artillery, to the bombardiers. We thought we would get cannons, but we were mistaken. Every other soldier received a weapon. There was no talk of cannons; the English didn't even have enough weapons.

Wedding in Tel Aviv

In December 1941 my wife and I were married in Tel Aviv. My wife really wanted for me to be married in plainclothes, not in a uniform. I asked my officers, but they said it wasn't possible and I had to get married in uniform. At the wedding four soldiers held the canopy, one of whom was Yigal Hurwitz who was later the Minister of Finance of Israel. My wedding day wasn't only a happy one, I was also very sad, since I only had Uncle David in Tel Aviv. Uncle David took such a long time to get ready for the wedding, that if I had waited for him I would have missed my wedding. So I went alone and really wished that my family could have been there for this big event.

My wife and her family were already there and the Rabbi asked: "Where is the groom?" I was standing there so alone in my uniform I wasn't recognizable as a groom.

My Uncle Alexander was living in Jerusalem, but he was poor, never had money, and would have had to pay for the bus from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv to come to my wedding, which I didn't want to ask of him. I thought: I have to send him an invitation, but I will send it so that it will arrive too late and he won't have to spend the money on a bus. So I brought the invitation to the post office on the morning of the wedding. Of all things, the mail was especially quick that day, so that he got the invitation by the afternoon. He immediately boarded a bus and rode to Tel Aviv.

My wife's family lived on Dizengoff Street. That was a German neighborhood back then, and that's where Uncle Alexander got off the bus. The people looked so astonished from their balconies, because in Tel Aviv you so rarely saw Orthodox Jews, like my Uncle Alexander was, and they asked themselves: What's that Jew doing here? "Maxl is getting married and I won't be there," Uncle Alexander thought; he spoke in a very thick Viennese dialect. And then my Uncles sang Heurigen (wine tavern) songs together at the celebration. They had a large repertoire and set the right mood. Uncle David was not Orthodox, he lived traditionally, but you just have to imagine my Ultra-Orthodox uncle with payos and beard singing cheerful Heurigen songs in the thickest Viennese dialect.

No one had enough money for gifts, but we received flowers; it was a real sea of flowers. The military gave me two weeks vacation and Fritzi and I went to Tiberias for our honeymoon. When I took my wife out, I would buy a piece of chalva [oriental dessert]; I didn't have money for more. After two weeks I needed to return to the army. I was stationed in Haifa. My wife rented a room in Bad Galim, that's a place near Haifa, so that I could visit her whenever I was granted leave.

Just before the birth of my son Ralph in January 1941 I was badly wounded from the faulty operation of a cannon near Akko, and Yigal Hurwitz was given the assignment of bringing me to the hospital in Akko. I was bleeding profusely and getting weaker, but Yigal asked if I could hold out until Haifa, since there were Arab doctors in Akko and they would surely let me bleed out. I knew that Fritzi was in Haifa and could only nod and we rode like fools to Haifa. I was getting weaker and weaker and when we got there they carried the stretcher I was on quickly into the hospital. I couldn't open my eyes and heard someone say: "There's no hope!"

Luckily another doctor came by who immediately had me brought into the operating room. They cleaned off the blood and I was immediately operated on. Before the operation I could feel them suddenly pulling on my top and bottom teeth and I thought, what are they doing, what do they want from me. I learned later that most of the English wear dentures and the nurses were trying to yank my dentures – that I didn't have – out of my mouth so that I wouldn't choke on them during the operation. I was getting healthy again and they sent me off for convalescence. Then I was transferred to Cairo.

During this time my son was born. Of course I wanted to be at my son's circumcision, which takes place eight days after the birth, and requested a leave of absence. Normally you didn't get a leave of absence, but the Major, who was a Rabbi, had an understanding, and so I was able to go to my family in Tel Aviv for two weeks, as my wife was living in Tel Aviv again. I was very happy, but our son only weighed 2.75 kilograms [6lbs] and you couldn't be circumcised if you weighed under 3kg. I spent two very lovely weeks with my family. A month after the birth there was another celebration for the first-born son, what they call "pidyon haben," and the "bris," the circumcision, was postponed until this day. So I went back the Major two weeks later and asked for a leave of absence. He threw a fit over my audacity but still gave me the two weeks leave again. I witnessed the party and the circumcision and everything was wonderful.

Not long after was Passover and I went back to the Major to ask him to let me go home. As I opened the door to his office he screamed, "Get out! I don't want to see you! Get away from here!" After that I went to the priest, who was also a major, and said, "Excuse me, I'm not a catholic, I'm Jewish. The Easter holidays are just around the corner, and, as I'm sure you know, we only eat matzah [unleavened bread, eaten during Passover to remember the escape from Egypt] and I'm from a very religious family and would like to be with my family in Tel Aviv over the holidays." He said, "Yes, of course, son," and gave me another two weeks leave.

After that I was sent to my old unit in Cyprus. At this time the Jewish Brigade was formed within the English Army. The Jewish Brigade was made up of around seven to eight thousand people – the Infantry, Artillery, and so on. In 1944, just before the end of the war, I went to Italy as a bombardier with the Jewish Brigade. We were sent as occupying troops through Germany to Belgium and Holland.

My wife was with our son Ralph in Tel Aviv and didn't know when I would be coming home. She went to the director of Mikve Israel, who I always got along well with. She had our baby on her arm and said to him that he should request me, since if you were needed in industry they would let you out of the army. He solicited me and I returned to Palestine.

Return to Austria

My wife actually never wanted to go back to Austria, but I started having a lot of problems getting work even though there were clear orders that those released from the army were to be given job priority. Not only could I not get work, but a young man also called me a Mishtamed [a very mean name for a slacker] at the employment office. He told me I was also just one of those people who would rather join the military than work. For many Jews in Palestine, building up the country was much more important than the fight against fascism. I was really proud of the fact that I had spent five years fighting for the fatherland. But that didn't mean anything, and I was deeply hurt and even cried like a small child. After a long search I got work as a gardener.

Because of this trouble with work – otherwise we would have likely stayed in Palestine – we decided to immigrate to America. I knew that my mother was in America and my wife wrote to her Uncle Max Linker, her mother's brother, who was living in New York, telling him to send us an affidavit. He immediately sent us a good affidavit. We brought it to the American Consulate and wanted to get an entry permit for America. They asked us if we were registered and we answered that we had been registered in Vienna in 1938. After the German invasion my mother had tried to get us an entry permit at the American Embassy. We were told that the quota number they gave us back then was no longer valid so we had to re-register, and that the permit could take one or two years because the "Displaced Persons" would be the first to receive entry permits to travel to America. So we decided to go back to Austria first, since I knew we had houses in Vienna and also that my wife's parents wanted to return to Vienna after the war. So we registered ourselves for repatriation.

We were transported to Egypt with a truck, then with a ship and then a cattle car to Austria. Our first stop in Austria was Klagenfurt, I think. We got out; our son Ralph was six-years old and he had a somewhat darker skin color. The people looked at him and said: "Look, they brought a negro with them!"

That was in 1947 and we were received in Vienna by President Koerner. The city was damaged from bombings and most of the windows had been nailed shut. As a soldier I had seen German cities in which there wasn't a single house left standing, so I wasn't that shocked. We had accommodations in the Wiedner hospital. This hospital no longer exists. My parents-in-law and my wife's sister were given beds in a large hall. As a family with a small child we were given a single room. There were two stove burners mornings, afternoons and evenings in order to heat up a little water for coffee.

My family owned two houses. One was in the 1st district and the other was in the 16th. I said to my wife that we should go to our house in the 1st district, on Vorlauf-Gasse. There we met our old caretaker, Mr. Meyer, who was a Czech, could hardly speak German, and was an overzealous Nazi. "Mr. Meyer, what are you doing here, you were surely incriminated, you were a real Nazi!" "Yes, that's true," Mr. Meyer answered, "But you know, then the Communists came to me and said, if you join the Communist party you will be exonerated. So I joined the Communist party. Mr. Uri,

there is an empty apartment on the 2nd floor. But you didn't hear it from me."

There weren't any empty apartments at this time. I went to the Aryanizer, a man named Metzger. Metzger had turned two rooms in the apartment into a pied-à-terre and I paid him 100 dollars for his expenses and moved into this apartment with my wife and our son. Some time later we got the house back. At that time the Allies were still in Vienna and when a Russian and an American fought everyone thought the next war would break out. My mother and siblings in America urged me to sell the houses. I was really cross about that at the time but my mother didn't want to listen to me, and so I sold the houses. That was a big mistake, but there's nothing more that can be done about that.

We lived in a five-room apartment with side rooms and brought my parents-in-law to live with us. "Uri & Zwick" had been looted and run down; but not long after my father-in-law re-opened his fur business. He advertised in hunting magazines – just as he did before the war – and there were distributors who asked him where he was these past years, because they didn't realize that the Max Haber firm was a Jewish one. I worked alongside my father-in-law in the fur trade. But both living and working with my father-in-law created somewhat of a problem and so we decided, when we learned that nothing stood in the way of our entry to America, to immigrate to America in 1952 with our now three children – in December 1949 the twins Eva and Robert were born.

Immigration to America

I can still clearly remember – our ship was called Queen Mary and it was a terrible journey. The sea was stormy; we needed an extra day and everyone was seasick. My wife was especially ill. Max Linker, my wife's uncle, was supposed to pick us up at the port in New York, but he wasn't there. My father-in-law had transferred to me in New York the money that I had put into his fur business the previous year. When I was released from the military I was given a severance pay of 8,000 dollars, which was a lot of money, and put it into my father-in-law's business. This is the money he sent to New York. But when we arrived we didn't have any American money. We stood there alone with our three children and my son Ralph saw a gumball machine and said to me, "Papa, get me a gumball from the machine." I told him I didn't have any American money and he said: "But Papa, you don't need money, it says: One cent."

It was very cold and I wanted to find us a lounge where we could wait for Uncle Max. They said there weren't any but that over there was a restroom. I said to my wife and children, "Come, there is the lounge." I thought that "restroom" was a lounge and opened the door and there we were in front of the toilets. Later we visited Aunt Emma and she showed us her apartment and said, "here is a closet, and here is a closet, and here is a closet, and here is a closet!" And I thought: why does she need so many Klosetts? [Ger. toilet]

After a week in New York we flew to Los Angeles where Francis, a cousin of my wife's, lived. After I'd received the 8,000 dollars I put half of it into a business, but my supposed co-partner was a swindler and I lost almost everything. The business worked with scrap metal and it was through that that I had contact with other businesses, and one of them offered me job. I was very happy about that since I would have been unemployed otherwise. And as ill luck will have it – I was never sick – but after two months I was suddenly sick and needed to go to the hospital. I was very restless and wanted to go back to work, since in America you could be laid off very quickly. After

that I had to return to the hospital two more times, but it was a like a miracle – the boss was very fair and I kept my job. He valued me and my work and even trusted me to make my own decisions regarding the staff in my department. Unfortunately, the young boss passed away and a new manager came in who knew less about metal than I did; he was also aware of that and caused me inconvenience because of it.

In the meantime we had a really nice house with a swimming pool. Our children went to school and we rent regularly to the synagogue. Our children had religion classes and we celebrated all the Jewish holidays. We had established ourselves in America and were doing well.

My brother was first married to an Indian, got divorced, got married once more, and then divorced again. He lived in Los Angeles, had three children: two sons named Dany and John and a daughter named Naomi. Both sons and the daughter are doctors.

Vienna

After eleven years in Los Angeles, in 1963, my father-in-law asked me to come back to Vienna because he was old and sick. So we packed up our things and came back to Vienna. Since I hadn't had any bad experiences in Vienna before the Holocaust, experienced little anti-Semitism, I went back without reservations and didn't regret having returned. My parents-in-law were both still working in the business and I also began to work in the fur trade again. I learned the ropes quickly and became a good fur trader.

Our son Ralph had already finished school in California and was accepted to UCLA. That was a great achievement, since out of one thousand applicants, only one hundred were accepted. When he showed his matriculation in Vienna they told him that he would have to complete his general qualification here first in order to even be allowed to study. Those would have been two lost years, so he went back to Los Angeles, studied medicine, and became a doctor. He married Marcia and had two children, David and Deborah.

Our twins were 13-years old when we returned to Vienna and Eva, our daughter, said that she would finish school in Vienna and then go right back to America. She finished her general qualification examinations, went back to Los Angeles, studied Political Science, married, and had three children – Lisa, Mike, and David. She has been divorced for 25 years and works at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. She is very well liked, recognized, and competent.

Our son Robert decided after a few semesters of studying medicine at the University of Vienna – where he had to dissect an amputated arm – that he would get into the family business. He married Judith Hacker, the daughter of Ivan Hacker, President of the Jewish Religious Community in Vienna from 1982 to 1987. They have three children: Sandra, Linda, and Marc.

My sisters Edith and Cilli had started studying medicine at the university in Vienna and worked as lab assistants in Cleveland during their emigration. Edith married Robert Herzlinger and Cilli married Walter Lauber. Cilli had two children, Eileen Egerer, born Lauber, and Steven Lauber. Edith also had two children, Hans Herzlinger and Kittz Karner, born Herzlinger. They returned to Vienna in 1950. In America my sisters and their husbands were members of the organization “Free Austrian Movement.”

Because our son Ralph was studying in America, we flew to Los Angeles multiple times a year, where mother was also living. One day she said: "I am coming with you to Vienna." It all happened within a few days – after she renewed her passport, which had expired, she flew with my wife's ticket to Zurich and from Zurich to Vienna.

My mother wanted to spend her final days in Israel, lived a few more years in Vienna, and spent the last ten years of her life very happy in a religious old age home in Jerusalem. During the time that my mother was living in Jerusalem my wife and I went visit her three or four times a year. My mother passed away in Israel in February 1985. I go regularly to Israel and visit her grave.

I am the only descendent of the Uri family to live a religious and traditional life with my family. My sister's children were not raised religiously, but my sister Cilli's grandson – he is 15-years old – is catching up on his Bar Mitzvah with the Or Chadash [Jewish reform community]. There is going to be a big celebration and of course I will be there. Or Chadash is not for me, but it's probably good for Jews who would otherwise have nothing to do with tradition and religion. Or Chadash includes a portion of these people, and that is very important.

I am the president of the temple board at the City Temple on Seitenstetten-Gasse. I am the vice president of the chevra kadisha, and of Keren Hayesod, and I am the treasurer at the old age home. Besides that I am responsible for the morning minyan, which is unfortunately very difficult: ten people belong to a minyan and I have to pay four people to get them to come. The religious community doesn't give me any money so I have to see where I can get ahold of it. It's sad that we don't have a minyan – but that's life. I am therefore very busy with the religious community. I haven't just been doing this since I retired – but for quite sometime already. I'd like to pull back a bit, but they don't let me.

My grandfather was very Orthodox; in the prayer room where he prayed they were all very Orthodox and I had a good relationship with them. But now, I have to honestly say, a lot of the Orthodox are coming to Vienna and they're getting on my nerves. I don't know where they're from – maybe Israel or America. You see them in the 2nd district in shtreimels [fur hat worn by Orthodox Jewish men] and white socks. I particularly don't like the ones with the white socks because they don't recognize the State of Israel. I once met one on Saturday – as temple chairman I am in temple every Saturday morning – I didn't recognize him and said: "Good Shabbes!" and whatever else you say. He then asked me, "Where do you pray?" And I answered, "Here in the City Temple." Him, appalled: "You pray here?" Me: "Yes, here!" Him: "You might as well go straight to St. Stephen's Cathedral!"

For our 60th wedding anniversary in 2001 I had a Torah written special for me and my wife. There was a very good director at the Shaare Zedek hospital, where my Uncle Alexander had worked for 60 years as an accountant, who oversaw the work. There was a large celebration in Vienna that started at the Hoher Markt. We went from Juden-Gasse to the temple on Seitenstetten-Gasse with music and dancing. And now our Torah is at the temple and on it is written: "This Torah scroll was written for the 60th wedding anniversary of Max and Fritzi Uri, married on 7. December 1941."