

1938

## CHAPTER 26

## CUBA. DESPAIR.

A few days later, we were in Havana, Cuba. The whole voyage had taken 14 days.

The disembarcation took a very long time, as an officer of the immigration department examined the papers of each passenger very thoroughly. While this was going on, a man from the Joint Distribution Committee came on board and explained

1918  
HAWAII



The investigation took a very long time, as an illness  
of the investigation department delayed the progress of our  
particular very thorough. While this was going on, a man from  
the Joint Expedition Committee came on board and explained





16/11/38

First pictures from Cuba (1938)



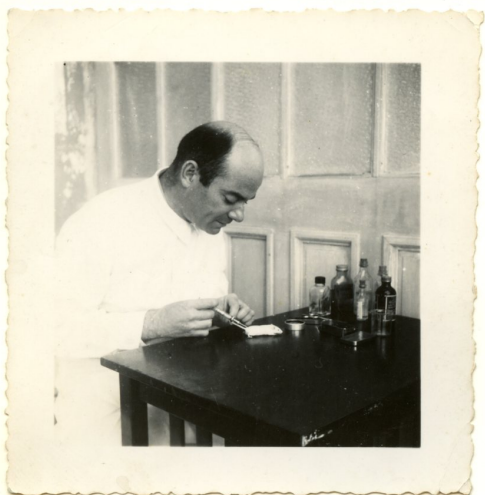






the situation, in which refugees from Europe will find themselves in Cuba, and what the chances of getting visas for the immigration to the United States were. He explained the quota system and the waiting period for people from different countries of origin. For me, this man had very bad news. I had expected that I would have to wait a few weeks or perhaps months, but he told me that it will take years, since I was born in Rumania, and the Rumanian quota was very small, only 375 per year. I was shocked, and fell for the next few days into deep despair. All my plans had suddenly come to naught.

For the first night I went together with some people I had befriended with on the boat to a hotel in the old city of Havana, at the corner of Calle Obispo and Calle Cuba. I woke up early on account of enormous noise by a streetcar, which passed near the hotel through a narrow street, autos, vendors. My friends and I went in the morning to look for other quarters and we found a nice rooming house on the Prado, a wide boulevard with an alley with trees. I got there a room, which I was to share with a man I knew from the boat, a Mr. Oling, who came from Berlin. It was a different world, which I had not known before. I was not completely unprepared, since I had gone on land, a few days before, in three different Latin-American cities, San Juan in Puerto Rico, San Domingo in the Dominican Republic, and Port au Prince in Haiti, all of them big cities, though each quite different in appearance. Very similar the large noisy crowds in San Juan and Port au Prince, the great number of black people, the many vendors. Havana was much larger, also full of life, and noisy, and in many respects more beautiful, with its boulevards,



On the terrace of the house where I lived.

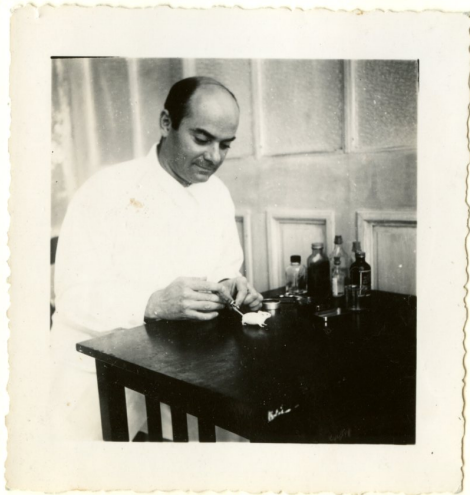


In Cojimar with Hedy, Johanna and Mrs. Else Wagner. Nov. 1940





Johanna





MALECON DRIVE, HAVANA, CUBA





parks, and many imposing, big buildings, old, but impressing in style. Very beautiful the Malecon, a long avenue along the seashore and near the entrance to the port, running along a wide canal between the city and a peninsula with the old Castel Moro.

I became very soon acclimatized and found my way around. I had learned Spanish, while still in Vienna, with the help of Heini, Hedy's uncle, who had lived for many years in Panama, and who had come almost daily to give me lessons, altogether about 20 times. And while on the boat, I had a good Spanish grammar, and tried to acquire more knowledge of that language. Having a talent for languages, I was soon able to talk and understand people.

I went soon to the American consulate to ask about my chances to get an American immigration visa. The answer was as devastating as the information I got on the boat when it arrived in Havana: Many years of waiting. That threw me again into despair and depression. I could figure it out myself that I would have to wait many years on account of the Rumanian quota. I had applied for immigration at the consulate in Vienna in June 1918. There were so many people ahead of me, Rumanians still in Rumania, and the many Rumanians living in many countries in the world, in Austria, Germany, Poland, Hungary, and elsewhere. The number was in the 100.000ds, and I was told that it may take as long as 80 years till my name will be at the top of the list.

I spoke with many people about my situation and also, among other things, about my invention of Viperin. Some of them thought that this might help me to get the immigration

visa. That gave me a little hope and I thought much about it.

I had another problem: Living expenses. I had brought with me only 420 dollars, and it was obvious that this small amount of money will not last very long. It had shrunk already considerably. My roommate, Mr. Oling, asked me one day about my financial situation. He had thought that I must have a lot of money, since I was dressed neatly, was wearing a fine white suit, had fine shirts, etc. I told him the truth and he was amazed how little I had. He advised me to go the next day to the refugee committee like most of the others and ask to be enrolled, which I did. From then on, I received regular support money and my worries about money had come to an end. I could even save a little money and put it in the bank. Every two or three days I went to the bank and took out 5 or 10 dollars, rarely more. It was enough for the coffee house in the morning and for the restaurant at noon and in the evening, also for the wonderful fruit I bought every day, for the movie theatre in the evening, for the laundryman, newspaper, postage, for the development of films and prints, great numbers of them, and, of course, for rent. Everything was cheap and I could afford it.

It did not take long and I got some patients, refugees, who needed advice, and I earned a few dollars. And there was a druggist, who filled my prescriptions, given over the phone, delivered them even to the homes. My fee was small, usually 1 to 2 dollars for a house call, seldom more. I was satisfied.

I had taken with me to Cuba the name and address of a Mr. Alberto Johnson, who was an importer of medicines from



many European countries. I was told that he might be interested in distributing Viperin in Cuba. So, I went to him soon after my arrival in Havana. He was a fine gentleman and showed great interest in Viperin. He had two brothers, who had an enormous drugstore under the name Johnson & Johnson, the second largest in Cuba, and he introduced me to one of his brothers, Dr. Carlos Johnson. We had long discussions about Viperin and the possibility of manufacturing and distributing it in Cuba. They decided that they themselves would not undertake it, but that they knew of other companies, which would do it. I told them that I had to do some experimental work before doing anything else and they recommended me to a man, who had a big medical laboratory, one of the biggest in Havana. This man was very friendly and obliging and told me that I can use his laboratory whenever I wanted and for any kind of experimental work. What I had to do were experiments on mice, in the first place to find out the number of mouse units that went into one gramme of ointment. The powder, which I had taken along from Vienna, was supposed to contain in one gramme the amount of snake venom that went into 5 grammes of ointment. I had to find out whether that information was correct. Later on, I would have to find a snake venom that would replace the snake venom, which we had used in Europe, which was the venom of *Vipera ammodytes*, a snake, which is very common in Yugoslavia and other Balkan countries. I will now leave the story of my experimental work, will later come back to it, since important things, which had happened in the meantime, have to be described.

I was receiving letters from Hedy and also from Lisa and

Francis and had written to them frequently. Pictures, which I had sent them, showing me in a white suit with a straw hat seemed to have impressed them very much. In one of the letters Hedy wrote that the Nazis had come to look for me on the day after the so-called Crystal-Night from the 9th to the 10th of November, 1938, when they had put on fire 17 temples and 61 Houses of Prayer in Vienna and the other cities in Austria and had arrested and sent to concentration camps 7800 Jews. In Germany they had also destroyed by fire innumerable temples and arrested 26,000 Jews. That was 40 days, after I had left Vienna. How lucky I was! Hedy had a hard time there, all alone in the apartment with Johanna and her parents nearby, since restrictions for Jews became stricter and life almost unbearable. This is well described by Hedy in an interview, which will be attached here. We had hoped that she will get her American visa soon after I left, we thought within 3 or 4 months, but it took more than a year, till the American consul gave her the visa. In the meantime she had to handle the packing of the furniture and all our belongings into a liftvan and then to move to the apartment of her parents. She was threatened by the Gestapo frequently with being sent to Poland, if she will not leave soon. But how could she without a visa? What Lisa and Francis went through, is also well described in interviews with them, and will be attached later, to give you a first-hand description and well-rounded picture of their lives. This will allow me to restrict myself to describing how I fared in Cuba.

I should, for instance, mention that about two weeks after my arrival in Havana, Leo and Ella Ziegler arrived there



also. Before I had left Vienna, I saw them and told them that I am going to Cuba. They were astonished, but did not say a word that they also will be going to Cuba, 14 days later. They kept it as a secret, probably in fear that the Germans may learn about their departure and somehow interfere with their plans. Anyway, I learned about their arrival through Ella's brother Maurice Ziegler, who was already in New York, and I went to the boat when it arrived. Although my Spanish was not yet good, I intervened on their behalf, using all kinds of excuse and explanations, and finally succeeded in freeing them, so that they could leave the boat instead of being sent to the camp Tiscornia for quarantine like all the others. They were very happy about it. I had prepared a hotel room for them and instead of flowers a basket full of fruits. A few days later, I took them to the Malecon, where they found a nice little apartment, where they stayed for many months. We often met in their apartment, a few times went on small excursions, often met in a little Chinese restaurant for lunch. Ella got her visa for the United States earlier than Leo, perhaps because she was born in Egypt and a visa number was free at that time for that quota, and she joined her father Marcus Ziegler in Chicago. Leo had to wait a few months longer, had rented a little room somewhere in Vedado, a suburb of Havana. He had a talent for painting and went almost daily out with an easel and canvas to paint, always aquarells. Some were quite good, and with the help of Ella, while she was there, he framed a great number of them and once arranged an exposition in the lobby of a big hotel, and sold a few of them. Ella worked in Chicago

as a maid in a hotel, had to wash bathrooms and scrub floors, worked very hard. Later Maurice settled in Los Angeles, and when Leo arrived in the United States too, made arrangements for Leo and Ella to settle in California too. They wanted to settle in a place far from a big city and they bought, high up in Santa Ynez, a delapidated farm house and farm land with a chicken farm. They remodeled the house nicely, planted great many walnut trees, which would bear nuts in about 4 or 5 years, and in the meantime raised and handled about 2000 chicken, and sold the eggs. They lived not only on the gains from the chicken farm. Leo got a position as an art teacher on four different high schools. They had bought a little car and he had learned how to drive, and he drove every day from one high school to another one, and he worked and earned a living this way, till he died at the age of 81 or 82, some 10 or 12 years ago. Ella still lives there about 80 years old. She once was a real beauty, and still shows it. We had visited them there three times, once with Nancy. I wrote all that to show a real success story of two refugees from Europe.

Now back to me in Havana. I should mention that I was there in the middle of a bunch of young and middle-aged men, who met almost every evening at a rendezvous place on the Prado, a promenade with many coffee houses on wide terraces, where there was always music being played, across the street from the beautiful capitol. Great numbers of people were sitting there or promenading till late at night. One of my friends, Mr. Oling, was my room-mate, and another one, Mr. Koltitz, was the only one, whom I later met in New York and we remained friends and see each other quite often. There was



also a Mr. Luxemburg, a very fine fellow, a Mr. Herrnsstadt, a Mr. Kreuzberger, and a few others, whose names I have forgotten. When I missed them at our rendezvous place, which happened a few times when they had gone to a movie without me, I was quite disappointed and felt lost, and went to my room to read or write letters. I was sitting at my typewriter all the time, during the day and often till late at night, writing letters. But evenings I liked to be with these people, discussing the news, getting opinions. Often we gathered around a table to play cards, usually poker, for money, which was fun. There came New Years Eve, when the whole group of us went to the casino, where there was a big celebration, all of us wearing tuxedos. And then came carnival time, celebrated on the Prado and Malecon with big parades, quite an event in Havana.

I should also mention that I was taken to butterfly hunting in Havana, in a special way. Since I had no net, I used to hit the butterflies with my stiff straw hat and pick them up from the ground, kept only those, which were not too badly damaged. In this way I got a small collection together. Once I had sent a wooden cigar box with butterflies to Francis, with pieces of cork glued in to hold the pins. I was careful and had put the pins in firmly, had selected really beautiful specimens. But unfortunately, they arrived in France completely destroyed, probably because the box was thrown and hit hard in post offices and during the voyage on the boat. Francis was disappointed, but at least he saw the good will. I received from him quite a few painted postcards, which showed birds or butterflies, which I had in my room, posted on the



Lieber Papa!

Küßes dabei! Ich danke dir für diesen wunderschönen Brief.  
Ich werde dir in den nächsten Tagen beschriften.  
Es gibt nicht Mein! Ich küsse dich

Gestern war im Garten eine Katze.

Und da hat es gerade geregnet und das Haustor war schon gesperrt weil es war schon Nacht. Da hat die Katze die ganze Zeit geschrien. Dir geht es hier sehr gut. Ich gehe jetzt in ein Hinderheim, aber nur am Nachmitag und nur Montag, Dienstag, und Freitag. Ich habe auf keinen Brief gewartet. Du tust mir sehr leit, weil du so viel arbeiten must! Der Schmetterling ist ganz verküetscht angekommen wen du mir wieder einen Schmetterling schicken wirst dann gib ihn in eine Schachtel. Ich war noch nicht beim Schneiderwittchen, aber dafür



habe ich ein Buch von der Frau  
Dr. Taxel bekommen. Ich freue mich  
sehr mit den zwei grosse schönen  
Schmetterlingen. Ich werde dir mit  
diesem Brief eine Zeichnung schicken.  
Ich habe aus Wien die Rechenma-  
schine bekommen. Die Lisa hat auch  
aus Wien zwei Bilder von der Han-  
nerl bekommen, ich möchte dir  
sehr gerne schicken aber die Lisa gibt  
sie nicht her. Wie geht es dir. Schick  
dem Herrn Steix auch ein paar  
Schmetterlinge. Wann wirst du  
nach Amerika fahren. Hoffentlich  
recht bald. Hast du schon so  
grosse Schmetterlinge wie das  
Briefpapier gesehen. Viele Liebe von Franzi.  
13. Dec. 1907



wall. I have a collection of letters, written by Francis, and I had given most of them to Francis, some time ago, also many drawings and paintings.

I am here inserting two of his letters, one preceding this page and the other one following this page. The first one was written on or about December 13th, 1938, exactly 2 months after I had left him in France, when he was  $7\frac{1}{2}$  years old, written in German, and I am giving here the translation into English.

Dear Papa!

Yesterday there was a cat in the garden. And just then it rained and the door of the house was already closed, because it was already night. The cat had cried all the time. I am very well here. I am going now into a children home, but only in the afternoon and only on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. I did not wait for any letter. I am sorry for you, because you have to work so hard. The butterfly arrived completely squashed. If you send me again one, then put it into a box. I have not been yet to Snow-White, but instead of that I got a book from Mrs. Dr. Saxel. I am very happy with the two big beautiful butterflies. I will send you with this letter a drawing. I received from Vienna the calculating machine. Lisa received also from Vienna two pictures of Hannerl; I would like to send them to you, but Lisa would not let me have them. How are you? Send also to Mr. Streitz a few butterflies. When will you go to America? Lets hope very soon. Have you seen already butterflies as big as this letterpaper?

Many kisses from Franzi.



Lieber Papa!  
Ich habe heute das  
erste Mal in unserer neuen Woh-  
nung geschlafen. Heute bleibe ich  
den ganzen halben Nachmittag  
im Hotel Scribe, während die Lisa  
eine Stunde gibt. Wie geht es Dir?  
Mir geht es sehr gut. Warst Du  
schon auf einer Krokodil Jagd?  
Hast Du schon zugeschaut wie  
man den Haifisch fängt?

Ich habe 89 fcs. und mit  
12 fcs. habe ich der Suzanne  
etwas gekauft. Sie hat heute Gebur-  
tstag. Wir essen jeden Mittwoch bei  
der Lucy. Morgen sind wir beim



Jaquost (das ist ein Neffe von der  
Lucy) eingeladen. Ich freue mich  
sehr. Wir werden ganz auf die Spitze  
von Eiffelturm hinauf fahren. Ich  
werde mir einen Aeroplan machen  
den wirklich fliegen kann.

Ich lasse die Tante Ella und  
den Onkel Leo grüßen und küssen  
und für Dich viele Tussi von Franzl.

I. Februar 1939



The second letter was written on February 1st, 1939, and here is the translation into English:

Dear Papa!

I have slept today the first time in our new apartment. Today I am staying the whole half afternoon in the hotel Scribe, while Lisa is giving a lesson. How are you? I am very well. Have you already been on a crocodile hunt? Have you already watched how they catch sharks?

I have 89 francs and for 12 francs I had bought something for Suzanne. She has today birthday. We eat every Wednesday at Lucy's. For tomorrow we are invited to Jaquot (he is a nephew of Lucy). I am very glad. We will go up to the top of the Eiffeltower. I will make an airplane for myself, which will really fly.

I send regards to aunt Ella and uncle Leo and kisses and for you many kisses from

I. February, 1939

Franzi.

Two more letters, written later, will be inserted later on.

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After my room-mate, Mr. Oling, had moved out, I got for a short time another room-mate, a Mr. Barasch, and, following him, again another one, a Mr. Platschek, a very fine guy. Soon afterwards, he found a rooming house on the Malecon, and we both moved there, had two separate rooms and all meals there at a modest price. It was a fine house, at the corner of Calle Lealtad, with a big terrace and a view of the ocean and further to the right of the Castel Morro, where I could watch the boats coming from Florida, also the daily ferryboats, loaded with trains. Sitting on the terrace was quite a pleasure. I had made a good change.



I should mention here that at about that time I got a letter from Julius Ziegler, in which he wrote that a Mrs. Else Wagner will arrive on a certain day in Havana, and he asked me to help her, as much as I could, to get established in Havana. It was a very nice, fine lady, about at least 15 or 20 years older than I, and we became good friends. She was never married, was the life-long friend of Julius Ziegler's former boss, a Mr. Spielmann. Mr. Spielmann's two sons, both homosexuals, came later also to Havana and we met often in coffee-houses. Later, when Hedy and Johanna came to Havana, we still met Mrs. Wagner, and Hedy seemed to like her. Soon afterwards, Mrs. Wagner got her visa for the United States, where Mr. Spielmann had already arrived, and they both settled in Miami.

In the meantime, I had received from Hedy the good news that the liftvan had been packed and sent to Hamburg. This was at the beginning of the summer of 1939, and at about that time Lisa had sent Francis for the summer to friends in Le Touquet-Paris Plage on the English Channel, who were taking care of other children too, and where he had it very good. Lisa had started working in Paris for Raymond. These were relatively good news.

But the general situation in the world grew worse with each day. Hitler, after having taken over the Sudetenland, succeeded soon in taking over the rest of Tchechoslovakia on March 15th, 1939, incorporating it into Germany as a protectorate. Slovakia and the Carpatho-Ukraine became independent, but soon were put by Tiso, who headed the state, also under German protection. The German colossus had become enormously



big.

It did not take long and Poland appeared to become the next victim. Starting with a barrage of threats in speeches and in the press, Hitler told the world clearly, what would come next. Faced by the project of limitless German expansion, the British and French pledged aid to the Poles in case of action threatening Polish independence. The British made also every effort to draw Russia into the anti-aggression front, but the Russians were suspicious and insisted on complete reciprocity in defense. On August 20th, the world was startled by the conclusion of a trade treaty between Germany and Russia, followed the next day by the announcement that Germany and Russia were about to conclude a non-aggression pact. Coming after months of negotiation between England, France, and Russia, this move was regarded as a demonstration of Bolshevik perfidy. In England and France, as well as in Germany, military preparations started. The British government reiterated its pledge to Poland. The German-Russian pact was signed in Moscow by the German foreign minister Ribbentrop and then on August 23rd in Berlin by Molotow, the Russian foreign minister.