

The Ruthie & Bill Katz Archives
Our Immigration Stories: Edgar Rose
By Ellen (Katz) Block

We continue to document the stories of valued members of our congregation who arrived in the U.S. as immigrants and without whom our congregation and country would be less diverse and less resonant. The following story about Edgar Rose's is compiled from an interview with Merle Branner, February 25, 2019, and Edgar's own narrative which he wrote at the request of his children.

Edgar Rose was born on September 17, 1926, in Essen, Germany to Max and Irene Rose, who had been born in northern Hungary in what is now Slovakia. Immediately after their wedding in 1918, right after WWI, Max and Rose moved to Essen where Max opened and ran a furniture store so successfully that Edgar and his younger sister, Mirjam (Miriam) were able to have a governess and Max, though he didn't drive, had a car and a chauffeur. The family was part of the larger community, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

In 1933, Hitler had come to power and Jews began feeling the effects of his campaign against them. Max's store, like many others, was labeled with a sign that said, "This store is owned by a Jew. Germans, do not shop here." Significantly, when Irene took Edgar for his first day at school, two men in uniform scanned the lists of enrolled children and refused to let them enter. They asked Irene if the family was Jewish and when she replied, "yes," told her that Jews were not allowed to go to school. That night when Irene related to Max what had transpired, Max immediately realized the family could no longer stay in Germany. He was persistent in terms of what would happen and he had the means to do something about it.

It took Max some months to make arrangements, but in November, Irene, Edgar and Miriam moved to



*Edgar before first day of school -
September 1933
The blackboard says, "Mein erster
Schultag (my first school day)."*

Czechoslovakia to live with Max's mother in a small town which had no running water or electricity. Edgar attended school in the town and quickly learned Slovak, but he was also considered an outsider and identified as a Jew.

Max, meanwhile, had stayed behind in Essen, but subsequently got a job in Moravia, Czechoslovakia, which necessitated frequent travel to Turkey. In the spring of 1939, the situation in Czechoslovakia worsened and the Germans occupied the area where the family now lived, once again banning Jewish businesses and confiscating Jewish valuables. Jewish men over the age of 14 were required to report for transport to a "retraining camp." Luckily, Edgar was under

age 14 and Max was in Turkey at the time of the order, thus both escaped the edict. Edgar was also quite religious at the time, having received some training from the local rabbi to prepare for his Bar Mitzvah. Edgar's narrative for his family describes the way in which he was able to have his Bar Mitzvah in secrecy. It was only attended by 10 men who had to sneak into the former Jewish school which had been closed by the Nazis. No member of Edgar's family could attend.

Although Edgar had several Jewish friends and did not feel antipathy from them, he was well aware of the dangers of the uniformed Hitler Youth. Max was unable to return to Czechoslovakia because of the transport, but he was able to arrange for Irene, Edgar and Miriam to get false passports according to which they were Catholic and Edgar's sister Mirjam was renamed Maria. They managed to get out of Nazi occupied Moravia and travelled((travel)) to Budapest where they stayed with cousins for a couple of

days and continued by train through Yugoslavia and Bulgaria as far as the Greek border which the train could not cross because a few hours earlier a bridge had been washed out by the raging waters of the border river.

After an unscheduled overnight stay at the border, the next morning the train was able to turn around and the Roses ended up in Sofia. In the meantime Max Rose, working frantically on other transportation to Istanbul, was able to book a cabin on a Russian passenger ship plying the Black sea and Bosphorus. Edgar's mother, sister, and Edgar got on a train to Varna where they arrived that evening in the middle of a winter storm. The wind was so intense that upon arrival in Varna Edgar's mother was told that the ship might not be able to dock in Varna because of the large waves on the Black Sea. Fortunately, the next morning the ship did manage to dock at Varna during the night, and the next morning Edgar, Mirjam/Maria, and their mother arrived the next day in Istanbul. Now reunited with Max, the family lived in Istanbul for the remainder of the war. Though they were relatively safe, once again, they had to start over. There was a special section of the police force in Istanbul which "watched" over and monitored people who had foreign passports. Each person had a policeman assigned to him; Max gave their policeman a monthly payment which made things smoother regarding the many rules which foreigners had to follow. While not particularly discriminated against for being Jews, though as Ashkenazi Jews they were somewhat isolated from most other Jews who were Sephardic, Edgar did feel the discrimination of being a "foreigner."

Edgar now had to learn English and Turkish and in September 1940 enrolled at Roberts College, an American school which was a combination upper high school and college. Because of his interest in taking things apart and finding out how they worked, his parents determined he should become an engineer and he graduated from Roberts College with a bachelor's degree in Engineering. In 1947, Edgar wanted to go to the U.S. to get a Master's degree and was accepted at M.I.T. There, he discovered an interest in designing machinery for textile manufacturing and decided he should obtain a further degree in textiles rather than returning immediately to Europe, which had been his original intention. Lowell, Massachusetts, was the center for textiles at that time so Edgar stayed in the U.S. and learned the textile business.

This was a pivotal period in Edgar's life. He lived in a furnished apartment in someone's home while he



continued his education. He had no family near him and few friends, but he realized that for the first time in his life, he felt at ease, that he was a person who was accepted for who he was and no longer a pariah. He asked an uncle in Cleveland how he could become a citizen and subsequently had to travel to Havana to obtain a permanent U.S. Visa. He took the citizenship test and became a U.S. citizen in 1954. His parents moved to Vienna, Austria in the mid-1950s and lived the rest of their lives there. Miriam married and lived with her husband in Venezuela for many years before eventually emigrating to Israel. Edgar married and has two daughters. Of those relatives who stayed in Germany or Czechoslovakia when the Germans invaded, most were murdered in the Holocaust. In answer to, ' Why didn't they leave?' Edgar says it was almost impossible for Jews to believe that as people who had been an integral part of the socioeconomic spectrum and who had fought for Germany in WWI so recently before, they would be turned upon and become victimized in their own country.

There are two important thoughts Edgar has stated in his interview with Merle and his family narrative. One concerns the feeling of being treated as an equal in this country irrespective of his accent, "religious background and foreign birth." The other idea is that what happened in Germany could happen in the U.S. Germany, before Hitler was a democratic country which was tolerant and accepting of Jews as equals...."but under the sway of a democratically elected racist demagogue the Holocaust happened there so it can happen here.