

Living in Interesting Times

A Memoir



Gabriele Neuhäuser Scott

Gabriel Neuhäuser Scott was born in Berlin in 1911. Following research in Kemal Atatürk's Turkey, she was awarded a Ph.D. in Zoology, and left Nazi Germany in 1937. Arriving in Australia, she collected for museums, married, had two children, and lived twenty years in Mount Isa. There, she worked as hotel kitchen maid, library aide, and, eventually, regional librarian for northwest Queensland. Told without

sentimentality, her autobiography reflects her analytical mind and extraordinary recall.

LIVING IN INTERESTING TIMES: A MEMOIR

by Gabriele Neuhäuser Scott

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Gabriele Neuhäuser Scott

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ISBN: 978-1-63490-879-5

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2017

First Edition, Revised.

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NEUHÄUSER HISTORY

I don't have much information about the origins of the Neuhäuser family. My mother always said that they were Sephardim, that is, Jews who descended from those expelled from Spain in the late 15th century, as opposed to the Ashkenazi Jews who were from Russia and Poland, and most of those in Germany. I think this is apocryphal; my mother, as so many assimilated middle class German Jews, looked down on the Eastern Jews and thought the Sephardim were superior. However, I have since read that most of the Sephardim went round the southern part of the Mediterranean, through Algiers, Morocco and Egypt, and those now in Egypt are generally darker skinned and also more fundamentalist than the Ashkenazi.

My own knowledge only goes back to my great-grandmother, who must have been a remarkable woman. Her husband died when she was quite young, leaving her with three young sons. She continued to run the family farm, educated her children, and lived until she was 104, still in her own home and doing most of her own work, mentally alert to the last. I chiefly remember her for the saying, which I have used a lot, "What you haven't got in your head you have to have in your legs," whenever I forgot something and had to go back for it, as well as "Wenn du dennst du bist allein, mache deine Nagels rein" ("When you think you are alone, clean your nails.") All of the Neuhäusers were

healthy and long lived; my great grandmother's sister lived until 102, and at that age was still housekeeping for two banker sons, with only a 15-year-old girl from an orphanage for the "rough". Another great-aunt was diagnosed with cancer in her eighties. The doctors operated and saw that the cancer was inoperable and widespread, so they sewed her up and sent her home to die. She spent some months in bed and then started to improve and lived for another six years, eventually dying of old age. Her doctor was so surprised that he requested an autopsy, and no sign of cancer was found. My mother always said that if she had been a Catholic and gone to Lourdes it would have been called a miracle instead of spontaneous remission. I remember a time when my father took me to visit his relatives in the Rhineland, and I saw all these people in their eighties, nineties and some over 100, including the 102-year-old great aunt. However, others were blind, deaf, paralyzed, senile, or all of these, and this is really when I first decided that I would do something about things if I ever reached that stage. Of course in those days cataracts were inoperable and the only hearing aids were ear trumpets.

My father's father became a "Kaufman," sort of halfway between a shop owner and a merchant, and married (doubtless in an arranged marriage) a girl called Doris Sahlmann who came from a prosperous merchant family in Fürth. She was neither beautiful nor intelligent. As my other grandmother, Ida, was very beautiful and both my grandfathers were quite handsome men, I always blamed my own looks on her.

My father's family came from Mannheim, which is an industrial town and fairly new by European standards, becoming a town about 1660. It is only a few miles from Heidelberg, and about 150 miles north



Richard Neuhäuser in 1884, aged about two.

of Freiburg, and about the same distance south of Bonn, which is not far from Cologne. My grandfather Sigmund Neuhäuser settled in Ludwigshafen, the twin city to Mannheim on the other side of the Rhine. (Just like Buda and Pest are on opposite sides of the Danube.) He ended up building a factory that produced equipment for breweries, and did very well until he invented stiff cardboard envelopes for packing beer bottles instead of using straw. Though they seemed

successful in trials, once he had released them for general use they failed dismally. It took only one bottle to break and the beer from this would soften all the other envelopes so the whole crate was lost. I don't know whether he actually went bankrupt, but he did retire with comparatively little money. Clearly it was an idea before its time.

My grandparents Sigmund and Doris had two children, my father Richard, and a daughter Elsa. I wonder if they were Wagner fans? My father must have been a difficult child. In spite of his intelligence he did badly at school, which he hated, so much so that he was warned that

unless he improved he would not pass the "Einjährige", an exam all German boys going past elementary school had to sit for at sixteen. In this time of compulsory military service, the normal period of enlistment was three years, but those who passed the exam only had to serve for one year and emerged as non-commissioned officers. My father must have taken the warning to heart; he got his first attack of rheumatic fever at this time and lost quite a lot of school time, but on his next school report it said, "In spite of long illness, much improved," and he had no problems with the exam once he had made his mind to pass it. He turned out to be very good with horses, and was put in the Ulans, the Light Cavalry, ending up as something like a sergeant. In those days of course a Jew could not become an officer.

My grandfather wanted my father to go into the family business, but having an adventurous spirit and also the "wanderlust" that I inherited from him, he left Germany as soon as possible after finishing his military service, and went to America. He never told me much about this, but I got stories from my mother. Apparently he did all sorts of interesting things, like being an assistant to a seller of patent medicines and later assistant to a snake catcher. He also went to South America and was tutor to the sons of a German hacienda owner in Brazil, and no doubt did all sorts of other things I don't know about. He kept in touch with his parents, and eventually his father, who wanted him to come home, sent him a one-way ticket. However he had no desire to return as a failure, so he sold or swapped the ticket for one to Japan, where he went early in the 20th century. He was very impressed with the Japanese arts and crafts, somehow managed to learn Japanese quite

quickly and well, and then went around selling for merchants such things as lacquer work, ivory sculptures, silk kimonos with gold and silver embroidery, and lots of other things which were at the time still produced for domestic consumption and not for export or tourists. Somehow he persuaded the merchants that if they trusted him with samples he could get them big orders in America. Returning to America, he hired space in a hall for his exhibition. I have an idea that it may have been in St. Louis, possibly at that famous Fair in 1904, but I am not sure about this. However, he ended up getting lots of orders, and in a fairly short time developed a thriving business, perhaps being one of the first to popularize Japanese arts in the West. He finally sold the business for a lot of money, and once he was a success returned to Germany.

His father was thrilled, and sent him off on a trip around Germany to visit business friends. When he visited Louis Grumach he was invited home for dinner and met my mother, who was then twenty-four and regarded as an old maid by her relatives. My father, who did not suffer fools gladly, had been meeting lots of young "higher daughters" who had the normal accomplishments but were giggly and silly, and he was delighted when my mother could talk intelligently about Japan and its art. After a few more visits he asked her out on an excursion to the Grunewald, the forest area near Berlin. By this time the aunts were so keen to see her get married that they actually allowed her to go without a chaperone, and on that occasion they became engaged. He arranged to phone the next morning; the phone was in the hall, and having warned him that the aunts would be

listening my mother spoke to him in the most formal manner. My mother said she distinctly heard the sighs of disappointment from behind the door.

My aunt Elsa in Mannheim married a man called Alfred Mann in the Rhineland, and had two sons, Robert, and a much younger one whose name I don't remember [*Fritz*]. I detested Robert, who was fond of practical jokes like pulling a chair away from someone about to sit down, or sneaking up on someone and shouting "Boo!" He was however a gifted tennis player and played in competitions. I once played Ping-Pong with him and he beat me 21-0, which I didn't mind at all. The younger one I remember vaguely as being a nice little boy. I also met a cousin of my father's who also loved playing practical jokes and who had a houseful of gadgets made to look like something else. For example, you lifted the phone and found a bottle of brandy underneath.

When I knew my grandparents they were already retired and lived in a very pretty villa in Wiesbaden. One of my earliest memories is their white painted villa covered with pink rambler roses, and a white picket fence with a bench outside it. I sat on the bench and had a view of a wide valley with meadows sloping down to a river, which might have been the Main or the Rhine, while a young Alsatian dog ran around trying to dig out moles from the numerous molehills on that meadow. I might have been about three at the time and certainly not shortsighted, as the picture is very clear and detailed. Later my grandparents lived in other places like Bad Nauheim, north of

Frankfurt, and Bad Kissingen, a spa not far from Mannheim in another direction. Halfway between Mannheim and Freiburg is Baden-Baden, where I spent quite a bit of time during the holidays, as my mother was in a sanatorium there during the last three years of her life. After my grandfather died, my grandmother Doris went to live with Aunt Elsa. She got senile at an early age of 78 or so and my father, and later I, paid for her upkeep. Just before I left she wandered off and fell and broke her hip, dying shortly afterwards of pneumonia. This was a blessing as she was about to go into a home, and it was 1936.

My father found it hard to come to terms with the customs of the German middle class, and often embarrassed my mother. For example, it was the custom for people to arrive at least half an hour late for an social invitation, but he insisted on being on time, so if the invitation said 7:00 p.m. he would drag my mother there at that time exactly and often the hosts were not even dressed. On another occasion he insisted on giving one of my mother's cousins a large, perfectly plain crystal container full of priceless green tea as a wedding gift. She thanked him rather lukewarmly, and promptly sent it to the kitchen, only realising its worth when someone more knowledgeable asked what she had done with this treasure.

When I was growing up my father's favourite breakfast was Kellogg's cornflakes with light cream, and he was fond of American music, including Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

NAZI GERMANY

There was always a certain amount of anti-Semitism in Germany and much more in the East, where there was a constant trickle of Russian and Polish Jews coming to escape from pogroms in those countries. There was less in places like the Rhineland, where the Jews had been living for centuries with a lifestyle much like that of everybody else. Politically I grew up in a Social Democrat democracy, but there were many people who still hankered after the "good old days", including the aristocracy and old army people. The old German flag had been red, white and black, the new one was red, gold and black, and on public holidays one could see peoples' political opinions by the colours of the flags they hung out. Also, on the seaside, the "castles" surrounding the beach chairs would often be decorated with red, white and black flags, and later, during the early days of the growth of Nazism, also with swastika flags. However, on the whole there was not a great deal of discrimination. After the 1918-19 revolution a law had been brought in that all children had to spend at least the first four years of their schooling at state schools, so that there was none of the enmity between Catholics and Lutherans, the only Protestant group in Germany, and I was quite surprised to find in Australia all the different brands, Methodists, Anglicans high and low, Presbyterians, Baptists and many more. My high school had Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish girls and no troubles between them. My cousin, who went to a conventional German school, said that apart from having Jewish religious instruction

he did not feel any different and was not persecuted. One generation earlier there still had been some discrimination, for instance to advance in the army and the public service it was an advantage for a Jew to become a Christian. There was a joke about the man who went to the Catholic priest and asked to become a Catholic. "My son," said the father, "I see you first became a Lutheran before coming to me. Why was that?" The man replied, "Well, when people asked me my religion and I said Lutheran they would say: and what were you before? And I had to say Jewish. If I join you and they ask that question I can say Lutheran."

Certain areas of Berlin, like Lichterfelde and Potsdam, were noted for anti-Semitism, also certain places on the seaside. I remember once being taken to the island of Helgoland (which was fortified and used as a base by the Nazis and blown up after the war), and seeing not one republic flag on the sandcastles.

My mother, who did not like many of her relatives, often called the Jews "a small but nasty race" and many people, including my parents, expected that in another two or three generations the Jews would have become so assimilated as just to be Germans. Most German Jews considered themselves Germans of the Jewish religion, except recent Eastern immigrants who still stuck to the old ways. For this reason I did not believe in Zionism, the movement for a Jewish state (Israel) in Palestine. I felt the trouble with the Jews was that they kept themselves apart and Zionism was doing just that. After all, with all the migrations that had gone on in the world in the past two thousand years, if

everybody wanted to go back to where his ancestors had lived two thousand years ago few people would stay where they now lived.

At that time there were published magazines called *True Stories*, *True Confessions* and *True Romances*, which I read whenever I could borrow them. I remember reading a story about a Jewish girl, not looking it, who went to an American university, was asked to join a sorority, got engaged to a fine upstanding wasp boy and then the horrible truth came out and of course everybody dropped her. This was the main reason I refused when my father offered to send me to Stanford University.

The Nazis were just a joke at first, and probably would have stayed a minor splinter party except for the Depression, which hit Germany worse than any other country. We had a system of voting still used in most European countries, proportional voting. This on the face of it is the fairest way. If a party gets ten percent of the votes it gets ten percent of the members of Parliament and so on. Any party that didn't get a minimum of votes lost its deposit. One voted for the party and not for individual candidates. In practice it leads to unstable government. Rarely has one party been an absolute majority. There may be up to forty parties, some large, and some just splinter groups like the landlord's party that wanted to increase rents, and the tenants' party that wanted to decrease them. In Germany for ages we had the Social Democrats, just left of centre, as the largest party that governed with help of a few similar ones. When their government failed during the Depression, Brüning, who came from a good old family and had been

an Army officer, was the leader of the next largest party, the Catholic Centre Party, and Hindenburg appointed him Chancellor. Hindenburg had been one of the chief generals in the First World War and had been pulled out of retirement in his eighties and elected President. Brüning thought he could improve conditions in Germany if the treaty of Versailles was revoked, because it still required huge payments of reparations. Unfortunately the French and others would not agree at all, so he too failed. Then Hindenburg's son, who like so many staunch nationalists rather favoured Hitler, persuaded his senile father to call on Hitler to form a government. Actually the Nazi Party had only got 19% of the votes at the previous election and Hindenburg didn't really like Hitler, who was lower class and had only been a corporal in the war. However, the deed was done and one of the first things the Nazis did was to burn down the Reichstag and blame it on the Communists,



Berlin. Boycott of Jewish business. April 1933

outlawing that party. The first concentration camps were built not for Jews but for political opponents.

A few months later Hitler held another election, and this time it

was announced that the Nazis had got 98.9% of the votes. This of

course was quite ridiculous, as we all knew. On the other hand voting tickets were numbered, and the numbers written on the roll beside the voter's name, so that theoretically it was possible to find out how someone voted, particularly in small rural areas where the odd brave dissident would promptly be sacked by the lord of the manor.

During the early time of Nazi rule nothing really terrible happened to the Jews, and many kidded themselves that persecution of the Jews was going to be dropped from the programme, or at least that people who had served in the war would not be affected. Shortly after that I went to Asia Minor. When I returned things had changed considerably. Hitler had certainly created a lot of employment, simply by making large-scale war preparations. The famous Autobahnen (ancestors of freeways) were one of those war preparations. There were mass meetings in halls and on streets. I remember once Hitler was supposed to speak somewhere and our housemaid went to hear him. She came back full of excitement about how wonderful he had been. When I asked; "What did he actually say?" she replied, "Well, I couldn't really say, but he was wonderful."

No doubt Hitler was a great orator who had the secret of getting people enthralled. Also the Germans had been starved for pomp and circumstance during the rather drab times of the Republic. I remember some years earlier we had a visit from King Ammanullah of Afghanistan, quite an unimportant figure on the world stage, and the Berliners went absolutely mad with excitement. So the Nazi rallies were popular for that reason too.

During my first sojourn in Asia Minor there was the first real official persecution of the Berlin Jews. Houses where Jews lived and businesses owned by Jews had windows smashed and JEW written across the doors and windows. That is when my grandfather died, in September 1933. He was in his late eighties, and went out and tried to tell the storm troopers how honest he had always been, (I remember he objected strongly to silk stockings because he didn't think they lasted long enough), and what a good German he was. I don't think he was actually injured, but died in his office from the shock and upset of the thing.

By the time I returned from Asia Minor for the second time, things had taken a decided turn for the worse. The racial laws had been introduced, making sexual relations between Jews and Germans a crime and letting Jews only stay in Jewish owned places. So I had to find a new landlady, a middle aged Jewish woman who lived somewhere in Charlottenburg. She had one son in his early twenties who escaped to Holland just a step ahead of the Gestapo. Apparently he came home one night from a lecture sopping wet and told her he had been thrown into the Spree by a group of Brownshirts. He saved himself by hiding behind a bridge column with only his nose out of water till they had gone. As soon as he got home he packed a few things and took the next train to Holland. In the morning an official party of Gestapo men came to arrest him. At that time it was mainly people who had at one time been members of some left-wing group that got into trouble. Another time my landlady stood in a butter queue. This was during the time when Göring announced "Guns before Butter" and

everyone had to queue. A policeman stood by to watch the people, and when a woman started to grumble he said: "What are you complaining about, you voted for this." Shortly afterwards some Gestapo came and took him away and we heard later that he had shot himself at the police station. Whether he did, or they killed him, I do not know. "Aryan" shops had to put signs in their windows saying, "Jews not wanted here". One day I went to my hairdresser to find one of those stickers on his window and of course went to find a Jewish hairdresser. A few months later I met the hairdresser in the street and he asked why I had stopped coming. I said, "How could I come when you have that sign in the window?" and he told me that he just had to put it in, or he would have ended in a concentration camp as he was already in trouble with the Nazis, having been at a compulsory Nazi meeting and raised his hand with a cigarette in it for the Hitler salute.

There was a tabloid paper called "'Der Stürmer" published by one of the head Nazis, and this was displayed on stands on nearly every street corner. The stands were wooden and the frame was painted red with swastikas all over, all pages of the Stürmer were nailed on to the blackboard in the middle. They contained such items as stories about a nasty Jew who seduced a nice Aryan girl, giving street names and house numbers, also stories of how girls having affairs with Jews had been shaved, stripped and flogged through the streets. I was told that the addresses given in the articles were completely fictitious, some of the streets existed, but not the numbers given.

It was during this time that my father killed himself. He had for

years lived with a very nice young woman who became a good friend of mine, and he was blackmailed at work by the head accountant, who later became the managing director when the firm was turned over to Aryans. My father discussed this with me for quite a while, and I tried to tell him that a man of his ability should have no trouble making a new start in another country, and he actually said he would do so, even had his teeth attended and bought a lot of new shirts, but then he killed himself instead of going to South Africa as he was supposed to do. My friend never married anyone else and I corresponded with her till she died of diabetes about 1960.

[Richard told everyone that he didn't like goodbyes at trains. Then he went to his office building and turned on the gas in the company kitchen, after taking sleeping tablets. He posted a notice on the kitchen door: Danger. Gas. When he was found he was in a coma. He lingered for several days while Gabriele sat by his bed hoping he would die, for if he had lived he would have suffered terrible brain damage. Oral account.]

It was after this that I decided I would leave Germany, and indeed Europe, as soon as I had got my doctorate. Matters improved in 1936, as the Germans wanted to make a good impression on foreigners who came to the Berlin Olympic Games.

Before leaving Germany I decided to go on one more trip. My friend, *[Marguerite Hornauer]* whose Aryan appearance was a good protection, and I went to North Germany for a change, visiting Bremen and Lübeck and then the Lüneberger Heide, moorland with heather and gorse and blueberries growing.

[Following completion of her thesis in 1936, Gabriele was required to take an oral defense examination. She had three examiners, each of whom awarded a grade, with the lowest grade given normally being awarded for the whole exam. Two of the examiners gave her the highest possible grade. The third asked her only one question: "What scientific evidence proves that the Jews are an inferior race?" She replied, "There is none, " and he promptly failed her. To fail the oral examination meant to be denied a degree. In this case, however, the normal procedure was set aside and she was awarded a degree with the lowest passing grade. Oral account.

On 18th April 1937, the distinguished mathematician Dr. Ludwig Bieberbach, Dean of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at Berlin University and also a committed Nazi and anti-Semite, was evidently reluctant to sign Gabriele's doctoral certificate (Promotionsurkunde), and took the time to write a letter denouncing her to the Gestapo. "I have heard rumors according to which something is not quite right about Miss Neuhäuser," he wrote, helpfully including her address. (Humboldt Archives). Gabriele may have been on her trip to Northern Germany at the time, and fortunately left Germany in June. She never knew of the existence of the letter, and very likely she never received her actual certificate either. It was sent to a lawyer in 1938.]

Prom.-Akt.

Lehrer Dr. L e i t m e y e r ,
h i e r .

Am 8. Mai 1936 hat sich bei meiner Fakultät die nicht mehr immatrikulierte Jüdin Gabriele Neuhäuser zum Doktorexamen gemeldet. Nach den bestehenden Bestimmungen musste ihre Meldung angenommen werden. Am 17. Juni 1936 bestand sie die mündliche Prüfung. Im unmittelbaren Anschluss druckte sie ihre Arbeit. Inzwischen waren mir Gerüchte zu Ohren gekommen, wonach mit Fräulein Neuhäuser irgend etwas nicht stimmen sollte. Ich habe daher bis heute den Vollzug der Promotion hinausgezögert. Ich wäre Ihnen dankbar, wenn Sie bei der Gestapo eine Erkundigung einziehen wollten, ob dort irgend welche Umstände bekannt sind, die den Vollzug der Promotion hindern.

Der Dekan
Bieberbach

Wohnhaft NW-87,
Solingerstrasse 9.

Bieberbach denunciation letter

At that time it was getting difficult for Jewish people to go to the more desirable places in the world. There were just too many refugees looking for somewhere to go. My younger cousins, Hilde and the Colman boys, had been sent to French secondary schools in 1933. Hilde went on to University, where she met and married a young Frenchman. The marriage didn't last long, but gave her French citizenship. The Kochmanns (Colman is how they Anglicized it), also matriculated, then the elder started work, while the younger one did a course of textile designing. They went on to the Argentine, but were advised that their

chances would be better in Australia, and with sponsorship by the Jewish community in Australia came to this country, first Ulli, then Gerald, and they managed to get their parents out too, just before the war. The U.S. was getting very hard to get into; they had a quota for different nationalities and that for Germany had been overfilled. My aunt Mummi Danziger and her family went there. They had quite a lot of money of course, but even so had a lot of trouble. In those days immigrants still had to stay in Ellis Island to be vetted, and they had a handicapped child. They employed a very good lawyer who gave a heart-rending description of the terrible fate that awaited them if they were turned back, and got them permission to immigrate.

Australia was even more difficult, and by 1937 about the only way to get permanent residency was to be sponsored by Australian relatives.

I had other problems too. When I was quite young, my parents, who could see that I wasn't going to be very good with money, (I could never manage my pocket money), and also were afraid of fortune hunters, had made a joint will saying that I was not to come into the complete control of the estate till I was twenty five, and in the meantime my financial affairs were to be managed by a solicitor appointed by the Government. Then, when my father tried to alter this after the Nazi take-over he couldn't, because my mother was dead and the will had been a joint one. The best he could manage was to be permitted to appoint an Aryan lawyer of his choice, which of course was much better than having the Government appointing a good Nazi.

However, this man, though well-meaning, shared with many of my relatives and friends the attitude that anti-Jewish ideas were not really serious, and he was not at all in favour of my giving up nearly all I owned and leaving the country. Also my grandmother then suffered from senile dementia and had reached the stage of having to go into a nursing home. Though my aunt had looked after her, my father had been financially responsible and I was told I would have to deposit a sum sufficient to secure my grandmother on the income thereof. This was only a problem because by then the Nazis had brought in a law making all Jews deposit in cash or negotiable shares a sum equal to one quarter of their total estate, as valued by the Nazis. My Grumach shares were valued at three times their face value, so I had to deposit all I had for this purpose alone, leaving nothing for a fund for my grandmother. As it happens she died just then after a fall, which was the best thing for her and certainly made things easier for me.

My father had had a fully paid life insurance in a Swiss Bank and the Nazi authorities told me I could keep half of this (M1500) if I brought the other half back into Germany. The Germans then were very short of foreign currency to buy essential war materials. Not long before the Germans had built an airship called *Hindenburg* and had to fill it with hydrogen, because they could not buy helium, and it promptly exploded on its maiden flight.

I could, of course, have gone to Switzerland pretending I was just going on holidays, identified myself, and got the whole amount, but I was both too cowardly and too law-abiding to do this. Also it meant I

could buy all my clothing and equipment in Germany. I was a bit sorry when I found that my normal German passport, still valid for five years or so, was taken off me and replaced with one stamped "Non-Aryan" and valid only for two years. This meant that at the end of two years I would have become what was then called Stateless, which made it much more difficult to get into any country. Also, as I only went to Australia with a permit to stay two years (to collect) I could not possibly bring out my furniture and other household goods, which I had to leave in storage and eventually lost for good. However, I did get out before the worst happened.

Gabriele Neuhäuser Scott



Gabriele Neuhäuser. 1937

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A Memoir



Gabriele Neuhäuser Scott

Gabriel Neuhäuser Scott was born in Berlin in 1911. Following research in Kemal Atatürk's Turkey, she was awarded a Ph.D. in Zoology, and left Nazi Germany in 1937. Arriving in Australia, she collected for museums, married, had two children, and lived twenty years in Mount Isa. There, she worked as hotel kitchen maid, library aide, and, eventually, regional librarian for northwest Queensland. Told without

sentimentality, her autobiography reflects her analytical mind and extraordinary recall.

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