

Biography of Henry Kempe: pediatrician, virologist, and pioneer in child abuse.

A Good Knight For Children: C. Henry Kempe's Quest to Protect the Abused Child

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Annie Kempe

CHAPTER 1: HEINZ

It was a humble but auspicious beginning.

On April 6, 1922, in the early spring following a bleak winter, Karl Heinz Kempe became Breslau's newest young citizen, the second surviving child, and a welcome blessing to his parents, Richard Kempe, a 34-year-old watchmaker, and his 30-year-old wife, Mary.

Although presently contained within the boundaries of modern Poland, Breslau was a German city before the Second World War, and German was the primary language spoken by its citizens. After the alterations in the European map following World War II, this area was renamed Wroclaw, Poland, a place much changed, scarcely recognizable to its former inhabitants. The citizens now spoke a different language and practiced new Polish customs. After a relentless series of bombings during the war, the city once known as Breslau had been battered, and few original German buildings were left standing or undamaged.

However, for most of Karl Heinz Kempe's childhood years, Breslau was a beautiful city, the third largest in Germany, with parks, museums, theaters, a train station, and a university. The old town square reminded some of the town squares or city center of Amsterdam. Breslau was located some two hundred miles from Berlin and was situated on the railway line, making it an important transportation hub. The city previously had been the capital of the Prussian province of Silesia, a rich agricultural valley. The river Oder, which bisected the city, produced fertile riparian farmlands on either side. Numerous bridges spanned the river, traversed daily by throngs of pedestrians, horse drawn carriages, and the occasional motorized vehicle. The often-crowded bridges provided a network of mobility and access to all parts of Breslau. Toward the center of town, the streets of commerce converged to form "The Ring," a large market square. Nearby, the local university, which faced the river, was housed in a large gothic building, once the site of a castle.

The older enclave of the city on the left bank featured a town hall surrounded by lovely walkways and, from the crest of a nearby hill, a view of the countryside. The newer section of Breslau included suburban homes, manicured streets, and attractive public squares. Today, in the city's center, several medieval buildings remain, including churches and historical monuments, and, most notably, a series of equestrian statues. In 1922, the year of Karl Heinz Kempe's birth, Breslau boasted a magnificent Jewish

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synagogue, considered one of the most impressive in Germany, second only to the synagogue in Berlin.

Karl Heinz Kempe (or “Heinz,” as he was called by the family) was born on Pesach (Passover), the Jewish holiday symbolizing the Jews’ exile from Egypt in ancient times, a flight from servitude under the ruling Pharaoh. In their hurry to leave, the Jews were unable to fully leaven their bread, and, for the next forty years had to subsist on thin, cracker-like “matzoh,” unleavened flat bread.

In the Kempe home, in observation of the centuries-old traditions surrounding the Passover meal, a piece of matzoh was hidden, later to become the object of a search, wherein the child who discovers the hidden matzoh is rewarded with a small prize. On that warm April day, Richard and Mary’s first and only child, 4-year-old Paula, remembers being told to put a piece of matzoh on the windowsill outside the home. Although she had been accustomed to searching for it herself on past Passovers, Paula complied, this time positioning the matzoh piece as instructed, wondering what would happen next. Over several hours, Paula would look outside periodically, checking to see if the matzoh was still resting on the sill.

She recalls with delight, “I was so surprised; as soon as the matzoh was gone, there was a baby!”

Heinz was born in the family home on that Passover evening. He was treasured for having survived childbirth, his mother Mary having previously suffered two sorrowful miscarriages. Highly valued as the first son born to these relieved young parents, Heinz was also considered by his family to be blessed because of the symbolism associated with the Jewish Passover holiday. Following Heinz’s birth, there was much celebration, as Mary and Richard hosted visitations by friends and family, with congratulations and toasts all around.

Baby Heinz was considered a “Gold Prinz” (a Golden Prince) by his parents, and over time was thus mildly resented by older sister Paula. Although she sometimes referred to him as “Gold Prinz” in a sarcastic tone, Heinz’s nickname amongst family members was “Heini.”

Encouraged by the success of Heinz’s birth, Mary risked another pregnancy and a daughter was born two years later. However, Mary’s chance to mother subsequent surviving children was not to be. When Heinz was only three, his one-year-old sister became ill with diphtheria and, after a rapidly progressive deterioration, died. The family was devastated, but their mourning was private and personal, with feelings left unresolved for the surviving siblings. Mary and Richard were grief stricken, but unable to

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share it with their two young children, who felt excluded from the whole tragedy; Paula and Heinz were never adequately assisted in coping with their own grief. Within the family, the lost baby was never discussed. It was as though their sister had never existed. To this day, Paula does not remember her baby sister's name.

The most remarkable change after the baby's death came in the way Richard and Mary doted on their two remaining children and created an insular, protective nuclear family. As a young child, Mary Kempe had lost her own mother to illness, and had been raised by her widower father, a solemn, rather stern parent. She was an only child and, lacking both a mother and siblings, had no models of defined family roles from which to prepare for her position as a wife and mother.

Eventually, Mary's father determined that she should marry Richard Kempe, and the marriage had been arranged without ever soliciting Mary's opinion. Arranged marriages were the norm in early twentieth century Germany. As a result, many married partners tolerated their various incompatibilities and were forced to adapt to one another. Mary and Richard were introduced, courted briefly, and married. As a young wife and mother, Mary Kempe was quiet and serious. She was meticulous and neat, though not quite compulsive. Although she was reserved, she was reliable, consistent, and determined to create a lovely home. She took pride in her cooking, kept a very tidy house, and was most comfortable as a homebody and a housewife.

During her early years as a mother, Mary was forced to deal with the personal tragedies of two miscarriages as well as the death of her third child. Predictably, these losses made her more attentive and concerned about Paula and Heinz. (During this era, many families lost children and babies to diseases we now take for granted and treat, cure, or prevent easily, such as whooping cough, diphtheria, and pneumonia.) Mary had become, not surprisingly, a "worrier," and was overly protective of her two remaining children. Medically fragile and often ill herself, her physical activities were limited, and over time she developed a personality molded by chronic pain.

Mary Kempe was affectionate and maternal, but like many parents of that period, she didn't tend to spend time playing with her children. Much of her day, in fact much of her life, was occupied with making meals from scratch and keeping their third floor apartment home pleasant and welcoming. It may seem contradictory, but despite her serious health problems, Mary had a good sense of humor and greatly enjoyed the antics of

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her children. In Heini's case, Mary delighted in his bright, curious nature, his love of being read to, his incessant joke telling, his propensity to lose his belongings, and his high energy level.

Richard Kempe was as unlike Mary as one could imagine. From a family of five siblings, Richard was of unusually short stature and rotund. He walked with a decided limp, the result of a leg length discrepancy caused by a scoliosis of his spine. A malformed foot and a resultant bone infection, or osteomyelitis, caused additional physical challenges. As a very young child, Richard had suffered a severe fall while ice-skating, and had never received the proper medical attention needed to assure a full recovery. Subsequently, his life-long limp became gradually more pronounced. As a result, as an adult he was never without his wooden cane, which was memorably discolored and smoothened over time by the pressure of his ever-strong grip.

Richard had a sweet smile, a jolly belly laugh, and a gentle, affectionate manner towards his children, his round mustachioed face ever animated and expressive, his emotions transparent and deeply felt. Despite his physical limitations, he had an unfettered "joie de vivre," an unrestrained enjoyment of life. To compensate for his small stature and his own view of his handicap (which he worried might keep him from being professionally successful), young Richard Kempe had developed a gregarious and assertive personality, and was determined to acquire marketable vocational skills. Due to his physical limitations, he would never be able to pursue a career that required great mobility; instead he chose to apprentice to become an expert watchmaker and repairman, following training in Switzerland at the Omega Corporation. Capitalizing on his friendly demeanor and natural salesmanship, upon his return to Breslau he gradually built up his own watch and clock repair business. Sympathetic to Richard's handicaps, but perhaps more because of his extroverted manner, people generally catered to him, and he in turn reciprocated with his charming jovial ways. With piercing bright eyes and a moustache that curled up at each end of his broad smile, he was animated, affectionate, and universally enamored of women.

At 4:30 each morning, Richard would awaken, walk in the predawn darkness to his place of business, and work diligently until midday in his small shop. Feeling vindicated after accomplishing so much work in the early morning hours, he would then meet friends at the local café and, for the remainder of the afternoon, talk with acquaintances, read the newspaper, and "kibitz," ever establishing the business and social connections he valued so highly. At times he'd return to work late in the afternoon, his exuberant

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persona and humorous nature filling his small shop with local friends and the banter of the café “regulars,” drawn along to his tiny workplace. Although his physique was visibly awkward and deformed, his personality was so outgoing, humorous, and friendly that he had many friends. He was reputed to be “a real ladies’ man,” flirting shamelessly with his female customers. Despite his handicaps, he played the violin reasonably well, and through his own musicianship encouraged in his young children an appreciation of music.

Richard Kempe’s marriage to Mary, an arranged union rather than a romantic one, was generally stable, but, as in some life-long relationships, there were occasional loud arguments. The more timid Mary had little chance of winning these disputes, considering Richard’s verbal prowess, his more dominant personality, and his chauvinistic conviction about being in the right.

When compared to Richard, in whose shadow she often found herself, Mary was shy and private. She physically resembled actress Hermione Gingold (perhaps best known for her portrayal of Madame Alvarez in the film “Gigi”), with wavy brown hair and soft eyes, though Mary was more fragile in her demeanor than the look-alike movie star. By contrast, Richard was domineering, demonstrative, vocal, and impulsive, often independently making rash decisions. On a whim, he once committed to purchasing a new apartment within the city limits of Breslau on the same day he first saw it, without even consulting his wife, Mary.

Now, many years later, Paula remembers her mother’s shocked expression on that day when Richard arrived home after work saying, “Let’s pack; we are moving right away.” The surprised family began boxing possessions immediately and, on this occasion, Mary didn’t hesitate to let Richard know what she thought of his actions. His passive-aggressive response was simply to shrug, so that, presumably, Mary would understand the conversation was in his opinion concluded.

The couple’s arguments were often heated verbal exchanges which, in the family’s confined apartment, made things very uncomfortable for their two young children, who had no recourse but to listen. While she was rarely successful in convincing Richard of her viewpoint, once riled, Mary could be very vocal and long-winded in expressing herself. For Paula and Heinz, there was only the familiar discomfort of witnessing such arguments, and a desire to remove themselves from the scene. Richard and Mary’s patterned behaviors, a husband’s bossiness waged against a wife’s nagging, made Heinz want to somehow escape, a recurring feeling which remained

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with him throughout later life whenever he was confronted by verbal conflict. During his parents' argumentative times, Heinz found solace by immersing himself in reading alone behind a closed door with the radio volume turned up, blaring his beloved classical music.

Heinz could never shake the memory of a particular incident wherein his father threw and broke some porcelain plates during such a marital argument. Richard's outburst represented an action designed to strike at the core of Mary's security, an attack on her primary role as a homemaker. Despite Richard's subsequent profuse apologies and his purchase of an upgraded set of dishes for his wife to compensate her, young Heinz would retain this unsettling image, branded into the mind of an impressionable young boy.

"When they fought, it seemed like I could never get far enough away," Heinz would say.

Of course, there were happy family times as well. On weekends, Richard would take young Heinz to their favorite local café, where Heinz would drink hot chocolate and read comics while his father sipped coffee and perused the newspaper. While they were away, Mary and Paula would make homemade noodles and cook a large midday dinner. Although Paula was the elder of the two children, societal and cultural norms dictated that Heinz would be given more early freedoms, with the expectation that, as the son, he was preparing to head a family of his own eventually.

For their special weekly repast, Mary would buy live fish, usually carp. To keep the fish fresh until she was ready to cook them, she allowed them to swim around in a makeshift pond in the bathtub. Paula, whose dark hair and eyes resembled her brother's, often teased Heinz about being a picky eater; he would reply that watching carp swim in one's bathtub just prior to being cooked for Sunday supper would make anyone queasy. He always had a hard time eating those fish only hours afterward, explaining years later, "I had bonded with those fish by then, played with them, even named each one."

Much of family life in those days was occupied with chores. There was no refrigeration; the iceman delivered ice for the small icebox, the women hand-washed, then ironed, every piece of clothing and linen. Their noodles and breads were always homemade. Of the time not devoted to food preparation, much of the remainder was spent in housework.

In the Kempe household, there was a real love and appreciation for classical music, especially opera. On Saturday afternoons, Heinz would be found at the local opera theater, as the tickets were easily affordable.

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Occasionally on Sunday afternoons, the family would attend concerts in the local park at the band shell. Those outings were among Heinz's favorites, as musicians performed, undeterred by the noise of playing children and barking dogs. "Once I sat there in the rain," Heinz recalled, "mesmerized by the brass band playing, the music so unlike the weather and the mood."

As a young boy, Heinz tried to learn to play the violin. Although he practiced for several years, he had no natural ability or special talent for playing music. Nevertheless, he retained throughout his life a deep appreciation for listening to music. When young, he would accompany his sister Paula by singing or playing violin while she played piano, providing the family's evening entertainment. Richard would often cry unabashedly while listening to a beautiful passage played by his children.

As he grew into a tall slender schoolboy, the friendly face of Heinz Kempe was highlighted by his large brown inquisitive eyes. Although quiet in his mannerisms, Heinz was striking in his appearance. He was intense, constantly asking questions and always on the move. As his family would say, "he always had one foot out the door."

One of Heinz's favorite pastimes was playing soccer, although he was never a very athletic or even healthy child. Nevertheless, he loved being outdoors, whether on the sporting fields, on the nearby beaches, or in the countryside. Having only one or two toys, Heinz's entertainment was found in imaginative play, team sports, and informal games. Whenever possible, he and his friends would play outside, where he felt a sense of release from the small confines of the family's apartment.

At the age of five, Heinz developed a tuberculous pleurisy for which he was hospitalized for several months. Prior to the advent of antibiotics, children in the 1920's either managed to fight off such diseases on their own, or, nearly as often, succumbed to them. The whole family worried that he might not survive this serious illness, and they took turns holding a vigil at his hospital bed daily. Once released from his extended hospital stay, Heinz gradually recovered at home over the next year, but thereafter had decreased endurance, fatigued easily, and was never as athletic again. As a result of his prolonged illness, he couldn't attend school until he was six years old, which delayed his socializing with other children and may have contributed to his early timidity around classmates.

During his long convalescence, Heinz enjoyed being read to by his father, and therein began a lifelong sense of solace found whenever he immersed himself in his books, typically enjoyed with classical music playing in the background. As a child, his favorite story was "Uncle

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Hahnemann,” a clever and funny tale about a man who couldn’t hear well, misunderstood what was said, and had to have everything repeated. Heinz laughed each time it was read, and begged “again, again” the moment his father finished the story. The two also played card games for many hours together, a shared time that Heinz treasured.

Although Heinz was obviously very bright and intelligent, Paula describes him as having been a generally mediocre student. He had a tendency to be distracted and to rebel against working up to his capacity at school, as noted in his old report cards showing average grades. He seemed to question the relevance of studying, and was a little cynical about the need for some subjects. He didn’t care very much about school in general, and considered it boring and unimportant.

“He was a very shy young man,” reports Paula of the school-aged Heinz. “And if you don’t progress normally through the developmental stages of childhood,” she adds, “you don’t easily catch up later.”

Considering his lackluster early school performance and lack of motivation, it is surprising to contrast his academic roots with his future adult life as a newly determined, hard-working, and thoughtful person. Paula reflects about Heinz when he was young and, according to her, a bit lazy, saying, “It’s surprising to see what he accomplished in his lifetime. Who would’ve expected so much from an average student? It just goes to show that you can never tell how children will turn out.”

Young Heinz loved flying kites, and played happily outside for hours on end. Despite his illness and incomplete recovery, he took pride in learning to cook over a fire while camping, participated in the local scouting troop, and was notorious in his family for losing so many caps during his outdoor adventures. Scouting continued to occupy much of his free time during his early teen years.

The Kempe children’s favorite holidays included traveling to the seaside at Kolberg, where they would play in the sand, or to farms in the countryside to visit extended family. But despite the occasional respite of enjoyable interludes, the family’s existence was generally melancholy.

“We didn’t really have a happy childhood,” recalls Paula, “because we weren’t in good health.” Alluding to the family’s Jewish heritage, she adds, “It was so hard politically to feel frequent (societal) rejection as a child. Later on, we couldn’t date because, by the time we were old enough, conditions didn’t exist for us to do so.”

Religion played a limited role in Heinz Kempe’s early life, but the related political and social implications of being Jewish in Breslau in the

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1930's forced the Jewish community into a frighteningly isolated, yet unified group. The Kempe family practiced reformed Judaism, but rarely went to Temple. Religious ceremonies and holidays were observed with extended family, and Friday night Shabbat dinners were generally held at Heinz's paternal grandparents' home where the Sabbath ritual was strictly observed.

Although Mary had no relatives in or near Breslau, Richard's large family lived nearby, and extended family gatherings were frequent and lively. Heinz and Paula would often spend Friday nights at their grandparents' house and sometimes accompany them to synagogue the next morning. Their grandmother, the family matriarch, was very religious, but did not impose her more devout beliefs and practices on Richard and Mary's family; instead, she led by example as a very pious and observant Jew. Heinz adored his wise and serious grandfather, and would follow him around, whether spending time with him walking on city streets, or simply observing him in his study.

Young Heinz and Paula always had the feeling that there was never quite enough food to go around, that they were always hungry. The children once snuck away outdoors after attending High Holy Days services at the Temple, and broke their religious fast by wolfing down food they had taken from home; they simply couldn't tolerate the hunger pangs any longer. "We felt very guilty, but we couldn't help it," Paula remembered.

Although Paula describes their early childhood as uneventful, with only occasional unpleasant incidents, she does recall going to their German Lyceum (the equivalent of a U.S. high school) one morning to be met by two guards who told her, "You can't attend here anymore. You are no longer registered at this school." She was incredulous that she and her brother wouldn't be allowed to attend their old school, and felt shocked by the finality of it. Paula, Heinz, and the rest of the Jewish children of Breslau would subsequently be educated in their own segregated schools.

At the age of thirteen, an important milestone for Jewish boys, Heinz became a Bar Mitzvah at the synagogue. The ceremony was followed by a small family dinner at a local restaurant. It was a time of celebration and excitement for the future, despite Adolf Hitler's growing and powerful influence and the evermore overtly anti-Semitic trends. (In that same year, 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were passed, stating that Jews were not allowed to marry gentiles in Germany; unfathomably, the law further stated that Jews were not German citizens.)

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The restaurant celebration following the Bar Mitzvah signified the Kempe family's momentary respite from the country's advancing political turmoil, and the family's resulting change from the simple but comfortable lifestyle that they had once known to one of fiscal prudence and worries. The family was quickly experiencing a loss of financial security as a result of the economic effects of anti-Semitism. But, at least for that one day, all worries were forgotten, and there was feasting, revelry, singing, and the camaraderie of good friends and family.

Heinz was a little cynical about gifts presented to young men on the occasion of a Bar Mitzvah, and, in particular, about the number of fountain pens a boy might receive. He joked that any fellow might easily make a mistake; instead of reciting, "Today I am a man," one might become confused and instead say, "Today I am a fountain pen."

In addition to the requisite fountain pen, one of the most desirable gifts for a local Bar Mitzvah boy at that time was a bicycle, a symbol of mobility and increased independence. Heinz was elated to receive such a bicycle as a gift on his special day. With no other way to protect his coveted new "wheels," he was, however, forced to carry the bicycle up and down the three flights of stairs to and from the family's small apartment. Heinz was thrilled with the somewhat used "new" bicycle that he simply loved riding, a gift he treasured as a valuable and coveted means of transportation. Suddenly, more places became accessible to him, and on his bicycle he explored Breslau and its environs. His many excursions provided freedom from the limitations of the apartment and the boundaries of their isolated Jewish neighborhood. He enjoyed sightseeing, but perhaps more so appreciated the ability to move about without restrictions.

Apart from the celebration of his Bar Mitzvah and his special gift, Heinz began to take his responsibilities as a young Jewish man very seriously, especially the concept of "Mitzvot." In addition to being a commandment, "Mitzvot" to Heinz meant acts of human kindness, giving back to one's community, helping others in a show of good deeds. As a result of his Bar Mitzvah and early life experiences, he committed himself to following that commandment, even though he was never enamored with the formal trappings and ceremonies of organized religions.

Even before Heinz's Bar Mitzvah, the Kempe family and others of Jewish faith had encountered forced segregation of schools and of associated extra-curricular activities. No longer were interfaith sports teams or recreation centers permitted. While it meant forfeiting old childhood mates, inter-religious friendships were now being discouraged among

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children and youth. It remains a sad commentary that the children never did understand the need to give up old friends because of their different religious affiliations. The non-Jewish friends of the Kempe children had stopped interacting with them, their parents afraid or unwilling to allow association with Jewish children and to risk possible reprisals.

During the 1930's, the political climate became even more dangerous and openly negative toward the Jews. For many years, the Jews of Germany had been aware of the religious prejudice directed towards them. German citizens, and the Nazi party in particular, blamed Jews for spiraling inflation. As Hitler was rising to power as Chancellor, he equated the Jews with the Bolsheviks. The Nazi party spread the propaganda of fear and hatred of Jews and Communists, and government-sanctioned anti-Semitic practices were promoted. Boycotts of Jewish businesses were supported, even encouraged, which directly affected Richard's watch-making business. Like their Jewish countrymen, the Kempe family's senses of political, social, financial, and religious security were universally and concurrently threatened. On one occasion, Heinz walked by his father's store and discovered large lettered graffiti painted on the windows displaying one word, "Jude" (Jew). The single word was widely understood and extremely powerful; the additional words, "don't shop here," were missing but wholly unnecessary.

While local Jewish businesses were targeted for boycotts, and as the additional threats of deportations to camps or ghettos increased, many Jewish families fled, either together as a family unit or, more commonly, as individual emigrants. Adults might escape to whatever countries would accept them. Many of Breslau's Jewish children, as well as others throughout Germany, were later transported out of the country to England by the "Kindertransport" (the Children's Train). The Kindertransport was sponsored by British Quaker groups, determined to save as many children as possible by relocating them until after the war was over. Some children were placed in British orphanages or homes, some sent to other European countries.

Richard Kempe became very concerned when Adolf Hitler came to power. As early as 1933, Richard wanted desperately to leave Germany to relocate his family until the political climate changed for the better. But Mary was very naive, believing that their family was somehow protected; after all, she argued, they were "good German citizens," patriotic and nationalistic. In fact, she felt some sense of righteous indignation that anyone would assume they could be in danger of any kind. She was afraid

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of leaving her homeland, and hoped the frightening rumors were inaccurate and overly exaggerated. She tended not to be very analytical, and her focus was more familial than political, hence her misguided response. Many German Jews, as well as most of their non-Jewish fellow citizens, could not yet foresee the possibility of such coming horrors as the ghettos and concentration camps.

The extended Kempe family became even more upset, however, when Heinz's matriarchal grandmother suffered a heart attack on January 30, 1933, the very day that Adolf Hitler assumed the office of Chancellor of Germany. The word of Hitler's gradual ascension had already resulted in a newly increased anxiety among the Kempe family members. But when told the news that Hitler had gained ultimate power in Germany, Heinz's grandmother became especially agitated, saying, "This is the end of us." As she had always held a position of authority and respect amongst her extended family members, her prediction held more sway and power.

Later that same day, she was found dead in her favorite napping chair.

"It was a beautiful death," remembers Paula in an ironic and melancholy tone, "and she didn't suffer long." However, the event was very traumatic, even ominous, for their extended family as it signaled an end to their large gatherings, an end to the family group as they had known it. Simultaneously, beyond the demise of their beloved matriarch, there remained religious and political forebodings, as evidenced by Richard Kempe's and his brothers' gradual loss of most of their business. Even once loyal customers had become reluctant to support them.

In later years, the timing of Heinz's grandmother's death was deemed by some family members to be a metaphor for the family's larger losses, not merely fateful coincidence. After all, they had subsequently lost properties, livelihoods, and the lives of several family members. The juxtaposition of the grandmother's death with the ascension to power of Adolf Hitler remained a powerful symbol of loss and suffering for years to come, and, for some family members, to this very day.

In 1934, Heinz, aged twelve, and Paula, aged sixteen, were required to register as Jews at the police station in Breslau. The children were given identification cards to represent their status and to be carried at all times. Richard became ever more desperate to find a way to get his family out of Germany, and began networking with friends and old business associates to plan his family's escape, with the eventual plan of reuniting at home or elsewhere after the war.

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Heinz gradually developed an awareness of the political prejudice and wholesale rejection of Jews, but as a youthful idealist was perplexed in his attempts to comprehend how so many fellow citizens could hate him without ever knowing him personally. Realizing that he was part of a minority that was despised and deemed inferior, he found refuge in reading modern literature and philosophy, developing his significant academic intellect, and, eventually, perhaps contributing to disproving the beliefs of many of his non-Jewish contemporaries.

As did many young people in Breslau at that time, Heinz fancied himself an intellectual, often meeting with other youth to discuss philosophy, politics, and avant-garde literature. In the tradition of German culture of the time, Heinz and his friends learned the classics from the Greek and Roman philosophers to Goethe and Shakespeare. They prided themselves on being well read, introspective, and very "modern." Like those of the artist protagonists of one of his favorite operas, "La Boheme," the cafe-based discussions of Heinz and his friends were animated, lively, a form of entertainment in and of themselves. Attendance at opera performances, concerts, and films whenever possible enhanced their collective self-image as cultured and knowledgeable young adults. Among this group of friends, Heinz became especially close with Richard Glass. Several years older than the youthful Kempe, Richard and Heinz would engage in stimulating conversations about the history and culture of their hometown of Breslau. (Years later, Heinz Kempe would be drawn to live once again near this close friend, as he made arrangements to move to Los Angeles shortly after his emigration to the United States.)

Unfortunately, although one could escape temporarily in abstract intellectual discussions, the fearsome reality surrounding German Jews was ever present, gradually more evident, and predictably more dangerous. Young Heinz, at five-feet nine-inches tall, weighing only a hundred and twenty pounds, demonstrated youthful bravado. He wasn't really scared of the Nazi threat, nor was he fully aware of the dangers surrounding him. He would say that he felt at that time like "David against Goliath; the Nazis were wrong, so therefore, like David, we would triumph, as did anyone in a righteous position." Innocently, Heinz initially believed that these differences were simply philosophical, and that the Nazis' own beliefs and theories were rooted in ignorance.

One acquaintance who influenced Heinz's intellectual growth was Dr. Erich Landsberger, a family friend and physician. He would host discussions in his home, with topics ranging from great books and

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philosophies to culture and music. Otto Weddigen, a cultured physician fifteen years Heinz's elder, was another participant in the intellectual group of friends who met frequently at Dr. Landsberger's home. Otto would gradually make a deep impression on young Heinz. An outspoken individual, Otto always thought independently and acted with disregard for conventions. He was very well read, especially admired Greek culture, and loved to participate in the group's discussions. He was not Jewish, but would eventually marry a young Jewish woman simply to keep her safe from the Nazis; it was a marriage of friendly protection, not one of love. Within three years of their wedding, Otto was finally able to help her to leave Germany, thus likely saving her life.

When Otto himself was ordered to report for military service in the German army, he "accidentally" broke his arm to escape serving Hitler. He was not a coward in Heinz's eyes, but rather a man of conviction whose life could have been made easier had he cooperated with societal dictates. Otto's choice not to serve in the army was an unpopular decision in his own family, a family that already boasted a fallen war hero; Otto's own brother had lost his life years earlier while demonstrating valor on a U-Boat during World War I. Without his family's support, Otto would later work for the Allied Forces in refugee camps after the war, using his skills as a physician to treat the victims of the Nazis. Throughout his life, Otto refused to be concerned about earning money; instead he supported only causes in which he believed, and never Hitler's regime.

As anti-Semitic tensions continued to mount in their hometown of Breslau, the Kempe family's finances had been almost completely depleted. Sadly, the first valuable item to be sold was the family piano, a tangible symbol of shared family time, of togetherness now increasingly threatened. As Mary finally developed an awareness of the need for their family to leave Germany, at least temporarily, the Kempe family talked around the kitchen table, trying to decide where and when they should all depart. It was a very difficult time for such a close and interdependent family. Knowing that several young men from Paula's Youth Group had already been arrested and imprisoned by the Nazis, her parents determined that she should leave Breslau as soon as possible.

Therefore, after a few months of attending a technical school, training in "domestic sciences," Paula was prepared to work in a field desirable for exportation from Germany. "Eventually, one no longer thought about enjoying life, one thought about survival. How do I get out of this? That was on everyone's mind," Paula remembers.

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After spending 1937 in Essen, Germany, as a domestic servant to a wealthy family, Paula was eventually sponsored by an English family who were willing to hire her. She thus relocated to Birmingham, England, where she would be employed as a "domestic." Paula was very sad to leave her family behind, apprehensive about when they'd next meet, and most certainly fearful about moving to a foreign country without any connections. She would leave a home where she had been overly protected for a new situation with many unknowns.

Determined to adapt to her new setting and with only six words of English in her vocabulary initially, she read the newspaper daily and taught herself to read and write English as she learned to speak it. Throughout the hard labor of maintaining her host family's home to their satisfaction, Paula was reminded repeatedly through the family's comments and innuendos to be grateful for her redemption. Although thankful on the level of survival instinct, she never fully recovered from the resentment of being forced into servitude or of leaving a generally comfortable life in her own country for a foreign domicile which overnight made her a servant, an alien regarded with suspicion by local townspeople.

Like Heinz, Paula couldn't comprehend, indeed was incredulous about the Nazis' (and their fellow countrymen's) wholesale denigration and subjugation of the Jews of Germany. But now, in her new position in northern England, Paula Kempe was required to report daily to the local police station, to present her identification papers, and to "check in." Feeling like a criminal on parole, she carried a book that charted her location; inside was written the statement, "Refugee from Nazi Oppression." Even sending a letter to her parents cost several shillings, a third of her weekly salary, so it was a rare and special treat to send or receive mail, now her only remaining connection to her own family.

Once Richard and Mary were forced to sell their Breslau business and apartment at a price far below market value, they realized that it was finally time to leave their homeland while they still were able. The couple could no longer afford, either financially or politically, to indulge Mary's naïve optimism about the basic goodness of their German compatriots. The escalating political environment of encouragement of boycotts and violence against Jews was now even more pronounced and difficult to ignore. Richard was verbally harassed and threatened constantly on the streets, while Mary had become a virtual shut-in, rarely leaving their apartment. Within a short period, all of Richard's four brothers were interned in camps. He subsequently learned that none of them survived the Holocaust; all had

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been gassed. Richard would live with “survivor’s guilt,” from which there would be no reprieve, for the rest of his life.

During those unsettled times, Richard Kempe was detained once again on the street by Nazi officers, forced to show his identification card, and taken in to headquarters where he was interrogated. He was not sent to a concentration camp, however, because he was able to contact one of the family’s Gentile friends, a loyal customer of Richard’s who interceded on his behalf, assuring his release. Reflecting on the incident years later, Richard suspected that the Nazis who had questioned him didn’t really want to transport him to a camp; a man with a physical handicap was likely unable to provide useful labor, and therefore generally represented only a nuisance to those staffing the camps. Similarly, in the early days of Hitler’s programs, the Schutzstaffel (or “SS”) policy allowed for some disabled people to leave the country. (By contrast, the infirm or disabled were among the first to be executed in Germany when the “Final Solution” of mass genocide was later implemented.) One issue complicating Richard and Mary’s departure was that those who were physically challenged weren’t deemed beneficial to other countries either, and were therefore considered undesirable as immigrants. The handicapped were generally viewed as presenting a potential economic drain on any country.

It was very difficult at that time for any Jew to leave Germany. From a bureaucratic perspective, Jews were required to provide written proof of out-of-country sponsorship and to procure documentation permitting emigration. All documents related to Jewish departures were dated with a predetermined and limited period of validity, after which they expired, resulting in a lengthy process which one had to begin all over again. Although it was heart wrenching for families to be parted, to be sent separately to often unfamiliar places and, for a time, to be out of contact with one another, the bureaucratic requirements often left little choice. “In those days it was rare for families to get out of Germany intact; most of the ones we knew had to separate and hopefully regroup later,” Paula recalls.

With sponsorship from friends newly based in Bolivia, Richard and Mary hastily left for France in early 1938, and later for Bolivia, where they resided, first in La Paz, and subsequently in Cochabamba, for eight years. Leaving their extended family in Breslau and in the surrounding countryside had made their decision to depart much more difficult. Heinz’s aunt, Anna Mendel, had a handicapped child who was not permitted to leave Germany, so Anna remained with her daughter. Eventually, they would both be arrested and gassed in a concentration camp.

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Prior to their departure from Germany, Richard and Mary had quickly sold everything for very little income. Richard had also been forced to part with his watch-making tools, as he was allowed only minimal luggage. However, during their long overseas voyage, Richard scrounged to find junk metal from which he fashioned and hand crafted his own new tools, hopeful that he would later be able to resume his watch repair trade. Through all of their personal sorrows, Richard was determined to succeed and thrive, regardless of the odds.

Once he and Mary were settled in a small rental house in Bolivia, Richard wandered the streets daily, gradually ascertaining which jewelers had good reputations and consistent customers. After locating the ideal store, and having no Spanish language ability with which to communicate his watch-making and repair skills to the owners, he simply set up a work bench and small table just outside their store each morning and began repairing watches at a nominal charge. Ever the opportunist, he gradually established a small but loyal clientele and the shop owner soon realized that Richard was indeed intercepting business. In accordance with Richard's plan, the jeweler soon invited him into the shop and offered him a job with decent pay. He and Mary were therefore able to live quite comfortably during their eight years in Bolivia.

Remarkably, young Heinz, at fifteen years of age, was successful in persuading his parents that he should be allowed to remain in Germany when they themselves fled. Richard and Mary seemed to have a trusting sense of confidence in their optimistic plan that assured their son would soon be in Israel working with his Jewish Youth Group. Young Heinz was entrenched in this group of friends, and had been preparing to join their upcoming extended trip to Israel, uncertain of ever returning to Germany. Heinz was oblivious to his own impending health problems, and perhaps also to the other real dangers surrounding him.

"We lived from day to day," Paula remembers, "never mind from month to month, and we didn't know what was coming. It was a good thing, looking back, that we didn't know."

After finally appeasing his parents, Heinz was allowed to remain behind as the rest of his family departed their hometown for the last time. Heinz happily anticipated traveling to Israel on the trip that had been planned and promised to the youth group for several years, a trip that presented a chance for many Jewish youth to leave Germany, perhaps permanently, for a sympathetic country. While he prepared to leave with his youth group, Heinz stayed in Breslau with family friend Dr. Landsberger.

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In order to make the journey, the boys were required to remain for a period of time in the limbo of an “adjustment camp.” While there, the boys were expected to pass a strenuous series of thorough physical examinations. At the camp, the children were also questioned extensively and evaluated to assess whether or not they had the emotional stability to handle the trip and contribute to their new country. Palestine wasn’t an easy place to live at that time; even youth were expected to perform hard labor, and the living conditions were uncomfortable. The country of Israel was not yet an independent state in the pre-World War II era, and therefore sought only those youth who could endure demanding physical work, and who could readily adapt emotionally. The members of the youth group were expected to demonstrate maturity well beyond their years, and to adjust to adult-like independence in this strange setting, far removed from their families.

The aforementioned criteria had to be met for each boy to leave Germany. During the protracted evaluations, the group of friends tolerated the tests with humor and the optimism of youth, talking animatedly about their adventure to come.

But for Heinz, it was not to be.

Head down, listening quietly to the physician who told him the unexpected news, Heinz was shocked to learn that, according to his X-ray results, he had a tuberculosis-like spot on his lung, and would therefore be unable to accompany his troop. At the time, it was assumed that this previously undiagnosed lung damage might have resulted from his prolonged childhood illness.

Heinz was devastated by the loss of this long-anticipated trip with his friends, and became very depressed for months afterwards. As a young person, he was further very concerned, overwhelmed and worried, not only about the test results, but also about his overall health and his ability to take part in the activities of his peers. His anguish perhaps distracted him momentarily from the growing political threat to his own well-being.

This life-altering event seemed to change Heinz Kempe’s personality. Following his early childhood illness, he had gradually regained some of his health, endurance, and strength through camping and youth group activities. Now, responding to the physician’s recommendation to “take it easy,” he was newly reticent to participate in sports and physical games. As a result, Heinz became even more introspective and serious, more of an observer, less of a player. Although still young, he had learned about the fragility of health and, with an impending personal encounter with the Nazis, he would soon be forced to acknowledge his own mortality.

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With the option to relocate to Israel no longer available, it was time for Heinz to find another way out of Germany. Residing once again with his friend, and the host of the intellectual group meetings, Dr. Landsberger, together they began to make enquiries about Heinz's emigration alternatives. Dr. Landsberger was a quiet, well-educated man who acted as a father figure for Heinz and offered him a sense of security, however temporary. One morning, as the two walked down a street in Breslau, they were confronted and detained by Nazi soldiers, who demanded that they produce their identification papers. After relinquishing his papers, the professor was immediately arrested, then led away by the soldiers.

When the soldiers checked Heinz's papers, they realized that he was not yet sixteen years of age, and told him, "You are still too young; we'll see you again in a few months." (At that time, sixteen-year-olds were considered by the Nazis to be adults, and that was the minimum age of eligibility for imprisonment. Eventually, Jewish children of all ages were summarily included in the "round-ups.") Years later, Heinz would consider the irony of how the Nazis' rigid and compulsive adherence to such rules had actually saved his life on that occasion.

Heinz wasn't able to talk with Dr. Landsberger even for a moment, as the whole process was brief and their parting abrupt. They sent one another a silent message, locking glances for a few seconds; then Heinz watched as his guardian was led away. After being frozen in place for seemingly an eternity, Heinz walked off slowly, later seeking out friends with whom he could spend the night.

The incident devastated Heinz, and made a lasting impression on him. He immediately became acutely aware of the dangers and the reality of his "near miss."

Heinz learned long after that terrifying event that Dr. Landsberger had been interrogated and killed within five days of his arrest. Heinz would never see his beloved guardian again.

Adrift without adult support and feeling very isolated, Heinz made his way to a local orphanage, where he would reside for several months. Below is a copy of a letter written during the fall of 1938 on behalf of Heinz by his father, presumably sent from Bolivia. The letter attests to young Heinz's anticipated future plans, and appeals for an official approval for the boy to leave Germany:

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Breslau den 1, Oktober 1938

*An das Amerikanische Generalkonsulat zu Berlin,
Dem Amerikanischem Generalkonsulat zu Berlin, bescheinige ich, dass ich
als gesetzlicher Vertreter meines Sohnes Karl-Heinz Kempe geb. Am 6. April
1922 zu Breslau hierdurch die Genehmigung erteile die Alexander Hamilton
High School zu Los Angeles als Student zu besuchen und den Antrag auf
Erteilung des Non-Quota-Immigration-Visums zu stellen.*

Richard Kempe

Breslau, October 1, 1938

*To the American Consulate General in Berlin,
I herewith certify to the American Consulate General in Berlin that I, as the
legal guardian of my son Karl-Heinz Kempe, born April 6, 1922 in Breslau,
give him permission to go as student to the Alexander Hamilton High School
in Los Angeles and therefore to apply for the Non Quota Immigration Visa.*

Richard Kempe

Similarly, Mr. Joseph Bonaparte would be enlisted to write from the United States during the fall of 1938, again with hopes of confirming a plan that would meet with the approval of the German authorities:

Berlin, Germany

October 12, 1938

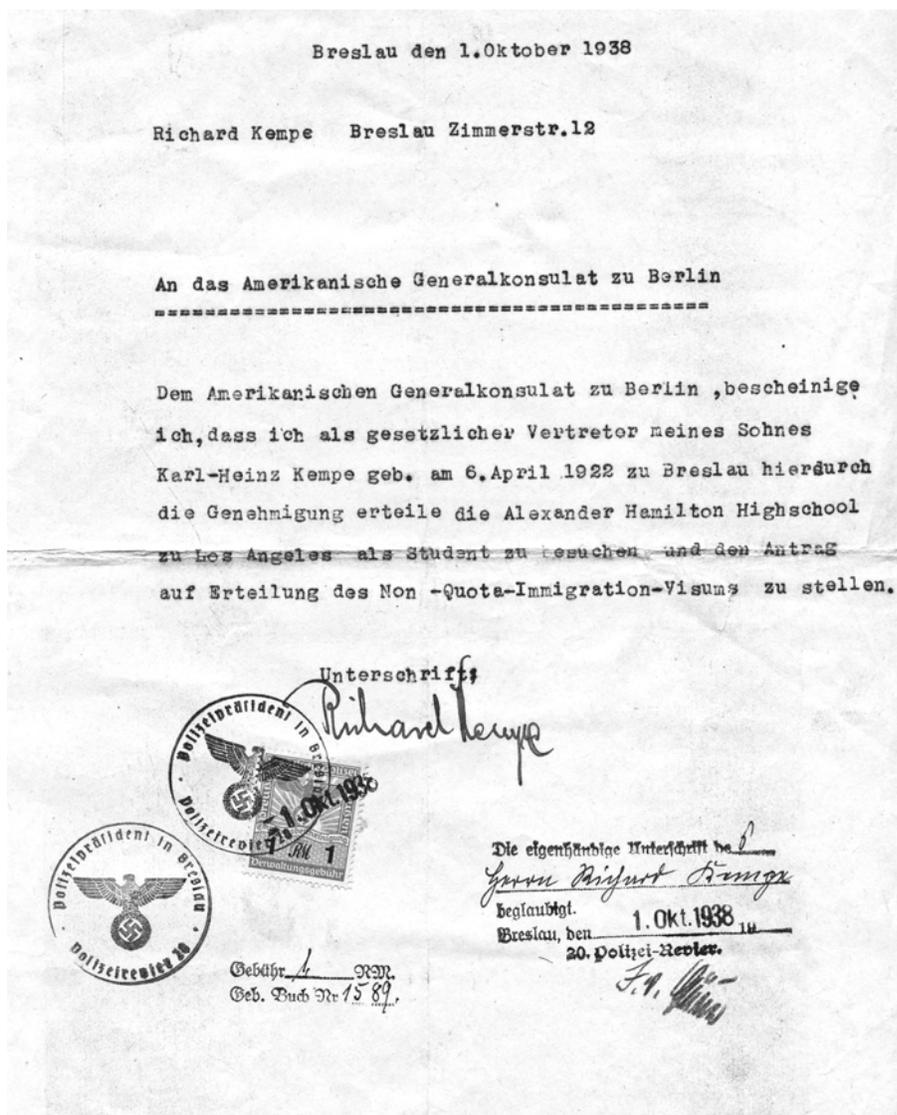
Letter to the American Consulate General

Dear Sirs,

*This is to certify that the Los Angeles Coordinating Committee for Aid to
Refugees will provide maintenance and support for Heinz Kempe during the
time that he is a student in the United States.*

Respectfully yours, Joseph Bonaparte

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Richard Kempe's letter requesting permission for Heinz to leave Germany

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Richard and Mary Kempe

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Despite these attestations, Heinz remained within the walls of the orphanage. While he resided there, Nazi storm troopers invaded Jewish neighborhoods throughout Germany during a single widespread pogrom, destroying a thousand Jewish synagogues, torching many homes and businesses, and killing eight hundred Jewish citizens. This unprecedented event, which occurred on November 9-10 of 1938, became known as "Kristallnacht," or "The Night of Broken Glass."

Heinz was cared for at the orphanage until a female employee contacted a group of Quakers in England who were known to be helping children relocate to orphanages and homes in that country. She made a plea on Heinz's behalf and, on December 29, 1938, at the age of sixteen years and eight months, Heinz was sponsored to go to England on the "Children's Train" or "Kindertransport." Heinz reflected about the exciting plans to which he had once looked forward, and about the new unknowns that now awaited him. The Kindertransport train traversed Belgium and Holland, and Heinz finally ferried by boat across the Channel to England, eventually arriving at a temporary camp on England's south coast. Some of the camp's children were later dispersed to private homes; in Heinz's case, he was sent to a group home in a suburb of Oxford. Once settled, he attended the local school, where he began learning to speak and write English.

Soon after landing in England, Heinz wrote a letter to Mr. Isidor Fox, a Boston-based American lawyer and a relative of his mother's, asking for support for him to journey to the United States. Remarkably, Mr. Fox generously agreed to loan Heinz the funds and to sponsor his travel to the United States. Granted a certificate of registration as a refugee on February 25, 1939, a mere two months since his arrival in England, Karl Heinz Kempe was now eligible to leave for the United States. Finally, arrangements were made for him to depart, and he booked ocean passage in late April. As he was packing his few belongings for the journey, Heinz suddenly realized that his seventeenth birthday had passed without his notice, and without any fanfare. It undoubtedly served as a sad reminder of his now splintered family and loss of youth.

Departing on April 28, 1939 from Southampton, England aboard the USS President Harding, Heinz stared out across the ocean from the deck and wondered about his future. He was lonely, felt apprehensive about the new country to which he was traveling, and longed to simply enjoy being young again. Despite his concerns about what life would be like in the United States, Heinz eagerly anticipated being free to study and work, awaiting the day when, hopefully, he would finally reunite with his family.

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Upon arriving at Ellis Island in New York City, United States of America, on May 6th, following eight days of turbulent sea travel across the Atlantic Ocean, Karl Heinz Kempe stood for a moment on the shore, gathered his thoughts, and mustered his confidence. He boarded a train to the Boston home of Isidor Fox for a brief stay, until final arrangements could be made for Heinz to continue his journey on to Los Angeles. (Heinz wanted to live in close proximity to his older friend, Breslau-born Richard Glass, whose family had successfully emigrated and now lived in Pasadena, California.) Although a rather serious and reticent man, the brilliant “Uncle Isi,” as Heinz would eventually call him, turned out to be somewhat protective and paternal toward the young immigrant.

Heinz was required as an enemy alien to comply with strict and limiting restrictions, defined by the U.S. government and adhered to by the organization that sponsored him. The Jewish refugee organization, in turn, was responsible for finding housing and schooling for Heinz in Los Angeles. Upon his arrival there, Heinz spent the next several months living in the dormitories of the orphanage for Jewish refugees while completing his high school equivalency. As he preferred not being addressed by the anglicized version of “Karl” (that being “Charles”), he chose instead to be called “Henry,” and settled on changing his legal name from “Karl Heinz Kempe” to “Charles Henry Kempe,” the most literal translation possible. Over time, he came to abbreviate the name “Charles” with the letter “C.” Friends and colleagues called him “Henry,” although outside of his presence, the label “C. Henry” was used as frequently.

Influential in Henry’s life during that time in Los Angeles was Mr. Joseph Bonaparte, the director of the Jewish refugee orphanage. Kind and supportive, another father figure, he recognized the potential for accomplishment in Henry, and encouraged him to excel as a student so that he could progress in his newly adopted country. Although Henry didn’t realize at the time that he would never again return to live in Germany, he was nevertheless determined to complete his college education, to learn to speak and write English fluently, and to assimilate as much as possible into a new American culture. After years of being segregated and demeaned in Germany due to his Jewish heritage, he was sensitized to the uncomfortable feeling of being an alien, an outcast. He recognized only too well the stigma that had followed him to the United States; many newly arrived refugees were regarded with suspicion or antipathy.

Soon after taking an equivalency test to gain his high school diploma, Henry began attending the City of Los Angeles Junior College.

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There he was required to take a general test of intelligence. The staff person who evaluated him determined he had an IQ of 75, the equivalent of mild mental retardation! His score, obviously inconsistent with his true cognitive abilities, was largely the result of his limited grasp of the English language. In addition, the Germanic method of test taking, with which he was familiar, emphasized accuracy over speed, and he was therefore unaware of the timed element of test performance.

He gradually developed his English language skills, although throughout his life he used his own unique speaking and writing styles; his new training would never fully overcome the grammatical influences of his early German education. For example, after living in the United States for most of his life, he continued to say, "Many thanks" instead of the more typical, "Thank you."

While attending junior college, Henry simultaneously held two jobs as well, selling men's clothing in a department store, and hawking newspapers on the street, the latter a dangerous vocation due to the fast-moving traffic of an already automobile-dependent city. He was determined to be self-supporting, to eventually be a part of the "American Dream," and to assimilate as an American citizen. His desire for acceptance was heightened by the distressing and confusing sense of rejection and isolation he had felt in his home country. Ever struggling with the disconcerting idea that people could reject one another based on criteria other than one's character, he was committed to beginning again in a homeland of acceptance and inclusion.

For Henry, these important issues later influenced not only the strength of his commitment to abused children and their plight, but also to the parents or caretakers who abused and neglected them. Even after seeing real examples of man's inhumanity to his fellow man, Henry was determined to believe the best of people, an attitude seemingly at odds with the actions of those families with whom he would later work. Maintaining his sense of optimism about the potential for good in mankind represented a challenge, but one to which he clung.

With the assistance and advice of family friends, Henry was subsequently able to transfer as an undergraduate student to the University of California at Berkeley. There, while rooming in the International House dormitory, he held an assortment of odd jobs, cooking for his fellow students, washing dishes and cleaning rooms, all while diligently studying. One dorm-mate was comedian Mort Sahl, who even then practiced his fledgling art with his friends.

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Years later, Henry would reminisce about asking girls out on dates, humored by the fact that they wouldn't recognize him in the evening, even though he had seen the same girls in hair rollers while serving them their breakfast earlier that morning. He used to say that those days came back to haunt him years later when he had five daughters, and was forced to tolerate a long row of newly-washed nylon stockings hanging over the shower stall door.

A mere three years after his arrival in the United States as a frail seventeen-year-old German-speaking immigrant, Henry Kempe received his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of California at Berkeley in 1942. As his senior year studies came to an end, Henry paused to appreciate his adventures and accomplishments thus far, and reflected about his future career. Espousing the Jewish commandment of "Mitzvot" (which to Henry meant acts of human kindness), affected by the death of his baby sister years earlier, and influenced by his mentor-like relationships with family friends Drs. Weddigen and Landsberger, Henry Kempe decided to attend medical school.

The now confident and determined graduate applied to the prestigious University of California Medical School at San Francisco (UCSF) and, in his newly found good fortune, was accepted. He was "over the moon" with excitement, feeling a gradual sense of real acceptance and of wondrous possibilities. To help with medical school expenses, Henry found a job as a handyman at a preschool, cooking meals and serving as a night watchman for the woman who owned the preschool and lived onsite. As a fledgling medical student at UCSF, he frequently returned to his place of employment smelling like lab chemicals or formaldehyde preservative, which seemed to upset his landlady's sensibilities. She was admittedly impressed by his work ethic, both as a student and as her handyman, but one day she found a bag of human bones used for the study of anatomy stashed in his room. Reluctantly, she asked him to move, saying she "couldn't do this anymore." It was presumably the skeletal remains and noxious smells that she couldn't tolerate, but Henry later joked that, more likely, it must have been his cooking. Struggling financially to pay his tuition, Henry next took a part-time position as a janitor at Children's Hospital. While cleaning the patients' rooms, he would bring flowers in to place by their bedsides to cheer up the children.

In medical school, Henry distinguished himself as a gifted student. "During the polio epidemic," Henry Kempe recounted, "I met Dr. Edward Shaw, who taught me about polio and other infectious diseases." Through

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his newfound association with Dr. Shaw, an attending physician at the medical center, Henry discovered a special interest in the field of virology, and arranged to conduct research under Dr. Shaw's tutelage. Henry was strongly influenced by him, and adopted many of Shaw's philosophies of "how a physician should be."

Ed Shaw was interested in researching the poliovirus, an infectious agent which was one of the primary public health concerns up until the 1950's. Shaw was a partner in the premier private pediatric practice in San Francisco, but at the same time was considered an expert in the study of polio. Through his own great interest, and in his role as a much-admired mentor, Dr. Shaw encouraged Henry in the study of viruses which affect humans.

Dr. Shaw taught Henry to combine intellectual curiosity and scientific discovery with the clinical practice of medicine. In addition to his research, Dr. Shaw loved seeing his own patients in his urban pediatric practice. Shaw would state that clinical medicine is where the pathology is found, that students had to find it and care for it.

"It's always a lot more fun to find the bird in the bush than in the zoo or cage," Shaw was often heard to say. He presented to his students a freeing, creative way to look at pediatrics, to step out of the strict medical model, to become investigators and to research new symptoms and diseases they would encounter. Eventually, Shaw would shift his primary work from clinical practice to accept the position of Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics at UCSF.

Fellow medical student during those years at UCSF, pediatrician Dr. Misha Grossman recalls his relationship with Henry Kempe:

"I first met Henry as a medical student. He was two years ahead of me in medical school. We ate lunch together daily at the same boarding house. We had a lot in common: both foreigners, both Jews, both interested in pediatrics, both admirers of K.F. Meyer (we both took his classes at U.C. Berkeley). Henry graduated from UCSF Medical School and left for his pediatric training at Yale before my graduation."

Many German immigrants during the war were given 'Enemy Alien' status upon their arrival in the U.S., which meant they had to carry identification papers, check in to designated government offices periodically, observe evening curfews and obey the law faithfully. It seemed to Henry, a struggling medical student, that the potential for imminent deportation as a result of any infraction was being waved in front of this particular group of immigrants, and, once again, the ugly fact of

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being considered ‘undesirable’ was evident. It was very stressful for newcomers, unsure of the rules and laws, apprehensive of stepping out of line for any reason, fearful of possible deportation. In Henry’s case, he wasn’t allowed outside the dormitory after 9:00 p.m., which made it very difficult for him to study, as most of his fellow students studied at libraries every evening. Often he had to rely on classmates to check out materials for him to study at home.

Henry Kempe’s dream of changing the abhorrent label “Enemy Alien” was finally realized when he traded this moniker for that of “Soldier in the United States Army.” He and fellow medical student Ralph Wallerstein, designated as “Enemy Aliens,” had formerly been quite restricted by virtue of their status. Finally, the rigid and limiting conditions took their toll, and Henry and Ralph decided to speak up and express their disagreement with the system. Together, they appealed to the University of California Chancellor, who investigated their options and worked to help the young medical students receive a new designation, literally overnight. Within twenty-four hours, they were both transformed from “Enemy Alien” to “Private First Class,” assigned to “Medical School Training.” As such, their newly designated military service even helped pay for medical school.

Despite the ongoing separation from his family, Henry now felt a new commitment to eventually being granted U.S. citizenship and becoming a contributing member of his new country. He left behind thoughts of returning to Germany, and instead envisioned reuniting his scattered family one day soon. With a sense of resolve, he began investigating the process involved in bringing his family to America.

Although Henry had originally applied for citizenship in 1940, being granted citizenship was a lengthy process. Finally, with letters of support from his medical school professors and friends, Henry became a citizen of the United States in 1945, the same year he completed his medical degree. Upon the receipt of his Doctor of Medicine diploma from the University of California at San Francisco in a formal graduation ceremony, Henry finally felt somewhat vindicated, settled in his newly adopted country and proud of his chosen profession. Only he could know the goals and plans he envisioned at that time for his future as a physician, but being a doctor had great significance and meaning for him. Upon graduation from medical school, Henry was also promoted to the rank of first lieutenant in the U.S. Army.

This celebration of his latest accomplishments must have been colored by the bittersweet memories of his extended family, many now

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deceased, his own unhealthy and stressful childhood, and the loss of his former homeland. Nevertheless, that night Henry took his friends to the "Top of the Mark" restaurant in San Francisco, and they all celebrated. For the first time in his tumultuous life, he decided for just one night to be unconcerned about expenses, and there was much eating and drinking. He toasted his friends and they him.

Henry Kempe had arrived!

Gradually experiencing acceptance in his work and camaraderie among new friends, he had matured, finding himself a niche and a place of comfort for the first time in years. Unlike his early days as a complacent student in Germany, Henry was now driven and intense. From that day forward, indeed for the rest of his life, Henry Kempe would become known for accomplishing a great deal in a short time. He had an uncanny sense that his time was limited, valuable, and not to be wasted.

Henry spent the next year as an intern at the University of California at San Francisco, followed by two years of service in the army. During this period, Henry worked to bring his parents to the United States from Bolivia. He finally convinced them to join him in San Francisco, as soon as he was allowed to sponsor them, another fortuitous result of his position as a military officer. Richard and Mary, like Henry, had gradually come to realize that a return to their former hometown was no longer an option.

After Richard and Mary Kempe arrived in the U.S. and settled into a small apartment in San Francisco, Richard, in his limited, broken English, made social connections with local jewelers, and sought employment at local watch repair and clock stores. He updated his knowledge about modern methods of watch repair and cleaning, trading his own labor in return for training while making very little pay. Once comfortable with his newly updated skills as a watch repairman, he rented a small storefront on Geary Boulevard in San Francisco, and set up a modest shop.

Eager to be assimilated in the United States, and concerned about reliving past religious persecution, Richard contemplated changing his last name to "Kemp," thinking that dropping the final letter "e" would make the name more "American." Henry was incredulous and very upset about it, and told his father pointedly, "In this country it doesn't matter!"

It is ironic that the young man once called "Heinz" would say this to his father, who now called his own son by a newly adopted anglicized name. For a brief time, Richard's shop window displayed the name "Kemp," but he soon became comfortable in his new country and then repainted his proper surname on the storefront. Like Henry, he seemed to revel in having

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the chance to recreate himself in his new environs. Eventually happy and, by all standards, increasingly successful, Richard Kempe spoke of America as “The land of milk and honey.”

As ever, Richard was a very skilled craftsman. Resourceful and gregarious, he soon established a solid base of loyal customers. His own son, Henry, was his most vocal supporter and referral source, sending his friends and colleagues from UCSF and elsewhere to Richard’s shop, determined to help his parents become financially secure.

As luck would have it, there was a coffee shop across the street from Richard’s San Francisco storefront. As in his earlier years, Richard went there daily, dragging along anyone and everyone who visited him at the shop, whether friends or customers. Undaunted by his limited ability to speak English, he would drink hot chocolate, converse animatedly, always interacting, the social center of any room, with his walrus moustache and contagious laughter.

Finally, after much correspondence and planning, Richard and Mary’s daughter Paula arrived from England, sponsored by her brother Henry. Then stationed at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington D.C., Henry traveled to meet her when her boat arrived in New York City. Paula, of course, would still be labeled with the status of “Enemy Alien,” with its related rules and stigma. After her experience with this label in England, she naturally felt apprehensive. At the end of a tiring, unpleasant trans-Atlantic ocean crossing, she found herself several hundred people back in a long line of on-board travelers, holding an assigned number, waiting to be assessed and determined whether fit enough to be allowed to disembark. But after only a few minutes, she suddenly felt a tap on her shoulder, and her brother, “Little Heini,” was by her side, in full military uniform. Somehow, he had talked his way onto the ship and rescued her from the hours-long wait. Once the officials saw his uniform, they immediately waved Paula onto American soil.

Henry and Paula had a brief visit and reunion, catching up on one another’s lives before he saw her off to board a train to San Francisco, where Paula was to be met by her parents days later. Richard had closed the store in order to meet Paula at the train station, leaving an awkwardly scrawled sign on the shop door stating the reason for his departure:

“Shop Closed Due to Daughter’s Arrival in the United States.”

After their extended separation, the once-young Kempe family would finally have a long-awaited reunion and celebration, with much eating, laughing, and reminiscing. Henry and Richard described to Paula

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their happy experiences in the United States, and tried to encourage her to accept this new homeland with a similar optimism, but she remained apprehensive and suspicious as a result of her recent lifestyle of loneliness and servitude. She was reluctant to allow herself to commit to this new country and to adopt her brother's positive attitude about his new life. Not surprisingly, it would be years before she decided to become a citizen of the United States.

At his thriving watch repair store, one of Richard Kempe's customers, Mrs. Ruth Pulverman, had a brother-in-law, Gerald, who was unattached. She was determined to see him married, and began actively matchmaking. With Richard's help in arranging formal introductions, Gerald Pulverman began dating Henry's older sister, Paula. Gerald Pulverman had also emigrated from Germany. Most of his family members, though, had remained there, in a feeble attempt to protect the family's home and possessions, and were subsequently gassed in Nazi concentration camps. Gerald's own father, realizing that his arrest by the Nazis was imminent, had committed suicide. His mother was also a victim of the concentration camps. Bonded by common language, culture, and experiences of exile, Gerald and Paula soon married and began their own family.

"So whatever we have now is FOUND," Paula opined years later, "whether family, or things, or freedom. I think this is a great thing. You don't appreciate what you have unless you lose it."

Like his son, Henry, Richard Kempe had a sense of anticipation and hopefulness about his new country and the opportunities available, while Paula and Mary never seemed to fully share their optimism and excitement about the future. The Kempe family had finally given up the idea of returning to their former home, a city which was now newly designated as being absorbed within the borders of Poland.

With the Kempe family finally reunited in America, Henry developed a strong aversion to revisiting or discussing his earlier life in any conversation. Thereafter, he would rarely talk about his youth in Germany, or his difficult journey and transitions, not even with his sister Paula. It may have been that he didn't want to "jinx" his blessed new existence. Perhaps he thought that the deeply felt isolation and fears he'd experienced were best ignored. For the remainder of his life, he was largely unwilling to express his feelings about his youth or to recall specific old memories. And, as such, the history of C. Henry Kempe's childhood and adolescence will remain forever full of gaps and conflicting recollections.

A Good Knight for Children

Although Henry was now an adult, an American doctor, in his desire for a new and different life of happiness and acceptance he was truly a “newborn.” Following medical school graduation and a one-year internship in pediatrics at UCSF, Henry fulfilled his two-year Army obligation. He served the first year in the Virology Laboratories as an assistant virologist at Walter Reed Army Hospital in 1946, where he received invaluable training from Dr. Joseph Smadel, a skilled Army physician with high expectations of his staff. The following year, Henry served as Chief Virologist in the Army laboratory at Fort Baker in the San Francisco area, followed by several months of further research in Washington, D.C.

While at Walter Reed Army Hospital, Henry began interviewing for various positions as a virologist. Although he was turned down for the Harvard University position, he later joked that, had he been hired by Dr. John Enders at Harvard to do research on the topic of tissue cultures, he might have been one of the physicians who received the Nobel Prize for Medicine years later. Enders and his team, as it turns out, were awarded the coveted prize for isolating poliovirus in the laboratory, a discovery that eventually would lead to the development of polio vaccines by researchers Sabin and Salk.

Though not destined to become a Harvard researcher, Henry Kempe’s hard work was nevertheless rewarded in 1948 when he was accepted as an Assistant in Pediatrics at the prestigious Yale University School of Medicine. Excited by his research in virology, he looked forward to working as a pediatric resident in a supportive facility with the opportunity to learn from renowned researchers and professors. When Henry Kempe first arrived at Yale, Chief Resident Dick Olmsted’s first glimpse of Henry was as a young man driving up to his house in a rusty, dilapidated used car with classical art prints scattered across the back seat. Dick thought to himself, “This must be an unusual person.”

Several professors influenced Henry during the years of his pediatric medical training, among them Dr. Grover Powers, a Yale pediatrician who taught Henry important communication and research skills. Whenever Dr. Powers had a patient who presented with complicated symptoms, rather than having the medical residents simply discuss the case amongst themselves, Dr. Powers would take Henry and the other residents along to consult with an expert in the appropriate area of specialty, ranging from surgery to virology, to determine how to best treat the child. Henry

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later used this learned skill and his own intuition to consult with and learn from other experts very effectively.

Dr. Powers was also very interested in and concerned about the comfort and welfare of his young patients, as evidenced by his insistence that the babies in the hospital nurseries have socks on at all times, so they “wouldn’t have cold feet.” Although this was the focus of much joking among the residents, it was a lesson well-learned by Henry. It was tempting for the young doctors to think of their patients in clinical terms, as medical cases, or diagnoses, or treatment plans. Dr. Powers instead taught his house staff to regard the patients as helpless infants and children, and to become very sensitive to the personal needs of their pediatric patients.

Dr. Powers recognized that parental concerns must be addressed on an ongoing basis, and taught his students this lesson well. Every afternoon at New Haven Hospital, he required a designated half-hour period when parents who were at home could have a session by telephone with residents to ask questions and clarify their concerns about their child. This was very unusual, occurring at a time when visiting hours on the wards were very limited, even for family members. Although Henry enjoyed these telephone conversations with the parents, he remained concerned about the hospital’s restrictive visiting hours. Despite Dr. Powers’ efforts, those limited visiting hours created an overall sense of very restricted access to medical personnel for parents of hospitalized children.

Although he had by now collected an assortment of friends and colleagues in his daily work, at the age of twenty-five Henry Kempe had never been truly in love. Perhaps a certain melancholic affect had interfered with his potential for real romance. As a teenager, he had written to himself a private note, a pledge which read, “I will only ever love one woman.” Through his travels, he had kept the note with him over the years. Now Henry looked back on his childhood and teen years with mixed feelings, with a pervasive sense of loss and sadness, and yet he somehow maintained a sense of a positive outlook toward the future.

He frequently said, “If I had my life to live over again, I would have it begin when I was twenty-five years old.”

For it was then that he met Ruth Irene Svibergson.

A Good Knight for Children



Karl Heinz Kempe, Germany

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Karl Heinz Kempe and sister Paula Kempe

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Karl Heinz Kempe

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Dr. C. Henry Kempe

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Ruth Irene Svibergson

Biography of Henry Kempe: pediatrician, virologist, and pioneer in child abuse.

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