

The family of my father, Otto Aufrecht
Taken in Vienna, Austria.
If there is a date on the back of this picture, it is
inaccessible.
My father was born in 1900. Perhaps you can estimate
a date from that.

The family of Alice
Hirschfeld's father,
taken in Vienna:
Father Otto Aufrecht seated,
beside him Alice Hirschfeld's
grandmother Emma;
back row from left to right
Uncle Erwin, grandfather
Julius, Uncle Eugene



seated: my father, Otto Aufrecht, and his mother, Emma
standing in the middle: Otto's father, Julius
standing behind Otto: his brother, Erwin
standing behind Emma: Otto's other brother, Eugene

... may you be destined for a **happy** and **prosperous future**

Alice Hirschfeld, USA, born 1936

Alice Hirschfeld was born to Jewish parents in Vienna on 2nd July 1936. Shortly after the *Anschluss*, her father was dismissed and "replaced by aryan personnel". The family's entire possessions were confiscated; Mrs. Hirschfeld's parents even had to hand over their wedding rings.

In February 1939, Mrs. Hirschfeld, then a child of 2 ½, fled by ship from Geneva to Ecuador via Panama with her parents Elke and Otto Aufrecht. The emigrants suffered as a result of the unaccustomed climate, the poor hygienic conditions, the mosquitoes and diseases. In July 1940, the family was able to travel to California, where they had relatives.

Mrs. Hirschfeld's mother, Elke Aufrecht, wrote her last diary entry before her escape in 1938. Nearly one year later and already in exile, she continued her diary.

Vienna, 15th July 1938

On the second of the month, Mädi [little girl] celebrated her second birthday. Her talking doesn't seem to want to progress. In recent days, however, she has been starting to repeat what she hears. It is still unclear but, with a little imagination, understandable. She already has all her milk teeth (20 teeth). The growth of each tooth, particularly the molars, always brought with it restlessness, irritability and loss of appetite; when she got her last 2 molars, Mädi even had a temperature of 39°! Now this is all done with, thank goodness, the child is lively and cheerful and has been potty trained for a long time. Who knows where on the planet Mädi will read this all one day. Once citizens of this city, we are no longer wanted here – ostracized and despised. We rack our brains over in which corner of the world we could rebuild a home. These are difficult days full of worries for your parents. May you, dear child, never experience anything like it, and may you be destined for a happy and prosperous future. We wish you this for your birthday.

Papa & Mama

Geneva, Italy, 1st April 1939

On 28th February, four weeks ago, we crossed the German border as emigrants, inasmuch as we were leaving our homeland and house to settle somewhere overseas. This is already our second stop; the first was Milan, where you spent 4 weeks with your Aunt Gisa, and we are now in Geneva where we are to embark. The chart for our voyage follows the route Panama, Ecuador, last stop Los Angeles, where Aunt Ani lives. On 13th March 1938, Hitler occupied Austria, that criminal whose goal in life is the extermination of Jewry, and a torturous time began for us then – expropriation and a campaign of persecution crowned by the critical 9th November. During these days, the Jews were raided and beaten and the Jewish men were herded up and incarcerated in concentration camps. Unspeakable suffering, blood and tears flowed over our heads, and we also reached the point, as did many of our fellow Jews, that we packed up our things and left.

The day after tomorrow is Seder night [first night of Passover]. We will celebrate it together, isolated in a distant land. As our forefathers once left Egypt, we too have left our homeland. May the Almighty also show us mercy that we may again create a home in the world out there. We are happy that you, my child, have not yet grasped the situation with your young mind, have not yet comprehended the change in time and surroundings. The little girl jumps and hops happily around,

talking to pebbles by the sea as if we were here for pleasure and not as emigrants. Mädi easily understands what she hears and already speaks a few scraps of English and Italian and has generally good pronunciation.

Mrs. Hirschfeld's mother describes her arrival in South America, the culture shock and her attempts to adapt to the completely new conditions in a letter to her sister.

Guayaquil, Ecuador, 11th June 1939**Dearest sister and family!**

We arrived a week ago today and immediately sent a card informing you. Today, we received your first letter. It gave us great pleasure and now we want to describe our impressions and experiences so far. We left Colón [Panama] on the 30th of last month. I must say, in the end we were happy to be leaving there. The climate there is unbearable, particularly in the rainy season, which lasts from May to December. It's like a sauna, and the nights bring no relief. It is even harder to bear when there is no possibility of building a life and living is very expensive. On top of this, the government of Panama also determined that the deposits of \$ 85 per person will simply not be returned to immigrants who do not leave the country within a year. Our ship was moored in Buenaventura, the Columbian port, and we went into the town for a while, where we got a foretaste of South America. On the ship, we were warned to shut the doors securely and even the portholes were all locked in port because of the thieves.

On Saturday afternoon we arrived in Salinas [Ecuador]. The big ships moor in Salinas, as the water is too shallow in Guayaquil. We disembarked and were brought to land. The area consisted of a few hotels, a few natives' huts, a very beautiful beach and a not too hot climate, relatively speaking. But the hotels! I won't be forgetting the "El Pacifico" on the Pacific Ocean any time soon, although it is a so called 'better hotel' costing 15 Sucre = \$ 1 per person. You walk up noisy wooden steps into the room, which could not be any more primitive but was all the more dirty. The toilet is also in the room. Otto had to wait at customs until two in the morning and I was in a terrible mood as I had seen a mouse scurry right through the middle of the room. The food is similar, you eat it along with the ants, we were warned about the water and drank mineral water. In the morning, instead of at 7 we traveled at half past 9 to Guayaquil in one of the streetcars included with the voyage. It was 150 kilometers away, which we covered in 5

hours. The engine broke, but the driver simply filled it with a banana skin and it worked again. The single train track took us right through the jungle where, every now and then, we saw a few natives' huts, although "huts" would be a bit generous, its like seeing the stories of Karl May come to life before your eyes.

Then we finally arrived here, and a gentleman from the committee was there to advise the people. There wasn't enough accommodation. However, a few days earlier, 100 refugees had arrived and on our ship there were 74, so everything was pretty full. The lodgings that we got here were an improved version of those in Salinas. [...] After four days, I changed lodgings as I found them particularly horrible. These impressions greet the Europeans in their first days, on top of this there are plagues of mosquitoes and other insects which bite and sting the white newcomers. As you can imagine, the atmosphere among the newcomers is pretty grim.

But after a few days, the feelings of horror begin to recede and one begins to reconcile oneself with reality. There are emigrants here who have already been here for a few years and have been able to settle in because they had to. [...]

The first days were filled with dealings with the authorities. [...] We were at the American consulate. At first we only got an appointment for next week and today he said to us we first have to state our exact address by letter, and only then can he request our papers from Vienna. You have to wait for everything here. *Mañana* is the keyword here. Everything will happen, but not until *mañana* (tomorrow).

However, we have still not been able to reach a decision about where to live. In the view of the committee and in our own opinion, Otto has the best chance of finding something here in Guayaquil as most of the tourism and companies are here. So it is easiest to find a job here, even the committee has given him a prospect. They need a French-English-Spanish correspondent, but as always *mañana*. First they must hold a meeting and the matter will only be decided later.

The downside is that the sanitary conditions are very poor. There is a considerable danger of catching malaria or typhus. Quito, which lies 2,800 m above sea level is apparently better in this regard but is already overflowing with immigrants. Living is also supposed to be cheaper up there, but on the other hand

it is very demanding for the heart due to its altitude and the chances of finding a job are very small. The third town, d. L. Ambato, where the climate is the best and it is also very cheap, also comes into consideration. It lies 1,800 m above sea level but is a nest without prospects. So if we have to live off our money, we will chose Quito or Ambato, but should Otto find something then we will of course stay here.

It would be of great use to have our things here, and as I don't know when and if we shall go to Los Angeles, I would like to redirect the two trunks here. I have been thinking about maybe setting up a little boarding house here. They must definitely already be there by now as they were with us on the ship "Fella" and must have arrived in Los Angeles in around mid-May. I wanted to unpack various things on the ship and put in the non-essentials but the ship's officer didn't allow me, as a lot of marble, which was to be unloaded in L.A. was loaded on the trunks. It is probably best if you ask for information at the local branch of the shipping line "Italia" in L.A.

Please be so kind and inquire about sending them to Guayaquil – how long it would take and how much it would cost. As long as I don't have my things here I can only sit around in the pension which is much more expensive and uncomfortable. I will only be able to write to you with specific details at a later date. We have arrived in a very unfamiliar world and have not yet really got used to things. It used to be much easier, now the government only wants to grant permits for industry and agriculture. Businessmen and representatives have almost no prospects. On the other hand, with a trade or some kind of industrial manufacture it is possible to be very successful.

The land is still very uncultivated and undeveloped. There would be space for a few million more people, but the immigrants are supposed to cultivate it and hand over the money. The ship with the 100 immigrants was also in Salinas and the committee took part in negotiations about their disembarkation here, but without result. They are also beginning to write in the newspapers here that too many Jews are entering, although they bring thousands of dollars with them. Hitler has boosted the economy in the whole world; they are all profiting from our misfortune and trying their best – the democratic countries maybe even more so than the others.