

MA, MOTHER AND ME

A MEMOIR



By

Marge Huneke Blaine

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A MEMOIR**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
FRONT PAGE	PICTURE OF MA, MOTHER AND ME	
DEDICATION		
INTRODUCTION	BEGINNINGS	
CHAPTER 1	SCHILTERN, AUSTRIA, FALL - 1915	1
CHAPTER 2	SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA – 1916	11
CHAPTER 3	SEBASTOPOL, CALIFORNIA – 1920	18
CHAPTER 4	BACK TO SAN FRANCISCO – 1924	30
CHAPTER 5	CARL – 1932	49
CHAPTER 6	THE GROCERY STORE – 1936	67
CHAPTER 7	WORLD WAR II – 1941-1944	95
CHAPTER 8	MARINA COURT APARTMENTS – 1944	118
CHAPTER 9	GERMANY AND THE GERMANS – 1953	148
CHAPTER 10	PEOPLE	176
CHAPTER 11	MORE REAL ESTATE & GRANDCHILDREN – 1958	193
CHAPTER 12	MENLO PARK – 1961	211
CHAPTER 13	WINDING DOWN – 1968	237
CHAPTER 14	AFTERWARD – 1972	262
CHAPTER 15	THINGS HAPPEN – 1978	300
FAMILY TREES	Lee Tham Huneke's Family Tree	306
	Gus Tham's Family Tree	307
	Carl Huneke's Family Tree (Partial)	308
	Fini Michaelson's Family Tree	309



Ma, my mother and me

Mirror Lake, Yosemite National Park
Summer, 1943

Left to right, Leopoldine Moser Tham, Lee Tham Huneke,
Front, Margaret Lee Huneke Blaine

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By
Marge Huneke Blaine

December 2006

Written for my mother
Lee Tham Huneke
for the 100th anniversary of her birth
September 6, 1906

and her children
Rudy Tham and Marge Lee Huneke Blaine

and her grandchildren
Tim Blaine, Greg Blaine, Connie Lee Blaine Ahern,
Judy Lee Tham Hurley, Gus Lawrence Tham, and Bradley Carl Tham

and her great-grandchildren
Nick Blaine, Alex Blaine, Chris Blaine, Laura Moir, Mia Blaine, Michelle Lee Ahern,
Meagan Lee Ahern, Tony Hurley, Todd Hurley, Lori Lee Hurley, Paolo Tham, Mike Tham,
Matthew Tham, Chris Tham and Lauren Tham

and her great-great-grandchildren
Travis Hurley and Tyler Hurley

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Beginnings

Everything has a start and a finish. My book is now finished, but I must tell you how it started. Most of the stories came from my mother, Lee Tham Huneke. Mother was a good communicator and she told me stories about Ma and Pa; about my Oma, Daddy's mother; Rudy and Ev; Fini and Mike, Kitty and Richard, Elmer and Hilda and so many others, whose stories are all in my book.

She told me everything she knew about her own life. She was born in Vienna, Austria September 6, 1906 and died in San Francisco, California October 22, 1978. She always wished she knew more, but what she remembered, she remembered well, and her stories were rich with detail. I'm so grateful now for the times I sat under the dining table, playing with my paper dolls, listening intently to the adults talking. I had no idea then, that so much of what I heard is still there in my mind, waiting to be summoned. Later, as adult women, Mother and I shared endless conversations about everything. Not only people and real estate, but life itself

Mother did better than just tell stories. She kept journals. Mother entered notes into her handwritten journal each day. She started with the grocery business. At first it was only business. How much money came in – how much money went out. What groceries and supplies they bought. But eventually when they bought Marina Court Apartments in 1944, Mother started jotting notes in her journal about everything that went on in her life. I have all her journals. Those notes have helped me recall the stories that I have told in this book.

In addition to my own recall and Mother's journals, I've taped many family members and friends during the past ten years. I'm grateful to all of them for their candor in sharing their thoughts. So many of them are gone now – when I listen to their voices it is bittersweet. But I'll always be grateful to my dear brother and sister-in-law, Rudy and Ev, for all their tales. Others who allowed me to tape them were my niece, Judy Tham Hurley, my cousin Horst and his wife Vonnie, my cousin Warren Gade, Mother's cousin Elsie Adkins and Fini's daughter-in-law Ruth Michaelson. My cousin Hans Gerhard Huneke and my friend Franz Amandi wrote their remembrances for me.

Some people agreed to talk to me about my mother, but didn't want to be taped. Some were shocked when they heard she kept a journal. The inevitable question was "What did she say?" Some people refused to talk to me, so their stories are told from a singular perspective – mine. Some people talked to me

more than once, then changed their stories when they understood that I was really going to write a book. I had to decide which version was the truth.

I'm grateful to my husband Terry for many things, but especially his incredible memory. He and my mother were great friends and he took an enormous interest in her life early on. His early journal on the details we have about her family is invaluable. Without his "family trees" on huge rolls of butcher paper that he started so many years ago, much of this information would be gone. For me, his "final edits" are the last word.

And I thank my two sisters-in-law, Joan Blaine Lampe and Liz Logrecco Blaine, who were kind enough to give me meaningful ideas for improvement. Liz suggested that I change the story and write it in the first person and it made a world of difference.

I alone am responsible for the final product. The facts gleaned from official records, documents and the incredible web, stand for themselves. People's recollections, including my own, are just that: Recollections. Everyone sees life from an individual perspective. I have tried to tell about the events in Mother's life accurately and objectively. I've expressed opinions that might not be universally appreciated. They were formed over a lifetime, starting from years of living with and listening to my parents. I take full responsibility for them.

I am content that this book about my mother's life is finished. She was more than my mother. She was a great friend – fun to be with – and I will always miss her.

Marge Huneke Blaine
December 2006

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Chapter 1 Schiltern, Austria Fall, 1915

Poldi sat at her school desk and waited her turn to read for the teacher. She was nine years old and liked her teacher, though she was sometimes impatient with the hours spent in the classroom. The sun was low in the sky on this late Autumn day. She daydreamed of the Christmas holiday ahead, remembering the feasts and joyful celebrations of past years.

Several grades shared one teacher since Schiltern was a small village. The children in the school were mostly from families of farmers surrounding the village, but Poldi's family was different. She lived with Herr Georg Eckharter and his wife Johanna. He was a prosperous landholder and a teacher. He and his wife were both devout Catholics and prominent members of the parish church.

Poldi loved them both as if they were her parents, and indeed, they were the only parents she had ever known. The Eckarter's own three children were already grown. Teresa, the eldest, married Anton Weichselbaum, then had a daughter named Anna. Their son Georg Junior was unmarried and their third child, a daughter named Anna was married to a professor at the University of Vienna. Sometimes Anna's husband thrilled everyone by bringing his luftballon (hot air balloon), when they visited the Eckarters in Schiltern.

The Eckarters loved children, and after their own were grown, they offered to care for children whose parents were unable to do so. The parish priest brought a new child to them from time to time as the need arose. In those days the Church arranged for care of the sick, the impoverished, the aged and the orphaned.

In 1908 a young woman from the big city of Vienna came to her parish priest with her baby girl, who was born September 6, 1906. The woman's name was Leopoldine Moser and she had named her baby Leopoldine, but called her Poldi. She asked the priest if he could find someone to care for her child for a short time until she could arrange to care for her herself. The priest evaluated the situation and decided this woman was neither very rich, nor very poor. She told him her husband had died of influenza. She seemed to be in good health, was

well dressed and wore some modest jewelry. He told Leopoldine he knew of a kind family nearby who took in homeless children as a service to the Church. They were landholders and had other children they cared for. They might be able to care for Poldi for a short time. But the priest warned Leopoldine that she must promise to pay the Church for each month of the child's care. Leopoldine readily agreed to leave the child. She thought to herself as she returned to Vienna that she would worry about payment to the Church later. Everyone knew the Catholic Church was rich – all the gold was in the Vatican! Right now she needed to leave this baby with someone so she could continue with her life. She was nineteen – she had her life ahead of her – and she wanted to go to America!

The Eckarters welcomed little Poldi as if she was their own and soon she was part of the loving family which included several other foster children.

In her classroom, Poldi was startled from her daydreams when a strange woman appeared. She was tall and lean, dressed in a dark slim fitted suit. Her hair was pulled back in a bun at the nape of her neck. She rapped on the door with her knuckles to get the teacher's attention. "Teacher! I am here to get Poldi. She is a student in your class." The teacher looked confused. This woman was a stranger. But the woman continued, "The priest has sent me to get her. I must take her to the church. Her mother is waiting for her there." The teacher beckoned to Poldi who came forward shyly. "Poldi this woman will take you to the church where the priest is waiting for you. Go now. Be a good girl!"

Poldi walked outside the classroom with the woman, who took her by the hand and pulled her along the path. The woman thrust a large dark coat, really more like a hooded cape, at her and said brusquely, "Put this on now. It's cold and we have a long way to go." Poldi said, "I thought we were going to see the priest. You told my teacher we were going to the church to see the priest. You said my mother was waiting for me!" The woman said, "Hush! Come along now. We aren't going to the church. I am your mother and I have come to take you home with me!"

Poldi was shocked at these words. She and the other children who lived with the kindly Eckarters knew that they had real mothers and fathers who temporarily could not care for them. But Poldi was nine years old. She had lived here for many years and remembered no other mother and father. She called them Mama and Papa Eckarter, as did the other children. She had dreamed of what her real mother and father might be like, but this woman did not fit her dreams. Poldi shrieked, "I don't believe you! You are not my real mother. My real mother would not steal me away from my classroom! My real mother would meet me at the church. Take me to the priest now!"

Leopoldine was dismayed at this vehement child. She expected a docile creature that she could easily control. Instead she had to hang on to this

struggling nine year old who was strong and threatened to pull away from her completely. If she continued to shriek she would attract attention. The woman stopped suddenly and took Poldi squarely by the shoulders. "Listen to me now I am your mother! My name is Leopoldine Moser and I come from Vienna. I brought you here to the priest when you were little. I knew that someday I would return for you. I had to steal you away – I couldn't afford to pay the priest what I owed him. I live in America now – in a city called San Francisco and I came to take you home with me. All of Europe is in war now and if we don't go soon we will be trapped here."

Poldi was confused. She didn't believe this woman. But what if she spoke the truth? Now the woman pulled her along again. She stumbled on the path, looking behind her from time to time, as her school, and even the church became smaller and then faded from sight. Soon they rounded a corner in the village and passed the shops and buildings she had known all her life. She tried to absorb the words this woman had spoken, but it was all too much for her to understand at once.

Leopoldine made better progress once the child stopped struggling so much. She still held her arm tightly because she feared the child might bolt and run back to the church where the priest would demand payment for the years the Eckarters had cared for her. Leopoldine needed every penny she and her current husband, Gus Tham, had saved. They were determined to become successful in America and they wanted to buy a chicken ranch and become landholders. Someday she might pay the church, but not today. The Vatican, with all its gold, could take care of the Eckarters. Today she needed this child to come home with her. Today she needed to flee Europe before the war made it impossible. Today she needed help on the chicken ranch they would buy near San Francisco. Tomorrow would take care of itself.

She finally reached a wagon, where the driver was waiting for her. Poldi struggled and made one last attempt to escape and run back to the church, but Leopoldine held her tightly. She dragged her onto the wagon and with a crack of his whip the driver urged the horses to a gallop. Poldi strained to look back to her school, the church, the little village of Schiltern, the only home she had known, but the scene was disappearing quickly. She pressed herself into the corner of her seat, distancing herself from this stranger, this woman who said she was her mother. She tried to be brave, but her lips quivered, not from the cold, but from the overwhelming fear that her familiar, happy life was changing forever, and perhaps not for the better.

Eventually Poldi dozed. When she woke they had arrived in a bustling town called Langenlois. She was groggy and did not resist as the woman pulled her onto a train. Soon the steam engine pulled them through the countryside and

once again her head nodded from the rocking motion of the train. Leopoldine offered her some bread and hot coffee, but feeling sick, she refused

Poldi was awake when the train steamed into the huge station in Vienna. She had never seen so many people, so many large buildings, nor heard so much noise. Leopoldine seemed energized, as if she were now on familiar ground. She said to Poldi, "Vienna is my home, Poldi. And that makes it your home too. This is where I was born. This is where I grew up. This is where my parents lived. My father's name was Michael Moser and my mother was Charlotte Fastenbauer. And this is where I met your father, whose name was Michael Moser. We were distant cousins. You were born here in Vienna. I named you Leopoldine Charlotte after me and your grandmother. You are Viennese too, Poldi. You must always remember that and be very proud of it. Vienna is one of the great cities in the world and to be born in Vienna, not just Austria, but Vienna, is a great honor. You will always be a citizen of Vienna in your soul no matter where you live."

Poldi listened to this information about her ancestry with a heavy heart. She found little comfort in the bustle of Vienna though she noticed that this woman, Leopoldine, who had taken her from school, now seemed lively and familiar with everything. Leopoldine stopped often to speak with people briefly and Poldi tried to listen and understand what they were saying.

There was talk of war and soldiers and armies. People were still outraged about the assassination the previous year, in June 1914, of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The incident ultimately resulted in war between many countries in Europe. Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia and Russia; Germany declared war on Russia and while they were at it they declared war on France and Belgium too. As a result of the latter action Great Britain declared war on Germany. By the end of 1915 Germany had conducted Zeppelin air raids and submarine blockades on Britain, and any ship approaching Britain was considered a legitimate target. German U-Boats had sunk the Lusitania with 1,198 civilians aboard, including 128 Americans. Germany had responded to U.S. anger by agreeing to stop sinking ships without warning.

In San Francisco, Leopoldine had listened to all the news of the war with increasing alarm. She knew her child was in Austria. She and her husband Gustav Tham, whom she had married on July 11, 1914, had tried to have a child but so far she was not pregnant. She was almost thirty years old and would soon be too old. Gus worked as a journeyman butcher and sausage maker. Though she was skilled as a seamstress, she did not work and was a homemaker. She was determined to have something – to be somebody – in America. She and Gus agreed that becoming landholders was the key to success. In the old country, those who owned land always had that security.

They saved their money and looked for a place where they could make money from the land. They found an old chicken ranch in the country near the village of Sebastopol, fifty miles north of San Francisco. The former owner had failed to make the mortgage payments so it was now owned by Analy Bank in Santa Rosa. The Bank was willing to consider Gus and Leopoldine Tham as potential owners. However, since they did not have enough money for a down payment to buy the ranch, the bank agreed that they would enter into a contract of sale with the Thams. They could live there and raise chickens while paying a monthly payment to the bank. When those payments had reached an agreed amount for the down payment, they would then receive a trust deed for the ranch. Gus would have to keep working at the slaughterhouse in Butchertown in San Francisco. They needed his salary in order to pay the Analy Bank each month to accumulate the down payment for the ranch. He could come up only on weekends to help. Now all Leopoldine needed was someone to help her run the chicken ranch. With Poldi to work for her she would soon become a prosperous land owner.

The dire war news spurred her to action. She told Gus, "If she were ever to retrieve her child in Austria, she must act now." Gus said, "We don't have enough money to pay the church for her care these past years. How can you get her if you don't have money to give the priest?" Leopoldine was silent but plotted her strategy. She decided she would go without the money. She would find a way to get the child. She would steal the child if she had to. She must get her now before it was too late. She gathered enough money to secure passage on ships, steerage class, to and from Europe. Enough extra was scraped together for travel to Austria where she would find Poldi and bring her to America.

Now she had the child in Vienna and she was eager to continue her journey. She had booked passage on the Noordam, in steerage class. The ship was scheduled to leave Rotterdam in Holland on January 5, 1916. The trip to Rotterdam from Vienna would be risky for her and the child since German soldiers were marching through France and Belgium, but they would have to take that risk.

She arranged for train travel to Rotterdam and within a day they embarked on the journey. They crossed the countryside in the swaying train, traveling day and night. Poldi felt sick most of the time, ate little and cried quietly to herself. When she slept she dreamed of home, Mama and Papa Eckarter, her teacher, her friends and her favorite things. When she awoke she was still with the woman named Leopoldine, still on the cold, swaying train, moving ever farther away from everything she knew and loved.

After they got off the train in Rotterdam they hurried to the docks looking for their ship. They found the Noordam and boarded as soon as possible. They were led to their space in steerage. As the ship's horn blasted, Poldi stood forlornly at

the rail with Leopoldine. She watched the land pull away from her and fade, becoming a thin line on the horizon. She felt as though she were leaving behind everything that was good in her life. She had no hope that a better life was ahead of her. After one day on the water the ship docked at Liverpool, England, to take on more passengers. All the travelers were nervous at being in British waters since the Germans had been known to sink passenger ships and bomb civilian cities in Britain, but they soon left Liverpool and headed to America.

Poldi had never been this far away from home before. She had never traveled on a train and certainly never been near a ship as big as the one she was on now. She and Leopoldine were crowded together in one bed in their small steerage space and she felt sick all the time. Leopoldine took her on the deck for some fresh air, but it helped little. People were kind to her and many of them spoke German. Some spoke a language she didn't understand and Leopoldine spoke this language too. Leopoldine said it was English, and everyone spoke English in America. During the passage she tried to teach Poldi some English words, but it was hard for Poldi because she felt so sick. The only time she felt better was when she slept. Then she dreamed about happy days in Schiltern.

They passed the time visiting with fellow travelers in steerage. Many of them were fleeing Austria and Germany, fearing the war sweeping across Europe. They entertained each other with stories of home. It was the Christmas season so Poldi shyly told about the way they celebrated Christmas in Schiltern. "During Advent, Saint Nikolaus, with his long white beard and white robes, visited the house and read from his big book about the many good deeds, and sometimes misdeeds, of the children in the house. He brought a large sack, filled with fruit, nuts and candies and gave it to us before he left." Everyone listened as Poldi continued. "One week before Christmas Mama and Papa Eckarter closed the large doors to the drawing room and we children were not allowed to look inside. We crept respectfully and quietly near the closed doors, only guessing at what was happening inside. On Holy Eve, the day before Christmas, we all went to the Church for the Sacrament of Confession." Her little voice wavered as she remembered those lovely times. "We climbed the one hundred steps from the street up to the Church. The air was cold but that was all part of the Christmas season. The church was crowded and bright with candles as we all sang *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht*. We tried to warm our hands and feet in the cold air. After holy mass we went to the side altar to see the Nativity scene showing the little town of Bethlehem, with the shepherds and Mary and Joseph. The crib was still empty, waiting for the coming of the Christ Child. We sang *Gloria In Excelsis Deo* before we went home."

Leopoldine was amazed at Poldi's long recital. It was as if she were comforting herself, remembering all the happy times. The child hugged herself as she sat rocking on a small stool. Poldi continued, with tears in her eyes. "Once we were home the doors to the drawing room were thrown open for all to see. There was

a beautiful tree, with wax candles, decorated with berries, cones and fruit. We all sang *O Tannenbaum*, as we sat around the tree. Marzipan made into different shapes, gilded nuts, small apples and tangerines had all been hung on the Christmas tree with slender threads and there were tinsel garlands everywhere. It was beautiful. There were gifts for us all. We feasted on Lebkuchen and Spanischer Wind." Poldi's little face glowed and her eyes glistened as she remembered her past Christmases.

Leopoldine almost felt sorry for taking the child away from this seemingly idyllic home, though she was happy to know the child had been treated well. She urged Poldi to eat some bread and brought her hot coffee from the galley to get some liquid in her. But by now Poldi had been sick so many times even the smell of the coffee made her feel sick again.

Eventually the passage came to an end. One day the word spread that the ship neared New York harbor with its famous Statue of Liberty, which welcomed immigrants to America. Poldi stood at the rail and looked at the great lady. She wondered what was in store for her in America. Leopoldine had made the trip several times but this time she had to enter through Ellis Island with a child. She hoped it would go well.

They gathered their bags and lined up at the immigration station. Since Leopoldine was re-entering and bringing her child, (now Gus Tham's step-daughter) with her, she was processed through a line for returning residents and they were soon allowed to enter the United States. Poldi was overwhelmed at the sights and sounds of New York City with its towering buildings and crowds of people. Leopoldine no longer had to hold Poldi's hand so tightly. There was no place for her to run. She was so far from home now that she was afraid she would never see Schiltern again. Leopoldine did not waste time in New York. She made her way to the train station with Poldi and their bags, which were few. Poldi had been stolen with nothing more than the dress she was wearing at school. Leopoldine had a few clothes for the child, but they were traveling light.

They boarded the train heading west to San Francisco and once again the rocking motions made Poldi feel sick. She slept most of the time. Now her dreams were of great ships rolling on gray waters, rooms that were too warm with too many people, all babbling words she couldn't understand and through it all the nauseating smell of coffee. Each time she woke, hoping for the comforting arms of Mama Eckarter, there was only Leopoldine. After New York they passed some rural areas and then a few towns but after a while it seemed as though all of America was empty. There were no cities, not even towns or villages and very few people. How could America be so great if no one was there?

The journey across the flat land seemed endless but eventually the train climbed high mountains covered with snow. The tracks wound through mountain passes

and etched serpentine curves as it made its way down the other side. Leopoldine seemed relieved when the train was once again on a great flat plain. There was no longer any snow and the brown grasses showed touches of green as if spring were just around the corner, even though it was still January. Leopoldine told Poldi there was never any snow in San Francisco, even in winter, and it would be green again soon enough.

As the train neared the end of its journey, Leopoldine told Poldi that they would soon be arriving in San Francisco where Gus Tham would meet them and take them home. "Poldi, I am your mother and my husband, Gus Tham, is your stepfather. You must call us Ma and Pa. I do not want to hear any more about Mama and Papa Eckharter. That part of your life is over now. They were never your real mama and papa and you must forget about that time in your life."

Poldi sat stiffly and nodded her head, and said nothing. But she thought to herself that she would never forget that time in her life. She would make herself remember that there was a beautiful place called Schiltern in Austria, where she lived when she was a child. There she was loved, the land was beautiful and food was plentiful. There she could always find loving arms for comfort. Someday she would go back and find that beautiful place again. She would find the Eckarters and put her arms around them once again and thank them for their kindness to her. She would find her teacher and tell her she did not run away. She would find the parish priest and pay him what Leopoldine owed. She would tell them all she did not run away – she would never have run away from them. She had been stolen!



Ma in her twenties
Leopoldine Moser Tham



Ma as a teenager



Ma's mother and Poldi's
Grandmother Charlotte
Fastenbauer Moser

Lee Moser Tham Huneke
About 18 months



Lee Moser Tham Huneke
Around six years old. (Presumed)





Schiltern as it was when we visited in summer 1979.

Connie and Marge at the door of what was the school where Poldi was when her mother took her away. It has now been changed into a post office building.



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Chapter 2
San Francisco, California
January 1916

The train finally ended its continental journey at the terminal in Oakland Leopoldine gathered Poldi and her bags and they moved toward a ferry boat. Leopoldine told her, "San Francisco is across the bay from Oakland where the train has ended its journey San Francisco is surrounded on three sides by water, on land that is called a peninsula. We will get on the ferry boat and after a short trip across the bay we will be in San Francisco. There my husband, Gustav Tham, will meet us and take us home." Poldi listened but said nothing. Leopoldine spoke to her in German, but most people around her now spoke English, a language she did not understand. For now, she had to depend on Leopoldine for any information about this new place. She felt helpless and alone.

The boat was full of travelers who had been on the train. There was an air of expectation and excitement among them as they approached a building with a tall tower and a clock. "That is the Ferry Building where all travelers must pass through" Now Leopoldine saw someone and she waved with one hand as she held Poldi with the other After more lines and crowds the two of them were swept into a large hallway As they walked toward the stairs, a tall, lean man with blond hair, and blue eyes approached them at a run. He embraced Leopoldine and then stepped back formally, clicked his heels together, made a small bow and offered his hand to Poldi. He was dressed in a gray suit, complete with a vest and a gold pocket watch on a braided leather chain. He held his fedora hat in his other hand as he continued to look at Poldi kindly She put out her hand timidly and allowed him to take it in his own "I am Gustav Tham. You must be Poldi. Welcome to San Francisco."

Once again, Poldi was overwhelmed by buildings and noise and people – so many people. The streets were bustling; the buildings were tall, though not so tall as in New York. The noise of clanging street cars, ferry boat whistles, and fog horns in the distance blended with the constant unnerving discordant sounds of words she couldn't understand. And there was a smell, an overpowering smell of coffee, which reminded her of so many sick days on the boat and on the train. Thus far she was not happy with San Francisco!

They took Poldi to a rented flat at 1575 Palou Avenue in the Bay View District. It was a workingman's neighborhood and a workingman's dwelling, but it was clean and provided a comfortable place for them to live. Gus and Leopoldine shared

the bedroom and there was another space for Poldi to sleep. She had few belongings, only those which Leopoldine had provided for her. She had no toys, no books, nothing that belonged to her. After the long journey she fell into a dreamless sleep. At last there was no motion. Her bed was not rocking. The house was quiet. And best of all – the air was fresh – there was no smell of coffee.

In the nearby area called Butchertown, Gus Tham worked as a butcher and sausage maker. The primary industries in Butchertown were slaughterhouses, sausage factories, tanneries and leather manufacturers. Though the overwhelming coffee smell from the roasteries on the waterfront, like Hills Brothers and Folgers Coffee, did not often waft towards the Bay View District, the smell from the tanneries and slaughterhouses in Butchertown did. Most days the onshore prevailing winds kept the Bay View District smelling sweet with fresh salt air. But when the wind occasionally changed to offshore, the fetid smells of Butchertown, the slaughterhouses and the tanneries, prevailed.

Palou Street was bustling with activity. It was broader than any of the streets in Schiltern and even most of the streets in Langenlois. It had many shops facing the street and they contained almost anything you would need. Above most of the shops were flats – places where people lived. In the shops below there were grocers, butchers, vegetable stands, tailors, hardware stores, cobblers, bakeries, barbers, pharmacies, doctors and dentists and even a savings and loan at Third and Palou. Poldi did not even need to know the words in English, she could see from the displays in the windows what kinds of things they sold in each shop. And so she began to learn English. One day Leopoldine took her to a neighborhood shop that sold inexpensive clothes. They purchased one extra dress and some underwear for Poldi.

She had only learned a few words of English when Leopoldine said “You must go to school now. I will take you there.” Bay View Grammar School was only a few blocks away from where they lived, so the two of them walked there together. They entered the building and went to the principal’s office. They were told to wait outside. They sat there for a long time before they were ushered into his office. He sat behind his desk and raised his eyebrows at them quizzically, saying nothing. Leopoldine explained that her daughter, Leopoldine Tham, who she called Poldi, was nine years old and had been in school in Austria, where she spoke only German. Now she must go to school here in America. The principal explained firmly that only English was taught in his school and in fact, he added archly, only English was *spoken* here! Anti-German sentiment was running high in America since Germany was currently at war with our friends the British. Those who spoke English with German accents were sometimes looked down upon with scorn. If you actually spoke German publicly, you were regarded with downright suspicion. Leopoldine spoke to him carefully, trying to conceal

her German accent, "I'm sure Poldi will learn English quickly if you will let her attend your school."

The Principal said nothing for several minutes. He made a bridge with his forefingers over his nose. He looked at the child and then back at Leopoldine. "How old did you say she was? Nine? I will see if we have a place in the third grade. Let me speak to the teacher. Sit outside here and wait for me to call you." Once again they waited. Leopoldine told Poldi what had been said. Poldi wrung her hands in her lap, with lowered eyes, and only dared to look up from time to time.

The Principal returned and said nothing except "Follow me." Obediently they hurried after him. He walked quickly down the hall, turned a corner, and when they turned the corner, they found him standing next to a door marked Room 3. He knocked on the door and opened it. He walked in and all the children stopped their activity and stood by their desks. "Sit down now", he told them. "Miss Perkins, I have brought you a new pupil. Her name is Poldi Tham, she is nine years old and she does not speak English. Her mother says she will learn very quickly." With that introduction, he turned on his heel and left the room.

There were titters around the room at hearing this newcomer's strange name – Poldi. Miss Perkins rapped the ruler on her desk. "Hush. All of you. Poldi, will you please take the last seat in the third row. There is an empty place for you there." Poldi stood looking at her, not moving, struggling to comprehend, but not understanding the words Miss Perkins spoke. Leopoldine then said to her in German, "Poldi, she says you must sit in the empty seat at the back of the third row." Miss Perkins held her head even higher than usual, looked down her nose at Leopoldine and said in haughty tones, "Do not speak German to her. We do not allow that filthy language to be spoken in this school."

By now all the children's faces were turned to the two women, sensing some kind of drama unfolding. Leopoldine hesitated, but only for a moment. She looked at Miss Perkins with disdain and said, "And you! If you couldn't speak English you'd have to bark like a dog!" At that the room exploded with hoots of laughter, while Miss Perkins, with reddened cheeks, tried to restore order. Somehow in the bedlam, Leopoldine left the room and Poldi sat in the empty seat, not understanding what had happened.

That night when Leopoldine told Poldi and Gus what she had said to Miss Perkins, Poldi understood why the children had shunned her in the play yard that day. Her first day of school was not promising, but she vowed to learn English as soon as she could. Gus shook his head sadly, "Leopoldine, you have to learn to watch what you say. You must not be so fresh. You must learn to be respectful of others." Leopoldine tossed her head. "You're always too much the gentleman, Gus. Careful of what you say. Worried about the way things look. Wondering

what others will think about you. This is America, not Austria and I will be my own person and say what I think! We will soon become landholders and then everyone will have to look up to us!" Poldi listened to them talk from her bed in the corner. During her childhood, it was an argument she would hear often, between Leopoldine and Gustav Tham, the people who were now her Ma and Pa.

Even though she was off to a bad start in her new school, Poldi learned English quickly. The children taunted her for being German, though she insisted over and over, "I'm not German! I'm Austrian! I'm from Vienna, a famous city in Austria." But to them it was all the same and they taunted her at recess.

"Kaiser, Kaiser went to France
Where he shit in his underpants"

At first she tried to ignore them, but finally she could take no more and she hit one of her tormentors in the mouth. The boy wiped the blood from his mouth and vowed he would get even. But, in truth, he was the worst bully and he left her alone after that. She made a few friends. The refined girls avoided her, but there were some girls and even a few boys who grudgingly admired her bravery with the class bully.

As Easter approached that first year in San Francisco, Ma told Poldi, "Now we must go to church to do our Easter duty. As Catholics we must receive Holy Communion at least once a year during the Easter Season." Poldi nodded as if she understood, but she didn't.

During the years in San Francisco Ma took Poldi to All Hallows Church for Christmas and Easter, but Ma was too busy and disinterested to take Poldi on most other Sundays. Sometimes she sent Poldi alone, but most children were there with their mothers and she felt alone and shy.

In Schiltern the Church and its obligations were such an integral part of Poldi's daily life with the Eckarter's that she didn't even think about it. After Christmas the next indulgence was Fasching, the pre Lenten carnival season. Festivities of all kinds went on until Fasching Dienstag (Mardi Gras) when the last party stopped precisely at midnight and Lent began. At home in Schiltern they had their own party and all the family wore home made costumes. Before the feasting on Fasching Dienstag, the family gathered and everyone shrieked with laughter at the variety of things used to make up costumes. There was music and some dancing until midnight when the clock struck at midnight in the middle of a Viennese waltz. The music stopped and they said a prayer together preparing for the holy season of Lent.

Poldi remembered attending Church on Ash Wednesday, the day after Fasching, when the priest rubbed ashes on her forehead at morning Mass. She felt like she was branded and the feeling was reinforced by all her friends bearing the same smudge until it wore off at the end of the day. Fasting continued during Lent, though the children under age seven were excused. Each one was expected to do a penance, some personal deprivation, each day. On Palm Sunday, one week before Easter, Poldi received a blessed palm from the priest at Mass. It was kept in her prayer book for one year, until the next Easter Church attendance during Holy Week, the Stations of the Cross and the three hours of silent prayer on Good Friday, as they remembered Christ's suffering on the cross before he died, were all part of the traditions in the Eckarter home. Of course there was no school during Holy Week so there was time for these activities. Spring cleaning of the entire house also occurred during Lent.

On Holy Saturday the final preparations for Easter began at noon. Eggs were hard boiled and Poldi helped dye and decorate them. She trimmed them with flowers, bits of fabric and whatever else she could find.

On Easter Sunday the entire village gathered in church for Easter Sunday Mass. Poldi remembered the new dress she wore and a new straw hat with a spring flower tucked in the band. The air vibrated with "Allelulia, Allelulia", and everyone sang his heart out. After Mass the tables at home overflowed with food. There was ham and baked Easter bread with raisins popping out and boiled eggs with salt. In the afternoon the children hunted for candy eggs in the garden where the Easter rabbit had visited.

Tears filled Poldi's eyes as she remembered all these things. She had not thought of them until Ma took her to All Hallows Church for confession on Holy Saturday and then suggested that they dye some Easter eggs in preparation for Easter Sunday. They went to All Hallows Church on Easter Sunday and though she had no new dress, Ma gave her a straw hat and they gathered some wildflowers from an empty piece of land in the neighborhood. Pa brought home a ham from Butchertown and Ma made Easter bread with raisins and they ate the colored eggs, dipping them in a little salt and pepper.

After Easter, the school year quickly came to an end. But Miss Perkins never forgave Poldi the embarrassment caused by Leopoldine that first day of school. Poldi had learned English quickly, and the hard way, but she was not a good reader, though she spoke without any German accent. Miss Perkins demanded that she read her lesson aloud again – and again – it was never quite good enough. She was good at numbers and the times tables and could have recited those perfectly, but Miss Perkins never allowed her that success. Somehow the school year came to a close and the children were all to pass on to the Fourth Grade – even Poldi. Miss Perkins was happy to see her go.

When Poldi finished the seventh grade Ma announced one night that the bank had approved the purchase of the chicken ranch in Sebastopol. The house and chicken coops were in disrepair and not habitable. Pa would continue to rent the flat on Palou Avenue while he worked at his job in Butchertown. Ma and Poldi would live at the ranch and raise chickens to sell eggs so they could make the payments to the Analy Bank for the chicken ranch. Someday they would own the ranch, be landholders and become rich. Ma was happy she had Poldi, who was becoming a big strong girl and would be a great help on the ranch.

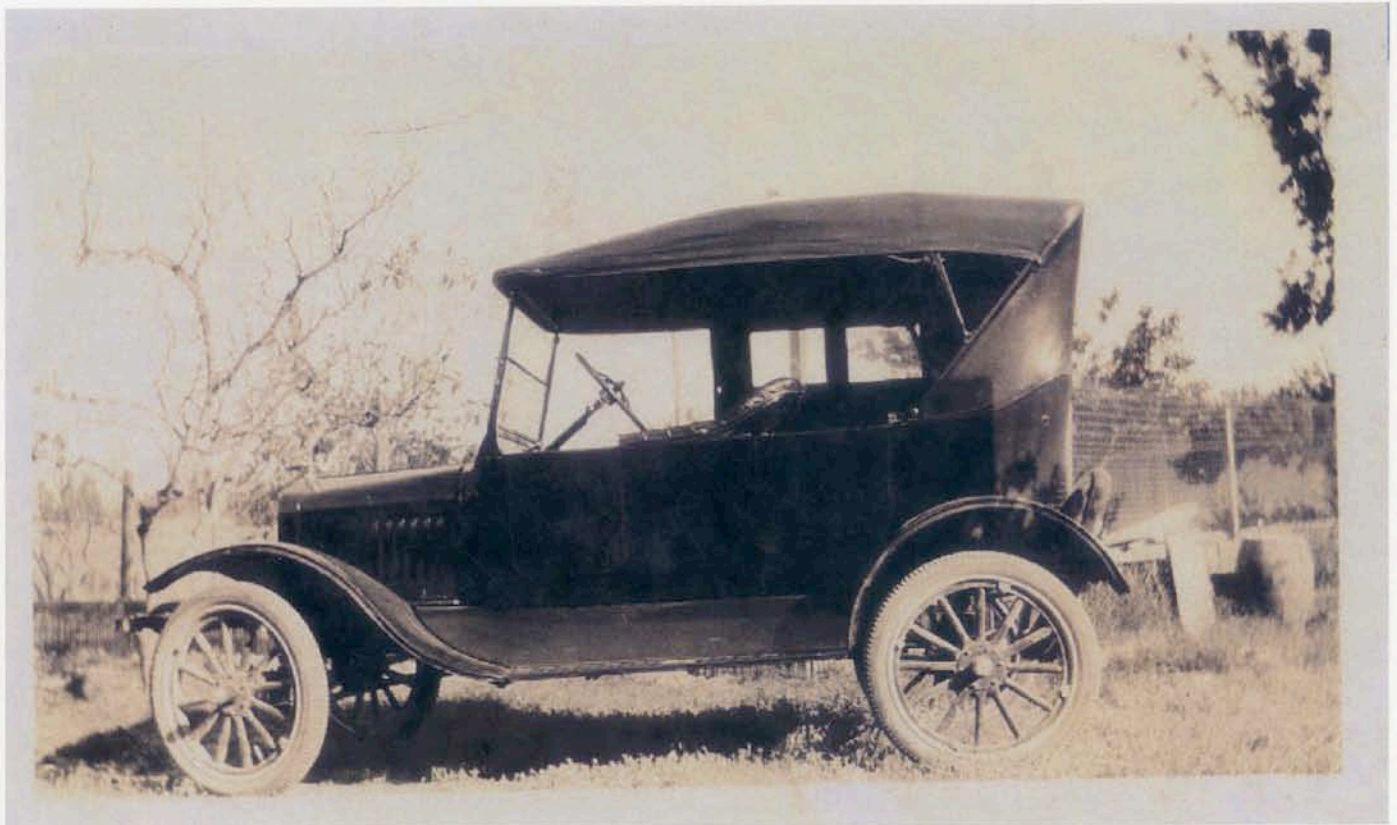


Above: Left: Gus Tham and his brother Julius Tham in San Francisco



Tham family Coat of Arms

Below: One of Ma and Pa's cars - about 1920 model.



MA, MOTHER AND ME

A BIOGRAPHY OF LEE THAM HUNEKE

Chapter 3 Sebastopol, California 1920

It was a beautiful day in the Bay View District when they packed their belongings and left for Sebastopol. Poldi had come to know all the shopkeepers, neighbors and even had school friends now, so she was sorry to leave. There was Dr Jerry Ferrari who kept his busy office nearby and the father of one of her classmates, Elwood Hansen, had started a new bank, called Bay View Bank. But Poldi had come to accept that Ma always got her way. On the appointed day the family left for Sebastopol. The loaded car was put on the ferry that crossed the great San Francisco Bay and then traveled up the El Camino past the old Mission San Rafael. Beyond that the country road led toward Petaluma, which already had a reputation as a great egg producing area, and then finally to the village of Sebastopol. The Analy Bank in the larger town of Santa Rosa had already contracted with Ma and Pa to run the egg ranch and pay them each month, until they accumulated enough money for the down payment.

They arrived at the ranch on Hessel Road and tried to settle in. From the beginning, the work so overwhelmed them, that each day ended in exhaustion and disappointment. But Ma and Poldi continued to work from early light until after dark. Gus came up each weekend to add his hands and back to the labor. By September they began to see some progress. The house was now habitable, but more important; one chicken coop was repaired and occupied by the first hundred laying hens that were now clucking happily as they each laid one egg a day. Poldi had to collect the eggs and Ma told her to watch to be sure each hen produced an egg each day. If a hen didn't produce she was to be slaughtered for meat. Poldi didn't like to see a hen slaughtered just because she couldn't lay her daily egg so she often cheated and covered up for a non-producing chicken. Sometimes a hen tried to hide her eggs and gather them into a nest and sit on them so she could hatch chicks instead of just producing eggs for the table. Ma tolerated this because it resulted in more chickens and more chickens meant more eggs.

If collecting eggs was Poldi's only chore it would have been easy, but the work was endless. The hens had to be fed and watered every day, the coops cleaned of their manure, the roof hosed with water during hot spells, heaters lighted during cold spells, sick chickens culled from the flock, chicken wings clipped so they wouldn't become wild and fly away. And always, eggs had to be collected each day, cleaned of dirt, candled for purity, sorted for size and set out in egg

boxes in the wheelbarrow. Then they were wheeled to the Hessel train stop, a short way down the road where they were taken to San Francisco to be sold through the co-operative. Each day the whole process was repeated.

Poldi was such a big help with the chickens that Ma decided they should get a cow and Poldi could learn to milk it. So they bought a milk cow from a neighbor and it was led to one of their pastures. A shed on the property was repaired to provide a makeshift barn. Ma didn't know how to milk the cow so the neighbor came over to teach Poldi how to milk. Each morning at dawn Poldi sat on the small three legged stool in the dark, resting her forehead against the warm belly of the cow. She warmed her hands under her armpits before touching the cow's teats and then started the slow rhythmic pulling first on one teat, then the next until all four had been milked into a pail on the ground under the cow's belly. Sometimes she was rewarded with a full pail of milk and the gentle lowing of the cow. Sometimes she was rebuked with a sharp kick of the hoof and a spilled pail of milk if she had not pleased the cow with her milking techniques. Then the only ones pleased were the barn cats who lapped up the milk quickly before it soaked into the dirt floor of the shed. Ma liked to keep cats around the ranch if they were good hunters, because she said they kept down the rats and mice that were always plentiful.

Ma was busy too. She planted a garden with beans, spinach, tomatoes, parsley, squash and potatoes. On weekends Pa came up to the ranch with meat from Butchertown. Food was plentiful, though they all worked hard for everything they got. But little by little, egg by egg and month by month, they accumulated the pennies, then the dollars to pay the Analy Bank in Santa Rosa for the ranch on Hessel Road in Sebastopol.

They had all worked so hard that Ma forgot that Poldi should go to school. Sebastopol Elementary School was at the end of Hessel Road and when Ma finally thought about taking Poldi there the other children had already started the new school year. Poldi now spoke fluent English like an American and in February, 1921 Ma told the school she was ready for eighth Grade. Poldi was accepted in the class and soon met the other children who lived on farms in the area. They all had to help at home, but none had to work as hard as Poldi.

Most days she was so tired from getting up before dawn to milk the cow and tend the chickens and working until after dark, she fell asleep at her desk. The teacher would rap her hands with a ruler to wake her up but she never had enough time to read books or keep up with her schoolwork, though she graduated from eighth grade with her class.

She made friends easily in the neighborhood and was a great favorite with her big smile and white teeth, beautiful skin and happy voice. By age fourteen she learned how to drive an old car. Soon she often told Ma "I'll drive. I'll take the

eggs to the Hessel train stop” She was a sturdy girl and worked as hard as many of the men. Sometimes her hands were cracked and bleeding with the cold and milking chores. The old farmers told her the old fashioned remedy “Your own pee is the best cure, Poldi. Try it! It’ll heal those cracks and sores on your hands in no time.” So she did .and it worked!

When Poldi was fourteen, Pa’s brother, Julius Tham and his wife Harriet, and their four children moved to San Francisco from San Diego. Julius was one of Gus’s three brothers and he had been trained as a brewer in Pressburg, now Bratislava, Czechoslovakia. Their eldest daughter, Elsie, was just six months younger than Poldi, with Florence, Margaret and Jules spaced behind her. They stayed with Gus, Leopoldine and Poldi in San Francisco for a short time after arriving in the Bay area from San Diego. They rented a house at 1447 Thomas Street, just five blocks from the flat on Palou Avenue. Gus saw a lot of them during the week when he lived and worked in San Francisco and Leopoldine and Poldi were in Sebastopol.

Often Julius’ whole family came up to Sebastopol on weekends in the summer to help work on the chicken ranch. They loaded the family onto one streetcar, then another, then the ferry and finally the train to the Hessel train stop. They walked to the ranch where they all enjoyed the time together. The children slept on the porch on old mattresses. Gus, Julius and Leopoldine laughed and told stories of the old country in German. Harriet, Julius’ wife, only spoke English so she didn’t appreciate being left out of the jokes. But Leopoldine made up for it by cooking her Austrian specialties of Wiener schnitzel with spaetzle drizzled with melted sweet butter and fresh chopped parsley from the garden, or liver dumplings in chicken broth and fresh spinach from her garden pureed with a fresh cream sauce. But the best was apple strudel when the Gravensteins were ripe. Leopoldine rolled the dough so thin, on a clean cheesecloth, that you could see through it. Then she layered the dough with sliced fresh apples, raisins, cinnamon and bits of sweet butter. She used a cloth to lift and roll the thin dough and the fruit mixture into a long log shape and then pulled it into a big “U” before she slid it onto a pan and placed it in the oven. The end result was delectable and the adults sat in the kitchen with their coffee cups long after the children were asleep.

Poldi was always more daring than Julius and Harriet’s children. She tried to persuade them to join her in risky escapades, but they looked timidly to their mother who usually shook her head “No”. One hot summer day Poldi asked Ma if they could all walk to the Russian River. Ma was eager to get them all out of the house, though she wasn’t sure where Poldi was going to take them. Harriet said “No” as usual but this time Poldi prevailed and all three of the girls were allowed to go with her. Only the baby, Jules, stayed behind.

Leopoldine packed up a lunch for them to carry and they all headed off down Hessel Road. The day was hot and they had walked for a long time when Elsie asked plaintively, "Where are we going Poldi? Do you know where we're going? It's too hot to walk so far." Poldi waved her off with a flick of her hand, but when a truck came by later, she waved the driver down and they all climbed in the back for a welcome ride. She seemed to know everyone and had a wave and a big smile for everyone they met. Eventually Poldi banged on the back window of the truck and they stopped to let the four girls out. They walked into a field and soon climbed down a steep embankment. Sure enough, at the bottom, was a small creek, surely not the Russian River, because it was much too small. But Poldi insisted that it was at least a stream that was going into the Russian River. They took off their shoes and socks and got their feet wet in the River, but none of them wanted to go in any deeper since they couldn't swim. They rested in the shade and ate the food Leopoldine had packed for them. As the sun lowered they climbed up the steep bank, crossed the field to the road and started the long walk home. The sun was low in the sky when they finally got back to the ranch. Harriet was very upset that they had been gone all day, but Leopoldine was unconcerned. They were back home now, so why worry?

Because Poldi spent so many hours working and so few hours at school, she had few school friends. She was changing into a husky, well developed young woman, but Ma hardly noticed. As long as she did her work on the ranch, Leopoldine had few words for her. But others did notice her. Poldi was beginning to attract the attention of young men in the neighborhood. She enjoyed their attention, because it was almost the only time anyone spoke nicely to her. When Ma scolded her now, instead of silently walking away, she stood her ground and said, "Ma, I don't even believe you're my real mother. A real mother wouldn't treat me like you do." "Hold your tongue!" Leopoldine said harshly and usually accompanied that with a quick slap to Poldi's mouth with the back of her hand. At first Poldi cringed, but as the punishments continued, she became more defiant, now even daring to mouth the words "I hate you! You're not my real mother!"

Poldi's defiance was getting out of hand, so Leopoldine finally decided to do something. She enrolled Poldi in a Catholic High School even if it would cost some hard earned dollars they so carefully saved. Ursuline High School was in Santa Rosa. The Ursuline Sisters had a good reputation and even had accommodations for Poldi to board there during the week. Leopoldine brought Poldi there to meet the Sisters. Poldi was quiet during the meeting, wondering what would come of this. The Sisters said they would evaluate Poldi's work at Sebastopol Elementary School and would let Leopoldine know if she would be accepted. They accepted her conditionally and she attended for a short time before they told her she was not accepted at Ursuline. Late in the Fall of 1921 she entered Anny Union High School in Sebastopol.

The work at the chicken ranch continued, but Poldi found many opportunities to leave the ranch alone. She met a quiet young man in the neighborhood who was very kind to her. He was soft spoken and gentle and was never harsh with her like Ma. He worked on a neighboring farm and had saved almost enough money to buy an old used car. He and Poldi became friends and she found many opportunities to slip away to see him. His name was George Antonovich and his family was Slovenian. They had many relatives in the Santa Rosa area, but his parents were poor and his father was a farm laborer.

Poldi told George about her early years in Austria. She told him how much she hated Ma and that she didn't even think she was her real mother. George was sympathetic. Before long they planned how they would go away together, when he saved more money. They talked of getting married and getting away from Sebastopol. Poldi was happy thinking she had found a way to get away from Ma and the ranch where she worked so hard. But before they could make any more plans, Poldi realized she was pregnant. She was not yet sixteen years old and she was scared. She didn't know what to do about it. Could she get rid of it? But then she'd have to tell Ma. She didn't know any other women she could talk to. She felt sick each morning but it was easy to hide that from Ma because she left the house so early. The cow was her confidante as she leaned her forehead against the big brown belly and moaned "Oh cow, I'm so sick – I'm so sick"

As the weeks went by she was less nauseous in the morning but so very tired at the end of the day. She still worked all day, but sometimes she felt as if she could hardly lift her feet to walk to the house at night. As the weeks turned into months her belly began to swell but Ma didn't notice because Poldi wore loose clothes that concealed it. George was trying to save his money, but it was hard to scrape together enough extra to amount to anything. He had to pay his parents each week because he lived with them and they needed money too.

Finally in spring as the weather turned warm, Poldi could no longer conceal her condition. Ma looked at her in disbelief! She put her hand on Poldi's belly and then said in anger "Who's the father?" When Poldi told her, she was disgusted. "He has nothing! Nothing! Not a pot to pee in, not a window to throw it out of! How could you be so stupid to go with someone who has nothing? And you get yourself pregnant on top of it. We could have gotten rid of it if you told me in time" Poldi was still defiant. "We don't need anything from you. We're going to go away together after the baby is born. I just need to stay here until the baby is born and then I'm going away with the baby and George and we'll never come back!"

Gus was kinder to Poldi when he found out. He put his arm around her shoulders and shook his head sadly "Poldi, Poldi. we will work out something" He didn't know what else to say. Ma ruled the roost in their family and he provided the paycheck. He could only wait and see what would happen

But Ma's mind worked quickly. She would not let this child go. Once Poldi had this child she would not have enough time to do the work at the ranch. Leopoldine knew that without Poldi, she couldn't do it alone. She needed another pair of hands to work the ranch and to help care for the baby. She had cousins in Austria. Leopoldine was an only child but her mother Charlotte, had a cousin. Their maiden names were both Fastenbauer, but though Leopoldine's mother Charlotte married a good man named Moser, her cousin had married beneath herself. His name was Michael Haider. He turned out to be an alcoholic, underemployed, but good at breeding children. They had five children and little else, not even a job sufficient to care for them. Leopoldine was told they lived in a shack and did not have enough to eat. Leopoldine was sure her cousin would be happy to get rid of a mouth to feed.

As the time approached for the baby's birth, Ma found a woman who could help with the birth. The baby had to be born at home because they couldn't afford a hospital or a doctor. On May 30, 1923, when Poldi was sixteen years old her son was delivered. It was a very hard birth and she labored for many hours before the child was born in the bedroom of the ranch house on Hessel Road. He was a healthy boy and she named him Michael Rudolph Antonovich, after George's father Majid, and Gus Tham's favorite brother Rudy, back home in Austria.

George Antonovich came to see Poldi and his son. Leopoldine only allowed him a little time alone with Poldi and the child because she was afraid he might try to take them away. Poldi felt exhausted after the birth and was having trouble nursing the child. The baby wailed for milk but when she held him to her breast to suckle, he struggled unsuccessfully to drain her breasts. Within a few days, Poldi's breasts were engorged with milk which soured and then became infected. Now a doctor had to be called and he declared that she had developed a condition called Milk Fever. Nothing could be done except to stop nursing the child, apply ice as often and for as long as possible to cool the fever and bind her breasts tightly until the condition improved. The pain was excruciating and Poldi suffered for many days until the fever in her breasts subsided.

By then the baby had become accustomed to the cow's milk he drank from a bottle and thrived. Leopoldine's maternal instinct flowered at last. She cuddled and snuggled the infant as she fed him his bottle several times each day and night. Here was the baby – she knew now – she had longed for. This was *her* baby! She and Pa would raise this boy to be *their* son! Poldi could do whatever she wanted, but *this* was the boy she had longed for.

In a while Poldi regained her strength. Her breasts, though no longer engorged nor feverish, were enlarged and remained so. George tried to see her and the baby often, but Leopoldine made it clear that she did not want George to come around the house.

All she needed was his name on the infant's birth certificate and she already had that. And she didn't need him to get a marriage certificate for Poldi either. She had friends in San Francisco who told her they would take care of everything. All you needed was enough money in the right place and you could have any kind of papers you wanted.

Poldi continued to see George and they made their plans to take the baby and go away. There was only one thing holding them back. They didn't have enough money. George was a good man. He worked hard on farms in the area, and he worked in a bakery when a job was available. He still helped his parents and his sister as much as he could, but he had little for himself, though he was already twenty-five years old. But Poldi, only sixteen, was a strong woman already. They were both good workers. He knew he could make it with her, once they got away from Leopoldine and the chicken ranch.

One day he and Poldi planned to just take the baby and leave. He arrived and walked up to the porch. Gus and Leopoldine came out to see who was there. Poldi took the baby in her arms. She told Gus and Leopoldine that she and George were leaving with the baby. Leopoldine sprang up and snatched the baby from Poldi's arms. Poldi said to George, "Come help me. We're going to take the baby and leave now!" George looked dubious but approached the porch where he joined Poldi in trying to pull the baby out of Leopoldine's arms. Gus stood there looking agitated, but Leopoldine pulled the baby away and thrust him into Gus's arms, then ran into the house and came back with a shotgun. She stood on the porch and leveled it at George. "Get off this property! Get out of here and don't ever come back!"

George backed away, scared of this wild woman who looked as if she meant to follow her words with action! He loved Poldi. He wanted to go away with her and his child. But Leopoldine looked like a mad woman. She looked like she wouldn't hesitate to take a shot at him with her gun. "Poldi, maybe we should go away together and come back later." Ma stood her ground with her gun and the baby safely on her side of the porch. Poldi looked at George sadly. He didn't have the courage to stand up to her mother. He was afraid of her and backed away from the house. He tried again, "Come on Poldi. Come with me. We'll get the baby later." But Poldi stayed on the porch, head hung low. As George walked away, Leopoldine shouted "And don't come back. I don't want to see you around here again." And she didn't. That was the last Ma ever saw of George Antonovich.

Years later, Rudy, by then a grown man, looked up his father in New York. George had never married and had lived there all those years with his sister. Rudy told me later, "It was just like meeting any other stranger. We had a nice dinner together. He asked about my family. He told me about his life. He said his sister was very demanding of his time. That was it." But it meant something.

to George Antonovich. When he died a few years later he left a \$5,000 insurance policy to Rudy, his only child. Everything else went to his sister. Rudy told me, "He probably kept the insurance policy with his name on it a secret from her or she would never have allowed it."

Ma went to Santa Rosa to get a birth certificate. Somehow that had to be arranged. The baby had to have a birth certificate with the father's name on it. Otherwise he would be called a bastard! She went to her friend in the county building in Santa Rosa and she made sure the child's birth certificate named the father and declared Poldi to be eighteen, though she was only sixteen, when her son was delivered. Then she found someone in San Francisco who was willing to prepare an official marriage license for the right amount of money in the right place. The resulting document declared Poldi to be eighteen and George to be twenty-five, a more acceptable age difference than reality. The "marriage date" was September 6, 1923, but it was written so illegibly that it looked like 1922. In either case, a marriage late was better than no marriage at all. It was not that uncommon. And a date misunderstood by someone in a hurry was better yet. When Poldi saw the papers she smiled wryly. September 6 – what a nice birthday gift for her.

Now Leopoldine had to get another pair of hands to help – and fast. She arranged a quick trip to Austria to visit her cousin, Serafine Haider. She found her in Leobersdorf, a village in Austria, in a house just as humble as had been described. The father, Michael, was nowhere to be seen, but Serafine, looking disheveled, greeted Leopoldine at the door. "Leopoldine, I am happy to see you. I understand you want to take one of my girls to America with you. Come inside and let's talk about it." Leopoldine stooped her head under the low doorframe. Inside, the house was dark and dingy. Several children lurked in dark corners. Her cousin pointed out three girls: Lotte, Maria and Serafine, along with a boy named Richard. Lotte and Maria seemed healthy, but disinterested in the visitor. The mother said "Richard is too young to leave. He must stay here with me. Angela, the eldest, was farmed out to a household to work. But the daughter named Serafine, who was sixteen and called Fini, would be a good candidate to take to America. Fini cringed in a corner by the fireplace; scrawny, with wild red hair and skin so white it appeared translucent. She hugged herself with skinny arms and turned her homely face away from Leopoldine.

Leopoldine walked closer to get a better look. This one did not look like she would be able to work on a ranch and take care of the baby and do all the other things Leopoldine would require. "I don't know. I don't think she looks healthy. I need someone strong to work." The mother took Leopoldine aside and said to her quietly. "She knows how to make good whiskey. She has made it many times here. She's good at it too. She has the recipe in her head."

This made Leopoldine pause for thought. The Prohibition Act had been passed in America in 1920, after the end of World War I. By 1923 men found a way to get drinks if they wanted. If you knew how to make whiskey, you'd always have it available for your own use. But, if you knew how to make *good* whiskey, now that was a different story. If you could make *good* whiskey, you'd have no trouble selling it and making money. *Lots of money*. Now that greatly interested Leopoldine.

The two women came to an agreement. Leopoldine would pay for Fini's passage to San Francisco and to the ranch in Sebastopol. Fini would work on the ranch and take care of the baby. And then... Well who knew what would happen then? Leopoldine's head was full of ideas about using Fini's special talent which would not be appreciated on a chicken ranch in Sebastopol. Fini hugged her sisters and her brother Richard and finally, her mother. She left with Leopoldine hoping that her life would be improved, but not at all sure.

This time the passage home was uneventful, but entry into America through Ellis Island was required. Immigrants still feared that they might come this far and then be turned away from America for unknown reasons. Leopoldine expected an easy re-entry for herself and assumed that Fini, as her cousin, would pass through as easily as Poldi did six years ago. But that did not happen.

Doctors looked at Fini and pulled her out of the line for further examination. After what seemed like hours, Leopoldine was informed that Fini would not be allowed entry to America because she had rickets, a bone condition associated with malnutrition in children during their formative years. Leopoldine and Fini both lied and assured the immigration doctors it was arthritis from working in the fields, not malnutrition during childhood and that Fini was capable of hard work and would not become a burden to this country. Fini was ashamed to be diagnosed with a condition associated only with poor people who were ill fed as children. Leopoldine was always prepared to do what was necessary to persuade the officials to believe that Fini was healthy. Money passed from her to immigration officials, couched in warm handshakes and finally Fini was admitted.

They continued their journey on a long overland train trip. Finally the ferry from Oakland arrived at San Francisco, where Pa met them. He greeted Ma and Fini warmly, but looked sideways at Ma as if to say "Is this really who you meant to bring home with you?" They proceeded to the chicken ranch in Sebastopol and Poldi greeted Fini more warmly than she did Ma. The baby had gotten big during the weeks Ma was gone and Ma hugged him close to her. She wasted little time in putting Fini to work. Soon Fini helped Poldi with the chickens and with the baby.

Meanwhile Ma was busy at another task. She hardly had time to talk to Pa about it, but she was sure he would agree. He had to agree when she told him her

plan They would sell the chicken ranch and with the money they made they would buy a house in San Francisco. She told him about Fini's special talent for making good whiskey And Leopoldine was a good cook. She knew that when the ships were in San Francisco, the seamen were in port with lots of money in their pockets. They looked for a place to get a good home cooked meal, a good bottle of whiskey and a comfortable place to play cards and visit with friends for an evening. With Prohibition, the local hotels and restaurants could not legally provide whiskey, so small "speakeasies" opened all over Ma was going to have a kind of "speakeasy" in her home with Fini's whiskey and Ma's good Austrian cooking

After buying a house she would use the extra money from the sale of the ranch to buy furniture, linen, china, crystal and silverware and set a fine table in San Francisco. The seamen would spend freely once they tasted Fini's excellent whiskey and her good cooking and she and Pa would become rich! She had it all planned in her head Pa said little, but nodded his head It was a good thing that he agreed though, Leopoldine had already told the Bank to find a buyer for the chicken ranch



Above and right: Ma in Sebastopol with infant Rudy born May 30, 1923.



Below: Ma and Pa in Sebastopol with baby Rudy before they moved back to San Francisco.





Poldi above with unknown older couple. 1923

Poldi left with chickens in Sebastopol. 1923

Poldi with dog and car



MA, MOTHER AND ME

A MEMOIR

Chapter 4 Back To San Francisco 1924

By December 1923 Ma and Pa had sold the ranch, bought a two bedroom house at 1435 Newcomb Avenue in the Bay View District and moved into it. On the ground floor it had a one car garage and a basement work area behind. In back of the house was a good sized back yard with sandy soil where Ma would plant vegetables for the table. Upstairs was the front room next to a dining room. Here is where they could entertain seamen who would pay well for excellent food, Fini's good whiskey, and a comfortable place to play cards and visit with friends.

The kitchen was modern with a large stove and an ice box. She bought a Chesterfield set with sofa and chair for the front room. For the adjacent dining room, there was a large, handsome table, eight chairs and a credenza, where she displayed her fine china and eight place settings of silver ordered from Shreve's, San Francisco's finest jeweler. She bought the best linens for the table, which Fini would wash and iron after each use.

Ma had plans for Poldi too. She wanted Poldi to have a better life. Nursing was a good profession – a respected profession. Poldi could learn to be a nurse at one of San Francisco's fine hospitals. It only took two years of practical training in the hospital and during that time she would work with patients right away. Poldi could live free at the hospital. In two years she would become a nurse and make good money and that was very important. But what was even better, she might meet a patient with money, or, marry a doctor. The opportunities were endless in Ma's mind.

Leopoldine took Poldi to the French Hospital, which had a good nurse's training program. She was conditionally accepted into the Practical Nurses School and was shown to a bed in the nurse's dormitory next door to the hospital. Leopoldine left, sure that Poldi was on the right track. Poldi looked around her as she listened to the rules being recited to her. She could have no visitors; doors were locked at eight o'clock in the evening unless you were on duty working at the hospital, when you were escorted to and from the hospital. You had to wear starched white uniforms at all times; low white shoes and stockings, hair pulled back and in a net, to contain it; no makeup, no jewelry and certainly, no boyfriends. Ever. Poldi was dubious about this lifestyle. But she decided she would see what the job was like.

The next morning, after a spare but adequate communal breakfast, the new students were taken to the hospital as a group. Poldi was assigned to one of the wards and there the head nurse explained her duties. Each day when she arrived for her ten hour shift, which would change each week, she would report to the nurse in charge to find out which patients she would be responsible for. She would empty bedpans for each patient in each of those rooms. She had enough patients to care for, that by the time she emptied bedpans for them, it was time to start with the first ones again. Poldi was bored after one day. By the end of the week she was fed up with nurses, hospitals and bedpans. She packed her few belongings and left, never to return to the hospital or the nurse's dormitory.

When she arrived back at 1435 Newcomb Street Ma demanded, "What are you doing here? Why aren't you at the hospital?" "I quit. I left" Poldi answered defiantly, looking at Ma and daring her to say more. "Bedpans! Bedpans! That's all they know there is bedpans! I don't ever want to see another bedpan in my whole life. Don't ever talk to me again about being a nurse because I won't do it. Ma, you always have these ideas for me to do, but you don't do those things yourself. I'm not going to listen to you anymore. I'm leaving and I'm not coming back".

Poldi could not forgive Ma for driving off George. She was angry and hurt that he did not stand up to her. But mostly she blamed Ma. She was no longer willing to work without question and obey Ma's commands. Further, she didn't think all of Ma's ideas were good. Poldi loved the baby but Ma made sure the baby did not spend too much time with Poldi. Ma wanted this baby to be hers and she made sure it worked out that way. Ma thought Poldi would change her mind, but the next day, without warning, Poldi took off with a small bag. They did not hear from her for a couple of years.

By the time Poldi returned unexpectedly, the baby, now a toddler called Rudy, screamed when she picked him up. He didn't know her. He cried to go to his Ma. "Where have you been Poldi? With Rudy's no good father?" "No, Ma. I haven't been with him. You drove him away for good. But I've been around the country Ma. I've been in Chicago – and Cleveland – lots of places. I've gotten good jobs Ma. I've taken care of myself." "I even brought some presents for the baby – for Rudy." Pa was happy to see her. "Stay home now Poldi. Stay with us", he said.

Poldi and Fini giggled and shared stories behind Ma's back. Fini told Poldi how she made good whiskey and the word got around. Now Ma cooked Viennese meals and served whiskey for the seamen who visited every weekend and sometimes during the week. They were willing to pay good money to be in a real home, eat good food, drink whiskey, play cards and even play with Rudy sometimes, to substitute for families back home. "Poldi, don't leave again. Stay

here," Fini pleaded. She spoke with an Austrian accent and when she said Poldi it sounded like "Boidy." She liked Poldi and thought she was brave. She even hoped Leopoldine might treat her better if Poldi was there to watch out for her.

"Does she pay you?" Poldi asked. Fini shook her head no, but went on quickly, "But it's all right Poldi, I have a place to sleep and food to eat. I don't need much. And sometimes the seamen put some extra money in my pocket, just for me, and I don't tell Ma. I have a little bit saved now. I don't spend much on myself but last month I took ninety-nine cents to buy a new blouse for myself. When Ma saw it she lost her temper. She yelled at me. She said that any extra money had to be saved for the church. Poldi we don't even go to church except at Christmas and Easter. I don't know what she was talking about. She didn't hit me that time Poldi, but she said all my money had to be given to her and she would let me know when I could buy something."

Poldi was not inclined to stay, even with Fini's pleadings, until Pa came home from work the next day and told them about jobs on the assembly line at the C&H Sugar factory that just opened in the Bay View District. Fini was timid but Poldi said "Let's go get jobs."

Within a day they were both working on the assembly line. There were many women on each side of a long table, each one wrapped in clean white smocks and gloves, with nets covering their hair. Machinery above them extended the length of the table. In the center, the sugar flowed through. Each woman took a cotton sugar bag, held it below a funnel, where sugar filled the bag to a precise amount. Then they sewed the bag shut and put it back on the line, where it continued its journey to the consumer. They were absorbed in the rhythm of the machines and worked hard on the assembly line until the whistle blew for a thirty minute lunch break. They laughed and talked with the other women, some of them single, most of them living with family, or husband or in a women's boarding house. Most of them had not finished high school. Most of them were poor, but not hungry. They were all eager for whatever money they could put in their pockets.

Poldi and Fini sat near each other on the assembly line and sometimes Poldi helped Fini because she could not keep up the work for such long hours without a rest. Then the foreman made an announcement after the next whistle. "The line's moving too slow! We got the word from the boss – we got to speed it up! We got to make our quota each day. The machines are going to move the sugar faster when they start up again. And you got to keep up or you're going to lose your jobs!"

With this threat the machinery started again. Poldi and Fini sewed each bag as fast as they could. After an hour Fini had tears in her eyes. "I can't do it. I can't do it any more Poldi. My arms are hurting, my back hurts. I'm going to spill the

sugar if I try to go this fast any more. Poldi, who was tired herself, said, "So go ahead, spill the sugar!" The other women, who were working feverishly, watched and nodded, agreeing with Poldi. "If none of us can keep it up, then we'll all just spill the sugar. Too bad if they don't make their quota. Who made up their quota anyway? Nobody asked *us* what the quota should be!" Soon there were spilled sugar bags all along the line.

The foreman walked down the line, scowling at the offenders, shouting that they would lose their jobs if they couldn't keep up the pace. But Poldi stood up to him. "Nobody asked us how fast we can work. Nobody can go this fast! You can't fire all of us. If you do, then you won't make any quota at all. Slow down the line!" The foreman was furious. He approached Poldi. "What's your name?" "Leopoldine. Leopoldine Tham" "Come with me," he barked as he turned and walked to the back of the room. There the stairs led to an office with a window looking out over the assembly room. Poldi followed him, thinking to herself that she would be fired, so she might as well quit now! But she decided to wait to see what happened.

When they reached the top of the stairs, the foreman told her to sit on one of the wooden chairs and wait until he returned. He went into an office and she heard voices but could not hear what they were saying. After a while, she thought they were taking a long time to decide to fire her.

Eventually the foreman came out and said more kindly, "Leopoldine, come in here." She walked into the office where two other men smoking cigars sat at desks. One of them said, "Leopoldine? Leopoldine Tham is your name?" She nodded. His voice was smooth as he said, "I'm going to call you Lee. That suits you better. We understand that you're a good worker and keep up the pace. We think that the other women listen to you. They do what you tell them. We think you should be moved to a better job, Lee. What do you think of that?" Poldi said nothing but waited to hear what he would say. "We're going to move you to a different part of the room and you're going to be a line supervisor for twenty women. You'll make sure they keep up the pace. You'll let the foreman know when someone is lagging. And, of course, you'll get more pay," he said smiling broadly, making sure she understood the last bit.

Poldi went along with this reluctantly and was soon in her new job, but with little enthusiasm. She did all she could to help the women and keep the pace as slow as humanely possible, but it was a constant struggle between the foreman and the women, with Poldi acting as referee.

They were tired each night but they were earning money. By the time they returned home Ma needed help in the kitchen to feed the seamen who arrived to eat and drink. Fini had to produce whiskey in the basement. Pa kept working as a butcher and they were putting money aside every week to buy a sausage.

factory Ma had made up her mind that the only way to get rich was to have your own business – a real business – not just selling food and whiskey to seamen in your house. Pa was a good sausage maker and it was time that his talents reaped rewards.

Many evenings when they had no guests, they sat around the table in the kitchen while Ma pattered in the kitchen. The table and two wooden benches were built into an alcove painted white, with a light fixture hanging above on a lowered ceiling. Pa would light a cigarette and place it in a slender black cigarette holder before bringing it to his lips. Ma would fix a pot of coffee. The dogs were not allowed to come into the house, but the cats jumped up onto the table and settled down for an evening of conversation.

Sometimes Ma and Pa would talk about Austria. Then Poldi would ask Ma again, "Are you really my mother?" Leopoldine had answered this more than once and did not like to be questioned about it, but did repeat the oft told saga. "I was an only child, born March 2, 1887 in Vienna, Austria. My father was Leopold Moser and my mother was Charlotte Fastenbauer. He was in the lumber business in the Zieletaal area and we lived comfortably in the Leobersdorf area. My mother and Fini's mother were cousins and my grandmother loved them both. She was a very proud woman. You look like her Poldi"

With this she would get her elegant wooden inlaid jewelry box and carry it to the table. Inside there was a music box and many velvet lined compartments. In one there were pictures of her mother and herself as a girl and then as a young woman. In another were silver thimbles and a carved ivory edelweiss flower.

"Your father and I were cousins – his name was Michael Moser and he was seven years older than me. After we married we lived in Neustift am Wald, 18 Bezirk, a district of Vienna, and that's where you were born on September 6, 1906. Your father was a dentist, but when you were a baby he died of influenza. I was only twenty-one years old. I knew I had to earn money to support us and I couldn't take care of you, so I took you to the priest. Here is a picture of you, Poldi. I had it taken before I left you." Poldi looked at the picture of herself as a baby. "How did you know what I looked like when you came to get me eight years later?" Leopoldine laughed. "I wrote the priest and asked for a picture of you. This is what he sent me." Poldi looked at a stylized portrait of an angelic child. It didn't look like her. Were they playing a joke? Leopoldine said, "I didn't know if you looked like that, but I decided to go find you anyway. When I saw you in that classroom in Schiltern, I knew you were my child." Leopoldine continued her story.

"I was offered a fine position as a lady's maid in America and I had to take the opportunity. I arrived at Ellis Island from Vienna on the SS Cincinnati on July 11, 1909." I came to San Francisco and got a job with a fine wealthy Jewish family.

named Magnin. The father of the family was named Josef and he had a brother named Isidor. They were well known women's clothiers in San Francisco. Mrs. Magnin hired me as her personal seamstress. She hired me in San Francisco for five dollars a week. She took me to Paris where she stayed for several months.

Once we were in Paris, she paid me five *francs* a week, which was worth less money. I told her she had agreed to pay me five *dollars* a week and she owed me more money. She said 'When in Paris we will pay in francs, not dollars.' So I went to the American Consulate and complained. The Consul spoke to Mrs. Magnin and told her she had to pay me in dollars as agreed." At this part of the story Poldi and Fini always shouted with laughter and the cats ruffled their fur at the disturbance. Pa continued to puff his cigarette, but he rolled his eyes and sometimes said, "Ma, Ma I always tell you – you are too fresh. You always have to make trouble instead of being polite."

Ma would grin at all of them as she continued. "I returned to San Francisco on October 11, 1910, on the SS Kronprinzessin Cecile from Cherbourg, France. After that I met and married Robert Schieve on January 18, 1912 and we were married for a year before we decided to go our separate ways. And then I met Gustav Tham." She grinned at him, "We were married July 11, 1914 in San Jose. And you know the rest, Poldi."

Gus was much more reserved in telling about his family, but he was proud of his heritage. He said the Thams were burghers in Pressburg (now Bratislava, Slovakia). "My father had a butcher shop. My mother's family had vineyards. My eldest brother Karl is a restaurateur, my brother Lyos is a jeweler; Rudolph, a skilled ironworker; Julius a master brewer and myself a butcher. Our only sister Paula is a housewife. All of us work hard at jobs that take skill. Julius, here in San Francisco, has three daughters and one son as you know. They live here in the Bayview. My brother Karl in Pressburg has three children. Sadly, Karl's wife Anna died in childbirth with his third child, a son named Karl also, who survived. My brother is a busy restaurateur and could not raise three small children, so my sister, Paula Tham Schevela and her husband Robert Schevela, who were childless, raised his daughters Paula (Bauchie) and Karolina (Linchie) and his son Karl as their own. And my brother Rudolph and his wife Rosa have one daughter Wilma. My family is very proud of their history. We have records going back to the Crusades and a Coat of Arms dating back to the year 1293."

Then Fini would tell about her family and Leopoldine filled in with more tales of her mother and grandmother. They laughed and cried as they remembered the old country and their families. Rudy was growing up and sometimes played with his toys on the kitchen floor as he listened to them. The stories were part of his childhood, as he grew up with Ma and Pa in the house on Newcomb Avenue, in the Bayview District of San Francisco.

Other nights the seamen would visit for dinner, whiskey and cards. When they tired of playing cards, sometimes one of them would say, "Leopoldine, why don't you throw the bones for us tonight?" Then she'd go to the side drawer and get the brown alligator leather box, about the size of the palm of her hand. "Who's first?" she'd ask. One of them would come forward. Mostly they wanted to hear their fortune in private, but sometimes they all stood around as she opened the container, shook the bones and threw them on the table. Then she'd take her glasses off, lean forward and stare intently at the little ivory carvings which had landed randomly on the table. There were six miniature carvings. "Let's see what the bones say tonight", she'd start, as they all stared intently. If the man landed near the devil, trouble was brewing. But if the man landed near the Buddha, fate was different. The bird and the kangaroo with a little roo in the pouch could be good signs, unless the devil was too close. "It looks like you might be in for some good news. Maybe some money's coming your way, or maybe good news from home. I can't tell which. Ah, look at this! I think you're going to find a new girl friend. Maybe even a wife. This looks very good here. See how the bird rests next to the kangaroo. A very good sign." Or sometimes ominously, "Oh no! I can't be sure but this could mean sickness. Either you or someone you love. But it ends well so you must be brave when it happens." The men were intrigued and stood there gazing at the little ivory carvings scattered on the table for hours until Ma was exhausted and put them away.

Poldi and Fini asked her, "Where'd you learn to do that?" Ma said the Gypsies lived in an encampment near Vienna and she would go there with her grandmother. The Gypsies sold artifacts and told fortunes and one of the old mamas taught her how to read the bones. Poldi said, "Do you really believe that stuff?" Ma answered, "Sometimes, what you say you believe, comes true, just because you believe it. Anyway no harm is done. And everyone is entertained for a few hours. But I'm surprised how often the bones tell the truth. Sometimes I can't believe what the bones say. Then I find out later that it really happened!"

Ma also had a dream book which she kept in a drawer of her bedside table. She couldn't remember where she had gotten it – maybe from her own mother long ago. But the 175 page book was already old and crumbling when she first started reading it and it was even more worn now. Whenever she had a dream she would pull out the book to see what it meant. And when one of the seamen asked her to interpret a dream he had, she would get the old book and thumb through the pages. "Apples: To dream of apples is an excellent omen. To see them on a tree: prosperity; (to eat them, if they be good and ripe), a signal for you to go ahead and carry out your plan." "Nurse: To dream of nursing a child denotes an illness to some member of your family. To be a nurse implies you will be in a position of trust." And down through the alphabet to "Zodiac – To dream of seeing or studying the zodiacs, predicts fame and riches to the dreamer through his love for wisdom and loyal benevolence to humanity." And all of this minutiae was followed by the meaning of signs and omens – "Dung – To step

accidentally in ordure matter, is a sign of good in a money matter ” Though it doesn't say in the book, one has to assume that stepping *intentionally* in dung is a sign of stupidity! “Nose Bleeding On a Friday is lucky ” Unless you're wearing a white shirt, of course. Then it's unlucky The seamen never seemed to tire of Ma's ability to entertain them with her knowledge of the spiritual and the occult.

One of the seamen who came to the house took a liking to Poldi. His name was Sandy Bernsen and he was a First Mate. He shipped out all over the world from San Francisco. He wanted to be her sweetheart. He knew Rudy was her little boy, though Ma let everyone think he was her son. He just laughed at Ma, who ruled the house and he took her in his stride. Poldi liked that about him but she wasn't interested in settling down with a seaman, who she would see only when he was in port. Sandy was a gentle man and she enjoyed his company when he was in town. He kept trying to persuade her to marry him and gave her a blue sapphire ring with two small diamonds in a marquis shape to remember him. She took it, making him promise there were no strings attached. He agreed, but said he'd be asking her again until she changed her mind.

Another seaman who came to the house often was a big burly Norwegian with a homely face. His name was Ole Michaelson. His booming voice and raucous ways always announced his presence even before he entered the house. He was a hard working and hard drinking seaman, with a heart of gold unless he was drinking. Then he was unpredictable and you had to be careful what you said to him so he wouldn't lose his temper. But he never lost his temper with Fini. Somehow the frail homely woman with flaming red hair and white skin kept him on his best behavior when she was near. Ma warned Fini to stay away from him, but Ma said often to Poldi, “There's no pot so crooked that you won't find a lid to fit it.”

Fini liked the big gruff man too. Ma never let Fini go out just to have fun, so Fini would sneak out to meet Ole Michaelson who picked her up in a borrowed car. They'd go have a good time together and then he'd let her off around the corner from the house on Newcomb and she'd walk home and go in the back door. Ma never found out she and Ole Michaelson were sneaking around.

While she worked at the sugar factory Poldi attracted the attention of one of the other sugar workers who had a much better job. He was a machinist and kept the equipment running properly. His name was Lars Laurson, actually Mikailovitch Davidovitch (Lars) Laurson and he was born in Lithuania. Poldi and Fini got to know him and invited him to Ma's house.

Ma continued her scheming ways and was always looking for husbands for Fini and Poldi, preferably one with money. Poldi always rejected her suggestions, but Ma continued trying anyway. Laurson, the engineer from the sugar plant was quiet, kept to himself, and enjoyed the good food and whiskey. He never talked

too much, but amiably listened to the conversation of the raucous seamen. He was kind to Fini, called her Serafine and often slipped her some extra money for her pocket. The other seamen told Ma in confidence, "That guy is rich. Everyone knows he has a stash of money put away! Yeah Ma, he's rich. He has a load of money." Ma decided to find out for herself so she talked to Laurson. He never admitted to her that he was rich, but he never denied it either. She finally decided from the way he acted and the reports of the other men that he would be a good catch for Fini.

Leopoldine talked to Laurson and suggested a marriage between him and Fini. Laurson was polite and after thinking about it he told Ma that would work just fine. He was older and had not yet found a wife and thought this just might be a more practical way to go about it. Ma decided that they would have a party on Sunday to announce the engagement of Lars Laurson and Fini. Fini resisted, but to no avail. Ma was determined to have her way.

In tears, Fini asked Ole Michaelson what she should do. She told him Leopoldine was forcing her to marry Laurson and would announce their engagement at a party on Sunday. Ole was outraged. "That old she-witch!" He told Fini, "I'm going to get you out of there myself. I'm going to take you someplace else to live – away from that old bitch."

They made their plans and on Sunday, before the engagement party began, Fini sneaked out of the house with a small suitcase and walked around the corner where Ole Michaelson waited for her in the borrowed car. He gave her a big grin and a hug and they drove away from the house on Newcomb Avenue, never to return. They went to his rooming house on Steiner Street where Ole's boss, Captain Larsen, lived with his wife Edna. She wrapped her ample arms around the frail Fini and led her to a bedroom that had been prepared for her. Eventually she and Ole lived together for five years before they were married at the Woodside Town Hall the day before Thanksgiving, November 1933.

That Sunday Ma greeted guests for the engagement party. They enjoyed the good food and drinks and called for Fini. Laurson had a big smile on his face as he accepted the congratulations of the others. Where was Fini? Ma went to find her. She looked everywhere but Fini wasn't there. Then Ma looked in the closet and saw that Fini's suitcase and clothing were gone from the closet. Ma was furious! That scrawny girl had taken off – without so much as a goodbye or a thank you for everything she had done for her. Not only that – Ma had to face her friends who were waiting to toast the would-be engaged couple. And worst of all she had to face Laurson. When she came back into the room one look at her face told them that something was wrong. "I'm sorry Laurson. She's gone. That no-good girl took off for no reason. After all I've done for her too. I just don't understand it."

Now that Fini was gone, the whiskey supply soon dried up because Fini took the recipe with her. Ma could cook the best Austrian food in San Francisco, but without whiskey to wash it down, the seamen would find someplace else to go. Ma had made good money and had saved most of it. And Pa kept working at the meat houses and made good money there too.

Ma wanted to own a real business. She finally found one at 1451 Haight Street near Ashbury. It was called The Pork Store and they sold meat, mostly pork, bacon, ham, lunch meat, some fresh sauerkraut, German potato salad and sausages. Best of all, there was a small sausage factory in the back yard. If she bought the business, Gus could make sausages. And she would sell them across the counter in the front store to Germans who would come from all over San Francisco for the best fresh sausages in town. She knew they would finally be rich. They would be able to buy land – they would become rich landholders! There was only one thing wrong. She was still short of money to buy the Pork Store. She had counted on Fini getting some money from her new rich husband, which should have been Lars Laurson. Now she had to plot a different strategy.

“Poldi, Laurson has a pile of money – I know he does. He as much as told me so himself. You keep hanging around with men who have nothing. Why don’t you get some sense in your head and marry a nice guy like Laurson who actually has something.” At first Poldi thought Ma was crazy. Laurson was nice enough, but she wasn’t thinking of marrying anyone. She already had one nice guy who was too weak to stand up to Ma. From him she had Rudy, who hardly knew she was his mother. But Ma kept it up every day. “Poldi, I know he has a pile of money. And he’s old, Poldi. He’s almost forty years old! He won’t be around for that many years. You keep hanging around with losers. This is your chance to have something.”

One day Poldi said to Laurson, “I can’t take it anymore. Ma keeps nagging me to marry you. I want you to tell her to cut it out. She’s driving me crazy.” Laurson looked at her and laughed. “I don’t think it’s such a bad idea. I think we might make a good match. But if we did get married, one thing is for sure. We’d have to get away from Ma. You’ve got a job and I’ve got a good job as a machinist at the sugar plant. You and me – we’d do just fine together.” The best thing that Poldi heard in that whole amazing conversation was getting away from Ma.

She and Laurson talked some more and then got married in San Francisco City Hall on December 12, 1927. They lived with Ma and Pa for a while, then they found a nice little place to live at 3815 ½ Eighteenth-Street in the Mission District. Laurson called her Lee, or sometimes Leah. “That suits you better – Leah.” She liked the name change too, but mostly when people said it, it sounded like Lee and she liked that even better. She was happy being away from Ma and Laurson was easy to get along with. They both worked each day and enjoyed wonderful things to do in San Francisco in the 1920’s.

They drove out to Playland at the Beach, watched Laughing Sal in her upstairs glassed in space, laugh endlessly at people who stood, faces upturned and smiling. They went to the Fun House, ate Bull Pups, the best enchiladas, wrapped to go in brown paper, and rolled into a cone. Or for a different experience, they went to the Cliff House, or Sutro Baths, or in the other direction, Blackie's, a speakeasy down by the Zoo. There was so much to do In San Francisco in the Twenties, you just had to make up your mind what to do first. And the best part of the fun was getting there. There were streetcars, cable cars, Model T's, horses and wagons and the endless whistle blowing ferries always ready to take you up the hills, down the steep streets, or across the Bay It was fun just getting to the fun

Rudy was five years old now, and Lee wanted to spend more time with him Ma spoiled him terribly and sometimes she worried about Ma's lack of discipline with him. He was very cute and Ma thought he looked like the drawing of a little boy on the can of popular Dinty Moore beef stew, so she nicknamed him Dinty Moore. Poldi thought he should be spanked when he needed it, but Ma wouldn't let anyone punish him, no matter how bad he was. She'd just say, "My Dinty, my little Dinty," and hug him close to her

Poldi kept telling Ma, "You've got to have the boy circumcised It isn't going to get any easier when he gets older " Finally one day they had the doctor come to the house to do it. The wooden kitchen table was set into a booth, with two benches on each side. They spread clean cloths on the table and laid the dubious, but still placid boy, on the table and took off his pants. When he saw the doctor's instruments he began to fight, but he was soon overcome by a towel soaked with ether which Ma and the Doctor held over his nose while Poldi and Pa watched. The job was done quickly and other than being very sore for a few days he recovered well.

They hadn't been married long when Ma asked Lee to get some money from Laurson. Lee ignored her but Ma kept at it. One night they were at Ma and Pa's house for dinner Lee and Laurson wanted to see Rudy and get to know the boy better Rudy was having none of it. He didn't like this old guy who took his mother away and he kicked him hard, in the shin After dinner Ma sat next to Laurson and told him about the Pork Store on Haight Street that she wanted to buy But she was short some money Laurson nodded, not understanding Lee said it was time to go home and they left.

Later when they were alone, Lee told Laurson that Ma thought he had a lot of money and would be able to help her with the last money she needed to buy the Pork Store. It would probably only be a loan, but since he had a pile of money, he wouldn't mind giving it to her Laurson sat back and looked at her in

amazement. “Ma thinks I have a lot of money?” “Yeah, Laurson. Not just Ma. Everyone thinks so. All the seamen. Everyone”

Laurson leaned back in his chair and started laughing. He laughed so hard the tears rolled down his cheeks. “Lee, what a joke on all of us. I don’t have a pile of money. I only have a few hundred dollars in a bank account, nothing more than that. Honey, I don’t have anything to give Ma. I wish I did. But I don’t.” Lee started laughing too, because if she didn’t laugh, she would cry. Soon they were rolling on the floor, laughing so hard they both had tears. The irony of it all was just too funny.

The next time Ma asked Lee to get some money from Laurson, Lee told her the truth. Ma said she didn’t believe it. She thought Laurson was hiding the truth about his pile of money, which must be hidden someplace. Lee said “Ma, I’ll never listen to you and your advice again. This was the last time. Laurson’s just a nice guy – a hard worker at a skilled job, with no pile of money, lonely for a wife and a place of his own. I will never listen to your advice again”

Lee and Laurson stayed together for a while, but finally Lee told him it was time they split. She said she was sorry it didn’t work out. She was sorry for everything. She came into the marriage with nothing and she would leave with nothing. They hugged each other and shook hands. No hard feelings. Right? No hard feelings. And that’s the last they saw of each other for almost a lifetime.

Soon after that Ma managed to find enough money to buy the Pork Store on Haight Street. Pa quit his job at the sausage factory so he could work full time at his own Pork Store. Ma got the next door neighbor, Mrs. Rasmussen, to take care of Rudy. Her son Howard was just a little younger than Rudy, and they played together anyway. Mrs. Rasmussen also had an older girl and she helped take care of the little boys too.

Ma went to the Pork Store with Pa every day and they started working long hours to make a success of “Tham’s Delicatessen”, but the new name never really replaced the original. The old stained glass window above the door proclaimed “The Pork Store” and that’s what people continued to call it. The front store was a large square, with a high counter and glass display case running the length of the room. Hams, both smoked and fresh sausages, smoked ham hocks, smoked tongues, fresh bratwurst, blutwurst, liverwurst, frankfurters, head cheese, pickled herring salad, German potato salad, fresh sauerkraut in white enamel pans, huge dill pickles and pickled herrings – all were displayed inside the case. Many kinds of large dried salamis hung on the hooks suspended from the ceiling. Fresh breads were delivered every day from Larraburu, San Francisco’s best French bread bakery. Pumpnickel and Kosher Rye bread were also delivered from the German bakery.

Large round globe lights hung down from the ceiling. The small hexagonal floor tiles were scrubbed white with light blue tiles interspersed in a decorative pattern. At the end of the counter a large square, wooden butcher's block provided a well worn place where Gus could wield his butcher's cleaver and his honed knives to cut meat to order for the customers. Behind a wall there was a walk-in ice box, where Ma and he spent many frigid hours, sorting meat and preparing it for the counter, the sausage factory or the smoke racks. There was also a wash sink, a toilet and a door leading to a back path which led up a few stairs to the sausage factory

The sausage factory was Gus' domain. Here he plied his trade each day, single handedly creating fresh and smoked sausages for the customers, who soon heard about the new German owners, Gus and Leopoldine Tham, at The Pork Store on Haight Street. Gus made fresh bratwurst one day a week, frankfurters two days a week, bologna once a week. His liverwurst was prized as more delicate and flavorful than the finest French paté. The smoke racks were always hung with salamis, hams, tongues, ham hocks and pig's feet.

When Rudy got older, he helped Gus after school and during vacation, but for the most part Gus did it alone. His deft fingers could quickly link sausages as the ground meat, mixed herbs and spices, squeezed out of the machine and filled the natural gut casings. Watching him one knew he had learned his skills over the years and with some hard learned lessons, graphically illustrated by a shortened index finger on one hand. A shortened digit was almost a badge of honor for many a sadder but wiser butcher.

Leopoldine wanted Poldi to come work for her, though she couldn't afford to pay her right away. Poldi declined, knowing it was time she moved on to a new job, new friends and new adventures. She and Laursen moved to Palo Alto and she found work at a Chinese Laundry in Palo Alto. After a while she decided that she liked the job. The owner saw that she worked hard and before too long she was at the counter taking in laundry and winning new customers with her beautiful big smile and happy voice. She was willing to do any job. She sorted dirty clothes and ran the machines. She attempted working at the pressing and fluting machines, but the owner soon decided that it was best if he left that to other workers.

In the meantime events were unfolding that would change all their lives. During most of the Twenties, prosperity was the order of the day. People had jobs, there were places to live at a reasonable cost, there was plenty of food on the table, and even ordinary people could buy an automobile. A variety of transportation was available to take them to places to have fun in and near San Francisco. It was a great time to be alive and to invest in the future, because the future, as far as you could see, looked bright.

Herbert Hoover was President of the United States. He said "I have no fears for the future of our country. It is bright with hope." Americans, earning more than they had ever before, filled their homes with the latest gadgets and machines. Many people stopped saving money, betting instead that they could multiply their gains in the stock market. Companies that capitalized on the latest technology saw their stock prices quadruple in a single day. Disney created the first Mickey Mouse film, Eastman exhibited the first color motion pictures, Amelia Earhardt was the first woman to pilot a plane solo across the Atlantic, and the Charleston was the dance craze.

Many people invested in stocks, hoping to catch a piece of the soaring economy and become rich. And some did – at least on paper. Many had invested in stocks, sometimes on margin, which was a way of buying more stocks with money that you didn't really have.

But early in October 1929, the overheated stock market started an orderly decline. By late in the day on October 23, the market was down sharply, but rallied the next day. On October 24, people sold their stocks as fast as they could. By eight in the morning in San Francisco the panic was on. Finally on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929, the New York Times headlines screamed

**"STOCK PRICES SLUMP
\$14,000,000,000 IN
NATION-WIDE STAMPEDE TO
UNLOAD"**

October 29 was the beginning of the Crash! Within the first few hours after the stock market opened, prices fell so far that all the gains that had been made in the previous year were gone. The Dow Jones Industrial Index closed at 230. Since the stock market was viewed as the chief indicator of the American economy, public confidence was shattered. Between October 20 and November 13, when stock prices hit their lowest point, over \$30 billion disappeared from the American economy. It took more than a decade for many stocks to recover.

Against this backdrop Ma and Pa continued to run the Pork Store. Sometimes Lee worked with them on Saturdays. People still had to buy food to eat, no matter how bad the economic news. Rudy continued to spend his time either at school or at the Rasmussens, playing with his best friend, Howard, and the dogs and cats that Ma collected at her house. Brennie, one of the cats, was getting old now and shared the kitchen with Pete, the other cat. Prince, the German Shepherd half breed, was loyal to Ma to a fault, daring any other dog to get too close to her. The little white shag dog managed to keep peace with him most of the time.

Lee continued to work at the Chinese Laundry in Palo Alto. Many Stanford professors were their customers and they still had the means to have their laundry done at the best laundry in town. She started looking for fun with new people. She met many Germans in San Francisco and soon she joined them at their various activities.



Top Left: Poldi, Ma, Fini 1924 Bayview, San Francisco

Bottom, Left: Ma, Rudy, Bayview. 1924 San Francisco

Bottom Right: Gus with Rudy 1924 San Francisco



Top, Right: Ma in the Bayview in San Francisco





Top Left: Rudy
About 1925

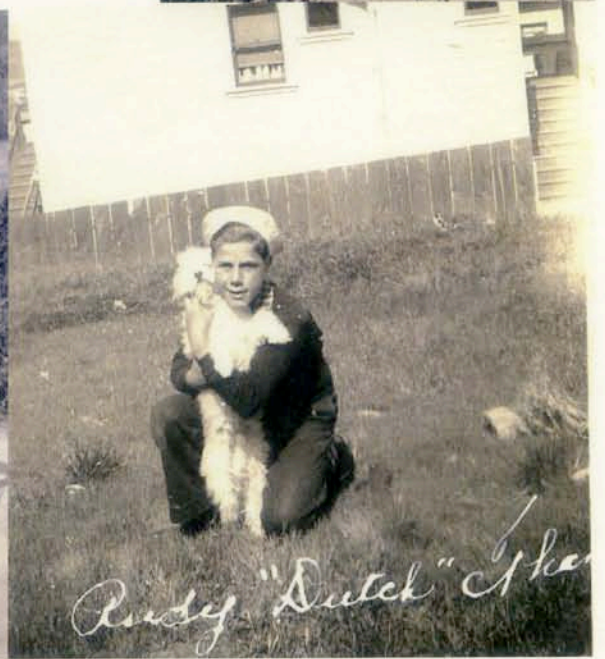
Top Right: Ma, Pa
and Rudy about
1927

Right: Rudy about
1927



Bottom Left: Ma, Pa and Rudy about 1927

Bottom, Right: Rudy and dog in Bayview San Francisco
about 1929





Top Left: Poldi in Half Moon Bay June 29, 1924.



Top Right: Poldi in Cleveland 1926.

Bottom Left: Poldi

Bottom Right: Poldi





Top Left:
Poldi



Top Right:
House in
San Fran-
cisco today,
where Lee
lived with
Laursen at
3815 1/2
18th Street.



Below: Left, unknown
man. Maybe Sandy
Bernson. Next, Lee,
Mike (Ole) Michaelson,
holding
Rudy, then Fini.

MA, MOTHER AND ME

A MEMOIR

Chapter 5 Carl 1932

Carl Huneke was a thirty-one year old German immigrant living in San Francisco on Black Tuesday, October 29, 1929. He was skilled in the art of designing and making stained glass windows. He had a good job and had saved his money

Unlike Ma, Pa and Lee, he invested in stocks, much of it purchased on margin. Earlier in 1929 he watched the stock market carefully. He had accumulated more than \$40,000, a huge amount for him, and he began to fear a drastic drop in the stock market. He subscribed to a financial service and read the financial news constantly watching for warning signs of a downturn. As autumn approached he decided to cash out all his stocks. He believed that the stock market had climbed too high and was ready for a "correction." His strategy was to sell his stocks at a high price now and buy back later, after the prices dropped, as he felt they must. All of his margin accounts were covered in full. After paying his stockbroker's commissions, he cashed out for \$40,000. Then he put his money in a bank account, sat back, watched and waited.

He didn't have to wait too long. On Black Tuesday, he was appalled as the economic disaster unfolded. He was grateful he had sold his stocks, but felt regret for his friends who had not done so. Most of them were more conservative than he was and had not been buying on margin, however, they had lost a considerable amount of the value of their investments.

Because of his enormous confidence in America's strong economy, he believed that economic recovery would start within a short time. He watched the stock market carefully for indicators that it was on the rise so he could buy in again. Through the end of 1929, stock prices continued to slump. Between October 1929 and February 1930, the interest rate was lowered from 6% to 4%, which increased the money supply. The market responded by climbing in January, February and even into March, 1930. Carl was ready. With full confidence that the bottom was behind and nothing but prosperity was ahead, he invested his entire \$40,000 in stocks that he believed were bargains.

For the first few days he was pleased. He watched anxiously as minor increases pushed the market up a few points. Even the most prestigious economists predicted recovery. As it turned out, he bought in at the *only* time stocks rose a few points. Then they continued a slow but steady decline. Some

days he wondered to himself just how low they would go. Eventually he would find out.

He worked for Edward Lapotka at Church Art Glass as a stained glass artist. He was an excellent artist and was assured a job as long as work lasted. But as weeks unfolded, conditions worsened. He was finally let go with the promise of being hired back when there was work again. Though stained glass was his craft and his art form, he was also a fine oil painter and kept himself busy working at his easel. He rented a third floor attic room from his good friends Carl and Herta Feldman at 557 Sanchez Street in the Mission District. He set up his easel near the window and frequently the Feldman's young son, Carl, came up to stand and watch him paint. As he lost himself in his work, he would whistle a little tune, which made the little boy smile.

He found no work that he considered suitable. He still had pride and refused to sweep streets or wash dishes. He also refused to stand in line for food at a soup kitchen. Occasionally he worked a few days for Mr. Lapotka or he went to the union hall and stood in line for work in stained glass or as a glazier. During this time he met Charles J. Connick, the renowned stained glass artist from Boston. Connick needed help installing stained glass windows at Grace Cathedral on Nob Hill and hired Carl from the union hall. They forged a friendship that spanned a lifetime. Aside from these small jobs he lived on practically nothing and paid as much as he could to the Feldmans for his room and board.

He continued to seek the company of his German friends. He hiked to Mount Tamalpais most weekends, or went to the Tourist House for chess or card games or to the German Hall in San Francisco for Liederkrantz or other activities. During this time he met a young woman named Lee Tham Laurson. In contrast to his own depressed demeanor, Lee had a strong, determined will. She told him she was twenty-five and twice divorced, with a young son Rudy, who was being raised by her parents. Her parents owned a Pork Store 1451 Haight Street, but she didn't work for them. She had a job at the Chinese laundry in Palo Alto.

Lee told Carl about her happy childhood in Schiltern, Austria, and being kidnapped by Leopoldine Tham, who said she was her mother. She told him of her dream to return to Austria to find the parish priest to determine if Leopoldine was really her mother. She told him about the hard work on the chicken ranch in Sebastopol and George Antonovich, Rudy's father. She talked about Ma and Pa and their home "speakeasy" on Newcomb Avenue. She shared tales about Fini and finally she told him about Laurson too.

Carl was depressed. His spirit was broken. His \$40,000 in stock had dwindled to nothing. In his despair he was fascinated with Lee's stories. He had never met anyone like her. She never let the world put her down. She had the courage to stand up to any challenge. He told her about his family in Achim, Germany.

He painted a picture called "Golden Harvest" to show her what the flat wheat fields looked like near his home. He loved her big, beautiful smile and her flawless skin and when he hugged her to him, her buxom figure felt warm and comforting. Just the sound of her happy voice could make his heart sing. He was in love.

Lee liked the Germans she met, but she was too outspoken for many of them. She never hesitated to say what she thought. Many of the men did not agree with her opinions about almost everything. Most of the men preferred their women to be more demure than Lee. Most of the women preferred their friends to be more coquettish and maidenly than Lee.

As Carl spent more time with Lee and enjoyed her company, many of his friends, including Carl Feldman, Werner Heintzen and even his own cousin, Ernest Gade, urged him to be careful before getting too involved with her. "She's a divorced woman, Carl! Twice divorced with a child! You can do better than that. She's not even German. She's from Austria. You know how different they can be. There are many girls – German girls – who would be happy to be with you."

Lee took Carl to meet Rudy and Ma and Pa. Rudy was eight and suspicious of any strange man his mother brought to visit, but this one seemed nice enough. Carl even went downstairs to the basement with him to look at his toys. Carl seemed afraid of Prince, the German Shepherd, and he only tolerated the cats, both of which entwined themselves around his legs. Lee told Ma and Pa that Carl was a talented artist, who not only made stained glass windows, but also created oil paintings. Unfortunately, though, he was currently unemployed.

Pa said nothing. Ma threw her hands in the air. "Poldi! Poldi! Will you never learn anything? How often do I have to tell you that you must look for someone with money! This is the worst you have ever brought home. A starving artist. He'll never have anything. How will you feed yourself? How will you live?" Lee knew she should have expected Ma's reaction. But Ma's words helped her make up her mind.

She had been living in Palo Alto working at the laundry. Sometimes she stayed in San Francisco on weekends so she could be closer to the activities that she enjoyed. Carl moved out of the room he rented at the Feldman's and moved to an apartment on Gough Street and Poldi moved in with him. She got up every morning at five in order to get the train to Palo Alto to her job at the laundry. And except for the days he could find occasional work, Carl painted. They continued their friendship with Carl's German friends, who made it clear that they did not approve of his choice of a partner. But Carl was happy with Lee. She filled his heart with hope. She made him feel safe – nothing really bad could happen as long as he was with her. And she loved him too. The scorn, snubs and whispers

behind her back by Carl's friends hurt her, but she shrugged her shoulders and pretended not to notice.

In spite of the Depression, San Francisco had much to offer and they enjoyed it together. They went to Sutro Baths for 5 cents, rode the little dinghies, the cable cars, up the steep hills all hours of the day and night. For 20 cents at the Fox Theatre on Market Street they saw the news, a main feature, as well as a stage show, all with organ accompaniment. They hiked in Marin County, went to Golden Gate Park and the Beach and enjoyed the activities at the German gatherings.

On May 2, 1932, Lee went with Carl to the Courthouse in San Francisco and watched him sworn in as a citizen of the United States. He had registered as soon as he arrived in San Francisco seven years before, because he felt strongly that he wanted to participate fully in the rights and privileges of citizenship. He had no desire to remain affiliated with Germany, even though it was his homeland. Recent political events in Germany made him even surer that he never wanted to return there to live, regardless of the present difficulties in America. Lee was very proud of him. She confessed to him that though she was a citizen by virtue of naturalization, through her stepfather's citizenship, she had never received her own citizenship papers because she had no birth certificate. She was still ashamed of this. He told her, "Honey, someday we'll go back to Schiltern in Austria together and get your birth certificate." She couldn't imagine when it would happen, but she hoped in her heart that it would be true.

Early in 1933 Lee told Carl some news that scared them both. "Carl, it's a bad time to tell you this, but I'm pregnant." The baby was due around the end of November. The economy seemed to be getting worse, not better, so there was no way he could count on getting his old job back. Once the baby was born, Lee would have to stay home. As the months passed, they tried not to worry. They decided Lee would continue to work at the laundry in Palo Alto and Carl would stay home and take care of the baby. Carl was dubious at first, but finally decided it was the best choice. They moved to a cheaper flat in an attic at 522 Fell Street.

Carl insisted that Lee find Laurson so she could get a divorce and they could marry before the baby was born. Lee asked Ma to ask everyone where he might be found. Finally she learned he had left the country to return to his parents' home in Lithuania. No one knew the address. To Lee it was not so important. No matter what the legal papers said, the child would be born and Carl was the father. But Carl was very upset. It was important to him that he and Lee marry before his child was born, but there was nothing he could do about it. Bigamy was against the law.

As November approached, Lee felt large and clumsy. Still, she got up at five each morning to catch the train for her job at the laundry in Palo Alto. She got home by seven in the evening. For many months she wore loose clothes to hide her pregnancy. She worked as hard as ever because she knew that jobs were scarce and there were many others who would happily take her place. Finally at the very end she could no longer hide the fact that she would soon have a baby. She assured her boss that she could still continue to work as hard as ever, and did so. Everyone was kind to her at the Laundry, but she knew she had to keep working as long as possible.

Early in the morning of Tuesday, November 28th, Lee's pains began. By sunrise she was in hard labor. "Carli – go get the Doctor," and Carl ran to let the doctor know it was time. This was Lee's second child, but the baby was breech and her labor was harder and longer than she expected. Finally Dr. Hall gave her some pain-killing medication and assisted the birth by using forceps on the baby's head. When he held up the wailing baby, he said, "Well, well, it looks like we have a little girl." He cleaned her off and Carl nestled close to Lee as she held the baby to her, examining every inch. "She has a huge red mark on her forehead. What's wrong with her?" Lee asked frantically. "Nothing, nothing, it's just a mark, where I held her with the forceps. It will fade and go away in a few weeks. If a small scar remains, it will be under her hair on her forehead." "She looks very frail and small," said Lee. Dr. Hall smiled. "She weighs about seven pounds. She's a fine, healthy baby."

The baby had long dark curly hair, which fell over her face. Carl took a soft brush and lifted it back to show a high forehead just like his. She had a button of a nose, which she wrinkled as she squirmed, getting ready to cry. He smiled as he studied her face. Her rosy lips were full and rounded, like his and his father's and his sister Martha's. "How strange life is," he thought to himself. "This little one already resembles me and my family, whom she doesn't even know, in another land." Lee thought to herself, "She looks just like him. And her life will be different. This time I will see to that myself. Her life will be different."

Soon Pa arrived with Rudy. As a ten year old, Rudy sat in a chair, they let him hold her. "Is she really my little sister?" "Yes, yes." "Will the red mark go away?" "Yes, of course, in a few weeks." "Will I be able to play with her?" "Yes, of course, when she is older." Then Pa went back to the Pork Store with Rudy. That evening when the store closed, he drove Ma to see her new granddaughter. She took the baby in her arms and sat down with her and studied the little face. "What is her name?" she asked quietly. "Margaret Lee Huneke," answered Carl firmly. "She'll be my little Grelie," said Ma. True to Austrian custom, all names were shortened to a nickname. Margaret would be Margarethe, or Gretel, which was then shortened to Grelie. Carl didn't care. Her name was Margaret and that's what he would call her. "Who will take care of the baby?" said Ma, hoping that she might raise one more child. "I will", answered Carl firmly. Ma looked

surprised “How will you feed her?” “With a bottle,” said Carl. “And who will earn a living?” she asked “Lee will. She’ll keep working at the laundry in Palo Alto.” Ma raised her eyebrows and nodded slowly. Times were very hard and everyone did what must be done in order to survive. Lee listened to the exchange between Ma and Carl and smiled to herself. Carl might not have a job – maybe he was an artist who might never have money – but at least this man told Ma the way things would be.

After Ma left, Lee rested, knowing she would have to go back to work as soon as possible. She would not breast feed the baby. The painful milk fever after Rudy was born had so enlarged her breasts that she feared even attempting to nurse. Besides, bottle feeding was necessary if Carl were to care for the baby while she worked. So she bound her engorged breasts tightly to dry up the milk and endured the pain.

Carl went to the closet where he had something hidden. He brought out a painting of red roses and put it next to her near the bed. “I couldn’t afford to buy you roses like I wanted to, so I painted these for you. I thought they might last a little longer this way.” She started to cry and then they hugged each other. Lee said “Carli, someday we will have something. Someday we will be able to buy the roses. Someday we will have the money to buy anything we want. Someday.” He smiled, but said nothing. He couldn’t imagine how that could be. But Lee believed it with all her heart.

Carl had kept all his stocks hoping they might be worth something, but he finally gave up on them. They needed money to pay for the doctor. Dr. Hall had just moved to San Francisco from Illinois and didn’t have too many patients, so he had agreed to come to their flat to deliver the baby. They couldn’t afford to have Lee go to a hospital.

The next day Dr. Hall came back to check on Lee and the baby and to bring his bill. It was for \$50 as agreed, but he explained that he had to charge an additional \$25 for the use of the forceps because of the difficult birth. Carl gave the Doctor cash. The week before, Carl had sold all his stocks to pay for the baby’s birth. His stocks, once worth \$40,000, were sold for a little more than \$75. He laughed wryly to himself, “This \$75 will surely be a better investment than the stocks were.”

The following Monday morning Lee got back on the five o’clock train for Palo Alto to go back to work. By then her boss had been told that Lee had a baby girl and that she would return to work on Monday. When she arrived she was grateful her job was waiting for her. Her co-workers had covered for her while she was gone three workdays. She was still tired, but she was strong and worked as hard as ever.

The days settled into a routine. Carl took care of the baby and painted while she napped. Lee got up at five each morning and returned by seven in the evening. She continued her job of sorting the dirty clothes for the washing machines, folding, ironing and packaging them for the customers. When the owner was away she filled in as manager of the store.

Each night Lee fretted over the baby. Margaret spit up sour milk all the time. Lee tried to find a new milk formula so Margaret could keep her food down. Finally they tried goat's milk. Although it was more expensive, it worked.

Then they noticed that she had a lump next to her eye, near the bridge of her nose. The lump grew larger every day. Though they could ill afford another doctor bill, they took her to Dr. Hall, who massaged and probed the growth. He diagnosed a blocked tear duct. The blockage would have to be surgically removed. That night they hovered over her, agonizing about where they would find the money for the surgery. During the night she sneezed several times, and in the morning they found that she sneezed the mass out of her nose and it lay on the mattress next to her face. They decided that the doctor's probing had dislodged it. She smiled happily. Lee and Carl hugged each other and the baby with much relief. By now, Margaret was several months old.

On weekends they dressed the baby in her best clothes with her first pair of soft shoes. They had no automobile so they walked with her in Golden Gate Park or in the Panhandle visiting friends and family and enjoying the sun whenever it appeared in the City.

Rudy was growing up. He went to Bayview Elementary where Ma had enrolled him as Rudy Tham, not Michael Antonovich. No one questioned her. Her name was Leopoldine Tham, her husband was Gus Tham and this was their child. He called them Ma and Pa and that was the end of it. Among his friends on Newcomb Avenue he was the undisputed ring leader and trouble maker. There was Howard Rasmussen, whose house was separated from Rudy's by a vacant lot. Mrs. Rasmussen still helped take care of Rudy. But she felt that Howard, her only son, was being influenced badly by the neighborhood boys so she took Howard out of Bayview Elementary and enrolled him in the French School. The other boys on the street were the Viannich brothers – Nick and Sam, and Eddie Garcia and Eddie DuPrez. Rudy was cute and daring and still spoiled by Ma. Whenever Lee confronted Ma, complaining that Rudy was getting into trouble, she would smile and say "My Dinty. My little Dinty. He's a good boy. He even takes the street car to the Pork Store every day after school now to help us at the store. He's a good boy. My Dinty doesn't do anything wrong." Lee said she thought the French School would be a good idea for Rudy too. Somehow they would all find the tuition money. Lee talked to the French School and they were willing to talk to Rudy. When she told Rudy he said "No way! I'm not going to leave the guys in the neighborhood! I'm staying at Bayview! I'm not

going anyplace!" Ma immediately agreed that Rudy would stay at Bayview with his friends. Lee gave up. Clearly nothing she said could ever overrule what Ma said. Ma spoiled him and he loved it. Pa didn't agree with many of Ma's ideas, but he was a quiet man. Mostly he listened, then shook his head and said nothing. Ma would have her way.

Carl tried to become more involved in Rudy's life. He and Lee found the money to get Rudy a two-wheeled bicycle for Christmas, which he soon learned to ride on the steep part of the hill on Newcomb Avenue. Lee frequently brought him souvenirs from Stanford University in Palo Alto, hoping she might inspire him to study and go to college someday. He shrugged his shoulders and grinned at her, knowing that she had no control over his life. For him Ma and Pa were his "real" parents and he knew he could get away with whatever he wanted with them.

One night Gus contacted Lee at home. "Poldi, we can't find Rudy. Is he with you?" "No. Why? What is wrong? Where is he?" Gus continued, agitated, "He didn't come into the Pork Store today so we thought he was at home with Mrs. Rasmussen. But when we got home he wasn't there. She thought he was with us at the store. So now I came to see if he was with you." When they couldn't find him at any of his friends' houses, they notified the San Francisco Police. So far no one had any information about the missing boy; all they could do was wait. The next day they got a call. They went to the Police Station and were told that a boy matching Rudy's description had been picked up hitchhiking on Highway 101 near Atascadero. He was at the Juvenile Detention Center in Atascadero.

Lee took Pa's car right away and drove there. She told them she was his mother and had come to pick him up. But when they brought him into the room he told them, "She's not my mother. I'm Rudy Tham. Ma's my mother." And then he grinned at her, daring her to explain. Embarrassed, Lee explained the confusion and the discrepancy. The Detention Officers seemed understanding, mumbling something about, " .boys that age do this kind of thing."

She was allowed to take him into her custody and they drove back to San Francisco. At first there was silence in the small car. Finally she asked, "How did you get to Atascadero? That's a long way from San Francisco." "It's easy. I hitched a ride with a guy who took me a ways. Then I hitched a ride on a truck and they let me off after a while. I was about to get another hitch when the Police picked me up." "Where were you going?" At first he refused to answer. He looked out the window and said nothing. Finally, he grinned at her sideways. "Hollywood." She didn't understand. "Why were you going to Hollywood?" Again silence. "The guys on the street said I look like a movie star. Everyone says it. They all tell me I look just like Robert Preston. So I was going down there to get a job. You know they discover people all the time in Hollywood. You just hang around the street corner and they see you. And I was going to get a

job in the movies and get rich. Then I'd have lots of money for me and I'd give some to Ma and Pa too." Lee didn't say much. Clearly Rudy was getting ideas from Ma. Lee had certainly heard enough from Ma about the importance of getting money somehow – some way – from someone. She took him home to the house on Newcomb where Ma welcomed him into her arms. "Dinty, my Dinty. I was so worried about you." The dogs danced around his feet and the cats were draped over his shoulders. "Never do that again." He promised her he wouldn't, grinning once again at Lee. She shook her head at Pa, wondering how he would turn out.

Lee didn't get to see Margaret much. She spent long hours away from the house including the long train ride to Palo Alto each morning and again in the evening. She wanted to cuddle the baby when she cried, but Carl was much more the disciplinarian. When the baby cried, Lee put a "gooey" in her mouth. Once the "gooey" was an established habit, the baby cried to have her "gooey" all the time. Then Carl decided it was time to break the habit, so he cut holes in the "gooey" and the baby screamed again. Then Lee bought a new "gooey" for her. Carl quietly cut holes in it. Lee then bought a whole box of "gooeys." The silent "gooey" battle went on for weeks between the parents, until the baby discovered that her thumb worked just as well and was much more reliable than her confused parents.

They moved to a larger place that cost less money at 633 Oak Street. Carl's cousin Ernst Gade came often to visit the baby. "I am your Uncle Ernst – yes, yes – I am your Uncle Ernst." He confided to Carl he would soon go home to Germany and return with a wife, since he was disappointed with the quality of potential brides in America. After Ernst left, Carl told Lee that Ernst had confided that he wanted to marry one of Carl's sisters, probably Martha. Carl's mother, Johanna Huneke, wrote with news of home telling about Carl's brother Hans Huneke's marriage to Gerda Braukhof, who was expecting a baby a few months after the marriage. Johanna seemed angry about it.

This renewed Carl's determination that Lee must find Laurson, so she could get a divorce and they could marry. Lee asked Ma to ask around and find out where he was. Finally she found out he had returned from Lithuania and was living in Palo Alto. She hired a lawyer to file the divorce papers and Laurson agreed not to contest the proceedings. Lee was granted an Interlocutory Decree on September 27, 1934 in Santa Clara County. One year later she would get a Final Decree of Divorce and then she and Carl could get married. Carl was grateful, though impatient for the time to pass. It troubled him deeply that he and Lee were not married.

One day Lee told Carl, "Margaret is going to be baptized." "Why?" he asked. Carl, was baptized a Lutheran himself, but was not particularly religious and saw no need to burden the child with religion. Lee put her foot down. "I want her to

be baptized Catholic. I want her to go to Catholic schools. I want her to go to church on Sunday and make her First Holy Communion ” She remembered her own early years in the church in Schiltern and the many traditional celebrations that were part of her early life. She clung to those childhood memories of a happy time that ended so abruptly when she was snatched away by Leopoldine Carl shrugged Apparently it meant something to Lee. On June 9, 1935, Father McCabe baptized Margaret at Saint Agnes Church. Ma and Pa were there and Rudy, at age twelve, was proud to be the godfather for his little sister Isabella Quigley, a lady from the neighborhood, was her godmother

Ernst returned from Germany with a wife, Adele Huneke. Lee said to Carl, “I thought you said he wanted to marry Martha?” They waited to see what had happened Adele was thrilled to meet her little niece for the first time and hugged her close. She was interested in her new sister-in-law, Lee, who seemed very self confident and had a smiling face and plump figure. Adele said they were married in a civil ceremony in Bremen, so she could get an exit visa. They returned to America by boat via the Panama Canal.

Adele soon confided to Lee that she expected Ernst to provide a suitable home for her Adele said, “My mother always told me, ‘If you sell yourself for a herring, you’ll be eaten as a herring’ ” They went home to Ernst’s bachelor quarters at 400 Duboce Street until a suitable home could be found Lee smiled to herself Adele was certainly going to look out for herself

Later Carl told Lee that Ernst had confided that he felt he had been tricked into marrying Adele, not his first choice for a wife. Furthermore he thought Carl had something to do with it. “I told him I didn’t know what he was talking about. How can I have anything to do with it? I’m here and they are there. Even *they* complain that I don’t ever write them So I gave him my sincere congratulations and he scowled at me, looking like he didn’t believe me” Lee laughed at Carl’s description, wondering what the real truth was, but he smiled, humming, and rocked on his heels, and said no more.

Lee and Carl tried to see more of Rudy, though he still lived with Ma and Pa. Ma continued to spoil her Dinty, and never disciplined him. Once, Carl’s friend, Rudy Weederman, drove Carl to Ma and Pa’s house to visit. Carl wanted to interact more with his stepson, so Rudy Weederman, Carl and Rudy played around in the basement with a punching bag and a set of boxing gloves. Carl invited his stepson Rudy to come to Yosemite and he agreed They made plans for the family to go to Yosemite later in the year Mildred, a friend they had met through the Sierra Club, went along to help with the children and the camping details. Mildred was very outspoken and told anyone who would listen exactly what she thought.

Lee was happy for the family to take a vacation together. She borrowed a car and drove the long trip to Yosemite. They arrived at Housekeeping Camp 17, which had lean-to shelters with canvas roof covers. There were metal beds and an outdoor cook-stove. They set up camp and cooked the evening meal. Rudy still sucked his thumb to go to sleep and Mildred, outspoken as always, scolded him loudly about that. She told Lee that she should put iodine on his thumb to prevent any more thumb sucking which would deform his mouth. Carl and Lee nodded benignly but said, "Leave him be; leave the boy alone." They wanted to enjoy this time together.

The next morning Lee and Mildred stayed at Camp 17 with Margaret while Rudy and Carl left at dawn for an eight hour hike to the top of Half Dome. When they returned that night Rudy couldn't wait to tell the adventures of the day. "I climbed up a steep granite trail! And we saw a huge rattlesnake! With six rattles on his tail! And I had to climb up steep granite holding on to rails. And at the top it felt like we were on the top of the world!" Carl and Lee smiled at each other. This was a wonderful time for all of them.

That evening, after dinner around the campfire, they all went to Camp Curry for entertainment and the Firefall. The crowd had already gathered and was huge by the time they arrived. The show started at 8 p.m. and included a ranger talk about Yosemite Valley, its plants and animals and its geological formations. There was also singing and sometimes members of the audience would perform. As 9 p.m. approached, anticipation became almost unbearable. A "fire caller" asked the crowd for silence, before the exchange of calls began. In the dead silence, the fire caller at Camp Curry yelled in a loud voice "Hello Glacier!" In the silence the crowd could hear the faint response from the cliff: "Hello Camp Curry!" Rudy was astonished that the human voice could carry that far, to the top of that cliff over three thousand feet into the night sky. Then the fire caller yelled, "Let the Fire Fall!" They heard the final response. "The Fire is Falling!" At that point the red embers were pushed over the edge in a steady flow to produce the illusion of a waterfall of fire. While the embers fell, a vocalist at Camp Curry accompanied by piano or violin, sang *The Indian Love Call*. When the song and the Firefall were over, the crowd stood silently, faces upturned, for what seemed like minutes, until finally a few were bold enough to clap. They were joined by others around them, then those in the meadows, and then from all over the valley. For those moments of wonder, everyone, parents and wide-eyed children, forgot the Depression and daily hardship. They felt kinship with one another. To a person, they stood marveling at the grandeur of the incredibly tall cliffs, the quiet of the forests. This treasured time together with family and friends gave them hope for the future. They left the next day, but the family trip to Yosemite was never forgotten.

Lee continued to work at the laundry. Carl continued to paint while taking care of Margaret. As Margaret got older, they went to the Tourist Club more often. Half

the fun of going was getting there. First they took the ferry, then the train and finally the old Pipeline Trail. There they tried to have Margaret walk as much as she could, but soon she would wail, "Carry me, carry mee-e-e-e." Carl would say, "Here, I'll take her. Throw her up on top of my knapsack." When he tired, someone else would say, "Give her to me, I'll carry her for a while." They'd continue up the trail until they reached the old Buttermilk House where they stopped for a cold glass of buttermilk, or beer for the men. Then, they went on to the Tourist Club where they'd spend a pleasant afternoon, Carl with the men and Lee and Margaret, with the women and children.

Carl enjoyed playing chess or Skat, but Lee found few women with whom she had anything in common. Most of them were housewives who did not have jobs as she did. Everyone was still poor but most men had found some kind of job. They talked about those daring couples who had bought grocery stores. It was a risk, but at least you wouldn't starve. And you could sleep behind the counter if you had to. For the most part Lee was still shunned, though some of the women secretly admired her for working while Carl stayed home with their child. They whispered behind her back about her other child – her son. "He was probably born out of wedlock. Her parents are raising him." Carl's friends Werner Heintzen and Carl Feldman still remained aloof to Lee. After all, she must have tricked such a fine catch as Carl into marriage. Well, they had warned him. But Werner's wife, Pepi Heintzen, admired Lee and enjoyed the time they spent together. Herta Feldman, Carl Feldman's wife, was more timid, but equally kind to Lee. She also worked with her husband in the grocery store they had opened on Santa Cruz Avenue in Menlo Park.

The Tourist Club celebrated Easter with an egg hunt. Maifest was also special, with dancing, singing and the new wine floated with fresh strawberries for the adults. For festivals there was always a band and Margaret begged, "Daddy, dance with me." Carl stood her little feet on his big shoes and they moved around the dance platform. She learned the Rhinelander, the polka and the waltz. Kinderfest was held in summer on a large grass field. There was a tall pole with a wire frame "tree" on a pulley. Gifts were hung all over the wire frame and children of all ages climbed the slick pole to pluck the toys as the "tree" was pulled up or down, corresponding to the child's skills. Margaret's skills were non-existent, so Carl would abandon his chess game to help.

Once each summer they went to the Mountain Play near the top of Mount Tamalpais. The stage of the large outdoor amphitheatre had a spectacular view of San Francisco Bay as its background. Everyone's favorite play was the legend of the Indian maiden, Tamalpa, for whom the mountain was named. At the end of the play, Tamalpa "appeared" for the last time, as if by magic, on a large rock, high above one side of the stage and gave her farewell speech, before "disappearing" in a puff of smoke. After the play, families gathered in the meadow for a picnic dinner and games. Lee brought bread and sausage from

the Pork Store. Everyone was still poor, but many days were filled with fun for the young family. At the end of the day they returned to San Francisco and sat on the lowest deck of the ferry with friends, singing the old German songs from home. The ship's lower deck was aglow with the setting sun. They looked toward the Golden Gate, through the scaffold of the new bridge that was being built across the span. It would be called the Golden Gate Bridge.

After a year, Lee assumed her divorce from Laurson was final and she and Carl were free to marry. On December 27, 1935, they went to Reno and got married before a Justice of the Peace. They stood on State Street near the elegant old Riverside Hotel and the Truckee River. Lee laughed as she told him the story that all the divorcees stood on this bridge and threw their rings into the river to celebrate their divorces when they became final. In those days you could get a "quickie" divorce in Nevada by taking up residence for six weeks.

Their marriage certificate declared the date, which bothered Carl, since his daughter was now two years old. At home he took a blue pen from the drawer and changed the date to read December 27, 1932. He showed Lee. She agreed that it now looked as if he had tampered with the date. She persuaded him not to worry about it. She laughed and told him she would ask Ma to get a blank copy of a marriage certificate someday, so he could fill in any date that he wanted. He didn't understand the joke but he didn't care. At least he and Lee were now legally married.



Above Left: Carl and Lee at the Tourist House in Marin County

Above Right: Lee at a swimming lake

Left: Lee with Margaret

Right: Lee with Margaret

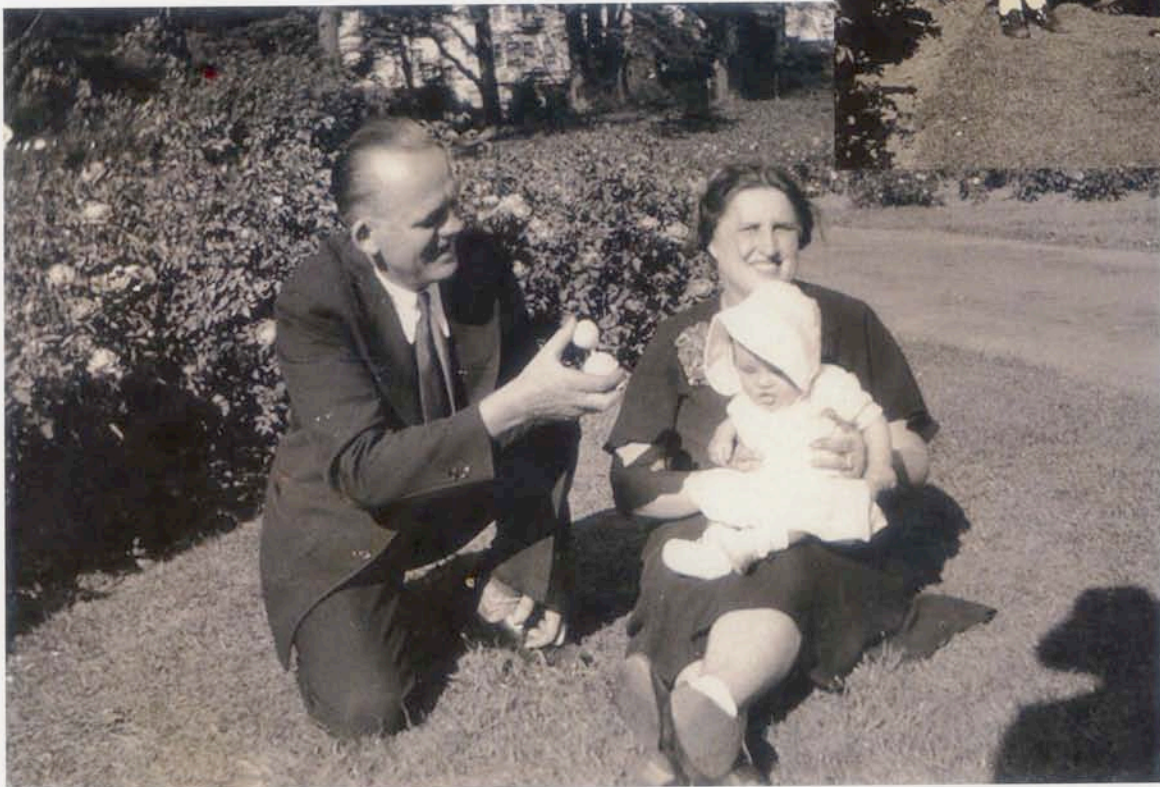




Above: Uncle Ernst, Aunt Adele and Margaret

Right: Lee, Carl and Margaret

Lower: Carl, Lee and Margaret





Upper Left: Gus, Rudy and Ma



Upper Right: Rudy with one of the dogs.

Lower Left: Ma in backyard on Newcomb Avenue in Bayview.

Lower Right: Ma with one of the cats.





Family Trip to Yosemite

Upper Left: Carl, Lee, Rudy and Margaret at Mirror Lake.

Upper Right: Carl, Lee, Rudy and Margaret in meadow with Yosemite Falls.

Lower Left: Rudy, Lee, Carl, holding Margaret at Housekeeping Camp 17



Above Left: Rudy with two of the cats.



Above right: Rudy with Gus Tham



Right: Rudy and Ma with two of the cats and two of the dogs.

Below: Rudy with two dogs.

