

AUSTRALIA BOUND ... ONE BOY'S JOURNEY FROM PERSECUTION TO LIFE

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PROLOGUE

On 9 May 1939, when his ship docked at Fremantle, Rudi Halberstadt (later Robert Halbert), a fourteen-year-old Jewish refugee from Vienna, was handed a letter from Hymie Marks, a gentleman unknown to him. Rudi later wrote: 'He welcomed me to Australia, introduced himself as my 'Guardian' trustee, ... and referred to me as his 'little brother'. Hymie's promise to board the ship in Melbourne 'improved my disposition slightly ... it is always helpful to know someone awaits you'.

Rudi was one of twenty children arriving in Australia under the sponsorship of the 'Welfare Guardian Society', which had been established in Melbourne by John Wars to assist Jewish refugee children from Europe. Members of the Perth Jewish Community were waiting at the port to welcome the newcomers and escort them on a tour of the city. The day's activities did much to lessen the youngsters' apprehension as they set foot on their new homeland.

Their arrival was the culmination of a rescue plan conceived by John (Jack) and Elsie Wars who had persuaded nineteen like-minded men from the Melbourne business community to sponsor twenty boys for resettlement in Australia to learn farming. Appreciative of the urgency, the group had acted boldly and decisively to support the ambitious British sponsored 'Children's Transport' already under way in Europe. Known in Vienna as the *Kindertransport*, the operation was a valiant effort to save Jewish children from the clutches of the 'Third Reich'. Initiated by the British in the aftermath of *Kristallnacht*, the ghastly pogrom the Nazis unleashed on 10 November 1938, it hoped to rescue thousands of desperate children from Germany and Austria.

* This article is dedicated to the memory of my brother Ernst Schiffres and his close friend in Vienna, Robert Halbert.

The program soon ran into difficulties, however. By year's end a great many refugee children remained housed along the English coast waiting for families to adopt them. The temporary quarters in vacant summer campgrounds soon proved a problem. Winter conditions in England, the worst in decades, made life miserable for the weary children. Heavy rains and strong winds battered the coast, flooding both lodgings and surrounding fields. Relief was urgently needed, but appeals to other nations to admit refugee children were unsuccessful.

One notable exception was the generous response that came from a small group of compassionate Australians who called themselves the 'Welfare Guardians'. They asked London's Bloomsbury House, the *Kindertransport's* central refugee registration bureau, to find agreeable children. Convincing male children to volunteer to go to Australia was not an easy task. The refugee children expected to be reunited with their parents shortly and travelling to a distant continent far from Europe was not an enticing prospect. In fact, a mere fourteen accepted the offer in England, amongst them my late friend Robert Halbert who had arrived in England from Vienna in December 1938 and now languished in the camp. The other six volunteers had to be found in Nazi Germany and brought to England. On 9 April 1939, twenty teenagers left London for Southampton, boarded the steamship *Jervis Bay* and journeyed five-weeks to start life anew in Australia.

This is the story of Robert Halbert, whom I knew growing up in Vienna as Rudi 'Micky' Halberstadt. Most of the narrative is taken from letters written when he was a teenager although recollections provided by Bob at the age of seventy are included. Bob's inspiring story is one of triumph — the tale of a courageous fourteen year old forced to leave his Viennese home alone and, through the generosity and foresight of twenty virtuous strangers, was able to rebuild his life in Australia.

AFTER 50 YEARS A LETTER REKINDLES A FRIENDSHIP

'Dear Paul, I was extremely intrigued by your letter. I am sure I am the person you are looking for as the name checks out and I did come to Australia in May 1939 from Vienna via England.' In February 1994, Bob Halbert's reply from Moorabbin, Australia, to my letter of inquiry confirmed that I had contacted the boy I knew in Vienna during the late 1930s. For half a century I had wondered what had become of my brother Ernst's friend after their correspondence ceased in 1944. He wrote briefly his story as follows:

I was brought to Australia by an organisation called the 'Welfare Guardian Society', a group of Melbourne businessmen who undertook to look after twenty lads from Austria and Germany, who were in a refugee camp in England. Their idea was to send us to school in rural areas whilst living with farmers and learn all about agriculture. This worked well until we were old enough to join the Australian army, which we were all anxious to do to get a crack at Hitler. Nearly all of us spent four years in the services but being big city boys none wanted to go back to the farms. We drifted apart and I only see one of them occasionally.

The plan to make these Jewish refugees into farmers had not succeeded, but the rescue from the Nazis had. Bob's story begins in 1938, the year Hitler annexed Austria. I was then ten, my brother Ernst and Rudi (Bob) fourteen. Rudi, my late brother's friend, was a daily visitor to our home. I last saw Rudi¹ on the afternoon of 10 December 1938 when he came to our Vienna apartment to bid us farewell. He was leaving for England. When we parted that day we expected to soon meet in England. At least that was our hope. At midnight the next day Rudi was on board the first *Kindertransport* train to leave the city's Western Railway Station. Exactly one month had passed since the Nazis unleashed the brutal *Kristallnacht* pogrom in which his father was arrested and incarcerated in the infamous Dachau concentration camp. His mother had died in 1936, so Rudi was on his own. His dire predicament was the reason he was selected to be among the initial four hundred 'lucky' children headed for the safety of England.

The 10 November pogrom against the Jews had galvanized Britain's 'Refugee Children's Movement' (RCM) to organise the children's rescue mission. The venture received official government support with the promise to 'facilitate entry for all child refugees whose maintenance was guaranteed either through their own funds or by other individuals'. Special travel documents issued in London expedited entry by removing the need for passports or visas. An unspecified number of unaccompanied children up to the age of seventeen were stipulated with a target number of 10,000 being set. England was intended primarily as a transient haven for these young refugees from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia for it was thought they would soon immigrate to other countries.

Vienna's Jewish Community Organisation responded magnificently to the extraordinary British offer. To choose from amongst an estimated 35,000 eligible children would have been a formidable challenge under the best of circumstances but Adolph Eichmann

made the selection process exceptionally chaotic when he imposed special obstacles by giving the organisers a mere twenty-four hours to submit a transport list. The required documents included a signed questionnaire, two photographs, a valid passport and a medical certificate for each child. Acting in great haste the Jewish community met the capricious deadline and the first train departed on schedule. All on board were desperate, helpless children, some descendents of 'Polish Jews' threatened with imminent deportation, others like Rudi 'orphans' with no parent to look after them. Until they abruptly ended with the start of World War II, the *Kindertransports* saved nearly 10,000 youngsters from extermination, 2,844 of them from Vienna.

Scores of parents, mine among them, wishing to send their children to safety, registered them for these transports. Ernst and I were sent for a medical examination in January 1939. Our parents began preparing us by buying clothing and necessities as if we were headed to summer camp. At the age of ten I thought travelling to England with my brother an exciting prospect but did not correctly appreciate its implications. Our cousins, Kurt and Jackie Schwarz, fourteen and ten like us, left for England that March. We bade farewell to them as well as to other departing friends, but our turn never came. On 23 November 1939, almost one year after Rudi's departure, Ernst and I immigrated to the United States with our parents.

In the intervening fifty-five years the memory of Rudi remained a treasured memento of my Vienna childhood. My brother and he maintained an unbroken, if not always regular letter exchange until Ernst's death in 1944. He had stored the letters amongst his belonging when he left for the Army. There they remained, untouched, until I read them years after my parents' death. Phrases and expressions I had not heard in decades made the past come alive for me. Many letters were written in German. These I translated, placing the entire collection on my computer. The material fascinated my wife who called them a treasure and urged me to find Rudi. I procrastinated for years using various rationalisations to excuse my inaction. I thought it an impossible task, particularly since I believed he had resettled in the United States after the war. Then, in January 1994 a chance encounter at the New York Gift Show indicated that my assumption was incorrect. An Australian importer's booth displaying opal jewellery caught my eye. The Berlin-born proprietor, Manfred Anson, mentioned that he had lived in Australia for many years, arriving there as a youngster in 1939. I replied that a friend from Vienna had reached Australia the same way. He confirmed that he knew Rudi and had attended the same

school in Australia. Manfred Anson had left Australia 35 years ago and he suggested that I contact the Australian Trade Commission and ask them to look for a Robert Halbert² in the Melbourne telephone book.

Manfred's advice propelled me into action. I made the suggested phone call and soon a brief note of inquiry was on its way to the only 'R. Halbert' listed in the Melbourne telephone book. Ten days later a reply arrived in my mailbox. I was unprepared and disheartened by the opening paragraph:

I don't remember you although the name seems vaguely familiar. What puzzles me is why would you be looking for me after fifty-five years, why at the Australian Trade Commission and how would they have a record of my name change? Please tell me a little more about yourself!

It had not occurred to me that Bob's remembrance of me might not be as vivid as mine were of him. Although my letter was lacking in particulars he readily accepted our Viennese acquaintance as fact. My subsequent letter was more explicit and I quoted extensively from his 1939 letters to my brother. Again his response disappointed me:

I was amazed that you found letters of mine written to your brother. I must admit I have no recollection of writing to him. Perhaps you could write again and tell me from where you know me.

Had Bob forgotten so much or was I unreasonable in having expected more? He provided a summary of events in his life during the past fifty-six years starting with his marriage to Millie in 1946, which produced one daughter and two lovely grandchildren. He had made the automotive parts industry his career rather than farming and was now seventy and fully retired. The letter closed with an often-heard observation from Holocaust survivors:

I have no living relatives (that I know of). My father survived Dachau, went to live in West Virginia, worked there as a Textile Engineer for some years, changed his name to Hilborn, remarried an American woman and died of a heart attack. I never saw him again, as at that time he could not afford to visit Australia nor could I go to the States. That's Life!

Bob's request I write again encouraged me to identify myself in more detail hoping it would enable him to better recall our relation-

ship in Vienna. He began with a comment on my meeting Manfred Anson:

What an amazing coincidence that you should run into Manfred Anson. We were very close friends in the Army and just after the war. We played tennis together and he often had breakfast with my wife Millie and me when he could not be bothered to cook for himself. I was amazed about your knowledge of me. You seem to know more about our life after the *Anschluss* than I do. I must admit that I am terrible about remembering names, but I do remember having a close friend who lived across the road at the corner of *Zirkusgasse* and *Rotensterngasse* (my father and I were at No.36³). He used to look out the window and if there were no S.A. men [storm troopers] or Hitler Youths in sight he would get on the phone, let it ring three times and then hang up. That was a signal for me that it was safe to come over. That must have been your brother Ernst ... It is quite amazing that Ernst kept a dairy. The activities he mentioned become quite real to me, particularly the sledding ... My father's knitting mill was ... just around the corner. It was there he was arrested, taken to Dachau and I never saw him again. My mother died in 1936, just before I was due to have my *bar mitzvah*, then I contracted Scarlet Fever and was in isolation for six weeks and consequently was not *bar-mitzvahed* at all. I remember we had a housekeeper named Thekla who stayed with us until after the *Anschluss* when she was forced to leave. I did four years schooling in the *Realschule* ... then switched to the *Textilschule* ... where the Nazis expelled me. I was in training as a textile engineer when I was kicked out of the Textile School, but I remember running a class in my father's factory until he was arrested and sent to Dachau. When I left for England in December 1938 I was unable to take anything with me. No photos or other memorabilia exist other than a photo of my late mother, which my father sent to me after the war.

This is how our correspondence began in 1994 and as the letters crossed the Pacific they grew in congeniality until six months later we were finalising plans for a reunion on the Hawaiian Islands.

BOB'S NARRATIVE — A TRANSITORY STOP IN ENGLAND

Bob's journey to Australia via England is an extraordinary saga of courage and good luck. Of the thousands of children saved by the British '*Kindertransport*' only a very small handful reached the far-

away continent. With the *Anschluss*, the German invasion of our Austrian homeland in March 1938, the Jews of Vienna lost their legal status as citizens, followed closely by loss of jobs, property, businesses and, for some, life. The city to which they had contributed learning and culture, the country for which they fought in World War I was promised to be 'cleansed of Jews' by 1942 (made *Judenrein*). Unhappily, the vow was not an idle threat. Ordinary security ceased as Jews lost the protection of the state. Danger lurked everywhere. In the first few weeks after the *Anschluss* 'street scrubbing parties' became a favourite Nazi sport throughout the city. Bob recalled his own ordeal in our neighbourhood:

We used to chase after a girl named Edith whose father had a shoe shop in the *Praterstrasse* [a nearby shopping street]. It was in that vicinity that I was picked up one day by some S.A. hoods [Storm troopers], given a scrubbing brush and bucket, taken to the Danube Canal, punched and kicked in the kidneys all the way, made to fill the bucket dozens of times and forced to scrub the pavement. This went on for hours and when they finally let me go I was black and blue all over. Incidentally I had been wearing a brand new suit, which was now in shreds! I have often thought of going back to the place of my youth but it sticks in my gullet to let those bastards have any of my hard-earned money.

The 10 November pogrom, which came to be known as *Kristallnacht*, erupted without warning. Jewish homes were searched, plundered and destroyed. Synagogues were torched and allowed to burn to the ground. Jews of all ages were arrested, beaten and murdered. Three weeks after his father's arrest Rudi was headed for freedom in England. During the trip rumours circulated that if just one child in the group was discovered smuggling anything out of the country the entire transport would be turned back. Rudi managed to mail a post card en route, signing his nickname 'Micky'. It was the start of the prolific correspondence that continued until Ernst's death in 1944. His delight at departing Germany was apparent in his words: 'Dear Friend! For the moment I am well and satiated with food. In approximately one hour we will cross the border. Hurray! Best regards from 'Micky'.

In Cologne more children boarded the train. At the last station in German territory suitcases were randomly opened for inspection as the frightened children watched in silence. Gestapo guards were inclined to steal items of value and frequently vandalised luggage. One boy had his cherished stamp collection pilfered by an inspector

who remarked he could start another in England. The surly Nazi guards were promptly forgotten the moment the train entered the first Dutch station. Smiling people stood on the platform waving to the children who stared out from the windows. Dutch refugee personnel boarded the cars to warmly welcome them with refreshments. The contrast to the Germans could not have been greater.

After a rough overnight ferry crossing from Hook of Holland they disembarked at Harwich, England in the morning. Here the sponsored children left for London by train. The non-sponsored ones like Rudi boarded buses for the two miles trip to the Dovercourt Camp. It was one of two holiday camps rented by the Refugee Children's Movement (RCM) as temporary shelters while the refugee children awaited sponsors. The accommodation designed only for summer living soon proved an unfortunate choice as the winter of 1938 was one of the coldest on record.

Rudi slept in one of the many small 'chalets' that overlooked the dry mud flats from which one could see the North Sea. The bungalows were poorly insulated, had no provision for heating, and adding to the youngsters' discomfort, the adjoining grounds lacked surface drainage, becoming a quagmire in wet weather. To keep warm the children slept in sweaters and coats, covering themselves with an abundance of blankets. During Christmas the cold intensified, temperature fell below the freezing point, solidifying water pipes and preventing washing or toilet use. When the arctic colds reached the point that even the urine in chamber pots froze, Dovercourt was hurriedly evacuated. Some went to quarters at the Salvation Army Sailors' Hostel in Harwich while others like Rudi were transferred to the St. Felix's Girls School, a public school near Clacton. They remained there until the first week of January 1939 when the regular students returned from their holiday. Rudi's first letter from England is lost but the second one, sent on 3 January 1939, following his stay at St. Felix, described the situation at Dovercourt when he responded to Ernst's inquiry about the political 'weather' in England:

In spite of the fact that I understand quite well your meaning when you inquire about the weather, I will report to you about the weather we had here a few weeks ago. During the night we had a terrible rainstorm that was so bad we thought the bungalows would collapse. It continued that way until mid-day. The bungalows closest to the ocean were already 33 centimetres [almost one foot] under water. Raincoats and rubber boots were promptly distributed to us more fully grown boys, and we were forced to scoop up the water and pass the buckets until 11pm. I fell into bed at night lifeless.

Thank you for your letter of 30 December. I only received it yesterday because I moved again and it had to be forwarded. Since we are constantly relocating much of our mail gets lost in delivery. My ambition to reach London has unfortunately not been realized. I am again in a camp, sleep on a cot, play a lot of soccer, and suffer daily muscle pains. It will be a long time before we are assigned to families. As you may already know S. suffers from inflammation of the throat, middle-ear infection, and may have measles to boot. He is now in a hospital somewhere and because of the infection we are all quarantined in camp. Until I am assigned to a family I can't do a thing for anyone, not even for my father.

The first mention of Australia in a postcard dated 9 January 1939 stunned us all. He wrote: 'I initiated something quite unusual. I have registered my name as a farm labourer for Australia. After a year on an English farm it's off to Australia.' On 25 January Rudi qualified his optimism about registration as a farm labourer by explaining 'I am not going to Australia so soon.' He continued:

This is my first opportunity to reply to your two letters. There is nothing special doing here, except that I again had to move. The former camp is less than five minutes away. We are six hundred people in the new camp, which is very modern and much better than the previous one. We are strictly a boy's camp. I am corresponding with an English girl who is my age. She has already sent me a picture. Very nice!

The camp directors had decided to separate the sexes. The girls were now quartered at Dovercourt and the boys at Pakefield. The change became necessary when evidence surfaced that a few older youngsters had gotten a bit too friendly with each other at night. There was also the episode in Harwich when a few boys on an outing to town discovered the red light district. The incident seems funny now but had even a hint of scandal reached the public then it would have had serious repercussions for the entire rescue program.

Ernst and I had expected to leave for England and were awaiting selection when Rudi's letter of 6 February brought discouraging news:

I have heard from many sources that the transports are being halted until further notice because, in the first place, apportioning us to families, schools, etc is presenting great difficulties, and secondly, there are reports that they are not satisfied with the quality of people that have been sent here to date.

I obtained the girl's address in the following manner ... we were in a girl's college during Christmas. There, we all recorded our names on door nameplates and the girls then wrote to us. I answered immediately. I know just barely enough English to enable me to correspond. As a precaution I omitted a photo of myself, although she had requested one. If one of the boys ends his correspondence, I will send you his girl's address at once. Having contact with someone could be advantageous for me. The girls must all come from wealthy families, as the college fee is £40 per year. There is another approach you could try. Address it to: A girl in the St. Felix School, Gardiner House, Southwold, Suffolk, England. Write that you have a friend in the Dovercourt camp, and that you too would very much like to correspond with an English girl. Make yourself one years [sic] older, and don't send a photo for the time being. You are sure to get an answer.

I have now been assigned to an extraordinary chore. I had volunteered for work in our library, but the camp director informed me that there were no further positions open. However, he said, you could clean the toilets daily, if you wish. Since it was impossible to say no, my friend and I are now cleaning all forty-eight toilets. However, our efforts have made us his 'darlings'.

All the children left in camp were 'unsponsored' which meant they were still the committee's responsibility. The situation needed to be remedied if more children were to be brought over from Germany, but finding sponsors was difficult. Visitors to the camp looked at the youngsters but few offered to take older children. As Rudi explained to Ernst 'that ladies are visiting us daily is an exaggeration, but visitors do come every Saturday and Sunday'. The majority was seeking younger children, generally preferring girls to boys. Boys over twelve were especially hard to place; yet it was exactly this age group for which placements were needed because early transports had contained a high proportion of them. Neither did re-emigration, still the official government policy, offer a viable solution. Only 113 refugee children re-emigrated during the first six months of 1939 and that included the 'Guardian' boys leaving for Australia.

By mid-February the prospects for Australia had become more definite. As Bob wrote in his letter at that time:

My Australian situation has now been settled. I am to travel directly to Australia in the near future!! I am not yet sure of

the exact date; it could be tomorrow, but in eight weeks at the latest. For the first year I will attend an agricultural high school, and afterwards secure employment. Naturally, I will then be more than just an ordinary farm worker.

Meanwhile my cousins, Kurt and Jackie, had been selected and left for England on 13 March 1939. Ernst's persistent plea to find a guarantor for the two of us obligated Rudi to reply with logic that was as irrefutable as it was discouraging:

The situation with the visitors is as follows. If they plan to take a child, they select one; if not they only come to observe life in the camp. It is unreasonable to expect a woman to choose two boys unfamiliar to her, whose appearance she does not know, nor have knowledge if they are well behaved or naughty, etc., when she can eliminate that uncertainty by choosing from among the five hundred boys here. Even if I tell her extraordinary tales about the two of you, there is no assurance that she would believe me ... I have heard that transports without guarantors will not resume until the number of boys that have arrived and still in camp falls below two hundred ... Our relatives and acquaintances are attempting to obtain an entry authorization for my father, but to no avail as far as I know ... I cannot write you anything regarding the weather prospects because I know nothing. We are totally cut off from all news here that I know neither what is happening in Germany nor in England.

Camp life is slowly becoming extremely wearisome. In spite of soccer tournaments, variety shows, jujitsu and a jazz band there is no diversion. Like the cursed *Hakoah*⁴, my group was eliminated from semi-finals of the soccer tournament. Literally in the final second of the second extension of play we, that is I, received a goal. It was impossible to halt this final goal (by unanimous agreement). The shot, coming from 22 meters, was so powerful that I thought it would tear the netting. That's all the news.

Except for playing soccer and the cold weather, Bob remembered few details about life in camp when I asked him in 1994. He wrote then:

Don't count on much help from me. I could not even remember the events I wrote to Ernst about. All I can remember about the big camp in Harwich was playing soccer nearly everyday, the

freezing cold winter in a holiday camp in Lowestoft, my introduction to porridge, corn flakes and a horrible sweet called 'Spotted Dick!'⁵ I remember nothing about the train trip from Vienna to the Hook of Holland or the trip across the Channel.

In his letter of 1 March 1939, Rudi announced his departure for Australia as follows: 'I am to travel to Australia this month. My permit is already on its way. I am extremely pleased. In Australia I will attend an agricultural school for a year and then have a good job.' At the age of fifteen Rudi had made the crucial decision to relocate far from Europe. An important consideration had been his expectation that it might be easier to assist his father from Australia. He ended his letter with the following request:

I have an enormous favour to ask of you. If you happen to have some time, would you be so kind as to walk up to our apartment, see if Rosa is at home, and if she is, make some inquiries about my father, but try no to let on that it is I who sent you. The people are all so crazy (*meshugge*), and one can't determine what is really happening.

Ernst had written to a girl at the St Felix School as suggested and Rudi's 7 March 1939 letter asked:

Have you received a reply from the girl yet? If not, don't give up hope. The English are very peculiar people. I am convinced that she is making every effort on your behalf without informing you. Suddenly you will receive the permit without knowing how it came about. I will recount an incident to you to demonstrate how very friendly and honourably they behave towards us and how unselfishly they treat us. A benefit performance was organized for us in Harwich. It was well publicized, and although the cost of admission (2 shillings) was very high, it was sold out. Fifty of our boys were invited to attend. After we arrived and were seated it was discovered that our seats, valued at 5d, had also been sold. In other words, fifty English ticket holders were without seats. Actually we should have returned home at this point, but the performers declared themselves ready to perform another show free of charge for these fifty people. This enabled them to sell additional tickets, also for our benefit. Isn't that nice? I would so very much like to help all of you, but I can't even do something for Papa. I am really sorry that I won't be able to welcome you to England anymore, but I am convinced that we will see each

other again if we maintain our correspondence. At the moment I am just longing to mail the first postcard from ship-board. Our permits have arrived in London, and we have already been asked what clothing we require. Naturally everyone prepared a long list of his needs and we were promised that we would receive everything. The committee has an enormous amount of money. Just consider the cost of the journey to Australia for fourteen boys which is not cheap, and that the committee is probably also contributing something for our schooling in the first year when we won't be earning a salary.

It is dreadful that the American quota is unavailable for so long. Last Sunday a distinguished committee official, a 'Lady', visited us here and reported to us that a project is in the works, which will enable 10,000 youngsters to travel from Germany to America.⁶ This resulted in a five minute long 'Stadion-like' [Vienna's soccer stadium] eruption, celebratory shouts and cheers that so moved the Lady that she sent her servant into town, naturally in her automobile, with instructions to buy us sweets. Can you imagine, candy for 450 boys? The car returned crammed to the hilt. These people are loaded with money.

I thank you very much for your effort to find Rosa at home. You don't have to go up there any more, because a Nazi storm trooper might abuse you. We no longer own the apartment. Who knows who might be living there now?

My correspondence with the girl has ended. She apparently resented my asking her if she wouldn't care to come for a visit. I was extremely disheartened but it wouldn't have come to anything anyway. In 5th grade the girls are either eleven or fifteen, in other words no older than you.

Rudi wrote his final letter from camp on 16 March 1939. Anxious for the mail to continue uninterrupted on his forthcoming journey he listed all ports with docking dates. In his penultimate letter from England he wrote:

I am answering your letter immediately, but I probably won't be able to mail it until Wednesday when I am allowed another letter. I am surprised that your girl is taking such a long time to answer but it will happen ... to comfort you let me assure you that the mood here in camp is no better than the way you all feel. You can't imagine how dispirited and despondently most of us walk around here. We hang around from one meal to the next and go hungry in between. Our only activity is

playing soccer or writing letters. If I could, I would write three letters a day, just to have something to do and for the opportunity to unburden myself to someone. On a dreary, rainy day like today for example, one really knows not what to do with oneself. I have heard that we will leave this camp on the 30th of the month. I feel so sorry for those who still have not found a place for themselves and must move into this new 5th camp.

To prevent an interruption in our correspondence I am providing you the following listing with exact details for my departure and the trip.

Departure on the *S.S. Jervis-Bay* from Southampton on April 8

Malta	15 April
Port Said	18 April
Aden	22 April
Colombo	29 April
Fremantle	9 May
Adelaide	13 May
Melbourne	15 May

Naturally you can write to me even during the trip. All you have to do is to address one of the harbours where we dock. Of course it must be done in a timely manner, lest we are already elsewhere when your letter arrives. As an example the address should read as follows: Rudi Halberstadt c/o onboard the ship *Jervis-Bay*, Colombo, Ceylon. I imagine you can look up the letter's travel time at the post office. I assume that only airmail is possible (from Australia, naturally), for otherwise I would have to wait twelve long weeks for a reply, which I couldn't stand!

Thank God we are now well informed about political events because they are providing us with an 'oral newspaper' each evening that lasts ten minutes.

Three weeks elapsed before Rudi's last letter from Europe arrived. Mailed from London on 7 April 1939 it described a misfortune that almost prevented his departure for Australia. He wrote:

Due to two relocations and a few days illness I was unable to write to you until today. I hope you are not too angry with me. When I received your letter I was lying in the sickroom with a 103°F (39.6°C) fever. Although I only had a mild tonsillitis I had a high fever for two days. Of course with my customary bad luck I was still sick when my Australian comrades departed for London. The doctor must have done it to spite me

because at 8AM they all left and at 10AM he allowed me to get out of bed. You can imagine how infuriated I was. I immediately rushed to the camp supervisor urging that he allow me to chase after them, but that was not possible. He could not allow me to travel until he received notification from the committee. As a result of my dilemma I had to endure a move to a new camp as the old one had to be readied for Easter guests. Moreover they kept heaping more and more chores on me as the camp looked like a pirate's lair. We slept on the floor on mattresses, which I had already experienced so it didn't bother me anymore, but the others began to mutiny. Their complaints were useless and only served to get additional work chores assigned to us.

When I was finally allowed to travel to London a new misfortune befell me. Three others and I were driven by car to the railway station but our luggage was to be transported on a next second trip. While the driver was getting our luggage the train arrived and we had to leave for London without our luggage. I immediately went to the Committee, feigned desperation, whereupon the necessary steps were taken to make sure I obtained my luggage. I met very many acquaintances there among them Kurt who seemed to wander about the place all day long as if at Vienna's Palestine Agency, or the Jewish Community Organization ... you can't possibly imagine how this committee operates. Before I came to London and saw how immense it was I had envisioned it as a small office with four to five people. There is much turmoil at the place ... one department adjoins the next, employees dart back and forth, and rooms with fifty to sixty stenographers are not unusual. They have links to everywhere and work closely with the Home Office.

Rudi was fortunate to have recovered from his illness in time but not everyone was as lucky as he later recalled:

The only close friend who came to England with me on the same transport was N., who also wanted to come to Australia. Unfortunately on the way to the medical examination for the final selection he had a very bad cold (1938 was one of the coldest winters in England's history). He failed the medical, stayed in England, was drafted into the Land Army and wrote me bed-by-bed descriptions of his adventures with the Land Army girls! Eventually he joined the British Army and unfortunately was killed during the landing in France. A twist of fate!

The 'Committee' Rudi visited in London was the Refugee Children's Movement's (RCM) head office, which managed the children's rescue operation. Located at Bloomsbury House, it was mostly staffed by volunteers. Visitors seeking information were ushered into two large rooms, formerly the ballroom and dining room of the Palace Hotel. Refugee children sometimes waited hours before being able to talk to someone. Conditions at the place reminded Rudi of the turmoil he had witnessed at Jewish agencies in Vienna.

My cousin, Kurt Schwarz was staying in London at the time but his eleven year-old brother, Jackie, had been sent to live at a hostel in Glasgow, Scotland. Kurt had a guarantor but was seeking ways to get his parents and us to England. So many of our Viennese friends had already left that my brother Ernst lamented in a letter he wrote to Kurt of being the 'Last of the Mohicans'. Kurt responded with pragmatic advice but not before attempting to be witty by stating 'this is not an accomplishment for you, but someone has to be last'. Kurt continued:

Regarding the permit I could do nothing although I tried everything possible. When you write to people in England always emphasize that you will shortly be continuing your journey to the U.S.A. ... I offer you the following recommendation: write to 'Mrs. Schwab, Welfare Dept., Bloomsbury House, Bloomsbury Street' and besiege her with letters. One young boy did just that and now he is in London. Compose utterly desperate letters. Maybe that will work. Naturally, do likewise on Paul's behalf. Mrs. Schwab can only provide a guarantee, but she can't expedite matters. To expedite matters you must write to the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany.

At this time, Rudi was enjoying London for a few days in the care of people acting on behalf of his Australian benefactors. Later in reminiscing about this he wrote:

In London I lived in a boarding house, went to movies daily, to the cabaret, to the theatre, feasted in the very finest restaurants, visited chocolate factories where they offered us whole cartons of bonbons and chocolates and even encouraged us to pocket as much as possible, provided we did it surreptitiously. We received new suitcases, a pair of pants and a jacket, a pullover sweater, shoes, etc. Whatever you had ordered, you received. Tomorrow morning we travel to Southampton ... I expect your next letter will reach me in Malta. I think you will

have to mail it on the 11th at the latest in order to make certain that it arrives there by the 15th. Should you mail it later, then write to Port Said to be on the safe side. I will probably have no more than six to ten hours stopover time at each harbor. That will just have to suffice ... I have had no proper news from Papa for a terribly long time.

On 9 April 1939, Kurt wrote to us that: 'Rudi departed yesterday. It was even mentioned in the newspaper'. By mid-June 1939 he too was planning immigration to Australia. Kurt was learning farming in England whilst Ernst was doing the same at a Zionist farm in Moosbrunn's, just outside Vienna. Here is how Kurt described his training experiences:

I changed my address on April 8th. Now I am on a farm training school, Flint Hall Farm, Hambleden Near Henley on Thames. After approximately two months I will be going to Tasmania. I hope to be able to better help my parents from there. Both of us seemed to have landed in the same occupation. You must not think that I am not going to Palestine because I am not a Zionist. The reasons are quite different. As always I am still the old 100% Zionist. The reasons is that I cannot obtain an entry for my dear parents in Palestine, while in Tasmania I am certain I can because I will have a good future there as I will be given pasture land from the government. That it is far away makes me happy, the further away the better.

Like Rudi, Kurt, was similarly motivated in seeking to migrate to Australia. He believed Australia offered a greater possibility of help for his loved ones left behind in Vienna. In late July 1939, Kurt wrote to Ernst at the Moosbrunn farm:

Like you, I had imagined farm work to be much more strenuous. Please write me in detail what you do there, etc. I am not in a camp but on a farm where seventeen young boys are learning farming. We primarily learn milking, an art at which I am already quite proficient. Do you also milk?

With the outbreak of war in September 1939, all mail between England and Germany ceased but on 21 January 1940 Kurt wrote to us in New York from Stotley Rough School, six weeks after our arrival in the US. Without further explanation he stated the 'Tasmania plans unfortunately miscarried ...the guarantor insisted I leave the farm and attend a farming school'. Kurt was probably

ineligible for Australia, which only accepted orphaned or semi-orphaned children. Later he was interned as an 'enemy alien' and then transported to Canada where he worked at logging for one year. When his status was changed to 'friendly alien', he volunteered for the Black Watch, the very regiment that had guarded him, quickly rising in rank to Captain. After the war Kurt served the British High Command in Austria as chief interpreter during the four-power occupation of Vienna. The boy who had fled the city of his birth had returned to it a British officer, living in the *Schönbrunn* Palace where Austrian Emperors once resided. He was refused English citizenship, left the army, decided Austria was not the place for him and settled in Brazil where he married and had one daughter. His brother Jackie also rejected Austria deciding instead to settle on a kibbutz in Israel. Their parents perished in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz.

ON BOARD THE HMS JERVIS BAY EN ROUTE TO AUSTRALIA



Rudi sent two letters from onboard the *HMS Jervis Bay* describing events during the journey. The first was mailed on 17 April from Port Said, Egypt and the second on the 26 April 1939 from Columbo, Ceylon. Upon reaching his adopted homeland Rudi Halberstadt legally changed his name to Robert Halbert, as suggested by the 'Guardians'. Only one letter from Australia reached us in Vienna prior to the start of the war. In his first letter from the sea voyage he wrote:

Now I will report to you all that is talking place on board this ship. The farewell with our leaders in Southampton was not

especially affectionate. Nonetheless, we were sorry that those enjoyable London days had ended. Once on board the ship, which we had envisioned as much bigger than it actually was (although it is very large) we began to explore it exhaustively in all directions. At first it was extremely difficult to become oriented. I had to search more than two hours before I found my cabin.

Eating consists of four meals per day at which everyone eats so much that no one can move about afterwards. At the 7AM wake up call you are greeted with a tray of fruit from which you can select whatever and as much as you wish. Breakfast starts at 7:45AM opening with an appetizer of mixed compote or porridge, followed by a main entree that is selected from the menu. If it tastes good one repeats the order again. There are also cold meats, ham, or bacon, followed by tea or coffee with cakes, biscuit and tiny breads. The ship also has twenty-two English youths onboard who are on their way to Sidney [sic] to pursue agricultural studies. They are much more brazen than we are, literally devouring the entire menu from top to bottom at every meal.

While in the Bay of Biscay the desire for eating eluded us all. We encountered an absolutely dreadful storm. You couldn't take two steps without the need to grasp for support somewhere. This was the time when I realized my sea worthiness. Of the five to six hundred passengers there were probably no more than sixty that did not vomit during the two days the storm lasted. Among our group of twenty boys six were absolutely unable to move and lay stretched out in bed like wax figures, while another ten ambled about with painful expressions. Just four, myself included, remained steadfast continuing to eat as before. After the storm ended several very pleasurable deck games were set up which now occupy my entire day. Two days ago we arrived in Malta where we sighted fabulous warships and aircraft carriers. Unfortunately we were not allowed to disembark.

Since this letter will not be leaving the ship in Port Said until tomorrow (18 April), it will be impossible for you to write me in Aden. I think there should be enough time for Colombo, then Ceylon [now Sri Lanka]. The most unpleasant part of the trip will be passage through the Red Sea, which is at the same latitude as the Sahara.

His second letter of 26 April 1939 was written on 'Aberdeen & Commonwealth Line' stationary en route to Ceylon. Rudi wrote:

Your postcard addressed to Port Said did not reach me until Aden because it probably arrived too late. In the interim you must have received the letter I mailed from Port Said. I am extremely happy when I receive a letter from you because you are the only one who writes to me. Our current correspondence arrangements seems to function very well, because soon after mailing a letter to me my reply to your previous letter reaches you. Nothing special happened on board the ship. There was no problem getting permission to go ashore in Port Said. It is a dreadful city. You can't walk a step without being accosted by a beggar or stopped by a peddler. Children lie or run about the street 3/4 naked, the stench is awful and it is impossible to fend off the flies.

In this city I have learned the art of bargaining. These crooks raise their prices three or four fold when they sight a European. We needed to purchase tropical hats for ourselves. The dealers demanded 8/6, in other words 8 shillings. One of the youngsters said 5 shillings, another 3 shillings and I had the chutzpah to offer 2 shillings expecting him to throw us all out the door. Quite the contrary. He reacted with a friendly laugh and said, 'Only because you are Jews'. We all purchased hats for 2 shillings. Afterwards we were sorry we hadn't offered even less. If you believe that you struck a great bargain you can be certain the hawker did three times as well. I purchased nothing except the tropical hat that I needed for passage through the Red Sea and beyond, thereby I have already saved myself 12 shillings. This is because we are each paid a 5 shillings weekly allowance. By the time we reach Australia I want to have £1.

Let me describe another larceny that befell one of our youngsters: This lad, an enthusiastic stamp collector, wanted to exchange 6 or 7 postage reply coupons for a set of Egyptian stamps. So we walked to the post office with him. An Egyptian with some knowledge of English waited in front of the counter. The boy asked him where he might exchange the coupons. The man contemplated a moment, seized the coupons shouting 'just a moment!' and disappeared never to be seen again.

You need have no fear of being able to speak English. I have befriended several English boys on board ship and converse in English all day long. Occasionally when I am stymied for a particular word I simply look it up in the dictionary. Although the style of English that you learned in Vienna is hardly heard here, for everyone without exception speaks in slang (dialect). However, one soon get accustomed to it.

ARRIVAL AND FARM LIFE IN AUSTRALIA

On arrival, Rudi anglicised his name to Robert Halbert and his first letter from Australia dated 6 June 1939, five weeks after his arrival, was signed with his new name. He was working as a farmhand for Vic Walpole at Hurdle Creek, Whorley South, Victoria, and described his experiences to Ernst:

Upon our docking in Melbourne I received the airmail postcard you had addressed to Colombo. You mailed it on April 22, and it did not arrive there until May 2nd, in other words too late. I replied to you immediately as I am certain I wrote you once, if not twice, after Port Said. First let me respond to your postcard queries and then report to you my other adventures.

I will get to the question of my name change later. You appear to have a mistaken impression in regard to my adventures on board ship. Of course we weren't just boys on the ship. Did you think that a special ship would travel to Australia with just twenty lads? It had approximately five hundred passengers and naturally there were several girls among them. The war danger appears not too great at present, but in any case, the Australians are not too worried about it. That pretty much takes care of the items in your postcard.

I will begin my report with our arrival at Fremantle, the first Australian port in which the ship stopped. The primary item of interest to us upon arrival at each port is the mail that is brought on board. I obtained at least one letter or post card at every stop but in Fremantle something extraordinary occurred. I received an English language letter from a gentleman of whom I had not heard before. He welcomed me to Australia, introduced himself as my 'Guardian' trustee, related to me his entire family structure and referred to me as his 'little brother'. In summary he was extraordinarily kind. Furthermore, he wrote that upon our arrival in Melbourne he will come on board ship. As you can imagine this improved my disposition slightly. It is always helpful to know someone awaits you. All twenty boys received similar letters, each from a different individual. Quite by chance my guardian, Hymie Marks, and my friend's are brothers. Several gentlemen from the committee also came on board, at Fremantle, loaded three or four of us in each of their cars, and showed us Perth, the capital of West Australia. We received a fabulous lunch and toured the entire day.

In Adelaide several more gentlemen from the committee

came on board, the president, the vice president and the treasurer of the committee. The latter was the one who conceived of the good idea to bring us over. This triumvirate, all of them also 'Guardians', travelled with us to Melbourne. We didn't have a free moment on this part of the trip and had not time to tour the city of Adelaide either. There was an awful lot to accomplish. We altered our names. Mine is not particularly attractive but it is English⁷. Then each of us was medically examined and assigned to one of two schools. One is an agricultural college and the other, which I attend, an agricultural school.⁸ All of us live with farmers. Afterwards we had to sign a declaration that we would obey our guardian, that we would write to him, that we would remain on the farm until we are twenty-one years old, etc. Those sorts of things occupied all of our time until we reached Melbourne where a very special surprise awaited me on my arrival. I received my first letter from Papa who had finally returned home at the end of April.

My guardian had also boarded the ship and he immediately struck me as very congenial. We secured my luggage and he took me to his home, of course driving his own car. Like almost everyone here he owns his own home, has an exceptionally friendly wife, and two sons, six and one year old. I spent the entire day with them and they showed me Melbourne as best they could. In the evening there was a marvellous reception party for us with approximately four hundred invited guests. There were tedious speeches, glasses were raised to toast the president and us and there was much feasting and drinking. Reporters accosted us by the dozens, making us feel like movie stars. Afterwards we fell into bed dead tired.

On the following morning we were transported into 'the wilderness'. The ensuing account refers only to ten boys as the others went elsewhere. We ten who were to attend the Wangaratta Technical School were taken to Wangaratta, a city with 10,000 inhabitants, where the farmers who will be our guardians and with whom we are to live for the next year took custody of us. My farmer lives twenty-six miles (40km) from school and I travel almost an hour by bus each day to reach it. To arrive at the bus stop takes an additional ten-minutes on the bicycle given me by the committee! The daily bus trip is the best part of the entire schooling. We entertain ourselves wonderfully and boys and girls are intermixed. My farmer has six children between the ages of two and fifteen years of age. The eldest attends the same school as me and is a decent chap.

The school itself is remarkably good. Courses involve pri-

marily practical subjects: Machine Shop, Sheet Metal Shop, Carpentry, and Forge. In addition we also study Chemistry, English, Agriculture, and Physics. It's child's play for us because the teachers think our English is inadequate for comprehending their lectures. They are forever giving us magazines and newspapers to examine. The grades range from 10/10 to 1/10 with the latter being the lowest.

The Welfare Guardian Society (WGS) had assigned a guardian ('big brother') to each immigrant ('little brother'). This arrangement not only emulated the British 'Big Brother' movement's approach but also served in meeting Australia's entry requirements. The formal agreement stated each party's obligations explicitly. The guardian would provide material, practical and spiritual guidance, keep the migrant in a rural occupation, provide clothing, equipment and reading material, visit him and compensate for the absence of parents by assuming moral responsibility until he reached the age of twenty-one. The migrant youngster promised to work diligently at school, accept the guardian's advice and guidance without question or dispute, refrain from drinking or gambling until age twenty-one and open a bank account to save a fixed amount each week. Furthermore, he agreed to write to his guardian at least one a month, not leave his employer without written permission and behave in an upright manner to reflect credit on his Welfare Guardian, his faith, his new country, and on himself. In 1994 Bob reminisced about Jack (John) Wars, the founder of the Guardians, and the boys who came to Australia with him, writing that:

Jack Wars was a wonderful man. He died about ten years ago. Incidentally he was the man who introduced 'Ready Mixed Concrete' to Israel. Previously all building sites mixed their own concrete. My own Guardian, Hymie Marks and his wife Lena were like parents to me. They were in the Fur Trade as manufacturers in partnership with Hyman's brother Morris, who was also a Guardian (of Manfred Burns). Hymie amazingly is still alive, drives a car and plays bridge two or three times a week at the age of 93! Lena died about ten years ago. You asked if all the boys were Jewish. They were, not all of them practicing. At least two of the boys were raving Communists and tried their hardest to convert us to the Cause. No success there!

On 3 September 1939, the Australian Prime Minister speaking to his nation declared: 'It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that in consequence of a persistence by Germany and her

invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war'. The war severed mail to Vienna and nearly eight months passed before another letter from Rudi reached us when we were already in New York. We had arrived on 5 December 1939 in accordance with U.S. immigration law that had prevented the consul in Vienna from granting us a visa until our quota number was reached and our affidavit of support approved. The affidavit, I later learned, was not really required by law but was used only to insure that we would never fall burden to American taxpayers. Bob, writing from Wangaratta on 5 February 1940, was overjoyed to hear of our liberation. He wrote:

I was happily surprised to receive a letter from you with such a wonderful report. It is hard to believe that the Nazis even allow anyone to leave during the war. I hope your wait along the English coast wasn't too long, but that's a situation one happily endures. I don't think you need to tell me much about the ship. I too couldn't find my cabin either and had to keep searching for two hours until I found it. I never knew whether I was lying towards the bow or stern direction of the ship and when I awoke in the morning I always thought the ship was moving the wrong way. I too saw Rotterdam but very briefly and at night. There were many illuminated billboards and it was very modern. There were just two sittings on our ship and we too ate at the first one because then the tables were immaculately set and we were always able to order things that would no longer be available at the second sitting. It was a wonderful time and we didn't even realize what a regal life we were leading.

Most likely you didn't receive my last letter. I had sent it to N. in England, but the mail between England and Germany was already suspended by then ... I am in regular correspondence with N. He is also on a farm learning all sorts of things about cattle, pigs, sugar beets, etc. and expects to also come to Australia in about a year.

I already have received two letters from my father in America. He was barely one or two weeks in New York and now lives in Virginia with a good job in a gigantic knitwear factory.

As for myself I continue to do very well as before. I work very hard, but that doesn't matter. We have just completed the harvest (wheat and oats) and now we again start with sheep. Every morning and evening I milk six to seven cows. I wake at 6 AM and never get to bed before 10 PM; sometimes it's past 11 PM.

Tomorrow school opens again after the Christmas vacation. Prior to the recess we had examinations on which we all did extremely well. We surpassed all the Australian boys in our class by wide margins. One among our ten was best in the entire school! I was second best in the class and the third best in the school! All the Victoria and New-South Wales newspapers carried reports about our splendid achievements and we received congratulations from all over. We only attend school until May here after which we will go to other farms and start earning pay. I don't yet know how much I will be paid but I am confident my guardian will find me a good job. I expect at least £3/4 per week with meals and lodging included.

Reporting on the Wangaratta Technical School's Annual Speech Night, *The Wangaratta Chronicle-Despatch* of 20 December 1939 referred to the Farm School as 'the most important section of the activities because of its relation to the industry of the district'. Dr. Davies, the vice-president of the school's council, spoke with pride of 'the five honour certificates in the farmer's class (that) had been won by boys who had come out from England under the auspices of the Welfare Guardian Society. Ten of these boys were at the school and ten had gone to Dookie. Their success was a phenomenal achievement as they had commenced at Wangaratta Technical School some time after the school had commenced this year.' One of the boys attending Dookie 'topped the second-year class in English' although 'he never did well in practical work' and was told 'If ever you go on a farm you won't earn enough money to keep you in tobacco.' In his 5 February 1940 letter, Bob asked my brother, Ernst:

How is your English progressing? Now you will learn it very fast. I speak so little German that I can no longer talk without sometimes inserting English words. You can't even imagine how hard it is for me to write a German letter. You will have to forgive me if you discover many grammatical errors. Please write your next letter in English, because I have heard that the censor won't pass many of the letters written in German. Each letter is opened.

In a letter found in the files of the WGS⁹ Bob described the farm life to his guardian as follows:

I am working on Mr Walpole's farm. This farm is about 4,000 acres large¹⁰ and carries at the present time 3000 sheep, 300 head of cattle, 30-40 young and old racehorses, 7 draught-

horses, 30 hens, 8 dogs and lots and lots of rabbits ... at the present time our sheep are lambing. They want lots of attention in this period and we got to go every day among them. Last week I sold the rabbit skins that I caught [sic], I got £1/19/3 for them. On Sunday I sometimes ride with a horse 10 miles to see some of our boys. I love the life and work in the country very much.

Vic Walpole's son, Dick, only twelve at the time Bob worked at the Hurdle Creek farm, could still remember him vividly sixty-four years later. 'Because it was believed that "Robert" could easily be confused with my brother Robin, called Bob, and cousin Robert also known as "Bob" it was decided that "Hal" was a less confusing name. Hal did not mind, as he said it was not his right name anyway ... I remember my father telling the family ... that a Jewish lad was coming to stay and his religious customs were different from ours, and must be respected ... Hal observed his religious fasts and ceremonies. He was very homesick, and sometimes dressed in his Alpine Costume: leather pants, climbing boots, a special shirt and beret hat with feather.' Three boys 'were given refuge in Whorouly South'. George Upton worked at Silverlea, a property 'owned by my father's brothers.' Dick Walpole commented further on farming life during the war years as follows:

Farm life was as always, hard work with little pay, but we all love being our own masters. The meat was killed on the farm, and the vegetables grown of course, and jams made with the orchard produce. The milk came from the cows (as did the) butter made and cream consumed. Oats etc grown, and chaff cut for the horses. The wood was cut with handsaws and axe. Bread was delivered to the farm once a week, and when (we) ran out, mother cooked scones.

Hal started midyear at the Wangaratta Technical School. He caught the bus with Robin at 7.30 am and got home at about 6pm. Since the other Walpole children attended a nearby school they did the daily milking of the cows etc, before going to school, and all the farm duties when they got home. Robin and Hal had the longer journey, so they did not work on the farm except at weekends and holidays. My brother Robin was a big lad, as was Hal, but Robin was a bit of a bully ... Robin knew Germany would cause a war (and) did not like Germans. He did not like Hal and I don't think Hal liked him much either. The animosity between Hal and Robin grew worse, until it came to a head in the cowshed. I was milking a

cow in the middle bale, Robin in the far bale. Hal (had) just finished milking one cow in the first bale and was pouring the milk into the can, when Robin said something that infuriated Hal. Hal yelled, 'I fix you' and attacked him with fists and feet. He left Robin underneath the cow. He ran past me, stopped and yelled, 'I give you one too' and pushed me over off the milking stool. The cow kicked, put its foot in the bucket, oh what a mess.

In contrast to his brother, Dick wrote that he 'got on well with Hal.' They 'worked together in the milking shed' and, as Dick Walpole wrote:

He was teaching me German, until my father suggested it was not a good practice ... when local lads started to be killed in the war — three lads in this little valley — animosity started towards any that spoke German.

One dark night Dick accidentally smashed his bike into a closed farm gate. He described how:

I knocked out 6 teeth, broke the tops of 5 others, and was a mess. Hal was kind, and he went next morning and found my lost teeth. He also gave me his precious camp utensils, a folding fork and knife ... Hal lived with the family, sat at the table, and shared family life ... the children slept on the open verandah, even during the winter, and when it rained, they covered their beds with horse blankets ... Hal slept in a smaller room off the end of the verandah.

These memories of Dick Walpole of Bob Halbert add to the picture of his life in rural Victoria during the war years. Bob's letter of 25 February 1940 was the last he wrote to Ernst in German:

I am thankful to have received your dear letter of January 10th. Your English letter is quite in order save for a few minor errors. I am sorry that you suffered seasickness on your voyage, as it is such a great opportunity to relax and gorge oneself on food. I took full advantage of the occasion.

I hope that you have already received my reply to your first letter. It is dreadful how long the mail takes. When I ask something of you or my father I have to wait almost four months for a reply. Thus I will barely receive three letters a year from you! I arranged matter[s] with my father that each

of us send a letter on every departing ship without first awaiting a reply from the other.

You write that you ice skate after school. I wish I could ice skate. Instead I sweat half to death every day. As you probably know 'bushfires' cause immense damage here yearly. Most fires are started by bits of glass that act as lenses in the fierce heat but at times it is simply due to carelessness. If I were now to describe to you what that looks like you would laugh at me thinking I was telling you fairy tales. For a European the immensity of these fires is unimaginable, unless he has seen it for himself. For hundreds of miles there is just one single flame and columns of smoke are visible throughout Victoria. The roar of the fire is the equivalent of ten thunderstorms and it spreads with incredible rapidity. Even so the farmers are always able to bring the fire under control. At such times they unite and cooperate by placing themselves under the command of the oldest and most experienced farmer. Everyone has a big bucket strapped to his back that can hold about twenty litres of water and aided by it rushes into the battle.

Last week a brush fire erupted right in the vicinity of our farm. Instantly the fire bells rang in the entire neighborhood. My farmer loaded his truck with filled water cans and off we went. It was already near dusk but it was almost like daylight with all the hills surrounding our farm in flames. The entire night I carried water up the steep incline, each load weighing 40kg. You can imagine how I felt by dawn. I didn't have one minute of sleep. My farmer remained at the site until 3PM but he sent me home at 6 AM for I had to milk the cows on all the neighboring farms since the farmers were all tending to the fire. That morning I milked about twenty-five cows. When I was finished I slept for two hours and then had to get up to bring chow to the men. Each farmer's wife sends five times as much as her husband can consume so that everyone has enough food to eat. When I arrived up on the hill I was immediately assigned to guard a particular stretch of ground. I was 'on duty' at my station until late in the evening. The grass was already totally consumed. Only trees and tree trunks remained ablaze and I had to watch that no fallen tree rolling down the hill would set the unburned grass on fire. I found it terribly difficult to stay awake as staring into the flames makes one very sleepy and I was already quite exhausted. Since I was an immigrant and persevered I received high praise for it.

I am still on the same farm but no longer attend school. I

already have a job on another farm and will move there next week. The address is: R.H. c/o Mr.A.Cook, Bobinaworrah, Victoria, Australia. I will be paid 10/- per week including my meals, lodging and with laundry washed and mended. This farm is not as large as the present one but it is two and a half sq. km. They own forty cows but have a milking machine and there are sheep and pigs, wheat, oats, tomatoes and other vegetables. The people are reported to be extremely congenial and very well liked. They have three little girls and except for the farmer I will be the only male there. I will report more about it in my next letter to you. I am very encouraged.

Bob's first English language letter was written on the Havendale farm in Milawa on 28 April 1940. He wrote:

I received your letter from 18 March 1940 last night and it takes a terrible long time, does it not. I am glad you wrote in English because it would have taken about a week longer had it been in German. Your letter was really not bad at all, very few mistakes.' Responding to Ernst's difficulty in finding work he contrasted the situation in Australia as follows: You should only have one look in a newspaper here and you find about fifty advertisements every day where boys are wanted for all sorts of things, delivery, messages, to learn trades and so on. You would most surely find a job in a day. Not bad wages either, up to 30 shillings a week (\$6). If you wanted to go on a farm you could get dozens of jobs.

Well I think I wrote enough rubbish to you for now but I will add a few lines about my new job. The farm (two and a half sq.km) is small by Australian standards but very nice and my boss is a great fellow. It is a pleasure to work with him. He's got a lot of confidence in me too, because he went away for ten days and left me to look after the place. There was a lot to do of course but I managed it and was very pleased with myself. The food here is more than I can eat five or six meals a day, breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, sometimes supper. I am trying not to eat too much because I am getting too fat.

In a further letter headed, Havendale, Milawa, 8 May 1940, Bob wrote to Ernst:

I am glad to hear that the mail works better now and I am ready to write to you with every second ship, that is about

every four weeks, sometimes a few days more, sometimes less. If you should happen to read the New York Times you could find out when ships sail from San Francisco to Sidney [sic] and make sure that you do not miss a ship.

You want to know about my further plans. I wrote you something about it in my last letter but they have changed a bit since then. I will stay in Australia; try to get into a decent position and save as much money as possible. My father will do the same and in three or four years he will come over to me (if conditions permit it) and we will buy a little farm. I will be able to manage it by then. What do you think of this plan? It would mean a good future for me and for my father a life without worries or work. I do not by any means intend to give up farming and learn something else.

I am trying very hard to learn to ride a horse now. Here in the country one must be able to ride a horse and ride it without saddle. You would not believe how hard it is to keep your balance if you [have] got nothing to hang on to. I was riding along the road, suddenly the horse stopped and I did not, so I fell right over the horse's head and made a somersault in the air. I did not hurt myself, only a bit of skin off my cheek. It is just like learning to ride a bike, only harder. Once you can keep your balance you are all right. I have not learned it yet. People say, one has to fall off seven times before one can ride, so I have a long way to go yet. I will learn it some day, I am sure.

My guardian is wonderfully kind. I thought when I started to earn money he will stop sending me things but I was mistaken. Together with your letter I got a parcel with two pajamas, two overalls and a pair of rubber boots for the winter, so I will be warm at night and won't get wet feet! Tonight I got a six page long letter from his wife, 'my big Sister'. She writes to me, just like she was my sister, asks how I am getting on with the girls, and thinks I better not marry a Yankee film star, because she would not be able to come to the wedding! She sends me love and kisses and I get the latter ones too when I go to Melbourne. She kisses me every five minutes but I do not mind at all, because I like her very much too.

In a letter written almost three months later from the same farm, dated 28 July 1940, Bob wrote:

Received your letter from 18th of June last week but so far I did not get the one in German you are talking about. But it can still come because the Walpoles are in no hurry to send letters to

me. Of course it could be censored and seized too. I am afraid you did not get my last letter because it was on the *NIAGARA* and this ship sunk off the New Zealand coast after an explosion¹¹. Have you heard about that? It is not known whether the mail was saved or not.

My work here is going swell and I had very interesting jobs lately. It is just 'lambing time' now, (that means that the sheep get young ones) and these little lambs got to be watched very carefully against crows, foxes and wild dogs. Three times a day I take my horse and look through them. Very often a sheep has trouble with lambing or the lamb is too weak to get up on his legs to get a drink from his mother. In this case I have to drive the ewe (mother-sheep) into a corner of the paddock and catch her (not an easy job) and pick up the lamb and give him his drink. Sometimes the mother will not have him after he has been touched. If this is so I have to catch her again, lay her flat on the ground, put some dirt over her eyes and place the lamb beside her. Then I walk slowly away and see what happens. Usually the little lamb knocks the dirt off and the mother looks around quite astonished. When she sees the lamb she sniffs at it and everything is O.K. There is always trouble about but one has to learn to see it.

When the lambs are about a month old they get an inoculation (injection) against a very common disease, which would kill them. I have learned to inoculate. It's a very interesting job. I felt like a doctor. Every lamb gets 5 cm of a serum under the skin. Immediately afterwards the male lambs are castrated and all the tails are cut off with a knife to prevent fly blowing. I bet you know very little about that sort of work, do you?

I really don't get much free time. I get up at 6:15 AM and knock off about 6:30 PM and it is dark by then. Last week I rode the bike 15 miles to a town to meet friends at the movies. I got home at 2:30 in the morning. The work the next day was 'not too hot'. I do not ever hear any music, because the boss turns the wireless on only for the overseas news (to save battery!). But I can't be worried. I am quite satisfied with my life apart from the wages. We got no right not to be.

In the 1 August 1940 letter to his guardian (in the WGS files¹²) Bob again described his work on the farm and expressed his appreciation for being in Australia as follows:

I am working on this place ... a mixed farm with a dairy. I am enjoying my work with my new boss very much ... I am the

only labourer in the place and as Mr. Cook is councilor [sic], I often work on my own ... I had to manage on my own for eleven days when he went to Melbourne ... I conclude I must be doing alright[sic].

Now that I have been more than a year in this beautiful country, which gave us shelter from Hitler's claws, ... I think this year was more valuable and full of experience than any other before.

Despite his appreciation of life in Australia and his enjoyment of the farming experience, his life in Milawa was very isolated. He did manage to maintain contact with his father in the United States and with his guardian in Melbourne and on 7 September, when he was still working on the same farm in Milawa, Bob wrote to Ernst with what he thought was exciting news:

There is a big chance that I will be with you in the USA within a year. My father is already starting to fill in papers for an affidavit. He says he won't wait until this war is finished, because if Britain can stand it, the war will be long, and if they can't, then Australia will not be safe from Japan.

We are at present deep in winter, no snow of course, but frost in the mornings. During the day it is as hot as hell. It is a mad weather, but the year is bad like in all the rest of the world. I remember last year at the same time there were floods and perpetually torrential rain lasting for weeks. This year there was so little rain that there is already a shortage of water in some parts of New South Wales.

In about three weeks I am going to Melbourne for a weekend (Yom Kippur) and I will get in touch with a Vienna girl with whom I was very friendly seven or eight years ago I have not seen her since then but I believe she is not bad looking at all. I got a letter from her where she tells me she would be very pleased to meet me, as she hasn't got any friends in Melbourne. She is working as a domestic servant.

I suppose you heard about the Jewish army of 100,000 men to help Britain. I think the Jews in Germany will have to suffer badly for this, but whatever they do is wrong, so they might as well help Britain. One of the boys who came to Australia with me has his brother in England. Last week he got a letter from him. He had joined the British army, went to France, back to England, and to Dunkirk. After the evacuation he is back in England now. N. writes me it is an uneasy feeling to have the German bombers above you nearly every day and I bet it is too.

Arrangements had been made for the boys to spend the Jewish High Holydays with their guardian's family. Bob travelled to Melbourne by train from Wangaratta. When he returned to the farm, he wrote to Ernst on 15 October 1940 describing his time in Melbourne:

You must be having a great time at the World's Fair. It is a pity they don't keep it open until I come. Would be better for your mother too¹³. Would you mind explaining to me what these 'girly shows' are? There is nothing of the sort in Australia. I wish you would tell me WHAT you SEE and HAVE there. If you spend 85¢ for it, it must be pretty good.

Yesterday I came home from the Yom Kippur weekend in Melbourne. I had an easy fast and a pretty good time afterwards. I went to a party with fourteen boys and about seven or eight girls, everyone a beauty. I played tennis with one and when we sat down for a rest she told me she comes from Heidelberg. I went with her to the movies in the evening. She is the prettiest girl I have seen for a long time, tall, fair, a real sports figure (It took me all my time to win the tennis match against her) and very intelligent ... She asked me to write to her and I will although I see no chance of seeing her again within the next six months and there are so many boys in Melbourne!

I feel just like you about soccer. It is not popular here and everybody is mad about football (Australian) and cricket. I go to sleep at a cricket match but I played a bit of Australian football at school. It is played with hands and feet and an egg-like ball. The forward picks up the ball and kicks it forward and then runs after it. Everybody looked at me when I dribbled past half a dozen backs and scored one goal after the other. Dribbling is hard with this ball because it does not roll as nicely as a round ball and is harder to kick true. My friends and I gave the whole school an exhibition what a soccer match looks like and nearly all of them wanted to learn it right away. But as we left school soon after they did not get the chance. I have not touched a football since. I got a new pair of football boots lying idle in my wardrobe.

Bob's letters to Ernst continued to provide a clear picture of rural life in Victoria. They also show how successfully he had managed to acclimatize himself to his new life and how hard he tried to ensure that he fitted into the local lifestyle, to the extent of learning to ride a horse bareback. On 23 November 1940, he wrote to Ernst, including a photo of himself sitting bareback on a horse and explained as follows:



...I thank you very much for the nice snapshot. I don't suppose you have any of me, so I am enclosing one too. Don't laugh about that horse, I admit it is too small but you would be surprised about its speed. I can ride pretty well now. The snap was taken on a Sunday and I am in good clothes. You would not recognize me in my working dress. I look like a real cowboy. You might notice that I got no saddle on the pony. I have learned to ride like this from the start although it is much harder because the saddle helps to keep balance. In the rear at the left you can see a shed to store hay. It will hold approximately 30 tons. When I came here last autumn this shed was full. At the end of the winter it was empty (we fed it all to the milking cows) and now that we have finished harvesting it is two thirds full again. There is nothing else to say about this picture except that right below the pony's nose, but far at the back, there are some sheep. I think you need a magnifying glass to see them.

The pictures here are not too bad. You always see two at a time. The first one is generally a funny picture with no sense in it or a Wild West film with nothing but shooting. The second one is what you actually come to see. 'Gone with the Wind' has been going in Melbourne for four months and still brings a full house. I have not seen it yet, but I will not miss it. 'The Great Dictator' is just starting in the city tomorrow and it will be a long time until it comes up here into the country towns. Have you heard of 'Rebecca'? I am going to see that next week. I believe it is an outstanding picture.

From N. (in England) I am getting no word lately. In

his last letter he wrote me that he and four other German boys are the only aliens not interned in the whole district. They have been searched and cross-examined dozens of times and expect internment daily. The same thing can happen to me but I don't worry, as an internment camp here is as good as any place to live in.

The farm work is going good. I have learned to drive a team of three and four horses in a plough, harrow, cultivator and roller. Yesterday we have started very interesting work. We are putting electric light into the house. We only have kerosene lamps so far, as there is no electricity anywhere near. Now we bought a dynamo and a 1.5hp petrol engine to drive it and a 12 volt battery to store the power. Today we built a shed for this business and on Monday we will lay the wires into the different rooms. A farmer really has to know something about everything, carpentry, blacksmith, plumber, bricklayer, engineer, electrician and hundreds of other jobs.

Farming is what they call 'a lifetime job'. You often see farmers of sixty and more years attending to lectures of a fellow perhaps twenty or thirty just because he is an expert in something and can beat their forty years of experience. That's why I am studying anything I can get hold of. I suppose farming will be different in America, but it certainly can't be more up to date than here. I think I will be able to get quite a good job over there with my excellent school report and the references of my two bosses.

At the age of sixteen Bob had chosen farming as his lifetime occupation. Working long days as a farmhand in the sparsely inhabited Australian hinterland with few friends his own age nearby made life very lonely. The mail interrupted the monotony keeping him connected to his dad and his old friends. Surface mail was slow but the faster airmail was much too expensive for regular usage. The strategy they had established to time letter postings for alternate ships seemed to work well. Instant electronic mails as we know it today was then still an inconceivable technology. Writing from Milawa on a hot summer Christmas Eve 1940 Bob discussed the mail situation:

Well today is X-mas. I am not working except milking the cows. I spent about £1 for presents and got four lousy handkerchiefs back for it. But still I just had a grand dinner and last night I had a pretty good time in town. I met half a dozen of my mates there and we had no trouble to pick up some girls. Nothing per-

manent of course but they gave us a nice evening. I got home at 3 AM and only had two hours sleep afterwards. It is getting pretty uncomfortably hot again and I sweat like a radish all day long. I think I will be fighting bush fires before long.

Well you might call me mad but I am starting to study sexology next month. I am buying a book containing a quarter of a million facts and thousands of photographs on this matter. It is definitely very interesting. There are very few people who are aware of 'the facts of life' into the last detail and it is a great advantage if you are, don't you think? I already got a list of blokes who want to read it after me.

I am glad you got somebody to spend a Sunday with. A Sunday in Brooklyn might be very monotonous, but what about me? I got to ride a bike many miles if I want to see anybody I know and when I get home at five I can work again until eight. There are no movies on Sundays in Australia, which I consider very foolish. I very often like a day of work better than a Sunday. What about that? One day last week the boss told me that a windmill which pumps water out of a well into a place for the sheep to drink has gone bad. I have a day to fix it up. Of course, as I did not know what had gone wrong I had to take a lot of tools with me. Then I took food for the whole day and a billy to make some tea. I carried all that riding the horse for four miles. I was on my own so I hopped into the job and my training in turning and fitting proved very useful. It was a pretty complicated defect. At lunchtime I lit a little fire and made some tea and had my lunch and then I slept for an hour in the shade. Then I went on with my job and at about 3:30 PM. I had it all finished and fixed up. Don't you think that is very interesting? One feels more important when doing a job his own way without any instructions. I am starting to like the technical part of farming. Of course there are other jobs, which are not pleasant at all, but in general I think a farmer has a bigger variety of jobs than any other profession.

The mail was now functioning quite well as Bob's letter of 26 January 1941 letter attests:

Many thanks for your letter of 20 December, it went remarkably fast across to me. I suppose you got letters from me since then, I wrote some anyway ... I am going ahead as fast as possible with my immigration plans. I expect my father's affidavit any day and as I got no passport at all I applied for a Certificate of Identity, which will act instead. As soon as I get

that I will hand everything to the American Consul who is already waiting for it. I hope I will not be very long but I am not as optimistic as you to think that I will be able to go by spring (here autumn).

On the farm I am at present pretty busy because it is summer (not like you thought winter!). The weather is completely mad. Melbourne experienced a cloud burst and in fifteen minutes Elizabeth Street was three feet under water! As it was in the evening, all shops were closed and the street crowded with people who could not get shelter anywhere. Women were washed down the gutter and were only stopped by cars, which were standing everywhere and the owners unable to get out. A man and a woman narrowly escaped drowning. I was only sorry that I could not see all this. It would have been a 'pretty sight' to see women swimming in the streets!

My boss does know that I intend to go to America but I don't tell him any details. He was certainly surprised when I received letters from the American Consulate, the Department of the Interior and the Union Steamship Line! He does not dare ask me when I will be going. However I expect to get either double wages or another job altogether in two or three months. Two of my mates have changed their jobs and get forty shillings a week compared with 15/- on the first one. I think my guardian will announce me a new job for my birthday next month. I also expect a new bicycle as birthday present. My bike is fit for the rubbish heap. If I were not alien here, I would have a motorbike long ago. I need to ride about 50 miles every week on the pushbike and I could make better trips if I had a motorbike and a friend to go with me. Now I usually sit home on Sunday's and write letters. In a few hours I start milking again and that is the end of the Sunday. Well I mustn't complain, I am lucky to be here.

'I am lucky to be here!' Ernst expressed the identical sentiment in a letter two years later when he was with the American Infantry fighting in the wretched jungles of New Guinea. They were contrasting their situation to the suffering of defenseless Jews in Europe.

Bob's following letter to Ernst was not as positive. He had experienced a setback in his plans to rejoin his father in the United States and disappointment on the romantic front. On 26 February 1941, he wrote to Ernst of these disappointments as follows:

Yesterday I received your letter of January 13th. It beats me why you had to wait seven weeks for a letter from me. I wrote

pretty regularly I think. Thanks very much for your birthday wishes. I am glad you liked that photo but I did not know that I have changed so much ... You are wrong. I can't go to the USA without a quota. My father is not citizen yet. I only get second preference quota ... I am not writing anymore to that girl. She wants to talk highbrow stuff all the time and it got on my goat. I want cheer up and not talk about the position in the Far East. It's lousy all right without a girl and I am blowed if I can find one. The next time I go to Melbourne I must learn to dance. That will at least increase chances to meet one ... You never write my complete address on the envelope. With the bad postal organization here it can cause long delays in delivery. Write it like that: R.H. c/o A.H.Cook, Milawa via WANGARATTA, VIC. Australia.

It took Bob another three months until he was able to write to Ernst again because he had developed an abscess on his jawbone and in the end needed an operation. In his letter of 31 May 1941, he described his experience:

I think I owe you an apology for not writing so long, but with my Melbourne holiday, terrible cold evenings and nights, and a certain amount of laziness I have put it off and off. I received your last letter just when I returned from Melbourne (about the end of April). I have put it away somewhere and can't find it again, so I will have to answer without it.

My Melbourne holiday which was to be for a week, had to be extended to seventeen days on account of an operation which I had to have done. I developed an abscess on the jawbone. One doctor (a German Jew) said it was nothing to worry about, but another doctor had an X-ray photograph taken and he found that this abscess reaches from the root of a bad tooth right down to the jawbone and had to be lanced at once as there was danger of affecting the jawbone. I did not worry much about it as I felt no pain at all neither before nor after the operation. I was put asleep with 'laughing gas' and had the funniest dreams. It lasted only for five minutes, but I had two teeth pulled and the abscess lanced and drained. The best of it is that you can get up and walk away in ten minutes and you don't feel sick like after chloroform. I had a great big plaster over the whole side of the face and the doctor would not let me go back to work until it was cleared up.

Although I met some girls, I could not go anywhere but to the pictures because of this big plaster. I saw some good pic-

tures anyway ... I went nearly every day, as I had nothing else to do.

I could do no good at the American Consulate, as expected. The Consul is a very decent chap and he thought there is no way to appeal against this rejection. Otherwise my papers are in perfect order and the visa ready to be issued. I will have to wait until the war is over.

Ernst had written about a New York club where old friends from Vienna meet. As already discussed, Bob was very isolated on the farm and he wrote to Ernst:

Let me learn all about it and the girls and boys from Vienna, which you meet in this club. I have not got a damned soul here to go to. Fortunately my work keeps me pretty occupied and at night I go to bed very early and read some library books. I may not stay on this job much longer depending on the wages Mr. Cook is prepared to pay me in the future. I will be here another three months at any rate. Well, I better get to bed now. The boss got rheumatism and I have to do everything on my own. Tomorrow is Sunday and I am going on a thirty-eight mile bike trip to see a mate.

Why Bob's attempt to join his father in the United States failed is not clear. He may have been a victim of a reversal in American immigration policy. In an unannounced policy change the US State Department, in agreement with the Visa Division severely tightened



Ernst on furlough 1943



Robert in the Army

immigration in mid-1940. Public sentiment had not favoured immigration in general and there was even less enthusiasm for accepting Jewish refugees. Possibly his father's support affidavit was judged insufficient to overturn the rejection. On 8 December 1941 America entered the war, an event that would bring the two friends physically closer but with no opportunity for a reunion. Ernst wrote several times but the mail failed to reach Bob and their regular correspondence was interrupted for two years.

By 1943, both young men had joined the army, Bob serving as a non-combatant in Australia and Ernst undergoing basic training in the United States. Ernst's troop transport stopped in Australia on the way to the Southwest Pacific Theatre of War. When Ernst arrived in Sydney the correspondence resumed. On 28 January 1944 Ernst's letter home brought news of Bob:



*Rudi (left) with Ernst
1938*

I wrote to Rudi immediately on arrival in Australia and to my amazement I actually received a reply. He was extremely happy to hear from me again. Apparently my last letters of approximately two years ago had not reached him. For the past fifteen months Rudi has been in the Australian army where he served 100% non-combatant duties. Australia is not as broad minded on the alien question as the U.S. and he is not a citizen. Hopefully it will be possible for us to meet sometime but that will be difficult as he is stationed in Melbourne in the south. Well we will have to see.

On New Year's Day 1944 Ernst was with the infantry forces wading ashore at Saidor along New Guinea's north shore. The American military met with little resistance from the Japanese who were retreating along an inland jungle route. General Mac Arthur wanted the site to establish a strategic airbase to further his plan for liberating the Philippines. When Ernst wrote from 'Somewhere in New Guinea' on 5 February 1944 he had already been on the island for almost two months. He told his family:

Although I have adapted myself surprisingly fast to the life here I could very easily forbear it. I tend to think that in ano-

er three months I might get a furlough and then attempt to reach Melbourne. In any case I will try. I could then get together with Rudi if at that time he is still there.

Subsequently, on 20 March 1944 Ernst wrote:

A few days ago I received a very engaging letter from Rudi. It is really a shame that we can't somehow get together. He is in Melbourne. But after the war he plans to go to the U.S. and then we will be able to meet. In June he is to become an Australian citizen and he enclosed a photo that shows him hardly changed. He asked after all of you and sends his regards.

Later on 24 April he commented: 'I don't know when I will be able to visit Rudi. Hopefully soon as each day is more bleak and tediously boring in spite of the bits of entertainment provided us.' On 4 May, Ernst advised his family that another letter from Rudi had reached him. He told us:

He continues to do well and sends regards. His father has remarried as you probably know and he is doing quite well. Rudi longs very much for a reunion but of course that must await the end of the war just as ours must. I cling to Paul's advice 'Let's get the war over with' which is the motto of millions but we must be patient.

With every passing week the prospect for a reunion with Rudi became less likely. On 6 June 1944 Ernst informed us, 'I will have to wait quite some time for a furlough and even if I receive one it will be very difficult to travel south as far as Rudi. But being away from here for several weeks would be a delight in itself.' By 27 June his pessimism deepened. He wrote: 'As things stand now it is almost certain that I will not be able to meet with Rudi. I know neither when I might get a furlough in the future nor to where.'

Two of the September letters contained references to Rudi, indicating that they continued to correspond across the Pacific. Ernst wrote:

He is working hard in the Army and is generally doing well. Rudi at present is performing some kind of unique work. That's as much as I could ascertain from the letter since the censor had cut out some parts. His father is superintendent of a huge textile factory and earns good money. He now has a

very good job, earning \$150 a week and can retire with a pension at age sixty.

A reunion in wartime was unrealistic as Bob confirmed in 1995 when discussing his wartime activities. I had sent excerpts from Ernst's letters and Bob responded:

Ernst's letters brought a lump to my throat. I must have been a prolific letter writer during the war, but I don't remember any of it. There was very little chance that Ernst and I could have met. Most of the U.S. servicemen spent their R & R leave in Cairns, Townsville, the Gold Coast and Brisbane. Not many came further south than Sydney, because of the distances involved and the problem with transport limitations. In any case, I was not in Melbourne but stationed on the Victoria-New South Wales border. My Army career was not very illustrious. The Australian authorities were very nervous about refugees in the early part of the war, suspecting that there might be some Nazi spies amongst us¹⁴, particularly those who could not prove that they were Jewish and claimed to be political refugees, mostly Communists. We twenty all volunteered and were put into one unit. None of us were shipped to any war areas, were not issued rifles, nor did any Rookie training until V.E. Day. We were given mostly menial tasks such as trans-shipping cargo going north to the war zones, erecting barracks, and building copies of Japanese bunkers for the Air force to practice bombing and strafing and all that type of work. Our unit was employed transshipping hundreds of tons of goods from the Victorian Rail line (5'3" wide) [wide gauge railroad] onto the N.S.W. trucks (4'8") [standard gauge railroad]. As you can imagine the troops stationed in Queensland and in New Guinea needed everything from corn flakes to tanks and it all had to be handled at two railheads on the border. One of our jobs was the 'Lashing Gang'. We used to meet trains of flattops, some many hundreds of meters long with trucks, armoured cars and tanks, which arrived in the middle of the night in Albury and Tocumwal. These were held down with thick ropes, often with icicles a foot long. We had to undo the ropes, drive the vehicles onto the narrower gauge N.S.W. trucks and lash them down again. In the winter it was like working in a freezing chamber and in the summer the metal burnt your hands. We needed gloves nearly all of the time. Not a very glamorous job, but someone had to do it and we, who could not be trusted with a rifle, were the ideal men to do it.

On 3 November 1944, Ernst wrote to us from Morotai, an island in the Dutch East Indies. He knew with certainty where he was headed but could not tell us it was the recapture of the Philippine Islands. Again the letter mentioned Rudi, this time to indicate he was headed in a direction away from Australia:

You might as well forget about a visit to Rudi, as that isn't possible anymore. Times have changed, you know, and the war over here is progressing. A year ago today I arrived in Sidney. That one-year has really passed by very fast and I hope that the next one will pass too (Yes, I do really expect to spend another year over here).

Ernst's last letter was sent on 17 November 1944 from Leyte Island, which he identified only as 'Somewhere in the Philippines'. He wrote:

As you can see above my outfit has moved again, and I have now been in the Philippines for a few days. The stay on the ship took longer than I expected and therefore I wasn't able to write you for two weeks. Hoping to hear from you soon. With many kisses, your loving Ernst

Two days later the Japanese fatally wounded him when his patrol was ambushed by an enemy machine gun position and was forced to retreat. December 16th brought a telegram reporting Ernst 'missing in action on Leyte since 19 November 1944'. We knew what that meant; yet we continued to hope, until the 'killed in action' telegram confirmed our fears on 5 February 1945. Ernst's death brought to an end the connection with Bob (Rudi) Halbert and I did not hear any further news about him until 1994 when we reestablished contact as previously explained.

EPILOGUE

Bob's post-war life in Australia began to emerge in his 1994 letters. He began his narrative with the most significant event of his life, his marriage:

Whilst on leave (furlough) in Melbourne I went to a dance for Jewish Servicemen and women. I met Millie, we married whilst I was still in uniform and we have been happily married since 1946.

Prior to joining the army Bob had been very enthusiastic about farming, intending to make it his life's work. At war's end he thought differently as he explained:

When I received my discharge I was determined not to return to farming. You can probably tell from my letters to Ernst that my time on the farm was anything but exciting. Just bloody hard work for ten shillings a week in temperatures of 40 degrees and millions of flies. It was quite a relief to go to school after milking thirty to forty cows by hand. This is such a huge country, houses are miles apart and I found life on the land very lonely. My first boss owned 3,000 acres, which is considered a fairly small property and apart from his family I saw no one except my classmates at the school who were also studying Agriculture. We came to school by bus from a 60-mile radius after getting up at 5AM and helping to milk the 50 cows by hand. No milking machines in those days! My only entertainment was a 25-mile bicycle ride on Saturday nights to see two cartoons and a double feature movie in the closest town of about 6,000 people. I usually arrived home at 2AM and had to be up again at 5AM to round up the herd who were dozing in the paddocks with an inch of frost on their backs, it was that cold. I decided this was not for me.

I found a job in an automobile parts warehouse selling parts and accessories ... found this to my liking, worked my way up and eventually got a position as Spare Parts Manager of a dealership. Millie and I lived in a seaside suburb named Carrum nearby. In 1948 our daughter Rosemary was born, we built a new larger home and lived there happily until Rosemary was twelve. As there was no Shule and very few Jewish youngsters for her to mix with we moved to Moorabbin, a suburb of Melbourne about eleven miles from the centre of the city where we have lived ever since. It is a very peasant middle class suburb with every facility, close to the beaches, not far from the hills and has a Jewish community without any great problems with Anti-Semitism.

Rosemary did well at school, got a job... as Private Secretary ... married a nice Jewish boy ... and after raising her kids went back to work as a Legal Secretary ... they have two children, a boy named Reuben and girl named Melanie ... They are both good kids, no worries with drugs or alcohol, thank God.

I also worked as a Senior Buyer ... until I turned sixty-five in 1988 ... I now do some volunteer work ...at a Freemason's Hospital and at a Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Both Millie and I are very keen lawn bowlers, a sport ... very popular in Australia ... We both have represented Victoria in games against South Australia and have won many tro-

phies. Our social life centres around our Club and a few friends we made in Shule, the Bentleigh Progressive Synagogue. During the coldest part of the year we generally head north to Queensland and bowl to our hearts content up there in the semi-tropical climate. As a bowler you are always welcome wherever you go.

After reestablishing contact by mail, we decided to meet in person in Hawaii. In anticipation of our planned 1995 reunion Bob had ordered a bowling shirt for me as a birthday surprise with my name embroidered in capital letters. After we were forced to cancel the trip due to Bob's illness the shirt arrived by mail. On the enclosed card Bob had written his final message to me shortly before he died:

To Paul: I had this shirt especially made for you intending to give it to you on your birthday before visiting the Bowl Club together in Honolulu. This is not going to happen now. ... You are now an honorary member of the City of St Kilda Bowling Club! *C'est La Vie!!* Wishing you all the very best — particularly good health! From Bob & Millie.

My wife, Hannah and I planned our first visit to Australia in February 2004. Our cruise ship docked at Melbourne for one day. Sadly, I arrived too late for a reunion but when I disembarked the ship I was wearing the bowling shirt to honour my late friend Robert Halbert. "That's Life!"

NOTES

1. The names Rudi and Bob are used interchangeably as appropriate.
2. Bob Halbert was the anglicised name suggested by the Guardians. Rudi Halberstadt made it his legal name on his arrival in Australia.
3. We lived across the street at Zirkusgasse 38
4. Vienna's Jewish Athletic Club to which we once belonged. In the 1930s, its soccer team was generally at the bottom in league standing
5. Spotted Dick is a British concoction, a steamed, log-shaped suet pudding studded with currants, hence the 'spotted.' But why the 'dick'? I can see 'pudding' become 'puddink' becoming 'puddick' and then just 'dick.'
6. In February 1939, the Wagner-Norris bill was introduced in

the U.S. Congress allowing 20,000 German refugee children over fourteen to enter the country over a two-year period without affecting the quota. The legislation initially won public support but powerful opposition groups soon rallied to defeat the measure and it was never brought to the floor for a vote.

7. In 1994 Bob provided a few names. 'Of the twenty boys who came to Australia under the Welfare Guardian scheme only a few were from Vienna. I remember Otto Schustig, Egon Kammermann, Hans Reiner and Henry Zipper'. An article written by Manfred Anson in 1989, listed all twenty original surnames and their new English equivalent. Baron became Barton, Elsasser ... Eltham, Berstein ... Berns, Bernstein ... Berns, Halberstadt ... Halbert, Schustig ... Sherwin, Bacharach ... Baxter, Apt ... Upton, Kahn ... Cann, Kammerman ... Kamer, Reiner ... Raynor, Sommer ... Somers, Reiss ... Rees, Neuman... Newman, Lustig ... Lester, Bauer ... Bower, Jachman ... Kackman, Traugott ... Traynor, Dreyfuss ... Drayton, Ansbacher ... Anson. *Australian Jewish News*, 19 May 1989, p.11.
8. Ten attended the Dookie Agricultural College between Shepparton and Wangaratta; Rudi and the others were enrolled in the Wangaratta Technical School
9. Rodney Benjamin *A Serious Influx of Jews*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998, p 119
10. Vic Walpole owned only 1500 acres, Bert Walpole about 2000 acres, but Horace Walpole had 4000 acres.
11. On 19 June 1940 the passenger ship *Niagara* (bound for Suva and Vancouver) struck a mine, laid by the German raider *Orion*, and sank two hours later, shortly after leaving Auckland Harbor. The 349 passengers and crew aboard all survived.
12. Benjamin, op. cit.
13. Mother was working at the fair's 'Midget Town' as personal cook to the midget performers.
14. One of the twenty refugee boys was accused by the farm manager at Werribee of being a German spy when he was seen identifying United States planes from a booklet as they landed at Laverton. So to complete the farce, he joined the army where, as an 'enemy alien' he was used initially in a labour corps. Later he was a volunteer for malaria control experiments. On naturalisation he was allowed to serve overseas — as a batman to the commandant of a detention barracks in New Guinea. Aldridge and Keen, *Dookie College: The First 100 Years*, VCAH, 1986, on the webpage <http://www.landfood.unimelb.edu.au/dean/book2/ch3.html#Enfant>