



Alfred Eisenberg

My father, Alfred Eisenberg, was born in Vienna in 1920, first son of Samuel (known as Jacques) and Leopoldine Amster Eisenberg. Though I'm not exactly sure of the details, Alfred's grandfather was a violinist back in Poland and although Alfred's father never played, Alfred took to the instrument quite early. He became accomplished at a very young age and performed concerts all through his younger years.

The situation in Vienna was getting increasingly tense in the early to mid 1930s but I can only surmise that disbelief overpowered reason. The reality of the situation became dire, and on November 9, 1938, the utter destruction of their neighborhood finally gave them the impetus to leave their home. In the early fall of 1939, Germany invaded Poland and at the same time all Jewish travel documents that showed "of Polish birth" were canceled. Immediately, all naturalized Polish citizens were detained and their travel documents revoked. For many weeks, my father, uncle, and grandmother were detained in a transfer camp and separated from the dozens of other family relatives that had not been born in Austria as they had. The stories were starting to travel about the building of the work camps and separation of families. The three were told to leave all of their possessions other than what they could carry. My grandmother carried her silver Shabbat candlesticks hidden in her coat, and my father, who had preceded my grandmother and uncle in their exile to England, carried his inexpensive but third-generation Czech violin, as well as his and his father's tefillin. (His father joined them in America the following year.) My uncle and grandmother took a train to Holland, and then a ship to England to meet my father. On February 5, 1939, the three sailed from Southampton to America. They entered NY through Ellis Island and headed to Brooklyn NY to live with relatives temporarily.

My father was made a naturalized citizen, drafted into the army, and given a driver's license. He first went to Camp Pickett, and then on to Camp Ritchie on secret orders. Camp Ritchie was just evolving into the now famed Military Intelligence Service. The "Ritchie Boys" consisted of approximately 20,000 servicemen, about 14% of them Jewish refugees born in Germany and Austria. Most of the men sent to Camp Ritchie for training were there because of their fluency in German, French, Italian, Polish, or other languages needed by the Army. At Camp Ritchie, Alfred was taught interrogation techniques and spy craft training with the intent of sending him back to Europe to interpret for the Allies or to spy on the Germans. The Senior Staff decided to take Alfred and his friend Eddie, dress them as German officers, and have them mingle with the captured German POW's, which allowed them to remain in the US. Apparently, this was so successful that one of the camp colonels arranged a band for the camp commander comprised solely of this small group of interrogators. As there were no stringed instruments in a marching band, my father learned to play the snare drum, but in his off hours when he returned to Brooklyn on leave, the violin always came out. My father rarely talked about the war. When he was finally discharged in 1945, he went to work for the Paul Bine Paper Company, and then started his own company Canover Paper Company in LIC NY in 1949.

All through my childhood, my father played all the classics: Strauss, Rachmaninoff, Gypsy music. He played at parties, at peoples' homes, and when entertaining at home, the violin was always played. The violin was part of his soul. My father played with a beauty and a sadness that only now in my memories can I appreciate. It captured his life, his lost childhood, and the

horrors of all the family members left behind, murdered in the Holocaust, and buried in Austria and Poland. My father passed away in 2004 and his violin found a home under my piano. My family couldn't be more pleased that the violin's new resting place will be with the Violins of Hope. It could never do the story justice sitting under my piano when it can sing the story to the world in such illustrious company.