

Hanns Joseph Rothschild:

*The following account was provided by Hanns' wife Myrtle to Louis in June 2022, with notes in italics from*

Hanns was the only child of HUGO and BERTHA Rothschild. (nee Levy).

*(Bertha was the daughter of Julius Levy, who was Juda Levy's brother. Juda Levy was Louis, Michael, David and Jean's great grandfather who lived in Melsungen and died in 1927. Bertha in turn was Walter Levy's sister).*

Hugo came from Rotenburg an der Fulda, a town nearby to Melsungen an der Fulda, the home town of Bertha (nee Levy).

Hugo had two brothers and a sister. He served in the Prussian Army in WWI and was awarded the Iron Cross. His father Meier died in 1938 and was the last person to be buried in the Rotenburg Jewish Cemetery.

Bertha was the daughter of Julius Levy and his wife Rebecca. Bertha had two brothers, Leo and Walter.

Hugo and Bertha lived in Melsungen and their son Hanns was born on 14 July 1930.

In 1933, first Leo and then Walter left Germany to settle in South Africa.

In 1938, after Kristallnacht, Julius and Rebecca were able to join their sons Walter and Leo in South Africa.

The plan was for Hugo, Bertha and Hanns to follow shortly and join them all in S Africa.

Whether Hugo delayed because he thought he would receive better treatment after having served in WWI, or whether he was reluctant to leave because of his aged mother and widowed sister, remains conjecture.

Having entered primary school at age six, Hanns was discriminated against from the time he was eight years old. Other children were not allowed to play with him because he was Jewish and he was no longer allowed to attend school.

IN 1939, Hugo, Bertha and Hanns left Germany by train for Belgium. They intended travelling from Brussels to Ostend to take the ferry to Britain and then sail for South Africa.

On reaching the German border, Hugo and Bertha were taken off the train by the German authorities, leaving 9-year-old Hanns alone in the carriage not knowing what was happening to his parents. They returned to the carriage some time later, having been severely beaten but were allowed to continue their journey.

The Rothschilds arrived in Brussels on 3 September 1939, the day the war broke out between Germany and the Allies. As a result, they were unable to continue their journey as planned.

They found accommodation in an apartment in St Gilles, a poorer part of Brussels a few blocks from the Brussels South Railway station.

Hugo arranged with a man living in the same house to care for Hanns if anything should happen to him and or his wife.

The Rothschild family did try to escape to France on foot but were unsuccessful in their attempt and returned to Brussels after the German invasion of Belgium, Netherlands and France in May 1940.

In February 1942, Hugo was sent away to serve in a slave labour camp in northern France.

In October 1942, Bertha was instructed together with other women in a similar position, to bring food parcels to the Post Office situated at the Brussels South Railway station. She had sent Hanns, now aged 12, to a farm outside the city prior to this event.

On arrival at the post office with her parcel for her husband Hugo, she was arrested together with the other women.

The Post Office had an entrance from the street, but also an entrance from the railway platform on the opposite side of the building.

They were herded onto a waiting train on the platform and sent to Auschwitz.

Hanns, on arrival at the farm, had been warned that the S.S. were looking for Jews and was sent out into the fields to hide. A young Jewish couple with a baby were also staying at the farm.

After spending the entire day out in the fields, he was called back to the farm. The S.S. had been there and had arrested the young family. He was told to return to Brussels as it was not safe for him to remain there.

On returning to St Gilles, he found their apartment empty, his mother gone and without any food. He was told to stay with the Bruyninckx' downstairs and warned not to return upstairs to his parents' apartment.

A few days later, he returned upstairs to his parents' apartment, but heard voices and footsteps coming up the stairs and rushed to hide in a cupboard.

Two S.S. officers entered to empty the contents of the apartment in order to send everything back to Germany. On opening the cupboard, they found this terrified boy.

Speaking to each other in German, the one officer asked the other what they should do with him. He shrugged his shoulders and said that Hanns reminded him of his own son at home. They told him to leave at once and not to return or they would arrest him.

Hanns remained with the Bruyninckx' and lived under the assumed name of Jan (Jean) Bruyninckx from 1942 till 1944 at [162 Rue Emil Feron](#) in St Gilles, after leaving his parents apartment to live with the Bruyninckx downstairs. He attended primary school in the Ave. Fonsny (school no. 9) from 1939 till 1942, opposite the Gare du Midi (South Station). (It was from the post Office at this station that Bertha was arrested in 1942 sent to Auschwitz.)

Hanns was baptised Jan Bruyninckx in September/October 1944 at Schaltin-en-Condroz (near Namur).

He attended Marist Brothers School for a short period but was advised not to return for classes as it was too dangerous for him as a Jew.

In 1944 he had left the Bruyninckx to live with the De Haeseleer family at [178 Rue Emil Feron](#), two streets away from the Gare du Midi. He was only some miles from the spearhead of the last S. S. counter offensive in December 1944 (the Battle of the Bulge) at Schaltin with the family Warrant.

In September 1944, Belgium was rescued from German domination by Britain and Hanns witnessed the visit of Churchill, General Montgomery, General Eisenhower and General Paton in Brussels.

In 1946, through the efforts of his uncle in South Africa, Hanns was able to proceed to Britain where he lived for eight months with family friends of his parents who had managed to escape from Germany in time to reach Britain.

He was then able to leave Britain on the troop ship Asturias for South Africa , arriving in Cape Town in 1946. On arrival, he discovered that his grandmother Becky (Rebekka) Levy had passed away shortly before and that his Uncle Leo had been swept off a rock whilst fishing at Rooi Els and drowned.

In 1947, after interrupted schooling in two countries and two languages, and having had to master a third language (English), he completed his schooling in Parow, Cape Town at JJ DuPreez High School, entering Std 9 and matriculated the following year in 1948 whilst living with his grandfather Julius at [15 Hopkins Street Parow](#). *The Freedbergs lived across the street. Lore Freedberg, whose mother was Grete Levy, was Hanns' second cousin*). His uncle Walter and family lived in the house behind this at [16 Smith Street](#).

Hanns completed his medical studies at the University of Cape Town in June 1957, and had a successful medical career in South Africa.

He currently (as of 2023) lives in Johannesburg with his wife Myrtle.