

Emigration to Argentina in 1929 and Return to Neupanat in 1934

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From an account by Eva Sellner (née Mittermueller), born 1915

Translated from the German by Cindy Quitta

In 1927, there was a large sleet (hail) storm. The corn was destroyed. The hail soon destroyed everything on the ground, so that there wasn't any corn left. Farther away, where it wasn't so bad, we still had some crops (grain), because the crops were still standing. Then, we threshed and, to have bread, we had to cultivate 50 meters [50.7 yards] of crops and grains. However, in one part of the field everything was destroyed. There was nothing left at all. We did not have corn, and all the cattle, pigs, horses, and poultry depend on the corn. Everything depends on the corn. My father had to take his money to buy corn. Therefore, we went to America. In January 1928, 39 people emigrated from Neupanat at the same time.

On **December 9, 1929**, we left Neupanat. My father Peter **MITTERMUELLER** (a.k.a. Pheder **KOSCHERS**), my mother Eva (née **DIRB**), and five children (Eva, Anna, Marianna, Juliana and Peter) left Neupanat. I was 14 years old at that time—the oldest one of my brothers and sisters. There was another girl, Anna **KONRAD**, who was as old as my mother was, and she worked for us. When she heard the fact that we were leaving, she absolutely wanted to go with us. However, she did not have any money, so my father paid for her journey. We never got back the money. As a single woman, however, she was not allowed to enter Argentina. Therefore, she went down to Uruguay and then died there a half year later.

The trip was long and cumbersome. We went by train from Arad to Vienna and stayed overnight there. The next day we went to Paris, where we ate that night, before we continued to the port in Cherbourg in northern France. However, we had to remain there for eight days, because our ship, which we should have left on, had to save a sinking ship. From Cherbourg, it took us three days to go to Lisbon. From there, our ocean voyage took 24 days to Buenos Aires, Argentina. I often asked the steward whether we would ever see land again. There were about 2,500 people on the ship. Most were Jewish emigrants from Poland.

On **January 14, 1930**, we finally arrived in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina. I was from the city. However, I had never seen such a beautiful place. At that point, my father said, "What do we do now?" There wasn't anybody there to meet us, because we didn't come on the right ship. However, we disembarked and then my father said, "We will put all our luggage in the storeroom." At that time, we were so ignorant that we did not know that houses were built at the port where immigrants could live until they found work. Then my father said, "Come, we will go on the streetcar. We will ask where we need to get off. We will show the address that Johann **SELLNER** gave us." At home, he was our neighbor and he had written to us once, so we knew his address from the letter. He had emigrated the previous year. One time, I heard someone call my father. So, I thought, if someone is calling my father, he must know us. I stood still while the others kept going. When they stopped, my father saw that I was missing. Then he looked and saw that I had wandered off. I was standing with the men, two brothers, who had called my father. I knew them from home, because they had only left the previous year. They said they knew where the man we were looking for lived.

Outside the city, the Rio River came from the sea. We had to go over a large bridge there. And, as we drove over it, we said, "Now you are leading us to the Gypsies." "No, it will become more beautiful again," they said. We got out and continued on foot. There were people from our village, who left in 1928. They said, "We have a place and it is warm. You can lie down anywhere. You don't need to heat it." Then, we stayed there.

It was good that, except for our brother, who was barely five year old, we were all girls. Therefore, we got equal work. Our father was a sick man when he came home from the war. Also, our mother was not healthy. Then I went to work and, also, my other sisters Nanni and Mariann. Mariann went to care for someone's children, and Nanni and I had places, too. Our mother went to work in a factory, where cleaning rags were made. Our father got work where we worked. My mother always searched for jobs

where I could be paid more. Therefore, she took me away from one place and brought me to another place. We also found another job for my father, where he worked until we came home. He worked at a factory, where zinc and copper sheets were manufactured.

Our mother was operated on at this time, because she had a growth on her large intestine. We became acquainted with a physician. I still know his name today: **LEMBERTSKI**. He spoke German. He said, "She should not go home again. Perhaps, she will live until tomorrow—no longer." In the hospital where he was employed, he performed the operation. It was far away from us. However, the operation succeeded. It only took one syringe to kill the growth. She asked the physician whether her husband could look at the ulcer he removed. My father said, "If only you had seen that." One growth was as large as a stuffed pig's stomach [Schwartelungen, which is similar to haggis] and the others looked like a hen's eggs and goose eggs. The physician said to him, "When she puffed up, she had to have stitches, or she would have died." After six weeks, my mother went to work again.

On **April 8, 1930**, I turned 15 years old and, on August 23 in Buenos Aires, I married Johann **SELLNER**, because my mother forced me. She had a lot of fear that someone else would take me away. One man wanted me very much and told me that I should run away with him. He knew that I could not marry yet. But he took me to his aunt, and I remained there until I was old enough for us to marry. Often I said, "At 15 years, you are still a child!" They had submitted a written request for us to marry without me knowing about it. My father did not want the marriage. He always said to my mother, "You see that she does not want to marry. So leave her in peace!" Because we are used to my parents, my little brother Peter said to my mother, "Don't you have enough children? You don't still need another one." Then, later, I always said to my mother that she should have more understanding, like him.

At that time, many girls ran away from home if their parents did not want them to go with a boy. You couldn't look for anybody there. At that time, Buenos Aires was a city of eight million people. People did not need to register themselves if they moved. Many people were outside, so no one knew that they were there. We also disembarked from the ship without announcing our arrival somewhere. Children came into world, which people did not announce at all. So, that's how it was there.

After I married, I went to work in the glass factory, where my husband already worked. I worked on a machine there, which engraved patterns on the glasses. The glasses went into an acid, so that the pattern was etched in. In this glass factory, there were also two men from our village: Anton **BUTSCHLER** and Johann **ZELLER**.

I remember the following families from Neupanat in Buenos Aires:

- Jakob **HEINRICH** and his wife Eva had two children, Hans and Magdalena.
- Johann **HOFMANN** and his wife Barbara had a son, Johann.
- Georg **KAEMPF** and his wife Rosalia had two sons, Jakob and Georg.
- Franz **KRAEMER** left with my husband and married Josefina **REIFF** there.
- Jakob **LEPTICH** and his wife Rosalia had one daughter.
- Martin **LUMP** and his wife Katharina had a daughter, Anni.
- Peter **MITTERMUELLER** and his wife Eva (née **DIRB**) arrived with five children (my parents).
- Michael **NOSAK** and his wife Maria had two children, a son and a daughter.
- Philipp **PLENNERT** married Theresia **REIFF** there, sister of Josefina.
- Michael **REIFF** and his wife Josefina are the parents of Josefina and Theresia.

- Johann **REINGRUBER** (his wife followed later) with his son and his brother Franz **REINGRUBER** with his wife Eva and two sons, Franz and Andreas.
- Michael **SAND** and his wife Magdalena had a daughter, Margaretha.
- Michael **SCHERER** and wife Rosalia did not have children.
- There was a family—I do not know how the name was written—people always said "Bastel **SCHLAPP**" and his wife Katharina had three children (two boys and one girl).
- Sebastian **SCHMALZ** and his wife Anna had a son, Sebastian. With them was:
- Johann **SELLNER** (my husband) was already a farmhand in Neupanat for the Schmalz family, and he emigrated with them when he was 17 years old.
- Johann **SELLNER** and his wife Anna had a son.
- Johann **TROPFENBAUM** and his wife Franziska had three sons (Hans, Franz, and Sepp). Hans **TROPFENBAUM** married Maria and had a daughter, Anni.
- Anton **WERNER** and his wife Elizabeth had a son, Anton.
- Jakob **ZELLER** (brother of Johann) and his wife Katharina had one son, Jakob.

At that time, many families from Neupanat living in Buenos Aires returned to Neupanat. **SAND** and **SELLNER** as well as **ZELLER** and **HEINRICH** returned with their families. The **REINGRUBER** and the **TROPFENBAUM** families remained. Those families aren't coming back.

Why did the family return to Neupanat? As I said, my father was not healthy, and he feared that he would die in Buenos Aires and then the remaining family would return to Neupanat. In addition, my sister Nanni became acquainted with a young man who was from St. Anna, a community close to Neupanat. And my other sister Mariann had already become acquainted with a young man who was from Yugoslavia and, in addition, a German. And then our mother realized, if we stayed there one more year, we would never return home. My sister Nanni's boyfriend was Jakob **KOEHLER**. And my mother always said, "She may not marry a Koehler, because the Koehlers are all bad." And Mariann's boyfriend was Hans **SCHNITZER**. That ruined everything.

On **April 13, 1934**, we left Argentina on the General San Martin and, after 26 days, we arrived in Hamburg. From there, we continued by train across Berlin through Czechoslovakia to Prague. In Prague, we had to wait four hours for the train to Romania. At that time, nobody was allowed to travel through to Hungary. Because we had a lot of luggage, we had to get a truck in Arad. Then my father went to a landlord who had ordered wine from us in the past. The landlord said to him, "The man sitting at the table there has a car." He wanted 500 Lei [about \$370 in 2005] to drive our luggage to Neupanat. My father said that he only had a dollar. Coincidentally, there was a teacher from Neupanat sitting there, and he offered to pay the 500 Lei as long as my father repaid him. And, just like that, we were on the truck with our luggage and drove home.

We arrived in Neupanat on **May 10, 1934**. That was Ascension Day, our pilgrimage day. We thought that if we arrived in the morning, then we could ride along to Maria Radna and our father could go to Neupanat with the luggage. But we had to wait so long that it was already afternoon when we arrived. Given that, we could no longer go along on the pilgrimage. Our grandmother was at home, and, at that time, my father's mother was still alive, too. The old women always sat in the shade together with **SCHMIDT**. And they said to my grandmother, "Bel Nanni, Peter is close. Look, there is the car. There it is!" And then it came closer. And as we drove down the lane, I thought, there are only small fences. Everything appeared so small to me.

How was the new start in Neupanat? Our grandmother was using our house and the field was leased. Our godfather had authority over our property and would give us about half of the field, so that we could

have bread, if we returned to have a new beginning. Otherwise, we would have had to buy everything ourselves. Then we bought a house until we had everything together. We also had a horse and a cart there. We had half the yield, so we bought some animals to eat and to have. And I went to work on my husband's sister and my brother-in-law's property. At that time, people still had to make everything with their hands. And my mother said, "You go along. You can still earn your bread!" Then I went along to cooperate, and then my brother-in-law said, "Well, we will see now, what that American can do." I was accustomed to the heat. I had come from summer into summer. They were all ill from the extreme heat. They drank water, and then they all became waterlogged. Then I alone was responsible and committed. So I asked my brother-in-law, "Well, which one is the American now? I have done everything now, and all of you just lie down nearby and sleep soundly" [literally, "sleep like rats," which is derogatory].

My husband and I bought a house in Langkleinhaeussler Lane [literally, Long, Small Houses Lane] and, in **March 1935**, we moved in there. I was still so angry because he had bought that, because it was so expensive and it was still covered with straw. Also, there were places where it rained inside, and he paid over 40,000 Lei [about \$148,000 in 2005]. That was a lot of money at that time. My father wanted us to build on an empty spot that they had. For the money, we could have built a new house there. "But then there would too many relatives living together," my husband said.

After our return, my mother didn't give me any peace; she insisted that I must wear rustic clothes. If I put on a heading covering, my small daughter Gretel always cried and threw a fit. Then I would bend down to her and she would embrace and kiss me. My mother sold our entire wardrobe, since we could not have anything but rustic clothes made from cloth. I only had a dress that was made from green material. From the same material, she made a blouse for me. That's the way she had us wear it. That was all. Then I said, "Now you have blended the entire dress, and there is nothing that is showy."

Our mother was an experienced dressmaker, although she did not necessarily have to do that at all. Her father, Jakob **DIRB**, had a fortune and was, by occupation, a carpenter. He earned a fair amount and did not care about his fortune. He always had farmhands and apprentices who learned from him. He went to the field only when it was cut. Otherwise, he didn't go for the rest of the year. And she was allowed to do whatever she pleased, whatever occurred to her. That is why she went and learned to be a dressmaker. I always said that that was good. Because, otherwise, we would have had to pay for anything we needed, but she could make everything.

My parents made a big mistake; they threw away their entire fortune in order to go to America. At that time, the trip cost 86,000 Lei [about \$318,200 in 2005], and they paid for it from the sale of cattle and grain. Seven pigs were slaughtered, a sow with a piglet the next year, five horses in the stable, two cows, and more. We had a vineyard in the mountains. My father could sell up to 45 hectoliters [11,887.65 gallons] of wine each year from there. And then we had another vineyard at home. How could they throw it all away? At that time, we were young and ignorant, and we were glad that we could go to America. But when we returned, I often said, "How could they be so blind? It was such a foolish thing to throw away everything."

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