

# THROUGH THE LENS OF ESKENASY

## THE STORY OF A TURKISH, JEWISH, GERMAN FAMILY

This exhibition offers a glimpse into the story of a cosmopolitan family that defied clear national, religious, or ethnic categorization.

The **Eskenasy** family crossed state borders, switched religious categories, and changed citizenship several times. Their story links Istanbul to Vienna, Munich, the Theresienstadt Ghetto, New York City, and Washington state.

*Image: Alfons Eskenasy holding his camera (early 20th century)*

*Exhibit curator: Joana Bürger*

*All exhibit photographs taken from Inez Eskenasy's personal family collection*

HOLOCAUST  
CENTER for  
HUMANITY

**STROUM CENTER  
FOR JEWISH STUDIES**

**W** HENRY M. JACKSON SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES | UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON



# THE ESKENASY FAMILY

**Inez Eskenasy was born in 1938 in Munich, Nazi Germany, into a family of mixed religious and cultural heritage.**

Her grandfather, Alfons Eskenasy, was the son of Jewish parents from the Ottoman Empire who moved to Vienna in the 19th century, and her grandmother was a German Catholic.

Inez's grandfather, Alfons Eskenasy, was a talented photographer. Through his photos, we gain a glimpse into the life of an extraordinary family from the time of the German Empire until the Nazi regime and in the post-war years.

*Image: Inez Eskenasy (ca. 1945)*

# ESKENASY FAMILY TREE:

Two worlds coming together

**Sephardi Jews** who immigrated from the Ottoman Empire to Vienna in the 19th century

**German Catholics** from Bavaria



Jacob Avram Eskenasy  
(date unknown)



Elizabeth Sussin  
(date unknown)



Karl Hafner  
(unknown–1927)



Berta Wunderlich  
(1862–1955)



Alfons Eskenasy  
(1881–1955)



Louise Lea Hafner  
(1889–1985)



Dionys Rusnak  
(1901–1939)



Louise Eskenasy  
(1911–1996)



Carmen Eskenasy  
(1923–2015)



Inez Eskenasy  
(b. 1938)



*Elizabeth Sussin Eskenasy*



*Jacob Avram Eskenasy*

# ELIZABETH SUSSIN & JACOB AVRAHAM ESKENASY

**Sephardi Jews from the Ottoman Empire, they moved from Istanbul to Vienna in the second half of the 19th century. In Vienna, they opened a café and traded in Oriental rugs.**

The roots of Sephardi life in Vienna reach back to the early 18th century. While local Ashkenazi Jews still faced harsh restrictions, a series of economic treaties between the Habsburg monarchy and the Ottoman Empire encouraged Ottoman subjects to settle in the city.

1718

**TREATY OF PASSAROWITZ**  
Ottoman Jews allowed to settle in the Habsburg Monarchy

1778

**TURKISH ISRAELITE CONGREGATION**  
Established in Vienna

1867-1918

**AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE**  
Jews gain equal rights

1914-1918

**WORLD WAR I**



# ALFONS ESKENASY

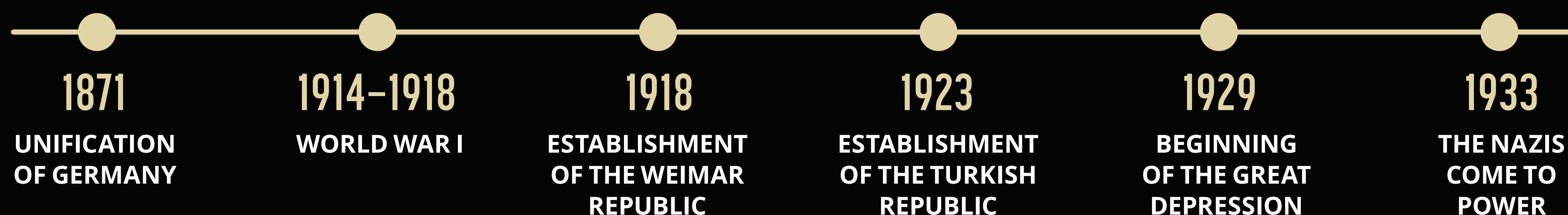
(Born 1881 in Vienna)

**Alfons Eskenasy grew up in Vienna in a multicultural environment.**

He pursued a career as an opera singer and moved to Munich in 1909. When he lost his voice, he made his passion a profession and opened a photo studio. He married Louise Lea Hafner, a German Catholic, in 1911.

*Image left: Alfons Eskenasy holding his camera (date unknown)*

*Image right: Alfons Eskenasy in front of an opera poster (date unknown)*





# LOUISE LEA HAFNER

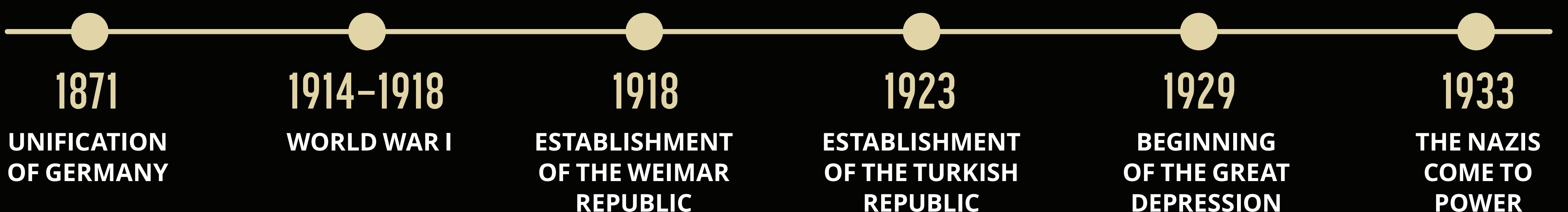
**(Born 1889 in Munich)**

Louise Lea Hafner and Alfons Eskenasy married in 1911 at the Turkish Consulate in London after Louise Lea had converted to Judaism.

They had two daughters, Louise (born in 1911) and Carmen (born in 1923).

*Image top left: Louise Lea Hafner (1910)*

*Images bottom left, top right, bottom right: Alfons and Louise Lea with their daughter Louise (1911)*





# LOUISE ESKENASY

**(Born 1911 in Munich)**

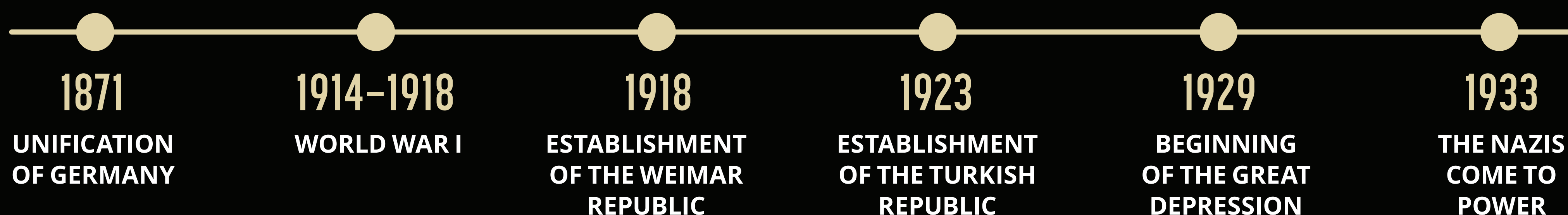
**Louise was born in Munich in the late German Imperial era.**

She grew up in a cosmopolitan home filled with the sound of opera music. Louise was baptized but her parents also organized a Bat Mitzvah for her.

During her childhood, she witnessed World War I (1914–1918) and the establishment of the Weimar Republic (1918).

*Image left: Louise Eskenasy (1912)*

*Image right: Louise Eskenasy (date unknown)*





# LIFE IN IMPERIAL & WEIMAR GERMANY

**Celebrating Christmas and maintaining connections to Jewish circles was not a contradiction for the cosmopolitan Jewish-German family.**

*Image top left: Louise Lea with little Louise (ca. 1912)*

*Image top right: Louise Lea with little Louise (1916)*

*Image bottom left: Alfons, Louise, Louise Lea, and Carmen (ca. 1923)*



# A VISITOR FROM VIENNA

**Grandmother Elizabeth visited the family in 1923 to meet her second granddaughter Carmen.**

For the Sephardi Jewish woman, who was born in the Ottoman Empire in the mid-19th century, accepting a non-Sephardi and non-Jewish woman as daughter-in-law was a big step.

*Image from left to right:  
Louise, Elizabeth, Louise Lea, Carmen,  
and Alfons (1923)*



# FAMILY EXCURSIONS

The bicycle revolutionized mobility for all social classes in Weimar Germany, and the Eskenasys enjoyed bicycle outings as a family.

*Image from left to right:  
Louise Lea, Carmen, Alfons,  
and Louise (ca. 1924)*



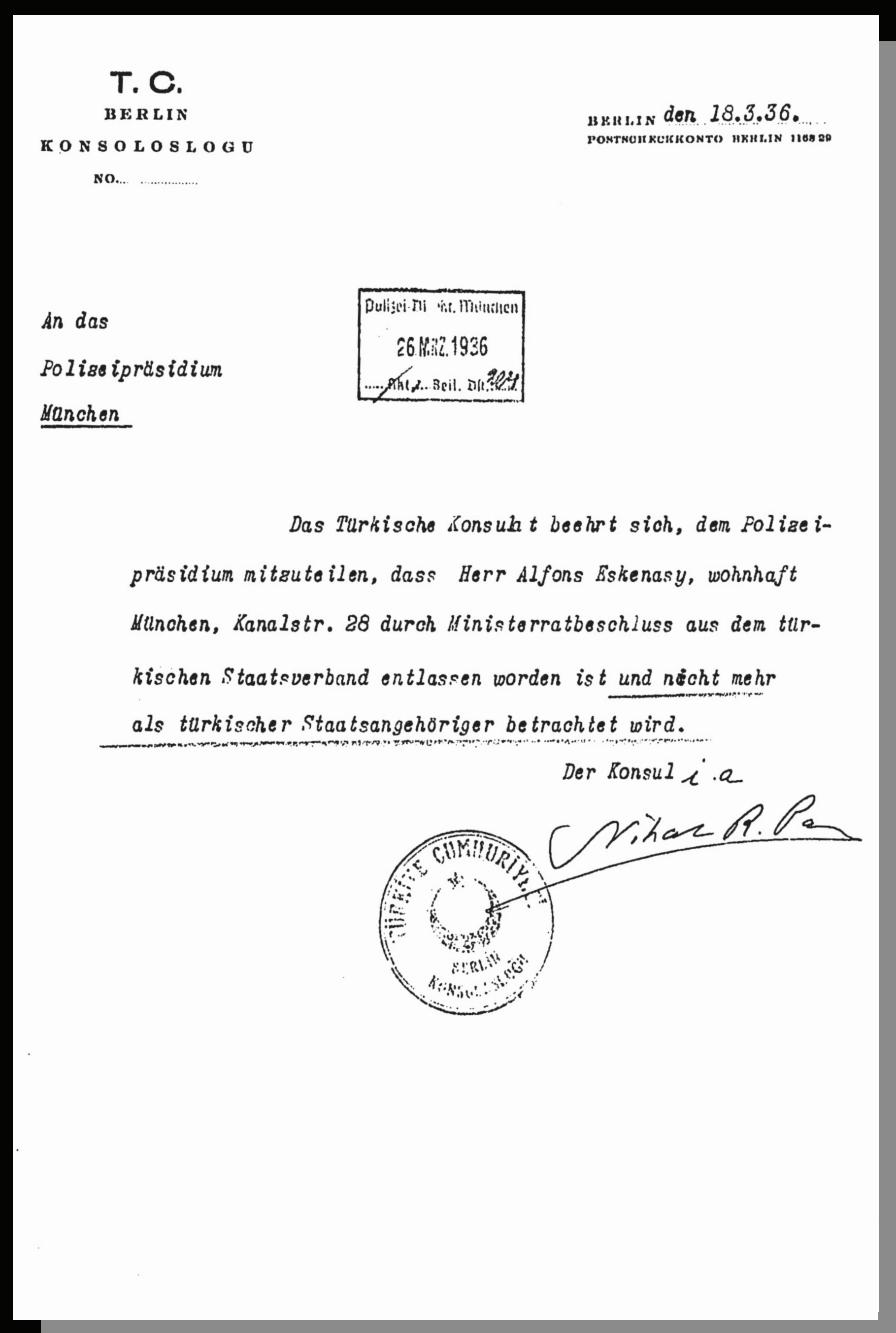
# AT THE COTTAGE

**Many middle class families in Munich owned small garden allotments at the outskirts of the city, including the Eskenasys.**

They put up a Turkish flag to express their loyalty to the newly founded Turkish state.

Despite being born in Vienna, Alfons Eskenasy only possessed Ottoman identity papers and when Louise Lea married him, she lost her German citizenship.

*Image, from left to right:  
Louise Lea, Carmen, Louise, and Alfons in  
front of a Turkish flag (ca. 1930)*



“The Turkish consulate informs the police ministry that Alfons Eskenasy (...) was released from the Turkish Federation and is not considered a Turkish citizen anymore.”

# STATELESS IN NAZI GERMANY

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Alfons Eskenasy tried to move his family out of Germany.

He sent his Ottoman identity papers to the Turkish consulate in Berlin and requested Turkish passports for himself and his family.

After years of struggling for Turkish papers, Eskenasy received devastating news in 1936: the Turkish authorities revoked his Turkish citizenship, effectively pushing him and his family into statelessness.

*Image left:* Letter from the Turkish Consulate (1936)

*Image right:* Turkish flag from the Eskenasy family



*Image left, from left to right: Louise, her daughter Inez, Louise Lea, and Carmen (1938)*

*Despite having lost their Turkish citizenship, the family kept a Turkish flag and portrait of the founding father of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, on their living room wall.*

*Image below: Jewish star from the Eskenasy family*

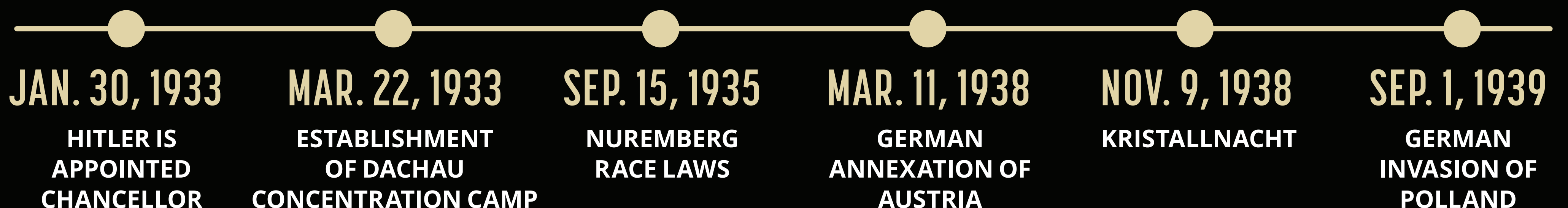


# LIFE IN NAZI GERMANY

**In 1938, Louise gave birth to her daughter Inez.**

The Nazis considered the two sisters Louise and Carmen as “Mischlinge” (mixed-race person) because their mother was Catholic and their father Jewish. Louise’s daughter Inez was considered a “Mischling of the second degree.”

Louise wrote to the authorities trying to get an exemption for her daughter from wearing the Jewish star but to no avail.





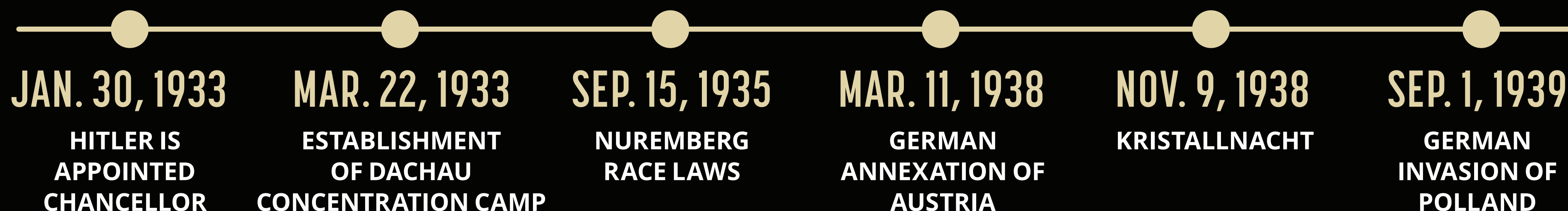
# 'FIRST PHOTOGRAPH AFTER D'

*Image: Alfons Eskenasy  
and his granddaughter Inez  
(December 12, 1938)*

**In November 1938,  
Alfons was incarcerated  
at the Dachau  
concentration camp.**

A few weeks later, he was released again due to his wife's "Aryan status," which gave the family some protection.

The note below the image reads: "First photograph after D." The "D" stands for "Dachau."





# FORCED LABOR

The sisters Carmen and Louise were put into forced labor at a battery factory in Munich.

Knowing many languages, they worked at the offices. Their mother, who refused to divorce her Jewish husband, had to sweep the streets of Munich.

*Image from left to right: Carmen, Inez, Louise, and Louise Lea (December 12, 1938)*

JAN. 30, 1933

HITLER IS  
APPOINTED  
CHANCELLOR

MAR. 22, 1933

ESTABLISHMENT  
OF DACHAU  
CONCENTRATION CAMP

SEP. 15, 1935

NUREMBERG  
RACE LAWS

MAR. 11, 1938

GERMAN  
ANNEXATION OF  
AUSTRIA

NOV. 9, 1938

KRISTALLNACHT

SEP. 1, 1939

GERMAN  
INVASION OF  
POLAND



# IN HIDING

**As the situation grew more severe, Louise found a hiding place for her daughter in the Bavarian village of Schliersee.**

From age five until seven (1943 until 1945), Inez lived in Schliersee with Mrs. Schneider, who took in children evacuated from major cities due to allied bombings. No one besides Mrs. Schneider knew that Inez had Jewish roots.

*Image left: Inez (1943)*

*Image right: Photograph of Schliersee taken after the war*

SEP. 1, 1939

GERMAN  
INVASION OF  
POLAND

JUN. 22, 1941

GERMANY  
INVADES THE  
SOVIET UNION

SEP. 1, 1941

JEWS HAVE TO  
WEAR THE  
JEWISH STAR

NOV. 24, 1941

THERESIENSTADT  
GHETTO  
ESTABLISHED

JAN. 20, 1942

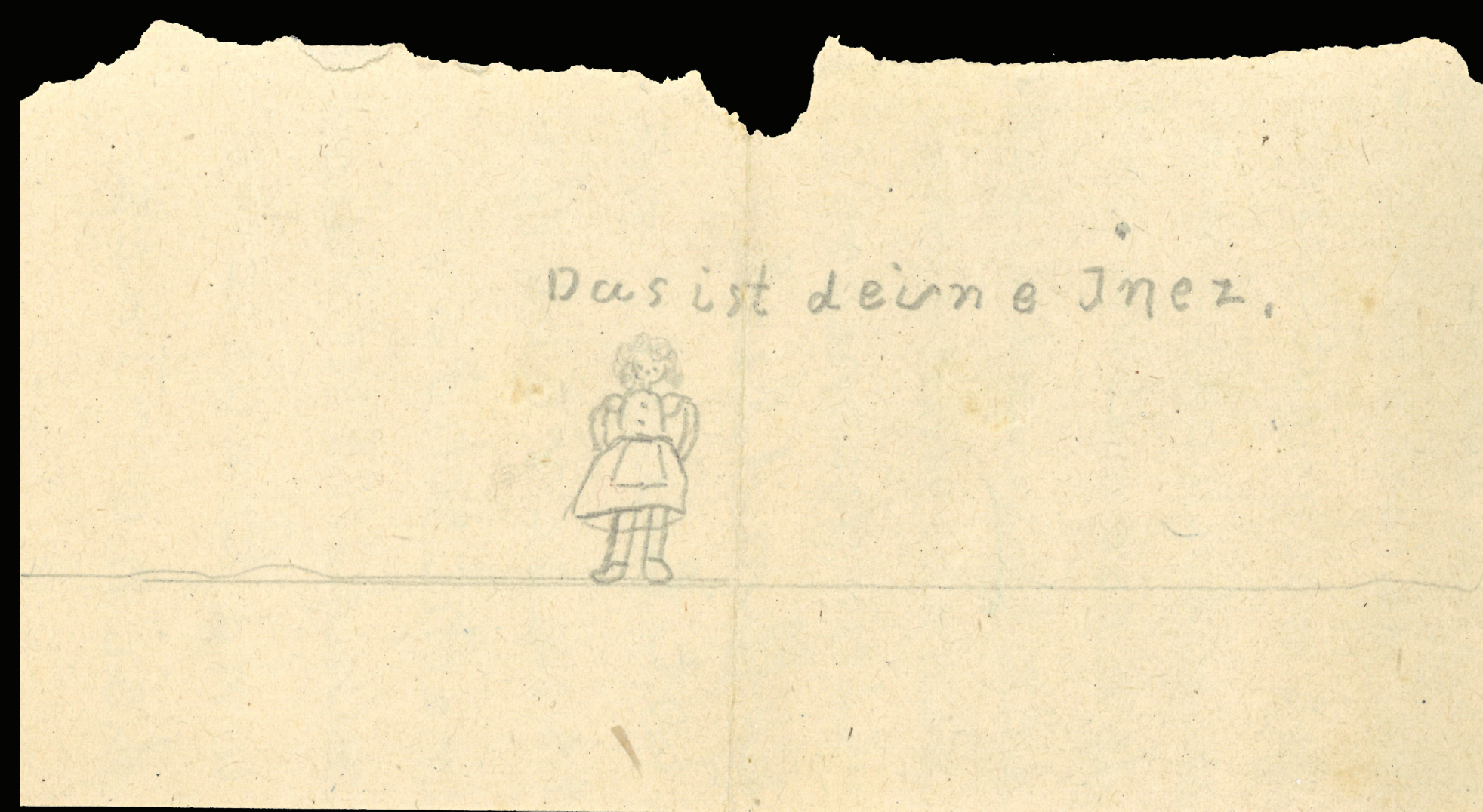
WANNSEE  
CONFERENCE

FEB. 2, 1943

GERMAN DEFEAT  
AT STALINGRAD

Schliersee den 15. Juli 1944.  
Meine liebe Mutter immer  
get es sehr gut schreibe  
mir doch bald wie-  
der einmal wie get es  
der Engi und dir und  
wann kommst du mal  
wider zu mir  
hoffentlich  
ist bei dir nich-  
ts passiert bleib  
recht schön ge-  
sund. 1000 1000 Küsse  
und Grüsse von  
deiner Inez.

“My dear mother, I am doing very well. Do write to me again soon. How are you and Engi and when are you coming to me again? Hopefully, nothing happened to you. Remain in good health. 1,000 kisses and greetings from your Inez.”



“This is your Inez.”

# A LETTER FROM INEZ TO HER MOTHER

*Images top left and top right: Letter from Inez to her mother (1944)*

*Image bottom right: Inez and the other children at Schliersee (1944)*



JUN. 6, 1944

ALLIED FORCES LAND  
IN NORMANDY

JAN. 17, 1945

DEATH MARCH  
FROM AUSCHWITZ

JAN. 27, 1945

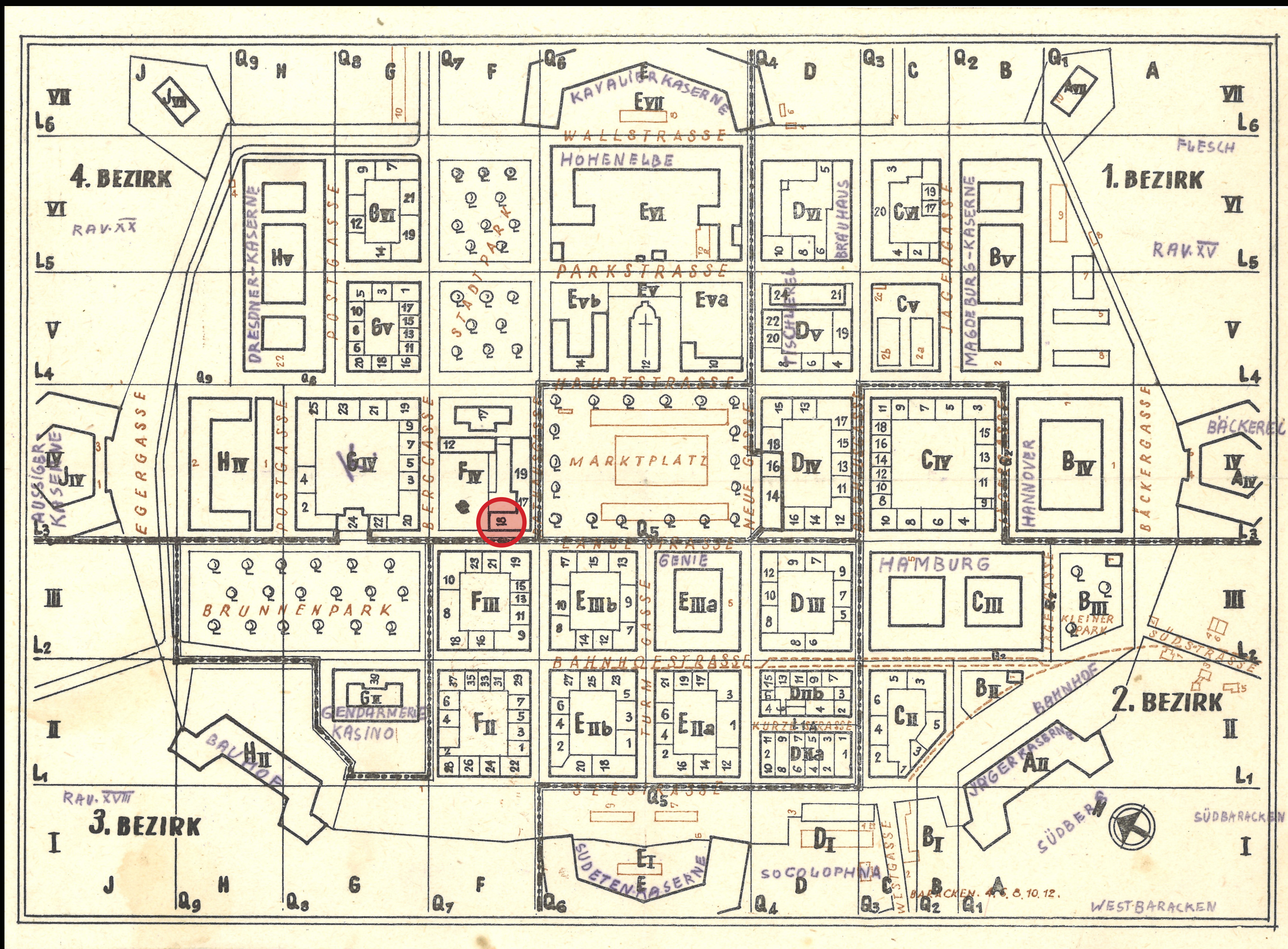
SOVIET LIBERATION  
OF AUSCHWITZ

MAY 2, 1945

THE RED CROSS TAKES  
OVER ADMINISTRATION OF  
THERESIENSTADT GHETTO

MAY 7, 1945

GERMAN  
SURRENDER



# DEPORTATION TO THERESIENSTADT

**In February 1945, the Reich Security Main Office declared that persons of mixed ancestry and Jews married to non-Jews had to be deported.**

Alfons and his daughters were incarcerated at Munich's Secret State Police (Gestapo) headquarters before being deported to Theresienstadt Ghetto.

Alfons was on Transport II/34 and arrived at the ghetto on February 20, 1945. Due to heavy war damage to the railway system, the transport took two days. Louise and Carmen arrived with Transport II/35 on February 23, 1945.

*Image: A map of Theresienstadt Ghetto from the Eskenasy family. The red circle marks where Louise lived: Badhausgasse 18/1*

**JUN. 6, 1944**

ALLIED FORCES LAND IN NORMANDY

**JAN. 17, 1945**

DEATH MARCH FROM AUSCHWITZ

**JAN. 27 1945**

SOVIET LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ

**MAY 2, 1945**

THE RED CROSS TAKES OVER ADMINISTRATION OF THERESIENSTADT GHETTO

**MAY 7, 1945**

GERMAN SURRENDER

When I was seven my grandmother walked all the way out to the little mountain town to get me because she heard people from different concentration camps were coming back. She decided to get me so we could both look for Mommy, my aunt and Grandfather. Going back to the city was quite a job because we had to walk most of the way. Finally a big red truck gave us a ride, we were both so very happy.

## THE WAR IS OVER

When the war ended, Louise Lea walked over 30 miles to Schliersee to pick up her granddaughter Inez.

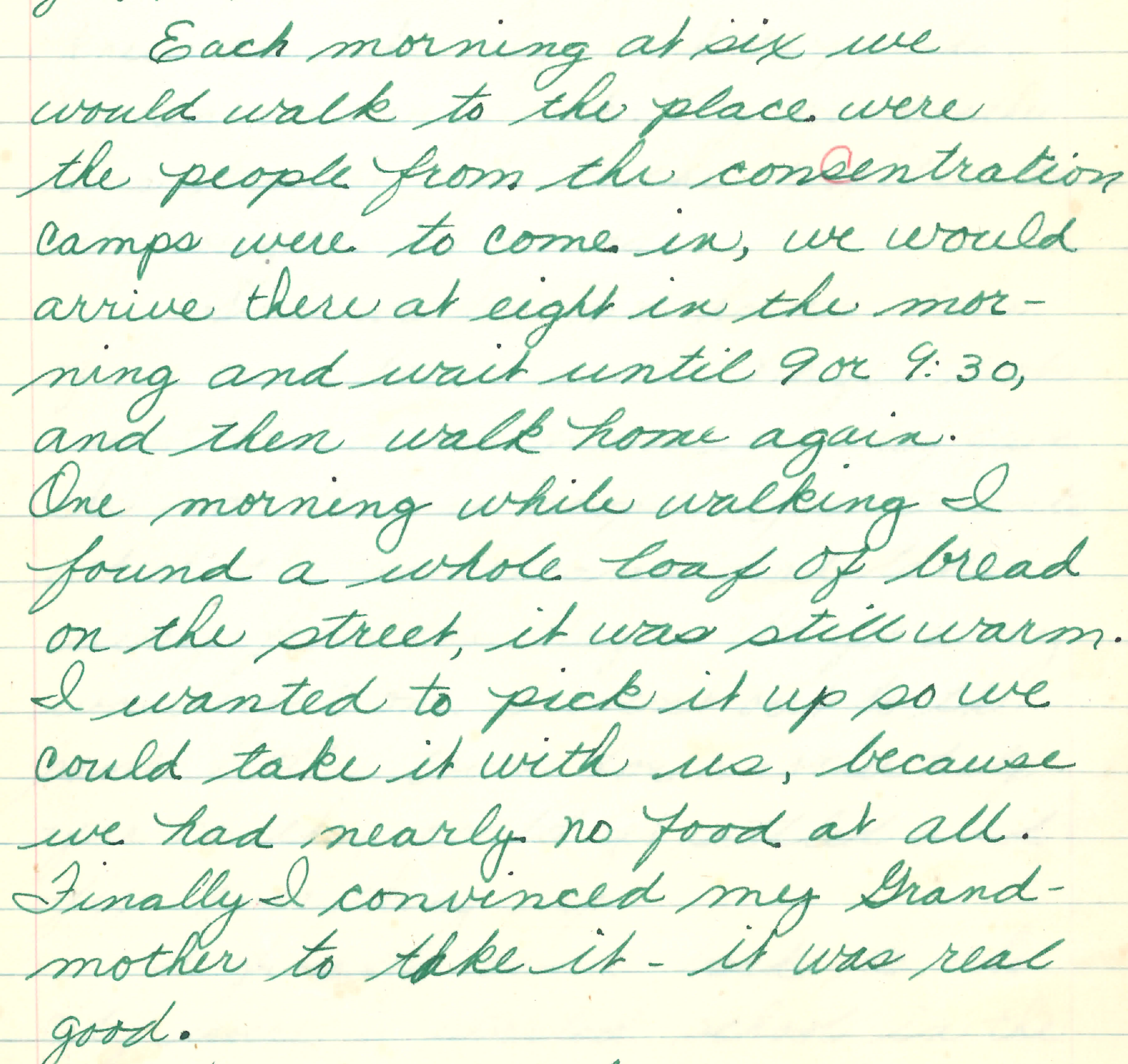
*Image:* Excerpt from Inez's autobiography, which she wrote as a school exercise after the war

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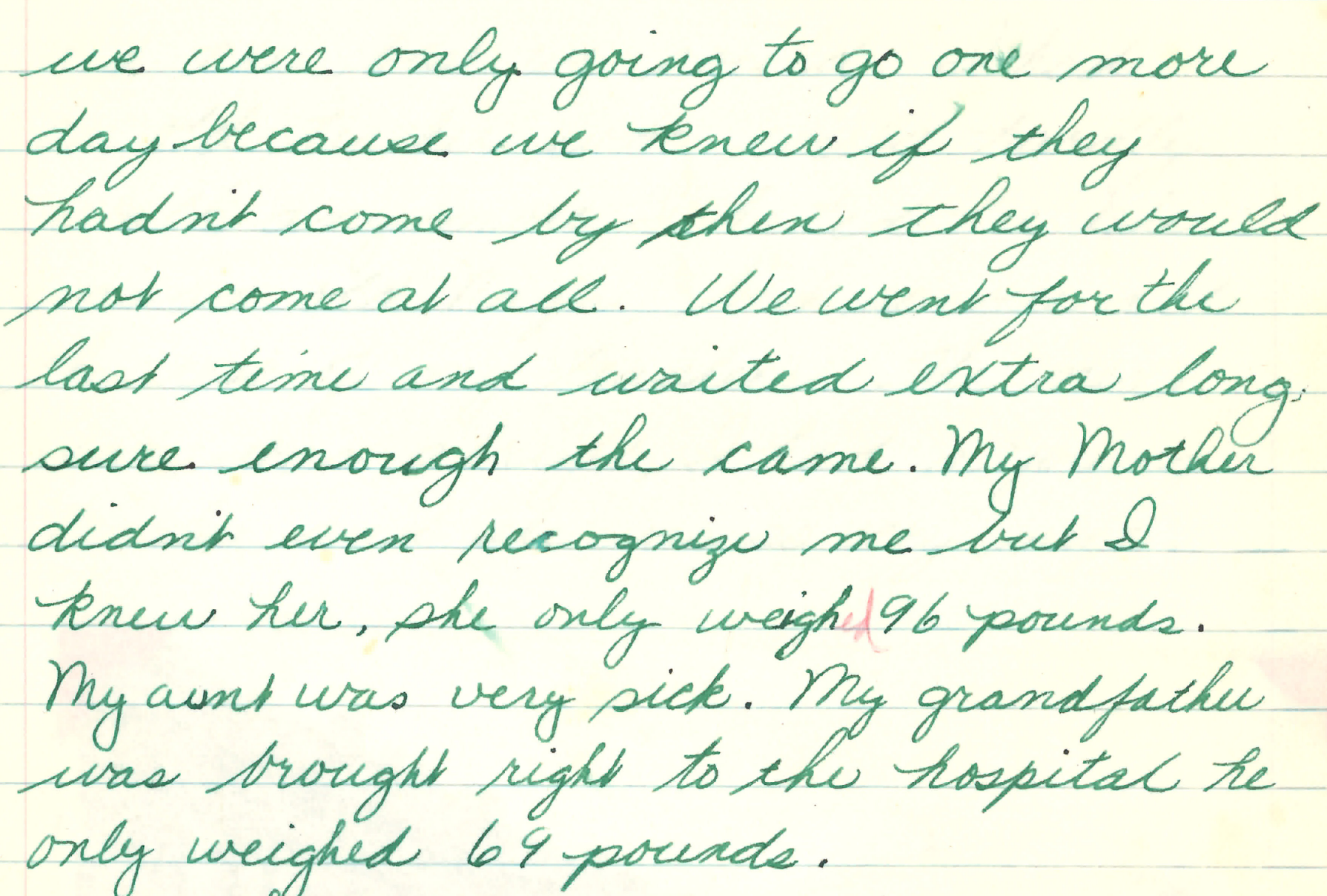
# WAITING FOR THE RETURNEES

“ Each morning at six we would walk to the place where the people from the concentration camps were to come in, we would arrive there at eight in the morning and wait until 9 or 9:30, and then walk home again.



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We went to this place every morning for nearly a week



we were only going to go one more day because we knew if they hadn't come by then they would not come at all. We went for the last time and waited extra long, sure enough they came. My Mother didn't even recognize me but I knew her, she only weighed 96 pounds. My aunt was very sick. My grandfather was brought right to the hospital he only weighed 69 pounds.

**Images:** Excerpt from Inez's autobiography, which she wrote as a school exercise after the war

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# IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

**After the war, the family decided to immigrate to the United States. They came on the Ernie Pyle in 1947.**

While Carmen, Alfons, and Louise Lea stayed in New York, Louise and her daughter Inez moved to Leavenworth, Washington.

Back in Munich, Louise had met an American soldier named Lloyd, who was from Leavenworth. They fell in love and married once Louise arrived in the United States.



*Image top: Photo of the SS Ernie Pyle*

*Image bottom: Photo of Inez*



# LIFE IN BROOKLYN, NY

**Image left:** Alfons and Louise Lea Eskenasy after the war

**Image top right:** Alfons Eskenasy in NY holding his camera

**Image bottom right:** Louise Lea Eskenasy ("Mama") at 267 Kingston Avenue in Brooklyn, NY



# LIFE IN LEAVENWORTH, WA

**Inez lived with her mother and her stepfather in Leavenworth, where she went to elementary and high school before moving back to the East Coast to live with her grandmother and finish high school there in 1955.**

*Image: Inez and her mother Louise in Leavenworth, WA*



**Image:** Inez in her home holding two Turkish flags with the suitcase that contains her family albums and documents (summer 2023).

The family used this suitcase when they immigrated to the United States in 1947.