



Photo courtesy PBS Learning Media

Why were Jewish refugees from Germany turned away from Cuba and the United States?

HENRY GALLANT

Henry (Heinz) Goldstein was born in Berlin, Germany in 1928. He was the only child of Hermann and Rita Goldstein. Once Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933, life for Jewish Germans became increasingly difficult. The Nuremberg Laws in 1935 had taken away their rights and citizenship. Kristallnacht, in November 1938 revealed that Jews were now subject to government sponsored violence. By the end of 1938, the Goldstein family, like many Jewish Germans, understood that their lives were in danger.



Photo courtesy of US Holocaust Memorial Museum

The Goldsteins began looking for a safe haven. They obtained landing permits for Cuba and bought tickets for passage on the SS St. Louis. On May 13, 1939, the German transatlantic liner St. Louis sailed from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. Of the 937 passengers onboard, most were Jews fleeing from Nazi oppression. Most were hoping to receive visas for the U.S. and were planning to stay in Cuba only as long as it took to get permission to come to the United States.

What the passengers did not know was that just a week earlier, the Cuban president had issued a decree that cancelled all new landing certificates. The passengers on the SS St. Louis did not have the paperwork or financial guarantees to enter Cuba. Without this information, the passengers, including the Goldsteins, enjoyed their journey onboard, looking forward to their arrival in Cuba.

Despite negotiations, Cuba, other Central and South American countries and the United States were unwilling to accept the refugees. Ultimately the ship was sent back



Photo courtesy of Aish.com

to Europe, where France, England, the Netherlands and Belgium agreed to take some of the refugees.

“It’s an epic Holocaust symbol that the world did not come to the rescue of the German Jews.”

When the St. Louis docked at Antwerp, Belgium, Henry was sent to a children's home outside of Paris. Hermann Goldstein, Henry's father, was imprisoned in Gurs, a French internment camp, then moved to Drancy, a transit camp near Paris. From there he was deported to Auschwitz, where he was murdered.

Henry and his mother traveled to Nice, in the south of France. They were safe there until August 1942, when the collaborationist Vichy government began arresting and deporting all French Jews in southern France. Henry's mother obtained false identification cards and they went into hiding in the attic of the home of a gentile family. They knew they had to flee France.

With a guide, they crossed the Alps into Switzerland. Henry's mother was sent to a refugee center near Lucerne and Henry was placed in foster homes. He attended school and furthered his studies in hospitality at the Swiss Hotel School.

In 1947, Henry and his mother arrived in the United States. Henry served in the Air Force and worked on merchant marine ships. His training in Switzerland helped him get a job at the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia.

In 1965 Henry became a captain in the nightclub in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan. Eventually Henry married and moved to Atlanta where he and his wife established a catering business and raised their family. Henry Gallant passed away in May 2019.



Map courtesy of US Holocaust Memorial Museum