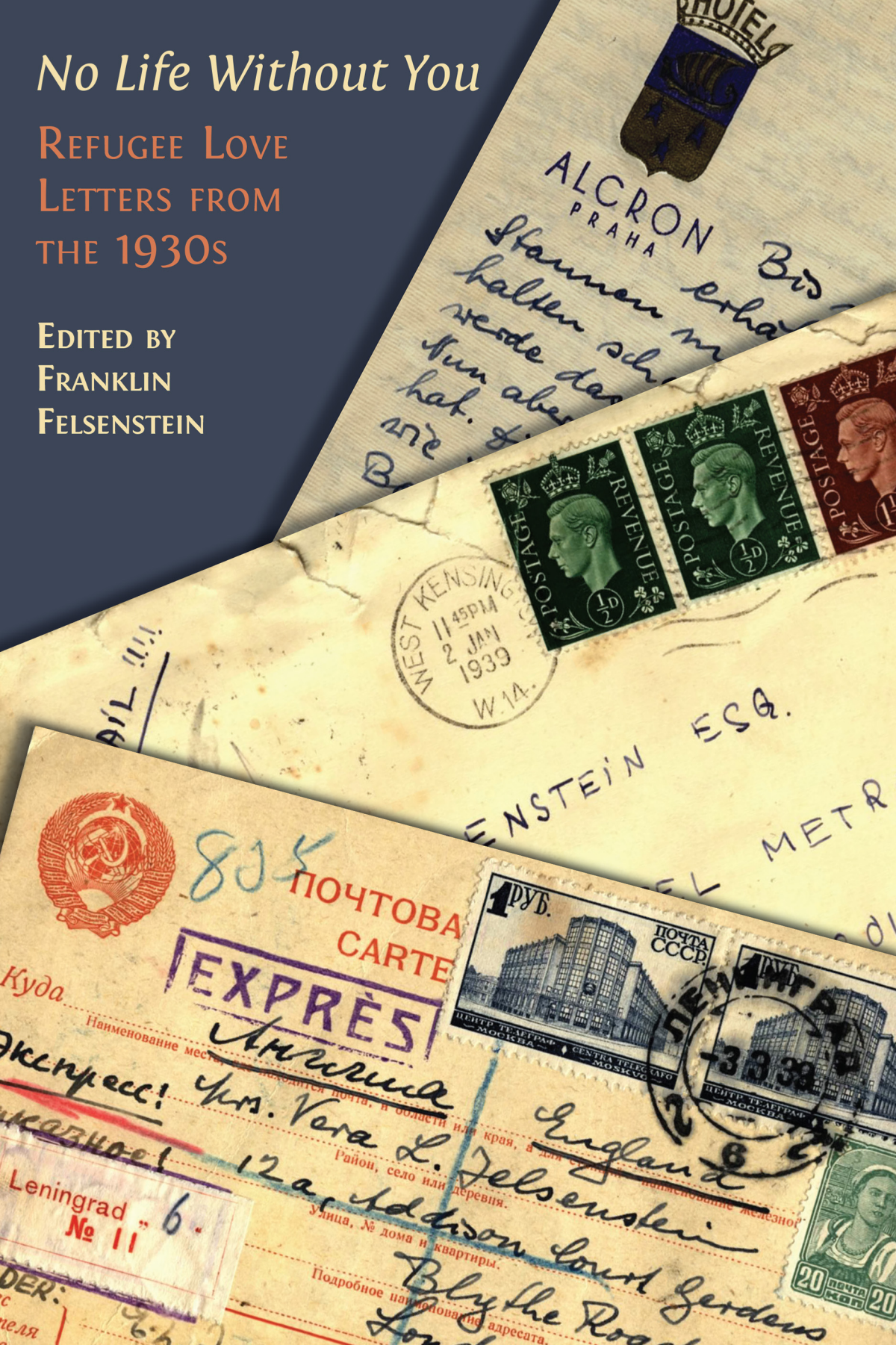


No Life Without You

REFUGEE LOVE LETTERS FROM THE 1930s

EDITED BY
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Three: Victoriaschule



Fig. 18 Victoriaschule Frankfurt (postcard).

At the same time that Ernst Moritz was serving in France, Vera was experiencing her first years at the all-girls Victoriaschule in Frankfurt. Until the advent of Hitler, a significant number of the pupils were of Jewish extraction. A story that Vera would often tell illustrates well her unfamiliarity with her own Jewishness.

Not long after she first became a pupil there—I reckon when Vera was perhaps six or seven years old—the Jewish girls were asked to withdraw from an assembly before the recitation of Christian prayers. All the Jewish girls started to file out, but my mother stayed rooted to the spot, half believing that she belonged in the assembly. Only after almost all the girls had left the room, one little classmate came running back and grabbed her, pronouncing to my mother’s surprise, “Vera, you’re Jewish; you’re supposed to be with us!”

VERA

There are about thirty girls in our class. The class teacher, Fraulein Albrecht, will remain as our form mistress until we take the *Abitur* (graduation exam). I’m thrilled about that because I really like her, and I believe she likes me. In common with most other girls of my age, I have gone out of my way to be well-liked. My open manner soon made

me one of the most popular girls in my class. In my first school year—when I was aged 6, the form was asked by Fraulein Albrecht to elect a girl as class prefect. I received 40 out of 42 votes. After one year in this position, I had become so unpopular, that I was *not* re-elected. From that time, I have learned that throwing one's weight around and being bossy is a very stupid and unworthy activity. To my good fortune, my school friends appear to have forgiven me and forgotten my electoral humiliation much more rapidly than I did.



Fig. 19. Victoriaschule Class in 1915, including VH, wearing a white bow (top right), and teacher, Fraulein Albrecht (middle right).

When one recalls that the traumas and tragedies of the Nazi era were to scatter her surviving classmates across the world, it is testimony to the endurance of childhood friendships that Vera was able to re-establish contact with several members of her class. Like her, a few found refuge in Britain, while others affirmed their Jewishness through settling in Palestine. At least four, including Vera's best friend, Hilde Mayer, rebuilt their lives in the United States. Almost without exception, these former pupils were to choose fellow refugees as their husbands, their shared experience providing an indissoluble bond, often enhancing their identity as Jews in their post-war lives.

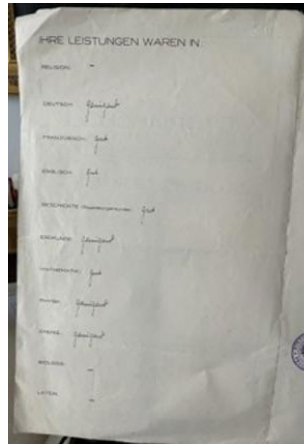
As with thousands of other refugees, each of these surviving school friends will have had her own personal story of fleeing from Nazism. Each would constitute a fascinating narrative. Unique as it is in its intactness, my parents' correspondence may serve as a measure of the broader experience of so many other German-Jewish refugees of an equivalent social milieu and upbringing.

Before the Abitur, which she passed with distinction, Vera, shown here in the school's science lab with more than twenty other rising Seniors, took pre-college classes in Physics and Chemistry.



Fig. 20 Victoriaschule Chemistry Class; VH at right hand side second row from back.

Her transcript shows her success.



Figs. 21 (a) and (b) VH's Graduation Transcript from the Victoriaschule, 1928.

In 1929, at the age of nineteen, she matriculated with distinction, and enrolled as a student of medicine at the University of Frankfurt. In her journal, she reflects on the transition.

VERA

Today, I have to give a short overview of many things that have affected me over the last few weeks.

I used to think that, once I left high school, my time to learn would be over, but I found out that it never ends! I did not realize until just a short time ago that passing an exam does not mean reaching a *goal*, but merely a *station*, and that is the major difference between the way I used to feel and the way I feel now. The insignificance of my person and my lack of knowledge is becoming completely clear to me.

Right now, my work is very satisfying. Anatomy in the morning, after lunch an English lesson, reading and some fresh air and nice people around me. I want to go back to regarding every moment as a gift, a gift that will bring many unknown and unimagined things. I want to work, enjoy, create. I will finish my studies for sure. I want to be someone, and always have courage in my life. I want the strength to make decisions.

How wonderful it is that I am studying medicine. Because of that, I lost my silly prudishness, which used to make conversations very uncomfortable to me. I will try to analyze myself as to why. I think it is an inferiority complex: you think that you are not capable of being entertaining enough for people, not amusing enough, and then, there is that certain reticence that still haunts you from your childhood. However, these things are receding more and more into the background. In my twenty years of life, I have collected enough experiences and more are being added all the time, so it is not presumptuousness and arrogance to have self-confidence, because the self is not built on this self alone, but from the self plus experiences from outside, which together form my current self.



Fig. 22 Hilde Meyer with Vera on the ski slopes; Bad Homburg, winter 1930.

Again today: Hilde told me that she is afraid that I was going back to the small and insignificant non-person I used to be! Is that true? Actually, I am feeling quite content, that is, I know now that things are working out

well for me: I have time to read, to do anything that makes me happy, and my studies fulfill me. I am not completely lazy, although my time could be put to better use. I am learning a little bit of Spanish, Chemistry, and Histology every day, read German and French books, and work on little pieces of handicraft.

Working, accomplishing things, that is the right thing for me. I am young, I am strong, I have the opportunity to learn something and that is why I will take advantage of it. I will work diligently throughout the entire semester—that is the only thing, the right thing I can do. And because of that, I am content today. The one thing one is always looking for is to give meaning to one's life!!!

