DEDICATION

This story is written with love for Robin Hanley, my true sister from the beginning of everything. Your faith gives us courage and light. You are one with those who sail against the wind. Cast upon the sea, you spread your wings and are lifted by the gale to rise above the waves.
LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of Elisa Lindheim Murphy.
Age: 27 yrs.
Born: February 3, 1913, Berlin, Germany.
Mother: Anna Ibsen Lindheim—German Christian. Concert pianist.

I am the beloved wife of John Murphy, American journalist in London. I am foster mother of twin adopted sons, Charles and Louis Kronenberger, age 8. I am mother of a baby girl, Katie, 17 months, who is safe in America now with my husband’s parents.

I have few material goods left to me after so many years as a refugee from the Nazis. All that I have I leave to my husband, John Murphy. More than material goods, I leave all my love.
To My Dear Ones:

It is ten days since the German U-boat attacked the SS Newcastle as we journeyed toward America. I am in Lifeboat Number 7, in the midst of the North Atlantic, among survivors—brave men, women, and children. As each day passes, we lose more of our company to death upon this cruel sea. Some among us have given up hope we will be found alive and rescued. I pray we will be spotted before it is too late. Our hope grows dim.

Perhaps God will grant us a second chance to live life with our families. But I do not know if I will survive. Others, stronger than I, have already perished. I feel I must write this love letter to my dearest Murphy and to our children. At the urging of my companions, who look at the empty horizon and no longer see hope, I will put down my final thoughts for my loved ones.

First, I think of my baby girl, who will never know me except perhaps from this letter and by what those closest to me will tell her. I pray the promises of Psalm 91 upon her sweet life. Beloved Murphy will tell our daughter who I was and why I sent her from England to America. My every thought and deed was motivated by love for my children.

I am a concert violinist, not a writer. Music is my first language, the language of my heart. Some among us in Number 7 will recount facts and details about our last days on the vast ocean.

“What was it like to be on the SS Newcastle when the German U-boat attacked?” some might ask.
If I could but lift my violin and play the music of Kol Nidre, I would feel the blast as the torpedo tears through the hull. I would feel the great ship shudder as the water rises. I could hear again the cries of children cast adrift in the seas....

Voices! Voices! My heart hears them still as the wind lifts their souls from the waves into the arms of angels hovering just above us.

It is strange to think that I will no longer inhabit the earth. I fought bravely and traveled far in the hope that I would live on beyond the war, as others perished. I was distracted by the expectation of what tomorrow would bring. I thought the stars would not shine unless I was beneath them, looking up. As a music student, I played my violin beside the open window of our house on Wilhelmstrasse, believing my music would bring heaven down to those who passed by.

The stars will shine without me. Some other musician will inherit the music of Bach and Mozart. My violin will sing for new generations long after I am gone.

The breeze is in my face. My soul is like a seabird rising against the wind. Soon I will hover with joy above the earth. I am finished wishing wishes, and I leave only one great regret behind.

With plain words, how can I portray a tale of life and death—my struggle and my failure to save all the little ones entrusted to my care? I string together the letters of the alphabet as if they are musical notes on a treble clef. I long for ink to become black fire upon white fire, tympany and trumpet, kindling a
requiem of courage and hope and self-sacrifice for those who survived and for those who did not.

As a child of mixed Jewish and Gentile parentage, I have spent all my youth, it seems, trying to escape the Nazis. I have left behind with Mama my personal diary, beginning the Christmas of 1936 when our family first fled Nazi Germany. I leave the diary to my husband now to translate into English for our children one day. Those terrible days, as our nation was lost to tyranny because good men failed to stand firm against evil, must never be forgotten.

Perhaps my diary is enough for my little ones to remember who their mother was and why I perished in the North Atlantic.

But there are those who cannot write down their thoughts. What can I say about those on the Newcastle who died so very young? Their parents, waiting for word in England, will want to know.

I see their faces, those beautiful children, so many lost in one night. They smile at me in my restless dreams upon the sea.

Who will write about them? If we do not survive, who will remember?

I raise my eyes now and squint against the sun. I see one child who is a hero in this story. He lies beside me in the bow of the lifeboat as our little vessel bobs in the waves. He is too weak now to write and, through parched lips, has asked me to recount what I could about his life. When I first met him, he was a choirboy at Westminster Abbey, a child from Primrose Hill Village. Sandy hair, fair, sun-freckled skin, wide, green-blue
eyes that narrow when he laughs or thrusts his chin upward to consider a clever reply.

The name of this small hero is Connor Turner. If he does not survive, he will be remembered as one woman’s darling son. He played the penny whistle, and everyone remarked that he sang like an angel. She was proud her son was selected to sing with the Abbey choir. She showed his school photograph to the girls round the telephone exchange where she worked. The language of a mother’s love is the same everywhere. Her heartbreak is a melody everyone recognizes.

After the Westminster Boys’ School closed because of the Blitz, Connor was sent home.

Brave and terrified at the same time, Connor’s mother stood over his bed and wondered if he would survive the rain of bombs falling each night on London.

In a queue outside the bakery, she studied casualty lists and noted the tender ages of the English dead.

While she uprooted roses and planted cabbages in her Victory Garden, her neighbor leaned across the fence and told her about the children’s ships.

Ironing Connor’s shirts, she dreamed that America might be the haven where her son could live safely until the war was over.

As the BBC announced grim news about the conflict, she listened at the kitchen table and filled out endless applications and forms.

She remembered that miracles are possible. Kneeling by the
radio, she prayed her boy would be given a place on one of the evacuee ships sailing to America.

Celebration and sorrow arrived in the post with the letter accepting him and a handful of choirboys into the evacuee program. They would sing and bear witness to the Americans that England stood alone against the Nazis.

Connor would sail a few days before his eighth birthday.

Was she doing the right thing to let him go?

Connor assured his mother that a sea voyage to America would be a great adventure. He would celebrate his birthday somewhere on the sea.

On the day of parting, he raised his chin and kissed her good-bye. She wiped her tears with a white kerchief and tucked it into his pocket. “Don’t cry, Mum. I’ll see you soon. Mum, I’ll be back! You’ll see. Don’t cry!” As the ship slipped from the dock, courageous Connor plucked out the hankie, and with fierce and desperate cheerfulness, waved it like a banner.

Listen and walk beside me through those terrible hours.

The dissonant music of parting plays for all those who sent their children away from England during the Blitz. It was the same for us as we tried to escape from Nazi Germany in 1936.

How many will turn their backs on all they hold dear and set out, never to return?

Connor’s face is the one I see when the wind whistles across the canvas shelter in the bow, and I dream again the desperate voices of children crying from the water.
We were three days out to sea, Connor’s eighth birthday, when the torpedo struck our ship. But I began my journey toward this moment of life and death long before I ever boarded the SS Newcastle.
He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

**Psalm 91:11 KJV**

BERLIN, NAZI GERMANY
DECEMBER 10, 1936

Angels have charge over all my ways? As all I have known and loved changes before my eyes, I hope this is true.

Opened gifts early with family tonight. Uncles, aunts, and cousins gather here at the Wilhelmstrasse house for our annual family holiday party. Our gathering is always early, since both my uncles are pastors, and their calendars fill up. And I have holiday concerts to play back in Vienna.

Mama’s present—this leather-bound diary—and one each of different colors to me and cousins Lori Ibsen and Loralei Bittick. Mine is red and stamped with roses. I thumb through blank pages. Scripture verses inscribed on each page.

I wonder what earth-changing events will fill the blank lines of our lives this year.

I pray there is an angel watching over every member of our family. I fear this will be our last family gathering in Berlin.

Cousins Lori and Loralei spend the night. They are like little sisters to me. We look like sisters, though each of us has different parents. Both girls named for great-grandmother Koenig. They both look so much like Grandmother’s
old photos. Lori and Loralei are slender, pretty girls. Hair the color of ripe wheat. Bright blue eyes. Straight teeth. We laugh a lot and talk about the king of England giving up his throne today so he can marry the woman he loves. King Edward and the American Wallis Simpson will ride off into the sunset. So romantic. We prefer to think about falling in love in Buckingham Palace even though Berlin is cloaked with gloom and the whole world is crumbling around us. Do we still imagine everything will return to normal somehow?

We feel sad when our fathers discuss the future of the German church as Hitler enacts new racial laws.

The conversation becomes ominous. Other dissenters arrive at our holiday party. Dietrich B. comes with Eben G. Eben G. is the man whom Loralei loves as much as her own life. I see Loralei blush when she hears Eben in the foyer. I smile at her in sympathy because I understand the heartache of an impossible love. Her eyes shine with tears when Eben speaks. He sees her but looks away quickly as if he does not have time for falling in love.

Loralei whispers, “He hates me. I told him I love him, and now he hates me.”

Mama sees Loralei is about to crumble and suggests we three girls go upstairs to listen to the radio. We say good night but turn off the radio. We sit on the stair landing to hear the men discuss what must be done as the Nazis grow more vicious, anti-Christian, and anti-Semitic. We girls sit with our arms around one another and our heads close. I am not so afraid when we are together.
Eben warns that any with Jewish heritage should get out of the Reich while it is still possible. That means my father’s family.

“The children,” Eben says. “You are already helping, Theo. We must continue our work.” Eben tells my father that the danger is very great and that our family is on a list with the Gestapo. What is coming against all Jews in Europe is worse than the Spanish Inquisition. It no longer matters if a Jew has converted to Christianity. The Nazis have declared war on all descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Since my father is Jewish, and I am half-Jewish, I feel his words very deeply. Papa says how thankful he is that I am playing in the orchestra in Vienna. He does not believe the Nazis will take over Austria.

Eben thinks Christians and Jews are all in danger in Hitler’s Reich. “Make preparations to leave.”

Lori murmurs, “If it’s as bad as all that, I hope I never bring a child into this world. It would be too much to bear—living with fear that something might happen. I would rather never have a baby.”


Loralei, who is American, whispers, “If we can’t be here for Christmas next year, then maybe in Jerusalem. Or maybe next year in New York? Or London. I fancy a Christmas with all of us together in London. Christmas tea at the Savoy. Oxford Street is even prettier than Berlin at Christmas. No Nazi flags. No danger of the Nazis ever landing in Piccadilly.”
Lori is not as optimistic as Loralei. Lori confides that she believes her father (Uncle Karl) will remain in Berlin as pastor of New Church as long as possible. She says he has warned many friends with Jewish heritage that they must leave. Some think the crisis will blow over, but now I am sure it will only get worse.

Dietrich B. tells my father that there must be funds to organize home churches throughout Germany in case war breaks out.

Eben says it is already too late to change the course of events. There will be war against the church and against Jews and against democracy. The German church should have spoken up when Hitler was first elected. He says that the true shepherds who remain in the Reich will be arrested.

Papa agrees with Eben. I shall never forget Papa’s words: “If the Church is silent in the face of Evil, in the end Evil will silence the Church.”

I promise Lori and Loralei that I will be careful when I return to Austria. There are Nazis there too. We pray angels will go with us as we part. Lori remains in Berlin for the sake of Uncle Karl’s church. Loralei will return to Belgium where her father (Uncle Robert) is headmaster of a seminary. I do not know when Papa and Mama will leave Berlin, but I think they will go until things blow over. Mama says Papa is turning over the management of the store to Aryan friends. That must mean something. I return to Vienna and the orchestra after our family ski trip to Kitzbühel.
I am already making plans for all of us to be together again. The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra is scheduled to perform in England at the Albert Hall in the spring. Perhaps then Lori, Loralei, and our mothers can all meet for tea at the Savoy in London!