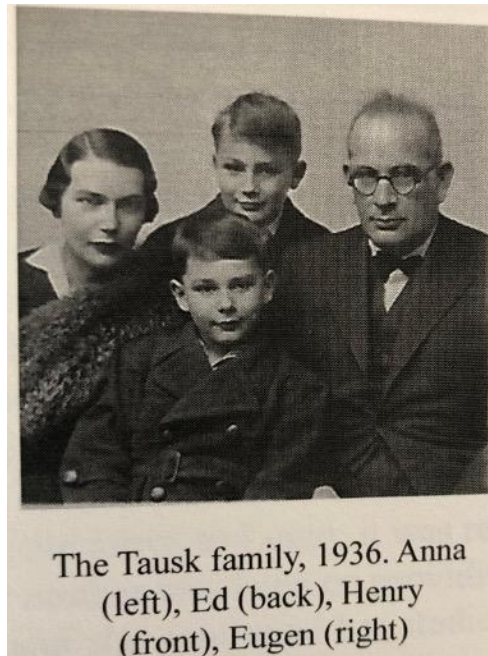


My Father: Eugen TAUSK (1894-1962)

Part II

Excerpts from **Heinzi Tausk's** Memoirs



One of my parents' friends was an ardent Zionist. He helped set up an organization called Tzur Shalom, aiming to buy real estate in Palestine. Father did contribute a certain amount, not out of Zionist convictions, more as a service to his friend. The real estate association born out of this action, was dormant for many years. Father was by far no longer with us, when in Israel, Mother managed to get good financial return from that almost casual investment.

The good family life, a beautiful home, professional success, high social standing, all of the above contributed to make the thirties the best decade of my father's life. At the time he for sure may not have thought so, there were too many worries, the death of his mother, lack of political stability, health problems, etc. but in retrospect there may be no doubt about the above assertion.

The real troubles started in 1938, when a strong nationalistic current in Romania was manifested with Anti-Semitic legislation. The outbreak of the war and territorial adjustments wherein Romania lost about one quarter of its provinces (newly acquired after World War One) brought rabid and violent Anti-Semitism, even a short-lived period of pogroms in the Eastern half of the country. Over the years 1938-1944 Romanian Jews

had lost much of their livelihood and fortunes, but luckily we were spared the deportations which decimated or annihilated the Jewry of most of the European countries.

The bank managed by Father was expropriated, for a while he was jobless, and for a short period of time conscripted into forced labor. Due to his health condition (and probably a considerable bribe) he was declared unfit for physical labor - there can be no doubt about the fact that he was indeed unsuitable: close to his fiftieth year, he was big and fat (at 180 cm height he was well over 100 kg), unused to any kind of exertion or sport, and with a previous history of myocarditis. For a time he contributed to the creation and management of the Jewish High School (Jewish children were excluded from all educational institution between the years 1940-1944). In the last years of the war he was working as a book-keeper at a local company, whose owners were family friends.

The end of the war brought a period of apparent tranquility: obviously nobody was prescient enough to anticipate that the liberation by the Soviet troops will bring communist dominance to Eastern Europe. Father, like most other middle-class people thought that it will be business as usual. We exchanged our house, which was given back to us, for a bigger and more elegant home, and Father sued for redress the large Romanian Bank, which in 1940 had swallowed up the institution managed by him. As of January 1, 1946, Father was offered the job of managing the Timisoara branch of the Credit Bank of Romania, one of the country's leading banking institutions. It was a good offer, it conferred the prestigious title of central vice-president and a very good monetary compensation. After some deliberation Father accepted and we moved to Timisoara. My parents renewed the ties formed 20 years ago and gained new friends. A house was purchased, again a cozy and friendly home for the family. Father must have soon gained the confidence of the local financial circles. In the summer of 1947 a large local bank offered him the job of general manager and he accepted it. The odd thing was that the bank was secretly owned by the local organs of the Communist Party, after they took it away from the former German (Nazi) owners. In the summer of 1948 all banks (including the one owned by the communists) were expropriated and that was forever the end of my father's banking career. He was offered and he accepted the job of head of the book-keeping section of a local shoe-factory. This was already in the midst of the communist take-over: they used the bourgeois elements as long as they were needed, and then discarded them. They even had a name for these people: fellow-travelers and there was nothing one could have done at this stage. After 1948 there was no, or only minimal emigration, and except for Israel, apparently no place where to go.

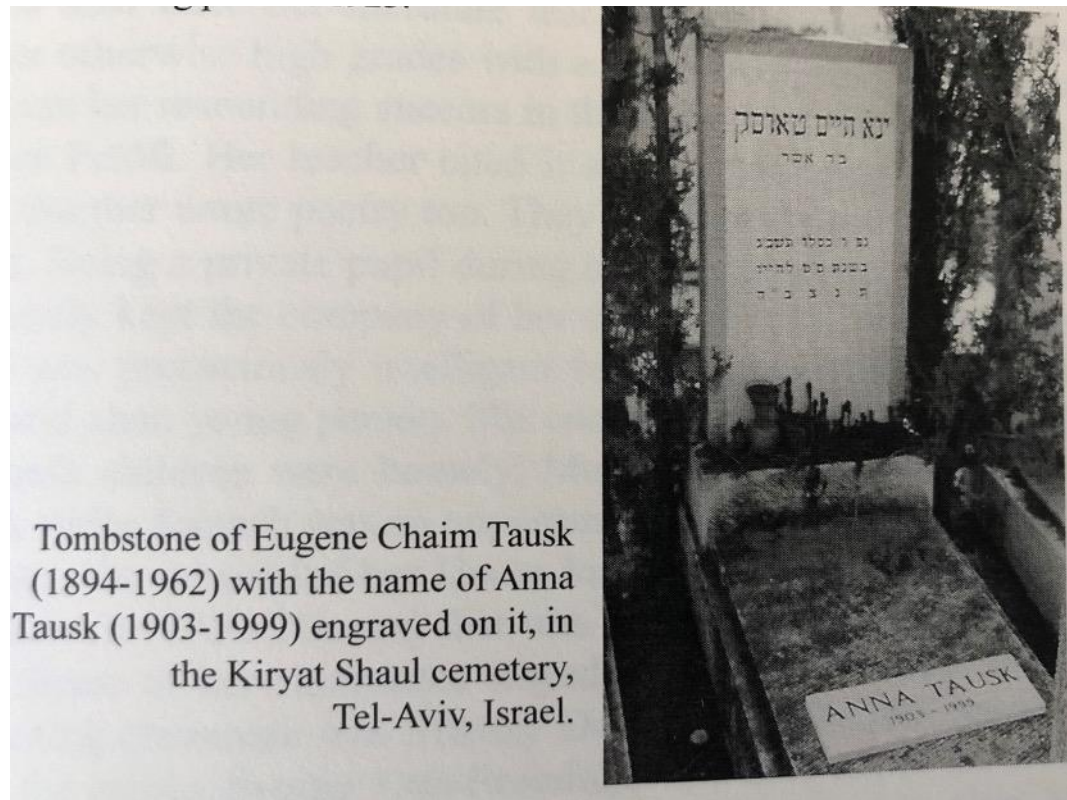
In 1952 Father was arrested by the economic police, which was almost as feared as the security police. He was detained for almost five weeks and quizzed about traffic in gold coins prior to the year 1948 - when it still was quasi legal. He managed to prove that all the gold he had touched was not his. He had functioned as a kind of trust-hand to

various legal and semi-legal businesses at the bank. He was released unharmed, but clearly his job was gone. The fellow-traveler business was still valid, the communist regime gave him another job as book-keeper, but not any more in a responsible position. At this time already key positions in the economy had to be filled with reliable party members.

In 1954, at the age of 60 Father retired from his job. The pension he received was meager and he looked for some additional way of earning money. Selling lotto tickets was an occupation open for retirees, he soon had his own booth and made a meager living of it. In 1957 he had a first myocardial infarction. At the time it was treated with absolute bed rest: for six weeks he was not allowed get up from the bed. Given the fact that the heart attack was diagnosed at home, with the help of a portable E.C.G. machine, father was bedridden at home. In 1959 he started to complain again of rectal bleeding - as he did years before, when he was diagnosed to have hemorrhoids. This time unfortunately there was a long delay in a positive diagnosis - it took over 3 months to find out that he has rectal cancer. Up to this day I blame myself, that as a surgeon I was not more aggressive in asking for a rectoscopy and satisfied myself with clinical examinations (done by very competent internists) and an inconclusive X-ray examination. I also feel guilty about the fact that I let him be operated by my former professor of surgery: he was busy testing candidates for specialty examinations (including myself) and this created another unnecessary delay. At surgery an inoperable cancer was found and 2 months later he needed a colostomy. I asked and received some chemotherapy drugs from uncle Joseph in Paris, and Father was also enrolled in an experimental program of cancer treatment. During this hospital stay he had a second myocardial infarction. Apparently none of the treatments had any beneficial effect. By this time he had already given up his lotto-job, and spent his time at home, reading or trying to compile a comprehensive list of Latin proverbs.

We had received our passports to emigrate to Israel in June 1961. Father was quite sick at the time, being in pain and having difficulties walking. We arrived to Vienna on June 29, and in the same evening he was taken to a local hospital and emergency surgery was performed. He stayed over three weeks in that hospital, very concerned that Vicza and myself, we were sent ahead to Israel by the Jewish Agency people. On July the 25th when he arrived by plane to Israel, he was taken straight to the Jaffo Governmental hospital, where I was already working. It was a tearful reunion, one of the few happy occasions in the last stage of his life. For the next year and a half he was in and out of hospitals, receiving radiation therapy, which in the best case had just slowed down the progression of cancer. He and my mother stayed in an immigration camp, where there were only minimal amenities, and his few joyous moments were when on weekends Ed and myself came to see him. His last weeks were marked by almost constant pain, and he had respite only when Mother gave him the pain-killer injections.

Father passed away on December 2, 1962, and was buried in the Kiryat Shaul cemetery, close to Tel Aviv.



The above chronology of my father is a matter-of-fact and bare listing. It does not give an idea of his character and personality. Unfortunately I have difficulties describing my father in a tangible way. First of all there is the distance in time - he is dead for over 36 years. Secondly, he was a reticent man, not given to express himself emotionally. Our relation was based on non-critical respect and filial love on my part and protective but non-communicative tenderness on his part. I also never managed to convey my feelings to him. He never talked to me about the emotional aspects of his life, be it before or after his marriage. Father was extremely straight-laced, I never heard him curse or use foul language, and we, the children were reprimanded for usage of even the mildest forms of swearing (I was once scolded for using the Hungarian invective "fene", which means a bad disease, something like anthrax). Sex was never discussed, and I do remember the embarrassed silence when once Gyurka Szánto inquired in our presence about a lady, if there is truth to the rumor that she is whoring around.

Father was well-educated, far better than the parents of my class-mates; he spoke beautiful German, a little bit of French (he enjoyed reading French literature too), and even knew a smattering of English. His favorite book was "Buddenbrooks" by Thomas Mann. He had a good ear for music, an excellent musical memory (inherited by Ed) and enjoyed playing the piano. In matters of art he was not knowledgeable, he probably did

visit as a youngster the art museums of Vienna, but had no later interest in the subject. He had a religious and traditional upbringing, but never insisted on keeping Jewish rituals at home. He fasted on Yom Kippur, but accepted the fact that there was cooking on that day in our home and Mother, as well as often the children, did not fast. He had a permanent seat in the synagogue, it was in the first row, but not in the center. He used a prayer shawl on the High Holidays, and whenever he went to Friday and Saturday morning services - but this was not a routine. He did not even own tefilin. Father was able to say all the usual Saturday and High Holiday prayers, he read the text in the prayer book, but he did not know modern Hebrew. He sang with us the "Maoz Tzur" on Channuka playing the tune on the piano. We never had a "Seder" in our home, we were always invited to a former colleague of Grandfather Tauszk, a retired teacher, Uncle Thédi. The above notwithstanding he had strong feelings about Jewishness: in the late 1950s Ed was deeply involved in a love affair with an attractive blonde. The problem was that she was gentile, a German lady. Father emphatically decreed that Ed can't marry her and he obeyed.

Father always acted timely and valued punctuality. He liked to laugh, a good joke always improved his mood. He was often impatient and short-tempered, I frequently heard him flare up at work or at home, bawling at the subalterns or family members who behaved or acted stupidly. Occasionally he even hit the table with his fist. Luckily the outbursts were short-lived, followed by mellower tones. In the days of my childhood, corporeal punishment was an accepted way of disciplining and educating the off-springs. Father hit me only once, when I kicked Ed in the belly, just after he was suspected (mistakenly) to have an appendicitis. His parental concern often limited our freedom: we had to be at home on time (even as adults he always queried: when will you be home?), he had to know where we are going, what we are doing etc. If we were late, or if he did not know our whereabouts he became extremely upset, nervous and anxious. To stay together as a family was very important for Father. One of the reasons that Ed had returned home from his trip to Budapest (it had coincided with the revolution of 1956, and he could have gone to the West) was that he knew how painful the separation would have been to Father.

Father, as mentioned above, was always overweight, despite the fact that he was not a big eater, and extremely moderate with alcohol: one or two glasses of wine, and only with guests, never at the family table. He fought most of his adult life a losing battle with the figures of the scale. He was a heavy smoker, at least one pack a day, and despite repeated attempts, was never able to kick the habit. He was indifferent to sartorial urbanity, his clothing was poorly tailored and ill worn, his shoes polished but never elegant. I had learned from him how to tie a necktie, but it was not a successful knot. He was almost completely bald, but the few wisps of hair in the back and above the ears were always untidy. Father invariably dressed in a conservative manner, wore even on hot summer days a straw hat, and always walked with a cane. Ed seems to bear more of a

facial and corporeal resemblance to him than myself. I definitively inherited the form of his hands and his teeth: he had early on chronic gingivitis, which in his days was not properly treated and by the age of 55 he became toothless, wearing dental prothesis. He was not myopic, however he wore eyeglasses because of severe astigmatism. He did not like to be photographed, and thus we have few images of him on paper: luckily some of the photos are good and they convey an authentic view of his appearance.