

Paul KLEIN (1894-1971), Cilli POLLAK (1894-1978), Ilse KLEIN (1925-2012), Otto KLEIN (1927-2010)

Paul Klein, Cilli Pollak and their children, Ilse and Otto, fled to Luxembourg from Vienna, Austria, after the Anschluss in 1938. The family lived there with the support of the Jewish aid organization ESRA and thanks to Paul Klein's continued employment as a sales representative for a Viennese weaving factory. He regularly travelled between Luxembourg and Brussels for this company. On November 7, 1940, they were on a deportation transport from Luxembourg to

Lisbon, which was stopped at the Portuguese border and sent back to France. In Marseille, the family finally obtained visas for Cuba and left for the island via Madrid and Lisbon at the end of 1941. After several years on the run — including two years in Luxembourg and three years in Havana — the family of four found a new home in the USA in 1945.

WRITTEN BY [Nicolas Arendt](#)

Early years in the Habsburg Monarchy and in Vienna until the Anschluss in 1938

Paul Klein was born on January 27, 1894, in Stanestie in Bukovina. At that time, this region belonged to the multi-ethnic Habsburg Monarchy and is now divided between Romania and Ukraine. His family was Jewish and came from the city of Czernowitz, the cultural center of Bukovina. In 1914, Paul Klein moved to Vienna, where he married Cilli (Caecilia) Pollak in 1919. ¹ She was born on December 30, 1894, in the town of Nagybosny in what is now Slovakia, which was also part of the Habsburg Empire. She came to Vienna at the age of 15 and later worked as a sales assistant at the Julius Krupnik fashion palace on Kaiserstrasse. ²

In the early 1920s, the couple lived in Budapest for a short time. They ran a shop selling hats and textile accessories under the name "Lengyel és Klein". ³ Their first daughter, Ilse, was born in Budapest on November 23, 1925. In the mid-1920s, the family returned to Vienna, where their son Otto was born on January 1, 1927. They took up residence at Kasernengasse 26, now Otto-Bauer-Gasse, in Vienna's 6th district. In Vienna, Paul Klein continued to work in the textile industry. As a qualified businessman, he was sales manager at the Viennese weaving factory "Westhauser Josef" in the 1930s, which is still commemorated today by the name of the

street, Webgasse, in the 6th district. From 1930 onwards, he was responsible for the international distribution of a "special item" and held a sales representative license, which was to become important during his flight to Luxembourg. ⁴

With the annexation of Austria to the German Reich in March 1938, the situation for Jewish families deteriorated dramatically. On June 1, 1938, Paul Klein registered his family for emigration with the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde of Vienna. At that time, the Jewish Community was already controlled by Adolf Eichmann. His agency, later known as the "Central Office for Jewish Emigration", organized the forced emigration of Austrian Jews under conditions of maximum exploitation. The documents show that the family originally planned to emigrate to North or South America, as close relatives were already living in New York. ⁵ In August 1938, Paul Klein finally set off for the West with his eleven-year-old son, while Cilli Klein and their daughter Ilse initially remained in Vienna. ⁶

Refuge between Luxembourg and Brussels

On August 10, 1938, Paul Klein and his son Otto were registered with the immigration police in Luxembourg. They spent the first few days at the Hotel Cosmopolite in the station district. ⁷ Klein apparently had acquaintances in Luxembourg who had recommended the city to him as a transit for his planned emigration overseas. ⁸ He presented his sales representative license from the Westhauser company as his travel document and was subsequently granted a work permit for Luxembourg. This allowed him to work as a sales representative, but only within the scope of "visites passagères de sa clientèle dans le Grand-Duché" — in other words, he was allowed to enter the country on business, but not take up permanent residence in Luxembourg. ⁹ This enabled him to continue working as a trader and to support his wife and daughter, who had remained in Vienna, financially. Otto Klein stayed with friends of the family in Luxembourg,

while Paul Klein himself initially registered his residence in Brussels. With his trading card, he was able to continue to enter and leave Luxembourg at regular intervals.

However, Paul Klein's Austrian passport expired in October 1938. Neither Vienna, Belgium, nor Luxembourg declared themselves responsible for renewing it. Without valid papers, he returned to Luxembourg, whereupon his work permit in Luxembourg was canceled. ¹⁰ He initially lived with his son at Dicksstraße 7 with the Loewenstein family, later moving to Stahlwerkstraße 18, where he rented a room from the Felix Hayum family. Paul Klein, however, remained active in business in Belgium until July 1939. He was able to continue working there as a sales representative and even registered a temporary residence in Brussels in the meantime. ¹¹ Nevertheless, the family in Luxembourg was increasingly dependent on the support of the Jewish aid organization ESRA. The organization not only paid the rent, but also prepared for the planned emigration overseas. ¹²

Despite repeated threats of expulsion, the Luxembourg Ministry of Justice repeatedly extended Klein's residence permit by several months. In September 1939, Cilli Pollak and her daughter Ilse finally received a residence permit for Luxembourg. They had previously waited several weeks in Trier for entry. ¹³ The family moved to Neypergstraße 48 in Bonnevoie. Otto continued to attend elementary school there and celebrated his bar mitzvah in Luxembourg. According to her own statements, Ilse attended a Catholic convent school in Luxembourg City for a time. In Neypergstraße, the family lived in two small rooms in a house occupied by several Jewish refugee families. ¹⁴

At the end of 1939, the family planned to emigrate to England. Cilli Pollak had already learned English in Vienna and taken cooking classes so that she could enter the country as a housekeeper for the entire family. ¹⁵ However, these plans could not be realized. Immigration police records show that Paul and Cilli Klein left for Belgium in August 1940: Caecilia left

Luxembourg on August 15, Paul followed on August 23. ¹⁶ It is certain that at least Cilli later returned to Luxembourg. In Luxembourg, the entire family had obtained visas for Cuba, which later turned out to be forged. On November 7, 1940, Cilli Klein finally left Luxembourg with her two children for Portugal, while Paul Klein was not included in this transport. ¹⁷

Via Marseille and Havana to the USA

Cilli, Ilse, and Otto Klein were on the transport that was turned back at the Portuguese border near Vilar Formoso. Since the French authorities were prohibiting the entry or transit of foreigners at that time, the train was escorted by uniformed and armed SS men. However, the Portuguese border officials considered this a violation of their neutrality. It also turned out that the passengers were unwittingly traveling with forged visas for South America. The transport was therefore stopped at the border and sent back to France. ¹⁸ The Klein family was first sent to an internment camp in Bayonne, France. From there, they made their way to Marseille, where they were reunited with their father, Paul Klein. Between December 1940 and December 1941, the family lived in Marseille and eventually obtained Cuban visa, and then traveled overseas via Madrid and Lisbon.

The four members of the Klein family thus survived the persecution of Jews in Europe. After a three-year stay in Havana, they finally emigrated to the United States in 1945. Otto Klein, who now called himself Arthur Klein, recounted a special moment in a 1995 interview about his life: at the end of 1945, he returned to Luxembourg as a soldier in the US Army and confronted a gendarme who had repeatedly harassed him on his way to school seven years earlier. ¹⁹ Paul Klein died in 1971, Cilli Klein in 1978, Arthur (Otto) Klein in 2010, and Ilse Klein, married name Rosenberg, in 2012.

Notes

← 1 Luxembourg National Archives (ANLux), Ministry of Justice fonds, Foreigners Police, J-108-0397505, "Declaration of registration" by Paul Klein, September 7, 1938.

← 2 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Registration declaration" by Cilli Pollak, October 19, 1939.

← 3 Rosenberg, Ilse. Interview 1533. Interview by Jeanne Muchnick. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, March 17, 1995. <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/1533> (accessed September 2025).

← 4 Archive of the Jewish Community of Vienna (IKG), IKG Vienna Welfare Center Collection, Emigration Department, Emigration Questionnaires, A/W 2589, 67, "Questionnaire" by Paul Klein.

← 5 Idem.

← 6 On the migration of Viennese Jews to Luxembourg, see Nicolas Arendt, "Tolerated but not welcome. Viennese Jews in Luxembourg after the Anschluss in 1938," in *Les Cahiers Luxembourgeois*, ed. I. De Toffoli, M. Limpach, and E. Schmit (Luxembourg, Luxembourg: Les Cahiers Luxembourgeois a.s.b.l., 2023), 97-111.

← 7 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Anmeldeerklärung" (registration form) by Paul Klein, September 7, 1938.

← 8 Klein, Arthur. Interview 1523. Interview by Jeanne Muchnick. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, March 17, 1995. <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/1523> (accessed September 2025).

(Accessed September 2025).

← 9 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Professional license for Paul Klein as a sales representative," August 16, 1938.

← 10 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Cancellation of professional license for Paul Klein," October 28, 1938.

← 11 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Report on Paul Klein," August 18, 1939.

← 12 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Report on Paul Klein," March 22, 1939.

← 13 ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Registration declaration" by Cilli Pollak, October 19, 1939.

← [14](#) Rosenberg, Ilse. Interview 1533. Interview by Jeanne Muchnick. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, March 17, 1995. <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/1533> (accessed September 2025).

← [15](#) ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Report on Paul Klein," August 18, 1939.

← [16](#) ANLux, J-108-0397505, "Registration declaration Cilli Pollak," October 3, 1940.

← [17](#) Portugal and Luxembourg. Pays d'espoir en temps de détresse, exhibition catalog, organized by Vilar Formoso Fronteira da Paz, Neimënster, and Memoshoah Luxembourg, Luxembourg, 2020.

← [18](#) Idem.

← [19](#) Klein, Arthur. Interview 1523. Interview by Jeanne Muchnick. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, March 17, 1995. <https://vha.usc.edu/testimony/1523>.

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1915

1918

1920

1930

1938

1990

1995



image

Ilse Rosenberg (geborene Klein) während ihres Interviews mit der USC Shoah Foundation

Mar 17, 1995



image

Arthur Otto Klein während seines Interviews mit der USC Shoah Foundation

Mar 17, 1995

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