

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: May 25th, 1938. Dear Sir...

MANDY PATINKIN: Kurt Kleinmann sits at his writing desk. Paper before him. Pen in hand. At 28 years old, Kurt's hard working and thoughtful, with ambitions to be a lawyer. He hopes to one day have a family of his own. But right now, his future isn't looking bright. In fact, his life's in danger.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I am obliged to leave Austria now, you understand.

MANDY PATINKIN: It's been two months since the Nazis invaded Vienna. Two months of Kurt watching his home city become more and more hostile - as neighbours and friends get arrested, humiliated, extorted. Thousands are trying desperately to get out. So, Kurt comes up with an idea. He begins to write a letter to a stranger...but not just any stranger.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: And I beg you to help a young Austrian Jew...who has the same name as you...by procuring him an affidavit security to America.

MANDY PATINKIN: The scheme is simple, yet ingenious. Write to Americans who share his last name, Kleinmann.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I can assure you, that it is not easy for me to write in this way. But I have no other possibility to receive a permission to emigrate into another country.

MANDY PATINKIN: And he hopes to convince these strangers to pose as his long lost cousins so he can get a visa.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I can assure you once more that I will not be a burden for you...Will you kindly accept my petition and answer as soon as possible. I'm thanking you in anticipation.

MANDY PATINKIN: And so our story begins with an act of desperation. A plea for the help of strangers. And a man waiting patiently for the right person—the *exact right person*—to receive his letter.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Yours very respectfully, Kurt Kleinmann.

MANDY PATINKIN: And to respond.

(OPENING THEME)

MANDY PATINKIN: Welcome to Exile - a podcast from LBI, the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. I'm Mandy Patinkin. When everything is taken away, then what? From LBI's archives, untold stories of Jewish lives in the shadow of fascism.

Today, one man's desperate attempt to escape leads to a long distance love story.

Before Hitler takes over Austria, Kurt Kleinmann is leading a comfortable, ordinary existence. He lives in Vienna - one of Europe's cultural centers. His family has money. And he's in law school.

He has a few close friends and he plays the piano. But for the most part, he seems like a practical young man. Serious, even. Someone who mainly spends his days studying and working.

Kurt's father is a wine merchant. Kurt has a job with him while in university. One of his sisters, Blanka, owns a gentleman's clothing store with her husband—Kurt works with them, too.

And then, in 1938, Kurt's way of life turns upside down.

The Nazis kick him out of school. And his family's businesses are at risk. There's an official boycott of Jewish-owned establishments. And in September of that year, Blanka's shop is robbed and vandalized by SS officers.

That's not even the end of it.

HASIA DINER: The German government imposed upon the Jews all sorts of financial dealings, financial restrictions.

MANDY PATINKIN: Dr. Hasia Diner is a professor of American Jewish history at NYU.

HASIA DINER: They had to essentially, by 1938, dispose of their property at a tremendous loss. Real estate, a store, jewels, bank accounts. All of these had to be essentially turned over to the German state. They had to pay what we might think of as an exit tax.

MANDY PATINKIN: But it's not just about the money - about the exit tax. It's also about getting a country to let you in.

HASIA DINER: This was not a world in which one could just get on a boat and go any place. You know, that world came to an end with World War I.

MANDY PATINKIN: People are desperate to escape. They line up at consulates and try to leave to the few places that might accept them, no matter how far flung. Trinidad, Shanghai, the Dominican Republic. Kurt's own family is trying to get to Argentina.

Kurt wants to go to America—the land of opportunity. But America doesn't necessarily want him.

HASIA DINER: Americans, from every opinion poll that existed at the time, didn't want any immigrants. Jewish or not. Remember the United States is still mired in a depression.

MANDY PATINKIN: But it's not just about economic uncertainty. Well before the Depression, America's immigration policies are anti-Semitic and racist.

There are immigration quotas—strict limitations on how many people can get in and from where. In 1938, the year Kurt applies, America will let in less than 30,000 people from Germany and Austria. But more than four times that number are on the waitlist - nearly 140,000.

HASIA DINER: Needless to say, for any one individual, he or she was an incredible competition with everybody else wanting to leave.

MANDY PATINKIN: Even worse, America is deliberately slow and bad at processing requests, leaving thousands of quota slots for Germany and Austria unfilled that year. Kurt is swimming upstream. And there's still more hoops he has to jump through. It's a miracle anyone got out. To get a visa to America, Kurt needs an affidavit—a letter that proves he won't be a burden. That he can support himself and won't cost the state any money.

HASIA DINER: Okay. So here's somebody who's educated. He has business experience. He has a spotless academic record. He has all the skills at his command that we can attest to will make him immediately employable upon coming to the United States. We vouch for him.

MANDY PATINKIN: Kurt needs an affidavit from someone on the inside. Like a relative. Or someone who can pass for one. Family lore has it that Kurt wrote several letters to strangers - to American Kleinmans.

Yael Danieli: I actually was weeping when I read the first letter.

MANDY PATINKIN: Dr. Yael Danieli is a clinical psychologist, practicing for over 40 years. She specializes in trauma and the experiences of Holocaust survivors and their families. We asked her to take a look at the letters, found in the LBI archives.

Yael Danieli: On the one hand, it was sheer ingenuity to simply write to whoever has a similar name. On the other hand, the degree of despair, the tension between despair and hope, which we are living through now, too, actually, and that is what touched me the most.

MANDY PATINKIN: But will Kurt's letter have that same impact on the person who opens it? It's been two months and nothing. No response. He's beginning to lose hope. Despair is starting to win.

On a Sunday in July, Helen Kleinman arrives home to her Greenwich Village apartment. She finds a letter waiting for her. She doesn't recognize the handwriting on the envelope.

At 25 years old, Helen's practically a spinster by 1930s standards. She's American-born and close with her parents and two sisters, who are nearby in New Jersey.

Helen lives where the action is, alone in a cozy apartment in the city - in a bohemian neighborhood full of artists and revolutionaries. She makes her money as a bookkeeper. And she spends her evenings reading, or going to the movies or to plays with friends.

She once wrote, "instead of marrying a boy, I married a job." Since she was a little girl, her parents expected Helen to graduate college, get married, be a housewife. Instead Helen moves to the city, gets a job, and attends night school.

Yael Danieli: She is a lovely Jewish young woman. However, even in her own family, she's a rebel.

MANDY PATINKIN: On that Sunday when Helen picks up that mysterious envelope, she probably notes the letterhead: M. Kleinmann. But the spelling is wrong—two 'n's instead of the singular one at the end of her own name. And what's more, the address

underneath it is in German. How strange. Intrigued, she begins to read the rest of it. Written in imperfect English.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Dear Sir, I am obliged to leave Austria now, you understand. I don't know my relatives who emigrated to America and it is possible that you are a relation of me.

MANDY PATINKIN: You can imagine Helen's astonishment. She knows what's happening in Europe, of course. She reads horrible stories in the papers. And it's a topic of conversation at the dinner table with friends.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: And I beg you to help a young Austrian Jew, who has the same name as you.

MANDY PATINKIN: But to be asked directly for assistance by someone who's living it, by someone who *shares her name*... She must have been taken aback.

Yael DANIELI: And you know, when I said at the beginning that I was touched to tears about his letter.

MANDY PATINKIN: Clinical psychologist Dr. Yael Danieli.

Yael DANIELI: For me, it would be impossible not to do something in response. How can you live with yourself after you have not responded to a letter like that?

MANDY PATINKIN: Helen's also not the type of person who turns down a plea for help. Or an adventure.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: Dear Kurt, Since we are cousins, I suppose it is all right for me to call you by your first name.

MANDY PATINKIN: She decides the best move is to play along. What if someone's opening his mail? She'll make it seem as if she's heard stories about Kurt Kleinmann all her life. That they are indeed, family.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I suppose that all the time you were worried that your letter had gone astray or been mislaid. Before I go much further, please let me impress this fact—that my entire family are eagerly awaiting the day you will arrive in New York...I'm going to send you the affidavit that you need, as soon as I can get it, which will be within the week, I hope...

MANDY PATINKIN: Maybe she pauses, her fingers poised on the typewriter keys. What else do you say to someone in such a wretched situation?

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I don't really know what else to write you—except don't lose courage—and please write to me regularly, so I'll know that you are well and able to write to me. How long will it take before you will be here? I don't know, but even if it takes a few months, we will try and make the time seem less by corresponding.

MANDY PATINKIN: Satisfied, she goes to type her sign off—but wait.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: Please send us a picture, so we will know what you look like, and be able to recognize you when you come... Affectionately, Helen Kleinman.

HASIA DINER: I'm going to presume that as a young Jewish woman and the fact that we know she took this tremendous step, she may have also been the product of a very deeply Jewish home. And developed a sense of communal responsibility and connectedness. And, you know, it could have been very much a kind of, you know, by the accident of history. It could have been me.

MANDY PATINKIN: And so, on July 12th, 1938, with Helen's first letter, a correspondence begins between Kurt Kleinmann with two 'n's and Helen Kleinman with one.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Dear Helen, I received your dear letter just now. You cannot imagine how much pleased I was to get it. This is the first joyful promising event in months.

MANDY PATINKIN: Helen and Kurt begin a near-daily exchange.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I am a rather earnest, diligent young man and I have no foolishness in my head. However, I like to laugh very much and I am not a joke spoiler.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I work for a large firm that makes the machines that print the newspapers. I take care of all of the money that comes in and goes out...

MANDY PATINKIN: They discover they both love music.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: My favorite operas are *Aida*, *Tannhauser* and *La Boheme*. It is a funny combination, isn't it? Did I ever tell you that I fight with my family, drive a car and can cook?

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Last week I saw in the opera of Basel a performance of *Aida*, I'd liked it better to hear it with you in a cozy, snug room.

MANDY PATINKIN: And that they're lonely.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I used to have many friends, but I don't have them any more. But that is part of the story that I will tell you about - and the story is sad - perhaps some day I'll tell you...

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I have never had many acquaintance, always for the quality and not the quantity was authoritative for me, as well for man friends, or for girl friends.

MANDY PATINKIN: Despite their similarities, Kurt and Helen are different people, from different cultures. Kurt is pragmatic and reserved, while Helen is chatty and rebellious. He's a traditionalist. She's the by-product of American independence.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: You are discreet. I'm just the opposite, because everything that I think, I say, and sometimes I get into the most embarrassing situations.

MANDY PATINKIN: When, after many months, Helen mentions off-hand that she's a heavy smoker, Kurt immediately bristles.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Do you smoke many cigarettes? Do me the favour and smoke not so much—do it for me—it is really not good for your body, you know...

MANDY PATINKIN: One thing they rarely discuss is the specifics of Kurt's situation. But it comes through sometimes, in little details. Like when he abruptly moves from Vienna to Basel, Switzerland, leaving behind his job and his family.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: August 12th, 1938. You will be very surprised that I am in Switzerland, but...I was frightened to be arrested every moment. I fled illogically without visa, for it was impossible to get it.

MANDY PATINKIN: Though he doesn't write about his situation a lot, the danger Kurt's in never leaves their minds.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I have to ask you, whether you have sent the affidavit for I have not received it yet.

MANDY PATINKIN: On September 16th, 1938, Helen realizes she's made a grave mistake that could cost Kurt his life.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I kept on asking you whether you had gotten the affidavit yet. While I'm writing this, I know that you haven't gotten it yet, and I think that you won't get it for at least 3 days after you get this letter. You know why? Because I'm a stupid girl and I'm crying over my stupidity...

MANDY PATINKIN: She writes to Kurt that she decided it was time to take matters into her own hands. After all, she delivered the affidavit to the shipping people almost two months ago. Why on earth hasn't Kurt received it yet?

She dials the number for the shipping company. When someone answers, she demands to know what has happened to her papers. And as she listens, she begins to cry.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I thought they would mail them, but no the people there are as stupid as I am. They were waiting to mail them, what they were waiting for I still don't know...

MANDY PATINKIN: The papers were never shipped. They've just been sitting at the office, all this time.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: What hurts most is that I thought that I did everything so quickly and so well—that just proves that it isn't good to praise oneself—even to oneself. And Kurt, if you are angry with me, I don't blame you.

Yael DANIELI: She went into his intensity. They became one in some symbolic way. They were fighting the same fight. There was solidarity. There was mutual caring. She was clearly caring!

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I suppose that by now you can tell that I'm angry with myself and with everyone else. But I'll get over it as soon as you get the papers and the visa and tell me when you will come here. If you think that you are anxious to be here, you have no idea how anxious I am to have you here.

MANDY PATINKIN: After just a couple of months of writing about their lives, their families, their aspirations, Helen and Kurt feel undeniably connected.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I am your debtor, for you help me about a time which is the hardest of my life. I always had courage and self confidence, but sometimes I lose the belief in me already. There are only your letters which give me joy and that I never shall forget.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: When you can't sleep and think of 151-8th avenue, remember also, that the girl that lives there can't sleep either, and she thinks of what you are doing, and where you go and whom you speak with, and keeps hoping all the time that the boy (you) will someday soon be with his friends and relatives again.

MANDY PATINKIN: As Kurt waits and waits and waits...for the affidavit, Helen brainstorms ways they could get him out faster. And she has...an unorthodox idea.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: If it would be possible, couldn't you marry an American girl, and in that way come to America? I know that marriage is a serious affair, but living is also serious, and of the two, I would prefer remaining alive.

MANDY PATINKIN: Kurt seizes the chance to finally express what he's been feeling.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: My darling...Far from you, I have fallen in love to you and I am happy that we both have the same thoughts. You are right, it is not good to stay alone in life. I would be happy if I could take your hands in my hands and then I would relate you my sorrows, cares, and last but not least our plans for the future. I'll write you again soon and remain with kissing of hands, Your Kurt.

MANDY PATINKIN: And then...nothing.

Cause these are the days when your letters travel by ships that have crossed the Atlantic.

Imagine. You've just confessed your love to your pen pal, a complete stranger who lives on another continent—and who's trying to help save your life. And it takes around two weeks for your letter to arrive to America. And then another two for hers to get back to you.

You check the boat schedule obsessively. Days and days pass. You receive letters from your sweetheart in batches. She writes about her life, her family, and the worsening situation in Europe. But none of her letters acknowledge your confession. Has she even received it yet?

But you continue writing her love letters, secure in the knowledge that she simply *must* feel the same way...at least you *think* so.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: My Helen—I have been thinking about a marriage with an American girl...

You are my fable fairy, darling, and I am the poor prince. The finish is always so, as by all fables—a happy end.

In order to say a certain Helen Kleinman: you are a wonderful person, who must be loved.

MANDY PATINKIN: Until finally, almost two weeks later, she addresses it—your confession of love. But it's not at all what you expected.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: Kurt—before I forget—you must not mistake gratitude towards a person for love.

Yael DANIELI: On the one hand she asks him to marry her but on the other hand she said but do you really, really, really love me?

MANDY PATINKIN: Kurt's exasperated. Why is she so confusing? Why even bring up marriage in the first place?

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Regarding your last letter—it is very difficult to write to a person who 1) I have never seen, and 2) I don't know the language well, and 3) I don't know the American girl type. I was always reserved, because I know you will say "gratitude and not love." You ask me and I answer your question—and suddenly instead of content, only distrust. Please Helen, we will stop to write about it and wait until we see each other and then we will speak about such things.

MANDY PATINKIN: Once again, Kurt waits weeks for Helen's response. In the meantime, her older letters keep coming. And with each one, she gets more and more comfortable expressing her feelings for him.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I supposed that you noticed I don't call you darling - the reason being, that I'm very shy when it comes to calling you by an endearing name. Though you must realize very much by now that you are dear to me, so you will excuse me for the lapse in that respect. But when I think of you, should you have seen my thoughts of what I call you, even you would blush for me. To myself, I have no modesty at all.

MANDY PATINKIN: It's difficult to say why she decides to open up. Perhaps Kurt's indignant response made her reconsider. Made her see that maybe his feelings are something more than gratitude.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I have a confession to make - I save your letters and read them over and over again as if I could find the key to your personality there, and of course, I keep wishing that you were here already.

Yael Danieli: Not so much only in times of fascism, but in times of any radical change. There is the adrenaline of having to find a solution. Now. There is the immediacy, the urgency, the rising to challenges, going to the depths of despair. That is very unique to these kind of times. And they tend to sort of erase, out of mind, like the silly things. And a lot of the important things that don't apply.

MANDY PATINKIN: In October - 5 months after his first letter, Kurt and Helen find out that Helen's affidavit by itself is too weak to get Kurt a visa.

For months, Helen's been writing to everyone - from the American Consulate in Vienna, to the President of Santo Domingo, to the United States Commissioner of Immigration. And it turns out they can't get married at a distance either. The law won't allow it. A major disappointment.

She sends Kurt two more affidavits—one from her aunt and one from a close friend. She and Kurt also hatch a new plan to get Kurt to safety.

They decide that marriage is still the best solution; they'll just have to do it in person. Helen plans to come to Switzerland to marry Kurt and bring him back with her. They look at ship schedules. She talks to her boss about how much time she can get off of work.

Helen decides she needs some professional advice. She talks to a lawyer about their plan. She's a do-er and an adventurer—who also has her practical moments.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I told him everything about us. Read what the lawyer said, and then tell me what you want me to do. Whatever it is, I'll do it, but let me know soon.

MANDY PATINKIN: The lawyer advises Helen not to go through with it. That there are too many obstacles in the way.

He writes: "You run the risk of his not being able to enter, and you are tied up with someone for the rest of your life who in fact, may be a detriment to you both financially and otherwise."

When Kurt reads the lawyer's document, he starts to panic. It seems like he thinks Helen wants out. That she sees how crazy this is. But she's too afraid to say it herself.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Dearest Helen, The world is in an entire confusion and this disease seems to have infected you too. I am used to getting from you reasonable and well considered letters and I knew you as a clever girl, what is the cause of this sudden change?

MANDY PATINKIN: Though his heart is broken, he's also a pragmatist. And the consequences of their plan become clear to him.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: Be assured that I shall try my utmost to come to you as quickly as possible and I must always repeat: go on leading your life as you always did before, be merry and force yourself to think of other things, go to a dance and be the Helen of former times.

MANDY PATINKIN: Helen, direct and stubborn, won't let him talk her out of it.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I understand. And appreciate your solicitude for my welfare, and I love you for it, but I am a capable person, in spite of the fact that you wrote you think the entire world is crazy, and that I'm getting that way too. The problem of my welfare and wellbeing, has no place in the present discussion, because if I were not able to do anything of the things that were suggested, I would have told you that.

The immediate problem is you, your family, and your future, not mine. And that is what still remains to be settled. What do you want to do? Whatever you decide to do, or have me do, will be alright with me.

MANDY PATINKIN: Helen is going to Switzerland to marry Kurt. Even if they don't know if it'll work, or exactly what their future will look like. End of discussion.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: The great question is now—what we shall do if we do not love. It is necessary to be candid. I have lost money and my home and I have only my life—not more. I want to have a happy life—and you also.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: When I answered your very first letter, did you have any idea that the correspondence would lead to the subject of marriage? I never did—and to tell you the truth, I don't know whether I would have answered you if, at that time, I thought such a thing might occur. But Kurt, please don't misunderstand me—I'm not sorry one bit.

MANDY PATINKIN: At some point in all of this, Helen tells her family about their scheme. That she plans to meet Kurt in Switzerland to marry.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: Kurt, my dear, from now on you must not believe in fairies, only believe in yourself. I went home, confident that my parents would approve of my wish to marry you. And met with grave disappointment.

MANDY PATINKIN: I mean, their disapproval shouldn't have been a shock. Whose parents wouldn't be concerned?

Their 25-year-old daughter wants to travel to a continent overtaken by a dangerous, anti-Semitic government...to marry a man she's never met. They were probably thinking - is her love for this man even real? Or is she falling in love with something else?

Yael Danieli: Is it the love of helping? Is it the love of rising to the challenge and being the heroine that she actually became? Is the love speaking with somebody in another world? You know, all the fantasies and hopes and wishes of a young woman.

MANDY PATINKIN: And what about Kurt? How sure can he be that his love is *love*—and not just gratitude? Helen and Kurt often talk about their relationship as a fairytale in their letters.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: Don't you know that in fables when the princess helps the prince she doesn't know that he is really a prince. And only after she falls in love with him, and helps him, does he tell her that he really is a prince. And then of course they live a very happy life ever after.

MANDY PATINKIN: It reminds me of the story of The Frog Prince.

It goes like this. The prince gets turned into a frog by a wicked fairy. Only a kiss from the princess can save him and turn him back into his original state.

It's one of the few classic fairy tales where the princess is the one who saves the prince. And just like that storybook princess, Helen steps out of her assigned role to take control of the situation.

A woman rescuing a man. An atypical setup by the standards of the 1930s which could make it a complicated way to start a union...or one that suits them just fine.

Yael Danieli: There's always a danger in relationships. When one, for whatever reason, is perceived as a rescuer and the other is needy of help and passive, active, passive. It's lifting and being lifted. Yes. So the question in general is do these initial interactions predict the struggle, the future struggles in relationships. And because we're only commenting on the letters, we don't have the answer.

MANDY PATINKIN: The misgivings of Helen's family aren't going to stop her. Nor is the unconventional set up of this entire thing. If we know anything about her, it's that she's persuasive. And stubborn. Seems like her family knows that too. Because they come to an agreement. If she can go one month without writing to her beau, and still wants to marry him, then her parents won't stand in her way...Helen only lasts a couple of days.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: I've broken my promise to my family not to write to you so, I'll write again tomorrow and then again on Monday.

MANDY PATINKIN: December 9th, 1938 is just another day in Kurt's monotonous life.

As usual, he wakes up at 7am, washes up and says a morning prayer. He drinks his coffee and ponders how he'll fill his time. Maybe he'll study English, or see a film, or read the book Helen sent him.

He's plagued by anxiety, about the looming threat of war and the safety of his family. His father has fled, his brother-in-law is in a concentration camp, and his sisters are still in Vienna—a city just recently overrun by the horrors of Kristallnacht.

On his way out the door for his usual morning walk, that's probably when he checks his mail, hoping for a letter from his sweetheart. Itching for her to meet him in Switzerland.

But something even more exciting has arrived: a letter from Zurich. His heart would be pounding. He tears open the envelope to see what it says...

Several hours later—and over 3000 miles away—Helen Kleinman receives a telegram that makes her want to laugh and cry all at once. Just four words:

“JUST GOT VISA - KURT”

MANDY PATINKIN: We don't know much about what happened after Kurt and Helen met. Did the love they felt in their letters bear out in real life? Were they able to get over their cultural differences? How did her role as rescuer and Kurt's as rescued play out in their relationship? In other words, was their love born in the shadow of fascism real?

But there are a few things we do know. Kurt arrived in New York in early February 1939, just a few months before the beginning of World War II. Kurt and Helen did get married, in April of that year. Some of Kurt's family eventually made their way to America with the help of Helen's family.

Kurt and Helen were together for 58 years, until Kurt's death in 1997. They had a child—a son. And they were always surrounded by family. Two different families with the same name, from different circumstances and different continents...coming together to share a life. And all because of a simple letter asking for kindness from a stranger, written in wartime Vienna and opened in a cozy Greenwich Village apartment.

VOICE ACTOR - HELEN KLEINMAN: The day is finished now so home to read, and then to bed with an apple. Love my darling always, Helen.

VOICE ACTOR - KURT KLEINMANN: I send you no pieces, but my whole heart, and remain always. Your only Kurt.

ARCHIVE THROW: The Kurt and Helen Kleinman Collection in the Leo Baeck Institute Archives includes Helen and Kurt's entire correspondence - hundreds of letters - from 1938 and 1939, plus telegrams and other material documenting Kurt's emigration. Learn more at www.lbi.org/kleinmann (with two 'n's).

TEASER: On the next episode of Exile...

An artist and his doctor wife flee Nazi Germany to one of the few places that will let them in: Shanghai. An unlikely refuge where a community of Jewish exiles finds a safe harbour. Until...

VOICE ACTOR - HANS JACOBY: Under the terms of the proclamation, all stateless refugees must move to a designated district outside of the city....To not offend the people behind the proclamation, the word "Ghetto" is to be avoided. It is a "concentration."

All this is antisemitism in its purest form.

Hans Jacoby and the Jews of Shanghai...on Exile

CREDITS: Exile is a production of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York and Antica Productions.

It's narrated by Mandy Patinkin.

Executive Producers include Katrina Onstad, Stuart Coxe and Bernie Blum. Senior Producer is Debbie Pacheco. Produced by Emily Morantz. Associate Producer is Hailey Choi. Research and translation by Isabella Kempf. Sound design and audio mix by Philip Wilson, with help from Cameron McIver. Theme music by Oliver Wickham. Voice acting by Heather Hedley and David Walpole.

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