

Ellen Ubelaker

Title: *The Unbelonger: The Autobiography of a Half-Jewish Girl in Hitler's Berlin*

Author: Ellen Ubelaker with Brian Wynn

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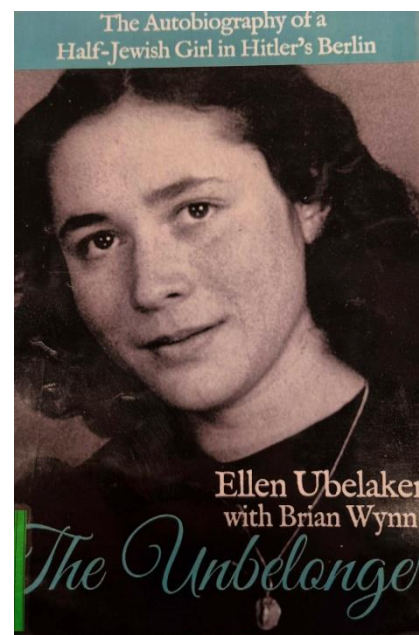
Location of Book: Melbourne Holocaust Museum.

Cities/towns/camps: Germany: Berlin; Australia: Melbourne.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative.

Genre: Memoir

Key events/experiences: *Mischling*; child survivor



The Unbelonger is the 43-page memoir of German child survivor, Ellen Ubelaker, who was born to a Jewish father and Catholic mother and survived the Holocaust with her family on the outskirts of Berlin. The memoir traces the family's experiences of antisemitic persecution, wartime deprivation, and Soviet occupation before their migration to Australia.

Pages 1–9 describe Ellen's family, early childhood, and the rise of Nazism, culminating in Kristallnacht. Pages 10–20 recount the outbreak of war, the family's survival in Berlin, the city's capture by the Soviet Army, and the violence perpetrated by Soviet soldiers. Pages 21–28 cover the Soviet occupation, post-war instability, and the family's emigration to Australia. Pages 29–43 recount Ellen's life in Australia, including her marriage and family.

Ellen Ubelaker (née Bukofzer) was born 14 July 1930 in Berlin to Arthur Bukofzer, a Jewish textile merchant and Lydia Kraus, a non-practicing German Catholic. She had a younger brother Manfred, born in 1934.

After the Nazis came to power in 1933, antisemitic restrictions gradually intensified. In 1936, Ellen enrolled in a state school, largely unaware of the implications of Nazi rule. As a *Mischling* (person of mixed Jewish and non-Jewish ancestry), Ellen was barred from joining the Hitler Youth with her classmates. Unable to fully comprehend the situation, she was simply distressed at being excluded.

In November 1938, during *Kristallnacht*, when returning home from school Ellen witnessed shattered shop windows, Nazi Brownshirts putting up antisemitic posters, and a middle-aged man being beaten in the street. The textile business where Ellen's father worked was ransacked and several employees were arrested.

Following the program, the family desperately made plans to emigrate, selling their furniture and possessions to obtain visas and passage to Cuba. However, one week before their scheduled departure, Germany closed its borders, leaving them trapped and homeless. With assistance from a Jewish relief organisation they found accommodation in a single bedroom in a large manor house in Bornepfad on the outskirts of Berlin, which they shared with Ellen's uncle Max, his wife, and two young children.

Following the outbreak of war in September 1939, persecution intensified. Denied a ration card because he was Jewish, Arthur struggled to feed the family, who survived largely on vegetables grown in a small garden. Forced into manual labour at an ammunition factory, he endured brutal antisemitic abuse and lost four fingers while operating faulty machinery.

In February 1943, Ellen's uncle Max, and his family disappeared after being arrested during a Gestapo roundup. They were deported to Auschwitz, where they were murdered. During the same round-up, Arthur was arrested and interrogated by the Gestapo but was unexpectedly released. A sympathetic government official quietly informed his wife that official records already listed him as imprisoned in a concentration camp, then replaced the document and pretended not to have seen it. Although spared, the family continued to fear arrest and deportation.

As Allied bombing of Berlin intensified, the family spent increasing amounts of time sheltering in the cellar. In early 1945, Ellen contracted severe pneumonia. Her father carried her on his back to hospital, where doctors gave her only a ten per cent chance of survival. Undernourished, suffering from extreme cold, lacking antibiotics, and repeatedly moved between the wards and bomb shelters during air raids, she miraculously recovered. By the time she returned home, she weighed only 38 kilograms.

During the Soviet assault on Berlin there was relentless artillery bombardment. The family spent the battle sheltering in their cellar. When the fighting ceased, Ellen emerged to see Soviet tanks and mounted troops entering the suburb. Initial relief quickly gave way to fear as widespread looting and sexual violence accompanied the occupation. Determined to protect his family, Arthur stood guard at the front door with an axe. Ellen believed that her emaciated appearance and shaved head from her hospital stay, which made her resemble a boy, spared her from attracting the soldiers' attention. Many of her friends were not so lucky.

Arthur was later arrested by the Soviet secret police and questioned about leading Nazis in the district. After explaining his persecution under the Nazi regime, Soviet officials issued him an official stamped document. Thereafter, whenever Soviet soldiers harassed the family, Arthur displayed the document which mostly secured their protection. By 7 May 1945, when Germany officially surrendered, Berlin lay in ruins.

The post-war period remained chaotic. Soviet forces requisitioned the family's home as a local headquarters, forcing them to live with neighbours, while Arthur briefly served as

a Soviet policeman. When the Soviets departed they looted many of the family's possessions. The family survived through food salvaged from an abandoned Red Cross train and by bartering for supplies, while Arthur made illegal trips to the countryside to obtain potatoes, bacon and sausage.

Once her health improved Ellen resumed her education. Towards the end of 1945, Ellen's parents opened a small business. However life under Soviet occupation remained difficult, especially during the Berlin Blockade, and they often engaged in illegal trading.

The family made plans to emigrate and registered with the International Refugee Organisation they were eventually granted Australian visas. They subsequently sold their property and briefly stayed in a refugee camp in Germany. In November 1950, they boarded the Italian ship *Castel Bianco* from Bremerhaven and arrived in Australia on 20 December 1950, after a 28-day voyage.

Initially accommodated at the Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre, the family was required to fulfil the Australian Government's two-year employment contract. Arthur and Manfred were assigned to work constructing rabbit-proof fences. In early 1951, Ellen moved to Melbourne to work at the Royal Melbourne Hospital, where she later met her future husband, Albert Ubelaker. They married in 1954. The couple had no children.

The Unbelonger is a brief autobiographical memoir that provides a straightforward chronological account of the author's childhood, wartime experiences, and post-war migration. It presents an overview of key events interspersed with vivid personal memories. While the author's youth limits her observations of the rise of Nazism and early antisemitic persecution, the memoir provides a particularly candid account of the bombing of Berlin and the Soviet occupation, including the widespread sexual violence committed against German women and girls. Despite its brevity, it offers a valuable firsthand perspective on civilian life in Berlin from the viewpoint of a mixed Jewish-Christian family, from Nazi persecution through to the Soviet occupation.