

Richard Seligman

Title: *Very Convenient Everywhere*

Author: Richard Seligman

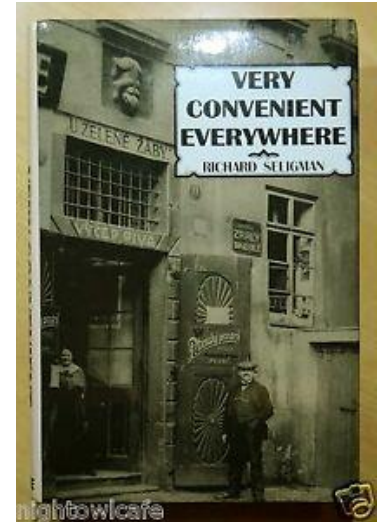
Publisher: Vantage Press

Place of Publication: New York

Year of Publication: 1991

Location of Book: Melbourne Holocaust Museum

Cities/towns/camps: Prague, London, Melbourne, Glasgow



Richard Seligman's memoir is 363 pages in length. It spans seventy years between and during the aftermath of two world wars and during the Great Depression, beginning in Prague in 1914 and ending in Melbourne. There are 46 chapters that relate to different periods of his life. Pages 1 – 45 cover his early years, pages 46 – 251 give a detailed account of the war years, and includes his father's letters and journal entries. Pages 252 – 290 explore the immediate aftermath of the war and Richard's plan to migrate to Australia. Pages 291 – 322 include a detailed reflection on Richard's life in Australia. The last few chapters (pages 323 – 347) delve deeper into Richard and Lise's family and includes family photos dating back to 1910. In total there are more than 50 photographs, as well as a number of maps, copies of letters, diaries and journals.

Born in 1914 in Prague, Richard was the only child of Dr. Angelo, a non-Jewish teacher born in Vienna and a Jewish mother from Prague. Neither were religious. Richard discusses little of the First World War, but remembers that they could no longer speak German in public. Although an only child, he had a large, extended family, and spent many holidays at the beach or in the Alps. He attended a German-speaking school and had no allegiance to any of the three mainstream religions – Jewish, Catholic and Protestant. In 1925 he went to High School where he met his lifetime friend Herbert Pressburg. According to his recollections he was a larrikin and prankster. Aged 16, Richard became more socially and politically aware and sought to join a Communist group, motivated to help solve the problems of the poor workers. As Czech fascists became more active, so did Richard. As a result he was arrested and questioned several times about involvement in demonstrations. By 1938 and 1939, although he saw many flaws in the Soviet Communism, he also believed that it was the only hope of

destroying Nazism. In the last two years before the war he served time in the Army and also short spells in prison.

On 15 March 1939 German troops marched into Prague, and it had become evident that Jews needed to leave Europe. In Richard's case, despite his Birth Certificate indicating his baptism, he found it difficult to obtain a visa. Overcoming a number of obstacles Richard arrived in London in mid-1939, where he reunited with friends from Prague. After Hitler's invasion of Poland, London began to prepare for war; gas masks were distributed and backyard or underground shelters constructed. In October 1940 German bombers began the attacks on London which continued until June 1941. During this time Richard married his former girlfriend, Lise. They remained in London until December 1944 and during this time Richard volunteered in the Czech branch of the British RAF, where he was accepted to do a six-month radio course in Glasgow. From there he was posted to Sussex to service radio equipment for American fighter bombers. In February 1944, he was sent to a one-year training course for the BBC during which time he recorded speeches made by a number of international leaders. In October their first child Peter was born. In January 1945, he was part of a fifty-vessel convoy bound for the Middle East. Richard eventually returned to Prague to find a destroyed city, but also to learn that his mother and Lise's parents had survived but his father had died just two weeks before his return.

While in Prague, Richard was able to find the diary his father kept during the war and learned the horrible truths about the lives of the Jews who were trapped in Europe. He also learned of the deaths of many friends and relatives. Over the next two years he travelled several times between England and Prague for the BBC. In December 1946, Lise gave birth to twin girls. Eventually, in June 1948 the family emigrated to Melbourne and settled in Essendon where they were still living at the time of publication of this book. Richard established a successful business with friends, manufacturing his personally designed soldering iron and other items. At the age of seventy he learned to fly and retained his license for 12 years.

The book is rich in detail, painstakingly derived from letters and journals belonging to Richard and others. His account of life before and after the war is written in the first person. He narrates his story with intelligence and his philosophical outlook on life permeates the pages. The memoir is particularly important for its insight into the life of a Jewish-Catholic native of Prague who was drawn to the Communist Party in his teenage years.

