The following life story was excerpted from Rev. Herman Doych’s autobiography which he wrote in 1972, about one year before his death at age 77.

Hermann Deutsch was born June 15, 1896 in Nagy Szecseny, Comitat Nograd, Hungary, to Emanuel and Hermine Deutsch. He was the youngest of four siblings, two brothers and one sister. At the age of four, Hermann’s family moved to Paks on the Danube, Comitat Tolna, where Hermann’s education began. His brother Salomon, three years older, “taught me how to write numerical figures and alphabetical letters with a crayon on a piece of board.” In addition, a yeshiva student was engaged almost daily to teach Hermann to read Hebrew. At age six, he started elementary school and Talmud Torah and between ages seven and eight, he was learning the weekly Torah portion along with the Rashi Commentary. By age ten, Herman was learning Mishna and Gemara.

When Hermann was eight years old, his father passed away and his mother was forced to earn a living to support herself and her four children. The two older boys were sent to Yeshivas and Hermann went to live with his maternal grandmother Sarah Rieder in Satoralja Ujhely, Hungary. Hermann’s mother Hermine and his sister Frieda traveled to Heidelberg, Germany to establish a kosher boarding house for students and opened “Pension Deutsch” at Marzgasse 20.

In 1908, when Hermann was 12, he and his brother Salomon joined their mother and sister in Heidelberg. Hermann’s education continued at the Talmud Torah Institute in Schwabach near Nurnberg, Germany. “In June, 1909, on a weekday, I became Bar Mitzvah in Schwabach. There was no celebration; just being called up to the Torah. Mother sent me a package with all kinds of cakes and salami, which I shared with a few fellow students.” For vacation that year, Hermann returned to Heidelberg.

In August, 1909, mother Hermine passed away suddenly at age 40. In September, Hermann returned to Schwabach to continue his studies at the Realschule. Frieda continued management of Pension Deutsch until her marriage and move to Sweden in 1920.

At the end of the school year in June, 1910, Hermann returned to Heidelberg. Instead of continuing his academic education, he was sent to work in Gunzenhausen as an apprentice at a wholesale glass and porcelain business, followed by employment at a wholesale carpenter’s supply business. This work proved to be an asset in later years when Hermann used the expertise he learned during this period to support his family.
In March 1915, at the age of 19, Hermann was drafted into the Hungarian army where he was trained in telephone communications and received a commission as crew leader of Telephone Communications for the Regiment. At one point, he was awarded a medal for bravery on the battlefront with the Russians. Shortly before the end of World War I, Hermann became a prisoner of war and was interned at the prisoner of war camp in Codogno, Province of Milano. In November, 1919, he was among 360 men who were part of a prisoner exchange between Italy and Hungary. He was discharged in December, 1919, obtained a Hungarian passport for travel in Germany and returned to Heidelberg in January, 1920.

Food and jobs were scarce in Germany after World War I. After a period of unemployment and small business attempts, Hermann continued his education, earning credentials in teaching and shechitah. In the spring of 1928, he applied and was accepted as teacher and schochet in Leutershausen near Anspach. Meanwhile, Hermann had received credentials from the Jewish Theological Seminary in Wurzburg.

In the spring of 1929, Hermann met Rita Gallinger of Wittelshofen. On September 1 of that year, they were married and started their lives in Leutershausen. Their first daughter Hermine was born June 10, 1931 in Wurzburg. In 1932, Hermann was reassigned as religious teacher and schochet with rabbinical duties at Congregation Cronheim where daughter Beate was born on May 7, 1933.

The Cronheim congregation consisted of Jewish residents living in the town and in surrounding villages. In October, 1936, Hermann was teaching in Heidenheim when a woman arrived at the site and asked him to slaughter a few chickens. The Nurnberg Laws of 1935 depriving Jews of their German citizenship were in effect along with a number of decrees and ordinances enacted between 1933 and 1935 boycotting Jewish businesses and making certain elements of religious practice illegal. Among them was shechitah. While Hermann and the woman were in conversation, Hermann explaining that it would be illegal for him to slaughter her chickens, two Nazi policemen and a Gestapo agent stormed in. They accused Herman of violating the law and attempted to arrest him. Herman showed them the sack of live chickens indicating he had not broken the law. He showed his Hungarian passport. The Nazis left without making the arrest, but one week later, Hermann was summoned to the Nazi district office in Gunzenhausen where his passport was confiscated and he was told he was being deported to Hungary. The following month, Hermann received his passport and orders to be out of Germany in four weeks.

After contacting several government offices, Hermann was successful in obtaining a four month extension. Immediately, he began the search for a country off the European continent which would accept him and his family. At the Council of Emigration in Munich, he saw a brochure
which advertised possible refugee acceptance in Colombia, South America. The Council officer wrote the Refugee Organization in Cali on Hermann’s behalf and within two weeks, word came that they would provide assistance to the family upon their arrival in Cali, Colombia.

On April 24, 1937, a Saturday, the SS Caribia of the HAPAG line left Hamburg, Germany with the Deutsch family on board. According to Jewish law, in order for an observant Jew to travel by ship on the Sabbath, some possessions must be placed on board before the Sabbath. On the Friday before the departure, Hermann placed an umbrella and a briefcase into the stateroom reserved for his family. After services in the hotel synagogue the next day, Hermann, Rita, Hermine and Beate walked to the port and boarded the ship. There they were met by Nazi officers who questioned Hermann’s having placed baggage on board one day in advance of departure. Suspecting smuggling of foreign currency, gold and other valuables, they opened every trunk, suitcase and hand luggage that had been delivered to the cabin and dumped the contents on the floor. They found nothing. At 6:00 PM, the ship sailed. With sighs of relief, Rev. Hermann Deutsch and his immediate family watched the German land disappear in the distance. There were feelings of sadness, however, to have left family and friends in the face of current difficulties and atrocities that would later be known as the Holocaust.*

On May 20, 1937, the SS Caribia docked in Buenaventura, Colombia. The voyage had taken 27 days, and Rev. Deutsch took that time to teach himself Spanish which helped adjust to the new surroundings. During the two years the Deutsch family lived in Cali, the number of Jewish refugees increased from 50 to approximately 400. Rev. Deutsch organized them into a functioning congregation using his teaching and rabbinical skills. The Jewish community had no funds to pay him and there were few other jobs available. The carpentry skills he acquired as a young man in Germany allowed him to perform odd jobs and build furniture for sale to help support his family. After two difficult years in Cali, Rita’s brother, Joseph Gallinger, who had immigrated to the US from Germany with his family, helped obtain a non-quota visa for the Deutsch family.

In March, 1939, Rev. Hermann Deutsch and family arrived at the Port of New York. In October, Rev. Deutsch accepted the position of schochet at Becker’s Kosher Market in Jacksonville, Florida. He held that position for 13 years, moving to Miami in July, 1952, where he also worked as a schochet and teacher preparing boys for Bar Mitzvah.

In 1944, upon satisfying the five year US immigrant residence requirement, the Deutsch family became American citizens. Because of the difficulty encountered in pronunciation and spelling of their German names, Deutsch was officially changed to Doych, Hermann dropped the extra “n”, Hermine became Hermina and Beate was renamed Beatrice.

During his 13 years in Jacksonville, Rev. Doych used his skills in many areas of Jewish life. He was one of the founding members of Etz Chaim Synagogue in 1947 and often conducted services
for this new orthodox congregation. His precise manuscript skills were often in demand to provide Hebrew lettering for Jewish gravestones and he regularly participated in Talmudic studies.

The scholarly book collection that was rescued from Germany during the Holocaust is appropriately named the Rev. Herman Doych Collection. It consists of 177 titles of a Hebrew rabbinical working library. These books were used in teaching and learning over all the years of Rev. Doych’s life. They are a living legacy that now resides in the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica, University of Florida, Gainesville.

Beatrice Doych Schemer

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*After World War II, it came to light that both Rev. Doych’s brothers and their wives had been deported to Hungary and perished in the Holocaust. Their children were sent to Sweden and Israel before the deportation. Rita’s older sister and brother-in-law, Selma and Sigmund Sundheimer, together with their daughter Therese and an aunt Paula Adler sought to escape Nazi persecution by fleeing to Holland from Germany. When the Nazis overran the Netherlands, the Sundheimer family was deported first to Theresienstadt (Terezin) then to Sobibor where they were executed. Of a fairly large family on the Gallinger side, most were lost in the Holocaust.