

Name: Joseph Vandewart
Lifespan: Birth - 1915 - 1985
Birthplace: Ober-Reidenberg, Germany
Parents: Theodore and Regina Vandewart
Siblings: Gerda
Children: One
Grandchildren: Two

By 1939, the full toll on the Jewish population of Ober-Riedenberg was beginning to be felt. The deportations to concentration camps had begun with the first targets being all adult males. Josef Vandewart, at twenty four years of age, escaped the first roundup. But he knew it was only a matter of time before the Nazis found him. He knew two Jewish women in a larger city whose father had already been taken away. Since the registered male of that house had been picked up in the first round of deportations, he reasoned that they might not return to that location. It was not to be.

One day Nazis circled the house and when Joe tried to escape he was caught. He was taken to a police station. There, one of the policemen happened to know one of the Jewish women who had hidden Joe so he released him. It was his incredible good fortune. As a diabetic he needed daily insulin shots. He could not have survived for more than two days in jail.

By this time Joe and his sister Gerda had applied for visas at the consulate and were waiting for their quota number to come up. It is unclear from family records who had sent them an affidavit. While waiting at the consulate one day, Joe's sister Gerda met another hopeful immigrant named Kurt Loewensohn who was applying for a visa for South America. They later married and Kurt changed his last name to "Vandewart" as it sounded "less Jewish." Together Josef, Gerda, and Kurt came to the USA.

Soon after his arrival, Joe was introduced to Jeanette Goldberg through a colleague at Joe's work as a butler and chauffeur for a well established New York family. The two were soon married. Joe and Jeanette and Gerda and Kurt shared an apartment in Forest Hills, New York. After the war, Joseph and Gerda learned that both of their parents and all other extended family in Europe had perished in the Shoah.