



# **Dr. Ernst Leitz II and the Leica Train to Freedom: Defying the Nazis with a Camera (A BOOK by ME)**

*A Book by Me, Taylor Beitzel*

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## **Dr. Ernst Leitz II and the Leica Train to Freedom: Defying the Nazis with a Camera (A BOOK by ME) A Book by Me, Taylor Beitzel**

As a successful businessman, Ernst Leitz helped hundreds of Jews escape death by creating an escape path out of Nazi Germany. His business manufactured cameras and photography equipment under the Leica brand. He sent Jewish employees abroad to safer places. Besides the employees themselves, Leitz helped their families and some of his Jewish neighbors and business associates flee by moving overseas. Jewish employees received training and permits that allowed them to travel abroad as sales agents for Leica products. Leitz organized and paid for their transit England, USA, Brazil, and Hong Kong. He gave them a Leica camera, which could easily be sold. Leitz paid their expenses until they could find employment in their new home. Many found work in the photo industry. Leitz did not speak of this but his son, Günther, tried to write an article about the refugees. Leitz did not want to share his story. Perhaps he felt it would be boasting. He believed he had done what any decent person would do in his position. Günther later said, "No one can ever know what other Germans had done for the persecuted within the limits of their ability to act." Like Oskar Schindler, Leitz was a member of the Nazi party. Many prominent people joined the party not because they agreed with Nazi policies, but because doing so allowed them to be left alone. They could continue running their businesses "under the radar" of Nazi scrutiny. Also, the Nazis' dependence on the military optics produced by Leica, made his company valuable to them. Leitz's heroism came to light many years later, when Rabbi Frank Dabba Smith of London, then still a student, saw Leitz refugees mentioned in a photography magazine. One of these refugees was Kurt Rosenberg, a camera mechanic. Leitz helped him get a visa to America, paid for his journey to New York in 1938, and got him a job at the Leica showroom on Fifth Avenue. Ernst Leitz's aid to his Jewish associates came from the heart. Also, from his determination to do what he believed was right. Günther Leitz said, "He felt responsible for his workers, their families, for our neighbors in Wetzlar." Ernst Leitz put those feelings into action, and hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of people are alive today because of him.

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