was recommended to take us across took the bribe of cigarettes (the only currency at the time), but never showed up the next morning. Mother, who spoke German fluently, made inquiries as to how to get to France. We were given some direction; she refused to wait and we started off on our own.

After walking for two hours, my mother could not go on. Her legs were all swollen. She kept our spirit up, sat down on a log and started to sing to us "we will wait until someone comes, someone will come I am sure." We had no food and it started to rain. After a long time some men and women appeared, they were gathering kindling wood. They told us that we were sitting next to a minefield, that these woods had seen some heavy fighting during the war: we were right in the middle of the Maginot Line, one of the fortified lines established by the Germans along their borders. The woods were full of mines, we could have been killed by walking further. After giving out some more cigarettes, we were guided to the border safely. Mother never let on how terrified she was; we did not dare to cry either, although we were hungry and scared.

Months of struggle followed, eating in soup kitchens, living in fleabag hotels, picking used clothes in refugee centres. Incredibly poor, barely surviving. But my mother spent two hours every day teaching me French from a used book she picked up (she went to a cultural association to pick up books so I could read). Every Sunday we went to the Louvre because it was warm and free; she explained art and gave me a love for art that stayed with me always.

She continued her quest to find a safe place for all of us — particularly her unborn child. It was going to be a boy, she knew it, and he was never going to be a soldier. My father was working at two jobs to save some money when we finally got out of France. After months of lining up in front of embassies with millions of other desperate people, mother got a visa to go to Paraguay. We had to check it out on a map as to where it was. Due to accidents of fate we never went there and for that I am eternally grateful.

We crossed the Atlantic in the cargo hold of the first passenger ship that sailed after the war. The holds were fitted with bunk beds to transport soldiers. We were several hundred people cramped into the holds, just like the cattleboats of the nineteenth century. When we arrived at Brazil on our way to Paraguay, we found out that there had been a revolution in that country and that all the borders were closed until further notice. We were stuck in Brazil, with no funds and no place to stay, along with several hundred other refugees who needed a place to stay.

Brazil was not prepared for us. Mother was seven months pregnant, and had difficulties with the heat, but my lessons continued and we explored Rio. Years later I found out that Brazil pressured the United Nations to find countries of settlement for these unwanted people. The money for shelter and food came from the Red Cross and the United Nations while we were waiting. My parents were desperate; finally we were selected to go, but the pilot of the plane did not want to take a pregnant woman. My mother put on a girdle to hide her pregnancy and went to tell the pilot that she lost the baby, even had a medical certificate — who knows where she got it.

We got on a plane, we crossed Brazil in a two-engine plane that nearly crashed twice, and was stranded for repairs for two days in the jungle. After four days of travel, with overnight stops, we arrived at our final destination, a new beginning. We were met by a community group, taken to a house, given a meal and a room. We had arrived. My mother went into labour two days later and had a healthy baby boy, a citizen of a country that had not had a war since the war of independence in the nineteenth century.

The odyssey was over. We were safe. Many years of poverty followed, but we never had to run again. My brother certainly had a better childhood than I; he cannot imagine his mother doing some of the things I tell to him. But I remember, and feel like a veteran. My mother and I have a special bond: we survived hardship and battles together. We are veterans of the refugee experience.

LAURA GARCIA RENERT

Acclamation

You will pay all your debts
You will collect all the repressions
You will comply with the slogans
You will question every order
You will dissolve the Yours into the Everybodys
You will wield whatever your language
You will invent new methods
You will tear down walls
madhouses mausoleums
frameworks, dungeons, museums
We are not momentaneous
    We are more
    We will be Tanias
permanent not perennial
present and not past
And I promulgate you Comrades
And I proclaim you Women
for being alive, for being legendary
for being ancient, for being contemporary
for being dead and for being killed
for being deflowered virgins
for being tormented with joy
for being rabid and for being clear
for being madwomen in love
    for being Women
    for being Ours
    for being Us