

FREDDIE'S BAT MITZVAH PROJECT 2023

For my Bat mitzvah project, I traveled to Leipzig for a weekend with my dad, my sister Daisy, my Auntie Mandy and my cousin Coco. My Grandfather, my "Opa" was born there in 1927. My Opa's parents (my great-grand parents) were called Frieda and Leo Schwarzbard – Schwarzbard in English translates to Blackbeard. They had five children Leni, Michael, Alfred, Harri (my Opa) and Wolfgang (who is now called Zev which means Wolf in Hebrew). I am extremely grateful that my Uncle Zev has travelled from Israel to be here with me in Shul today.

In 1939 all five children had to leave Leipzig by Kindertransport just before the second world war - the youngest, my Uncle Zev was only two. Their Auntie Reiss, who was already in England, was able to ensure that they would be able to travel safely to the UK. Frieda and Leo were left in Germany.

Six years later, after the war was over, the five children who thought they would never see their parents again were reunited with both their mother and father in England.

Frieda (their mother and my great-grand mother) had survived several concentration camps including camp Kaiserwald in Riga and Studhof near Danzig before being liberated by the Russian troops in 1945. Leo (their father and my great-grand father) had escaped through Europe spending the last two years in the mountains with the Italian resistance.

Word of Frieda's survival came via the Redcross. Then in 1946 my Auntie Leni, who was by then a nurse in England, received a telegraph from Leo (their father and my great grandfather) saying "Alive and well in Nice, Papa." My great-grandparents reunited in Nice and the whole family was reunited shortly after that in England.

My trip to Leipzig in February was a chance to learn about my heritage and the place where my Opa and his family grew up in their early years.

We stayed in an apartment close to Humboldt Strasse 10, where my Opa was born and raised. Six months earlier in September 2022 there was a ceremony in front of the house where my family had lived, to remember those that left because of the Nazis. During the ceremony Stolperstein's or in English Stumbling Stones were laid. Seven were laid in total, one for each family member who lived there - the five children and their two parents.



They are called Stumbling Stones because they are laid slightly higher above the pavement so as people walk past they stumble over them and this can cause them to stop and then read the inscriptions and remember those who had to leave Germany. There are now 100,000 Stumble stones across Europe in 30 different countries.

We then visited the Shul around the corner from Opa's house where my family would very likely have been members. It's

The Stumble stones for my family outside of Humboldt Strasse, 10 in Leipzig

called Brody Synagogue. It was the only remaining synagogue in Leipzig after the war. Before the war Leipzig had a population of 11,564 Jews and many more synagogues than just one. Today Leipzig has a Jewish population of 1,000, growing from the 15 Jewish people that remained after the war.

I never really knew my Opa, as he died when I was one, so knowing I was in the same place he would have been when he was my age felt really special and emotional.

After the Shabbat service, the Rabbi (Rabbi Zsolt Balla, who in 2021 was installed as Germany's first military Rabbi in over a Century) invited us to Kiddush and for a meal with the community. It was fascinating experiencing something so different to our Synagogue – it made me feel really connected to the Leipzig Jewish community. There were many more steps to follow before eating than we are used to and the food was very different. The community was still really close and friendly despite the stricter approach to Jewish culture.



After the meal, we went to visit the Holocaust memorial. The memorial is on the site of the Great Synagogue that was destroyed in 1938. The memorial is rows of empty chairs (140 in total). This is a statement about how there were no Jews left in Leipzig after the war - all of them had either fled Leipzig or had been killed by the Nazis.

The next day we went to the New Jewish cemetery. Most of the graves ended in 1938 and started again in 1990.

Inside the Brody Synagogue, Leipzig

This is because the Nazis did not give dead Jews graves to be remembered by, and after that there weren't any Jews left in Leipzig - they had all left. Only about 50 years later did the population of Jews start growing again and most of these were Russian Jews. We went there to visit the grave of my great-great grandfather, Koppel Balderman. This was unbelievable and impacted me. It also gave me a deeper understanding about my ancestors and family, as I didn't know anything about my great-great grandfather and to learn about him and also visit where he lived and was buried was a special moment for me.

Later that afternoon we arrived at Leipzig train station and saw the memorial for the children who left on Kindertransport. We also saw an exhibit showing the type of train that the thousands of children left Germany on before the war to be able to live a safe and healthy life in the future.



Me at the Holocaust memorial, Leipzig

We then left Leipzig by train from the same station that my Opa and his siblings would have left 84 years before we did. It was really moving knowing that I was surrounded by his presence. As we left, I thought about how it may have felt for my Opa and his siblings and their parents 84 years ago - the

panic and emotions they would have experienced would have been so different to how I was feeling and that was very sad for me to think about.



I am especially honored to have my Uncle Zev here today who is one of the siblings who left on Kindertransport from Leipzig 84 years ago.

Uncle Zev has traveled from Israel with his wife, my Auntie Janina and my cousins; (including his two daughters) Naomi, Juliet, Shmulik, Sara and Effi. Sara is the daughter of my Uncle Alfred (Uncle Zev's brother). I want to thank all my family who have traveled from Israel to be with me this weekend.

On the Leipzig train station platform – where Opa's journey to the UK would have started. A train similar to the one my family would have taken, stands in the background

I also want to thank Auntie Cynthia who has traveled very long distance from Australia as well as all my family and friends who have come to celebrate with me today including my Grandma, my Auntie Liz, my Nana and my Granny and Grandpa.

I'd finally like to take this opportunity to thank Rabbi Botnick for all his help and guidance with my D'var Torah and Rabbi Botnick, Cantor Heller, Joe Hacker, Adam Rynhold and Caroline Loison for their help, support and guidance with my Bat Mitzvah learnings.

Today there are 12 children of the five siblings who arrived by Kindertransport, 34 grand-children and great-grand-children too - living in both England and Israel.

Freddie Sherwood-Murphy, July 2023



Michael, Alfred, Harri, Wolfgang (now Zev) in Leipzig 1939 or earlier



Harry, Frieda, Alfred, Zev, Leo and Leni - Reunited in England, 1945 or later



Me and my Opa, Harry Sherwood, in 2011