

German Jewish Refugees at HTBE II

From Rabbi Weinberg's eulogies:

1)

Elizabeth Wolf b Nov 10, 1921, d. Aug 24, 2016

She was born on Nov 10, 1921, to well to do German Jewish family. Please note the date on which she was born. She was the only child of Solomon" Sigmar" Weiss, himself one of 8 siblings, and Flora, of the Borchardt family, a very prominent and affluent German Jewish family. Typical of a German Modern Orthodox family of the day, they kept Jewish observances and practices while being culturally educated and sophisticated Germans.

Of course, we know that the rest of the culturally sophisticated Germans turned on their Jewish neighbors, just on Elizabeth's 18th birthday, just for Kristallnacht! That is why I asked you to note the date of her birth. Her father was one of many Jews rounded up and sent to Buchenwald, treated as common criminals just for the crime of being Jews. He was released and the family wasted no time in looking for a refuge, which they found a few months later, in Bolivia, one of the last countries to open its borders to Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. They were very fortunate, as many of their relatives were killed at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust.

The next 14 years were a wonderful time for Elizabeth and the family. Her father was able to open a business in rugs and then bought land to rent out to farmers.

There she met and married Louis "Lajoš" Wolf. He too was a refugee, originally from Slovakia. They had no children, but she kept in constant contact with the children of her cousins in the years that followed, the last surviving cousin was Hannah Rose Keller, whose daughter Daniela Gliksberg, and son Simon Keller, remained in close contact. I had the pleasure of seeing them here when they came respectively from Chicago and Santiago, Chile, to visit her.

Unfortunately, good times can't always last, and Bolivia underwent revolutionary turmoil in 1953. Having had a taste of revolution in Nazi Germany and knowing what had

transpired under communist regimes as well, they fled to the best haven of security, the United States, and settled in Los Angeles.

Elizabeth and her husband did well here. Louis was a very talented man, and a real craftsman to boot. Elizabeth found good work in the banks here.

Elizabeth lost her beloved Lajos in 1993, when he was 91. It was a blow, but she recovered from it.

She kept in contact with the children of her cousins and travelled worldwide to visit- in the UK, in Israel, or in Brazil. It helped, in her travels, that she was conversant in Spanish and German as well as English.

Elizabeth was a very generous and giving person, to her relatives and to others, and helped people out in many ways.

She kept herself busy with the challenge of a bridge game and watching jeopardy, and I would assume, trying to guess the answers before the participants could.

We were very happy to have her presence at services at Hollywood Temple Beth El. She was always graceful and elegant, and donated generously to sponsor our Kiddush luncheons. It was getting harder for her, however, to get to our services as she aged. Just a few weeks ago, we found out that she had moved to the Belmont Retirement Village, a home with which we had done a program only a year before. She did not have a chance to enjoy it for long however, and she passed away this week, close to the age of 95.

Note: A close friend, Ron Galperin, former City Comptroller of Los Angeles, co-officiated at the funeral.

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2) Elsie Sussman Esther bat Shammai v Rivka

b.8/23/1919 dec. 6/14/02

Elsie Sussman, daughter of Shammai and Regine Best, was born in Cologne, Germany a year after the end of the Great War. The debacle of Germany's defeat in that War led to the rise of Hitler and the debacle of the next Great War.

The family understood Hitler threat to the Jewish people. The Nazis had already succeeded in shutting the doors on Elise's education, and by 1935, when Elise was a teenager, the parents packed everything and made their way to the one possible refuge, the Jewish territory known then as Palestine. Here in the emerging State of Israel, Shammai established a business in used metal parts. It was not an easy transition for a girl brought up in the very refined atmosphere of Cologne to get used to the roughness of early Israel.

In 1946, she met Yitzhak, or Ira Sussman, in her city of Tel Aviv. By 1947, they were married, and by 1948, Yitzhak was fighting for Israel's Independence and Elise was giving birth to the next generation, to son Nathan. As the guns of war fell silent, their daughter, Leanna, was born.

Elise and Ira, by this time, felt it was necessary to find respite from the difficult life of embattled and embargoed Israel. In 1957, they came to America, and settled in Los Angeles, where they joined Ira's brother who had preceded them here.

Ira had learned to be an architect, and in this new land, he worked as a draftsman to support the family. Elise devoted herself to the care of the two children, and also worked to help support them. Although the conditions of war and refuge had prevented her from completing her formal education, what she had received in Germany was enough to imbue her with a love of learning and reading that stayed with her all her life. She soon translated this skill into a position as library assistant at the University

of Southern California, where she served from 1966 until her retirement, at age 73, in 1992.

She took great delight in her reading, music, and in all things cultural, the influence of her upbringing in the highly cultured German Jewish society that is no more. While she was still agile enough, she dabbled in needlepoint and gardening as well.

She was never one for social functions. She was by temperament quiet, good natured, and sweet. She preferred to turn her attentions to her dear husband, Ira, until his passing, after 47 years of marriage, in 1994. She loved her two grandsons, Ayal and Oren, and, as typical of an ideal mother, put others' needs ahead of her own, thought about everyone else, not about herself.

She passed away at the age of 83, leaving behind her a legacy of warmth and affection for those who knew her.

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3) Edith Feuerstein

Born on June 18, 1913, in Gablonc, the Czech region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, she and one brother, since deceased, the children of Ida and Osias Orgell. With the troubles of World War I that broke out, the family moved to Vienna, a refuge for so many Jews from the outer regions of the empire. Their household was loyal to Jewish traditions, yet open to the new currents of the world. Her parents gave her a happy childhood, and a strong education, through gymnasias, high school (but in Europe, equivalent of college.)

As a young woman, she was very intelligent, independent minded for her times and travelled with her friends widely throughout Europe, especially in Italy, favorite vacation place.

Her father's work in import- export brought him to England-- the winds of war were beginning to be felt as Hitler rearmed and built up German military might and prepared the takeover of Austria. In England, he arranged for exit visas for his family to come to England, and Edith went there, while her brother was able to get to Canada. However, Edith's mother refused to abandon her Vienna, not aware of what nightmare awaited the Jews of Europe. By miracle, her mother was able to survive the horror of the Nazis by spending the war in hiding, and afterwards, she was reunited with her family. At the same time, a fellow Viennese, Jacob Feuerstein, escaped to Belgium. There, he was offered refuge in Britain in exchange for volunteering in the British army. This brought him to England.

One evening he was on leave from his base, when he attended a gathering of Austrian refugees. It was there that he and Edith met. It was the London blitz and his military commander that brought them together, however. She hoped to be able to get to Exeter, where he was stationed to avoid the Blitz, but his commander would grant her a pass to move--only if she married him. This was the best order a military officer ever gave, and they

married and remained loyal and deeply devoted to each other for 56 years. She was for Jacob the very best that he could wish for.

There, during the war years, their daughter, Vivian was born, and Edith turned her efforts to raising her in those difficult years and in the period of rebuilding that followed. She was always a loving, caring, and supportive mother, encouraging her daughter to do what she believed was right.

In 1953, they were able to get visas to come to the United States and try their fortunes here. They settled in Brooklyn, where Jacob worked as a dress cutter, and Edith began to work in cosmetics.

When Vivian finished high school, they came to Los Angeles, and Edith continued to work in cosmetics sales with department stores here, till she retired in 1970.

Edith was a world-wise woman, always well read, forming strong opinions on the basis of her reading and self-learning. To those who got to know her, she was lively, outgoing, friendly.

When Vivian married Lou Versace, who had two sons of his own, she gained a set of grandsons, Marco and Nikko. Marco and Nikko both speak German, and whenever they would come for a visit, she had an opportunity to speak fluently in her native German.

Her health deteriorated in these last years, but the loyalty that Edith and Jacob had developed over the years grew stronger. Jacob took care of her in the last years-- she was worried for him that he was straining himself for her, and his prayer was to live long enough to be able to care for her. Jacob is still here with

us, having himself just recovered from surgery, but indeed he was able to look after her to the end.

4) Alfred Sigfried Muenzer 1992

He was born in Brandenburg, Germany, 88 years ago, son of Louis and Bertha.

He married his beloved "trudchen", Gertrude, in 1929. They spent the next 63 years together, a true achievement in our day.

They set up household in Leipzig, where he managed sales in a department store - all fine and good, and a good future awaited them, till Hitler came to power, and destroyed Jewish life in Germany and Europe. Alfred was devoted and dedicated to his wife, and to their daughter, Ingrid Dorthy Lerman, and he sacrificed all to save the family. He succeeded in getting them out, almost in the last minute, to the Dominican Republic. Irony that they were befriended there by a couple who were members of my previous congregation, John and Katie Steiber.

By 1946, they settled in LA. He had to work hard, even here, and had to overcome stereotype of Jew. He was the first Jew ever hired by Wilson Sporting Goods, and he managed their warehouse.

He gave of himself, in the last years, as a volunteer at Cedars-Sinai for 10 years.

He was overall a wonderful man, a true mensch, to be sorely missed by his family. He was, in his life, true to himself, and true to those around him.

5) Sylvan Levy - 1994 husband of Erna Levy

Sylvan was born in the beginning year of this century, over 93 years ago, in a small town, Niederkirchen, in Germany, near the French border.

This was a small, tight knit Jewish community of merchants and cattle traders where everyone knew everyone else.

At 14 he set out on his own to the nearest large city to study violin and shorthand and later enjoyed violin playing with a local civic opera.

He began work as a sales representative for manufacturers and. In 1933, he married his wife, Erna, with whom he spent 60 years of love, until her passing just last year.

Hitler's rise drove them to southern France, and the village of Saarguemines, they were able to hide their daughter, Josie in a convent and were helped by the villagers to survive the Holocaust.

In 1947, they came to the US, and settled immediately in Los Angeles, where Erna's brother had settled before them. Leo Felsenthal, together with his wife, Irma, took them under their wings in these first years, for which they were ever grateful.

They had their second child, Mark, in this country as they began life anew with a variety of jobs and businesses. Finally, Sylvan found work as a chemist's assistant and buyer for the manufacturer, where he worked with his characteristic diligence and meticulousness.

He was very proud of his children as they matured and succeeded in college. Josie became a school psychologist and Mark taught art in high school.

He took much pride in his son-in-law as well, Ed Martin, a lawyer, and doted on his grandson, Geoffrey.

Indeed, his last special family "simha" was the graduation of his beloved grandson from Lewis and Clark University, in Portland, Oregon, an event which he celebrated this weekend with his family, and for which he declared "I'm so lucky".

He kept himself in good health and condition, and when he finally retired at 72, his associates were surprised because they thought he was ten years younger.

As I mentioned in the words of Rabbi Heschel, retirement was not a closing of doors, but an opening of new avenues for both Sylvan and Erna.

He served as a volunteer for over 12 years in the pharmacy at Cedars Sinai and was honored as their most veteran volunteer. He had always taken an active lead in organizing the tenants of the building in which he lived, as well.

Erna had served as secretary for a small congregation in Huntington Park, and with his retirement, they moved to our area and took active part in Hollywood Temple Beth El. They were very excited about it and the strong Jewish community they were in.

It was only upon their retirement that Sylvan and Erna were able to truly begin to enjoy life-- Opera, travel to Europe and Israel. They were always tremendously attached to each other==she cared for him with great and deep loyalty, and he appreciated her for all she had done.

He kept his mind at work, and read actively- Just last month, he finished Schindler's List.

The two were an exceptionally caring pair- He and Erna devoted much time and effort to looking after his sister, Augusta Winic, and his cousin, Carolina Nachman, who had developed Alzheimer's. He wanted especially to show his gratitude to Carolina, for she had sheltered his aunt in the concentration camp at Terezin--this was the same aunt who had raised him when his mother had died.

The loss of Erna was a terrible blow for him, yet he realized that now, his family depended on him, as much as he had thought it depended on her. Every Shabbat he would go to his daughter and ask what to bring for dinner. He kept his home spotless, kept careful track of all his accounts, and carried himself with extra dignity and grace. He was, to the very last, man of sweetness, a delight to his family and friends.