

DEZEMBER 7TH, 2012

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A Tribute to Frank A. Harris

Almost nine decades of *Franzela*, at least 35 years of the Nuremberg-Fürth Survivors Group - and many more to come for both of them

Among Frank's many achievements regarding the Nuremberg-Fürth community and its individual members the creation of the Nuremberg-Fürth Newsletter (NFXML) is the one that certainly soars far into the future because its issues preserve the biographies of hundreds of people for generations to come. By his gentle persistence he made them put their stories on paper and share their lives with others.

To give proof to the claim that with the NFXML the energetic philanthropist, untiring traveler, canny organizer, devoted friend, spirited correspondent and irresistible schmoozer erected his own monument, I compiled five autobiographical accounts from the first edition of the NFXML. These walks of life are as exemplary for the generation of forced emigrants as they are very specific and therefore compelling to read. The input of them and many more contributors to the NFXML eternalized their common history that originated in the Franconian twin cities and the fame of its publisher and editor.

Nuremberg, May 2012

Gerhard Jochem

Frederick E. Bergmann (UK, Canada, USA)

Not-so-vital statistics!

1916: Born as second child (after sister Ellen) to Theodor and Margarete Bergmann, officially named Ernst Friedrich, but called *Friedel*. Place of birth: *Nathanstift* in Fürth.

1922: I got a *reward* of RM [Reichsmark] 100 for having a tooth pulled. Little did I know about inflation at that time!

1923 - 1927: Entered *Privatkabenschule* [private boy school] *Heckmann*, Nürnberger Straße in Fürth, where I was for four years. I remember having had a book with monthly tuition which at one time went up into the trillions of marks.

1927 - 1933: *Realschule* [junior high school] in Fürth am Frauenplatz for six years.

1929: Bar Mitzvah.

1933 - 1936: Finished *Realschule* and started as *Lehrling* [apprentice] at Eisenmann & Co., toy export and wholesale.

1936 - 1939: Having finished apprenticeship, worked in the same firm as *kaufmännischer Angestellter* [clerk].

1937: Invited by a former school friend to Paris - where I was urgently asked to speed up emigration.

1939: 31st July left Germany on a transit visa to England; my travel funds were about \$ 2.50 or so - the ten marks allowed; no English funds were available. After a short stay in London I went to Lancing, Sussex, where my sister was employed and worked there as a waiter in a small hotel. Was classified C by the tribunal, after war broke out.

1940 - 1942: May 10th - two gentlemen from the local police came and apologized for having to pick me up - *don't worry, it's only temporary!* Via Chichester, Sussex I landed up in Huyton near Liverpool - a newly built project that had been taken over as internment camp. Later on I got -

somehow by accident - into a transport on the SS Ettrick and landed about a week or ten days later in Quebec, Canada. There followed three internment camps: Monteith, Ontario, which seemed miles from nowhere, but had a huge building with very modern kitchen facilities. Then Fredericton (near there at least) New Brunswick, where we worked cutting trees - and where I was introduced to the Saturday afternoon broadcasts of the Metropolitan Opera. Quite a job to get a dental or other appointment for Saturday morning so that one would not have to work Saturday afternoon and could listen to the Met. Third camp was near (or almost in) Sherbrooke, Quebec - by this time we were recognized as *refugees* rather than as *civilian internees* and had (aside from freedom) quite a few privileges. I did not go back to England for the Pioneer Corps but waited till October 1942.

1942 - 1944: Worked for a fruit wholesale firm in Montreal - a big surprise was my first occupation *cashier* (for which in Germany one had to be in a firm for ever so many years - here I was cashier on the very first day).

1943: Volunteered for the Canadian Reserve Army (the regular army would not take people like me). After six weeks I - and others - were discharged retroactive to the day of enlistment.

1944 - 1946: Refugees were finally allowed to join the army and with five others we were the first ex-German volunteers. It created quite a problem as they had to make rules. It took after basic and advanced training many visits to the Montreal Headquarters before they consented to let us go overseas. This happened in April 1945 - and by the time we landed in Grenock, Scotland, the war had progressed enough that we did not have to black out the railway cars at night. Several camps in Sussex - where I met my sister who had meantime become a Staff Sergeant in the English ATS [Auxiliary Territorial Service].

About July 1945 I was assigned to the *Third Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa* and sent to Holland and then to Germany. We were stationed in Esterwegen (near Oldenburg) and in charge of a camp for war criminals and security suspects. Strangely enough I was not used as interpreter, but as office clerk (the English provided the interpreters). I advanced to corporal. At that time I also became - under the regulations - a Canadian citizen - oddly enough (and I am sure by coincidence) on the very date that I entered Germany - although I only was advised months later.

1946 - 1947: Return to Canada, where - even though I was a Canadian citizen - I had to formally immigrate (my release from internment never was a real immigration, it seems). I worked for a year in Hamilton, Ontario, for another refugee in a footwear wholesale firm. I was *the office* (one man) shipping department and everything else - except the boss!

1947: Immigration to the US - My quota number long having come due I did not have any waiting period. My first job was with an American real estate firm whose bookkeeping department was completely refugee.

1951: Got married to Eva, nee Reiche (from Berlin); later on it turned out that both her parents knew my mother's family before my mother had married! I changed jobs for another real estate firm, with whom I was for 19 years.

1953: Our son Peter was born - prematurely and almost in the middle of a performance of *Tannhäuser* at the Metropolitan Opera. We never saw or heard act 3 of the opera! US citizenship.

1970: I changed back to the first firm, where I had been in 1947 and am still with this firm as a bookkeeper, in charge of the computerization.

Irma Mirjam Kahan, nee Schüftan (Israel)

In 1933 I had to stop my studies of medicine in Erlangen because of *Arierparagraph*. My father was the owner of the *Astoria-Lichtspiele*, Ludwigstraße, we lived in the *Marmorecke* and later in Further Straße 14 [in Nuremberg]. 1934 I was the secretary of the Zionist Organization Nürnberg-Fürth, Zuführstraße. Then I got a certificate for Palestine where I arrived in May 1934. I was sent to the Agricultural School for Girls in Nahalal (Wizo). After some months of hard work and high summer heat I had to leave the school because I got a so-called *training heart* and was not allowed to do any physical work. I had no money and nowhere to go. The only thing I could do was to marry the wrong man, who was ready to marry me in spite of my illness. He was of a very famous and one of the best families of Frankfurt. But he was a *Bohemien*, an artist, a painter. When my second daughter was ten months old, the eldest 2 ½ years, I left him and had to care for my girls all by myself. I made the household for two bachelors and two old ladies, that means I had to do five households (including mine). When the girls were older I changed my jobs and worked in a private bridge club, mostly till after midnight, in order to be with my girls in the day-time. By the way, I don't play cards. I had to stop because I had an operation on my feet. After the operation I was allowed to work only for a few hours. So I worked as a waitress in a restaurant, where I met my husband on the fourth day. This was at the end of 1944. In the beginning of 1944 the *Irgun Zwai Leumi* [Jewish guerilla organization] had started the independence war against the mandatory rule in *Erez Israel*. My husband was a staff officer and a close friend of Mr. Begin, the commander of the *Irgun* and because of this he was on the *most wanted* list (no. 5) of the British police. After some weeks we decided to marry. We took a flat and in the so-called 4th room of our flat were the headquarters of the *Irgun* and the reception room of Mr. Begin [...]. The flat was rented under the name of my previous husband and Mr. Begin carried a forged mandatory passport of Jona Konigshofer of Fürth. These were very respectable names, we all looked very respectable, so even during the British searches nobody had the slightest idea or suspicion that we have something to do with the illegal underground movement. Our house was in the nearest neighborhood of the British police force headquarters, because my husband believed that the darkest place is under a burning lamp. The cash of the *Irgun* was under our care, but I had not enough money to pay my debts (grocery). We had a normal family life and an open house for everyone. Even my girls, my brother, our best friends, the neighbors didn't know what was going on in our flat, in reality. Therefore the most difficult problem for me was the internal traffic in order to assure Mr. Begin's security. In 1947 my husband was sent to Europe as a member of the staff for operations outside of *Erez Israel* and during the defense war with the Arabs I was alone with my girls (and very little money). After the establishment of the state my husband returned under his right name and we got our common daughter. From then on my husband was a government official in Jerusalem, then a journalist and now he is working in the economic and social research bureau of the World Zionist Organization [...]. All these years I have been a professional companion of my husband with no ambitions of my own. I am a professional mother and grandmother, a *Babushka*, how the grandmother is called in Russia.

Al Meinhardt (USA)

Born July 16, 1925 in Nürnberg. It might be of interest that my Bar Mitzvah, on July 23, 1938 was the last one in the *Hauptsynagoge* in Nürnberg. It was together with a Max Fleischmann (not my cousin) who had a deaf sister. As far as I know, he and his family never got out of Germany. At that time, [rabbi] Dr. Andorn, cantors Kaufmann and Scheuermann were still present. Several

days after my Bar Mitzvah, the synagogue was torn down brick by brick. This was several months before the *Kristallnacht*.

My parents, my grandmother and I arrived in the United States on December 5, 1939. My Dad's only job was at the Beth Israel Hospital in Newark, New Jersey. That was why we settled in New Jersey. I graduated from high school in January of 1942. After that I worked for the local newspaper and attended college at night.

I became a G.I. on March 15, 1944 and became an American citizen in Spartanburg, S.C. I was sent to Europe, served with the Infantry (Bronze Star) and Military Government. From May 1945 until February 1946 I was, as part of Military Government, stationed, of all places, in Fürth. Our offices were in the *Rathaus* [city hall] and we were billeted in the villa of one of Germany's best known Industrialists in Dambach. I was able to help the few returning peoples from Nürnberg and Fürth and was instrumental in re-establishing the small Jewish community in Fürth. While I was there, we rededicated the chapel in the *Waisenhaus* [orphanage] which is still in use.

After my discharge from the Army on March 18, 1946, I entered into my Dad's business. I am the sole owner of this business today. I am in the small leather goods business and import quite a bit from the Far East.

I remained a bachelor until I was 37. On September 15, 1962 I married my wife, Evi. Evi was born in Vienna, immigrated to Chile at the age of 2 and then to the United States. On October 9, 1964 our only child, our son Edward, was born [...].

We are part and parcel of the *American community*. We are both active in our temple, Temple B'Nai Abraham in Livingston, New Jersey, where I have the honor of serving as an officer [...].

However, I am very grateful for my past and proud of my heritage. I support the Leo Baeck Institute and the American Federation of Jews from Central Europe. I find it very easy to be an immigrant and American at the same time.

Stephanie Orfali, nee Braun (Israel, Brazil, USA)

The first phase of my life I spent in Nürnberg, then studied at the universities in Erlangen and Vienna. I lived in Palestine in the thirties and forties. I married a Catholic Armenian, Jacob Orfali. I lived between two worlds, not only socially but physically as well, because our house was between the Jewish and the Arab sector of Jerusalem, and we lived at the time of the partition within the British military camp that separated the Jewish and Arab sectors of Jerusalem, with Jacob using the gate that led to the Old City and me using the gate that led to Jewish Jerusalem. It became a very unsafe place with bullets whizzing near our heads and bombs shattering our windows and carrying off our roof tiles. So, Jacob took us to his aunt in the St. Joseph's Convent in Bethlehem. We, in 1948, included 3 children.

After the War of Independence we were in Arab territory and for a year I was not able to leave the convent. When things had settled down, we took a house in Bethlehem. Jacob worked first as teacher in the Freres College in Jerusalem, later for his old firm, the Socony Vacuum Oil Company in Damascus, while I stayed with the children in Bethlehem where I found many friends, members of mixed marriages, Armenians and Christian Arabs. At the age of 39, I got pregnant again. The doctor did not believe me that I was pregnant. He said it was the change. However, the *change* began to kick in due time and became Johnny. I called Johnny the great luxury of our lives, something we definitely did not need, but that did enrich our existence.

When Johnny was half a year old, we joined Jacob in Beirut, Lebanon. We stayed there only 3 months. We had enough of the Middle East, and since Brazil was the country for which we got our immigration papers first, we went to Brazil, without knowledge of language or people, with nearly no money and four small children. The Brazilian years were extremely hard, extremely colorful, crammed full with tragic and happy experiences. Our children developed and it came a time when we realized that we could not give them an adequate education in Sao Paulo. By then immigration laws to the USA had changed. It was Jake's idea to leave Brazil. I dreaded the change. We spent three glorious weeks on a cargo ship as pampered passengers with the most delightful sightseeing trips on the way and arrived in New Orleans on March 12, 1957. We went from there to Chicago to meet Jake's aunt who had sponsored us. Jacob found work at Abbots in North Chicago and we moved to nearby Zion, Illinois, where we continue to live. Jake lost his job during the recession of 1958. Jacob had many jobs, separated by long periods of unemployment. Then he became a rural mail carrier, a long step from the supervisory jobs he had in Jerusalem, Damascus, Beirut and Sao Paulo, but at least he had job security. I worked at first in a factory sewing up curtains, went to school in the evenings, then, when I was laid off, I studied full-time and in 1960 I began teaching. I taught 5th grade in a Catholic school, then 6th grade in a public school, later French and German in high school. After I got my M.A. in guidance, I worked as counselor and French teacher at Holy Child High School in Waukegan.

Lisl Weinberg, nee Halberstadt (Netherlands, USA)

Born in 1915, I attended *Findel-Volksschule* [in Nuremberg] for three years, then went for seven years to the *Lyzeum der Englischen Fräulein* [Catholic high school for girls], Tafelhofstraße, as a Jewish extern (there were two more Jewish girls in my class), continued my schooling in the *Mädchen-Realgymnasium Findelgasse*, where I made the *Abitur* [high school degree] as the only Jew left at the whole school - in 1934. For the next two years I attended the *Israelitische Lehrerbildungsanstalt* in Würzburg, which had formed an experimental *Übergangskurs* of two years to accommodate the sudden great need for Jewish teachers for Jewish schools. Our class consisted of 13 boys and 13 girls, all with *Abitur* and no way to go. There I met my (later) husband Werner and we both graduated in 1936 [...]. After half a year as teacher of Jewish subjects at the *Jüdische Frauenschule* in Wolfratshausen near Munich I became one of the two teachers at the newly founded *Jüdische Volksschule* in Pforzheim (Baden). I taught the 3 upper classes (also in English; when I later came to USA, I met some of my former students again, only in the meantime their English was better than mine!) In the summer of 1938 I got engaged and in the fall I took a position at the *Jüdische Volksschule* in Hanover where Werner had been teaching for some time. November 9, 1938 we sat huddled in Werner's room, waiting ... In December of that year we got married under the burnt chuppah in the school building ... In March of the following year we emigrated to Holland, where we both worked for the *Hachsharah* [Zionist emigration agency], teaching Hebrew, other Jewish subjects and were *house-parents* of a *Beth Halutz* [emigrants' home]. In May 1940, while the hospital of our place was evacuated and the bombs fell around us, our oldest daughter Hanna was born (she died 2 ½ years later of meningitis). In 1941, our 2nd daughter Susie was born. In 1943 we gave her away to a wonderful Dutch family (who lives now also in USA and with whom we are still in contact) to hide her, and on Erev Rosh Hashonah 1943 we were picked up in one of the *Razzias* in Amsterdam where all Jews were crowded into two neighborhoods. Westerbork (Werner was sick with jaundice all the time we were there), then in January 1944 we came to Bergen-Belsen. It was a converted army camp and only a large group

of Greek Jews was there then. From then on for the following 16 months we were there to see it become all that is now known about it. End of April 1945 we were put on a transport to the east but after 2 weeks on a cattle train between the advancing fronts and under attacks by American dive bombers, the train was liberated in the neighborhood of Frankfurt / Oder by the Russians. Werner was sick with spotted fever (*Flecktyphus*). After 2 months behind the Iron Curtain, which it became almost immediately, we were repatriated to the West. After another week in 2 separate camps in Holland at our arrival there (this time as *Germans*) we returned to our hometown where we got a house, furniture, and clothing of former Dutch Nazis ... Werner worked again for the *Hachsharah* during the next 2 ½ years when we decided to emigrate to USA.

April 1948 we arrived in New York where we stayed for the next 5 months, taking refresher courses in English and education. September 1948 Werner and I started our *new life* as principal respectively teacher at the newly reestablished Hebrew school in Grand Rapids. Werner was also in charge of the youth work and went to college in the evenings. There followed positions in Louisville, Ky.; Albany, N.Y.; Dayton, Ohio. In Louisville Werner has gotten his M.A. So, when accepting the position in Dayton, one of the conditions was one free day per week to continue his studies at the HUC towards a doctoral degree. In 1959 he quit his job, we moved to Cincinnati, and (with help of the German restitution) we lived for the following two years on his fellowship [...]. Werner got his Ph.D. in 1961 and was subsequently engaged as professor at the HUC. We had finally found our niche, no more moving, no more tearing away from newly found friendships!

