

I want to thank the organizers of this special day for giving me the opportunity to speak about my Jewish ancestors. A special thank to Merle for the warm welcome.

I will first talk about the my father and what occurred to him during World War Two, before talking about his ancestors.

I will start by showing you my birth certificate, issued by the German embassy in Athens, Greece. According to this, I was born on June 11, 1943, that is, exactly 70 years ago today. But please, do not congratulate me for my birthday. Let me explain:

Here you have on the left, my high school leaving certificate, and on the right, my doctoral certificate.

On my high school leaving certificate, my birthday is the 27th of May, 1943.

And this is my real birthday.

What happened?

The fact is that when I was born, my parents hid me from the German occupiers, pretending that my mother was pregnant. I will come back to this.

Of my four grandparents, only my paternal grandfather, Josef Schwab, was Jewish, so I am only a quarter Jewish, if you like. My paternal grandmother Marie nee Köglmaier was a Catholic from Bavaria. My mother was Greek, but my great-grandmother on the maternal line was French Protestant. I know a lot of people of mixed heritage, but most of the time the mixing happened here in the New World. For a European-born, this is rather rare.

I was born in Athens, Greece. When I was a child, I was immersed in a large extended Greek family. However, about my father's family I knew very little. At the dinner table, my father would tell a few anecdotes about his childhood in Berlin, but that was all. The only relative that I knew was my father's first cousin Hans.

My grandfather, after marrying a catholic, Marie Köglmaier, abandoned his Jewish faith, On my father's birth record, my grandfather is mentioned as of Mosaic religion.

But my grandfather never told his children that he was born a Jew. My father did not learn about his Jewish roots until 1933, when the infamous "Law for the renewal of the German Civil Service" came into effect. According to this law, all civil servants had to prove their Aryan decent. If one of the parents or the grandparents were Jews, they were forced to retire. At the time, my father was a professor at the University of Munich, and professors of German universities are normally employed by the state. When the authorities asked for my father's four grandparents, he wrote to my grandfather for his birth certificate. My grandfather had to admit the truth: there was no such thing as an Ariernachweis for my father.

Nevertheless, he managed to remain at the University. Hindenburg, who was president of the German Reich until his death in 1934, convinced Hitler to grant an exemption from this law for those who had proven their loyalty to Germany by fighting at the First War. My father was one of them. He was also not affected by the Nuremberg laws of 1935, because he was a half-Jew with only two Jewish grandparents. But in 1938, my father's academic licence was finally revoked.

This is where my mother came into play. She had been in Munich as a student, where she did experimental work for her PhD under the supervision of my father.

It happened that in that year, 1938, a new research institute was established in Greece. My mother could make the connection, and so my father became one of the lead researchers and could continue his work.

Soon afterwards, my parents got married.

But in 1941, the Germans attacked Greece. My father, who was considered an enemy alien (he was German), was interned. He could not leave the country to escape from the Nazis. When the Germans captured Athens and the swastika was flying over the Acropolis, my father was released. But he had to keep a low profile. For the Greeks, he was still a German, but for the occupier, he was a half-Jew and therefore in danger. In June 1943, all German citizens were ordered by the Germans to return to Germany. My father managed stay because he brought up as a excuse that my mother was pregnant with me. My birth was registered after the transport to Germany had left Greece on June 13.

Fortunately for him - and for me - my father was protected by a courageous official of the German Embassy in Athens. His name was Mr. Lüders (I don't even know what his first name was). I show you here a document that my father wrote after the war to exonerate Mr. Lüders. I quote:

"By his courageous deed Mr. Lüders not only saved me and my family but he prevented the Nazi regime to put in practice its racial programme on my person."

My father's brother Josef was not so lucky. In 1944, all half-Jews were recruited into special labour camps under the banner of the Organisation Todt. My uncle was in a camp in Germany and died under mysterious circumstances one day before the Americans moved into town in 1945.

We stayed in Athens until 1950 when my father became a full professor of Physical Chemistry at the University of Munich.

My father died in 1984, and the next year my wife and I moved to Montreal with our two children. It is then that I started asking questions to myself. But it was not until 2001 that I started my research in earnest.

I wrote to the municipal archives of Würzburg, where my grandfather had lived as a teenager. Soon I got a letter from the archivist. I was informed that my great-grandfather was born in the town of Rimpar, about 10 km north of Würzburg. On one of my trips to Germany I visited the Bavarian State Archives in Würzburg which is housed in the residence of the prince bishop.

There I found a copy of the Rimpar Jewish vital records, which was made from a microfilm of the originals who were photographed by the Nazis during the war. And here I found the names of all my Schwab ancestors.

My great-grandfather Bernhard Schwab was the third child of Joseph Schwab, and the second child of Nanny nee Weinschenk. Joseph was the son of Löw, so, Löw was my great-great-grandfather. This is the death record of Löw Schwab, As you can see, he died in 1844 at age 86. This means that he was born in 1757 or 1758. He was the first of my ancestor to bear the surname Schwab, which he

adopted in 1917 when all Jews in Bavaria had to take a permanent surname. This is as far back as I can trace my Schwab ancestors.

While in Würzburg, I also visited the Jewish cemetery. There I found the grave of my great-grandfather Bernhard. I also found the tombstone for his mother Nanny Weinschenk. She was known by the Yiddish name of Knendl.

Bernhard married a young widow, Jeanette Scheid from the town of Ermetzhofen, about 50 kilometres south of Würzburg. Jeanette gave birth to a boy, Max. She died in 1863 at age 25 after one and a half year of marriage. Bernhard married again in the same year my great-grandmother, Justine nee Rosenfeld. Justine had four boys, one died in infancy. She died at age 26. My great-grandfather was now a double widower. His two wives are buried side by side in the Jewish cemetery of Ermetzhofen. I show you the two headstones: The broken columns are symbols of a life that ended too early.

Jeanette obtained an acrostic poem, where each line starts with a letter of her Yiddish name, Shprintzla. I show you also the western Side of the stone, where there is also an acrostic poem in German, with the name Jeanetta.

On Justine's headstone you can read her Hebrew name Sarah. She is the daughter of Aaron Rosenfeld, and the wife of Josef Schwab. There is also a poem on the German side, although this one is not acrostic.

The names of Justine's ancestors are shown on the death record of her father, Aaron Rosenfeld. I obtained this record directly from the city of Ansbach. It is a civil record. Civil registration started in Bavaria in 1876, and at that date the Jewish vital records were no longer officially kept. From this record I found that the ancestral town of the Rosenfelds was Leutershausen. Aaron's wife was Jette nee Guggenheimer, and his parents were Sussmann Rosenfeld and Rosalie nee Goldschmidt. After his wife's death, Bernhard took his four sons and moved to Würzburg, where his mother was living. He died in 1887 at age 51, four months after his mother.

In the meantime, I have found other living descendants of Aaron, which are my third cousins, and I have kept loose contacts with them.

After a decade of research, I now am happy to know at least something about my Jewish ancestors.