

GRÖSCHLERHAUS

The day had finally arrived. My sister and I were taking our families to Jever in Friesland, north Germany where our father originated from.

Fritz Groschler was born in May 1926 to Hedwig and Julius and had an older brother named Hans. By all accounts they had a good life until the late 1930s. Then under Nazi occupation came the events of Kristallnacht "The night of breaking glass", when all the synagogues in Germany were set on fire. His father had gone to the burning synagogue to try to help, been arrested by the Nazis, taken to "Bergen Belsen" then miraculously let go. He obviously realised the urgency to get the boys out and selflessly took them to Hamburg where they boarded the Kindertransport to come to England and safety. Dad could never understand why his mother didn't accompany them to the station, he read in a book in later years she was too sad to go.

Dad was never bitter and remembered their journey as an adventure, he didn't speak often about what happened but when he did we listened. He remembered the Nazis coming to the house and throwing their furniture out of the windows. Shops with signs saying NO DOGS ALLOWED, NO JEWS ALLOWED In that order! But he also had good memories of a lovely childhood. He was 12 when they left and his brother 15, they came with nothing but a few pictures. They were taken to Dovercourt in Leeds where a Rabbi taught them English, eventually they were given British naturalization. Dad would laugh when he talked of the rabbi who spoke in "broken biscuits" saying to him "now you are a Britisher". He had his Barmitzvah in a shrunken suit attended by his kind cousin Trudie. How sad his parents must have been to miss that most important day. He took various jobs to survive, selling ice cream outside a cemetery, glass collecting, on a Hoffman press and in a factory where he had half his thumb sliced off. When he was 18 he moved to London, changed his name to Frank Gale and joined the British army in the hope that he could go back to Germany and find his parents. He guarded "Hess" in Spandau.

Then on the top of a London bus on his way to the Astoria Ballroom he met my beautiful mum. They married in 1951 and moved to Northampton where they set up their business "Florella Modes" selling outsize ladies clothes. It began with a market stall, then a shop in Abington Square, a move to Horsemarket then finally around the corner to Gold Street. They also opened another shop in Kettering.

In 1973 we detoured through Jever on our way back from Italy, within hours dad had been approached and asked if he was a son of the Groschler family, someone asked to see him and he was told his mother was still alive three months before war ended. It was surreal, they gave dad the keys to the Jewish cemetery and we went to find his grandfather Simon Groschler's grave. We didn't stay long in Jever at that time, it seemed aesthetically pleasing but uncomfortably ugly underneath.

Years passed and he found out through books the horrific demise of his parents. They had stayed in Jever trying to help people escape when their money ran out they were taken to Thereisenstadt and eventually Auschwitz where they were murdered in 1944.

In 1984 Dad received a letter from a teacher and his students in Jever. They had learned of the atrocities of the Jewish population from their home town and were shocked and horrified. They wanted to invite all the survivors back for a reunion. My sister and I went too as we said "they are not going to get the ones they missed last time".

They flew in from all over the world. The teacher and historian Hartmut Peters and the students were amazing. Dad was reunited with friends he had not seen since childhood, these people had not known if he was dead or alive! We visited places with wonderful memories and they held a civic reception in the "Schloss" (the castle) in our honour. The pastor Volke invited us for Friday night dinner in his home attended by a rabbi, emotions ran high this was the first time Shabbat candles were lit and Jewish prayers had been said in Jever since the war. On Saturday the church service was taken by the pastor a Catholic priest and the rabbi, together we all said The

Lord's Prayer. It was an amazing week, we went anti-German and left with life-long friendships.

So here we are 30 years later returning on behalf of our late parents. Again they have flown in from all over the world 2nd, 3rd and 4th cousins, we all meet at the Schloss where we are greeted by Hartmut Peters and his team. Dinner is served followed by a slide show of "The Jews of Jever". Amazing to see pictures of Dad and his family in happy times and learn more information about our grandfather Julius Gröschler. Julius and his brother Hermann were prominent businessmen in the town, heavily involved in politics and the Jewish Community. They had two large houses and a factory overlooking the Schloss. All of this was taken from them, their living and their lives.

The next morning we met under the glockenspiel and were taken on a tour. We saw the Holocaust Memorial which is a pile of books in bronze, each one with the name of a victim, our grandparents names among them. Then to the site of our father's house and on to the Castle where a civic reception was held in our honour, in honour of the Gröschlers. Local dignitaries, the Mayor and our cousins all spoke and musical tributes were played. We then walked through the cobbled streets to the site where the Synagogue once stood, where the "Gröschlerhaus now stands. I could have burst with pride as they unveiled the sign " Gröschlerhaus" their name back in Jever for all to see. My sister and I lit a Yarzheit candle in their memory and placed it under a plaque on a piece of wall salvaged from the Synagogue, so poignant that the remaining walls and cellar of the Synagogue now stand inside the Gröschlerhaus. It is a museum downstairs and eventually will be a place of contemplation and discussion upstairs, potentially for students from all over Germany and hopefully the world.

Hartmut Peters and the working group the "Arbeitskreis" have worked tirelessly to make this happen, for which we will be eternally grateful. There is still work to be done and a grand opening to look forward to. There is a picture of my grandfather outside and the Mezuzah from my parents' house will go on the front door.

Lori Gale-Rumens



*Frank's daughters, Joanne and Lori,
outside the Gröschlerhaus*



The Gröschlerhaus



*Young family members in front of the
memorial*