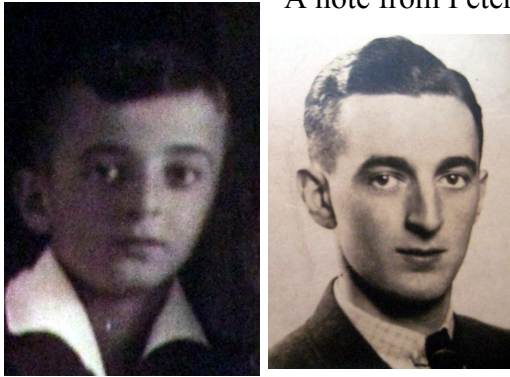


A note from Peter Benjamin 2008

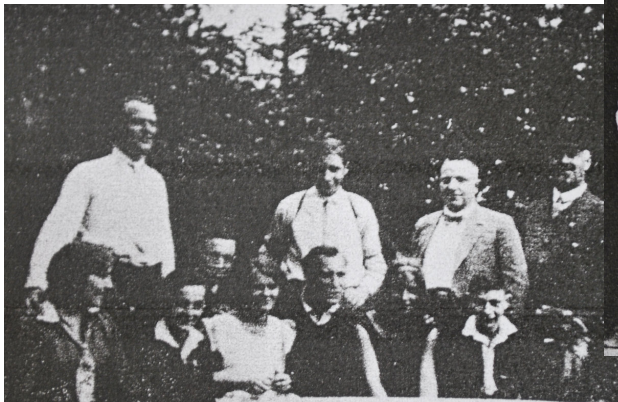


Alfred Benjamin—the Jew to returned to his home town, Bochum after the war—is 89, going on to 90. My blood chilled when he told me he'd survived three years in Auschwitz.

On Kristallnacht, 11/08/1938, the day of which my parents and I were fortunate enough to have left Germany, Alfred caught a train from Bochum to Berlin, and thus was not caught that night.

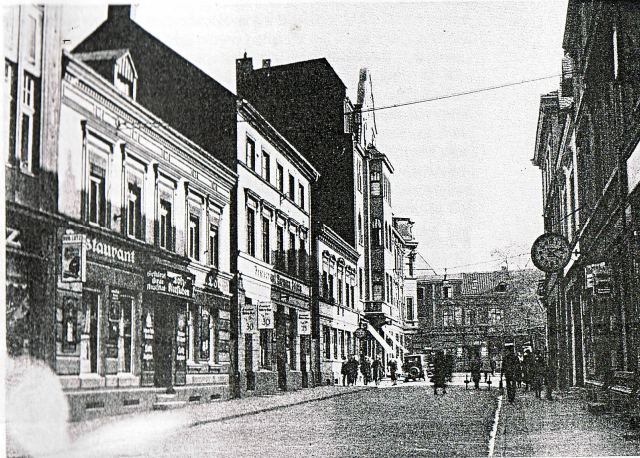


As a child albert's family spent holidays in Essen. Albert joined a sports club where most of his friends were Christians. He is the second from the left in the front row in the photo of his riding club (LEFT PHOTO and



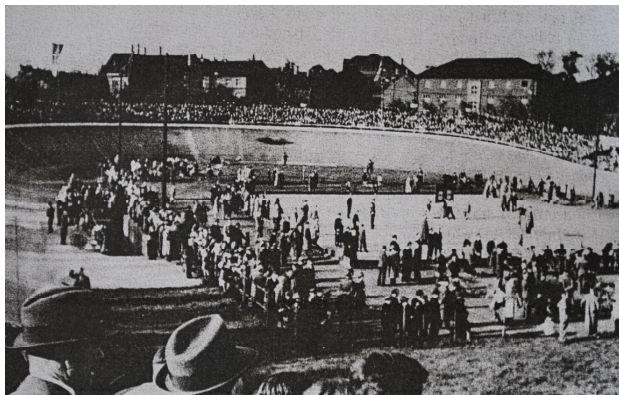
picture.

second from the right in the right



Konegstrasse Bochum. Alfred was born here.

The family was in the horse butcher business and made a variety of



The Bochum Velodrome where bikes raced. During the Nazi times he could not remain a member of the club.

Albert worked in a nearby town as a waiter and chauffeur. He had been in Bochum, living with his parents for about the week prior to Kristallnacht, November 8, 1938. The next morning he saw Rector Lux, the rector of the school, on the street and Rector Lux told Albert to not go home. Albert used to go skating with Hildegard Lux, the rector's daughter. That night at midnight he and Hildegard went to the train station in Bochum. She bought a ticket to Berlin. He bought a platform ticket. On the platform they swapped tickets and he went to Berlin. She left the station. There were controllers on the train. He hid.

He later learned that his father and one of his brothers were taken to a concentration camp that night. His other brother was in Denmark in a Kibbutz and was able to emigrate to Palestine. His parents had not considered emigrating. His father had served in the First World War and his sergeant lived nearby. He had said Schorsch (George), his father had been called Schorsch when he was a soldier-- His sergeant told him he didn't need to go away. "You were in the war. You were in my company. Come to me (if there's a problem.)" So his father didn't think he needed to leave Germany.

Berlin there was a family Bonn, relatives of his half-brother. They had an electro shop a lamp shade shop where he worked as a welder. Behind the shop was a small room. When the family could no longer keep the shop because they were Jews, Alfred went to work at a non Jewish business that did the same thing. They also were a food delivery company. He worked as an electric welder. The owner wrote him a letter on national socialist stationery that gave him a certificate to drive a truck in Berlin. Jews were not allowed to drive. The shop had 10 to 15 workers 2 of whom were Jews.



Dec 14, 1942 a few months before he was deported to Auschwitz, there was news that if you were married you could get a visa to Paraguay. Albert married Edith Salomon, a waitress at a restaurant where Jews could go. They paid money and got a visa. Alfred went to the Paraguay consulate and learned his visa was a forgery.

Late February or early March 1943 Alfred was arrested by the Berlin police. He was 23 and lived with his wife in Berlin. They had a small room that was previously a shop. They were loaded onto a truck and could only bring along basic needs. They were taken to a synagogue that was a collection center. Three to four days later they were loaded into a cattle wagon. They didn't know where they were going. Rumors talked about Palestine or Jewish ghettos in Poland. They were deported to a concentration camp.

They had no idea what Auschwitz was. "After we arrived in Auschwitz we were standing on a ramp. We heard "out! Out! Get started. Women right. Men left. Who is an electrician?"

I raised my hand. I had learned the electrical craft in Berlin. I was brought to the Buna-Werk in Auschwitz. So Alfred was taken to the labor camp where he survived for the duration of the war. He never saw his wife Edith again, and he thinks she was killed. As an electrician Alfred received more than the minimal bread allotted every morning, but not much. Because he was an electrician he was given leather shoes (to prevent shocks). The other prisoners wore wooden shoes. He thinks the shoes saved him during the subsequent death march.

The three main camps were Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, and a work camp called Auschwitz III-Monowitz, or the Buna. Auschwitz I served as the administrative center, and was the site of the deaths of roughly 70,000 people, mostly ethnic [Poles](#) and [Soviet prisoners of war](#). Auschwitz II was an [extermination camp](#) or *Vernichtungslager*, the site of the deaths of at least 960,000 Jews, 75,000 Poles, and some 19,000 [Roma](#) (Gypsies). Auschwitz III-Monowitz served as a labor camp for the Buna-Werke factory of the [IG Farben](#) concern. *The selection process.*





Auschwitz in winter.

The Monowitz camp was kept open until just a week before the Russians liberators arrived. The last roll call of the three Auschwitz camps showed a total of 67,012 prisoners. The last selection took place on October 30, 1944. The next month, Heinrich



Himmler ordered the crematoria destroyed before the [Red Army](#) reached the camp. The gas chambers of Birkenau were blown up by the SS in January 1945 in an attempt to hide the German crimes from the advancing Soviet troops. The SS command sent orders on January 17, 1945 calling for the execution of all prisoners remaining in the camp, but in the chaos of the Nazi retreat the order was never carried out. On January 17, 1945, Nazi personnel started to evacuate the facility. Nearly 60,000 prisoners were forced on a [death march](#) toward a camp in [Wodzisław Śląski](#) (German: *Loslau*). Those too weak or sick to walk were left behind **photo taken in Jan 1945**

Alfred marched 50 Km, then he and a group of workers were moved by truck to a work factory. It was a machine factory and concentration camp, but when Alfred arrived it was closed and the workers were guarded by old men with tossed together uniforms.

6 weeks after they arrived, the guard said to them that the clothing store was open. “There were 6 of us in the barracks. We assumed there would be fresh striped uniforms of prisoners but there were German army uniforms. The six of us put uniforms over our prison clothes and walked out of the camp to the city.”

The Local Deutschebank had been bombed but its cellar was intact. They climbed in. The cellars of all the houses were connected. There was food. Alfred remembered sauerkraut and cucumbers.

Next door was a bakery. One of the prisoners, not a Jew, went there in his uniform. The baker said come back tomorrow. Every day they got the left over bread.