

I look out of the ancient window at the field outside my grandparents' house. The grass grows knee high and an old, broken gate swings in the gentle breeze. I am in Solingen, in Germany, visiting my grandparents over the summer. Their house is in the middle of nowhere and there is precisely nothing to do except stay in my room whilst my grandparents have gone out into the village. I leave the boring landscape and turn to flop on my bed.

It is then, whilst lying upside down across my creaky old mattress, that I see a skirting board across from my bed has come away from the wall. My interest peaked; I make the considerably short distance over to the other side of the room.

I kneel down and see that it has indeed, come loose. I go to fix it but notice the light from my window reflect off of something. I instead, pull it away from the wall and am hit by a large cloud of dust. However, behind the dust I see a small treasure chest, about the length of my forearm. It is wooden, with beautiful engravings of flowers and birds, and is kept closed by a steel padlock. I try to open it but it is locked tight. Just as things were getting exciting. But then I remember something, though a shot in the dark, I reach around my neck for the key I have carried on a chain for as long as I can remember. My grandmother had given it to me when I was little, and told me to always wear it as it was a precious family heirloom, passed down through the generations.

I put the small key in the key hole and turn it, and am surprised when I hear a soft *click*. I can't believe it, my shot in the dark hit right on target. I take the lock off and look inside. There is a bundle of papers, all tied up, on one side of the chest, and on the other a collection of trinkets. I take it over to my bed and pull out the first thing. It is a small piece of yellow fabric, in the shape of a six-pointed star with 'Jude' written on it. A Star of David, from the Holocaust when Jews had to wear these on their clothes to show that they were different from the other Germans. I know what it is from my history lessons, but why is there one in my grandparents' house? I know that my family must have been Jews in Germany during the war, but I have never been told what happened to them.

I place the star down and pull out an envelope, I see that it is still sealed, but is addressed to Herr Karl Anton Reiche. Who is that? And why didn't he open this letter? And why was it in my bedroom wall? Should I open it?

My curiosity gets the better of me and I carefully try to open the envelope. Fortunately, its extreme age means that it is very easy to do so, without ripping it. I take out a folded piece of paper, flimsy yet well preserved. I unfold it and see...

Great, it's in German. Not surprising, but slightly disappointing. If only I had listened to Grandma when she said I should become fluent. I can make out some of the words but it mostly hopeless. I can, however, read the date as being Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> of July 1942. Wow. That is old. Older than my grandparents. I realise that this letter probably belongs in some kind of museum. But what does it say?

I decide that I must know, for I surely cannot just leave this secret hidden letter, with no one to tell its story. I put the letter carefully into its envelope, and throw on my jacket and boots. I must know what it says!

I race next door to the house of Dr Emil Kronenberg who I have known, for my whole life, as the neighbour of my grandparents. I know that he can speak both English and German, so maybe he can translate it for me.

I get to his house and knock on the ebony door. A short, grey-haired, wrinkly, hunched-over old man opens the door.

“Dr Emil!” I exclaim, and hold out my hand.

“Patricia Coppel, hello!” he says with a slight German accent as he grins toothily and shakes it, “do come in, I have just made a pot of tea.”

Once we are seated at his kitchen table, each with a cup of tea in hand, I take out the letter and pass it to him. I explain how I found it, and the treasure chest, and say, “Would you be able to tell me what it says?”

To my delight, he nods and begins reading,

“My dearest great nephew, Karl,

I pray that this letter reaches you. You are a good man who may survive this dreadful war and tell my story. For it is your story also.

I was born in Solingen on 18 September 1865, the youngest son of Gustav Coppel, an honorary citizen of Solingen. After I got my doctorate in law in Erlangen, I joined my grandfather’s company: “Alexander Coppel”. Like my parents, I made exemplary efforts to improve the social well-being of the company’s staff and the general public. In particular, I saw myself as a trustee of the Coppelstift foundation, which my parents had founded in 1912. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the company in 1921, the Alexander Coppel company donated two million marks to various social causes. I never married; the people of Solingen were family enough for me.

When the newly established Volkshochschule (an adult education college) was founded in 1912, I became its first treasurer. From 1914 to 1929, I was a city councillor for the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP). Until 1933, I was a member of the supervisory board of the Solinger Spar- und Bauverein, a savings club and building society. From 1915 to 1942, I was a member of the board of the Solingen synagogue community. I was its deputy chairman for 25 years and its chairman from 1940 onwards.

Despite our services to Solingen, the Coppel family was also persecuted by the National Socialists. Sophie Coppel (1875–1951), widow of my brother Hermann Coppel, who died in 1931, emigrated to Switzerland as early as 1934, together with her son Heinz (1898–1947) and his family.

Within a six-week period in 1936, during the course of the National Socialist “Aryanization”, my brother, Carl Gustav Coppel, and I lost the Hilden branch of our company to Kronprinz AG. The main Solingen plant went to a corporation under non-Jewish management, which

included yourself. However, even you were only able to remain in the company as one of two shareholders until 1939.

As of November 1938, I was forced to use the additional first name of "Gideon". In the November pogrom of that same year, the valuable furnishings in my flat were destroyed and I was temporarily detained in the police prison. Since 1941, I have been the "authorised representative" of the synagogue community, which had been demoted to a mere "Solingen office". The "office" received its instructions from the district office of the "Reich Association of Jews" in Cologne, which was under Gestapo supervision.

My eldest brother, your father-in-law, Carl Gustav Coppel, who had lived in Düsseldorf since 1920, took his own life last year, after his wife died. Your own wife, Anna Reiche, was murdered in Ravensbrück women's concentration camp this year. Her younger sister, Martha Coppel, who needed care, also fell victim to the Nazi killing machine this year, in Sobibor.

We have had to endure all these humiliations. And now, I have been assigned to the transport to Theresienstadt in Bohemia which leaves on Monday, the 20th July.

I never foresaw the possibility that I would have to leave, before my death, the place of happiness where my parents had lived since their marriage in 1856 and where I was also born. It is a sanctuary to me. I walk a difficult path, but I know that my God, in whom I trust, will not abandon me. That fortifies me.

I have enjoyed a rich and beautiful life. I took pleasure in work and in beauty, and no doubt the good name of our company is still in full force today. I have been something to countless people of good character and importance, I have helped an incalculable number of needy people, and I have always been able to educate and internalize myself on a higher level to this day. This comforts me.

May it comfort you.

From your great uncle,

Alexander Coppel"

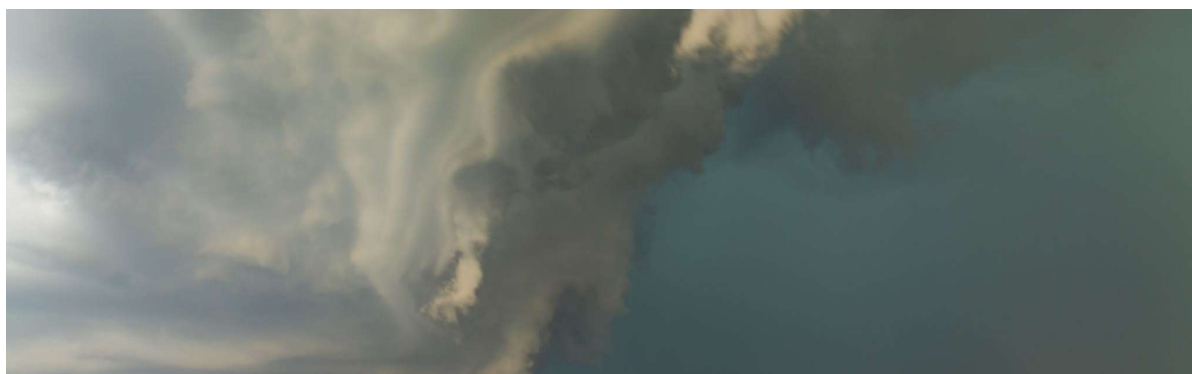
I heard Dr Emil's voice crack, and look at him to find tears streaming down his face. "Dr Emil?" I ask cautiously.

"I was one of the 16 other Jews to be deported alongside Dr Coppel, who was in fact your great, great uncle. The Karl in mention is the name your grandfather used to go by before he went by Heinz Coppel. In July 1942, Dr Coppel came to Theresienstadt, like all the others without a penny of money, with only the most necessary articles of clothing, and had to sleep there in the attic on the straw. After three weeks, as a result of hunger and exhaustion, he collapsed dead in the morning at the well where he was washing himself. His body was cremated, and the ashes later thrown into the Eger River with those of all the others in a cardboard box."

I am speechless. I don't know what to say, how to process what I have heard, how to console the heartbroken man in front of me. It is then that I feel a single tear roll down my

cheek, a tear for Dr Alexander, my uncle; for Dr Emil; for the rest of my family; for all the others who had to experience the heartbreak and the loss and the pain and the torture that was bestowed upon them by evil. A tear for what could have been, for lives that should have been lived, for hearts that should have loved and minds that should have thought. A tear for those whose stories will never be told, and whose lives will not be remembered. A tear for the innocence, and the cruelty, for what was taken mercilessly. A tear for the hatred that brought about such pain. A tear for those who have no one to carry their flame or tell their story.

Written by Amélie, based on the true story of my family.



A Windy Journey

It was just a normal day for us, the Kowalski family, my sisters and I running around, as Mum and Dad prepared for Shavuot. We were always like this, a happy, content family just going about business as per usual. My two sisters, Maja and Zofia, were playing with a doll as I snuck outside. After getting outside, I used a treat to try and get Rocky, our dog, out without making any noise. I ran around the garden, with him chasing not far behind. I was only little, I could not have outrun him for long.

We snuck back into the house as I had exhausted myself, right before we were met by a tall, looming figure. It was Dad. As he looked down at Rocky and I, he laughed. I never realised until then that we both got mud on our feet. We both followed dad into the bathroom where we had to be washed off.

“The date is the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 1935 and we are bringing to you, live from the studio, the marzyciel!” was the noise that came from the radio. As the days progress, Mum started to look worried about something. I noticed some paper sticking out of the cupboard, and went to investigate. I could not read all of the words, but the ones I could read out were “Palestine” and “travel permit.” Of course, I didn’t know what a permit was but I guessed we

were going on holiday. I snuck all of the paperwork back how I found it and carried on with my day.

The date was the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 1939. I had improved in school and with my reading. We were going to grandad's house to see him and my aunt and uncle. I drew a picture for grandad to put up somewhere. It was an illustration of mum, dad, grandad, me, Maja and Zofia next to my house. When we got there, it was still pretty early, so Maja, Zofia and I just played with our toys for the rest of the day, before having a family meal and being tucked into bed.

Nothing could have prepared us for what was to follow September the 1<sup>st</sup>, 1939.

We woke up to news on the radio that the Germans had made an attack on a radio station in Gleiwitz. Mum look terrified as the broadcast announced a war was confirmed. Maja started crying, she had done about the war in school and so she knew what was coming. Zofia didn't know what was going on but because of everyone's reactions she started crying too. I followed along as I realised the danger approaching.

The first night was traumatising. We had to find a safe place to go and hide, whilst making sure everyone was okay. We hid with others away from the nazis, as they were called and just tried to survive.

When my 10<sup>th</sup> birthday came around, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, it was spent in fear and sadness, it wasn't long after September that grandad couldn't make it any more, but we had to stay resilient. We hid, fled and rested, that was all we seemed to do. Days were long and tiring, nights lasted forever, it seemed there was no end to the violence.

It was 1942, when the nazis captured us. By then, we had lost aunt and uncle. I was 12 at the time, and because I was so quick witted, I managed to initially fool the nazis by telling them I was only polish, and not a Jew. That effect didn't last long because we were sent to a concentration camp. I was terrified and so was everyone else.

When we arrived, we were split up, mum, Maja and Zofia went one way whilst dad and I went the other. I felt a feeling of impending doom, as if I knew what lay ahead of us. That was just the start of moving from one ghetto or concentration camp to another.

It was early 1945, I had been almost completely separated from my family, no one had survived apart from Maja and I. We didn't think there was any more hope left for us. Being 16 and 15, we had seen it all, and were tired of it.

Then the day come, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1945. Everyone cheered as the war was over, but in my mind, I wondered where Maja and I could go from there. We had no family, no home and no money. We shared a glance and at that moment I knew we both had the same worry. We searched around the nearest town for someone, somewhere to go. We had no luck finding anywhere, until we bumped into a man named Piotr. He told us about Britain and described it as a sanctuary, which sounded great but I was worried about the cost. After inquiring further, we found ourselves on board to a place called 'Windemere'. Maja and I were excited to go somewhere new, especially because it was safe.

From Piotr we found out that we were among 732 orphan refugees brought to England, and we formed a part of the first 300 arrivals known as the Windemere children. Settling in the UK as a 15-year-old, was a tough but fun job. Life in the UK was easier in some ways and harder in others, it meant it was easier to try and block memory of the war, but was harder to learn a new way of life.

I had begun a course at the University of Southampton in 1948 but had dropped out after a year and thereafter was partner in a business manufacturing dresses.

After that, I trained to become an Olympic athlete, a weightlifting athlete. It started to work out as I won more and more awards through the years, it started off with winning the 70kg championship in 1954, I won lightweight champion in 1955, 56 and 58.

I was also represented Great Britain at weightlifting in the 1956 Summer Olympics at Melbourne, Australia. Followed by being represented Great Britain at weightlifting in the 1956 Summer Olympics at Melbourne, Australia.

I married my wife, Katerinne in 1966, whom I now have three sons and nine grandchildren with.

I have made a few other achievements in my lifetime, like Commander Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland in 2005, Knight Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland in 1994, Knight Bachelor in 2018, Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2000.

Sometimes I go back to my hometown, Piotrków Trybunalski, and every time I go, I am amazed how little the physical features of the town have changed even though the community was cruelly and systematically destroyed.

### Extra notes

In 2012, at a Limmud convention in Nazareth Illit organized to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Munich massacre, Helfgott was awarded a prize by the mayor.

In 2018, Helfgott was appointed a Knight Bachelor in recognition of his contribution to services to Holocaust remembrance and education.

In October 2020, Helfgott was awarded the Pride of Britain award by Stephen Fry; the 2020 event was held at the Holocaust Memorial in Hyde Park because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Faye, Y9

### Ben Helfgott Poem

What does bravery look like?

Is it to be dominant like a lion and reign supreme in the jungle?

To be fearless like a boxer and fight any and all opponents?

To be strong like a weightlifter, going beyond human limits?

To be determined like an explorer, seeking new places and paths?

Or,

Is it simply to find light in the darkest situations?

To be resilient in hard times?

To show kindness when faced with cruelty?

To inspire others to succeed.

What does bravery look like?

Bravery is Ben Helfgott.

-By Isabella

Time flies... Years go past...

Plenty of things I would not remember now

But there are things you could never forget –

No matter how hard you try,

you are trapped by those memories,

and you knew, just from the beginning–

there is no way out, no place to hide...

~

My day started in total chaos..

The truth is that everyday was like this since he came to power

But today something was different..

I was standing on the train platform,

It was impossible to explain the atmosphere here by words,

The parents were tongue-tied by emotion,

The children bewildered into silence. –

Only few of them knew what was going on

Other were angry with their parents for packing them off and refused the final hug as they clambered aboard the train–

The hurt was to stay with them always...

In the crowded compartments, the bitter sickness of loneliness took hold and there were many tears.

With the longing growing in their hearts,



with anxiety binding like steel chains –  
older ones were trying to comfort others saying: “Never mind”, “It won’t be long”, “You will see your families again!”  
But only few of them ever did.

~

Oh dear Lord, what a strange creature human is?  
Still having the Hope of having happy and easy childhood?  
After everything I was a witness of?  
When even a look at Starry sky triggers:  
Bloodcurdling fear.. mounting anger.. bitter loneliness..?  
But I did... I was Hoping for long-awaited relief  
For the safe place, for the **breath of new life**.

~

**Breath of new life** responded with a chilling cold that constricted the lungs.  
It must have been a relief, but what is with this pain?  
everything is different –  
but when you look back, day by day nothing change:  
wherever I went I'm always haunted by sidelong glances and whispers,  
parents did not let their children talk to me,  
Like I was a monster...  
And it didn't end there –  
There were some who were throwing stones at me  
Or even worse, they were raising their hands like they saluted Him..  
There were some who were trying to comfort me, but some of their words pierced my heart  
like the sharpest knife...  
Things like: “But it made you stronger”.  
I was a child.  
I didn't need to be stronger.  
I needed to be safe...  
I didn't blame them, they had never experienced what I had...  
Every morning I didn't want to open my eyes,  
and the night was never enough  
I loved sleeping, because it was the only way to escape reality.  
And the reality was harsh..  
Sadness from the loss of home, language and culture; painful loneliness from parting with  
family and friends, the bitterness of adapting to life in an unfamiliar and terrible world  
around...  
But I promised myself I would never give up.  
I will fight and keep going for myself, my future and the future of my nation.



~

It was hard. Fear of new, unfamiliar world as well as painful memories got in the way. Matured so early, they didn't give up and found the way to regain a happy, safe life that was unfairly taken from them. Among them are: Olympian and former champion weightlifter – Ben Helfgott, teacher and psychotherapist – Ruth Barnett, actor– Herbert Levy, researcher and biology teacher– Eve William. Ones broken souls sitting on a train to an unknown life, now people who found their new home.

Liana – Y9

### WHY ME

Standing outside in cold, I held onto my mother's hand tightly as the wind whistled in the air around us. The intense smell of smoke engulfed my nostrils, a thick layer of smog covered the sky. The atmosphere changed all around my palms were getting sweatier. There were overwhelming crowds of people everywhere. I grasped my mother's hands tighter than ever, the fear of us being separated was unthinkable.

The rumbling sound of more trains approaching, harsh screeching sound of the brakes slamming, more havoc arose as the crowd of people increased. The deafening cries and screams of innocent people merged with the shouts of the uniformed men that intimidated the swarm of people with their munitions and petrifying dogs.

There were divisions happening mothers from daughters, Fathers from sons' families being separated. BANG! BANG! Shots were fired. A deafening silence shocked the soar of crowds. The sounds of crying and screams heightened. The violence escalated people were being grabbed, snatched, forced, dragged left and right. I was panicking the uniformed men were approaching me and my mother. We tried to back away, but we couldn't move we were trapped. I looked around but before I could my arms were being pulled.

My left arm stretched out thin, my right arm stretched out to the limit. I panicked kicking and screaming I grappled onto my mother's hand with a firm grip. The man in the uniform pulled with all his might. My mother held onto my fingertips for dear life. I fell face first. We were separated. I was being dragged through the labyrinth of a crowd. My hand held out, but I was too far gone. The cries and scream were muffled as I was being dragged back. How could I find my way back through the maze of people. My inner thoughts were tearing me down from the inside out. I thought the worst as I sensed that nothing, but the worst could happen.

I looked in the distance at the lines of people ahead, not knowing they were awaiting their fate.

Sephora, Y9