

Memorial Speech
Bremen
September 10, 2023

Hello. My name is Barbara Maass. I am the granddaughter of Adolf Maass and Käthe Elsbach Maass. I never knew my grandparents as they were murdered at Auschwitz in May, 1944, 10 years before my birth. My grandfather was 68 years old, my grandmother 56.

My grandparents managed to send their 3 children, my father Gerhart, my uncle Herbert (Teddy) and my aunt Lisa out of Germany by 1938. My father arrived in Canada that year at 20 years of age.

My grandparents both came from very well-established families in Germany. The Elsbach family were the founders of the Elsbach clothing factory in Herford. In the 1920s this factory was the largest of its kind in Europe. My uncle has traced the Maass family tree to at least the 17th century in the Bielefeld region and in particular the town of Burgholzhausen. The 2 families worked hard, were integrated into German society and culture, and were prosperous.

After high school, my grandfather became an apprentice at Kühne & Nagel here in Bremen. In 1902, after only one year and a half, he was asked by the company founder August Kühne to establish a branch of the firm in Hamburg. A short 8 years later, in 1910, Adolf Maass became a partner in the company. Although a 45% shareholder of the very successful Hamburg branch of Kühne & Nagel, my grandfather was forced out of the company in April 1933 as he was Jewish. My father stated the following in the testimony he gave for the Shoah project: "... someone came from the Board of Trade to his office and said 'As long as the Jew Maass was still the boss in Hamburg of Kühne & Nagel', no more government contracts would be given to the firm and no more outside business could be asked for. That meant that the whole staff would be out of a job within a very short time. My father heard that and saw his whole life's work destroyed, he quit on the spot, gave his resignation." The interviewer then asks my father, "You say he quit, but actually he was forced to resign?" And my father answered "Definitely." About one week later, on May 1st, 1933, August Kühne's two sons, Alfred and Werner, who were now free to manage the company on their own, became members of the Nazi Party.

My grandparents, as millions of other innocent people, suffered the ultimate price of Aryanization. Slowly but surely after 1933, their economic livelihoods were extinguished, their assets were heavily taxed and stolen, their belongings confiscated. Slowly but surely, they lost property, freedom, and identity. After Kristallnacht in November of 1938, Adolf was arrested and sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp for several weeks. In 1941, Adolf and Käthe were sent to the Judenhaus on Bogenstrasse in Hamburg and in July of 1942 ordered to Theresienstadt. On May 14th, 1944, they were on the transport to Auschwitz and were very likely murdered upon their arrival.

My father Gerhart (Gerry) died 12 years ago at the age of 90. The searing pain of the murder of his parents never left him. I believe that he thought about them constantly (all the time) and he always carried the burden of not having been able to get them out of Germany. Many applications for visas were unsuccessful, especially once war broke out.

As young children, my brother and I knew very little of what had really happened. I believe that my father wanted to protect us in a way, to allow us to live a relatively "normal" childhood. Before their internment, in 1938, Adolf and Käthe had managed to ship a portion of their belongings to their children, to my father in Canada, my uncle in England and my aunt in the United States, in the hopes of joining

them soon. In our house in Montreal there was furniture, books, porcelain and artwork of my grandparents, what I realized only later was a very unusual situation for surviving family members of Holocaust victims. These items meant the world to my father and somehow kept alive a connection with his parents that we didn't really comprehend at the time.

In 1943, my father succeeded in becoming a Canadian soldier and during the war he served with the Canadian Intelligence Corps in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. In 1945-1946 he was stationed near here with the Canadian Area Security Office in Oldenburg. He was able to find out what had happened to his parents and to eventually retrieve many stolen items, from silverware to the Elsbach factory.

Until quite recently, I was unable to read about the Holocaust, and certainly not able to watch documentaries or movies about it. It was too painful, it was too horrifying, it was too frightening. Today, at 69 years of age and perhaps because of the time that has now passed since the death of my father, I finally feel stronger to be able to try and face what happened to my grandparents, to other members of my family, and to the unfathomable millions of victims of the Holocaust.

I believe that in order to have some hope that this pure evil does not rise again, we need to grapple with what happened and precisely how it happened. This reckoning is needed here and now, including with regard to companies such as Kühne and Nagel. Surely knowing is the first most basic and essential component needed to counter state-sanctioned lies, envy, cruelty, hatred, theft and genocide throughout the world.

My mother Joan and I donated the archives of my father and my uncle, including thousands of written documents and photos, to the Montreal Holocaust Museum. I am now reading all the correspondence, and, in a twist of irony, am finally getting to know my grandparents as they speak to their children through these letters. They give them loving advice, they talk of precious memories together, they try to comprehend what is happening. Käthe Maass wrote to her children on September 1st, 1939, the day Germany invaded Poland and World War II began: "You all should follow your own best judgement and don't worry about us. When everything is over let us hope we see each other again".*

Thank you Henning Bleyl, Evin Oettingshausen, the city of Bremen and everyone involved with this important memorial which asks us to acknowledge and understand the processes which facilitated, supported and made possible the Holocaust, that is Aryanization. This memorial is a significant step to recognizing the unconscionable actions of the accomplices and the profiteers of the Holocaust.

*For the translator: „Geht ruhig Euren Weg, macht Euch um uns keine Sorgen. Wenn alles vorüber sehen wir uns hoffentlich alle wieder“.

Barbara Maass
2023-09-05