

My parents were both from Germany. My father and his family emigrated in 1923, after the Great War. My mother came alone to America in spring 1939. She was 17.

Growing up, we were a family of six plus one: my parents, my three sisters and myself—and the Elephant in the room. The Elephant was the pain and grief that my mother suffered from the loss of her family and which we were told by my father never to ask about.

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In 1973 as young marrieds, Ray and I visited Europe, stopping Bavaria, and my mother's hometown, Nördlingen. We stepped into my grandfather's family's hardware store, sold for a Deutschmark to a non-Jew during the war. And we were curtly dismissed when I asked to see the living quarters. My blood ran cold with fear and anger, and my hatred and distrust of the German people were confirmed.

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With some trepidation, this spring—43 years later—Ray and I returned to Germany.

In Nördlingen, two members of the City Archive guided us through the Jewish cemetery, desecrated during the war. It's since been restored and is now maintained by the town. Also paid for by the citizens, *Stolpesteine*—bronze memorial plaques—are embedded in the sidewalks at former homes and businesses of Holocaust victims. Where the synagogue once stood is a stone memorial engraved, "*Zikhron.*" On the wall behind it are the names of the 51 deportees.

Several days later, Ray and I spent a week in Frankfurt am Main, where Ray's mother was born. We were guests of a program called "Jewish Life in Frankfurt," begun by an educator 35 years before. Our first night together, participants shared emotional family stories. We visited Jewish and local sites, met both Jewish and non-Jewish citizens, and were individually chaperoned to places familiar to our loved ones.

On the program's final day, we visited the schools, which family members had attended. At Bettinaschule, Ray and I met with German-born and immigrant high school students and shared our mothers' stories. We answered their many questions and then asked them some of our own.

We concluded with three days in Berlin, a rebuilt city of many memorials. We witnessed a remnant of the Wall made into an historical timeline; explored the New Synagogue, partially rebuilt after Allied bombing. We toured the fifteen-year-old Jewish Museum; walked among the tomblike stones of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

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A two-week journey cannot dispel the Elephant I lived with nor lessen our collective loss. But my deep-rooted hatred of an entire nation has been tempered.

In the 1960s, my German contemporaries grappled with their elders' past and gradually transformed their country's politics and morals. Today, Holocaust studies are taught at all levels; the country is marked with memorials; people talk openly of the past. Admissions of wrong have been made; restitution paid.

Perhaps this will prove to be another transitory cycle in history, a blip in German-Jewish relations. But I believe that for now the Germans are doing right. And I applaud them.