

## Rede v. Tom Schaumberg zum 80. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Verlorenen Transports am 28.4.2025 in Tröbitz

### My Lifetime Journey Through Germany

Let me introduce myself: Tom Schaumberg, my parents are German, my mother was born in Oldenburg, and grew up in Hannover – and my father is from Kirchhain, not the one here, but the one near Marburg, Frankfurt.

I am here to speak for myself, I do not speak for other survivors, other families. We just came from 5 days in Bergen-Belsen, where we heard a lot about the horrors of the war, the horrors of the concentration camp – and here we are talking about something different. I was seven years old in 1945 so today I'm 87. I have seen a lot, I have learned a lot, and I have had the privilege of also making many friends in Germany.

I would like to mention that I was in Tröbitz ten years ago with a German friend who came to Harvard Law School to earn his masters degree while I was studying there as well. When I came to Germany to see him, I said to him: Let's go to Tröbitz – he lived in Berlin, we went to Tröbitz and we found Erika Arlt. I had the privilege of meeting her, of speaking to her and learning about her efforts to try to help remember, remember what happened.

I think this is the time that I should also say a few words about Rainer Bauer. I met Rainer 3 years ago - I came to Germany with my son, Steve. I have 3 children, he is my oldest. We did not have time to come to Tröbitz, but Rainer was kind enough to come to Berlin to talk to us about Tröbitz and about things that we have in common. He has been - thank you – a friend ever since, and he has carried on the good work that was begun by Erika Arlt.

I came here with the Lost Transport like everyone else and clearly remember that we were freed by the Russians. I didn't speak any Russian, I did speak German, I did speak Dutch and we were told please go survive, do what you have to do to survive. I was very fortunate. My parents survived the war as well. So we were intact as a family, first in Westerbork, then in Bergen-Belsen, then in Tröbitz, then back to Amsterdam.

I don't remember much about my life here but I do know that it was the beginning of something new, that it was a change from bad to good from hopelessness to hope, from the past to the future. And again I give my parents the credit that they deserve for having made my life as good as it has been.

We were able to return to Holland which was not easy. Perhaps you know that the American army that was stationed in Leipzig sent trucks to Tröbitz and picked us up. I had the honor earlier today to meet Mr. Mann and I thank him for his goodwill and for his positive feelings for the survivors who came to Tröbitz. I'm sure that was not easy. People lost their homes, at least temporarily, they lost their food, they lost their belongings to people who were in absolutely worse condition, but nobody volunteered for the job – it happened. And people with good will, like Mister Mann are to be congratulated for what they did.

I told him this story very quickly: I'm 7 years old, we got off the train, the only thing that I remember there was a little bicycle. I knew what a bicycle was but I had never ridden one. I tried to pick the bicycle up to follow my parents but it was too heavy. I didn't know how to ride it and I had to drop the bicycle. So I did not have a bicycle while visiting Tröbitz and had to walk like everybody else.

After, I think, 6 to 8 weeks, we were picked up by the Americans. Mr. Mann and I both remember that they gave us chewing gum; it was the first time we ever had chewing gum. Mr. Mann was 10 years old and I was seven, and for us this was a wonderful discovery. They took us to the Dutch

border, but we were not permitted to go back to Holland because we were stateless. We were not Dutch citizens because my parents were German.

I don't remember the details. What I do know is we were in a cloister on the border of Germany and Holland. I think in the province of – I forgot name of the town - of Limburg<sup>1</sup>.

Near Sittard, I think we lived in the cloister for a couple of weeks. My memory tells me that the cherries were blooming, so it must have been May, June. And we were picking cherries as a family, as if it were chocolate. And from there we were finally permitted to go back to Amsterdam and that is the beginning of the rest of my story which began here in Tröbitz: freedom, education, evolution, family and often that involved Germany.

My father had a sister in Cincinnati, Ohio, in the middle of the country. So we didn't go to New York like so many other refugees did after the war. We went to Cincinnati in Ohio, a relatively small Midwestern city which actually had a large German population. There was a portion of the city called *Over the Rhine* because there were so many German people, so many German restaurants, so many different breweries in Cincinnati. That's where I grew up. I then went on to university and in 1958, I was 20 years old, I had the opportunity to study in France.

And that was my opportunity for the first time to come back to Germany. I wanted to see where my family was from. And I have to tell you my reaction was not good. There was a soldier at the border. In those days everybody had to show a passport and answer questions. And there was a guard who looked too much like the German soldiers that I remembered, but I got past that and went into Germany. So that was 1958. I finished, I came back to America, went to law school and then I was fortunate enough to obtain a fellowship from the DAAD-Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst, and I studied in Frankfurt. I studied antitrust law and European community law. And I met many Germans my age who had been in my circumstances much like Mr. Mann who had lived through the difficulties of the war themselves. And my connection with those people gave me a new and even better understanding of not only how difficult my life had been as a child and my parents' life, but that it was also the problem of a lot of other decent people.

My connections continued - I said already that in 1995 I came with one of my friends here to Tröbitz. And then something wonderful happened about 20 years later. In 2018 I received an email and I did not recognize the name. And the question was: are you mister Schaumberg– Yes. Are you Mr. Schaumberg who is perhaps related to the Schaumberg family from Kirchhain - and I said: yes I am, that was my father's birthplace.

And I am happy to introduce you to the teacher, Barbara Sonnenberger, who was the teacher of the students in Kirchhain who were active in putting together the stories of the former Jewish inhabitants, so that they could implement the Stolpersteine installation. In 2019 my brother Peter, who was born in America, and I came to Kirchhain and we, of course didn't know anybody when we arrived.

I have now been back (probably too many times) but I felt so much warmth, so much real feeling from the people in Kirchhain that really reminds me of what was happening here in Tröbitz, what I see today, what I saw when I was here the last time. These are the small towns in Germany that had

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<sup>1</sup> It is Sittard in the Limburg region on the Dutch side of the border. The monastery is the Leyenbroek monastery there, also known as the "Klooster van de Missionarissen van het Heilig Hart". Sittard was occupied by Germany from May 1940 to September 1944. The Jews living there were persecuted - the monastery seems to have helped them as much as possible. After the liberation, the monastery acted as a reception center for returning Jews from Germany. How German Jews and German Nazis were lumped together during the reception is described: Dr. Dienke Hondius: Return: Holocaust Survivors and Dutch Antisemitism, Westport: Praeger, 2003, 192 p., insbes. Kapitel 6. Dazu auch: Arntz, Hans-Dieter, Der letzte Judenälteste von Bergen-Belsen, Joseph Weiss, - würdig in einer unwürdigen Umgebung, Helios Verlag: Aachen 2012, 710 S. S. 536ff

Jewish populations, that understood their neighbors, that were open minded and wanted to be part of the same world.

And Barbara and her team of people have now been doing this work, I think, for over 10 years. Kirchhain has many Stolpersteine in front of the homes<sup>2</sup>, and when I told Barabara that I was coming here for this 80th anniversary she volunteered. She said: Oh, I would like to come to Tröbitz, I would to like to see Tröbitz, because she knows the story and she is going to drive me back to Kirchhain tomorrow.

And all I want to say by that is: I have been very fortunate, I've had a good education, I have parents who protected me and I am happy to be here. I would like to finally say something about the people in the German government. I have had the good fortune also of being involved with the people who are engaged in annual discussions with the German Finanzministerium to support Jews all over the world, not just in the United States. It is called the Claims Conference, and I was part of the discussion two years ago. What we are trying to do is provide dignity, dignity to the survivors, who are still with us. Of course their number is getting smaller and smaller, but these discussions have continued. And Germany as a country, and the German people have been absolutely exemplary in their willingness to accept responsibility, for which this group of people and this age group have no personal responsibility. And they are doing their best to help the people who need that help. And God bless you all for doing it, and I hope you continue. Thank You.

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<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.kirchhain.de/Leben-Wohnen/Unsere-Stadt/Stolpersteine/>