

**Speech by Maria (Polly) Paulsen, granddaughter of Gertrud Gerson
at the laying of the Stolperstein on 14.8.2021 in front of Rolandstraße 2**

Dear Family, Dear Guests

I am pleased that so many of you have come today to witness the stumbling stone installation for Gertrud Gerson.

We do not know the exact circumstances of her death; she has no gravestone. In its place this plaque will today be placed in front of her residence, as remembrance for us and as a warning for future generations to actively combat antisemitism and hate.

We know very little about Gertrud except that she came from an extremely wealthy and respected Jewish family from Leipzig. The fortune that she brought into the marriage made it possible for my grandfather to build this villa.

In some respects our family is typical for the Jewish upper middle-classes at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in Germany. Carl Gerson also came from an influential Jewish family; his father opened a banking and stock exchange business in Hamm/Westfalen in 1855 and was very active in community affairs.

Growing antisemitism and the wish to belong to society motivated many in this generation to convert to protestantism. This was the case with the Gersons as well and at the time of their marriage if not before, Gertrud and Carl Gerson were members of the Lutheran parish in Nikolassee. Our mother was baptized and confirmed there.

In contrast to Carl Gertrud was brought up in the Jewish tradition and we do not know what influence the change in religion had on her. Carl at any rate was ashamed of his Jewish heritage and suffered under the idea/misconception that with increasing age he might develop a Jewish hooked nose. His son Horst even called him an antisemite.

This resulted in the development of a strong love of country and the conviction that the German nation was superior to others. His son Walter was brought up in this spirit and consequently both felt a strong desire to fight for Germany in WWI.

Carl did not experience the rise of Hitler and the persecution of the Jews but for Walter it was unbelievable that he, who would have sacrificed his life for Germany, should now be considered unworthy of life. Many of his Jewish compatriots were in the same situation; they had been honored with the Iron Cross for bravery in the war and were suddenly worth less than animals.

Maria too, who was unaware of her Jewish heritage until she was 18, was totally unprepared for these regulations. She no longer could work in her profession, she was not allowed to learn another one and could no longer set foot in the church she had belonged to since childhood. The lack of support for „Jewish“ church members was incomprehensible to her and pained her deeply. She never attended another church service for the rest of her life.

After Gertrud had been forced to sell this house under value in 1938 she found a home with her son Walter in Göttingen. From there she was deported in 1942. At the time she received the order to join the transport she was in Leipzig, where she had cared for her sister Elfriede for 6 months until her death.

As mentioned in the flyer Walter was helped by members of his fraternity Bonner Germania. It is greatly to their credit that they were prepared to help a Jew. They testified to his „non-Jewishness“ and his exemplary character. The fraternity was banned between 1933 and 1945.

The fake Arian testimony enabled Walter to survive the war but he did not escape unpunished. In the last year of the war he was consigned as camp doctor for the Organisation Todt, where slave laborers worked under inhuman conditions. He survived, but his health suffered.

The fate of his mother burdened him and his family to the end of their lives. Some relations accused him of leaving Gertrud without protection from the Nazis only to save himself. The guilt question still remains unanswered: What should he have done? What would we have done?

The family was very aware that Gertrud was in danger, but they found no solution. There was talk of hiding her somewhere or sending her to her son Horst in the Netherlands but the war began before anything could be undertaken.

Not only Gertrud, but also other family members were Nazi victims. One example is Bertha Gerson, the wife of Carl's deceased brother Max, who was murdered in Theresienstadt shortly before Gertrud died. Other members were able to flee, as a result there are Gerson descendants in Great Britain, in the Netherlands, in the USA and even in Argentina.

Our presence here today is proof that the Nazis could not succeed in transforming the world in their ideology and destroying democracy in Germany. Nevertheless the Brecht citation: The womb it crawled from is still fertile“ is true today.

Antisemitic and radical right forces are gaining more and more influence in Germany. It is up to us as well, the descendants of Gertrud Gerson, to do everything in our power to put a stop to them.