

Erna Goldmann: From Frankfurt to Tel Aviv

For hundreds of years, [Jews had lived in Frankfurt](#).



From 1462 to 1796, they lived in the [Judengasse](#).

The Frankfurt Jewish community was well-respected throughout Europe, but their life in greater society and their means of work were restricted.

Then in the 19th century, Frankfurt's [Jews were emancipated](#), and from then on, some of them climbed up the social ladder and were proudly taking part in city life.



They founded universities, where they also taught as professors.

They played in symphony orchestras and Jewish families helped sponsor the city opera.

They worked as [doctors](#) and helped establish hospitals.

Others continued to run their small businesses.

They built grand synagogues and schools

And many Frankfurt Jews were proud and patriotic German Jews.



This memorial plaque for fallen [Frankfurt Jewish soldiers](#) in the [First World War](#) tells us that.

After the First World War, many of them hoped that the [Weimar Republic](#) would make Germany democratic and progressive.

But as we know this was not to be.

This is the family story of 92-year old Erna Goldmann, who grew up in Frankfurt and now lives in Tel Aviv.



Chapter 1: My childhood in Frankfurt

I was born in Frankfurt in 1917. Our family had lived here for many generations.



We lived in the center of Frankfurt, at the Eschenheimer Anlage 30 – close to the [Eschenheimer Gate](#).

Unfortunately, I don't have any pictures of my parents anymore. But I do have photos of my brothers, Paul and Karl.



They were both older, and when Karl – who studied medicine in [Munich](#) and [Berlin](#) – came home, he would take me to my favorite coffeehouse, [Cafe Laumer](#).

Our family was not Orthodox, but we kept kosher, and every Friday we observed Shabbat.

On Yom Kippur, the [Highest Jewish Holiday](#), my father and grandfather went to the synagogue at [Friedberger Anlage](#).

On the High Holidays, the city would even close the streets in front of the synagogue.

I attended the [Samson Raphael Hirsch](#) school, named after a famous rabbi.



We were raised as faithful sons and daughters of the German fatherland, but also to become observant Jews.

And we were not alone: More than half a million Jews lived in Germany back then – in the cities and in the countryside.

Some of them had come Germany from [Eastern Europe in the early 20th century](#), escaping from poverty and anti-Jewish [pogroms](#).

I can tell, for instance, the story of Adolf Goldmann, who arrived in [Dessau](#) as a 19-year old without a penny and without speaking a word of German.



He established a successful leather goods factory, got married and started a family.



But for Jewish families from Eastern Europe like the Goldmanns, there was often an invisible wall separating them from the Jewish community.

They were not accepted by those Jews who had lived in Germany for generations.

But none of this mattered when I met Moshe, the son of the Goldmanns - my big love.



I got to know Moshe at the [Zionist youth group](#) Kadima, where my brothers and I were members.



Moshe was older than me, and he often came from Dessau to visit me in Frankfurt.

Together with our [friends](#) we rode our bikes along the Main river, we went hiking, and we spoke about the Jewish homeland in Palestine.



For some, these discussions were theoretical. Others really wanted to [emigrate](#) to the Middle East.

Then came [January 30, 1933](#).

With the Nationalsocialist Party seizing power, the first laws were introduced that [excluded Jews from public life](#).

Suddenly, Zionism was more than just a theory – we saw no future in a country that obviously did not want us any longer.

Our parents and grandparents believed that eventually, the situation would improve again.

But the younger ones like us were not that optimistic.

So my brother Karl emigrated to Palestine in 1933.

Paul found work in the Netherlands, where he stayed until the German invasion. Then he fled to the United States.



Moshe, too, left for Palestine in 1934.

This is the last postcard he sent me from Dessau, before he left Nazi Germany.



But me? I was still very young, only 15, and stayed in Frankfurt.



I began an apprenticeship in a goldsmith shop in Frankfurt.

Our boss, Mr. Jobst, was not Jewish, but he treated the Jewish apprentices with great respect.



He and his wife did not want to live in Nazi Germany, though, and so they emigrated.

I then attended the [Frankfurt arts school](#).

But one day, it was in [1935](#), we were told that we were not allowed to come back the next morning. The school would no longer accept Jewish students.

That same year, my father died of a heart attack.

My mother, my grandfather and I were now alone in Frankfurt.

I wanted to follow Moshe and my brother Karl to Palestine, and with my mother's permission and a tourist visa, I went to Jerusalem in 1936.

I thought I could just stay there.

But Palestine was under [British mandate](#), and the Brits [did not extend my visa](#).

So I had to return to Frankfurt.

I needed a certificate to emigrate to Palestine –
before it was too late.

Frankfurt was my home, but we could feel the rising antisemitism.



Nazi rallies took place in the streets, and we closed the blinds out of fear. I still shudder today when I think about it!

Thanks to my brother Karl, my mother and I finally got the certificate, which we waited for, and [we left Germany](#).



But my grandfather stayed in Frankfurt.

I still remember how shortly before we left Germany, he went swimming in the Main river – even when there was already a sign that banned Jews from entering.

He said, „Well they don't mean *me!*“ Germany was his home, and he did not want to give up the life which he had established here.

My grandfather felt as a German citizen: He thought nothing could happen to him. But he was wrong.

One year after my mother and I had left Germany, he was forced to leave his home.

After [the November pogroms of 1938](#), he found a hiding place with a Christian family who protected him from the Nazis.

He died in September 1939.



I don't know how, but he was alone, without his family.

CHAPTER 2 Tel Aviv: Altneuland

My journey to Palestine led me through the Mediterranean... on a [crowded boat](#) to Haifa, I shared a cabin with three girls.



When I arrived in [Tel Aviv](#), I knew I was on a different continent.



Here I am on [Dizengoff](#) street. This is also how Tel Aviv looked back then – sand and huts.

But in 1937, Tel Aviv also had streets, movie theaters and cafes.

In our free time, we would meet and have a coffee with friends.

In the mornings we would walk down [Ben Yehuda Street](#), and every five minutes we would run into people we knew who asked us, “Oh, since when have you been in Tel Aviv?”



The whole Ben Yehuda street spoke [German](#)!

I had my family, my boyfriend; I could walk to the sea in shorts, and meet friends.

We didn't have a lot of money, but we were happy.

On December 24, 1937, Moshe and I were married in a small hotel on HaYarkon Street.



Then, [World War II](#) started, and Moshe joined the British military. He was not in Europe, but worked in Palestine as a driver.

During the war, our first son Daniel was born -



We had now become a real family and enjoyed our life in Tel Aviv.



When [Ben Gurion proclaimed the State of Israel in 1948](#), we went to the main square in Tel Aviv.

This was very exciting for us Jews, since we had waited for so long for the English to leave and for us to become independent. From now on, Jews could legally immigrate.

Immediately after that, [the War of Independence](#) began.

Like in World War II, my husband worked as a driver for an officer. And since the State of Israel barely had any money, Moshe had to drive his own car in the war!

After the war, Moshe founded a company.

I made my own jewelry and sold it to the [WIZO](#) store in Tel Aviv.

We went on a lot of trips around Israel, like here to [Ashkelon](#).

In 1951, our second son Rafael was born, and we moved to [Ramat Gan](#), a suburb of Tel Aviv.



We often went to the Habima Theater and to concerts at the beautiful Mann Auditorium.

We heard famous musicians like Leonard Bernstein and Isaac Stern. We went with our German [Yekke](#) friends!

In 1967, during [the Six-Day-War](#), my dear Moshe died of a heart failure. Suddenly I was alone.



My son Dani died in a car accident in 1990,

But I am lucky enough to have my younger son Rafi, who is always there for me.



In the early 1990s I received an invitation from the city of Frankfurt to come and visit—as a guest of the city.

When I went. I wondered: could Frankfurt feel like home to me again

Many memories returned

but Frankfurt was not my home now...

that is what I found in that White city, right on the beach...

where I got married,

raised a family,

And in my own small way, helped build a Jewish country.