

## Edith Blumenfeld and Joseph Bermann



Edith's birth announcement from an unknown newspaper. Found in MyHeritage.com, Borchardt-Pincus-Peier Family Website.

Edith Blumenfeld was the daughter of Max Blumenfeld from Kirchhain in Hessen and Anna Grunwald from Leobschütz in Prussia. She was born in Graudenz (today's Grudziądz, Poland) in the province of *Westpreussen* (Westprussia, Germany) on 16 February 1907. Her father was the director (*Waisenhausinspektor*) of the Caspar Lachmannschen Provinzial-Waisen-Haus (orphanage and school) in Graudenz at that time. When Edith's grandfather, the director of the Second Jewish Orphanage in Berlin-Pankow died in 1925, the family moved to Berlin. Edith had just turned 18.



Left: Anna and Max Blumenfeld. Photo: Max Bermann. Above: Second Jewish Orphanage of the Jewish Community in Berlin-Pankow. Photo: from Inge Lammel's book about the orphanage.

## Edith Blumenfeld and Joseph Bermann



Edith Blumenfeld Bermann in the 1960s. Photo: Max Bermann.

Edith's son, Max Bermann, says of his mother, "One of my mother's regrets in life was never having had the opportunity to go to university, although she never told me why she did not pursue higher education. She was very a bright and intellectual person who loved to read and became well-educated. She told me that when she was 16 years old, she did work for a while at her father's school and orphanage."

In January/February 1935 Edith married the physician Joseph Bermann from Merano, Italy. Joseph's father, Max Bermann, was the owner and director of the Waldpark Sanatorium in the resort town of Merano. Joseph was his assistant. It is most likely that Edith got to know her future husband during her family's vacations in Merano, which was a popular winter resort location for many Jewish families. However, this is only speculation.

Joseph, born on 3 August 1898 in Merano, Austria, was the son of Max Bermann (1865-1933) and Carolina, geb. Ullmann (1870-1958). He attended school at the k.k. Obergymnasium Meran.<sup>1</sup> Raphael Enettter from the Jewish Museum Hohenems was able to find out that "Josef Bermann was enrolled at the University of Innsbruck from summer semester 1919 until the end of January 1921. Before that he had spent a semester in Prague. On 31 January 1921 his oral examinations (*Rigorosum*) were evaluated overall as excellent, which is a grade rarely given. After that it appears that he went to Vienna where he – at a minimum – was enrolled from 1922 to 1923. He was awarded his Doctor of Medicine on 10 December 1923 (the information obtained via gen-team.at)."<sup>2</sup> After his studies, Joseph joined his father at the Waldpark Sanatorium. When Joseph's father died in 1936, Joseph became the owner and director of the Waldpark Sanatorium.



Meraner Zeitung, 11 December 1923.

**Conferral of doctorate.** Dr. Josef Bermann, the oldest son of our spa doctor Dr. Max Bermann, was awarded the degree Doctor of Medicine in Vienna.

There are two dates for Edith and Joseph's wedding. There is an entry in the marriage register for the City of Westminster in London which says they were married there in the first quarter of 1935. The *Alpenzeitung* dated 12 February 1935 reports, "The wedding of Dr. Joseph Bermann, owner of a sanatorium, and Miss Edith Blumenfeld took place in Berlin on 3 February." A likely explanation would be that they had a civil wedding in London at the end of January and a religious service in Berlin a few days later. It is not known, however, why they went to London to get married.

<sup>1</sup> Programm des k.k. Obergymnasiums Meran, 1903-04 – 1908-09, 1909-10, 1910-11.

<sup>2</sup> Email from Raphael Einetter to Richard Bloomfield, 4 July 2022.



Joseph Bermann in the Waldpark Sanatorium between 1923 and 1933. Photo: Max Bermann.



Waldpark Sanatorium, Merano, Italy, for diseases of the heart, nervous system and metabolism, diathermy, sun-lamp, X-ray, elevator, central heating, running water, reasonable prices. Head Doktor: Dr. M. Bermann, Assistent: Dr. J. Bermann, Wiener Morgenzeitung, 19 Aug. 1925.

Edith and Joseph had two children: Margaret Miriam (also known as Margherita or Grit) and Max. Margaret was born in Berlin on 22 August 1935 and Max was born in Merano on 21 March 1938.

“In the late 1930s Josef Bermann spent more and more time in Milano. On 22 August 1938 he was included by the fascists in the census of Jews living in Italy. On 13 February 1939 the remark ‘razza ebraica’ was added to his dossier. Josef Bermann fled to Milano.”<sup>3</sup>

In October 1939, Joseph’s siblings Siegfried (Fred) and Katharina (Käthe/Kay) left Italy for the United States.<sup>4</sup> Joseph followed them alone in November from Genoa, arriving in New York on the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>5</sup> The plan was for Joseph to establish a base in the United States and then to have his wife and children join him. After Italy declared war on Britain and France in June of 1940, escaping Italy became difficult and then, impossible. René, the youngest of Joseph’s siblings, was able to leave in May 1940, and Joseph’s mother, Carolina Ullmann Bermann, managed to get to New York in October 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Information from the database of the Jewish Museum Meran, Italy.

<sup>4</sup> Siegfried arrived on 4 October and Käthe on 15 October 1939 in New York.

<sup>5</sup> Declaration of Intention, United States of America, 23 February 1940.



## Edith Blumenfeld and Joseph Bermann



Fritz Blumenfeld about 1940. He changed his name to Moshe Bar Sadeh in Israel. Photo: Palestine immigration papers.

Edith's brother Fritz Blumenfeld went to Palestine in June of 1937 as a traveler. His application for Palestinian citizenship indicates that he had left Palestine and returned on 30 January 1939 as an immigrant.

Citing the registry of inhabitants of Merano, Sabine Gamper<sup>6</sup> says Joseph and Edith Bermann emigrated with their children in 1942 to Milan. By this date, Joseph had already been in the United States for about three years. It is possible that the registry records Edith and the children's move to Milan. Joseph's son Max, who was just a baby at the time, thinks that they might have gone to Milan before this time. However, he is not sure.

Max Bermann recounted in a zoom conversation, "After my father left Merano for the U.S., my mother, her mother (Anna Blumenfeld), my sister, and I went to Milan. The plan was to follow my father once he could establish himself in the U.S.A. Because emigration from Italy soon became impossible, we re-

mained in Milan and lived in an apartment. I do remember air raids at night and being carried downstairs to an air raid shelter in the basement of our building."



Max Bermann, 14 October 2022. Photo from a zoom meeting with Richard Bloomfield.

In an email Max gave more information: "My sister Margaret, also known as Grit and Margherita, told me that at some point my mother was able to get a job working for the Germans because of her proficiency speaking and writing German, Italian, French, and English. The story is that she worked for a high-ranking German officer and that she had put our names on travel documents which he unwittingly signed and that was how we were able to safely leave Milan and go to a place where it would be easier to avoid detection. It may have been in late 1943 that we left Milan and moved to a small town or village north of Milan."

Edith, Margaret, Max, and Edith's mother Anna Grunwald Blumenfeld left Milan and went into hiding in a small village north of Milan. Max said, "I don't know what name she

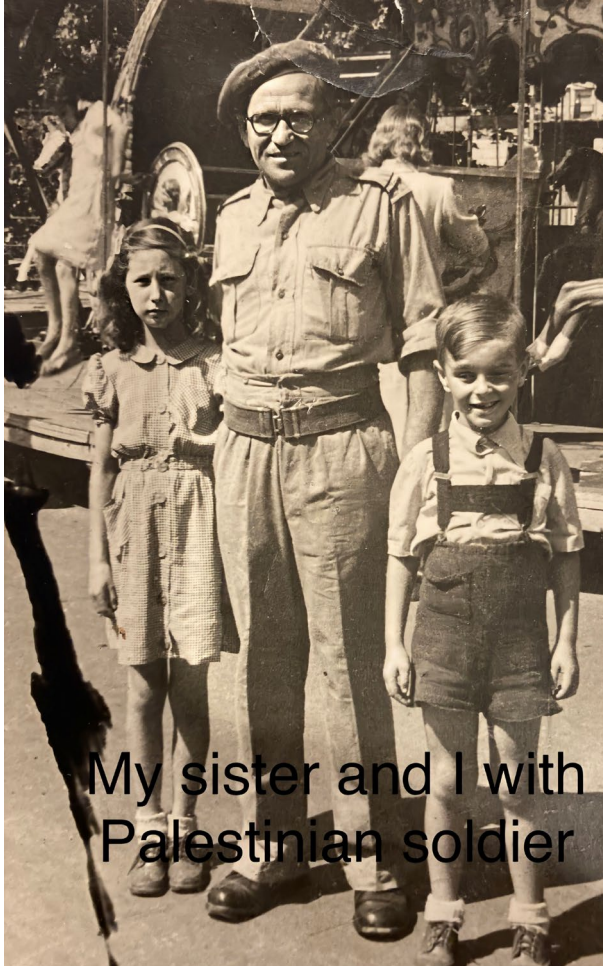
put on the documents. I don't remember the name we used during the war in our little village."

---

<sup>6</sup> Sabine Gamper, *Die Bermann-Dynastie: Eine Familie schreibt Meraner Tourismusgeschichte*, in: Thomas Albrich, *Von Salomon Sulzer bis «Bauer & Schwarz»*, p. 298.

## Edith Blumenfeld and Joseph Bermann

“German soldiers did, on occasion, stay in our town but, because my grandmother had arthritis and claimed to be disabled, the Germans never stayed in our house. I remember that once I was given some bread by some soldiers and that later my sister told me never to speak German. I didn't know why at the time, but it was explained to me much later that it could have put us at risk. Of course, we were in hiding and I never knew that I was Jewish until I came to the United States. My sister and I even sent to church on Sundays. My mother didn't accompany us, and the story was that she had to stay home to care for her ailing mother. My mother worked for the Italian partisan resistance as a courier and was frequently away from home. When she was home, she supported the family by knitting clothes for people in the town.”



My sister and I with  
Palestinian soldier

Margaret Bermann, Palestinian soldier, and Max Bermann in 1945. Photo: Max Bermann.

By the time the rest of his family arrived in 1946, Joseph had passed the medical exams in the states of New York and Massachusetts in 1940 and had become a U.S. citizen on 11 April 1945. Joseph's first address in America was his cousin G. Ullmann's apartment at 2386 Grant Avenue, New York.<sup>7</sup> A few months later, in February 1940, Joseph was residing at 114 West 81<sup>st</sup> Street.<sup>8</sup> His draft card dated 15 February 1942

“After the war was over, I remember that a soldier from the Palestinian Brigade of the British Army arranged for us to leave our village. I remember leaving in a truck and that was the beginning of our journey to the United States.”

Edith, Margaret, and Max left for the United States on 5 February 1946 from Naples, arriving in New York on the 20<sup>th</sup>. Edith's mother, Anna Grunwald Blumenfeld, emigrated to Palestine where Fritz had married Dora Salpeter and become a citizen. Anna arrived around the time Fritz and Dora's second child, Hilel, was born in February 1946.



Joseph Bermann, 1940. Photo: Declaration of Intention, U.S. Immigration.

<sup>7</sup> Passenger list.

<sup>8</sup> Declaration of Intention, 23 February 1940.

## **Edith Blumenfeld and Joseph Bermann**

indicates that he lived at 121 West 77<sup>th</sup> Street and that his mother Carolina Ullmann Bermann was living at the same address. At that time Joseph had his practice at 525 West End Avenue. In 1946 Joseph had his practice and his residence in the Paris Hotel at 752 West End Avenue. "That's where we lived when we arrived in the U.S.," Max commented in the zoom meeting on 14 October 2022.

Edith worked outside the home after coming to the United States. Max related that "my mother worked for an import-export company, General Overseas International. The office was located on Madison Ave in NYC. She was the executive secretary and I think she really ran the business. I think two men owned the business, one of whom may have been the person whose house we lived in during the war. The main business was selling GM cars to Libya."

"I don't remember my mother telling us about the many challenges she must have encountered during the war. The only hint of how that experience affected her was in one instance when she lamented 'I can no longer believe in God after what happened during the war.' This didn't dissuade her from supporting my father's wishes that we observe Jewish tradition to a certain degree. I did go to Hebrew School and became Bar Mitzvah."

Joseph Bermann died on 1 May 1966 of renal carcinoma. Exhausted from caring for her husband, Edith Blumenfeld Bermann died two years later on 12 August 1968 and was buried in Westchester Hills Cemetery in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York.