

“I personally find that it is important to live, no matter how and where.”
– letter from Ilse Ledermann-Citroen to Barbara Ledermann-Rodbell from Westerbork Labor Camp, August 12, 1943

Good evening and thank you for being here today. I am Sarah Richardson, Barbara Ledermann Rodbell’s granddaughter. When I began this process of commemoration for the Ledermann-Citroen family, this gathering is more than I could have ever imagined.

I want to begin with an enormous thank you to all the people who have worked hard to make this happen. Our family is deeply moved by your dedication to honoring the lost families who once lived here in this neighborhood.

I wish to especially thank Mani Tilgner of the Anne Frank Zentrum for working with me over the past many months to envision and organize today’s events, as well as his colleagues Emily Sasse and Maja Hindinger for the support today.

Thank you to architect Dirk Münkel for the laying of the stones today. Theo Bröcker and Mary Bianchi before him of the Stolpersteine in Mitte project, carried this work forward over many years. Sponsorship of the stones comes from Dina Blauhorn of the Anne Frank Zentrum, Gabriele Hulitschke and Dr. Bergis Schmidt-Ehry of the initiative on Jewish life and resistance in Tiergarten, Daniel Stein of the Heritage Association of Udelhoven, and students and faculty of the Gymnasium Tiergarten, here represented by Lea Dinger and Carola Freudenberg.

Thank you to members of the Jewish Chamber Orchestra of Hamburg, Emanuel Meshvinski, Natalia Alenitsyna, and Elisabeth Kogan, for the musical accompaniment. Librarian Kirsten Graupner of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin helped me with the initial research for the Stolpersteine. Thank you as well to all of the speakers on today’s program.

Thank you to members of the Rodbell, Ledermann, and Citroen families who have traveled from far and wide to join us today, or who are joining us over Zoom.

Ultimately, I thank my Oma, Barbara Ledermann Rodbell. We are all here today because of her. Five years ago, when I was preparing to move to Berlin for a year-long fellowship, my Oma asked me to see about placing stones in front of her family house at Genthiner Strasse 5A. Her Grandmother, Ellen Philippi Citroen, and Grandfather, Hendrick Citroen lived one street over, on Derfflinger Strasse. Her father, Franz Ledermann, had law offices staffed with secretaries and clerks right below the large family apartment on Genthiner Strasse. She remembers playing with her sister on the stone bird sculptures (perhaps in Lützohplatz), shopping for shoes at KaDaWe and exploring the whole city of Berlin with her mother and father.

This past Sunday, we celebrated my Oma's 97th birthday. Her eyes are bright. She greets each day with joy and optimism. She has lived a life of freedom, strength, and principle. What happened in the first part of her life does not define her and is not her whole story. She is fond of the saying that "Living well is the best revenge." But that does not mean that all of this is not a part of her. She speaks of her mother, father, sister, and grandmother often. Even in recent years, I have known her to openly weep when describing her anger at the pointless loss of her family's lives, especially her young sister, Susanne.

I love, admire, respect, and enjoy my Oma. She has a lust for life, an inner dignity, and a sense of the bigger picture more than almost anyone I know. She has always had high expectations for me and placed her trust in me, and that has given me great strength and confidence in my life.

After Nazi Aryanization laws made it impossible for Barbara's father to continue to practice his profession as an attorney in Berlin, the family left their Genthiner Strasse home for Amsterdam. This was an enormous change for Barbara. In Berlin, the family kept a full staff, including a cook and a nurse for the children – who even wore a nurse's uniform with a little red cross on it. The Genthiner Strasse apartment was so large that it could accommodate *two* grand pianos. In Amsterdam, things were far more modest. Ilse Ledermann-Citroen, her mother, now had to do everything in the home, and Franz had to go through a three-year process of relicensing, in Dutch, so that he could continue to practice law.

In 2019, Mary Bianchi of the Projekt Stolpersteine initiative for the Mitte area confirmed the location of my Oma's former home by consulting historical directories and overlaying historical maps of the neighborhood with today's layout, identifying the correct location to be Genthiner Strasse 14. I learned from Mary, with special joy, that following the Stolpersteine Initiative's principle of family unification, a stone with Barbara's name could be laid alongside that of her deceased mother, father, and sister, and her beloved and admired grandmother, Ellen Citroen, Ilse's mother, who was also born and raised in Berlin, acknowledging the impact of the Nazi persecution of her family on Barbara's life, too.

I need to take a moment to note that these five stones are but a sliver of the loss of life in our extended family during the Holocaust. Franz's sister, Käthe Ledermann-Kaempfer, was on the train with him to Auschwitz and was murdered that same day. Among the Citroen family on Ilse's side, 27 members of the family were murdered in the camps. Among the Philippis, in addition to Ellen, *five* of her brothers and sisters – all born and raised in Berlin– were murdered in the camps (Gertrud Hanff, Sophie Neumann, Fritz Philippi, Martin Philippi, and Pauline Schönlicht).

These acts left Barbara Ledermann a stateless, family-less, and virtually penniless orphan at age 17.

Barbara was 16 when she separated from her family to acquire false papers to live underground in Amsterdam during the war, where she survived, making her own living, supporting resistance efforts, eating tulip bulb soup, and shivering under flea-ridden blankets. In 1943, her family was arrested and removed to Westerbork camp, where they resided for five months. In archives at the Anne Frank Haus in Amsterdam, I was shown a most startling artifact of this event - a bill to

Franz Lederman from the Nazis, for the changing after their locks after the house was ransacked. On Nov. 16, the Ledermans boarded a train to Auschwitz. Three days later, on Nov. 19, 1943, Barbara's mother, father, 15-year-old sister, and aunt were immediately gassed upon arrival. Ellen Citroen died a year later at Bergen-Belsen.

There is a book, titled *Letters from the Ledermans*, that reprints 50 letters written among the family in the immediate period before deportation and during their months at Westerbork. The letters were written to Ilse's brother, Paul Citroen, and to Barbara Ledermann, who was in hiding, age 16, and working frantically to send them the items they needed to get by. The letters are heartbreaking to read. They chronicle the family's humor and search for dignity through a slow – and then increasingly rapid – boil of horrors experienced in the midst of birthday greetings and reports on school progress. They show a close family, in love with life, optimistic, rooted in a wide community, and determined to hold their heads high and live their lives fully to the end. The letters detail the family's desperate efforts to save Ellen and to secure emigration to Israel, followed by their final deportation to Westerbork on June 20, 1943, which Barbara narrowly escaped. The last letter is a short postcard to Barbara, written the day of their transport to Auschwitz in November 1943 and thrown from the train.

Barbara would not be able to confirm what happened to her family for several years. At the end of the war, she waited on train platforms and implored the International Red Cross for evidence of their status. Ultimately, at age 18, it seemed that she was alone in the world. This series of losses continued when she left Europe for good, arriving in New York City in 1947.

Today, we are an American family that exists and persists because of her amazing endurance. She had four children, the first two named after her dear sister, Suzanne - my mother, who is here with me, and the second, after her beloved uncle Paul - here as well, and his grandson Jeroen, also joins us. Her son Phillip, named after Ellen, and her grandchildren Max and Eric, from her third son, Andrew, also join us.

One of the tragedies of the loss of these individuals and their life possessions is that the information that we have about the Ledermann, Citroen, and Philippi families in Berlin is minimal and incomplete. Amongst our family, we know very little about Franz, Ilse, Susanne, and Ellen, except what my Oma recalls and what remains in fragments of photographic and written memorabilia.

Here are some things that we know. Ilse was born, raised, and educated here in Berlin on Derfflinger Strasse. Ilse's father was a textile merchant with a large international business in furs located, up until 1938, in Werdersche Markt near Gerson's Department Store. Franz, who was born in Silesia and educated in Zurich, established an international law practice in the heart of Berlin. The Ledermans were a highly educated, artistic, musical, upper-class family, with a staffed house, winter ski vacations, and a Citroen family vault in the New Jewish Cemetery at Weisensee. They were secular Jews who considered themselves German first, who celebrated Christmas, and who loved the city of Berlin, reveling in its history and participating in its immense cultural offerings. My Oma says that to the end, her father, a law-abiding humanist, would *never* believe that the Germans would actually carry out what was foretold by the violent Nazi rhetoric. Although she assimilated to Dutch life and came to love Amsterdam and later the

United States, for the rest of her life my Oma would describe herself as being from a very good German family. She reads and writes German and speaks Berlinese from her era. She is always quick to remind those who hear her tale that there were many good Germans, too.

Two more things can be gleaned about the Ledermann family from what remains. First, Franz had a wonderful wit. From Westerbork camp, he wrote wry letters, complimenting the terrific food and joking that he would not recommend it for an “extended stay.” One treasured relic that we have of his wit is a 1924 *Berliner Tagesblatt* essay considered a “genuine classic of humorous writing” that has been passed down through generations of amateur chamber musicians, titled, “Meet me at the Fermata.” In the essay, Franz writes with loving and self-deprecating humor of the foibles of amateur weekend chamber music players. How I wish I could have known him.

This brings us to the second thing that we know of the family: that Franz and Ilse were avid amateur chamber musicians, she on the piano, he on the violin and viola, and that this formed a core of their social life here on Genthiner Strasse. In a guest book preserved at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum titled "Musik im Hauss Ledermann," the family recorded the names of visitors and the musical program for Sunday gatherings and concerts at their apartment.

For this reason, music has been central to my vision of how we would bring the spirit of this family to life at the laying of these stones. I am overjoyed that we have with us members of the Jewish Chamber Orchestra of Hamburg, who have consulted the Ledermann's Sunday book and bring us some of the pieces that were played here in the Tiergarten. As we listen, I want to imagine Ilse's cakes on the sideboard, the girls playing with dolls in the corner, the warm coming together of friends, and the physical joy and mental uplift and occasional shared laughter at a flub as the players powered through a piece together to meet at the fermata.

The stones we have laid today do not belong to our family. They are for all who encounter them to absorb and interpret in their own way. What I hope is that the stones provoke, for passersby, reflection on the unspeakable ongoing tragedies in this world, including any event orchestrated by the powerful that leaves a family decimated and a child orphaned and alone in the world, that displaces families from all they have known, or that dehumanizes a class of people to the point that killing them can be rationalized and routinized. On this day, I am thinking, for example, of families facing the destruction of their homes and whole communities in the Ukraine, and of the cruel detention of Mexican and Central American immigrants in border control camps in the United States, often separating parents and children for years. I ask you to imagine these families in 90 years, returning to the original site of wholeness - the last freely chosen residence, as the Stolpersteine project puts it - and contemplating what could have been.

Here we are, nearly a century since the Ledermann and Citroen families were whole and complete, living on Genthiner Strasse and Derfflinger Strasse, and our family is still remembering -- and yes, despite our enormous relative privilege and security today -- sometimes crouching in fear and anxiety. Each person in our family carries this overwhelming violent tear in our family lineage in our own way.

To be sure, the meaning of these Stolpersteine is also highly individual to each person in my family. I cannot speak for them, nor for my ancestors, whom I never knew. But in closing, allow me to express some hopes, reflecting only on my own journey in pursuing the placement of these stones on behalf of my Oma. I love the city of Berlin, I feel ever more that it is part of me, and these stones make that even more tangible. The story of the Ledermanns inspires me to celebrate life and survive, persist, and build new traditions and community, in spite of everything. For me, these Stolpersteine feel more like stepping stones, one new toehold on a very personal journey toward understanding, forgiveness, closure, and wholeness. Thank you.

Sarah S. Richardson
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