

Albert and his twin brother Karl-Heinz were born on May 10, 1927 in Berlin, the capital of Germany. As they were growing up, the twins were very close. During the day, they would play together in the Tiergarten, which was the main park in Berlin. And at night, they would end the day by telling each other their secrets. Albert and Karl-Heinz also had a sister, Dorrit, who was two years older, but the boys found her too serious for playing games. She played with her own girlfriends.

Their parents, Mr. and Mrs. Friedlander, provided a comfortable life for their children. Alex Friedlander, Albert's father, sold fabrics to factories that made clothing. Salomé Friedlander, Albert's mother, took responsibility for religious life in the Friedlander home. She came from a traditional family, but brought her children to a more liberal synagogue called the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue.

This Berlin congregation was guided by Rabbi Leo Baeck, one of the great leaders of German liberal Judaism. In contrast to his wife, Mr. Friedlander was quite uninterested in religion. He preferred to spend his weekends at his boat club, rather than attending services at the synagogue.



Albert Friedlander and his twin brother, Karl-Heinz, early 1930s.

Albert and his brother went to the local elementary school starting in 1933. This was the same year that the Nazis came to power in Germany. There were only about half a dozen Jewish children at the school, and the twins were often taunted by their classmates and even some of their teachers for being Jewish. Some of the children would follow the twins on their way home from school and attack them. When Mrs. Friedlander noticed Albert's bruises, he claimed that he fell down and injured himself, to prevent his mother from being alarmed.

The family tried to continue living a normal life despite the increasingly difficult situation. Albert started noticing signs going up around town in public places and shops that warned: "Jews and dogs prohibited." Soon, Jews were excluded from certain professions, businesses, and schools. When the Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935, Jews were no longer considered German citizens, even if their families had lived in Germany for centuries.

With the increasing persecution of Jews, Albert's aunt, Judith, decided to leave Germany. She pretended to go on a visit to Switzerland, and invited Mrs. Friedlander to join her. Secretly, Aunt Judith and Mrs. Friedlander both carried bars of gold with them. The gold belonged to Aunt Judith. She had been a successful real-estate agent, and wanted to escape Germany with all that she had earned. After a brief visit in Switzerland together, Mrs. Friedlander came back to her family in Berlin, while Aunt Judith took her gold to Jerusalem and invested in an apartment where she believed she could settle down to live free from the Nazi threat.

For all those German Jews who were still in Germany, whether because they couldn't or wouldn't leave, a central Jewish organization called the Reichsvertretung represented them, advocated on their behalf, and provided social services. The organization, which was founded in 1933, was headed by Albert's rabbi, Rabbi Leo Baeck.



Albert (to the right of the sign, one row down, in glasses) among the boys at a Jewish sporting event of the Theodore Herzl School, 1937.

In 1936, Albert and his brother began attending the Theodore Herzl School, a Jewish school named after the famous Zionist leader. Hebrew language classes and training for aliya, or emigration to Palestine, were included among the lessons at the school. Sending children to the Palestine was one way to get them out of Germany. Albert enjoyed going to a Jewish school. As he became more aware of what it meant to be Jewish, he also became more interested in the lectures of the rabbi at synagogue and started to think about his future. He decided he wanted to be a rabbi.



The Friedlanders rowing on the Dhame River, 1930s.

Anti-Semitism, or hatred of Jews, was growing rapidly throughout Nazi Germany. At least, Albert and his family thought, they were safe with their friends at the Undine boat club. They enjoyed leaving the center of Berlin every once in a while for the more relaxing area of their boat club, where the boys played with other Jewish friends and Mr. Friedlander basked in his popularity as a fine sportsman. In 1937, however, when Albert was 10, there was a terrifying mob attack on the club.

With a growing concern about the safety of their everyday life, Albert's father went to the American Embassy to ask for an immigration quota number for the family. Because the Americans only permitted a certain number of immigrants each year, the number Mr. Friedlander obtained was not supposed to come up until 1943. They would have to wait at least six years to leave!

Not only was Mr. Friedlander unsuccessful at getting a quota number for his family to leave immediately, but soon all the students at the Theodore Herzl School were told not to return.

The school was ironically located on a square known as Adolf Hitler Platz, and the neighbors despised having a Jewish institution in the area. The neighbors managed to close down the school, and from that time on, the Friedlanders were taught at home.

In November 1938, the Friedlanders heard a rumor about the threat of even more violence, all across Germany. The family decided to visit friends in the suburbs of Berlin. They hid there, together with a group of about 20 other Jews, having been warned to stay there until the violence of what came to be known as Kristallnacht was over.

—Albert Friedlander



The Friedlander siblings, 1937.

The night of November 10, the family decided it would be safe to go home. They were still cautious, though. Albert and his father went first, and the others came half an hour later. They walked down the city streets over broken glass, passing their burned synagogue, which was still smoking.

As they finally walked up the steps to their apartment, they heard noises inside. They could smell cigars and beer, and hear laughter. They realized that **Nazi** officers must be sitting inside, waiting for them. The Nazis would arrest the heads of the household as a form of blackmail, in order to make the Jews pay for the return of their relatives.

Albert and his father waited at the corner until the other members of the family arrived. They returned to the hiding place and stayed there for two more days.

At this point the family, quite desperate to leave, discovered that Cuba was still giving out visas. They quickly got their passports and bought tickets to Havana on a steamship. The passports listed Albert's name as "Albert Israel Friedlander" and his sister as "Dorrit Sara Friedlander." By forcefully adding these middle names, the Nazis could clearly identify Jews.

As they embarked on the ship, the officials noticed that Albert was a Jew and gave him "special attention." They inspected his belongings, to make sure he wasn't taking any valuables. They poked his stuffed toy animal with sharp instruments to make sure there was no jewelry hidden inside, and they confiscated his beloved stamp collection.

There was no farewell party for the Friedlanders, because Jews were not allowed to assemble in groups. People just packed up quietly and escaped.

On December 28, 1938 the family embarked on their three-week sea voyage to Havana, Cuba. For Albert, it was one of the greatest adventures of his young life! The ship was a playground for the boys, who would hide down in the machine rooms or climb up and down the many ladders on the decks, and there were even special parties when all of the children could play together.



The Friedlanders in Havana, Cuba, 1940.

Most of the passengers on the ship were refugees, but the sailors treated them with respect. The Friedlanders had obtained first-class tickets. Some of their friends had taken second- and third-class tickets, whatever was available in order to get out of the country at that point.

The journey reminded Albert of the Passover story as told in the Bible, in which the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt. He felt that his own freedom was just around the corner. Indeed, when the Friedlanders arrived in Cuba they were able to return to a somewhat normal life, despite new difficulties. They had to search for housing, learn a new language, and make new friends. But with the support of Aunt Judith from Jerusalem, they managed to find a place to live and made connections with the growing Jewish community.

Just as Albert had arrived on a ship as a refugee, many other Jews were arriving in Cuba in this same way around this time. One day, Albert went to the docks with his family to greet

some of the new arrivals on one of the ships, called the "St. Louis". Albert learned that his friend from Berlin, Peter Korn, was on the ship. Albert used to play with Peter at the Undine boat club on weekends. He was so excited to see Peter again! When the Friedlanders arrived at the harbor, they rowed out in little boats to say hello to the passengers through the ship's windows, but no one was getting off the ship. In fact, because of a change in Cuban policy, the passengers on the "St. Louis" were not allowed to disembark. Soon, the ship left the harbor, and that was the last time Albert ever saw Peter. Albert began to realize that his own safety was a mere matter of chance.

Though life was pleasant in Cuba, the Friedlanders were still eager to immigrate to the United States. They believed the United States could offer them the best opportunities, but their American quota numbers were not due to come up until 1943.

Mr. and Mrs. Friedlander learned that there was a special children's quota that would allow Albert, Karl-Heinz (who changed his name to Charles Henry), and Dorrit to immigrate in advance of their parents. With the assistance of Aunt Judith and her contacts, the Friedlanders found three Jewish foster families in Mississippi. They then contacted the state senator, Pat Harrison, to allow the three Friedlander children to enter the country.

After a year and a half in Cuba, the three siblings arrived in Miami, Florida where they met their foster families and traveled with them to their new homes in Mississippi. Once again, they started to adjust to their new lives. Albert stayed with the Gordon family.

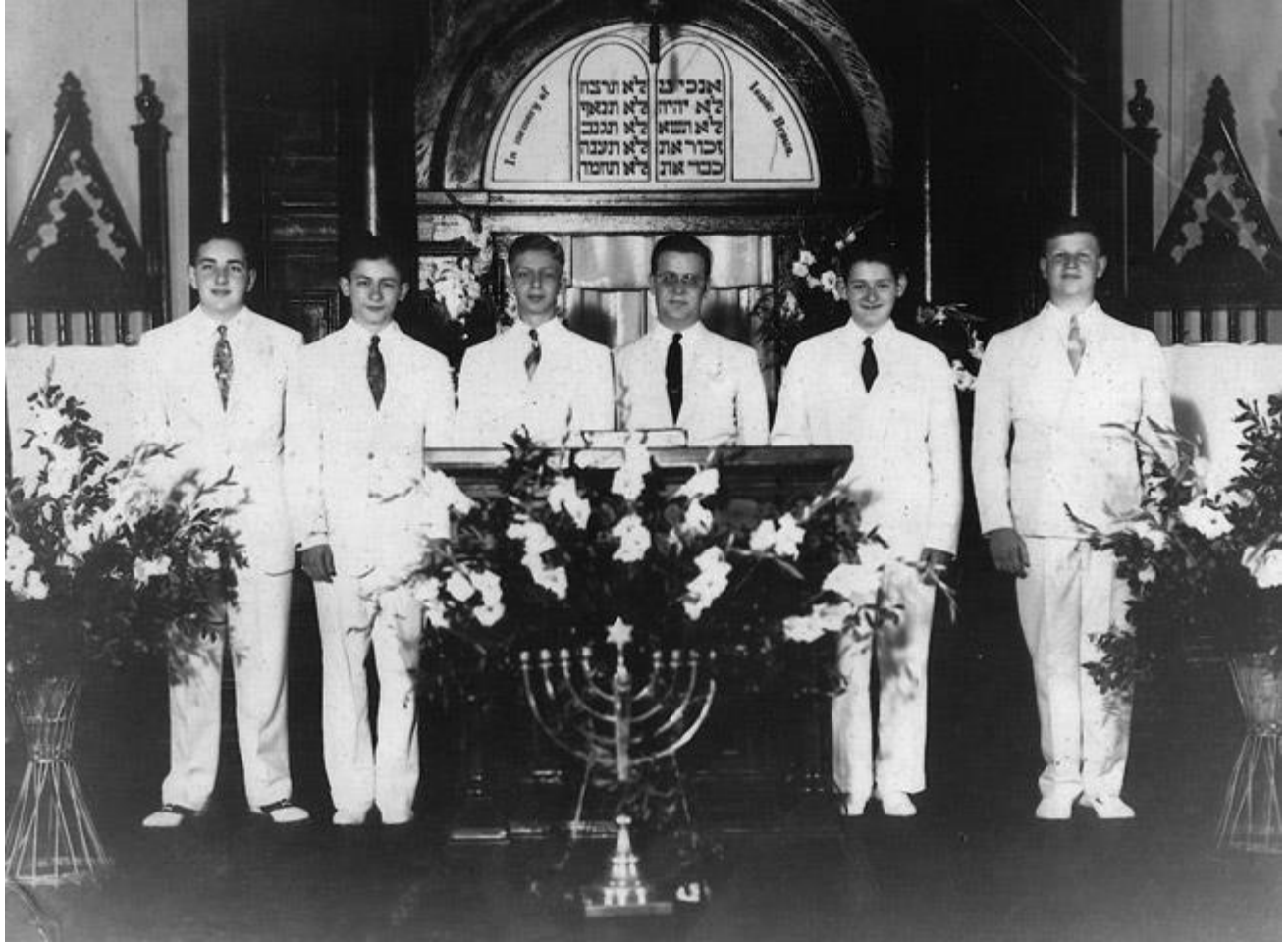
On Sundays the twins would meet each other at the synagogue in Memphis for religious school, and prepare for their upcoming bar mitzvahs.

TESTIMONY: "BAR MITZVAH"

"We didn't have any friends in Memphis."

—Albert Friedlander

After a year and a half, Mr. and Mrs. Friedlander finally joined their children in the United States. They first arrived in New York, and then made their way to Vicksburg, Mississippi. While it was difficult for the children to say goodbye to the foster families that had been so kind, they were overjoyed to be reunited with their own parents.



Albert (second from left) and Charles (second from right) with their confirmation class, 1942.

After finishing high school, Albert wanted to continue to college and even study to become a rabbi. His father believed that his children should focus on getting jobs and earning money, but Mrs. Friedlander agreed that each of her children should pursue higher education.

The leader of the Jewish community in Vicksburg, Rabbi Stanley Brav, helped Albert obtain a scholarship. Albert graduated from college in 1946, and immediately enrolled in the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary, Hebrew Union College, where he was ordained as a rabbi in 1952.

It was in rabbinical seminary that Albert first learned the full extent of what happened in Europe during WWII.



Rabbi Albert H. Friedlander with a portrait of Rabbi Leo Baeck on the wall behind him, 1955.

Rabbi Friedlander married in 1961 and had three children. His life experiences formed the values that he passed on to his children and community as a rabbi and as a father.

Though Albert and his family did not experience anti-Semitism in Vicksburg, they found a new kind of intolerance in the South, between the "whites" and the "blacks." Albert learned about segregation in the South, and became a strong supporter of the African-American civil rights movement.

Rabbi Friedlander became a leader in the Reform movement and a respected scholar of the Holocaust. Throughout his career, RabbiFriedlander also made trips back to Germany to serve the growing Jewish community there. Even though he found returning to Germany difficult, he believed in working with those who were interested in learning more about their heritage, and in pursuing reconciliation among Jews and Germans. In Germany, he would lead religious services, attend cultural events, and lecture. He worked to teach both Jews and Germans about the Holocaust.



TESTIMONY: "BEING YOURSELF... AS A JEW"

"Bar and bat mitzvah is not the end of a process, it is the beginning.