

My name is Peter Gossels. My brother, Werner, and I are the grandsons of Isidor and Lina Lewy, who bought this building in or about 1904-1905 as a source of income against the day that he expected to retire. My grandfather died in 1936, but Lina continued as head of the Lewy family. Then, in 1939, Lina was forced to sell this building for a pittance to a Nazi named Klaus.

Lina continued to live in her apartment on the second floor with her two daughters, my Aunt Hilde and my mother, but she had become so poor that she had to rent out space in her apartment to support herself. Then, on October 3, 1942, Lina, a good and innocent woman, if ever there was one, was arrested and deported to the Nazi concentration camp at Terezin, Czechoslovakia where she died on November 23, 1942. She was 67 years old.

It took me fifty years to recover this building from the Klaus family. Having accomplished that, my brother, Werner, and I decided that we did not wish to serve as foreign landlords, so we decided to sell this building and donate the proceeds to charity.

As you all know, today is Mother's Day and our family has come to Berlin to honor the life of our courageous and loving mother, Charlotte Lewy Gossels. When it became clear to her that the Nazis would make it impossible for Jewish people to continue to live in Germany, our mother worked for a whole year to obtain visas for her children from the French government so that her sons could escape what proved to be her terrible fate. Thanks to our mother's efforts, Werner and I were put on a train to France on July 3, 1939 and survived to return to Berlin this day. By saving her boys eighty years ago, our mother came to be a grandmother of eight children and a great grandmother of twelve. Seven of her grandchildren are standing here with you today.

Sometime in 1942, our 39 year old mother was forced to work as a slave laborer at a company named Deuta Werke. On February 28, 1943 our mother was arrested, forced into a cattle car with a hundred other innocent people without food, water or heat and deported to Poland, undressed and murdered at Auschwitz on March 2, 1943. That very day, the sixth German Army under General von Paulus surrendered to the Russians at Stalingrad, signaling the beginning of the end of the Nazi regime. Her sister Hilde had been murdered at Auschwitz the day before.

Our mother, grandmother and aunt will always be in our hearts wherever we may be, but that is not why our family has come to Berlin from America:

We feel so fortunate that Simon Lütgemeyer found us and devoted more than a year of his life to research and learn what happened to the Jewish residents of this building during the Nazi regime. We come to honor Simon today. He has provided us an enormous number of documents and information about the Lewy family that we did not have. He even found a series of articles that our father had published in 1939 in the newspaper of the Jewish community. During the course of that year, we have corresponded almost every day and I can say that Simon and Britta have become like family to us. Simon's extraordinary dedication to this project and all that he has accomplished are reflected in the beautiful commemorative plaque that he designed and unveiled today.

Even more important, our family has returned to Berlin to honor you, who stand with us today and are dedicated to making the world and Germany, in particular, a place where everyone can live in peace and harmony with each other. Our mother would be so moved if she could be with us this day.

So, with your permission, I would like to invite you to join our family in reciting an ancient Aramaic prayer that dates back to the time of Jesus, known as the Kaddish, which is included in the daily liturgy of the Jewish people and asks God to grant peace to Israel and to all men and women everywhere throughout the world . . .

Let us now thank God for keeping us alive to enjoy this moment by singing the Shehecheyanu.