

Egon and Else Baginsky

Friday 17 February 2023, on the installation of Stolpersteine at Bregenzer Straße 3, 10707 Berlin Egon Baginsky was an uncle of my brother Sidney and me. Else (née Angress) was his wife, our aunt.

Sidney and I grew up knowing that our father Kurt and his sister Edith, who both found refuge in England in 1939, had two brothers who did not survive the Shoah. Kurt and Edith always spoke of their brothers Willy and Egon with the greatest love and respect, as they did when they talked about their father Siegmund, who brought up his four surviving children after his wife Lina (née Krakauer) died age 38 in 1910 when the youngest child -our father - was two.

However, we learned little of what Willy and Egon were like as people -there were no photographs of them on display in our house, no stories of what made them laugh or energised or exercised them, no stories of teasing younger siblings, no accounts of being barmitzvah or of the wedding of Egon and Else. In retrospect, this isn't surprising because it was not until the late 1950s that Kurt knew for sure what had happened to Egon and he never knew, as we now do, that Willy and his wife Dorothea (née Müller) were deported by train from Breslau on 25 November 1941 to Fort IX in Kaunas, Lithuania, two of the 2000 women, men and children from Vienna and Breslau who lost their lives on arrival four days later, on 29 November 1941.

So, most of what we know about Egon is what we've discovered and pieced together over the years. The family had lived for several generations in Rosenberg (now Olesno) in Upper Silesia. Siegmund was the proprietor of Hotel Baginsky, formerly Hotel de Rome, on the Rink, the main square. The hotel was a focal point in the town -for good food, meetings and entertainments in the ballroom, and card-playing.

Egon was born on 28 December 1903. We have a few photographs of him. The earliest, taken in 1907, is a posed family-group picture of our grandmother Lina and grandfather Siegmund with his sisters and brother, their spouses and children. On Lina's lap is a baby, one-year-old Edith. Sitting on the floor nearby in front of Marie Kochman, Siegmund's sister, is six-year-old Willy and standing by his mother is four-year-old Egon. These were the days when photographs were formal, dignified, serious -no one is smiling.

A year or so later, there is a picture taken in a studio. This is of Egon and Edith dressed in outdoor winter clothes sitting on a sledge with a backdrop to look as though they are out in the snow. Another, slightly crumpled, photograph has Egon, around 10 or 11 years old, sitting outside a shop. He is wearing a sailor suit and his arms are folded in a determined way that reminds my wife Mary and me of our younger son Ben when he was a child. The leader of

the Jewish community in Rosenberg Erich Lewin wrote of the adult Egon that he always endeavoured to stand his ground - he was his own man. That's what we see in this photo of the young Egon.

The next picture was taken in May 1933. Egon, 29 years old, is standing on a cobbled street in Rosenberg. He is dressed in a smart, light-coloured, pin-striped suit. He wears round-rimmed glasses that would be fashionable today. He has a handkerchief peeking out from the breast pocket of his jacket. His hair is neatly parted. And he is standing next to his car, number plate IK-6574, one foot on the running board.

And in the last picture we have it's 23 March 1938 in Hotel Baginsky, the day of Else and Egon's wedding. Another family group. As you would expect, it's a happy occasion, smiles on many of the faces. The men are wearing evening dress - starched stand-up collars, black bow ties. The women wear smart, dark dresses. Sitting in the centre of the front row are Else and Egon. She holds a bouquet of flowers and she is smiling. Egon looks a little overwhelmed. To Else's right is Egon's father Siegmund. Next to Egon is a couple, maybe Else's parents.

When he reached secondary-school age, Egon attended the Israel Jacobson Oberrealschule in Seesen, in Saxony, a ground-breaking boarding school that in its 100-year existence pioneered, amongst other things, educating Jewish and Christian children alongside each other. When his schooling ended at age 16, Egon became an apprentice at a wood-saw mill and went on to work as a timber merchant. He lived in Berlin.

Else was born on 11 September 1901 in Krysanowitz in the district of Rosenberg. What we know about her is based mainly on an application that she made on her own behalf and Egon's in March 1939 to the Hilfsverein der Juden in Deutschland (the Relief Organization of German Jews) to leave Germany and specifically, we think, to go to Shanghai.

Of course, the forms that Else and Egon completed do not give us any sense of either of them as individuals with their own ideas and hopes and ambitions of what their lives might have been. The information they provided about their education and professional experience gives us the barest of outlines and was written with the intention of escaping to another country where they could use their skills to make a living. As a young woman, Else was apprenticed as a window dresser for a shoe company and later trained as a podiatrist with the Supinator Compagnie in Frankfurt am Main. A reference from her employer ends by saying that she carried out her duties excellently and was always "honest, diligent and zealous" and "We can, therefore, warmly recommend her to be efficient and reliable and wish her a very successful future."

The reference ends, as if it were the most natural thing in the world: "She leaves us owing to the aryazation of our firm." By this time, Egon too had lost his job, and for the same reason.

On 29 January 1943 Egon and Else were deported to Auschwitz.

Sidney and I would like to thank the Stolpersteine project in Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf for the important work you do to remember Jews and others whose lives were lost as a result of Nazi persecution and we welcome the opportunity formally to remember the lives of Egon and Else.

Despite everything that happened to our families, our parents, Erna -who came to England from Vienna following the Anschluss -and Kurt, always said that you cannot blame successive generations for the actions of previous generations. We think that they would have thought we were right to apply to have these Stolpersteine installed and to stand here today - Sidney and Linda and their daughter Lisa; Mary and me, our daughter Charlotte and her partner Richard; and to be with us in their thoughts, Sidney and Linda's son Adam, Mary's and my older son Abe (who walked across Berlin with me in 2019 to find the place where Egon and Else lived) and our younger son Ben.