

CIVIL COURAGE IN NAZI GERMANY: THE PISAREK FAMILY AND THE ROSENSTRASSE PROTEST

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INTRODUCTION

On February 27th, 1943, the Nazi regime, through the Gestapo, initiated mass arrests of the remaining Jewish individuals in Berlin with the goal of deportation. 2,000 of these individuals included men who were married to non-Jewish women, who had previously received temporary deferrals from deportation due to their "mixed marriage" status (Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation). However, they were now being held at a deportation center at Rosenstraße 2-4. Upon hearing that their husbands had been arrested and were being held at Rosenstrasse, hundreds of women began to gather outside the building protesting that their spouses be released. The protest lasted until March 6th, when the regime ordered the release of the men. In collaboration with the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation, I worked to uncover the untold histories of these courageous women who participated in the protest by researching these women and their families' lives. This research serves to honor the memory of the women at the protest and to educate on how ordinary individuals can challenge injustice and defy dictatorship, despite facing the threat of great personal loss, ultimately demonstrating civil courage. Through the creation of biographies using genealogical records, databases such as Ancestry.com, and testimonies from women at the protest, these women's untold stories are brought to light. This research project specifically highlights the story of the Pisarek family, whose family testimony provides an eyewitness account of how ordinary individuals bravely resisted the Nazi regime at the Rosenstrasse Protest and exemplifies civil courage. By creating and publishing a biography on the Pisarek family on the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation website, which is grounded in survivor testimony and genealogical research, the family's defiance and bravery can be honored and remembered for generations to come.

METHODS

- Used a list of names of women who participated in the protest, provided by Dr. Stoltzfus, who is a founder of the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation, which includes names of protestors, their spouses, addresses, and other research previously done by former research assistants, to select Ruth Gross as my biography candidate.
- Searched through Ancestry.com databases to locate historical records on Ruth, such as her birth certificate and records related to Nazi persecution. I used keywords like Berlin and the date of her birth, which was 1931, to narrow down search results.
- Once historical records on Ruth were located, the information from the documents regarding her parents led to finding her mother, Berta Pisarek, who was at the protest as well, but was not listed as a participant in the list of names previously mentioned. I utilized Ancestry.com again to find more information on Berta, including her marriage certificate.
- Discovered additional information on the Pisarek family from speeches and interviews given by Ruth through targeted online searches such as "Ruth Gross Rosenstrasse Protest" leading me to websites that had archived these speeches and interviews.
- Utilizing the results of the research, I completed a first draft of a biography on the family, which I sent to my research mentor and other UROP students working with the Rosenstrasse Foundation for review.
- After applying the corrections given by my peers and research mentor, which included revisions for historical accuracy and clarity, I wrote my final draft of the biography and submitted it to my research mentor for final approval. Upon receiving the final approval, I was then able to publish the biography to the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation website under the personal testimonies tab.

DOCUMENTS



Figure 1.
Berta, Ruth, and Georg Pisarek in the Spring of 1948



Figure 2.
Abraham and Berta Pisarek on holiday in Bansin



Figure 3.
Ruth and Georg Pisarek in the Spring of 1948

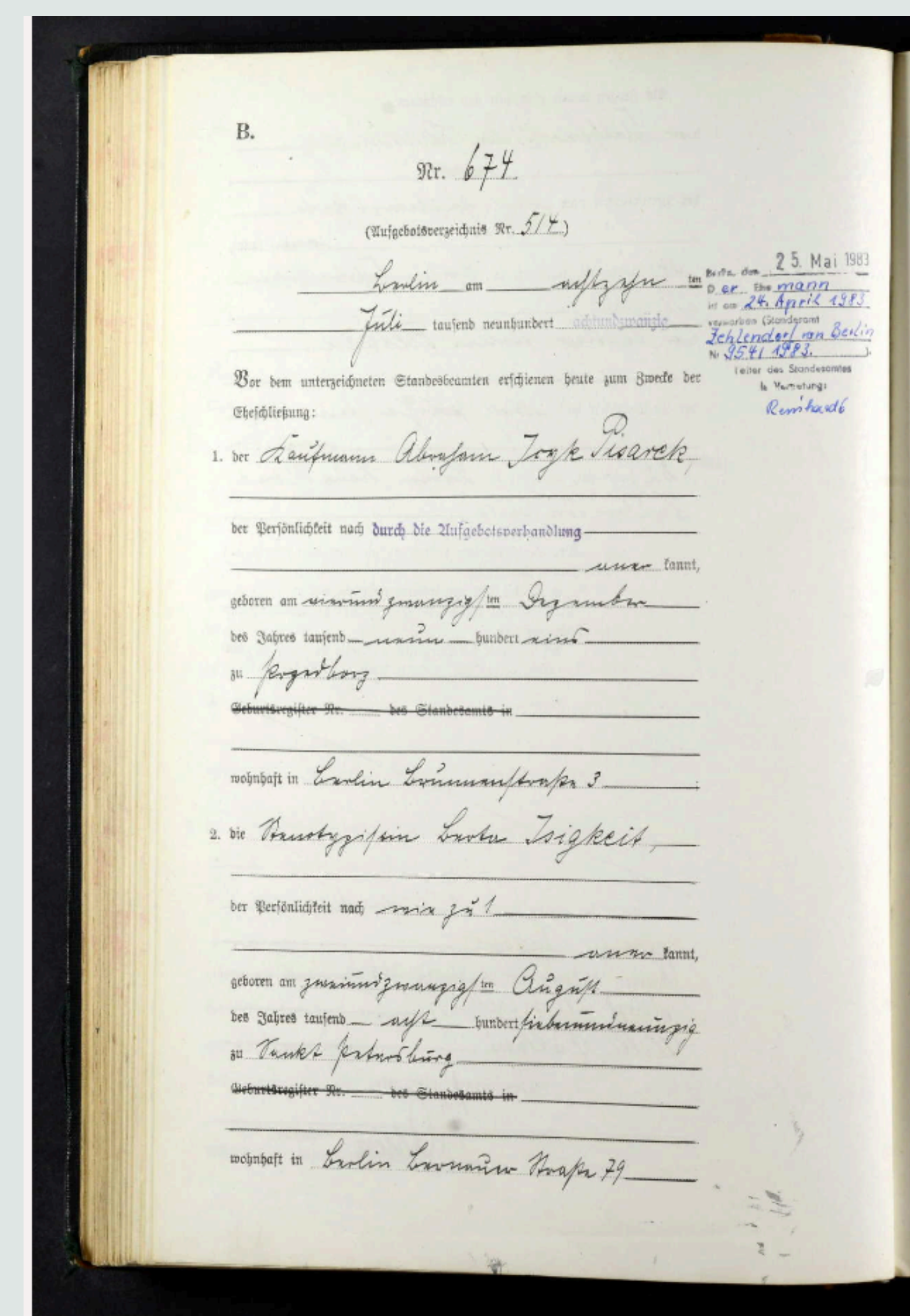


Figure 4.
Berta and Abraham Pisarek's marriage certificate

RESULTS

The information gathered from Ancestry.com allowed for a foundation of biographical information on the Pisarek family, while the details from Ruth Gross's testimony added an emotional depth and an eyewitness perspective. The Pisarek family was an ordinary middle-class family; however, they demonstrated significant civil courage, defined by the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation as "concrete acts in opposition to injustice and human rights violations that defend the values of a pluralistic society", when Berta Pisarek and her two children, Ruth and Georg, ages 13 and 10, challenged the injustices of the Nazi regime. On February 27, 1943, they gathered with hundreds of women outside the deportation center at Rosenstrasse to protest the arrest of the patriarch of the family, Abraham Pisarek. Every single day of the protest, Berta, Ruth, and Georg would return to Rosenstrasse in hopes of seeing Abraham be released, despite the personal danger they faced due to the brutality of the Nazi regime. Their story demonstrates how ordinary individuals, when confronted with injustice, were capable of remarkable acts of civil courage under the Nazi regime.

CONCLUSION

The story of the Pisarek family is one that exemplifies civil courage, as Berta, Georg, and Ruth bravely risked the dangers of the Nazi regime to protest the release of Abraham Pisarek. Their story will be remembered and honored through the publishing of their biography on the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation website under the "Personal Testimonies" tab. Further research on other women who participated in the Rosenstrasse Protest will be pursued through the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation with the continuation of biographical writing. These biographies will contribute to the broader mission of the Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation to "commemorate, encourage, and educate about civil courage" (Rosenstrasse Civil Courage Foundation).

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