

Silent Scars - A journey through lost Heritage

The air was heavy with the weight of history, lingering in the corners of Anne's mind as she recounted her family's journey of loss and displacement. It all began with her grandfather, Ernst Emmanuel Schwab, a man of German Jewish heritage.

Anne's mother, Iris Noel "Nelly" Knight, was an Englishwoman who fell in love with Ernst's world through the lens of soccer. Joe Bache, Iris' first cousin, played for Aston Villa and represented England several times. It was through the international games that Joe met Ernst, a German sports journalist, captivated by the game. Through this connection, Ernst and Iris met in her and Joe's hometown, Birmingham and later married. It is unclear as to whether Iris converted to Judaism as she was not of Jewish heritage and this would have caused some disapproval within Ernst's family. For his part Ernst was German and unlikely to be viewed very favourably in post-first world war England.

The young couple settled in Germany, first in Heidelberg, a town renowned for its university. Iris' presence brought a unique challenge. Ernst's mother arrived to ensure their home adhered to kosher rules. It was in Heidelberg that Anne, or Annchen as she was known, came into the world in 1926. Anne's earliest memories were shaped by her German surroundings, with German as her mother tongue despite her English heritage. The young family later moved to Mannheim, an industrial city on confluence of the Rhine and Neckar Rivers. Annchen started school here and this is where they lived in 1935.

The winds of change blew fiercely in the 1930s, especially in Germany. The rise of the Nazi regime cast a dark shadow over Germany and the rest of Europe. Ernst found himself trapped in England while reporting on the FA Cup final in 1935. The Nazi guards enforced anti-Semitic laws at the borders, effectively severing Ernst's ties to his homeland.

The 1933 "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" restructured the entire civil service according to racial principles. In particular, the "Aryan Paragraph", the exclusion of "non-Aryan" civil servants by compulsory retirement, ended the legal equality of Jewish people.

The 1935 Reich Citizenship Law of 1935 deprived Jewish people of German citizenship and assigned them the second-class status as 'nationals' with limited civil rights. Furthermore, the 'Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour' banned 'mixed marriages' between partners of 'Aryan' and 'Jewish' blood.

At a stroke of the pen this meant that Ernst was no longer deemed to be a German citizen and the marriage to Iris deemed illegal.

The family was torn apart, and Ernst knew that Iris and Annchen needed to leave Germany swiftly. With the help of friends, Iris and young Annchen were smuggled across the French border, where Joe awaited their arrival. The risk for Ernst to travel to Europe was already too great. The journey to Birmingham was fraught with

danger and uncertainty, and Annchen Schwab transformed into Anne Knight overnight. Her mother, determined to shield her from the stigma of being German, insisted on speaking English. Survival required adaptability, and Anne quickly learned the language and customs of her new home.

Amidst the difficulties of being refugees, tragedy struck when Ernst succumbed to cancer in 1936. He had fought for Germany in World War I, surviving the horrors of trench warfare and the long walk home after his escape from a Russian Prisoner of War camp, only to be stripped of his citizenship and belongings by the very country he had served. Anne, now ten years old, carried the weight of displacement and loss, very aware that her German identity needed to be suppressed in a society that viewed it unfavourably.

Ernst was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Birmingham, England, a testament to the diaspora that tore through their lives. The Jewish Women's Society in Birmingham provided support for Iris and Anne in the aftermath of Ernst's death, a lifeline in their tumultuous journey.

Throughout the war, Iris and Anne remained in Birmingham, their lives intertwined with the rhythm of the city. Anne pursued her studies at the University of Birmingham, aspiring to become a teacher. There she crossed paths with Eric Scruton, a young man from Kent who had excelled in sports during his school years. He was captain of both the cricket and the rugby teams. They married soon after Eric's release from military service. At the age of 22 he had already achieved the rank of Lieutenant and served in India and Egypt. Joe's modest apartment above his men's wear shop became their humble abode. Life was simple, with a kitchen table that doubled as a bath, by removing the top, a testament to the frugality of the post-war times.

Their family expanded with the arrival of three children—Deborah in 1949, Eric (Riki) in 1961, and Gareth in 1963. Anne, now known as Mrs. Scruton, dedicated herself to teaching at Glen Hills Primary School in Leicester, imparting knowledge and discipline to her students. Among them was Sue Townsend, a budding writer who would immortalize Anne in her *Adrian Mole* books. A character named Mr. Scruton, strict and conservative, mirrored Anne's indomitable spirit and no-nonsense approach. Anne's forceful presence and unyielding dedication to education left a lasting impression on her pupils. When Sue, in much later years walked the Camino, she was overheard to say in the showers, "Mrs Scruton would be proud of me", as she always needed a bit more encouragement to shower after PT.

In 1965, Eric made the decision to uproot the family and seek a new life in South Africa, enticed by the promises of a land in need of skilled engineers and tradesmen. Johannesburg became their new home, yet the journey was not without sacrifice. Their eldest daughter, Deborah, chose to return to the UK, unable to reconcile herself with the idea of living in South Africa at that time. Anne's teaching career faced a setback, as she was barred from teaching due to her lack of proficiency in Afrikaans. Undeterred, she ventured into the world of real estate, forging a successful path as an estate agent and eventually developed a business of her own.

The scars of her childhood seemed to remain with Anne until her final days. German remained unspoken within the family, a silent agreement to bury the past. She never

divulged her German-Jewish heritage to her loved ones, not even her husband. The weight of her history remained her secret, unveiled only after her passing. And only then, a poignant reminder of her journey was discovered. Amongst her belongings, lay the pillow from 1935 when they fled over the French border, a tangible relic of a lost homeland and shattered heritage.

Anne Scruton's journey, marked by loss, resilience, and an unyielding spirit, echoes through time—a reminder of the countless lives disrupted by war and persecution. Her story, like many others, serves as a testament of the perpetual struggle to reconcile one's heritage with the realities of a fractured world.