

# ONE *last* THING

## In Search of Understanding

A QUEENS ALUMNA TAKES A FAMILY TRIP TO GERMANY AND FINDS MEANING



*A memorial wall at Dachau in Germany honors those who were exterminated in the concentration camp between 1933 and 1945. Queens alumna Dana Childers visited the poignant site, where her paternal grandfather was imprisoned, following graduation.*

On our first night in Germany, my dad and I gathered with the rest of the group—city representatives, tour guides, researchers and our fellow Frankfurters. Joined together in our hotel conference room, all in a circle, we passed around a microphone to share our stories of love and loss during the Holocaust. Some were first-generation and had lived through events like Kristallnacht as young children. The stories were incredibly moving.

In 1996, my grandmother and aunt went to Germany on the same kind of trip. Sponsored by the city of Frankfurt, the opportunity is available to first-, second-, and third-generation Frankfurters. In 2018, my dad discovered that the city still offered the opportunity, and that my family members could apply. His application quickly got approved, and being the eldest child, he offered me first choice to go along. I agreed, because it was timed up just after my graduation from Queens, but more importantly, I wanted to take this trip with my dad. I'm 44 years old, and I was celebrating my recent accomplishment: earning my college degree.

A psychology major, I like to understand how people think and was eager to understand further. My hope was that this trip would help me understand where I came from and how it emotionally affected my dad's side of the family.

Both of my dad's parents escaped Nazi Germany and survived the Holocaust. They never talked about it. Not with me anyway. They didn't seem to discuss loss and grief at all. I think it is due to what they experienced in Germany. In contrast for me, my mother grew up very differently, her family all from North Carolina. They showed a large capacity for emotions.

Two parts of the trip stand out for me: visiting Dachau and trying to follow in my grandmother Minna's footsteps in Frankfurt. Dachau is a haunting place. Visiting the former concentration camp was one of the most emotional moments. Seeing the conditions the prisoners endured was beyond words, and all I could think of was my sweet grandfather, Al, being held captive in such a place. Equally disturbing, walking around Frankfurt, the town has identified Holocaust victims by placing plaques on the sidewalks where families once lived. The most striking was seeing 11 or 12 little gold plaques from the same family—the adults down to very young children.

My dad was more affected by our meeting with Sven Bischoff, the grandson of the family who brought my grandfather and his family out of Germany. I suspect that my father was more moved to meet Mr. Bischoff because, were it not for his grandfather's generosity, none of us may exist.

I never knew why my dad's side of the family had been so closed off. We never talked about what they went through. But now, having walked a little in their shoes and after learning what they endured in Germany, I've found a little understanding.



*Dana Beth Childers '19 is a native Charlottean and recent graduate of Queens University of Charlotte. She earned a degree in psychology with a minor in professional writing and rhetoric.*