David Horsley: Searching for Albert!

When my mother died, I made a vow. I promised to find her father's grave so she and he could be reunited in death. My mother Judith had told me some years previously, that her father was buried in a Berlin cemetery. As he was Jewish and died in December 1941, I did not understand how this could be. Surely, I thought, the Nazis would not allow the burial of a Jew specially in der midst of war time. Why would they allow this as they were embarking on the wholesale slaughter of European Jewry.

My mother said she could not go to Berlin because he was buried in the eastern part of the city and there were difficulties travelling there. I explained it would be straight forward as British tourists journeyed to the G.D.R. all the time, but she insisted there would be a problem. I said we could go together; I would arrange a journey and this we agreed. Unfortunately, as I was working full time, and due to her bouts of ill health, we never made the trip.

My mother also showed me some documents. They were telegrams, some from her to her parents, and the others, from her parents to her. They ranged from1939 to 1943 and were sent via Red Cross in Berlin and London. She translated them and obviously because of war time censorship, they were only of personal interest. There were also letters in German and other German documents. I expressed great interest and this pleased her.

She then told me of an incident in her leaving Germany in 1939. Her parents had managed to get her entry to Britain and on her journey through Germany, she was harassed by Nazi officials in the train. A group of British commercial travellers defended her and gave her protection from this and other difficulties until she reached the safety of the U.K. She was eternally grateful to them and explained that Britain had given her safety and I realised this was why she always stayed middle of the road and apolitical.

Unfortunately, I never followed up this discussion. She became upset because her mother had died in Auschwitz and I remembered many years previously when documentary film of the concentration camps were shown on television, this naturally distressed her very much. I did not want to cause more distress, so did not pursue the matter.

When my mother died, I remembered her account of her father Albert Salinger having died and been buried in Berlin in December 1941. So I made my promise to find his grave if it existed. I found the telegrams and documents she had shown me some years earlier an most amazing of all, a letter from the British travellers who had protected her all those years ago on the train out of Germany. It was written on the back of a letter in German from my mother to her parents. These British gentlemen and ‚old soldiers', as they signed themselves, must have written this to her parents to reassure of her safety. But how did my mother have possession of this letter? Was it sent and returned? I will never know.

It took another eight years before I took action. I finally began to make inquiries without much success, when a friend suggested I try the Weiner Institute. I telephoned the next day an luckily, the archivist, Howard Falkson answered. He was extremely friendly and helpful and invited me to the institute when he patiently gave answers to my many questions. I found that Albert was indeed buried in Berlin at the vast Jewish Weißensee Cemetery. The Nazis kept that cemetery and a Jewish hospital open all through the war years. Of course, Nazism like apartheid would not tolerate Jews

and Aryans mixing even in death so Jewish puppet officials were used by the German state to officiate these ‚Jewish' institutions in a grotesque manner throughout the holocaust.

Howard pushed me in touch with Centrum Judaicum, a Jewish institute in Berlin. Again, I was lucky, I spoke to a young woman Daniela Gauding who proved to be so helpful to me in my search. With the help of these two people, I found further details of Albert's grave and burial.

My usual impetuous self, I booked a flight to Berlin and found a hotel in Charlottenburg near the street where my mother lived with her parents, until her departure in 1939. On arrival, I headed for Centrum Judaicum which is in the former East - Berlin. The street has several international restaurants on one side and huge empty desolate buildings sites on the other. Further down the street was the recently restored synagogue and next-door Centrum Judaicum. Outside were about four armed policemen, witness to neo nazi attacks and provocative fascist marches since ‚reunification'. I had to go through ‚airport' type security to enter the building and met Daniela who had contacted the Jewish Cemetery at Weißensee and told them I was coming the next day to locate Albert's grave.

I took a tram from Alexanderplatz and then made my way up Herbert-Braun-Straße, named after a German Jewish Communist resistance fighter who was betrayed and killed by the Nazis in 1942. I entered the huge Weißensee Cemetery and was shown to a small office. An official photocopied plans of the cemetery and then told me that my grandfather, Albert, had no headstone. I was devasted by this news as my earlier research suggested there was a stone. However, he continued, there was a stone for my great grandfather who died in 1927. I resolved to find the site of Albert's grave and then look for my great grandfather's stone.

I followed the plan but had problems locating Albert's grave. Many graves had stones but they were not all numbered and some had no stone. I resolved to find the other site and followed the plan. Again, no stone seemed to exist, I found the row of graves but there was none with the correct inscription and number. Thoroughly depressed, I headed back to the office and told the official what had happened. He went into a back room and returned to tell me that Albert did have a stone but there was none for my great grandfather. Elation overcame my annoyance at this crass mistake and being given a larger plan, I returned to the plot where Albert was buried. There was a front row of graves, many with very ornate stones and I found the next row. At last numbers seemed to be in sequence with the plan. I carefully followed the names and numbers and there, resisting against some roots was Albert's gravestone. I was overcoming with joy an knelt down to read it better: **Dr. Albert Salinger 1.11.1877 – 8.12.1941**.

The stone as laying there loose not fixed to an plinth and was in amazingly good condition. It lay on a slope and under protection of many trees which no doubt had saved it from rough weather and the glare of the sun. I spoke softly to the grandfather I never knew and told him that his daughter had made a new life in Britain. I told him that I would come back and scatter my mother's ashes on to his grave.

After a while, I returned in high spirits to the office and said I wanted the stone be fixed by a plinth. The official said I would have to sort that out. The next day I saw Daniela again and she said she would investigate stonemasons in Berlin to do the job. For the rest of my stay, I was in cloud nine. I had succeeded. I had found Albert's grave.