

## Glacisweg 2B – David Silber, Ryfka Silber-Öhlbaum, Selman Silber, and Wolf Silber

Ernst Homburg and Erik van Rijsselt, April 2024

Lest we forget.

This house at Glacisweg 2B was from June 1938 onwards the home of the Silber family, consisting of David Silber, his wife Ryfka, born Öhlbaum and their two youngest sons Selman and Wolf. Their eldest son Chaim had already lived in Palestine for three years.<sup>1</sup>

David, Ryfka, Selman and Wolf were murdered in the Auschwitz death camp because they were Jews. Only the eldest son Chaim survived the Holocaust because he emigrated to Palestine in 1935. He founded a family in Israel and thus ensured that David and Ryfka had offspring. It is special and moving that three children and six grandchildren and their partners can be present today, as well as five great-grandchildren.<sup>2</sup>

David and Ryfka were from Galicia, a region which now belongs to Poland and the Ukraine. David was born on February 8, 1890, in the town of Ulanów on the San – the third son of Izaak Silber and Feigele Silber-Öhlbaum – and Ryfka was born on May 2 of the same year in the town of Lezajsk, about 30 km south of Ulanow.<sup>3</sup> Galicia was then part of the Habsburg Empire. It was a kind of homeland for the Jews of Eastern Europe because they were allowed relative freedom under Austrian rule. Both cities had a large Jewish community. In Ulanów, for example, about 40 percent of the

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<sup>1</sup> Personal Card David Silber, Bureau Vestigingsregister, The Hague (PCDS); Card System Joodse Raad, David Silber (CJRDS). In 1993 Chaim Silber wrote down his memoirs in a book for his family (in Hebrew), with the English title: *Tombstone with no grave: A family history*. We thank Zeev Silber for communicating this book to us on early April 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Email correspondence with Zeev Silber.

<sup>3</sup> PCDS; Personal Card Ryfka Öhlbaum, Bureau Vestigingsregister, The Hague (PCRO); CJRDS; Card System Joodse Raad, Ryfka Öhlbaum (CJRRO). For a description of the Silber family and of the life in Ulanow and Lezajsk, see Salomon Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik. Dagboek* (Kampen: Kok, 1997), pp. 8-24; and Chaim Silber, *Tombstone with no grave: A family history* (1993).

population was Jewish. However, anti-Semitism was growing in the region even before the First World War. For example, riots broke out in Ulanów in 1905 against the Jewish population.<sup>4</sup> Many left the town. Around the First World War, the number of Jews in Ulanów had almost halved.<sup>5</sup> During the war years and especially afterwards, when this part of Galicia became part of the new Polish state in 1918-1919, pogroms and aggression against the Jews by Polish nationalists became an almost daily practice. At the same time new tax measures and regulations made the lives of Jewish traders and middle classes increasingly difficult. Such economic factors also stimulated that part of the Jewish population tried to build a better life in Germany.<sup>6</sup>

We don't know in detail how David and Ryfka met. David may have visited markets and shops as a merchant in the larger city of Lezajsk, where Ryfka's father had a grocery store, but it is also possible that David's mother was related to Ryfka's father. They married in Lezajsk, in August 1918.<sup>7</sup> The young family settled in that city. Their son Chaim was born there on September 26, 1919. A second son, Selman, followed on November 12, 1921, and the youngest, Wolf, on October 11, 1926.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to two sisters, David Silber also had two elder brothers: Kalman, born in 1886, and Gerschon, born in December 1887.<sup>9</sup> Due to the deteriorating economic conditions in their native region, they would all move to Düsseldorf in Germany, followed by emigration to the Netherlands because of the rising Nazism and anti-Semitism in Germany. Kalman was married to Bertha Schleien from Ulanów, a sister

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<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulan%C3%B3w>; <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le%C5%BCajsk>.

<sup>5</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 10, 16; <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kolbuszowa/ulanow/history.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Roth, for instance, fled to Vienna, as did the families of Jacob Wasserstein and Manès Sperber. See: Keiron Pim, *Endless Flight: The Life of Joseph Roth* (London: Granta, 2022); Manès Sperber, *De waterdragers van God* (Zorgvlied: Van Maaskant Haun, 2022); Bernard Wasserstein, *A Small Town in Ukraine: The place we came from, the place we went back to* (London: Penguin, 2023). See also: Ilsa Josepha Lazaroms, *De Groene*, 17 November 2022; Michiel Krielaars, *NRC*, 17 February 2023; *NRC*, 1 March 2023; Silber, *Tombstone with no grave*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Silber, *Tombstone with no grave*, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Personal Card's, Bureau Vestigingsregister, of David, Ryfka, Selan and Wolf.

<sup>9</sup> Jan Diederer, *42 Joodse Valkenburgers opgepakt en vermoord* (z.p.: by the author, 2014), p. 29; <https://www.oorlogsbronnen.nl/tijdlijn/Gerschon+Silber/57/130373603>; Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, p. 11.

of Maschel Schleien who had married Baruch Liebermann.<sup>10</sup> Baruch and Maschel moved to Düsseldorf in 1914, where Baruch settled as a merchant.<sup>11</sup> A few years later their example was followed by Kalman and Bertha Silber. They also moved to Düsseldorf, where Kalman became a textile merchant. Their youngest son Max was born there in 1922.<sup>12</sup> Around 1927, Gerschon also followed his eldest brother to Düsseldorf because he could hardly support his family in Poland. Instead of being a shopkeeper in Ulanow, he now became a textile merchant. However, he left his family behind in Ulanow and sent them money from Düsseldorf. Only when he went to the Netherlands his family reunited with him.<sup>13</sup>

David and his family also followed the example of the two elder brothers and moved to Düsseldorf between 1927 and 1929.<sup>14</sup> Like his brothers, he traded in textiles, mainly as a peddler, but he also had a laundry (Wäscheversand). In the short time that David Silber and his family were based in Düsseldorf, they had several addresses.<sup>15</sup>

Even before Hitler came to power in January 1933, anti-Semitism was increasing in German society. Once again, Baruch Liebermann was the first to make the decision to leave. On March 17, 1932, he and his family settled in Maastricht.<sup>16</sup> Gerschon Silber also left in 1932. First, together with his eldest son Samuel he went to Amsterdam, and

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<sup>10</sup> We use here the spelling Schleien, that is also used on the tombstone of Maschel Schleien. In other documents also the spelling Schlijen or Schlejen occurs.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.struikelsteentjes-maastricht.nl/namenlijst/baruch-lieberman/>; Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Herman van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg: Joden en Sinti in Nederlands-Limburg tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2013), pp. 362-363; Silber, *Tombstone with no grave*, p. 24; Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, p. 12. For the birth date of Max Silber, see: <https://joodsbw.nl/id/P-8811>.

<sup>13</sup> Salomon Silber mentions different dates for the emigration of his father to Düsseldorf: 1927 and 1929. Given the fact that also David went between 1927 and 1929 to Düsseldorf, and seems to have arrived after Gerschon, I assumed Gerschon arrived in 1927. See: Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 8, 12, 28.

<sup>14</sup> According to Chaim Silber his family moved to Düsseldorf in 1927. But Ryfka and David Silber were formally registered only in 1929. See: Silber, *Tombstone with no grave*, p. 41; and email Hildegard Jakobs, Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Düsseldorf, to Ernst Homburg, 18 Jan. 2023.

<sup>15</sup> The laundry (Wäscheversand) was situated in 1931 at Schützenstrasse 54 and in 1932 at Klosserstrasse 102. The family lived just before their departure to Maastricht in 1933 at Karlstrasse 88. Email Hildegard Jakobs, Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Düsseldorf, to Ernst Homburg, 18 Jan. 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Personal Card Baruch Lieberman, Bureau Vestigingsregister, The Hague.

early October 1932 they moved to a house in Heerlen.<sup>17</sup> In January 1933 the rest of the family moved from Ulanow to Düsseldorf, and in the same month they all settled in Heerlen in the Netherlands, about 25 kilometres east of Maastricht.<sup>18</sup> After Hitler came to power, David Silber also moved to the Netherlands. In May 1933 he and his family emigrated from Düsseldorf to Maastricht, where they found accommodation at Achter de Molens 4. David and Ryfka were then 43 years old and Chaim 13 years of age. Selman and Wolf did not follow their parents until early November 1933, when they were almost 12 and 7 years old respectively.<sup>19</sup> Kalman's family followed a bit later. It settled in Heerlen, next door to Gerschon's family, and from 1936 in Valkenburg.<sup>20</sup>

When David Silber's family arrived in the Netherlands, there was a deep economic crisis, just like in Germany. Like his brothers, he tried to earn a living as an itinerant textile merchant. Starting from scratch in a new country with a foreign language in a time of crisis was tough. In his memoirs, Salomon Silber writes several times that his father Gerschon could barely feed his family. Sometimes there was true poverty and his mother Mirla had to ask for financial support from the Jewish aid committees in Heerlen and Maastricht. Fortunately, son Samuel sometimes also sent money to Heerlen from Palestine.<sup>21</sup> David and his family were doing slightly better economically than Gerschon's family. David also gave money to his brother's children in Heerlen when something was celebrated. Despite the poor financial situation, both families in Heerlen and Maastricht upheld middle-class cultural values. Education and study were in esteem, the works of Goethe, Schiller and historians were read, and the family photos taken of the families of Gerschon and David show that everyone was

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<sup>17</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 26; 'Burgerlijke standen. Heerlen, 29 Sept. – 5 Oct. 1932', *Limburgsch Dagblad* 10 October 1932. Thanks to Ludo Grégoire.

<sup>18</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 11, 26-29.

<sup>19</sup> PCDS; PCRO; <https://www.myheritage.nl/research/collection-10921/duitsland-joodse-slachtoffers-nazi-vervolging-1933-1945?itemId=110552&action=showRecord&recordTitle=David+Silber>; Personal Selman Silber, Bureau Vestigingsregister, The Hague (PCSS); Personal Card Wolf Silber, Bureau Vestigingsregister, The Hague (PCWS).

<sup>20</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 32, 35-36; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, p. 126.

<sup>21</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 29, 31, 33, 41-42, 45, 47, 49; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, p. 56.

well dressed. We see fully integrated 'Dutch' families who have left behind the clothing and customs of the Jews in Galicia.<sup>22</sup>

Politics and economics dominated life during the 1930s, but in addition - and partly related to this - there was also a strong desire among the older children of Kalman, Gerschon and David to leave for Palestine and to help build a Jewish society there. For example, Kalman's two eldest sons – Selman and Samuel – emigrated to Palestine. Also, son Samuel from Gerschon emigrated in 1933 and his daughter Scheindele (Naomi) followed in 1936, after she had gained agricultural experience in the Wieringermeer, organized by the Zionist youth organisation Aliyat-Noard. After David and Ryfka had settled in the Netherlands with their family in 1933, Chaim developed the same wish. He did not see his future in the Netherlands but in building a Jewish society in Palestine. He left in 1935 and arrived, on the same ship as Kalman's son Samuel, in Haifa on July 1 of that year.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, the sons Selman and Wolf went to school in the Netherlands. Wolf completed primary school in 1937.<sup>24</sup> We know little about his subsequent life. In the meantime, the Silber family had moved to Glacisweg 2B on June 30, 1938, where we are now. They lived in an upstairs house, above a hairdresser's shop, with a front and a back living room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, a small utility room and an attic space. There they were visited by their eldest son Chaim in the summer of 1939, at the occasion of Wolf's Bar-Mitzwa. It would be the last time he would see his parents and his two brothers.<sup>25</sup>

After leaving school, Selman became a textile merchant, just like his father. We know that he took an accounting course in the evenings at the Handelsinstituut Defresne on

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<sup>22</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 14, 26, 28-30, 32, 36-37, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 24, 31, 37, 41; Silber, *Tombstone with no grave*, pp. 61-70.

<sup>24</sup> PCWS; photograph of Wolf Silber at the occasion of having finished primary school in 1937.

<sup>25</sup> PCDS; PSRO; PCSS; PCWS; Silber, *Tombstone with no grave*, pp. 71-80, esp. p. 74. Inventory of the household good present at Glacisweg 2B on 9 September 1942, on <https://www.joodsmonument.nl/nl/page/494932/inventory-of-david-silber-and-his-family> (uploaded by the editors of Joods Monument).

the Wilhelminasingel in Maastricht, which he passed in 1941. His neighbour across the street Dolf Grégoire received his diploma in shorthand from Defresne in the same year.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly after Chaim's departure from Maastricht, the Second World War broke out on September 1, 1939. The Netherlands could not remain neutral this time because on May 10, 1940, German troops invaded the country and the Dutch army capitulated on May 14. The situation deteriorated rapidly for the Jewish part of the population. As early as the autumn of 1940, the authorities took measures against Jewish professors and civil servants. In the course of 1941, other groups of the Jewish population were also confronted with measures and were increasingly separated from the Dutch population and banished from public life. On July 1, 1941, Jews were forbidden to trade and their bicycles and other means of transport were also taken away. This, of course, directly affected David and Selman's businesses.<sup>27</sup>

Then came the first deportation of the Jewish population in the province of Limburg. On the morning of Monday August 24, 1942, David Silber and his family received a order to come to the meeting point in the school on Prof. Pieter Willemstraat in Maastricht the next day before 4 p.m.. Supposedly to be put to work in Germany. Due to hospitalization, Selman was exempted from transport, and Ryfka also did not have to leave due to illness. Wolf could also stay in Maastricht for reasons that are not entirely clear. Only David Silber was therefore part of the group of approximately 290 Limburg Jews who were transported to Camp Westerbork on the night of August 25.<sup>28</sup> David arrived there on August 26. The transport to Auschwitz followed just two days later. Immediately after arrival he was murdered there on August 31, 1942. He was 52 years old.

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<sup>26</sup> PCSS; Card System Joodse Raad, Salman Silber (CJRSS); *Advertentieblad van het departement van de Wester-Eems*, 19 August 1941, and *Advertentieblad voor Limburg*, 22 August 1941.

<sup>27</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 53, 55-56.

<sup>28</sup> HCL, GAM, Gemeentepolitie 20.108A, inv.nr. 1739, orders 153, 154, 155 en 156; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, pp. 120-124, 398; René van Rijsselt, Erik van Rijsselt en Marjolein Vlieks, *Onvoltooid verleden: Ontrechting en rechtsherstel van Joodse inwoners in de gemeenten Maastricht, Amby en Heer* (Maastricht: [Gemeente Maastricht], 2023), p. 198. Also see: Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 60-61.

Ryfka, Selman and Wolf continued to live at Glacisweg 2B for the time being. But they could not feel safe of course, because on September 9, 1942 they were confronted with members of the Hausraterfassungsstelle from Amsterdam – a part of the Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung, the SD organization for the deportation of the Jews of the Netherlands – who came to make an inventory of the household goods, in preparation for the robbery of Jewish property that they wanted to carry out. Perhaps then, or shortly afterwards, Selman gave the six volumes of *Schiller's sämtliche Werke* to Dolf Grégoire for safekeeping.<sup>29</sup>

Not very long afterwards - the date is not known - Ryfka, Selman and Wolf went into hiding, probably with Mathilda (Tilly) Clercx, widow of Franz Alard since 1920. She traded in textiles from her house at Minckelersstraat 2 and was therefore probably a business contact of David and Selman. We do not know for sure, but when the second deportation of Limburg Jews took place in November 1942, the three remaining members of the Silber family were not found in their house on November 11. Shortly afterwards, Ryfka, Selman and Wolf were apparently betrayed or tracked down, because already on November 13 they were delivered directly to the Prison in Maastricht by cop Van Huffel in the middle of the night (at 00:15 am). Mathilda Clercx was also arrested by Van Huffel and locked up for several weeks.<sup>30</sup>

On November 17, Ryfka, Selman and Wolf were deported to Camp Westerbork, where they arrived on November 18. Two days later, all three were put on a train to Auschwitz, where they arrived on November 23, 1942. Ryfka was murdered in Auschwitz the same day. She was 52 years old.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Inventory of the household good present at Glacisweg 2B on 9 September 1942: <https://www.joodsmonument.nl/nl/page/494932/inventory-of-david-silber-and-his-family>; Van Rijsselt, Van Rijsselt and Vlieks, *Onvoltooid verleden*, pp. 195-196, 201-202; Also see: Ludo Gregoire, *Tante Annie/ Zuster Reparatrice: gezinsleven/ kloosterleven*.

<sup>30</sup> HCL, GAM Gemeentepolitie 20.108A, inv. nr. 1738, J1 6730; HCL, Huis van Bewaring 07.A17, inv.nr. 30, registration nr. 1299; HCL, Huis van Bewaring 07.A17, inv.nr. 30, registration nr. 1300.

<sup>31</sup> CJRDS; CJRRO; CJRSS; CJRWS; PCRO; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, p. 398.



Selman and Wolf were put to work. A letter has been documented that Selman Silber sent from Auschwitz-Birkenau to the Silbermann family, Papenweg 1 in Maastricht, on December 14, 1942. That's the last sign we have of him. According to the *Sterbebücher* of Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Selman was murdered on January 28, 1943. This date differs from the official Dutch administration, which adopts February 28 as the date of death. He was 21 years old.<sup>32</sup> Even less is known about Wolf's last months. According to official records, he was murdered in Auschwitz on February 28, 1943. He was 16 years old at the time.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after Ryfka was murdered in Auschwitz, Dutch police officers visited the abandoned house, where we are now standing, in early December 1942 to register what was there, with the intension of transporting the goods to Germany. The fact that the Jews had been murdered was not enough. Their possessions were plain objects of robbery.<sup>34</sup>

The families of David's two brothers all survived the war. Members of Kalman's family in Valkenburg went into hiding.<sup>35</sup> Their youngest son Max was active in the underground movement in Amsterdam during the war, together with his future first wife Marga Grunberg. He stayed in the Netherlands after the war and became a successful businessman.<sup>36</sup> Gerschon, his wife Mirla and three of their children also went into hiding. Son Abraham was taken to a labour camp in Germany, which he survived. It is shocking to realize that David's family suffered such a different fate.

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<sup>32</sup> CJRSS; PCSS; <https://www.myheritage.nl/research/collection-10921/duitsland-joodse-slachtoffers-nazi-vervolging-1933-1945?itemId=164108&action=showRecord&recordTitle=Salomon+Siegmund+Salman+Selman+Salm on+Silber>; <https://www.myheritage.nl/research/collection-10460/auschwitz-overlijdensaktes-1941-1943?itemId=51482-&action=showRecord&recordTitle=Selman+Silber; JM>. See also email exchange between Marcel Bovy and Ernst Homburg, on 12 Dec. 2022, 12 Jan. 2024 and 13 Jan. 2024.

<sup>33</sup> PCWS; CJRWS; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, p. 398.

<sup>34</sup> (ca. 5 december) lijst “inhoudende gegevens betreffende woningen van geëvacueerde Joden.” (EvR). See also: Van Rijsselt, Van Rijsselt and Vlieks, *Onvoltooid verleden*.

<sup>35</sup> Diederer, *42 Joodse Valkenburgers opgepakt en vermoord*, p. 29; HCL, GAM, Gemeentepolitie 20.108A, inv.nr. 1739.

<sup>36</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, p. 24; <https://joodsbw.nl/id/P-8811>; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, p. 126. About the partisan activities of Marga Grunberg and Max Silber, see: <https://www.verhalenoverdeoorlog.nl/nl/interviews/marga-grunberg>.



Two factors played a major role in this. In the modern mining town of Heerlen, the willingness of the population to provide shelter to people in hiding was almost twice as high per capita as in the administrative and more traditional town of Maastricht. Moreover, Heerlen had a mayor, Marcel van Grunsven, who opposed the German occupier as much as possible, while Maastricht had a government ruled by members of the Dutch nazi party (NSB). The Chief Police Officer at Maastricht also followed all orders without protesting.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after the end of the war, in June 1945, Chaim Silber visited his family in Heerlen as a member of the Jewish Brigade, in the hope of tracking down his parents and brothers. To his great sadness and disappointment, he found no one.<sup>38</sup> In 1950 Chaim was one of the pioneers who founded the new settlement Kfar Mordechai some 30 kilometers south of Tel Aviv. During the first years of its existence, Chaim managed to convince the son of Kalman Silber, Samuel, and the daughter of Gershon Silber, Naomi, to join the new village and become farmers. As a result, children of the three Silber brothers from Galicia lived in the same village, and today their children and grandchildren live there too: twelve families in total.<sup>39</sup>

More than a year after Chaim's visit Heerlen, on October 1, 1946, Gerschon Silber placed an advertisement in the *Gazet van Limburg* in which he requested that people who had taken goods from David Silber's family into custody would return those to the only remaining son. We don't know what the outcome of that request at the time has been, but it is special that today Schiller's collected works will be returned to the children of Chaim.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 24-25, and passim; Van Rens, *Vervolgd in Limburg*, pp. 157, 362-363); Fred Cammaert and Marcel Put, *'Eindelijk een echte burgemeester': Feiten fabels over Heerlens burgemeester Marcel van Grunsven in de periode 1940-1946* (Roermond: X-CAGO, 2014), esp. p. 153; Van Rijsselt, Van Rijsselt and Vlieks, *Onvoltooid verleden*, pp. 82-90, 96-98.

<sup>38</sup> Silber, *Een Joods gezin in de onderduik*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>39</sup> Information received from Zeev Silber, on May 2, 2024. See also:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kfar\\_Mordechai](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kfar_Mordechai).

<sup>40</sup> *Gazet van Limburg*, 1 oktober 1946.

Let this commemoration be a symbolic tombstone for David, Ryfka, Selman and Wolf  
Silber: A tombstone with no grave.