

Texas Jewish Historical Society

Preserving Jewish Heritage in Texas
Est. 1980



July, 2010

Sadie

by Joseph Billy Pfeffer

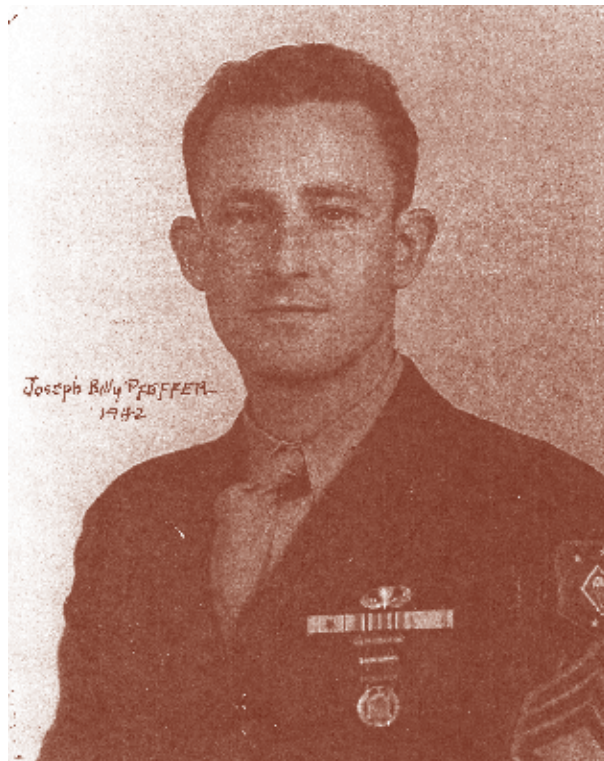
Edited by Davie Lou Solka

Of the hundreds and thousands of immigrants who came to these shores, one would stand above all the others for me. Her name was "Sadie," and her parents were Lieb and Rosele Nachtigal from Poland.

The family arrived at Ellis Island in late 1892. Upon arriving, Lieb and Rosele were taken to separate rooms, leaving Sadie alone. There were so many people rushing past her that she became confused and began to cry. The doctors and nurses rushed over to her and said, "Please, don't cry. We are not going to hurt you." One of the nurses took charge of Sadie and took her to the showers to be inspected for lice.

"Where is my mother?" Sadie asked.

The nurse replied, "Your mother had something on her eye. She had to be checked to be sure it was not



trachoma."

"My father?" Sadie asked.

"Your father is ok," said the nurse. "He passed all the inspections and is waiting for you and your mother in the next room."

Sadie was only sixteen years old and had traveled hundreds of miles from her home in Poland. She was scared that she would be alone in this strange land. After spending the night on Ellis Island, the Nachtigal family was put on the ferry for New York City.

Lieb was carrying two heavy suitcases and Sadie and her mother were carrying a heavy box, when a young man approached them and asked, "Can I help you with that heavy box?" They handed it over to

him and went forward with him following. As they neared

continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE:

Meet Your New President by Rusty Milstein	2	Dr. Newton Friedman: A Brief Biography By W. T. Block	11
From the Footlights by Vickie Vogel	6	TJHS 31st Annual Gathering	12-13
TJHS Donation Form	9	First Rabbi Saw Many Changes in Early Beaumont by W. T. Block	14
In Memoriam	9	Board of Directors, 2010-2011	15
Henry Gindler by Robert I. Gindler	10	TJHS Traveling Exhibit	15

the gate, Sadie turned around and the nice young man was nowhere to be seen. He had stolen the box! A man from the Jewish Benevolent Society, who was sponsoring them, was waiting and a policeman motioned for them to move on. They were upset, but there was nothing to do about the theft.

The Benevolent Society had been told that Sadie Nachtigal would be able to take care of her family. She was skilled in three languages and would have no trouble finding a job as an interpreter. She decided to find a family who had a small child that would need help in learning a foreign language.

Sadie saw an ad in the newspaper and applied for it. She rode the subway, and asked the conductor to let her off when they came to the street listed in the ad. After a short ride, he waved at her and she got off the subway. A lady passing by showed her the house she needed. It was a large two-story house and was terrifying to a girl from Poland. Taking a deep breath, Sadie knocked on the door.

The door opened and the lady of the house said, "Hello." In broken English, Sadie said, "I want the job taking care of your daughter. I speak three languages—French, Russian, and Yiddish, and also a little German. I can sew and clean your house. I work real hard for you."

The lady, Mrs. Green, smiled and looked at the pretty girl who was so frightened. "Please come in," she said. "And don't be so frightened. You are so young. When did you get off the boat?"

Sadie said, "Two days ago. My mother and father are with me. We

live in Brooklyn." The young girl was so clean and pretty that Mrs. Green said, "Sadie, you are hired. You will help clean the house and help in the kitchen. Your main job is to teach my daughter, Rebecca, to speak French. She is well spoken in Yiddish."

Rebecca came home in the late afternoon. She was eight years old and had long shiny red hair with a pleasant smile. Sadie was waiting for her by the steps. Mrs. Green introduced Sadie as the French tutor. Rebecca smiled and said, "So you are going to teach me French. Welcome." When Sadie told Rebecca her name, Rebecca asked what it meant. Sadie said, "Nachtigal—a bird that sings."

"How beautiful," replied Rebecca, "I think we are going to be good friends, Sadie."

Rebecca was a gem of a child. She had respect and a tremendous drive to learn. Sadie's days were fun. Rebecca taught her how to dance, helped her with her English, and treated Sadie as a member of the family.

Life for the Nachtigal family was good. Lieb got a job with a small school close to the rented apartment and Rosele learned how to press felt hats, which gave her a steady job. They kept a kosher home and were satisfied with what they had.

Lieb had a distant friend in Houston, Texas, by the name of Geller. The Geller family was contacted and they invited Sadie to come for a visit. Sadie began to get ready for the trip and bought some new dresses. Rebecca and her mother were happy for Sadie. They gave her a lovely gift and told her when she came back, she would still have her job.

Abraham Geller, Sadie's cousin,

met her when she arrived in Houston. He had prepared a room for her, and invited friends to meet her. One of the guests was a young man by the name of Ben Pfeffer. Sadie met Ben and was attracted to him. At the end of the day, Ben invited Sadie to go out for a picnic. He borrowed his father's car and they went to Sylvan Beach, a few miles out of town.

They had a lovely day at the beach and began to learn things about each other. Sadie asked Ben what kind of work he did, and he replied that he owned a small dry goods store on Oden Avenue. When Ben asked Sadie what she did, she replied "I'm a tutor—I teach children languages. And I love stage plays. In New York I never miss a Jewish play. I once met Molly Picon. That was a real thrill."

Sadie and Ben began to see each other on a regular basis, and soon realized that they were in love. When Ben told Sadie that he wanted to marry her, she replied, "Yes, yes, yes! Ben I love you with all my heart." They were married in 1907 with Rabbi Wilner officiating. When Ben placed the ring on Sadie's finger, Rabbi Wilner said, "The ring you put on your bride's finger is round. Your lives will be like this ring, never to be broken." Ben broke the glass and kissed Sadie. Ben's father, Peritz, provided everything for the couple. Sadie felt sad that her parents could not be at the wedding, but they were too old to travel.

Sadie went to work helping her husband in the dry goods store. She kept the books, ordered merchandise, and waited on customers. The

continued on page 4

Visit us on the web at www.txjhs.org.

www.txjhs.org

women liked for Sadie to help them because she had good taste in materials used for dresses and knew all the latest fashions. Life and business was good, and soon their family began to grow. Three boys were born: Shannon, Harry, and me—Billy.

As the years passed, the loving vows exchanged by the couple were forgotten by Ben. There was no excitement, no more warm glow. Hard work and taking care of the children was too much for Ben. He began to look at other women. He broke Sadie's heart, but she could not stop loving him.

Peritz Pfeffer stayed out of Ben's life. I don't think he cared for Sadie or his grandchildren. I remember sitting at his Seder table with his second wife. His first wife, Gertrude, had died.

Sadie was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She and Ben had divorced and her whole world was coming apart. She felt abandoned, alone, and at a loss. She had no one to whom to turn for advice, so she decided that it was time to return to New York.

After making our breakfast one Sunday morning, she sat down and said to my brothers and me, "Children, I am going to New York to help my mother and father, who are very old and sick. You will stay with your father for a while. He will take good care of you." Shannon, the oldest, just nodded his head, Harry, the middle son, asked if she really had to leave, and I just cried and ran to my mother and hugged her.

Sadie said, "Shannon, you are the oldest and it is your duty to watch over



your brothers. Whoever needs your help, you will help. Harry, you watch over Billy. He is the youngest and will need more help. I love each of you, but I must leave." She packed her bags, told Shannon to call his father to pick them up at Union Station after she left. We waited at the station until the train left. Shannon found Sadie a seat by the window, put her suitcase in the above storage rack, kissed her goodbye and said, "Don't worry, Mama—I'll watch out for the kids. I love you." The three of us watched the train pull out of the station and waved goodbye to our mother.

Sadie arrived in New York and immediately went to her parents' home. They were waiting with open arms. After a Shabbat meal and a lot of talking, they went to bed. Sadie woke the next morning and began to read the newspaper looking for a job. There was a job for a man to take care of an apartment building. Since it was within walking distance, she decided to apply. Going up a flight of stairs, she found the owner's apartment and

knocked on the door. A small, stout, clean-looking man opened the door, and Sadie said she wanted to apply for the job. "You are a woman and the ad said it was a job for a man," answered the owner.

Sadie replied, "Mister, I speak three foreign languages plus good English. I owned my own business in Texas, and know how to keep books. I am an honest person and will not steal from you." The man, Mr. Brandywine, was so taken back by a woman with such a mouth that he hired her on the spot. "You will collect rent each Sunday morning, make the tenants keep the hallways

clean, and make sure that trash is put outside. You will see that all repairs are made. After the rent is counted, we will have to know if anything is needed and have the janitor check the furnaces and steam heaters. Can you do that?"

Sadie said, "Yes, I can do all of that."

Mr. Brandywine replied, "Your salary will be \$50 per week, and if you do a good job, you can have a two-bedroom apartment at no charge."

Sadie was thrilled. It wasn't long before the Nachtigal family moved in with her.

Mr. Brandywine was ten years older than Sadie. Every Sunday morning, he would wait for her to show up with the rents, but he did not even check the records. They would talk about anything that needed to be done, and then Mr. Brandywine would toast bagels, make coffee, and they would eat. He had fallen in love with Sadie. He knew how much she liked the theatre, so he would take her to plays.

continued on page 5

Sadie, continued from page 4

One Sunday evening, they went to a nice restaurant, and he said to her, “Sadie, I am an old man. God has given me another chance to fall in love. Will you marry me?”

Sadie looked at the man sitting across from her. On the outside he wasn’t much to see—a little heavy, and his face was lined with age, but as she looked deeper, she didn’t see an old man, but a man with a kind heart who would love and protect her for life.

“Yes,” she said. “I will marry you because I love you, respect you and will treat you with kindness all the days of my life,”

Later, when they arrived home, Sadie told him about her three children in Texas. “What would you do if I sent them some money so that they could come here to visit?” she asked.

“Sadie,” Mr. Brandywine replied. “Your children will be my children.”

The next day, Mr. Brandywine took Sadie to his lawyer and had the paperwork made so that Sadie could live in her apartment all of her life. He said that she should be in complete charge of his apartments and continue to collect the rents. All she had to do was pay the taxes. If he died before her, this should continue and



upon her death, the property would revert back to his children. Sadie just sat and thought about Ben. This was something he would never do. This man knew what love and honor was, and she had at last found her deserved happiness. A few years later, Lieb and Rose died, followed by Mr. Brandywine. Sadie was alone, but still in charge of the apartments.

Sadie died in 1945 of a heart attack. When I went to New York, I

found her in a small funeral home in Brooklyn. I traveled with her on a train to Houston where my brother Shannon had made arrangements for her burial in Beth Yeshurun Cemetery on Allen Parkway. My father, Ben, is also buried there.

I loved both my father and mother, and after Sadie left Ben to go back to New York, he would travel to small towns putting on sales for clothing stores. While he was away, I had to make arrangements to sleep at different relative’s houses. I wasn’t sure where I would sleep each night and my grades in school suffered. I was always scared. Ben and Sadie were from different

worlds, and there were big cultural differences. Ben was outgoing and somewhat of a ladies’ man, and Sadie was old-world and traditional. He was a very gentle person and I never heard him argue with my mother. He never punished me, and although it may be hard to believe, he did love his sons. I think of him often and can still feel his arm around mine as we walked the streets of Houston.

continued on page 14

We need Your Stories!

We are currently looking for stories with ties to Texas Jewish history! Any kind of story about your family history or your Temple’s history can fill the pages of our quarterly newsletter. Write your story, and if you have questions or need help,

call our Assistant Editor.

Everyone has a story to tell, long or short. Your history is of interest to members across Texas and the nation! And you will be able to see your family’s history in print. It is a wonderful keepsake and a valuable piece of gene-

alogy for future generations.

So what are you waiting for? Send in your article to our assistant editor, Davie Lou Solka, at editor@txjhs.org, mail it to 3808 Woodbrook Circle, Austin, TX 78759, or call her at 512-527-3799.



Leona Westheimer Liedeker and baby Carolyn

and Robert Epstein's mother, who was a friend of Leona, saw Carolyn dancing. She told her son he should meet her. "She's so cute!" she said.¹⁹

Carolyn and Robert²⁰ married May 31, 1947. They had three children: Ross, Lauren, and Neal. There are seven grandchildren. Only Ross was born before his grandfather Louis' death.

Leona taught elocution and many consecration classes at Congregation Emanu El in Houston. She was a speech coach for bar mitzvah boys, including grandson Ross Epstein at Beth Israel, and later on, bat mitzvah girls.²¹ Leona was the aunt of TJHS member Christy Cave's father-in-law. Christy corresponded with Leona until her death. "She was one of my favorite people in the whole world," she said.²² She was unaware of Leona's early stage experiences, but knew her as an eloquent speaker and elocution teacher.

Leona was described as "a hand-

some woman" who wore hats "with such style." A founding member of Emanu El, she was also active in Eastern Star, a president of the American Legion Auxiliary and a volunteer for years at the VA Hospital.²³

Leona died December 20, 1984 in Houston. She is buried in Emanu El Memorial Park.²⁴ Rabbi Robert I. Kahn and Rabbi Roy Walter officiated at the funeral. In his eulogy, Rabbi Kahn said, "Leona was an eloquent speaker. I heard her so many times. She could read a poem, a speech, a statement, a story, with so much skill and convey its meaning so richly. And what a teacher of children!" He described

Leona on the pulpit at Simchat Torah facing a group of children. She would lead them saying, "Little Torah, little Torah, let me hold you tight." She taught hundreds of children and imbued them with a love of Judaism. Later, a kindergarten room was named for her at Emanu El.²⁵

Pauline Hecht and Leona Westheimer Liedeker led very different lives, but they are united by their love of the stage and language.

References

- ¹Box 3A167, Texas Jewish Historical Society Collection, 1824-2009, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin. All materials in this article are found there unless otherwise attributed.
- ²Winegarten, Ruthe, and Cathy Schechter. *Deep in the Heart: The Lives and Legends of Texas Jews*. Austin: Eakin Press, 1990, p. 197.
- ³<http://txobits.blogspot.com/2009/06/texas-obituaries-61309.html>. A photo of Pauline can be seen at this

website.

⁴See *Handbook of Texas* entry submitted by Lionel Schooler November 6, 1992. A copy of the submission is in Box 3A167. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/fwets.html>. The nephews were the children of M. L.'s brother Joseph and his wife Sophie Boettingheimer Westheimer, who remained in Germany.

⁵Read more at http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=178531170098

⁶Newspaper article on Hannah Fox Westheimer on her 90th birthday. Box 3A167 op. cit.

⁷There are three I. Westheimers listed at <http://www.faqs.org/people-search/westheimer/> but only one is I. B. His dates, however, are 1918 to 1989 which makes it more likely that he is I. B. Westheimer, Jr.

⁸1986 newspaper article in Box 3A167, op. cit.

⁹The photo is from Bettie Schlamme, granddaughter of Hannah and Sigmund. Bettie attended the first meeting of TJHS and was interested in restoring old cemeteries, according to a Ruthe Winegarten interview in the archives. Bettie died in 1995. <http://www.genealogybuff.com/tx/9502houc.htm>

¹⁰Winegarten and Schechter, *Deep in the Heart*, op. cit., p. 34

¹¹<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn93068209/1911-12-28/ed-1/seq-5/?words=Leona+Westheimer>

¹²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_Witherspoon. Witherspoon became president of the Chicago Music College in 1925.

¹³Winegarten and Schechter, *Deep in the Heart*, op. cit. p. 34

¹⁴Baines, Mrs. W. M., Editor. *Houston's Part in the World War*. Houston. 1919. <http://books.google.com/books?id=Dp3vAAAAMAAJ&pg=PA45&lpg=PA45&>

continued on page 9

First Rabbi Saw Many Changes in Early Beaumont

by W. T. Block

In April, 1925, Beaumonters often watched as an elderly man of small stature walked along Broadway and Calder Streets. His steps were short and his hair was silvery. He was Dr. Aaron Levy, Beaumont's first Rabbi, and one discerned that a great fountain of knowledge existed between his ears.

Dr. Aaron and his wife, Estelle, had married fifty years earlier on May 3, 1875, at the old Lopez Confectionary in New Orleans, and their children and grandchildren were preparing to celebrate their parents' fiftieth anniversary at Beaumont's Harmony Club.

Born in Sarribourg, Lorraine, on September 14, 1846, Dr. Levy grew up on the Rue des Juives, only two doors away from Estelle. Although the French province of Lorraine was later lost to Germany at the end of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871, French remained the spoken language in the province.

Dr. Levy enjoyed a classical and Latin school education in Metz and Paris, having also matriculated at the rabbinical school in Metz. He spoke six languages fluently—French, German, English, Latin, Hebrew, and Yiddish.

His future wife, Estelle, was the first one to migrate from Europe to New Orleans, where she boarded in the home of her future brother-in-law. A few months later, Dr. Levy followed her to New Orleans, where the couple soon began preparations for their marriage.

His first rabbinical assignment was at Temple Shaare Zedek on Rampart Street in New Orleans. During the next twenty years, he served congregations in Jackson, Mississippi, and Congregation Beth El in Austin, Texas. It was in Austin that he became an intimate friend of Governor Jim Hogg and U. S. Senator Charles Culbertson.

When Dr. Levy arrived in Beaumont

in 1895, the population totaled only five thousand souls. There were muddy streets and a few wooden sidewalks. During the wintry rainy season, buggies and wagons churned the mud on Pearl Street into a soupy quagmire the consistency of molasses. Dr. Levy watched as the Lucas gusher spouted, and its oily message across the nation resulted in a maelstrom of new drillers and roughnecks. He watched as young Beaumonters marched away to the Spanish-American War and World War I.

His Congregation Temple Emanuel worshipped at first in a wooden building at Pine and Crockett Streets. A few years later, the congregation built their first synagogue at Willow and Broadway Streets. To augment his meager salary, he began a Latin School in a wooden building on Pine Street, near the old Enterprise Building.


Being a distinguished mathematician, linguist, and liberal arts scholar, Levy was a natural choice for the classroom. His first school had only forty students, but when he closed it

several years later, more than five hundred scholars had passed through its portals. Some of his students included Hilton Duster; Willie, Frank, Harry, and Albert Shepherd; Sol Gordon; Leon Hecht; and several children from the Keith and Ogden families.

"Did you ever have to use the paddle?" one reporter asked him in 1925.

"Of course!" the Rabbi responded. "It was necessary to keep strict discipline in the school, and one Beaumont man that I know of can well attest to that fact!"

Long after another Rabbi had replaced him, Dr. Levy continued to assist the Jewish religious service at the Temple, and he was also present when a new Temple was dedicated at 1120 Broadway in 1923. He threw himself wholeheartedly into community life, and was a member of the Masonic Lodge, Sons of Hermann, and B'nai Brith.

Although wrinkled and gray at age eighty, Dr. Levy lived each of his years to the fullest and was never able to quench his thirst for more knowledge. He lived a life that others should dare to emulate. 

Sadie, continued from page 5

My brother Shannon was married to Evelyn Gordon Pfeffer and their children are Helene, Susan, and Larry. My brother Harry married Rae Kubby Pfeffer from El Paso, Texas, and their children are Ben and Gary. I married Mildred Reisman Pfeffer from San Diego, California, and our children are Nancy Pfeffer Israel and Sheldon. Nancy has two sons, Bryan and Jay Weisberg and five grandchildren, making Mildred and me great-grandparents.

I am the last of Ben and Sadie's children, and am 92 years old. My wife and I have been married for 66 years. I spend my time painting and writing or reading. I have exhibited my paintings at the Houston Holocaust Museum, and have a new group of paintings ready for sponsorship. Mildred is in a wheel chair, and although I wear a hearing aid, I cannot hear words clearly. She is my ears and I am her eyes. 