JEWISH JOURNEY

Leaving Egypt All Over Again

After Jewish life in Cairo fell apart, a family found its way to Seattle.

By Jennifer Fischâ€¢ 2/14/2018 at 3:35pmâ€¢ Published in the February 2018 issue ofJewish in Seattle Magazine

483

This March, Sara and Jacques Blumenzweig's family will celebrate the 50th anniversary of their arrival in Seattle after leaving Egypt as refugees during the Second Exodus.

The Blumenzweigs and the Cohens (Sara's family) were among many families who moved to Cairo from other parts of the Diaspora in search of a better life in the late 1800s when Egypt was welcoming outsiders. They were part of and felt accepted by a large, vibrant Egyptian community. As happened in ancient Egypt, the tenor of the times began to change, and around the end of World War II, the Jews were increasingly less welcome there. Life for Jews continued to deteriorate with Egypt's opposition to the creation of the State of Israel and Nasser's rise to power in the 1950s.

0418 journey giza n5b0x0

Sara Blumenzweig with her children in front of the pyramids (Joe is center).

IMAGE: COURTESY JENNIFER FISCH

In what is now called the Second Exodus, waves of Jews began to leave Egypt. But Sara and Jacques chose to stay in Cairo to be close to Jacques's aging parents, with hopes that things would improve.

At the outbreak of the Six-Day War in 1967, the Egyptian government rounded up the heads of all the Jewish households and imprisoned them. Jacques was taken away in front of his family. They didn't know if they'd ever see him again.

Making matters worse, the government had frozen the assets of Jews. Sara struggled to care for their four children as their available resources diminished. Neighbors and coworkers who had been friends turned a blind eye.

As Jacques and many other men languished in prison for months, the Jewish immigration organization HIAS worked behind the scenes to secure the release of as many prisoners as possible. HIAS got the Spanish government to issue passports for Jacques and Sara and their children, Cecile, Claude, Sonia, and Joe, and it urged the Egyptian government to "let their people go."

In late 1967, Sara and her children headed to the port of Alexandria, not knowing if Jacques would be there. He arrived at the ship still in handcuffs. With a mixture of relief and uncertainty, the Blumenzweigs began their personal exodus, traveling by cargo ship (the *Bena Dorm*) through a rough Mediterranean Sea to Barcelona, Spain, then by train to Paris,

Popular Content

THE SET TABLE
Bread and Friendship

TEST YOUR JQ
Bring Meaning to Passover with a Poem or Two

JEWISH CONNECTIONS
#NWIsraelFest Hopes to Unite and Inspire

SOUND OFF
A Local Veteran Strives to Honor Every Fallen Jewish Service Member



The Blumenzweig family in Seattle today.

IMAGE: JENNIFER FISCH

France, where they lived for five months as refugees before making their way to Seattle, Washington, in 1968. A year later, they welcomed baby Camille to the family. In 1999, Jacques passed away. May his memory be for a blessing.

In 2015, the bar mitzvah of Sara and Jacques's youngest grandson (also named Jacques) fell on the Torah portion Va'eira, in which Moses and Aaron implore Pharaoh to "let our people go." The serendipity invited us to reflect on how luck, individual actions, and external forces impact our lives, and how hard it can be to turn one's back on what is known (even when it's bad) and face the unknown in hopes of a better future.

The extended family remains grateful for the courage it took Sara and Jacques to risk an uncertain future, the inspired efforts of strangers who made their exodus possible, and the Seattle community who welcomed them to their new home.

Postscript: *Around 75,000 Jews were living in Egypt in 1948. Today there are fewer than 100.*

Jennifer Fisch moved to Seattle in 1992 for grad school and forgot to leave. She married Joe Blumenzweig in 1999, and they are the proud parents of Jacques. Jennifer currently works for Seattle Children's Hospital.

Filed under Egypt, immigration, Cairo

Show Comments

Related Content



WE'VE GOT ISSUES

Immigrant Literature Should Make You a Little Uncomfortable

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Sasha Senderovich

Eat & Drink Ï..

THE SET TABLE

Bread and Friendship

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Rachel Román

THE SET TABLE

Alon Shaya Marries Creole and Israeli Cuisine

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Rachel Román

THE SET TABLE

Is Dingfelder's the Jewish Deli We've Been Waiting For?

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Pam Mandel

DOMESTIC GODDESS

At Nigella Lawson's Table

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Karin Vandraiss â€¢ Photography by Jonathan Lovekin

THE SET TABLE

The Rose City Ups Its Food Game Against Rain City

02/14/2018 â€¢ By Naomi Tomky

THE FOOD ISSUE

How an Unlikely Snack Turned into a Family Business

12/07/2017 â€¢ By Rebekah Denn â€¢ Photography by Carlton Canary

Arts & Culture Ï..

WE'VE GOT ISSUES

Angels on High

WE'VE GOT ISSUES

American Pastoral

WE'VE GOT ISSUES

Israel Story Splices a Country Together

WE'VE GOT ISSUES

YidLife Crisis Preserves Tradition — and Pushes it Forward

WE'VE GOT ISSUES

Immigrant Literature Should Make You a Little Uncomfortable

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Sasha Senderovich

WE'VE GOT ISSUES

Maternal Instincts

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Tova Gamzasa

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Emily K. Alhadeff

03/21/2018 â€¢ With Gary Shteyngart

03/21/2018 â€¢ Edited by Emily K. Alhadeff

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Boris Kurbatov

Travel & Outdoors Ï..

INNOVATORS

This Summer, Hit the Road in a Peace Van

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Haley Shapley

TRAVEL

36 Hours in Seattle and Tel Aviv

02/14/2018 â€¢ By Alexis Kort and Keren Brown â€¢ Illustrations by Rami Neimi â€¢ Photography by Itai Fortis

TRAVEL

Discovering You're Jewish — and Taking on All that Comes with It

02/14/2018 â€¢ By Katie Lee Ellison

TRAVEL

Trading Paradise for Freedom — and a Chance to Return

02/14/2018 â€¢ By Rebecca Behar Notik

TRAVEL

Working the Land — and Finding a Home

02/14/2018 â€¢ By Shaul Judelman

TEVA

Jewish Values Inspire Cliff Mass to Work for Good — and Stir Up a Little Controversy

02/14/2018 â€¢ By Sydney Parker

Health & Wellness Ï..

LABRIUT

Politics and Connectivity are Burning Us Out

12/05/2017 â€¢ By Haley Shapley

MAKE 5778 YOUR BEST YEAR EVER!

Be Nicer

09/12/2017 â€¢ By Michael A. Stusser â€¢ Edited by Emily K. Alhadeff

MAKE 5778 YOUR BEST YEAR EVER!

Get Rich

09/12/2017 â€¢ Edited by Emily K. Alhadeff

MAKE 5778 YOUR BEST YEAR EVER!

Be a Better Parent

09/12/2017 â€¢ Edited by Emily K. Alhadeff

MAKE 5778 YOUR BEST YEAR EVER!

Be Healthier

09/12/2017 â€¢ By Michael A. Stusser â€¢ Edited by Emily K. Alhadeff

MAKE 5778 YOUR BEST YEAR EVER!

Be a Better Partner

09/12/2017 â€¢ Edited by Emily K. Alhadeff

Community Ï..

IDEAS

What's Your American Story?

JEWISH JOURNEY

What's in a Name?

THE SET TABLE

Bread and Friendship

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Rachel Román

THREE OPINIONS

#MeToo and the Jews

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Rabbi Yohanna Kinberg and Shira Kaufman â€¢ Illustrations by Sefira Ross

INNOVATORS

This Summer, Hit the Road in a Peace Van

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Haley Shapley

JEWS OF SEATTLE

Connie Kanter

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Meryl Alcabes

03/23/2018

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Gregory Gutterman Scruggs

Holidays Ï..

DOMESTIC GODDESS

At Nigella Lawson's Table

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Karin Vandraiss â€¢ Photography by Jonathan Lovekin

TEST YOUR JQ

Bring Meaning to Passover with a Poem or Two

03/21/2018 â€¢ By Rivy Poupko Kletenik

TEST YOUR JQ

Forget Hanukkah vs. Christmas. What About Reason vs. Revelation?

12/05/2017 â€¢ By Rivy Poupko Kletenik â€¢ Illustrations by Sefira Ross

THREE OPINIONS

What's the Best Approach to Dealing with Christmas?

12/05/2017 â€¢ By Simon Kaufman and Rabbi Seth Goldstein

THE SET TABLE

Three Hanukkah Recipes from Molly Yeh

12/05/2017 â€¢ With Molly Yeh

THE SET TABLE

Three Recipes from Sweet

09/12/2017 â€¢ With Yotam Ottolenghi

Jewish IN SEATTLE MAGAZINE
509 Olive Way, Suite 305, Seattle, WA 98101
Phone: 206-957-2234 • Fax: 206-447-3388
Published in conjunction with the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle

ï^° ï,™ ï...-

OTHER SAGACITY MEDIA | Seattle Met Portland Monthly Housilonia Magazine Sarasota Magazine 941CEO Venice Magazine Aspen Sojourner Vail-Beaver Creek Magazine Park City Magazine Portland Bride & Groom Seattle Met Bride & Groom Salt Lake Bride & Groom Love Wins Texas Love Wins California

SAGACITY MEDIA

© 2018 SagaCity Media