

KURT METZL



In the village of St. Leonard, Austria, Fritz Metzl was a horse dealer. Margit Metzl's family owned a bakery. They named their son Kurt after the Austrian chancellor in the middle 1930s, Kurt Schuschnigg.

Late in 1938, Fritz Metzl's friends warned him about the Nazi threat: "This is going to be serious. You need to leave." Under cover of darkness, he illegally crossed the border into Switzerland.

Margit Metzl and the couple's 3-year old son, Kurt, remained in Austria. Soon they were forced into a ghetto, but shortly afterward Fritz Metzl devised a plan for them to rejoin him. His wife bought a train ticket to Germany with a stop in Schaffhausen, Switzerland. In Schaffhausen, they disembarked, claiming little Kurt needed to use the restroom. They

never got back on.

In Switzerland, after being interned at a refugee camp and a rooming house, the Metzls found a small apartment. The Swiss government and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped with expenses.

Red-haired Kurt went to school and grew up thinking he was Swiss, although he couldn't figure out why other children sometimes accused him of killing Jesus. "I knew I hadn't killed anyone," he says.

The Metzls came to New York in 1948. During processing by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Kurt heard the caseworkers say: "There are too many of you people in New York already. You need to leave."

Because Fritz Metzl had been a horse dealer, he got three choices of destination – Sioux City, Iowa; Louisville, Kentucky; or Kansas City. Fritz asked 12-year old Kurt where he wanted to go and Kurt said, "Kansas City sounds nice." They arrived in January 1949.

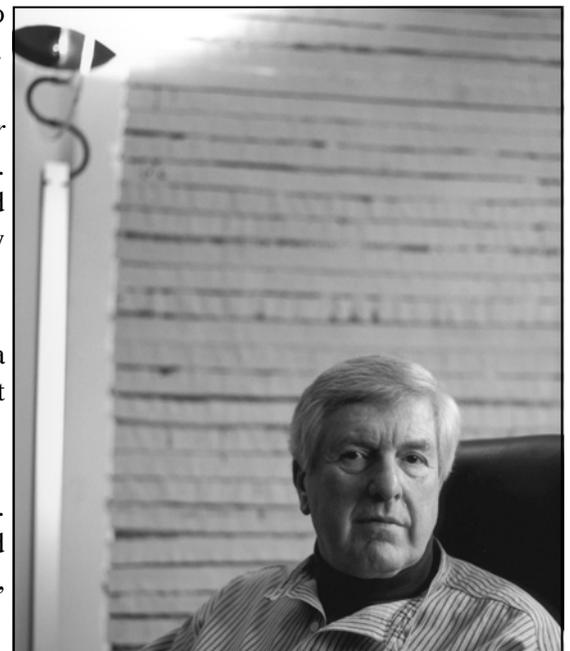
Four months later, Kurt – with no previous religious training – had his *bar mitzvah* at Kehilath Israel Synagogue. He gave his speech in German. Placed in the fourth grade, he quickly caught up with his peers and graduated from Central High School. He finished Washington University on scholarship.

Adjustment was harder for his parents. Fritz Metzl learned how to be a kosher butcher. Margit Metzl cleaned houses and took in sewing to put Kurt through medical school.

His parents became U.S. citizens in 1953, cause for great celebration. Considered less than Austrian, their European passports had been stamped "J" for Jewish. Switzerland had not granted them citizenship. For 15 years, the Metzls had been displaced persons.

So strongly did Kurt appreciate being an American that he volunteered for the U.S. Air Force in 1963 and spent two years in Turkey as a pediatrician. He has practiced medicine in Kansas City for years, and has been active in projects such as area pediatrics hotlines.

Kurt met his wife, Marilyn, a psychologist, during his training in New York. They have four sons: Jonathan, Jordan, Jamie, and Josh.



Portrait by David Sosland

Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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