

Eli: Hello and welcome to Queer as Fact, a queer history podcast. My name is Eli.

Hamish: I'm Hamish.

Irene: I'm Irene.

E: Twice a month, we talk to you about a queer history topic from around the world and throughout time. Today we're gonna talk to you about Gad Beck, the last known living gay survivor of the Holocaust.

[Queer As Fact music plays]

So there are of course some pretty hefty content warnings for this episode. The biggest one is just general anti-Semitism throughout, and there's mentions of wartime atrocities such as concentration camps, mob violence, executions, forced labour, torture, and bombings. There's also a brief recount of sex between a minor and an adult, and there's generally quite a bit of sexual content. This is obviously gonna be one of the heavier episodes that we ever do. If you need to, as always, please skip this episode, but I'd like to encourage you to listen to it if you can. I also wanted to note that this episode isn't a history of how queer people generally were treated by the Nazis. Although Gad Beck was a gay man, and that's a very important part of his story, the discrimination that he faced was primarily because he was Jewish, and so his story is different from those who were primarily discriminated against because they were gay, and so I didn't wanna short-change that by just shoving that into the introductory section of this episode. And I think it would be better if we came back and did its own episode and did it justice at some point. I also lastly wanted to note that the only source that I could really find on his life was his own autobiography.

H: So this is going to be very reliable.

E: [laughs] Yes.

I: Yes.

E: Everything else, whether it was like articles about him, or documentaries or whatever all led back either to that autobiography or to other direct testimony from him, and it has been noted by some people that certain parts of the story I'm about to tell you seem a little...a little implausible.

I: Okay.

E: I'm pretty much just gonna tell it as he tells it, and we'll discuss it maybe a bit at the end. So yeah, take this with a grain of salt. So Gad Beck and his twin sister Margo were born on the thirtieth of June 1923. They grew up in Berlin, at first living in a poor district that was home mostly to Eastern European Jews, and then they social climbed a bit and they moved in to a nicer neighbourhood in 1927. His mother was a Protestant and his father was Jewish. His father's family was from Vienna and he never got German citizenship, but he felt very strongly German, and he was one of the many very secular, upwardly mobile, very proudly German Jews who were quite common at the time. His mother's family either mildly frowned on the marriage or they just outrightly disapproved of Jewish people as like a concept entirely. His father intended their marriage to be secular, and then his family got involved and the mother ended up converting, and Gad and Margot grew up involved in both Christian and Jewish religions. Neither side of the family was enormously observant to start with, but they ended up being enthusiastically involved in each others holidays, and things and for a while was fairly peaceful and nice.

There had always been antisemitism in Germany, but as a child, Gad was more or less able to get by without noticing it. In the early 30s, things began to change. Hitler was elected Chancellor in 1933,

and antisemitism intensified, partly as a result of that and partly as a cause of his being elected chancellor. People began to talk about boycotting Jewish businesses, and their father's business suffered. But his family remained largely unconcerned however; they were very moderate politically, and they ultimately believed that things would be fine, they wouldn't suffer any terrible consequences.

Gad started to be rejected at school. The Nazi flag was put up everyday and saluted, and while this happened he and the other the Jewish students were made to stand in the corner because they weren't—

I: Wow.

E: —worthy to salute the flag. His grades suffered and he wanted to be moved to a Jewish school. But the school he was in then was a really good preparatory academy and they didn't want to take him out of it because they'd worked really hard for him to be able to go there. So they refused for a year or so. And then in 1934, his mother came to see him race at a school sports day and he won a race and because he was Jewish he wasn't allowed to stand on the podium, so the boys who won second, third and fourth place were put on the podium instead and she sort of had a realisation about what school life was like for him and took him out of it and put him in a Jewish school. And also his sister was taken out of her school at the same time.

H: That seems reasonable.

E & I: Yup.

E: So it's around this time that this sort of hybrid Christian and Jewish dual life that he's been living isn't really possible any more, and he felt that the only option left to him was to really strongly identify with Jewishness. He said that "my desire to learn grew much stronger, to grow into a community that was mine, that I fit into, and that did not question my integration in the slightest. Unlike his previous school, the Jewish school had an explicit goal of readying students for immigration. They learnt Hebrew, English, and French and he also took Spanish as an elective.

H: Immigration? Like gaining citizenship? Or emigration.

E: Emigration.

H: Leeeaving.

E: It was, we need to leave this country.

H: Mm.

E: Like, as soon as possible.

H: Solid.

I: Did they have where they expected people to go to?

E: Well, Hebrew, English, French makes me think Israel, well—

I: Yeah.

E: Palestine. America, France.

H: Was Hebrew an established language in Palestine at this point?

E: No, not really. It's undergoing its revival now.

H: Okay.

E: I think, because there'd already been some big Jewish immigrations to Palestine by then, because of anti-semitism, like big pogroms that had happened in Russia, and the desire to revive Hebrew as like a national language isn't new in the 30s. It's been around for a while. But it's not, you know, obviously, what it would become.

H: Yeah.

I: The whole Hebrew situation is so incredible to me.

E: Yeah, I'm...

I: I wish this happened to every dead language.

H: Yes, we should definitely resurrect more dead languages.

E: Mm.

I: I'm so impressed.

E: Yeah, it's delightful. I'm very pleased by it. It's alive again!

So yeah, he's learning a lot of languages, and he's enjoying that and he also really enjoyed gym class. He was somewhat athletic himself, but primarily his enjoyment was erotic. He said of it, "I enjoyed that the way some people nowadays enjoy porno films."

I: I was about to ask when you said he enjoyed gym class, whether it was him checking out hot muscly men.

E: It's a hundred percent, yeah.

He had his first sexual encounter when he was 12, after gym class, when he and his teacher were alone—

I: Oh no.

E: —in the showers.

H: I see.

E: Basically, they had been doing sports of some description, and then went to have a shower and Gad turned around and saw his gym teacher, who's in his, like, early twenties, somewhere round there, in like a bathrobe sort of this, and is just kind of overcome with emotion, and rushed up to him and kind of buried himself into his robe, and they ended up having sex. It never happened again. Although Gad tried to make it happen again. He said that — the guy — the first time, he was caught unawares, and then after that he was like—

I: This is not appropriate?

E: Yeah, and so he never let it happen again.

H: Still, I was surprised isn't really a valid excuse.

E: No, no, no, it's not. Like, it's a big deal in the autobiography, because it's the first time he has a sexual encounter, but it's not something that he feels any trauma over, or anything.

I: Yeah. Even if he's okay with it, I still don't think that makes it an okay action on the teacher's part.

H: Yes.

E: No, no, of course not.

H: I'm glad it worked out for him though.

E: After this happened, he went home from school, and he told his mother about it.

I: Wow.

E: And her response was just, "Oh, yeah, I thought so."

I: [startled laughed]

H: [laughs] Okay.

I: Okay?

E: And that was that.

H: That's not what I was expecting.

E: No.

I: Is there something I should know that I don't know about 1930s Berlin and their views on children having sex.

E: No. I don't—

I: Or is his mother just odd?

E: I don't think there really is, and I don't know – like, this may get into where we start wondering how many of the details are accurate, because there's just a certain way that he talks about sex and sexual interactions that makes me think that they might have either been exaggerated or that he's - I don't know how to characterise this without just telling you more of the story. Basically he's just constantly getting into like—

H: People's pants.

E: Yes. But like, fairly provocative sexual situations.

I: So what you're suggesting here is that maybe he and the gym teacher didn't have sex necessarily? That's an exaggeration of what actually happened? I mean you can't know I guess.

E: I think it's... I think what I would more suggest is that he didn't tell his mother all the details...

I: Yeah.

E: Or... I really don't know, because he talks about this reaction in the context of his family basically being quite blase about his sexuality and yeah, it's just never addressed that there's a difference between him just having sex with men and him having sex with an adult when he's a child obviously.

I: Mm.

E: I just, I don't know. Like, I feel like it's not written as being a big deal from his point-of-view because it just wasn't a big deal to him and he wants to represent it as like a positive, casual interaction.

I: Yeah.

E: And also he wrote this like sixty years after events. Like, I don't know. I certainly don't want to seem like I'm trying to be like, oh probably not much really happened and the gym teacher was like completely in the right in whatever did happen or anything like that.

I: So what we're suggesting is that maybe he told his mother about the queer feelings but not...

E: I think it's also kind of the case of... once one or two of his sexual interactions that he has seems a bit fictionalised it kinds of counts doubt back on all of it and that's not fair but... I don't know.

I: I mean, he definitely had sex with at least some men.

E: He definitely did. There's far, far more of that to come.

I: Okay.

E: But yeah, in terms of his family's attitude towards his sexuality he represented it as they were like, pretty practical and matter of fact about it. They would never like sit down and have like open conversations about it but everyone was aware of his preferences and he puts this down partly to the circumstances that they live in and the fact that this places like an increased importance on social ties and the family unit just as, like, a matter of survival. He said that, "When you look at it, our lives, especially during my youth, were filled with other problems - real ones. And we came to grips with them, together." But yeah, even after the war, when they're all in Israel, they just kind of quite matter-of-factly give him advice on his relationships with his boyfriends and things like that.

I: Okay. I mean, that's nice.

E: Yeah, which I wanted to mention just because like we've got this impression that like, oh, it was in the 30's, probably they would have been, like, very opposed to it and the overwhelming attitude that he seems to come across, not just with his family but with wider social groups is just kind of matter-of-fact, oh yeah, okay, sure, that's what you're in to.

H: Mhm.

E: So after he has this sex with his gym teacher, he begins to have sort of various 'playmates' as he calls them who are of his age and they're basically just other boys who he's having these casual, fun, no strings sexual relationships with.

H: That sounds fake.

I: That doesn't sound fake to me.

E: No...

I: I'd believe that of teenage boys.

H: Okay. You're experience of teenage boys is very different to mine.

E: This bit sounds fake though. He described that sometimes they'd go to the other boy's house and have sex there. Okay, that's plausible. Sometimes they'd have sex on crowded trains.

I: Okay, guys.

E: And sometimes they'd have sex in class when they're just like have their desks next to each other. And so at that point that to me sounds a little...

H: Feels like maybe he might be inserting some fantasy in there.

E: Yeah.

In 1936, he and his sister are forced to leave school and find an apprenticeship because of his family's worsening financial situation. They both found one in the garment industry; he was working in a formal clothes business. He said that he actually welcomed the change to an extent because it brought money and it made him feel like he had more independence and he was more adult. That to me also, to be honest, sounds a little fictionalised. Whilst I feel like those positive elements probably were present in his feelings at the time, the negative emotions associated with kind of losing his place at school and everything like that here aren't present and that seems unrealistic to me given how strongly he felt about that earlier.

H: Mm.

E: And I think it certainly is a thing throughout this that in really bad situations he kind of just... he won't dwell on it, he won't like emote for paragraphs, he'll just move on, he'll cut to the next scene or he will like downplay it. He describes in his job, part of what he was doing was like measuring like businessmen and so forth for trousers and things like that and he said he'd do a lot of like cheeky, overly thorough, unnecessary measuring.

I: I was about to say, was this an erotic experience for him?

E: [laughs] Everything's an erotic experience.

H: There's definitely a trope about the inseam.

I: [laughs]

E: Yeah, like that's exactly what it is. He'd be like, y'know, really like, oh, we just need to make sure we got that crotch measurement and they didn't like alter the pants specifically so it really didn't matter.

So I had trouble in this kind of... trying to smoothly go back and forth between, here is this – you know – one of the most horrible periods of human history and also just kind of all of the sex content. So now we're up to another bit where I feel awkward switching from this irreverent sexual banter to very serious wartime stuff.

H: That was very much the state of 1930s Berlin, where everything was terrible and then, in the middle, there were some lovely nightclubs, and Christopher Ishwood flouncing round.

I: To be honest I feel like that must've been the state of like, all of human history.

H: Yes. But also, this gets noted in – in -histories of Berlin.

E: Mm.

H: As it being this particular hive of activity, even in the face of such dire opposition, and it being a very stark contrast.

E: Mm. And it's definitely, like, how I'd characterise his autobiography, in general, though. Just veering back and forth between...

H: Terribly Bleak.

E: Yeah. Here is yet more of my rights being stripped away. Anyway, do you wanna hear about this casual sexual encounter now?

H: Yeah.

E: So, it's a fairly like, accurate representation, it's just one that I worried I wasn't going to carry off terribly well.

Anyway, moving on. On March 12, 1938, Germany invaded Austria and the Becks lost their Austrian citizenship because Austria, according to Germany, no longer existed. But they're also not able to receive German citizenship and so they become legally stateless. They're just Jews now. They received a letter telling them to vacate their apartment within four days. This is devastating to Gad's father; he'd considered himself, as I said, a very proud German, and now, essentially, that country didn't want him. And also, he'd worked incredibly hard his entire life to move his family up the social ladder, and now they had to move back into their old original neighbourhood. And he just sort of fell into depression for a few days and wouldn't do anything about this, and it fell to Gad to find them an apartment, and he did so.

I: How old is Gad at this point?

E: So he's about fifteen.

I: Okay. So he's at an age where he should be having to do this, but he's perfectly capable of it.

E: Yeah, basically. He starts realising that he can't just rely on his family to do everything, he has to kind of, look after himself, is what he takes from this experience. The side of his family that still lives in Vienna never made any moves to try and leave Vienna, and all of them apart from one cousin died in the camps.

I: Oh dear.

E: Gad's parents didn't start thinking about leaving Germany until 1938, and by then, it was impossible. At that point, they would have either needed to have like, high up contacts where they were trying to move to, or they would've needed a lot of money, and they didn't have either.

On the tenth of November, 1938, Gad left his house in the morning and for the first time, he could tell walking around his neighbourhood, exactly which businesses were Jewish and which weren't because of which ones had been destroyed. So the previous night had been the Reichskritallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. It's one of the most famous pogroms of the Nazi regime.

I: Yeah.

E: Over 250 synagogues, 7500 stores, many apartment buildings, cemeteries and Jewish community buildings had been destroyed. Nearly 100 Jews were murdered and 35,000 were arrested and taken away.

Over the next few months, restrictions were gradually put into place, on the Jewish community. So radios, telephones and valuables were confiscated. In 1938, the Becks gave all remaining valuables

to a non-Jewish family they knew and in 1945 when the war ended that family gave them all back to them.

H: Oh!

E: Yeah!

H: Good on them!

E: It's notable that they got it all back, because a lot of times that didn't happen. When Jewish people during the Holocaust gave their valuables away, either the people would sell them, or they'd just keep them, or whatever. So it's nice that they got them back.

I: Mm.

E: Gad says, like he, in his autobiography, refers to like, a non-Jewish person who was entrusted with a Jewish person's valuables as a "take-caryan".

I: A take-caryan?

E: As a pun on Aryan.

I: [giggles]

E: Aaah.

I: Oh dear. [laughs]

H: Really?

Eli: That's not the last Aryan pun that's gonna come up, either.

H: Oookay.

E: But, yep. As 1938 wear on, Jewish people are no longer around to run businesses, buy books or newspapers, own motor vehicles, use public transport, go to theatres, cinemas, public bathhouses, pools and certain streets, or attend Aryan educational institutions. Many Jewish organisations are disbanded and the Jewish community is forced to pay repair costs for everything destroyed in the pogroms, and they're fined one billion reichsmarks by the government as an atonement penalty.

H: That sounds like a very arbitrary number. That sounds like, you know when in Austin Powers, where the guy turns around and he's like, "I will ransom the world for one *billion* dollars." It's a very, like, supervillain thing to do.

E: So most of the remaining Jewish population in Berlin are assigned to work in armament jobs. Gad is sent to work in a cardboard packaging factory, because the store he was working in isn't allowed to be open anymore. The attitude of a lot of Jewish workers at the time is that they have to work hard and they have to prove that they're good German citizens, and that they're of use to the German state. And it's also just kind of a way of preserving some dignity for them.

In Europe at the time, if you wanted to immigrate to Israel, you had to first spend some time working in a sort of like, Zionist preparatory centre called a *hachshara*, where you study, like, agricultural and other practical skills, and also like, Hebrew and things like that. And interest in them increased greatly from 1933, as you can imagine. So Gad goes to one of these preparatory centres in May of 1940. He starts out just looking after baby cows.

I: Aww.

H: That's sweet.

E: In the countryside. It sounds nice. And he meets a boy named Reuwen there, and they became close and they go for long hikes and they have really deep conversations.

H: Aww.

E: And you can see where this is going.

H: [laughs] Yes.

I: It's not going to a casual no-strings-attached sexual encounter.

E: No, it's going to an uncasual, yes-strings-attached sexual encounter.

I: Indeed.

E: Which they have for the first time in a meadow.

I: Awww.

H: Awww, wow. Does this end terribly? His name is Reuwen, and they slept together in a meadow.

E: No no no, it's not like, the worst thing. It's like, medium bad. They have sex in a meadow, because Gad's meant to be looking after his calves, but instead...this.

So he's having a pretty good time. He's in nature, which he's not accustomed to being. He's with a bunch of other guys, he's living this like, idyllic, isolated life, that's very easy to romanticise. And then, because they've now spent time in a Zionist training camp, they get a place on a list for a boat headed to Palestine, and they make plans about how their relationship will continue there.

I: Aww.

E: And the one day, Gad is harvesting the tomatoes, he collapses.

H: Ooh.

I: Oh, dear.

E: And, he's taken to hospital, and they find that he has a tear in his stomach wall. So he has an operation, and he's fine, and he recovers.

H: Well, good.

E: Yeah. And he awakes to find the ship has left without him...

I: Oh no!

E: And his boyfriend's gone with it.

H: Wow, that is tragic.

E: Mm.

H: They had sex in a *meadow*, how did I know this was not going to end well.

E: I'm sorry.

I: I think it was probably a fair choice on Reuwen's part.

E: Oh yeah, I—

I: Like, I would not hold that against him.

H: No.

E: No, of course not. I don't think there was any...

H: Making it all the more tragic.

E: ...insinuation that you should. So that's happened.

After he gets discharged from hospital, he's sent to work back in the carton factory.

I: Aww.

E: And he's working 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, in crews made of Jewish people and also working class Germans who they call the proletAryan.

I: [laughs]

E: That's your second Aryan pun. They're done now.

I and H: [laugh]

H: Okay.

E: I'm sorry. I felt I should include some bad puns.

H: I mean, yeah, I appreciate it.

I: I'm...glad they were in there.

E: So he says that between him, his sister and his father, they've got three paychecks coming in, and they're actually doing pretty well financially. At this job, he meets a man named Erwin Tischauer, a Jewish man responsible for maintaining the machinery. Gad says that, so he didn't get his clothes dirty he'd get naked to lie in the machine to fix it?

I: Sounds fake.

H: That definitely sounds like the set-up for a porn film, where I'm a naked mechanic, and I'm covered in grease, and I've got an enormous spanner.

I: [laughs] Yeah, basically.

E: I just – like – you're in a machine with moving parts, and....genitals are just right there, and I just, like, take care of yourself, Erwin.

I: Yeah.

E: I also like this guy apparently having the thought process that is like, "Mm, I don't wanna get grease on my overalls, I better get it on my bare skin, and then put the overalls on over that.

I: Nah, there's like a sexy sponging down scene in between. I guess.

E: Gad would've told us.

I: [laughs] Okay, yeah.

E: At any rate, I mention this guy, half because of the naked machine nonsense, and half because he is involved in a, like, a Zionist group that's still active in Berlin. And he gets Gad involved in that which is quite important. They're the only Jewish groups that are still operating in Germany, now.

I: Are they still allowed to operate, or are they like secret underground Zionist groups.

E: Ah...They were allowed to operate beyond when a bunch of Jewish groups were allowed to, because for a while I think the situation was because they were so focused on leaving Germany, the German government wanted Jewish people out of Germany, so they were like, "Yeah, cool, leave." And then after a bit that stopped being the case, and they were made illegal.

I: All right.

E: So they were definitely illegal at a point, and he definitely stays involved in like, illegal underground Zionist groups, but I'm not sure at what point that becomes the case.

I: Okay.

E: They're normally meeting...so I have a note here that says they meet secretly at people's houses, so I guess it is...

I: Now we know, now we know.

E: ...already illegal.

H: Mm-hm.

E: They are studying, like, Zionist ideology, and studying Hebrew, but they're also studying just like, Jewish culture, and spirituality, more generally, and even just like, non-Jewish-specific culture and like they go to the cinema and stuff. So it's kind of just like a Jewish social group.

I: Do they have to sneak into the cinema as well?

E: Oh yeah, and they do. There's a part later on where they mention that going to the cinema even though it was illegal, could be like, quite safe, because it meant that you were in a sheltered place for like, two hours or whatever, and no-one knew you were there.

H: Mm.

I: Oh yeah. I mean, that's bleak, but there you go.

E: Yeah. But, they got to see movies...

I: Yeah.

H: [deadpan] Hooray, hooray.

E: Yeah, they like, for a while, they'll keep going to like, concerts and things.

I: Okay.

E: Yep, so they're meeting at people's houses, and they're studying Zionism and Hebrew, and Jewish culture and spirituality more generally, and then also like, literature, both Jewish and not, and like, just a whole array of things. They're basically just like a youth group.

And it's in this setting that Gad starts going by the name Gad. So his name's actually Gerhardt. He starts going by a Hebrew name.

I: Oh, okay.

E: Mm, and so like, his sister's name is Margot, and she starts going by Miriam, and things like that. In the youth group, there is a boy.

I: Of course there is.

E: [laughs] Yeah. And his name is Manfred Lewin.

I: Oh, you showed me a picture of him!

E: I did show you a picture of him!

H: We have a Tumblr, at..

E: Queerasfact dot tumblr dot com.

H: Where you can see this picture!

E: Yes!

So yep, he's in his youth group. There's a boy named Manfred Lewin. Gad doesn't really think much of him. He's kind of quiet and awkward and he stutters.

I: Aww.

E: But then he notices that when he gets like, enthusiastic about something, he can talk very like, fluently and passionately and eloquently, so he notices him kind of intellectually and thinks like, yes, good.

And then, the group begins to prepare to put on a performance of the play *Don Carlos*. Gad is playing Marquis Poser, and Manfred Lewin is playing Carlos. I don't know what this play is about, but my understanding of things is that those characters are in a lot of scenes together.

H: So it's the equivalent of that trope where you're playing the lead in the high school play!

E: [laughs] Yeah, that's exactly what happening here, yes.

So they get together to rehearse.

H: Mm-hm.

E: And it's like they're in a high school play, yeah. And then one day, Manfred leans in over Gad's shoulder to read something in his script, and Gad just kind of has this realisation that he wants Manfred to stay there.

H: Aww.

E: And that's his realisation that he's got feelings for this boy.

I: Aww.

E: So they get together more and more to rehearse. And Gad decides that he's going to seduce Manfred.

I: [laughs]

H: That sounds like a very Gad decision.

I: Does he have tips for us?

E: He does kind of talk about how this happens, but I don't think we're gonna use these tips.

I: Okay.

E: Um, just like...I'll get to it. Give me a minute.

One weekend, the group goes to 'camp out' on the roof of the old Jewish teacher's association building, because they're no longer allowed to leave the city to go camping in like, a wood or something normal.

H: Yes. They...so the crew from the high school play go and have an overnight sleepover on the roof of the teachers building.

E: Yup.

I: Are they about to kiss while they stare at the stars? [laughs] Sorry, go on.

E: So, I don't have like, lengthy details about how this plays out, but basically what happens is, during this camping trip, they have sex for the first time. Gad decides that he's not gonna actively come on to Manfred. He decides that it's gonna work better if he plays a passive, quote/unquote "feminine" role, to seduce him.

H: So I definitely misread "decides he's not gonna actively come onto Manfred".

E and I: [laugh]

E: That...might've happened, I think, actually. I'm not sure.

H: And...so you're saying he doesn't actually come on to Manfred by having sex with him.

E: It is Manfred who ends up taking the initiative. Later Manfred tells Gad that he had seemed like a girl, and Gad describes the sex he's having as, quote, "Not much like gay sex as one thinks of it today," end quote, so like, you can make of that what you will.

I: I was going to say, what is he trying to say there?

E: I think the deal is that like, the sexual relationships he has, there's a lot of kissing and a lot of like, caressing each other and things, and...

I: Is just what he's saying, there wasn't penetration?

E: Yeah, I think he's saying there's not like, the sex acts that you would specifically associate with gay men, like, anal sex or oral sex or anything like that.

I: Okay. All right.

E: But yeah, I say all that just to kind of talk about how he's kind of conceptualising these relationships.

H: I thought there were juicy details coming.

E: I was gonna talk about identity.

I: That's juicy.

E: Gad describes Manfred as being straight.

H: Huh.

E: And he talks about how he would quite often have relationships with men where...he's the only man they're ever interested in, he's the only man they ever have sex with, and apart from him, all of their desire is directed towards women, and they go on to have relationships with women.

H: Hm.

E: He's not particularly concerned about their identity, whatever, like, at the time, they're clearly like, in a relationship with him, they're committed to him at that moment, so that's good enough. He does talk a bit about how he thinks they interacted with concepts of masculinity differently. Where like, he was very attracted to athletic masculine men, and these men were attracted to him because he was more feminine.

H: Hm.

E: He also talks about how a big part of whether or not he considers a man to be gay is whether or not they're like, specifically interested in interacting with the penis of the man they're having sex with. And he says, "I don't a man is really gay unless he needs the penis of the other man."

I: [laughs] Okay...

E: So...I don't know, we could talk a bit about what's going on there if you wanted.

H: I don't that there's a super long conversation to have about that except for the fact that it's now 2017 and our understanding has moved on since then.

E: But yeah, like, that's the paradigms he's in.

I: Yeah... I mean, he's had to kind of form his own identity.

H: Mm, that's a good point.

I: In the 1930s... You can see, yeah.

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E: That they're like, real, like, men's men. That – that didn't sound straight at all.

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E: Like, he's really queer and he's kind of, you know, more feminine, and whatnot, but it's...yeah.

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E: Gad would spend a lot of time at the Lewins' house, and he would sleep in Manfred's bed when he was there. You know, like, they're two horny teenage boys who are sharing a bed. They'd end up having sex.

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E: During one of these nights, Manfred gave him with a little book he had made, that had like anecdotes about their friends in it, and poetry he had written and little drawings.

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I and H: [laugh]

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deportation by the Nazis became illegal for Jewish people. In 1942, information about what was happening to those who'd left began to trickle in. BBC radio recounted rumours of abuse. And Gad and his friends were warned from a contact outside Germany that they shouldn't comply with orders to 'migrate'.

Around this time, Gad meets a woman named Edith Wolff. She's quite important in the underground resistance work he gets involved with for the rest of the war. Eli: So I had trouble in this kind of... trying to smoothly go back and forth between, here is this – you know – one of the most horrible periods of human history and also just kind of all of the sex content. So now we're up to another bit where I feel awkward switching from this irreverent sexual banter to very serious wartime stuff.

H: That was very much the state of 1930s Berlin, where everything was terrible and then, in the middle, there were some lovely nightclubs, and Christopher Ishwood flouncing round.

I: To be honest I feel like that must've been the state of like, all of human history.

H: Yes. But also, this gets noted in – in -histories of Berlin.

E: Mm.

H: As it being this particular hive of activity, even in the face of such dire opposition, and it being a very stark contrast.

E: Mm. And it's definitely, like, how I'd characterise his autobiography, in general, though. Just veering back and forth between...

H: Terribly Bleak.

E: Yeah. Here is yet more of my rights being stripped away. Anyway, do you wanna hear about this casual sexual encounter now?

H: Yeah.

E: So, it's a fairly like, accurate representation, it's just one that I worried I wasn't going to carry off terribly well.

Anyway, moving on. On March 12, 1938, Germany invaded Austria and the Becks lost their Austrian citizenship because Austria, according to Germany, no longer existed. But they're also not able to receive German citizenship and so they become legally stateless. They're just Jews now. They received a letter telling them to vacate their apartment within four days. This is devastating to Gad's father; he'd considered himself, as I said, a very proud German, and now, essentially, that country didn't want him. And also, he'd worked incredibly hard his entire life to move his family up the social ladder, and now they had to move back into their old original neighbourhood. And he just sort of fell into depression for a few days and wouldn't do anything about this, and it fell to Gad to find them an apartment, and he did so.

I: How old is Gad at this point?

E: So he's about fifteen.

I: Okay. So he's at an age where he should be having to do this, but he's perfectly capable of it.

E: Yeah, basically. He starts realising that he can't just rely on his family to do everything, he has to kind of, look after himself, is what he takes from this experience. The side of his family that still lives

in Vienna never made any moves to try and leave Vienna, and all of them apart from one cousin died in the camps.

I: Oh dear.

E: Gad's parents didn't start thinking about leaving Germany until 1938, and by then, it was impossible. At that point, they would have either needed to have like, high up contacts where they were trying to move to, or they would've needed a lot of money, and they didn't have either.

On the tenth of November, 1938, Gad left his house in the morning and for the first time, he could tell walking around his neighbourhood, exactly which businesses were Jewish and which weren't because of which ones had been destroyed. So the previous night had been the Reichskritallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass. It's one of the most famous pogroms of the Nazi regime.

I: Yeah.

E: Over 250 synagogues, 7500 stores, many apartment buildings, cemeteries and Jewish community buildings had been destroyed. Nearly 100 Jews were murdered and 35,000 were arrested and taken away.

Over the next few months, restrictions were gradually put into place, on the Jewish community. So radios, telephones and valuables were confiscated. In 1938, the Becks gave all remaining valuables to a non-Jewish family they knew and in 1945 when the war ended that family gave them all back to them.

H: Oh!

E: Yeah!

H: Good on them!

E: It's notable that they got it all back, because a lot of times that didn't happen. When Jewish people during the Holocaust gave their valuables away, either the people would sell them, or they'd just keep them, or whatever. So it's nice that they got them back.

I: Mm.

E: Gad says, like he, in his autobiography, refers to like, a non-Jewish person who was entrusted with a Jewish person's valuables as a "take-caryan".

I: A take-caryan?

E: As a pun on Aryan.

I: [giggles]

E: Aaah.

I: Oh dear. [laughs]

H: Really?

Eli: That's not the last Aryan pun that's gonna come up, either.

H: Oookay.

E: But, yep. As 1938 wear on, Jewish people are no longer around to run businesses, buy books or newspapers, own motor vehicles, use public transport, go to theatres, cinemas, public bathhouses, pools and certain streets, or attend Aryan educational institutions. Many Jewish organisations are disbanded and the Jewish community is forced to pay repair costs for everything destroyed in the pogroms, and they're fined one billion reichsmarks by the government as an atonement penalty.

H: That sounds like a very arbitrary number. That sounds like, you know when in Austin Powers, where the guy turns around and he's like, "I will ransom the world for one *billion* dollars." It's a very, like, supervillain thing to do.

E: So most of the remaining Jewish population in Berlin are assigned to work in armament jobs. Gad is sent to work in a cardboard packaging factory, because the store he was working in isn't allowed to be open anymore. The attitude of a lot of Jewish workers at the time is that they have to work hard and they have to prove that they're good German citizens, and that they're of use to the German state. And it's also just kind of a way of preserving some dignity for them.

In Europe at the time, if you wanted to immigrate to Israel, you had to first spend some time working in a sort of like, Zionist preparatory centre called a *hachshara*, where you study, like, agricultural and other practical skills, and also like, Hebrew and things like that. And interest in them increased greatly from 1933, as you can imagine. So Gad goes to one of these preparatory centres in May of 1940. He starts out just looking after baby cows.

I: Aww.

H: That's sweet.

E: In the countryside. It sounds nice. And he meets a boy named Reuwen there, and they became close and they go for long hikes and they have really deep conversations.

H: Aww.

E: And you can see where this is going.

H: [laughs] Yes.

I: It's not going to a casual no-strings-attached sexual encounter.

E: No, it's going to an uncasual, yes-strings-attached sexual encounter.

I: Indeed.

E: Which they have for the first time in a meadow.

I: Awww.

H: Awww, wow. Does this end terribly? His name is Reuwen, and they slept together in a meadow.

E: No no no, it's not like, the worst thing. It's like, medium bad. They have sex in a meadow, because Gad's meant to be looking after his calves, but instead...this.

So he's having a pretty good time. He's in nature, which he's not accustomed to being. He's with a bunch of other guys, he's living this like, idyllic, isolated life, that's very easy to romanticise. And then, because they've now spent time in a Zionist training camp, they get a place on a list for a boat headed to Palestine, and they make plans about how their relationship will continue there.

I: Aww.

E: And the one day, Gad is harvesting the tomatoes, he collapses.

H: Ooh.

I: Oh, dear.

E: And, he's taken to hospital, and they find that he has a tear in his stomach wall. So he has an operation, and he's fine, and he recovers.

H: Well, good.

E: Yeah. And he awakes to find the ship has left without him...

I: Oh no!

E: And his boyfriend's gone with it.

H: Wow, that is tragic.

E: Mm.

H: They had sex in a *meadow*, how did I know this was not going to end well.

E: I'm sorry.

I: I think it was probably a fair choice on Reuwen's part.

E: Oh yeah, I—

I: Like, I would not hold that against him.

H: No.

E: No, of course not. I don't think there was any...

H: Making it all the more tragic.

E: ...insinuation that you should. So that's happened.

After he gets discharged from hospital, he's sent to work back in the carton factory.

I: Aww.

E: And he's working 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, in crews made of Jewish people and also working class Germans who they call the proletAryan.

I: [laughs]

E: That's your second Aryan pun. They're done now.

I and H: [laugh]

H: Okay.

E: I'm sorry. I felt I should include some bad puns.

H: I mean, yeah, I appreciate it.

I: I'm...glad they were in there.

E: So he says that between him, his sister and his father, they've got three paychecks coming in, and they're actually doing pretty well financially. At this job, he meets a man named Erwin Tischauer, a Jewish man responsible for maintaining the machinery. Gad says that, so he didn't get his clothes dirty he'd get naked to lie in the machine to fix it?

I: Sounds fake.

H: That definitely sounds like the set-up for a porn film, where I'm a naked mechanic, and I'm covered in grease, and I've got an enormous spanner.

I: [laughs] Yeah, basically.

E: I just – like – you're in a machine with moving parts, and....genitals are just right there, and I just, like, take care of yourself, Erwin.

I: Yeah.

E: I also like this guy apparently having the thought process that is like, "Mm, I don't wanna get grease on my overalls, I better get it on my bare skin, and then put the overalls on over that.

I: Nah, there's like a sexy sponging down scene in between. I guess.

E: Gad would've told us.

I: [laughs] Okay, yeah.

E: At any rate, I mention this guy, half because of the naked machine nonsense, and half because he is involved in a, like, a Zionist group that's still active in Berlin. And he gets Gad involved in that which is quite important. They're the only Jewish groups that are still operating in Germany, now.

I: Are they still allowed to operate, or are they like secret underground Zionist groups.

E: Ah...They were allowed to operate beyond when a bunch of Jewish groups were allowed to, because for a while I think the situation was because they were so focused on leaving Germany, the German government wanted Jewish people out of Germany, so they were like, "Yeah, cool, leave." And then after a bit that stopped being the case, and they were made illegal.

I: All right.

E: So they were definitely illegal at a point, and he definitely stays involved in like, illegal underground Zionist groups, but I'm not sure at what point that becomes the case.

I: Okay.

E: They're normally meeting...so I have a note here that says they meet secretly at people's houses, so I guess it is...

I: Now we know, now we know.

E: ...already illegal.

H: Mm-hm.

E: They are studying, like, Zionist ideology, and studying Hebrew, but they're also studying just like, Jewish culture, and spirituality, more generally, and even just like, non-Jewish-specific culture and like they go to the cinema and stuff. So it's kind of just like a Jewish social group.

I: Do they have to sneak into the cinema as well?

E: Oh yeah, and they do. There's a part later on where they mention that going to the cinema even though it was illegal, could be like, quite safe, because it meant that you were in a sheltered place for like, two hours or whatever, and no-one knew you were there.

H: Mm.

I: Oh yeah. I mean, that's bleak, but there you go.

E: Yeah. But, they got to see movies...

I: Yeah.

H: [deadpan] Hooray, hooray.

E: Yeah, they like, for a while, they'll keep going to like, concerts and things.

I: Okay.

E: Yep, so they're meeting at people's houses, and they're studying Zionism and Hebrew, and Jewish culture and spirituality more generally, and then also like, literature, both Jewish and not, and like, just a whole array of things. They're basically just like a youth group.

And it's in this setting that Gad starts going by the name Gad. So his name's actually Gerhardt. He starts going by a Hebrew name.

I: Oh, okay.

E: Mm, and so like, his sister's name is Margot, and she starts going by Miriam, and things like that. In the youth group, there is a boy.

I: Of course there is.

E: [laughs] Yeah. And his name is Manfred Lewin.

I: Oh, you showed me a picture of him!

E: I did show you a picture of him!

H: We have a Tumblr, at..

E: Queerasfact dot tumblr dot com.

H: Where you can see this picture!

E: Yes!

So yep, he's in his youth group. There's a boy named Manfred Lewin. Gad doesn't really think much of him. He's kind of quiet and awkward and he stutters.

I: Aww.

E: But then he notices that when he gets like, enthusiastic about something, he can talk very like, fluently and passionately and eloquently, so he notices him kind of intellectually and thinks like, yes, good.

And then, the group begins to prepare to put on a performance of the play *Don Carlos*. Gad is playing Marquis Poser, and Manfred Lewin is playing Carlos. I don't know what this play is about, but my understanding of things is that those characters are in a lot of scenes together.

H: So it's the equivalent of that trope where you're playing the lead in the high school play!

E: [laughs] Yeah, that's exactly what happening here, yes.

So they get together to rehearse.

H: Mm-hm.

E: And it's like they're in a high school play, yeah. And then one day, Manfred leans in over Gad's shoulder to read something in his script, and Gad just kind of has this realisation that he wants Manfred to stay there.

H: Aww.

E: And that's his realisation that he's got feelings for this boy.

I: Aww.

E: So they get together more and more to rehearse. And Gad decides that he's going to seduce Manfred.

I: [laughs]

H: That sounds like a very Gad decision.

I: Does he have tips for us?

E: He does kind of talk about how this happens, but I don't think we're gonna use these tips.

I: Okay.

E: Um, just like...I'll get to it. Give me a minute.

One weekend, the group goes to 'camp out' on the roof of the old Jewish teacher's association building, because they're no longer allowed to leave the city to go camping in like, a wood or something normal.

H: Yes. They...so the crew from the high school play go and have an overnight sleepover on the roof of the teachers building.

E: Yup.

I: Are they about to kiss while they stare at the stars? [laughs] Sorry, go on.

E: So, I don't have like, lengthy details about how this plays out, but basically what happens is, during this camping trip, they have sex for the first time. Gad decides that he's not gonna actively come on to Manfred. He decides that it's gonna work better if he plays a passive, quote/unquote "feminine" role, to seduce him.

H: So I definitely misread “decides he’s not gonna actively come onto Manfred”.

E and I: [laugh]

E: That...might’ve happened, I think, actually. I’m not sure.

H: And...so you’re saying he doesn’t actually come on to Manfred by having sex with him.

E: It is Manfred who ends up taking the initiative. Later Manfred tells Gad that he had seemed like a girl, and Gad describes the sex he’s having as, quote, “Not much like gay sex as one thinks of it today,” end quote, so like, you can make of that what you will.

I: I was going to say, what is he trying to say there?

E: I think the deal is that like, the sexual relationships he has, there’s a lot of kissing and a lot of like, caressing each other and things, and...

I: Is just what he’s saying, there wasn’t penetration?

E: Yeah, I think he’s saying there’s not like, the sex acts that you would specifically associate with gay men, like, anal sex or oral sex or anything like that.

I: Okay. All right.

E: But yeah, I say all that just to kind of talk about how he’s kind of conceptualising these relationships.

H: I thought there were juicy details coming.

E: I was gonna talk about identity.

I: That’s juicy.

E: Gad describes Manfred as being straight.

H: Huh.

E: And he talks about how he would quite often have relationships with men where...he’s the only man they’re ever interested in, he’s the only man they ever have sex with, and apart from him, all of their desire is directed towards women, and they go on to have relationships with women.

H: Hm.

E: He’s not particularly concerned about their identity, whatever, like, at the time, they’re clearly like, in a relationship with him, they’re committed to him at that moment, so that’s good enough. He does talk a bit about how he thinks they interacted with concepts of masculinity differently. Where like, he was very attracted to athletic masculine men, and these men were attracted to him because he was more feminine.

H: Hm.

E: He also talks about how a big part of whether or not he considers a man to be gay is whether or not they’re like, specifically interested in interacting with the penis of the man they’re having sex with. And he says, “I don’t a man is really gay unless he needs the penis of the other man.”

I: [laughs] Okay...

E: So...I don't know, we could talk a bit about what's going on there if you wanted.

H: I don't that there's a super long conversation to have about that except for the fact that it's now 2017 and our understanding has moved on since then.

E: But yeah, like, that's the paradigms he's in.

I: Yeah... I mean, he's had to kind of form his own identity.

H: Mm, that's a good point.

I: In the 1930s... You can see, yeah.

E: Mm. It's not something that he like, writes extensively about. It's clearly not something that he's like, overly concerned about. He just kind of has some thoughts at you.

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Around this time, Gad meets a woman named Edith Wolff. She's quite important in the underground resistance work he gets involved with for the rest of the war. E: She's also half Jewish on her father's side like Gad, and in 1933 she'd converted. In 1936, her aunt had stolen her membership information from the Jewish community files so kind of... for the moment they weren't paying attention to her.

I: Oh, okay. So nobody knows she's Jewish?

E: Yeah.

I: Alright.

E: She obviously felt very strongly against the Nazi regime and she wanted to do resistance work against it and she started with just kind of little pinpricks. So she'd make anti-Nazis remarks in public, she'd graffiti library books of Nazi propaganda, and she'd send bulk anonymous postcards to the German people. When the yellow star was introduced, she sent one saying: "Deutschland is now called Braunschweig", or Brunswick, as we'd Anglicise it, which is another city in Germany. "One half wears Nazi braun, and the other half remains schweigt, or silent."

I: Ah, I see.

E: Yeah.

I: Because... yep.

H: I don't speak any German.

E: Nope. So. The word she's punning on is Brunswick, or Braunschweig...

H: Oh, Braunschweig, oh, braun schweigt. Right, right.

E: Half wears Nazi braun, half of you are Nazis, and half of you just don't say anything in resistance, so half of you are schweigt. Like, I assume in German, the effect is immediate and cutting.

I: Yes.

E: I don't know if that was worth putting in but I enjoyed it. She's just angrily writing out 5000 postcards for the pun.

I: Yes. Angry pun.

E: And she also systematically fare evaded on public transport to undermine the state. So she gradually began to perform larger and larger acts of resistance, and ultimately she's helping dozens of Jews at a time go into hiding and maintain their underground lives.

H: That's quite a step up from fare evasion.

I: Yes

E: Like, she does this gradually. She doesn't, like, graffiti a book and then one day be like, hang on a second!

[laughter]

E: So she gets a fairly large circle of both Jewish and non-Jewish people willing to help together and is coordinating them all and they're providing lodgings, food and money, and this is the work that Gad is primarily occupied with until the end of the war. So the question of if and when to go underground is one that people are very conflicted about. Generally what people would do is they'd either hide out in a safe place or they'd assume an entirely false identity. Some viewed going into hiding as cowardly, others couldn't stomach the idea of having to maintain appearances under a false identity, so they'd have to, for example, like...

I: Be fake Christians.

E: Yeah, or they'd have to give the Nazi salute...

I: Oh, yeah.

E: ...as well and they just couldn't stomach the idea of having to do that. Other people believed they had the obligation to save themselves until they're able to make their way to Palestine. Other people believed that they had an obligation to stick together as a community. You know, like, if the rest of your family is going to be deported, how could you not go with them?

I: Mm.

E: So people are very conflicted. There's also the fact that the Nazis would take revenge on the community when individuals within it committed acts of resistance such as not showing up for deportation. So for example, twenty people didn't show up to the assembly camp as they had been instructed, so twenty other Jewish people were arrested and held, and eight were executed,

including one of their friends, Alfred Selbiger. So they held a memorial service at one of their houses for him and one of their group criticised those who were helping people go underground saying, "All of us who spoke out in favour of becoming illegal have driven him and the others to their deaths."

Then one day when Gad is at work, Manfred's younger brother Rudi comes by and tells him that the family's got their lists. He asks him to come by that night to see Manfred one last time, and Gad does so, but when he arrives he found that only Rudi and, um, another one of Manfred's brothers, Schlomo, is left. The rest of the family had been taken early that day and the brothers had been at work so they'd been missed. They were sad, but they were determined; they were going to go to the assembly camp the next day to be with the rest of their family, um, so they're relatively calm. They're just sitting in their, kind of, empty apartment, waiting for morning.

Gad, however, is distraught and the next day when the brothers go to the assembly camp, he doesn't know what to do, and he ends up going to Manfred's boss. He doesn't really have a plan in mind, he's vaguely hoping that the man will give him a letter or something like that saying that Manfred's indisposible and he has to come back to work so release him. Instead, the man tells him, well I've got a plan, but you're going to have to have a lot of nerve...

I: Okay.

E: ...and gives him his son's Hitler Youth uniform.

I: Oh God.

H: Okay.

E: Yep.

H: Well that went from zero to sixty quite quickly.

E: Yep. So Gad puts it on.

I: [whispered] Oh God. [spoken] I'm so frightened for him.

H: Mm.

E: And he goes to the assembly camp and he asks to see the overseer, and he's shown to the overseer and he gives the Nazi salute and he says that, y'know, in your camp there's a Jew called Manfred Lewin, he has the keys to some apartments I've been renovating with my father, and we need him so we can get the keys and we can see which ones belong to which doors and we can get back to work. The man barely pays attention, he goes, yeah, alright, sure, go get him, and Manfred's brought. He doesn't ask to see the keys, which is good because Manfred doesn't have any keys and they turn to go. The man stops them and says, 'Wait, you're going to bring him back right?' And Gad just kind of blase-ly, carelessly says, 'Well yeah, what would I want with a Jew?' and they have a nice little laugh together over that and then they leave.

H: Wow, well done.

I: This still is going to go horribly wrong, isn't it?

E: So they're walking down the street together in their neighbourhood and Gad feels quite triumphant, he feels quite secure, and he takes out a twenty mark note and offers it to Manfred and tells him to go to Gad's uncle's house and to wait for him there, and he's going to go into hiding.

So Manfred looks at the twenty mark note and he looks at Gad and he says, "Gad, I can't go with you. My family needs me. If I abandon them now, I could never be free." And he doesn't say

goodbye, he just turns and he goes back into the camp. Gad never sees him again. The whole family is taken to Auschwitz and they don't survive. Gad writes about this, "In those seconds, watching him go, I grew up."

The story as Gad presents it moves on quite quickly and I feel quite uncomfortable being like, anyway, so then at work!

I: Yeah.

E: But he doesn't dwell on it. He does say that never got over the loss. He buried himself in his illegal activities and in work.

I: Is work still the cardboard box factory?

E: Yeah, I believe it is. At some point, he gets switched to... Actually, I think it might be around now, that he gets switched to working unloading potatoes from a train.

I: Oh, okay.

E: But he just does sort of like physical labour for the rest of the...

I: Yep.

E: Yeah. So he's working, he's helping people in the underground and then in March of 1943, he briefly hides a young man named Zwi Abrahamssohn in his family's attic. Zwi Abrahamssohn's parents had been collected by the Gestapo, but he'd been working the night shift and so had been missed and so he's trying to find somewhere to hide out now. I wish I had a picture to show you of him because he's quite distinctive-looking, he... Gad describes him as blond, quiet, mischievous, athletic, with strange, deeply shaded eyes. And, like, he really, really has those eyes.

I: I was about to ask if Gad is into this.

E: I don't think Gad describes men unless...

I: Unless he's into him?

[laughter]

H: I was into him all the way up to his Steve Buscemi eyes. [pause] He has very distinctive eyes.

I: Thank you for that clarification.

E: So they sit up all night talking and he stays in the attic for a few nights before they find him somewhere else to go into hiding, but they stay in contact because he becomes part of their underground circle doing the work helping people living illegally. And he gets involved in supplying and distributing forged ration cards to underground Jews. One day, Gad and Zwi decide to kind of like sneak out of the city and they go to the forest and they go swimming there...

I: Aw.

E: Yeah. There's, there's bomber planes going overhead but nevertheless they describe it as this like nice, peaceful moment. They're lying on the banks there, and Zwi makes this really like awkward move to try and embrace Gad and then they end up entering into a sexual relationship.

I: To nobody's surprise.

E: To nobody's surprise. This is another one of Gad's lovers who he describes as being straight but nevertheless, he never struggles with the idea of being with another man like Manfred did, and it's not really a problem, and they have a pretty long term relationship. In 1943, in June, they get a letter from a friend of theirs, Karla, who's at Auschwitz. She flirted with an SS guard to get him to send a 'birthday card' to her friend back in Berlin for her, and she wrote this kind of coded letter that included the line, "Life and work would be tolerable if there wasn't always so much smoke around the chimney. Many of us have already joined Alfred." Alfred being their friend...

I: Yeah.

E: ...who had died earlier. So now they knew. The same month, Edith got a letter telling her to report to the Gestapo, and she who... She'd helped so many people go underground, she'd persuaded so many people to do so, but she ultimately decided not to do it herself. And she reported to them and she was tortured and then sent to the camps. She does survive, she lives until 1997...

I: Okay.

E: ...but she's out of our story now. It seems like their group is sort of being closed in on. Other people they know are also arrested or told to report and are tortured and one of them gives up Zwi's name as someone who's involved in the underground. And he's arrested and he decides to try to lie well enough to be seen to be cooperating, and he's pretending to show them, like, meeting places and things like that, but he can't carry it off and he's beaten and tortured. Ah, he loses all of his front teeth, and then he's put in a prison camp in Berlin.

He's being kept in a crowded cell, it's got a barred window and he notices that next door is a room with air raid supplies, that includes picks and things like that. He also notices that the Jewish cemetery that's adjacent has a hole in the chain link fence. And then an air raid occurs one night and the prisoners have to line up in front of their cells and the supply room is unlocked because...

I: It's the air raid supply room.

E: It's full of air raid supplies, yeah. So he sneaks in there, he grabs a pick and he hides it under his bed. The next day, he and his cellmates pry the grate off the window and then prop it back up into place and hide the pick again and they decide they're going to escape on December 31, because they think that, given New Year's that the guards will be like...

I: Yeah.

H: Drunk.

I: Having a party.

E: Laxer, distracted, yep. Luckily, that night there's also a bombing, so all of the lights are out.

H: Perfect.

E: And they pry the grate off the window and three of them get out before the guards are alerted and the rest are stopped. So the three of them run to the hole in the cemetery fence, they run through it, bombs are falling overhead, they run through the cemetery to the street on the other side, um, and then they're stopped by a policeman. And he says to them, 'Are you crazy? You need to be in air raid shelter!' So they go to an air raid shelter and then, when the bombing's over, they all scatter and go into hiding.

H: Wow, that worked out.

I: Yeah!

E: So Gad hears that Zwi has gotten out and he guesses correctly that he's gone to stay with his aunt who lives kind of like, further out.

H: Mhm.

E: Like on the outskirts or suburbs or whatever of Berlin. He has never met the woman but he knows some random details about her; he knows the ration card office she goes to, he knows she rides a bicycle, and he knows she has thick glasses, so he stakes it out until he sees a woman who looks like that...

I: [laughter]

E: ...and then he approaches her and he goes... Aunt Marie? And they, they speak and she tells him where he can go to meet up with Zwi. When he gets there he sees this, like, old man with no teeth and he doesn't recognise him...

I: Yep.

E: ...but then realises of course who it is and they're reunited. They get him new front teeth, they get him treatment for TB and gradually he recovers, and he ends up living with Gad some of the time, and gets involved again in underground activities. So he's come off pretty well from that experience all things considered.

I: Yeah.

H: Whole new set of front teeth, I didn't know that dental surgery was that advanced in the '30s.

I: They had prosthetic teeth.

E: It may have been a plate or something.

I: Yeah.

E: Which isn't particularly like advanced.

H: Yeah.

E: Yeah, I don't know.

I: But they had, like, false teeth.

H: That makes sense.

E: Yeah. So they start getting huge amounts of money smuggled to them from Switzerland from Jewish underground members who had already escaped there and they're using it to help people survive in Germany so that makes things a bit easier for them. They're also helping smuggle people out when they can. And then a guy contacts them and he says that he has been contacted by someone in the underground who deals in jewellery and other valuables, and he wants to meet and arrange potentially selling some stuff to them. I don't fully understand the deal here, but basically currency's, like, not stable because of...

H: War.

E: ...the war. Um.

I: The German economy was a mess, I think, if I remember rightly.

E: Yeah. So it would be good for them to have assets that weren't just cash, like to also have...

I: Like gold or something.

E: Yeah. So the end of the war seems to be approaching, they're desperate for assets like that, and even though things seem a little weird, they're like, alright, let's just give it a go. And then basically the guy can tell that because they're willing to take him up on this, they have enough money that they have to be a group of people, they're not just like one person.

H: Mm.

E: And so he rats them out, and that night Zwi and Gad go home, they go to bed, and they wake up at 4 am with the SS pointing guns at them.

I: What year are we in now?

E: Early 1945.

I: Okay.

H: Homestretch.

E: Like, stuff's coming to an end. Homestretch. So Gad is put in a cell. He considers hanging himself, and he's held there for a week and then both Zwi and Gad are brought before the SS for interrogation. Gad recognises the man who he's brought before for interrogation; he'd owned a tobacco kiosk in their neighbourhood and he'd given Gad and Margot lollipops when they'd been children. Or that's too much of a coincidence and he's a liar, like, up to you.

H: I mean, yeah. It's, it's his diary!

E: Mm. On the desk he's got Gad's briefcase and next to it some thumbscrews and he starts questioning him. He's trying to kind of answer him enough that stuff's not going to escalate but also kind of not really say anything. He hears Zwi start screaming next door and things seem to be escalating in his room as well so he just says, we know each other, do you remember me? And reminds him how he knows him and the guy's, like, disquieted by this so he tells him to get out and he's sent back to his cell. He gets questioned again, never by that man though. I feel like he was... must have been tortured.

I: Mm.

E: From all accounts, before this they're very liberal with their use of torture. He's there for, like, quite a while. It seems...

I: But he never talks about it.

E: Yeah, he just gives no details. And it also seems odd that, like, we know... He does mention that Zwi's being tortured, so surely also Gad was being tortured.

H: Mm.

E: But he just doesn't interact with that at all.

H: That seems fair.

E: Yeah, yeah, no, of course. But I just think it's kinda worth noting that...

I: It may have happened.

E: Yeah. Like, the most horrific, directly affecting him elements of his story, he just says nothing about. Basically by this time though, the end of the war is fast approaching and there's no more transports to work camps or death camps so he's just sort of being, like, left in prison because they don't have anywhere to send them. Then a bomb falls on the prison and Gad gets buried in the rubble. And when he's dug out he's taken to the hospital in the building and he's unconscious there for a while. And then on April 20th, when the Soviets arrive in Berlin, the other prisoners are all released and Gad gets carried downstairs on a stretcher to a room. Zwi is sitting there in the room; he's not doing well either physically or mentally and they're just left there. A member of the staff gives them their release papers and then all of the staff flee. So they wait. The Battle of Berlin goes on outside. On April 24th, the door opens and a Russian soldier comes into the room they're hiding in. He looks at them. They look at him. They're not sure if he's going to kill them. And then he reaches into his coat and he pulls out a piece of paper and he says in Yiddish, "Is there someone here named Gad Beck?"

H: ...okay.

[laughter]

H: I didn't expect this at all.

E: No. So what's happened is contacts of theirs in Switzerland have told everyone that they possibly know, like, spread the word, someone important to us, Gad Beck, is in Berlin in a Gestapo prison somewhere. Find him.

H: Huh.

E: So Gad goes, yeah, that's, that's me. And the soldier says, "Brother's you're free!"

I: Aw.

E: And that's the end of the war for them. That's also the end of his autobiography. It was published... I don't have the exact date in front of me but, like, some time in the '90s, and it does promise at the end that he's going to publish a second volume and it gives a little bit of a rundown about what that will go over which is essentially the rest of his life. It was never published. I tried to find if it had been something that had been in the works and then he'd died before...

I: He finished it.

E: Before he could complete it or if it was, like, unfinished in an archive somewhere because, hey, I have a PhD coming up.

[laughter]

E: But, um, I couldn't find anything, no one seems to have mentioned it. In any case though, he stayed in Germany until 1947 and then he immigrated to Israel. He spends the rest of his life either helping people integrate to life, either in Israel or in Europe, after the Holocaust or involved in Jewish education more broadly. He also has a prolific career as a lecturer. He and Zwi's relationship continues after the war, but eventually they break up, and in 1976, Gad meets a man named Julius Laufer, who becomes his lifelong companion. He returns to live in Berlin in 1979 and he lives there until his death in 2012, at the age of 88.

H: It's pleasing to me that he gets to live for a while in his city as a free man.

E: Yeah. It's quite an intense decision not only to stay there after the war but then to move back there.

I: Yeah. I mean

E: As I said, my sources for this, or my source for this, rather, is pretty much just his autobiography. There was a film made about him which I was not able to get ahold of which I'm really sad about, and the filmmakers had this to say about him: "For somebody who was threatened and persecuted by the Nazis Gad's stance towards life is puzzlingly positive. When talking about his youth in Nazi Germany Gad always keeps his agency and his good spirit. But he also tends to conceal his suffering. The Nazis did everything to turn life into hell for Jews but Gad talks about making love during heavy bombardment. Thus there is a counterfactual ring to some of his stories, a touch of wishful thinking. Sometimes I think it has something to do with his homosexuality, with the ability to sexualize even the most obnoxious situations."

I: That was a weird statement.

H: When was this film made?

E: Let me finish. "Sometimes I think it is Gad's revenge on the Nazis: He won't let them define the past. He resists being turned into a victim – even half a century later by well-meaning but largely ignorant filmmakers like ourselves."

H: That, uh, resolved our earlier question. "Well-meaning but largely ignorant."

E: Yeah. And I guess... We talked about it throughout, his potential, like, fictionalising of his own story.

I: Yeah.

H: There is a lot of 'and then we had sex in a meadow, and then we went swimming in a beautiful lake...'

E: Yeah.

H: '...and then we have sex on the shore of the lake.'

E: Yeah. Yeah, I guess I just wanted to kind of make the point that first of all, say what you want about their wording, but like he does, I think, kind of downplay the most horrific...

I: Yeah.

H: Mm.

E: ...things that happen to him, and I think it's interesting the role that his sexuality and his kind of sex life during the war played for him in telling this story. Like I think it was something that was just enormously psychologically important to him.

H: Mm.

I: Yeah.

H: As a buffer.

E: Yeah. There's a documentary called Paragraph 175 that's about how gay men and women were persecuted during the Nazi era by the Nazis and it features him in it and he's telling the interviewer this story about how, like, the bombs were falling and I was having sex with my boyfriend, and the interviewer stops him and says, 'wait, do you mean to tell me that while the Nazis were bombing, you were having sex?' And he's like, 'of course I did, are you stupid? Come on keep up.'

[laughter]

I: I mean, I think that's almost fair, it's not as though people stop having sex because there's a war on.

E: Mm.

H: And certainly if you're about to explode, then why not!

E: Yeah.

I: Yeah, it's like you said, it's psychologically important to him, he's got a coping mechanism, it's like there's this positive thing.

E: Yeah, well I mean I imagine it's kind of a way to retain humanity.

I: Yeah. Exactly.

H: And I'm sure that there are people for whom the war was an enormously desexualised time, I'm sure there are huge varieties of experiences.

E: Mm. That's definitely how people think about the like '30s and '40s, the wartime, as a very like desexualised...

I: That was certainly not his experience.

H: Certainly, yes. I don't think that should invalidate his experience.

E: He's not a very big name in history in a way that really confuses me. Like, this is just such a valuable record that we have, not only as like... Like resistance efforts by Jewish people during the war are enormously kind of ignored in mainstream, uh, WWII history narratives, I find.

I: Mm.

E: And the ones that do get talked about tend to be like in the ghettos, and in the, the forests with the partisans, in, kind of, Poland and Lithuania and what not...

H: And active armed resistance.

E: Yeah! Yeah, and, like this kind of thing in Berlin doesn't get talked about all that often so it's enormously valuable in that sense, but also the fact that he was just around and being queer during that is just like... Like why don't we talk about this more? Whenever we do one of these episodes, I do like a quick look to at least kind of get a survey of what kind of like academic works exist on them, even if I'm not going to read it all, and there's nothing.

I: Literally nothing?

E: Pretty much, yeah, I couldn't find a single book about him that's not this one, couldn't find any academic articles that were about him, just ones that like mention him in an offhand sense, and I think that's a missed opportunity and I think people should pay attention to him.

H: Certainly anything this comprehensive deserves its own...

I: Deserves a look at, yep.

E: He's a very interesting figure about whom there's surprisingly little academic conversation, so I'm glad we could try to generate some interest at least. Thank you if you've stuck with us through this episode, I know it's a pretty harrowing topic and I hope it was interesting and not too much of a, uh, depressing commute.

This has been Queer as Fact. You can find our other episodes at queerasfact.podbean.com. We're also on Tumblr as [queerasfact](https://www.tumblr.com/queerasfact), on Facebook as [Queer As Fact](https://www.facebook.com/queerasfact) and on Twitter as [Queer As Fact](https://twitter.com/queerasfact). If you want to email us directly, with any comments, anything you liked, anything you didn't, any suggestions for future content, we would love to hear from you and we're at queerasfact@gmail.com. Once again, I'm Eli.

H: I'm Hamish.

I: I'm Irene.

E: We'll be back with our next episode on the 15th of July when Alice will be talking to you about queer women in medieval Arab literature.