



Photo courtesy of Atlanta Jewish Times

Why would a six year old leave his parents and younger siblings behind?

BENJAMIN HIRSCH

Benjamin Hirsch was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, in 1932. In November 1938, Ben's father was arrested during Kristallnacht. Ben's mother, desperate to find a way to protect her children, sent him and four older siblings on a Kindertransport to Paris, France. Ben, a young child, saw this as an adventure, not understanding the danger facing his parents and two younger siblings who were left behind.

Ben and his four older siblings came under the care of a French organization (OSE) running homes for Jewish refugee children. By June 1940, the Nazis had defeated and occupied France. To protect Jewish children from the Nazis, the organization moved them from home to home throughout France. A year later, with the help of the OSE, Ben's two older brothers, Jack and Asher, fled Europe and arrived in New York in June 1941. They ended up in Atlanta, close to a cousin in Rome, Georgia. In September, Ben and his two older sisters, Sarah and Flora, also escaped from Europe and arrived in New York in September 1941.

"I came to this country, a forty-three pound, nine-year-old foreigner and a Jew, without any parental support."



Photo courtesy of Benjaminhirsch.com

The Jewish Children's Service, part of the Jewish Welfare Board, helped to settle the Hirsch children with foster families in Atlanta. For some of the children, including Ben, the adjustment was difficult. They all looked forward to war's end so that they could return to Germany and be reunited with their parents and younger siblings. Their hopes were shattered, however. After the war, the Hirsch

children found out that their parents and younger brother and sister had been murdered in the Holocaust.

Ben served in the U.S. Army from 1953–55. He wrote a book, *Hearing a Different Drummer: a Holocaust Survivor's Search for Identity*, describing his experiences returning to Germany as an American soldier. After his discharge from the military, he graduated from Georgia Tech's School of Architecture. Ben married in 1959. He opened his own architecture firm, designing local projects. His specialty was designing churches and synagogues around the country.

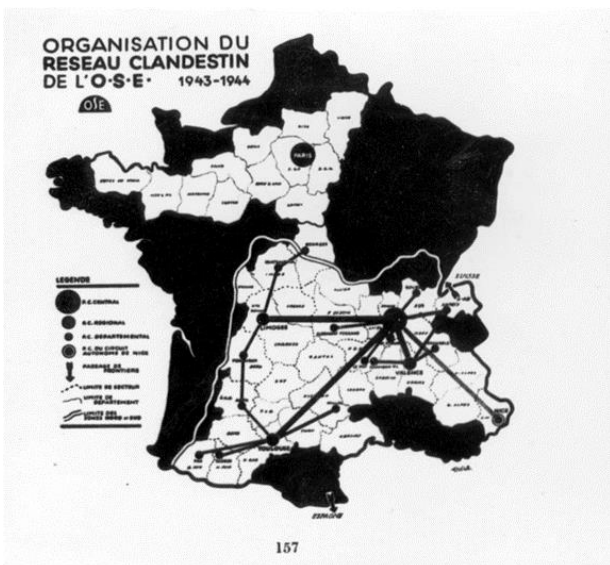


Photo courtesy of the Atlanta Jewish Times

Ben received a number of national design awards for religious architecture, and for the *Memorial to the Six Million* in Atlanta, the second Holocaust memorial built in the United States. The memorial was added to the National Registry of Historic Places in 2008. Ben was the architect and designer of the Holocaust gallery in The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum.

Ben served as president of Eternal Life-Hemshech, an organization for Atlanta Holocaust survivors and their families. He joined the boards of a number of Jewish schools and organizations in Atlanta. Understanding the importance of Holocaust education, he spoke to both students and adults about his experiences, being torn from home and family. His presentations were also a way to memorialize his parents and younger brother and sister,

Ben was proud of all he had built, but especially his family of four children, and many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Ben Hirsch passed away in February 2018.



Map of OSE rescue activities in France, courtesy of Yad Vashem