**Recha Freier (born Schweitzer)**

Recha Freier was born on October 29, 1892, in Norden (East Frisia) Germany, into an Orthodox Jewish family. Her brothers, Willi and Arthur, were also born in Norden; her sister, Eddie, was born in in Glogau (Glogow) Poland. Her parents were Bertha Schweitzer (bornLevy in 1862) and Menasse Schweitzer (born in 1855). .HTorah and Bertha died in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt (now Terezin in the Czech Republic) in 1945.

Recha’s first confrontation with antisemitism occurred in Norden, when she was still a young child. This painful event deeply impacted her for the rest of her life. Many years later, she wrote a poem about that incident.

Earthquake The city park. The golden shining fence. Closed. ?? A big white notice. A frame made of black paper. “No entry for dogs and Jews.”

In 1897, the Schweitzer family moved to Glogau in Lower Silesia, Poland. Recha attended the Glogau grammar school. Due to antisemitic taunting by her classmates, she left that school and attended a private school in Breslau (Wroclow). After passing her final exams, she studied modern languages in Breslau and, apparently, also in Munich.

In 1919, she married Rabbi Dr. Moritz Freier (1889 - 1969). In 1922, the couple moved to Sofia, Bulgaria, where Moritz Freier worked as a rabbi. Recha Freier founded a Zionist youth group for girls, the Young Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO). In 1929, they moved to Berlin, where Moritz Freier had been appointed rabbi for three synagogues. Recha Freier did research on folklore, delivered speeches and published several articles. Between 1920 and 1929 she gave birth to three sons and a daughter. Later she translated the book *Stories told by female workers: Struggle and life in Eretz Yisrael* from Hebrew into German.

**Recha Freier and the Youth Aliyah**

In 1932, Recha Freier organized the first emigration of a group of Jewish youth to Palestine and, thus, founded the Youth Aliyah movement. (Aliyah is the Hebrew word for “going up” and the term is used to refer to immigration to Israel). In January 1933, she officially founded the *Jüdische Jugendhilfe e.V.* (Committee for the Assistance of Jewish Youth, later renamed Youth Aliyah). Its aim was to organize the emigration of Jewish children and youth to Palestine. In September 1933, the Youth Aliyah was incorporated into a new organization called *Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden* (Representation of the German Jews in the German Reich).

Recha Freier became the director of the board of the department *Jüdische Jugendhilfe*, which was responsible for the selection of applicants for training in agricultural centres and Youth Aliyah schools, preparing them for life in Palestine. She also organized the necessary immigration certificates and travel expenses.

Photo

Youth saying good bye to their families at a Berlin station, 1936, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, Photo: Herbert Sonnenfeld

Recha Freier’s sons and her husband Moritz emigrated to Britain in 1937, 1938 and 1939. She refused to emigrate as long as she was able to help Jews flee from the Nazis.

Without any authorization, she provided exit papers for Polish prisoners in 1939, and, thus, freed them from the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. Because of this unauthorized behaviour, she came into conflict with the *Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland* (Organization of the Jews in the German Reich) and was removed from all her official positions.

**Escape from Germany**

In 1940, Recha Freier’s passport was confiscated. She and her daughter Mayaan fled, without any official travel documents, to Zagreb, Croatia via Vienna. From there, she again succeeded in saving Jewish children from Nazi Germany. Her escape eventually led to her arrival in Jerusalem. However, there, she was not able to continue her work for the Youth Aliyah, due to personal differences with the director of the Jerusalem office of the organization.

Photo passport

Recha’s passport stamped with the letter J for Jew (*Jude*), declared “*ungültig*”, meaning to be invalid.

**Recha Freier in Israel**

In 1943, Recha Freier founded a centre where children and youth from socially disadvantaged families could be cared for and educated. She occupied herself with modern music, played the piano, and wrote poems in German and in Hebrew. In 1958, she established a fund to support Israeli composers. Under the name of “Testimonium” she organized six major concerts between 1968 and 1983. Two books of her poetry were published in Germany: *Auf der Treppe (1976)* and *Fensterläden* (1979).

On April 2, 1984, Recha Freier died in Jerusalem.

**Jewish Life in Norden**

Jews first settled in Norden around 1550. The earliest gravestones in the Jewish cemetery of Norden date back to 1569. By the end of the 19th century, the Jewish community of Norden numbered approximately 300 members. Norden, at that time, was a seaport characterized by trade, shipping and agriculture. Many Jews worked as livestock dealers, butchers, grain merchants or traders.

In the 1933 election, the National Socialists won the majority of votes in Norden. Soon after that, Jewish shops were closed and the Jewish population was banned from their jobs, schools and clubs. Many Jews emigrated before 1938, and had to sell their houses and properties for less than their true value.

During *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, the Norden synagogue was set on fire by members of the Nazi SA and SS (paramilitary wings) from Norden. All Jewish families were driven to the slaughterhouse and maltreated there. With the deportation of the last Jews in 1940, the nearly 400-year history of the Jewish community in Norden came to an end.

Photo

Synagogenweg 3, Norden – the house where Recha Freier was born

***frauenORTE Niedersachsen***

*frauenORTE* is an initiative of the *Landesfrauenrat Niedersachsen* *e.V*. (Women’s Council of Lower Saxony) with the goal of publicizing the work and significance of historically important women. The initiative focuses on women’s history and culture regarding issues that are of interest in terms of both cultural studies and tourism.

There have been 42 *frauenORTE* initiatives in Lower Saxony since 2008. In East Frisia, there are currently six *frauenORTE.* The initiative is supported by the Lower Saxony Ministry for Social and Health Affairs. From the autumn of 2021 there will be seven additional initiatives, including Sara Oppenheimer from Esens.

**Credits**

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**Recha Freier**

In 1931, Recha Freier founded the Youth Aliyah, which organized the immigration of children and youth to Palestine. She played a decisive role in saving thousands of Jewish children and youths from the Nazis.

Further information can be found in the booklet on Recha Freier, available on request from the equal opportunities officer Elke Kirsten.

Photo

Three youth from Norden who succeeded in emigrating with the help of the Youth Aliyah: Zvi (Erich) Weinberg, Ruth Zadek, born Netheim, and Rudy Wolff in Haifa /Israel, 1985

Photo: Lina Gödeken, Ökumenische Arbeitsgruppe Synagogenweg Norden

**A tour of Norden**

1. **Neuer Weg 110 –** This is the oldest part of the Jewish community centre, located in Synagogenweg. Purchased by the Jewish community in 1679, it was used as a synagogue (house of prayer), school and residential building. In 1903, a teacher’s flat was built on the upper floor.
2. **Synagogenweg** (formerly known as Jews’ Lane) **–** The Jewish community centre was situated between Neuer Weg, Norden’s main shopping street, and Uffenstraße which connected the market place with the old harbour. As an ensemble of buildings, it is unique in the region. **Memorial -** In 1804, a new synagogue was built. In November 1938, the synagogue was burnt down. In 1987, a memorial was erected on its site. **Synagogenweg 2 –** the house where the beadle of the community lived. It was also used as an office, a conference room and a place to store timber for coffins and biers. The mikvah (ritual bath), was located here. The names of the committee members are engraved next to the entrance. **Synagogenweg 3 –** Thehouse where Recha Freier was born was built in 1891 as a teacher’s house. On the stones next to the entrance are carved the names of the board and committee members and the year the building was erected. Notably, the inscription of Recha Freier’s father “*Kantor M. Schweitzer*” can be seen here.

**Synagogenweg 4 –**Jewish school from 1871; extension of the building in Neuer Weg 110 with a little garden belonging to the school; the gym of a nearby sports club (*Norder Turnverein*) was used for physical education lessons.

1. **Recha-Freier-Platz –** This memorial was erected in the centre of Norden, with a memorial plaque in commemoration of Recha Freier’s life work dedicated in 2013.
2. **Am Zingel -** The oldest Jewish cemetery in East Frisia, established in 1569. About 330 gravestones still exist, the oldest one dates back to 1659. The last burial was in 1940. In 2005, a memorial was erected to commemorate all the Jews who were born or lived in Norden and who were murdered during the Holocaust.
3. **Remembrance Stones –** Thus far, 98 remembrance stones have been laid in the pavement throughout the city centre to commemorate the former Jewish inhabitants. The remembrance stones are mainly to be found in Neuer Weg and in Sielstraße.
4. **Am Markt –** In the belltower of the Ludgeri-Church is a memorial to those killed in World War I. The names of Jewish soldiers are also listed here.