

by Tom Segev

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Pictures in a Jewish album

Boy meets girl. They fall in love and marry and live happily ever after. End of story. It couldn't be more perfect.

In this case the boy was Max Uri and the girl Frieda Haber, both from Vienna. They met at a hostel for Jewish children in Austria, and the next year they met again, by chance, at a kosher hotel by the Adriatic Sea. But then World War II broke out, separating them. Max despaired of ever seeing his Frieda again. Until they met by chance on the street one day – in Tel Aviv.



Haber and Uri. Destined to marry.

It would make a great novel, but photographer and writer Edward Serotta has made a short film of it. Very short: "Frieda Suchen, Frieda Finden" (Seeking Frieda, Finding Frieda) is all of two minutes and 58 seconds long. The entire drama is there because the story is true. It is told in Max Uri's voice, on the backdrop of photos from

his family album and a few background historical pictures.

During the course of the film's 178 seconds, time is found for an important detail: When they met in Tel Aviv, Frieda was carrying a bottle, and when she saw Max it fell from her hand and shattered. They knew immediately they were destined to marry.

Uri and Haber are two of the 1,500 Jews in 15 countries, mainly in Eastern Europe, who Serotta and his people have interviewed in recent years as part of a historical and educational project based in Vienna. Fifty private and government foundations in six countries help support the Centropa oral history project.

Each interview takes from six to 20 hours and is based on the subjects' family photo albums – about 25,000 photographs in all. Some of the interviews have been adapted into very short films, like that on the Uris. All of the material is on the Web site of the project (www.centropa.org).

The endeavor is captivating and inspiring. Schools in several countries are already integrating the Centropa project into their curricula. It is also slated to come to Israel.

This is not another project about the Holocaust, but rather an embodiment of Jewish life in Europe before, during and after World War II. The possibility of living in Israel is revealed as an option, but not the only one: Five years after marrying, Max and Frieda returned to Vienna, where they live to this day. They have three children and eight grandchildren.