

## Obituary: W. Ernest Freud (1914 –2008)

W. Ernest Freud is best known as the 18-month-old child that Sigmund Freud observed playing 'fort, da' and described in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). What is less known is that he was also Freud's only grandchild to become a psychoanalyst.

Once, when asked when his psychoanalytic training began, W. Ernest Freud replied, 'In my mother's belly.' Ernest was the son of Freud's second daughter, Sophie Freud, and Max Halberstadt, a portrait photographer. He was born Ernst Wolfgang Halberstadt on 11 March 1914 in Hamburg, Germany, but changed his name to W. Ernest Freud after the Second World War, partly because he felt his German sounding name would be a liability in post-war England and partly because he always felt closer to the Freud side of his family. When Ernest was born, Freud sent a note to Sandor Ferenczi: 'Dear friend, Tonight (10th/11th) at 3 o'clock a little boy, my first grandchild! Very strange! An oldish feeling, respect for the wonders of sexuality!' (Brabant, 1993, p. 545)

Ernest's life was full of tragedy and courage, love and work. He enjoyed a blissful infancy with his mother, while his father was at war; and when his father returned, Ernest experienced him as an unwelcome intruder. When Ernest was four, his brother, Heinerle, was born and he too was experienced as an intruder. After the war, Sophie became pregnant again but contracted the Spanish Flu and died, with her third baby in her womb. Ernest lost his mother and his unborn sibling when he was five and three-quarters years old. His brother, Heinerle, died three and a half years later of military tuberculosis. Ernest didn't get along with his father or stepmother, and was not close to his much younger half-sister, Eva.

What was kept a secret, until now and is now divulged, with Ernest's permission, is that Ernest, at the age of seven, was Anna Freud's first analytic patient. His analysis was fundamental in the establishment of Anna Freud's child analysis theory and technique. Ernest also spent vacations with his Grandfather Freud, during which they would take walks together and collect mushrooms and fossils. When he was 14, Ernest moved to Vienna, to live in the home of Eva Rosenfeld and attend the Hietzing School, started by Dorothy Burlingham, under the educational guidance of Anna Freud and with Peter Blos and Erik Erikson as teachers. In Vienna, he returned to analysis with Aunt Anna, but this time, was on her couch. In 1931, Ernest went to school in Berlin, but in April 1933, at the time of the Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses, Ernest 'escaped' Germany with Eva Rosenfeld and her son, Victor. He returned to Vienna where he finished high school (1935) and met his life-long friend, Leopold Bellak. Ernest didn't know what he wanted to do so he toured Palestine for six months and stayed for a time with Max Eitingon. He then toured Moscow. But it was at the time of Stalin's purges, so he only stayed a week. He apprenticed as a portrait photographer with Trude Fleischmann for a year and was her

assistant for an additional year. But on 11 March 1938 the Nazis marched into Vienna. On 14 March Hitler arrived and the next day the Gestapo raided the Freud home. On 22 March the Gestapo interrogated Anna Freud and on 28 March Ernest left Vienna for Paris en route to London. He arrived safely in London on 1 April and Sigmund, Martha and Anna Freud arrived there on 6 June 1938. Sigmund Freud was old and frail but happy to be in England with friends and family, and with the prospect of dying in freedom. On 23 September 1939, Sigmund Freud died in London, just as the Second World War was beginning.

In July 1940, a month after the battle at Dunkirk and the invasion of the Channel Islands, Ernest, along with all other A-Class aliens (German citizens living in England), was interned on the Isle of Man where he remained for 14 months, and became a close friend of Hanns W. Lange. During the war, Anna Freud and Dorothy Burlingham, established 'war nurseries', where they provided care to 'bombed out' children and also conducted child observations and research. After internment, occasionally Ernest worked at the 'war nurseries' as a 'firewatcher', standing look-out for incoming German rocket bombs.

On 21 December 1945, Ernest married Irene Chambers. He did clerical work during the day and went to Birkbeck College, at the University of London, to study psychology. He graduated in 1949 and entered the London Institute for Psychoanalysis for his analytic training in adult (1949–53) and child (1954–58) analysis. He was analysed by Willi Hoffer, had his adult supervision with Hedwig Hoffer and John Pratt, and his child supervision with Ilse Hellman and Hedi Schwartz. He attended seminars led by his Aunt Anna, Melanie Klein, Donald Winnicott and others. From 1950 to 1953 he worked as a psychosocial nurse at Cassel Hospital under the direction of Dr Tom Main. His wife, Irene, also went to school and then took the child analytic training at the Hampstead Clinic. In 1953 Ernest opened his private practice in psychoanalysis. On 26 July 1956 their son, Colin Peter Freud, was born.

Ernest worked as an adult analyst in private practice and at the Hampstead Clinic with his Aunt Anna, doing research on infant observation and the metapsychological personality profiles. He was closely associated with Humberto Nagera, Gabriel Casuso and James Robertson. He was a training analyst at the Hampstead Clinic and at the London Institute of Psychoanalysis at the British Psychoanalytical Society. He taught mother–infant observation for several years at both institutions and was Chairman of the Well-baby Research Group at the Hampstead Clinic. In 1967 he defined his area of expertise and for the next 30 years did research, lectured internationally and wrote numerous articles on infant observation, mother–baby bonding and the psychological aspects of neonatal intensive care. In the mid-1980s he discovered, in self-analysis, that his research was, in part, motivated by his longing to retrieve his baby sibling who died in the womb along with his mother in 1920.

In 1982 Anna Freud died. In 1983 Ernest and Irene were divorced. And in 1987 Ernest and Irene's only son, Colin Peter Freud, was killed while riding a sport tricycle.

After his divorce, Ernest began a relationship with a lady-friend in Germany. He moved to Germany, resumed his practice and intermittently worked at the University of Cologne conducting brief classical psychoanalyses with students in Wilhelm Salber's Psychology Institute. In 1992 W. Ernest Freud received an honorary doctorate from the University of Köln in recognition of his work on the metapsychological personality profiles, on the psychological aspects of neonatal intensive care, and his experiments with brief classical psychoanalysis. In 1996 Ernest moved back to England but stayed only two years before returning to Germany – this time to Heidelberg, where he and his friend, Hans von Lüpke, compiled the selected papers of W. Ernest Freud and translated the English ones into German. His book is called *Remaining in Touch: Zur Bedeutung der Kontinuität früher Beziehungserfahrungen* (2003) (available at [www.sigmund-freudbuchhandlung.de](http://www.sigmund-freudbuchhandlung.de)).

W. Ernest Freud died on 30 September 2008 at the age of 94. He was Freud's oldest grandson and the only grandchild to become a psychoanalyst. He was the subject of his grandfather's child observations, his Aunt Anna's first analytic patient, a high school student of Peter Blos and Erik Erikson, and a psychoanalyst, researcher and writer fully involved with psychoanalysis, in one way or another, throughout his entire lifetime. With the death of W. Ernest Freud, the last thread connecting us to the era of Sigmund Freud is broken and now that era, and W. Ernest Freud are 'fort' – gone.

Daniel Benveniste

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#### Selected Publications

The following are some of W. Ernest Freud's better-known articles available in English:

Freud, W.E. (1967) Assessment of early infancy: problems and considerations. (Also known as The Baby Profile Part I) *Psychoanal Stud Child* 22: 216 – 38.

Freud, W.E. (1968) Some general reflections on the metapsychological profile. *Int J Psychoanal* 49(2–3): 498–501.

Freud, W.E. (1971) The Baby Profile - Part II *Psychoanal Stud Child* 26: 172–94.

Freud, W.E. (1975) Infant observation: its relevance to psychoanalytic training. *Psychoanal Stud Child* 30: 75–94.

Freud, W.E. (1989) Notes on some psychological aspects of neonatal intensive care. In *The Course of Life: Psychoanalytic Contributions Toward Understanding Human Development*, Vol. 1 Infancy and Early Childhood. Ed. S.I. Greenspan and G.H. Pollock. Madison, CT: International Universities Press, pp. 257–69.

Freud, W.E. (1983) Funeral tribute to Anna Freud. *Bull Hampstead Clinic* 6(1): 5–8.

Freud, W.E. (1989) Prenatal attachment and bonding. In *The Course of Life: Psychoanalytic Contributions Toward Understanding Human Development*, Vol. 1 *Infancy and Early Childhood*. Ed. S.I. Greenspan and G.H. Pollock. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.

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**The author now lives and works in Bellevue, Washington.  
Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to:**

**E-MAIL – [daniel.benveniste@gmail.com](mailto:daniel.benveniste@gmail.com)**