

Stumbling

Rose crouched down to examine the little brass square sunk into the winding cobbled street on the outskirts of Berlin. She felt the weight of the guidebook in her rucksack, and her feet were sore from all the walking, but she had found it – the stumbling block, or *Stolpersteine* as the Germans called it, which marked where her grandparents had lived when they were hauled off to a Nazi camp.

When Rose’s marriage broke down six months earlier, she had turned to a therapist to help make sense of what had gone wrong. After some cathartic sessions in which she had vented about her lying, cheating rat of a husband, the counsellor had gently suggested that there was little enlightenment to be found in blame. So Rose had been forced to examine her own part in events. To her surprise, she had talked a lot about her family’s experience of the Holocaust. Defying all odds of survival, her mother Inge had been born on the steps of Mauthausen concentration camp just as the Americans arrived to liberate the prisoners. Her grandmother had died from blood loss however, leaving Inge to be adopted by a childless American couple living in occupation Germany.

On hearing this story, the counsellor peered forward in her chair, intrigued.

‘There is a school of research called epigenetics,’ she said slowly, crossing one leg over the other and leaning back in her chair. ‘Holocaust victims went through such extreme

experiences that their genes were forced to adapt to regulate their bodies. New research suggests these adaptations can be passed on, leaving later generations on edge, and primed for threats that no longer exist.'

In the sanctuary of the therapist's room, Rose's mind had raced to join the dots. Did this explain her fight or flight response whenever her husband deigned to disagree with her, which, let's face it, was going to happen over years of married life? Rose began to see the responsibility she should take for the failure of her marriage, much as it was easy to lay all the blame at the door of an adulterer.

Rose looked up at the crooked, wooden house her grandparents had called home. The trip to Germany was a pilgrimage of sorts, to learn more about her past and to accept that it was part of who she was. Only then, she realised, could she look to the future.

Word count: 400 words