

Pierce says he carried the idea for this song and his memories of Mr. Zeidman around for many years before he finally wrote it. This newspaper article tells the story better than I could.

‘Candy man’ Mr Ziedman lived for many years in musician Pierce’s notebooks

IT would have been no mean feat to locate a Jewish resident in a small town in Alabama in the 1950s and 1960s.

Yet, perhaps the only Jewish person living in Fort Payne inspired Pierce Pettis to write a song about him on his forthcoming album.

Father’s Son, which will be released by Compass Records next Friday, is Pierce’s first album for almost a decade.

And he delves into his childhood for the track *Mr Ziedman* — the “one and only Jew” in his little town, who always wore long sleeves to “keep an ugly thing from view” (his Holocaust tattoo).

Musician Andrea Zonn has arranged the strings on the song, which ends with Pierce lighting a candle for “our one and only Jew”.

BY SIMON YAFFE

Pierce told me from his home in Alabama: “Mr Ziedman lived in my notebooks for a long time. He made a big impression on me.

“He owned a ladies’ apparel store in our town and I knew him very well.

“There are some details in the song which I have added, but songwriters, like novelists, take liberties!

“My grandmother always told me not to let facts get in the way of a good story.”

Pierce believes that Mr Ziedman, who was from Poland, was a Holocaust survivor.

He said: “I don’t know for sure, as it is an assumption of mine, but, looking at the timing of when he arrived in America, in 1946, and the fact a couple, who

lived in Fort Payne, sponsored him to come over.

“It is hard to think that anyone who came out of Poland at the time would not have been affected by the Holocaust in some way.”

The 64-year-old was later told that Mr Ziedman retired, sold his business and moved to Miami, where he married.

But Pierce was also told that Mr Ziedman committed suicide by jumping off his balcony in Miami.

“I am not sure if that was a fact too, but I was shocked by it and it stayed with me for a long time,” he explained.

Mr Ziedman’s shop was next to Pierce’s father’s hardware store and the two were friends.

“Mr Ziedman was a very kind man and whenever children came into the store, he would fetch a

big bowl of candy to give to them,” Pierce recalled.

“As far as I recalled, he was the only Jewish person in town and probably in the entire county.

“I learned about the Holocaust from my father and he had a lot of affection for Jewish people.

“He grew up in a town smaller than Fort Payne and, when I took him back there, he showed me his house and a house across the street and told me, ‘that’s where the Cohens lived’ — they were the only Jewish family in town.

“He and his brothers, and the Cohens’ sons grew up together, so I was raised in a home with a lot of respect for Jewish people.

“There was no antisemitism in my house.”

■ Watch Pierce perform *Mr Ziedman* at tinyurl.com/ZiedmanJT



MEMORIES: Pierce Pettis

He uses a very original chord progression in the song, but just about all the chords are quite accessible. For the **A9** chord in line 2, just fret the third and fourth strings both at the second fret, and that will work fine in this song. This song is on Pierce’s new CD, *Father’s Son*, just released in January of this year, or you can listen to it here: https://youtu.be/doCf_5WeWgQ?si=35qzaQSRK8jhJj-5.

To play along with the recording, capo at the first fret.

MR. ZEIDMAN

By Pierce Pettis

Em

Bm

Am

G

B7

Well, Mr. Zeidman wore long sleeves, to keep an ugly thing from view.

Em

A9

D

B

Not a birthmark on his arm, or a circus tattoo.

C

B

Em

B

Em

A

Am

No one ever asked about it, no one ever knew

B

Em

The terrible secrets of our one and only Jew.

A tailor shop in a small town – that’s where he lived and worked.
Used to go there with my mother, and I hid behind her skirt.
But he had a smile for every child, and a piece of candy too.

B

E(major)

There was kindness in the hand of our one and only Jew.

E

C#m

It was a beautiful world, it was a beautiful time.

B

B7

E

For a boy and a girl in the prime of their lives.

E

C#m

David, look, the baby smiles – he looks so much like you.

B

B7

Em

In the spring of ‘thirty-nine – how the apple blossoms bloomed.

Well, Mr. Zeidman sold his store, when his work was finally done.
For a condo in Miami, to enjoy the setting sun.
Then came rumors of a fatal jump – I prayed they’re not true.
The memories I carry are the memories I choose.
And tonight I’ll light a candle for our one and only Jew.

It was a beautiful world, it was a beautiful time.
For a boy and a girl in the prime of their lives.
David, look, the baby smile – he looks so much like you.
In the spring of ’39 – how the apple blossoms bloomed.

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