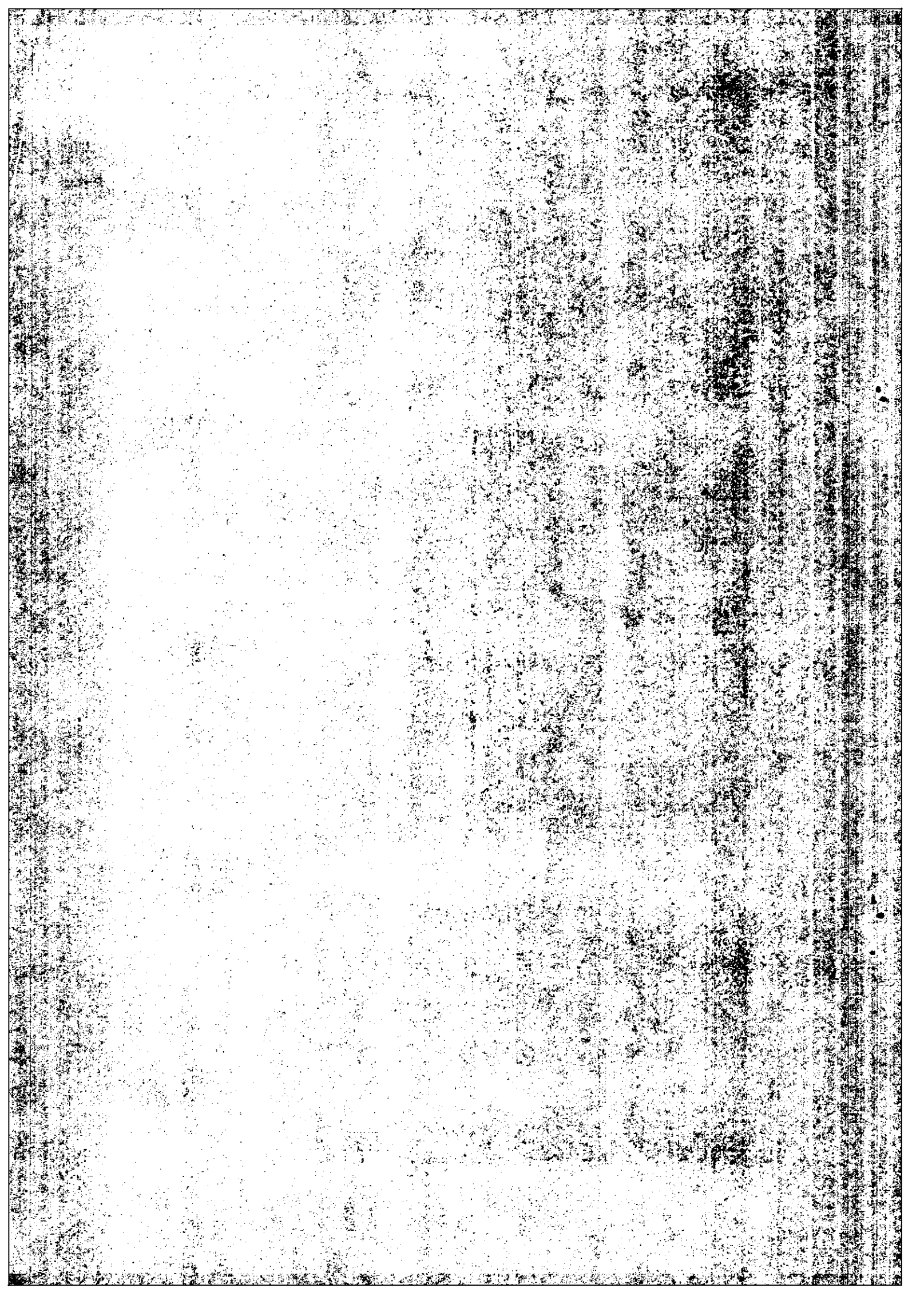


**Journal
of the
'45 Aid Society**

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

We were all shocked and numbed with the tragic news of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. A number of our members fought under him during the Israeli War of Independence. To us, like to so many others irrespective of our political affiliation, he was not just the Prime Minister of Israel, he was a familiar figure with whom our whole adult life was interlinked. He was a son of Israel, a man of daring, courage, integrity and vision who devoted his life to the security of the State of Israel. We were brought up to believe in the sanctity of the human being and such an act of sacrilege is to us unthinkable and incomprehensible. Let us hope that the most appropriate monument to the memory of Yitzhak Rabin will be the fulfilment of what the Jewish people crave most for - PEACE

The following is an extract from a letter which I wrote on the 25th July 1991 to the President of the Board of Deputies of the British Jews:

"It is an acknowledged fact that the Jewish community in Britain is the only one in the Western World where there is not a Holocaust Museum. Although many serious discussions have taken place over the years about the importance and desirability of such a venue, the objective invariably failed to materialise. There are many reasons why this happened, but I firmly believe it was mainly due to the fact that there was not enough commitment and determination by the leadership of the community."

Since that time exciting developments have taken place. You will be interested to read two articles in this Journal describing the opening of a Holocaust Centre, Beth Shalom, in Sherwood Forest. The Centre is dedicated to Holocaust education and commemoration and it is the first of its kind to open in this country. The initiative came from Steven Smith and his brother, Dr James Smith, but the scheme would never have come about without their parents who not only supported them but brought them up in a spirit of tolerance and understanding and a love for humanity. They are a remarkable family.

Another development of great importance to our members and to the Jewish and non-Jewish community at large is the fact that the Imperial War Museum has decided to build a Holocaust Museum within its precincts. The space allocated will be 18,500 square feet - it is planned to be opened at the end of this millenium. The IWM is known for its objectivity, enjoys a high reputation and it is attended by 450,000 people per annum, a large number of whom are school children.

The following are the reasons why the I.W.M. has decided to have a Holocaust Museum:

- i) The Holocaust is a central event in the remit of the IWM, Britain's national museum of twentieth century conflict. The Museum considers that it is best placed to meet the call for a museum in the UK dealing with the Holocaust and to do so in an objective historical fashion demonstrating its crucial place in the context of modern world history.
- ii) For many years now the Museum has been one of the chief centres visited by school children studying the rise of Hitler and the ensuing Holocaust. With the inclusion of the Holocaust in the Key Stage 3 of the National Curriculum's History Syllabus, the demand for services and information on this topic from our Education Department and the Museum's reference departments has increased dramatically. There is a clear demand - and this is frequently voiced by visiting teachers - for a full historical exhibition on the Holocaust
- iii) The Museum recognises that the generation which witnessed the Holocaust is growing older and that before long there will be no living witnesses left. The Museum has for many years documented the experiences of survivors and camp liberators as part of its oral history programme. It has long recognised that it has an important part to play in ensuring that the vital testimony of those involved in the Holocaust is preserved for posterity, and believes that a full-scale exhibition will offer an extremely useful platform for further and more ambitious collecting on this important theme.

- iv) The Museum is aware of the intense interest and support for the idea of a Holocaust Museum in London, and believes that it is singularly placed to harness this enthusiasm for the creation of a museum-within-the-Museum which can serve the interests of Holocaust education into the next century.

The year 1995 will be remembered as the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Anniversaries as a rule have an emotional resonance but to our members they have an ambivalent expression. On the one hand there is the tendency to rejoice that we have survived on the other hand the feeling of guilt, the grief that we feel for the loss of our nearest and dearest most of whom were struck down either in the prime of their lives or before they had an opportunity to blossom. The anniversaries of the liberation from the concentration camps have evoked memories which instead of fading away with the passage of time, have loomed large in our consciousness. The fact that we commemorated these events collectively, in many cases with our extended families, and that we shared our joy and sorrow together added great poignancy to the various occasions. This was particularly the case at our Reunion in London and subsequently in Israel. What was even more significant was that so many of our members travelled from so many different parts of the world to meet their old friends. For some it was the first time since they left England in the late 1940's or early 1950's. How exciting and memorable these reunions were. It emphasised the fact that the bonds of friendship that we forged in the ghettos and in the concentration camps and later in Windermere, Wintershall, in the hostels and in the Primrose Club are as strong as ever. The accounts in this issue relating to our gatherings are testimony to the bond between us and we cherish this special relationship.

Sir Martin Gilbert, our President, has started to write the story of "The Boys" - if you wish to be included, there is still time to send your contribution ... but only just!

May I take this opportunity in wishing you all a Happy, Healthy and Peaceful 1996. With fraternal greetings.

Ben Helfgott

PAST AND PRESENT

CHILDREN FROM THE CAMPS

JOAN STIEBEL

Joan was Executive Director of the CBF, now World Jewish Relief, at the time of our arrival in England.

Soon after the end of the war, the Jewish Refugees Committee and the Friends Committee for Refugees and Aliens asked the Home Office for permission to bring over some of the orphaned children who had been in concentration camps. The Home Office gave their consent for up to 1,000 under the age of 16 to come to this country and the scene was set for the operation to begin.

Through the Home Office, a largely disused Ministry of Production housing site on Lake Windermere was made available for the accommodation of the first group and we set about equipping it, whilst the selection of suitable children went ahead in Europe.

The first children came from Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia and numbered 300. It was anticipated that many would require medical treatment and the preparation of a suitable sick-bay was considered of great importance.

The arrangements for the transport of the children was put in hand and the Royal Air Force provided Sterling bombers for the purpose. Then the weather took a hand and for five days it was not suitable for the evacuation exercise to take place.

In the meantime, a special committee - The Committee for the Care of Children from the Camps - was set up in Bloomsbury House, with Mr Leonard Montefiore as its Chairman. It also included Mrs Neville Blond and Mrs Lola Hahn-Warburg, both of whom, with Mr Montefiore, were extremely active throughout. On the administrative side, I was the professional most involved, whilst Mr Oscar Friedman, a psychological social worker, was in overall charge of the care and welfare of the children.

It was decided that Mr Montefiore and I should meet the first group who were to come in at Crosby-in-Eden, an airfield near Carlisle. Sleepers on the trains were in short supply, but the Home Office arranged them for some categories of traveller, including those connected with the refugee organisations. I booked sleepers for four days in a row and always had to cancel them because the planes could not fly. On the fifth day, I did no booking, the weather cleared and Mr Montefiore and I had a crowded and, in a way, amusing journey sitting-up in a very over-crowded train.

We arrived at Carlisle at six o'clock in the morning and immediately contacted the RAMC who were providing trucks to transport the children from the airport to Windermere. We then managed to get a bath and breakfast in one of the hotels prior to going to Marks and Spencer, when it opened, to see the Manager. Through Mrs Blond, he had taken charge of all the local arrangements and was a tower of strength.

Eventually, we had lunch with him in the store and then drove out to Crosby-in-Eden. Immigration officers and MI5 representatives were there as were the press. An amusing aside in what turned out to be a very long day was when one of the press asked Mr Montefiore what he did, and he replied,

"I am one of those awful beings known as a rentier!"

Once at the airfield, all we had to do was to wait for the first plane to come into sight. When it did, I can still remember the choked feeling I had that it was all happening but, once the aircraft landed, followed by the rest, there was no time for contemplation.

Mr Montefiore went down to the landing area and I stayed at the airport building to deal with whatever came up. Some time during that hectic afternoon, there was a call from one of the MIS men:

"Miss Stiebel, come - we've got a stowaway."

I am not sure if it was ever discovered how the boy, known as Ivan, got onto the plane. Each plane had two adult escorts, in addition to the children, and there was a nominal roll of everyone on board, but nobody admitted having seen Ivan and he was clearly not a spy.

When they arrived, the children were not in very good shape. The plane had come down en route and the travellers had been plied with chocolate and oranges - not a good combination in rather choppy flying conditions!

By the time all the planes had landed and we had dealt with the formalities, it was quite late and we still had the drive to Windermere.

Some time during that drive, we heard that the Japanese had surrendered and that peace had come at last.

We reached Windermere in the early hours of the morning where staff and some voluntary workers awaited us.

The children were in amazingly good spirits and Mr Montefiore used to tell a story which indicated their joy at being in a free country. The truck he was in broke down en route and he apologised to his group for the delay. One boy said:

"Don't apologise. It is an honour to break down on a British road."

Surely that said it all.

The next day must have been a strange one for them all. There was so much that had to be done: Medical examinations, clothing distribution, acclimatisation to such a new environment and much more. One thing that stands out in my mind is the first main meal which the children had. Some of them emerged from it, their new jerseys bulging. Believing that there might not always be food, they had taken bread as a stand-by.

There were still some locals living on the Estate and they were very interested in our group and did everything they could to help them, amongst other things, loaning them bicycles. We were lucky in that we had genuinely concerned volunteers from nearby places as well as some Londoners who were holidaying in the vicinity, notably the late Mrs Anna Schwab, a former member of the Jewish Refugees Committee. She helped in many ways especially on the domestic front.

Whilst I was involved in everything during my brief stay in Windermere, mine was an administrative job and the actual planning for the children's future lay with Mr Oscar Friedman.

I also went with Mr Montefiore to meet the second group which came to Southampton. The contrast between the two reception places could not have been greater because the first was specially erected for the Ministry of Production during the war and Southampton was a beautiful old house lent for the purpose by its owner.

Although Mr Oscar Friedman continued in overall charge of the whole group, Mr Fritz Friedman ran Southampton and looked after the group who were housed there.

50-YEAR VICTORY FOR WAIFS OF WAR HOW WE GAVE LIFE AND LOVE TO DEATH CAMP ORPHANS

JOSEPH FINKLESTONE

Joe was a reporter working for the Carlisle Journal when he was sent to cover the story of the arrival of the first 300 of our group in England on the 14 August 1945. He has been closely associated with our members and he and his wife, Hadasah, are honorary members of our Society.

Fifty years ago a number of small aeroplanes landed at Carlisle airport. From them slowly emerged 300 boys and girls. They looked pale, bewildered. Some seemed sick and weak. A tall, thin, austere white-haired man, wearing a light, well-tailored suit welcomed them. As he did so, extending his hands and smiling, one youngster became sick and bespattered the front of the suit. The man appeared not to notice the incident, but kept on patting the heads of the boys and girls. As a teenage junior reporter of the Carlisle Journal, I was ordered to "cover the arrival of some young people from Europe".

It was not explained to me who they were. Only when I saw the boys and girls, in their ill-fitting clothes, tense as they entered a new world, did I suddenly realise with a pang that they had experienced the greatest human-made hell in history. They had seen their parents, sisters and brothers shot, starved and gassed by the Nazis. They all considered it a miracle that they lived to tell the terrifying story.

When the British Government decided in 1945 to offer asylum to 1,000 boys and girls - orphans from the death camps - under the age of 16, a macabre problem arose. British officials could not find 1,000 surviving Jewish youngsters of that age. Over one-and-a-half million Jewish children had been murdered by the Nazis. Those unable to carry out some form of slave labour had no chance of survival.

Thus, only 732 were given the opportunity to start a new life in Britain - most of them boys, because teenage girls had an even slimmer chance of hanging on to life.

Just over 300 came on this day, 14 August 1945. Another 400 arrived a few weeks later.

They had all been laboriously assembled in the German show concentration camp, Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. There, the Nazis had hoodwinked the neutral observers, including the Red Cross, who had expressed concern about the fate of inmates at the camps. Inmates were encouraged to display their paintings and play music.

But the reality was gruesome. Many thousands of the camp's inmates ended their lives in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Seeing these youngsters, brought out from the horrors of Nazi Europe, had a profound affect on me. By that time, I already knew that most of my own close relatives, including cousins of the same age as the youngsters at the airport, had been murdered. As I sat down in front of the typewriter in the office to write the report for the paper, I was suddenly overwhelmed by emotion. Putting my head down on the typewriter, I wept.

However, tears were a luxury for the youngsters from the camps. They had shed plenty of them and had found no solace. They had learned to control their emotions and even to stifle them.

Strangely, perhaps, they could feel somewhat privileged. Other survivors wishing to come to Britain had to prove that they had relatives here able to look after them. Very few could satisfy the authorities on that score. Those who wished to settle in the Jewish homeland in Palestine soon found that the fulfilment of their dreams had to be postponed.

The gates were to be closed for a number of years yet, as the survivors of the "Exodus" discovered when they were sent back from the shores of Palestine to Hamburg in Germany.

But for the bewildered youngsters assembled in Carlisle, and soon to be sent to Windermere in the Lake District to recuperate, the welcoming London group and their successors were to prove the very soul of the new life they were to live.

The elderly, white-haired man was Leonard Montefiore, related to the renowned 19th century philanthropist and centenarian, Sir Moses Montefiore, honoured by Queen Victoria for his good deeds. Leonard Montefiore's solemn, austere face disguised an unusually kind personality.

He was the leader of a committee for the care of children from the concentration camps set up in London by the Central British Fund.

As they arrived in Windermere and felt the spell of the lakes and the hills, the youngsters looked at one another in astonishment.

"It was so utterly different from what we had experienced for over five years - the killing, the hunger, the degradation, the filth," Ben Helfgott, who was to become their leader, recalls. "Here was beauty, silence, serenity, humanity."

The youngsters revelled in the fine air and good food. Even after a few weeks, their figures filled out and the scars of the camps began to disappear. The girls loved their new dresses. The boys laughed as they donned long trousers for the first time.

A football team was quickly formed. Matches with local teams were played with immense enthusiasm. As the youngsters were later sent to hostels in London, Gateshead, Scotland, Eire and Northern Ireland, they were fortunate in their advisers, who were to take the place of their parents.

Foremost among them was Dr Oskar Friedmann. he realised it was vital for the youngsters to spend time together as they became acclimatised to the ways of this country. But he also understood that they must not be together too long and should start to live separately, though not abruptly, while retaining close links.

A pivotal role in the transformation of the youngsters from traumatised camp survivors into well-adjusted British citizens was played by the specially established London youth club, named the Primrose after the local telephone dialling code.

Under the guidance of the club leader, Yogi Mayer, an athlete talented enough to represent Germany if the Nazis had not intervened, the youngsters found the communal home they urgently needed.

They could eat there after work and they could find the sporting facilities they craved for.

It was at the Primrose that Ben Helfgott could display the first inklings of his sporting talents which were to lead him - uniquely for a death camp survivor - to become the British light-weight weightlifting champion and record-holder and represent his new country in the Olympic Games in Rome and Melbourne.

An even greater hunger than for good food and sport burnt in them - that for education.

Ben Helfgott sums up this feeling. "For years we had been deprived of the chance to study. Now we wanted to make up for lost time. We literally swallowed education." Those with special talents even became university dons. Kurt Klappholtz became a Reader at the London School of Economics. Jerzy Herszberg, a Reader in mathematics at Birkbeck College. Witold Gutt obtained a doctorate in chemistry and a senior place in the civil service. Roman Halter won distinction as an artist and architect.

Their ranks also produced spiritual leaders, notably Rabbi Hugo Gryn of the West London Synagogue, who regularly agonises in the BBC's Moral Maze debates.

Speaking of their transformation into proud Londoners and Mancunians, "the boys" and "the girls", as they are still known despite having themselves become grandparents, make clear one crucial point.

Repeatedly they told me; "We survived because we wanted to tell the world the terrible story of Nazi murders. We wanted to help ensure that no such hell could ever happen again."

Yet they added; "When we emerged from the Nazi hell, we never thought of revenge. We retained our faith in humanity, a faith confirmed by our experiences in England."

Now, the once destitute "boys" and "girls" are raising, through their 45 Aid Society, considerable sums of money for worthy charities.

Having heard from their president - historian, Sir Martin Gilbert, author of the massive biography of Winston Churchill - of their endeavours, Prince Charles and John Major have voiced their admiration.

"Courage, fortitude, resilience" are precisely the words which one would want to associate with the youngsters who arrived in Carlisle 50 years ago.

...

THE GAMES MASTER - GEORGE LAWRENCE

When 82-year-old George Lawrence opened his Evening Standard on Monday, he got one of the biggest surprises of his long life.

"I could hardly believe my eyes", he said. "There in front of me were photographs of boys and girls I taught games fifty years ago. And there was the exciting story of their arrival in this country of the youngsters who had amazingly survived the Nazi death camps in Europe."

As he looked at the photographs, George Lawrence's excitement rose. He thought that he recognised quite a few of them. They had become his enthusiastic pupils. For fifty years he has kept the photographs he had taken of some of the "boys". Now he could compare them with those published in the Evening Standard as they stood at the window of one of the RAF planes bringing them from the former Nazi camp at Theresientadt to Carlisle on August 14, 1945. From there they were sent for recuperation to the Lake District and it was there that George Lawrence first met them.

"I happened to live at Troutbeck Bridge on the shores of Lake Windermere when the boys arrived there", he recalled. "I applied and got the job of games master and spent many happy hours in their company. It gave me a great feeling to read about them again."

His photographs of the boys are very revealing. Although now enjoying the beautiful and serene surroundings of Lake Windermere the scars of their terrible experiences in the Nazi death camps are still visible on their faces and in their stance. Their eyes look out as if from a different, harsher world. After a meal, some of them emerged from the dining hall with bulging pullovers. They had to be persuaded that they need not hide food as there would be enough for the next meal.

On the backs of the photographs, the boys wrote greetings to Mr Lawrence. At first the greetings were in Polish, as nearly all of them were born in Poland. Within months, however, the boys were writing the greetings in English.

"For my teacher - Gershon Frydman". "One of your pupils - Jashek, from Poland, Krakow".

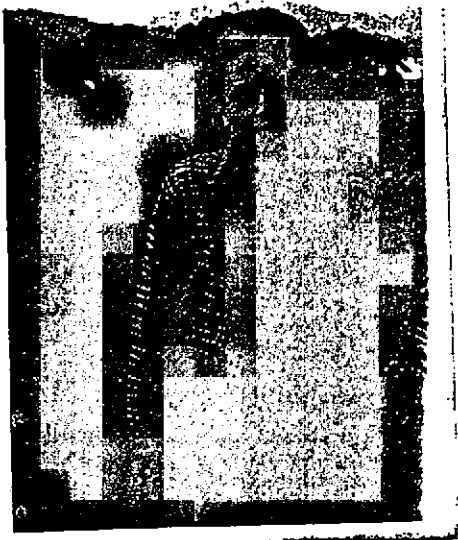
"I did not know what language they spoke, whether it was Polish, Yiddish, German, but we got on famously", George Lawrence said. "The boys loved sport and competed with immense enthusiasm".

This enthusiasm could even be excessive, as one of their club leaders at the Primrose Youth Club, Yogi Mayer, later found. When he rebuked one boy for fighting after a football match, he replied:

"I have lost so much that I cannot keep on losing".

For fifty years, George Lawrence, who now lives in Roehampton, has cherished the photographs of the boys. Some of the inscriptions have already faded, but his memories of the "boys" are still sharp. Now he is eager to meet them. One of them he will not see. The "boy" who saw his father shot dead by the Nazis, himself died a couple of years ago. But the others, now grandparents, are just as eager to meet him. A reunion is being arranged by Ben Helfgott, chairman of the 45 Aid Society, which represents all the boys and girls who came to Britain 50 years ago. The "boys" believe they owe a great deal to games master, George Lawrence, as they successfully struggled to start a fruitful new life in London and elsewhere, becoming doctors, dentists, university lecturers, manufacturers and, in one case, a champion bridge player. Learning to play the game, they became well-adjusted British citizens in abundance, the love, freedom and opportunities they found in their adoptive country.

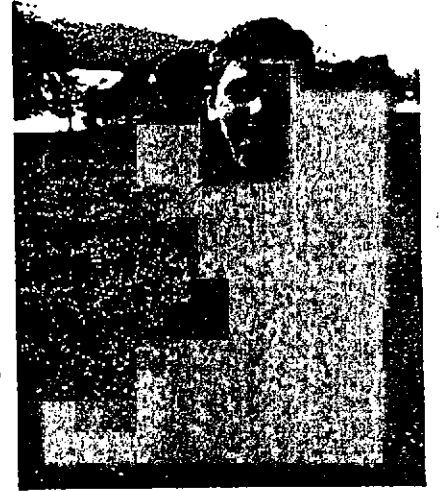
THESE PICTURES WERE GIVEN TO GEORGE LAWRENCE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1941
THE WAY WE WERE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1941



MARTIN HOFFMAN
World renowned Bridge Player.



MONIEK SZOTLAND
(Where is he now?)



SZLAMEK WINOGRODZKI.
(Gary Wino).



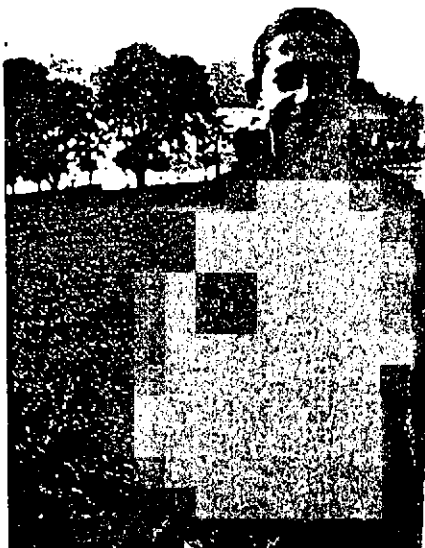
DAVID HIRSHFIELD.



JEFF FRYDMAN



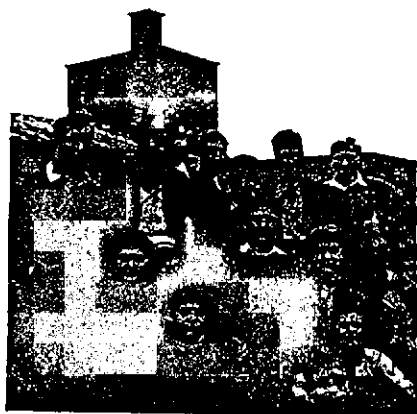
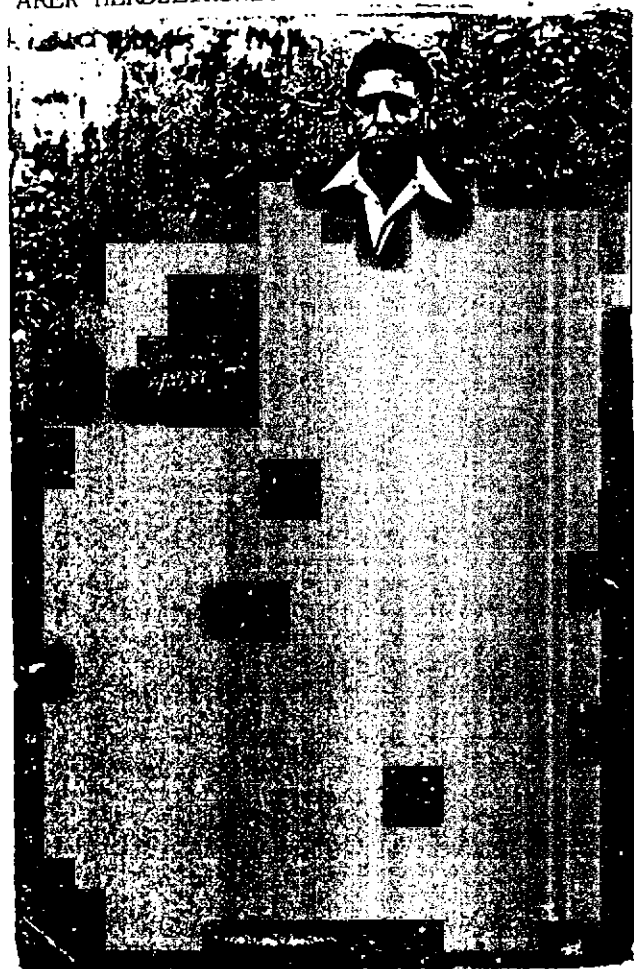
"BABY" ROZENBERG



JASIEK KURTZ (Deceased).



AREK HERSZLIKOWICZ. (ERIC HERSH).



CAN YOU RECOGNISE YOURSELF?



SEVEK WAJCENBLIT & ABY ELKIENBAUM