

# JOURNAL



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## **Aubrey Rose CBE**

*Apart from his career as a lawyer, Aubrey has played an active role in several fields. He was an original member of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and a member of Commonwealth Organisation. He was for five years a Commissioner of the Commission for Racial Equality. He played an active part in British Jewry including six years as Senior President of the Board of Deputies. He lectures widely and has written a number of books, including Judaism Ecology his biography.*

# **THE MIRACLE OF ISRAEL**

By Aubrey Rose

## **YOM HA' AZTMAUT**

1st May 2017

The word 'Israel' denotes the whole Jewish people, spread over the continents in past and present ages. It is a tiny people, few in number, a minuscule part of 1% of the world's population. Today there are more people in just one city, like Sao Paulo or Mexico City, then there are Jews in the whole wide world, Israel and America included.

And yet, how strange, and wonderful, that on each Sunday morning In New Zealand and Brazil, South Africa and Barbados, Spain and Canada, it is the literature of this tiny people that is read aloud to vast numbers of people. This is unique. There is nothing like it. Israel's story of old is thus heard in many, many languages. This is a wider Israel than the State, even though the State emerged from that world-wide efforts of the people, Israel.

The word 'Israel' has another connotation. It denotes struggle, Jacob's struggle, a struggle that has persisted throughout history, the freedom march out of Egypt, settlement in the land, exile to Babylon, The Maccabees, Romans, persecution over centuries by churches, pogroms, false

accusations, the unspeakable crime of the Holocaust, and then the establishment of the State in 1948, and the struggle ever since.

This remarkable people of ours has faced endless struggles, yet has survived. What other people has renewed its sovereignty in its original homeland after a gap of two thousand years, and renewed also its ancient language?

Our indeed, is a rare and miraculous story. One has to look at the wider sources that produced the State.

I was in Manchester Square in London in May 1948 when the birth of the State was celebrated, and the Shehecheyanu blessing uttered to a large and excited crowd. I have been to many Yom Ha' Atzmaut events since. A few years ago I was in the Tel-Aviv building in which The Declaration of Independence was read in 1948 by David Ben-Gurion School children were there being taught by their teachers of this historic event.

I was then in Israel to complete my biography of Arie Handler who, in 2009, was the only person still alive and who had been present in 1948 in that hall at the

personal invitation of Ben-Gurion.

Arieh described to me the scene. Indeed, his own life of 95 very full years typifies so much of the character of both the people Israel and the State of Israel.

Today Israel is the name of a legal, political, sovereign state, like 190 or more sovereign states. Yet the word signifies something more. We say, "Shema Yisrael", "Kol Yisrael Chaverim", and so on. This refers to something wider than a State, more a state of mind and heart.

My 19-year old grandson, studying science at university, told me to his complete surprise of the vast number of Jewish Nobel Prize winners in science and medicine. Israel in Science.

My late friend, Paul Yogi Mayer, wrote a book on the amazing number of Jewish Olympic Medal winners. Israel in Sport.

Music has seen a great outpouring of creativity, from Mendelssohn to Bernstein, alongside the unique galaxy of Jewish musicians.

The same applies to theatre, films, literature, humour, craftsmanship. All is Israel in human creativity.

And so, one can find outstanding achievement in many areas of positive civilised activity emanating from this tiny people. No wonder H.G. Wells wrote that: "With the Jews, a new kind of man came into existence."

No wonder there have been words of admiration from figures as diverse as Tolstoy, Churchill, Mark Twain, and many others. Just glance at Cecil Roth's work on

the Jewish contribution to civilisation. Indeed, Bernard Shaw once wrote that "The Jew was born civilised", whilst Jan Smuts referred to: "Israel, the nation of nations." Maxim Gorky said: "That Jewish wisdom is more all-human and universal than any other." And yet, this record of signal achievement has been one of our problems.

These are all aspects of the wider significance of the word "Israel". It is because of these qualities that the State emerged. Behind its creation lay the great faith of the religion, moral teachings of the highest order found anywhere, of devotion to study and learning, of family cohesion, of a perennial optimism as to the future, as a hope for the eventual repair of this tortured world, of Tikkun Olam. Hope is our national song.

The State emerged too, from the rabbi's of old, from Chassidim and Haskalah, from Achad Ha'am and Choveve Zion, from Herzl and Weizmann, from Congresses, from J.N.F., O.R.T., W.I.Z.O., from so much devotion, from Chalutzim and Kibbutzim, above all, from sheer courage and idealism.

I recall in 1949, wandering through Beer-Sheva, a dusty place of less than 10,000 people. I recall, also, meeting Jews who had fled Iraq, living in tents on the hills surrounding Jerusalem, saved from the racism that afflicted the Arab world. Thank heavens for the State as a refuge.

I wandered also at that time in Jerusalem with my father, who found a landtman he knew half century earlier when he lived in Plotzk in Poland, that same town that produced David Green who later took the surname of a first century freedom fighter, Ben-Gurion.

The State that emerged was based on the highest ideals of democracy, the rule of law, representative Parliament or Knesset, elected by the people, an independent judiciary of high reputation, a near-equality of men and women, even the abolition of capital punishment. Only one person has been executed in 65 years, Adolf Eichmann.

This is unique, miraculous, in the ever violent Middle East. In the last 65 years Israel has been the only country in that area that has consistently changed its government peacefully through the ballot box.

And that, of course, is part of the State's problem. It is an area where truly democratic ideals have penetrated but slowly, if at all, where truth has been perverted, where corruption is widespread. Hence the wars 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, and so on. Hence the vital need for the defence of the land for our support of those in the front line of our people, in Israel.

When I visited Ariele in his last years, I learned more about the fine institutions created, rare hospitals like Sha' Are Tzedek, universities like Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, science bodies like The Weizmann Institute and Haifa Technion, Yad Vashen, museums, libraries the Jerusalem Botanical Garden, and the Nature Reserves, many of which I visited, and whose Rangers in charge, Jews, Arabs, Druse, invited me to their homes.

I was struck too, by the participation of Arabs, Christians, and others, in terms of equality in so many areas of life whilst a separate world faith, Bahai, has its headquarters in Israel. I recall too the 880,000 Jews who fled from Arab lands in and after 1948, so many incorporated peacefully into Israeli society, whilst

Palestinian refugees, far fewer, are cynically still kept in camps.

It is a mark of the humanity of Israel. There has recently been talk of an Arab spring. I am waiting for an Arab summer when the human ideals cherished in Israel permeate the Arab World.

Ariele Handler is an excellent example of Israel the People and Israel the State. He was a prime mover, seemingly inexhaustible, in the rescue of Jews from Ethiopia, from North Africa, from The Soviet Union, the obtaining of visas for Jews from pre- 1939 and post- 1945 Germany, his sheer courage in contact the Gestapo, even once with Eichmann, his founding in the UK of Bnei Akiva, and also Thaxted and Hachshara Agricultural Training Centres throughout Britain, whilst in Israel he helped to found Kibbutz Lavi.

He and I once led a study tour of Israel. Everyone in the State, at all levels, knew Ariele. I was, in Yiddish, just a Nuchschlapper. He was held in such high regard everywhere and yet he never sought anything for himself. His personal friendship with Harold Wilson, Tony Blair and Margaret Thatcher was a great help to Israel, resulting in a clearer appreciation of Israel's problems and needs.

When Reagan and Gorbachev met in Iceland, Ariele was in Iceland too. He never spared himself for Israel the People and the State, and example of those devoted and courageous men and women of vision who helped found the State. He was an example of part of Hillel's statement: "And if I am for myself only, what then am I."

Aubrey Rose

# JEWISH HUMOUR

By Aubrey Rose

There is a funny thing about Jewish humour. We don't talk of Hindu humour, or Christian humour. We never hear of Muslim humour. But Jewish humour is a world-wide phenomenon.

Of course Jews can be seen as a people or a religion or both. They overlap. If you look at the scriptures of most religions you don't see any humour.

But consider the contest between the prophet Elijah and the priests of Baal. The later tried all day to bring fire to their sacrifice, without success. Elijah looks at them, and, with his tongue in his cheek, exclaims "Maybe your Gods are too busy, too occupied with business".

The book of Jonah has a strange ending that always tickles me. The writer says the people of the city don't know their left hand from their right hand, and then adds "and also much cattle". This addition is almost goonish or Monty Pythonish, a total non sequitur.

Jews have had a rough ride in history, a 4000 - year history. They could either laugh or cry. They decided to laugh. Comedy and tragedy are joined together like Siamese twins. So jews laugh through their tears. By laughing you give yourself courage and look forward to a better time. Jews joke about adversity. It has helped them to survive.

And, you know, it is medically proven that laughter is the best medicine. It release all sorts of impulses, chemicals, loosens muscles, does you a lot of good.

Laughter and humour are also comforters, and this people needed comforting, century after century. But Jewish humour is never cruel or malicious. It is ethically based, and

you laugh with people rather than at people.

Bearing in mind that Jews have been a literate people for over two thousand years, their humour often contains an intellectual quality. The joke has been used in teaching, in learning. Jews also have, like the English, the great gift of being able to laugh at themselves. When more people can laugh at themselves, the sooner will peace come to the world. Fanatics can't. They have no sense of humour.

And, of course, Jews are always arguing with God, like the milkman Tevye in Fiddler on the Roof. That musical is based on the works of one of the greatest Jewish humourist, known as Sholem Aleichem, a pseudonym meaning, 'peace be with you'. It is the traditional Jewish greeting.

You may remember this story from Fiddler. Two litigants come too a rabbi, separately to present their case. He tells the first one, "You're right". He tells the same to the second one. Both go away satisfied. The rabbi's wife says to him, "But, how can they both be right?" The rabbi replies, "You know, you're also right".

The Talmud is a mine of Jewish teaching, 63 books, 3,000,000 words, compiled in the first 500 years of the current era. It is interesting that in one story, some rabbi's put God on trial for creating man. They discuss the pros and cons and finally decide that God should not have created man, but, having done so, Man should make the best of things. Which reminds me of the man sentenced by a judge to ten years in prison. "But, your Honour," says the man, "I can't do that". "I know." says the judge, "but do your best".

There are a lot of these kind of jokes. For example, hearing a case brought by the wife

for alimony, a judge says "This court awards Mrs. Levy ten pounds a week". "OK", says Mr. Levy, "and, if business is good, I'll also pay her something."

I love the story by Israel Zangwill, a famous Anglo-Jewish writer, who wrote about character who stated on his calling card, 'Nehemiah Silverman, Dentist and Restaurateur'.

Jews are very much taken with words, often Yiddish words. Most Jewish humour is Yiddish in origin. Yiddish is a real language almost older than current English. A Nobel Prize for literature was won by Isaac Singer, writing in Yiddish. It is a marvellously expressive, warm language, a mixture of old German, Hebrew, Polish, Russian, and so on. I was brought up in the East End on Yiddish. I used to read the Yiddish newspapers.

So many Jews, whether Yiddish or not, make a great use of words. You get the gifted Disraeli referring to his opponent Gladstone as "a sophisticated rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity".

At the other extreme you get the thoughts of Samuel Goldwyn, the movie producer, with his bon mots. "An oral contract isn't worth the paper it's written on". "Include me out" "Anyone who goes to a psychiatrist ought to have his head examined". He even referred to M.G.M., the logo in front of his films, as "meine ganze mishpucha" - "my whole family" whom he had to look after.

In that genre are the fantasist Marx Brothers, with a host of fun from Groucho, who said he would never join a club that would take people like him as a member.

I mention a few Jewish names, but the whole of modern humour is full of Jewish names. In America alone there was Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, George Jessel, Woody

Allen, Jack Benny, Danny Kaye, and many others, all deriving from the Yiddish-speaking wave of immigration from East Europe from 1880 onwards.

Likewise in Britain a few of you may recall Issy Bonn, Max Bacon, Alfred Marks, Bud Flanagan.

Recently one of the funniest Jewish comedians, Jackie Mason, a former rabbi, appeared in London. We have our own rabbi's with a sense of humour, Lionel Blue and the wonderful Hugo Gryn, apart from gifted raconteurs, like David Kossoff.

As the humorists were not only on film or on stage. Many were writers. The twentieth century has seen a burst of Jewish writing, in Europe and America. Names include Herman Wouk, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Dorothy Parker, Mordechai Richter, S.J. Perelman, Joseph Heller, Philip Roth, while here you had Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, the Shaffers, Jack Rosenthal, Brian Glanville, Bernard Kops, and Chaim Berment. Many incorporated Jewish themes and ideas, many were influenced by their Yiddish background.

Very few were astringent, apart say from Dorothy Parker, who, when told that President Harding was dead, replied "How could they tell".

Humour was also linked to music and singing. How many of the famous musicals, words and music, smiles and tears, were written by Jews, Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Rogers and Hart, Oscar Hammerstein, Stephen Sondheim, not forgetting people like Lionel Bart over here. All this derived from the vibrant Yiddish musical theatre of a century ago.

It really is a fantastic tradition of creativity, of humour, and of tears. This ability to see the funny side of life has stood the Jewish people well. No small people has been so

afflicted over the generations, and no small people has responded with such courage, for it takes courage and balance to laugh in adversity.

Britons found the same courage and the same sense of the ridiculous even when the Germans were devastating their cities. A sense of humour is a sign of strength. I recall the story of the Jew who, in the blitz, was told, "If you're name's on it, there's not much you can do," and who replies, "That's all right, everything is in my wife's name".

Cartoonists, like Vicky, added their touch of humour. I particularly like the essentially Jewish humour of my late friend Harry Blacker, some of whose cartoons I now present to you.

And that same sense of humour is shown by the uproariously funny writings in Hebrew of the Israeli Ephraim Kishon.

There is a *schadenfreude* in some Jewish expressions. For example, "When a Jewish farmer eats a chicken, one of them is sick". This harks back to intense poverty, or "when a father helps a son, both smile: but when a son must help his father, both cry". Or even, "the Jews are like everyone else - only more so."

I may borrow a phrase of Stephen Leacock, a non-Jew, whom I regard as the greatest humourist of the 20th century, there is a certain larger lunacy about some Jewish humour. For example, two men met on the street. Said the first, "How's business?" He groaned, "Oy". "Well", replied the other, "for this time of the year, that's not bad". Or what about the shopkeeper who was asked "How's business", "Terrible." he replied, "Yesterday only one person came into the shop, and today was even worse". "What could be worse?" he was asked "They bought back the suit they bought yesterday", he replied.

Another aspect is a class or type of people, the shnorrers or beggars, who regard their calling as a profession. There are the *luftmenshen*, whose heads are in the air, as well as their feet, like a Chagall painting. There are the simpletons of Chelm, about whom are endless stories, and the *nebechs*, for whom nothing ever goes right.

It really is very difficult to analyse Jewish humour, except that it is vibrant, and very funny, and you cannot adequately translate the Yiddish into any other language.

Humour is, of course, subjective. I have sat at performances, doubled up with laughter, while others around me sat immobile. I found the fantasy of the Goons, (Peter Sellers was the only Jew among them), of Michael Bentine marvellously funny. Very few comedians today, apart from Morecombe and Wise or Ken Dodd, are funny at all. They all lack the warmth and the same indefinable something which makes for real humour as opposed to wit or satire.

I like the story of the three men in a restaurant. One asks for tea, one for lemon tea, one asks for the same, but insists that the glass should be clean.

A little while later the waiter returns, and asks, "Which of you asked for the clean glass?".

There are now 500 Yiddish words in the Anglo-American language, from *mezumah* (Aramaic actually) to *nosh*. Many English sentences are reconstructions of Yiddish grammar, e.g. Macy's the New York store, asked their patrons "Please be nice to our staff; customers we can always get".

Of writing books there is no end, says Proverbs, and of talking about Jewish humour there is also no end, so this maybe is a good point at which to stop.



## MICHAEL ETKIND

*Michael came to England with the Windermere Group lived in the Cardross Hostel in Scotland. He is a poet of high standing and was dubbed by Martin Gilbert as the Society's poet.*

## GHETTO MENTALITY

By Michael Etkind

What do they know about life in the ghetto those who were not there? They imagine that we were resigned, submissive, cowed, obedient and that we had lost the will to live. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Each day was a struggle to survive, and at the same time each one of us had to be responsible for his neighbours. There was no graffiti on the ghetto walls and no posters calling for freedom, because that would mean death for those who lived behind such walls. Unlike all other ghettos in Poland, Lodz became a part of the Third Reich and its name was changed to Litzmannstadt. In contrast to the Warsaw ghetto, we were surrounded by many German civilians and therefore escape from the ghetto in the hope of finding a friendly Polish family, was virtually unheard of. Lodz became the only ghetto within Nazi Germany.

I spent nearly four years in the Lodz ghetto, and almost a year and a half in concentration camps.

Should anyone ask me where I have met the bravest people, I would say that it was in the Lodz ghetto. There was the "Biala Gwardia" the White Guard, so called because they carried the sacks of flour each weighing one hundred kilos. Any one of them was capable of strangling an armed German with his bare hands, and the only reason they did not do that was because hundreds of innocent people would have been murdered in retaliation.

The three months after my liberation from a Death March by the Americans on the 8th of May 1945 were as turbulent as any of the previous years. In the middle of May I found myself marching from the border of Czechoslovakia towards Pilsen in a group of German and Italian ex POWs and Russian ex POWs just liberated by their comrades. We were led by Russian soldiers with their guns pointed at us. In the confusion I managed to escape from the prison yard and went to a hospital which was full of Russians. The two Jewish doctors, who admitted me to the hospital, disappeared a day later. Nobody asked my name and I was treated exactly like all the other patients. A week later we were all given uniforms and were transferred to a very large hospital on the outskirts of Prague, where I spent nearly a month. Again I managed to escape but this time in a Russian army uniform.

Since settling in Britain I have travelled to many places abroad. I visited Poland on a number of occasions and at one time we found ourselves at an early meeting of "Solidarnosc", together with dissidents from Hungary and Czechoslovakia, some of whom were being followed. My wife Elaine was afraid that we would be arrested. We have visited Israel and once back in the 1960's we took a taxi from Jerusalem with a Palestinian driver who took us to a number of places east of Jerusalem, which would be impossible to visit at the present time.

I believe that I survived the holocaust

because I knew when to take risks, usually for some extra food, and when to try to avoid danger; but when I hear the phrase “ghetto mentality” with its negative associations, my blood pressure rises. It is usually said by people who are unable to comprehend our predicament. If you carried on until the very end you were very lucky and more courageous than the bravest soldier.

The bravest man that I have ever met was Ojzer Walfisz, who was in prison with me in the ghetto in December 1943, and with whom I spent the remainder of the war. Ojzer knew no fear. He had escaped from the Lodz ghetto in October 1940 and went to the

Warsaw ghetto where he stayed until its liquidation in 1942. He then went from one small ghetto to another until he found himself in a train going to Treblinka. He somehow jumped off the train just as it was approaching Treblinka station and made his way back to Lodz.

At the beginning of December 1944, we were on our way to a camp as slave labourers. When we arrived in Czesochowianka camp, we were immediately put to work on a building site. However Ojzer managed to avoid working. When the Polish foreman needed ten men, Ojzer would wait until he saw that I was one of the group and then followed us. He would then find

## I SEARCHED FOR WORDS

By Michael Etkind

I searched for words  
Which could convey  
The truth about our past  
To those who were not there

I searched for words  
Which would describe  
The fear that held us in its vice  
And slowly ground us down

I searched for words  
Which would describe the hunger  
Which consumed us from inside  
Throughout the day and night

I searched ... to show  
How hunger usually won  
And made us risk  
A bullet in the head  
A blow with rifle butts  
Or lashes on the back

What do they know of hunger  
Who only fast but once a year  
And sometimes miss a meal?

What do they know of fear  
Who have not been condemned  
By Nazidom and never 'lived'  
Under its threat for years?

I searched for words to share  
With those who were not there

I'm searching still

At times of extreme danger I tried to  
abandon myself.

some hiding place, or go off to "organise" some food, and only reappeared when our soup was given to us.

The same happened in the Sonneberg camp. Ojzer refused to do any work. He would disappear into some hiding place during the twelve hour nightshift and asked me to wake him should any German foreman come looking for him.

During air-raids, when the lights went out, he would crawl in the direction of the kitchen past the guards standing at the main gate and would emerge with a bag of potatoes which I had to place under my straw mattress, because his bunk was always searched after any robbery took place. Fortunately his hut was some distance from mine and the potatoes were never found. Therefore, when I hear the phrase "ghetto

mentality", my mind goes back to those days. I have never, as yet, met anyone else who was so fearless and took such risks.

I have heard all the anti-Semitic slurs and curses and became immune to them, but there is one phrase that is hardly ever uttered by real anti-Semites but is an insult to the few holocaust survivors still alive and it is the words "ghetto mentality".

How sad that sixty years after the holocaust; after so much has been written about those times, there are "intelligent" writers, who are still unable to comprehend the inconceivable life led in the Nazi ghettos.

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## IN THE ABSENCE OF GOD

By Michael Etkind

In the absence of God  
And the fear of death  
They were herded and held  
In the clutches of hate

While the weaker were slain  
Without any delay  
Those who could be of use  
Had to slave till they fell

In the absence of God  
And the presence of death  
They were chased and coerced  
And deprived of their breath

In the absence of God  
In the Kingdom of Hate

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## I HAVE NEVER...

By Michael Etkind

I have never murdered  
Any living soul,

Nor have I taken  
What was not my own

And no false witness  
Did I ever bear  
Against my neighbours,  
Friends, or even foes.

Yet I confess  
With sadness  
And with shame  
That there were times  
I took Your Name  
In vain.

I prayed  
But silence followed all my pleas;

The pain stayed on...

All prayers are answered...with silence.

J.S. Lec

## ROBERT SHERMAN

*Robert is the husband of Judith Sherman and is a regular contributor to our Journal.*

### NEVER AGAIN, L'CHAIM

"Never Again!" The familiar slogan used to assure ourselves and the world that a Holocaust will never again be permitted to happen. It sounds good. It feels right. Yet we know that even if the Holocaust, as the Jews know it and define it, never happens again, nevertheless, the world is filled with ongoing examples of hate, dehumanization, terror, and murder. Historically, it has ever been so. Driven by competition for land and resources, the thirst for power and conquest, the desire to be superior and above all others, and the fierce bugle calls of ideologies, men learn to hate, to plunder and to murder as something glorious and heroic. It is the "right" thing to do. So taught the Nazis, their predecessors and their successors. The more cruelly done, the more honour to be achieved. The path to glory is through destruction.

For Jews this is a continuing two-sided story that goes back to slavery in Egypt and the Exodus and further back to God's blessing to Abraham that his descendants would be a blessing to mankind. The success of the Patriarchs evoked jealousy and fear in the hearts of their neighbours. Pharaoh was terrified that the Jews would join Egypt's enemies and destroy the Egyptians. The Jews left their persecutors and sought out new lands.

In each place and in each time, where the Jews left, the countries they left suffered the loss of their blessings - their incredible contributions to the land and its culture. But immigration to new lands and societies is difficult. Every generation of immigrants and refugees suffered the trauma of their previous persecution and loss of the familiar and the necessity of

acquiring new languages, customs, homes, and livelihoods among strangers. They strove to be both Jewish and somehow rid themselves of being the hated "other." They strove to do this by hard work and by making important contributions to their new lands and societies. Usually, they succeeded, until some new round of hatred toward Jews was fired up to persecute, kill, and drive them out. The Jews have had golden ages in many lands all over the globe. The Jew became a blessing for mankind by becoming the "Wandering Jew," bringing his blessings with him wherever he sojourned.

This is the experience of the members of the '45Aid Society. Surviving the loss of all that was dear to them and emerging from the bowels of hatred, death and destruction, they took on the mantle of the wandering Jew, who sojourns in a new land, somehow establishes a place for himself, and then miraculously brings blessings to its people and culture. Certainly the members have been making major contributions in all the lands of their dispersion despite their terrible losses and dislocations. This is true heroism, to emerge from the depths and create much good upon the ashes of the past. Jews are well practiced in such enterprises.

The story continues. We live in a world split by those people and nations who preach and practice humanitarian respect and concern for human dignity and freedom, and those who preach and teach hatred and practice terror and murder of the designated "others," including, of course, the Jews.

In today's fast paced world, fuelled by ever increasing technologies, we must be nimble

and fast. When we pronounce "Never Again," we have to hasten to act to marshal the forces of decency in the world to not stand by, but to take forceful and deliberate action to both restrain and to retrain the forces of hate. We need to employ both power and education to accomplish this goal.

Many members of the '45Aid Society are active in Holocaust education, political lobbying, enlisting the media, teaching our children and grandchildren to join us, and in many other ways engaging against the growth of evil among us. With anti-Semitism once more on the rise and Israel besieged,

we have no choice but to use our energies to their fullest to make "Never Again" a reality and not just a slogan. In this fast paced technological world we have little time to marshal the forces of decency. We do not have the privilege of being bystanders, for we know "they will come for us."

In all of its activities the Society and its members stand for life - the epitome of life. You model human decency and respect for life. You inspire all who know you and your personal stories. I am grateful for that inspiration. It is a blessing to mankind. Just like God said to Abraham.

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**Sam is one of the Windermere Boys He recuperated at Quare Mead and went on to become an accomplished artist. His work features in the permanent collection of the Ben Uri Gallery as well as the Imperial War Museum.**

## **THE CLEARING IN THE FOREST**

By Sam Dresner 2017

It was 1942.

Open season for killing Jews

We arrived on a lorry, picked out from one of the centres where they were collecting people fit for work before taking the rest on wagons to Treblinka.

I was picked to work in a group called Bau-Commando.

We were laying a road and rails leading into the clearance.

It was referred to as Strzeluica (Shooting Range)

It was meant to be a place where munitions were tested but there were other activities going on.

As our work brought us nearer to the Strzelnica we seemed to be facing a very big black hole in a dark silent pine forest with no light, sound, movement or birds.

From time to time covered lorries and small white vans vanished into them and came out a little while later in complete silence ...like a dream.

Even now when I think about it I get shivers and I have been doing that a lot lately. The more I try to push these thoughts out the more forceful they come back.

It is so real and yet it is such a long time ago.

Alec Ward was with me at the beginning but after a little while we got split up

## JUDITH SHERMAN STORY

My granddaughter Ilana has been urging since the age of 14 "Grandma, we must go to Ravensbruck, Auschwitz, and Kurima. We must go." Now in 2014 when she is twenty, we go. My children, grand children and other relatives, we go. Nine of us - to Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Germany. Four countries, 9 cities, 3 concentration camps. A legacy journey into my past -. I will share with you some scenes from this journey.

Sacred and profane Kosice Slovakia

### **Kosice, Slovakia- June 2014**

The guide takes us to a synagogue. It is recently rebuilt. Mrs J., the pleasant woman who works here speaks in Hungarian. She removes a brick from the wall adjoining the Holy Ark where the Torah is kept. She takes out the note from behind the brick. She reads in Hungarian "It vagyok a kis fiamal. Nem Tudom hova megyunk. Gondolpok rank." (I am here with my young son. I do not know where they are taking us.) Mrs J. informs us that when the Jewish community rebuilt the synagogue which the Germans used as a Samlungs Platz - a collection place for those to be deported - they found this note among the rubble. The note was later reintegrated into this wall. A wailing wall in Kosice?

This one brick with this one note adds special sacredness to this temple. I am here with my young son. Think of us. Think of us at morning prayer, at evening prayer. On Shabbat, on Festivals. "'Think of us' is the legacy of this father and young son, and of all those other fathers and mothers and sons and daughters who do not even have a marker of a note left behind. The wall with the note faces the direction of Jerusalem.

Mrs J. takes us to another synagogue - or rather a synagogue in ruins. It was used by German soldiers as a stable. Sections of walls are missing all together. The roof leaks and the ark has few Hebrew letters still visible. It is a holy ruin. A holy ruin in Kosice?

Is this historical re-enactment? The holy temple in Jerusalem destroyed by the Romans 2000 years ago-the temple in Kosice destroyed by the Germans within my memory. The past brought into the present. This community has no resources to rebuild this temple. Connection - The Sacred and Profane - Auschwitz.

Auschwitz - June 2014. Today my family and I visit Auschwitz. My first was in 1944 - a forced arrival in a wagon train. For my family today Auschwitz is not just my story. All shoes, all that volume of human hair, all those suitcases with names. Prisoners are told to mark their names in bold letters so they may easily retrieve them after showers. Another deception about the reality of the gas chambers. So many eye glasses - so many - so many - so many - so many un-lived stories. So many martyrs in this place of evil. The large iron sign above the gate "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Makes You Free). Work here is measured by your capacity to survive on minimum food and maximum harshness. The gallows for public hanging - the gallows have special attachment to prolong the torture. Miracle at Auschwitz - mine. Every survivor has a miracle story because survivorship depends on surviving in spite of, not because of, the proclaimed death sentence. 1944 the wagon train door is unlatched. "Raus, Schnell, Hinaus." After several endless hours on the platform we are ordered back into the wagon train. Our transport is sent on to Ravensbruck

Concentration Camp 60 kilometers out of Berlin, Germany. The Auschwitz prisoner in his striped clothing whispers "Sie hoben glick. Ales ist besser vie here." (You are lucky. Anywhere is better than here.) Miracle at Auschwitz. We learn that because of the massive Hungarian deportations even Auschwitz had no room for more Jews. This one day no more room in the gas chambers. This one day 10,000 Hungarian Jews are gassed. How does one give thanks for this kind of miracle? We learn that we are the only transport to be sent on intact out of Auschwitz. Are You not tempted Lord to intervene, lend a hand, prevent a scream?

The woman in this wagon train sits next to her boy. He is about 11. He keeps pulling at his coat. She, "Pauli, you will not look good with that button missing." Pauli continues and the woman continues.

God, did you save that button? For eternity? Is there a more important act in Your universe than this mother trying to protect her child?

On this June day in 2014 we go on to Birkenau the subcamp of Auschwitz designed exclusively for the murder by gassing. We say Kaddish—the memorial prayer—at the memorial site. The writing on these memorials are in Hebrew. Alex, 15, whose Hebrew is good, translates the prayers for us. On the grounds of Birkenau Alex finds a button. The guide explains "This is probably a button from a newly arrived prisoner on the way to the gas chambers." Some boundaries are blurred - mine too. I am here and in the past - like this button—the time frame could be either. But being here in reality makes a difference. A life and death difference. The lost buttons can be replaced. The owners of these buttons may not even have anyone in this whole universe to

remember them.

I am flooded with mergings, contrasts, differences. Alex keeps the Birkenau button. "I will keep it forever," she says tearfully.

The missing button of the boy in the wagon train and the found button in Birkenau both signify a disconnect. They do not hold things together. In Ravensbuck the boy is separated from his mother—male and female are separated. In Birkenau both sexes go naked into the gas chambers. Small items magnified by their presence in these profane locations.

Lord, you heard their cry in Egypt, remembered the Israelites, and brought about their freedom from slavery. The Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Sachsenhausen cries went unanswered. Unheard? 6 million cries unanswered until finally liberation for the remnant.

Lord, I am not sufficient to remember these two sacred buttons. This requires divine remembrance. Remembrance and caretaking into eternity. second temple in Jerusalem has also not been rebuilt and remains in ruins. The wailing wall in Jerusalem bears witness to this ancient catastrophe. I think in Kosice this ruined second temple is viewed with even greater reverence than the reconstructed first synagogue. The worshippers - the few who survived concentration camps, starvation, death – marches dispersed around the world after the war as did their ancestors in Roman times. The guide and I speak in Hungarian and I translate for my family. They are spellbound by my words. This place today is enveloped by holiness.

My family's reactions add holiness to this place You need the people to experience the holiness.

## **Janusz Makuch, creator of the Jewish Cultural Festival in Krakow**

My name is Janusz Makuch and I come from Poland. I come from a country of rabbis and tzaddikim, gaons and melameds, from a country of Jewish sages, writers, bankers, architects, painters, doctors, shoemakers and tailors, film directors and producers, physicians and politicians, scientists and Jewish soldiers, from a country of devout, good people.

I come from a country of antisemites and goodhearted people, from a country of blackmailers and informers and the greatest number of Righteous among the Nations, from the country of Father Rydzik and the country of John Paul II, from a country of anti-Jewish graffiti on synagogue walls, and a country where thousands of non-Jews study Jewish history, culture and religion, from the country of the German death camps and the country of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, from the country of Shmuel Zygelboim, Mordechai Anielewicz and Marek Edelman, and from the country of Jan Karski, Jan Nowak-Jezioranski and

Wladyslaw Bartoszewski.

I come from the country of the Vaad Arba Aratzot, the Jewish Parliament of the Four Lands, from a country of countless shtetls, yeshivas and Hassidic courts, from a country of Jewish autonomy and pluralism and I come from a country of the numerous ghettos, ghetto benches, pogroms and murder. I come from a country whose greatness was co-created by Jews who were Polish citizens. And I come from a country that after the war kicked out Polish citizens who were Jews. I come from a country of antisemitic madness where they burned Jews in barns. And I come from a country of Christian mercy where they hid Jews in barns.

My name is Janusz Makuch. I come from Poland and I am a goy, and at the same time for more than 20 years I have created and run the largest Jewish culture festival in the world.

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## **THIS IS THE STORY OF ITA JAKUBOWICZ**

Dear Jews of Piotrkow!.

I have long hesitated whether to send this letter, because some people may not like it, but in the end I made up my mind.

I am Polish, I come from Piotrkow where I was born a very long time ago, in 1925. I left the town in March 1945 to go to university and I never came back. My parents stayed in Piotrkow and lived there until very old age.

They are buried in Skierniewice (approx. 80 km away from Piotrkow) where I live now. My parents were music teachers and outside of work in the public education system they had a small, private 'Stanislaw Moniuszko' Music School, which I also attended. A Jewish girl, Ita Jakubowicz, once came to this school for lessons of solo singing. She was a daughter of a synagogue singer. She had a nice voice and a great passion for music, but her family was not wealthy,



she could pay for her lessons with great difficulty. After a few lessons my parents offered her free tuition. I must admit that I was outraged by this as a kid. "Aren't there Polish poor children, and can't you teach them for free?" But my parents said: "From time to time we admit musically gifted children from poor Polish families, to teach them for free - but this time we can take a Jewish girl." She studied diligently for several years, probably from 1937 or 1938. But then the war and German occupation came. The music school was consumed by fire. It was in the representative Kaliska street (now Slowackiego street), and almost the whole left side of the street was burned down by bombs as early as on September 3, 1939. During the war my parents continued to teach music at home, because it was not forbidden by the Germans. At that time I was attending a 'underground' middle school, because this level of education was forbidden for Polish children. Initially Ita kept coming for her lessons, but she had to wear the Star of David on her arm. After a short time, the Germans designated a downtown section as a ghetto. At first it was not heavily guarded and Ita was able to sneak: out in the evenings for her lessons. But then one day the ghetto was sealed off. The German brought some Ukrainian collaborators to Piotrkow, dressed in black uniforms. They used to have drunken rides through the town in horse carriages, singing their Ukrainian songs. I knew this language a little from my vacation trips to the eastern part of Malopolska. This state lasted for some time, and the Jews were suffering from hunger. People on both sides found a way around it, to alleviate the situation somewhat. Tunnels were dug under the street separating the ghetto from the rest of the town and people kept trading: food for clothes, money and other useful things.

We knew what the Germans were doing to Jews in Oswiecim, Treblinka and other places. It was also in Oswiecim that the parents of many of our Polish colleagues, members of the Piotrkow intelligentsia, were exterminated. Even one student we knew very well from the 'underground' school, Pisarski, was also murdered there. He survived only 3 months at the camp. People in the ghetto also learned about the genocide in Oswiecim and other camps. Finally, the Germans issued an order that the Jews are not allowed to leave their homes, and not even cross the street. The Ukrainians guarding the ghetto were expert shooters. A friend once told me that he saw a Jew running across in the distance, an Ukrainian aimed, fired a shot, and, a dead body lay on the pavement.

At that time (September 1942) I was with my mother in the kitchen, a man knocked on the door and asked if Mrs Jankiewicz lived here, when he got an affirmative answer, he handed a letter to my mother, and even before she opened it he left. He was so scared. The letter was from Ita. A picture of her fell out of it. We all gathered in the room and mother read the letter aloud. The letter and the photo is enclosed. Everybody in the room cried. These were thoroughly sincere words of a person facing death, someone who does not fear anything anymore. Words from the heart, straight to the heart. We never heard again from Ita. The crematorium furnaces took her secret with her.

The yard in front of the cargo railway station where Jews were loaded into rail cars, actually mercilessly shoved into them, was covered by a thick layer of banknotes torn into pieces: Polish, German and U.S. currency. They knew what awaited them at the end of the road.

Many years after the war, in 2012, a daughter of a friend of my father came from Canada, about 9 years younger than me. She knew Ita's case very well and it turned out that she knew many things that I wasn't aware of. She said that my parents tried to hide Ita on the Aryan side. The did not tell me anything about it, following the war-time rule: 'What you don't know, you won't tell when tortured'. But Ita refused - she said she did not want to part with her family. Maybe she also did not want to expose my parents (and me) to the draconian punishment, because

those who hid Jews or helped hide them, faced an extended penalty - death of the whole family. We lived in a cramped apartment in a tenement house together with people resettled from Poznan, so it wasn't possible to hide anyone with us. My guess is that my father found a place for Ita with people he knew in the countryside, but there is no way I can be sure.

I think it would be a pity, if these facts were completely forgotten.

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Piotrkow, 09/29/1942

Dear Mr and Mrs Jankiewicz

It's midnight. I can finally sit down to write these few words to you. The whole day I could not make myself do it, because these horrible thoughts were racing through my head, and there was no way I could calm down. But should you be surprised? Certainly not! I've been hearing the horrible news since the very morning, the news that takes my peace away. The situation now is that the fire is smouldering, but it will burst into flames any minute now. I pulled myself together to be able to write to you, because my heart is already so weary, I don't know how long I will be here and if I will see you again. I'm writing this letter to you, maybe it's the last time, because the time we have ahead of us is really short.

What can I leave behind for my dear ones, who were so kind to me in their time, who took so many burdens from my shoulders, could I ask for more? If I could achieve anything in my life, If I could reach a goal,

then I would owe everything to you. Oh how I dreamed of being able to live to the day when I could reciprocate your kindness. Can I have this hope now? I doubt it, but maybe? God will be kind and will help me, because everything depends on fate. Can you tell whom the bullets will reach?

Now I can leave for you nothing more but these voiceless words put on paper. I am sending you a picture of me, a memento. I do doubt that I will ever come to your doorstep again.

My dear ones, please make allowances for this letter, because maybe it is not very logical and there are some mistakes. Today you can't expect too much of me.

This is a farewell, my dear ones, my heartfelt greetings and hugs.

Your devoted student who will not ever forget you.

**Ita Jakubowicz.**

## Updated Bio on **ETTA GROSS ZIMMERMAN**

Etta Gross Zimmerman is the proud daughter of a Holocaust Survivor Alex Gross. After a successful career in commercial real estate, she began dedicating her time principally to Jewish causes. She served on the National Women's Philanthropy Board of the Jewish Federations of North America before becoming the Chair of the Board for the South Palm Beach Jewish Federation from 2005 to 2007. During her tenure, the Community raised record campaign funds.

She has been an active board member of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) for over a decade. Currently, she serves as the Chair of the JDC's Resource Development Committee and she is the immediate Past Chair of the its Africa/Asia Committee. Prior to that, she served as the Chair of JDC's Ukraine Committee.

Through her work with the JDC, Etta has travelled extensively throughout the world visiting various JDC programs. She frequently uses her passion for photography to enable others to understand and experience the needs of Jews in these distant communities.

She is an alumnus of the Wexner Heritage Program and an honorary member of the Jewish Agency for Residential Care. The



***He is one of our boys, Alex Gross.  
He contributed a great deal in teaching the  
lessons of the Holocaust.***

Zimmerman family partnership sponsors Thanksgiving for Jewish Community of Boca Raton.

Etta is married to Raymond Zimmerman and they are the proud parents of Leya.

# IN EVERY GENERATION

By, Etta Gross Zimmerman

We have just finished Passover, and in the Seder we read every year, "In each and every generation, they rise up to destroy us and the Holy One, blessed be he, rescues us from their hands." We as the next generation of the '45 Aide Society children, know we are together and celebrate victoriously. Our families are vibrant against their respective pasts, children and grandchildren living freely and in dignity. Though circumstances brought us together, out of the ashes, we are the benefactors of this glorious life.

My friends, we are the victors and at a happy time like this reunion, it is difficult to be mindful of those much less strong, or free. Those fellow Jew's living in circumstances well below the poverty line, frail, ill, and most often times alone. Those who were not fortunate to land in the welcoming arms of the "45 Aide Society, those people who returned home or stayed behind when they were liberated. Only to fall prey to Communism and when communism collapsed, many people chose to leave to America and Israel. But sadly, just as many people chose to stay clutching on to the meager existence they had. It is they, our lost Jewish family that needs help for basic survival. Unlike in the United States and the United Kingdom, there is no social safety net for these people. Through the partnership of World Jewish Relief (WJR) and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), these frail but not forgotten are cared for with food, medicine, winter relief, and homecare.

Social welfare for Elderly alone, is staggering. It is estimated that in Europe and the Former Soviet Union (FSU) alone there

are seniors being served totalling 132,126, of those 63,147 are Nazi victims, the remaining clients do not qualify according to the Claims Conference standards for more supportive funding. Those are the basic facts, so let me introduce you to a few of the people I have met over the years.

My first home visit was to Olga, a blind artist living alone in Bucharest. She was 81, and smiled with us through these tear filled blind eyes. She was a retired art teacher, living with her beautiful paintings on the walls, that she could no longer enjoy. Olga lived on a subsistent pension that made the decision between food and winter heat impossible, but for the generosity of strangers. I remember her smile, wide with gaps in her dentures. She had American visitors. She was thankful for the company and the assistance. For me, in the spring of 2000, it was pivotal. I always knew I was fortunate to have a family and live in comfort. But Olga's smile was a crucible moment. The JDC was the organization that cared for the Olgas of the world and I would have to become more involved to advocate for the distant and voiceless.

Home visits and visits abroad didn't stop with Olga, they began my life's journey. From Romania, to Bulgaria, to Moldova, to Russia, to Ukraine, to Belarus, to Hungary and beyond. I have hugged and held hands with down-trodden who are provided a modicum of dignity by these acts of kindness. In the summer of 2014 in Kiev, after the Maidan uprising I met bedridden Victor, who sang Yiddish from his childhood memory to my group of travelers. There was Rosi who I met in the summer of 2010, quite proud, as she was the face placed on the

Matzoh Box, wearing her little red dress and thankful she is the recipient of senior socialization and assistance with food.

One Kabalat Shabbat, in the summer of 2006, in Zaporoshe, I was honoured to join the senior's and then music started to play on a tired piano. The tunes, you all were raised with, as was I. Tumballa, Tumballa, Tumballa lika. A slight older man joined in the dancing and whisked me off my feet! For a skinny, 89 year old, with thick glasses, he was smiling and strong. It made my day, when Yankie bragged that he got to dance with a blonde from America.

Embarrassingly, I feel I gain much more that I am able to give. When I see a smile or a feel a sweet tug on my hand, or warm kiss on my cheek is a gift. A little bit of money goes a very long way all of these miles from here. That is what we collectively do as we are expected, one Jew, caring for another Jew. Kol arevim zeh ba zeh. All of Israel is responsible for one another.

So, why talk to the second and third generation about this work, you already have in so many ways owned your communal responsibility. Precisely, because you get it, you know we are challenged to meet the growing needs of our parent's contemporaries throughout the world. We have established strong schools and synagogues, we have built memorials, we have done so much. We are almost fatigued, from being asked, "Can you? Will You?"

But, walk upstairs with me in a post communist era apartment, without a can of paint in thirty years, or basic plumbing improvements, a divided apartment where the food rations are scant. Meet Dora, a retired pharmacist who is 93 years old. Bed bound and still traumatised by her friend

jumping into the river only to be shot by the Nazi's, she never married. Her body is broken and her meager pension doesn't allow her the dignity of hygienic products, like adult diapers and basic medicine. In her corner of the world there is no social safety net, except for the life sustaining work of the JDC. The JDC and WJR programs allow Dora to live her remaining days in some comfort. Her belly isn't full, but her basic needs are met.

In my travels, I have met many grandparents caring for grandchildren. Parents either gone to seek a living or more often died of a curable disease with inadequate medical care. Polina, 78 years old, raising Dmitri who is 8 years old in the Ural Mountains. Often times, we ask, what will the future hold for Dmitri? If we can barely be there for the grandparent, what does the future hold for the children and grandchildren?

While smiles and visits are bittersweet, bringing sunshine to a home that is broken, but is the sunshine temporary? Sadly, we know the answer. My friend's, the needs of the frail, elderly and forgotten Jew's far outpace the resources needed to sustain them, properly. Partnerships like WJR have been invaluable in answering the clarion call of the needy. JDC is compelled to continue this work with challenged resources.

In every generation there is always a Pharaoh that rises up to get the Jew's. The desperate, voiceless elderly in the former Soviet Union suffered from two such evil tyrants, Hitler and Stalin. It is imperative that we, in this privileged generation, are not so removed from the needs of these despairing elder's that our silence, our own meager actions or inactions harm our own people. We must and will join

# CHAYE SARAH

By Michael Helfgott

## BEING WITH MY FATHER IN PIOTRIKOW, POLAND 2016

Speaking to my father Ben on the telephone very late at night his voice suddenly perked up. Now 86 years old he often speaks so softly I have to listen very intently to hear what he is saying. He mentioned to me that he was thinking of going to his home town Piotrikow in Poland for a shabbaton in a few weeks' time and he asked whether I would like to join him. I did not hesitate for a moment and said straight away that yes I would come. I had been to Piotrikow in the Summer of 1985 with my father, mother Arza and eldest brother Maurice. That was a very different time when I was just a teenager and Poland was in the grip of Communist Party rule. My father had returned numerous times since but I had not done so and I had been looking for an opportunity to return with my father and the rest of my family.

I questioned my father for more details about who was organising the Shabbaton, who would be there and what it was all about, but other than the actual date of July 2nd 2016 I received precious little further information. I knew I would not be able to extract much more detail no matter how much I tried. That didn't bother me at all.

For as long as I can recall whenever he would ask me whether I wished to join him to go to some talk or an event or to Shul I would happily say yes. I suspect that my attitudes and thought processes have been shaped more than anything by three things: my nature, my mother and a listening to my father speak. However time and again, I realise that my father's lifetime experiences, his vast range of historical knowledge, his pragmatic approach and his unsurpassed compassion give him an

extraordinary power of insight into human nature so that as well as I think I know him he is capable of surprising me by giving an unexpected and unique understanding of a situation. I never tire of hearing him give those insights whether it is to me or to some else.

We travelled on 30th June with my middle daughter Amy and my niece Alex to Piotrikow. Before the War this town near Lodz had a population of some 55,000 inhabitants of which 15,000 were Jews. We arrived very late on Thursday evening where we met up with a group from Israel, France, America and Canada that included my father's first cousin Gershon and his wife Penina from Haifa. They are like an uncle and aunt to me and their decision to come at the last minute was a cause of great celebration. Gershon pointed excitedly to the building just next to our hotel in the main square of the town where my father had lived in during his time in the Ghetto. Gershon said he had thought so many times of being back in Piotrikow with Ben and now he told me proudly that 74 years after the last time they were here his dream had finally been fulfilled.

After touring the City and attending memorial services on Friday we dressed for Shabbat, and on a warm Friday evening we walked from our hotel on the pavements and along a bridge across the River Strawa until we reached the corner of the Alte- Warschauerstrasse and Jerozolimska (Jerusalem) Street where the former Great Synagogue of Pitrikow still stands. In advance of our trip I had felt some trepidation as to what I might feel when seeing this building. This was the place

where my father's mother Sarah and his little sister Luisa had been imprisoned with 530 other Jews in December 1942 before they were marched by the SS to the Rakow Forest on the outskirts of town and shot dead.

As we approached the Great Synagogue I was struck by what a large impressive building it is. The facade had been recently restored by Robert and Saul Dessau. We had the good fortune that Robert, a vivacious, kind hearted and shrewd former Piotrikower had travelled all the way from New York to be with 3 other Survivors of the Shoah and the group of about 25 of us for the Shabbaton. As we stepped inside the shul my niece Alex commented that it felt a bit like Hampstead Synagogue. I knew what she meant. Without being overly ornate it had an aura of majesty and calmness to it. The former Great Synagogue now serves as the town library and arrangements had been made with the local Council for the library to be shut on Friday evening and Saturday morning so we could daven there. The bookcases had been moved back to the side of the main room and three flags had been placed at the back next to where the women's gallery must have been in days gone by. There was the Polish flag, a local flag and an Israeli flag.

I asked my father if his mother had ever attended services in the Great Synagogue. He told me that as a family they had their own Shul but that his mother liked coming here occasionally as she enjoyed listening to the Chazzan. As I sat in Shul my thoughts turned to Sarah and Luisa. I have always thought it important to somehow honour their memory but how can I really remember them when I never actually knew them? My wife Thea and I had named our first born child Lucy Sara after them. Now I sat in a place where they both suffered grievously and spent their fateful last night. Their

prayers had not been answered and yet here I am persisting with saying those same prayers. Was this the way to remember them? Is this what they would have wanted me to do? How can I or anyone else possibly know?

Ultimately it is a personal decision and I have to do what I feel is right based on my upbringing and my understanding of the world. With the Israeli flag behind me, the big open windows of the former Shul letting in a cool breeze, and sitting next to my beloved father, my daughter Amy and niece Alex I choose to recall the good times that my grandmother would have and enjoyed here before the war. For me it felt appropriate to be here and to make sure that this place which was once full of Jewish learning, practice and life is restored, even if only for one Shabbat, to days of old before 1945. As I listened to the prayers being chanted this seemed the right way to honour their memory. Ben had survived and he had returned with one of his children and 2 of his nine grandchildren. Chapter 23 of Beresheit is entitled Chaye Sara, meaning the life of Sara. Yet all it says in the first lines is that Sarah died. Maybe the point is that the life of biblical Sara and all of us are remembered not just because of us but by the generations that follow. This is particularly so when a life is brought to an end as it was with Sara and Luisa prematurely and in such tragic circumstances. In the former great synagogue with my father and with Amy and Alex I felt immensely proud of my father and his sister Mala knowing all they had done to honour their parents through their many achievements and kindnesses and I understood that we as their future generations can also honour Sara and Luisa then by doing our best so that that are never forgotten.

Michael Helfgott  
14th August 2016

# ADDRESS TO THE PIOTKOWER SOCIETY NEW YORK 1992

By Ben Helfgott



**Ben Helfgott  
President**

I am grateful to my very close friend Ben Giladi to have asked me to address you to-day. Even if he did not ask me to address you, just to be here with my dear friend and landsman Krulik Wilder, and commemorate with you the 50th anniversary of the deportation to Treblinka of our nearest and dearest is for me a most moving experience. Those of us who have settled in England, who are more or less of the same age and who originate from different parts of Poland have, for years, been commemorating the memory of the Six million once a year at the beginning of May coinciding with our liberation when we share the memory of those whom we loved and knew so well so many years ago and permit our personal traumas

to merge with those of our collective.

Whenever possible I have tried to attend the Hazkarah of our Landsleit in Israel, always looking, searching, recapturing a thread, a connection with a past that is deeply embedded in my consciousness. It is difficult to convey, to someone who has not gone through our experiences the meaning of such encounters, the depth of feeling that it evokes. We remember our friends, our neighbours as they were before they were taken away to the gas chambers - young, happy and smiling with great expectations and full of joie dear vivre. We talk of a vanished world that had no chance to blossom and we cherish the thought that we



are privileged to revere their memory for most of them have probably no one to say Kaddish for them. Those who have lived a normal life and who do not begin to think about their deceased friends until late in their lifetime this may sound rather morbid. That is why it is so difficult to comprehend the enormity of the crime that was committed against our people.

I have also visited Piotrkow a few times drawn by a kind of nostalgia - a nostalgia that only persists in my mind when I am away from Piotrkow, for when I am there after a few hours I can't get away quickly enough. The buildings are the same as they were when we lived there. Outwardly, little has changed. When I walk on the streets that I walked as a boy in my mind I am completely oblivious of those walking in the street. What I see are images of those with whom I walked and played all those years ago. I am conscious too of the close proximity of my family. I know that just being there is the most tangible contact I can have with my parents, sister, members of my family and all my friends and acquaintances who perished so tragically and prematurely.

The majority who live there to-day are hardly aware of the kind of life that existed there before the war. The vibrancy and dynamism that was bursting at its seams. Apart from the cemetery- there is hardly a sign that Jews have ever lived there.

As we meet here to-day, 50 years after the selections and the deportations of 22,000 of our compatriots to the gas chambers of Treblinka, we are bound to acknowledge that the passage of time has not entirely healed our wounds. We do not have to search into the inner recesses of our minds, our anguish, our grief and trauma seem to be continuously lurking in the dark. In spite of

the fact that most of us have lived a full and fruitful life there is hardly a day or week that goes by without triggering off some association with those bleak and calamitous days. Our memory instead of fading with the years looms larger in our consciousness. Who of us can ever forget those frightful, frightening and traumatic 7 days - 14-21st October 1942 and the butchery that followed in its aftermath.

How can one describe the feeling of a mother torn away from her children or a father torn away from his family or the bedlam that reigned in the deportation square. Is it possible to imagine the disorientation, the feeling of isolation, the utter devastation that confronted those of us who returned to the small ghetto from our place of work where we were quartered during the time when the deportations took place?

Recalling these memories is by its very nature a painful experience but we have no alternative but to live with the memory of lives gratuitously and viciously annihilated. They are an inescapable part of our collective memory, a part of our identity and a means to our self understanding. Our common background also carries memories and echos of the stirring world into which we were born. As the years go by the more insistent becomes the desire to recapture something of the elemental power that has harnessed this vibrant and exciting life. Who can forget the talent, the genius, the traditional ceremonies, customs and the intense religious, Zionist and socialist fervour that was so pervasive. We also remember the cynical world in which we spent our childhood, a world of unemployment, virulent anti-Semitism and persecution. These stark and unique memories that we share together are completely

incomprehensible especially to those who were born after the war in countries where freedom and the Rule of Law is prevalent. It is now generally accepted that the lessons of the Holocaust are of universal significance. The Holocaust offers mankind for their reflection the acme, the culmination of the unprecedented spectre of man's inhumanity to man and the intolerable perversity of human nature. It points to the degradation, humiliation and cruelty to which man can be subjected when the Rule of Law is manipulated and abused.

However, it is important to remember that constant mourning on its own is a futile exercise which can too easily become chronic morbidity. As the former Chief Rabbi of the U.K. Lord Immanuel Jacobovits put it "we must beware against breeding a Holocaust mentality of morose despondency among our people especially the young". The Holocaust must not be presented in a way that will encourage passivity, depression extremism. Nor must the Holocaust be relied upon as an essential incentive to Jewish activity. The Holocaust alone is not a symbol of Jewish identity and survival. It is the quality of the Jews who have perished which determines the notional tragedy of the Holocaust. The real and ultimate tragedy lies in the destruction of the great centres of Jewish learning in Europe. The milieu of indigenous Jewish living which for centuries has been the cradle of Jewish leadership was obliterated. The source from which Jewish life drew its nourishment was destroyed. We must invest all our energies and efforts in the revitalisation of our lifeline and spiritual revival that would to some extent soothe the wounds and heavy losses that were inflicted. We must not only analyse how they died but delve also into the way in which our unfortunate brothers and sisters lived.

Jewish lessons of the Holocaust should motivate us to probe into the life of those who perished just as we examine their death.

All this needs emphasising as frightening errors are constantly repeated, lessons which are painfully learnt are forgotten in the space of a generation. The accumulated wisdom of the past is heedlessly ignored in every generation. Our vulnerability requires constant vigilance. Who would have imagined 47 years after the war controversies around the Holocaust would continue unabated. It is not just the denial and revision of the Holocaust nor the tracking down of the criminals that fuel controversy and attract the attention of the world media but many other aspects that are continuously catapulted into prominence to which we are inescapably bound to react. Despite the Holocaust and the crushing of Nazi Power anti-semitism has not vanished even from countries where the Jewish population has practically ceased to exist. The rise of Islamic fanaticism is accompanied with anti-semitism and virulent anti-Israel sentiment. The collapse of communism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union has if anything exacerbated the underlying currents of anti-semitism prevailing in these countries. It is an acknowledged fact that times of great change while engendering hope and expectation also bring great uncertainty and danger. Eastern Europe intoxicated at regaining an opportunity for democracy but without practice for almost 45 years and the former Soviet Union (C.I.S.) hardly used to democracy may yet fall prey to nationalism poisoned by racism and religious fundamentalism. Demagogic leaders driven to extremes by economic deterioration may exploit ethnic tensions involving minorities and old rivalries as can

be seen in what was Yugoslavia, Armenia, Azerbaijan Georgia and Abkhazia and many others. The Jewish community in the world is also watching with apprehension the rise of far-right or neo-fascist political parties in Western Europe. The far-right seems to feel little of the guilt that made anti-semitism socially unacceptable for nearly two post war generations. As Mrs. Jean Kirkpatrick stated when she was the American Ambassador of the U.Ns. "Anti-semitism is not a problem to be solved once and for all. It is not a battle won on a single battlefield in a single war. It is a struggle that must be continued day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year". There is, therefore, no room for complacency. Experience has shown again and again that eternal vigilance is of sublime importance.

Still, anti-semitism, however disturbing and pernicious should be perceived differently to-day from that of the 1930ties. Then in face of persecution the doors were closed for us, we stood alone, we were abandoned helpless and facing extinction. To-day as we have watched in awe the great in gathering of hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews and from other countries where Jewish lives are jeopardised, we can't help reflecting what would have been the outcome had there been a State of Israel in the 1930ties. How many Jews would have been saved? How many of our parents, brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts, cousins would have had the opportunity to live a full and happy life. Israel's existence has enriched our lives, enhanced our pride and identity and has served as a rallying point for culture and Jewish living. With the birth of the State of Israel the destiny of our people had entered the autonomy of its choice. We have become the agents not the victims of our history.

It is also important to remember that in addition to a Sovereign Jewish State, Western Jewry enjoys an unprecedented prosperity and political influence and Eastern European Jews, Jews from the former Soviet Union are emerging from a prolonged period of oppression and isolation. What is more, liberal democracy, with its political and legal defences against anti-semitism remains strong. The Catholic Church, once a major purveyor of anti-Jewish doctrines in Western Culture has firmly denounced anti-semitism. Although racial ideology has been debunked and Christian theology repudiated it still casts a shadow but we must realise that they have lost their potency.

It is necessary to remind ourselves of the positive aspects of contemporary Jewish life before we are overwhelmed by the depth of despondency. Those of us who live in the diaspora are fully integrated into the fabric of society. The political, social and economic problems that the world is at present experiencing is in the main a problem to which all the Nations in the world, us included, have to address themselves. I would like to conclude with a statement made by Itzhak Rabin the Israeli P.M. in his inaugural speech at the Knesset.

"We have to see the new world as it is now - to discern its dangers, explore its prospects and do everything possible so that the State of Israel will fit into this world whose face is changing. No longer are we necessarily a people that dwells alone no longer is it true that the whole world is against us. We must overcome the sense of isolation that has held us in thrall for almost half a century".

**Ben Helfgott**

## ANGELA COHEN'S MAIDEN SPEECH AS CHAIRMAN OF THE '45 AID SOCIETY

Welcome to our very special reunion, renamed the Benunion, a Gala evening to celebrate our president Ben Helfgott's extraordinary life.

Tonight is a momentous occasion for me. I now know how Golda Meir, the first woman prime minister of Israel, felt when she addressed the Knesset for the first time and how Margaret Thatcher, the first woman prime minister of the UK must have felt when she made her maiden speech to parliament.

**Big deal!** Tonight I am honoured to be here in front of you making my maiden speech as the first woman chairman of the "boys"!!

I know how important it is for the survivors to know that the second generation will take up the baton and carry their message forward and, therefore, on behalf of the second, third and fourth generations I renew the pledge to continue the work of the 45 Aid



Society to insure the horrors of the past are never forgotten or repeated.

I recently read a quote from Susan Pollack, a holocaust survivor, who wrote

*"Small streams of hatred can quickly lead to unstoppable, horrific things, so people should stand up to any type of persecution or discrimination, whether bullying or malicious gossip."*

Perhaps that is a sentiment that should be discussed with certain members of the Labour Party, suspended or not!

One of the 2nd generation's most significant achievements to date is the amazing Quilt, displayed here tonight, which tells so many of the boys diverse stories. This magnificent project was the brainchild of Julia Burton whose enthusiasm, skill and attention to detail has insured that their legacies are remembered for generations to come. Thank you Julia.

There are a number of people here that I must thank as without their tireless work and dedication this reunion would not have happened.

Firstly, the survivors whose lives we celebrate tonight, and secondly, in no particular order, Maurice Helfgott, Philip Burton, Kim Stern, Alan Greenberg, Ros Gebart, Michael Helfgott, Julia Burton, David Graham, Susan Bemange, Gary Spiro, Nigel Cohen Samantha Kingsley, Rob Rinder. I thank you all.

**Have a wonderful evening**

# **MICK ZWIREK**

By David Zwirek

Mick Zwirek was a good man. To me he was a great man. A true hero. I'm his son. I should know.

He was a Dad, a husband, a brother, a son, a friend and an extraordinary person. He was one of 'The Boys'. He lived a long life until he was 89 year of age. So let me tell you something about him.

Mick was born on 18 December 1925 in Plock, Poland, a busy town. on the River Vistula, about 60 miles from Warsaw. He was named Abramek Yitzhak Zwirek (Abraham Isaac Zwirek), the second child and only son of David and Helena Zwirek. He had a sister, Gutcha, who was three years older than him, who now lives in America. Jewish people had settled in the town in the 14th century so they were well established and part of the community. Before the Second World War, they made up just over a quarter of the town's 35,000 population and in the region itself there were over 10,000 Jewish people. By the end of the War there were just 300 Jewish survivors, who had originated from Plock and were still alive. My dad, Mick, was one of them.

His father was a well-respected member of the Jewish community and worked as a tinsmith and roofer, with his own brother, Solomon, my Dad's uncle. My Dad's grandfather, an elderly man in his eighties, lived with the family and used to be a chazan in the local synagogue.

My Dad's mother was very religious although his father was more secular, trading with non-Jewish people in the region. His father was also a representative of the local Jewish Community. Mick recalled his father going to the local Army barracks nearby each year, as a Jewish town representative, to attend Seder night at Pesach with the Jewish soldiers who were in the Polish Army.

The family business imported tin from Cornwall into Poland before the war, which was brought down the River Vistula from Warsaw to Plock. It was used to make household utensils, but also as roofing material for the houses of wealthy farmers in the area. Having a tin roof was a status symbol and was expensive, so it was a good trade to be in. My Dad often recalled how he went out with his father to help or watch as the roofing work was completed, which often took many days. Dad would have to return home, but his father would go back to complete the work, staying overnight in the farm buildings and would celebrate with the farmer over a few glasses of whisky at the end of the job!

So Dad was brought up in a happy, stable home, living in an apartment, with other relatives close by, surrounded by Jewish people and going to both Polish state school and Hebrew classes. Looking back he often recalled fondly of those times and how he was the apple of his Dad's eye. He even got a bicycle for his birthday and his father opened an account with the local ice-cream salesman, so Mick could get an ice-cream whenever he wanted. Sounds idyllic! Of course there was anti-Semitism and scraps with local non-Jewish boys, but in many ways my Dad had a lovely childhood – playing football with his friends, watching and loving Charlie Chaplin films, spending summers in the south of the country in the pine forests of Zakopane and accompanying his father to work.

As we all know, it didn't last and in September 1939 when Dad was 13 (he had managed to have his Barmitzvah), Poland was invaded by Germany and his life would change forever. Soon his father's business was taken away by the German invaders and given to a Polish tradesman who used to be one of the employees. My Dad and his family were forced from their home and had to go and live elsewhere in the Plock Jewish ghetto. Mick used to sneak out to the non-Jewish part of the town to smuggle in food for the family (I visited the same archway he used to go through with Dad a few years ago when we both visited Plock).

The family were forced out of the town and went sent first to Dzialdowo, a town in the north of Poland. Then to a village called Laczno and finally then were put in another Jewish ghetto in the town of Suchedniow, close to the railways and concentration camp of Skarzysko-Kamienna.

From then my Dad, Mick, worked as a slave labourer on the railways at Skarzysko in Poland for several months, and was incarcerated in the main concentration camp nearby. From there he was transported by train and imprisoned in the German concentration camps at Buchenwald and Schlieben, before ending up at Theresienstadt (Terezin) in Czechoslovakia, where he was liberated by the Russians in 1945.

The names of these camps are familiar, each person's story unique, tragic and inspiring. We have heard of the starvation, the deprivations, the murders and the torture and the evil that can be unleashed. We have heard of the bravery and compassion and wept at the horrors and inhumanity. Each of 'The Boys' (and 'Girls') can tell their own story. Here are some of my Dad's. My father and his parents were herded on a transport train by the Germans, hearing rumours of their ultimate fate. My Dad and his father decided to jump off the train and take their chances rather than go to their possible deaths. My Dad's mother refused to join them, putting her trust in God to look after her. My Dad and his father jumped off and ran across the fields. My Dad ripped his leg open on some barbed wire (he still had the scar for the rest of his life) and they made their escape. Eventually they were turned into the Germans by some Poles and were sent off to concentration camps. My Dad's mum stayed on the train. She was murdered in Treblinka on Yom Kippur 1942.

In an awful moment, a bit later, when my father was being used as slave labour on the railway lines, a train with Jewish prisoners pulled in. Someone shouted over to my Dad that he saw my Dad's mother on the train. My Dad could not look up and acknowledge her in case the German's shot him. He did not see her or speak to her. My father found out at a later date that she had died in Treblinka. The news was brought by a family friend, who had been there. This friend had managed to escape and came across my Dad and his father. The friend had been given the job of burning the dead bodies at Treblinka, including his own family and also my Dad's mother. He gave them the news and told them to mourn. They did.

So at first my Dad and his father were in camps together. Mick's father persuaded the Germans that he needed my Dad to help him, when they asked who had tradesman's skills. My Dad also spent some of his time in camp working with for a German civilian overseer, mending rooves and doing some manual jobs. This same German civilian saved my father's life. One day my father, a teenager, was walking in the camp and some potatoes he had hidden fell out of his trousers. A drunk soldier (an SS man, my Dad said), came out of the officer's Mess and saw this. He put my Dad against a tree and shot at him with his revolver. He fired three times. He missed and the last bullet whizzed past Dad's head. He fell to the

ground in shock. A friend nearby saw this and thought Dad was dead. As the soldier went to fire again the German civilian overseer ran up and told the soldier to stop because he needed Dad to work for him. The drunken soldier went off and my Dad survived.

During those years my Dad managed to keep alive, working in munitions factories, on the railways, using his roofing skills and by his wits. What he witnessed and experienced, too many of you reading will know, or have heard about from your own fathers, mothers and grandparents. Similar and different things but stories of heroism, tragedy and the struggle to survive.

At the end of the war my Dad, went back to Plock and found an older cousin and travelled around Poland and Russia looking to see who had survived. There was no-one else left in Plock. Back in Prague, he was airlifted by the RAF to Carlisle as one of the 732 young Jewish refugees who had survived the concentration camps. He arrived in August 1945 and went to Lake Windermere, in the Lake District and onwards to hostels in Bedford and London. At one point he and his friend, Jack Bajer, were sent from Bedford to Glasgow. A long way from their friends in London, they couldn't understand the Scottish people, who were very hospitable, but spoke so differently. No doubt the Scots felt the same! They wanted to go back, so they both ran away and got a train back down south (without a ticket). Panic set in. They were reported missing until they turned up back in south England, for a stern telling off from the people looking after them, The legacy of that story is that somewhere I have a photo of my Dad, young, smiling and posing in a kilt – a long way from his roots in Plock!

At another point Mick, Jack Bajer, David Herman and Sunog (Ernest) led a revolt at the Nightingale Road hostel. It was going to close and they refused to go and caused a problem. Looking at the Central British Fund documents (CBF), my Dad was identified the spokesman for the four troublemakers! They were close friends and eventually shared digs together.

So when my father came to England he wasn't alone. He found a family in 'The Boys', but he also had a family already here. His auntie Esther lived in the East End, with her two children. She was his Dad's younger sister who had come to England before the war to settle with her Polish husband, My Dad was welcomed by his Auntie, who looked after him. He was also welcomed by her children, his cousins – Ida and her brother Max. You know the rest. Ida was born in Plock, Poland too but had come to this country when she was a year old. Mick and Ida grew close, fell in love and became a couple. And yes. They were first cousins!

Dad was involved with The Primrose Club, and was captain of the football club – a speedy winger he told me! He grew from a concentration camp inmate to a young man, gradually learning English, going through a succession of jobs until he found one he liked and courting my Mum. He was helped in all this by the CBF and other youth workers and staff who looked after these traumatised young men and women.

Mick eventually became a furrier; he set up his own business with Jack Bajer and spent his working life in the West End, making fur coats for prestigious department stores and private customers, including the wife of the comedian Tony Hancock!

There is a tragic postscript to these immediate post-war years. My Dad's own father had survived the Holocaust, and so had his sister. They were in Germany, waiting to immigrate. My Dad, who had come to England, had not seen his father for at least three years. At one

point my Dad even thought he would go to Australia or Palestine, but decided to settle in England. He was trying to get his own Dad entry to England from Germany. In 1948, my Dad, Mick, got the devastating news that his Dad had died, following a car crash near Turkheim in Germany. He had survived for a few days in hospital but succumbed to his injuries. Who can imagine the pain of that letter and the emotions, having survived the war, the horrors and the starvation of the camps and the murder of your mother? Then the contrasting emotions of liberation and the joy of finding out that your sister was still alive and was with your father. Just when things seemed more optimistic, a letter arrives from Germany telling you that you father had died in such tragic circumstances. I have a copy of that letter, sourced from the CBF and details of my father's pain. It hardly bears reading.

So now my own Dad had to make the sad journey to Germany, to see his sister and mourn his father. His sister went onto America with her husband and baby. My Dad returned to London.

Back home, Dad married Ida (my mum) in 1951 and set up his business, became the proud father of my older sister, Helen, who was born 1953. Mick and Ida were still living with my grandmother, Esther, in her flat in East London. They bought their own house in Gants Hill in 1954 and I was born (David) in 1960. My mum lived in that house for the rest of her life until she died in 2004 and Dad stayed there until 2011, before moving to an apartment in Golders Green and then Brighton, closer to where I live in Eastbourne.

His life revolved around work, his family and the '45 Aid Society. As I grew up, I recall card games in my house, Mum and Dad getting dressed up for events, something called 'The Boys' (which included women!). Names like Kopel, David, Ray, Sheila, Bob, Jack, Ben, Ziggi, Krulik, Dundele and others. I remember Dad working out seating plans for the Annual Reunion and getting countless phone calls from people who wanted to be seated with someone in particular, or not seated with someone at all!

He spent many years on the Committee of the '45 Aid Society, mostly as the Secretary. There were committee meetings at our house and Dad driving off to go across to North London to attend meetings too. He loved doing the seating plans and would get exasperated at people complaining, or demanding different seats on the actual evening. Each year would start many weeks before, working with my Mum and with friends to get it all sorted. Then sitting at the door to the venue, collecting money, making sure people had paid and then running around during the evening sorting it all out!

For many years after the War, my Dad would not talk about his experiences in the War. Then gradually my mother persuaded him to open up. The years when I was a child growing up and would hear the nightmare screams from my Dad in his sleep, as he woke up in a cold sweat reliving those times in his mind, suddenly stopped. He began talking and telling his story. When he did it was like a torrent. He told me some of them and at the start protected me from some, but gradually he told everything. To me sound they seem other-worldly, of a time that I cannot imagine. Like many of the Second or Third Generation I question whether I could have survived, would have been strong, would have kept my sanity. I can't answer those questions.





**Mick aged 21 in 1947 sitting front right next to Jack Bajer. Sunog (back left) next to David Herman**

He also told his story to the Imperial War Museum researchers and to the Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation. They can be found on video and audio tapes which have been published. He also told his story to Martin Gilbert, for the book 'The Boys'. My Mum also wrote everything down and taped it herself.

Like many of 'The Boys', Mick, my Dad also found the strength to visit schools and tell the schoolchildren of his experiences as part of the programme which took Holocaust survivors into our nation's schools. They would sit, by all, accounts, open-mouthed, some with tears in their eyes as Mick and others from the 45 Aid Society relived their stories and educated the next generations.

So his life was full and he was a resilient and strong man. As he got older he eventually retired and enjoyed life with Mum, travelling the world.

In their 70's they flew to New Zealand with another couple from the '45 with just a short stop enroute for a couple of hours! Holidays, cruises and watching their children make their own lives took up their time. When Mum died, it was a difficult time but Dad as strong as ever kept going, living in the same house, until he moved to Selig Court in Golders Green. I saw him regularly, enjoying his company, watching football on TV with him, making sure he was ok. He was my Dad but I loved his company and admired him more than anyone else I have ever met. My sister and I miss him terribly, just as we miss our Mum.



**Mick aged 81 in 2007**

He had a long and fulfilling life until he was 89, passing away in Brighton on 31 December 2014. He had a wonderful start, a terrible six years, and spent the rest of his life making up for the bad times. I know that my Mum, my sister and myself, his friends and wider family helped him fulfil that.

Oh by the way. People ask me why he was called Mick. It's not a Jewish or Polish name! Well his real name was Abramek. So when he came to this country and he said his name, that was a bit too much for many people brought up in England, including my Mum. So everyone used the last syllable of Abramek - which sounded like Mick!

So goodbye Mick. Love you forever.

by David Zwirek (son)

## The Becher Family Square in the Memory Quilt

### BECHER



Sabina Marcus Becher



David Becher



Roman Becher



Carla Becher



Daniela Becher



#### Let My Child Go

I grew not on bread and salt  
But on fear, blood and pain,  
Yet I did exalt  
Thee, and never in vain.

Strike me with illness,  
Strike me with woe,  
Grant me no happiness,  
But let my child go.



Let my child go  
And with my last breath  
I'll bless thee as of long ago  
And worship thee unto death.

Roman Becher 2008

ONE STEP AHEAD



In 2013 there were talks about some sort of commemoration for the 70th Anniversary of the Liberation of The Boys. My father was delighted. Sadly fate deprived him of witnessing this pleasure but we had talked about how to represent the family and father had felt that a photographic representation would be the most appropriate tribute.

I had no choice but to cope with the death of my beloved father by getting on with life and keeping myself very busy. I felt him around me and derived an incredible strength which I had never felt before. I got through all the ghastly paperwork and came to terms with the realisation that I was now the sole remaining survivor of my family and was officially an orphan. My parents and I, all only children were very close and had a unique relationship. This was now gone.

However, around about the Christmas period in 2015, having accomplished all of my tasks and challenges that the loss of a parent presents, I had more time on my hands. Suddenly

grief hit me with a bang and this was right at the time when I was focussing on the memory quilt. What should have been a celebration of life became a nightmare to me. The grief took an ugly turn so I could not enjoy the process because I was in constant floods of tears. Even the simplest task and decision about the design of the square became an onerous one for me and I just could not make my mind up on which photographs to include.

Then after a few days of feeling this deep grief, my father came to me in a dream with a big smile on his face and said "Danuska don't be sad, the square is a celebration of all your loved ones and you are doing this for us all. We need to be remembered. Get on with it and make us all proud".

I woke up the next day with renewed vigour, transformed and within a couple of hours had sifted through all the photos and decided exactly how I wanted the square to be. I felt suddenly uplifted as the caretaker of my family's legacy.

Off I marched to Snappy Snaps, with my mock up. Having worked for Fitch, the design consultancy I was well aware of the less glamorous aspects of the creative process. It was not an easy one because there were many visits with fine tuning and tweaking but the final result was as my father would have wished. The square provoked a lot of interest and Snappy Snaps could not have been more obliging following my every instruction to the last millimetre in order to achieve the required balance and precision.

At the top of the square there are 5 photos. My heroic grandmother Sabina Markus Becher who was the reason that my father survived the Holocaust. Beside her is my grandfather David Becher, eye surgeon and Major in the Polish Army. The underground helped my grandmother due to my grandfather being in the Polish Army and so false papers were given to my father, Anka, Franciszek and my grandmother.

The Polish Army had to retreat through Romania, France, Dunkirk and my grandfather arrived in the UK and spent the duration of the war as an eye surgeon in a military hospital. My father came to the UK in 1946 and my grandmother in 1947. She had stayed behind to help the Red Cross and other less fortunate survivors on their way to Palestine and the USA. In the center is my beloved father aged 15. Both he and my grandmother had extraordinary wartime escapes. According to Sir Martin Gilbert only 180 Jews survived in Warsaw out of a peak population of over half a million. My grandmother, her sister, her brother in law and my father are amongst these statistics. We do not know how many of the 180 survived on false papers in total but the survival of four members of one family is miraculous and a testament that there were Righteous Gentiles who risked their lives and those of their family to help Jews. However, these were few and far between. The vast majority of Jews were not so fortunate because many Poles were either anti semitic, fearful for their lives and repercussions to their families or indifferent to a people whom they did not understand. It is a tragedy that so many Jews perished and that more were not saved. In spite of my knowledge of the Holocaust under the auspices of my father's detailed tutorials, still to this day new materials comes to light which is heartbreaking.

My father's photo is noteworthy because it was taken in 1945 when he was just 15 and after he had had his nose operated on. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler outlined his racial ideology. He was obsessed with the view that Jews were an exceptional evil, working within the nation to subvert "racial purity." He urged the removal of Jews from Germany as early as 1925. During the Second World War, the Nazi's measured skull size, nose length and shape as part of their racial purity laws with specifically designed instruments. My father's nose was a dead giveaway and it was decided that an operation would be the best course of action to save not only his life but the life of all the people around him. The streets of Warsaw Zoliborz throbbed with menace in 1944. My father did not have a school identity card and therefore lived in hiding with a Jewish lady and her son. This was an exceptionally dangerous situation to be in. My grandmother found a doctor who agreed to operate, endangering not only his life but the life of all his family and the doctors nurses in the hospital. The doctor explained to my grandmother, that because this was not a cosmetic procedure but a life saving one, he would not charge her. My father spent agonizing nights in hospital, with a high fever and hallucinated big fat rats falling off the ceiling on him. He was alone in a room tucked away and had to stay very quiet. My grandmother's visits had to be short not to attract attention. The medical team had been very kind and sworn to secrecy. My father had absolutely no choice but to have this life saving operation. This fact needs to be told as it highlights the insanity of racism and the Nazi master race ideology. In his book, *One Step Ahead*, my father explains how he was stopped by the Gestapo and ordered to show his papers. On this occasion, one of many and for the very first time he was not scared because "I was now the confident owner of an Aryan nose and a good identity card". One of his heroic school mates had gone to collect the document from the underground risking his own life and delivered it to my father in hiding.

I chose 4 further photos. One with my elegant grandfather in his army uniform and my father in his school uniform taken in a small Grammar school, Evans in Wem, Salop when he was 17. The next photo is with my handsome father in his uniform whilst doing his national service. I added a special photo of my graduation with my beloved parents and a photo of me as a three year old with my mother as we were gazing lovingly into each other's eyes. These were two of my father's favourite photographs.

In the centre of the square is a poem my father wrote in 2008. It will resonate with all parents. 2008 dropped a real horror as I was diagnosed with a life threatening disease albeit caught just in time. I had to survive because I had to take care of my father who in spite of being utterly devastated put on a very brave front. It was this acting ability of cool under fire that got him through the war. I had to be very strong and take a pragmatic approach because I could not bear for my father to see me worried or scared. So, I played the same game he had played as a young boy during the war that everything was going to be fine and that I would sail through all of the treatments. I delegated all worry to my specialists and it worked because I had a very positive journey. My mother who died in 2001, used to say that my father and I were two peas in a pod and our deep love for one another got us through yet another life challenge with the help of a very wicked sense of humour. When I read the poem I think of the parents who lost their children and especially those in the camps. I am

haunted by the deep despair that parents experienced knowing the their children had been murdered in the vilest and cruellest of circumstances.

My father made a pact with God that he would gladly die for me to be spared and live a healthy life which for a non believer was quite extraordinary.

I have a copy of the Becher square at home as well as the Quilt Book which beautifully represents each of the 152 squares introducing a survivor's inspirational life followed by a short biography to express in more detail the visual representations on each square. All the survivors have made a huge success of their lives in the UK and contributed to its richness with loyalty, philanthropy and hard work.

The diversity of each square is not only a reminder of our rich creative culture but underpins the power of several generations coming together to honour their beloved survivors. Touchingly, no one is forgotten! Everyone is precious and so for those survivors for whom we have no information, their names have been stitched on the borders of the quilts. The unveiling of the four quilts and viewing them in all their glory was very moving and rewarding to see the delight on the survivors' faces.

Everyday, I walk past my square hanging on the wall at home and I feel love and gratitude that my family was spared and that the '45 Aid Society came up with this amazing project.

***Daniela***

### **Let My Child Go**

**I grew not on bread and salt  
But on fear, blood and pain,  
Yet I always did exalt  
Thee, and never in vain.  
Strike me with illness  
Strike me with woe  
Grant me no happiness  
But Let my child go.  
Let my child go  
And with my last breath  
I'll bless thee as of long ago  
And worship thee unto death.**

**Roman Becher 2008**



# **A Story Published**

By Rosalind Gelbart & Julia Burton

David Herman's autobiography has finally been published, 10 years after he completed it and 8 years after he passed away – as his daughters explain

Our father, David Herman, taught himself to use a computer in the 1990's because he was determined to write his autobiography. He wanted to put his testimony in writing for his family and future generations, to let them know about his experiences during the Holocaust, but also about his life before the war, documenting a culture and community that has now disappeared.

David was born in Munkács, a border town in former Czechoslovakia. He tells us of a happy childhood growing up in the foothills of the beautiful Carpathian mountains within a large, noisy and loving extended family. The Jewish community was part of a kaleidoscope of different cultures living in the region, each group co-existing peaceably. When war breaks out and anti-semitism makes life increasingly intolerable, David leaves school at the age of just 16, and then in 1943, the Herman family move from their home in the centre of town to a small apartment in the Munkács ghetto. In May 1944, they are told to pack immediately as they are being sent to work on farms in the east. Unbeknown to them, their final destination is Auschwitz-Birkenau.

At 17, separated from everyone he loves, David is forced to rely on his most basic instincts. He survives a series of slave labour camps, living under gruelling conditions, and is on the verge of giving up when he is miraculously reunited with his younger brother, Abe. Together, the brothers keep each other alive until they are finally liberated in Theresienstadt.



David recounts his recovery from typhus, his return to Munkács in search of lost family and his journey to the UK under the auspices of the CBF to start a new life.

Sadly, David died in December 2008 with his book unpublished. It was painful for us to see such a strong man suffer and weaken, so it took us some time before we felt ready to revisit his story.

Over the past year, we have worked hard to make David's dream of seeing his book published come true. If it were not for Jack Kagan's insistence, we may never have got there, but today, we are pleased to say that David's Story is in print.

The book contains a Foreword written by the late Sir Martin Gilbert. A good friend to David and his fellow survivors, The Boys, Martin encouraged many of them to document their stories. We have included documents from the archives at World Jewish Relief (formerly the CBF) on David's early years in the UK and David's records from Buchenwald which Philip managed to get from the International Red Cross. Philip and Maja constructed a family tree that includes the names of those who perished in the Holocaust and the new Herman family that David and his four surviving siblings built. There are maps showing David's journey to the UK, photographs depicting pre-war Munkács and David's life after the war, and more recent images of David in the UK with The Boys, and the new family he created together with Olive.



As appendices, we have reproduced the account of our family's visit to Auschwitz together with David in March 1999, originally written for the 45 Aid Journal, and another article based on our trip to Munkács in 2008, sadly without David as by then he was too unwell to travel.

David always wanted to see his autobiography published, but sadly he died before that could happen. Now it is complete, we hope it will keep his story alive for us, our children and future generations.

Although the Holocaust cast a shadow over David's life, it was not the whole story. In an interview for the Spielberg Foundation, David summed it up perfectly:

"I've had happy times and sad times, but I prefer to remember the happy times."

To buy a copy of David Herman's autobiography contact [team@45aid.org](mailto:team@45aid.org)



## Recent Reflections

By Monica Gast-Stauber, Daughter of Paul & Edith Gast

I just spent a wonderful week visiting Florida with my parents. I say 'visiting' because after living for approximately two decades in Florida, they are now once again residing in the northeast region of the United States, closer to me. My Dad had a stroke and the requirements necessary to care for him have become too much for my Mom and he to facilitate on their own. So, after six months in Connecticut, the three of us went 'home' for a visit.

Florida is their home. The home containing all their belongings. The home where all their memories reside. The home where all their social interactions took place. The home where they shared their lives with not only their family, but also their extended family, 'The Boys'.

We arrived on a Tuesday and quickly settled in. Throughout the week we shared meals with many friends and relatives. Even the employees where they lived greeted them so warmly that it seemed as if hardly any time had passed. My Dad did not want to return to Connecticut.

Home was familiar and comfortable, as it should be. Both my Mom and Dad know where everything is. Nothing is out of place. Ultimately time moves forward and things are not the same. I get that! It is very hard for me to accept as well. My Dad is the most capable person I know. He is pragmatic and level headed, always there to come to the rescue when called upon. My Mom has a quick mind, forgetting less than I do, always able to reach a logical course of action. But the order of things has shifted; I am still their daughter, but feel responsible for my parents as well. That responsibility has descended on me very quickly. I never really thought about it happening, but I am prepared to do whatever is necessary. They prepared me very well to handle whatever life throws at you.

I never imagined my parents, not being my parents. Things were so wonderful for so long! I don't think that any of us are prepared for getting older; is that even possible? We are the age we are in our minds. I suspect that we all lag reality by at least a decade, happily seeing ourselves as we were ten years ago, or possibly even college students with little a care in the world. I kind of fancy being forty something (I am actually fifty something). We only mark progress by our immediate family. I am a wife, mother of two grown children, one engaged to be married, and now, am responsible for my parents as well. Yesterday the kids were in school and my parents were healthy and enjoying life in Miami. Where did the time go?

I bridge the gap sometimes through the Second Generation Face Book page, which not only chronicles events in the world, but both celebrations and sympathies of our community. I report to my Dad what has transpired and who has passed. He desperately hangs on to any news I have for him; because this is his changing family too.

If it is challenging for me, so, the question I have is, how does it feel for the generation ahead of me to get old(er), sharing memories with those who may no longer be here, and no one else can possibly fathom? What are our parents thinking? On a bigger stage, will anyone really be able to 'never forget' this remarkable survivor generation?

As children, we knew the story, but could we really feel it? It was part of our upbringing, but was it real to us? Some of our parents chose not to speak of the horrors. Mine was one of those. But recalling my childhood, I don't think any of the Boys who we spent our time with ever spoke of those days. As children we all just knew that we had a common bond and were proud. I am not sure what I was proud of then... maybe that my father had a history and an

association to this group of accomplished, outspoken and caring individuals. As children could we really understand what happened and how this group had evolved?

Our world is always in a tumultuous state but I feel baffled by that era, having travelled to see these atrocities and not comprehending how my father survived. The drive to endure, to live, requires endless personal strength, determination and personal resources. Is this instinctive, or were our parents different? Ah, the 'Chosen People' perhaps?

It has been written that Jews do not believe that being a member of the Chosen people gives them any special talents or privilege. Rather that the Jews had faith in G-d and in themselves. Our parents were instilled with the teachings of thousands of years. Is this how they survived? Did they pass this on to us as well?



**Manny Preter, Paul Gast, Ben Helfgott, Alex Gross. Florida, February 2017**

In the words of Rabbi David Wolpe: "The Shamash is the candle that lights the others. Be a Shamash." Everyone of us has a spark, something that makes us unique that we can impart to others. This means that we open ourselves up to the possibility that each of us has the power to make good and do good in this world, no matter who we are. By sharing our light, we kindle the light of hope and possibility in this world for others. Our parents were the light. They showed us in their everyday behavior that they had the will and self-discipline to serve a higher cause. To quote from Haftarah, Zechariah: , "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the Holy One."

Our parents, 'The Boys' surely embodied this spirit! Having attended many Reunions, I can attest that when entering the room there was a life force present in the room that emanated from them. A resolve that propelled them to form lasting relationships, bonds that would last a lifetime. Their lives were very challenging, both emotionally and physically. As a child, being sick from school was always worrisome, what did I miss and how was I going to make it up? Well, they missed years! They missed years of education, friends and family. None of the Boys wasted one moment on self pity, but rather made the most of the opportunity that was given to them now. Throughout their lives, they not only continued to deal with past memories, but the challenges of raising families, making a living and giving back to their communities. My father spent most of the last fifteen years retelling his experience in educational environments. For most, I believe in today's world, this would be considered a burden, but for him, a source of pride.



**Left to Right: Arza Helfgott, Manny Preter, Paul Gast, Edith Gast, Ben Helfgott, Alex Gross, Daisy Gross, Olga Lago. Florida, February 2017**

So, I return to the question, how does it feel to survive to a ripe old age? As a proud daughter, aside from the therapeutic benefit of writing this, my conclusion is that I can't know. What I do know, is that I must adjust to the fact that my parents have both reached what we refer to as old age. Yet oddly they still embody strength, in their resilience and fierce love for their family, which I witness on a daily basis. And, it goes without saying, an enduring spirit! I know that they have instilled these essential qualities in me, and I in turn hope that I have passed them to my children as well.

Monica Gast-Stauber

## Harry and Pauline Spiro – 60th Wedding Anniversary



**On 10 March 2017 Harry and Pauline Spiro celebrated their 60th Wedding Anniversary with family and friends.**



**They were thrilled to receive a letter from the Queen to mark such a wonderful occasion**

Gary Spiro



# **Visit to the Reunion of The Boys**

By Robin Frydman

My name is Robin Frydman and I am the daughter of Gerson "Jeff" Frydman and Edith Buxbaum Frydman. I live just outside of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA, with my fiancé, Billy Schall, and my 13- year old son, Jacob.

Years ago, Moniek Goldberg asked me to write an article for the Journal. I promised him that I would, but I could never find the words to write. A couple of weeks ago, Ben Helfgott called me from London. He asked me to write an article for the Journal. The second anniversary of my father's death just passed on March 21, 2015. I think I finally found the words to write, and besides, who can say no to Ben . . .

My father, Gerson "Jeff" Frydman was born in Lodz, Poland, somewhere between 1923 and 1930, depending on what documents you look at or whom you ask. He was the third of five siblings and the only one in his immediate family to survive the concentration camps and the Holocaust. Seventy-two years ago, the Central British Fund brought him from Theresienstadt to Windermere to begin his new life. My Dad trained to be an electrician.



**Jeff Frydman with The Boys**

My mother, Edith Buxbaum Frydman, was born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1925. Her father sent her to London in 1939 to avoid the concentration camps. She lived in a girls' hostel. Her mother passed before the War, her father passed during the War and her two brothers passed after the War. She found her way to the Primrose Club, where she initially met my father and met the best friends of her life.



**Edith Buxbaum Frydman (centre top) with The Boys**

My Mom was very active in sports and ran track for the Primrose Club. My Mom and Dad both moved to New York separately, and re-met there through a mutual friend. They fell in love and got married in 1958. My brother, Kerry, was born in 1961 and I was born in 1963. In 1973, we moved from New York to Hollywood, Florida. My Mom passed way too soon on November 20, 1987 at the age of 62.



**Edith Buxbaum and Jeff Frydman**

Growing up, I always felt different and never felt like I fit in, unless I was with other children whose parents were from Germany or Poland. I still feel this way today. Dad did not talk about the Holocaust and got angry with me if I told anyone he was from Poland or was in the concentration camps. He just wanted us to be the "all American family." To that end, my parents did not speak to us in Polish, German or even Yiddish. So, I assume Dad is not happy with me writing this article, but especially since his passing, I realize the need to keep his story alive and teach people about the Holocaust. Also, after his passing, all of a sudden I had so many questions, but no one to ask.



**Frydman Family (left)**



**Jeff Frydman and Edith Buxbaum Frydman**

Two months after my Dad's passing, I felt this need to attend the 2015 Reunion to celebrate 70 years since the liberation from the concentration camps in 1945. So Billy and I flew to London. Over 600 people, the largest turnout, attended the Reunion. Except for Paul, Edith and Monica Gast, one of the families who I grew up with in New York, and the Helfgotts, I was not sure which of my parents' friends would be there. I was very pleased to see about a dozen of their friends, who I have not seen in many years and was amazed at how many of The Boys' children were there, even though both parents passed away. I was on a mission to find every child of my parents' friends and found just about all of them. Some I met when I was younger, some I met for the first time. Every time I saw a familiar face or heard a familiar name, I began to cry. It was a very overwhelming night for me! During the cocktail hour, I first met Gary and Fiona Zylberschaz, the children of Aron and Evelyn Zylberschaz. Evelyn was my Mother's best friend. She wrote a lovely obituary for her in No. 13 of the Journal 1989. In 1987, I stayed at their house for a weekend after spending 6 weeks in Oxford.

When I reintroduced myself to my parents' friend, Ziggy Shipper, he didn't say anything or even react. Instead, he pulled out an envelope and showed me a picture of my parents. I was a mess. I found my father's best friend's children, Denise and Stephen Pomeranc, and felt an instant connection to them. I do not remember meeting them before, but they knew exactly who I was. I felt like I found long lost relatives. I also found the Balsam brothers, Stephen and Collin. I do remember meeting them in Florida and I especially remember a special watch that they had showed to me when I was about 10 or 11 years old. It was also so great to spend time with my childhood friend, Monica Gast and her parents who I refer to as Uncle Paul and Aunt Edith. While living in NY our families spent almost every Sunday together. It was also nice to see Harry Spiro, Fay Goldberg and Gloria Wilder. And since Billy always knows someone everywhere we go, of course, he knew someone at the Reunion, Lorraine Bailey, who I had never met, although I did know her parents, Benny and Sala Newton. They own a condominium in Billy's parents' building in Palm Aire, Pompano Beach, Florida, and they were good friends of my parents. In fact, the first time I took my Dad to meet Billy's parents, he looked around and said, "I was here before," as he had been to the Newtons' condo. Billy's parents were friends with the Newtons and Billy used to take the "English boys" to Night Clubs during Holiday. It really is a small world!!





**With Ben Helfgott (left) and with Zigi Shipper**

I received information about the Quilts while my Dad fell ill so I didn't make a square. I regretted that after seeing the beautiful Quilts at the Reunion. I still plan to make a square but honestly, I don't know how to make one. Instead, I sent several of my parents' pictures to Philip Burton for the 45' Aid Society Website and I posted pictures in the 45' Aid Society 2nd and 3rd Generation Facebook Group. So I contributed to history in my own way.



**With Gary Zylberszac (left) and with Steven Balsam, Denise Pearlman**

After the Reunion, I learned about the World Jewish Relief Organization and immediately requested Dad's documents. A couple of months later, I received about 50 pages. While some of what was written was not flattering, I couldn't help but laugh because my father hadn't changed since he was a teenager. He held on to the same beliefs and sometimes acted as they described. He was always a handful and once caused the entire Hostel to disobey the rules and refuse to clean dishes. I can so picture this! But I saw a side of my Dad that most didn't see. He was a loving father and even a more loving Grandfather to my Jacob. Dad and Jacob were so close and your heart would just melt watching them together. He loved being "Papa" to Jacob and to my nephew, Tyler.





**Jeff Frydman with his Grandson**

After receiving my Dad's documents, I requested and was pleased to see they also had a file on my Mom, which included her picture. It was only a couple of pages, but she was just as tough as my father. I know whom I get my strength from.

A couple of weeks ago, we celebrated my son, Jacob's Bar Mitzvah. It was very hard without my parents. But since they are always in my heart, during my speech to Jacob I told him by knowing Papa, he is a witness to the Holocaust, and it was his obligation and Honor to tell and re-tell Papa's story. I know my Jacob will keep his story and memory alive. For my part, I joined a group called the Next Generation, which is comprised of children of Holocaust survivors. Also, a friend of mine works for the South Florida Division of the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Her job is to "collect the evidence." I plan to be involved with her group too.

I am so grateful that I made the trip to London in 2015 and still keep in touch with my new friends and family. At the beginning of this Article, I wrote that I never felt like I fit in, but that sure changed at the Reunion. I truly felt I was with family, people with similar backgrounds who fully understood me.

It amazes me that The Boys, who were pulled from the jaws of death, prospered and lived their lives to the fullest! The room was filled with happy and successful first, second, third and fourth generation survivors. You have to really want to live to be able to survive such a horrible ordeal. I am in awe of all of The Boys (and Girls)! The lesson I learned from that fabulous evening was to Never Forget and to live your life to the fullest.

I plan to come back to London with my Jacob, hopefully, in 2018. Enjoy the Reunion!

Love from,

Robin Frydman, Second Generation, Parkland, Florida, USA, May 1, 2017.



**Jeff Frydman and his family (L-R): Kerry, Rachel, Tyler, Jeff, Jacob, Robin, Billy**

## **Jeff Frydman's Story**

19 October 1953, Baumholder, German

To Whom It May Concern,

I was born in Lodz, Poland on 15 September 1928. I lived and went to school there up until the time that World War II began.

In 1939 German Armed Forces occupied Poland. Two months later they confiscated all of my families properties and evacuated us to Izbica, Poland, which is on the Russian Boarder. We were only allowed to take the clothes that were on our backs and twenty Deutsche Marks per person. Also there were many other families with us from around our area. All of these people including my family and my self were of the Jewish faith.

We settled at this place and my parents had to work for the German Army for wages that were so cheap that it was impossible to even buy enough food for the family. They made two DM a day a piece.

We were not punished, guarded or molested while here. The people that were here stayed because there just wasn't any place else to go.

We stayed there through the winter of 1939 and in the summer of 1940 we left and made our way to Cracow, Poland. We were supposed to stay at Izbica, but we decided that we could find a better place in which to live.

We stayed at Cracov until the late summer of 1941. At this time the German SS Headquarters informed us that all Jewish people would have to go to a Ghetto that was already formed and had been there all of the time. It was in a section of the City Cracov. We were only given a 24 hour notice.

Again my family and I fled. This time we went to Sydlowiec, Poland. We settled here, but three months later the German SS Troops surrendered the town and took all of the people including my family away by train. After the War I heard that all of these people and my family had been taken to Treblinka, Poland and put into gas chambers. This could be true, as I have not heard from or about my family since that time.

My sister Adela, then 15 years old and I were taken to an ammunition factory in Poland called SKARYSKOKAMIENNA. We had to work here for no pay. The factory was guarded by SS Troops. We got coffee in the morning, but it was not drinkable. In the evening we got two pieces of bread with about 1/2 pint of watery soup. Work was from 0700 hrs until 1800 hrs or from 1800 hrs until 0700 hrs. If you did not work they would beat you with a whip about 4 1/2 feet long with a metal bolt attached to the end of it.

On night at about 2200 hrs I cut the barbed wire fence and got out into the city. I brought a train ticket and went back to Cracov to the Ghetto. My sister had escaped a week before me and I met her there. Also, we met my Aunt and her five year old son. All of the people had to work for the German Troops, but my sister and I were not registered at the Ghetto and therefore had to stay hidden all of the time.

We stayed here until 13 March 1943. At this time the German SS Troops surrendered Cracov, but before doing so they took all of the people from the Ghetto, about 10,000, by truck, under guard to Auschwitz, Poland. All of the small children, a few hundred, were taken to a city square and murdered by the German SS Troops with machine guns.

At Auschwitz I was one of a group of three hundred people that was selected aside from the rest. We were given a tattoo on our left arm. Mine was the number 108068. All of the other people were put in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, including my sister, my Aunt and her son.

The rest of us were made to work for the German Soldiers. I had to work eighteen hours a day building gas chambers. They continually beat us with whips while we worked. It was not because we didn't work hard enough, but more of a habit they seemed to enjoy.

After helping complete three gas chambers I was sent to Yaworzno, Poland. I worked here in a coal mine until the end of 1943. The work was the same as at other places. We worked twelve hours a day. I worked three months for one period without seeing daylight.

When the Russians started moving across Poland the German Army had to retreat to Germany. I was with a group of 3000 people who were taken on a death march, which lasted for three days and three nights. We marched without food, water and sleep. We finally arrived at Blechemek, Germany. When we got here only fifty of the 3000 were left. Those that could not stay up with the march were shot on the way. At Blechamek we were put on cattle trains with other people and taken to Gross Rosen, Germany, but when we arrived here it had already been evacuated.

From here we went to Lipmaryce, Czechoslovakia, which is about sixty kilometers from Prague. Here we worked in a factory built in the side of a hill. We made engines for German Army tanks. I stayed here until 1 May 1945. I was then sent to Teresenstat, Czechoslovakia. This place was a collection point for all Jewish people that the German Troops were trying to kill before the end of the war which was close by.

On the day of 8 May 1945 I was liberated by the Russian Army. On 14 August 1945 I was sent to England with three hundred other children where I stayed until 1952 [in 1947-48, I fought in the Israeli Air force].

On 30 Mar 1952 I arrived in the United States of America. On 21 November 1952 I was inducted into the United States Army.

As far as I know my whole family is dead because of the war.

Father Abraham Frydman

Mother Frania Frydman

Sister Adela Frydman

Sister Hela Frydman

Brother Smul Frydman

Sister Hanah Frydman

Brother Mosses Frydman

Frydman, Gerson

Pvt US 51 209 635

317th AM RCLM & MAINT CO (SMBL)

APO 46, US ARMY



19 October 1955  
Saunholder, Germany

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We stayed there through the winter of 1939 and in the summer of 1940 we left and made our way to Cracov, Poland. We were supposed to stay at Izbica, but we decided that we could find a better place in which to live.

We stayed at Cracov until late summer of 1941. At this time the German SS Headquarters informed us that all Jewish people would have to go to a Ghetto that was already formed and had been there all of the time. It was in a section of the City Cracov. We were only given a 24 hour notice.

Again my family and I fled. This time we went to Szydlowice, Poland. We settled here, but three months later the German SS Troops surrounded the town and took all of the people including my family away by train. After the War I heard that all of these people and my family had been taken to Treblinka, Poland and put into gas chambers. This could be true as I have not heard from or about my family since that time.

My sister Adela, then 15 years old, and I were taken to an ammunition factory in Poland called SKARZYSKO-KAMIEENIA. We had to work here for no pay. The factory was guarded by SA Troops. We got coffee of a morning, but it was not drinkable. In the evening we got two pieces of bread with about 1/2 pint of watery soup. Work was from 0700hrs until 1800hrs or from 1800hrs until 0700hrs. If you did not work they would beat you with a whip about 4 1/2 feet long with a metal bolt attached to the end of it.

One night at about 2200hrs I cut the barbed wire fence and got out into the city. I bought a train ticket and went back to Cracov to the Ghetto. My sister had escaped a week before me and I met her there. Also we met my Aunt and her five year old son. All of the people had to work for the German Troops, but my sister and I were not registered at the Ghetto and therefore had to stay hidden all of the time.

We stayed here until 13 March 1943. At this time the German SS Troops surrendered Cracov, but before doing so they took all of the people from the Ghetto, about 10,000, by truck, under guard, to Auswith, Poland. All of the small children, a few hundred, were taken to a city square and murdered by the German SS Troops with machine guns.

At Auswith I was one of a group of three hundred people that was selected aside from the rest. We were given a tatoo on our left arm. Mine was the number 108068. All of the other people were put in the gas chambers at Auswith, including my sister, my Aunt and her son.

The rest of us were made to work for the German Soldiers. I had to work eighteen hours a day building gas chambers. They continually beat us with whips while we worked. It was not because we didn't work hard enough, but more of a habit they seemed to enjoy.

After helping complete three gas chambers I was sent to Jaworzno, Poland.

I worked here in a coal mine until the end of 1943. The work was the same as at other places. We worked twelve hours a day. I worked three months for one period without seeing daylight.

When the Russians started moving across Poland the German Army had to retreat to Germany. I was with a group of 3000 people who were taken on a death march, which lasted for three days and three nights. We marched without food, water and sleep. We finally arrived at Blechmek, Germany.

When we got here only fifty of the 3000 were left. Those that could not stay up with the march were shot on the way.

At Blechmek we were put on cattle trains with other people and taken to Gross Rosen, Germany, but when we arrived here it had already been evacuated.

From here we went to Lipnaryce, Czechoslovakia, which is about sixty kilometers from Prague. Here we worked in a factory built in the side of a hill. We made engines for German Army tanks. I stayed here until 1 May 1945. I was then sent to Terezin, Czechoslovakia.

This place was a collection point for all Jewish people that the German Troops were trying to kill before the end of the war which was close by.

On the day of 8 May 1945 I was liberated by the Russian Army. On 14 August 1945 I was sent to England with three hundred other children where I stayed until 1952.

On 30 Mar 1952 I arrived in the United States of America. On 21 November 1952 I was inducted into the United States Army.

As far as I know my whole family is dead because of the war.

Father	Abraham Frydman
Mother	Franka Frydman
Sister	Adela Frydman
Sister	Hela Frydman
Brother	Samul Frydman
Sister	Harsh Frydman
Brother	Mosess Frydman

Frydman, Gerson  
Pvt US 51 209 635  
317th QM BCLM & MAINT CO (SMEL)  
APO 46, US Army

## Henry Rose

*Belinda Hochland and Sharon Landau provide news of their Father, Henry Rose, who has recently moved to Manchester.*

Alive and very well, 93 years young and now living in Manchester, this is our father Henry Rose.



**Henry Rose on his 93rd birthday in February 2017**

Henry (Henryk Rozagora) came to Great Britain having survived the Holocaust, as one of 'The Boys', and settled in Glasgow where he lived, worked and made his family.

He married Mindel Cohen, and had two wonderful children (my sister and I) who in turn had two wonderful children (Hannah and Samuel).



**Henry Rose and pictured right together with his wife Mindel Rose in February 2017**

In December last year (2016), we finally persuaded our parents to move to Manchester, where they are now settled, and we feel very blessed to have them so close to us.

If anyone is out there, who knew our Dad and would like to get in touch, we would love to hear from you. Please contact us via [team@45aid.org](mailto:team@45aid.org)  
Belinda Hochland and Sharon Landau.



# **Storm before the Silence – in Memory of Jack Kagan**

By Michael Kagan

My father – Jack Kagan (Yehuda ben Yaacov v'Devorah from the town of Navahredok) passed away on Sunday December 18th 2016 in London at 7:30am. That date may not mean much to you, other than it's a week before Christmas and a week before Hanukah, when so many of his friends had already left for winter holidays and therefore were absent from the funeral and shiva. And if I were to tell you that that date was also the 18th of Kislev I'm sure that for most, if not all of you, it would make no impression whatsoever.

I arrived in London from Israel on Sunday evening December 11th and went straight to the hospital. He had been admitted the night before with respiratory problems. He had a lung infection and could hardly breath. I found him in bed tied up to monitors and life-support. A mask was over his face with some liquid inside that was meant to break up the phlegm. When I approached him, and called his name, his eyes fluttered but whether he was aware of my presence or not is impossible to say. Two years earlier he'd had a stroke that left him physically unimpaired but mentally crippled. Every now and then his mind would be able to focus and see clearly, like a broken street lamp. At such moments he would recognize who you were and ask stunningly simple questions like: "Alright?" that would have us in tears. But that night in the hospital was not one of those nights.

Here lay the man who had escaped from the work camp into the forests during the coldest winter imaginable; a winter that destroyed the German 6th army at Stalingrad, and a winter that all but destroyed European Jewry. He was 13 years old and he knew that if he didn't make the rendezvous with the partisans he would die a silent death amongst the white frozen trees. The group of nine reached a frozen river. The first tested the ice, it held, and crossed. The second followed; the third; fourth; until it was my father's turn. Was he heavier than the others? Difficult to believe. Was he heavier footed than the others? Also difficult to believe. So how is it that when he began his crossing, the ice cracked and he found himself up to his knees in freezing water? They pulled him out and kept walking. But the water had flowed into his boots, boots that someone had given him as a parting gift, boots that were lined with wool to keep him warm, boots that would help him survive. Taking his boots off and tipping out the water was not possible since the wool had become saturated like a sponge, and as they plunged deeper into the forest the heavy water began to freeze encasing his feet in blocks of ice. They reached the cabin; there were no partisans. Had they missed the rendezvous? Had their contact been ambushed? Or was it just too cold to go wandering around that endless, ageless forests looking for a bunch of Jews?

I remember as a boy, when I complained to my father that it was cold, he would laugh and answer: "Cold? You have no idea what cold is. When I was..." And when we would go skiing and be stuck on a halted ski lift somewhere over the Alps, he would inevitably say: "When I was in the forest that winter, it was so cold that the sap would freeze and the trees would split in half with the sound of an artillery shell being fired."

Lying in that hut, trying to keep warm, his feet without feeling, he realized that he would not be able to make it further. He decided to go back to the camp. How does one make decisions like that: to go on would be certain death, to return would be uncertain death? As my father



would always say, shrugging his shoulders and smiling his infectious smile: "Life is precious." So he said his farewells and began the journey back; back to his father and mother and sister, who were still there working their daily shift on almost zero rations, trying to believe that somehow they would survive in spite of all the evidence around them that seemed to contradict that belief.

Jack crawled the last part, his legs no longer able to support him, and lay in wait near the gate for a sign, a plan, a hope. At the end of the day a band of brothers returned from work somewhere outside the camp. He somehow made a signal and somehow he was spotted and somehow he was surrounded and somehow he was dragged through the gates and somehow he wasn't caught. Somehow.

The boots were sacrificed and cut off him revealing blackened toes – gangrene had already set in. The dentist – this was a death camp not a hospital – was called and with him came his few instruments. They plied my father with home-made vodka until he was barely conscious and then cut off his toes with pliers. And until the day he died he was toeless.

Two memories: once a year the 'Boys' would come round to our house in Hocroft Avenue. The men would sit around the long dining room table speaking Yiddish and laughing loudly while the women would be in the kitchen or lounge or anywhere else. They drank vodka and ate smetina, thumping on the table, back-slapping, roaring with life. Our house was more or less alcohol-free except for sickly Palwin ("Palestinian Wine") and that vodka that flowed once a year. I remember how the shot glasses appeared from nowhere and the bottles clanked on the table and the laughing and swigs (I was sure that they would toss the glasses onto the floor like in the films) and the black, Russian bread that was sniffed. What? Yes. They would shoot down a shot and immediately hold a slice of bread under their noses and sniff. (These were the days before cocaine became fashionable.) Many times I would ask my father the meaning of this strange ritual. Once he told me that the smell of the yeast somehow prevented the alcohol from getting to the brain, somehow reduced the level or speed of intoxication. I can bear witness that it didn't work very well, at least not for everyone. After several hours of singing and boozing, crying and laughing, the wives came in to carry their boys home.



The other memory is of holidaying on some beach somewhere, every year. Whether it was Majorca, Rimoni, Herzliya, or Bournemouth, we would stake out our piece of the beach or grass around the swimming pool, unfold the deckchairs, apply the bronzing lotion guaranteed to give a great tan and terrible skin problems in later life, and then, and then the moment we would all be dreading, my father would take off his shoes and socks revealing his past for all to see. When, many years later, his granddaughter – my daughter - asked what had happened to his toes, he answered: "They just went for a walk."

The day after I arrived at the hospital the doctor took us aside and said: "I'm sorry." And then we knew that he was not going to leave alive. Such a simple word that says so much. By that evening – it was Monday – he had been moved into another room without all the monitors and life support, just a little tube that ran under his nose giving him a little extra oxygen and small dosages of morphine to ease the pain. The x-rays showed that he only had 30% functionality in his lungs. Without the oxygen he would suffocate.

On that Tuesday evening his vital signs were very weak and we gathered around him to say goodbye and to sing the Song of the Partisans - Mum, Debbie, her children, Jeff's children (Jeff was on his way back from an interrupted holiday in Burma) and myself. With Rabbi Liss, we sang the viduy (confessional) prayers, said the shema for him and hummed Shlomo Carlebach tunes. After everybody had left, I sat alone with the Rabbi asking about British Jewry's customs for burial and shiva. Besides the tea, he warned me of many significant differences between the customs in Britain and those I am familiar with in Israel. Suddenly he stopped mid-sentence and pointed across the room. My father was staring at us with a hard fixed stare as if to say: "I'm still here. Not gone yet." Or maybe: "Would love a cup-o-tea."

I went to sleep that night expecting the worst. I woke in the morning to find him breathing gently. The nurse checked his vital signs and told me that, surprisingly, they were pretty strong. I wrote in my daily Facebook report that his immediate demise seemed to be delayed. I also speculated that if he was waiting for a particular day then he was waiting for Sunday, December 18th, the 18th day of Kislev.

The next day, Thursday, the doctor told us that he could no longer consider my father to be dying but just deathly sick and therefore had to be treated accordingly. So he was hooked back up to the monitors and life support and a regimen started to enable him to receive food again via his PEG tube.

On Friday, he was trying to pull himself up presumably to get out of bed. We helped him sit up and he insisted on putting his feet on the floor. Keep in mind that he hadn't walked for over six months and that his leg muscles had atrophied so that they couldn't unfold.

On Shabbat, he was looking around, curious at the world around him, staring out of the large windows that opened out onto a wonderful view of London. At this rate, the nurse said encouragingly, he should be back in the nursing home in no time. I made Kiddush for him and swear that he lip-synched the words with me.

That evening I went out to the Swiss Cottage Cinema to see the new Star Wars movie. My family in Jerusalem had already seen it on opening night and I wasn't going to be the one

left out when it came time to discuss Parshat HaMovie at the Shabbat table. The film ended at midnight. I missed the last bus back to the hospital. Taxi? Forget it, its London. I walked. Swiss Cottage to the Royal Free. Not bad. Invigorated, I arrived outside the ward but the doors were already locked. I rang, and buzzed, and knocked until finally a doctor arrived and opened for me. What was she doing there so late? Just checking on her patients one more time. I entered my father's room filled with misgivings but there he was snoring gently, at peace.

At 6am he started to cough and wheeze badly. The nurses put on the mask again and upped the level of oxygen. I got dressed, folded the camp bed (I had been sleeping there since I arrived) and went to the visitors' room to davven. I just stepped back from the amida when the nurse rushed in urging me to return to the room. I quickly removed my tefillin, went back into my father's room at the very moment he exhaled his last breath.

Peace at last.

The nurse told me that seconds before, he had opened his eyes wide and looked out the window? What had he seen? He had seen the light of a new day. It was time.

So what's so special about the 18th of Kislev? It is the defining date marking the end of 500 years of Jewish life in Navahredok, Dad's town. It is the day in 1941 that the big slaughter of the Jews took place. 5100 Jews were taken into the forest, made to undress in the freezing cold, run across a trench and machine-gunned to death. On that date every year, the remnants of the town gather in Tel Aviv and grieve and remember what once was.

That was the day my father chose to die.

Reb Nahman says (Torat 67) that when it comes time for a Tzaddik to die, his upper soul descends into the body to pull out the lower soul that doesn't want to leave this world of mitzvot, of good deeds. When the upper soul enters the body it causes a sudden boost in energy making it appear from the outside as if the person is more vital and getting better. But it's not; it's an illusion. It's just the storm before the silence.

May my father, the Tzaddik, rest in peace – he deserves it.

This is a poem that I read at the funeral:

### **Thanks to my Feet\***

*Thank you my feet -  
frozen,  
bloody,  
rotting.  
You kept creeping,  
and crawling.  
You saved me  
from certain death.*

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\* This first stanza, originally in Yiddish, is from an essay by Jack (Idel) Kagan that appeared in the Pinkas Navahredok entitled "How I Survived".

For me, the ice broke,  
 Not like at a party,  
 But like at a funeral,  
 My funeral.  
 For me, the waters did not part  
 To let me walk through,  
 But poured in and cleaved  
 To my body and soul.  
 My poor feet,  
 All ten toes gone,  
 Each one cut off  
 In its prime.  
 One little toe for Mummy,  
 One little toe for Daddy,  
 One little toe for Sis,  
 And the rest for the all rest.  
 I am orphaned.  
 My toes are gone.  
 I walk in this world  
 Toeless, but I walk.  
 Toeless I run,  
 For I am alive,  
 And now my feet  
 Have sprouted new life.  
 One little toe for Michael,  
 One little toe for Jeff,  
 One little toe for Deb,  
 And the rest for the all rest.

Michael Kagan, April 16th 2015

## Remembering Jack Kagan

By Michael Kagan

Abba – Can you hear me?<sup>1</sup>

Words, words, words. So many words. I wake up early these days and rattle off words. I rarely read a book twice but I'm about to finish my book of slichot for the what? the fortieth time? That's a lot of times to say a lot of words most of which I can't understand, and when I do, I feel alienated from. And in a couple of days I'll finish another book from cover to cover – my Yom Kippur mahzor. Words, words, words. Sometimes I get lost in the sea of words.

*I'm reminded of the love song by Gloria Estefan:  
 But the words get in the way  
 There's so much I want to say  
 but it's locked deep inside*

When I was young, around this time of the year, my father would love to tell me the story of the poor shepherd boy who came to shul to daven on Yom Kippur with the Baal Shem Tov (he's a Litvak from Navahrodok so all his rebbe stories were only about the Besht). Not knowing how to read, he sat there mesmerized by the chanting and swaying. And as the

excitement rose, and as the crowd appeared to levitate, the shepherd boy did the only thing he knew to do – he wolf-whistled (some say he blew his recorder) as loudly as he could! Imagine that – not a shofar blast but a wolf-whistle. Of course, the congregants were angry and shouted for decorum, and to have the ignorant boy ousted. And then the Rebbe, as only the Rebbe could, calmed everyone down and said that the simple whistle that emanated from the heart of this peshute Yid (this simple Jew) was more effective, more powerful than everyone's words for it alone succeeded in penetrating directly to the heart of God.

Then there is the parallel story of the simple Jew who turns to the Baal Shem Tov (who else!) and confesses that he cannot read and therefore cannot pray. Whereupon the Rebbe asks him if he knows his alphabet, to which the man declares: "Of course!" And the Rebbe then tells him to open his heart and say the alphabet over and over again and leave it to God to rearrange the letters into his prayers (or maybe "His prayers").

And now here is my story: Last year after Yom Kippur ended, as my father was breaking his fast, he suddenly keeled over. Quick as a flash, my mother caught his plate before the fruit salad spilt all over the floor and, recognizing the symptoms of a stroke, phoned for an ambulance. She got him to Emergency in time for the anti-clotting medication to take effect and prevent permanent damage – at least that's what they told us.

It turned out that my father suffered no physical damage, like paralysis of the limbs or loss of speech, but as the days passed we discovered that he had lost his mind. He was medically categorized as suffering from Delusional Disorder. He started to speak in Russian, Yiddish, Polish, German, Hebrew,

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<sup>1</sup> To the memory of my grandmother and grandfather whose Yahrzeit my father commemorates on Yom Kippur.

Garbish, with smatterings of English. He continuously planned his escape from the hospital, scouting for the exits and the guards while on his way to and from the toilet.

And it's been downhill ever since.

One year later he sits in his wheelchair, having lost the ability to walk, moving in and out of lucid thinking like a flickering street lamp that momentarily gives hope only to have it die the next. One moment he could be asking after his great grandchildren, the next shouting in Yiddish, cursing the Nazis that murdered his family. For you see, at the age of 14 he was alone, orphaned and trapped in a German work camp. Four days before Rosh Hashanah, four days before the camp was due to be 'rid' of its last Jews, he and the 250 others escaped via a 200 meter long tunnel eventually to make his way to the Bielski partisans hidden deep in the impenetrable forests of Belorussia.

I see him now as stuck in that tunnel. There's light coming in at both ends but he can't decide which end to crawl to.

So there he is in the nursing home stuck: stuck between the horrors of his youth and the good years of his family, past and present; between this world and the next.

And so it was one evening, a few weeks ago, that I went to see him and I noticed that there was a neighborhood minyan gathering in the living room of the nursing home to pray afternoon and evening prayers. I went up to my father's room expecting him to be in bed,

raging before passing out for the night. Instead I found him sitting in his wheelchair looking very passive and awake. I asked him if he wanted to join in the prayers. He grunted for what I took as a 'yes' and I wheeled him to the living room.

Even though I was worried that he would start shouting in the middle I felt that he had a right to be there, that he might enjoy it, that it might shift a neuron or two, and maybe, who knows...

Immediately the organizer of the minyan approached me and said that my father couldn't stay, that he had to leave. Why? Because he didn't have a kipa on his head. I pointed out that there is no real necessity for his head to be covered especially if he was not even capable of praying, and besides which this was a living room, his living room, and not a Beit Knesset. The man insisted and I resisted. But then I decided to back down – remembering that we were here to pray not to war. I took my hat out of my bag and stuck it on my father's head. Appeased, we started: *"Happy are they that dwell in Your house..."*

I stood next to my father whispering the words into his ear. He seemed to be listening, recognizing, maybe even understanding. We finished *mincha* (afternoon prayers) without incidence and, without pause, dived immediately into *maariv* (evening prayers). We reached the *Shema Yisrael – Hear Israel...* I bent closer to my father's ear and said the words. His lips synched to mine – at least I want to believe so.

And then suddenly, out of nowhere, he started yelling: *"Do you hear me?? Do you hear me??"* Everyone looked round. The *minyan* organizer was clearly agitated. He gestured (speaking during the prayer is forbidden) for me to leave. I gestured defiantly – no! *"...And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with your soul, and with all your strength..."*

And then my father screamed: *"Du verstehst??? Do you understand???"*

That was it, the man stormed over and started to push the wheelchair backwards; I counter-pushed, while we both continued muttering the prayers under our breath – *"Whether you sit in your house or whether you walk by the way."*

And then a hysterical *"No!!!"* from my father. The man went berserk. Again I decided to beat a retreat, both from a sense that it wasn't fair on the others and also that this minyan did not deserve my father to be amongst it.

Together, outside the room, my father silently waited for me to finish my silent prayer. And then I took him to bed.

I often ponder what happened there. Had my father been aware of what was happening? Was he really praying? I hope so. And what would the Baal Shem Tov have said had he been there? Would his Hasidim have lifted up my Abba and danced with him while crying out to Our Father in Heaven: *Abba! Do you hear us? Do you understand us?*

May the words of our heart be heard in the heart of Hearts, and may we dwell in health and peace.

Gmar Hatima Tova

Michael Kagan

# **The Face to Oświęcim.**

By Michael Kagan

Place: Krakow – Land of the Living, Land of the Dead.

Time: Late afternoon, some time in Autumn 2012

Buses are lining up along the busy road filling up with people going home after a day's work. They are running, searching for the right bus, for an empty seat, for a little space, for a little peace. And while standing there amongst the swarm I see a single face behind a dirty glass window. The face of a man filled with sadness, lost hope, resignation. The sign on the front of the bus, on the side of the bus, on the back of the bus announces its final destination – Oswiecim. (Auschwitz). And as the beams from my eyes alight upon him, he senses and he looks up and he stares back. His eyes. His eyes are pleading, pleading to be seen, to be recognized, to be...

Who is he? Who is this man on this bus? What has happened to him? Where is he going? What will become of him?

Perhaps...

Perhaps the man – let's call him Artur - is about forty years old. He is married but his wife has left him. He is a father but his sons have sided with their mother. They too have left him. They now live in Krakow near the Wawel, just around the corner from where the Jewish Ghetto once stood. He now lives alone. Alone with his spirits. He is on the bus. The bus is taking him home. He has been in Krakow for the day visiting his children. It's difficult. Always difficult. His own children treat him like a stranger; to his wife – once his lover – he is a leper.

The spirits. Always the spirits. The doctor has warned him to lay off but he can't. The doctor has told him that his liver is corroding like a piece of rusting metal. But he can't stop. Spirit fights spirits; that's the only way he knows, that's the only way he sleeps, that's the only way to bring this to an end – this tragedy called life.

His face is red, blotched with veins and tears of blood. His nose is becoming bulbous like a boxer's but not broken, not smashed from without, but mashed from within. He looks at his hands, they have begun to shake. Once, strong as oxen but now he cannot control them, they have started to dance to another's tune. So young, yet already so old. A life unlived, a life – dare I say this – going up in smoke. He craves for a cigarette, for a dose of nicotine but the bus, the bus to Auschwitz, is a smoke-free, ash-free zone and he can't afford the fine.

Does he ask: Why? Why me?

He turns his gaze, beckoned by some unknown force. Out of the window he sees a Jew. A simple Jew. Amidst the crowds of running people there's a single Jew, just standing there, looking a bit lost, a bit bewildered, out of place, out of time. A single Jew, a kipa covering his partially bald head. A Jew; a little lost. A wandering Jew wondering where he is, where he's going. Take my place, Arthur thinks; Arthur prays: take my place and see where I'm going, to a place where there are more of you than any place else. His bloodshot eyes are pleading.

It wasn't my fault, he had told his children, he had told his wife, he had told himself: destiny is destiny. His father had burnt them, now he is doomed to protect their ashes. As a guard working at the crematoria keeping the sightseers in order: "Keep moving. Don't touch. Keep moving."

The crowds pour on the buses. No one is forcing them; no guards pushing them; no dogs snarling at them; no commandant fooling them; no cattle cars crammed tight with them; no dead bodies ejected from them; no fear of the unknown beckoning them. Just people, ordinary people, wanting to go home.

The buses pull away. Just the Jew remains.

I turn and make my way back to the hotel.

Michael Kagan

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## **Minia Jay**

By Denise Kienwald

### **My mother Minia Jay was born 1.5.1925 in Warta Poland.**

In 1940 she was taken to the Warta ghetto and made to carry out slave labour helping to make Nazi uniforms. In 1942 she was taken to the Lodz. In 1944 she was taken to Auschwitz Birkenau to the Oederan Chemnitz in East Germany and finally Theresientadt where she extremely ill with TB in Hopital. She was liberated at Terezin 8 May 1945.

She was brought to England in August 1945 and stayed in Winderemere before going to a sanatorium in Ashford Kent. She went to London after meeting Sam Heinrich from her home town of Warta who had come searching for a survivor of her family. He and his wife taught her corsetry and she was able to earn money making altering ladies undergarments. She met her husband to be Kurt Wassing, married and brought up her two children Denise and Michael. She later married Peter Jay. Her sister Hela was her sole surviving sibling and close family member.



# **I WAS THERE I SURVIVED 6 MILLION DIDN'T THE HOLOCAUST**

By Sam Gontarz

It's like a never ending horrible nightmare. It's been with me since the end of world two in 1945.

I was born in Lodz Poland in 1929. We lived in Ul. Kamienna 16. My name is Szmulek known as Sam Gontarz. I had a brother called Srulek, he was four years older than me, a sister called Sala she was two years older than me. We were a very poor working Family even on Poland standard at that time, but we were a happy Family. We kids had almost everything even what our parents couldn't afford, and it meant them going without, and deprive themselves of the bare necessities

## **THE WAR. 1ST, SEPTEMBER 1939**

It was like any other day Friday the 1st of September 1939. I was 10 years old at the time. I can remember it, as if it was today. The sun was shining, there wasn't a cloud in the sky it was like a mid summer's day. I was at school. At 11am in the middle of our lessons we heard the sirens followed by Aeroplanes and the occasional bombs dropping, it just sounded as if it was next door to our school playground, .We knew then the War that everyone has been talking about has began. We were immediately told by our teachers to leave school and hurry home.

When I arrived home the whole of my family had already been waiting for me, we were told to go up to our apartments and stay in doors. We could see the fear and worry in our parent's eyes , our parents explained to us what would happen to us Jews if and when [Hitler's](#) Germany invades Poland. It sounded very frightening which unfortunately came true.

For the next few days the bombardment became more intensified, at times it sounded as if it was next door. Food became very scarce. We had to stand in line for hours to buy a loaf of bread. I remember once queuing for hours and every time I got near the shop I was pulled out of the queue and told, you Jews have to wait until we have been served, by the time I got near the front again they sold out of bread and I went home with out. I was 10 years old at the time..

Seven days later the worst did happen, Germany invaded Poland and Lodz fell on September 7th, 1939. It didn't take long before it became incorporated in to the third reich and the Nazis changed its name to Litzmannstadt named after a German General who died while attempting to conquer Lodz in world war one.

Although we feared the worse, we could never have imagined at the time, that it could have turnedout as bad and frightening as it was.

The apartment Block we lived in was owned jointly by a Jew and so called a (Folks Deutcher) meaning a German living in Poland, He used to come every Friday to collect the rent and wish us a happy Shabbat, on the Jewish holidays he would come in wish us a happy Yom tov, (holiday) on Passover he would come for his Matzo and wish us a happy Passover, very friendly.

When the Jewish men fled from Lodz towards Warsaw he fled with them, we thought he was in sympathy with the Jewish people, but to our amazement several days later he, and several other Gestapo's on motorbikes dressed in Gestapo uniforms with swastika armbands, Guns, drove in to our yard and through a loudspeaker shouted ale Juden raus (all Jews out). Our apartment block was occupied only by Jewish people anyway. They gave us two hours to collect our belongings, only what we could carry with us, and vacate our apartment's. A complete different person to what he appeared to have been before the War. What became of his Jewish partner we never knew

We moved in with my Mothers Sister, Aunty Sipora, who lived in the next street UL Kilinskiego. They had a two-room apartment with a Family of 5, we were also 5 but somehow with difficulty we managed to squeeze in. As cramped, and as little food there was, by sharing it, we managed to survive from day to day.

My Mother and Aunty Sipora tried to keep the Apartment as clean and tidy as possible under the circumstances. Whatever little food was brought in to the apartment we shared it out equally.

One time I remember, walking down the street trying to find some shops to buy bread, and every time I joined a queue I was being pooled out because of being Jewish.

Another time I remember, for no reason what so ever the Gestapo raided our Apartment block, asked everyone to line up in the yard where my Aunty lived, and picked out a dozen or so people, men, women and children, old people and shot them. The screams could be heard in the next street. Everybody was frightened and we all run to hide, but where to? There was nowhere to hide.

At the bottom of the yard there was a small room where the very orthodox Jews assembled for the morning prayer's it was called a (Stible), one morning about 20 or so soldiers equipped with heavy guns raided the praying room shot them all, and set fire to all the prayer books, Bibles and all religious items. All they were guilty of was, to conduct a religious morning service.

The next several months were marked by daily round-ups of Jews for forced labour, as well as random beatings, hanging in the main square of Plac Wolnoszczi, and killings in the street of Lodz.

It was easy to distinguish between Pole & Jew because on November 16th, 1939 the Nazi's had ordered all Jews to wear an armband with a yellow star of David on the arm, and one on the front of the lapel. Any Jew caught not wearing it was immediately shot.

My brother along with some of his friends tried to escape towards the Russian border, but

were caught and put in to a forced labour camp, luckily at the time he still managed to escape and returned home, we had to hide him from the daily routine raids by the Gestapo.

Towards the end of 1939 The Germans imposed a curfew after dark for Jews. Any Jew found walking after curfew was immediately shot. Jews were not allowed to go to school or, Synagogues or any place of worship. Synagogues were closed or burned. All religious books and Bibles were also burned. From then on it was hell on earth. It went from bad to worse day by day.

One day I remember about 10 soldiers came in to the yard and picked on religious Jewish men with beards, kicking them, burning their beards, and then stabbed them with their bayonets and after they amused themselves, they shot them and laughed their heads off.

Some mornings the German Police arrived in large trucks accompanied by many SS with guns, rifles and machine guns, dogs, rounding up Jewish men and boys from the streets, young and old and if there weren't enough in the streets to fill the trucks they came in to the apartment's and dragged them out, throwing them in to the trucks and drove them away to forced labour, we never saw them ever again.

On other occasion's I witnessed soldiers picking on some religious men and boys, tying their hands behind their back, and using them as punch bags as if they were training for boxing match. After they amused themselves they shot them, and laughed. These atrocities carried on from day to day, from week to week, until early 1940 when the Lodz Ghetto was established.

Slowly we became conditioned to this way of life, and lived like Zombies from day to day, that was the only way to survive.

In February 1940 the German chief of Police in Lodz issued an order listing the streets where the Ghetto was to be formed. The area was called Baluty. Baluty was the most dilapidated-and roughest part of Lodz.

At the beginning of the war; Lodz had a Jewish population of 220,000, approximately one third of the total population at the time. When the Ghetto was established only 150.0000 were left, the rest had been taken away for slave labour or killed by the Nazis.

#### CHAIM RUMKOWSKI - THE ELDEST OF THE JUDEN IN GHETTO.

To organize and implement the Nazi policy within the Ghetto, the Nazis chose a Jew named Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski . At the time Rumkowski was appointed Judeneltester (Elder of the Jews) he was 60 years old, very distinguish looking with white hair,round face and pop belly. He had various jobs before the war, including Insurance Agent,Factory Manager, and director of a Jewish orphanage and was a very respectable prominent person in the Jewish community.

With 150.000 people confined to a very small area that had no farmland, food quickly became a major problem. Since the Nazis insisted on having the Ghetto pay for it's own upkeep, money was needed but how could Jews who were locked away from the rest of society and

who have been stripped of all valuables have enough money for food and housing. Rumkowski believed that if the Ghetto became a useful workforce, then we would be needed by the Nazis and thus, the Nazis would make sure that the Ghetto received enough food. So we thought.!

In April 1940 Chaim Rumkowski, even before the sealing of the Ghetto area, proposed that a system of labour for Jews in the Ghetto, could pay for the upkeep of the Ghetto. Rumkowski believed labour will be the key to the Ghetto's survival: He theretofore proposed to organize a workforce for the German Authorities

When we arrived in the Ghetto, we were allocated a small one room apartment, in the middle of the Ghetto, in Ul. Vavelska 5, for our Family of 5 we could hardly turn around but, the only good thing about it was that our family was still together.

My Father got a job in the building trade, which took him out of the Ghetto every morning by German Truck, and brought him back in the evening. My Mother was allocated a job in the local laundry, she worked from 7am to 9pm 6 days a week.

My Sister Sala was sent to the local Hospital, to do the cleaning in the ward she also worked 12 hours a day 7 days a week. My brother Srulek and I were sent to a leather-work Factory called Satler which made saddles and harnesses for horses, that was used by the German military. At mid day we were given a watery soup and a piece of black bread which could be swallowed in one go, that was our lunch.

The first few weeks in the Ghetto was still bearable, but it soon changed in to a living Hell on earth. On the 30th of April 1940 the German Authorities ordered the sealing of the Ghetto. The Ghetto was separated from the rest of the City by barbed wire fencing, and tower post's like a prison manned by German Soldiers with Machine Guns pointing towards inside of the Ghetto at all times. Hard labour overcrowding, hunger, and starvation dominated Ghetto life. I remember on one occasion after working only a few weeks in Satler I took a small piece of leather to mend the bottom sole of my shoes I was stopped and searched on the way out. I was given 20 lashes on my backside with a leather strap by the Gestapo, and was deprived of my midday lunch for 4 weeks, that was the only meal we were given for the entire day at work.

During the high holidays in September 1941 the news hit us that 20.000 Jews from other areas from the third Reich, namely Germany, Austria, and Luxembourg, were being transferred to Lodz Ghetto. Shock swept through the Ghetto. How could a Ghetto that couldn't even feed its own population absorb 20.000 more people? The decision had already been made by the Nazi official's and the transport arrived in October.

The newcomers were shocked at the conditions in Lodz Ghetto. They didn't believe that their own fate could ever mingle with us, because the newcomer had not felt hunger yet. Fresh off the trains the newcomers had shoes, clothes, and most importantly, reserves of food. The newcomers were dropped in to a completely different world. Where we have lived there already for 2 years with hunger, hardship and deprivation of normal life, but most of the newcomers could not adjust to the Ghetto life, many of them died very quickly.

In December 1941 the SS established the Chelmno extermination Camp. It's not far from Lodz. At Chelmno, the Nazis killed Jews from Lodz Ghetto and other nearby small Villages, and Towns. They had Gas Vans stationed at the side and were told they would be going to a labour camp, they gassed them with carbon monoxide. At a later date they took several thousand children out of Lodz Ghetto and killed them the same way. There was nothing That Chaim Rumkowski could have done.

On January 1942 The Nazis began the first large scale deportation's from Lodz Ghetto to the Chelmno extermination camp. Between mid January and the end of January over 12.000 Jews were deported to Chelmno extermination camp from Lodz Ghetto, over the next 5 month almost 60.000 Jews and 5.000 Roma (Gypsies) were deported and killed in Chelmno.

In April 1942 my Father took very ill and died of typhus, he was buried in the Jewish cemetery in a mass grave. I was 12 years old at the time.

In May 1942 the SS and the German Police began deporting the surviving newcomers from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Luxenbourg who have been interned in the Ghetto since October 1941, to Chelmno extermination camp Between September 1941 and the end of June 1943 some 3.00.000 Jews were Gassed in Chelmno Sometime in July 1943 we were told that the German's had liquidated the Camp.

One day in July 1942 the SS together with the German Police arrived in about 10 Trucks drove in to our Yard and demanded all children, infants under 5 years old to be handed over to them. Everybody was trying to hide their children but, where to? The police forced their way in to the apartment's picked up the children and infants through them out of the windows in to the trucks below, as if they were rags. When the Mothers resisted and cried they shot them on sight. We were all screaming and crying , but the Nazis were laughing their heads of, and enjoying themselves

Later in 1942 the Gestapo came in to the Ghetto, picked up 18 orthodox men with beards mainly middle age, hung them in the middle of the square, we were forced to watch. They were accused of plotting an uprising in the Ghetto. Now! We all know if there was any plotting for an uprising, it wouldn't have been organised by orthodox religious Jews. There were many more hangings on the main square since then and we were forced to watch.

In September 1942 German forces came in to the Ghetto and rounded-up patients from the Hospitals for deportation to extermination camps, A few days later a general ban on all movement was imposed along with a curfew , a second deportation was to take place targeting the ill, elderly and children under 10 years of age. I was 13 at the time. Lucky me, thank God.

RUMKOWSKI'S SPEECH SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1942.

The speech was as follows:

*“BROTHERS & SISTERS. The Ghetto has been struck a hard blow. They, the Germans demand what is most dear to us all, they want our children and our old people In my old age I am forced to stretch out my hands and beg you Brothers and Sisters give them to me, Fathers and Mothers, give me your children.*

*(Bitter weeping shakes - assembled the public).*

*Yesterday in the course of the day, I was given the order by the German authorities to send away more than 20.000 of our people from the Ghetto, and if we didn't-" they will do it themselves" that what they said. The question arose; "Should we accept and carry it out ourselves, or leave it to the Germans?*

*But as we were guided not by our thought:" but how many will be lost" but how many can be saved" we arrived at the conclusion – with those close to me at work, that is in myself that however difficult it was going to be, we must take upon ourselves the carrying out of this decree. I must carry out this difficult and bloody operation, I must cut off limbs in order to save the body! I must take away children, and if I don't others too will be taken, "God forbid.!*

*I cannot give you comfort to day. Nor did I come to calm you today ., but to reveal all your pain and all your sorrow . I have come like a robber, to take from what is dearest to your heart. I tried everything I knew to get the bitter sentence cancelled . When it couldn't be cancelled , I tried to lessen the sentence by one year. Only yesterday I ordered the registration of 9 year old to 10 year old I wanted to save at least one year. Let that be our consolation in our great sorrow.*

*There are many people in the Ghetto who suffer from tuberculosis, whose days or perhaps weeks are numbered. I don't know. Perhaps this is a satanic plan , and perhaps not, but I cannot stop myself from proposing it: " Give me this sick people, and perhaps it will be possible to save the healthy in their place." I know how precious each one of the sick is in his home, and particularly among our Jews. But at time of such decrees one must weigh up the situation, who should be saved, who can be saved, and who may be saved. Common sense requires us to know that those must be saved who can be saved, and who have a chance to survive, and not those whom there is no chance to save any way." End Of Rumkowski's Speech*

After listening to his speech, everyone in the Ghetto were stunned and speechless . Like everybody became deaf and dumb! A silence befell on all of us, a feeling that hadn't been felt since the establishment of the Ghetto.

## THE REALITY

On September 5th, the situation became clearer, and the frightening whisper of the past days became a terrifying reality. The evacuation of children and old people took on the shape of reality. Small pieces of paper on the walls in the busy parts of the Ghetto announced an address by President Rumkowski in an urgent matter. A huge crowd gathered in Fire brigade square.

The people were trying to console themselves in the square, saying The "Jewish Elder" Chaim Rumkowski will reveal the truth in the rumours. For it concerns the young for whom he had great love, and the aged, for whom he has great respect.

Friday 3-0clock in the afternoon. The President of the Ghetto is speaking,his voice fails him, the words stick in his throat .His personal appearance also mirrors the tragedy, one thing was understood by everybody: 20.000 people must leave the Ghetto, children under 10 and old people over 65.

Everybody was convinced that those selected for deportation would certainly be exterminated People run here and there, crazed by the desire to hide their beloved victims. But nobody knew who would direct the "Action" the Jewish Police? The Gestapo in The Ghetto? Or a mobile Unite of the SS? The President, in the coordination with German

authorities?. (Biebow) who was in charge of the administration of the Ghetto from the outside decided in his area of responsibility to carry out the deportation with his own forces and the Jewish Police. It was then to be expected that parents would try to make changes and corrections to the ages of their children.

An unprecedented rush began to the Registration office. At Number 4 Church Square , the official's tried to manage the situation, they worked without stopping, day and night. The pressure of the people at the Office window increased all the time. The Parents yelled, wept and went wild. Every second could bring the death sentence to their beloved children.

On Sunday, the Gestapo began on the operation, without paying any attention to the feverish work of the registration that had been going on at number 4 church Square. The infant's and little children who were loaded on the Carts by the Gestapo behaved quietly, in submission and some were crying.

The older children 10 years of age, were already matured and familiar with this conditions and, poverty, suffering, hunger, and deprivation. Their Parents were going out of their mind, screaming, and tearing their hair from their heads in despair. It was difficult to persuade them to give up their children and the old people who were hiding in the smallest and most hidden corners in the Ghetto. On Sunday Rumkowski imposed a general curfew which came in to force at 5 PM anyone who broke it was threatened with deportation.

No one really knew why the Nazis have chosen Chaim Rumkowski as the Eldest of the Jews of the Ghetto. Was it because he seemed, like he would help the Nazis achieve their aims by organizing a Jewish workforce in the Ghetto, to work for the Germans? Or did he just want them to think this, so that he could try to save his people? Or did he just want to save his own life? Rumkowski was shrouded in controversy-. Did he help the Nazis murder his people, or did he save lives? Who knows?

For work we did, the Nazis delivered food to the Ghetto. The food entered the Ghetto in bulk. And was then confiscated by Rumkowski's official's. Rumkowski had taken over all the food distribution.

For survival in the Ghetto, dependency on food was essential. The quality and quantity off the food was less than minimal, there were large portions of food being completely spoiled and wasted before distribution to the people. When potato's and other vegetables arrived in the middle of winter, they were dumped in open fields until they were frozen and rotten and unfit for human consumption. Why? (That was the big question).

The amount of food given to each individual depended upon the work we did. Certain factory jobs got a bit more than others. But office workers received the most. An average factory worker received one bowl of soup mostly water,if you were fortunated enough to find a couple of barley beans flouting in it you were lucky. The usual ration of one small loaf of bread for 5 days was later changed to last 7 days, with a small amount of vegetables, This amount and quality off food starved people in the Ghetto. There were dozens of corpses lying in the streets from starvation every day.

As the people in the Ghetto really started feeling hunger, we became increasingly suspicious

of Rumkowski and his Officials. Many rumours floated around blaming Rumkowski for the lack of food, saying that he dumped good food on purpose. The fact that each month even each day we became thinner and increasingly afflicted with dysentery, tuberculosis and typhus while Rumkowski and his officials seemed to fatten and remained healthy just spurred our suspicions. Rage and anger was felt by the population of the Ghetto and blaming Rumkowski for part of our troubles.

My Mother, Brother, and Sister, and I were just about holding out, our secret of survival was to share whatever we had in food, clothing, and spirit.

## JUNE 1944 THE LIQUIDATION OF LODZ GHETTO

On June 1944, Heinrich Himmler ordered the liquidation of Lodz Ghetto. The Nazis told Rumkowski that workers were needed in Germany to repair the damages caused by the air raids.

The first transport was to leave at the end of June, with many others to follow. On July 15th, 1944 the transports halted. The decision had been made to clean up Chelmno because the Soviet troops were getting close. We knew then that the remaining transport would be sent to Auschwitz. Perhaps we knew it all along but we didn't want to believe it.

Our Family was with the last transport to leave the Ghetto. I was 15 years old at the time. We were only allowed to take what we physically could carry with us. It didn't really matter much for we didn't have much of any value anyway, except a few personal things from our real home, that would have meant a lot to my Mother for sentimental reasons.

I remember marching from our apartment Wawelska Nr. 5, to Radegast station, but I can't remember what I was really thinking about. Was I thinking we may survive till the next day maybe not? Maybe I didn't think any more. We marched like the sheep following the flock. When we got to the railway station, there were cries, screams, and shouting, some were pushing each other to get in to the cattle wagons first, some were holding back thinking there won't be any room for them and maybe they will go back to their apartments in the Ghetto. But the SS made sure there wouldn't be anybody left outside the Wagons. They pushed us in like the cattle. Locking us in from the outside, and leaving us there for hours to choke in the extreme summer heat without any air or water, before moving.

## ARRIVAL IN BIRKENAU.

After several days travelling in the cattle wagons, we were so cramped we were lying on top of each other, people were shouting help me, help me, we were in no condition to help each other when the shouting stopped we assumed they were dead. We finally stopped in the middle of the night. We didn't know where it was at the time. After the doors opened, we could hear shouting in German Alle Raus (everybody out). As we got out and waited until the Capos and the Sonder commander carried out all the dead from the cattle wagon's, and then we were torn apart from our Family's. My Mother, Sister, Brother and I tried to hold each other's hands to keep together but that didn't last long. The next command came from the SS, men to one side, women to the other side. You are now in Birkenau and this is your labour Camp. The SS had to tear us apart for no family wanted to split up. There were cries,



screams, we were begging to allow us to go together, but nothing helped, nobody wanted to risk being shot, we were hoping and thought maybe we will meet up soon and be together again., we all wanted to survive. The will to survive helped, us to keep alive.

I was allowed to go with my Brother Srulek although he was 4 years older than me. My Mother and my Sister Sala also went together on to the other side. The bit of belongings we had with us was confiscated and they marched us to the main Camp, Birkenau. My Mother and Sister were taken to the women's Camp in Birkenau, I never saw them again.

When we arrived at the main Camp in Birkenau it was early in the morning, I was crying. I remember looking around at the Barracks, I said to my Brother we will never survive here, he tried to console me, and give me hope. He said don't worry, we will survive, it won't be long will be liberated you will see, and will all be together again with Mam and Sala. I didn't really believe that he meant it, it was just to cheer me up. Well I was a lot younger than him I believed him and that kept me going. We were allocated space on the floor in one of the barracks, there were no bunk beds, we were lying like herrings stuck together, there was an elevated gangway in the middle of the barrack and people were lying on both sides of the gangway like herrings. I remember two Capos walking the gangway shouting out loud in Yiddish, You know you are here to die, anybody with gold teeth in your mouth must report to us straight away, before the Germans found out – nobody owned up

The following day we got up for the Appel (that's where they count the inmates to see how many died or perhaps escaped). Then we stayed in line for our piece of bread. When I say a piece I mean a piece small enough to swallow in one go. My Brother offered me half of his, thinking that I needed it more than he did, I wouldn't take it. Then they assembled us and shaved our hair off.

There was nothing to do in the camp, it was more like a quarantine before we were sent to Auschwitz or any other Camp, or crematorium. The days seemed like weeks, months, never ending. We were cold, hungry, and damp. Some people fell asleep in a corner never to wake up again, there were times I felt like doing the same.

This carried on for several weeks, until they decided which camp to send us to. Had it not been for my brother's help looking after me, I certainly would not have survived. The conditions in Birkenau were unbearable, although it was summer, but it was cold, damp, muddy, where ever we went. We didn't have any reasonable clothes on our backs, no proper shoes on our feet, but we kept hoping for tomorrow, the liberation.

Then came my worst shock and nightmare yet. The Germans selected groups of young men to be transported to a camp called Gleiwitz for certain type of work, they picked my Brother, I was too young I pleaded with them, cried, begged, my Brother wouldn't let go of my hand and he begged and pleaded with them to let me go with him, but they dragged him away from me. I was left all on my own. It felt like I have been dumped in the middle of the ocean, without a life Jacket, and not being able to swim. I never saw him again. How I survived that morning I shall never know.

That afternoon we were ordered to line up to be tattooed on our left arm. I got my number B7965 and I then realized that I will be transported to the main camp of Auschwitz, which

wasn't far from Birkenau. We heard what was happening in Auschwitz about the gassing in the crematoriums, We saw the smoke from the chimneys smelled the stench, but there wasn't anything we could do and we didn't really care anymore. Life wasn't precious anymore, there was nothing to live for anyway. All my Family had gone, dying would have been a blessing.

## ARRIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ

By August 1944, the Lodz Ghetto has been liquidated. Though a few remaining workers were retained by the Nazis to finish confiscating some materials and valuables out of the Ghetto, everyone else had been deported. Even Rumkowski Chaim and his Family were deported with the last transport to Auschwitz.

It was sometime towards the end of August 1944 when I arrived in Auschwitz, Rumkowski together with his family arrived at the same time. Gertler who was in opposition to Rumkowski in the Ghetto, had arrived much earlier and established himself as a Capo. I think he was waiting for Rumkowski to arrive in order to take revenge, for they didn't get on in the Ghetto. Gertler never agreed with the policies carried out by Rumkowski inside the Ghetto. He wanted to know if any of us had any complains or a grudge against him for his conduct in the Ghetto. I am sure there were many people who spoke out. I know that Rumkowski and his Family didn't survive for long in Auschwitz. So with all his corporation with the Germans Authorities in the Ghetto , he couldn't even save his own life, I don't think any of us shed a tear.

I was sent to a (so called) Kinder Block with mostly children of my own age group. I was allocated a bunk bed in the middle of three high. The first seven days or so, we weren't ordered to do anything. In the mornings we had to get up very early to go out for the Appel , that's where we were counted. We lined up in front of the barracks for inspection. The SS walked along with a big stick when he looked and pointed at you, you had to step out, that means you are going to the Gas chambers. Every time he passes you, and looked at you, you think he is going to pull you out, that's when you wet yourself. This was repeated every morning.

The food was the usual small piece of bread and black coffee in the morning, a watered down soup at midday and another piece of bread with margarine at supper time. Very much like in Birkenau. For no reason what so ever, the Capos kept walking from one end to the other of the barrack , and kept beating us with their sticks, until we screamed. Most of the Capos in Auschwitz were either Poles or Germans. They were there for political or criminal reasons, To signify why they were there, they wore triangle's on their lapels, red, political, green, sabotage, black for murder.

After several days I was sent to work outside the the Camp accompanied by SS. My Job was to clean up round the electric wire fencing. After a week or so I started work in a Maurer Schule (to learn brick laying) we had to build a wall and next day demolish it, that wasn't really too bad, although the way the Capos treated us in a very brutal and indescribable cruel way. We learned later, the reason behind it was that some German high up official didn't fancy going to the Army, to fight on the Russian front, so he was given this Job as a get out. Whether it was true or not we never knew.

Every morning after the Appel and counting the inmates, the Germans did their selection of inmates and marched them to the Crematorium. No one ever knew when our turn will be, we tried not to think about it, it would have only made us feel worse, and demoralized us even more. The conditions deteriorated day by day, until we could hardly stand up for the Appel we were so weak and thin just skin and bone, many just fell and were shot. In mid-December 1944 as the Red Army approached Auschwitz the Germans started to transport us to other concentration camps.

Auschwitz was liberated by the Red Army on the 27th of January 1945

## THE TRANSPORT FROM AUSCHWITZ TO MELK IN AUSTRIA

The march from Auschwitz in early January 1945. We walked for days in the bitter cold, it was 20-25 below zero. People died like the flies. The easiest way out, was to step out of line and you were immediately shot. Many did, what a blessing it would have been at the time. We kept consoling each other, by believing that the liberation is near, and that kept our hopes up and it certainly helped us to survive. As we were walking five in a row we held each others hands and if one of us weakened and was near falling we tried to help him by keeping him up, but that didn't always work because if the guards noticed that we were dragging him, they pulled him out and shot him straight away and threw him in to the ditch. After several days walking we arrived in some old Railway station, and boarded the awaiting cattle wagons, similar to those we left from Lodz Ghetto. We were locked in, until we arrived in a place called Melk. We have never heard of this place before. The conditions in the closed cattle wagons were unbearable, less than half of us survived. Some people just gave up and took the easy way out.

When we arrived in the Camp in Melk, the usual greetings befell us. The Capos were waiting for us with their usual hostile welcome. We had to get undressed completely, outside in the freezing cold, and we were shown in to the shower rooms for what they call delousing, after the shower we were given just a vest to put on, no shoes, we had to stand bare foot in freezing conditions until we were counted. Some froze to death and were carried away in trucks.

We didn't work in Melk, we didn't know what was going to happen to us, or how long we were going to be there, there wasn't anybody that we could ask or would be willing to enlighten us, The Germans were only interested in beating us every time they needed some exercise.

For the few weeks we were there the conditions were appalling. Some days there was nothing to eat and we became weaker, and weaker day by day and many died.

## LEAVING MELK FOR MATHAUSEN IN AUSTRIA

I am not sure the date we left Melk it might have been early February 1945. We walked to the Station and once again packed in to the cattle wagons, locked in and off we went. I am not sure how long it took us, it would have been several days, because they stopped in several places to feed us. The Germans had a mobile canteen units, every time they stopped there were less people to feed and more dead bodies to be carried out.

We finally arrived at Mathausen. I remember it was very early in the morning, the doors opened and we were ordered out of the cattle trucks (alle Raus) everybody out to follow the Soldiers. The temperature must have been 20 degrees below zero, the roads were covered in in hard packed ice, we had very little warm clothes on our backs, old torn shoes with holes at the bottom of the soles we were freezing to death. The soldiers were dressed in fur coats and big heavy boots. The Camp in Mathausen was half way up a mountain, to climb it in our condition starved, and frozen it took some effort. Not surprising that out of several thousand who left Auschwitz, only several hundred of us arrived in Mathausen.

When we finally arrived in the Camp the usual greetings from the SS, you are now in Mathausen labour Camp. We stayed in line till we were counted again. We were then sent down to a basement for showers and delousing. After we had dried off they gave us a vest and marched us out in the freezing cold to count us again. I could never understand why they had to count, and count us again, and again, because no one could escape. The missing ones were dead.

We were then sent to a barrack packed in like in a barrel of herrings, there was hardly any room to turn around, and that was how we had to spend the first night in Mathausen.

When I think about it now I still can't understand what made us want to endure such suffering, and deprivation of mankind, when each one of us could have taken the easy way out and give up. I don't know how I slept that night, was I standing up, laying on somebody to keep warm, or somebody laying on top of me?, What did it matter anyway. I woke up in the morning with the hellish nightmare continuing as the days gone by. The main reason I wanted to survive was to live and be able to tell the story to the world.

The overall conditions in Mathausen were much worse than Auschwitz or any other Camp I have been in before. The only way to keep warm in the Barracks was to group together and rely on each other's body heat. The following day after The Appel (the count) outside the Barracks, we received a hot soup and a piece of black bread

Mathausen was the only Concentration camp classified as "stage 3" it became one of the most dreaded camp. In the initial stages of the Camp, we were confronted with utterly inhuman conditions, no sleeping places, no sanitation and starving of hunger.

After several days I was sent to work in a quarry below the mountains, we were wheeling and pushing wheel barrows of stones that had been quarried. We never knew what they were used for. I was 15 years old at the time. The working conditions were appalling, harassment, brutalisation, terror, punishment, hunger, and disease.

Killings in Mathausen took place in various ways, the SS beat prisoners to death, hanged them, shot them, administered heart injections, poisoned them with gas, and let sick prisoners or those unfit to work simply freeze to death. To survive, we had to rely on a miracle. I was in Mathausen until April 1945. As the Allies approached towards us we then marched for many days to a new place unknown to us at the time. Even now after 60 years I still can't believe or imagine, how a people, could have inflicted such inhuman and appalling suffering on men, women, and children just because we were Jewish.

## THE FINAL DESTINATION WELLS NR. LINZ IN AUSTRIA

We walked for days until we arrived at a place called Wells near Linz in Austria. We didn't know it at the time, but that was supposed to be Hitler's birth place Linz in Austria. On arrival in Wells we entered a large Forest, we thought that would be just a temporary resting place and we would continue the next day: We didn't see any buildings, barracks or any hut's to make us think that we will be staying there. As we kept on walking further in to the forest we noticed this massive hut, and some out buildings which looked like it might have been used for stables or a Farm it was full of hay.

We were ordered to enter this hut and that would be our living accommodation for the time being. As I approached near the hut, I didn't fancy it, people were pushing in, climbing on top of one another, I felt, if I go in there I would never come out alive, I would be crushed or suffocated.

Although it was early spring, it was cold, damp, and miserable. My friend Genek and I decided that we will take our chances outside under a tree and shelter there. Thank God for we did the right thing. The next morning only about half of the people from inside of the hut, had survived, most of them died, being crushed piled up on top of on another to keep warm. We were there for two weeks or so, I think the guards new that it was getting towards the end of the war, by then we were too weak to even escape, or if we could ! Where to? How?.

The Germans brought a portable kitchen unit, placed it near the hut, provided us with coffee and a piece of bread in the morning, a soup at midday, and coffee a piece of bread with some margarine in the evening.

As the American forces approached towards the camp, we could see and hear aeroplanes and the occasional bombing, and loud Guns. Although we realised then, that something is happening, but we couldn't believe our luck. We were hoping that this would be the real thing, that we are being liberated at last.

But what we didn't realise or didn't know at the time that during the last few days, the midday soup we were given was poisoned. We could see that so many of us were dying so quickly but we didn't know why.

As the Americans approached towards us, the German Guards got the order to abandon us and flee the camp. They didn't have time to take us anywhere, so they thought the quickest way to get rid of us would be by poisoning us. The daily soup was contaminated with slow poison so we shouldn't notice. Well they certainly succeeded, for the majority of prisoners died, Only about 270 of us survived out of several thousand that had entered the forest in Wells.

All I remember and can recall the last day seeing the Guards leave, hearing heavy Guns sounding nearer, and nearer, after that I too – passed out from poisoning and became unconscious .The next thing I knew when I woke up, I was in hospital being treated by the American uniformed nurses, Had the American's come one day later, I too might not have survived. It was then, that I learned it was the 8th, of May.

Since the end of the war, I have only met one other survivor from Wells, his name is Benny Rosenfield who used to live in Manchester. He now resides in The U.S. And three of my friends including Genek who are now living in Israel.

My Sister Sala did survive the Camps in Bergenbelzen, and we spent some time together in Feldafing D.P. Camp in Germany, while awaiting Alia to go to Palestine. Unfortunately, she was killed in an automobile accident in October 1945 in Feldafing displace-persons Camp, she died with two of her best friends who had survived the Camp with, she was 18 years old at the time. I still visit her Grave every year at least once. My Brother Srulek, was shot trying to escape while they were marching out from Gleiwitz just before the liberation. I didn't know that until I came to England and met Mendel Biel who lived in Manchester. He knew my brother from Lodz and was with him together in Gliewitz, who witnessed his death.

My Mother Ruchla never survived Auschwitz , she died there with the six Million martyrs, may she rest in peace.

In 1947 I came to England and settled in Manchester, In 1958 I got married to Sheila. We have two boys Adrian who was born in 1965, and Robbie who was born in 1971. we have now 4 Grandchildren.

I did try to locate my father's grave when I went back to Lodz in 1991, but was unable to pinpoint the grave or location, because he was buried in a mass Grave which was half in the Ghetto and half outside. Although the authorities at the Jewish Cemetery tried to be as helpful as possible to locate the grave, but there wasn't any dates recorded or location, with any names. It could have been anywhere.

Not having been to my Father's, Mother's, and Brother's funeral. I stood there thinking this could be the nearest I will ever get to finally say goodbye to them.

I stood there and cried,! and cried,! and cried,! as if all the pain I had been holding in for all these years, was being realised at last.

THIS IS MY PERSONAL STORY AND SURVIVAL OF THE HOLOCAUST. WE MUST NEVER FORGET

SAM GONTARZ

# **My return to Lodz (Litzmanstadt as it was then called) for the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the liquidation of Lodz Ghetto**

By Sam Gontarz

For the 4 days I was there, it felt like waking up from a nightmare, only to discover that it wasn't a nightmare but it really happened

On arrival in the hotel we were met by officials from the organizers of the event, who offered us information and any help we may need in connection with the commemoration.

The Mayor of Lodz Dr. Jerzy Kropiwnicki took the initiative together with the help of the very small Jewish community in Lodz in organizing this tragic, but very important event. I would like to complement them how well it was organized. Complimentary buses to all events and back were available at all times from the hotels.

The Honorary patrons were the President of Poland Alexander Kwasniewski, the Prime Minister Leszek Miller, The President of Israel Moshe Katsav, the President of Austria Thomas Klestil, the President of Yad Vashem Institutem, Avner Shaley, the Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit and many others.

Friday August 27th, we went to the concert in memory of the children of Lodz Ghetto who died from hunger, cold, starvation, and exhaustion. The concert took place at Posnajnski's factory, next to his Palace, that belonged to a Jewish family before the war namely Posnajnski. Music was by Andrzej Krauze. It was very emotional I couldn't help but cry most of the time.

Sunday August the 29th, the memorial service at the Jewish Cemetery, attended by approximately 2500 people. Speeches were, by Jehuda Vidavski one of the Ghetto survivors, Rabbi Eljezer Zyskind, and several other Rabbis who recited the prayer service, kadish and Psalm El Male Rachamim.

Later in the afternoon we walked to Radegast station, when in the year 1941-1942 the station was used as the point of arrival, for Jewish deportees from other country's to Lodz Ghetto, in 1944 Ghetto residents were transported from Radegast station to death Camps, Birkenau, Auschwitz, Mathausen, and other.

Concentration Camps from the same place. Speeches were by the Mayor of Lodz, the Prime Minister of Poland Ilan Shalgi, the Minister of science of the State of Israel Abraham Zelig, Leon Kieres, and Wladisla Bartoszewski who was the co-founder of Żegota (Polish underground) who aided Jews during the war, and several more representatives from various countries of Europe.

We sat in silence, listening to the speeches, which were very moving and emotional by all speakers. It was extremely hot. The Polish youth with brown uniforms from various youth clubs brought us bottles of cold water, for which we were very grateful, there would have been many people fainting.

The heat reminded me of 60 years ago at Radigast station walking through the same roads with my Family, being forced and bullied by the Germans with guns and dogs pushing us into the cattle wagons and closing the doors and left us roasting inside for hours.



The presence of the police was noticeable all over the City so there was no chance of any trouble. At 7.30 that evening" There was a gala concert in the great theatre in Dabrowskiego 4, the concert was by Warsaw symphony orchestra, and the Polish Krakow choir, conducted by Wojciech Michniewski. The speeches were repeated by the same speakers as at Radegast Station. In the afternoon, to conclude the concert there were three visiting cantors, from the United States, Benzion Miller, Alberto Mizrachi, Yaacove Motzen, and the choir of the great Jerusalem Synagogue. The conductor was Elli Jaffe, and the piano by Dani Gildar.

They had a big screen and loudspeakers outside the theatre for the local people to hear. The Cantor's were so powerful they drew crowds from the nearby streets by thousands, the applauding could be heard from far away. They had to come back six times for an encore. The last event of the 4 days was on Monday night, the concert in Stary Rynek, that was something different.! The whole square was fenced off with wrought iron fencing, on it they attached a thousand of Yorzite candles and lit them for us to put the names of our departed. To all of us survivors it was very emotional, it brought tears to all of us. We sat inside the square and listened and watched.

The concert started with cadish by Benzion Miller, he was dressed in a white robe with a big star of David on the front of his chest, he looked fantastic. The conductor was Josef Malowany, who conducted to an empty stage, only the instruments were displayed, leaning on very low tables, signifying the absence of the musicians (who are no longer with us) The background music was a much earlier recording of the original orchestra.

Cantor Benzion Miller recited some more chassidick songs and finished with el mallie rachamim, The crowds were going frantic with cheering; although it was raining heavily they simply wouldn't let him off the stage, he had to come back several times for an encore.

All in all, I would say that it was a very successful event well prepared and organised by the Lodz council, together with the small Jewish community.

For me it was a very mixed experience, one of sadness where I lost my Family, my youth, and as family life should have been for me. Yet I felt good walking in places now as a free man, where it had been forbidden for me to walk there as a child.

My saddest moments moments of the 4 days event were listening to the music of the children of Lodz Ghetto concert

Taking part at the remembrance in the Jewish cemetery on Sunday morning where my father God rest his soul was buried, unfortunately they couldn't locate his grave because he was buried in a communal unmarked grave.

Walking to Radegast station, in the extreme heat reminded me of 60 years ago, when I walked there with my Mother, Brother, and Sister.

And visiting the home we lived in before the war in Ul. Kamienna 16, where I was born. Only to find it's been half demolished. And visiting the home we had lived in the Ghetto, in Ulica Wawelska 5. In Baluty. Lodz

WE MUST NEVER FORGET.

SAM GONTARZ

# Holocaust Education - Training Sessions for Second/Third Generation Speakers

By Geraldine Jackson

Back in September 2016, I was intrigued to read an email from The 45 Aid Society Second Generation asking Second and Third Generation if they would like to join an initiative to tell the personal story of their Survivor parent.

At first, I thought the idea of 'guarding their legacy' was something I might want to be involved with.

I then quickly went through all the negatives of why I couldn't sign up for the training.

1. Could I really give up some of my precious Sunday mornings?
2. Wasn't the location for the workshops too far away?
3. How would I find the time to write and prepare my dad's story?
4. Would I have the confidence to stand in front of an audience and deliver something so personal and emotional?

Believe me, I thought of many more reasons! (I have always been good at coming up with excuses!)

However, the bottom line for me was... would my dad be happy with me telling his story?

I am sure he would have given me his blessing, because in his testimony for the USC Shoah Foundation he said at the end: *'These things happened to me and others and I don't want it to be forgotten'*.

When I recalled his words, my mind was made up! There was no contest! Of course, I had to sign up! Several months on, I can say that attending the workshops at Amelie House (not really far for me to travel, when some participants drove from Brighton!) has been a very positive and rewarding experience!

I would recommend it to those of you that are still wondering whether you should sign up or not. Just go for it!

I have met a very likable group of Second Generation, and can honestly say that I felt a bond when listening to them give their parent's very moving story. Even though each story is different, they have so much in common, and I found myself constantly interjecting, 'But my dad said that too!'

I think all of us in the group have found it cathartic, and it illustrates how the Second, and hopefully the Third Generation can help support each other to tell the story of our Survivor parent or grandparent.

None of this would have been possible without the hard work of Sue and Julia in organising the training sessions and providing inspiration, and constructive criticism, so that we will be well prepared to deliver our personal presentations for schools etc. Technical help, was kindly offered by Ros who completed the training team.



**The quilt square made in memory of Joseph Carver**

The stories of The Boys resonate today with the increase of anti- Semitism and the sad problem of refugees, because at the end of the day 'Knowledge is power'.

Geraldine Jackson



**Bryan Huberman presents his father Alf (Abram) Huberman's story to the Second Generation speakers workshop.**



**Second Generation speakers workshop 2016**

## **Second Generation, Learning to present our parents stories.**

By Gaynor Harris

My brother, Martin and I have just completed a series of workshops run by Sue Bermange and Julia Burton. These workshops were designed to help us, the Second Generation, to go out to schools and talk about our parents' histories.

Sue and Julia have been doing this for a few years and the demand for speakers has grown. They now need more of the Second Generation to be prepared to do these presentations.

The 6 workshops were run on a Sunday morning, on average once a month. They were invaluable, giving us tutorials on public speaking, creating power point presentations, and the value of their experiences on how to keep the stories suitable for different age groups.



**Gaynor Harris and Martin Bandel present their father Michaels Bandel's story in a Second Generation speakers workshop.**

We have delivered our presentations to each other for constructive feedback and in doing so we have all learnt so much about our fellow Second Generation members, both the differences in our parents' backgrounds, the similarities in their experiences and our shared experiences growing up with these histories. Not least we have also learnt so much more about our own parent's lives, many of whom had not shared their stories with their children in any great detail.

I urge you to consider attending the next series of tutorials that Sue and Julia will be running in September 2017. The more of us that do this, the more we can reach out across the UK to continue with the Holocaust education that is so important. We have a unique voice, we should use it.

Gaynor Harris

If you would like to register your interest in taking part in a 2nd Gen training workshop to speak in schools about your survivor parent/grandparent's Holocaust experience, please contact Sue Bermange via [team@45aid.org](mailto:team@45aid.org)



# **World Jewish Relief (WJR) may have original archives on you or your relative!**

## **How many birthdates was enough?**

By Kim Stern

The critical nature of your age was not new to most of the Survivors. Too young and you had had very little chance of survival and too old meant almost certain death. To survive had meant certain "changes" to your birthdate was necessary during the war years.

So immediately after the war, when given the chance to get into England, the fact that there was an age limit for entry would not be an insurmountable problem for most of the Boys. A certain adjustment to your birthdate could easily be made.

But just how many "birthdates" did each of the Boys have?

Mietek Szternfeld DP 241 had three!

That is what I learned when I read through the archive material on my father that WJR made available to me. But that was only a minor revelation compared to what else I discovered.

Please read the next article where Suzanne Kutner has described the extent of the information and some of the details that she received as well as the emotions that her late father's records evoked.

Over the past 12 - 18 months, WJR has been using some of their volunteer resource to collate and distribute copies of original material they compiled on the Boys from the point when they originally arrived in Britain.

It is estimated that only about 20% - 30% of the available archive records have been sent to The Boys or their immediate relatives that who have applied for copies. Unfortunately, the details of who has received material to date is incomplete.

We have agreed to work with WJR to achieve three things:

- (a) To track who has received copies of the original archive material;
- (b) To work together to promote access to and distribution of original archive material directly to the Boys or qualifying members of their immediate family;
- (c) To support the cataloguing process for the material on The Boys that is held by WJR

To achieve these aims we need your help. Please

1. If you have already received material about yourself or your family member (one of the Boys), please let us know. Contact us via [www.45aid.org](http://www.45aid.org) and let us know that you have the information.
2. If you are interested in receiving copies of the information held by WJR on your survivor relative, please contact WJR directly on [www.worldjewishrelief.org](http://www.worldjewishrelief.org) using the "Your Family History" page and then let us know how you get on via [www.45aid.org](http://www.45aid.org) . We will record your interest and make sure that we update our records on who has applied for/received information.

Kim Stern

## David Kutner Dp.134

By Suzanne Kutner

It was never difficult to talk to Dad about his new life in England after his arrival here with The Boys in August 1945. Proud of his achievement, "I learned English in nine months" and his series of jobs, lodgings and education-the paradise of Windermere, Bedford, Kent, the ORT School-I always felt comforted to think how relatively easily he had slipped into the English way of life, putting the horrors of the Holocaust behind him. Or so it seemed.

Therefore, when I heard from Kim and Judy Stern that World Jewish Relief had released archives about The Boys from 1945 onwards, I eagerly applied for information about Dad.

I wasn't sure what to expect...I certainly was not prepared for what appeared in my inbox less than a week later-six separate emails each containing an attachment of 40 documents, a total of 240 pieces of paper relating to "David Kutner DP.134".

I was overwhelmed by the quantity of information and also at times, deeply saddened and disturbed.

The intricate progress of Dad's adaptation to his new life was there on the screen...clothes bills, study reports, employment letters, accommodation, references, every bit of it recorded down to the last detail. All of this interspersed with constant psychological and medical reports.

"The boy" as Dad was frequently referred to in those documents, suffered greatly from anxiety attacks, asthma and dizzy spells to name but a few conditions. He couldn't settle and he had many personal difficulties, often with some of the other Boys themselves. I had never heard a word of all this.

Most moving of all and at times so difficult to read...Dad's bureaucratic struggle to get permission to visit his sole surviving sister in Germany who had been found by the Red Cross. Letters from Dad in that perfect English of his and written in such beautiful script reduced me to tears as I read how he fought for the right to get to her and humbly requested financial help for the passage to Munich.

Of course, in hindsight, I realize that I had created my own glorious picture of what life had been like for Dad post 1945. The archive documents from World Jewish Relief have helped me to see a different, harder story which I couldn't have imagined and I am so grateful to have all the information now.

For that reason alone I would urge any of you to contact World Jewish Relief if you haven't already done so. More than 70 years down the line it is never too late to learn and understand more about our beloved and admired Holocaust Survivors.

Suzanne Kutner



## **Antiques Roadshow – Broadcast on BBC TV – BBC1 - 15 January 2017**

By Sue Bermange

In 2016, at the end of an episode of the Antiques Roadshow, it was announced that a special programme entirely dedicated to the Holocaust was to be made to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. This was to showcase precious artefacts from the war, which, in a break from tradition, would not be valued due to their priceless nature and historical importance.

As viewers were asked to submit objects and the remarkable stories behind them, I immediately set about contacting the BBC to tell them about The Boys and the '45 Aid Memory Quilts, a project thought up and unwaveringly managed by Julia Burton to commemorate the 70th anniversary of their Liberation, unveiled at the '45 Aid Society Reunion in 2015.

Through several exchanges with the BBC Antiques Roadshow team, I introduced Julia and we told them the story of the four quilts, representing all 732 of The Boys. They asked a lot of questions. We explained that the 156 individual quilt squares each depict the story of an orphaned child survivor whose family participated in the project. The rest of the 732 names were included either on the country of origin maps or in the borders of the quilt. I suggested that the BBC could feature the memory quilts as a celebration of the lives of our orphaned loved ones who were given refuge in the UK. This would be a fitting and uplifting finale and a positive message of hope for anybody whose lives have been shattered by events such as war and displacement.

After some time, I was extremely excited to get the call from the BBC to say that we were to be included. The travelling quilts had already been exhibited at the London Jewish Museum, Beth Shalom in Nottinghamshire, the Lake District Holocaust Project in Windermere and at Manchester Menorah Synagogue as well as the Festival of Quilts in Birmingham. Now the quilts were on their way to The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a special location for a unique episode of Antiques Roadshow, presented by Fiona Bruce.

The BBC team invited us to watch the filming of the programme. The day of filming included a luncheon for survivors, hosted by the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, who partnered with the BBC for the event. The filming began with a small team of experts listening to each of the stories of survivors and discussing their precious objects.

We were the last people to be filmed in the presence of some of The Boys and their families. Julia and I stood before the magnificent quilts and were interviewed by the wonderful and empathic Paul Atterbury, who had taken the care and time to ask us behind the scenes about the quilts and our families. This made the filming much easier, as he totally understood the concept of the quilts and how they celebrated the lives of The Boys. In his words "the quilts were like a modern-day Bayeux tapestry".

It was an amazing experience for all involved, and we look forward to future platforms to tell the stories of our parents, The Boys, both through the quilts and through second and third generation talks.

First shown in the UK on BBC1 on 15 Jan 2017, you can find the programme online – it is listed as episode 13 in Series 39 of the Antiques Roadshow on the BBC Store.

*A big thank you to Philip Burton, who gave up his weekend to install the 4 huge quilts at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office before filming and then dismantle them afterwards.*

*Sue Bermange*



**Paul Atterbury, Sue Bermange and Julia Burton with the Memory Quilts on the set of the BBC Antiques Roadshow**



**Ben Helfgott pictured next to his square in the memory quilt.**



**BBC TV Crews film the memory quilt.**





**Filming took place at the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Offices in Central London**



**BBC TV Crews film the memory quilt.**



**Olive Herman and Vivienne Kendall.**





**Harry Olmer and Lili Pohlmann were among the members of The Boys who attended the filming of the BCC Antiques Roadshow**

## Leo Geddy

Leo Geddy (formerly Leopold Gedajlovic) was from Vulchovce, Czechoslovakia. He settled in London and he and his wife had 5 children. In 1961 he made a statement which has been provided by his daughter Madeleine Black.

YOUR REF.

DATE REF.

DATE 2--11--1961.

Leopold Geddy (Formerly Gedajlovic)  
33, Endersleigh Gardens London  
N. W. 4.

### Statement

To the best of my knowledge and what I remember, myself and my whole family were deported 1939 by the Hungarian Police and taken away in lorries and Trains to destination Poland, and the excuse was because we were not Hungarian citizens, and that all of a sudden we were taken by German S. S. or Police to a Ghetto passing by Towns Horodinka Kolow and then we arrived to Warsaw which looked like a prison guarded day and night by German soldiers, and went out to work miles by foot at Airports wearing yellow Band with a Jewish Star,

We have been warned if we run away we will get shot, we slept on the floors with straw under the head, and it was bitterly cold, if we stopped working for few minutes we were beaten up, and no food for a day.

After about 15 months or so 2 Polish gentlemen whom we paid some money which my mother has hidden, they took us out early in the morning over hills and meadows and gave us different clothes, we have been stopped once or twice on the hills and we paid some more money and let us free again, I think it was 1941 April when we got back all of us.. for several months, back home Vulchovce in Czechoslovakia. After then there was no trouble back home we got some money from some organisation and we lived again home for approx 3 years till 1944.

The Journey took several months, in 1944 my whole family were picked again this time by the German S. S. and sent away to Auschwitz Concentration Camps, and I stayed home hidden away with some christian people who fed me and looked after me for a while, and then I remember the family got frightened and told me to go then I was caught by the Hungarian and S. S. Germans and took my away with 100 of others young boys and we worked again and airports digging in Hungary big towns, various towns (NAGY Vared, etc..) and had to walk sometimes 50-70 KLM a day, and if any of us got ill then he was shot at once, we slept in fields stables under the trees and always been guarded by soldiers with guns, several boys run away then got caught and have been hanged to a lamp post in the street

On night there was a big Alarm several hundred Russian Planes started bombing and every one including the Guards run for shelter, and I have decided to run away

I tore my yellow band of my jacket & run away, and as many people at that time run to Budapest in lorry I got a lift as I speak hungarian & told them I was hungarian and as I have got out in Budapest I didnot know what to do, as every Jew was locked in the Ghetto.

REGISTERED OFFICE 14 MINNPALE STREET, W1 LONDON

C/Fwd..



DATE 2-11-1961

L. Geddy continued

I was wondering about for days in Budapest and, did not know what to do, I wished I would be killed for a bomb, but not from the Nazis.

Suddenley I saw a RED CROSS place and said every one welcome, when I got there ther Swiss people and I told them what to do they send me to another RED CROSS which was in a rian Road and ther they gave false papers in the name of SAFAR LAJOS, and I was living with a family at Wesselény Utcai went out some time with my new name I still did not feel safe I was always in fear and always thought every one is running after me and looking for me, because there were a lot of Jews living in hiding, and rewards were paid by the Nazis leding to arrest, quite a lot of my friends were shot dead in the Street, I must have been lucky maybe I did not look Jewish.

One morning Budapest was occupied be the Russians, and I decided to go back home hoping that my family would return, and unfortunately there was only one sister returned out of my whole family ~~XXXX~~ and she told me she has seen the others dying and further and mother was separated and she has never seen them.

After a while my sister went to Bechinberg in (SUDETENLAND) and after 1 year or so she left to go to France through the help of American Joint Distribution and then in 1947 we came to England, and my Sistre was quite happy for a while than as soon as she got married and had a baby she became Mental and still is ill now, all the Doctors say that it is the after effect from Conctratation Camps.

I lived for a while from my brothers help, now my brother also died, then I worked as a taylor and the Doctors told me to give it up because the woolen Material got on my chest and being a heavy smoker always I had to give it up, I have also been an agent for some firms and had to give it up because the sample range is to heavy to carry, now I have a small Wholesale business and I have neglected it because I fell depressed and sad and have dreadfull dreams.

If I was to give details in full, would take me several weeks to write it all.

## ***My Grandmother, Rachel Rózsa***

By Marilyn Herman

My grandmother, Rachel Rózsa, was born in Nagy (pronounced “Noj”) Szolos in Hungary (now Vinogradiv in the Ukraine): an idyllic spa town nestling in the Carpathian Mountains, whose name means “Large grapes” – indicative of its wine production. (Also famous because the composer Bartok moved there with his mother.)

Her father was Rav Itzhak Braun, who was renowned for being a miracle-worker. At the end of WWI, mothers would come to him to find out where their sons who had been fighting were. It was described to me that he would close his eyes and grab hold of the mother’s arm, then after a while, he said: “He is crossing the border NOW!” banging his cane on the ground at the precise moment at which the returning soldier was crossing the border, and it would turn out to be accurate. It was also described to me that he would take children who were sick in their spirit into his home and they would heal in his atmosphere.

I was the first family member to visit Nagy Szolos in 70 years. The previous visit was by Rachel Rózsa, who went to her father’s funeral taking my father when he was just a baby.

When I visited Nagy Szolos, I tried to find Rav Itzhak Braun’s grave in the Jewish cemetery. The Mukaceve Rabbi’s driver took me there, and we stopped at a house on the way to pick up the key to the cemetery from the lady who lived there, returning it on our way back. I spent 2 or 3 hours in the cemetery searching, but couldn’t find the tombstone. Half of the cemetery was overgrown with weeds, so it was hard to access those stones. Even where the weeds had been cut or trampled down, I was getting grazed and scraped by weeds, and burnt in the hot sun, trying to find it. Many of the stones were eroded by the elements, so it was difficult or impossible to read the script.

Rachel Rózsa’s marriage was arranged by a matchmaker. So after her marriage, she made the journey – a whole day by ox and cart (now an hour by car) from Nagy Szolos across the border into Mukacevo in Czechoslovakia, to live with a man she had met once or twice.

My aunt told me she was not happily married. Her mother-in-law would come into the kitchen, lift the lids off her pots on the stove, and exclaim: “What? Is this what you give my son to eat?!!!” So one can imagine this did not go down very well with Rachel Rózsa! Being Hungarian, she made goulash. She also made dumplings and pancakes. When food became scarcer – probably after they were closed inside the ghetto – she was able to make a chicken last for 3 meals for 6 people.

My father couldn’t remember the colour of her hair. Probably she kept her head covered most of the time. I think it must have been brown – her daughter had brown hair, and her sons had almost jet-black hair. She loved reading and was well-read, took pride in her

appearance, and one of the very few things I know about her is that she used to sing a song with the chorus:

*Van London, van Nápoly,  
van Konstantinápoly,  
Van Róma, Barcselona,  
Madrid, Csikágó*

*There's London, there's Naples,  
There's Constantinople,  
There's Rome, Barcelona,  
Madrid, Chicago*

.... and that she used to dream of going to these places. If she had known that two of her sons (David and Abe) would end up living in London and the other son (Zruli) in the States.....said my Aunt Miriam (who lived in Israel)! (And of course .... if she had known that she would have 24 great-grandchildren, plus one brand new great-great-grandson...so far....)

When I was in Budapest (the nearest airport to Mukacevo & then a 7-hour train journey) I tried to find this song, and asked in a number of shops and museums. Eventually someone told me it came from a film called Kék Bálvány ("The Blue Idol"), and it was quite a feat to access a DVD copy of this film from the National Film Archive in Budapest, with the indispensable help of a Hungarian friend who also watched the film with me, patiently translating it! I think my grandmother must have seen this film at the cinema in Mukacevo. The family was religious, like all the Jews of the region. But they sent one of their sons to the Zionist school (which the Mukaceve rebbe referred to as "that goyishe school"), which indicates that they were not ultraultra religious. And therefore I imagine she would have gone to the cinema. (My grandfather, however,) would consult the Mukaceve rabbi if he had any concerns about anything.) The song must also have been broadcast on the radio.

My father felt that his mother knew what was happening to Jews during WWII

In 1944, Rachel Rózsa was transported to Auschwitz with her family. They were forced off the train by barking SS with whips, and lunging alsations. She was forced to separate from her sons and husband. Someone, or some people, had decided that she should be exterminated, and had plotted, planned and collaborated to achieve this. Someone made her strip. Someone made her enter the gas chamber. Someone had designed the gas chamber to accommodate her and others like and unlike her. Someone released the gas into the chamber. Zyklon B. She would have been in her early 40s.

Before she was taken to the gas chamber, she told her 15-year old daughter, Miriam: "I have lived. Just that you should survive."

A silver leaf in her memory was affixed to the silver tree installed by Tony Curtis outside the Great Synagogue in Budapest, each leaf commemorating a Hungarian Jew who was murdered in the holocaust.

Apparently Rachel Rózsa did go to Budapest once with her father (and sister – I'm not sure how many sisters she had), although it is so far away from Nagy Szolos.



**A silver leaf in memory of Rachel Rosza on the silver tree outside the Great Synagogue in Budapest**

## ***Abraham Herman: How did he survive?***

By Marilyn Herman

When I tell people that my father was imprisoned in Auschwitz, the question that invariably follows is: "How did he survive?"

As is the case with most of "The Boys", the fact that my father survived is almost



inconceivable. And as we know from Martin Gilbert's book, *The Boys: Triumph Over Adversity*, survival depended on a combination of factors: kind acts by others, chance and luck against improbable odds, the will to live in the face of all that was happening; and physical and mental strength and stamina.

Since Transcarpathian Ruthenia, where my father, Abraham, lived, was occupied by Hungary in 1938, Jews in this region were not subjected to deportation until 1944. However, by this time, the Nazis were in a hurry to complete the job of exterminating the Jews. This was their priority.

Deported from Mukacevo not long after his Bar Mitzvah, Abraham was among the youngest concentration camp survivors, and the only survivor of Birchashof Birkenau – one of the camps – a farm complex - at Auschwitz. Almost all of his entire age group were exterminated with all the other children upon arrival at Auschwitz, but as is the story with many of the other "Boys", he observed the advice of one of the Polish inmates upon arrival, given in Yiddish: "Say you're 18"! As his family were being selected either for work or for immediate extermination, he insisted that he was 18. It seems someone wanted to believe him, and so he was steered in the direction of those selected to work and starve to

the point of death, as his father did, rather than face immediate extermination in the gas chambers, as his mother did.

The photo shown is the earliest photo I have of him. It was attached to his form held by the Jewish Refugees Committee, and seems to have been taken immediately upon his arrival in England, when he was 16. This is more than three years after someone accepted his insistence that he was 18, and let him live.

In the Auschwitz barracks where he and his father were imprisoned, there were two kapos: "a nice one and a nasty one". The "nice" kapo was a German man called Peter: *"a very tall fellow: 6'6" or thereabouts"* – who had been serving his sentence in a German prison after being caught just after robbing a bank. The "nasty" kapo was a brutal, heavy-set Ukrainian man called Otto. When Otto hit a prisoner, that prisoner never got up again:

*"He was a real criminal. He was a murderer. He must have murdered at least one a week there – beating him to death – giving him twelve lashes – and from him, they didn't last long. He was doing all the beatings – you know – during appell. He was always doing it. People were really shuddering."*

Peter, the German kapo, took Abraham under his wing, looking after him, bringing him extra food, and protecting him from the brutal kapo: "He told this Otto that if he does anything to me, he'll kill him!". When the SS there wanted fruit that had ripened on some trees, Peter recommended Abraham for the job of climbing the trees and picking the fruit, and while up in the trees, he was able to eat his fill of fruit.

*"So I remember we went with a horse, a German guard with a gun, there was this German kapo [Peter], and me. We had lots of baskets. So we went, and I picked fruit for them....That was in [the summer of] '44."*

*Abraham derived food from other sources:*

*"...there were the Polish boys – Jewish, who would go and work on transports. They'd bring some extra food back. Often it was green [with mould]...but it doesn't matter. It was still good enough."*

*Another source of food came from a Hungarian guard who had "...some German-speaking girlfriend".*

*"He asked if I would write a letter in German for him. I said: "You write it in Hungarian, and I'll write it in German." I had learned German.... before the War. I started German, I think I must have been five or six, I started to learn German – at school. And my father spoke German, and I was writing the Gothic German... the reason I was doing the old-fashioned German was because my father knew the old-fashioned German. Of course I learned it at school as well."*

I understand that this demand for Abraham's translating skills was an ongoing state of affairs, as was the extra food he received in appreciation.

Although Abraham would give some of the extra food he received to his father, instead of eating it, his father would give it to the Mukacheve rebbe who was with them, since the rebbe would not eat the food they were given apart from the bread, as it wasn't kosher.

There seems to have been a relationship of trust between Abraham and Peter, the German kapo, as Abraham discussed with him the possibility of escape.

*"I was in situations where I could have escaped, but I didn't know in which direction. I did discuss it with Peter, I remember... He said there's no way. I'm in the middle of things. Right in the middle. If I manage to get through this wire, which is easy enough....because we did get out... but you'll not get through further. There were wires within wires within wires within wires. There's no way. At least not from there, and with this tattoo, I'd be recognized anywhere. Yes, the only other thing I had was prison uniform. Not a very good thing to cover it with."*

Abraham's father grew weaker and weaker with starvation and labour; he was taken to the hospital, and Abraham never saw him again:

*"....he was writing notes for two weeks. And then they stopped, finished."*

In my father's dossier, a summary of Abraham's background provides the information that his mother (Rachel Rózsa) was sent to the gas chambers in May 1944, and his father (Chaim) was sent to the gas chambers in July 1944.

When Auschwitz was being evacuated and the prisoners were forced to go on their first "Death March", the German prisoners were free to join the German army and head for the Russian front (which I doubt that Peter would have done!) or to go wherever they wished or could get to.

Recently I have been wondering about Peter.

*"....he looked after me – the tall fellow. He told me his story: he was robbing a bank, so he said, on a motorbike, and they were chasing the robbers, and he said: 'Over there! Over there!' So they didn't believe him. They arrested him."*

I have been wondering what kind of person he could have been, to plan and embark on a bank robbery, and then, in Auschwitz, to make it his mission to protect and look after a young Jewish boy. My father assumed that his own father had asked him to do so, but Peter must have wanted to help Abraham regardless. He obviously hadn't been susceptible to Goebbels' anti-Semitic crushingly heavy-duty brainwashing and propaganda campaign.

Having lost his father, and without Peter to protect him, it seems Abraham wasn't completely alone: during his first "Death March", he walked alongside a Hungarian doctor who kept himself alive with pills for as long as he could. Abraham, having been based on the only farm in Auschwitz-Birkenau, (along with his father who had declared his trade as "farmer"), had to walk with the horses and the carts containing agricultural machinery which he and the other prisoners helped to push.

*"We were in Birchashof farm complex, and the Germans decided they were going to save the machinery and take it to Germany with their horses, carts. And it was winter, December, 1944.... or maybe even the beginning of 1945.... So there was a long line of people, about four or six abreast...I remember it was about six....and that line must have been miles long because they had been evacuated from other camps at the same time. Only we were at the end of the line because we had these carriages, horses, carts, pushing..... Now it appears that the Russians were advancing pretty quickly, so we were going day and night..... And anybody who couldn't keep up just sat down and he was shot. There were soldiers at the back who would shoot them. Every time somebody sat down you would hear a shot"*



*after, as we passed. And in any case, as we were at the back, there were other convoys, transports in front of us, who had marched before us, half a mile or so, and the sides were littered with dead prisoners shot all along the line.*

*"While we were marching, walking, the soldiers would take it in turn to sit on the carts and have their sleep. As we were pushing uphill .....there was a road once upon a time there, but it was an old track – we had to push the carts uphill, and there were always the Germans with their truncheons: "Los! Los! Aufgang! Los! Los! Los!", and hitting, always hitting – some of them were just hitting in any case for no reason at all....and one hit of that on the head, you'd fall down, you'd stumble, you'd stay there, you wouldn't get up anymore. In any case, many people couldn't keep up so they just sat down; they just gave up." (1985 interview)*

*"We were marching for two weeks. At that time, all the horses...had to be shot. The horses couldn't march any more either. They can't go on forever....People couldn't push anymore." (1989 interview)*

During the last stretch of the journey to Buchenwald, the surviving prisoners were squeezed into open-top train carriages, exposed to the elements. At the last stop before being forced onto these carriages, Abraham's doctor companion encouraged him to try to grab some carrots from the kitchen, which he managed to do without being shot, as others were. In the absence of any other food, these carrots kept him alive.

*"Now I'm going to give you an episode which sticks out in my mind. Now where I come from there were two brothers. They were hardy people – they were selling coal....they must have been 19 or 20 – and to carry coal in sacks to sell – so they were really used to hardship. There were two brothers, and they were with me on one of these open trucks.... railway carriages. After a number of days – since the total travel was only about two weeks – without food – all we had was snow for water – one of the brothers died. Then all of a sudden, somebody saw the other brother eating the flesh of his brother. And then he was pointed out: 'Look what's happening! Look what's happening!' And this person all of a sudden stood up – we were all huddled together in an open carriage – stood up as if to walk on all of them: "I'm going home for Shabbes! I'm going home for Shabbes!" As if to walk over the people, as if nobody was there. And the guard shot him. Others died, but more calmly. Just fell asleep and they never woke up. But that was something which.... It's not that he was shot – that he was 'going home', that his mind had gone. [It's] that he had eaten of his brother."*

The Hungarian doctor did not survive this stage of the journey. My father noted that about 10% of the prisoners on the death march from Auschwitz survived the journey to Buchenwald.

Upon arrival at Buchenwald:

*"We get food there, and it seems to be a bit better than the others, but every day I see people pulling carts – skeletons – dead people – to the crematoria to burn – all the time they're pulling them, pulling them. Therefore this event of people dying there like flies seems to be an occurrence wherever we were. However I'm told: 'Look, you're a young boy, you're under 16, you can stay in the children's ward. And*

*you will be all right.' I said: 'No! I'm 18 and I want to go to work!' I thought to myself: If I work I'm all right. If I don't work, I'm useless and we die...I was healthier when I left Buchenwald than when I had arrived there. Because we did have regular food. And not only that, the person who was serving the food, seeing I need a little bit extra, he gave me the extra little bit...he just gave me the bit which just had a bit of meat in it. These are these little perks which made the difference between people surviving or not."*

From Buchenwald, Abraham was taken to Rhemdsdorf to work in a factory which was serving the German war effort, and which was being bombed by the British, day and night.

*"...There were 30,000 prisoners, and for the first time I saw American prisoners, British prisoners, Russian prisoners....all there, trying to work, trying to ... rebuild the factory after it had been bombed. And the bombs kept falling almost any time." "So there [in Rhemdsdorf] they did give us food simply because we were doing a useful job....so to speak, but not very much of it. People still kept dying all the time. There were always the 'musulman'. The 'musulman' is the person who was skin and bone."*

In the case of the American, British and Russian prisoners of war, however,

*"...we were not together. They were looked after better.....they were demoralised, but they seemed to have been fed well. But there's no comparison."*

In Rhemdsdorf, he found his brother, David who was carrying out carpentry work.

*"...the point is, he was there. That is important. And now we were two together."*

The allies were advancing.

*"We were told again that we were going to be evacuated, and I saw people were running to the kitchen to find some food for the journey. I also ran to the kitchen, and I found, and I took, three carrots, and I ran away. But others managed to get shot for their troubles. I did get away with three carrots.: Now, we were put on the trains....after one or two days, their locomotive was bombed....The train came to a sudden halt, and as the aeroplanes came and our guards were frightened, they ran away. And many of us, prisoners, started to run away into the woods, only to be rounded up by local Germans – old people and young people, and most of those running into the woods – not knowing where to go – they were all shot by the local people, local Hitler Jugend. All young people were taught how to handle guns in Germany. Therefore I don't think anybody will have escaped that."*

*"After that we had to walk, and we were walking....I think a couple of weeks ....maybe even longer – through German towns and villages, and most of our shoes had long worn out. Some had rags [on their feet]. We did stop now and then, for a bit of soup...."*

*"They didn't shoot the prisoners in the towns, but as soon as we got a certain distance from a small town or a village, we'd stop, and those they thought unable to continue were shot. Or they would just take a group of people and shoot them in any case because they wanted to reduce some of the guards. Some of the guards wanted to go away. Some said they wanted to go to the front to fight, others who had other reasons. So since there were too few guards, they reduced the number of people in the march."*

During this “death march” to Theresienstadt, Abraham and David shared the carrots Abraham had managed to take from the kitchen at Rhemsdorf – one between them each day:

*“...and it kept us going: half a carrot for me, half a carrot for my brother, and it makes all the difference between whether you live a few days longer or not – whether you make it or not.”*

They would eat grass along the way, and then would get stomach cramps, and want to sit down and give up. If they had done so, they would have been shot by the German guards. But neither of them would allow the other to give up – mercifully, it seems, their stomach cramps were not simultaneously severe. David and Abraham enabled each other to survive the Death March from Buchenwald to Theresienstadt, which alone, each would not have survived.

Part of the story of my father’s survival is a Czech woman who gave him bread when the death march was proceeding through Czechoslovakia. While they had been marched through Germany, my father recalled that women, old people and children – the Hitler Youth – would smash bottles at the prisoners’ bare or rag-bound feet in order that they should tread in the broken glass. By contrast, when they were being marched through Czechoslovakia, the Czech people were throwing bread. However, for every piece of bread thrown, there was such a scramble that the bread would get broken into little pieces and no-one would get any. One of “The Boys” said it was a form of sadism: that bystanders were deriving amusement from these scenes. Whatever the case, one woman wanted to be sure that my father received bread, and ran out to place it firmly in his hands, even though the German guards were threatening to shoot anyone who gave food to the prisoners. The Czech woman who wanted my father to live, to the extent that she risked her life to make sure he got his piece of bread, then had a rifle butt slammed down on her head by a German guard as she was running back out of the line of prisoners.

When I was in Prague in the summer of 1998, one day, as I stood waiting for my friend to turn up, an elderly woman kept staring at me. When my friend arrived, he noticed how she was staring at me. I wondered: was she the one who helped my father? Did she recognize my father in me? Recently, it dawned on me that that woman who gave my father bread probably never got up again after the rifle butt crashed down on her head. I had always assumed that she had lived on, but it seems, in all likelihood, she gave her life to make sure my father got some bread. That the last thing she did in her life was to hand my father the bread, and then try to run back out of the line of prisoners.

This act of hers obviously made an enormous impression on young Abraham. The German Nazi Reich was focused on hunting him; its military machinery was designed to exterminate him and other Jews; German women, elderly people and children smashed bottles under his feet; and suddenly, here was someone, a gentile, who not only wanted him to live, but probably gave her own life to this purpose.

As with Peter, I have recently been trying to imagine this woman and the kind of life she came from. For her, we do not even have a name. Probably she was fairly young, as she was depending on her speed and agility to get swiftly in and out of the line of prisoners,

and out of reach of the guards, which she didn't succeed in doing. A kind-hearted, brave and defiant young woman, as the Czechs in general were defiant at having their country occupied by the Nazi imposters.

The Hungarian Jewish doctor who had walked alongside Abraham during the first "Death March" had told Abraham: "After the War, when there is food, don't eat too much. Just have a piece of bread and a piece of cheese." Once he was liberated from Theresienstadt, and able to go out of the Camp and find food, Abraham remembered the words of the doctor. Abraham was obviously someone who took advice very seriously – whether to say he was 18, or to eat moderately after starvation. Others found food and died from eating more than their starved systems could take. One of Abraham's uncles, having survived up to that point, went out and found a piece of fat which he ate, and then, after everything he had gone through, contracted typhoid and died.

*"People still kept dying, because it doesn't end at a certain point. People got used to not eating. They couldn't take food anymore. And when they got food, a little bit of food, [they] got typhoid. [They] died of it."*

Abraham, as advised, ate a piece of bread and a piece of cheese. As long as I remember, my father always ate in moderation, despite having been so severely starved at such a young age. After Yom Kippur, he would break the Fast with bread and cheese.

The net result of all these factors is that – against all the odds - my father survived.

*".....one day we saw the first Russian motorcyclist, and that was the end of the War. And we weren't allowed out straight away, but as soon as we heard there were no more Germans, some of us found a hole to climb out of Tereseinstadt, and there were strawberries there. Some of us had some strawberries."*

An interviewer asked my father: What kept you going mentally? And my father replied:

*"Oh – the War will end and then everything will be fine, and one day I'll have enough bread, butter and milk.... If I keep alive long enough, the War will end and I'll still be there."*

Having survived all that he survived, he then faced the task of living the rest of his life having experienced and witnessed the horrors of Auschwitz and the Death Marches. This, it seems, he achieved largely through music. In Munich DP Camp where he spent a year waiting to go to Palestine before deciding, instead, to join his brother, David, in England, he sourced two lots of food rations. He would then exchange the extra food (with the exception of chocolate which, as far as he was concerned, was not extra and not exchangeable!) for piano and violin lessons from teachers who taught at the Handel Conservatorium. In a letter to the Jewish Refugees Committee in September 1950 requesting help with fees for continuing his piano studies at the Toynbee Hall, he wrote:

*"I began to play the piano at Handel Conservatoire in Munich four years ago. There, not possessing a piano, I walked every morning three miles to the street-car where I continued my journey, by street-car, for another 30 minutes to the Conservatoire,*

*and there I was allowed to practice on one of the College pianos (if I bribed the school-keeper) until 9 a.m. when lessons started.*

*"Since then I have been keeping up my studies in music."*

In fact, my father's recently released dossier kept by the Jewish Refugees Committee during his early years in the UK, is full of documentation relating to the urgent nature, and great priority, of his need for piano lessons (and his depression before accessing these), a piano to practise on, piano repairs, further training in piano.

Abraham's brother, Zruli (Israel), with whom he was in the DP camp, studied opera, and my father seemed disappointed that he did not become a major opera singer, which he felt was within the range of Zruli's abilities and talent.

I have no doubt that it was largely through playing the piano that my father returned to humanity, received healing, experienced the sublime, and rose from the ashes.

Thus, my father survived. Because of someone who accepted his insistence that he was 18 when he looked and was in fact only 13; and thanks to Peter – the German bank robber; thanks to his fluency in German and Hungarian; thanks to the advice of the Hungarian doctor and to my father's strict observance of his words; thanks to the person serving food at Buchenwald; thanks to joining forces with his brother, David; thanks to an unknown heroic Czech woman; thanks to the carrots he found; thanks to his ability to eat in moderation even after having been so severely starved; thanks to the piano, and to Schubert, Chopin, Mozart, Beethoven, Grieg, Mussorgsky, Manuel de Falla; thanks to his physical and mental constitution and his will to live. And with all this, essentially, thanks to remotest chance, and luck, my father survived.

\* \* \*

*Note: Except where otherwise stated, quotes are from interviews conducted with Abraham Herman in May 1984 and March 1989.*

*Postscript: From an interview in 1984, my father talking about his time in a DP camp in Munich: "And for studying I had extra rations. Now I had two lots of food, and for two lots of food I could pay for some of my private lessons in food, to a German music teacher, because music was not provided as part of the learning. All the other lessons I had free....I attended Handel's Conservatorium .....there was a woman teacher who who gave private [violin] lessons in exchange for tinned food.....She invited me to her home and she had very many musical instruments: violins and others. So I said: 'You have very many musical instruments. Where do you get them from?' She said: 'Oh, my nephew was an officer in Poland. Whenever he came home on leave, he always brought me something.' And I remember particularly that she showed me: 'This is an Amati,' and then she mentioned the others..... And if you think about it - there must have been between thirty to forty musical instruments in that room - it will give you some indication of what was going on. "Well, after that I left her. I didn't go back to her anymore. I didn't want to know her...." "So I went down [to]...a place who arranged the administration of people leaving. So I said: 'Look, I think I should go to England now.'"*

\* \* \*

# **The Memory Quilts Come to Manchester and Menorah**

By Vicki Garson

I will never forget my first sight of the Memory Quilts. Julia Burton and myself had been speaking for months about them coming to Manchester and Menorah Synagogue, and I had seen many photos. However, viewing them briefly at your May Reunion, I realised that nothing prepared me for their sheer size, their jewel like colours and the moving tales they tell. The saying “Every picture tells story” was never more true. I knew we were truly privileged to have the opportunity to host them

The days leading up to their arrival in the North West were a frenzy of activity. Determined to show them the respect they deserved, careful rehearsals for the hanging of the quilts took place. Huge support was given by Shelley Laskier and Louise Elliot to ensure that all NW members of the '45 Aid Society knew they were invited to the event. When the big day arrived, a good sized audience settled into place early, just simply to enjoy gazing at the quilts. Then they kept arriving. We struggled to keep up with the extra chairs needed to accommodate the enthusiastic audience wanting to hear Sue Bermange, Julia Burton and Angela Cohen tell the Memory Quilts' story.

We were truly honoured to have Sam Laskier, Icek Alterman and Chaim Ferster among the audience.

Buoyed by the success of the Memory Quilts event, we held a screening of the film “The Boys – Triumph Over Adversity” at Menorah a couple of months later and were delighted that some of The Boys could join us again.

Journalist Diane Paul wrote of the visit of the quilts to Menorah for our in-house magazine, Shofar. It is reproduced below and describes the event in far more eloquent detail than I can manage!

In bringing the quilts to Menorah I have been lucky to meet many remarkable people, all of whom put so much effort into bringing this event to fruition. I thank them for ensuring our community had the chance to experience something so unique and moving. However, my parting thanks must go to Julia Burton, whose patience and determination made this happen, leaving a lasting legacy for Manchester and Menorah.

Vicki Garson

*The Memory Quilts were displayed in Manchester at Menorah Synagogue in May 2016. Journalist Diane Paul published the following article about the event.*

## **Memory Quilt to 'The Boys'**

By Diane Paul

'Triumph over adversity and tolerance, so it will never happen again and never be forgotten.' These were among the opening words spoken by Chairman of the '45 Aid Society, Angela Cohen whose late father, Moshe Malinek was one of 'The Boys'.

Angela introduced the remarkable presentation by Julia Burton and Sue Bermange, who brought the Society's intricate Memory Quilt from London, made by The Second Generation (children and grandchildren of 'The Boys'), to a packed audience at Menorah.

So who are 'The Boys'? The 732 orphaned child survivors of ghettos and concentration camps in Nazioccupied Europe (80 of them girls), who were offered refuge in the UK by the British Government at the end of World War II. Although half of them settled here, some went to the USA, Canada, Australia and Israel. The Memory Quilt was made to honour the 70th anniversary of their liberation and launched at the Society's 70th Annual Reunion Dinner in 2015. Daughters of survivors, Sue and Julia illustrated their talk with a slide show of photos tracking their parents' lives.



**Memory Quilt : Speaker Julia Burton, Angela Cohen ( '45 Aid Chair) , speaker Sue Bermange. Photo: Carol Shields**



Sue's father, Bob Obuchowski was born in Ozorkow, Poland in 1928. A survivor of the Lodz ghetto and the horrors of concentration camps Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Rhemsdorf and Theresienstadt, he was liberated in 1945. He described his arrival at the Windermere hostel where 'The Boys' stayed as coming 'from hell to paradise.'

'He had never seen white bread and marmalade before,' said Sue. 'Every day he had it, he ate half for breakfast and the rest later with a cup of tea, every day for the rest of his life.' Bob prospered as a master upholsterer and never lost his faith in Judaism. He died in 2014. 'The Quilt is a celebration of life. The pictures tell many stories,' said Sue. 'It's a shame there are many squares that could have been but it's important to remember the wonderful lives that these people have created.'

The quilt is made up of 156 squares mounted on navy, red, green and blue panels. The patches illustrate major themes or topics in the survivors' lives, from the hardship and deprivation of their harrowing days in the camps to their loving families and events in the new world that the UK opened up to them. Survivors and relatives spent a year learning how to create the squares. It is about survival in the face of diversity and is expected to be shown at exhibitions and museums before finding its final resting place at the new Holocaust Learning Centre in London.

Julia played a large part in conceiving the idea for the quilt and she organised the workshops and team to put it together. Her father, David Herman came from Munkacs in Czechoslovakia. As a boy, he lived in the ghetto and was later separated from his family at Auschwitz, followed by Theresienstadt, and liberation by the Russians in 1945. David became a successful designer of fur coats and died in 2008, aged 82, leaving four children and 10 grandchildren.

Menorah Chair, Hilary Thomas commented on how proud Menorah was to host this event, which celebrated 'the lives of 'The Boys', their achievements and contributions to society as a whole. It was a privilege and a moving experience.' She thanked everyone involved from Sue and Judith to Vicki Garson and her team for arranging it – 'a team with a purpose'.

More information can be found in historian Sir Martin Gilbert's extraordinary book, 'The Boys': Triumph Over Adversity (Phoenix, 2015) and the '45 Aid Society's website [www.45aid.org](http://www.45aid.org)

Our Ref: Aver001/5/jag  
10 April 2017

Dear Trevor and Angie

Thank you very much for your recent kind invitation to attend the 45 Aid Society annual reunion in London on May 1st 2017 for child survivors of the Holocaust.

I am so sorry that I can't be with you on that day but wanted to send an important message - in a world where there is again a tendency to seek to divide and to point the finger at the 'other', the message of the Windermere boys delivers a timeless rebuke. In the Lakes we are beyond proud of the boys and proud to have offered a home and hope for their future after the horrors of what had gone before. The Britain I am proud of is the Britain that opens its arms as we did here in the Lakes in 1945. Let that be the Britain we can be proud of in the future.

God bless you.

Yours sincerely

**TIM FARRON MP**

## **The Last Transport from Prague to England.**

by Majer Stern.

We left Prague in a special train in April 1946. We were 100 youngsters, girls and boys, including my sister Elsa, all survivors of Auschwitz. We had very little luggage; I took with me paints and an easel as I wanted to become an artist.

We travelled through Germany and stopped from time to time. Some of us loaded up with stones and when we passed a village we threw stones at the houses! The food we were given for the journey was American Soldier's rations. We arrived in Brussels where buses were waiting to take us on a Sightseeing Tour. That same evening we travelled by train to Paris. We were housed in the district of Le Vesinet where we stayed for 6 weeks because we had to wait until the Entry Permit arrived from England. We were offered French citizenship but all declined as we wanted to get away from Europe and become English.

We travelled from Paris to Dieppe by train where we boarded a ship to New Haven, England. None of us had even been on a ship before or seen the sea! We were so excited we ran around like crazy. Some Polish soldiers told us to sit down and relax so we don't get sea-sick but we didn't listen and when we started sailing most of us were so sick we wanted to die!

After a four hour journey we landed in New Haven. We lined up in front of the Customs Officers and I was pulled out and asked my age. I told him I was 16 and he didn't believe me as I looked older. (today I am 88 but look younger!) They filled out a card for everybody. He asked me my name. At home my name was Ossie(Oskar) but I didn't want to be Oskar any more so I told him my name is Mayer Stern. He asked me to spell it and I of course spelt it the 'Chech' way M A J E R. Oh! he said "Major" Stern.

After we finished the formalities we went by train to Victoria Station in London and from there by buses to the temporary Shelter in Mensel Street, Aldgate, so the journey from Prague to London actually took us 2 months, whereas the previous groups were flown in by the R.A.F.

Majer Stern

# Leo Stern

By Elise Stern Gropper

I am approaching the Reunion of the '45 Aid Society in London with a nervous energy and a whole range of emotions. I am the daughter of Leo Stern (aka Leib Strulovic, aka Leib Einhorn), one of the 732 "Boys" who, after surviving the Shoah, was given a new lease of life in Ireland. Having left England for Canada just three years after arriving in Ireland, my father's connection to the "Boys" and to the institutions and the community which gave him so much sustenance in those post war years, dissipated as he adjusted to life in Canada.

In Canada, he changed his name to Leo Stern, which further alienated him from any connection to the bulk of the "Boys" who settled in the British Isles. So it was only late in my father's life that I learned any details of my father's experience as a "Boy", and by that time he was too ill to travel to England for a reunion or to otherwise reconnect with his past. I feel that it is now incumbent on me to "close the circle" – to learn more of that time in my father's life, and to hopefully find some "Boys" who have memories of my father.

My father was born as Leib Einhorn in a small town in the Maramures region of Eastern Czechoslovakia. He was one of six children living what he told us was a "Fiddler on the Roof" shtetl life. In his early years, my father lived a quiet, simple life, immersed in Yiddishkeit. He was poor by our standards, but his life was nevertheless fulfilling and happy.

The war of course changed everything. After spending many months in various ghettos, my father was eventually transported with the "Hungarian transports" in April 1944 to Auschwitz. Arriving in Auschwitz as a slender boy, he bulked himself up with a heavy coat and answered that he was a "tischler" – a carpenter. His life was spared, as was that of his father; but his mother and two younger brothers were separated from him and immediately sent to the gas chambers. My father spent only a few weeks in Auschwitz before being sent to Buchenwald and then Dora-Mittlebau, where he worked in a secretive cave where the Nazis were manufacturing the V1 and V2 bombs. He was in Dora as a slave labourer for almost a year, before finally being liberated in Bergen Belsen.

After the War my father returned to Ganisch, his hometown, and reunited with his father and younger sister who had also survived the Concentration camps. My father quickly realized there was no life for him in Czechoslovakia and headed West to Budapest. His father stayed behind to sell some possessions and arranged to meet up with his son, but the Soviets had other ideas and the day after my father left Ganisch, the borders were closed. My grandfather lived in what then became the Soviet Union until the 1970s, but the Communist government never allowed my father to visit and my father and grandfather never saw each other again.

My father was then a de facto orphan. Somehow he ended up at a Yeshiva in Mareienbad with other survivor children, and it was here that he met the wonderful Rabbi Schonfeld.

We have no idea when my father was actually born, but it is clear that my father was a little older than the cutoff age for the "boys" that the Rabbi was permitted to bring to Ireland. So he quickly adopted a new birthdate – June 1, 1932. A birthday which I now see he shares with many other of the Boys.



Picture of Zaida with his face circled



My father arrived in Canada in 1949 and worked hard to integrate into his new homeland. He met my mother – a Polish Jew who survived the War in Siberia and Uzbekistan, and raised two children in a loving and committed Jewish family. He was a successful businessman, and while he died too young in 2005, he lived to see his children and grandchildren marry, graduate from University, attend Jewish day schools and form a tight family unit.

It was only late in life that my father came to terms with his horrific childhood in the Holocaust. He had kept those memories deep inside him and wanted to protect his children and grandchildren from those events. Eventually, he did speak of his past, and over time he even accompanied me back to Eastern Europe – to Auschwitz, to his hometown and most painfully, to Dora. It was only when he became “comfortable” discussing his Holocaust experiences that he also told us of his positive experiences in Ireland and England.

I regret that I did not hear more about the “Boys” when I could have escorted him back to England to connect and reminisce. But now is the opportunity for me to do so. If anyone has any memories, pictures or anecdotes of Leib Struluvic (as he was then known), I would be forever grateful. But even seeing and hearing the stories of others will allow me to vicariously understand that chapter of my father’s life.

This is my father with his seven grandchildren, Jory, Arlee and Ryan Stern. Alix, Evan, Noah and Adam Gropper.



**And with our mother,  
Bernice Stern.**

E. He.

DATE OF REG. 5.9.49 No. OF CHILDREN \_\_\_\_\_  
 No. R.E.C. 19 SURNAME STRULOIDS  
 CHRISTIAN NAME Leib  
 ENGLISH ADDRESS 2, Vessey Place, Dunsoghair, Dublin  
 HOME ADDRESS CSR. NATIONALITY Stateless  
 BIRTHPLACE HUNGARY // C.S.R. EXP. OF PASSPORT \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE OF BIRTH 5.7.29 // 1.6.32 PROFESSION \_\_\_\_\_  
 GUARANTOR - NAME AND ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
 ARRIVAL DATE May 48 H.O. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 LEFT U.K. FOR \_\_\_\_\_ MARIED NO CROSS REFERENCE \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE \_\_\_\_\_

~~21.1.49 to 4.1.1950 to 6.1.1950~~ ~~PRIVE~~  
 23.1.50 40 FIXLER, 40, 'Knightsland' Rd. (N.Y.C.)  
 E.S.)

Elise Stern Gropper



# Harry Balsam

By Natalie Meltzer

My name is Natalie Meltzer and my Grandfather was Harry Balsam. My Grandpa Harry spoke about his experience in detail, and this is a shortened version of his years during the war.



**Harry Balsam**

Grandpa was born on 15th August 1929 in Gorlice, Poland. He lived with his father Moses, his mother Adela, his three brothers Danny, Sanek, and Joseph, and his sister Gitel. After the war broke out in 1939, they knew that they needed to escape Gorlice, so they loaded all of their belongings onto a horse and cart. They didn't know where they were going, they just knew that they needed to go. After travelling for about thirty kilometres they came to another town called Jaslo. The Germans had started bombing and people were in chaos. When they arrived in Jaslo, the horse was tired so they decided to go to the train station, and continue to travel by train. They took the cart onto the platform and his father and eldest brother Danny got onto the train, as he, his mother, sister, and other brothers started to throw their belongings to them on the train. As they were doing this, with no warning, the train started moving away with his father and brother on it. They travelled to the next station about ten kilometres away hoping that their father and Danny were there, but they weren't, they had gone. They stayed in Jaslo with some relations who lived there for a few days, and then returned to Gorlice as they didn't know where else to go. They tried to find out what had happened to his father and Danny, and after a few weeks they heard from them. They had been captured by the Russian army who were on the other side of the River San. The river served as the dividing line between the Russian and German armies, and they were on the German side. The Russians told all the Jews they had captured that they had to register with them and they would be sent back to their families. The Jews registered, but instead of

sending them back to their families, the Russians sent them to Siberia, where they were put to work in the salt mines and in forests cutting down trees. His father and Danny spent the rest of the war there.

Back in Gorlice, his father's mill had been confiscated by the Nazis, and it was then down to my Grandpa, who was nine years old, and his two brothers to try and earn money to support themselves, and their mother and sister. They were approached by people to smuggle goods from one town to another. Not everyone was allowed to go on trains, but as they were so young nobody stopped them. They started smuggling saccharin from one town to another and got paid for doing so. They didn't realize how dangerous it was. His older brother and sister couldn't help with the smuggling because they were over ten years of age, and anyone over the age of ten had to wear the yellow Star of David, so it was difficult to get out of the town.

One day Grandpa was walking with his older brother Sanek in town, when the Gestapo official came over to them and put a hand on his brother's shoulder, took out his gun, and shot him dead. He told Grandpa to disappear. He was always convinced that a Polish pupil from his brother's class had told the Gestapo that they were Jews. He didn't know where to turn. He couldn't face going home to tell his mother what had happened to her son, so he ran to his cousins' house nearby and told them. I remember him telling me that it was the first time that he had ever seen the Gestapo shooting somebody. Up until then, he had heard about it, but not actually seen it, and then as a young boy he had just witnessed his brother being murdered before his eyes. It's incomprehensible. Grandpa and his family were then petrified that the Gestapo would come and kill them all. They had heard that after shooting someone during the day, the Gestapo didn't want to leave any trace of anyone from that family so they used to come at night and take the whole family outside and shoot them as well so there wouldn't be anyone left to bear witness. They were fortunate, because the older brother of a friend of his was working for the Gestapo, as a liaison between them and the Jews, and he managed to persuade the Gestapo to leave them alone.

When the ghetto was established in Gorlice in 1940, they were forced to move from their house which was outside the ghetto into a small house with four other families. They had to work for minimum twelve hours a day, shovelling snow in the freezing cold from the roads. All the Jews had to do it. There were some people with trades and skills, and they were used by Germans to work in factories for the war machine. Grandpa never got paid for his work, but he was happy to be working outside of the ghetto because he was able to bring bread, butter, or whatever he could get hold back in. Life carried on like this for quite some time until they started the deportations. One early morning all of the Jews were rounded up and taken to a factory, where they then spent three days in extremely cramped conditions with no food, after which the Germans opened the gates and started screaming, "Everybody out." At the same time, they heard shooting. Grandpa thought that they were killing all of them so he got hold of his mother, sister, and brother and pushed them forward. He couldn't bear to watch the shooting and thought that the sooner it was over the better. Fortunately, they weren't being shot. They were only shooting the people they had found in hiding. They were put in groups of one hundred and dragged to the trains, but he was pulled out of the group and separated from his mother Adela, sister Gitel, and brother Joseph. They were taken to

Belzec, the extermination camp and he never saw them again. Grandpa soon discovered that the reason that he was pulled out of the group, together with others, was to bury the bodies of those who had been murdered. He was then twelve years old and alone with no family left in the ghetto. People were being taken away every day, and at that time they did not know where they were being taken. Killing and shooting became a normal everyday event. My grandpa told me that by this time everyone had one thing in mind, and that was to survive.

One morning in August 1942, at 6am they were rounded up and told to go to the Appel Platz, where they sorted out three hundred of them and sent them towards the trains. They were told to leave all of their belongings behind. They were taken to a labour camp near Krakow called Plaszow, where his life in the concentration camps started. When they arrived in Plaszow after a night's journey in cattle cars the S.S guards were waiting for them and told them to throw any jewellery and money they had onto a pile. They said they would shoot anyone who was trying to hide anything, but there were many people who didn't want to give up their belongings. Most people started throwing their money and jewellery onto a pile, but suddenly they took one person and searched him. They found that he still had some money hidden on him and shot him on the spot. Grandpa was standing very near, and when he saw that, he was so scared that he pulled everything out of his pockets and slung it all on to the pile. They were then assembled for roll call, and stood in line waiting for the Commandant to arrive. He had to decide what to do with them. They were stood waiting for about three or four hours. After a while, they saw him coming and everybody got scared, including the Jewish police who were already in the camp, as even they didn't know what their fate would be. When the Commandant arrived, he looked them up and down. He was marching backwards and forwards and suddenly realized that there were quite a number of small boys in the group. He started screaming and shouting that when he asked for people to be sent to the camp, he didn't ask for little boys but for men who could be put to work. He shouted that all the boys must separate from the men. They did this and stood in columns of five. Naturally, they were all shivering and scared and were shuffling their feet. Grandpa was one of the smallest boys and got pushed and shoved to the side where the Commandant was standing. He turned round and told the other boys to stop pushing him, and as he said it the Commandant saw and pulled him out to the front. He thought his luck had run out all because he had opened his big mouth. He started begging that he had done nothing wrong but the Commandant didn't listen and instead told him to follow him. He was convinced that he was about to be shot. He followed him into an office where two young Jewish prisoners were working, a girl and a boy. The boy was dictating something to the girl, who was working on a typewriter. The Commandant told him to sit down and that he would be back soon. When he came back the Commandant started talking to him in German but he didn't understand what he was saying. The girl and boy had to explain to him that the Commandant had said that he was to become his shoeshine boy and he wasn't going to shoot him. He was obviously very relieved. Grandpa was now feeling a little more relaxed and when the Commandant returned to the office, he ran up to him and said, "Herr Commandant, will you please sit down and take your boots off and I will clean them for you." He removed his boots and Grandpa ran outside with them but realised that he had nothing to clean them with, so he took off his jacket, thinking that he could use it, but he didn't have any polish. There was a Jewish policeman standing nearby, and he told him to go over to the block where there was a boot repairer and they would give him some polish. He ran over to the block and

explained that he had the Commandant's boots and he needed to clean them. Everyone in there jumped to attention, took the boots, and started to clean them. They put wood into the boots to stretch the leather, and they polished them up so well that they looked like new. This, of course, took some time and the Commandant had started screaming for his boots. When Grandpa returned with the boots, the Commandant began screaming even more at him to give him his own boots back as he did not recognize the pair that he had been handed. Once the Commandant put them on and realized they were his boots, he turned around to Grandpa and said "I thought I had picked the right boy for the job." He then walked out of the office in a good mood. Grandpa was then taken to have a shower and a haircut and given a change of clothes.

The Commandant, Joseph Müller, came to the camp office most days which was where Grandpa would wait for him, and when he arrived he would take his boots off and polish them.

Outside the camp was a guardhouse where around thirty guards lived. The Commandant decided to extend the guardhouse and built four more rooms and a bathroom and toilet. When it was finished, he told Grandpa to move into one of the rooms in the house with him. Up until then, he had been living in the camp. He was getting plenty of food from the kitchen and the office, and was well looked after at that time. Müller had a lot of friends, including many women, who used to come and visit him for parties. Oscar Shindler, Amon Goeth, Wilhelm Kunde and Herman Heinrich were among them. Müller had cabinets filled up with cigarettes, whiskey, and all sorts of drinks and chocolates. As well as Müller's shoeshine boy, Grandpa also became his errand boy. This way of life went on for some time, and he got so used to living with the Commandant that his fear completely disappeared. During this time, Grandpa used his position within the camp to help his friends. He would regularly steal food and medicine for his friends who were living in horrendous conditions within the camp. On one occasion, a young friend of his called Pomeranc was dying of typhoid. The medicine that Grandpa took to him saved his life.

One day, however, things did begin to change a little. Müller had a wife and two children. One was about five years of age, and the other four. His wife was driving him mad to get permission for her and the children to come live with him in Plaszow from where they were living in Heidelberg. As he had a house, he got permission to bring his family to Poland, and it was then that his attitude towards Grandpa changed. Müller knew that she would shortly be coming, and he also knew that Grandpa knew exactly what had been going on with all of the different women and the partying. As Grandpa thought about it, he realised that this was what Müller would be thinking and he began to get worried. Müller told him that his wife would be coming in two weeks. He had to think very quickly. Should he run away? He could have done this because he had permission to go outside of camp any time he needed to run errands for Müller. He had a certificate which enabled him to go wherever he wanted. He was free to go all over Krakow and other places. In fear, he thought of something very quickly. Grandpa went over to Müller and said "You have just told me that your wife is coming within the next two weeks. Can I have permission to take half a dozen labourers from the camp and paint the house, clean up and spring clean from top to bottom, because I feel that when your wife comes I don't want her to find any evidence of other women being here."

Müller looked at him and his eyes lit up. He started smiling, "I knew you were a boy I could trust, the right one for me. Go ahead and do as you like." Müller left with a smile on his face. They cleaned and decorated the place from top to bottom. The two weeks passed by, and Müller's wife and children arrived. Grandpa was to also look after the children, and got on well with the wife. He used to take the boys out in the winter, and ski with them. At that time he had no fear at all.

From time to time, Müller would disappear. He told his wife that he was going to headquarters, but in fact he went to visit his girlfriends in Krakow. The only person who knew where he was going was Grandpa, just in case there were any problems and he was needed so that he knew where to go and find him. One day that was exactly what he had to do. Headquarters telephoned Müller's home, and his wife answered. They asked for him, and she told them she was sure he had gone to headquarters, but they said that he hadn't been seen there. She started going wild and went to Grandpa and asked whether he knew where her husband was. He told her that he had definitely gone to headquarters. He then took his bike and went to find him at his girlfriend's house, and told him that he was wanted immediately at headquarters, where he then went right away. This type of thing happened on numerous occasions. One day Grandpa was whispering with Müller, when his wife came in. She wanted to know what was going on. He told her nothing was going on. She then asked Grandpa, who said the same. But she suspected something. At that point, she turned against him and began questioning his every move, complaining to her husband that he was lazy and wasn't doing any work. She complained that he was eating and drinking the same food as her and her children and was basically of no use and therefore should be sent back into the camp with the others. Müller responded by telling her that he was liked by their children and was a help to him. Grandpa actually became a pawn between them. Müller knew, however, that Grandpa would never divulge any of his secrets to his wife. For example, Grandpa used to take parcels with drinks and other things to Müller's girlfriends in Krakow on his bike. He had to take these things out of the storeroom in camp without Müller's wife's knowing and then get them out of the camp itself. It was becoming increasingly difficult for him and he was beginning to become frightened because he began to think that, after all, she was his wife and she could eventually turn Müller against him. Fortunately, this did not happen. One day Müller came home drunk from his girlfriends, and he had lipstick on his shirt. His wife started screaming and shouting. As Grandpa was only in the next room, he ran in to see what was going on. They were fighting, and Müller began to go for his gun and was about to shoot her. Müller was very drunk and didn't know what he was doing. However, for him to kill someone didn't mean much to him, whether it was his wife or anyone else. Grandpa managed to stop him by taking away his gun and pushing him. Müller fell on to the bed and went to sleep. Müller's wife came out of the room and into Grandpa's room and sat with him for about an hour talking. He gave her his room for the night and went to sleep in the camp. The next morning no mention was made of this incident. But Müller knew that he had my Grandpa to thank. There was no question about it, he would have killed his wife had my Grandpa not gone in. Following this episode, Frau Müller's behaviour towards Grandpa changed considerably. Regardless of what he did or where he went, she asked no questions any more.

One day without any warning a lorry load of stormtroopers with high ranking officers in cars

arrived outside the camp. Among them was Amon Goeth, whom Grandpa knew very well. Goeth knew the relationship that he had with Müller. They stopped outside the gates of the camp and called out for Müller. They handed him some papers which took away all of his authority and responsibility. Grandpa immediately realized what was happening, and he ran into the camp through the back gates. Sure enough, Müller started looking for him, as he was afraid that he would be interrogated by Goeth and give away his secrets. He couldn't find him as Grandpa was hiding, and by then the stormtroopers had also entered the camp, rounded up all of the prisoners, and marched them across to the main Plaszow Concentration Camp, which was only one mile up the road. Commandant Goeth then went and stood by the gates and pulled out about eighty people, mostly the very young ones and very old. He had them machine gunned down on the spot. He suddenly called over to the head guard in charge of the killing and asked him to bring over Balsam, Müller's shoeshine boy. The head guard immediately replied that he had shot him with the others. Of course, he knew he hadn't shot him and he went to visit my grandpa in the block he was hiding in during the night. He was hiding under the bunks and shivering in fear when the guard called his name. The guard had brought him food, and told him that he mustn't be seen by Goeth because he had told him he had shot me. He said he had to stay where he was until they were deported to another camp. He hid under the bunk for seven days.

It was then July 1944, and Grandpa was deported to Sulejow, where he worked in the fields digging trenches for anti-aircraft. After Sulejow, in January 1945, he was transported to Czystochowa. He worked in an ammunition factory. The Jewish Police in the camp knew him from Plaszow. One day he was standing talking to one of the policemen when the chief engineer of the whole plant came over and told him that from then on he had to report to him every morning in his office at 8am. That became another good job for my Grandpa. His personality together with sheer luck had saved his life so far, but it was all about to change.

After a few weeks he was again transported in cattle cars to Buchenwald. They took away his clothes and boots and gave him a striped prison uniform. It was a very cold winter, and they had to stand in the freezing cold in high snow for three to four hours waiting for the Commandant to come and count them. If the Commandant made a mistake, or someone was missing because they had died during the night, they could stand on the Appel-Platz for six to seven hours. That lasted about five weeks. He was then transported by lorry to another camp called Rehmsdorf. This was a very big refinery, and it was bombed by the Americans, English, and Russians. They had to work very hard there with very little food. They wanted them to rebuild the refinery, as they needed the oil for the war machine. Every time they repaired the factory and they lit the ovens and the chimneys started smoking, by the following day it had been smashed down again. One day the bombs were falling and they all ran for cover, and were hiding in a very deep ditch. Some of the bombs failed to explode, which was another stroke of luck. The soft earth from the exploding bombs covered Grandpa up to his neck. On that raid there were at least two hundred planes. When the raid was finished, some of the inmates dug him out. They later found out that about one hundred were missing. They had been all been buried alive in the sand.

About late March, again they were put into little freight cars and travelled for two or three days. When they came to Marienbad station, their train was bombed and machine-gunned

by the Russian Air Force and about one thousand were killed. Grandpa saw an opportunity and ran into the station where the station master lived, as there was a bunker built there. There was a lot of food stored there but it was very dark as there was a blackout. He was stuffing his clothes with food and wasn't taking any notice of the grenades or machine guns. He was more interested in grabbing tins of meat and beans and whatever else he could find. However, when he came out with food stuffed in his pockets, the inmates noticed and jumped him, throwing him to the ground. They cut his coat from the back as he was lying on the ground and took most of his food away. The German guards stopped them, but by then Grandpa had very little food left. By then more than ever it was all about survival.

Eventually the guards rounded them all up again and started marching them by foot with no food or water. All this time, prisoners were being shot if they couldn't walk fast enough, or had no more energy to walk and stopped for a moment. They walked from Germany over the Sudetenland Mountains into Czechoslovakia. They marched for about three weeks. It became known as the "Death March". When they started in Rehmsdorf there were about three thousand of them, and when they arrived in Theresienstadt at the end of April 1945, there were only six hundred.

After a few days in Theresienstadt, Grandpa got very ill with typhoid and was in a very bad way. He was ill until the last day of the war. He was convinced that he wouldn't have survived much longer. On 8th May 1945, the Russian army walked into the camp and liberated them. It was the end of World War II. He stayed in Theresienstadt until 14th August. The British government had given permission for the CBF to bring over one thousand children up to the age of sixteen to England. However, by the time they gathered them together, only 732 children had survived. They became known as 'The Boys', even though there were a small number of girls.

When 'The Boys' arrived in England, buses were waiting to take them to Windermere, where they got a welcome reception. They were there for about four months, after which Grandpa was sent to Loughton, Essex.

He had been living in England for two years when he discovered he had cousins living in London.

Grandpa was reunited with his father and brother Danny in 1947 when they found out through the Red Cross, after the war ended, that he had survived and by then was living in England. Their reunion was in a displaced persons camp in Germany, from where his father and brother were leaving to go to Palestine, and of course they wanted Grandpa to go with him. However, 'The Boys' had become my Grandpa's life. They had survived together, been liberated together and started their new lives together in England and he didn't want to go to Palestine. He wanted to stay with his new 'family' in England. Danny is now ninety four, and lives in Israel with his wife Henia, their four children, and many grandchildren and great grandchildren, who I see regularly. My Grandpa remained as close to 'The Boys' for the rest of his life, and I was fortunate to have known many of them as I was growing up.





**Natalie Meltzer and Grandfather Harry Balsam**

My Grandpa Harry married my Grandma Pauline on 12th January 1958 and they had two sons, Stephen, my father, and Colin. My father married my mother Rochelle, and they had three children – myself and my brothers Jason and Adam. My husband Marc and I have three children – Macey, Lexie & Harley. Jason and his wife Jenna have a daughter, Bella. Adam is marrying Gemma on 23rd April 2017. My uncle Colin is married to Amanda and they have two children Jack and Emily.



**The Balsam Family**

My Grandpa came to England the day before his sixteenth birthday, and built a new life. He had to learn a new language and culture, and became a successful businessman through his hard work and determination. He had an amazing zest for life, and made an impact on everyone that he met. He passed away on 2nd October 2003, and a day doesn't go by when I don't think about him. I am unbelievably proud to have been his Granddaughter. Although there is such a huge part of my life missing without him, he created an amazing legacy that continues to grow. We will never forget the atrocities that he witnessed, and survived.

Natalie Melzer

# Chaim Ferster

By Arron Ferster

In later life, my grandfather Chaim Ferster became somewhat of a local celebrity in Manchester. To me and my cousins though, he was always grandpa, whether he was rocking us on his legs, teaching us to whistle or playing stare-outs through a 7up bottle on the Shabbos Lunch table. Watching him tell one of his stock Yiddishe jokes was one of our greatest joys in life, not for the punchlines which inevitably were either incomprehensible or sounded, 'better in Yiddish', but for his uncontrollable fits of laughter in trying to get through them.

We were lucky to have so many good years with him. Even though he was 94, his passing on February 6th, 2017, came as a huge shock to all of the family. To be honest I think we all thought he was invincible.

Outside of his loving and playful relationship with us, we always knew he was special. We'll never forget that feeling we got on Yom Hashoah, especially as children. It made us feel special to know that grandpa was a Survivor, that we were part of his story and that we had a duty to tell it. As a kid, I guess it was bragging rights but growing up it became so much more and has informed all of our identities.



As a family, Chaim took his sons and later us back to Poland to show us where he grew up and what he had been through. He was incredibly strong on these trips and as well as the important work of witnessing, we also shared something perhaps unexpected – laughter and lots of it. It is so important to us as a family that people know that before, as well as after the Shoah, grandpa and his sole surviving sister Manya led a full and happy life.

We were all worried 3 years ago after my grandmother's passing that grandpa would deteriorate. As he had always done, he lived for grandma. But grandpa did what survivors do, he dug deep and found a new lease of life. He picked up the violin for the first time in 80 odd years and built up quite the repertoire. He started speaking and telling his story with increasing regularity at schools all over the UK. He upped his daily treadmill practice, quit the whisky and earned himself a British Empire Medal from the Queen. Oh and only one week before he died, he became the first member of our family to go viral when a clip of him playing Hatikvah on his violin for the Greater Manchester Police was viewed over 80,000 times.

The numerous letters he has had from school children who heard him speak show the impact of his work and the impression he left. In January this year, I was contacted on Facebook by a schoolkid in Mexico who was doing a project on the Holocaust and wanted to know if I was related to Chaim Ferster who he'd read about on the internet. As ever I was proud to say, yes he's my grandfather.

On behalf of the whole family we'd like to thank the wider Manchester community and especially those in Broughton Park for taking Chaim to heart these last few years. People would come up to him in the street and ask for a blessing, something he would willingly give but also something he took very seriously. We genuinely feel that in his final years this emboldened him and gave him a sense of purpose.

Chaim was buried on 7th February which would have been my grandma Nan's birthday and we take immense comfort from the thought that his neshama is now fully restored with hers as well as those of his parents, grandparents, sisters, aunts, uncles, nephews and nieces that were so cruelly taken away from him.

I am grateful to be able to end on a truly happy note in reporting that just six short weeks after Chaim's passing, we as a family were blessed with a simcha when my brother Marc and his wife Deanna gave birth to a beautiful baby boy.



While Chaim was already blessed with three gorgeous great-granddaughters, this latest addition ensures that the Ferster family name will live on for a fourth generation and please G-d many more beyond that. While we would have loved for grandpa to have met him in person and given the blessing that he at some point gave to all of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, we hope that he will inherit the same strength of character as his late great-grandfather Chaim Ferster.

Arron Ferster

**Chaim Ferster's great-grandson, a baby boy born 18 March 2017 to Marc Ferster and his wife Deanna**



## 70 Years since The Boys arrive in Windemere



**Members of The Boys and their families attend a special commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of their arrival in Windemere. The event was held in August 2015 at the Lake District Holocaust Project in Windemere which showcases the story of The Boys in a dedicated museum and hosts thousands of visitors each year.**



**Left to Right: Icek Alterman, Solly Irving, Sam Laskier, Harry Spiro, Arek Hersch, Minia Jay, Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP, Ben Helfgott, Harry Olmer - in Windemere – August 2015**



**Icek Alterman at the Lake District Holocaust Project in Windemere – August 2015**



**Harry Olmer**





**Minia Jay in Windemere – August 2015**



**Solly Irving, Sam Laskier, Windemere – August 2015**





**Ben Hefgott and Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP - Windemere – August 2015**



**The Boys' Commemorative Garden, Lake District Holocaust Project, Windemere**



## Honour for Helfgott

■ A half century of endeavour by the indefatigable Ben Helfgott on behalf of the 45 Aid Society has been marked at a dinner in London. Since 1966 Mr Helfgott has been the chairman of the Society. While he now takes on the new role of President, stepping into his shoes is Angela Cohen, a 2nd Generation member.

Over 360 guests attended the event held in the Wembley Hilton this week. The dinner was also honoured by the presence of Sir Eric Pickles, Tim Kiddel from the Prime Minister's office and Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis.



Chief Rabbi Mirvis congratulates Ben Helfgott  
PHOTO JOHN RIFKIN



**'45 Aid Society**  
***The Boys, Triumph over Adversity***  
**Esther Gilbert**

It was at the January 2017 Holocaust Memorial Day at Westminster that I met Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London. I wanted to meet him to thank him for his kind words about Sir Martin's book *The Boys*, that had been quoted in an *International Business Times* article. The article described how the Mayor had met with genocide survivors a few days earlier, and had read an excerpt from Sir Martin's book at the event. When I introduced myself to the Mayor, he told me how much he had appreciated and learnt from Sir Martin's work.

As you know, *The Boys, Triumph Over Adversity*, has been out of print and unavailable for a number of years. Martin had involved me in his work and professional relationships so when he became ill five years ago, I had a good basis to go on. One of my priorities – which had been Martin's also – was to try to get this book *The Boys* back into print.

Rosetta Books decided to publish several of the out-of-print titles as ebooks, but there had been no luck with *The Boys*. In advance of the 2015 Seventieth Anniversary event at Windermere, I had been in touch with Trevor Avery of the Lake District Holocaust Project there but had no caches of *The Boys* to raid for him. So when the Sadiq Khan quote came out, I sent it immediately to Sir Martin's agent to be sent on to the publishers who are holding the rights. If the Mayor of London is reading this book – why can't everyone be reading it? I think it lit a spark.

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, the UK publishers, have decided to reprint *The Boys*. Copies of the ebook edition will be available in late May, with the print edition out in mid-July. 'Watch this space' as the moment copies are available, it will be on our [martingilbert.com](http://martingilbert.com) website on *The Boys* webpage, linked to Amazon. Then we will be able to get copies for our children, grandchildren, greatgrandchildren, and our local school and public libraries.

*The Boys* was one of Martin's more personal works as he grew to know many of the Boys from his correspondence with them, and from their stories which he wove into the book. It was a method he developed in his Churchill biography whereby he based the history on archival evidence within a chronology, and gave the story colour and context by quoting eye-witness reports.

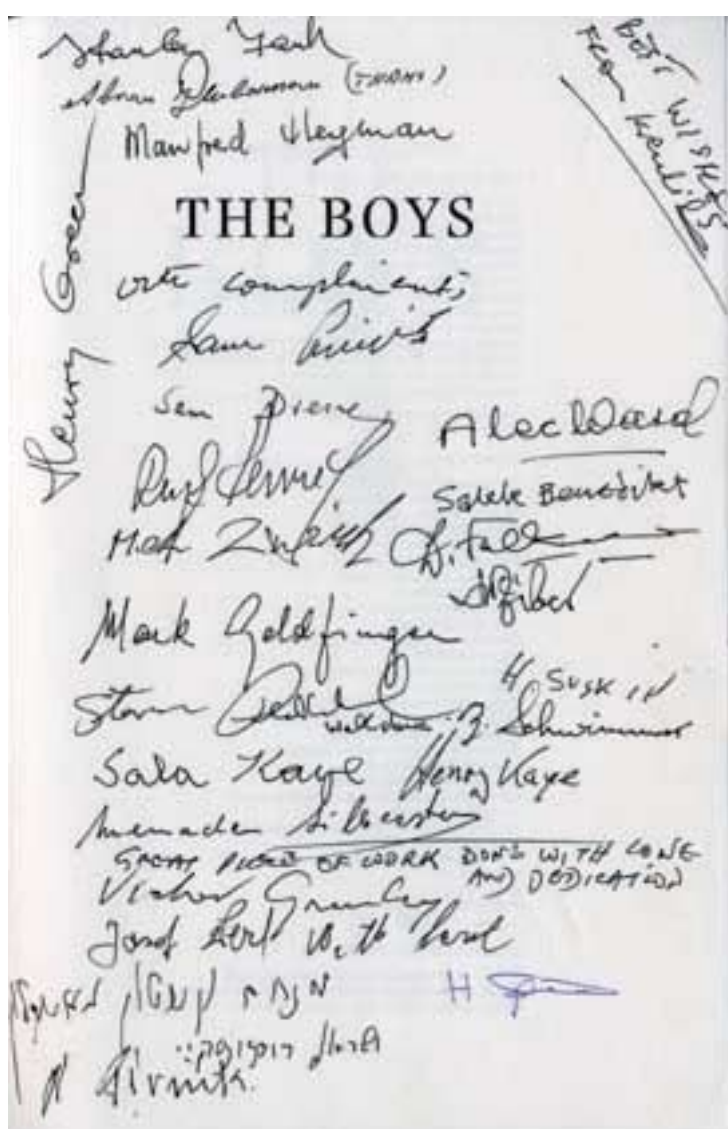
Martin's sensitivity toward the survivors came from the realisation that his generation was wiped out, that had he been born in Europe, he would most certainly not have survived. It was 'The Boys', born in the years just before Martin was, who were the youngest survivors to have vivid memories that could be recorded. He wanted their voices to be heard, and his Holocaust histories will keep their memories alive, as a memorial to their families, their hometowns, their pre-war way of life, their survival against impossible odds, and the vibrancy of their love and dedication to each other, to their post-war families and to their community.

Sir Martin's website: <http://www.martingilbert.com/>

Subscribe to the monthly newsletter:

<http://www.martingilbert.com/sir-martins-book-clubnewsletter/>

Email: [esther.gilbert@martingilbert.com](mailto:esther.gilbert@martingilbert.com)





## Samuel and Benjamin Nurtman

We have two sons called Samuel Charles Israel Nurtman and Benjamin Isaac Moses Nurtman. Samuel was born in 2011 and Benjamin was born in 2016. They are continuing an important legacy and will forever have an unbreakable bond with two boys who never had a chance at life.



In 1942, our uncles Benjamin and Samuel Nurtman were sent to Treblinka and they were killed by the Nazis. Benjamin was 18 and Samuel was 11. Our sons have a special Grandfather called Moshe Nurtman and they were his brothers.

Moshe also had two sisters called Esther Brandel and Rose. They were sent to Treblinka with his mom Sarah. His father was called Israel and he died of starvation in Buchenwald.

Before the war, they lived a very normal and happy life in Warka, a small Polish village near Warsaw. Moshe with his brothers and sisters all went to a Jewish school. Sarah ran the family grocery shop and Israel was a wheat wholesaler.

The Nurtman family were religious and attended Synagogue regularly. At home, they all spoke Yiddish. They would ride bicycles in their spare time and Sarah would make doughnuts if there was a special occasion. Life changed immediately after the German occupation of Poland. Restrictions on Jewish businesses forced Israel and Sarah out of work. Moshe and his siblings had their education stopped as schools were taken over by the army and thus off limits for Jews. The family tried to live for each day, selling household items to get food. Moshe's father was restricted in what he could do. Jews were not allowed to leave the town.

A few months after the outbreak of the war, Moshe and his family were forced out of their home and herded into the Kozenice ghetto. Conditions were overcrowded, there was hunger and disease.

They struggled to survive. The Germans attacked the ghetto and Moshe's father, who was 44 was sent to join a work group of 300 men. The rest of the family got by as Sarah sold all her possessions.

Moshe eventually ran away from the ghetto. He hid in a Polish families barn until he managed to join his father in a work camp called Mniszew. They were digging canals. His intention was to get some food and take it back to his family in the ghetto.

But Kozenice was emptied on September 27, 1942 and everyone was sent to the gas chambers of Treblinka. He never again saw his mother Sarah, aged 38, brothers Benjamin and Samuel and sisters Esther, 16, and Rose, just eight years old.

Moshe was sent to Skarziko in 1942 where he worked in an ammunition's factory. Moshe was then deported to another camp, Czestochowa without his father. On 15 January 1945, ahead of the Soviet advance, Moshe was sent to Buchenwald. Living conditions were awful and a primary cause of death was illness due to harsh camp conditions. Malnourished and suffering from disease, many were literally "worked to death" under the Vernichtung durch Arbeit policy (extermination through labor), as inmates only had the choice between slave labor or inevitable execution. Moshe was briefly reunited with his father, who was very weak and died of starvation.

Moshe was sent in a group of slave labourers to Weimar everyday, which was eight kilometres from Buchenwald. He had to collect bombing debris in the forests surrounding the town. This was incredibly dangerous because allied forces did not know they were there.

One day before Buchenwald was liberated in 1945, Moshe was forced to go on another long journey. He travelled by wagon from Germany to Czechoslovakia where he ended up in Theresienstadt concentration camp. Theresienstadt was finally liberated by the Russians a few days later. Moshe was the sole survivor of his large family, and came to England as one of "The Boys".

In 2009, we returned to Warka with Moshe. His family's grocery store is now a flower stall. We met the mayor of the town and had dinner with the kind Polish family who kept Moshe safe when he left the ghetto. Photos attached

It is an honour to be able to name our children, and Moshe's grandchildren after such important members of his family whose lives were so cruelly cut short. They never had the chance to grow old, get married, have children. It is our goal to ensure our boys lead the happiest and most fulfilling lives possible for them both. As we lose Holocaust survivors, we are going to lose the voice of people who said "I was there; I saw it happen". We have made the past part of our present and will keep their memories alive.

**Mickey and Victoria Nurtman**

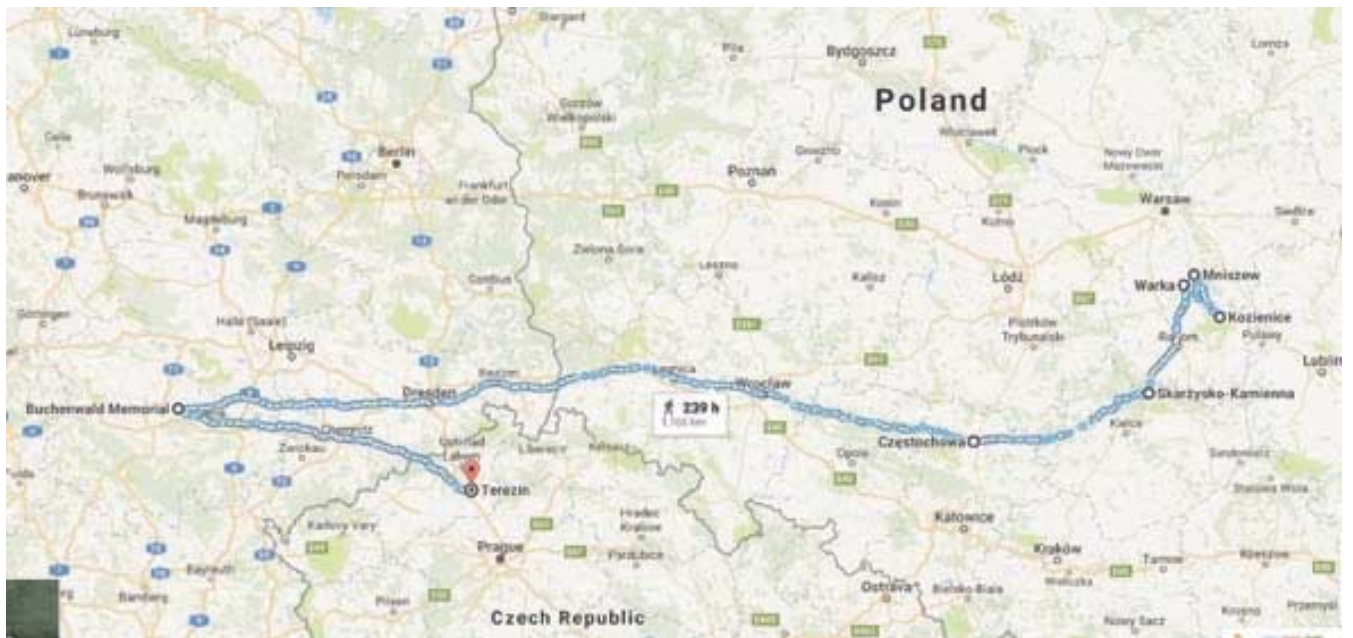
<p><b>החוק והזכרון</b></p> <p>(א) חוק הזכרון במסגרת החוקים לשנת תשמ"ד.</p> <p>החוק הזה הוא למען להיות זמן וזהו זה מה שיש לומר על המושג של "החיים". <b>תקנה מס' 1978</b></p> <p><b>החוק הזה הוא</b> <b>(א) חוק הזכרון</b></p>	<h3 style="text-align: center;">THE MARTYR AND HEROES REMEMBRANCE LAW, 1978-1975</h3> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>enacted by Article No. 2 Stat</i></p> <p>The task of YAD VASHEM is to gather into the historical material regarding all those members of the Jewish people who laid down their lives, who fought and rebelled against the Nazi enemy and his collaborators, and to perpetuate their memory and that of the communities, organizations, and institutions which were destroyed because they were Jewish.</p>	
	Possibly name *	\$ NURIMAN
	First Name (include surname)	SAMUEL
	Date of birth	1931
	Name of mother	SARAH
	Date of birth	ISRAEL
	Name of father	ISRAEL
	Name of spouse (if a wife, add maiden name)	
	Place of residence before he was	WARSAW, POLAND
	Place of residence during the war	KOZENICE, POLAND
	Circumstances of death (place, date, etc.)	TREBLINKA, 1942
	I am the undersigned	Melissa Nuriman
	residing at (full address)	15 FAUCETT FIELD, SPOKANE, MIDDLESEX COUNTY
	relationship to deceased	BROTHER
	I hereby declare that this testimony is correct to the best of my knowledge. I signed it on _____ day of _____ 1978	
	Signature	[Handwritten Signature]
	Place and date	20th May 1978

### 1. Yad Vashem record for Samuel Nurtman.

[illegible]

## 2. Moshe's entry card to Buchenwald.





### 3. Moshe's Journey.

H.O. Ref.		JEWISH REFUGEES COMMITTEE	
Case No.	DP162		
Surname	NURTMAN	Address	10 ALIAN ROAD
Other Name	Mosheh Moshe	Phone No.	H. 15 (Kew Gardens)
Date of Birth	1.1.29	Nationality	Polish
Place of Birth	Warka	Born in	Warka
Address in Germany	Warka	Date of arrival in England	14.8.45
Married	Yes	Wife	Parents
Katzenbach or Friends in England	Parents	Number of Children	1945
in England	Amount	Country	
Occupation in Germany	Land worker	Experiences	
Languages	German, Polish, Russian, Yiddish	Registered by any other Refugee Committee	1942 Kew Gardens, London
LEFT ENGLAND FOR	ON	1944. Suburban, London	1945. Suburban, London
Date of interview	22.4.46	Port of Arrival	Entered with children from Germany
<p>18.9.46. Boy called at R.H. Complained of having had severe cold for past two or three weeks. Sounded very hoarse. Took him to see Dr. Schiff. Dr. Schiff told my nothing seriously wrong with him.</p>			

### 4. Moshe's arrival card to the UK.



**5. Going back to meet the Polish family who kept Moshe safe when he escaped.**



**6. Moshe's family shop in Warka which is now a flower stall.**



**7. Meeting the Mayor of Warka.**





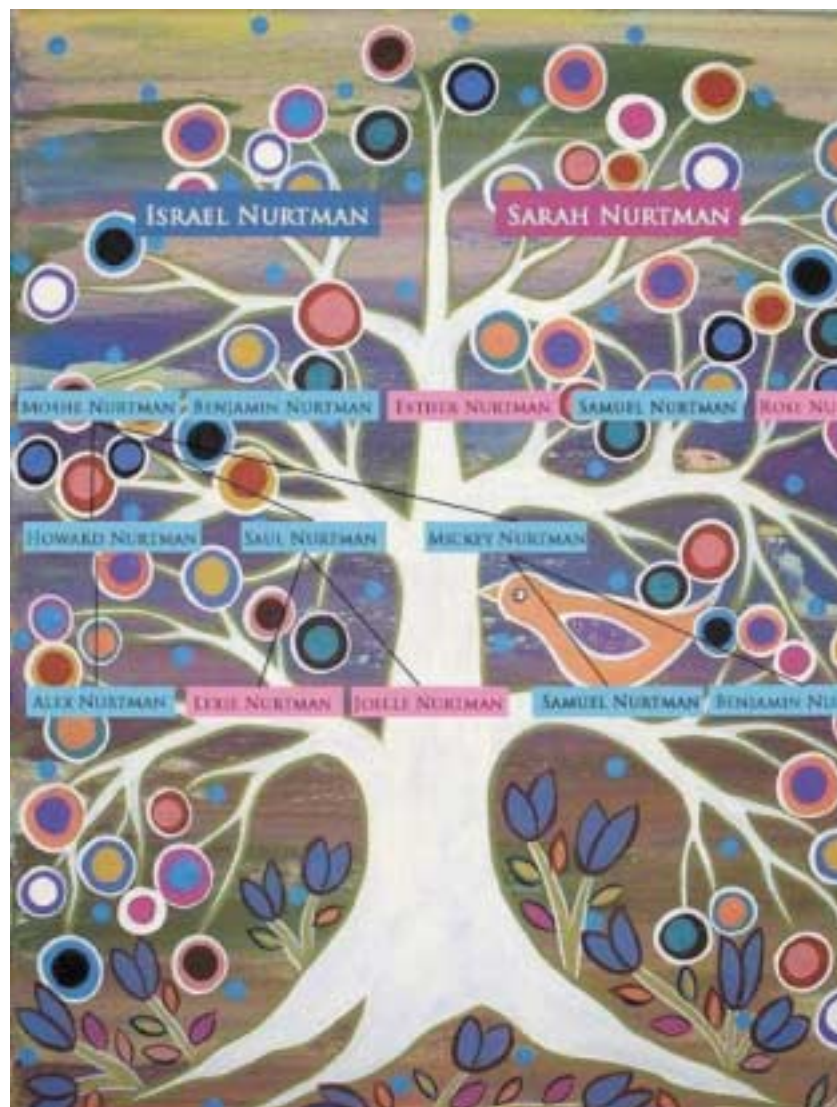
8. Moshe's quilt square.



9. Moshe with his quilt.



10. Moshe Nurtman.



11. Nurtman Family Tree.

# Bunce Court School

By Barbara Barnett

*Barbara Barnett chronicles the history of Herrlingen School in Germany that became Bunce Court School, in Kent. "An exceptional school created by a remarkable woman". A number of The Boys attended the school after their arrival in the UK.*

This school was originally established in 1926, by Anna Essinger, in south Germany where she grew up. She came from a well-established – non-practising - Jewish family. During WW1 she qualified as a teacher at Wisconsin University in the USA and went on to teach there. On her return home she opened with two sisters a school offering a wide and stimulating education by methods that were child-centred, far removed from the rigid and dry style of the day, much influenced by Montessori and Quaker thinking she had encountered in the States. The curriculum provided a rich mix of practical and academic studies, music, handicrafts and the arts with numerous leisure activities.

When the Nazi party began to gather strength it became evident that the school could not survive. So in 1933 more than 65 children and staff went "on holiday", audaciously eluding the Nazis, to settle at Bunce Court, a historic mansion in Kent, acquired with the help of The Society of Friends - the Quakers - among others. There was no cash for domestic help or upkeep so every child had chores to do in house and grounds, gaining useful skills in addition to a stimulating and wide ranging education and a wealth of leisure pursuits. Initially parents were expected to follow and local British had yet to realise how serious was the increasing power of Nazi activity.

As belligerence spread across Europe so did an influx of refugees from the continent. By 1939 "Tante Anna" (or "TA") crammed in many more children arriving on the Kindertransports; and she took on additional staff from among the adults, highly qualified and gifted individuals but restricted by British wartime regulations from professional posts. They provided stimulating learning experiences and wonderfully creative activities. In addition, almost all staff had dual roles as house-parents and parental figures. For as children lost touch with their families they desperately needed personal support and sensitive care.



**Bunce Court School**



By 1940 Bunce Court was abruptly requisitioned by the army. The school was evacuated to Trent Hall in Shropshire where every effort was made throughout the war years to carry on as before. On returning to Bunce Court in 1945, at least 10 Holocaust Survivors joined the school until it closed finally in 1948. By then TA was near 70 and her eyesight failing. Those ten included Erwin Bruncel. I hope he will not mind my quoting from a piece he wrote in 2003.

In 2003, fifty-five years after the school closed down, an extraordinary reunion took place at the home of a staff member, Hans Meyer (by then aged 90) and his second wife, Susanne. Thanks to my friend Anne Tedstone who was one of the English pupils during the war, I have a copy of *"Reflections - Bunce Court"* containing about 100 messages from former staff and pupils privately circulated after the occasion. There Erwin Bruncel tells how he left Bunce Court *"...with a curiosity and a love of learning that has stayed with me ever since"*. He tells of taking part in *Taming of the Shrew*, presented in the open-air theatre pupils had built, singing in the choir, a wide range of sports - of a teacher whose hobby was astronomy, red-headed Dr. Friedman who brought ancient history to life, that Hans Meyer taught woodworking - of night time escapades! And above all *"...the caring nature of our teachers was probably the most important factor that enabled us to recuperate emotionally from our wartime experiences"*.

He adds: *"...A few other 'refugee' boys arrived after me: Abie Herman in a leather jacket, Sam Oliner, Sidney Finkelstein, William and Leopold Frischman, Shaya Kushnirovski and 2 or 3 more who did not stay long."*

By 2003 **Erwin Bruncel** had retired as Emeritus Professor of Organic Chemistry at Queen's University in Canada. **Abie Herman** persuaded the Jewish Refugee Committee that he wanted to go to university and became a successful Architect. **Sam Oliner** retired as Professor of Sociology at Humbolt State University, California and then headed the Institute of Altruistic Personality and Prosocial Behaviour. **Sidney Finkel**(stein) published his biography in 2005: *"Sevek and the Holocaust: The Boy Who Refused To Die"*. **Leopold Frischman** and his brother (who I did not know) settled in the USA and on a return visit to London told me he was working in a factory that made long-lasting electric light bulbs. No information yet found about Shaya.





Of the 900 pupils a remarkable number also had outstanding careers. Among them Frank Auerbach, Artist, Peter Morley, Film Director, Harold Jackson, Gerald Hoffnung, Leslie Baruch Brent,

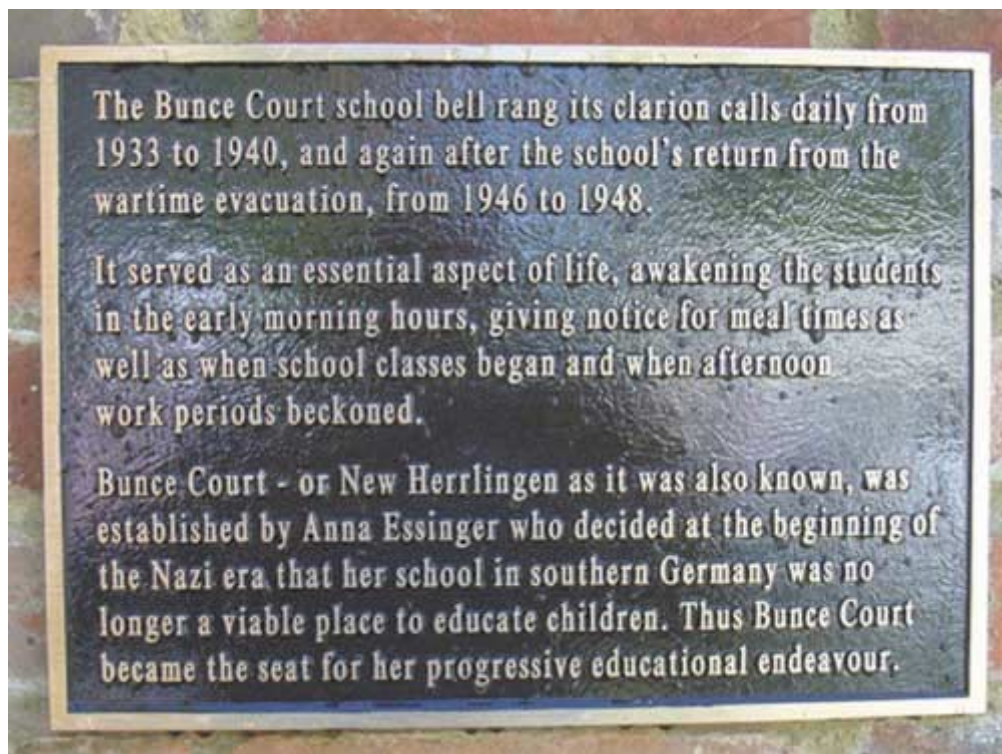
And a most interesting and relevant note to add: Yogi Mayer - so well known to *The Boys* as the devoted Leader of the Primrose Club - was visiting sports teacher at Anna Essinger's original school in Germany BEFORE 1933. He led exercises there before breakfast - and said that Martin Buber participated when he was teaching there. This Yogi told me many years ago. No doubt he was inspired by Anna Essinger and later incorporated some of her ideas into his own impressive activities.

Anna Essinger was a formidable woman. Her pupils stood in awe of her. She maintained strong and progressive principles on education and developed distinctive and inspiring teaching methods that prepared them for making the most of their adult lives. These principles were severely tested when the Nazis came to power and World War Two erupted with all the horrors of the Final Solution.

So very fortunate were those young people who landed up at Bunce Court School.

More details on *Bunce Court School* can be found on the internet.

Barbara Barnett, April 2017



*Barbara Barnett trained as a social worker specialising in child welfare. In December 1946, Barbara was invited as a volunteer to socialise with a group of young survivors who had just arrived at their temporary shelter in London. This was her first meeting with The Boys. She has remained close to them ever since and is still in regular contact with many of them today.*

*Barbara Barnett has published "The Hide-and-Seek Children - Recollections of Jewish Survivors from Slovakia" about Slovakian child survivors brought to Britain and Ireland by Rabbi Schonfeld. See: [www.thehideandseekchildren.org](http://www.thehideandseekchildren.org)*

## **Second/Third Generation Speaker Programme**

By Sue Bermange

My dad, Bob Obuchowski, one of 'The Boys', passed away in June 2014. He was passionate about Holocaust Education and gave many talks about his experiences, always ending with the message, "Do not tolerate bullying, as this can lead to a far greater problem".

As we are reminded each year at the Reunion, it will soon be the children and grandchildren who will have to shoulder the responsibility of keeping these stories alive. We are in a unique position to take up the baton; we know about their childhoods, their families, the subtle and less subtle changes to everyday life as the influence of the Nazis grew across Europe. We know about their thoughts, their fears, their hopes. We know the anecdotes and tales of miracles during the camps that no history book could ever recount. And, of course, we know about the liberation, the aftermath, the rebuilding process, and being accepted by the UK, which unites us all here today. In fact, our parents and grandparents passed on to us the responsibility of guarding their testimony, to remember the lives that were destroyed and to keep alive the memories of events from the Holocaust.

I made a personal promise to my dad that I would tell his story so that the lessons of the Holocaust would continue to be taught and so that his family would never be forgotten. In fact, they were my family too, but I never had the chance to meet them.

Last year I set up a speaker programme for the 2nd and 3rd generations. With the support of Julia Burton, Ros Gelbart, Marilyn Cornell and Angela Cohen, we have been guiding participants, helping with the creation of unique PowerPoint presentations, developing individual talks and providing tips in public speaking.

Since November 2016, we have been holding regular workshops at the Jewish Care offices in Golders Green on Sunday mornings. Recently, participants have begun to present their survivor stories at these sessions, and together we have offered feedback, support, guidance and shared ideas as a group. Throughout, we have watched their confidence grow. As children of 'The Boys', it has also been a great bonding experience; each life may have started somewhere different, but many of the journeys ended in Theresienstadt, as was the case with my dad, and then the UK.

Due to the success of the '45 Aid Memory Quilts on the Antiques Road Show, we have been approached to speak on several occasions and I am pleased to report that there is now a small group of us who have already begun and all talks have been very well received. Nevertheless, we are only 18-strong and we are still very much a work-in-progress, with each of us at different stages.



**Sue Bermange pictured delivering her father's testimony in schools**

I am happy to announce that we will be running another programme in September 2017. As well as keeping our families' history alive, our talks also spread the important message about racism and tolerance. Please think about joining us and together we will make a difference. You can email me via [team@45aid.org](mailto:team@45aid.org) for further information

## Memory Quilt goes on display at London Jewish Museum

News story published on 9 December 2015 by BBC London – Posted at 11:23

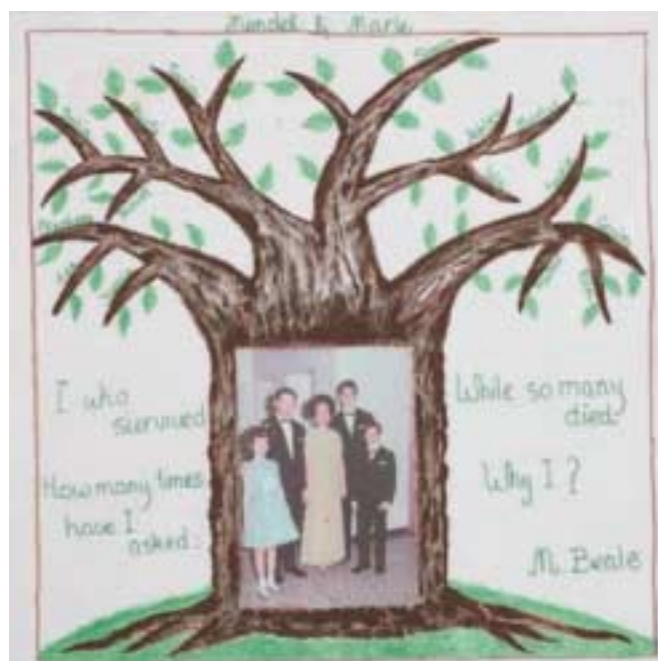
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/uk-england-london-35015405>

Holocaust survivors have created a memory quilt to celebrate 70 years in the UK.



**45 Aid Society**

Survivors and their families lit candles and gave speeches as the quilt went on display at the London Jewish Museum. The series of four quilts are part of a free exhibition that is open until February 2016.



**Mendel Beale**



## **'How can we turn away refugees?' asks Holocaust survivor**

Jan Goldberger, who came to England from Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1945, gave a speech as Holocaust survivors celebrated 70 years in the UK. "How can you turn away people who are fleeing to save their life?" he asked. "Of course we should take them."



**Janek Goldberger**

Mr Goldberger was born in Bielsko Biala, Poland in 1927. He came to the UK after the war with a young group of holocaust survivors who became known as The Boys. The remaining Boys and their families have created a series of memory quilts that are on display at the Jewish Museum in London.



## **The Boys visit the Memory Quilt exhibited at the National Holocaust Centre.**

In October 2015 the 45 Aid Memory Quilt for The Boys was exhibited at the National Holocaust Centre Newark, Nottinghamshire. Zdenka Husserl, one of the girls who is one of The Boys visited the exhibition.



**Zdenka Husserl is pictured studying the Memory Quilt.**



**Zdenka Husserl points to the square that she created in the Memory Quilt**





**Zdenka Husserl studies the square in the Memory Quilt that she dedicated to the youngest members of The Boys that were initially housed in a special hostel called Bulldogs Bank.**

For more information on the National Holocaust Centre in Nottinghamshire visit:  
<https://www.nationalholocaustcentre.net/News/the-45-aid-society-memory-quilts-for-the-boys>  
or <https://www.nationalholocaustcentre.net/>

For more information on 45 Aid Society, The Boys and the Memory Quilt for The Boys, visit  
<http://45aid.org/>

## ns Go in a win al intelligence

Coulton, developer of the previous leading Go game AI, Cray Stone, predicted that it would take 10 more years for a machine to win against a top-ranked human. AlphaGo approached the challenge in a different way from previous software, using "Deep Learning" to build up its understanding of the game. David Silver, DeepMind's co-lead researcher, said: "AlphaGo looks ahead by playing out the rest of the game in its imagination, many times over." The program involves two neural networks, software that mimics the human brain's structure, that aggregate very simple decisions into complex choices, running in parallel.

**Go, which involves placing black or white tiles on a 19x19 board, is far more difficult for a computer to master than a game such as chess**

AlphaGo is not just important to DeepMind's cap. The company is perfecting deep learning and this is crucial for its Hassabis, DeepMind's chairman, we want to focus on important real-world medical diagnostics. The team is focused on board: a match world champion. DeepMind's AI is getting stronger, in win, at least



Quilts made by survivors of the Holocaust are on show at the Jewish Museum in London Photograph: Carl Court/Getty

## The Holocaust that returns to haunt us 'again and again'

At the main event marking Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain yesterday there were many moving words, but it was the cheerful insistence of Zigi Shipper that "I was always lucky all my life" that left many at Guildhall, London, discreetly dabbing their eyes.

Shipper was liberated in May 1945 by British tanks surrounding the barge on

which he was about to be loaded - it was to be towed out to sea and then blown up with Jews packed into it. He was just 15.

Shipper's children, grandchildren and two-year-old great-grandson were among the 650 politicians, religious leaders, representatives of Jewish organisations and community groups, and survivors of the Holocaust - and of other genocides including Cambodia, Bosnia, and Sudan - in the audience.

The actor Robert Lindsay, who introduced the event, said the world's response to the Holocaust had been "never again" - and yet, he said, "geno-

cides have happened again, and again, and again".

Sir Peter Bazalgette, chair of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation, called the survivors "primary witnesses to one of the cruellest episodes in 20th century history", and Shipper was one of several who spoke, including Susan Pollack who survived the horrors of Auschwitz at 13: "The experience shut me down, shut me off from the world. I survived as a robot," she recalled.

The day was marked by more than 3,600 events across Britain.

**Maev Kennedy**



## BBC Antiques Roadshow 15 January 2017

The story of The Boys and the Memory Quilt for The Boys featured in a special edition BBC TV programme on 15 Jan. The Antiques Roadshow focused on holocaust memorabilia in advance of UK Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), held on 27 January.



The BBC team researched and explained the story of The Boys and the Memory Quilt. They showed original video footage of a group of The Boys arriving in the UK in 1945. Members of The Boys were present together with 2nd Generation members at the filming which took place in December 2016 in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London.

David Herman's daughter, Julia Burton, explained the background to the Memory Quilt and how it was created and together with Sue Bermange, told some of the stories behind the quilt. Sue Bermange explained the how her father, Bob Obuchowski's quilt square tells his story from his childhood in Poland, ghetto and concentration camps and the family and new life he created in the UK. David Herman's quilt square was presented by Julia who outlined how the it celebrates many aspects of his life, his family and character.

Survivors, their children & grandchildren presented precious family artefacts and keepsakes, and told moving stories of what they represent in the one-hour special which was a powerful and moving programme. Some survivors presented the yellow star. Other items presented to the show's team of experts (for discussion, not for valuation) included a tiny teddy bear, the only toy that a child refugee ever had, Shabbat candlesticks, buried for safekeeping in the garden of a family home and a Hanukia restored to its original condition and now used by the next generation at their annual Hanuka celebration.

The presenters were visibly moved hearing some of the testimonies and handling some of items presented, in particular, a prisoner's uniform, resembling pair of striped pyjamas, worn at Auschwitz, a child's tiny white t-shirt bearing the yellow star, recovered from Auschwitz after his death and the item described as "the most chilling", a 1938 German board game "Juden Raus" ("Jews Out") where players took the role of policemen clearing Jews from a city.

One of the show's highlights was the **Memory Quilt** which was on display in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London for the duration of the filming. **The Memory Quilt** is considered to be an important way of celebrating life after the Holocaust and the achievements of the Survivors.

"For those who missed the programme, search for it on YouTube or visit <http://45aid.org/news-2/antiques-roadshow-15-jan-17/> red to watch the segment on The Boys and the Memory Quilts."

## **New Years Honours for Survivors**

A number of The Boys feature among the 10 x Holocaust Survivors who have been recognised in the 2016 New Year's Honours list.

The Holocaust Survivors recognised in the New Year's Honours include: Lily Ebert, Chaim Ferster, Agnes Grunwald-Spier, Jack Kagan, Freddie Knoller, Rudi Oppenheimer, Ivor Perl, Susan Pollack, Renee Salt and Zigi Shipper. They are all included in the New Year's Honours list for their contributions to support Holocaust commemoration and education.

Congratulations to all of concerned for the most fabulous honour and the most wonderful achievement.

## **Holocaust Memorial Day 2017**



**Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby with Ben Helfgott and Julia Burton**

## Holocaust Memorial Day 2017



**Broadcaster Natasha Kaplinsky with Julia Burton and the Memory Quilts**



## Holocaust Memorial Day 2017



UK Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis is interviewed by BBC TV Journalist Martin Bashir

## Holocaust Memorial Day 2017



Ivor Perl shows his name on the Memory Quilt map of Hungary

## Holocaust Memorial Day 2017



Stephen Kendall with the quilt square made to remember his father Kopel Kendall

## Holocaust Memorial Day 2017



The Memory Quilts for The Boys were appreciated by Rt. Hon. Sajid Javid MP, UK Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. Here he is pictured with Julia Burton



## Caring for the Memory Quilts



Since creating the Memory Quilts in 2015, the '45 Aid Society has gone to great lengths to protect, preserve the quilts to ensure their safe keeping. The storage, insurance and maintenance of the quilts has become a significant project. The process of transporting, assembling the display equipment and exhibiting the quilts is complex and time consuming. The quilts are now being stored in museum conditions where they will remain until they can be installed in a permanent exhibition in a museum.

Our thanks go to David Graham pictured below right and events production company, SoundDivision.com, for the help provided to display and exhibit the quilts at events and functions when required.



## **London Mayor Sadiq Khan reads from the book The Boys**

Sadiq Khan has called for "zero tolerance towards hate crimes" and warned that not addressing smaller incidents, "can lead to things like the Holocaust happening". The mayor of London called for action following a string of anti-Semitic attacks on members of North London's Jewish community that took place over the weekend.

"I ask all Londoners to report any form of hate crime, no matter how trivial. A brick with a swastika on it thrown through a window of a Jewish home is not a trivial matter and needs to be addressed," Khan said at the first of a series of events to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 January.



### **London Mayor Sadiq Khan spoke about recent anti-Semitic attacks in North London during a Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony at City Hall**

What the police are doing is currently studying the CCTV footage... [and] there are police patrols in north London, particularly Barnet, to reassure London's Jewish community that we're on their side, we're here for them," he said while meeting with genocide survivors at City Hall on 23 January.

"It's not simply the person who is the victim who is affected... but the ripples of trauma are felt by the entire Jewish community, and we've got to understand that psychological trauma," Khan noted.

He also addressed fraying relations between the Jewish community and his political party. "If there are concerns, about anti-Semitism in the Labour party they should be taken seriously," he told Jewish News.

At the event, the mayor read an excerpt from Sir Martin Gilbert's book on Holocaust survivors– *The Boys: Triumph Over Adversity* – and met World War II Holocaust survivor Mala Tribich and Cambodian genocide survivor Sokpal Din among others.

"Leading a normal life after the Holocaust was one of the biggest challenges for the bleak shadow of that time penetrates deep," Tribich said while addressing the audience. "What we survivors have been able to show is that the human capacity for resilience can prevail."

## **Plaque Unveiled to The Boys in Lake District**



**Sam Gontarz and grandson with Tim Farron MP on the occasion of the unveiling of Ben's tree plaque on UK Holocaust Memorial Day, January 2017**



**Plaque Unveiled to The Boys at the Lakes School,  
Troutbeck Bridge near Windemere – UK  
Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January 2017**



**Sam Gontarz and grandson with friend Louise and Sam Laskier (background) reading the plaque for Auschwitz Tree HMD 2017**

On UK Holocaust Memorial Day this year, the Lake District Holocaust Project unveiled a plaque that dedicates a tree which was planted by Ben Helfgott on the 70 year anniversary of the arrival of The Boys in the Lake District. The tree was originally grown by LDHP Director, Trevor Avery, from an acorn brought back from Oswiecim (Auschwitz). An incredibly moving reunion was held in August 2015 when Ben Helfgott planted the tree. It was 70 years to the date of his arrival at Calgarth Estate, (now the site of Lakes School) with all the others who came to Windermere in 1945.



### **Schoolchildren at Ben's tree**

The LDHP team have waited until now to install the plaque as they had to ensure that the little tree had survived all the elements thrown at it since it was planted.....deer, rabbits, and the Storm Desmond flood in late 2015. LDHP Director, Trevor Avery comments that it is quite poetic that the tree defied all those setbacks, given the person who planted it, and the people it represents – “it may not be too surprising having met so many of you”.

Trevor and Rose and the LDHP team invited The Boys and their families to attend the unveiling at a small event at the Lakes School near Windermere. They emphasized that the LDHP team understood how long a journey it is for many of The Boys and their families. attend. However, any of The Boys and their families will be welcomed with open arms.

The plaque unveiling ceremony is shown in photos here together with the tree. Trevor Avery explained that tree is visited when the LDHP team give a tour of the area with schoolchildren. They show them the exhibition about The Boys and then walk them to where they stayed in 1945 and end with a visit to the tree. They also tell the story of the day The Boys arrived in Windemere, as told by Ben when he planted the tree.

The Lake District Holocaust Project (LDHP) is currently housed in the library building in Windemere. Plans are being developed for enlarging the exhibition area to show more of the story of The Boys and to accommodate more visitors which is a growing issue every summer season especially.



**The Lake District Holocaust Project (LDHP) exhibition on The Boys is on First Floor of Windermere Library building (above)**

# Celebrating Ben Helfgott– one of The Boys

**Moving tributes were paid to Ben Helfgott on Monday at the 71st reunion of ‘The Boys’**

ARTICLE IN JEWISH NEWS BY [JENNI FRAZER](#) May 5, 2016,



The Boys’ – a group of 732 child survivors, both girls and boys taken in by Britain at the end of the Second World War – held their 71st reunion on Monday. Moving tributes were paid to Ben Helfgott, the indomitable founder of the ‘45 Aid Society and former Olympic weightlifting champion.

It was, perhaps, one of Ben Helfgott’s grandchildren who summed up the founder of the ‘45 Aid Society so precisely. It was “a huge thing”, she said, “to be so strong on the inside as well as on the outside”.

The inner strength of Polish-born Beniek Helfgott in surviving the Holocaust – and his outer strength in becoming an Olympic weightlifting champion, as well as his sterling work for Holocaust education – were celebrated this week at the 71st reunion of the Boys.

These were the 732 child survivors taken in by Britain at the end of the war, boys and girls, who founded, at Ben Helfgott’s initiative, the ‘45 Aid Society in 1963.

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who came before the event to pay his own private tribute to Mr Helfgott, told Jewish News: “This is an amazing event, full of love, of hope and promise. It is wonderful to have that atmosphere in these most challenging times.”

More than 400 people, survivors and members of the Second, Third, and even Fourth Generation, crowded into the ballroom at London’s Wembley Hilton for a typically raucous celebration.

As Maurice Helfgott, Ben’s son and a leading member of the Second Generation, kicked off the party with a perfect opener – Mark Ronson’s Uptown Funk, accompanied by a terrific 1930s and 40s video mash-up of Hollywood stars – the survivors took to the floor and pretty much outdanced the younger participants.





Six candles were lit in memory of the six million and a pledge was made by Angela Cohen, chairman of the Second Generation, to continue the work of the '45 Aid Society. Such work, she said, in a pointed aside, should be of interest "to certain members of the Labour Party".

It was a tacit point later made by the presence of Communities Secretary Sir Eric Pickles, who joined in the tributes made to Ben Helfgott.

It was done in the form of *This Is Your Life*, with film and physical contributions from fellow survivors, Ben's family – including his intrepid survivor sister, Mala Tribich – and a rather extraordinary song parody performed by five professional women who work with Ben Helfgott, ranging from Holocaust Educational Trust Chief Executive Karen Pollock to the director of Holocaust Memorial Day, Olivia Marks-Woldman. All the women said fervently afterwards that they would have sung and performed for no one but Ben.

Judge Robert Rinder hosted the Big Red Book event in place of Eamonn Andrews. He said that the book contained scores of loving and affectionate tributes, ranging from individual survivors – such as one of "the Boys", Hanka Ziegler, whose brother Wolf had worked in the same glass factory as Ben during the Holocaust – to national organisations such as the Imperial War Museum and the new UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation.

West End star James Freedman, known as the Man of Steal, earlier gave a virtuoso performance in picking pockets.

But the evening belonged to Ben Helfgott, a legendary terrible driver, the most persistent of men, who by decades of warmth, charm, and tolerance, has drawn a positive story for Britain out of the horror of the Holocaust

## 70th Anniversary Reunion

Survivors lit candles and held 1 minutes' silence in memory of those lost in the Holocaust. Survivors who had travelled from North America to attend the 70th Anniversary Celebrations, remember lost in the Holocaust.



*Pictured Left to Right: Survivors Jack Rubinfeld, Howard Chandler, David Goldberg who is the son of Survivor the late Moniek Goldberg, Paul Gast, Pinchas Gutter, Bernie Frydenberg*

## The Boys Memory Quilt



**All 51 Survivors present at the 70th Anniversary posed for a picture with  
The Boys Memory Quilt**



## **Archive records on The Boys available from WJR**

**World Jewish Relief (WJR) has opened its archives to enable The Boys and their families to obtain copies of the records they created in 1945/6 onwards.**

**Formerly the Central British Fund, World Jewish Relief (WJR) was involved in bringing The Boys to the UK. They opened files on children and refugees at the time including many of The Boys.**

**World Jewish Relief is offering the families of The Boys the option to apply for a copy of the records from the time of their arrival in the UK. A number of families of The Boys have already received fascinating material and some amazing photos never seen before.**

**You can now request a copy of the archives files on The Boys that they hold at WJR in the UK.**

**Submit your enquiry directly to WJR archives using this link:**

**[https://www.wjr.org.uk/getinvolved/  
archives/](https://www.wjr.org.uk/getinvolved/archives/) Archive records are provided to families via email.**

**Alternatively you can email [archives@worldjewishrelief.org](mailto:archives@worldjewishrelief.org) providing full names and date of birth of your survivor relative.**

**WJR releases an individual's record only to immediate family. If you are one of The Boys or their descendants, we urge you to contact WJR.**

**Allow a few weeks to process enquiries. The archives are staffed part time by volunteers. Please let us know how you get on - send an email to [team@45aid.org](mailto:team@45aid.org)**



■ Alex and Luke Herman at the Jewish museum, in Camden, above, and Camden Council's event at the Wiener Library, right



# Keeping Holocaust memories alive

## Generations join survivors at memorial day events

Emily Banks

[emilysanderson@bt.com](mailto:emilysanderson@bt.com)

Members of the community came together with concentration camp survivors and their families at poignant events to mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2016 last week.

At the Jewish Museum in Camden, two young boys, pictured top left, paid an emotional tribute to their grandfather David Herman, an Auschwitz survivor who lived in Hampstead Garden Suburb.

David, who died in 2000, was one of 'The Boys', miraculously rescued at the end of the Second World War and brought to Hampstead to create a new life.

His grandsons Alex Herman, eight, and Luke Herman, six, visited the museum in Albert Street to view a 750 square metre memory quilt on display there. The quilt is made up of 188 unique pieces created by the families of survivors as a memorial to their loved ones.

At the JWC Jewish community centre, in Finchley Road, Holocaust survivors Ben Helfgott, 88, a former Olympic weightlifter, and Sabina Miller, from West Hampstead, lit a memorial candle at a commemoration event to mark the day's theme "Don't Stand By".

They were joined by around 20 other survivors, as well as local and national politicians.

At the Wiener Library, in Rus-

her Pogrom.

Selections from early eyewitness testimonies, which were recorded shortly after the Pogrom, were read aloud, with speakers including the Bishop of Edmonton, Rt Revd Bob Wickham, Rabbi Shlomo Levin, from Hampstead Synagogue, Youth MP for Camden Hannah Morris and GLA Assembly member Andrew Dismore.

A memorial service was held by Barnet Council at Middlesex University with performances from

London Cantorial Singers, Alyth Youth Choir and Barnet Wind Band.

There were also speeches from Olivia Marks-Wildman, Chief Executive of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, and Joshua Castellino, Professor of Law at Middlesex University.

Mark Shooter, Mayor of Barnet, said: "This year's Holocaust Memorial Day service was once again a very poignant and thought provoking commemoration. It was moving to see so many people united in remembering those who lost their lives."



■ Ben Helfgott and Sabina Miller at JWC, left. Above below, the ceremony in Barnet



## The Boys - Archive Photos. Who do you recognise?



1



2



## The Boys - Archive Photos. Who do you recognise?



3



4

## The Boys - Archive Photos. Who do you recognise?



5



6



## The Boys - Archive Photos. Who do you recognise?



7

### Cardross, Glasgow Boy

Do you recognise the person below as one of The Boys from the Cardross Hostel? His name was Ralph Ross Parnell which may not be his original name but his family don't know his previous name. His family are looking for any information they can find about him and his time at Cardross. Any information or suggestions would be welcome. Please contact [team@45aid.org](mailto:team@45aid.org).





**Holocaust Memorial Day**