



My Story

Anita Grant



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These are Anita's words. This is her story.

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).
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Anita Grant spoke to AJR volunteer Yoni Stone to share her story.
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My Story

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“I want to tell future generations to make peace. People are being hounded out of their homes and having to go to other countries, as I did. There are refugees all over the world. It’s a very hard task – and, to be honest, I fear it may never, ever happen - but I still hope there will be peace in the world.”



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I was a happy child: Berlin

I WAS BORN on 16 February 1928 in Berlin, Germany. I was an only child, and lived with my parents in the centre of Berlin, near Alexanderplatz, where the World Clock stands today. Berlin was much smaller than it is now. We lived in a modern flat with central heating and double windows. I was a happy child.

My mother Gerda (née Lewin, born in 1900) and father Max Ettisch (born in 1902) were both from Berlin. My mother had two sisters, Meta and Ilse. My father had a brother, Kurt, and sister, Trude. My father first met my mother on her way to sewing classes with his sister, when she was 17 (and he 15). He told Trude 'That's the girl I'm going to marry' and several years later he did, in March 1924.

My parents were always well-groomed, and they made sure that I was nicely dressed. They had many memories from the First World War, despite being only teenagers at the time. My father remembered the Revolution in Berlin just after the war, when hyperinflation was so high that a loaf of bread cost more than one million marks.

Pappa had a position in a large department store. In later years, when I was at school, Mutti had a good job as manageress in a posh gents' outfitters store. In those days, it was unusual for a married woman to go out to work, and certainly not in a senior position. We had an *au pair* girl who lived with us, and looked after me until my parents came home. My parents had a large circle of friends and they would often meet at weekends with the children and go to the woods and lakes outside Berlin. They were keen card players and played bridge and a German game called *scat*.

I attended a nearby state school. I was very keen on sport. I remember the large gymnasium at school, with climbing apparatus, double bars and rings on ropes to swing yourself from. I seem to remember doing sport outside of school too, through a Jewish youth organisation.



With my mother on a 'beach-basket' in Ahlbeck, 1929

I spent a great deal of time with my cousin Eva, Aunt Trude's daughter. They lived very near to us. We were, and still are, like sisters. She now lives in Los Angeles and we have phoned each other nearly every week, all these years. Recently, since she is in fragile health, I phone her more often. There have been quite a few visits in both directions, although not any more as we are too old for such long trips.

In my childhood winters were very cold in Germany, with much snow. I went with Eva and my school friends to outdoor ice-skating rinks, or we would take our sledges to a nearby hilly park and have a wonderful time. For some reason I had this huge sledge for about six people instead of a smaller sledge just for two people. Pappa used to pull me along on it. One day I said to him: 'I'll pull you along for a change.' I had a go and it felt so light. I said: 'This is very easy!' I looked round and realised he had got off it! He was just teasing me. There was also roller-skating and I learnt to ride a bicycle. There were no thoughts of dreading winter for me.



Jenny and Alex Ettisch, my paternal grandparents



Cecilia and Gershon Lewin, my maternal grandparents

In the summer, our families would take us to the lovely woods and lakes outside Berlin, where we would have picnics and bathe. There were tea dances, and I loved to watch people dancing. We had some friends who lived in a flat in Berlin but also had a little chalet in the woods outside the city where we stayed a couple of times when I was young. I loved it there: I remember being in the woods and cycling around, playing with the other children.

I can recall a holiday in Denmark, when I was nine or ten years old. My father and I climbed cliffs, with my mother watching anxiously. I learned to row in Denmark. There were woods, and I remember being surprised to see my first snake in the wild.

I spoke German, and my parents would drop in many Yiddish words, which I only discovered later in life were not actually German. I attended *Cheder* on Saturday mornings and was taken to synagogue on special holidays, either by my parents or my aunt. My parents were not observant Jews, although my mother came from a very religious family. At *Cheder* I learned Hebrew and stories. I have always been fascinated by Hebrew. We went to the New Synagogue, quite a famous one (which the Germans rebuilt after the war). I liked going and was always overawed by it - I still am, but our Judaism was something we left behind in Berlin.

There were other Jewish people living near us in Berlin. I had two Jewish friends in my class at school: my best friend Gerda Wendringer, and another, Lilly Kraschewski. After a couple of years at the German state school, the Nazis brought in racial laws, and Jews weren't allowed to attend any more. I don't know where they went, but I know both my friends perished in the Holocaust. I was transferred to a Jewish school further away from home, which entailed a tram ride. ■





Back row fifth from right, Gerda Wendringer. I am on her right. Front row second from right, Lilly Kraschewski



Me in April 1931



Me at the playground



Starting school in 1934. I had my sandwich box on my front and my satchel on my back



With Opa Ettisch, 1931



Left to right, unknown, Trude, Heinz, Gerda, Max, Meta, Max. Sitting Erna, Kurt in July 1923

Is he a Nazi?: the lead-up to war

I REMEMBER WHEN I was very little, seeing a policeman and asking my mother: 'Is he a Nazi?' I can't remember being too bothered or harassed by anyone, but the fear was always present. One incident stands out: I was with my cousin Eva, out walking in the street. Most of the time I had Eva as a companion. She is two and a half years older and used to protect me and look after me. She is very glamorous and attractive. One day, a burly Nazi girl in the uniform of the BDM (*Bund Deutscher Mädel* – female Hitler Youth) started verbally abusing me. Not physically, but it could have got to that. Eva stepped in and started to defend me. She felt she could hold her own with the Nazis as she was only half-Jewish (her father Heinz was not Jewish). Eva started telling this girl off, but then the girl punched Eva in the chest. A man passing by saw this, parted them, and told the girl to go away. A few years later he would not have been able to do this. Eva still speaks a lot about her experiences in Berlin. She tells me long stories, not fragments like I remember. She is only a couple of years older than me but she remembers so much more. Some things come back to me in flashes. Sometimes I wonder whether I've dreamt them up or whether they were real - it's quite strange.

I used to feel comfortable walking round the streets of Berlin, but that changed one night in 1938. I had a frightening experience when my parents were out, and I was alone in our flat. It was dark and I heard marching feet. When I peeped from behind the curtain, I saw a group of SS with their lit torches. That was scary. Another time there was a loud banging on the door in the middle of the night.

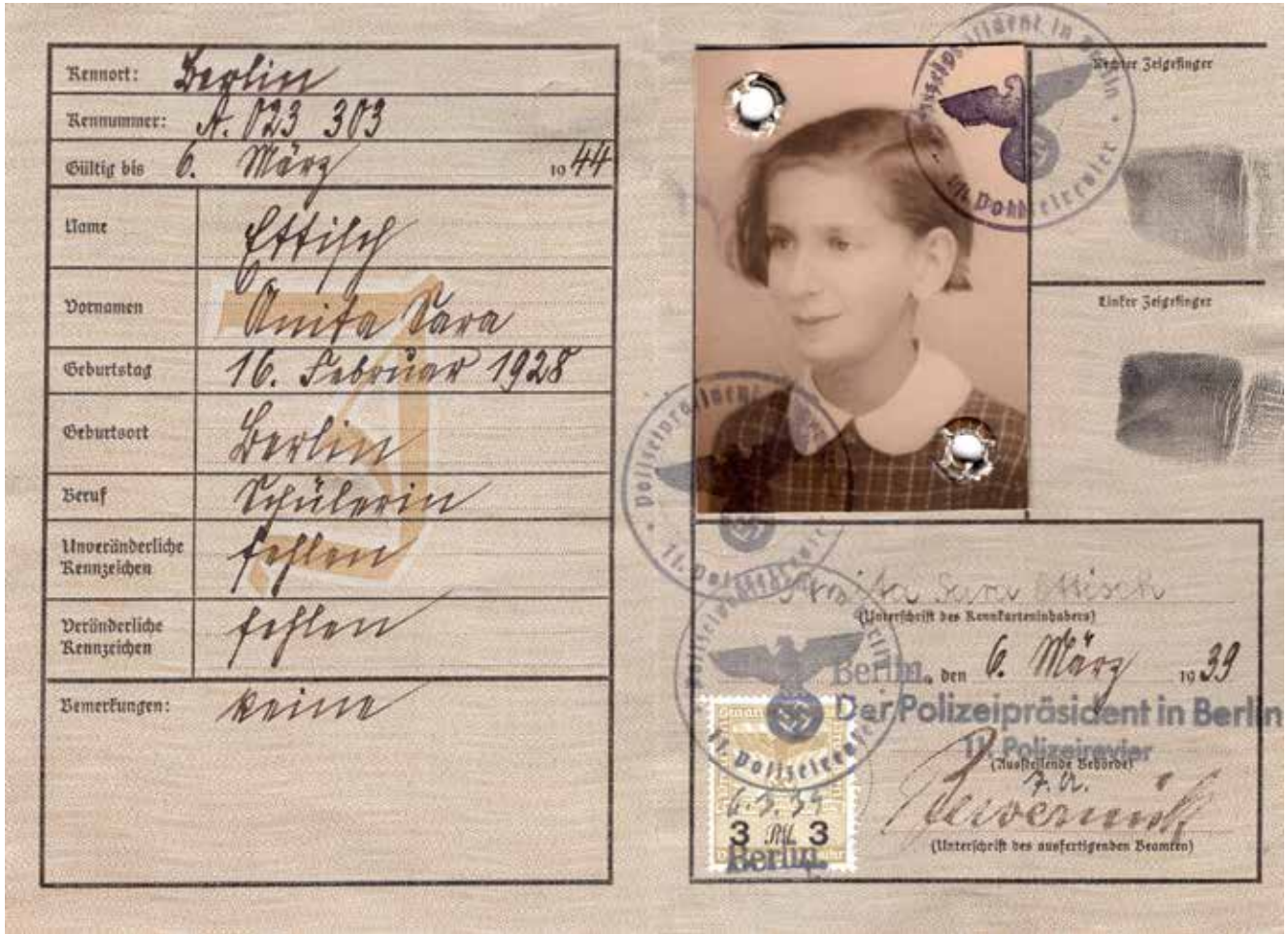
“ One day, a burly Nazi girl in the uniform of the BDM (*Bund Deutscher Mädel* – female Hitler Youth) started verbally abusing me. Not physically, but it could have got to that. Eva stepped in and started to defend me. She felt she could hold her own with the Nazis as she was only half-Jewish (her father Heinz was not Jewish). ”

My mother told me not to be frightened, but to be very quiet. When the doorbell rang, my mother thought the Gestapo had come for my father. A Polish-Jewish couple were staying with us. I'm not sure who they were. I think my parents had been asked to give them shelter. Those were the people the Gestapo had come for. They were taken away and we never saw or heard of them again. There was a feeling of guilt, mixed with relief. I am surprised that there were no repercussions. It's just one of the thousand questions I never asked my parents. When I have mentioned this to other people of my age, they seemed to have had the same problem.

When the Nazis came to power, they decreed that all mixed marriages be dissolved. Pappa's sister Trude was married to a lovely non-Jewish gentleman called Heinz. Heinz refused to leave Trude and wanted them to emigrate, but Trude refused to leave her parents, who were both still alive. Trude and Heinz went on as they were, did not divorce, and were somehow left alone. Mutti's sister Meta emigrated to Shanghai with her husband Max (later settling in San Francisco). Her sister Ilse emigrated to Melbourne, Australia, with her husband Arthur and son Gary, with whom I am still in touch. Gary has visited us two or three times, with his wife Vera.

Pappa and his brother Kurt sailed to South Africa to investigate the possibility of emigrating there. My father returned at my mother's request. She was frightened as she was being harassed by a Nazi who insisted on 'escorting' her home from work to 'protect' her. Kurt stayed in Cape Town, where his wife Erna and son Gert joined him, which meant they all survived.

I was in Berlin on *Kristallnacht*, 9 November, 1938. I remember going to school the day after, and being unaware of what had happened. Only four children remained in the class at my Jewish school. The others must have gone away or been in hiding. Many of the men were arrested. It was very scary, but fortunately nothing happened to my father: he slept away from home for a couple of nights, to avoid being taken away; my grandfather had just died and Pappa wanted to attend his burial. (My grandma had died some years before, as had my mother's parents). ■



My identification papers 1939. Note I had been given the middle name Sara to indicate I was Jewish



My travel visa



Just in time: emigration to England

MY PARENTS AND I emigrated in 1939, just six weeks before war broke out. I was 11 years old. We were booked on a ship to Shanghai in February 1939. My parents had sold everything in preparation for our departure but then our friends, the Behrendts, who had moved from Berlin to the UK in 1933, persuaded us not to go to Shanghai and that they could get us into England. They lived in Edgware, North West London, and had a business manufacturing dresses. We applied for visas to go to England but they didn't arrive. The Behrendts knew a diplomat who discovered our papers had been mislaid and was able to help. Meanwhile, we had rented two rooms in Berlin whilst we waited. The front room had a very low window, which my cousin Eva used to knock on when she visited, in order to let us know she was coming in. One day in July she knocked very hard and my father got cross. He went to the door to scold her, only to find it wasn't just Eva, but also the postman with our visas. It took from February to July but our mislaid papers had been located, enabling us to leave Germany just in time. When we left, Eva came to the station with her parents to see us off and she burst into tears.

My parents and I took everything we needed. Some of our possessions had already gone to Shanghai in containers, but I think we got everything back eventually. Our journey started by train, from Berlin to the Hook of Holland. I remember when we got to the Dutch border. Even though we had our papers, we were worried about being able to cross. Luckily, we made it. From there we took a boat and I was very seasick. I remember my father taking me somewhere on the boat to lie down because I felt so unwell. The boat arrived at Harwich, from where we took a train to Liverpool Street Station. We spent our first couple of nights in a Jewish hostel in the East End of London. It was ghastly. Men and women were separated in large dormitories. The Behrendts did not want me to stay there too long, so they arranged for me to move in with their nephew and his family in Amersham, a small town in Buckinghamshire. I remember they joked about Bank Underground Station and how difficult it was to find the right exit because there were so many. It was very cold where I was staying despite it being July. I got very upset being away from my parents, but thankfully it was only for two weeks.

My parents were allowed into England on a 'Domestic Permit', which meant that they had to find work as servants in a household. The Behrendts found my parents a position in Cobham, Surrey, with a couple and their two little girls. The house was newly built, with central heating and all 'mod cons'.

They had a washbasin in every bedroom! Cobham was a lovely village and quite a contrast to living in the centre of Berlin. It felt more similar to the chalet in the woods we had stayed at just outside Berlin, which I had loved.

My father was handyman/butler, cleaning and serving, and my mother was the maid and housekeeper. She was unhappy in the role, but they were both so thankful and happy to be in England. I joined the local school and was boarded out to a different family, living nearby, called the Carrs. The family my parents worked for were too posh to have their servants' children living with them. The Carrs' toilet was out in the garden, which was a new experience for me. The Carrs were lovely people, but I was unhappy because I wanted to be with my parents; I was a mummy and daddy's girl. Except for summer camps in Germany, and when my parents were in the Jewish hostel in London's East End and I was in Amersham, I had never been separated from them. Mutti met me every evening, when she was able. I used to cry when we met, which upset her.

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When the war broke out, my parents' employers allowed me to live with them, so I moved in. My mother said this was because they were afraid that otherwise they would have evacuees planted on them. Although I was only 12 years old I was very useful to them. I helped with the children - Jennifer, who was five or six, and Anthea, who was two and a half - as well as cleaning all the basins in the house. I used to bath the children every night, and invented a story to tell them about a little bird family. I also bathed the dog occasionally. I would push the little one to sleep in her pram after lunch. As soon as she was asleep, I could go to play with my best friend, Maureen Pope. I have fond memories of those days. The lady of the house was very nice, although she was quite snobbish, of course. She was extremely clever and taught me a lot. They owned a well-known heating engineering company with a big factory in Croydon. My mother ended up playing bridge with them, because they were short of a fourth, and my mother had learned the game in Berlin. I first shared a room with my parents in the servants' quarters, which consisted of two rooms, and later with Jennifer and Anthea. The grandparents also lived there. ■

That was my lucky day: school in Cobham

I WENT TO the village school. I can remember even to this day that the teachers were of the ‘old school’. They seemed to be very good teachers and the headmaster was such a lovely man. He taught us singing. He loved music and he was very kind. I was the only Jew and the only German in the school, and yet not one child ever mentioned anything about it. I would have thought that one of their parents would have pointed out, ‘She’s German and we’re fighting them,’ but no one was bothered. Fellow students always asked me to say something in German, but Judaism never came up. I don’t know if I felt it at the time, but I certainly realise now how wonderful everyone was to me there.

The school pupils were encouraged to knit for the Army Services ‘Old Boys’, and I volunteered, because by then my father was in the Army. The kind English did not enlighten me that ‘Old Boys’ meant former pupils, and just included my father as an ‘Old Boy’.

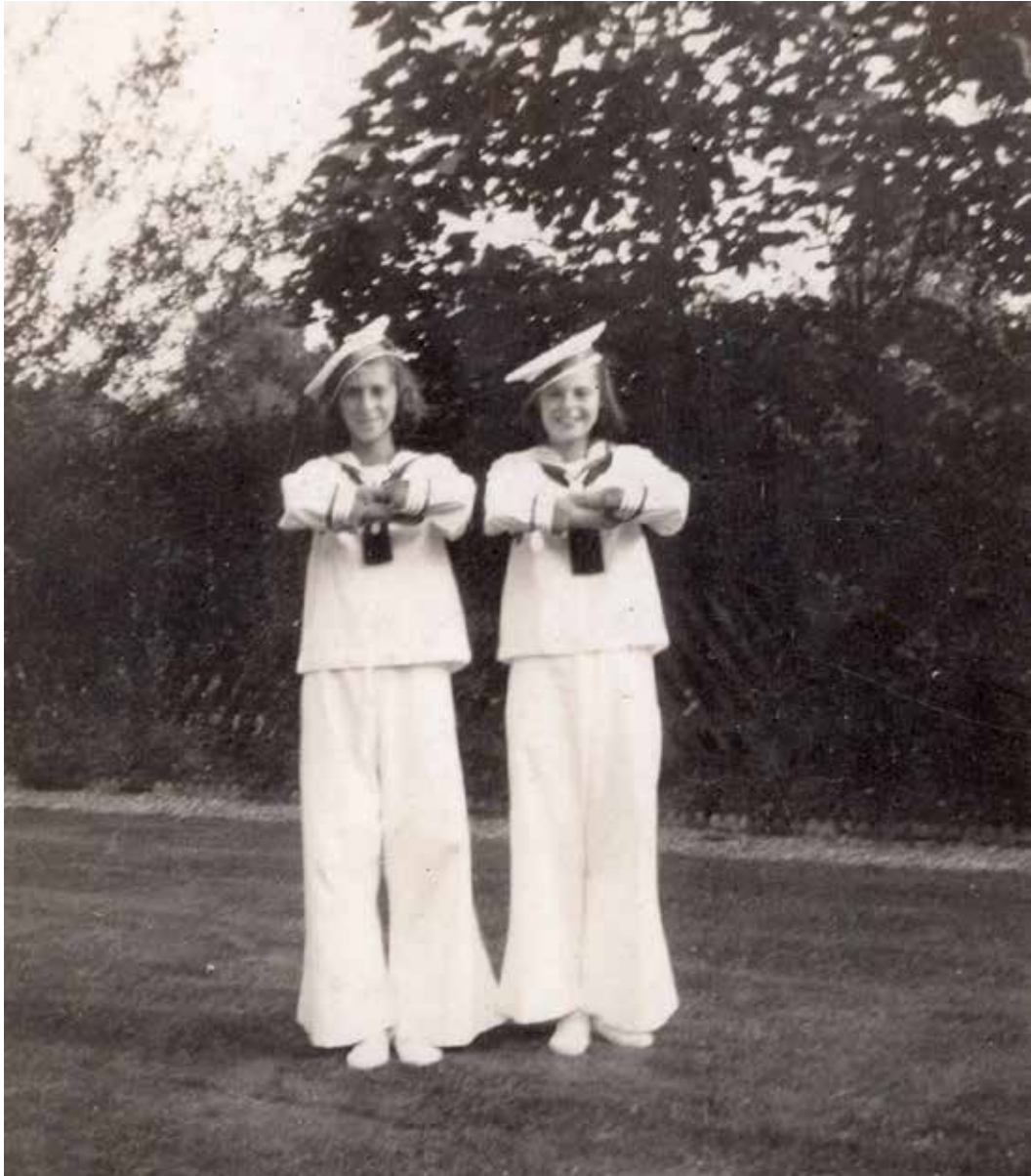
When I first came to the school, the teacher sat me next to a girl who wanted to sit with her friend, so we switched and I ended up sitting next to Maureen Pope. That was my lucky day, because Maureen and I became very best friends. We both lived outside the village (where the posh people lived), which was about a mile from the school. Maureen’s family were not posh but she was very well-spoken, and her grandfather owned quite a lot of property. They lived in a house that he had built. I was given an old bicycle and Maureen and I would cycle to school and back together, and play in the ditches along the way. One day, a couple of years on, my mother took me to Kingston, the nearest town, and bought me a brand new bike, a Raleigh. I couldn’t believe it! I am sure it cost her more than a week’s wages. I have never forgotten it. My mother was very careful with money but when she bought something it was always the very best.

The River Mole ran through Cobham and there was a section where we could bathe – I say bathe, because neither Maureen nor I could swim. The river was so deep at that point, we could not stand up. There were steps going into the water, and a bathing place. I had a rubber ring, and had the idea to swim with it on and gradually let out a little air at each attempt – and that’s how I learnt to swim (not very well!)

Maureen and I had to cycle past the fire station where the air raid siren was situated. One morning the siren went off just as we were cycling past. It was terribly loud, right in our ears, and we nearly fell off our bikes. We went to a nearby air raid shelter and watched the air fights and the Spitfires, which we probably shouldn't have done, but we couldn't resist..

When my parents realised we would have to leave Germany, I had private English lessons in Berlin and so I thought I could speak the language. However, when I got here, I couldn't understand a word anyone was saying. It was as if I had never had a single lesson. I gave the first English essay I wrote at school in Cobham the title 'The dog who walked on himself', when of course I had meant 'The dog who walked by himself'. This was an early attempt at English composition which caused much laughter in the class. In the end, I learnt my English at school, just by being with the other children.

“One morning the siren went off just as we were cycling past. It was terribly loud, right in our ears, and we nearly fell off our bikes.”



Best friend Maureen and me dancing the Hornpipe at Chobham school concert, 1941

Maureen says it took me six months to learn English. I remember reading Shakespeare out loud in class, and worrying about which piece I would have to read, and if I would be able to pronounce it. So when my line to read came up, I felt very happy, because my part was just one word: 'Welcome'. Even so I managed to get it wrong because I pronounced it accenting the 'come', which caused giggles. Come to think of it, in Shakespeare's time it might well have been spoken like that! There came a point at which I stopped speaking German. 'Mutti' became 'Mummy', and 'Pappa' became 'Daddy'.

Maureen and I had two other friends, Vera and Daphne. One teacher started a dance group that included the four of us. Vera had been having ballet lessons, and Daphne played the piano. We performed for the school on various occasions. Our speciality was the *Sailor's Hornpipe*: Daphne played the piano for us and Vera helped us with the dance steps. We wore the sailor suits from a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *HMS Pinafore*, which the school had performed before my time. I loved it. At school, when it rained at break-time, we would do country dancing in the school corridor, which was also lovely. I wasn't able to invite friends over to the house, although I was allowed to have the three of them to tea on my birthday one year.

At school they built bomb shelters in the place where we used to have gardening lessons. We had to use the bomb shelters quite a few times, since Cobham isn't really that far from London. I remember feeling scared at night when the Germans used to come over and you could hear their planes: they had a certain hum to them. I was always afraid a plane was going to crash on us. One night I was sleeping by myself under the stairs as a form of shelter, when a bomb fell fairly near to the house, right in the middle of the main road from Leatherhead to Cobham. Luckily, no one was hurt. ■



With my parents in 1941 when my father was on leave from the army

Singing songs he taught me: my father's story

BY THE TIME war started I was living with my parents in their employers' house. Soon after war broke out, my father volunteered for the British Army, but instead of being accepted he was interned and sent to the Isle of Man, along with hundreds of other German refugees. Being interned on the Isle of Man was like being at a sort of university, as so many well-educated Jews were sent there and they held lectures and lessons for the other internees. Later, they were accepted into the British Army, but only at first into the Pioneer Corps (considered to be the lowest level of the army at that time). Stationed in London, my father's first job was to clear rubble during the Blitz. My mother would see him off at the station when it was already dark and she could see fires where the bombing of London had already started.

Later, the Corps spread out and my father was stationed in Penclawdd near Swansea, working for a captain. I travelled all on my own from Cobham to visit him. That was quite an undertaking for a 13-year-old during wartime. Then, after D-Day, my father was transferred to Paris, to work at SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) at their headquarters in the Palace of Versailles. I'm not exactly sure what his role was there, but afterwards he had a similar role working for a senior officer in Germany.

Along with other German refugee soldiers, my father had to change his name. He changed it from Ettisch to Evans, although he wasn't able to change his German accent, which he never lost.

When my father was away, my mother made friends with an Austrian Jewish lady called Erna Sadger, who was also a refugee. My mum and Erna got on very well. She joined the same household and became my second mum, right up until her death. She was always interested in whatever I did.

As my father was interned and then joined the army, the only memories I have of him in the house in Cobham was washing up with him in the scullery and singing songs he taught me. There were quite a few of them, songs he had made up in German when he was younger and had family get-togethers - he was clever like that. He loved music, especially classical music. I didn't play an instrument and was dying to learn the piano, but there was no piano to practise on. I inherited his love of music, both jazz and classical. ■

Starting work: Surrey to London

I WENT TO the village school until I was 14, which was the mandatory school leaving age. My mother wanted me to go to Pitman's College for secretarial training, and she enrolled me for two years. I remember attending an interview with the headmaster of Pitman's. My mother was with me, of course - in those days parents came along to interviews. I asked the headmaster if there was any sport. 'Oh no!' he said, in an unkind way. He was quite nasty in his response to what I thought was a perfectly reasonable question.

I had to travel by train every day from Cobham to Wimbledon. Pitman's College was a miserable place, but I did learn the rudiments of shorthand, typing and bookkeeping. I was particularly interested in learning French. The teacher, however, was more interested in teaching the advanced students, which was disappointing for me. I did learn the very basics, nevertheless, but had to wait until later in my life to learn more of the language, when my second husband Barry and I spent a lot of time in France. In towns when I wanted to practise my French, the locals wanted to practise their English, but I did have to speak it more in the countryside, where people didn't know English as a rule.

“I asked the headmaster if there was any sport. 'Oh no!' he said. He was quite nasty in his response to what I thought was a perfectly reasonable question.”





Pappa in Hamburg 1945

We moved from Surrey to London, when my mother took a job as a housekeeper for George Petty-Fitzmaurice, who became 8th Marquess of Lansdowne, and Barbara Dempsey Chase, his American heiress wife. We were given servants' quarters within their flat in Portsea Hall on Edgware Road. It was small but lovely. Their children lived on their estate in Scotland so I never met them, and the Marquess was away most of the time, but Barbara was unbelievably friendly. I was a big fan of the film star Vivien Leigh, who once appeared in a photograph wearing a white blouse. My mother said that the heiress had six, seven or even ten blouses like that. They struck up a bargain: my mother asked for a white blouse for me and Barbara wanted one of my mother's very nice blankets in exchange.

After leaving Pitman's I wanted to learn beauty culture. I tried to get into Elizabeth Arden (a famous beauty parlour on Old Bond Street), but they weren't hiring. I went instead to work for Raymond Bessone, or *Monsieur Raymond* as we called him, at his salon in Mayfair. One of the top hairdressers in the West End of London, he was known later as 'Mr Teasy-Weasy' and had his own television programme. He was quite a show-off, and always dressed very smartly. He used to sketch styles to show his customers, with his eyes half-shut and a cigarette dangling from his mouth. His clientele included very posh women and film starlets including Lilli Palmer who was married to Rex Harrison. Raymond was a handsome man and loved the ladies. He was always one to *push past* the girls, taking the opportunity to put his hand on their waist. These days that would be considered unacceptable, but we didn't think anything of it then.

I was an apprentice hairdresser there for quite a while, working with and learning from a nice man called Jack Goldstein. When Jack changed jobs, I went with him. Funnily enough, we moved right near the Behrendts' dressmaking business in Margaret Street, near Oxford Circus. Sometimes I would pop up to see them. Then Jack moved again, and I moved with him, to Berkeley Square. ■

Living in Golders Green: life gets less comfortable

MY MOTHER LEFT her job as a housekeeper when she realised she did not have to be a domestic servant any longer. She found rooms to rent in Golders Green for both of us. It was very primitive accommodation. We were allowed a bath once a week and we had to cook and wash up in cramped and difficult conditions. By this time my father was stationed somewhere in Essex. He wasn't allowed leave because of preparations for the invasion of Europe, but he used to come to Golders Green to stay occasionally. I remember when a flying bomb fell near to where we lived. The motor stopped and the bomb dropped. It was quite frightening.

I was introduced to a youth group in Pont Street near Cadogan Square in London. It was a lovely club, with people of all nationalities, and young service people. The girls who took me there were refugees. They all raved about a boy called Serge who I would later go out with. I remember going on a bicycle ride with Serge, and ending up near where I live now, Allum Lane in Elstree.

I was also very much in touch with my school friend Maureen. She stayed in Cobham until later years. Coincidentally she too became a hairdresser, working in Surrey.

Holidays were not an option, so with several friends I volunteered to go fruit picking in Suffolk and Norfolk. I remember lying under the trees and slacking instead of working. We hitchhiked to Cambridge on the back of a lorry, and I can still feel the wind in my hair. One year we were housed in huts and the next year it was tents. My father sent me a camera from Germany, where he had been transferred. I insisted on taking it on holiday, ignoring my mother's warning that it could be stolen. It was! ■



In London, 1946

Jiving was the in thing: dancing through the Forties

I FIRST MET Vidal Sassoon at dances, at places like the Lyceum Theatre and the Astoria. We also went to dances at the Hammersmith Palais and I went to Brighton Aquarium a few times to dances there. I especially enjoyed the music – I couldn't keep still when I heard it. Jiving was the thing in those days – the Americans brought it with them. We danced to many bands including the Ivor Kirchin Band and the Tommy Sampson Big Band.

I volunteered at US Red Cross Clubs, which were social clubs for US troops. We were asked to perform the arduous task of attending their dances two or three times a week! In contrast to the general concept of the US soldiers, the boys who came to the clubs were well-mannered and respectful. Of course by then the war was over and they were not as stressed as those who had seen combat. One incident I have not forgotten was when two black GIs walked in and one of them asked me to dance – which, of course, I did. The next day, one of the American Red Cross girls, who ran the clubs, called me into her office, and told me I really did not have to dance with a black man. I informed her that no one had told me to look at the colour of someone's skin before I danced with them!

After a BBC broadcast by the Tommy Sampson Band in Regent Street, I got talking to Sammy Stokes, the double bass player. We went out together several times, and I went to see him play in Brighton. Maureen came with me quite often. He went on to play in Ted Heath's band. We saw each other now and then. ■

“ I informed her that no one had told me to look at the colour of someone's skin before I danced with them! ”

A dear little house: the family moves to Edgware

WHEN MY FATHER left the army in 1946, my parents bought a house in Edgware. It was a dear little house, with two bedrooms – two up, two down. Quite modern for the day.

At this time, my cousin Eva was still in Berlin. The only communication I had from her was a letter in the form of a diary, received just before war broke out. That was the only time I heard from her. I only knew that she had been very ill – I think she had peritonitis - but that she was recovering. I think she was living away from home while carrying out her National Service, which was mandatory. I kept her letter through all the years, although I accidentally burnt part of it some years ago while getting rid of some old papers. I didn't hear from Eva between 1939 and 1946. We found out from an army colleague of my father's that she and her parents were alive. She was my best friend and it was a massive sense of relief - also for my father, who learnt his sister was alive. During those seven years we had been praying that they would survive.

Eva's mother, Aunt Trude, came to visit us in 1946. I refused to speak German when we first came to England as it was something I wanted to leave behind. I learnt English and was happy only speaking my new language. But when Aunt Trude came, I had to relearn a bit of German, as naturally she couldn't speak any English. She didn't stay for long. We spoke about what had happened. She told us about the Russians who were known for raping all the women they came across. Aunt Trude said

“ She was my best friend and it was a massive sense of relief - also for my father, who learnt his sister was alive. During those seven years we had been praying that they would survive. ”

she would send Eva into the loft or somewhere to hide, take her false teeth out and open the door in case it was Russians knocking. Eva says now she can't remember that and found the Russians to be pleasant. She said when she told them she was Jewish, they would say: 'No, you can't be. There aren't any Jews left.'

Eva came to visit us in 1948, which was the first time I had seen her since we left Germany. She was here for a year, during which my father was recovering from pleurisy after being in hospital for a long time. Eva helped us to look after him at home; he took a long time to recover but, thank God, he did get better.

Eva wanted to earn some money, so I found her a few clients to visit in their homes and do their hair. She really enjoyed beauty culture. She lived in East Berlin, so I guess life there must have been very different at that time. After she left, I took over many of her clients and my father let me use his car to help me get around, which was fantastic. I learned to drive when I was 19, while my father was ill. It was quite rare for a girl to drive in those days, so people used to stare at me behind the wheel.

Eva married a Polish man called Leon Heitler. They moved to Montreal, Canada, and changed their surname to Herter. On their way to Canada, the boat docked in Southampton, and we spent a day on the boat with them. In 1952 they moved to Los Angeles, California, where Eva still lives today. ■



Left to right, Leon, my mother, Eva, my father, me and Charles on board the Italia en route to Canada, 9 October 1952

The happiest day of my life: the birth of Nicholas

IN THE OLD days, posh restaurants often held dances. On a Sunday night, many of these dances were taken over by the young Jewish community. They were very popular. It was at one of these dances in October 1949 that I met Charles Stern and he proposed to me on New Year's Eve. He introduced me to all his relatives, of whom there were many. Charles' mother had seven sisters and three brothers. Charles worked for an uncle in a clothing factory, and his mother manufactured girls' dresses. He was born in England and lived in Stoke Newington. We got married in August 1950 at Dunstan Road Synagogue in Golders Green. My wedding day was very nice – it was a proper Jewish wedding. The guests were mostly from his side, since his family were all based in England. He had a big family and I only had my parents. The only guests I had were friends that my father had made in the army, and my bridesmaid Maureen.

Before I got married, I had been working as a hairdresser and manicurist for a few years. I started in the salons and then found clients based on recommendation. I went to their homes, just like today when I have someone who comes to do my hair. My mother-in-law didn't think it was nice for me to travel from house to house like that. She asked me if I wanted to go and work with her instead, which I did. She suggested I take on a driving role. I would drive around with a car full of dress samples, taking them to shops to show and getting their orders. It was a lovely job. People were very pleasant, and I did quite well. I drove everywhere and knew London like I know my own home. I did it for a year or two and went as far as Cambridge. I was quite adventurous and loved driving.

Charles and I had a son, Nicholas, born in 1955 in Hampstead. It was the happiest day of my life. ■



Nick's first holiday in Bournemouth c.1956



Nick's first birthday. Heinz and Trude came from East Germany

A wonderful person: Eva Schloss

I FIRST MET Eva Schloss in 1956 when we were with our little babies by Canons Park Lake in Edgware feeding the ducks. She had been in Auschwitz concentration camp. We became close quite quickly. At first we didn't talk about our childhoods: we perceived ourselves as ordinary, and it wasn't the main subject for us. Of all the people I have known who have suffered in the Holocaust, Eva is the most down-to-earth. She is a wonderful person. I met Eva's mother Elfriede (known as Fritzie) and her husband Otto Frank (Anne Frank's father), when they came to visit her. Otto was a lovely man. He was kind and '*sympathisch*' as we say in German. His life's work was Anne's story. He was always doing something concerning her diary. I was shocked by their story - I still am, even now, as we all are.

Eva Schloss and Anne were friends and played together as children, before they went into hiding. Their families lived at Merwedeplein Square in Amsterdam. Anne took Eva to her home and that's where she got to know Otto. Eva's experiences were similar to Anne's, including hiding, being betrayed and getting sent to a concentration camp. Otto lost his wife and two daughters. Eva lost her beloved brother and father. Eva and her mother survived long enough to be liberated by the Russians, who sent them by train to Odessa, after which they made their way back to Holland.

After the war, Otto and Eva were able to return to their homes in Amsterdam to live. This is where Otto got to know Eva's mother Fritzie, whom he eventually married.

“ At first we didn't talk about our childhoods: we perceived ourselves as ordinary, and it wasn't the main subject for us. Of all the people I have known who have suffered in the Holocaust, Eva is the most down-to-earth. She is a wonderful person. ”



Caroline Schloss and Nick in Switzerland 1958

A play was written called *And Then They Came For Me* about Eva and Anne Frank's story. The play was first performed in a pub and, after that, in schools and theatres. After the performance, Eva would answer questions. She travelled with the play and one time, when she went to America, I went with her. I watched it in the theatre every day of the trip, and every time I was touched. This was in Rochester, North New York State, and from there we drove to Toronto, where I had a friend. We stayed there a few days and visited Niagara Falls. The last time I saw the play was at a theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Eva's husband was Zvi Schloss, who was born in Germany but later lived in Israel and then England, where he met Eva. Zvi worked for Bank Leumi, who transferred him to Switzerland. Charles and I would go and stay with them in Switzerland and they would come to stay with us. Switzerland is a beautiful country: every time you turn a corner, you see another beautiful view. Later they had an apartment in Mougins, Cannes, where we often stayed with them. ■

You do your best for your children: life after divorce

IT TURNED OUT that Charles and I married too soon after meeting and we separated in 1960. I'm afraid it was me who wanted to get divorced; it was hard on Charles.

After Charles and I separated, my son Nick and I went to join Eva and Zvi in Switzerland. I got a job typing for Bank Leumi and Nick went to the American School. I intended to stay but Nick wasn't happy at the school, so we were only there for a couple of months before I brought him home. Just like myself and Zvi, Nick would later also work for Bank Leumi.

At first, Nick and I went back to live with my parents in the two-bedroom house in Edgware, but then we managed to get the attached semi, right next door. When my mother became ill, it was easier to look after her as she was so close. I was working with my father in a book publishing office, doing general office work. Nick was a very nice young boy. I called him 'Nicky' then, but he's Nick now. He was independent: he would travel around on the Underground with his friend when they were about 11, something you wouldn't let children that age do today, but at the time London felt safe. Nick went to Edgware School, which was round the corner from where I worked, so I could do the school run on my way to the office.

Nick had his *bar mitzvah* at Edgware Reform Synagogue in 1968. We're not religious but I felt the *bar mitzvah* was something he should have. Zvi Schloss taught him his Torah portion but it didn't go terribly well. Nick had a high temperature the night before and was very nervous. The celebration was a simple affair. We had a tea party and invited all his friends. As a *bar mitzvah* treat, we went to LA and visited Eva. By this time, Charles had gone to live in New York. He later married Sandra, a New Yorker. We stayed friendly after our separation and they even came to visit us in Somerset. I think if you get divorced, then you have to do your best for your children's sake to make it as pleasant as possible, which we did.

I went back to Pitman's in 1960, but this time to a different college than before, where I learned shorthand and typing. My mother told me there was a job with the police. I wasn't sure I wanted to work with the police but I thought I should find out more. I had my first interview at Scotland Yard. They said they wanted me to go to Golders Green for an interview, where the headquarters for the S Division were.

After that interview, they told me that there was a job in Edgware with the CID. I thought: 'That can't be bad!' I took the job and it was great – so interesting. When you went into work you never knew what you would find: prisoners, people being interviewed, murders. I really liked that job. I had to report local crimes on to crime sheets, so I knew all about the neighbours, but having signed the Official Secrets Act, I never divulged anything! In 1965, a taxi driver who lived just around the corner from us was murdered up in Warren Lane in Stanmore. It was such a terrific enquiry, a huge investigation involving interviewing almost every London taxi driver – for which I think I typed 500 statements. It didn't get resolved in the end but was very exciting. Edgware Police Station closed in 1975 and I was offered a job in Wembley to work with the Chief Superintendent. I didn't want to do that, so I went to Hendon Police College as a shorthand typist. I remember when the voice recorders came in and I began audio typing from those. I started working in different departments and was promoted to clerical officer (CO). I started working in the library which was quite a responsible role, covering maternity leave, and when the librarian returned to work I went to work in other departments including media resources. ■



Media Resources department of Hendon Police College © Hendon Times



Barry and I got married at Burnt Oak registry office

A simple affair with nice friends: marriage to Barry

I MET MY second husband, Barry, whilst working for the police force. He was a non-Jewish Englishman who did many jobs in the police force, including CID and on a special unit. He finished up at the Hendon Magistrates' Court. We met in 1961, moved in together in 1975 but didn't get married until 1982. I always said I must have my wedding up in the West End, Caxton Hall, where all the stars get married, but we ended up in Burnt Oak Registry Office! Nick was best man. It was lovely. We had the celebratory dinner at a place in Borehamwood - a very simple affair with nice friends.

In June 1982, when we still lived in Edgware next-door my parents, there was a terrible flood and two children drowned in a park in Burnt Oak. It was a Saturday, I think, and luckily we were home. It was pouring with rain and we lived on a slope, so all the water came rushing down, more and more. That's when my parents lost all their photographs. I managed to save most of my photos, but my parents were having an afternoon nap and were completely unaware of what was going on. It was quite a deep flood. It took many months to clear and we had to live upstairs in the meantime. Exactly 10 years later, my son and his family were living in the house and it flooded again. They had to move out for a few weeks. Since I experienced that, I always feel so sorry for people whose homes get flooded now. It's a terrible thing to go through, especially in winter.

Barry fitted in everywhere, always bringing a *kippah* to every function. It was the same when we visited Germany. Barry and I went to Israel together. We expected the Israelis to be rude and crass, but we found them to be lovely. We stayed in Jerusalem and Tiberias, and did a few trips nearby to the Golan Heights and the Dead Sea. We also went to Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to the Holocaust, which was a moving experience.

Barry and I spent many holidays walking in England and France. We used to stay overnight, and Barry would carry all the gear. It was hard work and sometimes I thought I wouldn't be able to walk all the way, but I always managed. We did the Offa's Dyke walk in Wales, in stages. We completed the Striding Edge walk at Helvellyn, in the Lake District. That was quite an adventure. We were supporters of the London Symphony Orchestra and we went to many concerts. We went to the Royal Festival Hall and the Barbican. We loved to go and hear big symphony orchestras. ■



With Barry, Eva and Zvi Schloss c. 1981



Our house in Edgware



The view from our house of the flood in Edgware, 1982



With Barry in 1973



Me at the Berlin Wall, 1977



With my parents in Berlin, 1977

My father returned to Berlin: visiting was not easy

MY MOTHER BECAME very ill, so I retired in 1985 to look after her. Barry was so good with her. Nick married Anne in 1984. In 1987, Anne gave birth to my twin granddaughters, Jennifer and Danielle, six weeks before my mother died. They went on to have Mark, born in 1990.

My father moved back to Berlin after that. He forgot about the Nazis, I think, and just remembered the good times he had in his youth before the Nazis came. He imagined it would be like when he was young, but it wasn't. He moved to a nice Jewish care home in West Berlin, where we visited him often. We always travelled by car, driving from West Germany to Berlin. We had to go through what was at that time the Russian Zone. At the border check you had to hand in your passport and you hoped you would get it back. Then you drove the long distance on the motorway (full of holes). You were not allowed to leave that road, and you always saw armed soldiers keeping watch on observation towers.

My father came back to London a couple of times, including for his 90th birthday in 1992, but travelling soon became too much for him. His sister Trude had died, but her son Günther was still in Berlin. I never considered moving to there, but I got quite used to going to visit. I'd first gone back to Berlin when Nick was about three, to visit Aunt Trude. Despite the heavy bombing, many of the streets looked the same as they had when I was a child.

Before my father moved to Berlin, the German authorities invited all refugees to go for a week, whenever they wanted to go. It was a thing they did. Barry and I went along, thinking it would be interesting. We were treated well and, like the other former refugees, we stayed in the best hotel. We were meant to meet the authorities and go to the dinners but we never did. I showed Barry where we had lived but I didn't see it as my home in any way.

Despite the conditions, my cousin Günther, his wife Rosie and their son were very happy living in East Berlin and had a good life there. They had lived in Berlin throughout the war, although Günther and his father, Uncle Heinz, were sent to a labour camp, perhaps because Heinz had married a Jew, whilst Eva had to clear rubble as a slave labourer.

To visit Rosie and Günther we had to go through customs whilst on the train. The authorities were so nasty, really severe and unfriendly. You had to change your money, giving them Deutschmarks to exchange for their East Marks, which were worth nothing. There were always guards with guns walking up and down the tracks. Later, when it looked like the Berlin wall was going to come down, suddenly they were as friendly as anything. Since the shops in East Berlin had empty shelves, when Rosie and Günther came to visit us in England, they'd look at the shelves and in the shops tell us they were sure no-one could afford all those luxuries.

We took my son Nick, daughter-in-law, Anne, and the twins, Jennifer and Danielle, to Berlin when the girls were tiny. When we tried to cross the border back from East to West, they asked everyone except for the babies to get out of the car and searched everywhere, in case we were trying to smuggle people across. ■



With Nick and Anne



With my father in 1992 at our house in Somerset

Life in retirement: Taunton

IN 1988, BARRY and I went to live near Taunton in Somerset, as we'd always wanted to live in the country. My parents were no longer with us, and Barry's father had died. We suggested his mother move with us, but she didn't want to. I loved living there. We saw a lot of the family: I would often drive back to see them, and they came to visit, as we had a large house. It was idyllic. Barry intended to find a job, but we were so busy that he didn't have time to find work. We had a huge garden and my husband loved to grow things, which we often sold at the garden gate. I started playing golf, but I had left it a bit late to start learning how to play properly and we had plenty of other things to do instead. Our garden needed a lot of looking after. I would get travel sick on the ride-on lawnmower from looking back and around all the time to see where I was going. A bad traveller, me! Coincidentally, two or three couples we had been friendly with previously were also living within visiting distance, often staying overnight.



On holiday with Barry at the Grand Canyon, 1994

The house and garden became too big for us to manage, so we moved to Radlett in 1997 to this flat where I still live. We were near to my family and having a smaller home flat enabled us to go away a lot. We often went to the Continent – to Switzerland and Germany. We used to drive everywhere. We only flew to Berlin once – it must have been because my father became ill. My father became ill quite often and as soon as there was any chance of him being taken into hospital, Barry would say: 'Pack your bags, we're going to see him.' We went to France quite often too, renting a flat near Cannes for four weeks, usually in winter. It was a good time. Sadly, Barry died from blood cancer in 2002. I miss him very much. ■



My grandchildren



My great-daughters Amelia and Halle

I am blessed: current day

I AM BLESSED with my son Nick, my stepdaughter Diane, and my five grandchildren: twins Jennifer and Danielle, and Mark, Andrew and Angela. I have three great-grandchildren, too: girls Amelia (born 2016) and Halle (born 2019), and a boy Brodie (born 2019).

Andrew and his wife Lisa FaceTime me every other Sunday so I can see Brodie, and how he is developing. The little girls live near me, so I get to see them in person.

I have very rarely experienced antisemitism in the UK, maybe once or twice at work. I remember once we were waiting for a request bus in Edgware and the driver went sailing by. When we got to the depot my husband asked him why he didn't stop, and the response was: 'Why don't you go back where you came from?' My father always said: 'Where there's Jews, there's antisemitism.'

My parents were members of AJR but I never was until I was introduced to it by my friend Alfred Keiles and his wife Esther. I met Alfred through Jazz Club, which he ran, and we were friends for many years. They took me to my first meeting and it felt homely.

After Esther sadly passed away, Alf and I later formed a close and lovely friendship. He was a collector of jazz records. He has a lovely family. Two of his sons are talented musicians and their wives are professional singers. A third son lives in Australia. Alf passed away in December 2020, and is much missed by me, and all his jazz fans. I have continued to be close to Alf's family. ■



My great-grandson Brodie

A footnote . . .

IT IS HARD to believe the Holocaust happened or understand how. Yet it's happening again today, isn't it? And if it's not to human beings, it's to nature. I want to tell future generations to make peace. People are being hounded out of their homes and having to go to other countries, as I did. There are refugees all over the world. It's a very hard task – and, to be honest, I fear it may never, ever happen – but I still hope there will be peace in the world. ■



With Alf



About the AJR

Founded in 1941 by Jewish refugees from Central Europe, The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) is the national charity representing and supporting Holocaust refugees and survivors living in Great Britain. Primarily delivering social, welfare and care services, the AJR has a nationwide network of regional groups offering members a unique opportunity to socialise in their local area. Members receive support from volunteers and can obtain advice and assistance on welfare rights as well as on Holocaust reparations.

The AJR is committed to the education of future generations about the Holocaust and is now the UK's largest benefactor of education and memorialisation programmes and projects which promote teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

About 70,000 refugees, including approximately 10,000 children on the *Kindertransport*, arrived in Great Britain from Nazi-occupied Europe in the 1930s. The AJR extends membership to anyone who fled a Nazi-occupied country as a Jewish refugee or who arrived in Great Britain as a Holocaust survivor. We also welcome the descendants and spouses of the refugees as members.



“I want to tell future generations to make peace. People are being hounded out of their homes and having to go to other countries, as I did. There are refugees all over the world. It’s a very hard task – and, to be honest, I fear it may never, ever happen - but I still hope there will be peace in the world.”

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk