

My Story

Frank Leigh



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These are Frank's words. This is his story.

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).

www.ajrmystory.org.uk www.ajr.org.uk

Frank Leigh spoke to AJR volunteer Matthew Figg to share his story. Thanks also to AJR volunteers Muireann Grealy, Alix Lee and Lauren Rosenstone.

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"I grew up very fast; my physical age was immaterial at this point. I learned to trust no one; I felt a constant terror. I lived in a kind of hell and it became a way of life."



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Family

I WAS BORN Frank Herbert Lichtenstein in Vienna, on 13 December 1925, although my parents called me Herbert. I was an only child. We lived at Strömstrasse 81; our building was set out almost like an arena where all the doors faced inwards. Our flat was number nine.

My mother's name was Sidonie but everyone called her 'Siddi'. Her maiden name was Weissbartl. She was born in Ung Brod, Czechoslovakia, in 1905.

My father, Hans, found it hard to make a living. He was a sales representative for Singer sewing machines and my mother was a housewife. We were very poor.

My mother made the best apple strudel. She was a lovely cook but she never had much food to cook with. We would often have our meals at my maternal grandparents' apartment. That's how we got by. The tram fare to my grandparents' was only 15 *pfennigs*, but my parents couldn't afford it, so we had to walk instead, thankfully it was only a 20-minute journey. My mother would share what little she had with me. I remember her taking a sweet out of her mouth and giving it to me. According to Hitler, all Jews had money. This was not so, my family were absolutely destitute. We weren't a religious family but I do remember my mother would light the *Shabbat* candles on a Friday night.

My mother was the third of four children. She had two sisters and a brother. Mela was the eldest; she was an actress and her stage name was Mela Wigandt. She married a fellow actor, Franz Pfaudler, who was not Jewish. He couldn't find work as he was married to a Jew so they had to divorce, but he would send money to my grandparents.

Her other sister, Selma, was the youngest sibling and had left for England before the war and married a doctor, Heini Ritterman. The second eldest sibling, Leopold, who I knew as 'Uncle Poldi', left for Palestine before war broke out. I didn't know until recently that there had been another sibling before Selma, called Hedwig who died at the age of two months.

My father had just one sister, Valerie, who married Josef Walsch. I was very close to them and would spend a lot of time at their house and loved their little baby daughter Evile.



Me aged two, in the photo studio



From left to right: my mother, my maternal grandmother Josefine, my grandfather Nathan Weissbartl and me



My mother's sister, Auntie Selma Ritterman, and me on Danube beach, circa 1933



I am leaning on my Auntie Mela at the beach with my grandmother Josefina (middle) and mother (right), circa 1933



Leopold Weissbartl (Uncle Poldi)

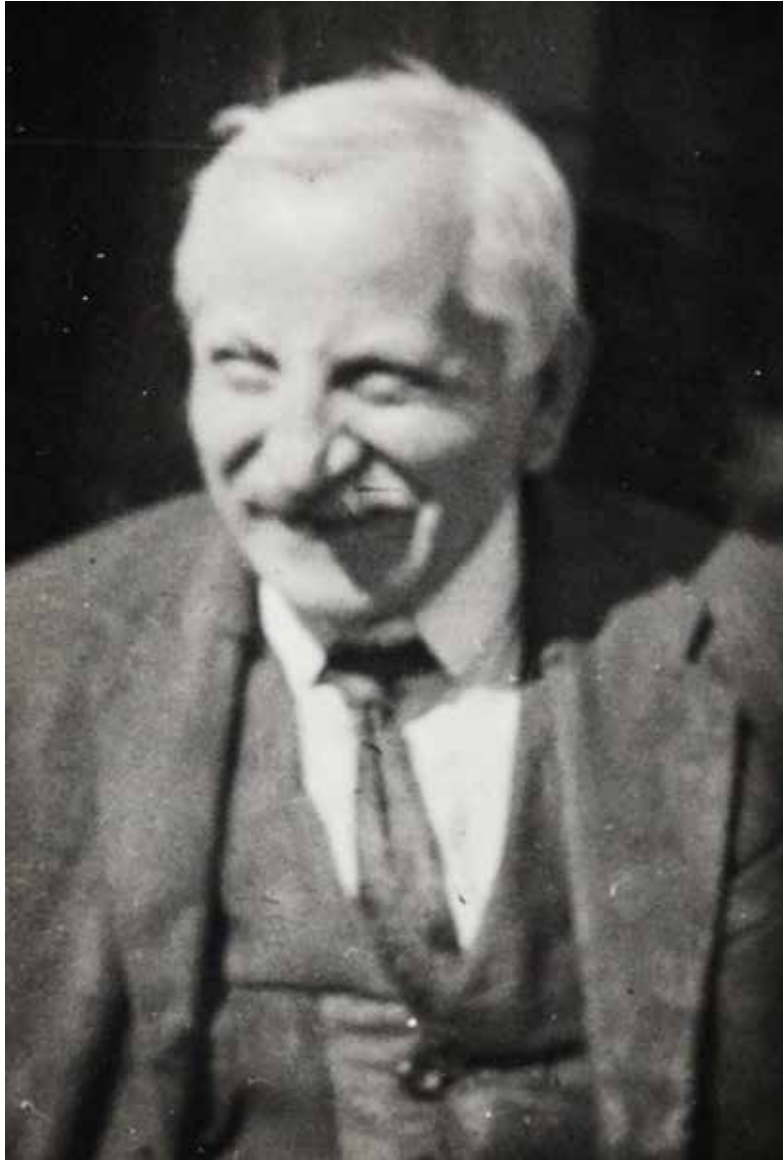
I don't have many memories of my paternal grandfather, who was an optician. He re-married Frau Lichtenstein after my grandmother died. I remember she looked after me very well. I have a vague memory of attending my grandfather's funeral when I was eight years old.

My maternal grandparents were Josefine and Nathan Weissbartl. My grandfather was awarded medals for bravery for his service in the Austrian Army during World War One. Consequently, my grandparents and their family lived their lives without restrictions. Nathan worked as a tailor. He made a good enough living to feed his family, but he never had any money left over. As the wife of a war hero, my grandmother, Josefine, lived the life of a privileged woman. ■

“ My grandfather was awarded medals for bravery for his service in the Austrian Army during World War One. Consequently, my grandparents and their family lived their lives without restrictions. ”



My paternal step-grandmother, Frau Lichtenstein



My paternal grandfather. He had an opticians on Treustrasse, just off Wallenstrasse, Vienna



My mother's sister Mela, and her husband Franz Pfaudler



Uncle Josef, Auntie Valerie and Baby Evile, 16 August 1939



From left to right: Frau Shapiro (neighbour in Karajangasse, who lived on the floor below), my maternal grandparents and me. The lady on the far right was another neighbour who was very friendly with my family, circa 1935

The rise of the Nazis

I WAS THE only Jewish child in my class of around 30. I had some nice friends, but there were others whose attitude changed over time due to their families' political views. At first, the teacher treated me like any teacher would treat their pupils today, but once the Nazis arrived, I was discriminated against and made to feel inferior.

I was aware, though, of the terrible position my teacher was in. Under the Nazis, people had to follow orders. If they didn't, they were killed. It's understandable that they kept their heads down and did as they were told.

Eventually I was banned from taking part in all school activities, such as using the swimming pool. The other children would say that I would pass on a disease to them, as I was Jewish. I heard someone say, 'Urgh, you dirtied the water!'



I am on the far left, with friends, circa 1933, Vienna



Me in Vienna, 1935

When I was about nine years old, a new law was passed preventing Jewish children from attending mainstream schools. I was forced to attend the Jewish school, *Khais Gymnasium*, which was on the other side of town.

Jewish persecution did not happen overnight; it happened slowly, insidiously. If Hitler had said from the beginning: 'Jews are all rats and must be destroyed,' the Germans would have said he was crazy and the Nazis would have been overthrown. The Nazis needed to get the German people on side, so they introduced their anti-Jewish sentiment in small, slow steps. The propagandists were intelligent lunatics who in that way succeeded in gaining full support from the German people.

Before the terror, I spent much of my time playing in the streets. I was a different child back then. I was shown *mitleid* (compassion) from others if I fell over. Once the Nazis rose to power, the Viennese people turned cold. There was no more sympathy from them if I hurt myself.

When the Nazis annexed Austria in March 1938, we were kicked out of our home. We had no choice but to move in with my maternal grandparents in Karajangasse, a street in district 20, the northern area of Vienna. I turned 13 during this time but never had the chance to be *bar mitzvah* (coming of age ritual for Jewish boys aged 13). We lived with my grandparents for almost a year until life in Vienna became very hectic, to say the least.

I would watch the Nazis through our window, as they herded people into the school across the road from our flat, beating them as they walked.

There was a lot of unrest in Vienna and each Sunday a different political party would march into town for a rally. One week it would be the Socialists; the next week, the Communists; then the Nazis, then the Conservatives and so on. Some Nazis wanted an independent Nazi Austria, but Germany was always there, ready to march in.

Our neighbour was called Löffel. One day he knocked on our door and said to my father: 'Herr Lichtenstein, would you like to come to town with me and throw some rotten eggs at the Nazis who are marching tonight?' After the *Anschluss* (annexation of Austria), when the Nazis invaded Austria, Herr Löffel returned home drunk one night and banged on our door shouting: 'Heil Hitler! Down

Öffentliche Hauptschule für Knaben in Wien:

Bezirk, Lehringergasse 43

Wien. Zahl: 1

Schulbezirk: Wien. Schuljahr: 1927-28

Jahreszeugnis.

Konstantin Jank, geboren am 13. Aug. 1917
 in Lehringergasse
 Religion, Schüler der vierten Klasse, erhält hiemit über das
 Schuljahr 1927-28 folgendes Zeugnis:

Vertrauen: gut
 Fleiß: gut

Lehrgegenstände	Leistungen	Gesamterfolg
A. Verbindliche Lehrgegenstände.		
Religion	genügend	Der Schüler ist zum Aufsteigen in die nächsthöhere Klasse der Hauptschule geeignet, und hat die ————— Hauptmatrikel zu übernehmen, was auf die Schulnote des Besonderen bezieht.
Deutsche Sprache	genügend	
Geographie	gut	
Geschichte	gut	
Naturgeschichte	gut	
Naturlehre	genügend	
Rechnen und Raumlehre	gut	
Geometrisches Zeichnen	gut	
Freihandzeichnen	gut	
Schreiben	gut	
Handarbeit	sehr gut	
Selang	sehr gut	
Turnen	genügend	
B. Nichtverbindliche Lehrgegenstände.		
Sprache	abgelesen	
höhere Form der Arbeiten		
Zahl der ver- läumten halben Schulstage	entschuldig nicht entschuldig	

My school report



My father, Hans

with the Jews!' Like so many Viennese people, he had moved with the tide and had become indoctrinated. Our neighbour on the other side was a lovely person called Kitsinger. He came out of his flat and pulled Löffel away from our door.

But when my grandfather died of bowel cancer that year, my family's freedom ended immediately. One day, my father went out to buy some cigarettes and never returned. We later learned that he had been arrested and transported to Dachau concentration camp.

I grew up very fast; my physical age was immaterial at this point. I learned to trust no one; I felt a constant terror. I lived in a kind of hell and it became a way of life. My mother still treated me as a child. She didn't know that, on the inside, I had grown up. Perhaps she did know, but she continued to mother me. ■



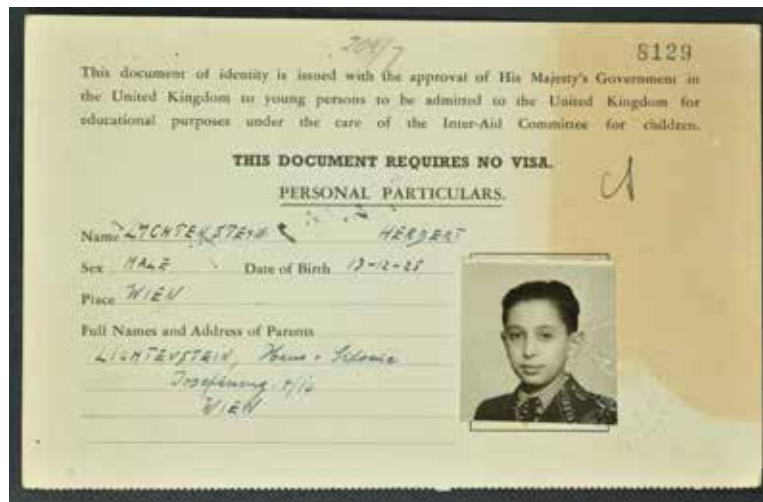
Me holding my first cousin, Evile Walsch, 1939

My journey to safety

ALMOST A YEAR after we moved into my grandparents' home, my family started to look for a safe way out of Vienna for me. I was 13 and a half when my mother secured a place for me on the *Kindertransport*.

She built up the idea that I was soon to leave for England on a lovely holiday she had planned for me. She said: 'In August you're going to England, Herbert.' She didn't mention that I would have to leave my family behind. I went along with this by excitedly replying: 'Oh yes, yes!' As much as she was trying to make me happy, I was responding in a way to make her happy, too.

The day of my departure arrived and my mother and grandfather walked me to *Westbahnhof* train station in Vienna. I could see my mother as I boarded the train and so I did my best to show her I was happy by smiling and waving. She, in turn, waved and smiled back at me; we were like two actors. Once the train set off and rounded the curve, my mother went out of sight and I started crying. I didn't have to act any more. I still think it was remarkable for a 13-year-old to have been able to wait before crying. I will remember this until the day I die.



My identity card

The train took an indirect route through Germany, where Nazi officers came aboard to check our passports. I felt like a criminal who had escaped from prison. The journey seemed endless, but as we reached Holland I remember how fantastic it felt. The Dutch showed such kindness to the children on board, and it was at this point that I felt I was truly free. I had dreamed about freedom for so long that it took a long time for it to sink in when I really was free.

After a boat trip across the English Channel, we landed on the east coast of England on 6 July 1939. I don't remember much about the journey, but I do know I was very seasick – and it lasted a good few days after the journey.

The first thing I can remember is that I was placed with a Jewish family who lived on Sylvester Road in the East End of London for a short time. I did not know a word of English before I came here. I could only speak German and my new family only spoke English, so I had no choice but to learn quickly. I remember the local barber's shop had a sign hanging outside saying: 'Shave Sir?' When a fellow refugee boy was going for a haircut, he would say: 'I'm going to the shave sir!'

I became poorly, although I am unsure of what illness I had. The Refugee Authority arranged for me to stay at a lovely convalescent home in Littlehampton, on the south-east coast, for three weeks. I enjoyed my stay; I was the only youngster there and was well looked after. ■



When I first arrived in England I was taken to Flat 61, Graham Mansions, Sylvester Road, E8



In respite care in Littlehampton. I am sitting at the front



As a teenager with fellow hostel refugees

Going North

AFTER 18 MONTHS in London, it was arranged for me to travel by train to Leeds. My best friend, Siegfried Goldstein, who I knew as ‘Siggy’, had also come over on the *Kindertransport* and joined me in Leeds. We moved into a big hostel with a large driveway on Stainbeck Lane in north Leeds. The girls and boys, all Austrian refugees, were separated into dorms of about 10. I’d had no education since schools had been closed to Jewish children in Austria. A school was set up in the hostel and we had lessons every day.

Business owners would often enquire at the hostel for suitable apprentices. There were plumbers, cobblers, electricians, all sorts. The boys had no say in who they were sent to work with. I had been in Leeds for about a year when a Mr Rosenthal arrived, saying: ‘I’ve got room for a little apprentice at my barber shop’ and I was taken to his barber shop on Meanwood Road, where he lived with his wife and young son.

The shop had no name and he was the only barber who worked there. He was about to run through the rules with me when a customer arrived. As soon as he finished one customer, another one would come in. I saw that when he had finished cutting hair, he used a brush to wipe the hair off the customer’s back. After about three or four customers, I was fed up of doing nothing, so I picked up the brush and brushed the next man down myself. That really impressed Mr Rosenthal.

“ A lovely couple, Harry and Diana Goldberg, took me in and made me a part of their family. Harry worked at Burton’s factory and Diana was a housewife. I lived with them at 6 Saville Drive for about four years. ”



Uncle Heini and Auntie Selma



Me with Auntie Selma Ritterman in London

I continued to live at the hostel during my apprenticeship and was so busy I never had time to play football with the rest of the children. The boys in the hostel were expected to look smart and have their hair short and neat. My friends would ask me to cut their hair instead of going to the barber arranged by the hostel. Word got around and it appeared that the boys preferred the way I cut their hair and would use their spending money on their haircuts with me. I was always good at my job because I was always trying to improve. I believed that whatever I learned, I hadn't learned enough.

Local Jewish families were encouraged to offer a proper home to children from the hostel when we reached about 16 years of age. A lovely couple, Harry and Diana Goldberg, took me in and made me a part of their family. Harry worked at Burton's factory and Diana was a housewife. I lived with them at 6 Saville Drive for about four years. Harry's brother had married Diana's sister and they lived further up the street. I have fond memories of us all spending time together.

Their son, David, was already at medical school at this point and almost married. Mr and Mrs Goldberg were very kind. Diana cooked lovely fish dishes and I remember her going to the market early to get more fish for her money. I became very close to the Goldbergs and once I moved out, I often went back to pay them a visit.

At any opportunity when I had time off from work, I would go to stay with my Auntie Selma and her husband Heini, who lived at 87 Harvard Court, in West Hampstead, London. They didn't have any children of their own. I really enjoyed my time with them, they looked after me very well. In the early 1970s, Heini was tragically killed after falling off a busy underground platform in front of a train. That was really very sad. ■

Thoughts on living through the war

WAR IS HORRIBLE. Innocent people get killed. War should always be avoided if at all possible, but I think if any war was necessary, it was World War Two. It was the only way the Nazis could be destroyed.

On June 22 1941, I woke up to the news on the wireless that Hitler had invaded Russia. I was only 16 years old, but I knew that Hitler wouldn't be able to defeat the Russians. I was the happiest boy in the world.

During wartime we mostly had plenty to eat despite food rationing. America sent boatloads of food over to Britain. The real hunger in Britain started when the war ended and the expense of war led to a food shortage. The country was exhausted from the war, in every sense; financially and physically. But slowly we built ourselves up. I remember feeling lucky to be able to buy half a loaf of bread and looking forward to my one egg a week.

Leeds City Council asked for volunteers to drive trams to keep the traffic flowing and I volunteered. They didn't care that I didn't have a licence, they just gave me a cap to wear while on duty. I was shown how to use the levers and it seemed dead simple but I was scared. I remember driving it into town. I kept moving it into the wrong ratchet which slowed the whole journey down.

As the war went on, I could see we were winning. It was wonderful when I read about the latest military action in the newspapers as the Allies gained ground against the Nazis.

On 8 May 1945, I was walking down the road in the sunshine when victory was declared over Germany. I was overcome with happiness. I was 19 years old and I thought: 'That's the end of those bastards!' My feelings were stronger than any Englishman's. There are no words to describe it. It felt like I had won the pools! It really was a case of good against evil. ■



My parents

My parents' story

MY MOTHER WORKED desperately hard to secure my father's release from Dachau concentration camp. At that time, prisoners were freed if they provided proof of an exit visa into another country. My mother organised an application for my father to go to Italy. They never used this, however, as once he was released they left for England on a domestic work permit my Auntie Selma had secured for both of my parents at a house in Pickering, North Yorkshire. The visa stated it would become invalid if war should break out.

Soon after I had left on the *Kindertransport*, they fled Austria. They planned to catch a boat to England and were making their way through France by train when war was declared. The visa immediately became invalid and they were left in France, with no way out. I later learned that my father joined the French Army to fight the Nazis and my mother took refuge in unoccupied Southern France.

Up until the end of 1942 I was able to send my mother money I earned from cutting the boys' hair at the hostel. I remember receiving a letter from my mother saying that the money I sent had paid the rent. It was only 15 shillings but it was a lot of money in those days.

“They planned to catch a boat to England and were making their way through France by train when war was declared. The visa immediately became invalid and they were left in France, with no way out.”



My parents in Nice

After 11 November 1942 all correspondence stopped and I could no longer send my mother anything else. France had lost any semblance of control when Churchill sank the French fleet to stop it falling into German hands and France's unoccupied zone ended.

Apparently, my father deserted the army on 25 November 1942 and made his way back to my mother when they were both arrested and taken to Drancy in a north-eastern suburb of Paris. My parents were both deported on Transport 55 on 23 June 1943 to Auschwitz Birkenau extermination camp in Poland. My father was selected for work at Auschwitz and my mother was sent to the gas chambers.

My father, who had previous experience at Dachau concentration camp, somehow survived. He was a clever man, although God knows what he must have had to do to survive. He told me that if the guard didn't like you he threw your hat onto the electric wire. If you tried to retrieve it, he shot you. The guards had to fill a form out to say why you died, so it would say: 'Shot while trying to escape'.

My father told me afterwards that as my mother was being taken away to the gas chamber, she said to him: 'If you survive, look after the boy.' I don't know whether this is the truth or if he said it to make me feel good, but knowing her, she would have said it.

When my parents left Vienna, my grandmother, who had once been protected by my grandfather's heroism, suddenly became *verschleppte* (a displaced person). On 6 May 1942 she was arrested and transported to Maly Trostinets, a village near Minsk in Belarus, where the Nazis established an extermination camp. She was 70 years old when she was murdered there on 11 May 1942. ■

“ My father, who had previous experience at Dachau concentration camp, somehow survived. He was a clever man, although God knows what he must have had to do to survive. ”

Sch.-Jude häftling Hans L i c h t e n s t e i n 8485 8485

Beruf: Angestellter geboren am: 11.4.01 in: Wien

Anschrifts-Ort: Sidonia L. Wien 20, Karajangasse 15/21

Eingel. am: 23.9.38 / 7 Uhr von KLD — Entl. am: 14.4.39**15 / 15 Uhr nach Adr. wie oben

Bei Einlieferung abgegeben:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hut/Waage	..... Kragen	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brieftasche/Papiere	..... Kamm	..... Spiegel
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> P. Schuhe/Stiefel	..... Binder	..... Bücher	..... Rasiermesser	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> P. Strümpfe	..... Vorhemd	..... Inv.-Verf.-Karte	.....
..... P. Gamaschen	..... Leibriemen	..... Drehbleistift	.....
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mantel <small>Sommer Winter</small>	..... P. Sodenhalter	..... Füllfederhalter	..... Koffer/Alltagsche	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rock	..... Mansch.-Knöpfe	..... Messer	..... Schere	..... Patete
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hose	..... Kragenknöpfe	..... Geldbörse	..... Wertfächer:	
..... Weste	..... Pullover	..... Schlüssel	..... Uhr mit Kette	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hemd	..... Taschentuch	..... Feuerzeug/hölzler	..... Armbanduhr	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unterhose	..... P. Handschuhe	..... Tabak	..... Pfeife	..... Ringe

..... **Erkannt:** *Lichtenstein Hans* **Effektenverwalter:** *W. M.*

Personal effects card recorded upon my father's arrival at Auschwitz

Reunited with my father

AFTER THE WAR, I tried to find out about what had happened to my parents by contacting organisations such as the Red Cross. I discovered that my father was still alive and was working in the 'Denazification' court.

I was given an address to write to him; of course, we didn't have the use of a telephone in those days.

I learned that he had returned to Vienna by bicycle from Poland. That's almost 300 miles; he must have been a very strong man. In 1946, I went to see him. Although I was happy to be reunited with my father, I had to accept my mother was gone. It was a very sad time.

One time, we were walking down a street in Vienna when my father spotted a Russian soldier. My father, who could speak a little Russian after picking it up in the camps, pulled the Russian aside. I don't know what he told him, but I could see he showed him the concentration camp tattoo on his arm. We all went off together towards the old flat I lived in as a young boy with my parents. We knocked on the door and the wife of an SS officer opened it and the Russian soldier told her she had 12 hours to leave. When we came back, the flat was empty: it was ours again. I can't say I was joyous, but I had a great feeling of satisfaction.

I wanted my father to move to England, but he felt that there was nothing here for him. I, on the other hand, couldn't get back to England quickly enough. I felt that England was my country now. I convinced my father to visit for a short time and he stayed at the Goldbergs with me for a couple of months. He returned to Vienna, although there was no one left there apart from my mother's sister, Mela, who had survived the war.

My father didn't have much money so I would often travel to Switzerland to buy sugar and deliver it to him in Vienna so he had something to sell to make a living.

Sometime in the early 1960s, I received a letter to say that he had died in hospital following an operation. He is buried in Vienna. ■

Memories of a young man

WHEN I WAS about 18 years old I decided to change my surname. I had grown tired of having to spell out 'L-I-C-H-T-E-N-S-T-E-I-N'. It was not a traditionally Jewish name, but in fact the name of a small country and also of a Count. I settled on 'Leigh', which I think is nice and English.

My best friend from Germany, 'Siggy', had changed his name from Siegfried to Freddy; he wanted to become more anglicised. He married Martha and they were both like a brother and sister to me. I am still in touch with their daughter Anne today. Anne showed me a photograph of Siggy as a young lad and that's how I remember him. She showed me a photograph of him as an old man and I thought: 'Oh, that's not him!'

I had many more good friendships that lasted through the years. Brothers Michael and Desmond Bergstein had made their own way to England from Vienna, as did Lilly Blumka who arrived here on the *Kindertransport*. We all had similar experiences and spent any spare time we had together. At the age of about 19 or 20 we would often go to the Jubilee Club and the Mecca dance hall in the County Arcade, right in the centre of Leeds. Michael immigrated to New York in the 1950s. I visited him in the 1970s but he would return to Leeds every summer when we would see each other as much as we could. Desmond and Lilly married and settled in Leeds. Our families would spend lots of time together and our close friendships remained until they passed away.

I always used to like playing cards in my free time. I played bridge and Solo. They are skilful games. It's not only about the cards you get – it's what you do with the cards. When I was living at Mrs Goldberg's I used to play cards on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. ■

FORMERLY CHILDRENS MOVEMENT. 12468
JEWISH REFUGEES COMMITTEE 18-12-47

A22289 H.O. Ref. 8129

Case No. **8129**

Surname **LICHTENSTEIN** Address **6, SAUNDERS DRIVE,**
 Other Names **FRANK HERBERT** Phone No. **LEEDS 7**

Date of Birth **13.12.1925** Nationality **AUSTRIAN** Born at **VIENNA** If Orthodox **JEWISH**

Address in Germany **VIENNA** Date of arrival in England **6.7.1939** PERMIT Valid for

Married Husband Wife Not in England

Relatives or Friends in England (Stating Financial Position)

in England Means .. Germany Elsewhere	Amount	Country	Number of Children			
			Born at	Age	Sex	If in eng.

NATURALISED DATE 10.12.47

OCCUPATION in Germany (in full detail)

Alternative Occupations Experience

Languages

If registered by any other Refugee Committee Passport Expires

LEFT ENGLAND FOR ON

Date of interviews	Port of Arrival	Nature of Hospitality	Money Grants	Initials
20.8.47.	Handed in letter of invitation, addressed to his father in Vienna, enclosed letter from Landlady, wants father to come for visit. States that he has savings of £200 with the Leeds Permanent Building Society.			REFEEM
15.3.48.				R/T

NATURALISED DATE 18.12.47

Just before my 22nd birthday I received my naturalisation papers and became a British citizen



Me and Siggy

My working life

I PICKED UP the hairdressing skill very quickly and was a trained hairdresser by the time I was 17. I eventually moved on from Mr Rosenthal's barber shop to work in another salon, owned by a lady this time. One customer was so pleased with the haircut I gave him, he said: 'It's marvellous, it's like a work of art; a real professional job. Thank you.'

Foolishly, I replied: 'Well, I don't get professional wages.' That comment led to me losing that job: the owner told me to leave straight away and not return.

My next job was at a barber's owned by Micky Newman. It was on Vicar Lane opposite the ABC picture house. The customers would say: 'I'll wait for Frank.' I was always working and the other barbers weren't, so eventually I thought I might as well work for myself. So, about 15 or 20 years after I finished my apprenticeship, I opened my own shop.

The problem was businesses were booming at that time and there were no empty shops to rent. In 1962, I eventually found a place on New Station Street, behind Leeds Railway Station. I had saved £700, which was just enough to open a shop and fit it out. I had one shilling and sixpence left in my pocket after that, which wouldn't have even bought me some fish and chips. I had no money left, but I had no debts either.

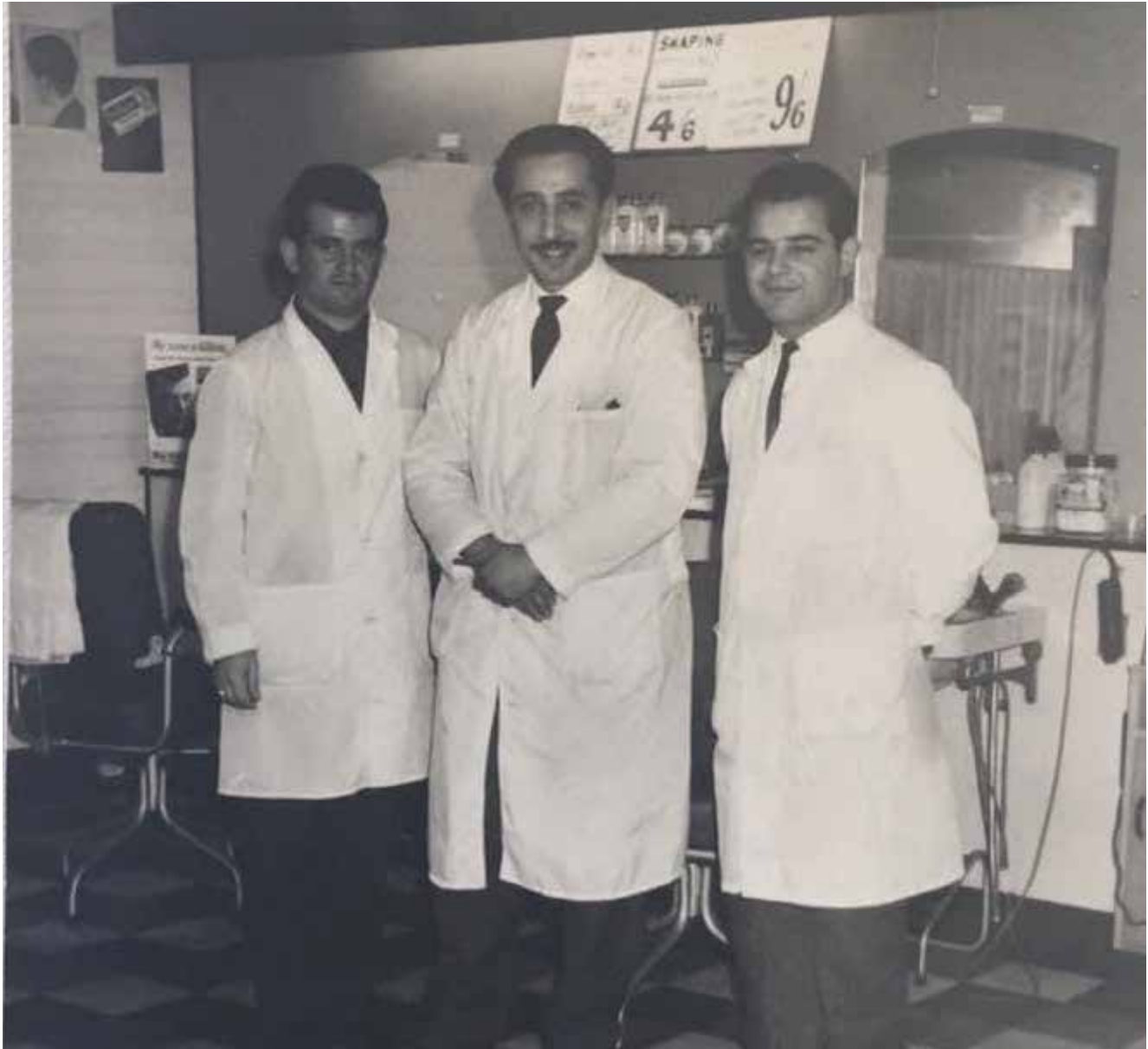
I established a good business and then opened a second barber shop on Duncan Street in the early 70s and was never short of customers. Never. Customers came in from the bus stop outside; people just came from nowhere. There would be seven of us working there at one time. Other hairdressers would often stand outside looking through the window into the shop. They must have wondered how I had so much work, because I wasn't charging any more or any less than other barbers.

I spent most of my time trying to keep my staff happy so they wouldn't be enticed to go and work elsewhere. I treated everybody fairly. Having experienced working for somebody else, I wanted to treat everybody how I would want to be treated myself. That made me popular with the staff. I always had a good relationship with them. ■

MEMORY LANE: Hair's one shop that hasn't been demolished



My shop on New Station Street appeared in the Yorkshire Evening Post following the demolition of neighbouring property. © Yorkshire Evening Post 10 April 1974



I am standing between my employees in my barber shop

Starting a family of my own

IN 1964 I met Joan at the Jubilee dance hall, Chapeltown, and we married a year later. Our daughter, Evelyn, was born in December 1965. We named her after my baby cousin, Evile, who perished in the Holocaust. Our son, John, was born in November 1966. We gave him the middle name Nathan after my mother's father.

In April 1974, British Rail approached me about a development project they had planned. They were selling their property on to a builder who wanted to redevelop the whole street and asked me to move out of my premises. I objected and despite the properties either side of my shop being demolished, my shop was left standing alone on New Station Street. We had to manage without water and electricity for some time and I carried on trading until I found another shop, but then the building firm went bankrupt so they didn't pull my shop down after all. In the meantime, I had already found another premises in Duncan Street so decided to go ahead with this and finished off with two shops.

When I opened my second shop, I didn't tell my existing customers about it, because I didn't want to pinch customers from one to the other. I remember when Joan asked how the new shop was going. I said: 'It's a licence to print money!'

I had 10 people working for me in total over my two shops. I was always busy but I enjoyed family time. We had a few day trips to Blackpool when the kids were little and also visited Israel once in the early 70s. ■



Auntie Selma, my daughter Evelyn at three months, with my wife Joan and Uncle Heini in Leeds, March 1966



Me and Joan in the 1980s



Evelyn and John on holiday in Israel, 1974

Would I go back?

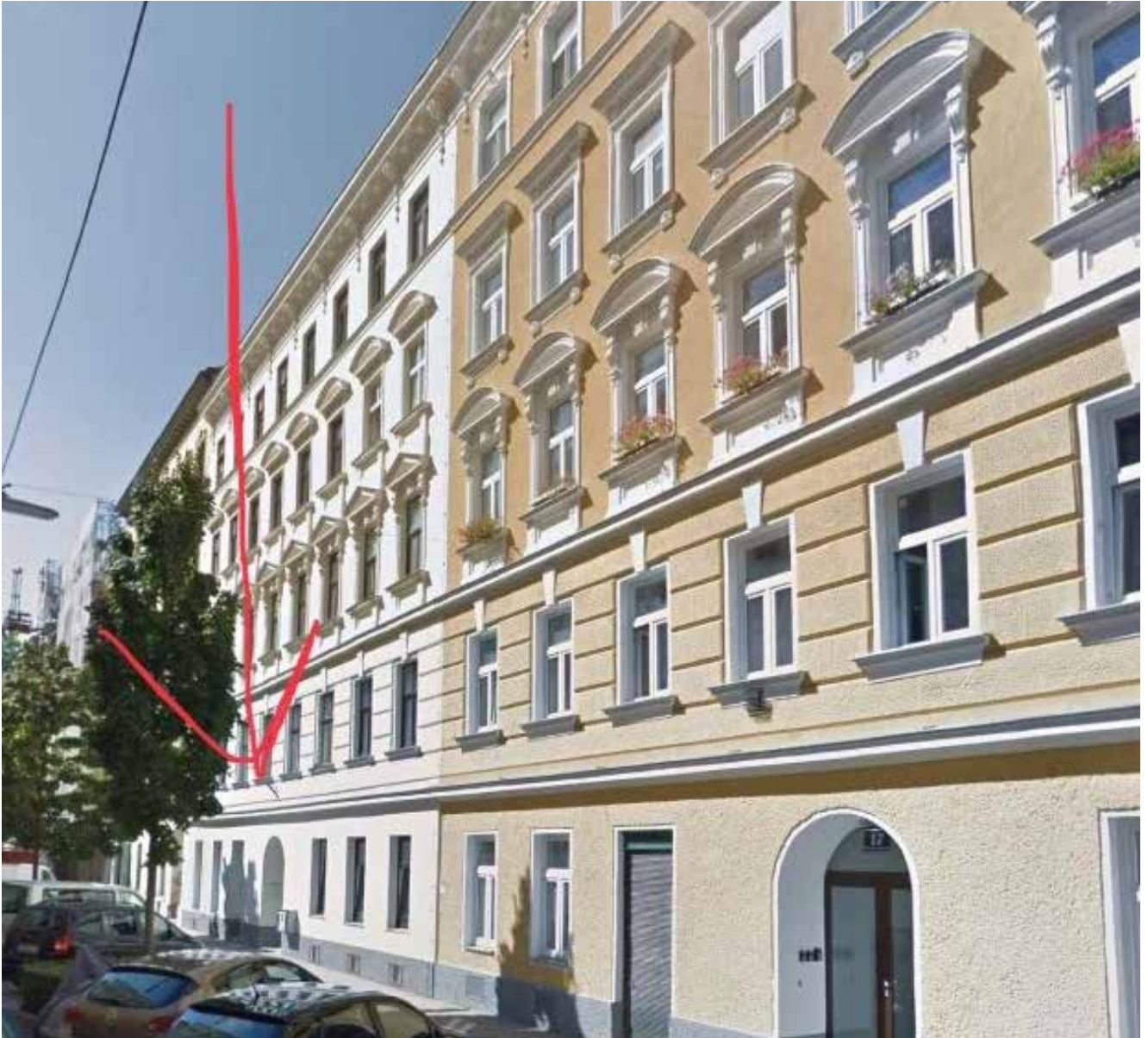
PEOPLE ASK ME: ‘Would you want to go back to Austria now?’ They may as well ask me if I want to go back to Hell. If you’ve had an operation and you had a scar that had just healed, you wouldn’t want to open it up. I don’t think my scar will ever heal. My bridge partner also comes from Vienna, but he has an entirely different outlook. He was lucky enough to leave a few weeks before the Nazis arrived. I, however, lived through it and, as a child, it affected me.

A few years ago the Austrian Government offered to pay for the travel and hotel for me to visit on a sightseeing tour. It didn’t interest me. I didn’t want to go. England is my country as far as I’m concerned. My daughter, Evelyn, and my granddaughter, Rachel, went to Vienna in 2018. They looked for my parents’ home where we lived on Strömstrasse but it wasn’t there anymore. They located my grandparents’ home on Karajangasse and FaceTimed me while they were there and I spoke German to their travel guide. ■

“If you’ve had an operation and you had a scar that had just healed, you wouldn’t want to open it up. I don’t think my scar will ever heal.”



Stadtempel, the synagogue where my parents married in 1925



The block of flats where I lived with my grandparents, 15 Karajangasse, Vienna, district 20



The main entrance to our flat

Emma and me

I WAS A regular at the bridge club. In fact, that's how I met my partner, Emma. One evening, I had ordered a drink which came with a little bowl of nuts that I had at the table beside me while I played. This woman walked past me, put her hand in my nut bowl and pinched some nuts! I didn't know her from Adam, but that's how we met. She is a wonderful person and I'm so pleased that she was a nut thief!

We were both divorced when we got together. We have played in many competitions together over the years, and won the Don Pepe trophy.

I remember trying to find a house together; it was a nightmare. I would endlessly drive Emma around looking for houses and eventually we found one we wanted, but at 6 o'clock on the morning of the day we were moving in Emma woke me up and said: 'I don't want that house, it's got no storage!' I said: 'It's this house, or it's no house at all!'

It was true there was nowhere to put anything, but otherwise it was perfect and eventually we organised the storage space. ■

“She is a wonderful person and I'm so pleased that she was a nut thief!”



Me and Emma

Spain

I REALLY ENJOYED taking part in bridge competitions and would often visit Marbella in Spain where prestigious competitions were held regularly. At first I would rent apartments for my extended stays but after a while I decided to buy a flat so I could go whenever I wanted. It was positioned right on the front.

At first I would take my bridge partner to stay with me at one point when I met Emma I invited her and her friend to join us. We would all compete in the competitions; I even won the cup in 1995.

I found the Spanish people very friendly. For many years we would spend all the English winter there but gradually that time became less and less. It was nice at the time. Eventually we became tired of the travelling and organising the flat. I kept saying to Emma that we should go again, but she doesn't like travelling so about eight years ago, I decided to sell it. We are two old fogies - I'm 96 and she's 80-odd. We just want to sit here, I suppose. Emma said she likes it here, and I don't blame her in a way. ■



Me on the balcony in Spain

The Italian immigrants

ONE DAY IN the early 1960s, while I was working in my shop, two 17-year-old Italians from Sicily called Carlo and Nicky came in and asked me for a job. I knew how difficult life was for an immigrant and I wanted to help them find their feet, so I took them on as trainee barbers.

I trained them up and they grew in skill and started to learn the trade very well. One day they told me they were leaving, however I didn't know that they had actually opened up their own barber's shop a few doors down from mine, on the same street. I really was not pleased about this at all.

About 12 years ago, Carlo wanted to track his old boss down. He had since become a very successful restaurateur, owning the San Carlo restaurant chain and Flying Pizza restaurant in Leeds. He put an advert in the Jewish Telegraph and Evelyn saw this and rang Carlo to give him my number. Carlo arranged a driver to take Emma and me to his Manchester restaurant for a reunion. It was good to see them and all the bad blood was forgotten. Carlo now has a chain of restaurants all over the world but had never forgotten his first boss.

I had another employee, Andrew, who had ginger hair and I always knew him as 'Ginger Andrew'. He was 17 when I first gave him a job. He became like a second son to me and we have stayed in touch for over forty years. ■

“ I knew how difficult life was for an immigrant and I wanted to help them find their feet, so I took them on as trainee barbers. ”



Meeting up with Nicky (left) and Carlo (right) at their restaurant



Ginger Andrew and me

Thoughts on Israel and Britain

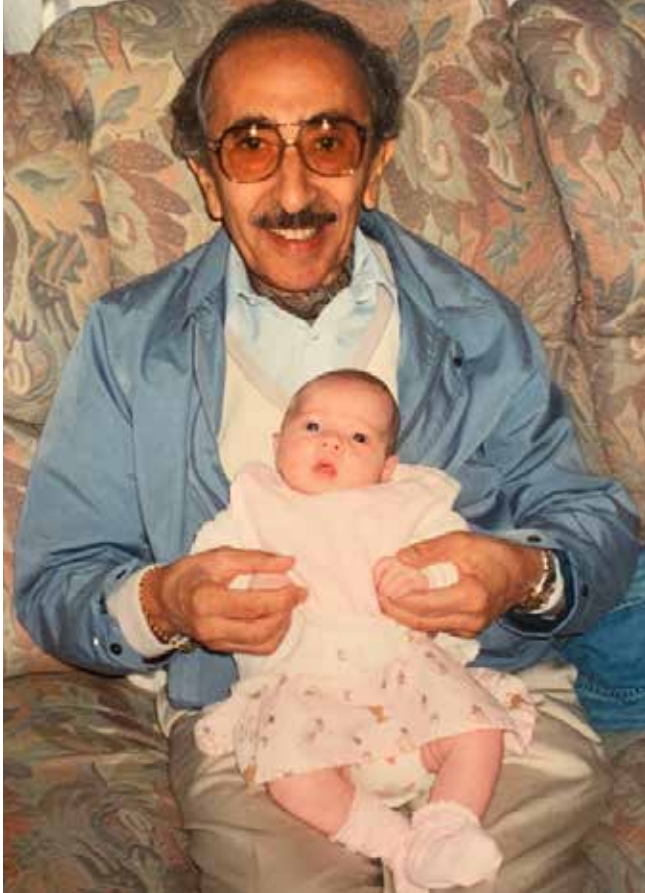
WHEN I WAS a child, antisemites used to say that all Jews should go to Palestine. Now we have Israel, they say that we are attacking the Palestinians. In other words, you can't win. The Jews have a country now, and it's established. I have been once and I didn't see enough. I went to the Western Wall, and I know how people say that you get a feeling there. So I put my hand on it and something did surge through me. It was very, very strange. I didn't think that would happen; in fact, I was sceptical. I have never been very religious but I believe in God and goodness.

I must tell you, I love Britain. I am proud to be British.

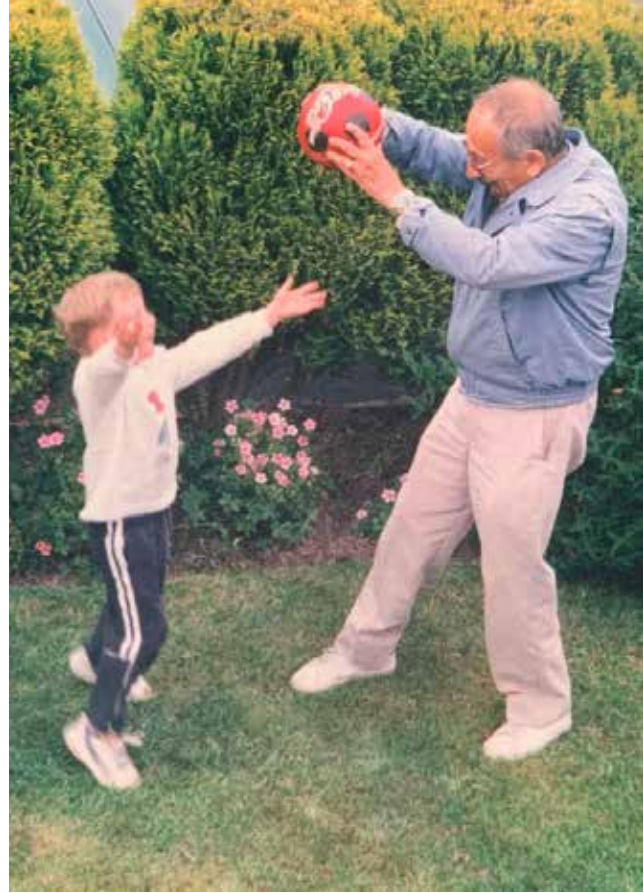
This country was the only one that declared war on Germany for moral reasons; the only country with moral fibre. They could have just let the Germans take Poland, but they didn't. England has always been a moral country. It has never lost its tolerance or its democracy. There is not much democracy in the world, but if there is any, it's here, in this country.

A few years ago, I was at a Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony at Leeds Town Hall. I was sat three or four rows back. When it came to the end of the event, I asked if I could say something. I went up to the front and said what a wonderful country this is. Nobody had said anything like that and I wanted to say that. I just gave my opinion about Britain, the moral side of it. They were the only ones who stood up to Hitler without being attacked. ■

“ I went up to the front and said what a wonderful country this is. Nobody had said anything like that and I wanted to say that. ”



With granddaughter Rachel at one month, 1999



Playing with grandson Daniel aged three, 1999



I am very proud of my grandchildren, 2019

Final thoughts

I ALWAYS THINK that somehow I will see my mother again. I wish I could. The only way I console myself about losing my mother is thinking that she would be dead now anyway, but that doesn't alter the fact that she didn't have a life.

I often have dreams about what happened to me and my family. I have never forgotten how frightened I felt in Vienna every time somebody came to the door, in case we were going to be taken away. It is unimaginable.

There must have been thousands upon thousands of children who lost their families in the Holocaust. And, it is still happening today, in places like Syria and Afghanistan.

I am very proud of my grandchildren, Daniel and Rachel. I love it when they visit me. The younger generation don't really know what hardship is. The terror of everyday life in Nazi-occupied Vienna made me grow up very quickly. People can read about these traumatic experiences and say: 'How horrible,' and then go about their business. It is unbelievably difficult for someone who has only lived in a lovely country like England to imagine how my life was as a child. It would be unnatural for them to fully understand.

I have a message for future generations: the world needs a lot of tolerance for other peoples' ways, opinions, and manners. That would be marvellous, and then there would be no wars.

I can't believe myself. I feel like a lad – my mind doesn't age the same as my body. I woke up today and I was a day older. I am a peculiar fellow but at least Emma can tolerate me! ■



Celebrating my daughter Evelyn's birthday with my grandchildren Daniel and Rachel, 2015



Emma and me, March 2022. Photographer: Claire Bartfield.

Sadly, Frank passed away on 21 May 2022, before his book was completed. He lived with the deep sadness of having lost his mother and other family members in the Holocaust. He never thought he had a story to tell but was grateful for the opportunity to express how much it meant to him to have been given a safe home in Britain.




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 grew up very fast;
my physical age was
immaterial at this
point. I learned to
trust no one; I felt
a constant terror. I
lived in a kind of hell
and it became a way
of life.”

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk