



My Story

Elsa Shamash



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

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).
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Elsa Shamash spoke to AJR volunteer Amanda Herman to share her story.
Thanks also to Anne Shamash and Cindy Mindell for their help in writing this book.

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First published May 2023

Designed by Berenice Smith, MA

Produced by Debra Barnes

Printed in Great Britain by BookPrintingUK

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My Story

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“Heinz and I left on the *Kindertransport* on 2 March, 1939. Parting from our mother and father was very difficult but I think the survival instinct in me overtook all other emotions; I was old enough to understand what was happening and why we needed to leave. I don’t know how Heinz felt; I think we were too frightened to discuss our feelings.”



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Introduction

I AM 96 years old.

Even though I was only 11 when I came to England, I knew why I was leaving Germany. When I arrived in the UK with my brother on 3 March 1939, I looked straight ahead and told myself a new life was beginning.

After the war, I told myself over and over again how lucky I was. I didn't acknowledge my trauma and as I brought my own children up, I focussed on the future. In the home I created with my husband Saleh, we did not talk about our pasts. He too believed in looking forward not back.

In 1977, a well-known British historian, David Irvin published a book entitled *Hitler's War*. In it, he claimed that there were no extermination camps under the Third Reich and if Jews had been killed it was without Hitler's knowledge. Later in 1989, he described the claim there were extermination camps in Auschwitz as 'fairy-tale'. In 1994, an American academic, Professor Deborah Lipstadt wrote a book, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*, published by Penguin. She called Irvin a Holocaust denier and maintained he was distorting history. In 1996, Irving sued Lipstadt and Penguin for defamation. The libel action was heard by Mr Justice Grey in the High Court. He described Irvin as wilfully misrepresenting "historical evidence to promote Holocaust denial and whitewash the Nazis." He said Irvin deliberately "for his own ideological reasons, persistently and deliberately misrepresented historical evidence."

The fact a historian was manipulating and misrepresenting facts triggered something in me and led me on a journey of looking back as well as forward. I felt an obligation to tell my story as an eyewitness to make sure this dark period in history was not distorted. In 2007, I went to a *Kindertransport* exhibition in Wood Green Library following which I started to talk to schoolchildren at the Jewish Museum.

In 2009, I was invited by the curator of the Jewish Museum in Berlin to speak to German schoolchildren. Since then I have taken all six of my grandchildren to Berlin to see where I lived as a child. We visited the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Memorial and I was able to talk to them about my experiences in a way I could not talk to my own children as they were growing up.

Talking about my childhood has given me perspective and helped me to better understand the current refugee crisis. Nowadays, I regularly speak to schoolchildren and to adults about my experience and I also volunteer with women from all over the world who have claimed asylum in the UK.

After World War II, we hoped to build a better world. I never imagined I would live through genocides in every part of the world. I watch with horror as our government closes its borders. I shudder as I hear the rhetoric of our current Home Secretary, Suella Braverman. As one refugee crisis after another unfolds and the British government imposes ever harsher laws, I feel anger that our government is trying to criminalise those who enter the UK illegally and to evade its responsibilities under the Refugee Convention.

Often, I think about the children arriving alone on the shores of the UK and I remember my own journey. I think how much simpler my journey was than the journeys of these children. I wish that the promises to resettle children through legal routes had not been broken.

On Monday 19 December 2022, the High Court decided the UK government's proposed plan to remove asylum seekers who arrive in the UK through safe third countries to Rwanda was not of itself unlawful. I trembled as I read the BBC news alert. I asked myself how it could ever be justifiable to send those in need of international protection to a country with an appalling human rights record.

Working with refugees today, I recognise the patterns emerging. I see the desperation of families separated through war and the overwhelming sadness that accompanies leaving the place they once called home. I wish I could say we have learnt from history, that we are more civilised and tolerant.

Sadly, I see history repeat itself. ■



My maternal grandparents, 1929

My maternal family

MY GRANDFATHER SIMON Anker was born in Wormdit, East Prussia. He was not an educated man and came from a poor religious Jewish family. He married Henrietta Meyer from Bartenstein, a small nearby town. My grandparents settled in Danzig on the western side of East Prussia where my grandfather started a business as a grain merchant. He was to become a very wealthy man and at one point had one of the largest silos in Danzig.

My mother, Rosa Erna Anker, was born in 1887. She was one of 12 children born to Simon and Henrietta. Only nine of the children survived into childhood: Dora, Arthur, Leo, Heinrich, Paul, Trude, George, my mother Rosa, and Else (who died aged eight of diphtheria).

My grandfather left school at 12. My mother said he had a thirst for knowledge and read his encyclopaedia over and over again. As the youngest surviving girl, I think my mother was terribly spoiled; she was certainly adored by her brothers. She wanted to go to university but there were no universities for women in East Prussia and her parents would not allow her to go to Berlin alone to study, so she had to train as a teacher. She was sent to finishing school in Lausanne where she learned French. Undeterred and driven by a fearless independent streak she took herself off when she finished in Lausanne, travelling to Spain and France alone, unchaperoned, which was unheard of at that time. In 1911 her older brother, Leo took her to Egypt and Palestine on a cruise. There, they climbed pyramids and travelled about on horseback.

During World War I, my mother served as an auxiliary nurse but when her eldest sister, Dora died in 1917, my mother gave up her nursing role and returned to Danzig to help bring up Dora's three children. One of them died as a teenager, but the other two – Lotte and Ernst – were enormously fond of her throughout their lives. ■



My mother Rosa with her two sisters, Dora and Trude Anker

Danzig: its geographical importance and the Treaty of Versailles

THROUGHOUT HISTORY THE Port of Danzig (Gdansk) has been fought over. It was a coveted and strategic jewel in the Baltic. Until 1793, Gdansk was ruled by Poland. After the Napoleonic wars it was integrated into Prussia (Germany) as Danzig. It is situated at the point where the River Vistula runs into the Baltic Sea. The River Vistula is extremely long; it begins in Ukraine and runs through Poland. Over the centuries, grain grown in Ukraine was placed on boats and taken down the Vistula to Danzig, from where it would be transported abroad.

After Germany's defeat in World War I – and under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Danzig became a Free City under the Protection of the League of Nations. From 1920 to 1939 the terms of the Treaty of Versailles gave Poland rights over the port facilities and imposed a union with Poland covering foreign policy, defence, customs, railways and post. This caused considerable tension as Danzig had a predominately German population.



Four of my mother's brothers: Arthur, Paul, Heinrich and Leo Anker

Four of my uncles: Arthur, Leo, Heinrich and Paul, were in the family business, having taken it over when my grandfather retired. After the fall of the Weimar Republic, Danzig's German community was attracted to Nazi policies that spoke of the reincorporation of Danzig into Germany. In May 1933, the Nazis won power in Danzig. By October 1937, local Nazis announced that they could not guarantee the rights of foreign-born Jews. My uncles knew that they needed to sell the family business and leave Danzig. In 1938, they were able to do so (albeit not at its market value) for dollars. As Danzig was not part of Germany, they were not bound by the laws imposed by Hitler forbidding Jews from taking money out of Germany, so they were able to use the proceeds of the sale to resettle.

One of my great-uncles had settled in California in the 1890s. Thanks to this family connection, Arthur, Heinrich and Paul were able to get visas for the United States. Leo came to England because his daughter was living in London.

It was Leo who sponsored my brother and me to come to the United Kingdom on the *Kindertransport* and it was family money from the sale of the business that was used to help us. He later helped my parents, my mother's brother George and George's family to come to London on transit visas. I understand that in the months leading up to the war Leo helped about one hundred Jewish families leave Germany. ■

My father's family

MY FATHER, SIGMAR Karplus was born in 1878. His mother and father were uncle and niece. The ancestral graves are in Hotzenplotz, which was in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The town is now called Osoblaha and is in the Czech Republic.

My father traced his family back to 1640, or even earlier. I don't know much about his ancestors. My father had four siblings but two of them died as children and his sister, Else died in childbirth. By 1906, my grandmother had buried four of her five children and my father was the only surviving child. Later my mother and I speculated that this might have been because his parents were so closely related.

My paternal grandfather studied to be a rabbi but was expelled because he was caught smoking on the Sabbath, when smoking is not allowed. The family then moved to Berlin where my paternal grandfather became a teacher of Jewish Studies but according to my father, he spent most of his time playing chess. He died in 1912. If his own father was lazy, my father was driven, ambitious, serious and studious. Apart from studying medicine, he could read and write in Latin, Ancient Greek and Hebrew, and was well-versed in German literature. ■

“My paternal grandfather studied to be a rabbi but was expelled because he was caught smoking on the Sabbath, when smoking is not allowed.”



My paternal grandfather



My paternal grandmother

My parents meeting and marriage

MY FATHER QUALIFIED as a doctor in 1902. He had a well-established practice by the time he met my mother. My parents were introduced by my mother's youngest brother, George. George had daughters and my father was their paediatrician. My mother said my father was a confirmed bachelor. I'm not quite sure if this was true or not, but she was fiercely independent too so they were a good match. They married in December 1924. My brother, Heinz Berthold, was born in February 1926. When I was born in June 1927, my mother was around 40 and my father was 49.

Once my parents married, my father started an Institute of Radiology. Radiology was a completely new profession in the early 20th century. X-ray machines were only invented after 1905 and my father started the first state registered school for radiographers in Berlin. I remember the lead aprons that he and his students would wear to protect their bodies from the radiation.

We lived in a large apartment, probably built in about 1924 in Charlottenburg, the area where doctors resided. The first four rooms were where my father practiced, and the back rooms were where we lived. In those days, if you needed an x-ray you didn't go to the hospital, you went to the doctor so we had x-ray machines at home. It's amazing to think he was one of the very first radiologists.

My parents were non-believers and they considered themselves Jewish by race only. Both had served in the German army in World War I and were extremely patriotic. My father was angered by the punitive terms of the Treaty of Versailles. They were Social Democrats and when Hitler first came to power they believed the Nazis, like the many governments of the Weimar Republic, would not last for long. ■



My parents



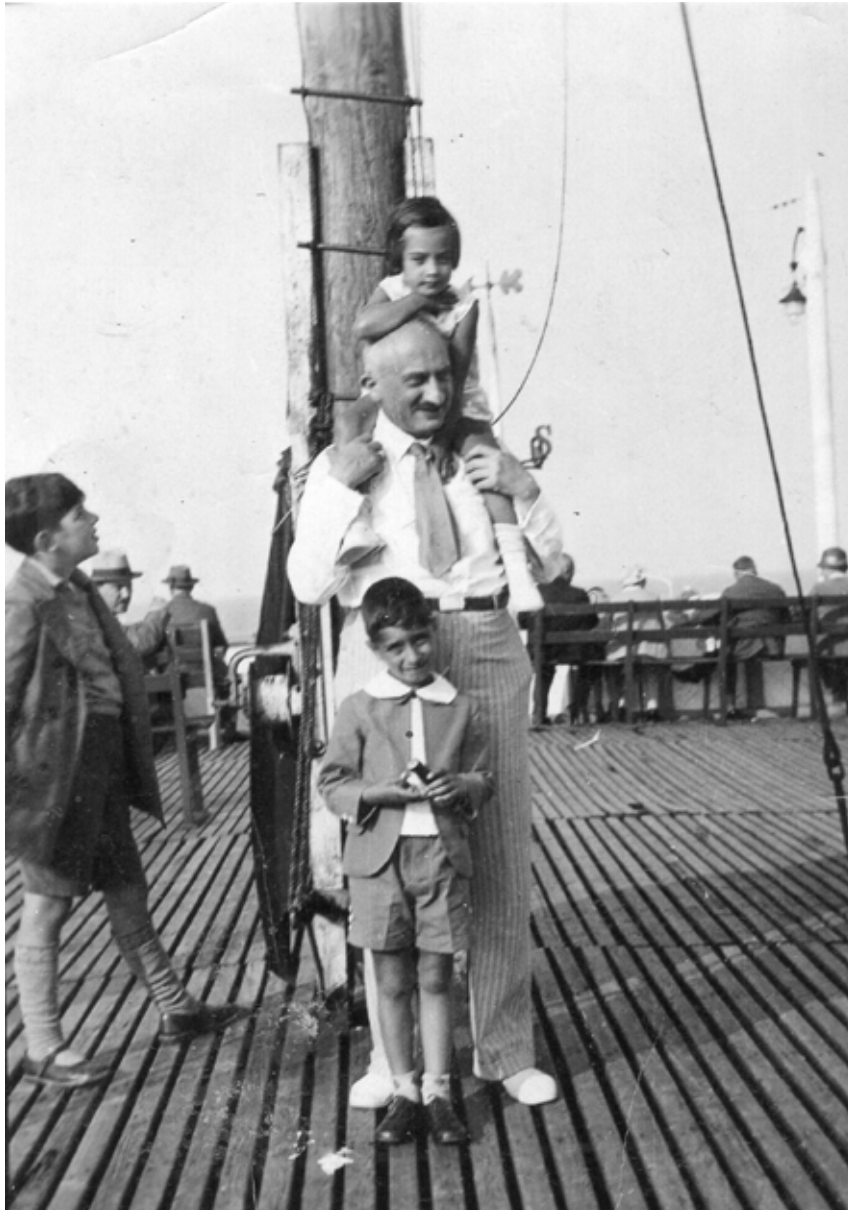
Heinz and me, 1929

First real memories

WHEN I WAS very little, my father's mother (my grandmother Karplus) lived with us but I can't remember her because she died in 1929 or 1930, when I was very young. My first memory dates back to when I was three. My maternal grandmother had just died, so we had travelled to Danzig. Heinz and I were in the kitchen with the maids and I was playing with the mincer, in fact I had stuck my right middle finger in it and then Heinz decided to turn the handle. Needless to say, I cut my finger and the nail on that finger has never grown back properly. I learned to tell my left and right by looking at my deformed nail.

When my brother and I were little we used to go to Heringsdorf for the whole summer with our mother. We rented an apartment there and I remember it had a big terrace where we would eat our breakfast. In the morning we went to the beach and in the afternoon we used to go blueberry picking. Every Saturday afternoon our father would join us but he didn't have time for holidays so would return to Berlin on Sunday night. We often took the steamer from Swinemünde to Zoppot, the seaside resort of Danzig where all my mothers' relations would go for the summer. My grandfather came to the beach once or twice but I just remember him as a very old man sitting in a rocking chair. I would sit on his lap and stroke his beard.

Later, I think probably after 1933, we spent holidays abroad. I remember holidays in Denmark, Lithuania and Switzerland. My father attended a medical congress in Switzerland, probably Zurich or Geneva, and the rest of the family went to a place called Pontresina. It must have been about 1934 and my mother observed that Switzerland was as overrun with Nazis as Germany was. ■



With Heinz and our father



Our happy family on the beach

Life in Berlin

I STARTED AT a tiny private school in 1933. It was run by a woman called Fraulein Pollei. The school was in her flat. Even as little children we were aware that the Nazis were in power. Small everyday things remain embedded in my memory, like my friend, Rosemary, telling me one day, when we were riding our scooters in the street that we wouldn't be able to play together anymore because I was Jewish. I remember too that I would often go round the corner with my brother to his friend Juergen's house. I think our parents were quite friendly but in 1933 his mother told mine that my brother and I couldn't play at their house anymore and they couldn't socialise with my parents, because her husband had had to join the [Nazi] party, so that he could work.

Life started to be really different from 1933. I was just five years old. Later, I learned that the Nazis had started to pass laws discriminating against Jews. On 31 March, 1933 the Berlin City Commissioner for Health suspended Jewish doctors from the city's social welfare service. My father had some dispensation as he had served in World War 1. Other laws discriminating against the Jewish population followed quickly. Just a week later, the Law of Restoration removed Jews from government service. That month Jewish lawyers were no longer permitted to enter the legal profession and by October, Jews were banned from editorial posts in newspapers.

We had two 'maids' in the flat, one employed to look after us, who I remember was called Hete and the other who helped around the house. Once I went to school, we only had one maid.

From 1935, we had a maid called Mariechen. She must have been over 35 because the Nazis had passed laws prohibiting Jewish households from employing maids under 35. Mariechen was a communist. She and my mother often whispered about things that were happening and as a curious child, I desperately tried to eavesdrop on their conversations. I remember snippets, like my mother warning Mariechen to be careful about voting and Mariechen telling my mother she would vote for who she wanted. Mariechen stayed loyal to my parents until they left Berlin.

In 1936, my brother was due to go to a well-known secondary school, the Koelnische Gymnasium, which our father had attended. My mother went to talk to the headmaster who said: "We'll take him but I cannot protect him from the boys or the staff." So obviously, my mother couldn't send him there,



Our family in 1936. Photo by my father's cousin Greta Karplus, a famous photographer in Berlin



My first day of school, holding my *Zuckertüte* (sugar cone)

especially as he was quite meek and a dreamer. By 15 October 1936, just one month after my mother visited the school, the Reich Ministry of Education banned Jewish teachers from state schools and by April 1937, Jewish children were not allowed to attend state schools.

Jewish schools were starting up from 1933, founded by Jewish teachers who had lost their jobs in state schools. My brother and I both started at the Kaliski School in 1936, which was founded by Lotte Kaliski who had been dismissed from her job. It was one of the most progressive of the Jewish schools in Berlin and it prepared pupils to emigrate. From Year 1 everything was taught in English and you could take English or American examinations so you were ready to go to an English or American university. We also learned a bit of Hebrew but otherwise it was the normal curriculum.

We had school on Saturday mornings just like in the state schools. The school was in a large private house with huge gardens, on the other side of Berlin. Even at the age of eight, I would travel to school by underground, with a change of trains. I was supposed to go with Heinz but as he was always late, I would go on my own. I did meet other pupils on the journey and somehow it was safe. The Kaliski School was a *Waldschule* and you could stay in the afternoons for extra-curricular activities like music, sport, swimming and cookery. The first *Waldschule* was opened in Charlottenburg in 1904. It was built by Walter Spickendorff, a city architect and led to the beginning of the open-air school movement across Europe and America. The English translation of *Waldschule* is 'forest school'. The ethos of the Kaliski School was to bring joy and normality to our lives. I remember it as a happy place in beautiful open countryside. I would stay on three afternoons a week, which were the best moments of my week.

By 1936, I only had Jewish friends. My close friend at school, Elizabeth, was sent on a *Kindertransport* to Belgium where she survived as a hidden child. Her parents, both doctors, did not survive.

Most of my social life as a child was with my cousins. My mother's youngest brother, George and his wife also lived in Berlin. They had three daughters – Eva, Dodi and the youngest, Hilde, who was just a year older than me. Hilde and I wanted to be sisters and spent as much time as possible together during the weekends. I remember our families going to museums and to the countryside. I realise in retrospect that our parents could talk without being overheard if we were outside in the countryside. ■



With Hilde and Trude

Nazi propaganda

FROM AS FAR back as I can remember there was Nazi propaganda everywhere; propaganda about Jewish people being and looking different. A proper German was blond, blue-eyed, tall and slim. Ironically, the four leading Nazis didn't meet this stereotype: Hitler had dark hair, Goring was small, Goebbels was fat and Rosenberg had a Jewish name. There was a French political cartoon that remarked on the hypocrisy: "blond like Hitler, slim like Goring, tall like Goebbels."

I proved the nonsense of this too! One day we were walking down the street when Heinz noticed my picture in a haberdashery shop under the title *Deutsche Mädchen tragen wieder Haarschleifen* (German girls wear ribbons) and then when ribbons were not fashionable, *Das Deutsche Mädchen* (the German girl). The only time the original picture could have been taken was when I was about six, in 1933. I used to play with a girl whose parents took us to a photographer on the Kurfurstendamm (one of the shopping streets in Berlin). The first time we saw my picture in a shop window, it was a photo of me with the other girl (whose name I cannot now remember). After that, we would see the picture in lots of haberdashery shops. At the time, my parents worried that someone would realise that the German girl was actually Jewish and that we would be taken straight to a concentration camp. As far as I remember this poster was in the windows when I left Berlin in 1939. Many years later, I returned on the invitation of the German Government for a reunion of the Kaliski School. There I saw the poster. Since then I have tried to trace it but without success.

I think one of the things that saved me from abuse in the streets was that I didn't look Jewish. I remember walking with Heinz one day and some children shouting names at us. One was about to throw something at us, when one of the boys told the others to leave us alone because the girl was '*definitely not Jewish.*'

We had English au pairs from when I was about seven or eight. I don't think they lived with us, the last one worked mainly for a relative but would teach my brother and me English. I didn't much like her lessons and my mother later told me I used to try to avoid them, even washing my dolls clothes when I was supposed to be in lessons with her. When we arrived in England, I was grateful that I could speak English fluently but I couldn't write nearly as well.

In the autumn of 1937, when I was ten, Heinz and I were sent to visit my father's brother-in-law and his second wife Betty in Heidelberg. We travelled across Germany alone by train. In retrospect, I think we were sent there because my mother and father did not want us to be in Berlin during Mussolini's state visit in September 1937. As part of the celebration a military parade was due to pass our flat. My parents were afraid something might happen and wanted us to be safe. Later, I would write about this visit to Heidelberg in my entrance exam essay to the Cambridge and County High School for Girls.



With Heinz. Photo by Greta Karplus

To get information other than Nazi propaganda, my parents secretly listened to the BBC at 8.30pm every evening. My brother and I had to be in bed by this time as we were not allowed to listen with them because listening to the BBC was now illegal. The only interesting German broadcast I remember was *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), the first opera to be broadcast on air.

Even though my parents were non-believers, my father had a profound knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish traditions. My mother read all the time and was interested in biblical history. Because of Hitler and antisemitism, they wanted us to know what it meant to be Jewish and so we sometimes went to synagogue. My father presided over the most memorable *Seders* (communal Passover meal) with all our relatives who were living in Berlin, joining us at the long table in our flat. I still have the fondest memory of those evenings with my cousin Hilde doing her best to make me giggle, which she almost always succeeded in doing.

On 26 April 1938, my parents were required to register their property. On 3 October 1938, the Decree on the Confiscation of Jewish Property meant that a block of flats owned by my father, and one owned by my mother, were sold under duress for a song.

By this time, we had applied for visas to go to the United States. It wasn't that the visas were refused, they just weren't granted. We were actively trying to get out of Germany and even as an 11-year-old child, I was acutely aware of what was happening.

Everyone trying to leave Germany needed to prove they did not have tuberculosis, it was a prerequisite for a visa to travel abroad. Jewish families from all over Berlin came to our flat to be x-rayed. Those who could pay did, others my father x-rayed for free. My father was trying to help everyone who he could leave Germany and I believe that he gave some of his patients money to help them escape. ■

Kristallnacht

ON 10 NOVEMBER 1938, the morning after *Kristallnacht*, I remember Mariechen telling my brother and me that the synagogues were on fire and the Jewish shops were being looted. My father's doctor's plate had been defaced. I remember her running down to clean it to protect us from seeing it.

I'm not sure why but we went to school. When we got there, we were sent straight back home because some of the teachers had been picked up and sent to concentration camps.

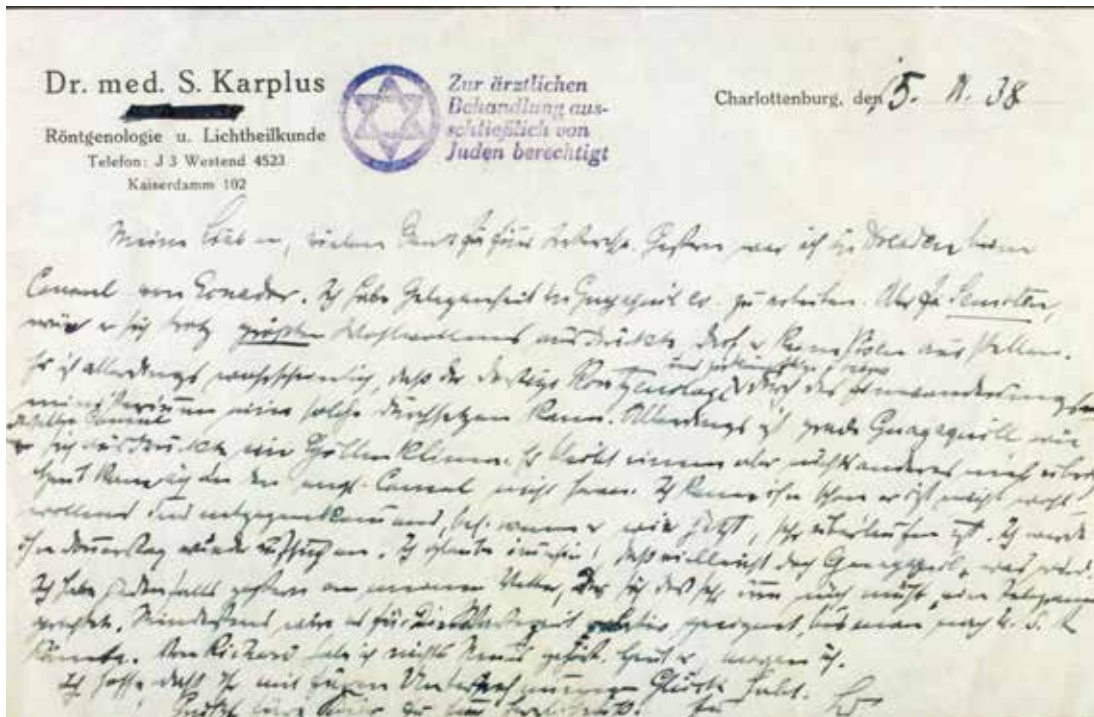
Nothing can convey the fear and trauma of that day and the days that followed. I remember we were sitting down for lunch when the telephone rang. I answered thinking it was one of my friends, but the voice at the end of line said it was the *Judencommando* from the Gestapo, and that I should tell the Doctor. My father went to the telephone but there was nobody there. Somebody was tipping him off, warning him not to be at home. The only explanation he could come up with was that one of his ex-patients, who had been obliged to join the Gestapo, wanted to save him. My father packed a little case and said good-bye to us. He was away for three days. We had no idea where he was. By the time he came back home, the Gestapo were no longer picking men up. He told us he rode the underground during the day so that he wasn't in one place at any one time and then went to his aunts' at night. At the time, the Gestapo were not visiting female only households and were not arresting women. His aunt was a widow.

I don't remember what happened over those three days except for the terror I felt and that Mariechen was the person who answered the door. My father was not picked up but he had terrible nightmares for the rest of his life. His nightmares were always the same, that the Gestapo were coming for him. He would frequently scream in his sleep.

In the immediate aftermath of *Kristallnacht*, Jewish men who had been taken to concentration camps were released if they could show they had a visa to travel abroad. I remember opening the door to a patient with his hands completely bandaged because the Nazis had forced him to break stones with his bare hands. I can still see this man with his bandaged hands. There were a number of men who came to our house in a terrible state for treatment in the days following *Kristallnacht*. Even as children, my

brother Heinz and I knew what was happening and we wanted our parents to leave. By this stage, my parents also knew that we had to leave.

All Jews were obliged to carry identity cards that indicated their Jewish heritage and in the autumn of 1938, all Jewish passports were stamped with an identifying 'J'. My travel documents included the 'J'. By 1 January 1939, Jewish men and women had to add *Israel* or *Sara* respectively to their given names. My father's name appeared on his bank statements and passport as Sigmar Israel Karplus and my mother was Rosa Sara Karplus. It was the Swiss who demanded the 'J' be added to passports so Nazis could enter the country freely but Jews were sent back, as described in Rose Tremain's novel, *The Gustav Sonata*. ■



This document is stamped to declare my father can only treat Jewish patients

The *Kindertransport*

FIVE DAYS AFTER *Kristallnacht*, on 15 November 1938, a delegation of British, Jewish and Quaker leaders, headed by Noel Barker MP, went to Chamberlain and asked him to allow Jewish children to come to the United Kingdom. A bill was prepared and debated the next day in Parliament. It was agreed that the government would waive certain immigration requirements to allow unaccompanied children aged 17 and under to enter the United Kingdom, under the condition they would not cost the government anything and left for the colonies when they reached 18 years of age. In 1937, there had been a *Kindertransport* with similar rules of Basque children after the bombing of Guernica in the Spanish Civil War, but most had returned to Spain when fighting stopped.

Heinz and I got a place on a *Kindertransport*, thanks to Leo Anker, our uncle in London. He had money and was able to put down the mandatory £100 pounds guarantee for my brother and me. We received the letter informing us that we had a place on a transport on the day of my brother's *bar mitzvah*. There was no party and the *bar mitzvah* had to take place in a hall as all the synagogues had burnt down. There was also a relief rabbi as the one who was to take the service had been arrested and taken to a concentration camp on *Kristallnacht*.

Heinz and I left on the *Kindertransport* on 2 March, 1939. Parting from our mother and father was very difficult but I think the survival instinct in me overtook all other emotions, and unlike many children who were on the *Kindertransport*, I was old enough to understand what was happening and why we needed to leave. I don't know how Heinz felt; I think we were too frightened to discuss our feelings.

Our parents took us to the railway station. On the train there were Gestapo soldiers everywhere patrolling the corridors, it felt as though the train was swarming with guards. It was frightening. We were only allowed to bring one shilling and not permitted to have anything of value in our suitcase. Only one case was allowed per child, and we had to be able to carry it, although none of the little children could carry theirs.

When we got to Holland at the end of the day, we cheered because we knew we were safe at last. I was 11 years old and I had to look after a smaller child and her suitcase. When we got on the boat from Hook of Holland to Harwich, she sat on my lap for the entire crossing, gripping my hand the whole way, even though I was terrified myself.

As I said in the introduction, my journey was simple. These days it can take a child refugee a year or two to get to England, if they manage to get here at all. They have to travel in terrible conditions, crossing the sea in rubber dinghies, clinging to the bottom of lorries or in refrigerated containers. Some die, others are subjected to abuse. It feels we have gone backwards not forwards. ■



The photo on my *Kindertransport* application



My travel permit issued the day before I left on the *Kindertransport*. The original is in the Jewish Museum Berlin

President, First Lodge of England
Dr. SAMUEL DAICHES
President, First Women's Lodge
of England
Mrs. NEVILLE LANK
Secretary
I. H. TAYLOR, B.A.

B'nai



B'rith

In co-operation with the
German Jewish Aid Committee
of the Council for German Jewry
and the Movement for the
Care of Children from Germany
British Inter-Aid Committee

B'nai B'rith Care Committee for Refugee Children

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OE/LA

16th February, 1939.

Leo Anker, Esq.,
2, Warrington Crescent,
Maida Vale,
W. 9.



Dear Sir,

Thanking you for your very kind offer to take
into your home a refugee child, we would like to
inform you that Else and Heinz, Karplus, Berlin,
are arriving in this country on one of the next
transports.

Would you please be good enough to state
whether 48 hours notice will be sufficient for you.

Yours faithfully,

p.p. Mrs. O. Epstein.

Handwritten signature: Louis Adman.

You can help to make a Refugee child happy. Will you?

Letter to my uncle informing him of our imminent arrival on a *Kindertransport*

Boarding School

HEINZ AND I arrived in England on 3 March 1939. Our uncle and aunt came to Liverpool Street Station to pick us up. We couldn't go and live with them because they were not settled; they were living in a boarding house. We stayed a couple of days in a hotel in London and then, on 5 March, we were sent to boarding school in Broadstairs. My brother went to Alexander House and I was sent to Hilderstone Girls School.

The boys' school was in one part of the town and the girls' in the other part. I had lost the last link to my family and my support; I was completely alone and very lonely. I often cried myself to sleep. It was less lonely after my cousin Hilde arrived at the school in June, but she was really unhappy and somehow managed to move to the boys' school where her sister Dodi was au pair to the headmaster, leaving me alone again.

The headmistress of Hilderstone school had no qualifications other than being the spinster sister of the headmaster of the boys' school. There was not a single qualified teacher at the girls' school and the building was filthy. I think the bed linen was washed once a term, underwear once a fortnight. The food was cooked by a fourteen-year-old runaway girl and was inedible. We were forced to eat up and I have vivid memories of trying to hide food. It was really cold; there was no central heating just one open fire, and I got chilblains straight away. I'm not sure how I survived this period. I remember being desperately unhappy but I knew it was only temporary and necessary as I had no home in England. Most of the pupils were the daughters of civil servants living in India. Their parents were not high earners and could only visit once every three years and there was therefore no parental oversight.

There were two other refugee children and we were, in every respect, the German kids. In Germany, we weren't wanted because we were Jewish and here we were the German kids and we were also not wanted. We had to go to church twice on a Sunday and say prayers every day. Lessons consisted of copying lines from the New Testament and from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and then learning them by heart. There was a French au pair who was supposedly a teacher, but she didn't teach; I was given a *Teach Yourself French* book and told to copy lines and learn them by heart. ■

15 March 1939

MY WORST DAY was 15 March 1939. I was walking with my class to the seafront when I saw a hoarding outside a newspaper shop announcing *Hitler hoists flag in Czechoslovakia*. I was horrified and my stomach churned. I thought it meant war.

Even at 11 years old I knew about the Munich Conference which had taken place in September 1938. Chamberlain had reached an agreement with Hitler over Czechoslovakia and returned claiming he had achieved “peace with honour” or “peace for our time”. The agreement was that Hitler would not invade the whole of Czechoslovakia. Now he had! I thought that if war started my parents would never be able to leave Germany but, luckily, I was wrong.

Back in Germany, my father was riddled with anxiety and guilt. He tormented himself for not leaving earlier. According to my mother he was inconsolable and walked about in the flat aimlessly even when he knew my brother and I were safe. By this stage, my parents were packing in earnest. In February 1939, the Nazis passed a decree requiring the Jewish population to surrender all gold, silver, diamonds and precious metal. Customs officers looked in every book my parents had packed to make sure they were not hiding money or jewellery. Uncle George was packing up at the same time. He told my mother that he had decent customs officers who looked the other way, so he would be able to take valuables for her. His containers went to the United States because like us, he had plans to settle there with his brothers in California, but after the war he gave my mother her gold necklace and diamond brooch, which I now have. I wear the necklace everyday. The rest of the jewellery that my mother gave him was sent to a bonded warehouse in London but lost when the building was bombed during the war.

My parents' temporary visas came in the middle of April and they arrived in England by Easter, invited by Leo and paid for by my uncles, with permission to stay until we could get to the USA, which we thought could be any day. Little did we expect it would take 10 years! My parents arrived with £1 and my mother with her wedding ring, the only jewellery she was allowed to bring. ■

AT CLARINGBOLD
AND
HILDERSTONE
BROADSTAIRS

Phone: BROADSTAIRS 275

ALEXANDER HOUSE SCHOOL,
15 OF
BROADSTAIRS,
KENT.

15th July.

My dear Daddy and Mummy!
Many thanks for your letter. Heinz gave it to me. I am very glad that you like it very much. I too. I begin to tell you from the beginning of the week. Saturday last week we went to play rounders. I was very nice. Sunday afternoon we stayed indoors and read my fairy tales. We went every day of the week bathing. Monday after tea we played rounders, and on Thursday afternoon instead of drawing and literature. Wednesday afternoon we went to Joss Bay bathing. First we played on the sands. And we came back for our tea at 6 o'clock. I hope we will go bathing this afternoon. Could you please send me a

Letter to my parents 15 July 1939

couple of colored socks, because in
the holidays they will get to dirty

I hope uncle George and both
aunties maiden will be here soon.
They are still in Kopenhagen.

Esa likes it very much in Sussex
We see Dodi ^{and Fleing} nearly every day in the
water, and Dodi on Sunday when we
go for a walk with Mr. Green.

Esa's address is

Esa Anker
40 Sidelatham
Kirdford Vicarage
Billingshurst
Sussex.

Much love and many kisses
from your

P.S. Please write my ^{love} ~~mis~~ ^{letter} if that were
you it is very nice. I like it
from day to day more. I hope you
can come soon to us, because
the Sundays was so nice the
last time I can't write to you, be-
cause Ise gave the letter to Lily and
she didn't know what to do about it.

Much love
from your
uncle

Life in England

THE FIRST COUPLE of months our parents were in England, my brother and I saw them some weekends; they were staying in a bed and breakfast in Broadstairs and later moved to Cambridge to take a course in English as my father had never learnt the language.

My parents had applied for us all to go to the US in 1938, and then as a back up to Ecuador, where my father had a cousin and where he could have worked as a technician in radiotherapy, but not as a doctor. The climate in Ecuador was very difficult and he didn't want to go. We had tickets to travel there in September 1939. When my aunt found out my parents were thinking of going to Gyaquil in Ecuador she was adamant that we should not travel. War had broken out by then and we had tickets to leave on an Italian ship from Genoa. She persuaded my mother and father to stay in England where we would be safe until we could go to the US. As my parents only had temporary visas, three containers with all our furniture, books and x-ray apparatus stayed in the Free Port of Hamburg. During the war the containers were confiscated and the contents auctioned.

We had been at boarding school for six months when war broke out. My father fetched us and took us back to Cambridge where we spent the whole of the war. I got into the grammar school; I had to catch up a year of French and a year of science and maths because I had missed so much schooling and the German curriculum was different. I was finally with children of my own age. I was much happier than at the boarding school. We didn't have any money and were living in cramped furnished accommodation, but we were together. We even got bombed one night but no one was hurt. We were just like the rest of the civilian population in a war. The other children at my school were working class. It felt as though the middle-class children went to private school in those days. The whole way through secondary school I thought England was a temporary home as we expected our US visas to arrive any day!

Despite this, I threw myself into school and life. I tried hard to integrate. As a teenager with refugee parents, I had a better command of English and understanding of the system than they did. Our roles had suddenly reversed, I had to protect and help them. I would go with my mother to appointments, which with hindsight I think was humiliating for her. My father found not working hard and suffered long periods of depression.



In my school uniform, Cambridge 1941

I joined the Girl Guides and became a First Class Guide. When the Chief Guide came to Cambridgeshire, we cycled to the Cathedral town of Ely for a church parade. I carried the British colours and handed them over to the Bishop of Ely. I was the only Jewish and non-English girl in the company. Nobody understood the irony of the choice except me. ■

France falls

AFTER THE FALL of France in spring 1940, the British panicked believing the Germans would invade England next. All Germans became enemy aliens. My father was interned, first in a camp and later on the Isle of Man where Jewish refugees were interned alongside German non-Jews. He wasn't there long, about two months until those who were no danger were identified as "friendly enemy aliens".

After this, the whole family was classified as "friendly enemy aliens" which only carried certain restrictions. We weren't allowed to leave the house in the evening and we couldn't speak German in the street, so Heinz and I had to force our parents to speak English.

We had to report to the police if we left town. When I wanted to go camping with the Guides, two other Guides came to the police station with me, to ask for permission for me to go. The police officer knew all of us and agreed. When I turned 16 in June 1943 and was no longer considered a child, I wasn't allowed to cycle beyond the city boundary or go to the countryside until I went through the tribunal and was formally reclassified in my own name as a "friendly enemy alien".

I spent a lot of my schooling in the shelters because of air raids but actually, Cambridge was never bombed heavily. It was one of the safer cities. There were 13 aerodromes around Cambridge so we could hear the British planes fly over from all these different aerodromes, and the Germans planes on their way to bomb Birmingham and Coventry.

My parents had been given permission to come to England provided they didn't work, paid or unpaid. Thankfully, in 1941 my father was allowed to work, albeit only as a Junior Doctor because he didn't have English qualifications. This was very humiliating for him, but better than staying at home and doing nothing. He got a job at Addenbrooks Hospital in the radiology department.

My brother studied atomic physics at Kings College London from 1943–1945. He was exceptionally bright and got his degree in two years at the age of 19, after which he was drafted for war service. He was sent to work in a factory in Taunton, Somerset as Head of Physics where he met Jean Clark. She was his assistant. She had also started a degree in physics but wasn't allowed to complete it because she was called up for National Service. ■

After the war

WE NEVER SETTLED properly during the whole of the war. I think my parents believed our visas would come at any minute. As soon as the war was over, we were evicted from our furnished house in Cambridge and my father went to London to work as a locum doctor.

I stayed in school until 1945 when I was 18. I passed the entrance examination for Newham College Cambridge but in 13th out of only 12 places, so I wasn't able to go. My second choice was Bristol University where I got a place but my father insisted that I live at home. So I went to Queen Mary College (London University) to study French and Spanish. I was terribly disappointed with university life. There was very little social life. On my course there were fifty-six women and just two men. The lecturers were really old, uninspired and doddering and should have retired years before but were still teaching because of the war. There were no seminars or personal tutoring, just an enormous number of very poor lectures. We did one essay each term.

Queen Mary College was evacuated to Cambridge during the war because of air strikes. It returned to London in 1945, to a building which had been badly damaged by bombings. There were still no proper windows three years later, when I left. It took a long time to rebuild and it wasn't until my last year that there was any kind of semblance of normality.

When I started university, my father, mother and I moved into an un-modernised house on Well Common in Hackney, which had been damaged during air raids. It had gas lighting (until we had electricity installed) and the cooker was on the landing because it had previously been a house with multiple tenants. We had a bathroom but no hot water. Coal was extremely scarce and I was the only one who knew how to light a fire. I was always terribly cold. 1947 was a particularly cold winter, and I remember a glass of water by my bed froze. I had chilblains going up my legs and my hands from the moment I first came to England.

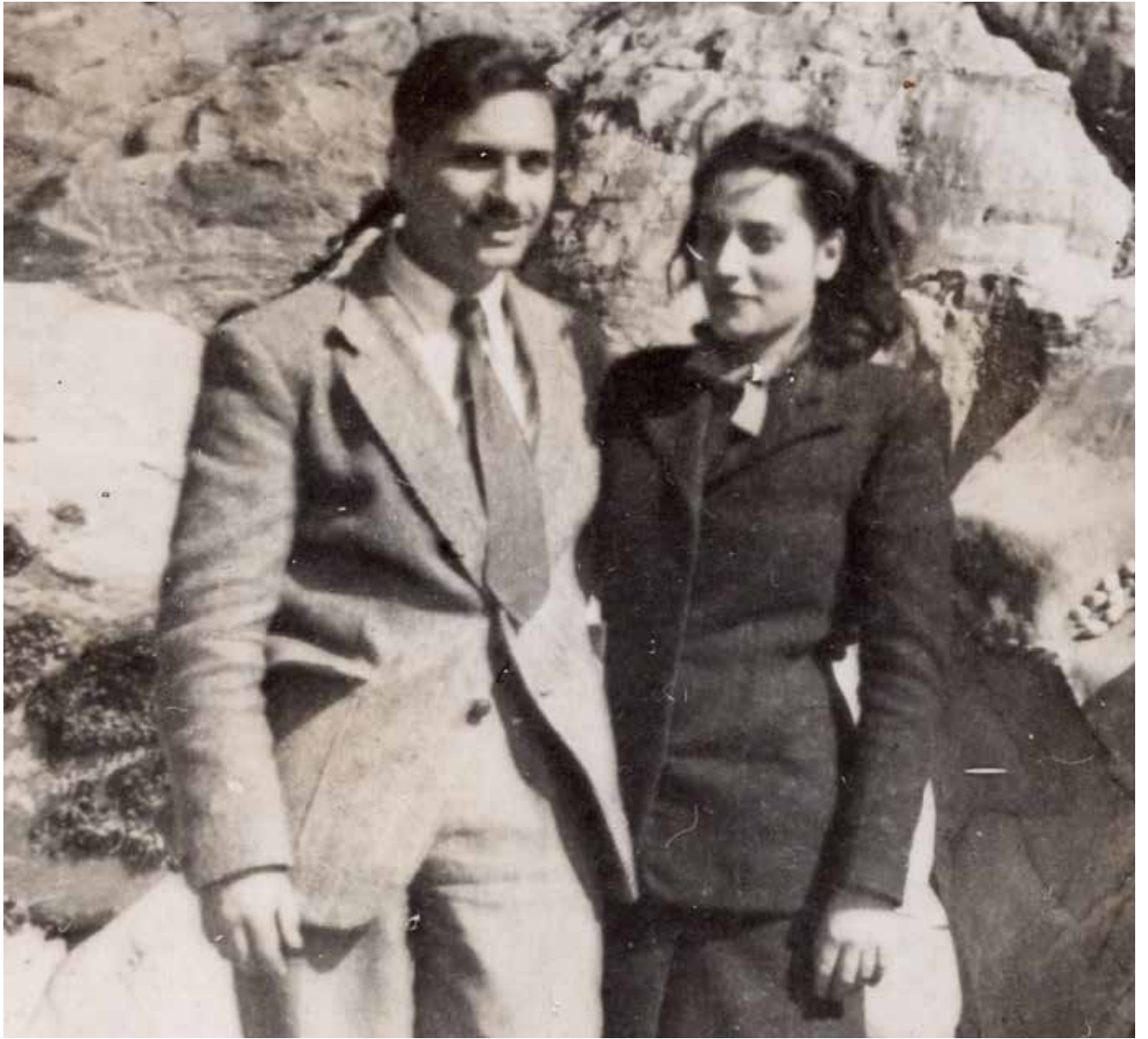
Food was in shorter supply after the war than it was during the war. We were suddenly feeding Europe, so even bread and potatoes, which had been readily available during the war, were rationed. My mother had to supplement my father's income as a locum doctor by letting the whole of the basement to students.

In the summer of 1946, I wanted to go to France like most of my fellow students but as a stateless person, France refused me a visa. I had a pen friend in Belgium, called Huegette. At Christmas, I managed to get to Belgium and stayed with Huegette and her family, and she came to London during Easter.

In the summer of 1947, I finally managed to get to France to take a summer course at the Sorbonne. I stayed with my French pen friend, Helene. I often stayed with Helene's family and she came to London for six months to get a Certificate of Proficiency in English and we became very close. In 1949, I stayed with a wealthy family in Vichy as an au pair, teaching their son English. At the time, everybody in France claimed to have been part of the resistance but I felt in my bones that they had collaborated. Only the grandmother was kind to me. I came home after one month.



Graduation in 1948, with my mother



With Heinz before he left for the US

The NHS and settling in the UK

IN 1948, WHEN the National Health Service (NHS) was created, my father was finally allowed to work as a General Practitioner (GP). We turned the basement of our home, which had a separate entrance, into his waiting room and surgery. In those days, the contract with the NHS was 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and if you took a day off you had to provide your own locum. Unsurprisingly, there was quite a lot of resistance to the National Health Service (NHS) at the time so foreign doctors living in England were allowed work. My father was 70 years old when he settled down as a GP and he worked until he was 80.

As the NHS came into existence, our visas for the US arrived, ten years after we had arrived in the UK on temporary visas. My uncle George and my cousins Eva, Dodi and Hilde had gone to the US in 1940 and if we had received our visas then, I have no doubt we would have gone to California. As it was, only my brother chose to leave the UK and travel to the US to start a new life in Chicago. His assistant Jean followed him to the US; they married in 1951 and had four children.

My parents could not countenance moving again. For my father the NHS meant he was finally allowed to work independently as a doctor. He could at last see a future and a way of regaining his self-respect. My parents decided to stay in the UK and I decided to stay too. I had just graduated and did not want to uproot again. My father wanted his family close; when my brother chose to go to the US, he was heartbroken.

Despite the shortages, being a GP carried certain privileges in post-war Britain. My father was allowed to buy a car because he needed one for work but he didn't know how to drive, so I had to drive him to see his patients. We were also able to buy a fridge to store penicillin, and we had a telephone.

We were finally naturalised as British citizens in 1949 by the 1948 Naturalisation Act. ■

Oath of Allegiance.

I, Hanna Elva Kapelus
 swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty,
 King George the Sixth, His Heirs and Successors, according to law.

(Signature) H. E. Kapelus

Sworn and subscribed this 2nd day of March 1949, before me,
 (Signature) H. Watts
 Justice of the Peace for London
 A ~~Commissioner of the Court~~

HOME OFFICE
 16 MAR 1949 U
 REGISTERED

Name and Address
 in Block Capitals) 332 Mare St
Hackney E8

Unless otherwise indicated herein, if the Oath of Allegiance is not taken
 within one calendar month of the date of this Certificate, the Certificate shall
 have no effect.

My Oath of Allegiance, 1949

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
 (TEACHERS' BRANCH)

21, BELGRAVE SQUARE, LONDON, E.W.1

Form No. 4577

Please quote in reply
 following to the SECRETARY: 48/27554

12 SEP 1949

Sir (or Madam),

I am directed to inform you that as you have indicated by the notification of the Minister in approved forms of training in accordance with Regulation 15(1) of the Primary and Secondary Schools (Trusts) Regulations, 1948 you are entitled to a special rate of pay under the Regulations. Regulation 15(1) applies to candidates for special category (including Nursery Schools) or Secondary (Elementary, History, or Technical) Schools and to those Schools, other than those Great Ormond Street Schools, which receive their special status from the Minister.

The rate of your qualification for the purpose of the British Primary and Secondary Schools (Trusts) Act 1948.

Your entitlement to a special rate of pay in any such school will be subject to the requirements stated in Schedule 1(1) of the Regulations 1948. The first part of section 4 of the Act as a qualified teacher shall be a probationary year during which he shall satisfy the Minister of his general proficiency as a teacher in a school which is under public supervision and conditions of work, provided that the Minister may, in exceptional cases, extend the probationary period beyond a year, or reduce it to less than a year, or waive the requirement of a probationary period. Section 4 of the Act applies to those candidates for the unclassified Public and School Board Service Regulations, 1948, who are liable to the special requirements.

If you have not (yet) put in a letter about special rates or in any other school to which Regulation 15(2) does not apply you will not be entitled to the special requirements stated above so long as you are employed there, nor will you be a qualified teacher under the Primary and Secondary Schools (Trusts) Regulations, 1948. You will however be eligible for that status and so subject to the special requirements mentioned in the preceding paragraph if you subsequently transfer to a school to which Regulation 15(1) applies.

The persons whose names are listed on the list of persons of the Ministry's administration is 48/27554.

Please quote this number in all communications addressed to the SECRETARY or to a local Education Authority.

Yours faithfully,
 (Signature) Seham Kilgoh

Miss Hanna E. Kapelus.

S. A. L. J.

MR. SECRETARY, THE HOME OFFICE.

My teaching qualification

Early career

I SPENT MY fourth year of studies at the Institute of Education doing teacher training. That was better than my experience of Queen Mary College. I did my practical work at a school under a Head of Department who the following year became Headmistress of Sarah Bonnell Grammar School in the East End. Two years later, she appointed me to her staff to teach French. There, I met life-long friends like Eva who had come on the *Kindertransport* too. She taught German. She was less lucky than me, her parents did not escape and she never saw them again. For her, my family was a connection to her past. She is alive today and we are still in contact. I also met Irene who had come from Israel and taught Maths, and Iris who taught English. We shared a common religion and a bond from the war, which probably explains why we remained close friends. I taught at the Sarah Bonnell School for six years.

The school still exists today. Recently pupils came to the Jewish Museum and I told them my story. I showed them a photograph of the staff from 1951. These days it is a comprehensive school; I think it's entirely Muslim and the girls were absolutely fascinated by my story and many had their own stories.

My German accent never softened, even though my English is probably better than my German. In the post-war years, I couldn't countenance the idea of being perceived as German. The atrocities of Nazi Germany meant that it was always important for me to tell everyone I was Jewish, lest they think I might possibly be German.

In 1955, I went with my friends Eva and Iris to Israel. At the time, Israel wanted graduates or professional people to settle there. It was a sort of 'propaganda trip' but none of us stayed. I remember at the time food was extremely scarce. We lived on a diet of melons and chicken.

I had not seen my favourite cousins, Hilde and Eva since 1939, before they left to live in the US. Their sister Dodi had died, soon after she married. In the summer of 1957, I went to the US to visit. It was much cheaper to go by boat than fly, and I managed to get a berth on a Greek boat that took ten days to get to the States. I really enjoyed the voyage: the food was excellent, and all the entertainment was in tourist class as there were only about a dozen first-class passengers. Plus, there was the excitement of meeting an iceberg on the way!

In New York, I was met by my cousin Brigitte (the daughter of my uncle Paul), and her husband, then I flew to Chicago to stay with my brother Heinz and his wife Jean and their three sons, Lester, Kevin and Wayne. After a week, I flew to Denver and then took a Greyhound bus, via the Grand Canyon, to Los Angeles. One of my mother's four brothers, Paul, was still alive, as were three of their wives. I stayed with Aunt Trude (George's widow) on her chicken farm in Van Nuys, a neighbourhood in the Central San Fernando Valley of California. I swam in the Pacific with my cousin Eva, who was pregnant with her youngest daughter Joan. Hilde had just had her third son, George. It was wonderful to reconnect with my cousins and see the life I would have had if our visas had arrived earlier, but I had no regrets. I returned home via San Francisco, Yosemite and finally Chicago on the *New Amsterdam*, the boat my relatives had taken to the US almost 20 years earlier.

One day, while we were teaching at the Sarah Bonnell School, Eva saw an advert in the *New Statesman* about a lecture at the Jewish Graduate Association and asked if I would come with her. We both started to regularly attend the talks, sometimes joined by Iris. All three of us plus another friend from university met our husbands at the London Jewish Graduate Association. Saleh and I met in 1957 although we didn't start going out together until 1958. By the time we started dating, we were both ready to settle down. I loved the fact that Saleh was gentle, dark and different. Our first date was to the cinema to see *Around the World in Eighty Days*. After we had been going out together for a couple of months, I remember looking at a dark girl in the playground at school and knowing that I wanted to have children with Saleh. Saleh asked for permission to marry me to appease my old-fashioned father. Unbeknown to him, I had already said yes. ■

Saleh Joseph Shamash

SALEH JOSPEH SHAMASH was a Baghdadi Jew. I only knew Ashkenazi Jews and so he was different from the other men I had dated. His family had probably been in Baghdad since the time of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian exile. His parents only spoke Arabic; I believe it was Judeo-Arabic.

The Baghdadi Jews were well-established and integrated into life in Bagdad. They were affluent and influential. Saleh was brought up in a large house on the banks of the river Tigris. It had a tennis court and a swimming pool, which was also used as a *mikvah* (ritual bath). His extended family were wealthy business people. Saleh's father, Joseph Shamash was religious and kind and probably the least wealthy member of the family but he was well-respected amongst both the Muslim and Jewish communities. He went to synagogue every day. Saleh's uncle Ben owned the Shamash Synagogue and School in Bagdad.

My father-in-law married Gourgi when she was just 15 and he was 35. They had four children who lived. Gourgi's first child, born when she was 15, died within weeks of birth. Hanina was the oldest surviving child, then it was Salman, then Saleh and the youngest child was Audrey. Salman was about two years older than Saleh. They both went to the Shamash School in Bagdad and from there to the American school. As affluent Iraqi Jews, the boys were sent to university in England to finish their studies in engineering as Iraq needed engineers. Salman was 17 but Saleh was still 15. They had places at Imperial College London. Saleh wanted to go straight to university so he made out his birthday was in January rather than 29 August 1921. Births and Deaths were not registered in Bagdad at the time he was born. The only proof of Saleh's birth was a piece of paper certified by the Chief Rabbi of Bagdad of his circumcision in 1921, and stamped by the British Embassy. Saleh joked that he had a real birthday and an official birthday and we often laughed about this.

Salah finished his degree in 1940 and couldn't return to Bagdad because of the war. Salman didn't finish his degree. Saleh always said his brother wasn't an engineer and should never have been sent to study it. I think Salman found life in the UK difficult and hankered after life in Bagdad.

When Saleh had finished his degree, he was sent all over the country on projects building aerodromes to support the war effort. He was appointed Chief Engineer at the age of 20. He would keep the labourer's wages in his hut during the week. The wages were never stolen, they were always still there on Friday. He would pay the men their wages that day, they would go out and get drunk, send part of their money home, and come back on Monday to ask for an advance.

Tragically, Saleh's brother Salman died in 1946. Saleh was out of London working when his brother was admitted to Barnet Hospital. Saleh got to the hospital before his brother died but he couldn't save him. He blamed himself for his brother's death. Saleh said his brother died from a misdiagnosis of pleurisy. Saleh didn't like to talk about Salman except to express sadness and guilt. After Salman's death, Saleh felt a huge responsibility towards his parents as their only living son.

When Saleh returned to visit his parents in 1947, they wanted him to stay in Bagdad but Saleh was adamant about returning to England. Bagdad did not feel like home to him. Saleh was used to life in the UK and the freedom which he had found. Having persuaded his parents to let him return to the UK he then had difficulty leaving Iraq because he was required to complete his military service. He finally managed to get out but his father had to put down a £1000 guarantee that Saleh would not stop in Palestine. Once Saleh reported to the Iraqi Embassy in London, the money was returned to his father.

By 1948, after the formation of the State of Israel, it became difficult for his family to stay in Iraq. Some believe that the new State of Israel lured the Arab Jews with false promises, while others say it was no longer safe for the Arab Jews to remain in the Arab countries. I expect the truth lay somewhere between the two positions.

At the time it was possible for Jews to leave Iraq, as long as they left behind their assets. Saleh's father had many business interests and he managed to transfer some money to Kuwait and from Kuwait to Saleh in the UK. Saleh would later tell me he would receive cheques for large amounts out of the blue, and he always knew the money was for his father and not for him to spend.



Saleh (right) with his brother, Salman



Me in the 1950s

In 1951, Saleh's mother Gourgi immigrated to Israel with his sisters, Hanina (who was by this time married with children), and Audrey. At the time, Saleh was chief engineer on a contract in Israel for the Cementation Company. The project involved building an underground chamber for a pumping station, which pumped water from the Jordan River down to Eilat. It had to be underground because the Arabs were attacking Israel.

It was while Saleh was carrying out this three-year project that his mother and sisters arrived in Israel. They were first sent to a *ma'abara* (transit camp). The conditions in the camps weren't good and many wealthy Iraqi Jews felt that rather than being welcomed as equals by the new State of Israel (as had been promised in the propaganda luring them there), they were treated as second-class citizens. As soon as Saleh's cousins in Israel knew of the arrival of his mother and sisters, they got them out and Saleh was able to visit them most weekends. Other Iraqi Jews were not so lucky to have family to help them.

52 Saleh's father had to stay in Iraq to make arrangements for the upkeep of the Shamash Synagogue and School in Baghdad. The money for the upkeep of the synagogue came from nearby shops. When he went to collect the rent from one of the shopkeepers, the man claimed he had already paid. He took Saleh's father to court but the case was thrown out. Saleh later said it was rare for the word of a Jew to be believed over that of a Muslim, but I think it was a mark of esteem for Saleh's father who was greatly respected in Bagdad as a fair and honest man.

Saleh's father eventually arrived in Israel having travelled via London. He was instrumental in founding the Benyamin Shamash Synagogue along with other members of the Iraqi community in Tel Aviv.

From 1951 to 1958, Saleh's family tried unsuccessfully to marry off their son. I think they were relieved when he finally told them about me. We married at Lauderdale Road Sephardi Synagogue in Maida Vale. The only member of Saleh's immediate family to attend was his sister Audrey who travelled to London for the wedding with her husband Edmond. ■



Our engagement, 1959



Our wedding. Saleh's sister and husband (left) came from Israel

Married life

SALEH AND I looked for a home. He had some money from his father and he really wanted a new house so when we saw a row of new houses in Seafield Road backing onto Arnos Park, we bought one. These new houses were mostly bought by young couples, some already with small children while others like us, hadn't started their families yet.

Our daughter Anne was born at the end of March 1960, ten months after we were married. The first German restitution payment came in as we bought our house. I stopped the building work and put the money into fitting central heating. At last, my chilblains disappeared.

A year later, I was finally introduced to my husband's parents when we went to stay with them in Tel Aviv. We had no common language but we managed to understand each other, one way or another. While his parents were alive, we visited them every two years. In those days, you couldn't take a direct flight from London to Tel Aviv; you had to go via Switzerland or Italy and it was very expensive.

Our son Michael was born in October 1962. It was lovely for our children to grow up with so many other young children in the same street and my parents used their restitution money from Germany to buy a little house very close to us, in Arnos Grove.

My father collapsed with a coronary and died just after Michael was born. He was 84. My mother stayed by herself in the house until 1969 and I used to go and see her nearly every day. That first winter was so cold and there was so much snow that I couldn't get through with a pram.

I had to stop work three months before my daughter Anne was born because in those days a woman couldn't work once she was 28 weeks pregnant. After that, I didn't work properly in a school for six years, although I kept my hand in marking exam papers.

I went back to teach when my son Michael was not quite four. I was offered a part-time job at Rhodes Avenue Senior School in Muswell Hill. I accepted on condition that the Primary School next door would take Michael. Michael did very well with the children there, who were more than a year older than him.

Saleh's father died just after the Six Day War, in June 1967. I went to Israel with the two small children after the *shiva* (seven-day mourning period) because Saleh was expected to remain in Israel for the full month of mourning.

The atmosphere at the time was jubilant because Israel had just won the Six Day War and, for the first time, we could go to the Wailing Wall. At the time, I was ashamed of the jubilation of the Israelis who were occupying Palestinian land (now the West Bank). I found the poverty shocking. I did not imagine that more than 55 years later the situation would be worse. In those days Israel had left and right wing political parties and up until the end of the 1990s I hoped that there would either be a one- or two-state solution and that the Jews and Palestinians might live in peace. I did not imagine that Israel would swing so far to the right. I ask myself how Israelis could choose Netanyahu, who faces allegations of corruption as Prime Minister or how Itamar Ben-Gevir could be the Minister for Security. He is a man whose politics are so far right that he wasn't allowed to serve in the Israeli Army.

Saleh's mother died just under a year after her husband. Saleh went to Israel to the *shiva* for a week. After, his sister Audrey came to live in England with her husband and their three small children: Eli, Nava and Jose. It was lovely for our children to get to know their cousins and for the three Israeli children to become fluent in English. They returned to Israel before the Yom Kippur War (1973).

From 1967, I spent ten years teaching at Hornsey School, first French and then German. Meanwhile, Saleh decided that he too wanted to go into teaching. He decided to do an MPhil and then got a job as a Lecturer. He ended his career as a Principal Lecturer in soil mechanics and civil engineering at Middlesex University.

Saleh and I couldn't have been more different. He was shy, musical, sporty and a good dancer. He was a fantastic tennis and badminton player and taught Michael tennis. He was also a worrier. I, on the other hand, was hopeless at sports and couldn't dance or hold a tune. I was sociable and an optimist. Somehow, our marriage was a happy one. We rarely exchanged a heated word. We both identified as Jewish racially but neither of us were believers. We went to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur but that was about it.

When we didn't go to Israel we took the children on walking holidays to the Alps. Saleh didn't like the heat, I think it was a throwback from his childhood. Michael was the more academic child and was a year ahead at school. He went to University College School whereas Anne went to the local state school, Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School.

Our main social activity outside the family revolved around B'nai B'rith. In 1967, I was asked to help re-found the North London Ladies Lodge, of which I became the Vice President. I took over as President in 1968, 1981, and in 1986 when we amalgamated with the men's lodge. We renamed the joint lodge, Ben Gurion. We had many cultural activities such as lectures, theatre and opera outings, and every year a garden party to raise money for charity. Our main purpose in the end was to look after our own aging members. Unfortunately, we had to close in 2004 as we weren't attracting the younger generation but we continued to meet for another ten years just as friends. ■



Saleh with the kids on holiday



At home with Anne

Family in the UK

WHILST MANY OF my cousins went to America, I still had lots of relatives who settled in the UK. I became very close to my uncle Leo, his wife Liesel and their children, my first cousins, who were older than I was although the age gap made no difference once I was an adult. Their children were really the cousins my children knew. Leo's oldest daughter Marianna and her husband Franz had three children: John, Peter and Anne. Anne was eight years older than my Anne and often babysat her. My Anne was nicknamed Little Anne and she adored Big Anne.

Leo's second child Charlotte married Michael and they also had three children: Leslie, Tony and Juliette. Charlotte was very good to my parents when they arrived in the UK and she lived until she was over 100. We were very close but she sadly died five years ago. Leslie, Tony and Juliette often visit me and invite me to family events.

Martin, Leo's only son and youngest child, took over the farm that Leo bought in Bedfordshire. He married Marjorie and they had four children: David, Mark, Caroline and Louise. Anne and Michael were the same age as Caroline and Louise and we spent many weekends at the farm with the children. Nowadays, Mark hosts a family garden party there most years.

Looking after my mother was always up to me. When my children were small she helped look after them but when she was in her 80s, she couldn't look after herself properly. We sold our house in Arnos Grove and bought a large house in Barnet. We built a little annex for her so she could be with us but independent. She had all her meals with us and while I was teaching part-time, if the kids came home early, there was always somebody in the house for them. In the end, we were never quite sure who was looking after whom. My children were very fond of their Oma. She came on quite a few holidays with us and at the age of 84, she still walked up Snowdon. She lived to 93 and kept her wits about her until the last month of her life. She died in 1981. It's comforting to know that both my parents died in their beds.

As teenagers, both my children had their own minds. Saleh's background made him particularly protective of Anne, which was difficult for her. There was one rule for Michael and one for her. Anne would fight the battles for freedom and Michael would quietly slip out and do his own thing.



In the garden with Anne

When she finished school, Anne went to the University of East Anglia where she studied French with European Literature. She spent a year in France. My cousin Denise was really good to her. She had heard stories from her father Ernst of being looked after by my mother when his mother Dora died during World War I. Denise was born in hiding in France during the war and had settled there although Ernst eventually returned to Germany and was appointed as a High Court Judge. Denise was almost the only family member in France. The rest of our extended family had managed to get either to the UK or the US.

After working for a year, Anne decided she wanted to be a barrister. She completed a post-graduate law conversion course, took her vocational exams, got tenancy and became a barrister. She met Ben at law school and they had four sons, Daniel (born in 1988), Matt (born in 1991), Saul (born in 2000) and Jake (born in 2002). Anne and Ben later divorced.

Michael took a gap year and travelled to Central America where he was thrown in jail on some spurious charge in Costa Rica. Luckily, by the time we heard about it, he had been released. Michael started University in London studying Chemical Engineering but didn't like his course. He followed Anne to UEA and studied Developmental Studies. By this time, Michael's girlfriend Miriam was pregnant and he had his first son Joseph (Joe) when he was just 21. A year later, Michael and Miriam married under a *chupah* (wedding canopy) in our garden and went on to have another child, Liana Rose (known to the family as Lani). Michael and Miriam split up when Lani was four and we as grandparents played a huge role supporting Michael with his children. Michael met his wife Kulbir in 1995 whilst climbing. They share a love for the mountains and yoga and now live in the Peak District, near many great climbing spots. ■

Our retirement

SALEH AND I were lucky, we were able to retire reasonably early and although Saleh was initially worried about how he would occupy his time, he took to retirement like a duck to water. He loved bridge and learned to play golf, which he played every day until the last four months of his life. Most he loved his grandchildren and was the most fantastic grandfather. If he was a worrier as a parent, he was the mellowest of grandfathers, with endless patience and a mischievous laugh. He would kick a ball about for hours and beat all his grandchildren at tennis until he was over 80.

We went on lots of holidays too. Quite often, we went to America to see our relatives. We went to family meetings where all the surviving Karplus and Anker cousins gathered. We went with two of my cousins to Hawaii, and had several holidays in Switzerland and Italy. We rode elephants in Thailand, visited our relatives in Israel and tried to converse with people in Morocco in a mixture of Saleh's Arabic and my French and Spanish.

“ We went on lots of holidays too. Quite often, we went to America to see our relatives. We went to family meetings where all the surviving Karplus and Anker cousins gathered. ”

Saleh and I were both diagnosed with cancer on the same day in 2005. Saleh died of pancreatic cancer three months later at the age 83. I had bladder cancer, which was operated on and hasn't ever come back, so I've been lucky. After Saleh died, I sold my house in Barnet and bought a flat in Highpoint. My apartment block was built in the 1930s and reminds me of the flat I grew up in, in Germany. It has a large garden and a swimming pool, which is a godsend and certainly helped me get through lockdown.

I still miss Saleh terribly, but I try to keep busy. Although my deafness is a great handicap, I still keep very active for a 96-year-old. I walk, swim, play bridge, attend U3A, two book clubs and help with a ladies group of asylum seekers.

I derive great pleasure from my six lovely grandchildren. Joe works in development; Lani as a senior Project Manager for Etsy; Daniel is a film producer; Matt has a successful restaurant; Saul breeds dogs, and Jake is studying Economics. They all look after me in their own amazing ways. I also have two beautiful great granddaughters, Nina and Ella, and a new baby great grandson, named Sala after Saleh, all of whom I love very much.

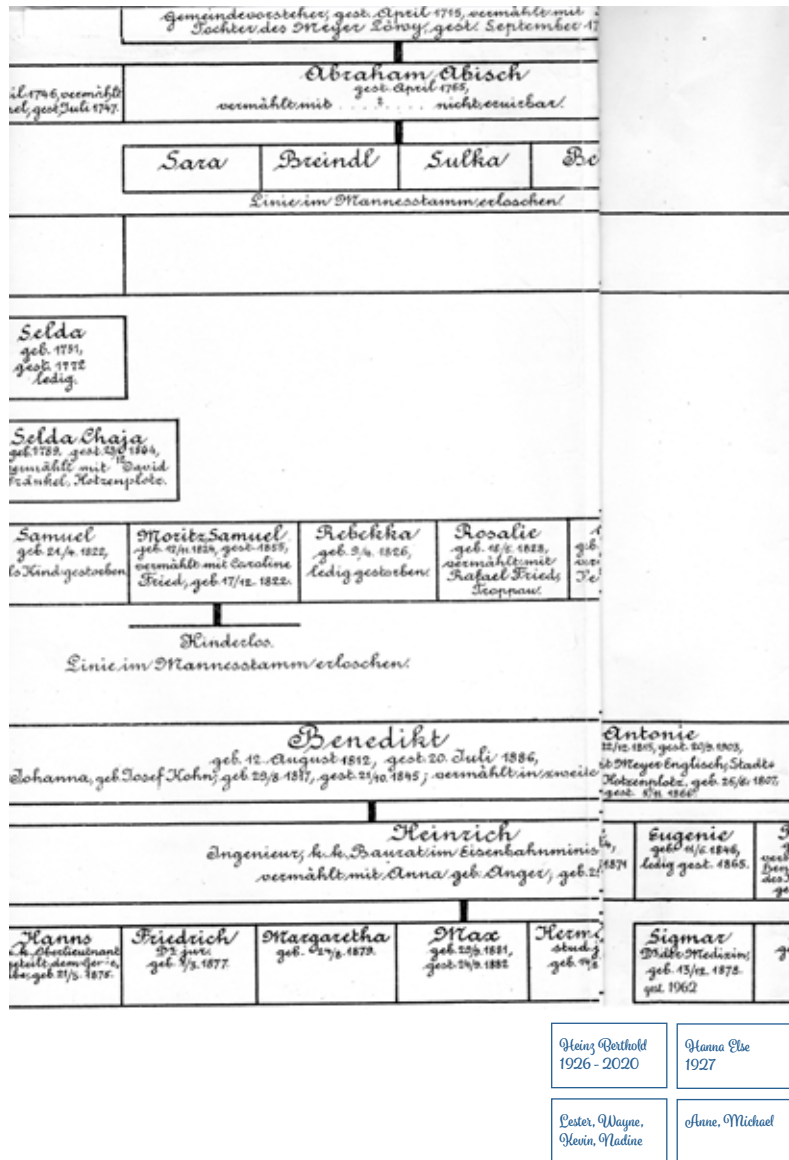
My brother Heinz died in 2020. From my generation, I only have my favourite cousin Hilde left. She is 96. We email each other. She has a new boyfriend, which makes me smile.

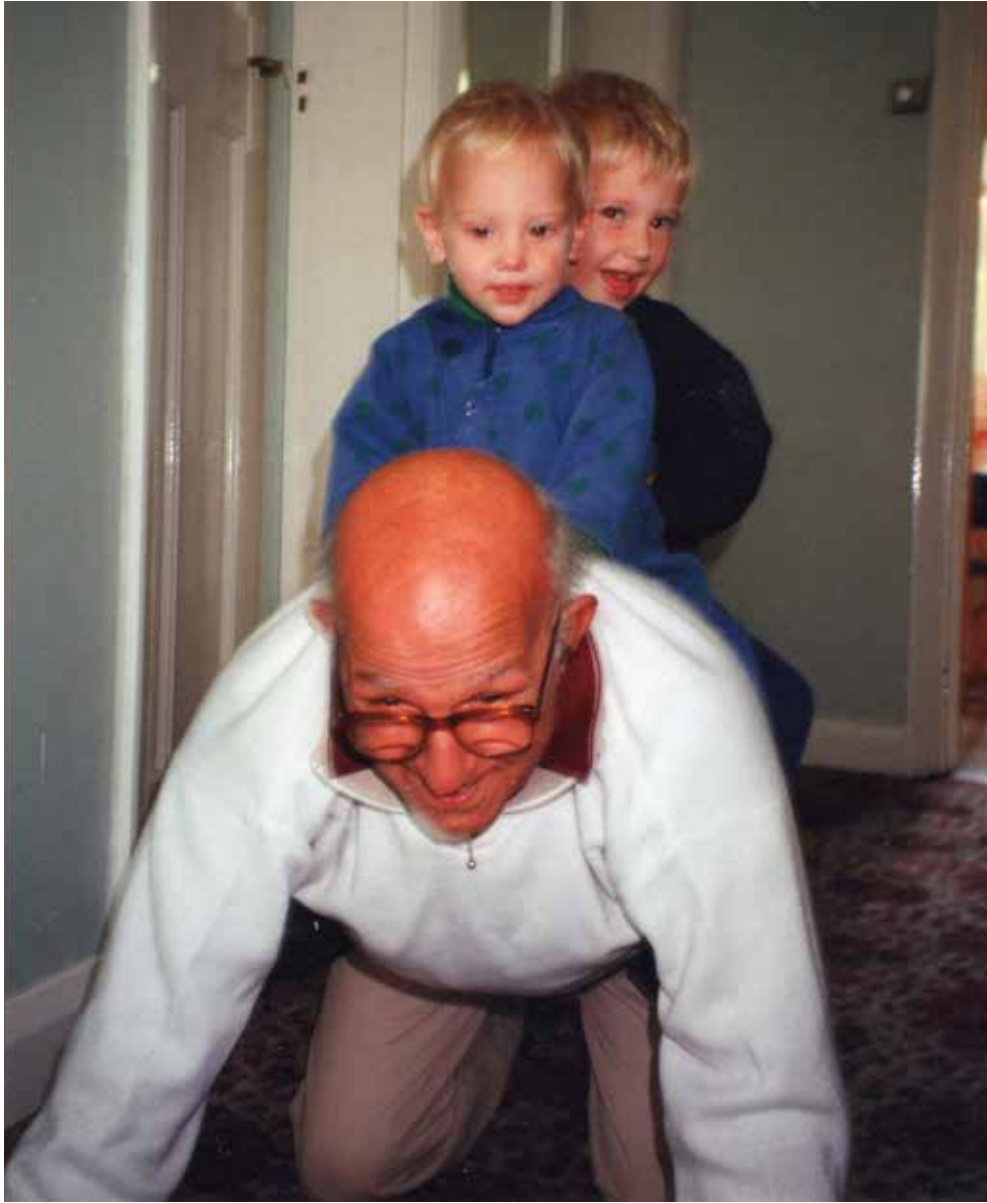
I have Heinz's four children, Lester, Kevin, Wayne and Nadine who I speak to regularly. They have all visited recently and I am in touch with Saleh's nephews and nieces who often stay with me when they are in London. ■



With Saleh picking damsons

My father's family tree





Saleh with two of our grandsons

Postscript and visits to Germany

IN 1986, AFTER 47 years, I felt ready to accept the Mayor of Berlin's invitation to return to Germany. Saleh and I, together with my second cousins Ali and Rosalind Jacobs, visited Berlin. I was surprised to find I could still find my way around Charlottenburg. The block of flats where I was born had grown shabby. At the time, Berlin was still divided between East and West. We managed to go to the Jewish cemetery in Weissensee where we saw my paternal grandparents' graves, and to Potsdam Sanssouci where the Palace was milling with very young Russian soldiers. We took a coach tour to the Pergamon Museum which I remembered from my childhood and we were held up for over an hour at Checkpoint Charlie – because a Taiwanese tourist was on the coach and East Germany did not recognise Taiwan as a country. As we only spoke English, I felt like a tourist too.

In 1993, we were invited to an exhibition of our Jewish School, the Kaliski School. All surviving pupils were invited. Heinz and Jean came from Chicago. This trip was hugely emotional. We were taken to all the Holocaust sites, and to the villa in Wannsee where Hitler and high-ranking officers from the Nazi Party and German Government officials gathered on 20 January 1942 to discuss and coordinate what Hitler called the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question'. I was photographed with my grandson Matt for an 80th anniversary exhibition of Jewish survivors for a future exhibition in Wannsee, which will travel around the world.

In 2009, Anne and Michael took me to Berlin. They wanted to see where I was born. After a very emotional visit to the Jewish and Holocaust museums, Anne said, "You must take all the grandchildren." I have now taken them all, mostly combining it with talking to schoolchildren at the Jewish Museum in Berlin. I went for the last time with my brother and niece in 2017. On that trip we went to Heringsdorf, where we had holidayed as children.

I have donated original documents of my father, Dr Sigmar Karplus, to the Jewish Museum in Berlin, and copies of mine and some family documents to the Jewish Museum in London. ■



Kaiserdamar 102 in 1986. I remember it looking the same back in 1939

Talking about my life

I STARTED TO talk more and more about my experiences. Now I talk regularly at the Jewish Museum and at schools. When I tell my story, I link it to what is happening today. It was interesting that Germany under Angela Merkel was the only western country to open its border and welcome over one million Syrian refugees at the height of the Syrian conflict. Ironically, she was the only leader to show compassion, courage and commitment to stand up for what was right. In 2017, after Brexit, my children and all my grandchildren applied for German nationality. I fully supported them wanting to stay European but I saw no need to do so myself.

Recently, I was photographed for the '*Kindertransport* Exhibition' at the Jewish Museum London and for the 'Holocaust Memorial Exhibition' at the Imperial War Museum. I was also filmed and spoke at JW3 about *Kristallnacht* with the German Ambassador.

The most fulfilling thing I do is volunteer with women refugees every Friday. Many have been waiting for several years to have their status determined. They live in a form of limbo. We offer food, English lessons and outings. Sometimes they prepare food and bring it with them and that's when the food is most delicious. They prepared a mouth-watering feast for my 90th birthday.

I hope I live to see a more compassionate, tolerant world, where those fleeing persecution can find safety and dignity and are afforded the opportunity to build a life here in the UK, as I was. I know how hard it is to leave your home behind, even when it's really dangerous to stay. I remember Anne once told me a story of an Egyptian whose asylum claim had been refused because he told the Home Office Interviewing Officer that he had gone to Turkey some time before he came to the UK but didn't feel he could take his family there so he returned to Egypt. In Egypt there were more incidents and threats to his life. He escaped to the UK. The Home Office said that if he really feared for his life he would have stayed in Turkey and wouldn't have gone back to Egypt. The story made her think of my father. ■

**JEWISH
MUSEUM**
LONDON

—
8 November 2018 —
10 February 2019



KINDERTRANSPORT ANNIERSARY
80TH

REMEMBERING THE KINDERTRANSPORT: 80 YEARS ON

DATE OF BIRTH

PARENTS

PLACE

JEWISH MUSEUM LONDON, RAYMOND BURTON HOUSE
129 - 131 ALBERT STREET, LONDON NW1 7NB

Photo: David Katz, National Film Theatre, 1948

I was the poster girl for the Jewish Museum *Kindertransport* exhibition in 2018



Me and the women refugees I volunteer with



Celebrating 90 years with my family



With my grandsons Jake, Subi (Matt's partner), me, Matt and Daniel



Daniel and Ariadne



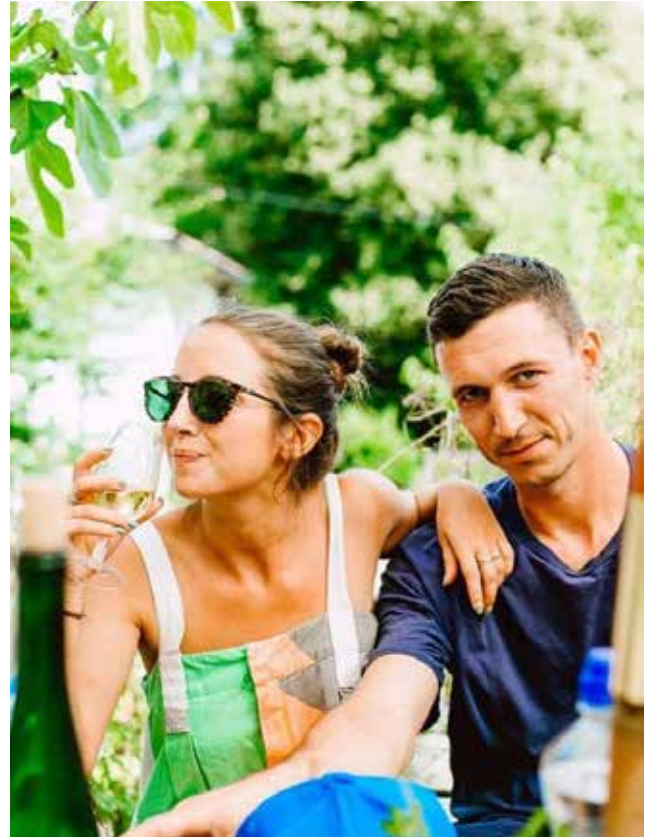
My great granddaughters, Nina and Ella



My new great grandson Sala Leonides
born in April 2023



Saul and Jorja



Lani and Dan



Joe, Hannah and Lani



Jake with Jessie



Piccadilly Circus HMD 2022






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.



“Heinz and I left on the *Kindertransport* on 2 March, 1939. Parting from our mother and father was very difficult but I think the survival instinct in me overtook all other emotions; I was old enough to understand what was happening and why we needed to leave. I don’t know how Heinz felt; I think we were too frightened to discuss our feelings.’

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk