



My Story

Edith Whyatt



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

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

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Edith Whyatt spoke to AJR volunteer Jane Garforth to share her story and we are indebted to Jane for her contribution to the making of this book. Thanks also to AJR volunteers Muireann Grealy, Shelley Hyams, Alix Lee and Cindy Mindell.

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First published June 2022

Designed by Berenice Smith, MA

Produced by Naomi Kaye

Printed in Great Britain by BookPrintingUK

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“I was sheltered from most antisemitism while growing up. I thought being Jewish was something good, but as time went on, I started to wonder whether it was actually a bad thing.”



Contents

06	Childhood memories	48	I meet and marry Kenneth
11	My family	51	My life with my husband
15	Grandparents and other relatives	58	Early widowhood
19	School days	59	My wonderful children
21	Leaving Germany	65	Ernest
26	We arrive in England	67	Helping others
27	My family is imprisoned	70	Living in Harehills
32	The family moves to Birmingham	72	Moving to Moortown
33	We move back to Nottingham	74	Being thankful
38	I become a Christian	75	My hope
39	I find my vocation	76	My poems
43	I fulfil my dream to become a midwife	78	Messages from Edith's children
47	Family and friends after the war		

Childhood memories

I WAS BORN Edith Leni Wertheimer in Frankfurt am Main on 29 July 1923. I think I'm good with numbers due to the economic hyperinflation that we went through while my mother was carrying me!

I lived with my mother Erna, father Otto and older brother Ernest, in a big third-floor flat on the *Bockenheimer Landstrasse*, a large thoroughfare in the West End of Frankfurt. Ernest and I were looked after by our *kinderfräulein* (nanny), Carolla and a Jewish home-help called Gerda. My mother was friendly with the maids who were her main social circle, which was quite unusual.

We lived just a few minutes' walk from the *Palmengarten* (Palm Gardens), a beautiful park with tropical trees and hothouses. My mother employed one of the teachers from my kindergarten, Tante Betty, to take me for afternoon walks, as she thought I needed fresh air. We would enjoy a handful of peanuts on our way to the park, peeling the outer shells as we walked, and would trace our way back home by following the shells. Tante Betty and her sister, Tante Lou, lived together with their nephew, whose father, Heinz Junke, was killed in World War One. They were *Neuapostolisch* (New Apostolic Church) Christians and always gave hand-made gifts at Christmas, which Ernest and I would help them make. Although my family didn't celebrate Christmas, I enjoyed visiting the *Messe Frankfurt* (Frankfurt Christmas Market) where there were little stalls selling hot sausages in bread.

As a young child, I thought Frankfurt was beautiful. I was often taken to the park and zoo. Stoll, who worked as a chauffeur at my father's business, would take us to the airport to see the planes and we would occasionally go to the cinema to watch my favourite, Charlie Chaplin films.

We would listen to the radio as a family - I liked funny shows and Radio Luxembourg. I have happy memories of holidays with my family in Switzerland; it was only a five-hour train ride to Basel. I would also spend time at the nearby mountains of Taunus with my father and brother.

My mother thought I wasn't independent enough. I would often say: '*schlenier mich*' (I am shy). I was anaemic and afraid of swallowing and refused to eat. I remember spitting food out in my cot. I was very inclined to tears and my parents would say I was '*ans wasser gebaut*' (close to the waterworks).



Germany, 1933



Me (far left) and Ernest (far right) with friends we met in Switzerland, 1934

Whenever we stayed in a hotel and I was allowed to choose anything off the menu, I would always have a soft-boiled egg, every single day for breakfast.

One happy memory from my childhood is meeting a couple while on holiday in Switzerland: the husband was very good with children. He talked to us a lot, which I wasn't used to. I picked some edelweiss and passed it to him through the train window at the station when they were leaving.

I was a sensitive child and would always want to give beggars some of my pocket money. On one family holiday, there was an English lady in our hotel who had broken her leg. I walked up to her and just said: 'I'm sorry'. One time, we were out as a family with my cousins and a little dog started following us. I wanted it to come with me into the house, but it couldn't, of course. When I started to cry my mother thought I was crying because I was jealous of my cousin, but it was because I wanted the dog to come home with me.

I would go to sleep with the palms of my hands facing down on top of the covers, afraid that burglars would cut my wrists while I slept. I don't know why I had those thoughts. I was always worrying 'what if?' If I jumped down steps and hurt my foot, I would think: 'Oh, what if it's broken?' I have been that way ever since.

By the age of 13, I developed a pain around my heart. The doctor prescribed thermal baths, for which I had to travel to Switzerland, so train trips across the border became an even more regular event for my parents and me. ■



On holiday in Switzerland, 1937

My family

MY FATHER WAS 14 years older than my mother. In those days it was jokingly said: 'Three times round the Dutzendteich Lake' and then you were expected to marry. I think most of the marriages in my family were rushed into and weren't ideal matches.

My father fought in World War One and received the German Iron Cross. He was a very gentle man. My mother was inclined to be a bit domineering. She always insisted on having the best of everything and would take things back to the shop quite often if they weren't up to her standard. She would decide when we went on holiday, even if it was during term time.



My mother

My mother was 21 years old when she had my brother, and 24 when I was born. I don't think she really liked children, so I didn't feel wanted, which is quite a sad thought. She was a good mother, but we were brought up by nannies. Perhaps she found it difficult having me so soon after my brother. She was sterilised when I was about six years old.

My mother never considered if her children needed love, but was keen for us to be brought up polite and to have good manners. My brother and I were expected to open the door for grown-ups and I had to curtsy when greeting someone. I do think that she cared for me more than I realised. She made sure we had plenty of good quality food and fresh air, holidays and nice clothes.

I suspect she found life difficult, although it never appeared this way. She was very well turned-out, would always wear lipstick and the most fashionable clothes. She needed to have her self-confidence lifted as it had been affected by what her father used to say to her, things like: 'You're too fat, you'll never find a husband.'

My father had a younger brother, Uncle Willi, and my mother had one sister, Gretel, who was about six years older than her. Gretel was married to Hugo who owned a chemical factory near Hanover. They had two daughters, Gabi and Suzanne. I often played with Suzanne.



My father, Otto

I have fond memories of my mother's great-aunt, Irma. I remember Irma being a very good aunt. She spent time with Ernest and me, making clay models with us. She was very artistic. She made a model of the poet Goethe, that was hung on the wall. I still have one of her clay models.

My parents were not religious. They were quite free-thinking, modern in a way I don't approve of. When I asked if there was a God, my father said he didn't know. My mother was against religious people, and thought they were perhaps hypocritical.

My brother Ernest was three years older than me. He was somebody who could always make people laugh. He wore a brace on his teeth and, unlike me, he loved his food. I would give him mine when no one was looking. In fact, he loved food so much when he was a child, he was hospitalised due to his excess weight.

Ernest would tease me by saying children didn't come from a stork, they came from a parrot. I felt he always got the better of me: I could never defend myself or put my case forward as well as he could. On his eighth birthday, he had a fancy-dress party where nanny Carolla's fiancé, Quasimo, dressed up as a chef and dished out marzipan and nougat. I was dressed as a ballerina and everybody said I looked beautiful, but I thought they just said it to make me feel better because it wasn't my party.

When I was 10 years old, my brother was *bar mitzvah* (Jewish coming of age ritual). We had quite a few guests at the reception, where we sang *lieder* (songs) and my mother recited a poem she had composed especially for the celebration. ■



Irma Lindenstien

Grandparents and other relatives

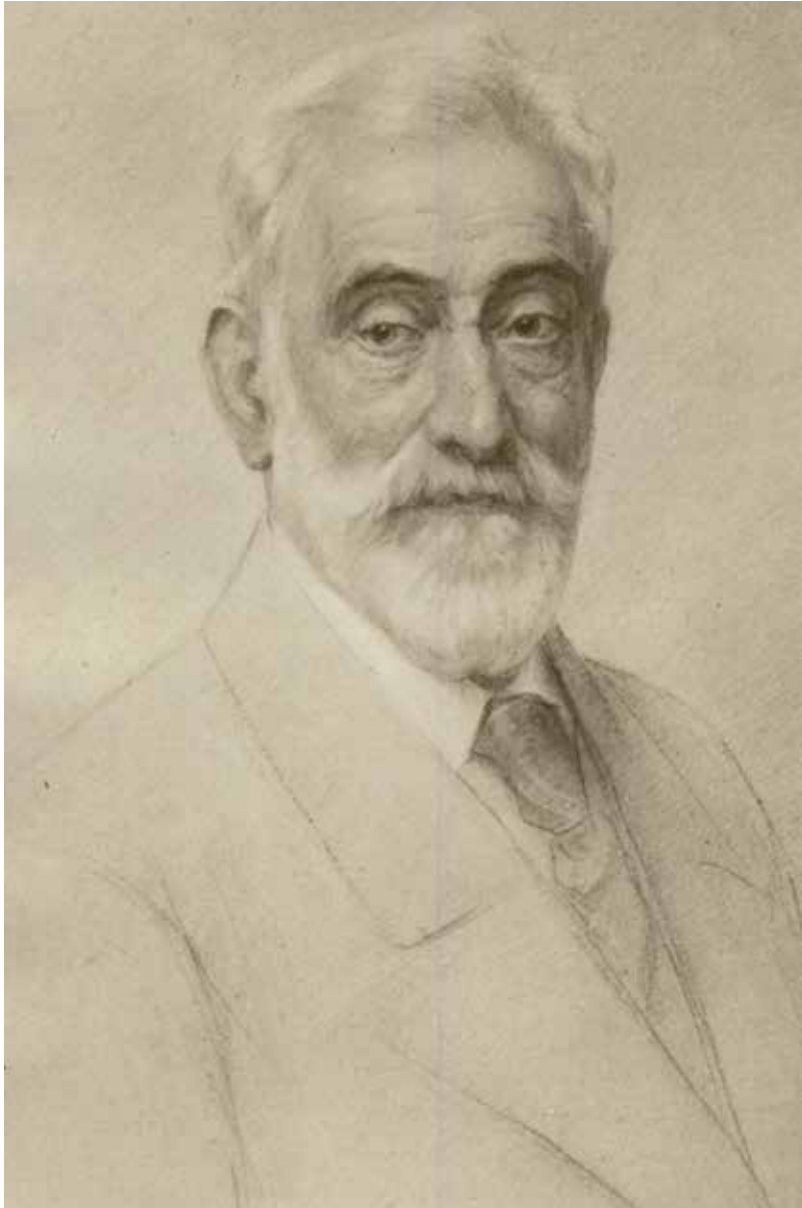
MY MATERNAL GREAT-grandparents had their own poultry business: '*Geflügel Mayer*' (Mayer Poultry). They were quite well known in Frankfurt and lived above their shop.

During World War One, my great-grandfather, Isaac Mayer, invented large cooling plants for food. I don't really remember him, but my great-grandmother, Mathilde, was really quite outstanding and loved by all the family. She was in her eighties when I was a teenager, and I knew her as Oma Mayer. My mother, brother and I would visit them for a meal every Saturday, and we would always have *Huhn-mit-Reis*, chicken and rice with cheese on top. My brother and I were always playing tricks on my Oma and sometimes she played tricks on us. I remember one time she fancied a piece of the liver and spinach that was on my plate, so she just took it and ate it!

We would be visited throughout the year by my mother's relatives who lived in Nuremburg and in return we would visit them once or twice a year. My mother's great-aunt Selma was married to Heinrich. They had no children but treated their little dog as their child. Selma's sister was my grandmother, Oma Emma. She was married to Heinrich's brother, Josef, my grandfather, whom I knew as Opa Sepp: so, two sisters were married to two brothers. They had two children, my mother and Aunt Gretel. Oma Emma was a very anxious lady and we knew her as *Oma Ängstlich* (Grandma Anxious). She would give us cherries and then count the stones afterwards to make sure we hadn't swallowed any of them. I was special to her: she really cared for me very much.

Opa Sepp was one of ten brothers and two sisters. When they were young, I think everyone dreaded it when the Schwarzhaupt boys were around! Opa Sepp was very kind and quite religious, and would go to synagogue and pray for his family every morning. He had a large warehouse of bedding, household goods and clothing. They were quite comfortable and he would say that he had enough money for his children and grandchildren but, of course, the Nazis soon changed that. Our family in Nuremburg decided to move to Frankfurt once the Nazis came to power because they felt it was a safer city.

My father and his brother Willi ran a big wholesale business together. Their company name, 'Heinrich Wertheimer, Gebrude Wertheimer' (Wertheimer Brothers), hung in gold letters from the top of their factory and could be seen from the railway station. They sold lace and fashion accessories and



My great-grandfather, Isaac Mayer

employed 144 people. My father often travelled abroad to buy and sell lace. He and my uncle would argue all day and then work after closing time. I remember when one of their customers, a big department store called 'Wronker', went bankrupt. Because they owed my father's business money, we were given permission to browse the shop and choose anything we wanted for free, to repay a business debt. ■



My great-grandmother, Mathilde Mayer



The Mayer family taken at my great-grandmother, Mathilde's 75th birthday, circa 1928-29

School days

CHILDREN STARTED SCHOOL in Germany at around the age of five. However, it was decided that I would not attend until I was six years old as I was so shy. My maternal grandmother took me on my first day to Farndraps *Schule* (school). I was given a *schultüte*, a big cone full of sweets, as is the custom for children when they start school but I was not interested in the sweets, I was just upset I didn't have my mother with me.

It was an official school for both Jewish and non-Jewish children, but in 1933, a few months after the Nazis came to power, my parents stopped sending me. I don't know if I was forced to leave because I was Jewish or if they just thought it wise to take me out. I had been proud of the fact that I would soon be able to walk to school by myself, I knew the way fairly well, but I never got the opportunity to do so.

I was sent instead to a private Jewish school held in somebody's home. I now wonder if it was perhaps not such a good school, because they used the same teachers for many of the subjects. There was a very good Jewish school in Frankfurt but my mother didn't want me to go there.

I remember a school art competition for which I painted a picture of Esther and the King, called '*Passing the Sceptre*'. I was so proud when it was hung on the wall as I didn't often achieve anything. My brother, on the other hand, was famous for painting pictures of Mickey Mouse!

I was quite good at languages. My mother organised a private tutor to teach Ernest and me English and French. I had the instinct to teach, even when I was at school, and I taught a fellow pupil some French.

I later enrolled in business school, but by the time I reached the age of 15, all Jewish children were forbidden to attend any school. ■



I am at the front of the rowing boat whilst on holiday with my friend Renard and her sister

Leaving Germany

BY 1938, THE streets of Frankfurt were covered in posters with caricatures of Jews. Jewish shopkeepers were forced to hang signs outside stating theirs was a Jewish-owned shop, and the non-Jewish shops hung signs saying: 'Jews not wanted here'.

I was sheltered from most antisemitism while growing up. I thought being Jewish was something good, but as time went on, I started to wonder whether it was actually a bad thing. I remember overhearing the caretaker of our apartment block talking about Jews. He was asking some non-Jewish residents about my family and they said: 'Oh, they're okay.'

We occasionally heard about '*Kab-Tzet*' (German pronunciation of 'KZ', abbreviation of *Konzentrationslager*, concentration camps) but nothing like we know now. I had a school friend whose father was taken to a camp quite early under Nazi rule; he was released but developed pneumonia during his imprisonment and died not long afterwards.

We knew that Jews were being persecuted. My mother was worried and kept nagging my father to make plans for us to leave Germany. I could hear them talking about it when I was in bed. But my father found it very difficult to make decisions – I'm the same, I got that from him. He knew it would be a big step to start anew somewhere else. He was in his mid-fifties at this point, and was concerned about finding a way to make a living.

“ I was sheltered from most antisemitism while growing up. I thought being Jewish was something good, but as time went on, I started to wonder whether it was actually a bad thing. ”

In November 1938, after much planning, my father decided to travel to England on business. My Uncle Willi had moved to the USA by then, where he would spend the rest of his life. My father managed to find a guarantor who agreed to start an export business with him. He took three key colleagues with him. My mother had the difficult task of winding up the business in Frankfurt after my father left. She had no experience of this, but she had no choice in the matter.

My father escaped on *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass, when shops were broken into and synagogues, including the one we attended, burned. He was detained at the Dutch border for a few hours. Eventually we got word that he had arrived in England. I remember my mother shrieking with relief when she heard his voice at the other end of the telephone.

Ernest left for Geneva shortly after our father's escape, having secured a place to finish his education at the International School. In May 1939, my mother and I followed my father to England by train, via Belgium. My grandparents would catch the last train from Germany to England. ■



In Germany, 1938



My German passport, 1939





With my mother and brother shortly after arriving in England

We arrive in England

WHEN MY MOTHER and I arrived in England on 2 June 1939, my father met us in London and we went to a room in a boarding house on Abbey Road. At night, the room was our bedroom which we shared, and in the daytime, it was our living room. My mother struggled to cope: we had no home-help and she was not used to cooking for the family.

My brother got to England at around the same time, but he went to Newcastle and found a job there.

Many Jewish refugees settled in North West London. In fact, the bus conductor would call out: 'Finchley *Strasse*' when approaching the Finchley Road, due to the number of Jewish German refugees that settled around there. There was even a restaurant which served German food.

My Aunt Irma, Uncle Louis and Cousin Frank had escaped Nazi Germany before us and had settled in Birmingham to live near friends. We visited each other regularly and I spent my time playing with Frank. He was always ready for a laugh. If something was very bad, he'd say: 'Oh, I've seen better!' On one occasion, when playing with him and a group of other children, someone stuck a big knife in the floor. I tried to pull it out and it cut through my tendon. I couldn't bend my thumb, so I was taken to University College Hospital in Central London, but they couldn't mend it. Uncle Louis was a doctor and used a machine to try and get the tendon to work again, but even that didn't work. I still have the scar.

We spoke German at home but when we were out I used the English I had learned back in Germany. I remember being in a shop around Christmas and a shop assistant asked: 'Are you alright for crackers?' I misunderstood as the only crackers I knew were cream crackers! ■

“ I remember being in a shop around Christmas and a shop assistant asked: 'Are you alright for crackers?' I misunderstood as the only crackers I knew were cream crackers! ”

My family is imprisoned

SOON AFTER I turned 16, we moved to Mabel Grove, Nottingham. My father found work as an apprentice at a local lace company. He had struggled to build his new business when he first arrived in England, but despite this he continued to pay the wages of the colleagues he had brought over from Germany. In my innocence, I was confused to see my father working as an employee as I had only experienced Jewish people in Germany owning their own business or working as doctors or lawyers.

Two months after we moved to Nottingham, war broke out. By this time, my brother had signed up to the Pioneer Corps because a minor eye injury prevented him from joining the Army. I had enrolled in Miss Bastow's Secretarial College and found the business studies side very interesting.

During the Blitz, we believed that a business competitor of my father's falsely reported us for disobeying the blackout rules. This was untrue, but a tribunal found us guilty. My father was sent to an internment camp on the Isle of Man while my mother and I were sent to Holloway Prison in London. We were locked in separate cells. They kept the lights on all night, so I took out the bulb in my cell to allow me to get some sleep. I got told off by the warden for that. My main feeling was of frustration, because I didn't have my Pitman's shorthand book with me to study. I do have a good memory from our time in Holloway, which was meeting my lifelong friend, Selma Seidel, who was from an orthodox Jewish community in Frankfurt. She told my mother that if she had been a man she would have married me! In later life we would have something in common, both losing our parents within a very short time of each other.

I found prison life quite interesting. We were allowed to go outside in the yard once a day. I had the job of dishing out the porridge in the morning. Some prisoners were clever and brought not just the dish for the porridge but a toothbrush mug as well, to get a bit more.

Case No.	31522	H.O. Ref.	W. 2771	GERMAN JEWISH AID COMMITTEE		23.2.40	
Surname	WERTHEIMER			Address	51, LOUGHBOROUGH RD		
Other Names	Edith			Phone No.	WEST BRIDGEFORD NOTTS.		
Date of Birth	24-7-23	Nationality	German	Born at	Frankfurt, Pr.	If Orthodox	no
Address in Germany	Wiesbaden 53	Date of arrival in England	2.6.39	PERMIT Valid for	21-12-39		
Married	no	Husband	Not in England	Number of Children			
Relatives or Friends in England (State Financial Position)				Born at	Age	Sex	If in Eng.
Father 15 384							
Mother 25 772, Brothers 12 476							
In England		Amount		Country			
Means " Germany		See 15 384		NATURALISED DATE 23.2.40			
Elsewhere							
OCCUPATION in Germany (in full detail)							
Alternative Occupations	Experience						
Languages	German, English, some French.						
If registered by any other Refugee Committees				Passport Expires	22-2-40		
LEFT ENGLAND FOR	ON						
Date of Interviews	Port of Arrival Dates			Nature of Hospitality	Money Grant	Initials	
10 AUG 1939	1 day in Hamburg						
	By visa granted 10-5-39, H.O. 122. W. 2771 for visit - to join father who intends opening business here.						
	"NO FINANCIAL SUPPORT. SEE 15 384"						
19.8.47	NATURALISED DATE 23.2.40						

Case file from German Jewish Aid Committee

During our sentence, the Christian chaplain Reverend Allen visited the prisoners. We told him we were innocent and should not be in prison. The reverend replied that we were all sinners in the sight of God. I could not quite understand this at the time.

We weren't there very long before we were sent to the Isle of Man. I remember the ferry journey being very jolly. There were young people cartwheeling and music played, it was quite an occasion.

We arrived at the all-female Rushen Camp in St Mary's, where both Jewish and non-Jewish women were interned. Some were put in big hotels, but my mother and I were in a small boarding house. We had meals provided for us; we hardly noticed we were being interned. My mother was delighted with the situation – she loved the view from the window of the sheep in the green pastures. We would often feed the seagulls our leftover kippers.

We didn't mix much with other people. We made jewellery from pebbles and seashells. We would take walks to Port Erin, which appeared more like a prison camp than where we were interned.

My father was interned at a camp in Peel, about ten miles from St Mary's. At first, we had permission to meet up together in Douglas, a short distance from our camp, for a few hours once a month. We would take sandwiches to share, but these visits stopped during the latter part of our stay. During his internment, my father found comfort in writing poems on peeling potatoes that he called: 'Peelology'.

We attended lessons in the camp. Somebody asked if we wanted to study the New Testament in French. I objected to this because the Jewish religion only believes in the Hebrew Bible. That was the attitude I had then.

DATE OF REG. 10.8.39 No. OF CHILDREN
No. 31522 SURNAME WERTHEIMER Edith
CHRISTIAN NAME Edith
ENGLISH ADDRESS *15a Newmarket Road, London N. 14*
HOME ADDRESS Frankfurt NATIONALITY German
BIRTHPLACE Frankfurt EXP. OF PASSPORT 22.2.40
DATE OF BIRTH 29.7.23 PROFESSION NATURALISED
GUARANTOR-NAME and ADDRESS DATE 23.2.42
ARRIVAL DATE 2.6.39 H.O. No. W 8371
LEFT U.K. FOR MARRIED No
DATE

CROSS REFERENCE
Mother 25772
Father 15389
Brother 12496

Registration slip from German Jewish Aid Committee

A man called Mr Eccles was there, but he was not an internee. He had evacuated himself onto the Isle of Man to get away from the air raids, while his wife stayed in Liverpool. I was surprised he chose to leave his wife. He preached in the church as a layman, and we would listen to him, which was unusual for us as Jews.

We met people who had fled from France, some of whom had walked across the Pyrenees and suffered from the extreme cold. There was a lady from Nottingham who was mentally unwell. I tried to be understanding towards her and was generally quite good at talking to new people.

At that time I had no idea what the future would hold. We had given up our home, I had to cut my studies short, but we were away from the Nazis and that was the main thing. I don't remember how long we were on the island, but it wasn't very long. On the whole, our experience felt very much as if we were guests not internees. I, however, would have liked the opportunity to be patriotic for England. ■

“A man called Mr Eccles was there, but he was not an internee. He had evacuated himself onto the Isle of Man to get away from the air raids, while his wife stayed in Liverpool. I was surprised he chose to leave his wife. He preached in the church as a layman, and we would listen to him, which was unusual for us as Jews.”

The family moves to Birmingham

MY GRANDPARENTS HAD been living with us in Nottingham while they waited for their immigration papers to be able to join my Uncle Jacob in America. They remained there during our internment. Opa Sepp was very worried for us: he thought the camp we were interned in was like the Nazi concentration camps. At the same time, his other daughter, Gretel, was hiding in Belgium with her two daughters, Suzanne and Gabi. Opa Sepp had a history of heart trouble and all this stress caused him a fatal heart attack while playing cards at his friend's house. My grandmother then moved in with her daughter, my Aunt Irma, Uncle Louis and Frank in Birmingham.

When we were released from internment in 1941, we had no home to go to, and Aunt Irma invited us to stay in Birmingham. Aunt Irma and Uncle Louis opened their home to us, so we lived there alongside my grandmother, her sister Selma and Opa Sepp's brother, Heinrich. We said their house had rubber walls, because we all managed to fit under that one roof. My aunt and uncle had many friends from the synagogue and I found my own friends through them.

I got a job for a short while with a credit firm. I had never heard of credit before. People ordered things from catalogues and then paid it off, which I found very strange. I was told that if I wanted a job I had to say I was experienced even though I wasn't, in the hope I would learn on the job. But I felt this was very bad advice; it was not honest.

I went on to work for a Canadian fur company called 'Marks', but it suffered from the bombings and I lost the job. I was, however, fortunate enough to receive a nice reference for my work there. ■

We move back to Nottingham

MY FATHER DECIDED to move us back to Nottingham where there was a thriving lace industry. He started a new business manufacturing ladies' and children's wear. My brother returned from the Pioneer Corps and went on to learn fabric cutting and designing at college. They hired a building alongside an embroidery firm at the lace market. The air in this area of Nottingham was so polluted that washing on the line turned black from the dust.

My father, mother and brother were made directors of the family business and would hold directors' meetings, which I didn't attend. Often through my life I felt like a bit of an outsider, but I wasn't really. We rented a house in Trent Bridge and I found a job as a ledger clerk in the invoice department of a wholesale grocers, located opposite the castle. There were plenty of vacancies available because of a dispute when many had lost their jobs by refusing to work on a holiday. Perhaps, if I'd had some knowledge of politics, I might have thought twice about accepting the job, but I was very aware of my limited education so I was ready to do anything. One of my tasks was to sort out credit notes for damaged goods. I remember a young man who carried out his work very quickly, unlike myself - I was quite a slow worker.

I enjoyed going to the local synagogue and would often spend *Shabbat* with family and friends. It was something I really looked forward to.

My mother didn't have a good relationship with my grandmother, Oma Emma, when she was with us in Nottingham. This made my grandmother very sad, and she was much happier when she finally moved to America with Auntie Selma and Uncle Heinrich to be near Uncle Jacob.

I was about nineteen years old when my mother was sectioned for a while at the Coppice Mental Hospital. I don't know how her problem manifested itself, but we used to say she was *Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand* (with the head through the wall). She was very domineering, especially towards me, and would say crushing things that affected my self-esteem. She would say that I was jealous of her because she had more sex appeal but I think God gave me strength to withstand everything.

TELEPHONE MIDLAND 1135.

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1941.

To whom it may concern.

This is to certify that Miss Edith Weatherman -
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she worked well, & was affable, obliging
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Director

My job reference

There is a part of my life which is very difficult to talk about. I was abused as a young girl. I am telling the story in the hope it might help someone else. Our home-help, Gerda, who my parents employed in Frankfurt, did things to me when I was a child that she shouldn't have. Gerda was like a mother and a friend to me and I always wanted to please her. I didn't know that what she was doing was wrong.

Gerda had arrived in England shortly after me and my mother but didn't live with us. She left for America when I was about 20 years old. I went with her to Liverpool from where her ship was sailing. I mentioned to her then that perhaps my mother knew about it and she seemed to think my mother knew. My mother was never able to talk about it to me. I realised then that this may have contributed to not having a closer, loving, happy relationship with my mother. ■



Left to right: Cousin Frank, Aunt Irma and my father, relaxing in the garden, Birmingham, circa 1950s



With Joyce, 1945

I become a Christian

WHEN I ATTENDED synagogue on *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), I never felt as though I had been forgiven. From an early age I was very keen to please God. If women near me were chatting during the service, I would ask them to stop talking because I wanted to pray.

My friend Joyce Fillingham, whom I met when I worked at the wholesale grocer, would often ask me to join her at the chapel. I would say: 'I can't, I'm Jewish.' One day when I was particularly low because a friend had just moved to America, I agreed and went to a meeting with her. Joyce gave me a booklet called 'The Reason Why'. It explained that God sent Jesus to Earth so that we would be forgiven. As I read it, I thought that if God did that, it would be a terrible thing not to believe it. From then onwards, I believed that Jesus and The New Testament are a continuation of the Jewish Faith. Some people thought I had moved away from my Jewish roots, but I still felt very Jewish. ■

“ From an early age I was very keen to please God. If women near me were chatting during the service, I would ask them to stop talking because I wanted to pray. ”

I find my vocation

I ALWAYS WANTED to be a nurse but I didn't have enough confidence. Then, at a church meeting, a speaker asked: 'Are you doing something useful with your life?' This encouraged me to apply to study nursing at Mansfield and District General Hospital. I didn't really have the required standard of schooling, so I was very pleased to be accepted. Nurses' accommodation was provided, and I moved to Mansfield to start my training.

On my first day, in July 1944, I wrote in a note book about wanting to please God more than myself. When I arrived on the ward to start work I was given the job of cutting bread for tea. Big chunks came off the loaf – I just could not manage to cut proper slices, I had never done it before. The matron told the sister I was 'a bit raw'. I was not very practical, but I managed to get through. On one occasion a patient went for an operation and I didn't know what she was having done. When I was on bedpan duty, I discovered she'd had her leg taken off, which came as quite a shock.

With English as my second language, I often misunderstood things but I would persistently believe what I thought I'd heard. At mealtime we would sit at a big table in order of seniority, with the matron at one end. When they prayed: 'For these and all thy mercies, we thank you Lord' I thought they said: "For these and all the nurses...'

I joined the local church and attended church meetings at Hardy's hat shop: before every meeting we had to clear the shop of hats. The people who attended were very enthusiastic and were loving and caring towards me. They would say: 'Oh, wonderful people, the Jewish people,' which made me very happy. I was always very upset when Jewish people weren't well thought of.

I enjoyed belonging to this group. They were such a happy crowd, always sitting around the piano, lifting their hands up, singing. We would share the gospel at the marketplace and spent time together on holidays. There were so many people singing grace together in the dining room, it made a tremendous impression on me.

CALENDAR for 1940

JANUARY.		FEBRUARY.		MARCH.		APRIL.	
S	7 14 21 28	S	4 11 18 25	S	3 10 17 24 31	S	7 14 21 28
M	1 8 15 22 29	M	5 12 19 26	M	4 11 18 25	M	1 8 15 22 29
Tu	2 9 16 23 30	Tu	6 13 20 27	Tu	5 12 19 26	Tu	2 9 16 23 30
W	3 10 17 24 31	W	7 14 21 28	W	6 13 20 27	W	3 10 17 24
Th	4 11 18 25	Th	1 8 15 22 29	Th	7 14 21 28	Th	4 11 18 25
F	5 12 19 26	F	2 9 16 23	F	1 8 15 22 29	F	5 12 19 26
S	6 13 20 27	S	3 10 17 24	S	2 9 16 23 30	S	6 13 20 27
MAY.		JUNE.		JULY.		AUGUST.	
S	5 12 19 26	S	2 9 16 23 30	S	7 14 21 28	S	4 11 18 25
M	6 13 20 27	M	3 10 17 24	M	1 8 15 22 29	M	5 12 19 26
Tu	7 14 21 28	Tu	4 11 18 25	Tu	2 9 16 23 30	Tu	6 13 20 27
W	1 8 15 22 29	W	5 12 19 26	W	3 10 17 24 31	W	7 14 21 28
Th	2 9 16 23 30	Th	6 13 20 27	Th	4 11 18 25	Th	1 8 15 22 29
F	3 10 17 24 31	F	7 14 21 28	F	5 12 19 26	F	2 9 16 23 30
S	4 11 18 25	S	1 8 15 22 29	S	6 13 20 27	S	3 10 17 24 31
SEPTEMBER.		OCTOBER.		NOVEMBER.		DECEMBER.	
S	1 8 15 22 29	S	2 9 16 23 30	S	3 10 17 24	S	1 8 15 22 29
M	2 9 16 23 30	M	1 8 15 22 29	M	4 11 18 25	M	2 9 16 23 30
Tu	3 10 17 24	Tu	1 8 15 22 29	Tu	5 12 19 26	Tu	3 10 17 24 31
W	4 11 18 25	W	2 9 16 23 30	W	6 13 20 27	W	4 11 18 25
Th	5 12 19 26	Th	3 10 17 24 31	Th	7 14 21 28	Th	5 12 19 26
F	6 13 20 27	F	4 11 18 25	F	1 8 15 22 29	F	6 13 20 27
S	7 14 21 28	S	5 12 19 26	S	2 9 16 23 30	S	7 14 21 28

CALENDAR for 1941

JANUARY.		FEBRUARY.		MARCH.		APRIL.	
S	5 12 19 26	S	2 9 16 23	S	2 9 16 23 30	S	6 13 20 27
M	6 13 20 27	M	3 10 17 24	M	3 10 17 24 31	M	7 14 21 28
Tu	7 14 21 28	Tu	4 11 18 25	Tu	4 11 18 25	Tu	1 8 15 22 29
W	1 8 15 22 29	W	5 12 19 26	W	5 12 19 26	W	2 9 16 23 30
Th	2 9 16 23 30	Th	6 13 20 27	Th	6 13 20 27	Th	3 10 17 24
F	3 10 17 24 31	F	7 14 21 28	F	7 14 21 28	F	4 11 18 25
S	4 11 18 25	S	1 8 15 22	S	1 8 15 22 29	S	5 12 19 26
MAY.		JUNE.		JULY.		AUGUST.	
S	4 11 18 25	S	1 8 15 22 29	S	6 13 20 27	S	3 10 17 24 31
M	5 12 19 26	M	2 9 16 23 30	M	7 14 21 28	M	4 11 18 25
Tu	6 13 20 27	Tu	3 10 17 24	Tu	1 8 15 22 29	Tu	5 12 19 26
W	7 14 21 28	W	4 11 18 25	W	2 9 16 23 30	W	6 13 20 27
Th	1 8 15 22 29	Th	5 12 19 26	Th	3 10 17 24 31	Th	7 14 21 28
F	2 9 16 23 30	F	6 13 20 27	F	4 11 18 25	F	1 8 15 22 29
S	3 10 17 24 31	S	7 14 21 28	S	5 12 19 26	S	2 9 16 23 30
SEPTEMBER.		OCTOBER.		NOVEMBER.		DECEMBER.	
S	7 14 21 28	S	5 12 19 26	S	2 9 16 23 30	S	7 14 21 28
M	1 8 15 22 29	M	6 13 20 27	M	3 10 17 24	M	1 8 15 22 29
Tu	2 9 16 23 30	Tu	7 14 21 28	Tu	4 11 18 25	Tu	2 9 16 23 30
W	3 10 17 24	W	1 8 15 22 29	W	5 12 19 26	W	3 10 17 24 31
Th	4 11 18 25	Th	2 9 16 23 30	Th	6 13 20 27	Th	4 11 18 25
F	5 12 19 26	F	3 10 17 24 31	F	7 14 21 28	F	5 12 19 26
S	6 13 20 27	S	4 11 18 25	S	1 8 15 22 29	S	6 13 20 27

DON'T BE AFRAID!
Be more daring!
Have the knowledge of your confidence.

Way at a can it help then
I am thinking of all
those who I liked and
loved and how they wanted
freedom from the oppression
off all those years just like
I did. But their lot, the
horror.

My g'd I cannot thank
her enough day feelings
of appreciation for my
parents, brother, grandpa
and so many ~~other~~
~~people~~ who have been
saved.. nothing we can

My notebook written in 1940

The Hardys had two sons. I thought I could perhaps marry one of them. It was always my first thought when I met young men: who might be suitable? I didn't have quite the right idea about courtship. I just thought you met somebody and they would be suitable. In fact, as a child I used to say I wanted to marry a poor man because when I saw a film about poor families they were all together with the mum and dad and I liked that.

One incident sticks in my mind. I came to believe in being very open about everything after I read a book called 'The Calvary Road' by Roy Hession. During my nursing training, I dropped a syringe of penicillin just before I was to administer it to a little boy. I didn't change the needle and he later developed a small abscess. I felt terribly sorry and guilty. When his parents came to visit him, I was led by God to tell them what had happened. I said I was a Christian and we had to confess everything. It was amazing, they said: 'We too are Christians,' and the mother shared that she had left a hot iron unattended one time and the little boy had hurt himself on it. It took a lot of courage to confess, but I am glad I did. I remember I compensated by trying very hard to help him when he refused to take his drinks and he needed plenty of fluid. I eventually realised the drinks weren't sweet enough for him, so I added more sugar and that seemed to do the trick.

It took four years of training to become a state registered nurse (SRN) in Mansfield. It was hard work, demanding long hours and discipline, but I loved it. I felt I had a lot in common with other nurses. Nursing meant a lot to me, but I really wanted to be a midwife, so I decided to apply for midwifery.

As I left nursing for my new post, I said goodbye to everyone. One patient, a badly injured miner from a pit accident said: 'Wherever you go, they'll get a good one.' It was the nicest compliment because he was so ill. I really loved my patients and think I was a good nurse. ■

“As I left nursing for my new post, I said goodbye to everyone. One patient, a badly injured miner from a pit accident said: 'Wherever you go, they'll get a good one.' It was the nicest compliment because he was so ill.”



Group of fellow trainee nurses. I am in the red square

I fulfil my dream to become a midwife

IN 1948, I was accepted onto the Midwifery course in Nottingham, where I became a State Certified Midwife (SCM). Midwifery was very rewarding work, and I loved the mothers and babies very much. I worked quite a lot with premature babies in oxygen tents. I would also visit mothers and babies in their homes. I remember once arriving at a house to tend to a mother in labour and was greeted by a crowd of children in the kitchen saying: 'The new baby is upstairs.' I had arrived too late!

I referred to the children as 'kids' as I thought that was the correct term. The matron told me: 'Their mothers are not goats!' I didn't know what she meant.

After qualifying, I moved to London to work as a staff midwife at the Annie McCall Maternity Hospital, which was part of the South London Hospital for Women. I lodged with a family for a nine-month period. It was not such a nice area, but this was a happy time in my life. I felt very fulfilled, particularly when I was delivering the babies and looking after children.

While I was in London, my brother put me in touch with Sister Kish, who was connected to WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation) and had been visiting from Israel. In the spring of 1952, this charity arranged for me to work at a baby home in Tel Aviv which supported mothers who struggled to look after their babies. WIZO paid my fare to Israel. My work differed to the job I had been used to. In Israel I was to call the matron by her first name, whereas in England it was more formal. It was quite confusing and I was afraid I might speak in a familiar way when I shouldn't.

My mother's cousin and her family lived nearby, in Petah Tikva. They owned a laundry and I would visit them regularly. I signed up for *Ulpan* (intensive Hebrew language lessons) and had to travel to these in the afternoons, in the heat of the day, when most people were resting.

After a year, the baby home moved, but I was not allowed to go with them. I looked for another job, but my English midwifery qualifications were not recognised in Israel. So, I found a job in a nursing home and stayed there until just after my 30th birthday in 1953. After quite a long period of indecision, I eventually decided to return to England. On my journey back, I joined my parents in Germany, where they were holidaying at the time.

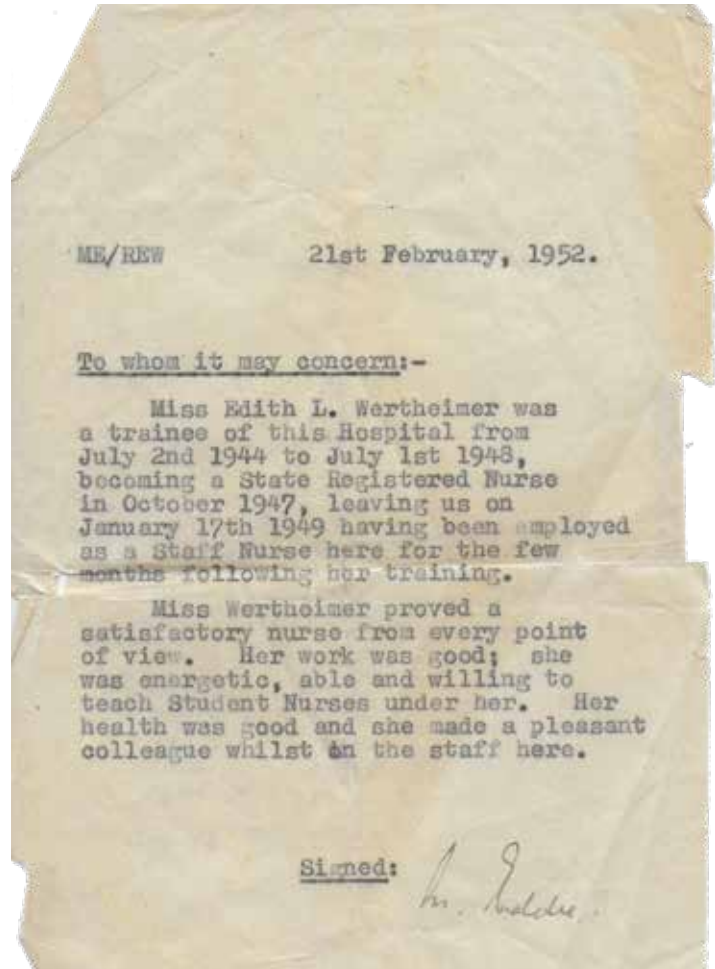


With a nursing friend. I am on the right. Nottingham, 1949



Working at mother and baby home in Israel

On my return to Nottingham, I moved back into my parents' house and went to work in the office at their factory. I had lost my confidence as a midwife. The way I had worked was so different in Israel. Things were more formal in England and I was afraid I might make mistakes. ■



My nursing reference, 1952

Family and friends after the war

MY MATERNAL GRANDFATHER'S sister and her children perished, but his eight brothers and one other sister managed to escape. My paternal grandparents died before war broke out.

A school friend of mine, Annaliese Volma, who I remember was always tap dancing, had not been able to leave Germany because she had polio, so she perished in the Holocaust. Her father was a sales representative and I remember as a child thinking that was very inferior. My religious studies teacher perished, too.

In 1966, I went to America and visited many long-lost relatives. Oma Emma had died in December 1955, but I did see the rest of the family who had settled there. Aunt Gretel had moved there after having been in hiding in Belgium during the war with her two daughters, Suzanne and Gabi. Her husband, my uncle Hugo, managed to escape Germany via the Pyrenees but died shortly after. Suzanne wrote a book called 'At the Mercy of Strangers' about her time in hiding. She mentions the journey my mother and I took on our way to England in the spring of 1939. We keep in touch now and again.

In America I also met my mother's cousin Martin's son, Richard. The last time I had seen him, he was a baby when we all lived in Germany. My mother's cousin Hilda and her daughter, Renate, had originally been refugees in Genoa after the war and then went on to build a life in America. I don't know what happened to her husband.

I also met up with our old home-help, Gerda, as she lived opposite my relatives. I was glad to see she had a husband and was happily married, and I was glad that what happened between us had not made her unsuitable for marriage. ■

I meet and marry Kenneth

WHEN I WAS 33 years old, I had the opportunity of going to the coast. Somebody had cancelled their place on a Christian Centre trip and I hadn't had a holiday in a while. I was taking a walk along the sea front when all of a sudden my skirt blew right up! Just at that moment, I spotted Reverend Allen who had visited the ladies in Holloway Prison when I was there. He was talking to a man who was walking with a stick. I was later introduced to this man, whose name was Kenneth Whyatt. We didn't speak very much but I could see he took an interest in me. He was 46 and originally from Nottingham, but now worked as a technical representative for an engineering firm in Yorkshire. He was a bachelor and was boarding with an elderly Jewish gentleman. Kenneth hadn't known about his own Jewish heritage until later in life. His grandmother was Jewish and his mother would impress on him that it would be nice to meet a Jewish wife. I thought he was a bit strange, which he actually was – a bit like me!

48 After the holiday Kenneth wrote to me and sent me a little New Testament bible. We didn't meet many times and I'm sorry to say that I didn't really fall in love with him. It was a huge surprise when he proposed; I thought he was asking me to meet his wife, but he was asking me to be his wife! I thought my parents would not be pleased if I had a proposal and refused, so I accepted the offer. We were married in a church in Nottingham on 27 October 1956.

My father gave me away, which he said was a pleasure, as though he was glad to get rid of me, but I know it was not meant like that. My brother was the best man and my friend Joyce was my bridesmaid. My mother helped to arrange the wedding, although she did not attend as she had cancer and didn't feel well enough to go. She did see me in my wedding dress before the service. My veil was embroidered and had been given to me by the embroidery firm that shared a building with my father's business.



Our wedding day, 1956

We had about 35 guests including several of my lovely relatives – Aunt Irma, Uncle Louis, Frank, his wife Herta and their little boy. Kenneth didn't invite his parents. He said it would be too much for them because they were elderly. He told me it would be embarrassing for me to meet them before the wedding; afterwards would be better, which I found a bit strange. When I eventually met them, his mother told me how pleased she was that he now had a nice wife. She was very gentle and had close Jewish friends in Blackpool. My father-in-law, Percy, was not encouraging towards me and not so gentle and kind to foreigners. He said things to me that were not friendly. It was clear Kenneth had not had much affection from his father, but that his mother cared for him. ■



Left to right: My brother; Ernest, my father, Joyce, Kenneth and me

My life with my husband

WE MOVED TO Leeds straight after our wedding. Kenneth had work there as a technical representative for an engineering firm. I was so innocent, I didn't know anything about finding somewhere to live. Kenneth found us a flat above Dr Rommelsberg's surgery on Chapeltown Road. An elderly doctor, Dr Schindler, lived in the flat below us. The area had been a Jewish neighbourhood at one time, but by the time we moved there in 1956, most Jews had moved to North Leeds.

Whereas I was very open, my husband was more private and was inclined to put a positive gloss on things. He didn't show his feelings so much and he didn't want people around sometimes. He didn't want neighbours to know our business. He would tell people I 'wrote to missionaries', when I had written to just one. He would say I was an office manageress in my family business, but really I was only doing odd jobs in the office. I remember seeing him in the street and he seemed almost like a stranger to me, which is a pity.

Kenneth used to say on a morning, after prayer: 'How should we order the day?' which seemed a bit formal to me. He was quite handy about the house. He was very good at mending things, could write in calligraphy and he also learned Hebrew. He brewed his own elderflower wine and probably knew more about cooking than I did when we were first married. He gave me complete freedom really, and never made many demands on me.

Our daughter Esther was born on 19 September 1957. My mother and father visited us in Leeds for a few hours one day that October. By November, they had both died. The combination of the damp where we had lived at Trent Bridge and the polluted air around the lace market in Nottingham where they worked was really unhealthy, and they both developed lung cancer. I think they had planned on euthanasia and travelled to a hospital in Germany. Nobody has confirmed this to me, but I have my suspicions. My mother had said: 'They are able to do things there they wouldn't be able to here.' She said my father was 'over 21 and old enough to decide for himself.' She hoped my father would die first because she believed a man was left more helpless on his own. My father was buried in Nottingham, and my mother in Frankfurt.

I always worried about my health before I married, afraid I might have cancer because I had a lot of stomach issues. Then when I had Peter and Esther, I worried they would grow up without a mother.

I was so sad that I didn't have my mother there for support when my children were young. She had not been around very much during the various high points of my life – when I graduated from nursing and midwifery college and on my wedding day – and once again I was left quite isolated when Esther was a baby. When Kenneth's father's cousin would visit I didn't feel as though I was part of the family as she would chat with Kenneth and I would feel left out. We did, though, have good support from friends in the church, and Kenneth's mother would often take the children out in the pram.

I joined the Pioneer Women ('Poale Zion'), a left-wing Zionist organization. One of the members, Mary Mikardo, came to stay with us once. She was the wife of Ian Mikardo, the well-known MP in London. The women from this group often helped me with babysitting the children when they were small.

When we were first married Kenneth was a member of the Open Brethren church. You had to have a letter of commendation from another church to take part in the breaking of bread (communion). Ladies had to wear hats and were not allowed to speak during meetings. Over the years I found myself becoming attached to some of the people at church. I was going through a difficult emotional period, and found I couldn't continue seeing some of the people at church, and so we left to go to a Baptist church and later a Pentecostal church.

Whichever church we were at, we always tried to help people who were struggling, but my father-in-law wasn't very encouraging. He thought it was a woman's job to look after her family. I wanted to be a dutiful wife to his son even though I had married him only because he wanted to marry me. I wanted to make him happy. All these years later, I realise there should have been more to it than that for me.

On 16 September 1958, three days less than a year after I had Esther, Peter was born. When Peter was about 15 months old and had just learned to walk, we moved to a house on the corner of Woodland Grove and Newton Road in the Chapeltown area of Leeds.

Kenneth's job gave him lots of spare time and he would help with the children. I think I might have had a closer bond with the children if he hadn't done so much with them. He took them over.



I am holding Peter and Esther is sitting on Kenneth's knee, 1958



Esther and Peter, 1960



Esther, Kenneth, Peter and me on holiday in Bridlington, 1963



Me and Kenneth, 1964

Esther told me very recently that her dad used to keep a little black book in his pocket; if she and Peter had 'earned' 10 black marks against them, usually by upsetting me, he would take them upstairs and hit them as punishment, either with a belt or his hands. I had no idea. It was very wrong of my husband not to tell me.

I loved the children very much, but I had quite a hard time being a mother. Kenneth was against vaccinating them and when Peter needed glasses as a little boy, he did not agree. My husband was against going to doctors and it was very worrying for me at times.

But I was happy in a way. Kenneth would take me and the children out a lot on his work rounds with him. We would go on trips to the seaside and had nice supportive friends. We went on quite a lot of holidays to Bridlington because Kenneth was able to work from there. Sometimes we stayed at a boarding house or we rented a flat by the sea. The children would play in the sand, have ice cream, and we would go for walks on the beach.

I would have liked to have had a job, say in a nursing home. It would have built up my confidence, even just scrubbing floors, but Kenneth was against it. He said: 'My colleagues don't find it necessary for their wives to work', and that was that. It was a question of pride for him. I volunteered as a waitress at Donisthorpe Hall Care Home. Kenneth would pick me up afterwards and we would go for a meal.

I was anxious a lot of the time and often used to feel quite desperate. I saw a psychiatrist at one point. Kenneth wouldn't – or couldn't – show his feelings, and he didn't like me to talk about mine. He often upset people and put a damper on things, I don't know why. Towards the end of his life, he was quite difficult and would become angry. Sometimes I felt he didn't really love me, but my children say he did, so maybe he gave as much as he was able to. I would like to have been in a close relationship, but most marriages are not 100 per cent. Overall, I am grateful and thank the Lord for my marriage – my husband provided for me and he was so pleased we had the children.

I started losing my sight in 1975 and had an operation for glaucoma on my eyes. Kenneth was quite poorly by that time. In 1982, he died from cancer of the oesophagus. He was 72. He was unable to swallow at the end, but thankfully he didn't suffer for long. I am glad I was able to be with him when he died. He was in St James's Hospital, which was within walking distance of our house. I was there during the night and the children joined me. I quoted his favourite Bible verse to comfort him and, just as I did that, he put his head to one side and died. ■

Early widowhood

WHEN KENNETH DIED I was only 58 and it felt very strange at first - I had to adjust a lot. I went to church as usual, but I felt terrible. It was too soon for me to mix with people as if nothing had happened. I thought managing finances would be difficult, but it wasn't such a problem. I wanted to keep myself busy and started to volunteer at a firefighting equipment business. At first when I answered the office phone I was very business-like. However, the owner said he wanted me to be chattier with people, which I was surprised about.

I continued volunteering with 'Pioneer Women' and became involved with a mission to prisoners. We would pray together for the prisoners, helping them through prayer and I would often read at our meetings.

I helped out with the Jewish kosher meals-on-wheels service, packing soups and other food and later helping deliver the meals. I also taught Asian ladies English, although I am not too sure how much they learned!

I would often babysit when friends and neighbours needed childcare and I also volunteered at the local school to listen to little ones learning to read. I had to be careful when I corrected them as they would feel as though I was criticising them. It was nice to hear them say: 'Good morning, Mrs Whyatt'. ■

“ I would often babysit when friends and neighbours needed childcare and I also volunteered at the local school to listen to little ones learning to read. ”

My wonderful children

WE DIDN'T HAVE a television at home when the children were young, but they didn't miss it. We had Italian, Polish, Ukrainian and German neighbours. All the children would play in a side street that we affectionately called 'The Village'.

Esther said her first words when she was crawling on her front. It sounded like: 'I got your letter, I got your letter'. I realised she was saying: 'I'm going to let her', because I would say: 'I'm going to let her have a roll about.' I remember, one day when I collected her from nursery, I was told that when they were saying grace, Esther grabbed the biscuits when the others had their heads down.

When she was about seven, Esther had to go into Leeds General Infirmary because she was making involuntary movements. She was diagnosed with chorea. Luckily, she wasn't in hospital very long as the symptoms subsided and the diagnosis was discarded.

Esther went to Roundhay High School. After she left, and before she went to Coventry Polytechnic to study Applied Social Sciences, she had a couple of gap years. She became a Community Service Volunteer and moved to Norfolk to work with ex-prisoners. Then, when she was 19, she volunteered at an evangelical holiday centre called Klostermühle, in Germany. I visited her there and found them all so friendly: it was a very healing experience for me. She volunteered at a children's home in France and also spent time on a kibbutz in Israel.

Esther's first job after finishing her degree was on the shop floor in an engineering factory. She came back to Leeds in the early 1980s and did community work. Next, she moved to London to do a TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) course. She had initially planned to stay only a month, but has lived there ever since. She found a secretarial job in Covent Garden for a short while. Peter was living in central London and Esther joined him in a shared house.



Peter and Esther in 1962



Esther performing in London, 2010

Today, Esther is a pianist and has worked on cruise ships, in hotels and restaurants. She runs singing sessions in day-care centres and residential homes. When she started playing, she would turn around to see the appreciation on my face, but I didn't think it was so good. Now I am a great fan of her playing, she sounds really beautiful. Somebody said that when she plays the piano, the piano dances, and I agree. She spends her spare time on printmaking and photography, and has had her work exhibited.

Peter's first words were spoken when he was eating a marshmallow. He said: 'It's nice, it's nice.' He has always liked his food! And he has always been a very independent soul. One holiday in Bridlington

while visiting a playground, Peter couldn't find us when he came off the roundabout, so he made his way back to the guesthouse and put himself to bed. We waited and looked for him and eventually grew very worried. We reported him missing and the harbour master took a boat out to sea to try to find him. We eventually returned to our holiday accommodation and found him in bed. He just said: 'Why didn't you wait for me?'

After his time at Abbey Grange School, Peter studied for a degree in Industrial Relations at the University of Kent. After graduating in 1980 he struggled to find work, so he decided to train in catering at the local technical college. He then went on to work in various restaurants. In 1988, he decided to take a gap year, which included travelling around South America. He left no address or contact details. I didn't hear from him for a long time and grew desperately worried. I rang a friend of his in London and she said not to worry as he was 'footloose and fancy free'. Somehow it helped me to hear those words. When he returned, he moved to London to work as a chef. That was over 30 years ago.

62 Today, Peter is also a musician and plays double bass for parties, weddings and functions. He has performed for Prince Charles, who is the patron of a charity for art students; Peter and his band played music while the students were painting them.

He writes for and helps to edit '*The Fitzrovia News*' newspaper, which is based in his local area. He was once featured in an article in a national newspaper because he supported some squatters. He feels quite strongly about how Fitzrovia is being gentrified. Expensive properties have been built where Middlesex Hospital once stood. Before it was knocked down, there was a rough sleeper called Richard who would sleep in the hospital's doorway. Esther and Peter would bring him food and invite him for meals.

Esther and Peter play music together from time to time. I have a fond memory of listening to them rehearse the jazz piece 'Take Five' in London. Esther was on the piano, Peter on the guitar, alongside a saxophonist and double bass. It was a lovely moment.

Peter comes to stay with me every three weeks or so. Esther visits less often, but we speak regularly on the phone. ■



Peter playing double bass in Fitzroy Square for a local festival, 1995



On holiday together, 1999

Ernest

MY BROTHER, ERNEST married Patti in a synagogue in Nottingham, not long after our parents died. It was a smallish affair, possibly because of the recent bereavement. They had three children: Julian, Marc and Erica.

Ernest was rather gifted in the clothing business he owned with my father. If a machine was broken my father would say: 'Ernie, fix it!' He was a very inventive, clever man. Ernest would encourage Julian and Marc to work in his cutting room during the school holidays. Ernest's philosophy was to throw his children in at the deep end and let them make their own mistakes.

Ernest inherited the clothing business in 1957, when our father died. It became 'Ernest Worth Childrenswear', which was very successful. He was a talented designer. He employed more than 100 machinists but after some years the company faced the problem of cheap imports from other parts of the world and it became impossible to compete.

Ernest had an embroidery department (Ernest Worth Embroidery Ltd) and, being very much an inventor, came across a process that involved replacing stitching or embroidery designs onto clothing by fusing them together using 'hot-melt' adhesives. He found this fascinating and thought it would be the future. He spent his nights experimenting in the factory. It was a new industry and he had a lot of technical challenges to overcome. He became an expert in the field of hot-melt adhesives, particularly in relation to the garment and textile industry.

He built a very innovative and successful business and exported this all over the world. The embroidery business changed its name to Heat-Seal (Textiles) Ltd.

Ernest, together with his two sons, worked for many years in the factory in Nottingham. The heat-seal business started declining in the 1990s, when Julian and Marc sold the business. They then developed an internet company forecasting fashion trends which they later sold.



My nephew Marc has four children and lives in London. Last time we spoke on the phone, he told me he had started a new fashion forecasting company. I had to laugh, because I am very much into fashions of the past - about 30 or 40 years ago! Julian lives in Switzerland, but I think he spends quite a lot of time in London. He has three children. My niece, Erica, is the editor of the monthly magazine, *'The Pianist'*. She lives in London with her husband.

I remember Opa Sepp always said that he wanted his children and grandchildren to stick together. I feel very close to all my relatives although, unfortunately, I don't see as much of them as I would like to. ■

Helping others

OVER THE COURSE of my life, I befriended many people who had difficulties or felt they were outsiders. I have always had the inclination to try to be a good influence. It was our privilege to help them to feel at home and offer them a place at our table. As a result of helping others, I acquired and maintained many friendships. It's good to make friends with people who could be otherwise. I am particularly pleased when people I have helped form connections between themselves and help each other.

When my children were aged one and two, I met Anna and her daughter Susan. We stayed good friends for many years, until Anna died. I'm still friends with Susan today. Anna went through some trauma in her life. Her mother was Jewish and was attacked and her face badly injured. Anna was very kind: she would always send cards or notes if someone was unwell. She was always so appreciative of my help.

There was one woman who lived in a brothel, either in a room there or a flat, not really connected with the brothel. We went to pick her up for church, and I remember the dark corridors. I think we were brave to do unusual things like that.

Kenneth and I spotted a man near the synagogue close to our house who said he had come to see the rabbi. He had a huge suitcase with him with a Bible in it. He told us he didn't have a ticket to go back to South America, so we gave him money. My husband believed you can come across angels unawares on Earth, and we thought that perhaps this man was one. He had meals with us, although sometimes what we had on offer was not good enough for him.

Our friends Stella and James Christie, whom I met through the church, were very good to me. They invited me to spend weekends with them in Boston Spa after my husband died. James had been a bank manager and developed Alzheimer's. Stella would take me shopping to Marshall and Snelgrove, and helped me buy some of my nicest clothes. I still have them now and I call them my 'Stella clothes'.

I first came across Rose in 1966, when I helped her to cross the road because she was blind. She had problems with her mental health and Kenneth and I invited her to live with us for a while. She said people called her a dirty Jew. She would throw things out of the window and walk around the streets

swearing. She was quite unwell, but became like family in a way, although I have since learned that the children were slightly afraid of her. She used to laugh every morning when she would fry butter on her Belling cooker and the whole house would smell of it. She was eventually admitted into a psychiatric ward, and we would visit her there. She died within days of my husband, which felt very strange.

We befriended Kenny who had learning difficulties and spoke with a high-pitched voice. He would often visit us with his young nephew, Ian, who was very sensitive and would cry if there was a family argument.

I met Keith at church and welcomed him into our home. His name is almost like a combination of mine and my husband's names: Kenneth and Edith. He also shared the same birthday as my mother and my husband's mother. He found a flat opposite mine in Harehills. I more or less fed him leftovers when he struggled with money. He came with me once to help another friend who had mental health issues and I was worried he might harm himself. Keith and he became good friends.

Madeleine was from London and suffered with depression. She came up to Leeds where she had relatives, frequently came to stay with me and made herself at home. She would buy food to cook and shared it with me.

Mike and his young children came to our home regularly. Mike's wife was Swiss, and her brother's wife was Jewish. Her brother had a big beard, like Moses.

I was introduced to Alan who had mental health problems. He had parties at his house for our birthdays made up of a very nice circle of friends, neighbours and relatives. He could be objectionable to people and say nasty things to me sometimes, but I wasn't put off. He would ring me several times a week. One day he was found lying on the floor, having lost the circulation in his leg. He had to have the leg amputated but that didn't stop him from getting around. I would speak to him often and I last visited him about a year ago, just before he died.

Muriel and David were good friends. Kenneth and I attended their wedding in Coventry along with Esther, who was studying at university there at the time. Muriel is a very kind, very caring person and one of the few people I have known for a long time. ■



At home in 1985

Living in Harehills

I DECIDED TO move to a smaller house on Conway Street, Harehills, in 1984. Like Chapeltown, Harehills was an area where a lot of Jewish people once lived, but had since moved away.

I befriended the neighbours who always liked to come to my door. A small front step led straight from my front door onto the street and people sometimes sat down on the doorstep. I loved the way lots of children from the neighbourhood came to my door and I would talk to them and give them little books.

There was a lot of crime in this area. I personally experienced many incidents. On one occasion, a woman forced herself in and I just stood at the doorstep and screamed, which got rid of her. I also had my handbag taken out of my hand when I was shopping. I thought they wanted to help me carry my bags for me as they came into my house and then went straight upstairs.

Once somebody tried to climb through the window. I thought: 'Oh, the window cleaner wants to clean the windows from the inside as well!' When he saw me, he left and tore the net curtain on his way out, but I was not too alarmed.

I sometimes think I shouldn't say too much, I should just be thankful that nothing so bad happened.

People kept urging me to move away as it was not such a safe area. A lady called Lorna who was a Labour Councillor at the time would often ask: 'When are you going to move to Jewish housing?' Eventually, I agreed. ■

“ I loved the way lots of the children from the neighbourhood came to my door and I would talk to them and give them little books. ”



Esther and I on the steps of my house in Harehills, 2010

Moving to Moortown

IN 2011, I moved into sheltered accommodation, where I live now. It was really friendly when I moved here, everyone was so keen to make me feel at home. I have carers who come daily. They often walk me round the building where I live which takes about 15 minutes and sometimes collect my dinner from the restaurant downstairs.

I made some nice friends and would see them often. When my friend, Julia, and I would go out with our strollers, she would say we were like a convoy. I seem to have become much more isolated, mainly because of my deafness and blindness. I can't communicate with people like I used to.

I have always worried about my health over the years. I fought off bowel cancer 20 years ago and after having suffered heart pain since childhood, I found out in later years that I had an enlarged heart. I was hospitalised a few years ago because I turned blue in the face due to heart failure.

I am registered blind and have had two lots of cataract operations and glaucoma that worsens every day. It's quite difficult to manage, even to go from one room to the other sometimes - I have to go back to where I was sitting to find my bearings. I never realised how isolated blind people may feel until it happened to me. I didn't know that they might appreciate being spoken to when out and about.

Positive things came through the negative thing when I lost my eyesight. I made some gains because I got in touch with various groups like creative writing and literature. I have written many stories and poems with the help of a creative writing group for the blind. It helped me to express myself.

I joined the Shire View group that provided a range of activities for the blind. I acted the part of a robber in a play. I baked, listened to literature and met a lady at the keep fit class who became my carer.

I'm very grateful for the help I get from the Torch Trust for the Blind. They provide me with various types of listening aids so I can listen to readings of scripture. I receive magazines in giant print, which I can still read. It is quite a lifeline.

I had applied to the Samaritans many years ago but was not accepted and I think it was because I was too sensitive and had emotional problems myself. I wrote many stories, some of which were printed in an internal college paper at Swarthmore Education Centre in Leeds.

I like to attend SOS club (Spot on Society). They help me to learn the braille type spots found on household items. It helps me to feel more connected, as I often feel cut off.

I really enjoyed a recent Elvis Presley tribute act. It was quite fantastic. I had the great joy of being able to see as he wore a white suit against a dark background and I was seated in the front row. It is a real treat when I can see and hear things.

I love all music. A klezmer band plays often at my community centre and my favourite is brass band music. I love listening to brass bands; I like to move my arms to the music, almost like I am conducting, but slightly ahead of the beat!

On my 94th birthday Peter arranged for us to attend an open-air brass band concert. He told them it was my birthday, so the whole band came up to me and played 'Happy Birthday'. The Lord Mayor wished me happy birthday too. It was a nice surprise.

I still try to stay socially active and like to attend my local church as often as I can. I have to rely on somebody to assist me due to my poor eyesight. When Peter comes to stay, he joins me at my discussion group, which gets quite lively. He can be a bit provocative during the debates and they laugh when I mention his name. I think he just contradicts them for the sake of it!

I like humorous things and like making people laugh, although I don't get many opportunities to do it. If I could be somebody else for the day I would be Ken Dodd because he made people laugh and I like to laugh myself. ■

Being thankful

I WAS INVITED to be interviewed on the television but I decided against it. I thought they might have wanted me to say that I was badly treated by the British because I was imprisoned in Holloway and interned on the Isle of Man. I refused as I was so grateful to be able to gain refuge here and did not want to complain. I understand that some people did feel they were badly treated as enemy aliens, but I didn't like the thought that they were trying to put words into my mouth. I remember, from an early age, how terrible Nazi propaganda was, and how people were fooled by it. I am very sensitive to hearing anything that prevents the truth from being recognised. ■



By the sea, 1947

My hope

THERE ARE THINGS that happened to me in my life that I have never spoken about but I wanted to share them to help those who are struggling, to know they are not alone. I decided to tell my story in the hope that it might help others.

I want to do some good with this book. Perhaps somebody might learn something from me, be confident and realise: 'Oh well, it doesn't just happen to me'.

Some might feel I have left my Jewish heritage, but I certainly haven't. I'd like that to be known. ■

My poems

The person who has time to spare
To listen to you, is very rare,
Some say if you've got troubles, don't come to me,
I've got plenty of my own, you see.
Go tell somebody in their need,
From fear and sorrow to be freed.
The listening ear can even lead
To someone's healing, worthwhile indeed.

I feel I'm weak and broken
And of support in need.
But if the truth be spoken.
I'm not a useless weed.
I am a tree so tall and strong.
My shade gives you comfort all day long.
If you are weary, lean on me.
That's what I'm here for,
I am a tree.

In spite of the sorrow,
in spite of the strife
life is for living,
Enjoy your life.

Edith Whyatt

Messages from Edith's children

Edith sadly passed away on 9 December 2020, before this book was completed. Her children asked to have their messages included.

Esther Whyatt

Mum was completely herself. She only spoke from the heart.

I never heard her put anyone down, make herself bigger or others smaller.

Mum was different. She often felt she didn't fit in. This overpowering feeling of being an outsider made Mum's life difficult, but it also made her reach out to others, helping those who felt desperate, because Mum understood pain and suffering at a deep level. People confided in her, and felt better for it. Mum was described as "therapeutic to talk to".

She had a yearning to be loved and accepted which lasted throughout her life. Mum had a rare openness and vulnerability. There was nothing under the surface.

She was interested in others. She really listened - never said, "I'm busy," never changed the subject, she gave you her time and herself. Whatever your problem, Mum understood, she felt it. I will miss that.

She was comfortable with herself, so people felt comfortable with her. She had an inner quiet and would often sit and reflect. I will miss that too. Perhaps this world needs more sitters and thinkers.

She exuded warmth. I always thought of her as a big warm hen. I miss the little German accent, which I never really noticed. She loved giving, always wanted to get the meal, the theatre tickets. She enjoyed the company of other people.

Appearance, status, success, meant nothing to Mum. The only thing that mattered was what was underneath. Mum saw the things no one else saw - you couldn't hide anything from her.

She knew what felt right and what didn't. She didn't conform to what others expected her to be, she didn't try to fit in.

Mum had a child's heart – she was open and trusting. She felt the pain of a child, the need for love, but she felt the joy of the child too, and lots of it. She was playful, humorous. She liked the ridiculous. A childlike nature with such depth. She was philosophical, profound. She had soul.

Mum's faith meant a lot to her. She read the Bible and prayed every day, with a list of people to pray for.

The connections Mum had were far and wide. She loved people. She was interesting and intelligent. She didn't enjoy small talk, talk for the sake of it, talk for fitting in. The things she spoke about had meaning.

Losing her sight was traumatic, and meant she couldn't join in as she'd like. This often made her feel excluded but she bore it with dignity and courage. Whatever health problems came along, and there were many, Mum was always strong, a fighter, and she survived them all until the end.

Mum lived for many years in Harehills, where she developed close bonds with neighbours. Here was one of the many examples of Jewish – Muslim friendship, of which we hear too little.

In her last 10 years, Mum was very happy in her LJWB sheltered flat, around people she felt comfortable with. She loved the café, the meals, the groups she attended, chatting with people in the corridors, the AJR events.

There were so many things Mum enjoyed – other people, food, jazz and classical music, playing tunes from her childhood on her electric piano, writing poetry. Mum had strong artistic inclinations, and if it hadn't been for her lack of confidence, might have taken these further.

Mum had a passion for life and people, which burned like a flame to the end.

Mum wanted it to be said at her funeral: "Everyone look after each other".

What mattered to Mum was kindness and this is what she left behind.

Peter Whyatt

With the benefit of hindsight I would say that my mum's life falls into three distinct sections.

Part 1

Born into a wealthy liberal German Jewish family at the height of Weimar Germany's hyperinflation, in July 1923, my mum had a warm and loving relationship with her grandparents, aunts and uncles, whom she regularly visited in Frankfurt and Nuremberg.

As a child, Mum was always more interested in faith than were her parents, and she was keen to keep attending synagogue after her brother's *Bar Mitzvah*.

A sensitive, generous and loving child, Mum craved love and affection from her mother, who seemed more interested in her own love affairs, her lipstick and shopping, than in her daughter.

This lack of love led to a relationship with the family maid Gerda. This relationship started when mum was 13 and lasted six years, during their lives in both Germany and the UK.

Mum told us about this life event and it certainly cast a shadow of guilt and shame over her life.

Mum initially didn't regard this as an abusive relationship. As times and attitudes changed, she realised the age difference and circumstances were what would now be described as an abusive relationship with her maid.

Arriving in England in 1939 the family spent some time in London but eventually settled in Nottingham where her father had links with the lace trade. In England, Mum expected the English to be sympathetic to their plight. However, they were more interested in football. She found it difficult to come to terms with English jokes about Hitler, but on the whole, "the British people were very kind."

After internment on the Isle of Man, a friend invited Mum to a Christian missionary meeting, where the speaker challenged the audience: "Are you doing something useful with your life?"

At the age of 21, Mum found a home with the evangelical Christian faith. In her words she: 'gave her life to Jesus'. This unshakeable faith was a constant throughout the rest of her life.

Mum, in 1944, trained as a nurse at the Mansfield and District General Hospital. She later became a state-certified midwife in Nottingham and practiced at the Annie McCall maternity hospital in South London.

Mum met and married Kenneth Whyatt who was a technical representative for an engineering firm. His local patch was West Yorkshire, based in Leeds.

Part 2

Family life in Leeds.

These years were chequered with both lifelong loving friendships, and challenges. Mum wasn't always happy and sometimes found difficulties fitting into these surroundings.

Our parents were different in many ways - temperament, class, religion, and upbringing. Mum was a German Jewish refugee from a wealthy family, Dad was a stern evangelical convert to Christianity from a farming background.

They were involved in the Open Brethren movement - a non-conformist Christian evangelical worship movement.

During the 60s and 70s Mum suffered from extensive periods of depression, anxiety, and uncontrollable emotions.

Part 3

Kenneth died in 1982 and Mum moved to the Harehills district, where she was involved with local community groups. She found peace and calm and moved to a new phase in her life.

She was also involved in prayer groups, regular church attendance, and spending time with new and continued friendships.

Among the many groups and activities Mum was involved with were Arts to Share, being a volunteer teaching assistant, book groups, prayer meetings, being a good neighbour, babysitting.

After she contracted glaucoma and started losing her sight, she joined groups such as Torch Trust for the Blind as well as missionary and prayer groups. She was a big fan of the radio and enjoyed the talking newspaper services. In her later years, mum gained an interest in creative writing, and composed many poems which were amusing and wry, expressing her unique views on philosophy and history. ■




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 was sheltered from most antisemitism while growing up. I thought being Jewish was something good, but as time went on, I started to wonder whether it was actually a bad thing.”

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk