



My Story

Eva Behar



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

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).
More information at www.ajr.org.uk

Eva was visited by AJR volunteer Suzie Miller to share her story.

Portrait photography by Paul Lang.

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You cannot go on hating, it's impossible to live. That's what I was doing from 1945 to 1949, I was hating and where did it get me? To a psychiatrist!

Plain horror what people can do to each other, no one has learned to respect human life. Life is precious, the most precious thing God gave you and I mean this with all my heart. If people stopped hating, the world would be a better place.

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My early life

MY NAME IS Eva Behar nee Herskovits. I was born 24 January 1925 in a town in Transylvania, Romania by the name of Sighet, the capital of Maramures. It was a small town, around 30,000 people, of which three quarters were very Orthodox Jews. I was the youngest of a family of seven. I had five brothers and one sister, who was the eldest. My sister's name was Hajnal, or Dawn, and my eldest brother was called Piku. Then came twins, Mai and Eli, then Kuli, Bubi, and then me. We were a poor and very religious family - my father never had his hat off from the minute he got out of bed.

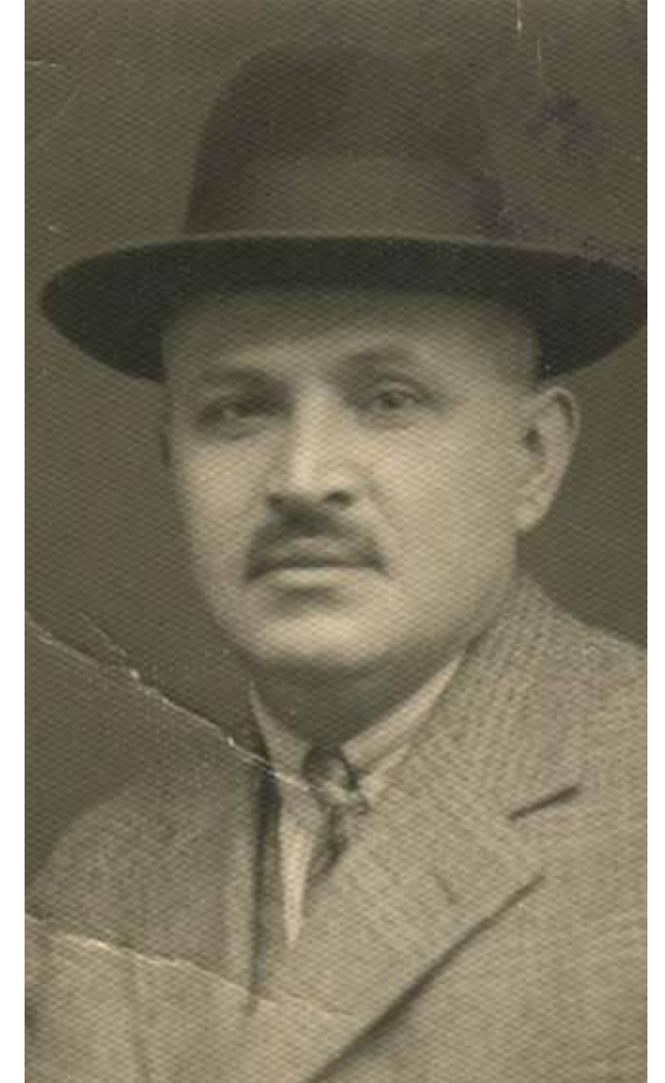
My sweetest memories of those days up to the age of eight are sitting round the *Shabbat* table with my siblings. My mother, Ghizella, sat at one end of the table and my father, Alexander, at the other end. My father always had to scream and shout to get my five brothers into the bath to wash and clean them so that they were ready for *Shabbat*! The memory of my mother lighting the candles on Friday night has never left me. The blouse she wore and her figure came to me the day I was married. On the Continent you light a candle for every member of the family and I remember my mother's tray with nine candles: two big ones, for my mother and father, five smaller ones for the boys and, of course, the two miniature candles for the two girls.

In 1933 I lost my mum – that was the hardest thing for me. When my mother died, I was not allowed to the *lavoya* (the funeral) and I remember banging my head against the garden wall, screaming that I wanted to go. My father remarried a widow who had six children of her own and they all moved to a much bigger town, Timisoara, the capital of Banat. They moved because my father couldn't make a living as a furniture upholsterer in the smaller town of Sighet. But they didn't take me with them.

I was eight years old and I was told, much later in life, that it was my mother's dying wish that I be given to my father's sister, Sari, and her husband Moritz Leichtman who lived in Sighet. My aunt was a wealthy woman who didn't have any children and apparently she wanted me. She was also looking after another girl, a cousin called Pitsi who was much older than me. She was my father's other sister's daughter. Her parents were very poor, so my aunt took her in as well. ■



My mother, Ghizella Herskovits



My father, Alexander Herskovits.



My sister Hajnal (Dawn) and her son Robert's plaque. They perished in Aushwitz.



New tombstone for my mother



Me (left) aged 14 in Cluj.

Life with my aunt

SOME OF these memories only came back to me a year ago. Up until then I didn't remember much of my youth at all. Memory is a funny thing.

My aunt was a very wealthy lady. We lived in a hotel with a restaurant, in the living quarters to the right. I had privileges I never had at home except, unfortunately, here I never had the privilege of love. My aunt was amazing, but she was a business woman and she had no clue how to treat a child, so I missed that warmth from a mother – something I missed all my life and that loss is still with me today. I went to this beautiful school called Liceul Domnita Iliana up to the age of 15. I had a wonderful time in school and an amazing education. My best friend at school was Cica Hertig and we are still friends today. She lives in Israel now, she went there with her mother after the war.

In 1940 through the Vienna Congress, Hitler gave back Transylvania to Hungary because Horthy, the leader of Hungary, was an ally of Hitler. So literally, overnight, you became Hungarian and from speaking Romanian one minute you now spoke Hungarian. I couldn't go to my school which was closed down as it was named after a Romanian Princess. Aunt Sari insisted on me going somewhere, so I went to a convent school for one year. As hard as it was, that year in that convent school gave me strength because they were so horrible, so cruel. I said to my aunt: "If you send me back there, I am going to commit *hari kari!* There is no way I'm going back there."

“ Aunt Sari insisted on me going somewhere, so I went to a convent school for one year. As hard as it was, that year in that convent school gave me strength because they were so horrible, so cruel. ”

In 1940 and 1941 the Hungarians brought in the first, second and third Jewish laws, and upper schools were not allowed for Jewish people. Aunt Sari sent me to a Jewish School called Kolozsvari Zsido Gymnasium (Cluj Jewish School), in Cluj, the capital of Transylvania. I was boarded with a Jewish family. I couldn't enter or leave my room without going through their apartment so I was not able to gallivant around, but I did - I went through the window! The family was very nice and very warm and I stayed with them for two years, from when I was 16 until I matriculated at 18, which was in June 1943.

To be quite honest with you, from the age of eight these two years were the happiest part of my life until that point. I used to get 110 *Kroner* pocket money and I would spend most of it on tickets to the opera, which I absolutely loved. The town itself was a beautiful place but the opera house and the theatre were extraordinary. I would go there with my boyfriend, he introduced me to it. But remember, we stood right at the top otherwise our money would have been spent much quicker! To this day I am a very keen opera lover. I love the music and the romantic arias are just incredible. Verdi, Puccini, they are amazing. I know every one of them! ■

“ I was boarded into a Jewish family. I couldn't enter or leave my room without going through their apartment so I was not able to gallivant around, but I did - I went through the window! ”

Things begin to change...

I FINISHED school and went back to Sighet for the summer. Then I returned to Cluj to start medical school in September 1943 but had to return back to Sighet in November 1943. Things were very bad. Because of the restrictive Jewish laws I was not allowed to continue studying and it became increasingly dangerous to enter the streets in the dark. Under the laws, the government did not allow Jews to earn a living. Thankfully we had a neighbour who was kind enough to buy us bread.

Aunt Sari was very clever and bought a little house, a bungalow you would call it, with three bedrooms, a kitchen and a salon. The Germans had chucked us out of the big house and taken it for themselves, so we lived in the little house. We lived hand to mouth. I don't know where Aunt Sari got the money from. I liked living in the little house, I preferred it to the big house.

The Germans thought that the Hungarians were very slow in getting rid of the Jews. We were in the little house and life was practically non-existent when we were told to pack a bag of about 30 kilos. Part of the town was cordoned off and made into a ghetto, and we had to go there. My siblings were not with me, they were still in Timisoara which remained Romanian throughout the war. I just had my Aunt Sari and my uncle and my cousin with me. I am sorry to tell you I do not remember the ghetto at all, I never have remembered it. The only thing I remember is that it wasn't very nice.

In May 1944 we were ordered to go from the ghetto to the Sephardi Synagogue. It was a beautiful place. When we arrived we were told we were going to be searched. I had buried quite a lot of our jewellery in a pin box by the base of the walnut tree at our little house, but also kept some of it on me in a handkerchief, because we might have needed it to buy food. Sari had a huge amount of jewellery but at that time all the Jewish people of Europe were buying their lives, when they could, with their jewellery. You know, the jewellery under the walnut tree is most likely still there. I went back to Sighet twice after the war but I would not recover it, I wanted nothing to do with it. I think Sari loved jewellery more than she loved me.

I took the jewellery which was in my handkerchief and asked to go to the toilet which was outside the Synagogue. In the toilet I saw a big stone on the ground, so I put my handkerchief full of jewellery under the stone, hoping to recover it before I went wherever they were going to take me. We spent the evening in the Sephardi Synagogue. It was full of people. There were people being sick and I remember clearly a woman with a twisted leg which was yellow and white. It was a terrible night and the beginning of a terrible period of my life.

In the morning we were told to line up in fives in the road in front of the Synagogue. I was in the line and thinking: "How the hell do I get the jewellery back?" I said to the guard: "Do you think I could go to the toilet?" and he said yes. I recovered the jewellery from under the stone and went back into the line where we were counted and then we were marched to the station. As we were marching the Hungarians and Romanians were standing in the doorways, laughing. My aunt's original house was bang by the station and people stood in front of it laughing. I can't forget that.

We got onto a train that only had wagons. I don't know how many of us were in the wagon, I can't tell you, but I know we hardly had room to sit down. There was a little opening on the right hand side between the slats, big enough to fit maybe two faces in. I was with my aunt, my uncle and my cousin and all the people we knew from the town. I can't tell you what I was wearing, I brought very few clothes, but I remember my bag and in my bag were preserves, some bread and the jewellery. I had hidden the jewellery in the handkerchief in a jam jar. I had a bag and Sari had a bag. We were given no food on the train, only water. We stopped maybe twice and there was a bucket in the wagon and that's what we had to use as a toilet.

I had no idea what was happening. We were told we were going to work and that is what we believed. My aunt thought that if you were working and if you had some jewellery, you could bribe your life with it. That was the European Jewish mentality. It's very hard for people today to imagine, thank God. ■

Auschwitz

THE JOURNEY lasted perhaps three days and we arrived in Auschwitz around 12 May 1944. All of a sudden we heard *RAUS! RAUS! RAUS!* (GET OUT!) - the usual RAUS! of the Germans, louder than any other language in the world. We got out and we were told to line up in fives and to separate men and women. There was this lady with a baby in one hand and a bag in the other hand. I didn't know the person next to her, but then it was my aunt, my cousin and me at the other end of the line. I had my bag, everyone still had their bag. Five of us in a line.

As we were standing there we saw this colossal man approaching us. Maybe he just seemed so large because I was short, but this big man was coming towards us and he was separating everyone in the line. I lost sight of my uncle, since men were sent to the other side. At this point I said to the lady: "Let me have the baby." I was younger than her, so I wanted to carry the baby for a little bit so that she could hold her bag properly. I had this beautiful little child in my arms and my aunt next to me.

My aunt saw this large man approaching us, she grabbed the baby from me and almost immediately his whip went between me and my aunt and the lady. My aunt and the others were straight away sent to the right and I went to left. I don't know why people say to the right was life, because to the right was the crematorium. I was looking around for my aunt to see if she was coming but I fell. A Jewish man grabbed me and pulled me up and pushed me forwards, away from the others and that was the last time I saw my aunt, my cousin, the poor lady with the baby and my uncle. That Jewish man saved me because he knew if I looked back for my aunt, that I would end up with her. I was the only one to survive. It was only many years later that I learned my sister Hajnal (Dawn) and my nephew Robert also died in Auschwitz; my children are named after them.

I lined up on another road further in and through the loudspeakers we were asked: "Anybody pregnant? Anybody unable to walk?" in clear Hungarian, because there were Hungarian Nazis there. "Step aside and you will be provided with transport." Nobody moved, I don't know why but nobody moved and in the end we were marched into this huge room and told to get undressed. Imagine coming from a civilised world and these SS men coming around with a whip. I am sure anyone would be reluctant to take their clothes off but then the SS were screaming and using whips. "Take your clothes off!" Some left their underwear on and this man was still screaming.

I had one special piece of jewellery with me. It was a little heart with an emerald four leaf clover, which I was given on my 16th birthday by my aunt. I had put it into my mouth as we entered this room. All the jewellery and all the jars and all that schlepping we did, it was all left by the train. But this little heart was in my mouth. I had kept my bra on and I knew I was going to get whipped but I just couldn't make myself take it off. The guard came over to me and he gave me a slap and this little emerald heart flew out of my mouth. I must have told my grandchildren about this because many years later, on my 80th birthday, they put a box in front of me. When I opened this box I thought I was going to die. It was an emerald clover pendant on a chain. I put it around my neck and I can't tell you the warmth I felt. I have never taken it off since.

We were now sitting or standing naked in this room. As you looked out of the room there was a corridor where there were girls standing next to two chairs. The first chair is where they shaved your head, the other is where they shaved your underarms. I didn't know what was happening, but I had beautiful hair, I used to have it plaited and rolled round my ears. We were shaved and we were showered in the next room and then we lined up again and there was a table with striped dresses. If you could visualize the scene, we were all shaved, there was no mirror, the dresses looked ridiculous on everybody and we just burst out laughing. It was so unbelievable, it was funny.

Then we were marched to Barrack 25. That's when we started swapping dresses and somehow or other we got the right size dress on. Being girls we ripped the bottom off and made a belt out of it. Well, I know I did. I remember this one girl. She was learning to be an opera singer and as we entered the huge and silent barrack the girl was singing 'My Yiddisha Mama'. I could never find words to describe the singing to you, not in a million years: her voice was piercing the silence and absolutely amazing.

In the barrack we slept on planks of wood. I can't tell you the size but I know that at the very beginning there were 12 of us on one plank. There were six people one way and six people the other way, like sardines, and I was on the upper bunk. I didn't know any of the girls in the barrack but funnily enough a lot of them were from Sighet. We stood for Appel (roll call) three hours every day, morning and night till all the numbers clicked, but we didn't go to work. We went out in the morning, wandered about all day and then came back in the evening and were counted again at night. That went on for six weeks, during which time we were getting weaker and weaker.



My great-grandchildren holding my arm with my camp number.

We were given soap, a sand grey blue colour. I used to brush my teeth and have a wash, summer and winter without fail. I never ever went without a wash before roll call and that was at five o'clock in the morning! The whole camp had to be counted and it had to be right. If it wasn't right, the sirens went and everyone would say; "*Guglie ha reiser.*" "*Good luck on your journey*" because somebody must have escaped.

I cried my eyes out. Every morning there were women hanging from the electric wire surrounding the camp, dead. Two of the girls were my school friends. They couldn't take it. They could not visualise a life, but nobody could. It depended how strong you were, how mentally strong you were. So we were on six weeks quarantine, the same routine every day and now they were counting the dead on the electric fences. After six weeks we were ordered to line up for another selection. On the right was the camp commandant Josef Kramer and on the left was Irma Grese. Grese was the one who would give chocolate to children the day before she gassed them.

Grese, Mengele and Kramer were there, all three of them on our left hand side and we were naked, totally naked. Mengele the doctor selected those fit enough for work, because now we were six weeks eating practically nothing and we had all lost weight. I went straight through the selection. They didn't stop you or do anything unless they were sending you to the crematorium. We showered, we came out the other end and were given new striped dresses. We were also numbered, God almighty! We lined up on the same corridor where we entered. They shaved our hair off, we were tattooed each with a number. Mine is A7784. Everybody who came through the selection was given a number ready for work the next day. We lined up minus the people who had been selected and returned to the barrack.

“ I cried my eyes out. Every morning there were women hanging from the electric wire surrounding the camp, dead. Two of the girls were my school friends. They couldn't take it. They could not visualise a life, but nobody could. It depended how strong you were, how mentally strong you were. ”

We marched out every day to build this *lazarett*, a rest home for the wounded German soldiers. In charge of us was a girl with a black triangle on her striped overall by her lapel, which meant she was a prostitute. I can still see her today, about 5'2", pitch black hair, stick thin and cruel as anything, and she had a beautiful black and white Alsatian. I was carrying eight to ten bricks from one end of the building site to the other, going backwards and forwards. It was July, very hot, and we were so thirsty you cannot believe it. When we returned empty handed you thanked God you hadn't got those bricks in your hands.

As I went by I passed a pear tree and this pear was dangling in front of my nose, I can't tell you how near. I said to the girls: "I'm going to take that pear." They said: "You must be mad, she's going to see you." "She's going to see me? With all this she's going to see me? I'm going to take it. I'm going to do it on my next journey down." Well of course, I plucked the pear and I got the dog on me straight away. Straight away! How she saw me I don't know. That was the end of my pear, I mean at least I could have put it in my mouth, but it didn't get that far.

I was working there till September and then we went through another selection. Some were sent to the crematorium and some were sent to work. I went to work immediately making tarred plaits to clean the bore of the guns. I don't remember it being hot and I don't remember it being hard work, it was okay. But slowly I became ill, I developed terrible dysentery and I was very weak.

Every day the kapo used to check the plaits. He would put his foot on one end and pull with two hands on the other end. The plaits were not allowed to break, but one day mine broke. I was very weak and tired, so with that the soldier gave me a slap and he said: "Transport!" By then the crematorium had stopped working so I was optimistic. It meant that I left in the same wagons we arrived in but this time the journey took us to Belsen. This was now 27 December 1944. ■

“Every day the kapo used to check the plaits. He would put his foot on one end and pull with two hands on the other end. The plaits were not allowed to break, but one day mine broke.”

Belsen

I ARRIVED on 1 January 1945. In the train it was so cold, there was snow all the way. Winter in Germany was bitterly cold. I took my shoes off and rubbed my feet because they were absolutely frozen - you know we didn't have any tights or socks or anything. I was rubbing my feet when suddenly the train stopped, the doors opened and there were German soldiers shouting RAUS! RAUS! I was looking for my shoes and I could only find one. There was no way I could look for the other shoe, so I left without any shoes and now I was bare footed on the snow and ice. We marched for 7km to Belsen.

Along the way there was a bridge above us and the Germans were all lined up on top of the bridge, laughing and pointing at us and using vile words. We started to march and march and then we arrived into what we then knew to be Belsen. My memory of Belsen is a haze, a terrible haze. The horror that confronted us was absolutely unbelievable. There were bodies strewn all over the place, there were people walking about half dead. I can't convey to you the horror of this place. The untidiness, the dirt, the calamity was unbelievable, because whatever Auschwitz was, it was orderly and clean. This was far from that.

We were shown into barracks with three levels of single bunks on top of each other. I was in the bottom bunk. The difference between here and Auschwitz was that at Auschwitz we used to get some sort of food morning, noon and night, here there was practically nothing at all to eat. We stood at roll call as per usual, morning and night and we soon realised that there was something very wrong. People were so ill they were dying all around us. Within a few weeks I contracted what I now know was typhus. The block hand at that time was a Slovak girl who was very fond of me and she didn't give up on me. At roll call they held my dress because I couldn't stand up while the Germans counted us. This girl wouldn't give up on me, if she had I wouldn't be sitting here today.

“There were bodies strewn all over the place, there were people walking about half dead. I can't convey to you the horror of this place.”

I was very ill, lying on that bunk with fleas all around - half an inch big, transparent and yellow, not like normal fleas. I was picking fleas out of my hair and as I took them out of my hair, my hair was coming out too. My strength was zero and there was no food, there was no order, there was no cleanliness. I lay on my bunk and I could hear people on the top bunk saying: "She's the next one on the heap." The heap in the yard was growing and growing, when somebody died they just threw them on top. I remember I didn't have the strength to answer them but in my head I screamed: "NO! God will never let me die here!"

I remember trying to be human, trying to go to the toilet. Because the work commandos had stopped, the holes had filled up and overflowed on to the floor. I don't know if I could convey to a civilised mind what went on in the barrack - people half dying and that smell, that terrible smell, that muck and dirt everywhere. I don't know how but I started to recover. The disorder in that camp and the heap that had been there when we arrived in January was nothing compared to what it was now in March. It was colossal. We were so hungry, I don't remember eating in the last three or four weeks before liberation. I don't remember putting a morsel in my mouth. The hunger was indescribable.

As the British army approached so the Germans were disappearing, but I remember this one German. I can see him now, he came in and wanted a few girls to clear up the mess outside. This Ukrainian girl jumped down from the top bunk, put her hands on her hips and said: "Today you are asking me to work for you. Tomorrow I will be asking you to work for me. But today I will not work for you!" We were holding our breath because he had a gun and we thought he was going to shoot her. But he didn't! He just turned round and walked out and she burst out laughing. She had such guts. ■

“We were so hungry, I don't remember eating in the last three or four weeks before liberation.”

Liberation

I WAS REASONABLY better- whatever better means - but barely able to stand on my feet. Food was nonexistent and we were scrummaging all over the place trying to find something to eat, but there was nothing. Days went on and then people said that the British Forces were coming and the war was nearly finished, but nobody believed it. I remember someone helping me out and propping me up against the wooden wall of the barrack. I watched Grese and Kramer in a British vehicle, a Jeep, saying: "Your day has come, you are liberated and you are free people." Both Kramer and Grese were hung on 13 December 1945.

We were liberated on 15 April 1945. I was half dead, half alive and I stood there but I couldn't take it in. Somebody asked me if I felt joy, but I didn't feel anything. I was incapable of feeling any emotion or joy or sadness or anything at all.

The British made the Germans dig graves which still exist in Belsen today, I've seen them on my return. Huge graves of 10,000 people, 3,000 people, 5,000 people. Heaps of skeletons, skin on bone, no flesh on any of the dead. There was no flesh on any of us. The British did not know what to do: look after the dead, look after the half dead or look after the living. We were taken to a barrack that was made into a type of medical unit where I was disinfected and washed with hoses and given clean clothes.

I cannot tell you how wonderful the British were, but I can tell you that the love and warmth I had for them has never been forgotten in the 73 years I have been in this country. Unfortunately the British soldiers who liberated us did not realise what they were confronted with. They left a food warehouse open and those poor people who were on their feet were able to go there and eat whatever they could find ... and then they died. They stuffed themselves with food and their stomachs couldn't take it and we lost a lot of people. They were liberated and then they were gone.

I was still too ill, so I was taken to this hospital, de-loused and gradually I started to eat. I can't tell you any more, I was just too ill and I don't remember if anyone from my bunk survived. The British had learnt their lesson with the warehouse, so we were fed very gently. I was getting on my feet and getting better. We were getting parcels from the Jewish Relief Unit and all sorts of little bits of niceness.

The British made the decision to empty Belsen with some kind of order and this order was to get people out based on nationality in alphabetic order. The first nationality was Czech. I was 20 years old and I thought: "What difference what nationality I am. Let me get out of here so let me be Czech." To this day I cannot believe I had enough presence of mind to say I was Czechoslovakian and to get out first. I had had no medicine, no water, certainly no food and remember, I had come to Belsen from Auschwitz so I wasn't exactly in good health. It must have been the survivor in me.

They took us to a place called Bergen, a stone's throw away from Belsen. It is very near the camp. I don't know how people lived so near the camp, how did they live there? When we arrived in Bergen it was totally empty – everyone had fled - but there was this one man who thought he was innocent enough to stay. One of the Jewish men killed him. We went into the deserted houses of Bergen. The Germans always had good china and the tables were laid. The German Commanders probably lived there. People were taking stuff back like the china or sewing machines but me, I was a funny girl, I was standing in a house and I took the tablecloth and pulled it. All the china smashed on the floor. Then I went to the wardrobe and I ripped everything. I wasn't taking anything. Everybody got something but I went back with nothing, I just wanted to destroy those things and that was exactly what I did.

Slowly we continued to get better and stronger. I remember at this stage we are taken to a huge stable which had been cleaned out. This was what I later understood to be the German barracks, Wehrmacht. The stable was on this site outside Bergen and we were there for some time before the next stage. It became the Displaced Persons camp and we stayed from April to September 1945. Then we got into these big lorries and were taken away again, this time to a little town called Celle. ■

Faith and survival

I HAD MY FAITH all the way. I had my mum and my faith. In the camps, like many people, my faith in God was tremendous. I said my Shema every night and I asked God to let me survive another day and another day. It's just amazing how He got me through Auschwitz and Belsen.

The difference for me between Auschwitz and Belsen, was that in Auschwitz I could survive on the food and if you could work you worked, but mentally it was a killer. Belsen was physically a killer. Unfortunately, the smell stayed with me until 1949, when I had my nervous breakdown. They were both death camps in different ways but Belsen was definitely a death camp. Auschwitz was a killer but Belsen was something else. ■



Outside the DP camp, originally Wehrmacht barracks, in Bergen 1945. I am 2nd on the left. My camp sister Pinick is on my left.

Celle and Lady Henriques

IN SEPTEMBER 1945 I was taken from the Displaced Persons (DP) camp to Celle. I don't know how long I was there. Then we were billeted into rooms in German houses as DPs. I can't remember how many different houses in Celle I lived in, but they were allowed to throw us out and yes, they threw me out. The Germans were afraid of us because we were Jewish. I tell you I don't believe to this day that they didn't know anything. I don't believe it for a single second because in Auschwitz and Belsen, Germans were coming into the camps. The locality was so near there is no way they didn't know. Thank God I don't hate.

In Celle, I made very close friends with two sisters, Liki and Pinick. I was called the *Lager Schwester* and the three of us stuck together like glue. *Lager* is 'camp' in German. I was their camp sister and we really were amazing together, the three of us in one room in these houses until I got married. I also made friends with an amazing man called Yanchi who was a Hungarian survivor. He looked after us and bought us food. He was like a father to us. He ended up in America.

I got myself a job with a dentist. I would buy a bit of butter on the black market with the money I earned or in exchange for the cigarettes I was given by the British. I bought clothes. I remember getting a parcel with a British air force scarf and a check blanket. I made myself a skirt from the blanket and knitted myself a jumper out of the wool from the scarf. We were trying to get back to normality.

The Jewish Relief Unit sent some people to help us, under the guidance of Lady Henriques. Lord and Lady Henriques were the people who brought the first Jews over from Europe and they were the founders of Liberal Judaism. Lady Henriques mostly brought women to help, one of whom was Millie Polatchek. The only man I remember was Wolfie Sherr, who became a lifelong friend. There was a synagogue in Celle with a hall attached to it where Lady Henriques and her helpers formed a recreational club for the survivors. We also received boxes of humanitarian aid with clothes and food sent from the UK.



The Jewish Relief Unit in Celle.

There was music, tea and coffee at the club, I danced there most nights. Lady Henriques was the most amazing pianist; if not dancing I would sit there all night listening to her. Before the war I used to play the piano, but believe it or not I couldn't put my hands on it after the war. Lady Henriques was a life saver after a time of unimaginable hell. ■



Celle Synagogue.



With Liki (right) in Celle 1946.



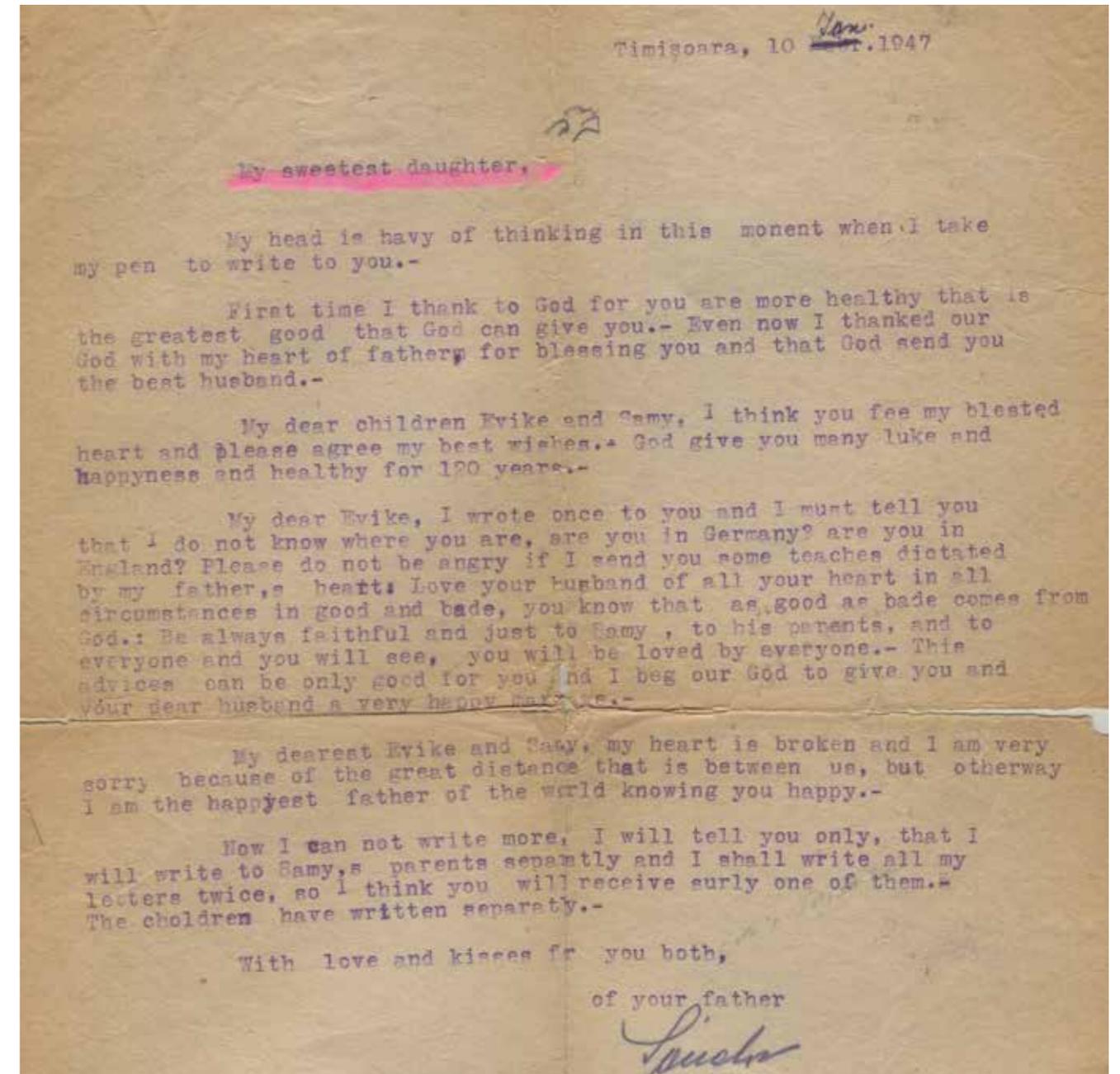
Yanchi in Celle 1946.

Transports going back home

IN CELLE there were talks about transports going home. I got two telegrams through the Red Cross from my brother Mai. He had seen my name on a list of survivors and, even though it was spelt incorrectly, he was convinced it was me. He wrote: "We are all OK, come home." My family wrote that they were waiting for me and if necessary they would send my middle brother Kuli for me. My old boyfriend from home, Shandor, wanted to come too but I told them: "Don't let him come. I'm a different person now." I heard later that Shandor became a doctor in Australia.



However I did try to get home in late 1945, just for a visit. The transfers were from Bergen, so I had to go from Celle to Bergen and there was no bus or train - you had to hitchhike, which is what I did. I got to Bergen and I got on the transport and I was going home. I had said goodbye to my camp sisters and told them that I was coming back. I just wanted to see my family alive and then I would come back to Celle and then go to Israel. I was on this transport from Celle to Timisoara, with the intention of travelling to see my family, and I still remember the name of a village there called Schwandorf where the Russians wouldn't let us in. They turned us back! It was fate, so I returned to Celle. ■



Sammy in Bad Harzburg.



Sammy Behar

I DON'T remember when it was that the British Jews from the RAF started to come to the club in Celle. They heard about it, they found it and they were coming in every night. It was still 1945 and one of those men was called Sammy Behar and he was at the base camp next to Celle in 54 RAF Group, in the air force. The handsomest man you had ever seen in your life, he really was, and besides, he was a very good man. Whenever he had time off, he went to the club and escorted us girls home, because the Germans were still very bad and used to give us a dig whenever they could.

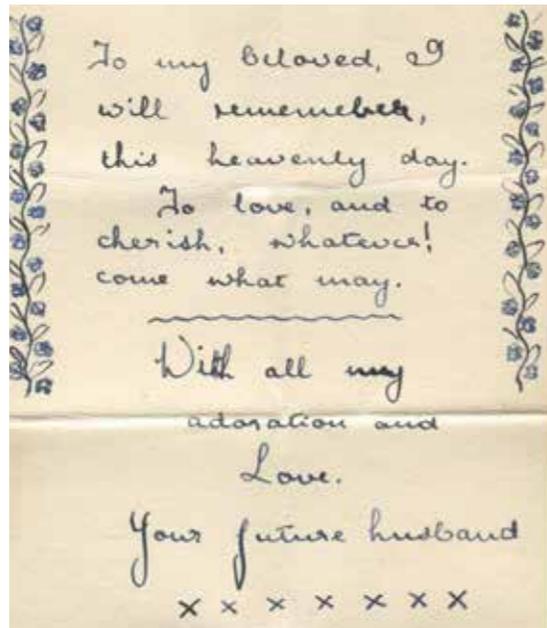
Sammy and I were getting closer and closer even though he was engaged to someone in England, he wore a ring. Following the failed first attempt, I wanted to go home with another transport to see my family. I said to Sammy: "I will go home and promise I will come back, and we will see what happens after." I got on the transport and Sammy went on leave. I got as far as Frankfurt and the Americans wouldn't let us through because there was trouble with the Russians on the other side and they turned us back. Sammy didn't know, he was in England. It was now 1946.

Sammy came back to Celle. I saw him from the top window of the house on 22 Schackstrasse, opposite a lake. I saw Sammy running. He had taken his ring off and called off his engagement. He begged me not to go back to Romania, but I still wanted to see my family who had survived. How could I move on with my life without seeing them first? I told Sammy I would give it one last try and if that one failed then that was it. But I missed the transport from Bergen because I had to hitchhike and I couldn't get there in time. I was 21 years old and I remember this so clearly. I looked up at the sky and I said: "Are you trying to tell me something?" That was my last attempt and I never tried again. ■

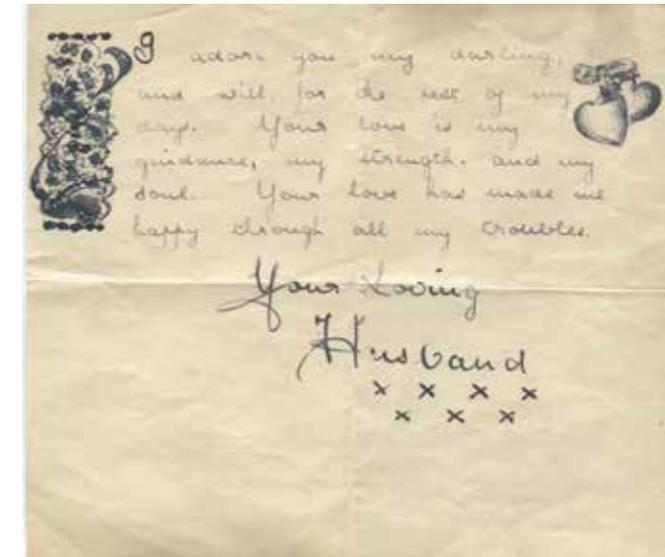
Our engagement and wedding day

WE GOT ENGAGED on June 6 1946. Sammy gave me a ring with a black stone in it, but I lost it. I was very good at losing jewellery! He also gave me some beautiful red roses, one of which I pressed in a prayer book and have to this day. Millie Polatchek from Jewish Relief made our engagement party at the Black Bear Pub, with all the girls who had survived. We had all become so close because there weren't many of us left. Some went to Cyprus, some to South America and some went home. But a few of us stayed for one reason or another.

Sammy applied to the RAF to get married which was refused because I was still considered an enemy alien. I was Romanian and Romania was an ally of Nazi Germany. Sammy would soon be demobbed. He had been in the RAF since 1939 when he volunteered, but he didn't want to leave me, so he stayed in the RAF for another year and we decided to get married there in Germany by Jewish Law. The Chief



Letter from Sammy just before our wedding.



Letter from Sammy after our wedding.

Rabbi for the whole of that area was called Chief Rabbi Olephski. Some rabbis had survived the camp with their long beards, I used to call them 'The Gang'. Rabbi Olephski was in Celle where there was a beautiful little synagogue, which is still there today intact, as it was before the war.

I was only 21 years old when we got married on the 21 November 1946. We were so in love it was wonderful. I mean, at the beginning when I had no hair, no clothes and no food, Sammy looked after me. He was just amazing. Millie arranged my wedding in Bad Hapsburg, in a small synagogue in what was a convalescent home for Jewish Germans before the war. Before the *chupah* the girls decided to take me back, I don't know how many miles back, to Celle to the *mikva*, otherwise the Rabbi wouldn't marry me. It was freezing and we got there and the water was ice cold. I remember I arrived back just in time for my own wedding!

Everybody came from Celle to be at my wedding. I remember on that day, I had a vision and I fainted. I know people will never believe me, but I was a little girl in my synagogue at home. My mother was standing up and I was standing next to her. She was holding her hands over my head and wearing

the blouse that I remember her wearing when she used to light the candles on Friday night. She said to me: "Don't worry darling, everything is going to be fine." It was a crystal clear image of the woman that I lost at eight years old. The next thing I knew I had buckets of water thrown at me. They couldn't revive me, they were panicking. Finally I was conscious and I saw Sammy coming down the stairs towards me.

I have to tell you how he got me the wedding dress. The day before the wedding I received this brown box with my dress in it. My husband got me a white wedding dress, and I thought: "What is it going to be like when I try it on?" I don't know where he got the material from in Germany, because it was beautiful. Later on I asked him: "How did you do it?" He said: "When the woman asked what size, I said, her waist is this size and her bottom is that!" He had shown her with his hands. Sammy had swapped his cigarette rations for the material. ■



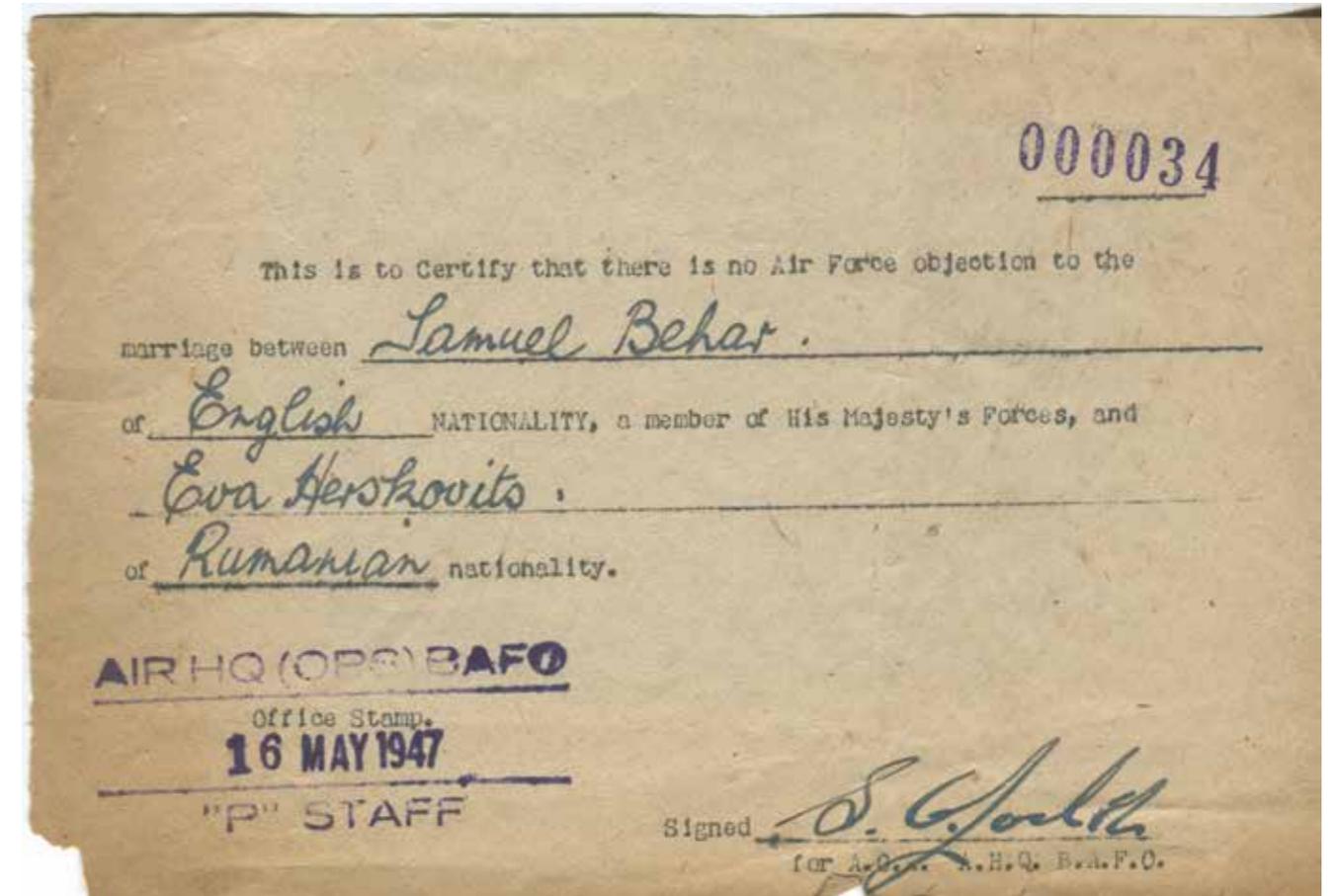
Our wedding day 21 November 1946, in Bad Harzburg, Germany.

I arrive in England

IT WAS NOVEMBER 1946 and I was still in Germany. Sammy asked his mother to invite me to the UK as a domestic servant. I arrived in England on 10 May 1947. We were still not married legally - under Jewish law yes, but not under British law. When Sammy was demobbed in June 1947, we immediately booked a civil wedding at Hammersmith Town Hall. I didn't get another engagement ring. Sammy said: "You don't really want an engagement ring do you?" When I asked why not, he said: "Because I want a cabinet for my records!" I didn't mind, he had an amazing record collection with first editions of Glenn Miller. Anyway he did buy me another ring, although I had to wait two years for it!

I was living with my father-in-law Jack and mother-in-law Allegra in Shepherds Bush. They had a huge Victorian house and gave us one floor at the top of the house. We had a lovely big bedroom, a tiny little lounge/dining room and a small scullery. For the two of us it was fine. Looking back I realise I was a phenomenon to Sammy's Sephardi parents, something they had never seen before. I was timid because I hadn't had a childhood or love. I was so pleased that I was going to have a family but they wouldn't let me in, it just was not happening. Sammy was a wonderful brother and he used to take his younger sisters everywhere he went. Then I came along and he didn't want to go with his sisters anymore, and it was very hard for them. They thought I was some stupid little country girl.

“ Looking back I realise I was a phenomenon to Sammy's parents, something they had never seen before. I was timid because I hadn't had a childhood or love. ”



Royal Air Force permission for us to marry, which arrived too late for our Jewish wedding in Germany, so we got married under English law after Sammy was de-mobbed in June 1947.

However, while I lived with my parents-in-law, I connected with some very important people, who became wonderful lifelong friends. Rivie and Ben, Essie, John, Julie, Jack and Jenny, Wolfie and Jean. Amazing people, all of them.

I remember Sammy had been given £72 repatriation money and, because I was still unwell, he decided to take us on holiday before we started our new life. So he took me to Cliftonville for two weeks and blew the £72. We had an amazing time. We came back on Saturday lunchtime but we hadn't got any food and we had no money either. My husband had a very good camera. He walked to Notting Hill Gate and sold the camera for £14 and he came back and said: "There you are, go shopping."

Sammy finally went to work at a carpet shop called Perez in Knightsbridge, bang opposite Harrods. He was earning well and he got terrific commission because, don't forget, each carpet was worth quite a bit of money. We were doing very well and life was actually very good, except I was not right. I was not getting the physical and mental help that I needed.

We had been married for over three years when our son Robert was born, on 28 April 1949. After previously suffering two miscarriages, Robert was like a gift from God, literally. From never ever having a family, I showered all my love on this child. They told had me I couldn't have children because of the bromide in the camps, but finally I did. He was my miracle. Robert had a strong character, a terrific temper and willpower and if he didn't get what he wanted he would throw himself into an asthmatic

“ We were doing very well and life was actually very good, except I was not right. I was not getting the physical and mental help that I needed. ”

attack. But how could I scream at him, when they told me I couldn't have children? So I spoiled him, I could never say no to him.

Robert was now four months old and I was sick all the time and I couldn't sleep. I had been very happy in Celle, but now I just couldn't integrate into a modern life. Plus I was having terrible nightmares. Every night the smell, the flames, the bodies... I couldn't cope with it. The minute I fell asleep I would wake up screaming. I felt as if someone was pulling a rope around my throat and I could smell the crematorium. It was so hard. I know the camp was hard but this was different. In 1949, August or September, I had a nervous breakdown. I was in a hospital. I was a novelty, a survivor. Today you are not a novelty anymore, but in 1949 it was different. This doctor said to me: "Listen, Mrs Behar. I will take you to somebody who will help you and you will be absolutely fine. You are a very intelligent lady and everything is going to work out alright."

The doctor literally took me by the hand and knocked on the door of a room. I didn't know where I was. He said to the man in the room: "Dr Ashken, I have brought you this very intelligent young lady and I am sure you will be helping her very soon." On entering the room I clamped down and I couldn't open my mouth. I remember Dr Ashken sitting at an angle by his desk. He was asking me to answer him and I couldn't. I couldn't answer and I couldn't open my mouth. He banged his fist on the table and said: "Fine! I will have to take your baby away from you!" As he said that, it was like a gate opening and I started to sob. He came over and he gave me a cuddle and said: "That's the end for today Mrs Behar, that's all I wanted to achieve."

Twenty years later, I used to go into a shop, the first supermarket in Shepherds Bush. I was standing at the deli counter and this man was standing there. My legs were shaking as I made my way towards him. I tapped him on the shoulder and said: "Dr Ashken?" He turned around to me and clapped his hands - after 20 years he remembered me. He gave me a hug, he gave me a kiss and I said to him: "Dr Ashken, you made a mensch out of me!" ■

Life carries on

WHEN ROBERT was almost three years old I fell pregnant again. We were still living with Sammy's parents. We were desperately trying to move out and found a flat on Shepherds Bush Green where there was a big Sephardi community. The flat had one bedroom and a huge lounge with one big and one small bay window. Sammy was still working for Perez. The governor opened another shop down the road just for tapestries. This was Sammy's speciality and he managed the shop all on his own.

Laura was born on 4 April 1952, so now I had two children and we were all doing well. Laura was an easy child who never wanted anything. She played, she had her friends. She was always very content. Laura wanted to be a vet, but she was a very sensitive child. She decided to go to college to learn shorthand typing and secretarial, which she passed with flying colours. She got a job at McCann Ericsson and stayed in advertising for most of her career. The one hiccup my daughter gave me in her life was she was on, off, on, off for five years before she married her husband Gary! ■

“ We were desperately trying to move out and found a flat on Shepherds Bush Green where there was a big Sephardi community. ”

The business grows

IT WAS LUNCHTIME one day in 1953 when Sammy came home and said he had quit his job and was starting his own company called S Behar Carpet Cleaners, a carpet cleaning and restoration company. This would be in a basement in Shepherds Bush, since this is all he could afford. In this basement he put a frame up where he would hang the carpets to dry. He cleaned huge Persian carpets by hand on his own! He was a hard-working man and he never ever returned anything that wasn't perfect. Sammy had started to lose his hearing and eventually would lose it totally. I think that's why he went into business on his own.

Once the children were five and in school, Sammy and I worked together and we were together seven days a week till the day he died. I had a little black book and I would write down all the work we did so we could see what was viable. At the beginning Sammy would work for hours on end for five shillings and it would cost us 15 shillings. But he wouldn't let me change the prices. Eventually we had the magical sum of £1,200 to put a deposit on a lovely mock Tudor house in a cul-de-sac in Ealing. It was a beautiful and unusual house with a huge kitchen and separate dining room and lounge. We moved in July 1960.

“ Sammy came home and said he had quit his job and was starting his own company called S Behar Carpet Cleaners, a carpet cleaning and restoration company. ”

That *Rosh Hashbanah*, Sammy took me to Bentalls , a department store in Ealing. It was a beautiful shop and he said: “Come on, let me buy you a hat for *Yom Tov*.” He bought me a hat that cost £17, which was a huge amount of money. I would never part with that hat and every now and then I still wear it. Personally I don’t think anyone would know that this hat was perhaps 67 years old! It was a Peter Bentley design. I love it, it’s like new and you know what, a good felt hat never goes out of shape!

We brought up the children, we were working together and we were paying our mortgage. We now had a car and a van, and if you ask my children the number plate of our first van, both will tell you PKV21, because they used to sit in the back of the van when we went on outings every weekend. We went to Brighton, we went to Worthing, we went to Cliftonville. Every picture you see of me from years on end, I am making sandwiches! There’s not a decent photograph of me, just me sitting making sandwiches for our outings!

When the children were older, Sammy and I went on our own to Spain, Yugoslavia and Italy. Much later on we went to visit Sammy’s brother Ronnie, in Seattle. In our later lives every holiday we had was to Israel. ■

Family reunion

I FINALLY saw my brothers in 1959. By then, all but one of my brothers were living in Israel. The last time I had seen them was in 1933. They could not understand why I hadn’t been to see them yet in Israel. I’m going to tell you the truth, I couldn’t afford it. A plane fare at the time was exactly £154 on Britannia Airways. The plane journey took about eight hours, I think.

My brother Mai sent me a plane ticket, an open ticket valid for one year where I could return at any time. It must have cost him an arm and a leg. I parked my two children with my husband and mother-in-law and I went to Israel in August 1959. I stayed for 10 weeks. In the end my brother said to me “Don’t you think you should go home?” For the first time in my life, I got to know my brothers and I had the most amazing time. I had my family round me and felt they really loved me. We created a bond. It was Mai, Bubi, Piku and Kuli, my four brothers, they were like peas in a pod, absolutely unbelievable. Unfortunately Eli was still in Romania at this time.

The next time I was able to go to Israel was in 1966. This time Sammy came with me. My brothers wanted to get to know him, so we went for a ten day holiday. Eli, Mai, Kuli and Bubi (this time Piku was missing – he was unwell and in a nursing home) and their families – don’t forget all our kids were young. Funny we each had two children. Mai and Bubi actually married their own step-sisters, Moncy and Blanka, Eli was married to Sargo, and Kuli was married to Nyafi.

We all went on holiday to Tzvat, the most delightful place I have ever seen on earth. My brother knew the hotel owner and because of the size of our family, the owner of the hotel put up a sign ‘Villa Herskovits’! It was the year England won the World Cup. We were in the street when Geoff Hurst scored the winning goal. Everyone was listening to it on the radio. The Israelis lifted Sammy up in the air. You have never seen anything like it, it was an amazing scene. ■

Sammy becomes ill

WE CONTINUED to grow the business, moving from the original basement in Shepherds Bush, to Kensal Road, then Brewery Road and finally to a beautiful factory in Islington, which we were able to rent in 1972. We got the work and we got the clientele, we had work from all over the West End. There were seven or eight of us working and the business grew very well.

At the age of 56 Sammy went to the doctor with indigestion which carried on for some years until one day my brother Bubi, the doctor, came over from Israel and told Sammy he had better go and get his heart seen to. Well, I laughed because Sammy was such a strong and strapping man and you could see that there was nothing wrong with him but he went for an angiogram. They told me it was a straightforward thing so I went to work. When I returned to the hospital there were about ten doctors around him. They had discovered that he had two arteries completely blocked and had to operate immediately.

It was now mid-December 1976, the year after my daughter was married. Sammy underwent a barbaric open-heart operation. He was one of the first to have a bypass in England. The operation had only recently been perfected in America and they were doing it for the first time on Sammy at Hammersmith Hospital. I went to see him in intensive care. What can I tell you? Our children were not allowed to see him for days because he was so bad. There were tubes coming out of everywhere, you couldn't get near him. His recovery was very slow. Then the tubes were taken away and he began to walk every day and got stronger. They told him not to work, but he wouldn't have it. At that time my son Robert was working in the factory with me and helped keep the business running.

In the 1990s Sammy had to have the other two arteries done and have another full open-heart surgery. He was terrified and did not want it done. My brother Bubi, who was now a Consultant Cardiologist and his wife Blanka came over to encourage Sammy to have this operation and be with us during this time. After the second operation he never went into the factory again. He recovered well but he was damaged. This is when he took up painting, he was worried he was going to be doing nothing.



With Sammy on my 85th birthday, 24th January. He passed away one week later.

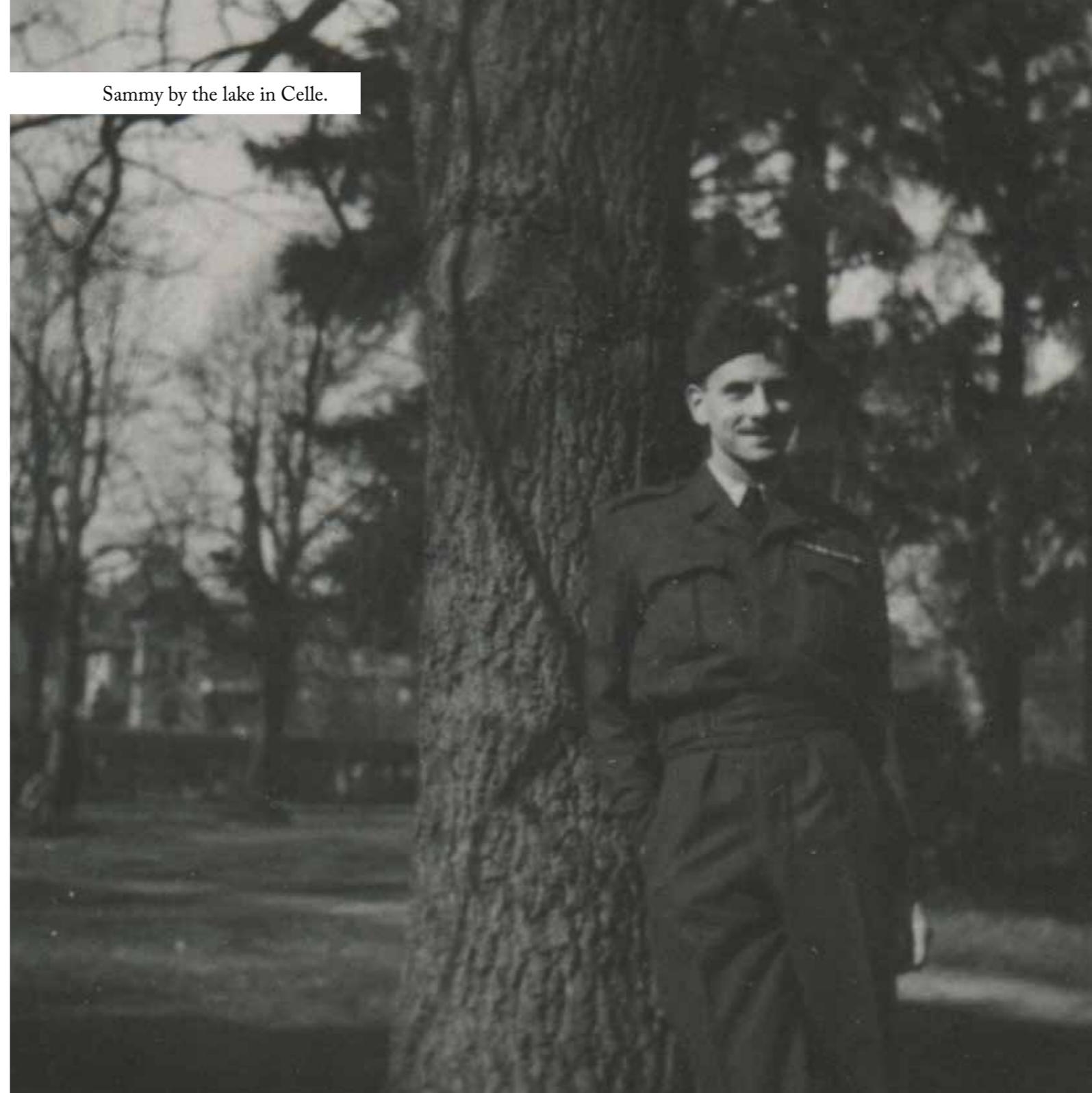
Sammy was a very mild-mannered man, I think he lost his temper only a handful of occasions, and one of those times was in Celle. I used to go dancing in the club set up by Lady Henriques and my dancing partner was an elderly gentleman. I used to dance rings round him! One evening Sammy stormed out of the club and I found him outside pacing. He told me that now we were engaged I had to ask his permission to dance with another man! Well, what could I do? So every time I wanted to dance with someone other than him, I would say: “*May I?*” This became one of our running jokes throughout our marriage.

When Sammy was well we had such a lovely time. Even in Shepherds Bush when he was working so hard, he used to come up to the flat to put his shorts on and go play tennis across the green. We didn't have much, but we enjoyed every minute of our life together. Sammy supported Queens Park Rangers, he always watched the matches. We also liked to watch the boat race and were usually at loggerheads. Sammy supported Cambridge and I supported Oxford! In the early days we rented a television, it was like a huge coffin with a twelve inch screen, the biggest and the best you could have. One year the television went wrong during the boat race and Sammy kicked it. There was smoke coming out of it, everywhere. I was laughing my head off - in the middle of the boat race! Honestly I remember that day, Saturday afternoon, I remember it clear as daylight.

Sammy was music mad. He was a great dancer and loved jazz, that's why his RAF buddies called him 'Boogie'. That man made me so strong, I always felt I could conquer anything. He made me aware of how precious life is and how lucky I was, and to make the most of it. He was just fun to be with. Every day and every memory, and there are millions of them, is a good memory. He was a happy-go-lucky man, he loved his family and did everything for us.

Sammy passed away on 1 February 2010 aged 89. We were married for 63 years, it's a long time. He was such a lovely man. He took me out of the ashes and saved me. I was in such a state, I was sick and he was so kind. A soft, gentle man and a gentleman. I was very lucky. ■

Sammy by the lake in Celle.



My return to Belsen and Celle

I DIDN'T GO back to Germany until the 70th Anniversary on 15 April 2015, when I decided to return to Belsen. I've not been back to Auschwitz - that would have killed me altogether. Returning to Belsen finished me off for a couple of months, but Auschwitz, I just couldn't, I think it would have been very bad for me. I think all the sleepless nights would have come back.

I said I wanted to go with all the family so my son Robert, my daughter Laura and her husband Gary came. So did my four grandchildren including Laura's son Paul who came from Israel with his wife Cara, and my three grandchildren from here: Jonathan, Suzanne and Rachel. What can I tell you about it? I didn't know I would be able to tread the earth but I did. I got to the entrance of the camp and I couldn't see anything other than the memories of my barrack and the bodies. The kids were holding me and all of a sudden I could see green. Green in Belsen? The ground was green, the graves were green, everything was green, green with grass. I literally came to and I could see these huge mounds covered in grass. You couldn't imagine how desolate it had been before.

There was a central memorial where we all stood for an international service for the 70th Anniversary of the liberation of Belsen. Chief Rabbi Mirvis was there. I went up to one of the mass graves to light a candle. I said a prayer and I remembered all the people in my barrack and the people that died, that never survived. I came out and they didn't.

As I came away from this grave a German girl with a whole lot of microphones approached me and asked if I would say a few words. I don't remember what I said, but whatever it was this girl took it the wrong way. She left in tears. I was obviously upset. I was saying you have to forget and forgive but you cannot forgive in the name of the dead. Later on I explained to her that she took it the wrong way. I wanted to say that you can't go on hating people who were or were not guilty. It gets you nowhere.

This trip was organised through AJEX, The Association of Jewish Ex-Serviceman and Women. We joined them for the commemorative trip to Belsen, but then we took our own guide called Anke and a mini bus just for us to Celle. When I agreed to go on this trip, Laura did some research and specifically tried to trace my steps post-liberation from April 1945. She also spoke to Anke, our tour guide, before we got there. From what Laura found we started our journey in chronological order.



We went from Belsen to the Wehrmacht Barracks, which post-war became the DP camp, and found the stables and matched a picture from that time to the building I had stayed in. We then went on to Hohne, where Sammy's RAF base had been. I recognised it in the distance and was so pleased to have found it. All these memories came flooding back. Sammy's RAF friends calling him Boogie because he loved jazz and playing the boogie woogie at the base. From there we went to Celle which was about thirty minutes' drive away.

Celle is not a huge distance from Belsen, we travelled past beautiful villages. You forget how near they are to Belsen and Bergen. I recalled the people who lived in these villages, who would shout and laugh at us, call us pigs, the lowest of the lowest in the German language. I remembered coming off the train into the snow and there was the bridge where those people were all lined up shouting and laughing at us. I was desperate to see that bridge again but I never found it.

We went to the five addresses where I had lived with my camp sisters. Laura found the addresses based on all the research she had done. My main reason to go there was to see 22 Schackstrasse, the house which meant the most to me. From this house I would see the path all the way to the lake. Things had since changed. A young couple lived there now and they invited us into their apartment. I recognised the room in which I had seen Sammy from the window. I can't tell you what it meant to me. We also found the tree by the lake, where Sammy and I used to spend so much time. It's such a beautiful town. We walked not far from the house to the lake and I often wonder if there was a connection between this lake and Sammy's favourite place at home, Stanborough Lakes.

We then went to the Synagogue. I was puzzled because I remembered coming through the Synagogue, through a corridor and into a hall, but now the hall was a Chinese restaurant! Apart from that the Synagogue was exactly the same as I remembered. Going back to Celle made me happy. When I lived there I was with Sammy and it didn't really occur to me that it was Germany. Only happy memories, we had such a lovely time.

At the end of our journey we went to our guide Anke's house for a drink. She was warm and thoughtful and we couldn't have asked more from her. At her house we made a l'chaim to life and to all that we had experienced together, to the fact that I had survived and that all my family was with me, which was lovely. ■

The Royals

PART OF OUR BUSINESS was to clean and repair the rugs and tapestries in the throne room of St James's Palace. We had the Queen Mother's Royal Warrant. Sammy cleaned the throne room in the early 1950s. I remember him telling me that he worked on a little needlework Queen Anne chair from the Palace. We met The Queen Mother at a Christmas Party at St James's Palace. She had two little corgis and she asked: "Why are you here my dear?" So my husband said: "Your Aubusson, Ma'am." She said: "Oh my lord, I am so sorry about that. The dogs chewed it to pieces!" It was an Aubusson that her husband bought her for their engagement, a huge carpet from France.

Then I was invited again to St James's Palace on the 60th anniversary of liberation, on *Yom Hasboab*. I went with a group on a coach. We were all lined up in a huge room and we were greeted by stewards with a tray full of minute sandwiches, so tiny I don't think they were even one mouthful! The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh entered from the right, which I knew was the throne room. They literally went along from one side, speaking to as many of us as they could. When The Queen got to me, she asked: "Why are you here my dear?" I will never forget the way she said "my dear". I said I had been in Auschwitz and Belsen and been liberated from Belsen. She asked: "Was it horrific?" and I replied: "Ma'am, if you could find a better word than horrific then that's the one I would use, but I haven't got one."

Then again, I was invited to a Garden Party in May 2017 and was privileged to meet Prince William and Kate, who I spoke to at length. Princess Beatrice also came over, The Duchess of Kent waved hello, The Queen smiled at us all and I shook hands with Prince Phillip. It was an amazing afternoon and I met some lovely people. I also met a friend Freda, who was another camp survivor. ■

Retirement and hobbies

I RETIRED at 80 years old. I hated being retired. I didn't know what life was without doing something but I had to retire because Sammy wasn't well.

I have been playing bridge for about 50 years. Sammy started to play bridge with me but hated every minute of it, that's why he started painting. He used to paint for hours and I took a lot of the paintings to our flat in Israel which we bought when we were close to retirement. Sammy was a very talented artist. I was taught bridge by Sammy's cousin Jack Cohen, who was a most brilliant player. We would play together with his wife Jenny. Jack used to play with a professional team against other countries. He would give me a headache but I loved it so much!

I also made needleworks in the evenings to relax. One of them took me four years. It was very relaxing and if I could do it today, I would. Also, remember I was a massive opera lover and I used to be a member of The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. I used to queue up at 7a.m. for tickets and go to the rehearsals. I miss it. ■





Laura, Robert and Sammy.



Laura, Eva and Robert.

My wonderful family

FROM impossibly difficult beginnings I have been blessed with a wonderful family. I have two children, Robert and Laura. Robert and his wife Mandy have Jonathan, who is married to Sara and they have two children, Ella and Asher....Asher Basher! Then there is Rachel (I am the only one who calls her Rachelly), who has only recently got married to Tal and is expecting her first child.

Laura and her husband Gary have two children, Paul and Suzanne. Suzanne is married to Gavin and their children are Evan and Coby. Paul is married to Cara and they live in Israel. They have three children, twins Joshie and Eden, and Hallel. The twins were tiny when they were born, Eden was just 800 grams and I think Joshie was 1.5 kg. Now they are nine years old and gorgeous. Don't forget Bisli the dog, who was their first baby!

All of them such beautiful children. They are just a beautiful lot. I cannot begin to tell you.

I remember when my grandson Jonathan was getting married. Sammy was very sick. The doctor suggested he go to the hospice to give me a break and to try and adjust his medication to stop the terrible bouts of choking that he had. Laura got him from there to the ceremony in a wheelchair with oxygen and back to the hospice after. She didn't get back to the wedding till half past eight. I was so upset when she took him back, I just couldn't cope with the fact that Jonathan was getting married and Sammy was at the hospice. I remember sitting at the dinner table and drinking the wine like it was water... and I can't take alcohol! I really got drunk, and they still joke about it today. I was on the dance floor all night, I was oblivious.

“All of them such beautiful children. They are just a beautiful lot. I cannot begin to tell you.”



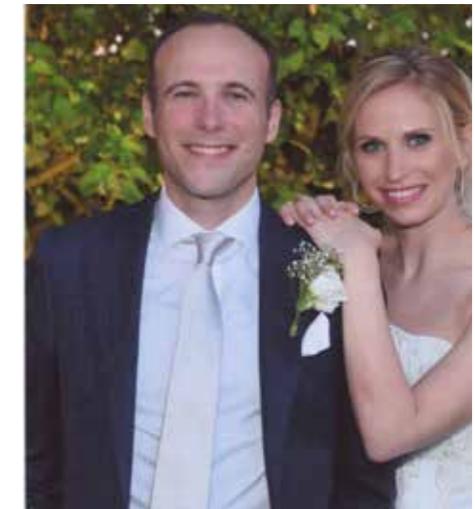
Paul and Cara.



Jonathan and Sara.



Suzanne and Gavin.



Rachel and Tal.

I was wearing a beautiful dress covered in beads. My family got me home and came in to make sure I was ok. I closed the door to the bedroom and I thought: “Oh my God, how do I take this dress off?” It was impossible, the hook was too high to undo by myself. I looked out the window and their car had gone. I couldn’t ask the man next door at 1.30 in the morning to come and help me take off my dress! So I got on the bedroom floor, stretched out my arms as far as I could and wriggled out of this dress and can you believe it, it worked, it did!

When I woke up the next morning I had such a headache. I could not cope with that night at the wedding without Sammy. I have coped with a lot of things in my life but that night was just..... Sammy was upset and I could see he was. It was just horrible. So difficult.

I am just one survivor and now have two children, four grandchildren and, at the time of writing, seven great-grandchildren with another on the way.

My wonderful family has always been there for me and Sammy. So from those early difficult years in my life, I at least had the chance to create, with my wonderful husband, this blessing that is my family. ■



With all my great grandchildren.

A letter from my all my nieces and nephews in Israel on my 90th Birthday

Eva, the incredible 90 year old lady.

Looking as magnificent as you do and acting magnificent as you do must be to do with those Hertskovits genes, but it mostly has to do with you and your magnificent family. Not many people went through what you went through all those years and thrived. You have managed to bury the terrible milestones of childhood and youth, and thrive. You have managed so incredibly to pick up yourself from the tracks with the help of your beloved Sammy and build a beautiful family.

Children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. A really absolutely magnificent tribe that grows and blooms as you nourish it constantly and it returns love to you. Yes! We all think you are absolutely incredible.

And not only the nuclear family but you have also managed to be loved and adored by us all.

Some of us are not present but we are here with you in our hearts always. We love you all so very much and we would like to wish you many more happy and fruitful years so we can keep on loving you.



Sammy and I with our grandchildren when they were younger.



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.



You cannot go on hating, it's impossible to live. That's what I was doing from 1945 to 1949, I was hating and where did it get me? To a psychiatrist!

Plain horror what people can do to each other, no one has learned to respect human life. Life is precious, the most precious thing God gave you and I mean this with all my heart. If people stopped hating, the world would be a better place.



www.ajr.org.uk