



# My Story

## Charlotte Lang

 **AJR** The Association  
of Jewish Refugees



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Charlotte Lang



These are Charlotte'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](http://www.ajr.org.uk)

Charlotte was visited by AJR volunteer Loretta Cohn to share her story.

Thanks also to AJR volunteers William Baginsky and Shelley Hyams for their editing skills.

Portrait photography by Paul Lang

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First published September 2019.

Designed by: Berenice Smith, Hello Lovely.

Produced by: Debra Barnes

Printed in Great Britain by BookPrintingUK.

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# My Story

## Charlotte Lang

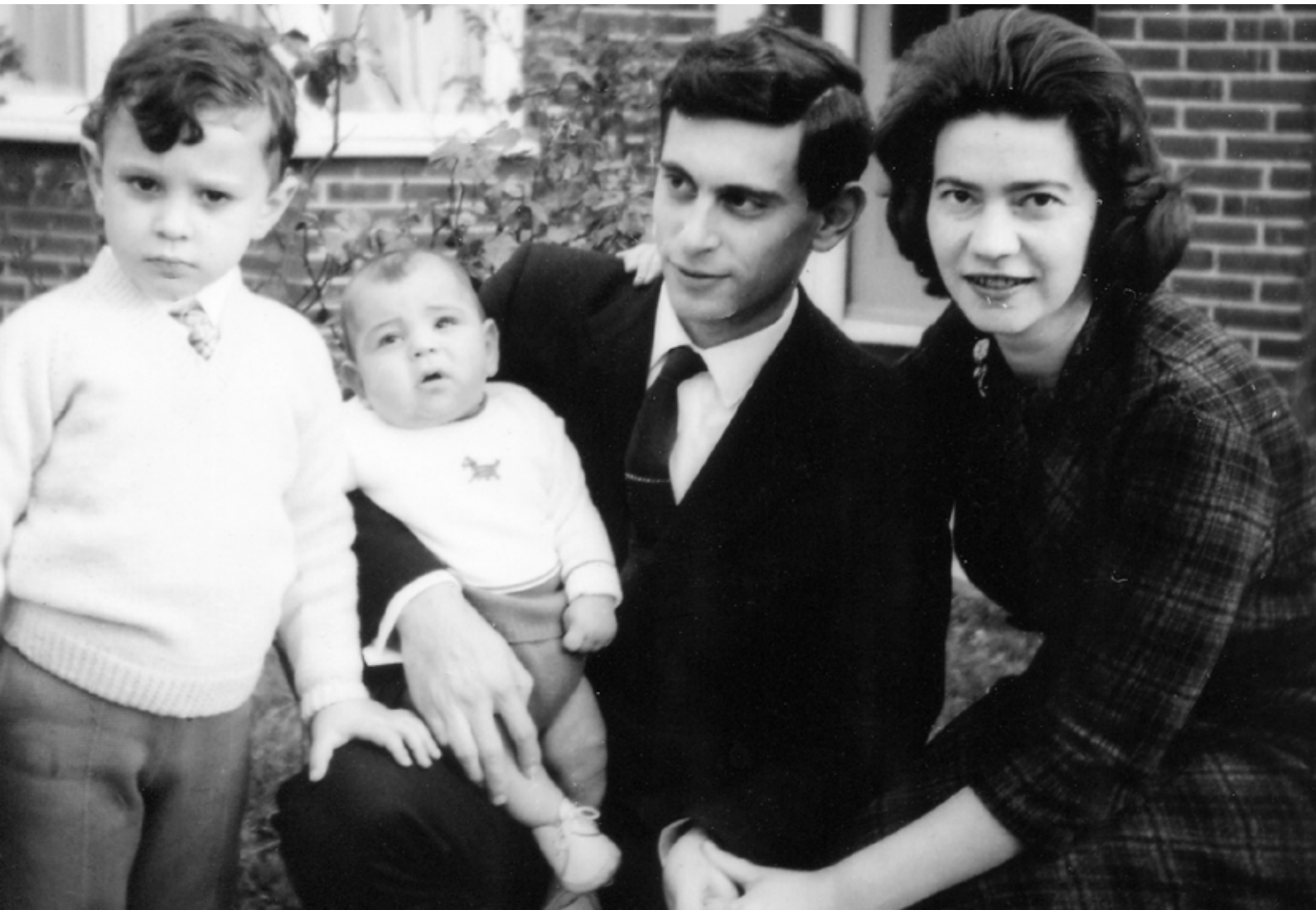
After the *Anschluss* the Nazis forcibly ejected us from our home. They took over the whole house and grounds and we were paid minimal compensation after the war. Another family was put in and a few years ago I discovered they're still there. One day I shall go back and say: "Excuse me – this is my house!"

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## My early years in Austria

I WAS BORN ON 21 February 1935 in Vienna in the *Goldenes Kreuz* (Golden Cross) maternity home, which was in the First *Bezirk*, the posh part of the city. I was named Charlotte but the family always called me Lotte.

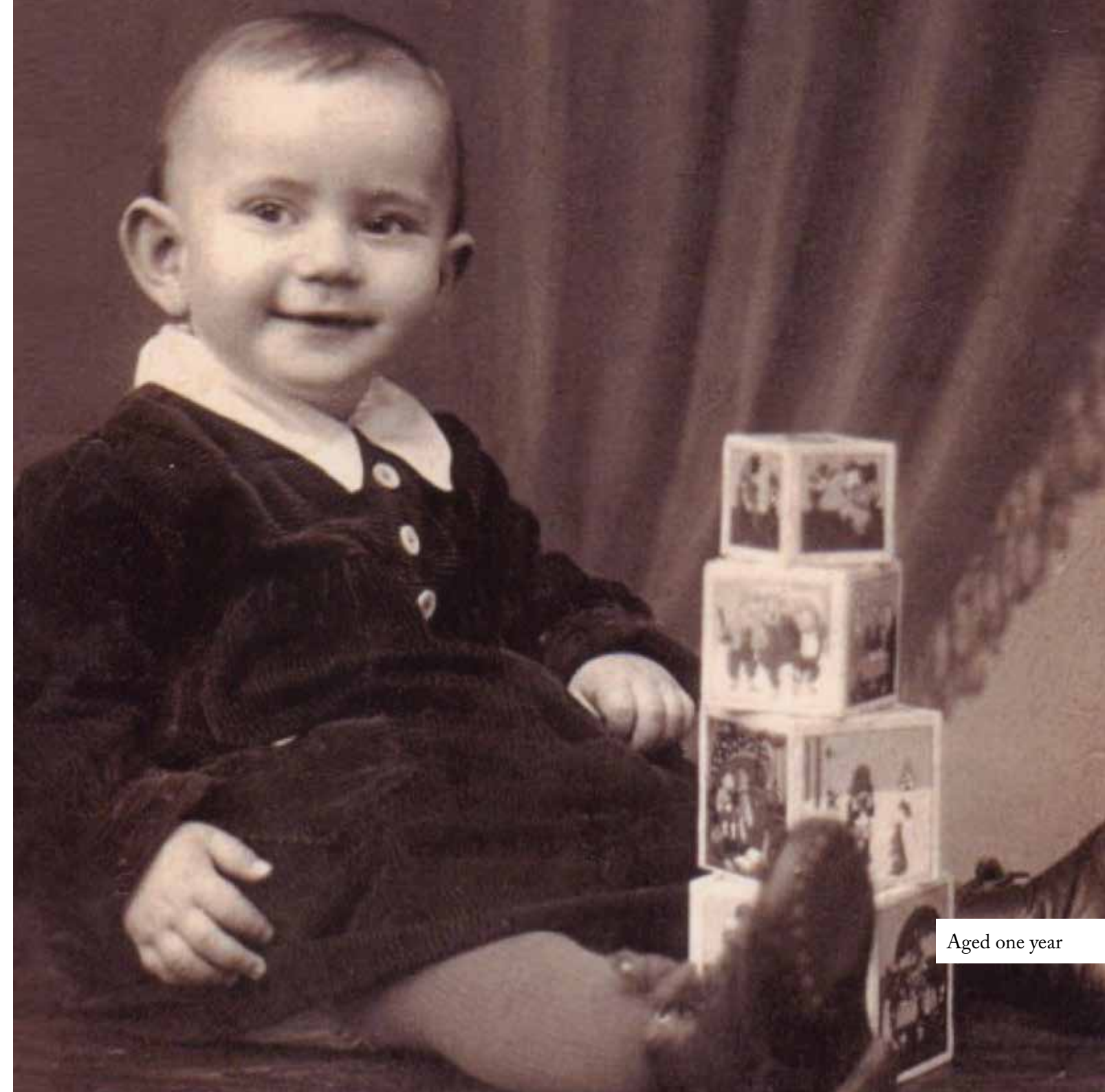
My parents were Irma and Siegfried Diamant; my mother's maiden name was Kohn. I was their only child and they doted on me. Father was born in 1892 and Mother in 1897. They had married on Christmas Day 1930. I still have their marriage certificate but no photos, and this upsets me a lot. They were all taken and destroyed by the Nazis.

My mother was very maternal and sweet, and always gentle. Father had a stronger personality and dominated her a bit. But he was also very kind and generous, as well as more outgoing. He was a terrible worrier and could be temperamental at times. Father was very proud of having served in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War One; his rank was *Zugführer* (sergeant). He was quite patriotic and felt truly Austrian.

My father's parents died before I was born and I was the only grandchild of my mother's parents, so naturally I was absolutely adored. My maternal grandparents lived in Mödling, a small town about 14 kilometres to the south of Vienna. They were quite orthodox Jews – my grandfather was *shammas* and also secretary of the *shul* there.

My parents and I lived in Wolkersdorf, a village in the countryside about 15 kilometres north of Vienna, where my father was a horse dealer and breeder. His family had always lived in the country and he took over the family business. The village was mostly non-Jewish so they probably weren't very orthodox. Father made quite a good living and we had a comfortable life. He had at least one stableman and Mother had a maid. We had a big property – a house and grounds for the horses.

I remember when I was about two being taken out in a horse and cart in the afternoons. I also remember a peanut vendor coming round every afternoon; my mother used to buy me a packet of peanuts with the shells still on and I enjoyed sitting on the back step shelling them with her. I also remember getting my first little coat when I was three, from a shop in Vienna called *Gerngross* on Mariahilferstrasse.



Aged one year



My father in the Austro-Hungarian army in WW1



Aged three years, in Vienna



It's still there, though now a small modern shopping centre. Another memory is of visiting the Prater amusement park in Vienna where there was a balloon seller. When we went back many years later with our sons, there was still a balloon seller, but a different one, of course.

We lived there happily and it was all very nice. Everything was great until 1938. And then came Hitler and the *Anschluss* - the annexation of Austria into Nazi Germany on 12 March 1938. After the *Anschluss* the Nazis forcibly ejected us from our home. They took over the whole house and grounds and we were paid minimal compensation after the war. Another family was put in and a few years ago I discovered they're still there. One day I shall go back and say: "Excuse me - this is my house!"

My father was arrested and held under terrible conditions. I was told how men were crammed into one big hall and many just dropped dead. Father used to smoke, and he vowed that if he got out alive he would give up smoking on *Shabbos*. He did so, but was always terrible to live with on Saturdays!

From Wolkersdorf Mother and I went to live with my grandparents in Mödling, along with all my maternal aunts and uncles (my father was still detained). I remember the Nazis kicking down the door on *Kristallnacht* and arresting my uncles, and also my aunt, but she came back quite soon after. I don't know how long we were in Mödling, but then we had to go to Vienna, to the ghetto. We had to go a number of different addresses - I have an impression of being on the move all the time.

In the ghetto we were reunited with my father. His head was shaven and he no longer resembled the same person - I still recall how terrible he looked. ■



My Father's stables





With my maternal grandparents in Mödling



l-r Aunt Amely, Grandmother, Uncle Siegfried, Uncle Ernst, Grandfather, Uncle Norbert, Mother c. 1930



# We escape to England, where life is hard

ON 27 OCTOBER 1938 my father had the foresight to put an advert in a British newspaper, *The Times*, saying he was a horse breeder and farmer and his wife had domestic skills. A farmer from Nailsea, near Bristol, answered and said he would sponsor my father to come to England as his own farm hand was leaving. There was a lot of correspondence to and fro as the farmer kept changing his mind about taking us, but eventually he agreed.

We came to England on 3 May 1939. I remember saying goodbye to my grandparents at the station. That would have been really terrible for my mother because she must have known she would never see them again. We travelled by train from Vienna to Flushing and then came by ship to Harwich. I'm told that when I was on the ship I said that I wanted to get off!

My parents were very restricted regarding how much money and possessions they could bring with them, only basic clothing and other essentials. I have a list of what they brought, comprising about 25 items for each of us; some items have been crossed through because they were not allowed. As soon as we arrived in England we went to one of the Jewish aid organisations at Bloomsbury House for help.

Ten days after we arrived I caught measles. The farmer who had sponsored us and taken us in had a little girl himself and he didn't want her catching the illness from me so, in effect, he kicked us out. Mother's sister Amely had already come to England as a domestic. She asked the people for whom she was working in Hatfield whether they would also take my mother and me, which they agreed to. Although the farmer made us leave I probably wouldn't be here but for him, for which I'm still grateful.

From Bristol we went to the East End for a few days, and then Mother and I joined Aunt Amely. My father stayed on in London, helping to clear bomb sites and sleeping mostly in the Underground. Amely was working as a housekeeper in a palatial house at Warren Wood near Hatfield in Hertfordshire. Mother, who was in her 40s by then, also went as a domestic, a maid, and was treated terribly. She had to work very hard and was really just a skivvy. Soon after we arrived the family took in 20 evacuees from the East End, accompanied by some nuns. I was separated from my mother and had to stay with the evacuees in a different part of the house, and from then on was rarely allowed to see her.

This was the start of a horrible time. I was only four or five years old, in a strange country, unable to speak the language. The nuns were absolutely beastly to me. It felt as if they were doing everything they could to make my life a misery and I'm sure it was because I was German and Jewish. I was treated quite differently from the other girls: they got treats and outings, and sometimes sweets, but not me. I think I might even somehow have been tied to my bed at night, which may be why I've hated the night-time to this day. The other girls were also horrible to me, following the nuns' example.

That was probably the first time I knew I was Jewish, although at that time I didn't know what that meant. I was certainly made to feel different. ■

RELIABLE young couple, wife capable housekeeper, husband expert in handling and breeding horses, farmer, can drive car seek posts. - Siegfried Diamant, Heinestrasse 5/22, Vienna 2.

where England.—Reply 29, Cornhill Court, N.W. 11, Scotland 4972.  
**DANISH** Cook-General: 37; 20 months' personal reference. Also many English meals, free now.—Berkeley Agency, Berkeley Gardens, W.8. Box 5824.  
**EXCELLENT** Cook-General, aged 30; thoroughly reliable, trained country servant; 12 years last situation; excellent cooking, all dishes; scrupulously clean, capable worker; any where; \$60.—Bland Bayly Agency, Aldershot.  
**INTELLIGENT** Viennese Jewess seeks post as cook-general or maid; all rough work, washing, ironing, able-waiting, English, industrious; references in London.—Leon Adler, Vienna 19, Sieveringstrasse 107.  
**NORWEGIAN** Cook-General, 31; excellent references; flat preferred; either English and Foreign Maids, Clyde Agency, 1, Earl's Court Road, W.8. (Wox. 3770).  
**SCOTTISH** Cook-General, age 26; nice, superior, thoroughly trained country servant; good cook; clean, willing worker, reliable, trustworthy, punctual; 12 years.—Scott's Agency, Hartwood.  
**THREE** young Viennese ladies, perfect in kitchen and household, seek posts in refined families.—Please reply Nelly Kessler, Vienna 17, Pottyanasse 18/2.  
**TRY** a Yorkshire Servant.—Apply Whitaker's Registry, 1, Middlesex Road.  
**TWO** exceptionally nice sisters as Cook-General and House-Parlourmaid; 26 and 18; excellent cook.—See Macks Agency, 9, Kensington Church Street, W.8. West. 3756.  
**VIENNESE**, 37 years old, healthy, versed in cooking and all household matters, seeks situation.—Write to Helene Brach, Vienna XX, Heilwegstrasse 9.  
**PARLOURMAIDS AND HOUSE- PARLOURMAIDS**  
**AUSTRIAN** Parlourmaid (29), fluent English, efficient, experienced all duties, seeks position; permit.—References R. M., 55, Cambridge Terrace, W.2.  
**EXPERIENCED** House-Parlourmaid (over 40), active, seeks post in small quiet family; flat; own bed room; good reference; London preferred.—Write Box E.1036, The Times, E.C.4.  
**SWISS** House, Parlour, and Children's Maids, also 3 Generals for country.—Women's Exchange, 27, Lower Belgrave Street. Slo. 7067.  
**HOUSEMAIDS**  
**HEAD** Housemaid; experienced maiting, excellent needlewoman; reference 18 months; second of four; £50.—Bentley's Agency, Salisbury. Phone 2922.  
**HEAD** Housemaid, Scotch, 38, of 3/4, exceptional 5 years' personal references, Town or Town and Country.—Mayfair Employment Agency, Ltd., 33, North Audley Street.

**MARRIED** Couple desire posts as porters or parlour man for a small house. Wife plain cook, house maid, and experienced in facial massage and pedicure own instruments. Both speak some English.—Fulmar, Castellestrasse 18, Vienna 2.  
**RELIABLE** Viennese couple (36, 41), wife good English cook, housekeeper, husband chauffeur (taxichauff), all housework, English testimonials, English references.—Schneider, 3 Sechschimmelgasse, Vienna 9.  
**RELIABLE** young couple, wife capable housekeeper, husband expert in handling and breeding horses; farmer, can drive car, seek posts.—Siegfried Diamant Heinestrasse 5/22, Vienna 2.  
**SERVANT** couple 140, wife cook, all housework, needlework, husband experienced gardener, all house repairs (technical knowledge), seek posts. Testimonials References in England.—Franz Trisch, 14 Fuchsbachgasse Vienna 2.  
**VERY** reliable Couple, pleasant, very diligent, seek urgent posts: husband, 36, all housework, gardener driver; wife, 36, capable in all housework, cooking sewing; references in England.—Leo Eisenfeld, 4/9 Markgraf Rudolfsstr., Vienna 15.  
**VIENNESE** Jewish couple seek posts in good house wife 43, excellent cook, children-nursing, sewing husband, 44, porter, gardener, handyman, etc. English references.—Katz, 14 Béchardgasse, Vienna 3.  
**YOUNG** Jewish couple, wife (27) versed in housework experienced hairdresser, manicure, husband (28) valet-classeur (10 years' experience), etc., seek posts best references.—Egon, 37 Langackerstrasse Vienna 9.  
**YOUNG** Viennese couple, wife perfect in housework good cook, and qualified dispenser, husband qualified hairdresser with first-class references, language seek posts as servant; capable.—Leopold Trauttmann 18, Liechtenberggasse, Vienna 16.  
**A** Gentleman would, for special reasons, like to find a position as Cook with good family in Kent or Sussex area; "Aan" preferred.—Apply G. A. Lewis Andre, Penbury, Tunbridge Wells.  
**MALE** Cook-General; 36; highest nine and four year personal references; excellent cook, cakes; good houseman; no any part. No booking fees.—British Agency (Female Servants' Registry), Domestic Chamber Hingham. Tele. 774, 6 lines.  
**MAN**, 32, thoroughly good Cook, desires constant situation; personal recommendations; immediate.—E. G. D., 55, Barnwell Road, Bristol, S.W.2.  
**MRS.** Hector Boltho highly recommends husband & married couple willing work alone London; excellent chef; all duties; intelligent and loyal.—A. Griffin "Boyton", Hempstead, Saffron Walden, Essex.  
**A** First-class butler-calet.—employer writes us & wants daily; 40s.—Mrs. Hunt, Ltd., 26, Marylebone Hill Street, W.1. Tele., Welbeck 7777. No booking fee.  
**RUTLERS**, experienced, single-handed, Town, 49,

The classified ad from The Times which my father put in asking for positions in England, 27 October 1938





Mother's passport and visa



Mother's passport



## My wretched start to school life

THE NUNS AND EVACUEES left after a year and then I had to go to the local school, which was about half an hour away. I was only five, but I had to walk down a long country lane, alone, to get there because my mother wasn't allowed a break from work to take me. I was ill-treated at that school as well. Again, I think it was because I was German and Jewish. Both teachers and pupils seemed to do whatever they could to make me feel wretched, even deliberately barging into the toilet when I was using it. The only amusing thing I remember is that we had a teacher who wore a kilt and I could never work out whether he or she was male or female!

Because my mother worked so hard I was left on my own a lot and I used to wander alone around the area, including into the local pub where they got to know me quite well! My abiding memory of this time is of being a very small, vulnerable and unhappy child left to fend for herself with no-one to care for her or take her side. I shudder to think of it now. That experience has stayed with me right up to today. Even now I hate being on my own, and need to have people around me. That always makes me feel miles better, and lifts my mood enormously. I still feel quite angry about what happened to me, angry towards people who could have shown more kindness – my mother's employers, the nuns, the teachers.

As an enemy alien my father had to get permission to move around and could only do so during daylight hours. I have a very poignant letter he wrote asking to be allowed to visit us at Warren Wood, which he was only able to do occasionally. At some point he was interned; I don't know exactly when or for how long, but I think he was on the Isle of Man for about 10 months.

Mother and I left Warren Wood together with Aunt Amely in 1942 and joined up with my father in London. He had left the East End by then and we all went to live first in West Hampstead and then in Cricklewood. By then my mother was not very well: she suffered badly with nerves. Her wartime experience had affected her severely. It was all a great trauma for her, and after leaving Warren Wood she was never able to work again.

My father took whatever jobs he could get to support us, including working in a handbag factory and for Wall's Ice Cream. At one stage he went to work in a munitions factory, but one day a load of

With my mother in Warren Wood, 1939



armaments fell on top of him. He broke a lot of bones, including his arms and legs, and was in bed for ages. It took a long time for him to recover. It was very difficult for us financially – there was no sickness benefit in those days – but I think one of the Bloomsbury House organisations may have helped us. Although Mother wasn't well enough to work, she was still able to look after me and to cook and keep house.

Auntie Amely came to live with us in Cricklewood and by this time she'd got married and was pregnant. Her husband, Ernst Gieler, was only allowed into England during the war on condition that he joined the British Army. Amely had been a nursery teacher in Vienna and was working as a primary school teacher in Hillingdon. At one point Mother was ill and in hospital so Amely took me to school with her. Being pregnant, she had a craving for cherries, so every day on the way home we used to have to stop and buy some. Her son Peter was born in 1943 and my mother looked after him when Amely went back to work. I remember wheeling him in his pram and one day I accidentally tipped him out. He still says this caused his baldness and blames me for it!

I started at Geneva House School in Shoot-Up Hill. There was only a small group of pupils and it was run by women who, to me as a little girl, seemed very old. Again, I had to walk a long way to school on my own, all the way up Shoot-Up Hill. I was getting quite used to being on my own as a child. I can't remember discrimination or victimisation at Geneva House, although I was probably the only Jewish child there. So in that respect it was easier, but I don't remember feeling especially happy there either.

I didn't have special friends there, but I did have a friend who lived across the road. Audrey was lovely, and the same age as me. We more or less grew up together and were like sisters. As an adult she became a model and lived that sort of glamorous life (she's been married four times) and I lived an ordinary sort of life so we drifted apart. We still keep loosely in touch – she lives in Spain now, and every so often we phone each other. She wasn't Jewish, and I remember I used to spend Christmas day with her. Her family seemed OK about my being Jewish, but nonetheless they obviously had some antisemitism because later on she had a Jewish boyfriend and her parents were going mad in case she married him.

I was at Geneva House School until the flying bombs started, and I remember our having an Anderson shelter in the garden. One bomb fell very close to our home, which prompted us to go to Leeds to

stay with my father's sister Berta. Amely chose to stay in London. My father got a job with Burton's Tailoring up there. We lived in the Jewish part of Leeds, Chapeltown, and I think we felt more at home there because we mixed a lot more with Jewish people. I went to school in Leeds and I think there were other Jewish children in my class, and I don't recall experiencing antisemitism there. I remember being at school when we heard that the war had ended and we all sang patriotic songs such as 'Land of Hope and Glory' and 'Rule Britannia'. Some friends made a party that evening and my cousin Herbert lit a huge bonfire to celebrate.

After the war we came back to London and young as I was – I was only 10 – I was glad to be back. I don't know what it was, but there was something about London which I liked and I was happy here – and I still love London. ■



Me in 1946

“I went to school in Leeds and I think there were other Jewish children in my class, and I don't recall experiencing antisemitism there.”



## After the war – growing up in London

AS THE WAR PROGRESSED Mother's mental health deteriorated. In June 1943 she had a breakdown and had to go into Shenley Hospital, but by then my father was well enough (following his accident in the munitions factory) to take over at home. Going to visit Mother there with Father was pretty awful. It was a terribly long journey, by train and bus. I only saw her about once a week.

Mother had been traumatised by everything she'd been through and had a whole series of what were then called nervous breakdowns. She had three spells in psychiatric hospital, first in Shenley Hospital and later twice in Horton Hospital, Epsom. She had shock treatments (ECT); the effects lasted for a while, then it was back to square one. She said the treatment was horrible. Around 1960 a new drug was developed which helped her enormously, and she got a big lift when I married and when her grandsons were born – I don't think she got ill again once they'd come along. When good things happened at last it changed her view of life completely.

My father was possibly more resilient than Mother. He looked after me very well. We often went to the Cosmo restaurant near Swiss Cottage for supper, and now it resonates with me every time I go past it, or the place where it used to be since it closed down.

When we returned to London we went back to the same house, but we had to look for another school. A Jewish school had just opened round the corner in Minster Road, the North West London Jewish Day School, and they agreed to have this poor refugee girl without charge. It must have been quite expensive, and we couldn't have afforded to pay. I was one of the first pupils. The headmaster was very religious and he drummed Judaism into us night and day. I got to the stage where I wouldn't switch on the light or tear toilet paper on *Shabbos*! I drove my parents mad. I remember my uncle taking us out to lunch one day, and I wouldn't eat anything because it wasn't kosher enough for me. He didn't like that! This phase didn't last because you know what children are like – they get very enthusiastic and then it peters out after a time.

I passed the 11-plus and went to a grammar school – the newly opened North West London Jewish Grammar School in Willesden Lane, which again took me without charge. I was the very first pupil in

the school. That school, as an experience, was OK. It was also very religious, although the headmaster there wasn't quite as bad as my primary school one had been.

In 1946 one of the Jewish welfare organisations had paid for Mother and me to go on holiday and we went, I think, to Margate for a week. While we were away Father had a heart attack. He never worked again, so financially things were very difficult from then on. Still, somehow we came through it. As Mother was also unwell, this was another pretty tough period for me. Once the Welfare State had been established Dad got sickness benefit and National Assistance, but some things, such as strawberries, remained luxuries I never had.

We kept a Jewish home, and I think I've been pretty Jewish since my schooldays. My parents were observant and we kept all the festivals as best as we could, and went to Walm Lane Synagogue. But we couldn't afford to buy kosher meat or live the Jewish life we wanted, because it was too expensive.

I think secondary school was a happier period. Being older it was somehow easier to cope with things like Mother's illness. We had our lunches at school which helped when she was ill. There was a real lack of discipline and we felt we could do just as we pleased. I swore I'd never send my own children to a Jewish school! I remember one end of term, on the last day, we put up placards saying, "We're not doing any work!" and that was it! I was learning all the Jewish things I hadn't known before, and that has certainly proved to be important for me. All my Jewish knowledge comes from that time. They did drum it in, but for me that was good, although I was a bit more laid back about observing all the rituals and *mitzvot* by then than I had been in primary school. I don't remember learning much else apart from Jewish and Hebrew studies. I started to learn French, but don't remember a word of it now.

As a family we didn't go to shul regularly on *Shabbos* morning, but when I was older I used to go by myself to Walm Lane Synagogue – not that often because I had to sit in a room at the back for people who couldn't afford to pay the subscription. I could hear the service but not see anything. I thought that was pretty mean and not very welcoming.

Going to Jewish schools, I no longer felt as much of an outsider as I had done when I was very young, but I still felt a bit different from the other girls. I was still 'the refugee' and we lived in a tiny flat, whereas they all seemed to live in much bigger homes. I must admit to having felt a little patronised at



North West London Jewish Day School, 1945. I am in the dark dress



both Jewish schools, and I don't recall many other refugee children at either. At primary school the headmaster took on a child from the camps. She was very different, somehow... and there was a Polish refugee girl in secondary school, younger than me. I still see her from time to time.

The other girls seldom visited me at home, but even so I did have friends. I actually had a friend from primary school with whom I kept in touch until she died a couple of years ago. After I left school I lost contact with most of the other girls but I've picked up with them again, and even now I still see some of them. I helped write the book to commemorate the school's 60th anniversary and that brought us all back together.

I have strong memories of Mother being away in hospital a lot during my schooldays, and of Father doing his best to care for me, including getting the school caretaker to look after me after school when he was still working. My sense of being isolated continued all the time I was growing up.

I left school at 15, the earliest age I could, because the way things were at home I thought I'd better go and earn some money. So I went out to work. ■



## My working years

MY FIRST JOB was with the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) as an office junior in their little place in the Strand, even though I hadn't had any specific training for office work. Then I started getting trouble with my eyes. My sight itself wasn't the problem, but I used to get eye irritation so badly that I had to leave the CCJ, and I had to leave a few other jobs for the same reason. I had eye drops, which helped for a short time but didn't cure the condition. This really did stop me doing things. I couldn't hold down a job for very long, and it also limited my socialising. I remember my friend Audrey telling me she'd been here, there and everywhere, and there was me stuck at home, all bleary-eyed. That was quite a difficult time. Thankfully a cure emerged eventually.

We had other problems at home around this time. The house where we lived had been owned by a Jewish couple when we moved in during the war. We had the top floor. After the war they decided to sell it, and it was bought by a couple who wanted to get us out. They made our lives an absolute misery. The man would go into the bathroom, which was next to our bedroom, during the night and roar like a lion so that we couldn't sleep. And the woman used to play the piano all day, so that my parents couldn't get any rest, which was not good for my father with his heart condition. It was a dreadful situation. And then one day the landlords got someone from the council to come round and take up the floorboards in our kitchen, which was our main room. They were taken up and just left for four or five months. They probably hoped we would fall and break our necks. In the end, in 1953, we took them to court and got an injunction against them, but even after that it was pretty impossible there: they still made our lives a misery. Later, the landlords took us to court to try to get us out. This was a terribly anxious time. We had no money, and we'd have been a very low priority for council housing so where would we have gone? Thankfully we won the case.

Things got a bit better after my mother collapsed and an ambulance had to be called. This had happened while I was out at work and when I got home the landlady asked if I needed anything! We had years of harassment, and it didn't do my mother any good at all – all the hassle, anxiety, victimisation. I don't think this had anything to do with our being Jewish and German – they just wanted us out as sitting tenants. I left when I got married, but my parents stayed on. Thankfully by then the owners had come round a bit, although when my parents finally moved out the landlords were absolutely overjoyed to see them go.

I remember being at home often because I couldn't work for months at a time. I was very lonely, and of course it didn't help us financially. But once my eyes had been treated successfully things got much better. I was quite lucky with my jobs. I was doing secretarial work, and also reception. I taught myself to type. I did try to learn Gregg's shorthand, but gave up after just a few lessons. Thankfully I seem to have managed OK without it.

I got a job with an estate agent in Bond Street for two or three years. There I worked for a man with whom I became quite close, and everyone said: "Ooh, you're going to get married!" but I insisted "No we're not!" I never actually went out with him – it was just office gossip. He left and started an agency of his own, and he phoned me up one day and said "Oh darling, come and work for me." I said "No, I don't want to," and he said "Oh, come on..." and in the end he talked me round. I hadn't wanted to work for him because, I don't know, I just had a feeling it wasn't a good idea. He'd just started out – perhaps it wouldn't work? It just didn't feel right. But in the end I went. I was there for seven weeks and then he said "Oh darling, I can't afford to pay you!" It was all *schmooze*. I won't repeat what my dad called him!

After the estate agency episode I was with a big whisky firm for a short time and then I went to work for Sharles and Co., a firm of accountants. I was there for five years, until I got married. The office was originally in Harley Street, which was wonderful because I was working in the basement where no-one ever came, and we had such fun down there. I was the only woman among 18 men. I was sort of 'one of the lads' but they were also very nice to me and a bit protective. Then they moved to Great Portland Street, virtually opposite Oxford Circus Station. It wasn't such a nice building, but it was still great because I continued to work with 18 men. Men are better to work with than women – less difficult, less catty!

“I was there for seven weeks and then he said “Oh darling, I can't afford to pay you!” It was all *schmooze*. I won't repeat what my dad called him!”

Probably my most memorable job was with British Lion Films, where I met a lot of famous people including Elizabeth Taylor, Michael Wilding and Anna Neagle. I met a girl there and we became good friends; she eventually became Anna Neagle’s secretary. Through my friend I met all the stars; it was very nice and carried on until my first child, Michael, was born. I remember having my ‘blues day’ after the birth, and there I was sitting in hospital crying my eyes out when the sister came in with a huge bouquet of flowers and she said “Don’t know what you’re crying for – these are from Anna Neagle!” And when Michael was born we were invited up to Anna’s flat in Park Lane; Michael was such a good baby, but that day it was hot, and he cried and cried and cried! I used to go to all Anna’s first nights, which was lovely. Michael Wilding was charming and delightful –we named our first son Michael after him.

Looking back, I guess growing up was quite tough. My mother was ill, then Father got ill as well, and we didn’t have much money, and my eyes were bad for a while, but I had to cope. My parents were absolutely wonderful but older parents are different from young ones, and as I was growing up they were ageing. My father used to phone me up at work goodness knows how many times a day, asking advice about everyday things, even when my mother was at home, not in hospital. From the time I started to go to work I had to be the adult in the family. I was looking after my parents rather than them looking after me. I felt a bit hard done by and that life was a bit unfair, but not in the least angry or resentful towards them. It was especially difficult when my mother was in hospital. My father felt lonely and also responsible for me. He had to learn how to cook; previously he hadn’t even learnt how to put on the kettle. He used to make a meal for me every night when I came home from work, which was so nice. ■

## Social life and meeting David

I’VE ALWAYS LIKED going to the theatre and cinema. As a young woman in the late ’50s and early ’60s I used to go to the theatre for five shillings. When I started work my salary was £2 10s, and about £5 by the time I stopped, out of which I had to pay my parents for my keep, so I wasn’t left with much. I became friends with a girl I met at the bus stop who actually lived in my road, which I hadn’t realised until then. She was Jewish, from Poland. Her father had been killed during World War Two – possibly a Holocaust victim. We started going out together to dances and other places. She introduced me to another of her friends, and so there were two or three of us Jewish girls who would go out together. We went to coffee bars and Jewish dances. I remember there was a good coffee bar in Wigmore Street. We also went to Bar Kochba and Maccabi in West Hampstead. I remember being very shy to start with.

I met David at a youth club in St John’s Wood *shul* in Grove End Road. At first I went there with my friend and then when I got to know it and got more confident I went on my own. For nine months I remember saying repeatedly “I don’t like that David Lang – he’s stuck up!” I recall we went on a club outing to see the film *Exodus*. David was treasurer and in the interval he came round for the money. I remember telling him “I haven’t seen the other half yet!” He must have thought I was a real so-and-so!

One of the other boys always used to give me a lift home because he lived in West Hampstead and it wasn’t far from there to Cricklewood. One night he said to me “I’ll give you a lift home but I need to go via the East End.” I said “I’m not going via the East End!” David was standing there and he said “Oh – I’ll give you a lift home – I live in Willesden.” So he did – and we were engaged a month later! And he wasn’t stuck up at all – he was lovely. I think he was just shy. He was a management accountant and worked mostly for various companies connected with the aviation industry.

We got married on 1 April 1962. We chose 1 April because the birthday of my grandmother Rosa was 31 March; I wanted to get married on her birthday but it was *Shabbos* so we had to do it the following day, Sunday. Our wedding was lovely. The ceremony and reception were at the Western Synagogue at Marble Arch, a beautiful little *shul*. My father gave me away, and oh he was so proud. A lot of family and friends came. My dress was a lovely crinoline – not fashionable now but then it was. I had two



little bridesmaids, David's nieces; my family was very small, and I didn't really have anyone to ask. Under the *chuppah* the rabbi told David to look after me, and he really, really has, ever since.

Afterwards we went to the Goring Hotel, which was very posh. I had come over from Vienna on my mother's passport and I still had Austrian nationality. Somehow it hadn't been stripped from us. If you got married in church your passport could be changed into your married name there and then, but with the Austrians, no! You actually had to go to the embassy with your marriage certificate, which was why we stayed at the Goring Hotel, near the embassy, on our wedding night. We went into the embassy the next morning and gave the official our marriage certificate and my passport to change it into my married name. He said "Oh, congratulations – we'll change your name and send it to you." I said "You can't do that – my plane leaves at two o'clock!" and after much persuasion they changed it on the spot – all he did was cross out 'Diamant' and put 'Lang'! It took one minute actually to do it.

We flew to the south of France, to Nice, and it was beautiful. That was the first time I'd been abroad since coming to England, and also the first time I'd flown. My dad said "Don't you dare fly! Don't you dare fly!" He must have been very scared for me. So I said "Of course not...", but we did. We stayed one night in Nice and then we went to a little place called Le Levandou. It was absolutely gorgeous, April, not too hot – the weather was fantastic. Then we went back to Paris for a couple of days. Then we came here, to this house, and we've been living here ever since.

I sometimes tease David that I only married him because it was a cheap way to become British. At that time, to become naturalised cost about £25 if you were single, which was a lot of money in those days, but if you married a British person it only cost about 10s 6d. So, I said to myself "He'll do!"

My wedding day was the day my parents' lives seemed to start again, and to get better from then on. I was happy, I had a husband and later on children, and my happiness was their happiness. ■



## A happy marriage and family life

SO THERE I WAS IN 1962, married, and it was lovely to start a family of my own. I only went back to work for one day after I got married. A friend of mine was a teacher at one of the Jewish schools and she told me that their secretary was leaving and said “If you want a job, go along...” which I did. They asked me to come in for the last week of term to take over from the woman who was leaving. So along I went and was sitting in the office when my teacher friend came in with one of the schoolchildren and said “I think he’s got German Measles.” I was pregnant with Michael so I got out immediately – I couldn’t take a risk with the baby. I had to have gamma globulin injections. So that was my one day at work!

Michael was born in 1963 and he really was gorgeous, over 9lbs. I was in labour two days, and we always tease him that he’s never hurried since. Paul was born three years after Michael, in 1966. That was planned because I wanted to enjoy Michael, and once he’d started at nursery I could enjoy Paul. During one of my pregnancies Father was in hospital, and David was wonderful and visited him every day.

My lifestyle was very different after we got married. I had a house and a garden, and no harassment from landlords. We could afford to keep kosher, and we joined Dunstan Road *shul* in Golders Green.

My parents came over very often, and when the boys were still young we went quite a lot to visit Auntie Amely in Hillingdon. In those days Michael never hurried himself but that was the one time he did because she was a wonderful cook. He’d be standing by the door waiting for us; any other time we’d be waiting for him!

We used to go on all sorts of outings with the boys. David was at one time working near St Paul’s where they had lunchtime military band concerts on the steps, and the boys and I would meet him there. We sat right next to the band and it made a nice day out, especially in good weather. We didn’t go to museums, because I’m not keen on them. I remember one day we took the boys to see Scott’s ship *Discovery* on the Thames. A police launch stopped and offered us a ride, and we had a great trip on the river with them. That was a thrill for the boys.

When the boys were young we had seaside holidays in places like Bournemouth, then, when Paul was about five, we started going on cruises, mostly around the Mediterranean. We had a limited budget so we would take a four-berth cabin right at the bottom of the ship, which was fantastic value. We also cruised to Norway, Ireland, the Canary Islands and to Madeira.

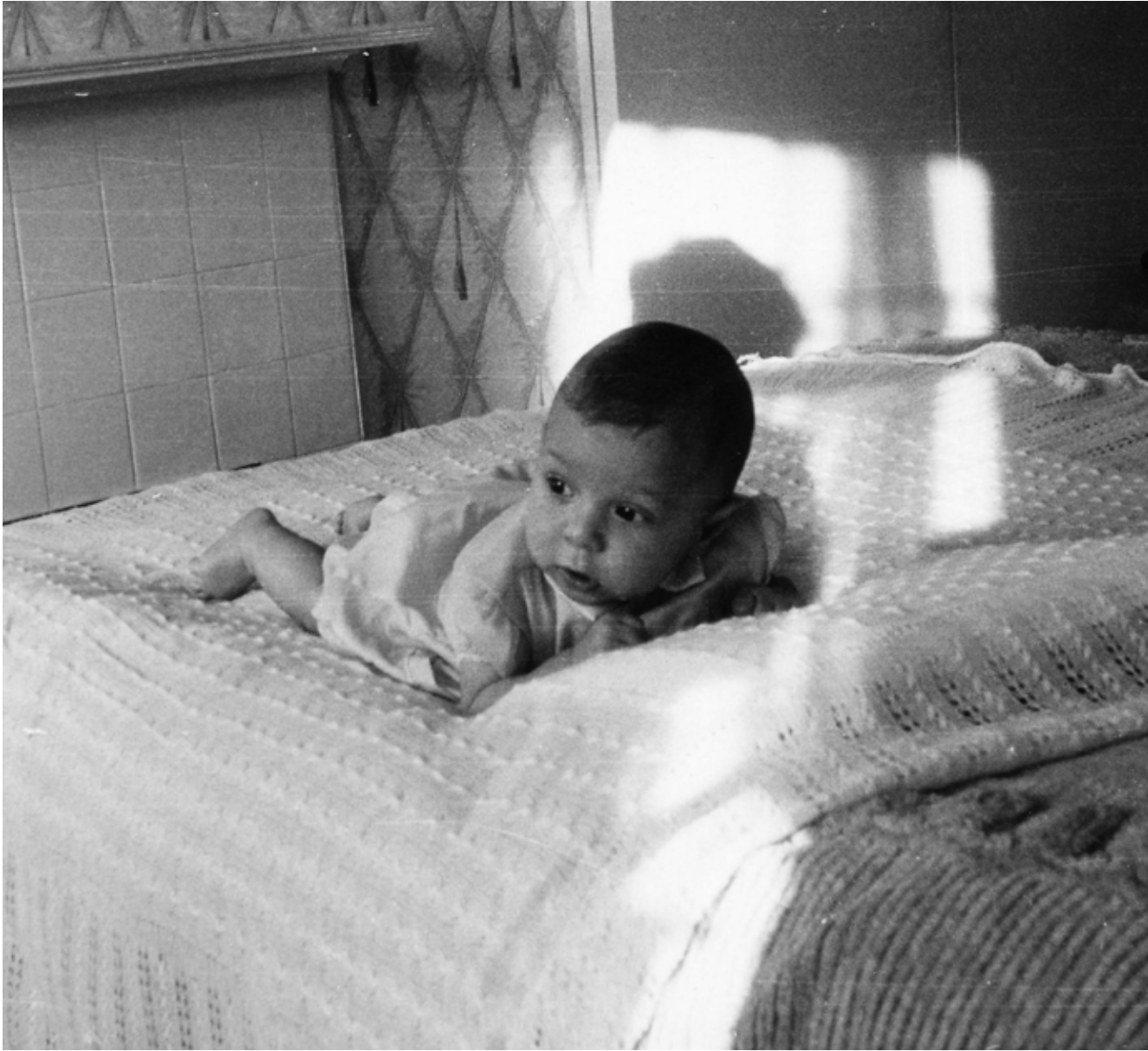
I felt a bit hard done by because we did so many boyish things. I missed having a daughter to do girly things with, like going round the shops together. I’ll have to rely on my great grandchildren for a girl now because all my grandchildren are boys – although I wouldn’t be without them for the world. Michael and Paul are marvellous and our grandsons are marvellous too.

Really, when the boys were young we were just a happy family enjoying doing things together. I think we’re still a very close-knit family, something David and I have built together. ■



David and I in our Scout Leader uniforms, 1962





Michael



Paul



## Losing my parents

WHEN THE BOYS WERE 10 and seven, my father was still in pretty good shape but Mother was going downhill rapidly. It got to the point where she couldn't cook or do anything around the home. I would have done anything for my parents and looked after them willingly, but it got to the stage where I found it very hard. The boys were then at school on Hendon Way and I used to take them to school, run down to the bus stop, get the bus to Cricklewood Broadway to my parents, see to them, run back to pick up the kids and then run home and try to get something ready for supper. It was very tough.

I looked after my parents for about a year – shopping, housekeeping and cleaning – but the time came when the doctor said that Mother's needs were too great for her to live at home any longer. Father wasn't ready to move into a home, but nevertheless he chose to move with her into Osmond House care home rather than leave her on her own.

In the end, after my parents moved into the home, I had a breakdown. It was as if the floodgates opened. It was a dreadful experience. I'd somehow manage to feed David and the

With my parents on my wedding day



boys, and take the boys to school, but once I came back home and shut the door I was on my own and that was not good. You name it, I felt it – unable to cope, panicky. At one point I became terrified of going into a shop. I saw a consultant psychiatrist at the Middlesex Hospital for quite a while. He was very tall, very ‘English’, very upright, and there was I, sitting all hunched up. I remember one day saying “I can’t go in a shop! I can’t go in a shop!” and he said “Mrs Lang, if you don’t go into a shop and buy your children some clothes, they’ll be walking down the street naked!” Once I’d got outside I burst into tears and I cried and cried and cried...and when I got home I threw myself on the bed and I cried even more. I went to see my GP the next day and said “Do you know what that man said to me?!” and my GP said “Well, I think it might have worked!” And it *had* worked: I’d been shocked into starting to change. Gradually, gradually I got back on my feet again; the psychiatrist got me doing things again, because one thing I didn’t want to do was to land up in hospital. I didn’t want to get like my mother and have to leave the boys. The whole episode lasted about a year or perhaps longer.

While I was ill I still visited my parents in Osmond House. I think my father knew I wasn’t well, but I don’t think my mother realised. I didn’t get much help from friends or neighbours really, except for one lady, Gladys, who lived on Hendon Way and would pick up the boys for me if I was really bad. She was very nice. I felt very much on my own, and going up to the West End to see the psychiatrist on my own was very difficult. Michael was marvellous for a lad of only 10. One day the doctor had given me some different pills. I took them and I couldn’t keep still and when Michael came home he said “Come on – I’ll take you upstairs.” He took me upstairs and he sat on me and told me to phone the doctor, which I did. I think she told me to take two Valium or something, but for him to take that initiative was wonderful – he really helped to calm me down.

My father’s death is something I’ll never forget. A friend of mine helped serve lunches for doctors at a hospital, and asked if I’d like to go along. I did, and it was really quite enjoyable. But one time I was there my father had tried to get hold of me on the phone at home. There was no reply, and somehow he fell and broke his hip. He had to have an operation and he was fine when he came round, but the next day he was in a coma, and that was it. He died on 5 December 1978, a year before Paul’s *bar mitzvah*. I’ve always blamed myself for his death. I can’t help thinking that if only I’d been at home to answer the phone he might not have fallen.

When the boys were born it brought a whole new light into my parents’ lives. When Michael was very little, my dad came every afternoon to be with him and he always brought a packet of chocolate buttons with him. He would say to Michael “One for Mummy, one for Michael, and one for me.” Michael thought my father’s name was “Me” and for years afterwards, possibly until he was almost adolescent, that’s what he called him! My dad really liked this and was quite proud of it.

Michael was very close to my father and he was completely thunderstruck when he died. Father gave each of the boys a signet ring when they were five, and after he died Michael had his made bigger and he still wears it every day. He loved Paul just as much but his relationship with Michael was very special. Michael absolutely adored him and even now if something good happens to him he says: “Grandad did that for me!” The boys came with us every week to see my parents in Osmond House, even when they were in their teens. It got to the stage when my mother would keep asking over and over again “How’s school? How’s school?” but they were very good with her, so patient.

My mother stayed on in Osmond House after my father died, but having Alzheimer’s she didn’t even miss him. I still went to see her every week, but she didn’t know me. I always say I lost my mother two years before she died, which was on 20 August 1981.

Neither of my parents ever went back to Austria – apart from anything else they couldn’t have afforded the trip, but they both retained their Austrian citizenship. They had no motivation to apply for British passports and at 30 shillings each couldn’t have afforded them. Father always wanted to go back. I think he had a fantasy that he could just pick up the threads of his former life there. In the area where we lived pretty well everyone spoke German or Austrian. I recall at that time in Cricklewood Broadway most of the shops were Austrian or German. My mother never learnt to speak English very well because she didn’t need to! But even so my father never got used to being here, and always thought of himself as Austrian. He loved Viennese music and food. In a way, Mother was more settled here, and may have felt safer; Austria held terrible memories for her, especially of losing her parents and brother. ■





My father with Michael



Our family in October 1966



Michaela bathing Paul

## What happened to my extended family

I HAD THREE MATERNAL UNCLES and one aunt. My mother was the oldest of the siblings. Then came Siegfried, Norbert, Ernst and Amalia (always known as Amely). I'd always adored Amely and as a child I'd follow her everywhere – I must have driven her mad. That attachment lasted until she died.

After they were arrested on *Kristallnacht*, Siegfried and Ernst were sent to Dachau, but I think if you had enough money you could bribe your way out and from there they got to Shanghai and eventually, after the war, to Australia. Ernst married in Shanghai and his two daughters were born there; his son was born in Melbourne. Siegfried met and married Irma Kraus in Melbourne. He had known her in Mödling. They had no children.

Norbert's wife Martha had tuberculosis, which meant the UK wouldn't have taken her in. She died in May 1939 and Norbert got together with Rudolfine (Rudi). They were both picked up by the Nazis and transported to the Opole ghetto in Poland, where they married. They were later transported to Belzec concentration camp and finally to Sobibor extermination camp, where they were murdered in 1941. My uncles in Shanghai sent papers to enable them to join them there, but they were unable to escape the Nazis.

Amely came to England before us, in March 1939. She had a Catholic boyfriend in Austria, which had upset my grandparents a lot. He fled to South America just before the war and eventually joined Amely in England, where they married and had two sons, Peter and Christopher, both brought up as Catholic. I became very close to Christopher, who died quite young. When he was ill he used to come for lunch every *Shabbos*.

My maternal grandparents were Adolf and Rosa Kohn; my grandmother's maiden name was Sprinzeles. They were taken to Theresienstadt in 1942 and from there to Treblinka, also in 1942, where they were murdered by the Nazis the same year. My grandmother was killed on 6 October, but I don't know the date when my grandfather was murdered. *Stolpersteine* (brass paving stones engraved with the names of victims of the Holocaust) have been placed for them and for Norbert outside their former home in Mödling.





Stolpersteine for my grandparents and uncle

We have copies of letters my grandparents wrote to my uncles in Shanghai; there are also some from Norbert, including letters sent from Belzec. The originals are all in the Jewish Museum in Melbourne. They date from late 1939 and stop suddenly in 1941. The letters are a window into a terrible time. The writers tried to convey something of what was happening to them, often using code, but mostly they expressed concern about the welfare of Ernst and Siegfried. My grandparents also somehow managed to get just two or three letters to Amely in England, not saying much about their own circumstances, but asking if I was well.

My paternal grandparents were Charlotte and Adolph Diamant. I was named after my grandmother, who had been born Charlotte Drill. Father was the oldest of their children, then came Rosa and Berta, and finally another son, Otto.

Otto was an actor on the Continent before the war. He came to England but was then sent to Canada with other Jewish refugees. He returned to England and continued his career here, under the stage name of Otto Admant. He wasn't that well-known on the Continent, but was a friend of Marlene Dietrich and other famous people. He was in the film of *Fiddler on the Roof* (mind you, if you blinked you missed him!), and *The Mousetrap* on the West End stage.

Berta married Gustav Bauer. She too came to England – presumably also on a domestic visa. Gustav spent the war years in Mauritius. They were reunited in England after the war and lived in Leeds. My grandparents had given me a Magen David on my first birthday, very small, only about half an inch in diameter. I was told that Gustav Bauer brought it to England after the war sewn into the lining of his coat. I've worn it ever since.

Rosa also got to England and went to live in Leeds, where she died from heart trouble in the 1940s. She had one son, Herbert, my only cousin on my father's side.

I also still have occasional contact with a relative living in Vienna, a married woman named Susie. Her father, Kurt Diamant, and my father were cousins. Kurt was twice on the platform to board a train to a concentration camp, but somehow didn't go. He was hidden and survived in Vienna during the war. I also used to be in touch with my mother's Aunt Clara who lived in Israel.

I keep finding 'new' relatives. For example, the mother of Tom in Australia was my mother's cousin – her father and my mother's father were brothers. Tom's mother came to England before the war as a domestic servant and he later emigrated to Australia with his family. Tom has visited us twice, and I've never been hugged so lovingly! Sadly, he and his wife have now died, but he has siblings here whom we see regularly. And I've just found out about someone on my mother's side in America. For so many years I was only aware of three first cousins here in England and three in Australia but now I feel that at last I have a proper family and this means a lot to me. ■



## Sons and grandsons

THE BOYS WENT FIRST to Wessex Gardens School on Hendon Way, and then they went on to Whitefields, a comprehensive in Claremont Road. At that time they had a lot of Jewish pupils. Those schools were thought to be best for both of them and also for me, as they were within walking distance from home. I know it was selfish, but I was worried about them going on buses and trains and that thought was beginning to make me anxious again. After all that had happened to me I couldn't face the thought of them being in danger.

Michael's *bar mitzvah* was lovely. My Auntie Berta came. The really nice thing about that occasion was how my parents were able to be involved despite living in Osmond House. When I told Rabbi Newman at Dunstan Road Synagogue that my parents weren't really up to taking part, he offered to repeat the *bar mitzvah* at Osmond House, which we did, and it was wonderful. The rabbi brought along a *Sefer Torah* and Michael read his portion again and we had another *bar mitzvah* cake made. All the residents came and my parents sat there, so happy and proud! I'm not sure that my mother quite knew what was going on by then, but certainly my father did. Rabbi Newman had come as a refugee from Czechoslovakia and was very understanding towards us.

Paul's *bar mitzvah* was also at Dunstan Road. The rabbi who officiated was Jonathan Sacks, who later became Chief Rabbi. Paul's was one of his first *bar mitzvahs*. And for Paul, my uncle Siegfried and his wife came from Australia. They were in their late 80s by then and it was wonderful to have them there. They went to visit my mother at the care home but she didn't know them, didn't even appreciate that it was her brother, which was such a shame because they'd been separated for all those years. My father had died by then, about a year earlier. We didn't feel able to ask Rabbi Sacks to repeat the *bar mitzvah* at Osmond House – we felt it would have been an imposition, nor did we have a party there as by that time my mother was past appreciating one.

Both *b'nei mitzvah* felt really important because they showed another generation of Jews were going forward, and that Hitler hadn't won.

After sixth form Michael worked for Barclays Bank for a while, and then applied to the Civil Service and joined what was then MAFF – the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and he's still there after 36 years.



Paul, Mother, Michael, me and Father at Michael's *bar mitzvah* held at Osmond House



Michael's *bar mitzvah*



Paul's *bar mitzvah*

Michael married Toni. Their son, Matthew, is 20 now. Matthew is madly keen on football. He got a place at the University Campus of Football Business, which is part of Buckingham University but is based at Wembley Stadium. He's just started his third year of a three-year degree course and absolutely loves it. He's thinking of going on to do a master's degree in a finance subject relevant to football. He also does football commentaries on YouTube for Minor League clubs.

Paul got into photography and eventually set up his own business. His interest started very young, I guess because photography was and is my big hobby. The earliest of Paul's photos we have is from his fourth birthday party when he got hold of a camera and snapped all his friends in the garden. Now his older son, Jamie, is also doing photography and filming, so it's gone right through the family.

Paul married Verna. Jamie (James) is their older son, and Adam is five years younger. Adam is the most *frum* member of the family; he's recently back from a year in yeshiva in Israel, and is now studying



Uncle Siegfried and his wife at Paul's *bar mitzvah*

physics at Imperial College. On *Rosh Hashanah* this year he walked to Barnet Hospital and blew the *shofar* for Jewish patients. Jamie has a degree in TV production. He was working for Sky News but has just left to work for the Stock Exchange, which has its own small TV studio. He recently married Danielle, who's a qualified accountant. ■





Paul and Verna's wedding, 1989



Michael and Toni's wedding, 1992



# Life today - keeping busy

MY BIG PASSION IS for photography and it started very early, during the war. My parents didn't have a camera so I don't know how this came about, but I've always loved photos. There was a shop opposite our home which had boxes of film in the window. I used to go in and ask for one and they'd say "No, not this week – come back next week." And I went back virtually every week, but they knew they didn't have any film because you couldn't get it during the war. The boxes were all empty. After the war it became available again and my parents bought me a camera, a Kodak Brownie, and I started taking pictures. And I loved it. Even now I love it. I still have pictures I took when I was young, albums and albums! And I took pictures of the actors and actresses I knew when I worked at British Lion. Now...I don't know – my hands are getting a bit shaky, and I'm not so confident.

After we got married I stayed at home to look after the children, but before the boys were born I helped David run the 27th Willesden Cub Pack (Jewish), of which he was Cubmaster, including taking the boys on a weekend break. It was all great fun. Once our boys were older I was able to do more. I went to sewing classes although I still can't sew! I mainly went because a friend was going, and



Matthew helping David take the *Seder*



Matthew at his first *Seder*



Our Golden Wedding Anniversary

it was good fun. I did make a skirt with a lot of help. It was also through this friend that I joined the group making lunches for doctors in hospitals; that was also good fun.

I went to the cinema and theatre when I could. I don't go now – it's too difficult for me to get around. I remember once after Michael was born wanting to go to see a film; David encouraged me to go and said he would look after the baby. I got to the cinema, and suddenly thought "What am I doing here? I've got a little baby to look after!" so I ran out and straight back home. I found it easier to go once the boys were older.

We've been members at Dunstan Road *shul* for a long time, but now we're more involved at Barnet, where Paul is warden. We no longer go to services at Dunstan Road but we still try to go twice a year to their Seniors Tea, and their former senior warden came and blew the *shofar* for us here this year. I





Jamie



Adam



My grandsons on their *bar mitzvahs*







Jamie and Danielle

used to be on the Parents' Committee and helped with events like the parties at *Chanukah* and *Purim*. I was really quite involved, including going to committee meetings with Jonathan Sacks. I really enjoyed Dunstan Road *shul* life.

Every minor *Yom Tov* like *Chanukah* and *Purim* – we wouldn't drive on the major ones – we used to go to Barnet, and sometimes we'd go on *Shabbos* and have lunch with the family afterwards. We got very involved at Barnet. For years we used to go to the Monday Club but it's too far for me to go now. We also used to take Jamie to the toddler group there when his mother was working.

David and I joined the AJR after we saw their advert in the Jewish Chronicle offering the opportunity to be *bar mitzvah* for men who hadn't had one at age 13 because of the war, aimed particularly at those who'd come on the *Kindertransport*. I thought this was such a lovely idea, and I wrote asking if I could come along to the ceremony. I had a phone call straight back from Bertha Leverton saying "Of course you can come! How lovely of you to write." She said I could be an honorary member of the *Kindertransport* Group, and that's how David and I got involved. We went to a meeting of the *Kindertransport* Group and enjoyed it so much that we joined. Later we also went to meetings of the North London Group. Now we go mostly to the North West London Group because it's easier to get to, as well as to the *Kindertransport* Group; they both meet at Alyth Synagogue. We've met some very nice people and AJR has given us a lot of friends. We also have their kosher meals on wheels, which are very good. And, importantly, they've also helped with my claim for restitution from the Austrians. It's been a big struggle to get money from them.

These days walking is a real effort and going out is much more difficult. David looks after me, and a carer comes daily. My current one is really good and I say "My parents must have sent her!" I still feel they're looking after me. ■





In December 2017 David celebrated his second *bar mitzvah* and I celebrated my first *bat mitzvah*. L-R Danielle, Jamie, Michael, Adam, Matthew, Verna, Paul. Seated Toni, Michael's wife. Dec 2017



## I become bat mitzvah

ON 23 DECEMBER 2017 I had a very belated *bat mitzvah* at Barnet shul, jointly with David's second *bar mitzvah*. The whole event was absolutely wonderful. It came about as a result of a suggestion by Paul, who arranged it all. I was a bit thunderstruck at the time, but the idea grew on me. I wrote a *D'var Torah*, which Matthew read out for me as I don't have a strong voice, and he actually got a round of applause, something unheard of at *shul*. And I just sat there and *platzed*. Our sons and grandsons all took part in the service. Adam had come from Israel just for the weekend and he read the *sedra*, doing all the *leynung*. Jamie read the *haftarah*, and David, Michael, Paul and Matthew were all called up for an *aliyah*. And *'Anim Zemirot'* was sung by Paul, Jamie and Adam, which was lovely. The rabbi's sermon was all about David and me and our lives, and a tribute to both of us. On behalf of the *shul* the rabbi presented each of us with a book and a certificate, now framed and on our wall. We had a nice *kiddush* in *shul* for all the community, and then we went back to Paul and Verna's where they'd made a lovely lunch for all our close friends and the family. It was all written up in the Barnet *shul* magazine and the *AJR Journal*, and the *Sunday Telegraph* sent a reporter and photographer to our home. ■

## Extract from Charlotte's bat mitzvah D'Var Torah

23 December 2017

*This week's parasha, Vayigash, is about Joseph being reunited with his brothers. The last time he saw them, they had thrown him in a pit and sold him into slavery.*

*Joseph goes down to Egypt as a slave but gains wealth and status over the passing years. When Joseph sees his brothers again...he does not feel anger towards them, saying "though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good".*

*Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks observes that Joseph has reframed his past, acknowledging it as God's way of giving him the ability to save a region from famine. He transformed his negative feelings towards his brothers into focused attention on the future.*

*This is a very appropriate theme for me today as, like Joseph, I have also moved countries and experienced a difficult past...*

*For me, family is life, and I have been incredibly blessed by my sons Michael and Paul, and daughters-in-law Toni and Verna, who have given me three wonderful grandsons, Jamie, Matthew and Adam.*

*Like Joseph, my past was difficult but by reframing it my future was given the purpose of family. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks says of this parasha:*

*"Whatever situation we are in, by reframing it we can change our entire response, giving us the strength to survive, the courage to persist, and the resilience to emerge, on the far side of darkness, into the light of a new and better day."*



## Going back to Vienna

I WENT BACK TO VIENNA with David and the boys to learn more about my roots. In particular I wanted to visit Mödling to see where my mother had come from, but while I was walking through the streets I couldn't rid my head of thoughts of the Nazis and what they had done there. And I don't feel things have really changed.

I still feel bitter about what happened. The Nazis ruined millions of lives and I feel very angry that my mother's was one of them. And I too am still suffering because of what happened all those years ago. I've had some form of depression virtually all my adult life and still take anti-depressants. Even now I hate the night time, and I still hate being on my own.

Nobody should forget what happened. To prevent the same thing happening again future generations should be educated so that they really understand what the Holocaust felt like at a personal level – it shouldn't just be dry history.

I still believe in God, and that the Shoah was something man-made. I've really been very Jewish all my adult life – when six million perished I feel I have to be. ■






## 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.



After the *Anschluss* the Nazis forcibly ejected us from our home. They took over the whole house and grounds and we were paid minimal compensation after the war. Another family was put in and a few years ago I discovered they're still there. One day I shall go back and say: "Excuse me – this is my house!"

 **AJR** The Association  
of Jewish Refugees

[www.ajr.org.uk](http://www.ajr.org.uk)