



# My Story

## Katinka Seiner Easton



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These are Katinka'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)

Katinka Seiner Easton was visited by AJR volunteer Loretta Cohn during 2017  
and 2018 to share her story.

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# My Story

## Katinka Seiner Easton

I am doing this, setting down this memoir, to leave a legacy and to send a message. The message is that  
Hitler didn't win and that evil doesn't win.

Out of the strong came forth sweetness. (Judges 14:14)

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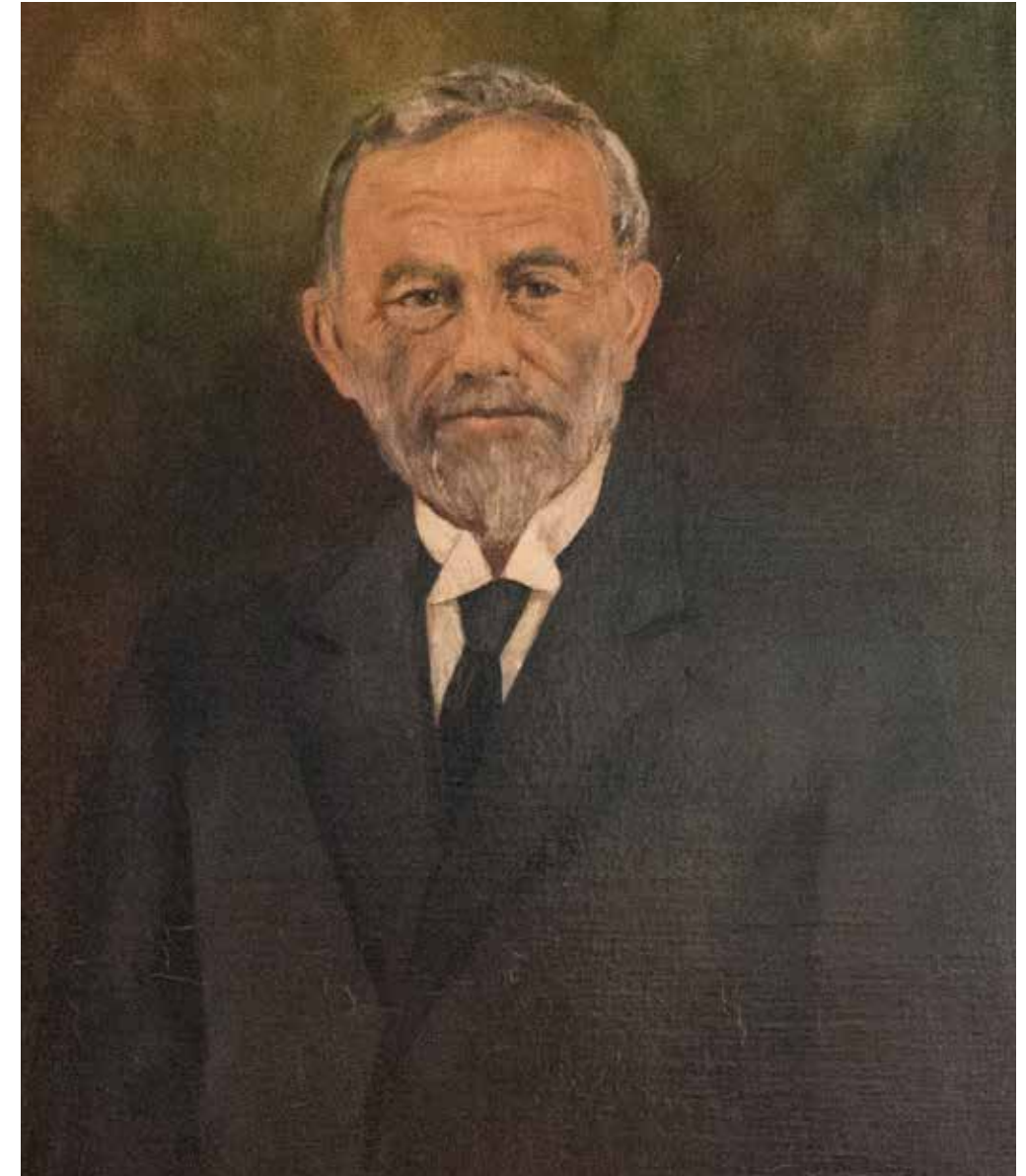
## Prologue

WHEN I light my candles on Friday night I light four: two for *Shabbat* itself, one for Laszlo and one for Daniel. Or I sometimes think “This one is for peace in the world, these are for Mummy and Daddy and this is for my brother.” Every night I say my *Shema* and then I say goodnight to everybody by name: first Laszlo and Daniel and then Mummy and Daddy, my brother Josef, my mother-in-law, and my father-in-law whom I never met, and Laszlo’s younger brother who was killed in the war, and my grandparents ... it’s quite a long list...

...and my sense of loss is still very keen. ■



The only photograph I have of my darling brother Josef, who died before I was born



Painting of my maternal grandfather Emanuel Guttman

## Early years in Budapest

I WAS BORN Katalin Seiner in Budapest on 7 November 1931. I dislike the name Katalin intensely and I've always been known as Katinka, which I greatly prefer. My surname is German-sounding but I don't know the reason, possibly some of my forebears lived in a German-speaking country. My parents' names were Anna and Imre and we lived in Pest. Most of what I know about my family I learnt from my cousin Agnes (sadly now dead) with whom I was very close. I hadn't even known my mother's real age: she'd always said she was younger than she really was.

I was an only child. My brother Josef died of meningitis before I was born. He was not yet five and very beautiful. My parents, especially my mother, never really got over his death. I was born afterwards as a kind of miracle because my mother was told she could never have another child. My parents never talked about Josef, which I really regret because I don't even know where he is buried. I'd like to look after his grave. I don't know his date of death so I have added his name to be remembered on my mother's *yahrzeit*.

I guess I was very precious to my parents. Having lost Josef, for the rest of their lives they remained scared of losing me as well, my mother in particular. I was always very protected, especially as a child when I was virtually wrapped in cotton wool. I had a very happy, very privileged childhood until things started to change in the late 1930s. I spoke German before I spoke Hungarian because I had a German nanny. One day, when I was about three, she told my parents that she was going back to Germany to bring children into the world for Hitler. I was very unhappy she was leaving, but I soon had another nanny.

My maternal grandfather, Emanuel Guttman, had a big estate with vineyards in the north east of Hungary. I have memories of being allowed to drive a carriage when I was a little girl. I held the reins with the coachman's hands hovering over mine, just in case, but I think I actually did very well! Grandpapa sat in the back and was very proud of his little granddaughter. When we stopped and got off, the peasants came and lined up and the women curtsied and kissed his hand. I would now, of course, find this completely unacceptable and quite terrible. Grandpapa was a member of the Czech Parliament at one time – I think he was then the only Jew. He died from cancer in the winter of 1943. He had been living with us, with a nurse to look after him. His wife, whom I never knew, died many



Mother





Father

years earlier. My maternal grandparents were very Orthodox Jews. I don't know anything about my father's father, who died before I was born, but I would imagine he was a secular Jew because my father wasn't religious until he met Mother. Her father stipulated that Father become Orthodox, and he did: he even laid *tefillin*. I never really saw much of my paternal grandmother.

We attended the Kazinczy Street synagogue. I remember going on High Holydays and sitting with my mother. My parents didn't go *Shabbat* mornings as Father had to be at work on Saturdays but I vividly remember celebrating *Erev Shabbat* at home every Friday evening with candle-lighting and a big dinner. Father always blessed me, a nice clean handkerchief over my head and him crying because he loved me so much. Mother lit the candles. It was very beautiful with damask, silver and crystal. The maid served the meal. My father came home for lunch every day but *Shabbat* was special. We always had somebody on hard times as a lunch guest and afterwards, as they were leaving, Mother would give them food and clothes in 'a good Jewish way'. My parents were very charitable, very generous. They always gave even when they themselves didn't have much. I recall, here in England, Mother writing a cheque every month for a favourite charity in Israel when she herself had very little.

Father started out as a bank manager and was very successful, but had to give it up to take over the family business when his father died. He was very good with numbers and, for a while, worked as an accountant when he came to London. His mother and brother also worked in the family business. It was a ladies' outfitter called *Seiner és Klinger*, I would say something like London's Fortnum and Mason in importance. They sold ready-made and made-to-measure clothes. The shop was on two floors and they had a lot of employees. I remember salesladies and a workshop with seamstresses. I loved going there as a little girl. There was one special room with buttons and zips and other such things; I used to choose some buttons and play with them - fun!

I remember learning to swim when I was about five, lying on my father's back with my arms around his neck. Throughout my life my parents were very caring and supportive - and very proud of me! ■

S  
K

Méltóságos Asszonyom!  
Nagyságos


"Őn sem engedi meg magának azt a luxust, hogy pénzért értéktelen dolgokat vásároljon." Epp ebből a fontos okból kifolyólag vagyunk bátrak szíves figyelmét ismételtén felhívni 40 év óta fennálló cégünkre, tavaszi ruhabevásárlásával kapcsolatban.

E salsont is az "Elegancia" jegyében nyitjuk meg - szépet, sikket, megbízható árú adunk Önnek.

Kérjük Méltóságod vételkényszer nélküli szíves látogatását, hogy köpeny, costume, ruha, blouse, és pongyola különlegességeinket Önnek bemutathassuk.

Még bátrak vagyunk megemlíteni, hogy egy esetleges fizetési könnyítéssel szívesen állunk nb. szolgálatára.

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An advert for my father's shop *Seiner és Klinger*

## My first public performance

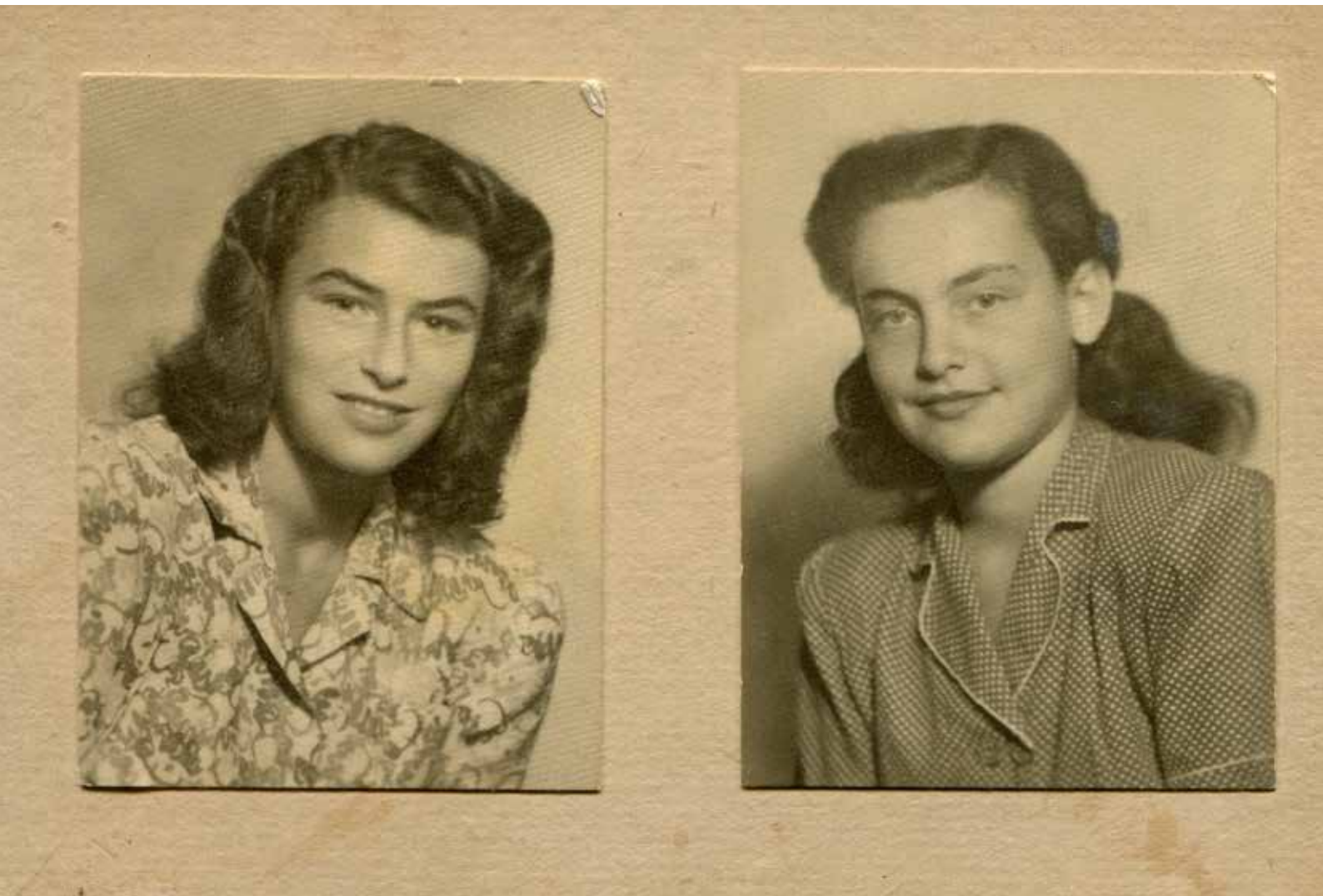
MY PIANO lessons started when I was five. People seemed to know I had a good singing voice and my first public performance came when I was about six, but it was entirely my own initiative.

Mother, Nanny and I were on holiday somewhere in Hungary. I remember being driven to a nice hotel; we had plenty of money and only the best was good enough. We arrived and it looked very impressive. I'd been travel sick on the journey, but after we got out I asked Mother "Please can I have an ice cream?" I wanted a cone. Mother was always terribly worried in case I got ill and she said "No you can't because you know it makes you cough" (which it didn't) "and it's bad for your tummy and I don't have any money." I was nobody's fool and I didn't believe her, but I knew it was no good arguing because Mother would win.

So in we went. Mother went to her room while Nanny and I went to ours. Eventually the grown-ups both fell asleep. I took my dolly's basket and then sneaked into Mother's room and put on one of her shawls or a fur stole. Then I crept downstairs, stopping a few steps from the bottom - I already had stage instinct - and I started to sing. I had a beautiful, big voice for a child and I sang in tune but my repertoire was very limited. I sang '*You are my heart's delight*' (from *Land of Smiles* by Lehár) in Hungarian. People were slowly stopping until I had quite an audience, and I sang it through twice. I really enjoyed myself (at that age one doesn't have stage fright). Then my audience clapped and I realised that was my moment. I slowly went round with my basket. I thought "Mother said we don't have money for ice-cream, but I've earned it now." These were rich people; they didn't have pennies so they gave me pounds! By the time I'd finished I had the equivalent of £100 or more. In the meantime Mother had come down and she was watching me going round with the basket. I thought "Maybe she doesn't like this." I remember she looked very smart; she was both very beautiful and very elegant. I said to her "Mummy, can I have my ice-cream now?" She said "Yes. We shall put the money away for you and you'll have your ice-cream." I still remember the look on her face - she was horrified.

Later in my singing career I wasn't so brave. One grows up and starts thinking about what one is doing and what might go wrong. ■





With Cousin Agnes (left)

## School

I COULD already read when I started state elementary school just before I turned seven. When I was 10 I went to a Jewish *Gymnasium*. By that time Hitler was in power and there was no choice. Every day we had some sort of Jewish studies; one day we'd have History, one day Bible and another day Prayer Book. I also chose to learn Modern Hebrew, which wasn't in the main curriculum. I think it was a very good school and I stayed there until I was 18.

From an early age I spent quite a lot of time with my cousin, Agnes. I made more friends later at school, all Jewish of course. We were a group of three and, looking back, we were big show-offs of our knowledge of literature and things; we called ourselves the *crème de la crème*. We were once invited for tea with a teacher we liked very much who taught us Hungarian, French and, for a short while, Latin as well. We wrote her a little note and she said "It's all very well that you call yourselves the *crème de la crème*, but you spelt it wrong!" We were mortified. Instead of *crème* we had written *craime*! We stayed friends right through *Gymnasium*, but then things changed. The post-war Communist regime became very tight and one of my friends became an informer, she even informed on her own parents. We all went different ways and lost touch.

I played Cinderella in a children's opera at the *Gymnasium*. I recall Father crying when I got a standing ovation. I also remember him sitting with tears streaming down his face when I sang in a school concert (I was about 10). I remember thinking to myself "Surely I can't be so bad that Daddy has to cry?" A lovely memory I have is of a communal *Seder* at school, when my parents came with my darling uncle, who was later killed at Auschwitz. I was the *Chazan* and had to sing a lot of the service, but I enjoyed it. I remember we had pretty tables laid with white tablecloths, *matzah* and all the other special *Seder* foods.

My life as a child in Hungary wasn't all pleasant. I recall walking with my nanny near the Danube past a smart restaurant which had a notice saying "Dogs and Jews not allowed." ■

## The wider family

OUR EXTENDED FAMILY was small compared with some others of that time. Father had two sisters and a brother. His brother was killed in Serbia during the war; he hadn't married, but was very good looking and had lots of lady friends. One sister lived in Transylvania. I recall that she and her husband were very nice. They were deported and killed by the Nazis. I haven't looked into the details because I always get so upset reading about what happened, or seeing films and documentaries. Father's second sister had a daughter. Both mother and daughter stayed on in Budapest and survived the war. We supported them; even after my parents died I sent them money. They're both dead now.

My mother had five siblings. Two were killed in Auschwitz including my uncle, Moses Guttman. He was a great Zionist and people wanted to spirit him out of Hungary somehow, but he stayed. He said "I stay with my people." An eye-witness said he led his group singing into the gas chamber. It was he who taught me to write Hebrew. I recall having big problems with the *aleph* and being very serious when writing, concentrating hard with my tongue out! The other sibling killed in Auschwitz was a sister, sent there with her husband. She died there but he survived. After being liberated, he and a fellow-survivor came across a large tub of honey. They fell on it and ate voraciously but doing so killed them; they were so malnourished their bodies couldn't cope.

The other three siblings came to England. My uncle Henrik came quite early in the '30s. He worked at first as an assistant to the film director Alexander Korda and then started his own photographic business. He had a daughter. The youngest sister, Judit, came from Germany with her husband. They had no children. Aunt Jolán was Agnes's mother; they both survived Auschwitz. Afterwards, they lived with us in Budapest for a while and then left for the West. ■

“My mother had five siblings. Two were killed in Auschwitz including my uncle, Moses Guttman. He was a great Zionist and people wanted to spirit him out of Hungary somehow, but he stayed. He said “I stay with my people.” An eye-witness said he led his group singing into the gas chamber. ”



Aged 16 or 17

## Wartime

I REMEMBER so vividly the time I heard Hitler talking on the radio. We had a funny little old brown radio, typical of the time, and there he was, yelling his head off. I was just a small child and I was petrified. Through the radio his voice bellowed “I shall erase England!”

Anti-Jewish measures seemed to develop relatively slowly in Budapest. Nothing much changed in my life when the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933. We still had the same sort of living standards. The only thing I remember is that, I think in 1939 or ’40, the *numerus clausus* – Jewish Quota – for institutions was introduced. I also remember Mother saying “We are not going to the opera and theatre any more.” This was her way of boycotting the establishment.

Some wise people had foresight and left Hungary. We stayed because my father was like those German Jews who said “It can’t happen here. We are a cultured country, how can anything bad happen?” He had a very good life in Hungary and he didn’t speak English. Mother did speak English – she had had some lessons. Father didn’t envisage what lay ahead.

I read somewhere that Heine wrote “Where they burn books eventually they will burn people.” And that’s what happened. I was with Mother and she was crying. I was sitting there with her, not really understanding what was going on. She had a beautifully bound set of books by Thomas Mann and she was very scared because he had been blacklisted for being a critic of the regime. We had a big fireplace and she was tearing up these books and feeding them into the fire. I asked “Why, why Mummy?” She said “I can’t explain,” but she kept on doing it.

The Germans came to Hungary on 19 March 1944.

I now hate sewing and for a very strong reason. The first thing I sewed in my life was a yellow star. Mother was busy; people were coming to our flat and she was trying to help them. She said to me “Here darling, sew this on” – so I did, on my coat. It was quite big and I remember thinking I didn’t like it. As that year progressed things were getting worse and my mother was getting into quite a state; she was very scared, especially for me. Our flat was big and soon after the Germans arrived a lot of other Jews were moved in, including my piano teacher. Our building became a Jewish House, with a

big yellow star outside. I remember Mother sitting in a big chair with both hands full of gold, jewellery and other valuables which she was giving to people she knew, hoping they would help, perhaps by sheltering us.

There was a big national pawnbroker where people, including us, had taken their valuables. That was one of the first places the Germans raided when they arrived before going into banks and other such places. They had their informants so they knew where valuables were. So we lost everything we had deposited at the pawnbroker – and we carried on losing!

At first Father still went to the business. There was a curfew. We could go out in the morning, but had to be back in the evening. No Jew was allowed out during curfew hours and we always had to wear the yellow star. We knew of Auschwitz, but we didn’t really know what was happening there. We received a postcard from my cousin that said “We have arrived and we are well,” but they were made to write that.

In late summer 1944 Father was taken away to do forced labour; I think there was a collecting point for the men somewhere in Budapest, possibly in the ghetto. They were taken on a march, the aim of which was to reach Germany. There was no food and they were being beaten. Father told us what happened next as if it was an adventure story. They were marching, it was raining and he was ‘fed up.’ The soldiers were far ahead at the front of the column and he managed to slip away. He was crazy, but lucky! He had only been away for a matter of days.

When Father was taken, Mother and I had managed to leave our flat and go into hiding. We didn’t wear the yellow star of course and it helped that I didn’t look Jewish. The first place we went to was in Buda. The woman we stayed with was very unpleasant to us. I don’t remember who she was or if she already knew us – it had been arranged by Mother. By that time there were a lot of air raids, but she didn’t let us go down and shelter in the cellar. That was where we were living when Father escaped the march and found us.

Then there’s a gap in my memory. I don’t remember if Father was with us in the second place we went to, a convent building; he must have been but I can’t see him, only Mother. It wasn’t really a convent, it was all a front. The woman running it, the so-called ‘Mother Superior’, was not a nun. One day the Arrow Cross came because she had been denounced for hiding her brother, who had gone AWOL.



They took him away and I suppose they killed him. The Arrow Cross men then went through the convent and found everyone hiding there. Mother and I were told to go outside. We knew what was going on and what was likely to happen to us. I was very scared. I remember vividly this young soldier with his machine gun. For some reason, maybe he had a child or a younger sister, he looked at me and then said to my mother “I’m going to light a cigarette. Because the wind is coming from the Danube I have to turn away from you and while I turn away, you run, because if you are still here when I turn back, I will march you down to the Danube and shoot you.” Of course we weren’t there when he turned back. We could have won an Olympic medal with our speed, like two hares! Mother just got hold of me and we ran. We were familiar with that part of Pest because our business was further down the same street. We just ran back towards our own flat and stayed the night there. I don’t know what happened to the other people hiding in the convent.

Then, in late autumn, we went to our third hiding place, which was with the manageress of our business. I definitely remember Father was with us there. He had to be hidden in the coal cellar during the day and was only allowed out at night. I recall venturing out for a walk one day with the niece of the woman whose house we were in. We saw some Arrow Cross officers herding men into a group and making them drop their trousers to see if they were circumcised. We didn’t hang around to see what would happen next.

One day, in December I think, the woman hiding us suddenly said “You’ve got to go now” and threw us out. And so we went, without our yellow stars of course, in the evening, during curfew time, on a tram, and again, no-one challenged us. We went to a Swedish-protected house – my mother had got papers from Wallenberg personally - and that’s where we stayed until the end of the war. There were a number of ‘safe houses’ for Jews in Budapest. I believe one or two were protected by the Vatican, a few were under Spanish protection, but most were Swiss or Swedish. My mother moved heaven and earth to try to get us into the Swiss Embassy, which she thought the best place to be, but the moment the Germans arrived they emptied it of people. They didn’t touch the Swedish houses. The countryside was emptied of Jews. In Budapest most of the Jews were in the Ghetto, under terrible conditions; the Nazis were planning to blow it up but they didn’t have time. ■

## Then the Russians came

WHEN THE Russians came in 1945 there was street-by-street fighting – it was very intense and very frightening. The order from Hitler was to defend the city, to carry on fighting until the last. There were stories about the Russians raping women. I was a well-developed girl. There was a very nice young couple in the Swedish house. He was a doctor and put some bandages on my face, and somehow they got hold of some crutches and I had, I remember, a navy blue coat with a hood. Whenever I moved around outdoors the hood was over my head and, with the crutches, I looked like an old woman so nobody was interested in me! Sadly, on one occasion when we went out together to look for food, the doctor was shot by a sniper.

We were very lucky to have had a flat in the Swedish house but most of the time we were living in the bunker. There was no running water or electricity. Mother had matches and candles and some tins of food, but we were virtually starving. I still have a bit of a thing about throwing out food. The flour incident is something I cannot forget. Father and I went out to scout for food. The word on the street was that you could get flour at a certain place but not for money - only gold. Money was worth less than paper. By that time Mother had used all the pieces of gold she could possibly lay her hands on; the only thing left was my father’s wedding ring. I shall never forget how we went to this little shop and asked the man in charge for a kilo of flour, and for that the price was the ring. My father was crying when he pulled it off his finger. I remember holding his hand; he was crying and I was crying and I said “Leave it.” He said “No, no, no – you must eat.” So we got the flour and Mother made a sort of bread with flour and water. And so we ate. That memory still upsets me.

Eventually, in 1945, we were able to return to our own flat and things started to normalise a bit. Then one day something amazing happened. The doorbell rang and there stood Aunt Jolán and my cousin Agnes. You can’t imagine how we felt; even now I get the shivers when I think of it. We were crying with joy, then immediately “Come and eat!” By some miracle they had survived Auschwitz. My uncle had survived as well; he had stayed in Budapest and not been deported.

I always say we were looked after "from above" because of the things that happened to us: we were supposed to be shot on the bank of the Danube and we weren’t, and Father coming back to us. ■



Aged 16 years

## I become a worker

AFTER THE war, in 1946, Father re-opened the business. I remember there weren't any window panes but it was still recognisably a shop. We were selling cloth to passers-by (I was helping as well), although not very successfully. The ground floor was let out to some friends selling lovely childrenswear and we had the first floor. Eventually the business was restored, but only up to a point: it was never as successful as it had been pre-war. Then, in the early 1950s, soldiers came into the shop and demanded the keys. They had machine guns, of course. Father argued and then there was a 'bit of a shove' with a machine gun so he handed over the keys. That was the end of the business.

Everybody was poor. We didn't starve but people had to queue for food. The best produce went to the USSR. My aunt and cousin sent us parcels from England, not food, but things we could sell, such as wool and perfume. We were back living in our old flat but other families were living in it as well. We'd been allocated the equivalent of one and a half rooms. Among the other residents were our former cook and her sister. Mother couldn't adjust to this new relationship and I often had to mediate when they had altercations.

I returned to the *Gymnasium*, but there were no facilities. We learnt chemistry in a make-shift lab and there were no study books. I liked chemistry very much and was good at maths. I graduated from school at 18. Had the politics of the time been different I would have gone to university. I would have loved to have become a doctor or a research chemist. But I couldn't go to university; they wouldn't let me under the Communist regime because I was 'bourgeois'.

Life was becoming really bad for people like us, for the bourgeois upper middle class. Quite a few of my friends were deported to the country as forced labourers and we were afraid of that happening to us as well. To try to avoid this I became a 'worker'. When I was 19 I went to work in the operetta theatre, whereupon I was allocated a further room in our flat; this was nice because I was allocated what had originally been my bedroom! I hated it in the theatre. My so-called colleagues made fun of me, calling me 'The Dowager Duchess' because my parents used to come and pick me up after work. I was in the chorus and I remember cheating because I didn't want to lose my voice. I was hardly singing at all and my colleagues who realised this reported me.





A party was held where the newcomers had to perform. When I sang they said: “Oh, this is the new *prima donna*!” But then the artistic director found out my background and the new *prima donna* was dropped like a piece of hot coal! The artistic director had been quite a Fascist but then she became a prominent member of the Communist Party.

The finance director of the theatre used to work for my father. He had been taken by the Germans as a forced labourer, so Father had given him money and clothes and looked after him. He knew that I came from that family and he persecuted me even though my father had helped him. He had become a Party member and this behaviour was the norm. Party members denounced their parents, or their children. He denounced me for my capitalist background.

One of the conductors took a fancy to me and then became an enemy, of course, when I wouldn’t oblige. He called a meeting of the company and said I should be sacked because I was no good as a singer and I was useless on stage. Others, including the music director, went for him because they knew that I was good. They told him “She’s very gifted and she looks lovely, what more do you want?” So he shut up! He later became deaf - God’s punishment?

When Stalin died everyone at the theatre was crying “Our father’s dead.” They were crocodile tears as nobody really loved Stalin because he didn’t give us a good life. The artistic director said: “We have to think of all the enemies of the State, and we have among us this snake...” and she pointed at me. I remember there was a stony silence. The two leading artists of the company were standing either side of me holding my hands, trying to reassure me and keep me calm.

One didn’t feel safe anywhere. Not for a minute. It was terrible. If somebody rang the doorbell unexpectedly we would think “They’re coming to get us!” You couldn’t just go and call on a friend unannounced. Once upon a time you could go to someone’s home and say “I’ve got some time, do you want to come and ...?” But not any more. You never knew who might denounce you. Everybody lived in fear. ■



## The Franz Liszt Academy of Music

A MINOR miracle happened. I won a place at the Franz Liszt Academy along with the largest scholarship, which was still rather small. I don't know how I managed it, given my bourgeois background, as there were only four places for 300 or so applicants. The Academy was very important to me, not only because I had actually been selected, but also because, had I stayed on, I would have had a job at the end. We had to learn Marxism and Russian at the Academy and I was very good – I didn't dare not to be! I always thought to myself "Well, to be a good singer you have to know Marxism!"

I had quite a bit of trouble at the Academy as well. At one time our flat had been very elegantly furnished with enormous crystal chandeliers. Mother, being very astute, took the crystal prisms off so only the bare arms were left, but even that turned out to be too much. The Academy had a study group and on one occasion they met at our flat. We were immediately deemed too grandiose and I was denounced for being bourgeois. I was called into the Board. I can still feel the fear even after all these years. I went into the big Council chamber. Students didn't usually go in there, it was sort of 'holy'. And there they were: the professors, the Secretary, the Dean and the Party Secretary. The Secretary started to talk. She said that there had been a denouncement against me and she began to list my 'sins': that I dress up for concerts, the way I live in the flat and so on. I suddenly saw red, literally. I thought to myself, like a little bull "I don't care, I'm just going to tell them what I feel." So I told them "Yes, we still have the remnants of the chandeliers, but we only have half of our flat. As for the dressing up – yes, I do it. I have two outfits for when I'm being sent to sing to the workers or when I come to a concert or to an opera. I change out of my work clothes because I want to honour the place I'm going to and honour the music and my colleagues. And I respect myself and I'm happy to be here as a pupil of the Academy. So this is what my 'dressing up' is all about." You have never experienced silence like it! What I'd said actually was true, because I wanted to make these activities special and festive. People often went to events dirty and for me that was wrong, and it really was very important to me to be a member of the Academy. Then the Secretary quietly said "It's OK, Kati," which is what they called me, "just carry on changing for concerts. Go home now." I felt they almost wanted to applaud me! In retrospect, the Secretary and the others at the Academy were probably just doing what they had to, to survive.

I found it very difficult to stand up to all the threats and abuse hurled at me during this period and I became very withdrawn. I crept away into a corner, mentally and I put on a lot of weight because I was comfort eating from anxiety and depression. When you are being told all the time that you are a lousy Jewish bourgeois – you believe! It took me a long time to get out of that way of thinking, but I did eventually and thank God now I'm OK. These days, I couldn't care less what people say but the unfairness of it all still rankles, even today. At that time I was naïve and couldn't understand or make sense of it. I was victimised and felt completely powerless. But now, reflecting on my awful experiences, I thank God that those attacks were political in origin and not directed against me personally. I was targeted because of something I represented in people's minds.

Had I been thrown out of the operetta theatre or the Academy it could have been really terrible for us; we would have been deported to the country to do forced labour. I received letters from some friends which said "Don't answer, we're just telling you what's what." That's why I tried to become 'working class'. I tried my best but it didn't work; people were very nasty to me and it really was a horrible time.

Later in life my husband Lazlo and I went back to Hungary for a music festival, partly because Lazlo wanted to see where I had lived. I was asked to stay on, but I felt there was no way I could live in Hungary again. Even now, I don't believe things have really changed much there. Antisemitism is still rampant and I don't want to go back. ■

“The Academy had a study group and on one occasion they met at our flat. We were immediately deemed too grandiose and I was denounced for being bourgeois. I was called into the Board. I can still feel the fear even after all these years.”

## Escape from Hungary

IN 1956 there was a huge uprising against the Communist regime in Hungary. When it began I marched in support with a large group from the Academy. The Russians intervened to support the government; they were shelling the city and it was in a terrible state. Our house was riddled with bullet holes.

My father hadn't wanted to come to the West, but my mother always had. I had a friend who wanted to help me leave but I said I'd only go with my parents. This really meant my mother, because my father, miraculously, had a passport with a visa. Eventually my friend gave up because he didn't want the responsibility of Mother as well; her experiences during the War had aged her prematurely and her nerves were shot to pieces. Then one day in 1956 a man rang the doorbell. He said he had been sent by my aunt to take us out of Hungary. The whole country was swarming with *agents provocateurs* so I thought it safest to say "I don't know who gave you this idea, but we are not interested; we are happy here." And so he left. Afterwards I thought "I've had enough." I told Mother "I've decided I want to leave. If you come with me, good; if not, I'm going with my friend." Mother said "OK!" She was coming with my friend and me. We packed a few things like soap and toilet paper. I had a spare cardigan set, underwear and a book, all in a sort of rucksack.

“ I had a friend who wanted to help me leave but I said I'd only go with my parents. This really meant my mother, because my father, miraculously, had a passport with a visa. Eventually my friend gave up because he didn't want the responsibility of Mother as well; her experiences during the War had aged her prematurely and her nerves were shot to pieces. ”

Another friend in the Education Ministry had given me a letter to say that I was needed to work as a singer in the west of the country. This would have justified my going on the train, but she told me that the letter wasn't worth the paper it was written on because officials took people off the trains at a town called Győr (roughly half way to the Austrian border). Mother and I didn't know what was going to happen; we had to take the chance that things would be OK.

Father stayed behind as he was going to follow by train, which wouldn't be a problem for him as he had a passport. We told the concierge that I was going to work in the country, but of course he didn't believe us. Father told us later that the moment we left the 'sharks' came and took everything in the flat they could lay their hands on, including the two packed suitcases that Father was supposed to bring later, with my clothes and books and other belongings.

Mother and I got onto the train. When we got to Győr I looked out and saw the man who had come to our flat, with a group of people. I thought "He wasn't lying, he really is a people smuggler." I dashed out and said to him "We've changed our minds. How much?" The price was around £100 per head. I agreed but, in fact, he'd already been guaranteed the money by my aunt. We had time to kill so we went to have some lunch and, as we'd expected, we were approached by people wanting to know what we were doing there. I told the story of my singing engagement - I'm sure they didn't believe me.

When evening came we had been instructed to go in small groups to a side street where there was a lorry with a canvas covering. We were to go into that lorry and wait, which we did. Suddenly we heard marching. A patrol came, asking our couriers "What have you here?" I can't remember what they said,

“ A patrol came, asking our couriers "What have you here?" I can't remember what they said, but the soldiers didn't believe them. To be sure one ran the canvas through with his bayonet, which went about two inches from my ear. ”

but the soldiers didn't believe them. To be sure one ran the canvas through with his bayonet, which went about two inches from my ear. I went "Eek!" but silently of course. He pulled the bayonet back because he hadn't hit anyone, and they left.

Eventually we departed. Our lorry stopped about 10 or 15 miles from the Austrian frontier where we had to get off. It was snowing. We were given soup and bread in a little hut, all prearranged. So we tanked up and then we started walking. It wasn't easy because we had an old gentleman and a baby in the group. I don't know how they quietened the baby; they probably gave it something to make it sleep so that it wouldn't cry. The Russians were shooting flares up into the sky to try to catch people smugglers and escapees. Hungary was surrounded by a barbed wire frontier, literally an Iron Curtain. Our guides had contacts and knew there was a hole in the barbed wire at one point. Some of the money we each paid probably went to bribe the border guards.

And so we walked. I was getting tired. There was this lovely snow and I thought "Oh, it's like a nice white blanket, with millions of diamonds. I'll just have a little lie down and rest." Of course, that would have been the end of me. I felt a couple of hands pulling me up and washing my face with snow, to rouse me. They frog-marched me until I'd properly woken up. The snow was inside my coat and prickling my neck. By that time I had thrown away a lot of things from my bag because it had been heavy. I think I wore my extra clothes to save having to carry them.

I don't remember how long we were walking, but it seemed days. When they told us "This is Austria," I remember I knelt down, kissed the ground and said "Thank God we are out!" We were taken to a cowshed, which the cows had made nice and warm for us, and were given something hot to drink. Those of us who were lucky and had somewhere to go, like us, were taken to Vienna by truck. We were then immediately taken to where my aunt was waiting for us. Others had to go to Displaced Persons camps. As for the friend with whom we left Budapest, we lost touch and I never saw him again.

My father joined us a few days after we arrived in Vienna. We left Hungary on 22 December 1956 and arrived in England on 26 December.



My parents circa 1960s in the UK.



## Meeting Laszlo

WHEN WE first came to England my parents lived with my mother's younger sister and I went to live with my cousin Agnes. She and her husband Tom had a house but there wasn't a separate room for me so I slept on a little bed in the dining room. Their son Larry, who now lives in America, still remembers coming every night for the story which I'd made up for him. They were about all kinds of animals and I'm sorry now that I didn't write them down. While living there I was trying to get a job and I remember Tom saying "Go to the Labour Exchange, you're entitled to some money." I was reluctant but he told me "I pay my taxes, so you go and get your money and whatever you get I'll double."

I met my husband soon after coming to England. Laszlo had been born in Hamburg, but his parents were Hungarian. He was very kind and patient with a good sense of humour. And he was good-looking. His wife had died when their second daughter was born and he had also lost his younger brother in the war, fighting for the Allies. A friend of Agnes, who lived in the same street in Wembley Park, got us together. Her name was Susan and she knew everybody. She came round one day and said "I have to go to town. I bought a wedding present and it's not the right thing so I've got to change it. Do you want to come with me?" I had a little office job but I wasn't working that day so I thought "Why not?" We went into town and she took me to Laszlo's antiques business in Jermyn Street. It was in a very good location, quite near Buckingham Palace. People just dropped in, members of the aristocracy, even the Queen one time. Susan introduced us and then she left us; ostensibly she was rummaging around the antiques! Laszlo and I got talking and we hit it off. He told me about an amateur orchestra in which he played the violin and I told him about my singing. A couple of days later he rang me in the office; Susan had given him my phone number. I pretended I didn't know who he was, but he saw through me. Later he teased me "You pretended not to know who was phoning, but there you were, sitting and waiting for me to ring!" And so, that was it. I was 26 when we got married in West London Synagogue. Our wedding day was 22 December, the anniversary of my leaving Hungary a year earlier. Laszlo wanted the dates to correspond.



Laszlo in 1948



Pregnant and feeling very happy!

Laszlo was eleven years older than me and had two daughters. When we got married Janet was almost eight and Carole was three and a half. I moved into their home on the North Circular Road near Henlys Corner.

I was 27 when our son Andrew was born. I didn't have a nanny. I didn't want one because I had been told that an English nanny would take control and I wouldn't even have the right to touch my child! I was never without help; I had a housekeeper and a cleaner, and later I had a sort of au pair or Mother's help, but not a so-called English nanny, because Andrew was MY baby and nobody was going to tell me what to do with him. All this time I was having singing lessons and giving concerts; everything had to be fitted in while Andrew was sleeping between feeds, which made it all a bit of a rush.

When I married I couldn't cook; I'd never learnt. In Hungary I'd been working very hard at the theatre and the Academy. Laszlo had a housekeeper who was a good cook but shortly after Andrew was born she suddenly decided that she'd had enough and wanted to go back to Austria. I rang my mother "Mummy! What am I going to do?" She told me not to worry. She went shopping and took a taxi to our house and said "These things you have to learn!" She taught me four or five recipes which we pretty well lived on for a while. Eventually I did learn to cook and actually became quite good at baking. ■

“I was 27 when our son Andrew was born. I didn't have a nanny. I didn't want one because I had been told that an English nanny would take control and I wouldn't even have the right to touch my child!”



Wedding Day 22 December 1957







Baby Andrew



With Janet (left) and Carole in the early 1960s



Laszlo with Janet and Carole



Andrew as a toddler



Debut at the Royal Festival Hall in 1957

## My career in the West

WHEN I LEFT Hungary in 1956 I was still at the Academy. I had been there for three years and I should have had another year. Soon after my arrival in England I was doing office work, temping.

I needed to know if my voice would be considered any good in the West. I knew people in Hungary thought it was good, but I wondered if perhaps I should forget about a singing career here. On reflection, I probably also needed to know because my self-confidence had been undermined by my experiences at the operetta theatre and the Academy. Susan (who introduced me to Laszlo) knew somebody who ran a magazine called Musical Events. He knew of an audition, although I'd not been told it was an audition. He said "Go to this place and there this friend of mine, a conductor, will hear you sing." And so I went; Mother came with me, of course, even though I was 25. It was good that she came because at that time I needed the support.

The audition was being held in some big hall in town. The conductor was Bryan Balkwell and Peter Gellhorn was also there; he would become my chorus master in Glyndebourne. I duly sang my two pieces. I recall there was great uproar and everybody was beaming. I had had no idea this was an audition for Glyndebourne. I thought I was just going there to get an opinion about my voice and, lo and behold, I certainly got it. They were so enthusiastic. We met some of the same people in the Underground afterwards and they were smiling at us. Later I was told they'd had a fight with Equity and the Ministry of Labour. "Why do you have to have a foreigner?" "Because she's better!" Peter Gellhorn was very outspoken. So I went to Glyndebourne!

Even before Glyndebourne I had sung in the Festival Hall as a soloist with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, two Liszt songs with orchestral accompaniment and a couple of arias, one from *La Favorita* and another by Mozart. I was having singing lessons privately with a teacher who became a firm friend. She was very good and she didn't charge me because I didn't have any money. Later I would have lessons at Wigmore Hall with a number of different teachers.

When I was at Glyndebourne I went into lodgings in Lewes. My whole family came down to have a look at the place. Mother was crying "Look after my little daughter!" It was so embarrassing. But the people with whom I lodged were very nice. However, my work colleagues weren't at all friendly to me. I





*The Good Old Days.* Search 'Katinka Seiner' on YouTube for the video



Professional photo from early 1960s

remember once walking up to a group of girls to ask something (I wouldn't have approached the men) and they said: "You should wait until we talk to you!" I think I was the only Jew in the chorus.

I was in the chorus but not for every opera, three or four the first season, more the next year and I also had understudy roles. I was there just for two seasons, 1957 and 1958; I didn't want to carry on after that. The Director wrote a very nice letter saying that they hoped I'd come back and offering me parts, but I didn't want to: I wanted to stay at home.

Getting into Glyndebourne boosted my confidence and helped me regain my belief in my talent. While I was there I had an offer to go to Switzerland, to Lucerne. I didn't go largely because Mother became very anxious. "What's going to happen to us? We're going to die!" She was very scared of losing her only child and the threats of the past continued to overshadow her life.

After Glyndebourne I didn't have a long term contract elsewhere because I wanted to be at home with my family; I wanted to be a mother and a wife. I still sang all over Europe, in Israel and the USA. I sing in 17 languages and was able to take part in many international festivals.

Laszlo was very, very supportive. He utterly believed in my talent and financed all my lessons. I gave Wigmore Hall recitals. The first one was soon after we married and was organised by B'Nai Brith. It was well received and I had more engagements in England and also abroad. Throughout the rest of my professional career I continued to have a lot of ad hoc engagements, including on radio and TV. I didn't want to tie myself down. Working for opera companies was problematic. For example, English National Opera wanted me but in those days they didn't allow outside appearances while one was contracted to them, the commitment had to be exclusive and that wasn't what I wanted.

A Yiddish organisation run by Mr Klinger kept me busy. We used to meet for coffee in London where we discussed dates and programmes. He helped me with the Yiddish, because my Yiddish was more German. Somebody came up to me after one of the concerts and said "You have such a beautiful voice but your Yiddish isn't good!" I replied "I'm sorry, maybe mine is Hungarian Yiddish?" and he said "That could be, but we do Polish Yiddish here!"

I experienced a lot of sexual harassment throughout my career, including in Hungary. It was very rare that an offer of work came without strings attached. This was one very strong reason I gave up.



A press photo taken at the Grosvenor House Antiques Fair, where we were exhibiting. I remember chatting with Vivien Leigh there. 1958





Family photo taken by the *Evening Standard*, 1960s

Laszlo had some really distinguished customers, including musicians, and it was through him that I got an audition at Covent Garden with one of the world's greatest conductors. He liked my performance and started sending messages that I was "very good" and "could we meet?" I replied "No thank you," and of course I never got a contract. I asked if I could meet him again at the theatre so that I could get some feedback, to which he replied "You are happily married and I could only give you small parts. It's not worth your while to get tied down." I just thought to myself: "You b\*\*\*\*\*d!"

I shall never forget my TV appearance on *The Good Old Days*. I received a 'proposition' from someone involved in the production, which I naturally rejected. I had been put up in a hotel overnight and felt so vulnerable that I called Laszlo and asked him to come and stay there with me! When I came to perform the man in question shunned me completely and refused to give me any help at all. Luckily the compere, Andrew Sachs, saw my predicament and promised to support whatever I did on stage, which he did, beautifully. The end result is still on YouTube. We also had a problem with the costume for that performance. The designer had given me pink and pale blue. I said "Please, not those colours. I need to have red and black. The costume needs to be gypsy-like." They re-made the costume but they didn't have time to stitch it so it was just pinned together when I wore it!

In complete contrast my big break into radio came without any strings attached. *Variety Playhouse*, which was broadcast by the BBC during the 1950s and early '60s, regularly featured up-and-coming performers. My agent sent me for an audition with the compere and conductor, Vic Oliver. I sang an aria from *Frederica* by L  har and he seemed to be blown away by my performance, saying it was his mother's favourite and immediately offered me a performance date. The show was recorded live in front of an audience and I was terribly nervous. Laszlo took me for a walk beforehand to try to calm me down. I recall sitting in my dressing room and when the tannoy called me to the stage I felt I simply couldn't go through with it. I managed to walk to the wings and was on the point of running away when the very distinguished bassoonist Archie Camden said "It's your turn, lassie..." and pushed me on. I literally almost fell on to the stage! But I needn't have worried because the audience were very appreciative and burst into applause. I recall Vic Oliver telling me I looked nice and asking how it was I hadn't broadcast before. I answered "Nobody asked me!" which raised a ripple of laughter all round. A few weeks later I appeared on the show again and then the BBC put me on their books as a regular performer. I still feel grateful to Vic Oliver who gave me my big break but asked nothing in return.



I had an ongoing problem in accepting engagements which involved periods away from home, especially overseas. My experiences in Hungary, particularly under the Nazis but also under the Communists, had left me with a lingering fear. I no longer felt confident I would be safe.

I auditioned for the Arts Council and received a very complimentary letter afterwards, but when they wanted me to start working I couldn't bring myself to go. I didn't want to travel to far away countries on my own. There were other similar opportunities, for example, a wonderful offer to go into contract in Australia, another to join the opera in Israel. I had offers to go to Germany and Switzerland, all over. I felt I was shooting myself in the foot. I had the necessary talent but I didn't have the inner strength to cope with such a lot of stress and I didn't want to be alone. Lazlo couldn't have come all the time; he had the business to run, and the children were still small then.

Hitler, and to a lesser extent the Communists too, did a good job in my case because I was crippled inside. My granddaughter travelled the world on her own. She and her generation seem to have no fear, thank God; they don't know what it is like to be persecuted and told one is less than human.

The time came when I decided I'd had enough of professional singing. I was probably in my 50s, I don't remember exactly but not very old. I just didn't want the hassle any more. People were still ringing me and I kept saying "No, I'm busy." Then something really nice happened; somebody in the synagogue heard me singing along with the congregation and asked me afterwards to do her a favour. Her mother was in a Jewish care home and she was organising concerts. Would I go and sing for them? Her mother would be so happy. So that started a new venture. Laszlo with his violin and I were volunteers and we paid a pianist to accompany us. Together we performed hundreds of concerts in homes, friendship clubs, for AJEX, and for AJR of course. For AJR and one or two other organisations we performed every month and it really became quite demanding because I was teaching as well. I stopped when Lazlo died. When he was in hospital I still did one or two concerts just with the pianist because I didn't want to let people down but after that I had to say "Sorry..." I'm still teaching though. I enjoy it, although nowadays I often find it tiring.

My career was wave-like; it peaked when I was young and growing up, then dipped into a big trough during the Communist period in Budapest, then built and climbed upwards in England. But I feel it never reached the same heights as the earliest years, when an international career was consistently and

confidently predicted for me. I was never able to fulfil my potential and in effect was robbed of the career I should have had. I used to feel bitter, but no longer.

I was also wary of men who would abuse their power to try to take advantage of me ...what people say about the entertainment business is true, sexual harassment is rife. I don't say that everybody who made it had to 'go through the mill' but if you caught someone's eye and then you said "no"...

But at least I can look in the mirror and not be ashamed, because whatever I achieved I achieved because of my talent, and not because of anything else. I didn't compromise myself or my principles and that makes a big difference to me and to my self-esteem. ■



From the left, Janet, me with baby Andrew, Laszlo's mother and Carole

## Family life in England

MY SON Andrew could have gone to Highgate School but at that time they still had a Jewish quota – a *numerus clausus* – and no child of mine living in a free country was going to attend a school where there were such limits. Andrew became a psychiatrist. He lives in Leeds now and phones me every day. He and his wife had three children, but the oldest, Daniel, died. It was a terrible tragedy and I light a candle for him every Friday night.

My stepdaughter Carole is a psychotherapist. She trained at the Tavistock Institute but didn't work as a practising psychotherapist for long. She used to work for Childline and now she runs another charity called Young Womens' Trust and has been awarded an OBE. She was married to Derek and they have two children whom I see whenever they're in town; Graham is a marine ecologist, currently studying for a PhD and living in Plymouth and Sophie, a doctor, is in her higher training as a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Carole and Derek are divorced. Derek is now married to Jo; they are both very supportive and help me a lot. My older stepdaughter, Janet, worked in advertising for a while. She now lives in Brighton and unfortunately has been ill for some time.

Laszlo and I spent most of our married life living in Salisbury Avenue in Finchley and then we moved to our flat in St Mary's Avenue, where we lived together for 20 years or so. We shared a lot; we liked to entertain and I helped him in the business as well. We went swimming together and skiing, always to Davos. I did my best to look after him.

Laszlo died in October 2010. He had a long spell in hospital towards the end and, of course, I went every day, so we were all overjoyed when he was allowed home. He came home by ambulance and it was lovely to be able to make him dinner. But in the meantime I had seen the doctor myself because I had noticed that one of my breasts looked different. My specialist appointment was the day after Lászlo left hospital, on what turned out to be his one full day at home. Derek had come to "baby-sit". When I came home I gave Derek the thumbs down and he went white. I had cancer. I never told Lászlo and the following day he had to go back to hospital because he'd had a fall. He died a few days later. My diagnosis was on the Thursday, he went back to hospital on Friday and he died the following Tuesday.

I so wanted Lászlo to live. My ideal scenario was that we would go together, but it wasn't to be. We were married for 53 years and I still miss him dreadfully.

I had treatment for the breast cancer for a couple of years. I had radiotherapy and then had a lumpectomy and eventually a mastectomy had to be done. So far I've been lucky and the breast cancer hasn't returned.

Laszlo and I were not very observant Jews, we didn't keep much. We always talked about it but somehow never did as much as we'd planned. We joined Alyth Synagogue soon after we got married. I was asked to sing in the synagogue choir for the High Holy Days, one of a quartet of four professional soloists. We didn't go to synagogue regularly; we couldn't because of my professional engagements and Lászlo's business commitments, but Andrew had his *Bar Mitzvah* there, which was very nice.

I started attending synagogue regularly when Lászlo was ill. I made a vow when he had a first heart operation (he had a second, similar operation ten or so years later). "Please, dear God, keep him alive and I shall go to *shul* every week." Sometimes Lászlo would ask "Why do you have to go to *shul*?" and I would say: "Because I have to!" I'm a person who keeps her word. Doing so was no hardship. I joined the regular *Shabbat* choir, but I seem to have bowed out of that now. I also got involved with the Alyth group which supported the Jewish community in Kerch in Ukraine. I also helped on the *Kiddush* preparation rota, with the special Friday evening *Shalom* suppers, flower-arranging and as a volunteer receptionist. I carried on going to synagogue after Lászlo died but nowadays I find it very difficult to get there for services. Occasionally I manage it; the last time was on Lászlo's *yahrzeit*. I keep on thinking I must go, I want to go, but there is always a reason not to go. So I do my praying at home and I'm 'in constant touch' with Lászlo and my family. We often have chats. As Andrew says, as long as I don't hear them answering it's OK!

Mother's religious beliefs changed after the war; she turned against God completely. She said "They killed my best people. God doesn't exist. Finished!" But Father's belief and practice didn't change. He used to go to *shul* in Hungary occasionally and he did here too. He observed *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* but Mother didn't want to know. I can't remember whether she continued to light *Shabbat* candles, she might have done it for Dad. ■





Andrew, his wife Amanda and their sons Benjamin and Daniel, taken before Rachael was born. Daniel on the right sadly died



My grandchildren, Benjamin and Rachael



With my first grandchild Sophie





My granddaughter Sophie



Graham's graduation



Completing the new scroll at Alyth with Laszlo

## Epilogue

I FEEL really blessed to be in England.

When I came here I felt human for the first time. Under the Nazis I was “a dirty Jew” and under the Communists I was “a useless enemy of the State,” all because I had been born Jewish and into a rich family. After 61 years in England, I still feel gratitude that I have been allowed to blossom and become a full human being.

I shall never forget when my cousin Agnes took me to the cinema here for the first time. In those days the National Anthem was played at the end of the show and everyone stood up. I remember crying as I belted it out because I was so moved. I have a great admiration for the Queen, almost a kind of love and also appreciation for our various Governments, even though they do things one feels are not quite right. I know the Queen is above it all and doesn't make the laws, but as Head of State, for me she is the fountainhead.

In my opinion this is still the best country in which to live. We have freedom of speech. If one disagrees with the way things are being run one can write to *The Times*, or stand in Hyde Park and tell people. I remember my parents telling me when I was a child that the best thing one could possibly have was a British passport - and I have one.

The synagogue also helped me to grow, through being able both to pray as a Jew and to belong to my Jewish community openly and freely. I experienced nothing like this in Hungary. To the Nazis Jews were less than human and under the Communists religion was non-existent for everybody, not just Jews. For Communists, Stalin was God.

I used to have horrible, recurring dreams until a few years ago of Panzer Divisions coming, escaping and running. I was of course reliving my own experiences, but some dreams, when my imagination took over, were worse. Thankfully, I no longer have them.

I also developed artistically here because I felt free and not bound by the ‘party line’. No longer was I being systematically undermined by negative messages and I felt valued and supported. Only my

lingering insecurity prevented me from taking up wonderful contracts in different parts of the world: I didn't want to leave my family.

I feel sad that I don't have any longstanding or childhood friends here. I used to have two or three very good friends in England, people I met after I came here. Sadly, all are dead now. One was my first singing teacher. She and her partner were wonderful, wonderful people. Laszlo and I often went to their home, including on our wedding anniversary. We were also there when I was pregnant and my waters broke. We dashed home because I thought I was going to lose the baby. I was very naïve!

I used to say I didn't like people and I only felt alive and really happy when I was on the stage, safe from real people and afterwards, when I could retreat to my dressing room. But now I like people; I feel happier and far more confident. This change wouldn't have happened in Hungary, not even now, because of the style of the current regime and the antisemitism. We know there is antisemitism everywhere, but I think it's appalling that in some countries it's still allowed to be openly expressed.

It's not been entirely rosy here. I've also experienced some hostility in this country because I am a foreigner and a Jew. It's all been covert but I remember one instance very clearly, after I'd been here quite a few years and was working for the Conservatives, around the 1980s. I was out canvassing with a woman and I made a critical remark of some sort and she just turned round to me and said “You don't have the right to criticize. You're a foreigner!” So I said “I also pay my taxes, you know!” I thought her remark was a bit much; she didn't say Jew but I heard other people talking, saying “Ah, she's a Jew!”

I still believe antisemitism originates with the clergy and what they teach people. I once had a Hungarian girl working for me as a cleaner. We were talking one day and she suddenly said “But you killed our Christ!” I gave her two weeks' pay and told her to leave. I don't look Jewish so I rarely get antisemitic remarks directed against me, but if anyone makes such remarks in my presence I jump on them, which I wouldn't have dared to do decades ago. Back then I was afraid and I was ashamed of being a Jew. I'm now proud and happy to be identified as Jewish.

My life experience makes me appreciate the essentials, and I'm happy to be able to thank God in freedom every day for having food, and to be able to say a *Beracha* for my bread. ■





Our Golden Wedding anniversary celebration at Carole's



With Laszlo in 2009, not long before he died





Three generations- Laszlo with Carole and Sophie



## 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.