



My Story

Mary Green



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Mary Green



These are Mary'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

Mary Green was visited by AJR volunteer Monique Rubens to share her story.

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It was just after I was born that the war in Europe came to Romania and everything changed. Our whole world turned upside down. I think it must have been very hard for my parents to accept what was going on. Some of the family went into hiding straight away. Even then, my mother tried to cling on to her experience of Czernowitz. "This is Czernowitz," she would say, "it will never happen here."

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Part 1

My Story

The necklace which my mother is wearing was given to her by my grandmother, and now I am proud to wear it, as I am in the photograph on the cover of this book



Happy times in Czernowitz

MY NAME IS MARY GREEN. I was born Maricha Wanderman. My name changed to Maria, I think when we were in Prague as Maricha was a German name and they didn't like Germans in Prague, and then, finally, Mary when we went to the United States. Like my maiden name, I wandered around early on in my life. Being an immigrant during that time, my first name changed to fit each new country I lived in. When I got married in 1961 I became Mary Haber. Now, I am Mary Green.

I was born in Czernowitz in 1940. At that time Czernowitz was part of Romania, but when my grandmother was born it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Czernowitz later became part of the USSR in 1945 and part of Ukraine in 1989. The same city has belonged to different countries over the last century. So, even though they were born in the same place, the different generations of my family had different nationalities.

My mother always said that there was no place like Czernowitz. My parents said that they had a very good life there. We were part of a large but close-knit middle-class family and things were going well for us before the war started. Czernowitz was a beautiful city, full of bookshops and cafes. There were hills in Czernowitz, lovely scenery, and my parents would go hiking in the woods – my mother loved being outdoors. She was also a runner on a long-distance team.

Before the war, there were a lot of Jewish people in Czernowitz. My father always used to say that there were more Jewish people than non-Jewish people, and that they all got on very well together. My parents got married in 1938 in the synagogue that used to stand in Czernowitz.

My father was quite well off, different from my mother's family. He told me that my mother's parents were always playing cards. They were sort of homebodies! His family was different, more formal. My mother said that they didn't speak much during meals, whereas her family were always laughing and joking.

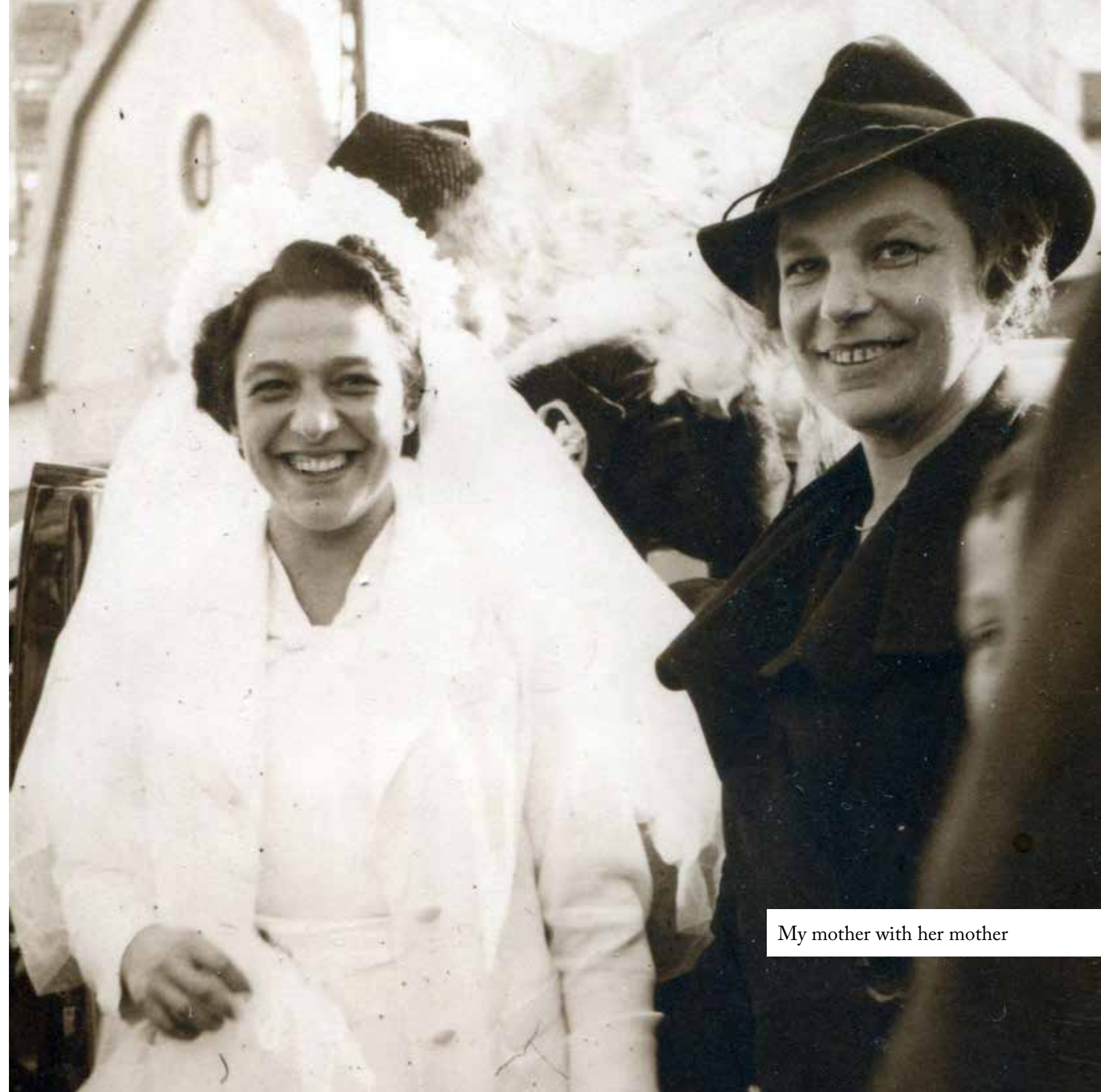
My father was living in Bern, Switzerland, during the 1930s. He completed a PhD in Economics in Bern and planned to stay in Switzerland, but his mother became ill. He said he came back to Czernowitz because his mother sort of called him. He remembered being on the balcony and hearing

My parents' wedding





My father with his grandfather, 1910



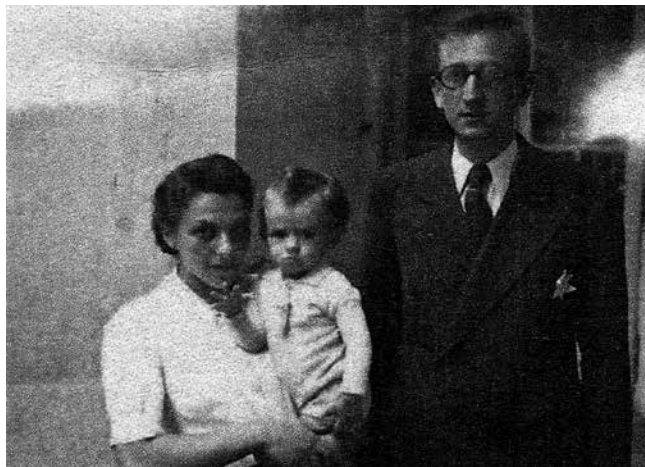
My mother with her mother

her voice. He packed his bags and went home, but his mother had died. That was before the Germans took over.

It was at that time that my father met my mother and he stayed with her in Czernowitz. They had been married for about two years when I was born – they hadn't known each other for very long at all. My parents made their life in Czernowitz but my father always had a longing for Switzerland. Even when we moved to America, much later on, he still thought about Switzerland.

Although my father's PhD was in Economics, he was a lawyer when the family was in Czernowitz. He was already practising law before I was born. My mother's father was an accountant and my father's father had a successful lumber business. My mother also went to university. She studied Languages and History of Art at the university in Bucharest. She was very good at languages and could speak at least five.

I was born in 1940 and everything was all right at that time. Even though Hitler had gained power and was growing in popularity, my mother always felt that the family would be safe in Czernowitz. My father had a sister, Selma, who he liked very much. She was with me when I was born. My mother said that we came home by horse and carriage and Selma shouted, "It's a girl!" My father rushed out to meet us. ■



With my parents

The war comes and Russians occupy our town

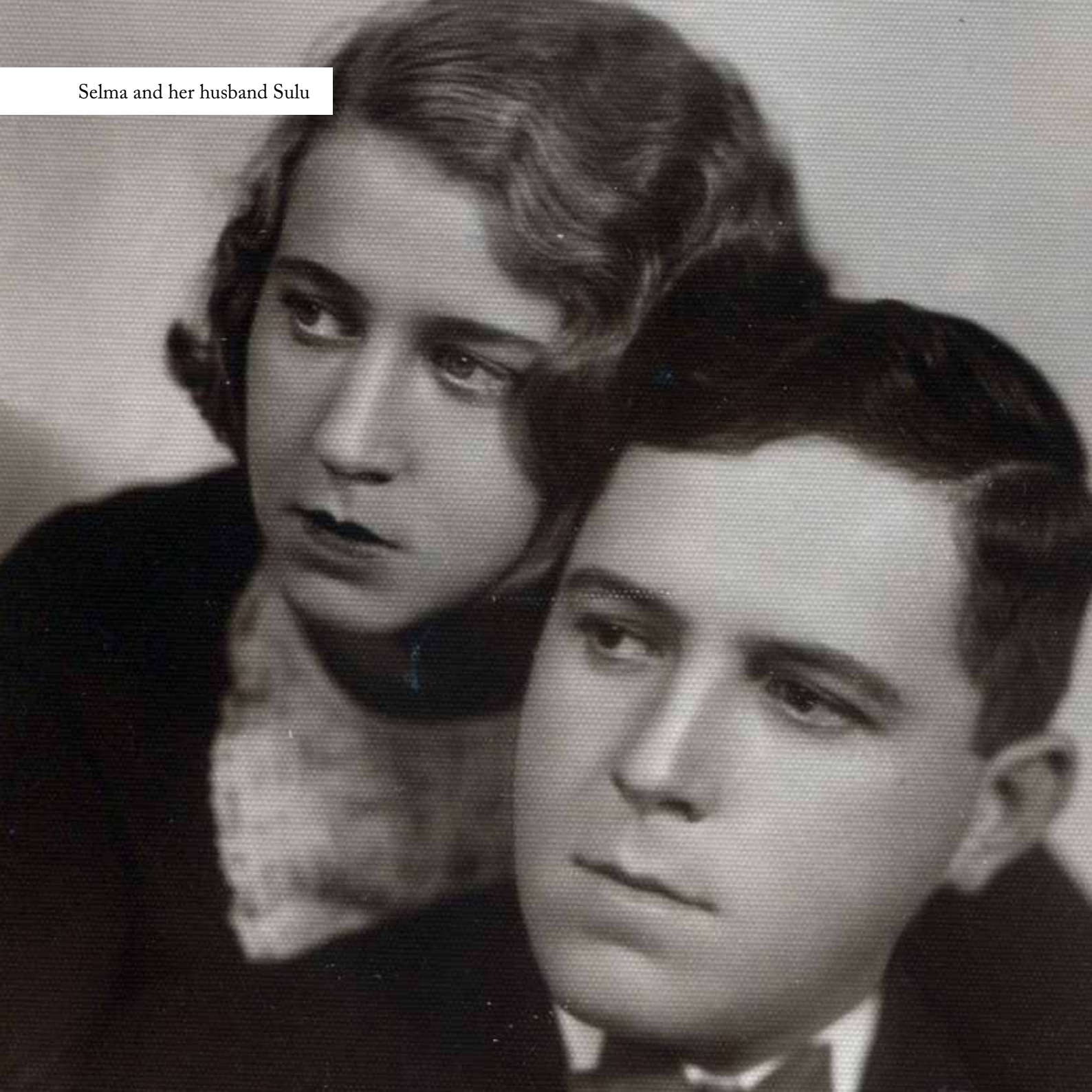
IT WAS JUST AFTER I WAS BORN that the war in Europe came to Romania and everything changed. Our whole world turned upside down. I think it must have been very hard for my parents to accept what was going on. Some of the family went into hiding straight away. Even then, my mother tried to cling on to her experience of Czernowitz. "This is Czernowitz," she would say, "it will never happen here."

I can remember certain things about our life in Czernowitz, but not much. I can't recall the neighbourhood where I grew up - I was too young. I don't have memories of only being with my parents; I was with my mother's family quite a lot, but I don't remember my father's family.

My mother had two brothers, Lulu and Guido. The older one, Guido, went to medical school in Prague and he met his fiancée there. His fiancée, Haide, came to Czernowitz to get married and then the war started and she had to stay. Her whole family was killed in Prague. My mother's younger brother, Lulu, wasn't married at that time.

After the Hitler-Stalin Non-Aggression pact in August 1939, the Russians occupied Czernowitz. They were there until 1941. The Russians took the people that had money, the bourgeoisie, and exiled them to Siberia. Luckily, my father wasn't one of them. Selma, my father's sister, lived nearby with her husband Sulu, who was a businessman. They, and also my grandfather, were amongst the people deported to Siberia by the communists in 1941. Selma died there. My father would always cry when he talked about her. His father was killed there too. Sulu survived the war. The reason Sulu survived was because when he was caught by the Russians he told them he was a doctor. My mother told me that he was fascinated by medicine and read medical textbooks. Because he had said he was a doctor, Sulu was sent to a different part of Siberia where he was able to watch the other doctors and "learn on the job." I saw Sulu later in Montreal - I went there on my honeymoon and we met up with him and his new wife.

Selma and her husband Sulu



Guido and Haide, 15 March 1939

My father said that the Russians wanted to kill the bourgeoisie and then the Germans wanted to get rid of the Jews. Hitler reneged on his pact with Stalin and made an agreement with Antonescu, the Romanian Prime Minister.

Jews were shot in the streets. My mother's grandparents who had a shop in Czernowitz were amongst those who were shot. A labour camp was set up with the sign "Arbeit Macht Frei" outside. The Germans told the Jewish men that if they worked in the labour camp, their families would be safe. Of course, that wasn't true. Soon after the war started, German soldiers knocked on our door. My mother tried to explain that my father was working in the labour camp, but they still tried to take us away. My mother screamed and our neighbour, a civil servant who wasn't Jewish, came to our rescue. For the moment we were safe. My mother was always grateful to that man, but from that point on she knew that we would have to hide. ■

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Me with my mother (centre) and Selma

Hiding from the Germans

MEANWHILE, my father realised that working in the labour camp offered no safety or protection. He convinced some of the men there that they needed to escape. I'm not sure of the details, but I know that some of them did escape and go into hiding. As for my family, we went to different places each night – sometimes we were outside in the woods and sometimes we found places to hide in the ghetto.

One thing that I remember from that time – or it may be because my mother told me about it afterwards – was my mother shouting very loudly. I remember sitting on top of a sort of box and my mother saying that the Germans were coming. I was on top of the box and my father was hiding inside it. My mother told me afterwards that she used to say we were playing hide-and-seek with the German soldiers. The Germans were very precise about their plans and we knew ahead of time that they were going to search that day, so she would pretend to me that it was a game. My mother's cousin, Rita, had a child and the trauma of hiding left her deaf and speechless. My mother always worried that the same thing would happen to me.

In more recent times I remember my mother telling me about a boat called The Struma, which was sailing from Romania to Israel. It must have been just before we were taken to Transnistria. My parents had paid with my mother's ring and things like that to go to Israel, but the boat never picked us up. It took some people, but not us. Unfortunately, The Struma sank. So, it was lucky we didn't get on the boat, but it must have looked like a chance to escape at the time. My father wanted us to leave Romania. He loved Switzerland and wanted us to go there, but my mother's family was in Romania and, like most people, she thought it wouldn't get that bad. After that, it was too late to escape. ■

In the camp - Transnistria

EARLY ON, THE MAJORITY of the Jewish people were made to live in the ghetto and then some of them were deported to Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen. Later, most of the Jews from Czernowitz, including our family, were rounded up and deported to Transnistria, the Romanian and German-run concentration camp.

I know now that Transnistria was horrible, but, you know, I don't remember too much about being there. I was only one-year-old when we were sent there, and four when we were liberated. I don't know how we survived, but we did.

I don't know how we were transported to the camp but I know that my mother's family was with us. I think my parents tried to hide things from me – as far as they could – and they were successful. Sometimes they talked in different languages, so I couldn't understand what they were talking about. They would speak in French and Romanian, of course, and German was their native language. They were really very good at that.

Even though I was very young at the time, only two or three-years-old, I can remember being stuck in the snow in a field. There was a lot of snow in Romania and I remember being stuck; I couldn't get out. My father had to come and help me. That must have been at the camp at Transnistria. I remember that there was a sort of gate on top and a tall tower with wires. I asked my grandmother what was the reason for the wires. Whatever she said, it calmed me down and I forgot about it.

I don't have many memories about Transnistria, but I remember being there. I had to share a bed with my grandparents, but I accepted that. I just did. My grandfather would say, "Go to bed now so it's nice and warm when we come in." I know that there was a gate around the camp so we couldn't get out.

I found out more about Transnistria later on. I came across it in a report that my mother wrote for her book club, but apart from the dates that we were there, she gave no details about life in the camp. I didn't ask my parents about it afterwards, I just went along with things. I wish I had asked them, especially as I'm the only child – because of the war, I'm the only child. I don't have anyone else to ask really. I wish there was somebody who could help me remember. I don't remember many things about the war... I suppose that's good: I know it was hard.

However, I found something on the computer, a film called ‘Transnistria, the Hell’. It was like Auschwitz; very, very bad, and we were there for almost four years until the Russians rescued us. It wasn’t an extermination camp, but people were starved, shot at random, and had to do forced labour. 60,000 people died in Transnistria. I was so shocked when I saw that film. Many of the survivors had not shared their experiences until the late 1990s. ■



With Lulu, 28 May 1946

My family disperses

AFTER THE WAR my remaining family dispersed. People went all over the place, some as far as South America. I’ve got some distant relatives in Israel as well. Really, people just wanted to escape. They wanted to leave a homeland that was nothing like home.

As for my parents and myself, we first went to Bucharest, the capital of Romania. My mother’s two brothers also survived Transnistria along with my aunt, Guido’s wife, who was Czechoslovakian. They went to Prague with my grandparents, who also survived, and we followed them. It must have been 1947 or 1948.

We went by horse and carriage – there were no cars! The transport was not good and I remember that I threw up on the journey. It was tough going from place to place like that. The family lived altogether in Prague. I remember playing ball with my grandfather and speaking to him in German. We were on the street and he said, “Don’t speak German!” I remember that. Because of the war we weren’t meant to. We spoke German in the house, though. ■



Romanian stateless card

We move to Vienna...

MY GRANDFATHER DIED in Prague, but my grandmother lived until she was 86. At that time, the communists were in Prague. We were always having to watch what we said, and other things like that. We had to get out.

My parents and I were the first to leave. We went to Vienna – probably by train – and we lived in a small apartment with one room. I made friends in Vienna, but I know that the Austrians were not fond of the Jews. We weren't citizens and didn't have passports, only identity cards.

I went to school for the first time in Vienna, although my parents had taught me to read and write. I was about eight or nine. The teacher there was really very good to me. She really inspired me and it's because of her that I became a teacher. I liked school. I don't remember too much about it, but I do have a scrapbook from that time. It's nice to have these little memories.

Although I was going to school in Vienna, my father wanted to leave Europe. I guess it was because he had lost his whole family to the war and just wanted to live a new life. It was for my sake, I suppose. My father wasn't a businessman and he couldn't make a living in Europe. That must have been the reason they left – because he wasn't happy not being able to make a living. Otherwise, why should they have gone? My mother was very close to her brothers and had friends in Europe.

We could have gone to South America, Israel or the USA. My parents thought it would be best to go to America. Just before we left, my mother caught TB and had to go and rest in a home. I remember being with my father for a month or two. I was very close to him. ■



The Prater in Vienna





My Austrian ID card

...and then to America

AT THAT TIME IT WASN'T EASY to immigrate to the United States. There was a quota and only a certain number of people could get in, but they were accepting college graduates and both of my parents had degrees. My mother had never collected her diploma because she had always assumed she would be a housewife and mother. Miraculously, her cousin was working at the university in Bucharest and found her diploma in a filing cabinet! She sent it to my mother and my parents' two degrees allowed us to go to America.

I was ten when the family moved to America. The Jewish Welfare Service offered us a place to travel as displaced persons and they were very good to us. They found us a small flat when we arrived and they went out of their way to help us.

We left Europe from Hamburg, Germany. It was a terrible journey. We went on a very big boat. It was horrible – nothing like an ocean liner – and the men were separated from the women. It was cramped, with a lot of people in one area. My father got very sea-sick. He thought he was going to die. I remember him saying “Behalt mich Liebt,” which means “always love me.”

The journey took about 16 days and I was pleased to get over the ocean. I don't remember what we did on the boat. I don't know what we ate either. I was quite thin at the time and my mother was always telling me to gain more weight, but I don't remember being hungry. I was always very well protected by my parents. I was very lucky to have them there.

I did make some friends on the boat and became close with a girl called Greta who ended up in Pennsylvania. When we reached America, we went to Ellis Island. They asked us where we wanted to go to live and my father said that he didn't know. We didn't have any relatives in America, so they suggested that we go to Syracuse, New York. I was excited. I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty – I couldn't believe it!



The boat on which we travelled from Hamburg to USA, 21 Jan 1951

We took some photographs with us to America. My mother had a shoebox full of pictures and there were lots of her and her friends. I took some diaries with me – I used to write them and I kept them all – but I didn’t take much else. I kept writing in my diaries and I think it had something to do with reading The Diary of Anne Frank. It inspired me to keep writing. ■

RESIDENT ALIEN'S BORDER
CROSSING IDENTIFICATION CARD

A. R. No. 7 951 534

NAME Maria Wandermann

ADDRESS 433 Oakwood Ave.,

AT TIME OF ISSUE Syracuse, New York

DATE OF BIRTH May 28, 1940

PLACE OF BIRTH Cernaui, Rumania


SEX F NATIONALITY Rumania

HEIGHT: FT. 4 IN. 2 WEIGHT 78 LBS.

COMP. Med. HAIR Dk. Nr. EYES Brown

VISIBLE MARKS OR PECULIARITIES
None

Maria Wandermann



No. 667365

Maria Wandermann

SIGNATURE OF HOLDER

0704-

CARD VALID TO Feb. 29, 1952

REVALIDATED TO
AT
INSPECTOR

REVALIDATED TO
AT
INSPECTOR

REVALIDATED TO
AT
INSPECTOR

REVALIDATED TO
AT
INSPECTOR

REVALIDATED TO
AT
INSPECTOR

No. 667365

US Resident Alien Border Crossing ID Card

Life in Syracuse

I REMEMBER MY FIRST IMPRESSION of the flat we were given in Syracuse. I wouldn't say it was bad. I've got a newspaper cutting about my parents and myself arriving in the town. I always kept that, but I don't remember them coming to the flat to take the picture. It must have been in 1951.

It was a one-bedroom flat and I slept on the couch in the living room. There was a small kitchen and that was it. We always rented a flat, we never had a house, but I was quite happy in Syracuse. When you're young, you don't even realise it if times are hard – not in the same way as grown-ups do.

I went to school when we got to Syracuse. It was an ordinary elementary school and the people there were all nice. Luckily, I made some friends. I was the only newcomer – and there weren't any other refugees at the school – but everyone made me feel welcome. I was put behind when I first started because I didn't speak the language, but once I had learnt English I was put in the right grade. When you're young, you learn very quickly and I didn't find it hard to pick up English. In fact, you can see from my diary: it's all in German and then, within about two months of being in America, it switches to English. I didn't even know that I had changed languages! I really enjoyed school. I particularly liked Math and I liked reading. My father just wanted me to do well so I could go to college and get a degree. He always wanted me to do that, and I always thought life would get better.

Moving to America was much harder for my parents than it was for me. They could read English but they couldn't speak it. They learnt by just being there and I remember helping them too. Of course, I felt how hard things were for my parents. If your parents aren't that happy, you feel it, don't you? My father worked in a candle factory in Syracuse. I know that he didn't enjoy his job, but I think my parents were just relieved to be out of Europe. My mother worked in shops and offices. There were other Jewish refugees in Syracuse, people from Germany and Poland, and my parents spent time with them. They only mixed with the other refugees, really. I suppose my parents could talk to them about their experiences, which must have helped. I'm sure they did talk to other refugees about what had happened during the war – you can't just hide yourself away – but I wasn't part of the conversation.

We celebrated the Jewish holidays and usually spent them with other refugees. We didn't go on vacation – we couldn't afford to do that – but we always believed that things would get better. Later, we had short, local holidays in New York State. We went to Alexandra Bay, the lake district in Syracuse.

While my father was working in the candle factory, he also took some night courses. He had a very nice professor, Dr Falke, who said to him, "You've got a PhD, you really shouldn't be working in a candle factory." He encouraged my father to try to get a college job. My father never thought that he could be a teacher in America, but Dr Falke helped him a lot and, eventually, after we had been in America about ten years, he was offered a job at East Carolina University (ECU). He couldn't teach Economics, but they hired him to teach German. I'm not sure that he liked teaching German – speaking it every day – but it was the best thing to do at the time. This was around 1960 and it changed everything for my parents. By that time I was away studying at Buffalo university in New York State. ■



My parents move to North Carolina

MY FATHER'S COLLEGE, part of East Carolina University (ECU) was in Greenville, North Carolina, and my parents went there with nothing really. They rented a flat and, eventually, they bought a house. They quite enjoyed their later years in North Carolina. ECU was a small community college, but it's much bigger now. The person who hired him, Dr. Fleming, told my father that he was the first Jew he had ever met. After a while, once they had become good friends, he said to my father, "If I had known you were Jewish, I might not have taken you on." But he realised that my parents were just regular people.

When they first went to North Carolina, there was only one Jewish family – they owned the big store – but the community has grown a lot since then. ECU has a medical school now, which attracts students from all over. It has brought a lot more Jewish people to the area and there's a small synagogue now. But when my parents first moved, there were barely any Jewish people, which was strange for them.

But the thing is, in North Carolina, people used to say, "As long as you practise something, as long as you believe something, believe in God..." From their point of view, I think it was better to have any faith than no faith at all. Still, at that time, in the 1960s, there were all sorts of racial tensions in the southern states. I remember going to visit my parents in Greenville and seeing that there were different restrooms, restaurants, schools, hospitals – even different drinking fountains – for black people and white people. Coming from Syracuse, in the north, I found that shocking.

People accepted my parents, and they were quite happy. My mother soon got a job teaching as well. She taught French, which she enjoyed. My mother never had a job until after the war. She worked in a meat market and as a secretary in Syracuse and then at ECU in North Carolina.

My father did very well at ECU and became Head of Department. After all of it, after all the horrible things that they had lived through – and for years we didn't have any money or anything – things were all right for my parents. Even though there were no other refugees in North Carolina, there were people there who respected them, and my parents felt at ease – as much as could be expected. It was a good life for them, and certainly better than working in a candle factory. ■

My mother's family

THE ONLY RELATIVES that we had left were my mother's family who had gone to Prague and then to Dusseldorf in Germany. It was hard for them to get out of Prague because the Soviets didn't want anyone to leave, so they all left separately. Guido, my uncle, left before his wife, Haide. He was a doctor, a dermatologist, and he left first to go to a medical conference in Vienna. Haide followed him and then my grandmother went to meet them in Dusseldorf. It must have been about 1954 that they settled in Germany. Guido and Haide weren't able to have a child during the war. They had Misha later and he also became a dermatologist.

Lulu, my mother's younger brother, was a businessman in Dusseldorf. He had also been with us in Prague and then moved to Vienna where he married his wife, Beena. They travelled to South America, then went to Paris before settling in Germany.

It was quite hard for us to go back to Europe – it was very expensive – but I did go one time when I was about 13. Lulu paid for me and my mother to visit him. He was always very good to us. At that time, Lulu and Beena lived in Paris, so we went there and it was a very nice holiday. We went to Paris first, where they had a lovely flat, and then Lulu took us to Nice. Lulu and Beena had a very luxurious lifestyle. There was a woman who cleaned the house and did the dishes, and things like that. It was a wonderful place; I had never seen luxury like that before. We stayed with Lulu and Beena for two or three weeks – it must have been during the summer holidays. It was a great trip, very different from the trip to America. The boat was lovely. It really was a very different experience.

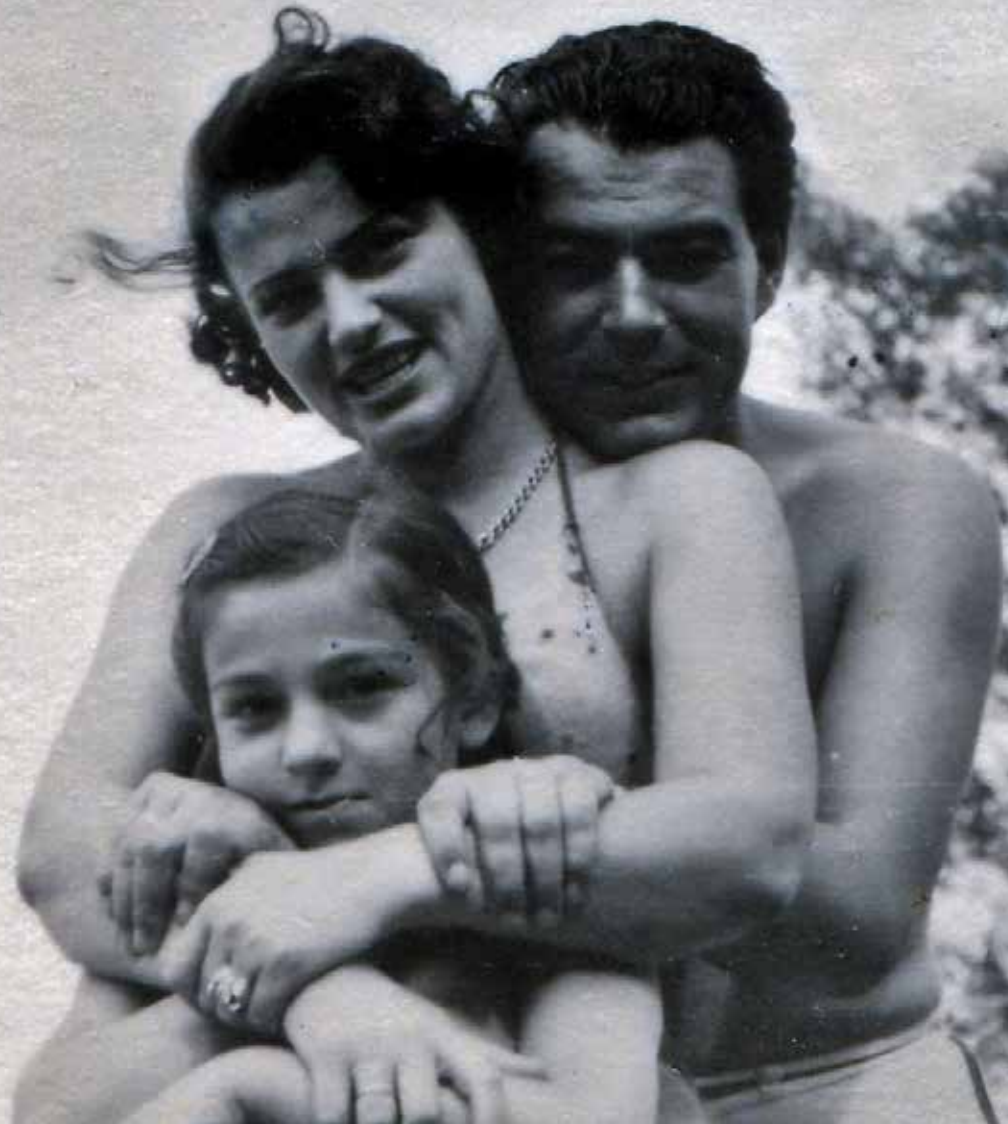
My mother was a different person when she was with her own mother and her brothers in Europe. She was completely relaxed with them – her whole complexion changed. I think her personality changed after the war and she became more subdued. It was hard for her in America. She missed her family and she missed Romania. She worked very hard and it was a different life. My mother survived the war but she wasn't the same. I think she would have preferred to stay in Europe with her brothers. My father was also a different person after the war. He never wanted to live in Europe again.

My parents never went back to Romania. My mother especially had good memories of being there, but she never wanted to go back. My father rarely talked about the past but I remember him saying: "You



My mother's family with
my parents centre back
row, my grandparents
and great-grandparents
middle row. 1938

With Loulou and Beena in Vienna,
August 1949



My maternal grandparents' wedding



My maternal grandparents in Prague, 1950

can't go back to Czernowitz. It doesn't exist anymore." The Czernowitz my parents knew and loved had changed – and so had they.

Unfortunately, my parents didn't pass on many memories to me. I think that they were most concerned about making a new life for us. Maybe I was too young, maybe I just wasn't – I'm sorry to say it – but maybe I just wasn't interested at that time. My father never wanted to talk about what had happened during the war. He would get very emotional and didn't want to talk. He really didn't. My mother barely spoke about it either. Maybe they talked about the past together, but they didn't talk to me about it. It was very much, "That's then and now's now." We were so involved with our new life in America. I wish that I could ask them more questions but it's too late to do that now. My mother died years ago, aged 96, and my father before her. It's a terrible shame.

You see, I was born in 1940, when the war had just started. I knew it was terrible for my parents – just to leave everything behind and go to a new country with nothing – and they were having a hard time in America too. We tried to embrace America, to be like Americans. I especially wanted to be 'an American'. I just wasn't that worried about being a refugee. It was always in the background, but I tried to be like everybody else. ■

“My father never wanted to talk about what had happened during the war. He would get very emotional and didn't want to talk. He really didn't. My mother barely spoke about it either.”

I meet and marry Seymour

WHEN MY PARENTS were in North Carolina, I went to Buffalo University in New York State. I started college in 1958 and was a student until 1962. I wanted to go to university; I wanted to be a teacher. Buffalo was a state university, so the fees were low and I got a scholarship. I could have gone to Syracuse University but the fees were much higher. I also wanted to live independently, away from home. It's about 300 miles from Syracuse to Buffalo. When I first started, I lived in a college dormitory and then, later, I rented a room and lived with some friends. I worked all the way through college. I was a waitress during term time and worked as a secretary during the summer holidays. I also worked in a card shop. I always worked.

I met Seymour Haber and we got married. We lived in Buffalo and for a while things were good. We had a daughter together, Sara, but, unfortunately, Seymour died of leukaemia when he was 30, which was just terrible. We had been married for five years. At that time I was a teacher – I taught secondary school Social Studies and Math, and then I taught primary school – and Seymour had just got a college job. He had almost finished his PhD in Political Science and accepted a job at the college in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania. We found a flat and we went to live there. It was on the way to Shippensburg that Seymour said he wasn't feeling well. After a couple of weeks, he wasn't at all well and we went back to Buffalo where there was a very good hospital. Sara and I stayed with Seymour's uncle in Buffalo. Seymour never came back from the hospital. ■

Seymour and I with baby Sara



Widowed, and then I meet Michael

AFTER MY HUSBAND DIED, I went back to Syracuse and I worked as a teacher. Luckily, I had someone to watch Sara. When I was in Syracuse, my grandmother, who was living in Dusseldorf with my aunt and uncle, came to visit me. She asked me if I wanted to go and visit them all in Germany, so I went to Dusseldorf with my parents and Sara that summer. While I was there, my grandmother asked me if I had ever been to Israel. Well, I hadn't, and she said, "I'll pay for your trip." My father and I went to Israel and that's where I met Michael Green, my second husband. We met in a hotel in Netanya.

Michael had lost his first wife to breast cancer and he was in Netanya with his two children, Ian and Alan, and his mother-in-law. I met Ian, who was ten, in the hotel lobby and we were talking when Michael came down the stairs with Alan and his mother-in-law. Ian introduced us and we just had a sort of chemistry. Michael asked me if I wanted to go out for coffee. We went out for coffee, but he was going back to England the following day. Before he left, Michael wrote me a note saying he would love to see me again and asking if I would visit him in London. So, I did. I went to visit him in London! Michael picked me up from the airport and asked, "Do you want to marry me?" which was crazy. Anyway, I stayed with him for about three or four days. I didn't know it at the time, but my uncle in Germany had Michael investigated!

That was in 1968. I went back to North Carolina with my parents because I was planning to leave Syracuse at that time. I had been thinking about going back to school to get a degree to do something else. Michael came to North Carolina, we got married and then we came to London. We lived in his house in Stanmore. We settled down to our new life. ■

Settling down in London

I WAS QUITE HAPPY to come to London. We could have stayed in America, but, as a pharmacist, Michael would have had to re-qualify. I was happy to be back in Europe. Even though I liked America very much – and I did like America, I went to school there, I grew up there, and I was happy there – I didn't mind staying in London. My parents came to visit us and they quite liked being back in Europe during the summer holidays. They liked it, but their homeland was now America.

You see, when I married Michael and came to London, I thought my parents would retire here. They always said they would, but they never did. By that time, they probably felt that they had moved around enough. It was too much for them to come back again, which I can understand. But I think my father would have been happier in Europe. He could have been more open about the past than he was at the university in North Carolina. Maybe he would have talked more about what had happened to the family, expressed his true feelings. He was never really able to do that, but they were settled in America.

I never met Michael's parents, but I know that they came to the UK from Poland. Michael didn't share my experience at all. He was English and he was in Singapore with the army during the war. He knew about my past, though. He recognised it and was very good about it, but we didn't really talk about it. I think it's hard to relate to something like that and, anyway, we wanted to live our lives. With everything that was going on, I wasn't thinking too much about my past. I was just trying to make a life in London.

Michael had two children from his first marriage, Ian and Alan, and I had Sara from my first marriage, and then we had Mark together. I was only 29 and we had four children! Michael worked very hard and I stayed at home to look after the children. I thought that would be all right because I liked children and I made some friends. ■



Alan, Sara, Ian and Mark

Disaster strikes

LIFE WAS GOING WELL and then, unfortunately, I had a terrible car accident. I was picking Sara up from school when a huge lorry came the other way. Because of the accident, I had a stroke and was in hospital for quite a long time. My parents came to be with me. The stroke has always affected me. I can't read and write and sometimes I can't remember things – and that's very important. It was a big blow to us all, including the children, but you have to live life. And I did manage with the children. I also wanted to find a job – I had been thinking about going back into teaching. Before the accident, I was offered a job teaching German in a secondary school and I was also working at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital up Stanmore Hill. The children in the hospital needed schooling, so I taught there for about a month. Then I had the car accident and they put me in the very same hospital for about six weeks.



When I was recovering from the stroke, I had a speech therapist called Irene Harris. She was really wonderful. She gave me a bit of hope when she said that, even though I couldn't read or write, I would be able to teach again. And I did – I taught cooking for children with special needs in Brent for about 18 years. The children were aged between seven and 18 and it was really very good. I was teaching three days a week and it gave me a bit more self-esteem. Even though I had four children at home, I felt there was something more I could do. I don't know, I just liked to work, and I did do that.

Unfortunately, as I got older, teaching became much more stressful for me. We were being asked to write things down all the time and it was very hard for me to do the written work. I had to give up teaching for my own benefit really. ■

Part 2

Piecing together the past

Piecing together the past

I KNOW THAT MY MOTHER once wrote about her experiences during the war. She was part of a book club at the university in North Carolina and she wrote an article for the group. She must have been asked to do that by the other members. I think it was probably the first time (and probably the only time) she spoke openly about what had happened. My mother showed me the article and I noticed that she had written a lot about the different ways in which people had helped us out during the war and about lucky escapes. She wrote about us being sent to Transnistria and gave the timeline of events, but she didn't talk about what happened there. She didn't write about how bad it really was.

I always kept the article and reading it again has brought back some other memories.

My children don't know too much about my past. My daughter, Sara, did find my mother's shoeboxes filled with photographs, which gave her a way to talk to my mother about the past. Together, they would rummage in the shoeboxes and my mother would tell her about the photographs and her life in Czernowitz. She talked about her experiences as a refugee to Sara, but she never talked about Transnistria.

Sara is a very liberal person, and she's interested in people's different backgrounds. My son, Mark, knows a bit about my past – more than he did before – but Alan and Ian don't know too much about what happened to me. They know I was born in Europe rather than America, but they don't know about how I moved around. They didn't ask and I never volunteered the information because I didn't know if they were interested. I think I'd like them to know more, but it's hard for me to talk about it.

This must be the first time that I've been completely open about my past. That's true. Even when I was writing in my diary when I was about 10 or 11, I never said the word 'Transnistria'. I wanted to be like everybody else and I didn't mention it. It was tough for my parents, so I didn't dwell on the past at that time. I'm just sorry I can't go back and ask them questions. It's very upsetting. I'd like to know exactly what happened during those first five years of my life. I know that I went through the war, but I don't remember much. I think that if it weren't for my stroke, I would remember more. ■

When I came to London I joined B’nai B’rith and met some other refugees. We got on quite well together and they introduced me to The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR). I was still very busy with family life at that time, but I felt at ease with these people. That brought me more into my heritage really. I talked to the other refugees about how they came to England and how difficult it was at the beginning, but we didn’t really discuss our early years that much.

Unfortunately, I’m getting older and some of these people have died, but I still have one friend who came to England from Austria. The people who came from Austria and Germany, they either left before the war started or they were on the Kindertransport. I don’t know anyone else who lived through the war. Of course, I know people who have been very badly affected, but I think I went through it in a different way.

I’ve forgotten a lot of things, but doing this project has helped me piece together my memories and make sense of the past.

When I was looking through all my old things, I found something else. I wasn’t looking for it at all and it wasn’t in a file or anything. It’s sort of like the article my mother wrote for the book club, but it’s something I did myself. I think it has to do with a talk that I gave for B’nai B’rith. I remember now that I was asked to speak about my past. There was another person who spoke as well. She talked about how she and her husband came to England from Germany, and someone else spoke about coming from Vienna. We all had different experiences. The others left before the war started, or they escaped during the war. I’m sure there are a lot more people like myself, but I don’t know anyone else who went through it. And I don’t know anybody who was born in Czernowitz, or even in Romania.

While I wrote about my experiences for that B’Nai B’rith event, I don’t think I ever showed it to my children. I don’t imagine that we talked about it much afterwards... but it’s part of my history. People should know about it. I think that, at the time, I felt that people should know about the past. Maybe I also wrote it for my children, even if I didn’t show it to them.

It’s a past life. I have a lot of photographs and I have my diaries. My son, Mark, has an accordion that I played when I was a child. It was a gift from my uncle and I took it to America. My mother said that if I wasn’t going to practise then she wasn’t going to give me lessons! I don’t think I did very much, but I kept the accordion and gave it to my son. ■

Part 3

My life today

My life today

I HAVE NEVER BEEN BACK to Romania, so I am delighted that I will have the opportunity to go to Ukraine in May 2019 with a group from B'nai B'rith. During the trip I'll be visiting my birthplace, now called Chernivitsi, for the first time in 78 years.

Some of the new technologies have made a real difference to my life. I can't read or write because of the stroke, but the advances in technology have helped me immeasurably. With the aid of my iPad, I can read a book, keep a journal, and dictate text messages to my friends and family. I have always used technology, but it's much better now and it really helps me to be independent. Right now, I'm trying to be independent. It's not easy but I'm learning all the time. ■



Some of my diaries

Family

The children have all got their own lives to lead, but you always worry about them and hope they're doing well. Ian was a hairdresser and is retired now. His wife is called Angela and they have two children, Suzy and Daniel. Suzy has two children, Eva-Rose and Lilly-Myer. Daniel just got married recently to Nicola and they now have a baby called Hollie-Jayde. So, altogether, I have three great-grandchildren.

My son Alan is a taxi driver and is married to Maxine. They have a son called Jasper.

My other son, Mark, lives in Boston where he is a psychiatrist. He is married to Danielle and they have three boys. Nathaniel and Toby are twins and their younger brother is called Oliver. My grandson, Oliver, called me from Boston not long ago because he was writing about refugees, people like me, at school. He was writing a paper and he asked me about my background, so I talked to him about it, which I was pleased to do.

My daughter, Sara, lives in Brooklyn and is a teacher. She comes to see me in London fairly regularly, usually in the summer. ■



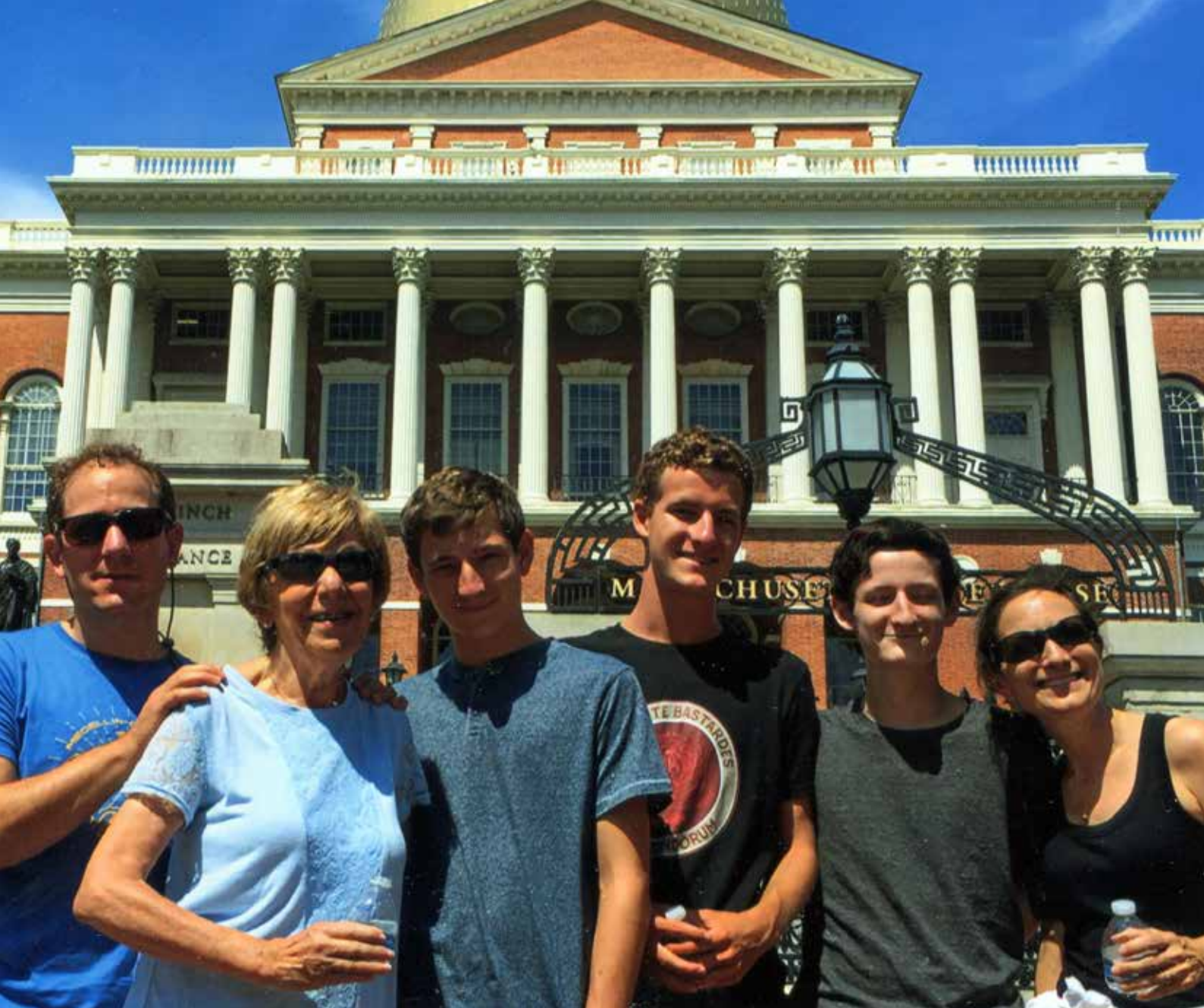
Sara



Ian and Angela



Alan and Maxine's son Jasper on his graduation



In Boston with Mark and his family

My Story Mary Green



The grandchildren at our 40th wedding anniversary

My Story Mary Green



Ian and Angela's family at their son Daniel's wedding to Nicola in 2017. My great-granddaughters Eva-Rose and Lilly-Myer in the front row

Michael and I

When I was 60, I was diagnosed with leukaemia. Of course, I was shocked because my first husband died of leukaemia. It comes in many forms and, luckily, I haven't had to take any medication so far and I'm doing all right. At 70, I was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin lymphoma and had to have treatment for that. Right now, I have my check-ups and I'm all right. Michael, my husband, was with me every step of the way when I was diagnosed with lymphoma. He was very supportive. Unfortunately, Michael died two years ago of pancreatic cancer. We were married for 49 years and I miss him an awful lot. ■



With Michael on our 40th wedding anniversary

Thanks

Many, many people have helped me over the years. My family, of course, who I value and love very much, as well as my lovely friends who I really could not do without. I also want to give special thanks to my speech therapist, Irene Harris, who helped me tremendously after my stroke. She gave me strength and helped me get a job in teaching, which I really enjoyed for 18 years.

I want to thank Debra Stevelman, who helps me at home. She's just wonderful. It was the synagogue that arranged for her to come after Michael died, and she continues to help me a great deal, especially because I can't read or write very well. When we have time I just go into my memory bank and we talk a lot. She has helped me in every single way and she knows everything about me. I want to thank her for that.

I also want to thank Monique for her help in putting this book together. We have spent a lot of time together and she helped me to go back into the past and remember what happened. I'm particularly grateful because, if you think more about the past, it helps you make a better future. ■

Afterword

I really do think that it's important for people to hear our stories now. If I could talk more, if I was more vocal, I would go into schools and talk to pupils like a friend of mine does. Some people pretend like it was nothing. They, especially, have to know what happened. It wasn't so long ago. I'm 78 now and all that went on in my lifetime. People just forget about it, or they ignore it. That shouldn't happen. It really shouldn't.

You see, unfortunately, it's going on today. Horrible things are happening today as well. I think you should always respect people – know their history and be aware that people are different. But, for all our differences, we must understand that it's one survival. We should think more about each other. What happened was terrible – it was all terrible – but, like I said, awful things are happening today. I don't know if we've learnt too much from the past. I mean, you only have to listen to the news.

I want things to be better for my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. I hope that people can learn something from my past experiences. It's important to tell people what happened, so they know... ■



With my latest great-granddaughter Hollie-Jayde

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.



It was just after I was born that the war in Europe came to Romania and everything changed. Our whole world turned upside down. I think it must have been very hard for my parents to accept what was going on. Some of the family went into hiding straight away. Even then, my mother tried to cling on to her experience of Czernowitz. “This is Czernowitz,” she would say, “it will never happen here.”