My Story

Joanna Millan, BEM JP

AJR The Association of Jewish Refugees

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

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).
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Joanna Millan, BEM JP

Sometimes my grandchildren ask me about my past. I would like them to know what happened within their family because that's part of their history and, in a way, it's their inheritance.

Contents

The early years

I WAS BORN Bela Rosenthal in Berlin in August 1942. As far as I know, I didn't have any brothers or sisters.

At the age of 50, after 20 years of searching through archives, websites, family letters, visiting the places where my family had been, as well as setting up my own website, I finally managed to piece together who my family were, what happened to them, and even obtain some photographs. In addition, I obtained family birth, marriage and death certificates. It was a voyage of discovery. I learnt my father, Siegfried Rosenthal, was the eldest of five children. During World War One he volunteered for the German army and was captured by the Russians in October 1915 on the Eastern Front. The Russians imprisoned him until the end of the war in 1918. After the war he wasn't able to get back to Germany and was sent to work on a collective farm in Russia - a *kolkhoz*. He worked as the accountant of the farm and married a Russian woman there. She fell pregnant but died in childbirth and the baby was stillborn.

My father stayed on the farm until 1939 when the Russians sent him back to Germany as an enemy alien. All he had with him were the clothes he was wearing and his travel documents. He went to his sister Paula's flat in Berlin. When she opened the door she was astonished as she had been told by the German authorities that he was missing in action and presumed dead over 20 years previously. He lived with her and her two children for two years. Whilst there he gave his nephew Issac maths lessons in return for his keep. Issac was not allowed to go to school under the Nuremberg Race Laws.

My father also had to work as a slave labourer under those laws, sweeping the streets and clearing rubbish. In 1939 Paula's husband Leo had only been able to obtain one visa to go to Argentina and was forced to leave his family behind. In Argentina he set up a business making fur coats. Two years later one of his clients, on hearing of his background, offered to take his case to the Argentine authorities and managed to get visas for Paula and the children, leaving my father on his own in Berlin. He accompanied them to the railway station and gave them a parting gift of a Spanish-Germany dictionary with a little note inside wishing his sister well and hoping to see them again. Unfortunately this did not happen.

Father in 1915

My father's brother Kurt also enlisted for the German army, albeit a year after my father did so, and he was sent to fight in France. He was imprisoned there before being sent back to Germany in 1918 and was awarded the Iron Cross. After World War One Kurt worked as an engineer and had managed to get to Melbourne in the 1920s, taking his wife Marta and their son Dieter and daughter Inga and he set up a factory making airplane parts. Another sister, Johanna, had married a non-Jew and because he refused to divorce her, as decreed by the Nuremberg Race Laws, they were both deported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. They survived the war and remained in Germany, living in poverty until their deaths.

My mother, Else (née Schallmach), was the youngest of three sisters. Her middle sister, Selma, was married to a non-Jew in Lübeck, a port city in northern Germany. He was a master glazier and they had two daughters, Ursula (born in 1920) and Gerda (born in 1922). I'm in contact with my family who still live in Germany. My mother's oldest sibling, a half-sister called Bella, emigrated to America and I only recently found, through the internet, her grandchildren, who live in New York and Arizona.

Before my mother married my father, she had been married to a man called Martin Fischer who, I believe, suffered from many illnesses. Because of his bad health, they were not able to travel and my mother felt that she could not leave without him. He passed away from natural causes after being ill for some time. She then married my father in 1941 and I was born nine months later.

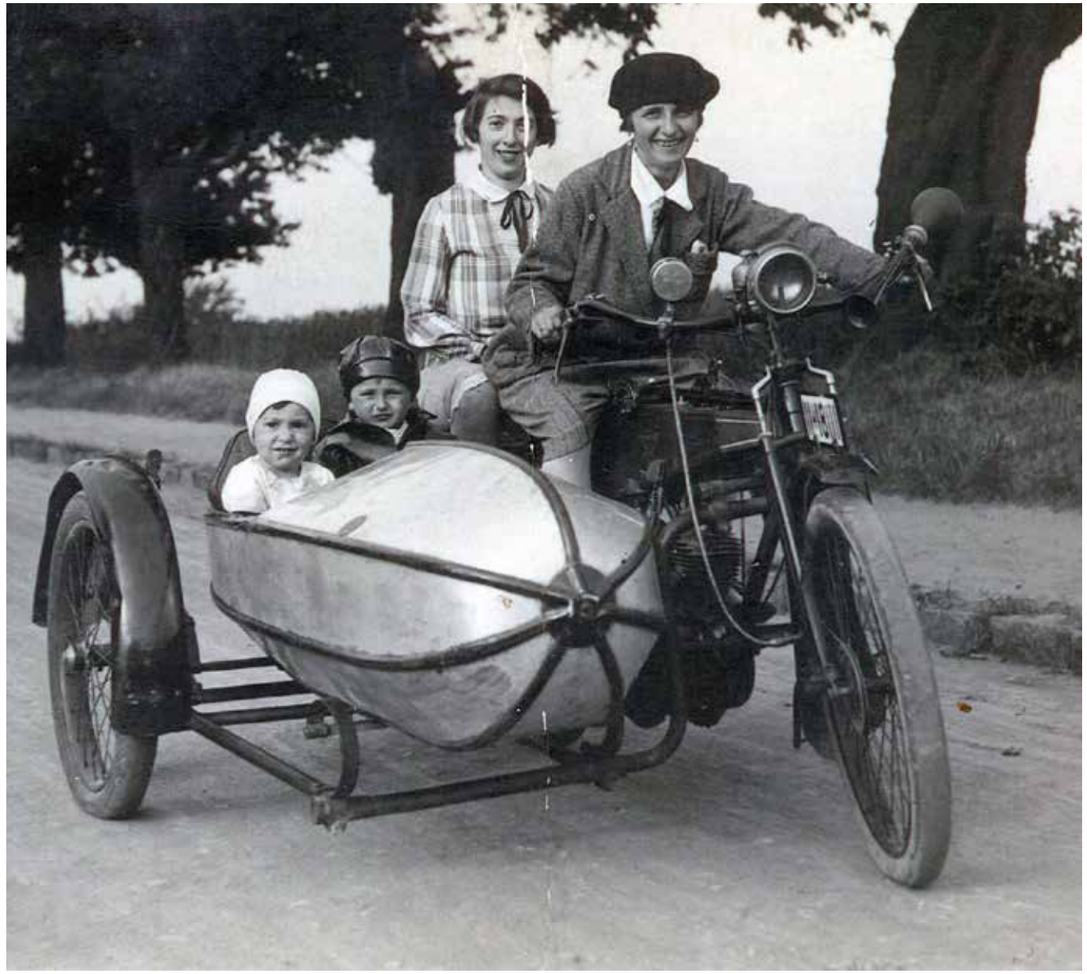
I don't suppose I was a planned arrival but in those days birth control wasn't easily accessible and because my mother hadn't had children with her first husband, she may have assumed that she wasn't able to have children. My father was 47 and my mother was 40 when I was born; they were considered middle-aged. In fact, when my father was deported to Auschwitz in early March 1943, he was deemed too old to work and was killed on arrival.

I didn't live in Berlin for long. Despite having no memory of the building where I spent those early years, I have pictures of it and I went back to visit in 1989. The address was the only information I had. Both sets of grandparents lived nearby, but three grandparents had already died by the time I was born. I found their graves in the Weissensee Jewish cemetery in Berlin.

My mother was working as a forced labourer at the Siemens factory in Berlin. I gather that all the employees were deported together to Theresienstadt in June 1943 after some sort of unrest. At just 10

Mother in 1918, aged 16

My mother, date unknown



My paternal aunt Paula with uncle Kurt's wife Martha and her children in the side car

months old, I was deported along with my mother and all of the children at the Jewish nursery where I was cared for.

I was at Theresienstadt for two years. I don't remember actually being in the camp but I remember coming out. That was one of my first memories, though I only have snatches of it. I was very frightened and nobody had told us what was going on. The Russian soldiers came; we didn't know that they were coming or why they were there. Soldiers of any type were usually trouble. Leaving the camp was also bad news because nobody who left ever came back. We didn't know what was going on, but everybody assumed it was bad news for us to leave. So, of course, we were scared. We were all herded together and we didn't know where we were going or what was going to happen to us.

I was with the other Jewish children from my nursery. I am still in contact with some of them now, although we weren't reunited until the mid-1980s, when Sarah Moskowitz interviewed all of us for her book, *Love Despite Hate: Child Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Adult Lives*. We had a big gathering, a sort of reunion, near where she lives in California, after which I kept in touch with some of them. I don't remember them from the camp, but I remember them from the children's homes we were in after.

My father's parents with his siblings (left to right standing) Johanna, Kurt and Paula

My maternal grandfather, Benjamin Schallmach

My maternal grandmother Auguste Schallmach (née Bresslau)
with her granddaughters Ursula and Gerda in 1932

My aunt Paula with her husband Leo and their daughter Zilla in Argentina

Irene (Kurt's sister), Martha (Kurt's wife), Dieter and Kurt

My maternal great-grandfather Abraham Bresslau and Ursula, 1921

The survivors in California, mid-1980s

Chateau of Olešovice outside Prague where I stayed before coming to England

Right after liberation, four confiscated chateaux were used to house the youngest children from Theresienstadt, (organized by Přemysl Pitter who would later receive several honours for saving Jewish children). Most of the children went in May, but I went in June because I'd been poorly. I have no recollection of the chateaux at Olešovice but in 1995 I would go back for the unveiling of a plaque to Přemysl Pitter and to receive a medal myself from the President of the Czech Republic. ■

I become a 'Windermere boy' . . .

THE CHILDREN FROM Theresienstadt were put on planes to Windermere in the Lake District. My first memory was getting on the flight to England. I was one of those so-called 'Windermere Boys'. I keep trying to tell people that we were the Windermere Children, not Boys but nevertheless, 'The Boys' seems to have stuck. I feel like the girls' stories have been rather hidden, because people assume that all of those child survivors were boys.

We arrived in Windermere on 15 August 1945. I was one of the six youngest children – three boys and three girls – who were kept together. I knew, even then, that my parents were dead because everybody's parents were dead. We were all orphans. We thought that was just the state of being. It didn't feel unusual, that's just how it was. I didn't know how they'd been killed, just that they had. I only found out many years later about the details. I wanted to know then so I could tell my children what had happened. That's when I was eventually able to get some dates and know exactly when my mother and father had been deported and killed. ■

"I knew, even then, that my parents were dead because everybody's parents were dead. We were all orphans. We thought that was just the state of being. It didn't feel unusual, that's just how it was."

At Bulldogs Bank, October 1945

. . . then off to West Sussex and Surrey

WE, THE YOUNGER children, were only in Windermere for two months, while the older children were there for longer. The younger children were taken to Bulldogs Bank in West Sussex, a home donated for a year by a friend of Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud. There we were looked after by the Dann sisters – Sophie, a nurse, and Gertrud, a teacher – and other volunteers. We stayed at Bulldogs Bank for a year, learning English, eating properly, and playing with toys. We were doing all the things that kids normally do but everything was new to us, so it was a big transition.

While we were there, Sophie Dann wrote a report every day of what we said and what we did. This formed the basis of a paper by Anna Freud called *An Experiment on Group Upbringing*. Because the six of us had stuck together in the camp without grown-ups looking after us on a regular basis, we were suspicious of the Dann sisters. In fact, we were quite rude to them and rather difficult - at least, to begin with. We all had nightmares but we never went to the grown-ups for help. We always supported each other, as we had in the camp and we kept very much together. If one of us did something, we all had to do it. We would not be separated.

I remember well the boys from Bulldogs Bank, but the girls less so. I think I must have been a bit of a tomboy because I was always hanging out with the boys. We were a very close bunch. We were like siblings, in fact even closer than that because we'd had two years together in Theresienstadt with very little supervision. We helped each other. Even though we were very young, all we knew of grown-ups was that they brought food and then disappeared. We didn't see them as able to care for us. This is what we expected was going to happen once we got to England as well but, as it turned out, things here were different. One example was that we had to learn to sit at the table and eat properly.

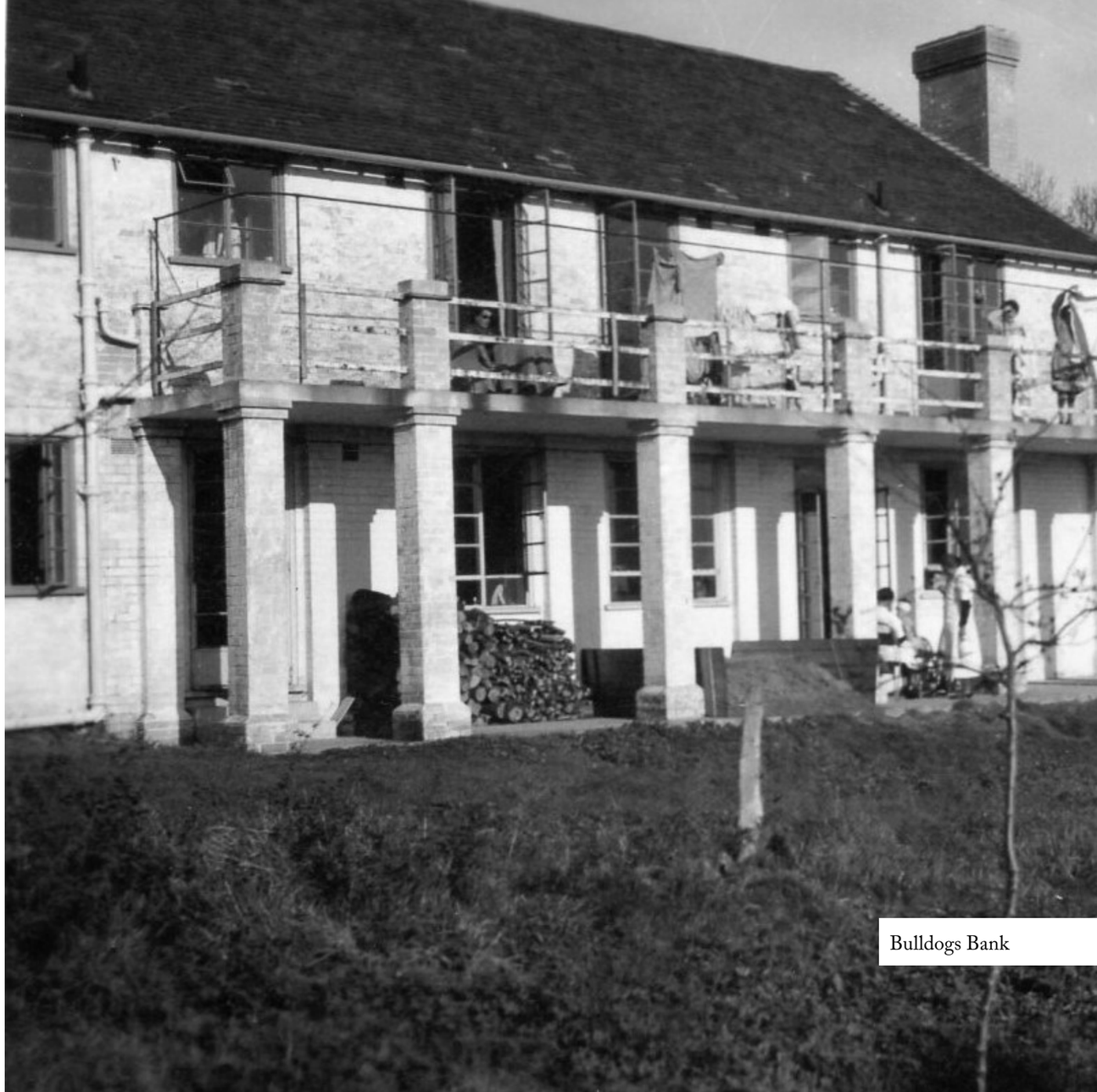
One of the kids I was with was Jackie Young. I think his given name was Yonah. We had toys donated to us by various people and Jackie was given a train set which he was very keen on. Wherever I wanted to go, Jackie would have his train set, and it always blocked the door to the room. I can remember tripping over it all the time. There was also a boy named Berli Lazarus; I think he had health issues. He was the weakest of all the children, the one who had nightmares. I was always busy at night helping and comforting him. Gadi Jacobsen was the other 'leader of the group', like I was. I felt like a leader

because whatever I wanted to do, the other children would follow. If I was ever upset about anything, the children would go to the grown-ups and tell them what I wanted. If any of the children went for a walk, I always had to come with. They were dependent on me in many ways.

I had always been like that and I still seem to end up in leadership roles, even though I don't seek them out. To survive, I think you've got to be both mentally and physically strong and although there were a few children who didn't match that description, most of us were very strong.

We had seen dead bodies in the camp and now, at night, we would still check on one another to make sure we were just asleep and that nobody had died. If someone didn't move, we were worried that something had happened to them. Many of the habits we had in the camp were still being displayed when we came to England and I don't think those habits eased off until I was adopted and taken away.

Left to right me, Gadi, Judith, Jack, Berli, Gittel in 1945



Bulldogs Bank

Left to right Judith, me, Jack, Berli, Gadi at Bulldogs Bank, 1945

We were forbidden to speak German but we would often merge English and German together to create words like *doggie-hund*. Because of that, we didn't completely lose our German tongue. We often communicated without language too - if you see a group of very young children together, they don't always verbalise, they just play together.

We didn't have any interaction with other children from outside of Bulldogs Bank. Occasionally, we took the bus to the nearby village of West Hoathly. There was a shop or two down there and we would come into contact with the villagers. They would try to interact with us but they didn't quite know how to and they often got rebuffed. We had no sense of being different at all. I suppose it wasn't until later that we realised we were actually quite different. We were always together and none of us remembered our parents, so the idea of children living in families, in houses, didn't occur to us. We thought everyone lived like us.

We spent a year at Bulldogs Bank before the house was no longer available for us and so we joined some of the older children, not far away in Lingfield, Surrey. We went by bus to Weir Courtney, a house donated by Sir Benjamin Drage. Alice Goldberger was the person who looked after us and she had many people working for her and a lot of volunteers too. The six of us weren't together any more: the three girls were separated from the three boys. We were all in the same building but we no longer slept in the same room.

Being with the older children was difficult for us because we had to share the attention of the staff and there was less focus on us now. We often felt a bit of a nuisance. The older children were going to school while we stayed behind; we had the run of the place while the others were at school. There was also definitely more discipline at Lingfield. We were moved around a lot and so it was difficult getting used to the new place and new people. It took quite a bit of time to settle in and, of course, we weren't sure how long we were going to be there or even where we were.

My memories of Lingfield are, generally speaking, fond ones. I remember spending a lot of my time in a very nice kitchen in the basement and I remember it always being warm and cosy. A woman called Sophie worked down there. We often sat together and she taught me how to crochet. I was also interested in cooking so I used to pick the rhubarb that she would then stew and make into a dish.

Weir Courtney

I recall spending a lot of the summer in the garden, where there was a swing. I don't remember there being a great amount to do, but if we ever played with the other children's toys, we got into trouble.

I have one clear memory of being stuck in a thunderstorm in the garden and taking shelter under a tree. They must have sent one of the older boys to come and find me and bring me back. I also remember Friday night meals where we lit candles. I realised it was a Jewish tradition at the time, but I had no idea that I was a Jewish child, so I just thought somebody lit candles and made a nice meal every week. In retrospect, it was my first Jewish memory. ■

Adoption and childhood

I WAS ONLY in Lingfield for about 18 months, until I was adopted at the age of five. There was a system of *aunties* and *uncles*, where we were 'tried out' from time to time by couples to test whether we'd suit them. When we were returned, it meant we had been rejected. In fact, the people who eventually adopted me were not my so-called *auntie* and *uncle*. They were somebody else's, which caused a lot of friction with the boy who was their *nephew*. We always thought that he was the one who should have been adopted by them. It wasn't my fault, I'd done nothing, but he had a big chip on his shoulder about it until many years later. We made up before he died.

I was actually the first child to be adopted from Weir Courtney and, many years later, I found out that one of the boys I had been with thought I'd run away. Nobody had told him I'd been adopted and he thought I'd fled because he had said something nasty to me and made me cross. Maybe the grown-ups never explained things like that to children in those days.

I never got to say a proper goodbye. Even I didn't know what was going on at the time. I thought I would maybe stay with these new people for the weekend, not forever. I don't think the adoption was ever properly explained to me. It just happened. Days passed, then weeks and so on until, eventually, I was formally adopted at the age of nine. I suppose by then I must have realised I wasn't going back, but nobody ever gave me the choice of staying or going.

"I don't think the adoption was ever properly explained to me. It just happened. Days passed, then weeks and so on until, eventually, I was formally adopted at the age of nine"

My adoptive parents were Freddie and Frances. They didn't have any children so I became an only child. That was hard, as I had been with other children for as long as I could remember. I didn't have a close relationship with Freddie and Frances. I later found out that my adoptive father hadn't actually wanted to adopt me at all. I think these days they probably wouldn't have been allowed to adopt a child - they didn't go through any interviews and were never vetted. But, back then, there were lots of children needing families and anyone who offered to do so was accepted. Many years later, I found a letter from the woman who had run the children's home, suggesting that they hadn't done the right thing in allowing Freddie and Frances to adopt me, but by then it was too late: they couldn't undo it.

My adoptive parents changed my name to Joanna and never wanted to talk about my past. It was a secret as far as they were concerned, although I don't think they actually knew much about my past history, or maybe they just weren't interested. In fact, I later discovered that when we came to England from the camps, there was a file about each of us. My 'parents' actually burned my file because they didn't want anyone to know about my past! I had no help trying to find out anything, so I just had to put it behind me and get on with my life. There wasn't any point in getting hung up about it. The only thing I was able to tell my future husband was that I was adopted, that I was born in Germany and had been in Theresienstadt, where my mother was killed, and that my father had been killed in Auschwitz.

When I first moved in with my adoptive parents, I started primary school in North West London. I remember being in the classroom and not understanding why everyone else could tell the time and do certain things that I didn't know how to do. I was well behind the other students. I don't think the teachers had been told anything about me and the kids had no understanding of why I was behind, so they just assumed I was a bit slow and didn't know things like my two-times multiplication table. I think my English was a bit better than my maths. My adoptive parents made sure I spoke without an accent and arranged elocution lessons. School food was also very different from what I was used to eating, so that was a problem at lunchtime. I had a big learning curve and my health wasn't great, so I had to miss some schooling. All this meant it was difficult to make friends.

After a year we moved to South London, so I changed schools. Again, I was behind - especially in maths. It wasn't easy to make friends there either, but I was good at sports, which was always a way in. I played tennis and, later on, badminton, table tennis and a bit of squash, which I really enjoyed.

I then got entry into St Paul's Girls School. I'd caught up academically by then. I sat my common entrance exams having had no preparation. I think my adoptive parents were absolutely astonished that I got in. Thinking back on it, I'm also amazed by it. I enjoyed my time there. I was able to do more sports and I had the opportunity to do independent learning, which I enjoyed. There were quite a lot of Jewish students so I was able to associate with Jewish girls, which I hadn't done since leaving Lingfield. I also had a chance to learn about public speaking. This was later a great asset because I was initially very anxious and had a bit of a stammer, which still occasionally comes out when I'm nervous or surprised about something. We would have to talk in front of the class about what we'd done in the holidays or another topic and it got me out of my shell. They also tried to improve my handwriting but it didn't really help - it's still unreadable.

While I was at St Paul's, I had a *Bat Mitzvah*. It was my idea: I wanted one. I went to classes at West London Synagogue and it was interesting to find out about what it meant to be Jewish and learn about festivals, because my adoptive parents, although they were technically Jewish, didn't keep a Jewish home at all. I also joined the Jewish youth clubs and discovered a bit more about Judaism from the other children. My parents had died because they were Jewish, so it was important to me to find out why. I had a very small *Bat Mitzvah* party with my immediate adoptive family, just a dozen people. It's a happy memory for me, reading from the Torah scroll, although it was a bit traumatic because I had only been told the week before that I also had to translate the portion, which I hadn't been prepared for. After my *Bat Mitzvah*, I continued going to synagogue and the youth clubs and to communal Seders and Friday-night dinners.

I was at St Paul's for two or three years and then, because life at home was difficult, I asked to go to boarding school. I think my parents were only too happy to agree. I didn't stay in touch with my St Paul's friends. I suppose I've always been like that. I find it hard to make friends for life.

The boarding school in Kent didn't work out terribly well. There was plenty of sport but I didn't do so well with the academic stuff. I left at 16 because I was told I would never get any qualifications. My parents decided to send me to Paris. They had the idea of a 12-month exchange with a French family they knew, who had a daughter of a similar age to me. It seemed a stupid idea, it would have been better if I was together with the girl of a similar age. We did the swap anyway. The French family had two other daughters. One daughter, younger than me, had some learning difficulties. The older

daughter was engaged. The parents sent me to school with their younger daughter, but I was far ahead of her class and so that didn't work out too well. They then sent me to another school where I could be with children of my age, but they were preparing to get their qualifications so I was only there for about a term before they all went off to sit their exams.

Fortunately, my adoptive parents got me membership of a tennis club in Paris. I spent most of my time there, which I enjoyed. They also introduced me to a girl who was musical, so we were able to go to many concerts in the evenings. I enrolled in at the Alliance Francaise, an educational centre for grown-ups. I met quite a few au pairs and other young women. We got on well and travelled around together. I also studied some French literature and learned about dressmaking. I had studied French at school, but by the time I left Paris I was bilingual.

When the year was up, I came back to London and took a cooking course and a secretarial course. I enjoyed them both and did quite well. My parents often held parties and I did quite a lot of the cooking for them, as well as for my own birthdays and, later, my engagement. ■

In 1959

My wedding – and we become a family

MY FIRST JOB was as a secretary to the director of IATA, the International Air Transport Association. They had a small office in Mayfair and I enjoyed the work. It was also nice to have a bit of money in my pocket. The offices then moved to another country and I was made redundant and so I found another job, this time at a very big advertising agency in St James's, in the information department. While I was there, I got engaged to my husband and he didn't want me to work after we married, so I gave it up.

I met my husband, Harvey, at a club for young members at our synagogue. I was the chairman of the club and he invited me out for a coffee after the meeting. At the time, he was training at Leo Baeck College in London to be a rabbi in the Reform movement. As a student, he worked at Bradford Reform Synagogue, so we used to go up there at the weekends for the service and Sunday-morning classes, and he spent the rest of week at college.

I told Harvey about my past, or as much as I knew then. He was so relieved that my adoptive parents were not my real parents as someone must have told him that daughters usually take after their mothers.

We were together for about a year before we became engaged in 1963, and we married a year later. The week before our wedding we were sitting in synagogue when Harvey suddenly remembered he had left our wedding ring in the drawer of his desk, which was headed to Bradford! We were moving furniture there because Harvey was going to continue serving that Jewish community. He had to rush out to phone the removal company. They managed to get word to the lorry driver who found the ring and had it couriered back to London in time for the wedding. It was all a bit hairy.

Our wedding day was actually the worst nightmare ever! We had to have five different wedding receptions, one after the other, because there were so many people in both of our families refusing to speak to each other. It was horrible and I couldn't wait for it to be over.

On our honeymoon, 1964

Our marriage worked well despite the fact that we had few shared interests. If you can think of two people who are polar opposites, that was us, but we learned a tremendous amount from each other and always talked things through until we ended up with an understanding.

In 1965, we had our first child. Daniel was born in Shipley, but we left about a week or 10 days after he was born. Harvey had completed the full five years at rabbinical school, but he didn't like the politics so he gave up the profession. He decided to go into industry instead. He had various jobs to begin with because it was difficult to get a job without relevant work experience.

We bought a house in Ickenham, near Ruislip. When Daniel was born, I hardly knew one end of a baby from another and I had nobody to go to or ask about how to look after him. In 1966, a year later, our daughter Amanda (Mandy) was born. Wendy was born in 1967. Having three children under the age of three was tiring but not necessarily stressful.

My daughters have told me that they wanted to bring their children up in the same way I brought them up, so obviously they thought I did a good job. My husband always told me just to do what I thought was right, not to read the parenting books, and to trust my instincts. That's what I did. I think I was fairly strict and we had a routine, so the children always knew where they stood. Harvey travelled a lot with work and so he was the one who would treat the kids and do all the nice things, while I was the one keeping the routines.

I didn't have anyone to help look after the children. It was before childcare was easily accessible. If I worked outside our home, I had to get back in time for the children when they came back from school,

> "When my children were little, I didn't tell them much about my past. I wasn't allowed to talk about it with my adoptive parents or ask questions, so there was always this feeling of secrecy around it."

so I got a job cooking for an office block. I did 200 lunches a day and made cakes for tea too, and I was able to be home by three in the afternoon.

When my children were little, I didn't tell them much about my past. I wasn't allowed to talk about it with my adoptive parents or ask questions, so there was always this feeling of secrecy around it. I didn't feel the need to tell my children because I actually didn't know a great deal about what had happened, and it really wouldn't have made a great difference to their lives. In 1981, my son was thinking about going into the British Army. He had to fill out an extensive form about where I was born and my background and I couldn't lie, so I decided that I would tell him but, of course, I couldn't just tell one and not the others. It just so happened that, at the time, there was a documentary about the Holocaust on television. I sat them down to watch it one afternoon. At the end, I told them that my parents had been killed in the Holocaust and that I had been in Theresienstadt, which was pretty much all I knew, but at least that gave them some sort of understanding.

When my adoptive parents found out that I had told the kids, they were furious. They said that it wasn't any of their business. They were afraid that my children wouldn't treat them as their grandparents, which was strange really, because they were not like real grandparents, they showed no interest in my children at all and they hardly saw them. My kids said that they were glad they weren't their real grandparents because they wouldn't have to make an effort with them any more.

Daniel was in the military for six years and now works as an extra in film and TV and helps the SSAFA, the armed forces charity. He has a daughter, Robyn, who is studying at university and is interested in the environment and sustainability. His son, David, is doing a Masters degree in Business Management and Human Resources. Mandy is a speech therapist for Luton local authority. She has two sons: Steven is studying to be an accountant and Alex is in his last year of university studying sports and nutrition. Wendy, my youngest, is a musician. She teaches, plays, and composes music. She has four children: Katie is studying Japanese and Russian at university, and Sophie is studying art and design. Her twin boys, Matthew and Jamie, are doing their A Levels this year. I am close to my grandchildren. Sometimes they ask me about my past. I've spoken at their schools and they ask me questions, usually when Holocaust Memorial Day comes around. I would like my grandchildren to know about their heritage and what happened within their family because that's part of their history and in a way, it's their inheritance. ■

My globe-trotting marriage

DESPITE HARVEY AND I being quite different, we had a very successful marriage. He died in 2003. When we knew he was terminally ill, I asked him whether there was anything he wanted to do while he still could. He replied: "No, we've done everything that I've ever wanted to do." That was great to hear. Because of his health problems I had suspected that he probably wouldn't live well into old age, so we travelled a lot and did things that other people would have normally waited until retirement to do. We didn't wait until we could afford to do something, we just did it, and on a shoestring.

We both enjoyed exploring and finding new places and rarely went to the same place twice. We had so many adventures, like crossing the Andes by car and seeing the condors flying; visiting the Galapagos and the Arctic. I also enjoyed visiting Canada, Australia and South America. My grandchildren once asked how many places we'd been to and I think I listed about 66 different countries.

We lived in Norway for a while in the 1980s. Harvey was working in project management for a new computer system for a company that was building an oil pipeline across the North Sea. We lived in Scotland too, along the River Clyde not far from Glasgow. We also lived in Florida while Harvey was working on a project.

While Harvey had serious health problems, it was impossible for him to be employed anymore. One of our friends was an internationally renowned double bass player and asked me to manage his business, buying and selling double basses and accessories whilst he continued to perform. After going through a divorce, he asked me to buy him out, which I did. I ran this company for a couple of years during which I travelled to visit international musicians and orchestras. The new basses were made in Germany and the bows in Canada. The special woods for the body of the instruments were imported from Canada and the Pernambuco wood from Brazil. Eventually travelling became impossible as Harvey's health was weakened and I sold the business on to another bass player.

In a way, Harvey and I grew up together; we did everything together. I'm not saying we didn't have our differences at times; we probably got annoyed with each other but we always sorted it. In the end, we only had 37 years together but it worked really well. Equally, I'm quite enjoying my independence now. I have nobody depending on me. I think you have to enjoy each period of your life. There's nothing

The family at Christmas, 1967

more frustrating than people wishing things hadn't happened or wishing their lives away. Each stage is brilliant; you've got to enjoy each year, each minute, and I think people lose sight of that. Every period of your life has challenges as well as good things, so don't wish it away.

Around the time that Harvey died, there were quite a few challenges. Just before he passed, the cousins of my adoptive family made a court claim against me over Freddie and Frances's will because they thought they should have a bigger share of it. My adoptive mother had arranged that I should have the bulk of it, giving something to the cousins but not as much as they had expected. I didn't have to appear in court but it took a couple of years to sort out. They lost, but it meant spending a lot of money on expensive lawyers and the family was cut apart. I suppose they didn't think I was really one of the family because I was adopted.

Harvey had his first heart bypass surgery when he was 39. He had five grafts done and after that he was much better. He had more energy and was able to do things, whereas before we didn't know why he was sleeping so much and had no energy to do anything. He had another bypass about eight years later, when he also lost his job. He was fed up with his boss. He always hated his bosses: he thought he knew better. His work life was a pendulum: he was either resigned, on the dole, or very excited about a new job. It was hard to live with, but we managed. Then he went downhill health-wise again. There were plenty of new medications available; he was given all the latest stuff and that helped, but it didn't cure the underlying situation with his heart. One day, he went to get a routine check-up at the surgery and they gave him a walk test. He did so badly that the doctor wouldn't allow him out of the surgery and called an ambulance.

The ambulance took him to hospital and that's where they noticed a lump under his arm. They sent him home and he started to see the oncologist, who offered him chemotherapy. I asked how much longer he would live with the chemo than without. The doctor told me it would be about four weeks. I thought there was no point having chemo with that prognosis and Harvey agreed.

We had to tell the children. We spent the whole day going from one child's house to another to tell them the news. Of course, they were upset and shocked. In reality, Harvey had five months left. For the first three months, he lived relatively normally and then he was in the St John's Hospice. It was a trying time. I could see he was going downhill. At first, he was given transfusions and then they stopped.

Danny, Wendy and Mandy, 1969

Mandy, Wendy and Danny in 1972

With Harvey in 1981

With Harvey in 1995

Wendy was pregnant with the twins at the time. Harvey kept saying he wanted to stay alive long enough to see the twins.

Harvey died the same week as the Queen Mother and the same week the twins were expected. They were born four days after his funeral. I then had my hands full helping my daughter look after her babies for the first few weeks. That was a distraction and it definitely helped. I was prepared for Harvey's death, more so than most people, I think, because death seems to have followed me around. I had seen dead bodies in Theresienstadt, so seeing a dead body wasn't strange to me. Life is an adventure, and this was a trying time, but you have the good bits and bad bits. ■

Real life – magistrate, chairmanships and more

AFTER I HAD my children I wasn't working and I was getting terribly stuck in a rut being a mother and housewife in a small bubble. I thought there was more to life than that, so I decided to become a magistrate. The last thing anyone would describe me as is a suburban housewife. I wanted to see what real life was actually like. I worked as a magistrate for 32 years but only once every fortnight so I was able to organise the kids for those days. In later years, when they were older, I could do more. I became the chairman of the Youth Panel in my area, a senior member of the team.

Whilst the children were dependent, I took many temporary secretarial jobs to boost the family income, working round the kids' activities and Harvey's life. This allowed me quite an insight into how businesses are run and gave me a head start when I decided to study for a post-graduate diploma in Management Studies, which I passed with distinction. My tutor later asked me why I hadn't gone for an MBA. Clearly he thought I could have been successful. Harvey by now owned a management consultancy company and I joined him, working on IT training which was in its infancy. Following on from my studies, I heard that Brunel University was looking for students for a new course in criminal justice which would appeal to a variety of students including from the magistracy. I took this opportunity and found the course extremely interesting. One of my tutors was a feminist and introduced me to the issues surrounding domestic violence. I decided to write my final dissertation on the response in Hillingdon to domestic violence. I interviewed police, solicitors, probation officers and so on. This led me to the issue of domestic violence in the Jewish community and I found that there was no facility to help Jewish women; neither a phone line nor refuge. Together with a small group of like-minded Jewish women, we founded Jewish Women's Aid (JWA). Firstly a phone line was set up with a 24/7 rota system together with training of those women staffing it all over the country. Later a refuge was added which was the first Jewish women's refuge in Europe.

Having studied the issue of domestic violence on my MA course, I was able to put together a presentation to promote JWA. I spoke frequently to many Jewish groups and was able to alert the Jewish community to this issue. I suppose, not surprisingly, each community told me it did not happen within their own community but there was a lot of it elsewhere. I had a hard job convincing people that it was everywhere, within all different types of families. I was also part of a wider network of domestic violence forums, where we could share the latest research.

Graduating with an MA in Criminal Justice from Brunel University

Receiving my Postgraduate Diploma in Management Studies

June 1995, receiving a medal at the chateau of Štiřín at the unveiling of a plaque for Přemysl Pitter.

I also became involved with helping people make films and write articles about my life. I'm the chairman of a child Holocaust survivor group for children who were in Nazi-occupied Europe, including those in hiding, in camps, or on the run. It's not a very big group but we meet occasionally, organise events and encourage research as well. Until recently, I was a trustee of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) and now I'm on the committee that dispenses money from the German government to needy Holocaust survivors. Until recently, I was the chairman of the directors at my block of flats. We have the right to manage, so we would employ agents and make sure everything was done according to the building regulations and health and safety laws, plus any issues arising from the residents that needed dealing with. That took up quite a lot of time and was quite intense.

In fact, I'm also the chairman of a new organisation, the International Centre for Jewish Studies, that plans educational seminars in China. I've been going to China for the past eight years to talk about Judaism. There's not much knowledge in China about the Holocaust but there's a lot of interest. They're very interested in Jewish topics and I've even had some Chinese students reading the Torah and who have decided to spend time in Israel. They see many similarities to Jews and aspire towards our ideals.

Everywhere I go, I seem to end up being chairman. I never seek it but somehow it's always 'Joanna will do it!' I don't mind, especially if an organisation isn't being run well, because nothing is more infuriating or tiring than having to go along with things that are wrong. At least I can then do my best to put things right.

I've been talking about the Holocaust in schools for over thirty years. When I do so, I always talk about tolerance. One should enjoy the differences in others because that enriches our lives. That's a big thing for me. We learn huge amounts from each other and there's no such thing as somebody being bad because they're different. Many kids don't conform and somehow that's considered bad. I think we need to fight against that. The work is still not done and I don't think it ever will be, but one has to try. It's better to have tried and failed than never to have tried. That's my mantra.

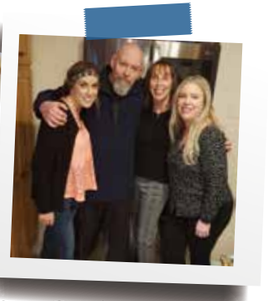
BEM investiture, April 2019

In 2019, I received a British Empire Medal (BEM). I got a letter from No.10 Downing Street asking if I would accept the honour. It didn't say anything about who had put me forward or even what it was for! It wasn't until the actual day of the event that I realised it was for Holocaust education. I assumed that was the case because I'd done a fair bit of speaking for the Holocaust Education Trust, often travelling to schools further away because some of the other survivors were quite old and not able to travel. I always volunteered to go to schools in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and the West Country. After Harvey died, I was freer to do more of that. I did always make sure that it wasn't a full-time job, though, because I had other things I wanted to do. I had all my commitments to AJR and to the family, and that meant that the weekends were always sacrosanct. The family always knew, however busy I was, that I would drop everything and do what they needed.

The day I received my BEM was problematic. I was only allowed three guests. Who would I ask? After talking it over, it was decided I would take my son, my older daughter, Mandy, and her son, Alex. After, we had a big lunch at the Tower Hotel for all the family. At the ceremony, people were called up individually. As you went up, a presenter read a citation, saying what the award was for and a bit about you. You had a photo taken at that point and then more photos were taken at the end. We were entitled to attend a Royal Garden Party with one guest at a later date. I had invited my younger daughter, Wendy, along because she hadn't come to the presentation. But when the time came, I was immobile with back pain and it was no longer practical to attend. I asked if we could go to the Garden Party the year after but, because of coronavirus, that was cancelled. ■

My cousin Gerda and her husband Fritz in 1987

Uncle Kurt's grandson Tim and his wife Heather



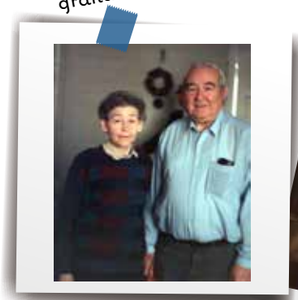
Aunt Bella's granddaughter Esther and family

Aunt Bella's grandson Ben

Uncle Kurt's granddaughter Jennifer

Aunt Bella's grandson Steven

Cousin Ursula's children in Germany (left to right) Reinhart, Hubert, Helga, Andreas and Maria



My cousin Ursula and her husband Arnold in 1986

Aunt Bella's only daughter Margie and her husband Charlie

Harvey, Wendy, Danny and I with some of my German family in 1990

I find surviving family

I FOUND OUT about surviving family through chance encounters. Several years ago, when I was applying for restitution from the German government, the solicitors told us that another member of the family had received the property restitution already, without knowing that I had survived. That was my aunt Selma in Lübeck. When she died and her grandchildren were clearing out her flat, they found a letter from a woman in America. I used the internet to search for the name on the letter and was able to trace my family in New York.

I found my father's family through Yad Vashem. When the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names was digitalised, a boy from Israel saw my entry with small bits of information that I had filed. The boy was my aunt Paula's grandson. He told his grandfather that he thought he might have found family and they contacted me. I'd posted out requests on genealogical websites before but never got a reply, so this was another chance encounter.

It's been an interesting journey. I found my uncle Kurt's grandchildren - Jennifer, Michelle and Timothy - in Australia through a letter announcing the death of one of his children. It was written by one of their neighbours in Melbourne, who reluctantly agreed to give me their phone number. I managed to make contact, and went on to visit them.

Finding my real family was like finding myself. I'd always wondered what sort of family I came from and what sort of illnesses the family were prone to. If I went to the doctor they would ask if a particular illness or condition was hereditary in the family and of course, I had no idea. Finding my family has helped my children and grandchildren, and given me a sense of identity that I'd been longing for. ■

Cooking up a treat

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN the cook of the family and I still enjoying cooking. I created a cookbook from my favourite recipes and have given copies to everyone in the family. A cousin in Arizona had a collection of recipes from my aunt Bella which she sent me. It was a bit of a mess, some handwritten recipes and others she had cut out of magazines and put in no particular order. You had soup recipes next to a pudding one next to a meat one and then something else and then fish. The cousin had received this collection from my great-grandmother on her wedding day. She then gave it to me. It was a German-Jewish cookbook that was traditionally given to a bride. It also had information about where to buy wigs and other items for a Jewish household. I gave it to the Wiener Library, but first I put it in order: I put the starters in one section and so on. Some of the old recipes are really good; there's a *Hamentaschen* recipe that I make at Purim. I've made some of the other recipes and put in some of my own. In my cookbook, I put together all the favourite recipes that the kids liked over the years. I really enjoyed compiling it. The recipes are easy so anyone can follow them.

I've always done the cooking for parties and special events and the Jewish festivals. My family has always relied on me to do the cooking: even if we weren't eating at my house, I used to bring everything. My family likes the *charoset* and the beetroot soup I used to make, and a lot of the puddings, like the apple pudding. The Passover dishes have always been special because I only make them once a year.

I feel like there's a real sense in Jewish families that food is the glue that brings everyone together. Of course, not having been brought up in that sort of environment, I've really enjoyed doing it and exploring it. I'd never eaten Jewish food until I met my husband and so I had to learn. He was a very good taster. If I made something, he'd tell me that it wasn't quite right and it needed a bit of this or a bit of that. Eventually, I got everything according to how he liked it. I enjoyed exploring recipes from different books and going to try other people's Jewish food. ■

The Windermere Children TV Documentary

FROM TIME TO time, documentary-makers or writers advertise that they are looking to speak to Holocaust survivors. If it's in your area and you want to participate, you might respond. It's perpetual. If you read the survivor magazines, they're full of people doing research and papers and other projects. One day, a woman who worked for a film company advertised for survivors who had been children during the war. She had already been in touch with Sir Ben Helfgott and had got the stories of some of the older survivors.

I responded to her request and said it was such a shame that it's always the 'usual suspects' who get interviewed and always The Boys. I told her that there were younger children in Windermere and some girls too, but nobody seemed to notice. This got her interest up and she said: "You know what? That's a good angle, let's try it." She interviewed me at length and also interviewed Jackie Young (from Bulldogs Bank) and a few others. During the interview, the scriptwriter was actually sitting behind a curtain. He was taking down verbatim what we were saying. I heard absolutely nothing for a year or more. I thought they had shelved the project.

Then, out of the blue, she phoned again and asked if I remembered the project. She told me that the company, Wall to Wall Media, had been given the go-ahead and that the BBC had agreed to a programme on BBC Four. She came to my flat and we had a further interview and filming. She later phoned me and said that the programme was going to be shown on Holocaust Memorial Day, including a documentary containing some of the interviews.

Not long after that, she asked if I was doing anything on Holocaust Memorial Day. I said that, funnily enough, I was free. She invited me to Brussels for a screening of the film, offering assistance to get on the train and make the trip. I knew they'd look after me. I brought a female friend and we went as guests of the Bavarian delegation of the European Commission. It all went very nicely. After the screening, we had a Q&A session and there was a reception. We stayed overnight and returned to London the next day.

That is how The Windermere Children happened. It's not the first film about us, though. There was a German company who made a film years ago about Bulldogs Bank. It is shown in German schools now. There are also many books and I am mentioned in a chapter here and there. There has been a lot of interest in our story. ■

Still busy . . .

NOWADAYS, I'M IN quarantine because of coronavirus. Honestly, I don't have a problem with it. I've never been very gregarious or needed a lot of people around. I keep meaning to read a book but I haven't gotten around to doing that yet. I have a lot of other things to do! ■

Family holiday to La Gomera to celebrate my 70th birthday, 2012

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.

"Sometimes my grandchildren ask me about my past. I would like them to know what happened within their family because that's part of their history and, in a way, it's their inheritance."

AJR The Association of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk