

My Story

Tommy Gutwin

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees



My Story

Tommy Gutwin



These are Tommy's words. This is his story.

'My Story' is an initiative of The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR).

More information at www.ajr.org.uk

Tommy was visited by AJR volunteer Laura Konviser to share his story. Thanks also to AJR volunteer Nadia Lipsey for her editing skills.

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My Story

Tommy Gutwin

"I do remember standing at Liverpool Street station with a cardboard plaque around my neck, on which was written my name and where I came from. All I took with me was a cardboard suitcase with whatever clothes and belongings I had."



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The early years

My name was Tomas Gutwein. It was anglicised to Thomas which is what appears on all my official documents such as my passport, but sometimes when I write a personal letter I revert back to the original spelling. My surname was Gutwein in Czech but I changed it to Gutwin by deed poll. This was after my wife had our children in hospital and didn't like having such a German-sounding name being called out.

I was born in Prague, Czechoslovakia on 2 May 1935. My parents were Ernest and Ella Gutwein and my mother's maiden name was Guttman. They were both Czech. My father was born on 31 May 1905 in Ostrava and my mother on 4 April 1909 in Vitkovice, which is a district of Ostrava.

I have no siblings. My mother died six days after I was born; she was just 26 years old. Her death certificate says she died from post-partum complications. I have only two photographs of her. One I managed to get from a relative living in America who knew somebody who had that photograph and he somehow managed to get it to me. The other photo is of the Guttman family and the young girl sitting on somebody's lap is my mother.

After my mother passed away, my father handed me over to one of my sets of grandparents. I don't know how soon after my mother died that this happened and to this day I don't know which set of grandparents looked after me. They both lived close to each other in Vitkovice so perhaps they shared the responsibility. They all perished in Auschwitz. I have a document showing that my maternal grandfather, Adolf Guttman was sent to Auschwitz. Apparently my paternal grandfather, Emil Gutwein, was a cinema pioneer on the continent at the turn of the century and my father remembered playing with his lantern-slide projectors.

My grandparents must have somehow heard about Nicholas Winton and his children's transport and I suppose they were responsible for taking me to Prague and getting me on a train to England. ■



The only photograph I have of my mother as an adult

C.T. 5124/A 5456

This document of identity is issued with the approval of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom to young persons to be admitted to the United Kingdom for educational purposes under the care of the Inter-Aid Committee for children.

THIS DOCUMENT REQUIRES NO VISA.

PERSONAL PARTICULARS.

1125

Name GUTWEIN THOMAS


Sex FEMALE Date of Birth 2.5.35.

Place PRAGUE

Full Names and Address of Parents
GUTWEIN ERNST
15, KOLINSKA
PRAGUE XII

**BRITISH COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN
IN PRAGUE.**

98



I wore this label round my neck when I arrived in the UK with just my cardboard suitcase



Aged five in 1940

CZECH CHILDREN'S SECTION

* Clump Hill
Stanmore
Middx (020)
HA7 3JS 2954-562

LIST OF CHILDREN BROUGHT OVER UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE CZECH CHILDREN'S SECTION
ON TRANSPORTS FROM PRAGUE. THIS LIST IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SECTION'S RECORDS
OF 15th FEBRUARY, 1940.

NAME	CHRISTIAN NAME	SER. NO.	BIRTH-DATE	CHILD'S PRESENT ADDRESS	GUARANTOR'S NAME & ADDRESS	RE-EMIGRATION LIABILITY	REMARKS
ABKLES	Fritz	12504	26. 6.25.	Bailey's Hotel, Gloucester Terr., London, S.W.7.	West London Synagogue Committee, 33 Seymour Place, W.1.	Guaranteed by guarantor.	Laplow School, Hares training.
ABOSCH	Alfons	12404	23. 2.25.	c/o Mrs. F. GAYTON, 6, LONDON ROAD, WELLINGBOROUGH.	Czech Children's Section Taken over by Movement	Czech Children's Section.	working at Nichols & Sons, 8 Daniels Rd., London Rd., Wellingborough Father: C.T. Reg.
ACKERMANN	Deii	5100	13.10.31.	c/o F. Ackermann, 294, Amhurst Rd., London, N.16.	M. Cousin, 52 Blackstock Road, London, N.4.	Personal guarantee by guarantor.	Evacuated
ACKERMANN	Esther	5621	28. 9.37.	98, Valley Drive Kingsbury.	Ralph Baker, 101 Osbaldeston Road, London, N.16.	Personal guarantee by guarantor.	Parents & two more sisters & 1 boy in E. C.T. Reg.
ACKERMANN	Jakob Pejsach	1329	12. 4.29.	c/o Mrs. Canutt, Walnut Farm, Upton, nr. Peterborough.	Louis Needleman, 56 Donald Road, Upton Park, E.15.	As above.	
ACKERMANN	Leny	5620	24. 7.27.	c/o Mr. A. Fairweather Close House, Barnack, nr. Skimpod.	Harry P. Green, 24 Grove Lane, N.16.	As above	
ACKERMANN	Renee	5099	2.12.30.	c/o F. Ackermann 294, Amhurst Rd., London, N.16.	M. Cousin, 52 Blackstock Road, London, N.4.	As above	Father: C.T.
ADLER	Anneliese	5632	13. 8.28.	c/o Mrs. Merritt, The Nook, High St. Oldland, nr. Bristol.	Woodcraft Folk, 13 Ritherdon Road, Tooting, S.W.	Czech Children's Section.	
ADLER ✓	Ruth	5601	26. 2.26. nr. S. P. Reg.	c/o Miss E. Stange 41, Fox Hill Birmingham 29.	Wm. A. Albright, 29 Frederick Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham.	Bank guarantee	During school term, c/o Mrs. J. Boag, Caincross, Finch Rd., Hollington, R.10.

Coming to England

My memories of actually arriving in England are very dim. I arrived in April 1939, just before my fourth birthday. I have a copy of the Winton list with my name on it. I was the youngest on my train. I know this because I met a man called Kurt Taussig who was the oldest on the train at 17 and he remembered me as the youngest. He was going to join the RAF. He told me that the train left from Prague main railway station, crossed the border into Germany at Furth im Wald, went through Nuremberg, Cologne and in to Holland. We then travelled by boat from The Hook in Holland to Harwich and then train to Liverpool Street station in London.

I do remember standing at Liverpool Street station with a cardboard plaque around my neck, on which was written my name and where I came from. All I took with me was a cardboard suitcase with whatever clothes and belongings I had.

A complete stranger, Mrs Smith, or Auntie as I would call her, collected me from Liverpool Street and took me on another train to Reading. We then walked from Reading station to 21 Ardler Road, Caversham, which was about one mile away.

First page of list of names of children brought to the UK under the auspices of the Czech Children's Section on transports from Prague

GUNS	Sidonie	5878	18. 1.28	As above	Czech Section	Czech Section	
GUGGENHEIMER	Rafael Penl	1624	20. 5.33		J. C. Gilbert, 3/9 Southampton Row, London, W.C.1.	Personal Guarantee	12/6d as above
GUGGENHEIMER	Hanna	5607	7. 2.38	Left for Sweden	As above	As above	} left for Sweden
GUGGENHEIMER	Eva	5608	11.10.35	c/o Mrs. Blackwell Strand Lodge Beaconsfield Road Epsom Downs.	As above	As above	
GUMPEL	Hannelore	7805	23.11.23	Pennyn Nursery Home Headley Down, Hants.	Czech Section	Czech Section	10/- weekly grant since 1.2.40.
GUMPEL	Lieselotte	7804	31. 1.26	c/o Mrs. Kingston 68 Chalkepit Lane Dorking, Surrey.	Czech Section	Czech Section	10/- as above
GUMPEL	Rosemarie	7803	1. 3.27	Bellan House School, Oswestry, Salop.	Czech Section	Czech Section	10/- as above
GUTTMANN	Nelly	7446	12. 2.25		Miss E. Rogers, Heightly, Park Drive, Oswestry, Salop.	Czech Section.	Bellan House School
GUTTMANN	Vera	5041	6. 8.34	c/o Otto Guttman 19 Norland Avenue Gulaby Rd., Hull.	Edmund Senter, 32 Enderleigh Gardens, Hendon, N.W.4.	Personal guarantee	Father:- C.T.
GUTWEIN	Thomas	1125	2. 5.35	With guarantor	H. A. Marston Smith, 21 Ardler Road, Caversham, Reading.	Personal guarantee	
HAAS	Eva Gisela	7573	3. 5.24	With guarantor	Mr. & Mrs. F. Davis, 6 Gibbon Road, Nunhead, S.E.15.	Personal guarantee	Learning hairdresser in Guarantor's business
HACKER	Rita	5625	6. 4.36	c/o Mrs. KEMP, READING SCHOOL, READING, BERKS.	S.G.T. Harris, 29 Byron Road, Earley, Reading	Deposit	
HAHN	Peter	1824	6. 1.27	Harlow College Harlow, Essex.	John McArthur, 90 Chiltern Court, London, N.W.1.	Czech Section	
HAIBERSTAM	Heinrich	3648	11. 9.26	MUNCASTER SCHOOL, THE LINKS, 1, STOMPOND LANE, WALTON-ON-THAMES.	Mon. Mrs. H. Franklin, 50 Porchester Terrace, London, W.2.	Deposit	Harlow College
						Movement	

I didn't speak a word of English and she didn't speak any German or Czech, so life was quite interesting for the first few months. I learnt English very quickly because there was no one else who spoke my language. Most of my English was learnt going to the larder (there were no fridges then) and pointing at food. As it was wartime I'm not sure what food there was, but there must have been milk, eggs and bread. I think they also taught me nursery rhymes.

“ I do remember standing at Liverpool Street station with a cardboard plaque around my neck, on which was written my name and where I came from. All I took with me was a cardboard suitcase with whatever clothes and belongings I had. ”

List of names of children brought to the UK under the auspices of the Czech Children's Section on transports from Prague (page 2). My name is in the middle of the page

The lady next door, Mrs Baird, was also a part of my life and she helped me to learn English. I do remember very clearly having my fourth birthday there but I can't remember actually having a party or if there were other children there. I had only just arrived and my English was pretty halting at that time.

Auntie and Uncle (Bert and Gladys Smith) always wanted children but never had any of their own. Auntie was a waitress and Uncle was an electrician at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Auntie gave up work when they took me in. I found out later that she was paid some money by someone so she wouldn't have to work. She looked after me very well and I had a very happy childhood with them.

I started the local school when I was five, by which time I spoke English. There was a Tate and Lyle warehouse in Ardler Road with a big patch of scrubland with bushes and trees in front and that's where I played with other children from my street, and I learnt some of my English from them. Most people who lived there had children. We would play Cowboys and Indians and Cops and Robbers. Everybody knew me. It was only much later in life that I discovered that the families who took in children had to pay a sum of £50, which was to send us back after the war. Everybody thought it would be over quickly, but of course it wasn't. I wondered how Auntie and Uncle could have come up with such an amount of money on their own; it was only later in a conversation with Auntie that she told me the whole road had contributed to raise the £50. It was a happy time with lovely memories like going fruit picking with Auntie in Wisbech. I think we picked apples. ■



Selling poppies for Remembrance Day on 11 November
1939, aged five



Ready for a swim with a friend. I am on the left



Playing Cowboys and Indians, 1940



With Uncle Bert in Reading, 1940



In my Cub Scout uniform. 1943, aged 8



In school uniform. 1943, age 8

My father turns up

My happy life changed when I was about twelve and a half. This strange fellow suddenly turned up at the house in Ardler Road and said he was my father. He had been in England working in London during the war and he must have known where I was but he certainly hadn't show any interest until then. There must have been some communication between him and the Smiths beforehand. I think he came on his own first and later he returned with his new wife, Henny. She was from Germany and my father and she spoke German at home which would help revive my knowledge of the language.

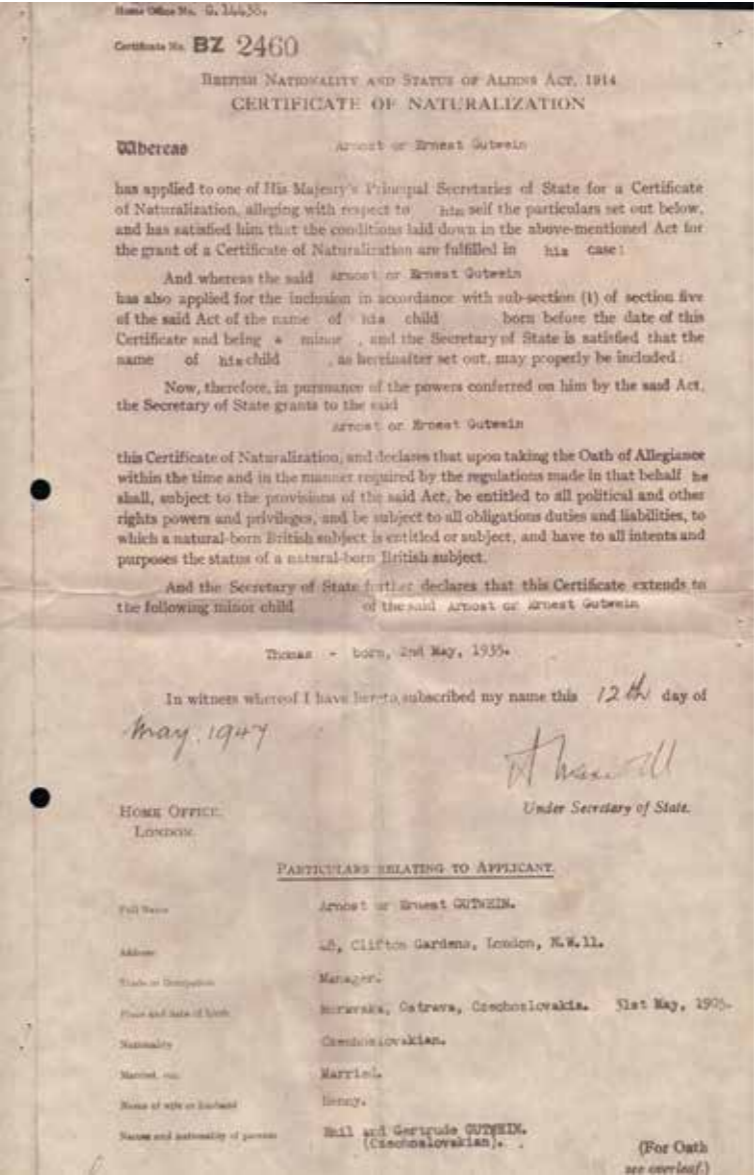
My father and Henny took me back with them to their home at 48 Clifton Gardens in Golders Green. They lived opposite the police station which was useful because as an alien my father had to report in. He became naturalised in May 1947 and applied for my naturalisation as a minor on the same certificate. Years later in 1995 I wrote to the Home Office to get my certificate of naturalisation and they told me there was no record of me.

My father told me I was Jewish and I had to go and learn Hebrew in preparation for my *bar mitzvah* which was less than six months away. It was all very hurried. We lived very near Alyth Gardens where there was a Reform synagogue. Luckily the rabbi, Rabbi Doctor Werner Van Zyl (who later founded the Leo Baeck College) was very good to me. He had a daughter my age, Nikki, (very beautiful, so it turned out) and we studied together. I didn't know anything about Judaism. I had gone to church with the Smiths and sang all the hymns and now suddenly I was Jewish. I don't think they had known I was Jewish and neither had I.

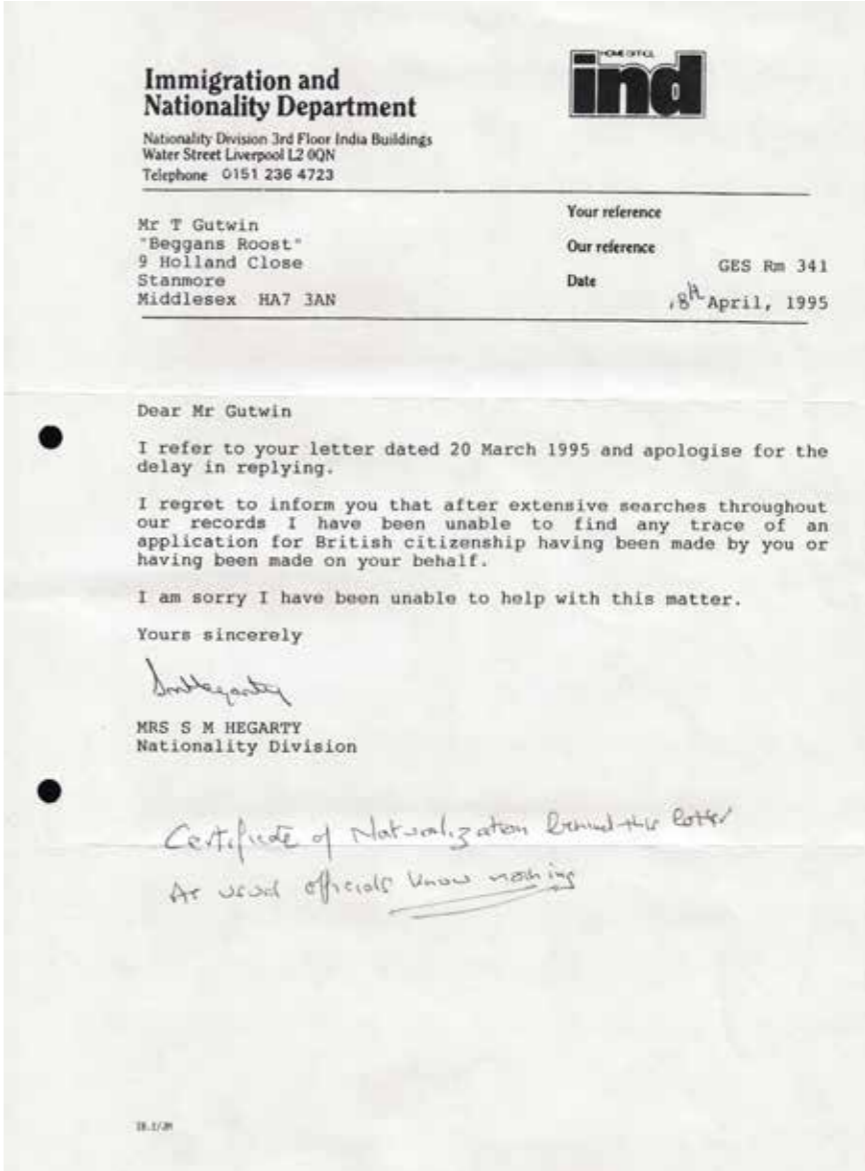
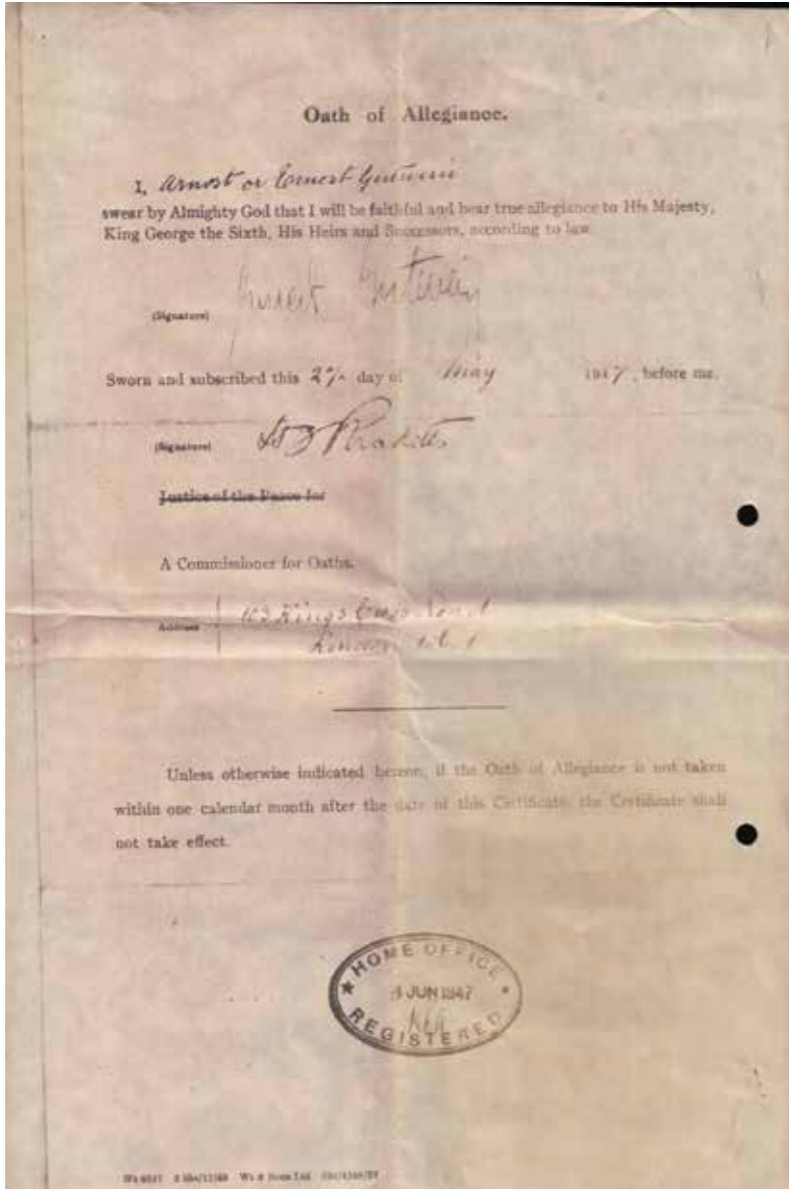
The rabbi taught me the basics and he gave me a very short portion because I had to learn it very quickly. And then I had my *bar mitzvah*. I don't remember if there was a celebration. There must have been something, but it would have been very small as we didn't have much family. I doubt I went to synagogue after my *bar mitzvah* because I was sent to boarding school and I don't remember celebrating Friday night with my father and step-mother so I had very little knowledge of the Jewish faith.

According to an article found in the Jewish Chronicle from 1955 my father came to England from Czechoslovakia in 1939. He knew little English and so went to learn the language while studying engineering at a Twickenham firm. During the war he joined a company called Key Leather. Strangely enough they started off making cork wedge heels for ladies shoes then suddenly they switched to making heaters for cars. This was a new thing as cars didn't have heaters before then. My father became general manager of Key Leather, and later was made chief executive, as it's now called. Under his control they started to produce car accessories and successfully challenged long established competitors with new ranges of car heaters, radiator blinds, thermometers and other car gadgets. I don't know how he got there because he didn't go to university but he was obviously bright and he made it. His English was fine but he spoke with a strong accent. He made enough money to send me to boarding school and have a maid at home. ■

“ I didn't know anything about Judaism. I had gone to church with the Smiths and sang all the hymns and now suddenly I was Jewish. I don't think they had known I was Jewish and neither had I. ”



My father's Certificate of Naturalization which includes my name and date of birth



Letter from 1995 suggesting that I was an illegal immigrant as they had not noticed my name added to my father’s Certificate of Naturalization!

Sent away to boarding school

I was first sent to a prep school, Normansal in Seaford in Sussex, which was a very nice school. The head, William Seagrove, had founded the school. I remember he had a Ford V8 Pilot, a very large car. A V8 was unusual because it had eight cylinders as opposed to the normal six. One thing I will never forget is that Mr Seagrove took the whole rugby team, including me, driving in the car with him. I think I was at Normansal for just over a year. I would have gone at twelve, taken my Common Entrance and then gone on to Friends' School, a Quaker boarding school in Saffron Walden.

Friends' School was about three hundred years old and I believe it closed in 2017. It was co-educational and I was about thirteen when I went there. I remember an avenue of trees and a walkway, at the end of which was the sanatorium, where you would go if you were feeling ill. It served another purpose as well. We had about half an hour between tea and prep when we would go back into the classrooms and you were allowed to walk up and down the avenue with your current girlfriend, if you had one. Lots of the couples later married. There was a tower which split the school in two: boys on one side, the tower which had the refectory and offices in the middle, and the girls on the other side. We would all have breakfast, tea and, of course, classes together, but not lunch – I don't know why.

My favourite subjects were History, Geography, English and English Literature. Maths was my weakness. I was always very sporty and I played rugby, football, cricket, hockey and tennis in all the top teams at both schools. I played scrum half for the rugby team, and a forward position in the football and hockey teams. I enjoyed the school, I thought it was terrific.

“We had about half an hour between tea and prep when we would go back into the classrooms and you were allowed to walk up and down the avenue with your current girlfriend, if you had one.”

As it was a Quaker school we went to the Meeting House every Sunday. The pupils could walk there on their own or with a friend. The boys sat on one side, the girls on the other side and the Quaker congregation in the middle. Everyone would just sit in silence then, when a sign came upon them, a member of the congregation would stand up and say something, usually about God and how God affected them and their relationships and their belief. It was the adults who stood up, I don't remember any child ever standing up. The meetings were about an hour and a half, two at the most and most of the time we would just sit there in silence. It must have been boring. Most of the pupils were Quakers and many were the children of couples who had met at the school and married. There were a lot of marriages between the pupils.

I had friends at school but my life was very different to theirs. I never went home for the holidays but I didn't really mind. There were about four or five of us who stayed at school all year round; the others were from abroad. We would use the gym and play football. There were generally a few staff around too. I remember going on one holiday with my father and step-mother and Rosemary, my step-mother's sister, but I don't remember where we went. I think my parents travelled a lot. I don't know why I never went to the Smiths in the holidays. The only people that I really made friends with were members of the sports teams. There were a couple of other Jewish boys there called Slowe; when I met my wife it turned out she knew the family. Her parents were friendly with their parents. It's a small world! ■



At Friends' School, Saffron Walden. 1949, age 15



At Friends' School, Saffron Walden. 1949, age 15

National Service

After school, at eighteen, I completed my National Service. I did square bashing (basic training) and then I was sent on a Russian course. I already spoke German and French fluently. I was in the RAF and was a senior aircraftsman. That was as far as I got. I didn't rise to any great heights because my job was sort of preordained as I had taken the Russian course. I also went to RAF Cardington for parachute training. We jumped off towers first and then we had to do six jumps. They had to push me out the plane as I didn't like it! My role was to be dropped behind enemy lines speaking Russian and causing a bit of havoc as a marksman. I was a good marksman. I could lie in the snow dressed all in white, hidden, sometimes for hours, ready to shoot. It seems like I had a natural talent for shooting. This was during the Cold War when war with Russia seemed likely at the time.

I was sent to Scotland to do the winter training. I'll never forget when I went to the military camp in Dumfries. I went up on my own. I was given a pass and I arrived about teatime. I went into the dining room and there were piles of sliced bread about eighteen inches high, two big bowls of jam and big pats of butter, or probably margarine. I did my normal thing and took two slices of bread, butter and jam and ate it. About fifteen minutes later this horde of wild young men, soldiers, rushed in and grabbed everything in sight. The bread went, the butter went, the jam went and I looked on absolutely horrified. But of course three weeks later I was doing exactly the same thing. It always made me laugh.

In 1954 I was sent to Germany to RAF Wildenrath in North Rhine-Westphalia and to RAF Gatow in Berlin. RAF Gatow was an important centre for intelligence gathering. One of my main jobs was to listen to the Russians talking over the radio and then to translate what I heard. I was probably in Berlin for about nine or ten months. We were told that if you had a German girlfriend you should go out in uniform. It didn't make a blind bit of difference because none of the boys did that. Sometimes they would fall asleep on the *Ubahn* (the underground) and would wake up in the Russian, American or French sectors. I would then get a phone call, especially if it was in the Russian sector, telling me a few of our guys hadn't turned up for reveille in the morning and could I go and find them. I would take a diplomatic pouch and a guy with a gun and go and have a chat with the Russians to get them back.

It was an interesting time and I was called on to do all sorts of strange things. For example, the British army held battle-plans there and carried out exercises. Often their tanks would drive through fields of corn, ruining them. Then I would have to go and discuss compensation with the German owners of the fields. I would travel up and down the Rhine in a jeep doing whatever I needed to in order to keep the exercise going. I had to be very diplomatic. Fortunately I am fairly even-tempered and don't get into arguments. I didn't make any long lasting relationships in the army and I don't think there were any other Jewish boys with me.

I did play rugby at Twickenham for the RAF against the Army. In fact, when I left the services, the only thing written on my discharge papers was that I was their top tennis player. Nothing else was mentioned! I actually enjoyed the air force life. Looking back on it I should have stayed longer. ■



In uniform, 1954



In my Air Force uniform at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, 1954



In uniform, 1954



In the Air Force, 1954

R.A.F. FORM 1394.
(Revised April, 1950)
(For issue only to National
Service Airmen and Airwomen
not on regular engagement).

ROYAL AIR FORCE

BRIEF STATEMENT OF SERVICE AND CERTIFICATE
ON DISCHARGE

1. Surname GUTWIN

Christian Names THOMAS

Official No. 2700425

Rank on Discharge S.A.C.

2. Period of whole time service, From 6/1/53 To 2/1/55 22-2-55

3. Trade in civil life ENGINEERING

4. R.A.F. trade on entry RECRUIT

5. Details of any R.A.F. trade training NIL

6. R.A.F. trade on discharge and brief description of duties. (vide A.M. Pamphlet 51.) GUNNER SIGNALS
ABILITY TO TAKE CHARGE OF THE JUVENON SIGNALS SECTION IN THE FIELD
A THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF A SIGNALS OFFICE:
TRAFFIC INNOVATION: FIRE ORDER PROCEDURE AND FIRE DISCIPLINE: REMOVAL
FIGHTING VEHICLES AND AIR RECONNAISSANCE

7. Assessments of Conduct, Proficiency & Personal Qualities during service: ON DISCHARGE

	Exceptional	Very Good	Good	Fairly Good	Poor
(a) Conduct	<u>Very Good</u>				
(b) Ability as tradesman/aircrew* ..		<u>Very Good</u>			
(c) Ability as supervisor in his trade ..					
(d) Personal Qualities:—					
(i) Leadership			<u>Good</u>		
(ii) Co-operation		<u>Very Good</u>			
(iii) Bearing (to be assessed "Very Smart," "Smart," or "Untidy")					<u>Smart</u>

8. Medals, Clasps, Decorations, Mentions in Despatches, etc. NIL

9. Reason for Discharge EXPIRY OF NATIONAL SERVICE

10. REMARKS. (This section to be used only to amplify Assessments, trade qualifications, etc., where necessary).
THIS MAN HAS BEEN ON THE JUVENON 13 MONTHS AND IS AN
EXCELLENT WORKMAN PARTICULARLY TENNIS AND HAS
REPRESENTED BOTH SQUADRON AND STATION

11. DESCRIPTION ON DISCHARGE
Height 5 ft. 8 ins. Colour of Hair BLACK
Complexion FLESH Marks or Scars OP. MARK MARK OF
Colour of Eyes BROWN BOTH EARS

12. National Service airmen are liable to undergo part-time service—See notice overleaf.

UNIT DATE-STAMP
ORDELY ROOM
7 JUL 1955
ROYAL AIR FORCE
STATION

Signed A. J. HUNT Rank Ser Ltr
AF OFFICE Commanding CAR. HUNTERMAN BAOR!

Signature of Airman/Airwoman T. Gutwin

WL 45055/0/2621 4,800 Pds 4/50 KJL/2621/4 Cp. 848/3

My Story Tommy Gutwin



In 1954

Beginning my career

After my National Service I went to the London Polytechnic in Regent Street where I studied for a BSc in production engineering. That was another good time in life. My father sent me to Esslingen, Germany to a company called Eberspächer which made pre-heaters and mufflers for vehicle engines. Engineers from Simms Motor Units came over when I was working in Esslingen and I took them around and showed them the turbo chargers we were making. This was something new for diesel engines which Simms made. They bought the rights to make them in England and I translated the manuals for them. They said that when I came back to England there would be a job for me.

I also worked in Paris for about a year in a factory which made heaters. I stayed with a family who had two daughters around my age and I was immensely pally with them. We were just good friends but they helped me perfect my French. From Paris I then went to Lyons to work in a branch of the heating manufacturers. I stayed in digs in Lyons across the road from the university which was handy because I went to French lessons at the university in the afternoons. I also played hockey for a Lyons team while I was there. I still speak German fluently but now it takes me a few days to get back to fluent French.

After returning from working in Germany and France I worked for my father for about a year at Key Leather but we never really hit it off. Simms Motor Units then approached me and I went to work for them in East Finchley. It was easy to get there with the trolley bus from Golders Green where I was still living with my father and step-mother. It was an interesting job. I started off as a production engineer and then I moved to do the newfangled thing, work and motion studies, which I had learnt while working at Eberspächer in Germany. I designed jigs and fixtures and watched the production to see how it could be made easier. Diesel engines were coming into use then and Simms produced turbo chargers for diesel engines. I laid out the production plans, which I translated from German, and then worked on improving operations.

My father had bought a company called Aeon where I went to work after leaving Simms. My step-mother was the managing director and my father and I were directors. Aeon took a patent on a rubber suspension unit which was highly technical and something new in the industry. ■



In 1955



While in Esslingen, Germany in 1957

My Story Tommy Gutwin



With my first car, 1959



Jo and I visiting Uncle Bert and Auntie Gladys in Reading before we got married, 1959



With Jo before our engagement party, 1959



Jo and I at our engagement party

Family life

I met Jo at Chandos tennis club. She was sitting there with her leg in plaster and I signed the cast. We became friends. She worked for an advertising agency in town as secretary to one of the chief executives.

When Jo would come to my home my father and step-mother would speak in German, even though she didn't speak a word of it. She still doesn't speak it although she did start taking lessons but then thought it was silly to learn because my father and Henny could speak perfectly good English, although accented.

Jo and I got engaged in May 1959 and I took her to meet Uncle and Auntie. Uncle died before we got married in May 1960 so Auntie didn't come to the wedding but Jo and I went down to see her about that time and took her out, which I am sure she enjoyed more than if she had come to the wedding on her own.

We managed to find a nice little house in Cornbury Road, Canons Park. I think the mortgage was about four pounds a month! Then we started our family - Mark was born in 1962 and Jeremy in 1964. One day Jo walked down to the shops in Canons Park and when she got home she realised she'd left Mark there in his pram. You couldn't do that today.

Aeon, my father and step-mother's company for which I was working at the time, bought a rubber factory in Birmingham called Bordesley Rubber and I was suddenly told that I was going up there to run it. We were living in Hatch End at the time opposite the tennis club. On Monday morning Jo used to drive me to Hatch End station, sometimes in her dressing gown, and I would come back early Friday to spend the weekend at home. I don't think my family were very happy; they didn't see me much as I would play tennis most of the weekend.

After commuting for about nine years we eventually moved up to Solihull with the boys who were about 15 and 13 at that time. We didn't want to live apart anymore. It must have been around 1977 and we were there for about two years after which Jo's mother became very ill so we moved back down to London, living in Stanmore.



Ready to get married! 1960



The family group at our wedding



Just married!



Leaving for our honeymoon

The boys went to St John's school which is in Northwood. Mark then went to The John Lyon School in Harrow before we moved up to Solihull. Mark subsequently took a banking degree in Wales. He was headhunted by HSBC and stayed with them until he retired a couple of years ago. Mark married Mandy (Amanda) and they have two sons, Steven and Alex. Mandy has just taken a doctorate in psychology. She's a trained speech therapist working in Luton and her thesis is on selective mutism.

When we moved back to London, Jeremy went down to Cornwall for a couple of years to a college there, and then he went into horticulture, studying at Oaklands College in St Albans and Cannington College in Bridgewater. While I was working at Islington Council a job came up for a grounds maintenance manager so I told Jeremy about it - and he's still there today, having progressed to a senior position. Jeremy's wife is Jayne and she's the office secretary at their local school. Their sons are Jason and Michael.

Although we didn't have a close relationship with my father and step-mother they had insisted on seeing their grandchildren every other Sunday, when the boys were young. We would drive them over and Jo would take the boys inside and I would stay in the car. I didn't speak to them for quite a long period of time. I didn't like them and they didn't like me. I think we only took the boys there through a sense of duty. We didn't stay. They were a very unpleasant couple and a bit frightening. We learnt later that the boys didn't have a very good time there. They were forced to eat sauerkraut and all sorts of things they didn't enjoy.

I never really got on with my father. We tolerated each other I suppose although I have to say that if it weren't for him and if I had stayed in Reading, I probably wouldn't have gone to university or got the jobs I did.

I was, however, very fond of Jo's parents. Her father died a year after we got married, but I always had a very good relationship with her mother. And I never forgot the kindness of the Smiths. After I left they had taken in an English girl, Jean, who called me her brother but, of course I wasn't. She was about 15 or a little younger. She wasn't very nice. Auntie's mother had also lived with us. I suppose I called her Granny although I can't really remember. When Uncle died Auntie found it difficult to look after Granny as well.

Once Granny died I saw Auntie on a very regular basis. She started hoarding and her house became absolutely filled up with rubbish. We managed to get that cleared up and I paid some of her bills for her. Luckily I was in a good job by then. We kept in touch until she died. The Smiths were delightful people. Very simple but hearts of gold. It had been a bit of a shock when my father had suddenly appeared and told me I was going to go and live with him in London. I had been disappointed about being taken from my home of eight years and I'm sure the Smiths were sad about it too. That could be why Jean arrived fairly quickly after and they also fostered two other little boys, one called Barry and another whom I met when I went to visit when I was older. ■

“ I was, however, very fond of Jo's parents. Her father died a year after we got married, but I always had a very good relationship with her mother. And I never forgot the kindness of the Smiths. ”

My later career

I joined a charity called Make Children Happy as their regional director for the Birmingham area. It wasn't a very salubrious time. Unfortunately, there were a number of charities then which set themselves up just to take for themselves any money raised. I arranged a number of events and even managed to get Peter Shilton (the former English goalkeeper) to make a personal appearance. As soon as I realised that the money raised was not going to the good causes, I left.

My next job was with the Initial Towel Company, which supplied and fitted clean roller hand-towels into their machines around the country. It was quite a large company, highly industrialised and unionised. I remember going to Sheffield for training. I trained as a manager and eventually took over the laundry in Clapton where they laundered all the towels before sending them out to be changed.

From there I moved to Barnet Council in their purchasing department for a few years and then to Islington Council in their HR department from which I retired.

My proudest time came when I was looking for part time work following my retirement. In 2003 Mandy's father phoned me. He was a minister and wanted to give the homeless of Kings Cross help to lead useful lives. He and a committee of Reform Jews raised some money but they needed the right person with the right skills and initiative to run a Jewish charity which recycled furniture, called the King's Cross Furniture Project. I applied for the job of general manager and had an interview. By the time I had arrived home, they had called offering me the job. It started off in a very small way. We were working in Russell Square on top of a boarded-over swimming pool! We collected furniture and resold it at extremely low prices to people who couldn't afford to buy new. The charity started mending cookers and fridges and then I found a proper engineer to come and fix them. We collected all kinds of things including mattresses and beds. The councils around there knew us and they would send people to get stuff from us. We started with one really old van, then managed to raise money to buy another two. We collected from all over but a lot of the donations were pieces of high-end furniture from Chelsea. I had some very happy years there and found it to be a very fulfilling role. I brought it a long way from where it started and I'm very proud of what I achieved. I retired from there in 2009. I then sat on the Board of Trustees for a further three years. ■

Tennis and other sport

When I went to live with my father and step-mother I joined the local tennis club, Chandos in Golders Green. I had always played tennis although I'd never had any lessons. I took to it naturally and it was the same with squash. There was a company called Preston across the road from our house, who were famous tennis racquet manufacturers. This resulted in my having the first two metal racquets (as opposed to wooden ones) that ever existed in this country.

In those days, when you went shopping, you were given Green Shield Stamps which you could collect and then exchange for goods from a catalogue or other stores. Green Shield Stamps ran a youth program which I managed to join and they sponsored me to play in tennis tournaments. I think I was already playing for Middlesex Juniors; I even played with Bobby Wilson who was a British number one - when the Middlesex team got together I would knock up with him or play with him. It was much the same when we moved to Warwickshire. As it so happened we bought a house next to a tennis club. From my study you could hear the *thwack thwack* of the tennis balls. There was a gate at the bottom of the garden that led straight to the tennis club. So I wandered down there. They knew of me from county tennis. They said there's a young guy playing with his father but his father's not up to his standard, and they asked me to go and knock up with him. I did and we had a really good knock-up. That turned out to be Jeremy Bates and he became England number one within a few years. At Chandos I played tennis with Jo's father, uncle and brother. I had played Junior Wimbledon, but Jo's uncle (David Griew) played in the main Wimbledon tournament. I never got to that level. I played on both lawn and clay courts.

“They said there's a young guy playing with his father but his father's not up to his standard, and they asked me to go and knock up with him. I did and we had a really good knock-up. That turned out to be Jeremy Bates and he became England number one within a few years”

Jo was also a tennis player but wasn't that competitive; not like me - I'm very competitive! I drove us into the final of the London Parks mixed doubles which was quite a big tournament, but I did most of the work. I took virtually every ball. We didn't win and that hurt. We didn't play that much mixed doubles as partners after that. When we lived in Hatch End we belonged to the tennis club and Jo's name is still on the board as Women's Singles Champion. Jeremy's name is also on the board as a Junior Champion.

Besides tennis I also played squash every week in Northwood. One day somebody at the squash club asked me if I'd like to play with a chap there and I agreed. I wasn't bad but this guy was exceptional. I worked very hard and I lost all three games, although not by a lot. I played to the best of my ability. Then they had the cheek to tell me he was a world champion, one of the Khans. I think they did it as a joke, but I was completely dehydrated afterwards and came home and went to bed for several days to recover.

After I retired I played a lot of tennis and also started to play bowls. I've always been sporty so I took to bowls easily even though I was never taught how to play. I played for Middlesex County and was close to being picked for the England team. In fact I did play for England once. This was outdoor bowls which I played a few times a week. Now I play indoor bowls at Herga Club in Harrow. I can't play outdoors anymore as I have a balance problem although I go to classes to help with that. Sport has always been a major part of my life. To be frank I'm really quite lost without it although these days I have to make do with watching it on television. ■

Nicholas Winton and the *Kindertransport*

In 1938 Nicholas Winton was a young man in England. He was going on a skiing holiday when a friend of his phoned from Prague and told him of the crisis concerning children who needed to be rescued from Czechoslovakia before war broke out. The *Kindertransport* had rescued about ten thousand children from Germany and Austria but Czech children had been missed out, although they were in the same situation. Nicholas went to Czechoslovakia and set up his own rescue operation. He had to find homes and guarantors for the children he wanted to bring to England. The guarantors had to pay a deposit of £50 for each child, the purpose of which would be to pay for their return home after the war. He organised seven trains and I think I was on the third. The last train never made it because it was due to leave on the day Hitler invaded Poland and all the borders were closed. He never spoke about any of this and it only came to light years later when his wife found a scrapbook in their attic with lists of names and other documents.

There was a feature about Nicholas Winton on the BBC television programme *That's Life* in 1988. Many of the children – then grown up, of course – were invited along to the programme but I wasn't included because they hadn't found me yet and I didn't know, at that time, that I was a Winton child. Nobody ever told me; not my father nor the Smiths. When I saw the programme it got me thinking so I phoned the researchers and discovered that I was on the list and Nicholas sent me a copy of the section with my name on.

It's a shame that I didn't find out before the programme was made as I would have liked to have been there, but I'm pleased that I met Nicholas a few times afterwards although not until I was already in my seventies. He, of course, was that much older than me but we got on extremely well. I think it must have been an emotional meeting because he had saved my life. In 2009 there was a re-enactment of the Winton transports, with a steam train making the three-day trip from Prague to Liverpool Street station and I was with him on the platform. We chatted for a long time about the rescue, but we also spoke about many other things. He was a very modest man.

I went to Nicholas Winton's memorial. Theresa May spoke because she was the MP for Maidenhead which is where he lived. After that I became more involved with memorial events about the *Kindertransport*. Late in 2016 I got a phone call from the theatre company, Chickenshed who were putting on a performance of the play *Kindertransport* for a group of schoolchildren. They asked me, as a Kinder, if I would come along and speak to them after the performance. I was very pleased to do so and it was a very interesting experience. The play was about one girl who had arrived on a *Kindertransport* and been in a similar situation as I had at that time.

I had never spoken to an audience about my childhood experiences before and didn't really know anything about those sort of events. When my son got married, I discovered that his wife's mother, Joanna, had also come to England as a Jewish refugee as part of the group known as 'The Boys', just days before her third birthday. She came over with other children from Theresienstadt and they were flown over in a transport plane. She was in a home, like an orphanage, for three years. Joanna gives talks to schools and is very active. Since I joined The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), I now see her quite often at various events such as the luncheon hosted by Prince Charles at St James' Palace to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the *Kindertransport*, which was an amazing experience.

I was seated at a table and was very surprised that there was a big gap between myself and the lady next to me. I thought that maybe that was where they would bring the food in, and in fact they did. But then suddenly they plonked a big chair there, Prince Charles marched in and sat down right next to me! We started to chat and he was very easy to talk to – although we had to call him 'Sir'. Of course, while we were chatting the photographers were there and then the television news reporters wanted to speak to us too. It never occurred to me that it would be on television but while we were watching the news that evening, to my astonishment, I suddenly appeared. I was a star for a day!

A few weeks after the luncheon the AJR asked me to come to the office and give a talk. I thought it would just be for one of the committees, but when I got there I was faced with a room packed full of people, all waiting to hear me speak. ■



Jo and me with our grandsons Jason, Michael, Alex and Steven at my 80th birthday celebration



With Mark, Mandy, Jayne and Jeremy



Having tea with HRH Prince Charles at St James's Palace to mark the 80th anniversary of the *Kindertransport*, November 2018

Life now

My life has turned out well, but without a few key events, it would have all been so different. For a start, I escaped from the Nazis and lived. This was not the fate of almost all of my family.

I had a happy childhood with Auntie and Uncle in Reading, followed by a great school life in Saffron Walden. A chance encounter at a tennis club found me my wonderful wife of almost sixty years and together we were fortunate to have two sons.

I now have an extended and close family, something that back in 1939 would have not seemed possible.

Mine is but one of the many stories of the lives of the *Kindertransport* children, who owe so much – their lives of course – to Nicholas Winton, all those that helped him and the remarkable generosity and kindness of heart of the people of England. ■




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.



I do remember standing
at Liverpool Street
station with a cardboard
plaque around my
neck, on which was
written my name and
where I came from. All
I took with me was a
cardboard suitcase with
whatever clothes and
belongings I had.

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees

www.ajr.org.uk