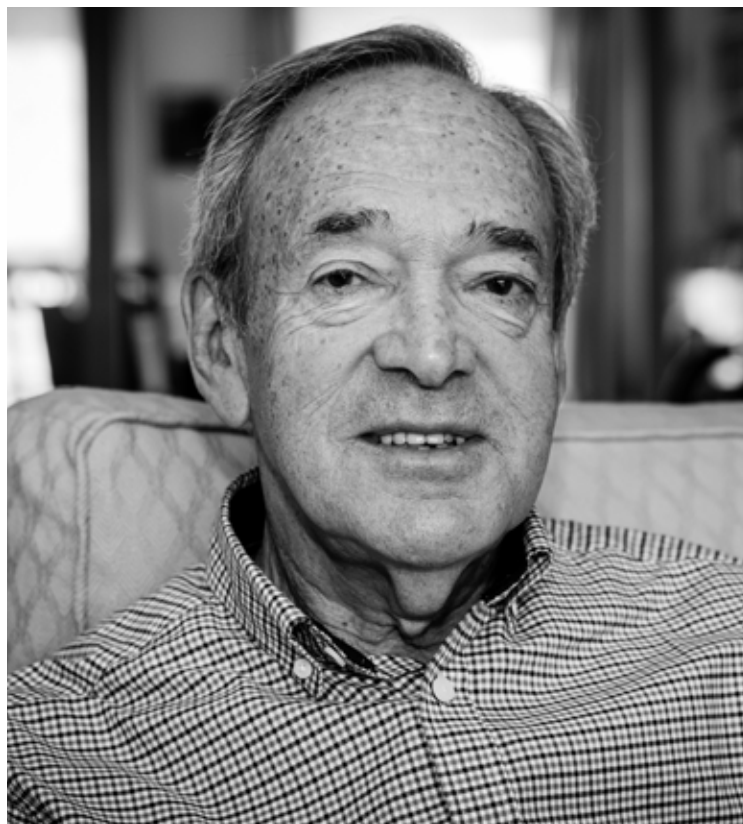


My Story

Ivan Shaw

 **AJR** The Association
of Jewish Refugees



My Story

Ivan Shaw



These are Ivan'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

Ivan Shaw was visited by AJR volunteer Lisa Bayfield to share his story.

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My Story

Ivan Shaw

I had a terrible fear, when my first child Andrew turned five, that something would happen to him, because that was the age that I was when my parents were transported to Auschwitz and I lost them. At that age, life had just turned upside down for me.

Contents

06	Part 1 A happy start before tragedy strikes	30	A culture shock - adjusting to life in England
07	My parents, Trude and Andor Buchwald	31	Repeat after me: “One, two, three, shut up!”
11	A happy start	32	Secondary school - Berkhamsted
13	The invasion of Yugoslavia by the Hungarian Army in 1941	33	A Levels - the mediocre scientist
13	... and the invasion by the German Army in the Spring of 1944	34	Leeds University
15	My parents are deported - and leave me behind	35	The broken promise and my eventual return to Vrbas
16	A betrayal by Erzsi’s neighbours	36	Joining the family business...and leaving it
17	The transit camp	37	One of the Serbian Shaws
18	Brave Aunt Etél to the rescue	38	Meeting Eileen
20	Another rescue - my precious family photo album	41	Turning five
21	A new life in Vrbas (May 1944)	42	Family life - our children’s childhoods
25	Another aunt: Magda Schatz	42	My adoptive parents
27	Another new start - leaving Vrbas for Amersham (October 1947)	46	Branching out on my own - the M&S employee becomes the M&S supplier
		48	Life is full of coincidences

Contents

49	Another generation - grandchildren	64	Buchenwald and Auschwitz
50	Adoption Panels	65	My family in Yugoslavia (now Serbia)
51	... and adoption papers	66	Vera and Gábor Vig (later Simhoni)
52	My slow Jewish awakening	67	Part 3 Eileen’s family
56	Golden wedding anniversary - a celebration at Burgh House	68	Eileen’s family
57	Part 2 What happened to my family	72	Part 4 Recording my testimony
58	My relationship with my adoptive parents	73	Recording my testimony
59	What happened to my parents	76	Part 5 Reflections
62	The fate of my grandparents and other family members	77	Never forget your roots
63	A shock in the Novi Sad Synagogue records!	79	Family
		81	Can one forgive and forget?
		82	A happy ending
		83	Part 6 Sources

Part 1

A happy start before tragedy strikes

My parents, Trude and Andor Buchwald

MY NAME IS IVAN SHAW, but I was born Ivan Buchwald on 27 February 1939 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia.

My mother's name was Gertrude Buchwald, but she was known as Trude. Her maiden name was Rado. She was born on 24 April 1905 in Újvidék (the Hungarian name for Novi Sad), which at that time was in Hungary. She was the younger daughter of Robert and Szerén Rado (née Pressburger). Her older sister, Magda, had gone to live in Berlin before I was born. I knew my maternal grandparents well. They lived in the flat above us. My grandfather had a small factory making jams and marmalades.

My father, Andor Béla Buchwald, was born on 16 July 1899, also in Újvidék. His father was called Ignaz and his mother Ida, although she was known as Ilona. Her maiden name was Bruck. Ignaz was Jewish but Ilona was not. Ilona meticulously recorded all of the births and deaths in the family by writing in the back of an 1874 Prayer Book from Prague, which I was fortunate enough to be given by my aunt Etél before she died.

My father was the youngest of seven children. His siblings were Ilonka, Jolánka, Debora, Elizabet (Erzsi), Jenő and Etélka (Etél). Three other siblings, Ilonka, Jenoke and Lajoska, died at a very young age before he was born. Jolánka died just before his 10th birthday. Both of my paternal grandparents died before the Second World War (the 'War'). ■

My mother pushing me in my pram, April 1939



With my mother, 1939



A happy Start

I was an only child. My parents had been very persevering. They tried several times for a baby but my mother had six miscarriages or still-births. I was the seventh baby; the only one who survived. I was born prematurely after only eight months, so someone somewhere was looking after me.

We lived in Novi Sad, a city roughly the size of Leicester, situated about 80 miles north of Belgrade (between Belgrade and the Hungarian border). The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was created after the First World War in 1920 by the Treaty of Trianon, following the Treaty of Versailles. This defined Hungary's new borders. Novi Sad was one of those places which changed nations over the years. So although my parents and I were born in the same city, they were born in Hungary and I in Yugoslavia (and now it is in Serbia). Later in my life, I visited the cemetery in Novi Sad and found tombstones for my father's family dating back to 1805.

We lived in an apartment in the city centre, at the back of St Stephen's Cathedral. My father had a shop selling electrical goods (record players, radios, irons etc.) in the high street, in a prominent part of town. My mother was a housewife. She helped my father occasionally in the shop. From what I can gather, my father was doing quite well and they led a reasonably normal, quite comfortable, middle-class life (given that it was during the War).

I grew up with three languages. Serbo-Croat was the official language at the time, although the population was essentially Hungarian. At home, we spoke Serbo-Croat and Hungarian. I spoke a mixture of those languages depending on who I was talking to. I also spoke German, as it was the common language of Central Europeans and most educated people spoke it.

I had a happy childhood. As an only child, I was spoilt and indulged. I must have been one of the most photographed babies in the country, taken to the professional photographer practically every week of the first years of my life. My parents must have loved me very much. I have happy memories of playing with them and being taken out by them. Novi Sad is on the banks of the Danube with a sandy beach and I remember going swimming in the Danube in the summer. There are photos of us there in 1943 and 1944 in a family photo album. ■



With my father

The invasion of Yugoslavia by the Hungarian Army in 1941


Going back a bit, Yugoslavia was not involved in the war until April 1941, when it was invaded by Germany, Italy and Hungary. Vojvodina, the area where we lived, was taken over by the Hungarians because, although it had been absorbed into the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia after The Great War, it had been in Hungary for centuries before that. The Hungarians were in charge again and patrolled that part of Yugoslavia until March 1944.

At the time of the Hungarian Army's invasion, there were around 4,000 Jews out of a population of about 100,000 in Novi Sad. Although anti-Jewish laws were in force and there were some very violent incidents in Novi Sad and the surrounding area, the Hungarians did not transport Jews to Auschwitz at that time. Most Jews in Novi Sad were pretty much left to get on with it and life was reasonably normal.

I am not sure how much I was told about the things that were going on around us. As far as I am aware, I had a happy childhood and I did not know about the hostility until, suddenly, in May 1944, life was turned upside down.

... and the invasion by the German Army in the Spring of 1944

By March 1944, the Axis Powers appeared to be losing the War. Realising which way the wind was blowing, the Hungarians put out feelers to the Allies to sue for peace. German intelligence found out and the Germans decided to take over. The German Army marched into the country and Novi Sad came under German occupation. With the help of the Hungarians, the Germans began rounding up all of the Jews and the deportations started very soon after they arrived. The Germans were making up for lost time and although Jews did not start being transported until the spring of 1944, within a few months half of the 800,000 Jews of Hungary had been taken to Auschwitz. ■



With Erzsi (holding me) and my mother

My parents are deported - and leave me behind

In early May 1944 (before 9 May 1944), Jews in Novi Sad were told to go to an assembly point by the Novi Sad Synagogue. At this point, only Jews who were fully Jewish were being sent away, not those who were half-Jewish. My mother had been summoned to go but my father had not, as he was half-Jewish. He had the option not to go and he was encouraged by his sisters to stay, but he elected to go, voluntarily, with my mother. In some ways that makes it even more tragic. I have mixed emotions about it because, although he did not abandon my mother, his wife, he did abandon me when he did not have to. He obviously had no idea what he was going into. My parents probably thought that they were going to a labour camp for a short time and assumed that they would eventually come back and that I would be safe with my aunt (whom they were sending me to live with) in the meantime. I don't think that anybody envisaged that they would be sent to death camps.

My parents left together. I never saw them again. I was five years old. ■

“My mother had been summoned to go but my father had not, as he was half-Jewish. He had the option not to go and he was encouraged by his sisters to stay, but he elected to go, voluntarily, with my mother. In some ways that makes it even more tragic.”

A betrayal by Erzsi's neighbours

Before they left, my parents took me to stay with one of my father's sisters, Erzsi. My father's family had been quite close. Erzsi lived nearby in Novi Sad and there had been a lot of family gatherings so I knew her and her two daughters. My grandmother Ilona's records show that Erzsi was born as Elizabet in Becskerek at 11.30 on 8 May 1889. She had married a non-Jew of German extraction, but he had died and she was a widow.

I remember being taken away and spending some days at Erzsi's home. I missed my parents and did not know what was happening. I wondered why I was with my aunt and why my parents had abandoned me. Erzsi and her daughters did not explain to me that Jews were being rounded up and deported.

Within only a few days of staying in Erzsi's home, I was betrayed by one of her neighbours and picked up by the Gestapo. I don't remember being taken away from Erzsi but I remember some things about what happened after. I was taken to some sort of solitary prison cell with very high walls and a barred window. I tried to stand on something to look out, but I was only able to peer at the outside world through the iron bars. I remember screaming my head off and crying my eyes out and being absolutely terrified. I was alone and I did not know what was happening. ■

“ I don't remember being taken away from Erzsi but I remember some things about what happened after. I was taken to some sort of solitary prison cell with very high walls and a barred window. ”

The transit camp

I think I was only in the prison cell overnight and the next day I was taken in a lorry to a transit camp near Novi Sad. There were a lot of other Jews from Novi Sad there. I knew some of them, including my uncle Jenő (one of my father's brothers) who looked after me, and some friends of my parents. I was there for about 10 days. I remember being undressed and being doused with buckets of water. I hated being made to run around semi-naked or sometimes naked. It was embarrassing. There were no sanitation facilities or toilets. The food was diabolical. It was inedible. We seemed to be eating baked beans for days and nothing else. I think that I was sick, but I was so hungry in the end that I had to eat something. I remember screaming and crying and not being happy, not knowing what was happening to me. It was a pretty horrific time. Obviously I must have been totally disorientated and terrified. ■

“ I remember being undressed and being doused with buckets of water. I hated being made to run around semi-naked or sometimes naked. It was embarrassing. There were no sanitation facilities or toilets. ”

Brave Aunt Etél to the rescue

After about 10 days, the camp inmates (including me) were taken away from the transit camp. We were to be marched to Novi Sad train station to be transported to one of the camps, probably Auschwitz.

While I had been in the transit camp, my aunts had been busy working out what to do to rescue me. The first thing that Erzsi did when I was taken from her home by the Gestapo was to send a telegram to her sister Etél (my aunt and another of my father's sisters) saying something along the lines of 'They have taken Ivan. What shall we do?'

Etél lived in Vrbas, a village in the countryside about 30 miles north of Novi Sad with approximately 25,000 inhabitants. Etel's husband, the local butcher, had died early on in their married life (of blood poisoning after an accident unrelated to the War) and she was left a widow with a daughter to raise on her own. She was quite a character, a very strong woman. She was the go-getter in the family, the one who got things done.

Etél immediately took a train to Novi Sad on a mission to get information. I am not quite sure how - perhaps she bribed a German official - but she managed to find out what had happened, that I had been taken to the transit camp and when I was going to be marched to the station. She had discovered exactly where I would be in order to stage a rescue.

I was marching to Novi Sad station. We walked in a long line with row upon row of people. As the long column of prisoners walked past some woods, Etél suddenly ran out from between the trees, grabbed me, picked me up in her arms and ran back into the woods!

I remember walking in the line and suddenly being yanked out, and hiding in the woods after. Obviously I did not know what was going on although I did know Etél very well. She certainly was not a stranger.

We hid in the woods for a period of time. Before she had rescued me, Etél had hidden supplies for us for two or three days in the woods. Then we went to the station master's house near the station where we stayed and slept on the floor. Etél had bribed someone so that we had somewhere to stay for a few nights.

Many years later, when I went back to Vrbas in the early 1960s, I met a woman who had also been in that column of marchers and witnessed the whole incident. Her husband was not Jewish and he had helped to prevent her from being deported. She told me that we were very lucky because the German soldier who was patrolling that part of the column had seen Etél rushing out of the woods and grabbing me from the line of people and rescuing me but he had done nothing to stop her. He simply looked the other way.

There were good Germans and bad Germans. They were not all Nazis. Maybe this one was a conscript. Had he been an SS officer he would have shot us both, but he decided to take no action. Luck was on our side.

Etél was obviously made of very tough stuff. I suppose that is why Erzsi turned to her when I had been taken away. She saved my life, no doubt about it, and she risked her own life (and the lives of her own family) to do it. She could easily have been killed. ■

“Etel's husband, the local butcher, had died early on in their married life (of blood poisoning after an accident unrelated to the War) and she was left a widow with a daughter to raise on her own. She was quite a character, a very strong woman.”

Another rescue - my precious family photo album

Rescuing me was not Etél's only act of bravery. After my parents were taken away, she went back to our home to retrieve a family photo album with all my childhood photos in it. I don't understand how she got it and how she had the courage to do it. Maybe after the deportations the Germans did not immediately take over the deportees' homes. There was obviously a window of opportunity where Etél could go in and pick up some valuables. She found the album and took it home with her. Without it, I would not have the same record of my family, no pictures of my parents and me going about our lives in Novi Sad, no idea about them or my early years. I would have missed an awful lot. ■



The only photo I have with my maternal grandparents

A new life in Vrbas (May 1944)

After Etél rescued me, I went to live in her home in Vrbas.

Ilona's records show that Etél (Etélka) was born at 11.00 on 16 July 1894 in Czentavér (Csantavért in Hungarian as it was then, now Čantavir in Serbia). She was not taken in by the Nazis because she was only half-Jewish. Her non-Jewish husband, Philip Scheer had been of German extraction. He had died in 1942. Germans had lived in Vojvodina for centuries. They were virtually all deported after the War.

Etél lived with her daughter, Böske, son-in-law Stevo Popic and grandson, Jovica. They hid me and looked after me. It was, again, a huge risk, because if we had been betrayed the whole family would have been killed and the house burnt to the ground. Who can say if they would have taken such a risk? ■



The house in Vrbas where I was hidden for 3 years

It was a large house with a huge enclosed courtyard and an orchard at the back. I was allowed anywhere within the house and the outdoor space but I could not leave the premises. I don't remember much about that time, except for the fact that it was drummed into me that if anyone came to the house, on no account should I tell them that I was Jewish.

In October 1944, the Russians invaded Yugoslavia and the Germans were driven out. The Nazis had occupied the part of the country where we were living for a matter of months. I had been in hiding for about five months and luckily all of the neighbours who knew had kept quiet about it. This time I was not betrayed.

Now I no longer had to hide from the outside world. I started school.

As my father was the youngest child, there was some disconnection between the generations, with significant age gaps between me and some of my relatives. Böske, my cousin, was born in 1914 and was therefore about 25 years older than me. Her son, Jovica, was born in 1935, and was only four years older than me so I grew up with him for the next three years. I was very happy playing with him. We were like brothers.

I spoke Hungarian with Etél (because she was Hungarian, although she could also speak Serbo-Croat), Serbo-Croat with Stevo, and a mixture with Böske and Jovica. At school I spoke Serbo-Croat.

“In October 1944, the Russians invaded Yugoslavia and the Germans were driven out. The Nazis had occupied the part of the country where we were living for a matter of months. I had been in hiding for about five months and luckily all of the neighbours who knew had kept quiet about it. This time I was not betrayed.”

I formed a very deep relationship with my aunt Etél, but I did wonder what had happened to my parents. I remember, at some stage, being told that they were not coming back because they had died in the War. I don't think that Etél ever told me any more details than that.

We learnt soon after the War what had happened to my mother. She had been deported initially to Auschwitz and later to Bergen-Belsen ('Belsen'). My mother's first cousin, Gábor Vig, had married Vera who was a few years younger than my mother. Vera was not just a relative, she was a close friend of my mother and also of Böske. Gábor had fought with the Yugoslav Army in the War and ended up as a Prisoner of War. He was not deported to a concentration camp but Vera and her sister had been taken to Auschwitz in May 1944. Vera's sister died in Auschwitz, while Vera was later sent to Belsen. Vera was able to tell us what had happened to my mother because they had met again by chance in Belsen. Vera also said that my mother had told her that if she did not live to see the end of the War, she wanted me to go to live with her sister Magda and her husband György, who had moved to London.

I was unable to find out what happened to my father for a very long time after the War. Following liberation by the Russians, the Yugoslav radio station broadcast the names of survivors and victims from the camps through the Red Cross. I remember being glued to the radio with the family for hours at a time, waiting for news, listening out for my father's name. We never heard it. I did not find out what happened to my father until over 50 years later, in 2002. ■



Jovica and me in 1945. We had both had our heads shaved in the summer, I think to avoid catching lice. I have a little dog on my lap and that love of dogs has stayed with me throughout my life.

Another Aunt: Magda Schatz

My mother's older sister, Magda, was born in 1903. She left Novi Sad in the early 1920s to go to Berlin to study music. Her husband, György (or George as he was known in England), was born on 18 August 1899 and was from Szeged in Hungary. He had been in the Austro-Hungarian Army in the First World War. Magda and György met in Berlin. They had no children of their own.

Magda and György were both Jewish. In 1933 when Hitler came to power, they had to leave Berlin and, for a number of years, they essentially moved back to Yugoslavia, living with my maternal grandparents. György travelled around Central Europe, using Yugoslavia as a base, representing a number of textile mills in Huddersfield by selling woollens and worsteds on their behalf. He would come to England twice a year on buying trips. As he was representing mills in the UK, he received a commission paid into a UK bank account. For reasons which I do not fully understand, but based on some correspondence that I have read, the Hungarian Government took issue with Hungarian nationals keeping money in England. So the fact that György was a Hungarian national, living in Yugoslavia and getting paid in England was a problem.

In 1938, Magda and György came to England, applied for permanent residency in the UK and got official Leave to Stay on a permanent basis. They came more as economic migrants than refugees. I have letters to the Home Office from György proving that he was financially strong, which was an essential prerequisite in those days. I do not think that they came here because they could anticipate what was going to happen with the War but because György saw a better future for himself and his wife in England.

Magda and György had come to Novi Sad and seen me as a baby and between February and September 1939 they had returned periodically to Yugoslavia. However, I was not close to them as they lived abroad and after War broke out they were no longer able to come to Yugoslavia. ■



The last photo taken before leaving Vrbas in 1947. I am with Jovica and Aunt Etél. This was sent to England. My adoptive parents would have had no idea what I looked like.

Another new start - leaving Vrbas for Amersham (October 1947)

Some years ago, I came across a telegram in my adoption papers, which had recently become legally accessible. It was dated June 1945 from Vera and Gábor, to Magda and György in England telling them that they had survived the War and that my parents had disappeared and they did not know what had happened to them but I was safe. That was probably the first time that Magda and György knew that I was still alive.

I don't know precisely how and when Vera had told Magda and Etél about my mother's wish for me to live with Magda if I survived the War. It resulted in a tremendous battle between Etél, who had saved my life and embraced and absorbed me into her family and Magda, who wanted to heed my mother's words to Vera in Belsen and bring me to England.

The situation in Yugoslavia at the end of the War was pretty grim. The country had just come out of civil war and was now in the depth of the Cold War. There was a big struggle for control between Tito and the Russians. He was playing the Russians off against the United States and trying to cement his own position. Communism was taking over. Tito managed to keep Yugoslavia independent from the Russians unlike other Eastern European countries. Life in Yugoslavia was hard.

Eventually, Etél, much against her will and with a heavy heart, decided that I would have a better life in London and reluctantly agreed to let me go. She probably felt that materially I would have more in England than she could ever provide for me in Vrbas. She agreed on the understanding that I would come back once a year to visit.

According to Vera, it was almost impossible to get permission to take a child out of Yugoslavia after the War when it had become a Communist country. It only became possible in my case because Gábor's friend (a lawyer and a senior official in the Communist party) knew Tito and pulled some strings to get the requisite paperwork. There may well have been a delay on the British side also. It took about two years to get permission.

At the end of October 1947, my prospective adoptive father, György, sent his cousin Miklós Farago to collect me as he could not come himself. Miklós was a refugee from Vienna who had settled in England with his wife Hilde. They had come to England to be a butler and maid. I don't fully

understand why my adoptive father did not come himself but he had terrible claustrophobia and I assume would have struggled to travel on a plane.

I remember being collected. I was nearly nine. It was very difficult and very much against my wish. I hated it. I was going to a totally strange world, to a country whose language I did not speak, to live with people who I effectively did not know. I had not seen my aunt and uncle since they had come to see me in Novi Sad as a baby and I had no relationship with them. It was traumatic for me.

It was bitterly cold. I was literally dragged, kicking and screaming to the station in Vrbas on the way to Belgrade. Etél fainted because of the stress. It was an absolute nightmare.

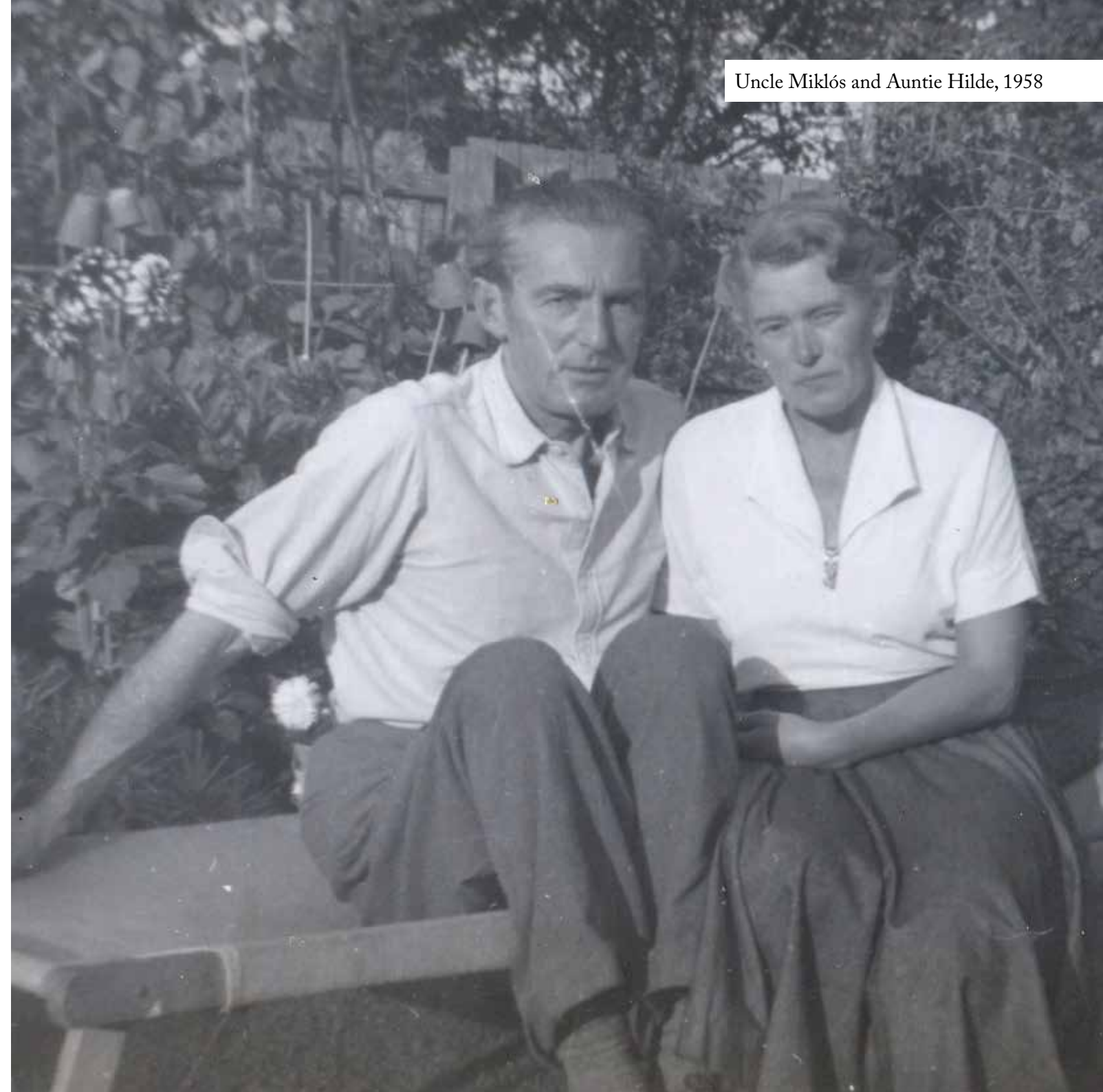
We got the train to Belgrade, stayed there overnight and Miklós and I flew to London via Prague the next day. I arrived in England on 27 October 1947.

At Northolt airport, Miklós pointed to my aunt and uncle and said to me: 'Those are your new parents.' I looked the other way. I did not want to know. I imagine it was strange for them too. They were a couple, aged 48 and 43, who had never had children and suddenly they were presented with an eight-year-old boy.

We were driven to my adoptive parents' house at 26 Woodside Road in Amersham. I was taken to my bedroom, where I found a bicycle. They had got me presents. Life began to look up. ■



Magda, my aunt and adoptive mother



Uncle Miklós and Auntie Hilde, 1958

A culture shock - adjusting to life in England

At first, living in England was a big culture shock. I remember shopping in Sainsbury's with my adoptive mother and seeing all of this food. I had never seen shops with such choice. Coming from a Communist country, it was quite unbelievable. This was another world.

It was very difficult to adjust in the beginning but I seem to remember being sent to the local school almost immediately and not speaking a word of English but actually adapting fairly quickly.

At home, I carried on speaking Hungarian (because György, my adoptive father, was Hungarian) and German, because a lot of my adoptive parents' friends were Central Europeans who spoke German. I never, ever, spoke another word of Serbo-Croat and, consequently, I forgot the language entirely.

In the first year, I missed my relatives in Vrbas very much, particularly Etél and Jovica. I regularly thought about going to visit them. I did not really feel at home here. I was never able to form the deep relationships with my new parents that I felt I would have had with my own parents or with Etél and her family, although gradually I reconciled myself to my new life. Over the months and years, I became more and more anglicised, and got used to the community and to the way of life here. I took on a veneer of Englishness and life moved on. ■

Repeat after me: "One, two, three, shut up!"

I went to a local school in Amersham called Amersham College which was in Woodside Road (the same road as our house), about a 10-minute walk away from home. I settled down very well. Initially it was a bit of a shock as I was not really able to communicate with anybody at all, but I must have been fairly outgoing and adaptable because I was very happy in the school and began to assimilate relatively quickly. Within about six to nine months, I spoke fluent English and was near the top of the class in English. Looking back on it, I am surprised how quickly I learnt to adjust.

I remember there were some funny incidents. One time I was in the classroom and the teacher was teaching me some numbers which she had written on the blackboard. I had to repeat after her: "One", "one", "two", "two", "three", "three". For some reason, some of the children started to laugh and chatter so she said, "shut up!" and I repeated "shut up!" thinking it was the next number. The whole class fell apart roaring with laughter. ■



At the Savoy in 1949 with Vivien Fox at whose wedding I would meet my wife

Secondary school - Berkhamsted



My adoptive parents did not put me down for the 11+ entrance exams because I had never had any training for them. Instead, at the age of 10, I sat for an independent public school, Berkhamsted, which was about seven miles away. By this time we had moved and were living in Punch Tree House in Sycamore Road, still in Amersham. I just about scraped in to Berkhamsted. I was put in class 1C (the bottom stream), but after one term I had already been moved up to 1B and eventually I ended up in 3A, the top set.

I was very happy at school. I also enjoyed the sports. I spent most of my summer holidays playing tennis. I had a lot of friends in Amersham, none of whom was Jewish, but that did not really matter. ■

Playing cricket, 1951

A Levels - The mediocre scientist

I struggled to choose my A Levels. I had been very interested in history and the arts, but my adoptive father was quite a dominant character and he persuaded me that science was the future. So I did A Levels in chemistry, physics and maths. I was a mediocre scientist.

Around the time of taking my A Levels I had a very unhappy period of about six months deciding what to do next. I was really at a loss. I had already rejected an offer of a place at Queen Mary College in London to study chemistry because I had decided that that was not what I wanted to do.

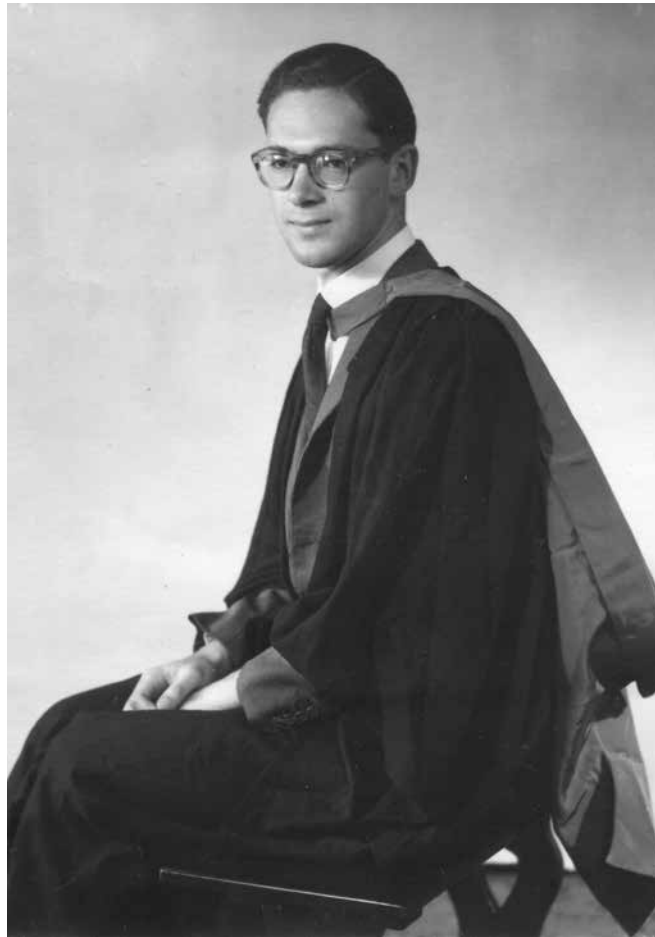
I got reasonable A Level results but could not decide on a degree subject. My adoptive parents could not understand the concept that you went to university to be educated rather than doing something that would help you in your career afterwards (for example engineering or science or whatever). The idea of studying philosophy, or history, or PPS (politics, psychology and sociology) was totally beyond their radar.

In the end, my adoptive father suggested that I do a textiles degree at university, after which I could come into the family business. He himself had a textile engineering degree from Aachen in Germany. I thought that at least that would give me something to do. ■

“Around the time of taking my A Levels I had a very unhappy period of about six months deciding what to do next. I was really at a loss.”

Leeds University

So, in October 1957 I went to Leeds University to study a textile engineering course, which I actually enjoyed. I did not regret doing it. I had a great time in Leeds for three years doing all sorts of things, including becoming involved with the Jewish Society (J-Soc), the theatre and the local student newspaper. I graduated with a BSc in Textile Engineering. ■



Graduation from Leeds, 1960

The broken promise and my eventual return to Vrbas

When Etél had agreed to let me come to England, it was on the understanding that I would go back regularly to Vrbas to visit my family. That did not happen and the promise was broken. My adoptive parents would not allow me to go back and, as I did not have the means to go on my own, I had no choice. They felt that, had I returned to visit regularly, I would not have had roots either here or there and so it was in my long-term interests not to let me go, even if that meant going back on their word. They thought that if I spent my summers in Yugoslavia instead of playing cricket here, I would not know where I belonged.

Looking back on it, overall it was probably the right decision for me, but I am not sure that it was entirely fair. I did not push it with them, even though I had wanted to go back. I was probably able to acclimatise and assimilate more easily and more quickly because I did not return. I became a typical English schoolboy. I do, however, think that by the age of 13 or 14 I would have been able to go back without the risk of any confusion.

I did not lose all touch with my family in Yugoslavia. I corresponded with them on a regular basis, although that was not the same and we did grow further and further apart. I wanted to go back as soon as I could fund the trip myself. Eventually I did return to Vrbas in 1960 at the age of 21, when I was able to pay for the trip with money that I had earned working at the Post Office and Barclays Woollens in the holidays. I was still not particularly encouraged by my adoptive parents, but I wanted to go. I had wanted to go back all along.

At that point, I made a conscious decision to return to Yugoslavia on a regular basis to visit my family there and I have returned every two or three years ever since (it became Serbia in the early 1990s). I have never forgotten where I came from. There might be a veneer of Englishness but I cannot forget my past and I don't want to.

Etél never forgave my adoptive parents for breaking the promise. When my relations came over from Yugoslavia, the two sides did not speak to each other, which was a shame. One time, years after I had come to England, I brought Böske and Jovica over and I phoned my adoptive mother to ask if I could take Böske over to see her. She said that she was too busy to see her. That said it all to me about their relationship. ■

Joining the family business...and leaving it

After university, I was again at a bit of a loss as to what to do. So I joined my adoptive father's textile business, Barclays Woollens, which exported fine woollens and worsteds to tailors all over the world. I knew the business quite well as I had worked there before in the school holidays. However, my adoptive father was a very dominant character and, although we got on well generally, at work we often clashed. I felt that if I stayed there he would not be able to let go and I would always be treated like the little boy and not be allowed to grow and run the business myself.

I stuck with it for 18 months until one day we had a violent row and in the evening I went to see a friend, Clemens Nathan. I explained that I was unhappy and that it was not anyone's fault but it was not working out. I asked Clemens if he had any ideas. By coincidence, he had just been to Marks and Spencer (M&S) and they were looking for someone with my qualifications, so he suggested that I apply and gave me the phone number to call. In those days you did not have to submit a CV. I had a half hour interview with a director, at the end of which he decided he wanted to take me on. So I joined M&S and ended up being there for 30 years. ■

One of the Serbian Shaws

When I started work at M&S, I decided to change my name.

I had arrived in England as Ivan Buchwald and had immediately taken on my adoptive parents' surname, Schatz. When I was later naturalised I was given the middle name 'Peter', as my adoptive parents thought that I should match the English practice of having a middle name.

One of the things that annoyed me at school was being called 'little treasure' (the English translation of 'Schatz') by my German teacher. Throughout my school years, I had always been conscious of having a German name when I really was not, and did not want to appear to be, German. I was Yugoslavian. I did not mind at all people knowing that I was not English, but I did not want to be presumed to be German.

Schatz was also too near to a not very pleasant sounding name. While at school, I had joined the Combined Cadet Force and eventually I got to the rank of Sergeant. Unfortunately, I was sometimes called 'Sergeant Shits', which I survived, but I did not want my children or grandchildren to go through it too.

My adoptive parents had heavy foreign accents and they always felt that it would have been ridiculous for them take on a traditional English name, such as Smith. They had no qualms about me changing my surname. I chose Shaw because it was a similar sounding name to Schatz. Nowadays I might have thought differently and felt it was unnecessary to change it, but in those days, the early 1960s, a foreign name stuck out like a sore thumb.

Fifty years later, my daughter, Tanya, who had been very close to her mother's father, Mischa, named her son after him. Mischa had been called Michael by his friends in England, but Tanya chose to call her son Mischa and that is all he is ever called. There is no question of his name being anglicised. Times have changed.

I have had people ask if I am one of the Scottish or one of the Irish Shaws. I tell them that I am one of the Serbian Shaws. ■

Meeting Eileen

During my teen years in Amersham I had only one Jewish friend, Vivien Fox, who lived in London. I met Eileen at Vivien's wedding in 1963. Vivien's parents were mutual friends of our parents. It was a tea dance wedding. I was sitting between two girls - Eileen was one of them - and I got talking to them both. At the time I was in a relationship which I knew that I was about to end, but I had not yet got round to doing it. I took a note of Eileen's telephone number and about six months later, after having split up with the other girl, I phoned her up. We both had a vague memory of who we were and we went out for dinner.

We went out officially for about six months before we got engaged, and we were engaged for six months before our wedding on 14 October 1965. Although I did not know it at the time, it is the groom's prerogative to choose the synagogue for his wedding. Eileen's parents were non-observant members of the United Synagogue and wanted us to be married in a United synagogue. At the time, I was a member of West London Synagogue (WLS) which I had joined after university. Eileen's parents lived round the corner from WLS. So I invited Rabbi Hugo Gryn, then a Rabbi at WLS, to meet them. He charmed them instantly. He was the only person who was able to speak to my adoptive parents in Hungarian, my prospective in-laws in Russian, and Eileen and me in English. Any objections Eileen's parents may have had to the chuppah being at WLS promptly evaporated. Our chuppah was followed by a reception at the newly built Hilton on Park Lane.

A year after we were married, I went back to Yugoslavia with Eileen.

At this time we lived at 5 Fairfax Place in Swiss Cottage. I was working at M&S and Eileen worked for Clive Goodwin, a literary agent. Our first child, Andrew (named in memory of my father, Andor), was born in 1967. In 1968, we moved to our current house. Philip was born in 1970, and Tanya in 1973. ■



Wedding day, West London Synagogue



Wedding Speech, Hilton Hotel

Turning five

I had a terrible fear, when my first child Andrew turned five, that something would happen to him, because that was the age that I was when my parents were transported to Auschwitz and I lost them. At that age, life had just turned upside down for me. My thoughts were totally irrational and illogical, but the fear and emotions returned every time one of my children, and later my grandchildren, came to the age of five. I thought of them and how lucky they were that they had not gone through what I did. I imagined them in the same situation. It was a horrific feeling. ■



Our children

Family life - our children's childhoods

Andrew, Philip and Tanya grew up very close to Eileen's parents who lived nearby to us. They were not as close with my adoptive parents, who were considerably older and lived in Amersham.

They had normal childhoods, with Andrew and Philip going to school at UCS (University College School Hampstead) and Tanya at South Hampstead High School. They were Bar and Bat Mitzvah at WLS and active members in the youth programmes and groups there. Later, Andrew got a job in TV, while Philip went to university in Nottingham and Tanya in Glasgow. ■



Andrew's 21st birthday

My adoptive parents

My adoptive parents stayed in Amersham until they moved to an old age people's home when they were both in their eighties and very infirm. My adoptive mother died in 1982 and father in 1985. They are buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Hoop Lane where my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Valentina and Mischa Tucker, are also buried. ■



House in Amersham c. 1951



Our family home



With Rufus

Branching out on my own - the M&S employee becomes the M&S supplier

By the time our children had finished their schooling, I was still working at M&S. I joined the Cloth Buying Department, which subsequently became Textile Technology. I was responsible for sourcing and developing new fabrics and finishes for M&S. In my time I was involved in everything from Bras and Knickers to Men's Suits. It was an exciting time when new synthetic fibres were invented to cater for increasing demand for easy care and improved performance and the company was expanding rapidly, accounting for 15% of all clothing and 30% of lingerie sold in the UK. One of my achievements had been to introduce Lycra to eliminate the rubber girdle. At the time this was a life-changer for womens' comfort. I travelled all over the world to source the best for the company. During the 30 years that I had worked there, profit and turnover had increased each year. We thought that that would continue for ever. In fact, in 2016 M&S made half the profit that it had in 1997. It was far more successful financially when I left over 25 years ago than it is now.

Going back in time, in 1991 a new Chairman was appointed and he decided to streamline the company to increase efficiency and profits. A huge strata of senior management was given the option for early retirement. I was 52 and was offered a package that I could not turn down. It was a fantastic opportunity for me to start my own business. By sheer coincidence, on the day that I was given the option of staying or leaving with the package on offer, my father-in-law was buried. Eileen had been working with him in a business exporting goods to Russia. I joined Eileen there and slowly developed another business basically supplying M&S. I had the benefit of knowing all about the company and how it worked. I knew the ropes and which buttons to press. I realised much too late that I could make far more money supplying M&S than working there. Eileen and I had about 10 good years of importing textiles from Turkey and Italy to supply the retail trade, with 80% of my business being with M&S. It went very well. I later retired in the mid-2000s. ■



Celebrating 25 yrs at M&S - with a girdle signed by my colleagues

Life is full of coincidences

It seems to me that life is full of coincidences. In August 1999, Andrew married Esther Ellmann. Esther was born in Copenhagen to Hungarian parents and speaks fluent Hungarian. Her father, Gábor, had been in Belsen as a four-year-old child and survived. So, by a very strange quirk of fate, my mother died in Belsen and Esther's father survived Belsen. The grandson of a victim married the daughter of a survivor.

In November 2001, Philip married Clare Stuart whose grandfather, Reg Dark, had been in the British Army troops that went into Belsen. I discovered this shortly after Philip and Clare's engagement, but Clare's grandfather never spoke about it. By another strange quirk of fate and six degrees of separation, over 55 years after Belsen was liberated, the grandson of the victim married the granddaughter of the liberator. You could not make it up. It was meant to be. ■

“ By a very strange quirk of fate, my mother died in Belsen and Esther's father survived Belsen. The grandson of a victim married the daughter of a survivor. ”

Another generation - grandchildren

Eileen and I are very active grandparents to our six grandchildren: Hugo and Amelia (Milly) are Andrew and Esther's children; Oliver and Luella (Lulu) are Philip and Clare's children; and Martha and Mischa are Tanya and her husband Dru's children. We are very lucky that all of them live nearby to us and we have close relationships with them. ■



Our grandchildren, 2015

Adoption Panels

For the past decade or so, I have sat on Barnet and Westminster Adoption Panels as well as the Intercountry Centre for Adoption, set up some years ago under the Blair government. The Panels have a set structure and usually include two independent members who have to have been adopted or to have adopted.

I decided to apply for two reasons. First, because I had been adopted and so had gone through the process myself and was familiar with it and, second, I had been a Magistrate in the Family Court so I knew how the legal and care systems for adoption worked. The panels consider cases of parents who want to adopt and matches between those parents and children who are up for adoption. I empathise with the children who have been placed by the social workers and matched with families. I come to the panel with my own perspective based on my personal experience.

Often my approach differs from that of the social workers, because I know from my own experience that children are very adaptable and resilient. Some do adapt better than others but, generally, children are flexible. Sometimes I will disagree with the social workers about a particular child's suitability to a family or their insistence that the child's culture at birth be maintained. For example, social workers will ask adoptive parents how they are going to make the Russian baby that they are adopting aware of its Russian heritage. The parents may answer that they will eat borscht soup every night, take the child to Pushkin House, play Tchaikovsky, go to Russia on a regular basis, and so on. My response is that, while that is good, this child is going to be raised in Britain and he or she has to be British. That is the most important thing. It is a question of balance. The child should be made aware of their heritage but there is no advantage to overdoing it. The social workers often take the opposite view. They have learnt their position from studying books but I have learnt from my own experiences. The social workers also often ask what the child's views and interests are, but a child's views at the age of five or six may not be in their best interests. Ultimately, you can transport a child from another country or a slightly different culture. They are adaptable and it is not the end of the world. ■

. . . and adoption papers

When, only some years ago, adoption papers were made available, I went to Aylesbury to examine the Bucks County Council Social Services Records to see my own papers. It was quite emotional because I could not understand why I had arrived in 1947 and had only formally been adopted in 1952. I still don't comprehend why and it is too late to ask. Perhaps the legal process took such a long time because my parents here had to prove that my birth parents had died. The papers stated that I was a rather nervous child. I am not surprised. I must have been about eight or nine years old and it would have been a strange situation to be interviewed by a social worker. ■

My slow Jewish awakening

Going back to my childhood, I grew up in a very non-Jewish environment.

In Yugoslavia, I knew that I was Jewish, but after the liberation Etél did not raise me as Jewish and I was not given any Jewish education. There was no synagogue in Vrbas. There were a few Jews in the village but not enough to form a community. Etél had married a non-Jew, as had Böske, so that side of the family was pretty much non-Jewish, particularly living in a Communist country where religion was not encouraged.

In England, Amersham had had a large, thriving Jewish community during the War but most of the Jews had moved back to London afterwards, leaving behind a very small community. There were hardly any Jews at my school and most of my adoptive parents' friends' children were much older than I was. So I had no Jewish friends apart from one in London.

At Berkhamsted School, Jews were a very small minority (3 out of 100 boys in my year). The school was a Christian Foundation and I did go to prayers initially, although I knew that I was Jewish and I think my friends also knew. In the Senior School, where there was Chapel every morning, I opted out, which Catholics and Jews were allowed to do. Everyone at school then knew that I was Jewish but it was not a big thing for them or me.

My adoptive parents were not observant. My adoptive mother went to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and would fast; my adoptive father went to work on Yom Kippur. While they may not have been observant, the fact that they were Jewish still gave me a sense of belonging, with my history and my background: a sense of being Jewish.

My adoptive father had brought his parents, Iszo and Therèse (known as Riza), over from Hungary in 1946, before I had come over from Yugoslavia. Iszo was observant and I remember having Seder nights in our home and celebrating Rosh Hashanah. After Iszo died in 1951, Riza moved into our family home and lived with us and we carried on the traditions.

My parents were conscious of the fact that I had a lot on my plate coming here without speaking the language. I had come from a non-Jewish environment and they were not particularly religious either.

They gave me a choice as to whether I wanted to be Jewish or not and whether or not I wanted a Jewish education. It was never really discussed but I did not have a Bar Mitzvah at 13. For many years I had mixed feelings about it, but at the age of 14 or 15, I made a conscious choice that I was Jewish and I wanted to stay Jewish. I was Bar Mitzvah at 16 in the Amersham United Synagogue.

It had been, if you like, my slow Jewish awakening.

I felt that because of my background and what had happened to my parents, I could not not be Jewish. I did not want to deny my heritage. My parents had been Jewish by race and they had died because of it. I wanted to be Bar Mitzvah to show that I was Jewish. I could not deny the very thing that they had been killed for: it would almost render their death insignificant.

When I went back to Yugoslavia in the early 1960s, the non-Jewish side of my family could not understand why I had chosen to go back to Judaism. I explained that my father had been half Jewish and my mother fully Jewish, I had been living with Jewish adoptive parents and I felt Jewish. They were not against it, they just wondered why I had done it. They were aware of the historical persecution of Jews and of terrible antisemitism, and they were curious why someone would voluntarily subject themselves to the potential risks.

When I went to Leeds University, I had decided that I wanted to get to know more about Judaism. I had grown up in a very non-Jewish, secular society but now I wanted to meet Jewish people. I joined the JSoc, and eventually became Honorary Secretary. Although I did meet lots of Jews there, I actually had very little in common with the English Jews who had come from the East End of London. I am a continental Jew. I also had little in common with the Orthodox Jews I had met. I remember a major discussion in the meeting of the Jewish Students' Association about whether we should invite a Reform Rabbi to talk to us. The Orthodox people were totally against it but I had not previously been aware of that dynamic at all. I never realised that there was a division between different strands of Judaism.

Even today, a lot of my friends are children of continental Jews. Not all, but quite a few, because we have a different mentality. I suppose it is no coincidence that my two best friends from university were Hungarian Jews who had come out in 1956. We are still friends now. There is an empathy between us.

When I returned to London after university, again I wanted to meet Jewish people. I became a member of WLS. Vivien Fox was a member of the Berkeley Group which was linked to the Synagogue, so I got involved with it too. I became a very active member of the Group, eventually becoming Chairman.

Later, when I joined M&S, I learnt that it had a strong connection and commitment to Zionism and Israel. M&S went out of its way to help Israeli suppliers and manufacturers build their businesses, for example helping the growth of a large part of the Israeli citrus business and introducing avocado pears to the UK from Israel. At the time, people here had no idea what avocados were. They were sold by M&S with labels on the side with instructions on how to eat them.

M&S would buy all fabric centrally and distribute it to the manufacturers with instructions on how to produce what they needed. We had a very large fabric supplier in Israel and also a large garment manufacturer which produced men's suits and underwear and so on. I used to go to Israel on business on a regular basis. I worked in a very Jewish environment at M&S and felt comfortable there.

For me, it has always been about my Jewish identity and heritage rather than my religion. Conformist religious faith has never been strong in my life. I think someone whose parents were killed in Auschwitz and who just about survived themselves has difficulty coming to terms with an all-encompassing good God and having religious faith. Some people came out of the concentration camp with their faith renewed and increased. Hugo Gryn was a survivor who came out of Auschwitz with his beliefs reinforced and became a Rabbi. Everyone reacts differently. ■



The family at our Golden wedding anniversary, 14 October 2015, Burgh House, Hampstead

Golden wedding anniversary - a celebration at Burgh House

In October 2015, Eileen and I celebrated our Golden wedding anniversary at Burgh House in Hampstead with our children, grandchildren and friends. Someone said to us that day that the chances of that little boy who just about managed to escape death in 1944 having this party in Hampstead 70 years later were one in a million. That is true. Being there, as a family of 14, Eileen and I, our three children with their spouses and our six grandchildren, somehow felt like a victory. In the end, Hitler had lost. He did not win. That gave me some satisfaction. ■

Part 2 What happened to my family

My relationship with my adoptive parents

I TALKED VERY LITTLE with my adoptive parents about my real parents or my life in Yugoslavia and my family there. It was no secret that I was adopted, but my adoptive mother never really wanted to talk about her sister or their childhood in Novi Sad. It was not a taboo subject and I was not discouraged from raising the subject and asking questions, but somehow it was not encouraged. The past was the past. At the time, I never pushed it, although looking back on it, it was very strange. Maybe my adoptive mother felt guilty that she had survived and my mother had died.

I also felt that perhaps talking about my mother made my adoptive mother feel less of a mother herself. Years later, when Eileen and I got engaged, the two sets of parents met with us to discuss the arrangements. My adoptive father mentioned to Eileen's parents that of course they knew that I was adopted and my adoptive mother got absolutely mad and said: 'What's that got to do with this? Ivan's our child. He's our son.'

However, having said that, overall we had a good relationship and I had a happy childhood. At first it was an awkward situation. My adoptive parents did not really understand me. They were very old parents (in comparison to others in those days) - my adoptive father was nearly 50 and my adoptive mother nearly 45. They had never had a child and it was difficult for them to empathise at the beginning, but they could have chosen the easy option, to let me stay in Yugoslavia and send money to my family instead, which they did not. They brought me over and adopted me, which was a huge commitment without them knowing what they were taking on. It was an enormous decision for which I will be forever grateful. I owe them a huge debt. ■

What happened to my parents

I now know a fair amount about what happened to my parents. I had always known what happened to my mother because she had been with Vera at certain points. I started looking into what had happened to my parents in more detail after Eileen and I got married.

They were both taken to Auschwitz in May 1944 and later transported out of Auschwitz towards the end of the War.

My mother was transported from Auschwitz to Belsen. Vera had also been in Auschwitz and been taken to Belsen at the end of the War. She and my mother had lost track of each other but met up purely by chance in Belsen, many many months later, by which time they were both extremely ill. Vera told me about my mother and the last few days. They were very difficult. They were trying to survive with scraps to eat while waiting for something to happen. When the British Army arrived, my mother had tuberculosis. She was already too ill by that point. It was just too late to save her. She died four or five days after the camp had been liberated by the British. There are no records of my mother's death in Belsen, because, as the Germans retreated and the British advanced towards Belsen, the Germans destroyed most of the papers.

Vera survived. She had suffered the most horrific experiences in Auschwitz including being experimented on by Mengele (as was her sister), as a result of which she was unable to have any children. She did not generally talk about it much, although she did give a deposition to the USC Shoah Foundation.

I had no idea what had happened to my father until fairly recently. He just vanished. I knew that he had gone to Auschwitz in May 1944, but what happened to him after that was a blank. I wrote repeatedly to the International Tracing Service (which is managed by the International Committee of the Red Cross) in Geneva. Initially, they wrote back informing me that they held no records. I then wrote back again and they eventually replied to say that they were receiving a lot of new documents from the former USSR and suggested that I contact them again in a few months' time, which I did. At that point they advised me to contact the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum which held all of the information, which again, I did.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum wrote back fairly promptly notifying me that my father had arrived in Auschwitz in May 1944 and had been transported to Buchenwald on 26 January 1945, the day before Auschwitz was liberated. They did not know what had happened to him after that and advised me to write to the Buchenwald Memorials Foundation as they may have more information, which I did.

I received a letter dated 10 January 2002 saying

'The content of this documents [sic.] is painful: Your father arrived at Buchenwald on January 26th 1945. They took him to the Small Camp. But he was so infirm he was unable to tell his name. So they noted his Auschwitz-number... Your father died in Buchenwald on January 27th 1945. About the cause of death they wrote... acute cardiac insufficiency.'

They enclosed with the letter a list of names and tattoo numbers. My father was listed under people who were 'Vernehmungsunfähig oder Tot' (very incapacitated or dead) with his name, tattoo number (Auschwitz A-10906) and a Buchenwald number (120856) that had been given to him.

At the end of the War, the Germans were sending trains with prisoners from Auschwitz to Buchenwald with passenger lists, like British Airways! They were losing the War and yet seemingly had nothing else to think about except these lists. It was madness.

I later also received a letter from the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen dated 16 November 2006. According to their findings, my father's prisoner number was issued on 31 May 1944. The letter stated that my father:

'... was incarcerated in Concentration Camp Auschwitz (Monowitz) on 9th May 1944 and still on 21st August 1944, prisoner's number: A-10906; was transferred to Concentration Camp Buchenwald on 26th January 1945, prisoner's number 120856.'

The entry list of Concentration Camp Buchenwald shows the note: 26th January 1945: unfit to be interrogated or dead, and the notice on the change in the number of prisoners of Concentration Camp Buchenwald of 27th January 1945: dead, not registered.'

Finding out that my father had died in Buchenwald on a particular day was one of the final pieces of the jigsaw. Although it was difficult to handle the information, not knowing what had happened to him had been worse. This was completion.

I wonder how my parents survived the concentration camps, my father for eight months (May 1944 - January 1945) and my mother nearly a year (May 1944 - April 1945). I don't like to think about what happened to them during that time, how they suffered and how they were dehumanised. It does not bear thinking about the hell they must have gone through. In some ways, it made me reflect that prisoners who were sent to the gas chambers immediately were better off, in a strange sort of way, than those who survived the whole horrific process, becoming skeletons and dying as, or just after, the camps were being liberated. ■



My parents, 1927

The fate of my grandparents and other family members

On my father's side, all of his sisters married non-Jews and survived the War. My father and his two brothers married Jews and none of them survived.

My maternal grandparents allegedly committed suicide in or around May 1944, to avoid being deported by the Nazis. They had probably seen some of their friends already being transported away. I have tried to get confirmation if this is actually true or whether they had in fact died in the War. I have written to the Jewish Community in Subotica and the Red Cross and others, but I have come up against a brick wall. They both died at the same time, which suggests it could have been suicide, but I am unlikely ever to know for sure.

My adoptive mother arranged and paid for a tombstone to be put up in their memory in the Jewish cemetery in Subotica in 1946 or 1947. When I went back to Yugoslavia in the early 1960s, I spent a few hours looking for it but the cemetery was completely overgrown and I could not find it. However, on a recent trip to Serbia in April 2017, Etélka, Ivica's daughter, was driving us around. Ivica is Böske's younger son, Jovica's younger brother. He was born in 1952, after I had come to England. Etélka suggested we go to Subotica for a day trip.

I remembered about the tombstone, so I looked up the Subotica Jewish Cemetery online and a website came up immediately with a search facility asking me to put in information to search the entire cemetery. I entered my grandparents' names and, within a nanosecond, the details and a photograph came up: Rado Robert and Rado Szerén born Pressburger and their dates of birth and death and the location of their tombstone: Sector 5, Row 14, Grave 54. Amazingly, someone had taken a photograph of every single grave and put it on the cemetery website. It was extraordinary.

We arrived at the cemetery. There was not a soul there. It was being cleaned up, the tombstones looked bright and you could read the names. However, there was no indication of the relevant Sector or Row so we could not work out where we needed to go. Eileen worked out where we were by typing into the search engine the name on the nearest grave, and, by process of elimination, within a few minutes, we had found my grandparents' tombstone. It was another piece of the jigsaw. ■

A shock in the Novi Sad Synagogue records!

Not all records were as meticulously kept as the graves in the Subotica cemetery.

About five years ago, on one of my trips to Serbia, I went to the Novi Sad Synagogue which is now a cultural centre used for concerts. There is a cemetery there and an office for the Jewish Community where I found a book listing the names of all of the Jews from Novi Sad who had not returned after the War. While I was looking through the book, much to my amazement I found my own name. To see yourself 'dead' is a bit of a shock. Obviously there was a record of me having been taken by the Nazis but no record of my rescue. I spoke to the person in the Community office and put them right. I explained what had happened to me and that I had survived. They were as horrified as I was and apologised. ■



Novi Sad Synagogue

Buchenwald and Auschwitz

In April 2002, Eileen, Philip, Clare and I attended a special memorial service at the Buchenwald Memorial to coincide with the opening of a new museum there. I had been invited as the child of one of the victims, together with my family. Andrew was in Tokyo and Tanya was unable to come. We stayed in Weimar, which is a most beautiful city, rebuilt by the European Union Commission, with certain parts designated as UNESCO World Heritage sites. I found it difficult to comprehend how a capital of civilisation could be such a short distance away from a concentration camp which was a killing machine. People from Weimar must have known about Buchenwald and the atrocities that were happening there.

It was a very moving ceremony. There is a memorial by the mass grave where people who died in the last few months of the War had been buried, most likely including my father. Now, of course, Buchenwald is an entirely different place and it is very peaceful there. When we were there, the sun was coming out and the birds were singing and Clare said that I should think of my father at peace there. She was right. In a way, again, it was another form of completion.

Having been unable to be in Buchenwald with us, Tanya suggested that we to go to Auschwitz together. I was not keen to go, but I did think that maybe it was something that I should do with my children because they would remember it for the rest of their lives. So Eileen and I went with Tanya and Philip in or around 2007.

We spent the morning in a group tour with about 30 other people, but the guide had an extremely insensitive manner and Tanya, in particular, became very upset about some of his comments. We abandoned the group tour prematurely and arranged to be shown around by a private guide who was excellent. ■

My family in Yugoslavia (now Serbia)

Over the years, I kept in touch with Etél, Böske and Jovica and later I also got to know Ivica and the next generations, Jovica and Ivica's children and grandchildren. I visited them regularly and Böske used to come here to visit us, as did Jovica and Ivica with their wives. My children also had a relationship with my cousins and whenever any of them come to England we had dinner together.

Etél died in 1976 at the ripe old age of 91. She was very special, the strong one in the family. An amazing woman. Böske died in 2000 aged 86. My most recent visit to Vrbas was in April 2017. Jovica passed away recently in November 2018, aged 84.

I always felt that I had a duty to my family who were left behind, a tremendous obligation to the people who had risked their lives to save mine. When Jovica came to England recently, we went for a walk in Highgate Woods with Philip and his children and our dogs. My son later posted a photo on Facebook with the comment: 'This is my father's cousin. Without his grandmother, none of us would be here today'. That encapsulates how he feels and how much he appreciates what they did for me.

I have some guilt complexes about my survival, not because I survived and others did not, but because I had this fantastic opportunity to come to London and live a prosperous life, but the rest of my family in Yugoslavia did not. Life there has been very tough. First they survived Nazi occupation, then Communism for 50 years and then the Civil War in the Balkans. Yugoslavia had been one of the freest, most prosperous Eastern European countries, but after the Civil War it became one of the poorest. ■

Vera and Gábor Vig (later Simhoni)

After the War, Vera and Gábor went to live in Israel, by which time they had changed their name to Simhoni. When I went to Israel in 1961, I stayed with them for about 10 days. Vera told me about my parents and their lifestyles. Vera and Gábor were a lovely couple and took me all round the places that I wanted to see. Whenever I went to Israel on business, I would pop in to see them and we would have dinner together. They also came to London and stayed with my adoptive parents in Amersham. Gábor died and then Vera died about three years ago at the age of 91. I went to see her in Tel Aviv just before she died. She was an amazing woman. ■



Vera and Ivan

Part 3 Eileen's family

Eileen's family

I WAS VERY LUCKY, I had wonderful in-laws. We got on extremely well and they were also very good grandparents.

Eileen's mother, Valentina Salkind, was born in 1914 in St. Petersburg. She was sometimes also called Valya. She left Russia in 1917 with her parents, Judith and Gregory, and her maternal grandparents, Vladimir and Daria Tiomkin, going first to Istanbul (then known as Constantinople) and then to Paris. My mother-in-law and her parents continued on to Berlin, while her grandparents stayed in Paris.

In the 1920s, Russians Jews often went to Berlin as it was then a safe place for Jews to go. When Hitler came to power in 1933, my mother-in-law had been in school in Germany. She went through a period when her friends suddenly would not speak to her any more, and she was not allowed to socialise with them because she was Jewish. She became a non-person. At the time she was taking her Abitur (the German equivalent of A Levels) but was told that she would never pass because she was Jewish. So she went to live in Paris with her grandparents, leaving her parents behind in Berlin.

Valentina's mother, Judith, died in April 1939 in Berlin. Valentina returned to Berlin for the funeral, after which she took her father with her to Paris, with him travelling on a passport bought from San Marino. She then came to London on holiday and while she was here, War broke out and she could not leave. She was stateless. Her grandfather, Vladimir Tiomkin, had been a great Zionist and had known David Ben-Gurion, who happened to be in London at the time. Ben-Gurion explained the situation and my mother-in-law's predicament to Winston Churchill, who gave her permission to stay in the UK.

Eileen's grandfather, Gregory, had remained in Paris after Valentina took him there. He had met a lady named Yvette who hid him from the Nazis during the War. She moved him to different locations regularly so that he would not be found. At one stage, the Germans interrogated her to find out where Gregory was hiding. She refused to divulge any information even when they put her entire arm into a boiling cauldron to torture her and attempt to force her to tell them. She was left with a badly scarred arm. She had been incredibly loyal and after that Gregory felt that it would be the right thing to do to marry her, which he did.

Throughout the War, Valentina had sent money to her father in Paris through the Quakers. As he was in hiding and moving regularly, she had no address for him except that she knew he was in Paris. She had no alternative but to send money addressed simply to 'Gregory Salkind in Paris'. She had no idea if any of the money had reached him, but she kept a tally of what she had sent. After the War, she found out that the Quakers had in fact passed on all of the money and every penny had been accounted for.

Eileen's father, Boris Belinki, was born in 1902 in Mogilev, also in Russia. He had been imprisoned in Lubyanka Prison in Moscow but managed to escape and go to Chemnitz, where he knew his parents were living. In 1933, while in Chemnitz, Boris was tipped off by a colleague that he was to be arrested imminently so he came to England and started a business in Leicester making hosiery.

Valentina and Boris were introduced by mutual friends in 1939. Around the same time, Valentina's friends, Renee and Mussia Soskin, had invited her to a party intending to introduce her to another friend of theirs, Mischa Tucker, but Valentina arrived at the party accompanied by Boris. She and Boris were married in Leicester in October 1939, within six weeks of meeting. Eileen's sister, Judith, was born in September 1940 and Eileen four years later, on 27 October 1944, both in Leicester.

One of Boris' hosiery factory customers was M&S. Boris died very suddenly of a heart attack in July 1945 when Eileen was only nine months old. He is buried in Willesden Jewish Cemetery. My mother-in-law was a ballerina but a car accident at a fairly young age had affected her chances of a solo dancing career although she continued dancing and was with the Léonide Massine ballet company. Suddenly she also had a factory to look after.

Recently, I found a letter to my mother-in-law in her papers. It was from M&S addressed to Mrs Belinki, expressing the condolences of the Board on the sudden death of her husband, Boris. It was signed by Edward Sieff, who eventually became Chief Executive. I know how M&S worked and there is no doubt in my mind that word would have come down from the top to support Boris' company and that it was M&S' support which enabled the factory to continue for nearly 20 years after that. Had my father-in-law lived longer, he would have had a huge business and been extremely successful. As my father-in-law died intestate, the factory had been handed over to the Public Trustee. When my mother-in-law was refused funds to purchase machinery to produce seamless stockings on the basis



Eileen's parents

that they were a 'passing phase', she made the decision to sell the factory. She eventually sold it to the Djanogly family.

A while after Boris' death, Valentina's friends, the Soskins, finally introduced her to Mischa Tucker. She and Mischa hit it off and were married in London in 1947. He was born Mischa Tikotsky in Bialystok in Russia and had left in 1921 and also ended up in Berlin, although he and Valentina obviously did not know each other then. Mischa decided to anglicise his name to Tucker after his brother had done the same. Mischa became stepfather to Eileen and Judith. He and Valentina had no children of their own together because Mischa had been concerned that his feelings for his own child might have differed from those for his stepdaughters.

Mischa was a fantastic man. Eileen really looked up to him as her father. He and Valentina were very close to our children. Two of them named their children after him: Philip's son Oliver Michael, and Tanya's son Mischa.

Eileen's sister, Judith, tragically died at the age of 19 of lupus, which today would have been entirely treatable but in those days it was not.

Valentina and Mischa both died in 1991.

Eileen was absolutely fascinated by the ballet from a young age. She was riveted from the first time and still loves it now. When Rudolf Nureyev first danced in London in Margot Fonteyn's Charity Gala at the London Coliseum, Eileen went to watch him and went backstage after. She was able to speak Russian to him. He thought that she was a member of the KGB. They became friends and she visited his family in Russia.

Eileen's great grandfather, Vladimir Tiomkin, was a very prominent member of the Zionist movement. He was born in Yelizavetgrad, Ukraine, which is now known as Kropyvnytskyi. He had been active in the Russian revolutionary movement but the pogroms in Southern Russia in 1881 prompted him to join the Jewish national movement. In 1893 he became kazyonny ravvin (Russian for 'Official Rabbi') of Yelizavetgrad, as part of which he did much to develop the institutions of the community. With the appearance of Theodor Hertzl, Vladimir joined the Zionist movement and became one of its outstanding supporters and speakers in Russia. He participated in Zionist Congresses, was a member of the Zionist General Council, and the Zionist representative for the Yelizavetgrad region. He left Russia in 1920 and settled in Paris. The settlement Ramat Tiomkin near Netanyah is named after him and a street in Tel Aviv also. The Great Choral Synagogue in Kropyvnytskyi/Yelizavetgrad has a Community Centre called the Elbert Centre named after Vladimir's wife, Daria Elbert, in which a large portrait of Vladimir and Daria can be found.

Vladimir's nephew, Dmitri Tiomkin (son of Vladimir's younger brother, Zinovi) became a very famous Hollywood composer. He was born in Kremenchuk in 1894 and left Russia to go to Berlin and then New York City. He was one of the top 3 or 4 composers in the film industry ever, with his fame peaking in the 1950s and 1960s. His film and TV credits included several Westerns such as High Noon, The High and Mighty, The Old Man and the Sea, several Hitchcock films and the TV theme tune to Rawhide, among other TV theme tunes. He received 22 Oscar nominations in total and won 4 Oscars.

Eileen was close to him. In 2014, his theme songs to It's a Wonderful Life and Giant were played during the closing ceremony for the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia to which Eileen was invited but declined to go for security reasons (the games were during the Chechen war and security was a big issue). ■

Part 4

Recording my testimony

Recording my testimony

I BELIEVE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT for future generations to know what happened and to learn from people’s first-hand experiences. My children and grandchildren should know what happened for posterity, that it should not be forgotten and that it should never happen again.

It had not been an overriding ambition of mine to record my testimony for the last 50 years. It really crystallised far more recently. I had got on with my life and not reflected too much on the past. Certainly since I started the process and was interviewed about my experiences, I have thought about my past more in the last few years than I had in the previous 50. I have not wanted to be defined by what happened to me as a child, so it had never really been at the forefront of my mind.

I cannot remember at what point I talked to my children about my childhood. I did tell them fairly early on the brief facts – that I had come to England from Yugoslavia and that my parents had died in a concentration camp, but not any real detail. It is not something that you wear on your sleeve. I believed that my children were not very interested in it. However, when my son Andrew was asked back in 1987 if he and his siblings ever talked to me about the terrible start I had had in life, he said that they did not because they knew that it upset me. So there had been a total miscommunication and misconception between us.

I found it difficult, initially, to consider myself a ‘survivor’. I did not think of myself as a refugee or a Holocaust survivor, because I came here after the War as an economic migrant. I was not really a refugee in the true sense of the word. I thought that to be a ‘survivor’ you had to have survived being in a concentration camp. I had not got to a camp, I had been rescued on the way to Auschwitz, so I did not consider myself to be in that category.

That was why I did not put my name forward for the USC Shoah Foundation testimonies programme set up by Steven Spielberg in 1994. After discussing my doubts about my status with others, who pointed out that I had in fact survived being hidden as a child in the War, I changed my mind and accepted that I too was a survivor. By that time it was too late for the Foundation, they had stopped recording testimonies.



With Natasha Kaplinsky

A few summers ago, I was contacted by representatives of the Holocaust Commission, set up by the then Prime Minister David Cameron, telling me about their objective to record biographies of Holocaust survivors for posterity and asking if I wanted to participate. At the time, the email came out of the blue and I did not know how they had got my name. I subsequently found out that Miklós Farago's son, John, had been to a meeting about the Holocaust Commission project at The Association of Jewish Refugees and that he had passed on my name and details. Miklós Farago had tragically committed suicide on the day of my 13th birthday in February 1952. I stayed in touch with his wife and with John.

I agreed to record my testimony for the Holocaust Commission and on 11 May 2016, I was interviewed by Natasha Kaplinsky. There was a journalist present and I ended up, by chance, also featuring in a Sunday Times article in January 2017 about Holocaust survivors, to mark Holocaust Memorial Day. After that I was approached to tell my story at my grandson Mischa's school, Hereward House School.

When I tell the story, it almost feels as though I am talking about somebody else, because it happened such a long time ago and obviously so much has happened to me over the last 70 years that it is somewhat difficult to comprehend that it was me.

It is quite an emotionally draining experience. I go back over the past and all of the memories come flooding back. I am pleased that I have recorded it and hopefully my children and grandchildren will look at it and think 'Goodness gracious. Can we learn anything from that?' ■

Part 5

Reflections

Never forget your roots

I HAVE NEVER LOST my roots. I have a veneer of Englishness but underneath I will always be from Novi Sad. Even now, after 70 years in England, there are still times when I feel a little bit of an outsider. It does not happen very often, just occasionally, for example in a sort of typical pub sing-song.

My children were always aware of their Jewish and their Yugoslavian heritage. When they were young, we went to Yugoslavia as a family on holiday, to Dubrovnik via Novi Sad. I also took each of them individually after their O Levels. I showed them where I was born, my father’s shop (which was still being run as an electrical shop at that time), and the Jewish cemetery in Novi Sad. I wanted them to be aware of where they had come from. They are, and should be, British but they should never forget their roots. ■



The family at Eileen's 70th birthday

Family

I have a tremendous feeling of not actually knowing what my parents were like. I have photographs of them and I have been told about them but not actually having role models as parents is very difficult. Something is missing in your life. People told me that my parents were very nice but it is not the same as knowing, seeing them or having a relationship with them.

I became family-conscious because, through circumstances, I have very little family. My children have no cousins. The only cousins in the family and the only real extended family we have is in Serbia. I have no family here to speak of except for my nuclear family. I miss not having an extended family. ■



Dougal

Where we lived in Novi Sad (modern-day photograph)



Can one forgive and forget?

I cannot forget what happened to my parents, my family or to me. I think that forgiveness is possible, to a degree. I have forgiven the German people, because I cannot blame the German people today for what their parents or grandparents did. I don't think that I could ever forgive the perpetrators of the Holocaust, those who helped transport the Jews or the guards in the camps. It was not just the Germans, because every country the Germans invaded helped with rounding up of the Jews. When I see elderly Nazis being tried for what they did in the camps during the War, I cannot forgive them. ■

A message for my children, grandchildren and future generations

Life is a question of survival. The reality is that there are good people and there are evil people in this world. You have to accept that fact. What happened to me is the result of what the evil people did when the good people were not there to stop them.

In life there will be good times and bad times and you have to fight to make the best of the good times and try to put the bad times behind you. Terrible things can happen to you and it is never straightforward. You just have to make the most of your lucky breaks. Life is a game of snakes and ladders and hopefully there are more ladders than snakes.

I would like my children and grandchildren to remember their ancestors' Jewish heritage and never to forget where they came from. ■

A happy ending

A friend recently asked me how I could say that I had been lucky in life.

I believe that I have been. After a traumatic start, fate has been kind. I survived. I was embraced by three loving families: my father’s family in Yugoslavia and my mother’s sister and husband, who adopted me. I then married into a loving family and acquired wonderful in-laws, Valya and Mischa. I came into a prosperous family in England and have led a comfortable life. Eileen and I have had a happy marriage, spanning over 50 years, surrounded by our children and now grandchildren and our friends. After a very rocky start, life has been very good. ■

Part 6 Sources

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Buchwald family photo album rescued by Etél Scheer from the apartment of Trude and Andor Buchwald, Novi Sad

Birth and Death records of Ilona Buchwald noted down in a Prague 1874 Prayer Book

Letter from Dr. Harry Stein, Gedenkstätte Buchenwald dated 10 January 2002

Letter from M Saureracker, the International Tracing Service, Bad Arolsen, dated 16 November 2006

Shaw Family Tree compiled by Andrew Shaw

Talk at Yom HaShoah Service, Alyth Gardens Synagogue on 11 April 2018

Jewish Virtual Library entry entitled ‘Tiomkin, Vladimir’

Jewish Cemetery Subotica website cemetery.josu.rs



Ilona’s records of the births and deaths in the family written into a prayer book

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 had a terrible fear, when my first child Andrew turned five, that something would happen to him, because that was the age that I was when my parents were transported to Auschwitz and I lost them. At that age, life had just turned upside down for me.