



# My Story

## Manfred Goldberg, BEM



*My Story*  
Manfred Goldberg, BEM



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

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

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Manfred Goldberg spoke to AJR volunteer Corinne Linsell to share his story. Thanks also to AJR volunteers Joshua Zitser & Shelley Hyams. This book was produced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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# My Story

## Manfred Goldberg, BEM

'I feel my revenge on the Nazis is the building of our lovely family ...'

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## My parents

MY FATHER, BARUCH (also called Benno), was born in 1900 in a small place called Olpiny, in Galicia, Poland. It was a family tradition that the boys would go to *yeshiva* (religious Jewish school). As there was no *yeshiva* in their small town, in 1914 my father went to live with his grandfather in a town called Tarnow to continue his education. After two years my father received call-up papers to serve in the Polish army in the First World War.

For this *frum* (religious) young man with *peyot* (sidelocks) behind his ears and who would eat only kosher food, the prospect of serving in the Polish army, which had a reputation for being antisemitic, was a frightening one. My father managed to persuade them that he was the wrong age and not due for call-up and he was able to stay in the *yeshiva* for the time being. Eventually he received the second call-up. This time there was no dodging it. He realised the only way he could avoid serving in the army was to pack his bag and, with his parents' blessing, disappear. In other words, he disappeared and made his way into Germany illegally.

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My parents



My father settled as a legal resident in Kassel aged 17 or 18. Kassel was the route into Germany taken by several others from his area, which would explain why he went there. He had no trade or profession, but had to earn some money. Possibly with advice or help from friends who had already settled there, he began 'walking goods'. He contacted a textile wholesaler who would give him goods on approval. He would take a suitcase full of these goods and travel through the surrounding villages, knocking on doors. He could be very competitive because he had no overheads, and he also offered some sort of hire purchase options, allowing his customers to pay weekly. This worked out well: it meant he had to keep going back and could offer new goods. He couldn't go home every day, so he took kosher food with him and stayed in lodgings. He established a clientele and built up quite a profitable business. He was fair, he treated people decently, and they became loyal customers.

Some years later, my father was introduced to a young Polish lady who had come to Germany. Her name was Rosa Seeman, born in 1904 in a small place called Pehinsko but referred to as Prensht. They married in 1927. I, Manfred, was born in April 1930, and my brother Hermann in July 1934. Around 5000 Jewish people lived in Kassel amongst a total population of a quarter of a million, but the Jews were two quite distinct communities. There was the German Jewish population, which was slightly larger at around 3000 people. They had lived there for generations and a substantial number of them were assimilated. The Polish community were recent refugees or immigrants and not welcomed by the German Jews, who considered the newcomers 'too Jewish'. The first community referred to themselves as 'Germans of the Jewish persuasion', while the Poles were Jews first and certainly not German, although when my father settled in Germany he renounced his Polish nationality. ■



Me with my mother and brother

## *Kristallnacht*

I RECALL AS a little boy my father walking me to synagogue on *Shabbat* morning. It was a small synagogue established by the Polish Jews. My parents had several Jewish Polish young couples as friends, they didn't really mix much with others - our friends were the Poles, my parents told me. Ours was a quiet, sedate life, a life of contentment. But of course, in 1933 the Nazis gained power and things began changing. A stream of anti-Jewish legislation was passed and by 1936, when I came to school age, I was sent to attend a Jewish school. The one thing the Polish and German Jewish communities shared was a primary school. There was only one in town and all Jewish children were accepted, although there was not much mixing between the two communities. In Germany, I believe, there was an unusual arrangement in that there was just one Jewish organisation in town, representing the Jewish community. The central tax authorities would collect money, on top of income tax, from every person who declared themselves Jewish. This additional tax was passed on by the central authorities to the Jewish community. I think some of that money went towards the running costs of the Jewish school.

There was already an unfriendly climate in Germany. It became more so as time passed. Eventually, on 9 November 1938, came *Kristallnacht* (Night of the Broken Glass), a nationwide orgy of smashing, breaking and burning of property belonging to Jews. It was organised by the Nazi authorities, but enthusiastically supported by a substantial part of the population. Already there were many shops displaying signs - either 'Jews not welcome' or 'Entry to Jews forbidden'. Most of the shops still in Jewish ownership had a brown-shirted SA man posted outside to stop non-Jewish Germans buying from Jewish shops. During *Kristallnacht* every shop that was known as Jewish was attacked, ransacked,

“Ours was a quiet, sedate life, a life of contentment. But of course, in 1933 the Nazis gained power and things began changing.”



With my brother

looted, and many of them were set on fire. My father had a first cousin, Isaac Goldberg, also living in Kassel. He had a gentleman's outfitters shop which was looted and set on fire. During the years leading up to *Kristallnacht* the Nazis were steadily robbing Jews of their possessions by extorting valuables and businesses. By 1938 two-thirds of Jewish businesses had already been taken over.

Synagogues were also set on fire. There was a large, long-established non-Orthodox *shul* (synagogue) not far from us. I remember it had an organ which was played on Friday night, meaning that Orthodox Polish Jews would not attend because they considered it wrong to play music on *Shabbat*. This *shul* was looted and set on fire. I remember it clearly because some weeks after *Kristallnacht*, all the children from our school were marched to the synagogue, or rather its ruins. It had completely burnt out; it was just a heap of rubble. They marched us primary school children there to clear the rubble. We had to pick up pieces of stone and pass it along the chain of children, until the last one threw it on to a truck. One child threw a bit carelessly and a piece of stone hit me on the head injuring me, which I remember quite clearly.

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Soon after *Kristallnacht*, the Germans issued a decree forcibly closing all Jewish schools, and forbidding Jewish children from attending non-Jewish schools, which meant that effectively no Jewish child had any education after that. All Jewish civil servants were dismissed, and Jewish people employed by non-Jews had to be dismissed. Jews were no longer permitted to run their own businesses. Doctors were forbidden to treat non-Jewish patients. We were not permitted to visit a cinema or theatre and forbidden to own a radio. Life got tough for Jewish people, but still they struggled through.

We lived in a block with six apartments on three floors. As far as I remember, there was just one other Jewish family - their name was Rosengarten. One of the tenants was a non-Jewish policeman, called Dilling. He was not a Nazi, and he and my father got on well. Before *Kristallnacht*, Dilling told my father that, although he couldn't give any details, it would be in his interest to disappear for a while. My father took his advice and went into hiding. And sure enough, days after *Kristallnacht*, the Nazis rounded up tens of thousands of Jewish men and sent them to concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald. When they came to take my father, they were told he was not at home. They didn't believe us. They came into the apartment and turned it upside down searching for him. After some weeks, when it was safe, my father returned home. ■

## My father is arrested

IN SPRING 1939, my father was arrested by the Nazis and told he would be deported to Poland, despite having renounced his Polish nationality 20 years earlier. They arrested around 25 men, all with the same background who, like my father, had come from Poland and settled in Kassel. The men were sent to the Polish border. The Poles refused to accept them - they considered them traitors because they hadn't served in the Polish army - and sent them back to Germany. The next night, the Germans took them to a forest close to the border, pointed them in the direction of Poland and told them to march until they reached the Polish border. But, as they crossed into Poland, the Polish patrols picked them up and again sent them back to Germany. The next night the Germans sent them back again, and eventually the Poles told them if they turned up once more, they would shoot them. Then the Poles turned them around and told them to walk back through the forest into Germany. The men were terrified.

In order to avoid being picked up by the German patrols, the group decided to break up into teams of two, to stand a better chance of not getting caught. My father's partner was his friend, Mr Ziering, and the two managed to get back into Germany. My father was afraid to return to Kassel and went instead to Berlin, where he had a second cousin called Sami Wildstein. Sami tried to help, but was terrified of allowing him into the apartment because the Nazis were in the habit of just knocking on doors unannounced. He was a religious man who went to synagogue every morning, so he took my father

“My father was afraid to return to Kassel and went instead to Berlin, where he had a second cousin called Sami Wildstein. Sami tried to help, but was terrified of allowing him into the apartment because the Nazis were in the habit of just knocking on doors unannounced.”

to the synagogue and got permission for him to stay there. There he slept on a bench in the synagogue and Sami brought him food. He sent word to my mother that he was hiding in Berlin. She came to Berlin to see him and, while in the city, after a number of other, unsuccessful attempts, went to the British Consulate to beg for help. The British passport officer who listened to her tale of heart-breaking agony, said he would like to help but he was under such tremendous pressure that he could give my mother just a single visa for my father, who was in immediate danger. He promised to put the rest of the family - my mother with the two children - on a waiting list and, in a matter of weeks, he would hope to give us visas to follow my father. My mother called this passport officer an angel.

I now know that this passport officer was Frank Foley, a British spy who had been posted to Berlin and this passport officer position was cover for his spying activities. But, unknown to the British government, Foley was sympathetic to Jewish suffering and apparently issued thousands of visas to Jews against the instructions of the British Government. He has since been honoured by Yad Vashem by being named a Righteous Gentile.

My mother returned to Kassel and asked the Nazi authorities if, should my father re-appear, they would permit him to leave. They said they would, if he had a valid visa. They were happy to get rid of him. The Germans kept their promise, although he was only given 24 hours to leave. He took his allowance of one suitcase and five German Marks. I recall the family walking him to the railway station the next day and he left for England. It was 20 August 1939, and the Second World War began two weeks later. It was now impossible for the rest of us to obtain visas. Germany and Great Britain were at war, which meant my mother, my brother Hermann and I were now trapped in Germany. ■

## Life in Kassel under the Nazis

WE RECEIVED ONE postcard from my father confirming his arrival in the UK. After that, no further communication was possible. The war began. For the time being we were not rounded up. We remained in our apartment, but life became very difficult. We had to wear yellow stars on our outer garments, which made it quite fraught when we walked the streets. We could be, and actually were sometimes, accosted. I was told that if any person in uniform walked towards me, I had to step off the pavement into the gutter. There was one shop which was declared the 'Jewish shop' where we had to do all our shopping. Sometimes there wasn't enough food. Of course, *shechita* (the slaughter of animals in the kosher way) was forbidden. There was never any meat. We went hungry even though we lived just around the corner from a street of retail shops, including a pharmacy, bakery and grocery store.

My mother asked me to go shopping with her. Taking my school satchel, we walked to opposite a non-Jewish bakery, which we were not allowed to enter. My mother asked me to hold my satchel over my yellow star. She gave me some coins and drilled into me that when the shop was empty, I should run across into the bakery, ask for a large loaf of bread, put the money on the counter, take the bread and run out again. We rehearsed it several times until I knew exactly what to do. And we did it. I went in and did exactly as she said. I had a feeling the girl behind the counter recognised me because we were local. She knew or suspected I was Jewish but, nevertheless, she served me, gave me the bread, and I ran out again. In retrospect, I realised that my mother would not have exposed me to such risks unless she was desperate and in real need.

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This happened two or three times. We were in a very difficult situation but we used our savings and managed to keep going. One of my mother's friends was able to buy some live chickens from a local farmer. The *shochet* (the Jewish slaughterer) came and slaughtered them in their garden and we, being good friends, were given one of these chickens. That was a real treat for us, but it was such a dangerous thing for these people to have done, and they never did it again.

My mother tried to teach my brother and myself at home. She spoke fluent German and Polish, which she had learnt at school. My father, on the other hand, went to a school where they spoke Yiddish. I would speak Yiddish with my father and German with my mother.

My mother was made to do forced labour a couple of times. The first time, a group of Jewish ladies were sent to the Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of town, where they had to get down on their hands and knees and rip out all the weeds from the pathways. They had to do that for several weeks. Then she was forced to do a second stint of forced labour and that was even more demeaning. They took the ladies to busy, popular streets, cordoned off a part of the pavement, and they had to get down on their hands and knees and scrub the pavement in view of all the passers-by who, of course, were free to poke fun at them. There was no alternative to obeying, and we managed to get through until 9 December 1941. ■

## From Kassel to the Riga Ghetto

THERE WERE TWO elite divisions which the Nazis had established: one was the brown-shirts and the other was the black-shirts. The black-shirts were the SS, who were the pride of the Nazis. In order to become a member, you had to swear allegiance to the *Führer*. With the SA, the brown-shirts, you just had to claim to be a Nazi. They were the bully boys. On *Kristallnacht*, it was mainly the brown-shirts who led the violence against Jews.

Two of these brown-shirted SA men rang our doorbell and gave my mother ten minutes to pack a case and then we had to accompany them. They said we should also take some food and water. They walked us to a big railway station in town. It was not very far, maybe 10-15 minutes' walk. We were taken into a hall where a large number of Jews were already assembled, each one accompanied by a suitcase. The number kept growing. After several hours there were around 1000 or so of us. We were eventually packed on to a passenger train and set off on the journey into the unknown. This was the first transport of Jews deported from Kassel.

My mother and I spent three and a half years in various camps during which time we never made another journey in a passenger train. From then on, for every move from one camp to another, we were transported in cattle trucks - covered cattle wagons with sliding doors, packed in, the doors shut and locked. And that's how we were transported - like cattle. But on this first journey we were on a passenger train. It was December, it was a cold winter. The train was not heated. I remember it felt cold,

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but because we were so tightly packed it helped keep us warm. We managed on the food my mother had packed. We travelled for three days and nights, and eventually the train stopped.

We had travelled east to Riga, the capital of Latvia, about 1000 miles from Kassel. We all got out, there was snow and ice on the ground, and we were now surrounded by armed guards. They made us assemble in a long column and then began walking us to an area of Riga surrounded by barbed wire, known as the Riga ghetto.

We were marched into this ghetto. It was quite small. We reached a row of houses where all the doors were unlocked. We could walk into any of the houses and find ourselves somewhere to stay. I believe there were about 40 of these houses made available for 1000 of us.

I remember this very clearly. I was 11 years old, my brother Hermann was seven. We made our way into one of the houses. It was a small two-up, two-down type house with no entrance hall. As we entered the front door, we were in what turned out to be the dining room. On the table were plates of half-eaten soup. I remember being rather surprised. Why would people have left, leaving the half-eaten plates of soup on the table? But we didn't have time to think about that. We had to hurry and find ourselves somewhere to stay. There was a tiny room which our mother managed to claim for the three of us. It seems it was a good choice as there was no space for others in that room and so we had it for ourselves. The larger rooms were occupied by more than one family who had to share. There was no alternative because there were only 40 houses, which meant that 25 people lived in each.

The Nazis had occupied Riga in early July 1941 and, without delay, they began to construct the wire fence around part of the town. Early in August they ordered the more than 28,000 Jewish people living in Riga to pack their belongings and move into the ghetto. At the end of November the Nazis told the Riga Jews they were being transferred, in groups, to another camp. They marched them out of the ghetto into a nearby forest, called the Rumbula Forest, on the outskirts of Riga. In the forest, using prisoners of war as labour, the Nazis had dug three enormous pits. Eventually, they murdered the prisoners of war who dug these pits, so they couldn't tell what happened.

As each group of Jews was marched towards one of these pits, concealed machine gun crews opened fire, murdering them. They either fell into or were thrown into one of the pits. The Nazis marched group after group into the forest. In a matter of less than 10 days, they had murdered practically all 28,000 of these Jews. Those three pits became mass graves. Today each one is marked by a stone statue commemorating this massacre.

Two groups of people were allowed to live. Around 300 Latvian young women, seamstresses the Nazis had been using for slave labour in a factory making German uniforms, were saved. In addition, 30 Latvian men were selected, all tall strapping young men, and the one requirement they had was that they spoke fluent German. These 30 young men were then appointed internal camp police over our Riga ghetto. There was a term for them – *kapos*. It was they who told us of the massacre. When we arrived in Riga – just days after the massacre - there were only about 4000 German Jews there, early arrivals. But at intervals of a few days at a time, more transports kept arriving and the Riga ghetto began filling up until there were over 30,000 German Jews living there.

As soon as we arrived, we were put on a starvation diet which continued relentlessly until the day of our liberation. Also, we had to appear every morning for the roll call which was run by an SS officer. On the first or second morning, they issued several declarations. One was that we would not have names from now on. Each one of us was given a number which we had to remember and recite each morning during roll call. If you didn't remember your number, you were punished. They also said we would be organised into groups and marched with guards into town to work in factories and brought back into the ghetto in the evening. Children under the age of 13 were exempt from work, which meant that my mother had to go out to work every day leaving me in charge of my little brother, Hermann.

It later became apparent that many of these factories weren't there by chance. The Nazis persuaded the German industrialists to erect factories close to these camps by promising them an unlimited supply of slave labour. It made a very profitable proposition for these firms. Many of them manufactured bullets, even parts for airplanes, or garments for the military, all sorts of things connected with the German war effort. The slave labourers had to do this on a starvation diet, which was just enough to keep us alive. After a while some people began to lose strength, and the Germans had a way of dealing with this problem.

I remember in March 1942, some three months or so after we arrived in Riga, at roll call one morning we were told that no one would be going to work that day; we all had to remain standing. We were led in groups to a nearby hall. We had to assemble in single file, and shuffle down the length of the hall. At the far end sat an SS officer at the table. In turn, each one of us stood before him. He would glance at the person in front of him and, usually without saying a word, he would point left or right, and the person had to walk in that direction. It soon became apparent that the elderly or weak-looking people were pointed in one direction, and the younger people pointed in the other.

The Germans made up some lies, probably to forestall any possible resistance. They said the elderly and weak would be sent to another camp, called 'Dunamunde', where the work would be physically less demanding, like knitting fishing nets. We had been in the camps only a few months and people were still so naïve that the sons or daughters of some of these elderly people actually had the courage to ask the SS officer whether he would make an exception and allow them to accompany their parents. Often he refused, but occasionally he said yes. The truth of what happened came to light just a few days later when truckloads of clothing arrived in Riga, and a group of inmates were appointed to unload these trucks and sort the clothing which would then be sent to Germany to be distributed to those in need. While sorting this clothing, one or two inmates recognised items worn by their loved ones, by their parents and grandparents, when they were sent away. It became clear they had been sent to be gassed or shot and buried in a mass grave and that, in fact, was later found to be the case.

For the rest of us, the children, we also had to appear before the SS at the selection. He allowed us, me and my little brother, to live. I don't know why because we were not useful to them, we were not old enough to work.

Soon after our arrival at the ghetto, the Germans issued an order that within seven days all money and valuables still in our possession had to be handed over. Anyone caught having anything after that time would be punished by death. Of course, people disobeyed and held back some of their possessions and began using them when they were in town working during the day. They bartered some of their valuables for food and brought it into the camp to help feed their children. The Germans issued another decree forbidding any food to be brought into the camp on pain of death. When the work groups were taken back into the camp at the end of the day, the guards would sometimes take one or two people at random and body search them to check whether there was any food concealed.

My brother and I got into the habit of running to the entrance gate of the camp early to await our mother's return. Often we got there too early and saw other groups returning. One day, while waiting for our mother to come back from work, an earlier group had two people taken out and body searched. They found some concealed food on a lady, took her aside and shot her in front of us. Hermann and I witnessed our first violent death. I remember it was before my twelfth birthday. But that was how life was then.

The guards were trained to keep a close eye on people as they worked during the day. If they spotted anyone who was weakening and could no longer perform a day's work, they would quietly be taken aside to an execution site, where they were shot and dumped in a mass grave. Sometimes people would go to work in the morning and not return in the evening, and that was their fate during the day.

We children were bored during the day and we tended to get into trouble. I had to look after my little brother but, one day, I got a friend to look after him and I teamed up with another friend to go in search of food. Much of the ghetto was still empty; we were one of the earlier transports to arrive. We knew that the Riga Jews had been permitted to take things with them when they were forced to move there. Some took food, which was left behind after they were taken to the forest and murdered. My friend and I managed to get into the empty part of the ghetto, made our way into a house and searched for food. We had taken with us a children's sledge because there was still ice and snow on the ground. We clambered into the house, searched for food and found a half full sack of potatoes. We thought it was our lucky day! Between us, we managed to drag it out and as we were putting it on to the sledge, we looked up and found ourselves staring down the barrel of a rifle. One of the guards must have spotted us going in and waited for us to come out. With the rifle pointing at us, our hands shot up. We started crying and saying we were not thieves, we took it because we were hungry. "Please, we won't do it again," we begged.

The guards in the Riga ghetto were Latvian Nazis who had been given a uniform and they were as brutal as any of the Germans. The officers were German but all the guards were local Nazis, presumably volunteers. However much we pleaded, that rifle kept pointing at us and his face did not change for what seemed like an eternity. Suddenly, he broke into a grin and waved us on, and even allowed us to take the potatoes. It really was our lucky day. Of course, we never did it again. ■



School class in Germany

## Education and *bar mitzvah* in the Riga ghetto

THEN SOMETHING QUITE remarkable happened with our transport. There was one gentleman among the 1000 who had been a teacher in our primary school, Herr Bacher. As the Riga ghetto was filling up, the Nazis set up an internal administration drawn from inmates. These were put in charge of internal decisions and through them the Nazis communicated with the other inmates.

Herr Bacher was concerned about the children, particularly from our town, Kassel, roaming unsupervised and getting into trouble. He approached this group in charge, pleaded for permission to act as a teacher to these children and eventually he was given the use of one room. All children from Kassel below the age of 13 were told to report every morning to the room where Herr Bacher would organise some sort of teaching programme.

Initially Herr Bacher divided us into age groups - four to seven, seven to nine and so on, and tried to spend a little time with each group. Of course he had no teaching facilities, no textbooks, no pens, pencils, papers - nothing. He could just tell stories or share his knowledge. It didn't work well because when he was spending time with one group, the others got out of control. Eventually, he had to admit defeat on that idea, but he was resourceful and very talented, and had a good knowledge of music. He lined us up and attempted to form us into a choir so he could deal with everyone simultaneously, from the youngest to the oldest. He began teaching us, mainly Jewish melodies from our prayers, and he was very good. He divided us into harmony groups and we became quite an acceptable choir. That is how he managed to occupy us during the mornings. In the afternoons, we would be dismissed and wait for our parents' return from work.

Sometime after my twelfth birthday, Herr Bacher approached me and said, "I know your father is not with you. Would you like me to teach you your *bar mitzvah*?" Jewish tradition says it is a father's duty to ensure his son experiences a *bar mitzvah*. And of course, I had no father - my father left when I was nine years old and I'd had no further education. I had no idea what he meant, because I didn't really know what a *bar mitzvah* signified, but I was a good boy and I said, "Yes please." We had no Jewish calendar so he had to calculate as best he could which *Shabbat* my *bar mitzvah* would be and he began teaching me the relevant portion.



On a normal *Shabbat*, the portion is read by someone who is experienced in reading Hebrew from the Torah, but a *bar mitzvah* boy has to learn it from scratch. That is what Herr Bacher meant by teaching me. It takes quite a time because, by tradition, in the Torah scroll the vowels are missing from the words, and there are no full stops. It's quite tricky, and it really has to be learned by heart. Herr Bacher began teaching, but I still didn't know what would actually happen until he explained that on the Shabbat there would be a regular service during which the Torah scroll would be opened and I would read the portion he was teaching me.

The Torah scrolls are usually stored in synagogues, but we had no synagogue. There was never any service in the Riga ghetto to my knowledge. But Herr Bacher got hold of a scroll which had probably been taken into the ghetto by the Rabbi of a *shul* in Riga and had been left behind after the Riga Jews had been massacred in the forest. On the *Shabbat* that he determined was my *bar mitzvah* we had the Torah scroll and, quite miraculously, 10 men assembled to make the *minyan*, the minimum needed to conduct a service. I felt very proud because I was counted as one of the 10. Below the age of 13 you do not count. When we came to that point in the prayer service, the scroll was opened and I read my portion. And that was my *bar mitzvah*, thanks to that dedicated teacher. I do not know of any other boy who experienced this in the Riga ghetto, nor did I ever attend any other service - that was the one and only. I had no idea how we managed to get 10 men together, when everyone had to report and go out to work seven days a week. Herr Bacher was dedicated and devoted to our welfare; I'll be forever grateful to him and never forget him.

Time passed and any day when nothing exceptional happened was considered a good day, because when things happened it usually meant trouble. One such day was in October 1942. We children were assembled as usual with Herr Bacher when we heard a commotion outside. We looked out of the window and saw a large number of German troops had entered the ghetto and were running around wildly waving their guns. At the time I didn't know what was happening, but I now know the 30 Latvian young men who were appointed kapos plotted an uprising. They had made contact with the non-Jewish Latvian resistance in Riga and had smuggled some weapons into the ghetto.

Some of the German Jewish inmates had been included in the plot but one of them was secretly a Nazi informer. The Nazis found out about the plot and came to arrest all 30 of these Latvian Jews. As they were being marched out, the Latvians realised that they were going to be executed. They

ran off in different directions, to get away and save themselves. That is when the Germans brought reinforcements in and began searching. One group actually came into our 'school' room to search. I remember them lighting a fire in the fireplace to smoke out any who might be hiding up the chimney. They didn't find any of them in our room, but eventually they managed to round up all 30. It took them the best part of the day. The 30 were, of course, shot. In addition, the many others who the Germans claimed had been involved in this plot were also taken away and, presumably, killed. But for that mishap of the Germans getting wind of it, Riga might have been a second Warsaw uprising. ■

KL: bergversteckungs stunde

Jude  
Häftl.-Nr.: 56478

### Häftlings-Personal-Karte

Fam.-Name: <u>Goldberg</u> Vorname: <u>Manfred</u> Geb. am: <u>21.4.19</u> in: <u>Kassel</u> Stand: <u>Heilig</u> Kinder: _____ Wohnort: <u>W. 19</u> Strasse: <u>Müllerstr. 12-16</u> Religion: <u>msz</u> Staatsang.: <u>sc</u> Wohnort d. Angehörigen: _____	Überstellt am: _____ an KL: _____ am: _____ an KL: _____ am: _____ an KL: _____ am: _____ an KL: _____ am: _____ an KL: _____ am: _____ an KL: _____ am: _____ an KL: _____	Personen-Beschreibung: Größe: _____ cm Gesicht: _____ Augen: _____ Nase: _____ Mund: _____ Ohren: _____ Zähne: _____ Haare: _____
Eingewiesen am: <u>9.8.44</u> durch: <u>Spaßweg</u> in KL: <u>Stutthof</u> Grund: _____ Vorstrafen: <u>keine</u>	Entlassung: am: _____ durch KL: _____ mit Verfügung v.: _____	Sieh _____ Körperliche _____
Strafen im Lager:		
Grund: _____	Art: _____	Bemerkung: _____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

KL 5/9 44, 500.000

My admission card to Stutthof Concentration Camp

## Precu labour camp

ONE DAY IN early August 1943 we were lined up for our morning inspection and told that no one would be going to work that day. They began sorting people into groups. My mother, brother and I became part of a group of around 2000 who were taken to a railway siding and told we would be moved to another camp. We were loaded into cattle wagons and we set off to an unknown destination. We travelled for a couple of days. These wagons were locked and there was usually a bucket in there for our natural needs. Of course, there was no washing, no food, no water. Eventually, we were ordered out and we found we had been taken to a purpose-built labour camp, which became known as Precu. I have not found it on any map but have since found out it is more widely known as Riga Reichsbahn.

It was built on the edge of a forest. Some trees had been removed and the open area had been surrounded by a large, barbed wire fence and inside this enclosure they had built a number of large wooden barracks. Almost all were filled from end to end by three tiers of bunk beds. We were allocated one barrack and that is that where we lived. The camp was already occupied - we were not the first to arrive.

One of the barracks was a kitchen where food was prepared for us in the evening when people came back from work. People were marched out in the morning, given a piece of bread and something to drink. No food was given during the day. In the evening, when we came back, we had to line up with a tin can and when our turn came, we had to recite our number. I remember my number to this day. I'll never forget it - 56478. I was never referred to by name, always by that number, which I had to remember because without it I would have been lost. When I recited my number at the front of the queue, my number was ticked and I was given a ladleful of some sort of broth with mouldy bits floating in it. It had to be gulped down as fast as possible, as there were fewer tin cans than prisoners. Those without a can would often snatch my can from me and, if I had not finished eating, that was just too bad. And that was our life there.

There was very little hygiene. On the outside of each barrack, there were two cold water taps which people could use for washing but, as a 13-year-old boy, I didn't stand much of a chance of getting near them. Washing was just a cold water rinse as we were not ever given any soap. We suffered severely from lice. Our heads were shaved and all body hair was also removed. When we came home from work,

one of our evening activities was to help each other catch lice. We would work in pairs because lice are very nimble, jumping creatures and it's difficult to catch them on yourself. We would catch them on each other and kill them, usually by squeezing them between our fingernails. In our straw mattress there were bed bugs, which feed on human blood, which would crawl on to our body and sting us. They would pierce our skin just to take a single drop or maybe even less. It felt like being pricked by a pin. Bed bugs are quite slow crawling beasts, so when we felt that prick we were able to catch them. We spent a good part of the night killing bugs and not resting.

In this camp, everyone had to work, including me, aged 13. My brother, aged nine, and three other small children were permitted to stay in the camp during the day. We were producing things to help the Germans. My mother and I were selected to work on a slave labour railway gang, because this camp was close to a busy railway junction. This was 1943 and the Allies had realised that an effective way of harming the German war effort was to damage the transport system. The Germans had long supply lines to their fighting front line and they supplied them by railway. This busy junction was a key transit point. All the trains going to the Eastern Front had to pass through, so it became an Allied air raid target. We were a group of around 300, who were marched out daily to the latest bombed section, and it became our job to take up the damaged railway tracks and fill in bomb craters.

We carried new rails from where they were stored to where they were needed, laid them and made the line serviceable again. But no sooner had we finished one repair job than we were taken to another because these raids were continuous. The Allies didn't let up - they kept on bombing. We were at this camp for a year and during all this time we were busy working on the railways.

We had been in this camp for no more than four weeks or so when, one day, we returned from work and the four young children left behind could not be found. A member of the kitchen staff, who was one of the few people left in the camp during the day, told us that two SS men had come into the camp and said they had orders to pick up these children and take them away. I can still hear my mother's wailing at the loss of her little boy, Hermann, but there was no time for mourning.

The next morning both she and I had to report and go to work as though nothing had happened. Post-war, we made many attempts, searching through various organisations to find out anything we could about my brother. But that day he had disappeared off the face of the earth. Hermann was only nine.

To this day, we have no definite confirmation of his fate. I know many people searching managed to find dates when their parents were murdered because the Germans were meticulous at keeping records, but of my brother we have not found any trace. When experts attempt to search for my brother, they usually come back with information on me for some reason. My transit from camp to camp is documented and that is what they find, but nothing about Hermann. We know the Nazis had no use for non-productive Jews and it is practically a certainty that these children did not survive beyond that day. But we have no closure because nothing was documented.

We were under strict guard because we were working out in the open on these railway lines over wide open spaces. The guards developed a very cruel game. I became one of a team who had to carry new railway sections from their storage place to where they were needed. They were quite heavy - there was a team of six of us carrying one of these long rails - and, as we moved along, we had to pass guards at various intervals. They armed themselves with long wooden sticks, nailed a sharp nail into the top end and, as we passed by, they lashed out and tried to hit us with the nail. It encouraged us, they said, to work faster.

I was fairly young and nimble and managed to evade most of the attacks, but to this day I have scars on two fingers where the nail caught me and ripped them open. Others were quite severely hurt. ■

“When experts attempt to search for my brother, they usually come back with information on me for some reason. My transit from camp to camp is documented and that is what they find, but nothing about Hermann.”

## A man saves my life – but my mother saves herself

WE EXPERIENCED ONE other extraordinary thing, though it's not extraordinary by Nazi standards. We had a second selection such as the one I described in Riga. It was very similar. We were walked into a hall but as we entered the hall, this time we were ordered to strip naked. Then we had to line up, single file, and again shuffle down until we stood in front of another dreaded SS officer who decided our fate. He did this just by movement of a finger left or right or saying: "Right. Left." As we shuffled forward, although we were forbidden to speak, the man behind me in line leaned forward and whispered, "If he asks you your age, say you're 17." I had turned 14 just a couple of months earlier.

That man saved me. I'd never seen him before and I'd no idea who he was, or even his fate, because he was behind me. He might have been an angel sent to save me. I don't know. As I stood in front of the SS officer, he asked me that very question, "How old are you?" and as I'd been prompted, I replied: "17." He pointed me in the direction of those people who were permitted to live. My mother, who was some distance behind me in line, was not so lucky and he pointed her to the other direction - those who were destined to be murdered.

“That man saved me. I'd never seen him before and I'd no idea who he was, or even his fate, because he was behind me. He might have been an angel sent to save me. I don't know.”

Depending on whether he said or pointed right or left, you had to leave the hall by a different door. I had to join my group and my mother, being condemned, had to join hers. Both were out in the open. Still naked, you joined your group, and they were not too far apart, but there were guards outside keeping an eye on us. I had joined my group when, extraordinarily, a smallish group from the condemned side suddenly began racing across to try and reach our group to save themselves. Of course the guards intervened, but by the time they did, the first group had already reached us and had managed to disperse among us.

They stopped any further people running across and then began searching. When they recognised anyone, they dragged them back from our side to the condemned side. It was only while this was going on that I spotted my mother and realised she had been one of those running across. Incredibly, she was not recognised. Possibly the fact that we were all naked meant it was not easy to recognise people, and she managed to save her life. She remained on our side. This was August 1944. We were liberated in May 1945 and she survived with me. She saved her own life that day. ■

## Stutthof Concentration Camp

SHORTLY AFTER THIS second selection we were loaded into cattle trucks yet again, to be sent to another camp. Again, no destination was mentioned. We travelled for several days, in the same conditions – no food, no water - and eventually the train stopped and we were ordered out. This time there was a violent exit from the trucks. Guards came along and started rifle-butting people because they were not fast enough. They kept shouting: “Dirty Jews, faster, faster.” We had been taken to a concentration camp called Stutthof.

We didn't know at the time, but it was 30 kilometres from the Polish town which was called Danzig, now called Gdansk. Stutthof was one of the early camps opened in 1939. There were no Jewish prisoners there during the first couple of years: it was used for German political prisoners, German homosexuals, gypsies, even criminals. When the war began, they also sent Polish partisan fighters there, at least those who weren't murdered. It was quite a small camp with a maximum capacity of 8,000 people, but in late 1942 they built an enormous extension, probably using the inmates to do the work. They moved the fence and built new barracks. They also built a gas chamber and a crematorium. It tripled in size: now it could accommodate 25,000. Then they began sending trainloads of Jews there.

Stutthof had an entrance known as the 'Death Gate' because to enter through the gate was, effectively, a sentence of death. Very few left alive: most were either worked to death or murdered. But our group of 300 were fortunate and became the envy of the camp inmates. We were told we were in transit and would be sent to another camp where our labour was required. We had by then become quite expert at repairing bomb-damaged railway lines and after almost four weeks in Stutthof we were once again loaded on to cattle trucks for another journey. ■





Stutthof Death Gate

1940-1941 The wooden construction of the main gate leading to the Old Camp was built. The inmates used to call it the 'Death Gate'. Standing in front of it, the column of newcomers waited to be admitted into the camp. After the registration, which took place in the administration barrack, the next stage of the 'welcome ceremony' took place after passing through the 'Death Gate'. There, one of the SS officers would hold a speech, giving inmates a picture of the place that they got to and what was expecting them; and afterwards the inmates' personal belongings were taken away from them and a humiliating medical examination took place. Also a bath combined with disinfection was obligatory. About 110,000 people went through the camp's gate. About 65,000 inmates - victims of the camp - never got to be free again.

## We are moved to Stolp labour camp

WE WERE TAKEN to a labour camp called Stolp, a satellite of Stutthof. It was also located next to a busy railway junction which was a popular target for Allied bombs. It was vital for the Germans to keep the transport running so they used us, that group of 300, because of our expertise. By now, we had a year's experience to do the same work again – repair the damaged railway lines as fast as we could. As fast as we repaired them, they were bombed again, and we repaired them again.

There was a foundry on site where specialist parts used to repair the railway lines were tailor-made. I became part of a small group working there. I soon learned how to shape the iron by putting it into a blazing red-hot fire and then hammering it into shape on an anvil. I became quite skilled at it. We were under guard, of course, and one day one of the German guards indicated to me to look in a particular drawer. When I opened the drawer, I saw there was a sandwich in there. Of course, grateful, I gulped it down. This happened several times. Why the guard took a liking to me and wanted to help me, I don't know. He was not a youngster. He may have been a married man, perhaps he had a child or children of his own and something plucked at his heartstrings, especially as I was the youngest person working in the foundry. It didn't last long. The guard disappeared after a few weeks. I don't know what happened to him.

There were trains coming and going nonstop at the busy railway junction. Often trains would stop and wagons would be uncoupled from one train and coupled to another. There was a lot of activity and rumour went around the camp that some of these wagons contained food destined for troops on the front line. One day some inmates, desperate with hunger, broke the seal on a wagon and found and stole some food. The Germans, of course, were livid and raided the camp. They took away eight men who they claimed were the culprits. Unlike the usual punishment where they would be taken away and killed, enormous gallows were built in the camp and we were all made to assemble and forced to watch these eight men being hanged. Guards circulated among us and if they spotted anyone closing their eyes or looking away, they would rifle butt us and threaten us. That was one of the last things we witnessed in this camp. ■

## From Stolp to Burggraben

FROM STOLP THE same group of 300 prisoners were packed on to cattle trucks once again and sent to a smaller camp called Burggraben, another satellite of Stutthof. On our first morning there we had to assemble as usual. An SS officer came along, we had to shout out our number, he would tick a list and we had to stand to attention. As he approached me, I could see him glancing at me repeatedly. My mother had always told me: 'Behave in such a manner that you will not be noticed,' so I was really quite frightened at this point. He stood directly in front of me and said: "When everyone is dismissed, I want you to stay here." I began to tremble. Everyone left, except for me. He looked me up and down and said: "I've decided to make you my Batman." He meant his personal slave. "Follow me." He took me to his accommodation, a little self-contained unit in the barrack where the SS were housed. He showed me what my duties would be: among them how to polish his several pairs of boots, to make his bed, wash the floor and his breakfast things, brush his uniforms – all sorts of things like that. He left me to it. Of course, I did everything to the very best of my ability because I knew what the consequences could be. I felt extremely uneasy because these SS officers had absolute power over us. If I displeased him and he were to pull out his pistol and dispatch me into the next world, there would be absolutely no consequences for him. Jewish lives did not count. But I seemed to have satisfied him because I had to go back morning after morning. I would go to his apartment and spend the best part of the day there while everybody else was divided into workgroups at morning assembly and marched out to work in nearby factories.

“An SS officer came along, we had to shout out our number, he would tick a list and we had to stand to attention. As he approached me, I could see him glancing at me repeatedly.”

We were in this camp for only three weeks, after which we were once again packed on to cattle trucks. This time we were packed so tight that there was no room to sit down. We were all standing like sardines squashed against each other. If anyone fainted or even died, as people did on the journey, they couldn't lie or fall down. They were held up by those pressing against them.

Eventually we reached our destination and found, to our horror, we had been taken back to Stutthof. There had been so many arrivals from camps in the East that it was now grossly overcrowded. We were pushed into a barrack with three-tier bunk beds in which we slept, three to a bed, on straw, plagued by vermin, mice and bed bugs.

There was no work. This time we were not in transit, we were there as inmates and things had become chaotic. Trainloads of Jews from the East were still arriving, and it became a lottery. Some trainloads of people were checked quite meticulously into the camp. They had to line up and there were people sitting at a desk, taking their details and filling in forms before they were allowed into the camp. Other train-loads were taken straight to the gas chamber and lost their lives the day they arrived, and then their bodies were taken to the crematorium for burning. There seemed to be no logic as to which trainload of people were taken one way or the other.

At some point Stutthof changed from being a labour camp, where people were exploited until they lost their strength and then were murdered, to just being a chaotic camp where the vast majority didn't work and just wandered round the camp aimlessly. Many people were very weak. The camp was surrounded by two barbed wire fences, one of which was high voltage electrified. We were forbidden to approach this and, in addition to the electrified fence, there were also towers at intervals manned by armed guards.

It was not rare to see someone who was quite literally skin and bones, shuffling as best they could towards the electric fence to try and end their suffering. Often, they wouldn't make it because they were spotted by one of the armed guards who would shout a warning and then fire a shot and kill them. Either way, they achieved their objective - they ended their suffering but not the way they had intended.

Every night, people died in their bunk beds. A group of inmates was set up to go around each barrack in the mornings and lift out the bodies, take them to the front of the barrack and lay them on the ground. There was another group who pushed a cart around the camp from barrack to barrack picking up these bodies and taking them to the crematorium.

The Nazis decided that the gas chamber, built around a year ago, was too small. They brought into the camp two cattle trucks, made them airtight and used them as additional gas chambers. The crematorium was now working 24 hours a day and could not cope with the number of bodies. Eventually, chaotically, bodies were lined up in piles out in the open and then they attempted to burn them where they lay.

The food situation deteriorated fairly desperately. They prepared a soup of some sort and we had to line up daily with a tin can and get our ladle of soup by reciting our number. Often there wasn't enough food and those towards the end of the queue would not get anything to eat that day.

It seemed a matter of chance whether the Jews arriving were sent into the camp or sent to the gas chamber. If they were checked into the camp, it just meant they were destined to die a slow death. Remarkably, both my mother and I managed to survive until early April 1945. Then they started to line people up and send them out of the camp. ■

## Crammed into the hold of a wooden barge

ON 26 APRIL 1945, around 5,000 of us were selected, both men and women. The women's camp adjoined the men's, separated by a barbed wire fence. Neither my mother nor I knew whether the other had also been selected. We lined up in a long column. We were each given a sizeable chunk of bread to take with and were escorted by German SS guards. We were marched out of Stutthof and continued most of the day at the fast pace set by the guards. Both my mother and I each searched for the other through the column while marching and were so happy when we found each other. Anyone trailing the column was shot. We reached a small port where there were four wooden barges moored. They were open barges, quite ancient, the sort used to transport coal. We were divided into four groups; each one filed on to one of these barges and we were squashed down into the hold. We were ordered to spread our legs wide open so that the next person could sit between our spread legs to lean against the person behind. Eventually four tugs appeared, manned by SS teams. These four barges linked themselves with the four tugs which began towing us across the sea.

We had no idea where we were at the time, but I've since found out that we were on the Baltic Sea and that Danzig (Gdansk) is a port city. Stutthof was 30 kilometres away, so we had walked the best part of 30 kilometres before we reached that port and were loaded on to the barges. We didn't know what our fate was intended to be. People began speculating and thinking that maybe they were towing us out to sea to drown us. We were helpless, there was nothing we could do.

Eventually the convoy stopped and something so gruesome happened that I'm hesitant to share it. An SS officer transferred in a small boat from his tug on to our barge. The top of the barge had a narrow gangway all the way round the boat from which this SS officer could look down at the mass of humanity crammed into the hold of the boat. He stood up there and selected a team of six men by pointing at them. He told them, "You are now under my command. You will do exactly as I say." He looked at us below him. He focused on one of us and said, "I want that person brought up to me." The team of six men got hold of that person, dragged them up, and then we couldn't see what happened, but we heard a scream, followed by a splash. That person was thrown, on his orders, into the sea to drown. Then the SS officer would point out a second victim, and a third, and so on. He selected around 25 people or so before he finally got into his boat, went back to his tug and the convoy continued.

We were at sea for six days and on each day the convoy stopped and this cruel event was repeated. The SS officer would come across and select his victims. At some point, he said, "We're using too much fuel; we have to lighten the load." While the convoy stopped, the tugs went off, presumably to refuel. After a while, they would return and we would continue our journey. On day six, the convoy again stopped. The same tragic event took place. The tugs went off, we thought to refuel, but a few hours passed and they didn't come back. People speculated that they were going to get dynamite and blow us up.

In our group, squashed into the bottom of that boat, were mainly Jews, but there were also some non-Jewish prisoners-of-war who had been brought to Stutthof not long before. I have since found out there were three different diets being prepared at Stutthof. The Jews were fed the worst, literally a starvation diet. The non-Jewish prisoners got a better diet and the prisoners-of-war, probably because of International Red Cross commitment, got the best diet. It wasn't exactly a luxury diet, but it was enough to give them some physical strength.

Some of these prisoners-of-war, who evidently still had the will to live, clambered up on deck and managed to pull up some of the wooden floor planks and form themselves into a rowing team. Using the planks as oars, they sat on either side of the barge and attempted to row towards land. They could see land. We had been travelling for six days but parallel to the shore - we were maybe three quarters of a kilometre away.

But still it seemed an impossible task. They worked tirelessly and managed to turn the barge to face the shore. We didn't see any of this, we were way down in the hold and couldn't see anything, but messages kept being sent along. Eventually, the barge began to move ever so slowly. The men kept rowing until they were exhausted, then others took their place. This went on, hour after hour, through the rest of the day. There was no sign of the SS manned tugs returning. Night fell and the men kept rowing. Teams rowed through most of the night and eventually the barge ran aground close to the shore. Those who still had an ounce of strength clambered up on deck, jumped into the water and waded ashore. Quite a number of people seemed to have lost the will to save themselves and remained on the barge. It was a very dark night, but my mother encouraged me to be brave and the two of us made it to land.

We were so hungry we searched for seaweed to eat, to get something into our stomachs. People were running around uncertain which way to go, there was absolutely no sign of habitation. It was just a vast open sandy shoreline; there was not a single light to be seen and people didn't know which way lay safety. Do we run right, left, anywhere? People got completely confused and while this was going on, quite extraordinarily, the SS manned tugs returned. Of course, they were dumbfounded and enraged by what they saw. Some of the guards boarded our barge and shot those who hadn't had the strength or willpower to get off. Then they came ashore and rounded us up; we thought we were also going to be shot. Dawn was breaking, daylight was beginning to return. They formed us into a column and we marched into a nearby town which I know now to be Neustadt, in the county of Schleswig-Holstein, into a large military compound and we had to stand to attention on the parade ground. A couple of guards remained on duty while the rest disappeared, most probably to obtain instructions of what to do with us. While we stood there we witnessed a very heavy air-raid. Sirens went off and we saw bombs being dropped, explosions and fire and a fight between aircraft. I recall silently hoping that the bombs would hit the barges so they couldn't put us back on them. After a couple of hours of us standing to attention, the other guards returned and we began marching again.

We marched. Those who couldn't keep pace with the tempo set by the German guards again were shot and their bodies left by the roadside. Many people lost their lives there. Military traffic was passing us in both directions, but that meant nothing to us. We were under this escort and my mother kept saying to me the only safe place to be was in the middle of the column so we did our best to remain as close to the middle as we could. ■



## Liberation by British tanks

A COLUMN OF tanks came towards us and suddenly a shout went up from among our group. 'Look! Our guards have disappeared!' As we looked around, we realised that the SS guards who minutes earlier had still been killing people for trailing behind, had suddenly turned and run. They recognised long before we did that this was a column of British tanks. People were yelling, 'We're free! We're free!' but we didn't know what it meant. We were in the middle of nowhere, at our wits' end and our last ounce of strength, what could we do? These tanks did not stop, but just by rolling past us, by having chosen to go along the same road that we were being marched on, they caused our guards to take fright and run away. These tanks had an objective to reach: they obeyed orders and kept on travelling. But in the process, they liberated us. That date is imprinted in my mind – 3 May, 1945. We set out on this death march on 26 April and we were liberated seven days later. Of the 5,000 who marched out of Stutthof, I remember hearing that only around 1,700 were still alive on our liberation day.

Then truckloads of British soldiers appeared. I don't know if a message was sent or whether these soldiers were just following the tanks, but they stopped for us. They saw we were wearing the striped convict-type clothing and they called up truckloads full of food, which was handed out indiscriminately. Apparently that was the wrong thing to do. After not having enough food for more than three years, the body revolts and cannot process it. Some became seriously ill; several lost their lives tragically by gorging on food. Fortunately, my mother seemed to have a sense of this and we just stuffed ourselves with dry bread. We grabbed whatever we could, to hoard, because our mental state was such that we didn't know what tomorrow would bring. We had butter, tinned meats, cheese, all sorts of delicacies which we hadn't seen for years. ■

## Freedom in Neustadt – but we were dangerously ill

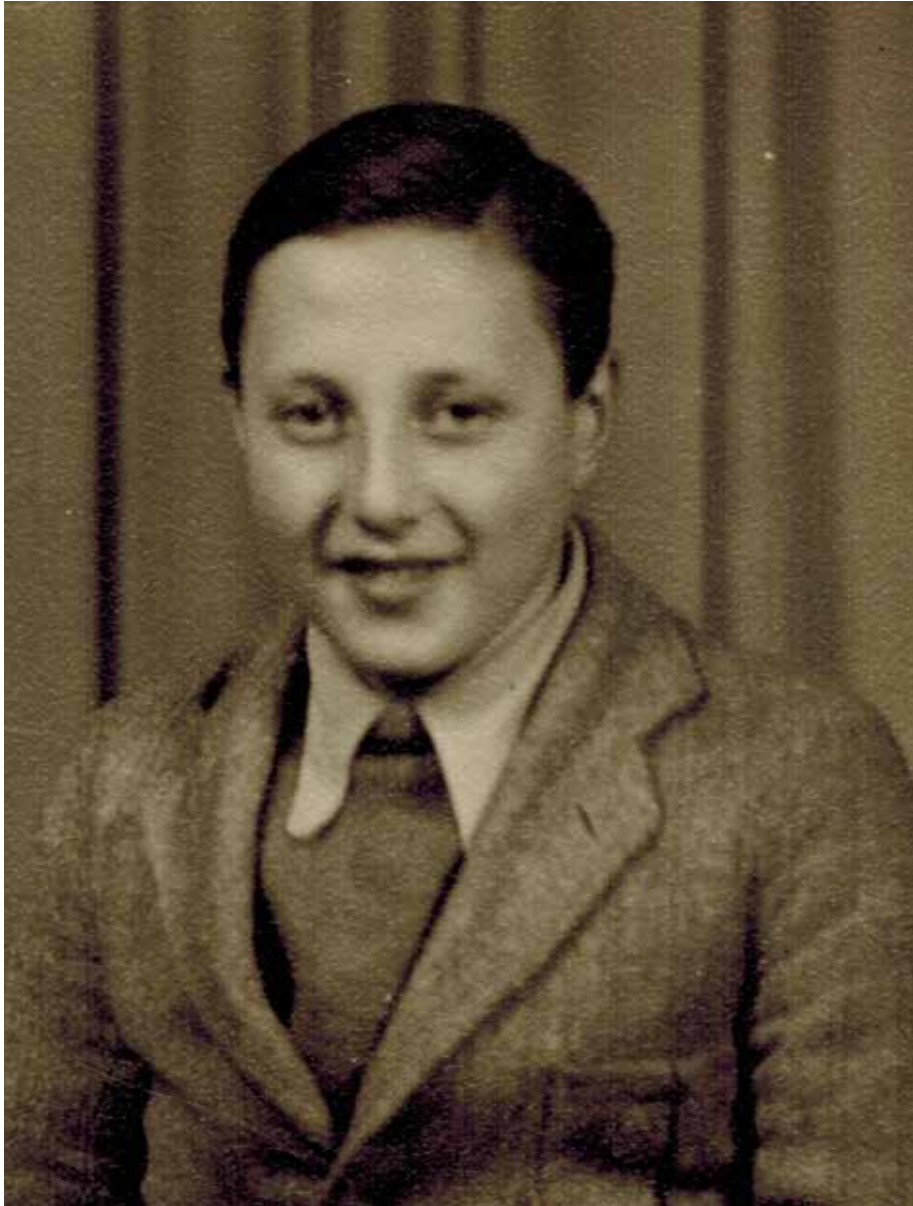
THE BRITISH SOLDIERS allowed us to sit and rest, and then they again formed us into a column and marched us back to the large military compound in Neustadt, where we had stood to attention for hours that same morning. By now all the Germans had been rounded up and taken away as prisoners-of-war and the British were using the residential barracks of the compound to house us. It was quite ironic: in the morning, the Germans had been the masters there, but in the afternoon it was our home.

My mother and I shared a room. We couldn't believe that we were finally free. After a few days, my mother fell ill and was taken to hospital and it turned out that she, like many survivors, had developed typhus. I, of course, was totally bereft. I spent practically all day with my mother in hospital. She went through a crisis point but survived. Then one day, on the way to the hospital, I fainted and woke up also in a hospital bed. It turned out that I also had typhus. My mother recovered and was discharged. I also survived the typhus, but they discovered that I was also suffering from TB (tuberculosis) in one lung. There was no recognised treatment, although I was told that the cure for TB was eating lots of butter. However, it was days after Germany capitulated and butter was in short supply. It was a bit hit or miss whether they could cure me.

Although we were liberated by the British, days later a group of American soldiers arrived and it became the combined British-American force who were looking after us. An American Jewish soldier became interested in the survivors. He went to the hospital to visit the patients. He came into my room and began speaking in broken Yiddish. I told him I needed butter. He understood and rushed off to his NAAFI (store), returning with pats of butter which I ate by the tablespoon. Eventually I was discharged, but told I needed a period of convalescence. As I was only 15 my mother was permitted to accompany me. We were sent to a convalescent home called Lensterhof. ■



Me and Sigi at Lensterhof



Me aged fifteen

## Convalescence in Lensterhof

LENSTERHOF WAS IN a small village called Lenste, surrounded by farms and countryside. There were around 40 survivors sent there for convalescence. We were interviewed by Jewish welfare officers who asked whether we had any relatives with whom we would like to be reunited, so we gave what sparse details we had of my father being in England. In London, the Chief Rabbi's office opened an emergency centre where refugees like my father could report and give details of families left behind who they were searching for. My father gave our details.

It all had to be handled manually and it took around three months before they matched the two searches. They informed my father that part of his family had survived and they told us he would make contact. My father was not permitted to come and see us as Germany was still considered a warzone, and we couldn't even speak by telephone. But he was allowed to write to us and soon after he was permitted to send us parcels. Of course he applied for permission for us to come and join him but that didn't happen until September 1946.

In the meantime my mother and I lived at the convalescent home along with the other survivors. People were only meant to be there for a few weeks, but no one told us to leave so we just stayed. There were around 10 boys of my age – 15 and 16-year-olds. I was the only one who had a mother with me: the others were orphans who had lost all their family. We youngsters all became close friends. There was one couple who had survived, who were special. Both of them had PhDs, Dr Gerberg and Dr Gerberg, husband and wife. He spoke fluent *Ivrit* (Hebrew) and to keep us out of mischief, with the consent of the non-Jewish staff of this convalescent home, organised a class for us youngsters.

Dr Gerberg began to teach us *Ivrit*, a few simple words and their German meaning. He was very bright. He spoke Lithuanian, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, English and possibly other languages as well. He introduced some order into our lives and eventually the convalescent home also began providing us with some tuition – very informal primitive tuition in German, grammar and mathematics. It didn't amount to much but it kept us disciplined and out of mischief.

That was how we spent our time there. Most people there wanted to go to Israel but the British wouldn't allow them. There were underground movements though. Every so often, someone would

disappear overnight. It was never spoken about. They would be picked up and, via the underground movement, taken to some port in Italy and put on illegal boats to Israel, to Palestine. The numbers were slowly shrinking, while a few people like us waited to join family in America, England or elsewhere.

Back in 1944, in the camp called Stolp, I had become friends with the only other boy my age. We were both 14 then, just three months between us. His name was Ziggy Shipper. We worked in the same slave labour gang, on the railways. We were the only youngsters still alive by then. When my mother and I were sent from Stolp to the next camp, Ziggy was left behind, and we lost contact. Unknown to me, at some point he was also sent back to the camp at Stutthof, as were we.

Ziggy and I met again, on the death march, the day we left Stutthof. There were 5,000 of us, and we tried to stick together; my mother, Ziggy and me, and a couple of others. He had already caught typhus and was quite weak and there were moments when he said he just couldn't go any further. He was desperate to rest but we knew that once he sat down, that would be the end. He would trail behind the column and be shot. So we, who ourselves were also quite weak, supported him, saying: "Ziggy, you must keep going." We made sure he wasn't left behind.

When we were liberated, Ziggy was still around with us, which was an achievement. He has told me more than once that, but for me and a few others, he would not be alive today. The moment of our liberation was complete bedlam. We got separated, I had no idea where to find him. I knew he had survived, but we were no longer together.

To my amazement, when we arrived in the convalescent home, Ziggy was also there. He had a mother who survived and found him. She hadn't seen him for so many years that she had to identify him by a birthmark on his left arm. He also came to London to live and we are friends to this day. There's not a soul alive in the world who I've known longer than Ziggy. ■



Community at Lensterhof

## Letters from my father

WHEN MY FATHER left for England he was permitted just one suitcase so he took very little, but he did take some personal things, including photographs. He was the only one who had any mementos of our earlier life. In one of his first letters to us, he sent a photograph of my little brother Hermann, the one killed in the camps. He also sent us parcels and, among other things, they always contained British cigarettes because that was the hard currency at the time. German money was worthless but British cigarettes could buy you anything.

Looking at that photograph of my little brother, I decided to try and get a portrait painted. I found an artist who, for payment in British cigarettes, would paint it. From that small photograph, which was roughly the size of a passport photo, he painted an excellent likeness of my brother - about 12 inches by 12 inches. I presented it to my mother on her birthday as a gift. Of course it was very emotional with many tears, but that painting has remained a treasured possession. We have it in our home here hanging on the wall.

Everyone in the convalescent home wanted to leave Germany. They had different destinations, but practically everyone had family living somewhere in the world and they were attempting to move there. We were waiting to get permission to join my father. Eventually, the big day came in September 1946, as mentioned earlier. We didn't travel on our own initiative, we were assisted by a welfare organisation caring for survivors. We were taken to a port and crossed the channel on a military boat taking British soldiers back to the UK. Then we were put on a train to Victoria Station. ■



## A family reunion after seven years

MY FATHER KNEW the details of our journey and he came to Victoria Station to meet us for the big reunion, seven years after we were parted.

Well, we arrived but we couldn't find my father. We walked around, searched for a long time and there was no sign of him. We were at a loss and eventually we went out to the street. We had his address written on a piece of paper. We showed it to a taxi driver and he took us there, to Cazenove Road in Stamford Hill, North London. We thought he would be there when we arrived, but he wasn't. We had no money to pay for the taxi but a young lady, Emma Shapiro, who lived in the same building, spotted us and came down. When she realised we had no money, she paid the taxi, and invited us in.



With Emma and Gerry Shapiro

Emma didn't speak a word of German or Yiddish and I couldn't speak more than three words of English, but we felt a bond. Eventually, I don't know how long after we arrived, a very dejected father returned. He had been waiting on the wrong platform. I don't know how the mistake occurred, but when he didn't see us arrive he thought we might have missed our train and would arrive tomorrow. Of course, there was great joy when he found us there, but it was a bittersweet reunion because of my younger brother.

It turned out that Emma lived on the same floor, and we became lifelong friends. She was a Jewish young lady, born in Calcutta, and her husband, an English Jewish soldier, had been stationed there. They had met at the Jewish club in Calcutta. I was in touch with them right up to the end of their lives. ■

## My father's life in England

SOON AFTER MY father had arrived in England, he was arrested as an enemy alien. He was sent to Kitchener Camp, a derelict abandoned First World War army camp near Dover, re-opened specifically to house these refugees. They were confined to the camp and not allowed to leave. They were not mistreated and, of course, it wasn't equivalent to the camps my mother and I had been in. Their lives were not at risk at any time, although it was quite a difficult time for them. They did, however, receive sixpence pocket money each week, which they were able to spend on little treats for themselves at the tuck shop.

Several months after my father had been sent to this camp, the British formed a division of refugees called the Pioneer Corps. All the refugees could volunteer to join, which my father did. He went through training and was sent to France. He told me he was detailed to guard an ammunition camp. He was given a rifle and instructed to march around the perimeter. If he saw anyone he didn't know, he had to challenge them - friend or foe? But although he'd been given the rifle, apparently they didn't trust him with bullets. He thought to himself, 'if I challenge anyone and they call my bluff, it will be the end of me.' He told me that when marching, if he saw anything untoward, he would just turn around and walk in the opposite direction to get away from it! He never challenged anyone.

“ He told me he was detailed to guard an ammunition camp. He was given a rifle and instructed to march around the perimeter. If he saw anyone he didn't know, he had to challenge them - friend or foe? But although he'd been given the rifle, apparently they didn't trust him with bullets. ”

Eventually my father was repatriated with the Dunkirk evacuation. He came back to England and, sometime later, he was discharged from the army due to ill health. But there was a condition to his discharge - he was only permitted to take a job which supported the British war effort and had been cleared with the Home Office. In those days it was the norm to work six days a week. My father was a religious man and didn't want to work on *Shabbat*, so he had difficulty finding work. He was now a free man but he needed some money to live on.

After quite some hardship, he discovered a building firm owned by a religious man who did not work on *Shabbat*. They sent work teams into houses which had been bomb-damaged, but were still habitable, to refurbish them so people could move back in. He applied for a job as a painter when, in fact, he had never held a paintbrush in his hand in his life! He said he played a bit dumb and watched the other painters. When the painters dipped their brush, he did, and when they painted the wall, he imitated them. After a while he got the hang of it. It wasn't high class work, but they were extremely short of manpower because all able-bodied men were serving in the forces. They were quite happy to take this man in his 40s and not in the best of health. He kept that job right to the end of the war. He earned a pittance from it so, by the time the war ended, my father was still quite poor. ■

## Continuing my education

WHEN MY MOTHER and I were reunited with my father in September 1946 I spoke just a few words of English which Dr Gerberg had taught me. I was 16 years old but, educationally, I was only eight or nine. There was a conflict between my parents - my father wanted me to go to *yeshiva* to do Jewish Studies, but my mother, who was more practical, wanted me to catch up on my general education. Because of what we'd been through, I was much closer to my mother. My father was like a stranger to me because I hadn't seen him since I was nine. It took time to establish some connection and bond with him so, naturally, I sided with my mother.

It so happened that my father lived in Stoke Newington not far from the Jewish Avigdor School, which was organising a crash course in English for refugees. I applied and was jointly interviewed by two headmasters, a gentleman named Dr Levine and a lady who became well known because she was quite remarkable. Her husband was Dayan Dr Grunfeld. She was also Dr Grunfeld in her own right and was the headmistress of Avigdor School. I told them my story of how I came to be here in London after surviving the camps. They accepted me into the school and I rapidly learned English. It must have been a good course and I must have had a good ear for the language, because in a very short time I was speaking fluent English.

Without my knowledge, these two headmasters approached two of their staff. One was Rabbi Israel Cohen, who later became headmaster of Menorah Primary School in Golders Green. The other was also a teacher, Mr Rosenthal. Both lived locally and both invited me to their homes. I visited Rabbi Cohen every *Shabbat* afternoon, when he would patiently teach me the basic tenets of Judaism. He realised that, although I was a teenager, my knowledge of Judaism, in fact, my knowledge generally, was very limited.

With Mr. Rosenthal it was rather different. Initially, I spent some time at his house in Allerton Road, then later, when I knew English sufficiently well, he would lend me a book which was appropriate to my standard. I would read it and then return it and he would offer me another book. So both these gentlemen had a lasting influence on my development, particularly of my Judaism.

At my mother's insistence and on advice from friends, it was decided that the way to fill the gaps in my education was to send me to a tutorial college in Great Russell Street, quite close to the British Museum. This was really a crammer place where students who didn't get the marks they needed attended crash courses to prepare them to retake exams. I went there for three terms, after which I sat for the matriculation certificate. I had to take five subjects and, to my amazement, I passed all five. I felt extraordinarily guilty of being a burden on my parents as I realised they could not afford to continue paying for me to attend the college. I insisted that after I obtained the matriculation I would go out to work and contribute to my upkeep. I found myself some dead-end jobs. My first was working for a Jewish bakery, serving behind the counter which earned me, I think, three pounds weekly. Of course, I handed it over to my parents; I was given pocket money but the rest was used for household expenses.

“ I went there for three terms, after which I sat for the matriculation certificate. I had to take five subjects and, to my amazement, I passed all five. ”

Then I worked for a Jewish grocery store where I also earned three pounds. But I decided I wanted something a little more skilled. I found myself a job with a firm servicing sewing machines, primarily in the East End. There were many sweatshops in the East End, with young women sitting at sewing machines manufacturing ladies' garments. Time was money and these machines had to be serviced very quickly because while they were out of action it cost both the employer and the machinist money. So we had to work hard and fast against the clock. I actually took a drop in salary. Instead of earning three pounds, I was earning two pounds and 10 shillings - and it was hard work. It wasn't highly skilled - in a couple of weeks you knew what you were doing and that was it. When I steeled myself and asked for a five-shilling rise, the boss refused. I got upset, gave my notice and I left.

I sat down and thought about my future and decided I was interested in the electrical field. I wanted to become an electrician, so I found myself a job as an electrician's mate. That normally meant that, for the first year at least, you carry the electrician's tool bag from job to job and watch him work. I was lucky in that my electrician was lazy. I carried his tool bag and, when we reached a job, he would show me what to do and then sit down and smoke a pipe and watch me do the work. This helped me learn a lot in a relatively short time. When I later returned to continue my studies, I managed to earn myself meaningful pocket money by doing small electrical jobs for people on a Sunday.

After almost a year with the electrician, I decided this wasn't for me. I had become more ambitious and I wanted something which required more brain power. I was told to go to university but when I applied, I found I hadn't got the necessary qualification. I was told to attend some college and get through a particular course called an Intermediate BSc. It normally took two years but I found a college in Walthamstow that did the course in one year. I had intended to work hard to save a year. As already mentioned, we shared the first floor with Emma and Gerry Shapiro, a lovely young couple. Emma was temporarily not working and they owned a TV set. We did not. She was very kind and welcomed us whenever we fancied watching. I succumbed to temptation and, instead of studying, I spent far too much time enjoying TV programs. I attempted to pass in four subjects, but paid the price for watching too much television, by passing in just two subjects, a borderline pass in the third and failing the fourth. I had to repeat the whole year, but had learned the lesson, worked hard and passed well at the second attempt. That was the only exam I ever failed. ■

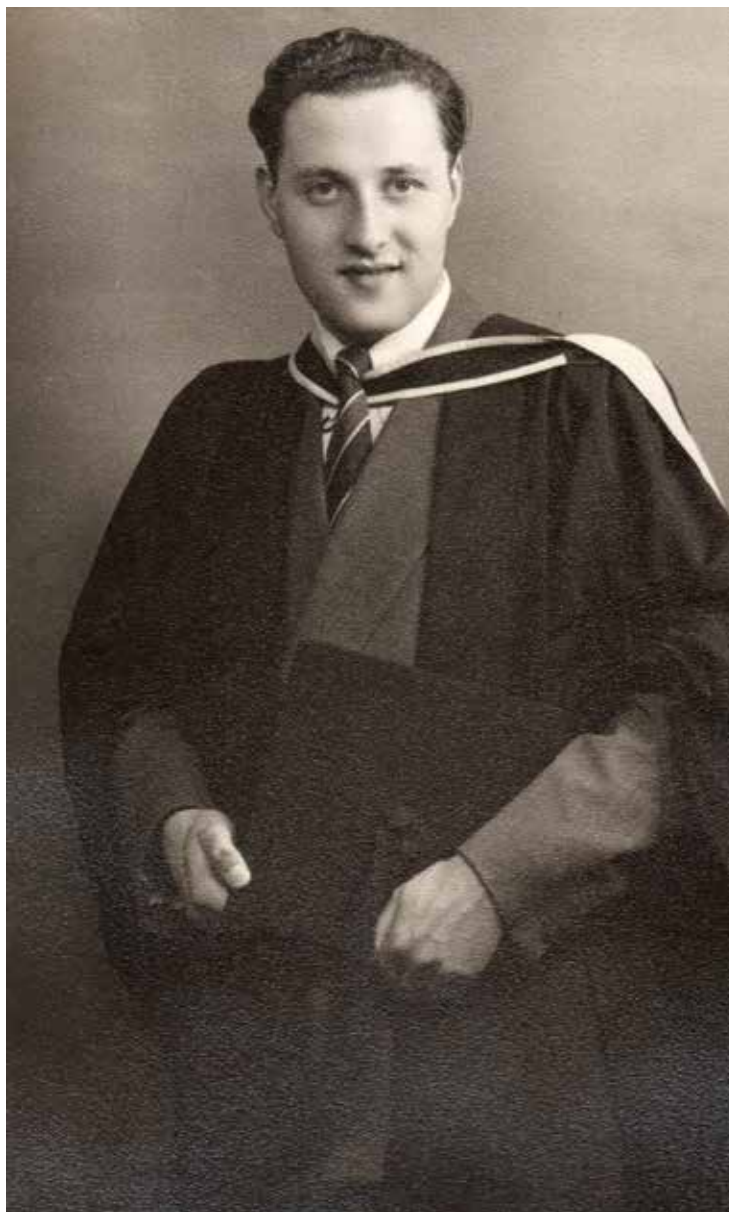
## University years and my early career

I ATTENDED NORTHAMPTON Polytechnic, which was actually in London, near the Angel in St John's Street, and part of the University of London. After three years I managed to get a second-class honours Bachelor of Science degree in electronics, then called 'light electrical' as opposed to 'heavy electrical'.

I told the head of the electrical department a little of my background, and he sent me a letter when I qualified saying it was a particularly distinguished performance from a 'disadvantaged foreigner'. I still have that letter. There was full employment at the time; firms sent representatives to colleges to interview students and if they liked the sound of them, they would persuade them to come to them rather than the competitor. There was a shortage of graduates, so I had a choice of jobs.

My mother was the archetype of a Jewish mother. I was her only son, her treasure, all she had in life, and, of course, she spoilt me, in fact smothered me - she wouldn't allow me to grow up. I was forever her treasure, her little boy. I felt that I needed a bit of breathing space, so I did something quite cruel. I accepted a job in Manchester, which meant leaving home. Of course, my mother was heartbroken. How could I do such a thing? I chose Manchester because it had quite a large Jewish community, which was important to me. ■

“My mother was the archetype of a Jewish mother. I was her only son, her treasure, all she had in life, and, of course, she spoilt me, in fact smothered me - she wouldn't allow me to grow up.”



My graduation



## Life in Manchester – working at Ferranti

I FOUND MYSELF lodgings with an Orthodox widow, Mrs Adler, who needed to earn a living. She let rooms in her house and I was one of four lodgers. She treated all four of us like her own sons. She made us sandwiches to take to work. In the evening, we had a hot meal waiting for us. When it came to *Shabbat*, we would sit around a table and she would feed us every meal we needed. It was quite lovely.

I joined *Torah V'Avodah*, the senior section of the youth organisation *Bnei Akiva*. I made friends and had a social life, but I felt guilty about having abandoned my parents. I got a job with quite a substantial firm called Ferranti, working in the laboratory with a team of engineers, developing circuitry for colour television which was not yet available. The chief engineer took a liking to me and I told him how I felt about leaving my parents in London. He allowed me to take every fourth Friday off work, and on a Thursday evening I would hop on a train from Manchester to London and spend Shabbat with my parents. On Sunday night I would travel back overnight to Manchester on a sleeper. The train would arrive around 4am but was pushed into a siding so passengers could continue sleeping. I would sleep till 7am, pray and go straight to work. ■

“ I joined *Torah V'Avodah*, the senior section of the youth organisation *Bnei Akiva*. I made friends and had a social life, but I felt guilty about having abandoned my parents. ”

## I return to London – working at AC Cossor

INITIALLY I THOUGHT I would stay in Manchester just for one year, but I stayed for nearly three. Towards the end of 1956, I returned to London and found myself a job with another electronics firm, this time working on the development of high-speed radar; work for which I needed security clearance. It wasn't far from home and I was able to cycle to work in under 15 minutes. The firm was called AC Cossor; a smaller firm than Ferranti. There was only one other Orthodox Jewish man working at the firm, a physicist called Dr Vivian Hammond. We were the only ones who requested to leave early on a Friday, which was granted without problem.

The Government in those days wanted to establish some new towns. Harlow New Town, which was 30 miles from central London, had just been built. Firms were encouraged to move from London into these new towns to provide work. The terms were extremely attractive. They were offered brand new factories at peppercorn rents and AC Cossor took up the opportunity, offering its staff very cheap housing in Harlow so they would stay with the firm. Although many engineers accepted, I wanted to live at home with the Jewish community around me. I was not the only one who refused to move so the firm laid on a coach to pick us up in the mornings, drive us out to Harlow and bring us back in the evening. This was fine except on a Friday, when it was necessary for me to leave early in winter. By then, I had my first vehicle, an ancient car, so I drove myself on Fridays. The journey made the days long. I felt it might be time to change jobs again, giving me the opportunity to go one or two rungs up the career ladder. ■

## Developing the transistor at Associated Electrical Industries

I JOINED WHAT was then the largest electric firm in the country, Associated Electrical Industries. It was eventually taken over by General Electric and had branches and laboratories all over the country. I joined the one in Brimsdown, Enfield in 1958.

It was very interesting work. The basic unit for all electrical work had been the electric valve, which was rather like a light bulb with a filament inside which heated up to white heat. It was Nobel Laureate William Shockley in America who invented the transistor, which had two major advantages over the electric valve. Firstly, they did not require filaments and therefore didn't get hot. And secondly they were tiny, about half an inch tall and less than a quarter of an inch in diameter. They were cylindrical but vertical. Each one of these would substitute for a valve, which was probably four or five inches tall and more than one inch in diameter, so they enabled circuits to be miniaturised. But these transistors were very basic. My job was to develop more sophisticated transistors which could react faster. These might take a thousandth of a second to react, and they wanted one which could react in a fraction of a thousandth or even a millionth of a second. There was a team of us working on this. It was very interesting work and we managed to get some results. I stayed with that firm for just over two years.

Then again, an unforeseen circumstance happened. Associated Electrical decided they would move the development laboratory I worked in from Enfield to Crewe. Again, they offered incentives to move, which of course I couldn't do because there was no Jewish community in Crewe. I handed in my notice and, seeing there would be no problem finding another job, I allowed myself a couple of months without work just to relax. I dreamt of a holiday in France, which I felt I deserved after having missed out on so much as a youngster during the war. ■

## I meet and marry Shary

BOTH MY PARENTS' families lived in Poland. During the war they were all rounded up and, almost without exception, killed. The only two who survived were brothers of my mother who, before the war, went to Germany. They grew up in an Orthodox family but became Zionists and dropped their religious practices. In Germany they got agricultural training and then made their way to Palestine. One of them, Arye, became a founder member of Kibbutz Naan in Rehovot which, to this day, is a thriving community. The other brother, Israel, was a founder member of a kibbutz further up north in the Galilee, called Maoz Haim. Curiously, these two brothers had different surnames due to the fact that in Poland Orthodox Jewish families only had religious weddings and never had a civil wedding, so the authorities considered the children to be illegitimate. Arye had the surname Seeman, which was my mother's maiden name, and Israel had the surname Lakritz.

After the war my mother made contact with her brothers. She was very keen to meet up with her only living relatives who survived the war, but we couldn't afford the ticket for my mother to go to Israel and they, living in kibbutzim, had no money. Eventually my mother managed to scrape together enough to go and meet her brothers. It was a wonderful but brief visit.

Later, in 1959, Uncle Arye persuaded his kibbutz to buy him a ticket to England as a reward for having been a productive member for more than 20 years. They gave him long leave, and he stayed with us for two months. Word soon got around that my uncle, who came from Poland, was paying a visit to London. Several people who had been at school with him and had survived and come to England, either pre-war or as refugees, got in touch and came to visit.

They reminisced about Yankel, and Chaim, and Yossele - everybody they had left behind. There was one name that came up again and again but nobody knew how to contact this man. They were all pretty sure that he lived in London so, trying to be helpful, I fished out the telephone directory. I looked up the name and there weren't too many listed so I started telephoning them. It was a Jewish sounding name, and when they answered, I said: 'I'm looking for a youngish man. My uncle went to school with him and he'd like to make contact again.' One by one they said: 'No, no, we come from a different part of Poland, we're not the family you want.' Then one person said: 'I'm not the man your uncle wants, but I somehow have a feeling I'd like to meet your uncle.'

We invited this man and his wife, Mr and Mrs Gerner, to visit us on a Sunday afternoon. They had a long chat with my uncle but, as suspected, they were not the family he was looking for. While at our house they saw me, an eligible young man, 28 years old at the time. They happened to live just a few doors from the Schechter family who had a single daughter, Shary. Mrs Gerner picked up the phone to their neighbours saying: I saw a nice young man and I know your daughter is eligible. Will you allow me to introduce them, maybe they will suit each other?' Mrs Schechter spoke to her daughter who refused, saying: 'No, this is an archaic custom. I want to find my own husband. I am not doing it.' But this lady wouldn't give up, she kept on nagging and nagging until eventually Shary, who was not very strong willed in this, said: 'Okay. I'll meet him, but I won't talk to him!'

The Gerners contacted us and said: 'We know we're not the family you were looking for, but we enjoyed your hospitality. Come to us this Sunday afternoon and we will reciprocate.' My uncle was still staying with us, so my parents, my uncle and I went to visit this couple and unknown to us, they also invited Shary and her parents. Just imagine all these people in one smallish room! Shary and I were, of course, sat next to each other, and the eyes of everyone in the room were on the two of us. How would we react? We were both very shy and it was quite embarrassing at first.

I must have found some sort of favour in her eyes, because by the time we parted, Shary had given me her telephone number and the rest is history. I remember our first date. I got tickets to the Royal Festival Hall to hear the Red Army choir. Things went on from there; we were slowcoaches, it took us quite some time, but eventually we got engaged. Some time before our engagement we discussed where we would like to live. Both of us were happy to settle in Israel. I made a visit to Israel and had an interview at the Weitzman Institute with a view of getting a job doing research in the Electronics field. They offered me a position, and asked me to contact them whenever I was ready.

However, almost immediately after my return to London, my mother fell ill and was diagnosed with cancer. Shary and I agreed that, as an only son, I could not 'abandon' them and settling in Israel was no longer an option. We then planned to live in North West London. Shary worked in that area and, during her lunch breaks, began looking at properties for sale. My late mother, although unwell, attended our engagement party but, heartbreakingly, passed away 10 weeks before our wedding. She died so young - aged 56.



My wedding day

It's Jewish custom that, once a wedding date has been fixed, you must not change it so we got married on 30 July, 1961, weeks after my mother died. We kept the date but cancelled the music. We've been happily married for almost 60 years now. I still bless the day when Shary said: 'Yes.'

We had a honeymoon in Italy. Our first accommodation was a partly furnished apartment in Stamford Hill, close to where my father lived. My father was totally on his own, with no other family of any sort. We had planned to begin our married life in north-west London because some of our friends had settled there, and there was already an exodus of Jews from Stamford Hill. We encouraged my father to move there also and be near us, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was settled in Stamford Hill - he had his own synagogue where he was used to going, he had his friends, he went to *shiurim* (lectures), so he didn't want to move. Shary and I couldn't bring ourselves to leave him behind, so we changed our plans and decided to stay in Stamford Hill, close to where he lived.

A year or so after we got married, we managed to buy a small three-bedroom terraced house in Stamford Hill, minutes from my father. He would come and spend *Shabbat* with us, and I could pop in to see him during the week. The house was recommended to us by a young couple, Karlie and Esther Weissbraun, who lived in the same street. Karlie had been a close friend when we were both single, and now the two of them became our good friends. We now lived five doors apart: they lived at number 14 and we lived at number 24.

My father was very badly affected emotionally when my mother died. She had been a very sociable and hospitable person and during the 15 years she lived in England she built up quite a circle of friends for them both. They entertained and were invited out a lot. When my mother died, the vast majority of those friends just melted away. My father no longer fitted in as a single man and people began distancing themselves. He became lonely and reclusive. ■

“ A year or so after we got married, we managed to buy a small three-bedroom terraced house in Stamford Hill, minutes from my father. ”

## Setting up in business

SHARY FELL PREGNANT and we had our first son in October 1962. I was still working in the electronics field for the firm in Enfield when our first son was a baby. It was an extremely cold winter and we were running electric fires all over the house but we were still freezing and it was costing us a lot of money. I was the only one working and although I was earning reasonably well, we were still not flush with money.

We decided we needed to install central heating, which was relatively new in those days. I got three estimates which varied considerably but we couldn't afford any of them. It seemed strange that for the same specification, the prices varied so much. I thought either they don't know what they're doing or they're earning good money on it. I'd had training in electronic engineering but central heating was more like mechanical engineering. I decided I'd get a book on central heating from the local library and read up on it. Then I read a couple more books and decided it was probably possible for me to install it myself. I was quite enterprising and I decided to give it a go.

Karlie came by one evening and I told him about my plan. He said: "Let me give you a hand to do your house, and then we can do my house together." I agreed. Of course, we both had jobs so we could only do the work in the evenings and Sundays, and it took us quite some time. There was a small shop selling central heating gear – radiators, boilers, pipe work and so on, in Archway. The man serving behind the counter, Mr Brown, was the owner and I admitted to him that I was a complete beginner and had no experience. He was very helpful and sold me all the materials I needed. With his guidance and having read up about it, we managed to install central heating into my house. I remember the big day when we flicked the switch and, lo and behold, the system got hot first time. Then we did the same at Karlie and Esther's house, which was also pretty trouble free. I was the technical one and Karlie helped move floorboards and furniture.

When people got to hear about it - the Jewish world, particularly the Orthodox Jewish world, is a small one - they kept knocking on the door and saying: "Look, do it for me. Do it for me, I'll pay you!" We did it at cost price for a mutual friend who lived not far from us. He got a fantastic deal.



Then Karlie decided he didn't want to continue so I was on my own. The next time I went to the shop where I bought the materials, the owner said to me: "Look, there's no problem. You hire a team of installers, they work in pairs. I'll introduce you to ones who are quite decent. You give a price for the job, you design it, you get the specification, you get the materials, then you send a team of two in and they install it for you." So that's what I did and I ran this as a business in addition to my regular job.

Although my father was a poor man post-war, he had a good name. He decided to buy a house and divide it into bed-sitting rooms to let. He didn't have the money for the purchase, but people were prepared to lend it to him thanks to his good name. He borrowed £50 from one, £100 from someone else and so on, and managed to get enough for a substantial deposit on a house, and the rest on a mortgage.

He rolled up his sleeves and got to work. He had the experience gained while working for the team repairing bomb-damaged homes during the war. Although he was a painter, he had watched plasterers and electricians and managed to do quite a lot of the work himself. What he couldn't do, he got tradespeople in to do. He converted that house and from the rental income he paid back the money he had borrowed and retained his good name.

In 1963 my father asked me to join him. He said: "I'm getting on in life. This looks like the nucleus of a good business. Come in with me, work with me, and the business will be yours. You'll be self-employed, here you're working for someone else. You saw what happened, they moved the laboratory from one town to another and you're out of work." I had this gap of three months between jobs so I said: "Okay, I'll come and help you temporarily" and temporarily became permanently. I never took up the next job, I cancelled my acceptance and stayed with my father. We worked together for years, building up his business. Eventually he retired and I took over. I'm happy to tell you that I've now handed it over to one of our sons. It has become a sort of family business: they all have a share in it and one of them runs it. They often invite me to attend meetings so I am kept in the frame with regards to business matters. ■

## Winding down a successful business

OUR FIRST SON, David, was born in October 1962, and Harvey (known as Zvi) followed a year later, so Shary had her hands full with our two babies. I was now helping my father run the business and I was still trying to run the central heating business. In the evening after work I would go and measure up houses, design the central heating system and then give a price and organise the installation. I managed to get myself approved by the Gas Board which led to some recommendations of non-Jewish customers. Working for non-Jewish people turned out to be considerably calmer than working for Jewish customers. I would do the job, show them how to use it, get paid, say goodbye and they would only contact me if there was a real problem during the two year guarantee period (which was quite generous, most only gave one year). I gave two years' guarantee because working primarily for Jewish people I knew that, at some point, I would meet my customers at a *bar mitzvah* or a wedding and I'd have to be able to look them in the face! So, I made sure that quality jobs were installed, no cut corners. I'm that type, I need to have a clear conscience.

Eventually it got out of hand. People thought by taking me on for a central heating installation, they owned a part of me. I became like a doctor, on 24-hour standby. People would phone me in the evenings and say there was a problem with the heating. I would say: "I'll come in tomorrow." They would reply: "What do you mean tomorrow? I need the heating tonight!" Some would pay me most of the money and since I gave two years' guarantee, they would say: "Well, I'll hold the rest for two years to make sure you honour your guarantee." Thanks to the work I was doing with my father, I didn't need the central heating business to earn a living. You couldn't really sell such a business because it's all dependent on personal goodwill. So, I just stopped it. I'd run it for about three and a half years and that was the end of my central heating business. My wife blessed me when it finished.

Every so often I still come across a customer who remembers me installing their central heating. There's a kosher grocery shop in Golders Green called Kays, although the owner's name is actually Landberg. I did an installation for them back in 1963 when they lived just around the corner from us. About ten years ago I was shopping in Kays and Mrs Landberg was on the till. She was quite elderly but still going into the shop. She looked up and she said: "Mr Goldberg, I haven't seen you for such a long time." Then she went on to say: "You know, Mr Goldberg, on a cold winter's morning I bless you every day because the installation you put in back in 1963 is still working perfectly!"

We had Arye in December 1968, five years after Zvi was born. We still lived in Stamford Hill and we wanted our boys to go to a Jewish school, so we enrolled them in the Lubavitch Boys' Primary School. Lubavitch are quite a *frum* sect and although they proselytise, the school did not. There were no suitable secondary schools in Stamford Hill, so when it was time for David and Zvi to leave primary school, we decided they would go to Hasmonean Boys' School in Hendon.

Although it was quite a distance, we decided we had to stay in Stamford Hill. My father did not want to move and we couldn't bring ourselves to abandon him. It was a long-standing routine - I would pop in every day because we were so close and he would come to stay with us every *Shabbat*. The boys caught the daily coach to Hasmonean School and back to Stamford Hill. It was a worn and rather aged coach which sometimes broke down. Parents had to stand at a particular place to meet the children on their return, so we often had to stand there for an hour or so while the coach was being repaired.

After a while, we realised it wasn't fair on the children. When it came to *Shabbat*, they had no friends locally to visit, because they would sit in a class of 30 boys and probably 28 of them lived in north-west London. Also many of our friends had moved from Stamford Hill. When youngsters got married, they would live anywhere except Stamford Hill. They moved to Wembley, Edgware, Ilford, you name it, but not Stamford Hill.

Our community was shrinking quite rapidly. I remained a member of the family synagogue but I didn't go there often. Originally, it was so popular that if you came more than 20 minutes late on a *Shabbat* morning you had difficulty finding a seat. But 20 years later they struggled to get 10 people together on a *Shabbat* morning. That's how rapid the decline of that type of community was in Stamford Hill. ■

## Moving to north-west London

SHARY AND I made the decision to move. It was about the time my father let it be known he was willing to marry for a second time. He wed a widowed Russian lady. It was not a particularly happy relationship, but it was companionship. She cared for him and we moved with an easier mind: he was not on his own any longer. He had stopped coming to us for *Shabbat* because the two of them were together. So we left my father in Stamford Hill. I still loyally visited him frequently. We had a good relationship although, as my father aged, he became quite a difficult man.

There may have been a reason behind my father's change of character. We were both regular *shul* goers, every Shabbat morning we were there. During *Shavuot*, it is customary to decorate synagogues with flowers. In our synagogue they put flowerpots in the ladies' gallery, which was on the top floor, along the front guard rail. Someone dislodged a flowerpot and it hit my father on the head, injuring him. He suffered some sort of prolonged concussion for which, as a desperate attempt to help cure him, he underwent electric shock treatment. It seemed to help but we have a feeling that it caused some disturbance and he became quite a difficult, cantankerous man. Our relationship with him was not easy. We bent over backwards for him but often even that was not sufficient. It was a difficult time for us, particularly for Shary, who took it all like a saint. My father died in 1986.

We needed a large house. We had four sons, Raphael (known as Rafi) was born in May 1975, seven years after Arye. We moved in the summer of 1976, to a house on the Shirehall Estate in Hendon, where some of our friends already lived, and we joined our nearest synagogue, Hendon Adass. It was so popular that, although I requested two seats when I joined because I wanted to begin bringing the boys to synagogue on *Shabbat* morning, they could only offer me one seat. It took me three years before I got the second seat! ■

## Moving house and sitting *shiva*

When we moved to Hendon in 1976, my father-in-law, Izrael (known as Sruel) was in hospital, seriously ill with lung cancer. We didn't have the head for unpacking so our hundreds of boxes were left untouched. Shary was spending most days at the hospital with her mother, Rosie, because it had become apparent that her father was terminally ill. He died within two weeks of us moving. The house was in a dreadful state but they - Shary and her Mum - needed to sit *shiva* (mourning), so friends came and moved all the boxes out for us. It was quite a traumatic beginning to life in our new home.

My parents-in-law were still living in Highbury. When they first moved there, there was a fairly strong Jewish community, but by this time there were just two or three Jewish families left. Now my mother-in-law was on her own. It became our regular custom to pick her up on a Friday, bring her to us for the weekend and on Sunday or Monday we would take her back to Highbury. This continued for a couple of years but it became quite stressful, particularly for her. Unlike my father, who had not wanted to move, she was quite agreeable to the idea, except she couldn't afford to do so. We managed to pay the deposit on a house in Hendon. We got permission to divide it into two apartments, one we let out to help pay the mortgage and the other apartment we got ready for my mother-in-law. Life became much easier once she lived close by. She would still come and stay with us over *Shabbat*, but now it was less than 10 minutes to take her home. She did that for years. She moved there in 1978 and remained there until she died in 2002.

Sadly, she developed dementia, and there came a time when she could no longer come to us. We luckily managed to get a young Polish girl as a live-in carer. She was very dedicated and looked after her well, plus we were on the doorstep making sure she was well looked after. We are quite proud of the fact that, between us, we managed to care for her without her having to go into a home, and she died in her own bed.

We are really lucky in that we have lovely children and wonderful daughters-in-law, who are all loyal and dedicated. We consider them the daughters we never had. All in all, I think we are very fortunate.

When Rafi, our youngest, reached school age Shary felt bereft spending all day alone in the house. Back when Shary left school her father did not want her to attend university, so she had attended

Regent Street Polytechnic and obtained a secretarial qualification. One day she saw an advert in our local paper inviting people to attend a course run by Middlesex Polytechnic to check whether they would qualify to study as mature students. Shary was keen and I encouraged her to apply. She was accepted. She began a part-time course, in which she excelled and obtained a BA in Humanities. She was awarded First Class Honours. In the 1980s this was achieved by less than ten percent of students. Her tutor persuaded her to continue her studies and she obtained an MA with distinction in Jewish Studies. She enjoyed her studies and was on the point of accepting her tutor's encouragement to continue for a Doctorate in Humanities when her mother was hit by a car while crossing a road, badly injured and spent 11 months in hospital. Shary spent time with her mother in hospital daily and helped her at home when she was discharged. That put paid to her PhD ambitions. Shary was very modest about her achievements.

Today we still live in the same house, a five-bedroom property which, of course, is much too big for the needs of two people. Some time ago, our boys suggested we might downsize. We began looking at apartments, but we realised the advantage of living in a detached house was that we didn't have to worry about noisy neighbours. We also have a large garden which my wife loves even more than I do. So we decided that we would stay where we were.

At the moment, of course, we're isolating and in lockdown. Fortunately, we have that garden and when it's lovely and sunny, we can sit there. Also, at the end of our road we have a park, so if it's not raining, we go for a daily walk. Nevertheless, it's quite stressful being in lockdown. ■

## 'The four sons'

### Waiting for the doctor

SONS ONE AND two were born in a Jewish hospital called the Bearsted Memorial Hospital in north London. They both had their *bris* (circumcision) in hospital, which was difficult to arrange. The *bris* requires a *minyan* (quorum) of 10 men, and it was devilishly difficult to get permission to have 10 men assembled in the hospital to witness the circumcision, but I was sufficiently insistent to make it happen. But just 10 people, no more.

For son number three we were recommended to a private specialist as the previous birth had been very difficult. Shary was booked into University College Hospital for the birth. When the time came - at one o'clock in the morning - I phoned the specialist who told me to take her to the hospital and he would meet us there. When we got there it was extraordinarily busy, but the Matron eventually came into the room. She said to me: "Please don't go, I'll need you. I'm understaffed and, unexpectedly, there's a spike of activity, I'm going to need your help. Here's an overall!"

She gave me a green overall which I put on and she sent me in to sit with my wife by her bedside. I couldn't really do much except comfort her, hold her hand and put wet towels on her forehead to try and ease things a bit. Eventually it became serious and the doctor still hadn't arrived. When the baby was ready to come out, the Matron instructed my wife not to push. We thought the doctor must have told her to delay the birth until he turned up as he had promised. But it didn't work. The baby was born at 6.31am and he turned up 20 minutes later. We were really upset with him. He had ample time to turn up when he should have done.

Number four was born in a very small Salvation Army Hospital in Clapton. It was a lovely little place, where you got personal attention. And that's the sum total of our experiences in that field.

### The boys' *bar mitzvahs*

Of course, each son in turn had their *bar mitzvah*. All the preparation - their *leining* (Torah reading), I taught them. I have reason for great thanks and gratitude to that teacher, Mr Bacher, who taught me in the camp, because he taught me my portion so thoroughly and well that I remembered how to read any



David's *Bar Mitzvah*



portion in the Torah. The first two *bar mitzvahs* were still in Stamford Hill, but a couple of weeks after Zvi's *bar mitzvah*, we moved to north-west London. So number three and four had their *bar mitzvahs* in our new shul in Hendon. Since then, I have taught four grandsons as well - all as a result of the effort made by that dedicated teacher who took the initiative and offered to teach me in the first camp, in the Riga ghetto. It's now 78 years since my *bar mitzvah*.

### David

Our eldest son David came under the influence of one of the teachers at Hasmonean who was pretty frum, right wing. All our sons are *Shabbat* observant, go to shul, keep kosher and so on, but David is the most religious.

While at school, he had to find himself a summer vacation job for work experience. He asked me to help him and I contacted our accountant who was a member of the same synagogue, so we knew each other reasonably well. David went to work for his small firm of accountants, and when he left, they told him: "If any time you want to return, contact us, we'd be happy to help you." And in fact, that is what he did.

He went to university and got a degree and then contacted the firm. They took him back and he's been there for more than 30 years. Now he's a partner there, so that shows you how life sometimes shapes itself quite fortuitously, without much foresight on our part about what might develop.

All our boys were sent to Israeli *yeshivot* to study for a year at age 18 - except David. His close friends from school were all too *frum* for Israeli *yeshivot*. They wanted to go to Gateshead *yeshiva* which was much more traditional, so he went there for two years. David has a lovely family. He married Linda Shapiro, a qualified nurse from Leeds, in 1990. They have six children and they live just minutes from us up the road, so we can walk to each other on *Shabbat*. They are wonderful to us. We haven't been shopping for many weeks. If we want anything, our grandchildren or our son and daughter-in-law get it for us.



*Arye's Bar Mitzvah*



*Zvi's Bar Mitzvah*



*Rafi's Bar Mitzvah*



David and Linda's wedding

## Zvi

Son number two, Zvi, told us that he wanted to live in Israel. When it was his time to go to *yeshiva*, he chose a particular course called *Machal*, designed for people who wanted to make *Aliyah* (move to Israel). They would spend six months in *yeshiva* then six months in the army, alternately for three and a half years, after which they were considered to have carried out their army service and had made *Aliyah*.

Zvi settled in Tel Aviv and shared an apartment with a couple of friends. Before going to Israel, he and a friend, Jeremy Broder, had formed a plumbing company in London called Pipeline Services. They became quite skilled and both made *Aliyah*, so continued to work in Israel as partners. Zvi found it difficult to deal with Israelis and eventually decided he would only work for contractors, not for private people. If they were putting up a new building, he would take responsibility for the plumbing and organising a team to do it. As he himself put it, it meant dealing with one major headache in place of 20 little ones.

Time passed and he didn't seem to be taking root in Israel. After he'd been there for 10 years he met a young lady from Holland, Eliza Nederberg, fell for her and they married in 2003 in Israel. Although Eliza had also lived in Israel for some years, they upped and came back to England and have been living in the UK ever since. They live in Finchley and have three children aged 15, 13 and 10, so we get to see them often. Eliza often prepares Friday night meals for us.

When I retired I handed over the property business to Zvi who runs it now, although all the children have a share in it. They are equally caring and helpful.



Zvi and Eliza's wedding

## Arye

When Arye left school, he worked with me in the family business but we always knew that there would come a point when he would want to make *Aliyah*. Before he went to live in Israel we persuaded him to get his qualifications. He went to university to study Environmental Science. His lead subject was water conservation, which seemed to be ideal for Israel. But things didn't go according to plan. He was promised job after job in Israel, but none materialised. He was strung along with the excuse that they were waiting for funding before they could offer him the job officially and each time he wasted months waiting. So in order to earn a living while attempting to find the job he wanted, he offered himself as a repairman and trained as a reflexologist.

Arye had learned skills here with me working in the property business and he was very handy. He knew how to do repairs, how to maintain properties and in Israel he did well. He became known: people liked him because he was honest, straightforward and he didn't take people for a ride. He gave up on trying to find a job and he earns his living as a handyman. He is the number one choice for managing agents who need someone honest to trust with the key to an unoccupied, expensively furnished apartment.

Arye has a friend called Victor, now living in Israel, whom he had known from England, and Victor introduced him to his future wife, Erica Friedman, at a Purim party. She's a lovely girl, originally from Toronto. They married in Israel and have three children who are now aged 12, nine and the little one is five. So, all in all, we have quite a number of grandchildren, all of whom are our treasures. For years we have been celebrating Pesach with them in Israel.





Arye and Erica's wedding

## Rafi

Son number four, Rafi, lives here in London. He did very well in school - maths was his best subject. He usually came top of Hasmonian: we have a collection of gold and silver certificates still hanging on the wall of his old room in our house. He studied at the London School of Economics, where he took a degree in Mathematics. He got a First and then transferred to Imperial College where he took an MSc in Computer Science. He found himself a job with a firm of actuarial consultants while, at the same time, taking actuarial exams. I believe there are 15 exams one has to pass to qualify as an actuary, normally taken at six monthly intervals while working. Rafi passed six of these exams but came home moaning: "Mum, Dad, you have no idea how boring this work is. I can't imagine spending 40 years of my life doing it. No way!"

Despite our protestations he handed in his notice and found himself another quite challenging job and, believe it or not, the same thing happened. Initially he was nervous but once he'd cracked it, he began to get bored again. This happened several times. His mind needs ongoing challenges. Then he became a civil servant, but after a while that also began to bore him, despite his having a highly technical role, and he left that too. Then he joined a small firm which needed someone with financial modelling experience. Rafi has been there for nearly four years now and seems to have finally settled there.

Rafi lives just about within walking distance to us. He's still single and has a lovely circle of friends who have a wonderful social life. He is an accomplished cook and holds dinner parties for a dozen people, with three or four course meals. He also plays the violin, having started to learn it at a very early age by the Suzuki method, on a quarter size violin. He often also brings us delicacies and invites us for barbeques in his garden, as well as doing weekly shopping for us. He also is extraordinarily patient in helping us to become computer wise. ■



All the family

## Spending time in Israel

EACH YEAR FOR around 10 years we have been going to Israel, spending time with Arye and Erica and their family. We have a modest apartment in Netanya, which we bought when Zvi was serving in the army, so that he had somewhere to put his head down when he was on leave. He could go to the apartment and sleep the 24 hours he needed to come back to normal life. Now we stay in the apartment when we go to Israel to spend *Pesach* (Passover) with our son Arye and family. Sometimes we spend the last few days in a hotel, together with friends. We go several times a year in order not to be strangers to our grandchildren. We have a lovely relationship with the Israeli grandchildren. They're all fluent English speakers - their father is from England and their mother from Canada. It's a bonus for us that we can converse quite easily with all the grandchildren.

So all in all, we have a happy life. Our major investment has been our family. We have a lovely relationship with all the children and the grandchildren who are happy to come to spend time with us. The ones who live close sometimes walk over on *Shabbat*, either in the afternoon to have a meal with us or just come round to spend time, sometimes playing games together.

Another of the treasures of our lives has been the lovely, wonderful circle of friends we have established over the years. I rate this more highly than financial success because these are friendships which money cannot buy and we have derived wonderful rewards from them. Many of our treasured friends have all their children living in Israel, so whenever they could, they retired and made *Aliyah*. Quite a proportion of our lovely, loyal close friends now live in Israel. We are in touch with them by phone all year round, but whenever we have the chance, we get together in Israel.

“We have a lovely relationship with all the children and the grandchildren who are happy to come to spend time with us.”

One couple, Michael and Gloria Broder, in particular, now living in Jerusalem, have been our travel companions for decades. Over the years, when we've gone on holiday, more often than not we've gone together. They have four sons, we have four sons - these siblings are more or less like brothers, all eight of them. They've grown up together, spent many holidays together and they're all good friends to this day.

I cannot resist mentioning two amusing incidents, of which we had many over the years. It was around 1973; we had booked two adjoining apartments in Spain. The Broders had four sons and we had, at that time, three. To give each set of parents a chance to relax we would occasionally look after their boys for a whole day and they would reciprocate. It was our turn. We had an estate car so we piled all seven boys into the car and drove to the seashore. There were some elderly men sitting opposite our parking space outside a café playing cards. We opened the tail gate and out came all seven boys, one by one. After the last one exited we got a long round of applause from these men who, of course, thought all seven were ours!

The second tale relates to the same holiday. On arrival we were told there was a severe water shortage and there would be tap water only for a very few hours daily. We filled buckets to use when we returned from the beach with the boys covered in sand, but it was hellish. We saved every drop of water after use, for toilet flushing. On day two we became suspicious because we saw people watering their gardens very generously. Michael and I climbed into the loft of our building and found each apartment had its own water tank. All were full - apart from our two. We took a bucket into the loft and began ladling water from the full tanks into ours. Our landlady caught us doing this. She let us have a mouthful of presumably choice Spanish curses and we gathered she threatened to call the police. We, in return, gave her a mouthful of English equivalents and miraculously we had regular water for the rest of our holiday! ■



Holiday with Gloria and Michael Broder

## Speaking publicly about the Holocaust

WHEN I CAME to this country I settled down very nicely. I learned English quickly and, thanks to my parents, primarily my mother's encouragement, I managed to catch up on lost education and build a career for myself.

In our synagogue every year when it comes to *Tisha B'av*, which is a sad day mourning for our long-lost Temple way back in history, they also commemorate the Holocaust. They usually ask a survivor to come along and give their testimony. The person who organised the speaker each year at our synagogue, Leo Wieder, happened to be a friend of mine. Of course, he knew my background but I didn't publicise it - there were many members who had no idea that I was a Holocaust survivor. When they eventually found out, many told me they didn't have the slightest inkling that I was a survivor ... because I was too 'normal'! I had settled my life looking forward, rather than dwelling on my extraordinary experiences.

Leo kept asking me, each year, to speak at the following *Tisha B'av* meeting.

The thought of speaking about it publicly was unthinkable to me. It was locked inside me although the memories were clear. Similarly, as our children grew up, they of course knew my general background but they didn't know any details. They asked me about it but I found it extraordinarily difficult to say anything specific. I told them how long I'd been in the camps, and other bits and pieces, but certainly not a sequential story.

Leo continued asking me to talk, and it became progressively more difficult to refuse. I would come home and tell my wife that "Leo asked me again." I told him I'd think about it but really I didn't need to because tomorrow I would again refuse. Eventually, Shary and the family began working on me, suggesting I shouldn't be so rash and I should ponder on it. Also, a local Rabbi who knew my background told me that I ought to consider it an obligation to speak out, to inform the younger generation who knew that it was a calamity but didn't know much detail.

So there was pressure on me. The time came when Leo asked me again. Again I said I would think about it. This time Shary gave me a firm lecture. This was not her usual style. She, as a rule, left these things to me, but she felt strongly about it. She must have touched something inside me because I

woke the next morning having decided to say yes to Leo. Of course the moment I said it, I regretted it but I couldn't go back on my word. The evening came, and I was the first to arrive at the *shul* hall. Then Leo arrived and the two of us sat there. Eight o'clock came and there were three people in the hall. I thought: "My goodness, what have I let myself in for? This is going to be a fiasco."

But then people started streaming in, and in no time at all the hall was full. People were still coming, they had to bring in more chairs and then people had to stand in the foyer because there was no more space inside the hall. It caused such a stir because of my 'normality'. Many people had no idea of my background and they were so surprised that they felt they had to come along and hear my story. Afterwards my name was in the public domain so I was contacted by other synagogues, asking me to 'Please come and speak'. And I did.

Once I had opened up and spoken once, it became a little easier, but it was still a very traumatic experience. Weeks before a talk, I would have sleepless nights dredging these thoughts to the forefront of my mind. After the talks it would take me days to calm down again. But I did speak. In addition to speaking in synagogues, I was also asked to speak to other organisations such as the Oxford University Students' Union and the Jewish Learning Exchange. And so it went on.

I spoke to a group of young professionals, aged between 25 and 40 or so, somewhere in Camden Town. At the end of the talk, there was a long queue of attendees wishing to speak to me on a one-to-one basis. They wouldn't ask questions publicly, but they wanted to speak to me. It turned out that many of them were second generation survivors. They told me that their parents never opened up, never spoke about their experiences, so they had to come and listen to people like me. They wanted to get some insight into what their parents, many of whom were in the camps, went through. I realised that there was a deep need for people to hear and understand what had happened.

After that talk someone told me I should also talk to non-Jewish audiences, but I said I would feel too uncomfortable doing so. That person told the Holocaust Educational Trust about me and they arranged for me to go along to a talk by someone else, to give me an idea as to whether I could do it myself. I decided, yes, I would give it a try. And I did. ■



## My work for HET and a British Empire Medal

THE HOLOCAUST EDUCATIONAL Trust (HET) put me on their list of speakers and sent me to a school to speak, which was the beginning of quite a change in my life. As they get more requests than they have survivors to fill the requests, I was kept fairly busy. In fact, I had to ration myself. One or two of the speakers spoke several times a week, but I couldn't do it as often as that. Also, as I eat only kosher food, I limited myself to venues where I could get back the same day. I wouldn't stay overnight in a hotel as most of the other survivors did. Still, it became almost a career for me.

I'm not a natural speaker but with experience it got easier. I found the questions from the youngsters rewarding. Although my story didn't affect everyone in the same way, much of the feedback I received showed that a proportion of children were profoundly moved by it. I had messages like, 'You have changed my life today,' 'I will never ever forget what you have told us today,' 'I will make sure that, in due course, I will tell this story to my children because it must never be forgotten.' Messages like these made it all worth my while.

The first talk in our synagogue was in 2004, so I've been speaking for over 16 years now. During that time I've spoken to thousands of schoolchildren, but sometimes I'm also asked to speak to adults, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and to universities where, as a rule, the attendance is more than half non-Jewish students. Recently, I was asked to speak again to the Oxford University Jewish Students' Union. The first time was 15 years ago. They had reserved quite a large hall and when I arrived, the organiser told me: "We thought there would be interest and we've taken this large hall but I can't guarantee to fill it."

In the end, they filled the hall, no problem, and there were people still queuing outside. They put up another hundred chairs at the front of the hall where they had left an empty area. The hall was packed, people were standing in the gangways, and there were still people outside. There was extraordinary interest from the non-Jewish section of Oxford University. There were at least 100 people who couldn't get into the hall. That was quite a remarkable experience.

For the past few years, around Holocaust Memorial Day, I have been asked to speak about my life at different Government departments including the Home Office and the Foreign Office. In 2020 I

was asked to speak at a “special department” which turned out to be MI6. After going through strict security, I was taken to the auditorium. To my amazement, I saw that it was named after Frank Foley, the passport officer who had issued the visa for my father. Before I spoke, there was a 10-minute talk by a distinguished academic historian who was compiling a history of Frank Foley. He said his research led him to believe Foley issued around 10,000 visas to Jewish people, many of them without the authority of the British Government. To the British Government’s credit, they never made an issue of it and now he is considered a hero. Foley never spoke about what he had done and it only became known after his death. A couple of years ago Prince William unveiled a statue of Foley at Stourbridge and he was also awarded the honorary title of Righteous Gentile by Yad Vashem. I then told my story to MI6, and, of course, dwelt on the fact that it was Frank Foley who issued the visa to my father, thereby saving his life.

To my amazement, at the end of last year, I found that I had been selected to be awarded a British Empire Medal for my ‘contribution towards Holocaust awareness and education’. My presentation was due to take place on 24 April, 2020. It had to be postponed, but the medal has since been sent to me. ■

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## Meeting the Royal couple in Stutthof

FOR MORE THAN 70 years I did not return to any of the camps. I never set foot in either Germany, Poland or Lithuania until the summer of 2017, when the Holocaust Educational Trust asked me and my friend, Ziggy Shipper, to go back to Stutthof.

Initially they wouldn't tell me the reason for the trip. They just said: "Keep those two days free. Make a note in your diary." It was only shortly before the date they told me Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge were paying a visit to Poland and Germany, and they requested to visit a concentration camp and to meet some Jewish survivors. Since their itinerary had been fixed, the closest camp was Stutthof. We were asked to show the Royal couple round the camp and allow them to ask us questions on what life was like 72 years earlier.

The decision to return was agonising. The experience was very traumatic. HET took us to Stutthof the day before the Royal visit so that if we felt too overwhelmed, we would get it out of our system and, by the next day, we would be able to remain more composed. And that's more or less what happened.

There was such poverty in post-war Poland that the wooden barracks were slowly but methodically dismantled. The Poles used the wood for firewood to keep themselves warm. That's how 80% of the camp disappeared before the Government decided to preserve Stutthof. They are now protecting the remaining 20% of the camp and six barracks have been turned into a walkthrough museum. We led the Royal couple through it and spent about an hour chatting with them.

There are two memorials, both close to the gas chamber. On one side there's an enormous cross, because many non-Jewish people died. The official list of Jewish people murdered in Stutthof is a gross underestimate because trainloads of Jews arrived in Stutthof and were taken straight to the gas chamber. Their numbers, I believe, were not recorded anywhere. The numbers on record are only of those who had been checked into the camp and died later, either in the gas chamber, from starvation, or other causes. When prisoners became very weak they were often taken aside and given lethal injections or sent in groups to the gas chamber.

The publicity surrounding the Royal visit was quite extraordinary and it had a couple of consequences. Prior to going to Stutthof, we were interviewed by the BBC, by ITV, and by Sky and these interviews were aired on the day of the Royal visit. We were contacted by friends from all over the world who saw the news reports. Sometime later, the BBC commissioned a couple of young film makers to produce a film for Holocaust Memorial Day and in preparation they visited the Holocaust Survivors Centre in Hendon. On the day the film makers came, I happened to attend, having been told there would be a talk worth attending that day. The film makers went around the hall to speak to each one of us briefly in turn, and if they felt that our story was suitable for their film, they would contact us privately.

The film makers decided that my story was something that they would be interested in. They came to my house to talk about the film and take some photos. They asked about a painting hanging in our hall. It was the painting of my little brother, Hermann. I told them the background story and they were fascinated. They photographed me holding the painting and it appears in the film, *The Last Survivors*, which was shown on BBC2. When they publicised this film, many of them showed that single shot of me holding my brother's likeness in this painting. That was an unintended result which perpetuated the memory of my brother, because that film will probably still be shown decades after I've left this world. ■

“The decision to return was agonising. The experience was very traumatic. HET took us to Stutthof the day before the Royal visit so that if we felt too overwhelmed, we would get it out of our system...”



Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in Stutthof No2



Duke and Duchess of Cambridge with Shary and me in Stutthof



Reciting the Memorial Prayer in Stutthof



Meeting Prince Charles



## *Stolpersteine* memorials in Kassel

MONTHS AFTER VISITING Stutthof I was contacted by an organisation which places *stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) and asked for my permission to have some laid in my hometown Kassel. This is a commemoration technique, which has gained popularity in Germany, and has now spread to other European countries. Small brass plates, on which are recorded the name of Jews who were persecuted or sent to the camps. Details of their fate are also recorded. The plaques are cemented into the pavement outside that family's last address in Germany. .

They wanted to put four *stolpersteine* commemorating my parents, my brother and me, at 12 Müllergasse, where we had lived before the war. Initially, I was very much against it. I didn't want to have any sort of commemoration on German soil. My family thought otherwise, and after discussion I recognised that this would be a memorial for my brother, who was murdered and doesn't have a grave. We don't even have a date, we don't know a place. I am the only person in this world now who knows he ever lived. But I won't live forever, and his memory will just disappear with me. This way at least there's a little six inch plaque which records his name, and maybe at some point some passer-by will stop and read the inscription and wonder, maybe even try to find out details of his fate. So I agreed to it. Our four sons, my wife and I went to Germany for what was a very moving ceremony when they laid those four plaques outside where we had lived and this ceremony was also included in the film *The Last Survivors*. ■

“...I recognised that this would be a memorial for my brother, who was murdered and doesn't have a grave. We don't even have a date, we don't know a place. I am the only person in this world now who knows he ever lived.”



Stolpersteine in Kassel

## Meeting Helmut's son

THERE WAS YET another unexpected consequence. In 2019 a letter arrived from Germany, signed by Norbert Sachs. He wrote that his father, Helmut Sachs, had been with me in the convalescent home in Lensterhof, Germany, post-war. He was one of ten or so youngsters of my age, and we all became friends, as I mentioned earlier. When my mother and I received permission to join my father, Helmut was still in the convalescent home.

Before I left, Helmut had said to me: “Manfred, I know we’ve become friends. Please leave me a photograph with an inscription.” By this time we had all been photographed, so I wrote on one: ‘In memory of our friendship’ and signed it. Norbert told me that his father had married, first lived in Israel and then went to live in Germany. He died when Norbert was only two years old, so he never had an opportunity to tell his son of his Holocaust experiences.

Norbert was very interested to know his father’s story. He found some information online and also saw an advert in a local newspaper – they lived on the outskirts of Dortmund - from a non-Jewish man who was dedicating his time to researching and publishing the history of the pre-war Jewish community. He said he would be happy to come and examine any information or documents anyone had, as they might help his research.

“ In 2019 a letter arrived from Germany, signed by Norbert Sachs. He wrote that his father, Helmut Sachs, had been with me in the convalescent home in Lensterhof, Germany, post-war. ”

Norbert told this gentleman: “I inherited a lot of things from my father. Most of them don’t mean anything to me but you’re welcome to come and have a look.” He showed him everything he had, including the signed photograph of me. The name Manfred Goldberg didn’t mean anything to Norbert, but the gentleman doing the research had followed the publicity of the visits to Stutthof. When he saw my name, it rang a bell.

The historian suggested to Norbert that he contact me. Norbert asked to meet me, to speak about the time I spent with his father. He said: “Maybe you were in the same camp but not aware of it?” His father had given evidence at the trial of a Nazi in Germany. As a result, some of his camp experiences were recorded in the evidence he gave at the trial. That’s how Norbert knew which camps his father had been in, although he hadn’t met anyone who could give inside information of what the camps were like.

Norbert and his wife came to London. We invited them for a meal, we conversed, and he avidly made notes. We’re still in touch. He continues to search online for information about his father, and now he also looks for information on me. He has sent me a few bits and pieces he’s managed to discover which I’m thankful for, because I’m not computer-literate enough to do it myself. ■

## Table tennis disaster!

I'm quite a healthy specimen considering my age. When I was in my 80s, four of us oldies began playing table tennis every Thursday afternoon. We played at a local health club and, because we were all pensioners, we got a discount! We'd all meet there for a game. Win, lose, it didn't really matter - it was just a nice social afternoon. We would have breaks in between and sit and chat. A would play B and B would play C and then in the end we would play doubles. Until one fateful afternoon on 6 January, 2016.

We were playing doubles. My partner and I were leading and somehow I really wanted to win that game. So, when a sharp ball was returned, I ran for it. I leaned over to try and get it, lost my balance and fell. I smashed my femur, the major bone in the upper leg. I didn't know I'd broken it, but I realised I couldn't move my leg. My three friends didn't know what to do. I was lying on the floor, but I had my mobile phone in my pocket so I fished it out and I was the one who phoned *Hatzola* (the Jewish community ambulance service). They came and took me to the Royal Free Hospital, where I was operated on the next morning. I've mainly recovered except for one muscle in my upper leg which no longer functions efficiently. I limp quite badly when I walk and have to use a walking stick when I go out.

Sadly, I haven't played table tennis again since that fateful day. The game fell apart: the others felt it was too stressful after seeing what happened to me. ■

## Afterthoughts at 90...

APART FROM THE extraordinary childhood, surviving those years in the camps, Almighty G-d has been kind to me. But the greatest gift He gave me was to lead me to marry Shary and that she said yes to me. That was the greatest thing which really made my life what it has become. She's a remarkable lady. I know, I may be slightly biased, but I'm telling you the honest truth when I say she's a lady in a million.

I feel my revenge on the Nazis is the building of our lovely family. Both Shary and I are immensely proud and thankful that each of our sons is a personality of exceptional kindness and integrity, truly a credit to the community. We are equally proud of our terrific daughters-in-law and our grandchildren give us great joy.

I am writing this paragraph in Dec 2020 having passed my 90th birthday. Sadly, since the pandemic began last March normal life has been upended and curtailed. We are fortunate that three of our four families live close by. They are very protective, send us food, organise our shopping and visit us regularly - which means they come and stand in the front garden while we stand by the open door! Sadly, the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic has prevented us from visiting our son Arye and family in Israel for well over one year. We have periodic video meetings, but there is no joy to compare with a hug from a grandchild. Vaccination has just started and we hope G-d will grant us a post-virus period of normality. I am somewhat apprehensive what 'normality' will mean in the post virus era. Whatever will be, will be. Que sera, sera. ■



Our 55th wedding anniversary




## 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 feel my revenge on  
the Nazis is the building  
of our lovely family...”

 **AJR** The Association  
of Jewish Refugees

[www.ajr.org.uk](http://www.ajr.org.uk)