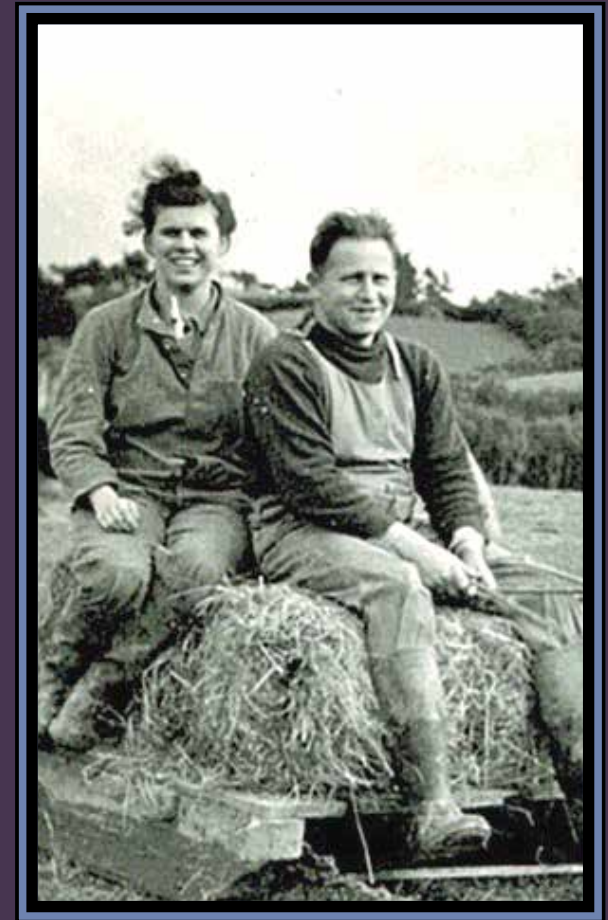


Searching for identity

2

Our parents' new lives

By Claire Bruell



COVER

Lizzie and Frank
bringing in the hay
on their farm north
of Auckland.





earching for identity

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Introduction



I wrote “The Business of Culture and the Culture of Business” as a chapter for a book edited by Ann Gluckman *Identity and Involvement Volume 3*. However, there were no graphics permitted. I decided to compile my own version using the text but also photos and memorabilia to liven up the text. I wanted to show how the entrepreneurial skills of my father Frank Briess, had been learned from an early age working in his father’s and grandfather’s business in Olomouc, Czechoslovakia. He grew up surrounded by a culture of business nurtured by a family that took its sons and sons-in-law into its companies as they finished their studies and entered the world of commerce from a base in the Hana Valley, Moravia – a location ideal for the growing hops and other grains.

This was completed as an Apple book.

The next project was to write about my mother Alice (Lizzie) Briess whose voice I considered had been overshadowed by my father’s in the earlier photobook.

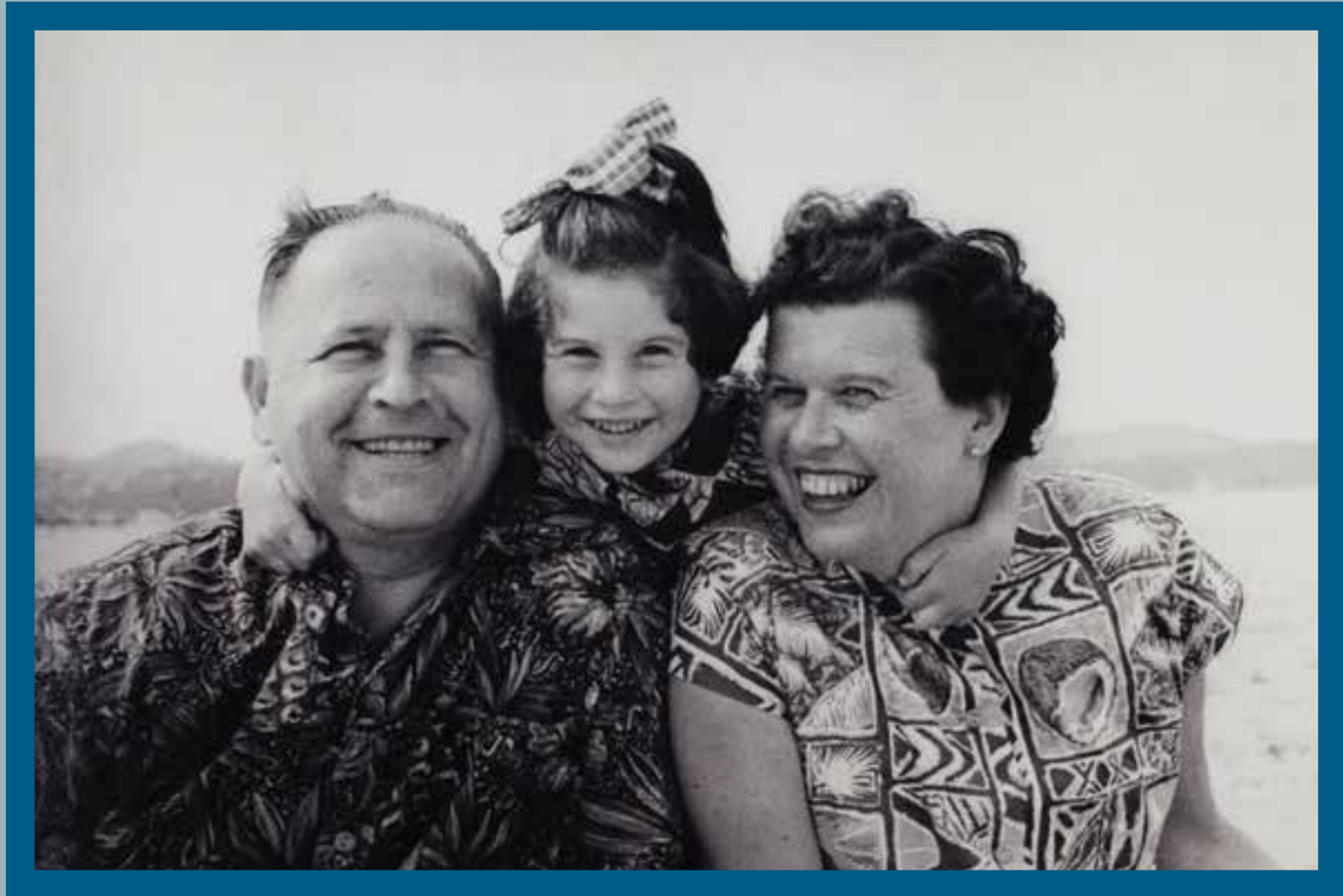
I wrote the Alice Briess book using letters and photographs from my mother’s life. She was the only daughter of a country doctor who studied for four years at the medical school at the Charles University in Prague before marrying my father Frank.

This second book is her story. Then I have added the transcript of Lilly Bruell’s interview in 1994 about her life, some personal pieces about Frank Briess, Fred Bruell and Rex Consolidated Ltd.

Both books together with additional articles have been incorporated into this larger family history and perhaps show how our family’s lives converged with history. ■



Frank with a stack of packages of tinned meat during the “Parcels for Britain” campaign, late 1940s.



Frank, Claire and Lizzie, Hawaii, 1952.

The business of culture & the culture of business





Franz (Frank) and Lizzie Briess married
6 June 1937, Brno, Czechoslovakia

My parents Frank and Alice Briess came from a place and a time which no longer exist, to make a new life for themselves and eventually for me, their daughter Claire in Auckland. After the war years Frank started a group of businesses involving European food, importing, manufacturing and exporting, the template for which was carved deep in his DNA. For centuries the buying and selling of goods had taken place in Central Europe, almost by cultural transmission. It was one of the few occupations open to Jews for centuries, so necessity had dictated excellence. Examining Frank's life trajectory reveals much about Jewish history in that area of the previous Austro-Hungarian Empire known today as Czechia, more specifically the eastern part called Moravia. It's a typical immigrant/emigre/ refugee story – how my parents made their way in their new country and through hard work and a measure of good fortune, were successful not only in making a livelihood for themselves and their family, but also contributed new ideas and brought previously unknown goods and services to a distant country in spite of the government's reluctance to admit newcomers at that time.

Some history

Until the middle of the nineteenth century the lives of Jews in Moravia under the Austrian monarchy were heavily regulated in order to limit their number and the harsh Familianten laws, in place from 1787 to 1859, governed their lives. The Enlightenment late in the eighteenth century was followed by Emancipation that finally came just after the middle of the following century. Thus it was that new Jewish communities could grow in larger towns where previously there had been none. Jews could study at universities, move into the cities, marry without needing a civil permit and extend their business activities. In the families of my grandparents' generation this change was immediately reflected in their life choices.

The broadened horizons afforded by Emancipation were quickly realised. Alice's father Isidor Löwy, one son of 16 children in Uhersky Brod was the first and only child in his family to attend university. He studied in Vienna to become a doctor and took up practice just over the Austrian/Moravian border in the small town of Břeclav (Lundenburg in German) where Alice grew up. His father had been a merchant in Uherský Brod. The word "Kaufman" (German) or "obchodník" (Czech) appeared as the occupation in many of the official documents issued.



The Jews of Olomouc

In Olomouc, a number of Jewish families were known for their contribution to the city's economic and cultural development during the 80 years leading up to the Second World War. The entrepreneurs included the Briess family. They were but one Jewish family who made contributions by leasing and owning factories for yeast works, distilleries, chocolate making, printing, banking, as hoteliers and even as fashion house proprietors.

The pater familias of the Briess family was Joachim Loeb Briess 1777-1849, born in Prerou, Moravia, a respected leather and hides trader. His sons Jacob and Abraham both entered the wholesale grain business. When my paternal great grandfather Ignaz Briess Jnr married Franziska Heller he was working in the firm his father Abraham had set up in Olmütz, not far from Prerou. Abraham had traded in grains and pulses and related products for many years and in the 1860s moved family and business from Prerou (Přerov) into Olmütz (Olomouc). Business expanded due to the flourishing economic situation and the development of the railways in the decades before the first world war. These activities were formalised into a company in 1903 when the firm of Ignaz Briess Jr was born. Family members were taken into the company as they matured or married into the family.

Olomouc (German Olmütz)



The company Ignaz Briess Jnr engaged in the import, export, wholesale and retail of agricultural seeds and produce, including rice, dried fruit, nuts, lard and margarine and other ingredients for the large margarine and vegetable oil industry in Czechoslovakia. The firm was the country's biggest importer and wholesaler of caraway and poppy seed (c.8,000 tons of each per annum). The malt exporting industry grew as a new sector of the food industry in central Moravia during the 1860s and the fertile Hana Valley area became a leading producer of Austrian malt. Olomouc was the centre of the world for the malt industry with some 14 factories supplying Hana malt worldwide. Ignaz Briess Jr contributed to this trade by supplying barley on a commission basis annually of from 100,000 to 120,000 tons by the 1930s. The city was known as an area for the growing of hops in particular, used in the brewing process. The industry was able to leverage the explosion of beer drinking that occurred in Europe in the late 1800s.

The family firm also supplied many flour mills with wheat and rye, and imported and wholesaled all milling products, some 15 kinds of split peas, 30 kinds of pearl barley, bran, pollard and other products. Ignaz Briess Jr was one of the principal importers, wholesalers and suppliers to the bakery trade of Canadian, American and Australian flour of high gluten content. Several big flour mills were represented, the biggest had a daily output of about 200 tons by the time of the war in 1939. 21 representatives operated in Czechoslovakia as well as several buying agents in other countries. The by-products of the grain and produce business were supplied to piggeries near Olomouc in which the company had an interest. For many years the company supplied the Czech army with meat.

Members of the family held positions such as President or vice-President of the Produce Exchanges in several cities, Arbitrator on the Produce Exchange and on the Arbitration Court. For a period of 20 years a member of the family was the official confidential advisor to the Income Tax Department of Olomouc.

Wilhelm, Frank's great uncle held a number of influential positions: Co-director of the company Ignaz and Wilhelm Briess, vice president of the Olomouc Chamber of Trade and Commerce, President of the Austrian malt manufacturers, co-director of the State Railway Industry Advisory Council, honorary citizen of Mähr. Ostrava and Paulowitz, member of the Regional Tax Commission for Moravia and a censor for the branch of the Austria Hungary Bank in Olomouc. Ignaz Briess Snr, also co-director of the firm of Ignaz and Wilhelm Briess, received the knightly honour of the Austrian Imperial Order of the Iron Crown 3rd class issued by the Emperor Franz Joseph. On the building committee for the new synagogue in 1897, half of the committee were maltsters like the Briess family. 42 years later the new synagogue was burned down by Nazis. Frank's great grandfather's brothers Wilhelm and Ferdinand as well as their first cousin Ignaz Snr all set up similar firms, first leasing then buying and upgrading factories mostly allied to the malt manufacture. They formed powerful connections through these positions. Intermarriage amongst other entrepreneurial Jewish families increased their economic as well as social standing in the area.

Frank Briess

Frank, (or Franz/ František in Moravia), studied commerce after completing his military service (1927 to 1929) and joined his father (Siegfried), uncle Theodor and cousin Hans in the firm of Ignaz Briess Jr. By this time the business had grown exponentially to have sales representatives all over Czechoslovakia. Frank gained experience in dealing with local farmers and wholesalers, buying and selling product. He visited customers in Olmütz and neighbouring towns and cities and attended to general business. Family members worked closely together.

Frank, a passionate sportsman, enjoyed positions of responsibility in various sports bodies, as Chairman of the Ice Hockey national organisation, Chairman and Captain of the local Ice Hockey club for 16 years, International referee of the National Ice Hockey organisation, Chairman of the Football club and the Tennis club and patron of a number of local sports clubs. His interest in sport was lifelong, as was his interest in coaching and encouraging the younger generation of players.

German occupation

The Nazis seized power in Germany and in 1935 enacted the infamous Nuremberg Laws the first of the anti-Semitic laws they would impose on all the countries they controlled. 15th March 1939 came and with it the German invasion of Czechoslovakia. Frank and Alice decided to leave as they felt their safety was at risk. They left Olmütz on 13th March. Frank put a notice in the Moravian newspaper (Mährische Tagblatt) on 14th March 1939, addressed to his friends and family, apologising for his hasty departure to a foreign country and that he had had no time to say farewell personally to everybody. He wished everyone well on their future life paths. A copy of the notice was found amongst Frank's effects when he died in 1979. He must have left his home in Czechoslovakia in haste, with a heavy heart.

Sky-larking in the Czech Army



With brother Alfred (Fred) 1930s.





The Germans set up the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and forced Jews to file lists of their assets as they had done in Austria the previous year. They then set about stealing Jewish property by transferring it to the Gestapo – real estate, bank accounts, insurance policies and so on, all meticulously noted and recorded on transport lists held by today's small Jewish community in Olomouc. A German sympathiser took over Ignaz Briess Jr. as trustee for the Germans and ran it until the end of the war. The five storey business building at 11 Ulice 28 Rijna, Olomouc, was confiscated by the Germans, administered by a trustee and taken over by the Czechoslovak government post war, as German property. After the war the company disappeared. Its officers were deported to Theresienstadt, the concentration camp in Bohemia. My grandfather Siegfried died in Theresienstadt Concentration Camp and his brother Theodor died in Holic near his Olomouc home in 1942.

New Zealand

After six months in London Frank and Alice finally got permission on their third application to come to New Zealand, on condition of posting a £2,000 bond. While in England, Frank took a commercial course at the Institute of Commerce in Birmingham and Frank and Alice both attended English classes. They arrived in Auckland in October 1939 and two months later they had paid a deposit on a farm on Royal Rd, Massey near Auckland where they farmed for two years.

This enterprise finished abruptly when government regulations dictated that they, classified as “Friendly Aliens” (ie from a country that was an ally of Britain’s) must move away from being close to Whenuapai airport, into “town” after the entry of America and Japan into the war. Alien Regulations were tightened and Frank was “manpowered” into jobs - the first to Westfield to work in the Freezing Works.

Extract from a letter written by Frank in an undated letter at the beginning of 1942

“Then at New Year we received, putting it mildly, the well meant but strongly worded advice that we should sell the farm. You can imagine that it hit us like a bombshell. I can’t repeat the exact state of affairs, I’ll only be able to tell you when we’ve won the war. I saw all our hard work of the past two years with all the effort, love, enthusiasm and energy that went into the building of our existence, fall down altogether like a house of cards. Today we’ve already come to terms with the standard, often quoted New Zealand expression “Don’t worry, she’ll be right”. So we went like good obedient children to list our farm with various Land Agents for sale. In the meantime we’re milking our 30 cows (5 still to calve) which are pretty good, despite the fact that the present adverse weather means the grass is slow-growing. In spite of the unfavourable conditions, the yield of the farm is about the same as it was this time last year. I had my hands full, trying to cancel the building materials, poultry, plants and seeds that I’d ordered and where we had already taken delivery, to send the goods back. As things stand at present on the sale of the farm, we should not only get back what we paid, at least, but also the capital we invested. When the sale will be finalised, I can’t say. Could be next week or in half a year from now. We don’t want to go farming in the back country or in the bush so we’ll head for Auckland and start up there with something new. I’m not worrying about it yet. I’ll take life easy for a bit. Our single biggest worry is about all the family, dear God, help them to survive all the obstacles in their paths”.

In the process of working at the freezing works at Westfield and running a restaurant with Alice and another couple to serve the American troops, Frank learned the butchery trade. The restaurant was called “The Centreway Grill” and was at 268a Queen St in central Auckland. These jobs were “manpowered” by the government as “essential industries”. Workers in these fields were necessary to fill vacancies left by men enlisted in the Armed Forces.



Holiday by the Sea 1940



1077

FRENCH NATIONALITY AND STATUS OF ALIENS (IN NEW ZEALAND)
ACT, 1908.

CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION.

NAME: Frank Brees

has applied for a certificate of naturalization, showing and except to himself
[insert] the particulars set out below, and has satisfied me that the conditions
set down in the British Statutes and Statute of Aliens Act, 1908 (Kapitell), in
his application to His Honor, for the grant of a certificate of naturalization are
fulfilled in his (said) case:

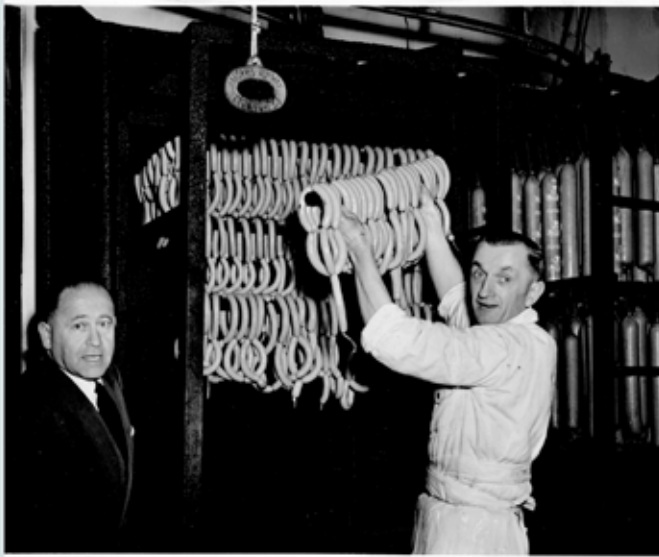
That, therefore, in pursuance of the power conferred on me by the said Act,
and by the French Nationality and Status of Aliens (in New Zealand) Act, 1926,
I grant to the said Frank Brees the conditions of
naturalization, and declare that upon taking the oath of allegiance under the same
and in the manner required by the regulations made in that behalf by me, and
subject to the provisions of the said Acts, he is entitled to all political and civil
rights, powers, and privileges, and to register as an immigrant, and, in
addition, to which a natural-born French subject is entitled in relation to the
said Acts and purposes the status of a natural-born French subject.

In witness whereof I have hereunto subscribed my name this 12th
day of December 1940.

[Signature]

PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO APPLICANT

NAME: Frank Brees
 ADDRESS: 50 Auckland Rd., St Heliers, Auckland
 TRADE OR OCCUPATION: Butcher
 PLACE AND DATE OF BIRTH: Olomouk, Czechoslovakia, 31st December
 NATIONALITY: Czechoslovak
 MARRIED: Married
 NAME OF WIFE OR WIDOW: Alice Brees
 NAME AND RESIDENCE OF FATHER: Vladimir & Alice Brees,
Gala, Czechoslovakia



NEWTON MEAT Co. LTD.,
AUCKLAND NEW ZEALAND

THROUGH OUR U.K. SELLING OFFICES

ECONOMIC UTILITIES LTD.
 17/19 STRATFORD PLACE,
 OXFORD ST., LONDON, W.1
 GROsvenor 8255/8

as exhibited at the

OLYMPIA FOOD FAIR
 ON THE
NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT STAND



Entering the meat trade, Frank's plan was to set up a series of butcher shops, starting with an old shop at 536 Karangahape Rd that was renovated for purpose and that had a kosher meat section catering to the Jewish community. At the other end of Karangahape Rd he leased another butcher shop where he began a canning operation, sending canned meat to Britain for some years from 1950, as there was rationing there up to 1953. He dubbed the enterprise "the Parcels to Britain Campaign". The canned meat was sent mainly to Britain but also to the West Indies as well as to several other European countries. A photograph (opposite) shows Frank standing proudly beside approximately 12 brown paper wrapped parcels containing tins addressed by hand, stacked up neatly beside him. The Newton Meat Co. specialised also in the supply of meat to ships, restaurants and retail meat outlets. The "Parcels for Britain" campaign was Frank's first venture in export and for the next 30 years he was a keen and active supplier of goods to overseas markets.

The notice on the wall behind reads:

“FOOD NEWS from BRITAIN
and what YOU can do about it.
Curly the pig says
' Urgently wanted meats and fats.
Bacon Rashers in Lard
Cooked Ham
Spiced Pork
Pure Dripping
Made FOR England”
The following photograph was taken around
the same time, about 1950-53

On the reverse of one postcard in the
company's records the following comment
was written:
“In appreciation of your much needed
supplies of the finest Ham I ever handled”
Signed: J.K.Redfern, Lewis' of Manchester



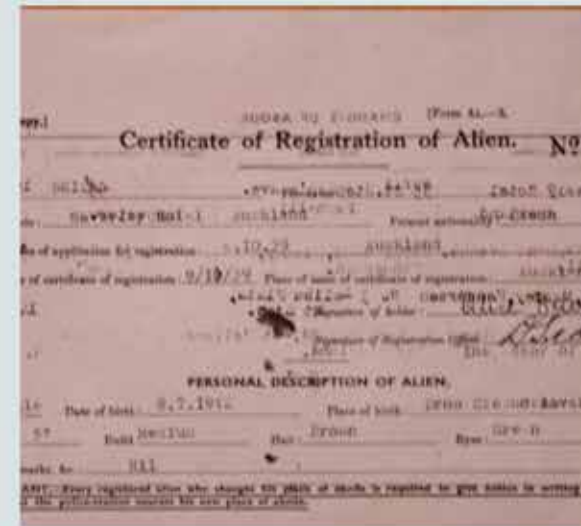
Frank and Alice had been stripped of their Czech citizenship in 1942 and in 1946 following the end of the war naturalisation in New Zealand was resumed. Frank's file reveals a reference from the Superintendent of Police at St Heliers with words to the effect that despite having been successful in business Mr Briess appears to be sincere and honest. It seems that the prevailing attitude towards business people who appeared to be successful was that they must have been dishonest in some way to have been so, or perhaps had avoided serving in the Armed Forces. Or maybe it was just that to have been successful in business during the war would have been difficult. In fact many of the refugees had sought to serve and had been turned down, possibly on suspicion of being spies. Frank and Alice were proudly naturalised in 1946.

Metzlers Continental Sausages

In 1952, Frank went into partnership with a German sausage maker named Mr Metzler and manufactured European style sausages and specialty meats under the "Metzler" label. Metzler and his growing team made the continental sausages – frankfurters, salami, bratwurst and the like, while my father promoted the brand and studied, self taught, the science of Food Technology, a budding new discipline in the 1950s and 1960s.

Active from the beginning of the restaurant trade and the culture of dining out, Frank supplied such popular early establishments as El Matador in Symonds St and La Boheme in Wellesley St West for years. Family trips were long and drawn out, interrupted with visits to many eateries and other customers along the route to our holiday destination – while Claire and Alice waited impatiently in the car.

An early company poster shows a pyramid of meat products by Metzlers Continental Sausages, distributed by the Newton Meat Co. Ltd, a display of some 49 meat products including prices and giving suggestions for preparation and serving. Included was an array of salamis, smoked beef, jagdwurst, frankfurters, cabanos, chicken liver sausage and much more.





The back of a photograph of Frank with seven staff in white butchers' aprons, backgrounded by 20 sides of meat, notes on the reverse:

“Premier Meat Cooperative, 84, 85 Karangahape Rd, Auckland

General Manager: F.Briess

Annual killings:

Carcasses beef 1100

Carcasses Pigs 1200

Carcasses mutton 1500

Carcasses lambs 1500

Plus various cuts in lbs (pounds) 200,000”

Development of the delicatessen

By holding licenses, Frank's company was able to import such delicacies as olives, smoked salmon, caviar, rollmops and so on, not previously on the menus in New Zealand homes. In one instance, called on to make her own school lunch and inspecting what was in the frig at home, Claire made herself caviar sandwiches. The facts of life were explained when her horrified parents found out. Nobody had told a 10 year old that caviar was the most expensive sandwich filling she could have chosen.



Premier Distributors & Manufacturers Ltd

The delicatessen boom was one of the most important developments of 1950s New Zealand and Frank took the opportunity to start an import business under the name of another company, Premier Distributors & Manufacturers Ltd (PDM). He often gave lectures and spoke on radio and at seminars about food and food technology. A great supporter was the food writer Tui Flower who enthusiastically promoted new products and recipes using the food Frank was now importing into the country under license as well as manufacturing. Spices and herbs were used in the sausage making process and Frank began to import these in bulk. The firm employed a group of women (“the spice girls”) who filled small coloured plastic pots with spices from faraway places not generally known by New Zealand housewives. These many coloured plastic containers graced the supermarket shelves for 25 years without change and were filled with approximately 42 different flavours. To assist in the marketing Frank wrote a booklet “Magic with Herbs, Spices and Tastetempters” giving the scientific names, history and uses of each. Over 85,000 copies were printed and distributed. The spices were marketed under the trade name “Gourmette”. These containers were also exported. For instance large sacks of pungent Hungarian paprika were imported from an agent in Sydney. The “spice room” women would fill the little pots which were then exported.



In the factory on the corner of Karangahape Rd and Gundry St, Frank's company manufactured over fifty varieties of sausage to cater to all tastes. Previously only pork sausages had been standard fare for sausage sizzles and backyard barbeques. The atmosphere was a truly international one, where Dutch, Czechs, Poles, Germans, Austrians, Tongans, Samoan, Scots Yugoslavs, English - and New Zealanders worked together at a time when New Zealand was not yet a multicultural country.

“METZLER’S”

The OLD Reliable Firm

Suppliers of 66 kinds of Sausages of Unsurpassed Quality

HAVE YOU TRIED THE NEW “CARLSBAD” SALAMI DE LUXE
AND THE “MILANO”

METZLER CONTINENTAL SAUSAGES LTD

536 Karangahape Road Phone 22-975

Meat Man Finds Mohammedan Priest In Sydney

A New Zealand meat processor, who wants to engage a Mohammedan priest for slaughtering cattle, found one waiting for him when he arrived in Sydney yesterday.

The priest, Mohammed Allam, was waiting on the doorstep when the meat processor, Mr. Frank Briess, arrived at his Sydney hotel.

He had read in "The Sydney Morning Herald" yesterday that Mr. Briess was flying to Australia and wanted a Mohammedan priest so he could kill cattle according to Moslem rites for export to Mauritius.

Mr. Briess, of the Newton Meat Company, Auckland, is on a business trip to Australia.

He was talking to reporters at the Rose Bay flying-boat base after his arrival when he was called to the telephone.

When he returned he said that a Mohammedan priest had telephoned him and made an appointment to meet him at his hotel.



MAHOMAD ALLAM



FRANK IS AHEAD OF HIS TIME

This advertisement (left) appeared in the Sydney and Brisbane newspapers

Halal butcher

A small article in the Sydney Morning Herald of 8 May 1954, and in a Brisbane daily, advertised for a Halal butcher to come to Auckland to work at the Newton Meat Company. The article claimed that Mr Frank Briess, New Zealand meat exporter, intended to export beef and mutton to Mauritius, Hong Kong, Malaya, Pakistan and other potential Moslem markets.



An appetising selection of the new Continental-type sausages which are appearing on New Zealand shelves.

Sugar 'n spice 'n all things nice

Plastic packs help start a N.Z. cooking revolution

A dash of garlic salt . . . a sprinkling of paprika . . . a *soupcou* of pimento . . . a taste of tabasco . . . a spoonful of apple cider vinegar — there was a time when Mrs New Zealand would just look blankly at a recipe calling for such ingredients, and pass on to something else.

But not now. Today exotic spices and herbs are to be found on the shelves of good food stores the length and breadth of the land. And pungent, moutwatering aromas, redolent of far-away places, issue from the kitchens of a hundred thousand homes where Mrs Beeton's cookbook lies buried under more exciting culinary guides.

The man primarily responsible for this cooking revolution is Auckland's Mr Frank Briess, managing director of Premier Distributors and Manufacturers Ltd.

Back in the early 1950's his company was concentrating on the manufacturing of continental-style smallgoods like salami, liverwurst, frankfurters and spiced meat loaves. For these, he required about 30 different spices and herbs which had to be specially imported from places as far away as Africa, India, Indonesia, South America and the West Indies.

"Then, because food is not only my business but also my hobby and I use lots of spices and herbs in my home cooking, I began to think about marketing these seasonings locally," Mr Briess told *Plastics Progress*.

Marketing thought

"We produced jars of spices and herbs and began to sell them through a few of the better delicatessens and grocery stores. They sold. We produced more and more of an increasing number of types of seasoning. They sold, and sold well.

"But it was not until comparatively recently that I thought of the idea of a special plastic pack for our range of salts — garlic, celery, vegetables, onion, mushroom and so on — plus other powder seasonings like paprika, vanillin sugar and cinnamon sugar.

Dramatic rise

"Then things happened with a bang. I'd planned on selling about 30,000 units a year in a colourful bellows pack I designed myself and which Plastic Products makes for us.

"Instead, our first year's sales were over 120,000 units. Last year, this total was well exceeded, and this year will be even better."

Mr Briess, who was born in Czechoslovakia but has been a New Zealander for the past 25 years, said that his experience with the bellows shaker craved him to look at other products which could be marketed in plastic.



Mr FRANK BRIESS — "my work is my hobby."



ABOVE — Masterfoods' newest packs. BELOW — The gold-labelled bellows pack that helped push up "salt" sales by 400%.



Published in "Plastics Progress" (PP) May, 1964

No. 4, Vol. 3

Throughout his travels Frank was always on the lookout for new ideas to incorporate into the business. For instance on a reconnaissance trip to Europe in 1967 he reported to Andy Politzer that he noticed pre prepared meals on sale and thought this would be a good idea to introduce for local housewives. He also saw bottled mineral water on sale and thought this also might be an avenue to explore. It would be some 20-30 years before these ideas would be adopted in New Zealand.

His next idea was for a plastic pack for a "Gourmette" range of concentrated liquid seasonings which combine up to a dozen different spices and herbs.

"This is a beautiful little pack — so good-looking and so cleanly and neatly made by Plastic Products that I even export the pack itself to Australia to be printed and filled by other seasoning manufacturers over there."

Mr Briess's latest venture into plastic packaging is a 25-ounce "flagon" with a raised "basketwork" surface for packing apple-cider, tarragon and other vinegars. PP made the mould to Mr Briess's design.

"And now we're away with another top-seller," he said happily.

Round trip

Harking back to the bellows pack, Mr Briess said that it has such consumer appeal that some of the spices the company imports from the West Indies are merely packed in the bellows shaker and sent right back to Port-of-Spain and Kingston for sale in shops there.

Incidentally Premier Distributors' premises in Auckland's Karangahape Road were made by renovating and remodelling New Zealand's oldest butcher shop which dated from 1848. And with a range of over 60 different sausages, Premier is still very much in the butchery business.

Import restrictions

In 1958 almost complete import restrictions were introduced on account of the Reserve Bank's lack of foreign currency. This meant Premier Distributors was no longer able to import delicatessen lines. Frank began to manufacture his own pickles, sauces and condiments grown in Napier, also sold under the brand of "Gourmette". A member of various organisations in the food trade, in 1968 Frank was awarded a Silver medal for Services to the New Zealand Division of the Cookery and Food Association as vice-Chairman. He was presented with the medal in England. The logo of the Association is "Docendo Discimus" (We learn by teaching).



Frank at work at his desk



Andy Politzer with his wife Mancie (later Christian)



Robert Linton with Claire
c.1952, Chateau Tongariro

Robert Lustgarten was employed early on. An engineer in a former life in Vienna where he had owned a factory producing shop fittings and hardware he morphed in New Zealand into Robert Linton. He was also a Holocaust refugee like Frank, although my father preferred the term “immigrant” to “refugee”, especially since he had had to bring funds with him to ensure he did not become dependant on the government. In the 1950s Frank was joined in the spice and food importing business by another Holocaust immigrant, Andrew (Andy) Politzer and when Frank’s sister and brother-in-law made their way to Auckland after the war, Otto Stratton (Stransky in Europe), was employed for many years as a salesman. Yet another immigrant, Andrew Ribary worked in the Accounts Department and Lena Sher was the company’s secretary in the early years. All had connections to pre-war Europe.

Today, we might refer to them as a group as Émigrés or Holocaust survivors: taking as the definition of a Holocaust survivor, as “anyone whose life was turned upside down by the Holocaust”. Certainly all had suffered dislocation, loss of culture, country and family but shared a common goal of making new lives in a foreign country.



To market his products, Frank would often prepare “open sandwiches”. Slices of French bread served as the base for an array of sliced meat, cheese, eggs, vegetables, flavouring such as chutneys and relishes, made to look colourful and attractive. In effect, trays of these sandwiches helped introduce new foods to unsuspecting consumers. He would often make up trays of open sandwiches or decorated hams or chickens to serve at functions, or at the opening of a deli or restaurant. The only type of sandwich known in New Zealand at that time was two slices of thin white bread with a scraping of butter and a meagre cheese, egg or tomato filling. Frank and his team often prepared displays of food for deli openings and other events where food was served.

“NZ Meat” publication December 1970 - a feature of a “Mastercut” seminar



THE BEST OF WURST

DISPLAYS of Continental-style sausages are becoming more and more familiar in New Zealand delis, but how often do you venture to buy them? If you are like me, you know a hot and spicy blood-sausage is a choice instead of being a new recipe you tend to select the one with which you are familiar. The big disadvantage in this is that you never get to sample the new, interesting range of these delicious specialties.

I thought that if I could show you what these sausages look like and tell you about their use and storage, the next time you browse in the deli's display, you would feel confident to choose something different.

TEST KITCHEN

BOLOGNA GRILL

Sausage sausage
Self-grated cheese

Peppera

Place the Bologna into separate hot oil and grill quickly under a hot grill on one side only. Turn over and grill the un-grilled side with grated cheese. Don't let pepper cover the cheese.

Remove to the grill for about one minute, or until the cheese is bubbling.

Please turn to Page 38



Trained staff were in short supply in New Zealand so Frank sometimes brought skilled men with their families to New Zealand from Europe as well as unskilled workers from the Pacific Islands. He would find them accommodation, help them settle and give them employment. The situation of the business in the "Red light" district of the city often gave rise to physical fights and if staff went AWOL they could usually be found in the pub next door. Many times the owner of the pub would alert Frank to the fact that one of his lambs or sides of beef was being raffled off in the pub. Wages were not paid at lunchtime on Fridays, but at the end of the day, to ensure that staff stayed on site to work a full day. Also, through B'nei Brith (a Jewish Service Organisation) Frank and Andy helped bring Russian Jews to Auckland by guaranteeing them a job, finding accommodation, providing support and essentials.

Restaurants, visiting ships, then later on supermarkets and delicatessens were all stocked with meat and smallgoods supplied by Frank's companies. Otto Groen used to own the Hey Diddle Griddle at 507 K Rd. which opened in 1952; he was the manager. Later he opened the Gourmet and White Heron restaurants and others in Auckland. Frank supplied very large T-bone steaks amongst other cuts of meat, to Groen's restaurants. Meat was also supplied to other early well known restaurants: El Matador in Symonds St and the Albert Grill in Wellesley St. The Albert Grill was the only place in town at that time where you could get a Wiener Schnitzel. In the mid 1950s when Meme Churton opened the Ca d'Oro, one of the first European style coffee bars in Auckland, followed shortly after by the Trieste, Frank supplied platters of meats, cheeses and other delicatessen items. In the business, Frank was the salesman and entrepreneur, Robert Linton was the engineer and kept the peace amongst the butchers and sausage makers. Frank always referred to the staff as "The League of Nations", an at times volatile mix of Maori, Pacific Islanders, East and Central European immigrants and the Kiwi butchers. Andy Politzer kept a sharp eye on the books and logistics, crossing "T"s and dotting "I"s and was the organiser. Frank and Andy ran the companies using the complementary skills they had learned in Czechoslovakia before the war. They spent each Sunday morning sequestered in Frank's study at Auckland Rd, discussing their problems and making plans. From the late 1960s Andy's son-in-law Allan was taken into the business that he later managed after the founders had died. Frank had successfully replicated on the other side of the world, the family business environment and culture that he had known in his previous life, using the skills learned from his father, uncle and cousin.

In 1945 Frank and Lizzie bought a section at 36 Auckland Rd, St Heliers which became the family home for the next generations.



Building in progress at Auckland Rd. c.1945

Frank, Lizzie, Granny Adi and baby Claire 1947



Marianne and Frank

Frank with his sister Mariane Stratton at Auckland Rd by the pool approx 1965



Lizzie and Claire 1947



Frank and grandson Ezra 1979





Claire, Lizzie with Nicky approx 1953



1965 Eric Briess (NY), visited Auckland:
 Claire, Frank and Lizzie, Eva Winton, Otto,
 Marianne and Marietta Stratton (Stransky)

NEW ZEALAND CUSTOMS No. 2266/1941

PERMIT TO ENTER NEW ZEALAND.

(Under the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act, 1938.)

Permission is hereby granted to Adela Briess
 of Olomouk, Czechoslovakia to enter New Zealand, ~~accompanied by~~

on the following conditions:—

(1) That this permit will not entitle the person or persons named herein to enter New Zealand after the expiry of two years from the date issued.

(2) That this permit will be delivered up to the Collector of Customs at the first port of arrival in New Zealand.


(3) That ~~she~~ ^{she} satisfies the Collector of Customs at the port of arrival that the particulars inserted hereunder concerning ~~herself~~ ^{herself} are correct.

(4) Full name: Adela Briess
 (5) Sex: Female (6) Nationality: Czech
 (7) Place and date of birth: Ustetake, Hradiste 11th May, 1876
 (8) Last place of permanent residence: Theresienstadt Concentration Camp now Olomouk
Czechoslovakia
 (9) Marital state: Widowed
 (10) Reasons for desiring to settle in New Zealand:
To join son, Mr. Frank Briess of Auckland.
 (11) Occupation or business to be undertaken in New Zealand:

(12) That the condition of mental and physical health of ~~herself~~ ^{herself} good
~~and that she can read and write fluently in the following language(s), namely~~
~~_____~~

(13) The amount of money in English currency which is brought by ~~her~~ ^{her} to New Zealand is not less than: _____

Paragraph of the permit to which this permit is granted:



(1) That ~~she~~ ^{she} is able to read and write fluently in the following language(s), namely: Czech, English, French and German

(2) That ~~she~~ ^{she} is a person of good character and reputation, that ~~she~~ ^{she} has never been in prison or in a mental hospital or the recipient of charitable aid, and that ~~she~~ ^{she} is not a disaffected or dangerous person or one who advocates the overthrow by force or violence of constitutional Government.

Dated at Wellington, New Zealand, this 23rd day of May 1947.

one thousand nine hundred and forty seven

[Signature]
 Top Collector of Customs
(1944A 100-1128)

After the war Adele Briess, Frank's step mother was liberated from Theresienstadt Concentration Camp and she arrived in Auckland in 1947.

Interviews with former staff

Interviewing three of the staff who had worked for many years for the company, anecdotes were recorded about the working life at PDM and the Newton Meat Company. Danny Hoeft was of German and Tongan background though a third generation New Zealander. He started work for the company in 1976 shortly after leaving school, as a storeman at PDM. Danny worked at despatching goods, carrying the heavy and cumbersome sacks of herbs and spices up the old, worn, very narrow stairs to the spice room. The storeroom where Danny worked was set up in the house at no. 2 Gundry St next door which was an old bungalow, now long gone. Each room was used to house a different product. The front bedroom became the packing room. The veranda had been taken off and replaced with a despatch dock. The rear of the house backed on to the sauna and massage parlour "The Pink Pussy Cat". The girls accessed their work place via an alleyway running the length of the storehouse from the Gundry St end. They definitely added an air of frisson to the work day at PDM.



Karangahape Rd and Gundry St corner 1920s



Frank and cousin Hans Briess, 1956



Ignaz Briess Jnr, Frank's and Hans's grandfather



Danny described the reaction of “the spice girls” when sacks of bay leaves from India yielded dehydrated cockroaches and beetles and once even a dead rat – fortunately all taken care of by the fumigation process as they came in to the country. Describing the atmosphere as “a nice family company”, generous and with a low staff turnover Danny maintained that Frank and Andy were very “hands on”, often checking quality and what staff were doing. After 19 years with the company Danny left to form his own cold storage company, using the skills and contacts learned at PDM.

There were regular visits by the Food Inspectors from the Department of Health. The premises at 520-536 K Rd and 2 Gundry St dated back to the previous (19th) century and required continual upgrading. When the Inspectors’ visits were scheduled, there was always a huge clean up and whiskey bottles were brought out to ease the passage of a “pass”. And then there was the time when a shipment of cheese arrived from Europe when unfortunately the refrigeration unit failed. The insurance assessor wasn’t pleased to have to check the contents of the unit when the door was opened and the smell of rotting cheese reached him.

Nelda, secretary for many years from 1972 explained that Frank often sent her home early if her work was finished for the day. She described the young woman who did the banking. The bank was by the overbridge on K Rd and if she had not returned in good time, Nelda would slip out and find her, as expected, in “the Rising Sun” pub near the bank. On many such occasions Nelda brought her back to the office and no one was the wiser. Joe, the foreman who ran the butchery downstairs never quite mastered the Queen’s English: “horseradish” remained a step too far and was always referred to as “horserubbish”. The mix of different cultures often led to volatile disagreements. Each person learned swear words in multiple languages. It was a colourful work environment and many anecdotes were reported over the dinner table at home. Frank, with his experience of dealing with teenage sports players in Olmütz, was well able to mediate the scraps amongst the butchers and sausagemakers. Claire confounded Frank on one occasion when he was overseas, by persuading Andy to give her a job during the school holidays packing sausages for despatch. It remained a wonderful memory of her first taste of real life. Frank wasn’t pleased! It was a rough work environment far from Claire’s experience at a top Girls Private School.

In 1966 a young Chris Moresby from Christchurch went to work for the company that had the PDM and Metzler agencies for the South Island. Eventually he set up his own agency taking the business with him. He reported that Frank would regularly come to Christchurch and Dunedin every year or 18 months. Chris would come up to Auckland from time to time and he enjoyed a warm relationship with the company for over 40 years.

Frank forged a new life for himself and his family in New Zealand, always supported 100% by Alice who injected a measure of realism to his most ambitious projects. He brought new foods to New Zealand tables and played an important role in the development of delicatessens and the deli and smallgoods section of supermarkets. He had a vision of what he hoped to achieve and studied the technology of food products, spoke on radio regularly, wrote articles for newspapers and magazines. A double page spread featured in “The New Zealand Woman’s Weekly” of 5 September 1966, other articles promoting his goods appeared in NZ Meat magazine, Plastics Progress of May 1964 and more. Frank was a sought afterspeaker at training sessions for the staff of delicatessens and supermarkets, at the Auckland Institute of Technology (now AUT) on Food Technology and he often addressed industry groups.



Travelling to Europe every few years Frank and Alice sought out food fairs such as the Anuga Food Fair in Germany, taking the opportunity to visit customers and suppliers all over the world. Frank always returned stimulated with ideas for new products and processes. With the proliferation of restaurants in the city he found a ready market for his companies' meat and meat products, cheeses, spices and smallgoods. He always stressed how lucky he was that his hobby was his business. His biggest strengths were that he saw the glass half full, thought outside the square; he was an eternal optimist who enjoyed a calculated risk and he had a great sense of humour.

By 1980 all the founding personnel of the enterprise had died. Premier Distributors and Manufacturers Ltd became a victim of the 1987 crash, was sold and years later, closed. Nevertheless the companies that Frank set up left a distinct mark on the palette of Kiwi households. Through his companies he introduced salamis, frankfurters, smoked salmon, olives, spices such as paprika, cumin and oreganum and European cheeses which today are considered part of our cuisine.



Frank made a valuable contribution to food manufacture and trade in New Zealand. He was the first to manufacture frankfurters, salamis and other continental meat products on any significant scale, the first to can meat for export, the first to import rollmops and caviar, the first to produce cider vinegar, and to import snails. The plant in Napier was at the time, the country's largest, growing and packaging gherkins, pickles, cucumbers, tobasco sauce and cabbage, packing olives and capers, canning and bottling capsicum and many other kinds of peppers. Frank had a long association with the Cookery and Food Association, writing many articles for magazines, journals and newspapers, taking part in French and German food fairs in New Zealand and speaking on radio. His sincerity and optimism made him a good listener who people warmed to. His legacy lies in always trying to push the boundaries of the possible.

View down Auckland Rd from the house
in 1945





Frank and Alice Briess in NZ



EARLY March 1939 Frank was warned by Josef Suchy, the company's accounts clerk at Ignaz Briess Jr, the company where Frank worked, that he should leave the country as there would shortly be changes and his life would be in danger. Ignaz Briess Jnr at 11 ulice 28 rijna, Olomouc was founded by Ignaz in the early 1870s. Sons Siegfried and Theodore joined him in the business and became 50/50 partners when Ignaz died about 1905.

Frank started work for the firm in 1925 and in the early 1930s acquired 25% share as Hans, his cousin, also had 25% share.

Activities: Trading, importing, distributing and agency organisation. Imported a large variety of agricultural seeds, were the largest buyers from the farmers on the local market of some agricultural seeds like clover that were cleaned and tested in the seed cleaning station on the premises, then sold as certified to customers.

The company was also importers and distributors of pulse (onions), rice,



Frank Briess.

dried fruit, oil containing seeds like linseed, hempseed, sunflower seeds, rape seed and others mainly for the margarine industry.

The company was the country's biggest importer and trader in poppy and caraway seeds; Also sole representatives of substantial milling concerns in the US, Canada and Hungarian flour mills. They were the biggest importer and trader of legumes, like peas, beans, lentils, broad beans etc.

During December 1938 or January 1939 Alice went to London and deposited much of her jewellery there. Once they arrived other jewellery and valuables were deposited with Mr Broll and Mr Josef Berger. It was difficult to take funds out of Czechoslovakia at that time so people often took other items they thought they might be able to sell to transfer into money such as stamps and jewellery. While in London friend and farmer Kreszylik was already sending money and valuables through various sources. They deposited

£2,000 with the NZ High Commissioner and paid £110 for their permits to enter NZ. When they left they took everything from Berger and almost everything from Broll except some money, part of which belonged to Stranskys

ALL THAT piece of land situated in the Provincial District of Auckland containing 66 acres and 38.5 perches more or less being Allotment 366 and part of Allotment 159 of the Parish of Waipareira and being the residue of the land comprised in Certificate of Title Volume 678 Folio 31 Auckland Land Register. SUBJECT to a grant of pipe laying rights and right of entry in favour of the Mayor, Councillors and Citizens of the City of Auckland created in and by Transfer No. 313587.

DATED this 9th day of June 1944.

H. Goddall
Chairman (ex officio)
North Auckland Land Sales Committee.

The legal description of the farm, Royal Rd, Massey bought by Frank and Alice on 1 January 1940.

- Frank's sister and husband. Much of the jewellery was sold. Stransky's money was sent to NZ and Frank invested the money for them and paid tax on the income.

They arrived in NZ Auckland on the Akaroa on 9 Oct 1939.

Business consists of two shops owned by O E Stransky and Frank Briess. All were partners in the two businesses – Frank and Alice Briess had 50%.

No. 84 K Rd was known as “MacSims” Meat Centre and 85 K Rd as “Quality Butchers”. Frank took over the two businesses on 21 August 1944. Together they cost £3,500 and Frank paid half.

The section at Auckland Rd cost £978 and building cost £3,400. Mortgage of £1,350.

Frank owned no car but the company owned one and two delivery vans, total value £800 approx.

Frank's account with the Bank of New South Wales, Queen St South had a balance of £190 as at 31.3.1946. As at that date the accrued profits of the 50% share of the businesses was about £2,000 approx and there was a loan of £1,700 from Stranskys.

Frank performed fire watching duty for the EPSO ((Air Raid Protection Office) at Westfield Freezing Co. in 1942 and volunteered for NZ Armed Forces but was refused. Ditto in England. During the years on the farm he lost money but later made some profit.

1943 Frank worked for wages at Westfield.

1944 F and A Briess became equal partners with two others running the



Ezra, Opa and Oma, April 1979.

Centreway Grill Room at 268a Queen Street until part way through 1945. At the Centreway with rehabilitation starting Frank arranged 500 free meal tickets for returned servicemen.

Towards the end of the war Frank Briess acquired a butcher shop and entered herewith, the food trade. Being a perfectionist he studied food science and technology independently.

On 14 July 1946 they were living at 36 Auckland Rd and he was employed as manager of a butchery at 84 and 85 K Rd.

Immediately after the war he started the “Parcels to Britain Campaign”, highly appreciated by recipients.

1950 Frank introduced canning to New Zealand of which the largest per-

An early timeline – Frank

Frank Briess mother tongue: German

German Volksschule, Mauritzplatz 5, Olmütz.

High school graduation: Staatsrealschule

Course at the Business Academy, Olmütz.

Eighteen years in his father's business wholesaling and import of agricultural goods, seeds, etc - Ignaz Briess Jr.

Oct 1927-March 1929 served in the military, Czech infantry.

From an early age he was active in many German organisations:

- Board member of the German Ice Hockey Association of Czechoslovakia;
- President and captain of the German Ice Hockey Association, Olmütz.
- Board member of the Olmütz Ice Hockey Association.
- Board member of the Free German Walker Association.
- Board member of the Free German Football Association.
- Member of the Association of the German Winter Sports organisation.
- Member of the German middle school team "Moravia" in Olmütz.
- Member of the Gymnastics Association.
- Member of the "Schlaraffia-Lodge" in Olmütz.

- Board member of the Olmütz Philately Club.
- Board member of the German Lawn Tennis Club.
- Member of the German Theatre Society, Olmütz.
- Member of the editorial staff of the Mährisches Tageblatt, Olmütz.
- 1939 passed exam at the Institute of Commerce in Birmingham (holding certificate) Frank is interested in sport - soccer, tennis, skiing, ice hockey and commercial affairs.
- 1939 New Zealand now naturalised and a citizen. ■



Frank and Ezra in the pool - Auckland Road, summer 1979.

centage was used for export to the UK, the West Indies and several other European countries.

In 1952 he introduced the manufacture of continental sausages and speciality meats under the “Metzler” brand and despite great difficulties in the beginning the brand is known today on account of its outstanding quality all over New Zealand as well as the countries where it is exported.

About 1953 a delicatessen boom started in New Zealand as never experienced before. Frank Briess grabbed the opportunity and started an import business under the well known firm of Premier Distributors and Manufacturers which has grown today into one of the best known delicatessen importers, wholesalers and manufacturers.

In 1958 almost complete import restrictions were introduced on account of Reserve Bank low funds of foreign currency. Premier Distributors, being unable to import most of their introduced imported delicatessen lines, started manufacturing under the “Gourmette” brand a wide variety of pickles, sauces and condiments. As a result of top quality and wide variety business of manufacture has grown very substantially and as a result a new factory is being built in Napier for PDM’s requirements.

One very important part of Premier Distributors business is import and packing of spices in retail packs that have found wide popularity on account of top quality and practical retail containers.

Frank Briess is author of “Magic with Spices, Herbs and Tastetempters” which is now in its 5th edition with 85,000 copies having been printed and it widely acclaimed for its practical and educational value’.

Despite his many duties and interests, Frank is a contributor and speaker and demonstrator at seminars and similar gatherings of food trade organisations to educate food handlers and spread knowledge.

Frank Briess is ably assisted by co-director Andy Politzer and export manager Alan Cohen.

Written before Frank died about 1978. ■



Butchery staff.



Lizzie, aged 17



Ruzenka



Alice (Lizzie) Briess, nee Löwy 1912-1986

Czechoslovakia - New Zealand

My mother Alice (Lizzie Briess nee Löwy 1912-1986)

Alice, or Lizzie as she was known by family and European friends, was born in Břeclav (German Luntenburg), southern Moravia when the Austro-Hungarian Empire was at its last gasp. The town (pop 25,000 today) lies amongst gentle hills in verdant landscape, 10km west of the Slovak border and close to the Austrian border to the south. It is 55km south of the capital city of Moravia, Brno (Brünn). The railway from Vienna to Brno had opened 73 years before Lizzie's birth, bringing industrialisation and consequent expansion; Břeclav railway station was the first junction on the Vienna to Brno route. The area is famous for having hosted the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805 when Napoleon's retreating armies defeated the larger Russian and Austrian armies. Today the tranquillity of the site belies this violent history and a memorial plaque marks the spot.

Tourist sites allude to the area's history and lie sprinkled across the area – the family owned vineyards each with their own tasting cellars, nestled side by side, have existed for many generations.

By 1930 Jews formed 4.3% of the population. The synagogue in Břeclav is in Neo-Romanesque style, built in 1868 with Neo Moorish embellishments and is now owned by the town, used as a museum and concert venue. The whole, is encompassed in the Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape inscribed on a UNESCO World Heritage List. Several castles at Mikulov, Veverei, Pernštejn, Lednice and more, some surrounded by extensive parklands, attest to the attraction of various Lichtenstein noblemen to this pretty area of vines and wooded hills and valleys.

Lizzie's paternal grandparents, were Hermann Löwy and Betti Thorsch, both descended from merchant families. They lived in Uhersky Brod not far from Břeclav. Isaac Thorsch, Lizzie's great great grandfather was a cow merchant, as well as a shochet (ritual slaughterer) and a cantor according to the census records of 1869 in Uherské Hradiště near Uhersky Brod. The graves of Betti's parents Kolman Thorsch and Resi Quittner and those of Herman Löwy and his wife Betti too, stand proudly upright in the Jewish cemetery in Uhersky Brod to this day.

Grandfather Hermann was an orthodox Jew and is noted in Hugo Gold's book on the Jewish community of Uhersky Brod (along with a photo) as having been a mediator within the factions of the Jewish community, at one time president of the community. Hermann's mother was Marina, born in 1802 and the 1869 census records her occupation as an innkeeper. Nothing is known of her husband Jacob but besides Hermann they had two daughters, Barbara and Sarah/Sali, Lizzie's great aunts. Lizzie's father Isidor, born in 1882 had grown up in Uhersky Brod, one of 13 children and the only one to attend university. He served in the Austrian Army during the years 1901/3 and completed his medical degree at the University of Vienna in 1907 with grades "genügend" (sufficient) in all subjects. In Břeclav he took up a post as a country doctor and married Marta Berger in 1911 on a sunny day in June. Their child, my mother Lizzie, was born before the following year was out. Growing up as an only child, she enjoyed the status of being the doctor's daughter. There was a garden, with tortoises that wintered in burrows under the garden cottage. From accounts by Isidor's niece Sue Eldridge, Lizzie's younger cousin, he was an excellent horse rider who lived well and enjoyed good food. It appears that he bequeathed the diabetes 2 gene to his unfortunate descendants. No doubt that and all the high living as well as the diabetes contributed to his early death at the age of 52 in 1934. He died in Vienna and his body was brought to Brno (German Brünn) where he lies buried in the Jewish cemetery.

Brno is the capital city of Moravia.

Lizzie knew her aunt Helene Broll and Helene's husband Ludwig Broll whose daughter Sue, escaped Czechoslovakia on a kindertransport. She also knew Sue's brother Kurt who spent the war years in the French Underground. Helene and Ludwig did not escape however; they were deported to Theresienstadt and did not survive. The military records of Lizzie's great uncles Jacob (born 1872, 1.68m tall, with black hair and brown eyes) and Leopold Löwy (born 1884, died in Auschwitz in 1943) show that both fought in the (Austrian) army in the First World War. Isidor also served, as a doctor, in the same war. He was stationed in various parts of Moravia and three postcards that he wrote to his Marta surfaced in New Zealand many years later.



Graves of Kolman and Resi (Quittner) Thorsch, Lizzie's great grandparents, buried in Uh.Brod



Graves of Hermann and Betti (Thorsch) Löwy, Lizzie's grandparents, buried in Uh.Brod



Isidor Löwy with his sister Helene Broll (nee Löwy) and her children Kurt and Susie approx 1926

One postcard, was written to Marta, at the time when she appeared to have been with her parents in Valašské Meziříčí (Wallachisch Meseritsch) dated 1 October 1914:

"Your card made me very happy - from which I take it that you, thank God are well. I would be very happy if you would visit me very soon so that we could be together. How are your parents? I fasted well - went to synagogue often. Today I will go riding so that I won't forget what I have learned. Greetings and kisses with all my heart, especially to my sweet girl and all our loved ones, Your ever-faithful Isi".

These postcards arrived in a collection that in the 1960s or 1970s were given to Frank to translate, some 60 years or so after they had been written. There were three, sent from Frank's future father-in-law Isidor to his wife, Marta during the First World War when he had been working as an army doctor. They were written in elaborate cursive old German script. I still remember the drama in our household when these cards coincidentally turned up in Auckland and then further coincidentally were returned to the very family from whom they had originated.

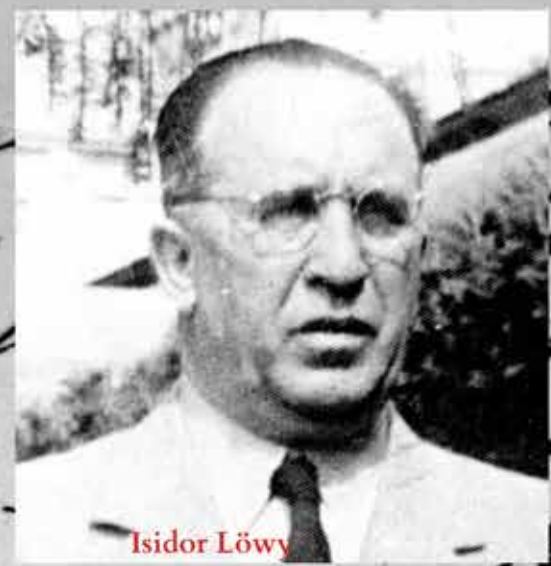


Lizzie's cousin Susie Broll, one of Lizzie's few relatives to survive the war. She escaped on a Kindertransport as a teenager.

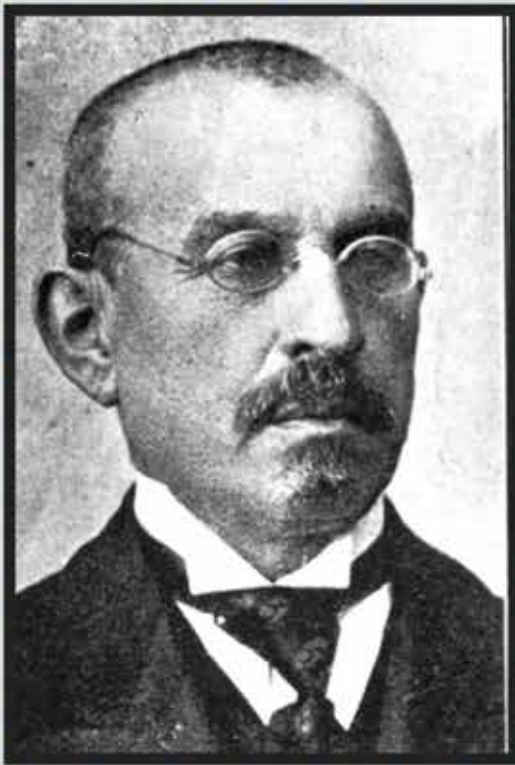
Lizzie's favourite cousin was Sue Eldridge, nee Broll. About 14 years younger than her, Susie was often left in her care or later, despatched to take her shopping. Sue survived in England during the war. After the war she and her husband Tom made their home in Montreal, Canada. She describes leaving home on the train from Prague: " It took me years to face up to the parting from my parents on the platform of the train filled with children and no adults, waving to them as the train left Prague. Many children around me, older and younger cried bitterly as the train gathered speed, I did not and much later felt guilty that I did not cry, but felt pleased and excited to be going away. It seemed we were on that train for ever, moving through station after station until we reached the border and German uniformed figures got on. I was scared, particularly as it was night and I was sleeping on the floor of the carriage and was awaked by a pair of boots right next to my head. I am still wondering now, whether we were really locked in as we sped towards Hook van Holland. The first bright moment occurred when we reached Holland and were free. We children were on a windy beach looking at the Channel and about to board a steamer to take us to Harwich. We had a lovely meal and white sliced bread, which I thought was wonderful and spent the night in clean bunks. Sitting in a large room the next day, wearing 2 coats, with my one permitted suitcase filled with new clothes and a rucksack by my side and waiting for this stranger who was going to be my guardian and take me into his home. I sat and sat, hot and very close to tears and was pretty much the last child to be claimed".

Mein Großmutter!

Dein L. heute hat mich sehr gefreut
zu erfahren, dass du g.
du würdest mich sehr freuen, wenn
du würdest, damit wir wieder
samt so, aber ich dich in allen
was ist mit den Eltern? Ich glaube, dass es
das kein altes Leben wird. Gefastet habe ich
es war viel im Tempel. Heute werde ich reiten,
damit ich nicht das, was ich gelernt habe, verge
steigert u. Kurz dich herzlich
mein süßes Kind u. alle unser Leben
Hier unser Kreuz sei



Isidor Löwy



Grandfather Hermann Löwy



**R to L Back row: Samuel Berger (Lizzie's grandfather) on right, Sigmund (great uncle) on left
Bottom left: Cousin Josef Berger**



Isidor served as a doctor during the First World War, for Austria



Lizzie second from the right. Bar Mitzvah dance c.1923.

Early years

One of Lizzie's school friends from the early years, Hans Weigl living in Israel in the 1990s, wrote the following to me, when I had requested a description of Lizzie as a young woman seen through contemporary eyes.

"My memories on your mother begin in 1918, when I was in the first class of the Jewish elementary school (the building opposite the synagogue, where today the Museum is housed). Lizzi came into the class and because I did not know her, your grandfather MUDr. Isidor Löwy made the acquaintance. She was so lovely, that I kissed her on the spot and this was all the time after related by my family, that Lizzi was my first love. 4 years did we spend there together, then I was accepted prematurely to the High school, so that Lizzi until the matriculation was always one class lower. We remained friends and I distinctly remember her on my Bar Mitzvah photo, where she towered above the other girls. Later we met at the school's dancing lessons and I remember the distress, when - corpulent as I was, whereas Lizzi was tall - we had to learn the Viennese waltz. Lizzi was so slender, that Walter Reich - another schoolmate - by clipping together the fingertips of both hands used to show the circuit of her garter girdle. As sole child, she was permitted all the liberties by her parents and she pursued them. For some time her steady friend was Milosh Bezdek, a gentile, called father Bezdek, because he was somewhat elder than we were. ... Extravagant Lizzi was and has remained in my memory, this is not a criticism, but characteristic".

There are small details I remember from my mother's descriptions of the household of her youth; the family had a maid, they took a weekly bath - her father had priority for the bath water, her mother next and then Lizzie herself - all in the same bath water! My mother told me that she had a difficult relationship with her mother Marta who would stand behind her chair at the dinner table, pulling her plaits when she couldn't eat her dinner. The family frequented both Vienna and Brno. They owned property in Brno, as well as 35 building sections on the outskirts of Břeclav where they lived. German was their main language and Lizzie went to German speaking schools. She also learned Czech, which would have been spoken with the maid. At school she also learned Latin, French and some Russian. Vienna was home to many family members so there were often visits. It was the cultural and economic hub that they gravitated to, being closer than Prague.



Cousin Josef Berger with parents Berta and Sigmund, Šumperk (Mährisch Schönberg). Sigmund was Lizzie's great uncle.



Lizzie's childhood home in Siebergasse, Břeclav (German Lundenburg)



Nameste 6, Valašské Meziříčí (German Wall. Meseritsch). Third building from right with Samuel Berger's name prominent across the front. Then (above) and now (left)

Samuel Berger's seal now in the local museum in Vsetin.



Gleich gewicht Kuchen: (Henna)
Hops zerlassene
schweres Mehl, Butter, Zucker.

Zucker gibt

nach dem andern
Mehl u. festen Schme

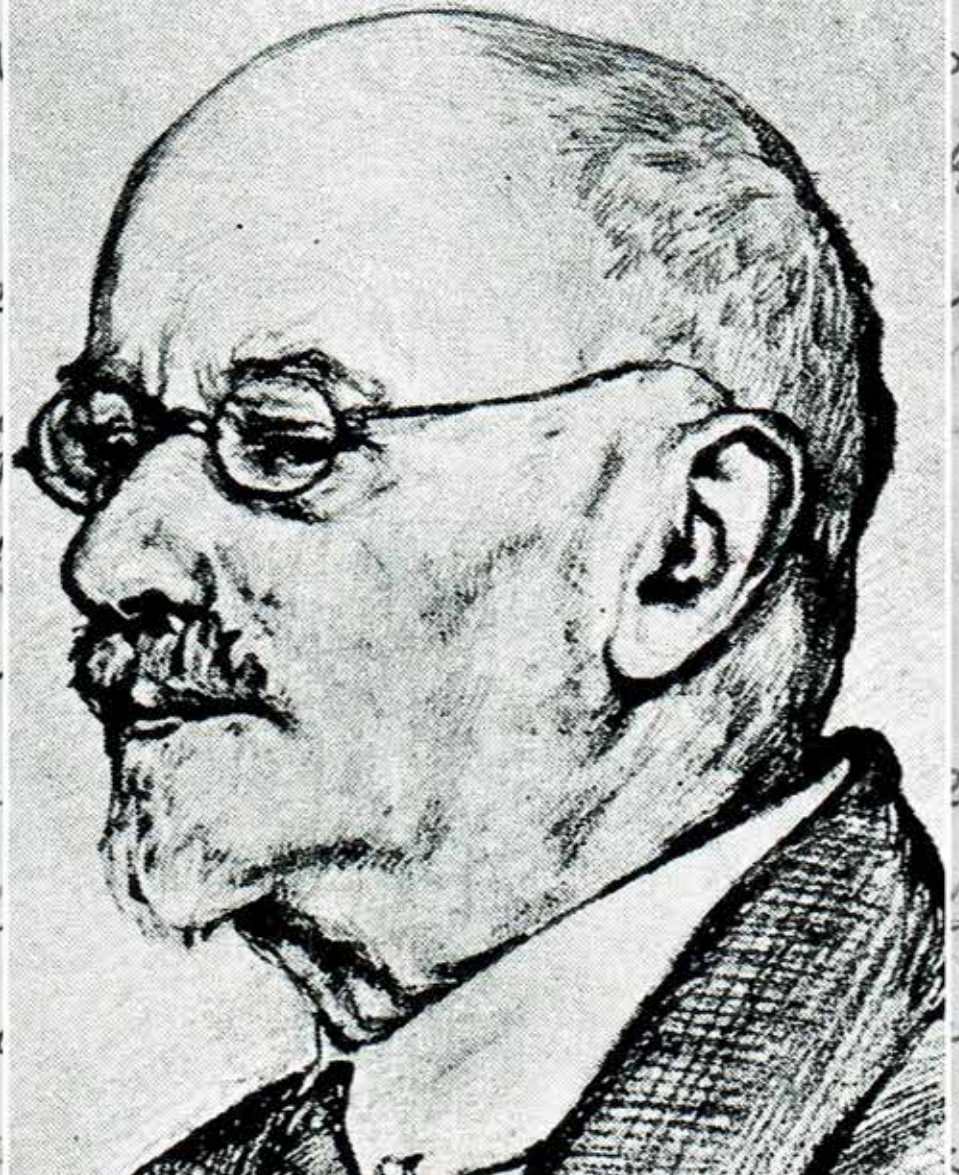
Orange
1/2 Zucker, 4 Eier, 1/4

Zucker u. Eier schau

u. schmele geben das

riehen. Form mit Butter
darauf u. das auch u
durchschneiden u. u

Lizzie's Grandfather Samuel Berger 1848 - 1927



Samuel Berger, 1848-1927 and Rosa Wolf, 1857-1934 Valašské Meziříčí (Wallachisch Meseritsch)

Samuel Berger and Rosa Wolf were Lizzie's grandparents on her mother's side. Josef and Anna (nee Singer) Berger, parents of Samuel, lived in Hranice (Weisskirchen), Josef being head of the Yeshivah in nearby Lipník (Leipnik), the fifth biggest Jewish community in Moravia. Anna came from Hranice and as her mother had died in childbirth she was called Anna in accordance with Jewish custom. She didn't get on with her daughter-in-law Rosa though they lived in the same house. It is said (by Dr Hillel, historian from Lipník/Leipnik) that she was a descendant of the well known Talmudic scholar Mordechai Jaffe, a student of the famous Josef Caro who wrote the Schulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law).

The Singer family had been dealers in skins, supplying meat to the Austrian Army and after Josef's death in 1866 Anna and the four children moved to nearby Valašské Meziříčí. Here, there was a nascent Jewish community. Potash found there was used to tan hides for leather and furs and first Rosa, then her son Samuel, operated a factory and leather and furs shop on the main square of the town. In this enterprise Rosa's brother Alfred Wolf from Holesove (Holleschau) was a partner. Today Val. Meziříčí is colloquially known as "Val.Mez"

Samuel's brother Sigmund married Berta Storch and they had a leather shop on the marketplace in Šumperk (Schönberg) 130 kms north of Olomouc (Olmütz). Sigmund often took his son Josef with him to visit Samuel and the family in Val. Meziříčí. In 1939 the Nazis compiled a file on Sigmund which makes outrageous reading "Der Genannte ist ein gerissener arroganter eckelhafter JUDE" (The subject is a crafty, arrogant, irritating JEW) "known as a businessman of the worst type and is remembered here as a pompous Jew. Politically he was outspokenly against national socialism in government".

Sigmund and Bertha also had another son Emil, who earned a gold medal in the First World War. Emil died in 1925 and is buried in Šumperk. Sigmund, Berta and son Josef with his family of wife Fay and twin boys Richard and Kurt, Lizzie's cousins, moved to London in 1938 when the threat of war and antisemitism were growing. I consider this elderly couple, Sigmund and Berta, uprooted from their home and transplanted to London where they spoke no English trying to live an orthodox life in unfamiliar surroundings. No wonder they fell out with their English daughter-in-law quite quickly. They lived in a flat in Brondesbury, a 30 minute bus ride from Josef. Fay and Josef separated and she bought a house in Surrey in 1941 where she and the children went to live. Josef corresponded with Lizzie until his death in 1962 and that part of the family did not reconnect until Peter and I visited London some 50 years later. We met with Josef's surviving son Kurt (then aged 90) and his wife Margaret. We spent a lovely Spring day on the Thames together, fortified by Margaret's rare roast beef sandwiches and fresh strawberries.

Samuel's son, Lizzie's uncle Josef (Pepi) was Bar Mitzvah in 1896 and in his honour Samuel and Rosa donated a torah mantle (cover) to the synagogue. This mantle now resides in the collection of the Jewish Museum in Prague. It probably arrived in Prague per the Nazis who during the war took the Judaica from the synagogues of Czechoslovakia and deposited the collection in a proposed Museum. Cousin Josef kept in touch with Lizzie after the war, writing to her from London in 1959/60. He wrote that since he was the oldest surviving member of the family he would tell her about the family history and his memories. After three lengthy, detailed letters he promised finally never to burden her ever again with such long letters. They were full of the minutiae of daily life and family history interspersed with pieces of gossip and one sided and wide-ranging discussions on issues such as the future of the young State of Israel and the survival of the Jewish diaspora. He lamented that synagogues in London had become places to climb the social ladder and to show off the latest fashion, just as they had been previously in Czechoslovakia. His view was that Jews would never be accepted into the higher levels of British society.



Hranice (German Mähr. Weisskirchen) cemetery, Josef Berger 1804-1866. Head of the Yeshivah in Leipzig

Statt jeder besonderen Anzeige.

Dem tiefen Schmerze schenkt sich die höchstschmerzliche Nachricht vom Hinscheiden Ihres Vaters, Herrn, Samuel, Schneider und Schneider, bei Herrn

Samuel Berger,
früheres Lederhändler,

welcher nach einem arbeitsreichen, dem Wohl seiner Familie anheimgebenen, fünfjährigen Leben nach längerer Krankheit in seinem 90. Lebensjahre am 20. Mai nachmittags verstarb.

Die Beerdigung findet am Samstag, 22. Mai 1927 um 14 Uhr in Hohl-Wiesenthal vom Trauerhause aus statt.

Hohl-Wiesenthal, am 21. Mai 1927.

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Herrn Jurek, Schneider. | Sigismund Berger, Schneider. | Wolfe Berger, Schneider. |
| Herrn Müller, Witwen Radek, Joh. Berger, Wolfe Schneider, als Kinder. | Wäinliche Gafel. | Herrn Max Müller, Herrn Wolf Radek, Herrn Radek, Herrn Müller, als Schwiegerkinder. |

Death Notice of Samuel Berger, leathermerchant, giving details of surviving family.



Samuel Berger and Rosa Berger (nee Wolf)



Cousin Josef Berger 1886-1962



Uncle Josef (Pepi) Berger 1884-1939



Cousin Emil Berger 1889 - 1925

Aufnahmebogen - Ar

zur Zählung der Bevölkerung und der wichtigsten häuslichen Antheiere
nach dem Stande vom 31. December 1890.

Land: Valaš. Meziručí
Politický okres: 1
Obec místní (obvod statkový): 1

Anmerkung
oznámka

| 1a | 1b | 2 | 3 | 4 | | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | |
|----|----|---|--------------|--------------------|----------|------------------------------------|---|--|-----|--------------------|------------|---|---------|-----------|
| | | | | männlich | weiblich | | | | | | | | | |
| | | Verwandtschaft oder sonstiges Verhältnis zum Wohnungsinhaber, wie in Abf. 13 der Belehrung des Näheren angegeben | | Geschlecht Pohlavi | | Geburtsjahr, Monat und Tag | | Geburtsort, politischer Bezirk, Land | | Glaubensbekenntnis | | Beruf, Beschäftigung, Er Povolání, zaměstnání | | |
| | | Příbuzenství nebo jiný poměr k majetníkovi bytu, jak zevrubněji uvedeno v odst. 13. poučení | | männlich weiblich | | Rok narození, měsíc a den | | Rodišťo, politický okres, země | | Vyznání náboženské | | Hlavní povolání, na němž výlučně nebo proce hlavní postavení, výživa nebo | | |
| | | Prädicat und Adelsrang nach Maßgabe des Absatzes 12 der Belehrung | | männlich weiblich | | Rok narození, měsíc a den | | Domovské právo (příslušnost), místní obec, politický okres, země, státní příslušnost | | Vyznání náboženské | | Genauere Bezeichnung des Hauptberufsweiges | | |
| | | Jméno, a to jméno rodinné (příjmení), jméno (křestní), předikát šlechtický a stopěň šlechtický podle odstavce 12. poučení | | männlich weiblich | | Rok narození, měsíc a den | | Domovské právo (příslušnost), místní obec, politický okres, země, státní příslušnost | | Vyznání náboženské | | Přesné označení oboru povolání hlavního | | |
| | | Im Namen und zwar Familienname (Buname), Vorname (Taufname), Adelsprädicat und Adelsrang nach Maßgabe des Absatzes 12 der Belehrung | | männlich weiblich | | Rok narození, měsíc a den | | Domovské právo (příslušnost), místní obec, politický okres, země, státní příslušnost | | Vyznání náboženské | | Přesné označení oboru povolání hlavního | | |
| | | Jméno, a to jméno rodinné (příjmení), jméno (křestní), předikát šlechtický a stopěň šlechtický podle odstavce 12. poučení | | männlich weiblich | | Rok narození, měsíc a den | | Domovské právo (příslušnost), místní obec, politický okres, země, státní příslušnost | | Vyznání náboženské | | Přesné označení oboru povolání hlavního | | |
| 1 | 1 | Samuel Berger | majitel bytu | 1 | | 18 ¹² / ₅ 18 | | Spanie | 262 | Křianie | irracolita | ženaty | německá | Obchodník |
| 2 | 2 | Rosa Berger | manželka | | 1 | 18 ¹⁶ / ₆ 57 | | Polévaco | 262 | " | " | vdana | " | domacita |
| 3 | 3 | Jozef | syn | 1 | | 18 ²³ / ₄ 84 | | Val Meziručí | AG | " | " | soob. | " | zak |
| 4 | 4 | Adela | dcera | | 1 | 18 ¹⁷ / ₇ 81 | | AG | 262 | " | " | " | " | " |
| 5 | 5 | Melanie | " | | 1 | 18 ³¹ / ₅ 82 | | AG | 262 | " | " | " | " | " |

Census Valašské Meziručí (Wallachisch Meseritsch) Showing the Berger



Letters from Lizzie's cousin Josef Berger, Sigmund's son, from London to Auckland 1959-1960

In a letter of 1st September 1959 Josef first wrote to Lizzie about the family history.

He described to her that in her grandparents' house, Samuel and Rosa's home, there were no creature comforts, nothing in excess. The house had a large, dark feel and one of Marta's sisters slept in a windowless room with no ventilation. Lizzie's grandfather Samuel became wealthy through hard work and that's how he was able to marry his daughters well. Josef's father Sigmund and Lizzie's grandfather Samuel were very close perhaps because they had to grow up quickly to support their mother after their father died when they were young. He mentioned that Josef was a family name in four generations. Cousin Josef commented that his grandfather, another Josef (who was Lizzie's great grandfather) had been a Talmudic scholar. On his headstone it is noted that Josef had been head of the Yeshivah (religious school) in Lipnik (where Peter and I visited his grave in 2011). Josef continued...."He married so that he could pursue his Talmudic studies which reflected well on the whole family. Cousin Josef himself studied Talmudic discourses as a hobby." Samuel's son Josef was known as Pepi – the rest of the family disliked Pepi's wife Rudolfine. Cousin Josef had boarded in Vienna while studying. Josef also recalled Samuel's opinion of his son-in-law Isidor, Lizzie's father: that he would make a good businessman because he advised his patients not to eat fatty foods but he himself could demolish half a goose at one sitting. In Josef's view that was responsible for his early heart attack. He also mentioned that Lizzie's mother Marta had been unhappy in Meseritsch before she married and often went to visit her sisters who tried hard to provide suitable prospects. Josef didn't approve of such gatherings. He said that Marta had not got on well with her mother Rosa and when Rosa was annoyed with Marta she often said hurtful, cruel things such as "It will rain on your wedding day" and so on. In the event, it did not rain on Marta at her wedding. "I ate at the same boarding house cook as Isidor, your father, Allah praise her, the things she cooked for us, how much better than all the others!"

Cousin Josef also reflected on all the members of the family and on having met Lizzie as a young girl. Josef had known great grandmother Rosa's family from Holesove (Hollerschau) well. Her father had been a grain merchant who was often in financial difficulties and had to be bailed out by Samuel.

He wrote of Samuel: "now to your grandfather: he was the most distinguished and worthy person in the family....he was a rich man because he was thrifty but it didn't affect him – he lived modestly. I hold uncle in unlimited esteem which he richly deserved. He supported many family members and I visited him when I had leave from the army. Meseritsch was not the ideal place to spend the summer being humid and hot, no drinking water, no inside toilet, but I was at uncle's place and I worshipped him. In spite of his piety he was a tolerant man. I must have bored you with the foregoing, you might think it's all uninteresting, but perhaps you have a sense of family history, so I wanted to tell you some personal memories. The family was his whole life, apart from the business. I went to him for advice which he never refused me. The last few days I've been quite upset, my parents' memory is very intense and all the memories are past now"...and later he comments on assimilation that "Even here, in the land of tolerance, the Jew is only just permitted to exist. A welcoming reception as equals doesn't exist although the English are always polite in their rejection. I had a good education in this sense, in antisemitic Schönberg".

Pepi committed suicide the day the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939. His wife Rudolfine died in the ghetto in Lodz. The three sisters, Marta, Adele and Melanie (with husband Adolf Lachs) were deported and died in the concentration camps of Central and Eastern Europe. Marta's and Adele's husbands had died before the war.



Citation
Right: TORAH MANTLE given by Samuel and Rosalia Berger in honour of the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of their son Josef (Pepe) Berger 1897.

Registration numbers of object
inventory number: 007.734
Identifier
OBJECT.JMP.COLL/007734

Collection of the Prague Jewish
Museum



Marta Löwy nee Berger
1888-1942 Lizzie's
mother



Melanie Lachs and Adele Löffler families. Marta's sisters.

Student in Prague

When Lizzie finished school, University in Prague beckoned. Her father insisted that the only course he would allow her to study was medicine, as he had. Lizzie first enrolled at the Karlova Universita v Praze (Charles University in Prague). Here, she led a very active social life, coming into contact with a wide cosmopolitan group which included homosexuals, intellectuals and Polish students. There were quite a number of these students as there was a quota system in Poland and only a certain number of Jews could attend University. So, many of them who missed out on attending university in Poland came to University in Prague, most from poor circumstances.

Lizzie first enrolled for the 1931/2 year and the last year for which she had student ID was 1936/7. Lizzie often told me that these years as a university student in Prague, were the best years of her life. She found Anatomy and Physics very difficult but must have done enough study to pass her exams. Living away from home, probably for the first time, she boarded with a family where she slept on the lounge sofa by night and by day it was used as a living room sofa. This was common practice and many Prague families supplemented their incomes in this way.

Another custom was for poorer students to eat their evening meal in a different home every night of the week. From time to time Lizzie would have to move to new lodgings. She would talk about the time that her mother came to visit her in Prague unannounced and found Lizzie sleeping in the syphilis ward on an empty bed. In anatomy classes the students treated the dead bodies they studied with such disrespect that the memory bothered Lizzie when she recalled the behaviour later in life. Certainly Lizzie always enjoyed reminiscing about these years of freedom and exploration, coming of age in Prague of the 1930s. She also told me that during these years she had a relationship for two years. It must have been an exciting place for a slightly spoiled country girl.



Lizzie's student ID



KARLOVA UNIVERSITA
V PRAZE.

LEGITIMACE
řádného posluchače

Lizzie Lowyové

Připomenutí. Posluchač mējz legitimaci tuto vždy při sobě, aby se jí k vy-zvání úřadů a jich organů mohl prokázati. Byt posluchačův budiž v legitimaci vždy správně a určité vypsán, vželiká změna bytu hned naznačena a do tří dnů oznámena kvestuře.

Legitimace tato buďž při odchodu posluchače z university odevzdána rektorátu.

Birth Certificate

REPUBLIKA ČESKOSLOVENSKÁ • ČECHOSLOVAKISCHE REPUBLIK

Politický okres: Zemské hlavní město Brno Čís. 1452
 Politischer Bezirk: Landeshauptstadt Brünn



Matriční úřad Náboženské obce židovské v Brně.
 Matrikenamt der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde in Brünn.

Rodný list – Geburtsschein

Svazek - Band III, strana - Seite 158, pořad. čís. - Reihenwahl 1315

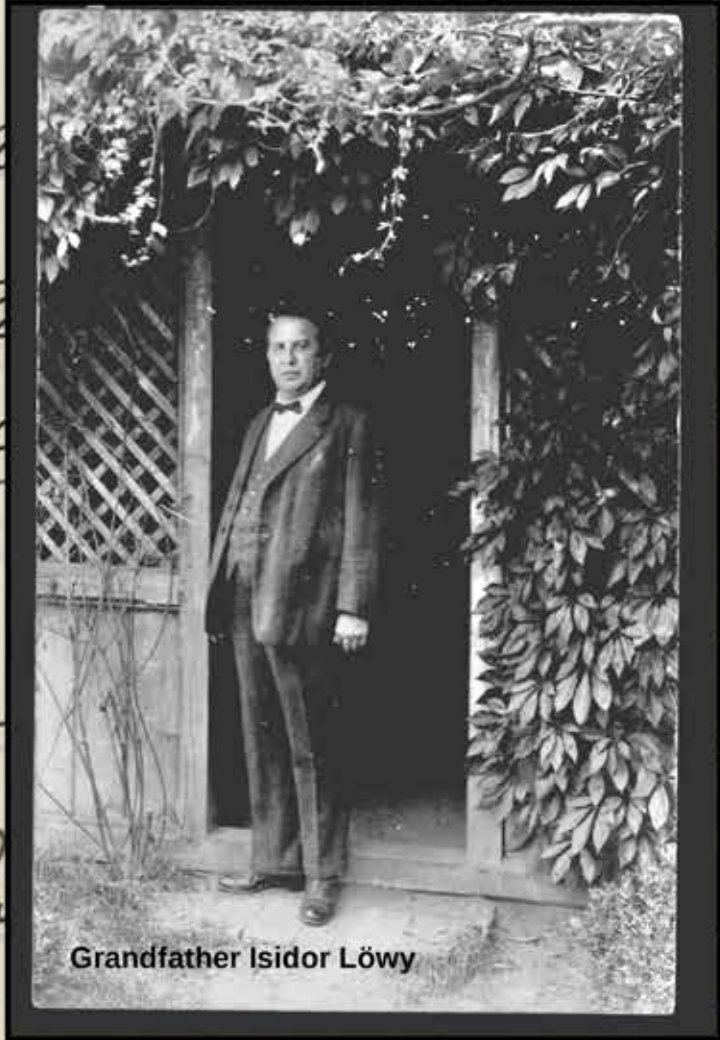
| | | |
|---|--|--|
| Jméno dítěte Vorname des Kindes | <i>Alice</i> | |
| Den, měsíc a rok narození Tag, Monat u. Jahr der Geburt | <i>8/7/1919</i> | <i>Osmeho dne v měsíci červenci</i> <small>(Children's story)</small> <i>devítistého devátého</i> <small>(In letters and words)</small> |
| Místo narození Ort der Geburt | <i>Brno, obilní trh 19, zemská porodnice</i> | |
| Pohlaví — Geschlecht | <i>Ženské</i> | <small>Leib</small> <small>Geschlecht</small> <i>weiblich</i> |
| Otec, jméno, příjmení, datum a místo narození, povolání, náboženství, bydliště. Jméno a příjmení jeho rodičů Vater, Vor- und Zuname, Datum, Ort der Geburt, Beruf, Religion, Wohnort. Vor- und Zuname seiner Eltern | <i>Dr. Löwy Isidor, narozený 3. 12. 1884, lékař, bytem v Brně.</i> | |
| Matka, jméno, příjmení, datum a místo narození, povolání, náboženství, bydliště. Jméno a příjmení její rodičů Mutter, Vor- und Zuname, Datum, Ort der Geburt, Beruf, Religion, Wohnort. Vor- und Zuname ihrer Eltern | <i>Marta, rozená Bergerová, narozená 22. 11. 1888.</i> | |
| Svědkové jméno, povolání a bydliště Zeugen Name, Beruf und Wohnort | | |
| Porodní asistentka Geburtshelferin | <i>Antonie Tichatešková.</i> | |
| Poznámka — Anmerkung | | |

Matriční úřad Náboženské obce židovské v Brně • Matrikenamt der Israelitischen Kultusgemeinde in Brünn

dne *30. října* 19*38.*
am



J. J. Štejnka
Správce matky. - Der Matrikenführer.



Grandfather Isidor Löwy





Meeting Franz Briess

In 1937 Lizzie met Franz Briess from Olomouc (German Olmütz). He was an eligible bachelor of 30 and most likely some manoeuvring behind the scenes had taken place. Whatever, they met and were engaged and married shortly thereafter. The wedding was in Spring, 6 June 1937 in the synagogue in Brno. Photos of the wedding show that Lizzie's mother Marta attended, on the arm of Franz's brother Fredi, together with Franz's sister Marianne and husband Otto Stransky. No white gown for Lizzie - but a sophisticated ensemble topped with fox fur draped over her short sleeved dark jacket with white highlights complemented by a white blouse, hat and shoes. Very elegant - to match my father's stylish dark suit with contrasting waistcoat and tie, fob watch poking out of his pocket. For their wedding photos, Franz stood on a box, so that he appeared taller than his 5ft 4 inches. Their honeymoon was spent on the island of Rhodes where they fell in love with the purple bougainvillea that they tried to replicate in their Auckland garden.

Franz and Lizzie signed what we would refer to these days as a "pre-nup", attested in the presence of a Notary Public in Olomouc. Franz Briess acknowledged he had received a dowry of 250,000kc. (Czech crowns) handed over by Lizzie. Her property at Stojanova 5, Brno, remained her property however Franz was to be the manager and had no obligation to account for the management or returns on the house. Alice Briess brought into the marriage linen, underwear, furs, jewellery, gold and silverware, bedding, furniture and furnishings and household utensils of all kinds and Franz recognised that these remained her property.





Vysvědčení oddávací. Trauungs-Zeugnis.

Čís. 736.
Nro.

OKRESEK
PRO BRNO

podepsaného se tímto dosvědčuje, že dne šestého
dem Unterzeichneten wird hiemit bezeugt, daß am
měsíc června roku tisícého devítistého třicátého sedm
im Jahre Eintausendneunhundert
Monates 6. června 1937

svatě manželé totiž pan Briess František, soukromý inženýr, svobodný
das Brautpaar Herr
narození v Olomouci dne 5. 11. 1904 příslušný do Olomouce (Morava)
geboren in (Morava) am 5. 11. 1904 zuständig nach
a bydlící v Olomouci, 28. října 11 (Morava)
und wohnhaft in
sog. pana Briessa Vítězslava

Sohn des Herrn
a paní Růženy rozené Schimmerlingové
und der Frau geborenen
se slečnou Lůvyovou Alicí, studující
mit der
narození v Brně dne 8. 7. 1912 příslušnou do Brně, okres
geboren in Brně, Svědská 4 am 8. 7. 1912 zuständig nach
a bydlící v Brně, Svědská 4 Hodonín (Morava)
und wohnhaft in

dcery pana Lůvyho Isidora, Med. Dr.
Tochter des Herrn
a paní Marty rozené Bergerové
und der Frau geborenen
v přítomnosti svědků a to panů: Zono Maxma, vrchního kantora
in Gegenwart der Zeugen, der Herren: v Brně, Holistě 57 a Mojžíše Glasera, rabínského asessora
v Brně, Svědská 4 panem dr. Ludvíkem Levým,
vrchním rabínem

v Brně, v synagoze Holistě 57
in

dle zákonných předpisů a dle israelského ritu oddáni byli.
nach den gesetzlichen Vorschriften und nach israelitischem Ritus getraut worden ist.

Poznámka:
Anmerkung:

Marriage Certificate and opposite "Pre nup".

DOCUMENT BY NOTARY PUBLIC

MADE ON SEPTEMBER 1937 before Mr.
my Notary Public's Office.

Notary Public, in Olomouc in

There appeared before me: Mr. Frank Briess, House Proprietor in Olmuetz and his wife Mrs. Alice Briess, nee Loewy, both in their own right. The undersigned witnesses who are personally known to me, have confirmed to me the personal identity of Frank and Alice Briess, who have concluded before me and the gentlemen signed as witnesses the following:

MARRIAGE SETTLEMENT AND INHERITANCE AGREEMENT

1. Mr. Frank Briess recognises having received in cash the amount of 250.000.- Czech crowns on the occasion of their marriage which has taken place on the 5th of June. This amount was paid out as dowry and Mr. Frank Briess therefore owes his wife the dowry to the amount of 250.000 kc and Mrs. Alice Briess herewith confirms that she has handed over these 250.000 Kc as dowry to her husband.

2. As token, Mr. Frank Briess secures his wife Mrs. Alice Briess an amount of 50.000 Kc and Mrs. A. Briess declares the binding acceptance.

3. Mrs. Alice Briess is proprietress of the building in Brno, Stojanova 5 Reg. Number 1815 District Register of Brno City. This house remains for the duration of their marriage the free property of Mrs. Alice Briess; she grants her husband Mr. F. Briess, who is her lawful representative, the right of management of this house and frees him of the obligation to account for the returns of this building.

Mr. Frank Briess accepts the management without obligation to account, which has been granted to him until revoked.

4. Mrs. Alice Briess brought into the marriage besides personal clothing, linen, underwear, furs, jewellery, also lots of gold and silverware, bedding, furniture & furnishings as well as other household utensils and gadgets of all kinds. All these items as well as wedding gifts and other gifts which Mrs. Alice Briess has received are being explicitly recognised as Mrs. Briess' property.

Mrs. Briess declares this connection explicitly that she does not give Mr. Frank Briess any rights to these items.

5. Mr. Frank Briess declares his particular agreement that these property rights of his wife Mrs. Alice Briess.....etc.



Wedding 6th June 1937, Brno: Marta Löwy, Fredi Briess, Lizzie and Franz, Otto Stransky (Stratton)



Wedding Photo 6 June 1937

... n. kornen Spinnen, 12 Körn
 gemahlene Haselnüsse nach Belie
 1/10 Bismut in den gesponnenen Zin
 Dann teilt man die leichte Hälfte
 füllt es mit obiger Masse. Glasur:
 Zucker, weißes auf Spinnen. Dann
 einen kalten, warmen Teller so lange pühen. Kochen lassen, bis
 bis es fest u. weiss wird.

(*) 12 dng Euterzie Judianerkräften.
 10 dng Zucker mit 6 Eidotter verrühren
 6 Ei Schnee u. langsam 17 dng hehl
 gen. Dann in beschmierte Form han
 wackler auskühlen u. auf einen kühl
 neuen Platz trocknen lassen. Chokolade

Jasminyseln.
 11 Ei Schnee, 21 dng Zucker, 21 dng geriebe
 nüsse, 7 dng halbierte Haselnüsse, 5 dng geschm

12 II 39
 18-19
 50
 50
 von
 Frant. Brics
 Olomouc
 Wellnerova 21
 0117



Wellnerova 21, Olomouc, Family Home built 1937

gut attraktiv, 1 Votter

mit Pfeffer (sogenannt).

Kugelhopp mit Erdäpfelmehl.

4 H Zucker, 6 Dotter werden abgetrennt
im Komman eine Citrone Saft mit
la, 14 H Fettgalmehl mit von dem
es Zehn Tz. Das ist das Grund
Zug Man kann ein Löffel gewin

Leaving home 13 March 1939

Family life in Czechoslovakia became overshadowed by the growing threat posed by the rise of Nazi power in Germany. This grew worse from the Anschluss (joining) with Austria in March 1938, followed a few months later by Kristallnacht: night of the Broken Glass 9th November 1938, when Jews all over Austria and Germany were beaten, humiliated and incarcerated and their shops and business were defaced. Lizzie and Franz began to consider a place to take refuge. On a trip early in the new year to London, they could see the situation objectively. War was inevitable. Finally they departed from their home on 13th March 1939 leaving by train for London, just two days before the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia. They desperately tried to organise their affairs at the eleventh hour.

In London for six months, Franz became Frank, attained a business qualification and he and Lizzie both went to English classes. They lived in an apartment building at 89 Brondesbury Villas, London NW6 where their rent was discounted as Frank was able to act as a caretaker. Three times they applied to the New Zealand government for permission to immigrate to New Zealand and on the third attempt they were successful, two of only about 1100 Jewish refugees allowed entry at that time. After two failed objections the last attempt was made through Samuel Landman, Solicitor in London who wrote to Mr Harry Cane of the NZ Jewish Welfare Society in Wellington on 12th May 1939:

“Re: Mr and Mrs F Briess

.....I have had a call from Mr and Mrs Briess today

You will observe that in my last letter I confirmed that they are able to deposit £1500 with the High Commissioner for New Zealand in London if permit is granted. These people are first-class people, young, energetic and honourable and I have no hesitation in recommending them very warmly to you and I shall be greatly obliged if you will secure a revision of the decision and hope you will let me hear soon that the permit has been granted.”

Further my parents wrote a week later to Harry Cane Esq, a letter which surely must have been written for them with their limited command of English at that time.

“Dear Sir,

Re: Permit to enter New Zealand

With best thanks I beg to acknowledge receipt of your kind letter of 26th ultimo and thank you also very much for the trouble you have taken over our case. In the meantime you will have received a letter with a reference about us from Mr Samuel Landman, solicitor, London and ask you to send this reference to the Minister of Customs. I shall send you another reference from the well known rabbi of London Mr Harold Reinhardt, at the beginning of next week. We trust it will be in your power to use your influence on our behalf and to do everything you can for us. Rendering you our best thanks for past favours we beg to solicit your further support. We remain, Your respectfully;”...

They sailed from Southampton on 1st September 1939 without being able to reach their families in Czechoslovakia to say goodbye and on the second day at sea the outbreak of war was announced. Full of anticipation and anxiety as they left Europe, they passed the weeks at sea getting to know fellow passengers and Lizzie doing some manicuring for other women passengers.

THE LETTERS

Leaving England

From the time they left Europe, they typed letters home on Lizzie's little portable typewriter, keeping carbon copies as a diary. They were of course, written in German. I have translated the letters, believing that this record of their journey and early years in a new country at the other end of the world would be lost to future generations if I did not. They signed the letters "Fralis", an amalgam of both of their names. I have included excerpts from their time on the farm as they give a vivid description of the highs, the lows, the new experiences, giving detailed accounts of their farming life. Hitler had invaded Poland on 1st September. France and Britain finally declared war two days later. They had had two lucky escapes – the first from Olomouc, two days before the Germans invaded and the second from England just before war was declared. The first letter was dated 6th September 1939.

"On board ship – the Akaroa
6 September 1939

We have been on board now for six days and feel really good. The first few days we were seasick as the boat rocked quite a bit, but today the sea is quieter and we're getting used to it. The ship is 15,000 tons, carrying 200 passengers. On board almost all English, Australians and New Zealanders. People are generally very nice, friendly and approachable. We will be celebrating Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur on board ship for the first time in our lives.....

I'm giving bridge lessons daily and receive English lessons in return. My partner is a New Zealand farmer's wife. She is an intelligent student.....

On Friday they had the usual fancy dress party on board. It was wonderful, but we weren't dressed up, though most people were. We couldn't imagine that English people would be so pleasant and gay. We must say, we've had wonderful experiences. We finished up by going to the Captain's cabin with 13 other people. It was really great fun and we forgot our troubles. Altogether it was like one big family. We are pleased that we are not treated as intruders, rather as equals. Perhaps we are a little interesting, everyone asks questions about our homeland. People only have a vague idea."

9 October 1939

"We just had 2 days of terrible storm but we weren't seasick at all. The waves were as high as a house, the ship, despite its great size was tossed around like a rocking horse. Today on the 9th October, we arrived at our destination, happy and excited and I am writing this letter from the hotel room. I cannot tell you how happy we are to have arrived".

What work were they to do? With some English and no knowledge of the New Zealand business world, their options were limited. Lizzie, with 4/5ths of a medical degree would have had to go to Dunedin to study for a further two years at least before she could qualify and that was out of the question. They decided to try farming and by New Year's Day 1940 they were on their own farm in Royal Road Massey, ready for haymaking, with no experience of farming whatsoever.

W. SAVILL & ALBION COMPANY, LIMITED

Cabin ticket to New Zealand
 British Steamship AKAROA of 15,128 Tons Register, to embark Passengers at the Port
 of SOUTHAMPTON. for NEW ZEALAND. on or about the
1st day of September 1939.

| NAMES. | No. of Persons. | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| | Adults above 12 Years. | Children 12 Years and under. |
| <i>Mr J. Briess</i> | 1 | — |
| <i>Mrs do</i> | 1 | — |
| _____ | | |
| _____ | | |
| _____ | | |
| _____ | | |
| _____ | | |
| _____ | | |
| Total No. of Persons ... | | 2 |

In consideration of the sum of £ 154 : of which £ 154 : as part/full

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as
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th
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No. OZ. 98 SURNAME BRIESS Alice
 CHRISTIAN NAME
 ENGLISH ADDRESS 89 Brondesbury Villa, N.W.6
 HOME ADDRESS Olodono NATIONALITY Czech
 DATE OF BIRTH 8.7.12 PROFESSION hairdresser
 GUARANTOR - NAME and ADDRESS _____
 ARRIVAL DATE 12.3.39
 LEFT U.K. FOR _____
 DATE _____

CROSS REFERENCE
 husband Cz. 97



or person
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 ad is not l
 and Passengers are
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325° for $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours

Gleichgewichtskuchen (Kernma)

$\frac{1}{2}$ Eier, $\frac{1}{4}$ Eier schweres Mehl ^{Holz} Butter ^{zerlassene} Zucker.
Butter u. Zucker gut rühren ein volles
nach dem andern dazugeben, wenn Schlem
Mehl u. festen Schnee. Mit Kirschen belegen

Orangentorte (Kernma)

$\frac{1}{2}$ Zucker, 4 Eier, $\frac{1}{4}$ Mehl, 1 Orange.

Zucker u. Eier schaumig rühren, Saft der Orange
u. Schale geben dazu. Mehl u. Schnee ^{leicht} hinein
rühren. Form mit Butter ausstreuen, Papier
darauf u. das auch mit Butter einstreuen
Durchschneiden u. mit Orangensaft oder

N.Z. JEWISH WELFARE SOCIETY
(WELLINGTON BRANCH)

HON. SECRETARY:
HARRY CANE.

hr 29/4/1939

39 FARISH STREET,
WELLINGTON, C.I.

HC/MK.

26th. April, 1939.

Mr. F. Briess,
C/- Dr. Joseph Berger,
10 Old Court Mansions,
LONDON. W.8.,
ENGLAND.

Dear Sir,

Miss Van Staveren has handed over your letter to us, dated the 20th. March, 1939.

As no doubt you are aware, Immigration is strictly controlled and out of hundreds who apply for Permits to enter New Zealand, very few are granted.

We regret that your application was refused, but you can write and ask the Minister to review your case.

If possible send references from someone prominent in London and stress the fact that you are both very young, and that you are prepared to deposit £1,500.0.0. with the High Commissioner of New Zealand in London if a permit would be granted.

Send copies of all the letters and documents to us that you forward to the Minister and we will support your application at this end, but please understand that if the Minister refuses again to grant your Permit we are powerless and helpless in the matter.

With best wishes,

Yours faithfully,

H. Cane

Hon. Secretary.

"Late October 1939

So much is happening. Luckily on Monday we found accommodation through the paper, a lovely place. There are a few brick houses here, most are built of hard wood and very comfortable. They are called bungalows. What strikes you most here, is the vegetation. You see beautiful palm trees, like in Italy, lemon trees line the streets. There are the most beautiful flowers in well-tended borders. We have a view on three sides to the sea. Anyone who wants can find work - that's the most important thing in a country. Everyone here is content and that makes us approach the future in a positive frame of mind. You can't believe how difficult it is for anyone to get into a country like this...You always have to have something in the house because people visit continuously.

Of course the whole farm undertaking is a colossal change - but when you see that former furriers, wholesalers and other people adapt to the different circumstances, then it doesn't seem so impossible...the agent takes us everywhere by car around the countryside looking for farms. The district is really uniquely beautiful, everything exceptionally well cared for, unlike anything we know at home. We are often open-mouthed, eyes on stalks!"



Those first few months were tough! Their letters show vividly their delight in the outdoor life and coming to terms with a new lifestyle, intermingled with their worries about their parents, siblings and other relatives left behind. At the same time the farm was close enough to Auckland that they could make the trip in their Morris 12 car for weekly shopping and friends could visit on weekends. Lizzie and Frank spent 10 days on the farm of their friends the Furst family to learn the ropes before moving to their own newly purchased farm property. Taking over their farm at new year they were just in time for haymaking, thrown in at the deep end. They were happy to find that local farmers banded together, all working on each of their farms in turn. Although life had its challenges they were small challenges and they had very helpful, friendly neighbours. On weekends friends, fellow emigres came from "town" bringing food and helping clean up before leaving. It wasn't quite the same as having maids and cooks in the house as they had had at home in Czechoslovakia. As former "townies" they had to learn a completely different lifestyle. They loved working with the animals and the physical work of being in the outdoors. Lizzie helped Frank with the milking, although she suffered greatly from an eczema caused by the milk. She attended to the household chores, cooking, mending and cleaning. Lizzie commented in one letter dated

"10th January 1940

We come in from milking at 8 o'clock, then I have to get breakfast, clean up, cook lunch, do the mending, washing and other housework. In the evening we milk again then eat dinner and go to sleep. The farm is wonderfully situated. From the milkshed we can see the water and every ship that arrives and hopefully brings mail for us. In the evenings we see the city lights. It looks like it does in Fiume, when you look over from Abbazia".

Letters from family in Czechoslovakia were few and far between. Lizzie refers to a letter of 10th October 1939 and another 2nd December from home. On 17th January 1940 they were advised that it was no longer possible to correspond with enemy countries, so from then until America joined the war they sent letters via Frank's sister Marianne and her husband Otto Stransky, in New York, who then forwarded them on to Czechoslovakia. They worried constantly about what was happening in Europe. Letters from home contained ominous comments such as 'Mrs Aufrecht's father has disappeared in Poland', a portend of what became clear at the end of the war. Lizzie described their get together at New Year:

" We were at a party, all friends. It was very nice. At midnight we thought of you and that hopefully next year we can celebrate in joy together. Of course everyone was reflective and we were all thinking of our families".

In a letter of 21 January 1940 Lizzie reported that

"there are about 3,000 Jews in the country, perhaps 400-500 in Auckland. Auckland and a number of other cities all have Jewish mayors. The prospects of the country are good. The country is developing and there is no prejudice against immigrants generally speaking. The neighbour is especially kind and brings us some of their vegetables, fruit, small gifts and tokens. He is especially considerate as he knows we are amateurs so he helps us with the milking and is generally more on our farm than on his own."



"22 February 1940

We have all we could wish for. Once a week we go to Auckland to attend to shopping. We have a little car that we need to get around the farm (Morris 12) and for going to the various markets to buy cattle, wood and other important things, radio, frig. All this sounds as if we were bragging. Of course we buy everything second hand. We are having our furniture made from the pictures I still have of the furniture at home, only adapted to our circumstances here. Next week it should be ready...as you can see we have settled in. We don't mind the work, the main thing is that we can achieve something. Never do we regret having left and we hope that we never get to the stage where we regret it. We like farm life very much".

"21 April 1940 (to Stranskys in the America)

Today I want to tell you about our finances. We bought the farm for £3,425 of which we paid £1800 deposit and the rest was left in by way of mortgage by the previous owner for 10 years. We have to pay £50 per year off the principal and besides this, 4 ½% interest. You can calculate that each cow will produce £15 per year so that if we milk 40 cows next season they will produce £600. Add to that about £150-\$200 income from the pigs, we'll have a gross income of about £750-800. Of that \$135 goes in mortgage principal, about £100 for living costs, insurance £60, tax £50, electric power, water, telephone £50, various sundry outgoings £50 so that unless there are unexpected urgent expenses we should have about £300 per year over (hopefully)"



"21 April 1940 (Lizzie to her mother Marta)

Today it's Saturday and as we have no visitors I want to gossip a bit with you. Where shall I begin? ...How I wish I were here with you. Hopefully next year it will be different. We don't do anything without taking advice and generally people give honest advice. ...June will be our quietest month. Then I will have my hair permed, we'll go to town more often and enjoy ourselves. This week we went to the pictures for the first time in 8 months! Greta Garbo was playing in "Ninotschka" and we loved it! ...One thing we don't have here is theatre but we don't miss it, as they have the best and latest films. On the radio there is always dance music on one station or another and I have it on all day...In the afternoon I always sit for a while and sew or go to a friend's on a farm close by for a chat. Shortly I will join a library so I can read some books"

[Alien's Copy.]

3008A 7-2-70 (Form No. 1)

Certificate of Registration of Alien. No. 1979

NAME: WILLIAM J. WILSON SEX: M RACE: WHITE

Place of birth: Waverly, Mo. Present nationality: USA

Date of application for registration: 10/10/52 Place of application: AMERICAN

Date of issue of certificate of registration: 9/10/52 Place of issue of certificate of registration: AMERICAN

Signature of holder: WILLIAM J. WILSON Signature of Registrar: [Signature]

Department of Registrar: INS. ST. LOUIS

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION OF ALIEN.

Sex: M Date of birth: 8.7.1914 Place of birth: ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI



"2 May 1940

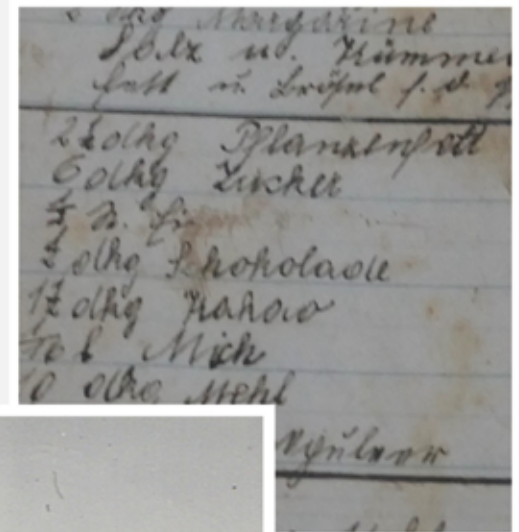
Yesterday was a momentous day for us. We got a collie who is like our Barry, so that's what we called him. He is 5 months old and grown already; he's a pedigree. A farmer advertised him and I replied. Barry is lying next to me now, snoring like his master...our sow is a Canadian Berkshire, a much sought after breed here and we got her cheap. I have a lot of fun with the pigs altogether and each feeding time they provide us with some new entertainment. When the pigs are hungry they start to knock, that is, they lift up their trough and let it fall on the wooden floor of the sty. If I come to feed them at the usual time, they kick up a fearful racket and if I give them the skim milk, which is at present mixed with molasses, bran and meat meal because there's not enough milk, and pour it into the spout of the trough, the pigs get up and let the food run into their mouths and fight each other so that they are a delight to watch. When they are full, you don't know if they are rounder than they are long or vice versa. With our four breeding sows, Piggie, Percy, Poggie and the latest addition Greedy, the situation looks good. The first three have already got beautiful tummies and hopefully we'll have big litters in July."

"6 May 1940

You mustn't be surprised that I'm so tired from the physical work, but imagine that we had had only 12 days' experience on a farm before and suddenly landed in the middle of the whole farming operation, 50 quadrameters of grass to cut, turn over several times, make into heaps, collect the heaps together and build three huge haystacks, sew the covers out of sacks, enclose the haystacks and all as quickly as possible so that it wouldn't get wet; that's a lot of work. As well as this to milk the cows twice a day when we hadn't yet learned to do it well, to do all the various daily chores when we were not used to hard physical work. We are now the same weight as we were when we got married and feel very good for it as we have got used to the work. As before, our neighbour is extraordinarily kind and helpful."

"11 May 1940

....also we have a telephone now. Our signal is long, short, long. We're sharing the line with nine other people - it's so much cheaper. ...we're going to buy still more pigs, not because the earnings are greater but mainly to produce as much as possible to increase exports to England to support the war effort to defeat the bloodhound who brought so much misfortune to the human race."







"18 May 1940

My dearest, for the last few days I've been preparing a letter for you in my thoughts. I always speak to myself in my mind. When I read your letter and see that you still have no news of me I'm very sad. I can imagine how discouraged you must be. When I write to you like this I could compose a love letter. I feel so strongly as if I'm speaking to you when I am writing that it couldn't be any different if you were sitting in the room with me....

The kitchen is very roomy. It's painted olive green and beige. I cook daily, meat, fruit or vegetables, potatoes and dessert. Sometimes I bake a cake which lasts for two days. Omlettes, Kaiserscharren, pancakes, apple dumplings. Besides I can make a wonderful butter dough similar to Frau Fischkus' except with water and vinegar because rum is too dear. Although I won't be as good a cook as you for a long time, I surprise myself at how well I get on and how good the results are. I seldom make soups - only when we have beef....I have a trolley, which is very important here as I have no help. I put everything on the trolley in the kitchen and then wheel it in. Then we have quite a large radio with which we can listen to the rest of the world. This radio is a big box about 1 1/2 metres high and 3/4 metres wide and it stands directly on the floor. It is a really beautiful piece of furniture. In the bedroom, as well as the wide bed, I have a vanity where I can do my hair and put on makeup."

"5 July 1940

...I am reminded that I have a birthday in a few days' time and I can't believe that I'm 28 years old already. How time flies!...When I consider what we experienced in the year since I spoke to you last birthday from London and see how far we have come; that first year was definitely the most strenuous - the beginning is the most difficult. Today the way ahead seems clear. We're really happy and live very well".

In December Lizzie wrote about being tired and taking it easy, from which I assume she was pregnant, but reading between the lines of the letters following, I gather there was a miscarriage in early 1941, which must have disappointed her terribly. There is no letter explicitly saying that she was pregnant, nor any following letter announcing a miscarriage.



mit Rasenfeld (eingegraben).

Kugelhops mit Erdäpfelmehl.

14 H Zucker, 6 Dotter werden abgetrieben

am Morgen mit Citronen

14 H Fettigkeitsmaß

Das Rezept ist

Man kann nur



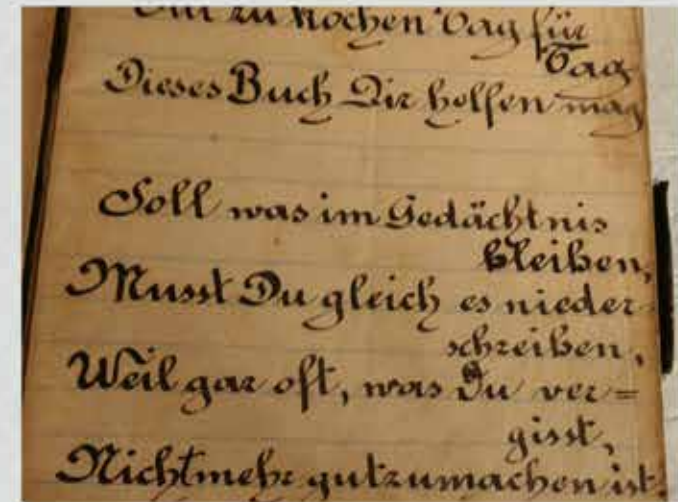
Friends came from town on weekends

3 February 1941

Lizzie wrote... "I'm very proud of my first lot of salted gherkins. They turned out well. This week I'll do 100 more and I'll also do two dozen mustard gherkins. They keep longer. As well as these, I bottled two dozen mustard gherkins. Also, I bottled 20 jars of plums. As you can see, I'm taking good care of our stomachs. I enjoy it and am very proud when things come out well. Of course I've also got plum jam".

Frank wrote... "the pigs require a lot of maintenance and you can spend hours observing them and laughing at them. Recently another sow was due to give birth. She didn't do too well last time - she smothered 3 little ones, so I locked her in the sty so she would have her babies there. It was so funny and she brought eight raven black little piglets into the world, none bigger than 15 cms. Today they are five weeks old and thriving. Because it was very hot in the sty at that time I wanted to make her feel more comfortable and went down with a bucket of water to tip over her to cool her down. She came right away as she usually does so I can give her a scratch. I tipped some water over her head, upon which she thanked me with a deep "uff, uff". What does she do then? She turns around, showing me her backside so I could cool off that end. But that wasn't all. After that she lay down on her back, stretched out all four legs and showed that she wanted her tummy doused too. I nearly wet my pants laughing... The two sows who were to give birth next, I let them do it in the open because it was too hot in the sty. I sat in the heat for two hours with one sow, to supervise the birth and eventually to help. Every time a little one slipped out, the sow stood up, had a pee, lay down and the next one came. Our neighbour, who happened to be passing, remarked shortly "oiling for the next". The last born was a bit big and she had problems so I helped and brought it out slowly and gently. So on New Year's Day we had 13 little piglets from the two sows. Hopefully that means pork!

...yesterday we got rid of our bull which as you know we'd only hired. To the farewell he wore the ring through his nose and a heavy chain through it that I gave him as whenever there was a cow on heat in the neighbourhood he leaped elegantly over the 1 1/2 m high fence".



To cook well from day to day,
This book may help you.
If you remember something
You need to write it down immediately
Or you will never be able to cook it.





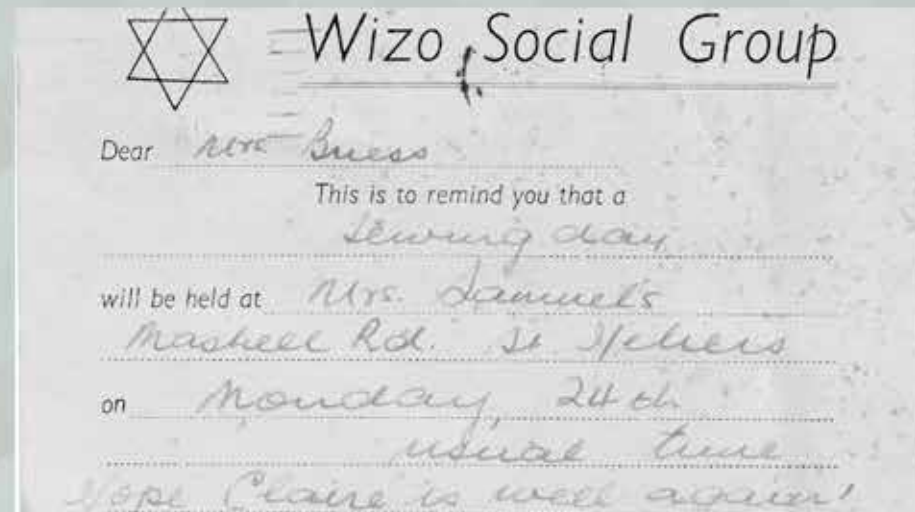
Frank, ? Lizzie, Ann Barnett, ?, Franci Kessler? Otto Altman
Front row: John Hess centre



Wizo women 1944?
Back row left: Flora Aufricht, Sally (Leisl) Hift, Ilse Stein, Don't know, Mrs Laskowitz, Don't Know.(2)
Front row: Left Lisa Huber, Don't know, Lizzie



Cover Granny Adi's recipe book



WIZO Womens Israel Zionist organisation was formed to support women and children in the new state of Israel.



Sometime in 1941

Lizzie: "I don't know if I already wrote and told you that I intend to make vegetable salad and sell it, with sauerkraut and cottage cheese. Of course I'll have to see if it would sell. These things taste differently to what people here are used to. Tomorrow I'm taking the first delivery to town. They sell the sauerkraut here in the best shops. It used to be imported from Palestine and Canada.....it's amazing how many of our people here supplement their income by making things at home to sell. Gloves, belts, artificial flowers, sweets, necklaces and more – there's quite a good market for all these things".

Early January 1942

Frank "...Then at New Year putting it mildly, we received the polite but strongly worded advice that we should sell the farm. You can imagine that it hit us like a bombshell. I can't repeat the exact state of affairs until we've won the war. I saw all our hard work of the past two years, with all the effort, love, enthusiasm and interest that went into building our existence, fall down altogether like a house of cards. Today we've already come to terms with the standard often repeated, New Zealand expression "Don't worry, she'll be right". So we went like good, obedient children to list our farm with various Land Agents for sale. ...We'll head for Auckland and start up with something new."

Lizzie and Frank moved into Auckland city and Frank was "manpowered" by the government into working at the Westfield Freezing Works. He joined the 180,000 New Zealand men designated to work in essential industries during the war years. While there he carried out fire watching duty under the EPS – the Emergency Precautions Service (civil defence). This lasted until late 1942. Although Frank had volunteered for the NZ Armed Forces, permission was refused, as was the experience of most of the refugees. There was sporadic news of deportations of Jews in Nazi occupied countries during the war years but little understanding of what this meant.

Sometime after September 1942 Lizzie suffered a second miscarriage in the fifth month of pregnancy. This, as well as their having to leave the farm was a double blow. Once they were in town she began taking in outwork in felt and leather like many of the émigré women. This was paid per piece completed. The women often did this together in each others' homes. During this time Lizzie and Frank belonged to the Czech Club and organised small fundraisers ("bring and buys") with profits sent to the Czech Red Cross.



First holiday in two years



... eine tiefe Schüssel 32 L...
... da...
... von 8 Kle...
... Schokl. le...
... damit f...
... eiden, bee...



... 8 Eiern, weicht
... Mandeln
... 60g Mehl.
... eise Rehrück...
... in Schaben

Bischopsbrot

... gut Helene
... schwer Zucker mit 4 Eiern abreiben, 3 Eier schwer Mehl
... Schmel dazu, Rosinen, Kürbis, Nüsse, Schokolade, Orangenzelke

Kirschen oder Nusskugeln

... 32 entkernte Kirschen in einer Mischung von Rum
... Cognac 2 Std liegen lassen, 30g Nüsse od. Mandeln
... Staubzucker, 2 ganze Eier gut durcharbeiten, Kugeln for...
... einer Kirsche füllen, dann in geriebene Schokol. roll...

22 September 1942

Lizzie "Not much news from us. Franz is still working in the factory and earns good money. Certainly, life, particularly in the city is very expensive and you can't save anything. It'll be a good year before we have our heads above water. With hesitation I want to tell you that we're expecting a baby again in April. We're both very happy about it, worried of course, like children who've already had their fingers burned, although the doctor assures us that there's no need to worry. So we hope for the best. Franz does everything, the washing, cleans and looks after me when I don't feel well.....for a short time I did outwork and made a little pocket money."

The Centreway Grill

By early March 1943 Frank and Lizzie bought shares in a restaurant at 268a Queen St in Auckland called "the Centreway Grill Room" where they worked as managers. Lizzie was the hostess/front of house and Frank was the manager. They worked there with another couple and the clientele was made up of the US armed forces stationed in the Pacific. Between 1942 and 1944 around 100,000 American troops were stationed in New Zealand, mainly in Auckland and Wellington. American soldiers brought a sense of glamour to the New Zealand restaurant scene. Lizzie and Frank made many friends amongst the young soldiers, providing a home away from home atmosphere and a listening ear. Christmas cards came from some of these friendships right up to the 1980s.

Karangahape Rd

On 21st August 1944 Frank took over two businesses known as MacSims Meat Centre at 84 and 85 Karangahape Rd, for a cost of £3,500. The company owned two delivery vans and a car. The businesses grew and an old butcher shop premises at 536 Karangahape Rd on the Gundry Street corner, was acquired and renovated. Lizzie was the cashier in the shops and supported every venture of Frank's, planned and shared in the evenings over the kitchen table.

Canning of meat began in New Zealand in 1934 when James Wattie established a pulping and canning business in Hastings. In the late 1940s Frank's business began canning meat, mainly ham. These cans were sent to the UK where wartime rationing continued until 1953. They were sent to the distribution company in the UK set up by Frank's cousin Hans Briess with whom he had worked in the family company in Czechoslovakia in the prewar years. My cousin Peter, Hans's son, then a child, recalls teething troubles in the form of blown tins arriving in England. Perhaps this was the beginning of Frank's foray into the study of food technology.

At that time the Newton area in Auckland was populated by Maori and Pacific Islanders and the suburb became a ready employment pool for Frank and Lizzie's Newton Meat Company Ltd and Metzlers Sausage Company Ltd on Karangahape Road. European sausage makers including Mr Metzler were employed and frankfurters, cabanos, salamis and other continental meats were sold alongside the butchery business. At the same time as developing his businesses Frank studied Food Technology which was fast becoming a new field of innovation.

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|
| Subšková Gertruda | |
| Dated date: 30.3.1903 | |
| Address: Brno, Štefánikova 50 | |
| 1. transport | 2. transport |
| date: 31. III. 1942 | date: 25.9.1942 |

Meanwhile, in occupied Czechoslovakia.....many family members were deported to concentration camps.

| | |
|---|--|
| USTREDNI KARTOTEKA — TRANSPORTY. | |
| Dated date de transport à destination: <i>Lachy Antonie</i> | |
| Dated date: <i>30.11.1941</i> | |
| Address: <i>Er</i> | |
| Dated date: <i>12.1.1942</i> | |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| USTREDNI KARTOTEKA — TRANSPORTY. | |
| No. 67342 | |
| Dated date: 26.11.1938 | |
| Address: <i>Papoušek Smlouva 312</i> | |
| 1. transport | 2. transport |
| date: <i>28. XII. 50</i> | date: <i>27.1.1943</i> |
| Address: <i>Osvětim</i> | |
| No. 52412 | |
| Dated date: <i>Lový Mária</i> | |
| Dated date: <i>2. 4. 1884</i> | |
| Address: <i>Nová Paka</i> | |
| 1. transport | 2. transport |
| date: <i>9. 6. 1943</i> | date: <i>28.1</i> |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |
| Date: <i>21.</i> | |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| USTREDNI KARTOTEKA — TRANSPORTY. | |
| No. 15247 | |
| Dated date: <i>2. 12. 1884</i> | |
| Address: <i>Small Lendach</i> | |
| Dated date: <i>2. 12. 1884</i> | |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |
| Date: <i>2. 12. 1884</i> | |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| USTREDNI KARTOTEKA — TRANSPORTY. | |
| No. 85 | |
| Dated date: <i>10. 8. 1885</i> | |
| Address: <i>Václav Vítězslav n. 72</i> | |
| 1. transport | 2. transport |
| date: <i>17. XII. 1942</i> | date: <i>19. 11. 42</i> |
| Address: <i>Ch</i> | |
| Date: <i>23. 11. 42</i> | |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |

| | |
|--|-------------------------|
| USTREDNI KARTOTEKA — TRANSPORTY. | |
| No. 82765 | |
| Dated date: <i>10. 8. 1885</i> | |
| Address: <i>Václav Vítězslav n. 72</i> | |
| 1. transport | 2. transport |
| date: <i>17. XII. 1942</i> | date: <i>19. 11. 42</i> |
| Address: <i>Ch</i> | |
| Date: <i>23. 11. 42</i> | |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| USTREDNI KARTOTEKA — TRANSPORTY. | |
| No. 119867 | |
| Dated date: <i>31. 10. 1897</i> | |
| Address: <i>Walf Alina</i> | |
| Address: <i>Walf Mexerice</i> | |
| Date: <i>1897</i> | |
| Address: <i>SV</i> | |

Copy in conformity with the ITS

Jews had to file lists of assets before deportation in every country where the Nazis took over. Then the Nazis began systematically transferring the assets to the Gestapo....Real Estate, Bank Accounts and so on.....This is an extract from the Olomouc list

| Name | Liegen- schaften | Bargeld | Bank- guthaben | Forderungen |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|
| J. Waldspicli | 525.000. | 52.720.- | 1,822.720.- | 417.770.- |
| Borger Paula, G. Bahnhofsstr. 8 | | 400.- | 10.000.- | |
| Borger Rosa, G. " " | | 500.- | 57.870.- | |
| Braud Eman. Bielkowitz 9 | | 700.- | | |
| Braud Regina, G. Edisong. 5 | | 600.- | 17.130.- | |
| Braun Tola, G. Hafelfeldg. 4 | | | 341.800.- | |
| Braun Josefa, G. Augasse 9 | | 500.- | | |
| Braun Julius, G. Hafelfeldg. 4 | | 500.- | 534.500.- | 90.600.- |
| Braun Salomon, G. Augasse 9 | | 100.- | | |
| Breitbarth Max, Holitz | 40.000.- | 2357.- | 60.720.- | |
| Breitenfeld Kamilla | | | | |
| Brenner Ludw. G. Vltav. 9 | | | | |
| Břestová Luise, G. Mannsg. 22 | | | | |
| Brief Felix, G. Sporerg. 4 | | | | |
| Brief Marie, G. " " | | 100.- | 4.300.- | |
| Brief Dr. Otto, H. 2. | | | | |
| Brief Vera, G. " " | | | | |
| Briess Adele, G. H. 15/16/11 | | 450.- | 45.500.- | 50.000.- |
| Briess Hedwig, G. Andreassg. 7 | | 800.- | | 67640.- |

POST WAR YEARS

In 1945 news of the deportations, murders and fate of the Jews left in Europe began to filter through to the rest of the world. Most of their large extended family were no more. Frank's mother Rosa Schimmerling had died in 1921 and grandfather Siegfried had remarried Adele Fried who had been the children's governess. Granny Adi Briess, Frank's step mother was liberated from Theresienstadt Concentration camp in May 1945. She spent several weeks regaining her health and slowly the mail started to come back and forth. In Olomouc Adi lived in the top of three apartments in the villa at Wellnerova 21 which Siegfried had built in 1937. During the war the villa had been confiscated by the Nazis and was occupied by a German officer. Adi and Siegfried had been forced to vacate their new home and go and live in the city centre where they had formerly lived in the building where the family business was located at 28 Rijna 11. They remained there until their deportation mid 1942. When she returned to Olomouc in 1945 Adi had to put up with much reduced circumstances.

A threeway exchange of letters began between Granny Adi in Olomouc, Marianne and Otto Stransky in New York and Frank and Lizzie in Auckland.

Granny Adi wrote to them:

"Finally we are allowed to write you what has changed. You certainly know that our dear father (Siegfried) died on 4th October 1942. I was with him until 6 and Fredi until half past 7 and he was speaking with the neighbour but in the morning he couldn't wake up. As his life was quiet and peaceful, so was his death and he just fell asleep.

Fredi treated us extraordinarily well. He protected me from all the transports otherwise I would have been on the way to Poland as all the others and I would have stayed there (and died in the death camps). Orlnike was also in Theresienstadt. We were always together and she was very nice to me. Trude, Ilse and Margitka came back. Uncle Rudolf died before our father in Theresienstadt."

"Once I was healthy I had only one wish and it was to see you all. The only single thing that makes me happy is that you are doing well. I was very content at Dr Berkas. (Dr Berka was the father of Fredi's wife Irene who looked after Adi for a while when she was recovering her health) I was there for five weeks and then three weeks at the home of one of my friends in Samotišky. Now I am living in Fredi's flat. Pazderovys are very nice to me (former caretakers). They cook for me.

"I don't have a flat yet. I can't do any better than where I am on my own. If only Fredi had been here, that would have been perfect. Who knows what happened to him? (He was taken to Auschwitz). Franta asked about Martha (Lizzie's mother). There is no news about her, which usually means that there is no use waiting for them any longer.

PERMIT TO ENTER NEW ZEALAND.

(Under the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act, 1920.)

Permission is hereby granted to Adela Briess
of Olomouc, Czechoslovakia to enter New Zealand, ~~unaccompanied~~

She may also
with "passport"
and by "R" and
green.

on the following conditions:—

(1) That this permit will not entitle the person or persons named herein to enter New Zealand after the expiry of two years from the date hereof.

(2) That this permit will be delivered up to the Collector of Customs at the first port of arrival in New Zealand.

(3) That ~~she~~ ^{she} certifies the Collector of Customs at the port of arrival that the particulars inserted hereunder concerning ~~herself~~ ^{herself} are correct.

(a) Full name: Adela Briess

(b) Sex: Female (c) Nationality: Czech

(d) Place and date of birth: Uhřetřez, Brdčitz 11th May, 1876

(e) Last place of permanent residence: Terezin Concentration Camp near Olomouc
Czechoslovakia

(f) Marital state: Widowed

(g) (i) Reasons for desiring to settle in New Zealand:

To join son, Mr. Frank Briess of Auckland.

(ii) Occupation or business to be undertaken in New Zealand:

(h) That the condition of mental and physical health of ~~herself~~ ^{herself} is good

~~and that she would accept of any such physical check as the passenger authorities~~
~~may require.~~

(i) The amount of money in English currency which is brought by ~~her~~ ^{her} to New Zealand is not less than:—

Photograph of the person to whom this permit is granted



(j) That ~~she~~ ^{she} is able to read and write fluently in the following language(s), namely:—

Czech, English, Russian and German

(k) That ~~she~~ ^{she} is a person of good character and reputation,

that ~~she~~ ^{she} has never been in prison or in a mental hospital or the recipient of charitable aid, and that

~~she~~ ^{she} is not a disaffected or dangerous person or one who advocates the overthrow by force or violence of constitutional Government.

Dated at Wellington, New Zealand, this 23rd

day of May

one thousand nine hundred and forty five

[Signature]
For Collector of Customs

Press No. 208

Please write to me and tell me everything about you and Franta, what are you doing, what kind of shop do you have, how big is Maricka? Georg came to see me, he also slept here. He is doing very well and so I have lots of news of the Stransky family (Otto's family). Hans (Briess, Frank's cousin in London) has already written to me."

An undated letter, probably mid 1945 to Granny Adi from Lizzie

"I certainly do not have to express what I feel about my poor mother. I know I won't see her again. My cousin in Cochabamba, Bolivia says that my mother and Tante Ada had to leave Tivoli 2, were forced to sell (I don't know to whom) and moved out of there. I never received a reply although I wrote Red Cross letters and they even were not returned. Do you know anything about my mother? What happened to her after we left? I have not heard from a single soul of my father's family either. Mrs Grete Fischer, who moved from Brno to Lhota Rapotín, aunt Hela Broll and her husband, Aunt Hermine and her three daughters. Neither have I heard of Alfred Wolf, Val Meziříčí, Grete Berg, Uh. Hradište, her husband and two children. Sery Reich or aunt Rudy Berger, wife of Josef Berger who committed suicide on 15th March 1939. I have looked through the few lists we could get here but not one name of my family was there. Again and again I am reading your letter. After so many years direct news again. I feel very grateful for it."

Adi responded philosophically "You don't need to worry so much about your loved ones. They had an easy death - this is what we feel now and they are at peace. Rather a bad end than a bad life without end. Have fun during your youth. Nobody can take that away from you. People here had a tough time during the war and a lot of our friends were locked up for over a year."

"Dr. Berka is looking after me and he is very nice. I am at his place every Saturday and then we have a bath. Since there is not enough coal, we don't heat here. I don't need any vitamins. Dr Bolek prescribes me everything I need. I look good again and I don't even want to believe how old I am. Hanus sent us small packets through soldiers. I can see how everything is difficult, I would be mad before I could have furniture, dishes etc, I can't do that alone."

"I had a good day today. I don't know if you remember Josefka but in the morning she brought me a little something from Leber's shop. Then there was that friend from Samotišky she brought me two eggs and apple pie and the third was Miss Krejzlikova who brought some milk and flour. Sometimes nobody comes for ages. Franz wrote them a telegraph that he will send them some clothes. Mr. Krejzlik died in Osvětim already in 1942. His boys are 18 and 16 years old."

"Are you asking where the kitchen is? On the toilet!! That's where the only socket is to power the electric cooker. Mrs. Pazderová cooks me lunches, she is very nice to me. I can see how Otto is laughing if he imagines where I cook but I like it. You don't have to worry about me, if I am healthy I can manage it. Dear Otto, thank you for all those kind letters. It is the best vitamin for me. Sorry that I write in Czech. I can read your English letters without troubles but I can't write in English. Irena was three weeks in Olomouc, she still lives in Prague and she is really nice and pretty as a doll. Her mother died one year ago. Dr. Berka is looking after me, he is a very nice person."

We have to admit to ourselves that those of our relatives who haven't returned yet will never come back. I have some stuff hidden at my friends but I didn't get back much. Some carpets and clothes but not much. I am sending lots of love".

3 October 1945

"Tomorrow it will be three years since our father died. He is doing well over there, no worries or troubles, he is doing better than we are doing here.

I do all the best I can so that I can be with you soon. Concerning my health I am doing better, you gave me energy. I am running on the stairs up and down, everything what I need to arrange I do because nobody else would do it instead.All my windows are broken. When it's raining I have to jump from one leak to the next to collect the water. That's funny isn't it? "

Lizzie reported from Auckland

"We both hope from the bottom of our hearts it won't be long before you enjoy it with us...About a year ago we started to build our house and in August 1945 we moved in. We have a picture taken of it and send it to you next time. It is built from timber and has a ground and first floor. Downstairs is the lounge, dining room, kitchen, laundry and hall, upstairs bedroom and a spare room, now being used as another living room or guestroom. Most of the furniture is built in, the floors are covered with felt. Help for the house is very hard to get here so I am looking after it myself. I have all electric appliances, like electric stove, lux (vacuum cleaner), washing machine, boiler for the washing, Frigidaire. We have got a large garden mostly in lawn at present but are growing our own vegetables, fruit, flowers. The house is situated on a little hill and has a gorgeous outlook to the sea. It can't be compared to anything we knew before as it is a typical "pacific ocean" scenery. The beach is only two minutes' walk".



1945 - 1947



28 June 1946

Adi "Thank you very very much for the parcel. Everything arrived in perfect order. The nightie is so lovely that I'm going to go to a ball in it! The neighbour thought it was an evening dress. There are lots of cherries this year. I think even the other fruit will be plentiful"

A month later she confirmed receipt of a parcel of tinned meat - beef, tripe, pork, ham, sausage, corned beef "a rare and lovely treat". She says she had returned to her some pieces of silver and some doilies. In July 1946 she reported that there are few ships available and it would probably be another year before she could join them in New Zealand. Finally on 7 October 1946 she wrote sending her best regards and love and "I kiss you and thank you again for everything you are doing for me. It's so wonderful to feel that somebody is concerned about me. I can hardly wait to be with you. See you soon".

The Stranskys also arrived in Auckland shortly after and became Otto, Marianne and Marietta Stratton. Granny Adi finally arrived in 1947 having flown via Brussels, London and New York. Adi wrote to Marianne in New York about what to bring with her to New Zealand from New York.

"Now to my special requests " I want some hair combs so my hair doesn't fly around so much in the wind. I can put my hat on when I go to town. I also want a basting feather, a goose feather. Bring some basting feathers for yourself because they are not available here and also bring your frying pan dear Marianne. You cook everything here without a lid and so everything is half dried out. So that's all".



Otto Stratton



Marietta



Marianne Stratton



A BABY - A NEW GENERATION

On 10th April 1947 the long awaited birth of a child occurred with my arrival. Claire Ginette, after months of resting and pampering, as it was thought that Lizzie's miscarriages had been due to the hard work on the farm. For the first 2-3 years of my life Lizzie had the help of a so called Karitane nurse and Lizzie dutifully breast fed every four hours like clockwork as was the custom at that time. Lizzie was always very proud of this. For the following few years Lizzie's life was focussed on my wellbeing, supporting Frank in his businesses and spending time with other immigrant women in the Jewish community, attending WIZO meetings and Jewish picnics. WIZO is an Israeli womens' organisation that promotes education and social services and an equal society for all. Many of the immigrant women had daughters the same age as me - Jana Hirst and Yvonne, Lilli Ziegler and Kitty, Nina Golding and Wendy, Ilse Stein and Veronica, Mancie Politzer and Eva. We were all only children and all daughters as well. The women had in common family left behind in Europe who had been deported by the Nazis and died in the camps of Eastern and Central Europe. Despite the joy of new birth and settling in a free, democratic country, most could not completely put behind them the immense losses of the past. Like ghosts their names sometimes cropped up in conversation, only for the chatter to move on after a brief, thoughtful pause.

The 1950s and 1960s

Some post war survivors found their way to New Zealand and one of them, Mancie Politzer became a lifelong friend of Lizzie's while her husband Andrew (Andy) became a partner in Premier Distributors and Manufacturers Ltd with Frank. The company imported fine food, small goods not previously available in New Zealand and played a big part in the delicatessen boom of the 1950s. Frank and Andy made it happen; Andy crossed the "T"s and dotted the "i"s while Frank dreamed big. They were a great team. Frank often helped prepare food platters for deli openings and spoke on radio, lectured and wrote articles for magazines - all helped sales for the business. The Politzers' daughter Eva became my friend. Robert Linton (formerly Lustgarten) from Vienna, a bachelor who also worked with Frank was a weekend fixture at Auckland Rd, usually for Saturday roast lunch. After the meal Frank would disappear to play tennis, leaving Lizzie and Robert sitting at the lunch table talking for hours. Robert had an interest in the Arts and he and Lizzie chatted about movies, books and music for many hours. He was a second father to me, always asking what I was doing and taking an interest in my school work, later reading my university history essays with critical attention. While Frank and Lizzie called me "Babbi", to Robert I was always "Clari" (Claree). He was generous and patient and when I came into the factory during work hours he would take me with him to do errands in K Rd. This always included a visit to the stationery shop where he would buy reading and activity books.





View down Auckland Rd from the new house 1946





Frank, Lizzie, Adi and Claire

Vanille Kipfel



6 kg Wehl, 6 kg geschälte
1 Lotter; ungeschme
Vanillezucker Sauchen

Esserln
Zucker an Hand dick

mit 7 kg Zucker

14 kg Mandeln gebrüht halt gerieben



zum Schneiden

2 1/2 kg 1 1/2 kg 2 1/2 kg

Naturalisation resumed in New Zealand in 1946 after the war. Most Jews had been stripped of their citizenship in Nazi occupied countries so they rushed to become citizens of their new home.



Skiing on Mt Ruapehu 1950s



[Extract from *New Zealand Gazette* No. 48, 21st August, 1947, page 1020]

Certificates of Naturalisation granted

Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 11th August, 1947.

It is hereby certified for public information that certificates of naturalisation, in accordance with the provisions of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens (New Zealand) Amendment Act 1946, have been granted to the women named and described hereunder.

W. E. PARRY, Minister of Internal Affairs.

| Name | Address | Country of Birth | Date of Certificate | Date of Birth of Applicant |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Aaron, Cecile | Wellington | U.S.S.R. | 8/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Alder, Marguerite Alice | Auckland | Germany | 2/5/47 | 8/5/47 |
| Alder, Nell | Auckland | Germany | 2/5/47 | 8/5/47 |
| Bach, Betty | Christchurch | Germany | 2/5/47 | 18/5/47 |
| Bach, Marie | Wellington | Poland | 18/5/47 | 18/5/47 |
| Bolton, Augusta Antonia | Wellington | Czechoslovakia | 28/4/47 | 1/5/47 |
| Bower, Irma | Wellington | Germany | 2/5/47 | 2/5/47 |
| Brace, Alice | Auckland | Czechoslovakia | 2/5/47 | 15/5/47 |
| Brace, Lily | Auckland | Austria | 2/5/47 | 28/5/47 |
| Burton, Vera | Wellington | Poland | 2/5/47 | 15/5/47 |
| Christensen, Leonie Lovie | Canterbury | Denmark | 2/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Cooper, Dora | Wellington | Poland | 8/5/47 | 15/5/47 |
| Cooper, Nina Dora | Auckland | Austria | 27/5/47 | 28/5/47 |
| Drozda, Minnie Marie | Wellington | Germany | 11/3/47 | 12/2/47 |
| Egig, Dorothy | Wellington | Poland | 14/5/47 | 19/5/47 |
| Evich, Jacar | Wellington | Poland | 22/5/47 | 28/5/47 |
| Faber, Eugenie | Wellington | Hungary | 8/5/47 | 24/5/47 |
| Fischer, Leopoldine | Auckland | Austria | 8/5/47 | 27/5/47 |
| Fischman, Eva | Auckland | Germany | 8/5/47 | 13/5/47 |
| Fischman, Irma | Auckland | Hungary | 8/5/47 | 18/5/47 |
| Fischer, Edith | Wellington | Austria | 28/4/47 | 1/5/47 |
| Fischer, Charlotte | Christchurch | Austria | 27/5/47 | 17/5/47 |
| Fischer, Olga | Wellington | Austria | 8/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Friedlander, Eva Helene Helene | Auckland | Germany | 8/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Fried, Cecile | Te Anau | Germany | 22/5/47 | 8/5/47 |
| Friedlander, Isabella Marie | Canterbury | Poland | 22/5/47 | 30/5/47 |
| Friedman, Eva | Auckland | Germany | 8/5/47 | 23/5/47 |
| Friedrich, Theres Margarete Edith | Canterbury | Germany | 21/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Fuchs, Johanna Dorothea | Wellington | Germany | 8/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Furt, Edith | Canterbury | Germany | 5/5/47 | 18/5/47 |
| Galdames, Emma | Wellington | Poland | 20/5/47 | 18/5/47 |
| Gali, Ida | Auckland | Austria | 14/5/47 | 10/5/47 |
| Gilman, Betty | Napier | Austria | 5/5/47 | 10/5/47 |
| Grothman, Fajga Hetnik | Christchurch | Poland | 12/5/47 | 10/5/47 |
| Grover, Maud | Auckland | Yugoslavia | 14/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Gura, Katharina | Wellington | Germany | 14/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Groisman, Herta | Wellington | Germany | 12/5/47 | 14/5/47 |
| Grover, Clara | Wellington | Hungary | 20/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Grover, Marianne | Auckland | Austria | 9/5/47 | 18/5/47 |
| Groisman, Herta | Christchurch | Germany | 12/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Haasen, Egid Katharine Lindholm | Canterbury | Poland | 20/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Haas, Ruth | Wellington | Poland | 12/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Hart, Frieda | Auckland | Poland | 12/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Heggen, Lene | Auckland | Germany | 8/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Hess, Lina | Lower Hutt | Poland | 12/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Hoyman, Bertha Deborah | Lower Hutt | Germany | 20/5/47 | 1/5/47 |
| Hilke, Elizabeth | Auckland | Germany | 8/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Hilke, Gertrude | Wellington | Czechoslovakia | 2/5/47 | 8/5/47 |
| Hoffmann, Christine Anna | Auckland | Germany | 8/5/47 | 27/5/47 |
| Hoffmann, Leonora Maria | Auckland | Austria | 4/5/47 | 12/5/47 |
| Hoffmann, Isabella | Canterbury | Czechoslovakia | 8/5/47 | 22/5/47 |
| Holmes, Edith | Auckland | Romania | 3/5/47 | 5/5/47 |
| Imou, Lorraine | Tasman | Poland | 8/5/47 | 20/5/47 |
| Jacoby, Hel Fannie | Wellington | Germany | 20/5/47 | 2/5/47 |
| Jacob, Marie | Christchurch | Hungary | 8/5/47 | 27/5/47 |
| Kahn, Joseph Marie | Wellington | Germany | 9/5/47 | 22/5/47 |
| Kaplan, Anny | Christchurch | Poland | 14/5/47 | 22/5/47 |
| Kendz, Louise | Wellington | Romania | 14/5/47 | 28/5/47 |
| Kessler, Sibille | Wellington | Poland | 14/5/47 | 19/4/47 |

* Certificates are issued in accordance with the European treaties of 1947.



1963 Frank, Claire with Eric, Eva and Ken





Our household was a secular Jewish one; Frank and Lizzie rarely attended synagogue other than at Yom Kippur when I, reluctantly, was taken by Lizzie to the Princes St synagogue. How I hated sitting outside during the Yizkor memorial service, feeling conspicuous and ignorant in the unfamiliar surroundings. However, for Lizzie it was the one time in the year when she went to synagogue to pray for the family who had died in the Holocaust, but particularly for her mother who had been deported to Theresienstadt in January 1942 and then to Piaski, Lublin on 23 April 1942 and had not been heard from again. She was 54 years old.

When Lizzie's niece, my cousin Marietta Stransky, (Stratton in New Zealand), born in 1932, arrived in Auckland in 1947 she sometimes looked after me, taught me French children's songs and occasionally came on holiday with our family. She accompanied us to Sydney in 1951 when Frank and Lizzie combined business with pleasure and visited their many European friends there and sometimes in New Zealand she came on beach holidays. The flight by seaplane to Sydney was a memorable experience, one of my earliest memories.

In 1952 Lizzie returned to Europe for the first time since the war, though not to Czechoslovakia (by now the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic - CSSR) which was inaccessible, being behind "the iron curtain". They travelled for some months with me in tow, held up in Honolulu as I became ill with tonsillitis. Leaving me aged six, in a Swiss boarding school in Gstaad, Switzerland for four months, as they continued to visit friends and family in Europe and the newly established State of Israel. About my experiences in the Gstaad boarding school, where no one spoke English, the less said the better.

During the 1950s and 60s Frank and Lizzie regularly went on business trips to Europe, the US, Australia and attended food fairs in Hannover, seeing surviving relatives in Milano, Vienna, London, New York and Los Angeles. Lizzie was a sounding board for all of Frank's ideas, sometimes giving practical advice when needed. Frank, the optimist, never gave up on an idea; he believed anything was possible.

In 1952 another part of our family relocated to Auckland. Eva Winton was my father's cousin. She arrived here with her husband Ken and son Eric, the only other member of the family of my generation. Eva had escaped Czechoslovakia on a kindertransport with her younger sister Anita. Their parents died in the camps and Frank's cousin Hans and his wife Else brought them up as their own. Eva trained as a milliner and had a shop in Symonds St. Anita also came to Auckland but left for Sydney some years later. By the 1980s all of the extended Winton family were living in Sydney.





Robert Linton with Claire at the Chateau Tongariro



Lizzie, Frank, Claire, Otto, Marianne, Eric Briess, Eva, Ken, Anita outside Stratton's Speight Rd flat



Ken Winton with Lizzie 1950s



**Eric Briess's visit 1965
Eric, Otto, Claire, Marianne, Frank, Marietta, Eva, Lizzie and dog Nicky**

... die ...
... mit 6 Eidotter veru...
... langsam ...
... 17 d... beh...

Winton family with Otto and Marianne, Frank, Lizzie and Anita



1/2 Stunde, dann 32 Dkg mit der Schale geriebene Mandeln
und von 8 klar Schnee, 8 Dkg Semmelbrösel 6 Dkg Mehl,
1 Tafel Schokol. leicht vermischen. Eine ausgestreute Rehr
form damit füllen, langsam backen. Erkalten in Scheib
schneiden, beiseiten mit Pistazien bestreuen.

xx

Bischofsbrot

4 Eier schwer Zucker mit 4 Eiern an
den Schnee dazu, Rosinen, Kürbis, Nüsse,

Kirschen oder Nusskugel

Ungefähr 32 entkernte Kirschen in ein
inot Cognac 2 Std liegen lassen. 30 D
15 Dkg Staubzucker, 2 ganze Eier gut da
mit je einer Kirsche füllen, dann in

Feine Mandelkipferl.



Transcribing books into braille for the blind

In the 1960s Lizzie learned how to transcribe books into braille for the blind. This was time consuming and exacting work which suited Lizzie as she could do it in her own time. She must have learned how to do the transcribing, however strangely, I have no recollection of her doing so. When she retired from this work she was acknowledged with a certificate of appreciation.

By the 1970s, Saturday afternoons saw the gathering of a mix of friends at our home at 36 Auckland Rd. Most of these people, immigrants and refugees like my parents, were not only holocaust survivors, but originated from the same places as my parents – from Vienna and from the cities of Czechoslovakia. Coffee and cake were served just as they had been in Europe on weekend afternoon gatherings.

Lizzie was always available when I came home from school and saw to it that I did the required 2-3 hours homework each night, hearing French and Latin vocab and checking essays. Frank was the Maths tutor, an uphill struggle for both parties! Lessons had begun early during the 1950s when Frank would bring home the shop takings from Friday night late trading. I helped to sort out the notes and coins before they were stored away in the safe for banking on Monday morning. On trips out of Auckland and holidaying, to pass the time, Frank posed mental arithmetic questions for hours of car travel at a stretch to keep me occupied.

1970s – onset of Parkinsons

At 52 Lizzie began to show the early signs of Parkinsons disease which plagued her for the next 21 years. At that time, patients were not told of their illnesses until the last possible moment. Parkinson's is a long-term degenerative disorder of the central nervous system that mainly affects the motor system. The symptoms usually emerge slowly, and as the disease worsens, non-motor symptoms become more common. The most obvious early symptoms are tremor, rigidity, slowness of movement, and difficulty with walking. Cognitive and behavioural problems may also occur with depression, anxiety and apathy occurring in many people with Parkinsons. This description thrown up by Google describes Lizzie's symptoms exactly.

Auckland Airport c.1961



Visitors' Day, Habonim Camp c.1961

A milestone in 1973 when I married Peter Bruell was a bright moment for my parents. Peter was the child of survivors from Central Europe like me and his parents Lilly and Fred had arrived in New Zealand months after Lizzie and Frank.

On the night of 3rd May 1979 Lizzie phoned to say that Frank had passed away peacefully in his bed. I left baby Ezra in the care of my mother-in-law Lilly and sat at the Auckland Rd house waiting patiently for the police doctor to arrive to confirm death. At Frank's bedside, Lizzie remarked philosophically "he could have died in the camps". Unwell and on her own, Lizzie had to learn to face life without Frank. It had been a great joy to them both, to see the birth of the next generation - our son Ezra was born in 1976. Sadly, Frank did not live to see the birth in 1980 of his second grandson Anton, who bears his name and many of his traits. For five years with live in help, Lizzie continued to live in her much loved home at the top of the hill in Auckland Road until eventually ill health forced her into hospital care at Caughey Preston hospital in Remuera. She died there on 8th March 1986.

Reflecting.....

I try to look past the woman Lizzie became during the Parkinsons years, to the warm, vivacious broadminded and intelligent person I know Lizzie was in her earlier years. She gave me much - intelligence, loyalty, the desire to "give back" to the community, the will and perseverance to study, an interest in the Arts and above all, unconditional love and the wish to make my family the nucleus around which my life revolved. My friends always lingered to spend time chatting with her and she always seemed to have time for them, enjoying the sounds of young people filling the house with laughter, music and fun. When Peter got his Private Pilot's Licence she was the only one of our parents to venture skyward, with him. Instilled in me by both of my parents, was a sense of how lucky I was to grow up in a country like New Zealand, a small island democracy at the bottom of the world. Having been helped themselves to settle here, they impressed on me the importance of welcoming other immigrant and refugee families - the traditional Jewish value of "welcoming the stranger".



Anton, Paul Markham and Ezra, Lizzie's 70th birthday at Caughey Preston Home 1992

Lizzie Briess. Country doctor's daughter, medical student, emigrant, refugee, beautician, farm hand, wife, mother, businesswoman, braille transcriber, New Zealander.

Dinner, Chateau, 1961



Lizzie, 1963





Claire and Peter's wedding 1973



Grandson No. 2 Anton born 1980



Whangaumu Bay, Tutukaka 1982

Claire and Lizzie, London 195



Claire's 21st 1968



Grandson Ezra is born 1976



Lizzie and Frank, party time!



Claire, Ezra, Carole Eldridge, 1986





Fixing the mezuzah at 6 Long Drive, St Heliers 1973



Lizzie's grandsons Anton and Ezra 2007

Lizzie's life was defined by three events; losing her family in the Holocaust, birth of the first child of a new generation and the third phase when Parkinson's disease robbed her of living the last 20 years of her life in good health, having to cope with the symptoms of a debilitating disease. The last seven of these years she was without her life's partner. The last two years she was in care at Caughey Preston Hospital. Life was not kind to her.

I have inherited several old family cookbooks. My grandmother Rosa Schimmerling's, my step grandmother Adi Briess's, my mother Lizzie's, my mother-in-law Lilly Bruell's, and my aunt Marianne's. Peter's great aunt Eva Bruell's. Eva Bruell's story is such a tragic one - she committed suicide in 1937, having embezzled a small amount of money from her employer, her uncle and was found out. She was 24 years old and Lilly and Fred never spoke of her until late in their lives. Some, of these books have multiple recipes for the same cakes, one from Tante (aunt) Hilde, one from Tante Marianne, one from Grossmama Adi, another from Grossmama Rosa, yet others from Tante Irena, and Mama Lilly. These women are no longer with us, yet I imagine them sitting over afternoon coffee and exchanging recipes and chatter. These images are lent weight by the beautiful embroidered tablewear bearing my mother's maiden initials "AL", stacked, little used but beginning to show the brown stains of age, in our hall linen cupboard now. I have used images throughout the book so that after the cloth has disintegrated, the photographs will remain as a memory of and link to a distant past. These are the ghosts that people our family history. Once genealogy led me to discover them, their spirit has sustained me on my 76 year journey through life.
Claire Bruell (nee Briess)



Lizzie, Ezra and Claire Hawaii 1979



Claire, Peter, Ezra, Anton 1998

Alice (Lizzie) LOEWY
 b. 8 Jul 1912, Luntenburg
 d. 8 Mar 1986, New Zealand
 & **Frantisek (Frank) BRIESS**
 b. 5 Dec 1907, Olomouc, (Olmütz) Moravia
 d. 3 May 1979, Auckland, New Zealand
 m. 6 Jun 1937, Czechoslovakia, Bruen



Claire Ginette BRIESS
 b. 10 Apr 1947, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 & **Leslie Peter BRUELL**
 b. 1 Aug 1943, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 m. 7 Sep 1973, Auckland, New Zealand



Ezra Jon BRUELL
 b. 20 Nov 1976, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 & **Yvette Belinda FLEISZIG**
 b. 25 Sep 1980, Melbourne, Australia
 d.
 m. 23 May 2010, Melbourne, Australia



Lily Alice BRUELL
 b. 21 Sep 2011, Melbourne, Australia
 d.
 m.



Sofia Emily BRUELL
 b. 26 Sep 2013, Melbourne, Australia
 d.
 m.

Nate Freddie BRUELL
 b. 18 Jan 2017, Melbourne, Australia
 d.
 m.



Anton Frank BRUELL
 b. 14 Dec 1980, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 & **Vanessa NEWTON WADE**
 b. 17 Nov 1982, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 m. 15 Jul 2012, Auckland, New Zealand



Isaac David BRUELL
 b. 20 Mar 2015, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 m.



Simon Luke BRUELL
 b. 24 Aug 2017, Auckland, New Zealand
 d.
 m.



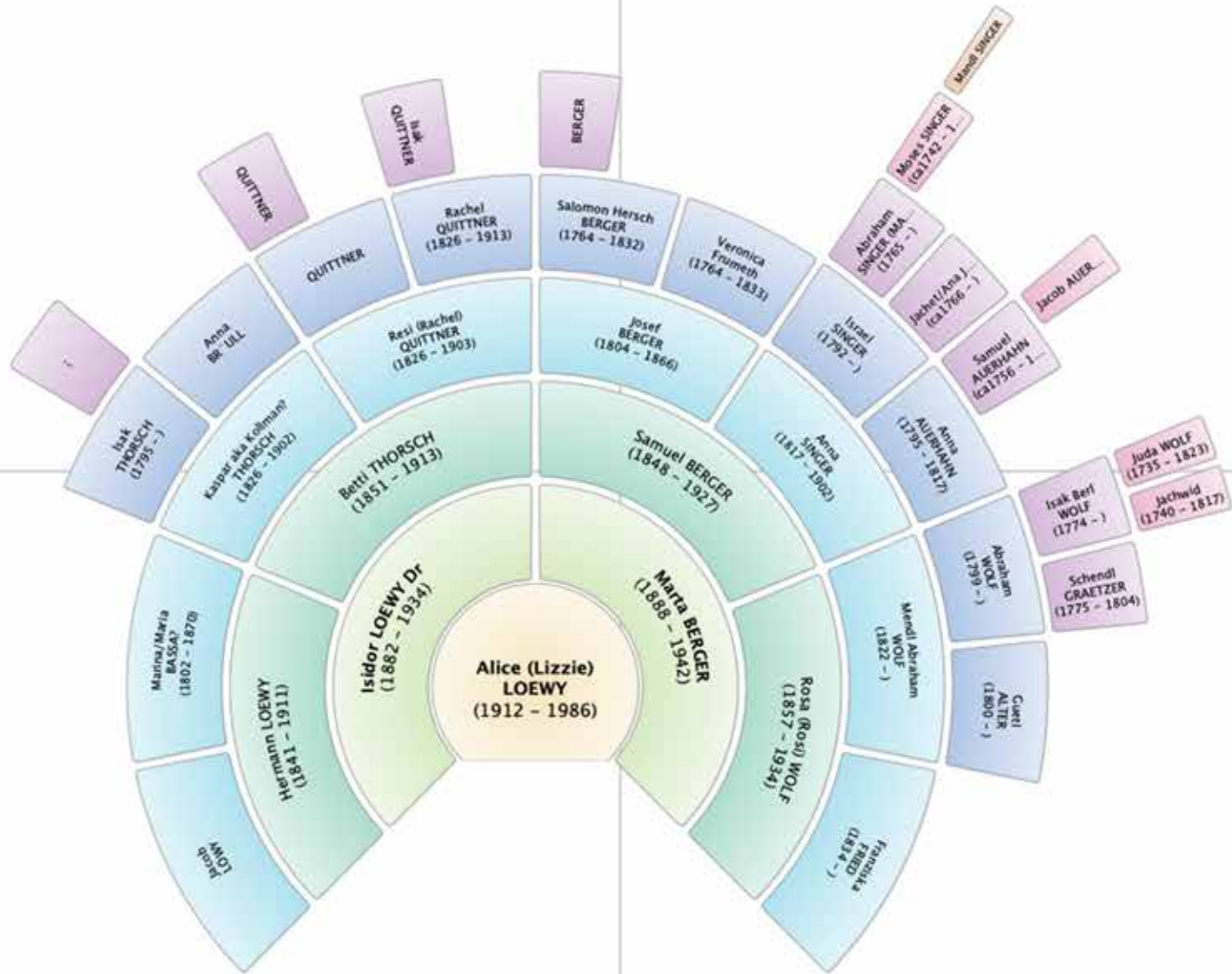




Lizzie's descendants in Auckland and Melbourne: Claire, (Yvette) Ezra, Anton, (Peter) (Vanessa) Nate, Sofia, Isaac, Lily, Simon. Queenstown 2022.

Handwritten text in German, partially obscured by the diagram. Visible words include "Handwritten text" and "20 days".

Handwritten text in German, partially obscured by the diagram. Visible words include "Handwritten text" and "Handwritten text".



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Three generations (l to r) Ron, Lilly, Fred, Peter and Helen.

Fred Bruell - in his own words



I arrived in London early in 1939 just prior to the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Adolf Hitler. I was separated from my wife, who stayed behind. It was only by incredible luck she made it into Poland to obtain her British visa after three attempts to cross the frontier, each time being caught by either the Poles or the SS. Each time she was gaoled but the third time she managed to reach the nearest British consulate in Katowice. She joined me in London early in June 1939 where I was employed as a voluntary worker in the settlement department of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund.

God given opportunity

The main object was to settle Czech refugees who were in transit in Great Britain (their transit visas did not allow them to settle) and to organise their onward migration to Canada and other countries. It turned out that working for this organisation was a God given opportunity as it enabled us to learn English and find out how English people work, although we were not paid. Apart from this, I liked the work. It was social work which I had done in the past with underprivileged children in Czechoslovakia and Austria. The difference was that I was trying to help refugees to settle overseas.



In the second half of 1939, World War II broke out and we spent the first 10 months of it in London. There was a New Zealand couple living in the flat next to ours in Soho. They were journalists and kindly introduced us to an ex-member of Parliament who was employed at the BBC. This man in turn had a very friendly relationship with the then Minister of Immigration in New Zealand. To cut a long story short, my wife and I received landing permits because of our qualifications even at that late stage when Britain and New Zealand were engaged in the war with Germany. However, as we were “friendly” aliens (being Czech citizens) as opposed to “enemy” aliens originating from Germany, we had no trouble whatsoever in coming to New Zealand and I can only speak in the

highest terms of the cooperation and assistance given to us by the Police and other Government agencies in New Zealand.

Only asset – a will to succeed

I had no money to speak of and no earthly possessions. My only asset was the will to succeed in whatever I did. The same remarks applied to my wife. Within a few days of landing in Auckland she secured the position of a fashion designer, in which she had been thoroughly trained in Vienna and within a

The Czechoslovak Refugee Trust

The Czechoslovak Refugee Trust was created on 21 July 1939 and was finally wound up in 1975.

Its original purpose was the assistance of certain categories of people who sought refuge from Nazi persecution following the ceding to Germany of parts of the territory of Czechoslovakia under the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938, and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Germans in March 1939. These refugees comprised not only Czechoslovak citizens but several hundred Germans and Austrians who had gained asylum in Czechoslovakia after escaping from Nazi persecution in their own country between 1933 and 1938.

Before the trust was created, several appeals had been launched in Britain for subscriptions for the relief of the refugees. Some of this money was set aside for the use in London of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, a voluntary organisation set up in October 1938 to provide temporary hospitality in Britain for especially endangered refugees.

Between October 1938 and March 1939 the British Committee brought 3,500 refugees from Czechoslovakia to Britain, which absorbed all the financial resources available to the Committee. The money for the trustees' needs was furnished from the Czechoslovak Refugee Fund, representing the unspent balance of a gift to Czechoslovakia of £4,000,000 for refugee assistance by the British Government in the autumn of 1938.

The assistance to be afforded to refugees took two forms:

- emigration to some overseas country of settlement, and
- maintenance and training in Britain pending re-emigration.

Friedrich/Fred, Lilly Bruell, Helen Bruell and Franz/Frank and Alice Briess were all helped by the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. Fred and Lilly did volunteer work for the Trust, helping refugees and learning English at the same time. ■

Frank Briess record from the files of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund from National Archives at Kew.

C97/3
No. C97 H.O. Ref. GERMAN JEWISH AID COMMITTEE

Sur-name: **BRIESS** Address: **89 Grandbury Villas, Kibbourn Hill**
Other Names: **FRANZ** Phone No.

Date of Birth: **5-12-07** Nationality: **Czechoslovak** Born at: **Olomouc** If Orthodox: **No**

Address in Germany: **Velbuzov Olomouc** Date of arrival in England: **12-5-39** PERMIT Valid for: **2 months**

Married: **Yes** Husband's Name in England: **C. F. F.** Number of Children: **None**

Relatives or Friends in England (Giving Full Name and Address):

| In England | Amount | Country |
|------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Germany | £2,000 (Basel's) | |
| Elsewhere | None | |

OCCUPATION in Germany (or last held): **Farmer produce export**

Alternative Occupations: **Baker** Experience:

Language: **German, Czech, & some English**

If registered by any other Refugee Committee: **No** Passport Expires: **29-1-44**

LEFT ENGLAND FOR: **ON**

Date of interview: **17 MAR 1939** Port of Arrival: **Norwich, direct** Nature of Hospitality: **5**

allowed to land on submission to Immigration Office of business letter. Wishes to emigrate. (Has visa for Ecuador - told Bureau you would await ship here, but states you to enable him to get money out - and is not valid, having undertaken not to use it) Tell him to send paper first to Velbuzov. Appoint to me a bit of the full note.

PASSPORT DEPARTMENT **April 5 1939**

Case No. 1065. Name - BRÜLL, Friedrich.

July 2nd. 1940. Agreed for emigration to New Zealand:-
 Passage & Auckland £140.
 Luggage £15.
 Cash for voyage £10.
 Landing money £200.

July 30th. 1940. Enter papers agreed £4.

Fred Bruell - in his own words

few weeks I also secured a position of a factory manager in a rather young cardboard conversion company.

My first job was to find out the way New Zealanders made boxes, cartons and containers and I tried immediately to improve the quality and production methods with which I was thoroughly familiar. Within a year my employer was approached by the freezing works in New Zealand to manufacture liver pail containers. These had been made out of tin plate but would have to be made out of waterproof cardboard. This was easier said than done because at that time there was only one company in New Zealand which made a chipboard thin product which did not contain any sulphide or sulphate and reacted to water - or any other liquid - like blotting paper! It was an inferior product and could not be improved because it was only chipboard manufactured out of wood pulp and nothing else. As the killing season was rapidly approaching, we had to have an answer within about 6-8 weeks. Together with one of the foremen in the company we set about designing a completely new product made out of one piece of cardboard with no joints and we succeeded. There was still the question of waterproofing this product and this caused considerable problems. At that time there was no plastic coating available, nor was the process even known.

Smelly solution to sticky problem

There was no paraffin wax available as urgent war supplies took preference and paraffin wax was not made in New Zealand. There were no other means of waterproofing chipboard and in desperation we used stearin. Stearin is an animal fat which melts when heated, but unfortunately it has a most unpleasant smell and polluted the factory where we "dipped" the product concerned. I was a very unpopular man for quite some time as the boiling stearin settled on all the machinery and everything else in the factory and we had no means of protecting our environment. However, 'war work' had to go on. I designed the necessary machinery which applied the boiling stea-

| Kind of Refugee | Case No. | H.O. Ref. | BRITISH COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA | | Date Interviewed |
|--|----------------|-------------------|--|---------------------------|------------------|
| Political | 1065 | 3-21274 | Friedrich Brüll | | 18.12.40 |
| SURNAME (in Capitals) BRÜLL Other names FRIEDRICH | | | Address Left UK for N. Zealand Mrs. Schwanke 6 Jorsch | | |
| Date of Birth | Place of Birth | Right of Domicile | Visa No. | Address in Czechoslovakia | |
| 23.5.1910 | Prague | Czechoslovak | Joint | Prague, Schwanke 6 | |
| Type of Passport | Passport No. | Validity | Date and Place of Arrival | H.O. Permit valid till | |
| Travel certificate | 7553/57 | 28.10.40 | London 7.10.40 | 12.12.40 | |
| Reasons for leaving Czechoslovakia Austria, pol. refugee Party not doing | | | | | |
| Married | Husband | Wife | Address | | |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | Lilly (Mrs. Brüll) 2/1048 | | |
| Relatives in England (Being Financial Position) | | | Number of Children | | |
| In England | | | Name | | |
| Means in Czechoslovakia | | | Born at | | |
| Elsewhere | | | Year | | |
| OCCUPATION (in detail) photostereotype paper & post absolute board work specialist | | | Sex | | |
| No. Qualifications | | | Widow | | |
| Experience 9 years | | | | | |
| References Papierwarenfabrik Kleinmünchen, Werkstoffbräunerei | | | | | |
| Alternative Occupations | | | Experience | | |
| Languages German English | | | | | |
| Other Refugee Committees. Already registered at Social number, Frühlingshilfe | | | | | |
| Referred to | | | | | |
| Comments CYTEE VISA CZ 4416 L48TRIBUNALS DEP | | | | | |
| Registered at Police Station No. | | | | | |
| Plans for future Work in English or emigrate to U.S.A. (preferred) | | | | | |
| Requests Loan from state | | | | | |
| H.O. PERMIT. | | | | | |
| Nature of application | | Date | Reply | Date | |
| Additional Application | | Date | Reply | Date | |
| Guaranteed by | | | | | |
| Other action taken | | | | | |
| LEFT ENGLAND FOR New Zealand ON July 40 FROM | | | | | |

Fred Brüll's record from the files of the Czech Refugee Trust Fund from National Archives at Kew.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

rin to chipboard cartons - and it made them waterproof.

Freezing work dilemma solved

The result was that the product was so eminently successful that a run of test shipments to Liverpool was made. It was the complete answer to the freezing works dilemma of how to pack and ship to the UK the carcass warm offal (mainly hearts and livers). My company continued to supply this type of packaging until 1951 - after the war - until the industry reverted to tin plate. A joint patent was taken out by the company and me to protect the design and method.

My personal financial situation was anything but satisfactory. For the first five months I was paid a labourer's wage for running this organisation. The company unscrupulously took advantage of my ignorance of local conditions of reward.

It might have been smart from their point of view but it was very shortsighted. After five months I demanded I be paid in accordance with my skill and in accordance with the contribution I made to the company. All this was granted forthwith as otherwise, I told the company, I would leave immediately. The financial situation was worse than it would appear as I had my mother in London to support



A young Fritz off to school.

and my sister was in a concentration camp in the South of France under the Petain Regime which “danced to the Nazi's tune”. So in addition to my own immediate family I had to remit funds for the support of these two whenever possible: it was indeed a difficult time.

It was at that time I told the directors of the company that I would stick it out with the company until the war finished but I would give notice the day the Armistice was signed. I would regard working for them as a form of military service about which I had no choice and would apply the same discipline to the private sector as prescribed for the military. My prime reason for coming to New Zealand was to join the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force and go to Egypt. After all I had accounts to settle with the Nazis for invading my country.

Half way through the war, New Zealand was requested to manufacture and supply to the Allied Forces, and in particular the New Zealand Army, “walkie talkies” (as they were known as that time). These had to be packed into waterproof containers as they were to be dumped in the muddy banks and shallow waters for retrieval by the natives and the Allied forces in their drive north to recapture the Pacific islands from the Japanese invaders.

Obviously they would be damaged if they were submerged in salt water. Again machinery had to be designed by me to manufacture this particular type of container and in the next few years we made 7,000-9,000 of them (I can't remember the exact figures). Again the containers did the job splendidly. Again the waterproofing was made of heated stearin.

In October 1942, as a result of my dissatisfaction at the lack of war work being performed by the company employing me, I decided to start on my own on a spare time basis. I worked every night until 9pm and the work had to be done in my own time, after my official working day had finished. I called my little company "L&F Bruell".

Pinpoint beginning to success

I borrowed a power press. The press was made available to me by the directors of the company that employed me. This was the beginning of "Rex". My total capital and cash resources were £52.12 and my first press tool cost me £65. I had to borrow the balance from an engineer in Auckland whom I had known and I worked with for some years and who was kind enough to extend this credit to me. The cardboard company gave me credit for 60,000 boxes which were to be used to box the six million drawing pins which I made at that time. The manufacture and quality of these drawing pins (of which I am not proud!) is a story in itself and a saga of endless difficulties and incredible handicaps, such as lack of equipment and the sheer impossibility of getting reasonably suitable supplies of tin plate. However where there's a will there's a way and with my typical stubborn determination I manufactured these drawing pins, although I made a loss of about £100. There was no return whatsoever for my six months of hard work, mostly between the hours of 9pm and 1am and Saturday and part of Sunday. The second six million drawing pins were much better – both quality and profit wise! It encouraged



Young Fritz/Friedrich.

me to make pen holders, mathematical sets and other stationery hardware particularly related to school needs which helped Rex Manufacturing Company (as it was now called) to become established. The company was duly incorporated as a limited liability company.

Towards the end of 1944 I was asked by a client in Auckland whether I would consider the manufacture of tea wagon castors. The country was bare of any castors and there were simply no castors available in the country at all. So I started making tea wagon castors which had considerable success and this was the forerunner of our materials handling divisions in the Rex Consolidated Group and especially the start of our castor range.

It was from these very small beginnings as a spare time business, with practically no money but a tremendous amount of perseverance, patience and stubbornness that "Rex" was built up to what it is today after 40 years. In October this year (1982) Rex will have been in business for 40 years and the public company, Rex Consolidated Ltd will have been registered for 21 years. In all modesty it can be said that the company has grown far more than anybody (including the writer) ever envisaged.

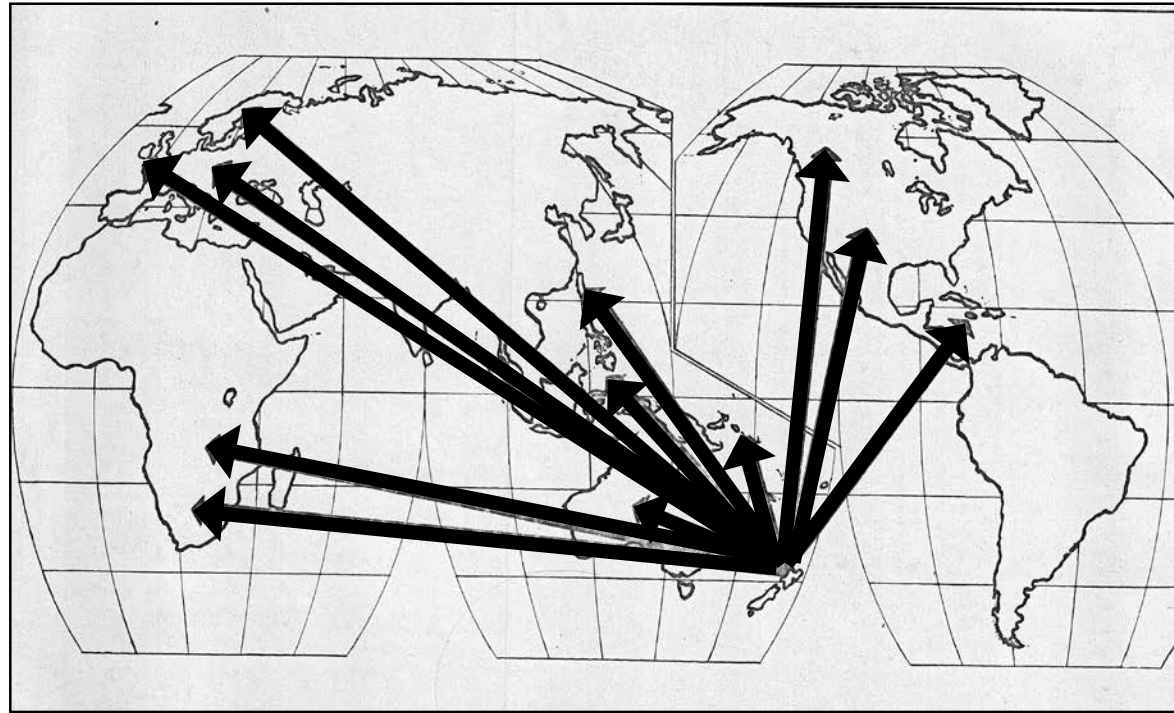
One line was added after the need became apparent within the New Zealand economy. To the original lines of school stationery hardware were soon added metal toy lines. Rex made literally millions of toys until 1951/2 when the government of the day abolished import control and allowed the importation of cheap Hong Kong, Japanese, Italian and later, German toys. New Zealand with its very small population could not possibly finance the tooling for metal toys on a large scale and although we sent our toys to Australia in order to recover the tool costs on a vast scale, it was decided in 1952 to withdraw entirely from their manufacture and we have never made them since.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

After leaving my employer at the end of the war I had to shift my factory to Vincent Street, into an old building of three storeys and every sheet of tin plate had to be manhandled. Over these years literally hundreds of tons of material had to be handed sheet by sheet in a human chain to its point of destination in the store or where it was guillotined. Thinking back to these times and the impossible odds one faced, one wonders how far human endeavour and human sacrifice can go. The incredible difficulties of manufacturing in these premises were unbelievable. The building was nearly 100 years old. Every time a press was used, the whole building shuddered! The other tenant, on the Vincent Street level, was a difficult man to say the least and it was in an area of the city where Auckland's prostitutes freely vied for their business. However these seven years were essential in order to earn sufficient tax paid profit to purchase a building further down the road in Federal Street. This was a magnificent step forward and we were occupying an area of 5,400 sq ft. The building was by no means suitable for the running of Rex Manufacturing Company as the construction of the site was such that the land fell away towards Albert Street and the presses obviously had to be installed in the basement. We had endless difficulties with regard to expansion and this forced us to look out for land on a permanent basis. In 1955 we purchased land in Otahuhu and in 1957 we built the first factory comprising 10,000 sq ft.

Growing fast

In the meantime, Rex was growing very fast and there was a sustained demand for our products. So much so that in 1948 Rex exported toy components to Melbourne and Sydney which became the forerunner of sustained export



Rex international export destinations 1971.

drives in the years to come.

We concentrated on builders' hardware and other products mostly components for industry. At that time our total production was based on metal stamping and welding. With the progressive industrialisation of New Zealand, the group of Rex companies grew and developed further techniques to serve industry in general. In the early 1950s Rex had already supplied links for slaughter chains for the freezing works and was engaged in the manufacture of components for radios, household appliances and later on, was prominently engaged in the manufacture of metal components for the television industry. Rex pioneered many "firsts" in New Zealand's industrial enterprises

and has been a leader in this field. It continues to blaze a trail for progress in line with overseas development. However, it became clear in the 1960s that if Rex wanted to develop in its chosen field of manufacturing components for other industries it had to make certain decisions:

1. We could not be engaged in making the final product for which we made the components.
2. We had to enter the plastics field which became more prominent from day to day and was replacing metal components on an increasing scale.

Public company born

In 1961 it was decided to form a public company. The company would be based on several registered private limited companies, amongst them a clothing company, Playnit Ltd, which was managed by Mrs L.

Bruell, a professional fashion designer. Her success was a dramatic one. In the first six months she sold about 20,000 garments and doubled it the next year. The clothing company exported its garments throughout the Pacific basin in the early 1960s when the export drive started. David Jones and Farmers in Sydney, Myers in Melbourne, the Robinson stores throughout South East Asia, Singapore, Hong Kong, Bangkok were all customers of Playnit and laid to rest the myth that the New Zealand garment industry could not export its goods.

Meanwhile Rex was expanding activities and shifted from the city to Otahuhu.



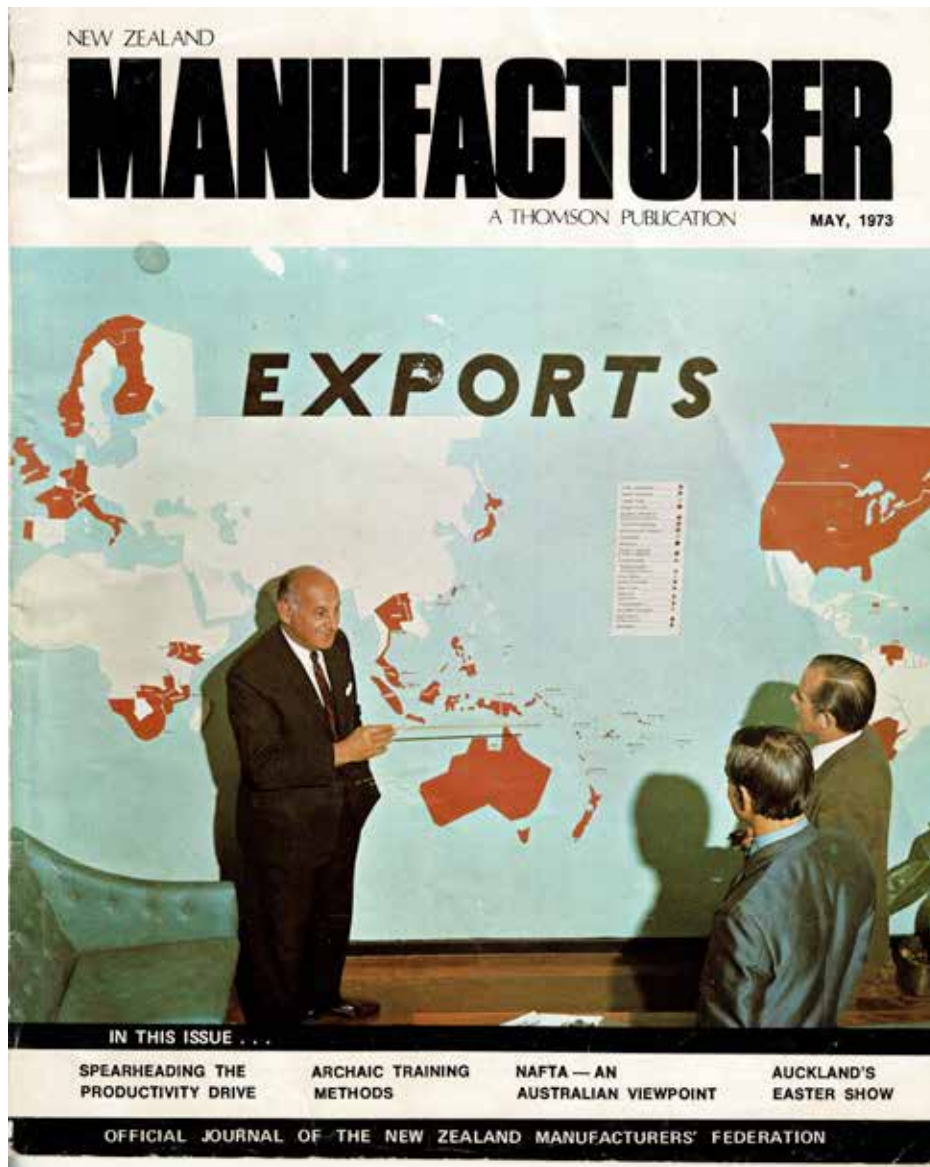
It continued to build and expand its plant until today (1982) the company has about a quarter of a million square feet of factories under its roof in New Zealand alone.

In 1972 it was decided to purchase a materials handling engineering factory in Melbourne and this was the first off-shore venture of Rex. The company is a valuable member of the Rex Consolidated Group and is still involved in the materials handling/rubber moulding and other engineering disciplines and has grown from strength to strength.

The New Zealand government started its export drive in 1960 and called for a national export conference in Wellington which was followed within a few weeks by one in Auckland. The writer took a particular interest in the export of New Zealand goods to Australia and other countries as he was aware in the long term, the survival of New Zealand

would depend on the contribution of all sectors towards export income. New Zealand's economy was based only on the rural sector but had to also develop its industrial sector.

There was a determined effort on the part of the New Zealand government of that day, wherever possible, to offset the cyclical movements in the economy which are endemic in companies involved with agricultural products worldwide. Today the exports of New Zealand manufacturers are over one and a half billion dollars in value.



Fred Bruell talking exports on the cover of the New Zealand Manufacturer.

The Export Institute

(An excerpt from an article written by Fred.)

I played a prominent part in the export promotion field and shortly after became a member of the Council of the Auckland Manufacturers Association. I finished these activities after serving two years as president of the Auckland Association. I was also active for many years on committees of the New Zealand Manufacturers Federation and was chairman of its Export committee for a number of years.

It became clear in the early stages of exporting that a tremendous amount of export education was essential to teach New Zealand manufacturers international marketing techniques and I tried, albeit in vain, to interest the New Zealand Institute of Management, of which I had been a fellow since 1952, to set up a diploma course in export on a New Zealand wide basis. Unfortunately this was turned down by the national executive and I then decided, in cooperation with the then assistant secretary of the Auckland Manufacturers Association, Ross Southcombe, to form an association of manufacturers interested in the export field under the auspices of the Auckland Manufacturers Association. It was called the Export Institute of New Zealand. At that time I was chairman of the Auckland Export Committee and represented Auckland at the Federation. The Export Institute of New Zealand became acknowledged as the export authority in New Zealand and for many years has been conducting courses in export techniques. Its Export Diploma (a three year course) is now standard practice. The mass education of New Zealanders in the export field is in no small measure based on the activities of the Export Institute, supported by the New Zealand government and actively supported by the New Zealand Manufacturers Federation.

Rex Consolidated, apart from all its other activities, went its own way in the development of exports and continued to develop export mar-

kets round the world. Rex exported successfully to South East Asia, Africa, Switzerland, South America and the Caribbean, the United States and Canada and, of course, to Australia - in other words to five continents on a continuing and profitable basis. The balance sheets of the holding company proves the progress and success of the countless hours spent by executives in establishing New Zealand-made products on world markets - no other company has done more.

Rex was the first New Zealand manufacturer to export to Thailand and South America (Venezuela, Ecuador and Peru) while shipments of Rex products to Singapore and Malaysia were among the first New Zealand manufactured goods ever sent to those places. Rex was at the forefront of the export drive and it could never have been achieved this without the devotion of a great number of people in an organisation which I headed in the early 1960s. I, together with many other manufacturers and other appointees of government, served many years on the Manufacturing Development Council and took an active part in its deliberations.

New Zealand Export Import Corporation

I served on the New Zealand Export Import Corporation as a member of the board for a period of over four years. I retired at my own request because I had too many other engagements quite apart from Rex Consolidated and because I believed that a younger person could fill the vacancy.

Export Guarantee Advisory Committee (EXGO)

I was appointed to this committee in the mid 1970s and served six years on its advisory body. In all modesty I believe EXGO has gone from very small beginnings to an immensely important and necessary export insurance operation without which we would be so much poorer in New Zealand. I take pride in being able to say I have contributed to this to the best of my ability and amongst the major successes which we achieved through this body was the in-



ANALYSIS

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Title 1. Short Title 2. Interpretation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PART I NEW ZEALAND EXPORT-IMPORT CORPORATION</p> <p>3. New Zealand Export-Import Corporation</p> <p><i>Functions and Powers of Corporation</i> 4. Object for which Corporation established 5. Functions of Corporation 6. General powers of Corporation 7. Contracts of Corporation 8. Delegation of powers of Corporation</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Directors</i> 9. Terms of office of appointed directors 10. Extraordinary vacancies 11. Deputies 12. Remuneration and expenses of directors 13. Disclosure of interests 14. Meetings of directors</p> | <p>15. Committees 16. Personal liability of directors</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PART II FINANCIAL PROVISIONS</p> <p>17. Capital of Corporation 18. Borrowing powers 19. Advances to Corporation 20. Bank accounts 21. Investment of money belonging to Corporation 22. Disposition of profits 23. Unauthorised expenditure 24. Accounts 25. Audit of accounts 26. Annual report</p> <p style="text-align: center;">PART III GENERAL PROVISIONS</p> <p>27. Directions by Minister 28. Employees and agents of Corporation 29. Acquisition of houses for use of employees 30. Protection of name 31. Corporation not an instrument of Executive Government</p> |
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1974, No. 2

An Act to establish a New Zealand Export-Import Corporation, and to define its object, functions, powers, and duties
[22 March 1974]

BE IT ENACTED by the General Assembly of New Zealand in Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1. Short Title—This Act may be cited as the New Zealand Export-Import Corporation Act 1974.

REX INCREASES TRADE

AUCKLAND — Rex Manufacturing Co. Ltd, already flying a flag presented by Government for export achievements, is now selling large quantities of its Lustra shelving to clients in Australia.

many years, it only recently realised there is a large market for quality shelving systems.

Wall standards, shelf brackets, porta posts and floor-to-ceiling posts are made in anodised aluminium, to give gleaming finishes that will not corrode.

Although the company has been making shelving for

1970 press clippings (r) showing Playnit featured in The New Zealand Herald with Lilly in the centre of the photograph.

roduction of an orderly discount system with the banks, the 100% guarantee by EXGO to trading banks on behalf of its insured exporters and is currently as a result of recent discussions, continuing to try and assist in the furtherance of exports from all sources within its confines.

CMI - Consolidated Metal Industries Ltd.

I served on the board of this company for 17 years.

Air New Zealand

I was appointed to Air New Zealand's board in November 1975 and served on it for over six years. It was one of the most challenging appointments I have ever experienced, in particular the last three years which were the most dramatic years one could possibly serve on any board anywhere in the world. I have persistently tried to convince the board to adopt an active responsible

From T-shirts to womens fashionwear

TWENTY five years ago, Viennese-born Lilly Bruell set up in business under the name, Playnit Ltd, manufacturing children's T-shirts. She followed up with a range women's tops — and a blouse named "Rita" which many in the fashion trade still remember today.

Her early success provided the encouragement to extend Playnit further and today her label "Viva Capri" is known throughout New Zealand in womenswear.

Recently her company, in association with Avey Taylor, the distributing agent marked the quarter century of achievement with a fashion parade and cocktail reception in Auckland at which Viva Capri's summer indent range was presented.

Lilly Bruell did her trade apprenticeship training in Vienna beofre coming to New Zealand with her husband Fred Bruell, now managing director of Rex Consolidated Ltd, of which Playnit is a subsidiary.

She has been a "New Zealander by choice" for 36 years.

Two of the couple's three children are attached to Rex Consolidated — Ron (35) is export manager and Peter (33), plastics factory manager.

Daughter Lorraine (31) is married and lives in Australia.

Lilly Bruell and Andrew Mann, who has been with Playnit for 12 years, work in close association as the design team for the Viva Capri range.



Lilly Bruell (front left) with models at the 25th anniversary parade of Viva Capri garments.

Assistant manageress in Playnit is Mrs Pearl White who spent 19 years with the company with a three year break for medical reasons before rejoining.

And how did Lilly Bruell, dressed in one of her own feature Viva Capri designs, feel on the occasion of her 25th anniversary? "Very proud," she said.

stance in the face of incredible difficulties caused by two “oil shocks”, industrial unrest, and the “open” air policy introduced under the Carter regime, all of which contributed to the massive losses to our national airline. However, I am bound to state that the challenges I have experienced and the responsibility I have taken have contributed a great deal to the better understanding of fundamental management problems and have often caused me to think about the inadequacies in the way the airline is run, the way people who have been appointed to the board – and are still being appointed – and in many cases the lack of understanding, skill and experience board members have which was reflected in an airline struggling for survival without having a firm leadership. It is my opinion that fundamental changes would have to be made to get this air-



Fred and Lilly at their wedding, 12 April 1938.

line out of the doldrums and considerably more freedom would have to be given by the shareholders through the Ministry of Finance so the airline can play a better and more constructive part in the aviation policy of this country. At the same time it has to be recognised that the New Zealand Treasury has always co-operated with the airline in a constructive and responsible manner and no false conclusions should be arrived at as a result of these remarks.

However, I am of the opinion, political influences should be removed as fast as possible, so in the future people are appointed to this board based on their qualifications in



the field of international finance, commerce and aviation and not based on party politics. I believe the time is well overdue for politics and bureaucratic interference to be eradicated from the board for once and for all.

The role played by some unions is a matter of great concern and strong recommendations should be made that the airline, along with shipping and many other enterprises in our country should be subject to the strictest control as far as strikes are concerned which, in any case should be forbidden, as they affect the population as a whole and paralyse the country.

People who are not prepared to abide by these recommendations, as in American Federal Law, should be strongly recommended to leave the airline and find a position elsewhere. Government should make it abundantly clear in any negotiations as far as awards and conditions are concerned, that they should be negotiated freely and not under pressure in the form of strikes, working to rule or overtime bans.

I have learnt a lot in these six years and will be anxious to pass it on to others who follow me.

Rex Consolidated Ltd. 1982

Fred Bruell

Chairman. ■

Lilly during her interview 1994.





LILLY BRUELL

- Interviewed for the Auckland Holocaust Oral History Group in St Heliers on 9 April 1994.
- Interviewer: Claire Bruell
- Lilly Bruell, maiden name: Rosenblum
- Born: 23 June 1914 - the second of four children.
- Siblings and parents emigrated to New York on the eve of the Second World War.
- Place of birth, Vienna, Austria 1914.
- Domiciled in:
 - Czechoslovakia, Brno [1938/39].
 - London 1939/40. Sailed to Sydney on the SS Orcades then to Auckland on the SS Wanganella
 - New Zealand: Arrived in Auckland 21 August 1940.
- Eventually, Fred Bruell established Rex Consolidated Ltd, and Lilly established Playnit Ltd, her own company.
- Married: Friedrich (Fred) Bruell 12 April 1938.
- Children:

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Ronald (Ronny) David | 4/12/1941 |
| Leslie Peter | 1/8/1943 |
| Lorraine Eve Gordon | 11/8/1945. |

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

Claire: Lilly I'd like to start back in time. I understand that your family originally came from Poland or what is now Poland?

Lilly: Yes, we came from Poland and lived in the town of Buczacz.

Claire: Can we spell that?

Lilly: Buczacz.

Thank you. And can you tell me a little bit about your grandparents?

I know very little about my grandparents. My grandmother on my mother's side lived with us in Vienna but apart from that I don't really know anything about their lives there.

So, it was Cipre, your Mum, that was in Vienna with you?

Cipre Kittenplon.

Sorry, I keep on making that mistake.

Yes I know. We all make the mistakes. I never knew quite how to sort it out until Hannah explained it to me. They carried on with their maiden name as well as their married name and that's where the confusion comes in about the names.

So her maiden name was Cipre?

That's C-i-p-r-e.

All right. Jurmann, J u r m a n n?

Yes.

And she married Samuel Kittenplon?

Yes.

K-i-t-t-e-n-p-l-o-n?

So they were quite orthodox? They were quite...

Yes, yes particular my mother more than my father. But they were both orthodox.

So they kept a kosher home?

Oh definitely. They kept a kosher home and my mother kept her eyes, the only thing I was allowed to do in the kitchen was sweep the floor. She would never let me touch anything in case I mix up milchig with fleishig. It would have been quite a tragedy.

So when were you born Lilly?

I was born at 23rd June 1914.

So you were born in Vienna?

I was born in Vienna.

And first came your older brother Otto?

Otto. He was two years older than I am.

And the family name was Rosenblum?

Rosenblum. Yes.

And he was born?

He was born in Vienna.

In Vienna on what date?

Oh, 8th of August 1912.

And after you...?

After that came my sister Mitzi and she was born on the 10th of April 1917? Was it?...And then came Eddie, and he was born on the 27th of July

1919. Right? (Actually 1920)

Okay. Excuse me. So can you tell me what was your family life like, the four kids in the family?

Four kids, we were quite a happy crew. We never had much money But we always could find enough enjoyment and played a lot together. Can't remember any great fights we had. My sister's a little bit of a spitfire and you know she kept things a bit rolling and she could lose her temper,

I can't imagine that..

You can't imagine? Though she wants an umbrella or some scissors or something? And I made a lot of fuss of Eddie. He was the youngest and he was a lovely little fellow really.

I remember when he got punished for something and he wouldn't get dinner and I would sneak in with some cup of coffee or cocoa, and bring him something to his bed. But we had a happy family. I can't remember any major tragedies. You know, we had the usual fights with each other. Otto was very placid and mellow. He was never a great fighter.

What about discipline? What sort of discipline did your parents mete out?

Well my mother was the one that sort of kept us (in line), she was stricter and more aggressive than my father. I remember once coming home late from school. She didn't know that I was going to be late, and of course she was in a panic. She put me, we had a table in our hall, and she put me on the table



Jochanan, Otto, Eddie, Lilly, Mitzi and Cilli.

to give me a hiding. And while she was going for the strap my father came along and grabbed me and that was the end of my hiding. But my father was always very mellow and soft with us. Also he was a bit of a . . . he stood his ground. He would fight, and I think that's where Mitzi got very much off him, you know? He wouldn't hesitate to go to court if he would think that he is right and the other fellow was wrong. And my mother wouldn't do that. She would give in and say: 'Let's forget about it.' But not my father. He was very good and mellow with us.

What about his occupation? What did your parents do?

They were both tailors. My father was a tailor and my mother worked, worked with him all the time. Yes, I remember her, that she was always with him in the workroom. My father was a very good tailor. My husband always said that he doesn't sew clothes, he builds them on you, you know? He was really very, very good, and worked for a long time. I think he was 82 when he made the last (caftan). He worked a lot for the rabbis and that was quite a special job because they had to have special lining, with 'kosher' printed on and all that. And he worked a lot and was going in and out of rabbis' homes with the deliveries and so on. Yes, he worked for a long, long time, until his eyes didn't see enough anymore to discover black from navy.

And where was his business?

It was in the second district. There was the shop downstairs and we lived in

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

the flat up. But not in the shop. It was the house next to it.

But it was in the same house: 21 Zirkusgasse. 21 Zirkusgasse. And what did your parents do in their leisure time?

Well my father was very keen on motorbikes much to my mother's sorrow. But he loved motorbikes and cars. That was really his greatest interest in life and he was racing. He always had Harley-Davidson machines and he was going to races and got several prizes. My mother was sitting at home. shivering. He took off early in the morning, on the Sunday morning and you know mother looked and he was gone and he was again at the races somewhere on the Ring or somewhere in Austria, where the racing took place. But that was his great interest and his great love and actually at one stage, it was quite a funny tailor's shop that we had because it was partitioned, the shelving was partitioned. On one side were the materials for suits and coats, and on the other side there were spare parts from motorbikes and motorcars and he handled that as well.

So did he build his own?

No.

Sometimes?

No. But he could repair. Whatever was going around he could repair.

So did he have a group of friends with similar interests?

Oh yes, yes. He had friends with similar interests. Umm you would never find my father without a pair of pliers in his pocket. He carried that like other people carry a pencil or a fountain pen. He always had pliers on and whatever was going around he could fix it.

So who were the group of friends in Vienna?

Some of them were tailors. Some of them were just friends he made in the synagogue. Ah, I remember Herman...one of the shamuses from the syna-

gogue. He was forever sitting in our shop. Quite a lot of Jewish friends mostly.

And Jewish holidays?

Oh, they were all observed in our place, very much so.

Even the lesser ones like Shavuot and...

Yes, yes. Holidays were all observed and we children were always home for that. I don't think we ever made any arrangements for Friday night outings. We were always at home on Friday nights.

And for instance, Sukkot? Would you have a sukkah?

Not in the house, but in the temple. We would go to the synagogue where they were members of, and the sukkah would be there. But in the house we didn't.

And Yom Kippur?

Oh yes, everything was observed, yes.

So your parents would sit inside?

All the time. But we as children, we never had seats. We just would go in and say hello and stay a little while and disappear again, and play outside on the street. We never owned seats in the synagogue. Yom Kippur, shall I tell you the story with my sister with the...Yom Kippur? To break the fast my mother always had to prepare some lekach for an..

Which was?

Lekach: honey cake. And a little bottle of schnaps, schnaps is schnaps isn't it?

Like brandy.

Schnaps. Yes and there was a tiny little suitcase my father bought me once as a present. It was not bigger than ten inches, the whole tiny little thing. And we were supposed to bring that to the synagogue to break the fast and every time

on the way to the synagogue I was fighting with my sister, my sister fighting with me, who will carry it. It was such a tiny little thing. It wasn't really worth the argument. But we fought over it every time and that's what we took to synagogue to break the fast and distributed around the friends that were standing nearby.

Any other incidents with your brothers and sisters? Little stories that you can think of?

Well I don't. Pete just reminded me...but we were not fighting to hurt each other. We just were fighting to see who was stronger and of course I was strong and I pulled his shoulder out. I thought it was Otto so of course, it was Eddie's. So perhaps I pulled both shoulders out because obviously I was the stronger one, ja? But not any major fights as I remember. Actually I was very close to my sister too. We had no major upheavals in the house at all. We were a happy family that enjoyed everything we did with very little money. When we were younger we were taken for walks in the Praterstrasse which was the main street of Leopoldstadt and then you know, and then stopped in a coffee house, and my parents had coffee. And then of course when my father had the car we would on Sunday go out and not too far from Vienna, but we would drive out into the country.

Picnics and things like that?

Yes, yes.

And your grandmother Cipre?

Yes.

When did she come from Poland?

I can't remember exactly Claire, but I think she would have come later. My parents wouldn't have brought her because before we moved to Zirkusgasse 21 we lived in Zirkusgasse 15, you know a few houses down, and it must have been a much smaller place. So when the children came along we moved to 21

which was a much bigger flat, and that's when my grandmother was there too. So I think she must have come later.

Hmm. Did she live with you...?

Oh she lived with us until she died, yes, yes. She was very frum, and when we on Yom Kippur, fasted for one day, she fasted for two days. You know she never broke the fast in the evening, Not until the next day. I don't know what she did. She was helping round the house, in the kitchen probably too.

What language or languages...?

Mostly Yiddish. She spoke mostly Yiddish. Mmm. I remember Eddie sitting by her feet and sort of playing with her knees, and Mitzi would sit next to her and she'd say, 'Come to me', "Bei mir ist Junger." (When you are with me I feel younger)

Meaning her knees were...?

Were younger than, ja ja...

Than granny's were. So you would have spoken with her in Yiddish?

Mostly yes. But you know I could have made myself understood with her of course. Her Yiddish was much better. But then my mother spoke Yiddish. My father spoke Yiddish of course. That's how I picked it up.

So that was the language of the household really?

More or less, only with my grandmother. Usually we spoke German.

So meal times?

Oh was German, yes. Oh yes. She would understand in Yiddish whatever we did say and...

But your parents obviously they all spoke Polish as well?

Oh yes, they would speak Polish to her but none of us understood Polish.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

We never picked it up. I think it's a language that is not so easy to pick up.

Would they all have been able to read Hebrew?

Oh yes, Oh yes.

So they...

Better than German.

So they would have gone to Hebrew school or the equivalent and learnt that?

Oh yes. And you know whenever we got newspapers that were written in Hebrew my father would read it just like German, no problem at all.

But you didn't learn Hebrew like that did you?

No, no.

Did you...

We learnt the Hebrew that we had in school of course. But that was more or less, we even had teachers at home. I remember Mr Frankl. We frustrated him very much, the poor old man. We had extra lessons at home in Hebrew and we upset him very much at one stage because he threw a chair at us.

You must have upset him!

So we must have been, three children, but you know Pesach, there was always a big function at Pesach. And Mitzi and I, we always had to get up and give a speech which Mr Frankl our teacher hammered into our heads and I always remember that we had to get up and give that speech and 'Next year in Jerusalem,' it always finished off like that.



Lilly & Mitzi Rosenblum, 1919.

And who said the Ma Nisbtana?

Eddie of course.

Once he got old enough?

Once he got older course. It was, our seders were very...

Formal affairs?

Formal affair? Oh yes. Father would sit on the cushion and would really preside over it and everything had to be done the proper way with hand washing, with hiding the (afikomen) and all that.

Mmm. Okay can you tell me a bit about going to school. How old were you when you first went to school?

Six. You start with six. We started with six and we go to primer school and then we go on to cheder schule which, it's the follow-up to it. We were supposed to go to cheder schule till 13, that was compulsory, but I think you could go to 14, which I did.

And what was your favourite subject at school?

I think it was chemistry. I think because that was where I was particularly good at. That's what I liked.

And sport?

Sport? Well we, in the school we only did gymnastics of course. We only had the hall to do gymnastics. Our schools were different than they are here. We had no playgrounds. We had a courtyard and our break was marching around for ten minutes in the courtyard, around and around. And that was it. But of course once I got older and joined the groups of girls active in the trade

union movement, we went skiing. We were hiking a lot every Sunday, we were doing different things.

Things that you had to go out of the city to do?

Oh yes.

To the countryside?

Yes.

So you left school at 14?

Yes.

And...

Well my teachers wanted me very much to go on to university and my father was very much in favour. 'Yes, yes. You go.' And my mother, who was a more practical woman, a woman with both feet on the ground, said, 'You know you can't afford it' because by that time my brother already attended the Technologischen Gewerbe-Museum, you know. He became an engineer.

That was Otto?

That was my brother Otto. He was going there already and you, now another one in the family. My mother said, 'You know you can't afford it so don't tell her she can go to university. You go out and find yourself a job.' So that's what I did, and finished up getting a job, an apprenticeship in a very good store in Vienna. It was quite an elegant store...



Lilly (r) as an apprentice at Lazslo Ungar.

So at fourteen you went out and got the job for yourself?

Yes.

It would have been advertised?

It was advertised in the paper and when I got there, there was a long queue applying. It was the critical time of '29 of course, where things were not so good in Austria either. But I got the job and I was very happy there. My boss was lovely, I really liked her, and you know they promoted me every six months in different departments, so I really was trained right through the mill. Also I was never a sewer. I was never on a sewing machine, because the shop just didn't have a sewing machine. It was, you know a boutique here is small, but that one was more of, it was a very large store with very elegant clothes. You know, the Queen of England came with Elizabeth and Margaret one time, the tiny girls, and she bought some

dresses for them, which were made in the place where Mitzi was serving her apprenticeship. And Mitzi remembers them still.

What was the name of the company, Lilly?

Laszlo Ungar: It is an Hungarian name isn't it, but he was Austrian Viennese and he was a Jew. But she wasn't. It was very good.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

And the different departments that you spent time in? In the company? What were they?

Well first I worked in the office for six months you know, and it was always a very tough upbringing. I must tell you a little story about that office. Our chief accountant was there and he said he wanted to have something from the shelves and he asked me to get it for him. And I went there and tried to reach up to get the thing and he says, 'With one hand you scratch yourself! You work with two hands.' So obviously I did the wrong thing by trying to manage something with one hand only.

So you learnt a lesson?

I learnt a lesson, yes.: And then I went into Sales and I was quite a good saleswoman. I got on very well with the staff. And then we had a room upstairs where we sent out the work to the different workshops which worked for us, which were usually model salons you know. They got the work. but we had to work out the material. If we got, my boss for instance went to Paris to every showing. She brought back dresses which we copied in Vienna for our shops. So these dresses had to be measured out and patterns to be made off and you know all that had to be worked out, and to be sent out to these different workshops that did the fine, the garments. So that also was my job.

So how long were you there for?

I finished my apprenticeship in '32.

(Possible page missing . . .)

What was the story with the Kapoori Hendl?

Father would make us all sit around in a circle on the floor and he would have a chicken in his hand. He would go over our heads seven times and say a prayer, a bracha over it, and that was the story.

Was this just part of the ritual involved?

Yes, yes...

In preparing for Pesach...

That's right.

Do you know why or how this came about or...?

I think you sort of make a clearing of your soul, purify the family with, with the

What did you kids think of it?

Nothing. We just did as father said and it was quite alright. It was part of the procedure. We just accepted it, no question asked.

But none of you do it any more?

No, no. None of us.

Mmm I see.

I don't know about Eddie in America. He may still do it, but I'm not sure.

Well, going back to work at Paul Honig's.

Laszlo's, Oh Paul Honig's? Yes well then after a while I left Paul Honig and I got a job with Katz, also in Vienna.

Katz?

There were two brothers and they specialised in jersey dresses and suits. Also a Jewish firm. And we worked there, I worked there very happily, also in the department where we distributed the work to different workrooms. It was a very good store, very classy store, next to the first district. And, oh they exploited me too. If I had a dentist appointment at 7 o'clock at night I had to beg the boss, 'May I leave now, I have a dentist appointment.' He said, 'Couldn't you do it another time?' You know, I don't know when he would have wanted me to do it. But I worked there for many, many years, I worked there actual-

ly until Hitler came to Vienna. Because my bosses were straight away arrested and all the Nazi women were sent, put into charge of the room and we all lost our jobs. I lost my job because I sabotaged the place because I knew we always had to train other people for our jobs and then we were thrown out anyhow. And I said, 'I'm not going to train, I'll let her find out herself. And of course it went back to the, ah, what do you call it? The commissioner of the city sent by the Nazi HQ. So I lost the job on the spot with a letter to give it to me, but you know...

Can we go back for a moment to your involvement with the unions?

Yes.

That was before Hitler came?

Oh yes, definitely. That was already, it was actually already I think even when I worked at Laszlo, I think I was approached by somebody to join the union. And of course there, there was a lot of work for the union to get straightened up because we had nothing like a 44, 48 hour week. You just finished when the boss said, 'Now you can go home.' So there was a purpose in it all. And I was quite involved in it because we attended a lot of instruction courses, we spent our weekends going canvassing or cashing membership fees, or we...And apart from that, that was my social place too, because we hiked together, we skiied together, and it was more or less my social activities.



But there was an educational part to it too?

Oh yes. We were trained for it. We had to attend evening classes. I remember even there was a Professor Ehrlich and he was very good to us because he was an economist, and because we had no other meeting house we met every week in a coffee house. You know three or four people. And he took us through economic classes, small classes more or less. But we were very busy filling in our evenings, very much to the upset of my parents because when it was 10pm I was supposed to be home. And I used to take my shoes off in the hall that they shouldn't hear me sneak in. But in spite of that they did hear me come in, so it wasn't so so easy to move round in those days.

And your sporting activities were also with the union?

Oh yes, we were going together to gymnastics and skiing and we did everything you know, within that group. There was always the first Sunday I think was for cashing the membership fee, and the second Sunday was for looking for new members in the group, and then of course we had the outings.

And boyfriends?

Boyfriends? Yes I had plenty.

But no one special.

Oh not really, on and off there came somebody who was a bit more serious but nothing really.

And what about the birds and the bees?

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

Well that is something that we got in the *Niederschule* (lower school). Our headmaster, she was a very progressive woman and she took us in the afternoon and explained to us the things. But of course I never got anything from home. Mother would never mention a thing like that. That was quite taboo.

And father wouldn't either?

Oh no, never, no.

But amongst you kids, would you talk, would you ask each other things?

Well perhaps me and my sister, but never with the brothers. But most of it we could get from friends and the union movement too. I had a very good friend that walked with me to work in the morning and we walked home lunchtime together, because we had a two hour lunch break, you know.

That's why your evenings didn't finish work until six or seven. So you used to come home at lunchtime?

We used to go home at lunchtime. That was our main break, and in the evening we had only a snack for a meal.

Okay, well going forward a bit again to the time your apprenticeship ended and you worked for Honig, Paul Honig...?

Yes and then I went to Katz.

Can you remember when you first heard about Hitler and the National Socialists?

Oh well we heard about it quite early of course, being in the union movement. It was quite often and very well discussed because antisemitism was always there. Then there was the Christian movement you know, where we always were having fights and arguments with. So we were quite informed about it. But of course it wasn't. Hitler didn't come up until 1936 when he was already very active in Germany. In Austria we still had to cope with Schuschnigg and Dollfuss which were ah, well they were also antisemites. But they weren't

Nazis, they were, ah what were they...? Christian Democrats. Weak. I sort of think of them as being sort of weak and ineffectual. ...the *Schutzbund* as well, so already a political movement, it was forbidden you know, from the Social Democrats, they put the clamp on us, a lot of them. And after '34.

*What was the *Schutzbund*?*

It was the form, the Social Democrat Party and they were the military protection group of the Social Democrat Party. They were armed like the, they were trained like soldiers. That was a military sort of section of the Social Democratic Party and of course they were formed after the 1934, after...

So what were the economic conditions?

Well that was very, very tough you know. It was very, it was a bad time for Austria too, like everywhere else. But the Nazi thing you know, first we heard of it from Germany, and there were people coming already from Germany who emigrated to Australia. One of the friends came up and said he's going to Australia. I said, 'Where on earth is that?' 'Oh,' he said, 'Six weeks on the boat.' I said, 'Oh you are crazy to go there.' You know he was one of the first people that I heard that goes to Australia. Well in Germany of course Hitler started to be active much earlier than in Austria.

Did you hear of a lot of people who were leaving?

Yes, Oh yes. There were a lot of people coming to Vienna and going onward from Vienna to further places of course.

And so when did Hitler come to Austria?

Well Hitler came in '38. '38, yes.

But when did you lose your job? What, would that have been also '38?

Yes, yes.

And what did you do then, once you'd lost your job? Did you find work?

No I didn't look anymore. You wouldn't have been able to find work you know. Most Jews in Vienna in those days, either. Once Hitler actually came I got married.

Yes, tell me, where did you meet Fred?

Well I was hitchhiking. Fred had a sister Eva, who died. But she was very friendly with my girlfriend's brother. Fred's sister was a friend of my girlfriend's brother. And through him you know we met Eva and she came very often to Vienna to be with him. And when we had our holiday friends, we were hitchhiking through Austria, my girlfriends and myself, she insisted that we come and stay in Linz when we are on the way to Salzburg and Upper Austria. So we arrived in Linz one morning at 7 o'clock in the morning and we went to the flat where they lived. And Fred was still in bed, they actually were all still in bed. They had only a small flat, it was a room and a kitchen, more or less. And Fred has one of those beds that you put up like a camp bed overnight, standing in the kitchen. So she said, 'You sit with my brother.' He was in bed and he looked like a little boy, so she said, 'Stay with my brother until I get dressed.' And they got dressed and we went out and she said, 'We'll meet lunchtime. So when we met lunchtime I could see it was a full grown boy. He wasn't a little boy as he looked in bed. And that's how we met.

So Eva was older than Fred?

Yes, yes.

And he was living in Linz at that time?

Oh yes, yes. They all lived in Linz at that time.

and how old were you then? What year would that have been?

I was 20. '34 it was. Not quite 20 because I remember on the 3rd my mother sent me a birthday card. So the 20, zwanzig, zig, zig, once you start to get zig on the end you are getting old and she wrote me a birthday card to that effect.

I think she sent it to Linz, yes.

And that happens at 20?

'zwanzig, ein und zwanzig, zwei und zwanzig' and you said when you start to be "zig" that is the end of your youth. So we were on that trip and that is where I met Fred. But at that time I had a boyfriend. I wasn't terribly interested but he kept writing letters. And all that time it was going on and on. Then of course there came that year of 1934 when Dolfuss was, and the Social Democrats. Well the uprising apparently started in Linz you know, where they put up barricades and Fred was, and the whole family was very much involved in the Social Democratic fight for freedom and they put up barricades and were shooting. It started in Linz because somebody phoned through to Vienna and said "Linz is already fighting" and they were all standing in attendance.

Waiting?

Waiting for what is happening. Of course nothing much was gained. There was a lot of fighting going on in Vienna too, you know. They all were fighting and shooting and all that but of course they didn't get anywhere. They lost and they were imprisoned and Fred was imprisoned.

So what was the group that Fred was part of in Linz?

The Social Democrat Party. The whole family was wrapped up in the Social Democrat Party very actively.

But Eva lived in Vienna?

No, she lived in Linz, she went to visit Vienna only.

And Hans was also?

No Hans was always wrapped up with Maccabi and more on the Jewish side. I don't think Hans was involved but Trude was of course the secretary of Adler and Bauer, and was quite high up and so was her husband.

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So who was the oldest in the family?

Trude.

Trude was the oldest?

I think first came Hans, and then came Fred, and then came Eva.

No, you said Eva was older than Fred?

Yes, Oh...

Fred was born 1910 and Eva 1912 it says, I have here.

Could be, yes that could be.

And Eva died?

Eva committed suicide.

In '37?

Yes

So just before Hitler came?

Yes, yes.

Can you remember the circumstances that led her to do that?

Yes as a matter of fact they were all working in the factory of Onkel (uncle) Sommer and Eva had apparently taken money from the company to support her boyfriend that she had at the time. And it was something like the sum of 400 schillings, it wasn't much of a money at all. But she worked in the office in the Kleinmuenchner Papier and when she was found out she, what do you use, Fred was a great photographer and he did a lot of his own developing, and he had some stuff at home...

Chemicals for developing?

That she...

She drank it? It must have been a terrible shock?

A terrible death because her mother was sitting all...(weeps)

And she, you knew why she had done it then? Or it only came out afterwards?

Yes. Oh well, we knew after she died, it came out of course.

A waste.

Yes. She was an immensely, she was very intelligent girl like all the Bruell kids were. Active, a great sportswoman. She was on the (tubby) side. She was a first class skier and mountaineer and climber and hiker and a lovely girl.

Well, so getting back to Vienna...

Well of course then there was the uprising and Fred got imprisoned. He got six months in Linz. He had three months and then he got a break to Christmas, and then he had to go back and sit another three months. And then there was a couple in Vienna, an old couple, and both their sons were imprisoned. I don't know whether I know but with the upheaval there was a couple in Vienna, two boys that were also wrapped up in the union movement, and also finished up in jail. And they had old parents and I kept visiting the parents. And the one boy was sent to Stein, which was a prison on the Donau.

That's Stein. On the Donau, which is a township, I don't know why they shipped him to Stein because it certainly wasn't dangerous.

Donau is the Danube. Anyhow, and there was Fred sitting in prison that kept writing the letters and it really was nothing to do with love or attention and I think it was more pity. I kept writing to Fred and I kept writing to Schambron and I kept visiting the old parents that were quite desperate because all they had were their two sons. And then suddenly I was faced with being the bride of two men that I had really nothing to do with. It was quite... Mitzi loves telling this story and Hansi always enjoyed bringing it back and...

So how did you extricate yourself from that?

Well as you see I didn't. Schambron, when he came out, and Fred came out and it was a terrible tragedy going on in Vienna. I think it was the first time when I had a nervous breakdown because everyone pulled me to one side and one pulled me to the other side and I was standing in the middle between these two men and none of them would let go. And of course Fred threatened suicide.

Oh, that was dramatic.

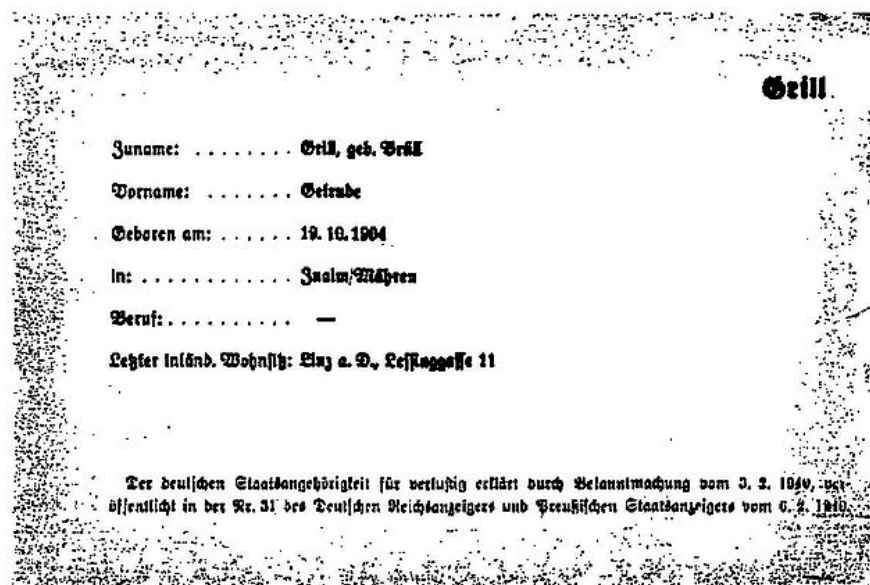
It was dramatic after Eva had died not very long ago and so on. And he threatened suicide and Mitzi and Hansi loved bringing this story and I could every time have kicked them for it, but they enjoyed talking about it because Mitzi was very much standing by my side and being the meeting up with Fred and being the in-between, trying to sort things out. But I don't know, Schambron I think lives now somewhere in Boston – got married and probably forgot all about me.

So when did Fred come out of prison?

That was Christmas then. Seven.

Right.

Yes he came out and then he had to go back after Christmas for another three months.



Gertrude Grill, Peter's aunt (nee Brüll) - this document records the withdrawal of her right to German citizenship.

every six weeks but there were letters every day and on Sunday we had express mail and I had another letter. So I had a whole lot of letters which made very good reading because it was all about the political situation and economical situation and all that. And I always thought, 'I'll make a book out of it,' because it was really, was quite fascinating reading but then when Hitler came and we had searched through the house when Hitler came, on the evening, I think I burnt them all. Or before a few days, before a few days, after, I can't remember. It was on our honeymoon so that must have been before, because there was too much material in it that could have.. .

Incriminated.

That's '38 we're in, '38 now?

No it could be six, '35, '36. No, the upheaval was in '34 wasn't it? So it was '35 then.

So it was Christmas '35 that he was... released. But he had been to prison again... and '36 that he came out.

Yes.

And that was two years before you got married wasn't it?

Yes, yes. Well there were letters going back and forth you know. Fred only came to Vienna once in six weeks.

So he was still in Linz?

Oh yes. He lived in Linz all the time. He worked in the Kleinmuenchner paper factory. He came to me only about

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Incriminated. When the Spanish War was on, I was a cover for passing on information to Dorl (his name was Theodore but they called him Dorl) and was very much wrapped up of course in that and was always involved in high politics and the letters came over me and I passed them on and...

And Dorl?

Dorl was Trude's husband, Theodore G-r-i-l--l. And they were all very much wrapped up in political activities.

So Trude was Fred's sister?

Oldest yes.

And that made Dorl Fred's brother-in-law.

Right. So all that became then very, very...

Dangerous.

Dangerous. And I burnt the letters but they would have made very good reading.

And Trude and Dorl, what did they do in...

They were politically, Trude was in the central committee in Brussels which set up after the '34. They had to emigrate of course straightaway because they were too exposed. They were too exposed in it and they emigrated straight away and went to Brussels and worked there with Adler. Bauer was in Paris

Adler is A-d-l-e-r?

A very prominent socialist in Vienna, and they emigrated, the whole office was operating from Brussels.

Getting back to you and Fred, your relationship obviously flourished and you, he stayed in Linz for the whole time until?

He had a job with Onkel

Onkel Sommer?

It wasn't very, Onkel Sommer was, well Fred was a very good salesman. Onkel Sommer had no family, no children. He had a wife, yes, he had a very orthodox wife. Actually they always bitched about her. I met her once, I found her a very nice woman. Well he was only allowed to go to Vienna every six weeks. He had a motorbike. If the motorbike conked out on the way, he got stuck in the snow, it was quite a procedure. One day he came suddenly to Vienna and something and the motorbike had conked out and I said, 'For God's sake why didn't you leave it there and catch the train?' And he said, 'Have you ever heard the captain leaves the ship?' So he was determined to make Vienna. But then Onkel forbade him to come with, he had a car, he was promoted. He got a proper car you know but then eventually he forbade him to come to Vienna altogether. But the story with Onkel was in some cases a bit complicated. Onkel Sommer was the boss of the Kleinmuenchner Papier Fabrik. When mother, Fred's mother, lost her husband you know, the children were young and he supported them. He told her what she can buy with their money and what they should do with the money. He kept her on not very generous... and they always resented him for that. On the other hand he kept-them alive. The money that the father left you know, Fred's father, when he died, was all devalued...

Lilly you were taking about

Onkel Sommer was the brother of Helena. Helena was the mother of Fred.

Okay. And you were talking about his role in the family.

Well yes, he more or less looked after the family because Fred lost his father very early. So he looked after them and supported them financially and Eva and Fred had a job with the company. It was quite a big paper concern, manufacturing concern. Well, Onkel, they were always struggling financially of course, and Onkel wanted Fred to marry somebody with finances behind

them. And he didn't want Fred to marry me. Well it was, when he told that to Fred, Fred just, they went up to the lawyer about it, it was that hot and that bitter, that Fred insisted in front of the lawyer that he wants to state that he'll marry whoever he likes and that Onkel can't put the stamper on him, can't stop him doing what he wants. And he can keep his car and he can keep... because the factory was to go to Fred, and he told Onkel to disinherit him. And Fred said you can keep your factory and you can keep your car, I will marry who I want to marry. So after that, Onkel came to Vienna. He took me to the Cafe Fensterkuche opposite the Opera House and he had a session with me and he said that I can't marry Fred and I should be a bit more considerate. He has lost, you know, Eva had died a few months before and you can't do that to his mother and the family. And you can't do that to the family and that would be, you know, selfish, if I want to marry him. I should tell him. I can't get anywhere with Fred, he said, he's as stubborn as can be. You have to tell him that you've found somebody else and break it off like that. And I said Onkel, do you know what, you tell him that. I'm not going to. So anyhow he sees so that he couldn't do much about it so that was it. Also Onkel liked me very much and Gretl, that was another aunt of Fred's, she always reckoned that Onkel liked me for himself, not so much of consideration about the paperworks, but he had a wife anyhow, I didn't know why that old man should have wanted me.

But no children?

He had no children, no.

And he, wasn't he imprisoned also, Onkel Sommer?

Yes, he was sent to Dachau. And in Dachau Onkel Sommer, it was a concentration camp, one of the earliest wasn't it. And he had to sign to give away the factory, you know to have no rights to the factory, and he signed it to come out, and went to Israel. That's when Onkel went to Israel. Of course the Kleinmunchner Werke were taken over and they were the Goering Werke. Yes Hermann Goering. You know, they were the works, and there was a long and

endless battle after the war to get the factory back. He got some of it back I think. But of course he never worked there anymore...

Getting back to your wedding to Fred, which was on the 12th of April 1938?

Yes, actually we wanted to marry on the 10th of April but they were the elections for Hitler, we didn't want to interfere with these activities so we postponed it to the 12th which actually was a Tuesday too, and we got married very quietly. It was Hans at that time was working at the cemetery as a gardener, you know Hans, his brother, Fred's brother is a gardener by profession. And he worked at the cemetery and he could bring some flowers home. And somebody volunteered to taxi, I think it must have been one of my father's friends that offered a taxi to take us to there. And I had a navy blue outfit on with a coat where I had hidden the flowers in my coat and we sneaked to the synagogue. And the rabbi was there, Fred was running a bit late, he stayed I think with Hans, and the rabbi said, "If he doesn't come soon I'll marry you without him being here. I cannot risk it to be here in synagogue." So there were only my parents and my good friend Lotte [Speiser], and Paul [Unger] who was a cousin of Fred's, and my brother Otto were the signatories, witnesses. It was a very quiet wedding. And we went home and we had lunch with Mum, probably gefillte fish and chicken soup, that's a must for a wedding, the golden soup. And then Fred and I went off and we went to [Mönischkirchen] which is a small place outside of Vienna but not very far. And when we arrived in Mönischkirchen there was a banner across the road: 'Jews not wanted here.' But we sneaked into the gasthaus in which we stayed and we stayed there a couple of nights when we got the phone-call that Hans has been arrested already. So we packed up and came back to Vienna. Hans was already in prison.

So in fact, were Jews allowed to get married at that time in Vienna?

Yes, we had a Jewish wedding. So there were no restrictions on us. Not on that. Then again it was pre-arranged wasn't it. It was something that we had booked in before so I don't think they'd woken up to the fact yet that they

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should stop us. But Jews with Jews that was no problem. If I would have married out or something it could have been a problem.

So the reason for a quiet wedding was just that you didn't want to draw attention?

No that was because everybody was scared, nobody would have dared to go out on the street unless they had to.

And Hans was arrested and what happened to him?

Yes. Hans was arrested and there he was was sitting, they were checking up records of course. Hans was never politically active or anything like that. He was released and went to Israel.

And when was that?

I think it would have been '38. Later on in '38.

So you and Fred stayed on in Vienna for a while?

You know that was the question we were asked here by that interviewer when we arrived here. He said to us that we left Vienna in July and Hitler marched in March, and the interviewer, he also asked us, You couldn't have been very much against him if you stayed until July. Well you couldn't get out as easily as you thought. You had to have all that paperwork done. You know you had to have permits to leave the country. I became a Czechoslovakian citizen by marrying Fred because then there were mostly Czechoslovakian citizens, so I could move in the street at least but you had to prepare things. We went one weekend across to Czechoslovakia to find ourselves jobs. I had a job in a clothing factory, Fred had a job in a printing works, over in Czechoslovakia. I had a Czechoslovakian passport and then I could travel in Brno freely.

So you left Vienna in?

For a weekend to go and find jobs, then we came back. Then we organised everything else, I got my wedding presents and my mother, from my parents

gave me a beautiful bedroom suite as a present and we wanted to get that all shipped out of course. We were setting up home in Czechoslovakia. So it wasn't so easy that you could say, 'I leave.' We got all that organised. In between we were summoned to the HQ of the Nazi HQ, Mitzi and I because of our involvement with the Spanish address, they found out somehow, they found out some of our letters, they must have found a letter from him or his involvement in it. So we were interviewed the whole morning by Gestapo officers sitting. There were three Austrians and one German. Luckily the Austrians weren't schooled enough to know to ask the right questions but I remember Mitzi saying they confiscated our passport. And Mitzi pleading, 'Please, give us back the passports, you want to get rid of us, let us have the passports back.' You know, she was quite shaken up.

And did they give them back?

Yes Mitzi got hers back and I had a Czechoslovakian one which they couldn't take anyhow. Then I remember one incident, I was walking, Fred was there. We were walking along on the Ringstrasse, and suddenly somebody tapped Fred on the shoulder, that must have been shortly before we emigrated and he turned around and there was a young Nazi boy who said, 'You are Fritz Bruell, you will come with me.' It was one Fred was very involved with in the youth movement, it was a children's group, the Red Falcons they were called. The Red Falcons. And he was running camps, he was the organiser of the Oberösterreich on the youth camps. He spent a lot of time with them, with these youngsters in education and camping out and all of that. It was taking up a great deal of his young life. And it was one of the youngsters that were in his group, and of course he marched us back to the HQ on [Stulmarine]. And he knew, 'You are Fritz Bruell from Linz.' Anyhow we were scared that he will take us up in the office but then Fred said, 'You know you can't do anything to me because I am a Czechoslovakian citizen and I am leaving Vienna on Saturday anyhow.' And obviously that kid didn't know quite what to do with him so he said, 'I don't want to have seen you, march off. You know, sort of,

'Just march off?' Which we did of course. And it was true that we had gone to Czechoslovakia very shortly afterwards anyhow.

But those experiences must have been pretty scary?

It was scary. And I remember you know I was the one, my father, when he needed money from the bank or something, I was the one running around because I had a Czech passport. You know they didn't know quite what to do with the Czechs at that stage, so I could go round. Then my father didn't have one, Fred was in Vienna, Fred was always so good to my parents, and he couldn't, my father never had enough money because he was too extravagant on one hand, you know, and he was always running low on money and he had to pay wages. He sent out work to home-workers you know, making trousers or making vests, you know, he said he can't pay the tailor or something. Fred said, 'Look you know we have got money saved.' We had it hidden in a Kachelofen. What do you call the Kachelofen?

I don't know.

You know the big..

A range? A kitchen range?

No, no the ovens with the beautiful tiling..

Right, okay.

You know like they have in the huts or country. On the continent you see a lot of them. And we had one in the bedroom that lifted the top up but it didn't work as a heater anymore so we discarded it years ago. And the money we saved we hid, Fred and I, hid in there. Fred said, 'You know we have the money sitting there. Go on, give it to Dad. He was really, so I gave it to Dad to pay. But Fred was so over generous it was, when the staff in Katz, gave me for my wedding present, they collected a thousand schillings and they gave it to me. And I came home with this thousand schillings in an envelope and I told Fred,

'That's from the staff.' Hans was there. He said, 'Give it to Hans, he is going to Israel, he's got to outfit himself.' So I handed the envelope as I got it to Hans. He was incredible, Fred. He was always giving money away. In Czechoslovakia we had 800 Krone in the bank. A friend of his went to England. Fred said, 'You have to give him 400 kroner, and he can't have ...torn pants.' He was one, he was always so generous, he was so good to my parents.

So your parents and Mitzi and Hansi and Otto and Lotte all left?

Well yes, in stages. We were the first ones to leave for Czechoslovakia. Well when we came to Czechoslovakia, after a couple of weeks I wanted to go back to Vienna to visit my parents and I came to the border and they wouldn't let me in. They said 'You don't let the Germans in,' you know, 'The Czechs don't let the Germans in so we don't let the Czechs in. So from the station at the border I rang my parents to tell them that I can't make it. But my parents were the last ones to leave Vienna. First left Mitzi and Eddie, and then Otto and Lotte, and my parents were the last ones to leave.

And that was all in '38?

'38. Towards the end. I left earlier. I left in July. Yes.

So what were you and Fred doing? You were working in Brno?

Oh, yes I had a job in a dress shop and Fred was in the printing works. Unfortunately when the Munich Agreement was signed Brno was Sudeten Germany. In fact that agreement with Chamberlain came up and the Sudeten Germans, you know, were given away. Straight away, Fred lost his job but I worked till Christmas. We had to go every week to the police to get an extension, a permit to stay a few days longer. We got that from week to week only.

That was because Brno was in Sudetenland?

Yes that was in Sudeten Germany and they wanted to get rid of it all.

And at some stage Fred's mother joined you, is that...

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Yes. Well Fred's mother, Fred's mother was in Brussels with Trude. When all the upheaval started we wrote to Trude and told her that they have to take mother. (pause) No, no that was later on. Fred's mother was in Vienna and she joined us in Czechoslovakia. Only from there on, she joined us in Czechoslovakia then when Fred lost his job of course and mine was limited, they gave me a permit to work till Christmas, Fred kept writing to the whole world you know. Everywhere he saw some possibility of emigration he wrote, to emigrate. Of course he never got answers for it either. He helped out in the B'nai B'rith soup kitchen. He helped out in the Social Democratic office. They had set up an office for the refugee assistance you know. So many people came across the border. He helped out there and then mother joined us. At that time of course, Fred, we had a very nice flat. Well we had sold everything, our wedding presents, our bedrooms, so whatever we had. We came across to Brno with about a thousand books, I remember them sitting lined up on the floor in there. And all the wedding presents went and the bedroom suite went. And all Fred always wanted was to save the mattresses. He always reckoned that if we've got nothing that we've got mattresses to sleep on. It'll be something to tide us over. Well I had all new linen and so on so we hung on to the mattresses. And...

So you had a little flat there or?

We moved and we had the mattresses in the storage then because we had to give up the flat of course, we couldn't afford it anymore. And we moved in with a couple, our finances were of course sort of dwindling. And we moved in with a flat, there were two women living alone, one must have been married because there was a child. And they had just a room and a kitchen. And they gave us up their bedroom. And it was a double bed. By that time mother had joined us and the three of us slept in the double bed for very little money that they charged us. But these two women were also very poor, low with their finances. And we slept there and we stayed there with them. Well then of course we had to try to get out of the country. Well Fred first of all tried to get

mother out and the trouble was that, the Social Democrats, when he went to the Kultusgemeinde they said you belong to the Social Democrats. When he went to the Social Democrats they said you belong to the Kultusgemeinde. So we were between you know, the two of them.

What was the Kultusgemeinde?

The Jewish congregation.

So it was the cultural Jewish, the community centre really?

The community centre from the Jewish congregation. It was a terrible time. There were every day there were suicides from people who jumped from windows because they had no chance to emigrate. And it was a terrible time really. And well Fred kept writing to Trude and Dorl, 'You've got to take mother over.' You know, 'We just can't have her anymore because it is not safe for her.' Well after a lot of ums and ahs, because Trude wrote, begged that mother makes Dorl nervous when he was reading. He was one of these highly intelligent people that studied economic reports from the whole world and you know, all the science that he wrapped up, and of course, Mother tried to talk to him or something, and for...'Never mind that, you've got to take mother.' Which of course then they agreed to take mother. We raised the fare from the Kultusgemeinde and paid the fare and she was brought to Brussels which was a help because we were slightly more mobile.

So how did you and Fred then, we're now by the end of '38? Would that be right?

Would be yes.

So how long did you manage to stick in that situation before Fred left?

Well Fred was active in the Social Democratic office there and he tried sort of, tried to be occupied, and he was writing all these letters to different people and then I think it was February. There was a committee, they were sending out a group of men who were politically endangered. They were going to

England.

And when was that?

I think it would have been about February.

February '39?

Ja. January or February, but it was '39. And Fred was amongst that group with the politically endangered men, in a transport to London. The day before he came there was a couple visiting us from somebody, I don't know who sent them to us, it must be some relation of Paul Unger or some friend, and they came to ask Fred, and they wanted Fred to take over some diamonds and, you know, jewellery something, they had already something. And they wanted Fred to take it and put it in the...you know, all sorts of hiding places that they were setting up. And Fred said, I want to get an English pound for that to be able to get my wife out. They wouldn't give it. The money in England won't be touched. I was supposed to get a silver evening bag for that, that was their offering for him taking out the jewellery. Crazy. I don't want a silver evening bag, that was the last thing that I needed in those days. And Fred refused to take it and I was, was very, very relieved of it. I said he would have lost his chances of getting across or being arrested...for what? To get their jewellery out of the country. We turned it down flat and it was a great relief to me. Well Fred came to England and worked in the Czechoslovakian refugee committee which they had set up to help the people that were losing everything through the stated agreement. It was called the Czechoslovak Trust Fund. They were English people who ran it, but they were volunteer workers like Fred and Hans and hundreds of others, and when I came away too. Voluntary workers.

Can you tell me about how you came to leave Czechoslovakia? By then you'd lost your job hadn't you. By the time Fred went in '39?

Yes, and then came March (Nazi invasion) of course. Yes. Well we women were supposed to be shipped across as soon as the men had arrived in Lon-

don but Hitler marched into Prague...it was...

15th of March or...whatever. 15th of March.

Yes well the borders were closed and consulates didn't work anymore and we were there with very little money, with very little places to stay in. I think I moved in one month about eighty friends' hotels because the minute I moved in the Nazis came...and moved out again. And it was a very tough time at that time. And then it was about in May when Fred wrote that it looks very much like the war breaking out, I've got to get out of Czechoslovakia. I don't, you wouldn't remember it of course but there was a time when war was very much talked about and it was a very, very tough time.

But in fact it didn't break out until September did it?

No. But he said get out, whatever you manage to do, get out. It was a very silly thing that Fred did...I don't know when he did that. That he wanted me to give my passport, to send my passport to Paris, you know to help some people from Vienna to get out he says swap the picture over or something. Because I wanted to get the travel paper and you know... no passport...get the travel paper anyhow. But I was frantic. You know it was always Fred's good natured way to help everybody and I was desperate.

So you'd sent it?

I had sent it, or he did, to Paris to the international HQ. And I was quite desperate. Through somehow he got the passport back, Fred, but he couldn't find anybody that would take it to Czechoslovakia for me. He tried the diplomatic post and he tried different sources to get me the passport. And everybody refused. In the end he just put it in an envelope and the passport arrived. And that was a relief and a half. You know without that passport you are really...

Stuck?

Stuck.

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So you were still in Brno then?

No I, we took the train with my girlfriend across to Prague.

So Lilly, we left you in Prague in May 1938, where you had gone with a girlfriend. So perhaps you'd like to... When did you say Hitler come to...?

Hitler came in March. Yes. So I was in March in Prague. The Ides of March, the 15th of March was when he arrived... He must have been there a few days before because I remember with my girlfriend, we stayed in a hotel which I am sure was just a, what you call a...?

A brothel?

Something like a brothel, because it was cheap enough. So we stayed there. But in the morning when we came down and the receptionist said to us: "The Germans marched across the border. They are here in Czechoslovakia." And that was another bombshell of course, but we went straight away down to the main street where they were marching, and the Czechs spitting at them and you know, performing, but here the Germans marched.

So. So?

So we were hoping, we took part because we were hoping that the British Consul would still work for something, something works there, but of course it didn't, you know. So our chances of moving out were getting smaller every time. But we moved around from one place to another just to find something and Fred kept bombarding me to leave Czechoslovakia at any price because, you know, it doesn't look too good. So we tried, we tried, and we contacted the ah, now what do you call the Kultusgemeinde, that's the...Jewish...

Jewish community... The Jewish community centre.

They said we should go to Mähr. Ostrau which is on the border of, what you call it, Czechoslovakia and Poland. What do you call it in English? It's um... Moravian... Ostrava...something yes. Well they reckoned that we've got

to make our own way over there because we'd have more chance to get across.

But actually it was going the wrong direction...

No, it might have been but in Poland the British consulates were still working.

Oh.

No, no. He was in Czechoslovakia with his troops and of course...

and Poland came after Czechoslovakia.

After Czechoslovakia, yes. So with that recommendation which, from the Kultusgemeinde saying we should make our move to Mähr. Ostrau and from there on they would help us along. So we went to Mähr. Ostrau, and contacted the community, the Jewish community centre there. They were helpful and they passed me onto a family Hirschfeld whose son had gone across the border the week before and they would give us more information. Well anyhow they put me up. I stayed with them. I could stay with them. They were a very nice old couple and their sons made it across and they used their contacts to help us get across. I was on my own at the time but there were two boys. One was a Doctor Stein and another man who was supposed to be with me. Anyhow they suggested that, you know there's a train leaving from the Czechoslovakian side, a coal train, into the Polish side, and that's what they suggested: that we go with that train. The driver would hide us in the engine room and let us out on the Polish side for a cost of, I don't know, 2000 crowns.

Crowns?

No, it was in Czechoslovakian crowns or something. Well anyway we got the the money from the Kultusgemeinde and they handed it over to the contact who told us how to go out to the train station which was up on the top of a hill somewhere around Mähr. Ostrau. Well we walked, I had no luggage. I had sent the mattresses already from Brno to England. I could get a clearance from the

shipping line Schenk. The Nazi officer was standing over there to check the, what is in that box, and he could see they were only mattresses. And linen. He said, 'The linen is new.' I said, 'What do you want? I've only been married for a few months, of course it is new.' But anyhow, they let it go and I had the box of mattresses sent to England. It was about the only thing that we really got out of Czechoslovakia. But coming back now to Mähr. Ostrau, not knowing where I will live and, I had funnily enough a sewing gear in my satchel, and shoe polish. I was very particular in those days. My shoes had to be clean all the time and my spare pants you know, that was about all I carry, probably some spare makeup, and I just you know had a largish handbag or small satchel or something or both because we were warned you know not to make it obvious what we are doing. So we walked up through the forest, through that hill, up towards the station. Somebody tapped us on the shoulder: 'Where are you going to?' 'Oh,' we said, 'Just for a walk. 'Come with me.' So they took us back to the station, to the police station..

You and...?

And the two boys. All the Czech boys. Dr Stein was one, the other one I can't even remember his name. We were grouped by the Kultusgemeinde, in little small groups, how to go about it. So we were there and of course we were separated, the men went somewhere else and there were so many. And we were searched thoroughly and interviewed and what I intend to do and I was going. I remember him cutting, I had some cotton reel, and they sliced it through to see whether I had something hidden in there. And of course the toothpaste was sliced open and Nivea cream that I had, you know, and that was all mucked up. They were just trying to find something that I had hidden. But of course I didn't have anything that was hidden. Even my rings. When Fred was at the station, sent to England, I gave him my rings. I said, 'You take that with you, I don't want to have them.' So I had really nothing that was, they could take. I had an international postal note on me, two of them, because I wanted to send one to Fred, I made it, and one to my parents, I made it. But

of course they took that away, so I didn't even have that anymore. So I was imprisoned. We were in a police cell. We were nine women in a single police cell. We took the mattress across the room at nights. We put our heads on it. They were lined like sardines. Well that's when the Nazis put that. They said a degrading gesture. They put the Czechoslovakian police on guard in the cells and of course they were good to us. They put us a slice, a stick of sausage in the room you know, at night when no-one else was about. You know, they were good. Anyhow we were then after a week, transferred to the Kreisgericht (District Court), which was a bigger prison room and we were interrogated again about what we had and what we had left and what we didn't. Well I said I didn't have anything, I didn't leave anything, all I want to do was make my own way to England to get a job and work there. Well there were about two thousand men and a thousand women imprisoned in Mähr. Ostrau at that time and when we came to the big Kreisgericht (district prison), we had a bigger room, you know it wasn't like the sardines cramped in the police cell, and we were not really knowing quite what is going to happen next.

All Jews?

Yes. All Jewish people who were trying to cross the border. Yes we were not mixed with any criminals or anything. It was all people that tried to get across. That's where I met Mrs Strauss.

Oh?

She was at Mähr. Ostrau too. At that time she was still Mrs Weil. She was still married to her husband, you know, she's married a second time to Strauss. Well that's where I met her and that's where she was. The minute we arrived here (NZ) she said, 'Don't you ever mention that I was in prison. I ask her 'Why? We weren't in prison for any other reason, we only were wanting to cross the border?' But she never wanted me to mention that.

Strange.

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Well anyhow, we were there. And after about two or three weeks we were, they said 'we are leaving tonight.' On trucks, there were several trucks filled up with the inmates and we were taken to the border. On that border we were told, 'You, that is no-mans-land in front of you. You see that star over there, you follow that star.' That was wild fields, you know, there was no road or anything. 'You go and follow that. Don't talk to anybody because you've got no entry visa to Poland and you can't speak the language, so just follow that and go across.' So a small group again formed. I think there was one pregnant woman and two men, and one of them was a journalist in Czechoslovakia. And we started to walk at night, just through the fields and through the rivers and all the time the searchlights were going, so whenever the searchlights came up we lay down flat on the ground. And we walked and we walked. And then at about one o'clock in the morning we came to a sort of a road and that journalist, the Czechoslovakian said, 'Look, I speak Polish, I see someone coming, I'll ask where we are.' And he asked that bloke where we are. And it was a policeman just coming off duty in civilian clothing. So he rounded us up and took us back to the police station. And that was already the Polish police station. And we sat there all night until a Mr Kommandant came at six o'clock in the morning. And he said, 'Back to Czechoslovakia. We don't want you here. You've got no papers, you've got no entry visas, back you go.' So he gave us a policeman, and he came on the train with us. And we went back to Czechoslovakia. And in those days, I don't know whether I used my charm or what, I begged him not to hand us over to the Germans. You know, so anyhow, he said, 'No, I'll just put you on Czechoslovakian soil and make you walk further.' And that's what he did, he didn't hand us over to the Germans, he just put us across the border on Czechoslovakian soil.

You still had your Czech, you had your Czech passport at that stage?

Oh yes, but under the Germans it didn't make much impression. So anyhow, we decided to split up, you know that we each make our own way because as a group it was too hard to move, you know. So I walked back from there to the

Hirschfelds again. And of course they were very upset. And somebody had tipped us off because the money that the Kultusgemeinde, the train driver was given never came back. He insisted if we personally came up he'd give it to us, but of course we didn't risk that. We could not risk that. Because he was obviously in with the Nazis. So I stayed with the Hirschfelds a few nights and they said they'll find something else. They were very good to me, they were like parents you know. Mind you, I scrubbed their floor, I cleaned their house. I tried to make myself useful and they appreciated it very much and I appreciated being with them. And then they found another contact. And it was again a coal worker, someone that worked for the coal mines or something. And he was to walk with me through the forest. He wasn't risking it to walk with me. He would walk ahead of me and I was following him through the forests. Well, he arranged a time, we started off, and we walked. And suddenly a Polish soldier. Well he walked on of course, he tried not to make known that he belongs to me he could lose his work permit or his job. And there was the Polish soldier, and he just said, 'Right. So to walk.' So I walked, and he was behind me with the gun, and I walked. Until I fell and, of course, he grabbed me - and raped me. In that misery I was lucky that there was gunshots not far from us. And he said 'smugglers' and he started to run towards where the guns were shooting. And I turned around and followed the path that I saw the man (guide) take, and I came into the Polish village. He was at the main road. He fell around my neck and he kissed me and he hugged me. He was so relieved to see me. He thought it was me, the gunshots. And he took me to a Polish family and I spent the night there. He had located the family, told them I was coming and I spent the night there. And that man was very good. He went to get me a bus ticket and a Polish paper in the morning and he put me on the bus, and he said: "You just keep looking at that paper until you come to Katowice, because in Katowice the British Consulate was still working." He said, "Keep looking at that paper all the time and don't talk, hand him the ticket but don't talk." So that's how I came to Katowice.

And how long was that bus trip?

Oh it would have been three or four hours or something like that. And I came to Katowice and went again to the Jewish community centre there. But the Poles didn't want us there of course, none of us had visas for Poland. So we were mostly in the courtyard from the temple and that's where I met Stiasny and his wife Bertha. They were in the same courtyard. So we were hanging around there and then there was a young couple, they all tried to make a few extra zloties, and the (authorities) sent us to that couple, me on my own and they had sort of double bed and there was a sofa at the end of the bed and I slept on that sofa for the zloties they got for the night you know. And there was a soup kitchen in the synagogue and that's where we were fed. Well I contacted the British consulate you know and I told them that my husband is already there and the whole story, and I was given a place on the last transport leaving Katowice, with 25 women and pregnant women. And we were taken to Gdynia and from there shipped to England. And that's when I arrived in England.

Shipped...

To England.

So there was...

Gdynia was our last port.

That was a port

Oh Gdynia is a port, Ja. The last one on the Polish end. And that's how I came to England.

So you must have been overjoyed to see Fred again?

And my parents blamed Fred, he should never have let me cross the border. It was my only chance because a few weeks later the Germans marched into Poland and shot whatever was visible. I mean the people that were running

were arriving, you know, they had holes in their suitcases, they were diving so low, and just shooting them like anything. So it was just my last chance of really getting out of Poland.

You must have felt lucky?

Yes I was. And then England of course, where Fred worked already in the committee and there was a woman there who was very good, and had a company house and let us stay there for a week or something. Then I worked in the committee too, in the clothing department. You know the British people were very generous and handed over old clothing to the committee and we distributed the clothing so that was my job. And for that, we were not allowed to work in England because we didn't have working permits, but we got 35 shillings maintenance from the committee. And that was what we managed on. And we managed very well because we saved a pound for mother, a month, and a pound for Uncle. You know we tried to save and help them along.

So mother was then still in Brussels?

Yes.

And she stayed there for the war, for the duration of the war?

Yes, yes. She came out 1948 or something. Yes.

She was there for ten years really?

Or was it earlier that she came out? No she was, I'm getting muddled. She came out before that because she stayed with us in Meadowbank, didn't she? She had a room in Meadowbank with us, and the children were little.

And Uncle Sommer was in Israel by then?

And Uncle Sommer was in Israel still and then he came out and when I came back from America with he children Uncle Sommer was here and Fred had bought them already the house in Upland Road...in Upland Road.

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And what happened to Uncle Sommer's wife?

I think she went to Israel, I never found out and I think she died there. They all bitched about her. They all bitched about her. But Uncle only married her for her money because he needed always money for his plant you know. And I found, she invited me once, she was a proud Jewish woman and I found her very nice but I don't think Uncle was easy to live with really.

It doesn't sound like it. And who, getting back to London and your life there, who funded the organisation that gave you the allowance? What was that organisation?

The Czech Refugee Trust Fund, which was started by English people after Chamberlain gave up Sudetan Germany and they felt they ought to help us, which they did with the maintenance. And Fred worked in the immigration department with a Dr Haas from Mähr. Ostrau, he was there too. And their aim was to get people out of England, you know, whenever they could dig up some permits for different countries that offered to take some in, they took them out; you know they helped to arrange everything for the departure. We had only transit visas. Had we stayed longer perhaps or something, we might have got permanent visas because once the war started they could, some of them got visas to stay on, but their aim was we that we had to get out.

But some people must also have done it privately, like my parents?

Your parents came with money or had money to buy it out themselves. And they were not evicted from Czechoslovakia, they went under their own free steam. But it's difficult isn't it? I mean the Hirstens, they got out, normally. And when people had money, you could sort of arrange things.

My parents, well they went to London.....

Well they went to London in March 39 and were there six months trying to get permission to go somewhere. And then they finally got permission to come to New Zealand and came in, left in September.

But your parents came with money,

You know, Claire, without money nobody wants you, really nobody wants you. They all want to have the security that people can feed themselves if they haven't got the job. You know you can understand it now, in those days I didn't understand it. And then, you know, when we were in London, that woman, that very nice women...no it's fine.

Well getting back to London...

Yes. Well we were in London and that nice woman Fred worked with that gave us that holiday in the country, you know, she also had that flat off Tottenham Court Road and she said we could stay there. And it belonged to a Miss Cook who lived there, and she was a Communist, but she was very nice. She worked in the BBC in London during the war years. She had a friend, Ormond Wilson, who was a farmer in New Zealand and also worked at the BBC in London and she got him to give us an interview, or talk to us, to see what he can do for us. And she arranged this and he met us once in a coffee bar there by Oxford Circus. And he interviewed us, you know, and asked all the questions about our qualifications and what we are prepared to do and what we have done, and so on and so forth. And he was the one who really, that contacted whoever it was here in New Zealand, and we got the visa to come to New Zealand. And we got from the community, we got £200 to come here, and that's what we came here with. And that's more or less how..

So how long were you in London then? You would have arrived about April, 39, May 39?

May, June?

June?

It would have been June or something like that.

So three months after Fred left virtually?

No Fred left in February, left Czechoslovakia and then we met up again, it

must have been June or something.

Okay, so four months.

About something like that. And we stayed, we had a flat in Mayfair with another couple, refugee couple, you know we all were scrounging things things and tried to..

Lilly, you left London to come to NZ in...?

In July, in August. No it was July when we left, 1940. We both worked in the Czech Refugee Trust, and Fred was in the immigration department. And he tried very hard to immigrate.

And the funny thing is that on the same day we got the New Zealand visa we got also one from Argentine and we didn't, weren't quite sure which one we should take. But of course we didn't want to have to study another language. I said now we speak already some English, let's go to New Zealand and speak English there. So that was the decision then, and we left, and we decided to come to New Zealand.

What was the ship you sailed on?

The Orcades. She was sunk during the war. We were given the £200 from the Czech Refugee Trust Fund. And the fare ah, was paid, and we probably got some money for it or something, which wasn't much. But it was something to tide us over.



Ronny, Lilly, Peter.

And at that time the rest of your family, where were they? Your mother-in-law was in Brussels, still?

Yes.

With Trude?

Yes my mother-in-law was still in Brussels. (ED: Helen arrived in London April 1940.)

And your family?

My family was by that time, all of them were in America, I'm sure, I think so...

Your parents?

My parents were the last ones to leave Vienna.

And what were your feelings on ah, boarding ship to go to a country on the other side of the world?

Well it, I don't think I was worried about it. We wanted to have a regular life and being able to work. And I knew we came to New Zealand I knew we would be able to start and do something.

And how long was the ship?

Six weeks. We went to Sydney on the Orcades and from the Orcades we went on the Wanganella to Auckland.

And what sort, was it a passenger ship?

It was a passenger ship but as we travelled over... and it was so close to the

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war it was blacked out, the Orcadis it was blacked out and rations, we never got butter, it was you know just the bare essentials. But I didn't worry much about that (time) because I was too sea sick most of the time. So I couldn't eat anything never mind what they put in front of me.

Did you have a cabin together, you and Fred?

Yes, oh yes. Then we came to Sydney and on the Wanganella from there on to Auckland of course there were steaks for breakfast and proper butter and you know, all the goodies you could get. And I never took my head out of the washbasin for the three days I was on the boat. Yes. No I am a terrible sailor. Ever since I've disliked ships immensely.

And you arrived in August?

Well yes. We arrived in Auckland. On the boat we met some people, on the Orcades already we met some people that tried very hard to make us pronounce our 'th' properly, and the-'v' and the 'w's.' They were very nice English people that tried to tell us what has to be done. And also coming back with us were two soldiers that were stationed somewhere and coming back with us. And we befriended them and they told us, you know, when you get to Auckland, you arrive there and you find that the trams are going: Ponsonby and One Tree Hill and all the different places, so you take a tram, because we told them we have nowhere to stay. He said, 'Take a tram and go out in one of the suburbs and you'll find somewhere to live.' So that's what we did. When we arrived in Auckland...

Nobody met you?

There was nobody to meet us.

Nobody from the Jewish community?

Nobody, I don't know how the other people notified the community of their arrival, but there was nobody there. Well our great luck was, or not luck,

was the first tram that we found was the Ponsonby. So we got on the tram and travelled to Ponsonby and looked at the vacant rooms. And I was horrified you know, these old dilapidated places where the blinds are drawn, the rooms were so dark you couldn't even see where to walk and I was really down in the dumps. Well we wandered round there for most of the day and then we went back and we stayed at the, booked the night in the, what was it called? Down bottom of the Queen Street before it is, now it is the...updated one? The Great Northern. Well we booked a night. We went around the corner, there was a fish and chip place. Of course we weren't prepared for it either that you eat at five o'clock your dinner or something. Well we had fish and chips and we went to bed very deflated. The next day then we walked up Queen Street. Fred pawned his Leica...

His camera?

His, yes his Leica camera that he had, in the pawn shop Robinson, was it? Robinson on the corner of somewhere, Queen Street. And he was very friendly. He said where did we come from and when did we arrive and so on. And he said, 'Sit down here, I'll get someone to pick.' And he rang Mr Rifkin, who was very nice and he picked us up and took us home for lunch, and told us where the Hebrew congregation is and you know, the offices and if we need any help we should go out there, which we did. It was Mrs Epstein in charge of the office and when we came up there and we said we are looking for accommodation, well she picked up the paper and started to read out advertisements. And we said, 'Thanks very much, we can do that ourselves.' You know to read out the paper and with that went, to go.

Well you'd been in London long enough to be able to read English and to get around.

Fred was always much better in English and his grammar was always much better than mine. But of course we could read English newspapers.

Had you learnt English at school?

Yes, both English and French that we learned at school in Vienna. But you know you don't get the sort of, when I arrived in London and heard the first English people speak, I thought I must have learned Chinese at home because I couldn't pick one word. They sort of never interrupted, you know, a continuous row of words. I couldn't pick up anything they were saying really. But then by and by, and then we took classes in England and took classes out here when we arrived, we took night school classes, and sort of eventually we got where we are.

So you, I guess over the next few days got yourselves a room, somewhere to stay?

Well yes, we tried. We got ourselves a room and we found a place in Grafton Road. I have to add to it that when we were on the boat first of all, going to Tilbury to board the ship, on the train there was a man sitting across from me, he had a hat on, sort of pulled over the eyes, and this one eye sort of sat there all the time and looked at me and was terribly nervous because I still thought the Nazis are following me around you know. We always had the habit to look over our shoulder, who is behind us. And that man was sitting there continuously staring at me you know, with one eye what he could get from under his...So then we boarded the ship and it was rather a joke because it turned out to be the father of Werner Alford who was also going on to the boat. And so I supposed perhaps I looked suspicious to him too. But he had that look of someone who tries to measure you up, your activities. And there was also Mr Hitchman on board, and Mr Hitchman came also from Vienna, and on the boat we were



Lilly, Fred, Mt Ruapehu.

quite friendly and it was also the last time we played cards every evening, Rummy, which they taught me, and I haven't played since. But...

And Mr Alford, where was he from?

Well he came from Czechoslovakia but they were all in London, they were all emigrating to New Zealand. So on the boat when we came up on deck, Hitchman wore a beret. I thought he was a Frenchman. But it turns out he is a Viennese too and that's how we came then. And we found in Grafton Road a place and Hitchman's English was very poor. That was a room there too and he stayed with us too in Grafton, in one of the rooms below. You know, below. There was sort of a half thing and there was another room available and we looked after him a little. We stayed in Grafton. Well Hitchman had money and also the introduction to Harry (Lowitt). Hitchman was Commercialrat in Vienna, that is one of the titles you could probably find Vienna. And he had money, and he had a letter to Harry Lowitt. So Harry Lowitt came over to meet him and to meet us. And he was already working for, ah, do you know, the paper, there was a write up the

other day about him and Harry Lowitt, the carpet people, carpet boxes? And he said he'll try and help. Well he did but for the time being we had made an arrangement that Hitchman wanted to buy a dairy. He had the money and Fred would work in the dairy with Hitchman and I would help out in my free time. Well, but the arrangement was that as soon as we had jobs Fred would get out of it. Well thanks to Harry Lowitt he got the connection with Johnson Cardboard Box Company and that's how he went to Johnson Cardboard Box. We were still in Grafton. I was trying to find a job. I don't know... Of course

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I'll try to find a job. There was Cinnamon in the Queen Street. The owners were Alberts. Cinnamon were retail shops and they had their offices in Queen Street in one of the shops up, you know, on the first floor. Well I couldn't take that and they gave me an appointment and I came in and they said the father, who is blind, but he wants to listen to all the interviews because, you know, he has the feeling for people. So I had to come up to, at the appointed time. And ah, you know the whole family was assembled there and I had to go 'through all my miserable story again at that time, you know it was always very traumatic for me to go through it over and over again and they wanted to know every detail of it.

It was still all ram.

It was, and so on and so forth. Anyway they are going to let me know. Well after I didn't hear from them for a few days I don't even know how I came to approach Classic but I approached Classic in T&G Building, Elliot Street and I went there and the girl told me that Mr Hunter is not in at present. He was the boss of Classic Manufacturing Company but he will contact me. So I left my phone number in Grafton Road. And sure enough, as soon as I walk back to Grafton Road, the phone call came: 'Mr Hunter will see you now if you can come down.' So I walked down again and Mr Hunter, after a few questions, said, 'Well start tomorrow. The salaries are, I don't know, between two and eight pounds. We'll give you.'

A week?

A week. Yes, yes. 'Lovely, thank you very much.' And I started with Classic and I was mostly pattern making, I started with pattern making, writing on my patterns frontside and backside until the girls from the office came and said, 'Mrs Bruell, if you just write back that will do.' No further explanation! [Laughs] And I worked at Classic. He was very good to me. The staff wasn't to start with. You know I was a spy for everybody. There was a great effort being made to raise funds for the troops. Of course I was giving to every raffle that

was going around. I was more interested to win the war than any one of them that have ever seen any miserable thing. There was a social on once to raise funds for the war effort. And the day before the social Mr Yoland who was in charge of the office called me in the office and said, 'Mrs Bruell, it does not come from me but Mrs Wild,' (Wild or Wise), 'the organiser of the evening would prefer if you do not come to the function.' Well I was dissolved in tears. I had no intention of going. I had nothing that, but the two jersey dresses that I had, you know. I wasn't equipped to going to socials dressed up with something. I wouldn't have gone anyhow. But even if I would have gone, what harm would I have done? You know little digs like that, I got, I was dissolved in tears and Mr Hunter took me off in the car and said 'I'll take you for lunch.' And that's always how he tried to cheer me up and break the unhappiness. I'd come back to the office, the chair was gone, somebody took the chair. 'Get another one.' You know little nasty things like that. But of course I was a foreigner and they weren't sure if I was a spy or not. It was after a few months when they got to know that I wasn't a spy or I wasn't doing them any harm they became very friendly and very helpful. Well Fred worked in Penrose and I worked at Classic. Of course we had to get up seven o'clock because Fred started at eight and I started at eight, and he had to take the bus out to Penrose and I had to walk down to the T&G Building. And one evening I came home and my landlady said to me, 'I have to give you notice, you have to leave.' I said, 'But why?'. She said, 'Well you get up at seven o'clock to go in the bathroom and you wake up the whole house.' I said, 'But if you start to work at eight we have got to get up at seven o'clock.' She said, 'Yes but workers people don't live in my house.' So that was another thing that dissolved me in tears. And Fred always said, 'Hit back, give them an answer back and put them in their place.' But of course I'm not made like that. I'm not quick enough with the answers. So we moved out. Fred worked already at Johnson. That was the time when he met Jack de Lowe and Jack de Lowe said, you know was quite friendly to Fred because the staff in Johnson wasn't too kind to Fred. He was put there as factory manager

straight away and of course the staff objected and threatened to go on strike if he keeps that position. They weren't going to take orders from a foreigner. But anyway, it blew over and he remained factory manager because his bosses were just sticking up for him and I think Jack de Lowe was probably behind it too.

And Jack, Jack was Jewish and from?

Well they said so! I never knew until I don't know how much later that he was Jewish. He was 11 years working at Johnsons already before. He was not a refugee. He was an immigrant.

From England?

From England yes. But he never admitted of being Jewish. He was very good to me. He had a motorbike and he came after work and I hopped on the motorbike. Fred somehow from the minute go had to work overtime because it was an essential industry, war industry, you know, to making things for the war effort and Jack would take me round on the bike you know, from one place to the other to look at different flats or homes or something. And that eventually, we lived in Epsom for a while which I didn't like either. So that was another place. Then we lived in Grafton Road. It was also such a filthy place that before I put, my handbag down I put a newspaper underneath it. So altogether my feeling about New Zealand, about being in Auckland wasn't happy at all. I didn't like it. I was ready to go on the next ship back home.

Were there, were you in touch with other refugees who had come at the same time?

No, no, no. We had no contact with anyone. It was poor Mr Hitchman and I that were miserable and we didn't like anything. And the best thing is to hang yourself on the next tree in Albert Park.

That's what he said'?

Yes. And Fred was the only one that liked it. He was happy here from the minute go. I had a false impression. I thought that a country that's a hundred

years old, the paint on the houses will still be wet, everything will be new and gleaming. And it wasn't you know. Everything was not up to what it should have been.

And your reception from New Zealanders was mixed?

Very mixed. Yes. They somehow didn't quite, there were some exceptions. I must say that people who had travelled overseas like Mr Hunter, I mean he was helpful from the minute go. And that's when I had the job at Hunter. The funny thing is I never heard from the Alberts until many weeks after. I worked at Classic, they came down to view the range. You know. They were buying in for, because Classic was a manufacturing company. They had no retail shops. So these retailers like Cinnamon, Alberts, came to buy from places like that. So they came and they saw me in showroom with Hunter and she called me aside and she said, 'We would give you the job if you come to us, you know.' I said sorry, I'm not interested.'

Wasn't there a story that you haven't told us about when you went to Cinnamon's for the first, for the interview?

Yes, that's the one I just said isn't it?

I thought there was another story that you hadn't talked about? No I think that's the story. Okay.

You know Cinnamon was the retail shops but it belonged to the Alberts and they had two shops in Queen Street. But then after not hearing from them for weeks on end, only because she saw me there, to leave Hunter or Classic, who were very good to me and, I didn't feel like doing that.

Did it seem to you that the New Zealanders you met were like the English? Did you feel that they were from the same...

No I think the English were a lot more friendly and used to refugees and more helpful. But then the New Zealanders I met at that stage, we were speak-

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ing German or we were speaking English with a bad accent. I don't think they were sure who is a spy and who isn't. We had no restrictions when we came. We were interviewed by an office, separated, we went to the office. Well Fred was interviewed separately and I was interviewed and we were asked a lot of questions before we got, you know, the Permanent Residence Visa or something. And they asked a lot of questions: whether we were in any political party. Of course in Fred's records it would say that he was active in the Social Democratic party you know. They wanted to check up whether we were communists, whether we would overthrow the government. Why we left only in July in Vienna if we were against the Nazis and the Nazis came in March, why didn't we leave then? You know. All questions like that obviously were asked. We were not familiar with how the procedure worked.

Would that have been something to do with the Alien Tribunal do you think?

Yes, I guess. Yes.

And did you have to report regularly?

Well no, because we were Friendly Aliens. Being Czechoslovakians we were friendly Aliens like your parents. We had no travel restrictions which the Austrians and Germans had. We were allowed to have a radio which the Austrians and Germans weren't allowed during the war.

So there were different regulations...applied...



Lilly and Peter 1945.

We were Friendly Aliens...

Applied to people from the countries who were on the side of the Allies. Right, right.

Than they were, the regulations were much stricter applying to the countries that Britain was at war with.

Okay.

If I must tell you a little story that just comes to my head. When we were in Sydney we met up with Paul and Irene (Unger) and they were lovely to us of course and Paul gave us introduction letters you know that they were already long before us here...

Paul and Irene Unger?

Paul and Irene Unger.

Fred's?

Fred's family yes. And they also knew a couple of school teachers that lived in New Zealand and they were very friendly with them so she said, 'Give them a ring, I'm sure they'll be able to help in some way when you arrive there.' So after a few days that we were here we rang them up and they were very nice and arranged to meet us somewhere outside Milnes (Milne & Choyce the department store). She said,

'How will I recognize you?' And Fred said, 'Oh you will recognise me, I have a black [-haired] wife.'

And what did he mean?

The black coloured hair.

Oh.

in those days I had black hair. So that was rather a joke.

But they found you anyway.

Yes we got together. They were very nice yes.

One thing I wanted to ask you about which is slightly off the subject, but were you used to doing cooking? How did you find the food when you came to England? I mean it was a bit different to the food...

It was, it was, but you know in England we ate very plainly. We couldn't go out very much to eat outside. I told you we had the 35 shillings and we really made it as cheap as possible because we tried to save that money that we send to Uncle and mother. We would walk to Tilbury on Saturday and buy the fruit and the vegetables that was already a little spotty but which we cut out. We really had to economize. And we lived with another couple in the same flat and shared the expenses. But the cooking was very plain that we did. And we couldn't judge English cooking at all because we didn't go out at all for meals

Had you cooked before?

Not really. When we were in Czechoslovakia my mother-in-law was a very, good cook and she cooked. But no I didn't really cook much before.

And at home your mother didn't want you to cook did she?

No she never let me in the kitchen. My mother-in-law was much more, you



Peter and Lilly 1993.

know, she let me do things, let me try out, make... or something, which were running out of the stove on me. But she would take that as part of learning how to go about it. She would give me a lot more freedom in the kitchen than my mother did.

So most of the recipes for the cakes that you bake, are they from your mother, or your mother-in-law? Or from Lilly Bruell?

I went to cooking classes. But it must have been, I can't remember when it was that I went to cooking classes because my book is still written in German. It must have been in Vienna that I did that still because some of the recipes are in Fred's handwriting, it must have been in Vienna that I learned to cook.

And they never had any scales at that cooking place you went to? Hmm? They never had any kitchen scales?

I've never seen such a kitchen in all my life. So I don't know, I picked it up by and by somehow.

And when you came to New Zealand you obviously, you were cooking again?

Yes I was cooking again and I had to cook of course, and you know. We had many times Mr

Hitchman ate with us. He was still in the dairy and I was still at Classic. I was at Classic until I was, I left Classic in October, Ronny was born in December. And I imagined that nobody noticed that I'm pregnant. I looked like the, a bus, the rear of a bus and I thought that nobody notices that I am pregnant.

And that was 1941?

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Yes. Well that was, and then they gave me a cheque. They collected and I bought a pram with it or something like that. They were very nice then. Then Mr Hunter went to America and he offered to visit my parents, which he did. And they enjoyed his company very much.

Well that was very decent.

Yes he was particularly nice. Well by that time of course they removed...

Wasn't that a strange time to be travelling to America in 1941?

For Mr Hunter? Yes. He was even searched for before boarding the plane you know, Mr Hunter, who was on the City Council and all that, they searched him and I don't know if they found dollars on him or something, but anyhow it wasn't big enough to make a how do you do about it, they let him go.

Was he going on holiday or what?

No on business. He was on the look out for...

New designs...

For the factory. He was very active. There was a dress department in the factory and a coat department. And he was in charge of the dress department. Yes.

Sorry I interrupted.

Then slowly, slowly we got to know people from here you know, because it was, you know, before we sort of settled down to all these jobs we tried to contact, somebody said Dr Tichauer he was looking after refugees... Well we went up to Dr Tichauer who was looking after the refugees and asked him, do you know what do we do? That was all before we had our jobs you know. And he said, 'Well I don't know. Of course you could go on a farm but as you haven't got money you can't go on a farm. Of course you could do such and such but as your language is not perfect you couldn't do that either. And you haven't got

enough money to buy a retail store so really I can't help you in any way. So that was that. Then we went to the manager of...and...We had an introduction there from Paul Unger, Fred's cousin, and he was very ...about it too because they had no vacancies in their place and they were not sure. And in a way you know, perhaps we wanted to start a clothing factory on our own straight away. And then we came to a man, I think his name was Benjamin, he had a clothing factory, and he was the only man who really gave us good advice. He said, 'Now do you know what, take a job, any job, for six months and get a feel for the country and what is required and from then on you'll do a lot better knowing what you want to do.' And I think that was the right advice and that's when we started, you know, looking for jobs and trying to get that because we thought that sounded very sensible.

So by the end of '41 though you had begun to make some friends amongst...?

Yes, yes. Well I left Classic then, before Ronny was born and we lived in, well we needed to have a place/flat again and that's how I came across Mrs Joyce. There was an advert in the newspaper advertised rooms and I rang up and that was Mrs Joyce and she was very sweet on the phone and she told us that there would be a bedroom and a sitting room for us and a share of the kitchen. To start with I wasn't quite sure if I liked that but she sounded so nice on the phone and I said, 'Well how do how do I find you?' She said the Epsom bus or train takes you to Epsom and you get out by the train depot. And I said, 'Well what's a train depot?' 'Oh,' She said, 'You know, where the trains go to sleep.' That's where the depot is, so you come then from there to Merrywell (?) which we did and she was absolutely charming straight away and we took it, and it was very pleasant relationship.

But by that time you already had a few friends here in New Zealand? People...

Oh yes, yes. It was, I don't know even how we met the Hirstens. I can't even remember that. And we met the Hifts at that time because they lived close by. We met Franci Kessler, we met the Goldings.

Hirsts? At that time?

The Hirsts, yes the Hirsts we met.

Korman?

Yes she was Hift at that time you know, yes we had some friends. Franci Kessler, the Goldings, we were very friendly with the Goldings. The Goldings appealed to us very much because they were hikers, and you know, outside activities which we liked. At one stage then..

Can you remember when you met my parents?

No. And Claire, the funny thing is, until I knew of your parents of course. I would have met your father in the butcher's shop you know when I went to get the meat for my mother, but the funny thing is, in all those years the first time I was in your house was at your wedding. Ilse was at the swimming pool because she picked me up because, she said, 'Come out, because she wouldn't mind. I know Lizzie, she wouldn't mind if you come on Saturday afternoon to the pool function.' And that's when I went up once or twice but funny, I was never in the circle of your Mum and Dad.

It is funny really because you had quite a few friends in common?

Yes we did. And Ronny thought the world of your father because when he went with the Jaycees to Fiji you know, and we knew of them. But we never somehow got together



Lilly and Anton.

Especially once I got friendly with Ronny and Peter in Habonim and we lived in the same area.

Yes, yes. And you came to our place to Marau Crescent and Mrs Hirst she always said she couldn't take her eyes off you, you had so much of a rhythm dancing.

I don't remember your place in Momona Road but I remember...

Not in Momona Road, in Mission Bay.

In Mission Bay.

That was Mission Bay. Yes.

Yes that would have been in the 60s.

Yes. That would have been later on. Well then you know, from Mrs Joyce's

place, she didn't own that place, I told you about it, that every Saturday or Friday, everyone of us had to scrub the kitchen floor and every time when my turn came Lionel helped me and said, 'Go on I'll do it.' So he did it for his mother and he did it for me which was very nice of him. It was a very pleasant relationship. Once we had a terrible fright there. Harry Lowitt, I invited Harry Lowitt in for dinner one evening and he came for dinner and after dinner we went out in the kitchen to do the dishes. Well Mrs Joyce had some beautiful carpets. Her sister lived in India and she sent her these carpets, and there were beautiful carpets all over our rooms. And we went out in the kitchen there were fireplaces unfortunately in that place. And when we went out in the kitchen to do the dishes we suddenly smelt smoke and we went back into the

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room and a spark fell out onto the carpet and burnt a big hole in the carpet and in the floor. And I was speechless. I was so desperate I didn't know what to do. It was really frightening. So I knocked on the door. I knew Mrs Joyce was in bed already by that time. I knocked on the door and I said, something has happened, and well, come out with it". I must have been white as a sheet because she was quite upset. And I said, 'Well we've burnt your carpet and we burnt the floor.' She said, 'My dear, if a bomb drops in London the damage is much bigger.' And what an attitude to take from that woman that didn't have very much herself. You know she was very, never very well to do. She, I don't know what she lived from. At the time the war was on. I couldn't get it fixed, I couldn't get it replaced. Even if I would have had the chance there was nothing available, I couldn't replace it. And that was all she could say about it. If a bomb drops in London the damage is much greater.'

Well that was nice of her.

It was really fantastic of her. I don't know how we overcame it in the end. Somehow we must have made an effort to fix it up somehow but of course the carpet was a loss. And then she, there was somehow, the Japanese war was coming on or something and the people that owned the house, because she only rented it, wrote that they were coming back from wherever they were. So she had to give us notice, because she had to move out too in December. And Fred was going round looking for somewhere to live and he found Momona Road. He found Momona Road. It was a double unit flat and it wasn't even quite finished. It took another week for the builders to finish it all off. But he liked it and he took it on.

So how long were you in Momona Road?

We were in Momona Road, Ronny, Peter and Lorraine were born. Lorraine was about 18 months when we went to Meadowbank.

So Peter was born in August, first of all it was 1943?

And Lorraine was born 1945...

11th August and she was eighteen months that we have made it...

47.

The beginning of 47.

We went to Meadowbank. Yes. Well we moved into Momona Road, and I told you it was a two-unit flat and Mrs Joyce was very good. There was nothing there and we had no furniture. She give me a table and she gave me a bucket and she gave me something to start off you know. And when we moved from Momona Road I had a sewing machine from the minute I arrived in New Zealand. In those days we could buy a sewing machine at Singers and pay it off at a pound a month. So I paid it off over two years but I had to have a sewing machine. I remember making the bedspread, you know I was highly pregnant with Ronny, the stomach was out there, the sewing machine was a treddle. So I treddled away on the quilted sewing, bedspread for our room.

So you made all sorts of things, clothes and...?

Well yes. I was working at home. I was making neckwear for John Courts Department Store. That was quite a business for me you know, I fiddled around but it was very hard to get lace and all these pretty things so I had to go round to different retail stores and he would give me three yards and he would give me three yards and that is the way...still carried on with it when Ronny was born and that was a little complicated you know, by the time Ronny was crawling around, of course I had to watch with the machine the machine...the wheel. Very often I had him on my piggy-back to make sure he doesn't come under the wheel of the machine while I was pedalling away on tray cloths or on... I was making tray cloths for a private hospital in Remuera Road. This is, you know borderline of stitching across.

So when the kids were little, preschoolers, you worked at home?

Yes. Well Fred was at Johnsons and he always told Johnson that he would stay while the war is on, but when the war is finished he wants to get out and start on his own. Johnson, the bosses, were very good because they were very helpful. They understood what he wanted to do and they lent him a press, a stamping press, because we were very, by that time, we were very friendly with Harry Lowitt and he was also friendly. He came looking for something what could we do. And they were sitting, I remember that Lorraine rang at three o'clock in the morning, 'Is Harry still there?' Because she was worried already how long he is out. And the two were still sitting in the lounge debating over all the things they could do. Blackouts for instance. I don't know. Everything came up in their discussions to try and find something. Well then Fred went on to the drawing pins and that was the beginning when Johnson lent him a press which he brought into the garage of our section of the flat, and next door neighbour had of course also a garage. The arrival of the press was quite a performance really, because I had invited the Hirstens for dinner that evening. And of course Fred was bringing the press home on a Saturday afternoon. But Joe (Spitzer) was already with them too. And the press and they are loading the press and it was running a bit late and the Hirstens had arrived and here they were trying to unload the press which took a bit longer than it should be. I was standing up there with Ronny, Ronny was a baby and the Hirstens were there. And the Hirstens looked down, it was time for having a dinner, but you know they were running late and he looked out and he saw how they were still struggling to get the press, and he said to Jana, Jana. Come on, we are going. That is it. If they can't be here when we are supposed to have dinner, we go.' And they walked out on me on a set table, on a ready made dinner, which was in those days quite an effort to do. And we didn't talk to them for many years. You know, when Yvonne was born we were not on speaking terms at all. I was so upset. Instead of him helping, and that's what they should have done, say, 'I come out, I give you a hand.' 'Come on Jana, we go.' And that was very upsetting.

And yet he was Ronny's godfather?

He was Ronny's godfather because you know, when we were living already in the flat, and one morning my waters broke. Of course I didn't know anything about it. I went to my neighbour who had a housekeeper there. I said, 'What do I do?' She said. 'Sit down and wait and time yourself. Well of course Fred took off and went to work. He was, you know he had had to go to work to Johnson. But he rang up Jana Hirst and said, 'I left Lilly in not too good a state.' So Jana came over and she sat with me until the afternoon two o'clock. The pains were coming and going and I wasn't sure. She said, she wasn't sure either, she was as nervous as I was. She said, 'Let's go over there. If it is nothing we won't tell anybody and if it is something at least you're in the hospital, they'll know what to do. Well it was the right time to go because you know, Ronny was born about seven o'clock in the evening or something. So, we went over there at two, so a few hours waiting and we were there. And they were the godparents and you know for the briss you know, she was very helpful with the arrangements, getting people, something...

And the bris was in the hospital?

In the house. In the house. We had it in the house.

So and...

And I carried them round, Ronny was a Plunket baby and we carried on. Fred went to work. I did the garden and I did the house and I did my sewing all the time. I always had an income you know, on my sewing.

So when did Playnit come about?

Playnit didn't come about until much later, in the Korean War. Already in Momona Road. Ronny was there and Peter was born. I remember the evening Peter was born Ilse and her husband came across Ilse Gelb, yes. In those days I was still packing up my neckwear, my collars and my bows and all of that for John Courts, I had to deliver and had to write out the invoices and I was

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also in labour pains. Ilse said, 'If you don't say anything to Fred I go out and I tell him.' I said, 'You're not going to tell him anything until I have packed the cartons, and written the invoices then I'll go out and tell him myself.' Well Johnson, who lived in Tarawera Road, around the corner from us. He was very good and he said to Fred, 'I leave the garage open, if you need the car during the night you just come and help yourself to it.' We didn't have a car in those days. And sure enough when Peter arrived, Fred got the car, it was a Sunday morning, and he collected the car and we went to the hospital. And Peter was born at twelve o'clock on a very cold 1st August.

And by this time Granny Bruell and Uncle Sommer were here?

No they were not here. They hadn't arrived then. They didn't arrive until quite a few years later because we were already in Meadowbank Road when Granny and Uncle came. Uncle came when we were on ... and Granny was then with us. And that's when they bought the house for them in Upland Road.

Ab ha.

I ...over the years ...but by that time of course we had once a business too in Momona Road with Lorraine Lowitt. We had Waldorf House. Do you remember Waldorf House? Lorraine and I had a business on the third floor in the Strand Arcade or something and we had a shop with gift items. We had lingerie and little nick-nacks. We were going around to different art places and buying up ornaments. And we sort of, half the day Lorraine was there and half the day I was there. And I think I was even doing some sewing for the shop.

When was that?

That was when Ronny and Peter were already here, quite young children, when Marjory De Lowe came into the picture. At that time she was Marjory something else. And that's why we got Marjory in the house to look after Ronny and Peter who were babies, and I was at the shop in Waldorf House. And she was with us quite some time. All the Americans were here in those days

and she cried her eyes out when one left, and in the evening she cheered up because she found another one. She really, and of course she brought them to the house, which in a way I didn't mind, because I wanted to see you know, who was coming. Some of them were very nice indeed. Some of them even brought us a bit of chocolate for the kids or, you know, they were a nice type of boys. Yes very nice. Jack de Lowe was sent overseas. He was in Fiji, with the army. He was sent there and he was in the warehouse or whatever. Anyhow when he came to visit once he met Marjory.

Mmm?

He met Marjory and fell in love, he must have been. We tried very hard to talk him out of it because we said, 'She's not the type of girl that you would really want to marry. So much so that when we were invited to the wedding we didn't want to go and look at how long, and what a happy, lasting marriage it is.

Something you learn is never to pass judgement on other people's relationships...

No, true.

As you grow older.

Yes, no I certainly was wrong.

So getting back to Playnit, Lilly?

Well Playnit didn't come up until much later, you know when the children started to go to school. And then we went to America and we came back from America. Fred had bought the house. And the Korean War broke out. By that time Fred already was very wrapped up first with the drawing pins in Momona Road, then you know, every night after he came home from work with Johnsons, he was going with the drawing pins, thump, thump, thump, the press underneath the floor. And the neighbour, Mr Barstani, he was very decent. He said, 'Look if you want to work until eleven o'clock I can put up with it, but any longer I don't think I'd like it.' So that was the beginning of the drawing

pins. That was Harry Lowitt, and both Johnsons were partners, and me, and the firm was called L and F Bruell or something. And that was the beginning. Then they moved into Greenlane in that shop, with their business. That's when Joe came into the picture. You know, he was helping along there not as a partner, on an hourly basis.

That was Joe Spitzer?

Joe Spitzer came on the scene yes.

So Playnit?

Playnit. Well when Fred was busy with his stamping, and you know that was Malcolm Gray and Bond and Bond, people like that helped him out with the offcuts of material. And then when the Korean War started he suddenly had no supplies. You know-they couldn't, they didn't have it themselves and couldn't get it and he had already by that time four girls working for him. At that time we were already in Vincent Street. Well I had come back from America and you know Fred was very upset about having to sack the girls. And I came out. I had seen a lot of babywear in America that we didn't have at that time: T-shirts and little sleeping suits and all that. And I said to Fred, 'What about if I start, and we start off with some baby clothes and do something like that?' You know. 'Sew it over there.' But that was I think Friday night and Fred being the spitfire he always was, you know by Monday we were up at the Auckland Knitting Mills and we had a connection with Levines where Mr (Sibble?) came in. We knew already about Interlock, we knew already about machines we need and had already made contacts to



Lilly with Otto and Mitzi with Eddie at Lorraine's wedding, 1973.

make, to buy a secondhand overlocker from where I didn't know the front from the back, they had to show me how an overlocker works. But we were moving. We had material. I cut out on the kitchen table the first few sets and we took two girls from Rex over in the front section of the Vincent Street factory, you know, there was in the back the stamping going on and the overlackers were shifted to that other room and we took two girls and we started off making T-shirts. And trying to sell them that's where Avey Taylor came in. We showed it to Avey Taylor and they were quite keen to take it on. The thing was we didn't have orders. 'I was cutting away and the girls were sewing away furiously but we didn't have orders. By that time the picture of

us must have been already amusing because every time Joe walked by my cutting table he said, 'Still working for stock?' I could have kicked him every time he'd say that. Every time he walked, so many times past and every time I got rubbed in: 'Still cutting for stock?' Well then of course Avey Taylor took over the selling part and they sold very well. We were about the only ones who made T-shirts. Then of course, when we switched into ladies knitwear, T-shirts and stylish T-shirts and sport blouses out of knitted material and all that, we were about the only one.

And you travelled overseas regularly?

Yes.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

For ideas?

Yes mostly with Fred I went, usually with Fred when he went and dresses we did very much later but we concentrated on blouses and T-shirts and I should have stuck to it because the way T-shirts are going nowadays.

Much competition though Lilly? Anyway so you continued...

That's where Pat Turner came in. We had Pat Turner was our office girl. She married a man from Sleepyhead. And she was the model, and she was the packer, and she was the dispatcher. That was the beginning of Playnit. And she even gave it the name Playnit because we wanted to have something that we could pronounce properly. She always said to keep an eye on our accent and language, and you know, she thought Playnit would be easy to pronounce for everybody and that's how the beginning was of Playnit.

So Playnit continued and grew until you retired and closed it down in 1977? Was it the year Ezra was born? 76?

Is it on the plate, the silver tray on the dining room? On the dining room table. That plate was presented to me by Mr Ross.

I have a feeling that you and I retired about the same time.

I retired because of my family and they thought it is time I retire and we tried to sell the business but they wanted me to...

July 1977.

My men were very much for it that I retire and after we tried to sell it and you know, Colin Kay was interested in it for his sons because they were in clothing.



Ezra's barmitzvah flanked by grandparents Fred and Lilly - 1989

So.

They wanted me to stay on and the family didn't want me to stay on.

So Rex grew also and Ronny and Peter ended up in the business?

Oh yes, Lorraine was there too before she went overseas. She was in the office. Until Rex was sold.

End of interview. ■

Retirement marks end of Playnit

THE retirement last month of Lilly Bruell, founder of Playnit Ltd, marked the closing of the company after 26 years of operation. It also means the end of the Playnit sports and Viva Capri women's fashion labels on the New Zealand market.

It was her third — and this time successful — "attempt" at retirement. But why close down? Why not sell the operation and the prestigious labels which have found favour on the local and export markets?

Lilly and her family felt that it was a "good thing to get out while on top."

"I would not like to see the image we have built up fade, or be downgraded, from the market point of view," she said.

Altogether, she has a background of 48 years in the apparel trade. She served her apprenticeship in Vienna with the major retail store, Laszlo Ungar. She can recall a visit by one of the store's clients — the Queen Mother, then Queen Elizabeth, who bought her two young daughters, the Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, to order brown velvet dresses.

Hitler's drive for power at the start of World War II saw her employer interred and Lilly out of a job. She married Czechoslovakian, Fred Bruell, and moved to his country where she continued working in the trade.

But they were uneasy years. Fred moved to England and Lilly was imprisoned three times for trying to leave. She finally reached Poland — and rejoined her husband in England.

Here too she picked up



Lilly Bruell

her trade, and when the couple migrated to New Zealand, she worked for a year with Classic Manufacturing until the birth of her eldest son.

She was not idle for long. The Playnit operation started on her kitchen table. It was officially launched in 1951 when two girls from her husband's business, then Rex Manufacturing, were about to be made redundant. When it was found they had talents as machinists, Lilly and the pair started operations in a section of the metal stamping division of the Vincent St, Auckland, factory with two machines.

Her garments found a ready market and in 1956, the Playnit range was joined by the Viva Capri women's fashion range.

Lilly Bruell experienced great loyalty from members of her staff over her years in business. Unlike other operations, each girl was responsible for an entire garment, leading to pride in workmanship.

The export market covered Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands.

As the Rex "empire" grew to become Rex Consolidated — and husband Fred scaled the heights to become president of the Auckland Manufacturers' Association — Playnit remained an individual entity with a personality quite unlike its associated companies.

And is Lilly Bruell's retirement, this time, permanent? "Well," she laughed, "I have kept one sewing machine and one overlocker."



Ezra with Lilly on his 19th birthday.



Ronny, Lorraine and Peter 2012.

Challenges and opportunities

This is the story of how a refugee family built up a New Zealand based multinational company.

By Ronny Bruell



IT was on a crisp spring day in Vienna, Austria in April 1938 that Fred Bruell, a Czech box maker, married Lilly Rosenblum, a dress designer. Only immediate family members were present at the ceremony and the celebrations that followed were subdued, for Austria had recently been annexed by Nazi Germany and gatherings for any reason, particularly Jewish gatherings, were forbidden. Both families were of humble origin. Fred's widowed mother had brought up four children through the depression years. Before Fred was 30 he was familiar with starvation, imprisonment and statelessness.

Becoming refugees

There was only sufficient food for four days in the week, on the other days the family starved. In winter Fred shared one pair of boots with his brother; when one went to school, the other remained at home. Fred spent six months in an Austrian jail as a result of his underground anti-Fascist activities. The

local Communist leader also threatened his life. He became stateless when he joined the flood of refugees fleeing the Russians and/or the Germans in the pre-Second World War carve up of Central Europe.

Lilly's father was a bespoke tailor. The family had emigrated from Poland to escape the infamous pogroms of the nineteenth century.

By marriage Lilly became a Czech citizen and although she and her family had affidavits and permits to emigrate to the United States, her marriage to a Czech national prevented this, at least for the time being. Her immediate family, however, did emigrate.

A pact with Hitler

The newly married couple returned to Brno, Czechoslovakia, where they lived for a few months. In September 1938, when British Prime Minister Chamberlain made a pact with Hitler to give up the Sudetenland, they were

About the author

Ronny Bruell was educated at Auckland Grammar School and Selwyn College where he was a foundation pupil. His tertiary education was gained at the Auckland Technical Institute where he studied Business

Management. He was among the first recipients of the Diploma of Export (Dip.Ex.), having completed his studies with a thesis entitled 'An Analysis of the Development of a NZ Manufacturing Exporter'.

He has over the years been an active member of Habonim, Jaycees and Toastmasters. An accomplished public speaker, he has competed in numerous speech and debating competitions with considerable success.

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

forced to leave, but they had no visas for any other countries. Although they were citizens of Czechoslovakia, weekly permits were necessary to live as Jews in their own city, until visas could be obtained although no one knew from where.

When it became inevitable that Hitler would invade Czechoslovakia, the Social Democratic Party in which Fred was active, organised a 'special' transport to take those who would be on the Nazi 'wanted' list to England. Wives and families were to follow.

Fred was in the first transport and duly arrived in England. The second transportation never took place as Hitler, in the meantime, invaded Czechoslovakia and immediately closed all borders and foreign consulates.

Lilly was always a determined and resourceful woman, one who did not take 'no' for an answer. If the borders could not be crossed legally she would cross illegally in order to join her husband. To do so she had to make contact with the British Consulate in Poland which was still operating. She travelled to a small border town where she made contact with the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (Jewish Community Centre) which was assisting hundreds of people, with money and contacts, to cross the border illegally each week. With only a hand satchel containing the most basic personal possessions she attempted to cross the border. She was caught three times, twice by the Poles and once



Travel pass for Fritz Brüll.

by the Germans. It was at her last arrest that rifle shots were heard in the distance. Her guards were distracted and ran to investigate. Lilly ran faster, the other way, across the border into neutral Poland and eventually joined her husband in London.

In England they both worked for the Czech Refugee Fund, an organisation set up to assist Czech refugees through resettlement programmes in Canada and Brazil. They applied for visas to emigrate to Canada and after several months were told that they had been granted visas, not for Canada, but for a country they knew very little about, a country called New Zealand.

After many weeks of sailing through the submarine infested waters of the Atlantic and Pacific they finally arrived in Auckland in August 1940, among the last of the European refugees. Lilly took one look at Queen St and would readily have gone back to Europe.

They soon settled in to a flat in Grafton and Lilly almost immediately found employment as a designer with Classic Manufacturing Ltd. Fred, after operating a dairy for a short time, became a supervisor and later factory manager with Johnsons Cardboard Box Co. Ltd. Fred was always an innovator and although he had been rejected by the NZ Armed Forces because he was not



Helen Brüll with children (l to r) Hans, Trude, Eva and Fritz Brüll.

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British by birth, he was determined to play his part in supporting the war effort. He designed and developed a process to waterproof the 'lousy' locally produced cardboard without the usual chemicals. This helped keep a hungry Britain supplied with New Zealand liver (previously shipped in tin cans), and enabled troops to keep vital communications equipment dry during wet landings on Pacific beaches.

It was during this time at Johnsons Cardboard Box Ltd. that the concept of starting his own business began to evolve. He had no capital, having arrived in New Zealand with a loan of £200 from the British Government, no premises, and a limited technical knowledge, but he did have the essential ingredients for success: enthusiasm and a positive mental attitude.

A fascination

Always fascinated with the process of metal forming he began experimenting with pieces of metal and in 1942 formed a part-time company F&L Bruell Ltd., in the basement of the flat that was rented near Greenlane. After a day, and sometimes most of the night at Johnson's, Fred would start work at his own little business, working into the early hours of the morning. The name of the company was subsequently changed when it became necessary to find a brand name short enough to fit on the head of the first product – drawing pins – six million of them. "They were terrible. We lost money and I was not proud of them, but we learnt a lot. The second six million were a lot better" wrote Fred. REX was born.

REX Manufacturing Co. Ltd. operated throughout the war years as a part-time business, making pressed components for the war effort: parts for walkie-talkie radios, stationery, hardware and other componentry.

At the end of the war Fred Bruell became self-employed and for the next 42 years the company expanded, eventually developing into a multinational, multi-product organisation, one of the 50 largest in New Zealand.

In 1946 Fred was joined by another refugee from Austria, Joe Spitzer, an association that lasted for 30 years until Joe's untimely death.

A small shop was leased in Greenlane Road as the fledgling company had already outgrown the family basement. The company continued to expand in a market still suffering the shortages created by war. Raw material was almost impossible to come by, particularly steel and tin plate. If it had not been for people such as Ian Harvey of Alex Harvey and Sons Ltd., who sold to REX the 'cover sheets', the protective outer sheets wrapped around each pallet of raw material, the Company may never have survived.

New products were being constantly added to the product range with a heavy emphasis on metal toys. Lorraine, the youngest of the Bruell children, was quick to understand the initial problems of production and after seeing a new prototype toy she asked "Daddy, can I have the first one you make? No," he replied, "the second one. The first never works!"

In 1948 a new company, Paramount Distributors Ltd., was formed to handle the distribution of a growing product range. It was also in this year that REX made its first export shipment of toy components to Australia, possibly the first production engineers to do so. However, the bureaucracy was horrific. No one could understand why a small manufacturer wanted to send his products 1200 miles across the Tasman. No one could understand the benefits of international trade. No one, except this budding entrepreneur who would have to wait another 14 years before export was accepted as being essential to the health of any manufacturing organisation, let alone New Zealand.

It was in the early 1950s that disaster struck. The Korean War caused a drastic shortage of raw materials. Only essential products were allocated metals like steel and tin plate. Toys most certainly were not an essential product. Half of the staff of six were women who depended on their employment with REX for the livelihood of their families.

It was Lilly Bruell who came to the rescue after she had determined that each female employee could operate a sewing machine. Using her training as a designer, she designed on the kitchen table at home a range of children's clothing based on American fashions. The range was enthusiastically received by the retail trade. It was the beginning of a dynamic business career which she combined with the upbringing of three children. The female staff at REX had a new employer, Playnit Ltd., a company which developed into one of the most successful in New Zealand. Playnit in the years to come produced twice yearly a range of ladies fashion wear, sportswear and beach wear under the "Viva Capri" label. Its products were sold not only throughout New Zealand, but also to Australia, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore and Fiji.

Two important lessons

The Bruell family learnt two important lessons from those traumatic days of the early 1950s:

- Never to rely on any one product or product group, one type of raw material, one customer, one supplier, one market or one staff member.
- It is an indictment on the ability of management to make innocent staff members redundant because of lack of work. In 45 years of Bruell family management, no one was ever made redundant at REX.

Our family life must have been different from most of our friends. Each morning we woke to the aroma of what would be dinner that night. As children we came home from school to stay with friends and neighbours until mother returned from a day's work at Playnit Ltd. Mother continued work late into the night designing, cutting and grading on the 'multi purpose' kitchen table. Holidays were often spent on farms, or with Fred's mother Helen, who had recently arrived from London. But these small sacrifices were worth the joy, pride and satisfaction in knowing that our family was contributing to the development of our country.

The years ahead were filled with challenges and opportunities. Diversification became the name of the game and REX introduced a strategy of rapid diversification. Toys became less and less important, componentry became the mainstay of the rapidly growing group. With the introduction of black and white television REX became the major supplier of the chassis and brackets that form the foundation of a product. Components for washing machines, refrigerators, motor vehicles and lawn mowers were produced by the millions at successive factories in Vincent St. and Federal St. alongside the catalogue hardware lines of builders and cabinet makers. REX developed new agency lines, ironing tables from England, hinges from India, swim goggles and flippers from Australia, and introduced to New Zealand foam plastic from Germany.

REX was fast outgrowing its existing premises and in 1957 a property company, REX Properties Ltd., was formed to acquire four acres of land in Otahuhu and to erect a factory. The following year these premises were doubled in size.

In 1960 a number of important decisions were made. Ronny, the eldest son, had completed secondary school education. Where to now? Fred, who never minced his words, laid it on the line quite simply. "If you want to be a vet, be a vet and I will be happy to put you through veterinary college. If you want to go to university, fine, and I will support you there too. If you want to join the family business that is OK by me too, but just remember one thing. The day you walk through the front door of REX forget that I am your father. If you succeed it will be because of your own ability, not because you are the boss's son."

And so, 'fatherless' Ronny joined the company as an office boy, ran more messages, licked more stamps and swept more floors than any other.

In those early days being a clerical worker at REX did not mean your duties were restricted to the office and that your hands never became dirty. Hand

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

assembly, factory duties and machine operations were an essential part of everyone's job, including the boss.

The company was growing and prospering, but like so many rapidly expanding companies the richer the company became, the poorer the family was.

Every time a new machine was purchased or a large shipment of raw material was needed, it meant yet another mortgage on the family home.

One day in discussing this problem with the family friend and lawyer, the late Louis Phillips, he suggested a meeting with a young accountant, Lew Ross, later Sir Lewis Ross.

The outcome of this meeting was that the five private companies, production engineering company, a distributor, a clothing manufacturer and two property owning companies were amalgamated into a Public Company to be known as REX Consolidated Ltd. and a listing was sought on the New Zealand Stock Exchange. *Truth* newspaper described this move as a 'strange marriage'. Lew Ross became the Company's chairman, the first of many chairmanships in a distinguished career, a position he held until his retirement in 1986.

The REX group relocated all companies to new premises in Otahuhu, next



Lilly, Lorraine, Ronny and Peter c. 1950.

door to one of its major customers, Dreco – later Atlas Majestic Industries Ltd.

Peter, the second son in the family, had decided on leaving school to become an engineer and joined the old established engineering firm of Eric Paton Ltd as an apprentice toolmaker. Ronny had been promoted from office boy to costing clerk and was then responsible for establishing a purchasing department and became the company's first purchasing officer.

At last, export was being recognised and accepted as vital to the New Zealand economy. Under the then Minister of Overseas Trade, Rt. Hon. J. R. Marshall, export incentives were

introduced to encourage and motivate manufacturers to sell their products and services overseas. REX did not waste time. They commenced a vigorous and determined campaign to sell their products world wide. Apart from the valuable financial benefits export also ensured longer production runs and hence, lower costs, and took reliance away from a fickle New Zealand economy. Fiji, Australia and South East Asia were the initial target markets. Competing against the low cost countries of Asia meant that REX products had to be sold not so much on price, but more so on quality. Quality was paramount. No expense was spared to ensure that the products being supplied were only of the highest quality. REX was a name synonymous with

quality products. In 1965 Ronny, who had developed a keen interest in export, became active in Jaycees who were planning the first non-government Trade Mission to Fiji. Together with nine other budding exporters, including Eric Svirskis and George Klein, these Jaycees represented 50 New Zealand manufacturers with considerable success, and much to the amazement of many, the venture was financially profitable. One manufacturer who never doubted the ability of New Zealand companies to sell products overseas was the dynamic food entrepreneur, Frank Briess, whose daughter Claire would in 1973 marry Peter Bruell.

All parents have ambitions for their children and those of Lilly and Fred Bruell were that, before they settle down, they should travel as widely as possible. In 1966 when Peter had completed his apprenticeship and obtained his NZCE and Ronny his Diplomas in Business Administration and Credit Management ANZIM, they left for extensive travels in USA, Eastern and Western Europe, Scandinavia, Israel and Asia.

Building business overseas

Then the two brothers decided to work for the company back home. Attending trade fairs and exhibitions and travelling to potential principals throughout the UK, they negotiated manufacturing licensing agreements with several companies, agreements that would propel REX into totally new and lucrative fields of manufacture.

Back home their parents were not sitting idle. In late 1966 REX acquired the Auckland Plastic Co. Ltd. and subsequently changed its name to REX Plastics Ltd. The materials handling equipment and conveyor division, REX Industrial Equipment Ltd., was formed in 1968 and a year later one of New Zealand's oldest companies, John Edward Butler NZ Ltd., was acquired. This old, established company which had been operating for almost 100 years with its reputation for fine products had recently specialised in the manufacture of Britax car safety belts and seats.

Exports continued to play a most important part in the Group's development. By year end the Company was selling its products to 25 countries. In June 1969 REX was awarded the Trade Promotion Council's 'Export Award' for "Outstanding Achievements in International Trade."

Research and development is a vital ingredient for success in any manufacturing organisation, and REX placed a heavy emphasis on the development of new products and processes, new techniques and the use of new materials. Growth in sales, production and profit necessitated an almost continuous building programme. The company now employed over 390 staff members.

During 1970 the companies in Wellington and Christchurch which acted as the group's selling agents were acquired as wholly owned subsidiaries. The new decade began on a euphoric note when REX was awarded the New Zealand Society of Accountants' Award for the best public company annual report.

Anticipating the potential for trans-Tasman trade and realising the inevitability of some form of trading relationship between Australia and New Zealand, REX expanded into Australia by purchasing the Melbourne based subsidiary of an Australian public company which was subsequently renamed Rexport International Aust. Pty Ltd.

The success of the Australian operation was such that it prompted further overseas expansion, for over the next 10 years subsidiary companies and divisions were established in many countries.

Together with expansion into Australia and Asia, a determined effort was being made in other parts of the world. Ronny and Peter opened up new markets in Africa, in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and Mauritius, while Fred cracked the South American markets of Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela and the Caribbean. Each senior executive in the Company was responsible for a particular country or area. Writing letters does not gen-

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erate orders; the only successful way to obtain business is by personal visits on a regular basis.

Meanwhile, back home the company was continuing its domestic expansion as international trade can only be sustained by a sound and profitable domestic market.

Following the successful negotiations of a manufacturing licensing agreement with Swiss principals, REX Syma System NZ Ltd. was formed in 1976 to manufacture a range of display systems, exhibition stands, showcases, domestic and commercial furniture.

The founder retires

In 1979 Fred Bruell, now aged 69, stepped down as Managing Director of the REX Consolidated Group, but remained an Executive Director and Deputy Chairman. His workload, nonetheless, was not reduced as he had hoped, for although the day to day operations of the company were no longer his responsibility, outside commitments made him more active than ever. This was the year of the Erebus disaster and as a director of Air New Zealand the tragedy meant endless hours of meetings and briefings. Few people can appreciate the amount of time, commitment and soul searching that the directors, management and staff of the airline devoted in the aftermath of Erebus. Hearings, inquiries, court cases, appeals, restructuring and the investigations kept Fred Bruell and his colleagues flat out seven days a week.

Ronny and Peter took over as joint managing directors, the former responsible for marketing, export and administration, the latter technical and production. Jointly they shared the financial responsibility. They had been well trained. Both had been born into the company. Together they had over 30 years experience and most importantly, they worked well together and were very close, a most important asset in the lonely position at the top.

Shortly before these significant changes took place Lilly Bruell had retired.

The only way to achieve this retirement was to close Playnit Ltd. The company was immensely successful and profitable but the family and the board knew that as long as Playnit Ltd was around, Lilly would devote her heart and soul to it. Because of this, and not wanting to sell the now well-known and well respected label 'Viva Capri', Playnit Ltd. was wound down and finally closed. One of New Zealand's most successful ladies sportswear manufacturers left the industry while at the top. No one could ask for more.

Lilly's retirement did not however mean that she was no longer involved in the company. Few people will ever appreciate the invaluable contribution she made to the REX Group over its 45 year history. Lilly was, of course, a Foundation Director in the 1940s, and was responsible for the introduction of many new products and techniques over the years. The major decisions of the Group were not made in the board room at Head Office, but at home around that most versatile kitchen table, at nights and in the weekends. It was Lilly with her sound common sense and a deeply humane approach to all problems who also had the ability to bring a bunch of over-enthusiastic entrepreneurs down to earth. She was undoubtedly the backbone of REX Consolidated Ltd.

In 1980 REX acquired Simon Metal Products Ltd., a Wellington based manufacturer of ferrous and non-ferrous forgings, as well as car safety belts.

An agency company, REX Agencies Ltd., was formed to take advantage of the government's liberalisation of the import licensing system.

By 1984 REX were importers, exporters, distributors, manufacturers and builders. Staff in excess of 650 were housed in over 300,000 sq ft of buildings, there were 20 subsidiary companies to the group based in five countries. Sales exceeded \$50 million including exports of \$5 million, no mean achievement for a family that started from scratch 45 years previously.

A real family business

At times all five family members worked in the business. Lorraine joined the

secretarial staff in the late 60s for a few years, but in spite of working in close proximity to each other there were never any family feuds, in-fighting, arguments, disagreements or ill will. Each had a job and did it to the best of their ability. Fred, who was undoubtedly the driving force, was quick to criticise but could also take criticism, and if warranted, would change a policy, decision or technique. The family was a team and this team spirit was reflected and encouraged throughout the whole organisation. From the beginning the family worked with people. No one was too insignificant, or performed too humble a task, not to warrant a word of encouragement, a slap on the back, or some advice, or help with a personal problem. This philosophy ensured that REX enjoyed excellent labour relations and industrial harmony. Everyone has common needs irrespective of whether they wear a collar and tie or blue overalls. Labour problems were settled in frank but friendly discussions rather than by confrontation. Ideas and suggestions were encouraged and welcomed from all the staff and some of the best came from the factory floor. REX was a family company, a family of over 650 people.

To ensure international competitiveness and to maintain domestic market share, in spite of having to compete with the increasing volume of imported goods, REX continually updated its manufacturing and engineering plants. It had the most modern production and engineering facilities in New Zealand



Peter 1982

if not Australasia. REX was the first to introduce many new sophisticated and innovative production techniques and technologies. Much of the plant was fully automatic and computer controlled. Robotics became increasingly important in recent years to handle the large volume production runs. Thorough staff training was essential and REX had its own apprentice school and cadet training schemes where tomorrow's tradesmen and executives received in-depth practical schooling.

In a large ultra modern precision engineering plant perfect housekeeping is an absolute necessity – products manufactured to an accuracy of thousandths of an inch required perfect working conditions. Spotless factories were demanded and housekeeping had to be superb. It was not uncommon to see Fred Bruell pick up a broom and clean up in a factory, he was after all by his own self-admission 'a perfectionist'. The standards of cleanliness at REX amazed many overseas visitors who believed that engineering plants had to be dirty!

The mid 1980s saw the bull run on the share market in full swing. New companies were being formed every week in a climate in which it was possible to float a lead balloon. Other companies were being taken over and swallowed up almost on a daily basis. REX was asset rich as a result of its conservative financial policies and that made it an inevitable takeover target. The Group's chairman, Sir Lewis Ross, warned the directors of this possibility, and sure enough in early 1984

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the company was subjected to a raid on the share market. After careful deliberation it was decided to join with a large New Zealand public company, Cable Price Downer Ltd (CPD), with whom it was hoped staff could work, rather than risk the fate of an unfriendly takeover. REX merged with CPD and the honeymoon lasted two years.

The Bruell family had been their own bosses for 45 years and it soon became obvious that enough was enough, and that it was time for a well earned rest. When the opportunity arose at the end of the 1986/87 financial year, the CPD Board of Directors accepted the resignation of Fred, Ronny and Peter Bruell who retired from the Company, which for almost half a century had provided the family with its challenges and opportunities.

The Bruell family are proud to be recognised as innovators and entrepreneurs, leaders not followers. One of their guiding principles has been to have a positive mental attitude, a philosophy that has guided them through many difficult situations. Great believers in serving the community, they have participated in many outside activities.

Fred Bruell was for 20 years a Director of Consolidated Metal Industries Ltd., a leading New Zealand public company, and for six years was a director of Air New Zealand. He was for many years a council member of the Auckland Manufacturers' Association, as was son Peter several years later, and Fred was elected president in 1976. Parallel with his activities in Auckland, he was chairman of the New Zealand Manufacturers Federation Export Sub-Committee and chairman of the Immigration Committee. In conjunction with other councillors of the Auckland Manufacturers Association he



Rex profit soars.

founded the Export Institute of New Zealand and was its first president. Ronny also served on the executive. Fred served on the Manufacturing Development Council from 1972-78 and was a director of the New Zealand Export-Import Corporation for over four years. He represented the New Zealand Manufacturers Federation at NAFTA (New Zealand – Australian Free Trade Agreement) talks in Canberra, Australia. He was also a member of the Advisory Council to the Export Guarantee Office. In 1968 he was leader of a trade mission of New Zealand manufacturers to South East Asia and in 1975 was a member of the New Zealand Government's economic mission to Eastern Europe.

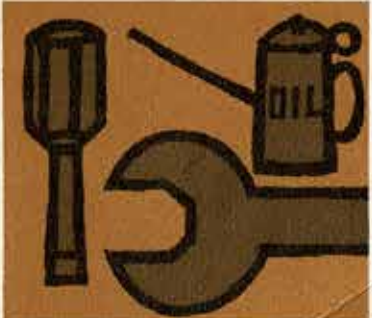
REX Consolidated Ltd. continued as a subsidiary of Cable Price Downer Ltd. It was eventually split and disposed of to numerous parties, and finally closed its doors in December 1988. ■

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Fred, Claire, Lilly and Peter relaxing at Waiheke c. 1990.

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MAINTENANCE?**



Throw away the spanners, oil and rag. "Extendaflex" is designed to be maintenance-free.

**Problem
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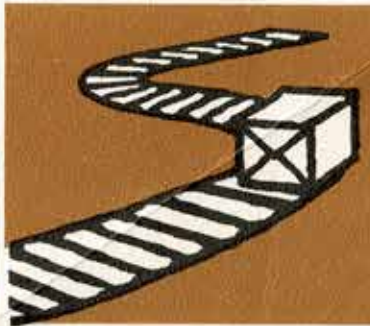
Fully extended capacity of 40 lbs. per foot enables all hand moveable items to be shifted with little effort.

**Problem
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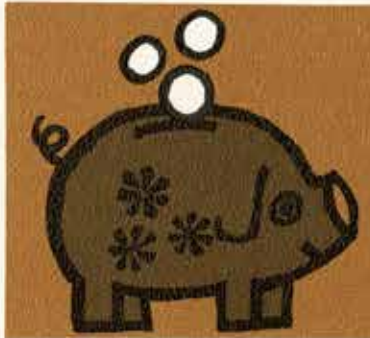
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Patented unique concave, free run skates always keep packages on course.

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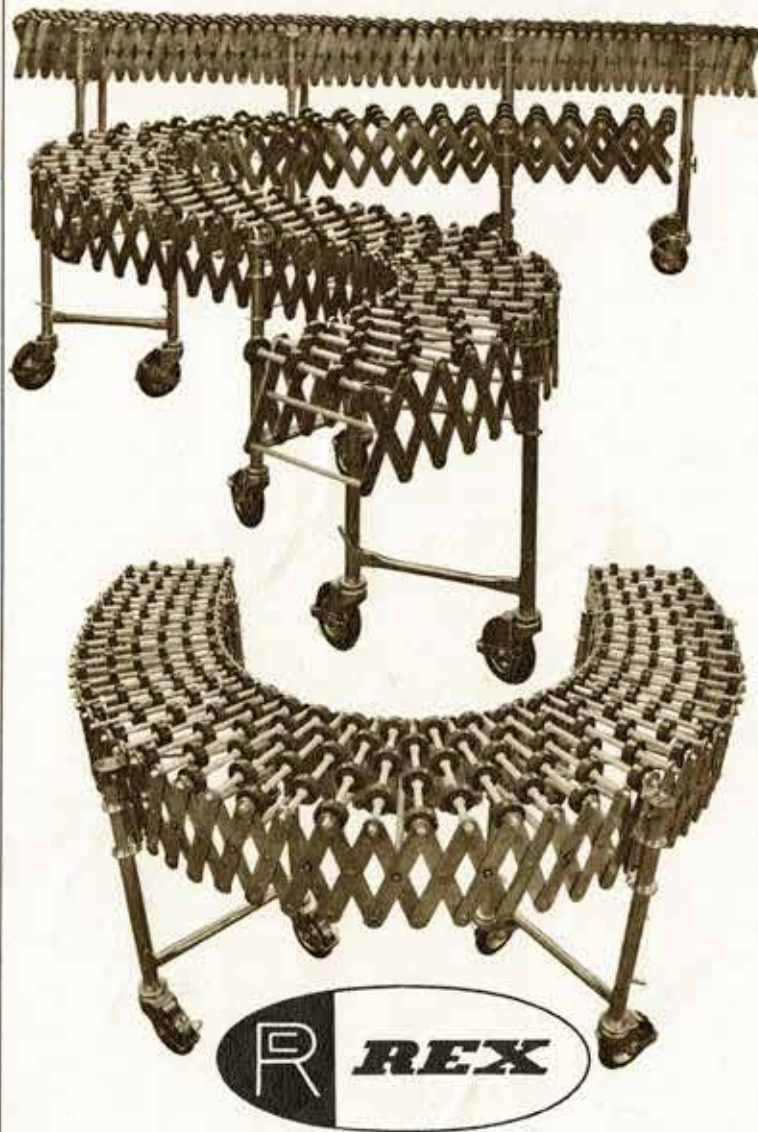


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Made to last. Strong metal construction — electro zinc plated. Four stands to each 24ft. section and three nylon skates per shaft dispense with section strain to give a strong, compact finish.

The story of Rex - its rise and fall

By Peter Bruell, May 2018.



MY parents arrived in NZ as refugees in 1940 with just £10 in their pockets. My father, Fred Bruell, immediately tried to enlist in the armed forces but was rejected as having come from a foreign country.

In the long term it was a positive outcome for New Zealand because during the war he worked in a cardboard box company where he invented a method of waterproofing cardboard containers making them suitable for sending meat to England and thus saving the country the need to use tin sheet which was in short supply.

In Europe he worked in his uncle's paper company so he was trained in the field.

Fred was employed by a company called Johnsons Cardboard Box and over



the war years he became close friends with its owner Hugo Johnson. He always told Hugo that the day the war ended he would resign to start his own business working with sheet metal. The day the war ended he fronted up to Hugo's office and before he could open his mouth Hugo said, "I know Fred you are resigning to start your own business and to help you on your way we have for you a small power press."

It was an extremely generous gesture and the two remained close friends for the rest of their lives.

The company he started, F&L Bruell Ltd, bought scrap tin from the can makers and produced thumbtacks. The company name was changed to Rex as that was as much as you could stamp onto the head of a thumbtack.

About the author

Peter Bruell was educated at Kohimarama School and Selwyn College. He gained a NZ Certificate of Production Engineering and while at Eric Paton Ltd he acquired precision engineering skills, serving an apprenticeship for four years.

He began work at Rex Manufacturing in Research and Development in 1967 after returning from overseas.

His responsibilities encompassed all the other companies in the Rex Group culminating in his appointment

as Managing Director, Technical.

Interests cover a variety of fields, from skiing, Toastmasters, Jewish community affairs against a backdrop of family life with wife, two sons and five grandchildren.

20 years down the track

In the 1960s Rex was thriving, doing ever better making industrial componentry such as wheels, castors, electrical terminations, builders hardware etc.

By that time there was hardly an industry in New Zealand that was not using components manufactured by Rex. The company was always short of funding and my mother spoke of that time as a period when she wanted new drapes for home and Fred wanted a new piece of machinery – the machinery always won.

Their accountant at that time, Lewis Ross, suggested they consider going public. He had determined that the company was large enough and healthy enough. Being public meant access to funds, having a board of directors and answering to shareholders, the public, on performance.

Next leap forward to the eighties

The company has now grown dramatically. It consists of 20 subsidiaries, 10 manufacturing and 10 marketing offices around the world in Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Los Angeles and around New Zealand with factories in Auckland, Wellington, Singapore, Melbourne. It was the 67th largest company on the New Zealand Stock Exchange at that time, employing over 1000 staff and exporting to about 70 countries.

Lewis Ross had become Sir Lewis Ross and was widely regarded as the lead-



ing public company director in NZ at that time. By this time Fred Bruell had retired from active management and Ronny and Peter were joint Managing Directors splitting responsibility – Sales and Marketing to Ronny and Manufacturing and Engineering to Peter.

The Board

One of the roles that the board undertook on a regular monthly basis at that time was a review of any share transfers which were all hard copy, printed share transfer certificates received by mail daily. The review was an opportunity for the directors to see who was taking an interest in the company and to assess if that interest was a healthy one.

The traditional investors, finance funds, insurance brokers, bankers, superannuation funds were always buying and selling shares. Individual shareholders were doing the same and there were no causes for concern. However, one day the chairman identified a shadow holding company progressively buying up small parcels of shares.

The strategy

The object was to acquire a large holding of shares in the target company

as unobtrusively as possible via purchases of small packets of shares that did not alert the market that a takeover was in the wind. If successful the raider could purchase small parcels of shares cheaply and make a significant gain when the market became aware of the action. Although the move clearly was an unfriendly move this was not a totally unexpected occurrence and one that had been the subject of previous board table discussions.

A public company is public property and the shareholders control its fate. As an organisation the directors strive to make the company appealing to the investors – after all it's the investors who provide the funds to operate.

One of Rex's weaknesses was that it was asset rich, against the advice of the analysts. As a company Rex always purchased its plant and machinery without loans, paid all the bills without bank assistance, built its factories and repaid its mortgages as required. Rex was never beholden to the banks.

The analysts critiqued the company for this, saying we were not taking advantage of the resources available. My father, Fred Bruell, who came through the depression in Europe was never moved by the whim of the analysts even though this made Rex particularly tempting as a purchase for asset stripping.

It was the directors' belief that the majority of shareholders would not be happy with an unfriendly takeover and the transactions picked up had all the hallmarks of an unfriendly takeover of the board. We had previously decided that in the event of a raid on the company – and the rate of transfers, indicated clearly the company was being raided – the board would seek a friendly takeover from a larger company. To that end a list had been compiled of companies deemed to be those they could work with.

Crunch time had arrived and the list was pulled out from the bottom drawer and hour by hour the company share transfers were monitored. It became clear very soon that Rex was under serious threat and the directors explored any and all options to protect the company.



Ronny and Peter in marketing mode c. 1970s.

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It is common to believe that the principals and directors hold controlling parcels of shares even of public companies. However, this is not necessarily true. It is the institutions that wield the control and they are only interested in the highest return they can get.

The method

Approaching the marketplace with a request to sell a public company is tricky territory and should the market get wind of intentions of a corporate takeover all hell can break loose.

Given that position and the company's obligation to the stock exchange we had a very short time frame before we came under exposure regulations.

If something is occurring in a public company that could materially affect the share price, directors are duty bound to advise the stock exchange and the public by a notice in the news media.

The directors made their initial approaches to the selected company and received a positive response and immediately issued a "don't sell" notice to shareholders advising something big is happening that will affect the public's investment and the share price.

The board had 24 hours to explain or request the stock exchange to halt all trading for 48 hours after which time it has to disclose the reason for the "don't sell" notice.

The end game

In that short time frame the board has to set up an acceptable sale and purchase agreement detailing the most significant details of the transaction that both organisations can live with. It was a challenging time and a time that focused an enormous amount of energy – "and yet there was still a company to run".

With the announcement made, the public advised, the agreements document-

ed, the acceptance of both parties received – it was time to move on again. The proposed raider sold his stock to move onto other companies and everyone settled in to working with a new board of directors.

The outcome

The story was not quite over.

Within two years the new owners were raided successfully and in the process Rex was asset stripped, its companies closed, its products abandoned, its tooling sold and its employees left neglected. Today you can still see the occasional Rex product picked up by other companies in the market but in truth the company has been relegated to the history books.

Regrets

I have a few but what angers me still, 30 plus years later, is the shoddy way all those loyal staff were left out on a limb – abandoned. The public was protected and loyal shareholders made gains in both the first and second raid as each time the share prices soared.

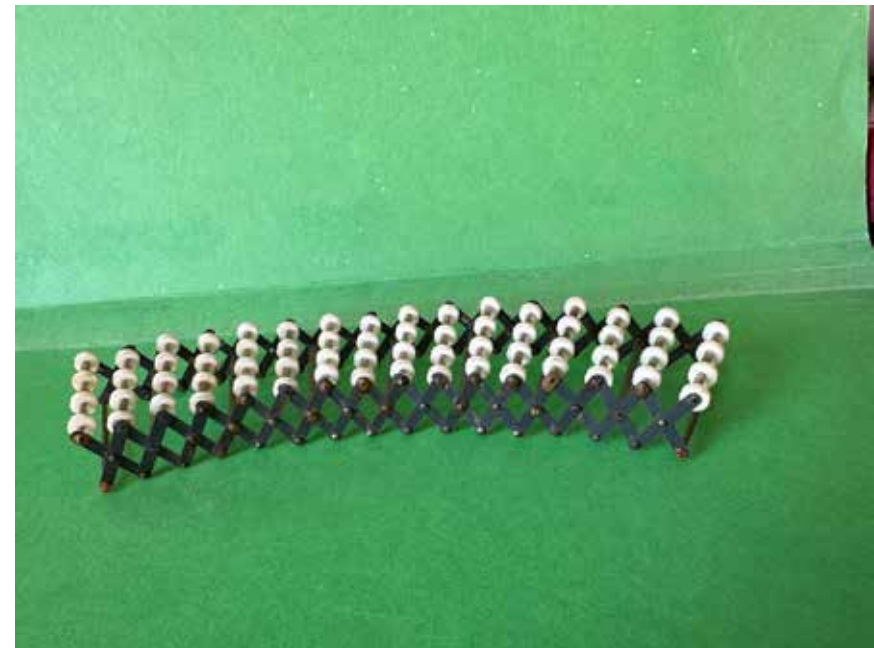
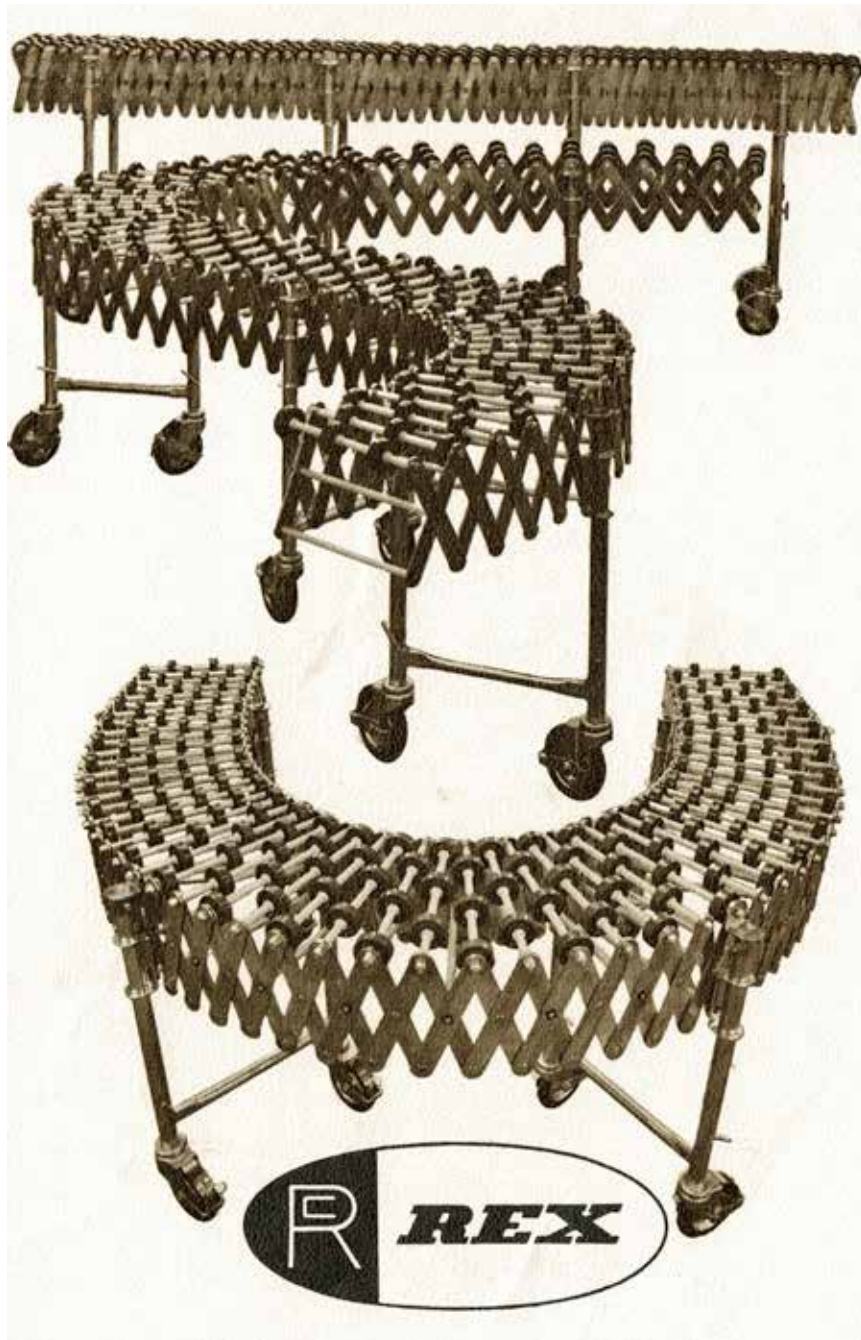
Fred retired and Ronny and I were asked to step down from our roles a short time after Rex was acquired. The family influence was too strong for the company's new owners.

The staff on the other hand were discarded. When the asset stripping began, staff, many of whom had only ever worked at Rex, were told to seek other employment. They weren't even given references – a task Ronny and I took up although it was long after we had left the employ of the new owners.

The rise, over 40 years, was controlled and measured.

The fall, in the final analysis, took place in a matter of weeks. ■

- Peter Bruell 2018



Six centimetre extendaflex model created by Peter as a selling aid.



Gathering my Herstory

By Claire Bruell



HISTORY has always interested me. Whether the history of my family, the history of the Holocaust, or the history of the Jewish community in New Zealand. History informs our present.

The often quoted phrase that we “see further because we stand on the shoulders of giants” resonates with me. What were the influences in my heritage that led me to develop interests that extended outward from New Zealand, the country of my birth, towards the wider world, seeking to see myself and my family in the context of a broader horizon?

A recent visit to Europe, connecting with family in Italy, Czech Republic (more recently Czechia) and Vienna has caused me to consider how my journey has been influenced by my background. In the hills above Lago di Lecco in Italy, the gardens of suburban Prague and the “heurigen” in Vienna, I sat with groups of up to 15 or so extended family, sometimes communicating in different languages, spanning three generations, but all sharing values and history, connected by the shared loss of a grandparent generation.

I am a Second Generation only child of Czech Holocaust survivors.



My parents Frank and Alice Briess, arrived in Auckland via London, shortly after German soldiers marched into Poland and the world was precipitated into the Second World War. My parents settled in Auckland in October 1939, farmed, went into business, worked hard and prospered and I grew up in a privileged yet modest household. Secular Jews, they rarely attended synagogue other than at Yom Kippur when I was taken reluctantly by my mother to the Princes St shul. I hated sitting outside during the Yizkor memorial service, feeling conspicuous and ignorant in the unfamiliar surroundings.

My mother belonged to Wizo, my father a founding member of B’nai Brith whose members assisted Jewish immigrants and refugees, finding jobs, household goods and contacts to meet their needs.

I endured six years of compulsory Hebrew School attendance but learned little, had a bat mitzvah nevertheless. We did not observe Shabbat, Pesach or Chanukah, yet the sense of

Jewish identity in the house was strong. A JNF blue box stood on the mantelpiece, Jewish and Israel causes were generously supported and my father ran a

SEARCHING FOR IDENTITY: Our parents' new lives

kosher butcher shop for some years to serve the community, alongside his meat and small goods business.

Early, I became aware of the Holocaust that cost my parents and me most of our extended family. My mother in particular had lost almost her entire family. Unburdening herself to me at the age of six, she deposited me soon after, for four months, in a Swiss boarding school where no one spoke English. No wonder this gave rise to the Holocaust-themed recurrent nightmares which plague many of the Second Generation. I recall those days in a completely foreign environment with vague memories of having to consume the skim on my hot breakfast milk and my evening meal being served into my soup if I had been too slow in eating. A stark contrast to the marmite sandwiches and Maggi chicken noodle soup that I chose to eat at home in New Zealand! The strict routine there meant a supervised visit to the toilet each day to ensure our bowels were working properly.

In Switzerland I learnt French, some German and a smattering of Italian, depending on the language of the child I was playing with at the time. Although no longer fluent in any language but English, the experience left me with a facility for languages that has been enduringly helpful to me – in conversation, reading newspapers and research documents.

In Auckland, Saturday afternoons saw the gathering of their friends at my parents' house. I gradually came to realise most of these people, immigrants and refugees like my parents, were not only



Holocaust survivors, but originated from the same places as my parents – from Vienna and from the cities of Czechoslovakia. At the same time I was aware that although they mixed with the survivors from other places – Germany, Hungary, Poland and so on, each group by and large, mixed primarily with their countrymen, sometimes underpinned by family relationship.

There was a perceived divide between those families who were from the established Jewish community and those who had come at the time of the war or shortly after. The perception by “the Continentals” themselves was that they were not easily welcomed. Their differences, with many speaking German or in accented English at a time when anti German sentiment was strong because of the war, speaking loudly in public and their sometimes pushy natures, drew attention to local Jews whose families had generally tried not to stand out. Attitudes were long held and only sometimes dissipated with time, marriage or the shared experience of youth groups.

Teenage years in Habonim, camps and an active social life obscured for me the fact that I had no grandparents in New Zealand, the only relations an aunt and uncle who arrived from the US in 1947 bringing my only first cousin.

In school there was one other Jewish girl in my class and we were only dimly aware of our common heritage. At University my interest was drawn to the study of languages and history, particularly the history of the Second World War.

I started to think about the place my family had in that broader history.

Travel to Europe, living in London for some years, meeting other family members who had survived and their children – in Austria, Italy, France, London, New York, Los Angeles, Toronto, Buenos Aires gave me an openness to and interest in the big wide world. I found my contemporaries in New Zealand did not share and could not really understand this since their life experiences and backgrounds were so different. Many of my Kiwi friends considered my parents exotic, cultured, sharing food they had never tasted before and having far more liberal attitudes than their own parents. Coming to our house, they often spent more time talking to my parents than with me.

I married Peter whose background closely mirrored my own. Our two children grew and matured. When aged 10 and 14 we took them out of school for three months and travelled the world, to expose them to other people and cultures and to meet relatives.

We foster relationships amongst the third generation in the hope of maintaining family ties.

I became interested in Genealogy – not just the names and dates, but the flesh on the bones of how life had been for my forebears in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. I realised that this research fitted neatly into what I had studied.

Of the 17 great grandparents who had spawned Peter and me, all but one had died in a place that was different to the places where they had been born.



I saw this as a window through which to examine the history of Jewish people in the 19th and 20th centuries, dispersed and displaced through pogrom, revolution, immigration and later through the Holocaust.

The Jewish Oral History Project that began with a desire to preserve the stories of Holocaust survivors has been a constant in my life since the early 1990s. It began in 1993 in a drive to collect evidence to bear witness against Holocaust denial, that is as relevant now as it was then. Helping interview for and administer the Jewish Oral History Project since inception rounded out my understanding of the Auckland Jewish community and its history; I learned about those who had come long before the Second World War, whose families had immigrated in an earlier century as well as those who had come as a result of the war. Valuable history is contained in these interviews, with many people who are no longer with us. I consider that these 150 or so oral history interviews and collections of papers form the basis of the history of the Auckland Jewish community.

Most of the material has been collected by volunteers and so reflects the subjectivity of the interviewees, interviewees and collectors. Authenticity is undeniable!

Genealogy led me to a global network of like-minded people and I connected to others doing similar work. I write occasional articles for Jewish genealogy publications and sometimes attend international conferences on the same subject. From time to time I speak to groups on the research I have done. I became a founding committee member of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy in 2004. The Institute seeks to advance the academic status of

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Jewish Genealogy within the field of Jewish Studies, through teaching and research and is based in Israel.

In 2007 I had the opportunity of visiting the International Tracing Service (ITS) of the Red Cross facility at Bad Arolsen, only just having been opened as an archive and offering research possibilities. The Document Centre, now Archive, had been administered by the International Red Cross since the war and holds over 30 million records in its archive, documenting National Socialist persecution and liberated survivors. I went with a group of seven and spent a memorable week finding out about the documents held in their files. Amazingly, there was a file for almost all of the 120

Holocaust victims, on whom I sought information. These 120 people were from both my family and Peter's. A researcher and translator were available to each of us. Every single file was scanned carefully, and after my visit the complete files on CD were sent to me. The information they yielded was mind-boggling and I shared most of it with members of my family. The documents ranged from transport cards to letters, school registration cards, small family trees and my parents' and my own correspondence with the Document Centre years before, seeking information. Most moving to me were the school



registration card for an eight year old relative in Berlin, who disappeared after his mother was deported. It was a poignant record stating blandly his name, address and telephone number, date of birth, date of inoculation and admission to primary school and the names of his parents. On file also was his father's desperate post war letter from England, searching for his little son. And then there was Sophie Jurmann, an 11 year old diabetic, who died in Opole Concentration Camp when she couldn't get the insulin she needed.

Recently in Prague we visited the Jewish Museum where there is a renewed interest in families who left Czechoslovakia at the time of the war.

There is a sense that with the disappearance of most of the Jewish people from the country, something has been lost from their own culture. The Pinchas Synagogue in the Old Town famously features the names of those who were deported, the names covering every available surface on the walls. Entering the building, the weight of the names feels enormous, more than the sum of the individuals listed.

In 2017 the Jewish Museum decided to put together a slideshow of photographs of Jewish families living normal lives before the war. These would be screened on the outside gable wall of the Pinchas Synagogue, to personalise some of the names inscribed inside. In Prague a year later, I went after nightfall to see if I could find the slideshow. Indeed, as I stood on the street outside the Pinchas Synagogue, up out of the darkness came a heading "Faces of some of those deported during the war". For a few minutes I watched prewar photographs of families happily swimming in lakes and socializing, doing ordinary things. I had submitted several photographs. Suddenly the image of my grandfather appeared, staring straight at the camera, leaning on his stick. I had never met him, since he died in 1942 in Theresienstadt Concentration Camp and I wasn't yet born, but seeing his photograph, looking larger than life-size, looming above in the night sky gave me goose bumps! Unfortunately I don't



speak or even understand the Czech language, but experiences such as this tie me inexplicably to this country and connect me to its history. Meeting family in Brno and Olomouc, two hours' by train east of Prague, to lay Stolpersteine (stumble stones) in memory of our family's Holocaust victims increased a sense of connection with place.

Today, although my feet are firmly planted in Aotearoa, New Zealand, I feel that connections with Jewish organisations overseas and in Auckland have given me something of an outsider's perspective on our New Zealand community. Isolation and waves of immigration from colonial times and since – from a broad spectrum of places – Poland, Hungary, Russia, Latvia, Lithuania, England, Israel, Australia Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia and more, have at times made it difficult for us to work

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together for the common good. Opportunities have been lost. We have developed our own local Jewish culture, made up of the tastes and customs of Jewish observance, practice and community coupled with support for Israel that has roots in many different places. New Zealand is seen as a safe haven at the bottom of the world. Most have come here from a desire to lead a better life, for the opportunities and refuge a young country can offer. The cost of integration has been that many have eventually become cut off from their families' roots and culture, from a lost European Jewish world, despite any efforts to connect via music, theatre, travel, scholarship and language. The Jewish community, like all religious and ethnic groups in New Zealand seeks a measure of cohesion as a discrete group contributing to the picture of a multicultural Auckland.

Recently, there has been the announcement that an existing school property in Remuera has been purchased by Auckland Hebrew Congregation interests. The Trust Board proposal is that their congregation and Kadimah School would move there in 2023 and that the property could become a community centre, with other Jewish organisations also moving to the site. Perhaps now there is a chance that community leaders can find a way to make this Community Centre a reality. My hope going forward is that not only can we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors but that their influence will be with us on the journey forward. ■



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