

Searching for identity

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4

# Family footprints

*By Claire Bruell*



Cover

*Claire among flowers  
blooming in a Czech  
Jewish cemetery.*





earching for identity

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*Table napkins  
embroidered with  
Alice Löwy's initials  
- 1937.*



# Introduction



HERE are some who are part of our family history that we can be rightly proud of. They stood at the forefront of their time and place for who they were and what they did.

This final book will speak of Mordechai Jaffe, Moriz Benedikt, Ignaz Briess Sr and others. Also of note were the maltster families and the industrialists of the Hana Valley, riding the crest of the wave of a dramatic increase in the consumption of beer and other food products throughout Czechoslovakia, Europe and even further afield. Harry Benton wrote a preface for Michael Viktorik's book on the maltster families, describing his childhood in Olomouc which I have included with extracts from Viktorik's work. I am immensely grateful to Michael Viktorik, an historian with the Olomouc Palacky University on whose research I have relied, even though little of the text has been translated into English. Also included are notes written for presentations and various publications as well as research for talks to the Second Generation Group in Auckland. Peter has contributed a passion for his interest in illuminated manuscripts, which has taken both of us on a journey into the world of the Falter Family and Facsimile Editions.

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To complete the book I have included some of the stories I wrote for publication in *Avotaynu – an International Review of Jewish Genealogy*, published for 37 years in the United States. Gary Mokotoff was the publisher and Sallyann Amdur Sack the editor of the journal and they also published a multitude of books. I am indebted to Sallyann for her guidance and friendship. I maintain that she could tickle a story from anyone with her enthusiasm and boundless energy. *Avotaynu* the journal, sadly is no longer, after having published more than 50 books which are still available to aid Jewish genealogists, as well as almost 20 more books no longer in print. Gary and Sallyann have left big footprints in particular with their massive *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust* (revised edition) written originally with Alexander Sharon, now a staple reference

text in many libraries throughout the Western world. They are giants in the world of Jewish genealogy and I owe them much.

Finally some reflections by Frank after visiting CSSR in 1966 and heartwarming pieces of research on the Kindertransportees who came to NZ and the Kitchener Camp, twin projects in 1939 which operated during a few short months but saved thousands – ordinary people doing extraordinary things. ■





# Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe



אבן מקד' תועק ותהנה נבאים  
 כי נפל אביר הרושים ונאון ותנאים  
 פד מונח אביר האבירים  
 מלך על כל חכמי המורים  
 סני ועוקר הרים  
 מאור הנדול שהארץ לישראל לדור דורים  
 בספרו "ם של שלמה" ושאר ביאורים  
 שבו נודע בסוף העולם בכל שערים  
 הרב ין חרות והרבה חלמיות בכל העולם  
 נודק וחסיד בכל מעשיו ההרורים  
 הרב הנאון הנדול מופת הדור

**שלמה**  
 מ"ה

ברב הנאון מ"ה יחיאל לוריא זכחו לבינה  
 נחבקש בישיבה של סמלה לרת ולהלכה  
 ים י"ב כסלו שנת נפלה עטרת ראשית  
 ונפול י"ג חשוון ה'ת"ק

תנצב"ה

שופר על ידי 'אהלי עד יום'  
 בראשות הרב יצחק שנייד נבא ה'ת'  
 לבינת סיכא אר"ה בן חיה ב"סל  
 ובני משפחתו

*The grave of Rabbi Mordechai's influential teacher – Solomon Luria, Lublin, Poland.*

# Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, Ba'al Halevushim



THE family of Samuel Berger, my great grandfather, centres around the town of Valašské Meziříčí in Eastern Moravia. Samuel Berger's mother was Anna Singer. In a book written by Ladislav Baletka, archivist and historian in Vsetín, Moravia, on the Jews of the town of Valašské Meziříčí he writes that "Sigmund and Samuel Berger were the descendants of the Gaon Mordechai Jaffe, 12 generations back on his mother's side. His Jewish name was Mordechai ben Abraham. Jaffe means "beautiful", or "nice".

Rabbi Mordechai (Halevush) Jaffe, son of Abraham Jaffe (1513-1564), was sent as a boy to Poland to study under Solomon Luria and Moses Isserles. There he also studied astronomy and philosophy, and at the same time he developed an interest in Kabbalah. After a few years he returned to Prague



*Solomon Luria and Moses Isserles*



where, in 1553, he was appointed head of the yeshivah.

The Jews were expelled from Bohemia in 1561 and Rabbi Mordechai left Prague for Italy, settling in Venice where he continued to write. He decided to write interpretations he had acquired in his youth, of the Guide of the Perplexed and the "Treatise on the Laws of the Jewish calendar" by Maimonides and the kabbalistic Bible commentary of Menahem Recanati.

In 1571 he left Italy for Posen in Poland which at the time was the centre for Jewish learning in the Diaspora. He was appointed 'av bet din' and head of the yeshivah of Grodno in Lithuania. Later he took a similar position in Lublin in 1588 and subsequently moved to Kremeieć.

He was active in the council of the Four Lands in Poland. In 1592 he returned

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

to Prague and became av bet din in succession to Juda Loew b. Bezalel (the Maharal) when Juda Loew was appointed to Posen. In 1599 Loew returned to Prague while Jaffe remained in Posen until his death.

Rabbi Mordechai worked on his book for almost 50 years. It contains 10 levushim or books or commentaries. As these came from a leader of 16th century Polish and Lithuanian Jewry they showed the influence of the Renaissance on Jewish scholars of that time. He regarded Kabbalah as the “crowning jewel of Spirituality”. The Levushim were published between 1590 and 1604 at various presses in Lublin, Prague and Krakow. His writings received criticism from some and fulsome praise from others.

Rabbi Mordechai died on 7 March 1615. His gravestone was transferred from the old Posen cemetery. to the new one. His children were Aryeh Leib, born 1555 Bella, Elka, Sarah and Rabbi Peretz Jaffe. There is an entry on Geni.com showing how I am related to Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, Ba'al Halevushim. Exactly how Rabbi Mordechai is related to Anna Singer, Samuel Berger's mother, is a mystery. A mystery for a future generation to solve.

***Adapted from Chabad.org***



***The Grodno yeshiva is a hotel today.***

However, Geni.com contains a warning to not to confuse Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe Ba'al “Halevushim” with Rabbi Mordechai ben Moshe Jaffe Singer. Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe is referred to as Halevushim and there is no mention of the name Singer, whereas Rabbi Mordechai ben Moses Singer, Singer being the name of Josef Berger's wife that can directly be found on our tree.

Yet further information comes from <jewishencyclopedia.com> described as follows:

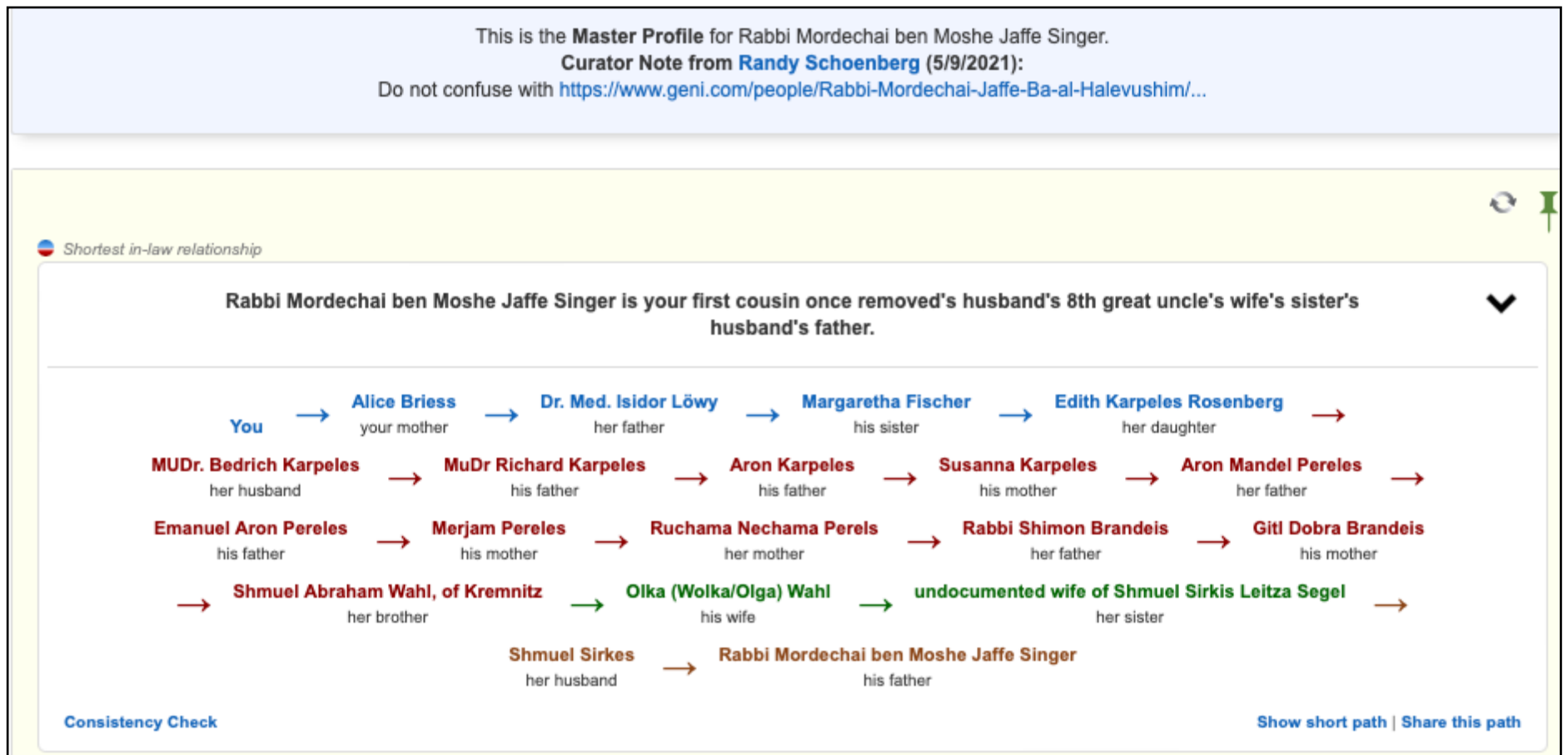
*The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* is an English-language encyclopedia containing over 15,000 articles on the history, culture, and state of Judaism up to the early 20th century.

The Jewish Encyclopedia was originally published in 12 volumes between 1901 and 1906 by Funk & Wagnalls of New York, and reprinted in the 1960s by KTAV Publishing House. It is now in the public domain. The entry under “Jaffe” (Joffe) states they were a family of rabbis, scholars and communal workers tracing their descent from Mordechai Jaffe (1530-1612), author of “Lebushim” and his uncle Moses Jaffe, both descendants of an old family of Prague. The progenitor of the family was held to be Samuel ben Elhanan, a grandson of Isaac ha-Zaken whose father was Samuel, the son-in-law

of Rabbi Meir of Ramerup, the father of Jacob Tam, grandson of Rashi. Abraham, father of Mordechai (Lebushim), was the head of the Jaffe branch while another Mordechai, son of Moses Jaffe married the daughter of Joel Singer, taking the name of his father-in-law as was the custom in Poland.

research by Paul Jacobi on the Jaffe family. Whatever the truth of the matter, or where Baletka got his information from, we will probably never find out. Baletka might just be correct and I may be connected to both Mordechai Jaffes in multiple ways, through both my mother's parents and my mother's father. ■

There is a further note on Geni.com that researchers should refer to the







**Moriz Benedikt**



*Rare view from the Neue Freie Presse news production room 1904.*

# Moriz Benedikt

Newspaperman,  
*Die Neue Freie Presse*

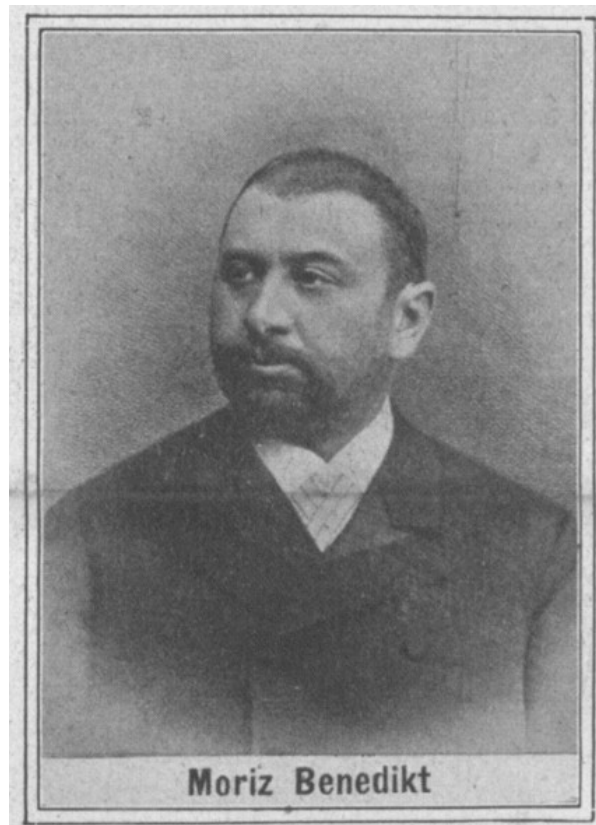


MY research led me to the obituaries in the *Neue Freie Presse* (The New Free Press) and as I looked for further information I discovered that the brother of my husband, Peter's, great grandmother – his great great uncle Moriz Benedikt – had a close connection to the newspaper. His obituary in the newspaper on 19 March 1920 was effusive in its praise, in a style that would be considered quite over-exaggerated today.

Who was this man, I wondered, who ended his life editing, owning and publishing the major Viennese newspaper of its time, known by everyone, a newspaper favoured by Jews all over the Austro-Hungarian Empire?

What was it about this newspaper that the words “subscriber to the *Neue Freie Presse*” on a business card validated the owner and conveyed him as being a man of the world, informed on current events?

In order to understand the contribution of the



1849-1920

Jewish journalists to the development of Austrian journalism in the last decades of the 19th century we need to take as a starting point the momentous year of 1848.

Revolutionary events began in Italy on 12 January 1848 as a protest against the government and spread to encompass the whole of Europe. In the Austrian lands this took the form of nationalist insurrections against the repressive policy of Prince Metternich on the part of all social classes from liberal aristocrats to middle class and professional people to the working-class who wanted a share of political power. Under the earlier regime, there had been only three news publications, all of them heavily censored or controlled by the government. With the resignation of Metternich and change of government, censorship was lifted on 15 March 1848 and an amazing proliferation of publications followed. Within a few short months over 700 newspapers, broadsheets and pamphlets appeared. *Die Presse* was one newspaper that managed to survive until, in 1864, it mutated into a new

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paper called *Die Neue Freie Presse* (NFP).

Moriz Benedikt was from an illustrious Moravian family connected to the famous Mordechai Benet (1753-1829) who had been the Chief Rabbi of Moravia for 40 years and whose authority had influenced the developments in the Moravian Jewish world during an important period of challenge to traditional orthodox precepts. Moriz was born in Kwassitz (today Kvasice), near Brünn (today Brno) in Moravia but was in Vienna by the time he became a sub editor of *Die Neue Freie Presse* in 1872 at the age of 24. His description as a journalist on the record of his marriage to Adele Krohn in Vienna in 1875 bears this out.

The newspaper survived the stock market crash of 1873 and went on to employ and interview some of the greatest figures of the Jewish world.

Theodor Herzl covered the trial of Alfred Dreyfus in France for *Die Neue Freie Presse*. Dreyfus was famously accused of treason during the course of several trials and was eventually pardoned and reinstated as a major in the French Army. The antisemitic nature of the case convinced Herzl that only in a land of their own could Jews really be free of prejudice and hate. When Herzl died in 1904 his obituary in *Die Neue Freie Presse* was full of praise although the praise was for his literary achievements – his Zionist vision was barely mentioned. Benedikt, the quintessential German liberal, was not a supporter of Herzl, yet the paper continued to pay his monthly salary long after Herzl ceased to have any time for the NFP. Benedikt and the other editors of *Die Neue Freie Presse* tried to avoid being identified with purely Jewish interests since they aimed for the paper to have broad appeal. Nevertheless a high proportion of its staff and editors were Jewish.

In 1904, the 40th anniversary of *Die Neue Freie Presse* was written up with fulsome praise in the *Oesterreichs Illustrierte Zeitung* in a two page spread with photographs of Benedikt, and his co-editor of the time, Eduard Bacher, as well as other staff. The article also showed the substantial premises of the

newspaper in Fichtegasse in the central part of the Vienna, not far from the Stadtpark. The text was accompanied by photographs of the printing and reporters' rooms. The article contained a detailed description of the production of the newspaper beginning with the editors sorting out telegrams and incoming reports in their offices, writing notes and articles on paper and then delivering the manuscripts to the compositor who arranged the work, checking for errors and arranging sentences in columns and printing them for the proofreaders to check. In the production process the text was measured out to fit the required space and the pages were arranged. The completed newspapers were put into piles of 500 and then packaged for delivery. Bikes and carriages were loaded up with the newspapers and they were taken to train stations where they were thrown onto the trains. The delivery people would arrive and collect the papers for delivery so that customers could buy their copies in time to read them at breakfast.

The *Neue Freie Presse* was stylistically and technically superior to any of its competitors. Famous writers, besides Herzl, were employed by the newspaper including Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Richard Beer-Hofmann and Stefan Zweig. Whereas its predecessor, *Die Presse* had published only translations of English and French literature, *Die Neue Freie Presse's* editors introduced separate sections within the body of the paper for Agriculture, Natural History, Ethnology, Art, Literature, to name just a few. These so called "feuilletons" proved popular with readers and set the paper apart from its rivals. Stefan Zweig in his "*The World of Yesteryear*" noted that the feuilleton, differing from the political articles, became the leading arbiter of literary culture in the Vienna of the turn of the century.

With the development of technology the paper's costs rose, especially when most of the news was transmitted by telegrams. Nevertheless technology also played a part in the success of the paper. For example, Bismarck, the German Chancellor made a famous speech (of 7,000 words) to the Reichstag during a Bulgarian crisis on 6 February 1888. Count Otto von Bismarck was the states-

man who dominated European affairs for most of the second half of the 19th century, uniting most of the German states into a powerful German Empire that set the stage for the First World War. Aggressive and domineering, Bismarck had a long term national and international vision while juggling many complex political matters in the short term. He is generally held to have kept the peace in Europe by maintaining a balance of power. Bismarck's speech to the Reichstag on the dangers of a European war, was published the day after it was delivered to the Reichstag, in both Berlin and Vienna so that readers in both cities could read the article at the same time. This was considered a great achievement.

Benedikt's co-editor Eduard Bacher died in 1904, leaving Benedikt in a position to buy the paper and so completely control its contents.

In Benedikt's support of liberalism and German interests some considered the paper and its editors contributed to the causes of the First World War. Benedikt survived the war and must have been dismayed to witness the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire he loved so much. He was forced to accept the reality of change, when new nations emerged from the crumbling structure of the old Empire. In those years there was criticism of the paper's disinclination to accept the new political situation and to ignore unpleasant truths and strong social tensions. Benedikt's style was seen as being excessively moralistic and belonging to an earlier time. Nevertheless, to the end, he devoted every waking hour to his beloved *Neue Freie Presse*.

Moriz Benedikt held a position of great influence, having even been appointed to the Herrenhaus, the Upper House of the Austrian Parliament, in 1917.



*NFP building Vienna, 1904, Fichtegasse in central Vienna.*

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*Another view from the NFP news production room, 1904.*

The success of the paper can be seen in the placement of the following phrase “subscriber to *Die Neue Freie Presse*” on a business card which was regarded as the ultimate status symbol.

Circulation figures for *Die Neue Freie Presse* are testament to what an achieve-

ment the paper was and how great was its influence. From a circulation of 4000 in 1864, sales increased to 25,000 in 1870, 55,000 in 1901, and in 1920, circulation reached 90,000.

Moriz Benedikt was known to have had a difficult personality. He belonged



worked hard to ensure the paper's continuity.

In the 1920s he appointed David Ben Gurion as correspondent of *Die Neue Freie Presse* in Palestine.

Visiting the United States in 1932, Ernst Benedikt was received by Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt and also by President Hoover and in his speech he paid tribute to the legacy of his father Moriz, for his credo of liberalism and for the high standard of literary excellence which he achieved for *Die Neue Freie Presse*.

In 1934 Ernst was forced to sell his shares in the paper to the Austrian government and he and his family fled the country, abandoning everything they owned.

Although they survived the war Ernst and his wife and four daughters went to different countries and followed their own separate paths. The oldest child Gerda went to an aunt in England in 1936. She studied at the London School of Economics, married and went to live in New York. Frieda went to England in 1938, writing three novels that were published during the war by Jonathan Cape. Ilse was in Switzerland, studied medicine and returned to Vienna in 1944 where she worked for the Resistance, later deciding to join the communists. Susanne, the youngest, was sent to her mother's relations in Finland while Ernst and Irma fled to Sweden. After her marriage, Susanne lived in France.

**Death notice in *Die Neue Freie Presse*  
- translated**

**Moriz Benedikt**

*Bent over from the deepest pain, we publish here the announcement, that the "Neue Freie Presse" has suffered an irreplaceable loss.*

*The publisher and chief editor of the "Neue Freie Presse" Moriz Benedikt died at 11 pm today at the age of 71.*

*After a life of ceaseless work (rastloser arbeit) our leader and friend has been prematurely torn away (entrisen) from us.*

*Vienna, 18 March, 1920.*

*Ernst Benedikt, Publisher of the "Neue Freie Presse"*

*The editorial staff (Redaktion) of the "Neue Freie Presse"*

I have used the data I found in the records and combined the information with what I found in books, on the internet and in family stories to clearly set a man and his family in their time and place. This picture has a place within the greater context of the contribution of the Jewish journalists to the development of the Press in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Moriz Benedikt was the brother of Peter's great grandmother Franziska Benedikt. ■

**Resources:**

- *Europe Since Napoleon*, Second Edition, by David Thomson published by Longmans, Green and Co Ltd, 1962.
- *The Jews of Austria: Essays on their Life History and Destruction* Ed. Josef Fraenkel published by Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. Ltd,

London 1967.

- *Rabbis and Revolution: The Jews of Moravia in the Age of Emancipation* by Michael Laurence Miller published Stanford University Press 2011.
- Article published in the *Oesterreichs/Wiener Illustrierte Zeitung* on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the *Neue Freie Presse*, translated from German. Published 4 October 1904.
- <https://tinyurl.com/4jh5ub33>

- <https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=nfp&datum=19200319&seite=1&zoom=33>
- Obituary for Moriz Benedikt *Neue Freie Presse* 19 March 1920.

By Claire Bruell published by *Avotaynu* Winter 2013

Volume XXIX, Number 4.

*Meldezettel (population register) dated 2.3.1882. Shows Moriz Benedikt, journalist of the NF Presse, born 1849 in Quatschitz, Moravia, Jewish, married to Adele. Stamped Death Notice 18.3.1920.*

Präf. 2. 3. 1882 19 **Meldezettel** *Wojna*  
für Haupt- (Jahres- u. Monats-) Wohnparteien.

1 Im IV Bezirke, Wollzeile - gasse Nr. 6, Stadt \_\_\_\_\_, Tür Nr. \_\_\_\_\_

2 Vor- und Zuname Moriz Benedikt F1

3 Charakter (Beschäftigung) Herausgeber d. N. f. Presse

4 Geburtsort und -land Quatschitz, Mähren

5 heimat(s) (Zuständigkeits)ort und -land \_\_\_\_\_

Staatsbürger(in) von \_\_\_\_\_

6 Geburtstag, -monat und -jahr, Religion und Stand (ledig, verheiratet, verwitwet) 1849 unv. verheiratet

7 Namen und Alter der Gattin und Kinder\*) Gattin Adele seit 2. IV 20

8 Frühere Wohnung\*) Ort Prinner - gasse Nr. 5

9 Reisedokumente\*) \_\_\_\_\_

Abmeldung \_\_\_\_\_

Ist ausgezogen (abgereist) am \_\_\_\_\_

Wohin? \_\_\_\_\_

Ort (Bezirk): \_\_\_\_\_

**GESTORBEN**  
Gasse 10. 3. 20  
**VERZEICHNIS**  
17. 3. 20  
Nr. \_\_\_\_\_

Verkaufspreis für einen Meldezettel 2 Heller.

Wien, \_\_\_\_\_ 19 \_\_\_\_\_

\*) Siehe Anmerkung auf der Rückseite.

*Elster Margarete, Honor. Geh.*





**Ignaz Briess Senior**

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*Prerau (Prerov)*

# Ignaz Briess Senior

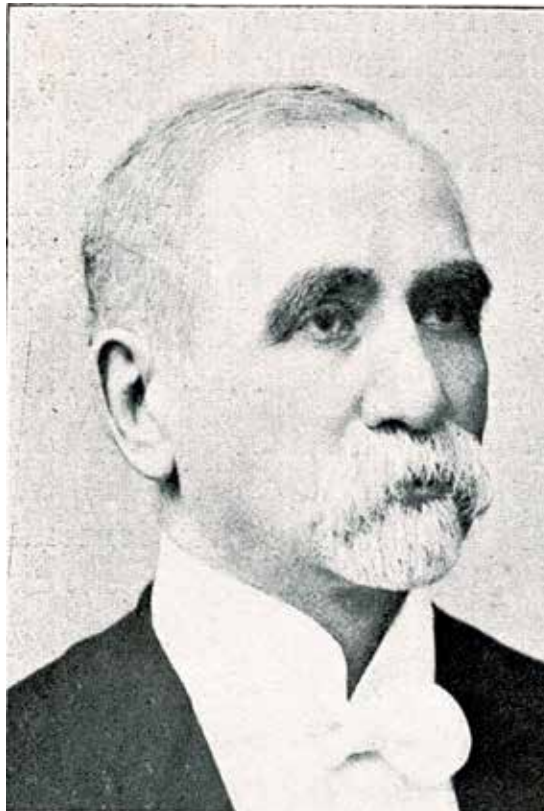
Cheder student, businessman  
and family man

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*Edited from: Images from a Bygone Ghetto-Life from the year 1838 to 1848, together with highlights from later years and the Memories of Youth of a 78, later 89 year old, Ignaz Briess sen in Olmütz.*



ON the track of any Briesses I could find, I was referred to a Paul Brennan (previously Briess) of New York in 1989. Paul in turn referred me to a book written in German, first published in 1911 by the brother of his great grandfather, Ignaz Briess Sr in Olmütz. At the time of the publication of the second edition in 1922 Ignaz was 89 years old. The proceeds of the first publication of



*Ignaz Briess Sr*

Ignaz Briess Senior of Prerau and  
Olmütz  
1833-1931

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the book were to be given to the Chevra Kaddisha of Olmütz.

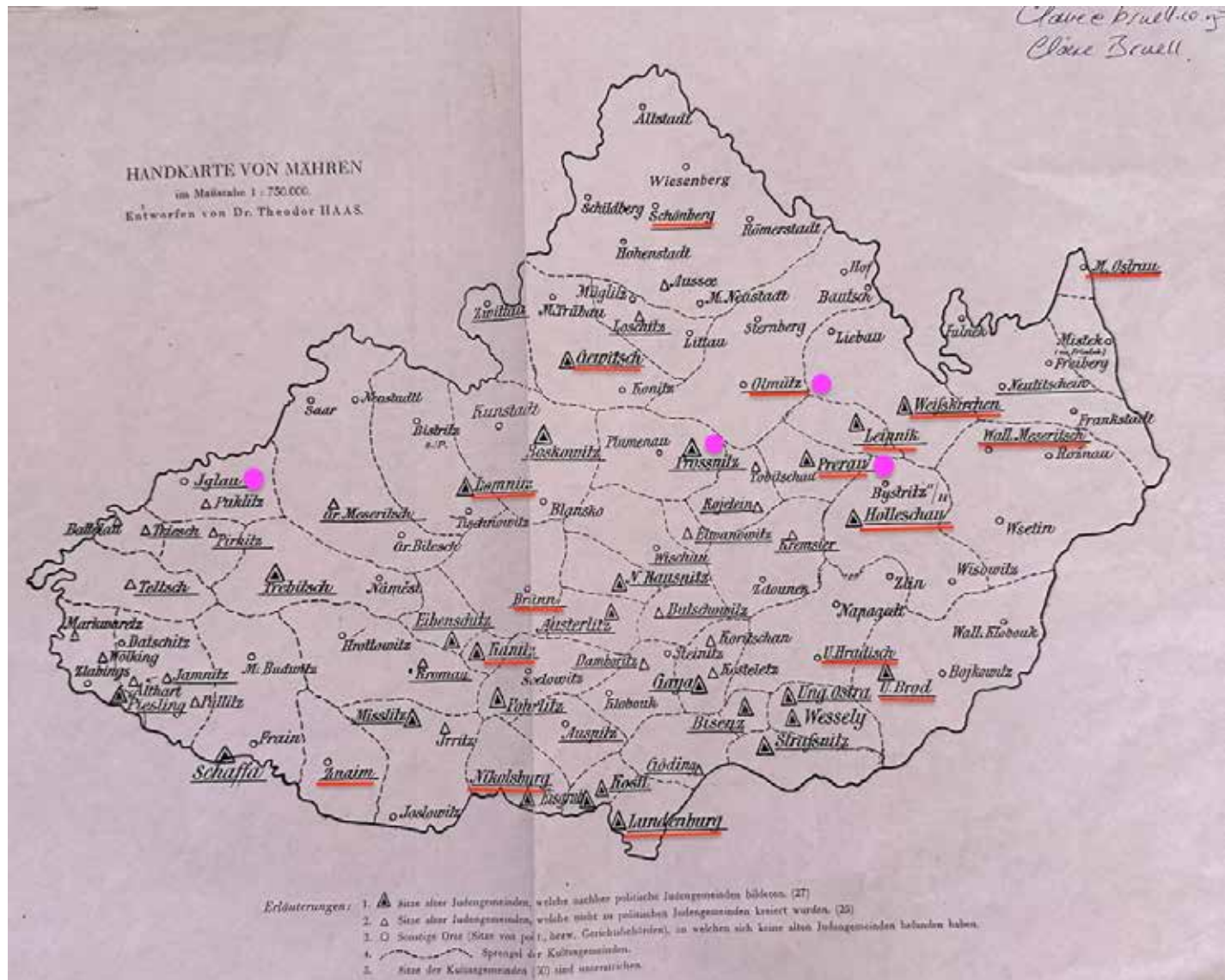
My translator in 1990, a student at Auckland University, was familiar with neither Hebrew nor Yiddish so the translation, while the best window we have into the life and times of the Briess family spanning the years on the far side of 1900, does not flow easily. Nevertheless, Ignaz says he hopes to provide a “vademecum” (guide – literally “goes with me”) through the labyrinth of Jewish customs and ordinances prior to 1848. The proceeds of the updated version were to be given to the impoverished Jewish technicians in Brünn (today Brno). The original text is littered with sayings and quotes from the Talmud and previous Jewish histories written

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by rabbis and other academics and philosophers. A more recent translation was done by Stephanie Noa Rudolph in New York, during isolation in the time of the Covid pandemic 2020.

In the notes at the end of the book, Ignaz explains the origin of the name “Briess” which came from the beginning and middle letters of the words “Ben Rabbi Jacob Szegal” ie: the son of Jacob. Szegal means a descendant of the line of Levi. The family name Briess had existed for over 200 years prior to the mandatory taking of surnames in 1788.

Carmit Sagie, historian and Briess relative, wrote from her research that the name Briess is an acronym for Bnei Rabbi Jacob Segal. Rabbi Jacob Segal who was also known as Rabbi Jacob Ben Moises Molin or an acronym “Maharil” (in Hebrew). He was born in Magenza, Germany (Mainz, in German) around 1360. He established a yeshiva and retired at



Map of Moravia showing the towns that featured in Ignaz's life.

the end of his life to Wormeiza (Worms, in German) where he died in 1427. He was the spiritual leader of the Ashkenazi Jews, and communities would come to him for advice on rabbinic matters. He wrote prayers to be read in synagogues and the chants sung in the traditional Ashkenazi way.

According to Ignaz, in 1833 there were only 16 Jewish houses in Prerau (today Prerov) whereas by 1869 there were 21 and by 1900 there were 25.

Prerau formed a junction for four railway lines and five main roads. In 1830 and 1840 agriculture was the main industry of the town and affluent Jews mainly ran the grain business and delivered the stock to Olmütz (Olomouc) and Silesia. In 1833 Prerau was a small city cut off from the world with 3,757 inhabitants but at the last census in 1910 the population had grown to 20,669. By then most of the Briess family had moved to nearby Olmütz.

Ignaz begins his account with some family history.

It seems the first Briess family might have arrived from amongst the eight Jewish families who moved from Vienna to Kremsier under the protection of Prince-Bishop Karl II of Olmütz, Count of Lichtenstein. The Prince-Bishop granted a temporary letter of protection for four years. The Lichtenstein nobility often granted such protection to Jews. Other families followed. They must have prospered, given the comparatively high amount of tax they paid annually. The deaths of Jehoshua and Jizchak Briess are recorded in Prossnitz, in 1742 and 1765 respectively and Jehoshua was Rosh Hakahal, head of the community, for a time. It is thought the Jewish community in Prerau existed in the 16th century however the early history of the town is not known.

Ignaz describes clearly his paternal grandparents Judith Grün (1777-1870) and Familiant Joachim Löb Briess (1777-1849) who were my 3x great grandparents. Judith's father was Aron Grün born approximately 1750, who was a rabbi. We understand there were at least seven children - Abraham (b.1815) and Jakob (b. 1807), Rosalia (b.1801), Charlotte (b.1818), Bernard (b.1811), Barbara

(b.1811) and Wolf (b.1821). Through Charlotte the family was connected to the Heller and Brach families, through Cacille and Judith to the Grüns, and via Rosalia (Ruchl) to the Groags, all well known families in Olmütz and Prerau. The families strengthened their status by intermarrying. Ignaz Sr was the oldest of Jacob's sons and he was married to Charlotte, the sister of his cousin Wilhelm's wife so they were doubly related.

## Joachim and Judith Briess

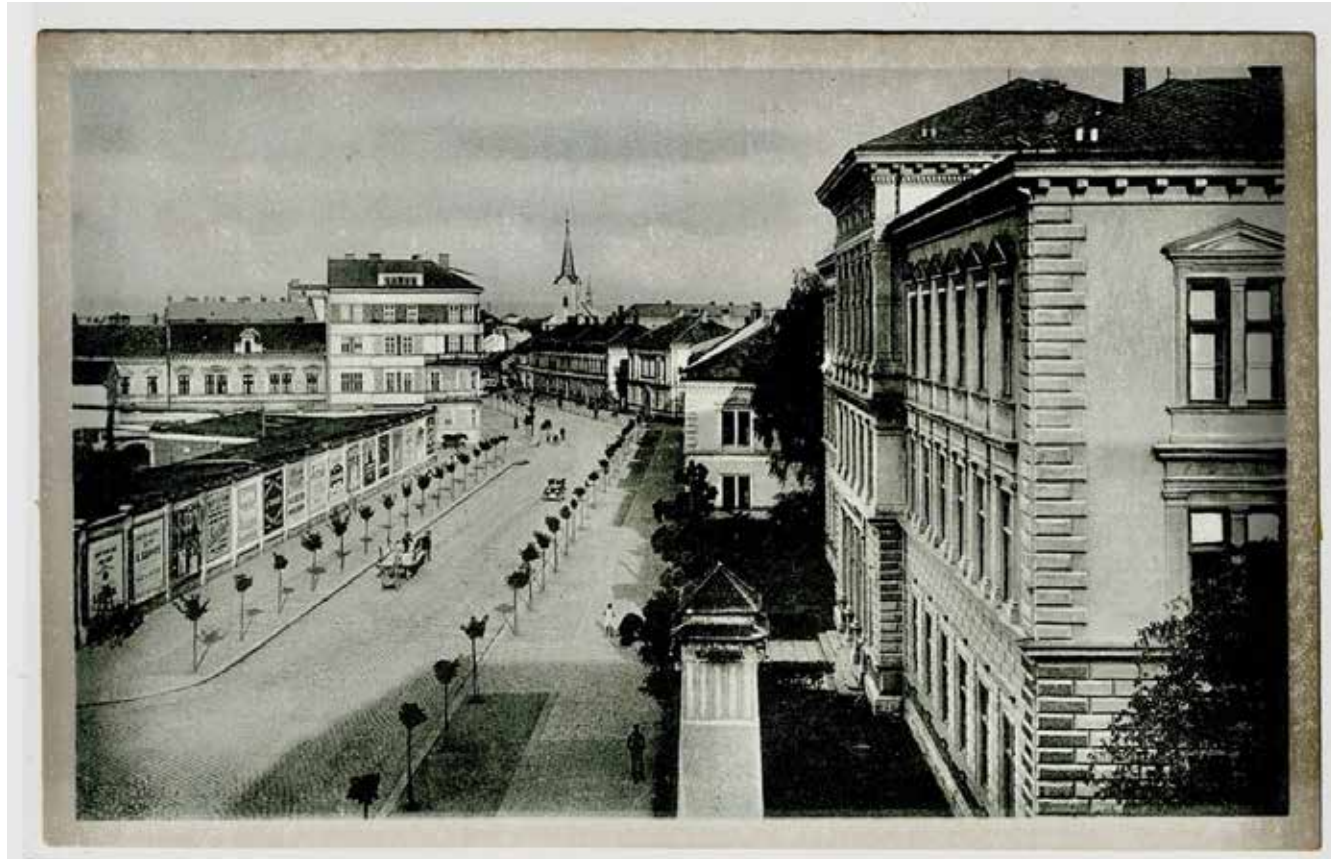
Patriarch Joachim was head of the Chevra Kaddisha (the society which cared for the sick and needy and presided over funerals) for many years. It is reported that despite the lack of sanitation, lighting, good drinking water and so on, most Prerau Jews were long lived, often being still mentally and physically active at an advanced age. Ignaz describes the Familianten laws which prevailed until 1849. These dictated that in Moravia there were only 5106 Jewish families permitted, increased to 5400 in 1787. The reason for these laws was to limit the number of Jews living in Moravia and Bohemia and to enable accurate records to be kept for taxation purposes. The firstborn son inherited the right to marry legally and this was often a long time coming. Second and subsequent born sons married under Jewish law only and their children were considered illegitimate under the law. Because of this, they often took the mother's family name. In Prerau, from 1798 to 1848, only 44 families were permitted under the law, to marry. These very restrictive laws were in place until 1849. The repeal of the Familianten laws expanded exponentially the options open to Jews.

In the early years of the 19th century, Joachim and Judith lived in their own house where they provided for their large family and ran a business for both treated and untanned leather and traded in scrap metal. They appear to have led a peaceful, patriarchal life. Their daughter Charlotte and her husband Lazar Brach who was a teacher and head of the German elementary school lived with them in their back room for three years and helped with their expenses. Judith ran the shop while Charlotte did the cooking and housework.

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

There are several amusing anecdotes describing Judith's business methods. She sometimes forgot people owed her money or for people who bought several times a week on account, she recorded purchases in chalk on the door jamb to be totalled at the weekend. Often she failed to notice the debt or rubbing out the chalked amounts on the door.

Judith and Joachim celebrated their golden wedding anniversary in 1849. After Joachim's death in 1849, Judith continued to run the leather and scrap metal business to make ends meet. Ignaz rather cynically observed that since her eyesight deteriorated, she often purchased the same piece of metal twice without realising it and her accounting was "idiosyncratic". Despite this, she reached the age of 98 in reasonably good health. Apparently of a rather serious disposition, she died in 1870. She must have enjoyed being part of the lives of her many children and grandchildren and she would have seen many changes in her world during that time. Ignaz writes how she used to describe for the children, the march of Emperor Josef II through Prerau when he spoke some words to her and she also recalled hearing the thunder of canons on 11 December 1805 during the Battle of the Three Emperors at Austerlitz. Napoleon's retreating army lured the armies of the Austrians and



*Prerau (Prerov).*

Russians into a lake where he fired canons at the drowning soldiers, securing a famous victory. There is a plaque on the site of the battlefield near Brno, giving a history of the battle. Grandmother Judith also told the grandchildren stories of her life with Joachim Löb such as the time he carried her over a big puddle one rainy day so that she wouldn't ruin her shoes.

Jacob Briess, Ignaz's father, spent some years after his bar mitzvah at the yeshivah in Pressburg (Bratislava) and became an outstanding Talmudist.

## Celebrations

Ignaz describes a typical wedding in Prerau. His mother, Betti, as the wife of the head of the Chevra laid a kerchief on the head of the bride at the parents' home and led the group under the chuppa (wedding canopy). The crown consisted of a yarn frame in the form of a crown decorated with little wax candles and silver bells. The candles were lit just before the ceremony began. Ignaz's Grandmother Judith had a brocade spencer interwoven with gold and silver and a hat spun with gold and silver yarn, trimmed with sequins. This was worn at family weddings. On leaving, each guest received a large piece of cake and little cakes and pastries. It was not uncommon in those times for the parents to provide food and lodging for young couples with few resources. As an aside, Ignaz opines "that many women dressed themselves from magazines and the men from the ledger".

## Moses and Anna Brück

Ignaz moves on to describe his maternal grandparents Moses and Anna Brück. Married in 1810 in Prerau, they later moved to Prossnitz where Moses worked as sales or technical manager of a clothing manufacturer. Grandfather Moses was a self-educated scholar in German, Hebrew and Talmud. He was religiously observant and his charity saw him as an active mohel (circumciser) with over 100 recorded in his little mohel book. He often travelled to distant places, taking several days if he was required to be away over a Shabbat. Their daughter Betti had an above average education for a girl of her social position. After 1828 Moses and Anna Brück with their children moved to Iglau (Jihlava). Moses had his own business selling fabric which does not appear to have been very successful. Anna came from an affluent household. She was an only child and her parents owned a distillery near Weisskirchen (Hranice). Moses and Anna were happily married for many years and were held in high regard. The Brück couple were





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“One curious custom, strange in modern eyes at Yom Kippor, was to “swing the kapores”, that is each person swung a cock or hen around their head three times, saying “this cock represents me and takes my place, is an atonement for me. This cock is doomed to die and bring me a fortunate life.”

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long lived. Moses Brück was buried 10 April 1863 and Anna on 19 April 1863, having lived in Iglau during their later years.

### Jacob and Betti Briess

Jacob and Betti were early childhood neighbours in Prerau as the houses of their families were linked by a common entrance. However the Brück family moved away, first to Prossnitz, then to Iglau. Before the marriage Betti lived with her parents in Iglau. The wedding took place in June 1832 and as a dowry Jacob was given a modest amount of cash as well as a house. The details are recorded in their three page ketuba (wedding contract), now held in the Jewish Museum in Vienna. Jacob looked after the grain business as a subcontractor.

He was serious by nature and read Hebrew and German books in his leisure time. He enjoyed Schiller, Goethe and Shakespeare as well as philosophical works by Maimonides, Spinoza and Kant. For many years he oversaw the community and also the youth group. Ignaz recalls how his father, on the 8th day of Schmini Azeres put on a buffet at their home for the young people and Jacob gave a humorous speech after the afternoon service which was greeted with thunderous applause. Jacob was widely respected in the community and was sought after for his advice.

Recalling his mother Betti, Ignaz said she was slim, beautiful and had a lovely complexion, lively dark eyes, a grand gait, true pitch voice. She dressed tastefully though simply, never wore old clothes, even when working in the

kitchen. She wore her best clothes for Shabbat or Yom Kippur, consisting of a sable velvet coat with fur edgings and was seen as noble and refined. Her piety, modesty and goodness to the less fortunate were exemplary. She bought poultry and other foods from the poor women who sold them on market days to give them business and gave her large household an air of class with little expenditure. She spent mornings in the house or kitchen and in the afternoons she read highbrow modern writing. When correcting the behaviour of any of the children she did so merely by rolling her eyes or by explanation. Betti and Jacob died within two years of one another, she on 3 July 1886 and he on 2 July 1888. Jacob gave a eulogy to his wife, praising her virtue and thanking the creator for allowing him so many years of good fortune with a noble spouse at his side.

Ignaz also describes how Jewish businesspeople operated: those with premises bought from factory owners at markets in Olmütz, Brünn, Prague or Pilsen. The hawker bought directly from the wholesaler and the poor villagers who sold door to door (called Pinkeljuden) purchased from the wholesaler. Jacob operated under the auspices of the local Count to whom he paid a regular amount. When



*View of Iglau 1849 from the south*

he died the “noble lord” left Jacob a silver snuff box, filled with the finest snuff which was only used on Jewish holidays.

### Ignaz's early years in Prerau

The Judengasse wasn't an isolated ghetto in Prerau as there were Christian houses amongst the Jewish ones. Ignaz understands from others that he was a strong and lively boy. For lighting, a flint or tinder of long strips of paper dipped in dissolved sulphur was used. In the houses of better off neighbours, chemical lighters were

used though they often failed. Jacob took Ignaz when he was six years old to see a travelling marionette theatre perform “Dr Faust's Cap” which gave him nightmares for years.

Ignaz recalled going with his mother and younger sister and a nanny to visit his Iglau Brück grandparents in the summer of 1840. There was at that time no rail connection and coach would have been too expensive and uncomfortable, so a horse and cart were rented from Leipnik. The trip took two days. It was probably his mother's first visit to her parents since her marriage. Moses showed young Ignaz the city of Iglau, the square which was the largest in Moravia, the bridge over the Iglava river with a span of 30.5 metres. The far side of the bridge led to the Kingdom of Bohemia. This is how he learned

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

that there was a crown land on the other side of the bridge from the Margraviate of Moravia. On the return trip the travellers stopped in Brünn where they heard about a railway being built – like an iron horse which would transport people and freight long distances. He peered through the gaps in the railway station fence to glimpse the monster locomotive. After that he thought about the mystery of its construction, finally setting up a railway workshop in the garden shed at home to experiment. During the return trip from Iglau, Ignaz (7) and his sister Pauline (5) were very quiet. Once home it became apparent that the children had eaten all the sweets which Grandmother Brück had sent with them with consequent stomach aches and diarrhoea.

### Education

Next Ignaz describes his schooling. German subjects were taught in 2 – 3 hour lessons on weekday mornings and afternoons at the German School for Jews. Public exams were held at the end of the year in the presence of the Catholic Archbishop who was also the school inspector – and the parents also. Each student recited introductory and concluding poems written by the teacher. The best students re-



***The Olomouc Astronomical Clock is part of the northern wall of the town hall of Olomouc, Czech Republic. The clock was built in the 15th century and has been reconstructed several times. The current appearance is from 1955. It is one of the few heliocentric clocks in the world.***

ceived prayer and reading books as prizes. The teacher was strict and a stick was used to maintain discipline. Quills were used for writing, since there were no fountain pens in use at that time. One year Ignaz, together with 6-8 other students was taken to Leipzig where they sat exams, attaining very good marks. As a reward the teacher took them to Olmütz, travelling in a large handcart where they sat on plain plank seats. They saw the best sights, including the famous astronomical clock built by Anton Pohl in 1422. They spent their savings in Fichtner coffee house, eating ice cream and caraway seed buns.

Jewish studies, such as reading, grammar and Torah, Psalms, the Prophets and Gemarrah were normally learned at the cheder (Private Jewish school) from 10am to midday and 3 or 4 to 7pm in the evening. To find his way home after class each boy carried a hand lantern as public lighting was not good enough to light their way. Friday mornings they prepared for reading the Torah portion for Shabbat. The children were impatient to hear the 12 gongs of the bell as there were always freshly baked kolatschen (cottage cheese Danish pastries) for lunch. In his leisure time Ignaz played in the family's large garden, climbing trees and stealing the neighbour's fruit. On Shabbat

there were no physical games because they had to be quietly occupied. Verbal tournaments took place when the best pupils took on the best of a competing cheder and these word jousts could last for hours. In winter there was ice-skating and tobogganing. Before having ice skates, first the breast bone of a goose was tied on the right foot in an attempt to skate. Then in the next attempt, a thick steel wire was fixed to the edge of a planed, conical piece of wood.

Ignaz described the setup of the cheder. The rebbe was usually an educated, strict teacher or even a failed businessman and lessons took place in his living room. 2-3 hours daily each morning and afternoon consisted of reading from and testing of the Chumesch (bible), grammar, Psalms, the Prophets and Gemarrah (Talmud and Mischna). Lessons were lively and noisy. The rebbe who taught was hard of hearing and liberally used his cane. A number of cheders operated, each with different material and style however the subjects taught were the same. Jacob placed higher expectations on Ignaz in terms of the studies undertaken at the cheder and taught him, himself. Ignaz studied the violin and had to practice till 9pm after the evening meal and to sit at his desk studying from 5.30am to 7am before going to school.

Synagogue services were announced by one long loud clap, followed by two short, in the front of each house with a wooden hammer. Two muffled knocks of the hammer announced a death in the Jewish community. Every Shabbat Ignaz was tested on subjects covered during the previous week. Jacob did not tolerate any of his sons to grow their hair long and they had to visit the barber every two months. Fires were common in those days and Jacob and Betti's home suffered fires in 1843, 1848 and 1868. Ignaz wondered if it was that their house was numbered with the unlucky number 13 when the houses on either side were untouched.

The years 1840 to 1850 were extremely cold and when people went to synagogue they covered their upper bodies with thick travelling or work furs

as it was so cold. Ignaz describes the old Rabbi Aharon Grün (his great uncle, born 1750) as a venerable, impressive model patriarch, an example of piety and religious sense of duty. He wore, corresponding to his spiritual dignity, a long black cassock, black leg covers and a low wide-brimmed hat during the week and on Shabbat and Yom Kippur a kaftan and a streimel in the synagogue. On the Eve of Yom Kippur the synagogue was adorned with candlelight. All married men and women wore white clothing.

Children generally married locally, visited their parents almost daily and grandchildren went on Fridays after the meal. On Rosh Hashanah a round challah was eaten, slices dunked in honey to symbolise a sweet year to come. On the first day of New Year people took breadcrumbs to a pond or river and threw them in to symbolise discarding their sins. One custom, strange in modern eyes, was to "swing the kapores", that is each person swung a cock or hen around their head three times, saying "this cock represents me and takes my place, is an atonement for me. This cock is doomed to die and bring me a fortunate life". (see photo on page 35)

Ignaz goes into much detail about the traditions and observances of the main Jewish holidays and festivals.

In the homes of the Jews of Prerau, he explained, no rooms were painted or papered. They were whitewashed two or three times a year. For his bar mitzvah Ignaz was given a new suit and a top hat. His parents wore modern clothes however the grandparents still had their old Jewish celebratory clothes. Grandfather Joachim wore a high, white scarf with frills, a long black shirt reaching to his knuckles, buckled shoes and a round low cap on his head. Grandmother Judith wore a bonnet worked in gold with matching top and a light, shimmering silk blouse.

As a bar mitzvah boy, Ignaz read the Maftir excerpt and the Haftorah in the traditional melody and a reception was held in his parents' home where Ignaz had to recite his drosh (sermon) in the presence of the rabbi and learned

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men, after which old Rabbi Grün prayed and blessed Ignaz. In the afternoon more visitors arrived, this time Ignaz spoke in German with them. Many presents were received, wine, fruit as contributions to the reception but his present from his maternal grandparents made him very happy. As the Brücks could not come all the way from Iglau, they sent by post in a case with plush lining, a gold ring set with a ruby to fit Ignaz's little finger. It was the case itself that most impressed him although at the time of writing he regarded his wedding ring as the most precious of his possessions.

On Friday mornings the women baked kolatschen (Danish pastries with plum jam), kugelhupf (coffee cake) and challah (plaited white loaf). Friday afternoons were free and shops closed by 3pm. Children were washed and dressed in clean clothes and likewise the adults. Two candles were lit, symbolically to lead the Jews out of the darkness and gloominess of daily life into an illuminated place of divine rest. Ignaz related that in synagogue when the service was long, the women were allowed to talk to their neighbours about "toiletry" and servant related matters which seemed to form the basis of what women mostly talked about. After the service, a walk was followed by an afternoon nap. The women read the German translation of the text which had that morning been read in Hebrew in the synagogue and then went visiting.

On leaving school in 1846 Ignaz was sent without any consultation, to the yeshivah in Leipnik. There, although his parents could afford to have him board, he didn't want to stand out from the other students and so ate "kosttage" (at a different home each night, four nights in the week). The rest



*Friday morning Kugelhupf.*

of the week he lived on the package he received from home every Monday. Going from the cheder to the yeshivah was like going from intermediate school to university. He finished his studies at the yeshivah by the end of the winter semester of 1847-8, having no wish to become a rabbi. His father Jacob recognised that Ignaz should learn German and Latin in the public school to equip him for a career in secular public life but needed to have permission for this from the local authority. Before this came through however, revolution broke out in Vienna and life throughout the empire for Jews changed. Permission was no longer needed.

### Further education

From 1848 to 1850 Ignaz studied at the Latin gymnasium in Iglau where he lived with his Brück grandparents. This was followed by two years in Kromeriz at the Piarist gymnasium. The Piarists are the oldest religious order dedicated to education and were founded by the Catholic Church. From 1852 to 1854 he went to Vienna Polytechnic school where his studies focussed on trade.

### Later life

Ignaz spent the period of his life from 1854-1859 working as an accountant and manager in several breweries. After a short time in Prerov he moved to Budapest and Segedin from where he returned back to Moravia, to the leased brewery of the Hatschek brothers in Tesetice. Ignaz had his own company over the years 1859-1872, moving to Olmütz in 1866. He does not, however, mention the name, or the location in his memoirs. In all probability he ran a



leased brewery in Citova and continued to trade with agricultural commodities. Jacob took one of his brothers and a brother-in-law into his grain business, which he had originally run alone, included Richard Fischel and Wilhelm Briess. By the first half of the 1870s the business activities of Ignaz Briess were closely connected with the activities of his cousin Wilhelm Briess. The firm of Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess was established at Pavlovičky in 1873. By 1935 the firm also had a branch at Olomouc-Klášterní Hradisko with a malt-house and chemical works. At that time 99% of the firm's malt production was for export with further products including malt coffee, butanol, acetone and acetates. In recognition of his outstanding services for the public good and services to industry and commerce Kommerzienrat I was conferred with the Order of Franz-Josef 1 and the order of Leopold, King of the Belgians. ■

## Sources

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- *Images from a Bygone Ghetto-Life*. From the year 1838 to 1848 Together with highlights from later years and the Memories of Youth of a 78, later 89 year old by Ignaz Briess Sr. In Olmütz
- *Family Ties: The History of a Jewish family from Napoleon and until after the Holocaust* by Carmit Sagie.



# The maltsters of the Hana Valley



*The graves of Ignaz Sr and Charlotte Briess in Olomouc.*



*The graves of Wilhelm and Julie Briess in Olomouc.*

# The maltsters of the Hana Valley

Dr. Michael Viktorik (Doc.Ph), historian with the Palacky University of Olomouc has been studying the history of the 19th century of Moravia with a focus on topics from the fields of economic and social history, amongst other subjects. He has written and published extensively, in particular in *Osudy olomouckých sladoven a sladovnických firem v kontextu vyvoje sladovnického průmyslu:*

(od 60. let 19. století do roku 1948) his book on the development of the malt industry in Moravia and he has traced the history of the industry from the year 1848, centred on the city of Olomouc.

Olomouc became a hub for high quality barley. The malt businesses were almost entirely owned by Jewish families and these families were highly respected with influence

in economic, agricultural, political and financial affairs of the region. They were also active in the Jewish community.

In Viktorik's book, unfortunately, only one chapter has been translated into English. However there is an English preface, written by Harry Benton, connected to the Briess dynasty through his great grandmother Adele Briess.

## Beginnings: Renovating and building



Prior to the 1860s breweries made their own malt for their own production. Those that did not have sufficient barley as base material, were forced to import barley to be processed into malt. In the 1860s as well as supplying barley, companies with plenty of barley processed it and supplied the malt as a base for a new food industry. From then on there were three decades of rapid growth for the Austrian malt exporting industry. Moravia had a surplus of the particular type of barley suitable for the making of malt and the first exporting malt houses appeared in the late 1860s and early 1870s. These companies specialised exclusively in exporting the malt, especially into German-speaking areas where it was much in demand. In Moravia, part of the Austrian Empire,

malt was at the top of Austrian export statistics just as there was an explosion in beer consumption throughout Europe.

## Capital, connections and entrepreneurship

The building of new malt houses required capital, connections and entrepreneurship. Jewish businessmen were in just the right position with the political and economic reforms of 1848 and later in the 1860s. Up to that time companies had traded generally in agricultural products, paper and lumber and they now began to lease or buy old and obsolete breweries and developed them into malt houses. Favourable business conditions enabled them to modernise the technologically outdated facilities. As capital became available with the explosion of the malt industry, they could invest in renovating and building new factories. According to Viktorik, who studied up to 20 Jewish families in his

## Harry Benton's English preface to Viktorik's Czech language book

**I** remember Olomouc as the almost earthly paradise where I spent the first ten years of my life from 1928 to 1938. From what I heard from my elders and saw myself those were the Golden Years of that small Moravian city. It had become a centre to culture and the arts and many of the famous artists, composers and architects visited Olomouc in order to take part in the 'Olmuetzer Kreis'. Although the population was ethnically mixed, everyone seemed to get along. The city was prosperous with its economy principally based on Hana agri-business. The main industry was the malting industry which produced arguably the finest malt in the world from the excellent Hana barley.

My family's firm, Ignatz & Wilhelm Briess, founded by my great grandfather and great grand uncle in 1873 was the most prominent of the malting companies in Olomouc. Most, if not all, the maltsters, including us, lived in patrician homes on what is now Videnska Ulice.

This idyllic world came to a terrible end in



*Harry Benton - 1928 (Olomouc) - 2022 (Colorado, USA).*

March 1939 when the Nazis invaded and systematically murdered or expelled the maltsters and other leading intellectuals many of whom were Jewish, who suddenly found themselves to be undesirables destined for destruction.

After World War II the reborn Czechoslovakia briefly offered to return the seized properties to the survivors of the Holocaust only to have that effort cancelled by the communist takeover who only added to the plight of the victims by forcibly discriminating against former capitalists and their descendants.

What the Nazis and the Communists had in common was their effort not only to eliminate the Jews or in case of the communists, former capitalists, but also traces of their very existence and their contribution to the glory and history of Olomouc.

**Harry Benton, Colorado, USA,  
October 2007 (The son of Paul  
Bermann. See *The escape of Viktor  
Bermann, Book 3, Page 69.*)**



*Moravian export malt factories - Brünn-Hubovice - Rudolph Briess, Brünn.*

research, all the families followed this pattern of development and all but three of the owners of the malt businesses which dominated the Olomouc area (including much of central Moravia) were Jewish. In 1922, 172 factories were in operation, 47 in Bohemia, 99 in Moravia, 4 in Silesia and 22 in Slovakia.

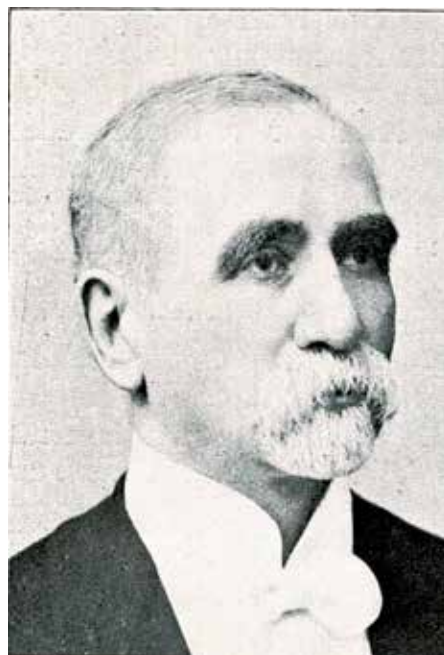
A Czechoslovak Malt Syndicate was formed to promote exports and representatives of all the Jewish families were active in the industry – Brach, Bermann, Briess, Fürst, Fischel, Groag, Hamburger, Heller, Husserl, Zweig and others.

The senior figure in the industry was Ignaz Briess Sr who died in 1931 aged 98.

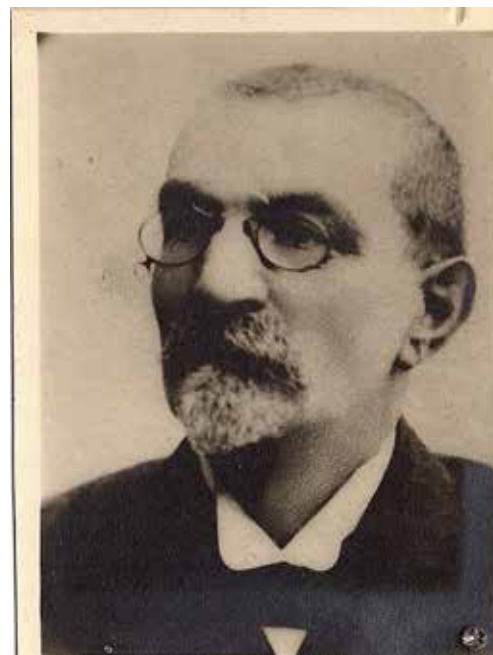
As Olomouc became increasingly important while business prospered, it also grew in importance as the political and administrative centre of a developed agricultural region and this was reinforced with the growth of the railway network. It became a major transport junction. In 1920 at the time of the census, citizens were allowed to state their ethnic origin. 38.1% of Olomouc Jews gave Jewish as their nationality. The new entrepreneurial spirit extended to

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other areas besides agricultural goods and Jewish merchants were dealing with fancy goods as well as manufactured wares, grain, wine, coal and rags. Others were active in the production and sale of spirit, liqueurs and vinegar, freight forwarding and factoring. German language schooling had been made compulsory which increased the germanisation of the Jews of Moravia. This meant the Jews of Olomouc supported the interests of the German speaking authorities in the city and were active in German cultural associations and school institutions. The Jewish community had its own recognised representatives in the municipal authority from 1884 when maltster Eduard Hamburger gained election to the council. Friedrich Fischel, married to Berta Briess, became City Council alderman from 1908 to 1918.



*Ignaz Briess Sr.*



*Ignaz Briess Jr.*

### Leisure activities

Leisure activities now included sports (tennis, ice hockey, soccer) and membership of schlaraffia, a worldwide apolitical intellectual organisation founded in Prague in 1859 by artists and their friends. The Jewish physical training and sports association was reorganised in 1927 under the title Makkabi.

Here, arts, humour and friendship were emphasised. My father Frank Briess and his brother Fredy both were involved with tennis, ice hockey and soccer teams and Frank listed membership of schlaraffia as part of his prewar life

in Olomouc. I was told that the family “donated a sports stadium to the city” but the exact meaning of this was not explained. Sport was a big part of their young lives.

Viktorik, having studied the maltster families, observes the first generation of these families, those who brought their businesses from Prerov and other neighbouring small towns, to Olomouc, became influential in government and economic agencies and made lasting friendships, networking and investing in the growing city, connected to and contributing to the Jewish community.

They were religiously observant although they had economically liberal ideas. Their children however, the subsequent generation of the maltsters were born in the 1870s and 1880s to different circumstances. Their families were respected, their futures assured, usually in their family companies. Each went to boarding school or business academy in Olomouc, followed by a business school or technical school in Vienna or the special brewer school in Berlin. Their connection to the Jewish community was not as strong as their parents’ had been. Some even married outside of the Jewish community and though they mostly identified as Jewish, they were no longer religiously observant. Besides, these prominent citizens, sons of men who had built up their businesses from small beginnings, had risen to the elite of the city. It can be seen from

Es hat der Vorsehung gefallen, unseren innigstgeliebten, unvergesslichen Gatten, resp. Vater, Schwieger- und Grossvater, den Herrn

## Wilhelm Briess

Mitglied der Firma Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess, Ritter des Eisernen Kronen-Ordens III. Klasse, des Franz-Joseph-Ordens, Vizepräsidenten der Olmützer Handels- und Gewerbkammer, Präsidenten des Vereines österreichischer Malzfabrikanten, Mitglied des Staatseisenbahnrates, des Industriekrates, Ehrenbürger von Mähr.-Ostau und Paslowitz, etc. etc.

von seinem unermüdlichen Erdenweilen in seinem 69. Lebensjahre plötzlich abgerufen.

Die Bestattung des teuren Verblichenen findet Sonntag den 18. April 1909 um 2 Uhr nachmittags statt.

Olmütz, 16. April 1909.

**Julie Briess**, als Gattin.

**Emil Briess, Ludwig Briess**, als Söhne.      **Adele Bermann, Dora Fürth**, als Töchter.

**Therese Briess**, als Schwiegertochter.      **Josef Bermann, Gustav Fürth**, als Schwiegersöhne.

Kranzspenden werden dankend abgelehnt.



*Death notice for Wilhelm Briess.*

written and oral reports from the 1920s and 1930s that these second and third generation sons, and sons-in-law were taken into the businesses as they settled down to adulthood. Viktorik's study draws on information available from local archives, extensive company archives and correspondence with family members.

### Ignaz Briess Sr

Ignaz Briess Sr, born in 1832 in Prerau, spent his early adulthood from 1854-1859 working as an accountant and manager in several breweries. After a short time in Prerov he moved to Budapest and Segedin, returning to Moravia some time later, to the leased brewery of the Hatschek brothers in Tesetice. Ignaz had his own company over the years 1859-1872, moving to Olomouc in 1866. In all likelihood, he ran a leased brewery in Citova and continued to trade with agricultural commodities. By the first half of the 1870s the business activities of Ignaz Briess Sr were closely connected with the activities of his cousin

and brother-in-law Wilhelm Briess. They were married to sisters Charlotte and Julie Bass, so were doubly connected. The firm of Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess was established at Pavlovicky in 1873.

### Wilhelm Briess

Wilhelm Briess was born in 1840 in Prerau. After his studies at secondary school in Kromeriz, Wilhelm studied trade and commerce in Vienna. Working for his father Abraham's company, as well as for the firm of A & H May in Hejčín as an accountant, he acquired practical skills. In 1864 he moved to Olomouc, forming his own company with Ignaz Sr, called Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess, trading in agricultural goods. The firm began processing malt for export just as there was an increase in brewing throughout Europe. Firstly, the malt factory in Kirwein was leased, able to produce around 100 wagons of barley per year. Sales increased to the extent that a second factory was built in 1881 in Paulowitz near Olomouc. The company became one of the most

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important in this sector, encompassing the whole of Europe, even extending to South America, Japan, South Africa and Australia.

In recognition of their contribution to the economy the company was awarded the distinction of carrying the imperial eagle on their shield/logo. In various international exhibitions the company received a number of prizes at Porte Alegre, Trieste, Amsterdam, Saaz and Antwerp where they received the honorary diploma in Brussels, the honorary diploma in Vienna and first prize

in 1891 in Gothenburg. The company also acted as a juror at a number of exhibitions. Both Ignaz and Wilhelm had a large influence on the Austrian malt trade, benefitting from the stable market and support of the banks, and played an important part in the management of industry bodies. Wilhelm was the co-founder of Verien Österreichischer Malzfabrikanten (Association of Austrian Malt Manufacturers) with its headquarters in Vienna and influence throughout the empire. In 1898 Ignaz received a commendation in the form of the order of the Belgian King Leopold and also in 1912 the title of the order of the Emperor Franz Josef in 1905. In 1912 Ignaz also sat on a number of organisations in Vienna and Olomouc.

Wilhelm held the position of vice-president of the Olomouc Chamber of Commerce and Trade from 1904-1909 and sat on the Industrial Council of



*Advertisement for Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess with the various awards won in competitions listed around the edges.*

ny. His son Paul began working for the company in 1918 as the war ended. He had been sent to other countries to improve language skills and by war's end he was studying in England. He eventually spoke six languages. In 1919 he began with the first of his business trips to the US to establish business networks that ultimately saved his life and also that of his family. As a member of the Czechoslovak Malt Commission he was responsible for sales of malt outside of Moravia. In 1921 he was company secretary for the Czechoslovak Commission Joint Stock Company for malt in Brno. After his father Josef Bermann died Paul moved from Brno to Olomouc and became a partner of Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess.

The plant at Pavlovicky was expanded several times. Built in 1881, it was expanded in 1884, then in 1900 to meet production demands. It appears that the

the Vienna Ministry of Trade, the State Railroad Council and the Council of the Moravian Regional Railways, as censor for the branch of the Austro-Hungarian bank in Olomouc. Wilhelm was also commended with the order of the Emperor Franz Josef 1 and the order of the Iron Cross of the 3rd class.

After the turn of the nineteenth century business conditions deteriorated as the First World War drew near and competition grew. When Wilhelm died in 1909, Josef Bermann, Wilhelm's nephew, was brought into the compa-

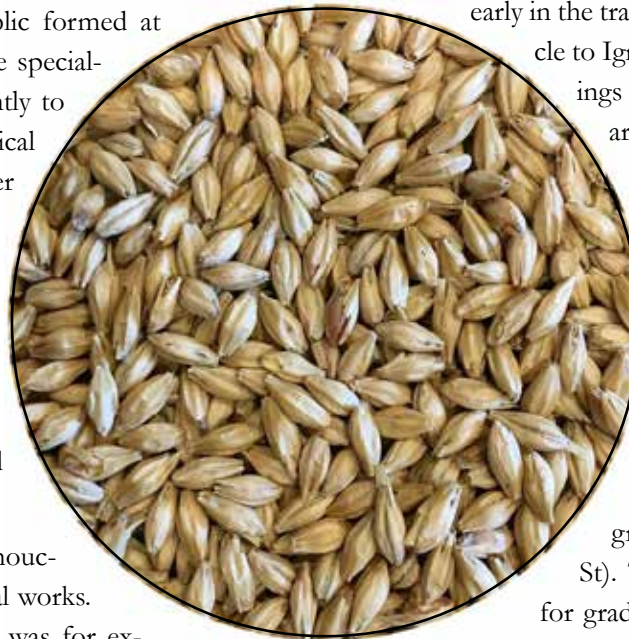
number of employees averaged at about 100 and by the second half of the 1920s workers reached 200 employees and annual production of malt achieving 1500 wagons. It had its own railway line connecting to the main railway. Post Second World War photographs reveal four kilns in the malthouse making it amongst the largest in the Empire and later in Czechoslovakia. Product was tested by a professional chemist and Ignaz and Wilhelm's company was the only company to employ its own chemist on site.



*Fürst trademark and some Hana Valley barley.*

Paul's brother Viktor, born 1890, studied chemistry in Vienna. At the time of the Republic formed at the end of the War he was known as one of the specialists in fermentation and he contributed significantly to the expansion of the company, running the chemical factory. Richard Briess, Ignaz Sr's son, looked after the production of malt and trade in malt preparations and other products. By the 1930s the men remaining as owners of the company were Viktor Bermann and Robert Fischel (son of Friedrich Fischel who was married to Ignaz Sr's daughter Berta Briess). The story of the survival of Paul and Viktor and their families when they escaped Europe can be found on Page 69 of Book 3.

By 1935 the firm also had a branch at Olomouc-Klásterň Hradisko with a malthouse and chemical works. At that time 99% of the firm's malt production was for export with further products including malt coffee, butanol, acetone and



acetates. In recognition of his outstanding services for the public good and services to industry and commerce Kommerzienrat I was conferred with the Order of Franz-Josef 1 and the order of Leopold, King of the Belgians. From 1939 and 1940 the company's assets were completely taken over by the Gestapo, had been sold and the company liquidated and all business activities discontinued.

### Ignaz Briess Jr

Another of the Jewish traders involved early in the trade of agricultural products, was Abraham Briess, uncle to Ignaz Sr and born 1815 in Prerau. As his business dealings grew, Abraham moved with his family to Olomouc around 1862, followed by his sons and their families. Son Ferdinand moved to Vienna in 1884 where he lived at Lichtenauergasse 5, and was active as a barley buyer for several of the Olomouc malt houses and breweries. Returning to Olomouc in 1895 he began working at the offices of his brother Ignaz Briess Jnr as a barley buyer for local malt houses and breweries. Ignaz Jr received a licence for trading in grain in 1874 and the right of domicile to Olomouc in 1888. From then on his successful, growing, business was based in premises (11/28 Rijnna St). The premises included offices, stores, departments for grading and cleaning seeds, cereal grains, vegetable and grass seeds and a laboratory. In 1903 the family business became a



limited company and after Ignaz died in 1905 his sons Theodore and Siegfried (my grandfather) took over the company.

Hans Briess, Theodore's son entered the firm in the early 1920s after a year's study at the Commercial Academy and experience in companies in Prague and Hamburg. Returning to Olomouc in 1924 he contributed to the growing prosperity of the firm. He became a member of the Prague and Olomouc Agricultural Commodities Exchange where he acted as an expert in the field of pulses and seeds and was also a member of the Exchange's arbitration courts.

### World centre of the malt industry

Franz Briess (aka Frank) my father, followed in his cousin Hans's footsteps, attending the Commercial Academy in Olomouc for a year after finishing school and completing his army service, he also joined his grandfather's firm in the late 1920s. Frank recorded that the company was engaged in the import, export, wholesale and retail of agricultural seeds and produce, rice, dried fruit, juices, lard and margarine. They imported oil, seeds and other ingredients for the margarine and vegetable oil industry in Czechoslovakia and were the country's biggest importers and wholesalers of caraway and poppy seed at approximately 8,000 tons of each per year. The population of Olomouc at that time was about 70,000 and it was the world's centre of the malt industry.

About 14 factories supplied the famous 'Hana' malt to markets all over the world. The firm of Ignatz Briess Jr contributed to this trade by supplying barley on a commission basis annually of from 100-120,000 tons, supplied flour mills with wheat, rye and were importing and wholesaling all milling products, 15 or so types of split peas, 30 kinds of pearl barley, bran, pollard and various other products. They also supplied, as importers and wholesalers to the bakery trade of Canadian, American and Australian flour of high gluten content. By 1938 the company employed 21 representatives in Czechoslovakia and several buying agents in other countries. They had an interest in piggeries near Olomouc to which they supplied all the byproducts of the grain and produce business.

The firm's assets, including real estate and property of all kinds were accumulated during the many years of its operation. The family was held in high esteem and held many positions on

***Siegfried Briess.***

## The Maltsters of Hana Valley

social, professional, religious and sporting bodies. For a period of almost 30 years a family member was official confidential advisor to the Income Tax Department of Olomouc.

### The demise of the maltster companies

For those with foresight after Hitler took power in Germany in 1933 and with even greater urgency after the Nazi takeover of Austria in 1938, it became imperative to find ways to transfer assets overseas if they were to be preserved. The Nazis had a grand plan to take over any assets belonging to minorities such as Jews and transferring anything of value overseas was difficult. Bribery was one form of saviour – Hans Briess exchanged his villa, coveted by a Nazi official, for visas for himself and his family, including children Peter and Hana. Paul Bermann also managed to secure the release of his brother Viktor and cousin Robert Fischel and their families in exchange for their company's assets in New York. Frank Briess escaped with wife Lizzie (my mother) exiting by train two days before the German invasion of their homeland, finding refuge in England. Other methods of transferring assets which were used was by transfer of funds, where possible, jewellery, gold bars, stamps and anything of value which could be traded for money.

By 1941 under the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia the firm of Ignatz Briess Jnr was 'aryanised' and transferred to an appointed compulsory administrator, Alois Suchy. In 1943 the company was deleted from the commercial register.

As can be seen, most of the Jewish maltsters began their trading businesses in much the same way, took advantage of political and economic conditions and by applying the capital back into developing their businesses, they flourished. Many of these maltster families formed a network of family connections from the very beginning. In the early firm of Briess Grün and Co, later to become Grün & Heller, Ignaz Sr and Wilhelm worked with Marcus Grün whose family was connected with the Briess family (Judith Grün was the grandmother of Ignaz Sr). There was also cooperation with Berthold Heller who in turn was connected to the Fleishmann and Winter families. There was an early link with the May family from Hejčín. Of the four children of Ignaz Sr Hermine married Gabriel Morgenstern from Tovacov, creating a link with the malting firm in Rikove. Bertha married Friedrich Fischel in 1890 who became a leading light of Ignaz & Wilhelm Briess. The third daughter was Anna who married Otto Zweig in 1899 connecting with Marcus Zweig's Söhne. Friedrich's son Richard joined Ignaz Sr & Wilhelm's firm in due course.

*Theodore Briess.*



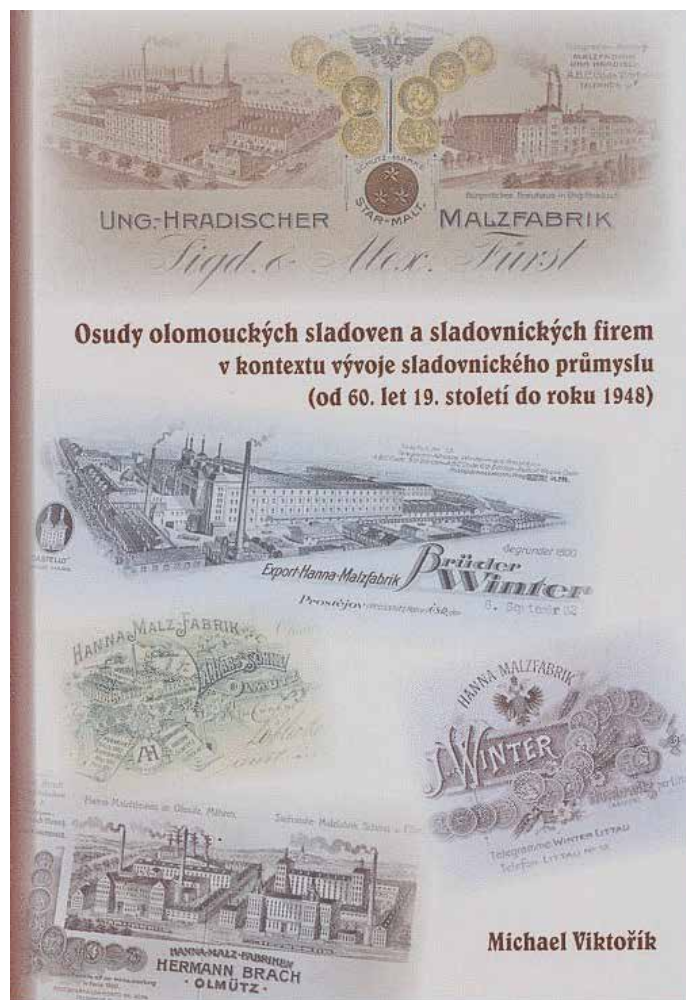
## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

Wilhelm married the sister of the wife of Ignaz Sr and Wilhelm and Julie had five children. Adele married Josef Bermann and their two sons, Paul and Viktor, were taken into the business of Ignaz & Wilhelm. All of the sons and some sons-in-law were taken into the various family enterprises. Many of the maltster families built impressive villas on Videnska Street (formerly Parkstrasse), designed by Viennese architect Jakub Gartner.

Today the few survivors of the extensive Briess family all managed to build new lives for themselves and their families in England, the US, New Zealand, Israel. While the minutiae of the history of the malting industry may not be of particular interest, the way in which family alliances were built up and networked said much about relationships underpinning the activities of the companies. That family members were taken into the companies and everyone worked for the common good is instructive.

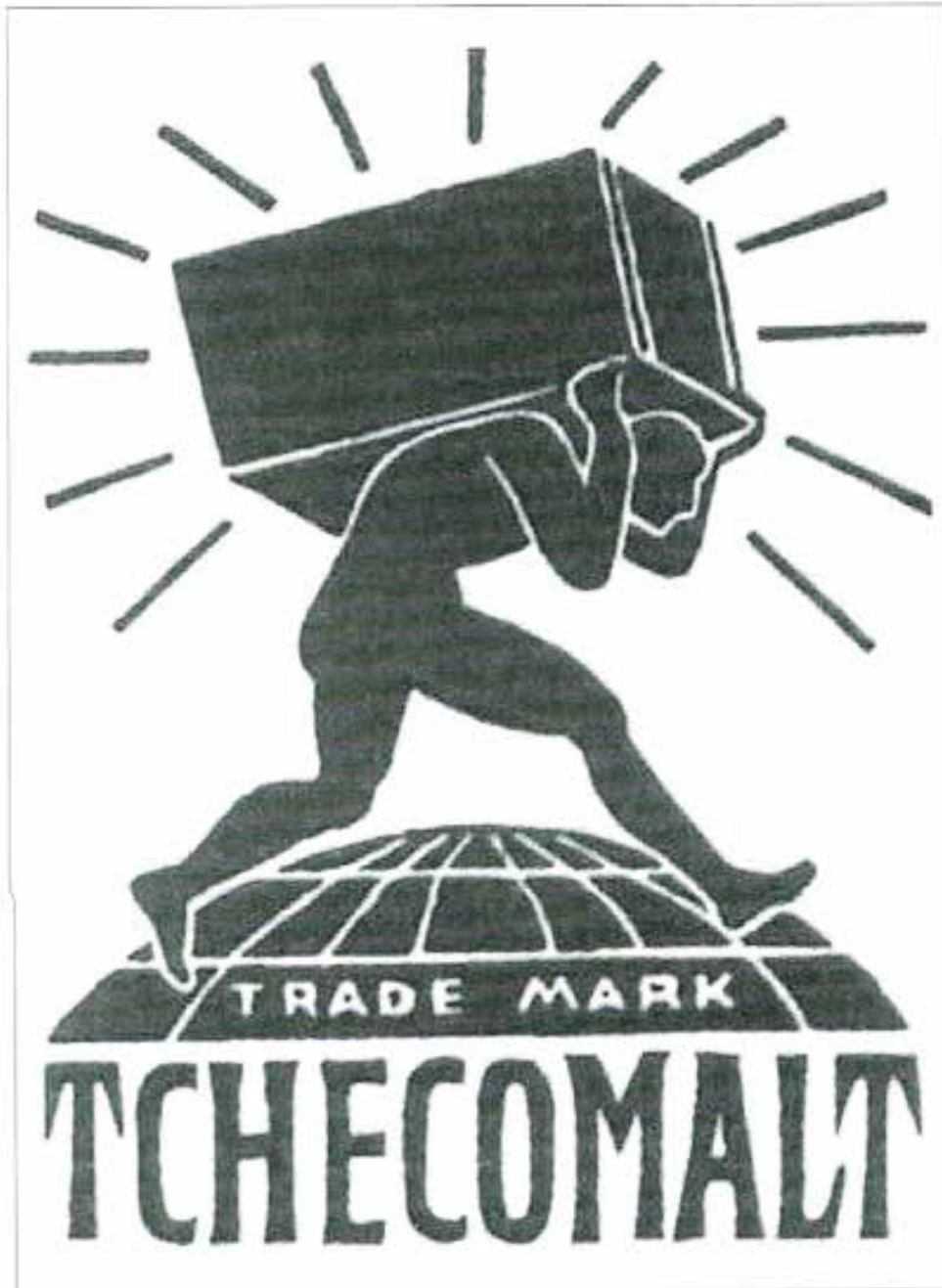
I would like to express my appreciation to Michael Viktorik, Miroslav Papousek and Jaroslav Klenovsky without whose extensive research I could not have recorded the above.

I also appreciate assistance from my cousin Peter Briess and Harry Benton in sharing information, otherwise this chapter could not have been written. Distance and lack of facility in required languages mean I would not have had access to the sources in person. ■



## Resources

- *Osudy olomouckých sladoven a sladovnických firem v kontextu vývoje sladovnického průmyslu: (od 60. let 19. století do roku 1948)* (*Development of Malt houses and malt companies in the Context of the Malt industry development from 1800s to 1848*) Michael Viktorík.
- *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Surveys and studies Volume 1* Published by the Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 1968.
- *The Jewish Community of Olomouc: History, People, Heritage* by Jaroslav Klenovsky and Miroslav Papousek published by the Jewish Community of Olomouc 1997.
- *Public Involvement of Olomouc Maltsters* Michael Viktorík (Published in Záricky, Ales (Ed.).
- *The Involvement of Businessmen in local and regional Public Life in Central Europe 1800-1914.* University of Ostrava 2009, s. 93-100).

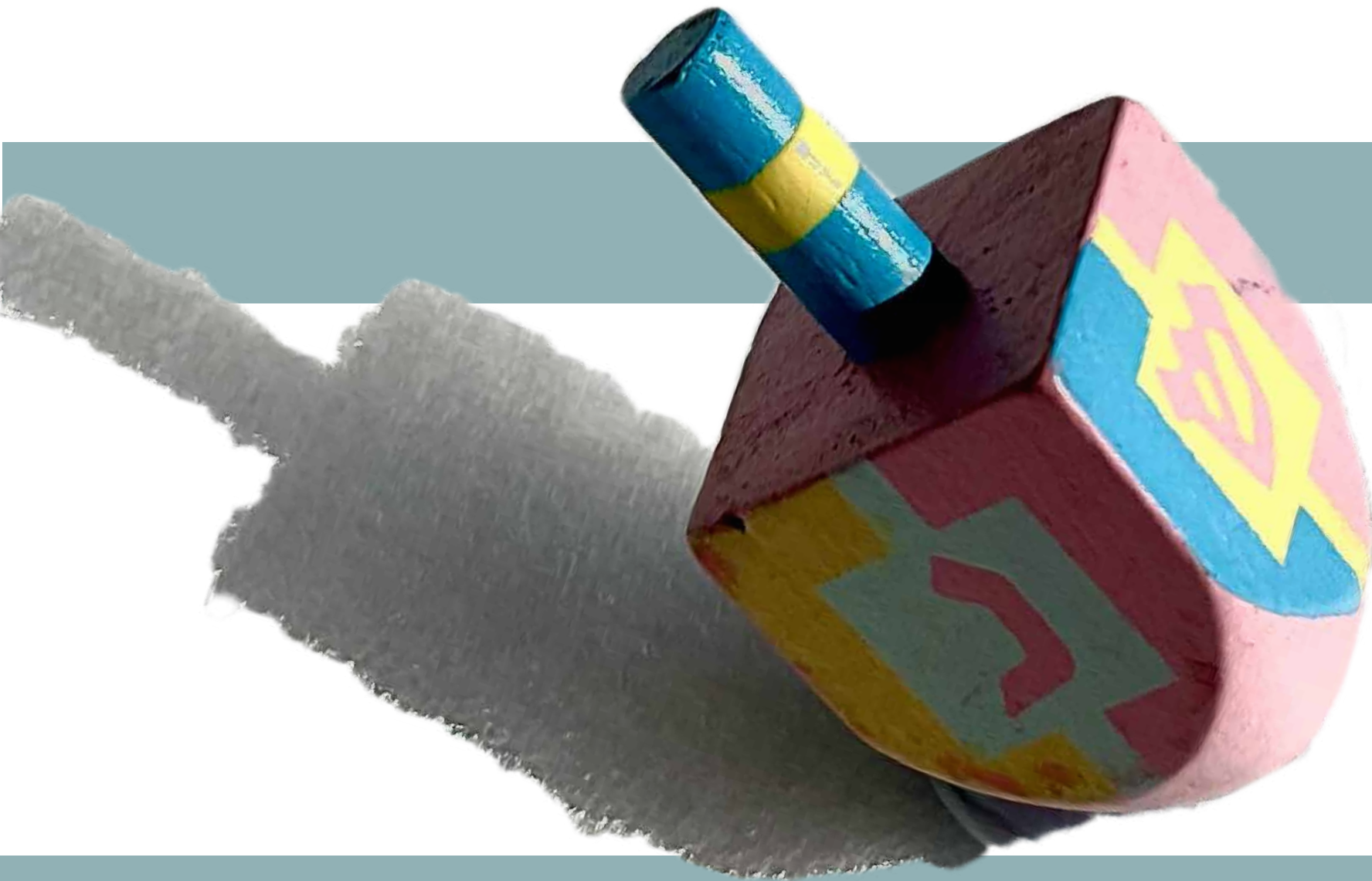


*Pilsner beer made with Hanna malt brewed by A Haas and Söhne (Sons), Olmütz, Moravia (Austria).*



*Trademarks for the malt industry.*





# Facsimile fascination



# Facsimile fascination

## ***Facsimile Editions - The Bruell family collection***

***By Peter Bruell***

***June 2024***



It was some time in the late 90s that a friend returned from a trip to Jerusalem. During his stay he had visited a book fair and knowing our interest in books brought us a brochure from a relatively new company called Facsimile Editions. The brochure was certainly interesting and not something we had seen before. Sometime later we purchased our first Facsimile Edition— the Perek Shirah, the Chapter of Songs. This started me on a journey of enlightenment and discovery. Over the years we have acquired several items, each one as exquisite as the last. The skill and craftsmanship are a pleasure to behold and the preservation of the Jewish world's most precious manuscripts, a special gift to our people.

Facsimile Editions began their work in 1980 with Michael Falter an entrepreneurial printers' engineer. His father and grandfather were printers. Michael, together with his wife Linda, first worked together on the Kennicott Bible which they took on as a hobby.

***Our Kennicott Bible in its unique box***

It quickly developed into something much grander. The Kennicott Bible was 500 years old. A facsimile of this nature had never been done before and, regardless of the technical challenges, the restrictions imposed by the Bodleian Library where the bible was stored since 1872, were soul destroying. The Bible is considered one of Oxford's greatest treasures. It took four years to reproduce the Kennicott Bible.





The Falters' travel across Europe to find a printer took two and a half years: then the gold, then the paper and the box binding. Oxford University Press (OUP) declined the challenge to copy the Bible as they felt it was beyond their capabilities. In creating the facsimile the Falters used a vellum indistinguishable from the original.

The Bible was printed in nine colours. The Falters visited hundreds of printers looking for someone capable of printing the work and then one turned up in London with his family from Italy. He had come from Milan from a family of printers and the quality of his work was astounding. The box that houses the Bible could not be constructed in England so the printer went to Milan to a nearby binder who produced the box from a photograph using Moroccan goat-skin over a wooden board. The problem of the gold was resolved quite by coincidence through a contact in the manuscripts field. Each illustration had to be hand gilded: ten thousand pages, 500 bibles were produced.

A facsimile is defined as "an exact copy". Today modern copy machines reproduce documents in seconds and to all intents and purposes are the same as the original. However, examine one closely and you will likely find a number of errors, inconsequential as they may seem. The size is unlikely to be exactly the same, the print will not exactly match the original, the paper will not be the same, the density and colour of the type or picture will not match the original. For business purposes all are acceptable variations.

The fascinating and amazing point to note on any item from Facsimile Editions is that whatever they produce, it is exact in every sense of the word. The attention to minute detail is exact. Even the stain of a drop of wine on a page is reproduced – and not only the drop but its shape as well. The paper they use, vellum or whatever it

### *The Alba Bible.*

## Facsimile fascination

may be, is faithfully reproduced, the method of binding is authentically reproduced. The metal clasps and fixtures are made by artisans to be identical to the original.

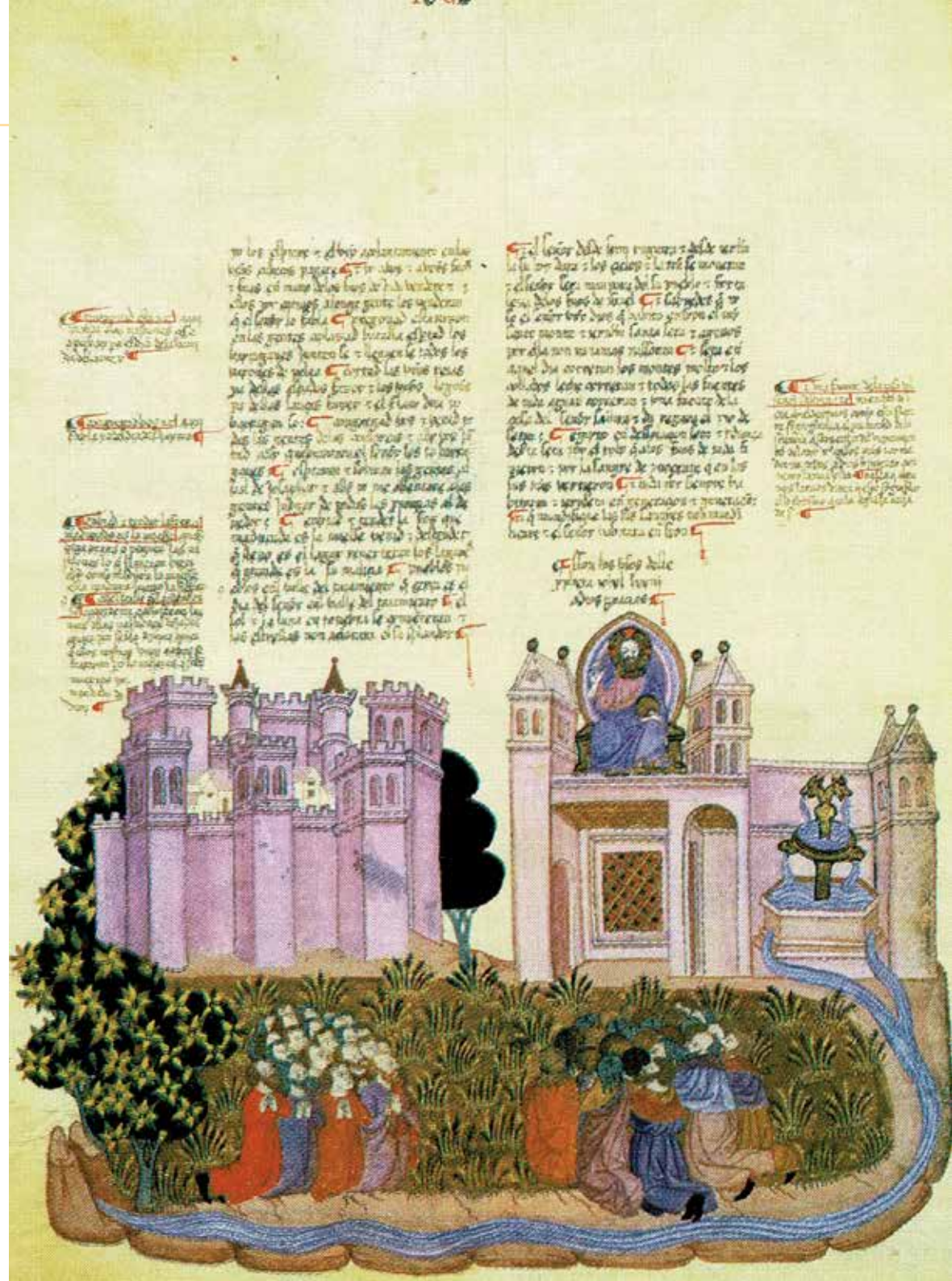
To hold in your hand a product from Facsimile Editions is paramount to holding in your hand the original. Each edition is accompanied by a separate book describing the journey to production; the artisans and materials used.

### The Rothschild Miscellany

This book was commissioned by Moses ben Yekuthiel Hakohen in 1479. It was created at a time when the Jews in Italy came into contact with all sectors of society and many adopted the way of life of the gentile aristocracy. They enjoyed the favourable patronage of some of the great Italian princes such as the Medici of Florence. The wealthy Jew became a man of the renaissance with a taste for letters and art and pleasure in affluent living. Nonetheless the Jews never became estranged from their Jewish intellectual and religious heritage.

The Rothschild Miscellany is the most elegantly and lavishly executed Hebrew manuscript of its era. It was planned as a sumptuous work to encompass, in minute detail, almost every custom of religious and secular Jewish life. The figure drawings and border decorations of the miniatures showcase the rich Italian Renaissance influence. The complete history of the Miscellany is somewhat of a mystery. Around 1855 the manuscript was sold to the Rothschild family in Paris where it remained until it was stolen during the Nazi occupation. It reappeared in 1950 in New York and was returned to the Rothschilds in London. Recognising that the manuscript was of such importance that it was a national treasure, it

*The Alba Bible.*





*Kennicott Bible – Jonah.*



*Two illustrations from the Barcelona Haggadah.*



*Two illustrations from the Rothschild Haggadah.*

was gifted by the Rothschilds in 1957 to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The Miscellany consists of 37 religious and secular works. Among the religious books are Psalms, Proverbs and Job and a yearly prayer book including the Passover Haggadah. All have textual illustrations for each festival and prayers for special occasions. The text throughout the manuscript is accompanied by marginal notes and commentaries of the sages. Ours is edition 349 of 500.

### The Megillah: The Scroll of Esther

This scroll is from the Gross family collection in Tel Aviv. The most splendid Scroll of Esther that the Falters could find was enclosed in a silver container artistically adorned as tradition has always dictated. It vividly revealed the joy and festivity of Purim, a carnival to lift the spirits however hard and tough times may be, written around the year 1700 and was one of 295 produced. Craftsmen from England, Italy and Israel worked to combine the latest digital technologies with the age-old processes of parchment-making and lost wax casting. Our Megillah is No 49 of 295. I gifted it to Claire for a “special” birthday.

### Meah Berachot: One hundred blessings for daily prayer

Meah Berachot are contained in a tiny leather bound book with silver clasps 45mm x 45mm. This was handwritten and hand painted by an unknown scribe 280 years ago (18th century). An awe-inspiring

facsimile, it came in its own bookcase with the usual reference book included in the case. What a treasure for a woman to carry in her handbag or for a man to carry in his pocket. Printed on fine vellum in a limited edition of 550 copies we have copy number 138. This was a wedding anniversary present to each other.

### Perek Shirah: “Chapter of Song”

Is an 18th century Illuminated Hebrew book of praise. It consists of a collection of hymnal sayings in praise of the creator, placed in the mouths of His creatures. Opening with the promise that all who recite from it are assured of a place in the world to come, it ends with the hope that the reader’s study will be transformed into good deeds that will win heavenly reward. This charming Hebrew and Yiddish manuscript written on vellum was probably executed in the 18th century. There are exquisite tiny paintings of animals throughout and its comfortable size means it can easily be held in the hand.

Each one of our Facsimile Editions gives hours of contemplation of the tiny Hebrew text and beautiful illustrations and can also transport the reader to the time when they were written and the manner of production. The dedication to faithful detail by the Falter family makes their work with each edition as close to perfection as possible. ■



*Perek Shirah.*





## Frank's decisive start



# Frank's decisive start



THE engagement of my parents was clearly a big event in Olmütz, particularly as Frank was so active in sporting circles.

Lizzie at 25, an almost qualified medical student, a doctor's daughter and Frank, son of a prosperous agricultural goods family were a good match. Whether they were introduced officially or met at some social event, I don't know. They were married at the synagogue in Brno on 6 June 1937 and dowry arrangements were recorded formally. The following appeared in the local papers in Olmütz. There is a whole scrapbook full of write ups on Frank's sporting achievements.

This one Frank translated (page 60).



## A TRANSLATION

**Mährisches Tagblatt Nr.126**

**Friday 4 June 1937**

### **Frank Briess's Decisive Start**

*The most popular sportsman of Olomouc is getting married. Who would not know him, the indefatigable optimist and best friend, Frank Briess. For many years he has been unselfishly serving the sport of our city and has achieved great success, in spite of many difficulties. In particular, the sport of ice hockey in Olomouc has a great deal to thank him for, perhaps even everything. The matches against the Canadians, Americans and other international teams in our city will remain unforgettable events which must be attributed to the initiative of Frank Briess.*



*But we can also find him on the football field, in the tennis world and on the ski fields. Whatever he starts he makes a real job of. He has been very successful, especially in the organising of big sporting events. He has been battling and is still battling actively on the tennis courts, on the ice rink and with the same ardour and perseverance as that with which he serves on the various committees. The boys are often difficult to handle, but never regretted putting themselves voluntarily under his command. They found in him their teacher and also their best friend and advisor who smoothed their paths, bridged their difficulties and has been doing everything to make fine fellows of them. Wherever he goes he makes friends and we can say that he has become a symbol for the sport of Olomouc, the image of the young man of modern times, straightforward, skilful, capable, with a sense of commitment in his business dealings which he does not neglect, in spite of doing so much for the sporting*

*life of Olomouc — a really fine fellow! And so, all of us are pleased to see Frank Briess going to his decisive start next Sunday, because such a family must not die out!*

*The Captain of the XI SK Olomouc team, Frank Briess was not only known as a footballer but also as a good ice hockey player and tennis player, he is getting married next Saturday 6 June in Brno, to Miss El. Loeny. His sporting friends trust that marriage will not estrange Frank from the sports world and hope to see him amongst them again soon, not only as a great and popular comrade, but as an example of a sportsman— a gentleman. We hope to see him soon again in his sporting activities and to welcome his wife amongst the true and faithful friends of the SK Olomouc.*

*For their future life — good luck! ■*

*The original newspaper clipping.*

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*Frank and Claire (5) on the slopes of Mt Ruapehu, 1952.*





# Frank's reflections



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# Frank's reflections



IN August 1967 a business trip took Frank and Alice (my parents) to the former Czechoslovakia, then the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR).

With no freedom to express opinions about how he found life there, Frank waited until he was well away, before reporting in full to Andi Politzer, his business partner who had come to New Zealand from Bratislava after the war, having also lost many family members during the Holocaust.

## Salzburg 10.8.1967

Dear Andi,

Thanks for your letter 1 August, keeping me informed of Auckland affairs. I shall deal separately with business matters and with my impressions of CSSR whilst they are fresh in my mind:

First of all the currency that is not quite easy to understand. The official rate of exchange is £1 (NZ) = 20KC. To further the tourist traffic to obtain foreign currency you get however +125% ie: £1=45kc (provided you exchange your foreign currency at an authorised hotel or bank which takes quite some waiting). The population however, also wants to buy foreign currency for some trips to western countries and pays for £1 = 100kc.

I shall give you here some facts intermingled with my observations and personal views as recorded in my shorthand-notebook. Until two days prior

to our departure from Hamburg, we did not have any accommodation for Prague. Then we received a telegram from Kospol, advising of reservation at Palace Hotel and Ing. Petr from Kospol would be waiting for us at the airport. We also received a similar telegram from Prof. Brod, who had apparently moved Musil (from Centrotex) into action who in turn activated Kospol. From Hamburg we flew to Frankfurt where we changed into a Cz.Aerolinky Russian "Tupolev" plane, a far more poorly equipped and noisier plane than anything experienced before.

On arrival in Prague there was practically no Custom's control, people pleasant, but Auckland Airport buildings, facilities and life are, by comparison with Prague, like comparing New York to Opotiki, the latter representing Prague. Ing.Petr from Kospol did not turn up and it was never explained to me why. But there was a niece of Erich Briess (New York) living in Prague came to welcome us at the airport. She has two boys, 14 and 18 years old, the younger one a great football fan, presented me immediately with a Slavia (Czech words - maybe hat and lapel pin?) and foto. The older one a poor performer at school is crazy with pop music playing and composing plus reasonably long hair. The husband had a delicatessen retail and wholesale business. It was not taken from him but he was simply deprived of supplies and had to give in: result = two heart attacks – unable to work – pension KC500. She works from 7-15.30 on 5 days and every other Saturday in a textile distribution centre for 1400KC weekly. No overtime ever paid. Without Erich's substantial support they would

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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be starving or mostly fed on bread and knoedling (dumplings). That is also the reason there are so many over fat people in CSSR on account of mostly starchy food, average 3100 calories per day.

### ***How they live?***

Sharing a flat in the old city of Prague, with two other families. They have two dark rooms (for four people) and kitchen, but the advantage is that the flat is just above the place where she works. When we were there the sewer had been blocked for some time, they had to go for water and the locus to the house next door.

### ***Fruit and vegetables:***

Very long queues everywhere, selection very small, quality very poor although prices quite reasonable.

### ***Looks of city***

With the exception of huge new and reasonably new blocks of flats at the periphery of Prague, there has been no maintenance work done on any of the beautiful ancient buildings in the inner city, for which Prague was famous – no repair work had been done since before the war. These buildings look from utterly neglected to desolate. Only after two famous balconies fell down into the street and people began gingerly to grumble and as a result they have started to do a little repair work on the antique buildings.

Under the “Vaclav” (St Wenceslas Square) there is an underpass being built by the army because they say, otherwise they would never finish it. As a result of this underpass nobody knows which tram is going where because everywhere is (Czech word– blocked off?). Tram transport is very, very cheap, the same old trains since before the war, only very occasionally a newer one. For only 60 hellern you can travel from one end of Prague to the other, but this will shortly be substantially increased.

The day after our arrival I went to see Prof. Dr. Docent Brod at a very big hospital in a far out suburb of Prague. Brod is a famous man very highly spoken of and valued. First of all he gave hell (by phone) to Kospol and Musil for not welcoming us at the airport. He made appointments for me for the following day 7am at the various departments. Next day Tuesday, they made an electro cardiograph blood test, urine test, Xrays from top to bottom, left to right, front to back, Xrayed lungs, stomach, digestive tract, spine– and god knows what else. I had to give my whole life history, working history, sickness history about my whole life, sickness history of parents, all kinds of other questions to answer and to be recorded, but too numerous to elaborate on here. After all that Prof. Brod wanted to send me additionally to another famous man Docent Prof. Dr. Jiront, for examination, who however was starting his annual holiday the following day. As a gesture of friendship to Prof. Brod he saw me however, the same day at 8pm, together with Prof. Brod who brought us there. Prof. Jiront made a further thorough examination after having heard Prof. Brod’s report. Then followed a severe manipulation that left me stiff for a few days.

Result: Everything internal is in good order but one has to count with a certain amount of wear and tear after the 30th year of age. I should play tennis as much as I like, or swim or walk daily, one and a half hours and when the back hurts– take some pills until it stops. The main medicine however: REDUCE WEIGHT BY 15KGS. No comment but I have so far reduced by 5kgs (gross). The injections are not supposed to have much value (the ones I have been getting in Auckland)– I must repeat Prof. Brod particularly, as well as Prof. Jiront, both of international reputation have just been terrific.

There was a record crop this year of berries(?) and they were sold on all street corners cheaply, but there were long queues waiting everywhere so that we only bought them once. Picked out 1kg about eight good ones, the rest we gave away for cooking. Otherwise there are only yellow capsicums and salad ones at 4-6Kc per kg for sale and tomatoes at about 8Kc.

OLMOUC.  
Ferdinandova třída.



## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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Mannequins are showing their wares in the main streets during lunch hour to tempt the tourists. CSSR is the meeting place for East and West Germans, because only at Xmas a few thousand West Germans get permits to visit East Germany but not vice versa – CSR citizens get foreign currency to go to east block countries but if they want to go to Western countries they first have to pay 300kc travel tax and then only get the approx equivalent of £2.10 – in foreign currency.

### ***Kospol***

I have spent a lot of time there. The referee introduced me to about a dozen other people with whom I discussed many many business matters, like sheep casings, hides, dried fruit, paprika aso aso (and so on). However there are many people on annual leave and its almost as if they did not want to sell anything. All negotiations are accompanied by a glass of beer. The trouble is that they actually have little to sell, a large part of what they have to sell goes in the first place to Russia, then to other East Block countries, then to the nearest Western countries at prices best achievable (because there is no calculation or costing), they just need the foreign currency and have for instance seen in Copenhagen 1kg jars pickled cucumbers selling retail at 2/3sh (shillings – NZ changed to decimal currency July 1967) NZ. Or here in Salzburg 5kg tins cucumbers at 6/8sh NZ. Regarding cheese: they had bad experience with their first shipment to Australia that had to be destroyed on arrival. This is the most backward country I have seen re packaging, refrigeration, food hygiene, old fashioned food handling equipment, because internally food takes no place of importance in the economy; only for export.

Eels: individually frozen, weight half to one and a half kg could be of interest must wait for my return. They import a lot of fish, part of which comes from Hussmann and Hahn, either our oval packs in sauces or deep frozen. Trevally, deep frozen could be of interest whereas the canned fish would be too pricy and non-competitive.

### ***Dr Henzl***

is one of the higher ups at the “Chema” similar organisation like Kospol, but other lines. He was the tour manager of Slavia Bratislava last year. I spent an evening with him. There is a fair chance of doing business with Cutinex but this must also await my return as well as a reply from the Dairy Board. Has Mrs Sher had a chance to speak to Mr Gray, manager of Dairy Board re my enquiry about export permission of Centrix for Germany? Dr Henzl offered me the management of football tours for Slavia and Dukla as well as Masopust (mardi gras) the footballer who was last year considered the best forward in Central Europe. If there is interest, Charlie can let me know– through you or direct.

### ***Polotovary***

There is an interesting type of retail shop in CSSR called “Polotovary” (freely translated as oven ready food) like fish: crumbed, uncooked, chicken pieces, chicken livers, cheese schnitzels, veal chunks (bite sized), pork schnitzels, mutton, veal, chops and cutlets, topfenteig (cottage cheese pastry) topfen knödel (cottage cheese dumplings) marillen,(apricot) zwetschken (plum), kirschen, (cherry) semmel, (bread roll) kartofel, (potato) bacon knödel (bacon dumplings) also. Saves the housewife a lot of preparation and time; worthwhile keeping in mind. Also all kinds of salads, sliced cucumber salad, grated carrots also.

### ***Mineral water***

Very popular. All over Europe as people don't like the chlorinated water. In CSR it is mainly Mattoni, elsewhere it is Apolinaris, Gishübler, Gasteiner, Sonerbrunn, Vichy water. They are all marked “Natural mineral water, serve cool”, some say “Leicht carbonisiert (lightly carbonated). Some with additions of raspberry, orange also. This experience revived my many years' old ambitions re Rotorua Spa “mineral water or “thermalbad Rotorua” or “Rotorua sprudel” or “Rotorua Urquell”. Let's see.



Once I was in the “Koruna Automat” corner Vaclav Namesti and asked for a kyselc mleko” (sour milk drink) to try it again after many years. How about that? The longest queue at Koruna was at the beer counter where the three men dispensing draft beer were very particular in checking the age (by documentation) of their prospective customers, because if they are caught serving someone under 18 years, they are fined Kc500 which is about one third of their weekly wages.

### **Shops (food)**

Many are closed altogether as unimportant for the national economy. Others are closed for 2-4 weeks on account of holiday. Generally the variety of food except bread, farinaceous foods and poor quality sweets is very small. There are canned foods from Eastern countries like canned fish, goulash, fruit, vegetables and canned pickles. Very little meat and very expensive. On account of mostly starchy food being eaten, there are very many over fat people (3100 calories per day)!

The main reason for great sadness is the fact that the spirit of the people is broken – they are listless and lethargic because there is no freedom of speech nor action nor any ambition. No pride in workmanship because there is no incentive and they get no reward for it. Nobody trusts anybody. People don't talk to each other on trams, in the streets and you seldom see a smiling face– everybody for himself and undisciplined queues, people push ahead as if it were a matter of life and death. With the exception of government employees, everybody hates the Russians for systematically robbing the country

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In my own personal opinion it is the lack of incentive, lack of freedom and the mental slavery that is causing the low productivity.

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of its products to further Russian interests in other parts of the world. People are “souveniring” everything including used lavatory brushes and toilet paper. Apropos workmanship and toilet paper– in all the hotels we have been staying, as well as in private places, all the toilet paper had four little holes of pinhead size right in the tricky middle of the paper. On my enquiry for the purpose of this innovation I was told with resignation “These have to be used up first”.

Tips are very readily accepted with gratitude whether in form of money, foreign cigarettes or foreign chocolate, the latter two only obtainable in the special TUZEX shops against so called tuzex bons (coupons) and these are only obtainable against foreign (western) currency.

A lot of building (huge blocks of little flats) are being built in the Prague suburbs but the buildings in the inner city are utterly neglected, the mortar falling off everywhere, “Ponsonby boulevard” (NB: At a time when Ponsonby was something of a poor suburb). In Prague I have seen Romanian processed BRYNZA (tastes very good). Comes from PRODEXPORT, Bucharest. Write to them what they have for export.

I am told that the relatively best-off people are the old, small holdings owners, peasants; all the young people are coming to the cities. The farm work has been considerably automated, equipped with moveable harvester combines, that mow the grain, collect it, thrash it, clean it, from impurities and bags it, whereas the remaining straw is machine-pressed into bales and later taken

away by special trucks. Haymaking is simplified and automated. About 1500 of these Russian Harvester combines are lying idle all over CSR unusable on account of technical defects.

### **Israel reaction**

The public opinion is very much in Israel's favour, but dare not openly express their opinion, but the controlled press of course is pro Egypt (Arab) and just repeats anti Israel news received from communist sources abroad. Newspapers generally are of the lowest standard anybody can ever imagine, at best containing a bit of propaganda. Of foreign papers there are only Ost block – and French “commi” papers obtainable; Western papers – very few and seldom obtainable and must be paid in Western currency.

### **Old home**

Went by train to Brno (Strela) Express. Dining wagon contains 10-14 seats – trains running to schedule. I wanted a photo of a house in Brno, borrowed a camera, but nobody dared to accompany me when I took the photos. I also tried to see the Pozemkovakniha (Estates land book) but without success; have to make a request through solicitor – a written request to the Advokatni Paratna.

After the war the Russians were received with open arms as liberators but quickly lost that popularity by looting, raping and general behaviour as in conquered Germany. At present they are about 10% of the population in the party but the general consensus of opinion is that they are no more than one to 1.5% true members whereas the remaining 8.5 to 9% are government employees who were simply told “sign here or take your coat and look for a job elsewhere”. Part of the Russian unpopularity is also the result of dismantling plant and machinery in CSR by the Russians and railing it simply to Russia. Brno generally looked better to us than Prague. The city is kept in better order and makes a better impression. We went to the cemetery, that is

kept in very good order. There are two tourist hotels in Brno; both new, one of which is 5-star where we stayed, not unreasonably expensive and one luxury hotel “International” that stands where my old military barracks had been under the Spilberk, replacing the kaserne (barracks) and the Nonnengasse (the brothel quarter of Brno) had been. The trams are mostly modern, also very low price train travel.

We met Lizzie's old professor with whom she had been exchanging correspondence as well as some old friends. They were all glad to be able to discuss freely old times and present conditions. Communism is, as I always claim, no export article; it may have some attraction for underdeveloped countries but certainly not for highly developed self sufficient countries as CSR used to be. Costing does not exist in production or industry; the Russians apparently doing the accounting (price fixing) to get the greatest benefits in their favour, enabling them to pay their propaganda in other countries. During school vacations students go “na brigand” (take holiday jobs) that are “odflakany” (under the table?). They have to fulfil their daily (quota) and are often home by 11am.

Whilst in Prague, Kospol arranged for me a visit in one of Prague's Masove Kombinaty in Holesovice – a very very old fashioned, neglected factory supplying meat (mostly pork) and sausages to Prague's shops. With very few exceptions there are very old fashioned machines and with regard to hygiene and housekeeping our friends Chapman Agnew Marshall and company would just go off their rockers (Health Department inspectors in New Zealand). There are many women employed there, who have to do a bit of heavy lifting and other strenuous work. Meat and sausages are displayed in shop windows, refrigerated windows nonexistent, despite the atrocious heat – the sausages look shrivelled although of relatively or surprisingly good quality – salamis of all kinds are mostly very fine-grained containing a high percentage of fat and partly tripe.

One of the doctors of medicine mentioned to me that he could do the work

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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he was doing weekly, within four hours but he would not be getting any more if he were doing more. But on the outskirts of the city he lives in a self-built bungalow on a piece of land, with a beautiful wine cellar and growing a great variety of wonderful fruit, vegetables and grapes. I think I must have eaten 3-4lbs of gorgeous apricots. After transferring to the wine cellar we tasted a great many delightful wines. Lizzie being a slight bit tipsy but no more. Prof H, her old teacher, took us the following day to the Brnenska prehrada at Kounice for a boat trip with two hours of swimming to follow. This trip was the highlight of our Czechoslovak trip (slight similarity to Lake Taupo). During this trip Prof H mentioned that he had wanted to bring along his old notebook containing the records of her class. When he found however, that Lizzie's marks were mostly 5s and 4s he rather left the book at home.

Restaurant meals generally of good standard, Turkish coffee and beer excellent. Very many tourists, mostly from East block countries, mainly East Germany who stood in long queues in the authorised banks to exchange their few Marks. They try very hard for tourists but are by far not properly equipped nor prepared nor have they got the staff. Very good tractors are now made in Brno but a large percentage are being sent to Russia and other countries.

Lizzie had a bit of foot (leg) trouble and was sent by a doctor friend to a specialist doctor at the orthopaedic clinic, was immediately attended to although very many people were waiting.

From Brno we went by bus via Nikosburg (Mikulov, current Czech name) to Vienna (bus was choc-a-block). Flowers and more apricots (merunky) were brought for us to the bus and we were given a great sendoff; it was really touching. At the CSR border there was no luggage inspection only passports were collected to be stamped and returned before departure. Suddenly from nowhere appeared a village brass band true to Uprka (the famous painter) style and played old folk songs (like the Maori performing a poi dance for the Mariposa passengers). I am not ashamed to admit that a few secret tears were

trickling down my quivering cheeks about this farewell.

When I exchanged my meagre leftovers of kcs money I was called into the customs building where I was told to wait. Came a uniformed so and so and threw me out. The girl who had asked me to wait told me apologetically (Czech – forgive but he is “a political”). Then there are only a few hundred yards to the Austrian border and you can immediately see the great difference, the free and easy atmosphere. But I just notice that I was carried away a bit by emotion and forgot to mention that on Sunday, whilst Lizzie went with friends to their chata (hut) near Brno, I took the bus to my birthplace Olomouc for the day. The “Orly” “Svata Trojice” (Holy Trinity column built 1716-1754) and other art treasures looked utterly neglected; a great pity. At 10.30 I met my cousin Richard Briess now living in retirement in Bruntal. Details of this reunion verbally. Then I went to see the ex wife of my late brother where I met some old tennis friends whose fate and experience the last 20 or more years I shall tell you on my return.

### ***Now about the people and how they live***

In the cities with industry, secondary industry, tradesmen, offices and administrative or government offices, cruel alarm clocks wake the working people between 4.40 and 5.30am. Public traffic vehicles are already chockablock between 5 and 6am (rush hour), at a time when other European working people turn round in their bed to have another round of sleep. People in the CSR have never been habitual early risers but they are forced to do so by law. The present regime has fixed the working hours since the very beginning from 6:14 or 15 to 7:15 o'clock on five days and also every other Saturday, that is for all factories, government and local authority offices also. When these working hours were introduced as socialist working rhythm, they were much praised and propagated to sweeten the pill and the free afternoon was presented and particularly mentioned as progressive socialist achievement.

Meanwhile times have changed even in the CSR. The variety of spare time

entertainment, mainly television (very poor programmes) as well as the tendency to earn a bit extra through so called “black jobs” (private work of a tradesman type for instance plumbing, that hardly ever is working anywhere) on the free afternoons, to subsidise the meagre incomes, fixed to skim off purchasing power because the consumer goods are not in the country (either not being made or exported). These circumstances don't lead to the government planned result, that workers and employees go to bed early and arrive next morning well rested and full of energy and ambition at their place of occupation. The results of these facts are showing of course. Statistical surveys show that about 50% of all employees arrive at work without breakfast and a further 95% with an absolutely insufficient breakfast of only a cup of Turkish coffee (very good quality). This refers even to school children. Lunch is usually taken between 15:30 and 16:30 due to these working hours (with exception where works canteens provide inexpensive but uninteresting light meals). The evening meal is taken relatively shortly thereafter which leaves on an average approx 16-17 hours to the next main meal, which according to medical opinion is detrimental to health and must in the long run also see a decline in productivity (output pro man hour) absenteeism and affects health.

### ***Won't be long now!***

As result of the general lack of sleep and the rather unnatural eating times, official statistics have ascertained an increase in work accidents but mainly a general decline in productivity which it is stated to be 25% less than West Germany and considerably less than the USA. In my own personal opinion it is the lack of incentive, lack of freedom and the mental slavery that is causing the low productivity. You often hear from people in the street that there is no sense in working harder as there is no reward for it and the only benefit goes to the Russians.

What I have said in this letter is not a criticism but as best I can, a picture of conditions as I have seen them, what I have heard and read. I wish I were

wrong.

Summing up: Sad. Sad. Sad. ■

(editorial note: Subsequently the football team, Slavia, did visit Auckland. I remember it vaguely, but wonder now, if it was organised by my father. This is the longest “speech” I can ever remember my father making!)





**God bless America**

A gathering of the Rosenblums in NY in 1947.

1. John Rosenblum. 2. Cilli/Czarne  
Rosenblum nee Kittenplon. 3. Sally Gottfurcht  
nee Rosenblum (Sally and Bernard sponsored  
Mitzi and Eddie) Wife of Bernard. 4. George  
Rosenblum. 5. Bernard Gottfurcht. 6. Selma  
Rosenblum nee Poppel (wife of George  
Rosenblum). 7. Eddie Rosenblum. 8. Shirley  
Rosenblum nee Levine.



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# God bless America



**T**

HE Rosenblum family from Vienna all survived the war – Lilly with Fred in New Zealand had her own story of escape and difficult beginnings (see Book 2), while her parents and three siblings all managed to find a new home in New York. In their interviews with the Shoah Foundation about 1997 Otto, Mitzi and Eddie told their own stories. Descriptions of growing up during the First World War years in Vienna, the Second District (aka Leopoldstadt), Jewish in character, attending

public school, then secondary school. Training in various trades took place against the backdrop of the Depression and the rise of antisemitism with the sudden rise in popularity of Adolf Hitler. Suddenly it was time to make plans to leave. Luckily Jochanan's sister Sally and brother George and their spouses and Cilli's sister Lena Grosnik had immigrated to the United States in the 1920s – a move that paved the way for the rest of the family to follow. Sally's husband Bernard Gottfurcht worked as a watchmaker for Tiffanys. George,

married to Selma, had a printing business.

Immigration to the United States in 1938-1940 was impossible without an affidavit. A strict quota system operated. Prospective immigrants needed to have an affidavit from someone in the US stating that they would take responsibility for the applicant and would ensure that they did not become dependant on the state. Two by two the family made their way across the Atlantic between 1938 and 1940.



## Eddie's voice

**Age 77**

I was the youngest, born in 1920. I went to school in the neighbourhood, mixed Jews and non Jews, no one taking much notice who played with who– we were just mates. My school was four blocks from our apartment, and Jewish students mixed with non Jewish, about 50-50. I never personally experienced any antisemitism. There was a succah in

our building and all the neighbourhood kids were invited in. Classes took place six days a week, though Saturday was a half day. We had one hour religious instruction at school, children of each religion had instruction with a religious teacher of their own faith.

Our family belonged to the Stadttempel and I sang in the choir, so was immersed in Jewish religion and culture in my young years. My bar mitzvah was celebrated in shul and then at home with nice food and friends and neighbours took

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

part. There was always food on the table, though during the Depression years the fare was less generous. Maybe potato soup instead of chicken soup. Grandmother Cipre Kittenplon/Jurmann lived with us. My father had his tailor shop at street level and our apartment was on the first floor mezzanine. My mother helped him in the shop.

My father had a motorcycle, a Harley Davison with a sidecar and we toured the mountains outside the city after the First World War, on holidays. My father made a living, the rent was paid and there was food on the table and life was good. That was enough for us.

Around 1935 or so the atmosphere began to change. We read about Hitler in the newspaper and then suddenly politics became important. We learned about Hitler's rise in Germany through the newspapers and also my brother Otto had a crystal set. We had a maid and until 1935 we had a nice comfortable life. But suddenly there was no central heating working and we had to buy coal for heating. After 1934 I began to help my father with his tailoring. At age 10 I could make buttonholes. My father suggested that I follow him in his trade and there was nothing else I was really interested in doing. I worked with my father for four years, cutting, pattern making and so on and he taught me well. Learning a skill was important.



***Eddie and his family in front of the family's shop.***

Near our apartment there was a large ornate Sephardic temple. We called it the "Turkische Tempel" and it had a huge glass dome. On 12 March 1938 the Nazis blew it up with dynamite. I will always remember the huge fire as it burned and glass everywhere as the dome shattered and the commotion. Jews were rounded up . . . and the Germans came from the Sudetenland in trucks. They rounded up all the Jews. Religious Jews were



***The Rosenblum family (l-r) Jochanan/John, Lotte, Otto, Mitzi, Cilli/Czarne and Eddie in front.***

made to clean the streets, had their beards cut and their side locks shaved. I was at home with my mother, it was the first wave of internments. My sisters were with their friends and my brother and father too with theirs. Frau Rausch the caretaker sent me to the top floor of our building where there was a laundry to hide in. Soldiers and Gestapo came looking for my father and my mother told them he wasn't there. They came in and looked around, then left. I stayed in hiding on the top floor for a couple of days, until I could see there were no more soldiers in the street and then I came down. My mother had brought me sandwiches while I was hiding.

I saw Hitler twice and I remember the charisma he had and how he convinced people. He came with a big entourage. I joined the crowds lining the streets and climbed a ladder. We realised that our future in Austria was compromised. We had very few relatives in Vienna. But my father's sister and



brother had immigrated to the United States in the 1920s and applied for visas to allow us to immigrate too. I was Austrian and we applied to immigrate in 1938, between March and December 1938, however my parents still had Polish citizenship and had to wait longer. I had to get a Certificate of Good Behaviour from the Police to prove I had no criminal convictions. You had to queue from early in the morning to get this. The day I got the papers in order, I happened to run into a group of SS (Schutzstaffel – the Nazi paramilitary protection squad) who stopped me in the street. “Hey you, what have you got under your arm?” I said “Nothing, just papers”. They kicked the bundle of papers all over the street and I had to pick them up, one by one. We had to put them together with scotch tape so they would be accepted. I think it was in December we got notice from the US Embassy that our papers are in order and then my father went and made arrangements for our passage.

### **9 November 1939.**

My memory of Kristallnacht is quite vivid. The SS went from store to store smashing in shop fronts and crashing and looting. My father had closed the shop and we were standing in the shop behind the closed doors, my mother, my father and I and they came in a truck. Next to my father was a grocery store. There was not much food left in Vienna for Jewish people. They looted the store, then they came to our store. There was a sort of an iron grate and they kicked it open. They came in, an SS man in charge, SA (Sturmabteilung - storm troopers) and other brown shirts. We had a few things ready for sale, some pants and some fabrics and they threw the lot onto an open truck. There

were some pillows that we used for pressing garments. They ripped them open, looking for what we might have hidden there and of course they didn’t find anything, making remarks about Jews hiding their money. Then they ripped open the walls. Scissors, knives, anything that they thought would be of value. Anything they thought they could possibly resell, they took. There was a worktable and on that worktable there was a pin cushion. My mother, she stood by the table and I stood next to her. He picked up that pincushion and gave it to my mother, clicked his heels and turned around and left. There is a superstition that if you remove a pincushion from someone’s house, you destroy the friendship. And he looked at my mother and handed it back to her. My mother regained her composure and we went upstairs.

Mitzi and I were both helped with getting steamship tickets by HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). We left Vienna by train for Switzerland, my parents saw us off at the station. We could take only a few things but we didn’t need a visa. At the border the luggage wasn’t inspected but the Swiss were not turning people back. We spent a few days in Zurich and met up with Mitzi’s husband Harry who had been escorted illegally over the alps. My older sister, Lilly, went to Czechoslovakia and then to London. We left Le Havre, on the ship *Aquitania* which coincidentally was the troop ship which brought me to Europe when I was in the US Army. Mitzi was very seasick so I looked after her. We made friends on board and retained the friendships. Arriving in New York harbour and seeing the Statue of Liberty was very emotional. Aunt Sally and Uncle George were at the pier to meet us and we went to their apartment

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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in the Bronx. Many people came to see us, but of course we didn't speak any English. I enrolled in Night School, took a job and learned how to use an electric sewing machine. I was keen to get a social security number and my green card. I came to the US when I was 19 and I registered for the draft. Normally you had to have five years' residence to become a citizen but it was cut to three years. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941 and America joined the war. I felt I wanted to give something back to America. I did my basic training, including latrine cleaning and KP duty. I was well treated and nicknamed "Rosie". I never encountered any antisemitism. I was inducted into the Army in 1943.

We were sent to England, to Southampton, got kippers for breakfast. We landed in Normandy, Europe by way of a landing barge, guns between our legs. In single file we made our way down the beach, sleeping in pup tents on B and C rations. It was December and we slept out in the snow, rain and I was in the Quartermaster division. I was sent for two weeks advanced infantry training and had to sort out the belongings of people who had died and whose personal effects had to be sent home. They found out that I could speak to the prisoners in German and so then I worked in Intelligence. I served for three and a half years and attained T5 rank, technical sergeant. In May 1945 I returned to my company outside Paris. I was there on D day and the singing, dancing and rejoicing was quite something to behold. I got a commendation from Washington when I sewed a flag – the Stars and Stripes – from parachute material.

When I was in the Pacific, letters were censored, and I couldn't write home to say when I would be home. I began a correspondence with the sister of my army buddy's wife and sent a coded message to her asking her to call my mother so she would know where I was. When I got home I went to the girl's apartment to thank her for passing on the message. Shirley and I went to the movies and courted and were married on 7 February 1947. Shirley could speak Yiddish with my mother which made my mother really happy. When the GI

Bill was passed I was able to go to design school. My father had opened a tailor shop and wanted me to join him but I was more interested in mass production. I took a job with Simon Ackermanm a large mens' clothing shop in New York.

In 1949 my son Harvey was born and I opened a tailor store in 1955. In 1956 I opened a custom tailor clothing store in Garden City, Long Island. When the store burned down in 1974 locals helped set up new premises in the middle of town and business tripled. I was there until my retirement in 1990. I was active in Lions, helped the blind and was Small Businessman of the Year, honoured by Nassau County. I was a scoutmaster for six years, both my boys are scoutmasters. My son Harvey became an eye surgeon (ophthalmologist), has a daughter and lives in New York. My daughter Barbara studied Classics, has three children and now lives in Boston. I have studied at night school, Latin, Greek, all sorts of courses. I have another daughter Janice. My son Stuart did chemistry and has a PhD in research chemistry from Stoneybrook and works for a big pharmaceutical company in New Jersey. He has five children. I enrolled in every subject possible, worked in a shelter as a volunteer. I like to use psychology to get to understand people. I try to lift people up, to help them. I did a lot of skiing and horseback riding. My aim in life is to be young at 75. We spent a lot of time with our kids. But they knew that I had to work hard to provide for the holidays. My belief in God never faltered. I always felt I was guided by God – a supreme thing above us. I never complained about anything, it keeps you young. I worked 6-7 days a week to have a good life. I go to tempel every Saturday and my kids went to yeshivah. We still have a long way to go. To prevent antisemitism we need to have a homeland as Theodor Herzl said. You have to be a good listener in life.





## Otto's voice

**June 18 1997**

**Age 85**

I was the firstborn, arriving in 1912, the year after my parents Jochanan and Cilli moved to Vienna from Buchach, Galicia, as newlyweds. My father was a tailor who had been apprenticed to his father Chaskel before him, also a tailor. It was not by choice. In those days you went into the profession that your father had. He had a highly developed technical mind. My father became a tailor be-

cause that is what his father was. But he was really a gifted mechanic. He could fix anything. And I seem to have inherited this gift. In Buchach he was known as the "Mr Fixit Man". We had an uneventful time during the First World War years and the 1920s. My mother was Cilli (also Czarna) Kittenplon. We kept a kosher home, mother was very busy and was also a seamstress. My siblings all ended up in the clothing business.

We lived in the second district which had the greatest concentration of Jews in Vienna. There was nothing significant that I remember. We grew up as ordinary youngsters and I don't really remember any antisemitism. During the war my father had been sent into the mountains about 100 miles outside Vienna where there was a Prisoner of War camp. He was a corporal, later assigned to a POW camp to the officers' mess and his job was to work as a tailor. The commandant looked after him, as he was his personal tailor. My father became friendly with many of the local farmers

and after the war we had the happiest of holidays renting a room in one of the farmer's houses. It was no holiday for my mother. The accommodation had no running water, no electricity, no proper toilet but I loved it though it was rough. I learnt to swim in a brook nearby. We had to rent a truck to bring everything we needed for the summer holiday. I had a special job looking after some of the horses and each day my job was to take the prepared food out into the fields for breakfast where the farmers had been working since early morning. Dr Nagelberg came to the house to give us religious education. My father was deep into motorcycles. Only Harley Davisons would do. He belonged to a motorcycle club, sponsored races.

I attended Volksschule and then Staatsrealschule in Vienna. Then I went on to technical studies at the Technologischen Gewerbe Museum in Vienna, Währingerstrasse 59. I studied for five years, completing practical work with Maschinenfabrik B.Roth, Gemeinde Wien-Gaswerk, Leopoldau and Automobilfabrik MercedesBenz. I graduated in 1931 with a degree in tech-



**Süre (AKA Lotte) and Otto, 1938.**



nance. What was going on in Germany was not affecting us. I had few hobbies as I was dedicated to my career. My parents sent me to ballroom dancing and I became a very accomplished ballroom dancer. I met Lotte (Sure) at a club. My job was well paid, I married June 11, 1936. We had a one room apartment. No running water or toilet facilities. The toilet was shared with three other tenants. No fridges, only ice boxes. The only source of water was outside. Plebiscites were held when the Austrians decided they should stay as Austrians or become part of the German Reich. There were slogans on the pavement and they made religious Jews scrub the slogans off the pavement. By that time we knew what was going on in Germany but we were so Austrian oriented we didn't realise what was happening but the night of the Anschluss March 1938 things changed. Nazis marched in with their brown uniforms and shorts and white socks. The SS were superior and the SA did the dirty work. The Wehrmacht (army) put a stop to these hoodlums.

On Kristallnacht, I reported for work in the morning. There was a man there in an ordinary business suit with Nazi armband and insignia. He was introduced to me as the newly appointed man by the Nazi party running the business. The first few words "Are there any Jews amongst you? There were three of us. In accordance with the new rules of the Third Reich, you are immediately dismissed. You have 30 minutes to pick up your personal belongings and leave the premises. So that is what we did. About a week later my boss contacted me and said because of the knowledge I had they wanted to reemploy me because they couldn't run the company without me. But to do this they needed clearance from the SS. They made an appointment at the headquarters and again marching up and down. Not a healthy place to be for a Jew, at Nazi headquarters. He said we have studied your work history and recognise you have expertise in this field and you have worked for Fordham and Company here for six years. Customer list includes hospitals, schools etc and your company has a responsibility to keep the heating systems going so we will make an exception to the rules about employing Jews and will give you

a permit to work until Dec 1938. You will have an assistant who will stay with you all day and you will teach him.

I was shivering internally when I was called to Gestapo headquarters. Aigner tipped me off that they are preparing a work permit for me. They issued the permit while I was there. I was never molested and I functioned without restrictions. I wore a long leather coat which was in fashion and a Tyrolean hat, almost as a disguise and spoke with a heavy Viennese accent.

One day I was out servicing oil burners and as I stopped to get my toolbox a German put a gun in my ribs and said "Hände hoch" (Hands up). He asked what I was doing and I told him I was there to service the oil burner. So he pushed me to go into the house, where I could see there were other Germans and the owners Mr and Mrs Greenberg were up against the wall with hands up and in front of them on the table were lots of papers, jewellery and so on. "Who is this guy the Germans asked?"— the oil burner guy. We want you to shut off the oil burner, We are going to take care of these people and they won't need the oil burner on. They left me to do my job which I did and then one of them thought he found a tube of platinum which he ripped out. This caused the heating system to fail and they were cold. I was allowed to go to my car to get my tools to fix the system, replace the tube, then to call the office. I went straight back to the office. I was sent out again. We have another call, a Mr Gottlieb. They have no heat so I went there and I was shocked because there was a huge swastika flag hanging in front of the house and a guy marching up and down and when he saw my car coming he stopped and he challenged me. "Was machen Sie hier?". "What are you doing here?" "I am to fix the oil burner." Another SS man came out, a bit dishevelled and we went to the boiler and checked it. I was uneasy because there were about 18 other guys having a good time, lounging around, boots on the table and so on, a Jew surrounded by so many SS men was not so good. On the way up I passed a storage room where there were about 2000 rifles there. That was enough for one day! All these houses had been confiscated. After I saw what was going on

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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I realised there was no longer a future for me in Austria.

My first service call was in a clothing factory and while I was there the government appointed manager came over to me and showed me the synagogue across the street had just been blown up. Lotte came to the office. She got a fright because she saw activity all over the streets. Aigner offered to go with us to go back home and we found my father's stuff was all over the street, the shop destroyed. They got hold of my sister and my brother. They took his papers and threw them all over the street. The store was a total loss. The Türkische Tempel was blown up. One hundred feet away all the prayer books and torah scrolls were thrown on the fire. My work permit expired in November 1938. I was fortunate to get the attention of a friend who worked for the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde and I became an orderly assisting him, stationed for four hours in front of his door to stop people barging in. They were busy organising kindertransports and so on. I received a small salary and I supplemented my income by packing belongings for people.

The SA did all the dirty work and went from house to house, they would take the old men. The Wehrmacht were even overruled by them. Where we lived, suddenly there was a turnaround in the attitude by the people there. I borrowed a wagon with four wheels like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* and I loaded my meagre belongings walked 25 minutes from the twentieth district to the Second District to be near the family. Our neighbours where we were renting became hostile.

My father lost all his non Jewish customers. Materials were hard to come by but he continued his business up to Kristallnacht when his store was demolished and the contents were destroyed. It was terrible. All the stores were marked with "Jude". They wouldn't dare do business with a Jewish tailor. I knew we had to get out. My mother's sister and my father's sister and Uncle George, and my mother had a sister who were all in the US but there were technical difficulties in getting a sponsor who had to have sufficient financial

backing to guarantee that the applicant would not become a charge on the country. The first thing to do was to register with the American consulate in Vienna in April 1938. You had to register at the American Embassy and get a quota number. I started contacting people and after a while they came up with sufficient affidavits to cover my parents, my sister Mitzi and younger brother Eddie but not my wife and me. My younger sister married her boyfriend who was a Czechoslovakian citizen and they relocated to Czechoslovakia and then to London where they stayed for one and a half years. Then they were offered to relocate to one of the British possessions. One was New Zealand. I expected the family would give us an affidavit. But it turned out our family were all middle income earners and could not cover an affidavit for my wife Lotte and me. I wrote to everyone I could think of, every little straw that floated by. I found out that the Chinese were looking for engineers so I applied for and got a visa for Shanghai. All the other answers came back negative. That was in the middle of 1939. My job turned out to be a safety blanket for myself and my family.

The Nazis had a really complicated process to leave. You needed a clearance document to certify that you have met all your debt obligations etc. I got in line to get the passport at 5am. Then about 5pm at night, when I finally arrived at the desk of the Nazi, he said "5pm. Finished. Come back tomorrow". When I finally got it, it was like a passport to a new life. When we left Vienna, the first stop was in Zurich, one of the Swiss railway employees tried to cheer us up. The Americans had to have a certain amount of funds to sponsor a person and the affidavit came just in time to stop me having to utilise the Shanghai visa. I got the visa— early June 1939. Then had to have a physical examination. My father made me a suit for the examination. We had to submit in duplicate a complete list of what we were taking, submitted to the people at the Gestapo who were supervising our departure. I had a winter coat they threw out. I took all my tools, my violin, correspondence, our wedding presents— they screened these things but didn't prevent us taking them. But you were sup-

posed to hand over all your jewellery. I needed to get a clearance from the Wehrmacht. We left by train from Westbahnhof, evening departure and arrived in Zurich the following morning. My wife had a pair of earrings which were from her family, so she wore the earrings and covered her head with a scarf. We passed. We were there a couple of days and went to the local immigration office. They helped us with a little bit of money. Zurich to Paris where we stayed overnight. From there we went to London where I visited my sister and then to Liverpool and boarded the ship at the beginning of August. Ship stopped in Galway, Ireland, Belfast, and the next stop was Boston, USA. Processed in immigration in Boston on the ship— not through Ellis Island. We arrived in a typical summer day, very hot, and I was wearing a suit, formally, with a tie. I virtually kissed the ground. My parents left 4 Dec 1939.

We stayed with my relatives and my uncle George organised an interview for me with Paragon Oil, owned by five Jewish brothers. About a week after I arrived in NY my uncle George rang and told me to get dressed and ready for a job interview. In Europe you get formally dressed up for a job interview so I went with Uncle George to a machine company that he supplied with printing materials. I couldn't speak much English, only a few words, so it wasn't much



*Claire, Lindy, Peter and Jerry in New York 2016, taking a break on the High Line.*

of an interview but we just asked that they give me a chance to prove myself. They were the only company on the east coast who manufactured oil burners on their premises. IW Schwarz and Hermann Gottlieb interviewed me. Uncle had to translate. They told me to call back on Friday. I'd never used a phone before but Mitzi helped. They said to come in Monday morning. After 20 years there and then they were taken over and I stayed altogether 38 years until at 65 I had to retire because of company policy.

We were invited by the Austrian government to return to Austria for a visit and they arranged the most wonderful trip.

My wife Lotte died in 1983 and when I was going to say our memorial prayers for her I met a widow who had just lost her husband around the same time. We courted for a couple of years and I married Thelma in 1985. We have now been married for 10 years. I am glad and happy that my life ended up the way it did.





## Mitzi's voice

**From Shoah Foundation interview**

**Born: April 10, 1917**

**Interview: 17.9.1997**

I was Lilly's little sister, two years her junior. We were always close. Ours was a happy childhood. I had two brothers and one sister. Mom and Pop had a tailor's shop. I was always interested in tailoring— taking scraps of fabrics and manoeuvring them to make things. My sister Lilly wasn't a sewer, she was more on the designing side. So if I made clothes for the dolls, she would make a box for them. So we were happy under the piano playing together.

Pop's name was Jochenen (also Jochanan, Johann, John). He was an excellent tailor who provided most of the rabbis with their robes and was sought after for that. But he was also a good mechanic and very interested in motorbikes. He was very devoted to us all. We would have loved to have spent more time with him but on weekends he rushed out to do business in the countryside. Mum was Cecilia (also Cilli, Czarne) and she was a typical, Jewish mother—protective, but she would give a smack on the behind. We loved and respected them. Once I got it from her and I couldn't sit for a week! Not only me, but my younger brother Eddie was deprived of any dinner as a punishment. I don't think these ways would work today but we loved them. My mother liked to help people. At one time an aunt came from Poland and was in hospital and three times a week my mother took her on the trolley bus, some chicken soup and that made an impression on me. She was such a busy woman with us and helping Pop. She taught us the goodness that was in her heart and it guided us

throughout life. The four of us got on quite well. My older brother Otto was fussy with his belongings and if anyone interfered it started a riot. Ours was a lovely warm Jewish home. The only thing we had a problem with was that in the synagogue we didn't know Hebrew so on the High Holy days sat there with them but after half an hour we kids went home. The delicious smell of rising, cooking challah pervaded and Mum would invite our school friends for lunch. Golden chicken soup was always there. She baked cinnamon rugelach, delicious, all her nice jams and jellies and she was such a balaboosta (good Jewish wife).

Jewish education – Mr Frankl came to the house and was strict. He would chase us with a chair in frustration! Age difference between the older and younger brothers was quite large so they didn't get close till later in their lives. We went to public school, then grammar, then high school. The older brother my parents managed to send him through university and this training saved him during the Hitler time. Mom said to me “You can have two choices – a hairdresser or a dressmaker”. I picked dressmaking and I love it to this day. It changed me. I still do it.

Before Hitler came to power antisemitism was not obvious but we were always a little reserved. The caretaker had three daughters and we became friends but we couldn't share our Jewish lives and we kept quiet about it. I was always hesitant to discuss anything. There was a certain difference but not expressed, but diffidence. I couldn't quite put my finger on it. You could feel it. It surfaced later. In the garment workers union, my union, you didn't feel it. We all, in the youth group I belonged to, we got on. Our ages were 14-18. We wanted a peaceful life. We were approached by the Garment workers Union. We were informed about the world around us. So I joined for classes but we also got together on weekends for hiking and so on. It helped me in later years to strive for more. Six months before Hitler came to power I was able to have studied under Sigmund Freud. The group arranged it. The group was politically oriented, we wanted freedom that we take for granted today. The group was

a socialist group. My sister was a clerk and she was at the Zentral Verein for clerks, a different division, but also had an education programme. We were considered Jews but were equal. 50-50 mixed. We respected each other's festivals and so on. It meant a lot to me. We felt there were differences with gentiles, even the people who were the caretakers in our buildings.

I was 20 years old when Hitler came to power. We knew something was brewing.

We took our bikes and delivered flyers to kiosks and schools and so on. 12 March 1938 a day or two before Hitler walked into Austria. I couldn't shake the feeling of anxiety and an icy frost in the air. We were always second grade and I still feel it to this day when I go in a store to buy a Jewish article. We were too young to connect it with hatred. Some of the young kids were dressed up in clothes, we felt there was something in the air that we just didn't understand. It still hit us like a brick – slowly started two years before– it carried it over as if by the wind. We were not surprised but shocked. March 11 1938 and Pop came home from a customer and he said there were hundreds and hundreds of people in the street – and we were so upset and not really realising the seriousness of it. He told both his non Jewish workers. Changes happened so quickly we hardly registered. The caretaker who cleaned the stairs each week, Mrs Rausch,



*Rosenblum sisters Lilly and Mitzi.*

she told my mother “Mrs Rosenblum for all these years I have cleaned the stairs for you and starting today you will clean them for us.” She had been so kind and her children were friendly, but that's when things started to change. I was really upset because in the youth group there had been no difference. Our youth group stuck together and together we got in trouble. We were restricted but couldn't understand until Kristallnacht when it hit us with a bang.

They restricted our activities. We couldn't mix and I was already working as an apprentice. There were 24 girls and I was the 25th, the only Jew. There were some who were very supportive and one was my boss. Pop noticed he lost some customers, people avoided us. The moment Hitler marched in there were restrictions. There was a line drawn and we knew we had to keep to the restrictions. That's when Pop wrote to Sally in America to see if she could help. The arrests started and so on. Pop was smart enough to get our passports ready for us and we were queuing all night to get our papers ready. We were happy when we were told they were working on getting affidavits for Eddie and I. Harry and I were married 3 July 1938 and my first move was to let the family in America know that I got married.

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

So they were able to now include Harry in the affidavit.

I married Harry (Hans) Fleischer. A hush hush marriage. We had the ceremony with soup then lunch. There were SS in the street waiting and they made Harry take a scrubbing brush and clean the street. We were wearing our best clothes but we had to obey. The process of the affidavit kept us going. It was horrible but there was no choice but to wait. We felt so privileged to have that offer.

After Hitler came we were afraid to go to synagogue because we were scared to go out in the street. Having the affidavit kept us going and gave our parents hope that they will be safe too. The American family had to prove they had enough money to guarantee us for each affidavit. They only had enough money to provide the guarantee for Eddie and me. So unfortunately my husband had to leave Vienna and go illegally. We had been married four months and I found I was pregnant and my sister helped me find a doctor to make an abortion. It was a criminal act and we would have been in real trouble if they had found out. My husband had to leave. We met up in Zurich for one day and his mother was also catching the boat at the same time. When I told Harry he was shocked but said we did the right thing. I think about it a lot and know that I did the right thing. My



*Mitzi's children (l-r) Bob, Jerry, Lenny and Lindy, 2023.*

sister was the one who encouraged me. She said just keep looking at that white ceiling and think that I will be waiting for you with a stick of salami! I had to accept it and we were just happy to be alive.

Kristallnacht – I remember. Something was in the air which you could cut with a knife until 7am our doorbell rang and there were the SS the storm troopers, the SA and they rang the bell and just walked in. They came in, opened the door, started removing the dining room table, the chairs and they carried it down and on the trucks were the groceries from the shop next door. And then one told me “now you come down with me to the store. I see my uncle, who was a stateless person, with a pair of shoes under his arm and the man grabs him by the neck and my uncle started to shiver and shake and said “I picked up a pair of shoes to be repaired.” And he grabbed him by the neck and threw him onto the truck

onto the potato sacks and that was the last I ever saw of Uncle Mendel. And he said to me “And you come into the store with me” and I followed and three more men came with me and they locked the door. I thought this is the end. He took his bayonet and ripped into the pillows we used for pressing. The feathers were flying. I asked “are you looking for something?” and “Oh yes,

where have you hidden the money”. I said “there isn’t any there”. They didn’t listen to me but kept ripping open pillows when they went upstairs. And I went upstairs to Mama and she said “Look what happened, everything is taken away and now they are arresting all the men and the man from the grocery store came up and asked for a place to hide. What we didn’t know was that they had that one day put aside to arrest as many Jewish men as they possibly could. In the middle of this confusion, I get a call from my mother-in-law, crying, they had a liquor



*Mitzi - about 2005.*

store and she said “come and help me”. She said a whole army of men came and broke all the bottles. She was in the next district. I wanted to stay with my family but knew I had to go to my mother-in-law as Harry had left already. I ran there as I was too scared to catch the trolley. They were not after the women that time. I could see there was glass and liquor everywhere.

There was a Sephardic temple with a prominent gold dome and the flames were jumping out, it was going up in flames. I saw the other synagogues on my way to my mother-in-law. I ran home again and helped hide all the men hid-

ing in the building. It was a frightful day. Around 7pm things lightened up a bit. We didn’t know what was going on. We heard rumours that by 7pm it will be over. Then we remembered Eddie was hiding. Eddie comes out, frightened like a little sheep, he was 18, clutching the papers we had ready. Eddie pleaded “Please, please” and another man told the guy to put Eddie down. There were two SS men still in the building. The other man said “let him go, it’s two minutes after seven. You can’t touch him” The man took the documents in the envelope

which Eddie begged them not to take and he pushed all the papers out onto the ground and we had to pick them all up and put them together. Eddie said “Please don’t take the papers, leave us alone we are going to America”. He opened the zipper and let all the documents fly as far as they could. We managed to retrieve them. We knew the future of our family was with those papers and Eddie and me. After that the men came out of their hiding places, shocked, worn out, grown men crying, uncertain what their future held and you want to help, but how could you? And from that day on they showed us that this is no

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

longer our world. It was theirs! It was a horrible, horrible day. We were so relieved to have our papers back and from that day on it just went down, down, down. It's no longer your world now, it's ours. That was Kristallnacht, it was terrible. You could no longer communicate or talk about it. You should never have to experience it, but we were just existing, scared even to talk to a Jewish friend. You never knew how you were being overheard. From then on they let us know that it was no longer our world. It was their world.



*Lindy and Jerry with Claire and Peter in NY 2016.*

My sister Lilly and her husband had gone to Czechoslovakia and he had left and gone to England but Lilly got stuck in the Polish forest for 20 days (ed: Lilly got stuck waiting to cross the border through the forest into Poland). Outside the Polish borders there were boats waiting to take any refugees. The Germans marched into Prague. Eventually Lilly made it over the border into Poland and got the boat to England. When she came over here on her last visit for my 80th birthday she confessed to me after 58 years that she had been raped there and a fire distracted them and he ran the other way which gave her the chance to crawl on her stomach to the border (ed: not likely) and she was grabbed on to the boat. She was brought to London and they helped in the committee there (The Czech Refugee Fund Trust) and after two years they were granted a visa to the last place in the world, New Zealand and they are still there to this day.

We had already set a date for our boat to leave on Jan 28, 1939. That period was bad. My parents still had no papers and we had no affidavit for them. I was also worried about my husband, what work could he do? He worked in a funeral parlour for a while to watch the bodies in return for some food. I managed to send him a few clothes and sew some coins in the shoulder

pads. Luckily there was a Swiss person who was helping. Our visit with him in Zurich coincided with the visit of my mother-in-law in Zurich. She went to Shanghai and was there for nine years. I was terribly seasick on the trip over. When we saw the Statue of Liberty that was so emotional, it was indescribable what it meant to us. It was raining and we saw my uncle in his wool coat and my aunt was so happy. She kept saying "Die Kinder sind hier!" (The children are here) and repeating it. Aunt Sally was preparing a

Shabbat meal. She had fresh rye bread with American cheese. It was the best! We hadn't seen challah for so long. Eddie reached over for another piece and uncle Bernard said 'In America you take one piece'. He put Eddie in his place. With an affidavit you didn't have to go through to Ellis Island.

I felt guilty as my parents were still without visas and we were scared the quotas would be closed. One of our friends was in the Kitchener camp in England and I negotiated to give him an affidavit and he came out. When Harry found out I was helping a former boyfriend he was not pleased so I said I was going for a fitting when I went to meet him. Then I had to help my brother Otto. Vienna was a hellhole. I had a job and the family was starting to come and I needed more money and my employer offered me \$18 per hour but I needed more. Aunt Sally was a very determined woman and she took me to buy a machine and we rented a ground floor apartment in the Bronx.

### **14.9.1997**

When we had the apartment we knew we could expect the rest of the family in four or five months and that's where my aunt helped so I put out a sign "Viennese dressmaker" - 1675 Andrews Avenue, Bronx. I was so thrilled we

had a place of our own. We bought a pot \$1.50 for the soup for the high Holy days. Eddie was sleeping in a folding bed. My husband wasn't here yet. But we were happy because it was a beginning. We had a strong enough affidavit for Mom and Pop to come out and we were so happy to be together again. My brother Otto and Lotte moved out and got their own place and my parents took their place. Then finally the day came when my husband Harry came and of course it was great. Mom and Pop already had an apartment and Pop looked for a store and wanted to make Sally a coat. From then on he was very skilled and independent and practiced his tailoring with Mom's help. I was blessed with a pregnancy but it went wrong. A miscarriage. After six weeks I was pregnant again. The war was raging again. I gave birth after 42 hours of labour, I delivered our oldest child Bobby. He brought us great joy, and then Gerry, then Lenny and then Lindy. I love them all dearly. It's such a sense of comfort to share my life with them.

What affected me, still affects me, I still turn on the street when I hear footsteps behind me – the heavy boots, the uncertainty, I have a hard time looking for a Jewish item so it stays with me a lot. I think what I carried over and my parents too is to help others and I feel that we were so lucky, we were chosen. I travel to look for the less fortunate. I took a boy from Nepal and sponsored him through school and he has just graduated. So I look for opportunities to help, to say thank you in a way and I like to do good.

I particularly felt I should share our experiences with our kids. To let kids get to 50 and find out by coincidence is not right. I recently went to Auschwitz, and my visit strengthened me in my belief that the world should know and you cannot say it often enough. We mustn't let people say it never happened. It is our utmost responsibility. I have spoken in synagogues, spoken to students where my son Lenny lives in New Hampshire.

**End of interview**



At the end of each interview the siblings were asked to reflect on their lives. Both Eddie and Otto said, independently, they felt their life's path had been preordained, that it was always to end up the way it did. They were both incredibly positive and were happy wherever their lives led. All three were particularly content with their families, their work, even the hard times. All three were active into their eighties and, in Eddie's case, through his 90s. Eddie and Otto had lifelong interests in pho-

tography and cameras, taking films at every family occasion. Perhaps they were lucky in that their close family bonds established eons back in the town of Buchach persisted into the Vienna years and they all immigrated together, supporting each other through the good and not so good times. Lilly, far away in New Zealand, didn't have that luxury but made many trips to New York, the first by ship with her children in 1949 when they were away for three months. She and Mitzi had long

phone calls each Saturday afternoon and followed the intricacies of each others lives by the day.

Mitzi gets the last word:

*“My message to my family – be united as people, don't segregate, we are all a big family. You should never forget where you came from and you should always look for the good. Pop talked about pogroms in Poland but he never told us any details. He should have.” ■*





# Abandoned treasures

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# Abandoned treasures

Connecting families across the world



SOME time in 2018 I received an email out of the blue. It came from a young woman in the Czech Republic, who introduced herself as Ema. She asked if I was a relative of Ernst Vogel. Well ... yes I replied. He was married to Jeny, the daughter of my great aunt Hermine Löwy from Uhersky Brod. Hermine and her husband Rudolf Subak had lived in Brno, Moravia, Smetanova 30. Jenny and Ernst Vogel, had lived in Vienna but must have moved back to her parents' address in Brno after the Anschluss (invasion of Austria by the Germans). From Brno Jeny, husband Ernst, mother Hermine and Jeny's sisters Marianna and Gertrude were all deported to Terezin in 1942. None survived.

My young correspondent, Ema, was looking for relatives of Ernst and Jeny Vogel, married in Brno in 1918 and wanted to know more about the family.

Her story was this:

Ema's mother Lena had grown up living in Smetanova, Brno with her parents. Next door to their home, in the 1930s, a family by the name of Subak/Vogel had lived. Lena, and then later Ema, had always been curious about some things that had pride of place in their family living room. These were two pictures in the shape of plates showing modelled and hand painted domestic scenes from the 19th century and three other items: a clock, a magazine rack

and a beautiful blue glass vase. Ema's grandpa told Lena and then Ema about the origin of the treasures.

Grandpa had been a small boy when his parents' friend from next door, Ernst Vogel, hid the items with his neighbour, Ema's grandpa's father. The Vogels left Brno in 1942 and were never heard from again. About the plates Ema wrote; "It was hung up in grandpa's living room, above sofa. I used to lay on the sofa and watch those pictures. It reminded me like dolls. It acted mystic to me. I didn't know the story behind them or maybe I knew but didn't understand yet."

Lena and Ema together resolved to find out more about the family, as they felt a responsibility to find out the fate of the people who had owned the precious items. In fact they may not have been worth a great deal but their value lay in the story they told about a family— one of so many stories about families that never returned to their homes after being deported. Grandpa's young boy memory remembered only a married couple and two older children living at Smetanova 30, next door.

Lena came up with the idea of having Stolpersteine (stumble stones) laid in front of the house, to memorialise Ernst and Jeny Vogel and they wanted to find out more about the lives of the Vogel/Subak family.

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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Their search led them to archives and repositories in Vienna, Prague and Brno and to Yad Vashem where they found the Pages of Testimony I had filed for the family on 15 June 1999.

So Ema contacted me and after an email exchange, wrote later “I am so happy that I find somebody to ask about Vogel’s family. They are no longer here but they are still alive in our family, in story, in those things. We would appreciate if you can tell us more about the Vogel’s family destiny. We can finish the stolperstein”.

Further . . . saying “thank you so much for your email. I am so cheerful from our on-line appointment because it means that no one cannot disappear until anybody else remember him. That is such a marvellous feeling . . . of course, I will take picture of all mention things.”.

Shortly after this she sent me lovely high resolution images of the pieces from her grandfather’s home. Ema told me that she herself had married the grandson of one of the few survivors from Mikulov, a once thriving centre of Jewish life in South Moravia.



*The blue vase finds its home in the family again.*

Some 18 months later Ema reported: “Last few weeks were very emotional here in Czech Republic. Finally, June the 14th at 10.30 (2020) we put the stolperstein for Jeny and Ernst Vogel in front of street Smetanova 30. It was big satisfaction for my mum and all of us. My mum and I finished the history debt and the feeling about that is amazing. Also my second child, a boy, was born a week later. This Saturday we are having big summer celebrating of third birthday of my daughter and also of the happiness and joy. And of course it is also celebrating of happy ending and opening.” Enclosed were photographs of the ceremony when the stone was laid together with photographs of her children.

Finishing her last email, she said: “Can you believe how history can connect people from so far! I am very happy that we ‘met’ at least via mail and post.”

Claire Bruell ■

## Abandoned treasures



*Stolpersteine laid for Ernst (Arnost) and Jena Vogel outside Smetana 30.*

*NB: My grandfather, Isidor Löwy, and Peter's grandfather, Otto Brüll, are buried in the Jewish cemetery in Brno. Some time after the laying of the stolpersteine, Ema (far right) wrote that she and her children had visited the cemetery and had looked up the position of the graves and placed stones on them on our behalf. She sent photos of her children playing amongst the graves in the sunshine. We were really touched at her kindness.*







**From my mother's kitchen**

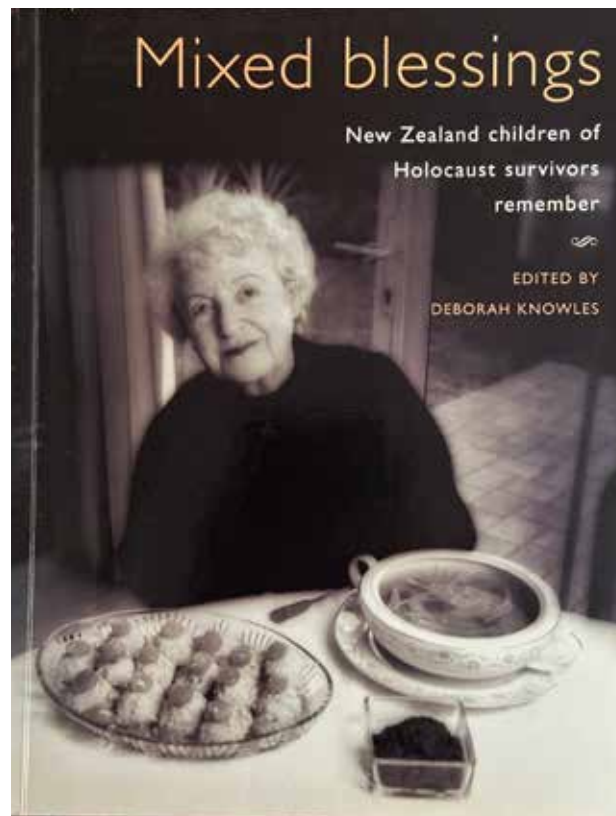


# From my mother's kitchen



My parents were Holocaust survivors who found refuge in New Zealand. My memories of my childhood are linked with the smells which came from my mother Alice's kitchen. These memories have led me to delve into the past looking for vestiges of a former way of life, peopled with ghosts, now vanished.

There is a chilling image which has stayed with me since the age of about 12. I am sitting in the kitchen of a friend whose mother is cooking me pancakes (palatschinken). For some reason I can no longer remember, we two are alone. She is from Eastern Europe, an excellent cook and plies me with fresh aromatic pancakes, one after another, oozing melted chocolate. At the same time she is telling me an unimaginable story of her experiences in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp during the war. In particular she describes the details of Nazi atrocity and how her only child



was taken from her, in front of her eyes. The juxtaposition of the terrible images from her story with the delicious richness and runny texture of the chocolate pancakes left an impression forever etched into my mind, as clearly as the sight of the number tattooed on her arm. I don't know why she confided in me. I can only guess it was because, as she claimed to my mother, I reminded her of the lost child. Thus I gained an insight into the demons that must have plagued her and many others who shared similar experiences, for the rest of their lives. Instinctively I knew that her confidences were not something I should share with others.

As a Second Generation person, this memory and others like it have led me to delve into the past. I seek out family details and cook recipes from my mother, grandmother and mother-in-law to a point which others might consider obsessive. These links through food to a culture prevalent in far away times and places are important to me.

### PALATSCHINKEN

#### Ingredients

- \* 250 grams flour
- \* 2 eggs
- \* 1/2 litre milk (approx)
- \* Pinch salt
- \* 60 grams sugar (optional)

1. Mix all ingredients and beat to a runny batter.
2. In a pan, melt a little butter.
3. Pour in sufficient to cover the base of the pan thinly.
4. When pancake starts to brown, flip over and cook until slightly browned on both sides.
5. Turn out onto a plate and continue to cook pancakes until all the batter has been used.



***My mother's kitchen on the farm, Royal Rd, Massey, 1940.***

Palatschinken are tasty, filled with jam, honey, lemon and sugar or even a sweet cottage cheese mixture, but a melted chocolate filling is the ultimate. At left is my family's recipe for palatschinken, the first thing I ever learnt to cook.

My mother was Alice (known as Lizzie) Briess (nee Löwy). She was born in Lundenburg, (now

Breclav) a small town near Bruenn (Brno) in Czechoslovakia where her father was the local doctor. He had been the only child of 16 to have received education beyond school and had studied in Vienna. When Lizzie expressed a de-

sire to attend university her father Isidor would agree to her studying only medicine. She studied at the Charles University in Prague in the 1930s but married my father Frank Briess just short of sitting the final exams for her degree. A most desirable match, they married on 6 June 1937. They settled in Olmuetz (Czech Olomouc) where Frank worked in the family grain business.

My parents fled the Germans and in October 1939 arrived in Auckland. They went farming in what is now suburban West Auckland. During the years they were on the farm their refugee friends visited on weekends. No doubt the women tried out recipes on each other and discussed and compared the results and they probably talked of home and worried about family and the war. They lamented the unavailable food and ingredients they were used to – gherkins, sauerkraut, sausages, herrings. At home in Czechoslovakia there had been a cook and servants. This was a different

life! Lizzie and Frank wrote weekly to their parents in Czechoslovakia. Lizzie's letters to her mother Marta were often about housekeeping and cooking. Fortunately they kept carbon copies of their typed letters, describing in detail their lives in New Zealand during the early war years.

“The only news from the farm to report is that we bought a goose. We locked her up in the pigsty at night and during the day we let her walk around a fenced off paddock. You're not allowed to fatten geese here. We fed the goose on maize and grass, looked after and protected her for four weeks and then we killed her. We were very proud that by correct feeding we were able to get rid of the fishy taste which the gooseflesh here usually has. Here, the geese wander freely over the farm and eat whatever takes their fancy, even fish. That's why the gooseflesh tastes so bad. We had a proper Friday night dinner – young goose with sauce and barches (challah). Lovely!”

“Franz goes to work and I begin cleaning up and cooking. Once a week I wash the bedclothes, as you wrote in my cookbook it should be done. Do you remember that? Washing is easier here in that we have a machine that looks like a mangle on a trough and we can wring out the washing. Summer and winter you can dry the washing outside. Once a week I bake bread with sour dough and yeast and once a week I iron . . . Today's lunch naturschnitzl, cucumber salad, new potatoes and a butter cake . . .”

“I don't know if I described for you before the way our home is arranged. The place in which I spend most time is the kitchen . . . On the farm we always have lots of supplies, especially me because every 5-6 days I bake a big loaf of bread . . . 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, omelettes, kaiserschmarren, pancakes, apple dumplings etc. Besides I can make a wonderful butter pastry similar to Frau Fischkus' recipe but 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. The guests always

## CARAWAY BREAD

### Ingredients:

- \* 2 tsp granular yeast
  - \* 1 tsp sugar
  - \* Water
  - \* Caraway seed to taste (4 tblsp?)
  - \* Salt (to taste)
  - \* 5 cups of mixed flours– white, stoneground whole-meal, rye.
  - \* (I use about 2-3 cups of white flour and the rest darker flour)
1. Leave yeast, sugar and water to “work” in a container until bubbling.
  2. Place all dry ingredients in cake mixer together with bubbling yeast mixture and beat with a cup or so of the water.
  3. Add water as required so that the resulting dough comes away easily from the sides of the mixer. It is a

fairly heavy dough but should be elastic and still a bit sticky to touch. It can be baked without a mould “stand alone” or in a loaf tin. I usually keep adding water little by little until the dough forms a ball around the dough hook in the mixer. Purists are welcome to knead by hand. I have not noticed a difference in the finished product.

4. Butter or spray loaf tin, roasting tin or whatever container you want to cook the loaf in. Place loaf in pan and pat top down flat.

5. Wet top by sprinkling water roughly on top.

6. Sprinkle caraway seeds over the bread and pat down to make the seeds stick. This bread only requires one rising.

7. Bake about 10 minutes on a higher heat to brown the top (180 deg) and then turn down for about 30 minutes to 150 deg.

8. Bread is ready when a wooden skewer can be inserted in the middle and comes out clean of unbaked dough. Turn out immediately– don't leave sitting in the tin or the bottom becomes soggy.

say so and I have a good reputation as a cook . . . We have a trolley, which is important here as I have no servants. I put everything in the kitchen on the trolley and wheel it in... On the buffet I have the candlesticks and the cups which you gave me for my birthday present.”

Above is a recipe for the caraway seed bread which Lizzie baked on the farm

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

each week. It was then, and is still today, always popular. Nostalgia and the aroma of bread baking lead me to bake it now and then. Lizzie stopped baking bread each week when she and my father had to lose weight. The loaf can be varied in size and use of grains according to the type of bread you want. If you want a heavier bread, use more stoneground wholemeal flour or rye flour in whatever combination you like. For me what makes the bread special is the use of large amounts of caraway seed which give the bread its distinctive flavour.

“In 2-3 weeks I intend to bottle about 50 jars of plums. I’m borrowing the machine. The plums are growing on the farm. I’m paying the lady in plums, for the borrowing of the machine. Funny, isn’t it? I planted dill to use with gherkins, but this year unfortunately I can only make enough for us.”

**27/6/1940**

*(letter to Frank’s sister Marianne and her husband Otto in America)*

*“Today we checked on how our sauerkraut is getting on. I tell you it’s just great! First we’ll try a small amount, then we’ll sell it. We want to do the same with pickled gherkins. By the way, can you get them in America? I am also interested to hear if you can get Hungarian salami and how much it costs. My mouth waters! Can you get rollmops? You can’t get these things here. I suppose because it’s too warm.*

*3/2/1941*

*“I’m very proud of my first lot of salted gherkins. They turned out well.*



**Lizzie, Frank and Claire in Hawaii, 1952.**

*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 20 jars of plums. As you can see I’m taking good care of our stomachs. I enjoy it and I’m proud when things come out well. Of course, I’ve also got plum jam . . . and three months later . . . The sweet and sour gherkins turned out quite well. The massergurken have already been eaten up and I still have about 11 jars of mustard gherkins. They keep well and we treat ourselves with them. I’m so pleased I’ll do some again,, hopefully soon. Slowly I’m making everything. I’m collecting recipes. Recently I made sweet and sour loin of beef. It says to use “stale” meat which is hard to get. I make brine quite often. I like to cook as we did at home, mainly because I can do the dishes so well. I always think of you, what you would say about it, when something turns out particularly well. I also bake bread all the time”*

*These letters were written during the war years – my parents’ early experiences in a new country.*

*I had not yet been born so I was not part of their lives then. One of the things I do remember when I was growing up, is the coffee afternoons, a legacy from their former lives. Each Saturday morning my mother would bake several cakes and in the afternoon, their friends would arrive for coffee and to eat the fruits of her labours. Unless she hid the cakes, my father, who was cursed with the family liking for sweet food, would yield to temptation and when my mother came to serve the baking she would find a wedge missing from her topsentorte or kugelbupf.*

## GLEICHGEWICHT TORTE

The name is German and means 'equal weight cake' with local variations and baked throughout Central and Eastern Europe. It is best made with fresh fruit. My mother-in-law used apricots or plums, my mother used cherries. My cousin, from the UK, told me she always bakes it at Rosh Hashonah, the end of the northern summer. Tart fruit seem to be best suited for it. A wonderful New Zealand variation is to use tamarillos. This is a recipe that can be varied according to the number of sharing it.

### **Ingredients:**

- \* Eggs (4 for an average size cake or to fill a swiss roll tin)
- \* Butter
- \* White sugar
- \* Flour

1. Weigh the eggs. Take note of total weight.
2. Separate the eggs and beat the whites.
3. Take the weight of the eggs and then the same weight of flour, butter and sugar.
4. Beat yolks, butter and sugar together.
5. Add beaten whites and sifted flour alternately until you have a cake dough. Turn into a swiss roll tin or equivalent.
6. Having de-stoned the fruit, set evenly and close together into the cake and bake on 150deg until the dough is cooked. If you have a lot of fruit this may take a while. Sometimes I turn off the oven and let it finish slowly.
7. Cut into slices. When cool, dust with icing sugar.

Best the day it is made. Serve with coffee or as a dessert. Cream, ice cream or crème fraiche are seductive optional extras.

**12/7/1940**

*"Today I tried your recipe for chocolate layer cake. I used butter instead of margarine as the margarine here is not like what we're used to and butter is easier to get. It turned out very runny and after cooking it for half an hour it was only as firm as a cheese omelette. I think something went wrong. Please send me the recipe in more detail. Actually I am really grateful for all the recipes as I bake quite often and we like the variety. I would very much like the recipe for the cream that you fill kremschnitten with. I really have only a few recipes here.*

*6/6/1940*

*"A few days ago I got some chives. I know where I can get some horseradish*

*and have a private source where I can get some dill. Besides this there is a Swiss here who makes wonderful sausages who supplies me once a week. His sausages are quite spicy. We eat quite a lot of cottage cheese which I make myself . . . So we have told you in every detail what makes us happy and the only thing missing is you. But this time will come soon, we are confident. Patience is the key. We are always with you in spirit and so I embrace you sincerely and remain . . .*

*Your Lizzie."*

Despite Lizzie's optimism, her dream was not to be realised. Marta shared the fate of about 60 other members of my close and extended family. She was deported from Bruenn to Theresienstadt (Terezin) Concentration Camp in Bohemia, on Transport U.759 on 28 January 1942 and from Theresienstadt to

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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Lubin (Maidanek) in Poland on Transport No.A1-196 on 23 April 1942. Lizzie never heard from her again.

Only three first cousins of Lizzie's family survived the war.

On the farm Lizzie suffered two miscarriages. Finally I was born in 1947. As a precious only child I was the focus of the undivided attention of both of my parents, but I believe I was particularly special to my mother. From time to time a rather irrational (to me) concern with my health and wellbeing surfaced, which I now realise is typical of the experiences of many others of the Second Generation. The horror and loss of the Holocaust were rarely discussed at home, although dead grandparents and an uncle were sometimes talked about. Although aware of the details I instinctively knew that it was painful for my parents to recall that time. Besides, they did not want to dwell on the past. They wanted to get on with the present and the future and were always grateful to New Zealand for taking them in.

So what does all of this mean to me, Claire, only child of Frank and Lizzie? For me, the death of so many of my family in the Holocaust meant that I grew up without siblings, grandparents or much of an extended family. I later discovered there were many more than the 60 early research revealed. There were few family stories for me to get to know my grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. There is no "rogues' gallery" of family photographs in our home. The photos have disappeared along with the people. This lack of a close family group led to feelings of isolation and "difference". I ferret around as a genealogist, searching out information, vignettes of the past.

The interwar Czechoslovakia of my parents' youth doesn't exist any more. The Czech Republic I now visit is a different place, changed by years of communism, its once vibrant Jewish culture largely relegated to memorial status in Museums and Galleries. I don't understand the language so it cannot be "my place". What does remain is the connection provided by my parents' letters and documents, the importance of food, traditions and values. My mother's

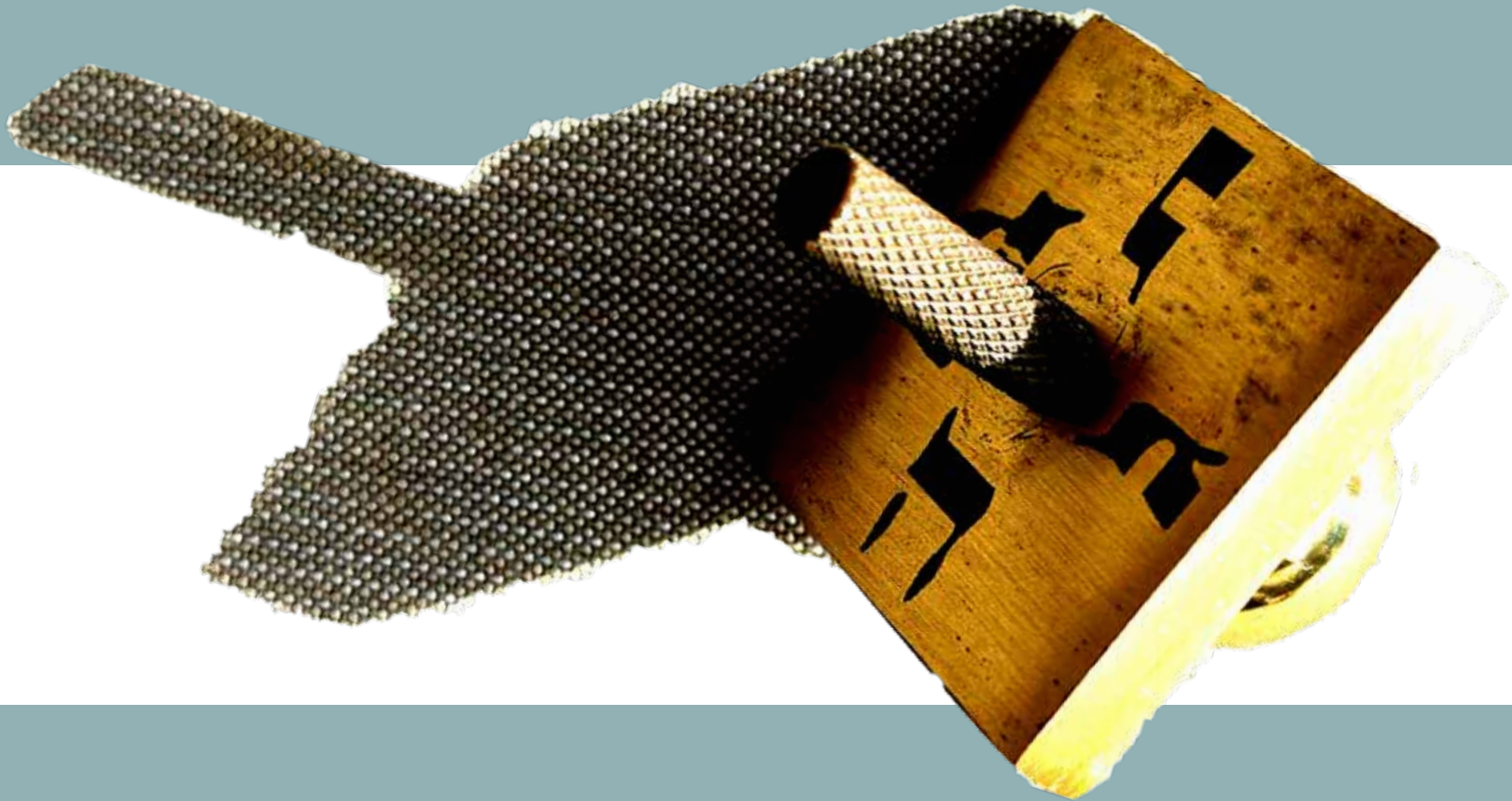
yearning to share her cooking successes and failures with her mother and for Marta's approval, speaks volumes to me. And my parents did eventually establish a food business dealing in meat, spices, continental sausages and small goods, importing gherkins and other pickles and even producing them in New Zealand for a time.

Although when I was younger I longed only for the Anzac biscuits my school friends introduced me to, my mother's earnest attempts with the recipes given to her by the mothers of my school friends never quite yielded the same results as theirs. They did not taste the same as those in the other lunch boxes at Kohimarama School. It is the nostalgia connected with the smells of Mum's own baking, memories of frankfurters for weekend lunches, salami in my school sandwiches and the cottage cheese hanging in muslin over the kitchen sink that evoke my childhood. I pour over my mother's handwritten cookbook, brown-stained, falling apart, with the translucent remains of a splodge of butter a memory on the page. I look at kugelhupf recipes, one from Tante Ilse, another from Tante Franci, yet another from Tante Paula and I can visualise them all sitting round over afternoon coffee, swapping recipes. These are my links with a past I never knew. ■

**• This story first appeared in *Mixed Blessings: New Zealand Children of Holocaust Survivors Remember*, edited by Deborah Knowles, 2003 Tandem Press.**







# Kindertransport - a safe haven in NZ



# Destination New Zealand



**K**INDERTRANSPORT was the unofficial name given to a rescue effort between 1938 and 1940 that saw approximately 10,000 children brought from Europe mainly to Great Britain.

Within this number, small groups were also sent to Sweden, Holland and Belgium and about 1400 found refuge in the United States.

Of the 10,000 children saved, about 7,500 were Jewish. The smaller number of non-Jewish children came from institutions such as orphanages.

## The Nuremberg Laws, 1935

When Adolf Hitler came to power in 1933 he began to put into practice his ideas of a superior Aryan race. At the party's annual rally in 1935 in Nuremberg he passed new laws that encapsulated these ideas, preventing any relationships between Jews and non Jews.

The laws excluded German Jews from Reich citizenship and discriminated in many more ways also. Others, such as gypsies, the disabled, homosexuals,

Slavic and mixed race people were also discriminated against.

Hitler's power grew through the 1930s, undergoing a radicalisation in 1938 that encouraged him to move against Austria on 12 March of that year. This "Anschluss" (annexation) continued a period of especially severe hatred against the Jews and the anti-Jewish laws in Germany were enforced in Austria too. On 9th November 1938, a night now commemorated as Kristallnacht (Night of the Broken Glass) SA and SS men pretending to be citizens, set fire to 1000 synagogues, smashed up 7,500 Jewish businesses, fatally assaulted 90 Jewish men and herded 30,000 Jews into concentration camps, pending ransom.

## Escape & emigration - but where to?

Desperation grew as Jews sought countries to immigrate to. At the Evian conference in July 1938 not one of the 32 countries attending agreed to take more than a small number of refugees. Pressure increased, to find ways of saving people and in particular, getting children out of Germany and Austria and other coun-

## Max and Annie Deckston

The Yad Vashem definition of a survivor is a person whose life was turned upside down by the Holocaust. Max and Annie Deckston had immigrated from Belarus to New Zealand in 1900. They had no family and decided to provide a home for some of their relatives' children in New Zealand as life was getting increasingly difficult in Europe. In 1935 they obtained visas for eight children, then brought a further 12 in 1937. The children mostly came from Bialystok in Poland. On 17 August 1943 the Germans deported 1200 children from Bialystok – ultimately gassed in Auschwitz – before they liquidated the ghetto. The Deckston orphans, although not part of the Kindertransport initiative, were certainly survivors of the Holocaust.

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tries that were under threat of invasion by Germany, as a matter of urgency. In Britain, there were a number of groups that ultimately worked together to make the Kindertransports a reality.

These groups included Jews, Quakers and other Christians of many denominations. The Movement for the Care of Children from Germany (later called the Refugee Children's Movement-RCM) set up ways of selecting, processing and transporting the children.

### Florence Nankivell

The first 'Kindertransport' was organised and masterminded by Florence Nankivell. The train left Berlin on 1 December 1938, and arrived in Harwich on 2 December with 196 children.

About half the kinder lived with foster families and the rest stayed in hostels, schools or on farms. Homes were visited and checked, however because of the haste and ad hoc nature of the project, children were not always matched to the most appropriate host families.

In the rush to finalise arrangements and find good foster homes, the outcome for the children was not always as was hoped for. The children ranged in age from the very young to teenagers and often infants were in the care of older siblings. They arrived bearing a tag around their necks which corresponded to a label on their luggage. A bond of £50 was to be paid for each child, pending their travel onward to other countries. As war was declared, this further travel did not eventuate as planned.



### Rescuing the children

Children were identified and grouped by list and issued with a travel date and departure information. The first train left from Berlin on 1 December 1938 and the first from Vienna, on 10 December of the same year. Trains passed from Germany into the Netherlands and the children travelled by ferry from the Hook of Holland to Harwich or Southampton, accompanied by a few volunteers who had to return to their homes after delivering the children to freedom. Three trainloads of Polish Jewish children were organised in February and August 1939.

Kindertransports also left from Prague in the final months before war was declared in September 1939. Although most of the children left from their homes by train travelling to main cities, then by train to the Hook of Holland, ship and train again,

some also went by plane and by boat. The last transport from Germany left on 1 September 1939 on the eve of war.

### Nicholas Winton

Nicholas Winton was an English stockbroker of Jewish background, although he was not a practising Jew. He was alarmed at the growing persecution of Jews in Austria and Germany and determined to bring out children from the countries under German domination and those likely to be invaded in the near future. In December 1938 Winton went to Prague and met organisers from the committee formed to help the refugees created by

Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland. In the name of the British Committee for Refugees from Czechoslovakia, he raised funds and organised eight transports from Prague in all, the last trainload leaving Prague on 2 August 1939. Today Winton's name is famous for having organised and overseen the rescue of 669 children from Prague. However, after the war his efforts were not publicised or acknowledged until 1988 when his wife found a scrapbook from 1939 with the children's photos and lists of names of those rescued. Nicholas Winton was made an honorary citizen of the city of Prague, later knighted by the Queen in 2003 and received many other accolades for his humanitarian work.



(l-r)  
*Eva Hayman,  
Nicholas Winton and  
Vera O'Brien.*

### During the war

In 1940 the British began detaining people from countries that were enemies of Britain in internment camps on the Isle of Man and in Canada and Australia and about 1,000 of the Kinder were interned. Some later joined the British Armed Forces and fought in the war. Some even lost their lives.

### Kinder who settled in New Zealand

After the war ended most of the rescued children never saw their parents again. They had been murdered in the Nazi death camps. Those few who were reunited with their families had been separated for the war years. The children had grown, many had even forgotten their mother tongue and parents were often traumatised by their experiences during the war. Reestablishing the pre-war family unit was almost impossible.

Most of the Kinder settled in Great Britain, Israel, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The common thread binding all the Kinder was their experiences during the six years of the war, having had their childhoods effectively stolen or truncated. It affected them for the rest of their lives.

Ten known Kinder came to New Zealand:

Ilse Brauer

Robert Fantl

Walter Freitag and Leonore Ball

Michael Goldschimdt

Liesl Green

Eva Hayman

Hans Herbert Simon Hirsch— later Herb Hirst

Vera O'Brien

Gerald Warner

Three others came to New Zealand initially but later moved to Sydney, Australia and the USA:

Eva Binder (Sydney)

Anita Chard (Sydney)

Ruth Hirsch (USA). ■

### Ilse Brauer (née Goldschmidt)

Ilse Brauer was born in Breslau, Silesia on 1 June 1927. At that time the city was in Germany, but today it is part of Poland. Her mother tongue was German. Her father had a wholesale business dealing in textiles. Though not a very observant family, they belonged to a synagogue and kept a kosher home.

After 1933 Jews were no longer allowed to go to Christian schools so Ilse was sent to the Jewish school. There were a large number of Jews in the city of several synagogues and even a Jewish hospital. The household boasted a maid who hid Ilse's father during Kristallnacht.

Nevertheless her father was taken to Buchenwald shortly after, although he returned a month later having suffered from the cold, beatings and sleeping rough. Then the family made efforts to leave Germany.

Ilse's brother Hans left on a Kindertransport in February 1939 and Ilse followed in June of that year. Their parents were lucky to get tickets to Chile, courtesy of a lawyer uncle. They left on the last boat to leave Genoa before war was declared on 3rd September 1939. Hans went to the Balfour Institution in Scotland. This was a home for Jewish children outside Edinburgh, donated by Lord Balfour. Once he left school, Hans got a job on a poultry farm.

The first family Ilse stayed with was a family of German Jewish immigrants. She was initially sent to a Catholic school where she said the nuns were kind and gentle. Unfortunately her stay with that family came to an abrupt end when the family was interned. Ilse spent most of the war years in a Jewish house in Leicester. Although appreciating what they had done for her, Ilse said



when interviewed for the Auckland Holocaust Oral History Project, that she had been abused. She was made to do housework and was treated like a servant. Attending school until 1942, she left to work in a hosiery factory where she learned to sew.

In 1946 Ilse was finally able to join her parents in Puerto Montt, Chile. She and Hans left by ship from Marseilles and Ilse remembers that they were in third class "removed", sleeping on bunks in the luggage hold that was infested with rats. They finally landed in Buenos Aires, Argentina where they were stuck for five days. The deep snow on the Andes held them up because the train could not pass. When they finally

made the trip to Santiago many of the passengers were sick because of the altitude and had to be given oxygen. At last in Santiago they met their father who had come to welcome them and together they made the 27 hour train trip to Puerto Montt.

Ilse began to learn Spanish, worked in her parents' shop and settled in. In 1949 she met her future husband and they were married in 1950. Ilse and Gunter had three children and in between she worked in the shop her parents-in-law owned. Life was idyllic until 1960 when there was an earthquake with its epicentre in Puerto Montt. In the early 1970s Salvador Allende came to power and everyone realised that his policies would make business difficult. The political situation deteriorated and the Brauers began to consider leaving. They arrived on 11th February 1973 with their two younger children and made Auckland, New Zealand their new home. ■

## Robert (Bob) Fantl

A transport from Prague took Robert (Bob) Fantl, age 15, to freedom at the end of June 1939. He was born in Reichenberg/Liberec, Czechoslovakia and came from a large extended family. His family (mother Pola Fantl/Bornstein, sister Lidia (Fantl/Hess) and he himself) were organising to immigrate to New Zealand when a relative alerted his mother to Nicholas Winton's Kindertransports.

Hurriedly Robert's mother arranged for him to leave, promising to meet up in England for his birthday 29 August 1939. In an interview with the *Dominion Post*, later in life, Bob recalled how terrified he had been on that journey and how grateful he later was to (Sir) Nicholas Winton, whose rescuing of 669 mostly Jewish children, is described in his biography, 'If it's not impossible'. Bob was lucky to be on the train, since the age limit was 15 and he had already passed his 15th birthday. He stayed in camps in England until he was able to come to New Zealand in 1940 and was reunited with his mother and sister. Most of the extended family died as victims of the Nazis, about 140 people.

In New Zealand, he became a pilot in the Royal New Zealand Air Force in the Pacific "to get back at the Nazis". He married Claire Wolff, daughter of German Jewish refugees from Hamburg, in 1949 and settled in Wellington, having two children – Judi and Peter. Tragedy struck when Judi died in her early 20s and again when Peter died at age 48 in 2001.



Although Bob's schooling finished abruptly when he was 13, he studied and qualified as an architect, joining the firm of Plischke Fantl, then becoming a partner and later forming his own practice. He became a leading modernist Bauhaus architect and was as egalitarian, modest and unpretentious in his architecture as he was in his life, designing affordable houses for everyday people. His architectural mark can be viewed throughout New Zealand in such landmarks as Massey House on Lambton Quay, a Catholic Church in Tāihape, the Sutch-Smith house in Brooklyn and the heritage listed (Henry) Lang House in Karori, Wellington. The best example of his architecture was his own house at 117 Wilton Rd, Wellington.

Bob was known as a leading environmentalist, co-founding COENCO, (later known as ECO) a nationwide coalition of over 100 environmental groups where he guided the organisation through key environmental changes for over 20 years. He fought against the motorway destruction of the Bolton St Settlers Cemetery in Wellington and was active in preserving Wellington's Otari/Wilton Bush from destruction, ultimately preventing via the courts, a major road cutting through Wilton Bush and saving an 800 year old rimu tree in the process. Bob was Jewish, though not a practising orthodox Jew. His style was to shun the limelight, keeping a low profile despite his considerable achievements. He is survived by two grandchildren, his wife having predeceased him many years before. ■

### Walter Freitag and Leonore Ball (née Freitag)

**W**ALTER and Leonore Freitag were born in Königsberg, East Prussia (now Kaliningrad, Russia), Walter in 1927 and Leonore (Lore) in 1933. Their father, Hans Freitag, was a lawyer. His wife, Trude, was originally from Chemnitz, Saxony. After Kristallnacht the Freitag parents increased their efforts to immigrate and join Trude's sister and brother-in-law, Hilde and Hans Frohlich, in New Zealand. Their application was not successful and they decided to send Walter and Leonore to England by Kindertransport.

Lore left first on 14 May 1939. She was told that Walter would follow her as soon as a home could be found for him, and their parents would follow later. Her mother accompanied Lore by train from Königsberg to Berlin, a journey of seven to eight hours. In Berlin she joined the Kindertransport. The journey took her by train to Holland then by ship to Dover, England. Yet another train took them to London where Lore was greeted by a distant cousin, 'Uncle David'. Their meeting was long enough only for a cup of British Railways tea, before another train trip, to her final destination, Newcastle on Tyne. Lore was placed in a hostel for Jewish girls at 55 Percy Park, Tynemouth, which had been established as a temporary home for Jewish refugees. At the



time Lore arrived there were 20-24 girls aged between four and 18 in the care of two matrons. In 1940 the hostel was evacuated to Windermere in the Lake District, where staff and children remained until the end of the war. Lore spent a total of seven years in this hostel. In 1989 she attended a hostel reunion, prompting her a few years later to document her memories of this time.

Walter, aged 10, travelled by train from Königsberg to Berlin with his father in July 1939. From Berlin, he went via Holland also to Newcastle on Tyne. In Newcastle, Walter was fostered by a working class family with three teenage sons. Six weeks later they were evacuated to a large privately-owned estate near Kirkby Lonsdale, some 20 miles from Windermere. When the other children returned home, Walter remained in the care of the estate's owner, who funded his attendance at a local grammar school. Lore visited him from time to time during school holidays.

After completing his school certificate in 1945, Walter gained employment as an assistant industrial chemist in Newcastle.

**\* Continued on the next page**

## Liesl Green (née Simon)

LIESL GREEN was born into a well-established Jewish family in Hamburg on 23 November 1925. She lived with her brother Eric (born 7 February 1923), mother Wally (nee Rosenbaum) and father Hans, at 143 Mittelweg nearby the Alster River.

At that time, Hans was a director of one of Germany's largest life insurance companies, a position he held until he died from appendicitis in 1936. They lived a Reform Jewish life, attending their Temple which stood alongside their local police station.

There was a large extended family and Liesl recalled the large numbers attending at her maternal grandmother's home for Jewish festivals. Home life was very strict with the children being brought up by a governess.

In the early 1930s Hans talked about the family emigrating to USA for fear

that Germany might become a Communist state. But they remained living in Hamburg. In 1936, despite the growing anti-Jewish sentiment he again had his directorship renewed. Until he died he still held to some optimism about Germany rejecting Hitler. Now, without a father, still living at home with her mother and brother Eric, Liesl learned that if you saw or heard a band marching towards you, it was time to go in the opposite direction. She continued her schooling at a Jewish school close to home. About 50% of the school pupils were non-Jewish.

Kristallnacht saw the Temple by the police station burnt to the ground. Only two siddurim (prayer books) survived. One of those found amongst the embers had belonged to Wally's mother. It survives to this day, now safely in New Zealand. The day after Kristallnacht, Liesl stood behind a curtain and watched

**\* Continued on the next page**

### Freitag continued

During the first year or two of the war the children received Red Cross letters of 24 words each until finally the last letter arrived from Königsberg in mid 1942. Records at Yad Vashem show that Hans and Trude were deported first to Theresienstadt, then to Auschwitz. Neither they, nor the children's paternal grandparents survived.

After the war the children were sent to their uncle and aunt, the Frohlichs, in New Zealand. Walter and Lore arrived in Wellington on 6 December 1946. Hans and Hilde Frohlich had arrived in Masterton, New Zealand, from Chemnitz in 1938. A dentist by profession, Hans Frohlich had set up a practice in Masterton and initially Walter and Lore went to live with them. Eventually Walter moved to Wellington to start work as a laboratory chemistry technician and part-time study for a science degree. In 1947 he gained NZ citizenship. In

1952 Walter married the daughter of refugees from Chemnitz who had settled in Christchurch.

For most of his working life he was chief chemist and technical manager of BP New Zealand. He lived his adult life in the Hutt Valley, moving to Turangi in 2010 where he died in 2014.

Lore attended Wairarapa College, gaining School Certificate in 1949. She then worked as a governess on a farm for a year before starting Training College in Wellington in 1951. Lore travelled widely, initially working in speech therapy and teaching roles in Blenheim and Wellington then in the US and Europe, before settling in New York for nearly 20 years. She returned to NZ in 1985, where she met and married Graeme Ball, another former pupil of Wairarapa College. She died in 1994. ■

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

### Green continued

her great uncle being taken from his house by the Gestapo. By late 1938 it was clear to Wally that she and the children must somehow get out of Germany.

Liesl was put forward to go on a Kindertransport which left from the Bahnhof (station) soon after her 13th birthday. As with all of the children she was only allowed to take what she could carry, a small suitcase— which held practical items and a blanket which belonged to her grandfather strapped to the outside of the case. The train arrived at Calais and from there she was put on a ship to England and placed in a children's camp awaiting family allocation. Dinah and Mossey Davis took her in to their home on Knights Road, Hackney, London where she lived with their children Betty and Bernard.

Later, Wally and Eric also got to England and were taken in by a Quaker lady, Miss Seebohn. When the bombing of London started and children were moved to the country Miss Seebohn also took in Liesl and so for a brief while the family was reunited. *Liesl Simon, aged approximately 18.* In 1940 Wally, together with Eric sailed for New Zealand where Wally married Walter



Baer and they settled in Wellington.

It was not until later in 1941 that Liesl boarded the SS Akaroa which sailed out of Newcastle to New Zealand. She watched as two days out, they sailed through a convoy of sinking ships and people drowning all about them. When the ship berthed in Auckland Liesl was met by Rabbi Astor who, having taken her home for a meal then saw her on the train to Wellington. Her mother and Walter were there to greet her on the platform and took her to their small home in Northland, Wellington.

Liesl became the first Jewish refugee to be accepted into Teachers' Training College, and at age 20 met and married Israel (Issie) Green on 21st March 1946. They lived most of their lives in Lower Hutt, and had two children, Valerie and Phillip.

Liesl left teaching, and became office manager for her brother Eric and his company, Simon Metal Products Ltd. She graduated with a commerce degree from Victoria University, became a real estate agent and in later life taught English as a second language to new immigrants and was doing that until she died in Auckland on 11 May 1999. Issie had died on 23 October 1997. ■

## Ernst Michael Goldschmidt

**F**RANKFURT-AM-MAIN, Germany, was the hometown of Ernest Michael Goldschmidt, known as Michael Goldschmidt. He was born there on 5 December 1936. In November 1938 when he was almost two years old, his mother Thea had to leave him in a home run by the Jewish Womens' League (Heim Isenburg) while she went to search for her parents. They had been ordered to leave Germany as they had been deemed Polish citizens by the National Socialist government and had been ordered to return to Poland. The Poles refused them entrance and the family had lost touch with them.

During Kristallnacht, on 9th November 1938 the main building of the Heim Isenburg was set on fire and the children watched from the yard in their night clothes. This was traumatic for all of them, even the younger ones like Michael.

Michael's father was arrested and deported to Buchenwald concentration camp and when he returned a month later it was clear he had suffered badly. Michael lived with his mother at the Heim Isenburg until the end of May 1939 and in June 1939 he was sent on a Kindertransport with his older sister.

On arrival in England on 7 June, brother and sister were taken to separate families near Marple. Michael went to a Methodist family and his sister Eva was cared for by Quakers. Some time later both parents escaped separately and Michael was taken back by his mother who was employed as a housekeeper on



a farm. His father Walter, was interned as an enemy alien and sent to a prison camp in Australia, on the SS Dunera. The ship is famous for the appalling, overcrowded conditions on board; the men were treated very badly, and there were Nazi prisoners of war also on the ship. Walter returned to England in 1943 when the family was at last reunited after the British government realised it had made a dreadful mistake.

Michael's grandfather Eduard Jammer was deported to Buchenwald where he died in 1941, however his grandmother Jenny survived, living temporarily with the Goldschmidt family in England, then spending the final years of her life in Australia.

Michael completed his education in England and trained in agriculture at the Reaseneath Agricultural College at Nantwich, Cheshire. He came to New Zealand where his aunt and her family were living on 29 April 1957, arriving in Wellington. Michael's aunt and uncle were living in Dunedin and kept him

connected to the Jewish community there whenever he came to the city. After years spent working on farms, he eventually lived in Christchurch and Rangiora, working for the Department of Agriculture and teaching agricultural students. Michael married in 1968 and had two sons. In later life he took a "retirement" job through Lincoln University as site co-ordinator for visitors from overseas who came to New Zealand to learn about agriculture. ■

### Eva Hayman (née Diamant)

**E**va Diamant was born in Prague on 1 January 1924 into a warm and loving family like most of the Kinder, and lived in the town of Celakovice. Czech was the language of the household, and Czech patriotism was emphasised from an early age, from both school and home.

Eva had one younger sister, Vera, and was very close to her parents. Her father had a business as a wine merchant and her mother worked with him. The family was not religiously observant and there were few other Jews living in the small town near Prague.

On 29 June 1939, at the age of 15, Eva left Prague on a Kindertransport, together with her sister Vera who was 11 years old. Eva felt a responsibility for Vera, throughout her life.

Eva was sent to a girls' boarding school in England where she was under the care of the principal, and later adopted by the family of a school friend, the Allners. Although everyone concerned was kind and tried hard to help her settle into a different life, Eva poured her lonely, anguished heart out into her diary. The diary was the answer to the intense culture shock and powerlessness she felt. She worried constantly about her parents and particularly about Vera for whom she felt a heavy responsibility as the older sister. Her diaries were published in 1992 as "By the Moon and the Stars". She arrived at the title by referring back to her father's parting remark to her "If we can't communicate by letter we will send our love by the moon and the stars".

After leaving school, Eva decided to choose a career that would enable her



to help others. She studied nursing in Poole, Dorset from 1941.

Eva's father died on a hunger march towards the end of the war and her mother died in May 1945 in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp.

In Prague after the war, Eva felt she could no longer live there. She returned to London and married a doctor, Michael Hayman. They immigrated to New Zealand with their two young children in September 1957. In later years Eva studied at Auckland University, achieving an MA with honours in education. She lived the remainder of her life in Auckland, making occasional trips to England and the Czech Republic.

Eva took part in Kindertransport reunions in England and was even featured in a book *Into the Arms of Strangers* and a documentary film of the same name in 2000. She spoke willingly to school and other groups about her life.

Vera was taken in by a loving Christian family, the Rainfords, who lived in Liverpool. Apparently she was chosen by their daughter who had selected Vera from photographs of six girls on the basis that she liked Vera's smile. Some time later Vera managed to attend a Czech boarding school in Shropshire where she was happy to be in the company of other Czech children, many of them Jewish, and to return to the Rainfords for holidays. At the end of the war the girls heard that their mother had survived Bergen-Belsen, only to find subsequently that she had died there of typhus. Eva had the truly terrible job

**\* Continued on the next page**

## Vera O'Brien (née Harth)

On the same transport as Eva Hayman and her sister Vera and Bob Fantl, was another young girl by the name of Vera Harth from Vienna. She was born on 7 February 1929. The family had both a cook and a personal governess for Vera, who was an only child. For some time Vera attended a Jewish school, however eventually she had to leave because of the growing antisemitism. Her father owned a pharmacy that was defaced during Kristallnacht with the word “Jude” (Jew) scrawled across the front. She was eight years old when Kristallnacht disrupted her life. Her family went into hiding, first living away from the spotlight at her grandmother’s secluded house in Czechoslovakia, then going from place to place and eating in soup kitchens as their flow of money and food ran out.

Vera was put on a Kindertransport on 30 June 1939 at aged 10 and was taken in by a family in Sheffield, Yorkshire, that was wholly unsuitable for her. They were not Jewish, were working class and totally different from the household she had come from. When she left Vienna, her father gave her a diary with a lock and like Eva, she poured her heart into it.



When she arrived in England Vera knew no English although she was fluent in French, German and Czech. In an interview for the Holocaust Oral History Project in Auckland, 2001 she reported that she had been verbally abused by her foster mother for years, referred to as “Jewish bitch” ordered to do housework and so on. Vera said that she did not turn out to be the malleable, feminine little girl her foster family had wanted and she found the environment harsh and unwelcoming.

Vera left school at 14 as the foster family would not pay for any further education and as soon as she could she ran away from the household and joined the army at 17. Some months later she met and married her Catholic husband John and became a Catholic herself. They arrived in New Zealand on 5th November 1953 and had six children, living at Waiouru, as her husband John had joined the NZ Army, then coming to Papakura near Auckland in 1968. Vera’s parents were killed in Auschwitz Concentration Camp in 1941. The Sydney Jewish Museum facilitated the publishing of her autobiography called “Journey to Life.” ■

### Hayman continued

of writing to Vera with the sad news. Vera also returned to Prague for some years after the war but escaped to England when the Communist government took over in Czechoslovakia. She married and lived in England.

She also kept a diary through the war years and published a book *Pearls of Childhood* in 1988.

Eva and Vera had two boy cousins who were to leave on a Kindertransport from Prague on 1 September. Homes had been found for them, but unfortunately the train was not able to leave and the boys were murdered in Bergen-Belsen. Hitler had invaded Poland and all borders were closed. ■

## Gerald Warner

**G**ERALD WARNER, previously Gerhard Wachsner, was born in Charlottenburg, Berlin, Germany on 29 September 1924. His father was a businessman dealing in buttons who had been a soldier in the German Army during the First World War. Although awarded the Iron Cross 2nd class, this was later taken from him by the Nazi Regime.

Gerhard's grandparents had come to Berlin from what was then Prussia (on his mother's side) and Upper Silesia (on his father's side). The family was not religiously observant, however Gerhard had a bar mitzvah and the study he did in preparation for this influenced him for a time. Young Gerhard attended a state primary school, followed by 18 months at the Kaiser Friedrich Gymnasium (High School) and in 1935 his parents moved him to a Jewish school due to the increasingly anti-Semitic atmosphere in Berlin and in particular at the Gymnasium.

Gerhard and his sister both belonged to a Zionist group in Berlin. He attended a hachshara (agricultural training camp) in Berlin, intending to go to Palestine, however this didn't eventuate and Gerhard left Berlin on a Kindertransport for Scotland on 1st August 1939. His sister, Anneliese, eventually married and went to Palestine early in 1939. After Kristallnacht, business came to a standstill for Gerhard's father and Gerhard and his brother Gunter became the main breadwinners - Gunter earning his wages as an apprentice and Gerhard by doing delivery jobs on his bicycle.

Gunter was the first to leave Berlin. He accepted a job as a carpenter in Wellington, New Zealand where he landed as an 18 year old without any con-



nections at all. Gerhard, still under 15, qualified to leave on a Kindertransport. He was one of only three children on his transport who went to Glasgow; the others went to London. Gerald, as he became in Scotland, was to have gone to school and live in a hostel with other boys, however because war was declared, he was evacuated to a village called Glencarse, between Perth and Dundee. There he was allocated to a farming family with three other boys. As soon as he could, he made his way back to Glasgow and after taking odd jobs he accepted an apprenticeship as a piano tuner.

Before completing this training, being 18, he joined the army. While serving in the British army he changed his name to Gerald Walker. He was stationed in Germany from April 1945 for two years and while there, found out

through international aid agencies, that his parents and many of their relatives had not survived the war. His skills as an interpreter were very useful, especially when translating in the law courts for the War Crimes Tribunal.

In England after the war Gerald sat some University Entrance exams and on 25 October 1948 he arrived in New Zealand where he completed his degree in languages— initially in French and English – then a Masters degree in English Literature. At this stage he also took a name that aligned more closely with his brother Gunter's and became Gerald Alfred Warner. He eventually became Head of Languages in two Auckland secondary schools – Papakura and Glendowie. He said he had very much enjoyed teaching. Gerald married three times and had three children and one step daughter. He died in Whangarei on 4 July 2007 and Gunter died in Auckland on 3 January 2017. ■

## Eva Binder (née Grätzer) and Anita Chard (née Grätzer)

**S**ISTERS Eva and Anita Grätzer grew up in comfortable surroundings, with families of both parents close by. Their father Viteslav, (aka Siegfried aka Friedl), ran several businesses with his father Leopold and his brother Otto, in the locale of Olomouc (German, Olmütz), Moravia in the newly formed republic of Czechoslovakia. Principal among these businesses was a considerable paper products manufacturing operation in Litovel, nearby. The Grätzer family lived in a fashionable building, each on different levels, which also included the business office. It was a building with baroque style features that later, after passing through Nazi and into Communist hands became small apartments for 16 or 18 tenants who were allocated housing by the City/State. Today, after so many years of total neglect, the earlier charms of the building are still evident.

With Hitler invading Czechoslovakia in March 1939, at the ages of 13 and 8, respectively, Eva and Anita, were farewelled in Prague by their parents, Herta and Friedl. They had managed to obtain permission for the girls to be taken to London—on the fourth such Kindertransport.

The promise was that their parents would soon join them.

Eva was charged with caring for her younger sister, a responsibility that burdened her throughout their lives.

The two sisters were always close. They were initially placed in a boarding school south of London that they both hated. After a few months, their uncle and aunt and their two children who had been able to reach London took the



girls in and for several years became “their family”.

For the first two to three years there was very brief and spasmodic communication with their parents. It was in 1944 and 1945 that the truth of their fate became known. In 1942, Herta and Friedl, along with grandparents, other aunts and extended family from Olomouc were transported to Theresienstadt and shortly thereafter to Baranovice where they were murdered.

A small number of their immediate Grätzer family managed to escape or evade the Nazis and made their homes in the UK and the US. Some of their mother’s family, including those who cared for Eva and Anita, also managed to eventually become established in the UK and the US – and in New Zealand.

Eva Grätzer learned millinery in London and at 19 married Kurt Weinstein, who had migrated from Stuttgart. In England, Kurt became Ken; he engaged in agricultural machinery. Their son Eric was born in 1947 and in 1952 they migrated to New Zealand, where members of Eva’s family had already settled. For many years Eva ran a ladies’ millinery store in Auckland, supplying much of the North Island. But changing fashions put an end to that. Later, Eva pursued a cosmetics career with a leading brand in Auckland and then continued in Sydney from the late 1960s.

In Sydney she ran several coffee bars over a number of years and later became manager for a Sydney jewellery manufacturer – in fact, for 20+ years

**\* Continued on the next page**

## Hans Herbert Simon Hirsch (later Herb Hirst)

**H**ans was born on 14 March 1929 in Königsberg East. He had an older brother Ernest and a younger sister Ruth. Their father Erich Hirsch had a department store in Neidenburg, also East Prussia. His mother Helene had three sisters, Beppa, Grete and Jenny.

The Hirsch household was firmly middle class, not religiously observant. After 1933 when Hitler came to power East Prussia became a Nazi stronghold and life for Jews became increasingly difficult. The family moved to Berlin. Hans and Ruth went to a Hebrew school, as by that time Jews were banished from any but Jewish schools. Kristallnacht in 1938 saw the family's store vandalised and Hans's father Erich was taken to Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp.

On 14 March 1939 Hans, then aged 10, Ernest aged almost 14 and Ruth aged seven left on a kindertransport and that was the last time they saw



their parents. Ernest records “I must confess for me it was more of an adventure and leaving my parents, we thought was a temporary thing.”

The last memory he has is of his mother at the railway station in Berlin, hiding behind a pillar with tears running down her face as she waved goodbye. This is an echo of Gerald Warner's memory of his mother also. He too left from Berlin. While Ernest spoke some English, neither Hans nor Ruth spoke English.

Arthur Ehrlich, an uncle by marriage had sponsored the children to come to Scotland and arranged a Jewish foster family for each child. Hans and Ruth were living with foster families who were brothers and they formed close relationships with their foster siblings and cousins. The children were well looked after. They remember being taken to buy clothes like the local children had, and wellington boots.

*\* Continued on the next page*

### Binder & Chard continued

until 2008 when she retired. In Sydney she had married Alan Binder, also from Europe, in 1977, however sadly he died shortly after the wedding.

Ken changed his name from Weinstein to Winton by Deed Poll in 1948. He remained in Auckland, where he died in 2002. Ken's parents were transported to Theresienstadt and murdered at Treblinka.

Anita's desire to be with Eva drew her to New Zealand in 1955 and in 1959 she made the move to Sydney where, soon after arriving, she married Jack Chard (known in Europe as Icik Chajmovic). They created a family with two children, Deborah and Gary, and established a lifelong joint enterprise in restaurants and coffee lounges. ■

In September 1939, two days before war was declared, grandfather Erich left Berlin and arrived in Scotland, however he was classed as an “Enemy Alien” and interned on the Isle of Man.

Mother Helene and her sister Jenny remained in Berlin to settle family affairs and between 1939 and 1942 many affectionate letters arrived for Erich and the children. They were full of news and questions: are the children playing the piano, skating, wearing the clothes she sent and please, please could they write more often. She was desperate for a visa that never came for any country she could get to. After 1942 no more letters arrived. Helene died in the Litzmannstadt ghetto, probably in 1943. After his release from internment Erich bought a small house but struggled with poor mental and physical health, dying in a care home in 1953, aged 63.

Meanwhile, Hans’s aunt Grete Hirsch sailed from the south of France and arrived in New Zealand in 1939. She had a domestic visa and worked as a cook for Sir Ernest David, mayor of Auckland. Her husband Ernst Ehrlich wasn’t able to join her in New Zealand until 1948.

By 1950 Hans and Ruth had finished school and were finding life in post-war Britain challenging. Grete and Ernst, having no children, offered to have

Ruth live with them in NZ where she could attend Auckland University. Hans followed soon after, studying at Teachers Training College.

He anglicised his name to Herb Hirst and joined the army during this time. Becoming a captain in the Army, serving in Korea he was the first German born officer in the NZ Army since von Tempsky.

Travelling the world after the war he found a wife, Iona, in Scotland and they were married by her father, a Presbyterian minister. In 1960 Herb brought his family back to New Zealand, resolving to settle here. Throughout his life he was adventurous and sporty, clever and kind and he kept in close contact with his brother Ernest and sister Ruth all his life. He was a popular man who made a number of career changes and died suddenly in 1990 aged only 60. He was survived by his brother Ernest in Scotland and his sister Ruth in the United States as well as daughter Jenny and two grandchildren Simon and Zoe.

After completing her BA at the University of Auckland Ruth won a scholarship to do a post-graduate degree in social work at Brown University in the US. For many years she worked for the Jewish Association for Services-Aged in New York. She was an accomplished musician. Ernest has been involved with Holocaust education in Britain for the past 20 years. ■

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\* Information on Eva Binder and her sister Anita Chard was contributed by Eva’s son Eric.

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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- \* Information on Herb Hirst was submitted by his daughter Jenny Hirst.







# Kitchener Camp UK



*A view of the Kitchener camp in its early days at the end of World War One.*

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# Kitchener Camp UK



THE story of the Kitchener Camp Rescue is not well known but it happened concurrently with the Kindertransports and saved nearly 4,000 German and Austrian men in 1939. Many of those men had been imprisoned in Nazi concentration camps—mainly Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald. In the main they had been released on condition they left the country and until that time they had to report weekly to a police station. For those with means they could transfer money to England to prove they could support themselves and their families. But there were many who could not.

The 80th anniversary of the setting up of the Kitchener rescue was recognised in 2019 and a number of articles and interviews appeared around a reunion in September of that year, as well as the mounting of an exhibition at the Jewish Museum in London.

The Wiener Holocaust Library has been collecting information from descendants for some time and the descendants of the men rescued have themselves been gathering photographs, stories and general information so we may hear more about it in the future.

## Background

Revisiting the history of Europe in general, and Germany in particular, in the 1930s . . . the screws were tightened on Jewish and other groups over a six year

period. In the pre Hitler days the tax on members of the Jewish community was approximately 11% of their income tax— in 1933 it rose to 20 and 30%. In some communities it was even higher.

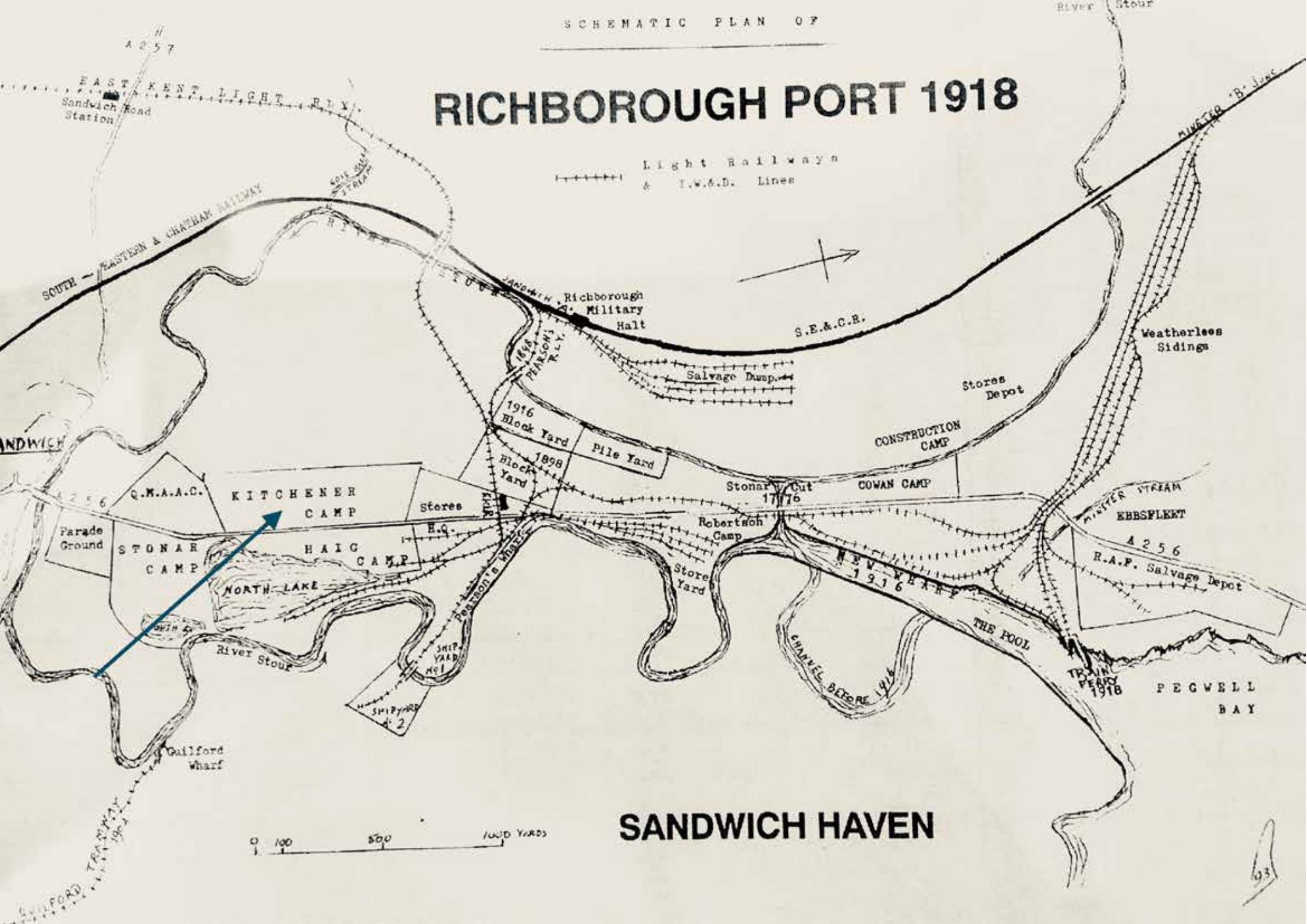
On 1 May 1935 Jehovah's Witness organisations were banned. By 1945, 1400 of them had died in concentration camps. On 28 June homosexuality was banned and about 50,000 men were imprisoned. Some were released if they agreed to being castrated. By the end of the war 15,000 homosexuals had been interned in concentration camps. Later that year the infamous Nuremberg Race Laws were enacted and its definition of a Jew adopted — anyone with three out of four grandparents Jewish, even if they had converted.

On 12 July 1936 Sachsenhausen was opened as the main concentration camp for the Berlin area. Around 6,000 Jewish men were imprisoned there in November 1938. Buchenwald concentration camp was opened 15 July 1937.

The Anschluss 11 March 1938 brought German troops to Austria and Austria became part of the Greater German Reich. By 31 May 1938 the situation of Viennese Jews is reported as desperate. Leaders of the Jewish community were under house arrest or prison, all Jewish institutions had been closed except soup kitchens which reportedly were feeding 10,000 people, funded by money via the Council for German Jewry (die Reichsvertretung der Deutschen Juden).

The Council for German Jewry was an umbrella organisation of all the political and religious groups of Jews living in Germany and was founded in 1933.

# RICHBOROUGH PORT 1918



## SANDWICH HAVEN

The organisation co-ordinated self-help activities during the Nazi era. As well as providing legal help they organised shelter and food and clothing for those who needed it. They guaranteed throughout the 1930s that refugees from Nazi oppression would not become a burden on the public finances, and they undertook to raise the funds required to meet all costs and housing needs. From 1939 it was the only organisation for German Jews to turn to and its structure and purpose was constantly being changed.

At this stage Nazi policy was still to force Jews to leave the country and one way of forcing this was to confiscate Jewish businesses and other property. On 1 January 1939 Jewish men and women had to add the names Israel and Sara to their own names and all German Jews had to carry Identity cards to state they were Jews. By Autumn 1938 all Jewish passports are stamped with the letter “J”.

On 29 September 1938, under the Munich Agreement, the Sudetenland is ceded to Germany in exchange for a promise of peace. The Council for German Jewry reports that the establishment of refugee camps in Britain is most urgent.

## A change in public opinion in Britain

Kristallnacht had generated, especially in Britain, some sympathy for the plight of the Jews caught in Germany, and eventually the Central British Fund for German Jewry persuaded the British government to allow two rescue efforts – the first was the Kindertransport and the second was the Kitchener camp rescue. The original intention was that neither group was to make Britain their home. In fact the two operations ran parallel.

By the end of 1938 the Lord Baldwin Fund was formed for Refugees, in response to an appeal and within three months £461,658 had been collected. (Equivalent to £13.2 million in 2020). The appeal attracted public support. For instance 10% of the sale of all cinema and theatre tickets were donated

to the appeal. In 1939 there were about 30,000 German Jewish refugees living in Britain but they had all been given permission to enter as they could show that they would make no call on the British government. By the end of 1938 the British government was prepared to accept the sponsorship of the Fund on a collective basis which meant Jews with fewer resources would be able to enter Britain, if only on a temporary basis. The Fund would take responsibility for them.

## The founders

A derelict site, previously an army camp outside the medieval town of Sandwich, was taken over by the Central British Fund for German Jewry (CBF) early in 1939 to rescue Jewish men who were threatened in Germany and Austria. From February 1939 and the outbreak of war, just under 4,000 adult male Jews were put on trains from Berlin and Vienna. They travelled via Ostend and Dover to Sandwich in East Kent where the Central British Fund for German Jewry had rented one of seven World War 1 camps, close to Sandwich. They were known collectively as Richborough Transit Camp.

There were conditions attached : the men had to be between the ages of 18 and 40 and have a definite prospect of emigration from Britain.

The first refugees arrived in February of 1939 and the influx concluded at the outbreak of war in September. On 2 December 1938 the first Kindertransport arrived in Britain.

The decision as to which people could be selected for the camps was to be made by the Reichsvertretung in Germany and by the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in Austria.

## Who was involved?

Norman Bentwich worked for the Central British Fund for German Jewry in London. During World War 1 he had been awarded a military cross and

# The forgotten haven: Kent camp that saved 4,000 German Jews

Descendants of men who fled the Nazis will unveil a plaque in their honour on the war's 80th anniversary.  
By *Harriet Sherwood*

It is a near-forgotten chapter in 20th-century history; the rescue of thousands of Jewish men from the Nazis, brought to a camp on the outskirts of the medieval town of Sandwich in Kent as darkness fell across Europe.

The Kitchener Camp rescue began in February 1939, and by the time war broke out seven months later about 4,000 men – mainly German and Austrian Jews – had arrived by train and boat. Although the story of

the 10,000 Jewish children brought to the UK on the Kindertransport is well known, the Kitchener Camp has received much less attention.

"It's not even well known in [UK] Jewish communities," said Clare Weissenberg, who has curated an exhibition that opens at the Jewish Museum in London on 1 September.

On 2 September, a blue plaque will be unveiled in Sandwich in the presence of descendants of the rescued men, as well as the son and daughter of two Jewish philanthropist brothers who ran the camp.

Among those present will be Paul Secher, whose father, Otto, arrived in May 1939.

"My father didn't talk about it very much," said Secher. "I sensed it was a painful subject for him. He managed to escape but his parents and a

sister didn't. The burden must have been immense."

After the Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938, when Jews and their property were violently attacked, about 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and taken to Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Buchenwald concentration camps.

The Central British Fund (CBF), a Jewish aid organisation in the UK now known as World Jewish Relief, persuaded the British government to admit some refugees. Adult men were brought to the UK on condition they would not be granted UK citizenship, they must not work, and they must emigrate onwards to the US, Australia and elsewhere.

The CBF organised transport



*Some rescued men, above, at Kitchener Camp near Sandwich, Kent, in 1939; refugee musicians, right, gave concerts for the locals. Courtesy of Werner Weissenberg and Franz Schanzer families*

OBE and had been the first Attorney General to Mandate Palestine. A lifelong Zionist, he was a professor of International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and wrote almost 30 books. He had worked for many years on behalf of Jewish refugees desperate to leave Germany and Austria as well. Bentwich was Hon. Director of Emigration and Training of the Fund

from 1935 and had been in Germany and Austria liaising with the German Jewish agencies. He was a deputy Commissioner at the League of Nations with responsibility for Refugees.

Much had to be done in a short space of time. Ernest Joseph, an architect

on the Fund Executive remembered the disused World War 1 camp outside Sandwich where he had designed the original kitchen. (Richborough site) Joseph designed many synagogues and had also been awarded an OBE. He also had an interest in the Jewish Lads' Brigade— a popular organisation to teach discipline and British values to Jewish working class boys. Their secretary Jonas May was appointed to be director of the camp and his brother Phineas also became involved. The two young men, with their experience of running summer camps for boys, were appointed to run the camp.

The group of men who ran the Fund were all Anglo-Jewish movers and shakers. Lord Samuel chaired their executive meetings and had been High Commissioner in Palestine in the 1920s and Home Secretary in the early '30s. Viscount Bearsted had been chair of Shell (a company founded by his father and uncle). He was a close friend of Sir Robert Waley Cohen who had been Shell's managing director and was vice president of the United Synagogue. Simon Marks was the son of the founder of Marks and Spencer and was the current chair of the company. Harry Sacher was a director of Marks and Spencer, Frank Samuel had also been a colleague of Sir Robert Waley-Cohen and was current managing director of Unilever. Chaim Weizman was the leader of British Zionism, Anthony and his brother Leo were from



the Rothschild banking family, Neville Laski was the president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Norman Bentwich had been Attorney General in Mandate Palestine, a deputy commissioner at the League of Nations with responsibility for refugees and a founding professor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

As well as these business and community connections, they were all related by blood and by marriage and were referred to as the cousinhood. For instance Norman Bentwich's wife Helen was the secretary of the administrative body overseeing the kindertransports. The group took on considerable risk in the task of funding and organising a refugee camp for an as yet unknown number of men. They were already subsidising the Kindertransports. The Home Secretary was a Quaker and was working effectively with their staff in Berlin and Vienna rescuing and supporting Jews.

The permission was to set up transit and training camps of the kind that had operated in Germany itself since the 1920s. These had been initiated by local Jewish communities to teach young people skills, to enable them to find work in other countries, mainly in Palestine. Bentwich had spent much time inspecting the training centres, most of them in Germany. The Council was to give a collective guarantee that those admitted to Britain not take any employment, and there should be a prospect of migration within a reasonably short time. The

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

vetting of applicants would not be done by the British consulates in Berlin and Vienna but by the Jewish agencies in Greater Germany.

A camp committee was established with Sir Robert Waley-Cohen as chair. Also appointed was Norman Bentwich, essentially an intellectual who valued order and kept immaculate paperwork, equally at home in London, Berlin, Vienna and New York. Sir Robert and Bentwich despite their personality differences were able to put together an amazing rescue operation. Bentwich set about getting further funds and support. The Fund was already subsidising the Kindertransports and Jewish enterprises in Greater

Germany, Bentwich set about getting further funds and support. The Joint (known today as JDC or Joint Distribution Committee) in New York and Paris lent support and the refugees who came worked as builders and labourers to get the camp in running order. Joseph, the architect used contacts to get free building materials, and other companies provided bunks, stoves, ranges and more. Unilevers undertook to provide the camp with all its dry foodstuffs, soap and more. They even got supplies of cigarettes (five per day per man) and chocolate.

Between the start on 12 December 1938 and 20 January 1939 almost everything had been arranged – except who they were going to rescue.



*Walter Brill and friend; Kitchener camp hut, 1939.*

wald, Sachsenhausen and Dachau after Kristallnacht. The only way the Gestapo would release the men was if there was documentary evidence that, once released, they would leave Germany within a few days. At that point in time, it was the men above all who were in danger, so for the time being there was no provision made at Kitchener for women. And the younger and fitter these men, the better would be their prospects for further immigration.

The May brothers were 33 and 35 in January 1939, born into an Orthodox Jewish family and had had an English Public School education. Together, they ran the camp. Phineas, from his arrival at the camp, kept his “Kitchener Camp Diary” in which he continued to keep recording even the most mundane of details. He recorded that on his first day at the camp he found that local work-

The Jewish Agencies in Berlin and Vienna were going to have to choose. What they needed were men to build the camp and for the therapeutic physical work of building to occupy their minds. They needed trained tradesmen, dentists and doctors. The May brothers were experienced in running boys’ camps – but learned on the job how to extrapolate that experience to organise a camp of 4,000.

When it came to choosing the refugees it became clear that there were reasons for men to be selected rather than women. There was a lot of pressure from German Jewish families whose menfolk had been imprisoned in Buchen-

men were offering their services. It was all go. That week in January large crates of plates arrived one day, 2000 blankets in bales of 20 came the next day, lorry loads of timber and chairs on the next. Word got around that there were business opportunities available at the Kitchener Camp and the Sandwich Chamber of Commerce invited Jonas to be their guest of honour at their annual dinner-dance.

The Mays' experience in organising summer camps for the Jewish Lads Brigade was limited preparation for running the much larger camp of 4,000: men who had left their families behind were understandably traumatised. A few of the men managed to get their wives and children out of Europe using Domestic Service visas for their wives and Kindertransports for their children, though most families remained in Greater Germany and were killed in the Holocaust.

The first group of refugees arrived on 10 February and after having dinner were shown how to make an English bed. The men were all skilled craftsmen and went to work the next day. Phineas organised activities to pass the evenings – table tennis, chess, darts – and began a library. Many of the teenage boys who had arrived on the Kindertransports had been difficult to place because of their age and they had been living in a holiday camp at Dovercourt near Harwich. The older boys were invited to volunteer to come to the Kitchener Camp and help with the refurbishment. On 3 March 1939, 69 boys from Dovercourt arrived. Their first breakfast consisted of porridge, white bread and marmalade and tea, then they were put to work in gangs headed by the skilled craftsmen. That was the pattern of their days with little time off. Only Saturday afternoons were for sports.

The second group who arrived on 9 March had come directly from a German residential training group for Jewish youths at Niederschönhausen. The young men were asked to volunteer to help set up the Kitchener Camp, encouraged by the visit from Norman Bentwich in 1937. Amongst the Niederschönhausen boys was Helmut Rosettenstein, who took the name Harry Rossney in the

UK in 1940 and he became one of the main people involved in preserving the memory of the Kitchener camp. Harry left from Berlin on 8 March and describes seeing the White cliffs of Dover as a rebirth, the most beautiful sight in his life. On arriving at the camp, despite the muddy fields, hard bunks and boring food, he remained enthusiastic.

Lothar Nelken, a Judge in Germany in a previous life, recorded in his diary “At around 9pm we arrived in the camp. We were welcomed with jubilation. After supper we were taken to our huts; Hut 37/II. I chose an upper bunk. One hut sleeps 36 men. The beds are surprisingly good. One sleeps as if in a cradle.”

Werner Weissenberg wrote to a relative “. . . I am so glad that my emigration has finally taken place, because every second in my original home, where conditions for us were a senseless gamble with our lives, entailed superpower for a human being to survive. Hopefully I will soon be able to emigrate to the USA so that I can earn my daily bread and not be so dependent on others and be able to support my relatives who unfortunately have not found a way to escape. . . “

### Who chose the men lucky enough to be saved by admission to the Kitchener Camp?

From the beginning the two relevant Jewish agencies in Berlin and Vienna were charged with making the decision. The three criteria were a man's age, the urgency of his need to leave Greater Germany and his prospects for further immigration. Minimum age was set to 17, to fit with the Kindertransport where the maximum age was 16. The Reichsvertretung der Juden in Deutschland (RV) was the stronger of the two Jewish agencies in Berlin and Vienna. They had developed alternative Jewish schools, training centres and farms, as well as health centres and giving support to destitute Jews. They did this by organising emigration in an orderly fashion, helping with paperwork, funding,



*Jonas May*

purchase of foreign currency. It was run by Rabbi Leo Beck and Dr Otto Hirsch who were both often in London liaising with members of the Central British Fund for German Jewry, often attending their meetings. In Vienna the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IK) was responsible for choosing and organising the emigrants.

By the second half of May the May brothers realised they had taken on a difficult task. Worry about those left behind made the refugees anxious. Phineas often found the men came to him to talk and he agreed to the job as “Entertainments and Welfare Officer”. Differences had started to appear, between the younger and older men, between the Orthodox and not so Orthodox, between Austrians and Germans. Men were from a wide spread of backgrounds, many traumatised, bitter and unhappy.

Phineas led discussions and Orthodox style readings and also gave English lessons. Phineas became the editor of “The Kitchener Camp Review” of



*Phineas May*

which there were to be nine issues in total, of 16 pages. A small group of men wrote regularly, mostly in English.

### Relations with locals

The town of Sandwich on the south east coast of Britain had a population of 3,500 at the outbreak of war. At that time there were about 4,000 men at the Richborough camp. The whole abandoned army site was transformed into a small town and relations with the locals were mostly good, especially when the locals realized that a doubling of their population meant more trade and more people coming to the town. Besides the 42 accommodation huts, shower and toilet blocks, two synagogues, a medical clinic, a post office and shops were established. A 1,000 seat cinema was built, the money donated by Oscar Deutsch, founder of the Odeon cinema chain. Many of the refugees were accomplished musicians and the people of Sandwich gladly attended concerts given by the men. Local children came to the camp to play table tennis.

Some men became office workers. Time was allocated for sports on Saturdays and there were two football teams and even a camp song sung to the tune of “The Lambeth Walk” composed by Ivy, Jonas’s wife:

*Any time you’re Richboro’way*

*Any evening, any day,*

*You’ll find us all*

*Working the English way, Oi!*

----

*Every man and every boy*

*Helps to make the Camp a joy,*

----

*You'll find us all*

*Working the English way, Oi!*

When I came to study the Kitchener camp story, it was the details of the camp and daily life the men made for themselves that I found the most fascinating.

To accommodate 4,000 men and take a derelict site to a habitable state within one month took quite some doing. Men with practical skills were put to work, planning and building the camp and all the utilities required with it as soon as they arrived.

Moshe Grunbaum:

“We had to install doors, windows, roofs, window panes, and electric lights and do all sorts of other jobs. After these repairs, each hut was divided into two sections and 36 fellows were accommodated in each”

Walter Brill wrote:

“. . . because only single people actually could go. And in this Kitchener Camp after a few weeks I became the foreman from the carpenters and we worked six days a week. I got up between five and six o'clock in the morning. Seven o'clock we started working and we were as happy as anything. We didn't get any money. Nothing. Only what, a few cigarettes and a couple of stamps and I think one orange a week.”

Men were permitted to leave the camp with a pass although there was a curfew.

The Golden Crust Bakery in Sandwich was a local shop which had a few

chairs and tables at the back where meat pies and cups of tea were served. At first serving “camp” coffee, Mrs Kimber, the proprietor, eventually bought the real thing and once she mastered the making of it there was a place for the men to have Kaffee und Kuchen, (coffee and cake as they were used to having in cafe houses at home). By summer 1939, it was often standing room only. Bike riding and swimming in the sea were occasional activities in their little spare time.

Everyone had to work. As well as building, local farmers showed some men how to grow their own food, a useful skill to have, also roads had to be built, ditches dug, drains cleared and ongoing hut refurbishment and repairs. There was little leisure time.

Moshe Grunbaum again:

“I must outline the kitchen operation. One has to remember that 3,500 men were fed here daily, which was achieved by 400 men working in two shifts. I do not have the least intention of praising their efforts: on the contrary, this was the worst managed operation in the whole camp. An average 40% of all the food was actually left uneaten, because what was prepared from the available ingredients was a disgrace”

English lessons were compulsory and Sandwich locals helped with this.

The inmates included many doctors and dentists as well as an isolation hospital unit, a general hospital, a dentist, a First Aid unit and a laboratory at Kitchener camp.

The Chief Rabbi in Kitchener was Rabbi Dr Werner van der Zyl and he led services and discussions, helped by Karl Rautenberg, also rescued via the Kitchener scheme. Interest in religion, both Orthodox and Reform was sparked by the circumstances and Rabbi Isidor Broch was appointed for the Orthodox Jewish community. Jewish festivals were held and the 1939 Rosh Hashanah service was held under blackout conditions because of the war but



*A typical bunk room ready for occupation.*



*The Camp's kosher chefs.*

apparently almost 3,000 men attended. A huge tent was erected as a synagogue.

After the outbreak of war the Kitchener men were encouraged to join the Pioneer Corps— an unarmed section of the British Army. Most enlisted and formed part of the British Expeditionary Force to continental Europe. Once France fell to the Germans Kitchener camp was closed as a refugee camp and as a Pioneer Corps training camp. It was considered to be dangerous to keep a group of German-speaking refugees so close to the English Channel and the ports. Most of the men were moved to Devon where they remained in the British Army. About 600 men who had not enlisted were sent to internment camps, principally on the Isle of Man but also to Canada and Australia.

One document shows that Walter Brill has been discharged as an alien as he has transferred to the army. Apparently most of the official records from

Kitchener were destroyed during the war to protect the men, especially if they still had families in enemy occupied countries.

Since 2019, the 80th anniversary of the Kitchener camp, there has been an intensified project to collect items from descendants with a view to expanding the website and the collection currently housed at the Wiener Library. Research about the men of Kitchener camp is ongoing. The descendants have put together a website for people to pool information. I have mostly used the book written by Professor Claire Ungerson, *Four thousand lives: The rescue of German Jewish men to Britain, 1939*. She was a Kitchener descendant. ■

***From a presentation prepared for the Auckland Second Generation Group 2020.***



*Kitchener camp orchestra including Franz Schanzer, centre right with cello.*





**Liebe Oncle Fredy**



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# Liebe Uncle Fredy

A speech prepared for Yom Hashoah, 11 April 2010



LIEBE Uncle Fredy,

You were the youngest child in my Dad's family and close to my Dad Frank— or Franz as you knew him. There aren't many photos of you, maybe half a dozen— in the early ones I can't tell if they are you or Dad. There is a sense of mischief about both of you. My Dad used to tell me stories of your exploits, some of the things you got up to when you were growing up. Getting into trouble for filling the town fountain with soap bubbles and such other boyish pranks. One time you and he sneaked a ride on one of the farmer's carts which had come to deliver produce to the family grain warehouse— you ended up somewhere in the countryside and they had to get grandfather Friedl to come and get you. I don't imagine you were too popular.

You were so tall and good looking, full of youthful vigour. Dad was shorter but there are a couple of photos of you both playing the fool — picnicking in the summer, short sleeved shirts, but in suits, both of you.

You and Dad were both sporty rather than academic. Only aunt Marianne was academically inclined but she had to go to cooking school — girls in the Briess family didn't go to university in the 1930s. Mum's family was more for-

ward thinking. Mum went to medical school in Prague for four years.

You were at Mum and Dad's wedding in 1937 — I have a photo taken outside the synagogue in Brünn. You, Mum and Dad and grandmother Marta, all dressed up to the nines.

You did a commercial course when you left school and eventually went to work with Dad and grandfather, also your uncle Dori and cousin Hans in the family business. You moved into one of the three flats in the lovely new house grandfather had built. It was on the edge of town near the river and the sugar beet fields. When the Germans came an officer moved into the house and took over one of the apartments.

I know you married Irene Berka in 1939. Granny Adi wasn't impressed because Irene was not only uneducated, she wasn't even Jewish. Actually after the war when Granny was liberated from Terezin, Irene and her family were very good to her, giving her clothes, food and money.

Yours is such a sad story. Cousin Marietta told me that you and Irene were so much in love but that you decided to get a divorce because once the Germans had come you both thought that Irene would be safer if she wasn't married to a Jew. But you were deported, first to Terezin and then to Auschwitz. You would have been 35 years old — in the prime of life— a little more than the age my children are now. It's hard to imagine.

After the invasion I know at first you were still working for the business

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in Olmütz, trying to carry on. Hans had left for London by that time so there would have only been you and Dori and grandfather left. Then the Germans took over the business and put in their own agent who ran things. My Mum and Dad said that you wouldn't leave because you didn't believe the Germans would cause so much harm and when the writing was on the wall it was too late. I suppose no one could really have conceived of the possibility of genocide. Antisemitism is one thing, but genocide is a completely different story. Only the most confirmed pessimist could have imagined what was to come.

You would have been in Terezin with some of the other relatives. Grandfather Friedl and his brother Rudolf died there. The younger ones were better off— they had jobs. Ilse was a nurse and Margit, worked as a gardener so they were useful. They said you saved Granny Marta from the transport east on three occasions— the fourth time she wasn't so lucky and was transported to Lublin in April 1942 during the mass deportations. There is no record of her after that. And no record of you either, after you left Terezin on the transport to Auschwitz.

I regret so much I was denied the chance to get to know you. I had no brothers or sisters, and only one aunt, uncle and a single first cousin. I only knew one of my grandparents and that was Adi who survived Terezin and came to New Zealand — but she died when I was four. All my NZ friends had quite big families and it felt strange only having a small family.



*Fredy's membership card for the Ice Hockey Association of Breslau.*

But I am sure that you would like to know that our family, although spread out all over the world, has grown roots in distant countries.

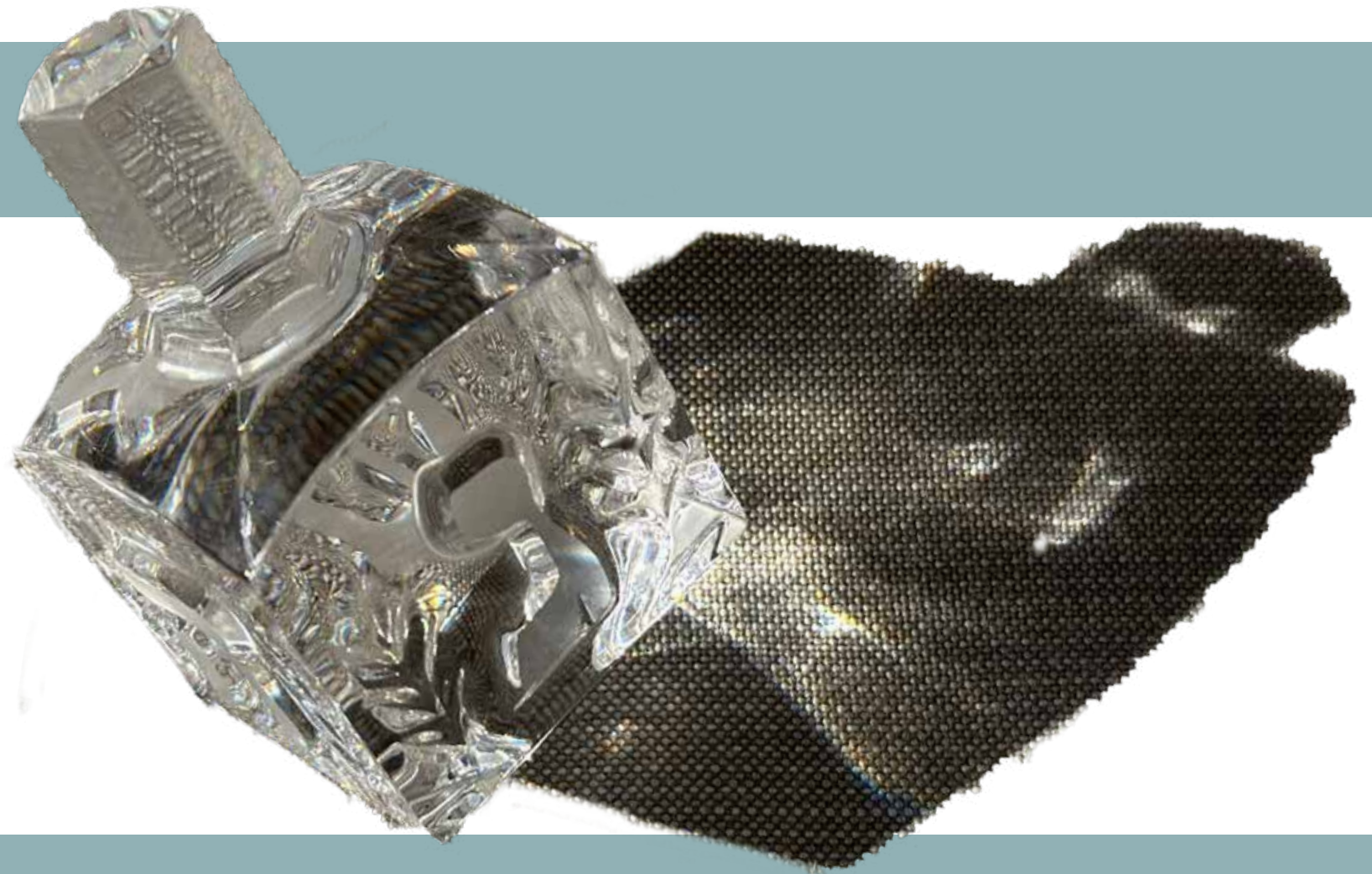
I married Peter in New Zealand and our sons are Anton and Ezra. Anton is here in Auckland and Ezra is getting married in Melbourne in a few weeks to a girl whose family is from Lithuania and Hungary.

Continuity after all. ■



*Fredy (r) and a friend  
in Theresienstadt (Terezin).*





# Voices from our collective memory



*The Berger sisters:  
(l) Melanie and Ernst Lachs  
(r) Adele and Max Löffler.  
Children: Ernst Lachs, Otto  
Löffler and Valerie Löffler.*

# Voices from our collective memory

***This presentation was prepared for a Beth Shalom Shabbaton in 2015.***



I am going to read to you excerpts from an ad hoc collection of writings. The unifying thread is they were all written at the time events were happening or shortly after. They cover the period approximately 1939 to 1945. All describe the condition of the Jewish people caught in the maelstrom of the Second World War. Some have been translated from German or Czech.

## Josef Berger

*I begin with Josef Berger and an extract from a Gestapo file in the town of Mährisch Schönberg, Czechoslovakia*

Josef Berger is a person known as a crafty businessman of the worst type. He is a wily, arrogant, irritating Jew. Politically he is outspokenly against national socialism in government and he was given the middle name “Israel”.

Of Josef’s father Sigmund, a man of 80 years by 1937, the Gestapo file was no less complimentary stating that he is “an ingrained Orthodox Jew”.

Unknown to the Gestapo, Josef had married Fay, an English woman of

German/Jewish descent and they had fled to England, taking with them their two young sons and Josef’s elderly parents. Transplanted to England, the marriage did not last: Josef and Fay separated and Josef lost touch with his sons.

*In 1959, embittered and elderly himself, he wrote to my mother:*

“You remark that you are so far away from all of your family, I’ve been thinking that perhaps I should tell you some things that you might not know about your mother’s family. If I bore you I hope you forgive me. My intentions are the best.”

*Describing my great grandfather’s household:*

“In Meseritsch there were no excesses, I mean no comforts. I don’t know if you remember the house of your grandparents, but it was not luxurious. The staircase was much bigger than the whole house, enormous, and the apartment quite dark and gloomy. The girls were quite primitively accommodated. Mela slept in a little chamber that was quite without windows and it may be that it was there that the germ of her TB started. But in those times one lived very spartanly.

About Samuel, your grandfather, I’ll say more. Both brothers, my father Sigmund and your grandfather Samuel were very close throughout their lives as brothers should be and not once, excuse me, despite the general unpopu-

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larity of your grandmother Rosa, it never influenced the relationship between the two of them.

They hardly knew their father who died in 1866, leaving his widow with four dependent children, quite poor and it was a struggle until the children became independent.

My father became a successful leather merchant and by 1914 was quite well to do until the Republic and then Hitler ruined him.

The name Josef features in all four generations (and) is from the Josef who died in 1866 – my grandfather and your great grandfather.

He came from Leipnik and as was the custom then he married into a family so he could pursue his Talmudic studies which reflected favourably on the whole family. He studied under the famous Talmudic teacher, Baruch Frankel in Leipnik where he headed the yeshiva himself – which fact is noted on his headstone. That wouldn't be regarded as an achievement these days.

Your great grandmother, Anna Singer came from Weisskirchen. She didn't get on with her daughter-in-law, your grandmother. She never saw her, although they lived in the same house (in two rooms behind the shop on the



*A recent photograph of the home of Samuel and Rosa Berger in Valasske Mezirici.*

ground floor (with) windows which looked out to the so-called garden). Rabbi Dr Hillel from Leipnik worked on a family tree and found that Anna was a descendant of the famous Josef Caro, writer of the Shulchan Aruch . . .”

He goes on to describe various family members.

“Your aunt Mela married Adolf Lachs and I met their son Ernst after the war in 1951 with his son. Ernst's wife was the headmistress of a school, very clever. This verdict was passed by your grandmother too.”

*As is obvious, Josef was a man of very definite opinions.*

*He speculated on the place Israel would play in the changing face of Judaism and commented on assimilation:*

“Even here, in the land of tolerance, the Jew is only permitted to exist. A welcoming reception as equals doesn't happen, although the English are always polite in their rejection. I'm not bothered by it. I give you my opinion, the way it seems to me to be.”

*And in a later letter:*

“Soon it will be the anniversary of your parents’ wedding, 1911, I think it was Sunday the 11 August in Ung. Hradisch. I remember the day quite well, I was there with my parents. Your mother wanted to leave Meseritsch for so long, it was no easy matter to find suitors – though Adele tried hard enough. Grandmother was often very critical and when she was cross, she often said to Marta ‘It’ll rain on your wedding day’ and made other such remarks. But she was wrong. It was a hot and humid day and your mother found a fine husband in Dr Löwy.

Now back to your grandfather Samuel. He was the most distinguished and worthy person in the family. If he was miserly, it was not from greed, but from thriftiness, otherwise he wouldn’t have been the rich man he was. But it didn’t affect him. He carried on living in pious modesty. He was a good family man. What he didn’t do for his wife’s family doesn’t bear thinking about. In later years he suffered greatly from shingles and I know how much he must have suffered because I’ve had an excema since January 1958 that I can’t get rid of. The doctors here don’t go to any trouble since the introduction of the National Health Service.

When my father was sick we visited him weekly and when he was recovering in the sanatorium in the evening the doctor said to me “your uncle must love roses very much”. I was surprised and asked why he made the comment. The doctor replied that he had stood by the rose garden for a long time. Uncle had obviously been praying Mincha and they thought he lingered by the roses because he loved roses!



**Melanie and Ernst Lachs.**

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 as I was so close to your grandfather. I’ll always remember him. I’m the last person living who knew him well.

The last few days I’ve been quite upset. My parents’ memory is very intense and all the memories are past now. I don’t know how I’ll spend the holidays. I avoid the synagogue on these days– too much hustle and bustle for me and too much of a fashion parade, just like it used to be in Brünn and Olmütz.

I want to assure you that you’ll never again get such a detailed letter from me,

I am, Your

Josef.”

*The last letter was written some months before his death in 1960. I traced his one surviving son Kurt through Ancestry.com. He was hale and hearty at 90 years and living in Chiswick with four daughters and seemingly vast numbers of grandchildren.*



### Eva Hayman

*At the same time the Gestapo file was opened for Josef Berger, another Czech, a 15 year old schoolgirl, reached London on a Kindertransport. She was adopted by an English boarding school while her younger sister, Vera, was taken in by a warm and loving English family. Eva Diamant felt very responsible for her younger sister, pouring her heart out in her diary, formulated as letters to parents whom she never saw again.*

#### 9 July 1939, Dorset

“I am in England, a land so many people dream of. For me this is not the best land, the country of my dreams can only be my Czech land. I have no idea when I shall return. When at the end of the last school year at home, we remembered Jan Hus, our national hero, I felt so dreadfully sad, I could not help crying, I promised myself never to shed tears at school again. But then I never dreamt that the time would come when I would have to leave all those I love so much without knowing when – or if – I will be able to return to them. Not even in my worst nightmares did I dream that this would happen. I wanted to get rid of every tear in my body so that there would be no tears left in the evening when I had to part from you. I wanted you and Mother to have only my smile to remember me by, my breaking heart you were not to see. I felt my parents’ pain as well as my own as I hugged little Vera, who, exhausted, finally fell asleep.”



*The entry ends thus:*

“I keep seeing my darling little sister looking so forlorn. I do so wish we could all be together. I feel myself to be such a pawn in the wind of fate. Vera and I led our own lives at home, but we do love each other and these last few weeks have brought us very close. I do so want to help her, look after her – will this be possible across the miles?”

#### 6 August 1939:

“Today I thought so much of home. In my memories I was walking in our streets and talking with friends. I so longed to run to them all. I do believe that I shall see them again. I don’t know how it can come about, it seems to me to be almost impossible for us to gain our freedom as easily as we have lost it, but in no way can I be reconciled with the thought that I will never return.

Suzanne is so happy at home, I almost envy her that her mother kisses her goodnight; I am kissed by a kind stranger. How I envied those who on our Sunday walks at school waved to their parents.”

*And later:*

“Every night I watch the stars and think of home. I write letters to all those I love. They are full of hope and faith that our tomorrows will be happier, and yet I fear that it may not be so. I must not be afraid, I must be brave. Today my father has written how proud he was of his brave daughter. And this

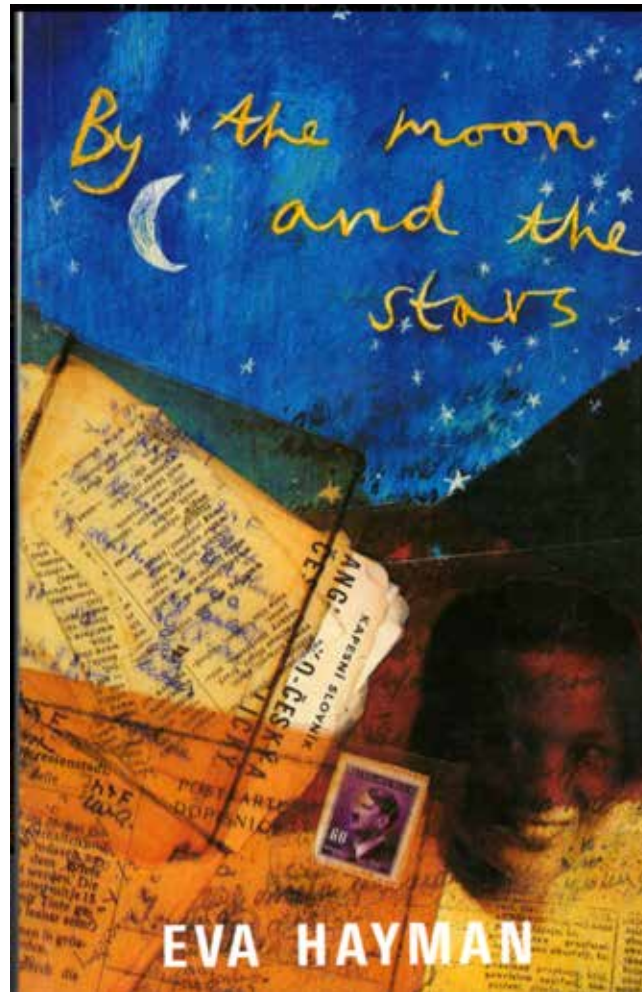
daughter must not disappoint him, she must be courageous. And my mother, her letter was so full of love, yet I could feel her hidden sadness.

I feel that life has taught me to grow up so suddenly and so I make plans for the future knowing well that fate may dispose of most of them. Yet I believe in a happy ending and I beg the Almighty to always help Vera and me to be our father's pride and our mother's joy. I do ask myself: When will hatred and mankind's folly cease? When will love among men prevail? Perhaps never."

*During the school holidays Eva stayed with the families of various girls she was at school with, writing:*

"I greatly admired my new friends. There was so much love and laughter in this family. I remember my delight the first time I watched Keiler the cat curled up on Mr Allner's shoulders as he sat at the head of the table carving the Sunday joint on Saturday. The rest of the meat was eaten cold on Sundays. We prepared the vegetables before going to church so that they could be cooked quickly when we returned to satisfy our hunger as fast as possible.

I never dreamt that one could be so lonely and go on living with this constant fear for our loved ones. The tears I shed at night do not ease my pain. Yet I was told that one feels better after a good cry. All I have is a swollen face and my heart is as heavy as it was before."



*Questions of religion and God occupied Eva's thoughts.*

"Why are we so persecuted for the faith of our fathers? I believe in one God, the God who rules over all his people whatever their religion. I believe in His justice."

*Each Sunday all the pupils went to the Anglican church.*

"Though baptized, in the vain hope of escaping Nazi persecution, I felt more Jewish. Should I pray our Jewish prayer or the Lord's Prayer, or carry on with both? Why were there so many religions? I had no answer, but I believed that the Almighty understood and forgave my dilemma."

*As summer grew into winter she commented:*

"The weather is cold; I remember looking at the frost and snow outside from the warm shelter of our home— all of us together. All that I can think of just now is "Are you warm, all those whom I love? Have you enough to eat? Oh, God, please, please protect them from all evil. Was it cowardly to leave my country? Should I have stayed home? I must make sure that my exile will make me a better, stronger person, that I will learn a great deal so that my parents and my country can be proud of me, so that I can be of help to them when the time comes. I must remain faithful.

I know my parents are thinking of me, I wish I could let them know that they do not need to worry about me. But how I wish they were near, that I could ask their advice about things in life that I am encountering for the first time

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and know not how to deal with. The main thing is that they should be all right, should know happiness again. On the radio I heard about the persecution of the Jews; I do so hope all the rumours are not true.

What has happened to mankind's humanity?

In spite of laughter, a silent pain has become an integral part of me, it will not leave me until a happy ending comes our way”.

*When the time came to leave school, Eva went nursing and felt that she was repaying England for taking her in, by helping in this way. With the German bombing, life was busy for all medical personnel. One weekend she wrote:*

“It is Sunday. I wanted to go to church because the preacher I like, Mr Guillingham, is joining the navy and is leaving us. But I was so sleepy for I am still on night duty. I also felt that it was wrong to go to church only when I feel in need of God, so I decided to pray really well in bed. Oh dear, half-way through my prayer I fell asleep.”

*After four years she finally qualified and even then her thoughts were of home. On hearing that their father had been taken to the Little Fortress at Terezin and tortured, she wrote to Vera, trying to summon enough wisdom in a letter to encourage her sister. The letter ends:*

“I can only beg of you, live and do not grieve. Try to be happy. Have faith and be patient.”

*Vera kept the letter and wrote back saying:*

“I read your letter many times. It helped not only me, but many of my friends who have no kind, big sister to turn to.”

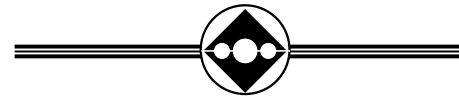
*The adult Eva, years later, in her book ‘By the Moon and the Stars’ ponders how she would have survived those years without being able to pour her heart out into her diaries.*

*In July 1945 came the sad news that their mother had died of typhus and Eva had to write the hardest letter of all to Vera, giving her the news. The day the news came, 27 July, was the day of Eva's last entry in her diary. She ends:*

“By the moon and the stars forever will my love soar to you – wherever you are.”

*Eva Hayman, who died in Auckland (2013) not long ago was that young girl. After the war she returned briefly to Czechoslovakia, but went back to England, fearing the growing communist influence.*

*She married and immigrated to Auckland with two young children in 1957.*



## Lizzie and Frank Briess

*Letters my parents, Lizzie and Frank, wrote. They fled to London on 13 March 1939, and at the end of August, two days before war was declared, left England and sailed into the unknown for New Zealand. They wrote many letters to their family in Czechoslovakia, neatly typed on my mother's portable typewriter. They kept carbon copies of their weekly letters home. On New Year's Day 1940 they took possession of a farm in Massey. Here are some excerpts from the letters they signed with the name Fralis (a combination of both their names). Of the three grandparents they wrote to, two died in the camps, only my step grandmother Adi survived.*

### 6 Sept 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 quiet and we're getting used to it. The ship is 15,000 tons, carrying 200 passengers the rest of the space for freight. Food and service are very good and if we didn't have our worries over all our family we could be very happy. We get news over the radio, the broadcasts are sparse. Otherwise we have all comforts.”

### 16 October

“We've been here for a week now and time has gone so fast. Luckily on Monday we found accommodation through the paper, a lovely place, a big room and a smaller room for sleeping. The houses here are built of wood, there are very few brick houses. What strikes you most 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, on one side right to the sea. The climate at present is like it is in May at home, up till last week it rained every day, that's winter here. Only our featherbeds save us from having to take the popular hot water bottle to bed.”

**Frank and Lizzie decided to buy a farm**



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“On 1 January we packed our few things and moved from our friend’s farm where we spent 12 days learning. We had no beds, so we set up camp in the corner of a room. A small folding sofa and two folding chairs, that was all the furniture in the house. But all that is better now as we have borrowed beds and as we mentioned in our last letter we have borrowed various things from our friends. There is plenty of work to do. Early in the morning we start with the milking— until we can do it in reasonable time, then we can get up later. After milking, a big breakfast and then we start the rest of the work— repairing fences, chopping up the wood, fixing machines and many, many other things which I can’t describe. The most important job at the moment is to bring in the hay for the winter. We have 50,000 square metres fenced off for the hay, one third we closed off before with the lawnmower and the rest we cut in three days. The grass takes about 2-3 days to dry and it is collected in small stacks by the machine. Next the machine comes. It takes 15-20 of these stacks and takes them to the big haystack. As far as labourers are concerned, there are always a group of neighbours (6-8) who help each other, so that it doesn’t cost anything. Every evening we are terribly tired, from doing work which we are not used to and also our hands have to get used to the work— then things will be better. For the present our hands hurt awfully, but these are teething problems over which we won’t grow grey hairs, we’ll overcome them.”

### **21 January 1940**

“In the whole of NZ there are about 3000 Jews, in Auckland perhaps 400-500. Auckland and even other cities have Jewish mayors. The mayor of Auckland is even a “sir” and is already serving a second term. The prospects here are not bad. The country is developing.”

### **6 March 1940**

“I’ll describe a typical day to you. First the milking which at present takes us two hours maximum, but there are always unexpected things to deal with, a cow with swollen tits, some you have to milk by hand etc. so it takes two and

a half hours. Then the washing down starts, feeding the pigs and cleaning the yard. That takes a further hour and has to be done once a day, after every milking. Then Frank goes to work— this week he built pig sties with the neighbour and I go to the house. Once a week I do the washing. I wash everything, even the bedclothes, working clothes etc, windows and do other housework that at home Bieta used to do. I’m busy up to 4pm. There’s always some sewing, sometimes writing to do and other jobs. Saturday and Sunday we only milk once, on these days we get both invited and uninvited guests, endless numbers of people come to our place. They bring their lunch with them, so there’s no work involved for us. Once a week we go to town.”

### **21 April 1940**

“Today I want to tell you about our finances. We bought the farm for £3,425 of which we paid £1,800 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, 4½% interest. The interest is payable quarterly and the £50 principal paid at the end of each year. You can calculate that each cow will produce £15 per year so that if we milk 40 cows next season, which begins in October, they will produce £600 income, add to that about £150-200 income from pigs we’ll have a gross income of about £750-800. Of that, £135 goes in mortgage principal and interest, 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!). As well as this we owe at present £105, payable in instalments. The few pounds we have left in the bank will be spent soon when we refinance the farm and divide it into paddocks. In my calculations I forgot the £50 for the fertiliser which we have to buy every year.”

### **14 April 1940**

*Referring to friends . . .*

“She dresses herself up, with showy jewellery and goes to parties. Most people leave their jewellery at home or in a safe or have already sold it. We don’t even wear our wedding rings– in any event, men don’t wear wedding rings here. The women wear them on the left hand. We’ve got farmers’ hands of course. We don’t know any manicurists . . .

Marianne you ask what radio stations we listen to. We barely get NZ and Australia, England, Berlin (wonderful, but we can’t bear to listen to such a bunch of lies), Russia. Shortwave of course, only at night mostly. However we do have a time difference of ten and a half hours from England. We have an American radio. This radio is a big box about 1.5 m high and .75m wide and it stands directly on the floor. It is a really beautiful piece of furniture. By the way have I already told you that every afternoon from 5pm our time, 7am London time, I listen to the Czech broadcast. They broadcast three times a day and always begin with the National Anthem. The first time we heard it we felt peculiar, now we’re used to it.”

### **January 1941**

“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 three 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 15cm. Today they are five weeks old and thriving well. 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 rear end so I could cool off that end. But that wasn’t all. After I’d done 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 which 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 too 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 two sows. Hopefully that means pork!”

### **Undated, end of 1941**

“We wanted to feed a small number of pigs with the leftover whey and in time, sell the little two month old piglets. We’ve ordered hens and ducks and have all the building materials here to build the new hen coops. I began building about mid September as we should get the little two month old chickens in October. I intended to plant maize to feed the poultry. As well as this we aim to milk 45 cows so you see, an ambitious programme, entailing a lot of work but with the promise of successful results.

Then at New Year, putting it mildly, we received 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 have won the war. I saw all our hard work of the past two years with all the effort, love, the 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 well meant, standard, often repeated NZ 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. I had my hands full, trying to cancel the building materials, poultry, plants and seeds that I’d ordered and in the cases where we had already taken delivery, to send them 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. We don’t want to go farming in the

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back country or in the bush, so we'll head for Auckland and start up there with something new. I'll take life easy for a bit. The single biggest worry is about all the family, dear God help them to survive all the obstacles in their paths."

### **6 January 1942**

*In a letter to a cousin, Lizzie expressed her fears as to what was happening in Europe:*

"I come to the concern which dominates my mind. I have not had any direct news from Marta (her mother) for two and a half years. We write regularly once a month to each of the grandparents, to Olmütz and Brünn, through the Red Cross on the printed form, 25 words. We got a reply once from my parents-in-law, dated 19 January 1942, saying they were all well. We heard that uncle Ludwig Broll and his family have been deported to somewhere unknown. I'm so worried and I just sit here like everyone else with my hands tied."

*In fact by the end of January Marta had been deported to Terezín, joined by Frank's parents in June of the same year.*

*In 1945, gradually they learned that almost all of their extended families who had remained in Europe during the war had been killed in the concentration camps. Only my father's stepmother Adi had survived. Lizzie wrote to her.*

### **6 November 1945**

"It is very interesting and very, very painful to read about your last six years. We here have no idea what was going on and only after VE day we saw the first pictures from Belsen, Buchenwalde, only months later we heard about Osviecsin.

We were on the farm for two and a half years, then we had to give it up (we were close to an aerodrome and the authorities did not like foreigners so close to it with the Japanese invasion so near) and came to town. For eight months Frank laboured and then we started to work in the restaurant in which we had 50% shares and good wages. It was 14 hours of solid work a day. In the restau-

rant trade Frank acquired a certain knowledge of quality of meat and being tired after 2 years' work there we bought two butcher shops in the busiest shopping centre."

*Around the same time Lizzie wrote again to her mother-in-law Adi:*

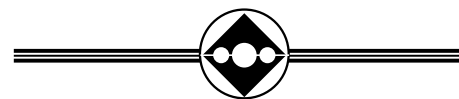
"I certainly do not have to express what I feel about my poor mother. I know I won't see her again, but all my efforts to get a bit of news about her were in vain. I have a letter from my cousin in Cochabamba and he said that my mother and Tante Ada had to leave Tivoli 2, the house they owned, were forced to sell and move out. I have not heard from a single soul of my father's family either. Mrs Grete Fischer, Aunt Hela Broll and her husband, Aunt Hermine and her three daughters. Neither have I heard of Alfred Wolf, Valasske Mezirici, Grete Berg, Uh. Hradiste, her husband and two children, Sery Reich or aunt Rudy Berger, wife of Josef Berger who committed suicide on the 15 March 1939 when the Germans invaded. I have looked through the few lists we could get here, but not one name of my family was in it. I am reading your letter over and over. After so many years, direct news again".

### **1945/6**

*She describes the house they had built and finished:*

"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. We both hope from the bottom of our hearts it won't be long before you enjoy it with us."

It was to be 1947 before Adi could join them to live out her final four years in peace and with her family in Auckland.



## Paul Ungar

*Paul Ungar was a great uncle of Peter's who escaped Vienna with his wife Irene and daughter Ruth, and landed in Sydney. As an Enemy Alien, he was interned. In the transcript of the court hearing, his objection to this humiliation tells a very familiar story of escape, luck and settling in a new land. Here is an excerpt:*

**The Minister of State (MoS), Mr J D Holmes** who appeared for the Army, asked how long after Hitler took control was it until your business was wound up?

"Hitler came to Austria in March (1938) and the business was wound up about the middle of November . . . I had to go there to answer questions asked by the official employee of the Nazis, but I could not sign a cheque and I had nothing to do with the business really, except to say 'yes' . . .

The goods were taken away, but I never saw the money. The official said that the money from the liquidation of all Jewish businesses was to be paid into a central fund to be controlled by one office. I had to make application for any money I wanted and sometimes I was given 200 marks and sometimes 300 marks. When I said that I wanted to leave the country, I had to produce the bills



showing what I had paid for travelling and for the cost of removing my furniture. They gave me enough money to pay these bills but all the other money went into a closed account . . .

**MoS:** So that all the money received in the course of the liquidation of the business was supposed to be paid into a fund in your name?

"...I had to make application for money . . . I got all the money I needed for my departure from Vienna to Australia. I was given money to buy tickets for three people and to pay for the transport of my furniture . . ."

**MoS:** What was the value of the business in English money?

"I think the last balance sheet showed the value of the business to be about 150,000 schillings. That was my fortune. We made a net profit in the last year of 22,000 schillings which are about the same as Australian shillings."

**MoS:** Who owned the property on which the business was being conducted?

"I was the only owner, I rented the factory."

**MoS:** What about the property in which you and your wife lived?

"That was a flat, rented too."

**MoS:** Did they take control of any of your other property?

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“All the contents of my banking account. I had a private account of 4,000 or 5,000 schillings.”

**MoS:** As a member of the Jewish community when the Nazis came to Austria, was there anything to indicate that you and your people were Jews?

“I could not wear a swastika. After the first two or three weeks the whole population was compelled to wear it. In every flat there was one man who had to look after this. All the flags had to be put out at the window and everybody would be afraid to object”.

**MoS:** You said you left Austria under the threat of a concentration camp?

“All Jews were under that threat. On a particular date one of the Nazi Party came to the flat where I lived and asked if a Jew was living there. The caretaker was a social democrat and not in favour of Hitler. On this particular day in Vienna, they arrested 12,000 or 15,000 Jews and sent about 6,000 to the concentration camp. On 10 November 1939 they burnt the synagogues. 60 to 70% of my friends were arrested. Then I got an official letter from the Party telling me to leave my flat. I told them of my intention to leave Vienna and they gave me three months to leave the flat. We were always under the threat of the concentration camp. When they took over my business I removed a very good carpet that I personally owned. I got a call saying that if I did not bring back the carpet in the following two hours I would have to go to the concentration camp”.

**MoS:** Did you have a motor car?

“I had 3.”

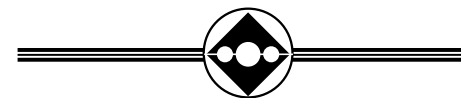
**MoS:** What happened to them?

“When Hitler came it was forbidden for Jews to use a garage. I never saw them again.”

*The transcript of his objection proceedings tells a now familiar story of a Jewish family prospering in business in the typical manner of Viennese Jews. Like so many others, Ungar's family originally came from the outreaches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and grew to prosper in the melting pot of citizens from the previous lands of the Empire that was Vienna. As many others of his generation Paul was tertiary educated (in his case in engineering), married a woman from the same background and with the coming of the Nazis to power decided that he needed to leave his homeland. All Jews in his position faced the same obstacles— assets taken and stolen, no compensation, the threat of the concentration camps, escaping with little more than youth and a few pennies besides, fleeing everything familiar and hoping to begin a new life free from persecution in a distant, unknown land.*

*The proceedings of the hearing give a very clear picture of Paul Ungar and his family and the minutiae of their flight from Vienna and early days of their settlement in Sydney. I am pleased to say that Paul was released after the hearing and helped many others to come to Australia. He was an active Zionist and businessman.*

**October 2015**

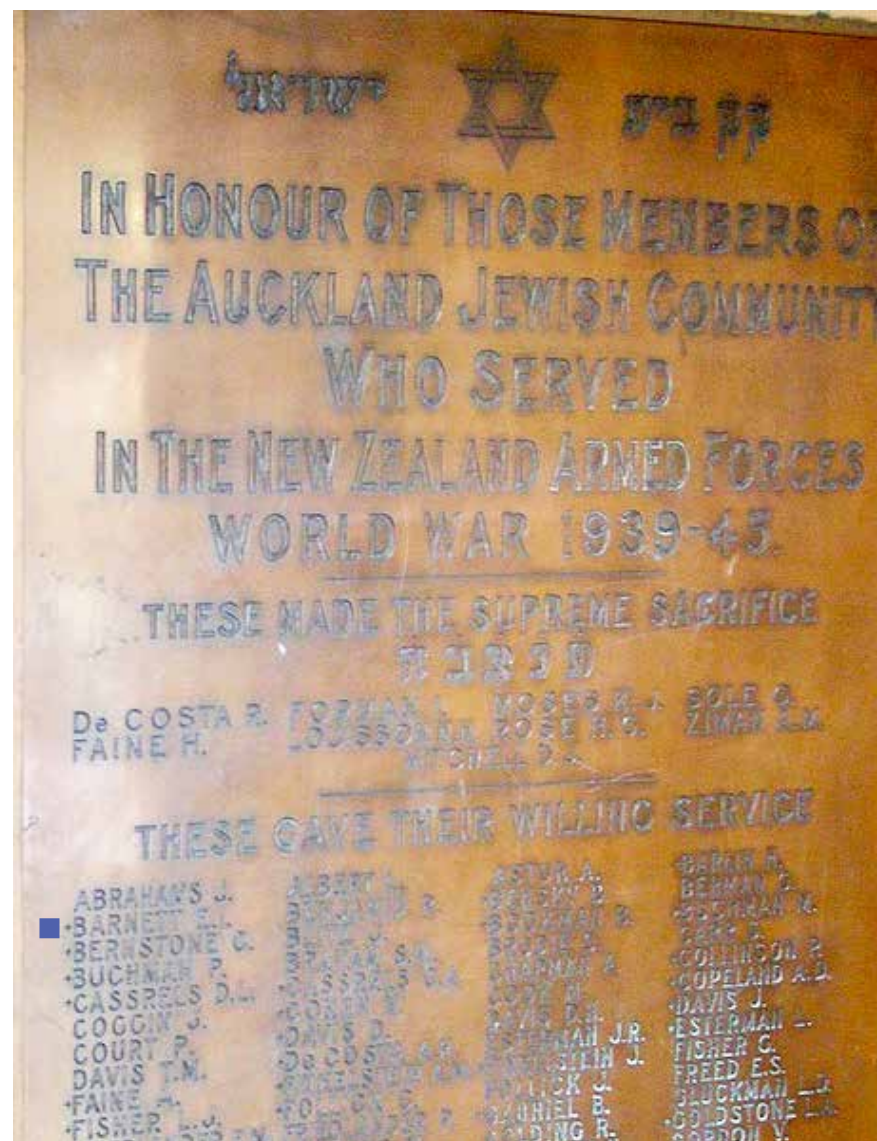


## Eddie Barnett

*Eddie and Ann Barnett came to New Zealand from England as newlyweds and no sooner had they arrived than Eddie left to join the NZ Armed Forces in the Middle East. He wrote many lonely, descriptive letters home to Ann during his time away.*

### **From England, September 1940**

“I got to Waterloo after leaving Winnie and while we were waiting for the train the alarm went again. No-one was allowed onto the platforms and everyone was shepherded into the shelters below the station. With a calm begot from an apathetic indifference and resigned to the possibility of having to spend the night below ground, we all settled down to await the all clear and resumption of the train service. A few laid down and pillowed their heads on respirators and in a few moments sleep had overtaken them, blissfully unconscious they slept on. Others clustered together in groups and talked, again of anything but raids! With the remainder I wandered through a labyrinthian maze of subterranean tunnels on a tour of exploration to find out what wonders existed in these cavernous depths. Music! Yes undoubtedly it was and attracted by the unexpectedness of such sound we made our way towards it. Fifty feet below the street we came into a new atmosphere, seething and animated. A concreted floor, the walls painted in restful shades of green and cream, long leather settees, forms, chairs and air conditioned, in the former from which emanated most unmusical noises and hidden a dozen or more people clustered round was a piano, being pounded away to glory. And everybody sang, they laughed, they talked, they danced. There were soldiers, sailors and airmen of all nationalities and rank and file. English, French, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish, Polish, Czech, Australian, NZ, New Foundland, Canadian, there were civilians, men women and children in every walk of life. Staid old gentlemen with Gladstonian features that could not but relax in the company and from the antics of those around. Dear old



*Eddie Barnett is listed on this WW2 memorial plaque belonging to the Auckland Hebrew Congregation.*

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Dowagers, middle class suburbanites who had done a show in town and tired worn out folk who'd been slaving away in their war effort. The soldiers, sailors, airmen and porter changed hats, coaxed the young girls to dance, wide eyed but tired little children ran and chased each other round and about in that untiring way which children have and then run back to nestle and be fondled by their parents, shyly hiding their heads. A young mother sits wearily nursing her babe amidst a pile of heaped portmanteaux while hubby stands comfortingly by. Lovers clasp each others hands undaunted by the glances of the mob around while in more darkened niches and recesses they spoon together with furtive occasional glance towards the crowd. Two young girls, Lambeth machinists probably, take advantage of the respite to carry out their toilet and assist each other to comb and set their hair, holding the pins in their mouths and placing one here and there as they pat and form the waves chatting all the while about 'wot she sez to im' and 'wot he sez to er'. Songs of humour and satire, classical and jazz and everyone joining in. Tipperary, Pack up your troubles, Mother McCree, Londonderry air, Beer barrel Polka, Tales from the Vienna Woods, There will always be an England— and of course there will, while the throbbing heart of patriotism pulsates and people forget their rank, station and surroundings to fraternise under circumstances such as these to join in with all their hearts and feelings. There will always be an England and an Empire. This was a picture of realism the accusations so blatantly prepared by defeatist propaganda with terms such as— a subjected people, cowed and fearful, hungry and starving with depression, how this one evening in an air raid gives the lie to such rot. And when the all clear went I'm inclined to believe that this merry throng resented the interruption and would have preferred to make the night of it now that it had begun and taken on such an aspect. It appeared to be with most reluctant steps that they moved towards the exit and then that drooping air of weariness asserted itself as they tiredly jostled at the barrier in eagerness now to be home and assure friends and relatives of their safety."

*One night in July 1941 Eddie describes a visit to shul in Cairo, from the camp at Maadi.*

"On Saturday morning I went to shul in Cairo. I struck lucky and managed to get a lift all the way in by truck. The road runs alongside the Nile practically the whole way and it was with much interest that I watched the varieties of transport in use on this highway and the types who throng it. Evidently early rising is of no concern to the natives as each little hamlet of low sun baked mud huts seemed to be a thriving hive of activity and everyone appeared as tho' they'd stirred much earlier. There were endless numbers of natives moving to and fro, some patting along the roads which are lined with tall date palms, overhanging trees and fields of maize. Others leading slow lumbering trains of heavily laden camels or herds of goats. One or two riding well up on the haunches of the smallest donkeys with no saddles and their legs dangling in the air— the funniest sight imaginable. Heavily veiled women with terrific bundles balanced precariously on their heads and no other support, swayed in perfect rhythmical poise as they made their way to no evident destination. Little children in bundles of rags ran barefooted about the roads and whined for baksheesh. Wandering mendicants clad in dirty tatters which scarcely covered their nakedness plodded wearily through the dust or with the rest carried out their ablutions in a ditch of dirty water that filtered from the Nile. Pairs of oxen yoked together by a block of timber the size of a boom and tendered by a diminutive yelling Arab boy moved calmly undisturbed by the noises around them as they must have done for thousands of years. Flat topped handcart drawn by donkeys and filled with melons and vegetables, army trucks, sleek roadsters, motorcycles, pushbikes, camels, goats, sheep and oxen. A more incongruous mixture in so short a distance could never be met with in a whole day's march and even at that hour in the morning the sun beat down with relentless heat. Every item stands out in vivid relief and I carry a picture of it all so clearly in my mind because of the contrasts. There is an indefinable appreciation of such scenes that imprints itself indelibly."

The city was equally as wide awake and already the many tea shops were busily concocting the mysterious brews for which they are noted and supplying

them ad lib almost, to the regular patrons lolling in indolent attitudes at the little rickety wickerwork tables on the sidewalks, chatting away volubly and taking occasional puffs from the narghillas set down beside them. Crowds of people moved about their respective occupations and added gaiety and colour to the variety of smells.

There were quite a lot of people in shul when I arrived but there was not the usual atmosphere to which I had become accustomed, nor the spontaneity of hospitable greeting and I'm sorry to say that I didn't enjoy the service at all. Everyone salaamed to the Ark, to the Torahs, to the Rabbis, and they held up their tallithim, kissed the fringes, wiped their mouths, wiped their eyes, blew their noses and spat into the cuspidors. At 10am when the service had finished and no-one seemed to do anything about it, the curtains covering the Ark doors were drawn back and men and boys made a concerted rush to kiss the woodwork over and over again and kow tow an innumerable number of times like a crowd of fanatical heretics. Talk about high church, it was miles above me! Next week I'm going to go to a smaller shul which I've seen where I think there's more sincerity and less eye wash!"

*Late in 1941 the tide started to turn and Eddie's division went into Libya, previously enemy territory:*

"We struck off into the desert and from that time on we progressed each day in anticipation of – who knew what? With my section I was attached to advance Divisional HQ, a sort of battle HQ and we proceeded in front of units to establish locations and communication. The day we passed through the wire into Libya gave us a great thrill and we were tickled pink at the audacity with which we entered the enemy territory. We drove into Libya as cheeky as you wish and parked for the night. My driver, he's an elderly chappie from the South Island and one of the grandest fellows one could wish to be with. I've nicknamed him "Dad" Gibson and the name's stuck, in return he calls me "son". Anyway we could hardly get over the manner in which we sneaked

over the border and while waiting for the others to come in we made (or at least Dad did) a darn good tea of sausages, fried potatoes, fruit and cream and tea. Not once during the whole of the time that we were moving about did we ever fare badly or suffer any hardship from hunger and believe me that's some accomplishment. During heavy shelling Dad got out of his trench at lunch and tea time, lit the primus and made a cup of tea. When your eyes, ears, nose, hair and every pore of your body and every particle of clothing is covered with the dust of a trench that never seems too narrow or deep enough, a cup of tea is a sip of nectar and settles with a gurgling sound into a turbulent stomach. I'll always be grateful to Dad for his ministrations in such moments in simple little deeds like this a man proves himself to be a regular guy and Dad certainly showed us some nerve, whenever I was away at HQ with the major – my DC – I could always be confident of returning to find my bivouac pitched, my bed made or a meal ready. That's one of the things I'll always like to remember and be glad of. We had hundreds of Jerry prisoners and most of my time in the field was taken up in interrogations and ministering to their wants. I'd saved a precious can of beer and when we passed through the wire, Dad, our officer and myself drank to our safe return to Egypt. Boy, was I glad."

*In June 1942 Eddie spent his leave in Palestine which left a huge impression on him:*

"I've just returned from Palestine after eight glorious days in that country. It was simply marvellous and I don't know what I ought to begin with to tell you about my holiday. Palestine is full of surprises, bewildering and charming, one is constantly fascinated by the spacious modern thoroughfares and large white buildings of the up to date cities. And in the old quarters, a world of antiquity into which one is transported as simply as stepping through a door from one room to another. It is almost inconceivable that two ages so distantly related can still exist in such proximity. The sun rising over the hills, pouring a pot of gold over purple and green mountains, spreading a carpet of light over a crazy patchwork quilt of ploughed fields and pasture, palpitates the emotions and makes one feel creation. Thousands of citrus groves dot the plains, long vistas

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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of cultivation stretch far onto the terraced slopes of hills and young plants and shrubs of afforestation cover acres of country, yet for all that there is an amazing bareness.

It is apparent that people may dress entirely according to their individual tastes, either the newest of style or the most very ancient the contrast and comparison causes one to stare in amazement. Debonair young men in faultless clothing, beautiful women sveltely clad and moving with perfect and attractive poise, jostle beside sandal shod Bedouins in voluminous robes, with their white headdress and double ring of cords. Strange figures in rags and tatters or drab brown sacking, seated astride gaily caparisoned diminutive donkeys, pick their way through the cobbled streets of the old towns or obstruct the way of sleek limousines which flash along the modern highways. Chasidim with long curls and heavy beards, black velvet hats and flowing silk coats, tread the paved streets, the flame of piety brightening in their prophetic visages. Arab women, completely dressed in black, some heavily veiled and all with their eyes heavily kohled, heavy silver anklet on their bare feet and jewels and ornaments adorning their persons, move gracefully about their duties.

The tongue? Well it would be hard to define in these days which language is more spoken than another and many strange conversations ensue in even three or four languages at one time but it's not in the least uncommon to sit in any restaurant, cinema or public place and listen to snatches of conversation in Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Russian, Polish, French, Greek, English, Czech, Hungarian and Arabic. It is reputed that no less than 60 languages are spoken in Palestine.

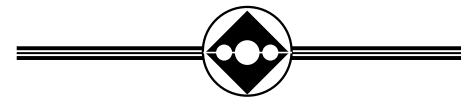
Every week has three sabbaths. The Moslems shut shop on Fridays the Jews on Saturday and the Christians on Sunday. Saturday is very obviously the main day of rest and practically everything is at a standstill but you can imagine what confusion reigns over the observances of these days of rest and of all the other festivals celebrated by these three creeds. Yet the tenor of life appears

to flow very evenly without clashing. All this is usual and a part of Palestine.”

### **November 1942**

“We are having a particularly welcome respite from action. The section is still attached to one of the brigades and we are situated once more in the sea coast town (what's left of it) from where we were so hurriedly rushed last June. We've had time to lick our sores, wash our bodies and clothing and recuperate from a few hectic days and nights. Again we've been extremely fortunate in getting in very early on the tails of the Hun and finding ration dumps and all sorts of useful gear— absolutely untouched. Bully and biscuits are spurned by us now cos we've got loads of continental delicatessen which are most tasty fare and in real contrast to our own 'Umble bully. Loads of Erstz too, vitamins ABCD and right through the alphabet, soya bean cakes and biscuits, ersatz coffee, tea and chocolate powder. We're sun and sea bathing to our hearts' content and cheering the victorious Eighth Army every time we hear about their further successes on the radio.”

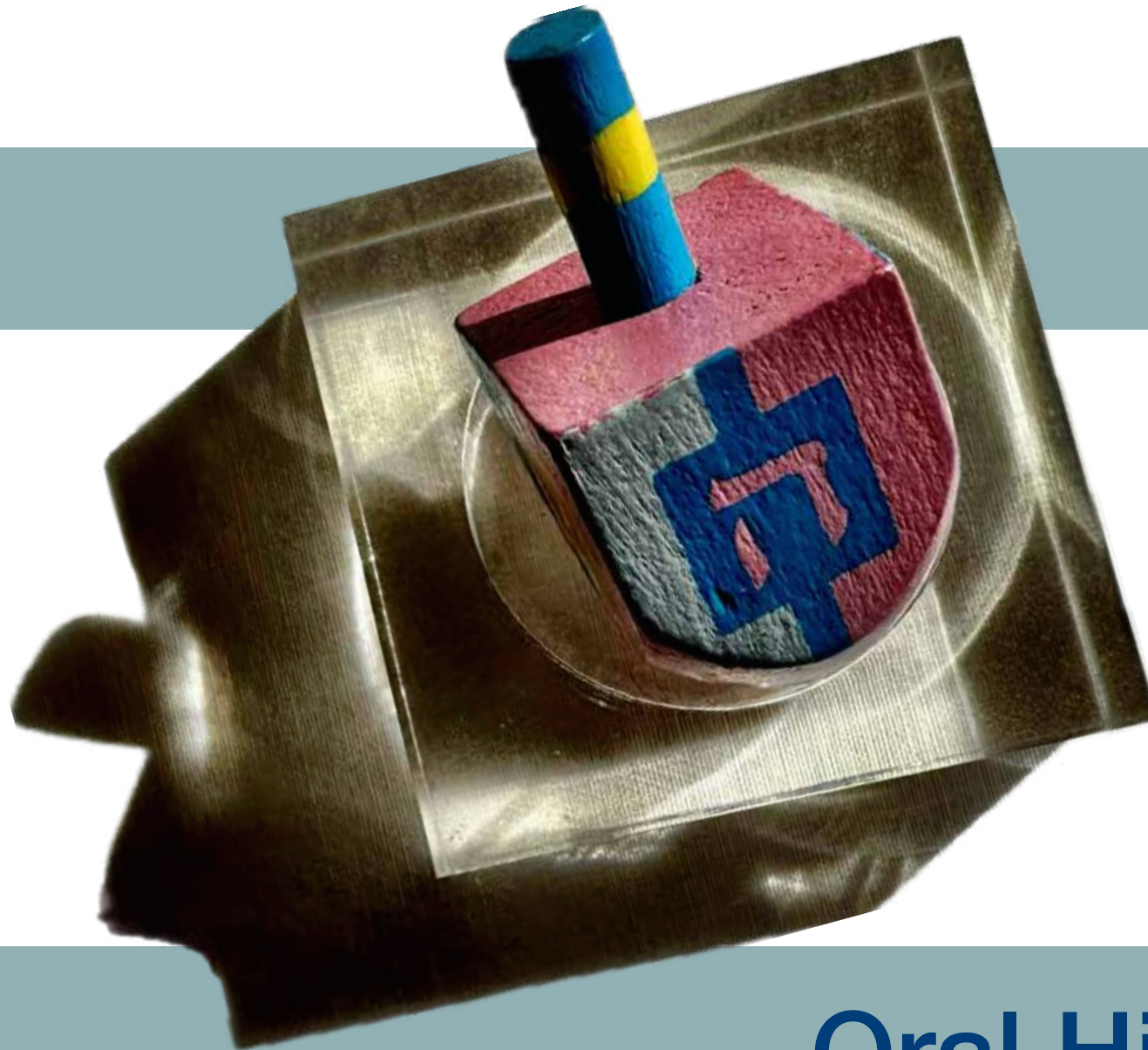
- All of these letters and other readings from archives were written contemporaneously as people lived and wrote about them. They present a potent mix of sadness, luck and despite everything, hope for a better future. ■



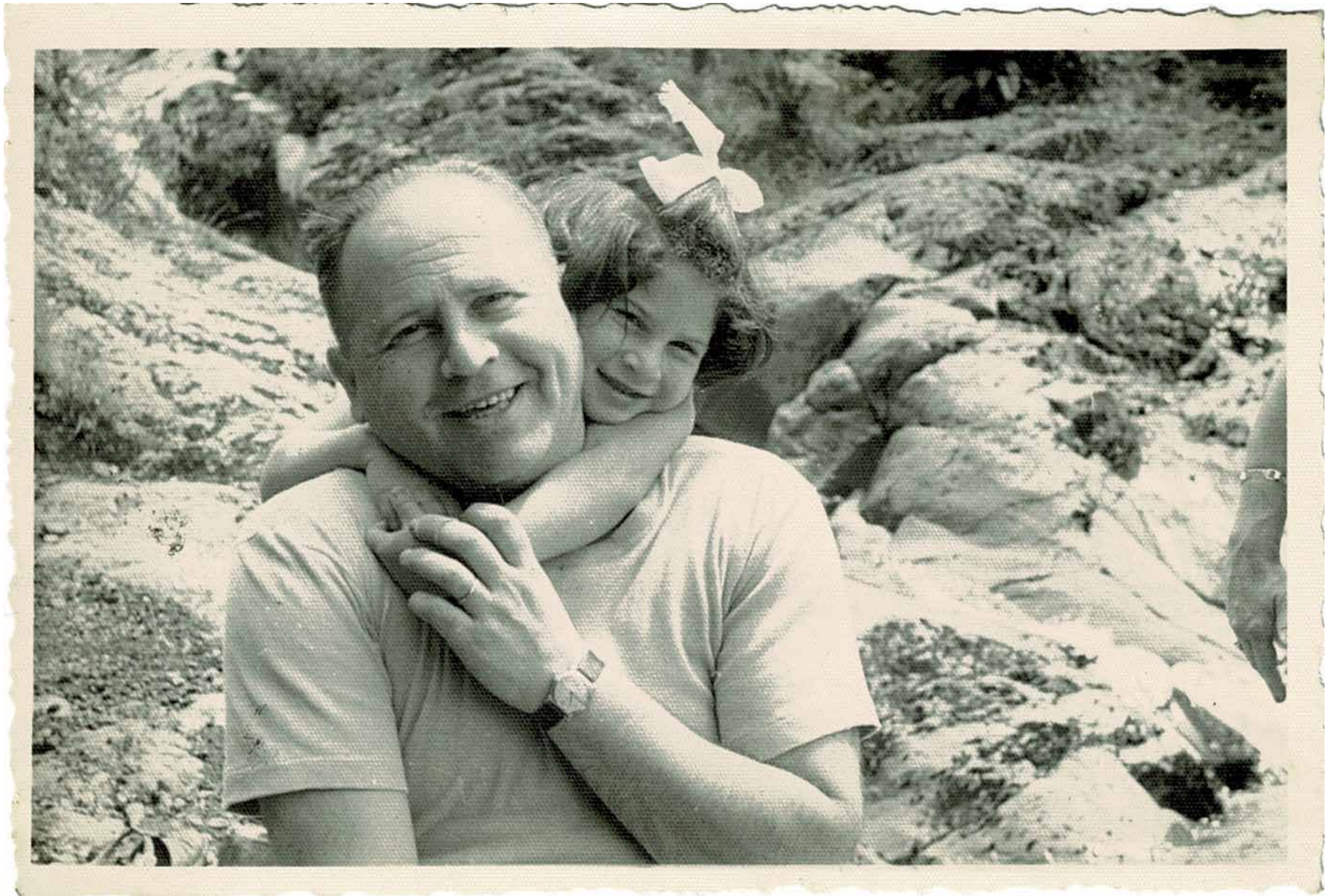


*Troops marching through central Jerusalem during WW2.*





# Oral History



# Importance of oral history

***A speech given to UNIHRD (United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day) – Auckland 27 January 2024.***



HONOURED GUESTS,

While starting to prepare my address an article on J-wire caught my eye. It was an item reporting on the Shoah Foundation of the University of Southern California. With the establishment of the Foundation in 1994 Steven Spielberg promised Holocaust survivors their stories would be preserved and used to teach history and to work toward a world without antisemitism or hate of any kind. The Foundation has documented the stories of more than 56,000 survivors in many countries and in many diverse languages, including 56 interviews which were from survivors

living in New Zealand.

Now, the article said, the Foundation started by Spielberg has begun collecting testimonies of Israeli survivors of the Hamas 7 October 2024 slaughter close to the Gaza border. In announcing the plan to interview these survivors of the Hamas murders, Spielberg said that after the Holocaust, he never imagined he would see such unspeakable barbarity against Jews in his lifetime. In the future these testimonies will surely bear witness to the terrible atrocities which occurred that October day and their aftermath.



The Auckland Holocaust Oral History project was born at a meeting in 1994. A call had gone out for anyone interested in interviewing Holocaust survivors, to attend a gathering at the Narev's home. I remember only a few of those sitting around the table – Freda Narev herself, Sara Nevezie, Ruth Filler, Judi Lubetzky and a number of others. At the time the driving aim of the project was to bear witness against Holocaust deniers such as David Irving.

## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

Despite little experience of interviewing but understanding the need to gain experience, I attended a training course set up by the Alexander Turnbull Oral History Centre in Wellington. Encouraged by Judith Fyfe, the celebrated oral historian who taught us, I embarked on my first interview. Working with Freda and many others over the past 30 years the group has assembled an archive of 90 testimonials. Now, when most of the first generation have died it is even more important that the histories of survivors worldwide and in particular of our New Zealand survivors are preserved.

These recordings have been digitised. Excerpts can be used for education and research, according to the consents accompanying each interview. Clips are already being used and quoted in schools' programmes, sermons and elsewhere. There is nothing more moving than listening to a survivor talking about their experiences. The stories of resilience, courage, and survival emerge through the voices of those who experienced the horrors first hand. Personal narratives provide a human face to the statistics. As time moves forward, the inevitable reality is that the number of living Holocaust survivors is diminishing rapidly, so these oral histories are becoming really precious. They are a taonga.

In the last few years we have been receiving increasing numbers of requests from descendants of survivors, asking for copies of the interviews. A number of children and grandchildren have written to express their gratitude at hearing their own family members' voices, long after they have died. The interviews



have mostly been recorded by volunteers, many untrained and so some may appear unpolished— this only adds to their veracity and authenticity.

My parents did sometimes mention in passing family members who had been murdered in the camps and I absorbed the details at our dinner table that etched images into my mind. Grandfather Siegfried who walked with a stick and who died in Theresienstadt, Grandmother Adi who survived Theresienstadt – was it by luck? – grandmother Marta, the strict disciplinarian who died in Piaski, a sub camp of Lublin, Uncle Fredy a sportsman, ladies man and a close companion of my father's adolescence, two years younger, who shared in making mischief, the army of Briess cousins making up large numbers of the local ice hockey, soccer and tennis teams.

Perhaps it was the stories my father told me in my early years when on a Saturday morning after playing tennis he would run a hot bath for himself. I was assigned a seat over the plug hole at the end of the bath while he told me stories of the adventures the Briess boys had in pre war Czechoslovakia; walking on the roofs of the three storey houses, peeing down the chimneys, putting soap bubbles in the local fountain and much more. Boys' stuff! Later, I wondered what had become of the family who peopled the stories, but it was too late to ask.

Then again perhaps it was Karl, the survivor who helped me with the translations of my parents' German language diary, carbon copies neatly typed in single spacing, kept from 1939 to 1944. Stories from the diaries and letters

would lead into tales of his experiences in seven different camps and more. He would describe the atmosphere, recalling:

“I remember the winter of 1940. It was a very bad winter and a train got stuck in the snow. We had to get a group together to dig it out and the cold was very severe . . .”

I can hear and see him still in my memory. Maybe it was these formative experiences that led to my involvement for many years in recording testimonies.

To quote the famous survivor Elie Wiesel: “Whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness.” By telling the stories, we create narratives and bear witness. By keeping the stories alive, to echo across the generations, we have an archive for the voices of our Jewish community for generations to come.

Written by Claire Bruell and presented by Claudia Arieli,  
Auckland Jewish Oral History Group.





**And so to the present . . .**



Awarded to  
**Claire Bruell**  
in honor of her outstanding contribution to  
the Historical Society of the County  
Being elected as an  
Honorary Life Member

THE WORLD IN COLORS  
INTO THE LIGHT  
MICHAEL SMITH PAINTER  
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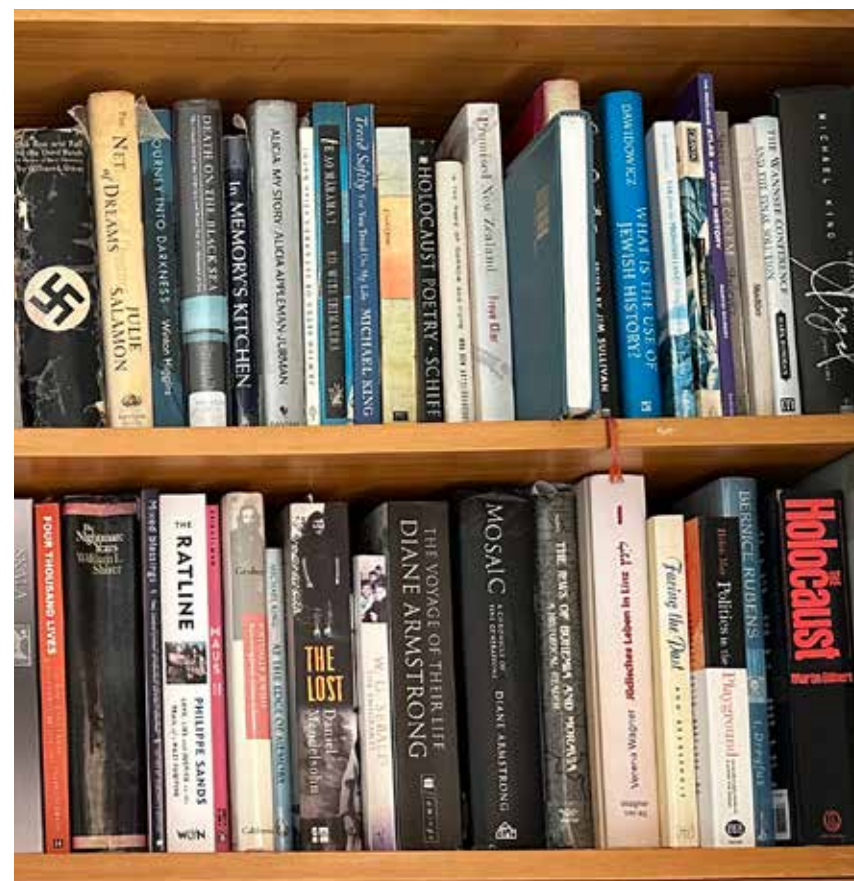
# Thank you . . .



FINALLY to the present.

Compiling a list of acknowledgements is not an easy task. Firstly, my father Frank who left me a piece of paper with a squiggly line showing his father and his father's siblings and thus planted the idea of a family tree in my fertile head in 1979. Who were these people, where were they, what happened to them? To my mother who started me with Holocaust stories which led me down another track. My gratitude to both of them and to Peter's parents Lilly and Fred Bruell too, all of them, for the guts and foresight to escape Hitler's Europe and come to the other end of the world . . . and giving us the luxury of relatively unscathed childhoods.

The next stage of my journey when the Czech Jewish archives became available with the arrival through the 90s of a multitude of records from Austria, Germany, Czechoslovakia and the Jewish Genealogy networks, the Austria-Czech SIG community, exchanging and connecting. Milos Dobry from the Olomouc Jewish community who contacted me and became a treasured friend, Jaroslav Klenovsky who researched archives, found records, kept in touch, filled in gaps, took us on information gathering trips. Doris Budowski was an early collaborator cousin in Israel. Contemporaneously those who unearthed and wrote books with all the information which became available; Hugo Gold's book on the Jewish communities of Moravia which arrived online and brought images of four of our great grandparents to life; Luise Brüll,



## PIECING TOGETHER IDENTITY

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Ignaz Briess Sr, Hermann Löwy and Samuel Berger. Michael Miller's book *Rabbis and Revolution* on the Jews of Moravia, expanded my vision, likewise my correspondence with Michael Viktorik, History Department, Palacky University, Olomouc. My special thanks to those working hard to put Jewish records of Moravia on line – Lenka Matusikova, Julius Muller, Bob Hanscom, Randy Schoenberg to name a few. To Peter's New York family who gave me treasures – Aunt Mitzi, Lindy, Hannah Scholl, Jim Ostroff, cousin Barbara Rosenblum and the plethora of friends who encouraged me along the way: Diane, Penny, Naomi, Daniela (Sydney), Helene and Mike and Gill (Wellington), my cousins Tom Lachs (Vienna), Peter Briess (London), Eric Winton (Sydney), Peter Maier (Los Angeles), the late Peter Löffler in Salt Lake City, Sharka (Prague), our Gerbi cousins (Italy), the Briess, Gilam, Schimmerling, Bruell/Bar Eyal families in Israel and so many more.

I am grateful to my proofreaders Leighann, Penny, Naomi and Janet for their eagle-eyed attention to detail. Thank you.

To Peter, my rock and my facilitator, for his infinite patience, endurance, and encouragement, allowing me the time and space to write and research, sharing my journey and the joy in my discoveries and keeping the household going while I was distracted. A big thank you too to Anton and Ezra, always interested in hearing the stories that began in the 1980s with the translating of Frank and Lizzie's letters from German, describing the war years on the farm, learning history as it was not taught at school, just as Frank taught me with his stories of pre war Olmütz, both boys always responsive to my technology needs.

And finally to the wonderful Mike, to whom I owe such a huge debt of gratitude. You made order out of chaos, patience, wisdom with your intuitive eye for design, ideas, suggestions and above all your shared enthusiasm for the project which must have expanded beyond your wildest imaginings. Our families are in your debt, their histories the richer, for your care and your

willingness to “go down rabbit holes”. How could you ever have known the energy and time it would take to complete this project? The books are part yours – not only for the design and layout but also for the photographs from your collection which slipped in occasionally to illustrate my points. My thanks to Gill for accomodating me by allowing you the time away from her own project.

I salute the good people who guaranteed and assisted the lives of so many. Nicholas Winton and the kind British who paid the £50 required and took in a stranger's child, sight unseen, Henry Sterling, an Australian, who heard the plight of Paul Ungar and offered a job, the Masterton man Mr Keith who saw an advertisement in the local paper asking for help and replied offering sponsorship to Lidi and Pola Fantl, an unknown mother and daughter duo in distress in distant Prague, George and Nina Wine who worked Frank and Lizzie's farm when it had to be sold and they had to leave, Mr Hunter, Lilly's Auckland employer, who visited Lilly's family in New York during the war, to assure them that their family in distant New Zealand were well and happy, so many countless good people including Annie and Max Deckston who brought 20 children to settle in Wellington and provided for them until they reached adulthood.

Finally, these books are dedicated, of course, to my five beautiful grandchildren, (l to r - opposite page) Simon, Sofia, Isaac, Lilly, Nate and Simon . . . this is your history, these are your stories, my gift to you.

**Claire Bruell ■**



SARDINHA



TÊNIS DO ATLÂNTICO

Informational sign with text and images, partially visible on the right side of the frame.



*42 Józefa St.  
The Hebrew reads:*

*The holy society for learning Torah.  
(l) Established in the year 1811.  
(r) Renovated in the year 1912.*



**Design Production**

Mike Regan  
WELLINGTON

*ISBN 978-1-0670423-3-2*

