



# My Story

## Mindu Hornick, MBE



*My Story*  
Mindu Hornick MBE



These are Mindu's words. This is her story.

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

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

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# My Story

## Mindu Hornick MBE

"I remember looking back. I couldn't see my brothers because of the crowds, but I caught sight of my mother. She was wearing a spotted scarf. I was able to wave to her and she waved back. That was the last time we saw her."

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## Part 1

### My early life



My parents, Chaya and Moses

## My family

I WAS BORN on 4 May 1929, in the village of Úrmező in Eastern Slovakia, Czechoslovakia. I was one of four children.

My sister, Bilou, was two years older than me. There was quite a big age gap between my two brothers - Josef was three years younger and Samuel, eight years younger. I think there was another child in between who died of diphtheria.

My mother Chaya Slyomovics was born in 1902, in Úrmező, which was located in Austria-Hungary at the time. She was one of 16 children born to Chaim David Slyomovics and Blima Holder-Kahan, 10 of whom survived into adulthood. In 1926, Chaim and Blima moved with their seven younger children from Úrmező to Carlsbad, and 11 years later to Prague. The two oldest siblings, Julius and Berta, moved to Tacevo, a few miles away, while my mother remained in Úrmező.

The names and birth dates of my ten maternal uncles and aunties who survived infancy are:

- 1 Julius (known as Yechiel) born 8 July, 1895
- 2 Bajla (known as Berta) born 31 March, 1899
- 3 Hani (known as Chaya) born 30 April, 1902
- 4 Emi (known as Margit) born 3 November, 1904
- 5 Zalman Leib (known as Zolly) born 14 September, 1908
- 6 Ida born 27 August, 1911
- 7 Ester Ruchel (known as Etel) born 15 June, 1912
- 8 Josef born 2 March, 1913
- 9 Roza (known as Shoshanna) born 27 December, 1914
- 10 Anna (known as Anci) born 28 November, 1916



My maternal grandfather, Chaim David, 1873-1944

My father, Moses Chaim Klein, was also born in Úrmező, in 1904. His parents, Ester Klein and Eizik Haskel, were married under a *chuppah* (Jewish wedding canopy), but not married legally until 1917. It was decided that my father would use his mother's maiden name as he was 13 years old by the time his parents were legally married.

My parents married in 1927 in Úrmező, where they settled. ■

“His parents, Ester Klein and Eizik Haskel, were married under a *chuppah* (Jewish wedding canopy), but not married legally until 1917.”



My maternal grandmother, Blima, 1875-1944

## A happy Orthodox family

MY IMMEDIATE FAMILY was a happy one. We had a lovely home, an orchard and a garden. My mother was a housewife and my father had a fruit and hay business. The area in Slovakia where we lived was rural. We had extremely hot summers and bitterly cold winters. My father's business collected grass-cuttings which were sent to a special depot where they were made into bales of hay. He sold this to farmers who needed to feed their cattle in winter. My father also had a business picking cider apples which were sent to the same depot as the hay, parcelled up and sent to a cider mill.

My father was successful. He spent most of the week working away, but always came home at weekends with an enormous box of fruit for us to enjoy. He was a loving and lovely man.

My father's parents lived just a few miles away. My grandfather had a little grocery shop. His family could be traced back to the Spanish Inquisition when the Jews were thrown out of Spain. I don't remember him well, although I have been told that he was a tall, upright, military man, dark and Spanish-looking. Tragically my grandparents lost three children to tuberculosis.

Our family was part of a small Orthodox community. The population was mainly non-Jewish; we were a small Jewish group which made us all very close. We spoke Yiddish at home and Czech at school, and my parents also spoke good German. Although we were Orthodox and observed the Sabbath and all the festivals, we were friends with our non-Jewish neighbours and school friends, and with everyone around us.

There were lots of activities on Fridays in preparation for the Sabbath. People assumed we were wealthy because we always managed to have special Friday nights, full of delicious food. We were one of the few families who had a kiln oven that we used to bake our own *challah* (Sabbath bread). We would often have a *kugel* (grated potatoes, cooked in animal fat) cooking in the oven. Our neighbours would bring a pot of *cholent* (a dish with beans and pearl barley, with a bone and meat of some kind in it) to cook in our oven for them. These dishes would be left in the oven overnight and the next morning on the Sabbath, after the lunchtime service at the synagogue, the neighbours would come to collect their food. ■

## Part 2 The nightmare years

## A devastated community

IT WAS A lovely community and way of life, but it all changed suddenly in 1939, when Hitler occupied Czechoslovakia in May and then marched into Prague in September. The country was divided and the area of Slovakia where we lived was given to the Hungarians. After a year or so Hungarian teachers were imported to teach us their language. By then my father had been drafted into a forced labour battalion. These battalions were attached to the military but had no uniform: they wore ordinary clothes with a Star of David. They were sent ahead to dig the trenches, unload the lorries and carry out other menial tasks.

In the summer of 1941, when I was 12 years old, almost the whole of our Jewish community was cleared out. Jewish families were rounded up, put on lorries and taken away, except for the families whose men had been taken into the labour battalions. This was an exception that was apparently arranged by the Hungarian Regent, Miklos Horthy, who was an ally of Germany but tried to keep some distance.



Czechoslovakia 1928-1938. Source: [wikiwand.com/en/HistoryofCzechoslovakia](http://wikiwand.com/en/HistoryofCzechoslovakia)

Around 22,000 Jews were deported from Hungarian territory in 1941, the great majority slaughtered by the SS in German-occupied Poland. Horthy then put a stop to the deportations and for two or three years after that first terrible round-up the Jews in Hungarian territory avoided the worst. But it was very frightening for us who remained, and my mother worried about what had happened to those who had been taken away.

My dear father came home just once after he was pressed into the labour battalion and I remember him being very tearful. We never saw him again.

Our relatives, friends, neighbours and synagogue companions had all gone. Some, including my uncles Zolly and Josef, had escaped to join the Czech-British Legion when Hitler marched into Prague. It was terrible to find ourselves without a community.



Annexation of Czechoslovakia, 1938-1939. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Our neighbours and school friends began to treat us differently due to the propaganda of the time. My mother always protected us children, not wanting us to worry about what was going on, but here and there I would pick up bits of information. We were restricted, isolated and frightened. Just like the German Jews, we were banned from visiting facilities such as swimming pools and we weren't allowed to go to the parks and the cinemas.

My mother lived with a terrible fear of not having any income and it must have been very difficult for her to feed us. I remember her struggling home with a sack of flour from a local mill so we could make our own bread. She had exchanged some of the produce we grew in the garden for the flour. ■

## The final round-up and the Kosice ghetto

In early 1944, when it became obvious that the Germans were losing the war, Horthy made attempts to strike a deal with the Allies. He was then no longer trusted and this led to Germany occupying Hungary in March 1944. It was a disaster for the remaining Jews in Hungarian territory. During the summer of 1944, some 400,000 were deported, the vast majority murdered in Auschwitz.

This was when everything changed for my family. My sister, Bilou and I were then 16 and 14, our brothers Josef and Samuel were 11 and six. German officials arrived in our village and ordered the remaining Jewish families to gather in the town centre, from where we were taken in lorries to a ghetto in the town of Kosice, Slovakia. The ghetto was part of the town but it was quite rural, and I remember us being in a hayloft, probably because the other houses were already occupied. We must have been given some sort of ration and I remember eating the home-made jams my mother had brought with us. ■

“ My dear father came home just once after he was pressed into the labour battalion and I remember him being very tearful. We never saw him again. ”

“ It was a disaster for the remaining Jews in Hungarian territory. During the summer of 1944, some 400,000 were deported, the vast majority murdered in Auschwitz. ”

## The transport from Kosice

A FEW WEEKS after arriving in Kosice, my family was given orders to get down from the hayloft and we were rounded up. This was in about May 1944.

After they collected us all they put us on to lorries once more. We children had no idea where we were going, although our mother may have known something. There were many lorries from all other areas. They were clearing out all the Jews in Slovakia, including the isolated communities like ours which had been allowed to stay until recently.

We were taken to a railway siding and there were these terrible cattle trucks; they started pushing us in, more and more. There were Hungarian soldiers, collaborators, to help and there were Slovaks also helping to push us into these carriages. I remember them putting a bucket in the middle for sanitation. We happened to be at the end by the door and my mother kept us there. They pushed so many people into the packed carriage that we felt we were suffocating. There were just mothers and children, maybe a few grandmothers, but no men at all in our transport. Many mothers with young children were desperate for milk, for food. The train kept shunting forwards and backwards, perhaps because of bomb damage to the railway line. This went on for three days and three nights. I could hear babies crying, but after a while they stopped. I think they just died. ■

“The train kept shunting forwards and backwards, perhaps because of bomb damage to the railway line. This went on for three days and three nights. I could hear babies crying, but after a while they stopped. I think they just died.”

## Arrival in Auschwitz: the terror of the selection

AFTER THREE DAYS and three nights we were absolutely exhausted. The only food we had was what my mother had brought, and we were terribly thirsty because there was no water to drink. Then suddenly we stopped and we heard this dreadful clatter. They were undoing the chains of the truck. The cattle trucks had wooden partitions which allowed in a bit of air and without them we would all have suffocated. I remember looking through one of the partitions and my mother asked: “What can you see?” I said: “There are men walking around, soldiers with guns,” and there was a sign which read ‘Oswiecim’. The Germans called it Auschwitz, but for the Poles it was Oswiecim. My mother said she had never heard of it and she didn’t know where we were.

Suddenly the door was opened and the scene that greeted us was nightmarish. There were loudspeakers and soldiers marching up and down with guns on their backs, walking around with Alsatians barking viciously.

A man in striped clothing looked into our carriage. He was a Polish *kapo* (a camp prisoner assigned by the SS guards to supervise other prisoners). He jumped into our wagon. He asked my mother, in Yiddish with a Polish accent: “Which are your children?” He knew we spoke Yiddish because he had heard us. My mother said: “These are my two girls, and these are my two little boys.” He said: “Let the girls go ahead, you’ll see them later.” You can imagine how terrified and confused my mother was when faced with the sight that greeted her when that carriage door opened. But the fact that this man spoke to her in Yiddish, and was so persuasive in manner, decided it for her. She looked at my sister Bilou and me and said: “You’d better do as he says.” At this point I still didn’t have a clue where we were.

When he was taking us down from the carriage, he said to me: “You must say that you’re 17,” and he told Bilou: “You must say that you’re 19 and that you are both seamstresses. Go on, go on, you will see your mother later.” So we joined an enormous trail of mothers and children from the train.

I remember looking back. I couldn’t see my brothers because of the crowds, but I caught sight of my mother. She was wearing a spotted scarf. I was able to wave to her and she waved back. I had no idea that would be the last time I would see her.

When my sister and I got to the front of the trail of people, to the main gate with the sign ‘*Arbeit Macht Frei*’, we realised that there was a selection going on. There was a lady in front of us with a daughter about our age, and several siblings. The mother and the siblings were immediately sent to the left and the girl of our age was pushed through. She started screaming and the SS man pushed her with the butt of his gun and said: “Okay, if you want to go with your mother, go with your mother!” It made no difference to them, one more or less for the gas chambers.

I suppose the Polish man who told us what to do, knew what would happen at the gate. I think 90% of those on our transport went directly to the gas chambers because they were not useful for work. That man saved our lives, because if we were sent one way and our mother the other way at the selection, we would have reacted exactly like the girl in front of us. We would never have allowed ourselves to be separated from our dear mother and our little brothers, Josef and Samuel. The Polish man assured us that we would see them again and we just hung on to that. ■

“The Germans called it Auschwitz, but for the Poles it was Oswiecim. My mother said she had never heard of it and she didn’t know where we were.”

## Entry into hell

THE SHOCK OF what was happening was so great that I have no memory of registering my name or age. Yet I have a certificate which gives all these details.

When we went through that main gate we entered hell. There were watchtowers and machine guns pointed at us, and all along the side there were skeletons just covered in skin on trollies, and men in their striped clothing, walking around dragging these trollies, and others just walking around aimlessly. And there was a terrible smell, and a grey ash falling. We didn’t know what it was, but it felt greasy. What we saw was just unbelievable. It was the vision of hell that a young girl would have.

The SS were shouting: “*Reihe, Reihe!*” (“Get in line!”). We had no clue what they meant, but we would soon learn; they were obsessed with forcing us to stand in rows of five and form a queue. Once there were enough of us in line, we were marched to a depot and ordered to take all our clothes off. This was the start of the Germans’ process of dehumanising us. And for us as young girls, at that age when you’re starting puberty, I don’t think even our mother had seen us naked, but no-one dared not do as we were told. There were men walking around and *kapos* were everywhere, telling us what to do.

We were forced into a shower to be deloused, and after made to sit while men brutally shaved off our hair. We were then taken to another depot to find some clothes. I was only small and handed something that reached the floor. Tall girls were given garments that were far too short. So there was a busy exchange going on to find the right size. We had no underwear and were given wooden clogs.

We were hungry, we were thirsty, and we were unbelievably distressed and crying for our mothers. Somebody said: “Don’t be silly. You see that smoke coming down and the smell? That could be your mother already burning in the crematorium.” Almost the whole of our transport of mothers and children went directly to the gas chambers, except for a few young women who were picked out as we might be useful. ■

## Zählappell and the Angel of Death

WE WERE NUMB from the shock of finding ourselves in this hell and still absolutely parched having been given no food nor drink. Eventually we were taken to Block 14, which would hold 1000 women. At that time all the beds were taken. They were small beds in tiers of three, each about the size of a small settee, with eight people per bed. The last big transports were those coming from Hungary, like ours, so there was no space for us and we were forced to sit on the stone floor all night, again with no water to drink or wash, and no sanitation.

The next morning when it was still dark, the whistle blew: “*Raus!*” (“Out!”) “*Zählappell!*” (“Roll call!”). Standing in rows of five, they would count us and decide if we were to be selected. The daily selections were used to get rid of any ill prisoners. I found out later that people would prick their fingers and use the blood to add colour to their cheeks to look healthy so that they would not be selected.

Dr Mengele, the Angel of Death, often walked around checking and selecting, accompanied by Irma Grese, a female SS guard. She was just a farmer’s daughter but fitted the image, blonde and tall. She would walk around with him in her SS uniform. She carried a plaited leather whip and could whip people to death for no reason. The Angel of Death was always immaculately dressed, a good-looking man with shiny boots. When he was there we would stand more upright, out of fear. Mengele carried leather gloves. He would wave one of these gloves at someone and that person would have to step out of line. They would be taken away and were never seen again. ■

## Family support

MY SISTER AND I supported one another and we quickly discovered that my Aunty Berta, my mother’s sister, was in the camp. Her family had been living in a village close to us and her husband, Avraham, was my father’s business partner. She had arrived a few days before us with her two daughters, Lily and Elsa, who were two or three years older than me. On their second day, after roll call, Aunty Berta heard that the transports from Kosice had arrived and she came running to our block to find us. I don’t know how she knew we were there as our relatives from Prague and Carlsbad were all sent to Theresienstadt. She brought some soup for us because she knew that the newcomers would not have eaten yet. It was horrible and slimy; when we put it to our lips we couldn’t swallow because we hadn’t eaten for so long.

Aunty Berta thought about how she could look after us and she managed to exchange a space from block 14 to block 16 so we could be with her. If anyone found out she could have been whipped to death, but a secret exchange was possible as long as the numbers tallied. There were relatives from another family who wanted to be together, so she was able to move us to her block and the others moved to ours. We may not have been able to survive without Aunty Berta’s support. ■

## Kanada

ROLL CALL WAS unrelenting. Sometimes it would be twice a day and could last up to four hours. This was where we would be selected for work. We were sent to work in a depot for valuables named Kanada, a country thought to be full of great riches like the wealth of possessions taken from the people who arrived in Auschwitz. Gold was especially popular in those days for birthdays and wedding gifts and these belongings had to be left behind. Very often people would sew items like rings, jewellery or watches into the linings of their jackets. So there we were in Kanada, tearing open the linings of coats and jackets to look for valuables. These were put into boxes, with the SS standing over us shouting “*Schnell! Schnell!*” (“Quick! Quick!”).

Semi-fictional books have since been written describing girls smuggling diamonds out of Kanada under their tongues, which were then sold so that they could get food. There is no way any prisoner could have taken anything and put it in their mouths because we were constantly watched. ■

“We were sent to work in a depot for valuables named Kanada, a country thought to be full of great riches like the wealth of possessions taken from the people who arrived in Auschwitz.”

## Transfer to Germany

SOME MONTHS AFTER working in Kanada, Aunty Berta got us all together - me, Bilou, Lily and Elsa, and told us to follow her. We were going to a selection in the hope of being allocated work outside the camp. We entered an enormous room and were directed to various areas and told to strip naked. Once again they found every way possible to humiliate us. They were apparently looking at our muscles, but we didn't have any. It was laughable but we were chosen anyway. We made up a group of 500 women from the Hungarian part of the camp and were being sent elsewhere.

This turned out to be a stroke of luck because there was no way, with the little food we were given - a spoonful of terrible slimy turnip soup, a small ration of bread now and then, and black 'coffee' - that we could have survived much longer in Auschwitz.

We were taken to a depot at a railway siding, kitted out with a dress and a coat and ordinary shoes instead of wooden clogs. Then we were instructed to exchange the sleeves of our coats with another person, so that each would end up with odd sleeves of different colours. I did not know what the point of this exercise was. We were then ordered on to a cattle truck. After travelling for about 45 minutes the train suddenly stopped and started shunting back. The railway lines had been bombed. At this point we were unloaded.

We slept outside by the crematorium for at least one night. The crematorium wasn't working at the time. I don't know if this is true, but I heard that if the railway line could be repaired we would carry on with our journey, but if not and the crematorium was working again, we would have been for burning.

We managed to continue on our journey with a lot of stopping and starting due to damaged railway lines. At no time did we know where we were going. Eventually, after three or four days, we arrived somewhere. We were taken out and made to walk to barracks which I think had been previously occupied by Russian prisoners-of-war.

We had no idea at the time, but we had arrived at Neuengamme concentration camp, a big slave labour complex. It was August 1944. There was a main camp, while our camp, *Lübbstedt-Bilobe*, was

one of 84 satellite camps that was located between Hamburg and Bremen. Slave labourers worked on munitions, parachutes and brick production.

It was a beautiful rural area in a wood 15 kilometres outside Hamburg. The air helped us to survive: it was so much better than the awful smell and dirt of Auschwitz with grey ash falling on us all the time.

The barracks were small, with about 18 of us in each cabin. These bunks weren't bare, as we had been used to in Auschwitz: they were covered in straw and we were actually given blankets. We could wash, although the water was cold. In Auschwitz there was nothing, unless we were taken to the shower rooms to be disinfected. It was certainly better than what we had come from.

Unlike in Auschwitz, Neuengamme camp had Wehrmacht guards, the armed forces of the Third Reich, supervising us and guarding the perimeter of the camp, as well as the SS. ■

| Häftlingskarte                           |                    |                   |                  |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
|--|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------|---------------|--|--------------------------------|--------|-----|
| Einlieferungsstelle                      | Einlieferungsdatum |                   |                  | Häftlingsart     | Geburts-           |       |               | Geschlecht                                   | Familienstand                  | Kinder | Kl. |
|  | Tag                | Monat             | Jahr             |                  | Tag                | Monat | Jahr          |  |                                |        |     |
| Stapo 01                                 | 00                 | 00                | 00               | Jüdin 08         | 04                 | 05    | 24            | weiblich <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | ledig <input type="checkbox"/> |        |     |
| Staatsangehörigkeit                      | Hauptberuf         |                   | 1. Nebenberuf    |                  | 2. Nebenberuf      |       | 3. Nebenberuf |  |                                |        |     |
| A Ungarn 3/12                            | Schülerin 793      |                   |                  |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| Wehrdienstverhältnis                     | T.-Grad            | Anzahl Vorstrafen | Gefängnis Monate | Zuchthaus Monate | Eingeliefert in KL |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| Ungarn                                   |                    |                   |                  |                  | Auschwitz 09       |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| Zugangsart                               | Überstellung an KL | Häftlings-Nr.     | eingesetzt als   |                  | Abgangs-           |       | Mitt. Verm.   |  |                                |        |     |
| E 1                                      | Neuengamme 09      | 3064              | H. Arb. 795      |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| Bemerkungen:                             |                    |                   |                  |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| Kontrollvermerk                          |                    |                   |                  |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| ausgestellt unterschrieben Lesch geprüft |                    |                   |                  |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |
| 10                                       |                    |                   |                  |                  |                    |       |               |  |                                |        |     |

My Neuengamme registration card



Location of Neuengamme concentration camp.  
Source: Karsten Dölger, 'From Auschwitz to Plön', 2017

## Muna munitions factory

THE CONDITIONS HAD improved slightly, but we still had to get up at four o'clock in the morning and stand in line outside the barracks to be counted. We were then given just a black coffee and marched to the Muna munitions factory in Lübberstedt, about 45 minutes away. It was hidden underground in the forest.

Our job was filling bombs, grenades and mines with explosives for the Luftwaffe. The tall girls, including both Lily and Elsa, were made to pour a hot gun solution into the containers, without any face or body protection. They were made to do this for months; some of the girls went blind from the acidity and some developed perforated lungs from the phosphor used in the process.

There was no petrol at that time, so when the grenades and bombs were finished we had to load them on to lorries, physically pull the lorries a long distance to a railway siding, and then load the arms on to trains. If there were no trains available we were made to offload the arms, which were very heavy, into bunkers next to the railway line. When the trains arrived we had to lift the arms into the carriages. It was back-breaking work. ■

“The tall girls, including both Lily and Elsa, were made to pour a hot gun solution into the containers, without any face or body protection. They were made to do this for months; some of the girls went blind from the acidity and some developed perforated lungs from the phosphor used in the process.”

## The soup that saved us

AT LUNCHTIME WE were taken to the factory canteen and given a German soup with pulses and vegetables. This soup kept us alive. In the evening back at the camp we would get another black coffee with a small ration of bread, often with some terrible smelly cheese that had gone off. But we would eat anything and that cheese was a treat as it had some nutritional value. Three or four of the older ladies, including Aunty Berta, were chosen to cook in the kitchen for the SS and the soldiers. Occasionally they would bring back a couple of small potatoes in their blouse and share them between all of us.

We were still freezing and malnourished, but we thought we had a chance to get through this because we were needed to make the bombs and grenades. ■

“We were still freezing and malnourished, but we thought we had a chance to get through this because we were needed to make the bombs and grenades.”

## The case of the beaten girl and the sympathetic guard

THERE WAS A guard, one of the Wehrmacht, called Willie. He was German but had been living in America and had an American wife. As he was visiting his family in Germany when war broke he wasn't allowed to return home but was forced to join the army.

Willie would visit the kitchen. He told my aunty where he was from, and some kind of trust was established. At one point he told us: "You need to hold on girls, we are losing the war." He would have been lynched had the authorities known he was passing this on.

We allowed ourselves some hope, but we still had to deal with regular brutality. One day a girl said: "I just can't pull this lorry any further," and a female camp guard who walked around with sticks started beating her and she just collapsed on the ground. Then she ordered: "Nobody is to go near her, nobody is to touch her, leave her there." When these evil female guards started beating someone they went into some kind of frenzy, as though they were having an adrenalin rush. Some of the other girls persuaded Willie to let them go back to collect her, but she was so badly beaten she died overnight. That poor wretched girl could have been any of us. ■

“We allowed ourselves some hope, but we still had to deal with regular brutality. One day a girl said: “I just can't pull this lorry any further,” and a female camp guard who walked around with sticks started beating her and she just collapsed on the ground.”

## Transport towards Lübeck: death march by train

WE SOMEHOW SURVIVED the camp for eight months. By spring 1945, Bremen and Hamburg were being heavily bombed by the Allies and we could see that the guards were getting agitated.

All of a sudden the camp authorities told us we were to board a transport. We walked to the railway siding. For the first time we were put on a passenger train, there was no sign of cattle trucks. We had no idea where we were going. Mercifully we didn't know Himmler had given the order to evacuate all surviving slave labourers from Neuengamme's 84 satellite camps to camps further inside Germany so they would not fall into Allied hands. The Nazis hoped to get rid of the prisoners or use them to bargain with. The journey we were on was a death march, but by train.

As we were travelling through Germany our train was attacked by low-flying British Typhoon fighter jets. The British thought that the train was carrying ammunition and fleeing Nazis, and didn't realise it was carrying prisoners.

There were two attacks on the train. The first as we passed through Eutin on 2 May, when the train driver was killed. The second attack near Plön the following day killed around 50 of the girls from my group, with many others injured. My sister pushed me under the seat so we both survived, but when I looked around there were bodies everywhere. My aunty and cousins were in the next carriage. I looked up and I could see the blue sky above - the roof on our carriage had been completely ripped away. A severely injured lady was lying next to me. She looked at me and said: "I would so love not to be hungry anymore," and then she died in front of my eyes. It is something I have never forgotten. Yet all I could think at the time was that I was lucky it wasn't me or my sister.

After the attack some of the girls broke the doors open and started waving at the skies with whatever they had in their hands. The German soldiers, however, continued to be loyal to their orders. They ordered us into line, and marched us in the direction of Lübeck, where the train had been heading.

We were to board one of the three SS ships in the Bay of Lübeck which were holding the evacuated camp prisoners, mostly from Neuengamme, but the naval commanders refused to take any more prisoners, so we continued on towards Plön. This change of plan helped us avoid certain death, as those ships were bombed that same day by the Royal Air Force. Nine thousand prisoners had been ordered

out of the camps by Himmler and transferred to the ships, in the hope of removing all evidence ahead of the German surrender. This was unknown to the RAF pilots, who thought the ships contained leading SS personnel, so the ships were bombed and 8000 prisoners perished. The few that managed to swim away from the explosion were shot in the water by the heartless SS.

I later read that a British report written of us stated: 'More than three hundred hungry, ragged, and emaciated Jewish Hungarians, who had been traumatised by the low-flying attacks...dragged themselves in prisoner clothes along the railway track to Plön, still under guard of the camp leader, the SS wardens and the army guards.'

I also discovered later that around 60 of our group were separated and taken to Bergen-Belsen. It was another stroke of luck that I was not in that group: Belsen was a death trap. Even if I had been there for just those last few days before it was liberated, I would very likely have caught typhoid and died. ■

“ I looked around there were bodies all around us. My aunty and cousins were in the next carriage. I looked up and I could see the blue sky above - the roof on our carriage had been completely ripped away. ”

## Arriving in Plön

OUR GERMAN GUARDS were on edge because the British were on their tail. When we came into Plön they set us on the embankment of an *autobahn*, opposite a little harbour.

We had sick and wounded girls in our group. We were in a state of shock, had been shot at and didn't know where we were going. We were exhausted and couldn't walk any further. Those railway carriages which had remained unscathed during the British attacks soon arrived and the guards were trying to make us board the train.

As dusk fell our SS *lagerführer* (chief guard) appeared and said: "There are some carriages over there. We would like to put you on them and hand you over to the Red Cross." We refused, despite the beatings they used to frighten us and force us on board. They had no guns at this point because in their fear of Allied Forces they had started shedding their uniforms and weapons.

We just sat there, stunned from everything that was happening, holding on to the hope that we would be liberated. My memory of all this is patchy, but I recently learned from my cousin Lily's friend, Barbara Lorber, who was with us, that members of the German army (not the SS) were supporting us. The German guard Willie was with us and whispered to one us: "Don't move off the hill!" This went round like bushfire. The Germans knew the train was at risk of being blown up. I don't know where we found the strength but our resistance became even stronger and we told the SS guards that under no circumstances would we go back into the wagons.

The *lagerführer* announced: "We are going into captivity and you are free," and with that he put his cap on the embankment. Then the guards disappeared and we never saw them again.

By the age of 14, I had witnessed and experienced unbelievable and unimaginable hardship, hunger, cruelty and death. I survived being forced out of our village and into the ghetto in Kosice, Auschwitz and Neuengamme's slave labour complex, then faced certain death on the train that was fired at by the British. I had to face the reality of knowing what had happened to my mother and younger brothers as well as countless others.

I survived through luck and being with my sister. Those of us in pairs had a better chance of survival than those who were alone. It was incredible to think that I, my sister Bilou, Aunty Berta and my cousins Lily and Elsa all survived this. ■



Lübeck, Plön. Source: Philips World Atlas, 2005

## Part 3 Liberation

## Liberation by the British

AFTER THE GERMANS disappeared we sat there terrified; we were still in a hostile area and we didn't know who was going to take a shot at us. We stayed there for about 48 hours, which seemed an eternity, until we heard a tank, two jeeps and two outriders coming down the *autobahn*. Those outriders looked as terrified as we felt. The British had arrived and this was our liberation, or so we thought, but no-one stopped for us and we had to wait another 48 hours, until eventually the rest of the armada followed.

It was 8 May 1945, when the British 6th Armoured Brigade, arrived in Plön with an order to take over the administration of the town after the unconditional surrender by the German army. An army report said that a particularly urgent problem was the group of 350 liberated Jewish Hungarian women 'who had had to live under appalling conditions on their trek to the West and who were now half-starved', and would have to be accommodated and catered for.

The British unit took us to a school in Plön, where they attended to the wounded and sick. My cousin Elsa had a very high temperature and they immediately looked after her. They started feeding us with very light food. We were not happy about that, but it was a good decision because if we had eaten heavy food, which many did in Belsen, it would have been dangerous. Some died with pieces of meat in their mouth. When you have been on starvation for all that time you cannot immediately digest heavy food.

We were lucky to have been liberated by the British rather than the Russians, because the Russians didn't have the same level of provision. ■

## Recuperation in Haffkrug

WE WERE NOW 'Displaced Persons' (DPs). This was how the Western Allies described all liberated forced labourers and concentration camp prisoners. We had to be cared for and returned to our homelands or settled elsewhere. Assembly Centres were set up and resettlement was to be organised from there. We were grateful to be alive but we were traumatised and had no idea what had happened to our families. Was there anyone left to be reunited with?

The British took over a holiday village, Haffkrug, on the Bay of Lübeck on the Baltic Sea, as an Assembly Centre. They ordered the Germans to vacate their homes and leave them furnished because slave labourers were going to be brought there for recuperation. Exceptions were made for fishermen, farmers, a baker, a merchant, and railway and postal workers who were allowed to stay in order to ensure supplies for us.

In mid-May we were put on coaches and taken to Haffkrug. It was a very diverse population; there were Czechs, Romanians, Slovaks and Hungarians. The wrecks of the three SS ships in the Bay of Lübeck were clearly visible. For weeks after the attack, the bodies of the victims were washed ashore.

We were allocated a villa. The United Nations (UN), who did a tremendous job considering the war conditions, gave us rations and Aunty Berta was happy to cook for us. Then around the end of June, several weeks after arriving, they asked us: "Where do you want to go?" ■

“We were grateful to be alive but we were traumatised and had no idea what had happened to our families. Was there anyone left to be reunited with?”



Aunty Berta

## Finding Aunty Ida in Prague

AUNTY BERTA DECIDED we would go to Prague, where most of the family had lived, to see who we could find. The United Nations displayed posters with lists of the people from the country where the DPs wanted to go and the United Nations office in Prague had a register of all the people that belonged to Czechoslovakia.

Aunty Ida, another of my mother's sisters, arrived in Prague two or three months before us. She had been selected for work in a German factory, but a different one from mine. As the Russians were closing in on the Germans towards the end of the war, prisoners were transported away from the camps, but Ida and her friend Lotte managed to escape from their transport. They walked for three days, getting support in farm houses en route, and eventually found their way to Prague.

Ida and Lotte immediately went in search of one of the directors of the company that my uncle Josef had been a furrier with before the war. They found him and asked if he could hide them. The war was not yet over and they were worried that they would be shot if the Germans found them. It was dangerous for this man, and he would not have been able to feed them in any case, so he took them to his Czech friends in the country where they were sheltered until liberation three months later.

As soon as the war ended Aunty Ida and Lotte returned to Prague and went to the UN office. Ida was allocated a flat which had previously been occupied by one of the SS. It had two bedrooms, a dining room and a kitchen, and a beautiful bathroom with black and white tiles which was very modern in those days.

Ida discovered we were alive after reading through the list of names on the posters. She left a message for us with the UN with her new address. She knew that we would visit the UN office when we arrived in Prague.

We were a group of seven: me, my sister Bilou, my aunty Berta, her two daughters Lily and Elsa, and two other cousins we found in Prague, Etel and Hony, daughters of my mother's older brother Julius (Yechiel). Aunty Ida found Julius and his son Moty in Tacevo. They too moved to Prague and found a flat which, like Ida's, had been occupied by the Germans during the war. Julius had lost his wife and

their two younger children during the war, but his two daughters survived. Moty also made it, having survived a death march from Auschwitz. His feet were frozen to his shoes. A doctor had to cut the shoes off and he nearly lost his feet, but he survived because he was a strong young man, 6' 4" tall.

When we first arrived in Prague we were put up in a school. My cousins Lily and Hony went to the UN. They returned two or three hours later to report that Aunty Ida was alive, that she had left an address and that we must go there.

Our group of seven presented itself at Ida's flat. There was no question of there not being room for us all. ■



Left to right: me with my cousins, Elsa and Lily, 1947

## 'Wherever you go, I go': the story of Aunty Ida and Uncle Mali

AUNTY IDA HAD married Ondrej Malinovsky, known in the family as Mali, in 1939. But six months later Ida and Mali were transported to the Theresienstadt (Terezin) ghetto, where they were in separate quarters. Uncle Mali was a furrier but he was good with his needle. He would do adjustments of clothes for other people in the ghetto and managed to exchange this work for bread. He would meet a go-between at Terezin station, who would put down a briefcase. Mali would bring what he had in just the same kind of case, they would exchange cases and Mali would then take the food to Ida and her parents, my grandparents Chaim David and Blima, who had also been taken to Theresienstadt. He was able to sneak into Ida's part of the ghetto, but could see her only for brief moments.

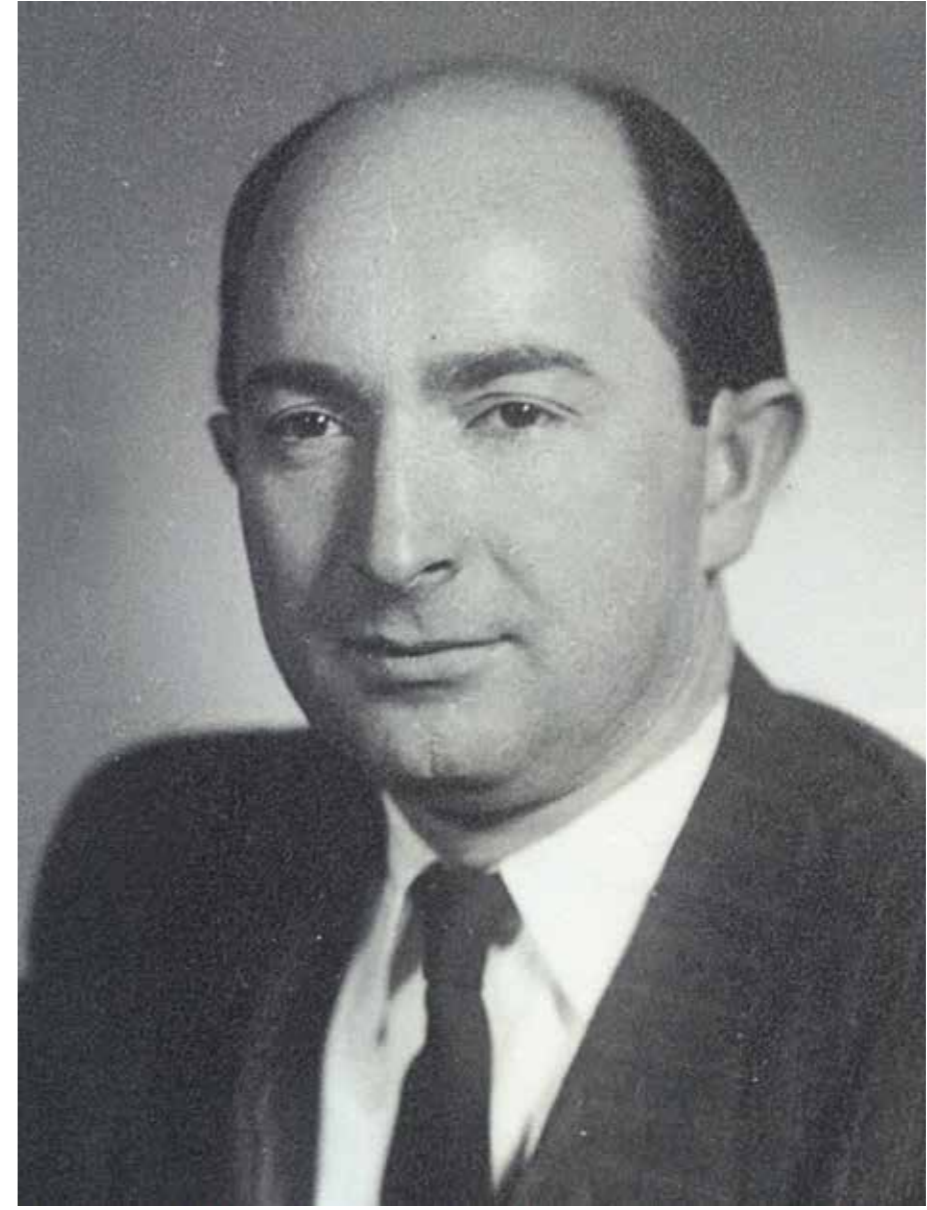
My grandfather died of a heart attack in Theresienstadt in February 1944, then in May 1944, my grandmother, aged 69, was chosen for the Czech transport to Auschwitz. Ida did not want her to go alone and visited her husband secretly. She was crying and told him: "I cannot let my mother go on her own." Mali said: "Wherever you go, I go." He went voluntarily on the transport with Ida and his mother-in-law. 'Wherever you go, I go' became the title of a wonderful book about Ida and Mali based on Ida's reminiscences.

I was already at Auschwitz but had no idea they had arrived. Ida and Mali, because they were young, were selected for labour, but Ida's mother was among a group murdered overnight in the gas chambers.

A few months later, Ida and Mali were chosen for labour outside Auschwitz. They were sent to another part of Germany so we did not see them. They were both sent to a different labour camp. And so, with the exception of a few secret meetings, for six years after their marriage, Ida and Mali were living apart. They survived the slave labour camps and found their way back to Prague after the liberation in 1945.



Aunty Ida



Uncle Mali

## Who perished and who survived

THE HUNGARIAN AUTHORITIES expelled 18,000 Jews from Subcarpathian Rus into German-occupied Ukraine and handed them over to the German authorities.

I lost my mother, father and two young brothers, Josef and Samuel at the hands of the Nazis. Many other family members perished: my father's parents were taken in the round-up of our village in 1941. They were forced to dig their own graves, made to undress, were shot dead and then thrown into the graves.

Most of my mother's relations lived in Prague and Karlsbad and were taken to Theresienstadt. My grandfather Chaim David Slyomovics died there and my grandmother Blima was transported from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz, where she perished. My aunts Margit (Emi) and Etel (Esther) were also in Theresienstadt, then transported, I think, to Treblinka, and died there. My oldest uncle, Julius, lost his wife Helena Markovics and two youngest children.

My aunty Berta lost her husband Avraham, who died in a camp, and also her sons Mayer and Josef. They had run away to Budapest during the occupation and were shot in the street by the Hungarian gendarmerie.

Other relatives survived World War II. My mother's youngest sisters, Shoshanna (Roza) and Anci (Anna), managed to emigrate to Israel just before the war.

My mother's brothers, Uncle Josef and Uncle Zolly, had survived by joining the Czech-British legion and Josef was living in Pilsen, not far from Prague, together with Berta's son, Julius. ■



Left to right: Aunty Etel (perished in the camps), Aunty Ida (survived), Aunty Margit (perished in the camps), 1937



Aunty Anci



Uncle Zolly



Uncle Josef



Aunty Berta's son, Julius

## Life in Prague

BILOU AND I stayed in Prague with Aunty Ida for three years, until 1948. We missed our parents terribly, but we had the wonderful joy of being alive. My sister and I considered ourselves very lucky to be living with family and to have cousins who had survived. People started to live again.

Uncle Josef married Vera Hollander, and Uncle Julius's oldest daughter, Etel, married a man who came to a tragic end when the Russians were searching for him and he committed suicide, jumping from a fourth floor window. The food situation in Prague after the war was very difficult because the Germans had eaten up the city. I remember my Uncle Zolly visiting us from Pilsen where he was stationed with his army unit. He came with sacks full of tins, donated by colleagues and friends in his unit. That was the first time I had ever eaten tinned salmon. He would also buy flour from the Czech farmers. One time he said to a farmer: "I want a sack of flour. I need extra food because I have a lot of hungry nephews and nieces from the concentration camps." The farmer said: "I don't have any," and my uncle replied: "If you don't open up your shed, I'll shoot the lock off and go in myself." He would bring the flour to us and Aunty Ida would make strudels and other good things.

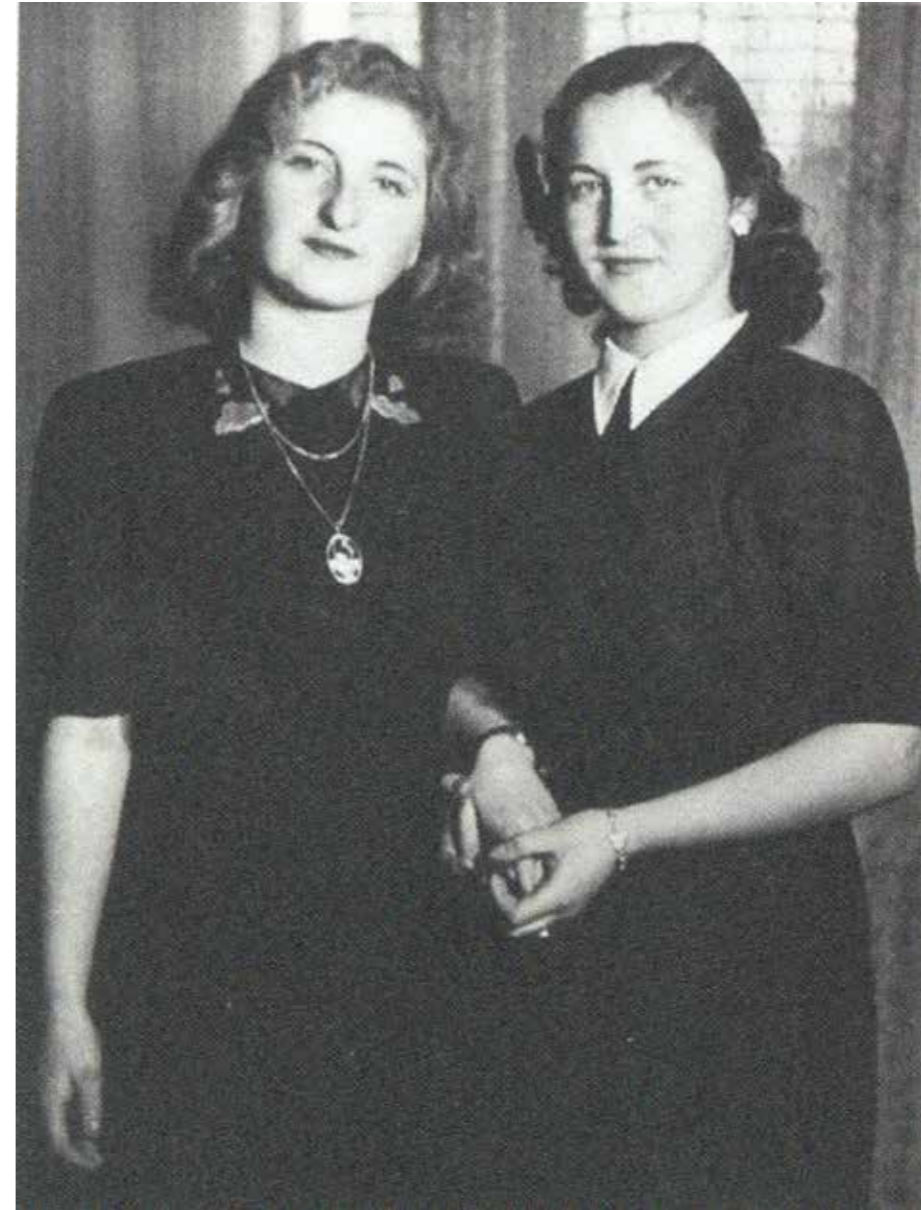
My oldest uncle, Julius, would walk round Prague and wherever there was a queue, he would stand in it. One day he came back with a load of frozen fish and Aunty Ida made a banquet with it. She was a domestic science teacher and a wonderful cook.

Cooking was a family tradition. My mother was very good, we used to do our own baking at home, and my aunts were the same, including Berta who cooked for us all in Haffkrug. I inherited that as well.

Although food was so scarce after the war, the coffee shops stayed open. This is where people would go to read the newspaper and to meet friends. Prague's café society re-started, though I don't know where they found their produce because the Germans had taken everything. The Germans did not destroy the city, however, because they loved Prague: the culture, the beer, everything about it. They didn't look after it though and the historic buildings had become very dilapidated. It was only once the tourism started that they could start to restore the city. ■



My mother's brother, Uncle Julius



Left to right: my sister, Bilou and me, 1948



Left to right: Lily (Aunty Berta's daughter), Uncle Zolly, Hony (Uncle Julius's daughter), 1945

## College

IN 1946, AGED 17, I attended a commercial college and began to learn English. My sister, Bilou, went to train in a salon with one of the top dressmakers in Prague. It was very common for women to become seamstresses, so what that Polish *kapo* in Auschwitz had told us ("Say that you are seamstresses") became true for my sister.

After about six months at school the headmaster could see that I was pale and lethargic and had a persistent cough. He was aware of my experiences during the war and called in a doctor, who took x-rays and found that I had patches on my lung. I was sent to stay at a sanatorium outside Prague. My uncle Zolly, who was in England, would send calcium injections for me and I was given fatty foods. After six months of recuperation I was able to return to school, but I continued to have regular check-ups. ■

“I was sent to stay at a sanatorium outside Prague. My uncle Zolly, who was in England, would send calcium injections for me and I was given fatty foods.”

## Looking for a way out of Czechoslovakia

THE RUSSIANS HAD liberated Prague. They walked around like victors and began grabbing everything. I particularly remember the watches. The Russians would walk around saying: “*Davai chasy!*” (“give me your watches!”), pulling up their sleeves to show watches all the way up their arms, and we would have to hand over our watches. It took time for the Communists to take command of the country, but as time went on they became more aggressive and strengthened their political grip.

By 1948, the Russians were about to close the borders and we became very worried. The camp survivors did not want to stay, because they knew that the Jews were disliked by the Russians. Some Jews did survive in Russia, but it was not a regime that the survivors wanted to live under after what they had gone through, so they started to think about their options. There were restrictions on immigration in Canada, America and Brazil. The British were resisting issuing any more visas after having previously taken in a lot of immigrants. Many had arrived in Britain in the mid-1930s, then there were the *Kindertransports*, and later the survivors from the camps.

Some were leaving for Israel, but Israel was difficult in the first years after the war because, up to May 1948, the British held the League of Nations Mandate in Palestine. They had drastically reduced permitted immigration and were imposing a blockade at Palestinian ports to enforce their policy. That was a deterrent, but also people were thinking about where they could continue their trade and there was no point in my uncles Josef and Mali going to Israel if they wanted to resume their furrier business. ■

## Uncle Josef escapes and leaves for Canada

AFTER THE WAR Uncle Josef left the Czech-British Legion and moved to Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) with his wife, Vera. Aunty Berta and her daughters, Lily and Elsa, also moved there. Berta had lain sick for about six months after the war, attended by doctors, but came through that ordeal.

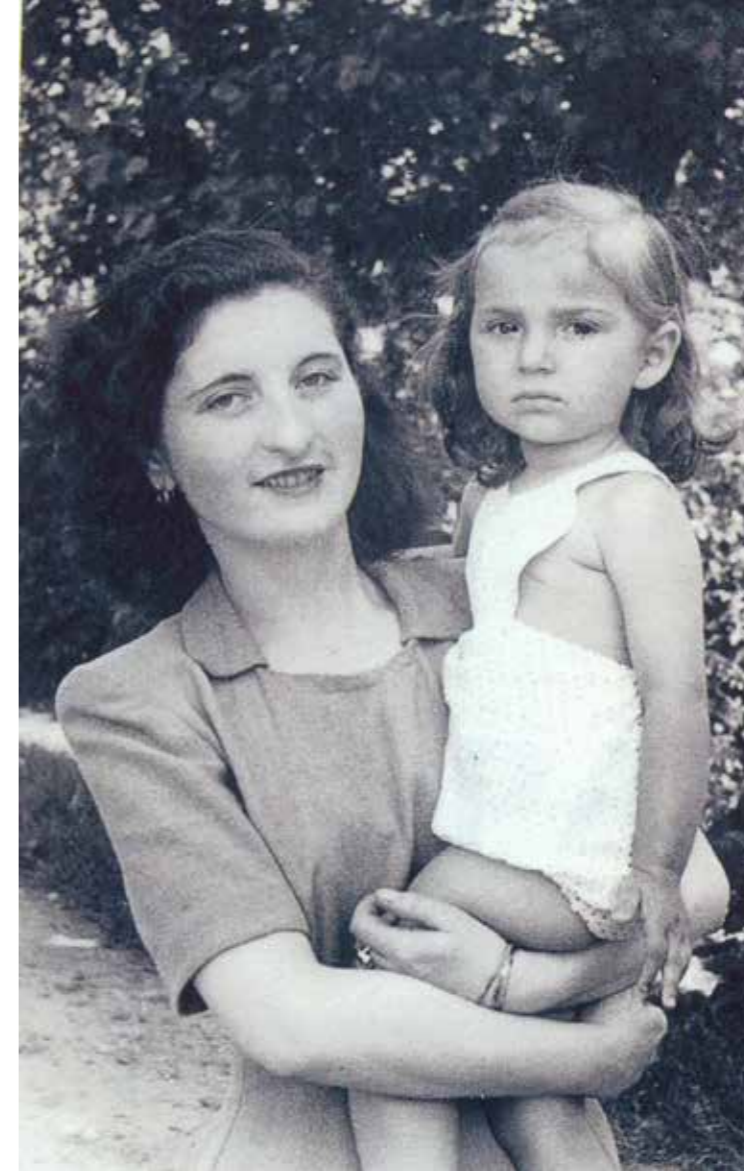
Uncle Josef set up a very successful fur company in Karlovy Vary, and would often show his furs in Prague; he was very gifted in fashion design. When the Communists took a grip of Czechoslovakia they wanted to interrogate the men who had been part of this legion. As a result, they confiscated his business and put him under house arrest as an ‘undesirable element’. He was allowed to go out once a week to a coffee shop accompanied by a bodyguard. He would follow the same routine each time: he had a coffee, went to the bathroom and then returned to his table. In the meantime he was planning his escape because he knew that otherwise he might simply end up in a Siberian gulag.

One day he arranged that the back window of the bathroom would be left open and a car waiting for him. He escaped to Austria and left for Canada in early 1949. His wife Vera was eight months pregnant. She followed him and they settled in Montreal where he again created a very successful furrier business. ■

“He would follow the same routine each time: he had a coffee, went to the bathroom and then returned to his table. In the meantime he was planning his escape because he knew that otherwise he might simply end up in a Siberian gulag.”



Mali, Moti, Ida, Blanche, Tom circa 1950



Bilou with Aunty Ida's daughter, Blanche, Melbourne



Elsa, daughter of Aunty Berta, with copy of the Renoir she painted

## Australia

AUSTRALIA WAS ACCEPTING people, though they expected immigrants to buy their own visas. Uncle Mali and Aunty Ida already had their first child, Blanche, with the second on the way. This was a wonderful development, because women who survived the camps lived in constant fear that they wouldn't be able to have children after what they had gone through. Mali, who was a furrier, needed to earn a living. They decided to move to Australia where there was seasonal weather with winters and he was able to open a very successful furrier business in Melbourne. They moved to Australia in 1949, as did my sister Bilou and Aunty Berta and her family. Initially it was to be a temporary arrangement, but sadly it was 20 years before I saw my sister again.

My cousin Elsa (Aunty Berta's daughter) suffered badly from the war and spent two years in a sanatorium in the Tatra Mountains on the Polish/Slovak border, recovering after having had part of a lung removed. She eventually settled in Melbourne, where she married and had a son. She became very keen on art and is noted for her copies of great painters. She is the only one of my generation who is still alive today. ■

“They moved to Australia in 1949, as did my sister Bilou and Aunty Berta and her family. Initially it was to be a temporary arrangement, but sadly it was 20 years before I saw my sister again.”

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## Part 4

# I come to England

### Dr Solomon Schonfeld

UNCLE ZOLLY HAD settled in Birmingham and was trying to find a way to get me to join him. He heard about Dr Solomon Schonfeld (1912-1984), rabbi of an Orthodox Jewish community in London. He had organised *Kindertransports* before the war, and after the war he travelled to liberated Eastern Europe to support Jewish survivors. He joined the British in a convoy of lorries to Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, wearing a military uniform to give the impression that he was an army officer, to help him in his task.

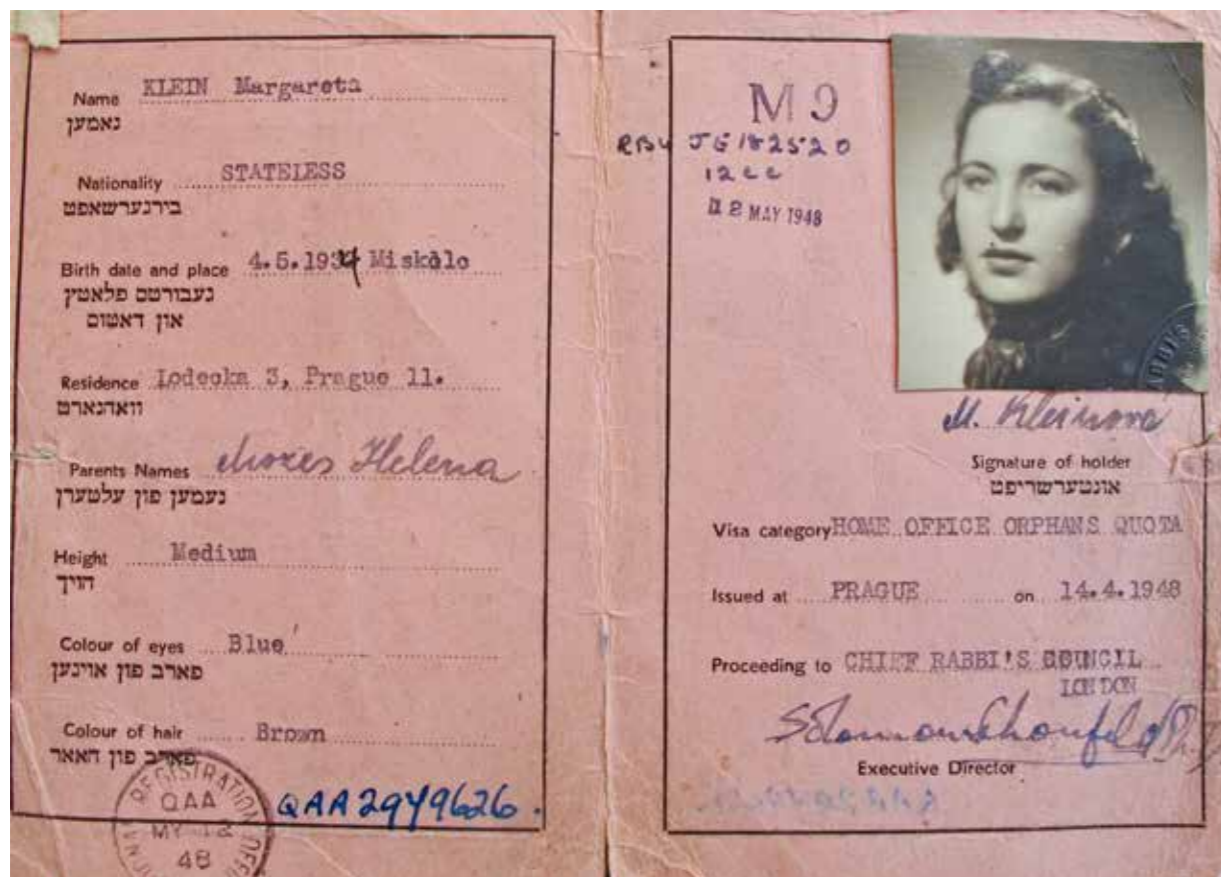
Dr Schonfeld arranged for the transport of around 1000 Jewish children from Displaced Persons camps to England, in groups of 100 or 150. He knew monasteries or good neighbours would have taken in a child, but where Catholicism was strong, as in Poland, he was concerned that the child would have been converted. If those children had survived the war and lost their parents, he wanted to enable them to maintain their Jewish roots.

Once the 'Schonfeld children' arrived in the UK there was a big problem about what to do with them. He organised a collective home to begin with, found people to look after them, foster parents and hostels where they could be accommodated and learn a trade.

Uncle Zolly went to London to see Dr Schonfeld, who said: "I have one place, Mr Slyomovics. If you give me £50 and tell me that you can give this girl a home, we have a deal." That's how the deal was done. £50 in 1948, was about £5000 in today's money, but my uncle found it straight away.

I was given a stateless passport where my birthdate was reduced a little as I was nearly 19 and the youth transports had to be below a certain age. As a result I have three birthdays: my true birthday, the birthday registered in Auschwitz and the birthday that appeared on my travel document.

In April 1948, my journey to England began. I was among 150 children, the last of the war orphans to come out of Eastern Europe. I didn't know any of the other kids because they came from all parts of the world. I was very lucky. We were taken to Ostend and from Ostend to Dover on a boat, and I remember everyone was sick. From Dover we took a train straight into Victoria station. When we arrived in London my uncle was waiting for me and from there he took me to Birmingham.



My stateless passport, 1948

The rest of my transport of 150 went to a castle in Ireland, which Schonfeld had managed to rent from a Jewish philanthropist in Manchester, in order to accommodate the children who had nowhere else to go. It was just before Passover when our group arrived in Britain. He employed ladies to look after the children, gave them kosher food and followed all the Passover rituals. Most of them didn't know what it was all about because they had been living in Catholic homes for so many years. ■

## My new Birmingham family

UNCLE ZOLLY HAD not long been demobbed from the armed forces. He was married to Hetty Goldstein and they were living with Hetty's parents in a big Victorian house on Moseley Road.

Hetty's father, Isaac Goldstein, had emigrated from Poland after World War I, settled in Birmingham and had a tailoring shop. The Goldsteins had four children: Anne, who was unmarried; Gerty, a talented milliner who was married with two children; Morris, a tailor like his father, married with two children; and Hetty. Zolly and Hetty had two daughters, Madeleine and Elizabeth. A third daughter, Helen, was born later.

All these people were very caring and made me feel at home. Hetty's parents were a lovely couple, and Anne became a kind of guardian to me. I was very sad to have lost so many of my family and to have left others behind in Prague, especially my sister, but the Slyomovics family in Birmingham were my saviours. They gave me confidence in dealing with my new freedom and also with a new family life. I was accepted everywhere as a cousin. I quickly became extended family to the Goldsteins and other families linked to them. All this compensated for the huge losses in my life. It was really special because a lot of young people of my generation who came to other countries after the war did not have that kind of support.

A week after I arrived the family had a traditional Passover. In his young days Uncle Zolly had attended a *yeshiva* (Jewish educational institute). We came from a very Orthodox home but I hadn't seen this for years. In the period after the war Jewish life in Prague was very lax, but this traditional Passover was wonderful because it was something I remembered from my childhood.

Aunty Hetty's food was amazing. You don't always remember recipes but you never forget taste, and the sort of taste that Hetty could produce reminded me of my mother's cooking. I was too young to learn recipes from my mother, but now I was able to learn traditional cooking skills from Aunty Hetty and her mother Roza. ■

## A culture shock

BIRMINGHAM AS A city was a culture shock for me. Despite the Germans having taken over Czechoslovakia for six years, and then the Russians putting a tight grip on the country, I still saw that people in Prague were happy to be alive after the war and Prague continued with its café society. In comparison, the people in Birmingham looked miserable. There wasn't that feeling of being happy that the war was over. Times were hard and there was still rationing, although Aunty Hetty was very pleased to have an extra ration book for the kosher butcher. There was terrible smog and we had no street lighting. By comparison with Prague, Birmingham felt very dreary, yet the warmth I had from the family and all the people that I met made up for it.

My gratitude and love for my charming, intelligent and caring Aunty Hetty who with Uncle Zolly provided me with security and a new beginning continues to this day. I still miss them even though they both died many years ago. ■

“ I still saw that people in Prague were happy to be alive after the war and Prague continued with its café society. In comparison, the people in Birmingham looked miserable. ”

## Jewish youth organisations

AT THAT TIME we had a large Jewish community in Birmingham and there were a lot of active youth clubs and organisations. Anne Goldstein was very supportive and whenever she found a youth group or youth gathering she would take me there. I became involved in the world of Jewish youth and that was very valuable, it made me feel that I belonged somewhere.

In May 1948, Israel became a state and all the young people went along to celebrate at Birmingham Singers Hill Synagogue. It was heaving with people and Rabbi Dr Pearl, who was a great Zionist and organiser of youth, gave a fantastic talk. Afterwards we all went to a party in someone's garden, which is where I met my life-long friend, Magda Bloom. Magda was from Hungary, a survivor of Belsen, and had already been in England for three years. She was adopted by a prominent family, the Haselbergs. My English was not very good then, but it was very fortunate that I had learned Hungarian because Magda loved speaking her mother tongue and we immediately became close.

Magda had a big group of young friends and I was quickly included in all the young people's events going on at the time. We raised a lot of money through jumble sales, coffee mornings and lunches. There was a youth club above Station Street which had dances every weekend and there was an amateur theatrical society which I became involved in. ■

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## Part 5

### Married life

### Meeting Alan Hornick

THE ANNUAL JEWISH Recorder Ball was held every Christmas at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens. In 1949, I attended with four boys who I had been introduced to by Magda. I wore a beautiful evening gown which Anne had made for me.

That night I met Alan Hornick who would become my husband. Alan kept asking me to dance and the boys who had brought me were very cross with him. He was from a traditional Jewish family. His mother, Kitty, was of Russian origin, his father, Joe, was of Polish origin, but born and bred in Birmingham.

The first time I went out with Alan his mother said to him: "If you go out with a Jewish girl then you must bring her home, you must not go anywhere else." So they invited me to their flat in Viceroy Close, Edgbaston, for supper. Alan's mother liked me immediately and told him: "This is a nice girl for you!"

She did not just become my mother-in-law but a lifelong friend. She was a wonderful cook and taught me new cooking skills. She was a lovely and very cultured lady. We used to call her the armchair traveller, because she would read a lot of travel books. She longed to go to all those places but it wasn't easy to travel in those days.

As Hetty and Zolly belonged to the Orthodox synagogue and Joe and Kitty belonged to Singers' Hill Synagogue, it was important to me not to offend either of these couples. So, all the Rabbis and Cantors from both synagogues participated in our ceremony and stood under the *Chuppah* (wedding canopy), which as a result was somewhat crowded but very memorable.

Alan played the violin and his mother was an excellent pianist. Sometimes they had little soirees when they would play music together. If ever I am asked to do Desert Island Discs I will ask for *The Rustle of Spring* because Kitty always played that. ■



Our wedding day

## The wedding

A YEAR AFTER we met Alan and I were married. My uncle wanted to invite the whole city! It was a big wedding with 400 guests. The reception was at a place called Tony's, below what later became the Albany Hotel. Zolly ordered a kosher caterer from Manchester who brought his staff and they all got so drunk that half the food was left in the kitchen.

Our wedding was a first for Singers Hill Synagogue because although Jewish weddings were held on a Sunday, not the Sabbath, it was the first time they allowed photographers in. We also used microphones to record the whole ceremony, a first of its time too. ■



Aunty Hetty and I being entertained by Uncle Zolly's speech at my wedding reception

## Finding our feet

ALAN AND I moved into a lovely two-bedroom flat in Handsworth. Four years later my father-in-law heard that they were building some new houses in Wellington Road in Edgbaston where a lot of the old houses had been bombed. Just before Nicola, our first daughter, was born, we bought a handsome house with four bedrooms. We paid £4500, a mansion compared with the houses our married friends were buying.

Just like my Goldstein relations, my in-laws continued to be supportive and whenever they could put something our way, they did. They were wonderful when our children came along soon after our move to Wellington Road. Alan was their only son and having granddaughters was the greatest joy for them.

After some years Aunty Hetty and Uncle Zolly moved to a lovely house in Sir Harry's Road, which was very close to where Alan and I lived. They had an open house every Shabbat for afternoon tea and they always had wonderful company. I would walk round with my children every Saturday to join in the fun. They would visit Israel every year. Sadly, Zolly had a heart attack and died in Tel Aviv. He is buried in Netanya. At her request, Hetty would also be buried there.

Zolly and Hetty's three daughters, Madeleine, Elizabeth and Helen, were very important in my life. They were like sisters to me as they were growing up and to this day we are very close and in constant touch. Madeleine emigrated to Israel and married just one week after the Arab-Israeli Six Day War in 1967. I flew out for the wedding. She has a daughter, Shiri, and two grandchildren. I speak to Madeleine regularly over the phone and stay with her when I visit Israel. Elizabeth (Lizzy) married John Malin, a loving family man, and they have two daughters, four grandsons and a granddaughter. We have already had three *bar mitzvahs*, with one more to go. John is always there to support us. Helen lives in Cardiff after studying at Cardiff University. She is married with two sons who are close to my own two grandchildren. They are all wonderful. ■



Alan and me, circa 1955



Left to right: Joe, Kitty, me, Alan, and his cousin, early 1950



Aunty Hetty at 80, with her daughter Helen and her grandsons, Des and Eric

## Nicola

MY DAUGHTER NICOLA was born in 1955 and Jackie about 18 months later. They both went to Edgbaston College Primary School and then to Edgbaston High School for Girls. My daughters were clever but they weren't very keen on school and found the High School rather snobbish.

Nicola didn't want to go to university, so she studied domestic science and catering in Bath. She met her husband Ken Foster, a Quaker, in Bath and they have a son Alex, a talented musician.

Unfortunately, Nicola developed ME, chronic fatigue syndrome. She was looked after by Ken and Alex for a number of years, but it eventually became too difficult so I offered her to come and stay with me. When she first came she could not even hold a pen and she was very poorly for quite a long time, but she's much better now. She's been with me for eight or nine years. ■

## Jackie

JACKIE CHOSE TO go to America, where she learned alternative healing, yoga and meditation at an ashram. She married an American psychiatrist, Rab Herron, and they lived in San Francisco with their daughter, Bibi. It was the time that many were dying of AIDS. Rab was working at the county hospital and they were sending AIDS patients to him because there was no medication then and the medics were uncertain how to treat them. After having been sent so many of these patients and being attacked by one, he found it all too much and decided to cease his work at the hospital.



With my granddaughter, Bibi

Rab wanted to live in an ashram in Chicago, but Jackie decided that this was not a place to bring up a child and so they separated. She rang me one night and said she wanted to come home. Bibi was two and half. Jackie and Bibi stayed with me for four years. I just loved living with my granddaughter. Bibi eventually went on to study art and the history of art at the University of London. She now works for the Whitewall Galleries.

When she came back to Birmingham Jackie was very creative and immediately organised a children's playgroup. She started yoga classes in schools, but decided that she wanted to have her own clinic for massage and healing. She wanted to work in a professional environment, so she set up in a centre in Chad Road in Edgbaston, alongside dentists, chiropodists and various other clinics. She created a tremendous business offering treatment for health problems and dealing with stress.

After a time Jackie was offered the job of creating spas in the Royal Crescent in Bath, in the Maldives, America, China and India. She created videos for the British School of Yoga. She's also written books about it. Nicola joined her in some of her learning when they took courses on exercise and nutrition. Jackie is currently living in Italy. ■

## Part 6

### A thriving business

#### Setting up the business

ALAN'S FATHER WAS a bookmaker for horse racing, in partnership with a fellow called Fred Bailey. Alan didn't want to follow in his father's footsteps - he didn't like the anxiety of gambling. He had a great interest in electronics and music production and had arranged to work under the famous film producer Cecil B de Mille. Unfortunately this never happened due to the outbreak of war, so at the age of 16 he found a job in Coventry providing entertainment for immigrants, like showing films at hostels where immigrants stayed.

We received £250 as a wedding present and Alan decided to use it to open a business in town, in Stevenson Street. He found some vacant premises and set up a toys and fancy goods shop there. Uncle Zolly, who owned a fancy goods warehouse, contributed stock like dolls and doll houses, model cars and trains.

Alan had a partner called Overton who was a bookmaker. We combined the two names and the business became known as Hornton Electronics. Overton visited once to see that the shop was working and contributed financially to the start-up of the business, but the partnership never developed and we never saw him again. ■

“ We received £250 as a wedding present and Alan decided to open a business in town, in Stevenson Street. ”

## Development of Hornton Electronics

THE FIRST YEARS after the war were financially difficult for everyone. Customers would come to our shop every week to contribute 50 pence or a pound towards an item for Christmas and we kept a record of it in a book.

People were beginning to enjoy themselves again. They hadn't been able to get many toys during the war and it was a great pleasure for us to be able to offer them now. That's how our business started and then we moved more into electronics. Although Alan didn't have engineering training, he was very good with electronics and so in the 1960s we progressed to selling electric train sets and racing car sets and from there we built up a good business.

We moved into new premises and opened a big corner showroom on Lower Temple Street. It was a beautiful place with enormous windows. It was on three levels with a salon downstairs and rooms upstairs. Alan set up an electric train track in the shop window which was always a big attraction.

We became the main stockist of high quality electrical equipment in the city centre and started dealing with big Japanese companies: Panasonic, JVC, Hitachi, Sony. We had the latest equipment: calculators, tape recorders, radios and ghetto blasters, televisions and hi-fis. Dictating machines became very popular and journalists would come in to buy this new device which allowed them to stop relying on shorthand.

The shop would have orders months ahead in time for Christmas and we turned Hornton Electronics into a very successful business. Birmingham's industry was booming with Rover, the jewellery quarter was active, the Birmingham markets were built and the city became alive again. Also the coffee improved: when I first came to England all you could get was Camp coffee, which was very disappointing after Prague! ■



Hornton Electronics

## Alan's struggle with asthma

ALAN SUFFERED BADLY with asthma. After setting up the business he would have terrible asthma attacks due to stress. He was a very gentle person who loved music and art, and wasn't used to such pressure. His stress would increase around the build-up to the busy season at Christmas, when we would hold a lot of stock. During two Christmas periods in the early 1970s, I took over. I had always helped in the business and used to go with Alan to the trade shows, so I was familiar with it.

Alan was susceptible to colds and doctors worried that his constant coughing would weaken his heart. We had cylinders of oxygen under the bed in case he needed help with his breathing, but if it was a very bad attack we would have to call an ambulance where he would sit in an oxygen tent.

Alan's doctor at Selly Oak Hospital learned about the discovery of new treatments they had developed for asthma that used nebulisers and cortisone injections. This was marvellous and for seven or eight years after starting this new medication Alan was much better. He would use the nebuliser for a mild attack or, if it was a bad attack, he received an injection. His condition wasn't perfect, but he was fine so long as he had a nebuliser in his pocket. If he thought he didn't have it with him he would panic.

Alan had a 10 year remission as a result of this treatment, but the doctors didn't realise the extent of the side effects of cortisone. They were explained to us by a doctor when we were on holiday in Israel. He compared it to the effect of water in an iron dish: after a while the water will corrode the dish. Cortisone was fine for a short period but long term it would cause corrosion. As a result, Alan developed a leak in his kidney. ■

## Alan's final crisis

ONE WEEKEND IN November 1974, Alan had insisted on stocktaking. He was worried because he didn't think he was solvent, though of course he was. When he came home he looked terribly pale. I ordered him to bed and he felt unwell in the night. Usually if he wasn't well or was coughing at night he wouldn't wake me, but this time he did and said: "Darling, I feel I'm just sinking into this cushion." He went to his GP, Dr Jones, who knew him well and was referred to his kidney doctor at the hospital.

The cardiograph test didn't show any problems and he was about to be sent home when he nearly fainted. I told the doctor it would be impossible for him to return home as there would be no one to look after him. It was our busy work period and I was needed to run the business.

I rang the hospital about six o'clock to ask if he was staying the night. They told me to bring his overnight bag and Aunty Hetty insisted on coming with me. We found Alan terribly distressed. He said: "Darling you've got to get me something, I'm in terrible pain." The sister told me they couldn't give him any more than the doctor had prescribed, but Alan was desperate and I wouldn't let it go.

Eventually, two young doctors came, one of whom would later become a top heart surgeon, and said: "Mrs Hornick, if only your husband would relax. We're going to give him something to relax him, phone us around midnight." They told me on the phone that he was a bit better, but then they rang me again at four o'clock in the morning to tell me things had taken a turn for the worse. Some friends down the road took me to the hospital, but by the time I arrived Alan had gone. He had suffered a heart attack. I always think of how I could have saved him.

The realisation that my beloved Alan had gone at the age of 49 years and the feeling of despair and loss was not possible to put into words. I could not stop screaming and had to be heavily sedated. I do not remember the funeral or what followed. ■

## Managing the business after Alan's death

AFTER ALAN'S DEATH I was left to manage the business. It was November and we had big music centres being delivered from Hitachi, a large load for which we had already taken customers' money. Somebody must have told the Hitachi delivery man that Mr. Hornick had died, because he phoned his company, picked up the music centres and put them back in the van, evidently thinking they wouldn't get paid. I cancelled that order and we organised delivery of music centres from another company, so we did not have to repay the customers.

We had a good relationship with the reps of various suppliers and two or three of them came to the shop, took their coats off and helped. They helped first with a stock-take for probate, which we had to do after Alan's death. That was an enormous job and had to be done immediately. The reps also came to the shop at the weekends to help with sales. It was November, a very busy time, and they knew the products and how to demonstrate them.

After we got through that Christmas period it was an exceptional year for the business. I was helped by the various companies which supplied us like JVC, Panasonic and Sony. They told me I had always been part of the business. These companies had confidence in me, more confidence than I had in myself. Alan had always instilled confidence - he was a wonderful tutor.

We had a van and two cars and I had the responsibility for several staff, as well as my family. There were a thousand and one things to think about. It was a very difficult time but I felt that it was my duty, for Alan's sake, to continue the business he had worked so hard to create.

He knew about all the new technology that was developing, the computers, music centres, CD players and so on. As the business grew I set up the leading players in the game at that time, Technics, National Panasonic, Sony and JVC, selling the very latest in hi-fi equipment. As time went on there were many complimentary trips as a reward for good trading, even to Russia during the Communist era, which was quite an education. I also visited Japan and saw their amazing factories, taking trips across this incredible country, including Tokyo and Osaka. I went to the New York World Trade Centre and visited the music business clubs in Chicago, plus many other things. I made lasting friendships with many colleagues across the country whom I'm still in touch with to this day. The responsibility was tremendous but I managed Hornton Electronics for 15 years up till 1989. ■



On a business trip to Tokyo

## Moving home

FOUR YEARS AFTER Alan's death I was faced with another big decision. The home that Alan and I created in Wellington Road became too big for me and I needed something smaller and easier to manage. My daughters had gone to colleges in Bath and Oxford. I did not want a flat as I have always been a keen gardener, and my new home had to have easy access to Birmingham city centre for business. In the climate of the 1970s, this was not an easy task.

I saw an advert in the *Birmingham Mail* that bungalows were being built in Edgbaston, not far from my house. I made contact with the company directly and bought off-plan, selecting the chosen plot. The construction of the development was to take two years. After one year on the market I sold my house to a Greek businessman, who was personally recommended by a neighbour. My doorbell went and there stood the whole Greek family. This was clearly a big family affair. I showed them the house and the next day the Greek gentleman returned with his bank manager. They arrived at 7pm and left at 2am! They consumed a bottle of whisky between them and smoked half a box of cigars. They said we have a deal at the asking price and could I also sell them the beautiful dining room furniture and any other items of furniture that I would not be needing. He was happy for me to remain in the house until my bungalow was complete.

I feel that Alan was constantly watching over me at this time and has continued to guide me through all the decisions and challenges of my life.

I eventually moved into my bungalow in 1979. I went on to create a beautiful home and garden that has kept me constantly busy and has been a source of absolute pleasure to me. ■

## Part 7 My relations abroad

## My relations abroad

TRAVEL WAS VERY expensive after the war and it was not until the 1960s that I started to travel to Israel and was able to visit my family there. My Uncle Julius survived, together with his daughters Etel and Honi and his son Moty, and they left for Israel from Prague in 1949. Moty later settled in Australia.

My mother's two youngest sisters Shoshanna (Roza) and Anci (Anna) were also in Israel. They had managed with great difficulty to emigrate in 1938 and 1939, just before the German occupation of Czechoslovakia.

Shoshanna married Walter Cohen and they had a daughter, Hannah, who became an archaeologist. Walter Cohen was a gifted man, musically trained, a graduate of the Prague and Vienna conservatoires, who had emigrated to Israel around 1938. He was in charge of classical music programming for Call Israel, the Israeli equivalent of the BBC. He also became director of the Fredric Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv. Whenever I went to Israel I would go to the most wonderful concerts with my uncle and aunty. They would have receptions at the Auditorium, and I met a lot of celebrated musicians there, including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Daniel Barenboim and Artur Rubinstein. In the early days of the new state, Walter also had a role serving on a committee for the creation of new words, since Hebrew had a limited vocabulary which needed to be expanded.

My Aunty Anci was a great swimmer who had participated in the Maccabiah games. I was very fond of her and I would always stay with her when I visited Israel. Anci married Kurt Grundland, an engineer of German origin. They had two sons, Joshua and Ronny, both of whom I am still in touch with. Anci came to England with Ronny in the 1970s, and Ronny went to a summer school to learn English in the Malverns, together with my daughters. Ronny graduated from Haifa University and is now CEO of Gottex Swimwear Brands. He was over here in January (2020) for business and came to see me. We had a lovely day talking about family.

I loved being in Israel to see my family, I always had a good feeling when I was there. I usually went by myself, but one time Alan and the girls came as well for Passover. We had a beautiful family *seder* (ritual of re-telling the story of the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery) with everybody



Aunty Roza (Shoshanna) at Tel Aviv beach, circa 1939

there - it was really wonderful. But there was never a question of us emigrating to Israel. England was now where my roots were.

Also in Israel was my Uncle Zolly's daughter Madeleine, who, as I mentioned, was like a sister to me.

Finally there was my Uncle Leib Haskel, my father's younger brother, living in Israel and it was through him that I discovered the fate of my father. ■

## Discovering what happened to my father

FOR A LONG time after the war I did not know what had happened to my father.

In the 1950s, I found out from Walter Cohen that Uncle Leib was alive and had settled in Israel. Before the war Uncle Leib was in Poland close to the Polish-Slovak border, where he had a big clothing warehouse. Like my father, he was taken into a forced labour battalion after the German occupation. He survived the war, but his wife and daughter and son were rounded up and transported to a concentration camp, where they perished.

Uncle Leib did not want to go back to Poland after the war, he only wanted to go to Israel. But there were severe restrictions on immigration to Israel at that time, with the result that he spent four years in a detention camp in Germany, where he met Yole, a Hungarian lady. They finally reached Israel after the foundation of the Israeli state. Leib joined an ultra-Orthodox community in Haifa. He had a strong Orthodox background, having studied at a *yeshivah* in his younger days.

Once I heard that Uncle Leib was in Israel I started corresponding with him and later went to see him several times. Once I stayed overnight, which was a strange experience. It was a little enclave where they spoke Yiddish and it was as though I had stepped back in time. They had traditional shops and bakeries and I can still remember the taste of the old-style rolls we had for breakfast.

Leib had met an old friend, someone he had known from boyhood, who had been in the same labour battalion as my father. Towards the end of the war their group was surrounded by the Russian army. The Russians took no account of who these people were and what they were doing on the front, although they were wearing Stars of David and clearly were not part of the military. They were all placed in a Russian camp in appalling conditions. There was no food; dysentery and typhoid were rife; and Leib's friend reported that my father died there of typhoid and starvation. ■

## The younger generation and the Holocaust

I HAVE TO say that there were those in Israel who did not understand the Holocaust. My Auntie Shoshanna's daughter Hannah, for example, was a real *sabra* (a Jew born in Israel). She was 18 years old and had just come out of the Israeli army. She turned to one of my cousins and said: "I have no sympathy with you, why didn't you fight back?" In Israel they were brought up to fight for their lives, to fight for their existence in Israel. Hannah didn't know anything else, she couldn't understand how all that part of the family were killed off and nobody got up to fight. But she was very young and just looking at it on the surface. Of course she loves all the family and what she said then became a classic quote. She was a talented girl, musically gifted like her father. She became a lecturer in anthropology and taught in various parts of the world. Her last post was in Switzerland but she's now back in Israel, in her 70s and much respected. ■

“She turned to one of my cousins and said: “I have no sympathy with you, why didn't you fight back?””



Aunty Ida at her 100th birthday party

## My relations in Australia



My sister Bilou with Uncle Julius's son Moty, Melbourne, 1950

IT WAS TWENTY years after the war before Bilou visited England and I saw my sister again. Fares were prohibitively expensive. I, too, visited her in Australia sometime after this.

Bilou lived with Aunty Ida and Uncle Mali when she first arrived in Australia and they became very close. Ida was like a mother to her. Their son, Moty, moved to Israel but soon returned to set up business with his parents as a furrier.

A couple of years later Bilou married Nelson Parush, the Australian son of Polish immigrants, and they had a son and a daughter, Morris and Gilda. Nelson's family were kosher butchers and he worked in the family business. Bilou and Ida remained close until the end, though Ida, who died in 2012 at the age of 101, outlived Bilou who died in 2010.

My relations in Australia came to love the country, though it took a long time for them to feel at home. To begin with there was a big problem with accommodation. Finding an apartment to rent was very difficult because Australia had taken in a lot of immigrants but did not have enough housing. Finally Aunty Ida found a house in Bentley Street, Melbourne. The atmosphere there was very open. On Friday nights whoever was about would come in and there would be chicken soup and other food on the table. Aunty Ida was always like that, she was domestic science trained and very gifted: she could create a meal out of nothing. Her *challah* was without comparison. ■

## Uncle Josef's family in Canada

MY UNCLE JOSEF emigrated to Canada and developed a big furrier business there. I didn't travel to Canada, but Josef and his wife Vera visited me in England several times. Vera was a very clever lady who had trained in medicine in Prague before the war. They had two children, Susan and Peter, who both became academics. Susan is an anthropologist who has written many works, including one on the question of reparations for Holocaust survivors, and Peter is a university teacher and Government statistician in Israel. Susan was in England three or four years ago and we had a nice family reunion in London.

When Vera's children had grown up she became very active talking about the Holocaust, long before I did. ■



Vera Slyomovics (née Hollander)

“Vera was a very clever lady who had trained in medicine in Prague before the war.”

## Part 8 Holocaust education

## Beginning to speak about the Holocaust

FOR MANY YEARS I did not speak about the Holocaust. Like the majority of survivors I needed a long time for the wounds to heal. It was too traumatic for us and we couldn't share it because it was much too soon. You need time before you can somehow detach yourself enough to be able to talk about it.

The other side of it was that in the early years after the war people didn't want to hear about the Holocaust. It was too harrowing, as Richard Dimbleby found out when he submitted his report for the BBC on the liberation of Belsen by British troops. At first the BBC refused to broadcast his report because they couldn't believe the horror of what he was describing, and it was only after he threatened to resign and report it independently that the BBC agreed. Also, austerity was very bad in Britain after the war. Everybody had been affected in some way. People had their own troubles to think about. Books did appear with accounts of the Holocaust in Yiddish and Polish and other foreign languages, but publishers were reluctant to publish. It was only in the 1970s that the atmosphere around it started to change.

I was helped and encouraged to speak about my past by Ruth Jacobs, a wonderful and inspirational lady to whom I will always be grateful for the support she gave me.

It was helpful when the Second World War and the Holocaust became an important part of the school history curriculum in Britain and also when in 2000 Tony Blair introduced an annual Holocaust Memorial Day, on 27 January, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. He made the announcement during a visit to an Anne Frank Trust exhibition in London. He said: "The Holocaust, and the lessons it teaches us for our own time, must never be forgotten. As the Holocaust survivors age and become fewer in number, it becomes more and more our duty to take up the mantle and tell each new generation what happened and what could happen again." It was 40 years after those events before I was able to talk about it and even longer before I began to speak about it in public. And I had to start digging very deep into my subconscious to get at what actually happened. ■

## The development of Holocaust education

SCHOOLS STARTED TO visit an Anne Frank exhibition at the Birmingham Art Gallery and I was approached to talk to these children. I agreed, but I just burst into tears when I started speaking. It was a traumatic experience for me and for the children. All of a sudden I was reliving it and the hurt and the sorrow were too deep. Some people who cared about me didn't want me to talk about it. They said: "Please stop. Why do you want to relive all that?" That's how a lot of people felt: they didn't want the survivors to have to go through it all again.

I carried on speaking to schools and it was very hard to begin with. I was exhausted when I got home. I asked Sir Bernard Zissman, a wonderful speaker, for advice on how I could stop myself from getting very tearful and emotional. He said: "Imagine that you're talking about somebody else."



Holocaust Memorial, Ireland

As time went on I spoke about it more and somehow telling the story became easier. People wanted to know about these atrocities and about other atrocities going on in the world, and I realised how very necessary it was for us to speak. When I saw that children in England knew nothing about the Second World War and nothing about the Holocaust, it became even more important. I now felt that I really had a lot to contribute to this work, to help prevent anything like that happening again.

So I kept on talking and educating, and the response and feedback I had from the schools and children encouraged me. I worked with the Holocaust Educational Trust (HET, established 1988) and the Anne Frank Trust (established 1991), which aim to educate young people in schools, universities and the community, about the Holocaust and to work towards a society free from prejudice and discrimination. I would also receive direct invitations.



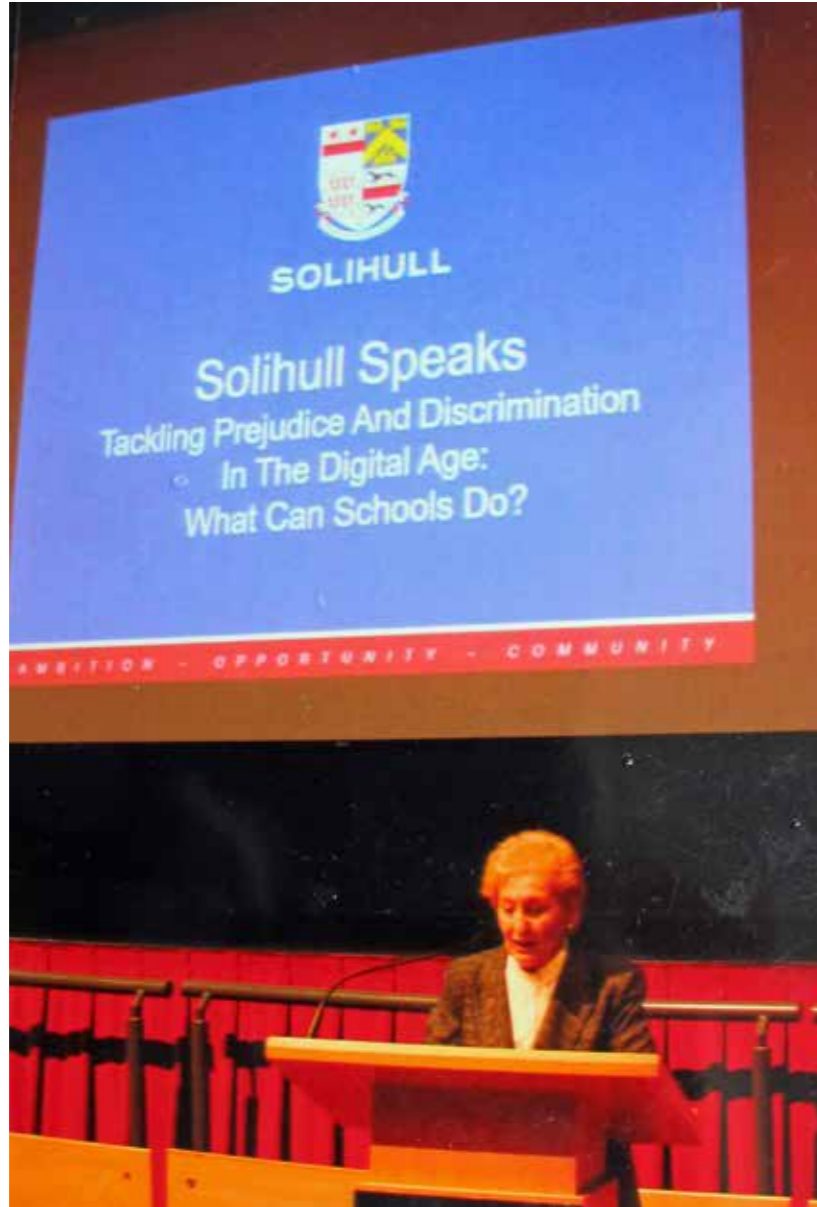
Holocaust memorial, Redditch

If I spoke one year to a school, the next year they might get in touch with me directly. I spoke not only to schools but also to universities, colleges and other organisations like the Women's Institutes, all round the Midlands. I did many talks in particular for Worcester University, for trainee teachers who would later be going out to schools to teach about the Second World War and the Holocaust.

We did not speak to primary school children, they were too young. The focus was on secondary school age. But it was incredible what the teenagers took on board and I received hundreds of letters after my talks, in appreciation of what they had heard. The point was that I could go into direct detail from my experience, could describe what actually happened in Auschwitz. One of the teachers said to me: "We've had people speaking about this, but never anyone telling us exactly, step by step from their own experience, what happened in the ghetto, and going in to Auschwitz. There is nothing that brings it home as much as when you hear it from a Holocaust survivor." That was terribly important. I spoke to the children in layman's language, and they understood.

I have been doing Holocaust education work for more than 20 years now, and it continues to be a very important part of my life. There have been so many other atrocities in the world and we must speak about those also, though there has been nothing to compare with the Holocaust, with those factories of death. It is still almost impossible to understand how Germany, the most cultured, the most educated nation in Europe, could allocate so many facilities, so much manpower to the annihilation of innocent people, for no reason other than because they were Jewish. ■

“There have been so many other atrocities in the world and we must speak about those also, though there has been nothing to compare with the Holocaust, with those factories of death.”



Speaking out against prejudice at Solihull School

## We cannot forgive - but we must not hate

WITH ALL THE atrocities the world has experienced, it is vital to teach that we must not hate, because hatred has catastrophic consequences. But this is not the same as forgiving what happened. I was invited to a meeting recently about the development of Holocaust education, a big event at the Birmingham Library, initiated by Professor Sarah Jones.

One of the participants was a Romanian lady who has been living in Germany for the past seven years. We were all there to provide our testimonies and this Romanian lady read out a passage from a book intended for survivors about forgiveness. Ruth Jacobs, chairperson of the Representative Council of Birmingham and West Midlands Jewry, said to her: "What gives you the right to start writing about forgiveness?" And I said: "There is no way, whatever you say, that I will be able to forgive. How can you forgive when you have lost your whole family? When they were shooting people by the thousand and throwing them into mass graves which those people themselves had to dig? When they were gassing 8000 people in an hour in Auschwitz?" The Romanian lady sat looking flushed for the rest of the meeting.

What I do teach in schools is that we must not hate. That is terribly important. ■

## Singers Hill Synagogue

THROUGHOUT MY TIME in Birmingham I have had support from the Singers Hill Synagogue. After the war my faith was seriously challenged, I had many questions for the One Above. But my Uncle Zolly's Orthodox home and then my involvement with the Jewish youth organisations in the city, brought me back to my roots and I have stayed there. ■

“Throughout my time in Birmingham I have had support from the Singers Hill Synagogue. After the war my faith was seriously challenged, I had many questions for the One Above.”



Singers Hill group on visit to Auschwitz, 2014

## Return to Auschwitz

I FIRST RETURNED to Auschwitz in 2014. Rabbi Jacobs from Singers Hill Synagogue asked if I would accompany a group of shul members. I was hesitant, but I had been watching programmes of memorial events and also enough time had elapsed that I felt I could cope with it, so I said yes. I am very grateful to Rabbi Jacobs and the social and community support, because I don't think I would have had the courage to do it on my own.

It was, however, terribly traumatic. When I was there I had a rush of memory. It was very vivid, although it looks so different now. Now it has grass and trees - at the time there was not a blade of grass or a tree anywhere. It was just mud and a terrible stench filled the air all the time from the burning crematoria. But it came back to me so vividly.

I coped while we were there because I was with friends, with people around me who cared. When I returned after the first visit I was utterly drained of emotion. It had an incredible effect on me.

The thing is that during all these years I had not lived in the past. If I had done so I would not have been able to cope with my life, because I had plenty of other problems to deal with. But when I was suddenly faced with that rush of memory, when I was reminded of what actually happened, I had a terrible reaction.

“Now it has grass and trees - at the time there was not a blade of grass or a tree anywhere. It was just mud and a terrible stench filled the air all the time from the burning crematoria. But it came back to me so vividly.”



Sharing the story of my round up and deportation experience

So, when Rabbi Jacobs asked me to join another Auschwitz trip in 2019, I said that I couldn't. 43 people had already signed up and were relying on me to join them and, in addition, Rabbi Jacobs wanted to make a film of the visit. I thought some more about it and eventually agreed.

I went for a second time and maybe because I had been speaking publicly about it so often, this time I coped with it better. The wonderful crowd of friends around me were very caring and supported me throughout the trip.

The Auschwitz museum has a number of memorials: they still have those piles of suitcases, piles of shoes and the hair, piles of pots and crocks and piles of spectacle frames. Those are all terribly upsetting.

They have preserved a few of the barracks with the bunk beds, with those horrible lavatory facilities. They blew up the crematoria, keeping just one. I could see that the visits are continuous, with streams of people from all over the world, and that even during those few years between the two visits a lot of the material in the museum was deteriorating.

The filming of my second visit to Auschwitz was extraordinary because Paul Davies, who made the film, was exceptionally understanding. He was there but not at all intrusive. We couldn't have hoped for a better person to make the film.

During my second visit we had a wonderful Israeli guide who took us to places that I had not seen before, like Tarnow and the memorial in Buczyna woods, which the Nazis used as a mass execution site.

I was the only survivor in my family to go back to Auschwitz. The others were far away, too busy getting their lives together, and they did not want to look back. My cousin Madeleine's daughter, Shiri, visited from Israel through her school, but I was the only one of my generation to return. In fact my family were quite worried about me going, but I told them that I had good support and I would be fine.

Paul Davies' film was shown in Birmingham at Singers Hill on Holocaust Memorial Day in January 2020, marking the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. It was to be shown again at another meeting that year, but because of the coronavirus restrictions a few Holocaust survivors were asked to light candles at home and it was shown on a video link. I lit a candle in memory of my parents and my two little brothers.

The Holocaust Educational Trust currently has a project to create a new series of films with testimonies of the Holocaust, including mine. ■



Sharing my experience with the group inside a cattle truck



Rabbi of Lübeck reciting Kaddish



In the barracks, remembering the mercilessly overcrowded boards on which the prisoners slept

## Return to Germany (Neuengamme memorials)

MY COUSIN, ROSLYN Eldar in Australia, daughter of my first cousin Lily and granddaughter of my Aunty Berta, had been intensively researching our family and the Neuengamme camp. Apparently Yad Vashem held information on my family as the Germans had kept 90% of what they documented.

Roslyn connected with Barbara Lorber, a friend of her mother Lily in Czechoslovakia before the war, and who shared barracks with her in the Muna Lübberstedt camp. She also made contact with the Muna Lübberstedt organisation, which was run by people who had been children of about 10 years old during the war.

For 73 years I had no desire at all to return to Germany, but when I heard that Barbara was to attend I was persuaded. The fact that she would be there was a big incentive for me. In May 2018, I was accompanied by my daughter, Nicola (Jackie was working abroad at the time), and my two grandchildren, Alex and Bibi. We met Roslyn in Hamburg and her son David travelled from London to join us.

On the first day, 2 May, there was an event organised by the Neuengamme Memorial, where I talked about my experience of Auschwitz and the Muna Lübberstedt factory. Nicola, Alex and Bibi also spoke about how my experience had affected their lives. There were about 150 people there, mostly younger Germans. It was here that I met up with Barbara Lorber for the first time since our liberation in 1945. She had travelled from Israel with her twin grandsons Daniel and Aviv Bar-On. She is three or four years older than me, now 94, a wonderful upright lady, and we would form a very close bond.



Roslyn and me on the observation deck of Elbphilharmonie, 2018



Memorial Service, Lübeck Bay

The next day, Amicale International KZ Neuengamme, an international association of survivors of the Neuengamme camp and of families and friends of the former prisoners, held a memorial in Lübeck. This was to commemorate the terrible loss of life that occurred when the three ships, *SS Cap Arcona*, the *SS Deutschland* and the *SS Thielbek*, were bombed by the British on 3 May 1945.

I learned that Swiss intelligence tried to send a message to the advancing British forces informing them that the ships at Lübeck harbour were holding slave labourers but this message never got through. It was absolutely tragic. A commemorative stone was erected in a clearing by the Bay of Lübeck. Six hundred and twenty one prisoners are buried near this monument, with a list of the countries where the prisoners came from.

This was a tremendous ceremony. We sat outside facing the memorial stone. The rabbi from the Jewish community in Lübeck and various Government officials were in attendance. There was a very moving laying of wreaths and speeches by representatives of the various organisations and survivors. School students read excerpts from the testimonies of former prisoners and the rabbi closed with *Kaddish* (Jewish prayer for the dead).

On the same day we attended another memorial at the main Neuengamme camp. It was here that around 40,000 slave labourers were in this network by the end of 1944; it was the very camp where I had been a slave labourer 73 years earlier.

The exhibition centre now stands on the site of the former factory building. It commemorates the horrors that had taken place and memorialises its victims.

All the barracks had been demolished: all that is left is gravel surrounded by barbed wire, with an enormous hall where they held a very big reception. There were representatives from Germany and people spoke in every language. Students performed a play and music played; it was very moving. I was interviewed and schools arrived to listen.

We also hoped to see Haffkrug, the site of the Displaced Persons camp where I had stayed with my family for several weeks in 1945 before leaving for Prague, but traffic prevented us from visiting this time.



Me with Barbara, Lübeck Harbour, 2018



At the Neuengamme Memorial ceremony, accompanied by my daughter, Nicola, grandchildren Alex and Bibi along with Barbara and her grandsons, Daniel and Aviv Bar-On, 2018



By the air raid shelter in Lübberstedt



Speaking at a Hamburg hotel

The next day, 4 May, was my 89th birthday and we went on a private tour of the site of the Muna factory, accompanied by volunteers from the Muna Association, two chaperones for Barbara and me, alongside a cameraman and a journalist. My cousin Roslyn, who had done so much to make our visit possible, wrote a diary of the visit as a whole and said this about the early part of it:

“This [tour of Muna Lübberstedt] was the culmination of almost two years of research. When I started this investigation I never imagined it would result in this family pilgrimage, a pilgrimage to such an unholy destination...

...We all had breakfast together in the Holiday Inn, Mindu, Nicola, Alex, David and myself. It was Mindu's 89th birthday. She was to celebrate by visiting the ammunition factory that she was imprisoned in for eight months, 73 years ago - it was a celebration of her survival...

...We reached the Community House in Axstedt, which is five minutes' drive from Muna Lübberstedt. About 20 school children around the age of 15 soon arrived via train with their teacher, to hear both Barbara and Mindu talk about their experiences in Auschwitz and the satellite camp. You could hear a pin drop as the two women spoke... Both survivors cried at times. Some of the students cried too. It was an impressive, authentic history lesson.”

The Lübberstedt site is just woodland now. People wanted to build on it after the war because it's a very beautiful area, like many of the areas around Hamburg. The memorial insisted it should be left as a woodland. They preserved an air raid shelter and, amazingly, the bunkers where the ammunition was stored. We walked to the shelter and the bomb production area, a walk that I did six days a week for eight months, from August 1944 until April 1945.

Back in Hamburg after these big ceremonies, Nicola and my grandchildren left for home and Barbara, along with her grandsons, were to return to Israel very early the next morning. This left Roslyn with her son David and me. It was still my birthday and so, in the evening, we celebrated it in a restaurant.

For the last two days I had a chaperone who took good care of me. We went to Neuengamme Memorial to film videos for their archives and Roslyn showed me round the sights of Hamburg.

In the end I was very pleased that I went to Germany because the visit was a wonderful way to see some of my family, to recapture something of the end of the war and to get a better idea about what actually happened during those last few days before our liberation. I met a lot of people from all over the world, from Romania, Slovakia, Russia, from all across Europe, Jewish and many non-Jewish. It was also lovely to form such a strong bond with Barbara. We are still frequently in touch and my children and her grandsons are also very much in touch as well.

Just recently (April 2020) Hartmut Oberstech, who is second in charge of the Muna Lübberstedt organisation and was very active in organising our trip, sent me a moving video of our visit, including a film of me walking in to see the bunker where we dragged the ammunition and then had to load it on to the next train.

The Hamburg commemoration is an annual event and I was invited to go again in 2020, the 75th anniversary of the liberation. Hartmut had organised a project for the gap year students to build a memorial out of the old railway lines and various other things that they have found at the site of the Muna factory, and we were to visit that. But because of the coronavirus situation, they had to postpone it until another time. If I am able to, I will go. Hartmut keeps me updated all the time on all the things they are doing there, so I am well informed about what is happening. ■

## German visitors

ANOTHER CONNECTION THAT I have established with Germany is through a scheme set up by the Diocese of Coventry. German gap year students have been coming here to help Holocaust survivors with IT skills and to hear their stories, as well as to develop their English. So far I have had three charming girls allocated to me. They all have excellent English and their spelling is better than mine! The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) looks after them, takes them on trips and visits to Holocaust museums. They also have lectures from HET and the AJR. These young people cannot believe what the Germans did during the war. Two of them told me that before they came to the UK they asked about the history of their parents and other relations, to try to find out what those relations knew. They discovered that they were unaware of the things that were going on, but also that many were worried for their own lives. ■



With Eva Shloss at an educational event, 2019

## Education

I HAVE BEEN working in Holocaust education for more than 20 years now, as well as in raising awareness about antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of prejudice which are so dangerous.

I have been privileged to join Auschwitz survivor Eva Schloss and Professor Sarah Jones of Birmingham University, as key speakers in remembering Srebrenica; to contribute to the work of the Anne Frank Trust UK and the Holocaust Education Trust; and to speak to over 100 educators about the biggest educational issues of the day.

Educating young people to love one another and appreciate each other's faiths and beliefs is so important in the light of the terrible atrocities that have arisen because of prejudice, intolerance and hatred. I am honoured that this work has in recent years been recognised in a public way. ■



En route to Buckingham Palace with Magda, 2005

## Worcester University

IN 2018 I received an Honorary Doctorate from Worcester University, after speaking to trainee teachers for many years about my experience of the Holocaust. The ceremony that took place at the mediaeval Worcester Cathedral was enormously impressive and will remain with me always. My family were present as were my cousins from London, Elizabeth and John, in addition to my supportive friend and mentor Ruth Jacobs, who encouraged me to speak at a time when I found it very difficult.

Professor David Green, Vice-Chancellor of the University, introduced me in a moving speech from which I will quote just a few passages:

“As a Holocaust survivor, Mindu has shared her story with students and teachers in a range of educational settings, bringing a personal reality to the history of World War II, and challenging students to consider their own responses to atrocity and conflict in more recent times...

...Mindu came to feel that it was important for survivors to come forward, as credible witnesses, to support the historical documentation of the atrocities of the twentieth century, and help future generations to learn and to remember...

...The Worcester community has benefited from this work: Mindu has addressed events at university partner schools and colleges, and the University's own commemorative event for Holocaust Memorial Day...

...The post-war programme of re-building gave the university its original mission – to help to ‘win the peace’ through education. And now, over 70 years later, the principle of education to promote peace, understanding and equality is still at the heart of the university's values...

...Mindu Hornick embodies these values, and she is the kind of teacher that we need, because it is by no means easy to learn from atrocity and suffering on a huge scale...[but] We must use education and culture to feel empathy with the victims of atrocity, outrage for the perpetrators, and to apply that learning to our own lives. That's why Mindu and her generation are precious to us: they help us to understand and to learn, with their personal witness and testimony.”



Clarence House Holocaust Memorial, 2017

Clarence House invitation, 2017

If we are afraid and troubled by the volatile nature of global politics in the twenty-first century... If we are sometimes drawn into intolerance or anger with those who disagree with us... If we are tired of the meanness of political debate on social media, which seems to produce more heat than light... If we have seen that film clip of people burning an effigy of the Grenfell Tower, and felt both revulsion and shame... And if we do want peace... Then we have an opportunity today, to be quiet and listen to the words of someone who was really there, who can truly teach us."

In my acceptance speech I said that the honour both frightened and pleased me. Here are a few passages:

"It frightens me because I wonder: do I have the right to represent the multitudes who have perished? Do I have the right to accept this great honour on their behalf? I do not. That would be presumptuous.

No one may speak for the dead, no one may interpret their mutilated dreams and visions.

It pleases me because I may say that this honour belongs to all the survivors and their children, and through us to the Jewish people with whose destiny I have always identified..

...I remember the bewilderment, I remember the anguish of parting from my mother and little brothers. It all happened so fast. The ghetto, the deportation, the sealed cattle car, the fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed.

I remember asking myself: Can this be true? Is this the 20th century, not the Middle Ages? Who would allow such crimes to be committed? How could the world remain silent?

What have they done with my future? I tell myself, I must try to keep the memory alive. I will fight those who would forget, because if we forget, we are guilty, we are accomplices.

And then I tell myself how naive I was to think that the world did not know and remained silent. And that is why I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation...

...Of course since I am a Jew, profoundly rooted in my people's memory and traditions, my first response is to the Jewish fears, Jewish needs and Jewish cries.

For I belong to a traumatised generation, one that experienced the abandonment and solitude of our people. But there are others as important to me. There are none who feel more for the plight of the victims and survivors of Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda and Darfur and what is happening today than the Holocaust survivors.

By sharing our painful experience we are reminding people that the unbelievable happened to us and should never be allowed to happen again.”

After my acceptance speech over 1000 students and university lecturers gave me a 10 minute standing ovation that was both deeply overwhelming and memorable. ■



On the occasion of my University of Worcester degree ceremony: Bibi, Alex, Nicola, John Malin, me, Lizzy Malin, Jackie

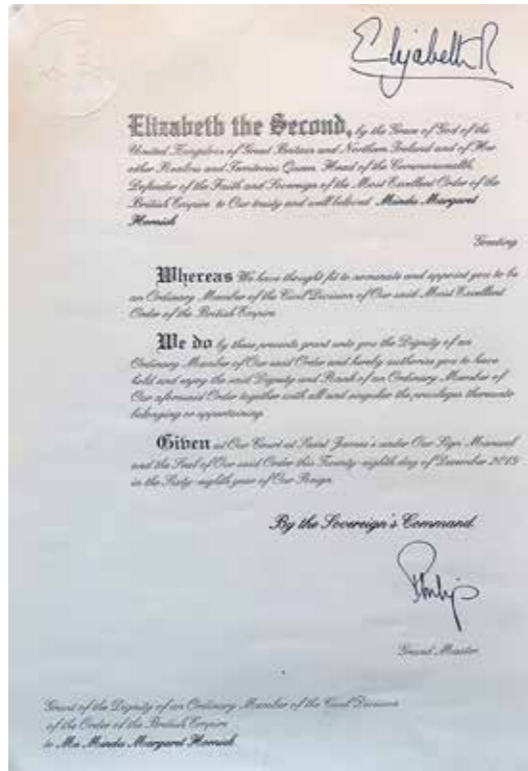
## Awards

I HAVE ALSO been honoured to receive a Pride of Birmingham Lifetime Achievement Award 2020, in recognition of my work in Holocaust education. I consider myself a 'Brummy' and this award showed me that I really belong here and for me that was the icing on the cake.

I had the great honour of being included in the New Year's Honours list for 2020 with the award of an MBE, again in recognition of my Holocaust education work. ■



Pride of Birmingham statuette trophy, 2020



Grant of MBE

## Concluding thoughts

IT WAS MANY years before I was able to talk about what happened to me. After the war I did not want to live in the past, and had I lived in the past I'm sure I would have ended up on psychiatrists' couches. It was only after 40 years that I was persuaded to speak, and then I had to dig very deep into my subconscious.

Looking back over my life in England, my greatest joy was Alan, creating a home that was full of love, friends and hospitality, the wonderful birth of our two daughters, Nicola and Jacqueline, and 24 years of a very happy marriage to a loving and caring husband. I always appreciate those happy years and the invaluable support of the Slyomovics family in Birmingham and of my in-laws, Kitty and Joe Hornick. They were always, unfailingly, there for me, and helped me cope with many problems in later years.

As for the future, my visits to schools, colleges and universities will continue, together with other events and celebrations. I feel my contribution and effort at the age of 92 years is worthwhile. The positive appreciative feedback that I receive is the reward: it is appreciation for the unclouded first-hand testimony of a survivor. I will continue to be involved in the West Midland projects, actively teaching about discrimination and hate crimes on all fronts.

Arriving in England on a stateless passport in 1948, it was always important for me to belong to a family, to a community, and to contribute as best I could to charitable organisations - to WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation), The Inter Faith Network, Singers Hill Synagogue community, and many others. I have always felt it is important to give back to a community and country that has given me my freedom and security. After 72 years in England I feel very English. However, very often after speaking a few words I am asked: "Where do you come from?" I never fail to be surprised as I always think my English is perfect and free of a Czech accent. I am obviously deluded and my family has always found this very amusing.

My 90th birthday was a memorable occasion. The day commenced with a meaningful service at Singers Hill Synagogue with my family and friends from Birmingham, London and beyond, followed by a lovely *kiddush* (small meal held after the Sabbath prayer service). The day continued with a tea and garden party at my home.

At the same time there is always an underlying sadness and void within my family and me because our dear Alan is no longer with us to enjoy these happy occasions. ■

## Part 9

### A jewel in history

#### I am Mindu's eldest daughter Nicola

Growing up, although my sister Jacqueline and myself were aware that Mum had been through the dreadful experience of the Holocaust, Auschwitz and all the terrible traumas of World War II, suffering greatly at the hands of the Nazis and losing many close members of her family, it was never dwelt on at home or particularly spoken about. My father didn't feel there was any benefit to my mother or us, to keep talking about this terrible time in her life, as she had been blessed with a wonderful new life, a loving marriage, children, a beautiful home and family living nearby.

I remember my mother, being blessed with good health, full of enthusiastic energy, which resounded around the home. She was always passionate about cooking both continental and traditional Jewish dishes in copious amounts (the house always full of the wonderful aromas of food), as well as eagerly embracing the introduction of new foods and dishes into this country during the culturally revolutionary time of the 1960s. Therefore, classic French and Italian dishes were on the menu as well.

And so, our home was a place of fun and energy, with a constant flow of friends and family popping in and out. Mum and Dad would often host elaborate dinner parties and social evenings for their friends, as was very much the fashion of the time. They both enjoyed an active social and Jewish community lifestyle. Mum was also deeply passionate about gardening; she clearly had naturally green fingers and loved being out in the fresh air. Our garden was fairly large and Mum was always out there, planting and caring for it all, encouraging new plant life to flourish. Our house was always adorned with stunning flower arrangements, effortlessly thrown together with an individual flair. Mum quite simply adores flowers, having them around her, growing; germinating from seed and being actively instrumental in the propagation of new life and rebirth - very indicative of her survival, spirit and positive optimistic nature: life goes on.

However, this seemingly wonderful well-deserved family life was to be cruelly and tragically shattered. My father, always embodying the spirit, laddish chumminess, and humour of a character out of his favourite *Beano* comic, suddenly suffered a fatal heart attack at the untimely age of 49 years.

The massive disbelief and shock to the entire family was devastating. We wavered between hysteria and numbness when the pain became too overwhelming to accept.

Why? Why? Why?

This was NOT fair!

Where was God now?

Mum continues to be an outstanding example of someone who has lived through the horrendous experiences of war: Auschwitz; loss of many of her family and loved ones; loss of her home in Prague; being dehumanised, and yet always holding onto hope, and the belief of a better future. Her fierce determination that her spirit will never be crushed, displays the primal human need to survive and hold onto one's sense of self; to dig deep, and find the strength to overcome such horrors that we can only imagine in nightmares. With her smiling face turned towards the sun, Mum always maintained the optimism and gratitude to embrace a new life... a second chance, with the intensity of welcoming and living each new day as though it were her last.

In more recent years, after the passing of much healing time, Mum decided it was important to share her experiences of the Holocaust, and the many lessons to be learned from them within the field of education: lecturing in schools, colleges and universities, teaching about the catastrophic effects of hate, racism and persecution, and importantly to raise and maintain awareness in a world where sadly these atrocities are still going on. My mother's talks have proved to be inspirational in displaying the strength and capacity of the human spirit to overcome the most frightening challenges of life in her personal testament as a living witness. This work within education has now become her *raison d'être*. Speaking in public did not come naturally or easily to my mother, but with her characteristic determination of spirit and sense of purpose, she has now become professionally accomplished, highly respected and much sought after.

Mindu is a shining inspiration to us all - a life that is both exceptional and exemplary.

A story of survival and transformation.

A life to be proud of. ■

## About my mother, Mindu Hornick, by Jacqueline Herron

Reflecting on of how my strong and creative mother developed our home life after going through what must be one of the worst crimes against humanity this century, I feel that I have inherited the legacy of her resilience and compassion for others. One of the most endearing qualities that I believe has given Mum her strength is that she is very open-minded and accepting of people for who they are. She listens attentively, does not judge and takes on board others' opinions and lifestyles. She has a great sense of humour which colours her mind with a sense of fun and lightness that must have also been a saving grace during the deep sorrow of war.

Mum has always carefully spoken her mind and has always been a truly giving and generous woman to all her family and friends. Her tireless spirit and ability to organise and focus her mind has given her admirable attributes to enable her to run a successful business alongside numerous other activities. After my dear father passed away suddenly, she bravely took over his business totally excelling in the trade, winning awards and accolades in a very male-dominated environment. She is a true multi-tasker and home-maker appreciative of others' abilities and how they may help and support her.

There are many occasions where I remember my father's more conservative attitudes on food, fashion, and business being challenged by Mum's forward-thinking, intuitive, open-minded view. Mum's health-conscious way of living was something very natural to her, as her childhood living in a rural environment in Prague gave her a pure understanding of health and wellbeing. I can recall her going to yoga classes and saunas in Birmingham in the 1960s when hardly anyone even knew what these things were! She simply loves nature, flowers, the sun, the birds and all animals. Also babies! Mum adores babies and young children who immediately feel her love and gravitate towards her, overcoming any generation gap. We always say if something has a mouth, Mum will feed it. When my daughter Bibi got a dog, Molly, Mum put her love of feeding animals into creating special meals for her new pet. Nobody can escape Mum's passion for nourishing others.

Mum has always had a great affinity with her faith, with God, with religion, and has kept the heart and soul of her life connected to the teachings of Judaism. As she grows into this very special time of her life, I see her faith and spirit become even stronger and more precious to her. She remains the matriarch of our large family circle and is dearly respected and loved by all of us and her peers. ■




## About the AJR

Founded in 1941 by Jewish refugees from Central Europe, The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR) is the national charity representing and supporting Holocaust refugees and survivors living in Great Britain. Primarily delivering social, welfare and care services, the AJR has a nationwide network of regional groups offering members a unique opportunity to socialise in their local area. Members receive support from volunteers and can obtain advice and assistance on welfare rights as well as on Holocaust reparations.

The AJR is committed to the education of future generations about the Holocaust and is now the UK's largest benefactor of education and memorialisation programmes and projects which promote teaching and learning about the Holocaust.

About 70,000 refugees, including approximately 10,000 children on the *Kindertransport*, arrived in Great Britain from Nazi-occupied Europe in the 1930s. The AJR extends membership to anyone who fled a Nazi-occupied country as a Jewish refugee or who arrived in Great Britain as a Holocaust survivor. We also welcome the descendants and spouses of the refugees as members.



“I remember looking back. I couldn’t see my brothers because of the crowds, but I caught sight of my mother. She was wearing a spotted scarf. I was able to wave to her and she waved back. That was the last time we saw her.”

 **AJR** The Association  
of Jewish Refugees

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