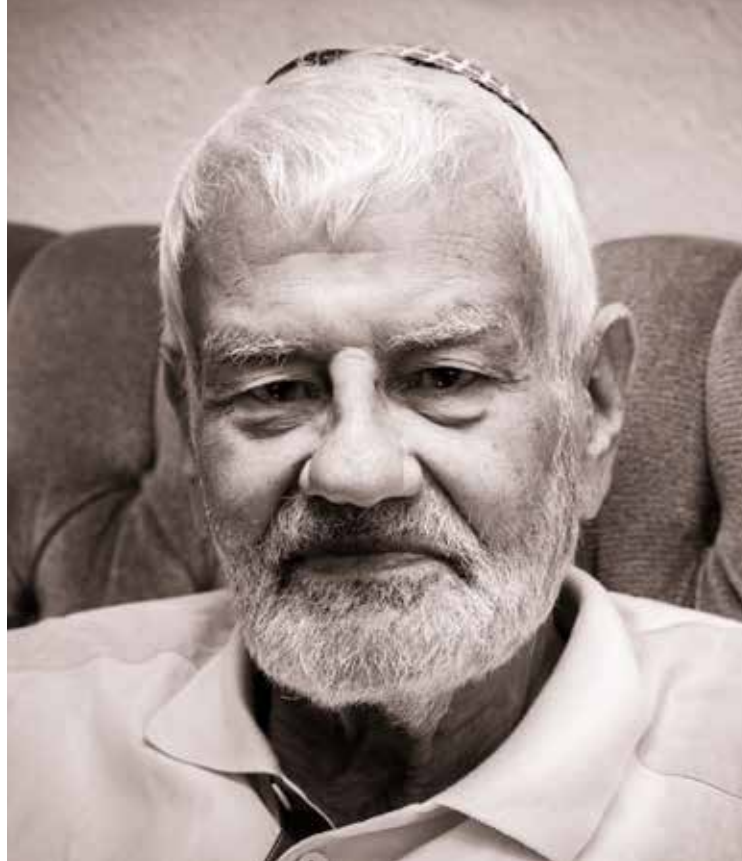


# My Story

Rev. Bernd Koschland MBE



# My Story

## Rev. Bernd Koschland MBE

Dedicated to the memory of my parents, Bella and Jakob  
Koschland; my wife Ruth, and my friend Michelle.



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

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

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

Rev. Bernd Koschland MBE was visited by AJR volunteer Mike Say to share his story. Thanks also to AJR volunteers Nadia Lipsey and Shelley Hyams for their editing skills.

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# My Story

## Rev. Bernd Koschland MBE

“My parents had heard through a distant relative that there was a vacancy on the Kindertransport to England for me. I still have a hairbrush that my mother packed, with my name on a little tag around it and a bag for PE shoes – Mum was concerned about me being untidy. Dad was more concerned with my future religious life, coming from an Orthodox Jewish home.”

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My father



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# Part 1

## A Happy Beginning

## My family and childhood life in Germany

I WAS BORN ON 27 January 1931 in Fürth, right next door to Nuremberg in Southern Germany. Ours was an Orthodox community by and large, although there was also a German Reform community in Fürth. Both my parents were born in Fürth, my father in 1884 and my mother in 1900. My father's family came to southern Germany in around 1760 from a town called Koschlanier in Czechoslovakia, hence the family name Koschland. They first settled in a town called Ichenhausen. Then some of the Koschlands moved to the nearby town of Fürth. In fact, my mother's maiden name was Ichenhauser, presumably from the name of the town of Ichenhausen. They both came from Orthodox Jewish families.

My parents were active in the community. My father was particularly active in our synagogue, conducting services and other things like blowing the *shofar*, which I was told by my sister only recently. Mother was the traditional Jewish housewife and our family was, if I can put it rather humorously, *Yekish* - a typical German Jewish Orthodox family. *Yekish* comes from the word *Yeke* (jacket) because they were always dressed very smartly. To be called a *Yeke* described the sort of background you came from. I still consider myself a *Yeke*, but the women in my life have rounded the corners off me from being too *Yekish*!

My father travelled quite a lot as a representative of a shoe trading company. Father had several half siblings and full siblings, because my dear grandfather married three times and had children by two of the wives. The children of wife number two were much older than my father, but there were a number of his siblings in Fürth.

I have one sister, Ruth. She is seven years older than me. Ruth told me there was a sibling between the two of us of whom she knew very little. I was able to solve part of the mystery when I returned to Fürth in 2000. We were taken to the archives where they had information about our family dating back to 1840. There was an index card which listed when Ruth and I were born and when we left the country, and also about that sibling whose name was Liesl. She lived only for a very short time.

My father had a sort of office in the room in which I slept. I remember him duplicating orders with what looked like a process as ancient as carving a message in stone. It was some sort of container with



My mother

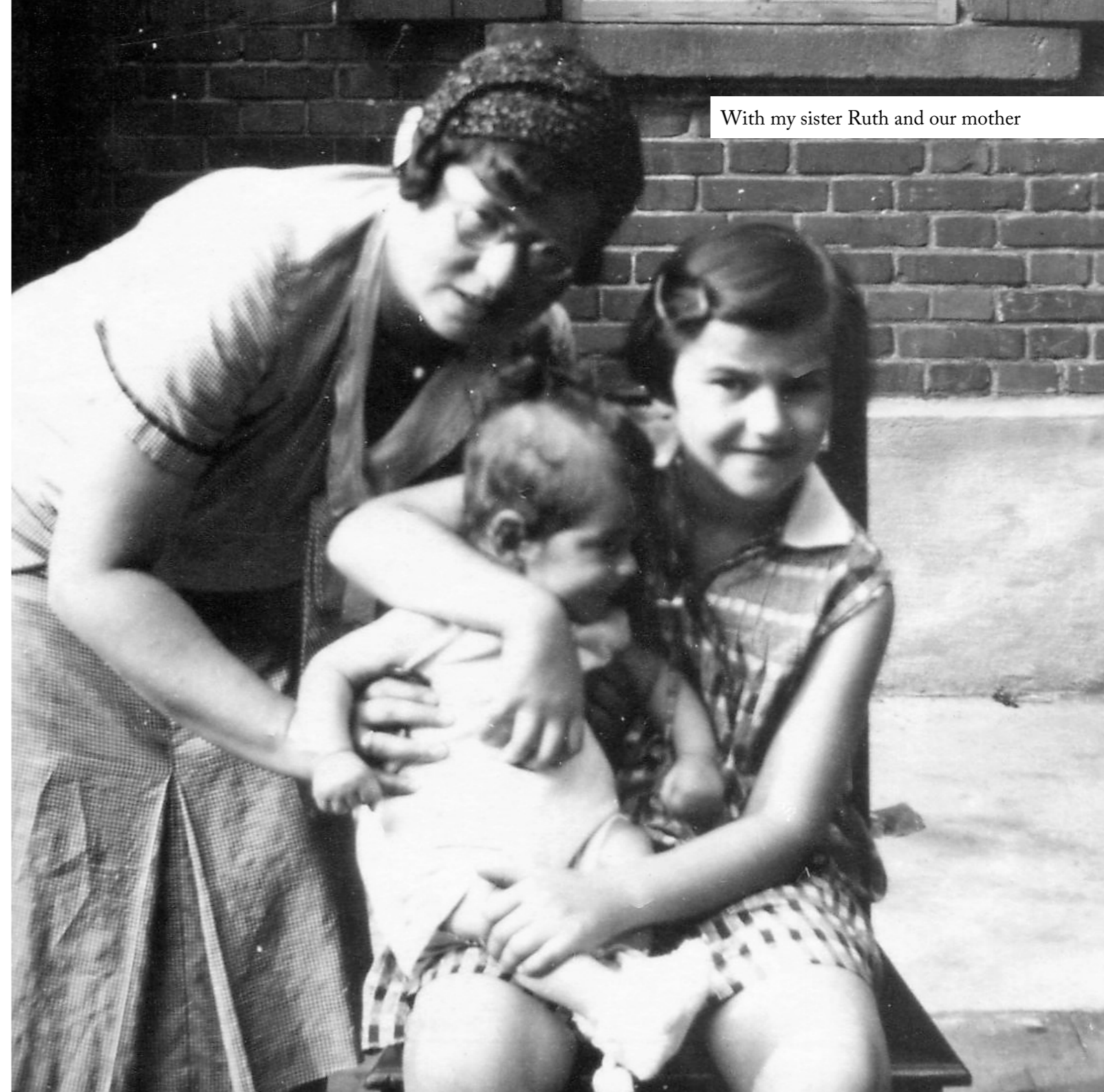
a flat plate and an ink mixture in which you rolled something and then rolled a paper over it and got a copy of what it was you were trying to duplicate. I've never seen one like it - it probably went out with the ark!

It's difficult to remember very early on, but I think I was a bit of a spoiled brat! I remember trying out my first attempts at DIY as a little kid, knocking a hole in the wall with some toys - my parents weren't too happy about that! I also recall being very naughty, swinging on the doors of our kitchen cabinet, as one would as a little boy, and bringing the whole thing down, including all the crockery. I have pictures of me with a patch on my knees because I used to fall over running around the town. Obviously in those days boys wore short trousers. I wore the equivalent of the *lederhosen*, a special Bavarian type of trousers.

When I was three or four I had my first lessons with my father where he taught me to read Hebrew. He was not trained in any way but, from what I can gather, he had a brilliant mind. In order to teach me Hebrew he used a method that he invented himself. He took the Hebrew letters and by using the German letter equivalents, he wrote in Hebrew a word which had a meaning for me in German. Apparently I picked it up very quickly. When I was six or seven, he started to teach me early rabbinic literature and slowly I was immersed in reading and learning at the hands of my father. We must have gotten on very well, as there is not a trace in my memory of having any arguments and I brought the book that he used with me to England when I came.

“ I remember trying out my first attempts at DIY as a little kid, knocking a hole in the wall with some toys - my parents weren't too happy about that! I also recall being very naughty, swinging on the doors of our kitchen cabinet, as one would as a little boy, and bringing the whole thing down, including all the crockery. ”

With my sister Ruth and our mother





With my mother

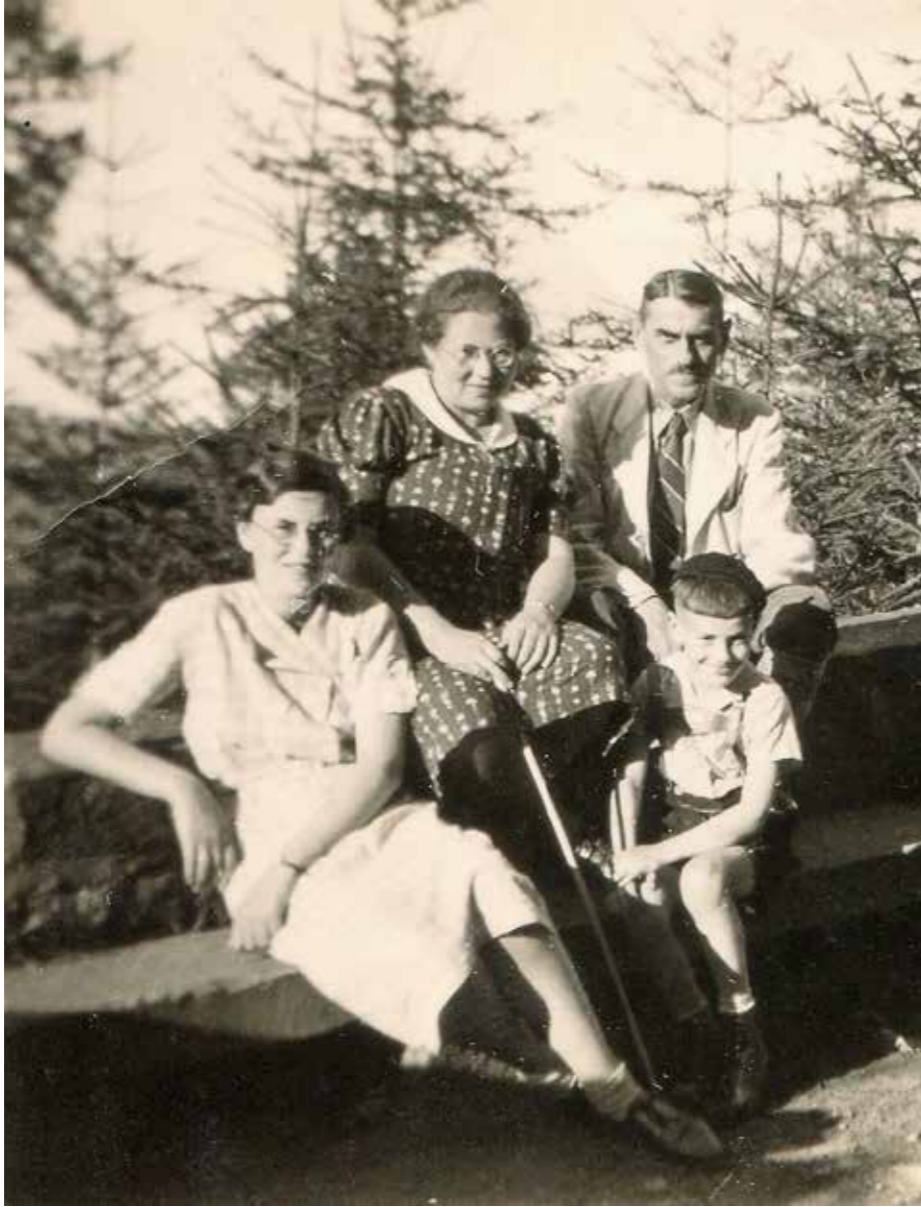
We lived in an apartment block on the top floor. I remember that clearly because when it came to the festival of *sukkot*, we were able to build a *sukkah* (kosher tabernacle) on the balcony of our flat.

I think my mother came from a fairly well-off family. Her mother lived with us for a while after she had a stroke, or we lived with her – I'm not sure which is correct because it was her flat that we lived in. I think my parents had moved in to look after her. I recall trying to get her to talk – I didn't understand what a stroke was. I remember that the word I tried to get her to say was *wagen* (pronounced 'vagen') – the German word for wagon. She was the only grandparent that I knew. She died in 1936. My father's father had died in 1886 or 87. He was born in 1831, my dad in 1884 and me in 1931. That's a very long stretch of time, 100 years in fact, between only three generations.

I was a bad eater. Our dining-room table had a sort of ledge underneath and anything I didn't like I used to put on there. When they cleared the table my parents thought I was such a good boy for eating everything but I had hidden it. My sister tells me that the only place where I would eat well was at the home of our doctor – I have no idea why, but I have certainly grown out of being a bad eater. We were a happy household, a happy family. I don't recall if my sister and I argued, I should ask her. The only time I do remember us arguing was when I wanted to play with one of her toys (rings on a rope hanging from the ceiling from which you could swing) and she told me to leave it alone because it was hers. I had my own toys anyway.

I had a Schuco car which would ride along until you told it to stop, so if it came to the edge of a table it wouldn't fall off. I also had a game similar to a Meccano set which was called Trix. Funnily enough, many years later I met someone who came from Nuremberg and it turned out that his family were the manufacturers of Trix. I had a book called *The Struwwelpeter* which was written in 1840 by a doctor to

“ We were a happy household, a happy family. I don't recall if my sister and I argued, I should ask her. ”



Our last family photo taken on our last holiday together



With my mother and my sister



amuse his children. The stories are not always very pleasant, like the child who sat at the table eating his supper and pulled the tablecloth and pulled everything down. Or the story which I often repeat to youngsters when I show them the book, of the young child whose mother told him not to suck his thumbs or a tailor will come along with his big scissors and cut them off. He tells his mum that he won't. She goes out, he sucks his thumb and along comes the tailor and cuts them off. Such a lovely story to tell children before they go to sleep! That is the sort of book that we had, and fortunately I found an English version of it even with the same illustrations.

I started school at the age of six, which was the usual age for children to start in Germany. Later on, as the Nazi system got stronger and more violent, Jews were not allowed to attend non-Jewish schools. Two or three might be let in but they would be treated like dirt and called names. We went to a Jewish school anyway. In fact, Henry Kissinger went to my school. I never knew him because he was eight years older than me. My sister knew him. My wife, Ruth, used to tease me and call him 'my relation' whenever the name came up. The head teacher of the school was a Dr Praager, who was related by marriage. His wife was the sister of my aunt. He later came to England. Mother would often meet me after school, particularly at the time when Nazism was on the rise. She used to buy me something I have never seen anywhere else, sardine *brotschen* – a roll with pickled sardines, which I liked. I also remember that my mother used to prepare the *challah* for Shabbat at home and then take it to the local Jewish baker to bake it as we didn't have the means to do so. Many people did this. I remember going to collect them with a cousin of mine and be treated to off-cuts of cake and things like that. ■

## Nazi laws and *Kristallnacht*

FROM 1935 ONWARDS there had been all kinds of legislation passed by the Nazis, of what Jews could do and what they couldn't do; where Jews could go, or where they couldn't go. I never went to the cinema for that reason.

Around 1937 life got more difficult. My father was sacked from his employment, as were many Jews, so he was at home a lot. I was too young to appreciate what was going on. I recall seeing the Stormtroopers on the streets, their brown shirts with swastika armbands. In fact, one of them almost ran me over, but fortunately did little damage. I am often asked if I ever saw Hitler, and I did. Trains from Nuremberg ran through Fürth and Hitler was on one, standing by the window as the train went very slowly over a bridge, passing people who were waiting to see him. Of course, being Jewish we couldn't stand around the front, we were right at the back, but I did see him in the distance - not that it made any difference to me at the time, but later on in life when children asked me I could say, "Yes. I saw Hitler."

Life became even more difficult in late 1938. In November of that year came *Kristallnacht*. I recall very clearly the smashing up of shops and so on. Jews were taken out of their homes and marched to an open space in the town, which was originally the end station of the train-line between Nuremberg and Fürth (the first train-line built in Germany c.1836). We were made to stand there while Jewish homes were broken into and things stolen and smashed up, but fortunately not our flat - I can't explain why.

I remember that it was a bitterly cold night and that I happened to be dressed in the same little outfit that I wore to school. We had to walk in absolute silence from our house to the central point. As with other towns, the synagogues were desecrated and burnt. I have a copy of a document which states that before the actual attacks began, the local fire brigade had orders from the commander, from somewhere in Munich, not to go and put out the flames of any burning building unless the fire would damage a non-Jewish building. When I read that it makes my blood run cold. As we stood there in the night we saw the synagogues on fire, and heard shouting and dogs barking, and whatever noises would accompany the orders of the SS or the brownshirts and bully boys. They claimed this was just a spontaneous outbreak as an act of revenge but I think history says something different. We stood there and eventually my mother, my sister and I were allowed home, but without my father. He was taken



(left to right) My father, uncle with the Iron Cross, and a cousin. 1917 - 18 in the German army

away along with the other Jewish men of the town. I always thought, and still believe, although others say something else, that they were taken to a building that was given to the town by a Jewish pencil manufacturer, and which still stands today. From there they were taken to Dachau concentration camp, near Munich.

The following day, Goering said that the Jews would be fined millions of marks for the damage that they had caused, which was completely crazy. But there we were, there was nothing we could do about it.

My father had served in the German army in World War One, as had his two brothers and my cousins, who were very much older than me. There was a group picture of the fighting Koschlands and several pictures of my father, on his own and with his battalion. Some years back AJEX (the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women) received a letter with a description of Passover celebrations at the German front in the trenches north of Paris. It said this service had been taken by a Lieutenant Israel Koschland, or Isser Koschland as he was known. AJEX asked me if he was any relation. I told them that he was my uncle – and there he was, conducting a Passover service in the front lines of World War One.

When bad things started to happen in Germany it was thought that those Jews who had fought



My father in Dachau (indicated by the arrow)

in World War One wouldn't suffer the denigration that others did because they had served the Fatherland. We have a copy of a letter from a distant relative saying that my father could use his German military experience and knowledge at Dachau. There is a note from this distant relative stating that Father took his *tsitsit* (ritual fringes) to Dachau. No-one knows how he managed to do so.

My father was released in early 1939. He had received a visa to go to Paris, so he came home, but he never used the visa. I don't remember exactly how I felt when he returned home, but he came back looking a little the worse for wear. That I do remember.

This story is a reflection of what I think happened, rather than actually remembering it clearly. I was in the sitting room of our flat with my father, mother and sister. My father told me that the situation was pretty grim and that they would like to send me abroad for safety to England. I don't know if I said, "Ok, I want to go" or "I don't want to go", but either way I was still going. To make it a bit easier for me, my parents said that they would hopefully join me soon and we would be together again. I remember very clearly to this day that they made me a promise that they would buy me a suit with long trousers when I reached the age of 13 for my *bar mitzvah*. Of course, that promise was never fulfilled because they never got out. Who knows how they must have felt to make that decision to send their child away. I showed my sister once an inscription that our father had made in Hebrew in one of my books. She said that it was dad's writing but that it was not his best; that it was somehow a bit shaky - as if to indicate the emotion of having to send me away. I had a vague idea where England was but, of course, I didn't know a word of English. To overcome that my parents taught me a sentence in English that they had learned at school. They taught me to say, "I am hungry, may I have a piece of bread?" The emotion behind that sentence is still with me, my parents not knowing what the future might be and not knowing where I would end up. They worried that I might be hungry one day and should be able to ask for a piece of bread.

Some years back, one of the school children to whom I was telling my story asked me if I was angry. Who would I have been angry with? My parents for sending me away or the Nazis? I really can't answer the question but it was very perceptive of this eight or nine-year-old to ask.

My parents had heard through a distant relative that there was a vacancy on the *Kindertransport* to England for me. I still have a hairbrush that my mother packed, with my name on a little tag around it



When I travelled to England

and a bag for PE shoes – Mum was concerned about me being untidy. Dad was more concerned with my future religious life, coming from an Orthodox Jewish home. He gave me the necessary basic books that one might need: a prayer book; a *Chumash* or Pentateuch (the five books of Moses); the *Haggadah* (Passover book); and a *tallit* (prayer shawl). I don't remember what else I packed, but I know I had a small photo album that was given to me by the parents of Michael Oppenheimer, a friend of mine from home, and I still have it. Other things, like a watch that I know my parents gave me, have vanished over the years. The other children who went on the train to the Hook of Holland via Germany to come over to Harwich were only allowed one small suitcase and up to 10 marks. It was a different story for me, although I have no idea why.

When the time came for me to depart in March 1939, I had a regular-sized suitcases and a trunk. The trunk actually still exists. It travelled with me all over the place and now is residing in my daughter's loft. I asked her recently if she wanted me to get rid of that trunk and she said that she wanted to keep it because it is part of me. So everything was packed. Dad, Mum and my sister accompanied me to the station. I said goodbye to my father and sister, not knowing if I would ever see them again. Actually my sister would come to England on a later *Kindertransport*. My mother boarded the train with me and we travelled to Hamburg. I don't have any memory of what happened in Hamburg. ■

## A new life in England

I EVENTUALLY BOARDED a big American ship of the United States Line called the SS Manhattan which plied the route from New York to Hamburg. It took on board eighty children of the Kindertransport. Whoever arranged it, may he or she be blessed, because I enjoy cruising as a result.

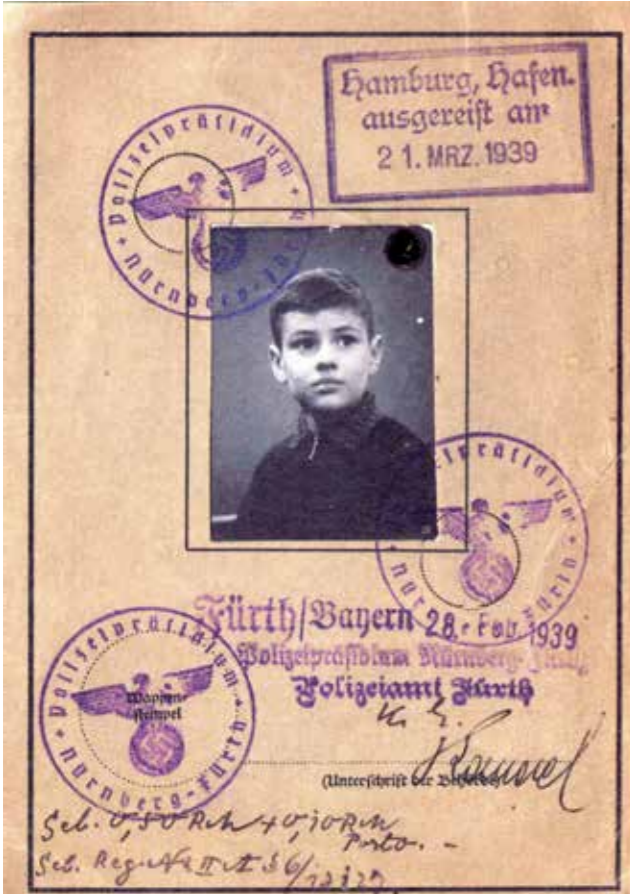
I said goodbye to my mother there, and that was the last time I saw her. Well, not quite, because she sent me a postcard before the war and put a ring around the picture of her on a boat, looking at me on the liner sailing away. Unfortunately, that picture has since vanished. My sister Ruth would follow a few months later, on another of the *Kindertransport*.

In recent years I have gotten the list of the eighty children who were on board, some of whom I remember, together with a certificate issued by a doctor in Hamburg that we were all medically sound.

The boat was bound for Southampton via somewhere in France - I think Le Havre but I am not sure. It was mid-March 1939 and we were at sea for three days. I don't remember much of the journey, except I think us younger children ran a bit wild, probably annoying the other passengers. When the boat arrived in Southampton, we disembarked and went through Immigration. Whoever was in charge of us must have taken us through. I have the actual pass that allowed me to travel out of Germany because I wouldn't have had a German passport as I was considered stateless. The pass has a stamp of admission from the Southampton officials and another stamp that makes me laugh as it says that I am not allowed to take up any work when I arrive - I was only eight!

The people who picked us up were from B'nei B'rith, an international Jewish organisation founded in the States in the 1840s, and they were responsible for me right up until the age of eighteen. We were under the auspices of Bloomsbury House, London, which was a centre for Jewish refugees arriving in the UK. Some of us were taken to the Rowden Hall hostel in Cliftonville, Margate, where we settled down. I think one or two of the other passengers from my ship were with me there. I found out recently that I was the youngest, and someone later told me that he 'sort of' looked out for me at the hostel for that reason.

Until the war broke out in 1939, I was in contact with my parents. They wrote to me and I probably wrote to them. I was not very good at writing. I kept their letters until I was advised to destroy them



My travel permit allowing me to leave Germany



after war had broken out as they said, “if the Germans invade you never know what will happen.” Foolishly I destroyed every one of those letters, so have no direct letters from my parents to me at all. I do have a few letters of theirs which were written to relations which somehow came to me after the war.

Cliftonville, in those days, was in the better part of Margate. There were a number of jobs that had to be done. One was to learn English. I believe we had somebody to tutor us and I picked it up sufficiently from my arrival in March to go to a local primary school in October of that year. We also had to settle in and learn the ways of the country that we were now in. When I arrived, the person in charge of the hostel, Mr G, was very harsh towards us. He left some time afterwards and, strangely enough, he was my grocer after the war and my rationing was with him. We had to do our bit to keep the hostel tidy. There was no dishwasher in those days and so we had to help with the washing up and drying of dishes – well, it came in handy later in life. There are other things that I learnt for reasons that I still do not understand but were useful, such as how to sew on a button and how to darn a sock.

The Rowden Hall hostel was in a former school on Third Avenue. I learnt there, amongst many other things, how to play hopscotch. I still recall that the rules were changed as you went along by the older ones, and of course, us little kids had to follow those rules as they were made up. We would go out and collect cigarette cards from the empty cartons in the street to use for playing games like penny up the wall or cards at the wall, flicking them or swapping them. I went to the cinema for the first time in my life; we saw *The Wizard of Oz*, which had just come out. We also had a few Jewish lessons of some kind

“Foolishly I destroyed every one of those letters, so have no direct letters from my parents to me at all. I do have a few letters of theirs which were written to relations which somehow came to me after the war.”

“I got two pence, which in those days was quite a lot of money. I bought sweets with it but I always had to make sure to leave enough money to buy stamps to send letters to my parents.”

with the rabbi of the local synagogue in Margate, Rabbi Cohen. I was really sad to hear recently that the synagogue in Margate, where we observed the Jewish holidays, is virtually closed now.

Mr G was replaced by somebody else - I think his name was Mr Berger. He was a very kindly man who made sure we kept pretty healthy by taking us to the top of the cliffs and doing exercise in the fresh sea air. I had to get used to a number of things, such as sleeping in a dormitory and not living in a parental environment. There were about fifty of us there.

I was given pocket money. I got two pence, which in those days was quite a lot of money. I bought sweets with it but I always had to make sure to leave enough money to buy stamps to send letters to my parents.

I started my first English primary school -I think it was called St Mary's - after war was declared and we were eventually evacuated. Some of us landed up in a village called Hammerwich near Cannock in Staffordshire. This was the first time I had ever lived in a village. We evacuees from Margate made friends with other boys in the village and we all played together.

I was put up in a foster home with another boy called Joseph. The family were called the Cotterils. They were a lovely elderly couple who had no children of their own and they looked after us extremely well. The house had no electricity, it was gas lit. It had no bathroom and the toilet was outside. Bath time was in a big tin bath in front of the fire, with water from a copper boiler. I have a feeling that it was a miner's cottage originally because there was a mining area somewhere nearby. We were made very much at home and had a small patch of garden for ourselves. One job that we had was looking

after three little chickens, which was exciting for us. Mr Cotterill used a bike to get around. We got pocket money, which I put away in a post office savings account. I had a little brown savings book and I would go to the post office and put in my sixpence or a shilling, or whatever it happened to be. Life was probably quite difficult for the Cotterills; they didn't have much, although they must have received payment from the government for housing evacuees. We were very lucky and happy and healthy and well looked after.

One of the difficulties that arose was around religion. They did occasionally take us to church. We ignored everything and ate what we were given. Whether that was right or wrong I don't know, but there was no choice and we had no one to ask about it. At Passover the refugee organisation sent us two or three 'kosher for Passover' foodstuffs, so we at least had matzah.

On *Shabbat* we would go to a nearby place in Cannock to meet up with other Jewish evacuees in the area. Something that is not well known is that when the Bishop of Birmingham heard that there were Jewish evacuees in his diocese, he spoke to one of the senior rabbis of Birmingham (Rev. Dr Abraham Cohen, editor of the Soncino Bible and later lecturer at Jew's College in Homiletics) to ask him if he could organise somebody to go and do something with these refugees on the Sabbath. A Mr Benny Winter came from Birmingham to say prayers and give lessons to the older ones.

I attended my third primary school which consisted of three classes. The headmaster was a rather shortish fellow, slightly humpbacked and walked with a cane. If you didn't hold your pen the right way, he would strike you with his cane. I was ten years old.

When it came to the Jewish New Year, the eight of us (the Jewish children) decided that we wouldn't go to school for the first day. In the afternoon the teacher from the school in Margate with whom we had been evacuated, came along with his large dog and he read us the riot act. We explained to him that it was one of the most important festivals in our calendar. He said to never mind Jewish festivals and then threatened us with all kinds of nasty things like being sent back or sent away. We felt that we had been dealt with unjustly.

We saw very little, if anything, of the war. The only thing we might have seen would have been planes flying over towards Coventry or Birmingham. ■

## Tylers Green

IN THE SUMMER OF 1941 news arrived that I was being transferred to a hostel elsewhere in the country. I wasn't asked if I wanted to go or not, so I packed my bags. I was told it was an Orthodox Jewish hostel and that was the reason. It was in a place called Tylers Green, which is a village about three miles from High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

Shame on me, I lost contact with the Cotterills. I later met the older brother of Joseph (the other boy who had been taken in by the Cotterills) and he told me that he had gone back to the village and tracked down their burial place, which had been completely neglected. That made me rather sad because I feel that I should have done something once I left, but I didn't and I couldn't undo it.

The hostel was, interestingly, in a building called the Old Vicarage next to Tylers Green parish church. It was a fairly large building which housed about twenty-five boys plus staff and wardens, set back from the road and with a huge area of ground behind it. There was space at the front which was used for football or cricket depending on the season. There was a forbidden short-cut through a gate which led through the adjacent churchyard. I took the short-cut to the hostel on one occasion, I thought quite unscathed, but the warden got hold of me and asked me if it was my *kippa* that he had found in the churchyard. I said yes and I got a slap in the face for it. It happened to be on my birthday. Years later I went back with a BBC film crew (they were making a documentary about the *Kindertransport*) and the whole place had changed: the buildings had gone and a new housing estate had taken their place.

The hostel was run by a warden called Max Baer – no relation to the boxer who was the World Heavyweight Champion in 1934. We had a teacher called Mr Woolf. We were given pocket money – I think I got three pence or sixpence which would be held over if you were being punished for some kind of misdemeanour, so occasionally you wouldn't get anything. We also had a ration of sweets that were dished out on *Shabbat* and if you were particularly naughty or did something wrong you might be deprived of that too. We slept in rooms of three or four and I don't think they had heating in them because I do recall seeing the windows frozen on the inside. And so life began for me again.

I went to my fourth primary school for the last year of my primary education in the village. The head teacher was Mr Filby, his wife was also a teacher and their son Noel was in my class. I remember that

we took part in Navy week or Air Force week and we had to make posters. Mine was displayed in the local post office, which I thought a great honour. We sat the 11+ and I got through, which was quite an achievement as only four from the class did. I went back to that primary school many years later and spoke to the children. My story had been picked up by a historian who was the editor of the village magazine. He got in touch with me and he brought me into the school. I still have a copy of the write-up in the local magazine.

We were very well cared for. We had all kinds of books and games and we made our own entertainment of one kind or another right at the back of the garden where we made a little secret hut. We were rather naughty and spent some of our pocket money on cigarettes. We first tried to smoke dried leaves in an acorn husk - that was enough to kill you. We could buy cigarettes either singly or in a packet, the Woodbines five for two pence, illegally of course. It was rather frowned upon to smoke at that age of 11 or 12. Once we started grammar school we had to help around the hostel. For example, on a Sunday morning we had to peel a huge bath of potatoes. We would do that in shifts and somehow I was given the job of organising the rota.

We saw nothing of the war whatsoever, other than some troops around. The only time the war came near us was when one of the buzz bombs, the V1, dropped about half a kilometre away from our grammar school and we were all annoyed that it hadn't come a little bit nearer!

The hostel was run by a committee from one of the Orthodox synagogues in Golders Green, London, known as Munk's Synagogue. Rabbi Eli Munk had come from Germany in 1933 and would become,

“ I remember that we took part in Navy week or Air Force week and we had to make posters. Mine was displayed in the local post office, which I thought a great honour. ”

as it were, my 'guru' (and my wife's as well because she worked for him at one point after the war). If I had any religious questions, he would be the only one I would turn to. He was obviously well learned in Jewish matters but he also had a doctorate from Germany in nothing to do with Judaism at all – but on William Wordsworth. Whilst playing football and cricket on a Saturday was not really encouraged, Rabbi Munk said that he would rather we did that than things we shouldn't be doing.

The secretary of the committee, Cissie Rosenfelder, came in fairly regularly to see that everything was alright. I have in my possession the archives of that hostel in Tylers Green; when Cissie Rosenfelder died, her daughter rang me and asked if I would be interested in having them. Looking back at the minutes and the correspondence in the archives, it really shows how much they cared for us.

By this time, my sister was living with the Gilman family in Streatham, South London, and I would go there occasionally and stay. I found out from the archives that they wanted to adopt me, but the hostel committee would not allow it. Mr Gilman took care of me to some extent and actually organised my *bar mitzvah* in early 1944. One of the older boys from the hostel took charge of me and taught me my portion to read from the Torah. I had my *bar mitzvah* at the synagogue in Brixton with Rabbi Moses Swift. We didn't have a big party, there was no chance for that. On the Sunday we had a little tea. My sister came with the Oppenheimers, who were friends from back home, and I got a couple of *bar mitzvah* presents and that was it. My sister made me a wallet and put a pound note in it.

Being a religious set up, the hostel virtually had its own synagogue. We had enough older boys to make up the *minyán* or quorum for daily services and there were quite a number of occasions when we were visited by Jewish soldiers who were stationed in the area. Although there was a community in High Wycombe, it was still three miles away. We used to have Jewish Studies, for want of a better name, for an hour every day and any homework we may have been given had to wait until after Jewish studies. On Saturday, to make us even happier still, we got an extra dose of three hours of classes. We tried to avoid those but were not really successful: on one occasion my close pal was caught reading a comic inside his book!

Whatever my thoughts about our study regime at the time, I now realise it was important because it brought me back to the Orthodox fold from which I had originated. I had a particular friend, Jacob. We were great pals and we did lots of things together. We even tried to teach ourselves how to fly with

the book *Teach Yourself to Fly* and a couple of brooms. The older ones got up into the loft and they would jump down from there or slide down the roof from the first floor. I tried that once or twice but wasn't happy doing it. We were given three bicycles by the Zwirn family who lived in the area, and we divided ourselves into three groups with a bike each. It was quite useful to have a bike and to learn to repair them.

We had celebrations at the hostel for the festivals and when it came to the Jewish High Holy Days, Moses Katzenberg (a friend of our teacher) came from London and took the services. I got to know him quite well when I came to London. People would come from various places to speak to us at the hostel and one of the people who came was a man called Max Neuburger who later became my brother-in-law. I told my sister I knew her husband before she did!

The food was as good as it could be. It was a case of if you didn't like anything then you didn't have anything. The meat had to be kosher of course and you couldn't buy that locally, so it was either sent from the butchers in Golders Green by train to High Wycombe and picked up there, or occasionally we would go into London and collect it. I did that trip once or twice when I was 13 or 14.

We had contact with the Jewish community in High Wycombe and we went there occasionally for parties, particularly at Chanukah.

I was accepted by the Royal Grammar School in High Wycombe, a school that was founded in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. There were two problems with that school. The difference between the others and myself was that I would have to pay to go to there because I was not a local resident. The fees were five guineas, which in 1942 was a lot of money. Fortunately, a member of Munk's synagogue offered to pay for me. I didn't know who that was at the time because he wanted to remain anonymous, but I was able to find out who it was later from the archives. I'm sorry that I wasn't able to thank him. Strangely enough, some years back I attended a dinner at one of the colleges at Cambridge and I was sitting opposite a lady who happened to be a relative of that person.

The other issue was that once you were in the second or third year there was school on a Saturday, which of course posed a great problem. Also, at the start of the school year, the Sabbath began fairly early, about half past three, and school wouldn't have finished until four, so we already had to get

released early on a Friday. I now know what happened because the archives had a lot of correspondence between Rabbi Munk and the headmaster and governors of the school, and eventually it was agreed that we didn't need to go to school on a Saturday morning. We did have a backlash from a French teacher called Mr Hett. If you had a test and scored five or less, you were automatically in detention and so if we were set a French test on a Saturday morning, we automatically failed and got detention. My English was pretty good by this time. I still have my reports and I was quite a good student for the first year or two but then I became lazy. Overall the education there was sound and stood me in good stead. The only thing about geography that I remember from there is that we had to choose football teams and I chose one which I follow to this day, Queens Park Rangers. I only chose them because the name sounded good.

The father of one of my school friends was in the Air Force. Through him I took an interest in aircraft and joined the aircraft modelling group and the aircraft spotters group. We used to make model planes from balsa wood.

I joined the Army Cadets at school because I thought it would be interesting. I never got a uniform but we had drills, square bashing with a Lee Enfield 303 rifle, which was quite heavy, and we learnt how to pull it apart and put it back together. We learnt map reading, which I found extremely interesting and still use some of the things I learned when looking at maps today. ■

“The only thing about geography that I remember from there is that we had to choose football teams and I chose one which I follow to this day, Queens Park Rangers. I only chose them because the name sounded good.”

## The war ends and we move to London

THE WAR ENDED AND life changed considerably. The hostel moved to London so I had to leave the grammar school. The lease had expired on the building we were in, as I saw later from the records. It wasn't easy for them to find somewhere else and we were moved around a bit in the meantime. My first stop was in Hendon in what was called the Abba Myers building. We lived there for three or four weeks and conditions were a bit rough. I went to a new Jewish grammar school, which had only opened a few months previously. In those days it was called Hasmonean Grammar school and the building was in Golders Green. I went there until I took my equivalent to GCSEs, which was the School Certificate in those days. There was a boarding house at the school but I stayed in Hendon. We moved from Hendon to another temporary hostel in Hampstead, where I stayed until the new premises were set up in Queens Drive, Finsbury Park in North London.

When I was at Hasmonean it was a very small school for both girls and boys. I went straight into the fifth form (or year 11, as it would be now) and there were only nine of us preparing for our School Certificate. It's interesting that two of the subjects that I took up there were later to be subjects in which I specialised in my career. I was thrown into the intricacies of Hebrew and Hebrew grammar, about which I really knew absolutely nothing, and looked an idiot when asked questions which I couldn't answer. The book that was being used to teach Hebrew was an academic one written in the late 1800's full of Greek and Latin examples, which made reading that book as difficult as learning Hebrew. Later I would become a Hebrew examiner. The other subject I became an examiner in was Religious Education. I also took the normal subjects like English and Maths. They tried to teach me swimming at the public swimming baths – it didn't help, I still can't swim. We were sorted into houses and I played in goal for my house, but I don't think I would have been taken on by any local football team given the number of goals I let through. I made friends, and of that group of nine, a few of us stayed in contact.

I took my School Certificate in January 1947 and passed in all subjects except in English literature, and was able to matriculate. In those days you needed to matriculate in order to go on to further study at university. The school had no sixth form as yet, but the Principal of the school, Rabbi Dr Solomon Schonfeld, who had founded Hasmonean among other schools, had a brilliant idea and founded



With others from the hostel in North London. I am third from left c.1946



New Year greeting from Fini and Nathan

the Yeshiva College, in which we would have half a day of Jewish learning and half a day of secular subjects. So I became one of three students at the new Yeshiva College.

I took French, German and Latin because I had made up my mind to become a French teacher. For Latin we learnt with Mr Frank, a brilliant Classics master whose idea of light reading was ancient Greek plays. He gave me a love of Roman history which survives to this day. For Jewish Studies we had Dr Abraham Levine, who was a great influence on me for my later studies when I went on to university. I adored his lessons and I learnt a lot because we were on a one to one basis. Another teacher was Rabbi Heschel. Students came and students went until, in the end, the only student of the college was yours truly.

The hostel in Finsbury Park became home to more or less the same group of youngsters who had come from Tylers Green, apart from some of the older boys who had moved on, and later some girls would join us. It was run by the person who had been the cook at Tylers Green, but life here was quite different because we were now 'in town'. We had our own services in the mornings, afternoon and evenings if needed, although we were quite near to the synagogues in the area.

At the Jewish New Year in 1947, I went to help out with a service not far away from where we were living, at the house of a man who had severe heart problems and wanted a service at his home. When I returned to the hostel, my friend Sigi told me that someone that morning had asked him if he knew Bernd Koschland. That person was Fini Noefeld (now Fini Zimmer), my former kindergarten teacher in Germany. The next day I met up with Fini and her husband Nathan and we kept in touch.

I belonged to a youth organisation called the Ezra and occasionally I was invited to have lunch on a Sabbath with my new friends and their families. One of the families I was invited to was the former headmaster of my primary school way back in Germany, Dr Praeger (whose wife was the sister of an aunt of mine).

In 1947 I had to register as an alien in the UK and that is when I had my name changed back from Bernd Israel Koschland to Bernd Koschland. 'Israel' had been added by the Germans in accordance with the 1935 Nuremberg Laws which stated that if your name was not 'Jewish enough' then men had to take on the name of Israel and women had to take on the name of Sarah. The police officer asked if I wanted to keep it. I said I didn't, so they removed it from my papers. I was naturalised in that same year.

As we boys got older and left, it was time for the hostel to be closed as there were no longer enough children there to make it viable – this was early 1948. I was given the option of staying with the Warhaftig family in Golders Green or with Fini and Nathan in Finsbury Park. I chose Golders Green because it was nearer my sister who then lived in Hendon and so I would get to see her more frequently. It was a good and not so good choice. The family were lovely and very caring. They had a son and two daughters. They were a very Orthodox family and they made me feel very much at home, including me on their trips. I shared a room with their son Jacob and they let us paint the walls – my first proper DIY project! Living with a family for the first time since leaving home back in 1939 was another new experience for me – well, a renewed experience. I was quite happy there because I was

occupied, but somehow, I didn't know what it was, I felt perhaps spiritually uncomfortable there as they were far more Orthodox than me. So when the opportunity came, I decided to move in with Fini and Nathan. Thinking back on it, the move was partly motivated by the fact that I had failed my Intermediate exam, perhaps because the Orthodox family were not particularly interested in the things I was studying.

Fini and Nathan made me more than welcome in their Finsbury Park home, and as they had no children of their own I became almost a son to them. It was the first time that I had a room to myself. Theirs was an old Victorian house. It had a cellar, the kitchen was on the ground floor and the lounge was one flight of stairs up from that. Then you went up to the master bedroom and then up another set of stairs to my room. It had a small garden and a little hole in the pavement outside for the coalman to deliver through. We still had gas street lighting. I was always interested in watching the lamp lighter come round on his bicycle with a long pole to light the lamp. I also remember the clunk clunk clunk of the number 33 tram that ran behind the house. Some years after Fini and Nathan moved out, the council pulled the whole row of houses down and put in a new housing estate. The only thing that remains is the bus stop outside for the 106 bus from Stoke Newington.

I completed my next DIY project by putting up a shelf for the books I needed for my study, which had changed direction after having failed my Intermediate exams. ■

Children from the hostel in North London. I am third from left back row



## Further education at Jews' College . . .

I WAS ADVISED by Cissie Rosenfelder to try for Jews' College. I applied and they sent me a prospectus of what I would have to learn to get into the college, so I spent a lot of time going through it hoping that I would answer questions correctly in my interview. Little did I know that my interview would take a different form. I was interviewed by the Principal (Rabbi Dr Isidore Epstein), the chair of governors and the secretary of the college and was expecting to be asked deep questions on Jewish law. The only question they asked was from the chairman: what sport do I play? The Principal then asked me what I wanted to do and I really had no idea so I told him that I wanted to be a Youth Minister - whatever that meant, as I hadn't a clue. He said, "No, no, no, not a Youth Minister. That's not a job. Train for the ministry and train for the Rabbinate." I said, "OK," and that was my interview. I was given a grant of £50 and I was able to start college. Bear in mind that £50 in 1949 was quite a sum. Jews' College was originally founded in the middle of the 19th century to train Jewish Ministers and teachers and it moved premises several times. When I was interviewed, it was in a Jewish community building in Woburn House.

The first thing I had to do was to retake my Intermediate and at the same time study for my Bachelors. For my Intermediate, the college made some provisions and they employed somebody to teach me Latin and English. So my new subjects at Intermediate were Latin, which I had to take anyway and I had done before, Hebrew which was the obvious thing as it was a Jews' college, and English Literature. The English Literature syllabus in those days was not what it is like today. The first paper was set books - two Shakespeares, Chaucer, and a poem which bored me, and everyone else, absolutely to tears - Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. The second paper was on English Literature from about 1500 to 1800 and involved reading around 17 books, essays and poems. I struggled and decided to get help. I took a correspondence course with a school in Cambridge and just before the exam my course tutor advised me to put it off for another year, but I couldn't. Despite that pessimistic note, I got my Intermediate so I could go on and get my degree. ■

## . . . and a degree of difficulty!

I STARTED MY HONOURS degree in Biblical and Medieval Hebrew and Aramaic. I worked on it happily, I got plenty of encouragement from Fini and Nathan and the college too were helpful. But I had a serious health problem with my throat. I had my tonsils taken out, but the problem didn't improve. For the next nine months I was in and out of hospital for sometimes two to four weeks, which meant that I couldn't really study properly and I had to put my degree off for another year. My treatment included a trip to Switzerland to see a specialist, which didn't help one iota. Eventually I was operated on by an outstanding surgeon at the Jewish Hospital in Stepney Green, which is no longer in existence. Once that was sorted I was able to go back and finish my degree. We had to sit ten papers - two every day. I tried to revise as best as I could. After the written papers, we had an oral and then three of us had an interview where we were asked about what we had written and what we hadn't written. Afterwards we sat outside the room and waited and then they called all three of us in and told us we had all got a first class honours degree - which was something I never expected. I did all right. "The boy done well"!

We were told to rush off to University College London as there was a scholarship available in Hebrew for students with first class honours; however, I didn't get it. I started on an MA but I wasn't particularly keen. I told the Principal of Jews' College that I would like to do research instead and work towards a PhD and he said, "No, no, no. That can wait. Go and study for the Rabbinate." So I said, "OK," and off I went.

In order to do that I had to take a post graduate course at Jews' College to give me the Minister's Diploma and then I could go on to the Rabbinic training section. In addition to that we had extra lessons, one of which was on education - but none of it sunk in. Of course at that time I didn't know that I was going to end up in teaching myself.

We had lectures in elocution, which I found extremely useful and has helped me to this very day. The teacher gave us exercises to read and to speak, he wasn't interested in what we said, only in how we said it. He would occasionally come along and listen to us when we went out into communities to practise giving sermons. We also had lectures in how to give sermons from Dr Abraham Cohen. The Chief Rabbi Dr Israel Brodie took over occasionally, so we had very good training for giving sermons.



Hitchhiking across England with Henry Fisher, 1952

Our liturgy course was taken by Rabbi Dr Naftali Wieder, who had a great influence on me, not just what he taught but also how to present materials and to research. He was the man who if you were to say to him that today is Wednesday you would have to prove firstly that it is today, secondly, that it is Wednesday and thirdly, that it is this date in this month. In other words, you couldn't just say anything off the top of your head, you had to have proof for everything.

Over those four or five years we had all kinds of activities, such as luncheon lectures where external speakers would join us. At that time I met the late Professor Yigael Yadin, one of Israel's outstanding archaeologists, who was studying over here after he left the Israeli army. We had a sort of students' committee of which I was chairman for a while. The only sporting activity was table tennis; if a game was still going at the beginning of a lecture we decided to finish the game first, as it was far more important than going to the lecture!

After my degree I decided to explore England and hitchhike to Land's End with a friend, Henry Fisher. One of our colleagues got engaged and we had to celebrate that, another one got married and we went to the wedding. After the wedding we decided to go to Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. We approached the gates to the park and saw a group of people with a rolled up banner. My friend Bernard Susser (later Rabbi Dr) went up to them and asked them what was going on. They said that they were collecting for some organisation in Denmark but were not allowed to unfurl their flag and they needed somebody to speak. Bernard said that he would speak for them. He managed to get a soapbox and speak for about 20 minutes on a subject, which if you had listened you would think he was the organiser of the whole project, but he actually knew nothing about it. I will never forget that. We had all sorts of adventures and made some very firm friends for life.

Around this time my sister was introduced to Max Neuburger whom I knew from years back as he used to visit us at the hostel in Tylers Green. Ruth and Max married and lived in London for a short time. Nathan tried his hand at photography but he wasn't extremely successful with it - he took photographs of my sister's wedding but he had forgotten to remove the lens cap so there were no pictures! I have one photograph that somebody else took. However, he did give me an interest in photography and I bought my first camera for £6, which was quite a lot of money then. ■

## Part 2

### I start work

#### Early working roles

WHILE I WAS STUDYING for my degree and for the first couple of years of my Minister's diploma, I was still living with Fini and Nathan as part of their family. They suggested that, although I had my fifty pounds per year grant from the college, it was about time for me to go out and earn some money of my own. I went to the then London Board of Jewish Religious Education and spoke to the Director of Education, Dr Fishman, to ask could I get a job as a teacher in the *cheder*. These were the Jewish education classes that all synagogues had in those days where children would come a couple of times a week. I was given a job in Tottenham High Cross, a class of ten and eleven year olds. I had not a clue how to teach or what to teach but I was told that if you are under a good head teacher they would guide you. It was a useful introduction to the idea of teaching. Interestingly enough, Dr Fishman and I would have a lot of contact later as his granddaughter married my son.

I took part in youth activities and I also would go out to practise preaching to the poor congregants who had to listen to me giving forth my wisdom at the tender age of 20. On one occasion I was speaking at the synagogue in Golders Green. I went into the pulpit dressed in the ministerial robes, which we all had to wear, and was spouting away about something to do with English law, of which I knew little or nothing. Sitting in front of me was a well-known QC. It taught me another lesson – be careful of what you say, you never know who is listening. It was interesting going to various communities and speaking. I still have copies of my sermons which I had to write out by hand as I had no typewriter. I continued going round different synagogues practising my preaching, taking services and speaking over the High Holy Days. I learned that a half hour sermon towards the end of a very long service doesn't go down well. ■

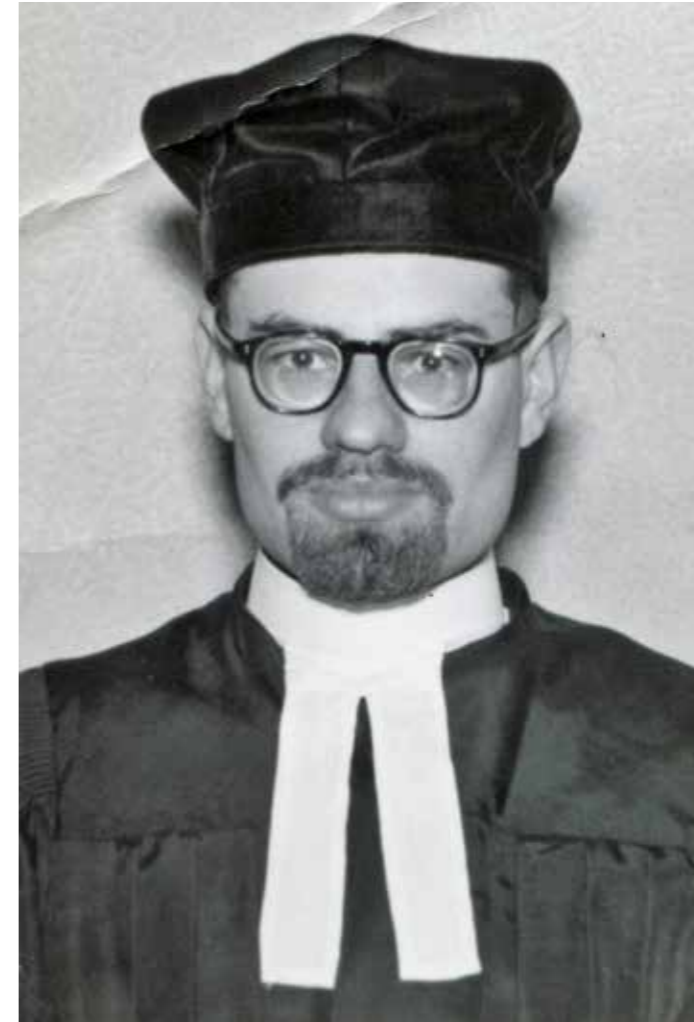
## My first Ministerial appointment

I FOUND A JOB with a community in Hounslow in West London. With this appointment I obviously had to move down to Hounslow and I rented a room in the house of one of the congregant's, the Levines. I still saw Fini and Nathan quite regularly because I would travel up to them on a Thursday, partly to say hello and partly because Nathan would listen to my Reading of the Law. He was a very hard person to satisfy, which I greatly appreciated to ensure that my Torah reading was accurate.

The synagogue was in Staines Road, Hounslow and it was a converted chapel. The community was not very big – about ninety to a hundred families. They were, in effect, a breakaway group from the Ealing community. My salary at the time was very, very low. I look back and think, I worked for peanuts. I settled in and found my feet. Fini came down with me when I moved to Hounslow to purchase the items I would need as a bachelor on my own and, in fact, the breadboard still survives from that time. I got friendly with the Levine family, who had a son and a daughter. Mr Levine used to play the drums and when he would practise he would show me how to play.

I had to get used to being a Minister. Our dear warden, Mr Scheuer, told me that on a certain day I was to unlock the gates and take the dustbin out – a very important job for a Minister! I tried to visit as many of my congregants as I could and it was quite interesting to turn up unannounced. There was one occasion where I went to visit a congregant. I knew they were home as I could see a chink of light between the curtains. I knocked and knocked and knocked and eventually they opened the door, rushed me in and sat me down as they were watching television, so I watched the programme with them. It was my initiation to television - not that I would have one for many years.

I set up a youth club which I would attend myself. It proved to be quite an important step for me because I had never been to a youth club of that kind, with music and dancing. Before long I was asked by Cissie Rosenfelder to meet a young lady who worked for the Jews' Temporary Shelter (JTS) in the East End. So I went along and I met the young lady and we sort of 'got together'. I'd pop in to the Shelter and act as an office boy if necessary, sticking on stamps and filling envelopes (a foretaste of my involvement with the JTS many years later). We'd go out together and I'd visit her in the East End. We were together for eight or nine months until it came to an end.



In Ministerial robes c. 1953. According to Q4 of Ministers Duties from the United Synagogue By-Laws booklet of 1936: "It shall be the duty of the Ministers to attend in the Synagogue whenever Divine Service is to be performed therein, and to enter the Synagogue, dressed in official robes, for that purpose at least five minutes prior to the time fixed for the commencement of prayers."

Talking of relationships coming to an end, I was involved with a divorce for the first time when I was 22 – luckily it wasn't mine! I hadn't a clue about marriage and I hadn't a clue about divorce. I was only a youngster. It was an interesting problem. The lady had married before the war in Burma and the only record of the marriage that she had was the *ketubah* (Jewish marriage contract), there was no other civil certificate. I had to help to translate it and explain it and then deal with divorce. It seems I did a fair job on it because I was presented with a pair of silver cufflinks engraved with my initials, which I still have.

I got friendly with a family whose son-in-law had also come over on *Kindertransport*. Julius was much older but I used to go there very often and we played cards - I had to do something to entertain myself. Other than that, occasionally I was invited out for lunch.

I called Dr Sandler, the local doctor and a congregant, one time when I didn't feel well. He said it was flu but he thought I should go to hospital. I went in an ambulance to the Jewish Hospital, but the ambulance driver didn't know where it was, so there I was lying in the back shouting directions at him. That bit of flu turned out to be pneumonia and took me out of work for two months: a month in hospital and a month recuperating, when I stayed with Fini and Nathan. I forgive you, Dr Sandler, for telling me it was flu and I'm pleased we became good friends.

“Talking of relationships coming to an end, I was involved with a divorce for the first time when I was 22 – luckily it wasn't mine! I hadn't a clue about marriage and I hadn't a clue about divorce.”

“My driving instructor told me to wear my Dog's Collar (which I wore often then) for my test. I passed despite a serious mistake, thanks to the collar!”

The other family that took great care of me was the Morris family. Mrs Morris's first husband had been active in the synagogue before I came but since died. She re-married to Mr Morris who came from York, had a strong Yorkshire accent and Yorkshire sense of humour. They had two daughters and a son and, interestingly enough, I am still in touch with one of them who rang me recently to congratulate me on my MBE. Her sister who went to live in Israel also rang me.

Another job that I was given without any training whatsoever was because the United Synagogue Visitation Committee, as it was called then, had a rule that Ministers had to visit hospitals. I was allocated the local hospital in Hounslow and the West Middlesex. I went back many years later to the West Middlesex when I was asked to speak on their radio station for patients. The hospital had changed completely from what I had known at the time. Once I had retired, I reflected on how difficult I found it then and how important it is to have some training to visit patients in hospital. As a hospital chaplain for twenty years, much later in my retired life, I felt that the chaplaincy wasn't just about visiting the patient, but how to deal with patients, how to respond to them and how you yourself feel after visiting.

While working at Hounslow I continued and completed my studies for the Ministerial Diploma at Jews' College. Although not keen, I went on to learn for the Rabbinate.

Before leaving Hounslow I learned to drive. My driving instructor told me to wear my Dog's Collar (which I wore often then) for my test. I passed despite a serious mistake, thanks to the collar! ■

## Next move: Kingston

LIFE IN HOUNSLOW continued, but after two and a half years I wanted to advance myself away from this small community where there wasn't much of a Jewish life. In fact, the community diminished and a few years ago I attended the closure of Hounslow Synagogue. I saw an advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle* for a Minister at Kingston, Surbiton and District Synagogue. I went for a trial, met the Honorary Officers and I got the job of Minister and secretary.

I rented a couple of rooms upstairs in a family home in Kingston and Surbiton. I had a sort of kitchen/dining room and a bedroom and I was very much my own master. The only thing that I had to get was a telephone, which in those days, around 1956, was still extremely difficult. However, I put on the ministerial act and said that I had to have a phone so that people could get in contact with me if I was needed, and eventually I got one. I now had a large community of 250 families. I say community, but it was very widespread. People came from as much as five or six miles away from various directions to the synagogue. Some of my members would walk from Hampton Court, which was a walk of three miles or so.

The synagogue was within a hundred yards of the Thames, past a couple of houses on a main road running parallel with the river, across the road and there it was by the riverbank. In those days to get across the river you could either go down to Kingston Bridge or you had somebody who would row you across in a little boat for a couple of pence. On one occasion I walked from Kingston to Hampton Court on the other side of the river and I could have been a hundred miles from the town. Later on, I would occasionally sit with my wife by the river to relax a little bit - it was lovely. One *Yom Kippur* the synagogue was full and then it suddenly emptied and after a little while it filled again. It turned out that Prince Philip had come to inspect the headquarters of the naval cadets on the island opposite the synagogue and everyone had gone to have a look at him!

I was made very welcome by the president of the community, the dear Mr Lichtenfeld. When I first arrived, I found that the synagogue was almost an empty shell as it was quite newly built and everything was still very temporary, including the Ark, but eventually the synagogue was fitted out and in 1957 it was officially dedicated and I was inducted as its Minister. So here I was at the age of 26 and a single man, the Minister of a larger community. I am sure that I made many mistakes, but coming



*Chanukah at Kingston*

to Kingston at that age and being in such a position of responsibility was quite a test. I continued at Jews' College following the advice of the Principal that I should study for the Rabbinate. I used to travel from Kingston and I had private lessons with one of the teachers at the college; I even travelled to North London early in the morning to have private coaching from a rabbi. Sadly, I actually never completed my rabbinical diploma. ■

## I meet Ruth

I WAS ALLOCATED another hospital, this time the Kingston hospital, where for the first time in my life I came across death. I formed a youth club which would meet every week. One day a young lady called Helen came up to me and told me that it was her birthday and that her mum and dad had bought her a moped. I will never forget that night, it was a Tuesday. I said, "Helen, drive well and I wish you happy birthday." The next morning I got a phone call to go to the Kingston hospital to sit with the parents of Helen as she had been knocked over and was in a very serious condition. Poor Helen never recovered. I had to officiate at her funeral. It was a very sad affair. At the *shiva*, Helen's father Harry and his friend Louis Mankin hatched a plot. Harry had told Louis that I was still single and Louis said he had a niece who was unmarried and maybe they should make a match.

After an appropriate amount of time, I was invited to Louis' flat in Ealing to meet this young lady, Ruth, who came rather grudgingly. After a couple of days I rang up the number she had given me and left a message with her father. When I spoke to Ruth later the same day she said, "My father gave me the following message: there was some funny sounding Minister with a name of Koshland or something like that who rang and wanted to speak to you. Don't ever marry a Minister." Well, we spoke that night, went out together and eventually married. Thanks Uncle Louis!

Ruth came from an Orthodox family called Yudkin. Ruth's mother was born in this country. Her father, Solly, came to England from Eastern Europe when he was just an infant. He was like a father to me: we got on like a house on fire. He often had ideas that that were well ahead of their time. He was a collector of antiques and objets d'art and he so enthused me. He was a surveyor by profession and an overseer of my DIY jobs which he couldn't do himself because of heart trouble - I had to do it perfectly or it wouldn't have passed! He died a few years after we married and was sadly missed.

Ruth and I were married at Willesden Synagogue in 1957. Before we married, Ruth was employed as a secretary in various places; the last role was at ORT, the Jewish educational international organisation. I used to go in there and be the office boy and stick on the stamps and so on. Once we got married she was to be a Minister's wife and that was a job at which she became very proficient, despite the fact that her father had told her 'never marry a Minister'. Ruth was a great help to me in my work. She also taught in the *cheder* of the synagogue, and some nursery teaching to supplement our income (because



Ruth and me on our wedding day

Ministers were not paid very much at all). Later in life she took on other secretarial jobs again and did some work with kosher meals on wheels.

While I was in Kingston, there were two groups of which I was very proud. One was the Youth Study Group which would meet for learning, studying and socialising - I think more socialising than studying! Two or three times I was able to arrange three day seminars for the Study Group so that we had youngsters coming and staying in the area and meeting for three full days. It was very successful and I can recall Ruth and one of the Ladies' Guild, Mrs Shirley Bloch, frying fish in the kitchen of the synagogue so that they could feed the young ladies and gentlemen. The other group, of which I am even more proud, was for young married couples where friendships were established which last to this day. We were newly married and Ruth and I thought wouldn't it be nice if young married couples in the area would come together. I also used to run a very small group for learning modern Hebrew which would meet one evening a week in somebody's home. On one occasion we were busy learning when suddenly there was a phone call to the house - the synagogue has been defaced with a swastika or two. It was some time in the middle of the 1950s. We left our learning, picked up buckets and brushes and cleaning fluid, and rushed down to the synagogue and cleaned it off. It wasn't reported to the police. We got rid of it and that was the end of it. When we had finished the cleaning we went back and had a cup of tea.

While I was in Kingston the Mayor taught me a great way of dealing with meetings. We went to the Town Hall one time for a meeting about something or other and the Mayor said that everybody had the chance to speak for a minute or two and that was it. In that way we got through the meeting and through the business in a relatively quick time without any repetition or long speeches, and it was a lesson that has stood me in good stead. Another interesting activity with which I was involved while in Kingston was participation in the Anglo Jewish Preachers Group. ■

## Woodside Park

AFTER ABOUT FIVE YEARS in Kingston I saw an advert in the *Jewish Chronicle* for a position up in North London at Woodside Park Synagogue. After talking it over with my wife, I decided to apply. I was asked to spend a Shabbat with the community, to preach to them and so on. That was when I had to tell the Honorary Officers in Kingston that I had applied to another community because I wanted to advance and move into a more Jewish area. There were three final candidates and I thought one of the other two would probably get the position as they had qualified as Rabbis but, lo and behold, I got a letter saying that they were delighted to ask me to join them as the new Minister. So I gave my notice to Kingston and said farewell to the new community.

We were told that there was a Minister's house available in Woodside Park. It was in a lovely spot in a cul-de-sac with a very nice green in the middle and no through traffic, although it had been neglected and needed a lot of work. I now had an assistant in the form of a cantor, the Reverend Michael Plaskow, and we were to manage the community between the two of us. It was a large community, 800 families or so, so unlike in my first community, I couldn't go round to visit them all or I would still be visiting them now! We went to see some friends one cold winter's night and I backed my car into the car behind me as we were leaving. I went back next day to explain to the owner what had happened. He said, "I am a member of yours, so at least I got a visit from my Minister even if it was as a result of bashing into my car!"

Generally, the Minister or Rabbi of a synagogue was well respected. People would look up to him and discuss problems with him of any nature but there were occasions where a lack of respect was shown. I remember I bought myself a sheepskin coat and someone made a comment that they didn't realise that Ministers could afford such things. Another time a Jewish caterer under the religious supervision was standing smoking a cigarette on the Sabbath, which is not allowed. He saw me coming towards him and tried to hide the cigarette behind his back, so I kept the chap talking until the cigarette had burnt down. Another time, in Kingston, I was walking home after celebrating a *bar mitzvah*, it was pelting with rain and a car stopped, the window wound down and the father of the *bar mitzvah* boy leaned out to offer me a lift!

I was now involved in a whole variety of activities, including Hebrew Classes. I didn't have to teach them all, but I oversaw the classes and taught on a Sunday morning. While at Woodside Park I became somewhat involved with the 'Jacobs Affair'. Rabbi Louis Jacobs had been invited to the Purim prize day for the *cheder*. Just before that point in time the 'Jacobs Affair' came to a head, when it was discovered that one of Rabbi Jacobs' books contained references which people didn't much like and put his Orthodoxy into question. The Board of Management at Woodside Park discussed whether he should come or not to the prize day. I insisted that he should, which he did, with his wife, and he spoke beautifully to the children.

I became the chairman of the kindergarten that was attached to the synagogue and if needed I would go in and help out, as would Ruth. I started a group of learning for ladies one afternoon a week and that went on for as long as I was in the community. We would have a 'car park' outside of prams and women of all ages would come and learn and drink tea. I was also involved in various fund-raising committees and teaching of *bar mitzvah* boys. I got involved with a local primary school and I went in several times a week to take the Jewish children for assembly, until the Education Officer for the borough said that it had to stop because otherwise other faith groups would want to have their own assemblies too. I could do nothing as it was a Council school, but I was sad to give it up. I was appointed to the sub-committee of the borough's education committee for youth, where I represented the Jewish community. The Education Officer once asked me what I did when Jewish pupils attending non-Jewish schools asked to be let off for Jewish festivals and then I would see them queueing up to go to the cinema or going shopping on those days. I couldn't answer that.

I wanted to introduce the *bat mitzvah* program for young girls of 12, as I had in Kingston. I had the support of the chairman of the education committee for the community and I brought it to the Board of Management. There was some opposition, but the chair of the education committee found a document from Chief Rabbi Hertz dated 1929 in which he advocated such a programme for girls and had the syllabus planned out. So it wasn't a novelty idea at all. It was a fight towards the end of my tenure and I left before it was resolved.

The Mayor of Finchley called a meeting in the early sixties to which local religious leaders and others were invited to form a branch of the Council of Christians and Jews. I enjoyed the meetings and after



A civic service at Woodside Park with Mayor of Finchley, Murray Medway

a couple of years I became the chair. It was interesting to be in contact with the Mayor and the local authority and when I left Woodside Park the Mayor made a presentation to Ruth and myself. Ruth was given a brooch with the coat of arms of Finchley on it and I was given a set of cufflinks with the same design. ■

## Becoming a teacher

IT WAS ALWAYS MY AMBITION to teach. I loved being able to teach, whatever it was, and I had enjoyed my regular teaching sessions with the youngsters on a Sabbath afternoon and in the Hebrew classes. I must have been acceptable because one of my students, who is now a retired rabbi, used to say that I was the only teacher in Hebrew classes who ever prepared his lessons and was able to teach and give the correct information. I had originally wanted to teach French, but it didn't work out because I had failed my Intermediate exam. I thought of taking a subsidiary subject to my honours degree, geography or something else, but that didn't work because of certain difficulties I would have had with the Sabbath.

So when, in 1964, I saw the advert for a vacancy at the Jews' Free School (JFS) in Camden Town, I discussed it with my wife, and took a chance which I have never regretted. I applied for the job and, following an interview with the head of the school and other high-ranking members of the community, I was offered the role of teacher. I gave due notice to Woodside Park and then had to find somewhere to live because the house that we lived in belonged to the community. My father-in-law suggested a new area called Southgate Cockfosters, and so we bought a house there. Although I took up my job at the beginning of the term in September, I actually only left my other job after the Jewish Holy Days because I couldn't leave them in the lurch. Ruth acted as my deputy, dealing with the community before we actually moved out some time in October or November. ■

“ I loved being able to teach, whatever it was, and I had enjoyed my regular teaching sessions with the youngsters on a Sabbath afternoon and in the Hebrew classes. ”

## Our family expands

AFTER WE MOVED to Southgate we had a son whom we named Jonathan, and two years later we had a daughter called Beth. When Jonathan was old enough he went to the kindergarten run by Fini, my foster mother who had been my kindergarten teacher way back in Germany. Fini said that she would not retire until Jonathan left to go to school, and she was true to her word. Jonathan moved on to the North West London Jewish Day School, which was convenient because by then we had moved to Willesden into the house that formerly belonged to my in-laws and the school was literally round the corner. Beth also joined her brother at North West London Jewish Day School.

For high school Jonathan went to Hasmonean. Life at Hasmonean was quite interesting for Jonny; discipline there was not the best and the stories he came home with would have made St Trinian's look tame. One time Ruth asked him how his history exam had gone. He replied that he hadn't taken it because as it was starting, one of the pupils got up and jumped out through the window. The teacher said that someone should go and get him back so Jonny and a friend went after him, caught him and brought him back to school. Another time some of the kids pickpocketed the teacher's little book in which he wrote down who was to go into detention. Despite all this Jonny did very well in his O Levels and we got him some extra coaching for his maths. After his O Levels we moved him to JFS where he joined the Sixth Form. Jonny became a lawyer and then went in to business. He married Fiona, grand-daughter of Dr Isidore Fishman. Unfortunately, they divorced but stayed good friends. They have two children, Adam and Katie.

My daughter Beth went through JFS. I never taught her until she went into the Sixth Form where she, like her brother, landed up in my A Level RE class. Beth studied to become a teacher but later decided she didn't want to teach, which is a shame because I think she would have been very good at it. In 1989 she married Daniel Epstein and they have four children: Benji, Sammy, Mikey and Ruthie. I currently have four great-grandchildren: Talia, Maya, Ella, and Yoni. ■



Our family

## Life at JFS

JFS DATES BACK to 1732, when it started in the City of London within the Great Synagogue, (no longer in existence as it was bombed during the war). From there JFS was established in the East End in Bell Lane, where it became a very large school and it stayed there until war broke out, when it was evacuated. That building was also bombed during the war. The school was reconstructed at a bomb site in Camden Town, where it opened in 1958 and then in 2002 it moved from that site to its present site in Kenton. Strangely enough I used to pass that bomb site when I attended the Hasmonean secondary school travelling from North London to Golders Green, not realising that one day I would be working there.

When I joined JFS that was the end of my full time career as a Minister, but I didn't leave the Ministry for very long because soon enough I was invited to become a part-time Minister at a new community in Barnet. In fact, I was the first Minister of that community.

When I started my new job at the school in 1964, Dr Edward Conway was head teacher. I wasn't given much guidance, but I thought being a Jewish school that there would be a very high standard of Jewish and Hebrew knowledge. In reality, even when I taught what would be now Year 11, they knew as much about these subjects as a plank of wood! On my first day I walked up from the staff room hopeful of finding my class, for whom it was also their first day, and I landed up in the art room. The art teacher at the time, Mike Webber, came to accompany me and act as my nurse maid. I hadn't a clue which end of a piece of chalk to use and was suddenly confronted with strips of paper, one of which had on it the timetable for the class, another their homework timetable, and on another strip of paper my timetable of where I would be teaching. To me it looked like Double Dutch and it had to be explained to me what exactly all this was about. Mike really guided me through: how to collect dinner money, how to mark a register and all the other bits and pieces that one had to do. Mike was a very good teacher and so within a short while I learned the ropes of what had to be done.

I must admit that in my first year I found it difficult to maintain discipline in my class, particularly with the older ones, but I managed and the odd ones whom I have met since recall that first day and they still think of it rather kindly. In fact, that particular Year 11 were quite a tough lot – there was another school nearby and I'm not sure if it was antisemitism or possibly just rivalry between schools,



JFS staff. I am in the middle in the pale jacket

but often their pupils would attack some of our pupils until some of the Year 11s went out on a 'commando raid' and dealt with them. We never had any problems after that. I had to teach on a Sunday morning because we had extra Jewish studies lessons. After a short while I was put in charge of the Hebrew classes on a Sunday morning, which was a hell of a job. The number of excuses the children had for not coming in!

I got myself acquainted with the teachers in the staff room. The room was dominated by a billiard table and Ted Goldberg would challenge anyone to play. He was a lovely chap, a former boxer who only taught sixth form to get them through economics. I taught the youngsters to read Hebrew, which was not very exciting. Later I became the main teacher for O and A levels but that was after my head of department retired.

I was asked to be the deputy editor of the school magazine and when the editor, Rev. Joseph Halpern, retired I took over. The school magazine was printed on an ordinary letter press by an outside company and we sold adverts to help pay for it. The head of the art department suggested that we print it ourselves. Well, it is rather difficult to print a magazine without a printing machine. The media resources officer, Vicky Lismore as she was then, and I decided we would do something about it. We found an offset litho machine produced by Gestetner which cost £5000. I approached the chair of the PTA and they approved the money. Vicky and I went on a three-day training course and then we were able to start printing our own school magazine. We also had to get a special piece of equipment for binding. One day an inspector from the electric department of the Inner London Education Authority came along and

said that he'd heard that we had a new electric binding machine and could he please see it, to which I replied, "if you can find an electric one my name is Charlie Cheesecake!" and I showed him the manual one. Eventually we bought a second machine, again with the help of the PTA, which printed in colour. Vicky had an assistant and he did some of the printing.

I tried to help as best as I could when I had free time, dressed in a white coat covered in ink, and my daughter used to say that whenever you rang the school to ask for me I was with Vicky in the dark room! I learnt a lot from Vicky about printing, setting out work using particular cameras and making plates. I have an aluminium plate of the Western Wall hanging up on the wall in my study that I made, which was an experiment and is the only survivor of that time. Eventually the machines were made obsolete when the new photocopiers came along. I happened to pass a stationery shop in Hendon which had a notice in the window that they were looking for an offset litho operator. I went in and told them that I didn't want the job but asked if they wanted a litho machine. They were very excited about it and bought it for £2000! When Vicky went on maternity leave, I became the acting unpaid replacement for her and I would walk around with a bunch of keys of which a jailor would have been proud. I greatly enjoyed working with Vicky and we are still in touch to this day.

I became the head of department for Jewish studies. The first job I had was to construct a syllabus for the whole school and so I spent all of the summer holidays creating this. I took over the O level in religious education, and the O Level in Biblical Hebrew and later also the A level. When I started teaching RE at A level, I prepared my lessons in a folder. By the time I had finished teaching that had increased to ten folders. I was then asked would I also be the head of one of the houses, and I was allocated Angel House, named after Moses Angel, the first important headmaster of the school when it was in Bell Lane. The role involved pastoral work and organising all kinds of duties, with prefects to see to various things such as monitoring the entrances and the exits and the dinner queues. One of the benefits of the role was my own office, although I eventually shared with a deputy. I did other voluntary jobs like trying to start a little bookshop in the school, which didn't really take off, setting up a chess club and bridge club, but the Head didn't want the bridge club so that had to stop. ■

## Then, an examining role

AT ONE POINT I happened to be absent from school through illness for a short time and as I wasn't there to refuse I was volunteered to represent the local education area of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) on the examining board for the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) and the Certificate of Extended Education (CEE) in RE. I became assistant examiner which meant getting up at 5am to mark papers. So I entered for the first time in my life into the world of examinations. The first meeting I attended might as well have been in Afrikaans because I couldn't understand a word of what was being said. From a rough start I was eventually appointed as vice-chair and additional examiner.

I also ended up joining the group overseeing Biblical Hebrew (BH) at the University of London examinations section. So now I was involved in two lots of exams at the Metropolitan Examining Board - or whatever it was called before it joined up with the East Anglian group and became the London East Anglian Group (LEAG). I became the chairman of the group which dealt with the RE exam, often thinking how funny it was to have a Jewish fellow as chair while there were several Christian clergy there discussing and arguing among themselves about the rights and wrongs of certain things. LEAG was swallowed up by another group when the exams got refreshed and I had my hands full with RE exams as well as still being involved in BH as an advisor and an examiner at O Level and then chief examiner. In fact, I chose the subject name 'Biblical Hebrew' to replace the old fashioned 'Classical Hebrew', which is a nonsensical term that was chosen to tie in with the 'Classics' such as Latin and Greek, but Hebrew doesn't fall into that category.

I also stood in when the chief examiner at A level was busy and was an advisor for Modern Hebrew - because I happened to be there! When the chief examiner at A level retired, I got the job which meant a huge amount of marking. I left the O level to someone else. Pay wise, I wasn't going to order my Rolls Royce, but it was interesting work. The students at O level BH had to write their name as well as

their examination number; one wrote something like, “You know who I am and where I live, please be kind to me.” I reported it to the officer in charge of BH because I didn’t want it to be misconstrued. My classes knew that I set exam questions so they would often ask me what was going to be in the next exam and I would make up facetious answers. The Biblical Hebrew exam transferred to the Oxford and Cambridge Examining Board and either I applied or was asked to join the group, not as an examiner but with some fancy title which was more or less as an advisor. I sat in while the papers were being set up and all the rest of it, which meant trips up to Cambridge. I had set a question at CSE, something like, ‘why the Torah is important’. One candidate said that as far as they were concerned it is not important and gave a reasoned argument. Well, as an examiner you can’t dismiss an answer because it doesn’t match your beliefs and I had to give him full marks! ■

“My classes knew that I set exam questions so they would often ask me what was going to be in the next exam and I would make up facetious answers.”

## Teaching adults - after a day’s work

WHILE I WAS STILL TEACHING at JFS, a friend of mine had been teaching at the Adult Studies department of Goldsmiths College. He was going to the States to teach and asked me if I would be interested in taking over. It was useful income apart from anything else and so I agreed to start in the September. Adult Studies covered a variety of subjects and I can recall sitting there before the term started for the adults to come in and choose what they wanted to do. It was like a market – ‘I think I will take Urdu, hmmm maybe not. I could take Spanish instead’ and so on. Some came to do Hebrew and when I started I had a beginners’ class and one for more advanced. Over the years the size of the groups would vary greatly. One year I had twenty beginners for Hebrew, but that dwindled when they found that it wasn’t quite what they wanted. If a particular subject didn’t have a certain number of students the college would cancel the course. Eventually both my beginners and advanced groups were below the minimum number so some of my advanced students signed up for the beginners so that it wouldn’t die out and we did a three hour combined class.

It was quite a drag to go from Camden Town to Goldsmiths in Lewisham and then back to north-west London. One of my JFS colleagues joined me to teach modern Hebrew, as distinct from Biblical, and we travelled down together. It was quite a journey – and this was after we had worked at JFS all day - but I enjoyed it and it renewed my spirit, particularly as they were adults so I didn’t have to deal with discipline issues. I had one student who was quite high up in the judiciary system. He had learned Sanskrit, one of the original Eastern languages, and wanted to learn Hebrew so he could compare the two. Often students would ask more questions about Judaism than about Hebrew and we would have conversations that would go on for quite a while. I had developed my own system of teaching Hebrew grammar while teaching at school and someone suggested that I publish it as a text book, but I decided it wasn’t my scene. I was there for six or seven years and I really enjoyed it but eventually I gave it up because I just couldn’t take the journey anymore. ■

## My American Odyssey

WHILE I WAS AT JFS I applied for a scholarship from the Jewish Educational Trust to go and visit Jewish educational establishments in North America. One reason for me wanting to go was so I could visit my sister who was now living in Canada. The Jewish Educational Trust asked me how long I wanted to go for. I said two or three weeks, but they said, "No, you're going for three months!" They gave me a grant of £1000, which in 1973 was a fair amount of money. My wife wasn't too happy about it as our children were still quite young. My head teacher at JFS agreed as he thought it was a feather in the cap of the school.

I had to arrange my own programme for the visit. I went to Toronto, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, New York, Chicago and then west to a place called Superior, which was an interesting experience. I stayed with a distant relative there who was the rabbi of the Conservative community. The synagogue was very busy on Friday night, but it was closed on a Saturday morning because they couldn't get people to come, so we went to another small synagogue for Shabbat morning, where there were about 14 or 15 people present. It looked almost like we'd gone back in time and to Eastern Europe. They asked who I was and when I told them I was from England, they asked if I wanted to give the sermon. Of course I couldn't say no, but I can't remember what rubbish I might have said! They also asked if I'd like to take the service as the Cantor, which I did. It made me laugh to think that if I would have taken the job as Cantor there in that synagogue of about 15 members I could have returned to England as Bernd Koschland, the great Cantor from Midwest America!

It was really fascinating to meet up with educators to visit the schools. I learnt quite a lot and it gave me some ideas. I travelled from place to place on Greyhound buses. The first thing I did in New York was fulfil a promise I had made to myself to visit Max Baer, the warden, and Mr Woolf, the teacher, both of the hostel in Tyler's Green.

The amount of material that I collected was quite massive. In fact, I sent a couple of parcels back to England and carried lots more home with me. I thought I must write a report to account for my £1000 so I wrote about 14 foolscap pages - I wondered if anyone had actually read it until I discovered that the Chief Rabbi had read it as he had pointed out a typing error. Years later, Jewish educational authorities set up a resource centre in London and the chairman of the Education Board told me that it was in response to my report. ■



My sister Ruth and her husband Max, with my wife Ruth and me

## I become a visitor to small communities

ONE OF THE JOBS that I did during the late seventies, eighties and early nineties, partly to boost my teacher's income, was to visit the Hebrew classes of smaller Jewish communities across the UK on behalf of the Jewish Memorial Council. Two of us took over from Harold Levy who had done it full time and we divided the country between us like king makers. We would visit these communities on a Sunday, technically as inspectors but really as advisors. Visiting these communities really opened my eyes to the way that Jewish communities in places like, let's say, Colchester, Chelmsford or Guildford, managed to survive. In Guildford I even watched the members build the synagogue themselves.

I happened to go up to Newcastle and thought I would pop over to Whitley Bay to visit their class there. Unfortunately, when I got there the Hebrew classes had finished for the day – they had a single pupil. When I was making the arrangements, the secretary to the community sent me a letter with the details and at the end he asked if I was related to Jacob Koschland whom he had met in 1936 in Munich and who was in the shoe trade. So I replied that yes, I was very much related to him, I was his son!

When I first took the job at JFS in 1964 I had no teaching qualification, but after two or three years the Ministry of Education recognised me as a qualified teacher by virtue of having a first class Honours degree. If you had a good Honours degree you were automatically recognised as a teacher, for better or for worse. ■

“Visiting these communities really opened my eyes to the way that Jewish communities in places like, let's say, Colchester, Chelmsford or Guildford, managed to survive. In Guildford I even watched the members build the synagogue themselves.”

## Serving under three great head teachers at JFS

IN MY TIME AT JFS I served under three head teachers. The first one was Dr Conway (he was head from 1958-1972), who handed over some of the responsibility for religious services to me and I had a couple of mornings a week in which I broadcast morning prayers over the school's internal loudspeakers to the students via the speakers present in every classroom. It wasn't quite up to BBC standard and whether the kids listened or not I could never tell.

My second head teacher was Leslie Gatoff (1973-1984), who helped me realise that I had to choose between being head of department or Head of House. He said you couldn't really do justice to both and asked me which I would prefer. I decided to stay as Head of House. I now had the responsibility, for want of a better word, to teach BH and RE at O level and A level. Later on I taught both my son and daughter RE at A Level. Once when I was teaching Jonny, we had a triple period of RE and he came in holding his head. He told me that a door had swung against him and he had a terrible headache. I sent him down to the medical room, knowing full well in my heart of hearts that probably nothing had happened except that a triple period of RE was more than anyone could take! Anyway, the matron sent him to the Royal Free Hospital to have him checked and he had to sit there for several hours, which cured him of trying to skip lessons.

Also during Leslie's tenure, I became the chairman of the staff association for a few years. I remember that the first item that came up in my first meeting as chair was to ask if the ladies could have softer loo paper. I had to present this to the Head as a very serious issue – we had a good giggle! One day in 1984 we teachers withdrew from lunch-time duties. I went out and on returning saw Leslie supervising some 1,000 pupils. I offered help. He could see I looked unwell. He refused my help and sent me to the medical room to call Ruth to take me to A&E. They found I had angina and I spent seven weeks in hospital.

When my son joined the Sixth Form he had come from the Hasmonean where discipline had been rather loose, and at JFS he was caught playing poker in the Sixth Form room. The Head suspended him and some of the other culprits for three days and then called me in and asked me how I could have let it happen. I pointed out that I couldn't be with my son all the time. It never interfered with our actual friendship: in school he was Mr Gatoff and outside of school we were on first name terms.

My third head was Jo Wagerman (the first woman head, 1985-1993), with whom I served for three or four years. Gradually the Biblical Hebrew at O level faded away, then the A level faded away and the only thing that remained was A Level RE. I moved from being Head of House to head of Year Four and eventually left the school in 1988, after 24 happy years there. In the library there was a section of books about Judaism and some of them went 'walkies'. I went on a rescue mission and found a few lying around the school so I took them to Janet, the librarian, and told her to keep them in her office so that if anyone wanted them she would know where they were. She named those books 'Bernie's naughty books'! When I left the school Janet asked me if I wanted some of those books to take home. ■

## I move to City of London

FOLLOWING JFS I was at the City of London School for Girls for seven years. I was what was called a supernumerary teacher, paid by the Jewish community for teaching Jewish students. Students had the choice of going to regular RE or to come to my lessons. The only problem I had was with a set of identical twins whom I could never tell apart. I enjoyed teaching there and I aimed to teach at the same level as they would expect in other subjects. There were a lot of Jewish students at City Girls and I was responsible for taking a couple of Jewish assemblies during the week. I had to deal with things such as getting permission for some of the Orthodox children to leave early on a Friday or collecting the names of those who would not attend school on the High Holy Days. By the time I left the school there were over one hundred names on the list, although I suspect that one or two 'converted' to get a day off school!

I had a wonderful head teacher, Valerie France (later Lady France). While I was working there Ruth had a stroke and I couldn't leave her at home alone. I rang my head teacher and told her what had happened; she told me to come back when I was ready. A few years later I had a heart bypass and had to be off work for a couple of months. It was coming to the end of term and I decided to go to a staff meeting; the Head told me off very nicely and at the end of the meeting she advised me that she had ordered a taxi to take me home. Well, when I saw the fare from the Barbican to my house I nearly had another heart attack! I went to pay the driver but the school had already paid, which I thought was wonderful and caring.

Generally, school was a whirl and we were very happy. We had a visit from Her Majesty the Queen for the 100th anniversary of the school, which was special. I remember one time at *Purim* I was reading the Book of Esther for the Jewish pupils when the school inspectors came in. I wondered what they thought when we all made noises at the mention of Haman, but they went away quite happily. I think it was the first time the school inspector had heard the *Megillah*.

I took advantage of teaching in the City by getting myself elected as a Freeman of the City of London for the grand sum of £12. They had to investigate where I came from, it wasn't simply cash over the counter, and then there was a ceremony in the Guildhall. It has no real advantages for me other than that I can take my sheep across London Bridge without paying the toll - which I haven't done yet!

I recently met the Lord Mayor of London and I asked him if he had any sheep that I could take across; he said that unfortunately he did not. The other very important role of a Freeman is to report any rumours of rebellion or revolt brewing.

Eventually I retired from there and when the centenary of the school came up, the City of London Old Girls' Association produced a history of the school to which I sent a donation, which made me an honorary 'Old Girl'!

I retired in 1995 and was able to spend time with Ruth, who had suffered from another stroke and was in a nursing home. The terrific support that I had from City of London school was beyond description, it really was marvellous. ■

“ I took advantage of teaching in the City by getting myself elected as a Freeman of the City of London for the grand sum of £12. They had to investigate where I came from, it wasn't simply cash over the counter, and then there was a ceremony in the Guildhall. ”

## Part 3

### A Busy Retirement

## Volunteering with SACRE

ONE THING I had gotten involved in while I was teaching was SACRE, the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education which, due to some law in the 80s, every Local Authority had to have. I was volunteered by the Board of Deputies to sit on both the SACRE for the ILEA (Inner London Education Authority) and the SACRE for my Local Authority of Barnet. SACRE's responsibility was to set out the religious education for the Authority and provide a syllabus of what should be taught. The SACRE at the ILEA, which met at County Hall, tended to be much more of a talking shop than anything else. I made a number of interesting contacts but found that the work was not particularly enlightening and it didn't seem to achieve very much.

However, the SACRE in Barnet was quite a different thing. I was appointed as the vice chair and when the chairman resigned, I was asked to take the chair after a while, a position I held for 15 years. We were very active which suited me, being someone who doesn't like just to sit back and have committee meetings and then have more committee meetings. We produced an initial syllabus and then revised it twice during my tenure, which is quite a big piece of work. We had representatives from many of the local faith groups and Local Authority, and we got on with it. We appointed a lady called Anna Sallnow (later Dr Sallnow) as the RE advisor succeeding previous holders and I think we formed a very good team. I would go into schools and take assemblies, speak to teachers, take part in teachers' conferences and so on. I attended meetings of national SACREs, but then came the time when I thought that I was getting a bit long in the tooth. I had retired from teaching some years back, so I retired from the chair.

The SACRE is still running extremely well and I am in touch with my successor. Anna and I still work together on a pack for the annual Holocaust Memorial Day, which goes to all schools in the borough and one or two other boroughs. One thing that came out of SACRE right at the beginning was that to commemorate the Holocaust we would plant snowdrops, with each snowdrop representing one of the children who had died. That programme has gone on and on and it's spread to one or two other areas. It even spread to City Hall. We have now given out around fifty thousand snowdrop bulbs to be planted to commemorate a child. ■



Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), 2002



The Mayor of Barnet presenting me with a decanter on HMD, 2003

## The Jews' Temporary Shelter

THE JEWS' TEMPORARY SHELTER (JTS) was founded in 1885 to assist refugees coming from Eastern Europe to find temporary shelter while they looked for somewhere to live. It later took over premises in the East End in Mansell Street at the turn of the 20th century and it remained there until about 1970, by which time many thousands of people had passed through it, given temporary shelter and three meals a day. JTS also assisted religious workers such as Rabbis, Cantors, *Shochtim* (slaughterers), and so on who came to this country. The Mansell Street centre closed down because it was no longer viable to have such large premises, so new premises were bought in Willesden and converted to a shelter. It was at that point that I became involved, in 1972. I had taken the Services over Passover and they invited me to join its council, something which I am still on to this day. They handed over the premises in Willesden to Hillel when the Shelter no longer served its purpose and was just being used as a cheap hotel.

Once we gave up the premises, our role changed to giving out grants (only via an agency such as Jewish Care) to Jewish people who need help with some form of accommodation, be it furnishings or towards a deposit, and that's what we do today. I am now a trustee and director of the shelter and we have a weekly conference call meeting of the Grants Committee, where the administrator sends us copies of requests for help. We go through each one and discuss it. We are the fastest grant-giving group that exists, because there's less than one week's turnaround between receiving the application and making our decision, then another week or so until grants are paid to the organisation on behalf of the individual in need. ■

## Final years with Ruth

RUTH AND I WENT TO CANADA in 1987 or thereabouts and she started to feel unwell. When we came back she was diagnosed with diabetes and had to get treatment for it. Maybe that caused her two strokes. She had a stroke in 1989. She made a partial recovery, walking with a stick and sitting by the window of our house looking out at the street because she couldn't really do very much more. When Jonny got married Ruth was still suffering from her first stroke. I can remember the opening dancing at the wedding, how tightly Jonny held on to his mother so that she could dance with him. That's a lovely memory. Her second stroke was much more serious and she was rushed to hospital, where she remained for about six months or so, gradually getting that little bit better. She wasn't able to move, although she could talk and gradually she was able to eat again for herself. Then she was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital in Colindale. On Shabbat I would walk down from Hendon and be with her and on a Sunday I would take her in a wheelchair round the building or take her out for a coffee.

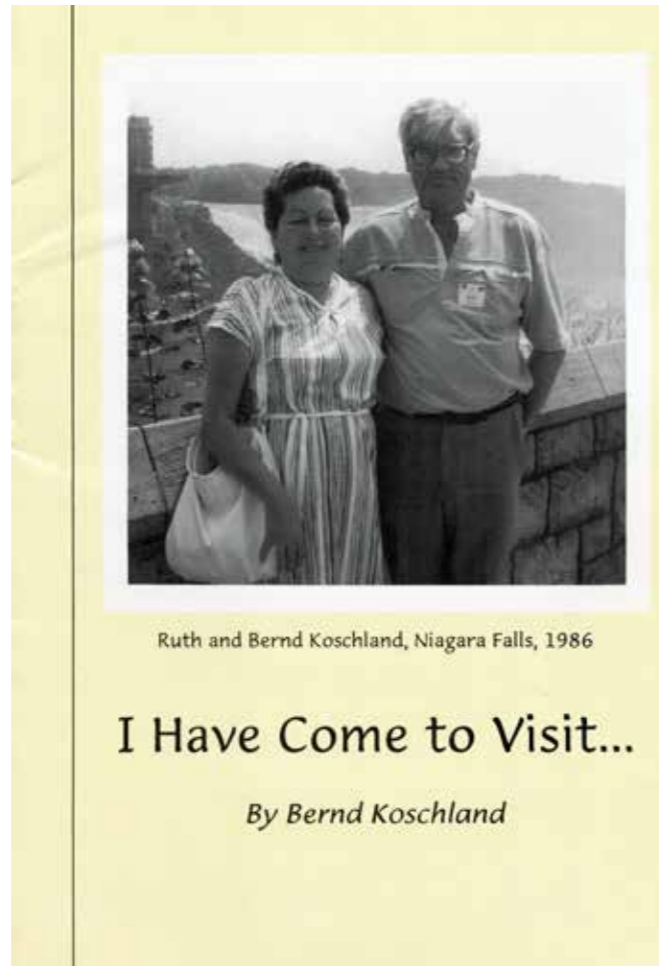
Out of the blue one day I got a call from the hospital, who told me that it was time that Ruth moved into a care home. It came as a shock because to be suddenly told to go and find a care home is not like going into a shop and choosing a jacket! This is something I discussed in later years with an organisation called The Relatives & Residents Association - the shock for relatives of being told that their loved one has to go into a nursing home. Ruth was transferred to the newly opened SAGE nursing home in Golders Green, where she was one of the first residents, and she remained there until the end of her life. I volunteered to take the services and helped generally because my wife was there and one had to do things in return.

Then I had heart problems and I landed up in hospital again. It was decided that I would have to have a by-pass done, which knocked me out for about three months, and for a short time I also lived in the nursing home with Ruth. I decided that if Ruth ever came home she would need a flat on the ground floor or with easy access. When I found a suitable flat in Hendon, which happened to be right opposite our family house, I moved in, although Ruth remained at SAGE. Sometimes I would take her out using North London Dial-a-Ride, an organisation which picks up people who can't go out themselves. I became a director of it for three years to help them out. They were very good to her.

As part of my work for the Relatives & Residents Association, I wrote a booklet called *I Have Come to Visit*, in which I expressed my feelings about Ruth's illness: how it affected me and how our relationship was affected. It has been used extensively: in fact, I attended a meeting some years later to do with nursing homes and my little book was included in the bibliography of the report.

Ruth did come to the flat for a while but she didn't regard it as her home and was quite anxious to get back to what she called 'her home' which was the SAGE nursing home. I remember this very, very clearly. One Thursday night in 1996 I got a call at about 11 o'clock at night to say that Ruth had been taken to hospital. She was in the resuscitation department. I stayed there for an hour or two and the staff told me that she was doing OK and that I should go home. I rang in the morning and they told me that she'd had another stroke. The doctor told me that her vital organs were not working anymore. Jewish law says that where there is life you have got to preserve life but the question is, what is life when you are being kept alive artificially? Ruth's condition was such that if she were resuscitated, life wouldn't be worth living - it wouldn't be a life at all, so I made the decision that she should not be resuscitated. Jonny, Beth and I just sat there, and her dear soul departed. At least her family was nearby.

It is horrendous to watch a person passing away. I mean I have seen it later in life, but when you see your own near and dear one, it is quite different to other people. We arranged for her to be taken to the mortuary and then we went home. I went to stay with my son that night and in the evening of that Saturday our rabbi came round and tried to comfort us. The Jewish practice is to have the funeral as quickly as possible, but because she died on a Friday we couldn't have it until the Sunday and there was a slot at midday. They had obtained the death certificate from the hospital but the registrar for the disposal certificate lived in Brixton, so my son and my son-in-law drove like two hooligans down to Brixton to pick up the certificate from the registrar. Apparently they drove up one way streets and red lights didn't really matter very much. They got back in time with the certificate and the funeral took place that afternoon in Bushey cemetery, attended by many people who knew her. Then followed the traditional days of mourning called the *Shiva*. I stayed and we observed the *Shiva* at my son's house. After I went back to the flat and did what I had to do to try and settle down. Fortunately, by the time she died I had retired so I was able to be with her from 1995 until she died in May 1996 and spend a lot of time with her. Ruth's passing hit our two children quite hard. They still talk about life at home and with their mother. ■



Front cover of 'I Have Come to Visit...'

## Michelle

WHEN RUTH AND I moved to Hendon in 1979 we became very good friends with Michelle and Geoffrey Goldberg. After my dear Ruth and her dear husband had died, I would visit Michelle quite often and we became close. Michelle and I had twenty happy years together. In the morning I would ring her regularly at eight o'clock and once or twice after that during the day. I often thought that we were like two young 'teenagers' in love, constantly ringing each other. I supported her in whatever she did and she did me. I was regarded as part of her family - and what a family it was as she had lots of



With Michelle

relations here, there and everywhere, especially in Israel. We went on holiday with friends to France and Italy. While on a visit to France, Michelle was suddenly unable to move and I had to wheel her around in a wheelchair. She recovered from that, but later in life she had two major operations, one of which knocked her back for a few months. I did my best to look after her, but then her second operation seemed to knock her entirely.

The last time Michelle and I went away together was in early 2017 to Israel to celebrate Jerusalem's 50th anniversary. After that trip she became very ill although I was still able to get her to synagogue or to visit her son or daughter. Towards the end of November, she was taken in to hospital and she never left. While she was in hospital I would make *kiddush* or *havdala* for her over the phone: she wanted to hear the coming in or the going out of the Sabbath. We were on the same level religiously.

We went in on the Friday about three days before Christmas. I sat next to Michelle, she would always like me to sit next to her bed and would give me her hand. I put out my hand and she moved it away: she really wasn't with us anymore. I lost a very good friend, partner and soulmate. Her children and I are still close.

I don't feel lonely, my children Jonny and Beth look after me; my daughter is on the phone every day a couple of times. I haven't got that person to whom I really talked about anything, like if I've got a toe ache or Michelle would have a problem and we would talk it over. Or I might find myself asking for her opinion after I had just written something. We were very happy for twenty years. We even discussed marriage, but we decided against it in the end and we were happy as we were living the way we did, apart but doing everything together. Michelle had virtually retired as a counsellor after her husband died but she was still active in the Jewish community locally and became one of the female representatives on the council of the United Synagogue. She was active with Jewish Care and started a singing group which became a choir and they were a support group for her when she got really ill. She was also a volunteer counsellor for the Jewish Marriage Council for some years. ■

## More Associations and Committees

IT WAS THROUGH MY WORK with the Relatives & Residents Association that I became involved in the local inspection service of nursing and residential homes in Barnet as a lay person. I found it extremely interesting. There were several occasions when I went into homes with an inspector and I would watch how they worked. They were meticulous in dealing with a home - whether the records were correct or whether the fridge was at the right temperature or the window frames were in good working order. On one or two occasions the inspector asked me to do part of that job for her. There were occasionally things found that the inspectors had missed.

At Kingston I had edited a small synagogue magazine (KSDS) and at Woodside Park I started the 'Woodside Ark' magazine, which has continued to this day. Now I was approached by the United Synagogue to edit what they call the *Daf Hashavua*, the weekly newsletter. I didn't get much guidance from the previous editor, but I gradually found my feet and I was the editor for seven years and enjoyed it thoroughly. Strangely enough, people still talk of the time when I was editor because I made a conscious effort to raise the bar with my writing. I would bring in things from people, rabbis and lay, outside that world and not always quote from the same rabbis, but write freely.

I became involved in the then Mayor's Charity Appeal by accident. I went to the Mayor's meeting for a particular charity. I sat there quite happily; a chairman had been appointed, and the Mayor asked those of us present if we would take on a role on the committee. I said, "Sure, I will be vice chairman," thinking I could sit back and let the chairman do all the work. At the next meeting the chairman resigned and as a result I became the chairman and remained so for the next four years.

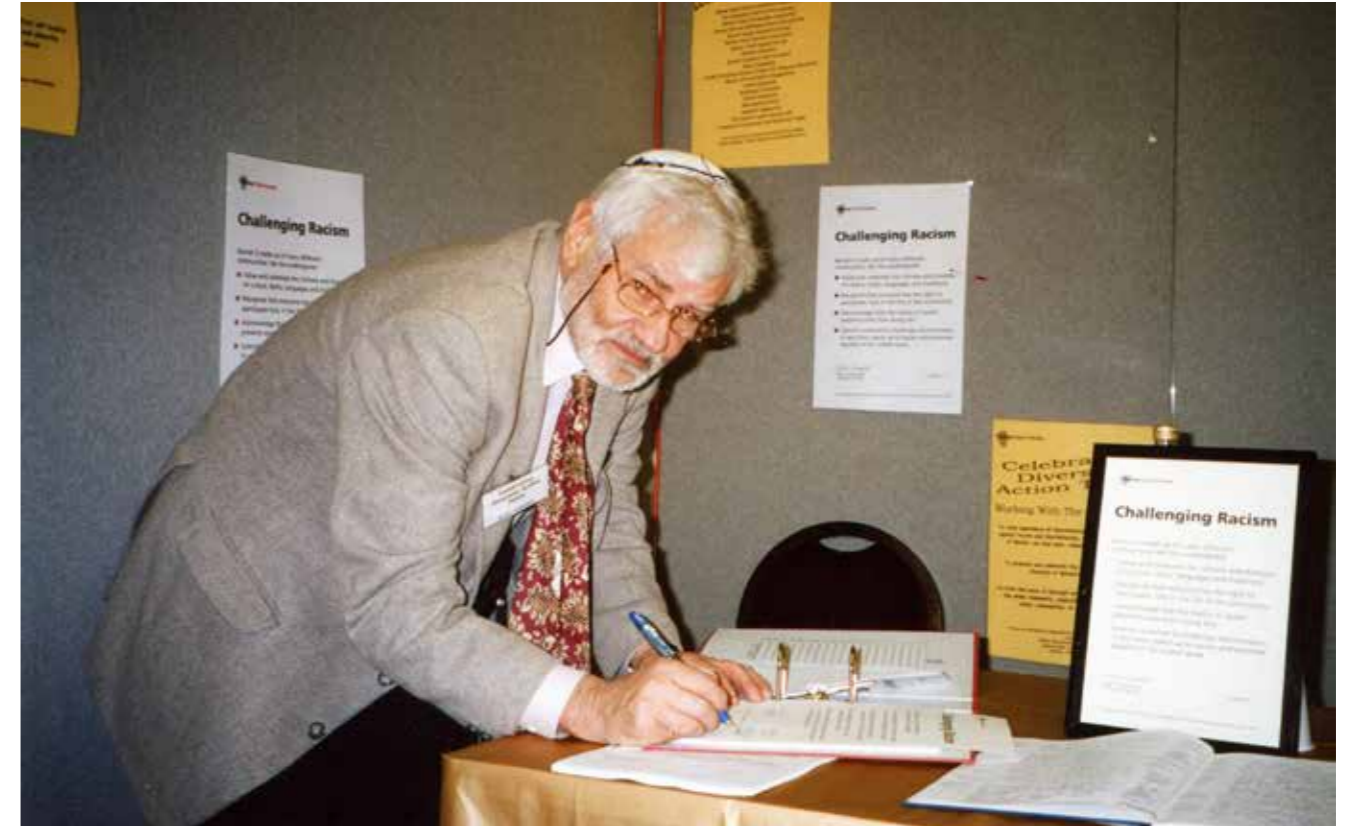
I was very proud to be chairman of Barnet Standards Committee, which was responsible for the ethical conduct of the Councillors and other officers. I first joined it as a committee member and when the chairman retired I was volunteered into the role and remained as chair until the group was dissolved in 2012 and all local groups were absorbed into a national one. As chair I was able to attend one or two meetings of the Conference of Standards Committees, travelling to Birmingham, and meeting a lot of interesting people. What was not so straightforward was when a councillor had misbehaved. In fact, quite near the beginning of my time as chair, a councillor had been prosecuted.

Many years ago I met the Borough Commander of Barnet Police at a meeting and he mentioned my joining the Barnet Advisory Group (BAG). I joined initially as chair of the Barnet Multi Faith Forum and was a member for many years. I was very active in the BAG; the Council offices were at one time almost my 'second home'. I was given a Civic Award by the Council for my inter-faith work in 2007. I also got to know the local Borough Commanders quite well. I went on a number of exercises with them, including one in crowd control in Gravesend. The Metropolitan Police chaplain contacted me with the idea that local borough police units should have volunteer chaplains, because if anything were to happen he could only be in one place at a time. I agreed with him and I still am the volunteer chaplain to the local police. I did go a few times into the local police station to just walk around and say hello to officers, but I haven't done it for a while now.

Occasionally I meet officers and introduce myself. One said to me, "Oh! I know who you are, your face is up at the local police station." One other Borough Commander who I worked closely with became Chief Constable of Essex. He emailed me when I got my MBE. I am also associated with a group that is called the Jewish Police Officers' Association, although I can't be a member because I am not a police officer. Being part of BAG also allowed me to take part in many Council activities such as Child Protection.

For twenty years I was chaplain at the Royal Free Hospital, appointed initially by the United Synagogue and soon paid by the hospital. During my time there I learnt the modern approach to being a chaplain, rather than what I had done in my early days in the Ministry, where I just went up to the Jewish patients and that was it. I now became part of a wonderful team. The senior chaplain, Robert Mitchell, made me very welcome. Once I had settled in a bit, I began to feel that I ought to be doing more than just visiting Jewish patients. I participated in the training days of new nursing staff, where one of my jobs was to take them down to the mortuary and explain to them about Jewish practice around death.

If I felt I could be of help I went round as a generic chaplain, irrespective of faith, if there was a call and no one else was around. One instance that will always remain in my mind was where I was the only one in the office and a lady came in distress and asked to see the Catholic priest. I told her he wasn't available and offered my help. We spoke for an hour, sorted out whatever had to be done, and she went away with a smile on her face. A quarter of an hour later I was walking down the corridor



As Chair of the Barnet Multi Faith Forum



With the Deputy Mayor and Borough Commander at the Barnet Multi Faith Forum, 2009

and there was this same lady who flung her arms around me and thanked me effusively. The following week I received a lovely card, which I still have up on my wall. Many years later I saw her again and she remembered and thanked me again. It's really remarkable the difference you can make as a chaplain.

Robert invited me to join the College of Health Care Chaplains, which was an association of chaplains serviced by the UNITE union. They dealt with the challenges that chaplains might face and I found that work very interesting, meeting fellow chaplains of all faiths, talking to them and hearing things about chaplaincy which made my role much more fulfilling.

When I decided to give it up as I was struggling with my sight and found it quite exhausting, they had a farewell party for me that was attended by the Chief Rabbi. Whenever I go to the Royal Free now as an outpatient, I make a point of going down to the chaplaincy office to say hello. I am now a retired member of the College of Healthcare Chaplains. In my retirement I look back at Hospital Chaplaincy and the need for training, especially in the Jewish community, to be a chaplain in the full sense of the word and not just a faith visitor. ■

“If I felt I could be of help I went round as a generic chaplain, irrespective of faith, if there was a call and no one else was around.”

## *Kindertransport* group and Holocaust education

OVER THE YEARS I became more involved with The Association of Jewish Refugees (AJR), of which I am a member, and with the *Kindertransport* specialist group. My first contact was with the founder, Bertha Leverton. She was collecting names of Kinder and she organised a reunion in Harrow, which I was unfortunately unable to attend due to work commitments. The later chairman of the Kindertransport, Herman Hershberger, who came over on the *Manhattan* with me asked me to join the committee. Under Herman's chairmanship, they put on a special *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony in Stanmore Synagogue for those who never had the opportunity to have theirs when they were twelve or thirteen. I took the service and was presented with a beautiful glass *chanukiah*. After Herman retired Sir Erich Reich took over as chairman and held two or three more reunions to mark specific occasions and he got me deeply involved. He asked me to take over the newsletter and I was then volunteered to create a booklet to accompany our next reunion, and I did a couple of others for the subsequent reunions. We are a small committee, of whom the oldest is in his nineties. I retired from my duties as editor of the newsletter in 2018 due to ill-health. I would like the next generation to take over – I wouldn't want it to disappear. Editing the newsletter was an interesting job and I also wrote quite a few pieces, one or two of them under pseudonyms. One of which I don't mind revealing are book reviews which I did under the name Kate which stands for KT or *Kindertransport*. Now I've revealed my true identity when actually it should be a state secret!

Holocaust education has become a very important part of my retirement. Speaking in schools takes me back to my teaching days and my message is more about my childhood experiences than the Holocaust per se. I also speak to school children visiting the Jewish Museum. I don't know how many different schools I have spoken in. A lot of them are primary schools and I find that the children respond very well with no fidgeting, although sometimes I speak a bit too long and there's no time left for questions. I have had some excellent questions from children. An eight or nine-year-old girl asked me if I had been angry when my parents told me they were sending me abroad. I couldn't really answer the question as I really don't know who I was angry with, if I was angry or if I am still angry. It is a question that bugs me to this day.

More recently an eleven-year-old asked me why I am such a positive person, which I thought was an excellent question considering my background. I explained to him that the past is in the past but not



With pupils of Bell Lane school, 2007

forgotten and the past builds us up to the present day and in the present day we live to prepare for the future, which seemed to satisfy him.

The majority of the children I have spoken to are not Jewish. I am asked by the Holocaust Educational Trust to go and speak to them and I am quite happy to do so. One of the things I find useful in talking to primary school children, and to adults in fact, is using a PowerPoint presentation. My first slide is a picture of the Tardis from Dr Who and I tell the children that we are going to use it to transport us from, let's say London to Berlin. That gets them on board. Of the pictures I show the one that gets the most giggles is the one of me at the age of six standing with a big bag. I ask them to guess what's in the bag and in reply I get all kinds of answers. I tell them that in Germany it was, and still is, the custom that on your first day of school you get a bag of sweets and then I ask them if they got the same and they all laugh and shout "No!" and I tell them to go home and complain to their parents, which makes them laugh more.

I talk about my life and illustrate it with the pictures. I also take a couple of items that came with me from home, a hairbrush and a cloth bag for PE shoes. I think these are important for them to see, that I was given things by my parents. One thing I avoid is referring to the Holocaust, the cruelties of the camps and so on, because it is not really my scene and in any case, children who want to see horrors just need to switch on the television and look at what's happening in, for example, Syria. I also try to link my story to the current situation with refugees, not at length, but to show that the problem still exists. I always try to finish on a positive note. I show them a slide where they choose between a smiley face and a non-smiley face and then another slide that says "We Must Make the World....." and they have to fill in the rest along the lines of ".....a Better Place" and I tell them that they each have a job to do in life to make the world a better place. I compare them to drops of water going in to a bucket which eventually fills with water if they all do their own little bit. Whatever their bit is, that is up to them.

Using that PowerPoint with children really changed how I spoke to adult audiences. I had written out a speech that I was going to give in Germany and it was about two thousand words long. Instead I used the PowerPoint and spoke about it in German and I found that much more effective.

The other thing that I've greatly enjoyed in my retirement is reading. I have quite a large library and I try to read as much as my sight will allow. I have been asked if I'd like to have audiobooks but the types

of books I read are more academic and they certainly wouldn't be in that format. Aside from that, though, I love handling books and occasionally walk round my library when I want to just have a break and I find my old friends whom I haven't seen for a while or I'd forgotten that I had; it brings life to my soul. I haven't got enough room to have all the books that I want. My daughter suggested I put them all in the bath, which would make it rather difficult for the books and for me! Reading keeps me going, keeps me thinking and also when writing I like to look up things rather than relying on Google. I think there are one or two occasions where I have used Wikipedia and I found after that the facts were not correct. It's no good sitting in what I term *widows' weeds*, feeling sorry for myself. No. There have been ups and downs and I have to carry on living. That's my motto.

After Ruth died and I started travelling with my friend Michelle I suddenly decided that I enjoyed taking photographs of scenery. I started using just an ordinary camera and as a result my lounge and one or two other parts of my flat are decorated with photos that I have taken. There is one which somebody once compared to a Constable painting of horses gambolling by a canal. My first attempts were very poor but then gradually I taught myself to get things the way I wanted it and I think I did quite well with some of the photos that I took. A lot of them are in albums and my favourites are framed and hung around the flat. It's not just about the photographs but the memory of places we have been. ■



On my first day of school in Germany with the big cone of sweets I was given

## Keeping my faith

FROM THE DAY I LEFT HOME until this day I have kept my faith. I have kept my belief in God and I have kept to the Orthodox way of life. I came from an Orthodox home in Germany. It was instilled in me by my parents. My father taught me Hebrew from an early age and was a brilliant teacher as there are still so many things that I remember. I remember my father officiating in the synagogue on *Rosh Hashana*. He was meticulous in his observances. One day I was walking with him when he stopped by a shop window and looked into it and I wondered what on earth he was doing; he was saying *minchah* (the afternoon prayer) because he couldn't get to the synagogue. That is always a picture that I will have in my mind.

Also there are the books that he gave me when I left: the prayer book, the Chumash (Pentateuch), the Passover *Haggadah*, and one or two other things that I had learnt with him. In the display case in the hall of my flat there is a little booklet which contains the whole Book of Esther. It's a very small thing, about a couple of inches square, and I always wondered why they made something so small. It has his name inside it and my sister explained to me that he had that in his tunic pocket in World War One so that he would not miss out on reading the book of Esther on the feast of *Purim*. These memories of my father and his teachings are the foundation of my faith. There is an inscription which he wrote inside the *Chumash* he gave me which I have had photocopied and it hangs on my wall to remind me that I should always study Torah and that it should always be part of my life. When I went back to Germany with my son, I showed him the balcony at the back of the flat where we lived and told him that that was where my father built the tabernacle for Sukkot.

I have always been a student of Jewish text and the history of Jewish faith and belief. However, I feel that in recent years Anglo-Jewry is beginning to polarise between the very Orthodox, Orthodox, Reform and Liberal. How one defines Orthodoxy is a question that has always interested me. To me, Orthodoxy means that you follow the rules. I liken it to a game of Monopoly. The rules of Monopoly are this, that and the other. If you go to another person's house you expect to play by the same rules, but if they play by different rules, you think, no, they can't do that, that's not how it's done. I feel I am 'middle of the road' Orthodox. To me, the extreme right is too over the top in many ways and, well I don't go to the left; although as far as I am concerned my faith is strong enough that I would speak and work with anyone of any denomination, faith or none.

For example, when I went into the ministry way back in the early fifties the tradition was that you attacked the Reform in your sermons, in the same way you might attack a political party, but I never agreed with that. For example, I am very friendly with the former rabbi of a local Reform synagogue and we share similar views on many things, although we differ in practices because he is Reform and I am Orthodox, but that doesn't make any difference between us. I believe and I am a believer; I do it in the way that I want to do it. I am not ashamed of anything and I am quite happy to walk around wearing my *kippa*. I am Jewish and I am proud of it. Not that my faith hasn't been tested very severely. Once was when Ruth had her strokes and ended up in a nursing home. That shook my faith to see somebody I loved suffering so much. The second time was when Michelle became seriously ill and then died. Why did G-d let those things happen? It was an enormous blow to me and it left a great hole in my everyday life. My faith was shaken but remained intact, even in recent ill-health. I believe that to some extent my faith is keeping me going. ■



Inscription written by my father in my *Chumash*

## Receiving my MBE

ONE DAY THE POST CAME and I saw one of these official buff envelopes with “On Her Majesty’s Service”. I thought it must be from the Inland Revenue, although I was sure I had paid my income tax. I opened it and discovered that it was from Buckingham Palace! It said something along the lines of: you have been recommended to receive an MBE for services to Holocaust Education, will you accept it or will you not, please tick the appropriate box and return the form. I didn’t have to think for very long – Yes! It also stated that I wasn’t allowed to tell anyone until it had been made public. This was in November 2017 and Michelle was quite seriously ill so I decided to tell her and I’m glad I did as she died before it was made public and I think it made her happy. It was hard not telling people, especially Jonny and Beth. They were both going away somewhere or other so I told them before they went and they were thrilled. It appeared in the New Year’s Honours List so I could now call myself Bernd Koschland MBE. I had lots of phone calls, emails and cards; people would stop me on the street to congratulate me. My children arranged a celebratory dinner with all the family and one or two others who had worked with me, and we all had a lovely evening together.

On the day of the investiture I arrived at the Palace with my son, my daughter and my son-in-law. We had a permit to park on the inside quadrangle of the palace and we had to be there by no later than a quarter to ten. Being a *Yeke*, I like to arrive early. We got there at about half past nine and drove right through the archway which faces the front of the Palace.

We were shown to what I think they call the gallery, and then the recipients were taken to get ready. This solved a mystery for me. I’d always wondered how they put the medal on people when they receive their honours. Well, when we went to get ready they put on each of us a little pin with a hook, on which they would later hook the medal. An official came to tell us everything we needed to know. Prince William was holding the investiture, representing the Queen. You approach, bow, the medal will be put on you, the Prince will speak to you for a moment and shake your hand, you step back, bow, and then you turn away and off you go. What was really interesting was, while we were waiting, meeting the other people and finding out why they were there. We had a lovely chat, quite a number of us, and then they called us through in batches. Ringo Starr was in the first batch. We could see everything on a screen and we watch Ringo being knighted. There were around eighty of us standing there chatting to



Receiving my MBE from Prince William

each other. I was in the last batch and I remember thinking as we lined up that it was like lining up to go into the headmaster's office.

Prince William hooked the medal on me and we had a little chat. He asked what I was receiving my MBE for. He recognised that I was Jewish because I was wearing my *kippa* and he told me that he was visiting Israel shortly and would have to learn about its history. We talked for a minute or so. I was very impressed by him. It all felt like a wonderful dream, like I may wake up at any moment and find myself lying in my bed. I was never on my own there, there was always some uniformed person hovering nearby to take me where I had to go. Once we got outside there was an official photographer for those who chose to have official photos taken. We took a couple of photographs privately, as did others, and that was the end of the investiture and home we went. It was all over very quickly. My daughter and son-in-law went home and got ready to go to a wedding, my son went back to work and I went home with an MBE. I still can't believe it when I receive a letter addressed to Bernd Koschland MBE. I recently received a huge envelope with the warrant for it which I've had framed.

So, I came to England as an eight-year-old on my own on the *Kindertransport* and I ended up being honoured by Her Majesty the Queen. ■

“ I was in the last batch and I remember thinking as we lined up that it was like lining up to go into the headmaster's office. ”

## Going back to my home town

IN 2000 MY SON Jonny and I were invited back to Fürth. We saw some of the Jewish buildings that remained including the synagogue in the Jewish orphanage, where I took the Sabbath Service with great emotion as my father eventually had to pray there before being deported. I was struck by the evidence of removed *mezuzot* on doorposts of houses as we walked through the streets. ■

“ . I was struck by the evidence of removed *mezuzot* on doorposts of houses as we walked through the streets. ”

## Part 4

# Summing Up

### Summing up

I THINK OF MY LIFE like a kaleidoscope, made up of many things. Within that, there were people who had a particular influence on me in some way or another. Obviously there were my parents, mostly for my faith and my memories of my early life. Max Baer, the warden at my second hostel, had an influence: he was a very good guy, quite strict but fair. Rabbi Munk who made the hostel happen, and also was my 'go-to' for any religious questions my wife and I would have. The secretary to the committee of the hostel, Cissie Rosenfelder, with whom I came in contact many times throughout my life. Fini and Nathan: Fini had known me as a little kid when she was my kindergarten teacher and then took me in, in London and became my family, and she knew my parents. And then, of course, my wife Ruth, my children Jonny and Beth and their families, and Michelle. Also my father-in-law, who was like a father to me once I got married and was a huge cultural influence on me.

These were the main influences on my life that got me to where I am and I think the award of the MBE owes much to them. My MBE is dedicated to the memories of those people and all the other people I've forgotten to mention, and it would be a very long list if I included them all. It's thanks to them that my life has gone the way it has, that I am here to tell the tale and hope to be able to tell the tale for many more years ahead. ■



With Jonny and Beth



## 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.



My parents had heard through a distant relative that there was a vacancy on the *Kindertransport* to England for me. I still have a hairbrush that my mother packed, with my name on a little tag around it and a bag for PE shoes – Mum was concerned about me being untidy. Dad was more concerned with my future religious life, coming from an Orthodox Jewish home.

 **AJR** The Association  
of Jewish Refugees

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