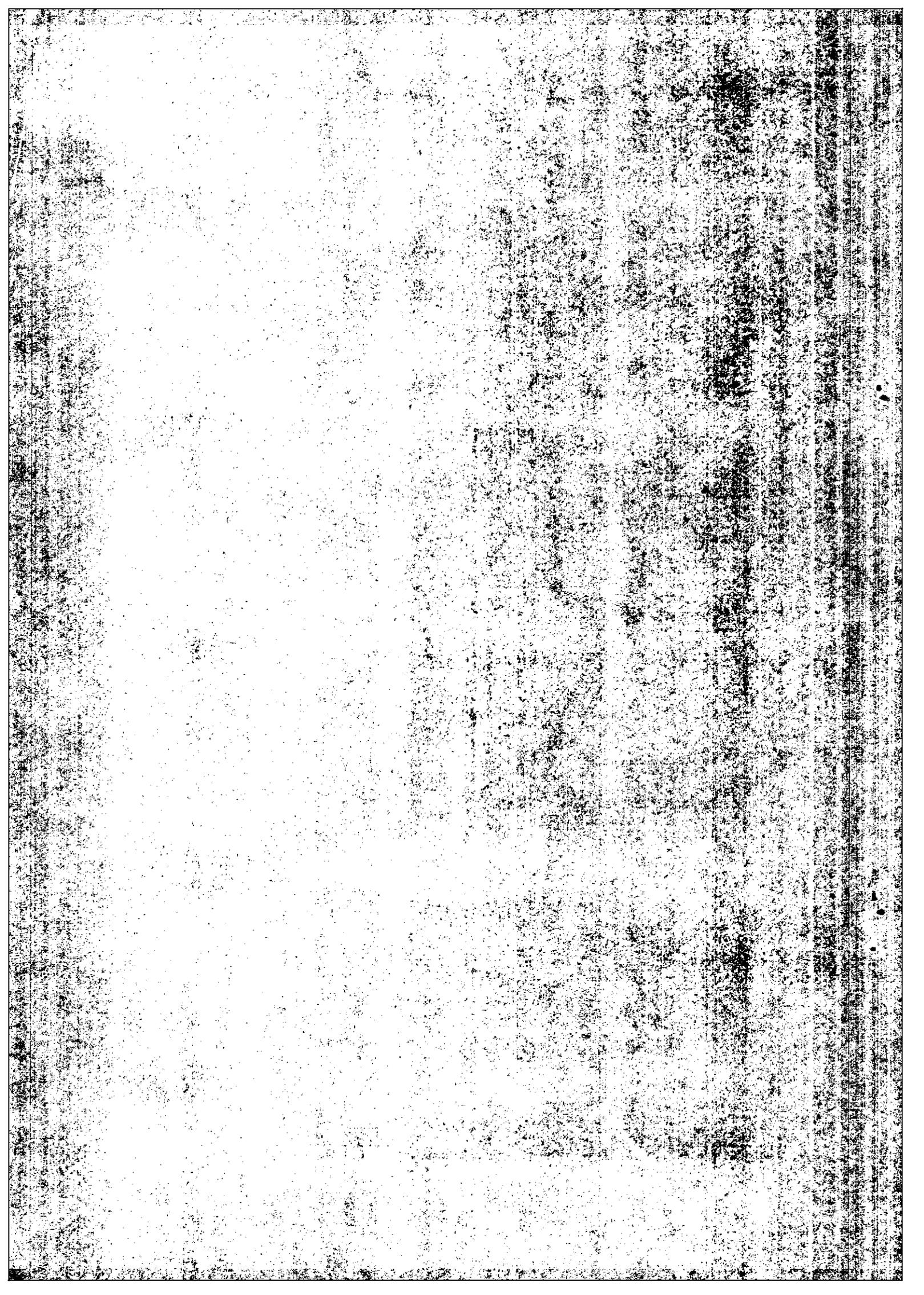


**Journal
of the
'45 Aid Society**

No:19

December 1995



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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

We were all shocked and numbed with the tragic news of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. A number of our members fought under him during the Israeli War of Independence. To us, like to so many others irrespective of our political affiliation, he was not just the Prime Minister of Israel, he was a familiar figure with whom our whole adult life was interlinked. He was a son of Israel, a man of daring, courage, integrity and vision who devoted his life to the security of the State of Israel. We were brought up to believe in the sanctity of the human being and such an act of sacrilege is to us unthinkable and incomprehensible. Let us hope that the most appropriate monument to the memory of Yitzhak Rabin will be the fulfilment of what the Jewish people crave most for - PEACE

The following is an extract from a letter which I wrote on the 25th July 1991 to the President of the Board of Deputies of the British Jews:

"It is an acknowledged fact that the Jewish community in Britain is the only one in the Western World where there is not a Holocaust Museum. Although many serious discussions have taken place over the years about the importance and desirability of such a venue, the objective invariably failed to materialise. There are many reasons why this happened, but I firmly believe it was mainly due to the fact that there was not enough commitment and determination by the leadership of the community."

Since that time exciting developments have taken place. You will be interested to read two articles in this Journal describing the opening of a Holocaust Centre, Beth Shalom, in Sherwood Forest. The Centre is dedicated to Holocaust education and commemoration and it is the first of its kind to open in this country. The initiative came from Steven Smith and his brother, Dr James Smith, but the scheme would never have come about without their parents who not only supported them but brought them up in a spirit of tolerance and understanding and a love for humanity. They are a remarkable family.

Another development of great importance to our members and to the Jewish and non-Jewish community at large is the fact that the Imperial War Museum has decided to build a Holocaust Museum within its precincts. The space allocated will be 18,500 square feet - it is planned to be opened at the end of this millenium. The IWM is known for its objectivity, enjoys a high reputation and it is attended by 450,000 people per annum, a large number of whom are school children.

The following are the reasons why the I.W.M. has decided to have a Holocaust Museum:

- i) The Holocaust is a central event in the remit of the IWM, Britain's national museum of twentieth century conflict. The Museum considers that it is best placed to meet the call for a museum in the UK dealing with the Holocaust and to do so in an objective historical fashion demonstrating its crucial place in the context of modern world history.
- ii) For many years now the Museum has been one of the chief centres visited by school children studying the rise of Hitler and the ensuing Holocaust. With the inclusion of the Holocaust in the Key Stage 3 of the National Curriculum's History Syllabus, the demand for services and information on this topic from our Education Department and the Museum's reference departments has increased dramatically. There is a clear demand - and this is frequently voiced by visiting teachers - for a full historical exhibition on the Holocaust
- iii) The Museum recognises that the generation which witnessed the Holocaust is growing older and that before long there will be no living witnesses left. The Museum has for many years documented the experiences of survivors and camp liberators as part of its oral history programme. It has long recognised that it has an important part to play in ensuring that the vital testimony of those involved in the Holocaust is preserved for posterity, and believes that a full-scale exhibition will offer an extremely useful platform for further and more ambitious collecting on this important theme.

- iv) The Museum is aware of the intense interest and support for the idea of a Holocaust Museum in London, and believes that it is singularly placed to harness this enthusiasm for the creation of a museum-within-the-Museum which can serve the interests of Holocaust education into the next century.

The year 1995 will be remembered as the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Anniversaries as a rule have an emotional resonance but to our members they have an ambivalent expression. On the one hand there is the tendency to rejoice that we have survived on the other hand the feeling of guilt, the grief that we feel for the loss of our nearest and dearest most of whom were struck down either in the prime of their lives or before they had an opportunity to blossom. The anniversaries of the liberation from the concentration camps have evoked memories which instead of fading away with the passage of time, have loomed large in our consciousness. The fact that we commemorated these events collectively, in many cases with our extended families, and that we shared our joy and sorrow together added great poignancy to the various occasions. This was particularly the case at our Reunion in London and subsequently in Israel. What was even more significant was that so many of our members travelled from so many different parts of the world to meet their old friends. For some it was the first time since they left England in the late 1940's or early 1950's. How exciting and memorable these reunions were. It emphasised the fact that the bonds of friendship that we forged in the ghettos and in the concentration camps and later in Windermere, Wintershall, in the hostels and in the Primrose Club are as strong as ever. The accounts in this issue relating to our gatherings are testimony to the bond between us and we cherish this special relationship.

Sir Martin Gilbert, our President, has started to write the story of "The Boys" - if you wish to be included, there is still time to send your contribution ... but only just!

May I take this opportunity in wishing you all a Happy, Healthy and Peaceful 1996. With fraternal greetings.

Ben Helfgott

PAST AND PRESENT

CHILDREN FROM THE CAMPS

JOAN STIEBEL

Joan was Executive Director of the CBF, now World Jewish Relief, at the time of our arrival in England.

Soon after the end of the war, the Jewish Refugees Committee and the Friends Committee for Refugees and Aliens asked the Home Office for permission to bring over some of the orphaned children who had been in concentration camps. The Home Office gave their consent for up to 1,000 under the age of 16 to come to this country and the scene was set for the operation to begin.

Through the Home Office, a largely disused Ministry of Production housing site on Lake Windermere was made available for the accommodation of the first group and we set about equipping it, whilst the selection of suitable children went ahead in Europe.

The first children came from Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia and numbered 300. It was anticipated that many would require medical treatment and the preparation of a suitable sick-bay was considered of great importance.

The arrangements for the transport of the children was put in hand and the Royal Air Force provided Sterling bombers for the purpose. Then the weather took a hand and for five days it was not suitable for the evacuation exercise to take place.

In the meantime, a special committee - The Committee for the Care of Children from the Camps - was set up in Bloomsbury House, with Mr Leonard Montefiore as its Chairman. It also included Mrs Neville Blond and Mrs Lola Hahn-Warburg, both of whom, with Mr Montefiore, were extremely active throughout. On the administrative side, I was the professional most involved, whilst Mr Oscar Friedman, a psychological social worker, was in overall charge of the care and welfare of the children.

It was decided that Mr Montefiore and I should meet the first group who were to come in at Crosby-in-Eden, an airfield near Carlisle. Sleepers on the trains were in short supply, but the Home Office arranged them for some categories of traveller, including those connected with the refugee organisations. I booked sleepers for four days in a row and always had to cancel them because the planes could not fly. On the fifth day, I did no booking, the weather cleared and Mr Montefiore and I had a crowded and, in a way, amusing journey sitting-up in a very over-crowded train.

We arrived at Carlisle at six o'clock in the morning and immediately contacted the RAMC who were providing trucks to transport the children from the airport to Windermere. We then managed to get a bath and breakfast in one of the hotels prior to going to Marks and Spencer, when it opened, to see the Manager. Through Mrs Blond, he had taken charge of all the local arrangements and was a tower of strength.

Eventually, we had lunch with him in the store and then drove out to Crosby-in-Eden. Immigration officers and MI5 representatives were there as were the press. An amusing aside in what turned out to be a very long day was when one of the press asked Mr Montefiore what he did, and he replied,

"I am one of those awful beings known as a rentier!"

Once at the airfield, all we had to do was to wait for the first plane to come into sight. When it did, I can still remember the choked feeling I had that it was all happening but, once the aircraft landed, followed by the rest, there was no time for contemplation.

Mr Montefiore went down to the landing area and I stayed at the airport building to deal with whatever came up. Some time during that hectic afternoon, there was a call from one of the MIS men:

"Miss Stiebel, come - we've got a stowaway."

I am not sure if it was ever discovered how the boy, known as Ivan, got onto the plane. Each plane had two adult escorts, in addition to the children, and there was a nominal roll of everyone on board, but nobody admitted having seen Ivan and he was clearly not a spy.

When they arrived, the children were not in very good shape. The plane had come down en route and the travellers had been plied with chocolate and oranges - not a good combination in rather choppy flying conditions!

By the time all the planes had landed and we had dealt with the formalities, it was quite late and we still had the drive to Windermere.

Some time during that drive, we heard that the Japanese had surrendered and that peace had come at last.

We reached Windermere in the early hours of the morning where staff and some voluntary workers awaited us.

The children were in amazingly good spirits and Mr Montefiore used to tell a story which indicated their joy at being in a free country. The truck he was in broke down en route and he apologised to his group for the delay. One boy said:

"Don't apologise. It is an honour to break down on a British road."

Surely that said it all.

The next day must have been a strange one for them all. There was so much that had to be done: Medical examinations, clothing distribution, acclimatisation to such a new environment and much more. One thing that stands out in my mind is the first main meal which the children had. Some of them emerged from it, their new jerseys bulging. Believing that there might not always be food, they had taken bread as a stand-by.

There were still some locals living on the Estate and they were very interested in our group and did everything they could to help them, amongst other things, loaning them bicycles. We were lucky in that we had genuinely concerned volunteers from nearby places as well as some Londoners who were holidaying in the vicinity, notably the late Mrs Anna Schwab, a former member of the Jewish Refugees Committee. She helped in many ways especially on the domestic front.

Whilst I was involved in everything during my brief stay in Windermere, mine was an administrative job and the actual planning for the children's future lay with Mr Oscar Friedman.

I also went with Mr Montefiore to meet the second group which came to Southampton. The contrast between the two reception places could not have been greater because the first was specially erected for the Ministry of Production during the war and Southampton was a beautiful old house lent for the purpose by its owner.

Although Mr Oscar Friedman continued in overall charge of the whole group, Mr Fritz Friedman ran Southampton and looked after the group who were housed there.

50-YEAR VICTORY FOR WAIFS OF WAR

HOW WE GAVE LIFE AND LOVE TO DEATH CAMP ORPHANS

JOSEPH FINKLESTONE

Joe was a reporter working for the Carlisle Journal when he was sent to cover the story of the arrival of the first 300 of our group in England on the 14 August 1945. He has been closely associated with our members and he and his wife, Hadasah, are honorary members of our Society.

Fifty years ago a number of small aeroplanes landed at Carlisle airport. From them slowly emerged 300 boys and girls. They looked pale, bewildered. Some seemed sick and weak. A tall, thin, austere white-haired man, wearing a light, well-tailored suit welcomed them. As he did so, extending his hands and smiling, one youngster became sick and bespattered the front of the suit. The man appeared not to notice the incident, but kept on patting the heads of the boys and girls. As a teenage junior reporter of the Carlisle Journal, I was ordered to "cover the arrival of some young people from Europe".

It was not explained to me who they were. Only when I saw the boys and girls, in their ill-fitting clothes, tense as they entered a new world, did I suddenly realise with a pang that they had experienced the greatest human-made hell in history. They had seen their parents, sisters and brothers shot, starved and gassed by the Nazis. They all considered it a miracle that they lived to tell the terrifying story.

When the British Government decided in 1945 to offer asylum to 1,000 boys and girls - orphans from the death camps - under the age of 16, a macabre problem arose. British officials could not find 1,000 surviving Jewish youngsters of that age. Over one-and-a-half million Jewish children had been murdered by the Nazis. Those unable to carry out some form of slave labour had no chance of survival.

Thus, only 732 were given the opportunity to start a new life in Britain - most of them boys, because teenage girls had an even slimmer chance of hanging on to life.

Just over 300 came on this day, 14 August 1945. Another 400 arrived a few weeks later.

They had all been laboriously assembled in the German show concentration camp, Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. There, the Nazis had hoodwinked the neutral observers, including the Red Cross, who had expressed concern about the fate of inmates at the camps. Inmates were encouraged to display their paintings and play music.

But the reality was gruesome. Many thousands of the camp's inmates ended their lives in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Seeing these youngsters, brought out from the horrors of Nazi Europe, had a profound affect on me. By that time, I already knew that most of my own close relatives, including cousins of the same age as the youngsters at the airport, had been murdered. As I sat down in front of the typewriter in the office to write the report for the paper, I was suddenly overwhelmed by emotion. Putting my head down on the typewriter, I wept.

However, tears were a luxury for the youngsters from the camps. They had shed plenty of them and had found no solace. They had learned to control their emotions and even to stifle them.

Strangely, perhaps, they could feel somewhat privileged. Other survivors wishing to come to Britain had to prove that they had relatives here able to look after them. Very few could satisfy the authorities on that score. Those who wished to settle in the Jewish homeland in Palestine soon found that the fulfilment of their dreams had to be postponed.

The gates were to be closed for a number of years yet, as the survivors of the "Exodus" discovered when they were sent back from the shores of Palestine to Hamburg in Germany.

But for the bewildered youngsters assembled in Carlisle, and soon to be sent to Windermere in the Lake District to recuperate, the welcoming London group and their successors were to prove the very soul of the new life they were to live.

The elderly, white-haired man was Leonard Montefiore, related to the renowned 19th century philanthropist and centenarian, Sir Moses Montefiore, honoured by Queen Victoria for his good deeds. Leonard Montefiore's solemn, austere face disguised an unusually kind personality.

He was the leader of a committee for the care of children from the concentration camps set up in London by the Central British Fund.

As they arrived in Windermere and felt the spell of the lakes and the hills, the youngsters looked at one another in astonishment.

"It was so utterly different from what we had experienced for over five years - the killing, the hunger, the degradation, the filth," Ben Helfgott, who was to become their leader, recalls. "Here was beauty, silence, serenity, humanity."

The youngsters revelled in the fine air and good food. Even after a few weeks, their figures filled out and the scars of the camps began to disappear. The girls loved their new dresses. The boys laughed as they donned long trousers for the first time.

A football team was quickly formed. Matches with local teams were played with immense enthusiasm. As the youngsters were later sent to hostels in London, Gateshead, Scotland, Eire and Northern Ireland, they were fortunate in their advisers, who were to take the place of their parents.

Foremost among them was Dr Oskar Friedmann. he realised it was vital for the youngsters to spend time together as they became acclimatised to the ways of this country. But he also understood that they must not be together too long and should start to live separately, though not abruptly, while retaining close links.

A pivotal role in the transformation of the youngsters from traumatised camp survivors into well-adjusted British citizens was played by the specially established London youth club, named the Primrose after the local telephone dialling code.

Under the guidance of the club leader, Yogi Mayer, an athlete talented enough to represent Germany if the Nazis had not intervened, the youngsters found the communal home they urgently needed.

They could eat there after work and they could find the sporting facilities they craved for.

It was at the Primrose that Ben Helfgott could display the first inklings of his sporting talents which were to lead him - uniquely for a death camp survivor - to become the British light-weight weightlifting champion and record-holder and represent his new country in the Olympic Games in Rome and Melbourne.

An even greater hunger than for good food and sport burnt in them - that for education.

Ben Helfgott sums up this feeling. "For years we had been deprived of the chance to study. Now we wanted to make up for lost time. We literally swallowed education." Those with special talents even became university dons. Kurt Klappholtz became a Reader at the London School of Economics. Jerzy Herszberg, a Reader in mathematics at Birkbeck College. Witold Gutt obtained a doctorate in chemistry and a senior place in the civil service. Roman Halter won distinction as an artist and architect.

Their ranks also produced spiritual leaders, notably Rabbi Hugo Gryn of the West London Synagogue, who regularly agonises in the BBC's Moral Maze debates.

Speaking of their transformation into proud Londoners and Mancunians, "the boys" and "the girls", as they are still known despite having themselves become grandparents, make clear one crucial point.

Repeatedly they told me; "We survived because we wanted to tell the world the terrible story of Nazi murders. We wanted to help ensure that no such hell could ever happen again."

Yet they added; "When we emerged from the Nazi hell, we never thought of revenge. We retained our faith in humanity, a faith confirmed by our experiences in England."

Now, the once destitute "boys" and "girls" are raising, through their 45 Aid Society, considerable sums of money for worthy charities.

Having heard from their president - historian, Sir Martin Gilbert, author of the massive biography of Winston Churchill - of their endeavours, Prince Charles and John Major have voiced their admiration.

"Courage, fortitude, resilience" are precisely the words which one would want to associate with the youngsters who arrived in Carlisle 50 years ago.

...

THE GAMES MASTER - GEORGE LAWRENCE

When 82-year-old George Lawrence opened his Evening Standard on Monday, he got one of the biggest surprises of his long life.

"I could hardly believe my eyes", he said. "There in front of me were photographs of boys and girls I taught games fifty years ago. And there was the exciting story of their arrival in this country of the youngsters who had amazingly survived the Nazi death camps in Europe."

As he looked at the photographs, George Lawrence's excitement rose. He thought that he recognised quite a few of them. They had become his enthusiastic pupils. For fifty years he has kept the photographs he had taken of some of the "boys". Now he could compare them with those published in the Evening Standard as they stood at the window of one of the RAF planes bringing them from the former Nazi camp at Theresientadt to Carlisle on August 14, 1945. From there they were sent for recuperation to the Lake District and it was there that George Lawrence first met them.

"I happened to live at Troutbeck Bridge on the shores of Lake Windermere when the boys arrived there", he recalled. "I applied and got the job of games master and spent many happy hours in their company. It gave me a great feeling to read about them again."

His photographs of the boys are very revealing. Although now enjoying the beautiful and serene surroundings of Lake Windermere the scars of their terrible experiences in the Nazi death camps are still visible on their faces and in their stance. Their eyes look out as if from a different, harsher world. After a meal, some of them emerged from the dining hall with bulging pullovers. They had to be persuaded that they need not hide food as there would be enough for the next meal.

On the backs of the photographs, the boys wrote greetings to Mr Lawrence. At first the greetings were in Polish, as nearly all of them were born in Poland. Within months, however, the boys were writing the greetings in English.

"For my teacher - Gershon Frydman". "One of your pupils - Jashek, from Poland, Krakow".

"I did not know what language they spoke, whether it was Polish, Yiddish, German, but we got on famously", George Lawrence said. "The boys loved sport and competed with immense enthusiasm".

This enthusiasm could even be excessive, as one of their club leaders at the Primrose Youth Club, Yogi Mayer, later found. When he rebuked one boy for fighting after a football match, he replied:

"I have lost so much that I cannot keep on losing".

For fifty years, George Lawrence, who now lives in Roehampton, has cherished the photographs of the boys. Some of the inscriptions have already faded, but his memories of the "boys" are still sharp. Now he is eager to meet them. One of them he will not see. The "boy" who saw his father shot dead by the Nazis, himself died a couple of years ago. But the others, now grandparents, are just as eager to meet him. A reunion is being arranged by Ben Helfgott, chairman of the 45 Aid Society, which represents all the boys and girls who came to Britain 50 years ago. The "boys" believe they owe a great deal to games master, George Lawrence, as they successfully struggled to start a fruitful new life in London and elsewhere, becoming doctors, dentists, university lecturers, manufacturers and, in one case, a champion bridge player. Learning to play the game, they became well-adjusted British citizens in abundance, the love, freedom and opportunities they found in their adoptive country.

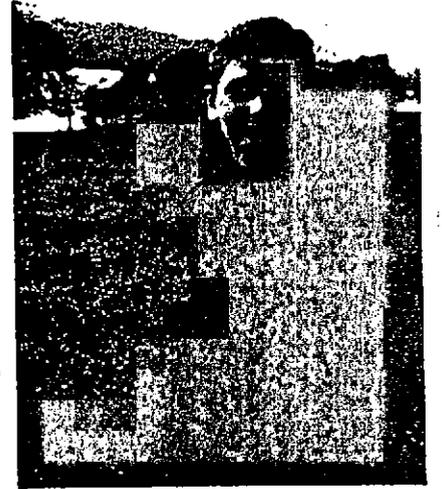
THESE PICTURES WERE GIVEN TO GEORGE LAWRENCE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1941
THE WAY WE WERE IN THE AUTUMN OF 1941



MARTIN HOFFMAN
World renowned Bridge Player.



MONIEK SZOTLAND
(Where is he now?)



SZLAMEK WINOGRODZKI.
(Gary Wino).



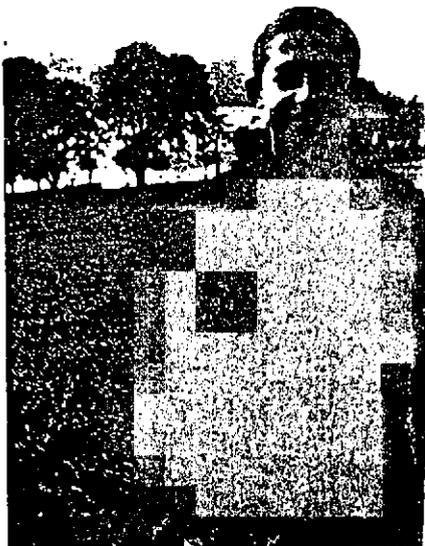
DAVID HIRSHFIELD.



JEFF FRYDMAN



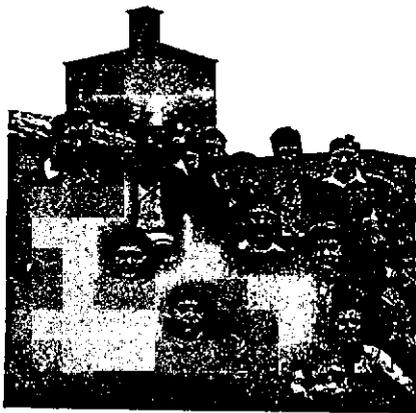
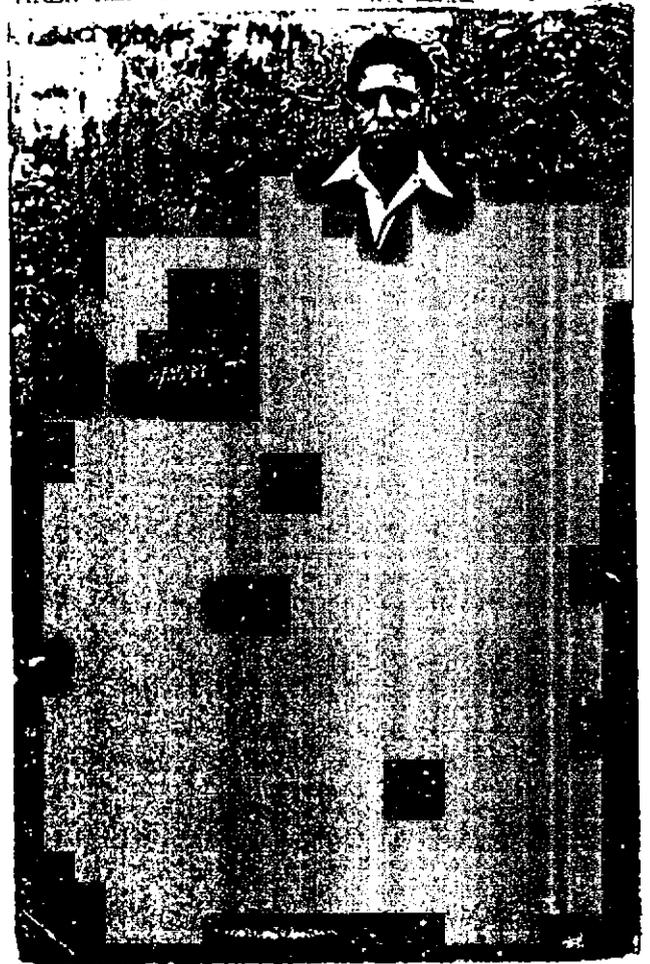
"BABY" ROZENBERG



JASIEK KURTZ (Deceased).



AREK HERSZLIKOWICZ. (ERIC HERSH).



CAN YOU RECOGNISE YOURSELF?



SEVEK WAJCENBLIT & ABY ELKIENBAUM

WINDERMERE '45

BERISH LERNER

It was during the recent fiftieth Anniversary Dinner of The '45 Aid Society, when, to my delight, I met many of "My Boys" for the first time since leaving Windermere. Suddenly, the past fifty years were condensed into only a few years, and both mind and memory went back to the year 1945. To my great surprise and pleasure I found myself face to face with the "Boys". Many of them I recognised immediately, particularly those whose essential facial features had not changed but rather aged.

At first sight I was emotionally so overwhelmed at seeing once again so many familiar faces, now matured and self-assured with an air of achievement. It took some time for me to focus, identify and mentally absorb, that these mature parents and grandparents, successful businessmen, professionals and academics were the same young boys I had become so fond of in Windermere.

During the dinner on that memorable evening, my thoughts went back to the time when I first got involved in Jewish Relief work in 1945. It was towards the end of the European war and, in particular, after the liberation of Auschwitz in January '45. By this time more detailed news had filtered through, both by way of newspaper reports and cinema newsreels. This revealed the horrific events and destruction of our people in Europe as the allied armies liberated the various concentration camps. I volunteered with an organisation then known as "The Jewish Committee For Relief Abroad" whose task it was to send educationalists, teachers and students, to camps in Europe. This was in order to help with the physical, emotional, as well as the educational rehabilitation of the survivors from the greatest tragedy which befell our people.

The committee had arranged a number of seminars to instruct and train our volunteers. Whilst some of the volunteers had already gone to a number of camps months before, it was during the month of July that we were informed that through the efforts of the Central British Fund, the British Home Office had given its consent to admit several hundred young survivors into the UK, and that the arrivals would be placed in the MAP (Ministry of Aircraft Production) hostel in Windermere. My instructions were to travel to Windermere on 6 July '45, and, together with other staff, to prepare and await the arrival of the children of the Theresienstadt transport.

The 6 July was a very eventful date. I boarded a train from Manchester to the Lake District. On the way to the station, I bought a "News Chronicle" for a penny, which had as its large headline "Atom Bomb Dropped on Hiroshima". People, who at the time read this or similar headlines in other newspapers, did not realise the significance of this momentous event nor the ramifications for years to come.

From the day of my arrival at the MAP establishment where some other staff had assembled, we spent an enjoyable time whilst awaiting the boys and girls. I think back with nostalgia to that first peaceful summer after the end of the war. Because of the delayed arrival of the youngsters, we had plenty of time on our hands and made the most use of sightseeing in the surrounding beauty spots and lakes such as Ambleside, Bowness, Grassmere and other sights.

In spite of this enjoyable interlude, we were getting impatient and anxious to come to grips with the rescue work we had volunteered for. No wonder, therefore, that on "D" day, the 14 August, when at long last we were informed that the Theresienstadt children would be arriving that evening at the airport in Carlisle, there was great excitement and anticipation amongst the staff.

During the waiting period, we had many discussions and numerous questions were raised; how would we be able to cope with these traumatised youngsters who had been subjected for almost five years of persecution and witnessed wholesale murder, most of whom had lost parents and families? We asked ourselves whether we could succeed at all in bringing back to them some semblance of what was considered "normal".

To me in particular as well as to other religious Madrichim, there were additional questions which we discussed amongst ourselves. How would the survivors react to our attempts in reintroducing Jewish traditions, which they were forced to leave behind when leaving their homes, which, in most cases, had been of a traditional Jewish background with observance of Kashrut, Shabbat and Festivals? What feeling would a Siddur, Chumash and Tallit evoke? Would the boys, without being pressured, join a Minyan for Tefillah? Or would they resent being influenced to lead a traditional Jewish life once again which, for most of them, ceased in the ghettos and concentration camps. These and many other problems occupied our minds when the first buses, with their precious cargo, arrived.

The arrivals were mostly boys and, together with a few girls, were led into the large centre hall. After receiving food and drinks, some preliminary personal details were recorded, followed by a medical examination by a team of doctors and nurses. I was put in charge of some 40 boys and led them to a block, one of many low buildings. Each building was divided into many single cubicles into which the boys took their meagre belongings.

In a sense, both the location near the village of Windermere and, in particular, the layout of the individual cubicles were really ideal for our purpose, because, for the first time in years, these young people had some privacy. During the war, the site and its buildings had been used by the Air Ministry as a hostel to accommodate workers in the aircraft industry, known locally as the MAP hostel. Windermere itself, with its adjoining large lake, gave one a feeling of a miniature Switzerland. It was in such beautiful surroundings that we were to spend many months together; but on this evening of the group's arrival, my thoughts were far removed from the idyllic countryside, for it took the staff many hours of making appropriate arrangements for the boys to settle down.

It must have been close to three in the morning of the 15 August, after the boys had settled down in their little rooms, when I went to each one in order to have a little chat and wish them a good night. I spoke to them in Yiddish, which was the only language we had in common. I realised then that by my speaking to them in a fluent Yiddish, a bond was forged and I subsequently became known amongst them as "Berish der Heimisher Madrich".

Even during that little encounter at their bedside, I realised what a deep emotional contact was made between us, because I felt that I could identify with these boys, having had a similar background during my childhood, and it was as though we had known each other before this encounter. When asked what their place of birth was, I heard names that I recall from my childhood such as Cracow, Zmigrod, Piotrkow, Rymanow and other places. It gave me a feeling of nostalgia because I left Poland as a young child in 1929, but still retained vague memories of these names from which my own parents and families came and, except for one brother, all had perished during the war. I looked upon these boys as the "She'erit Hapleta", the remnant of my own family. I felt great warmth and tenderness towards them.

In the following days and weeks, we all became involved in various cultural activities. There were lessons in the English language, current affairs and already, at an early stage, we tried to introduce certain English customs and generally tell them about life in England. We, the religious Madrichim, laid great stress teaching Jewish History and included in our lessons and socials a sprinkling of Divei Torah.

I was astonished and delighted to find that most of the boys had such a lively interest in many subjects: they seemed to have an insatiable thirst for knowledge. It was obvious that, having missed most of the formal schooling throughout much of the war, they were eagerly mopping up any knowledge which came their way.

Whenever I think back to our time in Windermere, many reminiscences flood my mind. I remember, with nostalgia, the many happy days we spent together. The centre of the complex was dominated by the largest building, comprising the dining room and the adjoining modern kitchen in which some of our staff spent many hours in cleaning and "Kashering" in order to be fit as a Kosher Kitchen. The large dining hall which seated many hundreds, served also as an assembly hall with its own stage and large cinema screen. I had been instructed in the use of a cinema type projector and had also been given the address of the British Council Film Library from where I ordered (at a cost of 12 to 15 shillings) main feature films such as Charles Laughton's "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" and "Henry The Eighth". I particularly remember "The Battle of Tobruk", a documentary in English, showing General Montgomery's Eighth Army's victory in that famous North African Campaign; the hilarious part in all this was that I gave, or at least tried to give, a simultaneous running translation in Yiddish.

I remember, with pleasure, the time when I organised our choir, which was an easy task because many of the boys were blessed with lovely voices. They are sure to remember the many songs, mainly in Hebrew, such as the popular 'Shomer Yisrael', and Hebrew marching songs as well as some Russian ones.

There was a thrilling atmosphere in the dining room on Friday nights when we sat down to our Shabbat meal during which the hall was filled with the harmonious singing of 'Zemirot'. It was then that I heard, for the first time, the stirring tune of 'Tzur Misbelo Achalau' brought over by some of the boys. Incidentally, that tune subsequently became so popular all over the world that it is now sung as part of 'Zemirot' in thousands of Jewish Homes

I remember, with affection, the devotion of my colleagues, Rabbi Weiss z.t.l., Yisroel Cohen, now Rabbi Cohen of Jerusalem, Trude, the nurse who became his wife, the late Chava Nissell, Heini and numerous others whose names sadly I cannot recall. They each, in their own way, gave of themselves and contributed so much to the rehabilitation of the "Windermere Boys" and later on continued in hostels in Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Southampton, Hemel Hempstead, Loughton and other hostels after the closure of Windermere.

After Windermere, I moved to the hostel in Liverpool's Princess Street and finally joined the staff at the Jews Temporary Shelter in Mansell Street in the East End of London, where a transport of survivors arrived from Prague.

In conclusion and upon reflection, I feel that no other work gave me so much satisfaction and fulfilment. The greatest reward for me was meeting Etta Zelovic at the Shelter, who became my wife in 1947.

IN MEMORY OF THOSE WE LOVED

BY MIRIAM STEIN

Miriam is the wife of Emil Stein

The quarry was captured and awaited it's fate
This was not war but a deep rooted hate
Hunted like rabbits from warren to warren
Herded like cattle, nowhere to run,
We stood to be selected at the gates of Hell,
From inside the camp came an awful smell,
Thousands of people arriving each and every day

With a flick of a finger a decision was made,
One side was death, the other meant life,
And so we lost our parents, children and wives,
Whole families torn apart at one man's whim,
Who lived or who died, - it made no difference to him,
The constant torments by our captors never stopped
Their only mission was to work us until we dropped,
Hard labour, starvation and daily beatings
Dead bodies hanging were our only greetings,
The atrocities that befell our families
Never to be forgotten in our agonies,
Never knowing if there would be a tomorrow,
Not wanting to think, too tired to think,
Wanting to shut out memories of that awful stink
Of our loved ones last moments on this earth,
To live another day, - Why, what was our worth?
That we survived those terrible times
was indeed a miracle, and also a sign
That we were reborn with G-d's help
To start again towards life and good health,
To a new country and a new beginning,
To work our hardest to earn a shilling,
Strangers in a strange land
We learned on our own two feet to stand.
We set up homes with loved ones of our own,
To build a future from seeds we had sown.
With pride and joy, and much labour
We prospered, never asking any favour,
Now there was no time to stop and ponder,
Too busy building a life, no time to wonder,
How we survived, how to tell the story,
Of one man's madness of hate and glory,
Who was determined to exterminate us forever
And how we faced this evil devil together.
And so the years were passing by,
Memories fading, the past we dare not deny,
Never again, we must stand up and be counted,
Our stories, each and every one must be recounted.
The time has come for us to reflect,
So that future generations may never forget.
A burning light we must all cherish
In loving memory of every soul that perished.
To be passed on from generation to generation,
So that the spirits of all those we lost and loved
Will rest in peace in the heavens above,
To guide us with help of the almighty
Until the day when we will once more be re-united

Shalom.

...

A SOLDIER'S DIARY OF BELSEN

7406789 Pte. Fisher E.
32 C.C.S., R.A.M.C.,
British Liberation Army
17/4/45

To whom it may concern:

The following is an attempt to record a chapter of my life that is bound to have a profound impression on me and those fortunate (?) enough to share my experience. Let me hurriedly write what has happened, before my memory fails

Our "Valiant 32nd," the first C.C.S.* to function in the invasion, after idling for months in Holland, quite suddenly one day left for Germany. After staying for a short while at Kappellen, a little village near Geldern, we packed up again - ready for our longest move to date. We were happy, thrilled at last at the prospect of going into active service again. We crossed the Rhine, exciting thirty seconds - we crossed the Weser, up, up towards Bremen. We stayed the night in a field, nowhere in particular.

How different was this move from any other we had made. Whole villages and towns had been well and truly flattened by bombs or shells. We had seen that sort of thing before of course, but this was Germany, the country that started all this bloody business. Always a man of peace, I nevertheless found myself chuckling - even sneering. "That should teach the bastards," I thought. Significant by their absence were the young or even middle-aged "Herrenvolk". Women, children and old men were the only Germans to be seen. They looked at us as we rode through their streets - studied our faces just as we studied theirs. Travelling at twenty miles per hour we could not get more than a fleeting glimpse of these defeated people, but it was enough. Bitterness, doubt, apprehension and humiliation were easily discernible. The children, however, were a problem as usual. How could we help but smile at them? Running about, playing, even singing Nazi songs (one was concerned with Victory) - they would stop to look at us, smile and wave their little Nazi hands. Further north, where there had obviously been no Wehrmacht opposition, whole villages and townships were untouched. White flags hung everywhere outside the pretty houses and people went about their business in a normal Monday-morning-in-the-City fashion.

Outside the towns we passed continuous expanses of prosperous farms and acre upon acre of beautifulcultivated Lebensraum. Farmers' wives and children stood by their white flags, ready to "fraternise" should we give them any encouraging sign, even giving their children eggs to present to the ever-hungry compo-fed Tommies. Some of our bright lads accepted them

I can't check my impatience any longer. Let me pass over the well fed, well-dressed, well-to-do German population and depict, if I can, one of the most pitiful sights I have ever witnessed. I knew what to expect. I had read in the military pamphlet "Germany", issued to British Troops, that we would encounter roving bands of freed slave workers, all probably undernourished and ill-clothed.

All along the route we came across these poor sods (I can't think of a better term) - men and women, young and middle-aged, straggling along. Soldiers and slave workers, they were making their way home. There were French, Russians, Poles, Yugoslavs, Italians - dressed in their original or prisoner's uniform or in an assortment of rags. Some were on bicycles, some in horse-drawn carts but some were on foot. One woman travelled literally on foot - she had no shoes. Some looked well - but who knows what diseases they were taking home with them? The Mongolian Russians were a strange sight short-legged and poker-faced. They were the first I had met since the Caen days, when some of them, conscripted into the Wehrmacht, had been brought in to us for treatment. The hearts of the hardest of men would have melted at the sight of these tragic, motley processions of liberated, weary people. I had to do something and tossed over 250 cigarettes to them - never were fags so welcomed.

*C.C.S. = Casualty Clearing Station - the Medical Corps' mobile front-line hospital

At one of the convoy's halts (natural reasons), there took place an incident I shall always remember. Two Russians were slowly making their way towards us. I stopped them with four cigarettes. One of them, about 25 years old, tanned and healthy, tried to converse with me. It was not very successful. He knew little German, and Russian is one of the many languages I do not speak. Nevertheless his meaning was clear. He and his friend had worked on a farm with eight other prisoners. Three German soldiers guarded them, supervised them, beat them. The Herrenvolk lived on the fat of the land they had slaved for. The prisoners had little food - even eating grass or roots. I gave them two sandwiches I had kept for the journey, a "bully" to the above, a cheese to his silent friend, Mongolian-type. (I have yet to see a man so utterly devoid of spirit.) They gleefully accepted them (the Mongolian's face remaining sphinx-like) and sat down on the verge, after divesting themselves of their packs, to feast on the first white bread they had tasted for years. Each took the upper slice of the sandwich, fingered it, cut a portion off and proceeded slowly (to my surprise), to eat. After a few seconds each noticed that the other had a different sandwich filling, then each gave the other half of his bully or cheese slice, so that neither would miss anything. Such perfect comradeship could only have arisen out of a long period of mutual suffering. Touched to the very core I then produced a tin of bully beef that I had been saving for a rainy day and therewith guaranteed them at least one day's food supply. We drove off, waving back to them.

A little later in the journey we were told that our plans had been altered. We weren't going into action after all. Our job was to be a unique task for any medical unit - to treat the sick of a large ^{con}ed. After passing by a notice reading "Danger - Typhus", we entered a gate guarded by an armed man in a brown uniform. What I saw next was unforgettable. Hundreds upon hundreds of men, leaning out of windows and lining the streets, were cheering and waving. They were a pitiful sight, heads shaven, dressed in pyjama-like striped garments - they were thin, pallid, wretched. Russians, French, Italians, Yugoslavs, Poles, Norwegians - all the nationalities on earth seemed to be represented. We drove on, turned into a field nearby, unloaded the lorries and began pitching our tents. Soon the whisper went round - "This camp is worse than anything we have read about. 60,000 people are in it. All are undernourished, 15,000 have typhus or dysentery, hundreds are dying every week. Corpses lie about everywhere - the stench is awful."

The next morning (17 April 1945) on parade, our O.C. addressed us. He had visited the "horror camp" and corroborated the rumours. "It is unbelievable" he said, "there is no organisation, no food, nothing. Half-starved, emaciated, spiritless, demented, these people roaming the camp have been reduced to animal level. I went through the women's quarter of the camp hospital. Many of them are stark naked and are literally crawling about on their hands and knees, too weak to walk. The bedridden, just skin and bone, lie in their own dung. In one small room were forty women, few with any clothes, huddled together to keep warm. Some of these women had been dead for days - nobody had come to dispose of their bodies. I have seen some sights, I thought I could take anything - but this "shook" me, made me want to vomit. Outside, the dead are piled four feet high over a large area and bulldozers are having to be employed to shovel the bodies into large pits. I could tell you more, even worse, but it's too sickening to talk about."

The whole business seemed fantastic, but it was real enough, as I found out later. We begged for permission to go in and see all this for ourselves but none was as yet forthcoming. Later in the day we heard more details about the "capture" of the camp. It was threatened by our troops and the Germans had asked for a truce, making us promise to take over the camp and guarantee safe conduct of their eight hundred odd soldiers back to the German lines. If we attempted to take the place by storm, they threatened to release those typhus-ridden prisoners and thus endanger the health of our occupation forces.

The situation was comical in many ways. Everywhere were Germans and Hungarians armed with rifles and hand grenades. The territory was in fact neutral; thus the guard on the gates consisted of our own "Red-Caps"* and Germans or Hungarians; and it was quite a common sight to see an armed Nazi walking out with his wife or best girl. This morning however (19th) I witnessed the fulfilment of the truce. Eight hundred Jerry infantrymen and their officers formed a half square just a hundred yards from my tent. They were packed and ready to go. British high-ranking officers were conversing with them through a Belgian interpreter. Soon five mobile Bofors guns rolled up and the crews, immediately on halting, trained their guns on the Jerries. An artillery officer quickly ordered the guns to be pointed in a different direction. The Jerry officers (one was almost the double of Erich von Stroheim as Rommel in the film "Five Graves to Cairo") parlayed with the British. Then one of them addressed his men through a loud speaker, commencing "My soldiers" and going on to explain (as if they didn't already know) that the time had come for them to go back. He expected absolute obedience to enable the conditions of the truce to be fulfilled. I stood there with my friend and our Nursing Officers and smiled at the thought of all those Jerries going back. Of the eight hundred, only thirty five wanted to return to their lines.

Our C.C.S. continued with the preparations for the reception of these thousands of sick. Tons of linen, blankets and palliasses were got ready. The job, as well we knew, was taking on herculean proportions.

This evening my friend and I managed to slip into the horror camp in an army lorry. We saw only a part of it and we were assured that conditions were seventy-five per cent better than yesterday. What my informant meant was that a large proportion of the dead had been buried, and that the smell of the camp was a little improved. Words cannot adequately describe what I saw. The prisoners' quarters were shacks, bounded by barbed wire. Outside, these pitiful wrecks walked about, enjoying the freedom of movement. Never have I seen men and women so thin. "Shrunken eyes, pallid complexion, skin and bone," would fully describe most of them. The others had obviously not been prisoners very long - they could walk as well as we. All along the banked earth leading up to the shacks men and women stood, sat or lay curled up almost motionless, too weak and stupefied to move. Most of those lying on the ground were dead - they sense that their end is near - lie down, fall asleep and die. Here, there and everywhere were corpses on the ground - in, or by, the road - uncovered - just heaps of skin, rag and bone. Nobody else paid any attention to them. The sight was so common. Further on we saw the gibbet - such a familiar Nazi institution. Then we passed stacks of literally thousands of pairs of burnt shoes - indicating the enormous death rate in this horror camp.

The prisoners were dressed mainly in the now familiar striped pyjama-like suit, but some, especially recent arrivals, sported slacks and gaily coloured turbans - ironic in the extreme. I noticed several young Jewesses from 14 years old upwards with the Star of David on the backs of their coats. One of them just sat by the road - staring into nothing The whole thing was just like a bad dream. I almost pinched myself to make sure I was awake. The scene was more like a Hollywood-produced representation of a concentration camp than the real thing. It was too unbelievable to believe. I was stunned. I didn't need to visit the gas chamber or crematorium. I had seen enough to give me an impression that time will never erase from my memory.

Today (21st) our C.C.S. began to receive some hundreds of these patients - all women. We had cleared a number of houses (a temporary German military barracks) and prepared beds in every available space. The patients were first brought to a delousing centre, where they were bathed and deloused by German nurses under the supervision of our staff. Then they came to us, borne on stretchers by Hungarian soldiers we had conscripted as "unskilled labour", and literally bundled into bed, for most of them were, or at least appeared to be, just nondescript bundles wrapped in three blankets. I helped to carry some of them in. They weighed three to five stone - less than my little brother aged nine. Acting as interpreter - I had to talk to some of them. One Jewish woman, aged about 45, as far as I could guess by her conversation (it was otherwise difficult), said, as soon as she was put in bed, "Please, I want to go to America. How long I have waited for this moment. They shot my husband and two sons in front of me." Another said "Must I die? I am only seventeen." Another spoke to me in English. She was quite insane.

*military police

I was giving each a warm drink - it took one woman a full minute to bring her arm out of the blanket to grip the cup. I simply could not look at these human wrecks for more than a few seconds. I found my eyes filling with tears, and had to turn away from my soldier-comrades. These women were not easily distinguishable - the same formula applied to them all, from the neck downwards - just human skeletons. I hope none of them look at a mirror for the next month, at least. To see themselves would certainly treble their grief. Some of them are beyond human aid and will soon die. But they are happy and look forward to living again even though they might know it is only for a short while.

We could not cope with the situation with our hundred men, and we are fortunate in having the help of many doctors, nurses and girls - themselves prisoners in the camp.

Near our field there is a large German Military Hospital from which we have requisitioned stocks of food, linen and blankets. It is almost unbelievable that they should have been feeding so well, and that only a mile away thousands were starving. The hospital personnel claim to have had no knowledge of the situation in the concentration camp. One of the doctors said to me "If I, even I, a doctor, tried to enter the camp I would have been shot. Similarly if I had even talked about it."

Yesterday at 6.30 am while we were shaving, three German fighters dived out of the low-hanging clouds and sprayed the Field Ambulance's tents, just fifty yards from us, with cannon-fire. We all stood and watched, rather stupefied. The red crosses were on the ground, for all to see - it couldn't be true. Our C.C.S. was untouched. The Field Ambulance's tents were riddled. Luckily only four men were wounded - one very seriously. He has since died. Such is life

Since yesterday I have been in charge of a house, holding one hundred and fifty patients, in one of the many blocks of houses being used as the hospital.

The following system has been adopted. Every day, roughly 500 sick (all women) from those who it is thought have some chance of recovering, are brought out of the horror camp to us via the delousing centre. Every day the houses are being hurriedly equipped with beds or improvised straw-filled mattresses. I cannot, simply cannot adequately describe these women - most ghastly sights. Nearly all of them have diarrhoea which is making everything dirty and smelly. All cry out in four or five different languages for hundreds of things they want. Lice are crawling over many of them. We literally shower the anti-lice powder over them. Every now and then one of them dies. The houses are staffed by one male or female doctor and eight nurses or helpers - all ex-internees of the horror camp. All have only recently recovered from typhus and/or dysentery themselves and are still weak. The clearing and corpse-removing etc., is done by Hungarian soldiers whose assistance has been extraordinarily helpful, slow and indolent though they were at first. I have never known such hectic times. I work from 8 am until 6 pm almost without stopping. We are short of so much, mainly staff and labour. However, gradually, things are beginning to look better. This morning I found two corpses and nine more died today. The bodies are a ghastly sight - skin stretched tightly over bone. Red Cross workers have come to help (and sometimes hinder). I suppose we must be grateful for any kind of help. The task is so gigantic.

This afternoon my friend and I got into No. 1 Camp once more. I shall never go there again. I cannot bear the scene nor the stench. I watched these people - one could almost see them dying as they stood or walked. One girl took two minutes to climb one step to the hut door. She staggered back once and managed it, the second time. The one thing I saw that pleased me was the S.S. men being bullied into work. They collect dead and infected clothing - push their carts by hand and throw the mixed loads into enormous mass graves (5,000 bodies each). All the time our armed troops shout at them, kick them, threaten them, never letting them stop for a moment. What horrible types they were - these S.S! - with their Hollywoodian criminal features. They are being shown no quarter - they know what end is in store for them when their work is finished. One of them, pointed out to me, was previously Commandant of a Polish Concentration Camp.

A film unit, making a propaganda film for compulsory German distribution, got the Chief Doctor of the Camp (a Polish Jewess, Dr Bimko) whom I was accompanying, to speak into the microphone. She gave a concise account of some of the atrocities - the gas chamber, crematorium, the gynaecology experiments on women - the petrol intravenous injections of the notorious Dr Klein - the starvation. Her speech brought tears to my eyes I gave a sweet to a young girl who spoke to me. She was a co-religionist - as were most of these wretched people. She was one of those helpers the doctor was recruiting to come to our hospital. Weak though they are - these youngsters are all eager to help. She said "Perhaps I will see you. I am coming tomorrow. What is your name?" I said "Fisher" - she jumped in surprise - "It is my name too!" An act of God!

I wonder how many of my patients will have died by tomorrow morning.....

Today, I was moved to another "house", prepared to receive more patients. It was merely a repetition of the previous days. Dash here and there. Direct the nurses and Hungarians; organise, command, "scrounge". I have never worked so hard before. Each house holds roughly 150 patients - the maximum number normally tended at one time by our whole C.C.S.

We, the R.A.N.C. men, after nine days of this life, are feeling the tremendous physical and mental strain imposed on us by this vital work of ours. There is simply no time to do anything but eat, work and sleep. A cruel and senseless (since we are unarmed) imposition is "Guard" once every two or three nights, when we lose three hours of our precious sleep.

The last three days have been quite maddening. I have been receiving male patients. Of the eight girls sent to nurse, there are but two who know what they have to do. The rest are too ill in any case, and huddle round the fireplace in their respective wards. There are only thirty beds in the whole building. The rest sleep on poorly filled straw mattresses on the floor. Nearly all have diarrhoea. There are as yet only 12 bed-pans for the 150 patients. Consequently, it takes the nurses 90% of their time to give and remove bed-pans and the urinal-and-faeces buckets originally intended to contain food. The internee doctor - weak, post-typhus, is a Czech Jew, who badly needs medical treatment himself. So weak and dispirited, he could only manage to "visit" fifty patients throughout the morning. He had been instructed to ascertain which of two diets his patients were fit for. To begin with he has been equipped with some opium, tannalbin, lysol, sulphaguanadine and one thermometer. I accompanied him on his "round", acting as French interpreter. Most of the patients were put on to diet 2 - which comprises soup, potatoes, bread. At midday, I took my Hungarians with me to the canteen kitchen to collect the patients' meal. It consisted of soup, made from a dehydrated vegetable preparation of the Germans. In all I counted four potatoes. I know our organisers' plan was not to give too much food at first, but I felt ashamed to have to serve this "Meal". Poor, disillusioned men. When they first came - they showered thanks and praise on me, as representative of Britain. They felt, "Everything is all right now. We will receive lots of food, clothing, cigarettes." After the plateful of hot, thin soup and half a slice of sour, brown German bread, they began to wonder. Unfortunately when the camp was liberated some idiot had made the fatal mistake of distributing lots of food to these starved wretches. In one hut 80 out of 160 had died from overfeeding in one night. Nevertheless, those men began first to murmur, then beg, then complain, then become hysterical and even cry, "Let us go back to the camp. We were getting food there!! Do you call this food? Give us some clothes - we will make our own way." How could they be expected to understand that they were being given medical treatment now, of which carefully-planned diet was an essential part? The tea meal (tea plus a slice of bread and butter) and supper (6 pm) - more thin soup and bread, satisfied them no more than had the midday meal. They began to rave. Unfortunately - these patients had not been sorted (there was no time for that, I presume) - thus quite a number who were relatively fit had been included. In the evening I gladdened 100 hearts by giving out some of my cigarettes.

I left the house at 7.15, having stayed 1 1/4 hours extra, through serving the 6 o'clock meal. I was afraid to think about the morrow. I knew there were no fires in the rooms for lack of labour to chop wood and maintain the fires. I knew the morrow's food would be no better nor more plentiful.

My fears were realised the next day. I found that one of the two night nurses had slept all night. Dirty, smelly buckets, blankets and bed-pans were littered all over the building. Even parts of the floor were covered with faeces. There had been no electricity throughout the night, - no coffee had been forthcoming from the canteen at 6 am. None of the patients had been washed. Nothing but chaos had reigned.

I served breakfast at 8.30 am - tea and a slice of dry bread. Every room I entered told the same story. The men pleaded for food, clothing (they were all naked), for bandages, for more blankets, medical treatment. I could do nothing but tell them to be patient. All would come in time. They were in no frame of mind to listen to any explanation I might give of the enormity of our task. I couldn't bear their frenzied shouts any longer - so after a while I shut my mouth and adopted a poker-face. If those men only knew how many years I had aged that day, they would have been sorry for me instead of vice-versa.

After my lunch, always a hurried affair, I came back to find my only efficient nurse weeping. She couldn't carry on, she said. The men had rioted during my absence - had run about, naked, searching for food. They had entered the doctor's room and stolen some biscuits I had given him. They had even snatched a large, quite meatless bone. The whole place was in an uproar. "Food, food, food," was all I heard. Some of the men were quite out of their minds.

A similar incident had occurred in the neighbouring house, where four men had lain, stark naked since midday, on the concrete floor, under the table used for serving meals, waiting for the next meal to appear.

My R.A.M.C. comrades saw my anxious face and told me not to "take it to heart". There was nothing I could do about it, they said. At tea-time, I asked the chief nurse to dole out the food herself, since I would not be coming back again, thanks to my leave being due on the morrow. She pleaded with me to accompany her. She was afraid that as soon as she made an appearance with the bread, the men would "tear her to pieces" in their efforts to grab the food. I insisted - saying she had to get used to doing it herself until one of our English nursing sisters started working there. I watched her mount the stairs and listened. After a few seconds there broke out a tremendous uproar. I dashed upstairs - entered the room and saw half of the occupants, stark-naked, scuttling back to their beds. Absolute silence greeted my stern countenance. I reprimanded them and told them to be patient - we were doing our best.

That evening I wearily made my way back to Camp, feeling, years older, afraid that my family would notice my grey hairs, afraid of what those men, reduced by the Germans to animal level, might do during my absence.

I am going on leave tomorrow, to London, which I have not seen for 11 months. I should be full of spirit, and happy in anticipation - but I am not. I simply feel tired, spiritually weak and depressed

Things are improving daily however, the first of our patients (we have brought 6000 out of the Camp in 8 days) are beginning to live again. Colour is returning to their faces. Some are even walking about, helping. I pray that the same progress will be made by the rest of these unfortunate people. I think it will. It is only a matter of time - but God, how nerve-racking is that time.

MUNICH, GERMANY
SEPTEMBER 9, 1945

This letter was written by a small group of young Jewish soldiers, amongst whom was John Najmann who came from Germany with the kindertransport and is closely associated with the 45 Aid Society. It was sent to the War Department in Washington and to the leaders of the Jewish community in the UK.

The following is a description of the conditions as they exist today among the Jews who have survived the Concentration Camps and who are now in Bavaria, and a plan to alleviate these conditions formulated under the direction of Chaplain Klausner of the United States Army by the Jewish soldiers in the Munich area. The facts are based on personal observation of the writer and of Chaplain Klausner himself, as given in a Rosh Hashonah sermon on the occasion of the first observance of the Jewish High Holydays in the birthplace of Nazism since the end of the war. Chaplain Klausner has not only permitted direct and indirect quotation but requested that in order to acquaint the Jewish Community in the United States with the facts, the true facts, in contrast to reports published in the daily press in the United States. These facts are shocking but they are true and immediate action is required to change them.

There are today about 55,000 Jews living in the American, British and French occupied zone of Germany. 14,000 of those live in Bavaria. Practically all of them have been liberated from Concentration Camps. They come from all countries of Europe which were at any time under Nazi control.

When these Jewish people were freed from the horrors of the Concentration Camps, in which some of them had been imprisoned for five or six years, it was expected by them and by the Jews of America, that everything possible would be done for them to return to a normal life, to provide them at least with the necessities of life on a human standard, to attempt to re-unite families scattered by the Nazis, in so far as the family members had not been killed or tortured, starvation, shooting, beatings, the gas-chambers and the furnaces. To that end a concentrated drive had been going on in the United States as well as in other countries for the collection of funds, clothes and other necessities.

Social agencies were set up for this purpose. The purpose of this letter is to drive home the fact, among others, that these expectations have not been fulfilled that nothing has been done, absolutely nothing, by either those agencies or any other official or semi-official agency now active in Europe, to rehabilitate, clothe and otherwise provide these victims of Nazism - our Jewish people who bore the brunt of Hitler's hate first and most. Today, more than four months after VE-Day, these people "live" in so-called D.P. camps, under military guard, under conditions crowded beyond imagination, with insufficient food (and what little they get is hardly fit to eat) without the most elementary sanitation facilities, without clothing beyond the striped uniforms of the Concentration Camps or what they have been able to obtain under various subterfuges (all of them illegal). These people, who came from all countries of Europe, can, to a large part, never return to their countries of origin, because of an active anti-semitism on the part of these countries.

An example of this is Poland, where there have been pogroms reported only three weeks ago. Many of our Jewish people here in Bavaria come from Poland, and to return there would be certain death, as well as for the former residents of all other eastern countries.

Having no place to go, these displaced persons must remain in Germany until a place of refuge has been found for them. They must remain here, but they must be given the opportunity to live as human beings and they must be given the status they deserve - that of the Allies, who have fought Nazism before anyone else, and who have suffered more in that fight than all others. Instead, our Jewish brethren are today considered "enemy aliens" by the responsible authorities, and treated on the same basis of German nationals, without being given the most elementary standards of living allowed the latter. American authorities here have, to date, refused even to recognise officially their presence. The only displaced persons carried on Military Government records are those who belong to a definite nationality such as Poles, Russians, Yugoslavs, Dutch etc. There are no Jews, at least not as far as official records go, they receive no help of any kind, from the military, from UNRRA, from the various national Governments and various social service organisations. The various Jewish organisations representing American Jewry have sent representatives here. These representatives, due to various reasons, given by them, have done absolutely nothing. This cannot be stressed enough, as it clearly contradicts various newspaper articles published in the United States. While 40 Million Dollars have been collected in the U.S. alone to help the Jews of Europe no material help has been actually forthcoming here at this writing. Why, we do not know. What is happening to the money, we do not know. At this writing the tubercular Jews are dying of starvation in hospitals administered under Army supervision. At this writing hundreds of Jews, including children, old and infirm people are crowded into temporary camps under unbelievably primitive conditions, are moved about from camp to camp at the will of local authorities with no adequate provisions being made for their care. The official indifference has not only been illustrated by the fact mentioned above, that officially Jews do not even exist, but also by various incidents in which military Government officials were involved. It is reliably reported of one government officer (and here Chaplain Klausner is my authority) that he said: "When somebody is brought before my Military Government Court for trial for any offence, I give him thirty days. When it is a Jew I give him 60 days". Two weeks ago, Chaplain Klausner discovered several hundred Jews on a rail road siding near Munich, crowded into box cars and left for three days without food or water. Jews are being systematically driven to black market activities by the lack of help on our part.

They are now in jails all over Bavaria by the hundreds for such offences. Still: nothing is being done.

Nothing is being done except in one way: In Munich a Central Committee of Jews in Bavaria has been set up to represent the 14,000 Jews in this region. This committee operates under the supervision and with the help of Chaplain Klausner himself. They are trying to help themselves, when no outside help is forthcoming. They already have compiled a list of the majority of the surviving Jews in Europe, to aid in the reunion of families. They have done this without the help of the agencies set up to do this work. They are also to house and feed the 14,000 Jews they live in inadequate quarters and have none of the materials which serve to distinguish human life from that of animals such as books and cultural articles, and the materials to observe the Jewish religion.

While no other help is forthcoming, for reasons unknown to us, we the Jewish soldiers of the American Army in Germany, have organised a project to relieve the most immediate needs of our Jewish brethren and to enable them to survive until public opinion in the United States, and in other allied countries, forces official help to come forth. For this project, we need the help of our friends and relatives in the United States. It has been determined by Chaplain Klausner and Chaplain Wall of the 9th United States Infantry Division (stationed in the Munich area) who are organising this project that if every Jewish soldier now in Bavaria can receive, within the next month or two, six parcels with the materials most needed by our Jewish D.P.'s, and if these materials can be distributed equally by the Central Committee of Jews in Bavaria and the two Chaplains, the most immediate needs of all our Bavarian Jews can be met. We ask all our friends, our relatives and our neighbours at home, to send us during the period of the mailing of Christmas packages (to eliminate the need for a specific written request) as many packages as possible with the following materials, and the following only:

1. Clothing (new or in excellent condition)
2. Toilet articles (soap, shaving materials etc)

3. Cultural articles (books, English-German dictionaries, English grammars etc)
4. Religious articles (Prayer books, Talleissim, Tfillin etc)

Only these four categories are of use and should be mailed. Include no food or other articles of any kind.

The packages should be sent either to the writer, who will pass them on immediately to Chaplain Klausner and his Committee or else to the Jewish Chaplain, 9th Infantry Division, A.P.O.9, c/o Postmaster New York, who will do the same.

The need is urgent, and upon the success of this project depend the lives of thousands, not to speak of their physical, moral, and mental rehabilitation. Where organised social agencies fail, it is up to us, as individuals to show these people who have waited for long suffering years for our arrival, that their suffering has not been in vain, that they are not alone. If we fail, we prove only one thing: Hitler may have lost the war against the Allies, but he has completely and unreservedly won it against the Jews - us!

Please help us in our work here, and show not only our Jewish people in Germany, but also us, the Jewish soldiers of the United States Army that our efforts in this war have not been in vain.

We do not wish to condemn any organisation or individual for having failed in their task over here - there may have been reasons which we cannot see. But we can see that they have failed that the need for action is urgent and may no longer be delayed by interminable discussions over committee tables or from pulpits. Help us to act now, every minute counts. I wish to repeat that the facts, inadequately described above (and most of them defy every effort as adequate description) are true, and in spite of all reports and propaganda published by any agency to the contrary. We know - we see the facts every day, not isolated instances, but wherever we go and look.

'THE BOYS' : TRIUMPH OVER ADVERSITY

SIR MARTIN GILBERT

This article appeared in the Jewish
Chronicle on the 14 August 1995

Fifty years ago, on 14 August 1945, a group of three hundred boys and girls, all of them survivors of the concentration camps, were flown in British bombers from Prague to Britain. As they landed at Carlisle airport, the newspapers were announcing the defeat of Japan.

The new arrivals were the first of more than seven hundred young survivors of the Holocaust to reach Britain from the concentration camps. Most of them were under the age of sixteen. Most of them had been born in Poland and Trans-Carpathia. By the middle of 1946 all had arrived, and were beginning new lives.

These young survivors had been brought to Britain under the auspices of the Central British Fund (now World Jewish Relief). The aim was to provide temporary rehabilitation to girls and boys who had been deprived of all education, and all civilised life, and who had been brutally treated and starved for the previous five years.

It was assumed that most of them would go on to Palestine or the United States. Many of them did indeed take this path, once they had learned a trade. But a large number stayed in Britain, most of them marrying girls from the British Jewish community.

Almost every one of 'the boys', as they call themselves, had lost their parents, and all their family, in the ghettos and death camps. There were some who did not have a single relative alive anywhere in the world. The experiences they had been through were terrifying. Many had been slave labourers in the cruellest of the Nazi camps. Almost all of them had been forced to participate in the 'death marches' at the end of the war, during which tens of thousands of Jews who had survived five years of brutality were murdered on the very eve of liberation. 'The boys' are among the last witnesses of the horrors of the Holocaust.

When they arrived in Britain, it was noticed that there were only a few girls among them. It had been far harder for young girls to survive, as they were not considered by the Germans to be productive enough for slave labour.

The first steps in freedom took place amid the beautiful surroundings of the Lake District. Subsequently they were sent to hostels throughout Britain, including one outside Glasgow and others in Northern Ireland, Manchester, and the London area.

In their hostels they learned to live again a civilised life. They had to learn a new language, trades, and to catch up on five years of lost education. The world of brutality and cruelty was behind them, but it was an ever-present, haunting nightmare.

Those who helped 'the boys' in their attempts to return to normal life were a remarkable band of dedicated people, headed by Leonard Montefiore, Elaine Blond and Lola Hahnwarburg.

An important step in their rehabilitation took place in 1947, when a club was formed for them, known as the Primrose Club. Located in Belsize Park, London, it was led by one of the most outstanding post-war youth club leaders, Paul Yogi Mayer, who, as a youth leader in Nazi Germany, had interceded with the Gestapo to help Jewish youth. He now devoted himself to the boys' physical renewal.

The Primrose Club soon became one of the most competitive clubs in the Association of Jewish Youth, winning many trophies. One of the club members, Ben Helfgott, went on to become British lightweight weight lifting champion, and represented Britain in the 1956 and 1960 Olympic Games.

Another of 'the boys', Hugo Gryn, after serving as a rabbi in India and the United States, became a leader of the Reform Movement of Great Britain, and the senior rabbi of the West London Synagogue. Roman Halter became an architect and artist of distinction.

The stories of each of 'the boys' is worth hearing, and in the book which I am writing about them, I start with their childhood memories of pre-war Europe, and end with their lives today, as their own children enter adult life, and their grandchildren promise the continuity of the destroyed generations.

The most unusual feature of 'the boys' whenever they get together, whether at their annual reunions, or to listen to the annual Montefiore lecture which they sponsor, or travelling to Israel or Theresienstadt on memorial visits, is their vitality. They are the most vibrant, energetic, enthusiastic, warm group of men and women it is possible to meet. Having lost their families in the Holocaust, they form a renewed and closely-knit family, with shared experiences both of terror and of renewal. Fifty years ago they trembled in the face of death. Today they can rejoice in life.

On the 50th anniversary of their liberation 'the boys' gathered in London from all over the world. So important is their bond that they came from as far away as California, British Columbia, Argentina, South Africa and Australia. Thirty-two years ago they had established the 45 Aid Society. They do charitable work and are active in communal endeavours. At their annual reunions they celebrate, as well as survival, their many remarkable achievements both as individuals, and in the life of the wider Jewish community, not only in Britain, but wherever they have settled.

HERE AND NOW

THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF BELSEN

PAUL OPPENHEIMER

Survivor of Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen
now lives in Birmingham

The Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was liberated by the British Army on 15th April 1945 — and April 1995 has been a busy month of commemorating the 50th anniversary of this event. I was invited to attend the official German ceremonies in Belsen and the commemoration at the Imperial War Museum in London; I also attended a conference organised by the Wiener Library in London and I was interviewed by the media, including a 20 minute live broadcast on local BBC Radio and a full-page article in the Birmingham Mail. I was unable to join several other commemorations such as the AJEX visit to Belsen, and the reunion of former inmates of the Belsen "Star Camp" for "Exchange Jews" (see below).

This is my report and impressions of the various events -:

It has been a memorable experience, with many emotional episodes:

- accompanying my younger sister, Eve, to Belsen for her first visit and to pray at our parents' individual gravestone;
- meeting fellow survivors from Australia, USA, Israel, etc. for the first time and remembering our life in Belsen;
- listening to eyewitness accounts of the liberation of Belsen and hearing other survivors' Holocaust experiences;
- applauding the speeches of politicians and other high-ranking officials ("we must never forget", "we must always remember", "it must never happen again", "not enough survived, too many died; millions of Allied soldiers and civilians died too, and should be remembered too").

The German ceremonies included a reception with speeches and mourning music in Hanover on the evening before Yom Ha'Shoah, organised by the Jewish Communities of Germany and the State of Lower Saxony, for some 500 survivors and other invited guests; actually, the "500 survivors" included husbands/wives/children/relatives of real Belsen survivors, such as my brother Rudi, sister Eve and myself.

Next morning we visited the site where 13,000 Belsen victims were buried, who died after the liberation — of exhaustion, starvation and disease, especially of typhus. This burial area, with many gravestones and names and a monument, is within the British Army training camp at Hohne and not within the Belsen camp site; for this reason, I (and many others) had never seen these graves during previous visits to Belsen.

The main event took place in the afternoon of 27th April 1995 (Yom Ha'Shoah) by the Obelisk in the Belsen Memorial grounds; almost 5,000 people listened to speeches from various important personalities, including Ignatz Bubis (Chairman of Germany's Jewish Community), Prof Dr Roman Herzog (President of Germany), Chaim Herzog (Former President of Israel) and Sam Bloch (President of the Bergen-Belsen Survivors' Association). This was followed by appropriate psalm readings and an inspiring wreath-laying ceremony by the Memorial (Inscription) Wall.

A central seating area was provided for the survivors; other guests and visitors had to stand throughout the two-hour event. It was a brilliant sunny day (I got a suntan) and the dignitaries in their dark suits, dark trilby hats and dark sunglasses looked most impressive.

Unfortunately, only Chaim Herzog spoke in English and therefore much of the emotional detail was lost on me; I obtained English transcripts next day and am attaching selected extracts. Additional speeches and services took place by the Jewish Monument; although we were standing within 10 feet from Chancellor Kohl (who made no speech in Belsen) and his colleagues, there was no attempt from the officials to speak to the survivors, or vice versa.

Some interesting comments from survivors appeared next day on German radio and television :-

- one survivor still wakes up at 20 minutes to four every morning, as in Auschwitz: "why was I liberated and not my relatives, friends and comrades?": "perhaps I should have stayed there; even in Israel, people don't want to know ...".
- another survivor and regular visitor to Germany, has never yet met one single German who admits that he was in the SS in a concentration camp;
- the older residents of the nearby town of Bergen continue to maintain their ignorance of the happenings in the Belsen camp;
- another survivor, returning for the first time, commented: "the Belsen site looks so different today, so clean and so many trees, almost like a suburban park"

We also noticed the park-like atmosphere and the many new trees (and the birds that have returned since Richard Dimbleby's famous observations in 1945, 1959 and 1965). In particular, we visited the area in the woods where German school children, together with youthful second generation survivors from Israel, are excavating the foundations of the only three brick-built barracks in Belsen; we lived in one of those barracks for more than a year; now there are 50 foot pine trees growing in the middle of these barracks.

There was another reception in the city of Celle after the ceremonies and next day we took the opportunity of re-visiting the Belsen site under normal conditions; there was still a continuous flow of visitors, mainly school children.

Apparently, more than 1,000 people visit Belsen every day (1/2 million per year), to see the memorials and the mounds above the mass graves ("Here rest 5,000 bodies") and to tour the excellent documentation centre, displaying the history of Bergen-Belsen and the story of the Holocaust.

The Imperial War Museum event on 12th April 1995 was attended by some 300 invited guests, mainly British Army personnel who participated in the liberation of Belsen 50 years ago. The commemoration included speeches by Field Marshal Lord Bramall and Lord Runcie, and eye witness testimonies from some of those present at the liberation and the relief of the camp.

The sequence of these accounts provided an excellent chronological summary of events 50 years ago :-

- Mrs Anita Lasker-Wallfisch recited her dreadful experiences in Auschwitz (with the camp orchestra) and subsequently in Belsen, up to the day of liberation;
- Major Bill Williams described his reconnaissance mission to the Belsen camp in a jeep with Brig. Glyn Hughes, and the temporary truce around Belsen in view of the typhus epidemic;
- Mr Jim Wheeler worked in the Ambulance Service, who were confronted by approx. 60,000 prisoners, surviving under the most appalling conditions, and suffering from exhaustion, starvation and disease;
- Dr Michael Coigley, one of 100 medical students drafted into Belsen to deal with the typhus epidemic, referred to the "human laundry", where individual survivors were washed and cleaned and dusted, before transfer to the "hospital" barracks in the nearby German Army camp;
- Prof Hall Williams related the humanitarian work of the Quakers after the liberation of Belsen;
- Dr Arnold Horwell was a member of the British Military Government, which administered Belsen when it became a Displaced Persons' camp;
- Mr Charles Salt from the Royal Military Police had to deal with the looting that was taking place in Belsen and elsewhere (looting was a serious crime, taking things you needed was OK);
- Mr Hugh Stewart from the Army Film & Photographic Unit recalled his experiences and accomplishments inside Belsen, before it was destroyed with flame throwers to prevent the typhus epidemic from spreading;
- Mr Doon Campbell was a War Correspondent in Belsen, with many stories to tell from first-hand accounts.

Two other historians presented similar findings :-

Dr John Fox, who explained the relationship between Belsen and the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" developed at the Wannsee Conference in January 1941 and who also referred at length to the "Exchange Camp" at Bergen-Belsen and the background struggle between the German Foreign Office who wanted to retrieve German nationals under the age of 40, and the SS who wanted to kill all Jews; the Foreign Office was also concerned that the killing of allied (and "neutral") nationals might lead to reprisals; eventually, some 10,000 "Exchange Jews" were to be kept under privileged conditions in Bergen-Belsen, as long as the negotiations with the Allies continued.

Prof Richard Breitman (from the USA) corroborated the story of the "Exchange Jews", citing several documents which referred to influential and prominent Jews as "hostages" and Eichmann looking for a camp for 'superior Jews' to exchange against trucks or even money. In 1944, Bergen-Belsen became a "multi-purpose camp".

Yet another historian (Prof Foot) spoke during a later session, recounting the story of "British Prisoners in Belsen" :- officially, there had been 15, but he had only identified two, of which one had survived; it seemed that Prof Foot was only dealing with British Forces personnel, because he was totally unaware of the Belsen "Exchange Jews", which included several British prisoners such as my sister Eve from London.

Dr Thomas Rahe, the Director of the documentation centre at the Belsen site today, talked about "Faith and Survival in Belsen" (from his book "Jewish Religious Life in Bergen-Belsen").

His immense knowledge of the whole Belsen story is based on individual diaries from Belsen inmates, face-to-face interviews with numerous survivors, supplemented by additional testimonies from eye witnesses and others, and a library comprising just about every book and article written about Belsen. Any form of religious activity in the camps was prohibited by the SS; yet the diaries and survivors' accounts confirm that the "Star Camp" privileges allowed the "Exchange Jews" to bring their luggage, which included printed bibles, tefillin and other religious articles which were essential for services; there were Rabbi's who ruled what deviations were permitted "if life and health is in danger", eg eating bread at Pesach. One group of (Hungarian) Jews in another section of the Belsen camp had kosher food.

This was followed by the testimonies from three Belsen survivors "Inside the Camp" :-

Alfred Garwood from the "Star Camp", and Esther Brunstein and Anita Lasker-Wallfisch from the Women's tent camp.

It would be unfair to recite their detailed individual experiences here; however, their quite different emotional stories were the highlights of the Conference for me.

The second day of the Conference dealt with "The Liberation" and "The Aftermath and Memory of Belsen".

Rev Leslie Hardman told how he entered Belsen as the first Jewish chaplain with the Star of David on his uniform, how he was received and what he saw with his own eyes;

Helen Bamber was with the Jewish Relief group that went to Belsen and Dr Annette Wiewiorka spoke about the 1200 French prisoners that were liberated by the British Army, including Simone Veil who became a minister in the French Government and President of the European Parliament;

Paul Kemp from the Imperial War Museum summarised the story of the British 2nd Army involved in the liberation of Belsen with slides from the Museum collection;

Rev Isaac Levy, Senior Chaplain to the British Forces, worked for six months within the camp after the liberation as the official responsible for the liaison between the survivors and the British Forces;

Joanne Reilly stressed the part played by women in the liberation of Belsen, particularly by the nursing sisters who did so much towards saving the lives of survivors;

Dr Hagit Lavsky and Dr Arnold Horwell spoke about Bergen-Belsen after the liberation as a Displaced Persons' Camp from 1945 until 1950; it became the centre for all Jews in the British Zone, who were not allowed out and had nowhere to go ("liberated, but not free"); the British would not recognise the Jews as Jews, but only as Poles, Germans, Hungarians, etc. who should go back to Poland, Germany, Hungary; obviously the Jews did not want to go back to Poland and Germany; they wanted to go to Palestine which the British government would not permit, until the State of Israel was created in 1948 and all Jewish survivors/displaced persons were welcome there.

The final lecture by Dr Tony Kushner on "The Memory of Belsen" effectively summarised all the previous presentations, whilst highlighting some overall conclusions:

for example, the lack of acknowledgement (by the British Army, by the British Government, even by Richard Dimbleby) that most of the victims were Jewish; and the general reluctance to publicize Belsen and the Holocaust for many years after the War for political reasons.

This perspective changed dramatically during the 1980's, possibly initiated by American Jewry: Sidney Bernstein's (1945) film "A Painful Reminder" was released, Ronald Reagan visited Belsen and the Imperial War Museum established a permanent exhibition of the liberation of Belsen; and many liberators and survivors started to talk about their experiences to interested audiences.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn, himself a survivor of Auschwitz, but not of Belsen, closed the Conference with references to various events from 50 years ago.

My own impressions and highlights of April 1995 relate to ..

- the amazing number of survivors of Belsen (and other camps); but how many will be left at the next commemoration?
- the enormous number of people who liberated Belsen (almost the entire British Army passed through Belsen); and all those who worked in Belsen after the liberation;
- the many errors and mistakes in the stories of survivors, who may have forgotten or mixed up their experiences; or, more likely, have been mis-quoted in newspapers and in extracts taken out of context.

CONCLUSION:

In another 10 or 20 years, there will be few camp survivors left, but more and more historians and academics (and second generation survivors) speaking about Belsen and the Holocaust; it is most important that they should understand and present the survivors' experiences totally correctly;

it is therefore essential for all able survivors to record an authentic version of their story on audio/video tape or in writing — which cannot be challenged by revisionists.

*Extracts from the speeches at Bergen-Belsen
on 27th April (YOM HA SHOAH) 1995 on the
50th Anniversary of the Liberation of the Concentration Camps.*

CHAIM HERZOG (FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL)

"What happened in the first half of this century cannot be undone. For no people can step out of its own history and disown it. It is a legacy which can never be denied. Our children, yours and ours, will remain the heirs of the past. This creates both a bond and a problem; it also creates a duty and a responsibility both to each other and to mankind; a responsibility to work towards a state of affairs in which Auschwitz or Bergen-Belsen will not be able ever to repeat itself."

"On this moving and inspiring occasion, on this holy site, which I first encountered 50 years ago as a Jewish soldier from the Land of Israel participating in the destruction of the Nazi regime, the memory of those shocking sights will never leave me. I do not bring forgiveness with me, nor forgetfulness. The only ones who can forgive are the dead; the living have no right to forget."

GERHARD SCHROEDER (PRESIDENT OF THE STATE OF LOWER SAXONY)

"I have dealt with the question of the concentration camps many times, I have seen the pictures, and have read diary entries and reports. And every time I have the impression that I have never heard the truth about them before. The horror is too great for it to be retained in a human memory."

It bursts the bounds of the memory even of those who were tortured. For me, the most powerful sentence that Hanna Levy-Hass wrote in her diary concerns the women who were taken from Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen in January 1945. They told of the death ramps, the selections, the gas chambers "and ask us silently with their eyes whether we believe them or not", she wrote. "For, they say, sometimes they themselves start to doubt the truth of what they are telling."

"Auschwitz is true. Bergen-Belsen, Treblinka and Buchenwald are true. They are German reality. The factory-like murder of millions of Jews is true, the systematic extermination of the handicapped, the murder of Sinti and Roma, of social democrats and communists, homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses, of prisoners-of-war and those doing forced labour, of hostages and resistance fighters in Germany and abroad - all this is true. All this is also German reality."

"In the soil on which we are standing lie the remains of 50,000 dead from the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. And not far from here lie the remains of 50,000 dead from the prisoner-of-war camp. They were not systematically murdered, but they were simply left to die a wretched death. They were left to die of hunger, of thirst, of epidemics, of exhaustion, of despair. They were treated in a way that nobody dared to treat any animal. When the British Army had liberated those who were herded together here, a further 13,000 of them died as a result of what Germans had done to them."

"No, for us Germans there is no alternative: we must accept history. There is no "yes - but" in the face of historical facts. For many years after the war the majority of Germans desired nothing more eagerly than not to have to remember any more. Today, the majority seek the memory."

"More than half a million people now come here to Bergen-Belsen each year, and more than one thousand each day. They come because they want to comprehend what cannot be comprehended. They come to seek strength from the dead - strength for the battle against those who want to cultivate hatred again today. We owe it to the dead that we win this battle. You, who have all these years found the admirable courage and strength to keep alive the memory of your own suffering in the hell of German concentration camps, you are an infinite help to us. I thank you for coming."

OLGIERD SCHAEFER (POLISH FORMER PRISONER IN BERGEN-BELSEN)

"In the name of all the former prisoners, here and now I once again thank the British Army and all the other armies who made many sacrifices for our liberation. Our special gratitude is to the British doctors and medical students: we were plagued by illness and epidemics and were starved to the bone, and they made us into respectable human beings again. Roughly thirty of them died while doing this, because they had been infected by us while saving us."

"In the name of all the former prisoners, I thank those who are involved in the work at this memorial. In the name of the 250 Polish prisoners of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp who are still alive, I should like to thank the government of the State of Lower Saxony for the many efforts it has made to preserve the memory of what happened here 50 years ago."

SAM BLOCK (PRESIDENT OF THE BERGEN-BELSEN SURVIVORS' ASSOCIATION)

"For 50 years now we carry in our hearts the memory and the prayer which becomes alive so often in an expression of pain and anger each time we meet at such commemorations as this one. Ours is a prayer which hovers over millions who don't even have a grave. It is a prayer that emerges and often continues with or without words, most often in deadly silence."

"With pain and anguish we stand here and shed tears at the mass graves of Bergen-Belsen. But there are so many other Belsens and Auschwitzs, and Buchenwalds and Treblinkas, and Sobibors and Babi Yars all over Europe. We remember them all today, yesterday - tomorrow and for all eternity."

"Today, on this occasion of the 50th Anniversary Liberation, some people say to us that it is time to forget, it is time to heal old wounds. We reject such statements, which are not only historically false, but an insult to the memory of our martyrs, and a danger of history repeating itself in a world of turmoil and strife, hatred and terrorism."

"Do not permit, that the memory of our tragedy should be detracted and desecrated. Let our words become a living monument. From the graves around us there comes forth the silent call from those who lie buried here:

DO NOT FORGET US!

CARRY IN YOUR HEARTS OUR MEMORY!"

MESSAGES RECEIVED ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF OUR LIBERATION

MESSAGE FROM HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES

For someone of my generation it is almost impossible to imagine the circumstances in which you came to Britain 50 years ago. You came as children - orphans and survivors of the ghettos and concentration camps. Only those who shared those terrible days can appreciate the horrors of the experiences which lay behind you.

What lay ahead were the unknown challenges of a new land, a new language and a new life. One can only imagine the spirit, determination and resilience needed to overcome the obstacles which would face you.

I send you my heartfelt good wishes as you remember today those who perished so tragically and those who did survive but, sadly, are no longer with us. I am also proud that Britain offered you refuge. All those years ago you came here with nothing and 50 years later our country is the richer for your coming. I wish to share with you the celebration of your Liberation and look forward with renewed hope to the future.

THE PRIME MINISTER

I am sorry that I cannot be with you this evening for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of your liberation from captivity, and your arrival in Britain. Having been torn from your homes and from your families, and having witnessed some of the most terrible events of recorded history, your gathering here tonight is a wonderful tribute to your courage and fortitude.

On my recent visit to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, I saw in the museum some of the evidence of the torments through which you had passed when you were young boys and girls. It was a moving experience both for me and for Norma, who is also sorry not to be able to join you on this important anniversary.

Tonight is a moment to celebrate all that you have achieved since you arrived here. The achievements of your first years of new-found freedom, and the work of those in Britain who helped rebuild your lives, are both impressive. So too is your strong sense of companionship.

Everyone in Britain can be proud of your contribution to our national life. For my part, I wish you not only a most enjoyable evening, but continuing good comradeship and strength in the years to come.

signed John Major (April 1995)

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF DEPUTIES OF BRITISH JEWS

I am very sorry that Jenny and I will be unable to join you on this special evening. I have to be in New York for a meeting of the World Jewish Congress.

On behalf of the Board of Deputies I extend to you all our warmest good wishes. I would like to express our admiration and respect for all of you who came here after the War from the Concentration Camps. You came to this country with only the clothes on your back, many of you could not speak English. You were strangers in a strange land. By sheer courage and perseverance you have built businesses, you established homes and you have made a great contribution to the strength of our community and the wellbeing of Britain.

We salute you for your courage and your contribution. May you and your families go from strength to strength.

signed Eldred Tabachnik

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF RABBI TO THE MEMBERS OF THE 45 AID SOCIETY ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEDICATION OF THE SEFER TORAH WRITTEN TO THE MEMORY OF THEIR PARENTS

Dear Friends

On the memorable and moving occasion, I write to send you my blessings on a project whose beauty and significance cannot be overestimated.

You, as survivors of the terrible years of war and tragedy, have gathered together fifty years after those events, to give thanks for the gift of survival itself, and to remember those who did not survive. It will be, for each of you, a time of powerful and mixed emotions, a time of remembering the darkest chapter in human history and one which, we pray, will never be forgotten as a perennial reminder of what must never be allowed to happen again.

You have chosen to mark the occasion in a deeply Jewish way, by writing a new Sefer Torah, to which each of you has contributed. What is the connection between the Sefer Torah and this act of remembering?

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Hassidic movement, once said that there are six hundred thousand letters in a Sefer Torah, and each letter represents a Jewish soul. Together, the Jewish people forms a living Torah scroll in which the presence of G-d and the spirit of our nation live in each generation. In the past, when our enemies attacked us, they did so by setting fire to the scroll of the Torah. During the Shoah, the Nazis set fire to the Jewish people, the Torah made up of Jewish lives. Today, in the spirit of the Baal Shem Tov, we know that each of the six hundred thousand letters of the Torah represents a minyan of Jews who died. The greatest act of remembrance we can perform is to rewrite that scroll, to remind us of those who died, and to affirm that something of them and what they fought for and what they believed in, still lives.

The Talmud tells us that in the bitterest days of the Roman persecutions after the destruction of the second Temple, Rabbi Hanina ben Teradyon was seized for teaching Torah and put to death. The Romans wrapped him in a Sefer Torah and set them both on fire. Before he died, Rabbi Hanina told his disciples that he saw the parchment of the Torah burning, but the letters were flying up to Heaven. There is no more powerful statement of the immortality of the Jewish spirit. The rabbi knew that he was about to die. But he knew that what he had taught would not die - and it never did.

By re-inscribing the letters of the Torah in a new scroll, you - the members of the 45 AID Committee - are making a similar statement about your beloved parents and those others who died in the Shoah. Every time it is taken out and read in the synagogue something of them will live on into the future, inspiring new generations of Jews to pledge themselves to honour their memory by living as Jews, proudly and without fear.

May the Almighty shelter the souls of those to whom this Sefer Torah is dedicated under the shadow of His wings and may their memory endure as a source of inspiration and blessing.

Yours, with warmest regards and best wishes,

Chief Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks

50 YEARS AFTER OUR LIBERATION - A TIME TO BE HAILED

MAUREEN HECHT

Maureen is the wife of Jack Hecht who came with the Southampton Group

"It was wonderful just for us to be alive and together"

*****David Mermelstein, Florida

On the morning of Sunday April 30th we arrived in Hyde Park, London. We were still a little bleary-eyed from the reception the evening before, in The Stern Hall; it was hosted by the '45 AID SOCIETY, and conversations had been flying from every corner, by people who had not seen each other for forty years.

Now the atmosphere was more sombre as we picked our way through the spring flowers to the Dell. The skies above were clear and sunny and the occasional police helicopter flew overhead, keeping a watchful eye on us. The singing was emotive and the speeches stirring. How very different from fifty years ago. Later the barriers were taken away from the Holocaust memorial, and with a little persistence and patience we could reach the granite stone. We placed pebbles to mark our visit and viewed the candles. We met friends, embraced and said L'hitraot. Yes, the next meeting was but a few hours away.

"I found the 'DO' very moving. Seeing people with their sons and daughters reminded me of the closing scenes in 'Schindler's List', when we saw the survivors as they are today, with children and grandchildren"*****Nina Hecht, London.

What can we say about the Do? The party of parties?

The jubilee of jubilees? The Committee must have worked extremely hard for over a year to produce such a fantastic evening at the Royal Lancaster Hotel. The reception was a continuation of the evening before; such excitement and tears of joy. The catering was excellent, the band superb and the speeches not too long. We were each presented with a copy of a book entitled "The day the war ended". It is written by our President, Sir Martin Gilbert. He kindly signed our copies. Ben deservedly received a presentation certificate for his unstinting work on behalf of the '45 AID SOCIETY. Time flew by and soon Hatikvah was being sung and it was another 'be seeing you'.

"To me, the most emotional part of these days was the dedication of the Sefer Torah"*****Sarah Goldberger, London

Next day, Monday, found us all at the BOREHAMWOOD AND ELSTREE SYNAGOGUE. This would prove to be a day of days. We were greeted by a scene which could have been plucked from an 18th Century painting and transferred onto a 20th Century camcorder. A young scribe, the son of Moishe Kusmierski - one of our "boys" - his head covered with a streimel had laid out before him the precious Sefer Torah to which we had subscribed. He was writing with a quill pen and special ink which he had made. The sun filtered through the windows and at stages in the writing members were able to place their hand on his as he inscribed. The Torah had a red and gold cover with the words '45 Aid Society embroidered on it, together with a large silver crown. When everyone had completed their piece the scroll was carried outside protected by a chupa. We all danced round it to the accompaniment of an electronic keyboard. Later the scroll was taken into the shul where a dedication service by Rabbi Plancy took place. The chazan was Avromi Freilich, and Dayan Ehretreu gave a stirring address. The feast which followed was sensational. Catered by Mr Reich, the artistry and bountiful amounts of food and drink was out of this world. Unfortunately, our waistlines were in 'this' world as we went home to finish packing for our journey to Israel.

"I had a very good time in London and saw a lot of old friends"*****Joe Grossman, New York and Miami

Tuesday 2nd May*****At last we were on our way to Israel. During the flight Menachem (Wakszok) fussed around us all, checking we were okay. He just cannot relax from being a travel agent! There was a reception committee at Ben Gurion airport where they guided us to waiting coaches. We appreciated a welcome orange juice at the Moriah Plaza Hotel in Tel Aviv and soon we were all tucked up in bed ready for the next day's challenge.

"It was a fitting tribute on a day so close to Yom Ha'atzmaut. Great being together and please G-d we shall meet again in three years' time for Israel's 50th*****Kruklik Wilder, Elstree

After breakfast, members of the Mahal fighters who fought in the 1948 War of Independence, set off for the Beit Shemesh road near Jerusalem. They gathered at the memorial there for fallen comrades. 118 soldiers had been killed during the conflict. About 50 of the 'boys' had fought in that war and the lighting of the eternal flame was indeed a very moving occasion.

YAD VASHEM - Four coaches collected us from the hotel to travel to Jerusalem. The roads there are excellent now and in no time at all we were at our destination. The visitors' complex at Yad Vashem is huge and still developing. We 'found' ourselves in the Valley of the Lost Communities - a cleverly designed, cavernous, brick walled maze. Lengths of slab on the rocks denoted every known community in East and West Europe, from the smallest steitl to the largest city - carved in English and Hebrew like giant tablets of stone. The moon peeped over the top and the slabs were akin to the Ten Commandments crying out for justice. In the central arena speeches were given, musicians played and yiddish songs were sung. Our lost homes seemed to come alive again and we almost forgot the cold night air.

"Such a wonderful display of the strength and statehood of the Israeli Nation. It brought tears to our eyes"*****All of us on the beach

In between our activities, Israel celebrated its Independence Day. The 47 years seemed to intertwine with our liberation. Parties appeared to go on all night with fireworks, coastguard flares, dancing and music. Next day some of us walked to the beach and were greeted by a vision of hundreds of people crowded onto balconies, roofs and cafes. All were waiting for the air and sea display which promised to be spectacular. We were not to be disappointed. Naval destroyers coyly appeared from behind the rocks, planes streaked across the sky - the helicopters gave coquettish bows to the crowd and the paras added weight to the display.

Our second visit to Yad Vashem included a tour of the main photographic exhibition of the Lodz Ghetto passing one eerie sight of a transportation truck, suspended like a time warp above our heads. Our guide was excellent but it was rather like teaching the converted; we had experienced it in real life. Inside the dark hall with the extermination camp names carved on the floor members laid wreaths, lit the eternal flame and recited Kaddish. Ruby (Dreihorn) gave a dissertation and the chazan sang in low throbbing tone. We all felt very close and bonded, standing there, and later in the auditorium we felt proud as Ben presented £50,000 to Yad Vashem for their tremendous educational work in schools and colleges. In our honour a buffet was served followed by a concert. As the first chords were struck the sun was setting over the glorious City of Jerusalem - it felt great to be alive.

"Loved seeing the boys and walking round Dizengoff. The people here, they don't worry"*****Joe Zeller, New York

At the end of the first week the Plaza was the venue for a party which was organised jointly by the Israeli and English contingents. This party turned into a cacophony of joy and feasting and cameras flashed like Chinese crackers. The bewildered trio of Russian musicians played on above the noise and there was a right royal menu of Duchesse potatoes, Norwegian salmon and Chicken Moriah. Chaim Liss called for all the gentlemen to go outside for group photos, but they couldn't decide which group they were in. A familiar story.

"The Sultan's Pound or Pool - this leaves a lasting impression on me - the lighting, the music, the ambience*****Gitty Kennedy - East Finchley

By this period in the agenda some members felt they must visit relations or attend to other commitments. They therefore missed out on this unusual occasion. The entertainment took place in a low lying auditorium with the audience looking down on the artists. It was a Son et Lumier extraordinaire, with President Eizer Weizman among the audience.

Some members attended the Memorial Forest in memory of Polish Jews and later joined others outside the Knesset. Unfortunately the speeches were entirely in Hebrew without headphone facility and this made it difficult for members but nevertheless they were glad to have been there. Mr Itzach Rabin was among those present.

Kibbutz Beith Lochamei Getaot. At 3 pm the coaches left for this special kibbutz. The theme of the place is about the lost children especially those in Thereisenstadt. We were entertained by a harmonica player whose talent had saved him from certain death in the camp. One of the reasons why we were visiting there was because Roman Halter had designed a number of stained glass windows for the kibbutz, which incorporated pictures by the camp children. One window which made a great impression was of a butterfly, signifying the freedom of this delicate insect which was able to leave the horror of the camp.

Roman, who was unable to be present, was represented by his son Ardyn and he gave a most illuminating and stimulating speech.

The invitation said 'Gala Opening of World Congress of Jewish Fighters' It all seemed a bit formal with Mr Ronny Milo, the Mayor of Tel Aviv, giving a word or two and a promise of an artistic programme. We were not to be disappointed. The orchestra of the IDF and choir with Ora Zither and Nachman Godfold as singers were waiting to begin. What followed was a pot pourri of Polish, Russian, American and English songs, together with operatic choruses. Among the audience were several old soldiers, many of them from Russia. I managed to speak to them through an interpreter. One of them, whilst under the command of Stalin in 1948, shipped arms to Israel via Czechoslovakia. Who would have thought a few years ago that an English woman would interview a Russian gun runner in Tel Aviv? That's what it's all about!

WE NOW WERE LEFT WITH A FEW MORE DAYS TO RECOVER BEFORE OUR JOURNEY HOME. WE SHALL NEVER FORGET THIS TRIP AND WE PLAN ON A REUNION FOR THE 50TH YOM HA'ATZMAUT. I HOPE MY REPORT GIVES SOME INSIGHT INTO HOW WE ALL FELT*****TO ALL THOSE WHO WERE UNABLE TO JOIN US*****TO EVERYONE*****L'HITRAOT*****WE'LL MEET AGAIN

THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF LIBERATION
CELEBRATION IN ISRAEL MAY 1995

LOUISE ELLIOT

Louise is the secretary of our Manchester
Group

The trip started from the moment we all met at Ringway Airport. Our group consisted of Mayer and Lily Bomszyk, Mayer and Judith Hersh, Louise and Herbert Elliott, Sam and Blanche Laskier, Adash and Zena Bulwa, Sam and Hannah Gardner, Jerry and Eunice Parker, Berek and Carol Wurzel, Itzek Alterman, Dorca Samson and Hennie Newman. There was growing excitement for the whole trip and particularly as Dorca celebrated a "big" birthday and Hennie's daughter had arranged with El Al for a "Happy Birthday" song and a cake - which we all enjoyed. The trip went smoothly. T.G and the coach was waiting to transport us to the Moria Plaza in Tel Aviv. We arrived there to find a large banner across the front of the Hotel welcoming all the members - the London and Continental crowd were of course already there. Two other of our members, Jean and Arek Hersh, had arrived prior to us, but were staying with friends for the first week.

Chaim Ferster went by boat and he and his wife were in the Hilton Hotel. Even the allocation of rooms went very quickly although both Hennie and the Bomszyk's had wrong suitcases, but eventually this was sorted out. I am fortunate that my husband was a "kinder" and had not been in the Camps, but we still of course knew quite a few of the London crowd but it was wonderful to see our Manchester boys meet up not only with the London folks but with old friends from USA and Canada etc. The programme we had been supplied with had been changed and sometimes, because of commitments already made with family and friends in Israel, we did not go to each event.

However on Saturday the 6th May, we had a Reunion Dinner at the Hotel which started with a grand reception and it was a joy to watch the boys renewing friendships with friends they had been parted from for very many years.

On Sunday the 7th May we had coaches to take us all to Yad Vashem, but we split up into groups with guides who whisked us around and did not leave us enough time to see new exhibitions. There were many tears shed particularly in the Children's Hall even though it was not the first visit for many - it tears your heart out. A very nice buffet was provided before we all put on as many sweaters and jackets as we could as the temperature dropped very quickly. Those who had taken heed had brought spare blankets from the Hotel and as we sat listening to the speakers who gave greetings, laid wreaths and lit torches and then lowered and raised the flags and the singers Urla Zitner, Kolm Choral Quarter Tal Mousseri and Avikotsky and IDF Orchestra, we looked like a lot of brown bears huddled together. Some even then couldn't take the cold and had to go and sit in the coaches. There was another trip to Jerusalem but I am afraid none of our crowd felt they could take it.

However, on Thursday the 11th May, we went to Beith Lochamei Getaot Kibbutz. Unfortunately we were not met on arrival as anticipated and there was a lot of floundering, but eventually we went into a Hall where Roman Halter's son - Ardyn, explained the concept of the new Children's Museum which we were shortly to see. The museum was dedicated to 1.5 million children murdered in the Holocaust and has been devised for a young audience. Roman Halter made the stained glass windows which were based on children's drawings from the Theresienstadt Ghetto. The designer of the building, Ram Karmi, designed the building from a concept by Roman Halter. The centrepiece of the museum is a 16 foot oval stained glass window set in the roof. The theme of the window is the symbol of the children's memoria - the sun, a flower and a butterfly, and the money for this window has been raised in memory of the late Joe Rubinstein. The concept of the museum was of a whirlpool and the paths in the building went round and round so that you felt yourself being sucked into the whirlpool.

I personally would have liked to have spent more time in this building, but unfortunately Dorca Samson was very distressed and I had to take her out. There was then a concert which started with an Ethiopian children's choir which was very well presented and with various speakers, but as there was no food available for us I am afraid our crowd was very impatient to get back to the Hotel after being eight hours without food and drink. However, thankfully, by the following morning everyone had recovered and, as usual, we all had an excellent breakfast.

During four days of our visit we had Mandy Spiller from Granada TV with us and on two consecutive nights there was three minutes of the filming from Israel shown on Granada TV in the North which was very well presented as we had our family take a video for each of us. Before she left for England, we arranged for the Manchester group a party at "the Reef Restaurant" which was between Bat Yam and Jaffa. Taxis took us there through not very salubrious streets of Jaffa to the most idyllic setting by the sea. The fish meal was excellent and the atmosphere vibrant. Every Hebrew song known to the boys was sung by all and even some English ones.

There were only two or three other tables occupied and I think the patrons thought we were all tipsy - this was probably true and we ended up all joining in the Hora on the sea front. Mandy has let us have the full tape made by Granada so that after copies have been made by Herbert we will all have a permanent reminder of the 50th Anniversary trip.

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08/07/95

Dear Ben

As you see I did not forget your instruction to write about my recent trip to England and Israel. The account represents my personal feelings and interpretation, and is my own perspective as the way these events affected me. I like my work, it seems to have all come together and it is readable. I hope that others have written to you about their version of this journey. You are free to edit it and use any part of it that you want, and discard the rest.

I think that my essay tells about how I felt about this trip. It was much more than that for me, it was a life time event that has changed me in some ways for the better. It was wonderful to be with the "boys" and especially with you Mala, and Arza.

I invited Henry Golde to an overnight teachers institute where I gave a talk. I am looking forward to a very busy speaking schedule this fall. I am associated with an organization that is called Facing History And Ourselves. It is a foundation that trains teachers about prejudice and discrimination, and also about the Holocaust. They have received a large grant from the Catholic Church and as part of that they will be sending me into many schools to tell my story to the students. I feel very fortunate that I have the opportunity of doing this work, even though it often wipes me out for a few days. I feel that I have experienced a lot of healing as a result of telling my story. A few weeks ago I was video taped by graduate students from the University of Columbia School of Communication when I was speaking before a group of teachers. They used professional cameras and lighting and I hope to get a copy soon.

Please put me on the mailing list of the '45 Society.

Please give my best regards to any of the "boys" you see, tell them that I am thinking of them.

Best regards

Sidney Finkel
615 Longwood Court
Glenwood, IL 60425
On-line: S341F@ amo.com

SIDNEY FINKEL (SEVEK FINKELSTONE)

This article is an account of my April 1995 trip to England and Israel, the purpose of which was to be reunited with my fellow survivors known as the "Boys". This reunion marked the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of our liberation, and was the first reunion I had attended as well as my first trip to Israel.

I had been one of the original group of young people that were allowed to come to England from Terezienstadt. I came with my older brother, Issie Finkelstein, who, together with the Rosenblatt brothers, was one of our escorts. We arrived in Windermere and after several months of recuperation, I stayed in a hostel at Bedford and Ascot. Soon after, the Jewish Committee placed me in a boarding school called Bunce Court. Having had little former education, not knowing the language and not having been exposed to normal civilized life, I found it extremely difficult to adjust myself to this totally new environment.

It was during this time that I lost contact with the rest of my group. I emigrated to America in 1951 and became completely absorbed in making a new life. At the same time I seemed to become removed from my war experiences. It was not until very recently that my involvement with my past was renewed.

This was prompted by a desire on the part of my son and daughter that I share information with them about my past. This is something I had not done up until this time. This open dialogue led to our ultimate trip to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. A short time after this I agreed to tell my story to a local school.

This was arranged by my son and a teacher friend of his. The experience was extraordinary. I began to feel all of the old feelings and emotions that I have suppressed up until that time. The interest and welcome that I received from the youngsters has encouraged me to keep speaking and to seek out fellow survivors who could confirm my memories as well as add new information. I have now been telling my story for over a year. It is still very painful for me, but has helped me in my healing process as did my reunion trip.

I looked forward to my trip back to England with apprehension and fear. I had been back since 1951 but this would be the first time I would see my old group again. I worried that they would not remember me. That they might remember my most difficult days of adjustment after the war and think badly of me.

My wife and I arrived in England on Friday and went to my sister-in-law Gertie Finkelstein's home where we stayed until our departure for Israel. We met up with Sam and Judy Rosenblatt and the five of us travelled to Israel together several days later.

On Saturday night in England, I gathered once more with the "Boys" (there were girls in this group but the name of our group was the "Boys"). Survivors arrived in large numbers. They came from Canada, South America, Israel, America and as far away as Australia. We met in the social hall of a Synagogue in the West End of London. The place was crowded and I was very nervous. I asked myself again, "Would they remember me?". If they didn't I could tell them I was Issie's younger brother. They would surely remember him. He was one of our leaders when we first came to England. His wife was with us this evening. He had died in 1992. I threw myself into the crowd and began to feel excited. I now wanted to meet with the people that had shared my experiences in the Piotrkow Ghetto. With those who were with me in the work camps and in Buchenwaldt, and on the train ride from Buchenwaldt to Terezienstadt. I had experienced so many lapses of memory when it came to my past, I hoped this would be my chance to fill in some of the empty spaces.

Once again I feared no one would remember me. This kept going through my mind. To my amazement and delight many of the "guys", fifty years later not only remembered me but called out to me in my Polish name "Seven"!! There was a lot of laughter, some tears at the painful memories and much hugging.

We shared a lot that day and it was a VERY emotional and satisfying time. We shared joy and sadness. Most overwhelming to me was that after being removed from them for so long, I was once more reconnected and accepted as one of the "Boys". It was easy to see that night that the "Boys" cared for and loved each other. Our common suffering and experiences had bonded us together.

I left that party feeling happy that I had been accepted as one of the "Boys". I found also that some good can come out of even the worst experiences.

There was another gathering on Sunday which was in total contrast of the one Saturday night. Sunday's event was formal and luxurious. It was held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel. It was not only a celebration of our fifty years of liberation, but ever more. The evening demonstrated to me that we were here to celebrate life. These survivors who, fifty years ago, wore the torn cloths of their encampment, had not showered for years at a time, were now resplendent in their fancy suits and accompanied by brilliantly attired wives in the best that the world could provide. We listened to a serious speech by Ben Helfgott, our Chairman, who was instrumental in making this reunion happen. I was thrilled to be in the presence of the world famous historian, Martin Gilbert, who generously made us all a gift of his latest book "The Day the War Ended". For me, however, the most miraculous happening of the evening was my finding a long lost friend. I had a photograph with me that was taken in Bedford Hostel in 1945. I showed this picture to some of the "Boys". Krulik said, "That is Harry Suskin, he is sitting right over there." He pointed to a far off table. Harry or Herschel as I knew him, was also from Piotrkow. We went through the entire war together at the Ghetto and later Bugaj and Buchenwald. In Buchenwald, he and I escaped from a building where Jews were placed and later exterminated. Harry and I travelled on the infamous train ride to Terezin. We of course came to Windermere together. We lost track of each other when I was sent to school and Harry was studying to be a mechanic. Among the many that I went through the war with, I was closest to Harry. When I arrived at his table he looked at me for a minute and very slowly exclaimed "SEVEK!! I cannot believe it. I have been thinking about you."

We had a great chat and arranged to see each other with our wives the next day. For me to have found my childhood friend was a real wonderment.

ISRAEL

The next part of my trip was to Israel. My excitement was profound as this was my first visit. For some reason I was always somewhat apprehensive about going to Israel. Like many of us, I felt a little guilty that I choose to stay in a safer and more comfortable country like America. Now I was actually on my way there. It gave me a thrill to see a plane with the Star of David painted on the tail. The trip on the plane was nothing like I expected or had experienced before. From the very first it seemed like a social gathering. People standing in the isles visiting and having discussions. Religious Jews at the front of the plane saying afternoon prayers. I had a sense that a Jew here could act as they wanted and be uninhibited and safe. I was watching a Christian minister smile and just shake his head at what was going on.

In Israel the quality of the Tel Aviv hotel chosen by the "Boys" went far beyond my expectations. It was the Moriah Plaza and it was luxurious. Even so, there were many complaints and I began to wonder if this weren't a cultural attitude because it was done and meant with the greatest affection. I was pleased that my wife, Jean, and my sister-in-law, Gertie, were with me. I felt a deep sense of loss because my brother, Issie, was not with me as well, but I felt throughout my stay in Israel that Issie was there with us in spirit. I was very eager to be standing on the soil of Israel and to communicate with it's people. I made a good friend with Henry Golden when I found out that he lives in Appleton, Wisconsin and likes to walk as I do. We also found that we both make talks in schools about our experiences. We walked through the streets of Tel Aviv and seldom would we reach our destination. As we walked we would stop and speak with people. Most of our conversations were in Yiddish. The Israeli were eager to talk with us and to tell us their stories. For me, every encounter was an adventure in itself.

When taking a bus back to our Hotel we witnessed a verbal exchange between a passenger and the driver of the bus. The strange thing was that after each one had their say, they remained friends.

Israel's 47 years of independence was extremely meaningful to me also. I watched the fly-by of the Air Force with a feeling of awe, especially when one of the jet fighters turned on its after burners making a very powerful roar. It made me think of when I was in the war and how powerless I felt. The Germans had all the power and I had none. I felt so helpless then, but here in the State of Israel, I felt a great sense of power and it was Jewish. I remember that when I was in Windermere we were shown a movie of Tel Aviv and all of a sudden we saw the Israeli flag on the screen. There was a spontaneous cry from all of us watching. I reminded myself of that moment as I gazed at the young Israeli soldiers and the guns that they carried on them.

All the events that we participated in, like going to Jerusalem to visit the Valley of Communities, the Knesset and so on were all very nice and satisfying, but for me, the part I enjoyed the most was the time that being in the bus provided. It gave me a chance to talk with the "Boys". I reconciled with my friend Herman Rosenblat, got to know others like Mark. One afternoon I spent a whole day gathered around the swimming pool with Harry Fox, Solly Irving, Harry Spiro and Joe Van Velde, our adopted "Boy". Our conversation was lively as we told our stories and I was able to fill gaps in my memory. I discovered that I was on the train from Buchenwald to Terezen with many of the guys who were right here with me in this hotel. To have shared this horrible experience and survived must make us "brothers".

We were loved by each other as we sat in this hotel lobby, in the luxurious setting overlooking the Mediterranean, drinking coffee and engaged in conversations about not only the past but our families and optimism for the future. I found myself dancing in the lobby with my wife and Mala, with whom I spent my childhood years in Bugaj. These are memories I will always cherish. To my wife and all the other wives, I want to send a special thank you. You had the patience and understanding to know how important it was for the boys to spend time together.

Meeting Rabbi Lau the Chief Rabbi of Israel

Since learning that Rabbi Lau was a fellow Piotrkowski and that we were together in Buchenwaldt, I had a strong desire to meet him. I cannot explain why this was important to me since I am not religious and neither was my family.

It was on our last day in Israel that the Rabbi made an appearance at Kibbutz. I waited until he finished his address and while the stage was being rearranged for a choir, the Rabbi sat down in the front row. Even though I was nervous, I decided that this was my chance to meet this famous person. I went up to him and told him that I was born in Piortkow and that we had been in the camp together. He asked my name and then stood up and embraced me. We talked for a minute and I thanked him. We were a real contrast. I was in shorts and a red sport shirt. Rabbi Lou was in his traditional hat, beard, suit and tie.

In my excitement at this meeting I had forgotten to have my picture taken with him. I grabbed my friend Herman Rosenblat and handed him my camera. "Come on Herman, you are going to take a picture of me with the Rabbi." We made our way back to the front and the Rabbi kindly stood up again and now I have my picture. The fifteen days of my trip were extremely exciting and rewarding for me. It was my first reunion with the "Boys", most of whom I had not seen for more than fifty years. Also, it was my first trip to Israel in the company of two hundred fellow survivors.

Now that I am back home, I keep going over those days in my mind. The ones spent in England and in Israel and of the time spent with my friends. For me, this was a totally unique experience. I felt I was reconnecting with a past that I had tried for so long to forget and ignore. I was thankful that at long last I could claim my heritage and be able to love the people that were in many ways responsible for my survival in the war. Now, when I think of Israel and the reunion, a warm feeling of gratitude comes over me. I know that this re-connection with my past has helped on my journey of healing to become whole. I am very grateful for that also.

To The '45 Reunion:

What a great reunion it was! It was like seeing members of our family, our "boys and girls." We were so excited to see one another, we stayed up till late hours in the hotel lobby, good naturedly kidding around, not wanting to miss a moment of the fun.

Occasionally there was sadness, as at Yad Vashem, and also as we paused to remember our dear friends who are no longer with us.

It was a wonderful reunion. I am very glad that we were a part of it and want to thank everyone who worked hard to make this possible in London and in Israel. I hope we can do it again in the future.

On behalf of the American "boys and girls" who attended, we thank you again - and hope to see some of you in Florida where many of our friends spend the winter.

Best wishes to everyone,
Erica and Joe Grossman
U.S.A.

July 24, 1995

We would like to express our appreciation to all those responsible for organizing the re-union to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our liberation; it was a Herculean task and as far as we are concerned, we had a wonderful time. Let us take this opportunity to thank all of you in England for organizing the "45 Aid Society" and keeping it going all these years.

Now start planning for a get-together for May 1998 for Israel's 50th birthday.

Once again, kol hakavod to all for a job well done.

Moniek and Fay Goldberg

A PERSONAL VIEW

MONIEK GOLDBERG

Under separate cover I had expressed my gratitude to the organizers of our last reunion. It was a milestone and I am glad that we were able to make it. We look forward, please G-d, to attending a few more. But, there is always the proverbial fly in the ointment. On this occasion there were two flies.

The first: I was sitting next to Kopel Kendall at the dedication of the Sefer Torah. As Rabbi Symcha Lieberman stepped up to finish an OS "letter", Kopel told me a fantastic story. It seems that Rabbi Lieberman attended a symposium on the Warsaw Ghetto uprising that was held in Austria. He expressed his view that the uprising should never have happened. He likened the ghetto fighters to "Lobises" with guns who caused a lot of unnecessary deaths. I could not believe it. I walked up to him and exchanged pleasantries where I delivered regards from a mutual friend in Miami. The good Rabbi told me that he has had another "sefer" published. Then I asked him if it was true that he made the statement about the Warsaw Ghetto while in Austria. He became quite belligerent. Of course it is true that they were like cowboys he declared. And what do I know, he charged, his family was taken to Majdanek where they were all killed. I told him lots of families were killed. My family was killed. I asked him if he had heard of Rabbi Menachem Ziemba. Of course, he answered, a great man.

I asked him if he was aware, while making that disgraceful statement in Austria, that the great Rabbi Ziemba not only sanctioned the uprising but declared the historic struggle "milheme mitzvah". Rabbi Lieberman became very agitated and said that Rabbi Ziemba never said such a thing. I would very much appreciate it if the editor would indulge me in reprinting the pertinent article about Rabbi Ziemba and the two other rabbis that were in Warsaw at the time.* It comes from GUARDIANS OF OUR HERITAGE a book published in 1958 by Bloch Publishing Co., New York.

This is what I see as a burden that we have had to carry all these years. All kinds of experts about the Holocaust abound; our tragedy has become a veritable industry, for some a way to fame and fortune. These people have told us how we feel; that we have survivor's guilt and how our children are supposed to feel. I have, through the years, heard the most outlandish statements from rabbis and other speakers about events that supposedly happened in places where I was and I know that they did not happen. Along comes a survivor - a rabbi yet - who was in Warsaw and was all of 15 years old at the time and he goes to Austria of all places and besmirches the names of the Warsaw ghetto fighters by calling them "lobises". Rabbi Ziemba, head of Vad, called them Kedoshim. I wonder what opinion the learned rabbis would have of "chilul kedoshim". I, for one, will avoid Rabbi Lieberman; they put people in Cherem for less.

The second fly in the ointment is revisionist history or people who will revise history to suit the occasion. Among the speakers at the dedication of the Yad HaYeled museum was the Polish foreign minister. While he has impeccable credentials, was recognized as a Righteous Gentile, and is an honorary citizen of Israel, he is surely trying to revise history when he paints Poland as a "raj" Eden for Jews prior to Nazi occupation. He must know that this wasn't the case. Poland was a country of rabid anti-semitism. Anti-semitism was prevalent all over Poland. It was institutionalized. Apologists have offered that the Poles really couldn't help the Jews because doing so they risked their lives. But they could have remained neutral. Let me cite two examples that will show the true character of the people from the country where I had the misfortune to be born. Late 1942 I came to a place called Pionki. I was 14 years old. It was a munitions factory. We did not get a lot to eat and I had no money. We worked together with the Poles. During the lunch break we would go up to the dining hall where the Polish workers got soup and bread to wait to collect their leavings. By far, the vast majority would spit, put cigarette ashes, salt, or anything else they could think of to make their leavings inedible. These were Polish workers.

In the town where I was born, Glowaczow, there was a family Rosen who had five sons and one daughter. One son married into a family named Starowieszczyk who decided to hide themselves by building a bunker in the forest. They made a deal with a Pole whom they trusted to supply them with food etc. He was to betray them. The entire Rosen family did not manage to get to the village where the bunker was. Mrs Rosen and her daughter and two sons were stranded in the Kozienice ghetto. Mother and daughter were sent to Skarzisko and the sons to Starchowitz. In the summer of 1943 the bunker was surrounded and torched by the local Poles with the people inside burned alive except for the Rosen's son who managed to run out. They chased him, caught him, and locked him up to await the arrival of the SS. He committed suicide. Mrs Rosen, her daughter and two sons survived the war.

Afterwards, Moishe Rosen, who was about three years older than me, went back to Poland to see what had become of his family. He was murdered on a train in Poland. These atrocities were committed by Poles and the number of incidents of this nature can be multiplied by the thousands. The Jew who took to the woods had more to fear from the Polish A.K. than from the Germans. I know that most of us were young and we were sheltered by our parents and we want to remember our homes and our childhood as the place where there was warmth, love, and all that was good. I do remember it that way. But, now, more than ever, do I appreciate the struggle, the worries my parents must have felt for their children's futures in that accursed country of rabid Jew haters. So, run to Poland all you want but remember when a Jew visits a cemetery he is careful where he treads lest he step on a grave. There is hardly a spot in Poland where Jewish blood wasn't spilled.

*A copy of Rabbi Ziemba's statement is available on request.

COMMENT BY MICHAEL ETKIND

"An enemy is an enemy, and I can live with this, but for a friend who betrays me, I have no word".

It seems strange that Polish Jews, who survived the Holocaust, feel an animosity towards the Polish Catholics, almost as great as that which they feel towards the Nazis. This could be explained by the many incidents which occurred immediately after the end of the war, involving returning survivors to their pre-war homes.

The Germans were THE ENEMY, from whom we could expect no pity, no compassion, and no human emotions. They were like aliens whose mission was to exterminate us, whereas our attitude towards the Poles was more ambivalent.

It is easy to be selective and to catalogue dozens of painful antisemitic experiences, and thus to "prove" how horrible the Poles were, or are. It is equally possible to do the opposite, by quoting statistics of how many Jews were saved by Poles who risked their lives for no personal gain or of simple acts of human kindness. I myself, while in Czestochowianka camp in 1944, would go almost daily for three months, to the Polish workers' kitchen, where the Polish women would give me soup. On one occasion I was caught in the kitchen by a young Polish S.S. man, who reported me to the German guards.

As far as my attitude to the Nazis is concerned it could be summarized briefly thus: "If to understand means to forgive, forgive me for not being able to do so".

I feel that Polish antisemitism should be viewed differently. They were also the victims of the Nazis, who murdered their intelligensia and their leadership, as well as all those who tried to resist them. They brutalised and encouraged all those who under such conditions flourish and prosper. A small minority collaborated with the Nazis helping them to exterminate the Jews and benefiting from the situation. Whilst some others risked their lives trying to save Jewish families or individuals. At the same time, the majority behaved - as majorities usually do - as "bystanders", fearful for their own safety.

The Pole whose house was destroyed had to find some vacant accommodation, which obviously belonged, before the war, to a Jewish family. Is it any wonder that such people, and there were many of them, were fearful of seeing a son of the pre-war owner arrive on their doorstep in May or June 1945.

This cannot justify murder, and there is no doubt that leading up to, and in the immediate aftermath of the war, terrible crimes did take place in those lawless days.

And yet, when discussing Polish antisemitism during and after the war, we must not lose sight of the real culprits, the Nazis, with their plans of enslavement and annihilation. The Poles were their victims also, albeit on a rung of the ladder higher than that of the Jews.

After five and a half years of Nazi rule and on the eve of Stalin's hegemony, it is hardly possible for the population of a nation to behave in a way similar to a Western democracy. It is well known historically and one can see it happening now, in the former Yugoslavia, that, at times of national stress and upheaval great injustices occur. It is hard to judge the majority of the Polish people during the Nazi occupation, because of the actions of a minority.

It is only now, since Poland's liberation from the Communist regime, that one can observe and judge impartially Poland's progress towards democracy and its fight against antisemitism.

VISIT TO ENGLAND OF POLISH FOREIGN MINISTER

JOSEPH FINKLESTONE

Poland's Foreign Minister in London with double task. Poland's remarkable Foreign Minister, Professor Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, has arrived in London with two aims. Invited by Foreign Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, to pay an official visit, Professor Bartoszewski will seek Britain's approval for Poland's admission to the European Community and to Nato.

After many years of forced Communist rule under the imminent threat of Soviet occupation, Professor Bartoszewski was one of its many victims, spending years in prison - Poland is now enjoying a free and full democratic regime. Although many problems still beset the country and governments have come under severe criticism for not fulfilling the citizens' hopes, there is confidence that Poland will emerge as a successful Western-style state.

Professor Bartoszewski confirmed last night that he will discuss Poland's wish to join the European Community and Nato when he meets Mr Rifkind at the Foreign Office today.

Russia is not at all happy at the idea that a former member of the Warsaw Pact created by the Soviet Union is seeking to join Nato. When I put this to Professor Bartoszewski last night he replied, with a broad smile, "The Russians cannot make us happy or unhappy".

Professor Bartoszewski's second aim is to bring Poles and Jews closer together again and remove existing misunderstandings. He rejects totally some Jewish accusations that Polish antisemitism helped the Germans to carry out the Holocaust during which over three million Polish Jews were murdered. He is in a unique position to bring about a new understanding. The son of a banker, he was 17 when the Germans invaded Poland. The Germans sent him to Auschwitz but released him. He then joined the Polish resistance and was a founder of an organisation devoted to saving Jews from the Nazi killers.

After the war he was honoured by Israel with the title of Righteous Among the Nations and his name appears in the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem in an avenue which also has the name of Princess Alice, mother of the Duke of Edinburgh.

So impressed were the Israeli leaders by Professor Bartoszewski's courage in saving Jews that he was made an honorary citizen of the State of Israel - a unique honour in national and diplomatic annals.

When the Polish Foreign Minister met Jewish leaders in London yesterday - they included Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Mr Greville Janner MP and Mr Eldred Tabachnik QC, President of the Board of Deputies - he told them that he wants to establish a world Polish-Jewish forum to discuss Polish-Jewish relations in an atmosphere of friendship and understanding. He also proposed the establishment in Poland of a museum marking 1,000 years of Jewish life and achievement.

Many Polish-Jewish survivors and others attended a lecture on "Polish-Jewish Relations Since 1989" given by Professor Bartoszewski and chaired by Ben Helfgott, in London last night. He was warmly applauded.

BETH SHALOM OPENING OF THE HOLOCAUST CENTRE

JOSEPH FINKLESTONE

"This is an inspiration to all of us, a wonderful unbelievable achievement". These words were constantly used by survivors of the Nazi death camps as they surveyed yesterday Britain's first Holocaust education centre established by two young Christian brothers, Stephen and James Smith, near the historic village of Laxton at the edge of Sherwood Forest.

How could two young men in their twenties establish such an inspiring Holocaust institution without public funding when major Jewish and non-Jewish organisations have so far failed to carry through any such plan? This was the constant question asked by the camp survivors who came from London and Manchester for the opening of Beth Shalom, the House of Peace, as the centre is to be known.

It was while visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem which commemorates the killing by the Nazis of six million Jews, including over one million children, that 28 year old Stephen Smith conceived the idea of establishing the education centre. "I was greatly moved by what I saw and I was disappointed that there was nothing in Britain to commemorate this tremendous evil event", he said yesterday, "I felt hurt and thought that it was the non-Jewish community that must first make the effort to fill the gap. I believe that we may not be able to make a better world but we can become better people".

Enlisting the aid of James, his younger brother, a medical doctor, Stephen began the planning only three years ago. Stephen and James were fortunate that their father, Edward, a retired Methodist minister, and mother, Marina, a teacher, shared their ideals. A large impressive building, with beautiful gardens, which had been used as a Christian retreat, could be transformed into the Holocaust centre.

Stephen has travelled to Israel, the United States and Poland to collect material for the exhibition. The steps leading to the greatest massacre of human beings by a State are explained by vivid, painful photographs and films. The peaceful scenes of towns in Poland, including one showing the town's people welcoming Sholem Aleichem, the author of the stories of "Fiddler on the Roof", are succeeded by the raucous noises of the rise of Hitler, the deportations and the mass killings.

In establishing Beth Shalom, Stephen and James set out to focus attention on education and public awareness. "The problem is that too many people know too little", Stephen said. "If we are to understand the potential for evil in the future, we have to be aware of how things have been in the past, as painful as it may be.

"Undoubtedly there were many courageous individual Christians who put their lives at risk to save Jews. However, these people were the exception rather than the rule and the Church as an institution failed terribly in its moral obligation".

Not only is Beth Shalom a centre for students but also runs an extensive service to schools and colleges around the country. It has produced a travelling exhibition, entitled Another Time, Another Place, which is already booked for most of the next school year. "Young people are very sensitive to this subject", said James Smith. "At times the older generation shy away but school pupils invariably want to know what has happened. They have a lot of mature and intelligent questions. The problem lies in finding the answers".

Professor Geoffrey Wigoder, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, tried to deal with one such question: how could a cultural modern state in the heart of Europe carry out the greatest crimes against human beings in recorded history? He blamed the historic prejudices of the Christian churches for making the Holocaust possible. He praised the changed attitudes of the churches but warned that the existent texts of the Gospels inevitably created prejudice against the Jews. The answer was the right kind of education like that provided by Beth Shalom.

To Bill Williams, a Manchester University lecturer, and Ben Helfgott, a leader of the Holocaust survivors, who unveiled the plaque marking the opening of the centre, the example set by Stephen and James Smith could be of immense importance in changing the attitude of humanity to bias and persecution. "You have inspired us all", Mr Helfgott told the brothers. "What you have achieved is almost beyond belief".

As they were leaving one of the Holocaust survivors turned to the mother of the Smith brothers and said: "We have always wondered who would remember once we are gone. Now we know that there will be many people like you who will keep on remembering".

THE OPENING OF A NEW HOLOCAUST CENTRE IN THE MIDLANDS - BETH SHALOM

PAUL OPPENHEIMER

More than 100 invited guests, including many camp survivors and their partners, attended the opening of "Beth Shalom", Britain's first Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre, in Laxton (North Nottinghamshire) on Sunday 17th September 1995.

Beth Shalom (House of Peace) is the brain-child of Stephen Smith, a 28 year old theology graduate and his younger brother, James, a medical doctor, and their parents, Edward and Marina — a non-Jewish family of amazing enthusiasm, dedication and ability.

After studying in Israel and visiting Yad Vashem many times, the two brothers noted the lack of corresponding facilities in Britain; just two years ago they decided to do something about it and to develop a Holocaust Education Centre in this country.

Starting with a 19th century farmhouse in the rolling countryside on the edge of Sherwood Forest, originally destined to become a Christian retreat, it has now been transformed to house a 1,000-volume library, video archives, seminar rooms, teaching equipment and a coffee lounge with catering facilities; and residential accommodation for research students will be completed in January.

The renovated three-story farmhouse is connected to a brand new octagonal Memorial Hall with columns inlaid with the flame-like bronze "Shalom" logo in Hebrew, designed personally by Stephen Smith; the Hall is based on an illustration of an ancient synagogue and aims to commemorate all those who died in the Holocaust; it can be transformed into a 100-seater lecture hall; underneath is the principal attraction of Beth Shalom, the country's first permanent Holocaust exhibition.

The exhibition is a mini-version of Yad Vashem and the Washington Holocaust Memorial Museum; obviously very much smaller (approx. 1500 square feet), but portraying the same composite story of events in chronological order via a designated route, often using the same familiar photographs and documents from Yad Vashem and other sources, professionally portrayed on a variety of wall panels, including sections on specific topics, such as:

- History of the Jews in Europe;
- Anti-Semitism and the Rise of Hitler and the Third Reich;
- Life in the Ghetto and the Will to Resist;
- Deportation and Life in the Camps and Extermination;
- Liberation and Survival.

It is difficult to appreciate all the detail features during a one-hour tour of the exhibition; for example, a chimney stack rising from below with the first names of some 100 deportees, a large Star of David with the names and photos of 650 victims from Bendzin, the end of the railway tracks and the lonely suitcases; the subtle changes of the surroundings within the labyrinth tour layout, such as stone walls in the ghetto, wooden walls in the camp barracks; there are at least three stops where video films are shown, with sound commentaries by survivors; the dark and claustrophobic atmosphere within the underground exhibition in contrast to the light at the end, where several survivor testimonies are displayed; there is a scale-model of an extermination camp (Treblinka), where everyone went directly from the cattle trucks to the gas chambers and the crematorium --- it was a very small camp, with almost no barracks, totally different from the vast complex at Auschwitz.

The two and a half acre site also includes landscaped memorial gardens for reflection and contemplation, with rockeries and fish ponds.

The inauguration ceremony was compered by Dr James Smith:

- Stephen Smith welcomed the guests, read from Elie Wiesel and explained the objectives of Beth Shalom;
- Marina Smith also recited an appropriate poem;
- Ben Helfgott, on behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and Chairman of the Yad Vashem Committee, assisted Stephen Smith with the unveiling of a Dedication Plaque;
- Geoffrey Wigoder, Professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, was the principal speaker on "Jewish-Christian Relations since the Holocaust";
- Bill Williams, from the Manchester Jewish Museum, talked about "The Holocaust in Education";
- Ben Helfgott, a Holocaust survivor and Chairman of the '45 Aid Society, offered a supportive response;
- Stephen Smith concluded with a redition of "Tikkun Olam", which he had composed on the previous day.

After an enormous buffet luncheon for all guests, lots of talking to old friends and many introductions to new friends, there was still time to visit the exhibition — for some people like me, this was the highlight of the day.

The main motivation behind the Beth Shalom project is educational and the permanent exhibition is designed for teenage children and young adults to visit Beth Shalom and to learn the history of the Holocaust and to have the opportunity to discuss its implications on modern society as part of the positive learning experience.

School visits to Beth Shalom are particularly encouraged, and the Centre's facilities and resources are also available to teachers and researchers on anti-semitism, the Holocaust and Jewish-Christian relations. Books, videos and educational materials can be supplied and there will be a quarterly newsletter.

There is also a mobile exhibition entitled "Another Time, Another Place", comprising some 20 large panels aimed at secondary school pupils and designed to complement the national curriculum. It is a smaller version of the permanent exhibition, professionally produced in association with a local design studio. This travelling exhibition is available on loan to schools and colleges, together with a resource pack including teachers' guides, maps, cassettes, videos and survivor testimonies

Speakers can also be supplied and, in some areas, it may be possible to organise a seminar with a Holocaust survivor. The mobile exhibition is already fully booked at schools around the country for most of the current school year.

I first met Stephen Smith last year at Wolverhampton University, where he is a visiting lecturer on Holocaust Studies, and I was very pleased to contribute various documents and photographs to his collection, together with a video recording of my Holocaust story. Another local survivor who features both in the permanent and the mobile exhibition is Kitty Hart-Moxon

Stephen Smith plans to publish a series of Holocaust survivor testimonies at regular intervals; the first book was launched at the opening ceremony, entitled "Beyond Imagination" by Victoria Ancona-Vincent, an Auschwitz survivor now living in Nottingham.

Stephen Smith also runs a successful confectionery business

Beth Shalom is not open to the general public; groups and individuals may visit the Centre only by prior arrangement. Local Jewish and non-Jewish congregations and societies may wish to take this opportunity; the telephone number is 01623 836627.

SECOND AND THIRD GENERATIONS

Exeter, 27th January 1995

Dear Pa,

After talking to you on the 'phone this evening I felt I wanted to write to say some of the things I feel about what happened to you in the war; things that are hard to say face to face because I know I would get too upset. I just don't know how you survived and how you survived without hate. If I have sometimes seemed not to want to know what you went through it has been because I couldn't bear the pain of it, and to know that you had had to see and experience such awful things.

Now I feel that I don't have to turn my back on it, but it is still very hard to imagine what it was like for you, and watching the programmes on television makes it real for the first time for me. Words cannot condemn enough what the Germans did to you, my grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, all the people who were persecuted. But I know you must be an exceptional person to have survived. It has not always been easy being a daughter to you, and I am not sure how much insight you have into that, but I am very proud to say that I am the daughter of someone who survived and who used their intellect to do so. If it is possible to find something positive in all this it is that, were it not for the holocaust, you wouldn't have met Ma and I wouldn't be alive and nor would Ruth and Molly - and we are all very pleased to be here. When they are old enough I will tell them about what you lived through, in the hope that it will make them more sensitive to the danger of prejudice and racism in all its forms, just as, I think, your experience has made me more aware of it.

I wish that there was something I could do to take away the fearful memories so that you could sleep peacefully and be less anxious when awake, but I know I can't. Perhaps knowing that I am trying to understand your pain will help just a little bit.

With much love,

Shira

CONTINUING MEMORIES - THE LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST

TALK GIVEN TO CCI 4th SEPTEMBER 1995

CAROL KOMARONY

Carol has worked in the NHS for almost thirty years as a general nurse, psychiatric nurse and a midwife. She currently works for the Open University as a Research Fellow in the School of Health and Social Welfare. As well as being Jim's daughter, she is the mother of a son and daughter.

When I went to Belsen on 2nd May to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the liberation, I had to ask myself, "What is a non-Jewish pacifist doing in a group of ex-servicemen and women?" In this congregation today I have to ask myself what is a person with no religious belief doing in a Christian and Jewish gathering?

When Mala asked me to talk, I was worried about this lack of fit. But, as you see, I said "Yes". There were two main reasons for this: First of all, I would find it very difficult, but not impossible to say "no" to one of the most beautiful and courageous women I know, and those of you who know Mala will know exactly what I mean. Mala would not ask me to do anything inappropriate. So if Mala thought I should do this who was I to argue? Secondly, it is vitally important that the holocaust remains a living memory, and my talk is about memories.

I had always felt a powerful personal connection with the holocaust, therefore when my dad told Anthony, his grandson, the story of his wartime experience for a school history project, and that story included his account of Belsen, then I was not at all surprised. I think I had been living with the unconscious memory of it. It seems that after the War my father talked nonstop about what he saw at Belsen, and then stopped and never mentioned it again, until he was invited to do so by my nephew.

My father was someone I was very proud of. He was very gentle, funny and kind. But he had an almost obsessive pre-occupation with safety and he saw danger in everything. Of course my sister and I did not grow up with the same sense of caution that he tried to instil in us. We rejected his fears as unfounded, but I know now that his fears were real, because he had seen what can happen. As a consequence he devoted a large amount of time to telling his family to be careful, especially me as "the baby". Until a few years ago there was nothing unusual in getting a phone call at about 10 pm saying, "Have you locked your door, Carol? You never know who's out there, be careful." Frequent presents were padlocks, bolts and torches. Of course, when I understood why he was doing this it was too late.

He was dying when he talked to me for the first time about Belsen. He had cancer and was taking on the appearance of a victim of starvation. He was pale, emaciated and had a piercing look of fear in his eyes. It struck me quite vividly then that I had to acknowledge what he had witnessed. There was to be a permanent memorial to Belsen erected in the Imperial War Museum. Peter, my partner, made connections with a Jewish group and, through Ben, we met his sister Mala. Eventually a very important meeting took place between Mala and my father, and although neither of them spoke of Belsen, there were obviously unspoken memories being shared. My dad was very impressed with Mala (and Maurice) and spoke of her with great pride and affection. He kept saying how amazed he was that someone who had suffered so dreadfully should come and see him, who had only been there very briefly and had done nothing.

The following account is one that he read to me. It took him a long time. Not only was he on very large doses of Morphine, but he cried a lot and had to keep stopping. I also cried as I listened, but mostly I wanted to scream.

"I have been thinking over my wartime memories recently as I approach my 70th birthday. Sometimes the memories come clearly but one will always live with me and that is the memory of my visit to Belsen camp.

I served with the 2nd Tactical Air Force (309 Squadron) during the war. As we travelled through Germany on the "Big Push", we were confronted by the ordeal of seeing Belsen camp. I remember clearly we were in a convoy and were told by our commanding officer that some kind of camp was concealed nearby.

We ourselves were camped almost next to it in a forest, and we were told that we were free to go into the camp and look around but it would be at our own risk. There was a serious risk of infection, especially Typhus. There were "displaced" persons walking around our camp in strange pin-striped clothes. They were begging for food and eating from dustbins. From our camp in a small convoy, I drove a truck along a dirt track through some dense forest into the camp to deliver some flour and water. My friend and I were not prepared for what we saw. I could not believe the size and the state of these people as they came over and began to scramble for a drink of water. Their eyes bulged out of their bony skulls, they looked like ghosts. I was with my mate; we didn't know what to do or say. They were in a terrible state, just skeletons not knowing where to go. With gestures, they begged us to take them with us, but we couldn't. They didn't understand why not. My thoughts were, how could this happen to these people? I was very frightened and all my friends were appalled. We were told that the SS were to blame for all their terrible suffering. I saw a baby who was really a small child and a very old woman who was a young girl. The sight was unbelievable. There were open graves with thousands of bodies in them, both men and women. The smell of all the corpses was terrible. There was a barn containing bodies stacked twenty high!

There were open latrines with dead bodies on them where people had just died on the toilet. We wanted to do something; to do our best to bring a little hope to them. We shared our cigarettes and some chocolate we had from our rations. My pal was Welsh and could sing, so he sang to them and I remember smiles appeared on their faces for the first time as he sang to them. We said good-bye to those smiling faces. We only camped there for 36 hours. I often wondered what had taken place before Belsen was liberated. What was it that made the SS behave so terribly? Later we heard of all the other camps.

I prayed that those who were lucky enough to have found their way back to their homeland found happiness. I cannot forget the sights I saw. We had many a bad time, but Belsen will always live with me as my worst experience.

Even after so many years, it is hard to forgive what happened there and to the many millions more in other camps. My prayers go out to all the victims. I hope the guilty were brought to justice. I often wonder is it still standing for the world to witness?"

James Gilmore
2/4/91

I asked my dad how it affected him now and he replied,

"The worst part is trying to understand how someone could do this to another human being. Trying to understand that cruelty. But the sight is there every time I shut my eyes. I tried to forget but I can't."

We talked about it then. There were two things which haunted him most, now that he was dying. Not being able to take those people with him who were begging him to do so, but worse than that, the knowledge that people were capable of doing that to others.

Mala's visit and subsequent letters helped him with the former

It seemed appropriate that this year I should go to Belsen to acknowledge the anniversary on his behalf and see it for myself.

Mala arranged the visit through AJEX and Peter, my partner, came with me.

I have lots of memories of that day. One is of the tolerance and acceptance of us as strangers, by the people with whom we travelled. Another memory is being received in Germany by very young British Officers and no-one else. The service at Belsen was very dignified and appropriate, and also at times incredibly moving.

On the way back, people relaxed and there was a lot of laughter and that was OK.

The outstanding incidents were:- A woman who was going back for the first time, and who had great difficulty going into the camp. Somehow she found the courage to do so. Her health was poor, but she had gone to try to find her mother's grave who had died 2 weeks after the liberation, leaving her daughter alone.

As I walked into the camp I felt as if my skin was being ripped off. It was intensely physically painful and quite terrifying. I was afraid to cry in case I couldn't stop. But there was no option not to cry!

The camp was enormous and the size of the graves beyond imagination. It was a sterile place, in that there was no evidence of the nightmare, except in the museum. But it wasn't beyond my imagination because there was this frail, heartbroken woman in our group, who was conquering immense fear and panic.

I know from Mala some of the details of what happened to her, both before going there and inside the camp. As we approached through the forest, and as I stood there in front of the mass graves, I tried to imagine what my father had seen.

Looking at those who were paying tribute to those who died I saw that they themselves were ageing and recognised the possibility that these living memories will come to an end. I suddenly felt afraid of that loss and realised that we must not forget! We have a responsibility not to. We must not let those who died cease to exist!

Primo Levi said,

"We, the survivors, are not the true witnesses - the true witnesses - those, that is, in full possession of the terrible truth - are the drowned, the submerged, the annihilated. They were not merely destroyed, they were blotted out of existence - we speak in their stead by proxy."

On the journey home from Belsen I had a long discussion with an ex-serviceman, who was disgusted by the sanitisation of the camp. The removal of the nightmare. He felt that it was possible to go there and not know what the place had been.

It seemed to me appropriate that it was like this, because the holocaust was a cold, brutal, systematic programme of genocide. The product of Belsen was death. The month before the liberation 17,000 people died/were killed.

When we reached the back of Stanstead Airport the serviceman said that this was more how he expected Belsen to look. This type of humour helped to make the nightmare day more bearable.

Humour is just one method, and one my father often employed in order to make the unmanageable, manageable. We have a huge psychic investment in not allowing ourselves to be overwhelmed by trauma, and the holocaust is one of the most horrific traumas and most difficult to take on board.

I want to remember with you, my dad, Maurice (Mala's husband), Mala's mother, father and sister, and the millions who died at Belsen.

We must look at the details, hear people's stories, while they are still alive to tell them, and repeat their memories. Those who were witnesses cannot forget. We must not forget! To answer the question I began this talk with, that is what someone like me is doing here!

A JOURNEY WITH THE BOYS

DANNY GOLDBERGER

Danny is the son of Jan and Sara

What would Israel provide? An enriching experience or merely a week's holiday with my parents and their friends. In the event an interesting combination of the two was the result.

For many of us of the "second generation" I am sure that we remember a childhood that contained many featured faces and characters that continually appeared. These were "The Boys". At functions and get-togethers, they were there, embodying a unity of feeling and surprisingly homogenous sense of humour. For me, all these old feelings were rekindled.

There has always been an openness and warmth that is irresistible. This was apparent from the very beginning, where on the plane to Israel, one hundred and fifty people were too excited to just sit still, especially as Yom Ha'Zikaron meant that there could be no in-flight movie. Everybody, it seemed, was in the aisle; exchanging seats; and generally spreading an atmosphere of expectancy. Nobody complained about the rising volume, and the aircraft staff helpfully worked around the obstacles, seeming to recognise the special nature of this group. This is your time.

There were events prepared, and excursions to hand. But the week for me, was embodied in the less than adequate lobby of the hotel. My father's relentless rush to get there as often as possible. To talk with people he had shared so much with, some not seen for years. Stories and opinions constantly being exchanged. I felt that this was probably the first time that I fully appreciated the significance of those first few months in England. There was a bonding so strong that nothing can ever break it. As with many things, time can only intensify a phenomenon of this nature. Despite personality differences, when pulled together in this manner, there are only smiles and togetherness. For me, I felt that I was not only Jan and Sara's son, but in fact, family to everyone there. I may never have met some of the people, but the connection was felt.

For my part, I was sitting with and talking to so many, about so much. I felt drained most nights. Memories are unique to the individual, but there were triggers to tales I had not heard before. Sometimes there was a tendency to try listening to three conversations at once. When I sat down and talked however, I realised that there are some things your own father finds it too difficult to talk about. My regard for many changed a little. But, to repeat myself, I appreciated the romanticism of that time at Windermere, and the subsequent fifty years of shared time, both adversity and celebration. I was always lucky to have hundreds of uncles and aunts. In Israel, I remembered why.

BETTINA FREEMAN

Bettina is a member of the young Yad Vashem Committee and is a relative of Stanley Faulk (Salek Falinower) from Brighton

Here are some excerpts which I wrote for my photograph album and which I think you might be interested to read:-

Poland Trip: 6th April - 10th April 1995

Introduction

This was my trip of a lifetime. What I experienced and learnt I shall never forget. The reason I went was because I felt it so important that we never forget what terrible atrocities happened, nor should the next generations forget, nor the generations in 200 years' time and thereafter for all eternity, so that it is never repeated again. The Jewish people, their Jewish way of life, so beautiful, vibrant and alive, and everything that they stood for were almost wiped out without a trace. The fate of non-Jews who were dealt with similarly must also never be forgotten. The fact remains that we, as Jews, are here today, strong, alive and willing to make sure it never happens again. However, the enormity of the situation is something we will live with, but we owe it to all those who perished to keep their memory alive. My experience is one I shall carry always and will be in my heart forever. I cannot change the world or nations within it, but as individuals if we can learn from what has happened and each do our bit for humanity, then we can start to make this a better and safer place to live.

Lublin - 7th April

When we were in the Synagogue, which consisted of one small room, I came across a separate room piled high with old Chumashim. I have to write about this because it was very sad to see all the old books, torn and dirty and you could see that they needed to be restored. I opened one and all the pages were yellow and hardened through time, however the Hebrew was still legible. In the right hand cover I could make out the name of Avram Grodinsk written in Yiddish and Hebrew. It was very sad to see the books that belonged to these people with their names in each one. One can only imagine the fate of the people who used to pray with them.

When I was in Auschwitz 1, I came across a visitors' book inside Block 24, which was where sterilisation experiments were carried out on Jewish women. I was momentarily shocked that such a "visitors" book could be in a place like this, however I was jolted back into reality and I wrote the following in it:-

"Let the world know what has happened here.
Let every nation, race, colour and creed learn from this.
Let it never happen again."

9th April 1995
Bettina Freeman
Young Yad Vashem
Committee, London

Such simple words, but written at a time when I was feeling such despair and anger.

Birkenau

I will never forget standing in the train tracks at the entrance of the gate house at Birkenau looking into the camp. A coldness that I have never felt before came over me and nobody spoke to each other, just lost in their own thoughts. I was completely overcome. I could not help but imagine all the faces that had come through this gate, unsure of what was happening, unaware of the fate that was to befall them. Little children playing games with each other and trying to make the best of the situation and mothers clinging onto their babies, while fathers and brothers tried to keep the family together as best they could before the selections were made for the chambers and families ripped apart from each other forever. Smoke billowing out of the chimneys darkening the skies and a stench so bad it was nauseating. Yes, walking up the track I could imagine all of this and more, much more. With each step I took I could feel death all around me, I could hear their crying, feel their suffering and pain, see their faces and yet, walking up the track, all that was left was their memory, their ashes still in the soil of the earth, the tracks that took them up to their death, the crumbling remains of the crematorium, the birch trees blowing furiously in the wind, ruins of the barracks with only their chimneys protruding from the ground and Yahrzeit candles, poignantly placed around the camp with an occasional red flower, bringing a shot of colour into this colourless, lifeless picture, for I was told the grass was green, but everything looked black to me.

THE DEADLINE CAME

HANNAH KAYE

Hannah is the daughter of Sala and Henry
Kaye from Luton

He was only 19 years old,
When he was told,
"You're going to die."
It was a great shock,
He could be shot,
By eight o'clock the next day.
The deadline came,
But their game was finally up,
The lad was found,
And alas he was shot to the ground,
He could have survived,
The army did try,
But the young boy's life still ended.
It wasn't intended on the army's side,
All I could do is watch and cry.
The question to the tragedy is WHY?

A POEM BY MARC WILDER AGE 10

Marc is the grandson of Krulik and Gloria

PEACE

On the 4th November at a peace rally
Yitzhak Rabin was murdered brutally

When I heard that Yitzhak was killed
I felt sad, frustrated and my eyes were filled

Yigal Amir will be sent to jail, but
Yitzhak was dead and his face was pale

Yitzhak is dead and buried in the ground
Peace in Israel is still to be found.

BOOK REVIEW

A SURPLUS OF MEMORY ITZHAK ZUCKERMAN'S CHRONICLE OF THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

BEN HELFGOTT

A prodigious amount of Holocaust literature has been published since the end of the Second World War. What is, however, noteworthy is that proportionately fewer Jews survived in Warsaw than in other Jewish cities. Yet more memoirs about the Warsaw Ghetto and the Uprising were published than from any other place under Nazi domination. They all are of great interest and make their specific contribution. However, "Antek", his underground pseudonym, Zuckerman's book "A Surplus of Memory" is unique in that it is recorded by a man who played a pivotal role in the resistance against the Nazis throughout the whole period of the war. Indeed, the sub-title "Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" detracts from the clandestine operations of The Jewish Fighting Organisation ZOB, under his leadership on the "Aryan" side as well as the participation of a few dozen Jewish Fighters under his command in the Polish Uprising in August 1944. The sub-title does not, also, indicate his activities in post-war Poland from the time of his liberation in January 1945 till the end of 1946 when he helped Jewish survivors returning from the concentration camps and Jewish refugees and exiles coming back from the Soviet Union. He was in the forefront of establishing Kibutzim in various parts of Poland from where they were whisked away, via the Brikha, to Palestine. All this and much more he relates with remarkable candour. He agreed to record his experiences and observations on condition that the book will be published posthumously and that he would not refer to any sources or documents but would rely solely on his memory.

Throughout the book he keeps emphasising that he talks the way he thought and felt at the time, trying to preserve the climate of experience as it unfolded before him. It is a phenomenal feat. He brings to life hundreds of names of young men and women, many of whom he worked with in the He'halutz movement before the war, who fought not only in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising but acted also as couriers keeping in touch with the various centres of Jewish resistance. They were the flower of Jewish youth whose lives were in constant danger and most of them were inevitably killed but at least they took their lives in their own hands and died a heroic death. Barbara Harshav, the translator and editor has performed a valiant job in providing footnotes about them.

At first "Antek" did not believe that the Final Solution would take place. He, therefore, directed all his energies to prop up the He'halutz movement. He arranged lectures, seminars, supported the Ghetto Gymnasium which existed until summer 1942 whose graduates later played an important part in the uprising. It was not until he heard about the massacre in Vilna at the end of 1941 and an account of the gassing in Chelmno, by Yakov Groyanowski who escaped from there, that he became convinced that the Nazi's final goal was the total destruction of the Jews. From then on all discussions centred round the creation of a Jewish resistance movement. His descriptions of the arguments that took place amongst the various Zionist organisations, the Bundist the Revisionists and the Communists are very illuminating. In the end a Jewish Fighting Organisation ZOB was founded on July 28th 1942 under the leadership of Mordechai Anielewicz. "Antek" became a deputy commander as well as the General Secretary of the Jewish co-ordinating Committee ZKK. The Revisionists, however, seceded from ZOB and set up their own organisation. No doubt, Antek's version of the events leading up to the Uprising and the Uprising itself will have been challenged by the, Bundist, Revisionists as well as the Communists. They all claim that they played a bigger part in the resistance than they really did. Nevertheless, the miracle is that they could play any part at all, having lived under such appalling conditions and the tragedy that even under such extreme circumstances ideology prevailed over unity.

'Antek' never shirks from speaking out. He is especially very hard-hitting against the Jewish Police and blackmailers. Polish-Jewish relations also come under his scrutiny. He worked very closely with both the AK-Polish National Army (London orientated) and the AL-Polish People's Army (Moscow orientated). He saw many Jews betrayed and killed by Poles, including the Kielce pogrom a few hours after it occurred in July 1946, but he also experienced many kindnesses and was aware of the charitable acts that some Poles extended to the Jews. His verdict was that "anyone who fosters total hatred for the Polish people is committing a sin! We must do the opposite". His views about revenge are equally level-headed and worthwhile noting. Throughout the book, whoever comes under his scrutiny, however critical, receives a fair treatment.

His account even if it is in some case hyped-up and containing some small inaccuracies is nevertheless an important historical document, moving and evocative as well as inspiring to read.

OBITUARIES

ICKY - MY BROTHER

To me he was a man of many parts,
A father, brother, uncle, with a great big heart,
Caring, sharing, always charitable and witty,
He was indeed a man of strength and integrity,
I will always remember the times we had,
Sometimes sad, sometimes happy, always glad,
He was my guide, my mentor and my friend,
I respected his wisdom right up to the end,
His passing has left an empty space,
His presence always felt, his demeanor full of grace,
He was my brother, and also your brother,
We had lost everyone, we only had each other,
We shared an overwhelming disaster,
But he overcame the traumas, became his own master,
He came back from the brink of hell,
With sweat on his brow, determined to do well,
That he succeeded is testimony indeed,
In the face of adversity, he had found the need
To leave a legacy for generations to come,
Icky my brother, I am proud of him, well done!
His memory, in my thoughts, I will always preserve,
May he rest in peace, which he so rightly deserves,
Shalom dear brother of mine, and of yours.

Emil Stein (Brecher)

MICHAEL FLASZ

Michael Flasz, affectionately known as Mike, by his many friends, passed away in Manchester, in May 1995. For a part of the war years he fought in the woods, with the Polish partisans, and also went as a volunteer to Israel in 1948.

He lived in London, after the war, so some of the "London Boys" would remember him from the 'Primrose Club'. About 1952, Mike came to Manchester to work in a handbag factory, and later became one of my business partners, in the 'bag' business, but later went on to start his own successful business.

We also lived together in lodgings and Lasky House, prior to our marriages.

Mike was a quiet and well liked active member of the Manchester group, and is missed by us all. He is survived by his wife Amelia, two sons and grandchildren

Mayer Bomsztyk
Chairman M/C
'45 AID SOCIETY

JERZY POZNANSKI



On the 24th of May the dear soul of my younger brother, Jerzy Poznanski departed from this vale of strife and sorrow.

It happened in a hospital in Newcastle, more than two weeks after a serious operation which had been deemed successful. Disconsolate and distraught by this sudden and untimely loss I reflect upon some phases and aspects of his life.

Jerzy, whose Hebrew name was Yitschak was also known by an affectionate diminutive - Jerzyk. He was born on the 22nd May 1930 in Praszka a little Polish town, where our father was the headmaster of the local school. Our mother was also a teacher specialising in arts and crafts.

From the beginning of the war Jerzy stayed mainly in Piotrkow where he attended clandestine secondary education classes in the ghetto. He had a very keen intelligence combined with excellent manual dexterity. Both of these attributes led him to be envied but respected by his Polish and German managers, when at the tender age of 12 he became the smallest master craftsman in the glassworks "Hortensja" in the slave labour camp in Piotrków in 1942.

In October of that year we lost our parents and most other relatives who were deported and murdered in the gas chambers of Treblinka with many thousands of other Jews. Within a year I was sent to another slave labour camp and we were separated. From that time on he was left completely on his own in the bitter struggle for survival.

In 1944 he was transported to a slave labour camp in Czestochowa, from where he was sent to Buchenwald. When the Allies advanced to central Germany he faced the long journey by train in open trucks to Theresienstadt (Terezin) where he miraculously recovered from typhus. By sheer chance I found him there pitifully emaciated and weak some weeks after the liberation. Thus re-united, we were brought to England through the auspices of a sub - committee of the Central British Fund.

After a few brief weeks of recuperation in a specially established youth camp in Windermere among the few hundred Jewish youths from the liberated Concentration

Camp of Terezin in Czechoslovakia, Jerzy decided to go to Gateshead in order to learn about Judaism.

In Gateshead he became absorbed in the intricacies of Torah and decided to pursue Talmudic studies but, to earn his living, he learnt to make articles of jewellery and watchmaking. He excelled in repairs of high quality watches. With the advent of electronic timekeepers he took a course in a local university which enabled him to deal with quartz and similar movements.

When he met Jacqueline Devorah Sugarwhite in 1956 he found love and companionship. Ideally suited to each other they married in June 1956 after a brief courtship and customary arrangements. Following his marriage to Jacqueline and with her help, he established in Gateshead a household of dignity, hospitality and charity. Yeshiva students away from their families were regularly entertained for Shabbat, infants of Jewish mothers in hospital were looked after for weeks, strangers were given bed and food. He also assisted many members of the community with electronic repairs, advice, and arranged for them to purchase a wide range of electric and electronic goods at discount prices. To be able to do all this for the Jewish community Jerzy worked at home in a room arranged as his laboratory from 9 or 10 in the evening sometimes to 2 or 3 am, which he decided was the only time he could work undisturbed, while listening to classical music, chazanut or operatic singing, all of which he loved.

He spent the happiest years of his life bringing up three sons and three daughters and imbuing them all with the highest principles of conduct and Jewish ethics. They are all now married. His oldest son, Zev is a rabbi, associate dean of a Jewish college in Israel.

Jerzy was not just observant; he "walked in the ways of Torah". He understood that rituals, mainly symbolic, are insufficient and deeds and behaviour towards fellow men are of utmost importance. He applied the precepts of honesty, tolerance and charity in everyday life, and never complained of hardships.

Small wonder that the whole town including many gentiles who liked and respected him for his honesty, skills and friendliness came to pay their last respects when we, his family sat in mourning. Literally hundreds turned up; many from Manchester, Newcastle, Sunderland and London. They will all miss him.

However his children, their spouses, his grandchildren and I miss him most of all.

May his dear soul find everlasting love and peace among the righteous in the Kingdom of the Creator and may his spirit of goodness live on in all those he left behind.

HE DID SUCCEED IN HIS ENDEAVOUR
THOUGH HE'S GONE WITHOUT GOOD BYE
TO LEAVE IN HIS SEED A SIGN FOR EVER
THAT AM ISRAEL CHAI

NORMAN TURGEL

The death of Norman Turgel has left a void not only to his wife, Gena, and his family, but to all those who have been fighting against the evils of racism.

Norman served in the Royal Artillery and the Intelligence Corps, during the Second World War, and was among the first soldiers to enter Bergen Belsen. It was there where he met Gena Goldfinger, a camp inmate, with whom he fell in love. They were subsequently married by Rev. Leslie Hardman, the British Forces Chaplain, and their marriage was acclaimed "as one of the world's greatest love stories". Indeed, theirs was a very happy marriage. They set up home in London where their three children, a son and two daughters were born. They became a pillar of strength in the Stanmore community, highly popular supporting many worthy causes.

However, in recent years both of them have indefatigably been travelling all over the country talking about their war-time experiences to school children, university students, as well as to adult audiences. Between them they formed a formidable duet, their message made a tremendous impact on those who attended their talks. Now Gena has pledged to go on with the mission to which both of them were dedicated.

We extend to her and her family our deepest sympathies and wish her well in her endeavours.

JULIE PEARL

Julie passed away on Friday 24th November 1995 after enduring two hard years of pain and suffering. During this time and in between her spells in hospital and the hospice she always had the welfare of her family uppermost in her mind, she never complained or let them see how much pain she was in. This was typical of her character always putting others first. To her husband, Steve, she was a caring, loving and supportive wife, and over the years she worked very hard in the business ventures they entered into. To her four children she was the perfect mother, and a wonderful grandmother to her three granddaughters who were her pride and joy. She was a most devoted daughter even during her own illness she was constantly going over to help her mother who only passed away three months ago. To her friends, and those of us who were her friends were privileged, her home was always open and she was always there to give of herself whether in times of pleasure or sorrow. To watch someone like Julie struck such a blow when she still had so much living to do was indeed a tragedy. To Steve, Helen, David, Kim and Laurie, we wish a long and healthy life and may they be given the strength to endure their loss. Julie will always be remembered with love and affection by all those who knew her and will be very sadly missed.

Ruby Dreihorn

We extend our condolences to:-

Henry Green whose brother died in Israel.

Jack Hecht whose sister died in Israel.

Arie Czeret in Israel whose wife died in Israel.

The family of John and Marsha Seagal both of whom died recently.

The family of Joseph Berman (Buchenwald).

The family of Pauline Robeson.

JAMES FREIMAN

The loss of our darling son, James, has left a void in our hearts and lives which nothing and no one can fill. We shall miss him forever especially his brother, Ben, whom he adored.

Sam and Sonia

MEMBERS' NEWS

BIRTHS

Sylvia and Joe Perl a granddaughter. Ella Kahan born to Frances and Albert.
Hettie and Alec Ward a grandson, Liron Mark, born to Lyla and Barend.
Pauline and Harry Spiro, a grandson, Daniel Saul, born to Tracy and Michael.
Sheila and Gary Wino, a grandson, Ben Maurice, born to Karen and Robert.
Annie and Harry Fox, a daughter, Lucy.
Susie and Roman Halter, a granddaughter, born to Aloma and Eli.
Diana and Ralph Arons, a granddaughter.
Kitty and Kopel Dessau, a granddaughter, Florence, born to Kath and Bruce.
Valerie and David Kutner, twin grandchildren, a boy, Zak, and a girl, Emma, born to Lorraine and Mitchell.
Jenny and Salek Orenstein, a granddaughter, Golda Malka, born to Shmuli and Minkie and a grandson, born to Josy and Sara.
Floris and Abe Dichter, a granddaughter, Yardena Yafit, born to Ruth and Mark.
Sima Joe Stone in Florida, mazeltov on the birth of your respective grandchildren.
Lilian and Michael Silberstein, mazeltov on the birth of your grandson in Hong Kong.
Ella and Romek Weinstock, mazeltov on the birth of your grandson.
Margaret and Harry Olmer, a grandson, Miles Oscar, born to Pauline and Jonathon.
Chaskiel and Rene from Buenos Aires, birth of a granddaughter, Violetta, born to Monica and Diego.
Thea and Israel Rudzinski, two great-granddaughters:
Miriam Reizy born to Yitty and Levy Itzich Miller.
Chaz Frimet born to Etti and Moishe Rudzinski.

ENGAGEMENTS

Shirley and Joe Kiersz, mazeltov on the engagement of your daughter Allison to Stephen.
Dian and Stanley Faull, mazeltov on the engagement of your son Maurice to Laura.
Sala Newton-Katz, mazeltov on the engagement of your granddaughter Debbie daughter of Janet and Dennis.
Arza and Ben Helfgott, mazeltov on the engagement of your son Michael to Thea.

MARRIAGES

Mazeltov to Johnny Gutman on the marriage of his grandson, Mark Jayson to Michelle Cohen, November 20th 1994.

Pauline and Harry Balsam, mazeltov on the marriage of Colin to Amanda.

Ivy and Michael Lee, mazeltov on the marriage of Dvora to Chris.

Dian and Stanley Faull, mazeltov on the marriage of Maurice to Laura.

Jeff Frydman and Doris, mazeltov on your marriage.

In Canada, mazeltov to Tiffy and Sam Borenstein on your recent simcha.

BARMITZVAH

MAZELTOV to the following of our members who have had the pleasure to celebrate the barmitzvah of their grandsons

Evelyn and Aron Zylberszac, grandson Eli Zew, son of Fiona and Armand.

Jeanette and Zigi Shipper, grandson Robert, son of Michelle and Marcus.

Marie and Bob Obuchowski, grandson Joshua, son of Susan and David.

Fay and Moniek Goldberg, grandson Leslie, son of Gaby and Stephen in Costa Rica.

RUBY WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Barbara and Jack Kagan, mazeltov on your 40th wedding anniversary.

2ND GENERATION ACHIEVEMENTS

Congratulations to Julia Herman on obtaining a B.A. in Textile Design.

JACK KAGAN

Congratulations to Jack Kagan for staging an exhibition on the life and death of his home town, Nowogrudek, which took place at the Spiro Institute.

The exhibition was well attended and widely acclaimed and will be shown in the autumn at the Imperial War Museum where a Holocaust Museum is to be established.

AWARDS FOR RABBI HUGO GRYN CBE

An honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred on Hugo by the Princess Royal, Chancellor of London University. The citation stated that "he has worked tirelessly for inter faith relations." He also won the prestigious Templeton UK Individual Award for his contribution to faith across the boundaries of religion

ROLLING STONE GATHERS MOSS

The following appeared in the Daily Telegraph on the 20 December 1995. No doubt, you will find it both interesting and amusing.

Mick Jagger has joined the Queen Mother and former Canadian Premier Pierre Trudeau in being elected an honorary fellow of the London School of Economics. Like them he has "attained distinction in the arts, science or public life" - from the wording, they are not sure which.

Martin Lewis, who as head of the LSE's student body nominated Jagger, goes so far as to eulogise him as "the international statesman of rock and roll". Unlike the Queen Mum, though, Jagger has attended the school, but after a year, he found accounting and finance was not really to his taste.

A cosy chat with his tutor Kurt Klappholtz established that he should take a year off to try out a career in music, although the tutor warned that he would never make any money at it. Jagger has found music to be a remunerative career but a spokesman at LSE assured me that his place is still open should he want to take his degree.

You may like to know that "Our" Sefer Torah is in constant use at the Borham Wood and Elstree Synagogue.

Plans for the plaque bearing the names of our parents are well advanced and we'll advise you of the date on which it will be commemorated.

There is still time to add names and should you wish to do so, please contact:

Mr I Rudzinski
36 Chardmore Road
London N16 6JD

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS IN MANCHESTER

BIRTHS

Blanche and Sam Laskier mazeltov on the birth of your grandson, Alexander, born to Gillian and Peter in December 1994, and in June 1995 a granddaughter, Lauren, born to Suzanne and John.

Pinky and Susan Kurnedz, mazeltov on the birth of your three gandsons in Israel - to Daniella and Jeremy a son, Matan, to Jeremy and Michal a son, Ayal, and to Simone and Icsik a son, Ro'i.

BARMITVAH

1994 September. Hannah and Sam Gardner, mazeltov on the barmitvah of your grandson, son of Maralyn and Harris.

1995. Zena and Adash Bulwa, mazeltov on the barmitvah of your grandson, Adam, son of Suzanne and Paul.

MARRIAGE

1994 October. Hannah and Sam Gardner, mazeltov on the marriage of Estelle to Clive Fisher.

BIRTHDAYS

August 1995. Hannah Gardner - 65 years young.

August 1995. Alice Rubinstein - 65 years young.

December 1995. Sam Gardner - 70 years very young.

October 1994. Mayer Hersh was honoured by Whitefield School and was Chatan Bereshit.

MAYER BOMSZTYK

Mayer Bomsztyk has been an enthusiastic golf player for many years participating in competitions which took him to many parts of the world. it is with great delight that we share with him his recent unique success when he scored a "Hole-in-One".

Dear Mayer

We were all delighted to hear of your recent "Hole-in-One" and note that, in spite of your handicap having gone up, this shows that you still retain your considerable golfing skills.

On behalf of the Executive and Council, may I wish you a hearty Mazeltov on your successful shot.

Yours sincerely

Michael Bartle
Hon. Secretary
Whitefield Golf Club

FORTHCOMING EVENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

MONTEFIORE MEMORIAL LECTURE

The 20th annual Montefiore Memorial Lecture will take place on the 11th March 1996 - entitled:

THE NUREMBERG TRIALS FIFTY YEARS LATER

It will be delivered by JOHN TUSA the renowned journalist and broadcaster at the Stern Hall,
33 Seymour Place, London W1H 6AT.

YOM HA'SHOAH

In 1996, Yom Ha'Shoah falls on Tuesday, 16th April. On that day, commemorations will take place in Synagogues, clubs and organisations etc. However, the gathering at the Holocaust Memorial, The Dell, Hyde Park, London, will take place on Sunday 21st April at 11 am.

1996 REUNION AND OUR SOCIETY'S BROCHURE

The 51st Anniversary of our Liberation Reunion will take place on:

SUNDAY 5th MAY 1996

**KING DAVID SUITE
GREAT CUMBERLAND PLACE
LONDON W1**

As always, we appeal to our members to support us by placing advertisements in our Souvenir Brochure to be published by the Society. Please contact:

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THE ANNUAL OSCAR JOSEPH HOLOCAUST AWARDS

The '45 Aid Society offers up to three Awards of £600.00 each to assist successful candidates to participate in the Holocaust Seminar at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, which is held for three weeks in July 1996. The overall cost of participation is about £1,000.00.

Applications are invited from men and women under the age of 35 who have a strong interest in Holocaust studies and a record of communal involvement. After their return, successful candidates will be expected to take a positive role in educational and youth work activities so as to convey to others what they learned and gained from their participation in the summer seminar at Yad Vashem. However, before applying for these Awards, candidates should obtain permission from Yad Vashem to participate in the seminar.

Those interested should write, enclosing their CV and other details, not later than 29 February 1996 to:

Ruby Dreihorn
37 Salmon Street
London NW9

REPORT ON THE SUMMER SEMINAR AT YAD VASHEM -

JERUSALEM 1995

ANGELA JAYSON

The course which took place at Yad Vashem lasted for a period of nearly four weeks consisting of a series of lectures supported by visuals, and an examination, study and understanding of exhibits and displays.

The participants on the course came from all walks of life, different parts of the world. They included priests, nuns, a Mormon, Jewish ecclesiastical representatives, as well as young students. These participants added another dimension to the course as one was able to gain a far broader experience and understanding not only on an educational level but also socially and culturally.

The programme was compiled and organised by the Educators at Yad Vashem which, in my opinion, was well contrived and presented in both structure and content.

The structure of the course was of fundamental importance. The subject matters commenced with an insight into the evolution of anti-semitism; followed by the formation of ghettos; the creation of the camps; the "Final Solution" ... etc. These gave a unique definition to each stage of the Shoah rather than just the universality of the stages.

The majority of the lecturers gave a well-balanced opinion highlighting both sides of the various on-going debates. All the lecturers were well-spoken and extremely knowledgeable of their topics.

As an historian, oral testimony on a particular subject is vital. In fact, in about 10/15 years' time there is unlikely to be any first hand evidence of the Holocaust available in view of the ageing of the survivors.

The importance of the oral testimonies was demonstrated as the survivors recalled their tragic memories and each of their stories was unique. Greater meaning and emphasis developed as the survivors recounted their early life surrounded by the exhibits of their birth places, ghettos and illustrations of the horrors to which they had been subjected.

My paper on the Kindertransport was compiled with the support of a number of these survivors and I interviewed several of them during the course of my research and the impact of experiencing similar testimonies in the environment of Yad Vashem gave an added dimension to the testimonies.

The pedagogical centre which housed a library of references on all subjects connected to the Shoah was of great value and much free time was spent conducting research, which would be used in pursuance of a career which encompasses the continuation of an awareness of the Shoah.

Since finishing the course at Yad Vashem, I have been on an Ulpan at the University of Haifa which was the reason for the delay in the forwarding of my report. I shall be pleased to meet with you to discuss any aspect of the course and any matters arising from it.

REPORT ON THE SEMINAR FOR EDUCATORS FROM ABROAD

YAD VASHEM, JERUSALEM - 3rd-16th JULY 1995

STEVEN COOKE

The Summer Seminar at Yad Vashem for Educators from Abroad, run by Ephraim Kaye was, for me, a truly amazing and worthwhile experience. The lectures, on the whole, were both informative and well-presented, although the time allowed for discussion could have been increased. The chance to explore the memorial complex of Yad Vashem was also a stunning experience. I also found many of the memorials, especially that dedicated to the children murdered by the Nazis very moving and for my research especially, the representations that the Holocaust has inspired at the site are very interesting, especially when comparing them with Germany, the United States or Britain.

A crucial aspect of the course, and one that I understand has been increased in recent years, was survivor testimony. It was both an honour and a privilege to hear from people who had experienced the historical events that we were learning about, and gave further insight into the Holocaust. Again, little time was left to discuss either what we had heard, or our responses to it.

I also welcomed the opportunity to meet other people who have an interest in the subject in various capacities. There was a wide diversity of faiths and educational experience, which made for some interesting discussions on various historical and philosophical debates that surround the Holocaust.

One of the useful ways in which my teaching and research about the Holocaust will be improved was the chance to meet and talk with other people who are working in similar or related fields. A small number of those attending, including myself, are in the process of setting up an informal network of scholars who are interested in the way that the representations of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem and at other institutions change over time in response to the social, cultural and political climate. I have just submitted the first draft of a paper looking at these issues at Yad Vashem to my doctoral supervisor, Mr Andrew Charlesworth, which we hope to publish in the near future. Whilst at Yad Vashem, I was able also to undertake some other research using the archives and pedagogical centre which I am presenting to the annual conference of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) in January 1996, on the subject of Britain and the Holocaust.

The aspects of the course specifically designed for the educators run by Dr Karen Shawn, I did not find particularly useful as it was aimed at primary and secondary school teachers with an explicit focus on the teaching of English Literature and History. The opportunity to discuss with other educators the emotional needs of pupils was, however, most welcome.

Also of importance were the educational trips that were organised by Yad Vashem, especially those to Beit Lohamei Hagetaot near Akko, and the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the trip to the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv had to be cancelled due to the fact that the curators were on strike.

One of the most important experiences for me was an introduction into the Jewish cultural life of Jerusalem. On the first Friday, we were invited to attend a Shabbat service in the Jerusalem Great Synagogue after which a Shabbat meal was organised at the Windmill Hotel where most of the course delegates were staying. The opportunity to begin to understand some of the religious aspects of Jewish life has helped in my work and also proved an excellent starting point for inter-faith discussion between those attending the course.

I found the final ceremony of the seminar very moving. Instead of having a religious service in the Hall of Remembrance, which would have proved problematic due to the different religious experiences of the group, it was decided that a tree planting ceremony would be held near one of the hospitals on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Most of the group took part, and I believe that it was a more appropriate symbolic and practical gesture than a service.

An aspect of the trip that could be improved in the UK is putting the two people who receive the Oscar Joseph Annual Holocaust Award in touch with each other. I met Angela Jayson at the course, and we both felt that it would have been better to either meet or telephone each other before leaving to talk about travel arrangements, share advice we had received and discuss our feelings about the forthcoming experience.

In conclusion, the chance to visit Yad Vashem, and to learn more about this vitally important topic was essential in helping me come to terms with my own role in teaching the Holocaust and in the research I am currently engaged in. It was an experience I will truly never forget