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I was born in Alexandria, Egypt, where my father - a regular officer in the RAF - was stationed. My brother, our parents and I led a very comfortable life with many people to look after us in a household ruled over by our Imman - a kind of major domo. When my father was posted to what was then Mesopotamia my mother decided to bring her two children back to England in time to start school. We stayed in Westcliff until my father returned home to RAF Henlow. He chose not to live on the station so we moved to Letchworth Garden City in Hertfordshire. In those days we were the only Jews in Letchworth and I still remember sitting alone, at the age of eight, in the school library as my parents did not wish me to go to R.E. classes. It was to Letchworth that the schools and people from Stamford Hill were evacuated during the war and subsequently there were Kosher shops, a synagogue and even a Mikvah in the city.

Although in his time my father was one of the few Jews to make HM Forces his career, he was a Hebrew scholar who knew his Judaism which he taught us. We used to be taken to London for the High Holydays and went to Great Portland Street Synagogue where my parents were married. I also have vivid recollections of our annual trips to the East End of London where we bought all our Passover provisions. Unlike many of their generation, my parents believed in equality of education for girls and my brother and I had to share the recitation of Mah Nishtanah, taking alternate questions. I still use the Hagadah which I had then - with the questions marked.

Service life in peacetime is easy and to some extent insulated from the stresses of the world. We had a very happy childhood until my brother's Bar Mitzvah loomed on the horizon. Although my father taught him his Parasha and Haftarah, my parents decided that we ought to be living in a Jewish environment and so we were uprooted from our peaceful country home and transplanted to North West London which we hated! We were sent to Hebrew classes at Cricklewood Synagogue where I was bored to tears - all we did week after week was learn the Shema and Amidah which I already knew anyway from my father's teaching. At school my friend and neighbour talked to me about her classes at West London Synagogue which were interesting and where she was taught Hebrew as a language. I was allowed by my broadminded



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parents to go with my friend to Upper Berkeley Street and so at the age of ten began my life long association with the Reform Movement. I really enjoyed going to classes every Sunday morning and when I was sixteen I was confirmed, with about ten other young people, by Rabbi Harold Rheinhart. In those days there were only confirmations at Shevuot and the girls were all dressed in white - I don't remember what the boys wore but no doubt it was their best suit. I was fluent in Hebrew, so was allocated a portion from the Torah to read. The service was in Hebrew and English and all the young people participated. We were sat in a semi-circle facing the Ark and were escorted to our seats by our mothers and later retrieved by our fathers. My brother, who was less liberal minded, had a conventional Bar Mitzvah at Cricklewood and only attended my confirmation under protest.

My synagogue affiliation was important to me always. I was a Junior member at West London Synagogue and after the war a member of the Berkeley Reunion Group which consisted of Junior members who had survived the war, including Hugo Gryn, Lionel Blue, Neville Sassienie and others who later became stalwarts of Reform Judaism. In later years I served on the Councils of West London Synagogue, Middx. New, Maidenhead, and Bournemouth where I served a term as Vice Chairman and Welfare Officer, and for three years as Chairman of Southern Region Committee and on the rsgb executive.

School life was conventional - always at girls only schools except for my first Montessori school. I matriculated and whilst in the Sixth Form walked out of school one half term and became a VAD attached to the Army. After about a year there was a new ruling which allowed VAD's to apply for commissions in the ATS. I applied immediately and was accepted. At pre OCTU everyone was made a Lance Corporal no matter what their previous rank had been, but for me it was a great thrill, on my first day in the Army I was awarded a stripe and I think I really believed that if that promotion rate were to be maintained I would finish up as a General by the end of the war. In the event I became a Signals Officer in AA Command and ended the war with the rank of Junior Commander/Captain. I was an overseas volunteer, so in the quaint way the Army has I spent all my service in the UK stationed in Gun Operations Rooms in the most vulnerable towns in the country. The nearest I got to overseas was when I had some Signalmen in my command stationed on the Maunsell Forts in the mouth of the Mersey. When I visited them I was hauled up in a rope sling



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with one foot in the sling and the other leg waving in the air over the sea. My CO thought I should get the Atlantic Star for this, but the War Office held a contrary view.

At the beginning of the war my father was stationed at Calshot with flying boats and my mother lived in the Trouville Hotel in Bournemouth which left me with the desire to live someday in Bournemouth. When France fell Calshot became too vulnerable and my father moved the flying boats up to Greenock where he served as CO, until he died in 1945, leaving my mother a widow. Whilst in Greenock the King decided to give my father an OBE, to add to his existing MBE, as a Silver Wedding present coinciding as the Birthday Honours did with their wedding anniversary. As the award was in Scotland the presentation was at Holyrood Palace and the Army gave me leave to attend. I had to go to Edinburgh Castle and I believe the biggest thrill I have had in my life to date was when the Sentry at the Castle presented arms to little me!

Demobilisation was followed for me by marriage. My husband, Charlie, had been in the same Scout Group as my brother, so we were friends of long standing. I was very active in AJEX at this time, serving on the National Executive and being the only woman to speak on their outdoor platform in the fight against the National Front and other anti-Semitic organisations. Many Saturday afternoons were spent walking up and down Ridley Road until the market ended and we could set up our platform and start speaking before the opposition did, as the police only allowed one platform. Being charged by mounted police was one of the most frightening experiences of my life and was even worse than the occasion in Derby when I was speaking and the platform, with me on it, was pushed over by the fascists. I was relatively unhurt but my precious nylons, then on coupons only, were ruined. M & S kindly replaced them following the intervention of the Chairman of the Board of Deputies.

After my marriage I spent three years at the London School of Economics from which I graduated a fully fledged Social Worker. Altho' I was qualified for any branch of social work, I decided to go into Probation which was an extremely interesting field of work. I subsequently spent a year at the Tavistock Clinic and worked as a psychiatric social worker there with some of the country's foremost psychiatrists who taught me so much, including that doctors are not gods and that with fame goes humility. Probation though was the right area for me and



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after various promotions and a period as a Regional Training Officer for advanced training of qualified Probation Officers in S E England, I was appointed the Chief Probation Officer for Berkshire. Not only was I the only Jew at this level, but I was also the first woman in the UK to hold that rank. My 56 male colleagues were mostly waiting for me to fall flat on my face and I knew I had to do a good job or I would also be the last woman in the UK to hold the rank. Suffice to say that when I took early retirement after over 10 years in Berkshire there were 6 other women appointed. During my time in Berkshire I served for three years on the Home Office Parole Board which although hard work and very stressful in it's responsibility, was also a most fascinating experience. When I first went into probation I knew of only one other Jewish officer and she was a woman. It was not then considered a proper career for a nice Jewish boy. Today there are many Jewish PO's including several males and the wives of two Reform Rabbis of whom I know.

Although I retired early from paid employment in 1983 I am still able to use my social work skills for the benefit of the community in a voluntary capacity. I wrote to the then Jewish Welfare Board and offered my services voluntarily to them. They immediately invited me to do any social work they needed in the Bournemouth area and in particular to vet all the applications made for admission to Hannah Levy House and work on the committee there. Although the home is now totally the responsibility of the local community, I have maintained my involvement in it and am a Trustee. I now also work with the management staff as well as the residents.

When we moved to London as children we had the opportunity to join Jewish youth organisations and my brother went to a Jewish Scout Troop and I into the Guides. This has been the other Movement which has had a profound effect on me and has been a life long interest. I became a Guide Leader of Jewish Brownies as soon as I was able and subsequently was the Chairman of the Jewish Advisory Council of the Guide Association. This led to my involvement with Guide HQ where I served first as Chairman of the Finance Committee and as a member of the Executive and Council. Later I became a Deputy to the Chief Commissioner of the UK - the first Jew to hold this exalted rank, and I represented the UK at several conferences world wide, including being the UK's representative on the first Europe Committee. In my capacity as Deputy I was privileged on several occasions to attend Royal Garden Parties at Buckingham



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Palace and at HQ to meet HM The Queen, HM The Queen Mother, and HRH Princess Margaret. After my term as Deputy ended I became, for six long years, the Honorary Treasurer of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, a position I still occupied when I retired to Bournemouth. I have just recently resigned from being President of the SW England Guide Association and am now only involved as a Trustee of the Pension Fund at HQ. Throughout my Guide voluntary career it has always been well known that I am proudly Jewish and at no stage has it impeded my progress.

Whilst we lived in Wargrave in Berkshire we bought our Bournemouth flat for holidays and to establish our presence for future retirement. It had been our original intention when we did retire to sell the Wargrave house and the Bournemouth flat to buy a larger flat in Bournemouth, but sadly after one year of retirement during which he became very involved in BRS, helping in the office, on Council, as Security Officer, etc. my husband died, so I have remained in my small holiday flat.

Life has been very good to me - a very happy marriage, a most satisfying professional life, a very worthwhile voluntary career and a host of good friends. In 1980/1 I was privileged to become, as my father and brother before me, an OBE.

I love Bournemouth and my life here. I echo the words of Lady Baden Powell - "God give me work 'til my life is done. God give me life my work is done."