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WALTER KAMMERLING

PRESIDENT, BRS

I was born in 1923 in Vienna, I had two elder sisters, Erika and Ruthi. At that time Austria had about six million inhabitants, of which two million lived in Vienna, because Vienna was the capital of a far larger empire. When, after the first world war the empire broke up into a number of independent republics, Vienna remained the same. The Jewish population numbered about 10%.

Father served in the Austrian army and married my mother in 1917, one year before the war came to an end (Herta and I married one year before the end of the Second World War). There was anti-semitism in Austria but certainly not of any dangerous proportions.

We lived with our parents in a small flat in the second district of Vienna, a predominantly Jewish district. I remember in our class there were 36 pupils of whom only 5 were non-Jews. There were a number of Zionist Youth clubs and I went several times to Hashomer Haza' ir, and in 1937 I went with G'dud zeirim to a summer camp in Zell am See. Compared with the youth of today we were very immature. I had my Bar Mitzvah in 1936 and it was the last occasion when the whole family came together for what was to be our last Simcha.

On 11th March 1938 Schuschnigg's declaration was broadcast. It was a Friday and the week before the country had been campaigning for a plebiscite that was scheduled for the Sunday; the whole country seemed to have united for an independent Austria. Schuschnigg even organised his old enemies, the Socialists, but unfortunately it was the government who paved the way for the Nazis. I remember that pupils in the top class came round, trying to impress on us the importance of an independent Austria and the same boys came round afterwards with the insignia of the Hitler Youth.

On that fateful Friday Schuschnigg informed the country of the German ultimatum and his decision to abdicate to prevent bloodshed! He finished with the words: "God protect Austria" (Gott schutze Ostereich). We were very much aware that this did not augur well for Jews, but nobody could foresee the full horror of what was to come. The screaming and shouting started on the streets straight away and we stayed at home; my sister was in tears. The Nazis rounded up Jews from the streets to organise "scrubbing parties", i.e. get Jews to scrub the slogans that were painted on the streets for the intended plebiscite. However, the population had found a new 'entertainment' and kept it up. I too had to scrub the street once; the worst part of that experience was the crowds who stood around laughing and shouting abuse. I remember a fur coated lady with a little blond girl with lovely curls who



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was held up so that she could get a better view of the (possibly) 17 year old Hitler youth who kicked an old Jew when he fell over as he found the crouching position too hard to maintain. Life became very difficult. On the way to and from school we tried to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible and avoid groups of people. We wanted to get home as quickly as possible without running, as that would have attracted attention. Often you heard screams and shouts behind you and you knew that was caused by Jews being stopped and possibly beaten up. You could not stop and turn round or you would be amongst those who were rounded up.

Father tried to find somewhere to emigrate, anywhere, but all countries had closed their borders to Jews. In the twenties father had a chocolate factory and I remember he sent some CV's to various places, but without success. Unscrupulous embassy employees of various embassies sold worthless visas. My father bought a visa for Columbia and we tried to get everything ready for our impending emigration, but alas, it was not to be. It was like so many other things, a sham - somebody had found a way to make money. It was as if the whole population had suddenly become Nazis. Jewish shops were taken over and there seemed to be a scramble for easy takings. Flats were acquired by telling the owners to get out and leave everything. Jews were outside the law.

When Von Rath was killed in Paris by a Jew in November 1938 a well orchestrated Pogrom was initiated by the Nazis all over Germany. Jewish shops were smashed, all synagogues were set alight, Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps. My father was ill at the time and his doctor was non- Jewish: that was the reason for not arresting him as well. My two sisters were taken to scrub the floors in a nearby office of the Nazi party. After the November pogrom (somehow I find it difficult to call it "Kristallnacht", a romantic sounding expression which hides all the horror connected with it), Jewish groups in the free world set up committees to save at least the children, and the idea of the "Kindertransport" was born. Money was collected so that no child became a burden to the country. I was lucky to be on the first transport in December 1938. My father, who was in the Jewish hospital at the time with angina, could not come to see me off. When I said goodbye to him in the hospital he was in tears and I was very reluctant to leave him. My mother and sisters came to the station to see me off. I was just 15 and somewhat dazed and hardly appreciated the enormity of the situation. I certainly did not realise that it was the last time I would see my parents and Ruthi. My 17 and 18 year old sisters were too old to go as the age limit was 16. My eldest sister, Erika, could leave on a domestic permit, being over 18, but Ruthi did not qualify for a domestic permit nor the Kindertransport. She went with my parents to Theresienstadt, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia and on 29th September 1944 my father was sent to Auschwitz. Mother and Ruthi were sent on the penultimate transport on 23rd October 1944. Auschwitz was liberated by Russian troops in January 1945, just three months later. I only learned these facts years later, when I came across a book listing all Jews that were sent to Theresienstadt and from there to the various extermination camps. I found postcards my father sent to non Jewish friends in Vienna and learned that Ruthi was married in Theresienstadt on 25th June, 1944. Her husband, Ernst Kronfeld, went with the



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same transport from Vienna his transport number and my parents' and Ruthi's were consecutive. He and father went on the same transport to Auschwitz, their transport numbers were also consecutive. Early in 1939 I was sent to Northern Ireland where the Jewish community in Belfast had raised money to buy a farm in Millisle, Co. Down. On this farm were three different groups: one group of adults, one of Chalutzim (pioneers) doing agricultural training for their future life in Israel, and a group of children. In 1940 we had to go before a tribunal to establish our status. Though we were considered "enemy aliens" our jobs were deemed to be important enough for the war effort and we were not interned. At the time we were all in the same boat and life went on but we were marred by the situation. All of us were hoping to be reunited with our families but, alas, it was not to be. Some fifty years later I made contact with other farm residents, by telephone or letter. I have since met some of them, including a mature lady who was a girl on the farm 53 years earlier, and we realised how little we knew of each other, being engrossed at the time in our private anguish, hopes and dreams.

The farm was run on a strictly orthodox basis and it was probably there that the foundations of my later Reform beliefs were laid. I remember that every Pesach the farm was sold to the one Christian worker on the farm. Rabbi Schechter came out from Belfast and a contract of sale drawn up. Mr Muckl, the buyer, invariably had no money and Rabbi Schechter lent him a shilling and everyone was happy. When I walked away I thought 'Muckl knows it is not his farm, the Rabbi knows it is not his farm and everybody around knows it is not Muckl's farm, so why should God believe that it is his farm?'

On another occasion I saw somebody come out of the toilet and fulfil the mitzvah of washing his hands by touching the tap without turning it on, and drew some drops. Having done this in a second or two he proceeded to say the blessing for an action he never did which took half a minute!

In 1942 I returned to England from Northern Ireland to work in a garage in Surrey. I only stayed there for a few months as I found a job in London in a factory. I joined the Austrian youth movement "Young Austria" and found the vast majority of members were Jewish refugees. Most of us were in the same position, having lost home and family, and strong bonds and friendships were formed. I met Herta there (who became my lifelong friend and companion), she was sixteen at the time.

In 1943, after we were allowed to join combatant units most of us volunteered to join the army. In March 1944 I went to Glasgow for my primary training. In November 1944 I married Herta on my embarkation leave. Marrying her was the best decision I have made in my life.

In December 1945 I was invalided out of the army with severe Sciatica. I managed to get into a government training centre, training to be a draughtsman. In June 1946 Herta and I



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had the opportunity to be repatriated to Austria and with the enthusiasm of youth we went back. I did not find any of my relatives. I tried to make up for lost time and took a matriculation course in order to enrol at the Technical University, which I did in 1947. It was rather difficult as I was working and studying at the same time, with absolutely no facilities, but I had the feeling that I had to make up for lost time and I have not stopped studying ever since.

Our eldest son, Peter, was born in 1948. Meanwhile, after a number of different jobs including driving a crane, I succeeded in joining AEG, at first in the drawing office and later in the design office. Living in Vienna again with the latent and not so latent anti-Semitism we soon turned away from our political ideals. I remember one winter walking with an acquaintance through the street full of snow, when she remembered with nostalgia when the streets were cleared of snow by Jews. A terrible thought went through my mind that it could have been my family who had to do that and then return wet and cold to their unheated homes.

Our second son, Max, was born in 1955. The attitude towards Jews did not seem to change in Austria. As Herta's parents lived in Bournemouth we decided to return and in 1957 we came back to Britain. As we had both spent our formative years here and felt at home whenever we came to visit Herta's parents it was not difficult and Bournemouth seemed the natural place for us to settle. I continued with my studies and enrolled with the Open University, gaining a degree in 1973 but still continuing to study - I think that if I should ever reach a great age my death will interrupt my studies!

As we still did not have British nationality we had to come on a work permit and it was quite difficult to obtain a good position. At first I worked in my father-in-law's business and then as a draughtsman and designer with a firm of industrial consultants, then as a mathematician with a machine tool company, and finally joined a manufacturer of air bearings. I became Chief Engineer and stayed with them for fourteen years. In 1978 I joined a firm of rolling mill manufacturers in the design and development office and retired from there as a senior research engineer when I was 65.

As Herta's parents were members of the Bournemouth New Synagogue (as it was then known) and we joined in 1958 when services were still held in Trinity Church Hall in Old Christchurch Road. Both our sons celebrated their Bar Mitzvah in our synagogue, and we both became more and more involved. It was after Rev. Solomon's retirement, when the synagogue was looking for a rabbi, that one applicant was turned down by the Executive. I mentioned to Brian Cowan who was Hon. Secretary at the time, that we should give him a chance. He suggested I "put up or shut up" so I 'put up' for council and was duly elected. As it happened it only took a relatively short time before I realised how correct the decision had been to turn him down.



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Rabbi Soetendorp joined the congregation shortly afterwards. It was in the early seventies that I started to teach myself Hebrew. As soon as he knew that I had reached a certain standard the Rabbi persuaded me to teach in the Cheder. At that time Herta took the kindergarten class.

Over the years I have held a number of positions on the synagogue council, including three years as Chairman. I am still very involved with different committees, teaching youngsters and adults and also involved with the library, which I ran for several years. I was a warden for about eighteen years and am still serving on the Ritual Committee. A few years ago I had the honour to be elected President of our synagogue and looking back at my busy and varied life, emigration, immigration, family, studying and all the other different activities, I have only one regret - that I was not able to introduce Herta, my sons Peter and Max and all my family to that part of my family I had to leave behind and who never survived the Holocaust. I have always believed that we have been given "free choice", and that you only get out of anything what you are prepared to put into it. I have chosen to spend a large part of my time and energy on study, teaching and synagogue affairs and have been richly rewarded with a large circle of true friends, many of whom have shared our ups and downs over the years.