



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

HERTA KAMMERLING

I was born in 1926 and remember my childhood as an extremely happy one. Being loved and cosseted by my parents, as was my brother Otto who was born some years later. Life seemed so normal, you went to school, you had friends with whom you played in the park, sat next to in school and went to the youth clubs in later years. Sundays were spent with your parents, aunts and uncles, with cousins, meeting up in the nearby Vienna Woods. Picnicking, gathering flowers to take home, buying and munching corn-on-the cob on the way, sharing secrets with your cousins and being foolish and giggling all the way home.

Father left in the morning to go to business, you went to school, came home, played and did your homework. And that was what life seemed to be all about.

In 1938 things suddenly changed. Your best friend was not allowed to sit next to you on the school bench. She sent me a card from Germany where many (non-Jewish) school children were sent for a holiday to sweeten the annexation of Austria by Germany saying: "please do not tell anyone I have written to you". Hitler's portrait appeared in every classroom, dominating school life. was not allowed to play or sit in the park anymore and, if a group of boys passed you, you were pushed over and were lucky if they did no more harm. From one day to the next you did not know what tomorrow would bring and I understood only little of what was happening to us and why.

Suddenly my father disappeared we children were not told that he secretly tried to cross the Czech border and would try to get us also out of Vienna he was not successful. We owed 120 Austrian Shillings tax (the equivalent of 1.13s 6d) so all our furniture and possessions were taken. I remember all too vividly that my beautiful doll in its own box bed was the last thing I saw when the lorry with our belongings disappeared down the street. We had to leave our flat and live in rented rooms without any furniture, living out of wooden boxes. We had narrow beds. My mother was pregnant.

Our parents succeeded to get us, my brother and me, out on a "Kinder transport" (Children transport) to Great Britain. My aunt who was working as a cook in London, had advertised in the Jewish Chronicle for a family to guarantee for us and when we arrived in England we were taken to Liverpool to the kind family who saved our lives. We had no idea of language, no idea of what it was all about, expecting our parents to come and our normal life to return again. When we said goodbye to my parents at the railway station in Vienna, my mother was a few days before the birth of my brother. My nightmare in England was that she would be left lying in the street and no German ambulance would take her to hospital. In my eight year old brother's nightmare our parents were looking for us and he turned the lights on in the middle of the night so that they would know where we were.



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

We were lucky, our parents managed to come to England with my baby brother, Eric, one month before the war started, on a work permit for a housekeeper and a valet. Eric was born two days after Otto and I had left Vienna. I was sent to the Jewish school in Liverpool, not understanding a word of the language. Mathematics was incomprehensible no decimal system, instead pounds, shillings, pence, guineas, yards and inches, things I had never heard of before. A couple of months later the Liverpool Jewish school was evacuated to Chester where, again, I lived with a different family, went to a different school, was always very, very cold and very lonely.

My parents had their own difficulties in London. They were supported by Woburn House with 1 per week and lived in one room. And yet after my 14th birthday I could not get to London quickly enough to join them. I found work as a finisher and later as a cutter in the West End in the clothing industry. Do you remember Issy and Jenny Stem? It was in their workshop that I found work and learned to speak English. And eventually I lived with my parents again. I was so happy. My brother Otto went to school and my small brother Eric was in a Jewish children's home in Highgate and we visited him every Sunday afternoon. My father was interned as an "enemy alien" and sent to the Isle of Man. (What a ridiculous terminology for someone who escaped from the enemy!) He was soon cleared and eventually found work in the north of England and some of the family went with him. In the meantime I had joined a Trade Union and there met a girl from the Austrian Youth Club. I also joined and became involved. The 9 hour working day and the club's activities kept me busy. The London Blitz was on, people slept in the underground, we had an incendiary bomb in the garden, a bomb passed the tailoring workshop and hit a corner building down the road. One thought that life was normal, having to report to the police whenever one travelled to parents or later to visit Walter in a military hospital in Darlington.

Walter and I met in the youth club. I had meanwhile left the workshop to take a government training course to become a Nursery Nurse. I subsequently worked in the War-time Day Nurseries which sprang up in London as the women were now working in factories and other jobs and the children were taken care of by these nurseries. I loved the children! I had to catch the 6.10am bus in time to light the fires and prepare breakfast for the children when they were brought in by the parents. Throughout the Blitz I also worked for some time in the Austrian Day Nursery. Soon Walter and I were in love and still are! We were married in 1944 on his embarkation leave before he was sent to Europe. We were utterly convinced that nothing could possibly happen to spoil our happiness and future. With my allowance from the army we bought our first Utility furniture. Our tallboy of that time is still in use by our grandchildren as a toy cupboard. Our first bedside table was an orange box covered with a tea cloth.

Walter and I agreed that we would return to Austria after the war to help make it a better place so that the evil years 1938-1945 would not be repeated. We were repatriated in 1946, lived under difficult circumstances, shortage of food, rubble in the streets but that was what we had chosen to do. I attended a two year course and qualified as a State registered



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

Kindergarten teacher (Nursery Nurse). To our great delight two years later our first son Peter was born. While Walter was studying and working I also worked, first in a work's Kindergarten and later in the publishing department of a left wing publishing firm. We eventually acquired our own flat which we sold when we decided after 1956 to return to England where my parents had remained. One reason was that my father was not well and because the better world we envisaged was not to be. Anti-semitism in Austria was never far from the surface and we felt we did not belong there any more. It was not an easy decision. Walter had to get a work permit. Our older son had started in a very good school and our second son was only small at the time.

With our parents help everything moved steady and in 1957 we arrived in Bournemouth as a family and were able to put a deposit on a bungalow within walking distance of my parents home. Mr Woudstra and my father were the Guarantors for our mortgage. After seven years we could apply for British citizenship and, having proved to have a bank account of £100 and being interviewed by the Aliens Officer, we were accepted.

The children grew up, Peter started school in Bournemouth and, as he could not speak English, he was given Noddy books to help him with the language. The following year he was top in English in his class and achieved his A-levels at Bournemouth Grammar School and we are so proud that he now has a degree in Management Studies. Our second son, Max, had it easier in this respect as he was only two years old when we came to Bournemouth and later, after finishing school and taking his A-levels, went to the Southampton Medical School and is now a Community Medical Officer. Both our sons are happily married and we are now the proud grandparents of five super boys.

As my parents were early members of Bournemouth New Synagogue, we also joined in 1958. Both boys started Cheder and celebrated their Bar Mitzvah in our Synagogue. I soon became involved in the Women's Guild of the Synagogue and eventually joined the committee. Eve and Brian Cowan befriended us and Eve asked me to join the choir. The texts were phonetically transliterated which I found annoying, so I started to learn Hebrew again. Eventually when Muriel Caliler retired as Guild chairman, I was elected and continued in that position for 6 years. The committee, with the support of the Rabbi, invited all Guild Committee members to take part in the service at Guild Shabbat in Hebrew and in English. We held monthly meetings even under difficult circumstances, when our Synagogue was being extended. The idea of Torah Breakfasts was taken up by Council, of which I was a member for 10 years. Bella Power was the first woman to read from the Torah followed by Liese Richards and myself. After some consistent ground work we succeeded in organising a combined event with the Ladies Society of the Bournemouth Hebrew Congregation, under the Chairmanship of Freda Saïpe, an afternoon with the cartoonist and raconteur, Harry Blacker. It was a great success. At that time WIZO organised an annual theatre visit to Chichester. The Guild started many summer outings to many historical places in our beautiful surrounding area: Montacute, Braemar, Wilton etc., and also theatre outings to Salisbury and Southampton. I especially remember planning a



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

Guild Oneg Shabbat about Jewish women. During my last term as Guild Chairman, Janet Davis suggested the embroidery of a tapestry of a Chagall window. At my suggestion all twelve tapestries of the stained glass windows of the Synagogue of the Hadassa Hospital in Jerusalem were embroidered by members of the Women's Guild and friends. They were dedicated in 1982 in the newly built Simcha Hall. Even after retiring as Chairman I have remained an active committee member, actively supporting all the Guild's activities and its current Chairman. To my great delight and pleasure at the last Guild AGM I had the honour to be elected President of the Guild.

In 1990 the Music Appreciation Society was started by Brenda Needleman and Harold and Lesley Morris have been presenting us regularly with light classical music on tape and annual live concerts. I am very involved with this committee under the chairmanship of Laurie and Peter Bird.

In the meantime I had also joined a voluntary organisation, the League of Jewish Women, which had just been started in town. After being Hon. Treasurer I became its Chairman in 1986 and after 3 years continued on the Committee as Welfare Officer, a position from which I am now standing down. A feasibility study was set up in town where there would be a requirement for Jewish Day Centre. Celia Myers and I represented the Reform Synagogue's Women's Guild. The study showed a clear 'yes' and the Bournemouth Jewish Community Day Centre was started with the initiative of the League of Jewish Women. It is still a resounding success after 18 years serving the Community. It meets in our Synagogue; I still work there every Monday and once a month as team leader of the Guild team and as kitchen co-ordinator. I am now one of the Trustees. Our past will always be with us, it has coloured our lives.

We are very proud and happy with our growing family and our very good friends, whose friendship we value greatly. We are very active, socialising, participating in Simchas and sharing troubled times. The word 'retirement' does not quite fit into the picture. We enjoy the life we lead and hope, with God's help, we will be able to continue for a while longer.