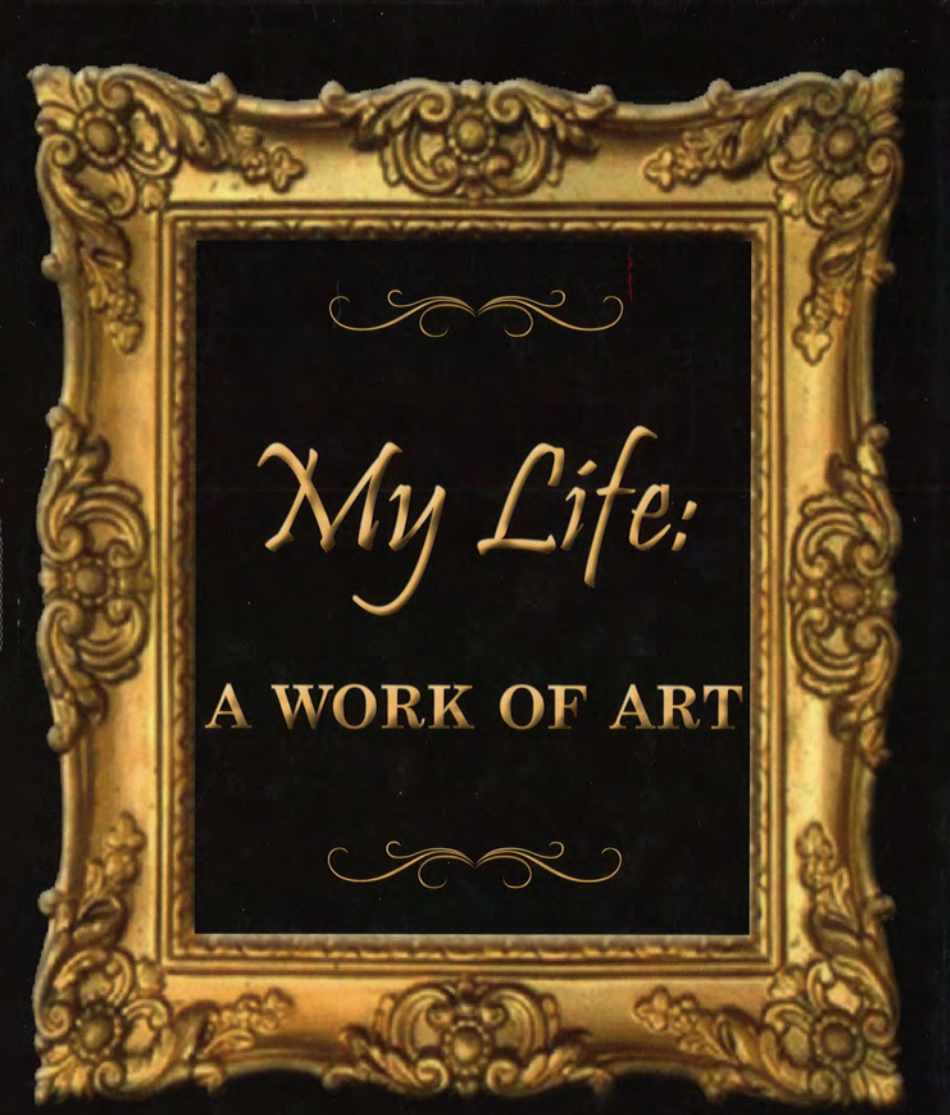


An Autobiography by

HERMANN GUTTMANN

Written by **D. HOFFMAN**

My Life:

A WORK OF ART



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HERMANN GUTTMANN

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My Life: A Work of Art—An Autobiography by Hermann Guttmann by **David Hoffman.**

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My Life: A Work of Art

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חסדיך. הודו לה' כי טוב.
Jakob H. Guttman 2014

Contents



Acknowledgments 7

CHAPTER I *From Galicia to Berlin* 11

CHAPTER II *Becoming German* 17

CHAPTER III *"Hotel Guttmann"* 23

CHAPTER IV *Growing Family* 29

CHAPTER V *Neurrupin* 37

CHAPTER VI *Community Life* 43

CHAPTER VII *Bar Mitzvah in Nazi Germany* 51

CHAPTER VIII *Kristallnacht and Deportation* 55

CHAPTER IX *Kindertransport* 63

CHAPTER X *Passage to England* 69

CHAPTER XI *Whittingehame Farm School* 73

CHAPTER XII *Enemy Aliens* 81

CHAPTER XIII *Chivers and Cambridge* 89

CHAPTER XIV *Life in Cambridge* 95
CHAPTER XV *Enlisting in the Military* 101
CHAPTER XVI *Basic Training* 109
CHAPTER XVII *Operation Overlord: Landing at Normandy* ..117
CHAPTER XVIII *Royal Dragoons* 123
CHAPTER XIX *Liberation of Holland and Germany* 131
CHAPTER XX *Back to Berlin* 139
CHAPTER XXI *Return to Civilian Life* 155
CHAPTER XXII *My Brother Egon* 163
CHAPTER XXIII *Reigniting an Old Flame* 171
CHAPTER XXIV *Starting Over in Washington Heights* 183
CHAPTER XXV *Family Values* 191
CHAPTER XXVI *Tough Times* 197
CHAPTER XXVII *Making it on my Own* 203
CHAPTER XXVIII *Expanding the Business* 209
CHAPTER XXIX *Moving to Monsey* 215
CHAPTER XXX *A Message to Future Generations* 225

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Likewise, a measure of thanks goes to my chavrusa, Rabbi Velvel Dickstein, who helped sort through many pictures and then sent them to Rabbi Hoffman for inclusion in this book. My grandson, Betzalel Moldaver did a wonderful job with the beautiful family tree, and how can I forget Frieda, Blimi and Chanie, who sat with Rabbi Hoffman on different occasions, and added much-needed family details to the story.

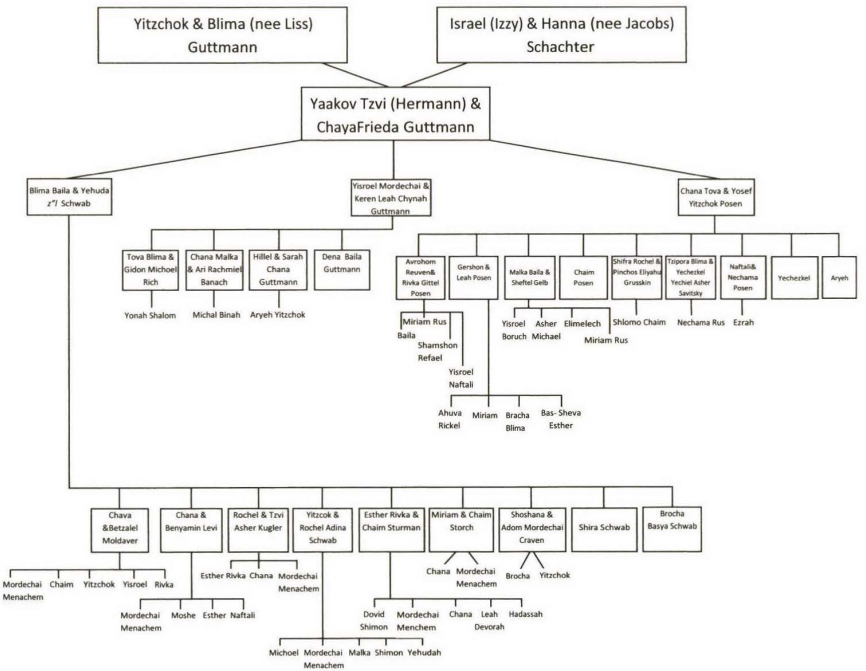
May Hashem shower you all with blessings of health, happiness, and nachas.

Sincerely,

HERMANN GUTTMANN

Guttmann Family Tree- 2014

by Betzalel Moldaver



CHAPTER I

From Galicia to Berlin





Opa and Oma Guttman, Lehrman, Oma sisters

I

Life for Polish Jewry was challenging and rewarding at the same time. During the 19th century, anti-Jewish persecution, economic restrictions, and outbreaks of violence pressed increasingly on the socioeconomic foundations of the Jews, especially those who lived out in the shtetls of Poland and Russia. On the other hand, life was simple, pure, and traditional ideals of piety, charity, chassidus and scholarship, were fused in the warm and intimate lifestyle of Polish Jewry. My Opa, Reb Mordechai Guttmann ob"m, was a simple Chasidic Jew living in Galicia at the end of the 19th century. He was a Bobover chasid, a follower of the original Bobover Rebbe, R' Shloime Halberstam zt"l (grandson of the Divrei Chaim of Sanz), and later, his son and successor, R' Benzion Halberstam zt"l hy"d. I recall how my grandfather would tell me how much Bobov and the Chassidic way of life meant to him. He would describe for me, in vivid detail, how the court of the Bobover Rebbe often developed into a completely self-sufficient social institution, centered on the Rebbe's house and the Beis Medrash (the house of study and prayer). Throughout the day, Chassidim of all ages could be seen coming and going successively, volumes of various Talmudic tractates and Chasidic literature, under their arms. Bobov had its own artisans, storekeepers, and religious functionaries, and evolved its own oral and musical traditions. Opa Guttmann was a part of this life. His manner of dress was decidedly Chasidic, he was a modest Torah scholar, and he would not embark on any significant enterprise without first consulting his Rebbe.

R' Shloime Halberstam, the first Bobover Rebbe founded a yeshiva, Etz Chaim (Chaim's Tree) named in honor of his grandfather, which soon became famous throughout Galicia and

Hungary. Bobov became one of the more important centers of Chasidic Jewry and hundreds of devotees would travel to Bobov to meet with R' Shloime, seek his advice and blessings, or even just to catch a glimpse. When certain Yamim Tovim (Jewish festivals) would come around, such as Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Shavuos, thousands of Chassidim would travel from all over the continent to be in the presence of their holy mentor. Opa Guttmann would also leave his family and like the devoted chasid that he was, would remain in Bobov, in the presence of his Rebbe, for the duration of the holiday. Of course, this would be inconvenient for Oma Chava and her young children, and they would be forced to spend the joyous days without their husband and father, but such was the life of a chasid in those days.

The Bobover Rebbe was one of the staunchest defenders of traditional Jewish life, against ever increasing secularism in Jewish society. R' Shloime fought against lay school education and made attempts to exempt Jewish students from the obligation to attend elementary state schools. It is reported that during Emperor Franz Joseph's visit to the city of Bochnia in 1889, he managed to obtain an audience with the monarch to whom he presented his opinion on the subject. Not much came of that meeting, but it was certainly the talk of town. This ongoing battle against the forces of Haskala (enlightenment) that threatened to overwhelm his Chassidic court, caused R' Shloime to become ill of health. It was often necessary for him to travel to the renowned German spas for treatments, and many years later, during one such excursion in 1905, the Rebbe passed away. His body was transported back to Bobov and he was buried there. Although Opa Guttmann was already living in Germany at the time of the Bobover Rebbe's death, the loss affected him greatly.

Daily life was consistently hard for Jews all over the European continent. However, in the 1880's, the economic situation of Jewish merchants in Galicia and all of Poland, took a turn for the worse when Christian cooperative movements were organized. This resulted in mass immigration, especially to the United States. Some 36,000 Jews emigrated from Galicia in the 1880s, increasing

to 114,000 in the 1890s, with the city of Brody becoming a key way station.



The Bobover Rebbe

Opa Guttmann heard about the "Goldene Medina," the term used to describe life in America—a land of wealth and riches, where the streets are paved with gold—and he was more than slightly intrigued. Although many, if not most, Chasidic Jews refused to hear of moving so far away from their Rebbe, to this land of wealth and opportunity—to them, America was not the "Goldene Medina" (land of gold) but rather the "Treifene Medina," an unkosher and decidedly unholy land—Opa Guttmann recognized that remaining in Poland would not bode well financially for himself and his family. In 1895, his oldest child, my father Yitzchok (Isaac), was already five years old, and supporting his burgeoning family was uppermost in his mind. After discussing the matter with Oma Chava, and coupled with the surprising blessing of the Bobover Rebbe, it was decided that they would move to America. Within a few weeks, the family was packed and ready to make the transatlantic voyage to the United States.

The first thing Opa Guttmann did was purchase tickets on a steamliner headed for New York city. But as the famous Jewish expression goes, "A mentch tracht, un Gut lacht!" (A man makes plans, and God laughs at them) The ship was scheduled to depart from a German port and it was necessary for the Guttmann family to leave Poland and stop over in Berlin while awaiting their passage. However, while in Berlin, Opa Guttmann observed the beauty of the capital city and the significant Jewish presence there. Jews of all walks of life—not only German Jews—lived in Berlin and the mosaic of Jewish life, the many synagogues, kosher restaurants and Jewish business establishments, made the city particularly attractive to him. Why must they go all the way to America, he wondered, when Berlin had everything a Jew could possibly want? With the nagging thoughts about America being a "Treifene Medina" and the danger of his family assimilating there still resonating in his mind, Opa Guttmann resolved to remain in Berlin and resettle his family there. The Guttmann family embraced their new city with love and tenacity and became pillars of their community over the course of the next four decades.

CHAPTER II

Becoming German





Opa in German Army

II

It is important to understand a bit about the nature of Berlin at the time when Opa and Oma Guttmann arrived, in 1895. Prior to 1870, visitors to the city found themselves confronted with little more than a swampy backwater. As the turn of the century approached, however, Berlin underwent vast and rapid change, becoming one of Europe's most modern metropolises. Berlin caught up to other European capitals at a breathtaking pace. The railroad provided the first catalyst, transforming Berlin into one of central Europe's most important rail hubs. Industry fueled the Berliners as well as many outsiders, and by 1864, over half the city's inhabitants were not native to the city. These new residents came primarily from Brandenburg and Silesia, in what is today the Czech Republic, and Poland. The economic boom after 1871 only increased Berlin's draw, providing fertile ground for the establishment of banks, insurance companies, trade and industrial enterprises. The government kept pace, putting its stamp on the city with awe-inspiring halls of justice, schools and palatial post offices, while the newly minted Kaisers publicly displayed their power and their taste with museums, monuments and equestrian statues.

From the moment Opa Guttmann arrived in Berlin, he fell in love with the city. Berlin was a bustling metropolis, filled with wide boulevards and colorful gardens. In terms of high culture, the city was filled with museums and theaters of all kinds; Berlin at the turn of the century was on the verge of becoming a major musical city. City parks teeming with playful children watched over by their nattily attired nannies dotted the sprawling cityscape and the hustle and bustle of daily life was an entirely new concept for

the Guttmann family. Especially since arriving from the Galician countryside, where shtetl life reigned supreme, and the quaint—almost backwards—life of the villagers was the only thing he knew, Opa Guttmann was taken in by the excitement and pulsating life of the big city. He knew that this was where he wished to bring up his family.

Oma Chava, Opa's faithful partner in life, who followed the guidance and directive of her husband unquestionably, was a young mother who raised a fine and beautiful family of six children. Always sparkling clean and properly attired, the Guttmann children were well known around the neighborhood where they lived. As Berlin's Jews continued to infiltrate the social and economic elite, their ranks continued to grow. By the turn of the century, there were more than 110,000 Jews in Berlin, comprising more than 5% of the total population. Most settled in the center of the city, but by 1900 had started to move to the outer districts of Spandau and Stralauer, and then to Charlottenburg, Schoeneberg, and Wilmersdorf. Although located in the heart of Berlin, the neighborhood where Opa and Oma Guttmann settled, known as the Scheunenviertel, was teeming with Polish émigrés who had relocated from their homeland to escape the oppression and impoverishment of the old country. For this very reason, my grandparents left their little town in Galicia, and looked ahead to creating a new life with new opportunities in their new country. However, old habits do die hard, and being the "farbrenter" Chasid that he was, Opa Guttmann fit right into his new neighborhood, with the distinct flavor of Chassidim and their mode of dress, language and lifestyle.

There were numerous communal institutions thriving in Jewish Berlin: between 1880 and 1930, eight elaborate new synagogues were constructed, raising Berlin's total to sixteen. Numerous Jewish newspapers were founded, and organizations such as Bnei Brith, Poalei Zion, Agudath Israel and Chibat Zion attracted many new members. Due to the old-fashioned synagogues and the Chasidic-style shtiebels (small synagogues) along the Grenadierstrasse, the Scheunenviertel where my grandparents settled was not

unlike New York City's renowned Chasidic enclave of Williamsburg. There were so many Jews of Polish origin sprinkled in with the native Germans that Opa and Oma felt right at home.



Ez Chaim Talmud Torah School (1929)

CHAPTER III

"Hotel Guttmann"





My Father

III

Early on, Opa saw a promising business opportunity and purchased a local inn on the corner of Grenadierstrasse and Hirtenstrasse. It was known as the "Kosher Hotel" and it became the pride of the family. As mentioned, numerous visitors and immigrants were streaming into Berlin at a daily pace, and more often than not, their first stop was Reb Mordechai Guttmann's hotel located in the heart of the immigrant district. My grandparents took great pride in their establishment and always kept it in tip-top shape. It was warm and clean and Oma Chava used to cook for her guests. Her old-style flavor became legendary and many of the most prominent visitors to Berlin would make sure to come and stay at "Hotel Guttmann." This included renowned Rabbis from all over the Jewish world and even Chasidic Rebbes would insist on staying at the inn. Opa set up a classic shtiebel downstairs and many Rebbes, especially the Bobover Rebbe, stayed at Opa's inn.

Opa Guttmann always remained a faithful Bobover Chasid, and even after moving away from Poland and living in Germany, he maintained his ties with the Bobover Rebbe. After R' Shloime Halberstam, the first Bobover Rebbe, passed away in 1905, his son and successor, R' Benzion Halberstam zt"l hy"d, rejuvenated the chassidus in a huge way. R' Benzion, the Kedushas Zion as he was known (after the name of his acclaimed work) was famous for his affectionate treatment of young people, in the hope that they would remain within a Chassidic framework. He founded an extensive network of over fifty yeshivos in Poland, which altogether enrolled thousands of students. A large part of the Rebbe's time was devoted to the material needs of the yeshiva students, and to that end he

established in each yeshiva an association called Tomche Oraysa (Supporters of Torah). When World War II broke out, he escaped to Lwów, where he died in an anti-Jewish pogrom in July 1941.



Hotel Adler

On the few occasions when R' Benzion came to Berlin, he stayed in "Hotel Guttmann" together with the group of followers who traveled with the Rebbe. On Shabbos, he would conduct a "tish" in the hotel's dining hall, which was attended by many of the neighborhood Jews—German and Polish alike. His presence was awe-inspiring and his visits left a great impression on German

Jewry. I recall, as a small child, how Oma Chava once took me by the hand and brought me to the Bobover Rebbe's room to receive a personal blessing. At the time, I didn't understand what it meant to be in the presence of such a great tzaddik and in my young child's mind, it seemed as if my grandmother was "shlepping" me to see an old man. However, after seeing the Rebbe with my very own eyes and standing in his presence, I will never forget the awesome feeling of fear—Yiras Shamayim—when I looked at him. I do not recall the blessing R' Benzion gave me on that occasion, but I will always remember the incredible impression he made on me as a young German boy, which continues to last until this very day, almost ninety years later.

The hotel was clearly the focal point of our family's life. Every major holiday would bring the whole family together under one roof. The entire first floor of "Hotel Guttmann" was taken over by the Guttmann clan and it was a great opportunity for the cousins, uncles and aunts, to spend quality time together with our grandparents. I will never forget the large billiard table in the hotel parlor which was transformed into a massive dining table for the entire family. Every Pesach, Opa would sit at the head of the large table and speak to us—his entire family—about the exodus of our people from Egypt and what it truly meant to be an Orthodox Jew. On Sukkos, the vision of the large and spacious Sukkah attached to the side of the hotel, lingers in my memory, and how we laughed with glee as Oma Chava would lower pots of food down with a string from an upstairs window right into the Sukkah. It was a sight to behold. And on Simchas Torah, as the men would dance in circles around the Bima, we, the children, would gleefully tie all the strings of tzitzis together, causing a great deal of confusion and sometimes consternation, when the dancing finally came to a stop!

Rosh Hashana was truly special on the Grenadierstrasse. Opa Mordechai had the most beautiful voice I can remember and he led the congregation as the Baal Tefillah for the High Holiday prayers. The shtiebel located on the ground floor of the hotel was packed with congregants who came from all over the neighborhood to hear Opa intone the special prayers. As spiritually uplifting as this

was, the quality of the prayers was further enhanced by the choir of children that stood on all sides of the Bima and complemented Opa's davening. We, his grandchildren, would stand proudly next to our grandfather and sing along with him, our high-pitched melodious voices blending and harmonizing with the deep baritone of our Opa. In the solemn atmosphere that permeated the shul and its overflowing crowd of worshipers, nary a dry eye could be found in the gallery when the prayers were completed—so powerfully inspirational was the result of our combined prayers and melodies. Just the mere thought of it today, brings tears to my eyes.



Grenadierstrasse

CHAPTER IV

Growing Family





Opa with Nathan, Ella and Moshe

IV

As much as my grandparents took an immediate liking to their adopted city, their children, my father and his brothers and sisters, reveled in their new surroundings. They felt as if Berlin, and indeed the German lifestyle as a whole, was part and parcel of their very fiber. My grandparents had six children, like I mentioned: Yitzchok (Isaac), Rosa, Ella, Leopold, Nathan and Ida. My father, Isaac, was the bechor, the first-born, and although he was born in Poland and only arrived in Berlin at the age of 5, he felt as German as any other native-born son of the Fatherland. My father grew up like a typical German child and was educated to be a good German. From early childhood, he attended schools that only spoke German—unlike the old-style "cheder" catering to immigrants from Poland and Czechoslovakia, where Yiddish was the prevalent language. My father attended German primary school and university and felt as "Yekka" as anyone else. He was always impeccably attired in fashionable clothing, spent his free time with his German friends and even stopped speaking Yiddish. In fact, I recall my father encouraging us, his own children, to only converse in German and not to speak Yiddish. This is how I remember growing up.

Rosa, my father's sister, also was educated in German-speaking schools, as were all the rest of the children. She later married a man from Zurich, a tailor who made a decent living and supported his family nicely. His family name was Hendelis, a well-known and respected family from Switzerland, and the young couple moved to Zurich where Rosa and her husband had two children. They were staunch Zionists at a time when the Zionist movement was strong and expanding rapidly, and they both joined the local branch of the

Zionist party in Zurich, Hashomer Hatzair, becoming active members. They were so committed to the cause that they were persuaded to send their two children to Palestine in the 1920's, so as to educate them in Zionist ideology and help prepare the future State of Israel for the eventual mass emigration of Jews to the Holy Land. To this end, the Hendelis children were sent to Kibbutz Schiller, one of the early Kibbutzim located near Rechovot. The kibbutz was founded as a kvutza in October 1927 by a group of twelve academics from Lviv and Galicia. This was after the group had spent two years of agricultural training in Kiryat Anavim. The new settlement was named after Shlomo Schiller, a Zionist activist in Lviv. The Hendelis children thrived in the kibbutz and eventually married and raised their own families in nearby Tel Aviv. Unfortunately, Rosa's marriage did not last and she was divorced from her husband before the Second World War. She died in an old-age home in Zurich.

Although Ella was raised as a German through and through, she nevertheless married a Polish émigré like her father. His name was Moshe (Max) Bram, and he was the only one of my uncles who was devoted to Talmudic education. He was a classic Talmid Chacham, in the truest sense, and I remember that when the family would get together on holidays and at family celebrations, my Uncle Max would invariably be the one asked to speak and say over a Torah thought. Ella and Max had one child, a son named Ziggy, who was saved from the Holocaust by being sent out of the country in 1938, and he ended up in Washington D.C. Because Uncle Max was born in Poland, he was among the 50,000 Jews of Polish descent living in Germany that were declared "stateless" to be forcibly expelled from Germany in October 1938. Fearing for his life, Max left Berlin and fled to Paris, where he was interred in a French concentration camp that housed Polish and German Jewish refugees.

Meanwhile, back in Berlin, after successfully seeing her son emigrate to the U.S., Ella too, received a visa and traveled through occupied France, Spain and Portugal before arriving in the states in 1939. Once there, she worked night and day, to spirit her husband out of France, and even managed to send him a visa that guaranteed his safety. Max received the visa while in Paris and was told

by the authorities there not to go back to the concentration camp at all, but rather to make arrangements to leave France for the U.S. immediately. However, years of living in Berlin had converted the Polish-born immigrant into a true German "Yekka" and he felt it was necessary for him to return to the camp to retrieve his belongings and settle his affairs. Unfortunately, he never made it out alive; he was deported with other Polish Jews to a German death camp during the war where he perished. Ella remained in the U.S. and later remarried.

My Uncle Leopold lived in Berlin for most of his life. He was also a tailor and he married and had two children. I lost touch with Leopold and do not know much about his life or his family. I heard that he lived out his remaining days in Switzerland.

My father's youngest brother Nathan, was quite a bit younger than my father, who was the oldest. He was a true "Yekka" and exhibited the characteristics of a pure bred German Jew. Before the war broke out, he managed to escape to Holland. He lived for some time in Amsterdam and married a Dutch girl. They were blessed with two daughters, who were very young when the Nazis invaded Holland in 1940 and deported most of the Dutch Jews. My uncle Nathan and his wife were among the Jewish deportees who were taken away, never to be heard from again. However, before their deportation, they made contact with the Dutch underground in Amsterdam, a resistance group that specialized in saving Jewish children, by the name of "Utrechtse Kindercomit." The group successfully spirited Nathan's two young daughters out of Amsterdam and sent them to live on a farm in Friesland, a small enclave off the coast of the North Sea.

I am proud to say that I feel personally responsible for rescuing these two girls, my first cousins (Mimi and Chanie), and getting them out of Europe. The story is amazing and touching at the same time. After Normandy and the D-Day invasion of June 5, 1944, allied troops moved east through the European continent, pushing the German army back into the Rhineland and reclaiming the freedom of Europe. I was then a member of the British I Corps, Second Army, and we were part of the troop that liberated Amsterdam

and the Netherlands. It was at that time, while stationed in Amsterdam, that I learned about the existence of my two first cousins, the daughters of my Uncle Nathan, who were currently residing on the farm of a Dutch farmer up in Friesland. I made it a priority to locate these girls and I requested—and received permission—from my kind Colonel, to requisition a jeep and drive out to the North Coast. I am still indebted till this day, to my battalion leader, this Colonel, a wonderful man who I believe (but never confirmed) was actually Jewish.

It took me quite some time to find my way—I was only commissioned for a three-day leave—but I eventually made it to Friesland and located the farm where Mimi and her sister were living. They were very little when their parents were taken away from them and when I showed up, they thought I was their father! Unfortunately, they did not speak any German and I did not speak Dutch, so communicating was a bit of a problem, but as soon as they learned that I was their relative, they were excited to see me.

I knew there was no future for them in Friesland and immediately after the war, I brought them to Amsterdam and put them under the care of the Hechalutz, a Zionist organization whose goal was to instruct Jewish youths that were planning to make aliya to the Land of Israel, in agricultural work. They took the girls under their care and eventually brought them to Palestine. Today, Mimi and her sister live in Ashkelon, and I still keep up with them from time to time.

Ida, the youngest sibling, married her first cousin (on her mother's side), a wonderful man by the name of Moshe Hochhauser. The name Hochhauser was renowned in Germany, synonymous with the Agudath Israel party. Moshe's uncle, Yochanan Hochhauser, was a prominent layman who was involved in numerous charitable deeds on behalf of Agudath Israel. He was a close confidant of Rabbi Eli Munk, the well-known spiritual leader of Congregation Adath Yisroel in Hendon. His nephew, Moshe, was a successful salesman in Berlin, and was quite well off. In 1939, before the outbreak of World War II, only those Jews who could afford to purchase visas were able to escape Nazi Germany. Ida, Moshe,

and their only son Helbert, were among the fortunate ones as they had the means to arrange safe transport for themselves to Switzerland. Once there, however, the Swiss authorities refused to allow the Jewish refugees to settle down and become naturalized citizens, and the Hochhauser family was forced to remain in a transit hotel for many months. Knowing that they had the means to afford living this way, the proprietor took advantage of Moshe and charged him an exorbitant amount, causing him to lose a significant portion of the wealth he had brought with him from Berlin. Eventually, Moshe, Ida and Helbert, managed to immigrate to the United States, where they settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Helbert became a professor in a prominent Cleveland university and still lives in Cleveland till this very day.

CHAPTER V

Neurrupin





Parents

V

In the 1920's, Berlin was a city alive with possibilities. It was an exceptionally fertile ground for intellectuals, artists, and innovators from many fields during the Weimar Republic years. A significant new development in Germany's intellectual environment occurred in 1918, when the faculties of a number of German universities became fully opened to prominent Jewish scholars for the very first time. My father, Isaak Guttmann, came of age in this glorious period of time, and in 1922, agreed to meet a young woman of Polish descent, by the name of Bluma Liss, on an arranged date. Bluma, or Blimchen as she was affectionately known, was an orphan who had lost her mother back in her hometown of Wojnicz, Poland. Seeking a better future, she came to Berlin all by herself as a young girl, and lived with her sister. She quickly adapted to her new surroundings and became a model German citizen, even picking up the new language and mastering it quite quickly. In fact, one of the things that appealed to my father, a real German Jew in every respect, who wouldn't even speak Yiddish at home, was her total command of the German language and the eloquence with which she spoke it. Blimchen was soft-spoken, quiet and very respectful of her surroundings. Her reserve also imbued her with an inner strength and character, something which my father immediately noticed and came to love about her. The two were married in 1922, and the wedding affair was joyous and solemn at the same time, since my mother had practically no family in attendance at her own wedding.

Immediately after the wedding, my parents moved into a small apartment near "Hotel Guttman" on Grenadierstrasse, but this wouldn't last long. My father had an acquaintance, a man by

the name of Goldmann, who had an idea to open up a furniture business. Herr Goldmann came from a wealthy family and money was of no object to him. He made an arrangement with my father whereby he would put up the necessary capital to purchase a large showroom, as well as the inventory, and my father would run the store. Herr Goldmann believed that it would be too expensive to purchase a store of such great proportion in the center of Berlin, and he looked outside the city for suitable space.

It did not take long before he located a store in the hamlet of Neurrupin, about an hour's drive from Berlin. Neuruppin is an ancient town with a great deal of history. It served as a garrison town for various armies, most notably that of Frederick the Great, who lived in Neuruppin in his years as crown prince of Prussia. The area is more rural than the bustling city of Berlin, and the store catered to the local populace, including villagers and farmers from the surrounding districts. As per the arrangement between my father and Herr Goldmann, my parents moved out to Neurrupin, where he could manage the business. Soon after I was born in 1923, my father and mother bade goodbye to my grandparents and the rest of the family and moved away from the Grenadierstrasse. They lived in a small home in Neurrupin, a few short blocks from the store. Of course, they came back to Berlin regularly, especially for the holidays and celebrations, as I previously mentioned.

My father proved himself as a capable manager who understood the business, and knew how to sell the product. Herr Goldmann was quite pleased and he paid my father well. The business grew and the store did well. As a young child, growing up in Neurrupin, I have very few memories, but there was one thing that I said which caused my parents to leave the small town and move back to Berlin. Neurrupin was in a rural area of the Brandenburg district of Germany, a place where not many Jews lived. In fact, I do not know if there was even a minyan of ten men to conduct regular services in Neurrupin. It was a thoroughly Christian town and this fact bothered my grandfather, Opa Mordechai, immensely. As a chasidic Jew who held onto his rich Jewish heritage, he could not understand how a Jew can live so far away from a proper Jewish community and

remain firm in his ideals and religious beliefs. Whenever my parents would come back to Berlin for holidays, this was always a topic of conversation. My father argued that it was necessary for them to live there in order to properly oversee the business and the lack of a Jewish structure was not having an adverse effect on himself and his family.

But he was wrong. One year during the Christmas season, when I was just a small boy, I noticed how all the neighbors would decorate their homes with Christmas trees and other festive decor. In my naive child's mind, I was envious and could not understand why we did not have a tree of our own. I begged my father to allow us to have one but of course he refused. Apparently, I made such a fuss, that even my grandfather heard about the request back in Berlin and that was when he insisted that we move away from Neurrupin. It was clear, said Zaidy Mordechai, that Neurrupin was no place for a Jew to live, and certainly not a town suitable for bringing up children. My father, being forced to recognize the truth of his father's words, relented and informed Herr Goldmann that he would be unable to continue managing the store. My parents left Neurrupin and not long after, the furniture store closed down.

CHAPTER VI

Community Life





My mother, Egon and myself in Berlin

VI

Upon returning to Berlin, my father found an apartment on the Hirtenstrasse in a part of the city known as Kruezberg, and his young family began to grow. We were a true "Yekke" family and Jewish values were totally intertwined with a strict German lifestyle. My parents had three children. I was the oldest, born on September 9, 1923. My brother Egon (Eliezer) was born about four years after me, on January 27, 1927, when my parents had already moved back to Berlin. My sister Thea (Toiba) was the youngest. She was born quite a bit later, on February 19, 1935, and was only four years old when I left Germany in 1939.

Having learned a great deal about the furniture business in Neurrupin, my father wished to start up his own business right here in Berlin. He leased a storefront on Marianstrasse and with the connections he had made previously, was able to acquire enough merchandise to get the business off the ground. He worked hard and with Hashem's help, he was moderately successful. Soon, the little storefront on Marianstrasse became too small. On top of that, we experienced various forms of anti-Semitism including vandals breaking the plate glass window of our store, and my father decided that it was time for us to get out of this area. To this end, he found a larger store in a bustling shopping district on Skalitzerstrasse. Behind the store, was an apartment large enough for our family and we moved to our new home with great joy and anticipation. Skalitzerstrasse was a half-mile long strip of shops, outdoor cafes and galleries, and if one wanted to position himself in a respectable retail area, Skalitzerstrasse in the Kruezberg district was as good an any.

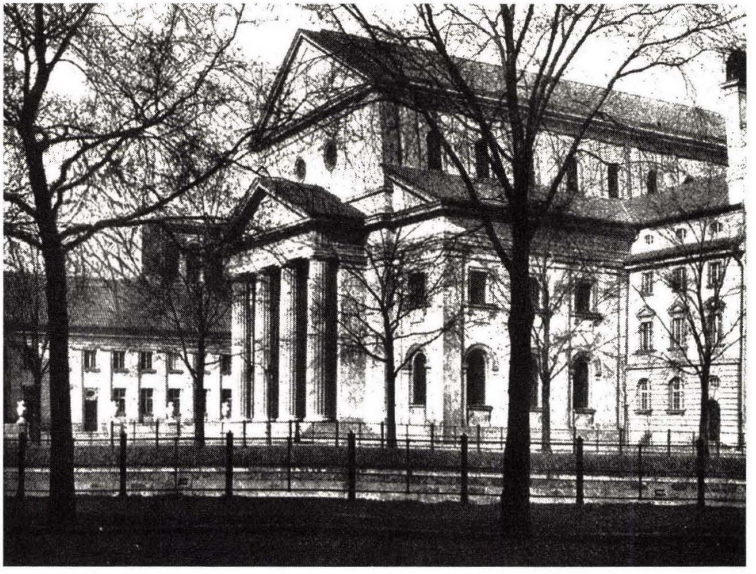


Furniture store in Berlin

Kruezberg was also a vibrant Jewish neighborhood. According to some sources, approximately 10% of the Jewish population of Berlin lived in Kreuzberg. There were synagogues and day schools, and we davened in the Kottbusser Ufer Schule, the third largest synagogue in all of Berlin. It was a grand synagogue, indeed. Finished in 1916, the synagogue was erected in three years in what then was known as Kottbusser Ufer (first called Kohlenufer, then Luisenufer, Kottbusser Ufer, and between 1937-1947, it was called Thielschufer, to commemorate a young Nazi killed during a street fight with communists in 1931). It was not only a house of prayer but also a huge social and cultural center of the Gemeinde: the community center housed a religious school, a kindergarten, a help desk, a youth welfare center, a welfare kitchen and a canteen.

The synagogue complex consisted of a large main building, with several smaller buildings on either side, where a weekday synagogue, service apartments and a youth service building was housed. The main sanctuary was built in a neoclassical style, in the form of

a three-tiered basilica that housed well over 2000 seats. It was only used on Shabbos and holidays, but when the synagogue was filled to capacity, the sound of the prayers were deafening. A balcony to the side of the Aron Kodesh contained the choir, which was used on special occasions, and it was truly an honor to be chosen for the choir. As our family was known for their singing talent, I was fortunate to be chosen to sing in the choir.

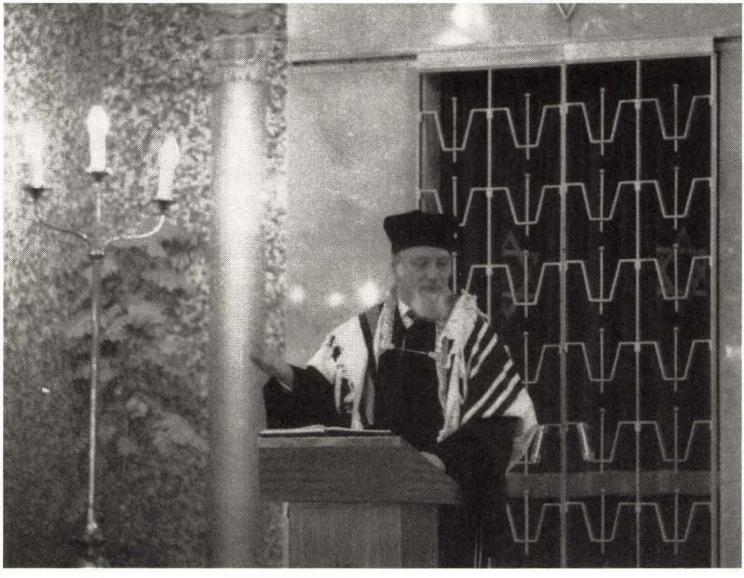


Kotbusser Offer Schule

The leader of the congregation was the esteemed Rabbiner, Rabbi Julius (Yoel) Jakobovitz zt"l. Rabbi Jakobovitz was a firm adherent of the German-Jewish "Torah im Derech Eretz" philosophy, having a broad knowledge of religious subjects as well as secular culture and philosophy. This made him a unique spokesperson for the Orthodox and traditional form of Judaism, and he was fiercely opposed to the powerful Reform movement that was dominant in Germany, particularly in Berlin. He was invited to join the Berlin Rabbinate in 1928 and served as the Chief Dayan, rabbinical judge,

in the local Beis Din. He also led the services in the Kottbusser Ufer Schule and was involved in many of the youth programs, including Ezra and Hashomer Hatzair.

Rabbi Jakobovitz's son, Immanuel, became famous in his own right, as the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth from 1967 to 1991. Prior to this, he had served as Chief Rabbi of Ireland and as rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in New York City. He was knighted in 1981 and became the first Chief Rabbi to enter the House of Lords in 1988 as Baron Jakobovits. Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits arranged for his parents and brothers to join him in London. But in 1940 the family was interned on the Isle of Man as enemy aliens, a supreme irony for Jews who had been forced to leave Germany. Upon his release, Rabbi Julius Jakobovits became a senior rabbi in Britain and sat on the bench of the chief rabbi's court.



Lord Rabbi Immanuel Jacobovitz

When I reached school-age, my parents decided to send me to the Kaiser Strasse Jewish Boys' School located near the well-known Alexander Platz. Although it was a "Jewish School," we really didn't learn much about Judaism or Jewish subjects, for that matter. It was certainly not religious in any form and the focus of our curriculum was on basic subjects like Literature and Arithmetic. Lessons there took place either in the morning or in the afternoon, because there were too many children. I attended morning sessions and managed to finish my schooling in the same school, unlike my brother Egon, who attended a non-Jewish school, but was kicked out of the school together with the other Jewish students in 1936 when the Nazis mandated that Jews were forbidden from attending German schools.

I remember the Kaiser Strasse Jewish Boys' School because it was considered a superior school. For the most part, only German Jewish children were permitted to attend, and the school was known to discriminate against religious children and those who came from immigrant families from Poland. That practice continued until 1942 when all the Jewish schools were closed down. The rector of the school was a man by the name of Max Reschke. He was feared and hated at the same time. He was a strict disciplinarian, who ruled with an iron rod. He was exceptionally discourteous to children from religious families and did his utmost to cause them as much discomfort and distress as possible. As I came from an Orthodox background, I was often picked on by Herr Reschke and made to suffer public embarrassment in front of the entire school. This went on for some time until I began dreading going to school. On one occasion, Reschke publicly berated me and called me a "Zou Yud" (A Zoo Jew, or a Pig Jew). My father later noticed that I was unhappy and asked me what the problem was. When I told him about the treatment I was receiving from Reschke and what he called me, he immediately stood up and went down to the Kaiser Strasse, where he confronted Reschke and ordered him to stop discriminating against his son, as well as the other religious children. My father must have made such a strong impression on the rector, that from that time on, he never bothered me again.

Max Reschke was not only an evil headmaster; he was also an informer and collaborator with the Gestapo. In 1942, when all the Jewish schools in Germany were officially shut down, including the Kaiser Strasse Jewish Boys' School, Reschke was appointed by the Nazis to run an assembly concentration camp for Jews and other political prisoners in the former home for the elderly on Grosse Hamburger Strasse. He curried favor with the Germans by treating the Jewish prisoners exceptionally harsh, and he was known to respond with great brutality to any and all escape attempts. After the war, he was tried in the Regional Court of Chemnitz and received a twenty-five year prison sentence for collaboration with the Gestapo and participation in the prosecution of Nazi victims and opponents.

In the afternoon, I would take a train to Grenadierstrasse and attend a religious cheder. I cannot say that I learned much in that cheder, as it was not set-up in a manner that was conducive for learning. There was a rabbi who served as our teacher. In our class, we had one chumash which was used by the entire class. The manner in which our rabbi taught us was he would call upon each boy individually to come to the table where he would read a posuk from the chumash out loud. The rabbi would translate the posuk and spend a minute discussing it and then the boy was finished, and it was the next boy's turn. All I can remember was that when your turn was up, you went back to the corner of the room and joined in the game of marbles that was in progress. Needless to say, we didn't learn very much in cheder and very little of my early Torah education emanated from that cheder on Grenadierstrasse. Perhaps this was the reason why my father hired a private tutor to learn with me. I remember him well. His name was Rabbi Schechter, and he was a Polish Jew living in Berlin. During those formative years, the lion's share of my Jewish education came from my private sessions with Rabbi Schechter.

CHAPTER VII

Bar Mitzvah in Nazi Germany





Bar Mitzvah

VII

Jewish life in Germany took a turn for the worse when Hitler's Nazi party took over in January 1933. Persecution of the Jews became active Nazi policy, but at first laws were not as rigorously obeyed or as devastating as in later years when Jews suffered appallingly. Some rich Jews could afford to leave Germany (or were forced to) but many could not. Over time, the pace of persecution increased. In 1936, Jews were banned from all professional jobs, effectively preventing them from exerting any influence in education, politics, higher education and industry. Because of this, there was nothing to stop the anti-Jewish actions which spread across the Nazi-German economy. Thugs in the SA and SS were given a free hand in their treatment of Jews. We heard daily about arrests and banishment. Children came to school in tears after the Gestapo had arrested members of their family during the night. Other children suddenly stopped coming to school; their fate remained unknown. The general atmosphere was very heavy after the frightening events and the personal tragedies of so many families. At home, at school, and even when we attended services in the Kottbusser Ufer Schule, our lives were filled with fear and uncertainty.

Additional anti-Semitic decrees forbade Jews to use trams and other means of public transport. Sitting on benches in parks and streets was also forbidden. Many shops closed their doors too: "Not for Jews" was written there. The SA marched through the streets, cursing and slandering Judaism with loud, threatening voices. Rumors about more and more anti-Semitic laws spread like wildfire and increased the sense of insecurity. There was talk of shutting down the entire Jewish school system. A further rumor mentioned forced labor from the age of twelve.

In 1935, as the anti-Jewish laws were being enacted on a rapidly increasing pace, I began to study the Torah portion for my Bar Mitzvah. I was born right after the conclusion of the Simchas Torah festivities, and it was decided that I would read Parshas Noach from the Torah. My father engaged the Baal Koreh from the Kottbusser Ufer Schule, a man by the name of Herr Lachmann, to teach me how to lain in the true Yekke style. I also read the Haftorah, which, as it turned out, was the special portion that is read on Rosh Chodesh—as the Shabbos of my Bar Mitzvah was Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. Herr Lachmann also helped me prepare a small Bar Mitzvah Drasha (speech), which I was to deliver before Rabbi Jakobovitz and the entire congregation.

The day of my Bar Mitzvah was October 17, 1936, the second day of Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. Fear and intimidation was pervasive in every Jewish home and on the face of every one of Berlin's Jews. All these restrictions created fear and concern about the future. Insecurity was everywhere; nowhere was one safe. To add insult to injury, on the day of my Bar Mitzvah, an S.S. officer was appointed to stand inside the synagogue and observe the proceedings. He was present as I read my parsha from the Torah and he literally stood by my side at the Bima as I delivered my Bar Mitzvah speech. His intimidating demeanor and the look of disparaging contempt on his face as he watched me speak, is a sight I will not soon forget. The thought of celebrating this milestone in my life with a large kiddush and Shabbos seudah, a common practice when times were good, was simply impossible for my parents to contemplate considering the tenuous circumstances we, the Jews of Germany, found ourselves in.

CHAPTER VIII

Kristallnacht and Deportation



Kristallnacht

VIII

The restrictive nature of life began to take its toll on my parents. The furniture store on Skalitzerstrasse had always been prosperous and a solid source of income for quite some time, and my father was considered an upstanding member of our community. I remember that our apartment, situated directly behind the store, was well-appointed and beautifully furnished. My mother, always a particular housewife, kept her home in immaculate condition and her children were equally well groomed at all times. However, as the Nazi policies against Jews and Jewish business interests became ever more difficult, my father's furniture business took a dramatic downturn. First, the Nazis insisted that he display his name—his Jewish name—in clear, bold letters in the window. He was forced to write "Isaak Guttmann" in the store window so that everyone should know that it is a Jewish-owned store. This had the effect of keeping many non-Jewish Germans away and the business began to suffer. If that wasn't enough, the Nazis installed a German gentile to run my father's business, even though my father had been doing a capable job of running it beforehand. Of course, this was of no concern to the Nazis and not surprisingly, the German, with no inkling of how to properly run such a business, ran it into the ground until it was forced to go out of business. My devastated father went from a prosperous businessman to a near pauper who was forced to live on charity.

My mother had always been the strong, silent type. Her life revolved around chessed—helping others, making peace among friends and neighbors, and most important of all, ensuring that her husband and children have everything they need. Now, in this difficult time, filled with panic and fear of the unknown, when people

were literally afraid to walk in the streets lest they be attacked by SA and SS thugs, my mother's only concern was one thing: getting her children out of Germany to a safe haven. This topic dominated our family conversation, as I'm sure it did in many, if not most, of Germany's Jewish homes. People were lining up in front of foreign consulates in the hope of securing visas and permits to travel abroad. My father spent days on line in front of the American, Argentinian and numerous other South American countries, hoping to receive the coveted affidavits, however, as these things cost money and my father was effectively penniless, he was unsuccessful in getting permits to go anywhere. No country would accept him or his family, and day after day, he would trace his steps from one embassy to another. All to no avail.

And then came Kristallnacht—the night of shattered glass. On November 7, 1938, a young Polish Jew, Herschel Grynszpan, attacked and shot two German officials in the German embassy in Paris. (Grynszpan was angry about the treatment of his parents at the hands of the Nazis.) On November 9, the German Attache, vom Rath, died in Paris and instructions were issued urging demonstrations against Jews to be organized and undertaken in retaliation throughout Germany. The SS ordered the "spontaneous demonstrations" to be carried out that night, November 9. The storefronts of Jewish shops and offices were smashed and vandalized, and virtually every shul in Berlin was torched with their windows smashed, seforim and ritual books ripped to shreds and sacred Torah scrolls desecrated. Approximately 91 Jews were killed, and another 30,000 arrested, mostly able bodied males, all of whom were sent to newly formed concentration camps. In the following 3 months some 2000 of them died in the concentration camps, the rest were released under condition that they leave Germany. Hitler ordered the devastation to be blamed on the Jews. Collectively, the Jews were made to pay back one billion Reichsmark in damages, the fine being raised by confiscating 20 per cent of every Jewish property. The Jews also had to repair all damages at their own cost.

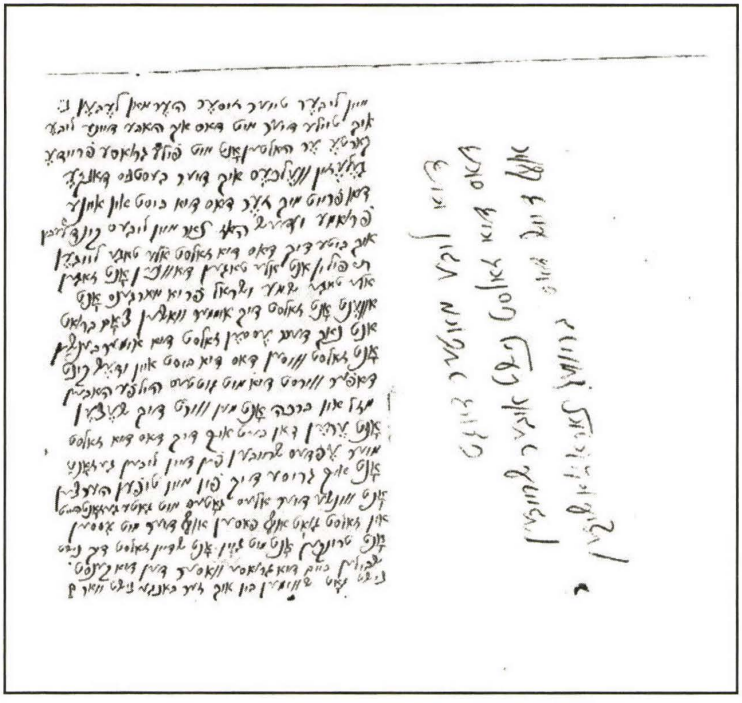
I will never forget the sights and sounds of that terrible night. As the mobs rampaged through the streets, setting fire to

synagogues and smashing every Jewish storefront window they could find, my mother, baby sister Thea, brother Egon and myself hid under a bed in my parents room. We could hear SA thugs screaming "Kill the Jews" so loudly as to ring in my ears till this very day. We were careful not to make the slightest sound as the downstairs neighbor, a German gentile, was always getting annoyed when we walked on his head and he would bang upwards with a broom to make us be quiet. Now, as we huddled under the bed, we prayed that he would not hear us and alert the mob outside that a Jewish family was living above. Thankfully, he didn't hear us and the mob never did enter into our home. Based on the stories that I heard from numerous other survivors, who endured far worse in terms of damage to property and family members being arrested, I can say we were lucky.

My father could not take it anymore. The strain of losing his business, being forced to live off of charity, and the inability to secure safe passage for his family out of Germany, was too much to bear. On top of that, my father and mother were not born in Germany and as per the edict of October 28, 1938, all Polish foreign nationals were to become stateless—Ostjuden—and deported back to their home country. This was known as the "Polenaktion"—forced deportation of Jewish Polish nationals from Nazi Germany to Poland. Not only were my parents now stateless, but my grandparents, Opa and Oma Guttmann, Polish immigrants back in 1895, were now being forcibly deported out of Germany.

I never did get to say goodbye to my dear grandparents. On October 28, they were herded together like cattle and forced to board trains that took them over the border to Poland. Those expelled in this manner had no time to arrange their affairs or even say goodbye to their loved ones. Together with seventeen thousand Polish Jews whom Poland had earlier disenfranchised, they were banished from Germany and wound up stranded in a no-man's land between the borders of the two countries. Like all Polish Jewish émigrés, they were now considered Ostjuden. Germany wanted them out and Poland did not want them back. They were forced to live in stables and transit camps in the vicinity of Zbaszyn and Beuthen.

The conditions were appalling and many people succumbed to the elements and the suffering. Some were able to make their way into the Polish interior, particularly those who had relatives and friends, while those not so fortunate remained in the railway station, on a nearby lot, or in the streets. The Polish authorities put former stables at the disposal of the deportees.



Yiddish Letter from Opa Guttmann while interned in Zbaszyn

Opa and Oma Guttmann remained in Zbaszyn for a few months, before managing to get back to their old hometown of Gorlitz. They had moved from Gorlitz some 43 years earlier and there was little left for them there. Their oldest daughter Rosa, who was divorced, came to be with them and found herself in Poland when the war broke out. She had blond hair and features that

allowed her to pass herself off as a German, and she was an eyewitness to the day in early 1940, when the Germans rounded up the Jews of Gorlitz in the local marketplace, and shot each and every one of them. Rosa was able to steal herself over the border into Switzerland and it was she who testified to witnessing the murder of her parents before her very eyes. Hashem Yinkom Damam.

My mother, Blimchen, recognized the danger of being stateless in Berlin, but could not bear the thought of leaving her children alone in Germany. My father, on the other hand, knew that he had no choice but to attempt to escape over the border, if he wished to survive. In late May 1939, he traveled from Berlin across the country and tried to sneak across the border between Germany and Holland but was unfortunately caught by German guards at the border and sent to the Aachen prison camp. There, he was beaten mercilessly by the depraved guards, starved and treated so inhumanely that he became deathly ill. He spent just a few days in the camp but his health deteriorated to the degree that the Germans allowed him to leave and go back to Berlin. They told him that he must leave Germany in 48 hours or he will be deported. My mother was shocked when she saw him. In just a few days, her young and vibrant husband looked as if he had aged 30 years. His head had been shaved, and his cheeks were pale and gaunt. He came home to his thankful family but he would never survive the terrible experiences he had been put through. He placed his name on a long waiting list of Germans hoping to immigrate to the United States, but he knew deep down that it would take too long. Just a few days after returning home and five days after the Shavuos holiday, my father passed away on the 11th day of Sivan—May 29, 1940. Yehi Zichro Baruch.

CHAPTER IX

Kindertransport





The First Kindertransport

IX

In late 1938, I was fifteen years old and the prospect of a Jew surviving in Nazi Germany notwithstanding, I believed that a better future in Palestine was in store for me. Since I was a child, I was always involved in youth programs like Ezra, the religious youth movement named for the biblical prophet Ezra, which was founded in Germany in 1919. It was originally affiliated with the Orthodox Agudath Israel party and its aim was to educate young Jews towards building the Land in the spirit of Orthodox Judaism. I also became affiliated with more Zionistic movements and all through my early adolescent years, I subscribed to and attended these programs regularly. The youth groups held activities and lectures, political gatherings, conferences, trips, scout camps and summer camps. Programs like Hashomer Hatzair and Hechalutz sent their members to hachshara (aliyah preparation) groups. Their activities influenced many Jews to consider emigrating to the Land of Israel. Those with means even went ahead to explore the possibility of settling and investing in the Holy Land. The youth movements invested resources in finding employment for Jews, proving they were just as skilled as their non-Jewish contemporaries.

As a religious Jew and a member of the Zionist youth programs, I was put in a group known as "Brit Chalutzim Datyim" (Buchad)—the religious settlers, which was a division of the worldwide Hechalutz movement. This was a stroke of good fortune, because since I was an active member, I was eligible to have my name placed on a list for transport out of Germany. To their credit, all the youth programs, both Zionist and Agudist were working feverishly to arrange "Kindertransport" to take as many Jewish children as they could out of Germany and to a better and brighter future.

Following the violent pogrom staged by the Nazi authorities on Kristallnacht, the British government eased immigration restrictions for certain categories of Jewish refugees. Spurred by British public opinion and the persistent efforts of refuge aid committees, British authorities agreed to permit an unspecified number of children under the age of 17 to enter Great Britain from Germany and German-annexed territories (namely, Austria and the Czech lands). Private citizens or organizations had to guarantee to pay for each child's care, education, and eventual emigration from Britain. In return for this guarantee, the British government agreed to allow unaccompanied refugee children to enter the country on temporary travel visas. It was understood at the time that when the crisis was over, the children would return to their families. Parents or guardians could not accompany the children. The few infants included in the program were tended by other children on their transport.

It is hard to convey in words the distress of parents forced to send their children away as the only means of saving their lives, or that of children separated from their parents. All too often, a brief farewell at a railway station was the last memory that the children would have of parents who stayed behind. The Nazi authorities, with characteristic callousness, decreed that the leave-taking must not be ostentatious, claiming that visible public gatherings of Jews and displays of emotion would arouse the righteous wrath of the Aryan population; for that reason, transports often left by night, sometimes from outlying stations. While some children saw the journey as an adventure into new territory, the majority were frightened and deeply distressed.

When the call finally came, I was ready. I was more than ready—I was eager to go, to get out Germany and start life in a country where I was accepted and where I would be given the opportunity to thrive and succeed. My transport was scheduled for the night of April 11, 1939, which just so happened to fall out on the last day of Pesach. That holiday was bittersweet for me, as the realization of my imminent departure and the distinct possibility of never seeing my parents again hit me like a freight train. My mother was emotional and was having a difficult time dealing with

the situation, but she understood what needed to be done and she cherished those last few days we spent together.

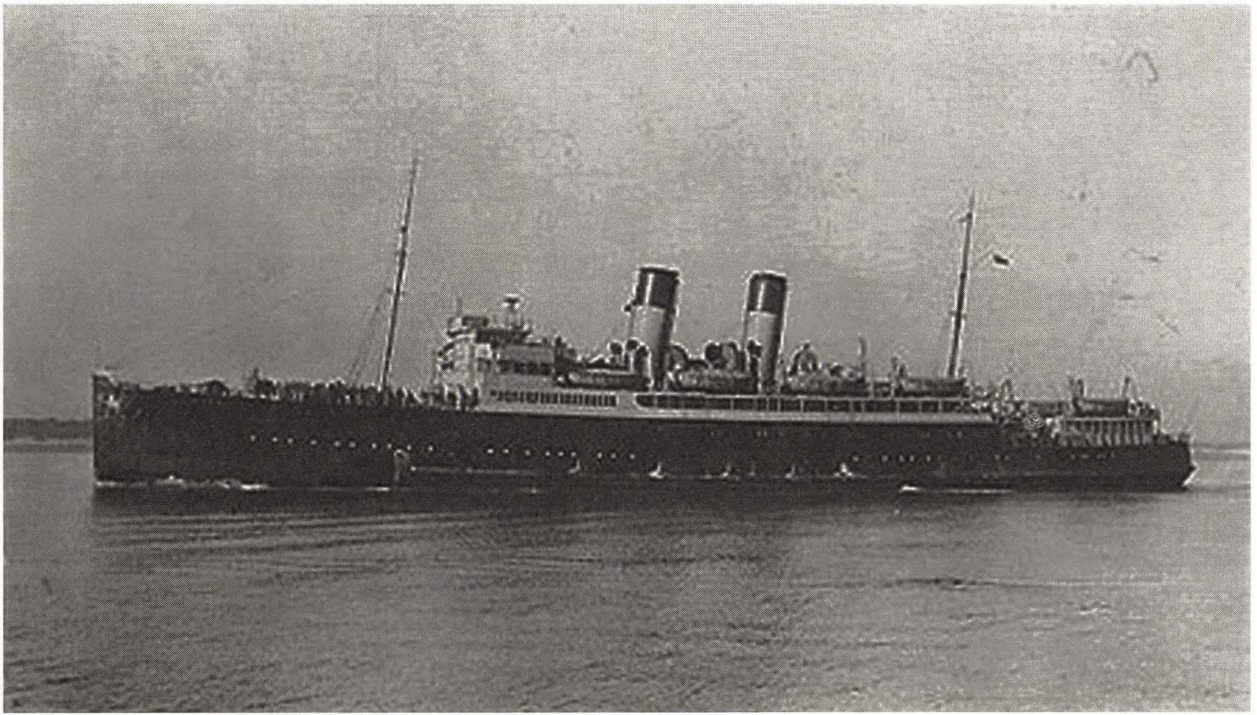
Within minutes after the holiday was over and we said havdala, my mother hastily ran to a local bakery where bread was already being baked and bought a number of loaves so that I would have what to eat on my journey. My bags were packed and the last few items were inserted with a heavy heart. The farewell from my brother and baby sister was quick and not nearly as difficult as parting with my mother. Words were not spoken but many a tear was shed.

My father took me to the Alexander Platz, where my train was awaiting boarding. My father was not an emotional person and he shook my hand as we said goodbye, but his deep-seated emotions did betray him as the train pulled out of the station. Rather than wave farewell like the parents of most of the other children on the train, my father literally ran alongside the moving car and chased it all the way to the next station. It was only a few short blocks but I could see how he ran as fast as his legs could carry him just to catch a final glimpse of his oldest son. He did this again at the next station and the one after that, before the train sped away and he was unable to catch it anymore. The sight of my father running after the train—running after me—and waving as it pulled away for good, will always remain with me. It was the last time I ever saw him.

CHAPTER X

Passage to England





R.M.S. Vienna - Hoek van Holland

X

Was I sad as I sat on the train as it sped westward, out of Berlin, and towards the border? I can honestly say I was not. I was excited to leave Germany, to travel with my youth group to England, to ultimately make it to Palestine. There were a number of guides (madrichim) on the train who were in charge of our safety but for the most part, we were on our own. We chatted amongst ourselves and we sang songs about our yearning to live in the Land of Israel. I sat next to a friend of mine from school, a boy by the name of Folger, and over the course of the next few hours, most of my conversation—when there was conversation—was with him.

We left Berlin and traveled due west, directly for the German-Dutch border. We arrived at the border in the middle of the night, and were all ordered off the train so that the Nazi border guards could inspect our papers and check us for contraband. Thankfully, they were rather courteous and no incidents occurred to slow us down. After that, we were ordered back on the train and we crossed the border uneventfully.

What I didn't know, was that I had nearly caused an incident that could have jeopardized the entire trip for myself, and possibly for everyone else as well. While waiting for the train at the Alexander Platz in Berlin with my father, a woman approached me and asked me if I could take a small package for her to England where her son would meet me and pick it up. Not thinking anything of it, I agreed and took a small rectangular box from her which I slipped into my inner coat pocket. When I boarded the train, I stowed my baggage carefully, and hung my coat on a hook. At the border, we alighted from the train and our papers were inspected. A number

of Nazi guards boarded the train and rummaged through our luggage to ensure we weren't smuggling any contraband out of Germany. We were warned time and time again, that if we were caught with contraband, we would be removed and detained by the SS. Of course, our papers were all in order and the Nazis left the train. We were then cleared to reboard and cross the border. I was not wearing my coat while we stood waiting at the border and apparently the guards didn't think to check the coats that were hanging in the train. It was a good thing, because the package that I was given contained a gold watch which I did indeed give to the woman's son, when he met my train in London. I had no idea that I was transporting such an item, which would surely have drawn the Nazi's attention and cause me to be detained. I shudder to think what would have happened had they found the watch and handed me over to the Gestapo. Missing the train and not crossing the border would have been the least of my problems!

Once over the border, our train continued to travel west. Dutch relief groups met our train at the border station in Holland, lining the platform and giving us food and drink, before accompanying us to the port of Hoek van Holland, near Rotterdam, and seeing us safely on board the ferry ship. It was a few hours cross-channel ferry that brought us from Hoek van Holland to the English port of Harwich Parkeston Quay, where we were met by representatives of a number of Jewish organizations, including the Jewish Agency. From the port, a number of lorries transported us to the Liverpool Street Station in London, where we were met by more well-wishers who brought us food and drinks, and generally made us feel appreciated and feeling like celebrities. It was at the London station that I met the son of the woman who had sent a package with me, and when he opened it and saw the gold watch, only then did I realize how much trouble I could have been in had I been caught. Obviously, Hashem was watching over me.

CHAPTER XI

Whittinghame Farm School

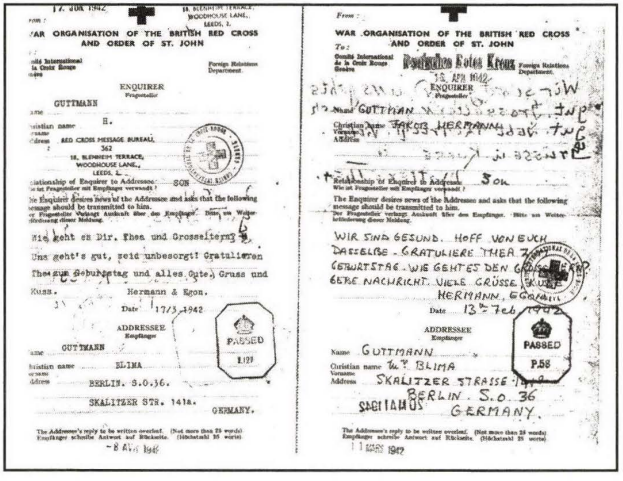




Some buddies in Whittinghame

XI

Feeling blessed to be out of Germany and imminent danger, and being treated like celebrities by the English locals, we were quite content to alight the trains that were to take us to our final destination: Whittinghame Farm School. Whittinghame is east of Edinburgh, Scotland. It is in an area called East Lothian near the coast; rolling hills, sheep, and isolation. Whittinghame was the ancestral home of Lord Balfour, the author of the Balfour Declaration creating a national home for the Jews in Palestine. He is buried on the property near Whittinghame Tower, a 14th century military tower. Lord Balfour believed in the justice of Zionism all his life. He died in 1931. His nephew Lord Tremain, inherited the property and he too was a Zionist.


WAR ORGANISATION OF THE BRITISH RED CROSS AND ORDER OF ST. JOHN

ENQUIRER

GUTTMANN

H.

18, BLENHEIM TERRACE, WOODHOUSE LANE, LEEDS, 2.

SON

Wie geht es Dir, Thea und Grosseltern? Uns geht's gut, seid unbesorgt! Gratulieren Thea zum Geburtstag und alles Gute, Gruss und Kuss. Hermann & Egon.

17/3/1942

ADDRESSEE

GUTTMANN

ELIMA

BERLIN. S.O.36.

SKALITZER STR. 141a. GERMANY.

PASSED

WAR ORGANISATION OF THE BRITISH RED CROSS AND ORDER OF ST. JOHN

Deutsches Rotes Kreuz

ENQUIRER

GUTTMANN

JAKOB HERMANN

Relationship of Enquirer to Addressee: SON

WIR SIND GESUND. HOFF VON EUCH DASSELBE. GRATULIERE THEA ZUM GEBURTSTAG. WIE GEHT'S DEN GROSSELTERN? GUTE NACHRICHT. VIELE GRÜSSE, KUSS. HERMANN, EGON.

13/7/1942

ADDRESSEE

GUTTMANN

ELIMA

SKALITZER STRAISSE 141a

BERLIN. S.O. 36

GERMANY.

PASSED

Red Cross postcards send from my mother after she was detained by the Nazis.

When the darkness of the Holocaust gathered over Europe, Britain barred Jews from entering Palestine, but they did agree to accept Jewish children, on a temporary basis. Lord Tremain, gentle soul that he was, opened Balfour's house, between 1939 and 1941 in Whittinghame, to the Kindertransport children. A special school was set up for us there by the Hachshara. It was called the Whittinghame Farm School. We Jews were to be trained as farmers for eventual resettlement in Palestine someday. Eventually, Balfour's home sheltered over 200 Jewish refugee children.



Thea

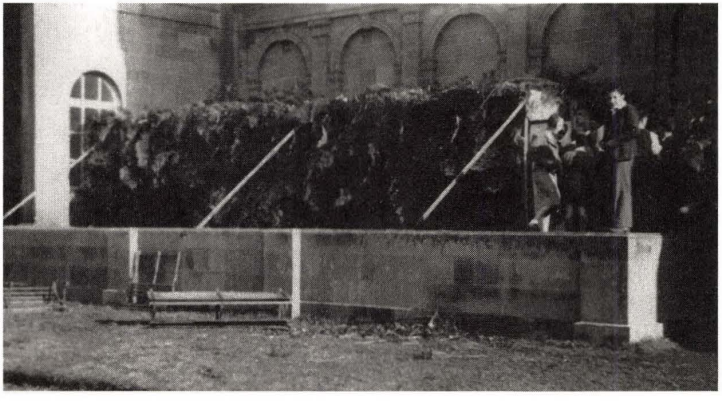
I must tell you, it was a great time for us at Whittinghame. True, we were away from our families. Letters from home became rare commodities and then stopped altogether. It was in Whittinghame where I learned of the death of my father in Berlin in June 1939, and I sat shivah for him there as well. I also learned of the final deportation of the Jews of Berlin in 1941 while at Whittinghame, which included my dear mother and baby sister Thea, who were "resettled" and eventually murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz, Hy"d.

Nothwithstanding, I loved it in Scotland; it was the best two years of my life. At Whittinghame we formed our own Jewish home, our own community and society. We learned English, but we also studied Hebrew, Jewish songs, learned about Palestine and even had a small synagogue in Lord Balfour's house where we lived.



Sleeping quarters in Whittingthame

Those of us who wished to retain our religious lifestyle, made use of the synagogue to great benefit. There were two dining halls—one for us, the religious children, and one for the non-Orthodox. Kosher food was served in both dining halls, a credit to the agencies in charge and the providers who ensured that even Jewish refugees did not have to sacrifice their kosher diet in times of distress.



Building a Sukkah in Whittinhame

The religious madrich (guide) in our group was a young man named Poldi Schleider. He came from Vienna and was a little older than the rest of us. He was kind and sympathetic to our plight, almost like a big brother to those who missed their families back home and needed some extra loving care. There was a rabbi in charge; his name was Rabbi Hans Heinemann, and he took care of all religious affairs in Whittinghame. He arranged our curriculum, watched over the kitchen to ensure that the food was strictly kosher, and attended the prayers in the synagogue with us. Later, he was paired up with another rabbi, an older man we referred to as Reverend Cherik. (Years ago in England, the title "rabbi" referred to the Chief Rabbi and the other religious figures were ministers who held the title reverend. Some Jewish reverends even wore the clerical collar. There were numerous reverend doctors and many of them had even higher levels of ordination like dayan [magistrate].) The two rabbis made sure to retain the Jewish flavor and representation of us German Jewish refugees, all throughout our stay in the Whittinghame Farm School.



Rabbi Hans Heinemann

As expressed in its name, we resided in a "farm school" where the bulk of the students labored in the fields, tended to the barn animals and were involved in many forms of agriculture. Personally, I disliked "field work" and had no patience or inclination to labor outdoors under the hot sun the entire day. To this end, I volunteered in the crafts department, and it was there that I truly found my calling. I built chicken coops, barn stalls and all sorts of cabinets. Quite often, I was asked to repair chairs, tables and just about anything else that needed fixing. I became quite adept at this new talent that I never knew I possessed, and to me it was like a breath of fresh air. It went a long way towards my positive attitude and experience for two years in Whittinghame.

One aspect of life in Whittinghame which we didn't enjoy or appreciate, was that often we became a "spectacle" to be ogled and stared at by visitors who came to see the school in Whittinghame which housed the "poor Jewish refugee children." Apparently, the Jewish agency in charge encouraged this outpouring of sympathy and the numerous trips made by London's Jewish elite, was an effort to curry favor and support for our eventual relocation to Palestine. Often, though, it had the opposite effect. Many of these wealthy Londoners were so taken by the sight of Jewish children—mostly orphans—working in the fields that they wished to adopt us and bring us with them back to a life of high society in England. But we were taught to be idealistic, to pine for the Holy Land and the opportunity to work it and settle there, that we had no interest in going with these fine Londoners. On the few occasions that we were given the choice to leave, I can't remember even one of our group agreeing to leave the hachshara and move to England.

CHAPTER XII

Enemy Aliens



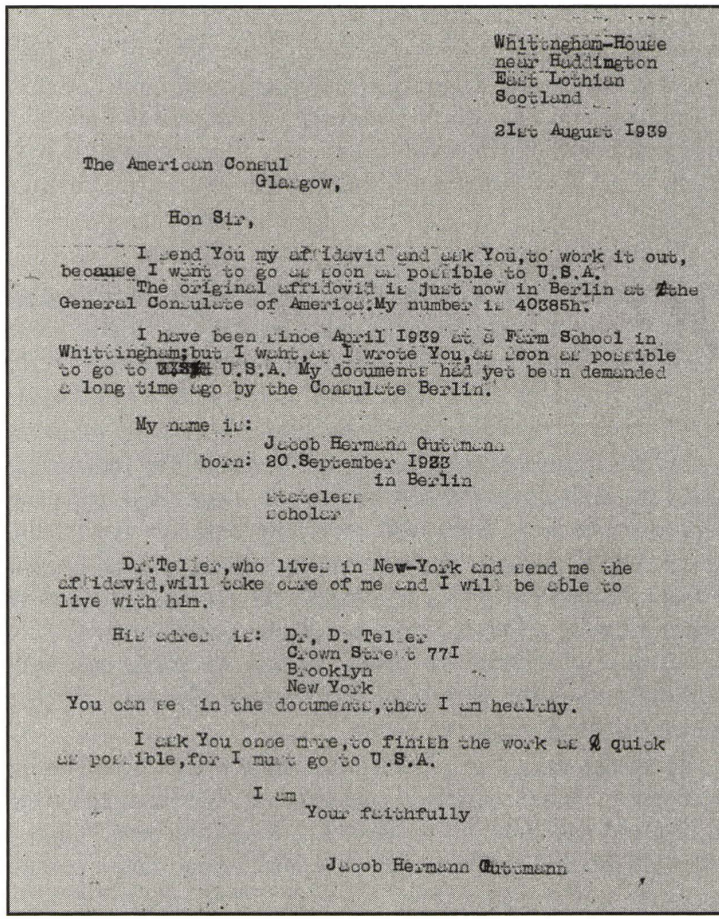


Lord Balfour's castle

XII

When the German Blitzkrieg began to bombard England in 1940, everything changed, including our idyllic life in Whittinghame. With the quick defeat of France and the desperate escape of the British Army at Dunkirk, Great Britain feared invasion; that there would be spies, enemies and saboteurs inside the country who would help the Germans. The Italians had joined the Axis powers. Great Britain was alone. Fear and panic gripped the country. Foreigners, especially Germans and Italians, were viewed as potential "fifth columnists." If you were not English or from a country that was fighting the Nazis, you were viewed with the utmost suspicion. It was a national madness that gripped the country. Neighbors who lived together for years, peacefully, were suddenly not to be trusted. If you spoke German or Italian you were suddenly under suspicion.

By spring 1940, the relentless German march over Europe prompted increased anxiety, a near hysteria. The German assault on Holland and Belgium in May 1940 coincided with Winston Churchill becoming Prime Minister and a new policy was immediately implemented. First came the May 12th order to intern temporarily German and Austrian males under sixty years old who were in the coastal regions of England and Scotland. Churchill's newly formed government took the advice of MI5, the secret service. "Round up the lot," was Churchill's phrase. British police fanned out throughout the country arresting every German and Italian they could find. If you were between the ages of 15 and 17 years old, you were considered a potential Nazi agent.



Whittingham-House
near Haddington
East Lothian
Scotland

21st August 1939

The American Consul
Glasgow,

Hon Sir,

I send You my affidavid and ask You, to work it out, because I want to go as soon as possible to U.S.A. The original affidovid is just now in Berlin at the General Consulate of America. My number is 40385h.

I have been since April 1939 at a Farm School in Whittingham; but I want, as I wrote You, as soon as possible to go to U.S.A. My documents had yet been demanded a long time ago by the Consulate Berlin.

My name is:
Jacob Hermann Guttmann
born: 20.September 1923
in Berlin
Student
Scholar

Dr. Teller, who lives in New-York and send me the affidavid, will take care of me and I will be able to live with him.

His adress is: Dr. D. Teller
Crown Street 771
Brooklyn
New York

You can see in the documents, that I am healthy.

I ask You once more, to finish the work as quick as possible, for I must go to U.S.A.

I am
Your faithfully

Jacob Hermann Guttmann

Letter to the American Consul in Glasgow

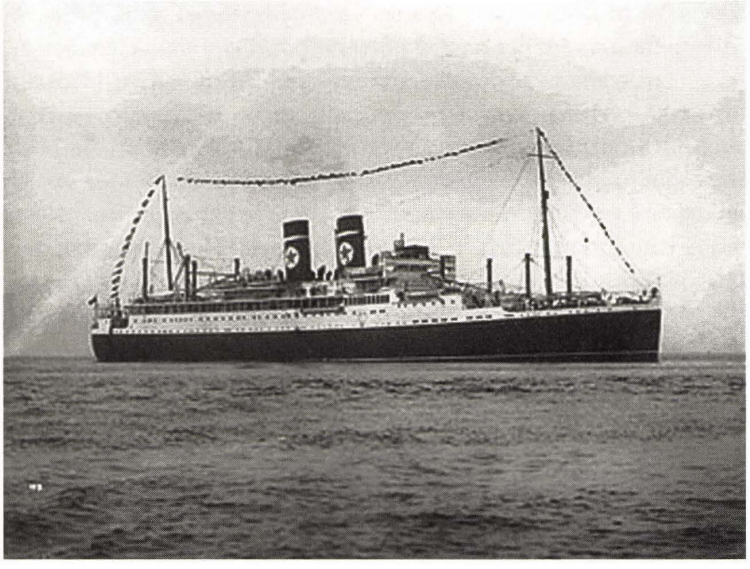
Eventually, they came to Whittinghame. We had just a few days to prepare ourselves and when they came they were polite and cordial as only British soldiers arresting innocent Jewish youths can be. Quite a few boys—myself and Folger my closest friend from Berlin included—were ordered to take our stuff and hop onto trucks that were to take us away. To where, we really did not know. But we soon found out.

Most of the recent immigrants to Britain, about 28,000 in the preceding years, were German speaking. Most of them were Jews. They were all immediately taken into custody and brought before a local magistrate. Hearings were hastily conferred and it was at these hearings that each individual was given a letter, an A, B, or C classification. C was considered the least dangerous; you were not an enemy of Britain but you still required minimal observation. B usually meant a higher level of observation. If you were classified as A, however, you were deemed an imminent threat to Great Britain. Single young men and boys, especially those of German descent such as myself, were promptly classified as A. Some of the boys were sent to internment camps in places like Isle of Mann. Most of us, myself included, were given over for "special treatment" since the British intelligence services were told that the German refugee Jews in Britain cannot be trusted and must be remanded. To the British populace, the intelligence services, and even the Churchill government in 1940, all this made sense.

Our group was taken to Liverpool together with many other refugees and we were marched through the streets on our way to deportation. The British Government approached the governments of both Australia and Canada and asked if they could take any of the over 12,000 German males, 2,500 of whom were pro-Nazis, Prime Minister Robert Menzies of Australia replied that his country would take half the internees and all the prisoners of war. Canada also agreed to accept a limited amount of refugees. As Canada and Australia were both former colonies of Great Britain, the deal was struck with both countries to accept and detain the "enemy aliens" who posed a threat to England. It was late June 1940. All of us boys from Whittinghame and many from other homes throughout England were taken to the docks to be shipped out to Canada. The people stared at us. Some called us names, a few threw stones. It was horrible and we felt like prisoners in this new land. Before long, we were loaded on a converted ocean liner, the Arandora Star. Barbed wire was strung along the deck, railings and upper structures to keep us contained.

Before 1939, the SS Arandora Star was a grand luxury liner in her Majesty's fleet. After the onset of World War II, however, the

Arandora Star was requisitioned and refitted as a transport ship for British troops. She was hastily put into service evacuating troops from Norway and from France in June 1940 before undertaking what was to be her final voyage taking enemy aliens and prisoners of war to Canada.



Arandora Star

I was fortunate. Together with the rest of the boys from Whittinghame, roughly forty of us in total, we did not remain on the ship for long. Numerous Jewish agencies worked feverishly on our behalf. Correspondence back and forth between Liverpool and London held up the ship for a bit, until finally our madrichim from the hachshara managed to convince the English authorities that we were not the enemy; we were on the side of the English! How could 15 to 17 year old German refugees, who were Jewish and more hated by the Nazis than even the British were, pose a threat to national security and be considered dangerous? Eventually, someone in charge in London agreed with that overly simplified assessment

and the order was given to remove us from the ship. So, after being forced on board together with over 1300 passengers, our group was the only one that was ordered off the ship, and sent back to Whittinghame.

As I've said many times, Hashem was good to me and was constantly watching over me. The hashgacha pratis was incredible for the Arandora Star didn't go very far. On July 1, 1940, the ship left Liverpool unescorted, bound for Newfoundland and Canadian internment camps with nearly 1,200 German and Italian internees, being transported from Britain. There were also 374 British men, comprising both military guards and the ship's crew. In the early morning of July 2, off the northwest coast of Ireland, she was struck by a torpedo from the U-47, a notorious German U-Boat. U-47 fired a single torpedo at the Arandora Star. All power was lost at once, and 35 minutes after the torpedo impact, Arandora Star sank.

The explosion ripped a huge hole into the hull of Arandora Star. The crew jumped into action to launch the life boats. Although nine could be freed, it was not nearly enough. The captain stayed on board directing the rescue operation to save as many lives as he could. Of the 1200 "internees" on the ship, 700-800 drowned, trapped within the barbed wire. The Captain went down with the ship. Many innocent Jews drowned that day, all murdered by a Nazi submarine commander who said later, he mistakenly read the Arandora Star's silhouette for a war ship when he decided to attack.

From Liverpool, we traveled back to Whittinghame, but our guides including Rabbi Heinemann, Reverend Cherik and our matron, Mrs. Lequer, felt that the mood in the country had changed drastically, and we were not safe remaining as a large organized group of German emigres living in England. It was decided that we were to be split up into smaller groups and sent to hachshara farms around the countryside. Our goal was the same: to learn how to farm, plant and till the land, until which time we could make it to Palestine and build up the Land of Israel.

CHAPTER XIII

Chivers and Cambridge





Chivers and Sons, Histon

XIII

I was part of a small group of young men and women, all teenagers and young adults from Whittinghame, who arrived in a place called Hinton. It was a small country parish near the educational center of Cambridge. The proximity to Cambridge encouraged the development of gardening and market produce in the early 19th century. There were several large farms and orchards, and many gardeners in the area, including John and William Chivers, brothers whose family came to dominate farming in Histon. By the 1930's Chivers and Sons Ltd. owned 1,500 acres in Histon and adjoining parishes, and another 4,500 acres elsewhere in Cambridgeshire, all run from a central estate office at Histon. When John Chivers's son Stanley took over the management of the farms after the First World War, they were reorganized as a highly integrated operation for supplying the needs of the local factories. By the late 1920's, the Chivers farm and factory employed nearly 2,000 at peak periods. Clerical work and management jobs employed another 250 in 1929 and 300 by 1939. The number of employees at Histon rose to 2,200 in the early years of the Second World War, when an important product was blackcurrant purée, and jam.

Our religious group—Kvutza as we called it—found our arrangements in Chivers quite pleasant. My friend Folger and I lived in a bungalow on the grounds, together with the others. We tried very hard to recreate the spirit we had so thoroughly enjoyed in Whittinghame. Most of us were Shomer Shabbat and the boys organized regular minyanim for prayers in a synagogue structure while the girls would light candles, the way their mothers did. We would conduct assemblies on a regular basis which we called "Asifa

Klalit" and we even appointed leaders in our group to oversee the hachshara and liaison with the Jewish agencies. We were excited to flex our "independence" and we made decisions as a unit, which we stuck to no matter what.

We were quite Zionistic in Chivers and we lived in the kvutza like we would on a kibbutz in Israel. Ours was a democratic community where we young people lived and worked together on a non-competitive basis, in a socially independent society founded on principles of communal property ownership, social justice, and equality. Everything belonged to everyone and there was no sense in trying to make money; we were all farmers preparing ourselves for life on a kibbutz in Palestine, and this was really all we needed. For six months, beginning in the summer of 1940, our lives were simple and carefree, fun and sociable—and as the world around us was becoming increasingly darker in the throes of a Holocaust the likes of which mankind had never experienced before, we remained a small, but content group of Jewish boys and girls living on a farm in Northern England, with a future filled with hopes and dreams in the Holy Land of Israel.

In Chivers, I met a boy my age from Vienna by the name of Henri Schmelczer. We became fast and close friends and we shared our life stories with each other on those long starry nights. We were very similar, not only in our Zionist outlook and desire to immigrate to Palestine, but Henri, like me, also had distaste for farming and agricultural work. He considered himself too intellectual to be a farmer and although he might not have been as handy as I was in crafts and woodworking, he dreamed of going to University and studying one of the professions. He also didn't necessarily appreciate the kvutza lifestyle of sharing everything in life with your neighbors and not being afforded the ability to "make it" on your own in the world—both academically and financially. It occurred to both Henri and myself that since the city of Cambridge was just a few kilometers away from Chivers, why must we stay here on the farm and work in the fields all day, when we can just as easily walk to Cambridge and enroll in the University there? And that is exactly what we did!



With my friend Henri Schmelczer

We said our goodbyes and left for Cambridge. It was a short walk to town and upon our arrival, we were directed to the CCRC, Cambridge Children's Refugee Committee, in Peterhouse College. Peterhouse is a constituent college of the University of Cambridge and it is the oldest college of the University, having been founded in 1284 by Hugo de Balsham, Bishop of Ely. The college was the first in all of Cambridge University to have electric lighting installed, when Lord Kelvin provided it for the Hall and Combination Room to celebrate the College's six-hundredth anniversary in 1883-1884. It was the second building in the entire England to install electric lighting, after the Palace of Westminster in London.

During wartime, Cambridge University was one of many places in Great Britain which set up a local refugee committee. Margareta (Greta) Burkill, was the driving force behind the CCRC. Greta was married to Charles Burkill FRS, a mathematician of infinite patience and goodness who later became Bursar of Peterhouse College. As Bursar, his job was to ensure the appropriate processes are in place for the effective administration of the College. Charles Burkill was responsible for the College's finances, estates and investments. The Bursar also had responsibility for the

College's staff and buildings and represented the College in the wider University.

At the CCRC, we were introduced to Ms. Burkill, a charismatic, hyperactive, tiny lady (I believe born in Odessa, Russia), who upon hearing about the events of Kristallnacht, reportedly remarked: "The whole of Britain is aghast—the horror of it all goes like an electric current through every town and village. The feeling is 'we must save the children!'" The CCRC was set up almost immediately, and ultimately took on responsibility for around 800 children, besides dealing with some 1,200 other cases. Greta Burkill, undaunted by the bureaucratic machinery, devoted her time, energy and money to the welfare of these children. She made it her life's mission to help the refugees and thus, when Henri and I walked into her small office on campus that day, she immediately made us feel welcome and worked to find us a place to live.

This was easier said than done. Although she was fully compassionate to our plight, nevertheless, we were still German refugees who had been given an A classification: in other words, in the eyes of the British, we were still enemy aliens. As such, we were not permitted to live on the Peterhouse College campus. There was even a 9:00 pm curfew that was enforced and we had to be off the streets by that time or risk incarceration. In jest, we mentioned that we had seen a girl's dormitory building nearby and inquired if perhaps there was room there for the two of us to stay. Ms. Burkill was horrified at the suggestion and this gave her the impetus to find us a place of our own—on the double! In short time, she located modest living quarters not far from the main Peterhouse campus, and she arranged jobs for us around the campus which would enable us to pay for our food and lodging. These jobs consisted of washing dishes, bringing coal to the rooms in the various buildings and other odd and end jobs. The tradeoff for doing these jobs—besides for paying for our lodging—was that we were permitted to attend classes in Cambridge for free. It was worth doing these menial obligations just for the opportunity we were afforded and we were very grateful to Ms. Burkill and the CCRC.

CHAPTER XIV

Life in Cambridge





Cambridge

XIV

Our arrival in Cambridge in the winter of 1941 marked a turning point in my life. It was a rite of passage and marked my transition from childhood into adulthood. Whereas until this point, I was constantly under the care and guidance of adults, madrichim and leaders from the Jewish agency who provided for my every need—from the Kindertransport out of Berlin, over the border into Holland, the ferry to England, two years in Whittinghame and six months at Chivers—my arrival in Cambridge began a new chapter of independence and personal achievement. The fact that Greta Burkill managed to arrange for Henri and I to attend classes at Cambridge—myself in Peterhouse College, Henri in Trinity College—meant that we were no longer children; we were now university students, and we took our studies seriously.

Due to the incessant bombing that characterized the "Blitz"—the phrase used to describe the period of sustained strategic bombing of the United Kingdom by Germany during the Second World War, many businesses, companies and institutions of higher education relocated from London to more remote towns and cities. Over a period of 267 days (almost 37 weeks), London was attacked 71 times from the air by German fighter planes. Beginning on September 7, 1940, London was bombed by the German Luftwaffe for 57 consecutive nights. More than one million London homes were destroyed or damaged, and more than 40,000 civilians were killed, almost half of them in London. One of the most prestigious colleges, the London School of Economics (LSE), took up temporary residence in Cambridge, and it was here that I attended classes in economics, under the tutelage of Professor Harold Laski. As a lecturer, Professor Laski was brilliant, but he was known to alienate

his audiences by humiliating people who asked questions. However, he was popular amongst his students, and was especially influential among immigrant and refugee students who attended LSE. I found him to be a kind man who cared about his students. I truly appreciated his lectures and gained a great deal from his classes. After one year studying economics, including a correspondence course, I passed the intermediate examination, which entitled me to a certificate of achievement (although this was not a full degree as I had not passed the Higher Schools Certificate examination—the highest level in those days).



London School of Economics

Other aspects of life in Cambridge were quite pleasant and enjoyable. As I mentioned, Henri and I shared lodging in Cambridgeshire, although we attended different classes in different colleges. We found out that there was actually a synagogue in town, and every Shabbos, we would walk there and attend services. There was no presiding rabbi, but one man would usually lead the prayers and speak to the congregation. His name was Chaim Herzog, and

I later found out that he was the son of the future Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchok Halevi Herzog. Chaim had come to Cambridge to complete his studies and in fact, graduated from Cambridge in 1942. While at Cambridge, he joined the officer training course and went to Sandhurst Military Academy in preparation for enlistment in the army. I recall how Chaim would stand at the podium on Shabbos and address us in his military uniform. He was a magnificent orator and he drew upon sources culled from the Torah as well as speeches he had heard from his father to weave a masterful tapestry on the weekly parsha. We enjoyed Chaim's drashos (speeches) and it was not surprising when I learned, many years later, that Chaim Herzog eventually moved to Israel and became the sixth president of the State of Israel, serving from 1983 until 1993.



A young Chaim Herzog

For food, we were limited in our ability to obtain kosher food, especially during wartime. Thankfully, the synagogue in Cambridge also maintained a small kosher restaurant where Henri and I

and other Jewish students would eat our Shabbos meals all together. Sometimes, kosher food was imported from larger cities like London, and even from farms like Chivers, and we made sure to buy whatever kosher food was available.

At this point, I had been in Great Britain for over three years and due to my English studies, I spoke the language quite well. This made it quite easy for me to converse with the other students in Cambridge, and for the most part, I liked my fellow students and they liked me. But there was one thing that truly irked me about the English men and women who were part of Cambridge University. As in many other universities and prestigious schools, there was a strict dress code that was adhered to by one and all. In Cambridge, students wear academic gowns for formal occasions, matriculation and graduation. The university has a long tradition of "academical dress." Undergraduates wear college gowns which have subtle differences enabling the wearer's college to be determined. It is to be worn on formal, and sometimes informal, occasions, and there are numerous rules and customs governing when and how it is worn. Black gowns (undress) are worn at less formal events, while on special days (such as the days of General Admission to Degrees) full academical dress is worn, consisting of gown, hood and headdress, with doctors in festal dress distinguished by the use of scarlet. The university officials also have ancient forms of academic dress, unique to the university.

Since I was not officially a member of the university and I was not actually enrolled in classes, I was not permitted to wear the black gown and hood that was worn at most times around campus. This bothered me immensely. I resented the fact that I was treated differently (only in this one area) and it brought back memories of when German refugees were despised all over the United Kingdom and considered enemy aliens. It was a constant reminder of my near fatal experience onboard the Arandora Star and how we were forced to dissolve the wonderful Whittinghame Farm School. Henri and I spoke about this often and for this reason, we did not mingle often with the rest of the student population so as not to feel inferior to them with respect to the dress code.

CHAPTER XV

Enlisting in the Military





Enlisting in the Military

XV

The war was dragging on and by the spring of 1942, after having spent over a year at Cambridge, there was nothing that Henri and I wanted more than to enlist in the British army and fight the accursed Nazis. Constant reports and stories of Nazi atrocities were well within what we—as German refugees—could understand and relate to, even if many of the British students and faculty could not. We knew what was being done to our Jewish brethren all over Europe because we had experienced the hatred firsthand. Our families were gone for the most part and all that we had left were memories and an undying vendetta against the German Nazis who perpetrated these horrific acts. We wanted to fight them. We wanted to kill them and exact revenge for what they had done to us.

There was a British army recruitment centre not far from Cambridge University and it was there that we learned about the various military roles available. With a huge range to choose from including tanks, crewmen, infantry, air force, medical personnel, vehicle mechanics and electricians to name but a few, Henri and I had much to consider. The Bassingbourn Air Base was situated 11 miles (18 km) south west of Cambridge and the planes could constantly be heard flying overhead. I decided that I wanted to be an Air Force pilot. Henri and I went to the recruitment centre where I signed up and immediately received a "King Shilling." This was a common coin given to young men who agreed to enlist in the British army, and for a long period of time, a variety of subterfuges were used by recruiting sergeants to persuade young men to accept the money and thereby enlist. For Henri and myself, no subterfuge was necessary—we were happy to enlist and looked forward to training and eventual military action.

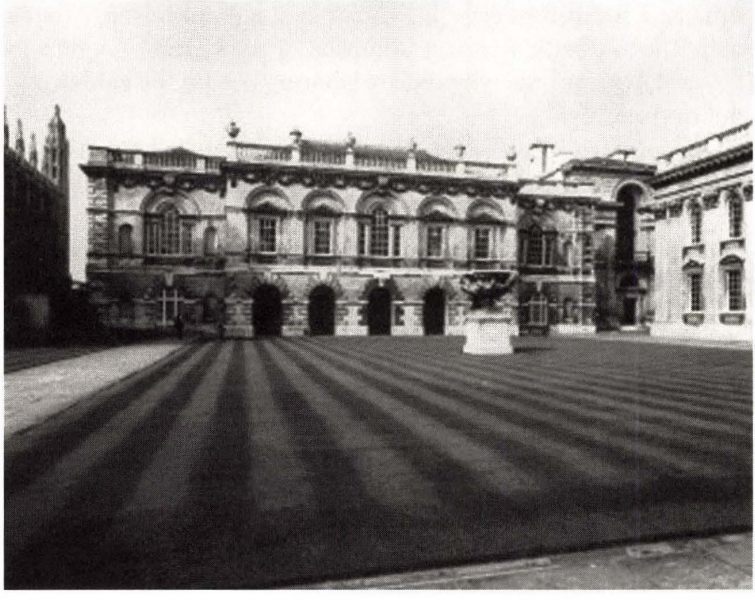
We were ordered to report to Cardiff and we lost no time in arranging transport to the recruitment centre there. However, to our utter shame and disappointment, when we entered the office and gave our names and birthplaces, not only were we turned down but our King Shilling coins were taken away from us. The British sergeant in charge of the office refused to consider us for the army—certainly not the air force—since we were German expatriates and in Great Britain, Germany was the enemy. Thus, Germans were not to be trusted nor were they to be allowed to fight alongside British soldiers. Shamefully, we were ordered to return to Cambridge and dismiss the notion of serving in the glorious British army.

Our disappointment knew no bounds. We had dreamed of this opportunity and everything seemed to go so smooth in Cambridge that we could not understand what went wrong here in Cardiff. No amount of explanation or persuasion could change the sergeant's mind and with no other choice, we left Cardiff with heavy hearts and returned to Cambridge.

We continued our previous schedule of attending classes and performing odd and end jobs around the campus, but things were not the same. We were not satisfied anymore as we had been until now and we took to our tasks with deep resentment and discontent. As it was spring time, we were assigned to work in the gardens, planting and cultivating the beautiful lawns. Cambridge University is renowned for its flowing greenery. While officially named the Grove, the grounds to the south of Gisborne Court have been known as the Deer Park since deer were brought there in the 19th century. During that period it achieved fame as the smallest deer park in England. Today, however, there are no longer any deer.

The remainder of the university's gardens divides into areas known as the Fellows' Garden, just to the south of Old Court, and the Scholars' Garden, at the south end of the site, surrounding the William Stone Building. Both are very large and students can walk all over them (a rarity in Cambridge). In spring, the gardens really come into their own; brimming with daffodils. They are a fantastic place to relax, eat dinner, or host a garden party. Many students

love to simply stroll through such lovely gardens for a few minutes, and it helps to give the college a nice, relaxed atmosphere.



Fellows Garden, Cambridge

Henri and I did not stroll through the gardens but it was our job to maintain the grounds. During wartime, vegetables and other necessities were in short supply and it was our job to plant edible vegetables in the huge gardens to supply the university's kitchens. As I mentioned previously, Henri and I did not enjoy nor appreciate "field work" and this lack of enthusiasm, coupled with our resentment at being dismissed at the Cardiff recruitment centre did little to improve our disposition. We were unhappy and wished for something more.

And then, our wish came true in quite an unexpected fashion. One summer's day in 1942, as I was digging in the gardens, I noticed a man standing a few paces away watching me. He cut an imposing figure in his top hat and tweed sports jacket with

a heavy cotton Viyella shirt and cavalry twill corduroy trousers. He held his umbrella on his forearm and gazed at me pensively. I knew he was somebody important but I did not know who he was. Finally, I heard him clear his throat and call out to me. "Young man," he said with a perfect inflection of the Queen's English in his tone, "might I ask why you are laboring here in the garden and not in the army?"

I was taken aback by the question. I stood up and removed my cap as a sign of respect. "Sir," I replied, "I would like nothing more than to serve in the English army."

"Well, then, why are you not there?" he inquired again, with the slightest hint of annoyance on his lips.

"I would like to be there but they will not take me. I am a German refugee and I am considered an enemy alien. Therefore, as much as I would like to serve and fight the Nazis, they will not take me!" The last words were spoken with such conviction that the gentleman nodded sympathetically. He could easily see the glint in my eye and my yearning to join the fighting corps. Obviously, he knew how to evaluate a truthful statement and he was a man of action.

He removed a small pad of papers from his jacket pocket and a writing instrument. Then, he asked me for my name and my present address, which I gave him dutifully and he wrote it down on a slip of paper. Then, he nodded and turned to walk away, but before he did, he told me one last thing.

"Young man, you will be hearing from me. Good day!" Then, he walked away. I stood there for a few moments trying to absorb what had just happened but as I did not know the identity of the dapper elderly English gentleman, I had no idea if anything was to come of this chance encounter.

Precisely, two days later, a British MP aboard a motorcycle drove to our lodging and handed me a slip of paper. It was an induction form into the British Army and it ordered me to report immediately to the nearest recruitment centre. Henri and I wasted no time in reporting there and this time, when we entered the office and showed the desk clerk the form, we were treated quite differently than the last time. In fact, we were treated like

V.I.P.s, almost like royalty—perhaps not like actual royalty, but we were certainly given the royal treatment! Officers came over and spoke to us at length and we were asked what part of the army we wished to enlist in. This, I later found out, was unheard of since a typical recruit who signs up for the military is never given a choice where he wishes to go and what division he wishes to be a part of. Selection for regiment or corps was in the hands of the Ministry for Labour, based on a superficial assessment of the individual, inadequate guidance on the needs of different parts of the army, and the individual's preferences. This suited the navy and airforce very well, although it was very unsatisfactory from the overall army perspective. Fortunately, we were afforded this courtesy and I said I wanted to be a tank man. Tanks and mechanized armor had always been a fascination of mine and here was my chance to be involved in this aspect of the war: the Tanks Corps Regiment. Henri chose a ski regiment and the two of us were quickly signed up.

We were shocked and thrilled at the same time. How had this happened? Why were we being treated with such honor and respect? We were told that it was because we had the personal recommendation of a famous military general, who had vouched for us. His name was Field Marshal William Riddell Birdwood, 1st Baron of Birdwood. He was an experienced military officer who served in numerous campaigns and in the African War. He was promoted to Major General in 1911 and Lieutenant General in November 1914. He saw action again in World War I as Commander of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps during the Gallipoli Campaign in 1915, before becoming Commander-in-Chief of the Fifth Army on the Western Front during the closing stages of the War.

After leaving the service in 1930, Commander Birdwood made a bid to become Governor-General of Australia. He had the backing of the King and the British government. However, he lost the bid and instead was appointed Master of Peterhouse, Cambridge in 1931. He was raised to the peerage in recognition of his wartime service as Baron Birdwood, of Anzac and of Totnes in the County

of Devon on January 1, 1938 and later retired from academic work. A town in Southern Australia is named in his honor.



Lord William Riddel Birdwood

It was this same Lord William Riddel Birdwood who had stopped me in the gardens of Cambridge and asked me why I was not enlisting in the English army. Obviously, he was impressed by my sincerity and conviction and wrote a personal letter of recommendation to the military recruiters vouching for me and insisting that I be provided every opportunity to serve in the military at whatever duty I wished. Until this day, I have a lifelong measure of gratitude to this kind old chap who saw past all the biases and gave me—as well as Henri—the opportunity to serve in the military.

CHAPTER XVI

Basic Training



Training Exercise

XVI

Henri and I wasted no time in reporting to our assigned barracks. We were shipped off to Maryhill Barracks, a military training facility in the Maryhill section of northern Glasgow, Scotland. The barracks were built to accommodate an infantry regiment, a squadron of cavalry and a battery of field artillery. It was home to the Scots Greys and the Highland Light Infantry, and at one time famously held the Nazi second-in-command, Rudolf Hess, after his supposed "peace flight" to the UK.

Upon our arrival in Glasgow, we reported to the guard room still wearing our civilian clothes. As new recruits we were known as rookies. After a few days acclimating ourselves at the barracks, and doing a small amount of training in our civilian clothes, we were then issued our uniforms and gas masks. We received an identity disc with our number on, together with the most important item of all: our rifle. We were told this item meant the difference between life and death, being killed or being saved, as your weapon was your first line of defense against the enemy.

The army training at Maryhills Barracks was intense. Typically, a British soldier served six to eight weeks in basic training before going to war. Specialized work, such as handling artillery and tanks, heavy machinery, medics, engineers, aviators, espionage, pyrotechnic and commando units, could take up to four months of additional training. New recruits like us, would learn general warfare tactics; how to fire various types of weapons, including rifles, shotguns, pistols and bayonets. We learned how to plant mines, build and throw bombs and grenades, as well as how to handle larger machinery and big guns. We were taught how to properly dig trenches and build fortresses of defense. We spent quite some

time learning what to do in case of a gas attack, a shrapnel attack, a bomb attack, an artillery attack or a physical attack with enemy soldiers and bayonets. We also learned basic hygiene and safety information, and how to wear our uniform correctly.

Basic training needed to be learned and internalized rather quickly—this took about four or five weeks—and after that, we spent another few weeks practicing general maneuvers, such as marching and saluting the queen, as well as conducting uniformed parades in the streets. By 1943, nearly all recruits went through some sort of "battle inoculation" course; Infantry Battle Schools tried to integrate many of the lessons learned into the training, and there was a lot of live firing and simulated artillery fire, plus rope climbing, long and short jumping and, in some cases, crawling through muddy ditches full of rotting sheep carcasses!



In Scotland

My dream was to be in the Tanks Corps. It wasn't so much the idea of operating and firing heavy machinery and guns. Nor was it the rarefied status associated with training and graduating from the armoured division that drew me to this area of the armed forces. It was much simpler than that: I didn't want to walk! I made a simple calculation that as we were to be the "liberators" of Europe, this would entail covering quite a bit of territory throughout the entire continent. As army infantry and even special forces, this meant walking through hundreds—perhaps thousands—of kilometers of European landscape carrying a heavy pack on my back and a rifle in my hand. I wanted none of that! Why walk, I figured, if I could ride in a mechanized automobile and get to the same destination? And if it meant, picking off Nazis from inside my tank, well.... I had no issue with that!

After about eight weeks, I completed my basic training in Glasgow and was transferred to the Royal Armoured Corps (RAC) Training Regiment at Beverley, in East Yorkshire. The Royal Armoured Corps was a highly specialized regiment and it was necessary for me to receive further training especially with the Cromwell battle tanks which our regiment primarily used. In many cases, four months of additional training was required, although this could be longer or shorter, depending on the need for soldiers at the time. Living conditions were spartan; clay huts if you were lucky, but often—especially at Battle Schools and in Divisional Areas—our "sleeping quarters" were tents made from canvas. Sleeping bags were a luxury—in the field you slept under blankets and a cape. Mattresses were straw-filled sacks. The food we were served was monotonous and limited. Most of what we ate was rationed anyway, and as for me, a Jewish soldier who kept a strict kosher diet, there was little food for me to eat besides for vegetables and certain dairy products.

On a personal level, I met up with a handful of Jewish soldiers and some were even religious as well. For the most part, we did our best to avoid eating non-kosher food. Sometimes kosher packages were sent from London for our benefit. For the High Holiday season, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we were permitted to

travel to Glasgow and attend the large central synagogue. Most of us took advantage of this holiday "furlough" and when we arrived in Glasgow, we were invited in for meals by the local Jewish population.

One incident stands out in my mind. It was October 1943, and we were in the midst of a heavy training regimen. Nevertheless, one day at roll call, our sergeant made an announcement saying, "All Jewish personnel are excused from military service for the upcoming Yom Kippur holiday." This was to be a two-day furlough and naturally, we planned to travel to Glasgow and attend services there. However, when the announcement was made, unlike myself and a few others, two Jewish soldiers refused to step forward and accept the invitation to celebrate the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Our sergeant, a Gentile and religious Christian, could not understand why soldiers would refuse an offer to celebrate their holiday. In response, the two soldiers, attempting to curry favor with their superior officer, began to recite the army oath swearing to bear true allegiance, to honestly and faithfully defend Her Majesty the Queen, Her Heirs and Successors, in Person, Crown and Dignity against all enemies.... and obey all orders of Her Majesty, and of the generals and officers set over them.... so help them God! The superior officer listened to their oath and after a moment's thought, decided to honor their wish not to celebrate Yom Kippur and remain loyally on base during the holiday. And so, for the next few days, while we attended services in Glasgow, these two soldiers remained on base and were tasked with the unenviable job of latrine duty for the entire barracks!

The method of our training was called "Infantry Tank Role," which was the operation of mechanized tanks in close support of the infantry. Our regiment was equipped with Cromwell Tanks and we began training with the 49th Infantry Division for the impending invasion of Europe. I learned how to operate the huge 75mm guns and the 17 pound Firefly, but in all honesty, I was never a really good shooter. Machine guns were located on both sides of the Cromwell and I did better with those. We were trained to coexist in a tank under battle conditions. Tanks are all about

teamwork. In fact one could argue that tank operations are the epitome of teamwork, from the top and all the way down to the individual tank crew with its tank commander giving directions. The average-sized tank would have a crew of four to five men: a driver, a gunner, a gun-loader/radio operator and a tank commander, all working as a team in their special positions within the tank. The driver was at the front, usually with a little viewing hatch right in front of him, and would sometimes have control of a forward-pointing machine gun, which in some cases would be handled by a fifth crewman, or navigator. The rest of the crew was in the fighting compartment, usually with access to their own individual escape hatches. The commander would direct the movements of the tank, while the gunner would aim and fire the huge 75 mm gun, the main weapon of the tank, and the loader would be in charge loading the correct ammunition—usually high explosive for enemy troops and buildings etc., or armor piercing for other tanks and armored fighting vehicles. The loader also served as our all-important radio operator. Without him, we would never receive our orders and know where to go or whom to shoot!

Upon graduation from the Royal Armoured Corps in the early spring of 1944, we were placed in individual units and regiments. My regiment was known as the "East Lothian Yeomanry Cavalry"—an ancient regimental name dating back to 1797, which was later changed to the "1st Lothians and Border Yeomanry" during World War II.

CHAPTER XVII

Operation Overlord: Landing at Normandy





Troops landing on Omaha Beach, June 6,1944

XVII

As 1943 gradually turned into 1944, the Allies embarked upon an ambitious plan to liberate Europe from the stifling grip of Nazi Germany, and to deliver a powerful death blow to the Axis powers of Germany and Italy, once and for all. This plan came to be known as Operation Overlord. Camp Griffiss in Bushy Park, near London, became the site of a large U.S. military base, headquarters to a number of the Allied departments. General Dwight Eisenhower, supreme commander of the American Armed Forces, chose to make Bushy Park the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) center for planning Operation Overlord and the Allied invasion of Europe that began with the D-Day landings.

Operation Overlord was the code name for the Battle of Normandy, the operation that launched the invasion of German-occupied Western Europe during World War II by American, Canadian and British forces. The operation commenced on June 6, 1944 with the Normandy landings. A 12,000-plane airborne assault preceded an amphibious assault involving almost 7,000 vessels. Nearly 160,000 troops crossed the English Channel on the 6th of June; more than three million allied troops were in France by the end of August. The battle for Normandy continued for more than two months, concluding with the closing of the Falaise pocket on August 24, the Liberation of Paris one day later on August 25, and the German retreat across the Seine which was completed on August 30, 1944.

It took a great deal of planning and training. Even after graduation from the RAC, my regiment continued training for this massive operation in various training sites across England. There was still a great deal of last minute training and equipment being issued

in the countdown to D-Day. Our crews spent our time waterproofing the tanks to create an amphibious machine that would be able to come ashore and act as fire support for the artillery and they were also installing new equipment that was being issued at the last minute like new gun sights, armoured ammunition storage bins and infantry phones that would enable soldiers on the outside of the tank to talk to the crews if they needed to. Each tank was given a new coat of paint. External equipment bins had to be fitted to the rear of the turret so that the crew's personal kit like blankets, rations, bivouac tents and water could be stored. There were fears that the thin armour of the tanks could not withstand a hit from a German anti-tank gun. For added protection, spare metal tank track links were welded onto the external tank armour by the crews. Every tank engine was serviced to make sure they did not let them down in France. Each tank was labelled so that it would be sent to the right ship and arrive at the correct destination at the right time in accordance with the instructions in the Operation Overlord plan.

All regiments were ordered to be ready for active service by the end of May and we achieved this. Of course, we were not privy to classified information like when the invasion would start. But we trained hard and we were ready. The weather was fine and May 1944 was a hot one. All that was left was for the order to come down and we were ready to move. Finally, the order arrived to start the regimental move to the invasion holding area, Gibraltar Barracks, in Aldershot. This was so the regiment could be closer to the embarkation port.

The coast of Normandy was chosen as the invasion site, since the the only viable port in the area, Cherbourg, was heavily defended by the German army. It was also considered that landings on a broad front in Normandy would permit simultaneous threats against the port of Cherbourg, coastal ports further west in Brittany, and an overland attack towards Paris and towards the border with Germany. Normandy was a less-defended coast and an unexpected but strategic jumping-off point, with the potential to confuse and scatter the German defending forces. Normandy was hence chosen as the landing site.



Preparing for Battle

General Bernard Montgomery was named as commander of the British 21st Army Group, to which all of the invasion ground forces belonged, and was also given charge of developing the invasion plan. The plan proposed a landing from the sea by five divisions and airborne descents by three divisions. In total, 39 Allied divisions would be committed to the Battle of Normandy: 22 US, 12 British, three Canadian, one Polish and one French, all under overall British command, totaling over a million troops. I remember seeing General Montgomery and hearing briefings from him that laid out our strategic goals. He was not a man to be trifled with.

The landing area was divided into separate beaches: Gold Beach, Sword Beach, Omaha Beach, Juno Beach, Pointe du Hoc, and Utah Beach. On June 6, 1944, the regular British infantry came ashore on Sword Beach with light casualties. They had advanced about 8 kilometers (5.0 mi) by the end of the day but failed to make some of the deliberately ambitious targets set by Montgomery. In particular, Caen, a major objective, was still in German hands by the end of D-Day and would remain so until Operation Charnwood on July 9. Once the beachhead was established, the Mulberry Harbors were made operational around the 9th of June. A Mulberry harbor was a

portable temporary harbor developed by the British in World War II to facilitate rapid offloading of cargo onto the beaches during the Allied invasion of Normandy. Two prefabricated or artificial military harbors were taken in sections across the English Channel from Britain with the invading army and assembled off the coast of Normandy. One was constructed at Arromanches by British forces, the other at Omaha Beach by American forces. Severe storms on June 19 interrupted the landing of supplies and destroyed the Omaha harbor. The Arromanches harbor was able to supply around 9,000 tons of material daily until the end of August 1944, by which time the port of Cherbourg had been secured by the Allies.

Units of the British 2nd Army led by Lieutenant General Miles Dempsey were assigned to the beach. Attached commando units were tasked with seizing the bridges on the River Orne and the Caen Canal, linking up with paratroops of the 6th Airborne Division. My regiment, the 1st Lothians and Border Yeomanry, was attached to the 79th Armoured Division and we crossed the English channel on June 10, 1944—D-Day plus 5.

As a young soldier thrown into action for the first time, you can be sure I was scared. When we landed on Gold Beach five days after the invasion, the beachhead was clear of enemy nests and there was little danger of being blown up by a mine or shot by a German sniper. And yet, we were still terrified to walk along the sandy dunes for fear of the unknown. Fighting was still raging nearby in Normandy and many of the army's early objectives had yet to be accomplished. I stayed close to my unit and never strayed too far from my Cromwell tank. My mates for the most part did the same. All we cared about was survival.

The Normandy landings were the largest seaborne invasion in history, and they did hasten the end of the war in Europe, drawing German forces away from the Eastern Front that might otherwise have slowed down the Soviet advance. The Normandy landings also heralded the start of the "race for Europe," between the Soviet forces and the Western powers, which some historians consider to be the start of the Cold War.

CHAPTER XVIII

Royal Dragoons





The Royal Dragoons

XVIII

By the end of June 6, the Allies had secured all five beachheads. However, we remained on the beach in Normandy for a few more days awaiting our orders to push out and begin the trek eastward through France and into Germany. My armoured unit was incorporated into a new regiment known as the "Royal Dragoons" and we were attached to the British 11th Armoured Division and later, the 79th Armoured Division. The Royal Dragoons were originally formed in 1661 and served until 1969. The regiment fought in most of the major battles of the last few centuries. In preparation for our push forward, our Cromwell tanks were outfitted with the "Crab"—one of what became known as Hobart's Funnies. British command knew that a specialist armoured formation would be needed to overcome the many anti-tank defenses set up by the Germans. Major General Percy Hobart, an engineer who commanded Britain's 79th Armoured Division, was given the task of creating these specialized armoured vehicles, which came to be known as Hobart's Funnies. The Crab acted as a mine clearer. It had a large jib covered in chains that whirled around a rotating drum and beat the ground ahead of the tank. If a mine was set off, the chains would be thrown upward but would not be damaged. Our tanks became known as flail tanks, for the flailing motion of the Crab. Some historians claim that the greater losses suffered by American soldiers trying to get onto the beaches at Normandy and even further on as they moved through France, as compared with their British counterparts, can be ascribed, at least partially, to the British use of Hobart's Funnies.

When the order was given, we began to move inland into the Normandy countryside. This terrain, known as bocage, was

characterized by high, thick hedgerows. In this environment, tanks and infantry became separated from one another. German soldiers would hide in the hedges and shoot Allied infantry with machine guns. The Allied infantry soldiers did not have tanks to protect them since the tanks could not get through the thick hedgerows.



Royal Dragoons Medals

We developed various tactics for using one tank, supported by a small infantry force, to fight off enemy infantry. With one method, a tank would fire at enemy troops through a hedge while it used the next hedge as cover. While the tank was firing, infantry would move through the hedge and attack the enemy position with grenades. Engineers would then blow up a hole in the hedge. This would allow the tank to pass through the hedge and join the infantry assault.

Another method was to use a tank to hose a section of hedgerow with machine gun fire. This would cover the infantry's advance. Some units would use their tanks to penetrate a hedgerow. The tanks would then turn along the hedgerow. Enemy units hiding

in the hedgerow become trapped by tanks on both sides. Infantry would then close in on the enemy.

My unit, the "Royal Dragoons" continued to advance on the ground through the French countryside, but we were slowed by German defenses, which included a large tank counterattack. At times, I recall, fighting was fierce and we simultaneously cleared out many German "nests" and captured many German prisoners. As we moved across France and later into Belgium and Holland, we underwent many near misses from the enemy. Good soldiers and friends were lost along the way and left where they fell. Each day we wondered if that was what war is all about. We feared a strike at any minute but there was no time for anything other than to keep moving, advancing and taking whatever rest and refreshment might be on offer. Every time we passed through and liberated a French



My sergeant and members of the regiment

village, the peasants and villagers would come out and treat us like vanquishing heroes. French boys and girls would throw flowers at us and the women would constantly shower us with food and drink. We appreciated these kind gestures until we realized that after suffering under the Germans for the past four years, this was the least the French villagers could do.

In August 1944, American troops broke through German lines west of St. Lo. The Germans retreated west and were trapped in an area around the town of Falaise. British and Canadian troops, including my unit, were advancing from the north and the Americans were coming from the south. On August 19, 1944, French resistance forces rose up against the German garrison in Paris and on August 25, the German commander in Paris surrendered.

Throughout the summer, Generals Montgomery and Eisenhower discussed the most promising approach. Montgomery argued strongly that his command, if well supplied, could lunge through German-held Belgium and the Netherlands, through the industrial Ruhr region, across the north German plain, and into Berlin, Germany's heart. This single thrust would enable the Allies to end the war in weeks rather than months. Eisenhower was willing to give priority to Montgomery's advance towards the Ruhr. Thus, following the liberation of Paris, we pressed north rapidly toward Belgium. Montgomery issued a directive on August 26, instructing his commanders, Lieutenant-Generals Harry Crerar (First Canadian Army) and Miles Dempsey (Second British Army) to seize the important port of Antwerp (Belgium), and to continue the advance towards the Ruhr region, Germany's industrial heartland. The Germans did not wait for retreat orders. There was no organized German effort to block the Allied advance into Belgium. Liberation in most Belgian towns and villages occurred very rapidly. The major cities of Brussels and Antwerp were quickly liberated. The British Second Army reached Brussels on September 3, and the 11th Armoured Division—of which my unit was a part of—captured Antwerp one day later on September 4. We were met by jubilant civilians realizing that the dark years of Nazidom were finally over. Soldiers threw chewing gum, Life Savers and chocolates. In

return, the civilians gave us fruits and vegetables and whatever else they found in their gardens at the time.

I was keenly aware that Antwerp had a large Jewish community before the Germans captured it in 1940, and I was determined to make contact with Jews and provide them with whatever they needed for survival. I hit upon a brilliant plan. There was another Jewish soldier in my unit who spoke Yiddish like me. On the day we liberated Antwerp, the two of us stood in the large central railway station—the Antwerpen-Centraal—and spoke to each other in Yiddish. We talked loudly and animatedly in the hopes that people would hear us. Thankfully, we were correct! Not long after we began speaking Yiddish, a number of Belgians came up to us and started talking to us in the same language. They could barely believe that here stood two British soldiers who were not only of Jewish descent, but spoke an excellent Yiddish. After years of suffering, they were more than content to pour out their hearts to us and describe the suffering they endured during the Nazi occupation. We listened and commiserated with them, and we gave them whatever food rations we had. In return, they showed us around town, pointing out the Great Synagogue that was still in use and the canteen where we were able to purchase food and supplies. Many Jews came out to greet us and they treated us like visiting royalty. I still remember davening in the large synagogue and the impression it made on me.

We did not remain in Antwerp for too long. My unit was billeted in civilian homes for a few short days before we were ordered to move on. The home where I stayed belonged to a Jewish family and I recall seeing a huge collection of Jewish books and ancient seforim in the house. I always believed that this house must have belonged to a prominent rabbi before the war, although I was never able to find out exactly whose home it belonged to.

CHAPTER XIX

Liberation of Holland and Germany





With a few army buddies

XIX

Although General Montgomery's plan was to knife through Belgium and Holland, cross over into Germany and capture Berlin by the fall of 1944, unfortunately, things did not quite work out the way he planned them. The liberation of Holland was begun by American troops, who entered the Maastricht district on September 13, 1944. British troops also played a major role in liberating southern Holland, with their advance toward Berlin while the Americans fought in Maastricht. However, the failure of an airborne assault on Arnhem on September 17stopped the allied advance in its tracks and it wasn't until May of 1945 that Amsterdam and the rest of the occupied areas of Western Holland were totally free of German personnel. Most of the southern portion of the country was liberated in the second half of 1944. The rest, however, including Amsterdam and The Hague, remained under occupation, and continued to suffer from the German occupation as well as a famine at the end of 1944 that was known as the "Hunger Winter."

The winter of 1944-1945 was brutal. Together with the country's population, the British Army regiments stationed in Holland suffered from the severe cold weather. The flat terrain of Holland meant that many kilometers of canals and wooden bridges had to be negotiated. Ice on the water canals had to be tested for thickness and strength, and the bridges had to take the weight of heavy tanks. We removed the flail chains from the front of our tanks because they were too heavy and slowed us down. In some villages along the River Meuse, the river was frozen over and the ice was thick enough to drive a vehicle across. Enemy patrols travelled over the ice and our unit sometimes did the same.

For three months, our regiment saw limited action, being responsible for protecting a long sector of the River Meuse with a number of other units. It was during this time in Holland that my tank was hit by an enemy shell and my crew and I were almost killed. The moment the shell hit, we scrambled out of the tank by any and all available hatches and thankfully, we all made it out alive. Within seconds, the tank blew up and none of us were hurt, but I will never forget what one of my crewmates said while we were all sitting on the ground watching our smoldering tank. Without taking his eyes off the burning metal, he said, "You know, I wish I was Jewish. Then, I would never have to sit in one of these miserable tanks!"

I was shocked! I never knew this man to be an anti-Semite or a malicious individual and I wondered why he said that. I looked at him and said, "Why would you say that? Did you know that I am Jewish?"

The soldier quickly looked at me and his face turned red. Apparently, he hadn't known that I was Jewish and he immediately began to apologize for his uncouth statement. I realized that his intention was not to be malicious and I assured him that I was not insulted, but I made it clear to him that he seemed to have the wrong impression of Jews. He agreed and we never said another word about this incident. We became close friends and I know that he appreciated my efforts and trusted me to serve with him in the same unit. I even remember on one occasion, when we were off duty and he had a bit too much to drink, he staggered over to me and said good-naturedly, "Johnny .... put me to bed, will ya?" I never felt threatened by my Jewishness and I think most of my fellow soldiers admired me for being a Jew.

Finally, in March 1945, the Royal Dragoons were once again on the move. Together with the British Second Army and the First Canadian Army, we joined the final push through the mud and flooded ground to drive the Germans eastward out of the Netherlands and Western Holland, and back across the Rhine. Canadian troops rapidly moved across the Netherlands, recapturing canals and farmland as they drove for the North Sea. We also began to

advance in the western Netherlands, which contained the major cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague. British and Canadian forces cleared the city of Arnhem in just two days by fighting a house-by-house battle.

At last, on May 5, 1945, Amsterdam was officially liberated and once again, we were treated by the occupation-weary locals like vanquishing warriors. I was successful in making contact with the local Jewish population who was thrilled to have a British Jewish soldier in their midst. They gave me a grand tour of the Amsterdam Jewish Quarter (Jodenbuurt), and they brought me to the famous Portuguese Synagogue, also known as the Esnoga, a 17th-century Sephardic synagogue. The Amsterdam Sephardic community was one of the largest and richest in Europe during the Dutch Golden Age, and this very large synagogue reflects this. There is no electricity and no heating in the Portuguese Synagogue. A thousand candles light up the Esnoga just like it always has for centuries. The floors are covered with fine sand to keep moisture from penetrating and destroying the (original) wooden floorboards, a technique commonly used in the 17th century in the Netherlands.



Portugese Synagogue in Amsterdam

The Dutch underground was very strong and active all throughout the Nazi occupation of Holland and I approached the Dutch liaison to the British Army to inquire about an uncle and aunt that I knew had lived in Amsterdam before the war. As I mentioned earlier in this narrative, my father's youngest brother Nathan escaped to Holland before the war broke out. He lived for some time in Amsterdam and married a Dutch woman who gave him two daughters. Unfortunately, Nathan and his wife were deported along with most Dutch Jews and perished in the ovens of the crematoria, however, before the final deportation, he made contact with the Dutch underground who rescued the two little girls and sent them to live on a farm in Friesland, a small enclave off the coast of the North Sea.

It took a few days but the Dutch liaison came back to me with good news. He learned about the two little girls, my first cousins Mimi and Chanie, who were currently residing on a farm up in Friesland. I was so excited and determined to find these girls. I received permission from my Colonel, to requisition a jeep and drive out to the North Coast. Like I mentioned many pages ago, I am still indebted to my regiment leader, this Colonel, a wonderful man who I believe (but never confirmed) was actually Jewish.

It took me quite some time to find my way—I was only commissioned for a three-day leave—but I eventually made it to Friesland and located the farm where Mimi and Chanie were living. They were very little when their parents were taken away from them and when I showed up, they thought I was their father! Unfortunately, they did not speak any German and I did not speak Dutch, so communicating was somewhat of a problem, but as soon as they learned that I was their relative, they were excited to see me. They chattered incessantly, especially when they thought they were talking to their father, and I smiled and nodded, waiting for a pause so I can tell them that I was their first cousin and they were now free to live as Jews again.

It was clear that there was no future for them in Friesland and over the next few days, I worked with Jewish organizations to bring Mimi and Chanie to Amsterdam and place them under the care of the Hechalutz, a Zionist organization whose goal was to instruct

Jewish youths that were planning to make aliya to the Land of Israel, in agricultural work. They took the girls under their care, provided them with food and support and eventually brought them to the Land of Israel. Mimi and Chanie grew up, married and established their own families. Chanie passed away some time ago but Mimi remains alive in the Israeli coastal city of Ashkelon. I still keep in limited contact with Mimi from time to time.

As part of G-d's Master Plan, I was involved in another incredible incident that resulted in the rescue of more lost Jewish children. On my way back to Amsterdam from Friesland, I was involved in a traffic accident and my jeep turned over. It probably looked more serious than it actually was because the rescue workers who came to my aid, were panic stricken and thought I was seriously injured. Thankfully, I was not, but they insisted on transporting me to the closest emergency facility in the area. It wasn't a hospital. To my chagrin, this "makeshift hospital" was located in a Catholic convent, a regular "kloister," situated in the northeast quadrant of the country, somewhere between Friesland and Amsterdam. My injuries looked substantial and I was rushed to the nunnery where a group of nuns began to treat me. The nuns must have been of German descent since they all spoke German and were shocked when this British soldier, brought in for a vehicular accident, conversed with them in fluent German. I was given a bed and ordered to rest and recuperate from my traumatic experience.

Of course, my curious nature got the best of me and since I didn't think my injuries were too severe, I began to walk around and observe my surroundings. What I saw gave me pause. In the large courtyard outside the medical building, I watched as groups of young children played in the bright sunlight. Something about them made me linger and it took some time before I could put my finger on it. Then, it hit me! These children all looked Jewish and I wondered if perhaps these were children of Holocaust victims who sent their children off to safety before they were deported and killed by the Germans. I asked the nuns if these were indeed Jewish children and I will never forget her cold sharp response. "No, these are refugee children. Not Jewish children!"

I wasn't convinced. I tried to approach some of the children but the sisters adamantly refused to allow me to talk to them. I decided to try an old trick—tried and true—which has allowed many Jews to restore their Jewish heritage. From my "hospital" window, I called out to the children, "Shema Yisroel ...." At first, there was no reaction. But after a few more prompts, some of the children began to look up and some even finished the sentence, "...Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad!" I knew I was correct and these children were Jewish but the nuns had seen enough of me to know that it was time to get me out of that place. After only two days of recuperating from the "extensive injuries" stemming from my horrible jeep accident, I was released from the nunnery and told to go back to my regiment. I had no chance to attempt any further contact with the Jewish children and so I left.

When I reported back to my Colonel and explained to him about my accident and hospitalization, he was very understanding. I spoke to my contact in the Hechalutz and told him about the Jewish children in the convent and he promised to take the necessary steps to rescue the children. I never found out what happened in the end but I truly hope they were successful in removing and restoring those Yiddish neshamos.

CHAPTER XX

Back to Berlin





Berlin in ruins, 1945

XX

The final phase of the war saw the Royal Dragoons doing bank control for the Rhine crossing and the River Meuse, and thereafter advancing to the Elbe, where we controlled the crossings in April 1945. The Allied ground advance into Germany reached Bochum and after encountering minor resistance, the US 79th Infantry Division captured the city on April 10. We didn't follow the Americans. My regiment, the Royal Dragoons had the good fortune to drive through Denmark and, as representatives of the Second Army, to liberate Copenhagen, where we received a tremendous welcome.

It was soon after May 5, 1945 and the liberation of Holland, when Denmark was liberated by the Allied forces, putting an end to the German occupation of the country. Out of all the countries in Europe, although it did have its share of difficulties and tragedies, Denmark was spared many of the hardships that other European states had to face during the war. Nevertheless, the citizens of Denmark were thrilled to see us arrive and the Germans retreat. A grand parade was held in Copenhagen to celebrate Liberation Day, and almost immediately, we left Denmark and headed for the border crossing with Germany.

We entered Germany in the Westernmost Ruhr region of the country. The Ruhr is an urban area in North Rhine-Westphalia with a population today of some eight and a half million people. It is primarily a coal mining, industrial area and it also served as a major contributor to war supplies for the Wehrmacht, the German army. The Ruhr consists of several large, industrial cities bordered by the Ruhr river to the south, the Rhine to the west, and the Lippe to the north. During the war, bombing in the Ruhr

district caused a loss of 30% of factories, plants and equipment there, compared to 15-20% for German industry as a whole. We arrived in the city of Bochum in May and set up headquarters there. The British Army occupied Bochum and established two camps to house people displaced during the war. The majority of them were former Polish Zwangsarbeiter, forced laborers, many of them from the Bochumer Verein.

Since I spoke fluent German, my Colonel insisted that I stay by his side most of the time and act as his interpreter. My first order of business was to find suitable lodgings for the entire regiment. As the occupying force, this was not too difficult; basically we threw most of the Germans out of their homes and requisitioned them in the name of the occupation force. This did not bother me in the slightest since the moment I stepped on German soil again, a feeling of disgust welled up inside of me for the German citizens who allowed such a horrendous destruction and loss of like to take place.

We didn't remain long in Bochum. Perhaps just a few days went by and the order came for us to travel on to Berlin and to take over occupation duties in the British sector of that city. I was nervous and excited to go back to the city of my birth. What would I find when I got there? Would any friends or relatives still be there? I knew that my family left no trace in that forsaken city; the only remnant was my father's grave in the Weissensee Judisch cemetery. All the while as our jeep drove down the Autobahn towards the capital, I feared what I might find—and most likely what would no longer be there for me to find! Indeed, tension and trepidation was building inside of me which gave me no rest until I actually reached Berlin.

Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 7, 1945, and V-E Day (Victory Europe) took place on May 8. My regiment, along with numerous other units of the British Army, moved with the rest of the division to Berlin shortly after V-E Day, taking part in the Victory Parade there in July. I was shocked! Berlin was a shell of the beautiful and glorious city of my birth! The crush of allied bombing over the past few months basically flattened the entire city and there were very few large structures remaining by the time my regiment arrived. The city was in ruins, its population wandering

the rubble-filled streets searching for food and shelter. Although most of my mates were jovial and excited to enter the German capital as victors and occupiers—indeed, soldiers of all the allied armies lorded over the German citizens to the degree that when a German man or woman would walk past one of our soldiers on the sidewalk, he or she would be forced to walk off the pavement and remain in the street until the soldier passed, and the men would be required to remove their hats—I did not share their sentiments. I sat in my jeep quietly, deeply engrossed in my thoughts, and just watched the pitiful scenery, as we drove into the city center, passing streets and boulevards that I remembered from my youth to be grand and magnificent thoroughfares. Now, these same boulevards were clogged roads filled with ruins and debris lining the streets on both sides.

It was quite an emotional sight for me to take in and even some of my fellow soldiers wondered out loud why I wasn't sharing in their enthusiasm, especially since this was where I was born and had grown up. They assumed I would be excited to see it. But what could I tell them? That I felt so disconnected from this city, from these people—these very same people who harassed, tortured, imprisoned and ultimately wiped out my German Jewish brethren? My own father was tortured until his heart gave out and my mother and little sister were shipped off and exterminated in a death camp for no reason other than the German people felt the need to perpetrate mass murder! My grandparents, after living in Germany for over forty years, were declared "Ostjuden" and deported to Poland where they were shot mercilessly in the town square of Gorlitz. The millions of Jews all over Europe—not to mention over one and a half million children—were slaughtered by these savages, not just the S.S. and Nazi officers or the Wehrmacht soldiers, but all the German people, who watched what was happening, who knew what was being done to my people, but said and did nothing! I had no pity for these people and rather than feel excited to be back in Berlin, I was somewhat ill at ease.

Arriving in the outskirts, my Colonel was a bit confused with the various streets and he required directions from a native Berliner. Like I mentioned, I was the unofficial regiment's interpreter and

I sat up front with my Colonel as we rolled through the desolate and destroyed streets. At one point, we saw a German policeman in uniform directing traffic and rather than just ask him where to go, we stopped and forced him to come with us and show us the way. We were headed to British HQ of the Berlin Brigade located in Wilmersdorf at Fehrbelliner Platz, also known as "Lancaster House"—which had earlier served as the former center of the Nazi military administration—before it moved next to the Olympic Statium in Charlottenburg. I began questioning the startled policeman in fluent German about which roads were passable and how we would be able to get to our destination in the shortest time. He attempted to answer all my questions and lead us to Fehrbelliner Platz, but it seems he was even more surprised at my ability to speak German. At one point during the drive, he looked at me and said, "If I didn't know you were a British soldier, I would think you are German by the fact that you speak the German language so well!"



Lancaster House 1945

I immediately snapped at him, informing him that I was born and grew up here in Berlin, but I escaped due to the persecution

that took place in this forsaken country. He was quite embarrassed by my words and he quickly began apologizing to me in every submissive form of apology. Eventually, we found our way to Fehrbelliner Platz and "Lancaster House" and I just kicked him out of our jeep, but not before he once again apologized for his pernicious words.

The victorious forces at the end of the war divided Germany into four sectors and administered it jointly by the occupying powers of the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. They also divided Berlin into four zones. Each of the victorious nations controlled one zone of Berlin. The Allies (Britain, United States and France) ran their zones differently as compared to the areas controlled by Russia. Russia wanted to keep Germany as weak as possible to ensure that Russia itself was never attacked again by Germany. The Western allies wished to revive the German economy and combine the three western zones into one area. Later, after the entire Germany was divided into two distinct sectors, the Eastern section controlled by the U.S.S.R. built the Berlin Wall to prevent its citizens from fleeing to the west. The wall physically divided the country into eastern communism and western democracy. Many East Germans tried to escape to the west because West Germany was economically prosperous and granted its citizens more freedoms.

In those early days after the war, traveling between zones was impossible for a civilian but relatively easy for a soldier of the occupation forces. Thus, soon after we settled in the HQ barracks in Fehrbelliner Platz, I set out to explore my former city. I saw a German riding a motorcycle and I took a liking to this mode of transportation, so I stopped the man and confiscated his vehicle, once again requisitioning German property in the name of the British Army. Naturally, the first place I wished to visit was my former home in Skalitzerstrasse and the family furniture store. With my new motorcycle, getting around Berlin became a breeze and in no time, I found my street in the Kruezberg district and our old building. It looked almost the same as when I left it in 1939 with one obviously distinct difference: there were no Jews to be found, anywhere.



Members of my regiment in Berlin 1945

Like I mentioned previously, my parents, Egon, Thea and myself, the Guttmann family, lived on the first floor of our building, directly behind the storefront of the furniture store. We had a large airy apartment and right below us, in a small cellar apartment, lived the German building superintendent, who was not always very kind. In the early Nazi years, and all through the 1930's, when harassing Jews became fashionable to any "self-respecting" German, this man was no different than the rest and my parents constantly urged us to avoid any sort of confrontation with him. Indeed, I can still recall on the night of Kristallnacht, when the SA thugs tore through the streets of Germany screaming "Kill the Jews," we hid in fear under our beds and were supremely careful not to make the slightest sound so that not only would the thugs outside not hear us, but also so that our erstwhile downstairs neighbor should not attempt to cause us any trouble, Thankfully, he didn't—and the mob never did enter our home.

On this day in late May 1945, I parked my motorcycle in front of the building and walked right into our old first-floor apartment. Even greater than my surprise at finding our former downstairs neighbor living upstairs in our apartment, was clearly this

German's shock and astonishment to see me, Hermann Guttmann, in my starched English Army fatigues, alive and well, barging right into his living quarters. No words were spoken. I walked around, from room to room, without making a sound, my heart swelling with choked emotions, remembering until my eyes settled on a familiar object sitting in plain sight in the living room: it was a pair of silver candlesticks—my dear mother's Shabbos Leichter—that she had used for as long as I could remember. Here it was, in this German anti-Semite's home, and I would not stand for it! I walked over and snatched the candlesticks in my hands. Then, with one last sweeping gaze across the apartment in which I had grown up, I strode purposefully out of the apartment and drove away on my motorcycle. I hadn't said one word the entire time—I couldn't—I was too choked up and upset to say anything. Today, the only thing I have left from my sweet loving mother are a few letters she sent me when I was in Whittinghame and the silver Shabbos Leichter that she used for so many years that I took back from the German superintendent who had stolen it. I still have those candlesticks with me till this very day.

I also went to see my old synagogue, the Kotbusser Ufer Schule in Kruezberg. The beautiful sanctuary, the third largest in all of Berlin, was taken over by the Nazis in 1941 and used as a storage depot for the property and possessions that were confiscated from Jewish deportees. Later, it was used by the German Army to park military vehicles there. During the allied bombing of Berlin, the main building was badly damaged, however, the youth service building and the cultural center remained intact. When I walked into one of the smaller buildings, I was immediately approached by a German whom I recognized. He was the synagogue caretaker and he lived on the premises of the synagogue. In the heyday of the Kotbusser Ufer Schule, his function was to maintain the cleanliness in and around the various buildings and he also served as the Shabbos Goy when necessary. Now, when he saw a British soldier walk into the synagogue, he walked over to me and asked if I was Jewish. When I told him that I was and that I used to pray in this synagogue when I was a child, he motioned for me to follow him.

Dutifully, I followed the elderly German whom I remembered to be a fine and upstanding individual. He took me down to the cellar and led me into the large boiler room, where oversized furnaces were used to heat the synagogue and adjacent premises. He informed me that all throughout the war, there was never any heat in the synagogue as the cost to run the furnaces were exorbitant and thus the boilers were never in operation. As a result, he felt that this room would serve as a good hiding place. He unlocked the door and walked inside. To my utter surprise, I found over twenty Torah Scrolls lined up carefully, each in perfect condition, with numerous silver adornments attached to each one or laying by its side. Apparently, when he said it was a good hiding place, he meant a good place to hide the Sifrei Torah, the holy Torah scrolls that he had personally removed from the large Aron Kodesh before it was damaged or desecrated by the Nazis. He encouraged me to take the Sifrei Torah with me but I had no means of taking them or any place to put them. I assured him that the Gemeinder would certainly come for them and all I took were some small silver adornments, which I donated to other synagogues.

Back in Lancaster House, I contacted the Jewish agency that was stationed in Berlin and they told me where there was an Orthodox minyan for prayers and a nearby kosher kitchen. I would go to Fassenstrasse where a former conservative temple was transformed into an orthodox shul and I was able to pray and find kosher food there. I also asked and received lists of deportees who were sent from Berlin to various concentration and death camps. These lists contained names and exact dates of deportation. Interestingly enough, I found the name of my sister, six-year-old Thea, on a list of Jews sent to Auschwitz, but not my mother and till today I still cannot understand how this is possible. All I can think of is that the two of them became separated, or that my mother's name was somehow omitted.

The Jewish agency also told me where I could locate my father's grave in the old Weissensee Judisch cemetery. This was my last remaining link to a family history in Germany and when I found his grave, I was shocked to find it—and much

of the cemetery—in great disrepair. Trees were growing out of marked and unmarked graves and debris from numerous bombing raids was littered about. The war years had certainly taken their toll and there was nobody available—or willing—to see to the graves, markers and headstones in Weissensee. Youthful and idealistic as I was, I had this idea to have my father's remains transferred to the Holy Land, where I would pay to have him interred in a holy cemetery there—indeed, the wish of many Jewish men and women since time immemorial. Although I was an allied soldier from the occupation force and believed I had seemingly unlimited power and jurisdiction to go wherever I wanted and do as I pleased in this defeated and defenseless country, this was one thing that I could not make happen. I called



My father's grave in 1945

a prominent rabbi from the London Jewish court (Beis Din) and asked a shaila (query) if I was permitted to move my father's grave. He told me that under no circumstances was I permitted to do so and I was forced to concede the point. Instead, I gave orders to the people in charge of the cemetery to erect a beautiful headstone over my father's grave, and it is this very same headstone that sits there today. (At a later time, I wished to add a smaller stone that would include my mother and sister's names and the years of their lives. To do this, I ordered a marble slab in Israel and then, rather than have it shipped to Germany, I personally traveled with the marble in my suitcase from Israel to Berlin, where I placed the stone on the grave of my father! My daughters, Blimi and Chanie, thought I was crazy for carrying the heavy marble slab on the airplane, but I felt that for the eternal memory of my dear mother and sister, it was the least I could do! I also paid for "perpetual care" which means that my father's final resting place will always be taken care of with dignity and respect, just as he had lived his entire life and raised a fine Jewish family with dignity and respect.

Many of the soldier's in my barracks were interested in seeing Hitler's bunker in Berlin and on one occasion I went with a few others to see it for myself. The winding, stone-paved road up the mountainside to Hitler's headquarters was filled with military vehicles—apparently everyone was bent on seeing where the Fuhrer had lived and operated. Hitler's quarters and the surrounding buildings had been heavily bombed—gutted, roofs fallen, lying in ruins. Craters from bombs that had missed their mark dotted the nearby hillsides. The pine forest around the buildings was stripped of limbs—trunks broken off, split and shattered. We parked our jeep at the side of the building and climbed up over rubble to a gaping doorway. A few yards up the road, a German officer (in charge of the soldiers cleaning up) was standing at attention saluting every foreign soldier who walked into the bunker. To a man, each American, British or Russian officer sauntered right past him, obviously taking no notice whatsoever, although the German held the salute until each soldier passed. It was clear that we held no respect or even the slightest regard for German soldiers.

Most of the walls of the building, built of thick stone, were standing firmly. Inside, rubble covered the floors, and part of the wooden furnishings had burned. It was necessary to walk over the debris on the floor to get to Hitler's office, a huge oblong gap which was once filled with a plate-glass window. It framed a high Alpine range—sharp crags, white fields of snow, saw-tooth peaks against a blue sky, sunlight on the boulders. Once again, I had mixed emotions standing in such an evil place and viewing such a beautiful mountain scene. I just had to leave—I couldn't bear to stand there one extra minute.

On a hot summer's day, I took my motorcycle and rode out to Bergen Belsen, which served as the largest DP camp for more than 11,000 Jews after the war. It was the only exclusively Jewish camp in the British zone of Germany. The refugees formed a camp committee within three days of liberation in April of 1945. Political, cultural and religious activities were organized by the committee, such as searching for relatives and spiritual rehabilitation. Bergen Belsen had been one of the most notorious concentration camps in Germany. Hundreds of thousands of Jews and political prisoners were sent there and although there were no gas chambers or crematoria like in other camps, untold thousands died in that horrible place. By 1945 thousands of prisoners who had become too weak to work in other camps were shipped there to die off slowly by starvation and typhoid. In the month of March 1945 alone, more than 18,000 people succumbed to their deaths. When I arrived in the camp, I found so many thin and emaciated prisoners walking about, and I immediately gave away everything I had on me; all my rations, candies and chocolate were given to the thankful survivors.

As I walked about the camp, I saw remnants of Jewish daily life springing up. There was a minyan in Bergen Belsen and I joined in to daven mincha. When the survivors realized that this British soldier was really an Orthodox Jew who even spoke a fluent Yiddish, they were pleasantly surprised. One by one—and often all at once—they spoke to me and wanted me to know what they went through. It was heartbreaking to listen to their stories but what else

could I do? The men and women looked starved and hopeless, they were clearly traumatized by what the Nazis had put them through and all I could think of was: why did they suffer and I did not? They were literally "Korbonos"—the sacrifices made by the Jewish people and they were sickly and emaciated, while I was a proud member of Her Majesty's Royal Dragoons Brigade, healthy and hearty. I was confused and felt somewhat guilty by it all.



Bergen Belsen mass unmarked grave

The Jews showed me around Bergen Belsen, including the barracks where they slept, the Appelplatz where they were forced to line up twice a day, and a number of mass gravesites, which literally made me sick to my stomach. I saw dead bodies lying around and bulldozers being employed to move the bodies. I saw one mound with a small handwritten placard dug into a post in the ground which read, "Here lies 10,000 bodies." There were other smaller mounds as well with signs that listed how many bodies were there, but this one was the largest and most memorable of all.



Bergen Belsen

If I had to describe Bergen Belsen in biblical terms, I would say it was "Tohu V'vohu"—literally, "Chaos and Desolation." People walked about with either hopelessness for the future or a crazed, even manic look, in the present. I was told stories about inmates who went out in search of Nazis and how they would kill them with their bare hands, just to exact revenge. There was no sense of control in the camp, no right or wrong, and everyone looked out for themselves. It was an utterly depressing place and I felt such pity and compassion for my fellow Jews who were stuck in that place—they had nowhere else to go. It wasn't until a few weeks after the war when representatives of various rescue agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), the Red Cross, Vaad Hatzalah, the Joint, and the Jewish Agency in Palestine, arrived to assist the former prisoners. Even later, the Haganah (Jewish military force in Palestine) sent in agents who held clandestine military training in Bergen Belsen in order to prepare DPs for immigration to Palestine and many

became influential in the Zionist cause and in the political debate about the creation of a Jewish state.

I remained in Bergen Belsen for only a few hours and then I left. I was too depressed to stay any longer and for the remainder of my tour of duty in Berlin, which lasted a few more months, I never returned to the camp again.

It was quickly becoming apparent to me that I felt uncomfortable in Berlin and I pined for the moment when I could leave. Everywhere I went, on every street of the German capital, I was reminded of the devastation that this "civilized" nation did to my family and friends, to the entire Jewish people. There was absolutely no remnant of the former Jewish kehillah in Berlin and whatever Jewish identity was left, was hidden and afraid to be exposed. I must admit, even I was somewhat unnerved and even slightly scared to be in such a city, where German men and women walked down the street going about their daily actions as if everything was normal. As if these very same people were blameless for the terror and devastation they had caused to the world in general and the Jews in particular. Most German civilians denied being affiliated with the Nazi party or having anything to do with what the S.S. or S.A. did. They even went so far as to maintain that they tried to help Jews whenever possible. Especially when they learned that I was Jewish, they could not stop falling over themselves trying to convince me that they were really good people who had nothing to do with the Nazis. But I saw their faces and I heard their voices. I knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that they were lying and I was thoroughly disgusted with them.

CHAPTER XXI

Return to Civilian Life





Portrait

XXI

At the end of the Second World War, there were approximately five million servicemen and women in the British armed forces. The demobilization and reassimilation of this vast force into civilian life was one of the greatest challenges facing the postwar British government. The release process began on June 18, 1945, about six weeks after V-E Day. During the next eighteen months about 4.3 million men and women returned to "civvy street" or life as civilians. The process was not without controversy. Demobilization did not go as smoothly or as quickly as first anticipated, for a number of reasons. Many men found themselves held in the field either because their skills and trades were still needed there or the British government feared too quick a demobilization would create a labor glut at home. Others were transferred to another zone of conflict where the war was not yet over or to the British occupation zone in Germany once peace had been achieved. Some men reacted angrily, frustrated by a life of boredom, seemingly needless military discipline (at a time of peace), waste and inactivity. The result was a demobilization process that dragged on, releasing men in dribs and drabs, which meant that their actual homecoming was often distinctly anticlimactic, with little fanfare or celebration of their return.

I waited my turn impatiently to leave Germany and begin my life anew in England. Like I mentioned earlier, I disliked being in Germany, felt quite uncomfortable in Berlin, and I positively despised the German people. I couldn't get away from those people fast enough. It took almost six months before it was my turn. We were given our demobilization orders and left Berlin quite unceremoniously. I found it quite amusing that we would be traveling by

ferry back to England—on the very same ferry-line that I had used on my Kindertransport six years earlier. We drove over the border and arrived in Hoek van Holland where we boarded the ferry and sailed back to Harwich, England. There, we were taken to the Harwich Naval Base for the process of "demobbing"—the English euphemism for demobilization.

Demobbing was a process that took a few days. Before a soldier was permitted to leave his unit he was medically examined and given a form which allowed him to make a claim for any form of disability arising from his military service. A Dispersal Certificate recorded personal and military information and also the state of his equipment. If he lost any of it after this point, the value would be deducted from his outstanding pay. After enduring the first day of the demobbing process, we were taken to the Dispersal Centre, which was a hut or tented camp or barracks, where we stayed overnight. The following day we passed through the "Mincing Machine"—the name given to the various departments and procedures one is forced to endure during the process of being released from Her Majesty's Forces. We collected our papers and documents, Release Book, Clothing Book, N.A.A.F.I. rations, etc., and made our way to the hut to collect the rest of our luggage, after which we were picked up by one of the Army coach drivers and driven to the local train station.

I boarded a train and headed to London. I was excited at the prospect of living in the big city and my first course of action was to find a place to live. I met up with my dear old friend Henri Schmelczer, who had also just been released from the British Army and we rented a flat together, using the pension money we received from the army to cover the rent. When I had joined the Royal Armoured Tanks Corp., Henri decided to take a different track and he enlisted for ski patrol. Ski troops played a key role in a number of battles in Finland and Norway during the bitter cold winters in forested, rural terrain with no passable roads, and since Henri was always a gifted skier, he served his time in the Royal Marines, 3 Commando Brigade. Now, after demobilization, he too, made his way to London and we resumed our former roles as roommates.

It took some time for Henri and I to acclimate ourselves to civilian life, especially after all the years we spent as soldiers following precise military orders. I found out that I had an uncle (on my mother's side) by the name of Mr. Lauer, who lived in the Stamford Hill section of London and he was thrilled to learn of a relative from Germany who had survived the war, living in London. He would ask us to come to him for Shabbos on many occasions and often we did. It was nice to have a place to go. However, since we were young, ambitious and "available," Henri and I were always looking to widen our social circle of friends and acquaintances, so quite often we would go out on the town to meet other young people. It was through this "network" that I found my first job—an occupation that became my lifelong passion and allowed me to become successful, both in England and later when I moved to the United States.



With my cousin in London

I met a girl in London who told me about an antique art frame and restoration shop where she worked, that was looking to hire a manager. She said that the boss was an elderly Jewish man who did not spend much time in the shop and needed a young and ambitious worker to run the shop. I had no experience in art framing but, as I was in desperate need of a job, I decided to apply for the position. I came to my interview and sat opposite a short Czechoslovakian Jew by the name of Frederick Pollak. He asked me a few questions about my history and I told him that I grew up in Berlin, escaped to England on a Kindertransport in 1939, and served in the British military until my recent release. He was impressed and nodded enthusiastically, especially since he had lived in Berlin for a number of years as well. Mr. Pollak was a shrewd man and he could sense my naiveté. His next question caught me by surprise. "How much do you need to live?" he asked me.

I had never handled money and was unfamiliar with its worth. Quickly calculating my basic needs for food and lodging, I quoted him a very low figure and he stood up with a big smile and extended his hand. "You're hired," he said, and I was thrilled with my new job.

I learned about my new employer. Frederick Anthony Pollak (1896-1968), an artist of Jewish origin, moved from Prague to Berlin in 1925, where he ran a successful frame-making business, known as the "Vergolderei Pygmalion," until he was forced to leave Germany in 1937. He escaped the Nazi persecution and set up a new shop in London. He was a master of his profession and created exquisite frames for some of the leading and most prolific painters of his time. Pollak made frames for John Merton's exhibition in 1938 and for much of the artist's subsequent work. He also framed works by the Italian master, Pietro Annigoni, including "The Duchess of Devonshire," and James Lloyd's "Lord Irvine," which hangs in the Palace of Westminster. Count Antoine Seilern, the renowned art collector and historian, employed Pollak to frame numerous works in his collection. He also sold antique frames to the National Gallery of Great Britain, and framed Tiepolo's "Banquet of Cleopatra" for the National Gallery

of Victoria, Australia. Frederick Pollak was most instrumental in preparing the groundwork for making London a center of the antique framing business.

I loved the work and in no time at all, I learned the finer points of art restoration and framing. In fact, I became so good at my work that in less than two weeks, Frederick Pollak called me into his office and increased my salary by 50%. He told me that I was just the man he was looking for to take over his shop and grow his business and he wished to compensate me accordingly. I was happy and worked extra hard to keep him satisfied. Pollak, for his part, almost never came to the shop anymore. He could usually be found in any one of the swanky restaurants, tea shops and cafes that lined the broad boulevards of London, and he enjoyed rubbing elbows with English royalty and the elite aristocracy of London's high society. This was fine by me and in the four years that I worked for Frederick Pollak, I developed contacts in the art business—like Agnew's, the Arcade Gallery, the Hanover Gallery and Leggatt's—that would serve me well when I went into business for myself in the United States.

In the course of running the business, I met lords and ladies, members of Parliament, Dukes and Duchesses, and I even had the privilege of meeting Queen Elizabeth herself in Buckingham Palace! This came about on one occasion when the palace called and asked for a number of paintings to be repaired. I went to Buckingham Palace myself to inspect the job and while I was in the midst of removing a painting to be brought to the shop, the Queen herself entered the room. I stood respectfully as she gazed at the painting and then she looked at me and inquired who I was. I told her that I worked for Frederick Pollak and was here to repair some of the paintings. She asked me my name and I told her Herman Guttmann. She wondered about my accent and I explained that I was originally from Germany and that I had served for a number of years in the British Army.

This piqued her interest, and she asked me what regiment I served in. I told her the Royal Dragoons and she was delighted with this development. It seems she was fascinated to hear about

the exploits of her royal army and she asked a few more questions about which theater I had served in and which battles I had fought in. She was extremely gracious and proper the entire time. Then, she thanked me for my service and bid me good day. And just like that—I met the Queen of England!

CHAPTER XXII

My Brother Egon





Egon at his Bar Mitzvah

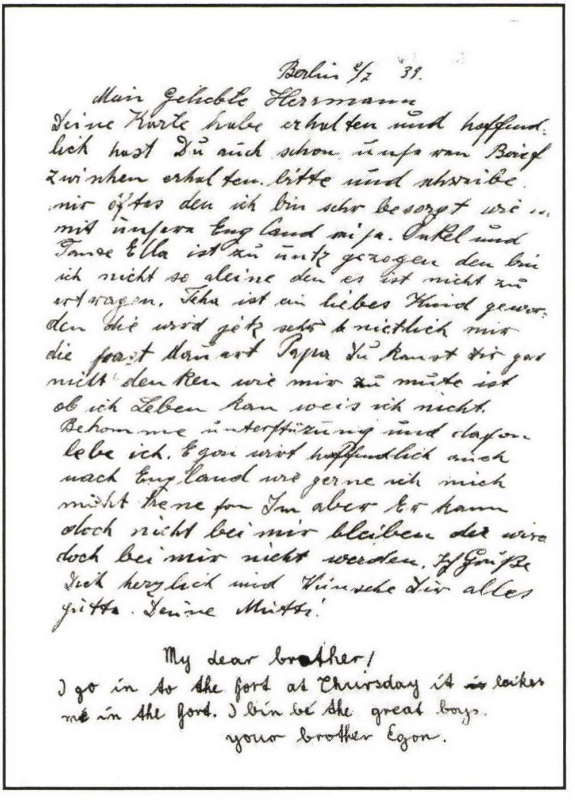
XXII

Henri did not remain in London for too long, and when he decided to move away, I found myself a new roommate: my dear brother Egon. Eliezer, or Egon as everyone referred to him, had also underwent trying and traumatic experiences during the war and although it wasn't always possible for us to keep in contact, we now made up for all our lost time.

As I discussed previously, I left Berlin on a Kindertransport on the night of April 11, 1939, and I was placed in the Whittinghame Farm School in Scotland by the "Brit Chalutzim Datyim" (Buchad). My brother Egon is almost four years younger than I am, and he came to England on a later transport, on August 1, 1939. After arriving in Harwich, like all the transports, he was sent with his entire group to the city of Leeds, in Yorkshire, where he stayed in Adelman's Kosher Hotel for a few weeks until the hostel, which was to be his home for the next few years, was ready to be occupied. The hostel eventually became quite renowned and saw many visitors who wished to meet the children and help out in any way they could. Among others, Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, the renowned London activist who is credited with rescuing thousands of children on Kindertransports from late 1938 until the start of the war in September 1939, was quite instrumental in seeing to the needs and requirements of the Jewish children in Leeds. On top of that, almost every family of the Leeds Jewish community paid a small amount of money per week to help support the children in the hostel.

Egon was quite young when he arrived in Leeds—about age 12. Like myself and the others in Whittinghame, he studied basic subjects, like mathematics and language courses that were taught in the hostel, and he became quite proficient in the English language,

and later, English law. If I thought I was an intellectual, Egon was even more so than I was. He read voraciously from any and every book he found, and he loved to discuss matters of politics and current events with his teachers and peers. After a few years, many of the children went out to work in local businesses and factories, and thanks to the assistance of Dr. Schonfeld and others, he was given a job in the Burton clothing manufacturing warehouse.



Berlin 3/2 31.

Mein Geliebte Herrmann
Deine Karte habe erhalten und hoffentlich hast Du auch schon unsere vom Brief zwischen erhalten. Bitte und schreibe mir öfters den ich bin sehr besorgt wie es mit unserer England reise. Onkel und Tante Ella ist an uns gezogen den bei ich nicht so alleine den es ist nicht zu ertragen. Ilka ist ein liebes Kind geworden die wird jetzt sehr hübsch mir die passt dann auf Papa du kannst dir gar nicht denken wie mir zu mute ist ob ich Leben kann weiss ich nicht. Betreffend unterstützung und dergleichen lebe ich. Egon wird hoffentlich auch nach England wir gerne wir mich nicht trennen von Ihm aber er kann doch nicht bei mir bleiben der wird doch bei mir nicht werden. Herzliche Grüße viele herzlich und Wünsche Dir alles gütte. Deine Mutter.

My dear brother!
I go in to the fort at Thursday it is lovely me in the fort. I bin be the great boys.
your brother Egon.

Letter from Egon

Moshe Osinsky was a Lithuanian Jew from the Kaunas province, who escaped scathing Russian and later German pogroms,

and arrived in England in 1900. Moshe started his life in Great Britain, like many new emigrants, selling trinkets door-to-door but he always had an intention to go into business, and in 1904 he opened his first shop in Chesterfield. After his marriage in 1909 he began to call himself Morris Burton and soon after, moved the business to Leeds, the heart of Jewish textiles and tailoring, where he became successively Maurice Burton, and then the much more impressive, Montague Maurice Burton. Montague Burton, was a man dedicated to providing high quality made-to-measure suits at a reasonable price. His ambition was not only to clothe the nation and to raise the bar on the quality of life for his employees, but also to co-operate and collaborate with those working for the advancement of culture and education worldwide. He became quite successful in this venture and by 1929, Burton had four hundred shops, factories, and mills, when the company went public.

On the eve of World War II, The House of Burton turned to the production of uniforms for the troops. There were thousands of employees working round-the-clock shifts in the factories all throughout the war years and many more were needed. It was here that Egon was pressed into service on behalf of the United Kingdom and the war effort, and right from the start, he didn't like it one bit. Sweating in a clothing manufacturer's massive facility was beneath a young man of Egon's intelligence and character, and he made it clear that he did not enjoy the experience in Burtons, nor did he wish to remain there. Thus, after only a few short weeks, Egon was given a new job as an apprentice to a Konditor—a master baker—in a prominent bake shop in Leeds.

The profession of the Konditor developed from that of the baker. Once the bakers of medieval times mastered the art of baking bread, some started to infuse the dough with honey, dried fruits and spices, creating a delightful pastry. A Konditorei is a pâtisserie and confectionery shop, which places extra emphasis on the artistic aspect of the trade and, unlike a bakery, does not produce bread. The craft developed when particular bakers specialized in the creation of sweet bread to which candied fruits and other sweet ingredients were added. This was a much more prestigious craft for Egon

to be involved in and he actually enjoyed it. However, within a few days after working in the Konditorei, Egon began to feel sick with a whole host of unusual and suspicious maladies. It got so bad that after a while, he could not work at all since he felt so ill. It wasn't long before a doctor diagnosed him with a severe allergic reaction to the flour in the Konditorei—and that was pretty much the end of his career as a master baker's apprentice.

During the war, Egon enlisted in the British Army just like I did, although I do not know where or for how long he served. We did meet up in Berlin immediately after liberation, and spent a bit of time together. Egon loved to read and dreamed one day of being a journalist, perhaps a foreign correspondent. He also enjoyed the law and read every book on English law that he could find. Since our father held a law degree from his studies in Germany (although he did not make use of it), Egon also wished to earn a degree in law. Even while still in Leeds, he applied for correspondence courses and when the war was over and he was "demobbed," his stated intention was to attend Cambridge University and become a barrister. Unlike a solicitor, whose job is to manage large volumes of documents in a case or negotiate a settlement outside the courtroom, a barrister is a lawyer who represents a litigant as advocate before a court of appropriate jurisdiction. Egon wished to get up in front of a full courtroom and present legal cases before a judge or jury. But this required a great deal of training in evidence law, ethics, and court practice and procedure. Thus, his formal training did not begin until after the war, when he came to live with me in London. As I had a solid and stable job working in Frederick Pollak's shop, I earned enough money to put Egon through his early college years and pay for his schooling. Later, he received a number of prestigious scholarships including the Leverhulme Trust, and was accepted into the London School of Economics.

My brother did well for himself and did indeed become a barrister. He graduated from London University in 1952 and became a pupil of the renowned Judge Hawthorne. I used to tease him about wearing the long robes and the wig on his head (I used to call it his "Shaitel") which is how formal barristers dress while court is in

session, but in truth, he proved to everyone that being a refugee from a foreign country who escaped from Nazi Germany and did not even speak the language when he first arrived, was not a hindrance in any way to becoming a successful and elite professional in English jurisprudence and society.

Upon earning his doctorate, Dr. Egon Guttman became a well-known name in England and in numerous other countries. He practiced, and later went on to teach, law and other topics in Universities in England, Canada, Israel and the Sudan. In fact, Egon moved to the African country of Sudan for a limited tenure as a barrister and a lecturer in Civil Law at the University College of Khartoum. He had originally applied to the British Colonial office telling them that he wished to serve on the Island of Figi, but they were quite adamant that they would be telling him where he will be serving rather than the other way around. Instead, he was sent to the Sudan, as a member of the Sudan Political Service, an attaché attached to the British Foreign office, where he acted as Assistant District Commissioner as well as a lecturer in the University College of Khartoum.



Egon in his office

In 1958, he left Sudan and was offered a position to lecture at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. Two years later, he moved to New Jersey and continued to lecture in Rutgers University. Eventually, he moved to Silver Springs, Maryland to be a Professor of Law and Levitt Memorial Trust Scholar, Emeritus. He holds expertise in corporate and commercial law, secured transactions, negotiable instruments and other payment devices such as letters of credit and bank collection. As a member of the American Law Institute (ALI) and the American Bar Association (ABA), Egon has been involved in the revisions of various Articles of the Uniform Commercial Code, and as a member of U.S. Department of State Working Groups in the drafting of conventions relating to international commercial transactions. He worked with the SEC (Office of the General Counsel and Division of Enforcement) and is the author of Modern Securities Transfers and two case books. Today, Egon is retired and living comfortably in Silver Springs.

CHAPTER XXIII

Reigniting an Old Flame





In front of Buckingham Palace

XXIII

Life seemed to take on an amiable, if not monotonous, course in those first few years after demobilization. I had Egon, I had a good job and I had money. But I wanted more—I wanted to meet a nice girl and get married. As was the case so often during my lifetime, Hashgacha Pratis seemed to take me by the hand and guide me. It was on one occasion when I found myself in the Golders Green section of London, that I met Frieda Shachter, a girl I had once known back in Berlin.



Frieda's mother, Mrs. Johanna Schachter, nee Jacobs

The circumstances of how we came to be acquainted are fascinating. As I mentioned, in my youth, I was a member of the religious

affiliate to the Hechalutz movement, the Brit Chalutzim Datyim (Buchad). This was fortunate because they managed to include my name on the list of children eligible for the Kindertransport, and in fact, arranged for me to be on a transport. The day my family was informed that I was to leave Berlin in April 1939, we received a paper from the Hechalutz which authorized me to purchase a suitcase and other necessary travel materials from stores in Berlin that offered discounts to affiliated members. I recall going with my mother to a luggage store on Leinenstrasse that was owned by Frau Shachter, where we purchased a suitcase for my trip. It was there that I met the fifteen-year-old daughter of the proprietress, Frieda Shachter, who was very friendly and helpful. We became friends and I enjoyed talking to her on that, and on many other occasions.

After I left Germany and arrived in Whittinghame, I did not see or hear from Frieda until a few months later when a new Kindertransport arrived in Whittinghame. I remember the day well. We were always excited to welcome the new groups that arrived in Whittinghame and we would go outside and greet the lorries as they pulled up. I was surprised and thrilled when Frieda stepped out of one of the lorries and came over to say hello. We renewed our friendship that had begun in Berlin and I really enjoyed the time we spent together. She remained in Whittinghame until after I had left and we became close friends during that time. I looked at her and thought that this was a girl I wished to marry—at the appropriate time, of course. I was even bold enough to broach the subject to her but apparently she was not entertaining such thoughts at this time in her life and she let me know that she wasn't interested. Although we were both members of Buchad, the religious wing of the Hechalutz party, she seemed to be more interested in religious practice than I was and she told me that she could only marry a boy who was strictly observant. She didn't think that I was religious enough for her, and we remained "friends" the entire time we were together in Whittinghame.

Over the course of the next few years, we lost contact with each other. I went on to Cambridge and then, after enlisting in the British army, was deployed with the invasionary force that liberated most of Western Europe. Frieda, on the other hand, remained in

the farm school in Whittinghame until it was disbanded in late 1940. From there, she was sent to "Hachshara"—a farm-like kibbutz in Thaxted, a town in the Uttlesford district of Essex. She remained there for a bit over one year, working together with thirty other young Jewish refugees in a cowshed.

Frieda was too gentle and sophisticated for such menial labor and she asked the Jewish agency to transfer her. They sent her to London where she was employed by the LCC, London County Council, the principal local government body for the County of London, the largest, most significant and most ambitious English municipal authority in the city. It employed thousands of municipal workers in dozens of fields. It was also responsible to provide technical education to teachers and students and after the disbandment of the London School Board, the LCC became the local education authority with responsibility for elementary and secondary schools. Frieda studied for two years to become a teacher and was gainfully employed as a kindergarten teacher in a Jewish school that was affiliated with the Brit Chalutzim Datyim organization.

She also studied nursing and took a great interest in tending to and caring for children and adolescents. Through her knowledge in this field, she landed a job as a baby nurse for a Jewish family in the Golders Green section of London. The family she worked for was exactly the kind of family she was looking for. The father was a Dayan—a rabbinic judge in the local Beis Din (Jewish court system) and they were strictly observant, as was she. All throughout the war years, Frieda lived with this kind and



With Frieda in London

warm family and she developed a great appreciation for the religious character of life that was displayed. Although she thought of Hermann and was quite fond of him, she did not see a future life as his wife since he did not share the same outlook as she did. He was religious but not as much as she would have wanted or liked.

The next time we met, however, seemed to reawaken those old feelings of fondness for one another, and we spoke of marriage more often. We found each other in London in 1948, at a local leisure spot where young singles would frequent. I was delighted to find Frieda again and she enjoyed my company. I had a good job and money was no issue for me. I took her to the theater and to the movies. We ate out frequently in local restaurants and went for long strolls in the park. I told her that I wished to marry her but once again she was unsure since she felt I was not serious enough in my level of observance. On one occasion, Frieda invited me to join her in the flat she shared with a few other girls for the Friday night meal. I accepted eagerly and when I came on Friday afternoon to her flat, I still had a bag of books that I was bringing back to my apartment with me. Frieda disapproved of me carrying the books on Shabbos as this is forbidden and she insisted that I leave them in her apartment until after Shabbos. She also disapproved of a number of my friends and acquaintances. Most of them were not religious at all and she would tell me on many occasions that they were a bad influence on me. Of course, I couldn't see it and I tried to convince her of my sincerity and good intentions, but a woman has a sixth sense about these things and she was adamant.

By the end of 1949, Frieda was convinced that there was no future for a religious girl like her in the U.K. She decided to move to the United States where she had many relatives on her mother's side, most notably the Jacobs family in Washington Heights. The Jacobs were Frieda's cousins—her mother Hanna, and their father, Saly, were brother and sister. I was distraught over her departure. I used every cogent argument at my disposal to attempt to dissuade her from moving away, including the fact that I was doing well in London and could give her a life of wealth and prestige if she stayed

here with me. But wealth and prestige was not what was most important to Frieda—she wanted a life filled with vibrant religious



Frieda in London

observance. She insisted over and over again that she could not find such a life in London and that if I came with her to the United States and agreed to such a lifestyle, she would marry me at once! She even went so far as to say that if I came to New York and was not happy there, she would move back to England with me.

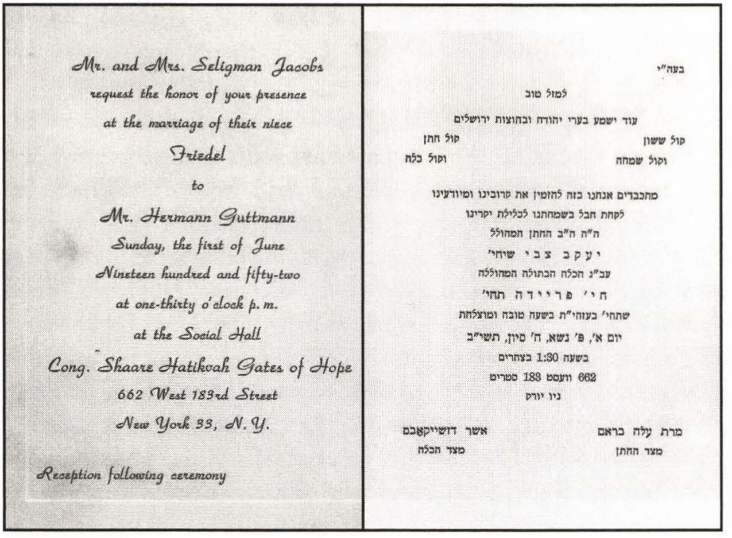
Well, I needed some time to think about it. Meanwhile, Frieda left England and moved to the U.S. I lavished her with many farewell gifts and even saw her off at the harbor in Southampton. Although I put on a brave face, I was truly sad to see her go. She arrived in New York in January 1950. For the next few months, life was not the same without her and I missed Frieda deeply. She wrote me often and in each letter, she insisted that if I came to New York, we would be married. She knew that I needed to get out of London and away from the negative influences all around me, and that New York was the perfect place for me to regain my religious footing.

In the summer of 1951, I finally decided to listen to her. I went to speak with my boss, Frederick Pollak, and I explained to him that I would be traveling to the U.S. for the purpose of matrimony. At first, he couldn't understand why I needed to travel so far away to find a proper mate; were there no women in London that I could settle down with? But after I explained our long and deep relationship dating back to our youthful days in Berlin, and that I was planning on coming back to London soon after the wedding, he gave me his blessing and even a beautiful wedding gift. (I found out later that when he realized that I was not coming back—that I was in the U.S. to stay—he was quite unhappy and cross with me!) I had many good connections in the art business, both in Europe and the United States, and a number of the American dealers were delighted that I was coming over. They encouraged me and insisted that I would do well in the U.S., especially with my talent, ability and youthful energy.

I set sail from England and landed in New York during September of 1951. I do not recall much about the voyage but I will never forget the surprise that awaited me at the pier. As it turned out, my ship landed in New York on Shabbos afternoon and since it was impossible for me to remain on the ship (as would have been required by halacha) until after nightfall, I had no choice but to alight with my valises during the day. As I walked off the plank, there stood my fiancé, my Frieda, all bedecked in her Shabbos finery. She had walked with her Tanta Bella from 177th Street all the way to the docks—over one hundred city blocks—to meet me when I landed. I was literally speechless, and more than thrilled to see her again! For a boy like myself who had lost just about everyone and everything in the world during the war, this gesture meant the world to me. Frieda and Tanta Bella also waited with me at the pier until Shabbos was concluded, and we all marveled at the timing of my trip and how Hashem watched over me even when I almost messed up the whole thing. During my processing, I handed my papers to an immigration officer who looked at me and said, "Cutting it close, there, are we?" I didn't know what he was referring to until I looked at the date stamped on my visa and realized that my foreign visa allowing

me to come to this country expired the very next day! Had I waited one extra day to travel here, I would not have been allowed into the United States! Thankfully, I made it and when it got dark outside, I retrieved all my belongings and headed to my Tanta Ella's apartment where I was to reside for the next few months. (For the sake of clarification, Tanta Bella is not to be confused with Tanta Ella. Tanta Bella [née Hirschman] was Frieda's aunt; she had married Saly Jacobs, who also happened to be her cousin. Together with her parents and sister, they had all been liberated from Bergen Belsen—which is miraculous in and of itself—before arriving as a family in the United States after the war. Tanta Ella was my father's sister. She had been on the last boat out of Lisbon, Portugal, to the U.S. even before the war broke out. See page 14.)

Within a few days after I landed, our wedding preparations kicked into high gear and those first few months after I arrived were like a whirlwind of activity. I had to acclimate myself to a new country with its new demands and customs and I had to prepare myself for married life. Living in Tanta Ella's tiny apartment



Mr. and Mrs. Seligman Jacobs
request the honor of your presence
at the marriage of their niece
Friedel
to
Mr. Hermann Guttmann
Sunday, the first of June
Nineteen hundred and fifty-two
at one-thirty o'clock p. m.
at the Social Hall
Cong. Shaare Hatikvah Gates of Hope
662 West 183rd Street
New York 33, N. Y.

Reception following ceremony

בעזה"י

למזל טוב

עוד ישמע בערי יהודה ובחוצות ירושלים

קול ששון קול חתן

וקול שמחה וקול כלה

מהכבדים אנחנו בזה להזמין את קרובינו ומיודעינו

לקחת חבל בשמחתנו לכלילת יקרינו

ח"ה ח"ב החתן המהולל

י ע ק ב צ ב י שיחי'

עב"י הכלה הבתולה המהוללה

ח י ׳ פ ר י ד ה תחי'

שתחי' בעזהי"ת בשעה טובה ומוצלחת

יום א', פ' נשא, ח' סיון, תשי"ב

בשעה 1:30 בצהרים

662 וועסט 183 סטריט

ניו יורק

מרת עלה בראם אשר דושיקאכם

מצד הכלה מצד החתן

Wedding Invitation

was no picnic either; the room where I slept was above the building's boiler room and boy was it hot! Often, the steam rising from the boiler made the room unbearable. I couldn't wait until the big day when my bride and I could move into an apartment of our own. A few months later, on June 1, 1952, I married my childhood sweetheart, Frieda Shachter, in a small little social hall known as Cong. Sharei Tikvah—Gates of Hope, on West 183rd street in Washington Heights. Frieda's father had died in 1936 and her mother and older sister Bella, had been deported by the Nazis and perished in the camps. I, too, had no parents, and it was a very small wedding affair. The Jacob's family, Frieda's Uncle and Aunt, took care of all the arrangements and I even remember how we tried to drum up some people to attend the dinner. I had absolutely no one on my behalf (Egon could not make it from London) and the few guests in attendance were friends of the Jacobs' and some of Frieda's acquaintances. The officiating rabbi was Rabbi Naftali Friedler, with whom I had grown quite close to in the short time since I arrived from London. Immediately upon my arrival in New York, I began regular study sessions in Talmud and Halacha with Rabbi Friedler to prepare me for my future life as a Jewish husband and father. For close to the next fifty years, I maintained a very close and warm relationship with Rabbi Friedler.



Wedding



With the Jacobs



Family Wedding Photo

CHAPTER XXIV

Starting Over in Washington Heights



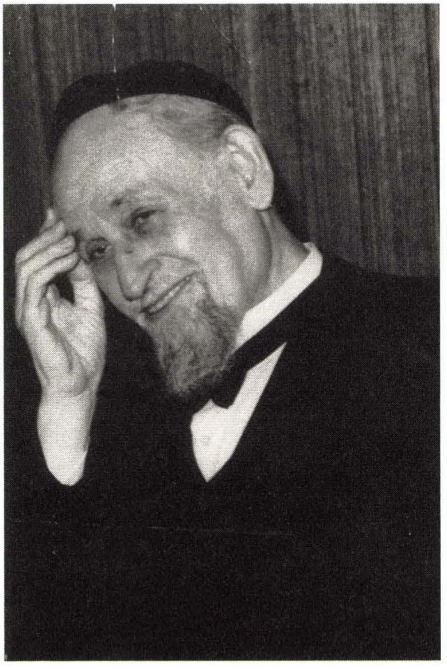


With my Rebbi, Rabbi Naftali Friedler

XXIV

In the years before and during World War II, about 100,000 German Jews arrived in the United States, escaping Hitler's persecution. Approximately 20,000 of them settled in the Washington Heights section of New York, where they strove to preserve their Jewish identity while fostering a culture that was still heavily German—a difficult combination in light of their origins. The social structure of the community and the folk culture of the immigrants posed serious issues with the formal nature of German Jewish cultural style, the relationships between the generations, and intergroup relations. But they persevered and in the late 1930's, a small number of German refugees joined together to establish a Minyan of their own where they could maintain their accustomed minhagim and cherished traditions. It was called Khal Adath Jeshurun (KAJ), after the famed Kehilla in Frankfurt-am-Main, in pre-war Germany.

When Rabbi Dr. Joseph Breuer arrived in New York in February 1939, he was asked to become Rav of this Minyan which, at the time, was held only on Shabbos. Rav Breuer was the grandson of Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch and the son of Rabbi Dr. Salomon Breuer, who had succeeded Rav Hirsch in his position as Rav of the Frankfurt Kehilla. Rav Joseph Breuer had served as the Rav of the "Klaus" synagogue in Frankfurt and as the Rosh HaYeshivah of the Frankfurt Yeshivah. Upon arriving in the United States and accepting his new position in Khal Adath Jeshurun, Rav Breuer immediately offered his home so that there could be regular weekday services. Like the Frankfurt Kehilla, this congregation was to become a full-fledged Kehilla to serve as a bastion of Independent



Rabbi Joseph Breuer 1967

Orthodoxy and a bearer of the "Torah im Derech Eretz" banner. Rav Breuer saw the opportunity to rebuild the Frankfurt Kehilla of old, but at the same time make it a center that attracted not only people from Frankfurt and Germany at large, but also from many neighboring Kehillos in Europe. While in general, the Kehilla continued the minhagim of Frankfurt, some changes were introduced by Rav Breuer to accommodate members who came from other communities.

After our marriage in 1952, Frieda and I moved into a quaint two-bedroom apartment on 179th street and Fort Washington Avenue. The landlord was a kindly Jewish man who allowed me to postpone paying the first month's rent—since I didn't have the money anyway—and he was nice enough to wait until the second month when I scraped together enough to pay him in full. Our apartment was not far from Uncle Osher Seligman and Aunt Erna. During those first few weeks, we ate many of our meals with the Jacobs family. Of course, we had very little money to spare and it was a wonderful gesture on their part. During this time, I was busy looking for employment and Frieda worked in Yeshivah Rabbi Moses Soloveitchik as a kindergarten teacher. Naturally most of the children in the school were German Jewish refugees, or their parents were. The school was always in

competition with Rav Breuer's school on Bennett Avenue and one major difference was that the Soloveitchik School learned spoken Hebrew, whereas Breuers did not.



Kever of Rav Naftali Friedler on Har Menuchos

Since both Frieda and I traced our lineage to Polish ancestry, we were not really part of the Breuer's congregation and KAJ. Instead, we davened in a small synagogue led by Rabbi Naftali Friedler, with whom I maintained my daily study sessions, even after our marriage. This synagogue later became the Agudath Israel minyan of Washington Heights. Rabbi Friedler was a remarkable individual and I cherished his friendship and guidance. He was a young man from Germany of Polish descent like myself (although he was older than I was), and he understood what I was going through and

what was needed in my life, both in a spiritual and material sense. Growing up in Germany, Rabbi Friedler had studied at the prestigious yeshivah of Rabbi Moshe Yehudah Schneider, in Frankfort. When the Germans expelled the "Ostjuden" (foreigners) from Germany in 1938, he was interned in Spungeon (on the border between Poland and Germany), however, through the incredible effort of Rabbi Eli Munk, he was released and made his way to England. He became a member of the renowned Gateshead Kollel under Rav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (author of Michtav M'Eliyahu) and he continued to learn at the reestablished yeshivah of Rav Moshe Yehuda Schneider in London. In 1948, when he immigrated to the United States, he became the senior maggid shiur (lecturer) in Yeshivah Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, which was established in Washington Heights by Rav Breuer a few years earlier, and ten years later, in 1958, he helped found the Beis Medrash of KAJ and was appointed its first Rosh Yeshivah. Rabbi Friedler later served as a Rosh Yeshivah of Yeshiva Ner Yisroel in Toronto, Canada, between the years of 1972-1987, and then as Rav of Khal Adath Jeshurun in Monsey—for which I was largely responsible. He passed away in August 1997.

In 1953, Frieda and I were blessed with our first wonderful bundle of joy: our daughter Blimi was born! If our apartment was small to begin with, it became even smaller over the course of the next few years as our dear son Mottie was born a few years later, followed by my Chanie in 1961 whom I truly doted on. By that point, we had already moved twice; first to 160 Wadsworth Avenue and later to 363 Ft. Washington Avenue, where we remained for close to the next twenty years, until the kids grew up.

As I mentioned previously, education was very important to me since I feel that I was deprived of one due to the war. As a result, there was nothing and nobody who would deprive my own children of a good, solid education. Thankfully, we in Washington Heights were fortunate to have the Breuers school which really did provide Blimi, Mottie and Chanie with a strong academic foundation, both in Jewish studies as well as secular fields. Frieda and I were happy that the children were attending such a fine school and even though we were not members of the Breuer congregation per

say, as Rabbi Friedler was my Rav and the Agudah was my shul, nevertheless, it was worth the association as our children's education was of utmost importance. Notwithstanding the fact that Breuers refused to give me a break on tuition, even though three of my children were attending the school, I was still satisfied to send them there from pre-school straight through high school.



Mottie, Blimi and Chanie in Washington Heights

When it came to post high school and seminary, we carefully evaluated each child individually. Blimi was always a "Rebbetzin" growing up and I knew that she was looking for something really serious as far as seminary. However, since she did not speak Hebrew well, she ruled out attending any seminary in Israel. She preferred a place that spoke her language and Gateshead turned

out to be her choice. Beth Midrash Lemorot Jewish Teachers' Training College, otherwise known as Gateshead Seminary, is a wonderful school that prepares young women to become excellent teachers. Its reputation as a no-nonsense, overly stringent environment, however, gave me concern and I needed to check it out for myself. On one of my business trips to Europe, I diverted to Gateshead to see for myself that Blimi was not headed to a "nunnery" and I was pleasantly surprised with what I saw. After that, I had no other objections and Blimi spent three years in the unique teacher's program in Gateshead.

When Mottie graduated from Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (YRSRH) also known as Breuers, we felt it was necessary for him to get out of Washington Heights and go to an out-of-town yeshivah. Rabbi Friedler advised us to send him to Ner Yisroel in Baltimore, where the beautiful, sprawling campus and the broad outlook and hashkafos of the yeshivah would benefit the inner-city kid. He was right and Mottie thrived in such an environment. Aside from the lifelong friendships that he forged during those years, Mottie became extremely close to the Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg zt"l. As for Chanie, she chose not to follow her older sister to Gateshead, and post high school, she went to Rabbi Herman's seminary in Israel. Frieda and I were delighted with her choice, as the State of Israel has always been close to our hearts, back from the days of our own youth. All in all, I must say, I think they all turned out alright!

CHAPTER XXV

Family Values





Looking dashing with Mottie and Chanie

XXV

The community in Washington Heights was a unique one. On the one hand, it was in the city—with the hustle and bustle that is the signature of any large metropolis, like New York City. It was cramped, noisy, dirty and very, very hectic. Traffic from the cars and buses mixed with the non-stop sights and sounds of a teeming mass of humanity thrown into a melting pot of paved surfaces and brick buildings. And yet, all of us living in that little corner of the city, constructed at the highest point on Manhattan island in the shadow of the George Washington Bridge, felt like one big happy family. We were mostly immigrants with a strong culture and vibrant German heritage and we kept those old-world values dear to our hearts. For example, it was important to teach our children to appreciate the value of a dollar—money did not grow on trees, and certainly not in Washington Heights where there were few trees to begin with. Our children were inculcated with the notion that one must appreciate what he or she has, and one did not spend money if one did not actually have that money. Today, this concept sounds foreign to many people—especially children—but Frieda and I, as well as most of our friends, neighbors and acquaintances lived with this principle—and still do—and felt the need to transmit it to our families. If Blimi wanted braces to better her appearance, she couldn't just assume she was going to get them automatically. We made her wait for some time, so she can appreciate the value of such an "extravagance." In the end, she got them, but it took some time. The same went for toys, clothing and the necklace that Chanie was pining for for months. We tried to give our children

everything they needed, but it is fair to say that they understood that wasteful spending was unacceptable in our home.



The Novominsker Rebbe dancing with Uncle Max Hirschmann at the Hachnassas Sefer Torah in Washington Heights

As I mentioned previously, my Rav was Rabbi Naftali Friedler, whom I considered my mentor for many years. I davened in his shul, the Agudath Israel of Washington Heights, and I am proud to have been the first person in our synagogue—perhaps in all of Washington Heights—to commission the writing of a Sefer Torah and make a festive Hachnassas Sefer Torah celebration. It was such a beautiful event and the joy was evident on everyone's face. It was clear that this was our revenge against Hitler and his accursed Nazis who turned our homeland, the land of our birth, into a desolate wasteland of death and destruction. As I held the precious Sefer Torah in my arms and the procession sang and danced through the streets from our home on Fort Washington to the Agudah building, one thought was uppermost in my mind: my parents and sister are not alive, nor are most of the friends and neighbors whom I grew up with in Berlin. They are gone, taken away by the brutality of

men; but the Torah will live on forever! It will never be gone and we will transmit its message to our children—and for all generations to come. So in the end, Hitler lost and we have won!

One thing that always stands out in my mind was the communal sukkah that was erected outside our building each year at 160 Wadsworth. It was a huge structure situated in the courtyard of the building and all of us—the entire population of the building—would eat our meals together there. The kids would squeal with delight as they maneuvered the "Sukkah Pot" with dexterity far beyond their years. In truth, it wasn't one pot—it was three pots that were all attached and made to raise and lower with a pulley system. Our apartment was on the sixth floor and when a pot filled with food needed to be brought into the sukkah, Frieda or one of the girls would attach it with a string and lower it down into the sukkah. When the pot was empty, it would be raised back up into our kitchen the same way. Surprisingly, not as much food spilled as one would think—a true testament to the skill with which they handled the pulley strings!

Once we moved to 363 Fort Washington Avenue, we had our own private sukkah, which was not as much fun as the communal one, but we always had guests and it was my pride and joy. Some of our most illustrious guests included the Perlow family who lived upstairs in the building as well. Rav Yaakov Perlow shlit'a was a Rosh Yeshiva at the Breuer's Yeshiva and as the son of the former Novominsker Rebbe, he took over the Chassidus when his father passed away. We remained friendly even after he resigned his position at Breuers and moved to Boro Park to establish his own synagogue and devote himself to his own yeshivah, and whenever I would see the Novominsker Rebbe, he was always warm and friendly to me.

The sukkah, however, did not last for too long. First of all, pieces of cinder from the incinerator would blow in causing everything to become dirty. On top of that, we would experience anti-Semitism to a degree in the form of teenagers and other non-Jews stealing the bamboo poles that I would use to cover the sukkah. This was a constant battle between myself and the hoodlums who vandalized

our property, and thankfully when we started making Sukkos in Monsey a few years later, I did not have to bother with all these obstacles: First we had a canvas sukkah, followed by a wooden sukkah (which my sons-in-law would put together with great effort) and eventually we built a skylight in our home, which we opened up and placed schach on top. A far cry from the old-fashioned communal sukkah back in Washington Heights!

CHAPTER XXVI

Tough Times





In my workshop

XXVI

In those early years, times were tough and I had trouble finding employment. Many of the art dealers and framers in New York had heard of me and the fact that I had run Frederick Pollak's entire studio back in London. One would think that with such a resume, people would be lining up to offer me a job. But in fact, it was just the opposite! Many of the shops who dealt in this line were afraid that I might start working for them or their competition and eventually overshadow them or worse, put them out of business! I even remember one man, a Mr. Loewy, who was nice enough to grant me an interview. He, too, had heard of me and was interested to see the kind of work I was capable of. He offered to give me a "project"—he asked me to frame a piece of art for him and he would pay me for my time. I eagerly accepted, thinking that this could be my big break. I took the painting to Frieda's uncle's warehouse in the Bronx and worked on the frame for a few days. When I brought it back, Mr. Loewy admired my work and even called all of his employees into the room. "Look here," he said to his employees, pointing at my frame job, "this is how a job should be done!"

I beamed from his praise and then he took me into his office and asked me how much I wished to be paid for my work. I was new to this country and my mind still thought in terms of English pounds. I told him he should pay me five pounds, and I turned red from embarrassment when Mr. Loewy burst out laughing. "Five pounds?" he said, with no small amount of incredulity. "You deserve at least $30 for such a job!"

He handed me the money and said, "Good luck to you." But he refused to give me a job because, as he put it, "most likely, you'll end

up jumping to my competition!" You can imagine my disappointment after he let me go like that.

I finally landed a job with an old German Jew by the name of Mr. Feist. He had a small framing shop and was willing to give me a chance to prove myself. He told me he would pay me six dollars a week and I accepted on the spot since all I cared about was getting a job—any job—to be able to support Frieda and myself. I came home that afternoon—it was a Friday—and I proudly told the whole Jacobs' family and Frieda about the new job I had just landed. When her uncle asked me how much I was to be paid and I told him six dollars a week, he stood up and said, "Absolutely not! A man of your abilities and qualifications must earn more. Do not take the job!" Well, as I saw how adamant her uncle was, I did not show up on Monday morning at Mr. Feist's shop.





Uncle Seligman (Osher) Jacobs (1951) and Aunt Erna (Esther) Jacobs (1978)

Uncle Osher Jacobs was a partner in the Jay Household Products Company, with a warehouse at 431 Southern Boulevard in the Southeast Bronx, where they spray-painted perfume bottles and salt-and-pepper shakers to make them colorful and more attractive.

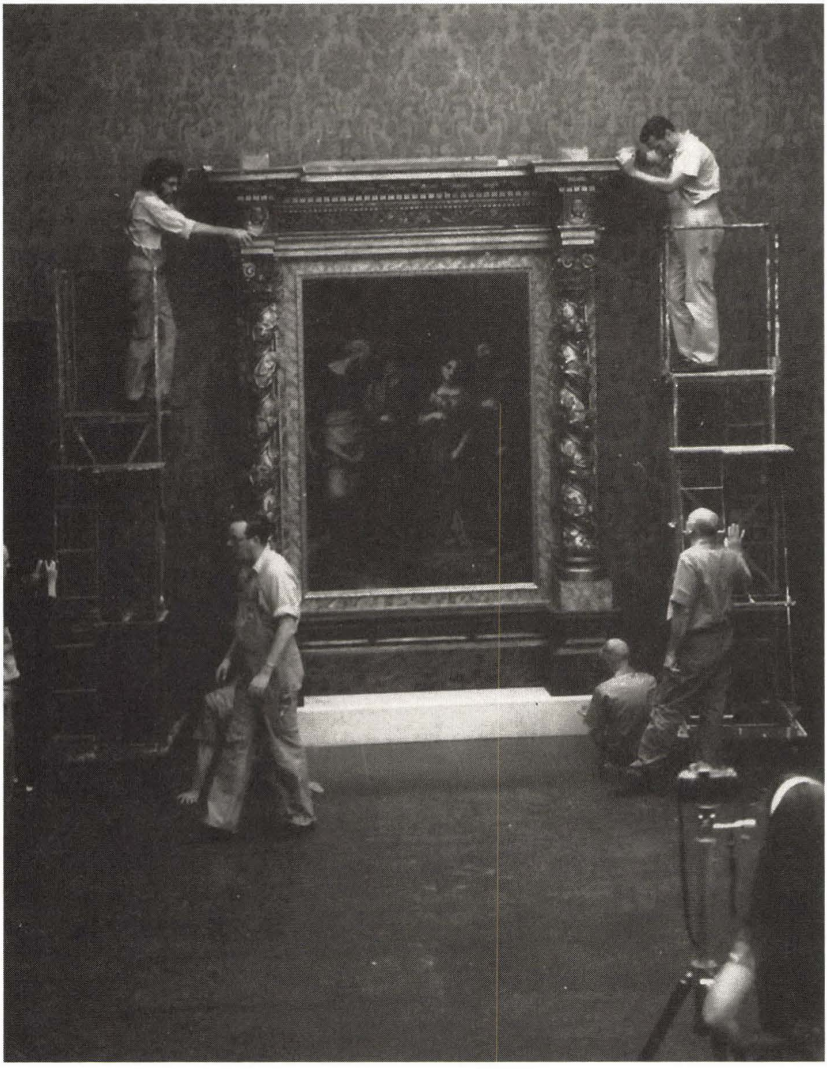
He was kind enough to offer me space in a corner of his warehouse where I could set up a work area and handle small framing and restoration jobs and he even gave me some start-up money to get the business off the ground. I was encouraged by the amount of faith he put in my abilities and how he wished to see me succeed on my own. I began to ambitiously run around the city looking for jobs and every once in a while, some dealer or art shop would give me something to frame. In this way, I managed to get my business started although I was told over and over again, that there is no way I can have a successful art business in the Bronx. Many of the large dealers with whom I had made contact during my years in London, refused to even consider giving me a job to do in the Bronx. "Move to Manhattan and we will definitely use you," they would say, but since I had no money to afford a shop in Manhattan, I had to make do with whatever I was given in the small corner of the Jacobs' warehouse in the Bronx.

In time, I made a little money and together with Frieda's earnings from the Soloveitchik School, we made a living. As soon as Frieda's Aunt Erna heard that we had some money, she decided that it was time for us to pay for our food. All this time, we had been eating many of our meals with the Jacobs family and Aunt Erna felt that it was time we chipped in to pay our fair share. We paid her ten dollars a week. I told Frieda that I thought it was time for us to eat meals on our own. If we had to pay anyway, I reasoned, we might as well make our own food. Frieda agreed and from that moment on, we felt like self-sufficient, contributing members of society.

CHAPTER XXVII

Making it on my Own



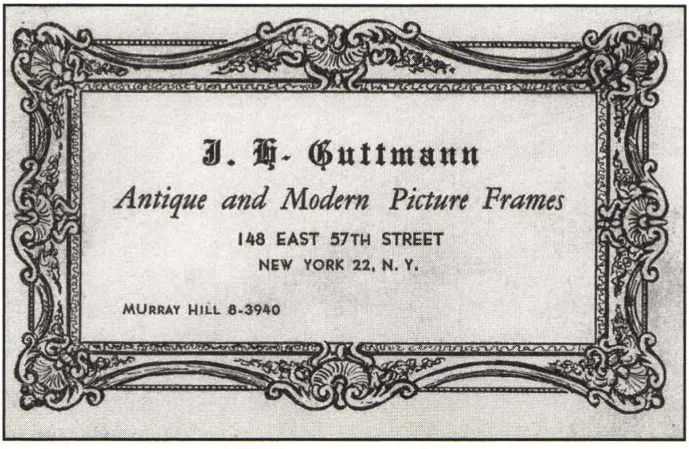


Working in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

XXVII

My little start-up frame shop in the corner of Uncle Osher's warehouse was only there on a temporary basis. For starters, the warehouse was noisy and disorienting, and often, I had a hard time focusing on the delicate task of restoring ornate antique frames with all the hustle and bustle that went on around me. On top of that, it was cold and dank, which made for less than optimal conditions for my line of work. But most of all, I knew that in order to be successful in this business of art framing and restoration, I needed to get out of the Bronx and situate myself in the center of the New York art world—57th street in Manhattan. I was constantly reminded that the Bronx was not the place for this sort of work and the minute I moved to Manhattan, people would flock to my shop.

With the encouragement and financial support of Frieda's uncle, I was soon able to find suitable quarters on 57th street. I rented space in a bookbinder's shop and found it to my liking. It was clean and quiet and in a very good location. In short time, customers did indeed flock to me and the business began to prosper. I took on clients and even hired two workers. The bookbinder, however, was a bit of a problem for me. He was not an honest man and he was constantly "playing with money" like it was some sort of game. Unfortunately, at times he dragged me into his games and I unwittingly was made to suffer not only a loss of money but a great deal of embarrassment. The bookbinder—a German no less—would exchange checks with me, assuring me that the checks he was giving me were perfectly fine and I could use them in any store I wished.



My first location on 57th street

I found out the hard way that this was not the case. On one occasion, when I went to the local kosher butcher, a man by the name of Schild, and paid for my purchases with one of the bookbinder's checks, it bounced and I was forced to pay for the difference. After that, I definitely did not trust the man—and it wasn't too long before my instincts were borne out: the man was so deceitful that he literally ran his business into the ground and was forced to close down. This actually worked out to my benefit because as his business was faltering, mine was prospering very nicely and I required more space for my studio. I took over the entire first floor of the shop and expanded the business. Later, when business was booming, I received permission from the landlord to construct a second floor loft on top of the building, where I built my own private workshop.

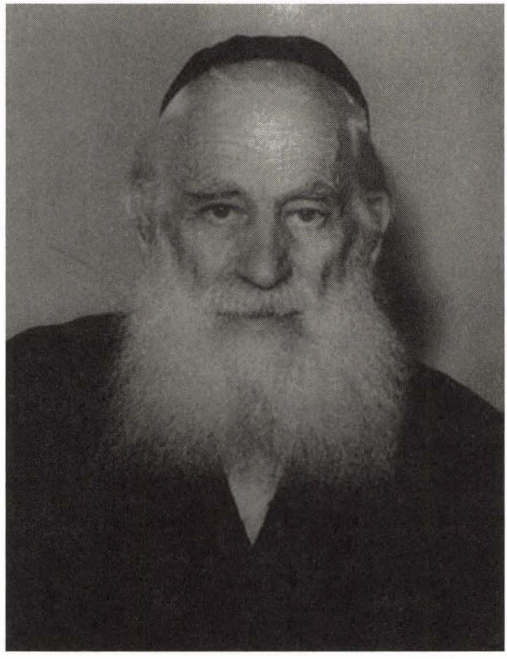
At first, people would take advantage of me. I was young and new to the art district and many dealers would pay me less than a job was worth. I was naive in the business aspect and didn't recognize the true value of my work. On occasion, I would request $100 for a job that was really worth $200. In time, I learned how to deal with clients and how much to charge them. And they were quite

pleased with my work. Some of the more well-known dealers came to me, including William Koetzer, Weitzman and Wildensheim. About a year after moving to Manhattan, I began to do restoration jobs for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and business took on an exciting and frenetic pace.

One of the more memorable jobs that I worked on was when I was commissioned to frame an antique painting in the Vatican. I recall the setting and circumstance of that job because of two interesting things that happened while I was in Italy at that time. For some reason, which till today I am not entirely sure I know why, I was somewhat bothered by the notion of working for the Catholic Church. It seemed that for a young Jewish man like myself, the concept didn't sit right with me and I was determined to somehow add a touch of holiness—perhaps "Jewishness"—to the center of the Christian religion's "unholy" headquarters. I guess you could say it was a prank of sorts but when the antique frame I worked on was guilded and completed, and the painting was set to be inserted into the frame, I added in a little extra bonus: a picture of my Rav, Rabbi Naftali Friedler! Perhaps the visage of a respected rabbi and Torah scholar would allow a slight purification to that painting, and to the entire Vatican as a whole! Maybe it removed some slight guilt I might have had for doing a job for the Pope! Who knows? Either way, all I can tell you is that somewhere in that huge Christian fortress, a picture of a great rabbi lies in the back of a well-known painting—I would love to see the look on the priests' faces when someday they open up that frame and find the picture!

The second interesting thing that occurred on my trip to Italy happened as I was riding on a train from Milan to Rome. I was seated in a compartment when I noticed a dignified looking rabbi with a long white beard sitting nearby. We struck up a conversation and I learned that this rabbi was the head of a yeshivah in Israel. In fact, I later found out, it is the largest yeshivah in the entire country and this Rosh Yeshivah was none other than the Ponovezher Rav, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman zt"l. Of course, in his humility, he played down his prominent role and told me that he was in Italy on a fundraising mission for his yeshivah. We spoke

in Yiddish and the conversation was nothing out of the ordinary. I didn't realize how prominent and respected this rabbi really was until we pulled into the Rome station and I looked out and saw a large crowd standing there welcoming the great Rosh Yeshivah. By then, we were already getting off the train and I could not talk to him anymore, but it was clear to me that I had just been sitting and talking with a special rabbi and a very important person.

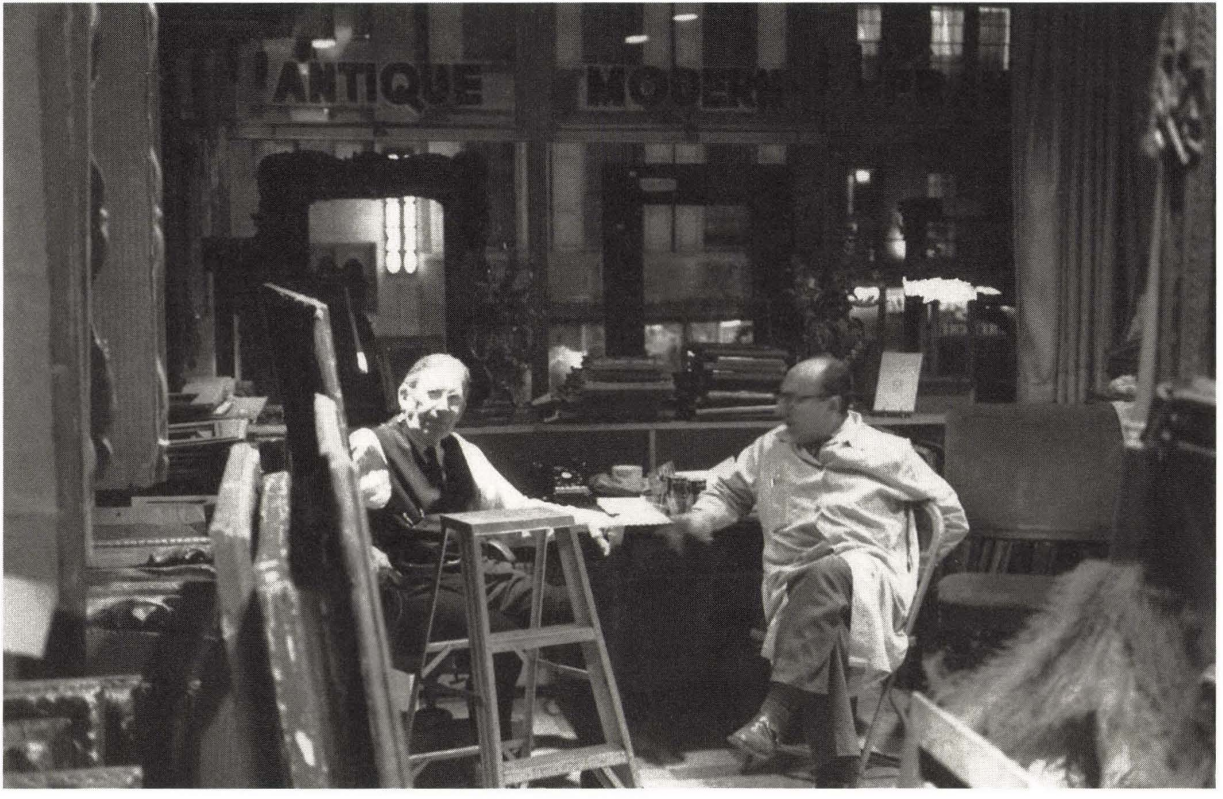


Ponovezher Rav

CHAPTER XXVIII

Expanding the Business





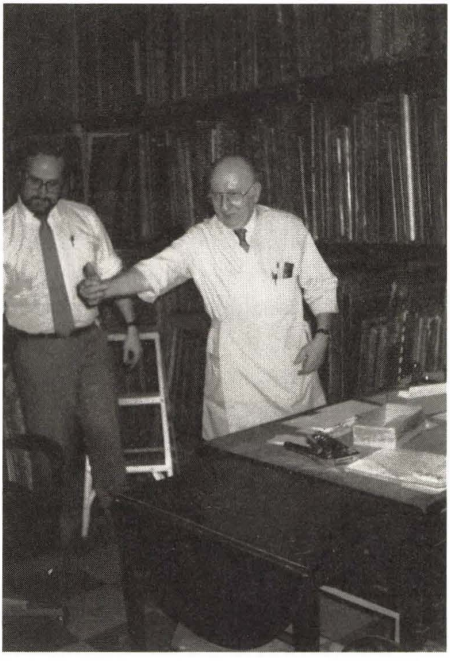
Business with an art dealer

XXVIII

Back in the states, the business grew and I became consumed with my work, spending many long hours in the workshop. I hired another few workers to help with the workload but this didn't slow me down in the least bit. I was happy and proud of my success and I knew that Frieda and the extended Jacobs family were as well. In fact, I remember, on perhaps the only occasion that I spoke with Rav Breuer, he paid me a wonderful compliment. It was when I was just starting out in the business and had begun to see moderate success. I happened to be in Khal Adath Jeshurun one morning and I was introduced to Rav Breuer. He asked me what I did for a living and I told him that I was an antique art frame restorer. He looked up at me and exclaimed, "I am happy to see members of the congregation in the art business!" It was truly a unique profession and Rav Breuer recognized that unlike most of the other young men who went into business or looked for a career, I was different. I was the only Shomer Shabbos person in the art business and Rav Breuer encouraged me to remain vigilant in my religious convictions.

It wasn't always easy. Many of the non-religious art dealers would go out of their way to try to get me to work on Shabbos. They would laugh at me and tell me that it was ridiculous to hold on to those Jewish antiquated laws and customs from the old country. They would even bring me paintings late on Friday afternoon and insist that I must have it done by Saturday night—just so that I would have to work on Shabbos. In fact, I later found out that a few of my "friends" in the business wagered a bet to see if they can get me to forgo my principles and work on Shabbos. I am proud to say that the person who bet against me lost! I was never again tempted

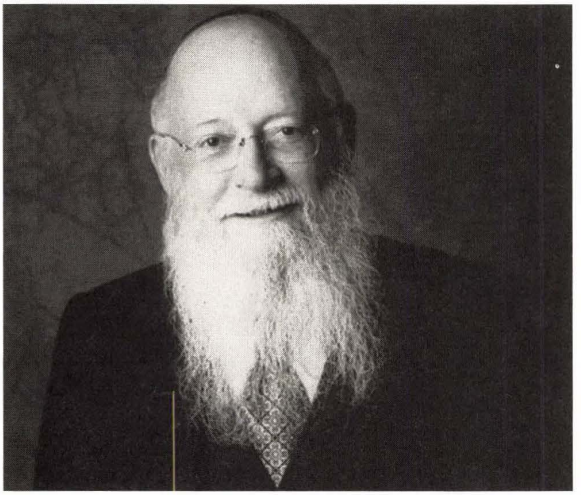
to violate these principles and I never did work on Shabbos! My strength came in no small part from the scrupulous observance and convictions of my wife Frieda. She was even stronger than I was and she never let me waver in any way.



Hard at work

By the late 1950's, I had established myself successfully in the art business and when my lease ran out on the space on 57th street, I moved my entire operation to a new site. I purchased an empty two-story building at 180 East 73rd Street for $250,000 and retrofitted the entire building to accommodate Guttmann Picture Frame Associates. I will never forget the look on the snooty lawyer's face when I told him that I was buying the building with all cash, and not taking a mortgage from the bank. He was quite impressed that a young man like myself could afford such a deal.

I kept an apartment for living quarters on the top floor of the building and in 1980, when all of our children were married and out of the house, Frieda and I moved from Washington Heights to East 73rd Street, where we lived for the next thirty-three years. Although we missed many of our friends back in the old neighborhood, our move to Manhattan was a blessing in disguise. Congregation Bnei Yehudah, a small but articulate and beautiful synagogue, became my place of worship and I developed an extremely warm and personal relationship with the rabbi, Rabbi J. David Bleich, the renowned lecturer and expert on Jewish medieval ethics. I especially appreciated his lectures and attended his Gemara shiurim religiously. I treasure my relationship with Rabbi Bleich, which I have maintained until this very day.



Rabbi David J. Bleich

CHAPTER XXIX

Moving to Monsey





My grandchildren at the house in Cameo Ridge

XXIX

I was a happy and satisfied man. Business was booming, the kids were growing and life was good. By the mid-1960's, I was doing better than even I expected. I worked in my shop non-stop and did not get home till very late in the evenings. During the week, I didn't see the children much and on the weekends, I needed to get much needed rest. It took me totally by surprise when Frieda mentioned to me that we should consider purchasing a "summer home" in Monsey, New York, where the family can go, not only for the summer, but also for weekends throughout the year and holiday vacations. It would be good for the kids to enjoy some "country air," she said convincingly, and it would allow them to meet new people, make new friends and experience new things. Additionally, since Frieda had a number of relatives living in Monsey—members of the Jacobs family—she also wished to be near her relatives on a more regular basis. I had no objection to the idea and the kids were thrilled. Soon we found a wonderful house at 14 Cameo Ridge Road in Monsey, and the first resolution we made as a family was to stop going to the decrepit, run-down shanty that we rented each summer in Hershkowitz's bungalow colony. Good riddance!

From the day I bought the house in Monsey in 1965, our weekends—indeed our entire lives—were transformed. Beginning from the week before Pesach until the end of the Sukkos holiday, we drove from Washington Heights each Friday to the beautiful country-like landscape of Monsey and spent our Shabbosos there in the comfortable surroundings of our new friends and family. Of course, during the week we resided in the city, where the kids went to school and I worked, davened and attended the shiurim of Rabbi Bleich. In Monsey, true to my "Yekke" heritage, I joined Congregation Beth

Tefillah, and was immediately enamored by the simplistic devotion and attention to the old German style of prayer—much like the way I remembered it from when I grew up in Berlin. The rabbi at the time was a brilliant and wonderful man by the name of Rabbi Lipschutz, and I took an immediate liking to him. Of course, I kept up my close connection with Rabbi Friedler, who initially had remained in Washington Heights, and I even managed to convince him to come live in Monsey as well (after he left Ner Yisroel in Toronto). In fact, I was quite instrumental in not only finding him a home, but also securing him the position as rabbi in the newly founded Khal Adath Jeshurun (KAJ) synagogue in the heart of Monsey.



Congregation Beth Tefillah

Beth Tefillah was my shul and I did my utmost to beautify it to the best of my ability. To this end, I helped build the Aron Kodesh and I adorned the entire synagogue with numerous guilded signs from my shop, including the "Mashiv Haruch" and "Yaaleh V'Yavo" signs which are still there to this very day. And when Frieda's cousin, Zolly Jacobs, made a bris milah for his son in the shul, I constructed and installed a magnificent gold-leaf chair—a "Kisei shel Eliyahu"—on which Uncle Aharon Jacobs sat as he performed the duties of the Sandek. All in all, I am proud to say that I contributed a great deal

to Beth Tefillah, and aside from the one or two years that I did not renew my membership as a sign of protest over the termination of Rabbi Lipschutz, to which I did not agree, I truly felt a part of the congregation for many years and gave considerably of my time and resources. Likewise, I donated generously to numerous local institutions and was even honored by a number of them, including Mesivta Bais Shraga, Bais Medrash Elyon, Beth Tefillah, Echo, and others.

Over the years, I attended many Torah classes and shiurim given by some of Monsey's most prominent Rabbanim. These include Rabbi Moshe Dovid Tendler, Rabbi Lipschutz and Rabbi Shlomo Breslauer, who currently serves as the rabbi of Beth Tefillah. When Rabbi Naftali Friedler arrived in Monsey, I began learning with him as well, just like I used to back in Washington Heights, and I attended many of his shiurim. However, moving to Monsey was beneficial in other ways as well, as it allowed me to come in contact with some of the most honorable leaders of the community. Obviously, the greatest relationship I developed in Monsey was with the esteemed mashgiach of Mesivta Bais Dovid, Rabbi Mordechai Schwab, once my daughter Blimi became engaged and eventually married, to his son Yehudah. The story of how this shidduch came about is legendary in the family and worth recounting.



Rav Naftali Friedler, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rav Mordechai Schwab

When Blimi was "on the market" and looking for a husband, we recognized that she was searching for a more serious learning boy, and not someone who was planning to go to work and become a businessman. After three years in Gateshead Seminary, what else could we expect? It was fortuitous that a friend of the family, Rabbi Avraham Gershon Zaks, happened to mention that he knows of a real "tzatzekela"—a wonderful boy who would be perfect for Blimi. His name was Yehudah Schwab, and he was the son of Rabbi Mordechai Schwab. At first, I dismissed the notion that a man of Rabbi Schwab's stature would consider doing a shidduch with a "poshuter Yid" like me, but as I came to realize with every other aspect of my life, I was totally under the reigns of Hashgacha Pratis and Hashem had other plans.

To my utter surprise and good fortune, Rabbi Schwab not only considered the shidduch, but he allowed Yehudah to date Blimi. As things became serious and we realized that an engagement was soon forthcoming, Rabbi Zaks became involved and presented me with a paper detailing what my financial responsibilities would be once the marriage took place. In effect, he laid out the "Nedunya"—the dowry that I would be required to pay as the father of the bride. The paper contained numbers and amounts that were staggering, in my opinion, and I was shocked. In fact, I was more than shocked; I was disturbed by the "demands" made upon me and the insistence that the shidduch could not be completed unless I acquiesced to these demands. Well, as you might have realized by this time, I am a straightforward type of individual, and I brought this paper directly to Rabbi Mordechai Schwab, asking if this was truly necessary. I did not know what to expect but I was happily relieved when he took one look at the paper, laughed and told me not to worry. "Forget about it," he said, and that was the end of that! Again, Hashgacha Pratis was in full bloom and the shidduch was concluded successfully. Blimi married Reb Yehudah Schwab and the young couple lived in Monsey.

Thankfully, there was less drama when it came to the shidduchim for Mottie and Chanie. Mottie married a wonderful girl from Monsey by the name of Karen Appleman, and eventually the

couple settled in Bergenfield, New Jersey, where they still live today. Chanie went for a little more of a European flare and she married Yitzchok Posen from Stamford Hill, London—my old stomping grounds. Chanie and Yitzchok, like Yehudah and Blimi and Mottie and Karen, have brought up beautiful families—and continue to raise their children in a manner that makes me so proud every time I see them.



My children

And in fact, Frieda and I do see them—every single day! In 2005, I sold the house on Cameo Ridge and built an extension to Yehudah and Blimi's house at 4 Shalvah Place. Soon after that, we moved permanently from our Manhattan loft and we now reside in Monsey, in our spacious and accommodating home. The children and grandchildren are always around, either to visit or stay with their Opa and Oma, and Frieda and I cherish every moment. I cannot say enough about Yehudah Schwab and the supreme effort he made during the construction phase, to ensure the extension was built, as well as the incredible level of Hachnassas Orchim that both he and Blimi displayed each and every day.



Me and my girls



Frieda at my side

I have since retired from my work and Mottie, whom I took into the business years ago, has now taken over the entire operation.

Retirement has allowed me to catch up with many of the goals and aspirations that I had heretofore been unable to achieve. In other words, I can finally learn Torah—something I was unable to do for much of my life. Each and every morning, I attend a daily Gemara class at Community Synagogue, given by Rabbi Avraham Steinberg, whom I admire very much. In the afternoon, I learn "b'chavrusa" with my invaluable study partner, Reb Velvel Dickstein, who is married to the daughter of my cousin, Rabbi Yehudah Jacobs. In fact, Reb Velvel used to learn with my good friend, Eli Hirsch, until Eli passed away a year ago. I feel very blessed and fortunate to study with, and learn from, such respected individuals and honorable Talmidei Chachamim. As they say, "It is never too late to learn in kollel!"



Learning with Reb Velvel Dickstein



At an einikel's bris



With einiklach

CHAPTER XXX

A Message to Future Generations





The Guttmann family

XXX

When I began this project of writing down my memoirs, my intention was—and still is—to recall and recount the amazing events that characterized my life, so that my children and grandchildren, and yes, my great-grandchildren, will be able to read it and understand how wonderful Hashem has been to me and how He kept me safe throughout the difficult, dark and dangerous years of my life. This is my story and I am giving it over to them for posterity. It includes my parents' and grandparents' history, my childhood in Berlin, the war years in England and in the British military, getting into the art business, moving to the United States and marrying my beloved wife, raising my loving family and the early years of my business dealings in New York. I want them to know where they came from and their rich illustrious lineage—their yichus—a combination of Polish Chassidim and German Yekkish blood. I want them to know where I was before, during and after the Second World War, and how I struggled to survive as a Jew in the days when being Jewish amounted to a death sentence for millions of our brothers and sisters. But most of all, I want them to recognize the hashgacha pratis that did not just follow me from country to country, but literally carried me through all those difficult and challenging experiences—I want them to appreciate that I was a simple boy who could have turned out quite differently, if not for the guiding Hand of Hashem at every step of my life.

I am a survivor. I survived against all odds and thanks to Hashem I was saved from the fate that befell my parents and sister. But I am also a spiritual survivor. It is truly a miracle in itself that a young boy of fifteen was sent out into the big and lonely world and although my background of Yiddishkeit and education was limited, I

tried to make it work and be a good Jew. How can this be anything but a "Nes Min Hashamayim"—a miracle from Heaven! To tell you the honest truth, I do not know what zechus I had to go through what I went through and come out the way I did. So many people I knew growing up perished or suffered terribly during the war and I walked away stronger in my convictions than before—can you even think for a minute that this is not a "Nes Min Hashamayim"?

One must remember that it was such a difficult time to be alive, to learn Torah and keep all the mitzvos. The temptations that I saw and felt almost daily during the war could have easily driven me away from the true path of Yiddishkeit—but it didn't. Was it me? No, it was hashgacha pratis! My parents gave me an education which allowed me to remain strong, to be shomer shabbos and an ehrlicher yid to the best of my ability. Indeed, when I was with my friends, I often felt lost. I could not rely on the strong influence of my family to keep me on the right derech and it was so hard. I was constantly tempted to veer off, to give in to the fun and chivalry of that time. I was young. I had few responsibilities—and I even had money in the years I lived in London right after the war! Being shomer shabbos was so difficult and people today cannot imagine how hard it was for me. But Boruch Hashem I didn't stray—I remained frum because I always remembered where I came from and who my family was. I may not have been the most observant Jew but I didn't stray as far as the others.

Of course, I really can't take the credit because we all know that if not for my dear Frieda, my wife of the past sixty-two years, I would not have turned out this way. She kept me straight and she made sure that I stayed a frum Jew. I remember when I would see her in London after the war—she thought I was such an Am Ha'aretz, ignorant of Torah and halacha, and indeed, I was! I didn't know much about learning but Frieda was able to see past my shortcomings and focus on my inner strength, the strength I received from my family growing up orthodox in Berlin. It was she who insisted that I move to the United States because she knew that I would never be able to keep my faith alive—to daven, keep kosher and be religious—with my friends and the lifestyle I was living in

England. It is a credit to her vision and knowing what was right for me—and what I must avoid at all cost. Believe me, I am not so educated but I knew that she was right. I saw what was happening to my friends—how they married shiksas and how terribly wrong their lives turned out. I almost turned out like them. I came from an orthodox home but being away for much of my formative years and serving in the army for so long weakened me and weakened my resolve to be a good Jew. It is in the zechus of my wife that I am what I am today—she insisted on a kosher home and being religious—and I cannot thank her enough.

A "Pintele Yid"—that was me throughout my entire life! I am over ninety years old—the time went so fast—I can't even believe it myself! The Ribono shel Olam kept me alive and gave me experiences that I will never forget. I was a soldier, I was even a prisoner for short time, but I came out alive with my faith in Hashem intact. I even carried my Tefillin with me the entire time I was in uniform—and no one ever found out! I may not have learned a lot when I was young but I always felt that spark of Yiddishkeit inside. I am sorry that I never really learned in my life. I was happy to pay for the expense of my brother Egon's education, but I missed out on my own, and for this I am truly sorry. If not for my connection with Rabbi Friedler, who drew me close to him and showed me how to be a good Jew, I may never have learned at all. I want my children and grandchildren—my entire family—to know what I endured during the war and how much I sacrificed to come back to Yiddishkeit. Boruch Hashem, now I am able to learn with chavrusos and I have all these seforim, but as a young man growing up during a terrible world war, I missed out on this and never had a chance. Life and war got in the way.

I am so proud of my family, of all my children and grandchildren, who live their lives on a kosher derech—this was and remains my main goal. This is why I agreed to uproot my "good life" back in England and come here to the United States. It is important to me that my family knows where they come from, that theirs is a Yiddish home where the main purpose is to be frum, to keep kosher and taharas hamishpacha, and to observe the dinim and halachos.

I am so happy to be able to say that my mishpacha has lived up to these ideals and they continue to make me proud and give me chizuk by understanding that this way of life is really to my liking.

I want to conclude this memoir by giving thanks to the Ribono shel Olam for all of His kindness and with a beracha that my entire extended family keep going on the derech that I wish them to follow—the derech of Torah and mitzvos. Their lives should be filled with much Torah study and they should continue to always be shomer mitzvos. Not overzealous or "farchnyukt"—just normal good Jews with a focus on teaching derech eretz to their children and grandchildren. They give me so much nachas and I only hope that they will continue to do so forever. I am so happy to be able to write down my life story so that they will know and remember that their old grandfather wasn't such a bad boy after all!

With my deepest love and affection,

HERMANN GUTTMANN

4 Nisan 5774

April 3, 2014



HERMANN GUTTMANN