

Life of Freddy Berdach

I was born in Vienna in 1930 into a lower middle class family. My loving parents and a sister 4 years older than I. Sadly she died when she was 6 years old of diphtheria. We were a happy family until March 1938 when the Germans marched into Austria and arrived in Vienna.

Within a few days, an SS soldier and a Nazi sympathiser knocked on our door and told us that we have to vacate our flat within 2 weeks. We moved in to a small flat with my grandparents. They had an unmarried still living with them and the flat became very crowded.

Within a couple of months, my father decided that he would go to Switzerland in order to get a visa for his wife and me. The visa to come to England eventually arrived but we had to get an exit visa, which meant visiting many offices and long waiting times for each.

We left for England, but had a 24 hour stopover in Switzerland to see my father. Zurich was so nice and peaceful after Vienna that we decided to stay. But the Swiss police eventually came and told us that we had 24 hours to leave the country. The rail journey from Zurich to Calais took a day and a half and we took the ferry to Dover on a winter's day, grey clouds and a howling wind, arriving on 20th December 1938

We got a visa to come to England provided my mother went as a domestic servant and as soon as Christmas was over, my mother went to work and I was fostered to a non-Jewish family in Kent. To make sure that I didn't get emotionally attached to the family, I was moved every 3 months and in 2 years I had 8 different families.

My father joined the army, was injured in France and was honourably discharged for his wounds in Taunton, Somerset. I was sent to a Convent school with wonderfully kind and dedicated nuns and in 3 months I had learned enough English to go to a Grammar school.

We moved to London where I went to parallel grammar school in Holloway. The war was still on and we were bombed out 3 times, the last when a Flying bomb (it was called a Doodle-bug) fell in our front garden.

After the war, I did 2 years National Service in the RAF, Was married IN 1955 and had 3 daughters. I became an exporter for men's ready-to-wear garments and they had to be made in England. I travelled into 57 different countries, always showing the flag .

I eventually had a heart attack and gave up travelling. Together with friends we formed a small committee to set up a Jewish 'Old People's Home' in Bushey. I became Chairman and ran the home with a House Committee for 12 years, giving up when I became as old as the residents.