

H M D

NORTHWOOD HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY EVENTS

... and the bush was burned with fire but was not consumed

Exodus 3:2

"Northwood Holocaust Memorial Day Events"

1st February 2016 to 10th February 2016

For every Holocaust Survivor who speaks at the NHMDE there is a difficult and painful story to tell. Many Survivors were separated from their parents at a very young age, but for those who had their parents with them, for some or all of the time, their accounts frequently include tales of extraordinary courage, resourcefulness and selflessness as the parents fight to keep their children alive. Here are two such accounts.

Steven Frank was born on 27th July 1935 in Amsterdam in Holland, the middle child of three sons. His mother Beatrix, born 1910, was British but went to Holland to study where she met Steven's father Leo, a distinguished lawyer who championed both legal aid and sat on the Board of a Jewish Mental Hospital. When the Nazis invaded, Steven's parents discussed the possibility of fleeing to England, but Leo felt a strong sense of obligation towards the patients of the Mental Hospital and decided they should stay in Holland. Leo became active in the Dutch Resistance but he was betrayed and the Nazis arrested and tortured him before sending him to Auschwitz in January 1943 where he was murdered.

After Leo was arrested, Beatrix was on her own with her three young sons. From that moment on, she demonstrated extraordinary courage and fortitude. Desperate



Amsterdam, March/April 1937. Soon after the birth of Steven's younger brother 27/3/37

to find out what had happened to Leo, she changed places with the cleaner at the prison where he was held, enabling her to grab



Holland. Place unknown circa 1939/40, the three Frank boys

a few hurried conversations with him. With no money coming into the household, Beatrix had to think how best to look after her young family. She started a school for Jewish children now excluded from State schools and also cut Jewish men's hair. She lobbied her husband's influential friends for help and they petitioned the Germans for clemency for Leo, but to no avail. However, their influence secured a place for the family on the 'Barneveld List', a list of eminent and influential Dutch Jews who were transported to a prison-castle in Barneveld. Living conditions in Barneveld were reasonable although medical provision was very basic. Steven contracted severe impetigo and Beatrix made bandages from sheets and ensured that he spent many hours in the sun to heal.

In September 1943, the Frank family was sent to Westerbork¹, a transit camp, where conditions were appalling, and Steven, like most inmates, developed dysentery as well as jaundice and a worm

infestation. Steven and his brothers and their friends devised what came to be known as the Westerbork Alphabet which represented life as they saw it at that time: **A are the (Ardapelen) potatoes on which the**



Amsterdam. Circa 1940/41. The back garden of the Frank home.

Jews have to live. B are the (baantjes) jobs we all desire to have. J is the (Jood) Jew the dangerous being, are among some of the entries. Beatrix encouraged the children to invent their own games. Steven remembers one game in particular which allowed one child to 'ride' another using a few small pieces of rope. Steven doesn't know how she did it, but for his birthday, Beatrix managed to find an extra piece of rope to make the game better.

In September 1944, the Frank family was deported to the camp-ghetto Thereisenstadt² on a perilous thirty-

¹ **WESTERBORK** It is estimated that 101,000 Dutch Jews and 5,000 German Jews were deported to their deaths in Auschwitz, Sobibor, Bergen Belsen and Thereisenstadt from Westerbork.

nine hour journey in cattle trucks with no food or water. On arrival, Beatrix had to be even more resourceful than ever to keep her children alive and her priority was to try and keep the children as clean as possible to stave off disease. Even though the job was extremely arduous and dangerous because she was

2 THEREISENSTADT Of the approximately 150,000 Jews sent to Theresienstadt (of which 15,000 were children), some 35,000 died there from disease and malnutrition, and about 88,000 were deported to Auschwitz and other death camps. It is estimated that around 90% of the children sent to Theresienstadt died.

in constant contact with medical waste and filthy bedding, she found work in the camp hospital laundry in order to have access to hot water. This allowed her to secretly wash the children's clothes and also to wash other peoples' clothes in return for food. Every night she would mix the bartered morsels of bread with water to make what she called bread porridge which she would dish out, spoonful by spoonful, to her three waiting children. Steven never saw her take a mouthful for herself.



Margate, Summer 1946, family photo now includes Ruth.

Theresienstadt was liberated by the Russians on May 9th. Beatrix pestered the Red Cross to allow them to travel on an ambulance going to an American-controlled DP Camp at Pilsen on the Czech border. Beatrix insisted on seeing the Garrison Commander and persuaded him to allow her to make contact with the RAF and, in turn, talked them into letting the family join a cargo flight that was returning to England. They were deposited on a runway in Croydon and Beatrix then made contact with her father and the family was reunited. After the War, Beatrix tracked down her Dutch niece Ruth who was born in 1939 and who had been placed in hiding with

a Calvinist farmer when Ruth's family was murdered. Beatrix brought Ruth to England to live with them. Unlike many Survivors, Beatrix spoke about the Holocaust so future generations would learn the truth about what had happened. She organised all her papers and records into a 'Living History' of the family's experiences during the Holocaust and after their arrival in England which is now held at the Imperial War Museum, including the Westerbork Alphabet which Beatrix encouraged Steven to write up after the war.

Another very remarkable story concerns that of Hannah Lewis who was born on 1st June 1937 in Wlodawa, Poland. Hannah was the only much loved daughter of Adam (born 1908) and Haya (born 1912). They were from a large and prosperous trading family and both



Christmas 1973 Letchmore Heath

her father and grandfather Jankel had a lot of contact with local Polish people in their business dealings. There was a deaf-mute strain in the family, and both Hannah's Uncle Shulka and his deaf-mute son Shlomo lived with them. Shlomo was slightly younger than Hannah and her great friend and companion.

After the Nazis invaded Poland, Wlodawa began to fill up with Jewish refugees and the city became a ghetto. Many families came to live in the large family house and there was dreadful hardship and deprivation. Adam and Jankel were wily and well-connected and, for a while, they managed to keep the family fed and protected. They also buried valuables and family mementoes anticipating that they might be needed later on.

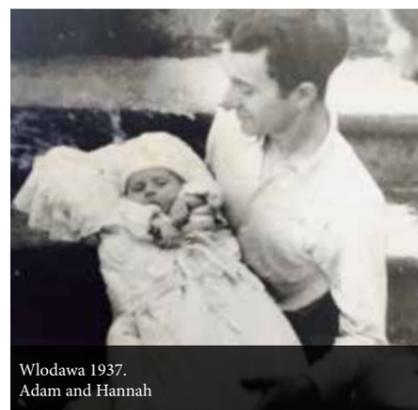
From May 1942, the Nazis started sending Jews from Wlodawa to nearby Sobibor, and other camps and around 14,000 people from



Wlodwa 1936. Haya is pregnant with Hannah

Wlodawa were taken to their deaths. In 1943, Hannah and her immediate family was sent to the slave labour Work Camp at Adampol³ which was a sub-camp to Sobibor. The march to the Camp was exhausting. Jankel was pushed in a wheelchair to avoid him falling behind as the family knew what would happen if he could not keep up. Hannah, aged just 6, found it very difficult and many times along the way her very diminutive mother had to carry her, sharing the task with Hanna's adored Aunt Sara.

When the family reached Adampol, Jankel recognised the house on the edge of the Camp as belonging to the village Elder with whom he had traded before the War. The Elder had some influence at the Camp and Jankel urged him to do what he could to save his grandchildren. It was agreed that Haya would come to work as the Elder's maid, and she was able to bring Hannah and Shlomo with her. The work for



Wlodawa 1937. Adam and Hannah

3 ADAMPOL Most of the Jews of Wlodawa and the surrounding towns were transported daily from the Wlodawa Ghetto to the camp, until October 1942, when almost all of them, some 8,000 people, were shot or deported to Sobibor.

all of them was hard and physical, but while she was with her mother, Hannah always felt safe, even though she regularly witnessed beatings and shootings. After a long, hard day at the house, they would return to the Camp and sleep in the filthy, crowded barracks.

Sadly, Jankel was one of the first victims of the Einsatzgruppen. He was taken to the nearby forest and shot and his body was left in a trench along with many hundreds of others. Adam swore that if he survived, he would bury his father in a Jewish cemetery. Hannah doesn't remember seeing her Uncle Shulka after they arrived at the Camp. Other family members also disappeared over time including



Wlodawa 1937. Hannah

Aunt Sara. Soon after their arrival Adam and his cousin escaped into the forests and joined a Partisan group comprising Poles, Russians and Jews. Even though Adam had no experience of fighting, he joined the group's activities which included destroying railway lines, stealing ammunition and warning others of pending Einsatzgruppen Aktions.

The Elder had two nieces who came to stay with him, Zosha, who was very hostile towards Haya, and Sala, who was the opposite. There were frequent Aktions and each time, Adam would come to the Camp to try and warn people but on one occasion, the SS came unannounced. Hannah instantly sensed the danger and ran with her cousin Shlomo to the barn to hide. Hannah hid in the hay loft, but instead of following her, Shlomo hid behind the door. Hannah called to him to come with her, but he couldn't hear her. When the Nazis opened the door, they found Shlomo and took him away. Hannah never saw him again.

And then one freezing January night in 1945, Adam tapped at the window of the Elder's house to warn Haya

of the Aktion planned for the next morning. He wanted to take Haya and Hannah with him. But Hannah had typhus and a raging fever and Haya knew that if she went on the run with Hannah, Hannah would die. And she would never leave her. So that night, Haya asked Sala if Hannah could stay in the warm house rather than returning to the



Wlodawa Circa 1940. Hannah and Haya

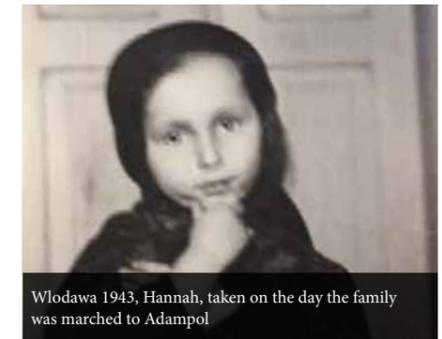
barracks. Haya held Hannah close all night. In the morning, they heard the SS knocking on the door. Haya gave Hannah the biggest hug of her life and then quickly left, closing the door behind her. Hannah waited patiently for her mother to return, and eventually, after Haya didn't come, Hannah decided that she must go and find her. She opened the back door, and from there, she could see many Jews being herded and lined up at the well. The group faced front, and it was then that Hannah saw her mother in the front row. The SS shot them all dead. Hannah remains convinced that Zosha, the hostile niece, betrayed them to the Nazis as this was the only time the SS knocked at the Elder's door.

After she lost her mother, Sala did her best to take care of Hannah who was now completely on her own, her entire family having been murdered. But Sala was ill and had to return to her home and this meant that Hannah was entirely on her own until the end of the War. Adampol was never actually liberated. Instead the Nazi guards just vanished in the wake of the Russian bombings and the prisoners were left to their own devices. Adam returned to



Family gathering for Steven's birthday July 2014 - (Steven is in the middle row, 2nd from the left.)

the Camp to take Hannah with him. One of the first things he did was to honour his promise and he retrieved his father's body from the trench in the forest and reburied him in a Jewish cemetery in Lublin. Hannah came to England in 1949 to live with her great aunt and uncle and her father left Poland in 1953 to go and live in Israel. While in Lublin, Hannah met a man from Adampol who told Hannah that she had had a wonderful mother who gave her food ration to his child. Haya was indeed a wonderful mother.



Wlodawa 1943, Hannah, taken on the day the family was marched to Adampol

Years later, Hannah returned to Adampol with her husband. Nothing remains of the Camp, although the Elder's house is still there. Locals at first denied the existence of the well, but then one old woman showed Hannah that it had been concreted over. There is only a small, inaccurate memorial plaque to commemorate the atrocities that took place in and around Adampol.



Hannah Lewis and her family (Hannah is seated on the far left)

WE ARE ALL DIFFERENT, BUT WE ARE ALL EQUAL. WE MUST LEARN TO TOLERATE EACH OTHER.

YR 10 QUEENSMEAD

I've learnt how indomitable mankind is, how resilient. It makes me want to become an MP or something so I can fight for this to never happen again. It was an excellent talk, thank you so much, Sir it was really inspiring. This will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Yr 10 Merchant Taylors

I thought you were so inspiring. Your story was incredible and I'm so glad you shared it with us. Please continue to do so. It is important the Holocaust is spoken about by someone who experienced it. I've learnt about it in the class but I've learnt so much more through listening to you. Thank you.

Yr 10 RMS

Due to this fantastic experience, I learnt more about the Holocaust. I really now understand that behind each number that you hear, there is a real person, a real life, a real experience. I also learnt about how cruel life was and usual it was to see people die, because 'one can only see sadness when in reach of happiness.' And there was no happiness.

Yr 8 HITCHEN BOYS

Your stories are both heartbreaking and inspirational. I have a deep admiration for all of those discriminated against during any time. I am sorry for your hardship and today has motivated me to work hard and be the best I can be in order to make a harmonious society.

Yr 12/13 GOFFS

I really appreciate you taking the time to share your experience. I am so sorry that you had to go through that as a child. No one deserves such treatment. I am so thankful. You have inspired me to make sure history does not repeat itself. I will do my best to pass on your stories to younger generations. Many blessings

Yr 11 BISHOP RAMSAY

The story that Harry told was very moving and I was touched by it. The fact that it was a first-hand experience made the morning very valuable and a unique experience. Thank you for sharing your story with us and others should learn from this horrific event, and should never let it happen again.

Yr 10 NOWER HILL

I found this trip very influential. I have learnt much more about the Holocaust during our workshops, and it was a brilliant opportunity to hear first-hand about it. It has shown us more about prejudice, how to recognise it and stop it as soon as we see it, somewhere without prejudice is a place with fairness and balance; it has been important to learn about this from the speakers. I found it very moving.

Yr 9 HOCKERILL

I feel quite inspired on today's speech. I feel that a horrific event should be told, so it never happens again. As everyone is different, but equal in one way which is we are people and humans. Segregating people due to colour, religion sexuality and disability isn't right.

Yr 10 BISHOPSHALT

I personally think your story can be an inspiration for everyone. Today, we need to remember that the Holocaust was not long ago and that it is our generation can prevent further genocide. In today's society, we are all equal, no matter the colour of our skin or ethnic background. To think that you went through so much in your life only encourages us to stop any further injustice happening in the world. So, thank you for this beautiful message.

Yr 11 ROSEDALE

OUR SINCERE THANKS TO OUR GUEST SPEAKERS WHO SO GENEROUSLY SHARE THEIR MEMORIES

Book your places for the 15th Northwood Holocaust Memorial Day Events - 1st February 2016 to 10th February 2016

Morning and afternoon sessions lasting 2.5 hours including a talk from a Holocaust Survivor will be held at The Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue, Northwood United Synagogue, Belmont United Synagogue, Bushey United Synagogue, Watford and District Synagogue, Borehamwood & Elstree Synagogue. Full details can be found on www.northwoodhmd.org.uk

NHMDE is funded solely by grants and donations and whilst no charge is made to attend we welcome and are grateful for any donations which may be sent to NHMDE, PO Box 288, Northwood HA6 9BT or by contacting the details below.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or to give us FEEDBACK ON THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL: 0845 644 8006 (this is a local call rate number) or Email: bookings@northwoodhmd.org.uk OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE: www.northwoodhmd.org.uk
These events are jointly organised by The Northwood & Pinner Liberal Synagogue and Northwood United Synagogue