

Karin Braun

Feb. 2002

Walter Braun

From: "Karin Braun" <kw_braun@mayan.org ll>
 Sent: Tuesday, February 12, 2002 9:44 PM

All Alone or my first year in England.

As far as I remember, my parents, although considering leaving Germany (1938) were not in a great hurry. The reason for this was that father was a state employed teacher at a Jewish school in Cologne and at that time, the Nazis had not yet decided on the closure of such schools. In consequence, father was one of the few Jews who remained in state employment and each month received his salary. At any rate, many German Jews at that time believed that the Nazi period was a passing event which would soon be over.

Things changed drastically on November 9th - Chrystal Night-when father was arrested by the Gestapo and sent to Dachau concentration camp. With a great deal of luck, a visitor's visa to Palestine was obtained for him and on the basis of this, he was released after 3 weeks. From then on, my parents had only one idea: To leave Germany as soon as possible.

My elder brother Gerhard was soon on his way to Kenya, father left in early January 1939 and mother stayed behind with the plan to join him the moment a visa for her would be granted. I myself was registered for a "Kindertransport" (childrens transport) to Holland. I was then not yet 15 years of age. A textbook for the Dutch language was bought for me so that I would be able to know at least of few elementary phrases. All the Dutch that has remained in my memory is: "Het Huis Is Een Gebouw" meaning: "The House is a Building"! though why these words were vital in the eyes of the author for a complete beginners text is a mystery to me.

By a stroke of miraculous luck -and the help of friends- my destination was changed from Holland to England. Mother hastily bought me some clothes including a brown suit with Knickerbocker trousers!!!

Enough is known about the difficulties encountered in obtaining a German passport, or in my case, a "Kinderausweis" (A travel document for children) When the German passport official took down my particulars and asked for the colour of my eyes, I truthfully said "green"; Whereupon he shouted at me that there were no green eyes in the Third Reich (Nazi Germany) and wrote "blue" forgetting for a moment that I was a Jew (I had blonde hair as well)

The most traumatic and sad moment came when I had to part from mother who suddenly found herself without a husband and without her children.

I vividly remember the Nazi custom official at the Cologne railway station who examined and if no forbidden articles were found, sealed the suitcases with the meagre belongings of the children. When my turn came, he saw my bulky stamp album, gave me a severe look and then suddenly, with a wave of his hand which meant "Geh schon" {Get going} he closed and sealed my suitcase.

The train moved out of Cologne station. In my compartment were a number of older boys who seemed to take it all in good spirits, sang Koelsche Fastnachtslieder (Songs of Cologne Carnival) whereas my friend Heinz and myself were rather subdued. I thought of mother who had to stay behind all alone although I was certain it would only be for a short time until she could join father in Palestine.

The great moment came when we reached the German Dutch frontier. German custom and frontier guards made a cursory inspection of our papers and those pieces of luggage that had not been sealed in Cologne station. Then they left and a few minutes later ^{we} were in Holland and this time were inspected by the Dutch who grinned at us and made us feel welcome. Some Dutch refugee committee people gave us sandwiches and hot soup and then the journey continued to Hook van Holland where the ferry for England was waiting. Heinz and I shared a small cabin. Poor Heinz got violently sick for the sea was rough but for some reason I was spared that ordeal. After about 7 hours, we reached Harwich and got our first glimpse of England. What struck me at once was the solitary Bobby (Policeman) with his typical high black helmet, very different from the German police. In vain did I look for his weapons - no pistol, no sabre and no truncheon, the latter at least was not in sight. After a brief inspection of our luggage and a not so brief one of our travel papers, we were allowed into English territory. From there we were taken the short distance to Dovercourt Bay Camp, rented from Butlin Holiday Camps. There were long rows of chalets each of which were for four boys or four girls. And then on to a large hall which served as the dining hall where we had a good breakfast which all of us hungrily devoured. There I had my first taste of porridge to which I took at once. After registration, our travel documents were taken away. (Never saw mine again), were given a pair of Wellingtons (rubber boots) very necessary because of the incessant rain and the ever present mud. And then into the Palm Court, an other large hall probably used for dancing and entertainment. Walter Frenkel, the camp leader, gave us a talk about behaviour and what would happen to us during the next few days. Then we were free to roam about. My first task was to buy stamps for letters to mother and father - 2 pence hapenny each, quite a fortune, as my whole cash consisted of 17 sh. about the equivalent of the 10 RM. which we were permitted to take out of Germany.

Towards evening, we were given hot water bottles as our chalets were unheated and it was icy cold. There were 2 or three blankets on each bed arranged in the typical English way. I don't think any of us slept very much that first night, not only because of the cold but of course because the events of the past day, the separation from the parents, leaving Nazi Germany and coming to completely new and strange surroundings. The next morning we trooped to the dining hall for breakfast and in spite of the cold there was only one large iron stove in the middle of the hall. That stove was tended by the "stoker" an English youngster, an "expert" on the political situation who freely voiced his opinions which were understood by only a handful of us. Nonetheless, we often quoted him in talks and discussions – we had very little authoritative information – and that of course raised eyebrows of the better informed with the inevitable remark: Oh, the stoker told you that????! There was a crew of dishwashers who often, just for the fun of it, picked up some plates and smashed them against the wall. We had our first English lessons given by a number of young English ladies – girls who volunteered their services and who knew their own language fairly well. Also, an elderly lady, Mrs. Williams, I believe, read us stories, among them "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens. Again few of us understood but she really meant well. The kitchen chef was drafted to teach us English songs which he did with a great deal of enthusiasm and one song I remember to this very day, words and melody! The following day we were interviewed and told that only very few of us would be able to go to school. I very stupidly said that I wanted to do farm work (God knows why) and after about three weeks was sent, not to a farmer but to an English landed squire. Remember, I had only just turned 15 and had no idea what I was letting myself in for. Heinz was sent to Oxford, I believe and was able to go to school. My memories of Dovercourt Bay Camp are still quite vivid although not many details remain. One day, the Camp management decided to send all the girls to an other camp which elicited numerous protest, especially from the grown up group leaders but to no avail. So ended my initiation to life in England. Again, I must say I was lucky^{ly} that my school English was of great help to me. English was one of the few subject at school at which I was reasonably good and I am grateful to our English teachers at the Jewish High School in Cologne who knew their job.

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So now I was to be sent to Yorkshire in the north of England. The logistics of the long journey went well enough. From Harwich to London by train where I was met at the station by a committee employee who was delighted that I knew some English. He took me by tube (London Underground), a great experience for me, to a refugee office whose director engaged me in a small talk monologue, offered me a cup of tea and from there I was taken to another railway station, boarding a train to York. Then another brief journey to the small town of Malton where I was met by a small, chauffeur driven car and an other man whom I at first took to be my future "guardian". However, he turned out to be the head gardener who in future was to be in charge of me. He, Mr. Calam, was disappointed that I could speak and understand some English as he wanted to practice his German which in the main consisted of three words: Karpuffen (Kartoffeln-potatoes) Kriegsgefällgenen lager (Kriegsgefangenenlager – prisoner of war camp, where he had spent most of world war 1) and a r b e i t e n and that in the oddest of pronuciation. He explained to me that Captain Gibson was no farmer but a "gentleman" who owned a large estate including woodland, kitchen and flower garden, a golf course etc. I was soon to learn that a "gentleman" is not simply a man but someone belonging to the "gentry", the upper classes. We came to a long wooded drive and arrived in front of a large mansion, 40 rooms or more. Captain Gibson made a brief appearance and told me in the best English with the appropriate stammer that I was to live and work here and that Calam was to be responsible for me. This was quite overpowering and he was gone before I was able to say more than "yes"

I was then deposited at the "bothy", a dorm, for unmarried workers and servants. There was some kind of lunch prepared by Mrs. Joe the wife of the second gardener who looked after the bothy in general. Calam told me to be ready next morning when he would take me to work. All in all, not very encouraging.

However, I had no choice and settled down as well as I could.

Next morning, Calam came and took me to the kitchen – flower garden, quite beautifully arranged with greenhouses, a small lake and many paths. I was given a hoe and shown how to weed the paths, a monotonous never ending job which I had to do for months and months, rain or shine. I was introduced to John, the cowman, who looked after 7 – 8 cows and several calves and also served as coachman. He taught me how to milk, feed and clean the cows and the shed and each morning, seven days a week I was to

work with him for about 2 hours before starting in the gardens. John was a pleasant enough man, only I could hardly understand his Yorkshire brogue but we got on quite well. On Saturday, work finished at 1 o'clock (except for the afternoon milking) and at lunch Calam appeared and handed me the princely sum of 2 sh., my weekly pay!! That was just enough to buy stamps for a couple of letters, a small bar of chocolate and a packet of Woodbines-a horrid brand of cheap cigarettes. In the afternoon, we drove into town where Calam bought me some working clothes, boots and a hat.

Continued p. 6.

Karin Braun

From: "Karin Braun" <kw_braun@mayan.org.il>
Sent: Tuesday, February 12, 2002 10:33 PM

Occasionally, there were additional jobs, not all of them during working hours. At times I had to help the butler in his pantry to clean the silver, which soon he left me to do on my own. If there were guests, I sometimes helped setting the table in the sumptuous dining room - 8 or more pieces of cutlery, 4 different glasses and numerous plates. No table cloth, of course, the table was of beautiful mahogany, polished to a shine. Sometimes I had to polish the Captains shoes, underneath as well and was told that a gentleman would never ever walk in unpolished shoes. Once or twice I helped to clean the parquet floor, 2 hours of hard work for which I was graciously given 1 Shilling by Mrs. G. who was good enough to say that the floor looked very nice!

The whole family, who lived in the large house, consisted of three people: Mr. and Mrs. G. and a grown up daughter. A younger daughter was away at a boarding school and their son was an officer in the regular army. After a while, Mrs. Joe no longer prepared the food. I was given the meals in the kitchen annex, served by Ada, the chef. She was a very thin but pleasant woman and it was not her fault that the food was quite bad. The menu consisted, with rare variations, of mashed potatoes, boiled cabbage, an egg (I was and still am a vegetarian) followed by a rather horrible pudding, rice or Tapioca. This was of course very different from the meals upstairs which were served by the butler assisted by the liveried footman (a servant of a lower grade than the butler) When no one was looking, Ada sometimes let me have a taste. She was helped in the kitchen by 2 maids and a scullery boy for menial tasks and the washing up which fortunately, I never had to do.

An other duty of mine was to pass the fresh milk through the separator. Most of the skimmed milk was given to the calves or thrown away. The cream was taken as such for coffee, cakes, cooking or made into butter (for "upstairs" only!) However I helped myself to cream whenever I felt like it. Only the kitchen maids, Mary or Sylvia saw me at it occasionally when they came to fetch the cream but as they were not beyond having some themselves, they kept mum.

Then one day, I am not certain why, I was told to leave the bothy and was given a small room in the house. The servants slept in attic rooms, mine was "upstairs" an unused dressing room which had an attached bathroom and from that day on I enjoyed the luxury of a daily hot bath. Also, there was a small fireplace which I was allowed to use. It did not give much heat and was hard to light but I appreciated it the more as no heating was permitted in the servants rooms. One more surprise: Possibly on instructions from Mrs. G. the butler served me each day a cup of what passed in England as real coffee with cream and rock sugar. It was wonderful!

Sometimes after work I sat in the servants hall which had some simple armchairs, a fireplace and a radio. On September 3rd we heard Mr. Chamberlain declare war on Germany whereupon all the women burst into tears.

Karin Braun

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 Sent: 19:02 2002 יום רביעי 13 פברואר

There were noisy small dogs which were constantly called to order by the Captain or his daughter. Also stables with 4 or 5 beautiful horses, presided over by the head groom and his assistants. The horses were used for ordinary riding but also for fox hunts which I sometimes watched from afar and which I thought eminently unfair to the fox, chased by a pack of hounds and any number of riders in their red jackets. I myself tried to hunt rabbits in the woods with a powerful air rifle with no reduction at all in the rabbit population.

I must say that no one in the family ever bothered about me except to give an occasional order. At work, after lengthy pleading, Calam permitted me to help in the greenhouses-his personal domain-and just as important, do the potting of small flower plants, a real change from the eternal weeding.

John, the cow and coachman took me sometimes along to the town in the horse drawn waggon, to do the weekly shopping for the Hall. The highlight came when he let me take the reins whilst he had a catnap. No one was prouder than I !!

The year slowly came to an end, the " phony war " continued, P. the younger daughter came home from school for the Christmas holidays and she at least talked to and with me in a friendly way. Christmas eve saw the big dinner in the kitchen with all servants and staff present. It was a sumptuous meal for once, nothing much for me though as a vegetarian but I enjoyed the sweet dishes and the Xmas cake. According to custom, there were a number of 6 penny coins in the cake of which I got one, which almost broke my teeth. Capt. and Mrs. G very briefly appeared in the kitchen, wishing everybody a merry Xmas and then left to their own party upstairs. All received an " Xmas Box ", an extra weeks pay, I believe. For me there were a few shillings too.

The time came to leave. I was sent to a nearby dairy farm belonging to a Mrs. Behrends (a Rothschild) where I also had to work hard enough, 7 days a week but I quite liked it there as I was treated well and paid 35 sh. a week, much more than the tariff. After paying 21 sh. for board and lodging, I still had 14 sh. left, a real fortune. Gibson wished me good luck and presented me with a £ 1 note for which I bought a second hand bicycle. Calam, Joe, John, Jacky and Ada the chef, seemed genuinly sorry to see me go. Sylvia, the first kitchen maid, broke into tears, as we had become good friends. I left with mixed feelings but on the whole, looked forward to my new job.

So ended my first year in England.

EPILOGUE.

One year had passed. Many more were to follow but naturally, the first impressions are the most lasting. During this time, I certainly did not learn farming except milking cows by hand. I did however learn to work hard in almost all weathers and tried to work conscientiously however hard and monotonous the job was, without supervision and without pay.

I learnt about the English class system, where there are masters and servants and others in between. Time and again I was told by Calam that when the Captain or Mrs. G talked to me, always to say: "Yes Sir, No, Madam, Thank you Sir," etc. but which I never did.

I learnt to be fairly fluent in the English language (but still made mistakes) without luckily imitating Yorkshire brogue. How I avoided that, I don't know, possibly because of my school English, more likely listening to the announcers and news readers of the BBC. I learnt that one almost never shakes hands, that the greeting: "How do you do or How are you?" demands in reply: "How do you do, or "How are you," but on no account is one to say: "Oh, I have a bad cold," or "My back aches," or whatever else ails you.

I learnt not to use certain 4 letter words, to shine my shoes, to keep away from bulls and to watch the traffic on the left side of the street.

I also found my way through the British monetary system: £ 1 (or a quid) had 20 shillings (sh.) equals 240 pennies (d.), half a quid = 10 sh., a crown = 5 sh. Half a crown = 2 and a half sh. (there was no such coin) a florin = 2sh. 1 sh. (bob), half a bob 6 pence or a tanner, 2 pennies = tuppence and half a penny a hapenny. I also learnt that the metric system was not known among most people. They had the mile, the furlong, the yard, foot and inch, weight measures were most confusing. No kilo

but a pound (ca.450 gr.) and others even less understandable for someone not used to them. Temperatures went by Farenheit-the freezing point was at+ 32 f. I learnt the meaning of a.m. and p.m. and that even youngsters rarely wore shorts and even less Plus Fours (Knickerbockers)

I also learnt about simple English working class cooking: Bacon and Eggs (the smell almost made me sick) Porridge (good), watery cooked tasteless vegetables and potatoes and the various commercial sauces such as HP and Worcester sauce which were used to hide the lack of taste, not to mention Colemans Mustard which left nothing whatever of the original flavour. Dessert puddings: Rice and Tapioca, the latter horrid and the former not much better.

I learnt to drink strong English tea with sugar and milk which increased my longings for a cup of real coffee.

I learnt about simple people who minded their own business but gave a hand (helped) when it was needed. I learnt about the weather, quite predictable: Rain, rain, rain with occasional sunny days followed by more rain. By the way, one form of greeting was: "Lovely Day" or "Cold and nasty day isnt it." I learnt what a Pub was (from outside) and a Public School-certainly not public.

Whilst of course one says: "Thank you, or Thank you so much or just Ta, please is n o t the reply but "Don't mention it, or Not at all, or never mind." And if you must swear say: "damn, damn it" or such similar gentle words.

At the end of a cinema performance (smoking allowed,)

God save the King or Queen is played and then of course one has to stand up. Not so most English people who would leave their seats seconds before the anthem was played and rushed to the exit in order to save themselves having to stand up for a minute or so.

And later, when the war had begun it was the duty of the citizens to carry a gas mask but many used the container for sandwiches or small purchases even at the danger of being given a fine when a policeman checked. And the Blackout: It was in one of the newspapers that a Mr. Jones lit a match to see whether there was still petrol in the tank of his car. There was!! He was fined 40 sh. at the magistrate's court for showing a light during the blackout.

On doctors: You called or saw a doctor when needed but the word doctor was more the name of the profession and not an academic title. Most doctors at that time had a BM and BS. degree and only relatively few had an MD. A surgeon was not addressed as doctor but as Mister!

I could write much more but want to conclude that I came to love England, with all her curious customs and habits and that I shall always be grateful for having been allowed to live there and to be saved from the Nazis.

R. Brant

11/11/42

4/11/42

Chapter II

~~Karin Braun~~

From: "Karin Braun" <kw_braun@mayan.org.il>
 To: <the Internment>
 Sent: 22:33 2002 יום שלישי 26 פברואר
 Subject: The Internment

Walter Braun
 Feb. 2002

The Internment

One morning, whilst having breakfast during a break from work, there appeared two policemen at my lodgings and very politely asked me to accompany them to the station. I was of course quite alarmed and asked what they wanted from me as I had not done anything wrong. They calmed me and said that I was only wanted for a few inquiries and kindly allowed me to finish my breakfast which I did without any appetite! Then I got up, put my coat on and was ready to go, when one of the policemen suggested that maybe it would be a good idea if I took my razor with me! That really frightened me, I was barely 16 years old and shaved perhaps once a week, so I did not take it. Instead of the ridiculous suggestion of taking a razor, they should have told me to take a toothbrush and a change of clothing. However, nothing more was said and I was driven off to the local police station where to my surprise no one made any inquiries. All I was told to do was to give them my name and some personal details. When I looked around me I saw that I was in the company of a number of men who were disconsolately sitting around, on benches or on the floor and trying to guess why we were all here. After a while, a lorry came which took us to the city of York where we were deposited in a large hall with dozens, perhaps hundreds of subdued men milling around, all trying to speculate on the reason for being taken here. More arrived continuously. Then some soldiers told us to come to be given palliasses (straw bags serving as mattresses,) and two blankets. Then we really started to worry! When that " operation " had been concluded, a army officer appeared, told us to be quiet and then informed us curtly that HM Government had decided to intern men and also women (at another place) from Germany and Austria as Enemy Aliens ! There was of course great consternation as just recently a special tribunal had determined who was a real German or Nazi and who was a genuine refugee from what was termed " Nazi Oppression ". The great majority of those present, including myself, belonged to the latter category, which added to the confusion, all trying to comprehend why suddenly we were interned. ..All protest were of no avail. We were kept " incommunicado " and after several days, were taken by lorries to Huyton, near Liverpool, a new working class housing project which was surrounded by a hastily put up barbed wire fence. There we were dumped and placed by soldiers into houses, 12 people I think to each house. Most men were married, many had children and were greatly worried about their

26/02/2002

families who were confronted with the sudden disappearance of husbands and fathers. There I was quite lucky as no one would miss me. My employer and colleagues would know that I had been taken away by the police and would be able to read in the newspapers what had happened.

It took some time before things got organised in the camp. There was a roll call each morning by a junior officer accompanied by a pistol toting sergeant-major who quite vainly tried to tally names and numbers.

Meals, very scant and poorly prepared, were served in a very large marquee with armed soldiers in attendance. Then came the order for all to assemble on a kind of parade ground, where the camp commander, a colonel, told us briefly the reason for our being behind barbed wire, that we must behave ourselves, not cause any trouble and that each of us would be permitted to send one letter per week! We would also be allowed to finish our cigarettes but nothing new could be bought. No radio, no newspapers, all strictly forbidden and then without taking notice of any question, we were dismissed.

The day to day management was in the hand of junior officers, some NCOs and armed guards.

Very soon, offices, staffed by internees were opened with a registry. Each house elected a "house father" and they chose a "camp father" whose unevitable job it was to see to some organisation in the camp. Also a "Liaison Officer" was appointed who was to deal with the camp staff and forward requests. Then began a brief interrogation, one by one, by an officer of the Intelligence Corps who knew some German. In my case, in spite of my protests, he opened my camera and took out the film. An army doctor was in attendance who of course in no way could deal with all requests for consultation and whose main task was to write out prescriptions which could not be filled as there was no pharmacy, at least at that time. However there were dozens of refugee doctors who were only too happy to have something to do and helped whenever possible.

Many of the younger people were detailed to various sanitary jobs including airing blankets and cleaning the streets. I volunteered often as the "workers" were given a large sandwich with cheese, an important supplement to our meals.

The lack of news was one of the main worries. As no newspapers were allowed, many houses paid 5 shillings to some soldiers who were glad to smuggle a 'paper into the camp. This was then read out aloud and sometimes translated, inside the house and in great secrecy with someone standing guard outside and giving a signal as soon as someone from the military appeared who was liable to come in for an inspection. So at least most of us knew what was happening. Many were depressed because of lack of news from their families and a number of people suffered nervous breakdowns.

Then, on top of it all, nightly air raids began. We sometimes saw German bombers high up in the glare of searchlights. They were peppered with anti aircraft guns with no noticeable results. We took shelter, under staircases as of course, nothing more solid was available. The Germans mainly bombed the docks in Liverpool but no bombs were ever dropped on our camp, possibly because the pilots knew that the camp housed a number of real Germans and Nazis who simply had not

managed to return to Germany when war broke out.

One day, the colonel was removed or transferred and a new camp commandant took his place: a Colonel Slatter,

I have reason for giving his name which I shall explain later on.

Slatter introduced liberalisation in the camp. He allowed newspapers, a canteen was opened (for those who had money - which I had not,) more letters were permitted and best of all we were allowed out of the camp for an " airing ". Several hundred of us, accompanied by a few guards with rifles - but no bullets, I believe - marched to the open gate after a brief address by the Colonel which ended with the words: " Well gentlemen, I hope you a r e gentlemen !" We were indeed, no one tried to escape during those outings which were greatly enjoyed in spite of being stared at by passers by. Food improved somewhat and a number of army cooks were changed. There was always some entertainment. Many professional and amateur entertainers from among the internees were quite happy to oblige ! Classes were held, especially for the younger crowd, mainly English but also other subjects. Many small " businesses " appeared in the streets, shoe polishing, laundering, writing applications for release, providing baths etc.

Then one day, several hundreds of men were told to have themselves ready for transfer to Canada. I tried to join but - fortunately - was told that I was too young. An other transport was sent to Australia. One ship for Canada, the Arandora Star, was torpedoed and sunk, with many drowning. The crew and the British army guards did not distinguish themselves in saving the hapless refugees.

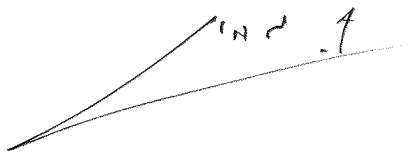
Later, I and many youngsters, as well as older people got travel orders for the Isle of Man. The ferry took us from Liverpool to Douglas, the worst sea journey I have ever experienced with nearly everybody, including tens of navy cadets being seasick. We got there at last and then were marched to Onchan, a pleasant holiday resort at the sea where we were quartered in boarding houses, the owners of which were happy to have us as they had no guests because of the war. A perfunctory barbed wire fence was erected which developed a new activity: removing the barbs and converting them into all kinds of ornaments.

Onchan was not a bad place. In the boarding houses we had real beds, the food was better as each landlady prepared the meals for her " guests ", few soldiers were around, mostly without arms, a school was established and several times we were taken out of the " compound " for walks along the beach. I almost enjoyed my stay there but after a few weeks, I was called to the administration office and told that I would be released the next day, with a number of others. Already in Huyton, an application for my release had been made, which had finally been granted. The sea journey back to Liverpool was better than the one to the Isle of Man. From there I continued my journey by train to my new destination.

So ended my 6 months internment. In retrospect, it all looked a rather hasty and thoughtless decision by the government. It took many people out of vital war work in industry and agriculture, upkeep of the camps was expensive and much military personnel which probably would have been better employed elsewhere, had to be

diverted to guard and administrative duties in the camps. That apart from the miseries caused to many families which were deprived of income and separated from husbands, fathers and children.

The camps in the U.K. were emptied and slowly, those people who had been shipped overseas were able to return to Britain.



4/11/02

Aliyat Noar in England

Back to Liverpool by sea, a much quieter trip than the one to the Isle of Man. From there by train to Barnstaple in Devonshire and then by bus to Bydown, a large ramshackle mansion near a small village by the name of Swimbridge. This had been converted into a Youth Aliya Centre (Aliyat Noar) with half day work and half day lessons. The place was run by a Mr. and Mrs. Schlesinger, the lessons were very competently given by Dr. F. Friedman (Friedel) and by some of the Madrichim from the various youth movements. There was a doctor Fritz Arnholz called Faeustchen because he was almost as wide as he was tall.

Work was done on a small farm belonging to the place, under the watchful eye of Schlesinger, who had once owned a large estate in east Germany. There must have been over a hundred youngsters for whom of course there was not enough to do. So apart from domestic jobs, mainly for the girls, a number of boys were sent to farmers in the vicinity who had to work quite hard.

Food was indifferent and not always enough and we often had to fill up on bread and jam.

I had no particular job except sometimes to take some vegetables to the market in Barnstaple where two or three of us tried with varying success to sell them without making much of a profit. One day, when walking along a street in Barnstaple, I saw a tall gaunt well dressed man and recognised him as Colonel Slatter, the former commandant of Huyton internment camp. I timidly went up to him and said in a small voice that I was one of his former "clients". He was really pleased although of course he did not recognise me and invited me to his beautiful villa where Mrs. Slatter treated me to tea and cake. Afterwards, Slatter offered me the key to his beach house, to use whenever I wanted. Before taking me back to town, he gave me £ 15.- That was a fabulous sum and I was quite overwhelmed. When some weeks later I was to visit him again, I learnt that he had suddenly died of a heart attack. Slatter was a man who had a heart for the plight of the interned refugees, especially for the youngsters.

Bydown was bearable although we had no luxuries and barely enough to live on but even so, after several months, it had to be closed down because of lack of funds. We dispersed, most went to Hachshara Kibbutzim, a very few were able to go to school and I myself was offered a job as a gardener's help at a mainly Jewish

school that had been transferred from Germany, called New Herlingen and later Bunce Court School. It was run by the headmistress, Mrs. Anna Essinger, known to one and all as Tante Anna and some members of her family. There was a small staff of good teachers and I soon felt at home there. My job was to work in the large kitchen garden with two or three others, supervised by Mary, a biology B.Sc. who had a good knowledge of vegetable growing. I was also responsible for the hot water boiler. At times, Tante Anna would call out: "Walter Braun, why isn't the water hot?" and I had to explain to her that there was no coke left for the boiler, an oversight by her sister who had forgotten to order the fuel in time. One day, a familiar face from Huyton appeared who there was working in the shoe repair shop. He was the brother of Mrs. Essinger, Dr. Fritz Essinger, formerly a senior Public Prosecutor (Oberstaatsanwalt) who now worked with us in the garden. Much much later I met him again in London at Lyons Corner House where he was a waiter. Remember, a former high ranking lawyer in the public justice system in Germany!

Earlier, I had already decided to continue my education, which of course was interrupted in Germany. University was out of the question, I had neither the time nor the money for a degree course and in any case, before I could be accepted at any University I had to pass High School examination (אגרות). The most prestigious at that time was London Matriculation which would open the door at any University in the U.K and probably anywhere in the Empire. I studied hard for the various subjects, ^{and} was given some help by the teachers at Bunce Court. The exams were in January 1943 and that meant I had to leave the school and move to London where I was accepted in the Beith Chaluz, a kind of town Kibbutz with about 40 Chaverim who worked at various places and pooled their earnings. The last days before the exams, I did some final cramming. The only place where I could have some quiet was a W.C. I locked myself in and did what I could to remember the subject matters.

The day came, I went to the large examination Hall of the University where about 600 candidates were assembled. Punctually at 9.00 the papers were distributed and we began to study the questions and to answer them. Punctually at the same time, the sirens sounded and the anti aircraft guns started firing and made even more noise than the bombs which fell not so far away. As nobody moved, I had to resist

the temptation to rush to the nearest shelter, especially as one of the supervisors told me that of course I was free to go but then I would miss the exam!!!

That continued for 5 days with monotonous regularity. No sooner had the exams begun, that the sirens sounded and the bedlam started. That behind me, I waited with trepidation for the results which took many weeks to arrive. When at last I had the letter from the University I again locked myself up in the W.C. and with trembling hands opened it. The first sentence began "The Secretary of the University has to inform you..." These opening words were usually the formula for the transmission of bad news. I hardly dared to read on being certain of having failed but miraculously, the letter went on: "that you have been successful at the Matriculation Examination." I let out a yell of relief and joy which brought chaverim to the door of the W.C. to ask if anyone had been murdered !

A little more about my stay in London. I went to a government training centre for half a year to learn industrial metal work and then was given a job at an aircraft component factory. That was hard work with a vicious collective bonus scheme which made each worker look over the shoulders of his mates, led by the foreman. However I was paid very good wages and the cashier in the Beith Chaluz was waiting for me each week for my pay envelope.

In the evenings and weekends most of us took an active part in the Youth Movement, Habonim or Mishmar Habonim. That all went well until one day, the Germans started sending over their V1 pilotless rocket bombs which were frightening weapons and one night, the Beith Chaluz received a direct hit. The four storey house was turned into a pile of rubble under which many of our chaverim were buried. 6 of them were killed, others injured. Again, I was lucky to have been in a concrete surface shelter which withstood the blast and left all of us who were there unharmed. Most of our belongings were lost but my stamp album was later dug out of the rubble and returned to me, outwardly much worse from the bombing but almost all the stamps still intact.

The same day, most of the survivors were sent by the Shlichim to Kempsey, a Kibbutz Hachschara in a small English village and where we were made welcome by the chaverim there. Most worked on farms. I was sent as a mechanic to a large firm of agricultural engineers where I helped with repair work of farm implements. That


went on for some time until Ruth and Walter Weil, our senior Chavrim, went on Aliya. Ruth was a kind of our hostel supervisor which belonged to the War Agricultural Executive Committee and when she left, I was elected to take her place. I now was a "Supervisor" officially responsible to the Committee for the hostel, after having been accepted by its chief. My firm agreed to let me work part time at the implicit order of the Committee.

Again, changes took place. The Maskiruth of Hechaluz decided to move us to an other Hachschara site, in Surrey and fill our places in Kempsey by youngsters from the religious Bachad movement. Up to this day, I am not certain why all these troublesome changes had to be made but after a short time we found ourselves in a large house, very much in disrepair, in a wooded area near Redhill, a small town in Surrey. My job continued but now I had much more to do: Find work for a number of chaverim, inform the police of any newcomer or departure, keep a meticulous account of every meal served and each cup of tea consumed !!!, see to the most necessary repair work by calling in various firms and haggling about prices, ordering fuel and food at the local Co-Op., calling the doctor if needed and reporting to the Chairman of the War Agr. Comm. who would appear at weekends to pay wages and to see if all was in order. The war was over and we became restless. One day, our Chaver Avraham Wr. who had been appointed by the Maskiruth of Hechaluz to deal with Alyah Beit ("illegal" immigration to Palestine) came and told us to be ready to leave at a moments notice. We would be allowed to take 10 kg. luggage in a rucksack each and - as many cigarettes as possible !!

But first there was the problem of being allowed into France (Marseille was one of the ports of departure). I was sent with British Travel papers to the French Consul in London and explained that I and some others wanted to visit France to help with the refugee problems. He kindly gave me a number of forms to fill in and when I had finished that labourious process, I expected the consul to give me a visa for France. He was quite shocked and told me that the forms had to be send to the Foreign Office in Paris first and, all being satisfactory, could expect the visa in about half a year !!! Well, of course this would not do. So someone had the bright idea to go to the the Belgian Consulate which was more liberal than the French. Lo and behold, the consul, for a fee, issued a tourist visa for two weeks. With this in our papers, the French granted us a transit visa

for 24 hours and we were in business !! So one day, about 40 chaverim, including a number of English ones, trooped to Victoria Station for a train to Dover and from there to Calais by ferry. The custom and passport people at Victoria regarded us suspiciously but as all papers were in order, including a number of genuine British passports, they let us pass. The trip over the channel was uneventful and in due course we arrived in Calais.

Thus ended my 8 year stay in England. I was to return there - as a visitor, only after a long time.

 29/III/04