

# **Jenny Brent**

London

## ***Speech from and for next Generations of the SHOAH***

Good evening everyone. Thank you so much inviting my brother Simon and myself to be here at the opening of this exhibition. My apologies for speaking in English! But – Ich spreche kein Deutsch. It's really special for us to represent our father Lothar, or Leslie, Baruch Brent, who owed so much to the fact that this building became his temporary home.

The Jewish Boys Orphanage housed countless children over the years, and provided them not only with a roof over their heads, but a nurturing environment. The director and teachers gave the boys emotional support and a rich academic and cultural life, which our father benefitted from during his time here.

In his home town Köslin, Dad was victimised by his Nazi school teacher, bullied and attacked by other children, and excluded from school. For his parents Arthur and Charlotte, bringing him to Berlin and placing him in the Orphanage was a way of keeping him safe and continuing his education. The fact that the director Kurt Crohn agreed to allow Dad to stay here undoubtedly saved his life.

It must have been very strange for Lothar, moving away from his family, leaving Köslin, and coming to live in an institution among strangers, in a strange city far from home. Arriving at this impressive building, with its imposing facade, stairways and many corridors, must have been daunting for a young boy. But the kindness of the teachers is something Dad often told us about, and it made his transition into this new community much easier.

To be somewhere safe, enclosed, where the problems of the outside world were shut out, was great for Lothar. He made friends, was immersed in school life, and was even taken by the director to his first classical music concert - helping build his lifelong love of music.

His sense of security was short lived though, shattered by the event that happened here in the days preceding the infamous 'Kristallnacht'. A mob came to the Orphanage. The boys were sent to hide, and Dad and his friend Fred hid in the attic. The mob started ransacking the lower floors of the Orphanage. As a child, this was a vivid story for me, I could picture Dad and his friend waiting there, terrified, listening to shouts, and the noise of things being smashed and broken downstairs, wondering what would become of them if the mob reached them. It was due to the great bravery of a teacher, Heinz Nadel, that this fate was averted. He took the smallest boy with him and faced the mob, asking them to leave the children in peace. Incredibly, they did. He may have saved many lives by his actions.

After that, it was clear that the children's safety was not secure, even within the seclusion of the Orphanage. Dad's family had also left Köslin, and were living in Berlin. When the Kindertransport was organised, they faced the awful choice of trying to keep the family close together, or sending him into the unknown without them - a dilemma that countless people in war torn parts of the world face, today. His parents decided that the hope of saving him, however painful parting would be, was better than Lothar staying to await his fate in Germany.

Arthur and Charlotte must have been desperate for Lothar to get a place on a train to safety. But the director could only give ten boys the chance to leave. Amazingly, dad was offered one of the places, and his life was saved by that decision. Most of the other Orphanage boys were not so lucky, and were among the hundreds of thousands of children who perished in the Holocaust.

Leaving the place he had come to call home, his teachers, friends, and his family, Lothar was on the first ever children's train to leave Berlin, on December 1st 1938. The Kindertransport and the journey to England were the start of a completely new life, life as a lone child refugee, where the kindness of strangers would continue to play an important role in his wellbeing. He never saw his family again – his parents, his sister Eva, and his extended family were all murdered.

Many years later, Dad was able to reconnect with the Orphanage through Prof. Albrecht, who with the Cajewitz Foundation has done such an incredible job of restoring, repurposing and revitalising this important building. It meant a huge amount to Dad to come here again, and have reunions with other surviving Kinder. He participated in talks and events in the Hall, and talked to some of

the local school children about his life here and the Kindertransport. And it was wonderful for him to return to watch a performance of his story, retold by the children. All of this, and his great friendship with the Albrechts and others he met here, was very healing and helped him to find a kind of peace with the country that had treated him, his family, and millions of others with such cruelty. He was glad he managed to build a new relationship with modern Germany.

As well as having a scientific career, Dad worked tirelessly to improve social cohesion. He hoped that by improving relations between different groups in society, by standing up for minorities, by working to support safe routes for refugees, and by telling his own story, the circumstances that led to the catastrophic events of World War 2 could be prevented from ever happening again. He wanted his story to help people see refugees or 'migrants' not as something to be feared, but as individuals with a lot to give to society, and each with their own, equally important story to tell.

This exhibition keeps the history of the Jewish Orphanage, the work and lives of it's teachers and children in our minds, giving names and faces to people who lived both ordinary and extraordinary lives at a time of great jeopardy for the world. It is a wonderful record of Jewish culture, and an important tool for Holocaust education.

If he was still alive, Dad would have been devastated by the bombardment of Gaza; the dehumanisation of Palestinians which has led to so many deaths, so much displacement, trauma and destruction. He would be alarmed by the increase in antisemitism and Islamophobia; and by the rise of the Far Right, here and around the world. But, perhaps fortunately, he isn't here to see it. So the torch of resistance is passed to us, to our generation and those coming up behind, to resist hatred in all its forms, to keep the flames of empathy, compassion, and love for our fellow humans alive no matter what the colour of their skin, their gender, race or religion. It's easy to feel overwhelmed when faced with ignorance, bullying, racism, violence and bigotry, but as Dad's story shows, small acts of kindness, humanity and courage are powerful. Together change can be achieved, and we can all play our part.

It's hugely emotional to be standing here today. Our deepest thanks to the Cajewitz-Foundation for making the exhibition, and our visit, possible.