Blackpool Jews

A research paper by Julia Pascal

Traditionally, twentieth-century British Jews have been associated with urban environments. Therefore, the idea of Jewish life in Blackpool, the country's most famous working-class seaside town, may seem incongruous. This corner of England has a distinct purpose: to offer pleasure and entertainment, English hedonism, to workers escaping the grime of the surrounding industrial cities.[1] In the 1950s and 1960s, before cheap air travel to Spain, holiday-makers flocked to this resort. At the same time, the Jewish community in Blackpool enjoyed safety and growth. Houses were purchased, children were born and schools were attended. Antisemitism was low-level and casual. These Jewish children were born as English and were British citizens – however, they carried with them a sense of 'otherness' even though they were the town's largest ethnic population (at 7.6% in 1961).[2] The Jewish community was the antithesis of Blackpool's unrefined world of gender stereotypes, in particular that of the grotesque postcard landladies and their 'hen-pecked' husbands. Ashkenazi Jewish life with its emphasis on learning and hard work ran in tandem with the wild and raucous, noisy English working-class visitors drawn to the joyous vulgarity, gambling, drinking and hedonistic attractions that were Blackpool's trademark. As I partly grew up in Blackpool, I decided to conduct oral histories from Jewish former Blackpuddlians willing to share their childhood memories as a way to answer the question: How did the two cultures and communities connect? These baby boomers are now men and women in their seventies and eighties. Their recollections, along with my own, are contextualised within the larger picture of what was happening in the country, and they show how the larger political movements during the period from 1950–65

[1] Blackpool's culture markets itself as a specifically English, rather than British experience.
[2] Blackpool's population reached its peak in 1961. 153, 000 residents were recorded. https://www.visitnorthwest,com/population/blackpool Accessed 1 June 2023. The 1961 Jewish year Book records the Jewish population as 2,000.

impacted those of us who grew up Jewish in Blackpool. Although this period is the focus, memories also evoke earlier decades.

A short history

Jews in Blackpool did not appear suddenly in the middle of the twentieth century: their longer presence, according to the Jewish Communities Records JCR-UK started in 1897.[3] Notices in the *Jewish Chronicle* testifying to the charitable and artistic activities of Blackpool Jews in the 1920s reveal an energetic community. For example, in 1927 this journal noted a reception 'in a private [Blackpool] hotel' to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Joseph Myers who 'traced his family history in England to 1718'.[4] Fundraising and charity events populated the Blackpool Jewish calendar. The *Jewish Chronicle* highlights cash raised for the Homes for the Aged, Needy and Incurable Jews.[5] There is also a special appeal for Eastern European Jews at a fundraiser which prompted donations amounting to £90 made on Kol Nidre in the synagogue.[6] Self-generated cultural events were common. In 1926, the Jewish Amateur Dramatic Society presented two one-act plays at the Savoy Café.[7] These were *The Conscript* and *The Matchmakers*, both written by Esther Morris.[8] The first, set in 1900, is about Jewish conscripts in the Tsar's army and their resistance to a military future of brutalisation or death. The second dramatises the idea of the New Jewish Woman who rejects an arranged marriage to choose her own husband. Both texts are political and original. The language is fresh and sharp. Interesting to note is that not only is

[3] https//www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/Community/blackpool.htm, Accessed 27 May 2023.
[4] 26 March 1927, page 33.
[5] 24 September 1926, page 20.
[6] 6 October 1926, page 28.
[7] 15 April 1927.
[8] In *Tears and Laughter* (London: Erskine Macdonald, 1926. A search into Esther Morris, the playwright revealed that this Jewish author has not been archived in any library that I could find. The disappearance of Jewish women authors is a worrying aspect of Jewish literary history.

the playwright a woman but that in 1926 the Blackpool community was producing such radical theatre.

The crucible of Jewish activity was the synagogue. Before its construction, Blackpool Jews held services in private homes or rented rooms. The Blackpool Hebrew Congregation was consecrated by the Chief Rabbi on 17 May 1900. Services were conducted there at Metropole Arcade Buildings, Springfield Road, North Shore. A new building was consecrated on Leamington Road by the Chief Rabbi on 25 January 1916. However, there was a rival congregation which held its high holy days at Masonic Hall, Adelaide Street. This was the Blackpool New Orthodox Hebrew congregation. The two bodies merged on 3 November 1907 under the appellation of the Blackpool United Hebrew Congregation.[9]

Mid-twentieth-century life for Jews in Blackpool appears to mirror the experience of other regional towns. The *Jewish Chronicle*, a weekly print newspaper, read by a majority of British Jews, gives a thumbnail impression of Blackpool Jewish life and, particularly during the Second World War, reflects what was happening nationally. Blackpool was a major hub for army training.[10] In December 1940, Blackpool classified as a Safety Zone and the kosher Chaseley, Continental and Brereton Hotels advertise that they have a bomb shelter.[11] But if Blackpool seemed a secure place for Jews, there is a report in the 24 November edition of the *Jewish Chronicle* of the presence of Blackshirts in the town.[12] Jewish evacuees to Blackpool are reported by December 1939.[13]

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[9] Ibid, Accessed 12 May 2023.
[10] https://www.blackpoolgrand.co.uk/blackpool-world-war. Accessed 30 May 2023.
[11] *The Jewish Chronicle* 6 December 1940, page 4.
[12] 24 November 1939, pages 20-21.
[13] 29 December 1939, page 18.

Why did Jews come to Blackpool after 1945?

Between the wars there was a Jewish presence in the town but it was the postwar boom that offered the most potential to Jews wanting to leave industrial cities such as Leeds or Manchester. The attraction of Blackpool was the anticipation of health and wealth. Fresh air and three piers, boasting amusement arcades and high-quality shows, made this a major tourist hub. The promenade appealed to all ages and classes. Blackpool offered famous attractions, most notably the Blackpool Tower and its famous Circus and Ballroom, the Pleasure Beach, the Winter Gardens, the Opera House and the Grand Theatre. On the pristine beach, there were Punch & Judy shows and donkey rides. In the many theatres, holiday-makers could enjoy star acts even before the Queen saw them at the London Palladium's Royal Variety Show and at a fraction of the price. The famous producer Bernard Delfont, whose parents were Olga Einstadt and Isaac Winogradsky, brought Laurel and Hardy over to Blackpool in 1953.[14] Other famous 'names' associated with performing in Blackpool include George Formby, Hylda Baker, Frankie Vaughan, Helen Shapiro, The Beatles, Ken Dodd and major celebrities working in theatre, film and television. As well as commercial productions at the Grand Theatre, the Winter Gardens and the Opera House, there was theatre, dance and music to suit all tastes in a variety of venues. Theatre impresarios courted landladies' opinion to market their shows to their clientele. Blackpool found a way of extending its season for as long as possible, stretching it almost into the winter with the October Blackpool Illuminations. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was no other English seaside town that enjoyed the fame and celebrity of Blackpool. Roy Griffins, who grew up there, says that for Jews, 'Blackpool was Klondike'. The Jewish presence was represented in business and in the professions. Jews came to settle in the town in the knowledge that here

[14] https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/heritage-and-retro/retro/laurel-and-hardy-on-blackpool-we-were-lucky-to-leave-the-town-in-one-piece-147026 Accessed 27 June 2023.

money and reputations could be made. They served the gentile and Jewish Blackpuddlians as much as the visitors. Interviewees for this paper revealed that they experienced little antisemitism. Since there was no Chassidic presence, Jews were not easy to spot. They appeared 'respectable' and they felt safe.[15]

Geographically, Blackpool feels as if it is another country within the island. It looks out to the Irish Sea and the Isle of Man. It is a sealed entity with its own shameless celebration of pure pleasure. There are churches of all Christian persuasion but the dominant ethic is that of enjoyment. Manchester is an hour away and, if Manchester still has a feel of the city state, then Blackpool is England's petty Las Vegas. If the Christians came to party in the town, it might be said that for many Jews that they came to work and pray. But the United Hebrew congregation lost its monopoly hold on the Jewish community. It faced a rival with the Reform Jewish Movement founded on 7 November 1947. From about 1951–3, it was known as the Blackpool Reform Jewish Congregation and as Blackpool Progressive Jewish Congregation. Services were held in a Methodist Church in Raikes Parade. Today they are held online.[16]

The *Jewish Chronicle*'s archives reveal the many activities organised by Jewish Blackpuddlians. On 26 May 1950, The Aintree, a new 'strictly kosher hotel' is listed.[17] The Jewish Year Book of 1961 notes Manchester's Jewish population as the second largest community with 28,000 members. Blackpool's Jewish population is 2,000.[18] By 1967, the population remains the same. Adverts for Jewish events at the Palm Court Hotel and the Brereton, which in September 1966

[15] Londoner Caroline Friedman regularly visited Blackpool in the 1960s with her Sheffield grandmother. She remembers the kosher Palm Court Hotel as being 'on a static cruise. Most of the guests barely left the hotel. Content to meet up with friends made over the years, It was where I learned to "shpiel" on card games like poker.' She describes leaving sedate Lytham for Blackpool's anarchic pleasures 'to the amusement (and horror) of our fellow guests.' Interviewed 23 May 2023.

[16] https://www.jewishgen.org/JCR-UK/Community/bl2/index.htm. Accessed 15 May 2023.

[17] *The Jewish Chronicle* 26 May 1956, page 22.

[18] *The Jewish Chronicle*: London, 1961, pages 108 and 100.

promotes itself as 'the largest orthodox hotel in the North', are continuous. A spring fashion parade is announced at the Palm Court Hotel on 8 April 1966. A Knights of Charity event takes place on 15 April 1966, when the Blackpool Jewish ladies' guild holds its annual hat parade. Money is raised for health and welfare, for the Jewish poor and also other 'deserving causes'. The Jewish Welfare Society's Supper and Social on 25 March 1966 endorses this sense of civic duty. To mark the 11 November ceremony, AJEX members parade around the Cenotaph on the town's front.[19] The *Jewish Chronicle* also publicises the arrival of Jewish stars visiting Blackpool. Lionel Blair, Mike and Bernie Winters and Sidney Tafler appear in Blackpool during the summer of 1965. The Labour Party Conference hosts a Socialist Zionist meeting 28 August 1965. Fundraising events and coffee mornings fill the Jewish social calendar. Blackpool was perhaps not so different from other regional towns where Jews were at ease. They mixed easily with their gentile neighbours, as is evident from the establishment of the Blackpool Council of Christians and Jews which met regularly in the Nathan Scheff communal hall, as reported in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 4 March 1966. There is certainly no sense of threatening antisemitism in the community recorded in the *Jewish Chronicle*'s 1960s archives. Boomtown Blackpool was a place where Jews were at home.

Schooling

Unsurprisingly for baby boomers, it is schooling which dominates the following interviews. There were no Jewish schools in Blackpool. Therefore the community was already integrated and mainly secular. Jewish children went to a variety of Church of England state and

[19] Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women.
https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1500106218 Accessed 20 June 2023.

independent fee-paying schools. Before 1944, children only accessed free education until the age of fourteen. This meant that those from non-privileged families had a sketchy education. The baby boomers, however, were all beneficiaries of Rab Butler's 1944 Education Act which brought free secondary school education for all.[20] In 1938 around 80% of children left school at fourteen, but in 1947 the school leaving age was raised to fifteen. Yet, if this generation benefitted by getting free education, the Butler Act came with a compromise.[21] All children were obliged to attend a broadly Christian assembly for forty minutes a day. This is why Jewish children learned hymns in primary school. Consequently, Blackpool Jewish children became acquainted with *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, *Once in Royal David City*, and *Onward Christian Soldiers*. This made us quasi-Christian Jews. [22]

Primary School was the first place where we learned to straddle the Christian social world while leading a Jewish home life. Most of us did not eat pork or shellfish and I remember my mother telling me to ask for beef rather than pork sausages when eating at a friend's house. School made us aware of our outsider status but it was also an exciting environment where we encountered gentile society. We also gained an understanding of the importance of competition. It was made clear to us that passing the Eleven Plus might open up the chance of excellent further education in a Grammar School. In the 1950s, the Eleven Plus, a so-called intelligence test for English, Mathematics and general problem-solving, was a hurdle to jump in the last term of primary school. Passing meant an entry into a privileged world of academic study where the scholarship was paid for by the state. Failure consigned children to the scrap heap of education: the

[20] https//www.national arhives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/new-legislation-1944.htm. Accessed 20 June 2023.
[21] https://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/25751787 Accessed 1 June 2023.
[22] When interviewing gentile women about their schooldays in Blackpool's Collegiate School, they remembered a mood of anti-Catholicism rather than any antisemitism. Indeed we Jews became educated as ProtestantJews in our absorption of hymn-singing and our awareness of the many Protestant churches in Blackpool's streets.

secondary modern school with a dubious quality of education and an implication of low intelligence. Certainly Jewish children who failed felt side-lined and deprived of their due.[23] Grammar Schools were the only route to university for those unable to buy private education. In Blackpool during the period 1950–64, these were single-sex, which meant that girls saw women teaching physics, chemistry and mathematics, subjects normally associated with male achievement. Secondary education led to the taking of General Certificate of Education (GCE) as Ordinary Level (O Level) followed by the choice of specialist subjects at Advanced Level (A Level). Good grades in O and A Levels were mandatory for university entrance.

But, whether girls passed or failed, all were subject to gender stereotyping. Our school days preceded second-wave feminism. At Collegiate School for Girls, which promoted the highest academic standards, we were obliged to take needlework and domestic science.[24] Boys at Blackpool Grammar School did not. At Collegiate, when we were fourteen we were presented with a bowl of warm water and washing-up liquid to teach us washing-up. I said loudly 'this is a waste of time'. Punishment was detention and writing out 500 times *I must not be facetious*. My rebellion against enforced domesticity is endorsed by Lynne Goldstone's memories of wanting to learn woodwork, which was a boys-only subject. Patriarchy was the norm both at school and at home. Jewish mothers rarely worked: it might have suggested that husbands were shamefully unable to support their wives and children. However, most Blackpool Jewish girls were getting a higher education, which had been denied to their mothers and grandmothers. Yet they received mixed messages. School encouraged academic achievement and the aspiration of a university education: the traditional Jewish home told daughters that their duty was to be a home-maker and

[23] I remember the schism caused in primary school between those who passed and those who failed and how even ten year olds believed that passing or failing would irrevocably mark their adult lives. I also remember losing all contact with Lynne Goldstone when we left Stanley Primary School as a result of this fracture. See her interview.
[24] https://collegiateweb.co.uk/history.html Accessed 5 July 2023.

mother. At the same time, the girls' brothers were urged to compete and rise in British society. They were expected to be doctors, dentists, lawyers, businessmen or accountants.

New wave culture

Given that this investigation touches on the cusp of a new Britain, where the sexual revolution and second-wave feminism was approaching, these new political and social movements were slow to arrive in Blackpool. When change happened it was through the 1960s Mersey scene. The Beatles came to Blackpool and Jewish girls went to see them. This new music scene was certainly more attractive to the Baby Boomers than the popular light music of their parents, and they certainly had no emotional connection to Klezmer, which was considered folksy and old-fashioned. Yiddish Theatre was unknown in Blackpool. Only Len Brown, the oldest of the interviewees, remembers having seen it. For most Jewish Blackpuddlians, Yiddish was dead and buried. It was associated with murder, discrimination and ghettoisation. Jewish Baby Boomers were part of a new British scene. Many absorbed a certain pride in being English

What did unite all Jewish communities was the authority of the synagogue. It was a building where Jews felt Jewish and British. Every week they prayed for the health of the Queen and the royal family. [25] It is evident that the United Synagogue, as a building and congregation, was a focal point for the majority of Blackpool's Jews. All who I interviewed referenced it. For the boys it was often a place of stress before the inevitable barmitzvah. Most Blackpool Jewish girls that I knew, and I include myself here, felt that they had no place apart from that of observer in the balcony or as a secondary participant in Hebrew classes on Sunday mornings. While the

[25] See https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/apr/12/face-to-faith-judaisim-prayers-for-the-queen Accessed 1 July 2023.

United Synagogue certainly dominated Blackpool Jewish life, in the 1960s, the rival Reform Movement attracted converts, members wishing to pay lower subscriptions and those critical of the separation of women from men. I remember attending services at both synagogues. The main difference to me was that men and women could sit together and that there was a mixed choir. But, there was no real division between younger Jews who went to either synagogue: Blackpool Jewish youth found ways of bonding.

This study shows the importance of class divisions within the Blackpool Jewish community. It shows up material need amongst working class Jews. It also reveals one common denominator amongst Blackpool Jewish youth: the desire to get out. If Blackpool felt like Klondike to Jews arriving postwar, it was different for their children. Many had been educated at Blackpool Grammar School, Collegiate School for Girls and other institutions with a strong academic reputation but, after A Levels, they understood that their only way of rising in society was by taking the train.[26] Most of these Jewish interviewees speak of attending Manchester, Leeds or London Universities. I don't know how aware we were that, if we really wanted to enter the English elite, we should have aimed for Oxford or Cambridge.[27] This study shows that Blackpool was a safe place for Jewish children to thrive but it offered little opportunity for adults seeking other stimuli. Despite the exciting entertainment industry, it always felt provincial and limited. References to Manchester Jewry's more sophisticated community occurs in some memories within this paper. Blackpool's Jewry did have an awareness of the more vibrant Jewish life happening fifty miles away.

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[26] The General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level is usually taken at 16. Advanced Level GCEs allowed more specialist study and were taken at 18 as a pre-requisite for university education which in the 1960s was taken up by about 1 per cent of the population.

[27] My parents, as the children and grandchildren of immigrants, did not educate me to consider an Oxbridge education or even to expect a university degree. Within this study of Blackpool Jews, the example of Gerald Mars' success at Cambridge is exceptional.

In the 1970s as the town's fortunes diminished so did its Jewish population. Jews went to larger cities or abroad. By 2012, nearly all the Jews had gone. Many of those who lived out their final days in the town are buried in the Carlton Cemetery.[28] On Sunday 13 May 2012, the last United Hebrew Congregation service was held. The Leamington Road Synagogue was deconsecrated and sold in 2012. Bess Robertson (née Tax) writes movingly about the Sefer Torah being paraded around the shul, leaving 'a big, empty cavity that was once the ark and their home for 114 years'.[29] In 2019, the United Synagogue was resold at auction for £100,000. It is a Listed Building, which means it has restrictions for further exploitation and, at the time of writing in June 2023, the former synagogue remains unused.

Today, Blackpool is one of the most disadvantaged towns in England.[30] The museum of entertainment, Showtown, which opens in 2024, has been designated as an archive of Blackpool's entertainment history.[31] However, as far as I know, there is no collected archive of the Blackpool Jewish experience housed there, or anywhere, apart from mentions on disparate websites. This project allowed me to understand the variety of Jewish experiences of growing up in postwar Blackpool but, most of all, it made me aware of a class divide between different Jewish families. When I was growing up in Blackpool, Jews appeared to be embedded in society. Now I realise that they were a transient population. The arrival of grandparents or parents was followed by the migration of the children in search of different worlds. Blackpool's pleasure industry was never enough. The study reveals a golden moment in provincial Jewish life in a special resort with its own mystique and history. This moment has gone but it deserves to be

[28] The Jewish section in Layton Cemetery, Westcliff Drive Blackpool was established in 1898. The Carleton Cemetery's Jewish section in Stocks Lane, Poulton-le-Fylde was established in 1981 to serve Orthodox and Reform communities.
[29] https//www.dhcreform.org/last-service-in-blackpool. Accessed 28 May 2023.
[30] https://www.blackpooljsna.org.uk/People-and-Places/Wider-determinants-of-health/Deprivation.aspx Accessed 26 June 2023.
[31] https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk Accessed 27 June 2023.

remembered, not only to show a distinct Jewish experience but to offer insight into the nation's wider culture view the wider culture through the lens of Jews living in a most extraordinary town.

Insights for this paper were gained from discussions with retired dentist Neville Harris and former school friends including Norma Bradshaw, Judith Cohen and Philip Lefton. I have used the women's maiden names, as this is how they were known as Blackpool girls.

Interviews were conducted face to face or on Zoom between August 2022 and May 2023. Original phrasing and language remains unedited to reveal individual speech patterns in accordance with Oral History Society guidelines as followed in Pascal Theatre Company's heritage projects.[32]

Each person was asked the following questions:

- What made your family come to Blackpool?
- What was it like growing up Jewish in Blackpool?
- Which synagogue did your family attend?
- How far did the entertainment industry affect you or your family?
- What was your family's attitude to Israel?
- What was unique about being a Jew in Blackpool?
- Did you encounter antisemitism?

[32] Pascal Theatre Company's Jewish Mothers & Daughters Archive, *https://www.pascal-theatre.com/project/past-projects/past-events/jewish-womens-video-archive/* The Secret Listeners *https://www.pascal-theatre.com/project/past-projects/past-shows/secretv-listeners/* and Discovering & Documenting England's Lost Jews *https://www.pascal-theatre.com/project/englands-lost-jews/* offers a variety of Jewish histories which also reference Oral History Society guidance.

- Was the Shoah discussed in your family?
- Did you attend school prayers?
- Did your family keep kosher?
- Was your family living in Blackpool during World War Two and, if so, are there areas of this history that you can share?

INTERVIEWS

Julia Pascal – Written 5 June 2023

Edward Freeman – Interviewed 13 March 2023

Michael Mars – 15 August 2022

Leonard Mars – 22 August 2022

Lynne Goldstone – Interviewed 7 February 2023

Lance Blackstone – Interviewed 21 September 2022

Gail Sheridan – Interviewed 7 September 2022

Len Brown – Interviewed 22 August 2022

Roy Griffins – Interviewed 10 September 2022

Jennifer Topperman – Interviewed 12 March 2023

Questions I ask of interviewees are predicated on my own lived experience of growing up in Blackpool. I did not know these Jewish Blackpuddlians except from a childhood distance. Meeting as older adults has meant a sharing that is insightful and provocative.

JULIA PASCAL

I was born in Manchester in November 1949 but my parents were already living in Blackpool. My father was a GP who benefitted from having a practice under the new National Health Service. My mother Isabel Jacobs (1918-2005) was the first daughter of Esther and Emmanuel Jacobs. They came to Manchester around 1910. Esther/Ernestina (1890–1982) was from Hyuši and Emmanuel/Menachim (1886-1962) from Jassy or Iassi. Emannuel's name was shortened from Jacobson to Jacobs. Esther's maiden name was Goldenberg. It was an arranged marriage. She had turned down two suitors before being pushed into marrying my grandfather. The first was an old man and the second was after her dowry. She rejected both. My grandfather's UK passport names him as an 'export merchant'. They were both naturalised at British citizens in 1948. My father Cecil Fridjohn, whose name had been Fridjhon, a derivation of Fridzohn, (son of peace) was the grandson of immigrants from Janove, Lithuania. Cecil's mother was Minnie/Naomi Cohen who married Hyman Fridjhon. They were first cousins. The original immigrants were Leah Waldstein and Joseph Cohen. Joseph was to marry Leah's younger sister but Leah was sent on the boat to take her place as the eldest daughter was to be the first married. Naomi was born in Bristol and her son, my father Cecil, was born in Cardiff in 1915. They moved to Dublin and formed part of the Dublin Jewish community. When Cecil joined the NHS his move to Blackpool with my mother was considered wise as Blackpool was flourishing. My Manchester grandparents would often come to visit us to escape the Manchester smog.[33] My brother David was born in 1945. We both went to Stanley Primary School where there were very

[33] The Clean Air Act 1956 reduced pollution from smoke and soot. See https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/nostalgia/manchesters-dark-history-archive-pictures-8722223 Accessed 15 March 2023. Friends of the Earth reveal how slow progress to halt air pollution was. But according to friends of the Earth it took around 3 decades, and another Clean Air Act in 1968 to deal with slow-moving local authorities, before smoke control programmes were finally completed. https://friendsoftheearth.uk/climate/london-smog-and-1956-clean-air-act Accessed 5 June 2023.

few Jewish children.[34] David briefly went to an independent boarding school, Rossall School in Lytham St Anne's, before attending Palatine School.[35]

At Stanley School I went into school prayers and learned hymns but had instructions from my mother never to say that Jesus was the son of god or the messiah. She also told me not to draw attention to myself or I would stand out as 'a clever Jew'. This 'cleverness' was seen as dangerous. The message was clear. Keep a low profile. But there was a contradiction. Although I was instructed not to stand out as a Jew, prominent Jewish personalities were remarked and approved. If a Jewish film star or scientist was in the news, this was always noted with pride. If a Jew was in the news for fraud or crime, there was a collective sense of shame. I was aware of antisemitism at five when a classmate screamed at me 'You killed Jesus'. My mother had schooled me to say 'It wasn't the Jews it was the Romans' but my riposte was 'no I didn't, I wasn't born.'

We attended the United Synagogue in the 1950s and moved to the Reform shul around 1961. I preferred going there as prayers were mainly in English. But my Jewish background was not particularly orthodox. My parents rarely celebrated Jewish festivals and only occasionally observed shabbos. Being Jewish felt more of a burden than a joy: it was always spoken of as a history of pain and the unspeakable. My grandmother often spoke about pogroms and although she was Romanian, her grandparents were called Moscovici which suggests that they had moved

[34] To research this paper I returned to Stanley School. Unlike Collegiate School which was demolished, Stanley retains much what I remember from my attendance there in the 1950s. https://stanleyprimaryschool.com Accessed 5 July 2023.

[35] The 1944 Education Act formalised a tripartide system of Grammar, Technical and Secondary Modern Schools. Palatine was a technical school for those who did not pass the Eleven Plus.

west from Moscow. However when she said the word ‘pogrom’ it came out as ‘programme’ so that I understood murder and rape to be a programme which could return.

My father was a religious boy in Dublin but the Shoah ended his faith. His cousins were shot in the Lithuanian forests. This changed his life. He transferred his love of religion to the land of Israel. The Hebrew he had learned as a child became a passport for Ivrit. His passion was translating Shakespeare into modern Hebrew for pleasure. After his death I found notebooks written with a fresh and sensual style. I understood that the man who wanted to be a chazan was a writer and an artist who had been pushed into a ‘respectable’ profession he had never desired. He wanted to live in Israel but my mother refused to make aliyah. Consequently, he lived in anxiously in England while longing for Eretz Israel. When I was fourteen, the family unsuccessfully tried to settle in Israel. I attended Tabeetha School, run by the church of Scotland, in Jaffa, for eight weeks where I mixed with Palestinians, Jews and Christians. At our return, in November 1964, the Blackpool house was sold and we moved to London. This was the end of our Blackpool life.

I learned about the Holocaust at around five years old when my father told me ‘You are lucky to live in England. A least, here, they don’t put us into the gas chambers.’[36] I remember always being aware of it through his constant references and by the portrait of Anne Frank hanging on his surgery wall. He admired David Ben-Gurion and was politically of the left. It pained him that I had not learned Hebrew, though he did not teach me to read it. My childhood in Blackpool was unhappy as a result of my mother’s misery with her own life but the entertainment industry was a positive influence on me through my love of ballet and dance. I trained at Laura Webb’s Ballet

[36] When I learned about the Occupation of the British Channel Islands, I thought that my father had been unaware of how the British collaboration with the Nazis on Guernsey and Jersey. See Julia Pascal *Theresa* in ‘The Holocaust Trilogy’ (London: Oberon Books, 2000) and http://www.juliapascal.org/play/theresa Accessed 12 June 2023.

School where I took part in Blackpool's Summer Dance Festivals. I wished to be a dancer and dreamed of leaving home to attend The Royal Ballet School at White Lodge in Richmond. I declared this to my parents who vociferously opposed this ambition. I entered talent contests and sang as a child. At Collegiate School I did not go into prayers but spent the first fifteen minutes of each day in the Sick Room with the other Jewish girls. We were supposed to be praying but we talked about boys. At Grammar School I experienced no antisemitism. I learned about hard work and discipline and saw women academics which showed me that there were alternatives to the expectation of becoming domestic.

The Blackpool Jewish world offered me little pleasure and I dreamed of leaving. I went to Jewish social events for teenagers with my brother David but, as he was older than me, I felt spare as the younger sister. Habonim meant learning to dance the hora and to sing the Hatikvah. I remember long rambles. At Collegiate School, I was friends with Susan Hart and Judith Cohen. Each of us had an older brother. Susan's father owned a silversmith's shop in London, her house was detached with a tennis court. Judith Cohen's father was a sign-writer.[37] My father's position as a doctor placed me in the middle of this class divide.

Our house was a semi-detached on West Park Drive which did offer exciting distractions as my father's morning surgery brought in fascinating local residents. Each patient had a drama. One woman wanted an abortion and was sent out with a refusal. [38] Others were exhausted from overwork, poverty and chest complaints. I remember how common it was for men to die of a

[37] Her interview is in *Jewish Mothers & Daughters: A Film Archive* housed at the British Library.
[38] Abortions were illegal in the UK until 1967.

heart attack in their forties and that women seemed to live forever. [39] This daily exposure to patients gave me an awareness of the intersection between Jewish and gentile worlds. It also made me understand the importance of The Doctor as a god like figure. My father had a library of medical books which I read. One of my jobs was to file hospital letters into thick brown files and, reading these documents, gave me an interest in surgery. One advantage to this 'medical' childhood was that the body was discussed without shame. A curiosity about bodily functions grew in me as soon as I could read. I shared what I learned with the girls in my primary school. This made me feel important as someone with extra knowledge.

In primary school I felt an outsider as I had coarse, unruly hair. The other girls were often blonde and with sleek bobs. And the name Fridjohn always caused hilarity and comment. I was mainly the only Jewish girl in my class: there were two Jewish boys but we never talked to one another. Our Jewish identity was ignored by teachers. In one unforgettable history lesson, the teacher pointed to each child to illustrate the various Briutish ethnicities. One freckled girl was seen as a Celt, a boy with a long skull was of Norman descendent, another with black hair had Roman soldier ancestor, a fair girl was of Anglo-Saxon stock. The teacher said nothing about me. This silence made me feel that Jews did not exist or perhaps were too difficult to mention.

Jewish ritual at home was negligible. Although my parents never ate pork or shellfish,

Purim, Pesach, New Year and Yom Kippur were hardly observed. It was only at my

Manchester grandparents' house where I glimpsed traditional Jewish life.

There I was reprimanded for switching a light on or off during Shabbos or for mixing up

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[39] https://rdcu.be/dgA1z Accessed 11 July 2023.

'milky' and 'meaty' tea-towels. The only Jewish observance to dominate my childhood was the impending stress of my brother's barmitzvah which made me feel excluded as a Jewish girl.[40].

It was the Blackpool entertainment industry, which offered me a creative family. As a seven year old, I was sent to ballet classes because I had painful feet .[41] It was in the ballet class that I discovered the joy of belonging to a community with a single goal: to create a meaningful artistic experience. The dance studio was a safe space away from the emotional miasma of home life. It promised a future where a girl's imagination could be developed.

In Blackpool, through the entertainment industry, my adult professional career was seeded. Later, when I was able to see the intersection between different theatre traditions, I understood the connected filaments between Blackpool working class culture, Yiddish Theatre and an international world of theatre and cinema. And when I realised that Jacobs and Fridjhons had come from Romania and Lithuania I felt a homecoming knowing that I belonged to a rich. Jewish cultural history which had never been spoken of in my Blackpool childhood.[42] And that this was mine if I could step out of the confines of provincial traditional Jewish life and seize it.

[40] No girl I knew was having a batmitzvah in the early 1960s.
[41] This discipline was believed to be a way of strengthening 'fallen arches'.
[42] Jassy and Vilna Yiddish Theatre traditions were considered the apotheosis of Yiddish Theatre in the 19th and early 20th century. See See Nahma Sandrow, *Vagabond Stars* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

EDWARD FREEMAN

JP: When were you born?

EF: 15 May 1953.

JP: What were your parents' names?

EF: Mother Muriel Goldberg. Father was Frank Freeman. He was born Freedman but in Blackpool, there was a butcher and baker with the same name. We got their post! When I was seventeen and I was working a few weeks in a local solicitor's office, we all changed our names to Freeman by statutory declaration.

JP: Where were your grandparents from?

EF: Grandmother on father's side from Leeds but my paternal grandfather was from Merthyr Tydfil. Both parents were from Leeds originally but they settled in Cleveleys and moved to Blackpool when I was five.

JP: Why did they move from Leeds?

EF: The Blackpool Congregation was increasing and they liked the idea of a seaside town to bring up children. My mother in particular regretted not going back to Leeds but my father wanted to stay in Blackpool. He ran furniture shops shortly after I was born. He was a successful businessman. When he got to his mid-fifties, they closed the shops they had and my father became a furniture manufacturer's agent. He was out on the road and worked until he was about sixty-six. Before her marriage, my mother was a medical secretary in Leeds. Then she became a housewife. I have brother eight years younger. I am a retired solicitor and he is also a solicitor. I was in private practice in Manchester for forty years.

JP: Tell me about school.

EF: When I was eight my parents wanted to improve my education. They sent me to King Edward VII, an independent school in Lytham. And so I travelled every day from my home in Blackpool by bus, leaving at ten to eight and getting back at 5.30pm. Added to this were three cheder lessons a week. These were Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5pm-7pm. The routine was get the bus from Lytham to Blackpool, get a coffee from the vending machine and run to cheder. My dad collected me at 7pm. On Sunday morning we used to have cheder too. At King Edward, I passed the Eleven Plus and continued from the junior to the senior school.

JP: Did the entertainment industry impact your life?

EF: As far as my father's business was concerned, there was only a little involvement but from a charitable point of view my father was involved in the Committee for Aiding Deserving Societies (CADS). It was a Charity which supported numerous organisations –Jewish and non-Jewish- including the Blackpool & Fylde Blind Society, The Fylde Jewish Flatlets Association, The National Children's Home in St Anne's, The Polio Research Fund, Meals on Wheels vans etc. CADS successfully raised money for charity. Showbiz personalities came to Blackpool for expenses only and the money raised supported a variety of charities. Celebrities included Sammy Davis Jr, Shirley Bassey, the Count Basie Orchestra. The Opera House was hired for a Sunday evening to have two shows bang in the middle of summer when Blackpool was extremely busy. This raised a lot of money from the brochure.

JP: Which charities were supported?

EF: This ranged from one or two Jewish societies such as the Board of Guardians which was the Jewish Welfare Society, to other non-Jewish charities including one or two cancer charities,

hospices other local charities. Stars performed free of charge. Apart from that, my father would occasionally deliver furniture to people in the entertainment industry but he didn't have that many connections.

JP: Was your family religious?

EF: We were traditional Jewish people. My late maternal grandfather was certainly a very capable father. He was the warden of his shul in Leeds. His Yiddishkeit has transcended the generations. I always went to shul as a young boy and my parents were always observant, although we were never shomer shabbos. My father did have to work on a shabbos. On a Friday evening he would go to the service because his main shop was only a few minutes' walk away. Always kept a kosher home. My mother kept kosher to the letter. We never travelled on Rosh Ha Shanah and we kept Pesach.

JP: Did you have antisemitic experiences as a child?

EF: I did have certain difficulties when I was about thirteen. At King Edward School, where there was one individual in particular who resented that I was quite popular at school, I was involved in sports. Fortunately, I managed to shake him off as it were but it did take a little bit of time. Yes I do recall antisemitism from him, but fortunately I was able to get a grasp of it.

I was proud to be Jewish and still am. I was the chairman of the local youth club from the age of thirteen onwards for three or four years. It was called the Blackpool Jewish Youth Club on Hornby Street. On a Sunday afternoon it attracted twenty to twenty-five young people from thirteen to seventeen. We did from time to time arrange inter-functions with people from Manchester and Liverpool.

JP: Were your family Zionists?

EF: I can't say they were but I am sure my parents would have donated some charity to Israel. Certainly I don't think there was a particular society that met involved in Zionism at the time because Blackpool was not quite like that.

JP: Were your friends mainly Jewish?

EF: I did have a few non-Jewish friends at school but my main Jewish friends were Anthony Harris who now lives in Manchester and Andrew Cohen who lives in Brighton. I went back to Blackpool for holidays from university and I did my holiday jobs there. Eventually I decided to become a solicitor. I did my articles with Jennifer Topperman's father. Howarth Goodman & Co in Manchester. Eventually I qualified at twenty-six. I got married shortly after.

JP: Did you marry a Jew?

EF: Yes my wife Maureen lived in North Manchester. I have been married for forty-three years. I have a son and daughter and six granddaughters.

JP: You mentioned your Blackpool holiday jobs. What were they?

EF: Working for a greengrocer on Central Drive. I used to drive his shooting brake and deliver greengroceries to boarding houses and private people in the morning and work in the shop in the afternoon. I walked from the North to the South Pier on a weekday afternoon selling the Lancashire Evening Post for people who wanted to know what was going on in the world and more particularly the racing results. The holiday-makers would sit in their deckchairs wanting to read the papers. I earned something like five shillings for the afternoon. Certainly not a lot, but my holiday job green grocer job earned me £10 for a forty hours a week. But I earned as much in tips from the boarding houses. This money was useful for my student holidays.

JP: Where did you go?

EF: Once to Bournemouth. And to Manchester. There was an odd student holiday abroad. Once we went to Geneva and the South of France. That was a big holiday.

JP: Did knowledge of the Shoah have an impact on your early life?

EF: I didn't take particular interest in this until I was married and had children. I would know more about the background – it's only now in later life that I have become more knowledgeable. I have visited Huddersfield University where they have a marvellous new venture on the Holocaust. Last week I went to the Imperial War Museum in Manchester to see a new exhibition about child survivors. But no, during my youth, it was not a regular topic of conversation, Obviously it would have been mentioned at times when maybe the Reverend was giving a sermon in shul.

JP: Were you aware of class differences among Blackpool Jews?

EF: Only because my father was involved in charitable matters and he had been Chairman of the Board of Guardians. He was involved in fundraising for the deprived. When you are young you are too busy studying or doing your social life.

JP: I have become aware of class differences between Blackpool's Jews and the rest of the population, as well as that of the Jewish community, and the visitors, from the surrounding industrial towns. Them and Us. Did you feel that?

EF: A little, but most people I knew were local Blackpool residents who had been there a long time. I knew a lot of my friends' parents. I didn't think of it. I was fortunate enough to be

brought up in North Park drive and to be able to walk to shul which was only fifteen minutes' walk away. So I did not experience it.

JP: Did you like living in Blackpool?

EF: Yes because I am very interested in sport. At the weekends I would walk from my house with my friend Anthony to the football ground, and in the summer shul in the morning and go watch Blackpool play cricket in the afternoon. And we played cricket on the square and we might play till eight at night. I enjoyed being chairman of the Jewish Youth Club. And being at cheder. I was lucky having five excellent cheder teachers. There were four of us in the top class and we created our own syllabus with Reverend Braslavsky. But by the time I was sixteen or seventeen, I was ready to get out. It was such a small Jewish environment and I was ready for the wider world.

JP: Did you know about the Blackpool Boarding Houses?

EF: Yes from my holiday job I got to know an awful lot. And the bus from home to school used to pass many boarding houses and I could see how thriving the local scene was. There was Blochs which was situated near to the North Pier. My father was very friendly with Phil Bloch who ran this Jewish hotel. It was small compared to Palm Court Hotel which was the main Jewish hotel.

JP: Did you eat chicken every Friday night?

EF: Yes. Chicken, chopped liver, chicken soup and all the bits that went with it.

JP: Did you hear Yiddish?

EF: My grandfather spoke a little and passed that down to me. I have a smattering of Yiddish words that I use.

JP: Did you think that Blackpool was a very peculiar town?

EF: What you don't know is my family's total engagement with the Blackpool Jewish community. My father was president of Blackpool shul for nineteen years. It closed in 2013.

My late father passed away in 2011. He asked me about twelve to eighteen months before he passed away if, I as a Manchester-based solicitor, I would help him close the shul. After his death I was very involved with Philip Lefton and therefore, between Philip Lefton and the synagogue's President Bob Pinkus in St Anne's, I eventually managed to merge Blackpool shul with St Anne's shul. At the time there were eighty-three members from Blackpool who became members of St Anne's shul. The Blackpool building is still there. It had been sold. They were able to use a small portion of the premises where they built flatlets, but the main building was sold to a developers, but they wanted to get rid of some of the stained glass windows. They were not able to do that as it is a listed building. The developer sold it on but it is now regrettably derelict because those who bought it couldn't do what they wanted. I know that there are still a few Jews who live there. Many went to Lytham and St Anne's but there are not many left.

Blackpool Jewry thrived in so much that around 1966 the synagogue had to be extend around 1966. Had people like myself stayed in Blackpool with a few others, there still might have been a shul today. But because we wanted to further our careers either in Manchester or London, there were not enough to keep the place going. It was able to sustain three different reverends for a long period. There was never actually a rabbi. Shul had the Nathan Scheff Hall and it was vibrant for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. During the Conservative and Labour Party Conferences in

Blackpool, Jewish politicians came to shul. Manny Shinwell might have been one of those. Between 1960 and 1970 Blackpool Jewry thrived. It was a rich period for Blackpool Jews.

The community was growing so fast that the shul had to be extended. It was too small for everyone, and maybe 150-200 seats were added to cater for demand. I did feel sad when it closed because it was the end of an era. Sad for my father who put his heart and soul in it. Also the former President Barry Goodstone and Philip Lefton. Reverend Braunold

was the minister and he worked very hard to make sure the community could keep going. Between 1960 and 1970 were the main years when Blackpool Jewry thrived. It was a rich period for Blackpool Jews.

JP: As far as you know has anyone written about Blackpool Jews?

EF: No there is no specific book on what's gone on.

JP: In my request for interviewees I have found that more men were willing to talk than women. Do you think that this is because men felt they had achieved something in the larger society, but few Jewish girls were encouraged to have ambitions beyond the home?

EF: I think that's probably true. There are one or two who did very well, but more men chose careers than the girls who got married and settled down elsewhere.

MICHAEL MARS

MM: I was born on 5 December 1945 in Cheetham Hill, Manchester.

I went to Blackpool when I was six months old.

My father, Ellis Mars, was born in Manchester on 29 August 1903. He was the son of Lithuanian refugees and worked as a presser in a clothing factory. Not a presser working the large machines. His job was to press individual clothes for salesmen to take to the shops.

He didn't speak English until he was five. His parents spoke only Yiddish.

My mother's grandparents came, possibly, from Germany. They did not speak Yiddish. They came to post war Blackpool because it was the boom period for tourism. Workers would get a week's holiday. There were different Blackpool weeks allocated to each town. The Oldham Week. The Accrington Week. The Blackburn Week. They were called 'Wakes Weeks'.

My mother bought a boarding house in Blackpool. Two of her siblings, one brother and one sister, had a Blackpool hotel and boarding house respectively. This gave her the idea. She wanted to live in Blackpool because it was better for the kids and she could see that we might become more prosperous. We were very poor.

I'm the youngest of four brothers. My mother was on a reconnaissance daytrip to Blackpool from Manchester and, when she got back, she told my father that she had bought a house. My father was not pleased but she was the dominant one. He was an urban, ghetto Jew, most at ease with his fellow, Yiddish-speaking workers in Manchester. But she decided and he had no choice. There was a huge demand for space in Blackpool from tourists in the industrial areas. When the season was on owners often slept in the bathroom. Our house was in Devonshire Road. The tram

route inland was how you got to it. It was not a hotel but a large four-bedroomed house. During the summer my parents slept on the settee and we four boys slept in one room. This was to accommodate the ‘army families’. My mother was a sick woman, she had rheumatic fever in her youth. In 1945, when she was pregnant with me, she was to be legally aborted. Doctors said she shouldn’t have kids and she already had three. She was told that the fourth would likely kill her. The Catholic midwives, who brought the other brothers into the world, persuaded her to have the birth. It seems she did not need much persuasion.

JP: How did you discover this?

MM: We discussed it.

JP: And how did you feel?

MM: I didn’t blame her. After all I would never have known and maybe by having me her life was shortened. She died in February 1976 when I was twenty-one. Her life was very hard. She was mostly ill and in poverty. But very strong-willed and inventive

JP: How was the marriage?

MM: My parents mostly looked after one another.

JP: Was it arranged?

MM: No. But they were unsuited.

JP: How did they meet?

MM: My father was calling house to house to raise money for some charity. He knocked on her door and she opened it.

She was eighteen, he was twenty-eight. She wanted to escape a huge house where there were ten kids. My mother was not educated but she was highly intelligent. She was very determined and intellectual.

JP: What do you mean by 'intellectual'?

MM: She could think things through and process a wide variety of issues. She could see how things could be done.

JP: Give me an example.

MM: All her siblings would challenge her on her vision for her sons going to university. Her response was 'It's all very well for you because your children are not very clever but mine are.' The idea of sending four boys to university was outrageous. She also prevented us falling into sibling rivalry and taught us to support each other. If there was only one sweet, my mother would cut it into four. Even seventy years on we cherish each other's achievements. My mother feared there would be jealousy among the wives and she warned us about that. Gerry, my oldest brother by thirteen years is my best friend and mentor. We've helped one another as we climbed the ladder of our professions.

JP: Tell me about the surname Mars. Among your friend you brothers were affectionately known as The Mars Boys.

MM: It was Margolis. My mother knew that there was incipient antisemitism which might be provoked by a Jewish name – Margolis. But Mars as a surname brought us ridicule as we were growing up. And all four boys wanted to change it back to the original. But it proved to be too difficult.

JP: Tell me about your father.

MM: My father was no use as a landlady's husband. He couldn't do the shopping or work in the kitchen. He travelled to Manchester two hours there and two hours back every day. I remember that he got up at 4.30am every day, we'd moved to a semi by then. This was 14 Banbury Avenue, North Shore. He would have his breakfast and walk to Blackpool North station for his two-hour journey. At night he arrived at 7pm and caught the 7.05 bus to get home for his dinner at 7.15pm. Then he read the paper and went to bed. My father was abysmally paid and when I was eleven, I realised that we were a very, very poor family in Blackpool. He almost went blind in one eye. It was glaucoma. His sight was saved by a surgeon in 1958. He could no longer work. Even in those days we lived on National Assistance. We had free school clothes, free travel, free school dinners. In terms of where we were on the social scale, we were a generation behind many Jews who had come from the wave of East Europeans to England.

JP: Tell me about the four brothers.

MM: Gerry was the eldest.[43] He was born in 1933. He struggled at school. He failed the School Certificate and worked in a menial job in Blackpool. He entered the Civil Service in a low-paid job as a clerical officer. During his National Service he entered the RAF. There he saw evidence of better educated young men who were officers but who were not as clever as him. He went back into the Civil Service to earn enough money to finance his younger brothers' education. At twenty-six he got a scholarship to Cambridge where he studied Social Anthropology and Economics. He was the trailblazer for the rest of the family. After his success, if you got a GCE 'O' Level that was nothing. If you got a GCE 'A' Level that was nothing. If you went to

[43] Gerald Mars *Becoming An Anthropologist* (Cambridge Scholars: Cambridge, 2015) Chapter Two references his Blackpool childhood which adds to the interviews with Leonard and Michael Mars.

university, well this was ‘ordinary’. The next brother, Len, born 1941, failed his Eleven Plus at Claremont Primary school where we all went.[44] Gerald failed in Manchester before the move. The three younger brothers also went to Claremont. Len went to King Edward School in Lytham.

JP: Why did he go there?

MM: My mother went into great debt with money lenders. This was a fee-paying private Grammar School.

JP: How did he get to university if he failed his Eleven Plus?

MM: After two years, Len’s intelligence was recognised and he was offered a scholarship place at Edinburgh University to study Social Anthropology. He worked for the Civil Service to earn enough money to finance his two younger brothers’ education and his family. He completed his PhD at Manchester University after field work in Israel.

In 1972 he accepted a lectureship in U.C. Swansea (now Swansea University), from where he retired in 2001 to teach and research in three Hungarian universities until 2009. In May this year a collection of his essays on Jewish Ethnographic Studies is in press with Harmatan publishers.[45] Now, at eighty-two, he lives in Swansea with his wife Agi.

Melvyn (born 1942) went to Blackpool Grammar School after passing his Eleven Plus. There he struggled to get his O Levels and went to teacher training college. Later he got an MA in Glass, having been a potter in North Wales for almost twenty years. Melvyn became a principal lecturer at Wolverhampton University and went to live in Shropshire.

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[44] https://www.schoolguide.co.uk/schools/claremont-community-primary-school-blackpool Accessed 5 July 2023.
[45]Leonard Mars *Mi volt Onan bune? Valogatott etnografiai tanulmanyok a zsido kultura temakorebol (*L' Harmattan Kiado: Budapest 2023).

I went to Blackpool Grammar School and wanted to be a medical doctor. I applied everywhere and was refused. In those days if your father was a doctor you were almost guaranteed a place even if your exam results were not excellent. We did not know the rules. I went to Newcastle University to study physiology and after one year changed to Dentistry which I never wanted to do, but it was my saving. I was very good at handling patients and children. I qualified in 1971 and after twelve years of junior doctor posts and post graduate qualifications I was appointed Head of the Maxillofacial and Dental Department, then Director of Special Surgery at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children.[46] I retired eleven years ago.

JP: Can you describe your childhood in the boarding house? What was the interaction with tourists.

MM: I don't remember the two boarding houses, as they were abandoned after just three years. I remember the visitors. The first thing they did when they arrived was to go to the ticket agencies to buy tickets for entertainment for every night of the week.[47] Postwar Blackpool was a place where stars jostled for prime billing in the many theatres and to perform on the pier. Television was rare in the 1950s. There was no internet, most did not have a phone. Visitors arrived on spec. They were a major influence on the town. Every Saturday the Blackpool population of a quarter of a million would double. Two hundred and fifty thousand would leave just as two hundred and fifty thousand arrived. They went in search of lodgings at the Information Bureau next to North Pier. The clerks would favour certain hotels and get a back-hander from them. At eight years old I was at the top of the queue shouting to the clerks 'have you sent anyone to my mum?' At which point visitors would crowd around me and I'd take them on the bus to our house. I was leading

[46] https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/Michael-Mars-39309834 Accessed 15 May 2023.
[47] https://www.blackpoolgrand.co.uk/blackpool-in-the-50s Accessed 15 May 2023.

them inland when they really wanted to be near the sea. But, by the time they arrived, they were too exhausted to protest. My mother greeted them with tea and cake.

The SOS time was late July and the first week in August. There was a general prejudice amongst many landladies against black people but not in our house. I remember one of the visitors, a Nigerian, who took delight in walking on the prom holding my hand. People looked. In the first boarding house we ran, a Jamaican airman in RAF uniform knocked on our door. He was just back from the war. One of the guests complained. My mother told this guest 'if you don't like it you can go elsewhere'.

JP: How Jewish was your family?

MM: We were openly Jewish. We were distinct and separate. We were thirty Jewish boys at Blackpool Grammar School. Ours was a different upbringing. Blackpool Jews were mostly comfortably off professionals or businesspeople. There was a scattering of working-class Jews. If you were poor and Church of England you tended to stay in your class. The aspiration was to get a job for life in the Town Hall or the Land Registry. Those working-class boys were as clever as me but they did not talk about 'climbing the ladder'. Your friends were Jewish and not poor. You shared the same ideals even though there was poverty. You went to Habonim together. There were strong bonds.

JP: This means that culture and identity rather than class is the connection in these friendships?

MM: Spending time with middle class Jews made us see what was possible. But the divide was that they went on holidays to Bournemouth and later to Majorca whereas we worked every summer to give money to my mother. My parents never went on holiday. But despite poverty we never stopped climbing the ladder. I got my PhD, my Fellowship, Consultancy and became a

Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons. You knew that if you were a Jewish boy or girl you could succeed. The message was not just religious it was that you must get a good education and the value of this was implicit.

JP: Did the class divide affect dating?

MM: I remember asking out someone who came from a wealthier family. She arranged parties in hotels and ballroom dancing classes. She was vivacious and attractive. Every time I suggested we meet she said that she was washing her hair. She had the cleanest hair in Blackpool!

JP: What jobs did you do?

MM: I was a labourer digging six-foot holes in the promenade. These were to hold structures for the Blackpool Illuminations. I got very fit. The bossman was called Bill Bossom. He was very kind. The other workers were not stupid. One was an ex-boxer with brain damage. Another was former shipyard worker, a riveter who was totally deaf.

I worked in an Italian cafe called Peeney's. I washed up for thirteen shillings and four pence a day. I remember that they sent me to Booth's Delicatessen, which was not a Jewish shop but which had European foods, there were huge wheels of Parmesan.[48]

I was told to buy two pounds of cheese. This was ten shillings a pound. I had to scuttle back with this cheese which cost more than I would earn in a day. My delight was to stop and eat a bit on my way back to the Cafe. I also worked in the kosher abattoir and delivered kosher chickens. Poor Jews would receive a chicken every Friday for shabbat. Our family was one of those who got one.

[48] https://orders.booths.co.uk/about-us Accessed 12 June 2023.

JP: What does being a Jew and Jewish culture mean to you?

MM: Culturally, I am a Jew through and through but I am not religious. I am, however Chairman of Ealing Synagogue. Being a Jew means being socially aware to me. It's about fighting abuse and being antiracist. Being a Jew means liking argument, dissent, discussion.

In the past I would probably have been a Talmud scholar as I enjoy argument and counter-argument. I was friendly with Billy Cohen, whose father was a sign-writer.[49] His mother converted to Judaism and the Cohen's house was very polite and gentile. He used to come to our house and we used to debate but he found it too noisy. He didn't like it. When I went to his house I saw that there was fruit in a bowl and that it had gathered dust. It would not have been dusty in our house. If someone came to visit our house my mother bought fruit. Once she got in some apples for the guest. We boys devoured them immediately. She was not pleased and said 'Do you think apples grow on trees?'

I think a lot about this level of poverty now that I am not poor. We have a nice house. When we were kids there was one threadbare towel hanging in the kitchen and we all had to use that to wash and, on sports day, I had to take it to school. Now I tell myself I am a lucky chap and I have my own bath towels.

JP: Tell me about your barmitzvah.

MM: Barmitzvah training was learning the portion of the Torah by rote, taking a whole year. Repeating each word many times, one to one with the Minister. 'Vayomer' again 'vayomer' again and again.

[49] Bill Cohen is the brother of Judith Cohen referenced in Julia Pascal's text.

We learned nothing about the meaning of the portion we were to read in public nor the Hebrew language or essential Judaism. It was a one-off performance and I remember none of it today.

JP: Did you experience antisemitism at school?

MM: At Grammar School we Jewish boys were absent from the Christian prayers. We went to a separate room where we were supposed to pray but we helped one another with our homework. When we walked into assembly for the notices, the other boys would chant 'Yids' but it didn't bother me. My friend Billy Cohen was beaten up by three boys in school. We were nine or ten years old. Mrs Day, our teacher found out somehow. She said she would not tolerate Jew-baiting. She told the attackers to stand up in class and sent them to the Headmaster where they would get the cane. They said 'We have already been bashed up for this by Michael Mars'. Unimpressed, she told them 'well now go for your second punishment!' At Claremont Primary there were fifty-two boys in the class and our teacher chose two class monitors. He proclaimed 'they will be Bill Cohen and Michael Mars'. I refused. He protested, telling me that to be a monitor was an honour. I told Billy Cohen that this was no honour if the two chosen ones are both Jews. After my refusal the teacher would wallop me and make snide remarks about Jews. Antisemitism was also apparent among my fellow sixth formers. One pupil was a member of the Golf Club where Jews were not allowed. I remember asking him why. He said 'well a lot of Jews are not very nice people'. Antisemitism was also endemic in some areas of teaching. In General Studies the teacher was one of many vicars. He said that 'even today the synagogues are run by elders of the ten tribes'. I told him 'I don't mind you being out of date but not by 2,500 years.'

LEONARD MARS

In this series of interviews Leonard and Michael Mars are the only siblings featured. I have decided that they both are important not only in their own right but because of how both reveal the importance of Sarah Margolis, their mother. She emerges as such a figure in this study of Blackpool Jewry. This woman stands for the generation of tough, British-born Jewish mothers of the north who transferred their confidence and fearlessness into their children and helped them jump class and achieve great success. She is perhaps the most prominent of the dead whose presence resonates in this study. At the end of this interview, with his permission, is Leonard Mars' essay on his mother.

LM: Sarah Margolis, our mother was tough, energetic and critical of authority. She had a strong command of English, a good ability to debate, and could be very sharp-tongued.[50] She was also an anti-racist and a champion of the oppressed. Had she not had a heart condition, I think she would have had a good career as a lawyer.

JP: You said she was tough.

LM: I failed the Eleven Plus, which was unexpected because I was in the top ten of an A stream and only three children out of forty-eight failed and I was one. My mother saw the headmaster and it was decided that I should sit the entrance exam of a direct grant school. There were two minor public schools. Arnold, which was in Blackpool, was a muscular Christian school, like Rugby. It had a Matthew Arnold-type ethos with a compulsory military corps and compulsory Saturday morning school. Now, we weren't religious but my parents weren't allowing me to go to school on a Saturday morning, let alone join a compulsory military cadet corps. Consequently

[50] This is discussed more fully in Michael Mars' memories of his mother.

the headmaster suggested King Edward School in Lytham which is in a very posh area, unlike Blackpool. I easily passed the entrance exam and at the end of the first year was promoted to the A stream. I took off academically and was good at athletics, football and cricket. Later I played tennis, I played rugby for the school at every level under twelve, up to the First Fifteen Rugby team. My mother was inordinately proud of that because I think it showed in her eyes that I was a tough Jew who could take it and give it.

I didn't particularly like rugby and that's why I was good at it, because I played on the wing and could have tried to avoid any tackle I could. I was a very quick sprinter. Anyway, my dad also the idea of tough Jews. He admired professional boxers, world champions, like Kid Berg and Kid Lewis. He did a bit of sport. Well, he liked snooker but I never liked indoor games, so I never played it. I played bowls with him on Claremont Park. I was probably closer to my father than my other brothers because like me, he liked his football. And we used to go on a Saturday afternoon to watch Blackpool, and indeed we would travel to Preston to watch Blackpool or even Bolton on the trains when trains were cheap.

I went to see Lancashire play the West Indies in Stanley Park, and for some reason, although she wasn't interested in cricket, my mother accompanied me, but not into the ground. She went into the park and sat on a bench next to a lady and she said, my son is in the ground watching Lancashire play the West Indies. And the lady wryly remarked, yes, my husband's there, he's playing for Lancashire. And it was Jack Ikin who is opening batsman, good bowler and a superb field

JP: You've spoken twice about the importance of the Tough Jew. Why?

LM: I think it means two things, both physically tough and this comes from opposition to Mosley's Blackshirts before the war in the East End and in Manchester, and indeed in Swansea, where I live now. In these places Jews fought the Moseleyites. Tough in the sense of physicality. If they're coming to beat us up, we will retaliate. But also it means a kind of moral courage to challenge authority. Tough in that sense, not afraid of the authorities. This contradicts the Jews in Tsarist Russia who could never challenge the State's authority.[51] But you could in Britain. And my mother was quite prepared to take on educational authorities or other authorities. So it's toughness in that sense.

JP: You talked about the Manchester ghetto. Can you unpack what you mean by that?

LM: Well, the first stage of immigration from Lithuania to the Red Bank area of Salford near Strangeways Prison: a slum area inhabited largely by Jews and Irish immigrants. That was the ghetto which gradually moved into Cheetham Hill, which was where all four of us were born. That was a move away from the slum and the majority of people there were Jews. Temple School, where Gerald attended for five years, and I went for two weeks, had a largely Jewish intake. So that's what we mean by The Ghetto. But it's not just the physical, it's the mental outlook.

JP: What's the 'mental outlook'?

LM: A distrust of non-Jews. When we Jews were accused of killing Jesus one the Blackpool Jewish wits said it wasn't our lot it must have been those Jewish boys from Manchester. I experienced it when I was a latent anthropologist in the sixth form. This was when, out of curiosity, I attended a lunchtime meeting of the Christian Union. One of my schoolmates, a mild

[51] The memory of the Tsarist oppression of Jews is direct here and it links with Esther Morris' plays produced in 1926 Blackpool. See note 13.

fellow, was giving a speech during which he called Jews 'Judases'. But nobody ever called me a dirty Jew.

JP: Did you go into Religious Education classes?

LM: At King Edward School in the first week of attendance, our teacher, Reverend Martin, asked if there were any Jews in the class. I put up my hand and he said 'we'll have to do the "Old Testament"', as he called it. Well, I didn't need to do the Old Testament because at primary school, under my mother's advice, she said, 'go into prayers in the main hall but don't say the name of Jesus'.[52]And I got to love the hymns and I still do. I listen to *Songs of Praise* and sometimes join in.[53]

JP: Can you remember any of those titles of those hymns?

LM: I liked *Onward, Christian Soldiers*. In Habonim we parodied it *as Onward Jewish Soldiers*. At King Edward the first week, I went into general prayers with six hundred other boys but after a week I realised that about thirty students who came into assembly after prayers were Jewish boys. I joined them and noticed their hesitation at walking the fifty yards before six hundred kids. I did not hesitate. I led them in. I didn't see why we should be timid. There were more Jews than Catholics in King Edward school: the Catholics had their own educational system. There were three or four covert Catholics, but they were outnumbered by thirty Jews and more or less 600 nominal Protestants.

JP: Were you religious?

[52] This was something my mother also told me and is echoed by many of the interviewees here.
[53] Songs of Praise is a BBC programme that has been broadcast since 1961. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006ttc5 Accessed 12 June 2023.

LM: We very rarely lit candles on a Friday, which my wife and I do. When we first went to Blackpool, we did not join the synagogue. It cost too much. We were non-members. Gerry had his barmitzvah the first year, but that was despite not being a member because he'd been more or less trained for it in Manchester. We attended Hebrew classes on a Sunday morning and two nights after school. Because we were not members we were charged double the fee. Two shillings a week. As for my father I hardly spent time with him as a child. He got up about 4:30 to get the train to Manchester and came home around 7.30pm. I never saw him read any Yiddish book or Yiddish paper. Never heard any jokes from him. So it was thin on Yiddish humour. I played football for Blackpool Maccabi as a schoolboy and we played in Liverpool.

JP: It was quite Zionist, wasn't it?

LM: There were three Zionist youth movements. The Orthodox one was Bnei Akiva which didn't exist in Blackpool, and I wouldn't have joined. Hashomer Hatzair, which was quite Stalinist in the early 1950s. Habonim was in the middle. It was close to Mapai.[54] But Habonim was the only Blackpool Zionist movement. We used to go there on Sundays. The place was a kind of glorified Nissan Hut.

JP: Yes. Was your family Zionist?

LM: Well, to some extent. My father's mother was a religious Zionist. She was a follower of Rabbi Kook. My mother, supported Zionism but not in an active way. She did encourage me to go with Philip Bloch, the Head of the Blackpool Jewish National Fund, who owned the Brererton Hotel, to collect the blue boxes.[55] My mother, who was quite secular, encouraged our Zionist

[54] Mapai was the Israeli Labour Movement. David Ben-Gurion was its leader.
[55] The Blue Boxes were in most Blackpool Jewish homes and they were collection boxes for Israel organised by the Jewish National Fund.

activities. Though most Blackpool Jewish parents didn't want their kids moving off to Israel. Well, in the 1950s it was quite a tricky place to be however my mother encouraged us to go to Habonim.[56]

JP: When did you learn about the Shoah?

LM: As a young teenager but I learned much more about it when I later did research in Israel for my doctorate and I met people for the very first time with tattooed numbers on their arms. My father didn't talk about the Holocaust. We did not know which shtetl our grandparents came from only that it was in the region of Kovno or Kaunas.[57]

JP: Did you learn Yiddish?

LM: I don't know any Yiddish. When I'd learned Hebrew, Yiddish was frowned upon in Israel. There were no university chairs of Yiddish. Yiddish was synonymous with the Ghetto mentality which promulgated the myth that the Jews went to the slaughter like sheep. This is not compatible with the concept of the New Tough Jew: the Sabra.[58] So when I said to my father, 'it's a pity you didn't teach us Yiddish' with a dismissive wave of his hand, he said, 'what's the point?' We did know a few words like 'gonif', 'mamser' and 'shiksa'.[59]

JP: You have spoken of a double identity. What's coming across to me is the huge class divide between Jews.

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[56] Habonim was an internationalist socialist Zionist movement.
[57] Many Jews who emigrated to England came from Lithuanian shtetls near Kaunus sometimes written as Kovno or Kaunas. As they were very small villages, Jews would often say that they came from the nearest large town. In my own family this was also the case. I discovered that they had come from Janova which was a street with a few houses and shops. This reference also mirrors Lynne Goldstone's memories.
[58] The New Jew or the Tough Jew is charted as entering the Jewish political thinking with Max Nordau's 1892 *Degeneration*. There is a correspondence between this New Jewish identity being related to a new country and a new language: Modern Hebrew/Ivrit. The modernisation of classical Hebrew was decided as a common language for a country for Jews. Yiddish was spurned as the language of suppression and the Ghetto.
[59] These Yiddish words respectively translate as 'thief', 'bastard', 'non-Jewish girl or woman'.

LM: It was quite a gulf. Middle-class and professional Jews had motor cars. We never had a car. My father couldn't drive, my mother couldn't drive. We had bicycles. At the school I went to in Lytham St Anne's, with one exception, I never went on school trips. The students went to places like the Dolomites or elsewhere that we couldn't afford. I was working in the school holidays as a waiter or a deck chair attendant. I don't know any Jewish boys in Blackpool who worked on the deck chairs, except my family. We were conscious of being poor.

The one time I did go on holiday was because I chose to have a very small barmitzvah in 1954. My mother offered a large barmitzvah or the chance to go for a week's holiday with the school to Paris. so I chose Paris with the school. Many years later I discovered that my mother had borrowed money from a member of the Jewish community. How she paid it back, I don't know. On that school holiday, we had a very liberal teacher called Mr Cronshaw. He insisted that in France, all the boys in the holiday group had to eat a snail, at least once. But to me he said 'Mars I know it's not kosher, so you don't need to'.

JP: How much connection did you have with the middle-class, more comfortable Jews in Blackpool?

LM: We knew them through Habonim, we knew them from Cheder. And my brother Mike had more contact because in the Grammar School, he did pass the Eleven Plus.

JP: Did you eat chicken on shabbat?

LM: Oh, yeah, chicken. There was a kosher butcher, which we didn't bother with, kashrut. But we had chicken delivered courtesy of Jewish charities. The poulterer's son was Barry Teff; a good friend of ours. The Teffs were Zionists. They weren't so well off because you don't make a big living from poultry in Blackpool but they were a step above us in the economic hierarchy.

Every Shabbat we were given a chicken, largely through the help of Reverend Brown, Len Brown's father. They were also poor. Apart from that, I don't think we got kosher meat. My older brother, Gerald, did his national service and the Jewish Chaplaincy supplied all Jewish national servicemen every fortnight with kosher salami, so they would not need to eat bacon and eggs in the morning. We were conscious of being poor but it didn't stop us interacting with more middle-class Jewish kids. We all worked in the holidays and made discoveries we might otherwise have not made. For example Gerry was working on the trams. His mentor told him when get to the end of the route, you go upstairs to check the seats. He was accompanied by this conductor, and she says, 'what the hell have we got here? By God, it's a French letter, a condom, and, by Christ, it's still hot'.

JP: Tell me about your later teenage years.

LM: After King Edward School, I had a place at Edinburgh University to read French and Spanish. And then, for family reasons, I did not immediately take up that place. In 1959 my father had to retire because of ill health and Gerry got a mature state studentship to Cambridge. This meant that two incomes were lost. After my A Levels I decided to defer my place for a year or two at Edinburgh University to support the family. I worked in the Civil Service as an executive officer, which was well paid, by the way. My father could not comprehend why I didn't continue in the Civil Service, especially as an executive officer. He saw it as a cushy job with a good pension and clean working conditions. It was seen by him as a much safer option than working in a factory work with its risk of dust inhalation and lung disease, During the eighteen months in the Civil Service, I gave all my salary to my mother. It was good money for those days. And mother gave me ten shillings weekly pocket money, which was quite something for me.

I had a bike, I didn't need much. I bought books. We didn't eat out in those days. I had a girlfriend from Habonim. My mother encouraged the friendship. I don't know if Mike ever told you, but when he had non-Jewish girlfriends, she stopped his pocket money but when his girlfriend was Jewish it was resumed.

We didn't really feel very poor. Although I do remember my mother would mainly make mashed potatoes with milk, with an egg. We ate little meat or fish but we thrived. We are all six foot, at least. I'm the runt to the family at 6ft. Mike's 6ft 4", Mel is 6'1" or 6'2". And Gerry's 6ft too.

We looked for ways to make a little extra. Mike may have told you how he supplemented his pocket money. He was a trumpeter who played in the Blackpool Youth Orchestra. This meant he had the talent to blow the shofar for which he was paid. He also attended Blackpool Grammar and he an Mel were paid by Reverend Brown to become one of a minyan of men if they would come to shul before school. And I'm not sure if he paid them each five shillings or ten shilling a week. Reverend Brown knew what poverty was which meant that he was sensitive to our family's situation. It was a small supplement, but very welcome.

JP: What are your memories of the family's boarding house?

LM: The first one in Devonshire Road. I was only five. it needed to be run by a husband and wife. Auntie Dora helped mum run it. But Dora married a German Jewish refugee who had two young children. His wife, I think, had been committed to a mental hospital and she married this guy called Kurt and went up to Manchester. And so my mother packed in the boarding house. Now, we moved to a semi-detached house Avenue in North Shore. The local authority encouraged n -boarding house people to take in the overflow of visitors and in return they would not have to pay levies and taxes imposed on registered boarding houses. So we took bed and

breakfast people in one room and later in 1952 I remember when the British Empire was dissolving, we took in army families. After that we had a series of families. One had three children. They were from Salford. Sadly, the boy had a brain tumour and died in our house. Not in our house but in the hospital. Then there was another family in 1952. They were originally from Sheringham in Norfolk, which was a posh place, and her husband was an officer in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Her name was Mrs West. She had some education and she had two boys and later gave birth to a daughter in our house. Well, we were four boys. I'd never seen a little girl, you know, Cecilia being bathed. They became very good friends with my mother. We would go along the promenade with the two boys. Mel and I were closer in age to the sons. After that, I think, the army families ceased, and we had lodgers. There was a boxer and his brother for a time. And then these lodgers ceased. I worked in the Civil Service as an executive officer, so we didn't need people living with us. That was one aspect of being poor and not necessarily being Jewish, but just being poor in Blackpool. But it was a real education. I worked in the Philharmonic restaurant, Foxhole Road, next door to the Philharmonic Working Men's Club, where I met people I never met before. For example, quite a few of the waitresses were Irish Catholic girls working in the summer to save money for a dowry. Now, these were peasant girls. They were sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds or maybe some were aged up to twenty. They were recruited through the Catholic Church. The owners of the restaurant were Blackpool Roman Catholics. And they got these girls coming over and they were housed with various families. They were very superstitious. I also met fish fryers who were working class. I remember George who had a bullet hole in his cheek from the First World War. He told me about working on the North Shore as a labourer. He told me he was building up those rocks in between the water. He talked about 'frying arse holes in in batter'. What a lovely image!

I get to this restaurant at nine a.m. and the mainstay of the restaurant was fish and chips with peas, bread and butter and a cup of tea. It cost two shillings and sixpence. If it was plaice, it was three and six. So before waiting on tables, I had to butter loaves of bread and I would butter these twelve or fifteen loaves with so-called butter. It was written on the menu as butter but there was no trade description then. In fact it was margarine with 10 percent butter in it. People did not like the crusts and they were not served so I used to butter the crusts and eat them. I learnt something about working class culture, the Pater Familias. They would come off the beach to have their lunch, having returned their deck chairs and come in, either from the working men's club where you could drink, or from the beach, and the father would say, 'I'll have roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, roast potatoes'. It was more expensive. 'And the wife will have fish and chips and the kids will have half portions of fish and chips'. Well, this was amazing to me because the father should have priority and the kids and wife should have less, because in our family it was the parents who did without. My dad and my mother had less of a nutritious diet than we boys. I saw this pattern repeated with several families in the restaurant. That was a culture shock for me.

JP: That's something Michael, your brother said, the working class boys he was at school with, tended to do the same jobs as their fathers whereas the Jewish boys, achieved much more. What you are saying here is that in the Jewish family, it's the children that matter more than the parents?

LM: Yeah, well, that was the case. In fact, in some cases too, the non-Jewish working class kids who did pass the Eleven Plus some were not permitted to go to the Grammar school in case they got uppity whereas my parents – or my mother, you can forget my dad in this decision – thought that their children should get as much education as they could. I noticed when I went to Scotland that there was a difference, that the Scottish working class parents encouraged their kids to go to

university. And in Wales, too, the Welsh working class, particularly the miners, encouraged their kids to go to Grammar School. It probably was general in the English working class that most of them would encourage them. But there was a significant minority who would not let their kids go to Grammar School.

JP: Where was your family politically?

LM: They were always Labour. I've always been Labour, except during the last elections when I would not vote for Jeremy Corbyn on the grounds of his antisemitism.[60] So I voted Lib Dem. I've never voted Conservative. And I voted a Social Democrat in the eighties with Shirley Williams and the others. So I felt the Labour Party was getting away from me then.[61]

[60] Jeremy Corbyn was Leader of the Labour Party 2015-2020.
[61] Sociology and Anthropology 4)1): 37-42. 2016 DOI: 10.13189/sa.2016.040106 Downloadable full text: http://www.hrpb.org/download/20160130/SA6-19605387.pdf

Memories of Mam by Leonard Mars

My mother Sarah, the tenth and last child of Moses and Sabrina Abel, was born in Manchester in November 1913. Her Jewish parents were born in the UK, her father in Cardiff and her mother in Plymouth, and neither spoke Yiddish unlike my father Ellis and his parents, who were immigrants from Lithuania and who arrived in Manchester in the 1890s.[62]

My mother was nine years old when Sabrina died in 1923, and she was raised to some extent by her elder sister Dora, who was seventeen years of age. At nine Sarah suffered her first bout of rheumatic fever which recurred when she was thirteen and again when she was twenty-four. When she was eleven years old she won a scholarship to a Girls' Grammar School, but her education was hampered by her ill health. When she was eighteen, she married Ellis and a year later gave birth to my elder brother Gerald, so that she became a teenage mother with no maternal role model to guide her. Because of her heart condition she had been advised never to marry, but if she did then never to have children. She defied that advice and bore four sons.

Sarah (we always called her 'Mam') was a dynamic, entrepreneurial person, unlike Ellis, and in 1946 took her family to Blackpool to open a non-kosher boarding house with the help of Dora, by then divorced and childless. Ellis continued to commute to Manchester to work in a clothing factory as he had done from the age of fourteen. She moved out of the Manchester Jewish quarter in Cheetham Hill to a town with a small Jewish community. The move was to mark a new beginning, signified by changing the family name from Margolis to Mars. She hoped that economically, educationally, and health-wise her young family (her sons were aged twelve, five, three and six months) would prosper. Her rationale was based on the fact that workers had received holidays with pay in 1938, but because of the war had not been able to take advantage

[62] Sarah Margolis (20 November 1913-February 1967). Ellis Margolis(29 August 1903- May 1976).

of those vacations. The boarding house venture proved too onerous when Dora moved to Manchester in 1948 to marry a German Jewish refugee who had two young children. Consequently the family moved to a semi-detached house in North Shore Blackpool, where Mam rented out the main bedroom as a bed sit to a series of individuals and military wives and children when the British Empire was winding down. So we had families from Egypt and Cyprus in the early 1950s, a young married couple, a boxer and his brother. Sarah provided bed and breakfast to these tourists.

Mam was very protective towards her sons. For example, when Gerald, who attended the famous Balkind cheder[63] in Manchester, had been beaten, either by Reverend Balkind or one of his assistants, she went to remonstrate with the former, 'I won't allow you to beat my son'.

'Mrs Margolis if you taught these boys you would beat them.'

'Oh no, I wouldn't'.

'Yes you would.'

'No, I would not. I would kill them, and that is why I am not a cheder teacher.'

Early in September, Mam accompanied me to meet the school's teachers. We met Mr Schofield, the head of PE and Sport. 'Does my Leonard have to play rugby, Mr Schofield?'

'All the boys have to play rugby, Mrs Mars.'

'Oh, it's too rough for my Leonard.'

I could have fallen through the floor with embarrassment. Subsequently I came to agree with her about this institutionalised brutality where big lads preyed mercilessly on smaller boys.

[63]An after school religious class for Hebrew education.

However, she was inordinately proud of my representing the school in this sport at every age level up to the first XV.

Although my parents did not have to pay fees, because they were means-tested, it was still expensive to send me to King Edward's, first, because the bus fares were dear, second because the school uniform was costly since it had to be purchased from an outfitter's in St Anne which enjoyed a monopoly, and third, because school lunches (five shillings per week) were more expensive than those at Blackpool Grammar. Here Mam manifested her enterprising skills and also the sense of morality that she had instilled in her sons. My brother Gerald, who was doing his national military service in the RAF, sent home ten shillings per week from his modest pay as a contribution to the bus fares and lunches. In addition, he despatched his ration of kosher salami[64] to our home. Mam bought the uniform for the first year of school but subsequently purchased a Singer sewing machine and tailored a blazer, having cut out the house badge that had adorned its predecessor

Mam was proud that I was good at Latin, which I studied at 'A' level, since I believe that she regarded it a sign of social distinction. She insisted that we pursue our education as far as we could possibly to earn a degree at university like our next door neighbour's son who had been to Cambridge. One day on the phone (more about that later), I heard her sharp retort to her sister Annie, who suggested that she remove us from school at fifteen so that we could earn money like Annie's two sons. Mam remarked that, unlike our cousins, her children were bright and would continue in education. Her caustic humour extended to another of her sisters, Miriam, who had boasted that her daughter in law spoke beautifully as she had received elocution lessons and also spoke two foreign languages. 'Ay! But does she speak any sense?'

[64] Issued by the Jewish chaplains to Jewish servicemen.

The first army family that we received as lodgers was an officer's wife and her eight-year-old son Rodney who had arrived from Egypt. One day Rodney dropped his sweet wrapper on the floor and left it there. Mam told the boy to pick it up, only for his mother to say, 'In Egypt Abdul picked it up', which elicited the fierce response, 'Well there's no bloody Abdul here! Pick it up'. Subsequent army families had between one and three children. How did Mam accommodate these families in a semi-detached, three bedroomed house? Part of the answer is that she bought a bunk bed which I and my two younger brothers, Melvyn and Michael, carried from a house in South Shore along the promenade to our home in North Shore. The three of us slept in the medium-sized bedroom.

Her sense of justice and her rejection of racism was shown in our first boarding house in 1946. On a day of torrential rain, a black West Indian airman, dressed in his drenched uniform, knocked at the front door and asked Mam if she had any accommodation. She invited him in and told him to go into the dining room where she was serving dinner. Instantly one other guest murmured his disapproval about black people. Mam retorted that it was shameful that a man who had fought for Britain should be so maligned. It turned out that the airman had been rejected by numerous landladies before he arrived at our place.

Mam's enterprise. In the early 1950s we acquired a telephone – a party line, i.e. shared with a neighbour who was the centre half for Blackpool Football Club.[65] Mam decided that to make the phone pay its way she would open a residential letting agency. This was a short term venture which did bring in some income. Another enterprise was the making of lamp shades which she taught herself from a book. After she had ceased to host army families, in her late forties, she took paid employment as a demonstrator for Ovaltine, a company that manufactured a beverage

[65]Eric Haywood who had played in the F.A. Cup Final in 1948 and 1951.

and biscuits. Since she did not drive she was collected by taxi at various stores, usually the Co-op. She proved successful in this job until her poor health obliged her to retire.

Sarah and Ellis would go almost every Saturday night to the Palace of Varieties at the Palace Theatre and Gerald would act as baby sitter to his brothers, until at sixteen he left to work in London before his conscription into the RAF. Mam particularly enjoyed the bawdy, risqué, humour of the 'Cheeky Chappie', Max Miller, the crooner Frankie Vaughan, and the music of Rawicz and Landauer. One of her favourite singers was Fats Waller with songs such as *Ain't misbehavin'* and *Your feets too big* and Nat King Cole with his velvety voice

In 1959, the family was hit by a double loss of income. My father had to give up his job for health reasons, and my elder brother Gerald who had just gained a mature State Scholarship to Cambridge University, resigned from his post in the Civil service. Thus there was no money coming into our home. I had just passed my A Levels and had a place at Edinburgh University. My two younger brothers were still at Blackpool Grammar. Mam and I discussed the situation and we decided that I would defer my place at university and that I would seek employment. I joined the Civil Service as an Executive Officer. Mam instructed her sons in the rudiments of cooking, and in the skills of shopping so that we were urged to compare the prices in the three different markets located in the town centre. Sometimes we would stroll into town, and on other occasions we would walk two bus stops down to save on the fare.

Mam died at home aged fifty-three, the same age as her mother. I was in Israel conducting anthropological fieldwork. I think that, worn out, she died contented with her first grandchild on the horizon and her second son engaged to an Israeli girl, like her, the daughter of a dentist.

LYNNE GOLDSTONE

JP: Where were your parents from?

LG: Both were born in Leeds. And then my father went to live in Newcastle or Gateshead when he was about ten or eleven. And my grandfather moved there for work. At the start of the war my father joined the Air Force. During that time, my grandmother, his mother, decided that she wanted to buy a boarding house so the boarding house in Blackpool. After the war my father came to live with her. He returned to Leeds to see his grandfather and that's where he met my mother at a Jewish youth club. They married in 1947. She joined him in Blackpool and that's where I was born, in a nursing home in Reeds Avenue. It was called Clovelly. At that time we lived near South Shore near Squires Gate airport. Rumour has it that the first word I ever said was airplane.

JP: Let's go back to your grandparents. Where were they from?

LG: My maternal grandmother was born in Leeds and was proud of being English born. My maternal grandfather, I think was born in Lodz in Poland. My paternal grandparents were born in, I think it was Lithuania. Well, it was Russia then. But the thing is, oh, a few years ago, we went on a Baltic cruise. And we went to Lithuania. And there was a map as you came out of the port. And it showed a place which I'd heard of before Kaunas in Lithuania. Yes, and my grandmother's maiden name was Kaunas. Now I'm unable to find out if that's where they actually came from. Because it's one of those things, they never really used to talk about their early life. And when you want to know about it, there's sort of no one alive or there's no one around. So it's quite frustrating.

JP: Did they speak Yiddish?

LG: My grandfather. Yes. He used to speak Yiddish. In fact, my husband and I were only talking about it the other day. They used to talk Yiddish if they didn't want the child to know what you know, understand what they were talking about. And I can remember as a child saying 'Why do you talk funny?'

JP: How important were your grandparents in your life? Were they in Blackpool all the time?

LG: Yes, yes. Because my grandmother, my maternal grandparents who lived in Leeds, probably lived about three miles from where I am now. When I was about three, they decided to come to Blackpool because I was the only grandchild. My mother was the only child and I was the only grandchild and apparently that they were missing me. My parents didn't have a car and there were no motorways in those days. So it was sort of – travelling was, you know, wasn't easy. So they came to live in Blackpool. Oh, yes. They were only there for about three years when my grandfather died. My maternal grandfather died. So I was very close to my grandma.

JP: What are the names of these people?

LG: My grandmother, my grandparents, my maternal grandparents, well, I think their actual real name was Kershonblatt anglicised to Kershaw. My paternal grandparents were Goldstone.

JP: And what were their first names?

LG: my maternal grandparents were Dora and Sam. My paternal grandparents were Annie and Harry.

JP: Were they orthodox?

LG: They kept kosher homes, and they went to synagogue three times a year and culturally they were Jewish. I wouldn't say that they were, you know, sort of strictly orthodox.

JP: You had the boarding house?

LG: My maternal grandma, Annie did but I can't remember her having it though she was in partnership with her sister, Pearl, and I remember going there but I have no recollection of my grandma running it.

JP: What was the name of it?

LG: It was 16 Charnley Road Blackpool. But I can't remember the name.

JP: Was it kosher?

LG: No but it did have Jewish customers and Jewish guests.

JP: Are you an only child?

LG: Yes.

JP: When were you born?

LG: 7th of May 1950.

JP: Is your name Lynne after anybody?

LG: Yes. Apparently, it's after my maternal grandmother's mother whose name we think was Lily. And I think my middle name is Eve. And I think that could be after – I think it's my grandfather's grandmother. But they don't know where the Eve actually, you know, sort of built in her name was actually – I think it was some sort of some sorts of similarity.

JP: Tell me about growing up at the primary school, the infant primary part.

LG: I went to it actually because I think that's when you couldn't start Primary Infant School, until you were nearly five, my parents or my mother decided to send me to school at nearly four

because I was an only child and I think they were concerned that I was getting bored. They sent me to Terra Nova, a private school. It was an old church building or an old Sunday school building in Forest Gate off Whitegate Drive. This was the 1950s. It was run on old-fashioned lines. Etiquette dictated that we shake hands with the headmistress. The boys wore caps and had to take them off when they saw her. And I think my parents got a bit fed up paying the fees and realised that maybe I wasn't benefitting. I started Stanley School in the middle of the first year in junior school. I started at the February half term, which is in one middle.

JP: What year?

LG: 1958. I was nearly eight. Mr. Swift was the teacher.

JP: Were we always in the same class?

LG: It was the second year when we were in Miss Dutton's class. I was advanced at Terra Nova and the work that was taught at Stanley I had already been taught. I was Because I getting top marks. So they moved me up to the upper class. So that's how we came to be in the same class when we were seven or eight.

JP: What do you remember of that period?

LG: Being in the school play in Miss Dutton's class.

JP: What was it?

LG: I can't remember but I was a sunflower in an old bridesmaid's dress. I think you were the queen. I have a recollection of the fairies. The fairies around us. Remember that?

JP: Were there any other Jewish children in our class?

LG: You and I were probably the only girls. There was a boy called Philip Myers. He had gingery hair. And there was Stephen Lefton.

JP: Did you go into to school prayers at morning assembly?

LG: No, no I didn't but I can't remember what I think. I think. I don't think so. Or I think we came in for notices at the end of the prayers. I can remember staying in the classroom.

JP: I'll tell you how you know, I know all the hymns, which means I went to school prayers. Yes, yes. My mother said, uh, you can sing the prayers of God, but you can't say that Jesus is the son of God. And I remember mouthing and not saying.

LG: Mouthing, oh, maybe. Maybe we did. Maybe I did. Maybe, maybe. I'm thinking about senior schools.

JP: Almost everyone I know who've interviewed about period was in primary school in prayers as they all know the hymns. Do you know Onward Christian Soldiers?

LG: Yes. And there was a school hymn wasn't there at Stanley School? Was it Praise my soul, the king of heaven? I remember now. It was led by the Head Teacher, Mr Hall.

JP: Were you aware of being Jewish?

LG: Oh, yes. Yes.

JP: In what way?

LG: My parents kept kosher and did not allow me to eat school dinners. Every day I had to trek home at lunchtime on the 16 or 16b bus to eat. I had time off school for New Year and Yom Kippur. My mother lit candles every Friday night. On Sundays I went to cheder. I did not enjoy it.

JP: did you go to ballet?

LG: I went to Elsie Bradley's School on or near Hornby Road. Then I went to Laura Webb's Ballet School.

JP: We were we at Laura Webb's at the same time?

LG: I think I was, but I think you were a higher grade than I was. I think I probably got to about grade two or something.

JP: Did you take part in festivals?[66]

LG: No.

JP: How far did the entertainment business touch your life? Were your parents in any way connected?

LG: No My father had his own shop up to me being about seven.

JP: What kind of shop?

LG: It was a menswear shop on Central Drive. He worked seven days a week in the summer season. So the holiday industry probably touched our lives, but probably not the entertainment side of it.

JP: Did you go to the circus?

LG: My mother did not want to go, it was not quite her scene, so my grandmother took me to the circus. I used to go to the children's ballet. My parents were very keen on variety shows. So I was, you know, occasionally taken to the theatre. Yes.

[66] Blackpool Summer Dance Festivals were a high point in the calendar of these ballet schools. I took part in several.

JP: How, how would you describe your family in class terms?

LG: I used to feel that living in Blackpool most of the Jewish people were quite sort of, upper class- sort of well off. Yeah. Apart from myself and I mean, once I moved to Manchester, then to Leeds, I realised that this was a wrong assumption. In fact there was a kind of snobbishness about material wealth. As I got to be a teenager, as I got to my early twenties, I would hear about who had the biggest car.–

JP: And where were you in this analysis?

LG: it's hard to say. I mean, I can't recall ever being needy, you know. But whereas the other teenagers were offered driving lessons for their seventeenth birthday and then a car, I was 25 till I got mine. And although designer clothes were not the fashion for young people during the 1960s, I was aware that there was a pressure to outdo one another in how one dressed. And I found as well that I think that they were quite cliquey.

And what I felt –because I left school at 16, went to work – and a lot of the Jewish contemporaries maybe stayed on at school or maybe went to college or something. When you were actually working at 16, you were sort of quite in your mind a minority.

JP: Did you pass your Eleven Plus?

LG: No. My parents, my father especially was horrified. The only compensation that my parents got for that was that Tyldsley School was around the corner.[67] So I didn't have very far to go, you know but it didn't have a particularly good reputation. My teachers told my parents that at parents' evening that I was probably in the wrong school.

[67] https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C6654625 Accessed 5 July 2023.

JP: And what do they mean by that?

LG: That I would've probably been better off in a more respectable, that's probably not the right word, but you know what I mean. I wasn't a high- flying academic but I wasn't too bad. But I think the thought that I would've been probably better off in a school with a better reputation. Pupils were dressed scruffily. They thought I would have fitted better at a school like Elmslie, Collegiate or maybe Queen Mary but I was not transferred.

JP: So why not? Do you think because girls weren't valued in the way that boys were? Had you been a boy...?

LG: I think so, yes. Yeah. I've thought about this many times and I've had discussions with people about it. Girls were taught domestic science. Boys learned metalwork and woodwork. I would've loved to have done metalwork and woodwork. Tyldsley had previously been separated into the boys and girls' school. I think the year before I joined it became co-ed and the headmaster, Mr. Rose, had been the headmaster of the boys' school. And the head mistress of the girls' school became the deputy head. Therefore the head of the boys school was probably very boy-orientated because he'd headed up an all boys' school and he was probably uninterested in the achievements of girls. Was I a late developer, is this also a component? Some girls of twelve were interested in the boys and that wasn't for me. It could have. I mean that might have been my Jewish upbringing as well. Therefore I could have achieved more academically in a school that had a focus on girls' equal education.

JP: Were there other Jewish girls at this school?

LG: There was Anne Tax, Bess Tax' cousin.[68] My cousin June was another and there was Susan Schuz who was in the first year when we were either in the fourth or the fifth. I think she lives in Manchester. I think she's called Rose now. I did meet her actually through a mutual friend many years ago.

JP: Did you encounter any antisemitism as a child?

LG: No. Yes. There was an incident that I actually didn't take too seriously, but my cousin did. And it resulted in my auntie a mother going to school and seeing the head teacher. And it was the maths teacher who made a comment. We were doing yards and inches or whatever, and he was talking about how people selling material, how they, the fold it out with their arm and measure with their nose. But he said, 'of course, if it's a Jew doing this then then it's going to be shorter because Jews have long noses. My auntie actually went up to school head and complained about this. That's probably about the only instance. In fact, the children used to say,' You don't have to go to the Carol services. So aren't you lucky. I'm going to be Jewish.' I don't think it was antisemitism. It was more envy.

JP: But this was at Tyldsley?

LG: Yes, yes.

Julia: How aware were you of the other Jewish families in Blackpool?

LG: My parents had a few Jewish friends, Jewish couples that they were friendly with. And my father worked for a Jewish business. I used to go to the youth club. So I knew some Jewish people. My parents, socialised more with other Jews than I did. By the time I'd left school, my

[68] Brother and sister Bess and Leon Tax were important members of the Jewish community. Bess Tax writes a reference to the demise of the United Synagogue. See footnote x

father was quite involved in the synagogue and my mother was on the ladies committee. They knew everybody.

JP: Did they entertain?

LG: I can't remember. No, I can't remember having meals at other families' houses. But I think my parents used to have people around. My mother would make sandwiches and rolls or whatever they call Victoria sponge, you know, something like that. I can remember sitting on the armchairs, balancing a plate on my knees. Yes, yes.

JP: What was your ambition when you were a girl?

LG: I wanted to be a teacher, an English teacher or a French teacher. Cause I really liked French and English. But I realised that to do that I would have to get good GCE results and go to Collegiate to do my A Levels. And that wasn't realistic.

JP: Because?

LG: Because I don't think I could actually have gotten the grades, the GCE results. Teaching at Tyldsley wasn't all that good. And in the last year you were very much left to your own devices. We were in what was called the fifth form block. This was actually a prefab at the end of the playground. And I think maybe that's what they actually mean about how I wasn't suited to that sort of environment.

JP: It sounds tacky and not encouraging.

LG: It didn't do much for me. I only ended up with a few GCEs. We had careers information. And Mrs Sanderson, the geography teacher, promoted the Civil Service to us for employment. There were many government departments, the Premium Bonds the Department for Work and

Pensions and the Land Registry. Mrs. Sanderson gave out leaflets and the entry requirements were only two O Levels and I thought, oh, if I can't get to do my A Levels, why not. In those days, a clerical assistant earned about six pounds a week. And my mother said 'maybe that's a good thing to leave school at 16 then you don't have the aggravation of exams and you've got yourself a job. So that's what I ended up doing.

JP: Straight from school?

LG: Before I got my exam results the Head Teacher Mr Rose told me that there was a job as junior clerk in a solicitor's office but I told my parents 'I don't want to work as a junior clerk in a solicitor's office. I have to aim a bit higher than that,' but my mother said, 'oh, well, yes, but it'll be experience until you get your GCE results. Even answering the phone's experience, you know?' I finished school on the Thursday and on the Monday I was working at the solicitor's very small office. There was myself, the secretary, the solicitor and a legal clerk. I was filing which wasn't really me. I used to go around Blackpool to different solicitors, delivering documents and that sort of thing. In the meantime, I'd applied to work for Customs and Excise and I got an interview. My 'career' as a legal clerk lasted about ten weeks. Most of my life I have worked in St. Anne's. I started working for Customs & Excise and for the Premium Bonds. It was great working in St Anne's Square. I managed to get promoted up a couple of grades and then we moved to Manchester. My mother wanted us to leave Blackpool in 1979 as my dad died in 1978. We moved to Manchester and I was fortunate to get a transfer to Bolton. So actually I wasn't commuting into Manchester, I was commuting the other way. And then I was there two years and I came to Leeds. I got married and managed to get a transfer to Leeds.

JP: What year did you get married?

LG: 1981. When I was thirty-one.

JP: And did you marry a nice Jewish boy?

LG: Yes. Well he was an accountant, still is, and I was at the office, so we thought it was a good match.

LG: So we were eleven years old the last time we spoke!

JP: It's very interesting to me. Do you remember the Beatles coming to Blackpool?

LG: Wow. Yes.

JP: Did you see them?

LG: Oh, yes. Yes. I came to the ABC Theatre in 1963 because my dad knew somebody who worked in the box office of the theatre. And we got –myself and June, my cousin, and a school friend – we got second row seats. So that was amazing. And when I spoke to people and people I've worked with, you know, it's almost like I made history, you know? They were, like, please, please me. Yeah. And everybody screamed. All the girls screamed. Oh, they were screaming. Yes. Which was a bit, we didn't scream, so it was a bit. Yeah. Oh gosh, yes. I mean, about Blackpool, one of the things about the entertainment…I've seen a lot of sort of well-known people at the theatre in Blackpool, because they used to come to Blackpool and there were – not like now, you know, like the arenas – but there were smaller theatre, so yeah, in fact, I saw them twice. Saw them at the Opera House as well. Yeah, it was about 1965.

JP: Did you work in the holidays or did you go away? What did your family do?

LG: well, we used to go away. We didn't go away every year, but we used to go away September, just before we went back to school. Or maybe the last week after August Bank

holiday, you know, just because I can remember coming back from holiday and going to school the following day. We never went – because my father was involved in the shop and sort of directly with the holiday trade – So we went to, Bournemouth. We rather liked Bournemouth, and we went probably about two or three times; there were Jewish hotels in Bournemouth. So we liked to do that. Went to Torquay. Went to Llandudno. Scotland. The year before I left school when I was fifteen, I got a job in TJ Hughes, which was formally an Owens in Bank Street in Blackpool, and it was horrendous, from being at school to starting work at half past eight in the morning and finishing at six and being on your feet all day. It was horrendous, and for like five pounds a week or something. Oh gosh.

JP: That's very interesting. Was there a sense of snobbery between the Blackpool natives like us to some extent the people coming in? People have talked about Scott's Street and the rowdiness of people.

LG: Yes. I mean, it wasn't much the snobbery, but I can remember counting the weeks until the end, you know? Cause I mean, I think the eliminations go on until January now, but I think then they're sort of finished in October. So you were counting the week just because you felt that your town was being invaded. Yes. Your culture. I think the Jews felt a bit above all that, and I think you felt – I say not threatened – but yeah, because oh, you know,

JP: The alcohol, the pubs and the rowdiness?

LG: Yes, the rowdiness. And you went into town on the sabbath, and you went to town on a Saturday afternoon, it was horrendous, you know? You just wanted your shops back in the world, you know? You just, you just wanted your town back. Definitely. That's the thing I didn't

like about Blackpool. You say, 'Oh, I'd love to live in a city', not realizing that cities at night, are horrendous now; I'm sure there were then.

JP: Who were your friends? Who were your close friends?

LG: I was friendly with a girl called Ruth Crystal.

JP: I remember Ruth Crystal.

LG: She lived in Kenwyn Avenue. I actually was friendly with her up until, probably actually up to maybe about the age of twelve. She was about eighteen months younger than me. She went to Collegiate. She was very musical. And my mum was quite friendly with her mum, and I think she went to Manchester University. I think we, we sort of split up because our lives took different ways. But I was very friendly with her and certainly as a chat, you know, up to the age of about 12 or maybe up to the age of her going to Collegiate. So I'd been thirteen when she was eleven. Yeah, and I was friendly with a girl called Susan Harris who was at the Collegiate as well.

JP: When did you learn about the Holocaust?

LG: At Tyldsley School. The English teacher ran a book club where you can buy books from her. She was probably an agent. And I bought *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I must have been about, thirteen, fourteen and that was the book that really had a huge effect on me.

JP: Tell me more.

LG: To see it from the eyes of a girl, you know? Cause it wasn't spoken about in those days. You know? There wasn't the Holocaust Day, there wasn't programs on television. I went to, to [H-],

you know, and it was never ever mentioned, but seen through the eyes of a girl almost my age had a tremendous effect.

JP: What about your parents? Did they talk about it?

LG: It wasn't really mentioned.

JP: But you must have had family – if you came from Lithuania – you must have had family murdered.

LG: My grandparents came early, you know, came to England around 1919–20. But they all have siblings. But they didn't seem to mention it, which is odd, very odd. Our synagogue had a trip about, it must be about six or seven years ago, to Auschwitz and, it's my daughter that actually wanted to go and we decided to share the experience.

JP: When did you have children then?

LG: Oh, I was forty-four when I had my daughter.

JP: And you have one child or more?

LG: No, just one child. She's twenty-eight.

JP: And did you want children?

LG: Always. Oh yes, yes, yes. That just took a long time. Yeah.

JP: When you left Blackpool?

LG: When I left Blackpool, yeah.

JP: Any Jews around in that period then?

LG: No. I mean like on Yom Kippur, as a child and as a young teenager, the synagogue was packed, right? Because people would commemorate those days. So I think they had like a strong Jewish identity. When I left in 1979, I was twenty nine and there were hardly any Jewish people left.

JP: What, what about Israel? How important was it. Were your family Zionists?

LG: No, not particularly, not strongly. My mum was secretary of the Blackpool Daughters of Zion. And I think that was just a social activity. My mother and I went to Israel for the first time after my dad had died in 1979.

JP: Where are your parents buried?

LG: My father is in Carlton in Blackpool, but my mother came to Leeds in 1994, and decided that she wanted to be buried here at Gilson Jewish Cemetery.

JP: Is there anything I haven't asked that you feel important to say?

LG: So the one thing I was just thinking about, there is an identity. Because when I was in my twenties and in Blackpool, and there was nothing really for Jewish young people, I used to go to a music club. I used to go to a drama group. Oh, well, you know, you're not really mixing with Jewish people. So although they wouldn't say that they were religious, it was more like a social and a cultural thing.

JP: It's because they didn't want you to marry out, presumably.

LG: Yes.

JP: And did you feel that pressure?

LG: A little bit.

JP: It’s great pressure. It was the biggest sin, wasn’t it?

LG: Yeah. Yes, yes, yes. Yeah. Absolutely.

LANCE BLACKSTONE

JP: Can you tell me about you? When were you born?

LB: 31st of May 1946.

JP: Where?

LB: Whitegate Drive Nursing Home in Blackpool.

JP: Was your name Fink or Blackstone?

LB: I was born Lance Fink. My father changed his name from Finklestine. Both my grandparents' families came from Romania. My mother's family were called Schwarz in Romania. They changed it to Black when they first came to England. Then, they changed it to Blackston. This was to differentiate my grandfather's business from that of his brother, who apparently had a habit of ordering goods on my grandfather's account (!) When I changed my name, just after university, I added the 'e' also to differentiate from the other branch of the family and partly because the name sounded odd (less English) without the 'e'.

JP: Did your father and mother come from Romania?

LB No, my father was born and raised in Salford 7. My mother was born in Burnley

JP: Do you know their dates of birth and death?

LB: Dad: 1909–1973. Mum: 1917–2010

JP: Did your grandparents come from Romania?

LB: They all came from Romania. On my mother's side, it was Piatra which is in the province of Neamt. And on my father's side, I don't remember the name, but it was about seventy miles away. They met in Manchester.

JP: Any other names from the grandparent's side?

LB: They came right at the end of the 1800s. I can't speak about my father's side, but on my mother's side my grandfather came by train to Hamburg and then by boat to Harwich. One of my cousins still has the ticket. They started out in Yorkshire. My grandmother told me that there were relatives or friends there already and then they found their way, via a stop in Leeds, to Cheetham Hill, Manchester, where there was a small Jewish community. I read that the community was not mainly Romanian origin to start with and they were not particularly welcomed into the local community/shul. But, as more Romanians arrived, a small Romanian community established itself.

JP: Did you know your grandparents?

LB: My maternal grandfather Harry Finklestine. He was very ill with some kind of lung problem. So, he was not somebody I knew very well, because he was usually in bed in his room. (I knew his second wife, Bessie) Usually, when we went to visit him, he wasn't fit to be seen. Occasionally, I was brought in to see him and he was so overjoyed that he would cry. I'm afraid he was hard to deal with for a child as he had a lot of phlegm and a lot of snot. Often, he would be so overcome that I had to be led out of the room.

JP: Did he speak Yiddish?

LB: Oh, yes. He would have spoken Yiddish.

JP: Did you hear Yiddish as a child?

LB: Not much. Like a lot of Anglo-Jewish parents, my parents wanted to put that European shtetl history behind them. They didn't want to talk much about it, and they didn't want me to hear much Yiddish. The only time they really spoke Yiddish was when they didn't want me to understand. Classic. They adopted a kind of quasi-Englishness you know; my father was always telling me how Englishmen behaved. Stiff upper lip, sang froid, play with a straight bat and all that kind of very English stuff. I think it was just a desire to be very English.

JP: Why did they come to Blackpool?

LB: They went there on their honeymoon – that was during the war. Blackpool was just beyond the bombing range. My father was in the fire brigade and was invalided out eventually: he inhaled smoke during the fire-fighting. My mother worked for an insurance company. She was one of six children, and because the other children didn't go on to any further education, she was not permitted to. The headmaster wanted her to be a doctor. However, she was not permitted because that would have been humiliation for her brothers.

JP: Do you know what school she went to?

LB: They would have been in Stanley Grammar School, Burnley and then I don't know what age she found her way to Manchester.

JP: Did you ever go on the Golden Mile?

LB: A bit. But this was not of much interest. We did, however, go the Pleasure Beach. There was one particular place that we always used to go right at the beginning of the Golden Mile, which

was a horse race where you bet on a mechanical horse. That's the only thing I remember. And then there was the laughing policeman, the ice rink, going ice skating.

JP: Michael Mars talked about there were two Jewish twins on the Golden Mile and he only knew that because he delivered kosher chickens to them.[69]

LB: I don't recall that particular one but there were indeed 'freak shows'. Some of the Mars family had summer jobs there. I remember Mike working for a Blackpool rock emporium.

JP: So he knew about these twin women, in various dwarf setting and he only knows the Jewish because he delivered chickens and he delivered to their house. And I can't get a reference.

LB: When I was a kid, there was a Jewish baker. I occasionally went there to get onion pretzels and bagels on a Friday. Very nice guy. Very kind, very sweet. Somewhere near Devonshire Square. Near King Street and Cookson Street

There was also a Kosher butcher (Freedmans) and there was Titanic's, a non-kosher deli but we could buy 'Jewish' food there. (We were warned about this in shul!)

JP: I remember Booth's Delicatessen. Titanic's and Booth's were not kosher.

LB: There was another deli. Probably in Queen Street, but I remember they used to sell gherkins. As kids, we often went there as a crowd to buy gherkins.

JP: I remember my mother going in to buy käse and smetana and I used to think why is she buying cares? Because I didn't know it was Yiddish. She seems to have enough cares. So that was a Jewish deli, but it wasn't, it was just very Eastern European. I know my mum used to go in

[69] An area that is not covered here is the itinerant Jewish individual, often an entertainer who is not a star name- who did not take part in synagogue or Jewish social activities. The suggestion by Michael Mars that there were two Jewish women taking part in popular 'freak shows' suggests that a particular Jewish experience is therefore lost.

there, but Titanic's sold wurst and things were awful; really, really bad stuff. We used to turn it into 'hamburgers'.

JP: Do you remember a tea shop on Queen Street? My mother used to take me. It doesn't exist, I can't find it anywhere, it's very strong in my memory. Many tiered platters. It's near the Library and the Grundy. I remember it but I don't think we ever went in.

LB: No. I remember the Library and the Grundy. The library was my second home. I also spent a lot of time in the Grundy. They had a Picasso dove. Not much else.

JP: Did your mother make traditional Jewish food apart from the Romanian?

LB: East European food. I always thought of it as Jewish food, but I've subsequently discovered it's mainly East European food.

JP: And can you say what that was?

LB: Stuffed elzl. We didn't get that very often, but I loved it. If you describe to anybody how it's made, they look at you like what? Stuffed chicken neck with lots of schmalz and cracked wheat. We'd obviously had chopped liver, egg and onion. The usual Friday night the roast was chicken. My mother used to do that sort of poor Jewish thing of three meals out of a chicken. She would poach it for soup then braise it with some vegetables and finally finish it off by roasting. As a result, I still like chicken that has virtually no flavour left. It's just a childhood thing. Boiled to death. Zero flavour. I don't really eat chicken anymore but when I used to, I would make stock. I would then eat the flavourless meat because it was just like childhood memory. The chopped liver would be made with schmaltz made by roasting onions and the fat from the chicken on a low oven.

JP: Stewed fruit?

LB: Not so much. And then there were jellied dishes and mamaliga and they were horrible. Fish in bloody aspic. My mother was not the greatest of cooks. She made Lancashire Hotpot, not particularly well. We'd have the chicken giblets in the chicken soup – the foot, the egg, the pupick, and the neck. Plus Mendles & Kneidels. Nothing went to waste. I got the neck. My brother got the leg. We used to fight over the (non-kosher) unfertilized egg. The butcher always asked if you wanted it, but the shul found out about it and at cheder, told us not to eat it. Nevertheless, the butcher continued to provide it except when there was the occasional crackdown from the shul when they would not be on offer for a while. But after a time, they reappeared.

JP: Why is it not kosher if the chicken is killed kosher?

LB: We were told that the eggs had blood in them. So my brother and I used to sort of compete for who got that. It was a big piece of chicken and those horrible dumplings. And my father had a dish that we only had when my mum went away, you know, for an overnight stay with her mother. And it consisted of boiling and mashing potatoes. I didn't really know what he was doing but it involved raiding the larder – it was a me and my dad thing: some hard-boiled egg, and onions, and then whatever we could find. We would keep tasting it as we went along. And there was always a point where it tasted pretty good. And then my dad always added more stuff. And then it didn't taste quite so good. That was his dish, presumably some East European thing. [My research indicates it is a standard Romanian dish called Salata Orientala. It is a similar idea to what we call Russian Salad. I think similar salads crop up around Europe. In Holland I used to eat Russiche Ei which is similar.]

JP: How good was your parents' marriage?

LB: I think they made it work according to the rules imposed by their culture. It's very hard to know because kids' perception of their parents isn't always realistic. They were probably much closer than I understood at the time. You would call it a successful marriage looking at it from the outside. From the inside I don't know. My father was very short tempered sometimes with my mum – and frankly with all of us. But, you know, there was a code, and you didn't break the code. So it's very hard to disentangle how much was emotional, and how much was objective.

JP: What were your favourite subjects at A Level?

LB: History and economics. I had a good economics teacher.

JP: Were the Jewish boys, at Blackpool Grammar treated in any different way? Are you aware of there being a small coterie?

LB: Not much. I didn't experience things very differently. There was one moment when we were differentiated. Because our headmaster was a reverend – the Revered H. M. Luft. Prayers were a big thing in the morning. Jews were not allowed to go into prayers. The son of the deputy head of the Shul, Joel Rockman, tried to encourage us to do Jewish prayers, but we weren't having any of that. Anyway, we had to sit in the classroom, during 'Prayers'. When Prayers were finished, we were wheeled in. The head boy seemed to be somehow posh. His name was Lofthouse. (And I wonder if he was part of the Lofthouse family that make the Fisherman's Friend pastilles?) He used to shout in a loud voice 'Jews and Catholics!' and wave his hand to usher us in, you know, slightly keeping our heads down, but I don't think anybody felt that we were lesser beings because we were Jews and Catholics. It didn't seem to be regarded as significant. You know, we mixed with everybody else. Really quite freely.

JP: Did you have Religious Education, RE?

LB: Yes. Yes. Gentle Jesus, all of that.

JP: Oh, you had that?

LB: Oh, yes. Up to a certain age in the old Blackpool Grammar we used to go across the road to a church where we used to learn about Jesus. So I know that stuff and can sing prayers and carols with the rest of them.

JP: Where do you think your aesthetic sense comes from given what you've said about your family?

LB: I have no idea. I was very interested in art as a kid. But it wasn't a permitted career option. I was supposed to do something in business or similar. There was no conception of anything outside that. I had no mentor outside the family. So I had to be my own mentor. And I used to go to the Grundy Art Gallery. Why? I can't answer that but I knew, in my teens, that I was very interested in contemporary art.

JP: Did you attend music or dance? Or circus?

LB: Not music or dance.

JP: Did you go to the circus though?

LB: Sure. The circus at the Blackpool Tower was phenomenal. Charlie Cairoli was the famous clown. There were horses, contortionists, high wire acts and at the end the arena sunk down into the ground and was flooded with water to make an amazing waterworks display. It was also a big boxing venue and my dad used to take me there. And I later on used to go with Roy Griffins. He used to get boxing magazines. So that was an early thing. And of course, there were a number of

boxers who lived in Blackpool. We used to see them because they would come into the shop, you know, with little trophies and things to sell them and they were often punch drunk. There was a famous boxer called Brian London who fought Henry Cooper for the British and Commonwealth titles. He used to wander around Stanley Park. I bumped into him with my brother. People would buy him a cup of tea and a cake.

JP: Did you go to Stanley Park much?

LB: Yeah, I used to go on rowing boats. we spent a lot of time in Stanley Park.[70] A lot of time. I sometimes go there in my dreams. I go to lots of places from my childhood in dreams.

JP: Tell me more.

LB: Dream versions of real places. Well, okay. I used to walk to either shul or school from our house and near the Park. And so that walk, I'm often near the bus stop in my dreams. Yep. And journeys in the car to Manchester (to visit relatives). There are bits of those journeys like passing Strangeways Prison. We also drove over to Manchester via Belmont. I go to parts of Stanley Park. Not the Park as a whole but the bits that stick in my mind – for example the clock tower. The clock tower is still there next to the neglected tennis courts.

JP: So you left Bispham.

LB: Yeah. And we moved to Newton Drive. That was a move up, initiated by my mum.

JP: When was the last time you were in Blackpool?

LB: We go to visit my brother and sister-in-law. So that would have been about three years ago. I drove around Blackpool with my daughters just to show them my childhood places, to Inver

[70] https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/heritage-and-retro/retro/11-evocative-scenes-of-blackpool-treasure-stanley-park-moments-memories-and-people-through-the-years-4086271 Accessed 4 June 2023.

Road, Bispham, where I was brought up and my school, St Columba's. As kids, we used to go to the beach, after school. We always hired a chalet in Bispham, and we'd spend the evenings sometimes and weekends. so I know Bispham quite well. Squires Gate Uncle Tom's Cabin. Oh, that's another of my dream visits – I go to along Warbeck Drive in Blackpool parallel to the coast. I think there was some anxiety about catching buses back home from Bispham. There was a repertory theatre on the route that we went to. Blackpool had a lot of theatres.

JP: Did you go to the theatre?

LB: Yeah, we always went to the shows. I remember the variety with acts like the Beverly Sisters and the Crazy Gang There were always acrobats and jugglers. Frankie Vaughan, of course. He went to school with Reverend Braslavsky (head of the shul) so one day he came to cheder to say hello, like the big star he was.

JP: Do you remember Hylda Baker?[71]

LB: I found her very disturbing.

JP: Why?

LB: It felt like she hated her act. She had a sidekick, 'Cynthia' a tall man dressed as a woman who never said anything in response to her questions, so her catchphrase was 'Oh, she knows. You know, she knows'.[72] The whole thing was very tired. It felt they had contempt for the audience. And there was the Clitheroe Kid, a very short old man dressed as a boy in a school uniform. Also, rather disturbing. The best was Ken Dodd. I went to see him later on. He was brilliant. He loved his audience and was genuinely funny. I didn't particularly want to go and see

[71] Jean Fergusson She Knows You Know: The remarkable story of Hylda Baker *(Derby: Breedon, 1997). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7NUysZ7aDEQ. Accessed 5 June 2023.*

him but once I was there, it was like being fired at by a machine gun spitting jokes. Eventually, you were won over and had to give in.

JP: You mentioned your Blackpool Grammar School song.

LB: Yes it is from *The Pirates of Penzance*.[73]

The junior school had to do the girls' voices with the sixth formers singing the lower notes. The Latin Master had to do the bass solo and he was very nervous. They stopped us doing it in the end, presumably because it was ridiculous. I mean how many schools have a pantomime, a comic song as their school song? But we loved it because the Juniors and Seniors had to end by singing different verses and try to together. Of course, we rarely did.

We also had a Cheder song:

We are the boys and girls who come to cheder

We keep the Jewish standards flying high.

The things we know are grand

we learn and understand.

We learn to speak Yiddish.

We daven, make kiddush and help the Holyland

heroes of the past, we love and honour

We have our own, like the British or the French

[73] https://genius.com/Gilbert-and-sullivan-when-the-foeman-bares-his-steel-annotated.Accessed 1 June 2023.

So you need not make a fuss

'cause great nachas you'll have from us

if you're a ballabatish mensch. Oy! Oy!!

If you're a balabatish mensch.

It was cool. That was a school hater song. Again, ridiculous. But we all knew that.

JP: Do you have a tallus?

LB: Yes, yes. Well, I still go to shul but less and less. We joined Belsize Square. We joined because the rabbi, Rodney Mariner was very good. His sermons were quite impressively intellectual. But I'm afraid rabbis nowadays seem to get an awful lot of their content from the internet.

JP: Because it was a German shul, wasn't it?

LB: Yes, the origin was people from German families. And those families still run it, pretty much.

JP: Something else comes up as more of my research and in my interviews is the feeling that Blackpool gets invaded by visitors at particular times in the year.

LB: They were called the Wakes Weeks. Two weeks of holidays taken by the cotton and wool towns according to a schedule.[74] There was a calendar, which told you which towns and the mills would close down. And they would come on coaches ('charabancs') and stay with landladies.

[74] https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/20283065.wakes-weeks-meant-east-lancashire-headed-blackpool. Accessed 1 June 2023.

And so you would always know which town was due each week. The very last one was Glasgow week. That was always the week when there would be violence. The Glasgow police used to come down on the train with them because they knew the faces. So that was what was a time when you shouldn't go into the centre.

JP: Was there a sense of Yok-dom if I can put it that way?

LB: Yeah.

JP; And can you say anything about that? It's come up so many times. I want to put it on this agenda.

LB: If our parents wanted to be insulting, they would call them 'yoks' or 'goyim'. But personally, I was very uncomfortable with that. Even as a kid, I mixed with them. They were my school friends. So how could we be demeaning to them?

But I recognize my Jewishness has been diluted by a generation compared to people whose parents came here as immigrants. They're more Jewish than I am. I think there was less possibility of them living outside the Jewish world. In my case, there was a definite possibility. I mixed with Jewish and non-Jewish girls. There wasn't much choice in Blackpool.

LB: As for Manchester. In reference to food we would always stop at Laps (Lapidus).[75]

I will always remember the chips in particular, yes. But I didn't know about it until I was, you know, in my late teens,

JP: What's your memory of Cheetham Hill?

[75] Lapidus was a fish and chip shop in Prestwich which also sold fried wurst and was frequented by Prestwich Jewish youth. It was a matzo-making firm which appears in the 1901 census. The shop was closed in 1989. See https://www.manchester-forum.co.uk/index.php?topic=13916.0. Accessed 1 June 2023. See also https://jewishmanchestermemorymap.org Accessed 13 July 2023.

LB: My grandma Bertha. That's my step-grandma who grew up in Cheatham Hill. Her parents came I think from Belarus. She once told a story in front of her sister. I think her niece was recording them. She started to tell us about her parents. The only thing they knew was how to make sausages. So where do you get the lambs intestines for the skins? The only place they knew was Poland. They came in barrels by train. It was not a success because during the summer the barrels containing pickled skins fermented. The venture was a bust. So they were at their wits' end. Then a man came to her and said, would you like to make moonshine whiskey? And they said OK. He provided the still and told them what to do. And so for years, they made moonshine which he sold in Cheetham Hill. All the while, Bertha's sister was listening to this, and she became really furious, because she didn't know anything about it until that point because of course, it was a secret. They almost came to blows. Her sister refused to speak to her after that.

JP: Did you go to Manchester to meet Jewish girls?

LB: We used to go sometimes but I, I was very scared of girls, at that time, and I found it difficult to talk to them. There was somebody I had a crush on, Jane Barnett. She lived around the corner. She had a brother who had the local radio station for a while and maybe still does. It got more interesting when for some reason the girls of St Anne's became part of the scene. There were some quite attractive girls. Well, that's how I felt at the time. They seemed a little more sophisticated than the Blackpool girls.

That's when I started going out with girls. I think I had a lucky escape, because I could have had a relationship and ended up getting married at an early age. I'm so glad I didn't.

JP: Did you know Len Brown who I have also interviewed?

LB: Yes. Len was kind of thrusting and ambitious. As the son of the shamus, he was quite low down the social scale. His father had a very strong Polish accent. The story was that he was part of the Polish Air Force. They all flew over at the outbreak of World War Two. He used to take junior classes in the shul. He was very, very sweet. He would never punish anyone. He would just wag his finger and say 'someone's being naughty but I "vouldn't" mention any names!'.

But I think Len wanted to put that behind him. There was a sense of embarrassment, amongst my parents' generation, about first-generation Jews – they were a bit odd, funny accents. Didn't fit in. And they pushed all the East European stuff to one side. One of my great regrets is not paying more attention to my grandmother, because she knew everybody. She knew what boat they came over on, you know, she really knew it. And she had photographs as well. She must have sensed that we weren't interested in historical photographs from back in Romania because when she died, we discovered they had mostly been disposed of.

All I remember is black-and-white photos of people in hats standing on wooden verandas.

This is back in the old country.

JP: And you've been to Romania, you said.

LB: Yeah, we did a family trip about five years ago.

JP: And what was that like?

LB: It wasn't very successful in terms of finding any lost family, but we had fun. It was great as a bonding experience. But we didn't prepare very well. My cousin Max, who lives in Jerusalem, had been before. He made contact with the president of the and we thought maybe we'll try and find something. We were given a list of all the members of the synagogue going back and it

seemed like the most common name Schwartz! So that was completely useless. Then we went to the cemetery with picks and shovels because the place was overgrown, and took photographs. More Schwartz's! It was like you know, we're not going learn anything from this. But we had a lot of fun. Our daughters Jessica and Helena got to know other members of the family.

JP: Was there a political awareness in your family?

LB: There is a branch of the family that was 'suppressed' by my mother because they were all Communists. My father was left wing but my mother was a true-blue Tory. We weren't allowed to know these relatives. We did get to meet them once or twice I think there was one branch of the family that was in Bispham but they were considered a bit vulgar by my mother so that didn't go anywhere. We met them all at a meal at Bertha's house in Manchester but there was too much talk of left wing politics and it was just put a stop to. This was mainly in Manchester. There were stories about going to sell The Morning Star outside factory gates and that kind of thing. One was a schoolteacher.

My auntie Margaret (my father's sister) was a staunch Communist. She left Britain because it was 'degenerate'. Went to Canada, got thrown out for being a Communist, ended up in Italy married to a policeman. Auntie Margaret, the family rebel.

My auntie Betty married a non-Jew. Uncle Wally who was a sailor, a Geordie. He was on the North Atlantic route during World War One when the survival rate was very low. She became asthmatic as a result of stress. But he survived and rose through the ranks from able seaman to ship's captain. He lived at least half his life in the Far East. Doing all sorts of odd things like working for a Swedish company delivering boats to China. He was supposed to be the first Westerner to sail up the Yangtse. He delivered ships to Cuba against US sanctions and things

like that. He had a mutiny. Often he returned with a cockatoo, a parrot or a monkey. The monkeys would always escape or catch a cold and die.

JP: In Blackpool or Manchester?

LB: This is Manchester. One of the parrots was a fantastic mimic. I mean amazing. It did the sound of the milkman coming up the gravel path clinking the milk bottles ringing the doorbell and he also did my cough. I had a really bad cough.

JP: Were you a sickly child?

LB: I had pleurisy when I was five, shortly after my brother was born. And I've had chest problems ever since – a standard Jewish thing. Chest problems. So yeah, I was fairly sick. I didn't do games and things as a kid but I played cricket and rugby. I ran and I think I was actually quite good. But then there was a thing at school that it didn't do to be the first so I'd always slow down but the others knew I was faking it.

JP: Do you remember children with polio?

LB: Oh, I remember polio. I remember getting the vaccine. And I do remember somebody with braces on their leg. Yes. That was very early on. That was in Inver Road. I remember when UNESCO announced that it was eradicated. To all intents and purposes.

JP: Anything you think of? Yeah, I mean, the process of talking about will bring back things.

LB: I do remember that we used to go to Manchester to hang out as kids while the parents played these games. Klaberjass (pronounced Klabiash). Also, Kalooki, a game where the score was kept with pegs on a wooden board. And there was salted herring and always a glass of Kimmel (plum wine). 'You'll have a little glass of Kimmel? Some herring?' They loved their herring.

JP: Tell me about your paternal grandparents, Solomon and Betsy Blackston.

LB: Our grandfather Solomon was born in Piatra Neamt in Romania in 1881 (or 1879, depending on what document you refer to) to Aaron and Golda Schwartz. All I know about his early life is represented by the witness of his birth certificate, passport, and a copy of his rail and steamship ticket from Hamburg to Leeds via Grimsby dated June 1900. Leeds was his first destination in England because of family; there was an uncle of his living there, Shia Black, who had already been in England for several years before our grandfather arrived. It was in Leeds no doubt that he met our grandmother, Bessie (or Betsy) Morris. She was born in Leeds in 1884 to Abraham and Amelia. They were born in Russian Poland. Our grandparents were married in Leeds on 7 March 1907. By this time, our grandfather's family name had been Anglicised to 'Black', which he then lengthened by the addition of 'ston'. I was told that this was to distinguish him from various Black relatives who were trading on his good name in business. The only part of this story I can vouch for is the existence of a number of cousins of our grandfather (Shia Black's children, in Leeds) as well as our parents' cousins named Black.[76]

Our grandfather was the oldest of four brothers and one sister, and it seems that the whole family – including his parents Aaron and Golda – established themselves in England. The 1901 census lists the whole family as living in Leeds. There was Jack (Yankel) who, according to my father, later lived in Paris; the third son was Harry (Haim)[77] followed by Harold (Izzy or Sruel) and

[76] One of these cousins, Arthur, was a bandleader, the son of our grandfather's brother Harold. His sister was Golda Stone.

[77] Father of Golda Price and Jack Price, who died in Australia

finally Hetty.[78] Our great-grandparents are buried in England – Golda in the cemetery in Southport[79] and Aaron in Manchester's Failsworth Cemetery.[80]

Grandmother Betsy was the oldest of seven children. Her siblings were Ray[81], Ginnie[82], Izzy, David, Barney[83] and Sarah[84].

Grandfather had established a tailoring shop in Burnley where his family moved. He was naturalised in 1910 and lived at 10 Tennis Street, Burnley, with two children – uncles Sydney and Gordon (two years and six months old, respectively).

JP: How much do you think Blackpool has had an effect on your life?

LB: Well, I think I lived in my head quite a lot while I was there, I was very interested in contemporary art when I was quite young, I read a lot. So I had a whole separate world in my head, and the kind of aesthetic and sort of quasi-intellectual system while I was there. I read a lot. I mean, a hell of a lot. maybe it was a way of escaping family pressure. But I have always had my head in a book. And latterly, studying at school was very important because it was a way of escaping I knew I would suffocate if I stayed in Blackpool

JP: Tell me what you talked about escaping family pressures.

LB: I just had to escape Blackpool. Going into the family business would have been death for me. It was very constricting. My father had read a fair bit, but he was not very literate, He used

[78] Mother of Golda Carr
[79] Our great-grandmother died in 1902. She was already known as Golda Blackston. https://www.jewishgen.org/JCR-UK/Community/sefton/index.htm Acccessed 5 June 2023.
[80] https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2201492/failsworth-jewish-cemetery Accessed 5 June 2023.
[81] Mother of our parents' cousin, Ruth, who married Sam Berger and lived in Coventry.
[82] Mother of Manny Price, who married Rose, the sister of Uncle Ellis' wife, Sylvia. Cousins married two sisters. Rose and Manny.

[84] Mother of Raymond Weiner, a Leeds dentist and Mildred Sharp.

to write in capitals. Most of it was sort of romantic, like Walter Scott and that kind of thing. He had a journal where he made notes on the books that he'd read. He was kind of striving to be a provider, I suppose, a good provider, but very limited in his horizons. And, like a lot of kids I was a bit embarrassed by him. At a certain point, I despised him, and I just wanted to get out. I got the progress prize when I left school. I suspect the school just assumed that I would go into my dad's business. Maybe they thought that was my destiny. I was in the top stream at school, but I regarded myself as fairly average. But as O and A Levels loomed I thought 'I've just got get my head down'. Education was my escape route.

GAIL SHERIDAN

JP: Tell me about your parents.

JP: They were both Irish and they got together in Dublin.[85]

JP: What were the names?

GS: Zelda Stein and Isidor Shreider. Dad was born in 1914. June the 19th. Mum was born in 1917, January the 14th. They were both from poor families in Dublin. And they lived within about a mile of each other off the South Circular Road. They tended to congregate like most immigrants.

JP: Do you remember your grandparents?

GS: My mother's mother, Esther Stein was alive and my father's parents were both alive when I was a child. My father's father was Hymie Shreider.

JP: And they came from?

GS: Lithuania. Myer Stein. Zelda's father came to Dublin from Zagar at the age of sixteen. He married Esther Levin, a first generation immigrant from Waterford, Ireland. Hyman Schreider is a mystery but he definitely immigrated from somewhere to Dublin and I was led to believe it was Lithuania. His wife Tilly Shillman was the daughter of first generation immigrants from Cork, Ireland. Tilly's mother, Ada was a midwife in Dublin and delivered most of the city's Jewish babies.

JP: How do you remember them?

[85] irish hosting Jews dates back to the 11th century. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/judaic-studies-centre-for-trinity-college-1.122528. Accessed 27 May 2023.

GS: As very frum. They would look for the stars in the sky on a Friday night. They would have the Shabbos goy do all the things they could not on a Saturday. They were superstitious too.

JP: Can you give me examples?

GS: I can only tell you that my paternal grandfather was a teacher in the synagogue. That's how he earned his living. My dad's family grew up with the Herzog family. Chaim Herzog who eventually became president of Israel and his father was the Chief Rabbi in Dublin. And I remember my cousin and I went to Israel and Chaim Herzog was detailed to look after us. He had to take us out for a day, which he did. He was very good natured about it. This was around 1962. In his autobiography he referred to my father's father and said that he was the most pedantic man he ever knew and any Hebrew he ever learned he owed to him!

JP: Why did your grandparents go to Ireland?

GS: Oh the usual story. They got off the boat thinking it was America. And it wasn't.

JP: Did your parents speak Yiddish?

GS: Never sentences just phrases and words. Meschugennah. Chutzpah. Klutz. Shlep. Nosh. Shmuck. Oy vey. Shmooze. Shlemiel. Meschugass.

JP: Where were you born?

GS: Blackpool on 16 September 1943.

JP: Why did your parents go to Blackpool and when?

GS: 1940. After he qualified, dad decided there wasn't much possibility of earning in Ireland and that he would be better off in England. His younger brother Matty had already gone on that route. He had discovered that Shreider was not a good name when the war was starting so he

changed it to Sheridan. So when my father came over to England he became Sheridan. He sent for my mother and she came over to London. They married in the Bayswater Synagogue. He became a locum and was not keen to join the army during the war. This was not true of his brother who did join up. Dad was locuming in London which was being bombed. My mother was not impressed. And then he got a locum in Blackpool and she was very impressed with that so they decided to stay.

JP: What impressed her?

GS: The fact that bombs weren't falling on her! And she liked the sea. She was used to that, having been partly brought up in Dun Laoghaire. She thought it was a good place to bring up kids.

JP: You have a brother?

GS: Michael.

JP: When was he born?

GS: December the 22nd 1945.

JP: What are your earliest Blackpool memories?

GS: Probably being in the surgery in my pram. Patients would goggle at me and say 'such a sweet little baby'! I used to thrown toys out of the pram and they'd have to pick them up. My father's receptionist I remember too. She was very lovely.

JP: Did the patients come to your house?

GS: The practice belonged to a doctor who had gone to the war and dad was looking after this.

JP: A Jewish doctor?

GS: No. A Scot. I am still friendly with his daughter.

JP: Where was that house?

GS: 12 The Crescent, Cleveleys.[86]

JP: Did you learn ballet as a child?

GS: Yes at Miss Dawson's but I had two left feet. I did ballet, I did tap, that was it. And every year Miss Dawson put on a show. I was always in the chorus, never a named part. I sort of enjoyed it but I knew it wasn't really going to be one of the things I succeeded in.

JP: Which school did you go to?

GS: Norbreck County Primary School and then to Arnold High School.

JP: In your primary school were you the only Jewish girl?

GS: I think so.

JP: Do you remember prayers or hymns?

GS: I can't remember them from there.

JP: In secondary school did you go into prayers? Or did you sit out?

GS: Mostly I sat out with the other Jewish girls. But I remember learning hymns there. So maybe it was then in the music class.

JP: Do you remember the names of any hymns?

[86] Cleveleys is the next town to Blackpool along the coast going north.

GS: Now Thank We All Our God was one of them. (Gail sings a verse from the Christian hymn which is a translation from a seventeenth-century Lutheran hymn.)

JP: At Arnold School were there many Jewish girls?

GS: I only remember the name of Ann Harris. She's dead now. And Judith Goldberg.

JP: Did you have a Jewish education?

GS: I had to go to cheder every Sunday, didn't you?

JP: Yes but it was not consistent.

GS: I had to go with Michael who had to go to learn for his barmitzvah. I remember developing awful migraines every Sunday! But I never got away with it.

JP: Did you find it boring?

GS: Girls didn't really count. You know, you sat at the back and twiddled your thumbs. All the attention was on the boys.

JP: Did you mind that?

GS: That was just how it was.

JP: Did you hear any antisemitic remarks in school?

GS: Not that I remember. Did any of your other interviewees?

JP: All of them.

GS: Did they?

JP: What did being a Jew in Blackpool mean to you?

GS: I knew I was a Jew because my parents, although not as frum as their parents, were still pretty observant. They kept a kosher home. And they went regularly to synagogue. My dad was a wildcard much like your dad.

JP: Tell me more about that?

GS: Dad liked to drink. He liked to gamble. He was a typical Irishman as opposed to being a child of a frum family. He was very, very Irish. He was like your father. Dad had always been keen on the races from when he was a teenager. So he used to go in Dublin. And funnily enough quite a few Blackpool doctors were keen on the races too. So he would go with his friends or sometimes take his family. He bet big so when he lost he lost big and sometimes, not too infrequently, he won, so then we'd all get things like fur jackets. Brown Lad was the name of the winning horse which paid for these.

JP: Did he choose to back a horse at random or did he study the form?

GS: He knew about horses. That's not to say that you've got a chance of winning through studying them as horses can do strange things. But he knew about horses and he knew about jockeys. And he was sort of in with the tittle tattle about who was trying and who wasn't.

JP: Did you see any races?

GS: Yes.

JP: Where?

GS: Haydock Park and what's the other one?

JP: Aintree?

GS: No I never went to Aintree. Beverley I think it was. In Yorkshire.

JP: What was your house like?

GS: The first house we had was just after the war when Dr John Williamson returned and took back his GP practice. Then we had to find somewhere to live and this was incredibly difficult for them. We (Mum and us two children) went over to Dublin for a bit while our father tried to find a house. It was on the Bispham Road, a corner house, semi-detached with a big garden at the back. It was ideal. There were prefabs opposite and we were told not to play with the children from there. So we did! We also played with Margaret and Billy up the road: twins. I'm still very friendly with Margaret.

JP: Were your parent's very different personalities?

GS: Oh they had their fights. They were terrific fun and they shared that. Of course my father was quite volatile. When he blew up he'd sulk for days. Whereas my mother was a pacifist, a sort of pacifying influence. She didn't sulk even though he might've been in the wrong and she had every reason to, she wouldn't.

JP: How did you and your brother respond to that?

GS: We just steered clear. She would excuse him and say 'he's working too hard'.

JP: He was a doctor at the time before the NHS existed and after 1948 that must have changed?

GS: Yes. He welcomed the change. He was very much pro the NHS.

JP: What difference did nationalising the Health Service make to his work?

GS: Well in later life, he got frustrated and he said 'you know a fireman earns more money than me', and I said 'yes but you know who's to say that a fireman hasn't got an equal responsibility in the work that he does?' And he said 'but a fireman doesn't have to study for six years'. And I

said ‘well that may well be true but you’ve had the benefit of more money earlier and now he’s caught you up’.

JP: Did your father want to be a doctor? I ask because mine didn’t.

GS: I never asked him and he never said because it was always expected of him that he would and therefore he was. My mother would’ve been a great fitness trainer. But she was put in reception work. She hated it because she was an outdoors person and she hated being cooped up.

JP: What did she do as exercise?

GS: She walked and walked and walked. She did her exercises too apart from the walking.

JP: What were these exercises?

GS: A sort of lying on the floor and putting her legs up and down, standing up and bending down and touching her feet. And she was religious.

JP: ‘And she was religious’?

GS. No! No!! For that she was religious! She never missed her exercises.

JP: Where did she get that from? Physical training for a Jewish girl was unusual in that period.

GS: I have no idea. She must have read about it and decided she wasn’t going to lose her ability to do what she wanted.

JP: Were you brought up to enjoy physical activity?

GS: Yes I had to walk with her!

JP: Where did you walk?

GS: We walked up to the prom and back again. Around the block. I mean she was so entertaining to walk with. We used to play games.

JP: What games?

GS: Quizzing each other mostly. Quite often on Greek or Roman mythology.

JP: This means that your mother had a good education.

GS: No she was basically self-educated. She left school at fifteen. She was not academic but she loved English Literature and reading. But when she tried to pass an O Level in English at night school, she failed. So she couldn't do exams and she couldn't read questions and answer them. All she could do was to spill out everything she knew about that particular subject which, of course, is not what you do.

JP: And her schooling was in Dublin?

GS: Yes but I don't know the name of the school.

JP: It is interesting that she spoke of classical mythology because this suggests a lot of reading and a lot of thinking.

GS: If she had been given the chance she would have made a lot more of her life. But who's to say she didn't because she had us and brought us up. She did a lot of work for WIZO.[87] I think she was President at one stage. And she was very supportive of my dad and his work. But she did not reach her full potential in my opinion. I think she was sorry about that in her sixties and seventies.

JP: What kind of mother was she?

[87] Women's International Zionist Organisation.

GS: She was a good mother. Very supportive. But she wasn't a great cook. But she did feed us!

JP: What was her cooking like?

GS: Boiled veg and, you know, roast chicken. Nothing imaginative.

JP: What was your relationship with your father?

GS: Sometimes I would say things to needle him.

JP: Such as?

GS: My parents were very keen that I go to university so I told them both that I had withdrawn my application. He ran down to the post office to try and retrieve a letter which was non-existent. It was cruel, wasn't it.

JP: What kind of father was he to you?

GS: I adored him. I was his favourite. We were very close. I could do nothing wrong in his eyes except when I needled him.

JP: So you did go to university?

GS: I went to the LSE. My parents expected me to have an education. But I was the brighter of the two children. My brother worked hard so he got to where he wanted to be.

JP: Did your brother go to university?

GS: He went to Law School in Guildford.

JP: With hindsight what would you say the position of Blackpool Jews was at that time?

GS: Well having told you, and I think truthfully, that nobody said anything antisemitic to me, I went to synagogue and I thought that Jews were basically comfortably off and you never had to question whether they were welcome in Blackpool or not. But I have reason to question some of the Blackpool Jews. A couple in particular who were always going bankrupt and leaving small businesses unable to get their money back and then they'd start something else. And I couldn't understand why the community didn't sort of shun them. I was also conscious of how the community treated Reverend Braslavsky who led the congregation for quite some time. Do you remember that?

JP: I remember him but not this reference. How did they treat him?

GS: They basically summarily dismissed him because they wanted a real rabbi and he wasn't. He'd done the education but he had not completed it so he was just a reverend and not a rabbi. So they said 'we've found somebody and now you're out.'

JP: Who did they find?

GS: I don't remember his name but it was one of those Lubavitchers.

JP: It went Chassidic?

GS: No. He was a fairly relaxed guy.

JP: Were you aware of the class differences among the Jewish community?

GS: Not so much class but the difference in who had money and who didn't. It couldn't really be about class as we all had grandparents who had come over with nothing from Lithuania.

JP: How would you describe the Irish Jewish element in both of our fathers within this community?

GS: I think that doctors in general, not particularly Irish Jewish ones, had to let off steam somehow.

JP: How?

GS: Mostly with drink. And sometimes with gambling. Mostly drink.

JP: How did Blackpool's entertainment industry touch your life?

GS: Dad was a doctor to quite a few of the local entertainers, including Violet Carson from Coronation Street. She lived a few streets away and he was the official doctor for a lot of the boxing tournaments.

JP: Did you go to any of these?

GS: I hate boxing.

JP: Where were these matches?

GS: The Tower Ballroom?

JP: How did he get this job?

GS: He must've been asked or he volunteered. Probably a sort of load of people were talking about it in the pub and the next thing was he said 'I'll do it.' I don't know.

JP: Did you attend entertainment events?

GS: We went to a lot of shows but we were forbidden to go to the Tower Ballroom.

JP: Why?

GS: Oh ‘riff raff’. ‘You can’t mix with them.’ There were fights. The police were called and that would have been embarrassing for Dad if I had been caught up in it.

JP: Did you go to the circus?

GS: Yes all that.

JP: What were your ambitions as a girl?

GS: I didn’t have a chosen profession. I knew what I didn’t want to do. I didn’t want to do anything to do with medicine or nursing and I didn’t want to be a secretary. At that time these were the only options available as careers for girls. Teaching and secretarial. What I wanted was to meet like-minded people and be able to have intelligent discussions and exchange views and especially meet people from other countries. That was for me and I was prepared to wait and see how it all worked out.

JP: How did you know about the LSE?

GS: I knew about it because another family friend’s daughter went there. She came back during the summer holidays and told us about it. We knew about Oxford and Cambridge but this was something new, different from the red brick universities.

JP: When did you get married?

GS: In 1972. We just had our Golden.

JP: How did you meet?

GS: That was fun. After LSE, I worked for a year and another friend of mine wanted to go to Japan and I wanted to go to India. We would go to India first and then we’d go to Japan and the plan was to come back on the Trans-Siberian railway that was going to take us an indeterminate

amount of time, maybe one year, maybe two years, and we would work on the way in order to get some money. So after a year of working, so we had something on our CV, we pushed off and we did work in Iran and in Pakistan and see India, and by that time it was a year and she was absolutely fed up with me. That's how it was. I mean, she was getting on my nerves as well, but I could just about tolerate it and eventually she said, I've got to go back to Pakistan and finish off this love affair. I said, fine. Penny that's great. I'll go around on my own. We've got a network, people from LSE who we knew, so first stop for me was Poona. I contacted the Poona Connection. He happened to be in hospital, so he rang a friend and said, 'look, will you look after this friend of mine?' The friend happened to be Dari and we hit it off immediately.

JP: How did your parents react to that?

GS: Not well. Because he wasn't Jewish. Being Indian didn't matter. Jewishness mattered more. I'm sure the Indian mattered, although they both belonged to left wing organisations in Dublin, so I'm not so sure that it mattered that much but the Jewish mattered a lot.

JP: And how did they express that?

GS: He's a nice boy but we prefer you to marry to a Jew.

JP: And how did you respond?

GS: My life. Now, I'm sorry to have put them through all that but in the end they came to accept it and it may not have been their ideal, but they felt that he was a good person and good to me.

JP: Where did you marry?

GS: Harringay Registry Office.

JP: Did they come?

GS: At the last minute. They weren't going to. At the very last minute, they did. They would have been very delighted if I had married a Jewish boy. That was a disappointment to them.

JP: And how were his parents with you?

GS: Marvellous. His father was dead by that time, but his mother was very welcoming and his elder sister had actually done most of the bringing up because the mother was always playing bridge, very good at it, but they were very welcoming to me.

JP: And they were Hindu?

GS: No. They're Zoroastrian.

JP: Did you have children?

GS: We have children. One boy. He's got three. And he doesn't care about any religion. The girl he married is Roman Catholic. She was practising but she's not anymore.

JP: Do you remember learning about the Holocaust as a child?

GS: No, I have no memory of it, but I was brought up to be conscious of it.

JP: Can you say more about that?

GS: Yeah, well, I knew that lots of Jews had been murdered by the Germans, led by Hitler, that Germany was a bad place and that the cruelties that had been visited on the prisoners were just unbelievable and had only come to light gradually after the war was over. That wasn't true. People were aware of it. So because of this my parents were very ardent Zionists because they felt that the Jews had to have somewhere to go, irrespective of whether the Arabs are being badly

treated, et cetera et cetera, that this was the paramount consideration. So they helped to raise money to go to Israel, planting trees and this and the other.

JP: What does being a Jew mean to you?

GS: History, tradition, culture but not religion.

LEN BROWN

As Len Brown's interview directly spoke of the Shoah, I preface his interview with this traumatic event which still haunts him. His accounts emerged as his own writing rather than transcription or edit of our interview.

Synopsis of the Murder of the Family during the Shoah

My paternal grandparents were killed on the night of 3 May 1945 together with a son, daughter-in-law and nephew (my uncle aunt and cousin). Not wishing to be captured and shot by the Russians, the SS left the nearby Mauthausen Concentration Camp earlier that day and, en route home, discovered a group of some five hundred, mostly Hungarian, Jews herded into the village of Persenbeug. They took about half of them, made them dig trenches and shot them. Those that they did not kill that night were liberated the next day, and others, relatives of mine among them, identified the bodies of my close relatives. The full story is written in two separate Vienna University theses written many years later.[88]

Synopsis of Life after Blackpool

On qualifying as a Chartered Accountant in 1961, I went to work with Deloitte in Paris. Later, I worked for Pfizer at their Central Europe and Africa Headquarters in Paris. In 1964, Pfizer transferred me to their head office in New York. Due to lack of work and boredom, I looked for another job and received an offer from the Singer Sewing Machine Company, based in New

[88] Tobias Hochstöger *Das Massaker von Hofamt Priel* Bachelorarbeit (Universität Wien: 2018)

York and travelling anywhere and everywhere in the world. Just before leaving employment with Pfizer, one of the ladies in the office told me that I should look up friends called Pick if ever I was in Paris. During a visit there early in September 1965, hoping to see some of my old friends, I telephoned the Pick family and was invited to lunch the next day. At their home, I met their daughter Magda, and for me it really was love at first sight. We married in 1966.

Having identified some problems during a visit to the Swedish subsidiary of Singer, the company asked me to solve the problems found and I spent most of 1966 and some of 1967 there. Later in 1967, my bride and I were transferred to the about- to-be-opened European headquarters in London, and we lived there for two and a half years before I became administrative director of the Italian subsidiary. After two years in that job, at my request, we moved to Palermo, Sicily, where I was the Regional Sales Director for Southern Italy. Two years after that, we moved to Germany. I was based in Frankfurt and served as Regional Sales Manager for Southern Germany. Shortly afterwards the 'Great Singer Sewing Machine Company' showed signs of disintegrating. (The company failed not long afterwards and even obtained Chapter 11 permission, from the New York court, not to pay some of its pension liability.) I had left the company by that time to become MD of the French subsidiary of Storeys of Lancaster. After four years in that position, I was head-hunted for the job of Vice-President Europe of Kem Manufacturing Inc., the Atlanta, Ga based subsidiary of the Crompton and Knowles Corporation, based in Rome. By then, both Magda and I were tired of living in other countries and moving home so often whilst our sons were in a boarding school in England. So we moved to England, where I began and developed an accountancy practice here, which I sold when I retired shortly before my eightieth birthday. Magda and I are both happily retired and very much enjoying our family and our life in general.

My maternal grandparents were Shloime Mayer and Rivkah Beenstock. Paternal grandparents are Erno and Malvine Weissbrunn. The Weissbrunns owned a haberdashery shop and traded Czech crystal buttons wholesale. My mother, Cissie Beenstock, born in Manchester on April 1917, died there on 20 December 1988. She was born and raised in Manchester but she met my father (born in Piestany, Slovakia 3 September 1911, died Manchester January 2007) in the Slovak town of Piestany when she was there accompanying her parents who were taking the waters there. This was a shidduch. They married on 20 March 1937 and lived there until the Germans occupied the country and entered her home to steal jewellery. The British Consul in Bratislava arranged for her immediate return to England in April 1939 together with her infant son. My father followed in August of that year. My mother spoke Yiddish but my father's first language was German.

BLACKPOOL

I was born on 17 November 1938 and was their only child. My early childhood was spent in Manchester. Mother's ill-health prompted the family move to Blackpool. From the day we got there I disliked Blackpool. We had a very nice, three bedroomed-house with an indoor toilet and separate bathroom. We were not flush with money. My grandfather lived with us. He got up at 4am and chanted psalms. At 6am he went to shul. My father was the shammas at the United Synagogue. Very few people knew that he actually was a Rabbi. He was a very humble man. But he was quite strict with me and occasionally gave me a slap with the back of his hand. We were not well off but this job meant at least he was not, like my grandfather, sacked from his job every Friday when he wanted to take time off to prepare for Shabbos as was the case when he lived in Manchester. I had to earn money when I could. During the winter, on Saturday nights, I got a job with Empire Pools. I remember how cold those winters were with condensation running down

the walls of the Empire Pools space above the Blackpool Bus Station. My summer job was working in Winstons' Morris' Haberdashery Shop and also working for Sid Richman selling beach balls and other touristy items. During the week I would get up at dawn to go to various Markets selling Sid Richman's stocks of fabric and leather gloves. I got thirty shillings a week as a market trader. Plus my tea. This included non-kosher cakes and I felt I was doing wrong by eating them. I only felt this the first time. My parents made me sandwiches after that.

JP: How did the entertainment industry affect you?

LB: Joe Loss came to the shul every year. I went to all the shows with my mother. I also went to the Tower Circus, the Winter Gardens and the Grand Theatre. I remember seeing the play *Hobson's Choice*. There was even a travelling Yiddish theatre on the top floor of the Co-operative store on Corporation Street. Max Itzkevitch came from London with sketches meant to make audiences laugh and cry. The second time Yiddish Theatre came was just before Tisha b'Av and you didn't go to the theatre at that season.

In Blackpool we lived at 3 Collingwood Road off Newton Drive. I went to Devonshire Road Primary School. Our teachers pushed us and said 'You're not lunatics, you will go to a good school after your Eleven Plus'. I remember learning the times tables, which was distasteful but very useful. There were other Jewish boys in my Grammar School class. Among them: Leslie Rayne, Barry Teff and Melvyn Mars. We sat in one of the classrooms during morning prayers and came in for the announcements. We had our dose of antisemitism. Boys would push us against a wall and shout 'You killed our Lord'. We would respond with 'It wasn't us, it was those Jews from Manchester!' I did pass the Eleven Plus and it was a nachas for my parents when we Jewish boys went to Blackpool Grammar School. On Mondays, after school, we learned to dance the foxtrot, the samba and the cha, cha, cha with the girls from Collegiate.

There was antisemitism at the Grammar School. It wasn't wicked but it was irritating. Jews were referred to as 'you people'. I was aware that I must not 'marry out'. As a Jew there were restrictions to my social life. I couldn't go to the cinema on a Saturday and spend money. When you are younger you accept this.

I was brought up very religious. I certainly couldn't play football on shabbos. Most Jews did not play football but this was the time of Blackpool football stars Stanley Matthews, Stanley Mortensen and Alan Brown. Our leisure was going to the Jewish Club in Hornby Road where we played table tennis. And we played rugby at school. To make some extra money we hopped over the road from the Grammar School to make a minyan at the shul. We got 1/6d for five attendances. This was easy to do in our lunch hour. At eighty-three I had my second barmitzvah. I'm now eighty-four.

ROY GRIFFINS

JP: Where were you born? Tell me about your family background.

RG: I was born in Leeds 8 May 1946. My maternal line was Litvak. Grandfather Jacob had a strong accent. My grandmother died, probably in a lunatic asylum. Somewhere in the Moors. The family name was Moses. It might have been changed to Moss. They came to Leeds for work in the clothing industry. My great aunt had a cast iron kitchen. She used Yiddish words such as goyim and yok. My parents also used these words. The family were fairly anti goy. I heard terms like a 'shikkerveha goy'. 'As drunk as a yok'. My father was a tailor. Manuel (Manny). Grandfather was also a tailor. Harry. Manny married Betty. Her date of birth was 30 April 1911. Father's was 29 January 1912.

JP: Why did the family come to Blackpool?

RG: My grandfather and my dad thought Blackpool was Klondike as it was the centre of showbiz. My grandfather died in the late 1950s. He had said 'let's start in Blackpool and we will have great success'. His business was underpinned by Alfie Fineburgh. He made trousers for every tailor from Blackpool to Leeds. That's how schneiders operated.[89] The shop was 15b Cocker Street. My dad used to sell cheap jewellery in front of the shop. His brother, Uncle Albert, was on the knocker getting second-hand stuff. My father was also a process worker at the atomic energy place in Salwick between Preston and Blackpool. Tailoring was interconnected with the entertainment industry. My father made tiny suits for the little Billy Clitheroe. He made and altered suits for the stars. It was started by my grandfather and my dad. They lodged in a boarding house on Bank Street, where I stayed with my mum when we visited from Leeds for a

[89] 'Schneider' is Yiddish for 'tailor'.

couple of years. Once a month, we went to Blackpool. To a boarding house owned by the Inmans. John Inman was the son of the family. He went on to become the star of the sitcom *Are You Being Served?* As a boy he liked dressing up in ladies' clothes. I was a child and, when I saw this I screamed, I was so shocked. Eventually we bought and settled in a house at 97 Lord Street. My school was Claremont Infants.

JP: Tell me the origins of your surname, Griffins.

RG: Kraftachinski I think but am not sure of the spelling.

JP: Where did you worship?

RG: We went to the United Hebrew Congregation but this was not a big thing in our lives. Atheism seemed natural to me. How come this god crap has impregnated people's minds for centuries. I am an atheist but I will never deny being a Jew. I like the difference in being a Jew. The slight edginess. My dad went to shul three times a year. Two days of Rosh Hashanah and one day for Yom Kippur. I remember there being women upstairs and the guys downstairs. But the men were hardly participating in the service. They were talking business. There were three cheder teachers. Cyril Braslvasky, Tolly Rockman and Shamas Brown (Len Brown's father). We boys went three times a week. Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. I hated it because none of these men could teach. They parroted stuff. I was a quiet, bespectacled little boy with a high IQ and remarkable French and German. I am a non-scientist scientist. I like to understand and have things explained, I quite like listening and I got none of that in cheder. I played truant. I used to disappear from cheder and go to the Golden Mile to eat Pablo's Ice Cream or play on the slot machines. I used the money that was given to me for cheder. For the annual cheder picnic we all went off in a coach. I had to find an excuse to say why I hadn't been. My father found out that I

had not been and was shocked that such a clever boy had embarrassed him by playing truant from the Cheder classes. I had my barmitzvah in Bloch's. We weren't well off. It was a cheapish boarding house. Dad was a good tailor, a crap business man. I remember someone prodding the cake at the barmitzvah to show what a crappy cake was being served. At that time I looked a little like Billy Bunter. Mike Sheridan and I went hitchhiking that summer. Mike's father was a doctor. They were well off. We watched TV and ate smoked salmon. I asked 'what are those slices of pink stuff?'[90] I learned. After that I did not go to shul except for the odd wedding and my parents' funerals. They are buried in Layton Cemetery. We weren't ever kosher. On Sunday we went to get bagels.

JP: Did you go to Jewish Youth Clubs?

RG: We went to Habonim[91] and to the Jewish club underneath the Hippodrome. I remember bingo and dances. Table tennis. Guys from Manchester were more sexually confident and sophisticated than us. The girls that I particularly remember were Elizabeth Febland and Jane Barnet. Habonim was where I got to learn about girls. And I learned songs. And Hebrew. I learned 'Sheket Bvakashah'. 'Shut up please'.

JP: Tell me about your Blackpool adolescence.

RG: We had no holidays. We once went to Morecambe. But we lived on seven miles of golden sand, we didn't need to go anywhere else. Later, when I was health checked for a trip with the Minister, I found out that I had had hepatitis. I had retained the antibodies which was probably

[90] Working class families rarely could afford a television in the early 1960s. The Sheridans' wealthier lifestyle, where smoked salmon was offered, was also a sign of affluence.

[91] The word Habonim is Hebrew for The Builders. It was a socialist Zionist youth movement created in 1929 for Jewish youth. In his email of 9 July, Len Brown remembers ' I was the person who brought Habonim to Blackpool using the shul premises initially and then moving to our own building with the help of a grant from the local education authority. These premises were still in use at the time that I left Blackpool.

from playing on the beach, near the numerous sewage outlets. I worked in the holidays. My best job was as a deck chair attendant, which I did for three years. You worked with the straight man who issued the tickets for one shilling and three pence. The straight man handed out the deckchairs on hiring, while the return man took the money and issued the tickets; then when customers brought back the chairs they had hired, the straight man re-stacked the chairs and the return man returned the deposits in exchange for handed-back tickets. The holiday-makers got 6d back when the chair was returned. Each rental was three hours and, if this was returned late, then the 6d was lost. Most people bring it back late and so that meant you could pocket the 6d. I remember buying a round of beers for eight guys and we all fiddled being the straight man that day. Because I worked in the summer I got tanned. I was a little fat and couldn't get girls but the tan helped change that. I did go to some shows and I remember the joy of seeing Morecambe and Wise. And Ken Dodd. There was a Russian Henry, very camp, on the Golden Mile. There was the circus and Charlie Cairoli.[92] Wrestling and boxing. On a Saturday I worked at Sid Richmond Fabrics. He liked to do the pools and relied on me to tell him whether we won or not. He never did. Tony Todd was a star rugby player. Once, I tried to box him clever. I danced around for two rounds. He punched me and dropped me.

JP: And puberty?

RG: I was a fat boy. From this time in my life I remember my mum giving me badly cooked chips for breakfast. My mother filled me with food and went to jumble sales. She filled the house with stuff. You should have seen the firemen's faces when they saw the amount. It's Diogenes Syndrome. Mother was very, very fat. She sometimes sat in my dad's shop but she couldn't sew. We went to eat in a caff down Cocker Street. Mother died of a pulmonary embolism. I learned at

[92] Most of us children visited The Tower Circus and saw Charlie Cairoli. (Born, Milan 1910. Died Blackpool 1980).

this time that I wanted to lose weight and be creative and that this would give me access to Jewish girls.

JP: Were your parents Zionists?

RG: Not consciously. This goes back to the 'drunken goy' syndrome. They believed that we had the edge over the goyim. We were cleverer and worked more assiduously.

JP: Did you attend Religious Education classes in school?

I learned Onward Christian Soldiers, as we sang hymns in primary school. At Blackpool Grammar School we didn't go into prayers. In this School I was very good at yoyo where I practised it during assembly.

JP: When did you learn about the Shoah?

RG: I was certainly aware that some of my aunts had been in concentration camps and that they got out. We never dwelt on it. On my mother's side I don't know very much. Habonim assumed that Israel was natural. I was aware what the Balfour Declaration was. I was never keen on history but I was well aware of that. In 2015, my wife Maggie and I went to Yad Vashem. It is so profound, that message of Never Again. We went to Masada. There were young people bearing Tommy guns. They were open minded about living with perpetual risk. Previously I had seen Lanzmann's film Shoah.[93] I was touched by the barber.[94]

[93] Claude Lanzmann's nine hour film documentary *Shoah* was released in 1985. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0090015. Accessed 24 March 2023.

[94] A reference to Abraham Bomba who was forced to cut the hair of those about to be gassed in Auschwitz. See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/10/the-day-israel-saw-shoah. Accessed 24 March 2023.

But as a young man I was more interested in Pierre Boulle's *The Bridge Over The River Kwai* or Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. It was the nasty side of people that transfixed me. People who go to watch others be guillotined.

JP: After Blackpool?

RG: I went to Bristol University and read French and German and to the Sorbonne in Paris and the University of Freiburg. At that time I was still longing for blondes with blue eyes. I still hold it against that nation which was horrible. I worry that this is part of most human beings but this lot DID it. This is an existential feeling and I wouldn't parade that. You will see on my shelves: *The Scourge of the Swastika* and *The Knights of the Bushido*.[95] The war crimes of the 'slitty eyed' Japs or Nazis. As a teenager I bought these books.

JP: What is your strongest memory of Israel?

RG: In Jerusalem when you see guys in gaiters and pig-tails, Charedi, totally convinced of the god crap. But I remember in Jerusalem seeing a Jew in a woolly hat and gaiters. He had an electric guitar and he was playing *Hotel California* by the Eagles. His presence said 'yes I am in the regalia but I want to play great rock 'n' roll'.

JP: Today the subject of Israel provokes huge debate.

RG: My belief is that Israel must survive. It has a right to survive. Jews have a right to somewhere they feel safe.

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[95] Edward, Frederick, Langley, Russell wrote *The scourge of the Swastika. A short history of Nazi war crimes, etc*. London: 1954 (Cassell & Co.) and *The Knights of the Bushido: the shocking history of the Japanese War Atrocities.* Bath: 1959 (Chivers).

JP: Do you feel a guest in the UK?

RG: Not at all. I feel that I belong here. If I were to give a thumbnail description of my life I would say that in my career I am a natural fonctionnaire et fier de l'être .[96] I have been remarkably lucky in my working life. A mini-biography might say that I am a one-man tailor's son, retired civil servant, diplomat, transport and health guru; francophile, once fat but now thin, short-sighted but still tennis-playing grandfather.

[96] I asked Roy Griffins to translate this untranslatable French expression and he said 'I am a natural civil servant and am proud to be one'.

JENNIFER TOPPERMAN

JP: Where was your family from?

JT: My grandparents were from Eastern Europe. One grandfather was from Brody, a border town. If you have read *The Radetsky March* by Joseph Roth he describes it as the town of B.

My other grandfather came from what is now Western Ukraine, grandmothers from Polish Galician area. Their names were Harry and Jane Topperman and Avrom and Sarah Manackerman. They all got married in Manchester in 1908.

JP: Why did they come to Manchester?

JT: Life in Eastern Europe was not always comfortable for Jews and there was also the economic motivation. A better life beckoned. Manchester was on the emigration route between Hull and Liverpool. My maternal grandfather was a lodger at my great grandmother's and took a fancy to the eldest daughter and married her.

JP: Do you remember your grandparents?

JT: Jane died before I was born – I am named after her – but the others I remember well. They spoke Yiddish at home but could all read English. They lived in Cheetham Hill, in Petworth Street and Elizabeth Street, an area where I was brought up. When we moved to Blackpool they often visited us. Grandpa M particularly loved the North Pier jetty. We moved to Blackpool in December 1952, the winter before the Coronation. I remember in the previous February in Temple School being told the king had died.

JP: When were you born?

JT: On 6 April 1947 in Crumpsall Hospital. I have a younger brother.

JP: What did your parents do?

JT: My mother worked in a tailoring workshop from the age of 13, but she was in the Women's Land Army during the war and loved it. My father was a solicitor with an office in Manchester.

JP: Why did they go to Blackpool?

JT: My mother was one of nine children, with seven brothers. One lived in St Anne's and another in Blackpool and we went there for holidays. My parents thought it was a healthy place to bring up children. Crumpsall was one of the worst areas in the country for pollution, and I was coughing a lot. I went to Temple Primary School, Cheetham Hill where my aunt was a teacher. I left Manchester when I was four or five.

JP: And the move to Blackpool?

JT: My parents went on before with my brother who was just a baby while I stayed on a few days until the end of term. My father worked in Manchester and collected me from my grandparents. It was dark the first time I saw our Blackpool house. I remember coming in and seeing my mother sitting by the fire with the baby.

JP: What school did you go to in Blackpool?

JT: Devonshire Road from the ages 5 to 11. I remember all my teachers. I've got a class photo somewhere. The headmistress was an old lady called Miss Gardiner. She died when I was in my second year and then the school went co-ed. At this point we began to have male teachers as well which was a novelty. After Eleven Plus I went to Collegiate School.

JP: Where did you live?

JT: On Newton Drive near Stanley Park. It was a very outdoor and healthy childhood. We were always roaming around in Stanley Park in our spare time.

JP: Were there other Jews in the school?

JT: One Jewish boy, Ian Harris, his father was a chemist. It was quite a change from Temple school where a large proportion of pupils and most of the teachers were Jewish. There was a kosher section in the canteen and the school closed on Jewish festivals.

JP: Did you go into school prayers in the morning? Did you learn hymns?

JT: We used to stand outside the Hall doors until the notices were read. Yes I know hymns but I don't remember where I know them from. It was a kind of osmosis. At secondary school I always sat at the back in RI lessons. When the teacher asked a question I was often the only one who knew the answer but I just carried on reading.

JP: Most of the Jewish Blackpudlians I have interviewed did learn hymns from primary school morning assemblies.

JT: I learned some ecumenical hymns in Temple School We sang *All Things Bright and Beautiful*

JP: Were you brought up to be religious?

JT: Yes and we were very kosher. Mother's parents were particularly so. My maternal grandfather had his own stiebel in Bell Street, Cheetham Hill. My father's family less so but my father went to yeshiva and could learn Gemara. He won a scholarship to Manchester Grammar School and a Classics scholarship to Oxford when he was 16, but refused to go. He was a macher in shul wherever we lived. I would call us Modern Orthodox.

JP: Did you go to cheder?

JT: Yes, I enjoyed going. I think I went before I went to school. It was easy because I knew stuff whereas the other kids had to learn it. By the time I was eight, I had gone right through the cheder, top of every class. They didn't know what to do with me. So I was put in the barmitzvah boys' class when I was eight. That's how I knew the older boys . When I turned twelve they made me the teacher for Class 1.

JP: Who were your teachers?

JT: Mr Brown. Rev Rockman and Reverend Braslavsky.

JP: What were your aspirations as a clever girl at Collegiate?

JT: My parents assumed I'd go to university. My mother was even more determined than my father that I should have what she hadn't. She was bright but had to leave school at twelve or thirteen to help her mother. She hated housework and having to leave school. She was self educated and very widely read. Anything I have learned about poetry and Shakespeare etc I absorbed from my mother. I always loved books. William was my hero – I was a bit of a tomboy I guess. That's why I liked being in the barmitzvah class. I'm not sporty so I held the coats while they played football.

JP: Did you encounter antisemitism?

JT: Not knowingly. In primary school a girl once said to me *you killed Christ the Jews killed Christ*. I didn't know what she was talking about. I was eight or nine. I was just baffled.

JP: Did your parents warn you that this might happen?

JT: No I think it did not occur to them at all.

JP: What did it mean being a Jew in Blackpool?

JT: I had a strong identity because we were ‘frum’. My parents did not encourage me to socialise with Jews who were less observant. During my teenage years things changed and became more difficult. That’s why we moved back to Manchester. At Collegiate School exciting things happened at weekends. My friends went to parties on Friday night. and went shopping or to the cinema on Saturday and I couldn’t go with them. I waited until Monday morning to hear what the others had been up to at the weekend.

JP: Did you mind?

JT: I think I did. I lived vicariously. There was the Jewish Social Club in Blackpool. A lot of people I bump into nowadays ask ‘did you go to the club?’ I think I went once to a Purim Party or a Chanukah party but my parents didn’t go there. They were more involved in the shul and the social life of the shul. They went to shul dinners like the Blue and White Ball.

JP: Was there a Blue Box in house ?

JT: Yes but they weren’t ardent Zionists at that point. Do you remember the Teff family? There were four children and I think they all ended up in Israel. They started a local Habonim. My parents were never that way inclined then. It was different after 1967.

JP: Did Blackpool’s entertainment -world impact on your life?

JT: Not a lot. Frankie Vaughan turned up in shul on Yom Kippur one year and he came to a garden party at the Finks at Newton Drive. I think he had been a shul choir boy with Reverend Braslavsky back in Liverpool. I got his autograph. Alma Cogan also attended services when she was in Blackpool. We went to Tower Ballet and the circus. I didn’t go to the beach or shows

much, I stuck to Stanley Park. When my grandparents were around we would go ‘on the Front’, i.e. the Promenade.

JP: Did you go to ballet classes?

JT: Yes. I went to Joan Davis’ Dance School. She ran the Tower Ballet. The classes were in a building opposite the shul. But when cheder classes clashed with her dance sessions, I had to stop ballet. But I carried on practising secretly in my bedroom. I dreamed of bursting out as a star on the international stage!

JP: What did you want to do for a career?

JT: That depended on what careers book I read that week. I never had a fixed vocation, just wanted to do well in whatever I landed up in.

JP: Tell me about your time at Collegiate.

JT: I was different from other Jewish girls because I was the only one asking to be let off early on Friday afternoons. The headmistress Jessie Robinson asked me ‘Why are you the only Jewish girl asking for time off when the others are not?’ She was a very churchy lady. I answered that not all Christians went to church. There was no difficulty about my request. I felt no antisemitism then. I feel it more today.

JP: Would you say now that there was a form of feminism at Collegiate?

JT: There were women teaching who had university degrees so that there was an academic aspiration. A lot of them were single, perhaps as a result of the First World War. But if the women were highly educated many still saw marriage as their aim in life. For example, Miss Cook who taught us Latin in Fifth form told us she was going on a Continental coach tour at

Easter. When she came back she held out her left hand and said ‘Look girls look. Look!’ She proudly displayed a sparkling engagement ring. She told us ‘my advice is invest in a continental coach tour to find a husband!’ She had a degree in Classics but it was her aspiration to get married. She had met a market gardener from Oxford on the tour. So, as for feminism, the message was dual. I don’t think I ever wanted to be a successful spinster.

JP There was a rumour of lesbians wasn’t there.

JT: Yes. Miss Walmsley, the French teacher lived with the Games Teacher Miss Parton. But in those days the notion would have seemed a bit unreal to us.

JP: I remember in one school assembly Mrs Robinson tried to teach us that boy trying to kiss us was ‘only the meeting of nerve ends’. Do you remember any sex education?

JT: We had a lesson called Physiology and Hygiene, from Miss Parton in fact, and they touched on it very vaguely. We kind of filled in the dots ourselves. I think some of the pupils probably knew more about it than the teachers.

JP: What shops do you remember in Blackpool?

JT: Springs, a furs and posh clothes shop on the corner of Queen Street. . Macfisheries and a hat shop that belonged to Ethel Davies, who was a neighbour of ours. Sweet and Clark’s in Abingdon Street, where they had the overhead wires where small metal tubes transported cash from the customer to the cashier. And RHO Hills, the department store.

JP: This overhead-wire journey fascinated me. When did you leave Blackpool?

JT: After O Levels when I was sixteen. I did A Levels at Stand Grammar in Manchester and I went to Manchester University. The family moved back because we thought that this would give us a wider social pool.

JP: You mean to widen the gene pool for marriage?

JT: No, I don't think it was that. I was only sixteen and they expected me to go on and have a glittering career. But there were more Jews. On my first day in Stand Grammar I found that around a quarter of the school was Jewish. I was astounded. Brave new world! I had Jewish friends who were kosher and went to shul like me!

JP: What was the importance of the Eleven Plus?

JT: It was a big thing at Devonshire Road Primary.[97] There were four streams and nearly all the top stream, boys and girls got through. For girls, Collegiate was a very good school, also Arnold (which had a nice uniform).[98]

JP: Tell me about your degree.

JT: I read Mathematical Economics at Manchester University although I was very much an Arts person. At Stand Grammar I was talked into taking Mathematics and Sciences. I could do those subjects but not as well as English and the Arts. After university, I joined the Inland Revenue and qualified as a tax inspector. I married halfway through the training and went to live in London. I left the Revenue when I had my first child and when my kids started school I did tax work for accountants. I returned to university as a mature student while I was still working for

[97] https://www.devonshire.blackpool.sch.uk/history Accessed 5 July 2023.
[98] http://educationbase.co.uk/index.php?id=BB1069 Accessed 6 July 2023.

them. This was at Queen Mary College, London University where I got a First in English. Later on I did an MA in Medieval Studies also at Queen Mary.

JP: That means you saw the Novo Cemetery.

JT: Yes, you can see it easily when you go between the buildings.

JP: Can you talk about your further career path?

JT: After I completed my English degree I thought I should do something different with my life. I taught at a local Jewish primary school for a couple of years and then, when I was on holiday and had time to read the back pages of the Jewish Chronicle I saw an advert for the post of Education Officer at the Jewish Museum, London. I applied and got it and eventually I was appointed Curator. I was there for twenty years and loved it. I grew to know all about the collection and Anglo-Jewish history, and devised and wrote many exhibitions. The Director was Edgar Samuel and later on, Rickie Burman. They were the best years of my working life. So sad to read that it has to close down.

JP: How would you analyse the Blackpool Jewish community?

JT: I think it's the saddest story. Once upon a time you could go virtually anywhere in the country and find a kosher meal, and a minyan. All the Jews have gravitated to London, Manchester and Gateshead. Blackpool is typical. Yes, many Blackpool Jews worked in Manchester but they had lives in Blackpool. There was a even card group on the 8.18 morning train to Manchester. Others had small businesses in Blackpool connected to the seasonal trade. My uncle Nat was one of those. He was a draper on Lytham Road near the Promenade.

JP: What was the name of his shop?

JT: I just knew it as Uncle Nat's shop. Do you remember Diana Warren's? That was Millie Samuels' shop. She was the mother of my cheder contemporaries Lester and Elaine Samuels. They lived off Newton Drive. I remember once that Elaine was dressed in something a bit revealing and Lester said 'look at her she's dressed like Lolita!' How did he know about Lolita at his age?

JP: Were your doctors and dentists Jewish?

JT: No. My parents weren't tribal in that way.

JP Some poor Jews in Blackpool would receive a free chicken for shabbos from Blackpool Jewish charities.

JT: I didn't know that.

JP: Did you go on holidays to other parts of the country?

JT: We went to Bournemouth where another uncle lived and stayed at the Majestic. The kosher hotels in Bournemouth were wonderful, a communal institution and vastly superior to what Blackpool had to offer.

JP: Who were the girls of your age?

JT: Elizabeth Febland. Jane Barnett. Linda Jacobs, Susan Harris who lived up North Park Drive and Diana Churba. She was the only one regularly in shul and I think she lives in Australia now.

JP: Did your family talk about the Shoah?

JT: Not really. During the war, my father was in the army in India near Rawalpindi , and that's what he talked about. By contrast, my husband's aunt and her daughters were murdered in Auschwitz. They were from Poland but living in Belgium at the time. There was no direct

mention of the Holocaust's effect on my family but then I don't think it was much discussed any where then.

JP: Was your family political?

JT: My mother was very left wing when she was young. She went hiking with the Young Communist League and joined the Left Wing book club. My parents met in the Challenge Club, a socialist working man's club. She told us about fighting Mosley on the streets. This is what I heard more about than the Holocaust. My brother and I were brought up on Stalinist marching songs not nursery rhymes. My father was also leftish but not quite so committed. They always read the News Chronicle though and then later the Manchester Guardian.

Summary:

Blackpool was only ten to eleven years of my life but looking back, it was a golden age. I felt very comfortable and free. You knew everyone and the shul was full on Yom Kippur. The sense of a united and tolerant community of Jews in Blackpool was what remains with me, but maybe I was just young and naive. Today the Jews I know in Manchester are mostly very frum or very nothing. It all seemed much less complicated in Blackpool.

CONCLUSION

What conclusion can be drawn from this exploration? Many of the issues revealed here are common to most British secular Jews such as the hiding of identity through the anglicisation of names and the abandonment of Yiddish.[99] As these Blackpool Jews were interviewed, it was clear that all had benefitted from an improved British education and the promise of social mobility. What is particular to Blackpool Jewry, as opposed to those living in cities, is the absence of any visible Jewish space. Activities occurred at home, in the synagogue, a youth club and as social events in hotels and halls but, on street level, Jewish life was invisible. If we consider Golders Green today we can see a cluster of Jewish spaces expressing both Mizrachi and Ashkenazi Jewish food. Shops selling gefilte fish, hummus and challah are plentiful. In Blackpool, at any time, a visible Jewish cultural life was hard to locate. The town feels large and spread out.[100] Blackpool Jews did not cluster together but lived all over the town, where their houses were an island of Jewish life in a sea of Christian culture. In contrast, in the 1950s and 1960s, many Manchester and London Jews were often living in the same tenements and streets. Some East End shops displayed Yiddish signage.[101] This gave the sense of a cohesive community, which was not the case in Blackpool where Jews were a glancing presence. They may have loosely connected with one another yet they did not hook into gentile society. But they did mirror their Christian neighbours' class and gender divide.

[99] Today's ethos of British multiculturalism was unknown at this time.
[100] https://knowsize.com/blackpool-united-kingdom-size/geography Accessed 13 July 2023.
[101] https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/jewish-history/the-memory-map-of-the-jewish-east-end Accessed 13 July 2023.

Class

The mainly Ashkenazi Blackpool Jewish population was middle or working class. This study shows how poorer Jews, as evidenced by Len Brown, Lynne Goldstone, Roy Griffins, Leonard and Michael Mars, lived with different financial pressures than those from more privileged backgrounds. Personal memories show that it was the Jewish poor who interacted more with the visiting populations when, as children and teenagers, they worked during the holidays, in shops, on the beach, in the boarding houses and on the trams. Wealthier families left during the summer to avoid 'the invasion' of working class visitors. The children of the Jewish poor were able to gain advancement because of increased educational opportunities, denied to their parents, but they were certainly aware of their economic disadvantage. Although Jewish heritage and values were shared through the synagogues and clubs, this small study shows that class divisions prevented some areas of social interaction Michael Mars talks about wanting to date someone from a wealthier family and that this young woman refused because she was 'always busy washing her hair'.

Politics

Although the country's political framework was radically changing, the Blackpool Jews I interviewed did not mention this shake-up. They knew which class they belonged to but they were not engaging in party politics. Of all those I interviewed nobody talked of entering British political life to change the country's social fabric. Traditional middle class 'Jewish' professions, connected to medicine, education and business, were in the interviewees' sightlines even those from the poorest families. Blackpool Jewish parents were not dreaming of sending their boys to

Eton or Rugby or to become the next Prime Minister. Neither were they aspiring for their sons to become a working class hero. Nobody spoke of dreaming of becoming the next Stanley Matthews: Blackpool's most famous footballer. The fall of the 1951 Conservative government to Harold Wilson's 1964 Labour government was a major change in the political landscape when these adolescents were moving towards adulthood. Yet this huge political shift goes unmentioned by the interviewees, perhaps reflecting a desire for anonymous integration rather than public identification with any political party.

Gender

In the 1960s, expectations of social mobility were part of the national discussion and prewar class distinctions began to erode. Socialism was to advance British society towards a more egalitarian country but gender politics remained firmly entrenched. Our aunts and mothers, who had worked as soldiers, decoders and other 'male' professions during World War Two, were returned to the household. British society's message to women was clear. 'We need you during war but during peacetime your role is confined to that of wife and mother.' Men's choices were opening up when Britain became socialist but that postwar socialism ignored the equal advancement of women.

Within this study, I became aware of Jewish women's half-lived lives. Apart from Michael and Leonard Mars' testimony, mothers were often described as having missed educational chances. Our mothers mostly appear as unfulfilled, sometimes mentally ill or scarcely mentioned. Most are the daughters of the original immigrants; our grandmothers who endured a triple exile: as a woman in England without equal legal rights; as a Jew ignorant of the English language and as a

Jewish wife. Being a Jew meant being Other. Being a Jewish woman meant a secondary status in both Jewish and British society.

Esther Jacobs, née Goldenberg, my grandmother, is an example as a Romanian Yiddish-speaking grandmother. She was sequestered in the house because learning English at night school might have made her vulnerable to other men. As a result she was never a confident English speaker. With age her isolation from mainstream society increased. However my Romanian grandfather, who did attend night school, often left their Manchester house to spend weekends in Blackpool. These jaunts were with his Indian work mates from the textile business. My grandmother was left at home, alone. She was a stable influence in my childhood, and one which I now truly value but, during the twenty two years that I knew her, she hardly spoke and seemed withdrawn and depressed. Her daughter Pearl told me years later that when Esther was with a Yiddish-speaking Romanian relative in Israel she changed into a vibrant and loquacious woman.

I discussed this silence with Parent Infant Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist, Michela Biseo. She spoke of how young Jewish brides arrived without their supportive 'emotional village' and how this exile from family could have affected their own emotional growth and ability to express love. We know today how unprocessed trauma of antisemitism and pogrom can ripple down the generations even when it is unspoken.[102] Once transplanted, these Jewish women gave all their energy to the advancement of husbands and sons. Their boys were expected to become doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants or scholars. Daughters were the promise of Jewish continuity. It was unthinkable that a young woman might refuse to be a wife or mother because she preferred

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[102] Robin Karr-Morse, Meredith S. Wiley, *Ghosts from the Nursery: Tracing the Roots of Violence* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997).

to follow her own career. Yet second-wave feminism was about to arrive. The immigrants' well-educated granddaughters knew that they had more life choices. If their grandmothers' early lives had been confined to the home, Blackpool Jewish girls knew that a world of possibilities awaited them. They might travel alone, pursue a career and start relationships with those from different cultures.[103] They were teenagers when the music scene exploded in nearby Liverpool.[104] This new impulse had an effect on them. In the 1950s and 1960s, Jewish women were more visible within popular culture. Examples are Helen Shapiro and Alma Cogan, both of whom appeared in Blackpool. In the USA Barbara Streisand celebrated her Jewish identity. Most Blackpool Jewish girls were not dreaming of becoming pop idols but the public face of the Jewish woman meant an end to traditional gender roles. Blackpool Jewish girls were unlikely to have learned about Jewish women who demonstrated that an intellectual life was possible. Although I heard of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, nobody spoke of the achievements of Hannah Arendt or Emma Goldman. It is telling that Esther Morris, whose plays were seen in Blackpool, has disappeared from any archive. But the vivid presence of Cogan, Shapiro and Streisand were examples of confident role models accessed through popular entertainment. This New Jewish Woman was a source of Jewish pride which drip-fed into the zeitgeist.

For Jewish men there was also a shift through the representation of the Jewish male body. The concept of the Tough Jew, the antithesis of the stereotyped puny, ghetto Talmud scholar, was replaced by the Muscular Jew.[105] Len Mars remembers his father's admiration for boxing. In English history, the pugilism of Daniel Mendoza is an eighteenth-century Sephardi success

[103] This can be evidenced in Gail Sheridan's interview.
[104] https://www.historic-uk.com/CultureUK/The-1960s-The-Decade-that-Shook-Britain Accessed 12 July 2023.
[105] https://www.timesofisrael.com/muscular-judaism-athletes-compete-for-unofficial-title-of-worlds-strongest-jew Accessed 13 July 2023.

story.[106] By the twentieth century, the fighting Jew emerges as an anti-fascist at London's Battle of Cable Street.[107] He is also pictorialised as the agricultural worker, kibbutznik and soldier in the new country: Israel. Surprisingly, no Blackpool Jewish male interviewee expressed a desire to make aliyah. Therefore the Muscular Jew, the English Jewish sportsman described by Edward Freeman is about passing into British male culture through the body.[108] On the school playing fields, Jewish boys could 'pass'. Freeman describes, how Jewish boys felt 'English' by playing cricket and football.[109] For Blackpool Jewish girls, there was no such melding into gentile society through muscular strength, agility or sport.

The bonding across a male culture was social and economic. Jewish and gentile men were equal in the eyes of the law however women were excluded from the same public life. Until 1975, unless a woman was a widow, she usually needed her husband or father's permission to open a bank account.[110] As shown in the Jewish Chronicle archives on Blackpool's history, when a Jewish woman's relationship with money is noted within the public arena, it associated with charity fundraising. This allows a performative aspect but only within the care sector. She is always in a supporting role.

Her daughters were also schooled to believe that their futures lay within ancillary positions. They might aspire to be teachers, secretaries, receptionists or clerks. No Jewish girl that I knew in our age group wanted to become a doctor, dentist, scientist, government official or high profile

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[106] Daniel Mendoza, Alex Joanides, *Memoirs of the Life of Daniel Mendoza* (London: 2011, Romeville Enterprises*).*
[107] https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Battle-Of-Cable-Street Accessed 13 July 2023.
[108] For a historical account of Jewish physical fantasies see Sander Gilman *The Jew's Body* (Routledge: New York, 1991).

[109] Harold Pinter declared cricked as being better than sex.
https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2008/dec/26/harold-pinter-final-interview Accessed 13 July 2023.

[110] The 1975 UK Sex Discrimination Act allowed women to open bank accounts and apply for credit and loans in their own name. It was not until 1990 that British women were taxed independently from their husbands.

public figure. Rarely were Jewish girls encouraged to pursue the life of the mind, or work in business, as their brothers were. In the 1950s, recognised British Jewish role models such as Myra Hess, Rosalind Franklin or Alicia Markova (née Alice Marks) were the exceptions. Blackpool girls were taught to know their place. As Gail Sheridan remembers, 'All the attention was on the boys'.

Blackpool Jews and the two Christian communities

Blackpool Jews negotiated with two gentile populations. Long-term was the interaction with the permanent Blackpool residents. These included school friends and peers as well as a society of teachers, dentists, shopkeepers, civil servants and other workers. More superficial was the Jewish connection to Blackpool's visitors who injected wealth into the town's economy. Of all who I interviewed, there was recognition of having grown up in a special environment but few were actively engaged in the pleasure zones except as holiday jobs. Blackpool Jews needed the constant flow of visitors to generate the town's wealth which fed into their own economic viability. However, there is also a mild sense of resentment at the town's 'invasion'. Wild, alcoholic crowds, the 'drunken Yoks' described by Roy Griffins and suggested by Lynne Goldstone, can awaken subconscious family memories of Tsarist pogroms. Although this hinterland was never directly mentioned, all interviewees seemed uncomfortable when describing the annual arrival of thousands of outsiders.

In between the permanent residents and the transient visitors was the figure of the Blackpool landlady with whom the Jewish worker would sometimes interact. She was usually gentile but Leonard and Michael Mars offer the vivacious persona of their own mother as a working class,

Blackpool landlady who rebelled against English, working class racism. But, apart from this particular evocation of a Jewish Blackpool landlady, this paper shows that Jewish interaction with gentiles was nearly always superficial.

Shoah

Surprising to me was that the majority of interviewees, with the exception of Len Brown, related that their parents had hardly talked about how the Shoah. Reasons for this are complex. Silence may reflect a desire to 'move on' or it could be that it took decades in Britain before the Shoah's was processed by scholars, popular culture and Jews themselves. How were our parents to tell us about the murder of their families when they were only too aware that their own names were on Hitler's death lists.

If the Shoah was an area of silence for most Blackpool Jewish families, so was the rejection of teaching Yiddish to their children. This was partly a desire to help the child assimilate into English society but perhaps also because, the association of the mama loschen, with the fate of millions of murdered Ashkenazi Jews, was unbearable. Indeed, we can now understand that our parents were themselves traumatised by what happened to their families. The heat of the Auschwitz ovens may have been felt on their own shoulders. Knowing that Hitler had lists of Jews to exterminate in Britain was no secret. In the knowledge of what was planned for them, Blackpool Jewish parents did not know what to say to their children and most of them said nothing.

The end of Jewish life in Blackpool

The decline of Blackpool, as a successful seaside resort, left a glut of accommodation which by the 1980s and 1990s was used by the government to house those with drug problems, people leaving prison and families on low incomes. Profit from tourism had vanished as Spanish beaches and cheap air flights ravaged the tradition of Blackpool holiday-making. If gentiles were abandoning the town, there was no reason for Jews to remain. Jennifer Topperman and Lynne Goldstone discuss this dearth of any vibrant Blackpool Jewish life. Consequently, young Jews disappeared to more attractive cities. Those Jews growing up in Blackpool during the 1950s and 1960s thrived in this most unusual British setting but they abandoned it. Almost nothing of this community remains. Only the names on the headstones in Layton Cemetery memorialise the Golden Years of safe passage.

BIOGRAPHIES

Lance Blackstone was an investment banker and partner with Blackstone Franks Chartered Accountants. He specialised in corporate finance, business and tax solutions. Now he is active in property development, investment, corporate finance, cloud hosting and related businesses, clothing manufacture and distribution and charitable work.

Len Brown qualified as a Chartered Accountant in 1961. He first worked for Deloitte in Paris, then for Pfizer in Paris and New York, before transferring to the Singer Sewing Machine Company. After some time spent in Sweden and then London, he became administrative director of the Italian subsidiary, moving to Palermo and eventually to Frankfurt. Brown then left the company to become MD of the French subsidiary of Storeys of Lancaster, after which he was the Vice-President Europe of Kem Manufacturing Inc., based in Rome. Eventually, Brown moved back to England, setting up an accountancy practice before retiring shortly before his eightieth birthday.

Lynne Dante née Goldstone attended Tyldesley School. She worked briefly in a solicitor's office as a junior clerk before joining HM Customs & Excise. There she worked for thirty-five years in Lytham St Anne's, Bolton and finally Leeds. She was employed on VAT inspections, Accounts, Training, HR, Equal Opportunities/Diversity. The last five years of her Civil Service career were spent in the Department for Work and Pensions managing HR contracts. After taking early retirement Lynne worked with her husband in his accountancy practice.

Edward Freeman is a former solicitor and partner in the firm of Glaisyers Solicitors, Manchester, with a specialism in all aspects of property, as well as wills and probate. After he retired five years ago, he is now pursuing a varied range of interests. A keen sportsman, he plays golf and table tennis, and is a supporter of Manchester City. He also volunteers at the National Football Museum and is an active Trustee of the Prestwich Hebrew Congregation.

Roy Griffins graduated from Bristol University and studied at the Sorbonne and ENA in Paris. Recently he was awarded a Master's in Philosophy, Politics and Economics of Health from University College London. Roy chaired the Board of London City Airport between 2007 and 2017. From 2006 to 2012 he was also British Chair of the Channel Tunnel Intergovernmental Commission. Previously Roy had a thirty-year career as a senior government official and diplomat. He was the UK's Director General of Civil Aviation from 1999 to 2004 and Director of Railways 1996–9. Previously he was a Counsellor for four years in the British Embassy in Washington DC and three years with the UK's Representation to the EU. Roy became a Companion of the Order of the Bath (CB) in 2003. He was made a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 2017.

Leonard Mars worked as an Executive Officer at H.M. Land Registry, before obtaining an MA in Social Anthropology from the University of Edinburgh and a PhD from the University of Manchester. He taught Social Anthropology at the University of Swansea, and held positions as Visiting Professor at the Freie Universität Berlin, the Economics University, Eotvos Lorand

University; University of Pecs in Hungary. His publications include *The Village and the State: Administration, Ethnicity and Politics in an Israeli Cooperative Village* (Gower, 1980), *Social Theory: A Basic Tool Kit* (Palgrave, 2003) and Collected Essays on Jewish Ethnography (Harmattan).

Michael Mars is the former Lead Consultant Orthodontist at the Cleft Lip and Palate Centre, Hospital for Children, Great Ormond Street, London and Director of Special Surgery. He set up the Cleft Lip and Palate Association and was its chairman of trustees from 1984 until 2005. His academic positions include Honorary Senior Lecturer, Department of Developmental Biology, Institute of Child Health; Hon Fellow Sri Lankan College of Paediatricians; Honorary Fellow Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists; Visiting Professor Faculty of Medicine Peradeniya, Sri Lanka; Visiting Professor University of Malaya KL. He is the previous President of the Craniofacial Society of UK and Ireland and previous Hunterian Professor of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He is the author of more than sixty refereed papers and senior co-editor of the textbook Management of Cleft Lip and Palate in the Developing World (John Wiley, 2008).

Julia Pascal graduated from London University in 1977 and gained her PhD from the University of York in 2016. She trained and worked as an actor before becoming a journalist, theatre director and playwright. Published texts include *Theresa, A Dead Woman on Holiday, The Dybbuk, The Yiddish Queen Lear, St Joan, Nineveh, The Golem, Woman in the Moon, Broken English, Year Zero, Crossing Jerusalem, The Golem, The Shylock Play* and *12-37*. Her plays have been seen in London, New York, Germany, Vienna, Paris, Lille and Antwerp. She was awarded a Fellowship from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts. At the Wiener Library she was Writer in Residence. For Pascal Theatre Company she has produced three major Jewish Heritage Projects. *Jewish Mothers & Daughters: A Film Archive, The Secret Listeners* and *Discovering & Documenting England's Lost Jews*. She is a Research Fellow at King's College, London University. Her dramas often feature neglected Jewish histories.

Gail Sheridan graduated from the LSE in 1965 and spent her career in Public Relations, interrupted by two years of travel, involving hitchhiking overland to India.

Her first job was with a political PR consultancy where she wrote speeches for a client with an eye on a peerage, which he eventually got. After two other consultancy jobs she went in-house at a major computer company where she ultimately became its UK publicity manager. From there she moved to the Midlands with her husband and established her own business building reputations for emerging computer firms. Some are now household names. In 1996, after establishing a successful London office, she sold her company and following a handover period became an independent consultant. In retirement she continues travelling, enjoying reading and theatre and relaxing happily into grand-parenthood. She is on the board of the British Federation of Women Graduates.

Jennifer Topperman attended Collegiate School, followed by Stand Grammar. She went on to study Mathematical Economy at Manchester University, after which she joined the Inland Revenue, where she qualified as a tax inspector. After marriage, children and a move to London, she returned to university as a mature student, and obtained a First in English and an MA in Medieval Studies, both at Queen Mary University. After several years' teaching at a Jewish primary school, she became the Education officer of the Jewish Museum in London, where she stayed for twenty years, eventually rising to the position of Curator

ENDS

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