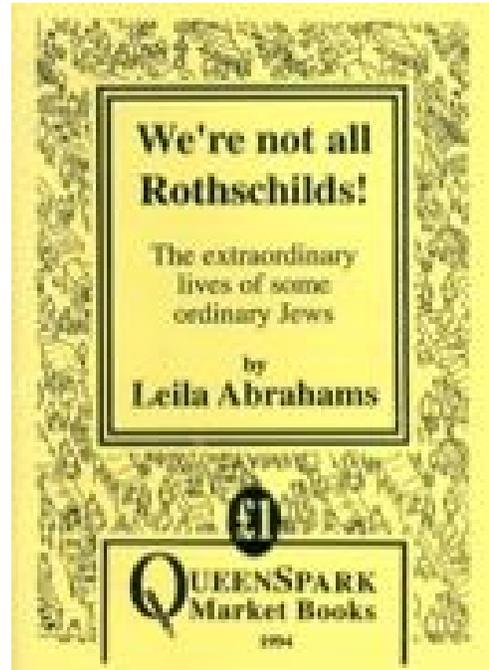


## About QueenSpark Books

QueenSpark Books was founded in 1972 as part of a campaign to save the historic Royal Spa in Brighton's Queen's Park from being converted to a casino. The campaign was successful and it inspired participants to start collecting memories of people living in Brighton and Hove to preserve for future generations. QueenSpark Books is now the longest-running organisation of its kind in the UK.

More than one hundred books later, as part of our 45th anniversary celebrations, we are making the original texts of many of our out-of-print books available for the first time in many years.

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## About this book

*We're Not All Rothschilds!* Is based around a series of interviews conducted by Leila Abrahams in Brighton and Hove in 1994. The book explores the lives of ordinary working people linked by their Jewish faith.

There are fascinating accounts of running Beall's Cork Shop in Gardner Street, memories of long-gone Brighton shops and discussions around the contributors' relationship to their faith, and to Brighton and Hove. You'll also find background information on the growth of Jewish communities in the city.

Some of the terms you will read here reflect the language of the era in which the book was first published, but to keep faithful to the original text, they have been left in and not amended for a 21<sup>st</sup> century readership.

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## 1994 INTRODUCTION

When my mother and father married in 1913, they honeymooned in a small boarding house in a Welsh village. On Friday morning my mother asked the landlady if she had a pair of candlesticks.

“Candlesticks!” came the reply, “What do you want those for?” Mother smiled shyly, “Well, I need to light candles to welcome our Sabbath.” As the woman looked questionably at her, mother continued, “We're Jews, you see, and our Sabbath starts at sundown on Friday nights.”

The woman gasped, then peered closely at mother. “But...but you've got no horns! I thought all Jews had horns and long noses. You...you look just like anyone else!”

Mother laughed, “Why shouldn't we? We ARE the same as anyone else - except for the rituals of our religion.”

But that was in 1913. In these days of mass media and a shrinking world, people are not so naive. We are much more aware of, and hopefully, more respectful of other religions and cultures. As countries become more and more of a melting pot of many different ethnic groups, schools are endeavouring to teach children respect for and understanding of cultures, different from their own.

But despite our so-called 'tolerance' old mis-conceptions die hard.

Some time ago I was chatting to a group of people about how difficult it is to live on a low fixed income. One turned to me and said, “Oh, you Jews are all comfortable. You have a knack with money. I've yet to meet a poor Jew!”

This incensed me so much, that I decided to show that all Jews are not wealthy financiers, adept at making money, and caring about little else. I started off by talking to one or two pensioners who I knew, and from them, learned of the other people featured in this little book. None of them may be called 'wealthy' in its fullest frame of reference, but all have struggled to achieve what they have, often from humble beginnings - myself included.

Some have led very eventful lives, some contributed to the well-being of the community, others have done things not usually associated with Jews, while one witnessed an event that had enormous impact on civilisation as we know it today. Although now mostly grey-haired, the spirit that motivated their life continues, despite the ravages of time and age.

Many of the QueenSpark books have featured reminiscences and life histories of older people. It was suggested, therefore, that I might also include some younger people, to show their attitude to being Jewish in the latter years of the twentieth century.

The lives of the persons chosen perhaps reflect more closely changes, attitudes and values, that have affected young people from all groups and beliefs. Changes that have tinged most of the world, and which the older generation find hard to accept or to believe in.

To most people the word 'Jew' is synonymous with wealth - but this is a misconceived anachronism. Yes, there have been a number of wealthy, philanthropic Jews, who, in the last century contributed greatly to the development of Brighton and Hove, and had a wide impact on the general life of the area in local Government and trade. The first Jewish Baron, Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid, had the title Baron de Palmeira, bestowed on him in 1848 by the Queen of Portugal. He developed Palmeira Square and Adelaide Crescent and gave land to St. John's Church in that area. Many street names in Hove are a reminder of his generosity.

But today, as in any society, there are two sides to every coin. In Brighton and Hove we have a NECESSARY thriving Jewish Welfare Board to help the many Jews in need. They support three houses which are divided into a number of sheltered flats; also the Jewish Home for the Aged in Burlington Street, Brighton, set up in 1954, which has over 70 residents - many of whom are helped by the DSS. There are several families on Income Support and Social Security, while others struggle but won't accept 'charity'. No, we certainly aren't all Rothschilds.

I joined a QueenSpark writing group a few years ago and was impressed by the Brighton Urban history books, published in conjunction with the Lewis Cohen Urban Studies Centre, while the Oral History Market books, published by QueenSpark, gave me the idea for this little book.

As my object was to tell you of some of the Jews who were born here or came at a very early age, and also a little of the history of Brighton Jewry, it struck me, as perhaps more than an odd coincidence, that the premises QueenSpark occupied then - in a place dedicated to a Jew, Lewis Cohen, and now - our new premises in Jew Street, have both been connected with Jews.

Please forgive the following bit of history, but I feel it does have a place in this manuscript, and I'm sure you will find it interesting.

The Lewis Cohen Urban Studies Centre, opened in May 1982, was a 5 year dream of Selma Montford, then a lecturer in Fine Arts, and now Director of the Centre. She had always felt that there was a need for an Environmental Information Centre for schools, colleges, local groups and councillors.

Lewis Cohen, who was born in 1897, and started work at the age of 13 as a clerk in an estate agent's office, for 5/- a week, eventually ended up a wealthy man, and head of the Alliance Building Society.

Part of his original job was to collect rents of around 10 shillings a week, in the Hanover Ward of Brighton. The poverty, hardship and soup kitchens he saw there appalled him so much that he never forgot it. He joined the Labour Party at 17, for emotional reasons of pity and pacifism - always caring about his fellow human beings and doing what he could to help. He was a councillor for many years and became Mayor of Brighton 1956 - 57. One year before his death in 1966, at the age of 68, he was created a Life Peer, and so became Lord Cohen of Brighton.

A Housing Trust was set up after his death, and in 1982 the Trust was approached for assistance. £40,000 was then allocated for the Urban Studies Centre to be set up, with a continued grant for 3 years for running costs. Thus the Lewis Cohen Urban Studies Centre came into being, and was opened by his widow, Lady Cohen, and Selma Montford was able to realise her dream.

One of the many books published by QueenSpark at the Centre was called, 'Who was Harry Cowley?' Harry Cowley was a life-long friend and co-worker of Lord Cohen, and said, in an obituary to Cohen, '..although wealthy, he was an ardent socialist who spent his life too hard, working for other people.'

QueenSpark's new premises at Brighton Media Centre in Jew Street is perhaps another coincidence. Jew Street is so-called as it is believed (from old records) that the first synagogue opened there in 1789 - a public place of worship before the Roman Catholics' in 1806 and the Methodists' in 1808 (History of Brighthelmstone 1862).

The first section of Jew Street leads immediately South from Church Street, and then turns into a 'twitten' with one building on the S. side and leads out into Bond Street. Both sections are designated Jew Street. The building on the S. side of the twitten extends into Bond Street, and is known as 14 Bond Street (Robinson's Books?) An additional storey has been added to the old building in Jew Street, but an archway and windows on the ground floor are clearly visible. There is an entry point on the exterior wall, and the area has been confirmed by J. Godfrey-Gilbert FRIBA, that it was constructed of 18th century material (David Spector 1987)

Jew Street, at the time, was on the outskirts of the town, now the North Laine area of Brighton, and a sound-proofed basement, by a method known as 'pugging', may well have been the room used for services by the then small community. Perhaps with a little imagination, we can visualise that small street in the 18th century, where devout Jews, living in the local area, mingled with beggars, while housewives haggled with pedlars and stall holders for their daily shopping. Not such a very different picture from today, when we consider the market and small shops still surviving in that area.

Brighton in the past, as it is today, has always been 'liberal' in its tolerance of different creeds and outlooks. In 1766 the first Jew recorded was Israel Samuel of 22 East Street, who was a silversmith and toymaker and also kept a lodging house.

But the founder of the Brighton Hebrew Community was Emmanuel Hyam Cohen who came to England from Bavaria in 1782, and settled in Brighton, producing a family of ten children. Although an educated and intelligent man, on his death in 1823 he left little money. But his descendants, especially his son Levi Emmanuel and his son-in-law Henry Solomon, were the first Jews to hold posts of high responsibility in the city.

The former was founder and editor of The Brighton Guardian for 35 years, and the latter becoming the first Chief Constable in 1838 and holding many important inspectorates until in March 1844 he was murdered in his office by an unbalanced youth apprehended for stealing a carpet. Thousands lined the funeral route, and the murderer was publicly hanged in Horsham on 6th April 1844.

The tradition of public service and welfare has produced seven Jewish mayors, many Jewish patrons of the Royal Sussex Hospital, St. Dunstons Home for the Blind, and the Midhurst Sanatorium of West Sussex. At the outbreak of the First World War, although there were only 200 families resident here, 125 men served in the armed forces and 33 were killed. Casualties in the Second World War were 30 killed and one member killed in Korea.

Where Jews settle they must have a place of worship. The first synagogue established in 1789 was a house in appropriately named 'Jew Street'. It was a place where pedlars would gather for gossip, trade and worship, and remained there until around 1800. As the community developed, the synagogue moved to Pounes Court, off West Street (now demolished) then in 1823 to Devonshire Place, where it is reported to have held 50 people. This was eventually found to be too small for the increasing population and visitors, so in 1860 number 66 Middle Street was purchased and the architect of Brighton Station, David Mocatta, commissioned to design a building which was consecrated in September 1875. Both Middle Street and Devonshire Place are designated Grade 2 listed buildings.

So, from a tiny population of some 20 or so families in the eighteenth century, increasing to around 200 before the First World War, there are now approximately 2500 - 3000 families living here, some 2,000 persons being synagogue members. The people whose lives and experiences I would like to tell you about were mostly born here, or arrived during the early part of this century. They found life very different then from what it is today, as you will read from their comments.

But the younger members of the faith look upon life differently. Very few have followed the orthodox family patterns and traditions of their parents. There is much more integration and assimilation, and non-Jewish partnerships and marriage are becoming more prevalent. But on the whole, the attitude of these young people, despite various hardships, is optimistic and encouraging about life today - in contrast to the opinions and views of the older generation.

And to conclude, although not a Brightonian, I have added a brief summary of my own life, to give you some idea of what it was like for me, growing up in Manchester. You will see how different it was from the liberal and tolerant outlook that most Brightonians were lucky enough to receive.

Leila Abrahams 1994

## **We're not all Rothschilds!**

### **The extraordinary lives of some ordinary people**

LOUIS AND BERNIE GOLDBERG.

"Brighton has been the funnel for Anglo-Jewry," said Bernie, "both before and during the First and Second World Wars, and then came the big influx after 1948, when the National Health Service was introduced."

I walked along to 16 Trafalgar St. and rang the bell on a large red garage door, above which bore the inscription, 'Grand Parade 1803'. I was invited up a narrow stairway into a small, crowded room where Bernie sat in a wheel chair and Louis, his older brother, had two quadruped sticks beside him. Both had been born spastic. But despite their initial handicap, they have faced life cheerfully and courageously. They both drive, have specialist abilities and run the funeral needs of Brighton and Hove Jewry.

They are 2nd generation British; their father, a coppersmith from Poland, married an English girl and moved to Brighton from London in 1921. Here he had a small garage where he made body parts and metal work for cars. Later he was chosen to repair the copper domes on the Royal Pavilion. He was a huge man of 18 stone who could neither read nor write English, yet he invented his own formulae for fluxes for ferrous metals. He died in 1953 at the age of 70 leaving his sons to carry on the business. Louis was born in Stepney in 1916 during an air-raid. There was no one to help, so his mother had to deliver a breach presentation herself. It is possible that this was the cause of his spasticity.

It appears that the specialist, although an honorary consultant at Hove Hospital, (then a cottage hospital with 22 beds), in 1932, had little knowledge of the source of spasticity, so he operated on Louis's leg, which used to go into spasm, believing that this would help. As there were no transfusions then, he was fed on barley sugar to thicken his blood. Unfortunately an artery was cut during the operation, with the result that one leg was shortened by 2 1/2 inches resulting in Louis, at 16, having to lie on a long, wickerwork, spinal chair.

At the same time, his father and his brother, Sammy, who was killed in the Battle of

Britain in 1940, had taken over the premises in Trafalgar St. and were running a motor repair and engineering business. Louis, by dint of much perseverance and fed up with being an invalid, determined to take on a share of the work. Lying on his back, he would scrape the bearings, and gradually, as he became stronger, took on a more active part, so that during the war, he could not only drive, but he became a despatch rider and a mortician for the civilian dead.

His father, having the facilities, began contracting to the Brighton and Hove Hebrew Congregation to carry out funerals. They made the coffins and provided transport for burials at Florence Place, Ditchling Rd. which was donated to Jewry in 1826 by Thomas Kemp. In 1950 when the British Embalmer's Society was formed, Louis sat the examinations and gained top marks, thus becoming the 1st. Jewish embalmer in the UK.

## BERNIE

Bernie was born at 127 Sussex St. in June 1928 when his mother was 45. Whether it was his mother's age or the breach presentation is not known, but he was also born spastic, although his development was normal. His 1st school was at Pelham St. Infants (now part of Brighton Tech.) and then he went, until 11, to St. Bartholomews C of E (now a car park). There were four other Jews at the school and their religion was respected.

Bernie told me, "In 1939 many evacuees came over and the schools were overflowing, but after Dunkirk, when there were fears of a south coast invasion, they all went away to be evacuated elsewhere. I was not allowed to go because of my disability, but, although I went for a short time to Stanford Rd. School, most schools closed down due to the shortage of teachers and pupils."

He went on, "I used to walk on my toes and I was admitted to Stanmore Royal Orthopaedic Hospital to have my achilles tendon lengthened. There was no physiotherapy then and I was put back in the same misshapen boots that I had previously worn!" He laughed, "You see, shoes were on coupons then and there were none to spare, so I had to manage."

Reminiscing about the old days, Bernie said, "Oh Brighton was different then. We had two sets of Jews - the wealthier ones who lived in Hove and Kemptown, while in the streets round here...Kensington Gardens, Middle St., West St., Queen's Rd. and Bond St. were the tradesmen:- tailors, furriers, jewellers, milliners and the grocer in Gardner St. and two butchers in Bond St. at numbers 20 and 40.

He chuckled, "You wouldn't believe this, but some of the kids I went to school with lived in Kingswood Flats. That was a place! Some grew tomatoes in the bath or kept coal there, and one family actually kept a pony in the bathroom!"

He went on to tell me that when they bought No. 16 Trafalgar St. it had originally been a butchers and slaughter house. They'd paid around £2000 for the whole property, but are unable to alter it in any way as it is a listed property in a conservation area.

Bernie married in 1954 but has no children, and Louis, who never married, is Chairman of Brighton and Hove Spastic Society and also Chairman of The Brighton and Hove Charitable Youth Trust, which gave away over £ 110,000 for youth under 26 in the county of Sussex. He appeared on BBC TV in November 1992, in a discussion to replace the word 'spastic' with 'cerebral palsy'. He argued in favour of keeping the term, 'spastic'.

Today, these two men appear to bear no grudge at fate. They have charming, humorous personalities and I was most impressed that despite their handicap they run the business together, have kept up with modern technology by using computers, both drive cars and carry on a successful and efficient business.

## DORIS ABRAHAMS

If you go up to the 1st. floor of Brighton Museum, you will see an old, reconstructed shop with the sign above, 'BEALL & CO. established 1883'. This shop, which was originally in 51 Gardner St. belonged to Doris' family. It was taken over by her grandfather in 1915, when the zeppelins started coming over London. He then decided that it was prudent to remove his family to Brighton, and add to his cork business warehouse in Aldgate. Gardner St. was then a small factory, but it eventually became probably the last retail cork shop left in the UK.

Doris was born in 1919 and lived in a house in Middle St. which was later taken over by a Professor Severn who termed himself "a phrenologist".

She told me, "I was actually born in the large multi-family home in Mile End Road, in London. My mother went back to be with the family for my birth. She stayed for three weeks and then returned to Brighton. I can remember," she went on, "when I was growing up, I used to visit London quite regularly - we were a very closely-knit family. Five different families, relations of my paternal grandfather, lived in a cul-de-sac of terraced houses and I went visiting from one house to the other. My paternal great-grandfather, who lived with a daughter, was a fierce, old man. I was petrified of him - a grey old man in a large bed, who seemed to shrink each time I saw him. To a little girl he was very frightening."

As Doris grew older the family moved to Oriental Place and Doris first went to Middle St. school and later won a scholarship to Varndean School for Girls.

She said, "I first met my husband, Jerry, when I was 15 and he was 19. We used to go to a Jewish youth club, behind where Waitrose's Car park is now. The first time I met Jerry, I remember telling my mother about the nice boy who'd held my arm as we

crossed the road. I was so thrilled and thought he was lovely. We got married three weeks after war was declared, when I was 20, and Jerry was due for 'call up'.

During the war I lived with my in-laws in the six-storey house in Hove, which Jerry's father had bought for £1500 in 1927, when he retired from Whitley Bay."

"I wasn't called up," she went on, "as I was married, but I worked with St. John's Ambulance. Three nights a week, I slept at the First Aid Post at the Windlesham Women's Hospital. We had to sleep on iron stretchers - God were they hard." She laughed, "Couldn't do it now. There was hardly anyone left in the town. Then in 1941 - 1942 we had a large influx of refugees from London. Although they hated it here, they did stay. And I remember we kept open house for a number of Canadian soldiers who were stationed here - many of whom, unfortunately, were killed."

"The Jewish Community, at the time, was well integrated and Barnett Marks was Mayor of Hove, while Harry Jacobs owned two cinemas. Life seemed much more compact then and we had good relationships with the community.

My first child, Roger, was born in 1944, and I can remember, when he was 6, a smallpox epidemic swept the area. Roger got Scarlet Fever and went into Bevendean Hospital. While he was there, the whole ward got Chicken Pox, and the hospital was isolated, because nurses as well as children caught it. A few days later the matron phoned to ask if we'd been vaccinated against small-pox. I knew what that meant - from my St. John's experience. My heart sank. Later the whole town was re-vaccinated. Those were the days! But thankfully, I wasn't then actively connected with the cork shop.

At the time both my father and sister were in the business, but unfortunately, five years after my father died in 1956, my sister died of leukaemia, so I, although married and with two young sons had to run the business to support my mother."

She told me, "My grandfather had taken on a boy, John Watkins, when he was 14, to learn the trade. He stayed on as manager and helped me run the business until he retired in his early 80s."

She went on, "We used to import cork from Spain and Portugal, then cut it to size to make bottle corks for pharmacies, brewers, and home wine-makers, all along the South Coast. We also made cork bath mats, carved cork pictures and cork tops for stools. There were originally very many uses for cork, but when plastics and laminates came into being, it became almost redundant, and by the 1980's, if I could show a profit of about £5.00, I'd had a good week. However, by that time my mother had died, so the shop was carried on almost as a hobby."

I asked her how the shop came to be in the Brighton Museum. She told me that it was

due to sentiment. "You see," she said, "John retired when the shop was nearing its centenary, so I kept it open in order to celebrate its 100 years. Then, in 1983, when the premises were being rebuilt from basement to roof, I donated the facade and contents to the Museum. They reconstructed it just as it had always looked and there it stands today - a memento of a now almost defunct industry."

The shop had stood on an ancient site and the original deeds, dating back to the 1750's are also with the Museum. There is now a fashion fabric's shop standing where the old 'Cork Shop' used to be.

Doris, sadly, finds it difficult to visit the Museum and gaze nostalgically at the old shop, as she is now disabled with a spinal condition and can only walk a few yards with the aid of sticks. But despite losing her husband recently, she keeps cheerful and optimistic.

She has learnt to use a computer for her varied communal and charity works and manages to carry on a normal domestic life. Family and friends are always assured of a warm welcome to her home in First Avenue, Hove.

CISSIE CROOK.

Cissie is 3rd generation British and was born in 1906 in High Holborn, London. In 1918 her mother took her and her two brothers to Brighton while her father was in the Flying Corps.

The only house they could find was one at 11 Spring St. off Western Rd, in Brighton, at 11/6d a week, and Cissie attended a little church school - part of St. Mary of Magdalene, in Bedford Place (now a theatre).

She told me, "It was run by nuns and we were the first Jews that they'd ever met. But they were very respectful of our religion and we would wait outside the hall until assembly was over, so we didn't start lessons until after 9.45am. - much to our delight!"

Cissie was always very artistic, had a good eye for colour and liked sewing, so at 15 and a half when she left school she went to the Tech College in Grand Parade, now part of Brighton University, to study millinery. Afterwards she started in the workrooms of 'Kate Darling' - corner of The Drive and Church Rd. and because she showed ability and initiative, was soon promoted to the showroom.

She said, "I was referred to as showroom assistant (very posh) and I was supplied with a special smart dress. But the workroom staff shunned me, as I was now the only saleslady, and they resented the fact that I'd been promoted from workroom to showroom. Unfortunately the business went into liquidation, and I remember that I had to go to the Receiver's office in Grand Parade to get my final week's wages of 15/-."

When her husband retired he became very involved with Middle St. Synagogue,

eventually becoming the warden. Cissie now also had more time to continue the welfare and social work that had always been part of her life. She became Chair of the Ladies Guild of the Brighton and Hove Hebrew Congregation and for over 45 years has been involved in the Jewish Friendship Club which meets every Wednesday afternoon at the Ralli Hall Community Centre in Hove.

This tiny, energetic lady of 86 shrugs off any aches and pains and is always to be seen busily engaged in many diverse activities... from painting and sculpting at Dupont Arts, and Brighton and Hove Jewish Art Society to caring for Jewish people in need, as a member of Brighton and Hove Jewish Welfare Board.

She told me, "There are many needy Jews here. Everyone is not wealthy and living in luxury. Some came and started small businesses, but were unsuccessful...some retired here and found that they couldn't manage on their pension. Many therefore have found it necessary to call on the Board for help." Cissie truly bears out the saying, "If you want something doing - ask a busy person."

## YETTA ROSE

As soon as I arrived at Yetta's home in Langdale Rd. Hove, I was offered coffee and homemade cake by this charming lady, who looked nearer 60 than her 80 years. Yetta, a 2nd generation Brit, was born in London in 1912, but came to Brighton in 1917 during the First World War. The family took over a sweet shop (where her brother was born) in Warleigh Rd. Brighton, near Preston Circus, and lived above it.

"We went to Preston Rd. School...now part of the Poly," she told me, "until I left at 14. We were the only Jewish children there, as few Jews lived in that area. But we were excused assembly and allowed time off for the Jewish Holidays. We would walk to Middle St. Synagogue as it was the only place of worship then. Most of the Jews lived around the North Laine and I remember going to the butcher and grocer in Bond St. and Gardner St. I believe the delicatessen in Gardner St. still exists, but I don't think it is Jewish any more."

After leaving school, she was apprenticed to hair-dressing at 'Collins Salon' in the arcade off Western Rd. and trained there for two years. When she was 20, she met and married Nat Rose, who was a theatrical agent. Unfortunately he became ill with TB after only being married for a few weeks. He died 3 years later, leaving her with a young son of 18 months.

When her mother died in 1958, she realised that her true talents lay in 'caring'...whether for sick, disabled or handicapped, so she gave up hairdressing and joined the British Red Cross Society. After passing exams she became cadet officer, training girls of 6-14 at Red Cross Headquarters in Montpelier Crescent.

Not content with this, she offered her services as nursing help in the Children's Hospital

and Brighton General, and finally, for 6 years she was Matron of the Spastic Centre in Dyke Rd. (now demolished).

She was now 50, and with all her experience she felt that she wanted to qualify as a professional nurse. But at her age it was difficult and daunting to start as a probationer with 18 year olds. "However," she told me, "with the help of a lady doctor I knew, who encouraged me and as I had prior knowledge of physiology and anatomy from my work in the Red Cross, my doctor friend persuaded the matron of the New Sussex Hospital in Windlesham Rd. to take me on."

She went on, "I trained and worked at that hospital until it closed in 1982 to become a psychiatric hospital. I did two years training as SEN for £28.00 a month plus uniform and laundry, but despite coming out top in the final exams, I decided against carrying on to SRN as I wanted to nurse - not to do admin work. I became acting Staff Nurse and was in charge of wards until I retired at 63."

But that wasn't the end of her career. Yetta continued to do supply nursing and voluntary work for the Red Cross. Apart from first aid and welfare work, she counselled, ran disabled clubs, helped at Red Cross shops and did escort duties taking patients to and from hospital. She now has a Badge of Honour medal as a life member of the Red Cross.

She said, "I've had a hard life, but my retirement years have been the best ever. I've had some wonderful experiences and memories. I remember when the Queen Mother came to Roedean College for the 70th anniversary of the chapel. I was on duty, and as she was walking down the green slope to the marquee, her high heels caught in the grass and she stumbled. I had visions of attending to a broken leg or sprained ankle... but she managed to right herself."

"Then there was the time, in 1962, when I was working with the spastics at the Dyke Rd. Day Centre. I was invited by the Duchess of Norfolk with two other matrons to the 'Queen's Garden Party', for 'services rendered'." She laughed, "We did it in style...hiring a Daimler and driving up to Buckingham Palace, like Royalty. We saw most members of the Royal Family and it was a wonderful day. I bought a new suit and hat for the occasion." She chuckled, "But I've never worn them since!"

I asked what she thought of nursing today. She was adamant. "Today," she said, "nurses are not taught to nurse. There's not sufficient discipline, too much technology. In our day we LOOKED. We noticed their colour, felt their pulse, talked to them...we could make an intelligent guess and had no need to rely on all the artificial technical aids that they have today. They're only machines, after all. No, those were great days and nurses were truly nurses! Everything is different today... and not always for the best!"

**BRIGHTON & HOVE JEWISH HOME FOR THE AGED**

I was introduced to some of the residents of the above home which was set up in Burlington St. by the Jewish Welfare Board in 1954. It is a bright, pleasant building, near the sea, where older Jews can enjoy their life in dignity and peace. The age range is from 70 to one merry, old lady of 107. She has all her wits about her, plays the mouth organ and has a daily glass of whisky. She plans to live until she can add her 10th telegram from the Queen to her other 7. I was unable to interview her when I was there, but I met three men whose lives may be of interest.

#### LOUIS DORE

He is a handsome man in his 70s and 5th generation British, whose family has lived in Brighton for over 150 years. His great-grandfather came to England from Poland in 1820 and then moved to Grand Parade in 1830, and became the first member of Middle St. Synagogue when it opened in 1875. He is buried in Ditchling Rise.

Although all the family were musicians, Louis opted to go into the Civil Service and was an Inland Revenue Officer for 30 years. He served 10 years in the RAMC, and now has lived 7 years in the home. He keeps his brain alert by studying maths and structural engineering at the Poly-tech.

#### JACK BARNET and NAT GILROY

Although both these men had come to Brighton at the age of one and had attended Middle St. School until 14, they were very different. While Nat was forthcoming and willing to talk, Jack tended to be rather taciturn. He wouldn't tell me when he was born, but I later heard that he was in his 80s, although he didn't look it.

His parents kept a fruit shop in Queen's Rd. but he was something of a child musical prodigy. He did tell me that at 14 he went to Brighton School of Music in North St. and studied the violin. He has been a professional musician all his life and played in orchestras, restaurants and dance halls. He still does the occasional gig.

Nat, on the other hand had lead a completely different life. His parents, both British, were wholesale greengrocers in Spitalfields, London, then came to Brighton in 1911 when Nat was 1 year old. They opened a business in Black Lion St. where Nat helped when he left school.

Being always a 'big lad' and very athletic - he was All England Champion Swimmer from age 12 to 14, representing a City school in London. Then he gave up swimming and became a professional Bantam-weight boxer until he was 20. During the war he was with the RE's from 1939 - 45 driving tanks all over Italy and Egypt, following the Germans. After the war he worked as a lorry driver for a firm in Worthing.

He chuckled as he told me, "I thought it was time I settled down, so I married a 'peach' - actually, I 'picked' her up on Brighton Beach. If you know what I mean! With a wife to

support, I decided to start my own business, so I began transporting greengroceries from local farms to several Brighton wholesalers.”

Later on in life, he told me, that after a number of 'up's and down's' he and his wife ran a Bingo club at Portslade Working Men's Club, which was packed out on their twice weekly sessions, until Bingo lost its initial appeal.

He went on, “I've seen so many changes in Brighton since I was a lad. And not all for the best. We used to walk on the West Pier - and look at it now! We would go dancing at the Regent by the Clock Tower and walk home late at night. But now...well, you take your life in your hands, especially if you're an old man like me! Even with my background. There's so much more traffic and noise. And the Jewish population - well, they've mostly gone from the area where I grew up - moved to Hove and further afield. Yes...life isn't what it was and it ain't any better!”

## SYDNEY LAWRENCE

And now - the man who witnessed an event which was to have worldwide repercussions.

Sydney Lawrence was born in 1917 at number 54 Waterloo St. which is still there. It was one of the first streets in Hove. He said, with a laugh, “My dad was away fighting in France and he came home on leave. I reckon I was the result!” A sister was born later in 1920.

He went to Middle St. School until he won a scholarship to Patcham High School for Boys, where he attended until he was 16. Then he was apprenticed to Rayners, the opticians, who had a factory in Kemptown. In his late teens he studied optics at the Polytechnic in London...now City College, and he qualified as an optician in 1939. Quite a break-away from the trade of his father, who was a self-employed bespoke tailor, working from home.

In 1938 Sydney joined the RAF Voluntary Reserve, so was one of the first to be conscripted in September 1939, as an instrument engineer and navigator with 5th Bomber Command. He was involved in the earliest raids of the war on Germany in 106 squadron, flying Hampdens Light bombers with a 5 man crew.

“I was determined to be one of those survivors so I tried to learn their language and managed to build up a kind of rapport with some of our jailers who were more amenable. I was moved around to different camps to supplement the work force, until, in January 1945, I was working for Mitsubishi in Nagasaki.”

He then went on to recall that fateful day on 9th August 1945. “It was a beautiful morning and I was working near a heap of rubble...the result of bombing by the Allies.

At around 11.00am I saw three large planes flying in formation. The two outside ones peeled off, then the centre one circled - and dropped its load...the PLUTONIUM BOMB!"

His voice shook as he continued, "I saw a flash. Then huge columns of smoke rose up. I stood paralysed behind the mountain of rubble, unable to move - or think! I saw people who were now dust swirling around, with their shadows still emblazoned on the ground...dead dust, but evidence of their existence still there to see! Ugh!...Unforgettable!"

I was surprised that he hadn't been affected by the blast. He went on, "Well, you see, the side of anything that faced the impact was blasted to bits, but the sheltered side was left more or less untouched. Trees were pure white on one side where the flash had struck, yet the other side still had green leaves on. Where I was crouching was untouched, yet the other side of the mound was flattened by the blast. Of the 2000 Allies there, only half survived the initial impact, but many more died afterwards. As I stood amongst the 85,000 dead inhabitants, I asked myself...' Why not me?' I felt guilty at being left alive. And the horror of it all was so pointless.

When the war with Japan finished on 16th August the Americans dropped food parcels and the surviving POW's helped the sick and dying people...the Jap guards just disappeared. A couple of weeks later the US troops landed and took us to Okanao in the Philippines, where we were isolated in hospital. Some died there and the rest of us were taken to Manila and Sydney, and eventually, those certified fit enough were landed back in England for Christmas 1945."

After the war, Sydney went back to optics, married a local girl in 1948 and a son was born in 1949. I asked him whether he had suffered any effects from the radiation. He said, "We knew little of the long-term, genetic effects in those days, but when my wife was pregnant, I spent 24 hours a day praying that the child would be OK, and not have some kind of mutation! Even now," he went on, "I still get nightmares. I still get guilt feelings that I was saved. Yes, I do have to cover up in the sun, otherwise I get a horrible rash. Every day I thank God, when I see my son, now 43, and my two grandchildren, that they have not suffered any radiation or genetic effects."

Sydney retired 10 years ago and his wife died shortly after. Now he lives alone with his memories, alleviated only by the times he sees his family and friends.

"Times have changed," he told me, "although we went through a war - moral values, law and order and people's attitudes to one another were much better then. The Jewish Community was very close when I was a boy, now it's much more diverse. Instead of one synagogue where we all attended, we now have five of differing outlooks...three Traditional Orthodox, one Liberal and one Reform. People have moved to different areas and property has changed hands. Society today is selfish and self-centred. There's a lot to be said for the old days...much better in many ways!"

## INTERVIEWS WITH TWO RABBIS

In the light of the ethos of our present society, which has created an erosion of the values and standards of the past, I thought that it would be illuminating to get the viewpoint of local rabbis. Although aspects of assimilation, religion and Jewish identity weren't originally planned to be within the scope of this book, I found that they have had an important bearing on people's lives - particularly amongst some of the younger members of my study - as you will see.

I approached Rabbi Efune, Principal of the Torah Academy - a private Jewish school set up by him six years ago, and I spoke to Rabbi Collick of the Reform Synagogue in Palmeira Avenue, Hove. Both these men were kind enough to give up their time to answer my questions.

### RABBI EFUNE

Although born in South Africa, Rabbi Efune has been in England for 10 years, and came to Brighton 7 years ago to do Jewish Community work and adult education. Being a chaplain to Jewish prisoners and students, he realised that there was a gap in full-time Jewish education, so in September 1988, he opened a Jewish school. There were originally only 7 pupils, but the numbers are now approaching 50.

Rabbi Efune went on to tell me, "Many of the problems today are due to secularism in Society and its quest for materialistic values. Around 100 years ago there was little assimilation, but much emphasis on integration.

To the many refugees from Eastern Europe, England was a haven. They were grateful for this, and their ambition was to become 'Anglicised' - to integrate without losing their identity. Although they struggled to make a living, they were of necessity a closely knit community still keeping to their Jewish/family traditions, values and culture. In order to integrate more fully, and also to 'get on' in a mainly Gentile environment, many changed their names...e.g. Abramovitz became Adams; Cohen - Collins; Michealovitch - Micheals, and so on. They endeavoured to learn English, and discouraged their children from speaking 'Yiddish' - their international tongue.

There was a gradual falling off of tradition during the next generation, who were more Anglicised and often, to improve their situation, had to work on the Sabbath and other Holy days. Many of this generation worked hard in sweat-shops, or started out on their own, as they wanted their children to have better prospects in life than they had had. But there was still the extended family, living closely together, with the synagogue at its centre.

During the War years, many children were evacuated, and also, with fathers serving in the British Forces, gradually there was less contact with past tradition and Jewish education. The situation worsened in the post-war years, when many of the

'lay-leaders'. although committed Zionists, were lacking in the knowledge and tenets of true Judaism.

The world continued to change, and attitudes, values and outlooks became more permissive, especially so with the wide-spread impact of the multi-media. This was reflected, in some cases, in complete integration and assimilation, and now many of our young people are ignorant of their roots and un-committed to their heritage, culture and religion. There is much inter-marriage, which may, ultimately, cause traumas and problems to the children of such mixed partnerships, as, in Jewish Law, a child born of a Jewish mother IS Jewish. Much will depend on the outlook and decision of the parents re their up-bringing.

I have children in my school from such alliances. Now, it seems to me, that there is a general trend amongst the 20 to 30 year olds, and even those of 40 odd, to seek out their Jewish identity, and to return to some of the true values of our faith, which can only be done through education.”

He ended by saying, “This is an encouraging sign, and I hope will provide the continuity which has been lacking for so many years. We must re-educate our future generation. An educated Jew must be a committed citizen, in all aspects of life, whereas an ignorant one is the opposite. He has nothing with which to assess his life...nor to guide it by.”

#### RABBI COLLICK

The Reform Movement began in Germany around 1800, after the French Revolution, when Jews were allowed out of the ghettos. It crossed to England in 1840, and started here when a group of Sephardic (Spanish and Portuguese) Jews wanted to open a branch of their synagogue in the West End of London. The elders of the synagogue refused to allow this, so they set up their own place of worship and decided to follow the German style of 'reform'.

Initially there was little 'reform' as such, but gradually it changed. Basically the 'core' is the same as traditional orthodoxy, but the differences being in the style of service, and the philosophy, which is geared more towards modern-day needs.

Rabbi Collick told me, "Theologically, we are not fundamentalists - we believe that Judaism is not static...it's continuously changing and developing. Although we're still traditionalistic, in that, although our service is mainly in Hebrew, there IS more English used. We've made it more 'user-friendly' to better the understanding. In the traditional 'Orthodox' synagogues, where the service is all in Hebrew, many people pray with little knowledge of what they're really saying.

Although all ritual laws are kept, we do feel that each generation has a right to a point of view, as reflected in modern life, so, while still obeying the main tenets of the religion, we do keep an open mind. One example of this is the driving of a car to the synagogue

on the Sabbath. According to the orthodox, driving on that day is forbidden, but we feel that it is better to attend by car - than not at all.

Our Synagogue was founded here in 1955 by a small group of people who wanted a more modern approach, while still being traditional. They bought a piece of land in Palmeira Avenue, at a reasonable price, from Lewis Cohen (later Mayor of Hove) and built a synagogue, which now has a large membership.”

Rabbi Collick was born in Hackney in 1957, of a traditional, Orthodox family. He told me that although there was no other rabbi in the family - his maternal grandmother being a kosher caterer, he'd always wanted to be a rabbi. He was educated at London University, and then studied in Los Angeles and Jerusalem. He moved here from Edgware eight years ago, to take up his calling at the Reform Synagogue. He has proved to be a most popular rabbi, as the increase in his congregation has shown.

His replies to my questions on the erosion of attitudes and values in society in general, and Judaism in particular, were very similar to those of Rabbi Efune. “Jews became well integrated within a generation. By the time of the third generation (post war) there was more mobility and freedom in society, more opportunity, and much parental encouragement towards betterment and professional qualifications - upward mobility through educational achievement. But by the fourth generation, not only was there integration - which means: 'to become part of society, but to keep one's own identity', there was also much assimilation - meaning that, 'one becomes so much a part of the society that individual identity is lost'. Inter-marriage is now the 'accepted' norm, and some half to three quarters of young people today have mixed relationships which is causing dreadful tensions.

In contrast to the Orthodox, the Reform want to be 'inclusive'...not 'exclusive'. We can't reverse the process, so we try to encourage the Jewish partner to pass on their Jewish identity to the child. What is heartening today is that many young people are seeking their Jewish roots, despite a mixed parentage. We have seen what happened in the past - in Spain and Germany when there has been total assimilation! I feel that the main thing is to be inclusive - to welcome all who want to come back to us. And I believe we'll be around for a long time to come.”

He ended up on a wry note. “Ruth, the Moabite, was the first convert to Judaism. Her great-grandson was King David, from whom The Messiah descended. So...if the greatest figure in Jewish history - King David, had a non-Jewish great grand-mother, then there's hope for us all!”

As mentioned in my introduction, I now feel it is appropriate to tell you something of the lives and background of some of the younger Brightonians. I will start with Roger Abrahams, the son of Doris, who happened to be around when I was interviewing his mother.

## ROGER ABRAHAMS

Roger, Doris's elder son, was born in May 1944, in the house in Hove where she still lives. He told me that his paternal grandma lived with them and he said, "I vaguely remember, as a child, seeing all the beaches still wired up, and my grandma, while wheeling me in a pram, tripping up over some loose wire. She got an ulcerated leg and was laid up for quite a time.

I went to St. Margaret's C of E School in St. Margaret's Place - it's now a multi-storey car park at the back of the Metropole Hotel. I remember the Head - a Mr. Mason - had a small cubby-hole as an office, there being no staff-room or Head's room. We had coal fires and you were lucky if you had a seat by the fire - otherwise you froze if it was cold. In the Winter-time you had to put on a coat and scarf to go to the toilets, as they were outside across the yard."

He laughed, "There were so many Jewish children there from around the area - Waterloo Street to Middle Street, that the school had to close on the major Jewish Holidays, as the classes would have been so depleted. There was a great respect for the Jewish religion and all the children, of whatever denomination, played happily together."

Roger went on, "Unfortunately I missed the first term there, as I came down with flu - possibly, we thought, from the local swimming baths. This then developed into rheumatic fever, with the result that I was two and a half months in the Princess Alexander Hospital for Sick Children. It was awful! I had to lie still all the time, then was not allowed to do sport for three years. With little exercise, I grew fat and was teased mercilessly. I can remember a bully boy who threw a bottle of ink over me. My clothes were covered in blue ink which wouldn't wash out - was my mother mad! She went round to see the boy's parents and told the Head, who severely punished the boy.

I also remember a time when I was around 13. I'd joined the RAF section of the cadets in school (training for National Service). One of the boys called me 'fat Jew boy!' I grabbed him and threw him over my shoulder and put my boot on his stomach. Everyone cheered and no-one dared to tease me again. The Head was most supportive and would lecture the boys about bullying or discrimination of any kind. He was a great man and I admired him tremendously."

Roger grinned up at me, "I would have liked to have been a pilot. I passed all the tests and would have been given free tuition by the RAF, but when they found out I'd had rheumatic fever I was not accepted, so at 18 I joined a local firm of chartered surveyors and studied with a home correspondence course. After five years of hard slog, I became a FRICS - like my father. In 1975, at 32, I joined a Government Valuation office, where I am still employed."

Roger is married with two children; a son of 22 and a daughter of 18, and the whole family are involved in amateur dramatics. His wife is wardrobe mistress for the Brighton and Hove Operatic Society, and Roger, while spending much time with Ralli Hall Drama Society, also continues his hobby of building and flying model aircraft.

He is in his 4th year as chairman of Ralli Hall - the Brighton and Hove Jewish Centre, which provides activities from the 6 year olds to 80+, ranging from music, drama, sport, Jewish Education and social events.

There are four Senior Citizen's clubs, the Jewish Scout and Cub groups, founded by Roger in 1955, and also counselling sessions for the Community where needed. The administrative assistant and caretaker are the only two paid workers, with all the other responsibilities being undertaken by volunteers.

I asked Roger whether being Jewish had ever had any adverse effect on his life? He laughed, "Well, apart from those kids at school, there was one time in the late sixties when I applied for a job as a chartered surveyor in the City. I didn't even get an interview, despite my qualifications. I wondered whether it was my name that had deterred them?"

He went on, "Strange - isn't it? At one time Jews changed their name, especially in show business, but now, particularly in the USA, people are keen to be involved with Jews - Sammy Davis Jnr, Elizabeth Taylor etc. Why, the film industry was started by Jews and still owes much to them.

Jews are conspicuous throughout the world, especially in music, entertainment and the arts, the media, as well as in business and politics. Assimilation is too easy today because there isn't the discrimination that there once was (and rightly so - we're no different from others). Someone once said proudly to me, 'I've got Jewish blood you know!' Today, thank God, there's no stigma in being Jewish.

I think things are much better now than when my mother was my age. Then we had to stay together - we had little option. Today we're accepted - there's laws against any form of discrimination, although the National Front is trying to rear its ugly head again. I agree that religion is on the decline - not just amongst the Jews. We question more and don't fear an after-life. I think the media is a lot to blame. Non-Jews have now integrated some of our culture, and the whole world is becoming much more homogenous."

This interviewee prefers anonymity, so she will be known as:

LYNNE

Lynne, a slim, attractive brunette, told me that in 1974, when she was 23, she was the

only Jewish police-woman in the Sussex Police Force.

She has had a hard life, not only emotionally and financially, but also in coming to terms with her Judaism.

She told me, "I was born in 1951, in a council house in Hove. My father was deaf and dumb and my mother was a weak woman - not overly educated, but very attractive. She felt that a man - any man, was necessary to her well-being and her life.

My parents were both Jewish, but owing to my father's disability, I was brought up without any Jewish teaching, as he was unable to participate in any of the ritual. The marriage was bad and my parents were divorced when I was 6. I was the youngest of 5 children, and was often dumped on my uncle, my mother's only brother, while she was galivanting off somewhere...with someone or other.

Not long after the divorce, my mother re-married a Polish refugee who was not Jewish, and they had one child. I remember much fighting, as mother took lovers and her husband would find out and beat her up. I was neglected - thrown around like a useless piece of furniture, and resented by my mother. I would go to visit my father, who had a room in Kemp Town, and he would try to tell me that he still loved mother. He was always 'constant' whereas my mother was 'in-constant'. I never knew where she was, or what she was up to!

Father had a friend whom we all liked and trusted. He would take us kids out, as Mum was only too glad to get rid of us. He seemed to favour me and would buy me sweets and then would touch and fondle me. This grew worse as I got older and my body started to develop. I didn't like it and felt that it was wrong, but I had no one to turn to, or to advise me. I now realise that I had been sexually abused by this man from the age of 8 to 12 years. I couldn't get my father to understand, and when I tried to explain to my mother about the touching, she replied, 'Oh go away - I'm cooking. Don't talk such rubbish. He's a lovely man - stop making up tales, or I'll give you what for!' So I felt that it was all my fault and that perhaps they were right, and I was making a fuss over nothing.

I was a real mixed-up kid. I was quite bright, but I remember when I went to Patcham School, and the 11+ exams were looming, I decided to deliberately fail the test. I wanted to stay with my friends, who I knew wouldn't pass as they weren't very clever - but they were the only friends that I had.

When I was 13 we moved to Spain, as my step-father was a chef. This didn't work out, and nine months later we moved back to England and went to live in London, where mother started mucking about with men again. This resulted in mother's second divorce, when I was 14.

This was a most difficult time for me - in the formative years of my life, I was so unhappy

and confused. I hated my parents, my life, and everything. I'd lost the will to live. I couldn't eat, was very depressed and eventually I went into a coma. The only person who seemed to understand me was my real father, with whom I was able to communicate in a certain way. I left home and moved back to Brighton when I was 15 and went to live with my sister, so that I could visit my father. In order to earn some money, I got myself a job in a factory, assembling parts.

Despite everything I was ambitious and intelligent, so after a variety of jobs and traumatic experiences which I prefer not to dwell on, I finally decided to join the Police Force. I was then trained in all aspects of police work, but I often wondered whether I was the right calibre of person to be in such a job.

I can remember one of my first cases. A woman had stabbed her husband and I had to stay in the room with her. She wasn't handcuffed or restrained in any way, and she kept staring at me in a most antagonistic way. I tell you - I was scared stiff! While on the one hand I could feel a certain sympathy for her - for the suffering that had caused her to take such a drastic action, but on the other hand, I couldn't help thinking, 'this woman's a killer - she must be a bit mad - and I'm all alone with her!' I had to walk her to court, and I kept telling myself - don't run, don't show her you're scared. So I walked slowly, but wondered what I'd do if she attacked me.

After two years in the police force, I met and married a non-Jewish policeman. He didn't approve of women working - considered a woman's place was in the home. He insisted that I left, and as by this time I'd realised that this wasn't the career for me, I wasn't too concerned. I was quite happy to be a wife and mother.

What I should have realised though, from his attitude, was that he was the original 'male chauvinist pig!' and pretty soon I knew that I'd made the wrong choice. He was possessive, very violent and a wife-beater. If I blinked wrong I would get it! If I broke the yellow of an egg, or was reading a news-paper when he was talking - or not performing to his liking in bed - then he vented his spleen savagely on me. I didn't know who I could go to for help. Maybe there were associations for battered wives - but I didn't know of them at the time, and anyway, I was too frightened to do anything about it.

We had a child by this time, and one day he nearly made our son choke, by forcing some food he didn't like right down his throat. Striking me was one thing, but when it was my son, I saw red! I stood up to him for once. And then he really gave me 'what for!' After four and a half years of heartache and abuse, I finally left him. I grabbed the child and ran to my sister, who put me in touch with a social worker, and eventually I was able to obtain sanctuary in a 'Refuge for Abused Women'. This was evidence for a divorce, and I was glad to be rid of him, so that I could now get on with my life.

After five years of surviving as a single parent, I met my second husband, who was a civil engineer. I was on the committee of 'Gingerbread' doing a traffic survey, and he was in charge of it. We were mutually attracted, got talking and he asked me round to

his place to discuss certain matters.

I looked round his flat and saw some Jewish artefacts on the side-board, and a box of 'matzo' (Passover biscuits) in the kitchen. I was surprised and said, 'You're not Jewish - are you?' He laughed quizzically at me, 'Might be - so what!' We realised that we were both Jewish and so the relationship developed.

He wanted to re-introduce me to my Jewish heritage. I had fallen by the wayside all this time, and I was glad to do this. He took me to the synagogue and explained everything and gave me books to read. I felt that this was what I'd been searching for, and was very happy.

He was 6 year's older than me and had two children from a previous marriage, but I was very much in love, and we got married. We had a son, and at last I felt that my life was good, and worth living. But I was to learn differently.

During four years of married life, I eventually found out that he was a liar and a cheat - a manipulator, and worse...moody and sulky. He wouldn't speak to me for months if he was annoyed over something. But he'd never tell me what I'd done to upset him. This was terribly wearing - like walking on eggs! Then I found letters and photographs in a cupboard. It appeared that he'd been advertising in the 'personal' column of several newspapers, for women friends - dating them and leading them on... telling them lies that he was single, when all the time he was married to me.

It was five years before I could get a divorce, but with the help of a friend I was able to buy him out of his share of our home, which is the house where I'm living now. Although I get no support for our child, he does have access to him - I can't deny him that as he does love the kid.

Unfortunately, my second marriage and my life has disillusioned me about Judaism and God - maybe partly it's been due to my own naivety and stupidity - who knows? I've had a life of hell, but have been lucky in so far that I've had some good counselling help - both from Jews and non-Jews. Now I feel more comfortable about it all - I can take it or leave it. I feel Jewish... culturally, but not religiously. I have little money; I'm a single parent and am on 'income support', but I have hope for the future. I've taken GCSE's at Night School and I plan to take a course in counselling."

She laughed, "After what I've been through in my life, I reckon I ought to be well able to understand any kind of problem that may come up. I've had the sort of experiences that half these counsellors and social workers have no real concept of. So maybe my life will have been worthwhile, even if it only serves to help others in need."

CORINNE SILVER

(A 3rd generation Jewess and an only child.)

Assimilation and integration is prevalent in all sectors of society today, particularly amongst the young. Corinne's story will show that despite a lack of understanding or knowledge of her religion; despite the struggles and problems of her young life, she has striven to find out about and return to her Jewish heritage and identity.

I was immediately drawn towards Corinne - a vivacious plumpish woman, with a great sense of humour. As we sat drinking a coffee, she joked, ""I came into the world at the same time as TV - 1951, and was born in The Drive, Hove. I think I've had to 'drive' myself all my life."

She went on, "I had a very mixed up childhood. My mother - a very attractive women, was separated from my father and they later divorced, when I was 12. My father and grand-father had a shirt factory by the Clock Tower, in Brighton, where they employed both Jews and non-Jews. They were very assimilated, and I remember my grandma as being an elegant and typically 'English' woman who taught me to make roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and also baked egg custard and eccles cakes.

In contrast, my mother's family, who were from the East End of London, and traditionally orthodox, moved here during the war." She laughed, "My mum's father was quite a character - a bit of a 'spiv'. He was a 'silver merchant' - what-ever that meant? Perhaps something a bit 'shady' - who knows? Anyway, he was a very short man with blazing blue eyes, and he loved to drive a very fast car. He was quite a sight driving along with his long hair streaming out from under his wide-brimmed homburg. I got on well with him, and I think I've taken after him in many ways. He adored me, and I loved him.

The years between 8 to 14 are rather muzzy to me, what with illness, and the divorce, but I do remember that I was brought up non-orthodox and knew little of Jewish life or customs. I can remember, though, when I was 7, being very ill. I had to have my spleen and gall bladder removed, and then, when later I returned to school, I couldn't keep up. I was in and out of hospital, and then later was found to be dyslexic. One thing I do remember is that I didn't go in to Christian prayers. The few Jewish girls would gather in a side room and one of the older ones taught us the Jewish morning prayer. I can still recite that today!

When I was 9, I went to Deepdean School in Hove, where I had little academic training, but plenty on how to be a 'use-less' young lady! There were a few Jewish girls there, but I didn't tend to mix with them - I was too assimilated.

After my parents divorced, when I was 12, I went to Neville Road County Secondary School - now Blatchington Mill, and I lived with my mother in Wilbury Road, Hove. This was a very traumatic time for me, but I do remember an amusing incident. My mother's sister was getting married and I was to be a bridesmaid with two other girls. It was really crazy.

I had had mumps and my cheeks and neck were still quite swollen; the other bridesmaid had fallen downstairs and knocked her front teeth out, and the third one, I think, had had nits, and had had to have most of her hair shaved off. We looked a right lot on the photo” She grinned, “I looked like a pregnant toad!”

“Both my mum and dad tended to live their lives up, far beyond their means. Dad bought a flat at the Metropole, and after the divorce, mum stayed at the Normandy, where she ran the restaurant. She was a very capable, intelligent woman and highly efficient.

When I was 16, Mum remarried. Her new husband was reasonably religious - in contrast to Mum, who had little Jewish background. My step-father had three children, the youngest of whom was only 6. He was a good man - a fruiterer, who I learned to love. At my own father's funeral, when I was 31, he was really so supportive, both physically and emotionally. He helped me to understand the prayers and ritual, and I had a far better relationship with him than with my own mother.

He later got Alzheimer's Disease, but I can remember taking him for walks. He had been a brilliant dancer in his day and had run dancing classes. Suddenly he started to quick-step down Furze Hill, and he laughed and said, 'Do you know, I once taught Ava Gardner to dance!' He died in 1992, after being married to my mother for 25 years. Mum has since re-married. She's a very attractive woman, you know! And she still lives in the same place in Furze Hill, Hove.

When I was 12 I began to develop a social conscience and decided to do some voluntary work. I used to take the children from St. Ann's Convent for walks. I spent one Christmas there. I was overwhelmed by everything and thought the nuns very kind and really devout in their belief. I wished that there were Jewish nuns - then I could join them. But I knew that there weren't and I couldn't.”

She chuckled as she ran her hands over her loose 'T' shirt. “I'm plump now - but you should have seen me at 16! I was huge - size 20, at least! At the time I was learning to be a hairdresser and I practised putting streaks in my hair. I thought I looked a sight, so I covered my hair with a scarf. My mother thought they looked great and encouraged me to use more make-up, to wear smart clothes and finally she made me go to 'Weight Watchers'. By the time I was 18 a 'butterfly' emerged. I was now a glamorous size 12 and boys started to date me. Unfortunately I couldn't handle them, or my life. I didn't feel right - I wasn't used to attention and approval for my face and figure. I broke off relationships and couldn't settle to anything. I went to work in a pub, and then to Marks and Spencers, and finally, rebelling against all the stresses, and pressure from my mother, I ran away to London. I wanted freedom for myself, and to find myself.

I got a tiny flat in the East End and shared a bed-room with another girl. We had two beds in the one room, and she used to bring her boyfriends home and have sex in her bed. I hated this, so would go and sleep in the lounge - but I could hear them. This was

so embarrassing and horrible, and she would get annoyed as she expected me to bring a boy home and also to do the same thing.

At the time I'd got a job at Bourne and Hollingsworth demonstrating some foul perfume for men. One day a handsome man came in and I asked him to try it, and sprayed him. He laughed and said, 'No way - but I'd like you to come and work for me.' He had just imported a special kind of brush that cleaned clothes, and he had a stall in Petticoat Lane Market.

So I became a 'market pitcher'. I used to stand there and yell, 'Come forward ladies and gentlemen - you've never in your life tried such a brush - it's wonderful, marvellous ...and so on.' I had a 'rick' in front - someone who would hand over a £1 note, pretending to buy, so as to encourage people to part with their money, and to get the ball rolling. I worked seven days a week and shared a flat with students - some of whom were boys. This was considered somewhat risqué then - but we were all good friends. In the evenings I had to work at a cartoon cinema in Victoria Station, as I only earned commission in the market. Sometimes I only had as little as £30 a week to live on. Life was hard then.

Although I lived a completely assimilated life-style at that time, I never denied my Judaism. People would say, 'But you don't look Jewish!' And I would answer, 'Why - how should Jews look?' Despite this, I always came back to Brighton for the Jewish New Year and Day of Atonement. I would attend the synagogue to please my parents, but it all meant little to me.

During this period I became disillusioned with commercialism and materialism. I was searching for something and decided to do something for humanity. But unfortunately I had a mental breakdown due to too many conflicting emotions - my childhood, illness, poverty and basically my identity.

From 1974-79, I became a Community Service volunteer and was given board and lodgings and £3.50 a week pocket-money. Then I trained as a counsellor for youth and drug prevention for 'MIND' with Hackney Community and later I worked in Manchester for the Jewish Student's Crisis line.

When I was around 26 I returned to London and was a volunteer Community Service director setting up projects in Islington. I had a 6th floor council flat, and all my friends were 'hippy and left-wing' non-Jews. I was fascinated with the East End, perhaps because of its original connection with Jews. Although not at all religious, I became interested in Jewish history and in my spare time wandered into synagogues - this resulted in a further identity crisis, and I started to put on weight again. I would wander around in flowing kaftans, until I once again took myself in hand, and at 27 or so, I'd lost over 6 stone.

During the Brixton riots in 80-81, I had much empathy with the black people as I was

working in Lambeth with them. Although I had no Jewish input at all, I would say, 'I'm Jewish - and proud of it!' But I didn't really know what I meant. I just felt that there should be no prejudice against different minority groups. I built up a rapport with the rioters, but then I got mugged. When a necklace that had belonged to my grandmother was ripped off my neck - this soured things, and once again, I became disillusioned.

In 1981, when I was around 31, my stepfather's illness became worse, and I returned to Brighton to help look after him. I got a job as welfare officer for Tikva - the Brighton and Hove Jewish Mental Handicapped Society and I also worked at the Jewish Old Age Home. Despite everything, something kept prodding me to keep in touch with Jews, thereby hoping that some aspect of Judaism would rub off on me and I would find my true identity. Then I met David, and I thought it had.

I had to attend the synagogue for some celebration, so I'd had my hair done and was dressed quietly and modestly as is the custom. There I met David - a studious and orthodox young man, four years younger than me. He told me that he was preparing to go to university to study social work, so I offered to lend him some books. Our friendship blossomed and he courted me with flowers and chocolates. He was so kind and helpful with my father, who now had diabetes on top of the Alzheimer's, that after eight weeks, I felt that I loved him, and as I wanted a child before my biological clock ran out, we decided to get married and go to Durham together. When I told my mother, she was in the middle of making a chocolate mousse. She placed her chocolaty hands on my face, kissed me and said, 'And about time too - thought you'd never grab a fellow!'

Because David was traditionally orthodox, I also wanted to be, but I didn't know what was behind the rituals and traditions - no-one had ever told me. I'd only followed what I'd been told, and I really wanted explanations.

After we got married, David deferred his place at Durham University, and got a job in Bournemouth at the Jewish Community Centre as administrator. As his wife, I was expected to be an example to the community. I took a crash course in 'Kashrut' (Jewish ritual and festivals) most of which I didn't understand. We stayed there two years, during which time my son, Josef, was born.

We moved around quite a bit after that, and David, for one reason or another, never went to university. I tried to live a Jewish life for his sake and my son's, but part of me felt hypocritical. There was much stress, many arguments and moves, and my marriage was falling to pieces. We then returned to Brighton where I worked for two years 'till 92 with 'PACT' at the Brighthelm Centre, setting up a 'Back to Work' mental health project.

After six years of marriage I separated from David, and Josef went to West Hove School. I wanted my son to be 'ordinary' - to cope in the modern world. Unfortunately Josef was not happy there. I think, instinctively, he sensed my uncertainty, which upset him, so I enrolled him in a small private Jewish school, in the hope that this would strengthen his identity and give him the answers that I was unable to do.

At the time I was finding things difficult at PACT. Becoming more involved with Judaism, I wanted to keep to the laws, which meant finishing early on a Friday, and not working on a Saturday. This was not always easy, so I left. Life was bad. I was ill, I had no maintenance and a child to support, no help from anyone, so I had to go on income support.

I was a real mess at that time - all mixed up. In my life I'd tried several religions, gurus, meditation and different life-styles - all the time searching for something that would give my spirit some meaning. Then I met Penina, the wife of Rabbi Effune, who was principal of the school where my son attended. She took me in hand, answered my questions and taught me what Judaism was all about. She gave me strength and life became clearer. Once I could accept my background and my religion, I gained my Faith - life was easier. I could accept God's rules. I'd spent over 40 years kicking out at life, and now I've, at last, found what I'd been searching for. I feel, for the first time in my life - safe!

Being brought up in the secular world, I now realise that the secular world didn't equip me for the true Jewish life. This may be fine for some Jews who will accept without question what they have been told - who will keep the rituals and dogma that they consider necessary for their beliefs, but this wasn't enough for me. I needed to know and believe in the reasons.

I see that the world today is full of trials, tribulations and chaos. I want my son protected and to understand and enjoy his Jewish Heritage, in a way that I never could. If this means living in a more closed community - then so be it! He must find his roots and his true identity."

Corinne is now planning to move to Manchester where her son can attend a Jewish High school, and she has been promised a job which will not compromise her Judaism.

At 43 she has finally found herself. I wish her luck.

And finally - a bit about the writer

LEILA ABRAHAMS

Many of us oldies like to think nostalgically of our childhood, but if I tell you a little about myself and my experiences, then you can judge for yourself my own feelings about 'those good old days'.

I believe that I was born with 6 digits instead of 5 on my right hand - the extra one being a pencil! From a very early age I can remember using every scrap of paper I could find to either write or draw on. No doubt I'd have used toilet paper if we could have afforded it. I'm sure many of my later problems have arisen through having to use scrunched up newspaper which hung on a rusty nail in our out-side 'loo' in the back yard.

My father was an opera singer, with a beautiful tenor voice, until he unfortunately contacted multiple sclerosis in his early forties. This brought his career to an end and left mother with four young children and no income. I was around 9 or 10 at the time, and being the eldest had to assume responsibilities far beyond what many children of that age are expected to face today.

Because of Dad's career with the touring 'Moody Manners Opera Co.' we all travelled with him, and I can remember living in Westcliff, Brighton, London, Wales and finally Manchester, from where my parents originated and where we settled when he could no longer work. I believe I must have attended around 8 or 9 primary schools before winning a scholarship to Central High Grammar School in Manchester. I can't remember learning to read or write, but I must have picked it up somehow, as I always had my head in a book, or was writing or drawing something.

But whichever school I attended it was my drawing that was always commended. Drawing and painting was such a passion with me that at the age of 13, I entered and passed an examination to enter Manchester College of Art at this young age. I transferred there much against the advice of my Headmistress who wanted me to stay at Grammar school until 16 to matriculate. Youth always thinks it knows best!

When I was 15, my mother entered two of my paintings to an art exhibition in London and both were sold. A wonderful future was predicted for me...but poverty and a war took their toll. I had to leave art school while still 15, as mother needed me to earn some money, so was unable to stay on the required extra two years in order to complete my studies and thus gain my degree. Who knows what might have been?

However, to return to the theme of this study. It is known that Brighton has always been liberal in its tolerance of different outlooks, and the early memories of the members of my study bear this out. Apparently their religion was respected at school and very few of them appear to have been subjected to any form of anti-Semitism or discrimination.

Not so with me! I can remember attending a small chapel school in Westcliff when I was 7, my sister 6 and my little brother 5. It was just before the Easter holiday.

We were coming home from school when a gang of older children surrounded us and began hitting and kicking us. We were bewildered and wanted to know why they were doing this. We started to cry and tried to get away. But they kicked us harder and chanted, 'You killed our Lord - we're going to kill you... Dirty Jews!' I really don't know what would have happened if one of the teachers hadn't passed just then and released

us. We, of course had no idea what they were talking about. I don't remember going back to that school after the holidays. But the memory is still with me even today.

Life, for me, as a child was hard. With father unable to work and there being no Social Security, income support, dole money or child allowances, mother had no alternative but to turn to the Jewish Board of Guardians for help. The allowance they expected us to live on was 30/- a week (£1.50) for two adults and four children! I believe our rent was around 8/-which left very little for food, clothes and all the rest. We had two bedrooms and a box room, plus one living room apart from the kitchen. Father had a bed in the living room as he couldn't climb the stairs, mother and I slept in one room, the three others in the 2nd bedroom and she let off the boxroom to a lodger for 5/- board and lodging.

But even this was not enough to keep a family on, so we had to resort to the Jewish Soup Kitchen for supplementary food of bread and soup. A duty that I absolutely hated was to go there several times a week, stand in a queue with wretched, smelly, men women and children, and bring home the soup in a dark blue can (like a workman's flask) and lug four stale loaves back on the tram. Even now I can't bear the smell or taste of barley soup or round stale cobs...they bring back such nasty memories.

I remember the Soup Kitchen was in the same street as Strangeways Jail, and I would scurry past, looking fearfully at the many dark, barred windows and hope that a prisoner wouldn't escape while I was nearby. There were also the times when a murderer was being hanged at 8 o'clock in the morning. People would gather outside the prison and as the clock chimed the hour, everyone would look up at the high tower where the execution was supposed to be taking place, and some would cry, sigh or send up a resounding cheer.

Across the road from the Soup Kitchen there was a brewery, and I can still remember the nauseating smell of hops brewing - a smell, which combined with the barley soup, has put me off beer for life.

At the time I attended the only Jewish State school in Manchester, which was in the same vicinity. The thirties was a time of poverty and unemployment, not only for much of the country, but for many Jews as well - particularly where I lived. Most of the children at that school, although clean and tidy, were forced to wear 'hand-me-downs'; patched and darned ill-fitting garments and boots, or odd grown up clothes donated by more wealthier brethren. But despite everything we laughed and played games of our own creating, oblivious to the wider world outside and what luckier children may have had.

The school was a short distance from the Soup Kitchen, and the majority of us used to walk there daily in a long crocodile, for our dinner. Ugh! I shudder even today when I remember the dinners. No wonder I was a fat child - brought up on a diet high in cholesterol and starch. It would be the same day after day - stew, swimming in fat and potatoes - you were lucky if you managed to find a bit of grisly meat lurking midst the

slush. Occasionally we would get mince, but again it was sloppy and slimy and supplemented by potatoes. As it is against Jewish law to have milk after meat, thankfully we never got milk puddings. Instead we were served with stodgy suet puddings; jam, syrup or spotted dick, all of which I ate with relish, as I'd always had a sweet tooth, and these filled me up after being unable to eat the first course.

We did have some fun though. On our walk back to school we used to pass the Lancashire Hygienic Dairies, where milk was beginning to be bottled. It's possible that in those days dairies didn't have the large refrigeration plants and automation that they have today. Anyway, there used to be sacks and sacks of ice spilling out onto the road after a delivery. This was such a bonus in Summertime. We couldn't afford ice-cream, but how we would rush up to that dirty ice, grab handfuls, oblivious to the germs, and the melting ice dripping all over our clothes, and suck happily all the way back to school.

But despite sometimes not having bread, we always had books. Mother could never resist a salesman selling culture - art books, encyclopaedias, biographies or music. All on the 'never-never' as it was called in those days. I do remember with nostalgia Sunday nights. Dad and Aunt Fanny, mother's sister, also a singer, would sing a selection of songs, accompanied by mother on the piano. Then we'd have a violin solo by Uncle Morris and a laugh with Uncle Jack, a ventriloquist, with his doll, Arnold. I often wonder what happened to that doll. We would sit listening, enjoying it all, then would demand of Dad to sing 'Schubert's Lemonade' our favourite piece. Now, whenever I hear Schubert's Serenade, it brings back such happy memories. Who needed television?

I could write a book about my life, as I'm sure most people could, but to give you some idea, without going into too much detail, I'll give a brief resume.

After leaving art school, I was employed at Roland and Rivkin, a couturier gown-house, where I trained as a dress designer and fashion artist. A few years later I served in HM Forces for over 4 years as a draughtswoman, then in 1945 I married, and together with my husband, opened my own design and dressmaking business in Lord Street, Southport.

After six years, we returned to Manchester and I continued my business through 3 pregnancies, until my youngest child was 5. Then, at 43 I decided to train as a teacher. As I'd left school with no formal qualifications, I worked during the day, then studied and gained 5 'O' levels and an 'A' level at night school, and went on to full time study for 3 years at Manchester Teachers' Training College.

I was ambitious and wanted promotion, so at 50, I studied part-time for a BA degree and qualified at 53. These were very hard years, as I was teaching during the day, doing a bit of private tutoring and coping with a family of 3 teenagers, while doing my studying at night and weekends.

After 7 years of teaching, I was promoted to Head Teacher of a primary school in Stockport, Lancashire, where I also acted as Educational Adviser for in-service training courses. After 8 years as Head, I took early retirement as my husband was 65 and wanted to emigrate to Israel. After 18 months, during which time I taught English in High school there, we returned to England, due to my husband's ill health, and decided to retire to Brighton (well - Hove, actually) as I have a son in London and also a sister and two brothers. And the weather's good!

My impressions of Brighton/Hove... well, since I've been here - 6 years now, I've made many friends of all denominations. I've gone back to my old love of art and belong to the Jewish Art Society. I attend the U3A discussion group, run an art therapy group and best of all, I'm a member of QueenSpark, where I've made many friends and have had the opportunity of developing my other love - writing.

Since being here, I've found Brighton to be much less 'provincial' than Manchester. It's far more liberally minded and cosmopolitan; there's a lot going on and with many interesting places to visit, and we particularly enjoy the season of Philharmonic Concerts. No, I don't miss Manchester, but I do miss some of my old friends from childhood days.

I know that some of the people in this study have looked back nostalgically to the past and compared it unfavourably with today, but I would say that despite the recession and cut-backs, I do think that people have much better opportunities and lives than I had as a child. People don't starve; education is more readily available to all, and despite what the media say, we do have a Welfare State, a National Health Service (of a sort!) Social Security and most importantly, laws against all kinds of discrimination.

I would like to end with another anecdote which I will never forget. When I went to Grammar school, we were so poor that I was given free uniform, books and dinners. I still squirm when I remember how I was shown up by a teacher who made me come out to collect my free dinner tickets. Her sarcasm made the girls laugh at me because, being fat and not stock size, my uniform had to be specially made. As it was free, I had to wait for it, and was forced to attend school with my own clothes and stock school items that would fit, like a tie, hat, knickers and stockings - I must have looked very odd, but that was no reason to be made fun of.

I thank God that my children and grandchildren will never have to suffer as I did through such intolerance and cruelty. There are many things different in society today, but a great deal that is better than it was, when I was young.

## CONCLUSION

### And Acknowledgements

This has been a most fascinating study and there are many more Jews here who could

have borne witness to the theme of this book. Unfortunately space only permits me to mention just a few who were recommended to me, and whose lives, I felt, would be of interest in writing about.

I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all the people involved, for so kindly giving up their time to tell me about their lives and experiences, and the two rabbis for taking the trouble to give me their opinions.

It was also kind of Selma Montford to allow me access to information on Lord Cohen and the setting up of the Lewis Cohen Urban Studies Centre.

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And to Danny Birchall, who so kindly volunteered to do all the technological work, the DTP, some proof-reading, and generally helped me in the techniques of book-making, many thanks.

I am sorry, but for the purpose of this little manuscript, it was not possible to give much more of the vast amount of detail of early Jewry in Brighton. If you are interested then you will find David Spector's research papers available at both Brighton and Hove Libraries.

I hope that you have enjoyed reading this book, and now realise that we Jews are just as ordinary as any-one else.

Although we are certainly NOT all Rothschilds, I do believe that we all have a certain inherent trait...SURVIVAL. Yes, survival - combined with perseverance AND courage - against any odds...as time has proved over and over again.

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