

## A moving return to the city of my birth

Throughout the years since I came to England on the Kindertransport in 1938, I had never imagined that my life in Innsbruck following the Anschluss, or my subsequent life and struggles after my arrival in the UK, were of much interest to other people.

Round about 2007, I received an unexpected phone call from a Professor Albert Lichtblau. He introduced himself as a historian working at the University of Salzburg and researching for an Austrian national programme entitled *Erinnern*. This programme aimed to instil awareness in Austrian students of the personal experiences of Jewish nationals who had had to flee from their homes. To aid his research, Professor Lichtblau had examined ten testaments held in the library of the Shoah Centre in Los Angeles and noted that one of these was by a refugee from Innsbruck. This turned out to be the testimony that I, like 50,000 others, had recorded some years earlier. Professor Lichtblau was intrigued that my story began in the provincial city of Innsbruck, making it stand out from the others.

We arranged to meet in my home in London, where he spent the whole day interviewing me but, more importantly, making copies of photographs of my family and myself taken in Innsbruck – the first of the photographs was of me at the age of four. Professor Lichtblau was most impressed that I still retained my school satchel – which is still in almost mint condition. Other items in my possession that he found of great interest included my *Stammbuch*, an item treasured by schoolchildren in my time and containing

contributions from classmates and other friends. He was also intrigued by my *Fleisszetteln*, the equivalent of today's gold stars.

In the autumn of 2008, there having been no further contact for over a year, I was surprised to receive a telephone call from a Dr Werner Dreier. Dr Dreier,



deeply involved with the Innsbruck contribution to the *Erinnern* programme, invited me to Innsbruck for a few days, with a companion, to attend the official presentation of a DVD produced from the material and interview notes taken by Professor Lichtblau.

In January 2009, I travelled with my granddaughter Katy to Innsbruck, where I met Dr Dreier and others involved with the production of this DVD, including Frau Irmgard Bibermann and Herr Horst Schreiber. For the actual presentation, my son Michael joined us from London.

During this stay, I visited my old grammar school, the Innsbruck Gymnasium, where I gave a talk to about 40

17-18-year-old students about my life and experiences between the Anschluss and my emigration. Some of the students were moved to tears as a result of actually meeting a survivor who had lived as a Jew during the Nazi period in their own home town, about which they had read only in textbooks. The presentation was televised by the local TV station. I also gave a press conference and spoke to about 70 teachers from the whole of Tyrol who were to receive the DVD for use in their schools.

Early in 2010, Frau Bibermann and Herr Schreiber visited me in London seeking further information, this time particularly about my life in England when I first arrived as a stranger. Soon afterwards, Frau Bibermann telephoned me to say that they had written and produced a stage play based on my experiences. I was invited to attend the premiere performance of the play.

And so in May 2011 I returned to Innsbruck, this time both my sons and their wives accompanying me. The play was performed before a sell-out audience which included the mayor of Innsbruck, the director of education for Tyrol and other dignitaries. I was moved to tears by the accurate and touching way in which the cast were able to bring my story to life. My children, while not being able to understand all the German dialogue, were equally impressed and had a unique experience.

We all came home richer for the remarkable experience we had had and the hospitality we had received from the 21st-century Austrian people.

Dorli Neale