



Family history: Debora Singer sits alongside her mother Hanna to look at her World Jewish Relief file

## Missing children and lessons from the Kindertransport

**Debora Singer MBE lives in the heart of East Finchley. A keen mosaicist, you might have spotted her colourful work in Cherry Tree Wood. She has devoted a large part of her life and career to campaigning for a fairer society in the fields of human rights and helping refugees, and received her MBE in 2012 for services to women seeking asylum, whilst working at Asylum Aid. As she explains here, her own family history of many relatives fleeing persecution, with varying degrees of success and tragedy, informs her current work with human rights charity René Cassin.**

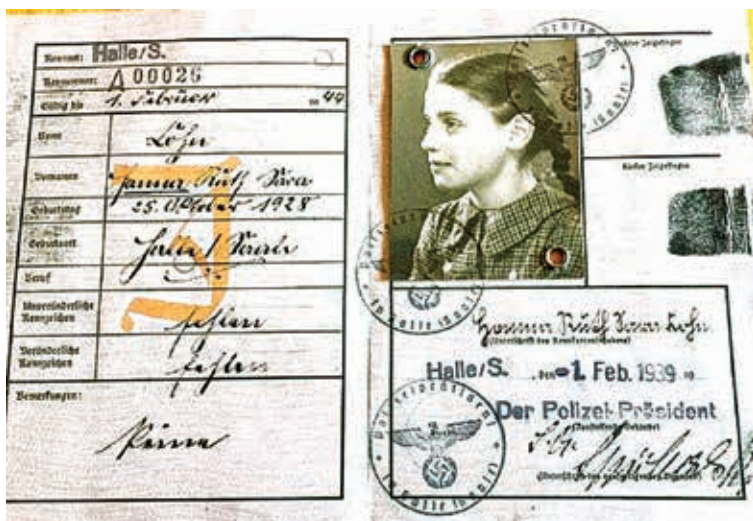
I have always enjoyed my work but it's only since I retired that my personal experience and my voluntary work have come together so closely.

At René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, I have found a charity that reflects not only my values but also my desire to use my family's history to inform the present. My work at René Cassin focuses on saving the Human Rights Act and keeping the UK signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights. Both of these are currently under threat.

Following the Holocaust, the cry went up that never again would a state terrorise a minority group, be it Jews, LGBT people, Roma, disabled people or Communists. The international human rights framework that benefits us all is a legacy of the Holocaust.



Married couple: Debora's grandparents Gertud and Willy Cohn before the war



The identity card carried by Debora's mother in July 1939

Most of my family escaped the Holocaust, leaving Nazi Germany just in time to get to England. But there was no safe and legal route for my grandfather who was too old to get a visa and was murdered in Auschwitz.

At René Cassin our work on refugee rights comes directly from our experience of fleeing such persecution. My other grandfather, having reached England, spent a year interned on the Isle of Man in the 1940s before a public outcry stopped such detention.

Given our families' experiences we believe that people seeking safety in the UK deserve dignity and compassion, not suspicion, punishment and cruelty. We know all too well where discrimination against minoritised groups leads.

Most recently I

used my family's experience to highlight a contrast in relation to child refugees. Recently we heard the shocking news that over 200 unaccompanied children seeking asylum had gone missing from hotels while in the care of the Home Office.

After my mother, aged 10, arrived on the Kindertransport in 1939, it was a charity that monitored her welfare and whereabouts. The Central British Fund for German Jewry (now World Jewish Relief) kept track of thousands of children. They sent visitors and provided welfare reports. My mother changed address five times over this period. WJR kept track of every single change of address.

So this is the contrast. Today's missing asylum-seeking children were in a few hotels and the Home Office couldn't keep track of them. Yet during the Second World War, before the digital age, one charity kept track of thousands of child refugees. This is just one example of how we can use our legacy to protect and promote our human rights.

## Think twice before buying at the garden centre

**Kew Gardens guide Linda Dolata, of Leopold Road, N2, explains how we can all help biodiversity in the suburbs by planting species that attract insects and pollinators.**

In recent years there has been a welcome trend to select plants to attract pollinating insects and indeed, the Station Bank, Cherry Tree

lem, however, is the lack of undisturbed soil, which is often used to pupate.

Garden chemicals, paving, mowing, pruning, an obsession with tidiness at all costs have a disastrous effect on the invertebrate life cycles. The dearth of once numerous animals is the terrible consequence.

### Leave alone

Often it is best to just leave things alone, so that a food web can develop. The 'tidying' deprives organisms of their habitat, and they are



Floral dance: A bee gathers pollen

Wood and Leopold Road's community garden are all superb examples. If you are trying to do your bit towards this, perhaps in your garden, perhaps in a scrap of uncultivated land, I have a couple of pleas.

First, insects will always go to native plants in preference, as they evolved in parallel with them. Detailed research has shown that the vast majority of pollen grains taken up by honey bees (where they have an option) is from indigenous plants.

Many of the brighter long flowering cultivars are bred to attract the human eye, but have no nectar to offer insects. The insects might check them out briefly, but they will not linger. For example, hybrid pansies look great but are sterile. Go for violas instead.

### Go native

So when you choose the plants for your garden, select ones that are closest to the natives. They could be wall-flowers, cowslips, alyssum, forget-me-nots, primroses, most bulbs, bluebells, marsh marigolds or rosemary. Leave dandelions in lawns. Pollinators love them and their young leaves taste good in salads. All clovers and similar vetches, hardy geraniums, any of the daisy family, salvias, most herbs and many Alpines are pollinator-friendly too.

Secondly, pollinators tend to be adult insects, but the egg, larval and pupal stages need to be nurtured if the insects are to reach adulthood. Larval food plants on which the eggs are laid will always be native (or closely related) plants like garlic mustard, nettles, wild grasses, ladies' smock and many of the vetches.

### Disastrous tidiness

I believe the worst prob-



Petal power: Forget-me-nots attract pollinators

already under stress. Long term it deprives we humans of the simple pleasures of the natural world.



**Where to donate your unwanted household items for recycling**

- Batteries to EF Electricals and Sainsbury's, High Road
- Bicycle inner tubes to Bike & Run, High Road
- Blister packs to Oakdale Pharmacy, High Road, and Links Pharmacy, East End Road
- Bras to Aliya J Boutique, High Road
- Cables and small electrical items to EF Electricals, High Road
- Crisp packets to Cherry Tree Café, Cherry Tree Wood
- Dental products (toothbrushes and heads) to Cavendish Dental Practice, East End Road
- Electrical cables to Everything Electrical, High Road
- Ink jet cartridges to UOE, High Road
- Lightbulbs to Amy's or EF Electricals, High Road
- Make-up to Oakdale Pharmacy, High Road.
- Paper, cork, ribbon, foil, wood off-cuts, buttons, stationery, sequins, carpet samples to Amy's, High Road
- Spectacles to Stewart Duncan Opticians and David Hillel Opticians, High Road