Harry Bibring

Harry was born on 26th December 1925 in Vienna, Austria. After the Anschluss in 1938, Harry was forced to leave his Gymnasium (German grammar school) and was transferred to a school that was solely for Jewish children.

On 10th November 1938, Harry’s father’s menswear business was looted and destroyed during Kristallnacht. He was arrested and Harry’s family were forced to leave their flat and live in a house together with 50 other Jewish women and children. The family were allowed to return to their flat following Harry’s father’s release, but by this point they knew they had to leave Vienna. The intention was for the family to flee to Shanghai but Harry’s father was robbed on his way to buy the tickets.

Fearing for the safety of their children, Harry’s parents decided that he and his sister should leave for Britain on the Kindertransport. The plan was for them to be sponsored by a family friend and for their parents to join them as soon as they could. That never happened. In November 1940, Harry’s father died of a heart attack. His mother was deported to the death camp at Sobibor in Poland in 1942.

When Harry and his sister arrived in England they were greeted by Mr Landsman, who Harry’s father had arranged to act as their sponsor and had offered to shelter the children but it turned out there was no room for Harry and the two were separated. When war broke out on 3rd September 1939, the school Harry was attending in Hackney was evacuated to Fletton, near Peterborough. Harry stayed with the headmaster of the local grammar school who offered him tremendous support.

After his 14th birthday, Harry left school and returned to London. His sister was no longer there, having been evacuated with Mr Landsman’s family. Now there was room for Harry to live alone with Mr Landsman. Harry started working for Mr Landsman in one of his shops as an errand boy. But feeling uncomfortable with this situation, he moved in with his sister, Gerta, who was now living elsewhere in London.

On his 18th birthday Harry applied to join the RAF. He passed all the physical and educational requirements but because his mother was believed to be alive and living in enemy territory, Harry was turned down on the grounds that if captured, this would be something the enemy could use to get information out of him. They offered to enrol him in the Pioneer Corps but he did not fancy digging latrines.

In May 1945 Harry met his wife-to-be, Muriel and they married two years later. Harry enrolled to study in evening classes at various colleges, while continuing to earn a living. After about 14 years of study Harry qualified as a chartered engineer with management qualifications. He went on to work for 20 years as a manufacturing engineer and later became a lecturer at Middlesex University. Harry continues to live in England. He has one son, Michael and two grandchildren, Lee and Nikki. Harry’s testimony is featured on the Holocaust Educational Trust’s interactive DVD-ROM teaching resource Recollections: Eyewitnesses Remember the Holocaust.