

# **THE EAST ENDER**

**An Autobiography**

**By**

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## THE EAST ENDER

I was born on the 7th November 1918, though my mother declared it was on Armistice Day and she named me Solomon Peace Haimov. My mother was a very busy woman as she eventually gave birth to eleven children, two boys and nine girls - I was number six. Having so many children she didn't have time to bother too much with any one of us particularly.

My mother and father came to Britain from Rumania to escape from the persecution of the Jews, that was in 1900. At five years of age I was sent to school in Hanbury Street in the East End. I was big for my age and other boys left me alone although I did have one fight with a big boy who called me a Jew-boy. I beat him and we became lasting friends. As I was not making any progress at school my father and I were summoned to appear before a Medical Board at County Hall because the Head Master of my school thought that I must be backward. I did not realise that I was becoming very deaf. Anyway when we arrived at County Hall I saw my father was having a long conversation with one of the Doctors and I could not hear what they were saying. Suddenly a Doctor looked at me and said something to me. I put my hand behind my ear to try to hear what he was saying. My father managed to tell me afterwards that the Doctor had said 'Didn't you know that your son is deaf?' My father had replied "I have a big family and I did not know". The Doctor said that he would inform the Head Master at my school and that I should be allowed to sit in front of the class. I was then about nine years old. I learned to lip read. To buy a hearing aid at this time was beyond my fathers reach as he had little money to spare for anything as times were very hard in 1926. This was the year of the general strike. As food was expensive at the time our family was issued with metal discs. These were given to us by the Jewish Board of Guardians. I was always the one who had to go to the soup kitchen at Whites Row which was in Middlesex Street or nearby. No matter how early I arrived there I had to wait behind a very long queue and it seemed to take hours before I was served. Father tried very hard to make a living selling children's clothing from a wheelbarrow in the Mile End Road, but as he could not speak English very well he did not sell much at all. At the end of the day I used to push the barrow home for him.

At the age of ten, after school hours, when I had finished my tea, I went to Chaida. (This was a Jewish School for teaching Hebrew and you could go on from there to become a Rabbi). After a couple of years, to my amazement, I passed my exams. Remember, I could only lip read then. I was sent to the Yeshiva. This was a higher grade school. The school was at the corner of Fourier Street and Brick Lane in the East End. I think that now it has become a Mosque. Unfortunately the Rabbi who took the lessons there spoke only Yiddish. This I could not cope with so I left.

I left school at fourteen with high marks so the world was open for me. This was in 1932 when unemployment was at its height. Eventually I did manage to find a job at a wholesale grocery store in Old Montague Street in the East End, which paid me a half a crown a week - a princely sum in those days. I was quite happy there but for some reason another chap there took a dislike to me and because I was smaller than he was he gave me quite a hiding. When I arrived home that evening

after work I had two black eyes and a cut lip. My father asked me what had happened to me. I didn't reply so he did not press me further. The next day I went back to work. The other chap looked at me and I stared back at him but he never bothered me again. One day I was loading up at van with jars of jam when one of my sisters was passing by. I turned to say "Hello Fanny", when I tripped and smashed a lot of jam jars. Needless to say I was fired.

I used to look up the adverts in the Hackney and Kingsland Gazette and I found a job in the fur trade as an apprentice. I hated every minute of it. The work was extremely hard. I started at 8 o'clock in the morning and finished at 6 o'clock at night. I became filled with hate for any employer as they did not have any sympathy for my affliction.

Down my street which was then called Great Garden Street, lived my best friend Morry Wartshi. One day he said to me 'You know what Sid?' ( He gave me this name because it sounded better than Solly). 'We, the working class, are being exploited. He also said 'Why don't we join the Young Communist League and help to make a Socialist country out of England?' I said 'Okay, I have nothing to lose, so why not ". When I joined I was told that I needed a khaki shirt and grey flannel trousers. I enjoyed myself very much at demonstrations and public meetings. At last I was somebody. As I was dissatisfied with my present job, which was only seasonal, we worked for 4 months then nothing at all. I noticed in the newspaper that a West End firm was advertising for a fur nailer which I had become. I applied for the job. My face was like any other English youth of that time. The Personnel Officer asked me if I could nail mink. I said that I could do anything as regards nailing. The Officer replied 'Fine, when can you start'.

I said 'How about next Monday?'

He said "That will do nicely. What is your name and address?"

I told him my name was Solomon Haimov.

"Oh!" he said, "I'm sorry you are not what we are looking for."

Of course it came as a big blow to me. Any way I did land another job with an employer by the name of Alfred Levy. He asked me "Are you experienced?" I said I was. Mr Levy then called to a chap nearby. "Cliff would you show this chap the room where he is to work." Clifford Smith soon discovered that I was bluffing. He said "Don't worry too much as I will cover for you". We became good friends for at least 40 years. Unfortunately he died in the workshop many years later.

One of my greatest pleasures was strolling with my friend Morry along the Mile End Road on Saturday evening, when the weather was warm or hot. We met some very unusual people. There was Prince Monolulu, a racing tipster who wore a head dress of a Zulu Prince. There was also a man named Jacobus Van Putz who offered to teach me wrestling. When I told my father he warned me to stay clear of this man as he was an American gangster working once for Al Capone. I heeded his advice and kept away from this man. I was sixteen at the time.

One day my big sister Rachel said to me that the shop she was working in needed some one to help clearing dishes and washing up. The job was mine if I wanted it. I gladly accepted it as I needed every penny I could get. I had started to smoke a pipe and as my wage in the fur job was rather small it made all the difference to me. The shop was a Kosher delicatessen in Black Lion Yard E. called Strongwaters. Where the name came from I haven't a clue. I happened, on one occasion as I was clearing the tables of dirty plates, that I began to sing some song I'd heard. There was a tubby little man sitting at one of the tables and he said to me "Do you call that singing?"

I replied, "Perhaps you could sing better".

Afterwards Mrs Strongwater asked me if I know who that was. I told her I didn't know and she told me it was Issy Bon. He was quite famous in those days. You must realise that any conversation I had was shouted at me. It was only later on in life that I began to hear with my first hearing aid. All the singers I missed when I was young like Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson etc. I still love to hear any great singer of yesteryear.

After a year at Strongwaters I was clearing tables one night, it was nearly midnight and I wanted to get home as I was feeling very tired. Suddenly for no apparent reason six men who were sitting with their young ladies said something to me which I could not hear. I most likely gave them a wrong answer, and then I was set upon. It was very unpleasant I can tell you. I was kicked in the face and ribs for at least five minutes. Nobody came to help me. After it was over I staggered home in great pain. My mother opened the door and she did not recognise me. "Who are you" she asked. "It's me Mum", I said. With that she fainted in front of me. My father took out a summons against them for causing me grievous bodily harm. My brother-in-law knew who they were. After receiving an apology from them they said they had made a mistake and thought I was somebody else. As they belonged to a club which had hoodlums and worse as members - my father decided to settle it out of court. They handed over a sum of money to my father and he gave it to me to do as I wished with it.

I carried on with my Communist activities. I enjoyed every minute of it as it provided something for me to do in the evenings. I was always at loggerheads with my father who was a Zionist and our ideas were different from each other. Then 'he' arrived on the scene - Adolf Hitler. I read about the Jews in Germany, how they were being ill treated. Then Oswald Mosley arrived and his Black shirts. The fight began in earnest. I was ordered by my branch commander in Stepney where we had our HQ to attend these fascist meetings, to cause as much ructions as possible. At one fascist meeting which was held in Victoria Park Road, Bethnal Green the main speaker, then was William Joyce who later became "Lord Haw-Haw" in Germany during the War, he would say "Germany Calling". Anyway, during the meeting, as I was heckling him, he said to his black-shirts "Get rid of the man with the pipe". They did. I ran for dear life as you can imagine. After the war there was a story in the newspapers about the terror in the East End and 'a man with a pipe' was mentioned.

1936 Oswald Mosley decided to march through the East End. I know it was a lovely sunny day and a Sunday. We, the people of East London, decided that no way were the Black Shirts going to march through the East End! I suppose on this day there were hundreds of thousands of people who were not going to allow this march to take place. The word came to us that Mosley had decided to come through Cable Street. My comrades and I quickly went there and we started to build barricades across the street. We were helped by the dockers from the East India Docks. They did not like what was happening to the Jews in Germany. We had a banner on which was written "THEY SHALL NOT PASS". They did not. Though I did have a big lump on my head which was caused by a police baton landing on my head. I felt elated that I was there on this day.

On the other side of our street (that was Great Garden Street) there lived a very pretty girl and I was now coming on to seventeen. I thought perhaps she would like to come out with me but she would not look at me. Personally I don't think I was bad looking as other girls used to give me the eye. A week later my pal Mory and his big brother, Lou, came round to our house and asked if I would like to visit Hyde Park with them. I said I was short of cash. Mory said, "Never mind, so are we. We're going to walk there." So I went with them and who did I see on the way to the park - only the young lady who refused to go out with me. She was soliciting in Piccadilly for customers. That did increase my education.

As time went on the war in Spain was going bad for our comrades. The War in Spain was between the legally elected government of socialists, communists and General Franco's fascist army. The International Brigades had many of our East End comrades fighting alongside them. A call came to us for more volunteers but I was turned down because of my deafness. My branch leader said that I could help in other ways, by collecting money etc., which I duly did., Sad to say that we lost the war in Spain because of the intervention of Germany and Italy. Our country did not intervene. If they had, in my opinion, the second World War would not have taken place. Up until 1939 life was perhaps a lot better and jobs were plentiful but things were not going to be good much longer.

1939

We had this Adolf Hitler person going on about the poor treatment of the Germans in World War 1 and he was making threats to all and sundry. Our Prime Minister Chamberlain caved in and let him get away with murder until Poland was attacked. That was the last straw. We declared war on Germany. I was called up in 1939 for military service as I had reached the age of 21. I was six feet tall and very muscular and very keen to join up. I arrived at Camperdown House in Aldgate one morning for my medical. There were dozens of other lads with me all waiting their turn to be examined. When my turn came the Doctors look at me approvingly until one of them spoke to me. I cupped my ear and listened hard to what he was saying. "Are you having us on?" he shouted. "No", I said, "But I gladly will volunteer and do anything to help my country"> the doctor then realised that I was really deaf. I was then exempted from military service. As the war progressed and Soviet Russia made a pact with Germany I resigned from the Young Communist League because

I began to understand that there were no differences between Communism and Fascism.

In 1939 we were living in Alderney Road, Mile End but when the bombing started my Mum and Dad and I used to go to the air-raid shelter in Mile End Road. Where my sisters went I hadn't a clue. One day an Air-Raid Warden spoke to me and asked me if I would like to be a "Shelter Marshal". I said I wouldn't mind at all. I pointed out to him that people were sleeping on the stone floor in the shelter every night and asked him if it would be possible for bed banks to be installed in the shelter. He said he would see what he could do. A week later we all had our own bunks to sleep in. One night, during an air-raid the Jerries dropped a lot of fire bombs in our area and, as we were already trained by the Civil Defence on how to handle them, I and a few mates went out to tackle them whilst the air-raid was still on. To tell the truth I was dead scared same as anybody would be. In one house I noticed that a fire bomb was alight in a bed room. The bomb was on a bed blazing away. I kicked the front door open, rushed upstairs and then I got hold of the bed and threw it out of the window. The man who lived there came up to me the next night in the shelter and said "Do you know that you caused more damage than the fire bomb?" I replied "Okay, next time I'll come and tell you to do it yourself."

Another night our own house was completely destroyed by a bomb. My Mum and Dad and sisters went to live in Windsor... As for my younger brother David he was called up for the army. He was just nineteen years old. He was in the 8th army and was in action at El Alamein. He went all the way to Sicily and onto Italy and was promoted to Corporal. Unfortunately, on a patrol near Florence, he was shot by a sniper and died. Our family were shattered and overcome with grief.

1942

My boss, Alf Levy, asked all his employees if they would like to go to Reading and carry on working for him. Accommodation would be arranged for everybody. I jumped at the chance, hoping to get away from the bombing. A week later I went to Reading. I was given the address of a Landlord with whom I would be staying. The man's wife did not like me very much. The man said to me one day "You Londoners have no guts". I did not answer him. One night a hit and run bomber flew over Reading and dropped his bombs. The husband and wife ran into the air-raid shelter nearby and did not come out until a day later, even when the all clear' was sounded. I was sound asleep in my bed and knew nothing about it until a day later. I was living in Reading for at least two years. I would have been very lonely if it had not been for my mate Cliff who kept me company. I used to visit my parents in Windsor at weekends.

At this time everybody was compelled to do fire-watching that included employers. My employer got round this and paid me five shillings to take his turn of duty for him. One day my employer received his calling up papers and this upset him very much. So on advice from other people he kept awake all night before his appointment. That was to make himself appear to be ill. Anyway when he was

examined the following day the doctor told him that he had a very bad heart and to take things very easy from now on. I'm afraid he had a weakness (women).

One day I was told by the owners of the house in Reading where I was staying that I would have to sleep on the floor as soldiers were coming to live there. I refused and I was told to sling my hook - which I did. I told my mate Cliff, and we both slept in a park till we were able to get a train back to London.

What I did then was to sleep in the air-raid shelter at night and travel backwards and forwards to Reading to carry on working. In 1944 the bombing seemed to have stopped. Mum and Dad moved back to London to a house in Forest Gate E and I moved in with them. It was not to be quiet for long. The 'flying bombs' were arriving so back to the shelters we went again every night. I left my job in Reading as I was getting rather cheesed off with travelling every day.

I managed to get a job in a sweet factory in Carpenter Road, Stratford E by the name of Clarnicos. I enjoyed this very much as people who worked there were very friendly towards me.

It happened one very warm night in 1943 - an air raid was in progress. It was extremely heavy and seemed to last for hours. When the 'all clear' sounded our Air-raid Warden told us all that a time bomb had landed on the roof of the Lycette Hall opposite our own air-raid shelter. This hall was used for religious services and it had a basement which was used as an air-raid-shelter. Our Warden told me to go and see if anybody was still in there. Obediently I went over there and inside there was a man, a woman and a young woman. I called out "Come on you lot there is an unexploded bomb in this building. The young woman looked at me and said something to me but alas I could not hear what she said. I left the building. I felt very down cast. She was the most beautiful young woman I had ever had the pleasure to meet. Still I had to carry on my life I suppose. I mentioned this because now in 1944 I was living with my parents in Forest Gate and I used to go over the road to a neighbour of ours and we placed cards most of the evening. Our neighbours names were Mr and Mrs Moss of Windsor Road. My brother David was a good friend of their son but he was on active service in the Western Desert. As it was on this particular night I went across the street to have a game of cards and to my amazement the young woman who I had seen in the Lycette Hall was sitting there. Mr & Mrs Moss introduced me saying to the young woman "This is David's brother". She said, "Hello, nice to meet you". She had that certain look in her eyes.

I waited a week and then I spoke to Mrs Moss and asked her if the young lady would like to go out with me and would she tell her of my affliction. Mrs Moss then said "Of course I will. I'm sure that she would be delighted." I arranged a date with Miss Fay Keyser. Yes that was her name I discovered and we used to go to the pictures quite often. She might have enjoyed it but I could not follow the sound track of the film and I just put up with it and I enjoyed being in her company.



The time for the invasion of Europe was on the way. When was anybody's guess! A new menace had now begun. The flying bomb had arrived. One night I was playing cards with my brother-in-law Artie who was on leave from the army. As we were playing the air-raid sirens sounded. Artie said "you have plenty of time to go to the air-raid shelter so lets finish the game". My parents and two of my sisters had already gone on ahead. I beat Artie and after collecting my winnings I made my way to the shelter which was situated a few streets ahead in Woodgrange Road, Forest Gate. As I walked along the street I heard a terrific noise and looked up into the sky. The flying bomb was coming straight at me. I crouched inside a doorway and prayed "Please God not yet!". The bomb struck a cinema across the road from where I was standing and blew it to pieces. It used to be called The Classic. Why I survived until this day I will never know. The police who arrived at the incident thought that I was a looter. Lucky for me Artie told them that I was deaf and that he had delayed me whilst the air raid was on. They let me go.

Whilst I was going out with Fay I found myself a better job for a firm of Dyers and Cleaners called Achilles Serre in Black Horse Road, Walthamstow. My job was to clean fur rugs and to nail old fur coats that had been dyed. I was working there for six months. This was when the dreaded V2 Rockets were being sent over London every day. The manager in my department was a sour faced looking individual and by the look on his face I imagined he wished I was some place else. One day it happened that the manager told me to go to the stores and bring back some more soap as we were running short - and make it snappy. He did not like shouting I suppose. I went to the stores to get the soap from the store which was situated at the other end of the factory. Before I got there I decided to go to the toilet. While I was in there an enormous explosion occurred. I quickly realised that what I dreaded had happened. A rocket had hit the factory. The only place that was undamaged was the toilet. People were lying everywhere. Some were bleeding badly others were in a state of shock. I did what I could to help. I arrived home very late that day and as I opened the street door my mother shouted at me "Why are you so dirty, can't you wash yourself". I said "Mother my place of work has received a direct hit from a rocket, that's why I am so dirty". She then put her arms around me and said "I am very sorry but I am glad that you are unhurt. I care for you just as much as all my other children"> I suppose being war time was a very great strain on her, she was living on her nerves.

After my supper I went to the shelter and fell asleep immediately as I was very tired. My young lady, Fay, was working at this time in an aeroplane factory working on the latest type of plane - the Mosquito. At about twelve o'clock midnight I felt somebody shaking me, it was Fay. I asked her what she was doing there. She replied "I heard from one of our drivers who had returned from London that "Achilles Serre" had been blown up by a rocket". she went on and said that the manager had given her leave to find out if I was still alive. I could see she was very happy to see that I was. She stayed the night in the shelter with me - other people were also sleeping in the shelter. The next day she made her way back to High Wycombe where the aeroplane factory was situated. We only saw each other at weekends when she stayed with her parents. At the moment her parents were not



very impressed with me as they were hoping that their daughter would find somebody who could give her a better way of life than I would be able to.

Fay took it for granted that I would eventually ask her to marry me but I had no intention of marrying anybody. I said to her "If you think we are going to get married forget about it, you will have no future with me. I cannot give you the life you deserve"> She looked at me and said nothing and walked away. I could see that she had tears in her eyes. When my father asked "Where's Fay?" I told him what I had done. He said "I think that you have made a big mistake there. Fay is a very pretty girl and she would have made you a good wife". Well it was my decision and I had to let it be. One day, when I came home from work I saw my parents and sisters were all crying. They told me that the War Office had informed them that my brother David had been killed in action in Florence, Italy. I was devastated.

Our neighbours came round to offer their condolences. Amongst them was Fay who knew my brother David and she was very upset to hear the news. I told her that I was sorry to leave her in such a cruel fashion but if she wanted me I was willing to give it a try. She said "Sid I love you and nothing else matters"> So we carried on where we had left off.

D-Day 1944 - this was a very exciting time for everybody and we prayed that everything would come out alright for our armies. As the allies advanced into Europe the rockets stopped coming over and it was good to be able to sleep in our own beds again. It was not a walk over for the allies as many young men died so that the world would be rid of this monster called Hitler. I happened to meet my old pal Cliff down Mile End one day when I went to see Fay - who was staying in her parents house. "Hello Sid, how are you keeping?" I replied that I was not bad. "Do you like your job?" he asked. I said "Not really - the money I get is lousy". He told me that Alf Levy was opening a new work shop in Stoke Newington and there was a job going for me if I wanted it. "Okay Cliff I will go and see Mr Levy". I took a day off from Achilles Serres and went to see Mr Levy. He was very pleased to see me and offered me a good wage - £7 a week - good for me but not for giving Fay much in the way of going out together. I gave in my notice to Achilles Serres and went to work for Alf Levy. He was a hard task master. He gave the sack to two other fur nailers and made me do the work of both of them. I had no choice but to bide my time and wait for the next job that would come along. There were very few fur jobs about at this time in 1944. The war went on and the allies gaining ground in Europe.

Fay and I decided to get married in October 1945 and we hoped that the war would be ended by then and so it was. Hitler was dead and Germany was given the punishment it deserved for all the suffering they caused the people of Europe. We then started to prepare for our wedding day and the service was going to be held in the same synagogue where my parents were wed in Stepney Green in the East End. Fay and I went there to find out how much it was going to cost. I don't know how much it cost as my father-in-law to be paid for it. Fay said to me "We must have the organ playing". I said "Why waste money, I won't hear it". But Fay was a

woman who liked to have the organ and it was ordered. I must admit that my Fay's father had a hard time getting the drinks together as rationing was in force and spirits were only available on the black-market.

A week before the wedding I had ordered a suit from a dress hire shop in Aldgate and I bought a blue serge suit off a stall in Petticoat Lane which seemed to fit perfectly. A bargain I thought till I took it home. When I tried on the jacket it was miles to big. Fay said to me "don't worry my father is a tailor and he will alter it for you. He did and it then really did fit perfectly. Came the wedding day. Calamity. I had forgotten to order black shoes and I was in a panic. The ceremony was to be at 2 o'clock and it was at 11 o'clock when I rushed down to Petticoat Lane and bought a pair of shoes for about £2 ( a lot of money in those days).

I had already learnt the Hebrew words that I would have to say in the synagogue. My father told me exactly what to repeat after the Rabbi. I stood under the canopy and waited for my bride to arrive. She was a picture of loveliness. I felt very proud as she came towards me and took her position by my side. Our parents were also under the canopy. The Rabbi commenced the ceremony. I repeated after him the words my father had taught me but the Rabbi was not finished. He carried on a little bit longer than I thought he would. How I survived I do not know. At last I was told to put my foot on a glass and smash it. I did this and all the guests shouted Mozeltov - "Good luck". I needed a good stiff drink believe me. The reception was held in a tea shop in Commercial Road E.1 It was very good considering food was in short supply due to rationing.

The next day we were on our way to Bournemouth to a guest house recommended by my parents. It was not bad, but the landlady would never stop talking about her illnesses. We were glad to get away from her. As it was October it rained continuously every day but we didn't mind as we had each other. We stayed only for a week and then returned home. Home was one room in my in-laws house. Up stairs on the landing we had a small gas double ring on which we did our cooking. We were expecting our first child in 1946 and we were making plans for the birth. Sometimes we went to the pictures and luckily there were foreign films being shown at the Peoples Palace, Mile End Road. It was right up my street as the films were subtitled and I could follow the story.

Things started to happen one day. My Fay was rushed to the London Hospital, Whitechapel when she went into labour. Unfortunately the baby was seven months premature and only weighed 4 lbs. We did not worry too much as we hoped everything would be alright with the baby - a boy. He was quite beautiful and we named him Michael. He was seven months old when we realised that he could not sit up or crawl. We took him to our Doctor who gave us a letter to see a Harley Street specialist. When we saw the Specialist he said, "I am sorry I cannot do anything to help you. I advise you to take your son back to the London Hospital to see if anything can be done there". We eventually had an appointment with a Consultant who told us that Michael was suffering from hydro-cephalus and would not live after the age of 15. We were absolutely shocked and dismayed. My wife

then took Michael outside as the Consultant wanted to see me on my own. He then said he could give Michael an operation for exploratory purposes. I asked if it would help him in any way. He said it wouldn't but it may help other babies born with the same problem. I left him then and joined Fay and my son. I told her what had been suggested by the Consultant and she said "No way, no body is going to experiment with my baby". We went home.

Despite his disability Michael was a happy child. He could talk very well and sing songs that he heard on the radio. We just had to carry on with our lives. Our Doctor told us there was no reason for us not to have a second child as it was unlikely it could occur again. It was too bad that we could not look into the future. As Michael was unable to go to school a teacher would call round every day to give him lessons. He was a quick learner. He was just five years old when our second son was born. We named him Jeffrey. He too was a premature baby and was barely 4 lbs in weight. He was kept in the hospital for another month until he had gained weight. We then brought him home. Jeffrey was quite a lively little chap and would crawl on his hands and knees but he could not stand upright as his legs were bent. That was another problem for us to worry about. Fay found that lifting Michael about was getting too much for her and she became ruptured. I then decided that Michael would have to be placed in a home for disabled children. He was taken in by a Dr Barnardos home in Woodford Bridge. As we left him there he said to me "Don't leave me here Daddy". I said to him "I will always visit you every weekend". We did, we went to see Michael every Sunday without fail and he began to look forward to our visits. The staff at the home were very kind to him and he learned to read and write. He always came home every Bank Holiday and Christmas which he enjoyed very much. Our son Jeffrey attended a disabled school at Dagenham but as he had to attend hospital every now and again he fell behind with his lessons. Fay decided to teach him to read and write herself and he was able to do it very well. One day we were asked to attend an interview at County Hall to see a Specialist to see if anything could be done to help Jeffrey and if possible to make his legs straight. The Specialist, a Mr Lloyd Roberts, said that Jeffrey has spastic legs but something could be done for him. Jeffrey was now 15 year old.

Mr Lloyd Roberts said to Jeffrey "There is a fifty fifty chance that the operation will be a success."

Jeffrey replied, " I am willing to take that chance." A date was arranged for Jeffrey to go to Tadworth Hospital which was an annex to Great Ormond Street Hospital. The operation was performed a month later. When we went to visit him at Tadworth the surgeon said that the operation was quite successful but the rest was up to Jeffrey. After a few weeks at Tadworth Jeffrey came home. We had fixed a bed for him in the living room as we thought he would not be able to manage the stairs. The Doctor at the hospital has told Jeffrey to try to walk in order that he would be able to walk properly but he just lay on the bed and did not try to walk. We tried everything to make him walk. I came home from work one night and there he was lying on the bed reading comics. I was so enraged that I shouted at him "Get up you lazy good for nothing." He became very angry and got off the bed and walked right across the room. He was so pleased with himself that he wanted to go

out in the street and show everybody that he could walk just the same as they could.

One day I was told by a friend of mine that I could get a hearing aid under the National Health Aid Department at the Royal Free Hospital in Grays Inn Road. I told my employer and he consented to let me go to be fitted with the aid. When I arrived at the Hearing Aid Dept I was given an audio test. The technician said that I did have a bit of hearing. He then tried the Hearing Aid in my ear. It was wonderful. I began to hear voices and sounds which I had never imagined were going on. I was very happy and looking forwards to getting back to work to surprise my work mates who did not know where I had been. I arrived back at work. I heard a voice call out "Here comes Deafy." I looked over to where the voice was coming from and I saw a fellow who I was never friendly with. I said to him "What did you say?" He replied "Deafy." I then punched him so hard that he flew across the room. My employer came out of his office to see what the shouting was about. "What's the meaning of this?" he asked me. I said "Nobody is going to call me Deafy and get away with it and I mean it." He just went back to his office without another word. At the end of the week I received a pay rise of £2 a week. A lot of money in those days. When I got home that night I heard my son Jeffrey say "Mum Daddy's here." I felt good. It was lovely to hear his voice for the first time. He was now getting on for 16 and he was riding on a tricycle which was given to him by the Social Services. He was very proud of his tricycle. He would disappear all day sometimes and not tell us where he had been. At this time he had found a nice job at British Aerospace in Chadwell Heath and he was quite happy to work there. Another thing which made us happy was that Jeffrey became a Queen's Scout and we were all proud to receive an invitation to attend the passing out parade of many Queen's Scouts. It was in 1957 late one night when there came a knock on the door. I opened the door to find a Policeman standing there. I was filled with dread. I asked if anything was wrong and he said "I am afraid that your son Michael has had an accident and is now in Chichester Hospital. I said that I would try to get to him as soon as possible. I must explain that Michael, who had now reached the age of 19, was transferred from Dr Barnardos in Woodford Bridge to a home in Bognor Regis that was run by the Shaftsbury Society. The accident which Michael had sustained happened in Bognor Regis. A young lady friend of his had taken him out for a walk in his wheel chair and he had fallen out and fractured his skull. That same night I arrived at the Hospital. It had taken me five hours from Victoria Station to get there. I stayed in the hospital overnight as it was 1 o'clock in the morning. I slept in an armchair all night. I saw my son the next day. He was delighted to see me. "I'm afraid it was my fault Dad", he said. "When the young lady took me out she went into a shop next to the pier and I must have blacked out and did not put the brakes of the chair on." He appeared to me quite normal and was not in pain. He also said "I do not want the young lady to get into trouble because of me". I said I would mention what he had said if any inquiry took place. After a few hours with him I made my way home.

After I had arrived home and was having dinner with Fay there was a knock on the

door and when I opened it I saw a policeman standing there. The policeman said "I have bad news for you, your son Michael has become unconscious and the hospital at Chichester has advised that you should go there at once." Fay and I made our way to the hospital at once. When we arrived we saw our son was covered completely in ice. This was done to bring his temperature down. We stayed with him all night but alas he passed away.

The Warden of the Home where Michael had been staying was at his bedside and a Rabbi said prayers for him. The Warden told me that the Rabbi had survived the concentration camps in Germany during the war. We were informed that a post mortem would have to be held. I declined to attend but I sent a letter to the Coroner to tell him the exact words that Michael had said to me. I received a reply from the Coroner saying that Michael's wish would be granted. I received the report of the post mortem in which the Coroner told the young lady that she was not to blame for Michael's death. A week later we received a letter from the young lady saying that she was heart broken because of the death of Michael and thanked us for letting the Coroner know what Michael had said to us. The funeral was held at Cheshant cemetery which is an orthodox cemetery for very religious Jews. We do go to visit the grave from time to time but as we have been doing this thirty years now and Fay and I are getting old our visits are now getting less and less.

My Jeffrey is now married to a nice Jewish woman and they are very happy together. Is this the end of our troubles I thought. Little did I know what was round the corner. It was one Friday when I left off work. I was looking forward to the weekend so I could do some gardening. I hoped that there would be a nice hot meal on the table - some hopes!

When I arrived home it was rather quiet and Fay was not there. I was filled with apprehension. What could have happened. I went to my next door neighbour and rang the bell. The neighbour said "I'm afraid that your Fay is in Harold Wood Hospital". I went there straight away. I found that she had tripped over a lump of concrete edging to a grass lawn and that she had smashed the hip in her left leg completely. I comforted her as she was crying bitterly. "Look what I've done," she said. "How will you manage without me." I told her not to worry and that everything would come right for us. At this time I was 56 years old. I had never cooked in my life and now was the time to learn. I started with boiled chicken, boiled potatoes and peas. Unfortunately I was not told that the giblets had to be removed from the chicken. Never mind, I survived until Fay came home three weeks later and she showed me what to do. Unfortunately the operation she had was not very successful. She was having a lot of pain in her leg. She did not complain and tried to put up with it. When I had my summer holidays we decided to go to Torquay for a couple of weeks. I got her a wheelchair so that she did not have to do any walking. We both enjoyed our holiday very much. When we arrived home I could see that she was in considerable pain. I went to see our Doctor and told him that Fay was suffering a lot of pain in her leg and asked if she could have a stronger pain killer. He replied that He had given her a very strong pain killer the last time he saw her and that he would come to examine her. When he came round and

examined Fay he asked who had done the operation because it had not been done very well as things were moving about in her leg and causing her great pain. He said that he would personally go to the hospital and kick up a fuss about it. A week later my wife received a letter asking her to attend the hospital to undergo a further operation. Fay had the operation and this time it was successful although this has resulted in her leg being an inch shorter than the other and she has always to use a walking stick to help her get about.

At this time I was 63 and I approached my employer to ask if it would be possible for me to take early retirement so that I could look after my wife. He was a very nice chap and he was sympathetic. He advised me that if I held on for another six months it would be to my advantage. I agreed to carry on. He did not tell me that the firm was being sold off so to my surprise when the six months was up I was made redundant. I was paid a lump sum on leaving which came in very handy. I had never had much money for my own. Fay was also very pleased and we went to Jersey for a holiday which we enjoyed very much and people we met in Jersey were very nice to talk to. The hot sunshine did us a world of good.

We settled down to a life of ordinary existence the same as other old age pensioners. We went shopping together and, if the weather was good, we took an Eastern National bus to Southend where it left us on the Sea front. Alas the bus routes altered and we had to get the train from Harold Wood Station to Southend Victoria which is about a mile from the sea front. Anyway we managed to get to the sea front walking very slowly. Taxi fares were too expensive for us. My son Jeffrey, married Madelaine, who is also disabled and has had to overcome some severe health problems which she does and keeps a smile on her face. They get along very well together.

I now began to wonder if it would be possible to move to an old peoples flat because Fay was finding it very difficult to climb the steep stairs in our house in Harold Hill. I applied to the local Council Offices and after some weeks I received a letter saying there was a waiting list and we may have to wait a long time. One day I was told that there were some empty flats at Beehive Court in Harold Wood. I decided to try once again to get a flat. I was lucky this time and we were given the keys and told we could move in in a fortnight. Meanwhile a favourite niece of ours was involved in a car smash and she was severely injured. This occurred in Peterborough where she lived. Her name is Corinne and we like her very much. I told Fay that I must go to see her and Fay agreed that I should go. Corinne was in Peterborough General Hospital. It took me at least an hour and a half to get there from Euston Station. Though she was rather poorly Corinne was delighted to see me. I stayed at least an hour. As I was chatting with her I felt a cold shiver down my back and I said I would have to go but that I would come again to see her. She kissed me goodbye and thanked me for coming to see her. I was lucky to get an early train back to Euston Station. As the train was speeding along the heavens opened up from a black sky. There was thunder and lightning all the way home. I was glad to arrive home to my lovely wife Fay. She seemed to be very nervous but I was given my evening meal and as I was eating I told her about Corinne. I said,



"You know Fay, Corinne is a fighter and she will overcome this accident, it may take some time but I know she will." When I had finished my supper Fay said, "I have some very bad news for you." I asked what it was. She said, "Your sister Mary has died in a fire." She then told me how it had happened. While Mary was asleep in bed the bed had caught alight and burnt her to death. What caused the fire we will never know. Her husband who is completely deaf and slept in another room was unaware as to what was going on. When he eventually awoke to go to the toilet he noticed the smoke coming from his wife's room. He did try to save her but was beaten back by the flames. Needless to say he was absolutely shocked and heartbroken to find that he was now on his own. His son, whose name was also Michael, was faced with the task of arranging his Mother's funeral. He had to come all the way from Bristol where he lived with his wife Anne. The Coroner's report recorded a verdict of accidental death. She was buried in a Jewish Cemetery in Waltham Cross.

We were now in the process of getting ready to move to our new flat in an old peoples complex - Beehive Court. It is a very nice one bed roomed flat with a large living room and a nice kitchen and bathroom. Everything went smoothly the day we moved in and we felt quite happy about it. At least I did. Fay was worried about having a bath as the bath is small and she could not lie down in it. I decided to have a shower installed. I tiled the bathroom myself and I ordered a shower from the Electricity company who installed it. The engineers who did the work did not tell me that our water supply, which came from a water tank somewhere in the building, did not have sufficient water pressure to work the shower properly. So when we turned the shower on we found the water was boiling hot. The Electrical company changed the shower for another one but it was not better so we could not use it. One day, looking through an Argus catalogue, a large store in Romford, I saw exactly what I wanted a shower which could be connected to the hot and cold water taps. It cost only £4. I thought this was a bargain as the shower from the electrical company cost me £250. The cheap one worked very well and Fay was delighted with it and so was I. We settled down at Beehive Court and joined the Old Peoples Club. I am on the Committee. I call the Bingo when ever I can. There was one dear old lady at Beehive Court whose name was Vie Smith who always called "the Brighton Line" when I called 5 and 9 - 59. She has since passed on. she died at the ripe old age of 94. We are fortunate to have here a nice Warden who is always on call if we need her - just in case - you never know what can happen these day however old you may be.

Being over 70 now I think I have fared well as regards being well. But one Friday I went to Romford to do the weekly shopping. I carried my shopping on to a bus to go home. It was a lovely summers day in May 1993. I felt at peace with the world. The bus was nearing the stop to cross the main road and I stood up to gather my shopping. The bus was hardly moving and I felt quite safe but suddenly the bus accelerated and then the driver slammed on the brakes. I flew through the air and crashed into the railings by the side of the drive. I was in considerable pain. The driver stopped near my bus stop and told me not to move. I told 'he must be joking'. I couldn't move. A couple of my neighbours, who waiting for the bus, kindly took my



shopping home for me and I was taken to Harold Wood Hospital where I was given oxygen. I had three broken ribs on the left side. Fay came to see me at the hospital with the kind help of my brother-in-law Reg, who had always been a great help to our family. I told Fay that I wouldn't be there long and not to worry. She was reluctant to leave me. I was told by the Doctor that I had a damaged lung but this was not caused by the accident. I was sent home four days later and had to sleep in an armchair for six weeks, taking pain killers every four hours. Time passed, the pain gradually went and I was able to go to bed once more.

Now I'm 75. I have been going to the East End occasionally with Fay but it is not the same any more. The Jewish people are not there, especially the ones I used to know. Other nationalities are living there now. Of course they have the same right to live there as anybody else. All I can do now is to look back and try and remember the good old days when I was courting. I remember taking Fay to see a show at the London Palladium in Argyle St in the West End called the Little Dog Laughed and the song Flanagan and Allen sang was 'Run Rabbit Run'. I'm afraid I have stopped running. I still remember seeing Kid Berg the famous boxer in the old days who was a friend of my Mum and Dad. There was also Harry Pollitt, the leader of the Communist Party, who I admired then, but he was rather let down when Josef Stalin made a pact with his enemy Adolf Hitler. There were other personalities I used to see in the East End, Eddie Cantor, Sophie Tucker. Those really were the days. I must rest now it is time for my after dinner sleep. I

was dreaming about an event which happened almost 30 years ago. Fay's cousin, Annie Cohen, came to see us with her daughter Evelyn. We settled down for the usual tea and cakes. The conversation was about old times and relations past and present. Annie's daughter was a very attractive young lady of 27. Suddenly Annie asked me if I might have a brother or male relation who I might like to marry her daughter. I was taken aback, but I replied that I was sorry, my brother had been killed in action during the war but if I thought of anyone I would let her know. After they had gone home I remembered Fay's cousin Gerald who was still a bachelor. Fay and I decided to invite Evelyn and Gerald to tea one Sunday but not to let them know what it was about. Fay thought it a marvellous idea. The invitations went out. Gerald arrived early one Sunday not realising what we had in store for him. Evelyn, her Mum and Dad arrived shortly after. I introduced them all to each other. It was not long before Evelyn and Gerald were chatting and I could see that they were both attracted to each other. When it was time for our guests to take their leave I noticed that Gerald was too shy to ask Evelyn for a date so I took him aside and said to him 'Why don't you ask her for her telephone number'. He did just that. 6 months later a big bouquet arrived at our house with a letter announcing the engagement of Evelyn to Gerald. Their wedding took place shortly afterwards and Fay and I were the guests of honour. They have now been married over 30 years and have two grown up sons. The oldest son they named Michael in honour of our son Michael.

As I look back to my young days I remember belonging to the Jewish Lad's Brigade. I was very proud of myself and liked wearing the uniform. They did me a favour by

letting me join as I was absolutely useless. I couldn't hear the music they were playing and I couldn't march in-step with the other lads. One older boy once told me to 'go and get some elbow grease from the stores and then you can polish the brass instruments - and don't me long'. I was naive and I went to a shop that sold various polishes and asked if they had any 'elbow grease'. The shop owner said 'Somebody is pulling your leg'. I was furious and went back to Brigade HQ and started to fight with the boy who had sent me on the fools errand. I was soon expelled from the Brigade.

I was also a member of the Brady Boys Club which was in Brady Street in the East End. One day I was egged on by some boys to sing the Red Flag at a meeting that was taking place in the Club. I was ejected forthwith. I was told by a senior official that they didn't want communists there. I didn't like it there anyway so it was not a great loss to me. Years later I learned that many of the boys in the Jewish Lads Brigade served in the armed forces during the Second World War. Me, I have nothing, only memories, some good, some bade and some pretty awful.

Sidney Haimov

