

# Dunera News



A publication for former refugees from Nazi and Fascist persecution (mistakenly shipped to and interned in Australia at Hay and Tatura, many later serving with the Allied Forces), their relatives and their friends.

No.108 August 2020



PHOTO: ANNA WOLF



PHOTO: ANNA WOLF

Our congratulations to Lurline and Arthur Knee on being awarded the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in the Queen's Birthday 2020 Honours List for their service to the Tatura Community. Their dedication has given us a museum to be proud of, capturing the history of Tatura and the Wartime Camps for future generations.

**Congratulations Arthur and Lurline Knee!**

## Foundation Editor:

The late Henry Lippmann OAM

## Editorial responsibility:

The Committee of the Dunera Association

The views expressed by writers of particular articles in this publication are the responsibility of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Dunera Association.

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Letters and articles for publication are welcome.

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*Many thanks to all the contributors.*

## From Friends of the Dunera Boys

There has been much activity in the Friends of the Dunera Boys facebook page, with new connections made.

## Kate Garrett recently shared a link.

Dear Friends of the Dunera Boys,  
I warmly invite you all to explore the newly launched *Dunera Stories* website.  
[dunerastories.monash.edu](http://dunerastories.monash.edu)



For the greater part of the last 18 months, I – alongside my colleagues Georgina Rychner and Seumas Spark (who many of you may know) – have been working on compiling the stories that now populate this website. We see *Dunera Stories* as a constantly evolving hub that will showcase and preserve the art and stories of the Dunera Boys and Queen Mary passengers, as well as those of their families, friends and loved ones. We invite you to explore the stories on the website and reach out if you have stories of your own to share. If you are interested in additional updates, please also follow our Facebook page – Dunera Stories. There, we will be sharing new stories as they are published as well as other relevant news.

*Please join our Facebook page –*

## ***Friends of the Dunera Boys***

*where you will enjoy exchanging information, stories and research from our friends around the world.*



Ron Reichwald  
President  
Dunera Association

## From the President

This year, we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the Dunera Boys to Australia, and I am pleased to introduce the 108th edition of the Dunera News. The first issue was published in September 1984; not many organisations are able to boast about such an achievement.

The front page of the first issue of the newsletter carried the headline, “Churchill’s biggest error! Mini-series to trace the fate of German Jews sent out to Australia”. We are discussing with an Australian television network the possibility of screening the series in September, being a significant anniversary of events.



In this current edition, you will read about recently departed members of the Dunera community, Dunera Boys Max Arnott, Henry James and Herbert Fraenkel who sadly died alone in his home in North London. Also, from the Singapore group, we read of the passing of Ilse Blair, wife of Werner Baer and later, Hans Blair. Also, a story of discovery about the Schlesinger family.

On a lighter note, we have an article from Alan Morgenroth, son of Dunera Boy Kurt Morgenroth, telling us a story of romance in which our organisation played ‘match-maker’.

I would ask you to take note of the dates of our future events, including ‘virtual’ events coming up in August and September, and proposed 2021 gatherings. Our committee recently decided not to call our events ‘reunions’ as sadly there are so few Dunera Boys who are able to attend.

We are all going through difficult times due to the COVID-19 crisis. So I just want to assure you that we as a community are here for you and your families. I hope you enjoy the news we bring you via the Dunera News, Facebook – Friends of the Dunera Boys, and our website – [duneraassociation.com](http://duneraassociation.com). I wish you all, Shana Tova, good health and keep safe.

# A Dunera Romance

By Alan Morgenroth

My father, Kurt Morgenroth, was born in Bamberg, Germany in 1911. He left Germany in 1935 and after two years in Paris he ended up in London running his own company selling imported watches. He passed away in 2002 aged 91. In common with so many of his generation he rarely talked about his past, however, on the fifth anniversary of his passing, in a moment of reflection, I Googled his name and found a reference to him as a 'Dunera Boy'. Whilst I was vaguely aware of his time in Australia, this was the first time I had heard of the Dunera and so started my research into this aspect of his life.

Central to my research was the life and economics of the Hay Camps which was initiated after I discovered that my father had been a member of the Camp 8 'Money Issuing Department'. He was lucky enough to be one of the very few who was employed outside the Camp, he worked in the supply depot in the old Drill Hall



in Hay where he is pictured with other internees (back row 3rd from left).

Additionally, he was the Scoutmaster of the Rover Scout Crew in the Camp and he was also nominated to stand, albeit unsuccessfully, as deputy camp leader.

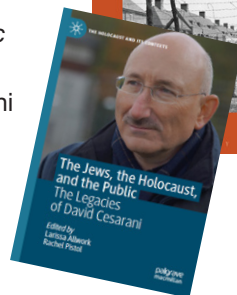
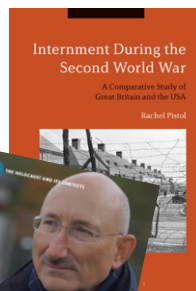
In 2001, I joined the relatively new Dunera Facebook group, but little did I appreciate at the time that it was in fact an online dating forum masquerading as a historical interest group. In March 2017,

historian Dr Rachel Pistol joined the group and posted a message about her research and forthcoming book on internment. It just so happened that we lived only 15 minutes from each other in the UK. In June, we agreed to meet for a coffee in Exeter. Rachel had allocated just 30 minutes for our meeting, however, after cancelling two appointments, our first encounter lasted over two and a half hours! We met again in October when Rachel invited me to her book launch at the University of Exeter. However, it was not until February 2018 that I persuaded Rachel to come visit me at home to see my research. On this occasion Rachel arrived for lunch and we talked for over 9 hours! Two weeks later, we were officially dating and we were married in July 2019!





We are looking forward to a wonderful future and are planning to combine our research with a view to writing books together. Rachel is currently working for King's College London on the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure and has just published her book *The Jews, the Holocaust and the Public – The Legacies of David Cesarani*. This is a collection of essays edited by Rachel in tribute to the late David Cesarani OBE who was her PhD supervisor, mentor, and one of the UK's leading holocaust historians. Rachel's chapter discusses the legacies of internment and how this episode in British history is remembered. Her first book *Internment during the Second World War: A comparative study of Great Britain and the USA* is out in paperback. For further details and a link to Rachel's talk on internment given to the Jewish Historical Society of England, please visit Rachel's website – [rachelpistol.com](http://rachelpistol.com)



The focus of much of our current research is the postal history of internment camps in the UK, Australia and Canada and we will be publishing a book illustrated by surviving postal records. Not only does mail in the form of postcards, letters and their envelopes provide a unique view of 'who, where and when' but they often give a fascinating contemporary view of events and the ever changing aspirations of the internees for their future after release. They provide an excellent framework to tell the

story of UK internment and the deportations to Australia and Canada. Our study of these items has already helped in unravelling the complicated movement of Dunera and Queen Mary internees through Tatura Camps 1–4 and the 12 compounds which were occupied by different groups at various times.

We are keen to hear from any families who have interesting or unusual correspondence which they would like us to study and appraise for them. We are particularly interested in correspondence sent to or from the internment camps in the UK before the Dunera sailed and letters between internment camps, whether in England, Australia or Canada. So often, members of the same family were separated with husbands deported, wives on the Isle of Man and siblings interned on two or even three different continents.

Rachel and I may be contacted through the Dunera Facebook group – Friends of the Dunera Boys, or by email – [a.morgenroth@hotmail.com](mailto:a.morgenroth@hotmail.com) / [rachel.pistol@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:rachel.pistol@kcl.ac.uk)

# Henry James (Heinz Jacobius)

1 May 1922, Halbe, Germany – 20 May 2020, Sydney

In September 1940, some 2542 “enemy aliens” from Britain disembarked HMT Dunera in Melbourne and Sydney. Most were Jewish refugees who had fled Nazi persecution in Germany and Austria. They were interned in camps near Hay and Orange in NSW, and Tatura in Victoria.

The ‘Dunera Boys’, as they became known, were released in 1941 and many chose to remain in Australia, making a significant contribution to the nation’s economic, social and cultural life. Henry James was one of the last of the Dunera Boys.

Heinz Jacobius (he later changed his name to Henry James) was born in the village of Halbe, 50 kilometres south-east of Berlin on May Day in 1922. His parents Alexander and Pauline Jacobius already had a daughter, Charlotte. The siblings embraced the outdoors as well as a rich cultural life and enjoyed listening to their mother playing classical music on the piano.



Heinz Jacobius, centre in white shirt, on May Day 1932.

At the age of 10, Heinz was drawn to the May Day march through Halbe. The day honours working people and marks their achievements and rights.

On a family beach holiday in 1933 in Zinnowitz on the Baltic Sea, Heinz was puzzled by the sign: “No Jews Allowed”. The rise of Nazism along with a few acts of kindness from non-Jews in his village began to influence the young Heinz in his appraisal of the complexities of the human race.

One act of kindness stayed in his mind: One day in his primary school calendar there was a sports meeting at the local lake. Initially, Heinz did not enter the water obeying the sign “No Jews allowed”. However, his teacher told him to ignore the sign and to join the race. Subsequently, Heinz came second in the swimming race for which a large picture of Hitler was the prize. His teacher exchanged first prize with second prize and Heinz was given a book.

Although Heinz and his family were the only Jews in the village he had a lot of good friends – in fact, he kept in contact with his best friends from primary school until his death.

Unable to attend the local Aryan school, Heinz enrolled in the Jewish ORT vocational school in Berlin, an education network driven by Jewish values.

In August 1939, days before the outbreak of World War II, and with only a half hour's notice, Heinz was rushed to the train station and out of Berlin with 100 other ORT students and teachers. Their escape was facilitated by the acting chairman of British ORT Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Levey. He had managed to break into the closed Berlin British Embassy and was able to stamp their passports. Subsequently the visas went for approval to Adolf Eichmann, the German high official or SS-Obersturmbannführer who was hanged in Israel in 1962 for his part in the Holocaust.

Heinz had to climb in through a train window as the doors were already closed. He did not get to say goodbye to his parents. He was later to learn that they became destitute due to the state's discriminatory policies and a Catholic communist neighbour, Frau Schultze, took them into her home. After a village member informed the Nazis they were transported to Treblinka concentration camp in 1942 where they perished.

By June 1940, the boys had arrived in Britain and were attending school in Leeds in northern England until one day Scotland Yard police called into the ORT workshop and arrested Heinz. He ended up in an internment camp.

Two weeks later the military asked the boys to "volunteer" to being transported and interned in Canada. "We boarded the HMT Dunera in Liverpool Harbour and about eight days later we found out that we were travelling to Australia," he said.

Hence, the new chapter in the life of 17-year-old Heinz began. Internment in Hay and later Tatura in Victoria. After 18 months, Heinz was offered an opportunity to enlist in the Australian Army.

Heinz transferred to Sydney where he had a cousin. In 1946, the year after the war ended, he was honourably discharged from the army. Under the Alien Registration Act he had to report to the police once a week. Attending Sydney's Phillip Street police station, "the sergeant looked me over and said: 'I don't want to see you any more'."

With widespread discrimination against Germans, Heinz Jacobius anglicised his name to Henry James to gain employment. He studied to become a painter and decorator, a colour expert and a French polisher.

Henry was never out of work and for many years painted various Sydney buildings, often working from a bosun's chair.



Heinz Jacobius enlisted in the Australian Army.

## Henry James (Heinz Jacobius)



At the 1990 Dunera Melbourne Reunion – left to right, John Gresham, Henry James and Bernie Meyer.

War Memorial's historical research section saying: "I am aware that I found a safe haven in this wonderful country, Australia gave me the opportunity to reconstruct some of what I have lost in Europe. Therefore, I wish to express my gratitude to all those good people who have sheltered us and have helped us and have tolerated us."

In the 1980s and 1990s, with his wife Leah and Paula, the family had some wonderful "kaffeeklatsches" in Halbe with old friends and their children.

He had a strong connection with the Sydney Jewish Museum and offered support in their activities and donated some items of memorabilia including letters from his parents and documents related to the story of the Dunera survivors.

In 2019, Henry James celebrated his 97th birthday at home, and in March this year his 70th wedding anniversary with their daughter, family and friends at a restaurant in Manly. Soon after, his mobility became diminished. His only regret in life was that he never got to say goodbye to his parents. He is survived by his wife Leah and daughter Paula James.



Celebrating Anzac Day 2019.



# Max Arnott – Birthday in the time of COVID-19

By Evan Arnott



My father, Max Victor Arnott, had his 99th Birthday celebrations during the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

Max turned 99 years old on 6 May 2020. It was the same day that the facility where dad lives, Arcare Caulfield in Kooyong Road, re-opened with restricted visiting hours. So we, as a family, were able to celebrate Max's birthday with him.

My brother Leslie and I were able to enter the facility for 30 minutes. Together with several members of the staff, we enjoyed singing "Happy Birthday" to Max, and presented him with a birthday cake.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, other members of the family were waiting outside the fence in the sunshine on Kooyong Road, with cheerful banners and signs to wish Max a happy birthday. Greeting him with big smiles were his six great grandchildren, Lazar, Sol, Flora, Mira, Pavi and Silvia. And grandchildren Zoe and Jade, and Zoe's husband Ricky Feldman.

Max laughed when he was told that Queen Elizabeth didn't call or send a telegram BUT would do so next year when he turns 100!



# Ilse Blair – A Wonderful Life and Legacy

27 January 1918–29 August 2019

By Miriam Gould, her daughter



Ilse Blair and her faithful pet Mandy.

Ilse Presch, Ilse Baer, Ilse Blair – daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, great grandmother, had an extraordinary life, straddling two centuries, full of turmoil and change.

Ilse was born in Berlin, the second child to Nathan and Elli Presch. Her brother Karlheinz was born in 1915, and Ilse on 27 January, 1918, as the Great War was nearing its end. Ilschen, as she was known, was part of a large prosperous Jewish family – there could be 32 people for Passover with much competition about who made the best matzo balls.

Ilse was an exceptional student. Her German teacher would give her top marks with no one directly below her, as he maintained she was so much better than the rest of the class. This was an intense, uncompromising, independent girl who adored reading and always wanted to be a writer. She spent most of her free time composing poetry and creating stories.

As the black clouds of Nazism swirled around them, Nathan Presch spoke to his adored 15-year-old daughter. He told her that her dream of becoming a journalist must be forsaken. Rather, she would have to be a dressmaker's apprentice so she would have a trade to carry with her to other lands. Shattered, Ilse wrote the poem *Leaving*, the last lines of which, loosely translated, were: "My dreams are now no more / And I must leave for unknown shores / The hopes we once had / Will never come to pass. / Fate has presented the reckoning / And we have paid."

Devastated and horrified, having never held a needle, Ilse left school immediately. She hated the apprenticeship, but later in life wished her teachers could know how she now valued their instruction. Her sewing machine, her training and her innate fashion sense were to become invaluable.

Aged about 19 in 1937, Ilse met Werner Baer, a musician and teacher and they were married. They were caught in the maelstrom of Hitler's Nazi Germany, where Jews disappeared without trace, where people were beaten up on the streets, where there were new horrors every day. Finally, on Kristallnacht, a night of infamy in November 1938, Werner and his brother Fred were taken to Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

The next day, without fear, Ilse went to the camp and persuaded the commandant to release her husband. Much later, she would think about the waiting room, full of elderly Jewish women and her eyes would fill with tears.



Left to right: Ilse with her father Nathan Presch and brother Karlheinz, 1926. Ilse in 1932. Ilse with Werner Baer, en route from Germany, 1938.

After a struggle for visas, they were ready to leave for Shanghai. Ilse would often recollect how on that railway station, she, young and adventurous, was so happy to go while her mother could not hide her distress. Elli Presch had now lost both of her adored children, Karlheinz having left for Brazil as an illegal migrant in 1936. Ilse would never see her mother again.

Singapore was to be their haven and where I was born. As the war gathered momentum in 1940, the young family was interned by the British as enemy aliens and sent to Australia on the Queen Mary. Taken to Tatura, they were faced with barbed wire and desperate fears the war would be lost. They were tough days, but Ilse was to meet her beloved second husband Hans Blair at Tatura and a better future beckoned.

When she was released from the camp, she settled in what was to be her new milieu, Balaclava. The shop at 204 Carlisle Street was where she set up her Exclusive Gowns shingle and it was wonderful when her father, Nathan Presch, came to Australia from Brazil in 1946. Ilse and Hans married in 1950 and to their joy, Noelle was born in 1951.

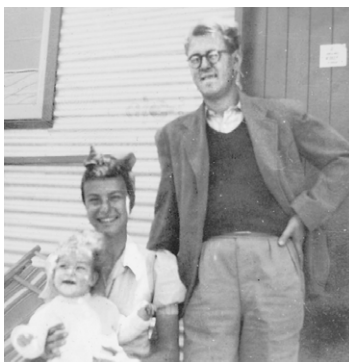
As I grew up, I could see how hard my mother worked, sewing till late at night for clients who often became friends. And looking back now, I see how fortunate I was. I grew up with books, going to the Atheneum library with her every week, reading the same authors, loving the same words.

She fostered my love of English as her own mother had fostered her love of German literature. As well, Ilse's enthusiasm for theatre, art, music and film, shaped and coloured my and Noelle's lives. Mum, of course, had been robbed of a university education. But in her 60s, she became part of the Citizens Advice Bureau and was finally given a university card. She found that delightful.

**I. NATHAN NORBERT PRESCH, of**  
Stateless (German) nationality,  
born at Ulbersdorf, Germany, res-  
ident five years in Australia, now  
residing at 204 Carlisle Street,  
Balaclava, intend to APPLY for  
NATURALISATION under the  
Nationality and Citizenship Act  
1948.

*The Age*, 9 June 1953.

## Ilse Blair – A Wonderful Life and Legacy



Left to right: Ilse with Miriam, Singapore, 1940. Tatura 1941. Melbourne, c.1946.

Balaclava was to remain her oyster and Ilse and Hans were well known to everyone as they promenaded up Carlisle Street every day. It was, as they often said, their village. Their marriage was a devoted one and Ilse was devastated when Hans died in 1998.

However, even in her grief, this indomitable woman continued, still walking along Carlisle Street, adoring her grandchildren, Belinda, Jonathan, Danielle, Michael and Kate. And then their partners, Stephen, Fiona, John, Katherine and David. At last, to her great joy, the great grandchildren, Brianna, Rachel, Jeremy, Ellie, Emma, Isabella, Elijah, Oliver, Zara, Ari, Lily and Flynn. When we were all together, Ilse would look around and say: “We came with nothing and look at us now.”

What a life! Always interested in the world, and until she died at 101, always had a copy of *The Age* by her side. For her, Australia was indeed the lucky country as

it had restored the dreams so cruelly snatched away in her youth.

Ilse leaves a family on which she has left an indelible mark, and which rejoices in her remarkable life.



Melbourne Reunion 2010. Front row from left, Ilse's grandson Michael Wengier, Ilse Blair, behind her is daughter Noelle Wengier. Daughter Michelle and Mick Gould is on the far right, front row.



# Dying alone, and ‘chessed shel emet’

By Ilana Spitz Epstein

Extract re-printed with permission from The Blogs – *The Times of Israel*, 6 May 2020

When you’re the community rabbi, you know you may have to bury the occasional 95-year-old stranger; what you don’t expect is your connection to him

On Friday morning, my husband, Rabbi Daniel Epstein walked through the door in tears. I mean a full-fledged deluge. Was it naive of me to think that this whole COVID-19 thing wouldn’t get to him? We have been the rabbinical couple in our 1,000+ strong North London community for the past six years. In that time, he has had to bury upwards of 250 people.

And then the pandemic hit.

Yet, on Friday, he wasn’t crying for the many lives that had been lost, the dozens of funerals he had done (many of those were accompanied by a Zoom call and virtual attendees), and not for the Zoom shiva with over 160 participants from around the world. He was crying for a man who died alone, whose funeral was conducted on Facebook Live.

The case of Herbert Fraenkel has touched us in the most unexpected of ways. Herbert Fraenkel died at the end of January, at the age of 95, alone in his home in Winchmore Hill, here in North London. The neighbours reported to the local council that they hadn’t seen him for a few days. The police broke into the flat to find Herbert had died. The environmental protection officer who came to deal with his body found a menorah in the house. Aside from his name and a menorah, no other relations, family members, friends, or community associations could be found. Herbert died completely alone.



Herbert Fraenkel

As the months passed and no one came forward to claim the body, the need to dispose of Herbert’s body became more urgent.

Paul, the environmental protection officer, insisted to his colleagues that he felt that the man was Jewish and thus should not be cremated ... with the menorah and the man’s circumcision being the only clues that identified Herbert as a Jew. Paul persisted and was in touch with the only Jew he knew in the council, Daniel Anderson, a local Labour councillor for Enfield. Daniel then contacted his rabbi — my husband.



Rabbi Daniel Epstein officiating at the funeral of Herbert Max Fraenkel, over Facebook Live, on 27 April 2020.



A small group went to incredible lengths to identify Herbert Fraenkel as a Jew. Between Daniel Anderson, my husband, amateur genealogist Andrew Gilbert and a long-time friend in Israel who also takes his genealogical skills seriously, they combed through records trying to piece together Herbert's life story and how he came to die alone, estranged from friends and family.

Martin and Ernestine (Ella) Fraenkel married in 1920 in Berlin and Herbert was born in 1924. In the early 1930s, together with his parents, he emigrated to Britain, the family settled in London. They were part of a large family back in Germany but with the rise of the Nazi party and the subsequent atrocities of World War II, the family had dispersed to all corners of the globe; some settling in South America, the USA, and Israel. ... But after the war, the parents seemed to lose contact with the extended family and the small family unit of three lived a very solitary life.

In 1953, Herbert's father passed away in East London and his mother came to live with him until she passed away in 1981 although the intrepid researchers couldn't find where the parents were buried. Herbert became an engineer and an inventor; never marrying or becoming part of the North London Jewish community.

Last Monday, my husband buried Herbert over Facebook Live with an audience comprised of our community members and people from around the world, who accompanied them both on Herbert's final journey.

Would this have been possible in our pre-Corona world? Would people the world over have paid their respects to a 95-year-old man who died alone with no family and, apparently friendless? Would he have disappeared into anonymity? We will never know.

Yet our team of amateur researchers was relentless. Even once Herbert was buried and his identity as a Jew confirmed, they kept on searching; trying to piece together the mystery of this man. On Friday morning, what had set off the waterworks for my husband, Daniel, is that the researchers had connected Daniel's family to the deceased Herbert Fraenkel.

In July of 1940, over 2500 "enemy aliens" were sent from Britain to Australia on the infamous ship called the Dunera. Over 2000 of the men on the ship were Jewish immigrants fleeing Nazi Germany. The ship held twice its capacity. During its perilous 57 day journey, the inmates were treated deplorably by the British officers, often beaten, undernourished and their possessions taken from them.

Onboard the Dunera were many people who rose to prominence later in life. Sigmund Freud's grandson was on the ship, as was the 17-year-old Herbert with his father, Martin. And along with these men was my husband's grandfather, Josef Heimann.

My husband never knew his grandfather, Josef died in 1969, three years before Daniel was born. What Daniel does know is patchy. Josef was born in Schildberg, Germany (now Ostrzeszów in Poland) on 25 December 1903, but eventually settled in Berlin.

Josef had worked as a tailor and cutter in Berlin and he was married and had a child. ... Josef was detained in Buchenwald in 1938, after his release the family thought it best that he escape to Britain while he still could and that his wife and young child would be safe from the atrocities to come.

He made his way to England, but on 21 June 1940, he was detained in London. Josef was interned as an enemy alien and subsequently sent to Australia aboard the Dunera along with Herbert Frankel and his father, Martin. Josef's wife Else and daughter Erna were rounded up in May 1942. They were deported to Lublin, Poland, and murdered, most probably in Majdanek concentration camp, Else was 33, and Erna was 7.



Lotte and Josef Heimann.

After [the internees were released] he returned to the UK in 1941. Josef remarried another Berlin native Lotte Mailich in 1947 who had also found shelter in Britain (a story for another time). The family later moved to Brighton and opened up a tailor shop. They had two daughters; one of them was my husband's mother.

Any kindness done for the dead in Judaism is called in Hebrew a "chessed shel emet" – a true act of kindness; one that can never be repaid. The emotion, when it came to Daniel, felt like a gift, a kindness from God, after burying so many – Daniel felt he was being gifted a piece of his own identity. Being able to place 17-year-old Herbert Fraenkel and 36-year-old Josef Heimann on the Dunera together and then subsequently in internment camps in Hay and Tatura, Australia, felt to my husband like a gift, giving what he does not just meaning, but now slotting an additional piece into the puzzle of his own identity.

I don't think we will ever look back at this period with joy, but we will find moments to be grateful for. The times we learned something new about ourselves, our loved ones, and the mysteries of the universe.

This blog post is dedicated to the memories of:

Herbert Fraenkel 1924–2020 and Josef Heimann 1903–1969

**You can read more about the author Illana Spitz Epstein –**

<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/author/ilana-spitz-epstein/?anchor=about-me>

# Schlesinger Family

By Joannah Eve Huntley

In March 2020 my father, Colin Huntley, passed away. Until his last two years, all he knew of his own history was that following his parent's divorce, he had left Singapore in 1948, aged 6, with his British father to live permanently in the UK.

In his own words, "My mother, Eve, and my grandparents, Paul and Gerti Schlesinger, were Viennese Jews who emigrated to Singapore pre-war. Gerti and Paul settled in Melbourne, and my mother died in Kenya in 1954 when I was 12".

In 2019, I delved into the histories of the Schlesinger family. Like so many during this period a wealth of information awaited discovery.

Eve Schlesinger, then 16 years old, married my British grandfather, Alfred Henry Huntley, a 36-year-old Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve Officer in Singapore in April 1940. My father, Colin Huntley, was born in Colombo, Ceylon, in March 1942.

Their marriage always struck me as odd. My grandfather was of Gerti and Paul's generation and not Jewish. I remained perplexed for many years until I understood the greater historical and political context of the times. The marriage was undoubtedly a means to safeguard Eve by securing her a new identity, British nationality and subsequent freedom from internment in 1940.

While her parents were expelled from Singapore on the Queen Mary in September 1940 for internment in Tatura as 'enemy aliens', Eve remained in Singapore working for the St John Ambulance Blood Transfusion Service until the Japanese invaded in February 1942.



The Austrian Ladies' Bridge Team, 1937. Gerti Schlesinger, seated front right.



Eve Huntley (née Schlesinger) with Colin Huntley, aged 3.

In August 2019, my research took me to Vienna where the lives of the Schlesingers had played out pre-1938. Paul and Gerti were born in Vienna in 1900, Paul was a broker at the Vienna Stock Exchange, while Gerti owned a Gymnastics School. They were dedicated Bridge players. Gerti, a member of the winning Austrian women's Bridge team at the World Championships in Budapest in 1937, and Paul was an esteemed member of the International Bridge League and the Austrian Bridge Club. They played what was called the 'Vienna System'. Little is known of the

possessions they took with them to Singapore on the Conte Rosso in December 1938, but I did learn their prized Bridge trophies were in their luggage.

Following the Anschluss in 1938, the lives of the Schlesinger family, like so many other Jewish families, were upturned. The Terezin concentration camp figured repeatedly and revealed the fate of many older members of the family while the younger members scattered far and wide.

Eve remarried in 1948 and gave birth to a second son, Julian, in 1950. My father, Colin, knew of the existence of a younger half-brother and it was Gerti's greatest wish that he should make contact with him. Although this did not happen during her lifetime, in 2000, Colin's half-brother discovered a long-neglected box containing a perfectly preserved and meticulously written record of Eve and Colin's history in the form of a baby book and a number of carefully annotated family photo albums. Quite a shock to Julian who had been just 4 years old when his mother died and never knew Colin existed!

It took a further 20 years for Colin and Julian to eventually connect, and the baby book, hidden away untouched for decades, was gifted to my father shortly after his 76th birthday in 2018.

One page in particular caught my attention. It detailed Colin's 3rd birthday in 1945 at Gerti and Paul's home in St Kilda, Australia. On seeing the lovingly handwritten names of the Seefeld and Liebrecht children, I knew that I would return to this page one day to research further.

Coronavirus lockdown presented just that opportunity. Amazingly, I connected with members of the Seefeld and the Liebrecht families, learning that many of the party guests were still living! Both families' lives had matched the Schlesinger's, with roots in Germany, or German occupied territories, emigration to Singapore

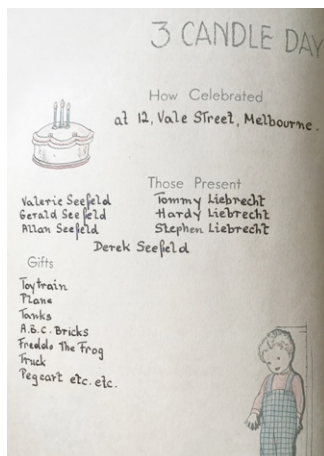


Gerti, Eve and Paul Schlesinger  
Australia 1948.



Tatura, 18 Jan 1941. By Ludwig Meilich  
Paul is the portly gentlemen in the centre of the sketch.

## Schlesinger Family



Detail of Eve Huntley's Baby Book, March 1945

This very page opened the way to discovering much of Gerti and Paul Schlesinger's lives in Singapore and Australia.

followed by internment in Tatura, before settling in Australia. These exchanges revealed many common experiences and intriguing insights and made way for a new chapter of research.

In parallel, I discovered the Duldig Studio and Eva de Jong-Duldig's award-winning videos covering her own family story, perfectly complimented by her book *Driftwood*, which I devoured with great interest.

The Duldigs had shared a very similar geographical history as the Schlesingers, Seefelds and Liebrechts. While viewing the video *Art Behind the Wire*, I noticed Eva mentioned the "Appeal Letter to his Excellency the Governor General Lord Gowrie", written on behalf of the Singapore internees in March 1941 by Eva's uncle, Dr L Duldig, Gerhard Seefeld (Internment Camp Leader), and my great-grandfather, Paul Schlesinger (Deputy Camp Leader for D compound in 1941). This letter exposed the injustice of the internment of the Singapore Group

as Jewish refugees from Nazi oppression and clarified for me the link between the Seefelds and Schlesingers from the baby book. The Seefeld family, I learned, had lived in the units above Gerti and Paul in Vale Street after their release from Tatura!

Eva connected me to many whose paths or research had crossed with Gerti and Paul's. I discovered that Bridge remained a constant passion which they took pleasure in sharing with many others. No doubt it allowed them a sense of continuity and respite in the face of adversity and family tragedy.

For the younger generations of my family, the Schlesinger's story has brought history to life. For my father, it allowed him what was denied to many of the post-holocaust generation: a revised sense of identity, belonging, understanding and connectivity with his family heritage.

My research into the Schlesinger family continues ...

Joannah Eve Huntley joannah.huntley@gmail.com

For details on *Art Behind the Wire* and *Driftwood* – [duldig.org.au](http://duldig.org.au)

With thanks for their insightful contributions:

Eva de Jong Duldig, Melinda Mockridge, Seumas Spark, Carol Bunyan, Alan Spencer, Marita Seefeld, Eva Layton, George Fink, Ruth Simon and Janet Arndt.



## SEEKING INFORMATION

Does anyone have any knowledge of Alfred Rosenthal, born in Breslau in 1915? He was in Camp 8 and later enlisted in the 8th Employment Company. He was living in Hawthorn when he was naturalised in 1946 and he may have been an employee at a hotel.

Alfred Rosenthal changed his name to Frederick Robinson and left Australia for England in 1949, intending to remain there, but later moved to Germany. He visited Melbourne and Sydney in November/December 1992 and his visit was briefly mentioned in Dunera News No.26 1993. It may have been on this visit that he donated his scrapbook to the Jewish Museum or perhaps it came later.

A museum in Germany is seeking information about Alfred and his twin brother, Horst, who died in Auschwitz.

**Please send reply to:**

Carol Bunyan – Volunteer Researcher. email: lcb5@bigpond.com

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## In Memory

**Erwin Fabian** – artist and sculptor

5 November 1915, Berlin – 19 January 2020, Melbourne

Much loved husband of Ailsa (Pat), father of Sarah (deceased) and Daniel. Grandfather of Hannah and Zachary. Long-time partner of Brigid.



**Henry James**

1 May 1922, Halbe, Germany – 20 May 2020, Sydney

His only regret in life was that he never got to say goodbye to his parents. He is survived by his wife Leah and daughter Paula James.



**Alexander (Ali) Volk**

Born c.1922, Vienna – 4 February 2020, Oregon, US

**A tribute from his 100-ysr-young friend George Lederer, via email!**

*Well, he was a mighty fine fellow. Ali was born in Vienna, he became a successful electrical engineer in Australia, then he moved to the US to work for General Electric. By this time he had got married in Australia, then widowed (his second daughter lives in Australia). He lived in Florida, where he worked. After retirement, he moved up north to be closer to his daughter. He was full of stories, once he got going. I enjoyed his company immensely.*



*Wishing you, Dunera-Centrum, much success.*

*Stay well, all of you, **George J.Lederer***

## SAVE THE DATES

### Virtual Events in 2020

**The Artwork of Dunera Boy Leonard Adam**  
Sunday, 30 August – 3pm

**Consecration of tombstone for  
Dunera Boy Kurt Kriszhaber**  
Sunday, 6 September – time to be advised

*To attend, see Zoom meeting details on our  
Facebook page – Friends of the Dunera Boys*

### ANNIVERSARY EVENTS IN 2021

Events to mark the 80th anniversary of the arrival of internees on the Dunera and Queen Mary have all been postponed to 2021.

We look forward to once again gathering together and celebrating with you next year:

**Tatura** Sunday 18 April 2021

**Sydney** Sunday 29 August 2021

**Hay weekend** 3–5 September 2021

**Melbourne** Sunday 7 November 2021

Visit our website

**duneraassociation.com**

For the story of the Dunera Boys, Singapore Internees, events, back issues of Dunera News, and much more.

#### All correspondence to:

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## Dunera Association Committee 2019–20

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## Dunera Museum at Hay

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## Dunera Hay tours

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