

The Board of Deputies of British Jews  
1 Torriano Mews  
Kentish Town  
London NW5 2RZ

31st July 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

I have been reading the Board's 2014 Submission to the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission and I presume you, as President, will continue to press for its recommendations to be adopted. I refer you particularly to these sections:

2.1.1 "There is a profound sense of anxiety, particularly amongst Jewish survivors, that with the loss of the survivors and their personal and compelling testimonies, the memory and lessons of the Holocaust will, over time, be forgotten. We owe it to Jewish survivors and victims alike, to ensure that this does not happen."

2.1.3 "We face the challenge of how to pass on responsibility for upholding the memory and lessons of the Holocaust to our children. ..."

2.2.1.2 "Teach our children how to campaign and to become activists on issues of human rights, social justice and fighting prejudice - enabling them to continue the 'positive' legacy of the Holocaust."

2.2.2.2.c proposes "A line on blue plaques of homes of survivors or refugees mentioning that they fled Nazi persecution." (In this sentence I think the 'on' and 'of' have been inadvertently transposed.) As your mother-in-law Nikki is such a person, would you agree that her current home in North London is an appropriate location for a plaque? The plaques would serve a similar function to the *stolperstein* mentioned in my letter to you of 12th June.

2.2.3.3 and 3.2.1 overlap. The latter states: "... There is an assumption that Jewish children start with some sort of knowledge and connection to the Holocaust. This is not necessarily the case." And 2.2.3.3 states: "Promote initiatives to enable young people to shadow survivors and take responsibility for telling their stories after they have passed on."

As the father of your children was raised and lovingly nurtured, together with his sister, by a survivor do you have any suggestions in this regard?

Having become part of the van der Zyl family through marriage to my step-son, whose mother escaped from Nazi Germany with her own parents, you and your children will have providentially acquired a close link with a Holocaust survivor and, in so doing, the opportunity to gain greater insights into the tragedy which befell European Jewry. The

relationship had the potential to facilitate greater knowledge, but - as the quoted text cautions - this is not necessarily the case.

What is your approach to educating children who remain uninformed of the Holocaust and unaware of their family link with a living survivor?

The editorial of one of Britain's major Jewish newspapers recently warned of the dangers of refusing to debate - which it said has been a proud Jewish tradition for thousands of years. This was a commentary on the polarisation of 'far-left' and 'far-right' groups having different perspectives on Israel and Palestine, but equally damaging, although often private and hidden, is the lack of debate within Jewish families. Oliver Kamm writing in the JC (01/06/18) about free speech said "... given that it won't be very long before the Holocaust passes beyond living memory, it's vital to keep educational activities vigorous so that future generations know." It is lamentable that Jewish parents neglect their obligations in this respect.

Perhaps you will come to realize that opportunities have been missed in fulfilling some of the Board's objectives - such as your children hearing the personal and compelling testimony of their grandmother. It is inevitable that, for some youngsters, Jewish History holds no interest while the lure of Topshop proves to be irresistible. We may have to settle for that.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker  
Historian