

Article

Growing up in Wartime England—A Selection from "The Rachel Chronicles: A Kind of Memoir"

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Abstract: The following contribution is an excerpt from the unpublished memoirs of Austrian Jewish émigrée, Lilian Renée Furst (1931–2009), a pioneer in the field of comparative literature. This journal issue grew out of an April 2011 conference in her memory, held at the National Humanities Center, on “Jewish emigres and the Shaping of Postwar Culture.” The nexus between her innovative intellectual contributions and her experience as a Jewish émigrée reflects one of the conference's central concerns: How, why, and in what fashion did the émigrés' dislocations shape innovative intellectual paths and cosmopolitan visions of Europe and European culture. Born in Austria and educated in England, Furst pursued an intellectual career in the United States, hoping it would allow her to break out of narrow national boundaries. The excerpt of her memoir here illuminates how her life's work as a pioneer in the field of comparative literary studies grew out of her experience with language as a German-speaking refugee in wartime England. Her memoir written in the third person about “Rachel” also reflects her dual identity as Jew and European. Part I by Dr. Anabel Aliaga-Buchenau, the literary executor of the memoir and a former graduate student of Furst, places “The Rachel Chronicles: A Kind of Memoir” in relation to Furst's other autobiographical writing. Part II includes Furst's own introduction to “The Rachel Chronicles,” followed by her chapter on “Growing up in wartime England.” (The whole of her unpublished memoir is available to researchers in the "Personal Papers of Lilian R. Furst," Girton College Archives, Cambridge University

(<http://janus.lib.cam.ac.uk/db/node.xsp?id=EAD%2FGBR%2F0271%2FGCPP%20Furst>)). Part III is a bibliography of Furst's writings.

Keywords: Lilian R. Furst; Jewish émigré memoir; comparative literature; England in WWII

Figure 1. Lilian Renée Furst.



1. “Remembering Lilian Furst” by Anabel Aliaga-Buchenau

When she spoke she held the entire room in the palm of her hand. A small lady, in an elegant red suit, with gray hair in a bun, wrapped in a tartan travel blanket stood in front of an audience at the Annual Meeting of the Philological Association of the Carolinas. This is the image of Dr. Lilian Furst I want to remember (Figure 1). She was giving a talk entitled “Being a Woman Graduate Student in Cambridge in the 1950s,” which is based on the chapter of her unpublished manuscript “The Rachel Chronicles: A Kind of Memoir.” In the chapter, Furst’s alter ego, Rachel, experiences graduate student life in Cambridge in the 1950s. She details the cold rooms, and the necessity of the travel blanket, which Furst brought to her keynote address about fifty years after its last usage in Cambridge. Lilian Furst was the kind of speaker who held everyone’s attention, had her audience chuckling, and actually seeing and imagining her life at Cambridge. Her gift for words translated into excellent presentations, engaging classes, prize winning academic monographs and in the case of “The Rachel Chronicles” a very personal “kind of autobiography.” As she explains in the introduction to the unpublished manuscript, Rachel is Lilian Furst’s alter ego. “The Rachel Chronicles” was not the first autobiographical writing by Furst. She published *Home is Somewhere Else: Autobiography in Two Voices* in 1994. In this earlier autobiography, Lilian Furst tells her story from the child’s perspective

superimposed with the view of her father's observations. She had discovered her father's journal detailing their life in Vienna during the thirties and their escape to England from Nazi persecution. In alternating chapters, the reader experiences the events from the child's and the father's standpoint. The autobiography lends itself to teaching classes on the Holocaust, or rather on fates on the "margins of the Holocaust" as Furst called it. She wrote "The Rachel Chronicles" much later and in a sense this autobiographical sketch is more personal, detailing Furst's memories of the different phases of her life: the early years in Vienna, briefly the escape, the year in a boarding school in England as a fresh exile, the years in Manchester, graduate school in Cambridge, her first job in Belfast, her move to the United States to teach comparative literature at The University of Oregon in Eugene, her life teaching in Chapel Hill, her collection of friends and bears, her reunification with her furniture from her childhood in Vienna, and the deterioration of her eyesight. In this volume the chapter "Growing up in Wartime England" tells of the refugees' arrival in England and their attempt at creating a new life. Rachel's first concern is going back to school and when the war breaks out her father is detained as an "enemy alien." Through the London air raids the reader follows Rachel and her family as they move from Bournemouth to Bedford to Manchester, struggling to make ends meet. Finally, Rachel's father is able to practice his profession as a dentist. Throughout Rachel's life ran the red thread of her wish to go to school, to learn. "The Rachel Chronicles" detail facets of Lilian Furst's life not previously available to the public. It provides important insights into this extraordinary life and at the same time serves as social history. Where else would one learn that incoming students of Girton College in Cambridge were admonished to bring a travel blanket to withstand the cold damp winters? Or that for a family of three the weekly food ration during the war consisted of "one egg per week, two ounces each of tea, sugar, meat, and margarine, and one ounce of butter?" Incidentally, as Furst observed, it was a diet "good for keeping your cholesterol down." Reading "The Rachel Chronicles" is like hearing Lilian Furst's voice: dry, full of humor, witty and extraordinarily intelligent.

2. "The Rachel Chronicles: A Kind of Memoir" by Lilian Furst

2.1. *Introducing Rachel and Her Memoir*

Who is Rachel? How did she come to spend the first half of her life in Europe and the second half in the US? And what is meant by "A Kind of Memoir"?

Perhaps this last question should be addressed first so as to explain the nature of this work. It is not an autobiography in the conventional sense, *i.e.*, a first person narration of the events of the author's life. Under her own name, Lilian R. Furst, the persona here called Rachel has already published a partial autobiography centered on the most crucial phase of her life, her flight from Vienna with her parents in 1938 after the advent of the Nazis. Titled *Home is Somewhere Else* it chronicles the family's illegal crossing of the frontier from Germany into Belgium at Christmas 1938, their subsequent legal entry into Great Britain in March 1939, and their struggles to resettle and to fashion a new life. A brief closing section tells of her and her father's further emigration to the USA in 1971 following her mother's death in 1969. As an autobiography it is unusual, maybe even unique, in being cast in two voices. Lilian and her father each recall the stages of their moves in turn and quite separately. In fact the two accounts were written twenty years apart: her father's in the early 1970s when he had just

retired, and her own in 1991. She recorded her memories without rereading his manuscript, only subsequently integrating the two in alternating chapters. The child and the adult are shown to perceive the same experiences from two different angles: the child merely seeing, hearing, and instinctively sensing the danger, while the adult grasps the political situation—and its implications. Readers of Rachel's memoir may want to look back to Lilian's and her father's book as a framework to Rachel's pieces, although it is not necessary to do so.

This "kind of memoir" follows sequentially some of the major episodes in Rachel's life: her early childhood in Vienna, her growing up in wartime England, her years as a graduate student at Girton College, Cambridge (England), her finding of her vocation and her field, her family's vacation travels in their small car, her search for a suitable position after coming to the USA. The order is chronological though not continuous. While the individual sections can be read as discrete entities, they coalesce to form a picture of her trajectory through life. It is a memoir in an absolutely literal sense in drawing exclusively on her own memories; she never kept a journal nor does she refer to outer sources.

Rachel's life is rather more complicated than the average partly owing to the political circumstances of the place and time (Central Europe in the 1930s) when she was born, and partly owing to the choices she herself made. Her early radically disruptive flights from Austria to Belgium and on to England were enforced; although her parents did not—could not—fully realize it, in retrospect they proved life-saving imperatives to escape the labor camps and the gas chambers. Her moves within Great Britain were also determined by necessity, either economic or in response to the ongoing war. So after an initial phase in London, Rachel was evacuated for a year to Chertsey, Surrey in 1939. When the family established a home in Bournemouth, an attractive resort on the south coast of England, she returned to her family. All too briefly, for her father was interned as an "enemy alien, a suspect holder of a German passport" in May 1940 when France fell despite the fact that it was the British Home Office that had directed them to Bournemouth. Rachel and her mother moved back to London, where they lived during the first months of the bombing. Without any reason to remain exposed to the city's increasing devastation and the frightening effects of the "Blitz," they selected Bedford, a small town about an hour north of London, as a relatively safe refuge. Finally, in 1942, they settled in Manchester, a major city in the north of England, the center of the cotton trade in which the family of Rachel's mother was engaged. There at age ten she began to go to school regularly after the many interruptions during their vagrant years. She graduated from Manchester University in 1952, did a Ph.D. in Cambridge, and got her first position in the German department of the Queen's University of Belfast in 1955. Her attraction to Comparative Literature took her back to Manchester University to try to build a department there in this fairly new discipline in 1967.

But Rachel gradually became disappointed at the resistance in Great Britain to an approach to literature that transcended national boundaries. Working on European Romanticism, how could she possibly ignore the impact of Shakespeare? The language departments in British universities, while strong, were entrenched each in its own traditions. At the same time, at international conferences, Rachel met American scholars who were far more open to innovation. So in 1971–72 she went "visiting" to Dartmouth College, a renowned Ivy League school in New Hampshire at the behest of a faculty member who had read her first book. She also taught at Harvard Summer School in 1971 and 1972. Before she came to the US she had already received an invitation to head the Graduate Program in Comparative Literature at the University of Oregon at Eugene. She knew nothing about this

university except that it published *Comparative Literature*, the first English language journal in the field. She and her father went to the library to consult the *Encyclopedia Britannica* where they learned that rain and logging were the main features of Oregon. They were used to rain in Manchester; nevertheless the visit to Dartmouth offered them the opportunity to sound out a land of which they knew precious little and that only from movies and books.

Apart from the rain, which did indeed come down in buckets from September to June, Oregon was not what Rachel had been led to expect. While the Graduate Program had some 45 students on its books and many applicants, it had no budget whatsoever. Its funding had come from the NDEA (National Defense Agency), but that had dried up, and what little was left had been appropriated by the incoming editor of the journal together with the typewriter and the secretarial assistance. Rachel had no means to pay even for postage. Used to fighting for her department, she pleaded with the dean, the graduate dean, the provost, and would have gone to the university president had she not been told that he was too dumb to understand. She also felt very much out of it in Oregon's counterculture, where she could not get world news (in those days before CNN) on Sundays when only "the game" mattered. They had to call her uncle in New York to find out what was happening in the Middle East. After two years she got a research fellowship that allowed her to go back to the Boston area—and begin the search for another position.

This decision initiated the phase of their wandering about the US. It was motivated primarily by the quest for a congenial position in a good university that supported her discipline. She did not know at the outset how difficult—quixotic?—her quest was in a period when the major expansion of American universities that had taken place in the 1970s was over. An immediate, if secondary benefit of their many moves was a vastly improved knowledge of the country's regions and academic traditions. From a base in a new branch of the University of Texas on the outskirts of Dallas, Rachel and her father embarked on a series of "visits" in every direction and to all sorts of schools: to Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, to Stanford, to Harvard, to the College of William and Mary in Virginia. Now and then they would spend a year in Dallas to fix their house, but for seven years in a row they were at a different address every autumn. Strenuous though it was, it certainly enabled Rachel to learn a great deal about the American academic system. And she did eventually achieve her goal in 1986, a year after her father's death, by being appointed to an endowed chair in Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which had the third oldest program in the field in the USA. She taught there for twenty years until her retirement, which has afforded her the time to write this kind of memoir.

Perhaps the trickiest question is: Who is Rachel? She is definitely not a fictitious figure in the sense of being invented any more than are any of her experiences told in this kind of memoir. The most precise characterization of her is as an *alter ego* of the author. Their relationship is indicated by their partially shared name for Rachel is one component of Lilian's Hebrew name (Rachelea). They overlap without being quite identical. They are separated by the many years—three-quarters of a century!—that have elapsed between "the little princess" of the opening and the currently scribbling persona. The passage of time inevitably results in a retrospective gaze that fosters a self-detachment conducive to both nostalgia and humor. Seen in hindsight, many of Rachel's adventures assume a tragicomic quality so that this kind of memoir is poised at the intersection of the sad and the humorous. Essentially a non-fiction, it is nonetheless written in the creative manner associated with fiction.

2.2. “Growing Up in Wartime England”

The day after she arrived in England on 1 March 1939 Rachel clamored to go to school. She was seven and a half, and she had not been to school for a year; in fact she had gone to school for just six months in her whole life—and she loved school. She had started in the first grade in Vienna in September 1937, but when the Nazis took over Austria in March 1938 she had been thrown out because she was Jewish. A segregated school for Jewish children was opened down the hill from the regular school. Her former classmates would taunt and jeer the Jewish children and then run down the hill throwing stones at them. Rachel’s new school was out of the ordinary, to put it mildly. The teacher was an elderly professor of zoology who had been dismissed from his university post on account of his “racial impurity;” he had, of course, no idea how to teach first graders; he just tried to keep them quiet (they were pretty subdued anyway) by playing his violin and reading aloud to them. What was so eerie was that the class got smaller and smaller; children disappeared without a word. Had they been sent away (to prison? to some camp?) or had they left of their own free will? Where to? No one dared to reveal anything of their plans or movements. This school was a strange, temporary, tenuous arrangement.

Eventually Rachel too left, also without a word to her schoolfellows. She and her parents had already moved out of the apartment where she had lived all her life into one in a house owned by an uncle of hers where the janitor was trustworthy. Those late fall days of 1938 were dark in every sense. Rachel remembered one day in particular for it was foggy and smelled of smoke. When her father returned home from an errand at the post office, he told of the horrors he had witnessed: burning temples, looted stores, and Jews on hands and knees scrubbing the sidewalks with toothbrushes—it was *Kristallnacht* [the Night of Broken Glass]. Her parents whispered a lot, trying to protect her, but she had sharp hearing, and even if she did not understand the precise details, she gathered that something really bad was happening. Not long afterwards, under the cover of the Christmas travel rush, they left as inconspicuously as possible, walking out with just a couple of very small bags, as for a weekend trip. Rachel insisted on taking her school satchel with some paper and pencils for she really loved school.

However, she did not get to go to school in Brussels where they landed after various adventures and where they lived for two months, waiting for the promised visa to England. They had entered Belgium illegally on foot in the depths of winter, and were terrified of being picked up by the police and sent back to Germany to a concentration camp. So there was no question of school for Rachel; it would mean being put onto a register, and who knew what the consequences might be. She wrote letters to her mother, decorating them with little drawings. She had no toys, and knew that she must be good and not cause trouble for her parents had more than enough troubles without her being naughty.

No wonder though that she clamored to go to school immediately after they arrived in England as legal immigrants. They lived in Kilburn, a district of northwest London where the rent was low. Rachel’s grandparents on her mother’s side, several uncles and aunts and two cousins were already there, occupying the second floor of a small house on Brondesbury Road, a pleasant tree-lined road not far from a park. They were awfully crowded as it was and had to squeeze together to make a room available to Rachel and her family. If they were short of space, they had an overabundance of furniture for her parents had shipped all their things from their large apartment in Vienna to London. Some pieces—the dining-room table and a cupboard—were too big to go in through the door and had to be

sold for a song at auction. The rest was crammed in, hardly leaving room for the inhabitants. But they were glad enough to have it or else they would have had to buy at least a minimum of furniture, and they had precious little money. A social worker, who came one day to inspect where Rachel was living, was bewildered: She was sleeping on a sort of settee in the one room that had been assigned to her family. The place was grossly overcrowded, but Rachel was obviously neither neglected nor abused, so she said nothing. In that part of London she must have seen much worse.

Her mother took her to an elementary school round the corner. She caused a great stir among the children. You might have taken her for retarded since she did not speak a word of English. Nor did she know the alphabet for the Nazis had taught her only the Gothic script. She could not even knit like all the others, so when she went home for lunch that first day, she asked her mother to teach her. Luckily she proved a quick learner, but her mother showed her the European way of knitting, which she went on using. In every respect she was different.

The children were kind to her. She had never seen children like this nor had they seen anyone like her. To them she was a sort of doll, unable to speak, and dressed in clothes such as they could hardly imagine. In this poor area of London they were almost in rags, with rough manners and speech, yet with Rachel they were gentle and considerate. They would escort her home and pick her up, finger the many bright dresses she had brought from Vienna, each with its matching hair ribbon, and matching socks and shoes. She was a curiosity, an almost magical figure who had appeared in their commonplace world. Best of all, they instinctively grasped how to help her learn English. Her mother, who knew a little, read with her every day from a book the school had lent her about an old woman and her dog. These lessons were a source of irritation to the other members of the family, already tense with their own worries, principally how to make a living. At school the children did "show and tell," holding up objects such as a pencil and scissors and saying the words. Once she had a big surprise when a boy brought a box and out jumped a frog as he triumphantly shouted: "frog." That was Colin, a tall handsome boy who had appointed himself her special protector. Rachel must have picked up the language rapidly for by the end of the school year in July, the children greeted her mother with excited cries of "She's top." Her mother could not understand what on earth she had been up to: "top" to her was associated with climbing a mountain, and there were none in this part of London. She was even more puzzled when Rachel's teacher assured her that she would get a "scholarship." She had not heard the word; when she mentioned it to their landlord, she gathered that it denoted something desirable.

Rachel picked up another language during those months in London: Yiddish. To speak German on the streets in 1939 did not meet with approval, so her grandparents were encouraged to speak Yiddish, which sounds a bit like Dutch. In their seventies, her grandmother was hard of hearing, and her grandfather frail. Rachel called Yiddish "old German" in the belief that at a certain age people switched to this dialect. This bizarre misconception proved to contain an element of truth, as she discovered many years later when she took a course in Middle High German and found it strangely familiar because of its affinity to Yiddish. Yiddish is in fact based on Middle High German, a version of the language of the time that the Jews took with them to Poland when they were driven out of Germany. It was subsequently enriched by loan words appropriated from whatever region the Jews lived so that it comprises Polish, Russian, and English terms, but its basic format remains Germanic.

On one occasion Rachel felt hurt and excluded. Her cousin, who was about the same age, had been invited to a birthday party. She went to a private school where her tuition was paid by some

benefactor. As her mother was working, Rachel's mother was asked to take her to the party and bring her home. Rachel secretly hoped she would be invited in too, so she dressed in her party finery. But to her great disappointment she was left standing on the doorstep when her cousin was let in. She and her mother sat on a park bench until it was time to pick the party girl up. At least here in London Jews were permitted to sit on park benches. Yet Rachel was rather sad because she had been excluded.

In the summer of 1939 during the long school vacation Rachel's parents decided to give her a break from the family commune. It was an unusually hot summer, hot also in the metaphorical sense as London waited anxiously to see whether—or more likely when—war would break out. The headmistress of her school recommended a tiny boarding school in Chertsey, Surrey, about twenty-five miles southwest of London, run by a friend of hers. It could hardly be dignified by the name “boarding school” since there were no more than four boarders. In a big, gracious house with a beautiful garden, it was run by Miss Theakstone and her mother, who did the housekeeping. They had begun by taking in Miss T's nephew when his parents were posted to India; he was the only boy there. Rachel did not know how the three other girls, all older than her, got there, perhaps also for a vacation in the peace of the country. Rachel was terribly unhappy there; she had never been away from home, and during the perilous flight from Vienna she had come to put her trust in her parents. She missed them dreadfully and wrote to ask them to take her home. The Theakstones censored her letters and got her to write how happy she was. This made her most uncomfortable as she had been brought up always to tell the truth, however painful. Miss T tried to persuade her that she would cause her parents grief by admitting her unhappiness; they were making a sacrifice to send her there (it cost a pound a week). Later, on reflection, she thought that the greater sacrifice would have been on the part of the Theakstones who wanted that income.

Rachel did not mind sharing a bedroom with two or three other girls. It was a large room overlooking the garden, far more spacious than the cramped quarters she had recently shared with her parents in Kilburn. But she fell foul of Eva, the oldest one who was inclined to be bossy. She would read after “lights out” by pulling the drape back a little. When Rachel was asked whether Eva had done so, she answered without hesitation: “yes.” Eva was told off, though not really punished, it was a minor disobedience. That was why Rachel could not understand Eva's extreme anger at her for “telling tales.” At age eight, having had the imperative always to tell the truth drummed into her, she simply could not grasp the concept of “telling tales.” Eva persecuted her; she instilled a terrible fear into Rachel by asserting that she would never be able to wear a skirt because she had no waist, she would forever have to have her skirt hang on a “bodice,” as little girls did. Rachel had no idea that eight-year olds are not yet shapely enough to have a waist; she had no one in whom to confide (at home she would have asked her mother), so she nurtured this dread for years. By a curious coincidence she ran into Eva again when both of them were in their early teens and Eva was visiting relatives who happened to be neighbors in M. Then it was Eva who was rather plump and shapeless whereas Rachel had grown to have the neat waist she still has in her seventies.

Rachel's other recurrent source of trouble at Chertsey was the food. Truth to tell, she had been a picky eater since her childhood, favoring a small repertoire of familiar things. English food was strange to her; she liked some of it, especially the colorful fruit jellos (“jellies” as they were called in England). She was made to drink milk (which she never TOUCHES to this day) and she “took to” fish. That phrase, “took to,” reported by Miss Theakstone to her parents, caused some confusion; without

sufficient idiomatic English, her parents took it to mean that she was going fishing. Rachel drew the line absolutely at “brawn” (“head cheese” in American); it was an ugly beige-gray color with bits of unidentifiable things in it. She did not know what it was, but it looked so hideous that she refused even to taste it. No amount of persuasion could convince her; “granny” Theakstone argued that it was like the fruit jellos she loved, but they were pretty and this was ugly. She was sent to bed without supper, and made to face the brawn for lunch the next day. When she continued to stand her ground, they became alarmed and excused her from this dish permanently. She had won that round.

She learned all sorts of things at Chertsey. There were, of course, no lessons in summer. They played croquet on the lawn, did some gardening, and she learned to ride John’s old bicycle. She also learned Church of England hymns for she went to church on Sundays with everyone else since she could not be left all alone in a country house at a time when there was talk of the possibility of German parachutists. Rachel knew that church was not her religion and she would recite to herself the Hebrew prayer she had been taught in infancy, but she enjoyed the hymns. She also had her first exposure, literally, to sex when John rounded the girls up in the bathroom and behind locked doors showed off his penis. Rachel was not much impressed and certainly did not feel deprived for not having that extra piece.

The most important and lasting thing she learned in Chertsey was English. At her school in Kilburn she had become fluent—in Cockney, the accent of working class Londoners. She would correct her parents who had taken English lessons in Vienna, assuring them that this was the authentic local pronunciation. What the genteel Theakstones must have thought she cannot imagine to this day. Miss T, who had been educated in Oxford, spoke beautifully. They were tactful enough not to say anything about the sounds Rachel made, merely correcting her until she spoke as they did, with an upper class south of England accent that she has retained to this day. Perhaps it was worth going through the brawn battle and the anxiety about her lack of waist in order to acquire the invaluable asset of good speech.

While Rachel was in Chertsey, war broke out. All children were to be evacuated from London to areas less likely to be bombed. Her parents decided to let her stay in Chertsey rather than make her deal with another new, unknown environment. In the belief that she was quite happy there, they preferred to spare her yet another dislocation, although evacuation was free and Chertsey had to be paid for. Rachel was too young to understand what was happening, so she ended by staying in Chertsey for some nine months. At the end of summer, lessons were instituted under the direction of an “Independent Schooling” system, similar perhaps to contemporary home schooling. Miss T did her best. John was lazy. Apart from English, croquet, gardening, and riding the bicycle, Rachel does not recall learning anything, but maybe that was enough. Actually she did acquire one other skill that has not proven so useful: that of undressing and dressing under the blankets because it was too cold to get out of bed in the unheated bedroom without clothing.

With the outbreak of war her parents became “enemy aliens” as they held German passports. Gradually all aliens were screened by special tribunals, no easy task since they still knew relatively little English. Both her parents were categorized as “friendly enemy aliens,” *i.e.*, not deemed to be any immediate danger to England, yet still subject to certain restrictions including no travel more than 5 miles from home without permission. This meant that they could not come to see her in Chertsey. Very kindly Miss T was arranging to bring Rachel nearer to Kilburn for a day when her father was

granted permission to visit Chertsey. Rachel's excitement was intense; however, the visit was by no means a success. She spoke rapid idiomatic English with which he had difficulty, and she hurt him by her blunt comment: "how strange, a father who can't understand his daughter." For his part he was astonished at her appearance; from all that milk, not to mention the puddings, she had ballooned out to such an extent that even her underwear had had to be let out. At home she had been a small eater whereas at Chertsey she was made to "clean her plate." Her mother's visit some weeks later went much better. To begin with, she had been warned of Rachel's appearance so that it was not such a shock. Also she was more gifted at languages and therefore better able to understand her. They went for a walk together. That visit has remained a precious memory for Rachel; her mother was so elegantly dressed in black and white as if she were still in Vienna. Only one shadow darkened the visit: when Rachel inquired about her grandfather, who had been unwell for some time, her mother said he was doing better. But somehow Rachel sensed that this was not the case. Later she found out that he had died and her mother did not want to tell her because she had been very fond of him. But this breach of trust—and of truthfulness—actually hurt her more.

By May 1940 Rachel's father had succeeded in obtaining his British professional qualifications. On the advice of the Home Office they moved to Bournemouth, a lovely resort town on the south coast where there was said to be a shortage of dental practitioners. Although by then Rachel had more or less got used to Chertsey, she looked forward eagerly to being with her family again and going to a real school. But it was not to be. Reading the newspaper in the train from Chertsey to Bournemouth, her mother already muttered: "He won't be there." And her father had indeed disappeared. With the fall of France in May 1940 all enemy aliens, no matter how "friendly," were interned from the south coast. Arriving at an empty apartment they were bitterly disappointed. They had expected the Nazis to deal harshly with them, but they believed they had found a legal refuge in England. Now they lost everything a second time.

For three weeks they did not know where her father had gone, for the newspaper reports in those critical days of the war when it looked as though Hitler might invade England were more than cautious. What did "interned" mean and how long would he be held? Finally they had a letter from the Isle of Man where he had been taken; conditions, he wrote, were uncomfortable though not terrible. The worst thing for the internees was the uncertainty and the worry about the families they had left behind.

Rachel longed to go to school; it would be a way of getting away from the anxieties at home and of normalizing the situation. She got her mother to take her to the local school only to find it closed—full of soldiers who had escaped from Dunkirk. Most of the children were happy at the unexpected vacation; not so Rachel. The elderly headmaster consoled her with: "Maybe tomorrow," so every morning she and her mother turned up at the school, always to be sent away with the same illusory hopes. They would go for a walk and sit on the sandy beach—1940 was another sunny summer—but this was not what she wanted to do.

Settling back to "home" after Chertsey was at once difficult and easy. She had a hard time in getting back to the standard of absolute truthfulness. At her young age she had become curiously confused about the difference between "telling tales" and lying about trivial things. When asked, for instance, whether she had cleaned her teeth, she would casually give the most convenient answer: "yes" and then have to go back to make a correction. What was easy to revert to was the simple eating that had

been customary in her family. Her mother, who could not cook, had got recipes from “granny” Theakstone in the belief that Rachel would have grown accustomed to English food. However, she was only too glad to be spared the milk and she never missed the puddings *etc.* She soon lost all that pudginess.

Her mother had bigger worries than cooking. They had nothing to live on. They had long ago exhausted the slender funds they had managed to convey to England as well as the yield from the diamond they had smuggled in a hollow tooth. They had lived on charity from the Jewish Refugees Committee in the full expectation of achieving independence again once her father could resume his profession. Rachel’s reiterated phrase during that time was: “when Daddy earns some money again,” and she was quite sure it would come to pass. Now their hopes were dashed indefinitely, and meanwhile they did not know what to live on. Their apartment in Bournemouth was in a nice part of town, half way up a hill with (almost) a view of the sea. Bournemouth was a “reception area,” *i.e.*, considered safe from bombing and therefore much sought after by those fleeing London. So they took in as sub-tenants the C family whom they had known in Vienna where Mr. C had been the representative of a major British firm and a patient of her father’s. He would come from London to visit only at weekends, and though the apartment was smallish, they managed to squeeze in all together in rather closer proximity than they would have liked. In wartime England everyone became used to doubling up.

The arrangement fulfilled its purpose of covering their rent; otherwise it was trying. Mrs. C, an arrogant, uneducated woman, treated Rachel and her mother as her servants because they were now poor. The Cs’ son, Peter, some three years younger than Rachel, was an utter pest, spoilt rotten, petulant, used to being king of the castle. Tensions arose particularly when Mr. C was there for he resented the fact that Rachel spoke so much better than his son, who had the annoying Cockney habit of punctuating every phrase with “eh?” Mr. C tried without success to eliminate this lower class interjection from Peter’s vocabulary. He also tested Rachel’s vocabulary by making her spell at meals: “rhododendron,” and “hippopotamus.” She would somehow get them right, thereby only intensifying his anger. Rachel was cast as Peter’s nursemaid. Instead of herself going to school, she was supposed to be his teacher, a difficult task with a willful, cheeky little boy. When he lost his boat in the park, it was she who was blamed.

There was no reason for Rachel and her mother to stay on in Bournemouth. They feared her father might remain interned for the duration of the war, anyway he would not be allowed to return to the south coast. Sometimes they had no word from him for weeks, and once they were worried sick when a boat carrying internees to Canada, the *Arandora Star*, was sunk with massive loss of life. This was the time when Rachel became her mother’s companion, sharing her anxieties and trying to mitigate them.

In September 1940 they went back to London. Why they did this was unclear; it was a time when all who could were leaving the city. Her mother’s family, who had been in the cotton business in Vienna, had moved to Manchester where they had contacts. Probably Rachel’s mother assumed, rightly, as it later proved, that her husband would come to London when—or if—he was released from the Isle of Man. Besides, rents were low in London so that they could live on the income from their apartment in Bournemouth where they left their furniture. It was a confusing time when life was so unpredictable that it was hard to make rational decisions.

There were, of course, no more schools in London; all the children had been evacuated. By September 1940 the blitz began in earnest, probably with the aim of demoralizing the population in preparation for a German invasion. While the British were sanguine, encouraged by Churchill's stirring speeches, the refugees from Europe were pessimistic and terrified, having once already experienced the Nazis' ruthless might and knowing that they would be the first targets for arrest and who knows what mistreatment. What did Rachel do all day? She knitted and read and went for walks in the park with her mother. Mainly, however, all day they waited for the night's air raids. Later raids occurred by day too, at first it was just at night, EVERY night without fail.

They would get into their shelter clothes, sturdy comfortable garments, and prepare their gear: a thermos bottle of hot tea, perhaps some sandwiches, and a large measure of hope that they would again be spared that night. They tried all types of shelters. The safest without doubt were the underground stations, which were kept open all night and crowded with people, who bedded down on newspapers, side by side like sardines. It was claustrophobic in that stuffy, not to say downright smelly atmosphere, and sleep was virtually impossible with the lights, the constant restless movement, and the almost perceptible undercurrent of fear: What would they find the next morning? Would they still have a home? Every day there were more piles of rubble, more devastation. The shops, however damaged, would hang out signs: "Business as usual." That indeed became the slogan in London, absurd though it was to pretend that anything was "as usual."

Their underground phase was of short duration. Next they tried the sub-basement of a big department store on Oxford Street. The sub-basements, deep enough to seem safe, were like the underground kept open all night, and they offered a more civilized environment. The countertops were cleared so that people could bed down on them as well as on the floor in the aisles. Rachel was asleep one night on a countertop when she felt herself lifted into the air and banging down again. She thought it was bad dream. It was a "direct hit" onto the building. Air raid wardens soon appeared to urge everyone to pack up and prepare for evacuation. There was no panic, quietly the orders were obeyed and they were led up the stairs out onto Oxford street. The sight that greeted them outside was one that Rachel will never forget. One store had been hit by an oil bomb, which fueled a fierce fire, and others had been struck by high explosives. It was as bright as daylight. The pavement was littered with broken glass and debris. And the noise was deafening, of the planes, the explosions, the anti-aircraft guns. The firemen worked as hard as they could but their task was hopeless. The air raid wardens led them to another store whose occupants were asked to move up and let them in. The calm was well nigh uncanny, bearing out the other slogan of the time: "we can take it." Miraculously no one was injured.

After that they stuck to the "Anderson shelter" in their back yard. Named after the Home Secretary who had devised it, the shelter was a small dug-out, three or four feet deep, covered by a piece of corrugated iron and with a few sandbags scattered around. It certainly would not protect anyone from a bomb; on the other hand, it was so small that the chances of its being hit by a bomb were very slim. Without a door, it was open to the rather damp, chilly night air even though it was only September. Here too sleep was very difficult because of the noise; in addition to the planes and the anti-aircraft guns you could hear the whistle of the bombs as they came down and the crash as a relief—so this one too had missed you. They shared this shelter with their landladies, three quarrelsome sisters who did not improve matters. They, the tenants, were barely tolerated as taking up some of their precious space.

One morning they came out of the shelter to find in the house the best surprise: her father fast asleep in bed. Released from internment, he had had a long journey from Liverpool to London, his train constantly stopped for air raids. He arrived at Euston Station in the middle of the night and the middle of a raid, but he wanted to get “home,” so he walked miles in the blackout with his suitcase, and was so tired when he got home that he simply fell into bed and slept. He was altogether rather fatalistic about the bombing, saying that if a bomb had your name on it, it would find you, no matter where you hid. When he joined them in the little shelter, they became even more unpopular for being one more.

If they had had no reason to stay in Bouremouth, they now had even less to stay in London. So they evacuated ourselves. Rachel never found out how their location was chosen; there was talk of Hereford, but then they went to Bedford, a lively little market town about an hour by train northwest of London and an equal distance west of Cambridge. Since Bedford too was a “reception area,” housing was extremely tight. They found one room in a row house owned by an old couple who had never taken in tenants but now thought they should do so as their contribution to the war effort. Ashburnham Road was hardly the safest spot in Bedford: alongside the railroad line, on the other side of which was a munitions factory. When the planes went over to bomb Coventry, they could hear the signal of the “spotter” on the factory roof although the sirens were not sounded so as not to alarm the population. On their way back the planes dropped a few spare bombs on Bedford without doing too much damage. Their second floor room was squalid, smaller even than that in Kilburn, gloomy, overlooking a desolate yard. There was a sink and a stove out in the corridor, no hot water of course, and a toilet down a long corridor. On top of a couch two mattresses were layered which were laid out side by side on the floor at night for them to sleep on. The room was heated by a tiny coal fireplace, on which a kettle could be perched to make tea. Water was also heated (occasionally) so that they could wash themselves and their clothes. Rachel and her mother would go out on her father’s washing day. There was a saying among refugees, all of whom have vivid memories of the cold indoors, that people had been known to freeze to death but no one had yet “stunk” to death.

Despite the hardships of these early days in Bedford, things slowly began to look up for them. Rachel’s father scoured the newspapers in the public library looking for a job. He was hired by a dentist, who had heart disease and could no longer work. The starting salary was six guineas (professional people and fancy stores dealt in “guineas,” *i.e.*, one pound and one shilling—a veritable fortune for them). Rachel’s mother was alarmed on the first day when her husband came home at four p.m.; she thought he had already been fired—it was “tea time.” Best of all, they also acquired superior accommodation in the house next to the dentist’s where a doctor had his practice on the first floor. Since he did not want evacuees billeted in the vacant second floor, he offered it to Rachel’s parents. There they had the luxury of TWO rooms, only one of which, admittedly, had a fireplace so that Rachel would go to sleep on the floor in front of the fire in the living-room rather than brave the iciness of the bedroom. A third small room served as a kitchen with an electric kettle and a gas ring, albeit no water. Water had to be brought in containers along a corridor some way from the back of the house. They were very glad to live in this relative comfort compared to their previous abode.

Best of all, Rachel now began to go to a proper school. Ten already, she had hardly been to school at all. Bedford was renowned for its schools, endowed by the Harper Trust so that they were all free. Since her parents knew nothing about the schools, they approached a police officer on the beat to

inquire about girls' schools. English Bobbies were then famed for their helpfulness, so this one hardly turned a hair at this rather unusual question. He recommended the High School and the Modern School. Later it became a family joke that Rachel had been educated courtesy of the police. Her father went first to look at the High School, which he thought rather pompous as the headmistress received him wearing her academic gown. He liked the Modern School much better; not only was it less pretentious, it also had a lovely new building down by the River Ouse. He opted for the Modern School and was keen to send her as soon as possible to get her out of that squalid one room where they were still living. The headmistress suggested she should start after half-term; why not earlier? Next Monday? How about tomorrow?

So she started on a Thursday and "took to" it as she had done to fish in Chertsey. She excelled at English, was bad at drawing, and slow at needlework, working so long on a piece of cloth that her fingers rubbed a hole in it. But her real nemesis was gymnastics. The main drawback of the Modern School in her eyes was that it had a proper gym with all sorts of equipment she could not cope with. She managed to stand on her head but could never achieve a handstand, and as for climbing a rope or jumping over a "horse"—forget it. Although she could balance on a bar one foot from the floor, she could not or would not do it at three feet. She argued with the gym instructor about the dangers of what she was supposed to be doing and refused to be convinced even when Miss Delamare pointed out that there was a mat underneath and she would catch her. Rachel was adamant. She could not explain to Miss D that they were poor and could not afford to have her break an arm or leg. Only one thing was worse than the equipment: the ritual of being measured and weighed at the beginning of each term. Rachel was somehow the youngest in the class, the shortest, and if not quite the heaviest, not far off. She was truly mortified as the girls crowded round the scales and laughed at her. She was a blot on the gym class in another respect too; everyone except her wore a short blue tunic and matching pants. Her parents could not afford to buy the school uniform, let alone this gym outfit, which was useless outside the class. With clothing severely rationed during the war and only a very limited number of clothing "coupons" per person per year, they could pretend to be out of coupons, although they had plenty, just no money. In class Rachel could fade in with the others by wearing a white blouse and a navy blue jacket her mother had knitted for her. And they bought her a school hat with its distinctive hatband. Only in gym she stuck out like a sore thumb, and if at least she had been athletic Miss D might have forgiven her for spoiling the whole picture by appearing in her underwear. It was a lesson in learning to live with being different.

Rachel put a stop to one sort of difference by prevailing upon her father not to walk her to school carrying her school bag. She felt ashamed of this escort, although she realized it was well meant. Before he got the job with the local dentist, he had nothing to do, and her school was on the way to the library, where he spent part of every day. She weaned him slowly of his care-giving, first dismissing him at the corner of the road where the school stood, and then insisting that she could go alone all the way. The problem solved itself when he landed the job and so was himself busy.

Rachel went to school on Sunday morning too, to a Hebrew school that had been set up for the evacuees from London. Before the war, there had been virtually no Jews in Bedford, now there was a kosher butcher on Fridays and Hebrew classes on Sundays. The old couple in Ashburnham Road would ask approvingly every week to which church Rachel was going. When her parents explained that she was going to Hebrew class, that they were Jews, they absolutely refused to accept this

explanation. Jews, they insisted, were people who came from London to the Saturday market and were liable to cheat you.

Rachel was happy in Bedford. Her father bought her an old bicycle at the cattle market, a very old “sit up and beg” model, the only sort available. As she perched up on the saddle, her father called her “Haile Selassie” after the Ethiopian emperor who would be carried about in a high litter. The bicycle gave her a certain freedom. There was very little traffic on the streets of Bedford other than bicycles because gas was so severely rationed as to almost nonexistent. Rachel would ride to the outskirts of the little town with a young refugee woman to her “allotment,” a patch of kitchen garden where people patriotically grew vegetables.

Food too was of course rationed: one egg per week, two ounces each of tea, sugar, meat, and margarine, and one ounce of butter—good for keeping your cholesterol down. Besides the weekly rations each person had 20 points a month to be spent on discretionary items “subject to availability,” a favorite wartime phrase. For points you could buy such things as cocoa, preserves, cereals, semolina (grits)—“subject to availability” which meant sometimes if you were lucky. Later, dried eggs could also be bought on points; they came in austere brown boxes from the United States and were an absolute godsend. Rachel’s mother was a wizard with the dried eggs, smoothing out the lumps, making a paste with a little water, gradually adding more water, and cooking them like scrambled eggs, perhaps with a tomato mixed in—subject to availability. Rachel once asked her mother what they had eaten before the dried eggs came, and neither of them had an answer. Only vegetables and food grown in Great Britain were freely available: potatoes, carrots, turnips, swedes, apples and plums in season. Such things as bananas, oranges, and lemons that had to be imported simply disappeared. Why there was a shortage of onions was unfathomable; they heard of an onion being offered as a prize in a fund-raising raffle. They ate a lot of potatoes, and even invented a dish of their own: “Italian potatoes,” *i.e.*, boiled potatoes with an egg thrown over them, one egg for the three of them. The high point of that year and a half in Bedford was a visit from Rachel’s grandmother from Manchester; she brought a small tin of Nescafé Rachel’s mother was a coffee lover; in the Viennese coffeehouses coffee could be ordered in all shades and varieties. In Bedford, she had had to make do with “Camp” coffee, a liquid essence out of a bottle diluted with hot water. Nescafé was a vast improvement. Once an American officer, who had consulted her father on a problematic tooth, sent his batman with a box of goodies: a cucumber, rice, chocolate, foods almost forgotten.

Altogether life got somewhat easier for them, at least in some respects. Her father’s salary gradually increased from six to twelve guineas a week as the practice flourished. It had been badly run down when he took it over, but in the small town word spread of the presence of a good dentist so that people flocked to him. They were able to repay the loan from the Jewish Refugee organization and to begin to save a nest egg. Several patients urged her father to have her transferred to the High School, which was attended by the daughters of professional people, whereas the Modern School was for trades people. Ignorant of the class system in England, he would say that Rachel was happy at the Modern School and that is where she stayed.

Rachel loved going to the movies, the “pictures,” as it was then known in England; to her mother’s exasperation, she favored not just comedies but slapstick farce—the three stooges—that prompted hearty laughter. School rules forbade the cinema during the week; they were supposed to do their homework and go to bed early. The high point of their time in Bedford was the visit of the London

Symphony Orchestra under Sir Malcolm Sargent. A special afternoon concert for schoolchildren was given in the Corn Exchange. Rachel proudly dressed up with a pair of white cotton gloves she still had from Vienna. Handel's "Water Music" was performed after the conductor had explained the occasion of its composition.

At the winter half-term holiday—it must have been in February—Rachel went by train with her mother to visit the family in Manchester. They lived in an apartment with central heating and constant running hot water—almost unimaginable comforts! But the weekend was overshadowed by new private anxieties sowed in Rachel's mind by the whisperings she overheard while her mother was out. Her mother's chronic cough was suspected as a symptom of TB. Rachel knew that her father was none too well either with his repeated gallstone attacks despite the removal of his gall bladder when she was just an infant. She could see herself left an orphan. To whom could she turn? Her mother's sister was a businesswoman, rather impatient and self-centered; she would not want Rachel hanging round. Her best bet, she decided, was her grandmother whom she loved. Yet the possible loss of the parents who had always protected her was a fearful thought, and one she could not mention to anyone.

The visit to Manchester was an exploratory expedition preparatory to their move. Although her father had been offered a partnership in the now prospering dental practice in Bedford, her mother's family urged them to move to Manchester. After the war, Bedford would revert to its former sleepy state when all the evacuees returned to London. There would be no Jews either. Besides, her mother missed her family. However, it was a difficult decision because of the risks it entailed. In Bedford they were financially secure. Starting up from scratch in Manchester would be a big risk; the hundred pounds they had saved would not go very far in meeting the rent in a big city as well as the costs of setting up in practice. After long deliberation instinct prevailed over reason; they wanted to live in a big city and to be with family.

They moved to Manchester in the winter of 1942. It was then a large, ugly, dirty city. When Rachel first saw the city center, she wept that she could not live in a place so hideous. Its mills and slums were remnants of its growth out of nineteenth-century industrialization, although its southern suburbs, spreading into the farmlands of Cheshire, were pleasant enough. It suffered from incredibly dense "pea-soup" fogs that would totally immobilize traffic: buses moved in convoy led by a man holding a lantern, cars were abandoned, and the only sure way to get home was on foot. The soot-laden air was not only unhealthy; it also led to constant dirt indoors, and even settled on clothes. When Rachel came home from school, her mother would ask her whether she had been down a coal mine because of the soot on her blouse. After the switch to smokeless fuel, a radical change took place, with the fog much attenuated, and the air more salubrious. Yet Manchester had its glories too in its liberal tradition, its past as a leader in the free trade movement (its new post-war concert hall is called the Free Trade Hall), its outstanding public library in addition to the Rylands Library with its collection of manuscripts, the Hallé orchestra founded by a nineteenth-century German immigrant and brought to world fame under the baton of Sir John Barbirolli, its distinguished university, and its wealth of theatrical activity. It was certainly not Vienna, but intellectually and culturally it was a good place to live.

For Rachel's family it was a huge leap forward. They rented an apartment in the same complex as her grandmother and so had central heating and running hot water for the first time in six years. Admittedly, the heating in their apartment was nowhere near as cozy as in her grandmother's place,

which was on the first floor while theirs was on the third floor and at the end of the heating line. Still it was incomparably preferable to the customary British little open fires that heated a radius of a few feet and left you fried on one side and frozen on the other. This was a proper apartment with a living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and two bedrooms, one of which was Rachel's. She was so excited at having a room of her own again that she dragged all visitors in with the cry: "come and see MY room," to her parents' considerable embarrassment. Yet they understood and humored her.

Her father also took two rooms in the city center on the main square opposite the landmark public library to open his dental practice. Later they heard that their choice of location created almost a scandal as those rooms had been occupied by Manchester's leading surgeon, and it was considered impertinent for a refugee dentist to succeed him, as it were. The rooms were above a branch of the drugstore chain, Boots; they hoped that the pharmacists would refer patients with toothache. In the middle of the war there was a great shortage of dentists with most of the younger ones away in the forces. But despite the fine location, Rachel's father read *Gone with the Wind* and other long books while waiting for patients. The first one was a Norwegian sailor. They reckoned that their small savings would cover rent and expenses for three months at most. In order to have some income Rachel's father took a job two evenings a week and Sunday morning as assistant to a dentist in a far suburb on the other side of the city. He was having gallstone attacks and would sometimes have to give himself a shot of a potent painkiller before setting out for this second job. Rachel vividly recalls seeing her mother standing at the window behind the blackout curtain late at night waiting for him to come home in the blackout on the buses that ran rarely at night and weekends. It continued to be a precarious existence.

In late 1942 or 1943 (Rachel does not recall the exact time), news began to percolate through of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis against Jews and others. They had known about concentration camps, beatings, every form of mistreatment before they left Vienna. But this was of a different dimension: organized extermination. Her parents did their best to protect Rachel from this news at that time. Yet she sensed from their whisperings and their deep gloom that something was radically amiss. All her father's family was in Hungary, and they had had no word from them for years. At first the Red Cross had transmitted occasional postcards of 25 words; then abruptly the messages stopped. They could only guess, and fear the worst. After the war, her father managed to find out that his younger sister, Ella, had been deported to Auschwitz and gassed on 6 June 1944 (ironically on D-Day), while his older sister, Irene, and her three children had been in Treblinka. Her husband, a furrier, was used to make caps for the German army in Russia, and when he was no longer needed, the family was exterminated.

The bright spot was that Rachel did get her wish of going to school fulfilled right away. Before they left Bedford, her mother had been to see the headmistress of her school to explain that they were moving. They intended to send Rachel to a convent school in their neighborhood. Miss Tonkin was very opposed to this and offered to write to Dr. Clarke, the headmistress of the Manchester High School for Girls, with whom she had been at Girton College, Cambridge. "And don't go to a policeman," she added. So Rachel was transferred without ever taking an entrance exam, much to the annoyance of neighbors who complained of her "walking" into the best girls school in Manchester, the sister institution of the famous Grammar School for boys. There really was not any room for her; a chair was brought into the classroom and she shared a desk. An independent school, run by a Board of

governors, it was not free, as in Bedford. The embarrassing task of telling the headmistress that they could not afford the tuition fee fell to her mother; Dr. Clarke, unperturbed, said that the governors would be satisfied with two pounds per term, a quarter of the normal charge. Another difficulty was that at this highly academic school Latin was started at age eleven, followed by French at twelve. As Rachel had done no Latin, she was six months behind. Her mother taught her in daily lessons so that she caught up in six weeks, and even came “top” in Latin by the end of the year. Perhaps this success contributed to a certain resentment of Rachel on the part of some of her fellow pupils who were far from pleased that she had disrupted the pecking order. On the whole she found that the further up the social scale she went the less friendly the children were. She, who so loved school, would weep at breakfast at the memory of those sweet ragged kids in Kilburn.

On the other hand, the Manchester High School for Girls had one enormous advantage in her eyes. With its building recently bombed, it was housed in three old buildings, and had NO gym! No “equipment” to torture her! Physical education classes, held in a church hall, consisted of innocuous exercises, waving arms and legs about, running and jumping, without danger. Sports, too, were limited by lack of proper playing fields. They would go to a nearby park and play hockey on a muddy field in winter and tennis and cricket in summer. Even at these Rachel was no good. She played hockey just once and got a nasty bruise on the shin with a hockey stick; the same happened when she ran to catch a cricket ball, not knowing just how hard it was. After that she absconded between the school building and the park, easy to do. She would have loved to play tennis, and realized only years later that she had been too myopic to see the ball in time to get into position. Being “brainy” and non-athletic made for a bad situation; she was given a really excellent education by superb teachers at the Manchester High School, albeit at the cost of developing rather an inferiority complex on account of her unpopularity. In a class of 29 she was invariably the last to be “picked” for any team.

Rachel fared only a little better at Hebrew classes, which she enjoyed far more than school. In Manchester the classes were conducted at a temple and were for the children of members. Her parents could not at first afford the membership fee, so she went on her own one Sunday morning and asked the rabbi whether he would admit her for free. An enlightened, scholarly man and a brilliant teacher, he welcomed a pupil who actually wanted to learn. Most were there only to get through the bar mitzvah ritual. Rachel was the only girl in the top class together with a bunch of disinterested boys. As they read and translated stories from the Old Testament, the rabbi explained the rigorously logical structure of Hebrew in which every word can be reduced to a root of three letters and then constructed with various particles into nouns, adjectives, adverbs, different verb conjugations. As the vocabulary of Biblical stories is small and repetitive, it was not hard to translate them once the basic grammatical principles had been grasped. To Rachel this was an amazing revelation that came at the same time as her initiation into Latin, no doubt laying the foundation for her lasting fascination with language. The rabbi described her as having “a mind like blotting paper.”

Rachel also liked going to Girl Guides (Scouts). Although the majority of troops were church affiliated, a friend of her mother’s, who thought Rachel was lonely, found an independent troop where she became a member of the Daffodil patrol. Curiously at Guides she had the self-confidence to do things she could not do at school such as winning a three-legged race. One weekend she went camping only to be literally soaked to the skin—her first and last experience of camping. She worked hard to get all sorts of “badges,” not just for reading and sewing (at which she had got better), but also

cleaning her room, washing and ironing, though not cooking. Her mother could not cook either, having had a maid in Vienna, and during wartime there was not much to cook anyway. She once told Rachel to ask the other girls where they learned to cook, and when she heard “from their mothers,” the subject was dropped forever. For her “First Class” at guides, Rachel had to cook outdoors. She cut the turf and folded it back neatly, and managed to light a little fire, helped by wax remnants from the candles they lit on Friday night. She had brought some half-cooked hamburger, and had just put it into the pan with some margarine when the examiner came around in the nick of time to see that the contents of the pan had caught fire! She passed all the same. It was the only time she cheated. With the Guides she also went to the top of the city library to turn paperback into hardbacks for the troops. They carefully detached the paper covers and stuck them onto cardboard, which was fixed round the books. They felt very important going up in the elevator behind the scenes in the library, and of course they came out covered in glue.

With her newly acquired cleaning skills Rachel helped her mother to clean her father’s office. They would go while he was at his second job, and Rachel went along during school vacations to scrub and polish until everything glittered. Sometimes a patient would come to make an appointment (gradually there were a few patients). It seemed to cause more embarrassment to the patient than to them to recognize that the cleaning crew was the doctor’s family.

Rachel’s ancient bicycle was a casualty of the move from Bedford. She mourned the loss intensely, especially as bicycles were, like most things, “in short supply” during the war, not to mention expensive. She saved her pocket money assiduously, and in due course her father was able to get a brand new bicycle through a patient. How she cherished it, fanatically polishing its chrome handlebars. One awful day, surely one of the worst days of her childhood, it was gone, stolen from the downstairs hallway where it had been firmly chained to a radiator. She was so upset that she called her father at his office, a thing she never did, and all she could do was weep into the telephone. Assuming that her mother had been injured, he was immensely relieved when at last she could stammer that it was her bicycle. “ONLY the bicycle,” he replied. After a while he managed to get her another one, but Rachel never felt for it the affection she had had for its predecessor. To begin with, it had black handlebars, more practical to be sure than the shiny chrome, and then she hadn’t “earned” it herself. Still she went out on it, sometimes with her one friend, Ruthy Macintyre, and later with her father. They would go off on Sunday afternoons to explore the environs of Manchester. On one occasion they skirted the airport, a training ground for paratroops. Her mother scolded them roundly for engaging in activities that might be deemed dangerous in enemy aliens.

Rachel became pretty self-reliant early on. Her mother spent a good deal of time in her father’s office, keeping the records and assisting chairside. Later a series of girls were employed to answer the phone and open the door, but they were notoriously unreliable so that her mother would have to drop everything and rush into the office whenever the help did not turn up. After coming home from school Rachel would hastily do her homework, get a tomato sandwich for dinner, and go out to play in the parking area of the apartment complex throwing her precious ball against the wall. It had started life as a tennis ball, but its covering had long since worn off to reveal its black rubber interior. Because balls were rubber, they too were “in short supply,” another phrase that meant you could not get them for they were, like almost everything, needed for “the war effort.” Rachel had that one irreplaceable ball for years.

Sometimes during the school vacations she would accompany her grandmother on her shopping, acting as interpreter for the old lady who never learned English. In her late 80s she came to believe that there were just two languages, the Yiddish spoken by Jews, and “Goyish” (“goy” = stranger in Hebrew) spoken by all others. In the shops she would address the assistants in her best German. Her grandmother was to be her refuge in case of an air raid. She was instructed to grab a small pigskin suitcase in her parents’ closet and go down to her grandmother’s place if the siren went off when she was alone. She did not ask what valuables were in that suitcase, and was deeply disappointed to find out many, many years later that it contained nothing but documents: a copy of her birth certificate (the original had got lost), her parents’ marriage certificate in Hebrew and German, her parents’ medical degree certificates, *etc.* Under the Nazis without documents you were lost, a permanent non-person, so it was highly important to preserve all this evidence. There were few air raid attacks on Manchester after 1942. What frightened Rachel more, irrationally, was the fear of a parachutist, a lingering memory of the early days of the war. When she was alone in the apartment, especially after dark, she was afraid to go along the short corridor to the bathroom for fear that a Japanese parachutist would jump out of the closet.

In her early teens, Rachel experienced the usual friction with her mother over very minor matters. She would throw her raincoat down on her bed, when she came home from school, whereas her mother wanted her to hang it up and brush it. In time Rachel realized that she would have to hang it up when she went to bed, so she might as well do it immediately. Brushing it (it was navy blue and showed every speck) was another matter. Her mother also wanted her to brush her hair more, although Rachel insisted that would not help. She had her father’s fine straight hair, not her mother’s wavy sort. However, on the whole there was little real strife in the family; Rachel understood that her parents had enough troubles without her causing difficulties. They felt that she should fend for herself at school too, although her father helped her with drawing homework and patiently explained various mathematical concepts that had been poorly presented by her one bad teacher who was a gifted mathematician but inept at verbal explanations.

When Rachel was about thirteen, the school told her parents that she had a gift for languages. The headmistress made it her business to visit classes and to get to know each of the school’s 300 pupils. Rachel had a wonderful French teacher, a French woman who made them not only read but actually speak the language from an early stage. Later Mrs. Herbert, like some of Rachel’s other teachers at the Manchester High School, was recruited by university departments of education to teach how to teach. The news that languages were her forte was a bombshell to her parents; it was like hearing nowadays that your child is on drugs. They did not know how to handle this; they were stunned, for they, like she, had always assumed she would go to medical school. It was essential for a Jew to opt for an independent profession, they thought, where one would not have to seek employment by others. After their experiences in Vienna, the specter of antisemitism was never far from their minds. How can one support oneself with languages? That she needed to be self-supporting was impressed on Rachel early on. The uncomfortable issue was temporarily shelved; in time it was to resolve itself.

VE (victory in Europe) day came in May 1945. The continuing war in the Far East was not of direct interest to the British population; as far as they were concerned, the war was over, and they had won. Immense spontaneous rejoicing occurred throughout the country.

Not so in Rachel's family where there was always more anxiety than celebration. Her father was in hospital, in desperate condition in those days before antibiotics, following another gall stone surgery after attacks for months on end that had often forced him to cancel appointments and had done his budding practice no good. Who wants to go to an unreliable dentist? There had been frightening talk of a tumor. Her father worried that he had no life insurance, he would have to rely on his brother-in-law to look after his wife and daughter. Rachel remembers well how terribly sick her father looked, curled up in bed, crouched in pain. A surgeon who was his patient and had an office in the same building insisted that it was not a tumor but further small stones coursing up and down the bile duct and causing terrific pain. He was right. He carried out the surgery under local anesthetic in a good but remote hospital in an extremely poor district (he was a socialist). After school Rachel would have to get two buses to go visiting. The people on the second bus literally smelled bad, yet they kept their tiny row houses immaculately clean, regularly scrubbing and whitening their front door steps. Owing to the shortage of nurses ("shortage" was of course another common wartime word), Rachel's mother would spend long hours in the hospital caring for her husband. She would come home at 11 p.m. sometimes. Fortunately it was May, and with the double summer time in operation in Britain during the war it remained light till very late. Rachel used to go to the bus stop to meet her until a man tried to molest her one evening, exposing himself and urging her to come and play with him. She turned tail, ran home, and never went to meet her mother again.

So on VE day Rachel was alone, not sharing the universal rejoicing. Her aunt, her mother's sister, rode round the city on the upper deck of a bus to see the crowds celebrating, but she did not think to take Rachel along. On the contrary, she caused her fright and grief by urging her sister to go back to Vienna now that the war was over to resume her profession, arguing that Rachel was old enough now at age 14 to look after herself, and her husband as good as dead. Knowing how much her mother loved both her profession and her sister, Rachel was truly afraid she might heed the advice. In these thoughts she did an injustice to her mother who was firmly committed to her family—not that she did not go on missing her profession. Apart from helping in the practice, she read the *British Medical Journal* and the *Lancet* with passion every week, only complaining sometimes that it was all biochemistry.

The war was far from over in 1945. Indeed, things got worse in the next few years because Britain was so depleted from the war effort. Bread was rationed briefly for the first time in 1946. Even in the early 1950s when Rachel went to Cambridge to graduate school, she had to take her ration book with her, although by then things were loosening up so that late on Saturday afternoon she might be able to scrounge an extra egg from a grocery store. Worst of all was the shortage of coal, particularly in the record-breaking cold of the winter of 1947. The central heating in their apartment gave out when the water froze in the underground pipes. The trains stopped running because the points were coated with ice. It seemed as if the entire country were immobilized, exhausted by the years of sacrifice that the war had entailed. The British resented the Marshall aid so liberally extended to the defeated Germans, while the victors were left to fend for themselves as best they could. The one bright event that year was the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Philip Mountbatten.

Rachel experienced "peace time" for the first time when they went on vacation to Switzerland in 1948 after becoming naturalized as British citizens. They were keen to try out their British passports immediately! The contrast between war and peace was starkly impressed on her during that journey. After crossing by boat from Dover to Boulogne they went by train through the "Pas de Calais" area

which had been heavily bombed in the closing months of the war when it had been the site for the launching pads for the unmanned V2 (“doodle-bug) bombs directed at London. Nothing was left but pile upon pile of rubble. The next morning, having crossed France overnight, they arrived into what seemed like a magically transformed world. They followed the advice they had been given to get off the train and have breakfast in the station restaurant in Basel. What a revelation! It was just a pretty ordinary continental breakfast but to Rachel it was full of wonders: freshly brewed coffee made from real coffee beans, crisply baked rolls, lashings of butter, two kinds of preserves, and to top it all, honey. Though she was no gourmet, she savored it. In Switzerland also they saw in the stores all sorts of things still unobtainable in England: Heinz baked beans, Dundee marmalade, British products that were for export only.

Growing up in wartime England left Rachel a legacy that was to prove utterly devastating later in her life. When she was fourteen, she got a bad sore throat with a high fever. Her mother looked at it and saw that her tonsils were all red and nasty looking, so she stayed in bed for a few days and drank lots of hot tea. There were very few doctors for the civilian population, and of course no antibiotics except those specially brought from the USA for Churchill when he got pneumonia. Several months later her parents noticed that her ankles were swollen and dragged her off to an old doctor who diagnosed that she had developed nephritis (inflammation of the kidneys) as a result of the strep throat. She was put to bed for months on end, cared for with great devotion by her mother. That is when she became a reader; she also knitted, sewed, and learned Italian from a course on the radio. Her classmates, who had hardly been friendly before, suddenly became amazingly kind; one of them would visit her on most days after school to bring the homework and to take her work back to school so that she was able to keep up with her class. Occasionally one or other of the teachers visited too. Apart from bed rest, the only other treatment at the time was a salt-free diet, which likely heightened her indifference to food. At the end of the school year, although she had missed six months of school attendance, she took the major public examination, the School Certificate. Her school made all the arrangements, sending a teacher who was on maternity leave to act as the official supervisor. Rachel was allowed to get out of bed long enough to sit at the table to write each of the eight three-hour exams. She got five “distinctions:” in English, French, Latin, German, and History, and three “credits:” in Geography, General Science, and Mathematics. Her illness and the exam results settled the question of her future direction. For the Higher School Certificate, which came two years later, she chose English, Latin, French, and German. It was obviously not feasible to pursue the scientific subjects without being in a lab, and anyway it had meanwhile become abundantly clear where her talents lay.

At the end of that summer a young doctor of German origin who had just been demobilized opened a practice in Manchester and quickly acquired a high reputation. He had newer ideas; he got Rachel out of bed. At first she was weak and very diffident, but by September she was able to go back to school half-time. Despite the kindness her classmates had shown her, her long absence made her detached from school, accustomed to doing things on her own. Resisting the school’s wish that she should sit for the Oxford and Cambridge entrance competitions, she decided to go to the Victoria University of Manchester in order to stay at home in the central heating rather than brave the cold in the colleges. For she had been urged to avoid catching cold so as to prevent the nephritis from flaring up again.

So she got a ‘flu shot in her mid-twenties; it seemed a prudent thing to do. By then she had got her Ph.D. at Cambridge and was in her first teaching job at the Queen’s University of Belfast. Before the days of disposable needles, total sterilization was not possible; as among drug addicts today needles could spread infections. That is how Rachel came to be one of ten cases of B-hepatitis traced to the same needle by the public health authorities in Manchester. Most were either mild or even sub-clinical; hers alone was so virulent that her parents were told that she had no chance of survival. They should have doubted this verdict for Rachel sent her mother to buy some orange tinted nail varnish, which would look better with her deep yellow skin than her usual pink shade. As an experiment, since there seemed to be little to lose she was put onto high doses of steroids, which were gradually tapered off over five months. It cured her although she was off teaching for a year and was a physical mess with damage to her skin and the grotesque “moon” face characteristic of steroids. Yet she recovered from all this too, and seemed alright for thirty years until she began to experience a lot of pain in her joints. At first a male doctor diagnosed depression (it was eighteen months after her father’s death) and put her onto an anti-depressant, which so knocked her out that she had to stay in the house for two days. A woman doctor sent her for x-rays, which showed that the steroids had cut off the blood supply to the cartilage so that bone was rubbing against bone. When she had hip replacement surgery, it was the joke of the hospital that she had been treated for this condition by an anti-depressant.

However, that surgery did not turn out well either. So now she sits and writes.

3. Conclusion by Anabel Aliaga-Buchenau

Today Lilian Furst does not write anymore but her voice remains. Working with Lilian Furst was a privilege in many ways. Her sharp mind and analytical skill were unmatched, and what is more her experiences and stories were a window into a lost world. The Rachel Chronicles tell her story from the early days in Vienna, to her life in war torn England, her education at Cambridge, her first academic job and then her immigration to and wanderings through the United States. Along the way, the reader learns about what it is like to be a woman graduate student in Cambridge in the 50s, about the Furst family furniture which made it from the apartment in Vienna, to London, then to Manchester, to Chapel Hill and finally to my home in Charlotte, Furst’s collection of more than 100 bears, her books, and the deterioration of her eyes. Lilian Furst comes alive in Rachel’s narrative.

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