

## **Yochanan Ben-Daniel zur Familie Balter**

*Yochanan Ben Daniel ist ein Enkel von Sidonie Kischkat (geborene Balter) und Sohn von Elizabeth. 1954 in Dar-es-Salaam (Tansania) geboren, übersiedelte seine Familie 1957 nach England. Nach Abschluss des Medizinstudiums war er dort als praktischer Arzt tätig, bevor er 1998 nach Israel emigrierte, wo er heute diesen Beruf weiter ausübt.*

In 1919 my grandmother, Sidonie, married a young man from Lithuania, whom her uncle had met on a train in central Europe. In return for Sidonie's hand in marriage, he agreed to go to East Africa and manage a sisal estate for this uncle. A year later, Sidonie gave birth to my mother in Berlin (1920). She then returned to her parents in Vienna for 2 years, before setting off to join her husband on the estate near Lushoto, in the Usumbara Mountains of northern Tanganyika (now Tanzania). On arriving in Naples to embark for Africa, Sidonie's little daughter (my mother) was kidnapped. Only by a miracle did she manage to get the little girl back before the ship departed.

Sidonie also took her piano. This had to be carried by a team of porters for many miles from the port at Tanga to their home in the Usumbara Mountains. In this remote setting, the family were frequently visited by wild animals, such as snakes and lions, and conditions there must have been very different from the Viennese way of life that Sidonie was accustomed to. She was unable to have any more children, because of the medication (quinine) she was taking for malaria, and her husband narrowly survived a serious complication of this disease. Yet their only child, my mother, grew up healthy, attended the local school and completed her education with a secretarial course. After World War II, she moved to Dar-es-Salaam, where she met and married my father, who was of Anglo-Irish origin. My sister was born in 1950, and I followed in 1954. Sidonie died of a stroke in 1956 and less than a year later my parents immigrated to England. My grandfather joined us there, and lived with us until his death in 1976.

Sidonie's sister, Sylvia, fled to England from Vienna in 1939, but when the war started she came under suspicion and was interned on the Isle of Man, along with many others from enemy states. After the war she settled in the Midlands (Wolverhampton) and initially found work as a housekeeper. A few years later, she got a job at the head office of Robert Maxwell's 'Pergamon Press' in Oxford, where she was responsible for despatching journals on request. At around the same time (mid 1950's) she moved to London and rented a small room in Kensington and then in Notting Hill. She used to stay with a family near Oxford during the week, and returned to London at the weekend – a routine she kept until her retirement at the age of 85. On public holidays, Aunt Sylvia would come and visit us at our home in Kent, and could often be persuaded to make 'Apfelstrudel'. In the mid 1970's she was awarded an Austrian pension in recognition of her original displacement. She never married and used to frequent the theatre in London. She studied Italian to an advanced level, as she liked to spend her annual holidays in Italy, always travelling by train, for fear of flying by aeroplane. After her retirement, she continued living independently in London, in very good health, until 1990, when she moved to Norfolk (Hoveton/Wroxham) to live with her niece, my mother. Sylvia was very happy to be close to the family at this time, just as my sister's young daughter, Isabella, was growing up. But then in April 1993, she became unwell from heart failure and died the following month in a small hospital at North Walsham, in Norfolk.

Until the end of her life, Aunt Sylvia kept an almost total silence on her past, and spoke very little about her family origins. After my graduation from medical school in 1978, She invited me to go on holiday with her to Maria Wörth on the Wörthersee for a week and then on to Vienna for another week. In Vienna, we visited Freud's studio, the Modern Art Gallery, the Park, the Cafeterias, the State Palaces, but she never took me anywhere near her old home in Leopoldstadt and neither to the graves of her parents. It is only now becoming clear to me how much she must have been traumatized by her war time experiences, to the extent that she could not, and would not, speak about them.

Sadly I never had the chance to meet Sylvia's brother, Maximilian Balter, though in 1995 I had the pleasure of meeting their cousin Miriam Redi in Milan. When Max fled from Vienna to Italy in 1939, Miriam's family was living in Trieste, where they were able to receive him for a while. She told us that he had managed to escape from the concentration camp by dressing up as an Italian peasant and using his acting skills. So presumably he got away before the British liberated the camp in 1943. After the war, Max joined his sister, Sylvia, in England, while she was living and working in the Midlands. He found it hard to find suitable work there. So after working at the 'Good Year Tyre' factory in Coventry, which he found 'soul-destroying', he decided to travel to the USA. He set sail for the US in 1950 and there he married a lady called Elise, who had been a secretary at the Nuremburg trials. They lived in Manhattan, New York City, and Max found work as a clerk in a shipping company. Sadly, he remained depressed and committed suicide on 23/04/60, at the age of 54.