

# ARRIVING AND BELONGING: STORIES FROM THE ST ALBANS JEWISH COMMUNITY

## AUDIO SOUNDSCAPE TRANSCRIPT

### ARRIVING

*The story goes, with my family, that my great grandfather Yosef arrived in South Shields.*

*The Customs Officer, now we know this isn't actually true cos they had to go and register later but the story is, he gets off the boat and the customs officer says 'So pet, what's your name' and my great grandfather says 'My name is Yosef Tibianski' and the customs officer says 'I'm sorry pet, I canna spell that. The guy in front was called Pearlman so that's your name now.' So that is apparently how we became the Pearlmans.*

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*I was brought into Auschwitz on the 2nd of April 1943 and the very first thing that happens to you [is that] you're initiated into the camp and part of this processing – we call it processing – is your camp number is tattooed on your left forearm.*

*All prisoners admitted into the camp were tattooed and you will notice there is a small triangle under one of the nines and that meant that was your Jewish mark.*

*I came in [to Auschwitz] with my mother and my mother was tattooed first. She was 39933 and I was 39934.*

*People didn't understand what a place like Auschwitz meant.*

*Well I was picking at it after the war and I realised my number was so visible. Every time I wore short sleeves it is going to be visible.*

*And as it turned out it gave me huge problems when I came to Birmingham. I was forced to do nursing, which I didn't want to do. And of course all the nurse's uniforms had short sleeves so I stood out, as you can imagine, and [the tattoo] was visible from across the room.*

*One day one of the doctors said to me 'Tell me, couldn't you remember your boyfriend's telephone number, so you had to put it on your arm?'*

*I knew a plastic surgeon, and one day I just said to him 'Look – take it out because I've just had it up to here with people asking silly questions and always whispering behind my back and as soon as I want to tell them something, they don't want to hear!'*

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*My mother came here, it must have been about 1950, 52 ish, to go to school.*

*My uncle was her guardian while she was here and my grandparents came to visit and while they were in the air there was the first Army coup and so my grandmother never went back.*

*My grandfather was retired, and I use the passive voice deliberately, when Jews were removed from all public positions in Iraq.*

*Whenever my grandmother saw anything nice, the expression she used was 'Kenni Bourhdad' which means just like in Baghdad! So when we were in the South of France and there were lemons growing on the trees 'Kenni Bourhdad', when she ate something particularly nice, 'Kenni Bourhdad' so she obviously missed it. My mother didn't feel that way at all."*

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*My Mum had a very strong accent and none of my friends, even my Jewish friends, none of their parents had accents at all, they were all very English. You know they'd been here for several generations and so that made me feel, sometimes I was embarrassed about that.*

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*We are the epitome of the wandering Jew.*

*My dad was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. My mom was born in Lima, Peru.*

*My father used to tell me all the time: I give you roots and wings. I know where I come from but you've got to go explore a little bit.*