

George Vulkan BEM



Hans Georg Vulkan was born in 1929 in Vienna, Austria. He lived with his parents, Marcel and Adrienne and his maternal grandparents in an apartment in the 9th District. George had a happy childhood attending family and friends' parties and also visiting the cinema and magic shows with his nanny, Olga. George also went on children's cruises on the Danube, where the Captain of the ship was his nanny's boyfriend but also a secret member of the Nazi Party.

George enjoyed school but after the Anschluss on 12th March 1938, this changed as did many things in Austria. George was forced to sit with the other Jewish boys at the back of the classroom and was forbidden from mixing with the non-Jewish children. Eventually he was expelled and sent to a Jewish school. This school was in a very poor building but the teachers, who had also been thrown out of state schools, were good. George and his friends were regularly attacked by members of the Hitler Youth. On several occasions this happened in front of the Austrian police, who ignored the incidents. The Jewish school was closed in mid-1938. The whole family then had to stay at home due to the various anti-Jewish restrictions enacted by the Nazis in Austria. All parks, playgrounds, cinemas etc were banned to Jews.

In September 1938, George was told that his family were going on holiday to France. He wasn't allowed to take any toys except his teddy bear. They were unable to say goodbye to their relations, all of whom were later murdered by the Nazis. On the train and at the border the family's luggage was searched by the police and some possessions were confiscated. The family then travelled on to Paris. When they arrived they had no money and had to rely on the refugee committees in Paris to support them.

Whilst in Paris, George's father heard news that people could travel to England if they could set up a business or were prepared to work in domestic service. George's father and uncle decided that they would try to establish a business in England and George and his parents travelled to England in February 1939. His uncle went back to Austria to collect the rest of his family. He never returned.

In England, George went to school and started to learn English. After the war George studied Physics at university and then did two years National Service in the Royal Signals. He spent most of his career with the Scientific Branch of the Greater London Council, including heading the Environmental Sciences Group.

George now lives in London and regularly shares his testimony in schools and colleges across the country and in his original home town, Vienna. He is married with two sons.

Glossary - George Vulkan BEM

Anschluss- The union of Germany and Austria after the Nazis invaded Austria in 1938.

Hitler Youth – Organisation set up by Adolf Hitler in 1933 for educating and training German youth in Nazi principles.

National Service - In 1947 all able-bodied men in Britain aged between 18 and 30 years old were asked to join the Forces to meet the challenge of a post-war world.