

Charlotte Lang

IRMA DIAMANT (geb KOHN)

1897-1981

My mother Irma Diamant (geb Kohn) was born in Pottendorf on 21st January 1897, the eldest child of Adolf and Rosa Kohn (geb Sprinzeles). Her younger brothers and sister were Siegfried, Norbert, Ernst and Amalia Kohn. They were an orthodox Jewish family who later moved to Modling where my grandfather, Adolf Kohn, became Secretary of the Synagogue.

After leaving school my mother worked in an office until she married my father, Siegfried Diamant, on 25th December 1930 in the Synagogue (Tempel) at Pazmanitengasse 6, Wien II. The witnesses were my father's cousin Alfred Diamant and my grandfather Adolf Kohn. After their wedding my parents lived in Wolkersdorf at Johannesgasse 34 (now 16), a comfortable house and grounds where my father was in business as a Pferdehandler.

I was born on 21st February 1935 and life continued as normal until the Anschluss in March 1938 when many Jews, including my father, were arrested and imprisoned and we were deprived of our home and the business. My mother and I went to stay with her parents in Modling but the situation worsened on the night of 9th November 1938, known as Kristallnacht. Like many other Synagogues, my grandfather's Synagogue and the Synagogue where my parents married were burnt down that night, never to be rebuilt. My mother witnessed the Nazis kicking down the door of my grandparents house at Enzersdorferstrasse 44 and arresting her brothers Siegfried and Ernst Kohn. After six months in Dachau Concentration Camp they obtained papers allowing them to go to Shanghai in China where they stayed until 1949 when they moved to Australia and this branch of the family still lives there in Melbourne. My mother's sister Amalia Kohn came to England in March 1939 after she had been sponsored to work as a maid in a big house at Hatfield, near London.

When my father was released from imprisonment we were forced to live in cramped conditions in Vienna until May 1939, just weeks before the outbreak of war, when at last we were allowed to leave for England. Despite valiant efforts there was to be no escape from Austria for my mother's parents and her brother Norbert. On 2nd May 1939 my mother's parents came with us to the West Bahnhof in Vienna where my mother had to say a sad final goodbye, never to see them again as they and their son Norbert were deported and cruelly murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust. However, their memory is honoured and lives on for ever with three Stolpersteine laid in the pavement outside their home at Enzersdorferstrasse 44 in Modling.

After a long journey by rail and sea we arrived on 3rd May 1939 at the port of Harwich in England where my mother's Deutsches Reich passport, on which I was also travelling, was stamped by the Immigration Officer "Permitted to land on condition that the holder registers at once with the Police and does not remain in the United Kingdom longer than twelve months". From Harwich we went to Nailsea near Bristol where, with help from the Quakers (Society of Friends), we had been sponsored by Mr Trefor Thomas so that my father could help him with the horses on his farm.

Ten days later I got measles and as he had a young daughter he threw us out. We had nowhere to go but my mother's sister Amalia begged the owners of the large house at Hatfield to take her in as a maid with me, then aged four. My father went to the East End of London and worked clearing the bomb sites. In 1940 he had to write to the Authorities asking for permission to visit his wife and daughter as he had not seen them for a very long time. This permission was granted, but only for daylight hours. My mother was treated very harshly and because of this and all that she had been through she suffered from nervous breakdowns for years to come.

However, good news came in March 1946 when the Jewish Refugees Committee wrote to my mother saying that they had received a letter from the Fichier Central Juif in Geneva asking for her address on behalf of her brother Siegfried Kohn in Shanghai. This enabled them to get in touch again and he wrote to her in December 1946 for her forthcoming 50th birthday.

Eventually after I had married her two grandchildren were the best cure for her and she adored them until she died aged 1981 aged 84.