

The President
The Board of Deputies of British Jews
Torriano Mews
Kentish Town
London NW5 2RZ

15th May 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Congratulations on becoming the new President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. You - and your children - bear the name of my father-in-law, the visionary Rabbi Dr Werner van der Zyl who, having witnessed the destruction wrought by the Nazis, was determined to rekindle the light of Jewish learning in Europe after the War ended. He founded the Jewish Theological College which is known as the Leo Baeck College. I had the honour to get to know him well in his retirement and was proud to be a contributor to the *Night Flight to Berlin* exhibition which was shown in Berlin from November 2013 to April 2014. It told the history of the families Less and van der Zyl covering their lives in pre-War Germany, the misfortunes they endured under the Nazi regime and the escape by Rabbi Werner van der Zyl and his wife and infant daughter to England in 1939.

You will always be dogged by your association with the disgraced firm Davenport Lyons, and you will be under constant scrutiny, but you must strive to do your best and live up to the respected van der Zyl name, which you acquired by marriage to my step-son.

The Jewish Manifesto of the Board of Deputies includes ‘Ten Commitments’, which calls for action to ‘Promote good relations, understanding and cooperation between all of the UK’s communities’ and ‘Celebrate and support Jewish heritage and cultural institutions.’

The Manifesto emphasises the need for Holocaust awareness and supports education through survivor testimony. It encourages solidarity with all victims of Nazi persecution and recommends initiatives to enable young people to shadow survivors of the Holocaust. The Board’s ‘Jewish Family Life and Customs - A Practical Guide’ states: “Families are the building block of society and Jewish law and tradition highlights the centrality of the Jewish family.” It reminds us that “Jewish tradition highlights the importance of family ties” and

children should be able to sustain relationships with grandparents and other relatives. Lamentably, in too many Jewish families, relationships fall far short of these aspirations.

Within the Jewish community there are many grandchildren who do not have contact with their grandparents because of the intransigence of the parents. Given the Board's guidelines, what positive action will you be taking as President, to support initiatives to enable grandchildren to shadow a grandparent who is a survivor from persecution in Nazi Germany? To frustrate direct testimony of a grandparent's experience to their grandchildren, is akin to Holocaust denial. As an historian with a special interest in the Jews of England, and also a past contributor to the Pankow Museum in Berlin, I am aware of the challenge of imparting knowledge with clarity and impartiality.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker