

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

18th October 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Home Secretary Sajid Javid MP, speaking during Hate Crime Awareness Week (13th - 20th October) said "British society is built on the historic values of unity, inclusivity, tolerance and mutual respect." Similarly, Conservative peer Lord Ahmad, speaking of his optimism about future relations between Britain's diverse communities (Jewish News 11 Oct 2018), said "The tapestry of Britain today is enriched by this legacy between our faiths, and our attitude to combating hatred." He reminds us of "the importance of robustly opposing all forms of bigotry."

Dr Marie Murray clinical psychologist, family therapist, journalist and author writes in *Harbouring bigotries we like to deny*: "Most people like to construe themselves as free of racism, prejudice or other unacceptable intolerances. Yet research shows the extent to which, ever so unconsciously, people harbour bigotries that they would vehemently deny." She says that prejudice and racism begin as early as three years of age when attitudinal patterns are being formed.

Your father, the late Barry Kaye, unwittingly endorsed this when he claimed that 'Yiddishkeit' is imbibed with one's mother's milk. Whatever beneficial merit that trait might bestow, we know that malevolent influences are readily absorbed by young children. This, coupled with Kaye's claim to have been mentor, teacher and guide to your children, is deeply disturbing given the offensive letters he sent me.

"Bigotry is learned" says Dr Murray. "Prejudiced adults breed prejudiced children." Those who harbour harmful prejudices become more emboldened by not being challenged. It may be that you regret your non-intervention at the time when you were informed of the hateful, menacing letters sent to me by your father. Given your husband's Jewish heritage and the suffering his family had to endure as a direct result of antisemitism, the lack of condemnation was particular egregious. By Kaye's actions - openly sending hate letters to someone he had never met and did not know - it was obvious he did not feel the need to restrain his prejudices, and no retraction was ever made.

Dr Murray recognizes that: "This is the problem with prejudice - a problem that is not named, acknowledged and accepted cannot be addressed. We cannot change what we do not know we have. We cannot fix what we do not know is broken." She writes of "those whose prejudices run deep but who do not know that they have any prejudices at all."

For the Home Secretary and Lord Ahmad to make any headway in stamping out, not only antisemitism, but “all forms of hatred in every community of the land” it must start with individuals coming clean about their latent prejudices. The problem is rooted in family members who are in denial, and therein lies the test; bigotry must be addressed at an individual level.

Board members could lead the way by recognising intolerance within themselves and their families and speak openly about it. Abrogating from the moral responsibility to speak out robustly against all forms of bigotry - wherever it is dormant - is not an option.

From now until February 2019 the Wiener Library is hosting *Shattered*, an exhibition focussing on Kristallnacht. The term refers to the nation-wide campaign of violence in Germany in November 1938, when Nazi thugs attacked the Jewish community. The exhibition explores the experiences of Jewish women, men and children whose lives were changed forever after that night. Your mother-in-law Nikki van der Zyl, the grandmother of your children, was one those affected and who, with her parents, had to abandon their home in Berlin just a few months later and flee to England.

In 2013 Nikki returned to Berlin to participate in the remembrance of the 75th Anniversary of Kristallnacht. On Saturday 9th November, she joined with hundreds of others as they walked through the streets, stopping at several points to hear eye witness accounts, music and prayers. That visit is recorded with photos on her website.

In the Board of Deputies Submission to the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission, 2014 it states at 2.1.3: *We face the challenge of how to pass on responsibility for upholding the memory and lessons of the holocaust to our children.*

And under Statement of Commitment: *We believe the holocaust must have a permanent place in our nation’s collective memory. We honour the survivors still with us, and reaffirm our shared goals of mutual understanding and justice.*

If these goals means anything to you as President of the Board why did your children express no awareness or interest in their grandmother’s survivor testimony when they saw her, briefly last year? Do they know anything about the impact the Nazi brutality had on their father’s family? If this level of interest is typical it is not encouraging. And what is the point of high-minded statements and submissions when free and natural contact between the generations through which memory and lessons of the holocaust can be passed on, is frustrated by controlling parents? The first challenge is encouraging honest disclosure between parents and children. (See under bigotry, above.)

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker
Historian