

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

13th January 2019

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Your statement (JC 4 Jan.) that concern for animals is “the very premise of our religious laws” is absurdly overstated. Maimonides thirteen principles of faith does not even mention animals and the relevant guidance contained in the Halakhah comes a long way after human relationships. Why is it necessary for you to exaggerate?

Your very public Presidential screaming tantrum at the Limmud festival gave the onlookers an insight into one aspect of your character which my family know only too well: when you do not get your own way you become belligerent. Is it because you are chip of the old block of your father Barry Kaye who sent me hostile and hateful letters containing the threat of violence? What is unpardonable is you bringing the van der Zyl name into disrepute, something I cautioned you about in my letter to you in May 2018.

Interestingly the qualities of what makes a good father was the subject of a recent article by columnist Sarah Vine in the Daily Mail. Writing about adoptive children she asks: What makes a father?

Is it the duplication of the genes, the resemblance in the eyes, the shared hair colour, the very obviously inherited sticky-out ears? Or is it the time spent together, the endless stories at bedtime, the joint adventures, the memories - good and bad - of moments shared?

I was an exemplary step-father to your husband Darrell - shown by a mountain of memorabilia, photos and endorsements produced to the courts when required. Later, astonishingly to all who had known our family, he tried to sully my character with outrageous, false allegations to the Court - supported by you without any attempt at discussion with any family members or other independent people and no evidence whatsoever. Happily the gross falsehoods had no influence with the Court and it treated them with the contempt they deserved.

It is instructive to remember that by that time Darrell had cut off all contact with his own family and had most likely been contaminated by the extreme views of your father Mr Kaye, who stated in one letter to me “My dear son-in-law Darrell and I have a remarkable friendship ...” The most generous thing one can say is that neither of them understood or had absorbed the full horror of the Holocaust, and in particular the effects it had on the van der Zyl family, otherwise it might have constrained them from their distressing actions. Nevertheless what was done cannot be undone and yet you have not condemned or distanced yourself from the extreme views held by your racist father. Maybe you inherited more from

him than you are prepared to admit. We should never forget the well known Talmudic Dictum “Shtika Kehoda” which means “Silence is complicity.” When will you speak up?

After abuse was aimed at a group that recited Kaddish for Gaza’s dead (JNews 24 May 2018), Rabbi Laura Janner-Klasuner said that religious leaders should help set the tone for debate. The purpose of the Board’s Jewish Manifesto for Local Government is to inform about antisemitism and racism and outlines ‘Policy Asks’, for which it seeks support, one of which is: “Politicians and officials from all parties and institutions must lead by example, use responsible language, and call out others when they do not.” What example does your Limmud outburst set?

Isn’t it ‘anti-women’ when a wife meekly takes her husband’s name in conformity with gender-specific expectations? It is interesting to note that Rabbi Laura continues to incorporate her father’s name as part of her marital surname. Many independently minded women do not take their husband’s name, especially after having more than one husband. (For example Mrs Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, retained her first husband’s name.) Keeping the birth name is a fundamental way of asserting identity apart from a women’s marital status. I would never impose my surname on my wife; she is proud to be Nikki van der Zyl and celebrates her many achievements in her own name. Would you be proud to revert to being known as Marie Kaye?

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian