

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

19th March 2019

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

An article in the Jewish News (14 March 2019) by Olivia Marks-Woldman and Trudy Gold declares: “Although we think the six million victims of the Shoah is universally known, knowledge of this basic fact is not widespread.” I am also reading *Reckonings* by the British historian Mary Fulbrook which follows up on the war time horrors by dealing with the attempt to bring the perpetrators of the Holocaust to justice. Coinciding with International Women’s Day, it was a sobering thought to realize that Nikki’s grandmother, Martha Less, was only six years older than you are now, when she was murdered by the Nazis. The wife, mother and grandmother was just sixty when she, along with other innocent victims, was herded into a gas chamber at Auschwitz.

A core Jewish ethic is the prohibition of *lashon harah* which means, as you may know, malicious speech or writing. How could anyone with a moral compass, knowing the devastating van der Zyl family history, think it acceptable for your father Barry Kaye to send hateful letters to me and Nikki, as he did following the 2012 court hearing? He gloated over the fact that the court’s decision meant Nikki would continue to be denied contact with her two grandchildren. He was also explicit as to the physical harm that would be inflicted on me. Why were your father’s threats so personal and nasty? We can only speculate on the extent of his prejudice and ignorance - and the mind-set of those who allow hate to fester and the legacy it leaves.

“The dead are not dead”, said Heiner Müller, because their lives, their suffering, their deaths continue to have an effect, and so there is no such thing as “coming to terms with the past”. In my correspondence with Ms Marks-Woldman she agrees that there are many people in the Jewish community who know little of the details of the Holocaust. Nobody who did not lose family members in the Shoah can fully understand the experience of personal loss and trauma, but how does your apparent indifference accord with Jewish moral teachings? It is intensely disturbing that neither you nor your husband, have ever condemned your father for his gratuitously distressing letters.

The Board of Deputies Submission to the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission (May 2014) contains the statements “We continue to mourn our lost family members, our lost communities and the lost potential. As Jews, we were all affected by the Holocaust ...”. Well, not all; not those who are ignorant or unconcerned.

Ms Marks-Woldman’s invitation for me and Nikki to become involved with the Holocaust Survivor’s Centre in Hendon, will provide an opportunity to counter some of the prevailing

lack of knowledge and misinformation. She says there are projects that work with survivors like Nikki to record their testimony in book form to pass on to the grandchildren.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker,
Historian