

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

2nd July 2018

For the attention of Marie van der Zyl, Deputies President

Dear Marie,

Re Mother/child separation

I read your comments in the Jewish News (28 June 2018) which are critical of Donald Trump and echo those made by Rabbi Janner-Klausner a few days earlier.

The USA 'zero tolerance' program to halt immigrant families caught entering the country, refugees without proper papers or families seeking asylum from horrors at home, was badly formulated and rightly quickly changed. Trump was subject to a lot of criticism but Janner-Klausner's comments which suggested that it was the first step toward genocide, was an over reaction and shows a limited grasp of history.

You refer to Britain's reputation as "a welcoming place for those seeking refuge ... as many of our own parents and grandparents did." This absolutely applies to your own extended family because your mother-in-law, Nikki van der Zyl, arrived here in March 1939, fleeing from Nazi Germany with her own mother, her rabbi father having arrived the previous year with a Kindertransport.

Mother/child separation can be emotionally devastating for both individuals, whatever the circumstances. Although 'safe' in England, Nikki was compulsorily separated from her parents during the War, when they were transferred to an internment camp on the Isle of Man. Her father Rabbi van der Zyl was camp spiritual leader and accompanied by his wife, but children were not allowed. This left their anxious five years old daughter, having only a basic grasp of the English language, to be taken away to a boarding school for refugees and live amongst strangers. Try and imagine her angst.

Having endured that traumatic childhood separation, years later as a mother she would fight vigorously in court to prevent her own two children being taken from her. Over an eight year period following the divorce from her first husband she defended herself against his repeated applications to the High

Court for custody, care and control of the children. He did not succeed and the children spent a happy childhood with their mother and me, and with lots of contact with their grandparents. But Nikki's harrowing court experiences would inspire her to study law and eventually become a barrister.

Without the family trio's successful flight from certain death in the gas chambers, you would not now be married to the dear husband you have, and yet - shamefully, given the Jewish emphasis on family life, relationships and Holocaust history - there is no contact by Nikki's son Darrell with his survivor mother. In fact, in a shocking statement some years ago, he declared that he did not want to have anything to do with her, thus depriving his children from visiting their grandmother and hearing her personal testimony of hardship and Holocaust survival which could help them understand their Jewish past. Just another form of separation imposed on your mother-in-law.

The Board's Jewish Manifesto claims that Judaism interprets the core Biblical commandment to 'honour and respect one's parents' (Exodus 20:12), and the instruction to "Stand up for an older person and show honour to the elderly" (Leviticus 19:32) as general standards for the treatment of older people. Even though he may not have had the benefit of reading the Manifesto, Donald Trump is a worthy role model for sons everywhere. He is renowned for his devotion to his mother and showed his respect, affection and love for her unreservedly. It is only through family relationships that a person can truly be judged, and Trump by these standards is a true *mensch*.

The Board can do so much better by encouraging its members to become familiar with and adopting the Manifesto's credo. Making "nicer than Trump" might be a hard climb.

Yours sincerely,

George Rooker
Historian