

## Volunteer Testimonials

Below are some reflections from our brilliant, dedicated volunteers.

### **Terry, Tour Guide**

*I started to volunteer as the subject has always interested me and I wanted to do something “useful”. Experience, after several years, has increased my understanding of the Holocaust (and of the library’s vital role) and allowed me to think that I may have helped increased the understanding of our visitors. That said, I have found many visitors knowledgeable, often with stories to tell about family experiences. Working for the library, whose staff I have always found friendly and helpful, has been both enlightening and, at times, humbling.*

### **Alan, Collections Volunteer**

*It’s with trepidation but also a sense of some excitement when making a start, never knowing beforehand what I will find in a donation. The first task of sorting is to arrange material, often mostly correspondence, into chronological order. This might comprise family letters and postcards, business letters and documents, ID documents, educational certificates as well as those of birth, death and marriage; these may date back to the late 1800s and be very fragile, so require careful handling*

*It’s been a privilege to see and hold fascinating and often invaluable historical documents and objects as well as a great opportunity to do historical research at the ‘coal-face’ so to speak, to help make sure that the documentation of the past is retained and that the facts and the truth are preserved for future generations. An added bonus is that, because of space limitations, I am able to work in the lovely Reading Room overlooking Russell Square surrounded by the Library’s collection!*

### **Ziggy, Tour Guide**

*Learning the script and my own personal reading beyond it has opened my eyes even further in understanding what cannot be comprehended, the persecution of millions. Sharing with others, those who attend the tours, gives us a great opportunity to reflect again on all that we think we know when there is not enough time or capacity to comprehend that wickedness of mankind. We also learn from those who come on the tour as well, as one woman from Germany told me that they don't call the events of 7th November 1938 Kristallnacht, but the night of the pogrom. Such details help us understand the impact the Holocaust has had on a culture.*

### **Margaret, Translation Volunteer**

*For most of my life I have lived and worked in Redbridge, East London, a suburb with residents from many ethnicities and still today an area with many Jewish families but we were a slightly different family. My mum was Dutch Lutheran from a small village in Friesland and my dad was from a Catholic farming family from Central Lithuania. Both had arrived in the UK after the war.*

*Whilst I have lived nearly all my life in the UK I still feel very European. I am fascinated by the way cultures merge and diverge, how borders shift, how languages, customs and recipes are shared. My parents talked about the war when I was growing up and the stories I heard were not ones about the Blitz or rationing. "They just don't know what it was like to be occupied," my mum used to say. There were sad, sad stories and some strange, funny ones too, stories which I have passed on to my children because the war wasn't just about battles and bombs but about ordinary, little people and the difficult choices they had to make. This is what I find so fascinating about the pieces I translate for the Wiener Holocaust Library. I am continually amazed at the resilience and the ingenuity of those who were determined to live. I am humbled when I read of their gratitude to those who helped them and I have the greatest admiration for all of them, the survivors and those who knew they would not survive, and their amazing capacity to come to terms with what they have lost. We can all learn from them.*

### **Stephen, Tour Guide**

*Prior to becoming a volunteer at the Library I had been a History teacher (secondary level) for some 25 years. Shortly after starting at the Library, what became apparent was how little I knew. The archives therein are truly*

*remarkable, the exhibitions enlightening. Alfred Wiener was not in any of the History books we used at A Level/GCSE. However, I have been fortunate to meet Daniel Finkelstein, a grandson of Alfred Wiener. Moreover, reading Daniel's latest book has been deeply moving. At the end of the introduction there is a powerful sentence. It reads, 'It's the story of how my family took a journey which ended happily in Hendon,...but on the way took a detour through hell.'*

*The Tuesday afternoon guided tours have been stimulating. On each tour I have met at least 1 person with a direct connection to the Holocaust. It has been a privilege to meet and engage in conversation with them.*

### **Des, Translation Volunteer**

*I have worked for the Wiener Holocaust Library as a translator (German into English) since 2016. The focus of my work has been the translation of eyewitness statements from Holocaust survivors, but I have also transcribed and translated countless letters written, mainly by Jewish parents trapped in Europe, to their children in England. I have been sustained in my work, even when the account contained some of the most harrowing descriptions imaginable. To conclude, it has been a privilege for me to be involved in the work done by the Wiener Holocaust Library.*