ARRIVING AND BELONGING: STORIES FROM THE ST ALBANS JEWISH COMMUNITY

AUDIO SOUNDSCAPE TRANSCRIPT

BELONGING

My mum was born in St Albans

During the Second World War my grandfather was in the army and my grandmother was evacuated to St Albans to give birth in Diocesan House which was like a nunnery run by the Catholic Church. It's currently, I think that place is now an old people's home.

One of my ancestors Abraham Vaz Martines was one of the first wardens of the Bevis Marks synagogue which was founded in 1701.

Some of the furniture at Bevis Marks, some of the low benches, are still from the original synagogue in Creechurch Lane from 1656.

Before I trained as a hypnotherapist I did a degree in restoration and conservation of decorative arts and because my college was very close to Bevis Marks and because of my personal connection, I got very involved there for quite a while. So I restored most of their furniture, a lot of their furniture, including those original benches.

I was born here. I was born at the top of St Peter's Street.

It was in those days a nursing home. It was pre-NHS days when there were private nursing homes, and that's where I was born.

My father was in the Auxiliary Fire Service during the war and he was based here in St Albans and at Hatfield and he used to drive into the Blitz in the East End and in the City.

To start with I went to Holywell House [primary] school and then from there I went to the Hatfield Girls' Grammar School, which is now Bishops Hatfield, and where I was the only Jewish child. And it was fine, absolutely fine. I didn't have any problems whatsoever.

This is my parents' shop – do you know the Peahen? – well that was it. Where the restaurant part of the pub is now was my parents' shop. My father and mother opened it just before they got married in 1932. My parents both lived in Kilburn, in north west London, and they met as youngsters at synagogue youth club, tennis club. They were childhood sweethearts.

When they decided to get married they didn't want to live in London so they came up to St Albans. My father had a car and they came out to St Albans

and fell in love with it. There was a very very small Jewish community here and they became founders of that community. They joined up the people that were here and they opened a business just before they got married.

We've actually been in St Albans for 40 years.

When I graduated my first job was in Stevenage and my girlfriend, Sarah, she was living still at home with her parents in Kenton, and halfway between girlfriend and work was… St Albans!

The Jewish Community moved out into St Albans during the Second World War when there was a vibrant synagogue there, to the extent that there was a kosher butcher in St Albans next to what's now the Odyssey Cinema - the Odeon as we used to know it. Just around the corner there was a kosher butcher.

I was born and brought up in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia (Canada)

All four of my grandparents are from Russia.

When my granddaughter was born, I moved to Hemel Hempstead to be near my daughter, son-in-law and my new granddaughter.

When I moved up here I was looking for a synagogue and I was looking for friends, I think as much as for a religious base, probably more than for a religious base.

People came up to me and were very warm and friendly and so it was kind of love at first sight.

I volunteer for Sunflowers, which is the [multi-faith] playgroup, and I help organise the rotas.

I go to the weekly parsha (section of the Torah read in synagogue) *study, which I'm very much enjoying. I have a great depth of ignorance, but the Rabbi …. doesn't intimidate so I feel good and I feel like I'm learning something. I belong to the Book Group - I like that too, very much. And I go to the social events that are organised, and I go quite often to services on Shabbat (*the Sabbath*).*