

He put colour in her cheeks: did her smile save his life?

BY JESSICA ELGOT

► A FORMER British prisoner of war in Auschwitz has described how he received a cherished oil painting of his sweetheart, painted from a black and white photograph by a Jewish prisoner in the camp.

Welsh-born Bryn Roberts, now 92, who lives in Lyme Regis, was a labourer in Auschwitz when he received a picture postcard of his girlfriend Peggy Gullup through the Red Cross.

A Polish POW saw the picture and offered to have it painted, as Jewish prisoners worked in the camp making copies of stolen artworks. The picture came back two weeks later, a colour oil painting, in the correct shade of Peggy's actual jumper, even though the postcard was in black and white.

Mr Roberts' cousin Peter Lewis submitted the story of the painting to the Radio 4 series *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, which looked at artefacts in the British Museum. Listeners were invited to suggest their own objects to map world history. The story thrilled producers, who made a one-off documentary about Mr Roberts' painting, broadcast this week on Radio 4.

Mr Lewis, 62, whose first wife and two sons are Jewish, said: "It is an amazing story, which we only really heard in full around ten years ago. Obviously, Bryn didn't believe the Polish POW when he said he could get the photo done in oils, but let him have it reluctantly, warning him that if he lost it then he



Peggy Gullup in the photograph and (right) as the artist saw her. He even managed to replicate the correct colour of her jumper



would break his neck. A fortnight later, the painting came back. There was no payment.

He said it was in the interests of the Jewish painters to keep busy, because otherwise the Nazi guards would question why they were kept alive. The picture was not signed, because obviously the person who did it could be punished.

Although the painter's identity remains a mystery, the family still hope

it could be possible that someone recognises the painting. Mr Lewis said: "Once there was a survivors' group of former painters in Auschwitz. I know Bryn wishes he had got in touch with them."

Mr Roberts married Peggy in December 1945, but is now widowed. He told the BBC: "I would have loved to have found out who the painter was. But I have no way of knowing."

He witnessed what was happening

The painters had to keep busy. Otherwise, the Nazi guards would question why they were being kept alive

in the Jewish area of the camp. "We knew what was going to happen to them. It was all out in the open. I saw the trucks arriving with all the naked people going to their deaths; kids, babies, and women. The Germans were always talking about it."

Mr Roberts was first captured in Belgium in 1940 and spent time in many different camps, including Lamsdorf and Terezin. He kept the painting taped to his stomach and hidden for two years, and he himself remained in captivity until 1945.

He attempted to escape 12 times and was finally successful, a month before the war ended. The painting still hangs in his living room. Mr Roberts said: "It's a damned good painting. I made sure the Germans never got their hands on it."

A History of the World Special can be heard on bbc.co.uk/radio4

Israelis shocked at life in Britain

BY MARCUS DYSCH

► A GROUP of Israeli parliamentary advisers say a visit to Britain to learn about pluralism in the Jewish community has revealed a stark contrast to their lives at home.

The fourteen, among them political advisers, Knesset spokespeople and parliamentary journalists, met representatives from all sections of British Jewry during the five-day trip.

They learnt about the range of Jewish activities experienced in the diaspora, but which is often less apparent in Israeli society.

Chief Rabbi Lord Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg of the Assembly of Masorti Synagogues, and Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner of North Western Reform Synagogue were among those to meet them.

The Israelis also visited the Board of Deputies, the new cross-denominational school, JCoSS and parliamentary friends of Israel groups.

One of the most eye-opening experiences came when they were watching a House of Commons committee hearing. The Israelis said they were shocked to find MPs speaking "one at a time, not talking on their mobile phones and not wandering around the room having private conversations".

The trip was part of the Gvarim Programme, set up by the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco in 2000 to develop relationships between Israelis and diaspora Jews.

Ranit Budaie-Hyman, a graduate of the project and organiser of the visit, said: "Previously, many of these advisers had no understanding of the terms Reform, Conservative, Orthodox or Charedi."

"Talking to the different rabbis opened up diverse Jewish worlds and the group now understands more about those communities."

"We were honoured to see how communities work together to present a united front in upholding Jewish practice in Britain. Jewish life outside Israel is very different from in Israel."

Ms Budaie-Hyman is a political adviser to Rabbi Michael Melchior, former Israeli Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The group participants were from across the spectrum of Israeli religious and social backgrounds.

AJR marks its 70th anniversary

BY JESSICA ELGOT

► THE LIVES of refugees who fled from antisemitic persecution will be celebrated in a week-long series of events to mark the 70th anniversary of the Association of Jewish Refugees.

Politicians, academics and human rights activists, as well as many former refugees and their children, will take part in the varied programme at the London Jewish Cultural Centre. Events will run from June 20 until June 26, to coincide with National Refugee Week.

The AJR, started in 1941 by refugees from the Nazis, supports Jews who fled to the UK from persecution, mostly from the Holocaust, but also from the former Soviet Union and the 1992 Bosnian conflict.

The week's events will include a Question Time session with the Austrian ambassador and deputy German ambassador, alongside former government ministers Lord Moser and Margaret Hodge and ex-deputy mayor of London Nicky Gavron, daughter of a German Jewish refugee.

The last surviving member of the Amadeus Quartet, cellist Martin Lovett, who met the three other members of the group in an internment camp, will be interviewed by journalist David Herman.

► LIVING IN A BOX

PHOTO: JOSHUA WHITE



Assemblage artist Dwora Fried will have her first UK showing in London in July. She will present pieces of box art in which she weaves together microscopic worlds of displacement and alienation. She studied at Israel's Avni College and received her BA at Tel Aviv University

Pair on track for Tony Blair's Faith Fellowship

BY JENNIFER LIPMAN

► TWO BRITISH JEWS are among 30 young people selected from more than 700 hopefuls to become fellows of Tony Blair's Faith Foundation.

From July Catherine Mansoor, from Middlesex, and Anthony Silkoff, from Essex, will be joined by three Jewish fellows from North America, as well as representatives from Christianity, Islam and other world religions.

The prestigious year-long leadership scheme, launched in 2009, challenges the fellows to promote interfaith understanding by working together on a global anti-poverty project. Fellows are partnered with another person of a different faith to work to mobilise people for the cause of malaria eradication and awareness.

The previous group ran a campaign raising more than £100,000 for malaria prevention.

Mr Silkoff, who has a postgraduate degree in human rights from Glasgow University, said he had applied because he wanted to work in the field "as part of a hugely diverse group".

"I consider it a moral outrage that so many people are still denied their basic rights, by poverty, conflict or disease," he said. "My faith inspires and compels me to change this status quo. I can't wait to get started."

"I'm looking forward to the chal-

enges and experiences," added Ms Mansoor, who studied law at UCL. She applied to the programme out of her passion for international development and her interest in learning more about other faiths.

Mr Blair said: "Too often we hear about the negative aspects of faith, but the number of applications we received shows the enthusiasm which exists among young people to use their faith as a force for good."