

## **Unveiling speech by Eva Loeffler**

I would like to thank all the people who have suggested and organised the placing of the plaque to honour my father Ludwig Guttman.

Just a few words about him –

He was born in 1899 in Eastern Germany and trained as a neurosurgeon. He had a brilliant career and was expected to be the successor to the top neurosurgeon in Germany. However, in 1933 the edict was announced that Jewish doctors, teachers, and other academics were not allowed to work in non-Jewish establishments. He was immediately dismissed. He became head of the Jewish hospital in Breslau where we lived.

In 1939 he received visas for himself, my mother, my nine-year-old brother, and me to go to England where Professor Hugh Cairns, who knew my father as a fellow Neurosurgeon, was able to give him a position to do research work in spinal-cord injuries.

We left Germany in March. We were allowed to take furniture and clothing. (All money, silver gold and jewellery, and valuables had to be left behind.)

In Oxford we were invited by Lord Lindsay, Master of Balliol College to live in the Master's Lodgings. It was difficult for that elderly couple to house two lively children who spoke no English, and as soon as we were able, we moved here to 63 Lonsdale Road, our rented home for the next twelve years. My home from the age of 6 to 18 – sometimes it still appears in my dreams.

My father was very much a man of the times. He took no part in any household duties. His study and one of the two living rooms was a forbidden zone for my brother and me. When he came back from the hospital he retired to his study and often my mother joined him to type out his research papers. The other living room was stuffed with our oversized furniture, upright piano, extendable dining table, and huge sideboard, and was heated by a coal-fired stove. Upstairs the small bathroom was heated by a paraffin stove. That smell is very evocative.

As we had no car (there was not a single car owner in the whole road) my father decided to cycle to make his journey to the hospital faster. His cycling attempt ended abruptly as he collided with a wall and never touched that mode of transport again.

When war was declared my mother put mattresses and blankets in the cupboard under the stairs and on the few occasions of the air-raid siren alarm we slept

there. My father joined the other men in the road in the ARP rota of patrolling the road, checking there were no infringements of the blackout regulations, and learnt how to use a stirrup pump (a simple pump in a bucket of water with a hose and nozzle spray to put out incendiary bombs). Fortunately, it was all unnecessary. My mother dug up the lawn and flower-beds and grew a variety of vegetables, and we kept four happy hens who kept us in eggs in a run outside the back door.

In 1944 my father was asked to take charge of a new spinal injuries ward at Stoke Mandeville for the expected war wounded soldiers after the D-Day landings. He was excited at having his own unit again, although it began with a few beds, a nurse, and one orderly. Eventually there were 100 beds and a full team of medical and nursing staff. Because of the distance he travelled to and from by bus, he only came home to Oxford at weekends until 1951 when my parents moved to High Wycombe and he bought a car. He was a terrible driver and had several fortunately not severe accidents.

As his revolutionary methods succeeded and his patients – all young war casualties – survived, he realised that strengthening the remaining musculature by ball-throwing and physiotherapy would not be enough and he started sport such as basketball, archery, and table-tennis. His methods of treating paralysed patients and their rehabilitation to accepting life in a wheelchair became known all over the world.

The Spinal Injuries Centre at Stoke Mandeville became internationally recognised.

From these small beginnings of sport for his patients the Paralympic movement grew.

The first Paralympic Games were held in Rome after the 1960 Olympics, and 300 wheelchair athletes took part. Since then, other disabled groups have joined the Paralympic Movement and in Paris next year over 4000 disabled athletes from all over the world will take part.

My father remained totally involved until his death in 1981 and is acknowledged as the father of the Paralympic movement. He was knighted by Her Majesty the Queen and elected Fellow of The Royal Society.

In conclusion I just want to say how thrilled the family is to have this wonderful plaque in honour of my father in Oxford. I have always had a special affinity to this beautiful and historic city that took us in as refugees and gave us somewhere we could call home.