

## Autobiography by Christian Frohwein

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I was born in a small town called Thungen near Wurzburg in Southern Germany on May 9, 1933. On my mother's 26<sup>th</sup> birthday. My father had recently been appointed as one of two GP's. He was employed by the Baron von Thungen. It was my father's first practice.

Soon after I was born, the Nazi movement began to become prominent. One day my father noticed a Jewish man being dragged through the street roughly. He complained about this treatment only to be told a few days later that he had better be careful because he might be the next. My father's mother was a Hebrew Christian and, though my father's father was gentile, he was considered to be half Jewish.

Soon after this it was necessary for my father to flee to the free city of Danzig in Prussia, which was then still a "free city". It was not long, however, before the Nazi's began to have influence in Danzig too. It was then that the Mission my grandfather, Dr. Paul Frohwein, had worked for in Vilna as a medical missionary, asked my father to take over the medical mission station in Vilna (Poland).

My mother and I remained in Thungen, until my father went to Poland, when she was able to join him. His mother also joined him there as did his sister, both living near the Mission.

My recollection of that time is faint, but I do remember the street and the flat we lived in which was quite large. They accommodated helps in the house, such as a nanny and general helpers in the house.

I can also remember the winters there. There were horse drawn sleighs and I was as confident on skies as I was on foot.

When I was about five, I had to have a mastoid operation. In the hospital they did not have many nurses, so someone had to stay with me much of the time and I recall the helpers from the house as well as my parents, grandmother and aunt taking turns at my bedside.

One of the things I enjoyed was my stays with my grandmother. During the months before coming to England she would try to teach me a few English words as she was very proficient in English. Her stepmother, my grandfather's second wife, was English so she was bi-lingual. (The first wife, who died, was German).

In 1939, with the war clouds looming, the British Mission suggested that my father should bring the family to England for safety. My father, being half Jewish, had to travel to England via Switzerland by air. My mother, with myself (nearly 6) and my sisters, Hanna (4) and Rika (2), had to travel by rail via Warsaw and Berlin. We stayed one night with colleagues in Warsaw. It was my first experience of central heating and a very modern home.

We then went to relations in Berlin on the paternal side who were pure Germans. We stayed one night and when we had to get the train to Holland they left us near the station because they were afraid of being seen with us at the station in case it became known that we were Jewish refugees.

On that train journey to England as we approached the Dutch border, a lady in the same carriage spoke to me and then showed me a large photo of a man on the front page of a newspaper. "Who is that, she said?" I had no idea. In fact, it was Adolf Hitler. The woman was amazed that I did not know. My mother

was terrified in case she reported such a failure to teach me who the great man was. To my mother's relief we got over the border into Holland safely.

On our arrival in England, we went to stay with my great aunt Blanche Handler in Croydon. She accommodated us for a short time before the Mission rented a flat for us in South Croydon, not far from Aunt Blanche.

The local Baptist Church, to which we went were very good to us and helped my mother to settle. One thing I remember clearly was a Sunday morning in September 1939. During the service, a man went up to the pulpit and gave the minister a note. It was to say that war had been declared on Germany. On leaving the church we were all given gas masks.

Another incident that comes to mind probably early 1940, my mother was invited to a lady for tea one afternoon. We went for a walk on a hillside called Riddlesdown which overlooked South Croydon including the then important Croydon Airport (at the time the main London Airport). It was a cloudless day except for a few little fluffy clouds into which a few aircraft kept flying. Then we saw some black objects being dropped from the planes. We soon saw black smoke coming from the airport and realised that this was an air raid.

We went for shelter to some nearby houses and about half an hour later the air raid warning went. We went to an air raid shelter. It was in the basement of a petrol filling station and the cellar was full of petrol cans. When we eventually got home local people were concerned and had been looking for us.

Soon after this, an Anderson Air raid shelter was built in the garden and I can remember long periods sitting in the shelter. During that time a neighbour in the shelter taught me to knit to while away the time.

At this time, there were some emergency acts coming into force. Germans were categorised into groups relating to how much of an enemy they were. 'A' were dangerous enemy aliens, 'B' were moderate enemy aliens and 'C' were friendly aliens. We came under this group. My people were shipped off to the Isle of Man some even from the 'C' group. This was really a panic action. We, however, were not interned.

In about 1941, rather than being evacuated, we were found accommodation in Sibford Gower, a village near Banbury, Oxon. We lived in one room, a kind of cellar, below a cottage. My Mother and us three children squeezed in there, this included cooking on a Calor Gas stove. There was just a door and a small window but we did not complain as we were away from the bombing.

During the first winter there I was a little daring in that I walked on the frozen pond and duly fell in when the ice gave way. It resulted in my having pneumonia.

We went to the village school for a year or so. It became known that a German family were living in the village in one room with only a small window and in very poor living conditions. In nearby Sibford Ferris there was a Quaker Meeting and the people from there came visiting us and were shocked with the conditions we were living in. Over a period of time, they renovated a semi-detached farm labourer's cottage some three miles from the village. This had three bedrooms and was wonderful **comfortable**; the place we had been living in, was still very primitive with a range cooker in the one downstairs room and an outside toilet. Next door lived a farmer and his wife who had a small farm.

We stayed there for over three years and were very isolated as the nearest villages were both three miles

away.

I can remember going to a small private school in one of these villages and walking there with my sisters each day for some months until I eventually was given a place in the Friends Grammar (belonging to the Quakers).

I stayed there for just over a year after which the Mission (BJS) arranged for us all three to go to the Bible College School (grammar school) near Swansea. This school was founded by Rees Howells who built the school originally intended it for Missionaries children, most of whose children were abroad. The school also had about 280 day children.

I stayed in that school from September 1944 until July 1949. My sisters early left in 1948 when my father was given a visa to live in England. More about that later.

My time in Emmanuel Grammar School where I was a boarder was interesting to look back on, though somewhat traumatic at times.

The conditions were very primitive. There were two residential houses. One for the boys and male teachers and another for the girls and younger children as well female teachers and other staff.

The boys lived in a dormitory housing about 25 of us under one roof. It was very cold in the winter, and we had about five sections containing 6 beds each. We had a sergeant major type house master who kept an eye on us. The only place to go other than the dormitory was a classroom during the first couple of years. The evening started with prayers, after which we occupied ourselves in that room in the winter or outside in the grounds during the warmer weather.

At lunchtime we had what was called a voluntary meeting once a week. It was called 'voluntary' because there were other meetings which we as boarders had to go to such as evening prayers.

It was through one of these meetings that I first became challenged about my faith. I assumed that I was a Christian because my parents were, but I now became convicted about the fact that I had never asked the Lord Jesus into my life. One day I asked a senior boy who had led these meetings if I could see him. His name was John Roacha. I went to his room (being a senior prefect he had his own room) and I shared with him my concern that I was not sure that I was a Christian. John had a long talk with me explaining the way of salvation to me and then sent me away to think about what he had told me about conversion and about faith and trust in the Lord.

A week later I saw him again on a Sunday afternoon and made a positive commitment to the Lord. It was in December 1944 when I was just over 11 years old. Despite ups and downs over the years I believe that was when I was converted.

Sometime in 1946/47 we had a new teacher / housemaster called John Thomas (later known as John Gwyn Thomas). John Thomas was an ex-pupil at the school and he really brought new life into the boys boarding school section. He became our housemaster. He arranged for an attic room to be converted into a boys' sitting room with easy chairs and even a radio. He also arranged for us to be better occupied in the evening and at weekends. John Thomas also gave us a real sense of purpose in life.

## **Revival**

In the year 1947/1948 we experienced a time of real revival in the school (John Gwyn Thomas refers to this very briefly in the preface of his book 'Rejoice always'. I can remember it clearly. It started in girls' morning prayers. (While the classes were mixed, the morning assembly was held separately for girls and boys) A number of girls many from Christian homes had made a commitment to the Lord during the previous week. Now the teacher leading the assembly asked those who had made a commitment and other Christians to sing the hymn 'it was down at the feet of Jesus' to sing this hymn. This was the beginning of a sense of conviction of sin, and it seemed that this caused very many to break down before the Lord wanting to trust Him. This assembly, therefore, lasted almost the whole morning. Many came to know the Lord and school was disrupted for several days. Word spread about this to the rest of the school and many boys came to the lunchtime 'voluntary meeting' some of whom became deeply convicted of their need of a Saviour. The result was that school was quite disrupted for the rest of the day.

This time of revival lasted for several days, and school was disrupted for several days. This was a true time of revival and in later years many of those who were converted at that time later were involved as leaders and in some cases Pastors of churches. I recently came into contact with one of those, Rev. Paul James, who was a retired vicar in a church in the north of England. The result of this time was effective for many years to come.

## **My Testimony: C Frohwein**

My parents were Christians, and my father was a medical missionary to the Jews in Poland, working for what is now known as Christian Witness to Israel. (CWI)

In 1939, father brought mother, myself my two sisters to England and then returned to his mission station in Poland in July of the same year. War broke out in September and as a result we did not see him again until 1947.

The Mission looked after us, and in 1944 when I was 11 years old, I was sent to Emmanuel Grammar School, near Swansea, which included some 70 missionaries' children who were boarders.

It was sometime later that year that I realised that although I was brought up in a Christian home, I was not actually a Christian. I saw other children who had a real positive faith and I wanted to know more. During the lunch hour, we had a Christian Union meeting once a week. On one occasion, two of the senior boys gave their testimony and the Lord convicted me of my need of a Saviour. This conviction was with me for some weeks until I eventually asked to talk to one of the Christian prefects. Very simply he explained the way of salvation to me, and I prayed with him that Sunday afternoon confessing my sin and asking the Lord to be my Saviour.

That was the beginning of my Christian life and while I had my ups and downs the Lord kept his hand on me over the years.

In my mid to late teens, I felt a clear call to the London City Mission (LCM), and later when I

had left school, after 18 months working in the office of CWI, I believe the Lord led me to work on the shop floor of a factory for over five years in preparation for work with LCM. Working in this factory I was given many opportunities to witness for Him. For the first three years I thought I was the only Christian but then I met up with some workers from the offices and we formed a small Christian Union

During my time in the factory, I went to evening classes and took some correspondence courses to prepare myself for work with the LCM. In September 1956 I was accepted as a London City Missionary and during the first two years had some in-service training.

My first four years in LCM were in many ways very exciting. I worked with a church in Walworth Road, Elephant and Castle area. This was a very rough area at the time. One was either welcomed into a home or virtually thrown down the stairs. Yet the Lord was with me in a special way and it was a privilege to see a number of people coming to the Lord. During that first period in the Mission, the Lord graciously led me to Johanna who became my wife and helpmeet in 1959.

After four years in Walworth, I was moved to Bow in the East End of London, where I looked after a Mission Hall that was due for demolition. During that time, I also began to develop a work in the London Docks visiting German Seamen on both Communist East German ships as well as West German ships. It was especially encouraging to be able to make contact with the men and women from communist East Germany.