

MEET THE READER

A NEW SERIES IN WHICH WE GET TO KNOW YOU, OUR READERS



Norman Bright

STAMFORD HILL,
LONDON

HAVE YOU ALWAYS LIVED IN STAMFORD HILL?

No, I'm from Clapham, south London. I used to call that the "golus of the gola" – the "exile of the exile". I couldn't wait to go across the river. I used to belong to different Zionist societies and would do anything to get out of south London. Clapham had a very small Jewish community.

WHERE DID LIFE LEAD AFTER THAT?

My main occupations were advertising and upholstery, but I also spent two years in the air force. One of those years was in Hong Kong, where I organised a 40-mile charity bike ride all the way around the island. I've been cycling since I was 17 and always wanted to be a top rider, but I was never that good. It was only when I was 58 that I got the bug again.

DID YOU HAVE MORE SUCCESS THE SECOND TIME ROUND?

Gradually I got better and when I was 62 I rode 10 miles in 26 minutes. I've ridden on tracks in Newport, Wales, the Olympic Park, and I rode in Birmingham last October, where I won a gold medal in the 80-year-old section. I met this professional rider once and I said: "I've learnt how to win races." He asked how, so I said, "I keep going until the others die."

WHEN DID YOU FINALLY MAKE IT TO NORTH LONDON?

In 1977, after living in Israel, I moved to Clapton. I got interested in the Lubavitch community and moved to Stamford Hill proper 35 years ago. I consider where I live – Ajex House, which was originally set up for ex-servicemen – an oasis of tolerance in a sea of fanaticism. In fact, some here are so tolerant they don't even keep kosher.

"How do you win races? Keep going until the others die"

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF JEWISH RENAISSANCE?

The listings are smashing. Although everyone can look things up on the web, you've still got to know what you're looking for. And if you're shomer shabbos [observe Shabbat] you can still pick up Jewish Renaissance when you really shouldn't switch on your computer. I've been quite strict on Shabbos, although occasionally I do wicked things like make a pot of coffee, but so far the thunderbolt hasn't come down and taken me out.

IF YOU COULD INVITE ANYONE TO A DINNER PARTY, WHO WOULD IT BE?

I'll tell you who's wonderful: Moshe Arens. He was the Defence Minister of Israel and he knows everything there is about aeronautics. He's a wonderful speaker too. I'd say to him: "Do you agree with the Lubavitch Rebbe that we must not give away one inch of the land of Israel?" Yup, that's the question I'd ask because I know what his answer would be – "no".

WHAT DOES BEING JEWISH MEAN TO YOU?

Free food! No, it's the culture. When I wasn't so lazy I used to put on tefillin and make up the minyan [number of people needed for prayer] in our local yeshiva. Friday night I see friends for a meal and a good laugh, then in the morning as punishment I go to synagogue. The worst thing about Judaism is boredom. With all the same prayers, do you think the Almighty gets bored? ■

Interview by Danielle Goldstein

Want to share your story? Email danielle@jewishrenaissance.org.uk with your name, age and local area.

EXPERIENCE STAMFORD HILL LIKE A LOCAL

Norman Bright reveals the best bits where he lives



GET A BITE TO EAT...

Every Tuesday when we play bridge I usually buy a nice kosher cake from **J Grodzinski & Daughters**. It's quite nice; you can sit in the window with a coffee or tea. And people come from all over the place to go there, they even come from south London!

GO FOR A WALK...

We have two rivers in the area, one is the **River Lea** (pictured below), where you can see houseboats and anglers and, if you can manage a long walk, it takes you to the Olympic Park, which has cycle racing, concerts and tennis. The other is the **New River**, where there's a playground, a climbing centre and a bit further on takes you to Finsbury Park Synagogue.

HIT THE BOOKS...

There's the **Lubavitch Library**, which has mostly Jewish books. I don't think they've got much in the way of fiction. I used to go regularly, but I was banned because I had an argument with the head of Lubavitch about the caretaker, who I thought was an antisemite. I then had a row with this caretaker and his wife hit me with a mop and smashed my glasses. They gave me £50 for the glasses and banned me for a year.

HELP OUT A CHARITY...

We have a wonderful Jewish mental health charity called **Chizuk**, who have a sort of party every two weeks. Different people host meals and they usually put on music, a bit of poetry and people can get up and express themselves. Chizuk is a fascinating organisation, because the one thing that people want to sweep under the table is mental health, which is ridiculous because anybody can suffer from it.



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