

Hannah Rothschild, CBE | A Journey Through the Rothschild Family History and her Literary Career

- Good evening everybody and welcome. And thank you very much to our special guest, Hannah.

- Hello.

- Welcome Hannah. Hello and thank you. I'm going to do a little brief introduction before I hand over to you. So Hannah Rothschild is a writer, a filmmaker, a philanthropist, and a company director. Her biography "The Baroness," was published in 2012. Her first novel, "The Improbability of Love," won the Ballinger P.G. Wodehouse Award for best comic novel and was runner up to the Baileys Prize for Fiction. The "House of Trelawney" was published in the UK and the USA in February 2020. Hannah writes for magazines and newspapers, including "The Times," "The New York Times," "Vogue," "Bazaar," and "Vanity Fair." Her award-winning documentary features on the arts, politics, and public figures have been broadcast on major networks, including the BBC, HBO, PBS, and also film festivals such as London, Tribeca, Telluride, New York, and Sheffield.

In 2015, having served as a trustee since 2008, Hannah became the first female chair of the National Gallery. She serves on philanthropic trusts in the UK and abroad, including chairing her family's Israel-based foundation, Yad Hanadiv, whose current projects include building the new national library in Jerusalem. She serves as a non-executive director for a quoted investment trust and for an asset management company. She chairs the American Friends of the National Gallery and is a consultant to organisations including the Hay Festival and The S. In 2018, she was made a CBE for services to literature and to philanthropy. Congratulations. Hannah, that's fantastic.

- Thank you.

- This morning. Yeah, amazing. This morning, Trudy Gold gave us a brief introduction to your astonishing family, and tonight we are really looking forward to you telling us about the Rothschild family. How and where did the story start?

- Well, can I say first of all, thank you very much for asking me, Wendy. It's a real pleasure to see you if not in the flesh, at least over Zoom and to be part of this really extraordinary initiative that you've started, this online university or whatever. I've caught a couple of the lectures. They've been very exciting actually, and so I'm learning. So thanks to you I'm learning. And thanks this morning to Trudy. I learned a bit more about my own family.

So I know some people were probably listening, so I won't go over it in too much detail. But as she said, the story started in a small squalid street in Frankfurt, where a man called Mayer Amschel and his wife, Gutle Schnapper had 10 children, and they lived in a house that was 14

foot wide. And the ghetto, or the Judengasse, was one small street with gates at both ends. And it was so squalid and so bereft of light and air that actually it became a place, rather like gap year students now go and look at slums, you know, in India or somewhere, the European kind of grand tourists would go first to Venice and then to Rome, and then they might stop off in Frankfurt to see how these strange, etiolated characters, the Jews of Frankfurt lived and that's where the story started.

And then as many people know, Mayer Amschel had these five sons, and he sent the five sons to the five capitals of Europe. And they set up what was in effect the first kind of international banking industry. So one was in Naples, one was in Paris, one was in Berlin, one was in London, where the hell was the other one, I'm trying to think where it was, Vienna. And they used to communicate with each other and they would tell each other about interesting deals and so it's long before the common market existed, in a way they set up their own mini common market, if you like, and they became wealthier and wealthier. And from there their success and their story spread.

- So Hannah, why do you think that they made it and other families didn't? What was the secret of their success?

- I think that it had a lot to do with being so unbelievably close. So I said, there were five brothers and their mother, Gutle Schnapper, who Trudy mentioned briefly this morning, she was the ultimate Jewish mother. She never left the little house that they were born in, the 14 foot wide, even though her progeny and her grand progeny and great-grand progeny made a huge amount of money, she refused to leave lest they forget where they came from. And this was incredibly important to the family and to their ethos. She believed that if she stayed in this house, however successful her children became, they must remember what their humble beginnings were. And this was drummed into both her children, actually right the way down to my generation.

So one of the first things you see when you go into my father's house is a black and white photograph of their house in Judengasse, in Frankfurt, because it's very important to remember where you come from. It's very important not to lose sight of that and to still keep striving for something. So there were these five sons in absolute awe of their mother, who lived till a very, very elderly age. And they kept this sense of family and kept this sense of communicating with each other very, very intact whatever they did. Now it helped of course, that they were all working roughly the same area, i.e. banking. And it helped that at that time, there were quite a lot of things going on so they could, for example, lend money to each other or to the governments where they were represented.

And I think it also helped, as Trudy said this morning, that they tended to intermarry, which is not something I would recommend, I think, for genetic reasons as we all know, and probably for familial reasons as well. But one of the advantages of intermarriage was it kept the family even closer. So although as I say, it's not a very good idea, I don't think genetically, in terms of the

family structure, you had this even more close sense of community. So I think that's partly it. I think that being Jews, and I'm sure some of your listeners will identify with this to an extent, I don't believe that you are ever a hundred percent assimilated into the communities that you live in. I mean, now that Israel exists, it may be different, but in Europe, for example.

So it didn't matter whether some of them married out, it didn't matter that some of them were fully integrated into the society. It didn't matter that they supped with kings and queens and the great and the good. I think they still felt quite outside. They never really felt like a member of the aristocracy or that they were absolutely part of, in this country, of British society. And I think that sense of being slightly outside Jewish kept them closer together than perhaps like other families who tend to feel much, much more part of the warp and weft of where they live.

- So Hannah, would you say that their Jewishness was very much a part of their identity? How important was the Jewish aspect to the family? I know that clearly for the mum it was very important. Was it the Jewishness or was it a community or her friends or being an anchor? And what did they take with them from their mother?

- It's a good question. I mean, I think as a mother myself and the daughter of a very strong mother, I would always say that what you take from your mother is key. Absolutely key. Jewishness, even today amongst my generation is still very, very important. Even though quite a lot of us have married out.

So I think if it's still important to me, it must have been unbelievably important if I roll back through the nine generations to get back to the ghetto. And when you look at the early depictions of the Rothschild elders, for example, in those, quite a famous picture by Max Oppenheim, you see the elders of the family praying. That's an unusual thing. You don't normally see paintings of Jews praying, but that's how they decided, it must have been a Friday night dinner. That's how they decided they wanted to be portrayed.

So that's one generation down. Later on, of course you get, you know, they have themselves painted riding out to hounds, or they have themselves painted in a much more of a kind of boardroom scenario. So you might say, well, they're not seeing themselves publicly as Jews, but at home, even though they may not have been totally observant, I think it was a very, very integral part of their identity. And as I said, Gutle would've made it very, very clear that that's what she expected. But again, I think it comes down to this slight outsider-ish thing. I think that it's where you feel you belong. And even my generation feels that that is our, that's the bedrock, if you like, of who we are.

- And where does your dad fit in in the scheme of things?

- Well, right now he's about five minutes up the road in his house. We're all in a shtetl, kind of in bunk heaps. We're all living on the estate at Waddesdon. But he is, now this is where I'm really going to fall down, because I am very, very, very bad at trying to keep track of the family tree.

But his father, so his great great grandfather was the first Lord Rothschild, that was Lionel. And I believe that Lionel was the grandson of Mayer Amschel but a lot of people are going to tell me I'm completely wrong.

But we were part of the English branch, he's part of the English branch. His father was called Victor and he was a well-known scientist. He was also chairman of the Rothschild bank, and he played cricket for Northampton. So he was a great polymath, and his father was called Charles. But perhaps for this audience more interestingly, his uncle, so my father's great uncle was Walter Rothschild, and it was to Walter Rothschild that the British government wrote the Balfour Declaration, which basically opened the door for the creation of the state of Israel. So that is I suppose, that perhaps for your audience is the most interesting aspect. I can't hear you, I'm afraid, Wendy.

- Sorry, I need to unmute. Can you hear me now? Sorry.

- I can hear you now, yeah.

- Okay, very good. So your family are known as bankers, but there have been many other successful stories that you can tell us about your family members. In fact, the first time that I met you was about 10 years ago. I came to a lecture at Rick Sofra's house. And you gave a fantastic lecture about your aunt or is it your great aunt?

- Yeah, so I have these three rather wonderful great aunts. So the one you are talking about was called Pannonica and she was known as the Jazz Baroness. And one day when I was in my teens, I was looking through our family tree, which is kind of quite an odd thing admittedly to be doing. But no, I was. And I saw this very near relation called Pannonica. And of course the first thing I thought was what a wonderful name. What a gloriously exotic and fantastic unusual name. And then I started to learn a little bit more about her, and I said to my father, Jacob, I said, "Why didn't we know her? Why haven't we met her?" And he said, "Well, I hardly know her either."

She went off to live in New York, and what I found out was that she had been married, she had five children and her husband had been posted to South America and one day she was on her way to, she went shopping in New York to buy some clothes from South America. I agree, it's quite a long way but you know, bear with. And she was in New York and she went to see a friend of hers and a friend said, "Have you ever heard of Thelonious Monk?" And she said, "No, who or what is Thelonious Monk?" And he said, "Let me play you a bit of one of his records." And she said, "I can't, I can't, I can't. I've got to catch a plane. I've got to go home to my five children." He said, "No, wait, you must."

So he put the needle on the turntable, for those of us who remember what needles and turntables look like. And for her it was like the vinyl version of a spell being cast. And the extraordinary thing is that she never went home. She stayed in New York and she went to find

this man Thelonious Monk because his music had cast a spell. Now, it's obviously quite a shocking thing to do to leave your children, and the marriage was already in trouble. But what happened was that she then immersed herself in this milieu of these jazz musicians, which this is the 1950s so remember that it was illegal for any relationships between Blacks and whites. There was a kind of apartheid system going on in New York.

The Blacks were, if they went out, they had to carry a special identity card, to work, they had to have a cabaret card. So although they were creating this extraordinary music, bebop at the time, they were very, very much second class citizens in America. And for her, a white woman driving a large Rolls Royce. Actually, I'll show you a photograph. I think if you can see this one. So this is Nica. I don't know if you can all see this. With Thelonious Monk in her Rolls Royce. That was taken in the late 1950s. But she basically lay her devotion and her belief in them and their music at their feet. And she did everything from support them financially to drive them around. She acted as Monk's manager.

She was a hopeless manager by the way. She even went to prison once so that he wouldn't have to, on his behalf, pretending that the drugs he was carrying were hers. And so not terribly surprisingly, she fell out of our lives. Not that my family disowned her, but they didn't quite know what to do with her. So when I went to New York for the first time in the 1980s, I was working for the BBC and I found her telephone number in the phone book. And I called her up and I was very, very nervous. I was young, I was nervous, I was slightly in awe of any relation 'cause they were quite scary, particularly the women. And I said, "Hello, I am your great niece Hannah." And there is an unbelievably long silence on the other end of the phone and then she went, "Wild." Which of course, is exactly what you want a great aunt to say.

Anyway, we agreed to meet later that night, in a jazz club, of course. And I said, "How will I find it?" She gave me roughly the right coordinates. And then she said, "Just look out for the Bentley." And then she hung up. So much, much later that night, three o'clock in the morning 'cause of course she didn't get up till midnight. I went downtown and there indeed was a Bentley with the lights on, with two drunk men sitting in the back. It was a convertible. And the headlights were pointing towards a door.

And I went and I knocked on the door and a guy opens the door and I go, "I'm looking for Nica." And he goes, "Who?" And I said, "Looking for Nica Rothschild." He goes, "Who's that?" And then I said, "Pannonica." And he goes, "Oh, the Baroness." And I went down some steps and there sitting nearest the stage was my great-aunt and we became great friends and I ended up writing a book about her and making a film about her. And she's been in a way, my guardian angel. Sorry, that was a very, very long answer to a question. I do apologise.

- No, that's fantastic. Did your family mind? You made a film about her and a radio programme. Well, did your family mind you making a film about a black sheep?

- Yes, they did a bit. I mean, I think my dad said, he said to me, he was very good about it. He

said, "Do you really have to do this?" And I thought about it and then I said to him, "Yes, I do actually, I really do have to do this." Because I felt very strongly that the women in our family had been quite airbrushed out of their history for lots of reasons. Again, this came up a little bit in the lecture this morning and I was thinking about it afterwards. I mean, N.M. Rothschild who was the founder of the British branch decreed, I mean, it was taught this morning about the sons-in-laws couldn't work in the family business but more importantly in that, the daughters couldn't.

And it was decreed that daughters could work as bookkeepers or archivists if they had to, but really what was expected of them was marriage and motherhood. And I believe that they had a kind of soft power. So they were the ones that basically organised all the life except for life in the boardroom. And if you read the letters between a lot of the Rothschild women and their husbands, or the daughters and their brothers, you'll see that actually that they were quite integral in the family history but they were never really written about. So I wanted to write a story about one unconventional woman in our family. There are many other brilliant ones.

- Hannah, what did you learn about yourself while writing the novel?

- I think I found it quite hard growing up in this family because it's a family of incredibly high achievers. And I was also not quite sure about my place when I was young. I wasn't very good at maths and there wasn't a place for me in the bank because at that time women were still not expected to go into that part of the family business.

So to discover that there was a near relation who had really followed her own path and who had been intensely brave, I mean, you might say reckless. She was reckless but she was also very brave, I think gave me a lot of courage and made me feel that yes, it was all right to be a bit different and it was all right to follow your instincts. And yeah, I think that's what I learned.

- You marched to your own drum beat.

- [Hannah] Exactly. Exactly.

- Thank you. And what about Miriam, the scientist? You've spoken about her and other stories, would you share other stories about interesting characters in your family?

- Yeah. So Miriam was Pannonica's older sister. She was born in 1911 and she was like all Rothschild women, they didn't bother to educate them. So I think she had a governess, her father hated any form of education. So the governesses would be sent in in a pony trap in the morning at 9:00 AM and then they would teach them. And at 9:30 they were sent back to the village. So the only thing she ever learned about were the Romans.

She learned nothing else. And in between then, I think most of her life was about being squeezed into petticoats and ribbons and everything else. Miriam was absolutely determined to

follow in her father's footsteps and become a scientist and an entomologist. And her specialty was fleas and she was known as Queen of the Fleas. And to get to the position of becoming Queen of the Fleas, she had to self-educate. And after the war, of course, after the First World War when they stopped concentrating too much on what people were up to, Miriam used to sneak off to the local town and she enrolled eventually in the polytechnic. And she ended up having more degrees than most people you and I have ever heard of.

And being a member of the Royal Society and winning most prizes that you can win in science. She was terrifying. And I really mean terrifying. I mean, my grandfather Victor was quite terrifying, but Miriam really was scary. And I remember for example, my father Jacob and mother Serena having a dinner party in London and there were quite a lot of the great and the good at this party. And the doorbell rang halfway through, and Miriam swept downstairs. The dining room was downstairs, carrying a large box, and she insisted, "Wake up the children, wake up the children."

So the children, we were dragged out of bed and brought downstairs kind of bleary-eyed. And Miriam refused to wear anything made of leather or anything which could have harmed an animal. She was a vegetarian, she wouldn't wear leather, she wouldn't wear anything that was made in any way that might, as I say, harm an animal or harm nature. And she swept aside all the cutlery and the glasses and the plates. And she put this big box right in the middle of the table. Astonished looking guests thinking, "What the hell is going on?" with this woman wearing these kind of swathes of purple.

And she lifted off this wonderful piece of material, and underneath there were caterpillars of all different colours. And she said, "I had to show the children, because I worked out today that if you feed caterpillars different coloured grasses or insects or best of all, marijuana, they turned very odd colours." Anyway, so that's what Miriam was like. And around her house, there were always insects in plastic bags. And there was a tamed fox, there was an owl that was allowed free range that used to swoop in and out of the windows and wherever you happened to be sitting. There were a lot of mice, a lot of mice.

And she always used to say, "Don't worry about the mice. If you have mice, it means you probably don't have rats." And these two extraordinary women were very much around during my childhood and young adulthood. And it's very nice, it's very exciting when you have people like that in your life. Very exciting. I think we're not nearly eccentric enough now, I think we're all a bit boring actually.

- It must have been a real adventure every time you went to visit them.

- Yes. Sometimes a bit too. So Nica, Pannonica, this is the worst thing. She lived with 305 cats. And she really did, this is not an exaggeration. There were cats everywhere and the house wasn't particularly big, but she couldn't bear drowning kittens. So she had a few cats and then they mated and then they mated and they mated. And basically it was completely out of control.

It was an infestation.

- Was your Aunt Emma as eccentric?

- No. No. My Aunt Emma, who's very much with us, who was I think at the time, the youngest woman ever to get into Oxford. I think she was just 16 when she got into Oxford and then wrote a seminal book about the automobile industry, predicting what might happen to the automobile industry. And she's now married to a Nobel Prize winning economist called Amartya Sen and they live between Trinity, Cambridge in Massachusetts, where they both teach, both at Trinity and at MIT. And she now writes micro history.

Which for those of you who who don't know, which I have to say, it's not my special subject even though I did train as a historian. It's taking a family in history and trying to understand everything you can about the history of the period through quite small but significant details in that family's life.

- Fascinating. And tell us, was Victor your grandfather?

- Yeah. Yeah. And Victor was also phenomenally clever. He had a very tricky upbringing. For some bizarre reason his father Charles, who had been sent to Harrow as a young man at the end of the 19th century when antisemitism was ripe. So to give you an example, when Charles Rothschild went to Harrow, they had a sport that they used to do on Saturdays. So presumably the aristocratic young men who were frustrated at not being able to go fox hunting would release the Jewish boys and then they would give them a slight head start and then they would hunt them around the hills of Harrow.

And when they caught them, they would beat them. And this was considered to be quite good fun. Obviously a nasty word, that young Jewish boy, which my great-grandfather was. And the most extraordinary thing is that he sent his son Victor to Harrow where Victor was submitted to the same kind of tortures. So I'd never quite understand this thing of you must send your child where you went to school, even if you were unhappy there. But it seems to be, I'm afraid endemic in certain societies and cultures, I should say.

So Victor had a very difficult beginning. And I think he also, his father died when he was very young, so he didn't have any male role models and he relied very much on his intellect. That was the thing I think that he felt set him apart from other people. So he polished this intellect and he used it as a sword and a sabre against anyone who came near, anyone who he felt perhaps was inferior and I'm afraid that was most people.

- Fascinating. And the Jewish aspect of life and Israel, what was his feeling towards his Judaism?

- Victor was, I think he was, as again, there was nothing very observant about, he wasn't a great

observer of the faith in a kind of day-to-day thing. He used to say, "I'd never go to the cinema on Yom Kippur," which I felt was kind of, he said it as a joke but I mean, I think that was his joke. I think that was his one joke I remember him saying. But he went to Israel a lot and he was obviously, not obviously, but he was a great supporter of Israel and a great friend, I think, to the respective successive leaders of Israel throughout his lifetime.

- Thank you. I'd like to just move on to asking you about your novels. You've just written "The Improbability of Love," and this is a novel that is set in the art world and there are some extremely dangerous people in the novel. Do these people really exist? And really, how does your knowledge of the art world, being chair of the National Gallery, making films about artists inform your work and of course has informed your work. But would you tell us a little bit about your journey?

- Sure.

- Thank you.

- Well, I was very lucky that I grew up surrounded by art. My father is an artaholic, I think it's fair to say. And on the weekends we grew up in London, we would go to the National Gallery when it was raining, often when it was sunny too. So basically, it was something that was completely natural to me to be surrounded by art all the time. And he was a very good teacher, quite, he is a very good teacher, quite an exacting one. He would say, "Who painted that?" and "What period was that from?" and "Who influenced that person?" And you had to be on your metal. And as a result, I learned quickly and not necessarily deeply, but I learned quickly. And when I was at Oxford, I took history of art as one, I read history, but I took history of art as one of my subsets and my first job when I left Oxford was to go and work at an art gallery.

And then my next job when I went to the BBC, I worked in the music and arts department. So I would say that it has been an absolute constant thread and a total delight and an inspiration to me my entire life. So when I came to write my first novel, which is something I'd wanted to do for many years but didn't really have the confidence until I was, you know, I didn't think I had a lot to say until I reached nearly the ripe old age of 50. Then to set it in the art world seemed completely normal. And I thought, "Well, this is a world I've inhabited. I know it inside out and back to front." And when people say, "write about what you know about," that was part of the inspiration. But the other thing is, I'm not quite sure why more people don't write novels set in the art world, because you've got everything there.

I mean, you've got beauty and you've got skullduggery and you've got desire. And with desire of course comes the flip side of desire, which it inspires people to do the wrong thing very often. You've got high culture, you've got low culture, and I just think it's the most extraordinarily rich and tempting world. In fact, it was quite difficult to draw myself or drag myself away from the art world for the second novel "House of Trelawney," which is set in the world of kind of crumbling aristocratic castles. And the next one I'm writing, well, I'm going to go back to the art world

'cause I'm missing it actually. I can't hear you again. Sorry.

- I'm sorry. I'm being muted and unmuted and I'm not sure if I'm doing it or somebody else is doing it. To go back just very briefly to "The Improbability of Love," there's some extremely dangerous people in the novel. Do they really exist? Were they based in true life?

- Well, I think I have to be quite careful about this because in my opinion, yes, the dangerous people do exist. I'm obviously not going to name who I think they are, but I have a subplot in the book, be very careful not to name anyone. I have a subplot in the book which is about a Jewish art dealer who uses his Jewish heritage basically to hide all manner of sins. And when things get really hot and difficult for him, he lets the sleeve of his shirt rise up a bit so that people can see the number tattooed on his arm.

So just in case anyone suddenly thinks, you know, he thinks it's getting a bit too difficult, he uses that as basically as a kind of get out of jail sympathy card in the most cynical and horrible way. And I'm going to let those who haven't read it, I need to let your imaginations run riot about whether he actually does have a right to that terrible heritage or not and why somebody might try and use that history and how awful it would be if they didn't have any right to that history. Is that a bit tautologist?

- Well, I actually am looking forward to reading the book, Hannah. I absolutely loved "The Baroness"

- [Hannah] Thank you.

- And "The Probability of Love" is next on my list. Now, "The House of Trelawney," this was set in 2008, is that correct?

- Yes, yeah.

- [Wendy] Okay. And is this based on your family?

- No, not at all. The House of Trelawney is a castle and it's the home to an eponymous family called the Trelawneys who've been there for 800 years and they have basically stayed ahead of the game for 700, 800 years by either switching sides during civil wars or through getting involved in various industries, some less palatable than others. So they were unbelievably wealthy and each generation threw another wing out of this great house and bought another marvellous artwork or another piece of land.

But basically for the last hundred years, so i.e. from 1908 to 2008, they were better at spending than making money. So when we meet them in 2008, they really are down to their last few shillings. And then of course, 2008, as we all know, the financial crash happens and the hapless eldest son and heir decides that he thinks he can basically pull a fast one and make money from

something called a credit default swap, which we all remember what they were. And he takes out a second mortgage on the castle and he puts it all on these new instruments of finance. And this coincides with the massive crash. And so of course, they lose everything. But into the fray runs cancers, I should say. His younger sister Blaze, who is surprise, surprise, incredibly good at finance and will manage somehow or other to dig her family out of a hole.

Now, if I'm making it sound serious, I don't want to give that impression 'cause actually, it's a comedy, it's a satire. and it's a satire on the English class system, it's a satire on finance, it's a satire on life. And I hope it's funny, people seem to think it's funny and the subtitle is "Old Money, New Money, No Money." So I also hope it's not really about my family, which is not quite there yet.

- So where does your talent and your passion for storytelling come from?

- I don't know, it's a good question. I'm not sure. I just love telling stories and I see a kind of seamless line whether I'm making a documentary or writing a novel or sitting at a dinner table or whatever. I like telling stories. If I'm going for a walk, I went for a walk this afternoon, told myself a story about somebody who'd lived, I imagined someone who'd lived there a hundred years before and how the view changed and what their life was like, et cetera, et cetera. It's just part of my DNA. It makes me happy. If I don't write, if I'm not making a documentary or writing a book, I feel very restless and unsettled.

- You're very lucky to have that gift of creativity and imagination. It really is a gift that one is born with. And, go on.

- Thank you. I think it is lucky. It's something you can pick up and take anywhere as you know. It's very nice, it's very, very lucky and it's funny, in this lockdown that we've all been experiencing and it should be a great gift to a writer to be locked down because obviously one has more time. And I don't know what other people's experiences are. I've actually found it very hard to write over the last 12 weeks.

And I do go to my desk nearly every day and I do try very hard to write, but I think we're so anxious or I am so anxious and fractured about what's happening at the moment. Not myself personally. I'm in a very fortunate situation. I'm in the country, I'm safe, my family's here. But I think the world is you know, we are going through this appallingly difficult experience collectively, and I'm personally finding it very, very difficult to be creative right now.

- I think you're right. One really does have to, must have all one's resources to utilise the time productively and also to see how one can make a difference during this extremely challenging time. We're going to enter into a new world when we do eventually come out of lockdown. And those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to make a difference, have the opportunity to do so. I think that there is going to be a lot of change and we are going to have to adapt and we are going to have to help those around us do just that. And I'm quite sure that your creativity will

come back in spades because you-

- [Hannah] I hope so.

- I'm quite sure. So Hannah, I'd just like to move across now, if you don't mind, just to your family, to the Rothschild's history in Israel. I'd like to ask you, I'd like to explore that avenue a little bit. Tell us a little bit about your family's ongoing involvement in Israel and do you have immediate family there right now?

- So just to go back to the beginning of your question. So Edmond Rothschild was one of the first people to set up to basically, I mean, it sounds, he bought land in Israel for people to basically do and go there or in Palestine as it was then. And he set up businesses and in other words settlements, you know, of course, is a very charged word. But in those times they were kibbutzes or early forms of kibbutzes where people went to settle and create and form lives. And the Rothschilds were involved through Herzl and through other people in Zionism, but not I would say on a kind of hour to hour, day to day way.

They stayed slightly out of the fray, although they did always, like many Jews, give large sums of money to Israel and believe very much in that there should be a homeland for the Jews. And Walter, to whom I think I mentioned earlier, the Balfour Declaration was written. I've got it somewhere, which I'm sure most of you have seen. I'll show you Walter. So this is Walter. If you can you see on the front of that cover of that book. And yes, you are right, Walter is driving a carriage pulled by zebras. There is relevance to this story. And here's Walter again. Yes, Walter is riding a giant tortoise. So Walter Rothschild was not the obvious person to whom a letter about the creation of the state of Israel might have been written, but here he is and here is a copy of the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

And for those of you who may not notice, it's a very short letter. So if you forgive me, I'll read it very quickly. So it's written on November the second from Lord Balfour. Dear Lord Rothschild, I have much pleasure in conveying to you on behalf of His Majesty's government. The following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations, which has been submitted to and approved by the cabinet. "His majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object. It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation. Signed by Arthur Balfour. So in that one letter, which views with sympathy as they say, the creation of Israel, I suppose laid the foundations for what would eventually become the foundation of Israel. It took obviously many decades after that letter was written in 1917. And as a result I think, well, not just as a result of that, but partly because of that, the family has felt very enmeshed and involved in the state of Israel to this day. And we have a foundation that was set

up by Edmond, the first Rothschild who set up the settlements, which still continues today, which was, it had very few chairs actually. So it was Edmond and then it went to his cousin James, and then James to his wife Dorothy, and then from Dorothy to my father Jacob. And now I am the fifth chair in 150 years of that extraordinary foundation.

- Would you tell us a little bit more about your foundation, please?

- Sure. So we try and keep under the radar very much, and it's called Yad Hanadiv. So it's got no mention of the name Rothschild in it. And that's a conscious decision that we made because I mean, I have nothing against people putting their names on buildings or on monuments or anything else, but it's just not quite how we approach things on the whole. But Yad Hanadiv for example, created, it built the houses of parliaments, the Knesset, and then it built the Supreme Court and now it's building the national library in Israel, which will be ready, I hope, in '22. It's set up the Open University, it's set up the Centre for Educational Technology, it's set up the Jerusalem Music Centre.

It really had the extraordinary opportunity of being able to be part of the fabric of that strange and wonderful country. And I'm happy to say that our endeavours continue today. So we, for example, set up the first environmental agency in the country, which of course now is much, much bigger than we are. It does a lot, a lot, mainly education, I'd say is our biggest thrust of our activities. We do quite a lot for Arab Israelis and for other minorities, whether Bedouins or Druze. So we do take that letter still very seriously. So our foundation should be for all the people of Israel as well as for the Jewish contingent.

And I have to say, it's an unbelievable honour for me to be chair of that foundation and to be very involved in that country. And for example, in the recent Covid crisis, we were able to put a fairly substantial amount of money, very, very quickly towards trying to help some of the distressed elements of society or people of Israel navigate this terrible time. So it really does feel like an enormous privilege to be involved and quite a responsibility to carry the mantle, I have to say, of those distinguished forbears but so far so good.

- Well, you're a real credit to Mayer and a great, great, great, great grandmother who certainly when she put her stake in the ground, she clearly knew what she was doing.

- [Hannah] Thank you.

- So Hannah, that was so interesting. I actually would like to turn, I want to thank you for really fascinating-

- Thank you very much. I want to turn over, I know that there are questions and I want to leave us just a little bit of time for you to answer questions. And I'm just trying to see where are they. Is Carly there?

- Hi Hannah.

- Hi Carly.

Q&A and Comments:

Q: So first question. In terms of your family role in the UK today. You know, obviously the Rothschild family has Spencer House, that's a building very visible in the centre of London. Do you still see yourselves kind of firmly rooted in the UK? You told us you're in the countryside. Could you just talk a little bit more about your relationship to the UK at the moment?

A: I feel a hundred percent British personally. I was born here, I grew up here, my children were born here. I live here. It doesn't mean that I don't, I go to Israel obviously quite a few times a year fulfilling that role. And I have very deep and emotional ties to that country. But this is my home and we are, I think very enmeshed in England.

We look after on behalf of the National Trust, a Rothschild house called Waddesdon Manor, which is a few miles from where I'm sitting now, which has about 500,000 visitors per year. Wendy mentioned obviously my former role at the National Gallery. And there there are quite a lot of other public things which I do for the country. So I can't see myself basically up sticks and going somewhere else.

Q: And then in terms of where you are at the moment, you touched briefly on your location. Could you tell us a little bit more about the manor?

A: Yeah, so Waddesdon Manor is a fantastic fantasy and if anyone watching hasn't been there, I do urge you to go and have a look at it. So it was built by Ferdinand Rothschild, who was Guttle Schnapper's, who we've mentioned, grandson. And he built it as a kind of Victorian homage to a French 18th century chateau. And it's built on top of a hill and it took him six years, which is quite an extraordinary feat when you see how big it is to build it. And he built his own private railway station and tracks to get the materials there and he had hundreds of Percheron horses, which are those very, very big French cart horses to carry the materials to the top. And he really built it as a kind of calling card, a three-dimensional calling card. Partly to say to people, the great and the good.

Look, here I am, I have arrived, but mainly to house his collection of art. And he writes very movingly about his love of art and fine objects. Indeed, he says in in one piece of writing, he says, "My seven year old fingers quivered with excitement when I touched a piece of Sevres porcelain." He was really, really obsessed by his collection. He married a relation called Evelina and very tragically Evelina and her baby that she was carrying, they both died when she was giving birth to this baby. And after that, Ferdinand really locked himself away at Waddesdon Manor and didn't leave very much. And his guestbook reads like a roll call of the great and the good from the Shah of Iran, or Persia as he was then, to Queen Victoria, to Winston Churchill, et

cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Q: And then Hannah, in terms of how your family was affected during the Holocaust, could you just expand a little bit more on that era?

A: Yeah. Well, my family were incredibly lucky in that on the whole, they managed to get out and there's a very good story, which some of my French relations tell for example, about they holed up in Chateau Lafite which is also mentioned this morning by Trudy, which is the vineyards in France and they managed somehow to get the last boat out of Bordeaux and to America. And indeed quite a lot of them, in fact, nearly all of them did manage to get out.

My great-grandmother's family who are Hungarian, were much less fortunate and they were caught and captured and there was an absolutely heartbreaking account of one of the old great-great aunts who was blind, was put on a train to Auschwitz. And when she got out, she stumbled and the guards realised that she couldn't see where she was going. So she was beaten to death with meat hooks in front of everybody as a kind of lesson about what happens when you're old and decrepit and useless. And another aunt was also sent to Auschwitz. But I'd say on the whole, we were one of the more fortunate. We were one of the more fortunate.

Q: Where did the seed money come for all of Gutle's children who went off to different countries?

- You mean from the Frankfurt ghetto?

- Yeah.

A: Mayer Amschel had been a coin merchant and he forged various alliances with the ruling German kind of princeling. So he made some money and in fact, they did go to their different places with a certain amount of money and remember that in those times, they weren't allowed to buy buildings so there was nothing really to spend their money on. They had this, as I said, this 14 foot house, 14 foot wide house and the first thing that Mayer Amschel ever bought was a tiny piece of garden 'cause you were allowed to buy bits of garden. So the first thing he ever bought was a bit of garden and he used to walk from his house in Judengasse to this little square of garden and stand in it and he felt kind of like a prince.

And actually, when Ferdinand who built Waddesdon, went to Waddesdon, one of the things I find so incredibly touching about his story is that when anyone came to stay with him, when they left, he would insist that they took boxes of vegetables and fruits and flowers. Because he remembered from Gutle, from going to visit Gutle what it was like, not to have anything green or not to have anything fresh to eat. So even if you were the grandest of the grand, Queen Victoria or the Shah of Persia, you had to leave with fruit and you had to leave with vegetables and that was for him the greatest gift he could give someone.

Q: As you mentioned, you recently took over as the chair of Yad Hanadiv. In terms of your hopes over the next kind of few years, I know that you've got a few fairly significant projects in the works, but what's your vision for the next 10 years?

- That's a hell of a question. That's your question, Carly, isn't it?

- [Carly] It is.

A: Having spent a couple of hours with Carly, I know a Carly question when I see one. I think that actually, and I'm not ducking the question, that I inherited a really fantastic organisation that had been brilliantly run by my father with the 45 people that work with him. So in some respects, I have to build strength on strength. So I think to keep going with what they're doing is very, very important. Israel is clearly living through tumultuous times and I don't think you have to look that hard to find projects that are worthy of help. And I'm not going to go into specifics, but I don't think that anyone needs much imagination to imagine where we could help.

But let me give you one example. So I think that what we're doing at the moment, and this is probably top secret, I probably shouldn't tell you, but I'm going to say, so I believe very strongly going back to Mayer Amschel's example of the small garden that we should be creating where possible more open spaces for people of all communities and faiths to be able to congregate. So we have this wonderful place called Ramat Hanadiv, which is in a part of Israel, which is visited by nearly a million people every year. It's a garden, it's free, anyone can go there. And my dream is to be able to create other gardens with open access, be they by rivers, be they in the desert, be they near the sea, so that people and their families can go and enjoy being outside, being safe, being in a clean and wondrous environment whenever they can.

- Hannah, I have to say it's an absolute honour and privilege to be in the position to run a philanthropic foundation. And I too have chosen to chair our family organisation because I think one can really make huge impact and hopefully we can someday work together.

- I would love that, Wendy.

- Yes.

- I would love that.

- That would be so great. And really, it would be a fantastic opportunity and extremely, extremely exciting. And what a gift and an honour, as I said. And I feel the same way in my family, it's a real creative experience. Just before we move on, one last question.

Q: I just want to say, have the Rothschilds had any dealings in South Africa?

A: Well, I actually did look in advance of this interview thinking I must find a really good

example. But we did certainly get involved with Cecil Rhodes way back when. And when Cecil Rhodes was a young man that he came to the Rothschilds and they rather sensibly, I think gave him a leg up. I know these days Cecil Rhodes is, if you're at Oriel College, Oxford, I think you mention Cecil Rhodes, it doesn't go down that well. But nevertheless, I think one can't detract from what an extraordinary achievement Cecil Rhodes made in his lifetime. And you know, what he did and the Rothschilds were part of that. But I think that was more because they were good at spotting talent. Now, whether you happened to agree with what Rhodes did or not, he was a talent. And by the way, another person that they also backed inadvertently was the very, very young Stalin who was working on the oil fields of Baku who they inadvertently gave him a bit of a leg up.

By the way, they also fired him because he was very insubordinate. But I think a lot of success, isn't it, is about spotting talent. I think that a lot of why people do well when people say why did so-and-so do well, a lot of it is because they are very adept and clever at spotting other people who are as or often more talented than they are. So Cecil Rhodes was one such person. I think my father also worked with the Oppenheims at various points and when he was younger through his experience at N.M. Rothschild. But I'll let him tell you that story.

- Yes. Yeah, I think that's quite correct. And also, there are Rothschilds that are involved with the, I think the Ruperts.

- Oh, of course there's the wine. Yeah, exactly. Well, there's the vineyard. That's my cousin Benjamin and Johann Rupert I think set up that winery, which is of course in Stellenbosch, I'm sure you know it well. Beautiful winery. I've only had one bottle of wine from there, but it was delicious. I'm looking forward to more. But it's got a lot of competition, of course, in that area for good wine.

- Well, we look forward to welcome you back to South Africa and to show our beautiful country. And Hannah, I'd just like to say thank you to you for a fascinating presentation. We were all looking forward to hearing from you and what an incredible family and what an honour to hear from you. Thank you very much. And thank you to Carly.

- Yeah, thank you both. Thank you so much for asking me. It's been a real pleasure.

- Thank you. Thank you everybody.

- [Hannah] Good night.

- [Wendy] Night, night.