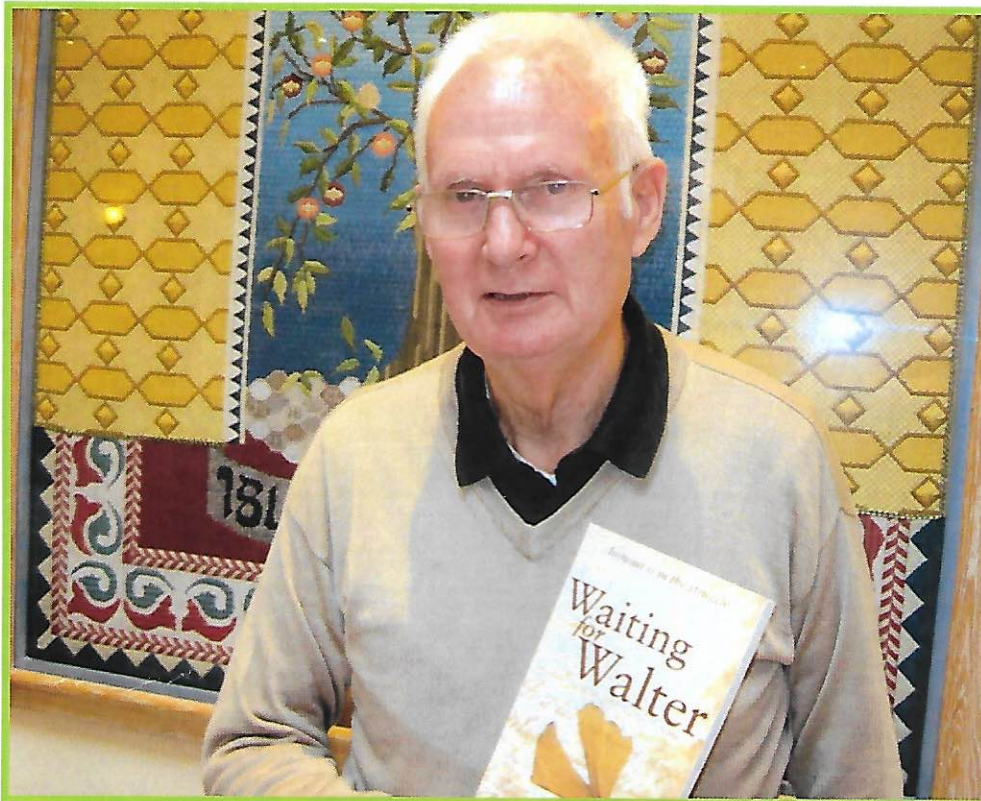


## The Seymour Group: Honour is in the Struggle



Alan Balfour was the guest of The Seymour Group at their monthly luncheon in February. Alan has had a remarkable life. I have always been aware that everyone has a story but few, I am sure, can lay claim to a story such as his. His book 'Waiting for Walter', which he launched to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day, while being a novel, has perhaps been a means of coming to terms with his own life experience.

Early in his talk he recounted Kafka's story of encountering a little girl, tearful and sobbing her heart out. She explained that she had lost her doll. Consoling her, he told her that her doll was not lost but had gone on a trip. The girl wanted to know how this stranger could know that and he explained that the doll had written a letter. The girl was doubtful and asked if he had the letter on him. "No", he replied, "but I will bring it tomorrow". He immediately went home and wrote the letter. He was not out to deceive but rather to console and was determined to help her say "Goodbye". The next day Kafka meets the girl and he reads the letter to her. The letter explains that the doll has become tired of living with the same people and wants to explore the world and

make new friends. The doll promises to keep writing every day. Kafka, so the story goes, continues writing these imaginative letters from a lost doll for three weeks, daily reading them to the child, with each letter describing the doll's new life and gradually hinting that the letters may some time have to stop. In the very last line of the very last letter, the doll bids farewell to her 'old and beloved friend'. The distress and unhappiness of this little child's loss had been cured. I only wish that I could share Alan's emotion, as he related this tale to us, in anything like the manner in which he was able so to do.

Alan has no qualms about relating his own remarkable life. He has been writing plays since the 60s, winning a prize in a National Play Competition for his play 'Pastoral'. His last play, 'The Hokey Cokey Man' was based on the life and times of his grandfather, Al Tabor, a society bandleader who composed the song of that name.

Alan spoke about how his mother had suddenly left home in 1942 and how it was 10 years before he saw her again. Aged 16, a husky voice on the telephone saying "Hello, honey, it's your mother"

may sound like fiction, but it was fact. As indeed, were the many facets of Alan's life to date.

He is a loyal man. His early 'association with and feelings for a German girl, who had never heard of the Holocaust', put him in conflict with his father, whom he respected and loved. Yet he was to receive, in the most emphatic of ways, a total rejection from the girl and the sternest of warnings to keep his distance. A dilemma, a challenge, a conflict.

And there were other challenges, some familiar, I have no doubt, to others reading this right now. The moment when he had to let his father know that he had Alzheimer's was particularly distressing.

Watching his son, who married an Asian lady who converted to Judaism, dancing with his newly wedded wife, Alan thought about how many lovers from many faiths and cultures are faced with imponderable conundrums.

As to his first novel, 'Waiting for Walter', one could find it a joy to read simply as a love story with a difference. It is certainly a 'can't put down' book but it is so much more than that. While stories must inevitably start with words, 'Waiting for Walter' started with a dried up ginkgo leaf falling to the floor and ends with a message that pulls at the heart. 'Honour', it silently proclaims, 'is in the struggle'.

Thanks, Alan.

Jack Lynes

If this Review is a little less polished than usual, it is because one of our dear proofers, Sheila Lewis, has been unwell.

This edition, and our very many good wishes, are dedicated to Sheila.

Wishing a *refuah shlema*.