

BY SIMON YAFFE

**A YEAR after the Berlin Wall fell, Dina Gold walked into a government ministry and declared: "I've come to claim my family's building".**

Those words were the start of an adventure which culminated in the building — which was taken by the Nazis — being reclaimed by Dina's family.

The former BBC investigative journalist wrote about her experiences in the book *Stolen Legacy*.

The new and updated paperback edition will be published on Wednesday by American Bar Association, priced £12.99.

The six-story office block, on Kraustrasse, in Berlin, was once the headquarters of the H Wolff fur company, which belonged to Dina's maternal family.

The building, constructed by Dina's great-grandfather, Victor Wolff, in 1910, was foreclosed upon by the Victoria Insurance Company in 1937.

Ownership was transferred to the Deutsche Reichsbahn, Hitler's railways — which later transported millions of Jews to the death camps.

London-raised Dina told me from her home in Washington DC: "In 1990, I was working with David Dimpleby on a BBC programme in Bonn, covering the first German unified elections.

"I had a few days' leave, so I flew to Berlin to locate the building.

"When I told the people there I had come to reclaim the building, they just laughed at me and said, 'Don't be so ridiculous'.

"All I had as evidence was an advert from the 1920s which had the name of the fur company and its address."

During her investigations, Dina discovered how the Victoria Insur-

# Wall's fall led Dina to claim family property



**EVIDENCE:** Dina Gold

ance Company held a mortgage on the building.

Once the Victoria foreclosed on the mortgage, it sold the building to the German state railways.

It now houses the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

The majority of the Wolff family fled Nazi Germany and moved to the British Mandate of Palestine.

Dina's mother, Aviva, was sent

at age 14 alone to England to school and, when war broke out, became a nurse working through the Blitz in London.

At university, she met her future husband, Dan Gold.

Dina's grandmother, Nellie — Aviva's mother — always told her: "Dina, when the Wall comes down and we get back our building in Berlin, we'll be rich."

Sadly, Nellie died in 1977, 12 years before the Wall fell.

When Dina began her research, she found that she had to get hold of the land registry documents which showed the building's ownership history.

"At the time, normal members of the public could not gain access to them — only lawyers could," she recalled.

"I found a lawyer in east Berlin who had the documents because a New York property developer wanted to buy the building.

"I tracked the lawyer down and went to see him with my husband. He told me he wanted \$200 there and then for a copy. Luckily, my husband had the cash on him."

Dina used her tenacity and investigative journalistic skills to build a claim and prove the line of inheritance.

It ended with Dina's mother and her siblings being awarded £8 million.

Dina said: "What I learned through being a journalist at the BBC, on Radio 4's *Checkpoint* and BBC One's *Watchdog*, was invaluable.

"It taught me how to persevere, to research and follow leads and to not give up at the first attempt.

"My mum was quietly pleased with the outcome, but not triumphant. She had told me not to do it.

"When I initially told her I was going to Berlin, she looked at me and said, 'don't even think about it'. My father asked who I thought I was, taking on the German gov-

ernment. I had to be fearless."

Dina had put the reclaim episode to the back of her mind, concentrating on bringing up her three children.

It was only a meeting with ambassador Stuart Eizenstat, who led the American government delegation to the 2009 Holocaust Era Assets Conference, which inspired her to write *Stolen Legacy*.

Dina explained: "There had been books and films on successful claims on artwork and antiques, but nobody had written one about winning a claim on a building.

"A lot of people have told me that the book is crying out to be made into a film, which I think would be wonderful."

Last month, the British government reaffirmed its commitment to help Holocaust survivors whose property was taken.

"I have done book tours in America and been mobbed, with people telling me their grandmother or uncle or some other relative died and that they have found papers which prove the family owned a property somewhere," Dina said.

"I can only wish them well and hope they are as fortunate as I was in proving their claim."



**RETURNED:** Dina's family's building on Kraustrasse