

IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	197

Interviewee Surname:	Land
Forename:	Ralph
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	24 October 1928
Interviewee POB:	Berlin, Germany

Date of Interview:	16 December 2016
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Jana Buresova
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour 19 minutes



REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV197
NAME: Ralph Land
DATE: 16 December 2016
LOCATION: London, UK
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Jana Buresova

[0:00:00]

The interview today is with Ralph Land in London on the 16th of December 2016.

Thank you very much indeed Mr. Ralph Land for agreeing to this interview for the Association of Jewish Refugees Refugee Voices Archive Project and for your contribution. Could we start please by your saying something about your parents, your family background - where they were from - and their occupations?

Of course. My mother came from Vienna but married a- a- a Berliner - that was my father. And so, they moved- she- she moved to Berlin. But she was a- she was an artist.

And what were their names?

She was Soscha? - Sofia - Sofia Landsberger. And my father was Louis Landsberger. He- he came from a fairly large family; he had six brothers and a sister. Fairly substantial business people. The family business was called "Gaslaterne und Fernzündung" which was produced the gas lighting... for- for, for Berlin and major cities. Even London, after the war, had some of their gas lighting still. It was quite a...a feature. It's now all gone of course- of course. But my father then came to London as a- apprentice, as a trainee – "Lehrling" ...and- to learn

English... Which he did in a very rudimentary kind of way, as we found when we later became refugees. And... then went back to Germany and founded his own business, with a partner, not from the family, which was to make a- air compressors. So that was "Gebrüder Lands- Landsberger". A- a business making some- these, these air compressors, which was quite a substantial business.

[00:02:22]

Thank you. And what were your early memories there?

Early memories. I mean, the kind of memories that are meaningless are, are... being taken for walks by a nanny and things like that. That kind of memory is still somewhere in the mind. The first really- we took an interest in what was happening, but the really... traumatic event was... the Kristallnacht.

And how old were you then?

We would have been about nine, ten- eight or nine. Yes. And this just- it was traumatic. And a woman coming running in... with her face covered in blood. It- it somehow- that was- if anything is a memory, that is.

Yes.

And then of course there are certain memories from school. We went to- to a Jewish school. I've got even reports of- of, of our poor performance. But I remember playing football and... and playing, as a child. But not- not a great deal. The traumatic event is this e- this- this event I was talking about.

Did you- do you recall experiencing anti-Semitism directly at school?

Not at all. Not at all. We went to Jewish- Jewish school. What we knew, again, is from what we saw of the damage that was done from the signs up, on- on the street: 'Der Stürmer' and, and all, and all these things. So, we- so we knew what was happening without being directly... directly affected by it. Later, of course, my father had his business taken away and

everything. But by that time, we were already moving towards... towards being- towards leaving and getting the visas to get to England. Getting support from my uncle who lived here, who guaranteed I think five pounds a week for the family. Which was enough to get us- to get us the visa. All these things.

What was your uncle's name, please, the one who-?

Frederick. [Friedrich]

Fredrick.

And he lived in- he lived in Brighton, or in Seaford, nearby. And he had worked... He had- when he- he was my father's business agent in England. When of course the business was taken away, although he had guaranteed us some, some income, he himself had no further income. So, his five pounds a week was a huge sacrifice on his part, because he had no job then any longer.

[00:05:06]

Gosh. How did he manage, in Britain?

I, I hardly know what- how- how he managed. He obviously had- he obviously had certain means which weren't taken away. But his- his steady income from business disappeared. Whether he did- whether he had any other employment... He was- he was elder- he was middle-aged. I doubt whether he had other employment. But- but he probably had enough not- not to be poverty stricken.

Do you know how long or how difficult it was to obtain visas for your family?

It was- I don't know in detail, but certainly between first realising that we had to go - that we needed to go. And by the way, my parents were, like so many, rather late on this; they believed it would all go over and so on. My father in particular didn't think this was going to last all that time. But gradually we did. And then I think it took some time, but I really don't recall whether it was two years or less or more. But around that time, perhaps.

*What was the effect during this period on your parents? Was it very depressing at home?
How did you feel?*

Again, I don't think- I think the parents probably hid depression from us... a little bit. We were con-conscious of it. And we were conscious of preparing for it. For example, somebody said all English boys wear plus fours. [laughs] So- so, so we had- we got brown shoes and plus fours were- were, were the thing. That happened in fact when we were later in, in- in England. My- my mother, who was- who, who was a painter, however went back to, to school - to painting school - to see whether she could possibly make an income from it when, when she, when she came. So, they tried to prepare themselves. For my father who- who had the business, he really was much more lost about what to do.

[00:07:11]

It must have been devastating for him...

Devastating.

...as the head of the family.

Yes.

And no occupation and no income, effectively.

Yes... yes. Yes. He- he had a very difficult time. And he went- when we came to, to England he got... a job making hair curlers. Now that job... meant taking this wire, inserting it into a little- into a little sleeve, and then dipping the end into- into some glue or something so that it was sealed. It was manual work of the simplest, most boring and awful thing to do, for him.

Yes.

But that's- that, that's what he did.

Indeed. Could I just go back slightly?

Yes.

During this period of preparation...

Yes.

How did you and your brother, but you in particular, feel about the prospect of being uprooted, leaving your home and going to a strange foreign country?

Virtually not at all. I- I think that's a fair comment. I, I... We hardly realised what was- we, we felt- of course we knew what was- the parents told us. We knew roughly what the political situation was and we'd seen Kristallnacht. But we were not conscious that we were- that this was more than a-a slight adventure. Not something completely new. That came later.

So, when did you actually leave Germany and come to Britain?

We- we left in 1938. I've got the date somewhere; we can look all that up.

And... you went to your father's - father... father's brother's home?

Well, no. He- he had a home in Seaford. We had- we had a...rented... in a- in a house, a basement flat in Carlton Vale in Cricklewood. ...Carlton Vale in Kilburn, I think it was in Kilburn.

And what was that like?

Terrible.

How did you feel there?

I mean, for us... the things that struck us immediately. One was the blackness of London. Because you know, all these streets were soot covered all these big buildings and so on.

They've been cleaned since then. So that struck us. The narrowness of the roads, because we lived near the Kaiserdamm in Berlin and, and, and everything. Everything seemed narrow and black to us. That was the overwhelming... overwhelming feeling.

That was your first impression.

Absolutely the impression, yes, very strongly. Yes. "What have we come into?" kind of thing... In school... We then later after a little while went to a... a local elementary school. And suffered a little bit of bullying...

[00:10:12]

I was going to ask about that because... the chances of being bullied, a: because you are from Germany...

Yes.

And b: because you were Jewish...

Yes. The, the, the chant was "German Jews". Yes. Yes. So, we had that... but we, we were reasonably strong and we were able to look after ourselves. But there was one particular bully who would come, you know, and... it was in that sense... a modestly difficult period for us... compared to the period for my parents... I remember my mother going into a shop to buy some orange juice. And she bought a- she said, "Can I have a *Flasch* [Flasche, German for bottle sounds like "flesh"] of orange juice?" [both laugh] '*Flasche*'...

Yes.

...that kind of thing. Liked to help themselves and so on.

Yes.

But- but my mother, again- maybe I'm jumping ahead of what you are going to ask. But she, having- being artistic, she started to design handbags made of felt. She made- designed, made

them herself and sold them to the best West End store- stores and, and so on. So, she made- she made the income, really. Whereas my father was stuck doing his...his hair curlers and very, very menial things. With very low income.

How did that impact on your standard of living in London, as compared with Germany, even leading up to the war?

Look, we- we lived in this basement... basement flat. And there, one of the big things was how to light a fire, by the way of course. That, that was an issue in itself. Compared to twelve... a twelve room flat in...in Berlin. Just one example. We took some of our furniture with us- when we arrived and so on, including a wooden- rather precious chandelier which my parents had sent with us. Unfortunately, it went from floor to ceiling... once it got there. In other words, the relative size, and so on. It- it had to be scrapped.

[00:12:27]

Yes. Were your parents very upset about that, or did they not show their feelings?

They tried not to show it as far as we, we were concerned and so on. But it was a real struggle for them in a sense. But my mother showed her qualities in the sense because she could cope much more easily than my father. My father was a businessman, but she was an artist. And she made these- and she made these handbags. Brilliant things. She designed them... and... cut the cloth and, and so on. And then went out into the- into the fashion shops in, in, in Mayfair and in Regent Street and everywhere and showed them.

So, she earned some income for the family but also had that artistic outlet.

Yes - yes. And, and later - if I can carry on, on terms of that- of course in terms of what my parents did. Hm, they did... My mother designed - designed dolls' dresses. Little dolls' dresses, which, which were mass- were mass produced. And they employed outworkers to come to a place, collect the stuff and she made them. And then my - my father organised the sale from two stores like Woolworth. Every Woolworth had their... had- had their dolls' dresses.

That's- that's using initiative isn't it?

It's using initiative and making use of her talents.

Yes - yes. Did it mean that you didn't have quite enough, though? Did you feel hungry at times?

Never hungry... never hungry. Other than in the sense it was war-time, and... and so on. And then of course... later- I'm jumping ahead now. We were evacuated.

Ah, there... go back a little...

Yes- yes.

Because you came in 1938...

Yes.

And the war started in - as far as Britain was concerned - on the 3rd of September 1939. And in principle, your parents presumably would not have been allowed officially to work...when they first arrived.

That is probably right. The- I was never conscious of that and then I didn't- we didn't know that. We just knew what they were doing and how they were struggle- the struggle- the struggles and so on. Had they been permitted to work I doubt that it would have been much different.

No...no... Did you speak any English when you first arrived?

[00:15:05]

No. Only- I mean min- absolutely minimal. My father spoke a little better, because he had been here in his youth as a- as an apprentice. And my mother spoke virtually nothing and she's the one with a "flasch of orange juice".

Yes. ...Yes. Did people take the mickey? Were they unkind when she asked for a "flasch" instead of a bottle of orange juice?

I don't think we felt that at all. No, no - no. As I said we had this bit of bullying. We had- we had, because of walking around in our plus fours, we had children running after us and throwing stones in...in the street. Pebbles, not- not bricks or anything like that. But just, just- just being a bit difficult.

Later though, were you accepted by the other children?

Yes. ...Once we... Well, his- historically...When the war started, very soon after, we were evacuated. And then, and then we went to a school in the village we went to...

When- when were you evacuated?

To, to a village called Bedmond - B E D M O N D...

And when?

Which was near the village of - a slightly bigger village - of Abbots Langley. Which is- which- which is not- not far from London, by the way.

And did you go together with your brother?

Yes, yes - yes. And that's a story in itself of course, because, because we were- The Women's Voluntary Service - the WVS - picked us up as we came- as all of us - the whole school. In a crocodile we walked up the village. And they knocked at each door and said, "I think you agreed you'd have two boys..." and, "you'd have two girls." Nobody had agreed to have two German boys. Eh? So, we were left right- right to the end. There was nobody else. Came to the last house of the village. And the- the husband was away. The wife... took the- took the risk on taking us. It was a brilliant success.

Oh, fantastic!

I say that, because I know quite a lot of our other - who came with us, our others - were not very successful. Some were run of the mill, but some were deeply unhappy, and that was a heavy, heavy return back to- back to London. But ours was... was a - a significant success. And we are- we were in touch with them until they died. We are- we are in touch still, and see every day, our foster brother there. Our younger brother their- their- their son, two years younger than we are.

[00:17:53]

And what was the family's name?

Gentle.

Gentle. And this was which year?

This was in 1940.

1940... And-

It- it could have been 1940-'41. But I think it was 1940.

And they treated you well?

They- they were- they were- he was a carpenter / joiner, an extraordinarily skilled man. Could do anything with wood. We learnt from him and so on. And an absolutely skilled poacher. [Jana laughs] So we went out poaching with him. We loved it. [both laugh]

That was fun, was it?

He transformed us, from rather plump city boys into more- much leaner country boys. And we loved it.

How long were you with the Gentle family?

Till '43. And then subsequently went back again for when- when the buzz bombs came, we went back for a short period again.

Was- was this upsetting? Even though the family treated you well and you became part of the family and close to the children... was it traumatic to be uprooted yet again from your original home?

We never had that feeling. In practice, of course it was. But we never had that feeling. We felt... certain discomfort. ...They had their rules about where to eat, and when to eat and what to eat and- and going to bed and things like that, which weren't quite what we'd been used to. Didn't quite like it. But we got on so well with them that everything worked alright. They compromised and we compromised.

Yes... When was your father interned?

He was interned about this time. I- I would think he was- he was away for about eighteen months. I don't know the exact dates, but at around 1940, '41 period... on the Isle of Man.

That would be- that would be right. Did you have much or any contact with him during that time?

[00:20:13]

During the period that he was away, absolutely none.

No letters? Nothing?

But we came up to- we had bicycles, and we were near enough to London actually to cycle to- to London and home again at weekends occasionally. So, we kept- we kept some contact with our mother. And my mother also came down.

So, you didn't feel that sense of isolation that you might have felt?

Not really, no. No, we felt - we felt- really, we quite enjoyed the new life. It wasn't 100 percent that way but - but there was certain excitement. And we loved going poaching with him... as boys are wont to. [both laugh]

Yes... yes. Did your mother ever speak about your father's internment, or any news of him that she might have received?

Very little. It was slightly routine letters and so on, but not - not very much. It seemed to us at the time, the period was rather short. But I think it was about eighteen months.

When your father was finally released from internment, how did you find him? How did you respond to him? Did he seem like a stranger?

No. No, not really. He was- he was who he was. He was an extraordinarily tolerant man and he took- accepted everything that, that - that happened to him. He never complained. Although in fact, within the family, it was my mother who ran things. And- and he- he was remarkably brave about working in that very humble way that he did. As, as formerly a businessman with a substantial business. Where he- where he'd been an eccentric director-manager. Where the story is that in the mornings in the factory, he had a bicycle in the factory and, and, and rode, rode from one end of the factory to the other. That kind of thing. He also... during the... during the honeymoon of my parents, he bought expensive clothing and expensive things. Hand... hand- he had cigarettes which were hand monogrammed and so on. Nothing at all modest in that, and- and so on. And he became so extraordinarily modest; he had no demands of any kind. So, it was an incredible contrast. He changed very much.

[00:22:52]

Yes - yes indeed. Did you absorb that as children? Or you realised that retrospectively?

Retrospectively.

Yes, yes. Because some children felt quite estranged from their father after such a long absence.

No. We-we just had the balance of, of a much more powerful mother. ...But we- we worked to- my father had a- bought a business which, which failed after time. But after- after doing these homework things and we helped him build shelves and all kinds of things, because we'd learned how to make shelves, and cut a piece of wood and do things like that.

So that possibly brought you together?

That brought us together as a family - all together.

Yes.

Then every week we went to Schmidt's to, to eat a good meal.

Did you miss- I was going to ask you- did you miss European food or was your- was your mother able to cook?

My mother cook- cooked tolerably well and... and that. But while we were evacuated, we had the British restaurant food all the time and that was our- that was our food.

[laughing] *But you enjoyed that...?*

We became foodies later.

But you enjoyed going to Schmidt's?

Yes absolutely.

I mean that was an institution...

It was a huge treat.

Yes. And where was it exactly? Do you remember where it was?

Schmidt's?

Yes.

In...In- somewhere near Wigmore Street. [33-43 Charlotte Steet] And... Quite a well-known restaurant by the refugee community.

Indeed... indeed.

And you know of course the place we go- we lived in Cricklewood, within a block of flats called Ashford Court. A very large block of flats... completed just before the war started. So, it was almost entirely filled with refugees, including us. And of course, the nickname for Cricklewood became 'Cricklewicz'. [Jana laughs]

You and your twin brother- identical twin brother- shared so many of these childhood experiences...

Abso- absolutely. I mean, if you were asking him - if you were interviewing him - I doubt whether there'd be many words that were very different.

[00:25:20]

Ah. That's exactly what I was going to ask...

Yes, yes... yes.

... whether you reacted similarly to those experiences. Because you're two individuals, after all.

Yes, but it- it's surprising how twins - especially under these circumstances - are brought even closer together.

Mn-hnn. So, you supported each other as well in many ways?

We- we- it was an advantage and a disadvantage. In the sense, we didn't need to socialise quite as much as others did. And we kept more to ourselves because we had ourselves. So that, that- that was a very- fairly common thing in twins. But that's the way it was.

And when you were - going back to your evacuation - how did the children in the village accept you, and the adults?

It's... What- what happened is the... the school was evacuated. And, and also brought a rabbi out for- with them, because there were quite a number of Jewish children amongst them. That's another story, because he went- our- he went to, to my foster parents and tried to persuade- to persuade us to go to shul locally. And we were rather resistant to that. But the local vicar was also an ambitious young man... and he came to my foster parents and said, "Well these are two souls that could be saved..." and so on. So, so we decided not to be saved either way.

[Laughing] This upset of course the then Chief Rabbi...

Yes.

... in Lon- in Britain Rabbi Heinz - [Rabbi Hertz] who was very upset that so many children-refugee- Jewish refugee children.

Of course, were lost, I mean...

Yes. Yes...

Yes - yes. Well a- a rabbi came to- was, was sent out because there were quite a lot. I don't, look- I don't really know how successful he was with the other Jewish children. Whether they... were better. But... we kept pretty clear of it. And, and... I've had- I've had a dislike of institutionalised religion since then.

[00:27:29]

Did you grow up consciously Jewish? Or was it just something in the background?

It was more in the background. It was later that I became much more- that I became conscious of being a Jew- or of, of even being proud of being a Jew. And- you know - that kind of thing.

Yes...

But at that time the Judaism didn't mean- didn't mean much to us except this rabbi wanting us to- to wear these funny things under our shirts and so on, et cetera.

The prayer shawls?

Yes, yes, yes - yes.

But so, you hadn't - back home in Germany - grown up as part of a Jewish community?

Very little.

You were very assimilated.

No. Once we went- once we went to school we did go to- to Hebrew classes and, and so on. So, we spent some- but frankly today I couldn't do ...couldn't- I couldn't even read it and so on but we were - 'fluent' would be an exaggeration - but at a simple level we had some.

I had the impression that... you didn't have that early background, but you clearly do.

No, no, no.

Yes.

And in Berlin... we kept the High feasts and so on...

Yom Kippur...

...in a cursory kind of way, but nothing more than that. My parents were never- never deeply religious...and so we weren't.

Did they go to- they didn't go to the synagogue sort of on a regular basis?

No. Only- we- only on very rare occasions and so on.

So that's followed through...?

That followed through, yes.

Yes. ...Your education and work: I know you're involved in so many things and I'm sure we could speak about those things for a long period. What were your- your studies after school, and your work and your many- that led into many activities and committees?

OK. Well at- we went at- we had – and it's often the story when... a remarkable headmaster... who- who was very, very progressive. And... And we had a number of refugee children and a number of others. But we had a sixth form which was a- which was an intellectual powder keg. I mean, it was really quite remarkable. Under the leadership of this- of this- of Mr. Wallis, who was the- was the Headmaster of that Willesden County Grammar School. ...And that really turned us from a rather dull, uninteresting... 'who cares' students - in student terms. If you count poaching and other things – that was a different thing. But turned quite a- that really transformed us into much more intellectual and, and well, frankly, intelligent - I mean appearing intelligent and, and so on.

He stimulated your intellect.

He stimulated us enormously.

[00:30:35]

So, from your school, what did you go on to do?

Well, then we went to- we wanted to go to university. We went to LSE. [London School of

Economics]

Both of you?

Both of us, yes.

On the same course?

On the same course. ...Of course!

And what- what was that?

Economics with a specialisation of transport. 'International Trade and Transport' was the- was the option we took.

And where did your activities after that diverge, so to speak, focusing on your activities?

Yes... Yes. Well, we, we- we became research assistants at- that was, as- as it were, the most junior rank - academic rank - because we thought, "Geez, we're becoming academics"... in fact, that was what my- what my brother did. ...And... the diversion came in a sense that he... He met a - a fellow researcher - a Scottish woman called Ailsa [Dicken] Land. And he... teamed up with her and later married her. And that really brought- that really brought about our, in a way, he went his way and I went my way.

And... I know you've done so much, but would you perhaps like to list some that are either more prominent or that mean more to you, in terms of the activities?

[00:32:17]

I'm not quite...Are we talking about people or, or, or activities?

Your- your work and your involvement in different organisations.

Yes. ...After ... After research- well, whilst in- in the research division of, of - of the London

School of Economics, we... we both looked for jobs of course. And looked in- for a long time I mean, dozens and dozens of letters and so on. And, and got a few interviews, but didn't really get any- anywhere. Frank, my brother, got- got a job first. And after a year he said, "Look, why, why - why don't you join us?" And that was at J. Lyons - yeah? - in the statistical office there. And I applied and joined too. And then Lyons developed a computer. He went- he was- he went into the computer and then I did too. And then I spent the rest of my life really basically in that industry or related industries. But whereas he stayed more technically, I didn't. I- I moved off because I was- because I was- because in this particular case was identified that I was German-speaking. I think I mentioned to you, the managing director had said, "We need an export business. From tomorrow you will be Export Manager." And there it started.

And that led, you were saying, to involvement in Eastern - Central and Eastern Europe.

Primarily, yes. So, I went to- I went a huge number of times to the Soviet Union. But there's no country I didn't go to. And there's no country I didn't develop some business in. So, it was- it was a- a very productive period for me. And of the whole of- of developing and growing a business in a rather difficult area. I could talk a long time about some of the specific problems and difficulties of that. But we did it.

You did it. And could you say something about LEO [Lyons Electronic Office]? Your involvement with LEO, please? And what it is.

[00:34:36]

Yes. Lyons recognised very early, that in the post-war era, they were doing an immense amount of paperwork with all these restaurants and so on. Every one of them generated paper. And the labour costs were going up rapidly for clerical work of this kind. And neither was it a very productive kind of work; it was very routine... and not leading to anything very much. And they had... They'd heard about computers, but computers were mainly mathematical machines. But they sent two people, Simmons and Stand- Standingford... who were employees- Lyons was a family business. Three families. Simon Gluckstein and, and Joseph. They sent these people out to look at computers. And they heard about the research that was being done on- on computers and in particular computer called EDSAC [Electronic

Delay Storage Automatic Calculator] which was a very early... Cam-Cambridge development... under a man named Maurice Wilkes. They saw that Simmons in particular was an absolutely brilliant man. And he- he saw that these computers could really, if adapted correctly, take away much of the, of, of that- of, of the drudge of, of clerical work, making it much more productive. And... extraordinarily they paid Cambridge- they paid Cambridge 3,000 Pounds to help them develop a computer. 3,000 Pounds. [laughs]

And it was in the early days of computing.

Yes. I've got this all written up. I- I recently met Dominic Lawson... the brother of Nigella Lawson. But the son of one of the Salmon's - Felix Salmon, of- and he's written a wonderful article which describes that. And I'll, I'll leave that with you because it's got the whole story...

Oh, thank you.

... of how LEO was created and, and, and... ex-

Because it was extraordinary at the time...

Totally extraordinary. Totally extraordinary. And when LEO went into it- when Lyons went into it, they wanted to develop a computer for their own purposes. Other people heard about it and it became- most of the- many of the biggest companies in the country bought them... And this became a business also.

Yes. Could you explain please what LEO actually stands for? What the letters...?

[00:37:16]

Lyons Electronic Office.

Thank you. ...And- you, you are involved in so many different charities also...

Well, not so many different, but I- I have one main charity I- I'm involved with and that's

called HealthProm - and I've been with them many years – which, which deals primarily, as, as I said, with health. But primarily in East Europe and so on. So, we- and we still work particularly at the moment in countries like Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, the -stans and so on, where the needs for - the health needs - are, are enormous. And, and we essentially provide good- training and good practice. In other words, we're not actually the people who do the curing and so on. But we see that the systems for health in the countries in these 'health underdeveloped' countries, are better. And I have to say, we are not big - small. But we really work very well. I mean, it- it's a- when I see what our people do, it- it's pretty impressive.

That gives you satisfaction.

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Yes...It's very gratifying...

I spend more time perhaps than I should on that. But- but now... I've come out of active- actively working, I'm now called- they've decided to call me 'Patron', I'm the patron of it. But anyway, it means I have to spend time of course to do- on helping fundraising and things like that.

But it still keeps you involved in that.

Absolutely. Yes. Yes. And also- I...I also had contacts in some of the countries of course. Not now, so very... very much. But... it's amazing how one loses contact when one isn't that totally active anymore. So... the people change and I'm no longer there.

Where did you... meet your wife and when, please?

[00:39:25]

I- I, I think I told you we were living in Cricklewood... in a block of flats called Ashford Court... And this is- it's- it's a sort of romantic novel story. But... I was on the balcony looking out. And I saw a- a very well-dressed young woman pushing a pram. And then found that she went into Ashford Court. And so, I found out what, what she- she was working as an

au pair. She's French- was French and so on. So, then I made contact with her- with her. And we got together. And that led to marriage, and...

When did you marry?

I- we married in - I've got the birth certificates out- no, the marriage certificates somewhere.

Roughly?

Oh, '53 or so- '52 or '53. Something like that. Some people know these facts of their life, but I don't.

Don't worry. And is she Jewish also?

No- no, no she's- she's is a Catholic.

How did you...?

So that was a bit of a shock to the parents. But not something that they resisted. That wasn't in their nature to resist that.

What about on your side of the family? How did your parents feel about that?

I- I think there - a degree of disappointment. But... but as I say, not the kind of disappointment that in so many Jewish families there would be. Partially because of- of course they were not strictly- strict observers. I mean we were- we were very- very relaxed observers.

Yes. And what does or did your wife do professionally?

She- she was working as a, as a bilingual secretary... for... for an airline. For Belgian Airlines. ...And the immediate benefit, apart from the marriage and all that of course, was unlimited travel with the airline.

Always useful.

It is. The airline staff managed to get it regularly. So, we- we travelled an awful lot. I mean, more- many people travel, but we travelled more than most, I would guess.

And... do you have any children?

Two, two boys.

And what are their names?

The older one is Bryan - B R Y A N... And I think he's probably fifty-seven now, or something.

And what is his occupation?

[00:42:21]

And he- he is an- he is an, an oil and metals specialist in the- in the World Bank. ... So, he's currently working- He's, he's- he's just moved to Singapore. They've moved him to Singapore now. But he is- he's a reasonably senior man in the- in the organisation.

And your other son?

And the other one, Anthony... Anthony lives in Botswana. He- he, he went- he went as a volunteer- a Voluntary Service Overseas - a VSO - to Botswana...some fifteen years ago and he's been - been there ever since. He married a local girl... and he has two daughters.

So, it...

One of whom- one of whom is studying at Goldsmiths here.

And is he involved in charitable work there?

He is a... consultant in capacity development. So, he travels all over- not only Africa, but about ninety percent Africa. Primarily Africa. Financed by the- by the various agencies IMO United Nations agencies and so on, in, in helping along. So, he has- he goes his way almost all the time. He's travelling immensely. Has meetings at- at high government levels to discuss- to discuss again, capacity. Where capacity is often lacking.

Yes... yes. Do they feel Jewish at all?

No.

No.

No. To my disappointment. I try. I mean, I'm not a good father in the sense of being a Jewish father as you- as you recognised of course. And that unfortunately means that they have never had it at all. I mean I'm- I feel I'm Jewish. But they hardly do.

Did- did they ever go to synagogue here in Britain?

They might have been just a curiosity. But the- but- but neither have they ever been to church. I mean it's- they are not- that's not theirs...their, their *metier* at all.

No... And have you ever together with your wife and your children returned to Germany? Do they feel any connection with your past?

[00:45:04]

We- yes. I went to... I was working for Xerox at the time. And the German subsidiary of Xerox was a- was a disaster... As we found when I went- I went out there to- and Xerox sent me out to find out what was going on and found that the man who ran it was an alcoholic. He started every day with a bottle of...of scotch or something like that. That was a breakfast, and so on. I had to get rid of him. And then for- I said- they asked me for a few weeks till they find somebody else, to- to run it. And it turned out to be three years. And I was uneasy about going back to Germany. But I, I, I - I agreed. So, I- we sold up here in London and bought a house in Düsseldorf, and lived there for three years. And the boys went to the- to the local

international schools. Which was- which was an excellent episode for them. Really good because they- they've- they understand the world much better than somebody who just goes to- the standard of education was reasonable, but it's actually understanding- understanding the world.

Yes... it's a, a much broader...

Yes, much better.

...background. Yes.

Yes, yes. It was a good experience for them. A good experience for us all.

And do they still retain an interest, do you think, in your family background and Europe in general?

Up to a point. Anthony in particular has- is trying do- to research and to keep a record of the company- of the family background. And what family background charts I have, mainly come from his work. Not entirely, but...

Tremendous. ...Do you feel that this is something that is important to you, this record- this family record?

[00:47:27]

Oh, I do, yes. I'm- I'm- I am very interested in it- not with any particular purpose in mind. I'm just- I'm just interested in, in general... in the Jewish families and Jewish background. How did this happen that these Jews were there, and came there and did this? Well that's of an interest, and of course interesting for my family. But... no end product in this; it's just that I'm interested.

To what extent do you feel that your- your refugee background has influenced your interests and involvements in the various organisations that you've been involved in?

I think primarily only that it's kept me very international in view. I mean I, I, I of course feel that Brexit is a, is, is self-harm on a massive scale, and, and so on... But I don't have to be a refugee to think that. But I- but I think very much globally and internationally and, and- and so on. A lot of friends I have, under present conditions, are thinking of taking back German nationality... which shocks me. But- but nevertheless, it's happening.

Yes... Had you thought of doing that?

I've been told I should, but I wouldn't do it. And I mean, just absolutely not. [laughs] No. And my view of Germany is, is, is not un- it's quite positive. And I worked there for, for, for, for three years. What I found is that the younger generation really are pretty well-educated and aware of what it is they've done. But when you talk to the middle-aged one- people, you talk to them, who say, "Oh, yes. I know exactly what we did." They don't. They absolutely do not feel it. They don't feel guilty or anything. That's the biggest generalisation, but it's a little bit like- it's a little bit true.

Do you belong to any Jewish organisations at the moment?

I don't belong to any organisation. I- I- the only one I support is Mogen – Mogen Dov [Magen David Adom UK] the charity.

And...

I, I was for a long time a member of the Northwest Jew- Northwest Jewish Boys Club...and played football for them. Frank as well.

And when was that?

When we were- when we were- when we were at school - at that sort of...

Oh, a school boy...

Yes. Fifteen to eighteen type of thing.

Yes.

Before we were in the working world. [Jana laughs]

[00:50:12]

In the world today, would you describe yourself as Jewish or German or British, or all?

Never German. I describe myself as, as Jewish and British.

Did you feel that, or were you aware of any help from Jewish [???British] Jewry in your early days here? Or aid to your parents?

Only I knew that, that my parents were helped at- in the- in the initial period by the AJR and, and, and others. I've never had any particular relationships with them nor have called for any help from them. I have- I have some papers here which at one stage - about what happened to my uncles. I've letters they wrote, after the war, describing what happened to them. I've sent some of them off I think, to the AJR. But that may have been it. I think I sent them to the AJR.

You- you mentioned your other family members and that's something I wanted to ask about.

Yes.

Did you lose many family members in the camps? In the...?

Curiously not. I, my, my mother's parents died in Theresienstadt... ..And various uncles had short periods in, in concentration camps. But really no, no, no, no long stay. They- it seemed to be that they were arrested, were there and then came out again. Most of them had non-Jewish wives. I don't know whether it played a part or not, but it could have been that they are mixed- as, as, as mixed, mixed marriages.

They were protected by that...

But as you can see, in terms of being strongly Jewish in any way, we were really not an ideal family.

How did you family - you and your brother - feel about the loss of grandparents?

About...?

The loss of grandparents, for example? Or were you not aware at that stage?

[00:52:34]

We were only aware of it after the war. We did not know what- we'd lost- we'd- we'd lost touch during the war with most of- with many of them. We really only pieced together what happened to various people after the war. Particularly those that- I would say except the grandparents, they all survived in one form or another. And as I've told you before, my Uncle Robert, who, who, who was a- was a slave labourer, committed suicide once he recovered.

Did you ever discover or are you aware of why he did that?

I don't think there was a specific cause. It was a much more a general thing that he couldn't- he couldn't combine- he couldn't... live any more.

He couldn't cope with life?

He may have recovered physically, but he never recovered from, from it. Anyway, we- we had- I had personally no contact with him at all and so- my father limited contact- we had very limited contact- contact with him in that post-war period. So, it's more what we heard. But knowing him and knowing his somewhat pessimistic nature in general, it's not surprising.

And where was he during the war?

I don't know exactly. I've got it- we've got it somewhere, but I don't know the answer to that offhand.

Because... we hear about the survival successes... the refugee successes...

Yes, yes.

But very little is acknowledged about those who committed suicide. Who felt that for whatever reason, that they simply couldn't live any more.

Couldn't live anymore.

Yes.

Yes, yes, yes that's the- that's the thing. That's the thing. In the case of- I- I also mentioned that his daughter also committed suicide. But in her case, it was... a depression but partially a, a failed love affair. In this country.

Yes. Do you know roughly which year or around about...?

The suicide? I would have to guess. I've- I think it's better for me to look up or give you the necessary background to it. I think you- you'll find out.

Thank you. Because that is important. And these tragic events also have an impact on the surviving family members.

[00:55:13]

Well, of course, this is the whole point. As I- as I say, the story doesn't end with the end of the war the close of the- it, it almost starts there.

Yes, exactly. Because adjusting afterwards...

Yes.

...to 'normal life' in inverted commas...

Yes, it's almost impossible, this...

Yes. Yes, it is for some people.

Yes. Well, I have some correspondence and so on. And I'll- I'll- if I can lend it to you, you might find some of it interesting support. But I do want it back, or you take copies of it.

Of course.

That's very easy.

Thank you very much. And... do you know how your parents reacted to this when they heard the news or did they hush it up? Did they not discuss it with you?

No, no, we- no. We, we, we - we discussed it. And... It wasn't so surprising, in a sense. In a sense I guess of, of the seven brothers... - did I say seven? - six brothers and one sister. The major- all of them survived except - yes, all of them survived. Not well, necessarily...

Yes...

... but they survived. It's only the grandparents who, who- of whom we have positive evidence that they died. We know where they died.

Because it also- I was going to ask, was there any sense of condemnation because it was illegal - considered illegal - to commit suicide? It was a criminal offence.

I don't- I- I...

I'm not saying you should, of course.

No, no... no, no. I would- I would say with a degree of confidence, without actually knowing it, that they wouldn't think that. That would not be the way my parents thought.

They- they were understanding.

Fully, yes, yes.

Good... You yourself, having lost members, but how do you feel that about having escaped and survived when others didn't? I'm not, I hasten to add suggesting that you should.

[00:57:26]

No, no, no. I'm sure you're- I'm sure you're not. I'm just trying to think whether... it's... You make me feel almost as if I should have done. But no, no...

No.

No, no. I know you're not trying to. But really, I haven't felt that way. ...I- I can't say that I, I- I in any way I ever felt this, no.

Do you feel perhaps that, knowing about your Uncle Robert's suicide, that life is important?

Well I do that in any case.

Or, more important?

I, I don't think it influenced me in any way. I think life is important and I have my views and so on. Unchanged by this.

Right.

Shock yes, but not, not, not condemnation...

No...

Or not any- or any other effect on me.

No... Did you...?

And by the way, you've read- one has read so many peer- it- it wasn't as if this was a unique happening.

No.

We know so many people whom- who had one form or other of tragic story...

Yes.

... much worse than ours. I mean that's what we always knew. We always felt we got away fairly well... because we didn't have... My father had, had the Isle of Man. But that's, that's, that's not... That's not an awful thing to happen, you know, in comparison.

Yes... You mentioned the prospect of gaining compensation from Germany on behalf of your family for loss of business and being deprived of education. Did you succeed in that endeavour?

We, we- no. We... I think there were a number of specialist lawyers who got in touch with us and said they could do these things for us. In part that was salesmanship selling their skills... What we got... was a very limited amount in lieu of loss of education and, and pension rights. Something like that. But really it wasn't more than peanuts. It wasn't really as if it made a difference to us, really. So. And I and other people were saying I should have pursued it much, much - much more. I haven't - and I don't intend to.

Was it just the principle of...?

[01:00:00]

It was... well, had I seen what we could get a lot back, I might not have been principled.

[Jana laughs].

How do you feel about your achievements as a former refugee?

I- I'm- I think what Frank and I- what we achieved in a sense... is what we've achieved by our, our... our ability and energy, or whatever it was. I see far too many people who fail and blame anti-Semitism or blame prejudice of one kind or another. And I've seen- it happens- I know quite a lot of people who when they failed, blame- blamed something- really is false, I think. They- of course anti-Semitism exists, and I'm conscious of it occasionally and so on.

And its resurgence...

It's a serious issue. But if, if I had not got a job - I would never have thought that unless I had some very specific knowledge about it - I would never have thought it was because I'm Jewish. I've never felt discriminated against. But I feel I know too many people who do. And it's in them. It's their own problem. Not- it's- it's easy to blame- blame something else.

You... Do...?

And by the way, I mean I know people, not only Jewish, but I know Indians who've not- who've failed because they say, it's prejudice against Indians and so- if you fail and you are a minority, you always blame the...

Do you feel that your refugee background has at times been a hindrance or... a benefit in- in some ways, especially with your dealings in Europe?

I- I, I don't think it's been a benefit in my dealings with- with Europe. I think it's a... a little bit. But it- it's really a parental background and so on and so forth, trying a little bit harder and so on around. I, I- I just can't judge. If it hadn't been for, for refugee status, how I would have come out. I suspect had we lived in Germany, as children of a fairly prosperous businessman, we would have turned out fat and lazy. But that might not be true. [Jana laughs]

Are you consciously aware of being a former refugee, or is that firmly in the past now?

[01:02:39]

It really is... in the past. I- I'm brought up to the fact that I'm a refugee if I hear myself on a recording and hear that I've got this dreadful accent. [laughing] I don't think that I have a

dreadful accent except- except when I hear myself. [both laughing] “Oh, gosh. Is that me?”

Do you have a special message that members of your family, or anyone viewing this interview film at a later stage might wish to hear?

I mean, what kind of message?

A personal message... or an opinion... or guidance?

No, I- I, I do think it's good that... I mean some people are very secretive about their lives for no particularly good reason. And I think it's much better to be open and to be able to say things and explain. It really does widen the whole prospect of, of the whole issue of whether you're a refugee or a minority or something like that. I think we should be within the world, and not outside it. And, and - I think that's hugely important. And, and we all see the fact that minorities... stick to themselves, feel the world is against them and so on. And that's very bad. You could open yourself to it.

Is there anything else that you would like to add?

I, I- no, no. Only, I guess...

In general, from what we've been saying or that you perhaps didn't mention earlier, but would like to now?

No, I mean not everything has been easy. And... I think I've had a good life. And... I'm sad about the world we live in today. I think it's... If- if I get depressed, it would be about the world today. There's practically no good news when you see Trump, when you see Brexit, when you see the right-wing alternatives. And all these things that are happening. I am- I am a member of the Labour Party so I'm a little bit on the left side. Not necessarily a Corbynite. [Jana laughs] ...Alas. What else can I say? What else can I...?

[01:05:06]

Yes. Well thank you very much indeed for contributing to the Archive Project. We appreciate

your...

What's the next step?

The next step will be to photograph you and some family photographs.

I've got to find some family photos. I can quickly look at- but the kind of photographs- I've got on the album somewhere, full of family photographs where we are as children and all the rest. All I found is...

Just a second...

Sorry. Are we still on? Sorry. I will show you some photographs, but they are mainly business-type photographs which...

We will have a look. Thank you. Frank we'll just take a...a...

...Family photographs I- which I know I have. I looked yesterday evening, couldn't find them but they must be somewhere.

Thank you.

[End of interview]

[01:05:59]

[01:06:03]

[Start of photographs and documents]

Photo 1

Okay. Yes... Alright. So that is a photograph of my mother with her- with her brother who was I think two years either older or younger. And she must have been about- well she- he's obviously younger. She must have been about sixteen. So this was- must have been taken in about... the early 20s I would think. ...Taken at their home in Vienna.

Photo 2

This is a photograph of my father in his... in his... sorry, sorry... [Sailor suit]. Thank you, yes. This is a photograph of my father in his sailor's suit. He was one of six brothers, somewhere in the middle. And it must have been taken around 1900 or thereabouts. He was born in 1888.

Photo 3

This is a photograph of my father, aged about... in his late, in his late 70s or early 80s. Probably taken around 1986 or '87 - something like that.

Photo 4

That is a photograph of my mother... I- I would think before we emigrated into- to the country. Probably around 1936, '37.

Photo 5

This is a photograph of our father with my twin brother in Berlin around 1935. And the memory it evokes is of the way we- these are embroidered shirts we are wearing. We absolutely hated wearing these embroidered shirts. We felt they were effeminate and, and uncomfortable. But that's what we had to wear.

Photo 6

This a photograph when we were in the Air Cadets at Willesden County School - Grammar School - and would have been taken in the... in the late 40s I would, I would think. It's- it's- it's my brother Frank and myself.

Photo 7

This is a photograph of my brother and myself. We are on holiday. I think almost certainly we were part- on a, on a cycle tour to Devon, and were sitting- sitting on the- on the- at the coast there. Around the late 40s.

[01:08:59]

Photo 8

Well that is- that is a photograph of, of me. I should think again taken in the... in the late 40s,

or possibly early 50s. I know very little about it.

Photo 9

This is a photograph of my wife and, and myself taken not very long after our, our wedding. In a garden in - I would think - the mid-50s.

Photo 10

This is a photograph of, of my cousin Peter. The son of my- one of my father's brothers, who came to Britain in 1939 on a Kindertransport. With... And then, after evacuation, volunteered to go to the Army and saw service throughout the whole re-reconquest and victory.

And his relation to the... to Miriam? His connection with Miriam?

Oh, yes, his, his sister committed- later committed suicide. And her father, who had been a slave labourer, left in, in Germany, after he was apparently restored to health - he looked normal again after being a human skeleton - committed suicide as well. The story goes on.

[01:10:38]

Photo 11

Well, this is a- this is a this is a photograph of, of the family of... I'm with my wife, my brother is with his wife and one of- one of his daughters. We are in the New Forest on, on holiday in the... late 70s dare I say?

80s...early 80s...

The 80s. Probably- probably closer to the early 80s.

Photo 12

This is a photograph of a major contract signing in Moscow. And I'm signing it together with the director of the purchasing organisation [inaudible] His name was Mr. Isaakov. And this was a multi-million-pound contract. They sent me an invitation at about the year's end - just near- near the end - and said would I come out over the year's end to sign a contract? And I was going to say, "Well I can't- I can't do that." And they said, "Well the year is finished.

You've got the financial allocation for that order. If you- if you don't sign it, it'll go away." I travelled.

And the year?

I said- I thought I'd given the year. Didn't I? Oh about- In the early 80s. This was- this was- Happened in the... in the early 80s. I wished I knew more precisely.

[01:12:19]

Photo 13

This a photograph of the English Electric LEO Marconi factory in... in Kidsgrove. And we were visited by- by Princess Anne. And she was shown around. And I showed her around the part of the exhibition which dealt with the equipment we were selling into Russia at the time, or into the Soviet Union. This would have been around the... This would have been in the early 80s. I- I was speaking to Princess Anne there. But of course, I had received in- a few years earlier I'd received a CBE for my services to export, given by- by Prince Charles. So, I was becoming familiar with royalty.

Photo 14

This is a photograph of my brother Frank and I, celebrating our seventieth... birthday at- at a well-known fish restaurant. I didn't meet my brother all that frequently. But we spoke every day on the phone. But we did at least meet annually during our birthdays.

Document 1

This is a children's identity card or- of mine which was issued in 1931. In other words, in pre- not in pre-Hitler days but before the Holocaust was even thought of. And so I had my normal name. Later documents show me with the name, Rolf Richard Israel Landsberger. And every girl was called- the name 'Sara' was added to their name. In some way the Germans felt at that time that was some way of identifying, humiliating Jews. Whatever it is, it didn't worry us.

Document 2

This is my first school report in- in my Jewish school in, in Germany where I went- where I

was sent with my twin brother. Its wording is not altogether encouraging for an intellectual career. It says, "Ralph is very quiet in, in his lessons. Writing is causing him considerable difficulty, but he will be- but he will be- Ralph will be elevated to the upper- to the next class."

[01:15:09]

Photograph of book cover

This is a cover of a book by Peter Bird, who had worked at J. Lyons, the big catering company, and became incredibly knowledgeable about the company and has written extensively about it. And this book writes about LEO - Lyons Electronic Office - which is effectively the world's first business computer. There were already other computers... essentially for mathematical and scientific purposes. But for a computer that dealt with the humdrum office procedures of clerical procedures it had not yet been developed. And Lyons with the help of Cambridge University and others and based on a computer called - a prototype computer called - EDSAC developed the first real business computer. And this is the story of, of, of - of that quite remarkable happening. And it happened because Lyons at that time, were fortunate in employing a - a number of quite brilliant people, who saw something that others hadn't seen: the potential of a computer to take over some of the multitude of work. What it could also do: from one piece of data, it could do useful- a number of potential outputs. So, it became a much more complicated but complete business machine. If it- if it got information about the orders going on, on a particular form of cake, it produced a number- an analysis of the amount of cakes, where they were going it would produce a delivery schedule for the- for the people who were then delivering it. And later it would produce statistics for the whole factory. And then financial information on the whole trans- on the whole transactions of the collection of all these orders and so on. A brilliant concept... and- and developed entirely for Lyons by, by Lyons people and the scientists they employed. But later they sold the- they built a business called Lyons- called LEO or Lyons Electronic Office, which sold its computers to many of the biggest companies in the country.

And what was your role? Your role?

[01:17:33]

I was... I- I had worked for Lyons in the tea shops division as their management accountant. And when the LEO was developed, they went recruiting from within the company and from without for it. And I was of course obviously very interested in it. And particularly because these first applications - or early applications - were involved for the teashops- the Lyons teashops. So, I was-added a little bit to the specification of that and that- became then deeply involved and worked for that company for the next- till I retired, or close to the time I retired. But basically, developing an export business for computers.

Document 3

I'm going to sleep. Sorry...

Right... This article was in, in, in fact in last week's *Sunday Times*, which very graphically describes this remarkable story of, of, of the- of, of LEO. Dominic Lawson himself is the son of one of the early directors of, of, of Lyons and the brother of the rather famous Nigella Lawson. But he- he knows the story very well and... has described the development of the computer which was part of this Lyons business.

[01:19:08]

[End of photographs and documents]