

IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	65

Interviewee Surname:	Gordon
Forename:	Hortense
Interviewee Sex:	Female
Interviewee DOB:	21 September 1920
Interviewee POB:	Breslau, Germany

Date of Interview:	3 July 2004
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Sharon Rapaport
Total Duration (HH:MM):	1 hour and 45 minutes

**REFUGEE VOICES:
THE AJR AUDIO-VISUAL TESTIMONY ARCHIVE**

INTERVIEW: 65

NAME: HORTENSE GORDON

DATE: 3 JULY 2004

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: SHARON RAPOPORT

TAPE 1

SR: I'm conducting an interview with Hortense Gordon on the 3rd of July 2004.

Mrs Gordon I would like to thank you for being willing to be interviewed and I would like to start if you please you could state your maiden name and at what date you were born.

HG: My maiden name is Heidenfeld, and I was born on the 21st of September 1920, in Breslau, which was Germany at the time.

SR: What is your full name?

HG: Hortense Marianne Pauline Gordon, née Heidenfeld. That's a mouthful.

SR: Do you know the origin of your name?

HG: No. You mean the first name? Well I believe it was Napoleon's mother or sister who was called Hortense. My parents liked it, that's what I was told.

SR: And do you know something about your middle name?

HG: I think Pauline was my one of the grandparents somewhere, the other one I don't know why that was chosen.

SR: It's actually a French name.

HG: It's a French name yes.

SR: Could you please tell me a bit about your family background.

HG: My parents were both born in Germany, in Breslau already, my father was in the First World War, got the Iron Cross, and the usual medals. He was a doctor already and my parents got married in 1919 I think, and my father then went into general practice after the war. His parents died in the flu epidemic in 1918, both parents. I didn't know any grandparents, my mother's parents I didn't know either. Not much was said about them. So since, I was born in Breslau, but I understand we very soon moved to Kant, where we lived until about 1936 or 7.

My father had a very large rural practice, single-handed, so, very many patients. In the beginning he travelled by horse and what do you call it? Horse and carriage I suppose. But then we had an accident and the carriage fell over and both my mother and I were injured. My mother quite badly and I was only bruised. And then my parents had a car. It was a big car, it was a Chevrolet, something quite big and posh, they also had a chauffeur, because my father never drove. My - when times became difficult in the thirties - my mother learned to drive, and my mother drove, miles away into the countryside, so it was pretty difficult I think at one time.

SR: Now going back a bit. Do you know how many generations your family were in Germany?

HG: No I don't, but many. No I don't.

SR: And you were telling me that your father actually fought in the First World War.

HG: First War, yes.

SR: Do you know where?

HG: No I don't.

SR: When he came back did he talk about it?

HG: No, never.

SR: And did your parents tell you anything interesting, any stories about their background?

HG: Not at all. Not at all, and we were, there were no other relations, except my father had two half or step-sisters, but who were very much older than him, about twenty years, who we did see occasionally, but we really didn't have any contact or know anything about them so we were a very, very small nuclear family.

SR: Could you tell me your father's and your mother's name?

HG: Yes. My father was called George, Georg Heidenfeld, my mother was called Stephanie Heidenfeld, née London funnily enough. That was her surname. Yes. And they had no, no real siblings.

SR: What kind of household were you brought up in?

HG: It was a very large house, we had a nanny, who ruled the roost, and we had a cook and a parlour maid and a gardener and the gardener's wife. Yes, it was quite a household and a lot of social life. My parents - actually their social life took mainly place in Breslau - because Kant was a small town, about 15 kilometres from Breslau, so not far, and my parents belonged there to various Jewish organisations, but we were very what we call in Germany Liberal, which is more liberal than Reform in this country.

SR: Do you remember the festivals?

HG: We did have, I do remember the festivals. We used to have a Seder at home, some sort of Seder my father did. But I also remember that inevitably he was called out to see a patient in the middle of it all, so it wasn't a very well organised thing, but I do remember having it, and I do remember of course New Year and the Day of Atonement but they were the only festivals that we really knew about.

SR: At those festivals that you are talking about, were other people invited?

HG: No. No. In the town, in Kant where we lived, there were only four Jewish families, altogether. We did know them. And we went to, his... Jewish history classes on a Sunday morning to one of the families but we didn't have a great deal of social contact with the people in Kant, the Jewish people.

SR: And what kind of lady was your mother?

HG: Very difficult to say. I look back upon it now, and think, she didn't have that great deal of involvement with us children. I had a younger sister by the way, who was three and a bit years younger than I am.

Tape 1: 9 minutes 29 seconds

And the most important person in our life, and she was important but I didn't like her, was this nanny. *Kinderfräulein*. She had most say in our ...

SR: From where was she?

HG: She was from - locally, yes she was with us for many, many years, even when we were no longer small children.

SR: Can you tell me a bit about your sister?

HG: My sister was a very lively and outgoing person, much more so than I was, I was very reserved. And she was very bright and cheerful and as I said, outgoing.

SR: How many years of difference?

HG: Three and a half years was the difference. I was the oldest and she was three and a half years younger.

SR: You were telling me about your father, that he was a GP. Who were his patients?

HG: Oh they were from all walks of life, from the labourer to the farm workers to the counts of the manor. They really came from all walks of life indeed, yes.

SR: And were they faithful to him?

HG: Yes they were.

SR: Do you remember a change in the atmosphere in 1933.

HG: Oh yes indeed. There was this boycott day which I will always remember, when the Nazis stood in front of our house and forbade the patients from coming in. That was a very traumatic experience, but then it passed and the practice continued and things were reasonably quiet, although financially things became bad. Because I think it was in 1929 my father bought a property and - in Kant - started a convalescent home for children, and because of all these difficulties, Hitler and all these sort of things, this did not work and materialise and develop the way he had anticipated. And that caused a great deal of financial problems. And then gradually also throughout the time the practice decreased and things were financially very difficult. I remember that.

SR: Did your father ever talk to you about this?

HG: Oh no, no, no. Children were not talked with. And, but we were brought up and I think this helped me in a way to survive. My father had a motto 'There is nothing one can't do'. And I have jolly well had to do a lot of things and done them in my life.

Tape 1: 13 minutes 28 seconds

SR: So your family after the boycott went on living in ...?

HG: Yes, went on living there until about - I think we left Kant in '37. But in the meantime my father was arrested for alleged abortions and things and he was taken to prison, a local prison and I remember having to go there. I must have been about fourteen or fifteen or something, had to take him food and blankets and things, to the prison, so that was another pretty traumatic experience.

SR: Did you share your feelings?

HG: No. We just had to get on with things.

SR: And how was your social life as a girl?

HG: My social life, of course I went to a primary school, a *Volksschule*, for four years and then I went - I wasn't accepted anymore to the High School in Breslau, which was a very prestigious school, I wasn't accepted anymore at that stage because there was already a limitation for Jewish children - I went to this mixed Grammar school I suppose you could call it, in Kant. And there was one particular girlfriend I had who one day came and said "I can't speak to you anymore because you are Jewish". So that was that. So, one got on with that.

SR: And she was your best friend?

HG: She was my best friend, yes. Do you know, one did get on with it in those days. Today one would think "Oh my God, the poor girl, the psychological upset". One didn't think about it in those days. Well that was that and it was dealt with and got on with.

SR: Before that incident did you go to that friend's house?

HG: Yes I used to go and they used to come to my house, oh yes. But that was a very sudden cut off. I think it must have been about '34, yes something like that.

SR: And in 1936 when there were the Olympic Games did it change anything in the attitudes? Did you hear anything?

Tape 1: 16 minutes 11 seconds

HG: I can't remember which year it was that Hitler occupied the *Saarland*, whether it was '35 or '36 I don't remember, but I remember then my father saying "This will be the end of Hitler because the allies won't put up with it and they will retaliate". And of course it didn't happen. I remember that and I was terrified and I overheard that, and I was in another room and I was very frightened of war, but of course it didn't happen at that time.

SR: So what would you say was the major crisis that changed the way that you lived altogether, the way the family lived?

HG: Yes the major crisis was I think in '36, probably in '36, when things became so desperate that we left Kant. The practice went totally to pieces and we went to live in Breslau. My parents lived in a furnished room. I was sent as an au pair I suppose to a Jewish family in order to learn Kosher cooking for my future, and my sister went to a - what do you call it - a domestic science college I suppose is the nearest thing, also to prepare for ...

Tape 1: 18 minutes 17 seconds

SR: Could you please tell me a bit about the relationship you had with your sister?

HG: I can't say that it was a terribly close relationship, but it was an ordinary one, what one was expected to have, you know, there was nothing, you know nothing very dramatic one way or another about it.

SR: And the family where you went, what kind of people were they?

HG: The family I was learning Kosher cooking from? They were - a very funny thing happened about this, because somehow either my parents probably knew them, one had to be prepared somehow for emigration, it came to mind to learn Kosher cooking, which I hadn't known anything about. And some 20 years ago, during the Leo Baeck launch, B'nai B'rith here in London and when you join the members are circulated with people who apply to become new members, and they give the name, the original name and where they originally came from and so that was that, one evening I had a phone call. And very strange, a lady, appeared, very old she was, in those days I was a little bit younger, and said "Do you know who this is"? And I did not know who this was, it turned out she was the daughter of these people that I was sent to live with and work with. Which was actually fantastic and I enjoyed this no end and so did she, this old lady, she was already in a residential home, she was already well into her eighties. And of course we became great friends, and of course she came here and I went there, we went out to lunch, and so it was really something back from home and that was very exciting, but that was quite a coincidence, but of course the Kosher cooking didn't help me one bit in my emigration.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 44 seconds

Everything but. But it was just a stage of my life.

SR: Where were you on the night of the *Kristallnacht* in 1938?

HG: I was with another family where I was a kind of au pair because I had to obviously have a home and some sort of a living, because my parents were already in Breslau, as I said in the one room. And I was staying with these people, and I looked out of the window and we saw people being carried away to the concentration camp. My father went to Buchenwald at that time. I did not see him go, but he did go to Buchenwald, and did come out, I mean my father. I remember my mother worked very hard to try and get him out and did. That was *Kristallnacht*. And then, of course it was thought that maybe – and I must say it was my idea - maybe I should try and get to England on a domestic permit. And see, or help, work on my parents and sister also coming out. But it was too late, because by the time I came to England it was June '39. I came to this family.

SR: You were talking about... I want to understand something. You were talking about two families, one family where you learned the Kosher cooking, and there was the other family...

HG: Where I was just au pair.

SR: And what was their name?

HG: I don't remember.

SR: And how long did you work there?

HG: Just a few months I think, not very long.

SR: Do you remember something from that time, or ...?

HG: No I really don't. Some of these experiences I really blocked out.

SR: So you were talking about that your father actually went to Buchenwald.

HG: Yes.

SR: And when he came back, when was actually the first time that people started talking with you about emigration?

Tape 1: 23 minutes 10 seconds

HG: I think we started to talk about it at the beginning of '39. And my parents somehow either knew an English family who then found me this job, with the family that I came to and stayed with for two and a half years.

SR: Did you want to leave home?

HG: I didn't want to leave home but I thought it was a way of getting things moving. I am really quite surprised, looking back on it, that this initiative came from me. Because I was just 18 years old, and an 18 year old in 1939 was not an 18 year old in 2004. I mean I was very immature and not very wise about things. I think. I certainly wasn't.

SR: Did England attract you specially?

HG: No, it was just an opportunity.

SR: So could you tell me: How was the emigration process?

HG: The emigration process was also a little strange. My father took me to Berlin and - I then went - put me on the train to Hamburg. I still remember to this day that we didn't kiss goodbye, there was all too much excitement going on, we just forgot. I went on the train by myself to Hamburg, I had been booked into a hotel, it must have been, had dinner there by myself of course, and there was a big notice *Juden Unerwünscht*. And then went by boat from Hamburg to Southampton.

SR: So who organised your visit to England?

HG: My parents must have organised it, I didn't, but it was of course- we must have discussed it some way or other. I didn't do anything. There were things like, things to be got, like documents.

SR: Can you describe the last day before your leaving?

HG: No, not at all, totally gone.

SR: Did your parents give you anything, or something for your journey?

HG: Well I took the most extraordinary things. I've got an enormous trunk which is still here, which was sent on, and in this trunk was bed-linen, a featherbed. We weren't allowed to take any sort of valuables at all. My mother bought me an evening dress, because in England one needs an evening dress. And my father said I should learn to play bridge because in England one plays bridge. Well, I didn't learn to play bridge, and I don't play it to this day. But these were the things that were discussed for the emigration. Funny, isn't it? [Laughs]

I then came to England. There was an old aunt of my father's, and had two children, they weren't children at all. They were much older than me. And I stayed with them one night. And they were refugees, and then we went to Lyon's Corner House in the buttery and had lunch, which was absolutely fantastic you know, because we hadn't, of course, been in a restaurant or anything like that in Germany for years. And Lyon's Corner House in Coventry Street was really quite something. And so I had this lunch, and then I was put on the train to go to Farnham to go to my employers.

Tape 1: 28 minutes 11 seconds

That was June, the 1st of June 1939.

SR: Going back a bit to the journey, do you remember something special that happened?

HG: I don't remember the journey very much. I remember the train - the ship rather than the train, overnight and there were a lot of us on it. Looking on now at so many pictures of emigration and *Kindertransport* again, I wasn't a kid, but all the same, we all looked the same, we all looked the same and arrived at Waterloo where somebody, a girl I had been to school with met me, and I brought her a great big long salami, that's what she had requested. So that was that, that's all I remember about that.

SR: What was the connection, you mentioned the girl you went to school with?

HG: Yes, but she was already in England and she met me at Waterloo, and then I think must have been handed me over to the aunt, the old aunt. I've forgotten.

SR: What was the name of the aunt with the two children?

HG: Oh well they weren't children at all, because they were already grown up when I was a child. The name was Dürenfurt, Dürenfurt. They lived in Berlin actually, we didn't know them that well, but we did know them. And they lived here. And I had contact with them here and the aunt died in the sixties, and the children at a very old age, ninety plus, died about fourteen years ago, one fifteen years ago or something like that.

SR: Do you remember: What were your first impressions, you were talking about this restaurant and ...?

HG: Well the restaurant was absolutely fabulous. I would now compare it to the Ritz. The house where I lived, where the Hunts lived, well I thought everyone in England lived like that. [Laughs]

SR: Can you describe it?

HG: I can describe it. I can even show you a picture of it, if you want to see a picture. A big house on enormous grounds with a tennis court, two cars, which was a lot of cars before the war, a gardener, I was cook general, and then in the next room was the house parlour maid. Actually she was also a girl who also came from Germany a few weeks after me but then went on to marry an English soldier and has never been heard of since unfortunately. And there was a kitchen maid, and there was you name it, it was a bit like 'Upstairs - Downstairs', only not quite so posh. So when war broke out all these extras left, because they went into war work. I didn't want to go into war work because I wanted to learn a trade, and eventually, a job, or a profession or whatever, I certainly didn't want to go into factories. And I stayed with the family until October '41 when I was able to start training as a nurse.

Tape 1: 32 minutes 21 seconds

SR: Could you tell me the names of the family? And what I'm interested in is, how did they treat you?

HG: Actually they were called Hunt, they were - he was a retired surgeon from the Indian Army. They treated me as was my status in the kitchen, I was, and stayed. But that changed later on as the years went by. I'll go into that later, unless you want it now.

SR: What was your daily life?

HG: My daily life was so. It was pretty hard, because as I say, I was the only employee other than the gardener, in the household. Also the daughters - they had six children altogether, the youngest was my age, he was a boy, he was still at home. The daughters were married, they came back home with their babies, because their husbands went to the war. So the household from being three people, mother father and son, it became six people or more. And they lived

a pretty normal life and by that I mean probably normal for that kind of family. We started, I started at half past five in the morning because otherwise the boiler would have gone out and that would have been a tragedy. And before breakfast I cleaned, the dining room, the study the drawing room, and then came breakfast, which had everything that their heart desired, from you know, from kedgeree to eggs and bacon and kidneys and God knows what all, every day, in the dining room. And there was a - then she came into the kitchen at about nine and discussed the lunch, which was also a three course meal. In between was morning coffee, and then afternoon tea, frequent tennis parties, with cucumber sandwiches as thin as a piece of paper. This was all my job, there was nobody else. And the gentleman as I said - the tennis court - he was very tin hat, gas mask tennis racket.

Tape 1: 35 minutes 26 seconds

So life went on as normal. So that was that. That was pretty hard going. And in the evening of course proper dinner and no washing machine, washing up. I usually managed to go to bed about eleven, and usually took a sandwich because I didn't really have time to have a meal in the day. But it was good schooling for the future.[Laughs] Nursing actually was almost ... nursing, although very hard in those days, because the hours were very long, and it was tough all the time, you had to be seen to be doing the whole time and there was time off and there were regular hours. So the hours weren't quite as long as they were in the household job. So yes, I think this stood me in good stead.

SR: And how did you feel being a maid?

HG: I just got on with it. I really didn't feel ..., on the contrary it was in spite of all this hard work and everything else, it was my home, you know. Yes, I was fortunate to cope with that.

SR: And how did you feel about the English way of living. Were there things that were strange to you, or ...?

HG: Well strange was of course the food and me being cook. I found it very strange because a lot of the food, of course, I didn't even know. For instance, one of the daughters got married just as the war broke out, and the reception was at home, and I was asked to make veal and ham pie. Well the ham didn't worry me, the veal didn't worry me, but the pie bit worried me, because that's a totally not continental thing, to serve meat and pastry. Pastry is jam or cheese, or God knows what, but certainly not meat. And it was an absolute disaster that I produced there, and somehow we survived it, I don't know, the pastry, so called, was that hard, they needed a chain saw to cut it. However, it was OK.

SR: And how did you fare with your English. Did you know English?

HG: Only school English, but somehow seemed to manage, yes.

SR: You didn't have problems?...

HG: None that I was very conscious of.

SR: Did you have any social life in this stage?

HG: No, not really, no. Except the only social life I had was that when we had an afternoon off, we used to meet, there were quite a lot of refugee girls in the area. We met in a café there.

And got to know each other but you see everybody was pretty busy with their own jobs. It wasn't that we met outside hours, except perhaps in that café now and again. But strangely enough I met a couple there, a married couple, older than myself, who were employed as cook and butler I suppose, or something like that, in a Lord's establishment, in a village a few miles away, and it turned out that this lady was a distant relative of my father's. And those two were in a very posh house, and she was a cook there too, and she was a very big lady, and she presided over her staff, which was a big staff, below stairs of course, and I used to be invited there sometimes for a meal or something, one more didn't really make a difference there. And so I used to see quite a lot of them. And there were some people, also friends of my father's, who had a guesthouse not so far away, and I used to be very friendly with their daughter and used to visit there quite often and stay with them. In fact, they became very good friends of mine. They were really my second home. And they were at my wedding and I'm still in touch with their grand-daughter who lives in Cologne now, so that was a great base for me. That's actually where I met first my parents in law, I didn't know they were going to be my parents-in-law, but I met them there, and they had a son who eventually became my husband and that puts it all together. [Laughs]

Tape 1: 41 minutes 34 seconds

SR: You were talking about the café in Surrey where actually you met your friends. Was it the kind of place like here in Finchley where all the refugees used to go?

HG: No, no, no, that was Farnham in Surrey, a very upmarket country town, and one just had tea there and if we you know happened to have the same afternoon off, two or three just happened to be there, but it wasn't a meeting place as such like Cosmo or Dorice. No, no, totally different. And occasionally we went to the cinema, which then cost thruppence or sixpence only. One did do this occasionally, as far as social life was concerned, no, not really.

SR: Did you have any cultural life then?

HG: No, not at all.

SR: Newspapers?

HG: Do you think I had time to read a newspaper? No. No.

SR: You were telling me about a letter that your father sent.

HG: Now my father sent a letter in July '39 to my employer. Written in English, very good English. My father was very versatile. He was not only a doctor, he was very musical, he played the violin and the piano. He also painted. How he did it all, God knows. And he also had as a hobby what one calls, could call a small smallholding. That is a little like a small farm with horses and geese, and goat and turkeys, all that sort of stuff, and also flower, not flower, a vegetable garden with large beds of asparagus and strawberries and fruit trees, and that was sort of a sideline, a hobby. And when I came to this country, I was used to large amounts of fruit, for instance. Also quite often my father was paid in kind, a bushel of plants or twenty pounds of cherries and of course all of this was preserved, this was all a big deal in my household, and it's something I didn't really come across in this country.

Tape 1: 44 minutes 55 seconds

But when I came to England and I really couldn't afford a half a pound of cherries that was a totally different ball game. Yes. That was another change.

SR: We were talking about the letter.

HG: Oh yes, the letter that my father wrote his appreciation and how much, how I had described the household, it seemed that it was very similar to our home, my own parental home etcetera. So that was very interesting, and the most interesting and exciting thing about it, I didn't know about this letter until about four or so years ago when I had a phone call from an English gentleman saying to me "You may not remember me, but I was a baby when I knew you and my name is Anthony". And I said "I do remember you. You were born in 1939 and this is where I was cook general". "Yes", he said. And he said "I found a letter from your father in my late grandmother's and subsequently in my late mother's belongings, and I thought you would like this letter". Well I thought this was tremendously exciting because I thought that was so nice. I mean God, I would have probably thrown it away, and I really thought - I was very, very moved by this. And he said he lives in Yorkshire, and he said he will bring this letter because he does come to London sometimes. Well he didn't, he did phone a few ... I asked him "Where did you get my address from"? Well, his mother, his grandmother rather, came to my wedding, so they knew my name, etc, they probably knew my address, but then we lost touch. And I got married in 1950, so it was a long time. And so "How did you find me"? Through the internet, he didn't bring the letter, because he was ill and this, that, and the other, then phoned me again and said do I read the Times? So I really have come up a bit from the kitchen, and so I said "Yes as a matter of fact I do". And he said "Well, in the Times there is an obituary of my father". His father was a very high-ranking military man, a Brigadier, a man who had been in *Colditz*, and there was a big obituary about this man, and Anthony said he thought I might like to read this. So I did and I've got it and - I always considered this could make a good sociological study, how one can come from the, being the maid, to the higher echelons. So anyway we had quite a few correspondence and phone calls and until about two years ago, that he rang me and said that they were having a family reunion and would I come and would I bring my daughter. So that was very exciting, and my daughter was happy to come and that was great because you know ... I didn't know how she was going to react, and she was very happy to come, so we went. This was held at one of the relatives in South London. A big thing, about seventy people. And there was a video-link to Australia, where the youngest son of my employers, the boy who was still at home at the time, lives. He couldn't come to the reunion, he was ill, he has since died, but they had a video-link to him and we all spoke to him and he replied back. And I think every single person was mentioned in person.

Tape 1: 50 minutes 16 seconds

SR: Every single person who worked in the household?

HG: No no, no, anyone who was at the party, the family. I was the only one that worked in the household. There were two ladies who were older than me. That was quite something, I was over eighty, and the old ladies were even older. So, Aunt Marie, for argument's sake, I can't remember her name, and aunt Jean, then came, "I'm so pleased Hortense is there, she is with you, she looked after us during the war". Now that was quite an honour. They did treat me like the Queen Mother. It was unbelievable. So turn, turn around, quite incredible. It was very exciting, I must say, I was very moved by that, and so was my daughter. We were exhausted

after that party. There were about seventy people there, from the old aunts, to the old cook general, to the babes in arms.

Tape 1: 51 minutes 27 seconds

SR: There, when you're a bit older, what was the equivalent between your family and the Hunt family, you worked for, that your father talked about in the letter.

HG: They were the same actually, we were the same, we became the same. I can think again, you know what I mean? After all these many years, oh yes, there was no class distinction or anything like that then. I mean they didn't have to invite me if they didn't want me to be there and be one of them. And now of course there are Christmas cards and even a present at Christmas, which is really quite wonderful, isn't it?

SR: Yes. And then comes World War Two.

HG: Yes.

SR: And where were you?

HG: When war was declared? It was a lovely sunny day. None of you know this, but it was a lovely sunny day. It was a Sunday, and I was cooking roast beef and Yorkshire pudding and peas and was podding the peas. And Mrs Hunt came in the kitchen and said, 'War, we are now at war with Germany'. And that of course was very traumatic because one knew that everything was, well, cut off then. But still work was so demanding one didn't even have time to think about it.

SR: Did it ever cross your mind to think what would happen, if the Nazis invaded, conquered Britain?

HG: No. We were very frightened when Hess landed in England. Of course that really affected, well, ... , we were very frightened then, but then it just passed, one got just - hoped one wouldn't be bombed.

SR: So until when did you work with the Hunt family?

HG: I worked until October '41. So that was really nearly two and a half years.

SR: And was there a big change in the atmosphere, in the household?

HG: Well, yes because everybody left, I was the only one left to do the work. [Laughs] Then really the work became hard, when the war broke out, because there was one instead of four people working in the household. And so it was pretty tough going. But as far as their standard of living was concerned, I don't think it really changed, at all.

Tape 1: 54 minutes 44 seconds

SR: Do you remember them listening to the news?

HG: Oh yes, but I didn't. I did eventually. Oh yes, at Christmas the Aga cooker went out, that wasn't a very good thing to happen, but we got by. I did eventually get a radio in the kitchen. I did occasionally listen to the radio. I did occasionally get Red Cross letters from my parents. It was only twenty five words and it was really nothing very much, because it couldn't be really be very much, but it was a communication.

SR: So until when were you in contact, letter-wise with your parents?

HG: I think probably about '41.

SR: Can you tell me what happened to them?

HG: Yes, my father - they were relocated let's say from Breslau, to a place called Riebnitz ,I think. And that was a camp. It was a kind of transit camp, where my father was a, was the so-called camp leader, something like that. And strangely enough, friends of mine, who I met forty years later, more than forty years later, their mother was in that camp, and apparently she wanted to go into that camp because my father was the camp leader there. So that's another connection, which is quite strange, but that's how it was. From there they went to Theresienstadt and from there to Auschwitz. And my father apparently died of typhoid in Auschwitz, but what happened to my mother and sister I don't know.

SR: Your sister didn't come to England?

HG: Well my sister was younger and - you mean the *Kindertransport*? Well I think that never entered - ,no.

SR: OK. In the Blitz where were you?

HG: In the Blitz I was in London, I think. Well yes, I was in - I started my nursing training. We weren't allowed to go into General Hospitals at that stage, we were only allowed into non general hospitals, i.e. Children's, TB, mental Hospitals. And I started my training in Queen Mary's Hospital in Carshalton, which was a Children's Hospital, for sick children. And they were long term sick children, who were there for literally years.

Tape 1: 58 minutes 20 seconds

With things like Polio, Bone TB, Rheumatic fevers, really, really long term things. And they used to be visited once a fortnight for one hour by their parents. Can you imagine? And there was one nurse on the ward at night for twenty eight children. And the bombs were going overhead. And I don't know how we survived it but we did. And the children did too, to some degree. And we used to go on duty with tin hats and masks and on the beds were red blankets. If the bombs came, the cots were covered with red blankets so they didn't get the debris. The hospital wasn't badly bombed, hardly at all, but the air-raid warnings went virtually every night.

SR: Mrs Gordon we have to stop the first tape now, and then go on.

End of Tape One.

TAPE 2.

SR: Two-shot: Hortense Gordon, on the second of July 2004, this is the second tape.

HG: Then eventually I got a permit to start nursing and I left the family in October 1941. They weren't happy to let me go. They encouraged me to stay, were going to pay me a bit more, but of course money wasn't everything and I really wanted to learn a career. And we then corresponded and they invited me to stay the weekend, and I had my meals with them in the dining room, and I was introduced as: "This is Hortense, she used to be our lady cook". So the whole system changed, and I started as a student nurse at Queen Mary's Hospital, Carshalton, which was hard. I liked the work. There were many refugee girls, because we were all in the same boat. We wanted to learn a profession, and so we had a little nucleus of friends there, but there one came across - was it anti- Semitism or was it because we were Germans? Because they didn't know the difference, from that point of view it was not very nice.

SR: What do you mean? Did you experience any problems?

HG: Yes, we had the worst rooms and were not treated very kindly by the senior staff. Not by everybody but by quite a number. We really did feel the tension. However, one just got on with it. The training lasted three years. The end result was the State Registration for Sick Children's nursing.

SR: Did you always want to be a nurse?

HG: Well in normal times I would have probably done medicine, but nursing was the nearest thing, and it was the best thing one could do without money because one had accommodation and one learned at the same time, so it was the ideal thing to undertake. And I was, of course, especially interested in these matters. And yes, it was right for me. I got an award there, I got a silver medal, which was quite prestigious at that stage, and I was there, as I said, for three years. But then things became easier. It was then 1944, the war neared an end, and we could go into General Hospital. And I started my general nursing training, in the then called St. Stephen's Hospital in Fulham Road in London.

Tape 2: 4 minutes 14 seconds

SR: I would like to go back a bit to the war. How do you recall the Blitz bombing?

HG: In Carshalton, yes. Well we were very near the Croydon Aerodrome, and we had lots and lots of air-raid warnings. I don't think we were ever bombed there, but I think it was, it must have been the beginning of '44, they suddenly decided they would evacuate the hospital. And believe it or not, we were evacuated all over the place. I myself and a group of others were evacuated to North London, to Tottenham, where the first night we were bombed. Not seriously, we weren't hurt or anything like that, but there was debris and things like that all over the show, yes.

SR: Could you tell me how was it to work in a hospital actually, training and all that?

HG: Well training was very, very tough of course, it was hard work, discipline was tremendous, hours were very long, the food was pretty awful, I'm sure not because of a

shortage of food, but because of the way it was produced and presented. So it was quite difficult.

SR: Was there a special thing that you remember with the - you were talking about the children, that you were the only nurse ... ?

HG: The children - that was in those days real, real nursing. I mean you'd - they were lying in bed forever and ever, really, really months, and they had to be fed, and they had to be washed and they had to be bed-panned and they were never allowed to do anything for themselves. That was part of the treatment because don't forget that in those days medication wasn't the way it is today. And these children, some of them were very, very difficult as well, understandably difficult, having no home life, having stayed there forever, seeing their parents once a fortnight for an hour. Gosh, only since I became a mother did I realise how deprived these poor little things must have been. They weren't all so little. They were from the age of very young, baby, to about sixteen seventeen, really, some of these were really adults in a way and very, very difficult, yes.

SR: Did you use already antibiotics at that stage?

HG: No, not in the children's hospital. Antibiotics - Penicillin was first used by us in '45. It was so precious that every drop - I was then working with children who had eye infections from birth, mainly Gonorrhoea ones, and we were then allowed to use penicillin eye drops - and every single drop had to be charted, and the drops had to be instilled I think first every ten minutes and then every twenty minutes and that sort of thing, and you had to be exact, and you can imagine how hard all this was.

Tape 2: 8 minutes 37 seconds

Oh they were really, really awful conditions. Maybe some of them even later became blind, but they really did try, and it was an enormous task. And for the first time penicillin was used. That was a very, very big event.

SR: Did you feel uncomfortable with your German accent?

HG: Not at all. I never, never really felt that, and I don't feel it even now. A lot of my friends say they're so embarrassed when people ask them where they come from. Well, why the hell does it matter? Because - I mean, even when people come from Yorkshire or from Scotland or from Wales people say "Where do you come from?" Why not? It's no shame, no I have never suffered under that, I must be unique [Laughs] I have got used to the fact that I shall never lose my accent, so there it is, I have to live with it now.

Tape 2: 9 minutes 45 seconds

SR: Can you tell me a little bit about your social life at this stage, were your friends especially refugees, or ... ?

HG: My friends were specially refugees, yes, mainly refugees. But then of course we also came to London sometimes and there was some international club somewhere behind Harrods, we used to go sometimes, so yes,

SR: Was it a club especially for refugees?

HG: No, no, no, for foreigners, foreigners. And then I had a cousin who was on Hasharah in, somewhere in Bedfordshire, so I used to go there sometimes. He eventually went to Israel, so yes, when we were, after I left Farnham, social life somewhat improved. Yes.

SR: Would you like to tell me about any friend specially, or any relationship you had ...?

HG: No I don't think there was anything very particular, nothing that was of any interest to me.

SR: So Mrs Gordon how did your career actually develop?

HG: Well I went from Carshalton - I then went as I said, and did three years training in St Stephen's Hospital, general training, I did very well there, but even in Carshalton I got - I was then awarded the Gold Medal, but not only that, I was the best nurse of the thousand in the London County Council Hospitals, which was quite an honour. And there was a sort of fan mail and a publication in the general press, and it was very exciting, yes. Looking back it was really quite something. So from then on I couldn't quite - I wasn't that keen on hospital work and decided I'd go into the community, and to study, and to become a health visitor, which ...

Tape 2: 12 minutes 28 seconds

but before I could do that I had to do my midwifery training, which I did, and I did that at Hammersmith, Du Cane Road. I did my first six months of midwifery training, because I had to, it's not because I liked Midwifery training, I didn't. Because I had - the person who trained me, and of course others as well, she was not a very kind lady, and not so much to us, but also to the mothers. You know a really tough cookie she was, and we used to say "Oh, I hope people treat you the way you're treating these women, if and when you have a baby". So that wasn't a very nice experience, but anyway I did the midwifery in order to do the health visiting course, and got a place at the first course in London, run in London University. There were many, many applicants, but I was lucky to get a place. I felt I had a good track record, so there we are. And then I worked in different parts of London as a Health Visitor, in Camden Town, in Kentish Town, in Brixton, in Cricklewood, in Hendon, etc. Until 1950, no, I stopped for a couple of years when I had my children and then I started again but only part time and I worked as a Generic Health Visitor, that means people from the cradle to the grave, or antenatal to, as it were, to the other end, which was interesting because the work changed. Originally health visiting was only for mothers and children, expectant mothers and children, including school children. And then the work changed and became generic right through the ages. And I worked as a Generic Health Visitor until the late sixties and then took a special interest in the elderly, and used to spend a day or a few hours a week in the geriatric department at Edgware General, and then a few years after that set up a scheme for liaison between the hospitals and the community. So I found out about patients, about the home, what the circumstances were, when they came into hospital. I liaised with their District Nurses, their Health Visitors, their GPs, and the other way round again. When they went home, I used to go home with the occupational therapists and the physios and see whether at home they needed adaptation. We worked as a team there and I published a paper in the Nursing Times, I think. And that was the beginning of this work they're still doing now. They're still doing this liaison work. It's a bit more sophisticated and all that, but I started it off at that time, in nineteen - I think - eighty something. So that was very interesting. And then they made me retire, it was obviously retiring age, and I didn't particularly want to because - for various reasons. For one thing I felt capable, and I liked the work, secondly also I needed to earn at

that particular time, still. So I wanted to continue but I couldn't. So end of story. I had been retired and I was called back a week after I went home and was asked could I do a locum, OK. So then about three weeks after that they called me back and said could I do locum?

Tape 2: 17 minutes 29 seconds

And I said "Look, make up your minds. Do you need me or don't you? Because if you need me and you can give me work until I'm sixty five, I can freeze my state retirement and pension". I could no longer freeze my National Health Service Superannuation, because you see they cut me off there, but I could freeze the State and Government pension, which makes quite a difference. So they said "Oh yes, we can give you work till you're sixty five". So I stayed until I was sixty five. And then quite by chance I saw an advertisement in one of the nursing papers, whilst in fact I was going to give my notice in, official notice to my superior, and this was a local group practice required a medical records officer. However, it was full time but it was local. But I thought nothing ventured, nothing gained, I will apply. And to my great surprise, they asked me to come for an interview. The job was full time. I didn't really want to do a job full time. I wasn't doing a job at full time before. But I went for the interview and I said - it was a group practice, several doctors and various staff interviewing me, and before I ever started the interview - I said "Would you consider this part-time"? And they said no they couldn't. I understood why they couldn't afterwards, when they explained it, but they continued the interview. And then they showed me round the building. And I was in sixes and sevens. I thought what am I going to do if they offer me this job, you know? So I went. The next morning at nine o'clock they offered me the job. So I thought 'Why not'? And they said, "It's only for a year". It had to be done in a year because it was being funded for a year and the work that had to be done, had to be completed in a year. OK. I did it. It was completed. But when it was completed everybody realised this just wasn't going to give up today, so we're back in the same state that we were before, before I ever started this job. It was a new job, so they said would I stay? I said I would stay. But I would not now stay full-time, and I didn't think it needed full time. So they said OK how much would you be willing to do? I said three days a week. And I managed to do it in three days a week. It was hard work, it was concentrated work, but it was worth it. I enjoyed it no end, and did it until I was - when I was 77 I said to them I think it was time to stop working. It was beginning to get almost indecent! So they said "Oh well". I said "I won't let you down, but if you find somebody to fill the job, I'll wait until then, but let's say three months". And this was August, August 97. No it wasn't August, it was April 97. So nothing happened, nobody was employed, nobody came for interviews.

Tape 2: 21 minutes 22 seconds

And in August '97 one of the senior partners said, "When I come back from my holiday we'll think about it". So I said, "Well shall we make it the first of October"? So, OK we agreed on the first of October. And on the 21st of October I had a heart attack. Nothing to do - it wasn't the excitement that I had to retire, it was just one of those things. So I left work, but I was going to leave anyway on the first of October so that was fine.

SR: You were very ambitious. Do you think there is any connection between the fact that you were a refugee and the feeling of ambition?

HG: No. I don't honestly think so, it was just me. It wasn't so much ambition. I think it was much more. I needed to work. I worked all my married life. I enjoyed the work, I shared it to the best of my ability with my domestic duties, in fact, it helped me. I think it kept me sane.

Tape 2: 22 minutes 42 seconds

SR: I want to go back a bit to your private life now. You started telling me that you met your husband's parents somewhere. Can you tell me the story again please?

HG: Well I met my husband's parents at friends of mine, friends of my own parents, and they invited me. My husband's parents I think knew - if they didn't know my parents they knew of them. And they invited me to my husband's brother's wedding. And that's where I met my husband and eventually married him.

SR: So from where were your husband's parents?

HG: They were from Hildesheim and lived in Cambridge at the time.

SR: And what were their names please?

HG: Gordon. They were Gordon actually. They never changed their names. The story goes, because a lot of people change their names, all kinds of names, changed their names to Gordon and suddenly became English. But the Gordons were always Gordon, and the story went that the Duke of Gordon and Richmond, who lived in Scotland, went to Russia, I don't know when, and became involved with Jewish people, and was - that is a legend maybe - and was very taken with Jewish ... and became Jewish. And that was apparently where the Gordons originated from. That's how the story goes and we were always Gordon.

SR: So you were telling me that you met him at a wedding.

HG: At his brother's wedding.

SR: At his brother's. Was it love at first sight?

HG: Yes, I could say that, yes.

SR: And where did you get married?

HG: We got married at the West London Synagogue.

SR: And who came?

HG: Of course the friends where we met them, who were friends of my parents - he gave me away - his daughter and son in law, and many friends. By that time I had many friends, and they came. And we had a service and a tea at the West London Synagogue.

SR: So who were your friends then?

HG: Many I still have now, many have died now, but they were mainly refugees.

SR: And in what language did you speak?

HG: Always English. We speak always English, yes.

SR: Always English?

HG: Yes. I'm not saying that we never speak German, but we did always speak English. Don't forget, we were all living and working in English surroundings, so English became much more fluent in a way than the German.

SR: Yes. And could you tell us a bit about the setting here in London, where did you live?

HG: When we got married?

SR: Yes.

HG: Well first of all we had half a flat in West End Lane and then we tried finding somewhere else to live and the landlady, the lady who owned the other part of the flat, couldn't have any children and I was expecting Yvonne, and so we had to move somewhere else. And we found a flat, a very nice flat, also furnished, in Finchley, and then fortunately for us the people who owned that house and sublet were expecting the baby and wanted the whole flat. So we had to do something and so we managed to buy this house, scraping together the deposit and whatever. It was very neglected at the time and all this, but that's what we did and it was really a blessing. And I've lived here ever since. I've lived here since 1955.

Tape 2: 27 minutes 4 seconds

SR: Do you remember Finchley Road in these years?

HG: Oh goodness, yes. Finchley Road and John Barnes, and Cosmo, of course, and my parents-in-law lived in Cambridge then, in Bury St Edmunds. My father in law was a doctor too, and he eventually got a job at the hospital in Bury St Edmunds. And so when they came to London we would go to Cosmo. Oh yes, Swiss Cottage was the haunt. Yes.

SR: What was so special actually? Everyone says about their experience in the Cosmo. Can you explain?

HG: What was special? Well one met the people from home, whether one knew them or not. The food of course was a great attraction.

SR: What did you have there?

HG: What did we have there? [Laughs] Sauerkraut and Red Cabbage all these sorts of things, which one, of course, cooked for oneself in one's own home, but yes... there was certainly a feeling, maybe a feeling of togetherness.

SR: Do you remember any outstanding refugee people in the area?

HG: I didn't meet any outstanding refugee people, I don't think. That's why I was a bit hesitant to offer myself for this, because as well these are important people, people like Weinstock and Professor Krebs, who was a Nobel Prize Winner. Actually he knew my parents-in-law. They came from the same place. And so there were some very important people. I was only one of the ordinary people but I thought 'Well I've done something'.

SR: Actually you spent your life, your working life with the English in English surroundings, and social life more with Did you feel any hostility of not being English?

HG: No. Never.

Tape 2: 30 minutes 4 seconds

SR: And could you tell me a bit about the way you brought up your children?

HG: Yvonne was born in '54. She went to Kindergarten, and to the local primary school, which was Wessex Garden, over the road, which was very good primary school in those days. There were all a lot - people around here have changed - but there were a lot of refugees in the area, children as well, and Yvonne is still friendly, since pre-school days, she still has very close friends, which is something I'm really very happy about. Because I always felt I would like my children to have life-long friends. It's not that I pushed it, but I had that wish, and actually it materialised, because Yvonne's friends from her own school days, and her sister's friends are still her friends, which I think is great, especially since we are pretty isolated, and very small family, no family now, so that pleases me no end. And I'm very friendly with them as well, with the younger generation. They're very, they're very nice to me, and invite me to their parties, and you know they come here, so that's lovely.

SR: So she went to Wessex Gardens as a primary school?

HG: Yes. And then she went to Hendon County Grammar, it was a Grammar school at the time, and then she went to Leicester University. And she did a combined arts degree. So that was Yvonne. Monica was born in '56, she was also at Wessex Gardens, and she became ill at the age of 9 when she developed inflammatory bowel disease and was very ill for many years, had lots of hospitalisations, and I mean lots. After forty we didn't count anymore. Lots of major operations, but she was a very independent girl, lost a lot of schooling, had home tuition. She was also ambitious, and wanted to - so she had home tuition from the local Education Authority and private lessons, which we paid for to keep her going, but when she was 15 she refused to go back to school, because they wanted to put her down a year. It was very difficult to find schooling for her because she wasn't old enough to go into further education, that was sixteen, and she wouldn't have been sixteen until the beginning of October, so they wouldn't take her for that year. However, I did find a part-time course for her at a further education college, which allowed her to learn, because she wanted to learn. So I used to take her to Hatch End every morning, there was a College that took her part time. So she did a bit there, and then she became sixteen and she was very artistic, and she got a place at, it was then called Kingsbury College, and there was an arts and crafts and general studies course, and we managed to get her in there. She wasn't too ill then, I suppose she had a bit of... but in between she had hospitalisation and all these things. And then she got a place on a foundation course at St Martin's School of Art for one year, and she was determined to do a Fine Arts Degree and she got a place in Liverpool, which didn't last I'm afraid. She couldn't, she was too ill, and that was that. And then she was fed up with the medics, and she was fed up, and Yvonne was fed up with the medics, and also said they didn't do anything for her, and that's how it was. And so the girls between them found the anthroposophical people, the Rudolf Steiner ..., the Park Atwood. Have you heard of Park Atwood?

SR: No.

HG: Well, Park Atwood was what they called a Therapeutic Community and in those days the state paid for this. And that was good, because I mean there was no way we could have afforded this. And Monica was there, for on and off, a couple of years. They were very supportive to her, she was - one thing about them is that they did combine the anthroposophical and the medical treatment. Because that was very important that they recognised, that when their skills finished and other's were perhaps more important, so that was fine, there were medical doctors there. There was a special interest in homeopathy and anthroposophy and they were really great and she liked being there. She stayed in that place for a while and then lived out, but was still under their care. And that was good. Monica was very determined and independent and lived independently. She wasn't going to live with her parents when she could manage otherwise. So she used to come here when she was post-operative, or whenever, and then off she went again to do her own thing. She was very popular. She was very popular by everybody, friends, doctors, nurses. She was an easy patient and would never inconvenience anybody. She was a great girl.

Tape 2: 37 minutes 35 seconds

Then it was, she was diagnosed, later on I think I don't know when it was, about the eighties, that she also had a heart, a congenital, well, a, not a congenital, a generic heart condition, and actually that's what she died of in the end. But you were talking about me working all my life. Yes, it was pretty hard working all my life but it kept me sane, you know. Work in the morning, go to the hospital at lunchtime, come home when Yvonne came back from school, went to the hospital again in the evening, it was tough, but it sort of kept my mind occupied with other things as well.

SR: At what age did she die?

HG: 34. She was ill 25 years.

SR: She was actually doing art?

HG: Well she was, she never had a job. Because she was never well enough to sustain that, but the art was very good for her it helped her in every way.

SR: Did she ever have an exhibition?

HG: Yes she had an exhibition. As I said, a posthumous exhibition in Stourbridge and she had exhibited at an art fair and at Lauderdale House, so she did actually, do things. Yes, and she had lots of friends and was well liked. With Yvonne they were very close, and for Yvonne then to be left on her own was quite something, for both of us. And then her father left us in nineteen seventy something and married again and that was all very, very difficult. But then he became ill, well he's been ill for a long time, but he became - in November last year he had a stroke and lost his speech and eventually died in May, just a few weeks ago.

Tape 2: 40 minutes 12 seconds

So that's the story of me life, but just one more thing to say, last year, at the end of my career and late in life, I was invited to the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace, and that's, I think, the end of my story.

SR: We were speaking of the way you brought up your children. Did you speak with them in German?

HG: No, now there's a special reason for that actually, I tell you. No, we did not speak amongst ourselves in German. We did not speak German and my husband always felt very strongly. I didn't feel so strongly but I accepted it without a murmur. English is the first language, end of story. And one day we decided, I think Yvonne must have been about five, perhaps it would be a good idea to speak German. And they came home from school, and we greeted them in German. She said "We're English, you're German". That was the end of that but she did do German in school, she did do German A-levels, she did do German at University, she speaks much more German now than she used to and - you know it's changed.

SR: How do you think your refugee experience influenced the way you brought your children up?

HG: I don't think it influenced us that much. I know there is this big thing. Yvonne belongs to the second generation and I used to read ... It has changed now, I think they changed their attitude, their attitude some years ago how the poor little things have suffered from their parents' background. Well I never accepted that for myself, I do feel we did the best we could for the children; we didn't hark back upon our experiences at all, perhaps even too little. I do look back now and I'm able to analyse things now and I do think we probably did too little. But as I said before I think one wanted to protect them and we didn't think it was actually relevant. So, no, I don't honestly think my children particularly suffered from our background. Maybe they suffered because their father was very disturbed through the background and did not live a full life, as good as he could have done, because he was a very intelligent and well-educated person, so that affected ...but I think on the whole we did the best we could and I do not think they really suffered. And having talked about it with my daughter now only in the latter years, she does not seem to admit to having suffered through this, so I can't do more than that.

Tape 2: 44 minutes 0 seconds

SR: Would you like to describe a little bit more your ex-husband?

HG: Yes, he actually suffered from his upbringing which was pretty Prussian like a lot of us were, but some of us got over it a bit better than others. He also was physically attacked by the Nazis, he was sent off to France at a moment's notice. He felt very hard done by all his life, which inhibited his progress. I think that's it in a nutshell. And then he married again, he thought the grass was going to be greener on the other side. It wasn't at all green, he still had a very good relation with me, I was still the Mummy, but not that close with the children when they - not close at all with the children when they grew up, he couldn't cope with that. He was fantastic when they were babies but he couldn't cope with them being people in their own right. So that was quite difficult but he was a good man, now one may say that now he's dead but I've said that always, "Children, he was just damaged through the experiences", and I was fortunate that hopefully I wasn't too damaged.

Tape 2: 45 minutes 53 seconds

SR: Did he want to bring up the children the way he was brought up?

HG: No, on the contrary, totally the opposite. No, not at all.

SR: Did you ever go back to Germany?

HG: Yes but not to where I came from because that's Poland now. Strangely enough Yvonne has a girl friend whose partner is from Poland, a young Polish man. And he sometimes goes there and last week sent a map of that part of the world where I came from over to me, which we studied, but we couldn't understand a single word, but Yvonne found on the internet a map I think. She told me that a couple of days ago on the phone, where the old and the new names are you know, sort of listed, and she said "I've got it on the computer", so she'll see if she can find it. So we're going back into this just a little bit now, like I think a lot of people do. Some people have never accepted being - living in England - British, all that sort of thing being in our country, but we have, and now we're looking back upon the roots. She's very interested, she brought me this map, and looked it up on the internet, coming here tomorrow I think, to see if we can find it here, and all that sort of thing. So we haven't forgotten it and we haven't made a total line underneath it, but this is the way we've lived our life.

SR: You were telling me that you went to Germany twice?

HG: Yes we went in 1953 when my parents in law went with us, because they got, I think, restitution and they went to their home town with us. And I went three years ago with a friend who was invited to Germany, she's a widow, her children couldn't come and she asked me would I accompany her, and I went with her. So we - that's when I went back and it does not worry me. I'm not one to, "Never would I put a foot in it", no, I'm not that person.

SR: Did you try to meet anyone from your past?

Tape 2: 48 minutes 40 seconds

HG: There was no one. There really was nobody at all from my past. Nobody at all, that's why I'm so happy that the children had friends, and Yvonne has friends now, and really they're life long friends, they've been friends since the age of two. So - and close friends, very supportive to one another in their joys and problem times, so that's great, they really are life-long friends. That's good.

SR: I'd like to speak with you about your refugee experience. How different do you think your life would have been, if you had stayed in Germany?

HG: Oh it would have been incredibly different, I would have thought. And I would have thought that probably one would have - first of all I would have finished my schooling, which I didn't. I didn't finish my schooling in Germany, I left it at sixteen which was GCSE kind of level, and I would have finished my schooling and I probably would have done medicine, and one would have remained in the circles that one parents were in. It's difficult to say, one can never tell, but

SR: Are you part of any refugee association?

HG: No, I wasn't actually. I only joined the AJR in recent years. That doesn't mean I wasn't friends with refugees. I told you I was, but I didn't and I when I realised that my daughter was a member of the second generation, I thought the least I can do as a mother is be a member of

the first. And that's how I joined and in a way, I'm not really involved with them because I don't do any voluntary work for them, because I do voluntary work for the B'nai Brith, the League of Jewish women, and also, that's enough, but I couldn't do anymore, but I do of course somehow go to their meetings. I went to their AGM a few weeks ago. So yes, I am involved in a certain way but in a loose sort of way.

SR: Do you go to any synagogue?

HG: No. I am Jewish but not religious. That's it. And so, of course, are also my children, because we're fully conscious of being Jewish but we're not religious at all. I wasn't at home, and so this is - this is us.

SR: If I asked to you to define yourself, if you're British, if you're British Jewish if you're German.

HG: No, I'm certainly not German. I think I'm British-Jewish, yes. I could say that.

SR: So you actually see Judaism as a culture, as a cultural ...?

HG: Yes, absolutely, yes.

SR: Do you think it's a bit more difficult for women to be refugees than men?

HG: That I don't know because had no contact with men at that time at all. My friends were all girls, one or two got married to Englishmen. I'm talking about many years ago now. I couldn't say.

SR: You don't think that gender has anything ...?

HG: Whether I have found it more difficult professionally, I don't know, no I couldn't say. I think altogether it is easier for women to adapt I think.

SR: And why do you think your daughter had wanted to go to the second generation. What do you think led her ...?

Tape 2: 53 minutes 58 seconds

HG: That's very interesting. I don't, no, I don't really know. I was very pleased she did. I must say, I was pleased she did, but we never really talked about it. She said she belonged to Second Generation, she showed me the journal, the 'Voices', and she'd also done some work for them. She'd written articles and reviews, we went together to the - they had a conference or something. A few - yes, when my car was towed away, yes - a year and a half ago, and she asked me to go with her then. So I, yes, I was pleased about it because I was pleased that her background was important to her.

Tape 2: 54 minutes 56 seconds

SR: And what is your connection today with the German language. Do you read German?

HG: Not at all. I do not read German. I speak German of course, some of my friends speak German, but only because now and again we speak German. I do not like reading German, I find that now I have no need to write German letters, because all this restitution business is finished, but I found it was quite difficult to cope with that. I can write an English letter much, much better than a German. I'm much more fluent in the English, although I have the accent.

SR: And you also don't read in English German literature?

HG: No. No.

SR: Is there anything you would like to say about your life or about life in general to someone who is going to see this tape?

HG: My life - I found there has been a lot of difficulty and hardship in my life, and hard work and everything else, but I've learned from everything, and I think in the long run it's stood me in good stead. I really don't regret any periods of my life or feel hard done by or whatever, and that's the honest truth.

SR: Is there anything you would like to talk about or ...?

HG: I really think I've covered pretty well everything. I cannot think of anything more.

SR: Before the document part I would like to thank you for being willing to be interviewed.

HG: Well thank you, thank you. I did feel I have a contribution hopefully, just another aspect of how life has been for a refugee. In the ordinary sort of way, without being outstanding but I hope it will be of interest to people who will be involved with it.

SR: OK now, we'll stop now for the second tape before we go to the documents.

Tape 2: 57 minutes 39 seconds

END OF TAPE TWO

TAPE 3 (Photos and Documents)

SR: This is the beginning of tape three. I am conducting an interview with Hortense Gordon, on the 3rd of July, 2004. My name is Sharon Rapoport.

SR: Mrs Gordon could you please tell me about the document you are about to read?

HG: This letter was written by my father to my employer, on the 26th of July 1939 when I'd been there six weeks. This letter has been found in about 1999 by the grandson of my employer who kindly sent it to me. And this is how it reads:

Dear Madam,

We are sincerely pleased by Hortense's report, who feels so happy in your charming home. Ever and ever she repeats that your endeavour, in such an amiable way, to

replace her native country and parents' house. Since her friend arrived she's totally delighted for being enabled to have a chat together about anything they are interested in. May I hope that my daughter performs her duties at your fullest convenience and satisfaction? She's sure to do all work you want, like Ursula who will try to do so. We were reported about your lovely house and garden, and as we owned a similar property, we are glad that the girls are allowed to enjoy it, in the nice surroundings of your residence. First of all I envy all people who have the chance of hunting and fishing, these things being a favourite sideline of mine. My wife being a well-known dog breeder is a great deal interested in your kennelling, and although my daughter doesn't know the size of your dogs and the race of them and gave only a slight description, she supposes you own a black Bernardine and a black tan terrier. I should like to know whether she's right. I'm aware of the fact that you speak German fluently, as I understood by Hortense. Nevertheless I prefer to send you an English letter, being desirous to exercise my insignificant skill of this language whenever I have the opportunity to do so. May I ask you to remember me to your husband and family, with kind regards on behalf of my wife too, believe me. Sincerely yours, Georg Heidenfeld.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 9 seconds

SR: When was this written?

HG: On the 27th of July 1939. Funny thing is, I was not aware that these people spoke German. Also interesting.

Tape 3: 3 minutes 37 seconds

Shots of letter.

Tape 3: 4 minutes 4 seconds

This is my father, taken somewhere in the 1930s. He was quite a tall man, very versatile. Professionally he was a doctor, but he had a lot of sidelines, he was very musical, he painted, he liked growing things. We had this small miniature farmyard and country garden. There was a lot going on in our house all the time.

His full name was Georg Heidenfeld, he was born in 1891. And he died in Auschwitz.

SR: Could you please tell me about this picture?

Tape 3: 5 minutes 30 seconds

This photograph is of my mother, when I was probably a few months old. My mother was born in 1899. She was a petite person, she was known as a very beautiful woman in Breslau. Everybody apparently knew her, and knew how good looking she was.

Tape 3: 6 minutes 48 seconds

HG: My little sister and myself. We were really not very alike, but there is an extraordinary likeness between us two and my two children, quite strange but very, very noticeable.

SR: When was this photograph taken?

HG: I think probably 1927 I would think, yes.

SR: Could you tell me the name again?

HG: My sister's name was Beate Heidenfeld, our family name was Heidenfeld.

Tape 3: 7 minutes 54 seconds

This photograph is of my parental home. It's a very large house, 20 rooms. My father's practice was in this house, and it took up a number of rooms, waiting rooms, consulting rooms, and various other offices and things. The children, my sister and I and our nanny had our own little suite, and there were some large reception rooms because there were lots of parties in our home. There was a music room and a grand piano and a library with several hundred books. [HG Pauses]

SR: So you were saying about different kinds of rooms?

HG: Yes, the huge basement with even central heating in those days and a garden and a huge kitchen so it was a very substantial house and home.

SR: And who are the people in front of the house?

HG: Well I can't really remember. The little girl may have been me.

SR: And in what street was it? There is a sign there.

HG: No that is the sign of Dr Georg Heidenfeld, *Praktischer Arzt*. It's not the street. That was in Kant where we lived.

SR: And when was the picture taken?

HG: The picture must have been taken also in the late twenties.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 0 second

HG: This is a picture taken in my primary school in 1929, the whole class. I can't remember any single one of them, except the name of the teacher, *Fräulein Lehmann*. I sit right in front of the teacher, short haircut, it was the fashion then. That's all.

Tape 3: 10 minutes 41 seconds

This is the house of my employer in Farnham in Surrey, a beautiful house in very large grounds, lots of rooms, tennis court, two cars, and very beautiful as you can see in the picture. After war broke out and all the other staff left, I was the head cook and bottle washer, who kept the household going. I think it was taken in 1939.

Tape 3: 11 minutes 43 seconds

HG: This is the wedding of the youngest daughter of the family in September 1939 in their garden. They had the reception in the house and I prepared the reception which wasn't actually a total success because I wasn't familiar with English food. The Hunt Family yes.

Tape 3: 12 minutes 21 seconds

HG: This is Mr Hunt at one of the Sunday afternoon tennis parties in the war, with the St Bernard dog, tin hat, gas mask and tennis racket. These afternoons took place quite often.

Tape 3: 12 minutes 56 seconds

This photograph shows the presentation in 1947 of the Gold Medal, which I earned as the best nurse of a thousand in the London County Council Hospitals. It was held at County Hall in London. It was a very exciting moment.

Tape 3: 13 minutes 39 seconds

Gold Medal.

Tape 3: 14 minutes 2 seconds

I was interviewed by the Evening News when they heard about this award. They wrote a little article about me. At the time I was doing private nursing looking after a baby whose parents had gone away on holiday, and they came and took me and this baby, who is there.

The date was 1947 I think.

Tape 3: 14 minutes 58 seconds

This is my wedding at the West London Synagogue on the 12th of March 1950.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 18 seconds

This photograph was taken outside our house in 1966, myself, Yvonne and Monica in front of our first car, a Morris minor.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 33 seconds

This is a photograph of my eldest daughter Yvonne taken in 2003.

Tape 3: 15 minutes 53 seconds

This photograph was taken in early December 1990 of my late daughter Monica. She sadly died two weeks later.

Tape 3: 16 minutes 23 seconds

Monica lived in Stourbridge in the West Midlands, and her friends in Stourbridge. Lots of whom were artists, had an exhibition in Stourbridge, a public exhibition, where they exhibited lots of Monica's pictures, and had this little notice by her pictures. That was in '91 I think.

Tape 3: 17 minutes 49 seconds

This is one of Monica's drawings. She was very good with colour and liked the delicate abstract drawings that she did, which gave her a lot of satisfaction. This probably was about '87.

Tape 3: 17 minutes 49 seconds

This is one of Monica's batiks, she made many of them. She had a very good teacher in the latter years of the drawing pictures she did many, many batiks and took lessons and classes and did some very excellent batiks, which she exhibited at Lauderdale House at one time and of course the exhibition at Stourbridge.

Tape 3: 18 minutes 31 seconds

This is one of Yvonne's drawings. She did quite a lot of drawings. Unfortunately this was not encouraged at her school. And she doesn't do very much of it now, but it's one of the very nice ones, and I look at it with great pleasure.

SR: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW.