IMPORTANT

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV279
NAME: Mala Tribich
DATE: 5 September 2023
LOCATION: London
INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[00:00:00]
Today is the 5th of September 2023 and we are conducting an interview with Mrs. Mala Tribich. My name is Bea Lewkowicz and we are in London. Can you please tell me your name?

Mala Tribich.

And what was your maiden name?

Mala Helfgott.

And when and where were you born, please?

I was born in Poland, the time – the town named Piotrków, the full name is Piotrków Trybunalski but it seems such a mouthful full for other people. But it is only Piotrków, – it was like Tribunal–ski. So Piotrków Trybunalski is the proper Polish name. **[0:00:50]**

And which year were you born?

I was born at the end of 1930.

Thank you, Mala. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for the AJR Refugee Voices Archive. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background, please?

Well, I was one of three children, the middle one, with a younger sister, Lusia, and an older brother, Ben. And we were moderately religious, just moderately, and before the war, I had a very happy life. I had aunts and uncles, my surname being then Helfgott. We had two Helfgott families and two Klein families – that's my mother's maiden name, and – 'cos her two brothers lived in Piotrków. They were born elsewhere in Poland but they lived in Piotrków. So, we were like four families that were related, which was rather nice, with cousins. But we were strangely enough the only family who had three children, were three siblings. **[00:02:02]** But all the others were just single children. Because I think it became sort of fashionable to have just one child. I don't know. I wasn't up to – if in those days to sort of enquire or know why. But all the others had one each. Mind you, one of them was very young. She was I think two when the war broke out, so there may have been more sort of later on.

And how did your parents get to Piotrków? Who was – was your mother from there or –

No, neither of my parents are from Piotrków. I don't know why they chose Piotrków but they obviously chose to live there. But there were actually four related families, so that's interesting because they also chose to live there. My- I don't know why they chose to live there. But what was –

Did they work together? Did they work together?

No, they were in the same kind of business, strangely enough, all of them. But they didn't work together because they were in the flour mill business. Well, in the flour business, but they actually had mills, flour mills. So, my two uncles, the Klein uncles, my mother's family, they were the owners, part-owners, of a very large and very modern mill in those days. It was electric. So, I have heard it sort of *en passant* and I've sort of worked out that obviously in those days there weren't that many electrical mills or gadgets or anything like that. So, they were partners in the other mill, apparently small partners but they had a comfortable living.

[00:04:10] And my father was – had a different mill with his brother and another man, a different – it was all in Piotrków but they weren't near one another. Obviously, there must have been a big demand for flour.

And do you know, Mala, how your parents met or where they got married or a little bit about-

I have no idea about that at all but I gather that probably in those days there would be someone who knew someone who'd introduce them, as they call it in Yiddish, a *shidduch*. I think it might have been but I'm not sure.

And what about your grandparents? Did you meet them still? Were they alive when you were born?

They were alive and I remember – but one died when I was five and I still have a memory of her sitting on the doorstep, of all places [laughs] and we were chatting. But I was five years old and – when she died.

What was her name? Do you remember her name?

I can't remember her name.

Was it your mother's mother or –

My mother's mother, yes.

And the other three grandparents?

Oh, the others, they lived, they lived in a place called Pabianice. There'll be a lot of hesitations because I'm doing it too late in life [laughs].

That's absolutely fine.

They lived in a place called Pabianice, which was a lovely town, it was bigger than Piotrków, my town. **[00:06:01]** And I know that they had trams. We didn't have trams. And we didn't see a lot of them because they were in another town, or for that matter, the other grandparents, my mother's parents, were also in another town but we used to go there every year for – during our summer holidays. And we would stay two weeks, maybe three, I don't know. I have to sort of judge the timing but I – we stayed what seemed like a – quite a long time during the holidays. But we also, in that town there was also – one of my mother's sisters lived in that town. Their name was Hildesheim and they had four children. One of them was Mala, my namesake, and there were two boys and two girls and we used to play with them a lot. And there was the river Warta going through that town – not through the town but sort of outside the town. And we used to go to the river very often and we – I remember always having a lovely time when we went during our holidays in the summer and spending with my cousins and aunts.

What was the name of the place? What town was that?

That was called Sieradz.

So, the grandparents lived there and your mum's sister?

Yes, one of her sisters.

And just tell me, what are your first memory of growing up or –

I can't think of any first memories really. They're just memories. I don't know in which order they came. But I don't have a specific first memory but I have lots of memories of my childhood in Piotrków and my school and going to friends for tea and playing with friends and then they coming to us. **[00:08:17]** I have very happy memories of my childhood.

And can you describe the town a little bit or the village? How many people lived there?

Well, it was a town, a very important town. It's very old. Yeah, I have – yeah, the total – the population in those days was 55,000, of which 15,000 were Jewish. And it was a very old – if I tell you it was older than America then it gives you [laughs] some scale. I think America progressed a bit faster than Piotrków did but it was an important town because the first tribunal took place there, the first military tribunal, and that's why they call it Piotrków Trybunalski, because there's another Piotrków without the Trybunalski bit.

A tribunal of what?

I don't know. I know it was a military tribunal but I don't know anything about the tribunal itself. And it was a very pretty town. I remember the architecture, I remember the – maybe I'm more aware of architecture now but no, I remember it as – I remember the buildings and lots of sort of green squares. There was one main square but the green – the sort of greenery, the buildings, were really from the architectural point of view, very interesting. **[00:10:01]** They were the building of that period. And I just have very happy memories and everything about it was really nice. Mind you, having said that, there was an area rather like the East End here. Before, you know, well, now as well, the East End's changed but the sort of pre-war East End in London. There was an area like that, where a lot of Jewish people lived, a lot of shops and traders and it wasn't a very – the architecture wasn't anything to write home about. But we lived – the street we lived in was really a beautiful street, very wide. Just to give you an idea, that now when I go back and I see it, they have got parking on both sides of the street at an angle, so that takes a little more space than a straight one, straight car. But they've got that on both sides and it's still a wide street to drive through. It was – some of the streets were really lovely.

And what was the name of your street?

Yes, *aleja trzeciego maja* [boulevard of May 3rd – refers to the 3 May constitution]. It means it's sort of – I don't know how to describe – how to translate *aleja* but there must be something in French –

Avenue? Avenue?

No, it was more than an avenue. An avenue doesn't have any special features, does it? This was a very – I think there is a different – what would you call those places in France's streets? They have got something more than just – I don't know. I haven't gone into it but *aleja* meant a sort of –

Boulevard?

Boulevard, that's it. **[00:12:03]** I think that'll be the nearest, yeah. So, it – and I remember it as – well, actually looking back on it I'm now judging it maybe with a different eye but my memories are of a very lovely place.

Did you live in a house or in a flat or –

We always lived in flats because there were no houses in towns. Any houses that were there were outside town or in villages but –

Yeah. So, can you tell me a little bit about the building or what you remember from the apartment?

Well, it was a – actually I can tell you because it was – you would probably consider it very unusual. This may have been the case on the Continent in many different countries but in our town the buildings, the blocks of flats which were in town, they were built around a courtyard and there was a gate to drive in. I mean when I say drive in, there weren't many cars but those gates were closed at night and we had, what are they called? Like a janitor, and it would be closed at eleven and if anybody came home late, they had to ring the bell and he came out and let them in and no doubt if there was tipping. I don't know about that, I'm just imagining. And so the block was a sort of oval shape round a courtyard and it was very nice. But if you see it today it's in a terrible state, so unless they have some nice photographs, you could never imagine how nice it was. **[00:14:05]**

And which floor did you live on?

In that one we lived on the ground floor but it was like a raised ground floor, so we did have to go up some steps to the landing and we had a flat there. It overlooked the – but some of them must have overlooked the – maybe the *aleja* or because there were at least three floors but I'm not sure, there may have been four. I really can't remember.

And who lived – do you remember some of the other people who lived there? Was it Jews, non-Jews? Was it mixed, was it –

It was mixed. It was very mixed. There was a lot of non-Jews, a lot of Jews. I know that the – there was one family who had a very – quite an important business. It was- I can't think of the name now. They did import and export and they had an office there. But their flat [coughs] – excuse me [coughs] – I have some water. Their flat stretched over the entrance, which was a big entrance, a drive-in, and it went – sort of had a few – had a few rooms in – on one side, a few on the other one, and right across the gate and it was very big, but because they had an office there as well. I don't suppose there were any regulations in those days [laughs]. **[00:16:00]** But – and they had staff and they had a sort – a family where the grown-ups, was part grown-up and – but one of their children, her name was [Rutha], she was a friend of mine. She was my contemporary, so she was like the baby in the family, so I went up there quite often and it was a beautiful flat, but further on, where the office is.

And did you share a room with your sister or your brother or – how –

Yes, I did, I shared my room with my sister.

And what sort of social circles did your parents have? What, you know, what – were they mostly with the family or –

I don't really know. I don't remember because it was so long ago, it's a lifetime ago, and I think all the lifestyle and the standards and the availability [sound of phone ringtone] of things that we have now, you can't compare with what- that is my phone but I won't bother with it.

[Break in recording]

We were talking about your building.

Yes. So, the building I have described their flat, my friend's flat but of course, it contained an office **[00:17:39]** and it was very big. But the flat itself was big and the office was the other half. I'd say it is probably another flat that they joined up. So yes, I have very pleasant memories of my hometown.

And did you, when you went to school was it near where you lived?

Yes, it was in fact on the same street but much – it was quite a long avenue or boulevard or – so it was at the other end, it was near the park, yes. **[00:18:08]**

And tell us a little bit about the school and what can you remember from starting school?

Well, yes, actually, it's quite an interesting story because I started a year early. We used to start school at the age of seven and I think they still do on the Continent. And when my mother went to register my brother, there was only a year – less than a year between us, so when she took him to be registered, she took me with, not for any reason. Maybe she didn't have anyone to leave me with but I mean she left my sister with someone. At one time we had a maid. It may have been that time. So when the headmaster, who was doing- subscribing my brother – it's not subscribing is it?

Enrolling?

Enrolling my brother [coughs]. He said to my mother, what about her? And my mother said, well, she's got another year, I'll bring her back next year. And the headmaster suggested that I start that year but not properly, I'll be just like an onlooker, I'd do what I do and next year I'll start properly. And I did, I started, and I was doing everything the others were doing. Maybe not as well, I don't know, but I passed at the end of the year. Because we didn't automatically

go through to the next year like they do in this country. We had to pass an exam and if you didn't pass you were held back a year. Well, I passed it, despite the fact that I didn't really expect to because I wasn't the right age. **[00:20:04]** But, so I was a year ahead and that's the reason I did three years of schooling – before the war started. It would otherwise have been only two years.

And were you together with Ben? Were you together?

Yes, in the same school. Yeah.

And what were – were there Jewish children, non-Jewish children? What was the percentage there of – do you remember?

Well, do you know, it's very strange but it was Ben who remembers so much more than I did. I thought it was just an ordinary school. I wasn't aware that apparently all the children were Jewish. But I wasn't aware of that. I had no idea till Ben told me all those years later. To me it was just my school and my –

So was it a Jewish school?

It was a Jewish school. I was so surprised when I – because I wasn't looking, oh, is he Jewish, is he not? Some people didn't look Jewish, some people did. And to me it was my school and people in it, I didn't take any note that they were actually all Jewish. Some of them, I didn't know and they didn't look Jewish, so –

What about language, which links to that slightly. Did you – what did you speak? Did you speak Yiddish at all or Polish at home or –

We spoke – the children spoke Polish but the parents among them spoke Yiddish quite often or to other people, or if they didn't want us to know anything, with the old story, that of course we got to know all these words they were using [laughs] and we knew what they were talking about.

Yeah. But in school, for example, it was all in Polish?

Yeah. I don't remember any Yiddish in school at all. **[00:22:00]** And you see, my source of information unfortunately, isn't here anymore but Ben would have known. I don't remember hearing – I didn't know it was a Jewish school. I really wasn't aware.

You don't remember any of the sort of Jewish subjects being taught or –

No. I don't remember any Jewish subjects being taught. I wonder if they were. There is nobody now that's alive that I can ask. Even before I – I didn't know many – I had one friend in New York and when we started talking about school she said, well, I did – I went to a different school, I didn't go to that school. They probably lived in a different area. But I was just thinking something that I was going to say but, yeah, it – for instance, we had breaks. Well, I – everybody has. All the schools had them. But we were able to get milk or cocoa. I don't know if they did chocolate, a thing called chocolate in those days. And so I remember sitting there in this – it was down by the caretaker of the school. I think it was his own sort of little business that he was running and I remember sitting there and I was getting a cocoa and there was a girl sitting near me. She was a daughter of one of the teachers. I knew her but she was so much older. Well, she – you know, I looked up to her. And I was just a little girl sitting there. I was – because I was only six. **[00:24:00]** And she said [sound of phone ringtone] – oh, gosh. I can't –

[Break in recording]

- having my cocoa. And this girl – she was so much older. It was quite – and she was the daughter of a teacher and she said to someone to the caretaker who would do all this – so sweet – and the caretaker said to her, "you are always grumbling." And she said: "oh no, I mean her. "

He thought she meant the cocoa [laughs]. So, that was a rather sweet compliment. But other than that, really it was quite uneventful. We went to school, we went home, we did homework and we used to finish school at two. Well, I remember it as two but someone said

to me it was one, so I don't know if they're right or I'm right. And then we used to have our main meal during the day and then it was supper later. And that's all about school. Not really a lot to say.

And were there any other activities you did? Sports or any other things?

Well, I didn't because I was still eight when the war broke out. Mind you, children are – they do do activities here. And it was a very long – it was so long ago that activities were different. Attitudes were different, schools were different. That's very difficult to compare. But I think that my brother, Ben, who turned out to be a sporting sort of person, well, more than that, an Olympian, I think he did play football. **[00:26:06]** And he might have done other things but I'm not sure. We didn't – strangely enough, we were very close in age but we didn't play together a lot at all. We had our own friends.

Yeah. And Mala, did you experience any anti-Semitism or anything in that time, before the war?

Yeah. Well, I was aware about anti-Semitism and sometimes I would hear someone go, oh, dirty Jew or something but I never experienced anti-Semitism personally, as I haven't here, either, with all the publicity that there is. So I haven't – there's only one memory I have and that's just a single memory. One day I was doing my homework and I needed a new nib so I went out to get it. I was – and I had some money for this nib and on the way there were a couple of boys or three boys. They sort of stopped me and he said where are you going, what are you doing? And they could see I've got some money in my hand and they were really after the money rather than anything else. I don't think it was an act of anti-Semitism. But they sort of said give me this and I wouldn't and they sort of pushed me and there was a pile of snow, it was obviously in the winter, and they pushed me onto the snow and they did get my money. It could have been tuppence or something but still to children that was money. So, that's the only single thing I experienced in terms of anti-Semitism or any unpleasantness or – I wasn't really hurt by sort of falling on the snow, a pile of snow. **[00:28:05]** And that's all I remember really.

So when did things change in your life as a child?

Well, they – when the war started, I mean the world turned upside down for us. No, with us it started when – because our town, I may have mentioned it before, was on the German side, not all that far from the German border. And it started on the 1st of September 1939 but by the – by the 5th of November – of November – sorry, I've got my dates mixed up, because I'm talking now about the ghetto. The war started on the 1st of September. By the 5th of September they had invaded our town. They got into our town. And well, in two weeks they invaded the whole of Poland. Poland was completely unprepared. And at first the invasion for us as children didn't mean very much. We saw these people in uniforms, we knew they were German, we knew that there were problems but I don't think we had the full grasp of what was really going on. And at first it was fine and we used to – the soldiers would sometimes stop the children, speak to them or – but we didn't understand it if it was in German because some of the Germans did – had come from Poland to Germany anyway, so they spoke Polish. **[00:30:03]** But at first it was very mixed but actually when the bombing started, we tried to escape, so my father arranged for us to go to- it – well, go east. But a lot of people were doing it and there were – the roads were very crowded and people had carts and horses and the odd car and – and the roads were full of people trying to escape. We got as far as a place called Sulejów which was a sort of resort place but forests, not lakes or – certainly not rivers. And there we met quite a lot of people we knew, where we stopped. And we met my father's brother and his wife and child, a very young child. And we were there in a house. The house was very crowded. The Sulejów actually had mostly wooden houses but there were a few brick-built ones. We were in quite a large brick-built house. I remember some people were in bed, some had – were just sitting there and suddenly a terrible bombing started. And my mother stood by the door and she didn't let the people out because she realised that they would just be killed. But she managed to keep the door shut and when the bombing stopped, of course people started running out and into the forest, nearby forest. **[00:32:02]** And lots of people were killed. There were dead bodies, dead horses outside. It was a terrible sight. And we could see that the Germans are a bit faster than we were and they were approaching us very quickly. We hadn't got very far in the first place, so we decided to go back to Piotrków.

Because there was nowhere to escape to, was there?

There was nowhere to – well, people were thinking of Russia of course but Russia wasn't that near [laughs]. So, and the Germans would have been there long before us, reached the Russian borders. So we went back. And on the way back, when people were stopping one another and asking, you know, what happened there, where were you and what's happening where you've come from and – so it was quite chaotic. And one of the people we met, when we said we're going back to Piotrków, and they said, oh, don't bother, there's nothing to go back for because the whole town is alight. [Laughs] And we were shocked but we continued towards Piotrków. And it turned out that the railway with the wagons carrying coals got hit and all that coal was alight so there was an absolute long line looking as if the whole town was alight. So that's what that was about. But in fact, when we did get back home, Piotrków wasn't bombed very much. And there were a few buildings came down but not very much. **[00:34:04]** There were some casualties but it wasn't – certainly wasn't the worst. So, we were back home.

And then did you feel – did you go back to school? Was the school still open?

No, schools never started again, not for Jewish children anyway. And we were sort of in a state of flux. We knew we had the Germans and at that time they weren't so threatening. It – for – I think for me it was a big adventure. I didn't know what was happening, what was going to happen. But we were actually the first town in Europe to have a ghetto. And the ghetto started on the 1st of November. By the 1st of November we had already been driven out of our homes and into ghetto walls. So, we, you know, our war was really long because some ghettos didn't start till later on, some in '40, 1940. But ours was the first one.

And why was it so early, that – in that particular town?

I have no idea. I don't know why.

So there wasn't an announcement saying all the Jews have to assemble –

Yes, they told us, they sort of- the regulations came telling us that by the 1st of November 1939 we have to move out of our homes and into ghetto walls. We didn't actually have physical walls, not at first. Well, we didn't have any walls at any time, but some, there were existing walls. They sort of planned the ghetto where there were walls, so there could be an actual stop. The rest was barbed wire and there was only one entrance. **[00:36:00]**

And was it far from where you had lived?

Yes, because ours was a very nice area but where we moved to, into the ghetto, was in fact the sort of nicer part – we were all – everybody was searching for accommodation and my father found something in the square, the main square, which was quite a nice place. I have a photo of it, you know, only on my mobile but I'll be able to show it to you. So, my father managed to find for us, what they would call a big flat because there were only five of us. The overcrowding became terrible because there were as many as ten people to a room. I mean we were five to a room but ours was an enormous room. I would say it was bigger than this lounge and we had it for the five of us. But my aunt came to join us, so there were six of us but – so we were obviously very overcrowded but with it we had a kitchenette and a kind of bathroom. It was a toilet and a basin which was as good as one could get in those days. It's better than a lot of people had.

And could your father continue to work somehow? What happened to the mill?

Oh, well, the mill was confiscated, everything was, then gone. But my father knew a lot of people outside the ghetto because he was trading with, you know, shops and bakeries and he was delivering flour, so he had a lot of contacts. **[00:38:08]** And he managed to get things smuggled in to the ghetto. He was doing sort of kind of business, so we weren't too badly off. But of course, people, other people who had to buy it, well, my father had to buy it as well initially, before he could pass it on. But it was all very risky and there's actually a little story that I have remembered because those individual little stories around all this, I don't always remember them all at the same time. But on one occasion my father had bought a whole lot of flours and wheat and whatever, sacks of really important goods to come into the ghetto. It was all illegal but people – at the beginning it wasn't too bad, people were smuggling things

in and there was – there had to be some bribing at the gate but things were coming in because on the rations, we would never have survived. So, on one occasion he had- he had a message for one of the suppliers. It was a farm outside Piotrków. And he wanted me to deliver the message, smuggle myself out of the ghetto, there were various places, and take this message to these people. And my mother was so against it, they argued, and my father said but she's not risking anything, she doesn't look Jewish, she doesn't – what can they do to her if says she isn't? I had some false papers. **[00:40:01]** And eventually he won, you know, I went to these people, to the farm. I walked there. It was well outside town but I walked all the way. And the people treated me very well, they asked me in, I sat down, they gave me a glass of milk, and we were chatting and then when – and I said, well, I'll go now, I've delivered the note, and he- the man who was going to drive all the goods in to the ghetto, he said, well, we're going as well, so we'll give you a lift into the ghetto. And on the way we were stopped. I was sitting with the goods, on top of the goods, and it was a cart, a big cart. And we were stopped by two Germans – we called them *gendarmes* – they were soldiers. And so as soon as we were stopped, I said I have nothing to do with these men, they're just giving me a lift. [Laughs] I don't know how that came into my mind. And I got off and they said- that's all right, you can go. And they arrested them, they confiscated the goods and I don't know all the great details. I mean they didn't risk their life. I mean they were released but they were in trouble, the goods were confiscated, so we – my father never got them and – but I got back safely. So –

You said you had some false papers. You had some false papers?

I – but they didn't even look at them.

But you had them, to –

Yeah, but they just let me go. **[00:42:02]** I said, oh, I just got a lift. They said, go on, then, go. And that was a real bit of luck.

They believed you.

So, they –

You were not scared to –

To go?

To do this, yeah.

Not particularly. I don't remember being scared. I can't remember all my memories, [laughs] my, you know, at the – of that time but I don't – no, I don't think it worried me. But I probably didn't realise the full significance of it, of what could have happened.

Yeah. What about the yellow stars at that point? Did you have to wear anything?

We didn't wear yellow stars actually. We had white bands with a Star of David in blue and just a little way up the arm. It was worn at sort of here, between the wrist and the elbow. And we had to wear that all the time.

Obligatory?

Yeah.

So you just took it off when you went out?

I took it off. But it actually started – I believe that the starting date would be after the age of twelve. Children didn't wear them.

Okay. So maybe that was why you were a good messenger as well, you were very young.

Yes, I didn't – yeah, I didn't break any rules.

So for you it was easy to get out of the ghetto?

Yeah. It wasn't easy to get out either. There were various dangers attached to that but if you were lucky, you just managed it. I mean I could tell you one of my brother's experiences when he got out of the ghetto. He- where we lived there was a courtyard, there were usually courtyards. **[00:44:04]** And one of the walls of the courtyard was outside the ghetto but you couldn't get up there because there was some sort of big thing standing there, rather like a coal bunker that we used to have when we were using coals in England. And I don't know what purpose it served but if one got onto it, it was quite high, then there were – the rest of it was wall and if you got onto there, then you'd get on the wall – top of the wall and jump down the other side. And this is what my brother, Ben, did. I don't know why he was going, what they – I don't think he was taking messages. I don't know the purpose of it. But he got down on the other side. I mean this was his initial Olympic training [laughs] you could say, if you wanted a laugh. But when he got down there, he could see two German soldiers walking towards him and he was a little blond boy and he was just going and so on and he had a satchel on, he was going to school, he was going to pretend that. And he suddenly saw some Polish boys who knew him and he thought, well, now I have had it, they're going to- what's the word?

Denounce him?

Denounce, yeah. But they didn't. To his surprise, they saw him, they saw the soldiers, but they did nothing, they just walked on. So you see, they weren't all bad, but there were plenty of them. **[00:46:00]**

So how – was that the only occasion when you left the ghetto? Or did you then – did you go more?

No, mine was the only occasion that I told you about.

And Ben?

I don't know. I don't know if he left any other time. I can't remember.

So what – how did you keep yourself busy in the terms of daily life? What else do you remember?

Well, it was very boring actually. At one time – at the beginning we had a few lessons. Some of the teachers would get a group and give them lessons but that was highly illegal and that soon stopped. And after that I think it was quite boring but we were just seeing one another, the children were playing together and there was some reading we could do. There wasn't very much and really when I look back, I can't – I remember some boredom but we weren't bored all the time, so there must have been something going on but my memories are getting very vague.

And your parents? What – do you remember, what were they doing? What was their mood or what did you pick up from –

Well, everybody was always worried and they were always discussing it and we were picking up little snippets of the discussions. And there wasn't much going on but actually the ghetto itself is quite a long story because it was really like – it was like a small town with a population with an administration, with a president, with a police force. **[00:48:00]**

A Jewish police force?

Jewish police force. And they had their, you know, they had – there was the head of police and there were people with three stars, they wore proper uniforms, MP [sic], and then two stars, one star, then three buttons, two buttons, one button. And they were patrolling all the time and they had a lot of clout and in many cases, they looked after their families if there was anything. There was so much going on in the ghetto. As children, we didn't know half of it but we did gain some knowledge from just simply hanging around and listening to their doubts, not deliberately listening but by chance we happened to hear this and that and – so, our president was – I have now – I've always known his name but it's now gone. I don't know if it was Warszawski, or Warszawski may have been the one for Łódź.

We can check it later, don't worry.

Ah, but anyway, we had a president, we had this police force, we had ration cards, and it was run sort of like a proper town, but with a great difference of course. There was a lot of black market, people were smuggling things in. Sometimes they could be shot and they were shot. I remember in the block of flats where we lived, in the entrance downstairs on one occasion they shot a man. His name was Jablonski. **[00:50:01]** He was actually an accountant and he was my father's accountant before the war. And they left him lying there for a whole week, for no reason other than to scare us. I daresay perhaps it – well, it does give you a terrible feeling but the adults probably weren't scared in the sense that – in the same way as the children were, because I had never seen a dead person before that. And to me, it was horrifying. I didn't even look, I would walk past, shielding my eyes. And why did they leave him there for a week? Only to scare us.

And who shot him?

One of the Germans – one of – it was – we always had Germans patrolling. And the reason? There was no reason. We couldn't think of a reason. So we were exposed to all these sort of things, apart from all the others. There was so much going on in the ghetto. But there were some nice things going on as well, in the sense that occasionally there was a concert.

Yeah, I was going to ask you about music and concerts.

Yeah. Well, first of all, we were – everybody had to hand in all their musical instruments, so there weren't many around. And those that were, were illegal, and they were hidden. And if they were caught, God knows what would happen. They could be shot. So, people were taking great risks but there were one or two violins and- that I remember. And there were a few concerts, very few because they were illegal.

What music? What did they play?

The classical music mostly. I mean some of them were good musicians among them. **[00:52:02]**

Did you play any music in your family? Was there anyone –

No. No. It might have come later but it never –

You didn't have to give in any instruments? You?

No, no, we didn't. And I don't remember my family being musical. I mean among my aunts and uncles, there weren't any musicians. But there may have been in the new generation. And, you know, I wasn't all that aware and I wasn't all that knowledgeable in those days probably because children today, of the age that we were then, are really like adults were then, because they're so sophisticated. They know exactly what's going on in the world and the television is here. But don't forget, we had such a closed life, that the – we didn't have – we could only pick up what was going on around us in the ghetto. I mean it was much more open and different before the war but in the ghetto was very limited. But for all that, there were weddings taking place, there were children born, and life just went on, albeit in a different way and some of it very sad and people were dying.

Yes, because the lack of food as [inaudible].

Well, the lack of food. But ours, I know that – I've read about other ghettos, for instance, in Łódź. It may have been Warsaw as well. People were so poor, they were dying in the street, but that wasn't the case in our ghetto, so we were lucky in that respect. Maybe because we were so far west. We're not far from the German border. And, you know, the German border was actually moved further into Poland and the result was that the people, the Jews living in that part, all had to leave because that became Germany. **[00:54:16]** And they had to go somewhere and a lot of them found their way into our ghetto, so our ghetto got terribly overcrowded. There were originally 15,000 Jews in Piotrków but during the ghetto time they – there was an influx of all those people who left that – what was before Poland, now became Germany. Then it went up to about 24 – it ultimately went up. The numbers went up to

28,000, out of the original 15,000, so the overcrowding became worse and worse and people had to give up, if they happened two rooms, which very few people had two rooms, but they had – and people had to take people in, into their own room because you couldn't leave them outside. So it was very overcrowded and at its worst, it was 28,000. But that caused so many epidemics.

Yes, that's my other question.

That that again reduced the numbers to 24,000 and that –

Because the sanitary conditions were not good.

Yeah, yeah. So –

Were there doctors there in the ghetto?

Oh, yes. Yes. There were quite a lot of Jewish doctors. I knew some before the war but I understand – this is something I have learnt – is that it was very difficult for them to study in Poland because I know stories from individuals that were friends of mine, maybe much older actually because they were already studying that before the war. **[00:56:14]** But I learnt from them that if they wanted to study medicine they couldn't get into a university for med – well, for a place for a – for medical, for medicine, studying medicine. So, they had to go abroad and Italy was apparently a place that wasn't all that far and a lot of them studied in Italy. Some came to England. Well, I know some doctors who had studied outside. So being Jewish, anti-Semitism showed itself in this way, even more than the sort of common street-fighting or anything.

Yeah, and Jews were not allowed [overtalking].

Jews were not allowed to have a proper education. I don't know if they went to university.

So how long did you stay in the ghetto, Mala?

The ghetto was finally – it started on the 1st of November 1939 and it was liquidated in – I can't give you the exact date but it was 1943. 1943, the ghetto was finally liquidated. And it took this form that, first there was what we called the big ghetto, then- because strangely enough, when I met somebody who is actually so knowledgeable on the Holocaust, well, he is a professor you know, at Hebrew University, he knows much more than I know. **[00:58:08]** But when we met, he – you know, I said I'm from – he asked me where I came from and I said Piotrków and he said- so were you in the ghetto? I said yes. Were you in the small ghetto or the big ghetto? And I thought, how does he know that? But of course – and this is what – how it was referred to, officially, you know, in books and things. Because the big ghetto was liquidated after the deportation and the small – and then the small ghetto had – was supposed to have 22,000 – no, 2,200 people in it. And- I'm sorry, you'll have to do a lot of cutting here because I really can't collect my thoughts like I used to.

Don't worry about the figures. It really is about your experience, so we don't have to worry about the figures.

Oh. But it's interesting for the record.

It is. So, you were in the big or the small ghetto? You.

I was in both.

In both. So first it was the big, then people were –

The deportation.

The deportation started and the small ghetto remained?

Yes. But the small ghetto didn't last very long because then they created a labour camp and there were only 2,200 people left and 1,100 was going to be – going to this glassworks that I mentioned before and the other 1,100 to Bugaj. **[01:00:00]** And that happened some – I don't

know the exact date but that happened sometime after the deportation and after the liq – well, after the liquidation of the ghetto obviously because then the ghetto was empty and the Jews were gone.

But Mala, what about your hiding? When was that?

My...?

Your hiding? You were taken away.

Yes, well, you see, when I tell my story in sequence, I tell you everything. But here it's coming in bits and pieces. And what I tell you, I put more into that and [laughs] we could be here all day. I said because I'm used to just telling my story in sequence. So [sighs] – so the small ghetto was liquidated after the deportations and we were allocated to these two places, the Bugaj and Hortensja. It was just over 1000 people in each. And at that time, I started working in the factory, I was twelve years old and I was a slave labourer. But in between something else happened because my aunt, a Helfgott aunt, was rounded up and deported. But when she was rounded up, she screamed as she was being taken away, who'll look after my child? She had a five-year-old daughter. And by then I was the only Helfgott, female Helfgott member of the family left and it was down to me. I was twelve and she was five and I looked after her, so she was my responsibility. And when I was separated from my father and brother, they were with the men, although we went to the same workplace in Bugaj, they were with the men, I was with the women, because we only had barracks. **[01:02:14]** And it was different, we hardly saw one another, we were on different shifts. So, I started working at the age of twelve and my cousin obviously didn't work, she was very little and very frail, very small. But we worked shifts, so there were always some people in the barracks, so there was always someone there to take care of her. But you see, I've left out a most important thing because I'm not talk – I'm talking in bits. There isn't a running order. But when the ghetto – before the small ghetto was liquidated completely, well- the people were deported and some were allocated to workplaces but there were still some children there and women who were illegal and some old people and they weren't supposed to be there. They hid or I don't know what they did during the deportations but they were there illegally. And once the people were

going to be in one of the two factories, well, both, there were still these people hiding in the little ghetto and they started searching for them. I was among them because I was a little – a girl with a child, a young child. So, they found us all eventually, we were taken outside the ghetto with – we were standing there, it was a column of people, I don't know how many. **[01:04:13]** It wasn't a very big column. It wasn't anything like the original deportations, which I didn't witness and I wasn't there. Did I tell you about that which was done to people, not yet? You see, I just – I'll keep telling you about what you asked me. Well, anyway, what happened at that time but this will go back now.

That's fine.

And you will put it in order?

Yeah. Yeah.

When I tell my story, you see, it goes through in sequence but here I'm going into different areas. So, what was I telling you?

You told me now about the line but I think chronologically what we haven't had is when you went into hiding with your cousin. You haven't told us about that.

Yeah. Well, that happened before.

So let's talk about that now.

But the other one is really important but let's talk about that. Okay.

We'll come back to it.

So rumours started circulating in the ghetto that there's going to be a deportation and everybody is going to be deported except people with working permits. And well, people were in panic, people – it's really quite a study of its own, how people want to live and

people tried to find ways of saving themselves. So, that could be all different possibilities, um, they could escape from the ghetto, live in the forests, in the sewers, in the open or they may have friends outside who'd perhaps save one or two members of the family. **[01:06:09]** And there were people who were doing it for money, saving Jews. Now, my father together with my uncle, Joseph Klein, were introduced to a man from Częstochowa. That's a town about an hour, an hour and a half away from Piotrków, a beautiful town. And there was a man from that town who was willing to hide two Jewish girls during the deportations but he was doing it for money. That was a business arrangement. So my uncle and my father were introduced to this man. He actually came from Częstochowa into the ghetto. He was smuggled into the ghetto. I remember them sitting around the table and discussing things but I don't know, I wasn't part of it. I just happened to see them. I don't know what they discussed but they obviously discussed money. He was doing it for money. So, he was going to- hide – well, I don't know what the conditions were because my parents discussed them, they never told me. But I know that we were to travel for – to Częstochowa, he was paid in advance on that occasion during the discussion and we were to travel to Częstochowa one at a time with him a week apart on false papers. So, he was going to come back to Piotrków and pick me up first and then come back for my cousin. But my aunt pleaded with him that they have only got the one child – I'm one of three – so would they take my cousin first but they said no, they insisted on taking me first. **[01:08:08]** I don't know why because I didn't see any sort of special privilege later on but it all happened according to plan, he came back for me and a week later for my cousin. Now, travelling itself was very scary because if you're sitting in a train with a lot of people and if someone looked at us – well, I could only speak for myself – if someone looked at me for longer than a few seconds I immediately thought, well, they're suspecting me of being Jewish. I mean it was really terrifying. And there was actually a price, er, a prize – there was a reward for handing in Jews, so there were people there on the lookout for Jews. And it really was a very scary journey but we both arrived there one at a time and we found ourselves in a big house on the outskirts of Częstochowa with a middle-aged couple. The man who made all the arrangements was their son-in-law, who lived around the corner with his wife and child. And these people weren't particularly nice to us but they didn't ill-treat us or anything, they just left us alone. But we, on the other hand, were very scared. We were supposed to be relatives who have come to stay from Warsaw – Warsaw because we would be not so easily identified from a large town as a small town.

What were your names? Or were you given –

Yes, we had papers but I can't remember [laughs] what our names were even. **[01:10:00]** I don't know that they sort of did it so very carefully but we did have – we were supposed to be relatives who had come to stay from Warsaw.

But you were still Mala? [Inaudible] or –

Yes, I – I can't remember, you know. I assume I was still Mala. It wasn't a particularly Jewish name.

That's what I mean. So that wasn't a [inaudible].

But often when I meet Poles today and they say they know I'm Polish and because we've, you know, and we've spoken Polish and she – and then they say to me, but your name is unusual. It's not a Polish name, is it? The Poles are not called Mala. It is in fact only among Jews because it's a shortened version of Malka.

Malka, yeah.

Yeah. But I had a cousin, Mala, as well. And I came across Mala once or twice, not that common. So–

So, they might have called you something else.

Yes, they may have done. I really can't remember what they called us. They – but because we were on papers [clears throat].

You stayed with them, the elderly couple, with –

Yes, not very elderly, sort of middle-aged [coughs]. So, my cousin Idzia, who was younger than I, she was eleven and I was twelve, and she was so homesick she couldn't bear it. She wanted to go home and she was told she can't because the deportations were still happening. And she said that her parents had very good friends in Piotrków – I always used to tell their name, I know their name, but I don't these days, because I came across someone with that name – and they will take her in. **[01:12:04]** So he said okay, off they went. And I was still languishing there what seemed like a lifetime. And eventually – I won't go into all the details about what happened then but eventually it was time for me to go home. I was to meet my father in a flour mill which before the war belonged to him. Now he was lucky to have a job there.

Sorry to interrupt, Mala, but you were not tempted to go with your cousin when she left?

No, no, I couldn't even if I wanted to. I couldn't because these were friends of her parents and she was counting on – because they had all their valuables and they were very good friends, she felt she could go there [coughs].

So there was no question –

But she couldn't take someone else as well. That didn't come into question and I wasn't asking to be taken [coughs]. I'm sorry [coughs]. So, they went and I – but eventually the time came – I don't know at which point I stopped and where to continue from.

No, so you just said that she left, you stayed.

And I was still there. And all sorts of things – I'll tell – give you just one little example. On one occasion they were- there was an engagement in the family and they all went to the engagement but they took me with. And there, there was this German soldier who was getting engaged to a Polish girl. **[01:14:00]** And I was there with all these people and I was terrified and I just hoped they wouldn't ask me any difficult questions and what am I to answer to this or that. So that was one incident. But the other one was that there was a boy about my age living down the road and he befriended me a little bit. I didn't see much of him. But he said,

do you know, I want to take you somewhere really interesting. And in Częstochowa there is a church with a Madonna who – a Madonna and child and the Madonna cries and her tears are real pearls that come. And I didn't know anything. He said, I want – this is something that visitors went to see. It's a kind of museum kind of church. And he said, I'll take you to see it. And I thought, if he takes me into a church, I won't know how to cross myself. I didn't know. This were – I knew something about it but not enough. So, I said – he will soon discover that I'm not Christian because Poles are mostly Catholic and they're very religious. So I was really worried about it but I had no way out to say no, I don't want to go. I had no reason to say no. So, we went and my good luck that the church was closed that day. It was on a Tuesday, I remember that. And I think they are – museums are closed one day a week and it is sometimes on a Tuesday, because I think I found that out here. So that was another bit of good luck. But eventually I was going home, I was going to – and meeting my father in the flour mill. **[01:16:02]** When we got there it was right at the top, there was an attic, and we came in and there was my father but also my uncle, Joseph Klein. He looked at us and he went white. He said, where is my daughter? And the man said, I brought her back – I took her back to your very good friends. He did tell the name, tell him the name, and my uncle said, but she's not there. Where is she? What have you done with my child? And he repeated it a few times. And I remember him vividly pacing with his hands behind his back, looking at the ground and pacing there and back, there and back, saying, what have you done with my child? And that's the end of the story, because nobody knows what happened to Idzia till this day. And not knowing is so terrible 'cos you imagine the worst. And I still keep thinking of what have they done with her? Could they have done this, or that, or cut her throat or thrown her in the river or – but, you know, bludgeoned her to death or how did – terribly she suffered. I – it's just something I can't come to terms with. And of course, her parents, oh, were devastated. But –

But was the suspicion, Mala, on the guy or was it on the family she went to? I mean was the assumption that she never arrived there or –

Oh, no, no. What we heard afterwards was that- she arrived there – my aunt found this out after the war. **[01:18:07]** She arrived there with the man, they collected a case of valuables and she left with the man and the case and Idzia, and that's it. That's the end of the story. And

soon after that my uncle was arrested together with my other uncle – they were the two Klein uncles – were arrested. The two Helfgott brothers were arrested. The- a lot of other people, Jewish people, not a lot but some others, and they were all imprisoned in the local prison. And we never knew why but there was some speculation about some woman was caught carrying false passport and some of the names were the Helfgotts and the Kleins and – I don't really know.

[Break in recording]

But it seems that the person who saved you – I mean – that he did something or he was the- ?

Well, no, …it may have been through passports, they got the names that way. But the man – he must have done something wrong because he left with [] and the case. And that's and all and my aunt said to me, how could anybody kill a child for the sake of a few goods? I would have given him everything I possess if only he had saved her. And she never got over it. And on one occasion she said to me, my Idzia had to go into the gas chamber by herself. **[01:20:09]** There was nobody to hold her hand. Those were the thoughts and the visions she lived with. And strangely enough, she – we never lived in the same place 'cos she lived in Poland for a few years and then she remarried. The two Klein brothers – well, there was one Klein killed and one Helfgott, so there was one Klein left and one Helfgott. And my aunt married the other Klein, the brother of her husband. It may be because of the Jewish religion or it may be because they were in love. Either way, she married, so she – her – she married her brother-in-law and that brother-in-law had a son who survived. We were all cousins, sort of more or less the same age. And Genek survived, so – and his aunt became his mother, but I think he called her aunt. And they stayed in Poland for some years but then they emigrated to Israel. But they didn't- they – he – my cousin waiting – waited for them to make their decision. Well, they made the decision but to put it into action, and in – then he lost patience and he actually emigrated on his own, they followed soon after, because life wasn't all that good in Poland after that. In fact, it was terrible for Poles, for Jews in Poland. **[01:22:03]**

Post-war? Post-war?

Post-war, yeah. And I must get a tissue, sorry.

[Break in recording]
So, we talked about your cousin.
[crosstalk]

I just finish on my cousin. And – Auntie Dora lost her husband and her daughter within a very short space of time. Because they arrested two – both Helfgotts and Kleins and some other people.
Two were released and I've told you that before, haven't I? So, I don't know, it's all bits and pieces [laughs].

So, you came back, you met your father in the mill and your uncle.

Yeah.

And they realised –

All right, take it from there. Yes.

Yes, they realised you were by yourself.

And so my aunt and uncle were devastated at what they heard and soon afterwards they were – all the Kleins and Helfgotts were arrested and other people as well.

Your family as well? Your family was arrested?

Helfgotts.

Your family? Yes.

My father, yeah, yeah. Both Helfgott – only the men, not – both Helfgotts were arrested and both Kleins and there was a Grynszpan who was related to one of the Kleins – my aunt was a

Grynszpan – and a few other people. They were kept in the prison then they were taken out, walked to the Jewish cemetery, lined up against a wall and all shot. So, my aunt lost her husband and her daughter within a very short space of time. **[01:24:00]** She survived the war. She never got over losing her daughter. And after the war she remarried, but I don't have to concentrate –

You said – what about your father?

Yeah. No, my father was all right, he had a job and he was –

So he was released from prison?

He was released, yes. One Klein and one Helfgott was released.

And Mala, how did you feel coming from this hiding? First of all, how long was the hiding? Was it about a few months or –

Do you know, I don't know how long it was. I really haven't – but it was – it seemed like a lifetime but it may have been two or three months.

Okay. And in that hiding, did you also sometimes have to be concealed or were you sort of in the open the whole time?

Fairly in the open. Sometimes when there was a knock on the door, it was okay to mix. Other times they didn't know who it was so they quickly hid us in a cupboard or under the bed or anywhere out of sight. So, you know, we never knew where we were. We felt very scared and very vulnerable.

Yes, it wasn't a safe place. You didn't feel –

No, not at all. Not at all. No place was safe, really.

Yeah. So how did you feel coming back to your father, to the ghetto, from your – at that point?

Well, when I came back it was just after the deportations and my mother – my family was intact because my father – my brother had a work permit, my father, mother and sister were hiding with families but each one with a different family. And then I returned, I was the last one to return, and our family was complete. **[01:26:00]** But then the ghetto became a very small ghetto, just two half-streets, the deportations had taken place, and they – we were very lucky that our family was intact. But most families disappeared completely. Some, there were perhaps one or two members left. It was a very poor sight and very sad and very, very tragic.

And the people, the friends, or the people in your generation, they would have probably not been there anymore? Being twelve.

Most – not. They wouldn't have been there because there were a lot of people deported. The figures are there, they're recorded, and they – I know now that they were deported to Treblinka. But the memorials there are just stones of the towns, they're not of people. They have records, they – of the final deportation, there's actually a list and it's online and I've got a copy of it, so – but that was the final, that was the last deportation, the one that went to Ravensbrück. So, I returned to the ghetto, our family was complete but alas, not for long because then when they thought everybody who was in hiding has returned – they were quite aware of all this – then they started searching for them. And on one occasion they stormed into our room where we were – my father and brother were at work – and I was with my mother and sister and a lot of other people – it was quite a crowded room. I was in bed only because it was somewhere to be. It was so crowded, so I climbed into bed – there was an empty bed. **[01:28:04]** And we had to take turns to use the beds because by then there wasn't – when people had night shifts, they could sleep during the day in other people's beds who were out at work. So things were really dire. And on one occasion they stormed into a room where my – I was with my mother and sister and a lot of other people. And I was in bed. I just climbed in a bed and- my mother said to the policeman in charge that I'm not well and he said, that's all right, she can stay. I mean it's the most unlikely thing that you'd expect but he said that's fine. And as my mother was walking out with my sister and all the people, she said

to me quietly, don't go out anywhere, stay here and when Father comes home, tell them what happened, tell him what happened. And my – well, I told them when they came home but my – and they were rounding up people at that time every day. They were looking for the illegals, as they called them. And then when they thought they had everybody – oh, they were taking them to the synagogue. The synagogue being beautiful before the war, it was now – it had been bombed, it was used as stables, it was in a terrible state, but this is where they were holding all these people, without any food or water, no sanitary, what's it- facilities. **[01:30:05]** And it was terrible. Some people managed to get out, there were bribery, but – and my father could have got my mother out but not my sister, and my mother wouldn't leave her. And on the 20th of December 1942 they marched them all out at dawn to the local forest, called Raków, and there they [sighs] met a death that was absolutely shocking. I never – I know we all know what happened but I could never repeat it. It hurts me too much to even think about it. And they – there's a memorial in that forest, called Raków, and there's another memorial of just some children and I'll tell you what happened about that. When they had subsequently liquid – when they were liquidated, the whole – the small ghetto, there were still some illegals. I was among them, so was my little cousin. But there were mostly old men and some mothers and children. There weren't a lot of people. I don't know the numbers. But they got us all out, they searched everywhere, and I was in this column of people waiting to be put onto a lorry. The lorries were arriving at the sort of front of the – this column, people were getting onto them and they were being taken away, I don't know where. **[01:32:05]** I was towards the end of the column with my little cousin and I don't know what gave me the idea, I looked sideways and I saw an officer, a German officer, and [sighs] I don't know what made me do it but I actually stepped out. And I could have been killed because they were shooting people and they were hitting them on the head and they were – and children were crying and it was all really horrific. And I walked up to this officer and said that I've been separated from my father and brother, they're inside the ghetto – because they were safe, they had jobs, so I said could I go back to them. And he looked a bit surprised, flabbergasted, sort of smile – he smiled slightly, he seemed amused. But he actually called over a Jewish policeman and said, take her back inside the ghetto. And on the way I said, just a minute, I've got to get my cousin. And he said you can't, because she hasn't had permission. And I said but I can't go back without her. What do you want me to – I was arguing with him and he said you can't take her. Now, I always make a point of telling people, it – how this wasn't just

a one-off. It happened to me but there were always the dilemma of what do I do, do I go to my father and brother, or do I stay with Ann and be deported? And we didn't even know the extent of what deportation meant. **[01:34:04]** And it was terrible. I draw people's attention to it because it existed all over. People had the most terrible dilemma when they give you a choice. Well, you can have one of the two children. Which one do you want to keep? I mean how do people make a decision? So, I argued with him and eventually – he was a Jewish policeman, maybe that helped – and he says suddenly – he said, well, quickly take her and go through the gates. And that was a real bit of luck because I now – I subsequently – well, after the war, I came across a booklet which describes what happened to these children. Because apparently, when the deportation took place, the person in charge said to the mothers, you know, you are going to be deported to a labour camp. You won't be able to look after your children but we are going to build a children's home for them and they'll be well-looked after. So, well, they took the – sorry, I've got to collect my thoughts for a minute. So, yes, the mothers gave up their children for this better place. And now I know after many years – I never knew what happened to the children – but apart from coming across a booklet – there is now a memorial for them in the forest, in the same – next door to the memorial which has been there much longer – for the other victims that got killed in the forest. **[01:36:10]** And these killings were carried out by the Einsatzgruppen, the 101 Battalions. It was taking place all over Europe and there is a lot written about it. There are many books, if anybody wants to know more. But those children, now, I was so – I – first I came across the booklet and then I came across the memorial, so it's all there, documented.

So this saved your life, that you asked –

He saved my life. I mean I really regret that I never make a point of finding out his name and doing something about it, even if he was later killed at some front or anything, some frontline, but I have no idea who he was because apparently, he was around there. He used to come into the factory where we worked and he enquired about me, but not to me. I didn't know about it but I heard it from someone else.

So you then went back to the ghetto?

Yes, I went back. And when the – I went back into the small ghetto, there were not many people there then, and soon after that, we were allocated to our factories, the glassworks and Bugaj and the small ghetto was demolished. And we were there for quite a long time, over eighteen months, before we were deported.

And you could take your cousin with you?

Yes, I had to. She was with me, they – but I could take her with me, but of course she didn't work. **[01:38:04]** But because we did shifts there was always someone to keep an eye on her. But she was so- so scared of losing me that [sighs] – I can't think of the word I want to say. She – so if I went to the toilet, which was way down – a long way down a long field, she would come with me and wait for me outside because she just wouldn't leave me out of her sight, she was so terrified of losing me. But I had to go to work so she, you know, she couldn't do anything about that. But there were always some women who would keep an eye on her.

She clung to you, yeah.

Yes, she did cling to me, yeah. But strangely enough, that clinging, it stopped after the war, you know, she just shed all that fear so quickly. It was quite amazing. I think she must have been – I don't really know, we never discussed it, and she said she didn't remember a lot – remember much. But I know that she was very scared, which any child would be.

And you said you were only twelve when you became a slave labourer, so were you quite tall and big that you could –

No, I wasn't. Because you can tell by what I am now, [laughs] I'm short, so I was never tall. I was kind of, you know, the size I was, was – maybe it wasn't average. I never compared it, so I never knew but it – obviously I had much taller friends, my same age. **[01:40:02]** I realised that after the war [laughs].

But they considered you big enough to work? I mean –

Yeah, yeah. Yes, and that was luck. That was real luck.

And in that time, were you in touch with your father and brother, when you were a slave labourer?

They were at the same place but men and women were always housed separately. It was no longer like a ghetto, no families, so we were living with the women in barracks and they were with the men in barracks. And their barrack – the- what is that place called, they sleep on?

The bunk beds?

The bunks were like four-high. Ours were only two-high.

And did you know any of the other women who were there?

Yes, yes, because they were from the town or – I may not have known some of them well. We all knew one another. We were quite a small group.

And what were the work conditions? Tell us a little bit about what you actually did.

Yeah. Well, the plywood was manufactured from scratch, so the manufacturing of plywood involved bringing in the- the trees but without the leaves, so they were – what do you call that middle part? It's –

The trunk? The trunk.

The trunk of the tree was brought in. So, there was a very large space outside because they took up a lot of space and they would sort of lay them in rows, sort of this way and that way and that's where they were kept. **[01:42:01]** Then they were stripped of the bark and taken into the factory and then there was a machine where you would put them on and it was a sort of revolving machine where it would cut the wood into a very thin layer. And it was very

delicate. You had to handle it very carefully. And in fact, the man who would put on this whole thing and then see it through to get the sheets, he was working at a machine – in those days there wasn't much protection for anybody but [laughs] less for people who were slave labourers. And he actually, as he was pushing it through, he pushed his arm through, cut off his arm, and then it healed and he actually survived the war. It was below the elbow. So they were sort of – so they made it into these sheets, they were laid on big tables designed the – for the same shape and they were big squares, those tables, and the women were carrying them sort of up, like this. You had to be very careful. And they somehow looked so elegant, carrying this thing above their heads, and they would get them to the table and they were all going one way. And then they would make, say, three-ply woods, three-thick. They would lay it, these sheets, these very delicate sheets, one way and then the diff – how would you describe it, um, one way and then the other way. **[01:44:13]** So they – and they could make three-ply or five-ply or whatever they wanted. I think they were making three-ply mostly. And I was working at a table which was- it was a sort of – the ultimate product was going – they were going to be tents, but wooden tents for the soldiers at the fronts, the German soldiers. So, they were designed as round and therefore, the roof had to be like at an angle, so they had special tables designed for that. And then you had to nail on a little strip on each one of those shapes and I was the one who was nailing on the strips. That was my job. And after that they were packaged, they were sent to the fronts. But my particular job, it wasn't difficult and I was standing there, putting these nails in all day long [laughs].

And what were the conditions in general, compared to the ghetto? Like, food-wise?

Well, we were living now in barracks, we had to share. There weren't many spaces. And well, I shared with my little cousin. Food was – in some ways it was less but there was more contact with the outside world because Christians were working there too, although they were quite separated from the Jews. **[01:46:06]** But there was contact and they used to do deals, they would bring things and people would pay them and – I don't know what happened when eventually everybody ran out of money but I don't really know about that – much about that side.

So people got – they brought food in, so food or other things –

They brought in food and information and- and there was one man there, strangely enough, he appro – we didn't – the Christians worked separately from the Jews. But one of the men from the Christians approached my father. Oh, I don't quite know exactly how it happened. He said to me, I would like to speak to your father. And I said, okay, I'll tell him, and I did. And he had an eighteen-year-old son, he was actually working there, so I still remember him but I didn't have much contact with – he wasn't my friend or anything. He told my father that he'd be willing to hide me as a Christian and my father said no, thank you. Well, you know, it seemed sort of fairly safe there, we didn't know we were going to be deported to camps and what was going to happen.

But maybe after that first experience...

Maybe because of that, yeah. So that was one of the things that happened there. It just came to mind. But other than that, it, you know, we just worked long hours and the rest we spent in the barracks and – but there were people around and we got some food and we cooked some food and, you know, it wasn't the worst. The worst was yet to come. **[01:48:00]**

And what about the Germans who were there? Were they mostly soldiers or also German workers? Or who were the –

There weren't many soldiers.

Were there SS?

The two men that were – this place, which was called Bugaj – actually, the area was called Bugaj, but this factory was called Bugaj as well. And, um, oh, I'm not quite sure but we knew it as Bugaj. And- he –

The Germans, I asked you.

The people in charge, during the war, they renamed it and called it "Dietrich und Fischer" because these were these two people that were allocated to run this place. And Fischer was there every day. He had a house in an adjoining sort of area. Well, a beautiful house and he had all the help he needed, like, he had a gardener out of these men, she had cooks, she had help, and they – because they did a lot of entertaining. I've never been there but some of the people had and, you know, they told us. But Dietrich didn't come very often, just occasionally. And they renamed it after these two people. They were the bosses. And Fischer had a big dog. The dog was terrifying. And not far – outside the factory there were toilets for the workers. They weren't very nice but – they were not flushing toilets, though it was like a hut and the top bit was open, so if you stood on the wood you could see outside. **[01:50:06]** And imagine what a recreation, to be able to look outside [laughs]. But sometimes people went to toilet just to spend time because they couldn't do any more work or they were tired or whatever. And he used to come with his big dog and sometimes he used to let him loose into the toilets. And there were men coming down with their trousers out and, you know, people were running away from this vicious dog. And yeah, we had one like that in the ghetto as well but a different one but –

A dog?

Yeah, we – the man in charge of the ghetto had a dog and he used to – his name was- I've forgotten it now. I've always known it. I can't remember his name.

A German? A German?

A German. It was a name that could be either a first name or a surname. But he used to come with his dog and let the dog loose on – you know, if anybody saw this dog from a distance, everybody would disappear, even the grown-ups would. Children were always scared of dogs but- in those days at that place. So, we were really scared but it seems that, you see, when we were then transferred to this Bugaj, there was again a man with a dog, and all these dogs were vicious. The one that used to come into the ghetto, that dog was trained to attack men in a certain way that was absolutely awful. I don't even repeat it.

So the – those Dietrich and –

Fischer.

Fischer. They were civilians? They were German civilians? ***[01:52:02]***

Yes, yes.

And what was their attitude to the Jews? I mean did you –

Hmm?

What was their attitude to the Jewish slave labourers? Do you –

I don't really know. One of them wasn't there very much. We hardly saw him.

So the other guy –

But Fischer, he wasn't too bad. Except for the dog, he was okay and he tolerated children 'cos there were a few children there, and my little cousin among them, that didn't work and he allowed it. And I don't know whether he did it out of the goodness of his heart or whether it was officially allowed or whether it were – I don't really know.

And did you have any – did you ever meet him personally, this Fischer?

I saw him many times but I've never spoken to him, not face to face.

Hmm.

Yeah.

'Cos this is quite interesting, within the slave labour, you know, structure, that you had these German civilians there in these factories and, you know, and that they had contact to the, you know, to the Jewish workers.

Well, it is like this- what is the film, um...

The Schindler's List?

Schindler's List. It's a sort of similar situation, isn't it? They had these labour camps all over the place. Yeah.

So your cousin managed there with, as you said, with other people, with you.

Yes, she just hung around, you know, but she was terrified of losing me but I came back every night, so it was okay.

Was Sunday a day off?

I can't remember, you know. I really can't. **[01:54:00]** I think we had a day off. I'm not sure. You see, I've got nobody to ask now. There's one person, Harry. I must ask him 'cos he must have been there. He may have been in the other one, in the Hortensja. But, you know, as people die, but because my brother, Ben, who was a source of information, he really had a good memory.

He remembered everything.

Oh, he remembered everything. You know, we did- not a testimony of our, you know, experiences for the Imperial War Museum but it – they weren't verbal and they- [overtalking].

Cassette audio? Audio?

Audio, that's right.

Did you do it together?

No, no. It's always separate. His turned out to be – I don't remember who was my interviewer but his was someone who turned – was actually- MP and then years later she became an MP. I think she was a student at the time. And so, she heard a bit about me in my brother's testimony but she had never met me. And then one day we met in- on the March of the Living and it somehow came to light that I was Ben Helfgott's sister. And she became so excited. She was – she said, I knew so much about you but – not that he said so much – but I knew about you. And I – and I had never met you in all the years. It was – I only met her recently, just before the pandemic. So, I did four tapes. **[01:56:01]** Well, that isn't bad, is it?

No.

How many do you think Ben did?

Ten? Eight? For the –

Twelve or fourteen. Now, I've forgotten. I think it was fourteen but it may have been twelve. So, I've been saying to my nephews, well, I want to read it, I want to listen to it, and they didn't come up with it. And in the end she said, well, it's online, you can listen to it [laughs]. And I did, I – it's amazing that he had –

So you found some of your memory is similar and some – obviously you had different experiences.

Oh, yes, yes. We – in fact, I must listen again because I don't know why there was such a big difference. I – well, I covered everything I knew. He obviously knew a lot more.

But his experience in the slave labour camp, I mean in the factory, what was he doing?

He was doing something else but I can't remember what he was doing. I've forgotten and now I can't ask.

Hmm, 'cos he recently passed.

But he initially worked during the deportations, he already had a job then in the glass factory. But in the glass factory he was doing some of the other – the Polish workers weren't very nice. They used to start with – there were quite a lot of Jewish boys and they used to, you know, one day they said – they did something to make him sit down on a very hot seat. Because they worked with a lot of hot things, yes. I don't know what they're called.

And he was a year older then? He was thirteen?

Yeah, yeah.

Did he have a bar mitzvah, your brother in the –

No. By thirteen we were already in a labour camp. **[01:58:00]** If it was in the- if it was in the ghetto he might well have had. I think some people did. But I'm not aware of any but I'm sure that there would have been.

Okay, Mala, before we move on to the next chapter, which is the deportation, is there anything else about that, the slave labour at that time, you want to add or we haven't discussed?

Slave labour. Well, there was one little story about me and a friend of mine. Among my friends – this friend actually died in a concentration camp – we were friends and her – there were a few people who had high positions in this sort of hierarchy. Was it in that camp? I'm now – it's a long time ago, you know [laughs]. Anyway, where we were, his – her father had a very high position in the police force and he – and – so they were allocated what seemed like a palace, a little hut that had two – not two beds, but two bunk beds. And there were four in the family, mother, father and two children, and one of them was my friend, Pema

Blachmann. And her mother was reading 'Gone with the Wind' and she told me about it and she said of course that was not a children's book. So, when her mother was out, she used to secretly read it, [laughs] hoping her mother would never discover. **[02:00:01]** And then we used to make arrangements to meet in the evening when we weren't working and walk and she would tell me what she read. She was transferring it to me, so I had the benefit of this amazing novel [laughs] and then my cousin, Ann used to say, well, she wants to come with. And I said, you can't come – I didn't want that little girl listening to a love story or [laughs] – and I would feel embarrassed. I mean there's nothing much in it like that but in those days it was different. So, she used to want to come and I don't know, I think once I did take her and she couldn't listen because we were almost whispering to one another and she was on this side and we were talking here and – but they were silly little things but, you know, but if it wasn't for those silly little things, I mean we'd all have gone crazy.

So she was reading it in Polish, yeah? Gone with the Wind. A Polish translation.

Yeah, yeah, Polish, yeah.

It's amazing that the mother managed to get a book in – at that time.

Well, she – yeah, well, people had books, you know, people had odd things that they managed to bring with or find there or – I don't know. One day, I said to my father – these are all little side stories, I never tell this. But one day, after my mother's – was gone, I said that I saw a pile of clothes and individual belongings in a corner, which was of – there was a kind of gate here, you couldn't go in there but you could see them from a distance. **[02:02:05]** And one of them was a handbag which I swear was my mother's but it was in a terrible state, all crumpled. Well, not exactly crumpled but it was in a terrible state. And I said to my father – and it was after my mother's, you know, death, so I said to my father, you know, I saw Mother's handbag there. He said, oh, don't be silly, it's not Mother's handbag. And I insisted and he didn't want to know and I was so upset and in the end he came with me and he looked from a distance and he said no, that wasn't her bag. But till this day I can swear that it was but he didn't want to admit it to me because first of all, it's too painful, and secondly, it looked

such a wreck that he thought, oh, he wouldn't have a handbag like that. But that's after they finished with it, so that's how it looked.

Did you know what had happened to your mum and your sister at the time?

Yeah, we were told. We were told very quickly. Very quickly. In fact, I had a dream that morning but I never tell it because people think I'm crazy or they won't believe it.

Tell us.

But don't include it. I mean I've told maybe one or two at most of my friends. I had a dream and it was very early in the morning, it was at six o'clock – I don't know what time it was but very early. I was asleep and my cousin was next to me and that was in the small ghetto and my mother appeared in front of me, naked, and then she disappeared again. **[02:04:06]** And I – and I had one other dream. Those are the only things I had but I always hesitate telling – my friend, Pema, who was reading the book, she disap – she appeared in my dream but this was – oh, this was in Ravensbrück, and in black stockings. And the next morning I heard that she had died. And I – so I don't talk about it because it sounds eerie, doesn't it? But this is absolutely true. I don't know how that happened.

Were there witnesses to – I mean that shooting of your mother and your sister? Were there witnesses?

Oh, lots of witnesses. We heard it from witnesses but of course there are books, so many books. One of them, [sighs] what's the author, what – I've forgotten his name. He'll be speaking at the event, the Holocaust Educational Trust have got their annual fundraising dinner and he'll be the key speaker but I can't think of his name.

Okay, Mala, I think we should have a break because we –

Oh, a cup of tea.

Because then we will go the next chapter – so to speak.

Yes, it –

[Break in recording 02:05:48 - 02:06:17]
Oh, you mean before we were deported.

Yes, before Ravensbrück.

You want to start from the deportation?

Yes.

But the other part, I can tell you, is going to be- I don't have half as much to say about the other part as I had about this. And most of this I don't tell because I don't tell about Pema and the book and lots of other things that went on.

Anything else? How do spell it? Interesting name. Pa –

P-E-M-A, just as you hear it. **[02:06:22]** Pema Blachmann.

Okay. Any other friends you had in that – any other names you remember?

Yeah, there were – I had a friend but she was with her mother. I think Pema was with her mother but Pema died in Ravensbrück, so it was much later. I met her mother after the war. I can't think of anything in this half, because there were so many bits and pieces I don't usually talk about. Oh, the most important thing, [laughs] that I am here, the – you know. I started telling you but I never got to the point. You know, when they were finally getting all the people out and I told you what – oh, I did tell you about it.

You told me. In the row, yeah, when you spoke to the German, yes.

The German [overtalking].

We don't know the name. We don't know his name.

We don't know. I think it's probably documented. But why I didn't – but because my brother told me that, you know, he used to come into the factory occasionally and he once enquired about me. So, I – I've got my main source of- what's the name, doc – [sighs] of information gone. **[02:08:04]**

Yeah. Yes. For you it was important I guess that you had somebody who could remember with you.

Yeah, yeah. And, you know, I think he wasn't well. He was quite ill towards the end but one day I came in and he said something about our father but you see, his speech, his vocal chords weren't working so he could say very little and he said it in Polish. And my sister-in-law said to me, no, don't speak Polish to him because he'll turn into Polish and I won't be able to understand anything. But he didn't, you know, and I didn't, but he said something to me about our father and his tears just came, big tears. And I think he was telling me what happened to our father as if, you know, he was – it was just new to him. Yeah.

It came back.

Hmm.

But did you talk a lot in your life? Did you talk about the past a lot with your brother?

No, we didn't. We didn't. A little bit, if it came up then it would perhaps sort of develop into a bigger conversation. But he told me many things like- for instance, he travelled an awful lot. He was always meeting people and very often people he knew and sometimes he would – people would say, oh, that's a friend of mine, or you – [inaudible] he survived and he would put people [inaudible] in Argentina or in faraway places. And he- what was it he – yes, one day he was walk – in Munich and he was walking just on the pavement, he saw a man whom

he recognised from Piotrków. **[02:10:19]** And then he went across to him, he said, you are Mr so-and-so from Piotrków. He said yes, how do you know? He said, well, my name is so-and-so. He didn't recognise Ben because he knew him as a little boy. He was now a grown man. So he said, oh. He was so excited about it and anyway, he invited Ben to dinner. He said, you'd better come home with me, I want to introduce you to my wife and – come home to dinner. But, you know, he used to recognise people on the street. He had a very good memory. But I didn't know that he had such a good visual, you know, you can have a good memory here or here or both. He knew so much.

Did he start talking about his experience before you, publicly?

Yes. Not publicly. I don't know about publicly, the boys among themselves talked. I sort of led a different life because I was – I was part of the boys inasmuch as I used to go to the events, the dances, I knew them, but I had- I married very young. I met my husband very young and I somehow went into the English way of life very quickly, whereas they sort of remained – they married much later and they were still a group of boys.

They stayed together and all, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. But they did, even after they were married. **[02:12:00]** But after they married, they had a lot of diversion with – into different subjects, you don't sort of talk about your experiences.

That's really interesting. Let's – I would like to – that's an interesting thing.

Hmm?

That's an interest – that's really interesting.

Yeah.

You know, how then post-war –

Yeah, yeah. Well, that's what they're working on today. But it's too late. It's too late. And, you know, to keep a memory for so long, the only reason I've sort of been able to do it I think is because I have been talking but otherwise – and now, I haven't been talking because of the pandemic. And even that, when we came out of – mind you, I was doing Zoom, so I was still talking during the pandemic. But now, you see, in talking to you, I'm already getting sort of- oh, what's the word? Now I can't even speak either. [Laughs] I can't remember my English. You get gaps, that you just say, oh, what happened there? [Laughs] You can go from this to this and you can't remember something in the middle.

That's okay, Mala. I think it's a good time now to take a break, yeah? So –

Yeah [laughs]. I'm going –

[Break in recording]

Yes, Mala we were talking about the time of being a slave labour. Let's pick it up from there towards the end of that time and your deportation to Ravensbrück.

So, we working at these two places outside Piotrków and then they decided to deport us, both lots, you know, the – both factories. **[02:14:05]** And they marched us to the, um, railway station and there were the wagons, the cattle trucks, ready, waiting for us, men separately from women. We didn't know where we were going. I can tell you now that the men were sent to Buchenwald Concentration Camp, and I with the women ended up in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. The journey took four and a half days, without any food or water and any sanitary provisions and it was a terrible journey. I don't remember it all anyway, which is just as well. I may have blocked it out. And when we arrived the first thing they did was take – well, they took everything away from us. We took a few bits and pieces but it wasn't of great consequence, so they took that. Then we had to queue up and give our names and- various details. And that's, you know, because they were meticulous at record-keeping and that list actually exists. It is online and I've actually got a copy [laughs] on my PowerPoint. So we gave –

Of your arrival? Of your arrival in Ravensbrück?

Yeah. Yeah. At arrival they took everything away from us.

And you were with your cousin?

Yeah, I was with my little cousin. And then we had to strip. They shaved our heads. We went through cold communal showers and when we came out at the other end we were given the concentration camp garb, this striped jacket and skirt. **[02:16:10]** And when we looked at one another, we really could not recognise each other. And it's very difficult to describe what it does to you, to be stripped of your identity, of your looks, of your hair. It's – hair is so important, to women particularly. But it wasn't only that. We really were like without a soul. It really does something to your soul. And this showed itself very quickly because people started losing hope. And without hope, there's no survival. And my friend, my best friend, Pema Blachmann, died soon after that. And–

Sorry, how did she die?

I don't know. She died actually in the barracks. She went to bed and she didn't wake up. She must have been ill. She wasn't in the same barrack as I was, so I'm not sure. But my aunt, Frania Klein, died around the same time. In fact, they don't even have a record of the date of death in the, you know, in Ravensbrück, and that's very unusual for their record-keeping. But they – I've asked several times and in the end they said, we don't actually have the record, not the date. So, my aunt died there too.

Sorry to interrupt you. What was the arrival date in Ravensbrück?

Arrival day, [sighs] oh, I wouldn't know. **[02:18:01]**

Roughly?

We didn't – at the end of November '44, so beginning of December. I don't have those details but it was around that time, before the end of the year. And you may have noticed that I actually gave the names, Pema Blachmann, Frania Klein. And I think that's terribly important because we always talk about 6 million, and who can imagine 6 million people? So I have decided that, speaking for myself of course, that if I ever know anybody's name that I refer to, I will always mention it. I won't just say somebody died. So that's one thing, that's a sort of recent acquisition, something I thought of and I then – I'm hoping that other people do it as well.

You want to name people?

Absolutely, if I – if we know. Because most of the names, we don't know, all the millions. So people started dying. Now, I didn't have a lot- I haven't experienced an awful lot there because the thing that stands out to me is the roll call. We had to get up at – I can't remember exactly but some people tell me five o'clock and some people say six o'clock. But it was more likely five o'clock because we had to be outside on the – on parade, [laughs] as they would say in the army, by six o'clock. And they started counting us and that would go on for hours and then they would go off and probably have a coffee, come back, start counting again. **[02:20:10]** And this was in winter. We were there in December, January. The cold was just piercing through our, you know, through our bodies. And we used to – we don't seem to have such strong wind as – winters any more but in those days, I'm talking about nearly a hundred years ago, they were very, very cold. People used to die quite a lot on this- on these, well, you could call them parades, but they did all the counting then. So, then we'd go back inside. The food was very meagre, there was like for breakfast, I don't know, there was something they called coffee, something dark, and half a slice of bread. Lunchtime, there was some of soup that had nothing in it, just liquid. And much the same in the evening. There really wasn't much. There wasn't much food, but not only that, well, I didn't work, some people did. For instance, my other aunt who was there, she used to go out – they were picking vegetables in the winter. And one occasion she brought me back a carrot. Well, that was like winning the pools. And if she was caught, she might have been killed, but she did bring me on one occasion something. And we weren't there very long but I didn't work, I was – by then I was just – I'd just turned fourteen. **[02:22:03]** And of course my cousin was with me. I was still

looking after her. I remember one particular occasion when she suddenly – we were sitting there on the bunk and she suddenly sort of fell back, closed her eyes and I thought she was dead. [Gasps] I was terrified, I didn't know what to do, but then she came to. She obviously fainted. So I had this constant worry about my little cousin. But I don't really have a lot to say about Ravensbrück because I didn't work. So we, when we weren't on parade ground, to give it a sort of [laughs] nice description, we were indoors. It – I remember the cold. It was really piercing. And we were there about between two and three months, about two and a half months. When they walked us again to the railway and we got into these wagons again, cattle trucks, and this time the journey was shorter, from Ravensbrück to Bergen-Belsen. Now, we found ourselves in Bergen-Belsen. They don't actually have a station there, a railway station, and the train used to stop quite a long way away and the rest, we walked. When we reached – it was quite a long walk. I can't remember how long but it was awful. It was in the depths of winter. And when we arrived at the camp, they didn't have room for us, so- because at that time – it's well-known now, I don't know if – we didn't know it at the time but because it was towards the end of the war and the Russians were moving into Poland, and they didn't want them to have the benefit of these poor- what do you call it? **[02:24:25]** Well, the- well, they didn't want them to capture us. They wanted the benefit of taking us with them and that's of course we ended up in Germany. But everybody was being taken to Germany in great numbers and there was such an overflow of people that they didn't have room for us and they put us in a very big tent. I think I said that before.

No, you haven't.

And there were people there of – for all different countries and all different languages spoken. And that's when I became aware of, well, it's all, well, the whole of Europe is here, all the different countries. Well, we spent the night in the camp. And I will perhaps tell a little story that I never used to tell, because I used to be ashamed for the person who did it. But when I – when we arrived in Ravensbrück I had with me my luggage [laughs] was a little, tiny bag – but it wasn't a bag but just a handkerchief which was tied up and in it I had my worldly goods. But I think I had just a little bit of bread that I kept for Ann, my cousin, in case she fainted again or something, and very little else, but I had this little bundle, it was tiny, the size of my hand. **[02:26:08]** And although it was very crowded, I somehow

managed to sit down and I dozed off for I don't know how long, perhaps a few minutes. When I woke up, my bundle was gone. And I felt so ashamed of – for anyone to do anything under whatever circumstances that I never talked about it. But I have mentioned it on this occasion.

It shows how desperate everyone was.

Yeah, people were desperate, they were stealing from one another, so – I have heard some stories. So, in the morning they let us in the camp and what we saw defies description. The first thing that hit you – I'm going to give you a very short description because there's a lot more to say. But the first thing was the smell and the smog and I can tell you why these were there. I don't usually for lack of time but the smog was because they were burning bodies and it was an awful smell and it caused this smell and the smoke. And there were people there we could see but they were like they were skeletons and they were just shuffling along aimlessly, and as they were shuffling, they would just collapse and die. And there were dead bodies everywhere. It was a horrific scene. And as we were going off to – they were going to take us to some barracks but I mean they were all full up, overflowing, but on the way I heard that there was a children's home somewhere in the camp and I quickly diverted with my cousin to find it. **[02:28:18]** And we did, we were interviewed by two women, Dr. Bimko and Sister Luba. I mean they quite well – if anybody reads about Bergen-Belsen, they'll come across their name Dr. Bimko, she was actually a dentist but she worked in the, um, she worked in the hospital and had a very good relationship with the boss, Kramer. I mean not exactly a relationship but she could ask him various favours but I'll come to that later because these women interviewed us and after asking us a lot of questions, one of them turned to me and said, "well, we are also very overcrowded, but in any case, you are too old", she said to me. I was then over fourteen. And I said, "okay, I understand. Will you take my cousin?" And they said, "oh, yes, we were going to take her anyway." She was very small, a seven-year-old, very thin. And my cousin wouldn't stay. She absolutely refused to stay. And they couldn't persuade her, so it meant her going back into the main camp with me. And somehow, they had this moment of this generosity and said – one said to the other, "well, we've taken in so many children, we'll manage these two little Jewish girls." Because they had just taken in some Russians. **[02:30:08]** But in fact, that children's home, as they called it, was occupied

by Dutch children with a very special – very special story of their own, which I don't have time to tell you. It's quite a longish story. So, we were there with the Dutch children.

Is this – sorry to interrupt. Is this the Dutch children who had like Spanish citizenship or that – who had neutral citizenships, by any chance? No?

No, they were there with their parents. I'll just very briefly tell you their story. They were there with their parents. Their fathers were- worked on the diamond bourse in Holland, in Amsterdam. And the Germans wanted to know where the diamonds are, they wanted the diamonds, and these men wouldn't tell them. I don't know whether it's because they didn't know or 'cos they didn't want them to have the diamonds. And they kept threatening them. They said that if they don't tell them, they'll deport them. And they didn't tell them. Probably they didn't know. And they deported the whole families in – to Bergen-Belsen. But of course, they all went through Westerbork, another camp, before they went on to Germany. And so, these were the children. But when they got to Westerbork, they started on them – to – rather to Germany, to Bergen-Belsen. They started on them again and they said if you don't tell us, we'll deport you to Auschwitz. And that's what happened. They deported first the women - first the men then the women, and the children were left on their own. **[02:32:03]** There were like fifty-one children, I think.

So all their fathers were Jewish, in the diamond trade?

I'm not sure about that. That's a very good question because, well, even if they weren't, they weren't averse to sending non-Jews as well.

So they might have been non-Jewish?

Well, some of them might not. But all the children that I knew were Jewish. Or maybe they only deported the Jews and not the others, yeah. So, that's how those children came to be there. And there is much more to this story, how this came about that they got a barracks for the children. So anyway, we got in there and- although we were now sort of a little bit more protected, we had a little bit more food, very little, because it was only that these wonderful

nurses, as we called them, or sisters in effect – there were Sister Helen and Sister Roma and Odette, Sister Kristina. And Sister Luba was in charge because Dr Bimko continued to be engaged with the – in the hospital but the only reason she got involved, that she was Luba's friend, and because she knew Kramer, she was able to ask for a barrack for the children. So that's how it came about. So, we got in there but even in there was minutely more food and I still – well, there was very little more food but the- all the diseases that were raging on the main camp also got into the children's barracks and I succumbed to typhus. **[02:34:17**] I remember lying on my upper bunk by the window and I must have come in – I had typhus. I must have come into consciousness, when I saw people running outside. They weren't running very fast. They wouldn't have had the – they wouldn't have had the strength, but they were running and I wondered where. And that was the 15th of April 1945 when we were liberated by the British, the British Army. And they were absolutely amazing in what they did. They really worked so hard to try and save lives but as many people died after as during the war because there was no saving them. They were on the brink of death and some of them couldn't be brought back. So, you know, that's- that's up to the liberation. And I don't know if you want to tell me any more [laughs] anything about –

No, I just want to go slightly back, to Ravensbrück. So, tell us a little bit. Ravensbrück was the women's camp and there were also Jewish prisoners, non-Jewish prisoners. Did you meet any of the other prisoners or were you aware of, you know –

Yeah, Ravensbrück was in fact the biggest women's prison. But I don't have a lot of memories of what I did all that – sort of all day long. **[02:36:03]** And in fact, I went back there quite recently during the year, in the spring, and I met some people who were there. There was a kind of reunion but there were just like very few people, nothing like what Bergen-Belsen does and they bring a lot of people back. But it may change now in talking about many years later and everybody's now old, so [laughs] it's – so it's just a question of time. But they- I keep losing my [inaudible] but I know that I – you'll cut that out.

Just about the women, I asked you, you know, the – and the non-Jewish, there were political prisoners.

Yeah. When I went back, I learnt quite a lot from them. So there was one girl there, one woman there, they're both of them with their mothers. One of them – there were three siblings with their mother but the mother died, so they were on their own. There was another one from Holland and she was with her mother and they both survived and I think they went to live in South Africa. And I really got to know these two women and some other people and there was a reunion and there was actually a special event and lots of people from outside came to commemorate. It was very well-attended by the officials and people from the government. And there's a lot – and in fact, I have now had a letter, only sort of last week or the week before, they're having a very big reunion next month. **[02:38:04]** But I won't be going, out of choice. I'm invited – I would be invi – they would send me an invitation but they wanted to ask me first whether I'd like to come.

But you don't want to go?

I don't want to go because first of all, I'm fairly busy and it takes – I am not likely to know anybody because they got a new organisation consisting of either six or seven camps that were in Germany and they- this is kind of joint event and there will be lots of people. What I have learnt is that they- it's very successful in the sense that lots of people come to visit, they get really big crowds, so that's really worthwhile. And they're going to have a meeting, a reunion of all those different camps, so there'll be a lot of people who I won't know and I – I've been there not so long – to Ravensbrück, not so long ago- because for all the years they weren't in touch with me. I don't know if they – I don't know why, I don't know if they mentioned it, but on one occasion we had a Beit Shalom organise something on Zoom about – during the liberation, to commemorate that. And the person in charge of Ravensbrück was on it. We were all on Zoom. But she was – she's got a special title. I can't think what it is. **[02:40:00]** And so I briefly met her on Zoom and since then I have now met her there and she was the one who wrote to me and she said she would really like to see me there but I decided not to go because there'd be a lot of people – most people I won't know. And it's quite a big effort because it isn't like going to Berlin. From Berlin you've got to travel north about a few hours, three hours at least, so – and I haven't got that much interest in it. The early reunions in Bergen-Belsen used to be very interesting because they – a lot of people came and among

them were my friends. Very often I would unexpectedly meet a friend and that was always very nice.

People you remembered, yeah.

Yeah.

But not in Ravensbrück?

Not in Ravensbrück, no.

Do you think the fact – I was thinking about it when I listened to your story – that you had to take care of your cousin, helped you to survive in – both in Ravensbrück and Belsen?

I'm not sure. You know, someone else said that to me at some point. I can't remember who it was. Maybe- it never occurred to me. All I felt was a very heavy responsibility. It really was a worry to me. But somehow I – I'm trying to recapture my feelings and my thoughts but it isn't easy after so many years. And I think that after the war it was a sort of relief not to be responsible for my cousin. And strangely, although she was clinging to me an awful lot, she was terrified of losing me, all this changed once the war was finished because when we went to Sweden they separated us because you can't have a seven-year-old with a fourteen-year-old in the same classroom, and it didn't bother her. **[02:42:25]** It – you know, she went quite happily, which – because I think she had this – she wasn't frightened of anybody any longer. I think she must have been so frightened in the concentration camp, that I gave her perhaps some- either some hope or some encouragement or something to keep her going, and she didn't need that after the war. And on one occasion I – someone traced me from Israel to say that they have an organisation where they all meet up, people who were – because a lot of people went to Israel after the war and they meet up. And he sent me actually photographs of the meetings and my cousin's one among them, from Sweden, photographs from Sweden. And I studied those photographs so carefully and I could see that she – she was alive in herself, she wasn't – you know, I don't mean physically alive but there's something she – she looked happy and she was okay. Even though we separated, it didn't affect her very much

because she was with children of her own age. Maybe it was because the war was over and she wasn't so frightened. **[02:44:01]** There – it could have been many factors. But I studied those – I thought, gosh, she looks so happy here. And that was a really nice surprise and I was pleased to learn that.

But did you stay close after the war or what – the two of you?

Well, after the war, I mean her mother survived and we stayed close but she lived in Australia and I lived in England, so it wasn't easy but we were – whenever we met and we went a few times and she came to us and we did what we could. But unfortunately, she became ill later on and she – I won't say she died very young but she suffered and she died. But while she was alive, it was lovely when we used to meet. And she had a very nice life in Australia and they- they did very well.

And did she manage to sort of I guess reconnect to her mother? Because she hadn't – she had a –

Well, that wasn't easy. That really wasn't easy because first of all, her mother survived and she was – and she went back to Poland to see who survived, as Ben did as well, because they put out big placards, so-and-so in Piotrków survived. And she learnt that her daughter survived and she went to Sweden. So, she said – she told me the story and she said, so, if she's gone to – she read it as Switzerland. They said Sweden but it was similar and she was so excited and so she went to Switzerland. **[02:46:04]** So she was – quickly started her way back to Germany to get- you know, to go to the embassy and get permission to go to Switzerland. But on the way she met people and they who read the announcement properly would say to her, no, she hasn't gone to Switzerland, she's gone to Sweden. So she said, well, then, I must go to the Swedish embassy to get, you know, a permit to go there. And she said that was in Hamburg, I think, and every day she'd get up and go to the embassy and queue up with hundreds of other people to get a permit to go there. And nothing was happening and she used to cross this bridge every day and she saw the different boats and eventually she learnt that the boat had been in Hamburg. There is a port there, isn't there?

Yeah.

But it had left for- so she missed that. It left for a port somewhere in the south of France, because they were taking them I think to Israel, so she realised there's no good going to Sweden, she's left Sweden. And she made her way to the boat and the boat was just on the point of leaving but it was still there. She got on the boat and she said, my daughter is here and I've come to collect her. **[02:48:00]** And the person in charge said, well, you say your daughter's here. How would I be sure that it is your daughter? I can't part with any of the children. So, she said, well, you could call her and ask her. And they called her upstairs and she saw her mother, she looked at her very shyly, and they said, this is your mother? She said, well, yes, it's my mother but I don't want to go with her. You see, she's got – I don't know how the mother received that but she got used to all these – all her little mates and she was happy with them. And this strange woman that she hasn't seen for a few years, she didn't really want to go with her. So that's what she was faced with. But needless to say, she did go with her because her mother was a very strong character, too strong in fact to – it was a bit hard on Ann. And she got her daughter back and then she got married, or she had already been – got married, because her father was one of the ones that was killed in Poland, you know, shot in the cemetery. And she married a lovely man. He was a wonderful father to Ann. And they had to wait in Germany for many years before they got their affidavit for Australia. That's where they were going. And so she went to school in Germany, her Eng – we never put it to the test. I mean I can't put it to the test but I mean she never talked about it but if she went to school and learnt in German –

Where in Germany? Where did they live? ***[02:50:00]***

I think Hanover. Yeah. And I don't know which year they went.

Probably early '50s.

Possibly. But all I can tell you that by the time my brother, Ben, was going to compete in the Olympics in Melbourne, they were already there, living there. And they got established so quickly. They were already living in a house, they were buying, and got married. I think she

had- no, I know she had two boys but I'm trying to think how old they were. Now, this grandfather was really wonderful to them and he used to take them, you know, to synagogue and for their *bar mitzvahs* and he was a wonderful grandfather. And they knew the surname, which I can't remember now, and these two little boys were so bright. And one day they say, wait a minute, if our name is Helfgott, why is our grandfather a different name, and our grandmother? And because when Ben came on the scene, he suddenly thought, well, they're Helfgotts there. Because he was born a different surname anyway because his father was a newcomer into the family but they sussed it out. With Ben there they said, what's this? And they worked it out. It was quite amazing because they weren't very old. One was just learning for his bar mitzvah. And this grandfather was wonderful. Grandfather but unfortunately he died quite young. **[02:52:00]**

So, Ben reconnected with Ann?

Yeah. And Ben reconnected with everybody because he travelled such a lot. It was quite amazing.

Just to come back to Bergen-Belsen, Mala. In Bergen-Belsen there were – you said you were where – the whole of Europe was assembled there.

Hmm.

So I know there was a Star Camp, there were many Greek Jews there in Belsen. Did you come across those?

There were about – there were eight camps.

Yes, there was a – also a camp for the neutral, you know, people who were neutral [overtalking].

Yes, that's right. I've got all that on my PowerPoint.

Were you aware of that at the time or –

No, not at the time.

But you said you met people – but do you – there were people from all over Europe.

When we were in the tent. And I think that they maybe sorted them after they went in, or it was so close to the end and they were so disorganised because the people were arriving in their thousands from the other camps in Poland. So –

So by the time you got there, the conditions were absolutely terrible.

Oh, they were appalling. They were unbelievable. And one of the scenes, if I describe that, where the children's barracks was, it was – opposite there, and there was a road running along. And opposite that road there was a shed across the road. It was like a small barracks but it was empty. And all that, along that road, all day long there were people bringing dead people and throwing them in the shed, because they had to keep clearing the dead.
[02:54:04]

And you saw that?

Oh, yes. But they used to come – at the beginning they would come with carts, had the dead person on a cart. Then the carts were breaking down and they in the end deteriorated to- they would pull them along in a blanket, perhaps two people holding the ends together. And then it deteriorated to a person going along, pulling a dead body by a limb, along the ground, to get it into this shed. This – it was just unbelievable.

Did you and also the nurses try to shield your cousin- could you, was it at all possible, from the, you know, when you arrived?

Well, they tried to protect us.

No, did you, you know –

The nurses?

Yeah, or you with your cousin. You know, when she saw all this. Did you try to shield her from – you couldn't?

You can’t. You couldn't. You couldn't. I don't really know how much she saw of it because I, when I sat at that window, she wasn't sitting there with me. Maybe she was at some time but I can’t remember her sitting with me. And I don't know, there were younger children there as well, so maybe she drifted a little bit towards them. But we weren’t there very long, when we got typhus.

She also got typhus? Both of you?

Well, she told me – I didn't know at the time, but she did. **[02:56:00]**

And so two questions. First of all, did they keep the children busy? I mean did they do some –

Yes, yes.

Because I heard there was some sort of school, or did they do something for the – I mean [overtalking].

Well, in the home itself, the older children like my contemporaries were – we used to sometimes have discussions in German because we were different languages. But the Dutch were usually good at German anyway. And I think that us, we were not good at German but because of our knowledge of Yiddish, even if we didn't use it we knew some of the words, so we managed. I remember one day we had a discussion and some – and we were saying, what is the first thing you would do if you get – when you get out of here? And one of them said, I'll go and find a German and I'll kill him [laughs]. I can’t remember what the others said but I said I'll go and find a loaf of bread and eat it. Those were my priority, [laughs] over food.

So actually the Dutch children were very interesting because they weren't there – not long after the war they were actually taken back to Holland and Sister Luba went with them and they said she was offered a home in Holland to stay and live in Holland but she said no, she was going back. She went back to Bergen-Belsen and ultimately, she lived in America. I don't know where she came from but it could have been – her Polish wasn't very- like pure. **[02:58:00]** So she could have been from Ukraine or any of those adjoining places.

But Jewish or not Jewish? Sister –

Jewish. Jewish.

She was Jewish. So all the sisters, the people there in charge, they were Jewish?

Yeah, they were all Jewish. Yeah. It was like a Jewish home really [laughs] in a way. Yeah.

So you remember some of these discussions and other. So –

Yeah, I remember those but we had very few. If we did have more, I don't remember them. But –

Did the children have some pens or crayons or – in that sort of thing?

I think there was a little bit of something. I don't know, I can't – I haven't used – didn't use them myself but I think they may have had something. There was a girl among them called Hetty. She had two brothers and she was the oldest of the – of them. And she was about the age limit, like I was, and there is seven months between us. She was seven months older. She is seven months older. And she – they took in her brothers, her two brothers, but they wouldn't take her, even though they took the – all the other Dutch children because she was too old, they said. So she said okay, well, as long as my brother are all right – she was the eldest – so she used to go and visit them every day, so seven o'clock she would show up and go home very late, home, you know, to her barracks. And one day the two in charge said to one another, look, she spends all the days here, she – we may as well find a bed for her. So

she was already there when – and she's written a book, a very good book, and she describes our arrival in it and that was before we made contact after the war and she said that these three children were admitted- two girls, because there was a friend with us as well – I'd quite forgot – two girls and a little boy. **[03:00:20]** She described Ann as a little boy because she had shaved head. Well, we had as well but being older, our features were probably – because a baby's features are not so distinct, they –

So she – you feature in this book? What's the book called? Or what –

Oh, I could lend you a copy. It's called – I can't remember.

What's the author? What is she called? Do you know her name?

Hetty Verolme.

Verolme?

Verolme. V – yeah, with an L-M-E. I'll tell you on the way back out because I think I've got a – I keep – I gave one book to someone and now I haven't got a copy, from Beit Shalom. And my story is in it. But yes, I was going to tell you, perhaps it will give you a sort of- an idea of my character or my optimism because when the war was finished, I had typhus and they didn't have hospitals. They had – there was a garrison town next door and so they something there but they had to create a lot of beds. They didn't have the beds for all the people that were ill. And in fact, I listened to a lecture myself where they said that they suddenly had to create 2000 beds, they didn't have the wood, they didn't have the material, but they must have worked very hard, they actually – there were miracles there. **[03:02:17]** They performed miracles. And they left me in bed, in – no, it wasn't a bed, it was a – what's it called?

A bunk?

A bunk. Upper bunk. They left me there till they got a bed for me. And then they came for me and there was two soldiers and a stretcher and they wanted to help me. They wanted to carry me onto the stretcher and I said no, that's all right, I can do it myself. And of course, I stood up and collapsed. I couldn't even walk for quite a long time. So, it just shows you, I must have been an optimist if I thought that.

And can you remember talking to a British soldier when they came in to the barracks? Or how –

No, they – I was on my bunk, so I didn't even have the opportunity but they just came and looked around and I wasn't outside. But the soldiers were wonderful and they wanted to do something for the children. That was after we came out of there and had a children's home. But I don't remember anything about the children's home, strangely enough. But I know that on one – oh, I've got a – I'll show you the photograph. From there, from that time, I've got one photograph and you can still see it because some of the photographs have faded terribly. **[03:04:02]** Not important ones, but still. This one didn't.

So that photo is from the children's home, of –

No, it was one day when we were having a treat and we were going to be taken by the soldiers. They organised it themselves in their spare time, arranged all the food and there were lorries there to take us to the woods. And I remem – and they had music and we danced and I remember the tunes. I somehow remember that kind vividly. So they didn't have to do that, that wasn't part of their duty.

This is after you recovered?

Yes.

So you were taken first to –

A hospital. I remember the hospital. I remember that it wasn't a very big room and there were four beds there in it but I can't remember – I don't remember the people in the beds. Maybe there weren't – I didn't think there were people in those other three beds.

And your cousin with you or not?

No, I didn't know what was happening to her.

Okay, so you were then separated.

But she was being looked after obviously, yeah.

Yes, so she was somewhere else in a hospital as well.

Yes, another part, but she doesn't remember anything.

And how long were you in that hospital? Do you know or –

I don't think it was very long. I recovered quite quickly. But I have no idea of the actual time. But I can tell you that amazing things happened after the war because they put up a tent which they turned into a theatre and we had like shows and the children took part. The children were taught – I was one of them – and we were taught certain dance routines. **[03:06:08]** And I still remember this – the tunes [laughs] they used.

Like what?

One was Sweet Sue. Do you know that tune? It goes like, [hums tune], sweet Sue, sweet Sue [sings]. It was of that period, so you wouldn't have heard, you don't – they don't – the same – different songs now without tunes [laughs]. So we had Sweet Sue for one and we had a classical one for the other, and I have forgotten the name of it but I knew the tune. Oh, yes, [hums tune]. Do you remember – do you know the tune?

Yeah, yeah.

I've forgotten what it's called. A friend told me and I should have written it down somewhere. So that was the classical bit.

So who was teaching those? Who was [overtalking]?

There was a woman there who was actually a choreographer. She was Polish and she had her hair. Her hair hadn't been shaved. Mind you, we had shaved hair – what must we have looked like? There was a little growth I think. I can't – so yeah, we definitely had these two things in the show.

And this was still in Bels – because Belsen became a DP camp, didn't it?

Yeah.

So this was already in the –

No, there were still a lot of tents around. **[03:08:01]** They hadn't organised it yet but there was the DP – er, well, yes, that garrison town, it – and when the British moved in, strangely enough, they [laughs] – they drove on the left because in – they were driving on the right. So, they – inside the town they would be on the left. When they came out, they were – they had to be on the right. Why would they –

That's so interesting. Never thought about that.

I – it – you really had to have your wits about you to remember to change here, and when you come out to change here.

And did you have any contact with – because I know there was the British Relief Unit came in there as well.

Well, we did know about them because they did have contact with me. I think you can see someone on –

Not yet, not yet, not yet.

No, because I want to get the pictures.

Okay. We'll look at it in a second.

Yeah.

You think there's somebody on the photo from –

Yeah, I think so.

Because, you know, many years ago I interviewed Helen Bamber.

Oh, yes.

And I don't know whether you came into contact with her.

Yes, I did know her, yes, but only to say hello.

Because she came as a young woman. She was at Belsen.

Yes. And then she devoted her life to it, didn't she? But we never – I never really got to know her well but I got to know her a little bit. Yeah.

So, there was a big effort dedicated to the children, to –

Well, there were just a few people who took that interest. And there was, for instance, a Rabbi Helfgott.

Not related?

No, he came from – not Romania but another country close to Romania, I can't remember now, yeah. **[03:10:05]**

And Mala, once you were liberated, what were your first thoughts what you should do or have to do or – I don't know, what do you remember?

No, I can't remember. It was sort of taking each day as it came. I just kept wondering, well, who survived? Did anybody survive? But I assumed no one did, until Ben showed up. He was the only other one.

So you at that point thought that you were the only survivor, you were, with your cousin.

Yeah, my cousin. And now there's another cousin survived on the other side, on my mother's side.

I mean did you feel like you wanted to go back to Poland to look for people at that point, or you were not healthy enough, in any case at that – then?

No, I didn't think about going back to Poland at all. I think that Ben had more initiative and he was that little bit older and he was very – and he was very clever. He just went there like that and he had some terrible experiences but –

When he came or after he –

When he went, yeah. But he –

Just tell us briefly, how did he survive? How did he survive? Ben.

Well, he was deported to Schlieben [Germany] then he was separated from my father and he said that he cried all day and all night when he was separated. And he was a real sort of [laughs] – I won't say a fan of my father, he was his father, but he had so much respect for him, he looked up to him. And he was very good at sports as well and apparently, in the winter when the lakes were frozen, he and his friends used to break the ice and go under, swimming, in that freezing [laughs] cold. **[03:12:13]**

So it was hard for him to be separate. Was it –

Oh, it was terrible. Even –

Even towards the end of the war, they were separated? Or when they arrived?

It was fairly towards the end, yes. Yeah, they were separated. He took it very badly, Ben. And then he found out quite a long time later that my father was on a death march – not death march – yeah, death march, they called them that. And he tried to escape with some other people, that's when he lost his life. He was – they were all shot.

A death march from where to where? From...

I don't know the exact spot. You see, Ben probably knows but I never asked him and I didn't make a note of it. But it was – I think they were still in Poland, marching to Germany.

So where was Ben liberated? Where was he?

He was liberated in- in Czechoslovakia, in-what do you call the- what was that Czech camp?

Terezin?

Terezin, yeah.

He was in Terezin. And then made his way to Poland? You said he went back.

Well, if he was there. He went back because he thought to see who survived. But then when he arrived, he had a cousin there in Terezin and he – a younger cousin, and was he quite ill. **[03:14:12]** And Ben went back to Poland to see who survived and he, well, he – I don't know what he found but he was met by an aunt of this cousin, but an aunt on the other side of the family. And she said, you know, Genek survived and he's in Terezin. And she said he survived? So why didn't you bring him with you? But actually he wasn't well enough to travel. But she was very angry with Ben, saying, why didn't you bring him back? So, he quickly made his way back to Czechoslovakia and got Gershon to take him back. And they were standing on the- at the, um, they were standing on the rail platform, railway platform, waiting for a train and there were a lot of people milling around. And they had a little case with a few things, whatever they were. And suddenly two men, well-dressed, not in any uniform but well-dressed, they said they were detective, and they said to them, will you come with us? And he said why, where? They said to the police station. And well, they didn't have any option but to follow them. And they started walking, and they were walking and walking and walking and they were already getting out of town and Ben realised that there's no police stations outside town and he realised there's something not right here. **[03:16:16**] But eventually they arrived at some old hut or something, went inside and first of all, they wanted this little case they were carry – they were after that. But they would have parted with that. But they were going to kill them. And Ben pleaded and pleaded and eventually they let them go but they could so easily have been killed. And then they walked all the way back to the station and the trains were running and not running, it was chaotic, on the whole of the – of Europe after the war. Well, for a little while at least. And eventually they got back to Poland and my – he left my cousin there but his father hadn't arrived back yet. He survived. And Ben went back because he heard that there was a transport of children going to England and he rushed back to make sure he'd make it in time for that transport and that –

From Terezin?

Yeah.

So he delivered his cousin and went back?

Yeah. Well, he wouldn't have stayed in Poland anyway. There was nothing there for him. No relatives.

He wanted to come –

The aunt that, that was on his mother's side, my cousin's mother's side. We were on the father's side, Klein.

So then he came with the boys?

Yeah.

In that transport. ***[03:18:00]***

Yeah.

So when was that, when he arrived?

I don't know when they came here. I think in August.

August in '45?

'45.

In August '45.

Yeah. I – hmm, that's funny because I don't – I can't remember or I don't know if I ever knew, but they came quite quickly after the war. And then when he discovered that I was alive and they decided to- that I should come here and not the other way around, I had to wait for a visa. I couldn't just come without a visa. I mean look at it today, people are coming en masse without visas, but I waited and then somebody in that organisation had such a good

idea. They said – 'cos they – the government offered to take 1000 children but only 722 came. So, somebody said, well, why can't we use one of those visas that we didn't use? And they said yes, you can [laughs]. So, I came.

So your visa was part of those 1000 unaccompanied children who were supposed to come from the camps?

Yeah.

And you were of course. You came from the camps.

Yeah. Yeah, I was completely unaccompanied. I travelled on my own from Sweden.

First of all – one second. How did your brother discover – how did he find you?

Well, [sighs] he said that he found a list somewhere and my name was on it as having survived. Because my aunt saw it on a placard, the two Helfgott girls have survived and they're in Sweden [laughs] when she made her way to Switzerland, where she wanted to make her way. **[03:20:02]**

Oh, on that list?

[Laughs] Yeah.

Okay. And Sweden, were you given a choice or some, you know, like after, from the hospital –

When we got there –

From the hospital you came back to Belsen, to the children's home, you said?

Yes.

And then how –

I remember nothing about the children's home, strangely enough.

And then were you given a choice or, you know, were you just told you were going to Sweden?

No, we were told we're going to Sweden.

To recuperate? Was it – was there [overtalking].

Presumably. We didn't question it but maybe – I think that probably because Sweden had such a small population, they wanted more people and they just opened their gates.

So how many people, how many children went with you or –

I don't know. We went on a boat and we were quite – sort of probably a couple of hundred maybe.

From where?

I don't really know.

Where was the boat from?

Which port? I don't know. I don't know which port we went from.

Were you by then healthy enough to travel and strong enough?

Oh, yes, I recovered. Once I got over typhus and then I started eating non-stop [laughs]. I recovered, yeah.

So you ate the bread you wanted to eat.

[Laughs] Yes.

So you were taken with your cousin, but you said you were not together.

We were not together 'cos she was a different age – she was half my age.

Yeah. And were there other people your age?

More or less, up and down, one or two years. Yeah.

And what was it like to arrive in Sweden? What do you remember about –

I don't remember the actual arrival but I remember the first place they took us to was a sort of – like the Lake District, there were lots of lakes there. **[03:22:06]** And we used to swim in the lakes and it was like a sort of resort place. It wasn't a smart hotel or anything but it was a building with accommodation, like bedrooms with two beds and there was a dining hall and – like when you go on holiday, you – for young people.

And who was in charge of this at that point? Who was in charge?

I can't remember. I can't remember but someone must have been in charge.

But you said the Jewish community was involved?

I – the Jewish community was involved but I don't know how much. We weren't there all that long and then we went to another resort place. But soon they established a kind of – it was like- a stately home stripped of all its beauty inside and they may – I think we may have slept in dormitories, I'm not sure, but we were there and we had lessons every day. We had teachers but they were teaching us I think this is not necessarily suitable for public consumption, as they say, [laughs] but they were really preparing us for Israel, for what was

Palestine then. And I have learnt a lot afterwards. I didn't know much at the time but what I was – what I learnt was that there were competing political organisations in Israel- in Palestine as it was then, and they were all interested in getting that youth into their organisations. **[03:24:03]** So I have no idea, I only learnt that very much later, so I've no idea what, you know, what organisation or anything like that.

But did they teach Hebrew, for example?

Oh, Hebrew every day.

Okay, so it was –

We could – I could speak Hebrew. I mean not very well –

So, it was like a Hakhshara, like a training?

Yes, that's right. But we also learnt geography and history and, you know, it was a school, with an accent on Hebrew and Israel.

'Cos at that point you also only had your three years of school.

Yeah. But we were learning geography, for instance. I remember that. We were learning some mathematics, which was sort of fairly international and the language they taught us in was mostly German. They made German a sort of general language. And so much so, I – there's always a story to everything – the person who taught, she was actually Polish but she taught German and French. She was officially a teacher of – no- English and French. German, we already knew. Well, what we needed, we knew. But German and French were her languages. And one day she said to me, after I started receiving letters from Ben, she said, you know, your brother is in England. Why don't you write him an English letter? I will help you. I said okay. So, we wrote this letter. Well, I wrote it with her help. And she put 'I have become your letter.' **[03:26:04]** Become is *bekommen*. She took a German word. She didn't put 'received.' And that's what I wrote. I wrote what she told me. And when Ben got this

letter, he showed it to his – all his mates and they fell about laughing [laughs]. I'm not surprised [laughs].

And Mala, how – when you found out about your brother, how did you react to –

Well, one day I got a letter, when we were already in this sort of stately home without its beauty, I opened it, I read it and I was so excited, I ran out in – I remember this distinctly – I ran out into the grounds of this place and there were people milling around. It was a nice summer day and I was holding up this letter saying- shouting, I've got a letter from my brother, I've got a letter from my brother. And I was sort of running through the grounds saying that. And I think that probably it was sort of nice for all of them to know that somebody's found their relative alive.

It's funny because when you say that, you know, it comes to my mind because there is a scene in The Windermere – in the film, The Windermere Children, you know, where the brother comes.

Oh, yes, and –

And everyone is sort of –

Was it the one in uniform?

Yeah.

Yeah.

You know, it – which is that sort of situation, isn't it?

Yeah. Yeah. So, everybody was celebrating.

And so while you then left to England, did the other children stay there for much longer?

Yes. I didn't know for quite a long time what happened but then we started corresponding. **[03:28:03]** They stayed there for some time but I don't know whether they went to Israel before it was Israel or after, because that was ’47. Oh, no, ’48. ’48. I came here in ’47, so they went a year later. But I haven’t got a proper list of all the dates.

And were you, when they used to suggest that you would come to England, were you happy to come to England? To leave your friends –

Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes. I was going to my brother. Oh, it was a great celebration. And they were all very pleased for me. And people were leaving gradually. There's one boy that had relatives in Buenos Aires. Well, that was so, you know, he went very quickly. But most people didn't have anywhere to go.

No. So most children were orphans then.

Yeah. Yes, there's Harry Spiro here still from Piotrków. I think he's the only one. And what did I say before I would ask him? Do you remember?

It will come to me.

I should have written it down. [Laughs] I should be the last one to rely on my memory. I always had a good memory but this is quite recent.

You remember many things. So just tell us please, Mala, about your – the travelling, coming to England now.

Well, I was seasick and I was on the –

You were by yourself, you said?

Yeah, I travelled by myself. **[03:30:01]** Today, they would send someone with you and, you know, everything. If I have to go to somewhere, they will send a car for you in England and say, but in those days, they put me on the boat and I travelled. I think I was seasick. I don't think – it's not a long journey and I can't remember the name of the port I arrived at. But if I look on the map I'll find it.

And was Ben waiting there or was anyone waiting for you?

Oh, yes, Ben was waiting with a friend. And we had a little dispute – recently, not then, because he said he came with a certain friend and I said no, you came with this other friend [both laugh]. But I'm sure I'm right.

He came with a friend to pick you up.

He did come with a friend. And [laughs] now I can't –

Again you hadn't seen each other for, what, two or three years at that point?

We were separated in – when we were deported from Poland –

So '44?

'44, '44. And I came here in '47.

So, what did he look like? Could you recognise him? Was there any difference?

Yes, yes, I could recognise him. It – three years. Mind you, that three years is different because one develops and – yes, I have some lovely pictures of his early time here.

And what was it like to arrive and how did you – do you remember how you felt when you [overtalking]?

Well, I was very excited. We got on the train to go to Victoria Station then I – I was quite fascinated by the houses. **[03:32:02]** The back of the houses on a railway [laughs] stretch, they don't look so great. And that was just after the war when they hadn't done anything to them. But I don't know whether it was the houses, but all the chimneys – there were chimneys and chimneys and chimneys on some older houses, so that's what struck me. And when we arrived in Victoria Station, we were in this big hall with a lot of people mixing. They don't call it hall. What is the proper name? There is a name for it. Concord? I don't – anyway, I suddenly said to Ben, oh, look, there is a black man. But in Polish there is a name for it, called *Murzyn*. I said, oh, look, there is a *Murzyn*. And he said, quiet, don't say anything. There's a lot of them here. And he really, you know, mustn't say that. It's the first time I had seen a black man. Did you see black people in Germany or –

Yeah, a few.

Yeah, but you didn't have no knowledge of black people, like I didn't till I came to London.

And where did Ben live at that time? Was he established already when you came in '47?

He lived in – yeah, they had – he was living in, oh, what's the name of the road, park- in Swiss Cottage. You know, the road that leads from Swiss Cottage to Belsize Park? What's it called? Something Park.

Belsize Park?

The road is called Belsize Park? Oh, it must have been Belsize Park, yeah. **[03:34:00]** There were two houses there that somebody owned. I don't know the man's name.

They were hostels. They were hostels.

Well, they – yeah, but he donated them, they were his, and he didn't sort of give them over. Eventually they were returned to him. But he had two empty houses, so one of – was a hostel.

No, they were both the same. We had games, dances, music, meetings. They were proper like- they were –

Wasn't it called one the Primrose Club or something like that?

Yeah, well, that came later.

Oh, that was later.

But when we were first there, at the top they used it for residents, for the residences for the boys, some of them –

So did you go there as well?

No. They – someone from this committee came to meet me and she said we haven't found anything for you yet but there's one girl who's had an operation and she is on convalescence in Blackpool, so you can have her room and when she comes – by the time she comes back- we'll have found you a room.

This is the Central British Fund?

Yeah.

So they were involved in your –

Oh, very much. They were wonderful.

So what did they do?

Oh, everything. So first of all, they sent me out – they always had someone to sort of go with me, to look after me, and they sent me out to get some clothes for me. I mean I had clothes but they felt that they wanted to fit me out, so they sent me out with – I can't remember

exactly, you had to have coupons. They didn't always have the clothes that you wanted and there wasn't another delivery for six months and you saw something in the window and you liked it and then they'd say no, but that's only for the window, we haven't got anything for sale. **[03:36:09]** They were difficult, very hard times then but they took me out to kind of fit me out. It wasn't anything too extravagant but they – anything I needed. Then they sent me to learn English. I went to a place in Warren Street. It was called English for Foreigners. And I went there to learn English. I learnt that very quickly, [laughs] not because I'm good at it but because I knew how quickly I needed it. So then from there, yes, then they wanted to know what I wanted to do, what sort of – to earn a living and I wanted to do secretarial work, so they sent me to a secretarial college for just about a year, a little less than a year in Swiss Cottage. And after that I was working and I was self-supporting and my first job was for Cape Times, you know, the newspaper. They had a London office and that's where I got a job, at £4 a week, and I lived on the £4 a week. And from there, you know, I went up and up.

So did you ever look for your files in Central – in World Jewish Relief? Do you have a – do they have the archive, your –

I've got them on my computer but I've got to get them together in one place because one is here, one is here.

And were you surprised by some of the things you read? ***[03:38:01]***

Yes. You know, I don't want to be self – I don't want to praise myself but I am so surprised, I was in correspondence, we often wrote to one another, in English.

With your caseworker or –

Well, sometimes it was the caseworker, sometimes – mostly it was Mrs Laqueur. She was a lovely lady and I've seen correspondence that she has written to someone, which I don't know about- about me and she was so complimentary, she was [laughs] really lovely. And what surprised me, I don't want – I don't like to say it because it's like self-praise, but I can show it to you and you will- you [sighs] – gosh, I'm – words escape me. But anyway, and you agree

with me that- my English after so few weeks, I was corresponding with them in English and not a single mistake. I mean it wasn't anything wonderful but it was correct English.

When you did find these – when did you look at your own archive?

Only when they released them in the last couple of years, two, three years. Yeah. And I found some really nice things there, so it was a real surprise. Yeah.

Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it? Because I've been to the archives and suddenly when somebody finds something about themselves, you know, it's an amazing –

It's amazing and it's all now – but you see, those people were all very nice. Some of the things they said were really complimentary but Ben, [laughs] my brother, may he rest in peace, he always said- he was very strict, he – I think that he felt, well, he's my father, he's got to – he's the big brother, so –

To you? ***[03:40:13]***

Yeah, so he has got to be strict with me. So, for instance, when I first started wearing lipstick, and I don't think it was – maybe eighteen, he looked at me with such dis – not discredit. What's the word?

Disdain?

Disdain. No, there's another word I'm thinking of.

Disrespect?

No, disdain is really –

Disappointment or –

Yeah.

Disapproval?

Disapproval, that's the word. And Ben was very old-fashioned in his own way. Perhaps not with other people but with his own sister, you know, I had to be correct. But when I had this – what I didn't tell you is when I had this- room, this girl's room – her name was Rosa but we called her Rosalyn. She was Hungarian and she had two brothers who had the room next door. And hers was a single room but it had a nice big bed which I occupied. That was her bed. But when she came back, they hadn't found me a room. So there was a couch but just a very sort of not even full-sized couch and I slept on that. And it was fun. I was comfortable enough. When you're young, you can sleep on anything. But eventually I moved out and I went to live in Dollis Hill.

And where was this, the first –

This was in Maida Vale. In fact, I want to ask AJR about some records. **[03:42:01]** Our-landlady was German, Mrs Neuberger and she was really nice. She was nice to us. And sometimes when I had – I was upstairs on my own because Rosalyn had gone out and the boys were out and – and I didn't mind. I could listen to the radio, I was reading, I had things to do. It wasn't that I minded but she would call me down and let me sit with her in her dining room. That's where she used to sit and listen to the radio. She used to listen to it. And she's – you know, looking back I feel I didn't really appreciate her enough.

Was she a refugee?

Well, I don't know. I didn't ask a single question. And this is why I want to check with AJR to see whether she's anywhere on her, you know, on their records, because they had all the refugees. It isn't – they did, didn't they? They had all the refugees.

Yeah. Unfortunately, a lot of records post-war were not sort of kept.

Oh.

Yeah. But if she had – if she was a member a bit later then maybe.

She came from Aachen.

Aachen.

Yeah. Yes, I know where she came from. I learned that much. But I probably felt what else can I ask except where you come from. I couldn't ask are you a widow or are you a single woman, are you –

You could – Mala, you could put maybe a little search notice in the AJR journal. Maybe somebody else remembers her, you know.

Oh, yes. I was just going to approach them direct, say have you got someone like that? But it's better to do it in –

In a way, the chances that they have something is quite little, unless she has children, if she had children.

No, I don't think she had any children. **[03:44:06]** I presume she was married.

Well, Belsize Synagogue might have something if she was a member. Otherwise, you know, sometimes when you put a little search notice in, it's quite interesting who reads it.

Yeah. Well, she was a lovely person and when I came from Sweden, I was quite big and – but it all went naturally very quickly when I came to England. Well, it took a little while but you see, I was getting just my meals and even if I wanted to supplement them I had – I didn't have the money. I couldn't afford it [laughs]. I used to get five shillings a week. How much is that? 25 pence [laughs].

Mala, was there any thought at all about going back to school or getting any – or was that just not possible?

No, because I would have been too old. I was sixteen when I came and they wouldn't take me into a school. People were leaving at sixteen. And I hadn't – I had missed all that education beforehand. What I learned in Sweden, some of it would have been valid but most of it was Hebrew and Palestinography [sic], they called it [laughs].

Yes. You were that generation where really your education was completely interrupted.

Oh, completely. And I don't know – it was my daughter's initiative that I did take a university course, 'cos imagine, doing university without having had a regular education. I mean even people with a regular education have a problem because there are things they don't know, they don't understand. **[03:46:00]** But I don't know, I had a very supportive husband and family because my daughter is the one who found me the course, who encouraged me to go. She really did. Without her, I wouldn't –

You did it. In 19 – in the mid-'70s, you did that.

Yeah. When did I get it? Oh, I know, we were planning our silver wedding, because I remember that somebody phoned me, had a caterer in – because we were going to do a party and somebody phoned to say, oh, congratulations, and we didn't have time to talk and [laughs] so it was about that time when I finished. 25 of '75. So I got my degree in '75.

Mala, tell us a little bit about your husband. How did you meet him?

Well, because of my education in Sweden, which was a lot of Hebrew and a lot of Palestine, as it was then, I was quite imbued with that sort of interest. And when I came here the first thing I did, was to join Habonim. And it was a lovely group in Hendon, the Hendon Shul, Raleigh Close and there was a lovely group of people and they always had *shlichim*. Do you know what that is? *Shaliach*.

Yeah, leaders or –

Yes.

Not leaders, it's, missionaries.

Missionaries, that's right.

Emissaries.

But some of them were leaders as well. So, they used to come over and it was a lovely group. **[03:48:00]** I made some friends there that lasted, well, they've died now but I was in touch for a long time. One of them went to live in Israel but I saw her when she came over through the other friend. And one of our members was- the Reform rabbi that wasn't very distinguished – I shouldn't show off with him – Lionel, Lionel, what's he called? He died –

Not Blue? Lionel Blue?

Lionel Blue.

Lionel Blue?

Yeah, Lionel Blue. He was in our group. And we used to go to various places. Sometimes we'd go to the opera. We didn't go to the theatre but we used to go to the opera sometimes.

On outings and things like that.

Yeah. And they were all lovely and – but you see, I was different. We sometimes went to their homes for a meeting. Well, I couldn't ask anybody, I didn't have a home. But they were all nice people and I think that that sort of got me more into the English society, English Jews.

Right, whereas your brother, you said kept more with the boys, they had their own sort of –

Yeah, they had their own – yeah.

Network, hmm.

So I did that. And actually, that's how I met my husband-to-be. He was- he had spent five and a half years in the army. He joined- well, when war broke out, he wanted to join immediately. He said to his mother, I'm going to – not enrol, they called – they have a name for it. **[03:50:00]**

Enlist?

Enlist, that's right. I'm going to enlist. And his mother said, don't rush, they'll send for you when they want you. And he got his calling-up papers on St Valentine's Day [laughs] February the 14th in 1942. And he served for five and a half years and he was in the Middle East, in the – Iraq and places like that. And he was with the Engineers. What do they call it? Royal Engineers. And he told – he didn't talk a lot about his army because, well, he did when we got on the subject but he had five and a half – he was in some very serious battles, Monte Cassino is one of them. And that's very interesting because I learned a lot about that because there were a lot of Polish soldiers there as well and –

The Polish exile army?

Yeah. And they – and there was this building, a monastery at the top of this- mountain. It was not quite a mountain. It had some other name. And the German had occupied it and they were sitting up there with their total view of everything that moved and the British had no chance of getting it. If they try, the get shot. **[03:52:00]** And well, eventually they did get it but with an enormous loss of life. And because my husband was in the British engineers, he was the one who built the bridge. Well, he – the British engineers, not just him. They built a bridge across the river so – they could only build it at night when they couldn't see them. He used to tell us a bit about it. My son used to ask. He was so interested and he's actually been to visit.

So he was in the army for five and a half years. When he came out, he joined this group – not *Habonim*. He didn't join *Habonim*. But when I was – during my era, what we did for entertainment – I don't know if this is familiar to you or whether you know about it – we used to go to dances and they were wonderful. We always used to meet different people or not meet people, but there were always dances. If nothing else, the music was lovely. So- and people always used to dance with someone. A boy asked you to dance and he'd always say, do you come here often [laughs] and all the usual questions. And on one occasion someone asked me to dance and he said, well, do you come or what else do you do, well, do you belong to anything? And I already realised that he was Jewish so I said yes, I belong to *Habonim*. And he said, well, his name was Shmaryahu and he was one of those people who came from Palestine or Israel – I can't remember if Israel was already in existence – and he was a *shaliach*. **[03:54:04]** And he said, look, why don't you come and join- what were they called, now? From *Habonim*, I joined –

More religious or less religious?

Not religious, but it was political parties then.

Mapam or something like that or –

No, this was like Mapai but it wasn't Mapai. It had another name. Oh–

Not Hashomer Hatzair?

No. Definitely a well-known name. It was Mapai in Israel but- anyway, he belonged to that so we were a group like that. I went to one of the – I went to one or two meetings and on one occasion – there was a place in the West End, an old house that was called the Palestine Club. On the top floor there was like a club and, the name was Palestine. And we used to go there quite often, various people. One day I went and there were these two handsome fellows, both of them, selling this 'Darkenu'. You know what 'Darkenu' mean? Do you know what *derech* means?

Yeah.

Road, way. *Darkenu* is our way. So that's the name of the magazine that they published. And they were with Mapai but they were called something else. They don't – they- the Hebrew name of the party. I've forgotten now what they were called but they were quite involved in this, these two fellows that started chatting me up. **[03:56:07]** They were two friends. And one of them said, you know, my sister is emigrating to America and we're having a party this weekend. Will you come to the party? And I said no, I can't because I've already got arrangements. And the other fellow was kind of flirting with me but the other guy – I found it out later – he was looking for money, [laughs] a girl with money. So anyway, that came to nothing but we met him – we met again and again by chance and hello and nothing special. And then one day someone came to his parents with a *shidduch*. But you can't – these are all that- so I am just talking. So this wonderful *shidduch*, he was – it was a nice girl from Wembley, the father has a dowry he's going to give her, he would offer her bridegroom, who was a qualified architect, he would offer him an office, he would buy them a house and £10,000. I think that was a fortune in those days. They must have been moneyed people.

[Break in recording 03:57:39 - 03:58:08]

Yes, you were talking about this offer.

So, he had this offer. He didn't know the girl and he said, "well, I can take her out, you know, I got nothing to lose. And it would be only right." I said, "how can you say no without meeting her?" So, he met her, they took her out and they went to this club. And as they were coming down the stairs, I was going up the stairs. It was an old house in the West End, next to a theatre. **[03:58:11]** It's the theatre that never closed during the war. I can't remember what it was called. But you know of it? So, I was going up with some friends, he was coming down with this girl. So he stopped and said hello and he introduced me and we went on our way. And he told me years later, after we were married, he said, "you know, when I met you on those stairs, I thought, why am I taking out this girl, when I love this girl?" [Laughs] Those were the words he said. And, so it sort of started from there and he started taking me out and he started taking me home. And his parents were elderly and not well. His mother

was amazing. I didn't really appreciate her. Because later I heard things like, he said to his mother, "Mum, I have met a girl that I love. I'm going to marry her. She doesn't know it yet [laughs]." And I said, "you were very sure of yourself." Like, if I would turn him down [laughs]. And he said, "and I'm going to marry her and I hope you will like her." So, she said- he said, "I love her and I know you'll like – I hope you'll like her." So, he [sic] said, "if you love her, we will love her." And not many parents around like this. I only came to appreciate it many, many years later, after they both died. **[04:00:00]** Because he was an only son, not an only child, there were three girls and this one precious boy who was now qualified and this was just after the war, not many people – in those days, people didn't – we didn't have the accountant and the architects and the doctors and the – I mean people were just pleased to make a living, no matter, you know, what kind, what trade. So, things were very different and yet Maurice, my husband, Maurice, never looked at these- financial side. You know, he didn't care about money. He just loved me and he wanted to marry me. So – and he was like that till he died.

And what was his – he was an architect, you said?

Hmm.

And what was his background? He'd come –

What do you mean, at home?

The family's background, yeah.

Well, his mother was born in this country. His father came – I think I mentioned it earlier – he came from Kraków. That's where he was born. And he came towards the end of – not last century, the one before.

So you could speak –

He was – it was the Austro-Hungarian Empire effectively when he was born.

So, could you speak Polish to your father-in-law? Did he speak some Polish? No?

We never even attempted it. I don't know if he did. I don't know, 'cos we never spoke Polish there. And people say to me, didn't you speak Polish to your children? And I said no, we were an English-speaking family in England. And now I think about it, I suppose it's always useful to have a language but –

But then it didn't occur to you. ***[04:02:06]***

No. But Polish wouldn't have been that useful anyway [laughs]. But –

So you were quite young when you got married?

Yes, I was nineteen. Nineteen and a half sort of. Yeah. So, it was a very happy marriage but my husband died too soon.

When did he pass away?

Oh, it's a long time ago. He passed when he was seventy-two and it was hard. But I'm twenty-something years, twenty, yeah, nearer thirty year. He was nine years older than I was.

And do you think for you, I mean arriving here not having your brother but being by yourself, do you think this, like together, it helped you to settle down in a way, in England?

What, having my brother here?

No, getting married and starting a family.

Oh, getting married. Yes, I was always- yes, we always had an English circle of friends. Not that we didn't know Polish people, if they came our way or if we were friendly, but I sort of had a very sort of English life, quite early on, you know, because I married young.

I mean what sort of identity did you want to give to your children, for example? What –

I just never thought about it. **[04:04:02]** And we didn't discuss things in these terms. It was – I think that – yeah, my son always says, why didn't you speak Polish to us? And I said, why should I speak Polish to you? No one else would understand. He said that's another language. He wanted to learn Polish. And he went to classes and the teacher said he was very good, he was – he had a sort of affinity to it.

But what were your feelings towards Poland at the time? I mean your own feelings after the war.

I didn't have any feelings because I'd been through a terrible war. I mean when you think, how long did it last? Five and a half years nearly, say six years, and when I started, I wasn't even – I was barely that age, so I had experienced Poland not at its best and- except for my childhood. And I was kind of fitting in to the English way of life very easily because I had an English family around me. I never thought about it in those terms. It just came naturally to me to be – you know, I had all English friends, our synagogue was, you know, we were active and –

What synagogue? What did you join? Where did you live? Where did you start your family?

We joined – where did we get married? Oh, the synagogue – no, we belonged to the – oh, what was it called? It was in Highbury. **[04:06:00]** I've forgotten the name of the synagogue. It was a lovely synagogue with a lovely community. It doesn't exist now. They pulled it down and built flats. But because there aren't many Jewish people around that area but there used to be really a lot of Jewish people there, a lovely community. And so – Poets Road Synagogue. Poets Road. The name of the street was Poets Road. So, we got married there, so I was like on their doorstep, well, their synagogue, and we lived with my parents-in-law for quite a long time. My daughter was born there. But my mother-in-law died when my daughter was about three – two and a half or three. She was very ailing. She was very ill. She had diabetes but – and she was lucky because insulin came along just at that time. A little bit earlier, she

wouldn't have survived. And-, I was just saying – I'm listening to myself because it was a little bit later, she wouldn't have survived. [Laughs] Earlier would have been better. And I just – I was with them, then she died and then we still carried on living there for a little while until we saved enough for a, you know, for a deposit for a house and then we moved and my father-in-law came with us. But as it happens, he was also ailing and he had heart trouble and he wasn't with us very long after – he died after six months. But he – and the doctor who treated him said, you know, he was lucky to live that long because he had – he really – his heart condition was really quite severe. **[04:08:12]**

And you came to here, to Whetstone?

No. We came to Finchley- West Finchley. We had a three-bedroom house, very small, but we made it really nice and we were very happy. We joined Woodside Park Synagogue and we had lovely friends and it was just these – an ordinary sort of Jewish life of this area and the people were – he found one friend that he was at polytechnic with and he- we just made a lot of new friends, and our old friends, and life was the normal sort of Jewish English life. And the boys, I mean they married much later but they all – most of them made a success of their lives. Not all, but most. And they were always very close to one another.

Yes, they had each other. And they were slightly older than you as well, or –

Yes.

Most of them, slightly.

Well, most of them. Yes. Well, they were Ben's – if they were Ben's age they were slightly older. But I think some of them were a bit older than Ben, or some younger.

But what's always interesting for me is that it seems the Jewish identity was very important, also for you probably or – I don't know.

Yes, it wasn't – when I was on my own, yes, I suppose it must have been because I joined *Habonim* and not Scouts or something. **[04:10:05]** Oh, not the Scouts, the other, the girls. What are they called? [Laughs] I can't think.

Guides, Girl Guides.

Girl Guides, yeah. So yes, I always had that interest because I mean even in Sweden, I was learning so much about Israel and about Jewish things.

So that was – it stayed with you –

That was the sort of the basis perhaps. And then I married into a nice Jewish family.

Yes. How do you think your identity has changed, Mala, from after the war to today How would you describe yourself?

I don't think anything has changed. It's remained constant I think throughout that time because I continued to belong to the synagogue, the United Synagogue. My children did all the Jewish things that Jewish children do, and, you know, they went to Heb – we call them Hebrew classes and my son had a bar mitzvah, my daughter didn't because they weren't doing girls then. And I really followed the Jewish English way of life. I felt that I became one of them. And I know I was always very accepted by everybody. At the beginning people would say, oh, where do you come from? Well, if they didn't know me. I don't know if I still have an accent today 'cos I couldn't hear it – can't hear it. Can you hear it?

Well, do people ask you where do you come from?

Hmm?

Do people ask you where do you come from?

Not these days, but sometimes they do. **[04:12:02]** They do. Because –

Yeah. And does it bother you?

Not particularly, except that I think I should have achieved a proper English accent [laughs] in the time that I've been here [laughs]. But I think you – don't forget, I only started it at age sixteen. That's very late, isn't it? Like, the Kindertransport came here much younger.

And many have an accent, so – many, yes.

Yes. But maybe those were the older ones.

Also, younger ones.

So, I – some people say still today when I open my mouth, they say, where do you come from? But mostly people don't ask me. But that may not be because I haven't got an accent but because if I have, they're too polite, they're very English, [both laugh] so they wouldn't ask.

Yeah. So, would you – do you define yourself as English or British today? How would you describe yourself?

Well, I'm British. I think I'm English. I'm as English as all my friends who were born here. I think – I don't – I wouldn't like to describe myself really. I'd like other people to describe me. I'd like to hear what – how people see me.

And where do you feel is your home today? Where do you belong?

Well, it's definitely in England. Certainly not in Poland. But I have to tell you that I have somehow managed to preserve my Polish so that when I go to Poland, and I've been many times, they say, oh, where do I – if I speak Polish to people they say, where do you live, meaning in Poland. **[04:14:00]** They don't know that I'm anything other than Polish. So, that

is, you know, because I left it – I think I was speaking it till, well, till I came to England because in Sweden a lot of my friends were from Poland and we were speaking Polish.

And in England, you didn't speak it at all?

A little bit at first. It depended on who I was speaking to. I didn't have that many Polish friends. And even the one who was much older than me – she wasn't my contemporary – but for instance – oh, yeah, and they were both Polish, her and her husband, so they always spoke Polish at home. But even with her we ended up speaking English. So, I did speak quite a bit of Polish when there was an opportunity at the beginning but since then I never speak Polish in England, because I mean [laughs] I have got nobody to speak to. And sometimes Ben used to speak Polish to me, especially when he wasn't well, he would turn to Polish and my sister in-law used to say, oh, please don't speak Polish with him because if he gets used to it, he'll speak Polish to me and I won't understand anything. But I think he had sort of both. He didn't forget English. Just occasionally he would come out with something Polish.

Okay, Mala, there's lots of other questions I would like to discuss with you, for example, when you started talking about your story and your work now as a Holocaust educator. But I think what we'll do is we stop here and we will come back and talk about the other things and talk – and look at your photos and documents as well. Is that okay?

Yeah. Yeah.

Unless – is there anything else you want to add today?

No, not particularly. **[04:16:00]** I'll just – when you go, I'll still look in towards the *shiva* tonight. I – you know, they're a family, four children, all married and all have children, you know, a big family, I don't know how many grandchildren they've got. I never asked. My sister-in-law will know. They were very close friends. And I think they belong to United Synagogue, all of them, or most of them. And yet the syna – the- the *shiva* is eight o'clock in the evening, so you feel you have to get there at eight. You daren't get there at seven.

No. So Mala, we're still filming. So we will –

Are you still filming?

We're filming now, so –

Oh, I thought we were – okay, can you rub that out?

No, it's okay. Anything else for today? Otherwise, we will stop now.

Yeah, well, no, I haven't. It's your choice, isn't it?

So in the meantime I'll say thank you so much, so far. And we will continue shortly.

Yeah.

Yeah. Thank you so much, Mala, for sharing your story.

Okay. I think I [laughs] told you a lot more than is suitable for public, the public. Well, you know, I wouldn't – actually I think I should be more guarded because, I don't know, I don't want everybody [laughs] to know my complete history. In fact, at the moment I'm being pursued by people, who – everybody wants to write. Did you know that?

Okay, let's – let's –

[04:17:55]

[End of transcript]

[END OF PART ONE]

[PART TWO]
[04:18:00]

Today is the 20th of September 2023 and we are continuing to do the interview with Mala Tribich. Mala, we – last time we – at the end we were discussing speaking Polish and not speaking Polish, so what I thought we could pick it up from here and then have some other questions about maybe how do you feel about Poland today?

I'm actually always very pleased to be there when I go. I think it's probably this sort of thinking back, not that I consciously think about my family all the time when I'm in Poland, but it has some – I have a great affinity to it probably because it reminds me of my family, the lost family. And it's very special. Whenever I go, I'm pleased to be there.

And do you like speaking Polish?

Yes, I quite like it because it's a challenge [laughs] and I know I speak it pretty well but if I had to make a speech or speak about some particular subject when I don't know, you know, some of the words, but general Polish, having a conversation is no problem at all. And I think I mentioned that sometimes people think I live there. So, I'm quite pleased that I have sort of preserved it for so long, even though I wasn't speaking. If the opportunity arose, I was. But there weren't many. Well, there aren't that many opportunities in England. I don't live with a Polish commu – within a Polish community or anything.

And how do you feel about, you know, today there are all these things with the Polish government, that they're, you know, outlawed this issue about – I mean Holocaust memory and I guess what was Polish and what was German and… ***[04:20:14]***

Yes, I – well, they have got a very right-wing government and I think that it is not a secret that they are a bit anti-Semitic but I'm not really aware because I don't live there, so I don't know what's being said daily, so it's only what I hear on the news here or from people. But then I hardly ever discuss Poland with anybody, so I really know it you could say on the surface. I don't know what's brewing underneath. But I believe, from little bits I have heard,

that they're a bit anti-Semitic. I haven't sort of experienced it there at all. Some people have. [Sighs] I have heard from other people but I have never experienced it there. I don't experience it here. So, it is only what I read and some of it is quite disturbing.

Have you ever spoken in Poland about your experiences? Have you been asked to speak?

No, not in Poland. I've spoken in Poland but to Jewish audiences, March of the Living or people from other countries, all Jewish people – mostly Jewish people. Now, there is quite a lot of non-Jewish people. But I've never spoken – I have spoken in Germany to a school 'cos I was there and they just used the opportunity. Oh, and on occasion I went especially to speak to a school but other than that I haven't done very much in Germany. **[04:22:03]**

And because my thought is, would you like to be invited in Poland, you know? I mean should they not invite you to speak in Poland?

Well, I wouldn't have thought so. They don't want – they probably – this is all assumed, because I don't know what's going on really. I'm not up to date on Polish feelings and I'm – I don't know how they look on Jews. I understand they're still quite un-Semitic. But the people I meet are usually very often at the – they've got a centre in Kraków, a sort of club, which was opened by the Prince of Wales then – then-Prince of Wales.

The JCC, as in the Jewish Community Centre?

Yes. Yeah.

In Kraków.

And of course, when you meet people there, they're all very happy to be part of that community, even if they're not Jewish. Some of them are not. And I don't think I'm getting the correct picture because I never speak to anyone of great consequence. And if they're clever, they're of course not going to speak badly of the Jews. They want to keep the – keep it open, keep the Jews coming.

But in the town where you came from, is there any memorial? What is there today? Is there any presence of –

There are. There are a few memorials. There's one but it's in the forest, which is just outside town, not very far out, where the people were killed, there's a monument. But that was – I believe was done by the Jewish people. I don't know whether it's done by the government. And some people have had sort of various plaques put up on walls or buildings or houses but it's all been personal. **[04:24:13]** I don't know how much the Poles themselves want – either wanted to do it or didn't want to do it. I don't really know what's going on there.

And is there anything for your family? Anything? Any plaques and memorials or did –

Well, there is only – there's the one in the forest but that's not specifically for my family. It's for all the people that were killed there. There's nothing personal on any wall for my family, no.

And do you feel – is that important to you or not? Should there be something? Or –

Not really. Not really important to me because the local people won't be particularly interested. They will look, they'll read it, they may even remember, there may be some who were – but actually the generations that were around then are gone. And the new people – I've spoken to quite a lot of young people when I visited my own town, sometimes it was an official visit with a big group from all over the world – there was one particularly in [sighs] – oh, I can't remember which year it was, this was a few years ago but the town was celebrating 800 years of existence. It's actually older than America. That gives you a perspective. And there were quite a lot of people from all over the world. We had a big gathering and it was wonderful to see them. I didn't know them all or remember them all because some of them I had never met, some of them were people who emigrated before the war but there was a really nice reunion on that occasion. **[04:26:13]** And all the local dignitaries came to see us and we had meetings and dinners and it was celebrated in a sort of – in a nice way.

And who organised that?

Partially the people abroad and partially the people in Poland. There was a sort of- the people that were going, well, they had to give numbers and they have to – there were quite a few official things that took place, so – and I was there with the family. Not all my family because my daughter lives in America and she wasn't around. Well, she – but she has visited Piotrków since, so she – she's –

Ben?

Ben was always going to Piotrków. He was going there regularly. He knew everybody, all the – and he's been awarded various – he's got various awards from the Poles, including a very important one but I can't remember what they call it actually. But he's well-known by all the officials, the council and the president and so on. And he had a real love for Poland because it continued for him. He – there wasn't a long space between the end of the war and when he started going again- 'cos at first it was all under communism and people didn't go and you had to have special permission when you did. **[04:28:03]** But Ben was always a sportsman and he was taking part in various competitions that were not international but European competitions, so he would go to Russia, to Poland to take part. We were always very worried and we said, you know, one day they might want to keep you if they have some reason to do an exchange or anything like that, 'cos he said, no, they wouldn't keep me. But of course, it could have happened but he took the chance. He said he wasn't afraid and that he – he'll continue going, and he did throughout that Iron Curtain period.

He started going and went. And it was important for him? He was looking, he wanted to go there.

Yeah, I think it was in a way a challenge. He was always invited to take part in various sporting event. But he was always willing to go. He used to go to Poland very often actually. And that's why he was so well-known and he received so many awards.

And so always as a weightlifter? You said various sports. What did he do?

He did weightlifting but he may – I'm not quite sure, he may have done other sports at that time. I can't remember. I know we always used to get a postcard from Piotrków. And in those days that was really meaningful because we were so separated from – it's not like today where you can get on a plane and go and see for yourself.

But did he or you, did you still know people there in Piotrków?

No, but on one occasion some people recognised us in the street and they came over to speak to us and… but very few. **[04:30:18]** But there used to be a programme in England by Michael Freedland. It was called 'You Don't Have to be Jewish'. It was on the radio on a Sunday afternoon. And on one occasion Michael took Ben with them. They were going to Piotrków and Ben was explaining everything they wanted to know and on one – one of the things he was asked, and this is all recorded, I've got- oh, what's it called? It's – mind you, it may – something may have happened to it because they- I've got a reel of that particular visit. And I was listening to it and I could hear someone say – from the public – there was a group of people visiting – and one woman said to another – I didn't see it – this was on the radio – she said, oh, look, there's the young Malenicky. Not – they recognised Malenicky is actually the grandfather of someone who's very famous now. Gosh, I can't remember. You'll have to cut this out. Let me see. He's in everything. He was on Come Dancing and he was on- Jewish –

Rob Rinder?

Rinder. **[04:32:04]**

Rob Rinder.

Rob Rinder, yeah.

So, his grandfather.

His grandfather. [Moishe Malenicky]

Yeah, was called…?

Malenicky. The surname was Malenicky and they had a bakery and a shop and they – I think they must have been quite popular. And there was a couple of women – I mean I could visualise them, I only heard them, I couldn't see them on that programme – and one of them – he must have been in that group visiting and one said to the other one in Polish, oh, look, there is the young Malenicky there. So, they did know people because they had a shop and they had a bakery and they, the Jews and Christians, did mix but there was of course a lot of anti-Semitism. And having said that, but I didn't really experience it personally.

And after the war did some Jews remain in Piotrków? Was there a Jewish –

There were – there were some but not for long because they had nowhere else to go. They would go back to their home, which wasn't theirs anymore because other people lived in it. And my aunt and uncle went back and they had a – well, there were two Klein brothers in Piotrków. They were my mother's brothers. And they were both married, each with a child about the same age, and one had a girl, one had a boy. **[04:34:00]** Now, the boy survived. The girl is the one who was with me, who disappeared without a trace. And my uncle lost his wife. She died in Ravensbrück. And my aunt lost her husband. He died – he was shot in the Jewish cemetery with a lot of other people. And this aunt and uncle got married after the war. And I – I'd – there's apparently a requirement to marry your brother's widow, something like that, but I don't know whether that was for that reason or they fell in love. I don't know, but they got married after the war. So, my uncle's son, he's a year younger than I am, my cousin, was there with them and he said he wanted to go to Palestine and the parents said yes, we'll all go to Palestine soon. But in the end, he got very impatient. And also, he went to school after the war, in Poland. But he actually went to school in Łódź, he called it [English pronunciation – "lodge"] because they had good schools there and there wasn't very much in Piotrków after the war. He may have gone to a Jewish school and there wasn't one after the

war in Piotrków. So, he waited and waited and in the end he got impatient. He said, well, I'm emigrating, and he did. They soon followed him.

To Israel?

Yeah. And this is where they settled and this is – well, my aunt and uncle have since died. **[04:36:00]** My cousin is okay but he's not very well at all. We keep in touch and I've seen him over the years many times and they've been here many times.

So are there lots of Piotrków descendant in Israel or are there –

There are, there are. In fact, there is a Piotrków Society.

Is there a Landsmannschaft?

Yeah.

Landsmannschaft?

Yeah, yeah. Well, in German it's called *Landsmannschaft*, isn't it?

Yeah. Well, it's a sort of interesting – it's a Yiddish –

Oh, that's what people call it.

Yeah, association or –

Yeah, yeah. I haven't actually heard that, although I understood what it meant. Yes, I actually attended one meeting once because they have a meeting every year. I don't know if they still do because I don't know if anybody's still alive of their generation.

This is in Israel? In Israel?

Yeah. But they did – we- I – but I was so young that I didn't know all these grown-ups, are now elderly, and I was still young and- but my aunt kept me informed who is who and what's what.

Because sometimes they also produced, you know, in the '60s, '70s, sort of Yizkor books.

Yes, I've got one for Piotrków.

Yeah. This is really interesting.

Yes, very – some of it is in English but the English part is very short and of course it's in Yiddish and Hebrew as well.

Yeah, there is a lot of research now, you know, on these Yizkor books.

Is there?

Yeah, because they're being translated because it's a wonderful testimony what the survivors did, you know, for the memory of their towns, of their fellow community members. It's –

But of course, it was done by people who survived and returned and they did it very quickly afterwards. **[04:38:00]**

Yes. When was this done, the –

After the war, within a few years, within no – it was done much sooner, I don't know the date but soon after the war they started writing while their memories were fresh. And there is – in ours there is one section in English which is very good because the rest is in Yiddish and Hebrew. So, you know, I could possibly read the Yiddish because I can read Hebrew and try and understand it that way because I – there'll be much more but it'll be a slow process and I just don't [laughs] seem to have the time.

Yeah, yeah. What I wanted to ask you, Mala, is so when did you start talking about your experiences? Is there any particular moment you remember or did – was it a gradual process?

It was a very gradual process and one of the earliest I remember was a Jewish club and the man who ran it, he was a boy then, a young boy, he was very enterprising to have asked me because people weren't even thinking of asking survivors to speak then, and there weren't so many organisations anywhere. So, he was running a Jewish club and he asked me to come and speak, which was very unusual and he's – I can't remember his name unfortunately- but he's quite a big personality in the Jewish world here because he runs one organisation and I can't remember what the name of it. He's the head of it. They do a lot of statistics and numbers and about the Jewish population and a bit more than that but I can't re –

Jewish policy, the JP and Jewish –

Yes, Jewish something. **[04:40:12]**

Yeah, I know what you mean.

Something which – I think it's got policy, it sort of sounded familiar when you said that. I can't remember the name of the organisation.

Yeah, I know what you mean. I think it's the Jewish Policy Institute or something like that.

Yes, that's right. Yeah. So, he, this young boy who was only running a club, he couldn't have been very old, he was early teens, he had already the thought, the need, to ask a survivor to speak because he knew me and so –

And when was that, Mala, roughly?

I can't remember the year but it was very early. People weren't speaking in those days. And –

Like in the '80s or roughly what time?

I'll tell you – I can't remember when that was but I know it was very early, much earlier than people imagine. He just felt there is something to learn and he asked me to speak. But when people ask me when did you start speaking, I know when generally people started speaking and that was in – I think it was 1981. There was a very big reunion in Israel of survivors. Do you know about it?

No. Go on.

It was worldwide and people came from all over.

In '81?

I think it was '81. I'm almost sure, but I can't be sure. **[04:42:00]** And I've got some notes on it and I've got some papers but I'm – I couldn't lay my hands on them at the moment. So, it apparently – it arose out of a meeting, people who were in a camp, I think in Auschwitz, and there were a few of them. I think it was six but I'm not sure about the numbers. And they used to discuss things and sort of plan for after the war. They said if we survive this war and we're free, we'll all meet again in Israel. They were all – you know, even then they were dreaming of Israel. There was no Israel then. And so, it happened in – I said about 1981. I have got the date so I could tell you. I can't remember it. So that reunion took place. And I don't know how, I haven't heard it from the people concerned, but it's fairly – it is certain that this is how it came about.

And you went?

I went with my husband and we met a lot of people. It was taking place all over Israel, in the main cities. And they prepared a lot of lectures and speeches and reunions. And there were people actually who somehow in some cases, people were walking around with their name on their back in case someone recognised the name and the town they came from. And there

were – apparently – I don't know how true this is – but apparently, there were two siblings that met, one didn't know the other was around. Because one ended up in Australia and the other one, somewhere Europe, and they found one another at that reunion. **[04:44:19]** And we were travelling between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and we went to some of the *kibbutzim* and there were lots of events going on all over the place. And I belonged to a Zionist society here. We had a lovely group of people and one particularly lovely friend, who said to me, now, when you go, take notes so you can tell us about it. And I said no, I'm not going to speak about it. And so, she said, well, take notes anyway for yourself. She persuaded me. I took notes. And when I came back, they organised a meeting and whereas we used to have meetings in people's houses, you know, just in the lounge – we weren't a very big group. A meeting could have, well, thirty would be the maximum. It was really a lot. But mostly a lot less than that. And when I got back, they organised this meeting and they actually booked a hall. It wasn't a big hall. It was this place in North Finchley. There was a JNF there and a lot of – the building that's in North Finchley between Ballards Lane and the High Road, the sort of island in North Finchley, and the different shops and offices. And the Jewish agency, or JNF, they were all located there and they had, you know, sort of halls for speaking. **[04:46:10]** But this wasn't a very large hall but it was larger than somebody's lounge and – but it was quite large and they booked the hall and they organised the meeting and so many people turned up. People were interested. But no one was talking and no one asked – liked to ask, so it just stayed silent for all those years more or less. There was the odd talk here and there. So that's when people really started talking about the *Shoah*, that's what sort of woke it all up. And that was- and of course I said no, I wouldn't speak, but I did speak. And there was a friend that was with us and she wanted to come to the meeting and she spoke as well. And it started from there really.

And what was it like for you, let's say in the early – you said it was early '80s, so a good thirty-five years later, to start talking about your experience? Was it difficult?

I can't remember it being difficult. And possibly, I remembered more then, than I do now, although once I started speaking what I've been speaking about, I remember but probably there's much more. Well, there is much more because we gave a testimony to the Imperial War Museum. I may have told you about that.

Yeah, go on.

Yeah. So, I did four tapes, four hours, which I thought was okay. **[04:48:01]** That's all I remembered [laughs]. But I told you my brother did fourteen hours, so he remembered an awful lot and he was very passionate about what happened and how it happened and that's why he was in the forefront of pushing the Holocaust education, so that people know, because it gets forgotten quite quickly, even by people who experienced it.

Yeah. And he did the – in the '45 Aid Society.

Yes, '45 Aid Society was one of the very few soci – well, it was the only one really that had Holocaust survivors.

And was he involved from the beginning, Ben?

Yeah, he was the one who created it really, with other friends. I don't know whose specific idea it was but a few of the boys got together and I think Ben was in the forefront.

Yeah, but at the time I guess the idea was more to support each other rather than them thinking of Holocaust education at the time.

Yes. Yes, well, they've –

To help each other.

It was to help each other and they were already helping each other, even before that was created. They were a very close-knit group and they were very aware that some people were better off than others and some people needed help, because there are always people better off than others. That's not unusual. But there were people who needed help but they would be too proud to ask. So that was all done in such confidence that I never knew – well, I never knew. I don't think anybody knew except the people involved in giving the money.

When was it founded, then, the '45 Aid Society?

I can't remember the date but there is a date of course, we had the first sort of – because it now takes place – since then it's been taking place every year except for the pandemic and they're planning the next one now in May. **[04:50:17]** But I can't remember when the first one took place. It is all –

Don't worry, it will be on the website. It will –

Yeah, it will be on the website. Yeah.

That's going on for many years.

Yeah. And there's always such a lovely atmosphere when they have the reunion.

Because by now it's the families and second, third and fourth generation.

Yes, that's right. Yes, absolutely.

I mean in a way it was a bit like this Landsmannschaft association, isn't it?

Yes, yes.

The idea that you come together and support each other.

Yeah.

Yeah. But Mala, what I'm going to ask you, so did – when you started talking and – two questions. So, when you first came, did you want to talk about it? Did people ask about it? Did people not ask about it? What was it like? I mean you came, you know, you survived two

concentration camps, you came to England. What was it like, in terms of your experience and what other people wanted to know or didn't want to know?

You know, there were times when I felt I didn't really want people to know that I am a survivor. We didn't call them survivors and I don't know what we called them. But I didn't particularly want to disclose that. It just seemed so horrific and so- so out of normal life that, well, who would ask me, and if they asked me they would – who was it that – something I said to someone at WIZO– so – and we were just talking and I said – well, someone must have asked me. **[04:52:12]** I really didn't – I didn't ask to speak, ever. But I told them something from a camp and this woman made this funny face, like, oh, dear, how awful. But it was a response that made me realise that she really hadn't a clue because people wouldn't respond like that because it's just much more than oh, dear, you know. So, there are so many aspects of people's reactions and what people felt and what people said and how they said it and who was interested and who wasn't. There were so many aspects of people's reactions and what actually happened during that period because now it's come to a point where it's an established thing, it's – people know about it, they teach it at schools, it's something that can be discussed. But at the beginning it was just weird. Sometimes I felt I didn't want people to know that I was in a concentration camp. And I remember – and if people asked me, where do you come from. And I had actually come from Sweden and sometimes I used to say Sweden, sort of not fully understanding or pretending not to understand that where you come from is where you've just arrived from, not where you were born. **[04:54:00]** So I said it quite innocently actually, quite often, because I had just arrived here and where you come from, I didn't know is an expression of you would ask where you were born, I – anyway, I've sorted it all out [laughs] in time but I had very mixed feelings. I – sometimes I didn't mind talking about it and sometimes I did. It sort of varied. I was going through a phase and ultimately, I was – it only three years later I got married and then we weren't talking about it because I had a family. They probably – I didn't even tell the family, the brothers and sisters of my – because we – it wasn't a subject for discussion. It was sort of painful, not just for me but people were so horrified and anyway, the books started coming out and people learned that way.

Yeah. Well, I guess if there wasn't a sort of framework for talking.

No, no. And the schools came much later and when they came, they didn't use it because it wasn't compulsory. It was on the curriculum but they weren't obliged to teach it. So now it is compulsory, so it's different.

And did you talk to your children about your experiences at all?

No, never. But my children knew all about it. [Laughs] And my grandson was the biggest surprise because I certainly didn't tell my grandchildren. I didn't – I just didn't talk about it to family. But my grandson made a wonderful eulogy for my brother and I learnt so many things I didn't know. **[04:56:05]** [Laughs] I mean he's a very good writer and he's very good at everything as – there goes the doting grandma [laughs] but he actually is quite clever. So, he did one of the speeches and it only came about because there were so many people at the *shivas* and luckily the weather was good so the *shiva* in their house was in the garden. And we had one in – the first one was in Dennington Park synagogue and it was all spread out, so the last day, I did in my synagogue and lots of people – and that's when my grandson spoke. I was just amazed how much he knew. And he said that he learnt a lot of it from his Uncle Ben because Ben had an enormous library, not just about the Holocaust, general as well and he would sort of show it to Samuel when he visited. I didn't even know about it. They'd go off and he would just discuss books with him. He had a wonderful relationship with him, of which I wasn't really aware. So, the eulogy was quite amazing.

So, it wasn't through you?

It wasn't through me, no.

That they – you talked about it.

No, no. Once I – he was staying with me and there used to be the Jewish Museum around here in East End Road? It's called East End Road. **[04:58:00]**

Yeah, the Museum of Jewish Life.

Yeah. And the person who was going to speak, the very well-known survivor – what was his name?

Leon Greenman?

Leon Greenman. He wasn't well or something, he couldn't turn up, and I got a phone call saying, could you come and speak because there's a group coming. And I had my grandson with me and I couldn't just leave him at home, so he came with me and he was very young. How old could he have been, maybe eight, ten, and I heard him say as we were going upstairs that – he said, my grandma or she was in a camp and he said it very discreetly but I heard it [laughs]. I didn't respond, I didn't say anything. But he knew all about it. I don't know how. Maybe Ben told him, maybe he read a lot, maybe – I don't know. We haven't discussed it since but I – one day we'll get down to it. But his eulogy was amazing.

And do you think – even if you haven't talked about it, do you think your children were affected by your history or –

I really don't – I would like to think that they weren't, but I don't know. I don't know.

Because you know, obviously this – the topic of talking and not talking is now a topic and –

Well, they all knew. Shannon, my daughter, said she was reading about it in so many books and she was reading a lot of – and she knows my story. Sometimes if she is around, she sometimes reminds me or corrects me [laughs] or – she knows it, yeah. **[05:00:00]**

It's interesting what you said, that this whole notion of survival, that of course at the time, post-war, people didn't call themselves survivors.

No, no, indeed.

I don't know when it was first used but today do you – would you define yourself – do you define yourself as a survivor? Is that –

Well, I prefer not to. I have survived but in the ordinary way we don't use that. If people have survived something dreadful, they don't say, well, I'm a survivor but it's become a sort of – it's almost in the dictionary or it may be in the dictionary. I'm sure it is in Israel. But I never call myself a survivor. There's something about it that, I don't know, I haven't sort of examined my feelings –

What don't you like about it?

But I just – I think I don't like to be branded as something because I'm an ordinary person as well, I'm not just a survivor. It's all put into sort of one category. And in fact, when I think about it – I haven't discussed it with anybody, but when I think about it, now that you've asked me, I don't like to be thought of as a survivor. I'm a lot of other things as well. I'm an ordinary human being. But I mean if it comes out at the appropriate time, that's fine but – because I am a survivor, I'm denying it. But I'm sure that people's perception of a survivor is quite different from mine and I wonder what people's perception is actually. Do you have any idea? Do you think of what they might be thinking a survivor –

I mean it is a sort of label. ***[05:02:04]***

Yes.

A group label. And I mean I know there's a lot of discussion about, you know, survivors and refugees and often now of course you can – the Kindertransport are called Kindertransport survivors or refugees are called survivors and I think there were lots of discussions. So, I think it is a – it can be a problematic label.

Yeah.

I don't suppose, as you said, lots of people are put together and is it a collective identity, not necessarily, you know, from within but on the other – you know.

Yeah.

So, I think it's complex.

It is because I think – I wonder whether all the survivors are – have to be called survivors, whether it worries them or whether they don't mind either way or – I don't know what the perception is of survivor and what the assumptions they make as a result. I don't know. It's a big question.

It is. And sometimes some people talk about second-generation survivors, which –

That's right.

I find that more problematic. I mean that to me is very problematic.

Yes. That – like you've got to carry that label forward, so that you're known as coming from a certain line that survived that horrific war.

Yeah. So, it would – at some point there will be some research, you know, who – actually where this word was first used or how it's now become so prevalent.

Yeah.

And I don't know. But Mala, the other thing I was going to ask you is whether talking actually for you, you think helped you or did it partly – I mean every talking is also kind of – can be really traumatising because you talk about your history, particularly for you, some of it very traumatic and sad. ***[05:04:11]***

Yeah.

Or do you find that it is helpful or helped you or – how did you deal with that aspect?

It's actually mixed. It is not therapeutic for me. It is not the opposite. It doesn't damage me or disturb me to an extent where I'm – where it really bothers me. I sort of look on it as if it's just part of my life and it comes in when the situation arises. I would never want to create a situation where some – so that someone would ask me about my experiences. I think they have to be at the right time and the right place. And I know I met somebody at one of the dinners some years ago and we started talking and somehow it came to light that I'm a survivor. I'm sure I didn't introduce myself as a survivor. And she said she used to- this woman used to work for HET, she said. She was a young – very young woman. I don't think she was a married woman. And [laughs] she said to me – she said, oh, so you're a survivor. What's your story, then? And I just looked the other way. I just walked away. **[05:06:00]** Well, she also [laughs] walked away. But I mean this is how she approached it, what's your story, then? These are the words she used and I was so irritated by it but I didn't want to say anything obviously.

Yeah, so it has to be at the right time and the right space.

Exactly, yeah.

Have you had other experience of sort of something you find offensive or – in that context?

Not really. Nothing I can think of. This was so exceptional, it's the way she did it. I remember the words. I mean- oh, what's your story, then? You know, like I'm going to sit down and tell her the story right away. And if she worked for – she apparently had worked for HET and she didn't have enough sense not to put it like that and I [sighs] can't understand it.

And you recently just spoke at the HET dinner last week. So, you're a regular speaker [overtalking].

Well, no, no, I – very rarely but I have spoken a few times over the years but I'm not regular. All different people speak, different survivors. But [sigh] I –

But you've been going to many schools with HET.

Yes, yes. At one time it was a lot of schools. I haven't had any schools and now maybe they now have a policy not to use survivors for schools because of the effort to get there and back and – I presume.

And in your experience, did you find – did you have any- from the children did you have any, what's the word, not negative experiences, but what, I don't know –

Unusual questions?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah. Did you?

Well, I did because, for instance, on one occasion, you know, one of them asked me why did Hitler hate the Jews. **[05:08:10]** Another one was really slightly amusing because he was a tiny, little boy, I don't know, he didn't even look school-age, and I – and he suddenly out of the blue said to me, well, what about the Palestinians? Just completely out of context. I mean you can talk about the Palestinians, there's a lot to say, but he just came out with it. And I – I can only assume that he learnt about it from his home, his parents, his – they must have discussed the Jews and the Palestinians and – I don't know why he thought he was there, what he was going to hear or he thought he was going to hear. But anyway, there is that. And yes, so did I tell you why did Hitler hate the Jews? I said that one because that's the sort of – I think the first one that was asked. But yeah, some people ask me, are you still Jewish? And they ask all sorts, I can't think of anything else that's sort of inappropriate but it's not inappropriate in a sense they can ask anything they like and they have an inquisitive mind and

– but I just can't think of the question. And the one thing about the talking, when I think back, I think that that's kept it more alive for me and if I hadn't been talking all these years, maybe I would have forgotten a lot of it, and I have forgotten. **[05:10:20]** Some of it just comes back now and again because you obviously remember much more when you're closer to the event, so, you know, closer in time to the event. So, I – there's an awful lot I can't remember. And sometimes people say, oh, I've heard your story when it happened and I haven't heard about this. And –

Yeah. So new things come up?

You know, it just – I remembered it then or sometimes I forget to tell something very relevant and very important. In – I mean one of the most important thing in my story is about personal survival, is that if it wasn't for one German soldier – he was actually an officer – I wouldn't be here. And sometimes I forget to tell that. I leave it out, and yet it's so important. So, I know – or sometimes people say, oh, I've heard your story before but I didn't know about that. I said, you can never hear the whole story because it'll be too long. I just – whatever I can tell within that hour.

Yeah. Mala, so you said you – it's neither therapeutic for you nor traumatising. So. what is your main motivation for doing all this, what you have done?

Ah. Well, that's a very good question. I am very motivated because I think it is so important for people to hear the story. **[05:12:06]** It's not how I – it's not about me, how I feel telling it, although if I couldn't tell it, I was unable to tell it, well, it'd be different. But I'm able to do it. And when you tell it consistently over a long period of time, you kind of get used to the idea that you're telling it and that it needs to be told. But I think it desperately needs to be told because people need to know and maybe some of them will be affected in a way to actually become active about it and to do something. And there is just so much in it and different parts of the story may affect people in different ways. Yeah.

Yes. And what would you like them to do? What –

Well, I would like them to be vigilant, I would like them to care about what's happening in anti-Semitism, to care about it in a sort of negative way, to try and do away with anti-Semitism. And I'm actually so surprised that despite the Holocaust, despite all the stories that are being told which always shock people, there is still anti-Semitism today. So, I think that – and I don't know what causes it today, I don't know. Well, there are various thing – I can think of one or two, the Palestinians, the Israel situation and all that. **[05:14:02]** But even that is all misconstrued, people don't know the right story and how and why it happened, so there's a lot of education needed out there.

And do you feel, you know, we have had now, let's say, if people start off in the '90s, the last twenty, thirty years of Holocaust education, do you think – how do you feel about it? Has it achieved what it – you know, so many survivors talking, the school programmes.

Well, it's a very difficult question because you really need figures and statistics and I haven't got those and although I know that the stories are very well-received, I've got some amazing letters. I wish I could share them with someone or to have them published because –

You should.

Well, yes, I – well, I won't publish them just like that but I should sort them so that I keep the really important ones. And I've got so many letters and some schools have actually bound them into like a book and they're all there.

What do people say? What stands out?

Oh, I [sighs] – they, first of all, some of them have beautiful English and I can't remember to repeat them because, you know, I don't think about it in those terms. But they say they will never forget my story, they'll teach them, they'll tell it to their children and grandchildren and someone will say, I promise you, I'll never forget your story. **[05:16:03]** But they [sighs] – they pay me great compliments [laughs] which I can't even remember. I could show you some of the letters. I've got them to – some of them to hand. And one girl said that it's changed her life, listening to me. And she actually stayed in touch with me for at least six

months and then the correspondence stopped. Of course, it's difficult for me to correspond with people. It's just too time-consuming. But she changed her life. She decided what she's going to do and she was going to go to Africa and work with needy children. But I think she had other things in mind. I must, you know, I can't remember myself what they said but at the time I was so moved by it. And they, some of them express themselves so beautifully. The letters vary between very ordinary or didn't say very much- but others were outstanding.

So, you had a big impact.

On me?

No, you also had a big impact on –

Oh, I had on – yes, yes, I did in some case. If everything they write is true, [laughs] I'm just amazed.

And Mala, how do you see the future of Holocaust education? What do you think, in your mind?

Well, I think that once all the survivors have gone and they're hearing it from other people, it'll be just like any other lecture that they hear about somebody, about a book, about – I don't think it's going to have the effect. **[05:18:03]** I mean I say it in all modesty because it isn't – well, sometimes it's how people put it over as well but if you're hearing something second-hand, well, it's second-hand.

Yeah. And do you think the second, third generations should continue the story or –

Yes, it's got some impact. I mean and if their parents or grandparent – but gradually they'll become grandparents and great-grandparents and because young people say, oh, yes, I'd like to tell that story, it's an interesting story, but if somebody talks about their ancestors, it's not the same, is it?

No. And what do you think enabled you to be able to tell the story? So, without being asked – because I know, for example, in my own family, my mother, she couldn't talk about it without getting terribly upset. She could never go to schools. She did for a few times and every time, you know, it really upset her for days before and for days after.

And your mother was in a concentrations camp?

No. No, she was in hiding. But just telling was difficult for her. So, I just wonder what you think enabled you to do it? Or, you know, to –

Yeah, I really don't know. Maybe subconsciously I'm very driven but I am not consciously driven to do it. I think it's very important and I think and I recognise that it must make a difference. I mean I haven't had that much feedback. I've had a lot but you can't go by one school or so- a few people. **[05:20:02]** But I spoke to the Bank of Canada this week or just gone, the week just gone, and they were all adults. The hall was fully sort of occupied, or every seat was taken, lots of people turned up but they were all adults but sort of not old people, not very young people, so that sort of generation. And I think they missed out altogether because they didn't teach it at schools then or if they did, not all schools taught it, it was sort of at their – the schools' will. And so many people came over to me afterwards and they said, you know, I have never heard a Holocaust story. I wasn't aware a lot of the things that you told us. Mind you, there are lots of books they could have read. But I think that when they hear someone who was there, well, it encourages them to perhaps read more and they can learn a lot more because every story is just an individual story and every story is different. But there's a lot out there to read. But I suppose seeing someone is not the same as reading.

Absolutely not. And do you find because – I know you've worked with March of the Living or HET or other organisations. Is it for you – what's the word? Not problematic- I mean every organisation has a different – slightly different style or context. What do you think about that? Is it a – not a problem but – do you see what I mean?

No, I just accept that every school – I mean my – I've been to a lot of schools. **[05:22:05]** And for instance, if I went to Scotland, they say, well, you know, while you're here we want you to do two today and two tomorrow, and that is difficult. And at one point I said, look, I don't do more than one a day because it affects me. I pretend it's all okay but it isn't really but I do it because I feel it's necessary. So- sorry, I've forgotten what you asked me [laughs].

So, I asked you about the context. So yes, the different schools but also different organisations, so I guess very different, whether you go to March of the Living or, you know, to a school in Scotland.

Yes. Well, I'm – I sort of accept that everyone, every school will be different and some will be better listeners than others. And in a way, when you're facing the whole room, or usually it's a hall, it's big, and I can see all their faces, I can see their reactions, 'cos I, in some schools in the past I could see there would be a teacher. It would be a raised stage but at the side there were steps, so the teachers would be sitting at the side and watching all the children. And on one occasion I saw one teacher just pull a child out from sort of the middle of the row and take him outside. I didn't notice anything that he was doing wrong and I was looking at them. But he obviously demanded a very high standard of maybe – I don't know what he did but whatever he did, he got taken out. **[05:24:00]** In other schools, they weren't quite so fussy and in most schools they would say, look, [laughs] I'm so sorry, I've got to miss your lecture because I'm teaching at that time. But anyone who was at all available, always made sure to come into the talk. And there was great interest, especially with the children. I think probably the teachers prepared them and the teachers have a big influence and it's how they introduce and how they talk about it, because when I hear either afterwards or when I arrive, oh, they can't wait to hear you speak or other things like that. So, it all depends a lot on the teachers.

Yeah. And Mala, do you find it difficult – I mean one of the problems some survivors have, sort of including certainly my mother, was that to fit a story into a time is actually quite difficult, especially in stories like yours.

It is, it is.

Is it difficult? How [overtalking].

Well, it is very difficult but –

But what is the minimum time you would accept, for example? Is it you say to somebody, I cannot tell the story, I need at least half an hour, or do you have a – do you see what I mean? Do you have a minimum –

No, I would – I will adjust to any timing because otherwise, it means not telling it at all. And I could just some – I'm going somewhere where I've got half an hour, I'm going to Arsenal but there's going to be like- it's not for the footballers, although it is for the foot – I haven't got the full information for it yet. **[05:26:01]**

Arsenal invited you? The football club?

No, it's through HET. Yes. But there's going to be like a conference. Mine will only be – and I have to speak for half an hour. Now, half an hour, there'll be quite important people speaking and they'll all be limited because [laughs] you can't take all day. So, I know – I think she said half an hour but it's fair enough. I can't possibly take an hour if there are another six speakers. So, I'll conform to that and what I'll do, I must have a- a –

A watch?

A watch [laughs] on me. Yeah. I must have a watch and just – because it's important. I mean there'll be important people there speaking. It's on anti-Semitism.

When is it? Coming up?

Coming up, yes. I think it's next month.

Okay.

Yeah.

What is your favourite timeslot? What do you think normally? What do you like, how much time [overtalking].

Well, I got used to speaking for an hour and I can – sometimes I come away thinking, oh, I should have said more about this or less about that or I didn't – I forgot to mention something else and I do sometimes think about it. But in the end, I've come to the conclusion that I can't remember every word every time exactly the same as I did last time. So, I – I'm telling it naturally as it comes to me, so it involves my feelings because it brings it to mind and it's not easy and sometimes, you know, when I speak and I really have tears in my eyes but, you know, I never cry with tears. **[05:28:05]** I don't have tears running down, no matter how tragic or terrible or, you know, things today, well, they – my eyes fill with tears but they don't come down my face.

And did you ever have a situation where you had to stop, where you got upset or it never happened?

No. I sort of swallow and I may take a second longer and I sort of try to stop myself. But no, I have never sort of broken down in front of a crowd.

Mala, thank you for sharing it. It's really interesting, you know, how, you know, the talking about it and what impact, you know, that you have such an amazing impact on so many people, you know, and going to companies, not only schoolchildren, you know, that adults can also listen.

Well, I'm pleased to hear that you say that because I don't know, you know, I always think, well, I don't know how they took it or I don't know how I said it and –

Well, I can only say I heard you once and, you know, there was a big crowd in South Hampstead Synagogue and –

Oh, yes. But that was a bit limited because I was being asked questions.

Yes, so there was a slightly different format.

Yes, yes, which I don't like so much because in some ways it's good but they're very general and I may have some special experience that you wouldn't think to ask about because you wouldn't know about it. I mean they wouldn't say, so was there anybody there, a German that saved your life? **[05:30:02]** But they wouldn't know at that. So, questions are okay but if in addition, well, perhaps – it varies because one doesn't stick exactly – the answer doesn't – isn't exactly answering the questions, you can bring in something extra.

Yes. So, you prefer to tell your story and then have questions.

Well, I just got used to it. But quite honestly, I don't mind questions but something may be left out. I'll bring something in that I know is important but I may not remember it at that time because I don't have a script and I don't have it in my head all in the correct order [laughs].

So, you go in without any notes?

Yeah, absolutely no notes.

And PowerPoint or not PowerPoint? Do you use PowerPoint images?

PowerPoint. Yes, I do have a PowerPoint but I don't use it very often because I – you don't take a PowerPoint to companies somehow. On the Zoom they used to show my PowerPoint from HET and I was speaking and I would say, next. I knew what was on it. But I haven't used a PowerPoint for a long time and that's a shame because, well, I think it makes it interesting for them. I only keep anything on for a second so I don't take long with the PowerPoint. That's got photographs of my parents. I haven't got a single photograph of my sister. It doesn't exist anywhere. And I've almost forgotten how she – what she looked like. **[05:32:00]** She was the youngest.

No photographs.

And all these are by chance. I got them from other people after the war.

Yeah. Your photographs, the family photographs didn't survive. No.

No.

That so many survivors have had the same problem.

Yes, they have albums – or some problem, yeah.

Well, yes, I think, you know, how could they – unless they were hidden somewhere, the photos.

And especially I've questioned one or two and I understand that my aunt, who was my mother's sister, who was deported but within Poland. She wasn't sent to Germany but there were some terrible camps in Poland. Well, Auschwitz was in Poland. And she apparently, grabbed a couple of photographs as she was being led out and that's how I got some of them.

And she kept them?

Yes, she managed to keep them. She must have had a pocket or something.

We're going to look at some photographs soon.

I have very little.

Okay. Mala, I wanted to also ask you, now looking back, what impact do you think that your experience had on your life, on your later life? Which is a broad question.

Well, quite honestly, it's a question I can't answer. I really don't know. To be fair, I mean there are lots of people around with terrible mental problems and they haven't been anywhere near a camp. And I really don't know. Good or bad or indifferent or – I know that I think about my family and it breaks my heart. **[05:34:04]** And my brother, who – he was so ill, he was dying. I think this was maybe a couple of – a few days before when I went to see him and he greeted me with sort of tears streaming down his face and he said the word father in Polish. It's *tatuś*. And he said *tatuś* and he was trying to tell me something and is tears were just streaming. And my sister-in-law walked in, she wiped his tears and changed the subject and he was okay in a few minutes. And he's such a strong character, physically strong and he was mentally strong as well. You know, he was – he was very determined and active and he was a doer. He didn't just talk, he made things happen. And yet when it came to our parents, he just cried, like other people.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And do you sometimes think, Mala, how your life, how different your life would have been if – without the Holocaust?

Yes, I have given a thought. I said, well, if the war didn't start, if it didn't happen, who would I have married, where would I have lived, what would I have done? I've just very vaguely thought about it though. There's just no knowing. **[05:36:00]**

No. No. And what's the outcome of it? Where – what do you think would you have done or – still be in Poland or –

Probably I would have still been in Poland. But people were emigrating, weren't they? And it would have depended who I married and what sort of a living they could make in Poland or abroad. 'Cos for instance, my father, he made a good living, he was quite established and – but my mother wanted – I think I told you that in the other – my grandmother – my mother wanted to go to Palestine. She was longing to go to Palestine. I didn't know it then but I know

it now. And of course- because some of her family went. She had some cousins there whom I met after the war, and my aunt had a sister there. My aunt by marriage had a sister. And they had family and I know people who came from my hometown, after the war they told me – I know that before the war somebody who went to Palestine, as it was then, but she came back. She didn't – you know, conditions were so primitive and they had to be real *halutzim* to want to stay there in those swamps. Gosh, they really built it.

Mala, what do you think – we discussed this slightly about identity and how you, you know, feel today. How would you describe yourself? ***[05:38:01]***

Well, Jewish, foremost [laughs]. And English, British passport, British identity. I've been here a very long time, most of my life 'cos I was quite young when I came. This probably applies to a lot of the Kindertransport, came when they were very young and they're totally English. I mean they don't know anything- I should imagine. But well, I was sixteen when I came, so I already had a sort of identity of my own. But so much happened in those sixteen years, so I had just come from Sweden, before that, five and a half years of war, and before that I have happy memories of my school and my friends and my relatives and my town.

Yeah. So would you call yourself today still Polish Jewish or Polish at all or, I don't know.

I don't know. I don't – wouldn't know what to call myself because I identify with many places and many things, because I think wherever I would have ended up, I would have become that. And really the longest part of my life I spent in England. Oh, somebody once said to me – I think I told you that story before because a lovely – someone I met in France was the – French- I tell you that story?

Go on, then I'll tell you whether.

And there were- I was doing French just for a month during summer and there were a lot of students – and I made a big mistake from mixing- with the students rather than living in a pri – in somebody's home and using the language. **[05:40:13]** I was on the university premises and there were people from all over. There was someone from New Zealand who was of

English origin, not him but his family, and he was very interested in me because he was very interested in Israel and he had a girlfriend in Sweden and he was very interested in a lot of things that I was doing or I knew about. And we were always discussing things and one day he said to me, [laughs] you know, Mala, you are so English [laughs] and I said to him – I've forgotten his name now – I said, to you I am English, to the French I am English, but to the English, I am a bloody foreigner [laughs]. And he said, you don't mean it, do you? [Laughs].

And did you – but you said you had no anti-Semitic experience but did you feel – did you have experience of being –

Anti-Semitism?

Of considered a foreigner?

Where, in England?

In England, yeah.

I don't really know because people didn't tell me. I could only deduce it perhaps from certain things they said but they would be general, not about me. And I don't know. [Laughs] I just found the English very nice most of the time. I think they're really lovely people and especially when you go out of London, in the provinces. **[05:42:02]**

Mala, is there anything of your post-war life or in general which we haven't discussed at all? Maybe one of the things is you went back to university, you – not back. You did a degree. Tell us a little bit about that.

Ah, yes. Haven't we discussed it?

No, I don't think so.

Oh- well, it was my daughter's initiative. She – I, in my spare time I was going to classes at Barnet College and there were – I was learning French actually. That's why I was going. But then – and then I got it, I passed it and- wasn't my teacher that said to me, why don't you do another course? But anyway, I ended up doing seven courses but sort of one or two at a time and I don't know – not a very long period. And so, I had five O-levels that I had passed and two A-levels and those were requirements for getting into university. And it was my daughter's initiative. She found me a university and I did a university course but at that time they were saying that mature students can get in without any qualifications but they were probably thinking of mature students who had been to a school here. [Laughs] I hadn't. But whatever they were thinking, I got the right number of A's and O's and I got in to London University and I did sociology. That is really my daughter's initiative. **[05:44:00]**

Did you enjoy it?

Yes, it was- it was interesting. I was with young people. There were a few mature students, I think about three. I can only think of two but there were more. There were two or three. And one day I was – and there was quite a lot of publicity about mature students because quite a few people were taking a course but I think they already had Open University then, so most people were doing it through that. So, I – there was one Swedish girl who spoke perfect English as she was living here and she was doing the course. I say girl. She wasn't student-age, she was older. And there was one older woman, oh, much older than me. I was in – sort of fortyish when I was doing it. And I think I got it at forty-two maybe. Anyway, and there was quite a lot of publicity about mature students, so I was approached by a newspaper, The Times, who said, we'd like to interview you about your course and I said okay. And when it came out, I had said about – apart from other things, I said that I am doing this full-time course but I'm also living my home life at the same time 'cos I have a family. And I still entertained friends to dinner, and we have the usual thing, and it's, you know, I'm managing it all together, of course I come to lectures every day. **[05:46:06]** And anyway, there was quite a long article. I think I've got it somewhere. I wonder where it is. And next day all the students came in and said – and I said, I all do – when I said in the article, I still have people to dinner, we still have dinner parties, and the next day these pupils came in, they say, ah, can we come to your dinner party? [Laughs] They had all read this article.

And do you think maybe this helped you also with the speaking later? That –

Yeah, you mean it gave me more confidence?

Yeah, yeah.

Yes, probably. I ended up with a degree, [laughs] not a very good one but I ended up with a degree. I didn't get a first. And it was a good experience. And I had this feeling, I remember just one or two sort of feelings about it, so on a Friday morning I remember when I was sort of rushing to the Underground to go to a lecture, and I could see – and I had crossed the high street in Whetstone and there were people, all the housewives busy shopping and there was a sort of buzz. And for a minute I sort of felt nostalgic. I felt, oh, I'd like to be back doing this. But no, I sort of managed both. And, you know, some of the – I was with young people, young students, and some of them hardly attended lectures. And there was one particular one, a girl, who when it came to exams, she said, may I borrow your notes, and I lent her my notes, but she got a better degree than I did. **[05:48:11]**

[Both laugh] Yeah. Yeah, but again at that time probably you didn't talk about being a survivor or that – did that come up at all?

No. I'm trying to remember. I can't remember whether we – I think they must have all known because they knew I had an accent. Oh, there was someone there from Sweden, she had an accent [both laugh]. But I can't remember if they knew or didn't. I don't remember discussing it very much. Maybe a little bit, a tiny bit.

Interesting.

And that was nice. It was my – I had my family's support. My son was in- in Wales, in Cardiff, studying architecture. My daughter had just finished hers in Manchester. And I was there studying. [Laughs] And my husband used to say, well, I'm the only one in this family

who hasn't got a degree but he had – I mean he was a qualified architect but he didn't do it at university to get it. It's a different course. It's a seven-year course.

Mala, is there anything else which we haven't discussed, which you would like to mention?

Well, you were better at telling me that than I can tell you [laughs] because I hadn't thought of the university, I haven't thought of many – but I- I don't know if I had sort of told you just little details like I was still quite active in sort of doing social work. **[05:50:10]** I used to visit people, there was someone in Jewish Care that I used to visit, and there were various things in the community that I was doing, I was on committees and, oh, there was – as I was saying that I thought of something and I forgot it.

Speaking of Jewish –

Yes, I was chairman of the – not chairman, treasurer of the Ladies' Guild. And I did have other – I was very active in the Zionist Society and there were lots of things, probably smaller things that I've forgotten about. It's been a long, long time.

But what I wondered, speaking of Jewish Care, do you go to the Survivors Centre at all, to the Holocaust survivors?

Hardly ever. I hardly ever go because I don't have the time. Sometimes if there is something really interesting, so it's my bad luck that I'm speaking somewhere or doing something else.

You're too busy.

But tomorrow, strangely enough, they've got the HS – [sighs] gosh, the organisation that organises the Holocaust Memorial Day. What are they called? Holo –

HM – Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

That's it, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust. And they're coming tomorrow, a few of them. I don't know who's coming. And they're going to tell them about it or discuss it and there's a free lunch. **[05:52:00]** And they do get tea sometimes, lunches, but on the whole, they pay for their lunches or they buy their sandwiches. And I'm going to go tomorrow. I hope they don't think I'm coming for the free lunch [laughs] because for a minute when I read it, I thought of this and I got the dates mixed up. I thought, oh, I can't go. But then I remembered no, you're coming today, so it all worked out and I was pleased because this year- well, no, next year, I've got something on the – for the event, I'm doing something.

For Holocaust Memorial Day?

Yeah. And- no, I'm just thinking of – that I've got to phone someone because they've asked me for a date and my daughter will be here from America and I've got to juggle. So, I want to go this year particularly because I'll be doing – I'll be involved in the event, the live event, and even though – and I've done it before but I don't really know everybody there. And I want to meet, if there'll be some new – people that worked there and I get to know them because I'm involved this year, I want to know more people there. So, I'm pleased that this has worked out well for me and tomorrow I'm going to the centre but I go very rarely. Mostly, sometimes it's because I'm busy and other times it's because I'm not interested in the subject [laughs] and other times, it's because of parking.

Yeah, yes. But what are you going to do this, the coming Holocaust Memorial Day? Do you know yet?

I don't know yet. In fact, I've got to reply. I've had an email giving me a date when they want to do something. **[05:54:01]** And my daughter will be here from America at that time and I wanted to leave as much time for her as possible, although she's got friends here. So, I don't know whether to actually go or ask them if I can do it a week later.

Okay. They want you to speak? I mean –

Well, they have an event, well, it would involve speaking, but I don't know, it's because they do quite a lot of the – on the genocides. And my brother- I'm also fussy about it but he was quite passionate about it, that they are giving the genocides the sort of same platform and that – he was very concerned about the genocides not being mixed up with the Holocaust because it was quite different. I know people got killed and it was shocking and it was tragic but it was different. And he always worried about that. And for his memory, I – you see, I – so when they came to ask me whether I am willing to do it, I said yes and I did tell – there was Rachel that I know, and I said I really – my concern is always not to mix up the Holocaust with the genocides. And she said, well, I'll make a special point of telling them that and would you still be prepared to come? I said yes. But, you know, the genocides, they're just as tragic. People are getting killed. And you could say, well, so why should we distance it from that? **[05:56:01]** But they're so different in that they're happening, they're still happening in places where the civilisation isn't so great, they're still people killing people with machetes, with – and they are – it's still quite a primitive world out there, with the tribes, and they're fighting over tribes, whereas the Holocaust happened in Europe. It was the most civilised place in the world and especially Germany. Look at all the literature, the music that came out of there. You can't compare it with the tribes fighting there. So, I know Ben was very passionate about it and so I am – I did tell them what I felt. But I know that they'll be doing it because they said you'll be particularly connected with someone from- I don't know, one of the tribes and –

They will connect you somehow? And Mala, do you feel because Ben sadly isn't here, now it's your –

Well, I've sort of taken- not that he said, look, make sure that this doesn't happen [laughs]. It was happening while he was alive. But one occasion he said to me, have you noticed the, you know, this year's different? But on one year they didn't mix it up. But I don't want – I don't want them to mix it up. I feel it quite passionately too.

Okay. Mala, have you got a message for anyone who might watch our interview in the future?

Well, if it's in the future there'll be people who possibly not have heard of the Holocaust or not have been taught at school about it or not have read anything about it, 'cos there's a lot out there that they can do. **[05:58:11]** But if they've never done anything, any – but listened to me, mine is a very mixed bag, isn't it, because it isn't just the Holocaust exclusively. So, I would say that I hope that people will go on reading about the Holocaust and make sure that it's never forgotten and that some lessons have been learnt from it. Of course, one could say more and more and more of the same in different words but basically that is the message.

And is that the message to the children, when you speak to the schoolchildren? What do you tell them?

Well, more or less because I – whatever I happen to think about then, I haven't got anything prepared that I have really properly composed and I tell it every time. So, I tell them much the same, that they shouldn't be bystanders and they should care about other people and they shouldn't tolerate prejudice and discrimination and they should stand up and fight for what is right. I say different things at different times, you know, different occasions.

Yeah. Unless you have anything else to add, Mala, I will say thank you so much for sharing your story with AJR Refugee Voices, with the Archive. I hope many people in the future will listen to your story and we're going to look at your photographs and documents now. ***[06:00:08]*** *So in the meantime, thank you so much.*

You're welcome. [Pause]

Yeah, but I'm quite slow.

Yes, Mala, who do we see on this photo, please?

Right. From left to right, top row, is my aunt, my mother's sister, Róża Hildesheim, who didn't survive. Next is my mother, who didn't survive. Next is my aunt, Frania Klein, who didn't survive. And next is my Auntie Dora, who survived. She's holding her daughter, who disappeared without trace. A terrible story. And my Uncle Markus, my mother's brother. And

the next row, they're just two children, my cousin, Mala, and my brother, Ben, next to her. And below there's three children. So, on the left is, um, am I, Mala, and my cousin, Shmulek, who didn't survive, and my other cousin – I think it's my cousin, Genek, who survived, but I'm not sure. **[06:02:06]** And that's a lot.

So, of the five children, Mala, so you survived, Ben survived.

Yes, and one cousin, if he is the one, on the right-hand side at the bottom. A very young child.

And the other two were murdered?

The other two, I'm on the left and my cousin, Shmulek, is in the middle. And yes, his name is Hildesheim. He's the son of my aunt who's at the top, on the left.

And when was this picture taken roughly?

I can only assess. I may have been maybe three, and Ben, four. Or I may have been two and a half and he's three and a half. I'm not sure of the dates. I don't know when it was taken.

So, in the early '30s.

Yeah, very early '30s, yeah.

And where was it taken, Mala?

I think it was taken in Sieradz, where my grandparents lived and my Aunt Róża lived. And I think we were visiting. I don't think it was in my hometown, Piotrków. I think it's Sieradz.

Thank you.

Those are my parents. My father's on the left, my mother on the right. And that's all I could tell you- I can tell you about them. They were made obviously before the war but I don't know how close to the war, so I don't know how old they were then.

[Cameraman] And their names?

And I know that one of them, we got back from a cousin in Israel, to whom my mother sent this- this photo of herself, to her cousin, who was then living in Israel. **[06:04:05]** Well, she lived there since long before the war. And my father, I think it was a passport photograph that came about from somewhere.

So, are these the only photos you have of your parents?

Yes. Well, my mother was on that previous photograph as well.

But I mean the portraits.

Yeah, they're the only ones.

Thank you.

Well, on this photograph is my father on the left. And on the right is my cousin, Żalek. And I have learned comparatively recently that – I didn't know about it – is that Żalek was an amazing chess player and under normal conditions if he had gone on, he would have been a champion without a doubt. But he didn't survive, nor did my father.

Thank you, Mala.

This photo has my cousin, Idza on the left, who disappeared without a trace. We were together but I don't know what they did with her, whereas I survived. And that is her aunt and they're coming back from school and it is in Piotrków.

This is a picture of me with my cousin, Ann, who survived the war and it was taken after the war in Sweden where we were for nearly two years, not together but we were there in different parts of Sweden, different schools because of her age. **[06:06:01]** She was exactly half my age when we were liberated. I was fourteen and she was seven.

Thank you.

[Cameraman] Yes, please.

Yes, well, this is the school. It actually wasn't intended as a school originally. It is a stately home which has been converted into a school, there were mostly children who had survived the Holocaust and I was living there with them in Sweden. And we're actually there in front of the school but it's minute. No one would be able to recognise anybody.

And what was the name of the school?

The name of school – well, the name of the place was Voxnabruk but the school was called Voxna School, but school in the native language, in Swedish.

And roughly this was taken when, in '46 or –

Yes, I was there in '45, '46 and '47 really. And this would have been in around '46, maybe towards the end of '46.

Thank you. Yes, please, Mala.

That's my cousin, Ann, and myself outside. It was a sort of – we had very long winters and people used to go out on these toboggan because you could propel it by having one foot on part of the toboggan and the other one, you would sort of push along. And it was commonly used because the streets were full of snow and it was very cold and this was quite a common sight in Sweden. **[06:08:06]**

Thank you. Yeah. Yes, Mala.

So, this is a photo of myself with a friend called Dora and we were out- well, we were not skiing at that moment but we used to go out skiing quite a lot, and we're just being photographed. There's really not a lot to say about it otherwise.

And what happened to her? Where did she go?

She went to Israel. She settled in Israel.

And did you stay in touch?

Yes, we stayed in touch to the very end. Now, I haven't been able to contact her lately and I'm going to try for a little while longer. Maybe she's possibly ill in hospital but it's possible that she's not around anymore. I don't really know and there's no one I can ask. She was actually the one who used to give me all the news of whoever's still around but if I can't get hold of her, that's it, that's my last contact.

Thank you. Yeah, Mala.

So, this is Sister Luba. She became quite famous actually because she looked after us in the children's home in Bergen-Belsen. They were mostly Dutch children. And after the war she actually went back to Holland with the group of children and they offered her to stay there, to live there, but she declined that and she came back. And she was in charge of this children's home, she and Sister Hermina, who was isn't on this photo, and there's quite a well-known story about the Dutch children. **[06:10:05]**

And what was her surname, do you know?

No idea, no.

So, she was with you when, exactly?

In Bergen-Belsen towards the end of the war, because I arrived in Bergen-Belsen about between two and three months before the end of the war. I don't have the date of arrival. And she was in charge. She – there is a whole long story about the Dutch children that were in that children's home, but it's too long to tell it here.

No, we talked about it in the interview.

Yeah.

But what was her – was she Jewish or not Jewish? Sister Luba.

She was Jewish. She was Jewish. And she was instrumental on starting this children's home because she was a friend of another person, whose name I now cannot remember, who worked in the hospital, Dr Bimko, in fact. She worked in the hospital and she had access to Kramer and she was able to get a barracks for the children and that's how it all started. So that was a children's home with mostly Dutch children and Sister Luba was in charge.

And she didn't go to Sweden? She didn't go to Sweden?

Do you know, I'm not sure. I don't think she did. I don't think she went to Sweden but I don't know for sure.

And how did you get this photo of Luba? I guess this is post-war.

Oh, that was – oh, wait a minute, of course that was in Sweden, so she did go to Sweden. [Laughs] This was taken in Sweden, in fact. But she didn't stay in Sweden, she finally ended up in America. **[06:12:02]** But I think it – yes, it says Sweden on there.

In 1946?

Yes, about that time. We actually went there in ’45 after the war. We went in- during the summer. It was ’45 and then the whole of ’46 and then I left in ’47 to come here to England to be reunited with my brother, Ben.

Okay. Thank you, Mala. We're going to look at the back now, what it says on the back. What does it say on the back of the photo?

It says for you, Mala, from Sister S, for Sister Luba.

In Polish?

Yeah, *Dlaciebie,* that is the Pol – the only Polish bit, for you. It’s one word. Oh, no, it – no, it should be two words. Oh.

Okay. Thanks.

Oh, this is my brother, Ben, in England. I guess it’s soon after arrival here, with his three friends whom – I’m sorry, I don't know them. I may well have known them but I may have got to know them sort of at – well, it would be at least two years later and they would have changed. So, this was much earlier. But it is a lovely photo and it is in Windermere.

And he wrote something on the back, which we're going to look at now as well.

[Cameraman] Which one is your brother?

The one sitting on the left.

On top?

The top left.

Thank you. Yes, Mala. Can you –

What does it say on there, what date? **[06:14:02]**

It says –

[Cameraman] 24th of October.

24th of October 1945. So, what does it say, Mala?

October.

What does it say on it? Can you please read it?

What, on here?

Yeah.

It's all in English, yeah. "In remembrance of – to my sister after freedom from the barbarism hands, your dear brother, Beniek." That was his Polish version of Ben. Oh, well, that's- he was still in the process of learning English.

And did he send it to you? This? Did he send this to you?

Yeah, yeah, to me in Sweden. Yeah. He sent it to me in Sweden.

Thank you. Picture.

Oh, I would have to read it to know where it was taken or anything. Well, it – this picture is of me, Mala, and I don't know exactly when it was taken but it was after my arrival in England, which was in 1947. I arrived in March but I think that this may have been taken at, oh, well, definitely a few months later. I don't have the exact date, not without looking at it, anyway.

Thank you. What do we see on the picture?

Right, well, this is a picture of me with my landlady, Mrs Neuberger. She was a wonderful landlady. She was very kind. And on this picture, she had actually taken me to South Kensington to one of the big stores for lunch. And she was really kind. And this was just snapped in the street, one of those pictures where people used to do in those days. **[06:16:01]** And then of course they charged for it but it's a wonderful souvenir for me. I'm really pleased to have it. And I think with her- of her, with great affection.

And where was she from?

Aachen.

From Aachen in Germany.

Yeah.

She was a refugee.

Yes, she must have been a refugee. I knew nothing about her. But mind you, I have friends in America who knew her a bit better because they were already there when I joined them. She had two rooms she was letting, two bedrooms. And I wonder if I could – oh, yeah, I must try and find their address and ask them about Mrs Neuberger.

And the picture was taken in 1947, yes?

Yes, but I don't know which month because '47, I came here.

Yeah. We'll look at the back. Yes, Mala. Tell me, you wanted to tell me a story.

Yes, so when I arrived here, my brother wanted to find anybody that I knew that I could say hello, because they were all strangers. And we had a friend from Piotrków who lived here with two cousins. She came here after the war and these cousins lived in Maida Vale and she was – her job was to look after the children of the Polish ambassador. And my brother had taken me and shown me a few sights and he said, now, I'll take you to see Ella. And Ella, he – I already knew where I lived, I had slept there one night, but I didn't know the address. And he told Ella where I live and he left me with her because she was going to go home, so I could go home with her and drop me off. **[06:18:00]** And when we got there to the station, I knew the street and when I looked at the – I didn't have the number and the houses all looked the same. I mean just a row of identical houses, and I just didn't know what to do. I was absolutely lost. And what could she do? Just take me home with her, to her two maiden aunts and they were not very pleased about it and they said, well, how can you do that? Why didn't you take the address? And they were telling her off. I hardly knew any English and it was just an awful feeling. But they had no alternative but to put me up. And in the morning, I would phone Ben because it was much too late, and ask him, which I did and he gave me the number and I went back to Mrs Neuberger. She opened the door and she said, you have only been here one night and then you go missing [laughs] for the second night. She had not very good sort of thoughts of what I might have been up to. And I felt awful and I explained what happened and she, well, she ultimately knew that I stayed with these people [laughs] and – but it was a terrible experience. What she said to me actually, and I remember it, you're here one night and you stay away the night. Ah, it was an awful experience. But after a time, and you can see with this photograph and the inscription, that she was actually very nice and she treated me very well.

And what was the address, Mala? Do you remember it?

I think it was 51 – oh, this – I can't remember the street now but it's such a major street. **[06:20:06]** It's not the main road but it's quite a major road that goes down to where the- just turn left when you come out of the station on the corner, and that's the street.

Randolph? Randolph?

Randolph Avenue.

Randolph Avenue.

Randolph Avenue, yeah.

51?

51. Now I remember it [laughs]. And those were- they were not flats, they were maisonettes. We had to go up to the first floor, the second, and then she had two floors. And sometimes when I'm on – when I was on my own – and she would sit in her lounge and knit or read or something, and she would listen to the radio, always classical music, and if I was on my own, she would call me down to sit with her. She was really lovely. I appreciate it now more than I did then.

Thank you, Mala. Yes, can you please read the back of the photo?

Yes. It says here, to my dear Mala, with love from Mary Neuberger. And it was in 1947, November 1947.

Thank you.

Yes, this photograph is of my friend and me and she's- her name is Ella. Well, it was Ella. She's no longer around. And she came from the same town as I did and she came to England, she had relatives here, and we happened to live in the same area in Maida Vale and I used to see her from time to time. She was quite a lot older, she was older than I was, so she was actually my teacher just before the war, or a bit in the ghetto as well. **[06:22:10]** But she settled here, she got married, she had a very brilliant son. And she's no longer around but she was just a friend of mine.

Thank you. Yes, please.

Now, that is my wedding. And I remember being very happy and it was so special and I had a wonderful husband. That's all I can say. [Sighs] I only didn't have him for long enough, unfortunately. We were married forty-four years when he died but that wasn't long enough. And well, a very happy marriage. I look back with nostalgia. And I really thank God for what I had.

When was this, Mala? Which year?

We got married in 1950.

In London?

In London, yeah.

Thank you.

Oh, this is a picture of my husband and me on our honeymoon in Jersey and really that's all I can say about it. It was just a wonderful time and a wonderful marriage for as long as it lasted. I mean I lost my husband, he died and I just have happy memories now.

Thank you.

Ah. Well, this is a photograph of me with my children. **[06:24:02]** On the left is Jeffrey, the younger one. And on the right is Shannon, the older girl, the older one. Well, I've got a girl and a boy and they were lovely children, and they're nice adults too. They're really –

And when was this taken?

I just have to assess the ages of them to work it out. I think Jeffrey must have been about maybe four, so Shannon would have been seven, or maybe six and three. There were three years between them.

So, in the '50s, this was?

Sorry?

In the '50s?

In the '50s, yes. Shannon was born in '51, at the end of '51, in October. And Jeffrey was born on, [laughs] oh gosh, now I've got to remember. Jeffrey was born in 1955. 1950 and '55, but there's only three years and three months in –

1951, Shannon was born '51?

'51. Did I say '50? No, I said '51.

[Cameraman] I think you said '58.

No, Shannon – oh, well, this is really a family tree. At the top there is a photograph of my father on the left, and my mother on the right. And the whole family follows, so that is my brother's family on the left, and mine much more smaller on the right. So, all the details are here, all the dates of births and a lot of information that's useful. **[06:26:01]**

And your grandchildren of course.

My – of course my children and grandchildren, these families are all on there.

Thank you. Yes, Mala.

[Gasps] Oh. Well, [laughs] that's me with the Queen where I'm receiving my MBE for education, Holocaust education, at schools and other places. And the Queen – it was a lovely experience and the Queen was very charming and nice and she asked me about my work and it was really great.

Thank you. Mala, who are you with here, on this photo?

Now, here I'm with the current King, which was quite special because I was with the Queen before, now with the King, so it's been interesting and exciting to have a chat with him because he's sort of friendly towards people and very interested in what they're doing. So, it always ends up – I did meet him as a prince and that was interesting because he would always chat a lot as a prince. Now, I've only met him this once since he's been King and he didn't have that much to say but he did make conversation. He's very good at that. So, it was very enjoyable and an honour of course.

And this was at JW3?

Yes, this was at JW3. He – I think it may have been his first sort of outing to a Jewish organisation and he was really very jolly and he danced with the people [laughs] and he was really happy to be there. **[06:28:03]** He was presented with something, I think it was a vase or something, but he also visited but that I saw on film, I – sort of pictures, not – I haven't seen it personally. But he visited sort of, there's a whole row of women with their babies and people who work there at JW3, so it was quite a long visit and a very jolly one because he was dancing with some of the people. It was all very nice and he did get around to say hello to me as well, so it was rather good [laughs].

And do you feel he's – he is interested in Holocaust survivors?

Yes, he – he is very interested in the Holocaust and of course survivors, anybody who had anything to do with it. And he's been really very friendly towards the survivors.

Mala, I'd like to thank you again for giving us this long interview and sharing your photographs with us. Thank you so much.

You're very welcome. And I wish you good luck with everything else, all your undertakings.

[06:29:28]

[End of transcript]