

IMPORTANT

This transcript is copyright Association of Jewish Refugees

Access to this interview and transcript is for private research only. Please refer to the AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive, prior to any publication or broadcast from this document.

AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive

AJR

Winston House, 2 Dollis Park

London N3 1HF

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it. Should you find any errors please inform

ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

Interview Transcript Title Page

Collection title:	AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
Ref. no:	22

Interviewee Surname:	Mitchell
Forename:	Ernst
Interviewee Sex:	Male
Interviewee DOB:	24 October 1909
Interviewee POB:	Breslau, Germany

Date of Interview:	18 June 2003
Location of Interview:	London
Name of Interviewer:	Dr. Bea Lewkowicz
Total Duration (HH:MM):	2 hours 3 minutes

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

INTERVIEW: 22

NAME: ERNST MITCHELL

DATE: 18 JUNE 2003

LOCATION: LONDON

INTERVIEWER: BEA LEWKOWICZ

TAPE 1

Tape 1: 0 minute 25 seconds

BL: Can you please tell me your name? Just tell me for the camera, in your voice, please.

EM: Ernst Mitchell.

BL: And when were you born?

EM: 24.10.09.

BL: And where?

EM: Breslau.

BL: Can you please tell me about your family background?

EM: Family?

BL: Background.

EM: Well, average, lower middle class German Jew.

BL: Could you describe it a bit? What sort of memories do you have from growing up in Breslau?

EM: Well there wasn't much. Breslau was quite a big town, school was very agreeable. What do you call it? Oh, it doesn't matter. It was a Humanistisches Gymnasium [...] over to Judenschule, with several Jewish teachers. Two by the name of Cohen. To distinguish them, one was called A.C. and the other W.C.

[Interruption]

Tape 1: 2 minutes 16 seconds

BL: Yes?

EM: After school, university, attempting to study, 'til mein Führer thought differently. And then, of course, was a way to try to get a job until my Führer found a job for me - '42, the famous 18th Transport to Riga, where I learned the difference in the word 'Kippe'. I only knew 'Kippe' as a butt but there 'Kippe' was meant to be a tip-up place. So you learned, you learned different things. My great proud achievement was to carry, I don't know, half a hundred weight, or a hundred weight of paris of plaster three stories upstairs. Then I told my foreman, who was a dental surgeon, how proud I was of this achievement. Half a hundred weight or a hundred weight of plaster on my back, three stories up.

BL: Mr Mitchell, before we start talking about the concentration camp, can we just go back a bit to Breslau? What was your father's profession, please?

EM: He was a Chazzan.

BL: He was a Chazzan, in which synagogue?

EM: The Neue. Neue Synagogue.

BL: And did you go with him to synagogue, did you go to synagogue?

EM: Oh, yes.

BL: Yes? Can you describe this a bit for us?

EM: No, it's quite unuseful, you know the set-up, nothing really special about it.

BL: Did you like it?

EM: Yes, why not?

BL: Did your parents keep an observant home?

EM: Can you imagine not, in this position?

BL: So you grew up in quite a religious house?

EM: Yes.

BL And what sort of activities did you have when you were young? Did you belong to any clubs, any youth movements?

EM: No.

BL: What did you do after school?

EM: Reading. Reading a lot. Later I joined the school rowing club.

BL: Any other activities?

EM: Not to my memory. No, I can't remember.

BL: What sort of friends did you have?

EM: None.

BL: None?

EM: For a short time there were some friends also, what do you call them? A bit socialism, mild socialism.

BL: Were you active in any political way? Were you politically interested?

EM: Oh, yes. I remember at the electing time I was-, what did you call that? What's the name? When you get people to vote. 'Schlepper', 'Schlepper', they called it.

BL: Which election? When was that?

EM: It was all the time in the twenties. In the twenties. Mein Führer came first.

BL: That was in '33. But that was a bit later. You said you started studying at university. What did you study?

EM: Dental surgery.

BL: In Breslau?

EM: Yes.

BL: And then what happened? You were expelled from university?

Tape 1: 7 minutes 12 seconds

EM: No, there was no formality, but I just ceased to be a student.

BL: And how many years had you studied by then? What year were you?

EM: Two.

BL: And what did you do then?

EM: Tried to get a job, a training.

BL: In the same field?

EM: Um.

BL: And couldn't find anything?

EM: Finally, I got a training place, 1937, in Berlin in a laboratory, but that was short-lived.

BL: So you moved from Breslau to Berlin?

EM: Ja. September, '37.

BL: And what were your experiences in Berlin?

EM: Well, nothing special, the usual life, somebody first to be in training and then out of anything. Occasional labour, 'til that was stopped, and then I was designated a dental mechanic by the German authorities. I was designated a dental mechanic, although I wasn't one. But that saved my life. First, that was a special privileged occupation, like watch-makers. So I was lucky, I was indoors, 'til the deportation came.

Tape 1: 9 minutes 31 seconds

BL: Where were you during Kristallnacht? Were you in Berlin during Kristallnacht?

EM: [Nods]

BL: Can you describe what you saw?

EM: No, well, it was a normal life, I mean, what can you describe there?

BL: In 1938, Kristallnacht.

EM: Ja, it was normal life. In '38, '39, '40.

BL: Did you experience any persecution?

EM: Pardon?

BL: Until that time, did you experience any persecution?

EM: None whatsoever. Sorry to disappoint you.

BL: So it was easy to be, I mean, it can't have been easy after Kristallnacht to be in Berlin?

EM: I had to do also some unauthorised work, again, I was designated by the German Labour Office for Jews, a dental mechanic, which again sometimes saved me from hard labour, and later saved my life. It was the same in the concentration camp. I was designated a dental mechanic by the officials, which saved my life, between many other things.

BL: You joined, in the thirties, you were interested in Anthroposophy. Is that right?

EM: Ja.

BL: Can you tell us a bit about that, please?

EM: Well, it is just a movement, which is concerned with the development of man and the world.

BL: So how come you became interested?

EM: A lecturer came and explained that behind the Nazi movement were very anti-progressive, sinister organisations.

BL: Yes?

EM: And then I thought it was time to-. So I became a member in '31 or '2.

BL: And what sort of activities did the society do? Were there lectures, were there-?

EM: Yes, normal, normal, nothing special. Lectures and conferences.

BL: On what topics?

EM: Man.

BL: How did your family react to you being involved with the-?

EM: My mother was there before, my father already came to it shortly before his death, he died in a 'Kloster', what is that?

BL: Monastery.

EM: Monastery, where monks were driven out into the Labour Office and the Jews from Silesia were concentrated, on the way to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, and my father died there at Easter in his sleep in that monastery, as a Jew, or a Christian Jew if you like it. So, there he died, luckily, Easter '42.

BL: So did you have lots of friends from the Anthroposophy Society? Were you friendly with other people?

EM: Not really. No.

BL: So I didn't quite understand. Your parents also became interested in Anthroposophy?

EM: Yes.

BL: Did they go to meetings as well?

EM: My mother did, my father, but then the society was forbidden and there were no activities allowed.

BL: So when Hitler came to power, Anthroposophy-. You have to explain this a bit because people who are going to watch this tape don't know about it. So what happened to the society?

Tape 1: 14 minutes 51 seconds

EM: It was forbidden, as usual, like all organisations. Money confiscated, people, offices closed, the usual well-known procedure.

BL: Right. OK, so let's go back to Berlin, where you spent from 1937 to 1942. So, you said you were assigned to be a dental technician. Where did you work?

EM: When?

BL: Where did you work in Berlin?

EM: First in Berlin, yes. And then in the concentration camp, there were all kinds of different jobs, and one of them, which again saved my life, was as a dental mechanic, although I wasn't one.

BL: OK, let's go back. So when did you get notice that you were being deported?

EM: Summer, '42.

BL: So what happened? The Gestapo came? Or what happened?

EM: I got an invitation to visit them. Which I complied, and I didn't get out anymore. The next: First, was in a cell, so you learned how to behave as a prisoner.

BL: How long did you spend in the prison, in the cell in Berlin?

EM: First a month, before the transport was compounded.

BL: Yes. And then?

EM: And then the transport came, it was a special train, and off we went.

Tape 1: 16 minutes 42 seconds

BL: And where were you taken?

EM: Riga. It was the 18th Osttransport.

BL: And who were the other people in the transport? Mainly Jews from Berlin?

EM: Yes, they were all Jews from Berlin. Special privilege.

BL: So what happened after you arrived?

EM: I had volunteered as a First-Aider. People were then herded together, and then a shuttle service of buses came and took them away. And I, as the First-Aider, looked after them. I was the last to go on the last bus, when the SS officer ordered me to stay put. And so the whole transport went to the cemetery, where they were shot. Bang. So that was the first miracle of survival. So I can go with the next two years until now.

BL: So what happened after that?

EM: We were first taken to do some temporary work, to see if we are allowed to live, and then we were taken to a special work in Mitau, Jelgava, to work for the organisation 'Tod', building, you wouldn't believe it, but it's true, building a shunting station on sand, of sand. Until October, that was October '42, 'til December. Then I was getting ill and, by the kindness of the doctor, I was sent to the ghetto hospital in Riga. But of the transport was nothing heard anymore.

BL: That was when?

EM: Christmas, '42.

BL: So this was the second time you were saved?

EM: Well, we went in between. There was another one, yes. I was sent to the ghetto hospital.

BL: And then, when you came out from hospital, where were you sent?

EM: To work. And then, in summer, was a special assignment, 'til the autumn, and then the ghetto was dissolved, and the concentration camp properly established. It was in autumn '42.

BL: Can you describe life in the concentration camp, please?

EM: No. It's well-known, no need to describe that.

Tape 1: 20 minutes 25 seconds

BL: But your experiences are not known.

EM: Well, we had a great surprise when we arrived. The tone was much harsher, the SS and staff, it was always 'Quicker! Quicker!', 'Schneller! Schneller!', everything at the double. And you got your number, you got your-. First, you were adorned with red oil-paint, marked across the jacket, to mark you as a prisoner, and across your back, and generous stripes along the trousers, and later you got your uniform, the usual uniform, but then that saved them the paint. Instead of that, you got your number.

BL: You got your number tattooed?

EM: Well, we got our number to sew on. I forgot my number now, but there was a four, in the four thousand.

BL: How many prisoners were there in that camp?

EM: Oh, tens of thousands. It was a transit camp, a principal camp, a transit camp.

BL: So you were in a particular block, in what sort of block were you? What sort of people were with you?

EM: We were altogether.

BL: Were you in a hut, or a block, or in a-?

EM: We had three blocks, and the women's block. So we were housed in a company part, meant for 100 people, and there were perhaps at least a few thousand in each block. Well, there is nothing that is new about the conditions. And there was occasionally work, 'til I was again on the point of breaking down, completely exhausted, when I was again transferred as a dental mechanic to a dental laboratory of the army dental unit, which again saved my life.

BL: So you were taken out of the concentration camp?

EM: No, we had an hour's march to the laboratory, but we were resident, as you will call it, at the camp.

BL: So there you met German soldiers, in that laboratory?

EM: Well, it's a unit. There were some Estonian, not Estonian, now what is the country? Latvian, Latvian Jews working as mechanics, the others were German soldiers.

BL Did they give you some food or help?

EM: The Commandant arranged for us to get food, soldiers' food from the day before, which we fetched, not very good food of course, he arranged that we got this food from the soldiers kitchen. He also arranged that we came to work in this lab on Sundays, in order that we didn't have to work in the camp, which we would have had to do. He also arranged that we were not put to hard labour after our work, when we came back to the camp. We had the use of the soldiers' bath, which was unheard of. And we had another privilege, which was called 'Zuehrkeit', a piece of paper - the prisoner so-and-so is authorised to wear his hair long; we were not shorn like prisoners. So the local Jews, who worked there, had also hidden, I suppose, their own money, from before they were transferred. They had money deposited, probably, I didn't know, probably deposited with the boiler man. And there, on that Sunday when the soldiers were absent and officially no work, there they had an easy life, and food, all kind of food, which was available on the black market - chicken, fish, white bread, whatever you like, they had it. They were-. I was present-. They were all local men. So they lived quite comfortable on that day. But I of course, being a German Jew, didn't have that privilege. But one day I saw the Commandant coming in, and finding an open plaster tan and found the butter in pound packages and fried fish and what have you. He also found, they had a newspaper of a later edition than the commandant had himself, so his reaction was to order his sergeant to tell our foreman to hide it better, not to be forced to notice it.

BL: So who was this commandant, do you remember his name?

Tape 1: 28 minutes 13 seconds

EM: I found him after the war and made friendship with him.

BL: Really?

EM: Very close friendship. I had a present from him, which I still treasure. A candlestick.

BL: What was his name, please? His name?

EM: Lamprecht. Dr. Lambrecht. So we made friends after the war.

BL: How did you find him after the war?

EM: Via the Red Cross.

BL: So that must have been very unusual, for a Commandant to put-

EM: Ja.

BL: So how many people did he actually help all the people who came to work in that laboratory? How many people came from the camp to work for him?

EM: I forgot. Ten, ten twelve men. And two women, as cleaners.

BL: So how long did you work in that laboratory?

EM: Until the Russians came nearer. Our foreman escaped and the lab was dissolved. Ja. He had good, he was a local man with good friends, he was hidden, I don't know by whom, by local people, and survived.

Tape 1: 29 minutes 59 seconds

BL: So where were you liberated?

EM: In the side camp, in another camp, belonging to it, called Stutthoff, there was another big camp.

BL: Stutthoff. What was the other name?

EM: The first was Kaiserwald, and the second was called Stutthoff.

BL: So first you were in Riga, in the Ghetto, then in Kaiserwald and then in Stutthoff?

EM: Ya.

BL: And from where were you taken to that lab? From which camp?

Tape 1: 30 minutes 36 seconds

EM: When the Russians got nearer, we were transported to the other.

BL: To Stutthoff. But when you were working for this laboratory, you were in Kaiserwald or in Stutthoff?

EM: That was in Kaiserwald.

BL: How were you transported from Kaiserwald to Stuthoff?

EM: By stolen ship from the harbour, to Danzig, or-. Ja. It was a whole convoy.

BL: And then how long did you spend in Stutthoff?

EM: A month. And then we were transported to a side camp of it, of Stutthoff. Excuse me, I must interrupt.

[Interruption]

Tape 1: 31 minutes 42 seconds

BL: Yes, you were talking about the liberation. You were in Stutthoff, in a side camp of Stutthoff, and what happened?

EM: We worked in a ship-building yard called Zichau, where Wasela, or what was his name, the Polish started, the uprising in Poland, Wasela or similar. It doesn't matter. There we worked in this ship-building yard and that was an outside camp of Stutthoff. We were more or less 800 men there, 6 or 800 men.

BL: And you said you were liberated by the Russians?

EM: Ya.

BL: How do you remember liberation? Do you remember the liberation?

EM: I was what they called in our language a Muselmann, that means one who couldn't die yet, you know, one of those skeletons who hung between heaven and earth. Wasn't quite dead yet. And again, by one of the miracles, I was allowed to be ill. Otherwise, people who were ill were killed or sent to the ovens. And I, again, one of the many miracles was that officially I was allowed to be ill. Certificated. And there the Russians came, one day, I mean I was lying there on that cot, half dead, and there the Russians came in. Unbelievable! It was Easter '45. Wait a minute, ja, '45. And another miracle was that although I was an enemy alien as a German Jew, they took me to their Russian army hospital and nursed me back to life.

BL: Where was that hospital?

Tape 1: 34 minutes 57 seconds

EM: Oh, that was a moving army hospital. I forgot the name of the-. One was the Bogutschütz, or something like that. It was in East Prussia. I forgot the name of the-, one was Thorn, the town of Thorn, and some other places where the Russian army had established temporary hospitals for the survivors.

BL: And how did you speak? Did they speak German? Or you spoke some Russian, or how-?

EM: Well, I had no idea of Russian; I had to learn speaking Russian living with them. Of course I was not welcome there as a German Jew, an enemy alien and a Jew.

Tape 1: 36 minutes 1 second

BL: How was that manifested? How did that manifest itself?

EM: Well, one of the Siberian patients was raving against me in Russian. I understood but I couldn't speak, I couldn't answer anyhow. Later I also became cured of his anti-Semitism because I looked after him. And then, a year later when I saw him, I didn't know he was there, he was dying of tuberculosis, there was a whole lot, perhaps a ward of 40 people who would die of tuberculosis, all victims of the war, and there I saw him again and he was, I was very embarrassed, he was full of praise for me. What happened was, he had a spittoon and I had to go x-times out to the Thorn, the laboratory, and when that spittoon was full, on my way I emptied it for him, and he didn't know what happened, he was asleep, 'til he found out, the man, towards whom he was anti-Semitic, that that man had done that for him. And he was so full of praise, and I was very embarrassed, I didn't know what he was saying, but I knew he was full of praise for me, which cured him of his anti-Semitism. And that was a way to deal with anti-Semitism, one of them.

Tape 1: 38 minutes 9 seconds

BL: What do you think helped you to survive in the camps? What helped you to survive in the camps yourself?

EM: Ah. You needed two things. You needed a theory to hold on or a philosophy to hold on to life, and you needed a human being to be able to believe in human beings. And I was, by grace of God, supplied with both. The theory was anthroposophy, and the belief in people were two friends, also anthroposophical school girls, risked their lives 'til I was deported, risked their lives and stuck with me.

Tape 1: 39 minutes 19 seconds

BL: Can you tell us what these two girls did for you?

EM: Well, it's well-known; everything was when the so-called blood laws came out by Hitler, what happened to people who continued their human relationships. And they risked their lives to continue. Two sisters, both of them of the original Rudolf school, and both of them anthroposophists.

BL: Did they help you or did they both stay in touch with you? Did they hide you?

EM: First of all, by the fact of visiting me was good enough for them to be caught. And I was all and when I was arrested they brought me food from their ration, also some clothing, and risked also, what they don't know, two friends who can go with them.

BL: You said the philosophy of anthroposophy helped you in the camps. What is the essence of anthroposophy?

EM: Now, one of the aspects, it's not a dogma, but a thing you can believe in, is reincarnation, where at the end everything will go right, if not in this then in another life. And that makes sense, can help make sense of everything, or at least takes the sharpness out of hits below the belt. So I was lucky to have met anthroposophy before my number was up.

BL: Were you in touch with these two women after the war?

EM: I'm still in touch. One of them died since. The other of the miracles, shall we say, after 35 years, was that we're still in touch.

BL: What are their names please, and where did they live after the war?

Tape 1: 42 minutes 31 seconds

EM: They live in London. Or she lives in London. The other one died. The names I can't dispense.

BL: So we'll come back to them because you probably re-met them when you came to London.

EM: I met them when I came back from the concentration camp, back to Berlin. And there I found them again. Another one of the miracles. And with the millions of people, you know, of course I didn't know anybody, I didn't have any money, I didn't have any training, I didn't have even a change of clothing, I had nothing, not a halfpenny.

BL: When was that? When did you leave the Russian hospital?

EM: When the Russians discharged me.

BL: When was that, please?

EM: The 3rd of December '45, no, '44, no, '45.

BL: It must have been '45. And then you went from the hospital to-?

EM: They sent me back. I mean, one of the other miracles was that I was sent to Berlin and not my home town. So I found them again.

BL: How did you find them?

EM: Before my number was up, I made these two friends known with another friend, who was a so-called Aryan, married to a Jew, and made them friends. And, after my number was up, they kept up the friendship. And this lady, Maria, was known, to who I thought would be the only person in life whom I would know, was murdered at the end of the war by a Russian in error. But one of the two girls kept in touch with that family, and so when I came back from the hospital, from the army hospital, I was told this friend had visited the other friend, a friend of friends, and so I found her again. And I will also remember the German soldier, who risked his life and took a letter from me from the concentration camp in Riga, home to Breslau, and delivered it by hand, so he risked his head for a complete stranger.

BL: What did you write in this letter?

Tape 1: 46 minutes 1 second

EM: Oh, I wrote a normal letter, describing my life in there as a prisoner.

BL: By then were you in touch with your parents? Did you know what had happened to them? When did you last hear from your parents?

EM: Oh yes, I knew what happened, that was known what had happened to the Jews.

BL: But you said you wrote a letter to them, in Riga?

EM: No, I wrote a letter to the girls.

BL: Sorry.

EM: And friends. Ja. Of course, I didn't know the name of the soldier, and he didn't know my name. But he risked his head to do that.

BL: And they got your letter, the two girls? They got this letter? The letter arrived?

EM: Yes. He delivered it by hand. And I addressed it to a lady who worked in police headquarters in Breslau.

BL: But I thought you sent it to these two girls in Berlin?

Tape 1: 47 minutes 17 seconds

EM: Not directly, I didn't know where they lived, if they lived, if they were attacked. I sent it, I addressed it to a lady who belonged to that chain, who worked in police headquarters, so I sent it to her. Imagine!

BL: So, when you came back to Berlin, where did you live? You said you had no money?

EM: Three months in hospital, and then two years in the displaced person camp, an UNRWA camp.

BL: What was the name of that camp, please?

EM: It didn't have a name, it was an UNRWA camp.

BL: In Berlin?

EM: In Berlin.

Tape 1: 48 minutes 34 seconds

EM: It was just for survivors and displaced persons.

BL: And what sort of activities were there in that UNRWA camp?

EM: There were no activities, except the black market.

BL: Because in some camps there was training for emigration to Palestine, or-. Was there any training for emigration to Palestine?

EM: Later they tried to press some people to go to Palestine to emigrate, you know, to empty the camp, but I had no inclination of going there, I'd never been a Zionist.

BL: Did you want to stay in Germany? What was your plan at that time?

EM: Well, I wouldn't have minded to stay in Germany, but I experienced only two experiences but that was enough – Germans, who welcomed me back and, when I was out of earshot, swore “Another bloody Jew”! And that took the ground from under my feet because you can't suspect a stranger of being a murderer. On the other hand, you couldn't trust them anymore either. So that threw the ground from under my feet. I would have gone anywhere, but out, out of Germany. Later on, I found a friend, a German friend, whose book was-. He wrote in one of the Israeli papers, so I found this school-mate, friend, and made friends with him again, and his wife. In fact, his wife offered me I could stay there for life, on my own freely, in one of their little houses, but of course I didn't take it. Anyhow, I went twice over, just to show him, he was one of the sensitive Germans, who suffered from guilt, and just to show him I don't hold him responsible, so I went twice, maybe three times, to see him in Germany. He was then a very high official.

BL: Did you go back to Breslau after the war?

EM: No. There was no Breslau, it was Wrocław, Poland.

BL: Did any of your family survive?

EM: No. Well, it's not quite correct. A half-sister, coming to think of it, two half-sisters survived. I forgot. But we were not, with one I wasn't very close, the other one was a typical German Jewish bourgeois, who hadn't learned anything.

BL: They were your half-sisters from your mother's side or your father's side?

EM: Father.

BL: So your father had married before?

EM: Ja.

BL: So they were older than you?

EM: Yes.

BL: And so what happened to them, where did they go after the war?

EM: One of them went to Shanghai, from there to Palestine, from there back to Berlin, where she died. And the other one caught the last train to England, worked as a domestic and did all kinds of hard labour, and then worked herself up in the so-called social care back to the German Jewish bourgeois level. And, at the very end, she lost of course her family and children, her husband and everybody, and, at the end, at the age of 72, committed suicide.

BL: She lost her children where? She lost her children, you said?

EM: She had two children, which she originally left behind in order to get out. The boy died in a camp, and the girl went on a Hachshara and then to Israel and died in the Patria tragedy when she went back to get her coat or something, when the ship blew up. So she lost her children.

Tape 1: 55 minutes 30 seconds

BL: Were you in touch with her, here in England? Were you in touch with your sister, with your half-sister?

EM: Yes, sure.

BL: You spoke of this German Jewish bourgeoisie, what do you mean by that?

EM: Well, a normal life, respectable money people, or business people, or just having a PhD to boast of, and being, well, respectable, despising people who were just craftsmen, or handymen, or just despising anybody who wasn't a director or a PhD.

BL: So I understand that you don't see yourself as part of that?

EM: [nods]

BL: Let's just go back to the UNRWA camp. You said you stayed in the UNRWA camp. Did you do any work in the camp?

EM: I was number two of the camp police.

[Interruption]

EM: Yes, I was number two of the camp police. I was the liaison to all the police forces, the Americans, the Germans, the German police force, and having a lot of responsibilities for the labour, for the guards at the gate, or gates, for a daily 200 boys or men, to guard the gates, responsible for them. And so, anyhow, in a camp life there are always things turning up, for daily connection with thieves, or Germans who are brought in to deal with, and I also came across the black market deal of, I think, 63 million between the American and Russian governments, their black market deal on gold. The Russians bought up, for their cigarettes, which they threw on the market, in turn, they got silver or gold or whatever the Germans had stolen, to exchange them for cigarettes. And I nearly lost my head. A kindly captain told me to keep out of it; I would vanish without a trace because the governments are involved in that black market deal. That felt very-, then I got a fright. And when I reported things about the Nazis inside our camp, I was ordered to stop my investigations.

Tape 1: 59 minutes 40 seconds

BL: About the Nazis in the camp?

EM: We had two Nazis or three Nazis in our displaced persons camp of the Jews, who were obviously kept by all of the Americans, obviously. And I traced, I traced one of them, and reported it to my senior officer, who was the second in command, and the answer came back, "Stop the investigation".

BL: Mr Mitchell, I have to stop you because we have to change tapes.

TAPE 2

Tape 2: 0 minute 8 seconds

BL: You were talking about the UNRWA camp and the corruption you found. Any other memories from that time?

EM: You mean from the time in that camp? Not really. They were basically all people who were either discharged veterans from the Red Army or people who fled after the Polish pogroms, the post-war pogroms, they were running for their lives, and came to our camp. There were of course well-known moves from the side of the Poles, pogroms after the war.

BL: Do you remember weddings in the camp?

EM: Yes, of course.

BL: Children born?

EM: Oh yes, of course, as a reaction to the concentration camp.

BL: So, after those two years, where did you go?

EM: England.

BL: OK, so how come you came to England?

EM: The half-sister managed to get me a permit as a dental mechanic, to England, so I came again as a dental mechanic.

BL: When did you arrive in England?

EM: When did I arrive? On the 3rd of May '48.

BL: Were you happy to leave Germany at the time?

EM: Well, the thing was, I will never forget, I was in the customs hall, for the first time changed a border, and I was left alone with a customs officer, who wanted to know what happened now in Berlin with the air lift starting. And we talked and talked and were quite happily talking. Presently, a porter came up to me: "Sir, the train is waiting for you". And then I knew I had come home. I didn't have a halfpenny; literally I didn't have a halfpenny. I had all old underclothes, but I know I had come home, I never forget that.

BL: Because he said, 'Sir, the train is waiting'. I don't quite understand.

EM: When we were talking, a porter came up to me and said, 'Sir, the train is waiting for you'. And, well, my reaction was that I knew I had come home.

BL: Because the way he had addressed you?

EM: Not just the way he had addressed me, the whole atmosphere. Not only that he addressed a beggar as 'Sir', but also the fact that he told me, 'The train is waiting for you'. Imagine another country, 'The train is waiting for you'!

BL: Where did you arrive? Where was that?

EM: I can't remember. Probably Dover. It doesn't matter. Ja. And then it took me half a year to find a job again.

BL: And what were your main impressions coming here?

Tape 2: 5 minutes 6 seconds

EM: I was shocked when the train came in, the blackened trousers, you know all from the smoke of the engines, and looking so terribly poor and desolate, and that was a very bad impression, but otherwise, I remember I put, I wanted to see people's reaction, and I put a cosy on my head, a tea-cosy, to see how people would react.

BL: What's a tea-cosy?

EM: A tea-cosy.

BL: Oh, what you put on a kettle?

EM: Ja. With a little flower on top, or I don't know, I put that on my head and went with it outside.

BL: And what happened?

EM: I was very disappointed. People did not react. Except perhaps a tiny smile. Ja.

BL: So that you think that is symbolising the attitude in Britain?

EM: Ja. I had another like that, even more. Somehow, I went to a swimming pool in Gospel Oak, in a labour, in a poor labour area, and everybody's skin tanned from brown sun, except one man, whose skin was still untouched by the sun. And he had the misfortune that his black swimming trunks had burst just at the wrong place. And the children were round, nobody took any notice, these uneducated children didn't take any notice of it. And near me was a girl lying in the sun, and long after he'd gone, this faint smile passed over her face. That was England. If I thought what would happen in another country, just imagine, these black swimming trunks burst.

BL: Did your sister help you to find your feet in London? You came to London, where did you find accommodation?

Tape 2: 7 minutes 48 seconds

EM: She had arranged with the school to house me, 'til I found a job. And that was very kind of her. But I didn't keep in touch in that way with my sister, because she then married a well-to-do fur dealer, a very fine gentleman, I mean I liked him very much, we went on well, but he belonged to what I should say 'better bourgeois' and my sister had dropped all her previous friends, and I didn't fit into her, I didn't want to fit into her German Jewish bourgeois life. I partly despised them, partly pitied them. So she, I couldn't help her anyhow, because I never had any knowledge of business life, until these dealings, and so we had not much contact. And my wife was a scientist and a teacher, I mean she was a Senior Lecturer, and quite a revolutionary, and these two ladies didn't click, as you can imagine. But when I met my wife, I thought she was a Russian spy. Which was a joke. She was English.

BL: Where and when did you meet your wife?

EM: Where is the International Friendship League, I don't know if you've heard of them, probably not. A small club of reconciliation, mixed English and foreigners, who met in a little tea place in Finchley Road. And there she was giving a lecture, and so we met. I did not know she was academic, I didn't know her degrees, and when I enquired about her the secretary told me she's a very clever girl, she's a BA and MSc etc.. I had no idea they were academic degrees and didn't want to show my ignorance, and I offered her literature on her subject, which she took and had no idea it was really, really laughable, it was really a joke. Ja.

BL: When did you meet her? How many years after you came to England?

EM: A year later. The International Friendship League, they did a lot of good work, but did dissolve, I mean they still have a hostel somewhere, probably in the West suburb somewhere.

BL: But that had nothing to do with anthroposophy?

EM: No, no.

BL: Did you look for any anthroposophy communities?

EM: Oh, by the way, the IFL people also went on rambles, you know, on Sundays, from Charing Cross or Victoria, just on these rambles. There were people, you know, of all kinds, Germans and Jews, and English, really a friendly mixture, where you could speak freely about your questions and ignorances about habits or when you put your foot in, you knew it wasn't taken amiss, so you could get assimilated to the other people.

BL: How did you find this group?

EM: Somebody told me about it who went there occasionally once a week or fortnight for a lecture, I don't remember. And so I heard about them and went and there they elected me as service secretary and so I got involved with their work and arranged gift parcels to Germany. And I was very proud, even the former refugee Jewish men and women contributed from their ration. So I felt very glad that I felt free enough to send parcels to Germany.

BL: Were there any other German Jewish refugees in that group?

EM: All kinds of, it was a small crowd, perhaps twenty, thirty people, thirty people perhaps.

BL: Was it a socialist group?

EM: No, not politically, it was just, probably many of them had socialist inclinations, but not necessary. I remember one of them was an Austrian teacher, there were all kinds of unfortunate lapses of language, but nobody took it amiss and we were all friends together. So people felt free and quite integrated.

BL: So did that group help you to settle in England?

Tape 2: 14 minutes 59 seconds

EM: Well, I soon joined the Red Cross and got involved quite deeply with the Red Cross. There you can see some of the output lying [points]. First Aid, nursing, and training of the youngsters.

BL This was as a volunteer?

EM: Oh, yes.

BL: What about your work? What sort of work did you find in England?

EM: As a dental mechanic, 'til I got married, and then, I forgot, oh yes, I had 17 years at Selfridges, and always to do what I despise most: money. At the Chief Cashier's office, in the shipping office, in the post department where I was then in charge of about 5 natives and in charge at the warehouse of the First Aid. Incredible!

BL: Did you ever experience any hostility towards you as a foreigner or a German Jew, or-?

EM: No. First there was no opportunity. I mean in the Red Cross I was a Red Cross, at work I was one of them, and no-. One of the men tried to shake my equanimity, and he called me 'Spy of the Nazi' and I burst out laughing naturally. And his reaction was, 'I made him lose his bet'. So we were all friends.

BL: What was your wife's background?

EM: She was a Senior Lecturer.

BL: No, I mean her family, was she English or-?

EM: Oh yes, she was English. Her father was a stone-mason.

BL Was she also involved in anthroposophy?

EM: Oh, not at all, nothing like that. The opposite.

BL: Meaning? What's the opposite?

EM: No, nothing specially to be labelled, but she wasn't interested. But, at the end, she said she was sorry. She envied my beliefs.

BL: And where did you settle?

EM: Not far from here, in Hampstead we lived. Most of the time in Hampstead. And some time we lived in New Haven, where I worked then in the Harbour Office, which belonged to British Rail, and, yes, for a short time we lived in Lewes, and there I visited prisoners. There was a prison opposite where we lived, mostly murderers, yes, and when I was retired, by the Red Cross, I went on with the Samaritans. And there I broke all rules, I broke all rules possible and made a good friend for life, who still visits me.

BL: Which rules did you break?

EM: Every rule you can imagine.

BL: Such as?

EM: Disclosing my identity, or my place of work, where I live, or taking tea within where they were not allowed, into the office, or at night time and so on, or disclosing one's identity. Ja!

BL: So for you social work was very important? You also told me you were involved in the Summer Hill Movement?

EM: What was it supposed to be? I worked also for seven years living in a home for the mentally handicapped.

BL: Yes, what was that called?

EM: Lark Field Hall. It was a home for mentally handicapped young men.

BL: Last time when we spoke, you told me about a place in Scotland, for the disabled children.

Tape 2: 21 minutes 29 seconds

EM: Oh, I see, yes, Camp Hill.

BL: Yes. Camp Hill.

EM: That was independent of Camp Hill, but I knew very well people who founded it, the founder, people who were involved in the foundation of the Camp Hill Movement.

BL: Who was the founder?

EM: Dr. Karl König.

BL Did you know him from Germany?

EM: Yes.

BL: And can you tell us a little bit what he did? About his activities?

EM: He started a new branch of medicine, namely looking after the handicapped, handicapped people, developing a three or four year training place, for the volunteers who worked there, they were all volunteers, but to supply them with scientific backgrounds or whatever you need, teaching, agriculture, whatever there is in life, to teach, living with them. It's well-known, spread now all over the world. Camp Hill. You surely have heard of it?

BL: And they had a house in Scotland?

EM: They had several, all independent settlements, quite a number of them, and each of them independent and still an association, and controlled by outside friends.

BL: But you said initially it was set up by Dr König and his wife.

EM: Ja.

BL: Here in England.

EM: In Scotland.

BL: In Scotland.

EM: Camp Hill.

BL: And did you go and visit that place, here?

Tape 2: 23 minutes 36 seconds

EM: I went there once at their invitation, I forgot which year, with the other staff of Nuffield Hall, the other manager and his wife, and the warden. And visited them in Camp Hill Headquarters. Once. I could have trained too, but too late for this life, I was too old. It takes years. A very demanding, very demanding training. But voluntary.

BL: For most of your life in England you lived in Hampstead. There were quite a few refugees in this area, in Swiss Cottage, in Finchley Road. Did you frequent the German Jewish refugee clubs, the coffee shops?

EM: Not to my, as I remember, I can't remember.

BL: Did you ever go to the Cosmo coffee shop on the Finchley Road?

EM: No. Once. I went with an ex-school, fellow-student, who had his meals there. Yes. He was still a good friend and he qualified here as well, he qualified in Germany and qualified here again, was very busy, but occasionally we met, and I remember he took me once or twice to the Cosmo, he had his meals there. This whole, what shall we say, atmosphere, was French to me.

BL: You didn't like it? Why not?

EM: Business, business, business, what is the word, 'orientated', business-orientated. And later on I agreed, commerce has its rightful place in life, but I had to learn that only when I worked in Selfridges. Before the whole way of commerce and trade seemed to me, which is of course partially true, anti-social, and I am very touchy against anything anti-social. But that's it. I worked in Selfridges, dealing with money and money, I could see their limited justification and necessity for life.

BL: Did you have contact with other refugees, I mean not to organisations, but in a social way? Did you have mostly English friends, or-?

EM: Not to my memory.

BL: When did you become-? Are you a British citizen?

EM: Yes, of course.

BL: When did you become a British citizen?

EM: Oh, I don't know, many, many-. Decades before. In the fifties. My first application was refused because I did not have any proper references. But for my second application, you will laugh to hear my references. One was head of a permanent government department, head of a government, no, how is it, permanent head of a government department. Second was a councillor here, who was also a Major during the war. The third one was a member of Churchill's Government and Air Force Commandant. And the fourth was a colleague at Selfridges, who had done secret war work. Not a bad reference.

BL: How do you see yourself in terms of your identity? How would you define yourself, how would you describe yourself?

Tape 2: 29 minutes 34 seconds

EM: Well, as a British Foreign and German Jew. I mean I feel at home here. I miss what I missed with my education, German poetry, and so on, and German habits and so on. I mean English, English poetry and habits and children's games, and like that type, and of Germany I still feel the classic Schiller-Goethe and that type of German classic, I anyhow had a German school, and the German University, took them for my education, and so, in that respect, I can't deny, and have no intention of denying that I am a German. On the other hand, the German past is no more, a past life. My life is here and I don't feel to be a foreigner and I feel quite integrated. Now there may be spots where I'm not quite at ease.

Tape 2: 31 minutes 24 seconds

BL: Such as?

EM: Yes, I mean, again, English education. I'm sorry for my deafness, but it can't be helped.

BL: English education, what do you mean? You feel you lack English education, or you are critical of English education? What do you mean, could you clarify?

EM: Well, the past years where I wasn't here. It's an appreciation of poetry and so on.

BL: What impact do you think it had on your life to be a survivor, a camp survivor? How did it influence your life?

Tape 2: 32 minutes 45 seconds

EM: Oh, that is deep in your bones. You can't, and you don't want to, forget about your camp experience, but if the question is what you could have learned from it, you still can learn from it. And to be really, if I may be grateful for an opportunity to learn, but it is of course engraved in your bones, and, from time to time, you remember like lightning situations where a fellow-prisoner died for you, or other camp situations, which sometimes come up, but it's not forgotten, but its lost its sting.

BL: The pain? The pain is less?

Tape 2: 34 minutes 24 seconds

EM: Not quite, no. What is completely, to at least one's conscious life, managed, is, you don't feel revenge. You don't feel any guilt. But I wouldn't dream of having to live again in Germany or with Germans. That is still, although I don't blame this generation which was born after it was all over, but I would have nothing, I don't need them individually. I have German friends, I have close German friends here, now, the doctor with his wife for instance. But otherwise I would not visit Germany, I wouldn't live in Germany. I never visited Germany. I've visited German friends in Germany, this German school mate, I've visited him, but I would not visit Germany, although I miss-. My home country is Poland now, it's all strange, but I'm concerned to hear what's going on, I'm only interested if and to which degree they follow the old German culture, which was pre-Wilhelm. There were the great writers and poets.

Tape 2: 37 minutes 2 seconds

BL: You said you haven't been back to Breslau?

EM: No, there's nothing to do. A strange place. No wish, no, no heartache.

BL: So, the most important part of your German Jewish heritage is what, is the literature?

EM: Ja. Yes. You know, as a German Jew, you were anyhow limited to contact, and my father, a Chazzan, was doubly limited, by having to attend the services, which in the afternoon and evening he had to conduct, so there was no room besides that, there was no equal partner for social contact. The main Chazzan was too high. And the second had a business, and the other wasn't good enough. So very, very class-conscious. And also, besides that, I was physically very weak, as three and a half, eight month baby wouldn't live or die, at seven, when I went to school, I could not hold a pen in my hand. For years I had to support the right with the left hand writing, so I was excluded not only by being a Jew but also a physical act, besides also the financial limitations. If I, you know, regarding the Jewish youth clubs, they were Zionists, and the others Liberals. Regarding the Zionists, I did not share, they were financially agreeable, simple and nice, but, there I disagreed with their philosophy. The others, the Liberal Jews, they were very well-heeled, the sons of doctors and lawyers and so

on, which I wouldn't and couldn't take part in, so I fell again between two chairs. And also, as I said, my physical weakness. So, only when I went to the school's rowing club as a teenager, there I was at home, and when I think back, I was the only Jewish member of the rowing club. But then, at that school, the question of the Jew never turned up. It was one school where you were not regarded as a Jew but as a fellow club member. And although you knew the others were right-wing, but it was more theoretical, it was never personal. It did not extend to personal friendships across a divide. Not to my knowledge. Perhaps there may have been, there might have been one or two friendships across a divide.

Tape 2: 42 minutes 31 seconds

BL: Coming from quite an orthodox background, and being involved in anthroposophy, does being Jewish, is that still meaningful today? Is being Jewish, or coming from a very orthodox background, is that still important for you?

EM: It strengthened my Jewishness.

BL: Anthroposophy?

EM: Anthroposophy strengthened my Jewish background.

BL: Can you explain that a bit?

EM: Well, you have to read Steiner.

BL: OK, but most people probably haven't read Steiner.

EM: Well, it's a cosmopolitan aspect. It isn't anymore the division of religions, but it is the common background, the common thread, the greater horizon. And now I can say it strengthened my beliefs as a Jew as well, although it has a strong Christian aspect as well, but it would have to need a different word to distinguish it from the official Church, Christianity which is to my mind not a strong representation. Everybody makes his own way. Or his own God. It's not easy for a Jew, or for anybody, to believe in a possibility, even the possibility, that a God could become man. That is so against our present epoch, that it is regarded, or felt, as basically absolutely impossible. That it's not a problem of a Jew, but it's a problem for a Christian.

BL: Did you ever meet Rudolph Steiner, or your parents? I don't know, when did he die?

Tape 2: 45 minutes 34 seconds

EM: '45. Well, he saw me, but I didn't see him because he wore his hat, you know, glasses, and was sitting in the right position of the car, so there were the high polished windows of the car, his glasses and then the hat, so there was nothing left.

BL: Where was that?

EM: In Breslau.

BL: Did he give a lecture?

EM: No, he was sitting in that car. He was sitting in that car but he couldn't help seeing me, outside. Where I, what shall I say, not quite up to good behaviour, what shall I say, you know.

BL: The Anthroposophical Society in England and in pre-Nazi Germany, was it very different? The practice of anthroposophy in England and in Germany, was it very different?

[Interruption]

EM: Oh, yes. I mean, it was very different because human beings were different. You can't put it otherwise. You had Germans and English people, who were anthroposophists.

BL: What was the main difference?

EM: The approach might be slightly different. Because, in Germany, the anthroposophical thought also created more activities, more schools, other cultural progress, and so on, than it was possible in England to establish. Organisations, or-. But perhaps I wouldn't be able to say, to put it-.

BL: OK.

EM: Anyhow, it wasn't very long that I was an anthroposophist in Germany, because soon the Nazis invaded. I went just once to one conference in Germany, with Germans, locally. And, of course, I had conferences here, of the English Society. And I went to Dornach twice, to a performance of Faust, or Steiner's dramas. I could not say. So I was not at a large, at a conference where, oh yes, perhaps where a mixture could be established, you know, where you forgot you were English or German, or anything else, just by dealing with common subjects to discuss, whether it was agriculture or other practical work, education, where the differences in nationality vanished.

BL: Yes. You said before a lesson can be learnt from your experiences. What is the lesson?

EM: Ah! Just to try to work on one's own black spots, to get one's own black spots less black. That's all I can say. As human beings we all have in us the angel and the devil, so we all have enough to do with ourselves, beyond any theory, religion, or whatever. And that is a battlefield in each of us, of our own angel and our own devil. And we have enough to work for longer than 'til our death. So that is-. And, on the other hand, you can feel at ease that you will be able to be good for your faults, or where you hurt other people, and you can bear it without being crushed, without by guilt, if you understand that. We all, as human beings, can't help hurting people and if you die in the meantime and it's too late to make amends, you still have a way in another life, you can make up for it without being crushed by guilt. That is the quintessence, to make it able for you to die.

BL: We've discussed many aspects of your life. Is there anything I haven't asked you which you would like to add?

EM: No, I, just perhaps the three words by St. Paul: Faith, Love and Hope that carry you through life. If you take it that serious.

BL: Can I just maybe ask you, at the end, are you a member of the AJR?

EM: Ja.

BL: For many years? Or did you join recently?

EM: Oh, yes. I can't tell you for how long.

BL: Why did you join the AJR?

EM: Well, as a German Jewish refugee, you need first of all some representation. And also it is not just a legal representation, but also a moral one, and I found it is very often exaggerated, where they put stress on former refugees who 'made it'. I find this exaggerated and unnecessary. Because individually you live and work, and you can't put it so generally. And I feel they have done a wonderful work, and still do. But, if I look at the paper, it hurts me that it's so much negative in it, and the arguments in the arts and so on, instead of working or stressing what we have in common here, what we find with the English, although you don't want to eradicate the parts of the organisation, but I feel it has over-stressed this Jewish, this Jewishness. In every paper by that, I find the way of fighting anti-Semitism, it's not a question of theory, of lectures, of books, but of individual life. I find, if you find also, if you look back, families in Germany where the people, the households, were lived sociable, and social-minded, they were not, they were not left low and unprotected. There were many Germans, who are forgotten, who helped, and kept up the German, the human connection, and that is what I miss in the attitude here. It is too much Zionist, I feel, and too sharp, too sour. And so, let us forget, and carry on what we have in common with our neighbour, instead of putting stress on the differences. So I, while on the one hand I'm grateful-

[Interruption]

Tape 2: 58 minutes 12 seconds

EM: I feel we have to stress more what we have in common than what divides us, and not feeling sour or-. That is not English, but continentals who stress: 'He's a Jew' or 'That is a Jew'. Nobody will, if you look here, nobody will stress you because you are Jewish, that you are a Jew. You are a member of the community. And that is what counts, I feel. That is the last I can say. To me, it's too much orientated Zionist, and negative. But I don't blame them.

BL: OK. Is there anything else you would like to say about anything?

EM: Time will heal. Other generations, and this thing will be less sharp.

BL: OK. Mr Mitchell, thank you very much for this interview.

End of Interview.

PHOTOS.

Tape 2: 59 minutes 0 second

1. Mr. Mitchell's parents, Julius Champagner, and Rosa, née Löwenstein.
2. Mr. Mitchell and Margerie Mitchell.