IMPORTANT

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AJR Refugee Voices Testimony Archive
AJR
Winston House, 2 Dollis Park
London N3 1HF
ajrrefugeevoices@ajr.org.uk

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Interview Transcript Title Page

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Forename:	Stephen
Interviewee Sex:	Male
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Interviewee POB:	Budapest, Hungary

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REFUGEE VOICES

Interview No. RV235

NAME: Stephen Nagy

DATE: 27th March 2019

LOCATION: London, UK

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Bea Lewkowicz

[Part One]

[0:00:00]

Today is the 27th of March 2019 and we are conducting an interview with Mr. Stephen Nagy. And my name is Bea Lewkowicz, and we are in London.

What is your name, please?

Stephen Nagy.

And where were you born?

In Budapest.

And when?

1935.

Stephen, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed for the Refugee Voices Archive. Can you tell us a little bit about your family background?

My grandfather lived in the country. His father was murdered because they run- he ran a public house. And my grandfather moved up to Budapest just before the turn of the century and started a printing press. And my father was born in 1894, and studied and went to university up to 1914, when he was called up at the beginning of the First World War. And he was highly decorated during the war, despite being Jewish. And at that time, still, Jews had a very easy time in Hungary. It was from the beginning of the 19th century, from the middle of the 19th century, it was a golden age of Jews. Unfortunately, by the end of the war, when Hungary lost about one third of its territories, they had to find a scapegoat. And the Jews were a- a very readymade scapegoat. The reason I said that my father was highly decorated, because it was significant, it became significant thirty years later. So, my grandfather ran the printing press until the early 1930s, when my father took over. My father worked in the printing press. And my father, married my mother's sister, who was a pianist, and died in childbirth when my brother was born in 1929. And a year later, like it was customary in the Jewish family, the next sister - there were three sisters. So, the second sister, my mother, married my father. And it- she was a violinist. And when the depression came, the printing press wasn't doing very good business, she played in- for silent films. She played her five o'clock tea, and she was the main breadwinner. And then I was born in 1935. And the rest is history.

[0:03:53]

What was the name of the printing press?

Szent Laszlo Keres Nyomda, which just means, 'Saint Ladislaus' Printing Press'. And it was- it was never printing books but it was printed matter for, amongst other things, a Jewish organisation, letter heading, et cetera, et cetera.

Your grandfather started it?

My grandfather died in 1932. And- one grand- my paternal grandfather. And my maternal grandfather died in 1934. So, I never knew them.

So, your father took over the press once your grandfather passed away?

Yeah.

And you said he worked with a- the grandfather worked with the Jewish community for printing, or…?

Already, yes, and my father continued.

And- but your father, you said, studied law?

[0:05:00]

My father studied law and had a doctorate. Not a full doctorate, but in name, he could call himself a doctor because he was twenty years old when the war started - the First World War started. And after the war, he never went back to university, but started working for my grandfather.

And tell us a little bit about your- your mother's background.

My mother's background. My grandmother came from Transylvania, from the city of Arad. My grandfather- I- I don't know. I think he was a Budapest person. He- he had quite a few business ventures; most of them failed. So, in fact, when he was made bankrupt in 1926, my mother and my aunt, my mother's younger sister- my mother was a violinist, my- her younger sister was a cellist, and together with a pianist, they formed the trio. And they went to Norway, and got a contract with one of the big hotels, and played music for five o'clock tea and special locations and they kept on sending money back. And that's how my grandfather and grandmother managed to survive.

And when was that? When? In the…?

Nineteen-twenty-six, till 1929, when they came back. When my aunt, my eldest aunt, died in childbirth in June 1929. They came back for the funeral. Then they went back to Norway for another three or four months, I believe, to finish their contract. And that's when my mother came back to Budapest, and, as I said, in 1929, married my father.

What was the name of their trio? Did they have a name?

[0:07:31]

I don't know. I don't know, whether they had a name. I have a picture of them, but I don't have a name.

So, all the sisters were musical? All the…?

Music, yes.

So, the oldest sister was playing- the oldest sister was also playing an instrument?

The oldest sister was a pianist, yes.

Right. And then your mother was a…?

My mother was a violinist. My older sister studied amongst other people, with Bartók. My mother studied with the world-famous, world-renowned, Jenő Hubay. And my aunt studied with also a very famous cellist by the name of Schiffer. I can't remember his other name.

Yeah. So, they all were professional?

Yeah, and they all became professional. My mother stopped playing the violin when I was born. But when our printing press was nationalised in 1947, he took it up again and played in a theatre orchestra, the operetta theatre. And my aunt Kato, the younger sister, also picked up the cello after the war when her business collapsed. And she didn't play, but she was teaching the cello.

So, you carried on the- the musical tradition?

Yeah. Correct. Yes. But I'm an outcast because I became a wind player.

Yeah. So, what are your first memories of growing up in Budapest?

Of the Holocaust?

No, of growing up in Budapest.

Of growing up in Budapest?

What are your first memories?

[0:09:30]

The first significant date must be, which may be a pointer to my character, was when I was four years old. I went for a walk on a Sunday morning with my parents and my brother, along the Danube. And my parents met an acquaintance and started talking and I was being ignored. So, after a while, I had enough of that and walked home on my own. That's my first recollection. And apparently, they sent my- they couldn't find me, so they sent my brother, eventually back to where we lived and he found me in the house. And at- at that time, there weren't any mobile phones. So, I don't know how, but my father managed to tell them that I was home and safe. And they were so relieved that I managed to escape my just punishment.

And you were four years old?

That was- I was four years old. And the next thing I think I could tell you when, when Hungary joined the war, in 1941, from 1939 till 1941, Hungary wasn't in the Second World War. And the only thing I realised that there was something, which later I found out was called Numerus Clausus, that my brother couldn't get into the local *Gimnázium*, it was called - secondary school - because the number of Jews in secondary school and higher education was restricted. So, he went to the Jewish *Gimnázium*, which was quite a long way out. Well, in London measurements, it was still maybe walkable in a half an hour, but that meant quite a way out. And then I realised that by that time, I went to a primary school locally, but he had to go to a secondary school much later. Then, in 1942, I found out that my father was suddenly not at home. Again, I found out later he was taken- taken towards forced labour, but managed to come back with- with the- his- his- he was highly decorated in the First World War, and his superior officer told him to disappear back to Hungary. So that saved his life.

[0:12:43]

If I may interrupt you, just before we get to the wartime- just a little bit before-

Yeah.

…can you please describe what sort of- where you lived? And what sort of milieu, you know, your parents moved in, or…?

I was- I was living in the eighth district, within fifty metres from the ring road. There are two ring roads in Budapest. The small one called *Kiskörút* and the large one called the *Nagykörút*. Very similar to the ring road in Vienna. And we lived quite near there. On the other side, there was a big square with a- a market, the second biggest market at that time in Budapest, which was quite important for me because I used to go with my mother to the market. And my interest in food and cooking started probably then. On the other side, towards the small *körút* the small ring road, was another square called Gutenberg Square, named after Gutenberg, who was the inventor of the printing press. Why this is quite interesting, because at Gutenberg Square there were arcades, and if you went further towards the small ring road, you got to the radio building. It- it was significant. It became significant much later in 1956 during the Revolution. Otherwise-

What smells…? You said there was the food market. What do you remember? What- what- what food was there?

Every - the people there, yes. There were stands inside the marker, like it would be in a market in this country. There were meat counters. Downstairs there was fish and cabbage – sour cabbage. So, I wasn't happy with the smell of that. But on the main street level there were fruit stands, there were groceries. Everything. Outside the market in the street there were- the peasants came in with their ware. And I often went with my mother there. And, you know, I was silent witness of my mother bargaining, not just silent witness, I was also quite embarrassed. But, that's my first impression of the market.

[0:15:45]

And what's sort of flat? Was it a flat? Did you live in a flat?

It was a flat on the second floor. Three rooms overlooking the street. There was one bathroom, and a hall, and a kitchen and a maid’s room opening from the kitchen. And two pantries. And the maid’s room, we- we had a- a maid usually from the country. And, you know, I can remember that ever since I can remember things. And it went on till even after the war until 1947, when our printing press was nationalised, and we- we were left without income.

Yeah – yeah. But until then- so there's a maid's room. Yeah. And, what was the address?

What was the…?

Yeah, what was the-

Address was number 28 Rökk Szilárd Utca - Rökk Szilárd Street. It was a building at the corner of Rökk Szilárd street and another one. And from one room you could overlook the square, Gutenberg Square, from my- the children's room, if you leant out of the window, which we weren't allowed to do, and looked right, you could see the ring road.

[0:17:25]

And were there other Jewish families living in the house or…?

Yes, there were other Jewish families. One on our- our floor. And one which I found out later, on the third floor, there was a gentleman who owned a shop, a grocery shop, not very far from us. And that was the first shop which said: “I do not serve Jews.” And when I found that out I was, you know, I was absolutely concerned. But I found out after the war that in fact his wife was Jewish, and was hiding in the flat. And that was the reason for it.

That he had to put up the sign early?

So- yeah, put up the sign and, well, he was hoping that you know, they won't be looking for her. Living there during the persecution, people were clutching at straws. Some people were being christened. My father thought about it, and then decided against it.

Why? Why?

You were… At the end, nothing really worked.

Tell us a little bit about your school. What sort of school did you go to?

The school was a primary school. A local primary school. I remember the teachers. I can't remember the see- every class had a class teacher. I remember the one in the first one. Can't remember the second one. The third one, we thought was very strict. And, but, in fact, she colluded with the headmaster. At the end of the third year at the school, four days before the end of term, Jews had to start wearing the Yellow Star. And the day before that, my friend - whose name was János Fürst and became a famous conductor, sadly he died a few years ago - and I, were given our reports and told not to bother to come in for the last four days. So, we have- we don't have to go in with the Yellow Star. So that's what I remember of the primary school.

[0:20:33]

So, there were not that many Jewish children there?

There were, in-

In your class? There were two people in your class?

Just the two of us. Yes.

Right. There were other Jewish children in the school?

There were, other- I believe. I don't know what's happened to them, or whether they were given their report as well. I have no- no recollection of that.

And how Jewish was your household or your family? How- what?

Not very. Very- very much a Jewish as a race, not necessarily Jewish as a religion. Though, my father insisted of me having a Bar Mitzvah. That was compulsory religious education. And the two of us went to have- separate from the other school. There was a rabbi. I can even remember his name: Mr. Rosenblüt.

Is this after the war?

That is after the war. Yes.

Right.

In the primary school, I can't remember any religious education. After- after the war, yes. And I remember going on Friday afternoons, youth service. Until the Communists took over.

Yes, but your parents felt very- they felt Hungarian?

My-

Or, how did they…?

My grandfather was almost feeling Hungarian first and Jewish - next. And my father also felt very Hungarian. As I said to you, he- he was decorated in the war, basically because he was a- he was in the artillery. And he was a brilliant mathematician, and was very good at mental arithmetic. And in those days, you had to calculate the- the- where the guns get- a bullet will land. The ballistic way of the bullet, and so he was pretty good. And apparently his garrison was surrounded. And they managed to get out and escape and that's why he was decorated and promoted to, I think, equivalent to a major. But he wasn't himself a religious- he could read Hebrew. So, could I.

[0:23:20]

But you said your grandfather changed the name? Who changed the name?

He changed his name from Neufeld to Nagy. Nagy is a very common name in Hungary; it means you can choose large, great or grand. I prefer the last two.

And when did he change it?

Nineteen-o-one [1901]. I actually have the paper saying that- the proof that he changed his name from Neufeld to Nagy.

But you know that you- you knew you were Jewish?

Yeah, of course I did. Yes. Yeah. We had to leave the class, already in the primary school, when- when, there was religious instructions. The Roman Catholics, which were the majority, stayed in the classroom. The others: there were the Protestants, the Jews and the Greek Orthodox. There were about two or three of them. We all went to different rooms. I don't really remember much of that during the primary school, excuse me, but in the secondary school, yes.

But you don't remember any sort of incidents? It was- you said, until…?

No, not in the primary school. I don't remember any incident. In the secondary school, we found that when we went back to the class, we found that the- suddenly those children were not the same friendly children to us as we- we just found- they had this priest, who was a very unpleasant character. And we are certainly- I have no proof, but we are certain that- that he incited religious hatred.

[0:25:33]

Again, this is post-war?

Yeah.

Okay, let's just come back to before. So, you finished the- they dismissed you four days earlier-

Yeah.

- from the school. And what happened then?

What happened then- school-wise or life-wise?

Both.

Both. Well, school-wise, I didn't go back to school till Easter 1945 - when we just have one- one term. Life-wise, it was pretty full on. What I remember after the school- well, I can remember even before we were given our reports. The more significant date would be the 19th of March 1944 when the Germans occupied Hungary. And I remember- I remember seeing German soldiers on the ring road. I would say to you that it was a Sunday. And on Sunday we always went into the hills, Buda hills, for a hike. And I was- I loved it, and I was very keen. And I was already downstairs. That was one day after my ninth birthday. And suddenly my brother came to collect me and come- he said, “Come upstairs straight away”, and I didn't realise why. And when I went into the flat, I saw my father, white as a sheet. And I found out later about the occupation, and what it meant. And, then the next date that I remember was that we were given our reports. And next day my mother was sewing Yellow Star on our lapel, on all, on all our clothes. And, you know, I remember people looked at us with some curiosity when we went down to the street. But we were advised not to go down too often. Another three weeks or a month later- or maybe I should say that in May, before the Yellow Star business, suddenly at beginning of May, my aunt and my uncle moved into the flat, into our room, the children's room, and we had to bed down with my brother in my mother's room, in the room in the middle of the flat. And I didn't realise why, but found out that they were chucked out of their flat in Buda because somebody wanted it. And I also suddenly saw that a week or two later, they disappeared. But I found out again, much later, that they- my uncle worked for Jewish firm owned by two Jewish gentlemen. The firm was agricultural products and seeds. And they told my uncle that they found a man who, for a lot of money - because my uncle didn't have a lot of money, but - they would pay for him as well. And the six of them would be taken to somewhere, and spirited away to Switzerland. So

that's what's happened. Apparently, they wan- went down to a rendezvous somewhere in the- in a square in the fifth district called Szabadság Square. Strangely enough, it means ‘Freedom Square’. And my uncle's brother went down, because they gave him the money. And the arrangement was that if my- if the gent- the man who took them had my aunt’s wedding ring, then he can give the money to him. So, my uncle was a bit suspicious already, because they walked and he saw some strange looking people. But he was just a bit suspicious what was happening. Well, it- about three or four hours later, the man came back from the money. And my uncle saw the same suspicious people. But- and the man didn't have the wedding ring. But my uncle was very afraid of his own life, and give them the money. And as we found out later, they were taken straight to the, what was called Svábhegy, the- the Gestapo centre in one of the hills. And from there they were taken, deported to Auschwitz. And they both perished. But that I found out later. Then came this event of the Yellow Star. And then a month later, early July, I believe, all Jews had to move into designated houses in the fifth district.

[0:32:06]

And then we moved in with my uncle's brother and his wife and two children. They were grown-up children; they were older than us. And then the next thing I remember, again a couple of months later on- exactly on the 8th of September, I contracted scarlet fever, which at that time was a very serious illness, and you had to be taken to an isolation hospital for six weeks. So, I was taken away to the isolation hospital, which used to be called Szent Lázló kórház, hospital, but renamed Horthy Miklós kórház, because Horthy Miklós was the Regent of Hungary, who incidentally stopped the deportations a couple of months earlier of the Budapest Jews. But by then, most of the Jews in the country were deported. And about eighty percent of them perished. They were- mostly they were deported to Auschwitz. Some of them to Theresienstadt, which is now called Terezin, or, or Mauthausen or Bergen-Belsen.

[0:33:35]

Do you- do you know whether your parents at that point- did they know about the deportations from the countryside?

When who took over?

No, your parents, for example when they were in Budapest in 1944. Did they know?

Yes, my, my- my father was first deported. Well, no, first called up. I think I mentioned, in 1942. But he had… proved that he was highly decorated, and he went in his military uniform. And his superior officer sent him back to Budapest. In 1944, it wasn't till October that my father was dep- he was in- neither my father nor my mother, were actually deported. But my father was called up again, this time for forced labour. But that was- that was after the *coup d'état* on the 15th of October. So, I was in- in hospital. And occasionally my mother managed to visit me. It was very dangerous because it was a very long tram journey. And I remember the date 1944 October the 14th, when I got a- a phone call from my father that get my clothes together, because they have got exemption from wearing the Yellow Star because of his decoration. And next day, we are going back to our home in Rökk Szilárd utca. Next day was the 15th of October when the right-wing fascist Hungarians took over. The- a man called Ferenc Szálasi, became the leader of the government.

[0:36:14]

How do you spell that?

Szálasi is S z a l - or maybe double l - a s i. And after the war he was prosecuted and hanged as a war criminal in Munich. And I think my father would be deported- would be called up something like the 27th or 28th of October. And my mother through his [her] musical con-contact, found a man who went into the Swiss legation, where the head of the legation was- the consul was called Carl Lutz. And he and his staff issued hundreds of what they called *Schutzpasses.* The original one I have my- in my- in my filing cabinet. And this man managed to get one of these *Schutzpasses* and took it down to the count- to the town Miskolc, where they collected all the Jewish so-called soldiers. And with that, he has been able to escape and come back to Budapest. In the meantime – [Bea sneezes] All right? - In the meantime, my aunt, my mother's youngest sister, the cellist had her nose operated on – straightened, her hair dyed blonde, wore a big cross on a necklace. And he- she came to see me once with somebody else- with a Christian friend of hers in the hospital, just to see how I was, but didn't say much. And then after the coup, as I found out later, she found a so-called, well, not safe house. She found a house where she was half-sitting basically for a dog, for a

friend of hers, a famous architect, Jewish architect, who went away from that house, from his house. And, and she took my cousin, her daughter there, first, who was hiding in a nunnery. Then my brother, who was also taken away by escaped- but escaped, and my mother. So, the three of them were already in hiding, by the time my father was taken away. And my father came back and was in one of these safe houses. And my aunt, who told me the story, went to look for him in a street called Pozsonyi út, which is in the fifth district, parallel with the Danube. And she said to me, she went into about four or five of these safe houses. There were some safe houses under the aegis of- aegis of the Swiss. And there were some under the aegis of the Swedes, created by Wallenberg – Raoul Wallenberg. And apparently, my aunt found my father, and managed to take him to this hiding place in the hills. I have been to that place quite recently, and it was a house set back from the street. And this explains that though, the so-called Nyilas, the Hungarian fascist were looking for Jews everywhere. Because this was well hidden by trees, that was their- their luck. So, they were never found.

[0:41:12]

And they stayed there?

Later.

This was the aunt who had the operation?

Yes.

So, tell us a bit how could- how did she have an operation? How could she do that?

There were- there were a few people- I don't know. She had connections. She was working in a firm. She was partner, I think one-third partner, in a firm selling medical supplies. And I think she had some connection that way.

So, did you recognise her when she came to the home?

Oh yes. Oh, yes. Oh, no, I mean- anyway, as she called me and my nickname Istivatte - I recognised her. I was a bit taken aback, but I think she said that one day she will come for me, when she- when she visited me.

And I want to ask you, so how did you feel in that hospital being yourself? As a child?

[0:42:20]

At first, I felt reasonably safe. I had a friend who called me, in Hungarian, *büdös zsidó*, which means “smelly Jew” which the Jews were called. But he wasn't nasty about it. I wasn't very pleased. But he wasn't very nasty about it. And I didn't realise why I was still in the hospital. I realised later, that first of all my aunt couldn't come for me, because the Germans blew up the British. So, he- she could no longer come over. And I realised later why I was kept there after the six weeks, because through my father's business acquaintance, who was the head of a big pharmaceutical firm, they found a connection. They- I think my father, somehow, told them earlier where I was. Because there was no telephone where they were hiding. And the head of this firm asked one of the older gentlemen, who I actually knew, and he first organised with the head of the- the director of the hospital that they keep me there until further notice. I remember already having guns- hearing guns. The Russians were already getting nearer. And I believe… that by the end of Oct- by November - end of November – Budapest was encircled. It- again, I found out, that Russians sent two emissaries. Strangely enough, one’s name was Captain Steiner, probably Jewish. And the other one called Captain Ostapenko. And Captain Ostopenko who then had a statue they made for him at the… west end of Budapest, went with a white flag. And Captain Steiner [sic] went probably quite near to where my hospital was with a white flag, to tell the Germans and the Hungarians that they're surrounded. And there is no hope. Will they give up. And they were summarily shot dead, without any questions, despite the fact that they went with a white flag.

[0:45:43]

And, I mean- they- by December- again, we knew that there was something up, even though I was only nine and a half. And on the 21st of September- December, suddenly this gentleman called Mr. Bujdosi**,** I remember the name, a lovely gentleman, came with the chauffeur of the firm, and a car. And I was taken to an International Red Cross house, which strangely

enough, was in- within 2- or 300 metres in the dist- in another street called Teleki Pál utca, number 16, I remember. And there were a lot of Jewish children there. It was under the 'defence' - in inverted commas - of the International Red Cross.

Sorry to interrupt. Were the conditions worse or better than in the hospital?

Were the-

The conditions. How were the conditions compared…?

The conditions were reasonably normal. There were- there was food. I can't remember was food, but there were no shortages. I didn't suffer any- any great problem. I was quite ignorant of what was going on except I knew I was- there was a war. I knew the Russians were coming nearer. I knew that there were daily air raids, the siren sounded, and we had to go down to the shelter. But otherwise-

[0:47:45]

And did you have an adult who was taking care of you, or?

Well, that was- there was medical staff.

Right.

Yeah, I didn't meet the director, but there were nurses and medical staff. I think. Again, the hospital escaped because there was obviously a Red Cross marked on the roof. And to the best of my knowledge, there was no, no trouble there. And the Germans didn't come.

I mean, did you remember crying when you first arrived in the hospital? I mean, you were- You were so young, and being by yourself.

I was pretty frightened, I think. I was pretty frightened. Yeah, I wasn't a happy bunny. But I was nine and a half, and I was reasonably streetwise and old for my age. I was already on my own for nearly two months, by the time they came for me, without seeing any member of

my family. So, I suppose I was fending for myself. But I found it a relatively normal thing. I mean, I wasn't crying or hiding under the bed or- I just found it strange that I had a very good friend and he was a very good friend, but called me *büdös zsidó*. And it was a bit strange, but other- otherwise I took it in my stride.

But when you came to the International House-

In the International-

There were more Jewish children?

[0:49:26]

There were a lot of Jews. And as I found later, the two or three adults who were in charge I remember one woman in particular, if you pardon the expression, a rather old battle axe, wasn't really very pleasant to us. I remember Christmas we had to sing Christian songs. There was a certain amount of food - not an awful lot of it. And then, soon after Christmas, suddenly, the adults disappeared. And I was curious what was happening. And I went down in the shelter. And I found a lot of old Jewish people. When I say old, probably about fifteen, twenty years younger than I am now. [half laughs] And I found a distant relative there, who was, I believe, my father's second cousin, whose daughter and grandson I knew. But she was there on her own, and I remember when she saw me, she just said, “My God. What are you doing here?” Suffice to say, she said, “Don't go back upstairs. Stay downstairs with me. We've still got some food. We've got a kitchen. And I have some friends who sometimes bring some food.” What I remember, and this is my children's favourite story, that one day, I can't tell you the exact date, quite soon, maybe- or maybe early January she said, “Will you go to this and this address? Somebody will give you some food to bring back.” And I went to that address. And the lady gave me a- a- what do you call? Oh, just a minute- yeah, a saucepan, but a funny saucepan. One of the tall saucepans. In Hungarian, you have the different name for a- a low one and a- a high one. This was a high one, full of bean soup. I could even see some meat inside it if you- if I looked carefully. And I carried that soup back, occasionally hiding in doorways. Because by then, the Russians were striving all the roads. What I didn't realise, it’s the same Freedoms Square – Sza- Szabadság tér - was very near the International Red Cross house, and the German anti-aircraft was stationed there.

[0:52:58]

So, there was a, a lot of bombing. And the fascists were afraid for their lives. So, they didn't come all that near. This is why we escaped, probably. Anyway, my main concern was dodging the bullets, and in dodging the bullets, not to spill the bean soup. And the bean soup safely arrived and I think we lived on that for two or three days. And that's- that's how it went on. By then, I mean, there was tremendous bombardment, I can remember that. And I can remember the day- 18th of January- when after weeks of this awful noise of bombs falling, suddenly there was a- an eerie silence. I woke up in the morning. I think I was lying on a straw mattress next to the lady, whose name was the same as my mother, Erzsébet, but we called her *Böske Néni*. And suddenly - completely silence. And some of the curious ones, which I was one of them, despite the- the fact that she said to me, “Don't go outside!” I took my nose outside, and I saw a few soldiers with guns in a different uniform. The Germans had a sort of bluish-grey uniform. The Hungarians had khaki uniform, and the German- the Russians had, again, khaki but a different colour, you know, a yellowish-brown uniform. And then we realised that we were ‘free’ – again, in inverted commas. And the same day, my relative’s daughter came for her and found me there and took me back to their flat. They were in hiding, but they went back to their flat. And I had my first decent meal - a potato dish - there.

[0:55:29]

What happened after that, and I never, I would never forgive her, the daughter, for that. She took me back to the house, the Yellow Star house, in Arany János utca, saying that she knows that the Wolffs - the Wolffs were the owners of the flat. She didn't know anything about my parents. But she said the Wolffs - will come back and find me. And there was another three or four days before the Wolffs came back. And I was- maybe a week, I don't know. But the people who were still hiding in the shelter- because after this eerie quiet, a few days later, the Germans started bombing the Russians around where this, where we lived. Because the- the Germans were holed up in the castle hill till the 13th of February. So that's an- another three and a half weeks, despite the fact that there was no hope. They- they- they dug a tunnel and tried to escape, but they were all annihilated. But there was- so there was a lot of bombs

falling, and sadly, my older relative, who was at the International Red Cross house, was in the street and was killed by a shrapnel.

The lady?

[0:57:09]

The lady, yeah. Anyway, I was in the shelter of the house. It's called Arany János utca, number 27. And some of the Christians there were helpful and I got scraps. Some of them were openly hostile. I remember being very hungry, waking up at night and I saw this- which looked like a rather large bread roll. Turned out to be a dough. Instead of yeast, because they didn't have yeast. But what yeast they had, they always- they took a bit of dough off. It was called in Hungarian *kelesztö* [leavening]. I don't even know whether it's got an English name. But if you mix that dough with some other dough, then it would rise. And I picked a bit of that and ate it, even though it was raw dough. I also remember going upstairs. Sadly, my relatives lived on the fifth floor, and by then I was pretty weak. So after each floor, I had to stop to have a rest. The- flat was broken into, so I could go in. And I found what I thought was flour. And I went down and I told them there are some- some flour. And they said, "Oh, it's not flour. It's plaster." Which wasn't true. Actually. Why would my aunt and you know, an uncle, have plaster in- in the pantry? So, they were a pretty malicious lot. And then a few days later, again, probably, well, I would guess 25th - maybe the 25th of January, these relatives arrived and I was told to come upstairs, that they had managed to find some heating. It was ice cold. It was a very cold winter. The Danube was frozen over. And they said, "You do not accept any more fruit- food from anybody." And my job was, to go down again with one of these saucepans, and bring up water from- from the ground floor - there was a stand pipe - because there was no pressure. And I carried this water up, again, stopping after each floor.

[1:00:24]

And one day, which turned out to be the 1st of February, I was carrying water. From the third floor I found a strange voice, which I thought may have been my brother's but it's gone a bit deeper than what I remembered. As I said, he was fifteen at that time. So, I went up there and I found my mother and my brother in the flat. I can tell you the shorter- either way, they

escaped from Old Buda. Apparently, they were still, after- Pest, the Pest side of Budapest was freed - in Buda. And they were- I would say to you- there is a- a bridge called the Margaret Bridge, which is the- really the border of the inner city. From there it's probably about a mile, mile and a half, half way up a hill, where this house where they were hiding was. And again, partly they survived, or because the Nyilas didn't come there, because the Germans, some Germans moved into the lower ground floor, and were shooting from there. But these Germans never bothered- by then, they were fearing for their lives and they never bothered to come upstairs. Luckily. Anyway, on the 1st of February apparently, or the day before, I think, the 31st of January, suddenly these Germans disappeared. And again, there were silence and they looked out. And there were no Germans but they saw Russian soldiers. And, and so next day, my mother and brother took off with what- a, a part of what little food they had left with a rucksack, and went down to the Danube, where they found the Russians building a Bailey bridge. And they asked if they could go across it and they were sent away, so that they went a bit further up where the Danube narrows. And it was thick ice. And they- they took the dog. As I mentioned earlier, they were dog-sitting. They took the dog, who was very close to my brother and my cousin. My cousin was seven years old at the time, very close to my brother and- and the dog went with my brother. And several times, my brother gave it a kick to go back and he wouldn't. But they managed to cross the Danube and arrived the other side. And they decided to write a little note, "We crossed the Danube at Ujpest," - you know, the suburb where they crossed. "Come after us." And my brother gave the dog a huge big kick. And apparently the dog went- found a way all the way back to the house. And my cousin tells me the story that she was so happy to see the dog. Happier than seeing my brother or my- my mother. And put her arms around the dog and kissed the dog and as she put her arm around the dog, found this note. And in this note they found- and next day, my aunt, with my father and my cousin came the same way and arrived at the- at the house. And at the flat where we were. So that was the family reunion. The war was still going on. The Germans were still, for another twelve days in the castle hill. But by then where we were, in the eighth district, you didn't have any shooting. And again, next day we went back all of us to our flat first, and then my father took my aunt and my cousin to their flat which was on the *körut* - on the ring road - and one, two, three tram-stop further. Of course, the trams were- weren't running yet.

[1:05:55]

So how did your father join your mother in the house there? How did he manage to join?

My- my father was found by my aunt in Pozsonyi út**,** in this safe house, and my aunt took him to the- to the house.

So, there was quite a big group of them, in that house? Your mother, your father-

They were- there was a group, apparently, okay- two people were there all the time. And some peoples arrived and then left, including one very famous actor, who later became the director of the National Theatre, who wasn't Jewish, but that was a Communist and was persecuted.

What was his name?

His name was Major - Tamás Major**,** very famous actor. But apparently, my mother was doing all the cooking. My aunt while he could- while she could, went out and did manage to buy things. I don't know how they had money on them. They must have taken their life savings with them, probably – I, I don't know. Strangely enough, we never discussed this afterwards.

How they managed-

How they managed to- to pay for the goods. But they managed to get some- my aunt was very, very clever and managed to get some provisions. And my mother was baking. There was quite a lot of flour there. And my mother was baking. And they were all rationed. My mother even told me that my aunt kept on giving half her rations to- to my cousin. And my mother put it back and forgave- anyway, said, “You've got to keep alive as well as the girl.” I mean, these are just sort of snippets of information I got after the war.

And my other question is, how did they know where you were? You said they came to that house. How did they know about it?

[1:08:18]

I can tell you that. They knew that I was in the International Red Cross house. They- they came from- to go up to the Danube where it was frozen over, was probably about a mile and a half. From the Pest side to the house, the Yellow Star house, where the- we last lived, would be another two and a half, three miles. And the way they came, there was no transport, so they had to walk. And the way they came was on the little *Körut.* And from there, the street opens so they had to go past the house where I actually was. And my brother says, “Well, let's go in. Maybe he is here.” And my mother said, “Nope, we're going to the Red Cross house.” And they went to the Red Cross house, another 4- or 500 metres further, when they found a doorkeeper, and said, “Do you know if a person by the name of Istvan Nagy?” And the doorkeeper said, “I'm sorry, I don't know him. All what I know, that we- we buried a dozen children who died of starvation - the other day.”

[1:10:07]

So, with that- I mean, again, I hear- I hear this from mother- from my mother. I heard this story a good two dozen times during my life or during her lifetime, later. Anyway, so with that they went round to the Yellow Star house where I actually was. I must have missed them going down to the standpipe which I believe was in the cellar. Because as I said, there was no pressure. So, they must have gone up before me. And that's how I followed them. And that's- we went- we went back to our flat, which was occupied by a Christian couple. Apparently, they were quite nice. I think they were afraid what was going to happen. And my father agreed that they could stay in the maid’s room. I think the gentleman was very- was a heart patient. Though he was probably in his middle fifties only. And they occupied that room for, I believe, two or three weeks, and then he actually had a heart attack and died. And fairly soon after, she left as well. What I do remember, that my father went down to the cellar, where we had our coal and wood- firewood. And more than half of it was pilfered by the inhabitants of the house. But my father - not the bravest of all people usually- he must have been brave in the First World War or must have been brave- I mean to say, he- he demanded the firewood back so we could keep warm. And slowly we picked up.

[1:12:21]

So, when you went into the cellar first, with this relative, was that the cellar of the International-

Yes, yes-

...of the Red Cross house?

Yes.

And then-

It was called the shelter, but it was really just being in the cellar.

Yeah. And when then the daughter came, then you moved into-

Then-

They dropped you there?

Then we- we be moved out. This would be probably the next morning. We moved into her flat for a meal. And then she took me back to Arany János utca. So I was, for another four days I think, on my own there.

But why did she do that? Did you find out later?

I never forgave her. They emigrated, I think in 1956, to Sweden. I never met her again. I never wanted to meet her again. I don't think my parents wanted to meet her.

So, was that the hardest time for you in the war time, that- that week?

[1:13:27]

I supp- I suppose so. I suppose- I suppose it was, because I've- I was faced with- with open hostility. I also was full of lice, which I knew. My mother didn't. So, when we got to the flat, late evening, we were just bedding down all of us. My aunt and my cousin went home next day, their home. And my mother managed to run a bath and wanted me to get undressed. And

I got undressed and she saw all the- all the lice- lice I had- head lice- I mean, I was in the same clothes as I left the hospital. And I think I- that was the last time I actually had a wash, or a proper wash. And I had lice in my hair. And it's the first and last time that I heard my mother in a hysterical state, calling my father to straight away go for the doctor. The doctor lived one flat below us. A very nice man. And the barber, whose son was an employee of my father, he- he came as well. And my hair was chopped off. It- I must tell you that it did grow- grow back for the time being. And the doctor came and examined him and settled my mother down, saying that "even the Prince of..." I-don't-know-who, had lice during the- during the war. So… I recovered from- from the lice. And, and as I said, we- we slowly picked up. And- but school didn't start- maybe it has- it may have started in March. I really can't- can't remember when- when school started again.

[1:16:09]

And do you remember the feeling when you heard the voice? What was it like to suddenly hear them upstairs?

Well, I just run and jumped on him, or on my mother or both. I- you know. If I think about it, I still- overcome a bit. And I also find - this is childish, but I find - I repress it. I don't say anything to my grandchildren. I occasionally said something to my children, when- they picked on, picked their food, or- they said how, "Oh, it's awful." I did say, "Just say 'I don't like it.' Don't say food is awful." But I- I didn't ram the story down their throat. I - some of my friends did, and the children - didn't like it. Eventually. I still feel guilty when I throw food away. I - that is something. Yeah, I don't say to any- I'm saying this to you. I may have said it to my wife a few times. I never said it to the grandchildren. I mean, I don't say anything to my children anymore. At the age of eighteen, I said "That's the last time I said something." Every other year I may say something, I buck up enough courage. Funnily enough, my youngest son asked my opinion for certain things. And I gave him my opinion, and then he does what he wants to do anyway. What I say, if I knew what's best, I wouldn't say it, but as I don't know what's best, I have nothing to lose by not saying anything.

[1:18:16]

But you remember the hunger. So, the hunger was most extreme in that last period?

Last?

Last- the last period. That week?

Yes.

That was where you really didn't have anything to eat?

Any?

Anything to eat - when you were by yourself?

Well, no, by the time my relatives arrived-

Yeah.

They- I will say to you that I was - very short of food. Don't let's call this starving. Very short of food, for - about a month. At least. Ever since I left the hospital till- till about the 25th of January from the 21st of December.

And your mother and father, they in that time- they had still- they still had food, or they also [inaudible]?

They, they had some very limited food.

Right.

Enough to survive on.

So, they also-

But they were also short the food. Whatever my- my aunt managed to get together. There were- my mother could bake bread every other day, and everything was portioned off. So, them- they survived. They were short of food, but not desperately short of food.

So, did you, then, as a child, did you think that if you hadn't had that scarlet fever you would probably be - during this whole time - you would be with your mother?

[1:20:01]

Yes. Oh, yeah. I mean, it was an unnatural thing for nine-and-a-half-year-old - to be on their own. I can- if I may tell you a- an anecdote- a true anecdote, that- I was already in the *Gimnázium*, the secondary school, and we had a science teacher who- we were- we were talking about birds and the war and he said, “And those poor birds, frozen to death, and nobody felt sorry for them. Nobody fed them.” And I said, “Excuse me, sir. There were a lot of children who died of starvation, and no- nobody felt sorry for them.” And I got a- scolding in to- he called my father in, to reprimand him, and me, for being cheeky. I found out later that he was sent to early retirement, because of his views. He was a Nazi sympathiser, which there were a lot of them.

But in your time in the war time, did you witness- you said you witnessed-

Witnessed-

The bombarding.

Yeah.

Yeah. But obviously there was- there were things going on in- in Budapest.

Yeah.

In the Danube and these sorts of things-

Sorry, I can’t-

On the Danube, where people were shot-

Oh yeah. Well, I only found that out later. Again, I didn't know what was happening. The thing was that by- by November the ring? was closed. So, they couldn't deport Jews. So, there were bands running about. Rather- rather like groups of young adults or children running around with knives now, there were groups running around, again, very young, trying to find Jews. And when they found them, they couldn't deport them anymore. No trains were going out of Budapest, so they took them to the Danube. And that was one of their favourite places - where the shoes are now exhibited there - and show summarily executed them by shooting into the Danube. I believe two or three people survived by jumping in the river.

[1:23:17]

My relative's son, who as I said to you about this swimming champion, jumped- was shot- shot dead, before he could jump in. It was found later. So, where this memorial is in Budapest is very near the Parliament building. And there are about two or three dozen shoes made of iron. There reason is that- because they were made to take their shoes off. I don't know why. It would have actually assisted them for- from, you know, for swimming. But they were made to take their shoes off. I don't know whether they were made to take their clothes off or not. That I don't know. But that's the- what the memorial is- is for. I could tell you one more story, true story, of interest. My father gave our family jewellery to the barber, whose son was an employee and you know, my father was a wonderful employer. He was a very difficult man, as a family- head of the family, but he was a wonderful employer. He treated everybody with- with kindness. And after the war I can't tell you how well they talked about him, and- and some of them kept on bringing food to us, because food was still in short supply. Anyway, he gave the family jewellery for the- to- to the barber for safekeeping.

[1:25:22]

Then when we came back after the war, we- he found out. The barber came and explained what happened. Another friend of his also gave- a Jewish friend of his also gave the jewellery. And this jewellery he hid in the lavatory, behind the box of the- of, or in the box or somewhere. Anyway, in the lavatory. So, if somebody comes, they don't find it. Well,

somebody squealed and said- oh no. What happened, this- this chap was caught by the Nyilas, the fascists, and tortured. And wanted to find out where his pictures and jewellery- and he gave, he had to give, the name and the address of the barber. And they came to the barber and said to the barber - with guns - and said, "We want that jewellery." But the barber went into the- the lavatory, picked up one of the jewelleries in- in a bit of cloth, and gave it to them. And it turned out to be my father's- our family jewels, and not this man's jewels. So after the war, this is what happened. And the man got his jewels back. My father's closest friend was a solicitor, whose grandfather was the first Jewish minister in Hungary at the end of the 19th century, incidentally. And he said, "I think you should sue him. And at the very least, he should offer half this jewellery to you." And the court case came on, and as court cases go, it was delayed. And, sadly, my father's friend, who I knew very well too, had a heart attack and died. And before he died, he was already very ill. In fact, I was the last person from the family who visited him, and saw him about two days before he died.

The [inaudible???]?

[1:27:52]

In his flat. I was so well known to him. And he told my father that he has a friend who could take over. This friend wasn't a very good- turned out to be not a very good solicitor, and lost the court case. And the people- maybe if there hadn't been a court case, they would have offered by themselves. I don't know. But suffice to say, this may be of- no. Things did happen, which you only read in books, but they did happen. And everybody- everybody has a story or two or three. And again, this gentleman, Béla Vadas, my father's closest friend, school friend, said that every Jew who survived is a miracle standing on two legs.

He was the- the lawyer?

He was the lawyer, yes.

Was he Jewish or not Jewish?

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. His- his grandfather was the- the first Jewish- there were two Jewish ministers. Strangely enough, the grandson of the other one who was a minister of

culture [sic. Justice] by the name of [Vilmos] Vázsonyi, the- his- his grandson was also a school friend of mine.

So you lost the jewel- the jewellery. They didn't get back the jewels.

No

They didn't get back the jewels?

No – no.

And the flat? Was it your flat or was it a rented flat?

The flat was- was my father's. My grandfather's flat and my father inherited. And we had some quite valuable pictures. And as my mother said, “We ate them.” Later, in 19- the printing press recovered, and- and started working for the Jewish organisation. Hence that I went to the Friday afternoon service because my father thought it was- as he was in touch with them, I should go. But he didn’t go. And…sorry, go on-

[1:30:30]

Yeah, no- we're getting now- what I was going to suggest to you Stephen, maybe because we just got now to after the war-

Yeah.

Maybe just have a little break?

Yeah.

[sound break]

Yes. So, we're continuing your story after the war. You were saying slowly, slowly things went back to normal.

Yes.

Yes. So, tell us when you started first going to school, for example.

Well, I would say to you, I started school soon after my tenth birthday. My birthday is 18th of March, so it would be, probably, I don't know, maybe- maybe it was an early Easter. It was soon after my birthday, but it's probably an early Easter, that there was still one long term. And then I went to the secondary school, which was supposed to have been a very good school, and I was lucky or good enough to get into it. It's a teacher's straining school. In other words, a lot of the time, candidates were sitting at the back, listening to, and watching lessons. And from time to time, they would take over for a week even, or- or, or two weeks, which ensured that we actually had some very, very good teachers.

[1:32:09]

But you went back to the primary school for one term?

The primary school for one term.

And was the same headmaster still there? The one who let you go?

I can't remember. The school moved for that- because the school building got damaged. That- for that term, the school moved, and then we went back. The lady teacher- I didn't get on all that well with. Because- once you've been your own boss, and you- you've- you know, I wasn't going to be very easy. And she wasn't going to give any allowances. But anyway, I- I- I got a decent- I think I got a very good report. So, I got into the secondary school.

And were there other Jewish children in your class then? In that class in primary school?

In the secondary school?

No in the primary school, when you went back.

In the primary school? I mean, some of them went to school in the autumn term. I didn't, because, you know, I was in one place or another.

Because I'm thinking of- was there any awareness of the trauma you had kind of been through? Or, you know, either in the school or?

[1:33:30]

There must have been. There must have been. It was- it wasn't an easy three months. Because everybody- don't forget, when you are virtually living in the shelter for three, four months and the bombs are falling on top of you. Even if you're not Jewish. You know- there- there weren't many Jews in- in the- in fact, the only other one, Fürst, didn't come back to that school. So, I was the only one in- in that class at that time. And it's, I mean, it was so short a time that it, sort of- it went in a blink of an eye. And as I say afterwards, I got into this, so-called very good school, which it was, for a couple of years. Then the Communists took over Hungary. And they started bussing children in from the outskirts, and it was all watered down. Some of the best teachers were sent away. And we had some- still some of them extremely good. I mean, my Hungarian language and literature, which was not just Hungarian literature, but - world literature as well. And the way he taught, and I- I spoke to other friends of mine.

[1:35:20]

I'm- I'm going to have my reunion within the next six weeks, and we still talk about this teacher. Eighty-four-year olds, still talking how- how much we learned from him. And those who did some teaching in their profession, we modelled ourselves on- on this person. I mean, all I can say to you that when I came to England and first saw the Shakespeare Memorial Window with my colleagues at the college, I knew more of the characters than they did, the English, or British.

And what was his name, this teacher?

Gusztáv Makay. He died a few years ago. He was- he lived for a fair old age. Brilliant, but there were some, some less good ones. So, it- it became a bit more difficult, especially after

1949. For the last four years, we were marking time. I mean I- all of us were asked to help- the older ones there, the ones who started in the school, to help the new recruits. Now the first real crisis, was where I lost my enthusiasm for the new system. Because- when you suffered during the war, and you were Jewish you felt, well, this is going to be the future. And then I had a very good report for my fourth year of the secondary school. And that was another fourth year, four years – the higher four. And I found that when I went in to see- there were two parallel classes, and I went in to see on the noticeboard which one I was put. My name wasn't there. And I went in to- saw the deputy director, who said, “Well, I'm sorry, mate, but your father was a capitalist.” Luckily, a year earlier, through another friend of mine, a colleague and a classmate who I'm going to see again in, in May, early May- he asked me to go and do some coaching for the Pioneers. What you have to know, that at the age of thirteen, I started in a club to play basketball. If you think, how is it that me, with my height, but at that time my height was as it is now; I was one of the tallest. And anyway, it was a different game. And so, I did a lot of basketball playing. And, and I obviously had some sort of a flair for teaching, because they asked me and I did quite well, you know, teaching them gymnastics and how to warm up the muscles. So, I got a Pioneer, a Red Pioneer tie as a- for- for my service to the Pioneers. So, I put that on. I went home and I told my mother, who already twigged that things can happen. Because she's, she has already heard other parents. And she said, “Put your uniform on – put your new uniform on, go and see the *szakfelügyelő isten* [head superintendent].” Let's say: education advisor of the council, who was a Social Democrat, not a Communist, but the Communist and the Social Democrats joins forces. Anyway, when he saw me, he organised it that I could go back to the school. But that was a big, big shock. And that's why I realised that- this is not necessarily a system that I want to be involved in.

[1:40:08]

At the same time, my mother wanted me to pick up learning music. At the age of ten, I learned a bit of piano playing, but I wasn't very inspiring. And my teacher wasn't very inspiring. Suffice to say, that my mother thought I must have some musical talent. And my mother, by that time, picked up the violin, and was playing in the National Philharmonic Orchestra for a season. And there he met my future oboe teacher, and talked to him. And because- he- she thought- I wanted- originally, I wanted to be a doctor. She thought I would never get into a university because of my… parentage and being a capitalist parent, who - I

think the maximum he ever had was nine or ten workers. But usually, only about four or five. So, I went to see this man, and it was decided that I will play the oboe. And I started at the Conservatoire. And that's how it- it went, that- in the, in the school. You know, you had to toe the line, but I did quite well as a music student. And it came to matriculation, which is the equivalent of A-level. And I did pretty well. I think, I had one subject that I didn't get top marks. And then my teacher, or both teacher and my mother, contrived to say that- take a year out, and do- just do- spend a year just studying the oboe, which I did. And I got into the Liszt Academy of Music. Well, there again, I met a- a certain problem. What do you have to know that if you were in higher education, you were- were exempt from being called up. There was compulsory conscription. My brother went to a college of higher education, studying - printer, being a printer. And after a year he gave up. Three weeks later he was called up in the army. Not in a- we found out- not in an ordinary garrison, but in a forced labour garrison, really. And where it's relevant then- about six months later, I had my first concert – student's concert - at the Academy. They had- the rule was that two weeks before the student's concert, you had to play to the- a collection of the teachers. In my case, all the woodwind teachers. So, I played the piece, a piece by Handel. And a clarinet teacher took a dislike to me. And she said, "The way you are trilling - you do know, what a trill is? Well, you- you can't do it. It's out of style." Another thing you have to know that of course, the clarinet wasn't discovered yet before the Baroque period ended, so how much she knew about it, well, is anybody's guess. Anyway, so I go into my next oboe lesson. And I say to my teacher, this is a new teacher at the- at the Academy. My teacher was the Principal Oboe at the Opera House. And I said, "Sir," because we still called them, 'Sir', I said "Sir, Mr. Balassa," who was the secretary of the local Communist Party, "said that- that I shouldn't be trilling like this. How do you think I should trill?" "Trill the way you want to!" So, I did.

[1:45:13]

The day after the concert I was called into the deputy director. The director was a very fine violin teacher, that- also a pupil of the teacher that my mother studied with. And, and György Pauk's teacher he was, too. And- but he didn't get involved in anything like that. Anyway, this woman was very much a party person, even though in 1956, she was the first one to leave the country. And she now lives in- or lived in Australia. Anyway, I was called in. "Comrade Nagy." I said, "Yes?" "Comrade Nagy, Comrade Balassa told you that you cannot trill like that. And yet you disregarded his advice, and trilled your own way. But don't worry,

in the army they will teach you how to trill." Which of course was a very thinly disguised threat that they will chuck me out and I'll go straight into the army. All right, this is- we are now talking about 1955 - spring. Okay? 19 - let's go one more year – 1956. By then, I was an advanced student. And advanced students were allowed to join part-time orchestra. These were like belonging to the Army's orchestra, or the Interior Ministry's orchestra or the- you- half the time you played and half the time you served. I had an audition, and I came top of the audition. And they offered me the job. And I said, "Yes, thank you."

[1:47:39]

And you have to go for a medical. And next morning you have to see the- the secretary of the local Party, and it was called *Káder összes*. In other words, they have to find out whether you were a reliable person for the Party, or whatever. So, I had the medical. I was passed fit. They didn't check my brain, luckily. And next- next morning, I rolled up at the office of the secretary of the local Party. That was the orchestra of the Interior Ministry. What you have to realise, that the secret police belong to the Interior Ministry. And the members of the orchestra had to be in a similar uniform to the secret police. It's quite important. Anyway, I knock on the door of the Secretariat Party and I said, "Good morning, Sir." I may have said "Comrade", I don't know. "Good morning." He said, "Your father had ten workers." Now, if I did that today, I would say, "I don't know, I never counted them." But at that time, this was rather serious. And I said, "Well, I can't help that." The end result was that I was not a reliable person. And I didn't get the job. So, I went home. By that time, my father was retired and was waiting for me. Well, you can imagine how he felt. I said, "No, I'm sorry." "Why didn't? What's happened?" I had to tell him. He was crying that because of him, I don't get the job. A month later, the Fire Brigades orchestra had an audition. Again, I went to the audition. I even remember. I remember the- what they gave me to sight-read at the- a Beethoven's Sixth. And the Interior Ministry one. And the one is a little-known piece, but luckily, I used Boieldieu, [*The*] *Caliph of Baghdad* overture. There's an oboe cadenza there. So, it's- the conductor thought that I wouldn't know that but as it happened, as luck would happen, I actually played it. So, so I did a good audition. Same thing. I didn't even have to go for the- for a- a visit to the Secretary of Party. They just said, "We'll write to you." And next day they rang me up. And the conductor was very nice. He said, "I'm very sorry. It won't happen." Well, it so happens that in 1956, less than six months later, of course, the

Revolution came. Had I been wearing a uniform of the secret police, I probab- probably wouldn't be here to tell you the story.

[1:51:19]

As it happens, when the new term started at the Academy, middle of September, or- I was called in to the office. This time, because there was going to be an interview with people from each department on the radio. And who do I find there? A former classmate of mine who said, “We would like to interview you on behalf of the wind department.” And they did a pre-recording. And the recording went out at three o'clock Tuesday the 23rd of October. So, orchestra, student orchestra was on from three to five on Tuesdays, but I got permission to miss it, to hear myself- I'd never heard myself. There was- the facility wasn't there. So, I got permission but they said, “As soon as you're finished, you come in.” So, there I am, quarter to three I was already sitting in front of the radio. And turned the Radio Kossuth, which is the equivalent of Home Service Radio Four. And I hear: “The Interior Minister is forbidding the collect-collective- the demonstrations or the getting together groups of more than four.” And I didn't know- I was, as you can imagine, I was just waiting for my, my son- time and then- Yeah, I didn't get- that sort of? What was this all about? So, three o'clock came, and as it happens, mine was the first interview. And I had to talk- there were- questions were asked by this former classmate of mine. And then I started- and then I played the introduction, lasting about three minutes, maybe four minutes of the Haydn *Oboe Concerto*. When it's finished, I turn the radio off. By then it was twenty past three. I picked up my instrument. I ran downstairs to the tram stop. No- no trams anywhere. So, I decided to walk, and then I started running. The Academy was three stops away. I should say about half a mile, or even less. I run in. I go in the hall - empty. I go to the doorkeeper, “What's happened?” He said, “Oh, they've all gone to demonstrate.” And apparently the whole orchestra and a lot of the students have gone to demonstrate in front of the Parliament - where the first shooting happened. And as it happened, my closest mate and colleague- oboe- another oboist with whom I- you know, I was- I will say one or two words about him to- to show you what character he had. His brother was killed outside the Parliament. I went home. I had my tea, because I had a rehearsal with the Iron Workers Orchestra, if you please, which was an amateur orchestra, though they gave us some expenses. And my cousin, who played the cello, the daughter of the lady who had the nose job, she was- she was playing as well. And some of the wind

players already had a- transistor radios were a new thing. And they were listening to the radio, playing with one hand and listening with the other.

[1:55:47]

And they were listening, and when the rehearsal finished at nine o'clock, they said, “Stephen, Vera don't go near the ring road. There are tanks there. And there is shooting.” So, I thought well, I will accompany my cousin first home, with her cello. And we were dodging the streets and only crossed the- I mean, she lived on the ring road. So, we only crossed very close to where she lived. And when- I went upstairs and my aunt said, “Your father rang. He is hiding in the bathroom.” - which is inside. The demonstrators went that way. They thought that the Prime Minister was going to give a speech on the radio. But in fact, he did the speech from the Parliament building and not from the radio building. And the radio building was surrounded by demonstration. And you remember I said there were arcades at that square? Well, the- the- the crowd were hiding there and shoot- and trying to, with stones, break the lights so the secret police or the army who came to restore order, couldn't shoot at them. And my father could see this from the window. And there were some stray bullets, but luckily, they didn’t hit the window. But he was so afraid that he was hiding in the bathroom and sent a message, “On no account are you to come home. Go and pick up your mother.” My mother was playing in the operetta theatre. So, I went there, picked her up from the artists’ entrance. We went back to my aunt, and keep down on the floor or on a settee. And that was on the Tuesday evening. And it was only- nearly two days later, on a Thursday, midday, that there was a lull. And we could quickly get back to our flat. And that's how the Revolution started. And that's what gave me the opportunity, a month later, to escape. And emigrate.

[1:58:25]

So just to go back a little bit- do you think when you didn't get those jobs, was it because you were Jewish as well?

No.

Or you were capitalist?

No, no, no. But, if I may say, there was a week when- from that Thursday on the two days after the Revolutions, the Russians withdrew, the government withdrew to the east of the country to - the then second, now, I think third or fourth city of Hungary - Debrecen. And suddenly, things- everybody seemed… relieved. Though, there were some anti-Semitic sentiments expressed. Unfortunately, some of the greatest gangsters were Jewish. The leader of the Communist Party after the Communist takeover was Mátyás Rákosi, previously called Reich. The present- at that time present Prime Minister was Ernö Gerö, also Jewish. The head of the secret police, who tortured people- and were generally hated, was also Jewish. So, I'm afraid some of the anti-cism- anti-Semitism was brought on by Jews. And this is very sad and it's lasting till the very day today.

[2:00:17]

When-

Anyway, my mother always talked to me about going abroad, emigrating if you can and work abroad, because she worked for two and a half years. So, my best friend, who sadly died five years ago, already- he was deported. His family were deported because they were capitalists, and he already left and went to Vienna. And then, on the 1st of November, my father woke me. He was listening to the radio bulletin, and- and- and the bulletin said that the Russian Army is moving towards Budapest from Debrecen, and the government- and they are going to install the old government. The new government was headed by Imre Nagy. You may have heard the name. He was a Communist but a forward-looking Communist. And- and he was generally respected. Before that he was Agriculture Minister. He knew what he was talking about. Anyway, by eight o'clock in the morning, he has made a radio communiqué saying that “the Russians are attacking. We have asked for help from the West, and God save Hungary.” Of course, the West was too busy with the Suez Crisis. And nothing happened. And the 1st of November by the afternoon, the Russians were back in Budapest. And that's why I decided if there is a chance- and we still- the Academy still wasn't functioning, and some of the leaders of the Revolutions were arrested. Imre Nagy was arrested and later murdered. And-

Arrested by who?

[2:03:02]

Sorry?

Arrested-?

Arrested by- by the Communists who came back.

Yeah.

And on the- on- on the twen- things were just beginning to get back to the sub-normal normal. And I think I got a communiqué from the Academy that teaching will start on the 1st of December. And, and while- while all this happened, I did a lot of practice at home. I thought well, there's nothing I could do. I'm not going to demonstrate. And- anyway, two days before- before the 20th … let me- twentieth- on the 22nd of October, my friend, a clarinettist friend, rang me - also Jewish - and said, “My uncle has organised some transport to go to the frontier.” By then we heard that lots of people left Hungary. For about ten days before that, it came through the grapevine that people are escaping through the frontier. By that time, the Russian- the Hungarian frontier guards left during the Revolution, and the Russians haven't replaced them yet. Anyway, he said it will cost that amount of money - I don't know how much - and we are expected at nine o'clock at the corner of these two streets.

[2:04:57]

So, I went home, and I broke the news to my mother and my father. My father was- was- my mother was very worried and said, “If something happens, it doesn't matter if you lose your instrument or anything, just come back in one piece.” My father seemed to have been very, very… I don't know, brave or clever or whatever. He showed me some of the family papers and he talked to me. You would say, if- had he been a religious person, he would have given me his blessing. As it is, figuratively concerned, he’s given me his blessing that I should go. And on Thursday morning the 22nd of November 1956 I closed the door behind me having said goodbye to my parents, thinking that I will never meet them again. And went to meet my friend, and- and we- we got a lift close to the border about, I should say, five miles maybe. And met a- the- the- we were the two young ones in the- it was a lorry with a tarpaulin on

top. And it kept on picking up people. But we were the only the military age personnel so we were hiding as far as possible from the back of the lorry. He had good papers, and we had a few bottles of rum. So, he managed to bribe when there was a- when we were stopped. Anyway, we were dropped there about four o'clock in the afternoon. We met this man – smuggler - who said, “Give me all your forints because you won't need it over there.” At nine o'clock it was getting dark- it was dark. Then he took us and he said, “Well, the border is just over there. It's about 500 metres. You cross the railway line. You cross the main road and you are in Austria.” Well, four hours later, we were still walking and it was ice cold. I also had that bottle of rum. The only way we could keep warm is drinking from that bottle of rum which neither of us was accustomed to. He got completely sozzled. So much so, that he fell head-long on his stomach onto the ice.

[2:08:08]

It was- it was a- a marshland which was frozen over. So, it wasn't easy walking. And we argued that - which way is the border? That- he said, “That way.” I said, “This way” - we had no idea. Then we walked and we bumped into a building, which had one light on. And we decided- I said, “Look Péter. We've got to go in, because I’m cold. Maybe there's somebody who can give us - some idea where we are. And if something happens, we get arrested, well, it’s just one of those things.” Anyway, so we rang the bell and a couple of dogs started barking. And then this elderly gentleman, fifteen years younger than I am now probably, came in. He was the night watchman in a storeroom where they're stored - what is - what do they make into material? I forgot the word now-

Fabric? Fabric?

[2:09:27]

Yeah, something like that. Anyway, he was guarding it and he- he started crying that his son was in hospital having been shot during the Revolution. So, we got him on our side. And having warmed up, he showed us the way. And precisely at four o'clock in the morning, we found no man's land, where the- we thought that the- the border was under- mined. But they've already picked the mines up earlier, so- but we saw that there- the- there were sand and it was raked, so it will show your footmarks. And, as I said, twenty past four, we were on

Austrian soil. And the rest- of this- of what I said much earlier, then we were taken- there was a farmer, ploughing the field. He picked us up, took- took us into this camp about four kilometres further, where there were a lot of escapees. And that's where this man came up to me in a Tyrolean hat and said, “Do you belong to the Jewish faith- faith?” And then, if you remember when we first started, I told you that's- that's how we were taken up to Vienna. And- I mean, it belongs to the story that when he took us up, it was- by the time we got to Vienna, it was over five o'clock. It was getting dark. And the Shabbos was in or Shabbat was already in. And he delivered- it was a ten-seater Volkswagen minibus. And he delivered some of the other people who had money, or somewhere to go to. We haven't. And he was going to deliver us to the Mizrachi. Then we got to the Mizrachi, or close to the Mizrachi, he said, “I can't go any further. I need some money.” Oh, first of all, he said, “I need some money.” I said, “We don't have any money. But you can have my watch if you want it to…” So, I started taking my watch off and he said, “All right, come on. They won’t- they won't give me any money in the Mizrachi, because it’s already the Sabbath and they don't finger money. I will have to go back Sunday morning for my money.” Anyway, so he dropped at- at the Mizrachi. And that was Friday evening. And they- they received us. And we got some, some food, or hot drink. And then each one of us separately was sent to a family for the Friday evening dinner and prayer. And then we were taken back and kipped down on the- they put some mattresses down in the- in the Mizrachi.

What- what was the Mizrachi?

[2:12:55]

The Mizrachi was in Vienna, in a- in a square called Judenplatz. And- and it was next day that I went to the British legation. And that's what- it was arranged that I'll come to England.

But Mizrachi was a- it was a- is movement, isn't it?

It’s a- well, it’s a Jewish, Zion- Zionist organisation.

It was the movement. Yeah. The Mizrachi movement.

It’s the Mizrachi movement. But this- this was the head- the head office of- of them.

So, did you ever find out who this person was, the- who brought you there? Was he-?

No, I don't know. I can't remember.

And why did he- why did he come up to you and said, "Are you Jewish?" Did he ask everyone?

Well, the- because he got- every Jew that he picked up from the camp and took up to Vienna, he got money for.

Right.

They were paying him. A- a number of- there were a- there were a couple of families- I can't quite remember who the people were. But there were- on- on this minibus there were eight other people, and we stopped at three different locations. And they gave him or the whoever was there, waiting for them, gave him money.

And can I ask you something else? The reasons why suddenly people started to move was because-

Where?

In- in Hungary. Because the reason why people started to leave was because they knew that the border guards would be replaced?

Yes.

Is that?

It was

There was the feeling, you had to do it now?

Absolutely. There was a three -week period, when of the 200,000 Hungarians, probably 160,000 left. I mean, the camp was absolutely full by then, of just one night who- who arrived.

[2:15:03 – on audio 1st part]
[0:00:34 – on audio 2nd part]

And I mean, I think it ought to be mentioned that when we were in Vienna, there were long queues outside the American Embassy, where some people wanted to go. The Swiss embassy. When you went to the- and they had to fill in long forms. When you went to the British Embassy they asked, “What is your name?” “Do you wish to come to England?” Oh, no – “How old are you?” “Do you wish to come to England?” “Be here nine o’clock Monday morning and there will - we’ll transport you to England.”

And why did you choose to go to the British Embassy?

To?

Why did you come to the British Embassy?

Several reasons. Number one, I had this very distant relative, who it turned out to be the only one who didn’t help at all. I stayed with her for about a week or so. And then- no, sorry. Let’s say three weeks. They rented a room for me. And… then I was taken up at Trinity College of Music. And I had, I was given a grant even though it was a small one. And through another- friend of mine, who is actually I’m just going to his ninetieth birthday up in the north, next week. I hadn’t seen him now for about twenty years. He said, “There is this- I know of a room that you can stay very cheaply.” So, I left them because his two adopted children, who were by then grown-ups - Czech refugees, Jewish refugees - were not very helpful. The older one, when I said, the musician’s union here said, I have to wait a year before I could join. And I said, “Well, it’s not fair.” He said to me, another Jewish refugee, he said, “Well, nobody invited you here.” So that’s- as I say, you can choose your friends. And that was one reason. The other reason was the world renowned and probably the most famous oboe player in the world was called Leon Goossens, and he was English and lived in England. And anyway, I had a smattering of English. And I, I never felt that I wanted to go to the States

anyway. And I felt that, I read about the British way of life and I felt that that would be- a plus some of my friends said that they were aiming at coming to Britain. So - and they also had some connection. This best friend of mine I was referring to, his- his aunt- his father's sister lived here with- with her husband in London. So, we were- we- though he came a few days later and he flew because they sent him the ticket. But we exchanged addresses so that we could find each other.

[0:04:06]

And did some people- decided to stay in- in Vienna? Did some people stay in Vienna?

Who? I mean, no. I- I- I never wanted to be in Vienna. Vienna was also not the nicest philo-Semitic place - the Austrians. So- no, but I- I wanted to get as far as possible. Also, this acquaintance of my father's said to me, "Careful with the Mizrachi because they will want you to go to Israel. My brother is in Israel." He said, "The climate is terrible." Well, I never- I mean, look, the Israel Philharmonic is one of the greatest orchestras in the world. The conductor who conducted them, I actually played with later, in England. And it's not that it's a cultural…

Who, Zubin Mehta?

But- Israel.

Yeah. Zubin Mehta, or? Who? Which conductor?

William Steinberg was his name.

Right.

He- he was the chief conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra. So, I mean, there's a lot for me to come to England, and I was lucky. Some of my friends, musician friends, would have- have gone to the Royal Academy. I was a big fish in a little pool. I became the principal's favourite. And they backed my national- naturalisation. They backed my house

purchase. I was- this would be ’57, so, six years later they backed my- the house purchase, as I said.

This is Trinity?

Trinity, yes.

Trinity College.

And, and in 1962 I was appointed to teach there. And by 1970, I became a full-time senior professor.

So was it quite a short time span-

Yes.

- from your arrival?

Yes, well- I arrived in- at Trinity in January 1957. I was a student till 1959 - Christmas. Then in my last year, I got a job with Sadler’s Wells Opera which is now the English National Opera in the Coliseum. At that time, we were in Sadler’s Wells Theatre. I became a co-principal player. And this is 19- I started the day after Christmas- Day after Boxing Day. And then, 1962 I got a phone call from Trinity that the teacher who was teaching there has left, would I come and teach. And I had some junior pupils. And then, two years later I was appointed at the Senior department. And by as I say, by 1970, I was full time. But still hourly paid. Everybody was hourly paid. And when the college was put on a Department of Education footing, I was offered- I was given a Principal Lectureship in 1979, that is, yes.

[0:08:11]

But tell us a little bit- first you were sent to Sheffield.

Sheffield-

Why was that?

Yeah, I went to Sheffield-

Why?

Yes, and- as it happens, we arrived- we arrived in London and we were put up in a hospice. St. Stephen’s Hospice in Fulham. And we were all registered there by a police person. And next day we were taken- I mean this was- next day we were doing the registration and given a temporary travel document - identification document. And then about two o’clock, three o’clock we were put on this coach. Well of course, there was no motorway; it was- took six or seven hours to get to Sheffield. The- The Women’s Voluntary Service, WVS organised people who will put up refugees. But, most of them have left. In fact, all of them but one, have left, because by then it’s eleven o’clock when we arrived. And this person, Mrs. Joy Simpkin said she’s not going away without a Hungarian refugee boy. So that’s how I got to them. Found out that her husband was Jewish, as it happened. In fact, it didn’t take long to find out because he had a fairly hooked nose and all the Jewish characteristics. And- a day or two later, I think we have to go into the WVS and they- they will found work for us. But Joy, the lady of the house, came with me and told them, “He’s not going to go anywhere to work. I've arranged for him to see the Professor of Music at Sheffield University-” and- “Tomorrow.” And that would be, I should say, Events Day. And I went to see, and I played- strangely enough exactly the same pieces I played in the radio before.

[0:10:42]

Which was?

The Haydn Oboe Concerto. And he gave me a letter to Trinity College of Music. I ought to tell you that- when I went to see this friend of mine that I talked about, another oboist- you probably know that the clarinet plays with a reed, a single reed, and the oboe plays with a double reed. And I learned to make that double reed. I didn't have to buy it. And when I went to this friend of mine, to say goodbye to him, he said he had- his mother who was- she was living on her own. He can’t- he can't, his- his brother has been shot dead, and he can't leave, but he would come with me. But as it is, he's given me a half a dozen pieces of cane to- out of

a dozen which he had at home. And I'm desperate. I made a reed which worked really well at my audition in Sheffield, and then Joy, the lady of the house rang up this very distant relative of mine and said, here I am, and I'm going down, will he- she put me up? So, I- I met them. You know, I was put on a train. I- I was told to take a taxi and she will pay for it when I arrive. As it happens not very far from here, she lived on Shoot-Up Hill, on- on the main Edgware Road. That's how I got there. Again, as it happens, years later, sadly, her husband died. And I have been able to more than repay the kindness, unfortunately, that I had this, well, duty, as well as this chance. In fact, she- she became manic depressive. And luckily Frances and I went on a very cold, icy night when she rang up and sounded very strange - at home. And I said to Frances, “Let's get in the car and visit Joy. There's something not right.” She was already drinking whiskey and taking sleeping pills. So, she- we stopped her from taking her own life. Life throws up strange situations.

[0:13:30]

But this was the lady from Sheffield?

It was the?

This was the lady from Sheffield?

From Sheffield. The lady from Sheffield. So, I've been able to repay in the kindness I wish I hadn't. I wish I didn't have the chance, but there it was.

So, she moved down to London?

She- yes, she got married again, then divorced and married again and- which- and then she died. I- I went to the funeral and I gave a speech. And in my speech, I told them that, “there's this Hungarian refugee arriving in Sheffield. And the person who took me in was the deceased. And the person who was taken in, is the one who is talking to you.” That was my opening gambit. Very sad that- she was a wonderful lady in many respects, and she had some terrible hang-ups. She had a daughter, who was an unwanted child. So was she, an unwanted child of her parents. And she had a brother who was the prince of their eye. I met- met their parents and the brother as well. And she- she hated it. But she behaved exactly the same. The

younger boy, who was eight years younger than the girl, was the prince. He also became mentally ill. So that's the sadness of the story.

[0:15:28]

But she helped you here, and she helped you with your-

Yes.

…music. Musical career.

Yeah. But she behaved in what- I said that I'm a musician. She didn't question. And she came into the WVS to say, “He’s not-” - Because they wanted everybody to start work, which I would- I would have done. In fact, I passed my audition to Trinity College of Music on the 13th of December. And I think by the 16th, or 15th of December, I was told to come back. I think the term started on the 5th or 6th of January. And I was given a scholarship. And I was told that they will hope to arrange for- for me a maintenance grant, however small it may be. So, then I- before Christmas I did portering at San Pancras station, portering the mail. And I did I think two or three days and they gave me an extra day as a Christmas box. Exact- except when I said, “Well, you overpaid me.” They said, “A Christmas box.” I thought, boxes? What is a box? I didn't realise it was a Christmas box - a Christmas present.

But the reason why you went to Sheffield because you said before Sheffield, the city of Sheffield sponsored-

[0:17:03]

Sheffield city- it was- I don't know, whether it was the city or whether it was some sort of organisation who did a collection. I mean, when- when I went for a walk in Sheffield, they were still collecting boxes and people collecting money for Hungarian refugees.

And what did they pay for? The buses? What did they sponsor, Sheffield?

Well, they- they sent two coaches, they paid the driver, the coach company and-

To London- to London? To get-

To London. Yes. Also, I mean, we stopped on the way one night in Salzburg, in that tourist accommodation.

So, they sent - sorry - so they sent the buses to Vienna?

All the way to Vienna, two buses came,

Right. Not from London. They picked you up from Vienna-

And then we came back, stopped in Salzburg. Next day we stopped in Karlsruhe. The third days we stopped in Brussels. I remember being taken to Grand Place and seeing the lights and the Grand Place, and I – "This is the West." And then the next day we went to- to Ostend, in the bus and via- from Ostend to Boulogne. And we crossed from Boulogne to Dover and it was a very rough crossing. They said, I'm pretty good on- I'm a pretty good sailor. And they said, "Go on upstairs and get some fresh air, but hold on." And there were about three of us who was on- up there. But it was a pretty bad crossing. Then we went from there to- to London.

And what were your first impressions of England, when you arrived? Coming from Hungary?

[0:19:04]

Bay windows. I've never seen a bay window in my life before. And, going along streets where every house looked the same. Not having tall buildings. I mean, people now go into the city and I mean, what you see there is amazing, but there weren't any tall buildings. Everybody was living in houses. Now, in West Hampstead we are one of the probably less than ten percent who occupy a house which hasn't been divided into flats. And also, there are a lot of mansion flats and blocks of flats. I had my first cup of tea, which I couldn't drink- without sugar. Nobody said to me that normally you put sugar in it, but I couldn't drink it. Otherwise, the food- some of my the- my friends, when they were given lamb, they couldn't stomach it. I mean the lamb which you could then- lamb chops were different today- than

today. You know, there was a lot of grease and, and fat on it and didn't smell brilliant. I- I think the one thing I learned: you eat everything. My mother insisted on it anyway. Even before the war, you know: "You don't eat it now, you eat it at the next mealtime." And- otherwise, she's quite a sympathetic person. But she, you know, when it came to eating- and I think I should say to you that, that I went down with my mother to the market, that it taught me how to choose food, and that my mother joined the Theatre Orchestra as a permanent member when I was thirteen and I started cooking for the family, most days. So, hence that I am, though I save myself, I'm a- for a musician, I'm a good cook. For a cook- good cook, I'm not a good enough musician. [Bea laughs]

Can I ask you also why- what about your brother? Did he not want to come?

My brother?

Yes, he decided to stay?

He is a completely- well, strictly speaking of course, he's a half-brother. And except that he never knew anybody else except my mother and called her 'Mama'. And he is a different kettle of fish I'm afraid. I'm estranged from his family because of the way they treated my mother. But I really don't- I don't really want to say much more about it. I'm still in touch with him. I will see him again in May. Unfortunately, he inherited my mother's eye problem. What's it? That? Not retinal but macular degeneration. He is now- he's not walking with a white stick, but he's only got side vision. And, of course he is six years older than me. He will be ninety this year. Whenever I go to Hungary, which I go once or twice a year, partly because we took the grandchildren there on holiday, partly because I've got a reunion. And, and partly because I've got a very good dentist there.

[0:23:21]

Yes, I asked why your brother didn't want to leave, or?

My brother?

Yes, he decided to stay in Budapest.

To stay, yes.

Yes. And what did he do? What was his profession?

He- he- at that time he was working in a printing press as a typesetter. And then he went to work for an advertising company. And he became the head of the printing department. So, any printed matter, advertising - he was the head of that. So, he get- he got a very, very good job. And my sister-in-law was a chemical engineer. So, they did quite well.

And they were not considering- they were happy to stay in Hungary?

They- well, my sister-in-law's parents were still alive. Her aunt was alive. And, and my brother is, is- my brother is the Conservative Party and I am the Liberals.

Right.

He didn't feel- he didn't feel- he’s an older generation. He had- and he was married by then - only just. He didn't- he wasn't adventurous enough. I mean, it’s a very big decision. It was forced to me by the fact that it would have been very difficult for me to get a job. As a musician.

Yeah.

[0:25:06]

There was no- I mean, I remember weeks when I did hardly any practice, because I thought, well, what's the point? Then as soon as I started getting involved that I will- I want to leave then I, I really worked very hard. And you know that concerto I learned stood me in good stead.

And were you helped by any Jewish organisations once you went England? Were you helped by any Jewish organisations?

No, no. No. You- as an orchestral musician you don't have - at that time.

Not as a musician. I mean, when you were a student. Did you get any help from any organisations?

Yes. The- the AJR, I got some money from. When I went in, which would be about three or four times, when I asked for help. And basically, the college contacted the World University Service. And the World University Service got together a few musical life personalities, and suggested to them that they sponsor a Hungarian refugee musician studying. And they found out that I- well, the college wrote to them, and told them that I got a scholarship which meant that my tuition fees were waived. And they obviously gave a good reference. And they got- Peter Heyworth was the music critic of *The Observer* for many years. I mean, he’s died about twenty years ago now. And he provided the money which was a hundred and four pounds per term. Four pounds a week for the term, and then in the holidays I did holiday jobs.

Such as?

[0:27:21]

Such as baking hot cross buns in Miller's Bakery at Stamford Brook, twelve hours a night for a week, and I earned sixteen pounds. Then I- I are packing popcorns. But by- by the middle of the first term- by- by early January, even before I think, or a week after, at that college, somebody asked me to go to the Oxford and Cambridge Music Club. And there I meet people- met people on the amateur circuit. Amongst them an oboist, who then became the principal oboe - though he was an amateur to begin with - he became the principal oboe at the London Philharmonic Orchestra. And he put some, what we called, “Guinea jobs” in my way. That you went for a week: Monday – rehearsal, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. Five- six days a guinea, a day. So, I've got six guineas. I- knew- I remember the first one was at Easter time ’57, and I did a week of *Oklahoma*. I’d never heard of Rogers and Hammerstein until then. A week of *Oklahoma* and then I was- then I met- I was playing with the Chelsea Opera Group, which was an amateur orchestra, but they gave some expenses. And we went to Oxford and I played with Colin Davis, who later became the music director of Sadler’s Wells, with whom I played. He was at my audition as well. And so, I earned a bit of money quite apart- aside of the grant. So, though I- others got six pounds a week: the

Rockefeller scholarships. But- but they were on the breadline. I wasn't. I- I also did a little bit of- I got one or two private pupils, one of them a Cambridge Blue, who I still meet. His wife is an oboist, and I gave her lessons as well. And so, I made some money. I didn't have to do necessarily, man- menial jobs. I did- yeah?

And where did you live? Where did you live?

[0:30:24]

I lived.

At that time?

I had three address- four addresses in my life. First, in 86 Shoot-Up Hill with this relative, then for ten days at Litchfield Road [sp/Way?], which is just around the corner. Then, with this very good friend of mine I mentioned who left Hungary as soon as the Revolution started, and who's sadly died. With him and his wife, we hired a flat and we paid two pounds each. So, it was six pounds a week. And we put one pound each in the kitty, and I did the shopping and the cooking. So, three pounds a week, we- we ate at home. And - that was the third. And then a- another friend of mine, who then studied at the Royal Academy, a pianist, got in touch with us- we were in touch, and said she met somebody on the underground because she was talking Hungarian with a friend of hers. And this old lady started talking to them in Hungarian. And she said, "Incidentally do you- we have a house in Menelik Road NW2, which we signed the lease, but we are moving. Do you know anybody who would like to take over?" So, Eva, the- my friend of mine got in touch with me at that time, because from the very word go, I went to Trinity. I was the only Hungarian. I only spoke English, except when I met- met up with them. So, my English was much more advanced than most- most of them. Except that ones who went to university where there were lectures - they had to learn. So, I got in touch with the agent and I signed the contract- forty pounds a month. And I got two of my fellow students from Trinity. And there was this clarinettist friend of mine that I left Hungary with, and the girl pianist who was at the Academy and five of us rented the house. We actually paid, and there were always somebody staying here illegally and paid one night one week. We- I- I wish I'd kept the guestbook. And I signed the contract

with Dutch and Dutch 1st of September 1957. And I've lived here ever since; 1964, I bought the house.

[0:33:40]

And it was- I mean, it was a very, very, very dilapidated way. I mean there was wet rot, dry rot. You have no idea what bad decorative order. But I got it for a song. We were sitting tenants, except that we had to be given six months' notice. And the landlady lived in Miami, in Florida, needed the money. So, it was offered to us for 5,000 and we got it- got it for 4,500. The bay window was in a collapsed state. Then with- I got a council hundred percent mortgage. I mean, this was- I've already been in the profession, so I wasn't, you know, I- when I first joined Sadler's Wells, I was 1000- on a thousand pounds a year. And that was the cut-off point. When you made that then you were, if not well-to-do, but you were alright. And I saved up some money. Frances- when we got married, Frances won a competition, the Queen's Prize Competition. And that was 400 pounds. And she also got a scholarship to Vienna. And she was there for a year. We were already engaged. And we decided that it's such an opportunity for her. We were a- she came back for the holidays, but otherwise we were apart. And she saved up some money. And her parents, unfortunately her father wasn't a very well person and- and died in 1963. But by then she- he was retired, and he didn't arrange his retirement properly. So, we even paid for her wedding gown ourselves. And we had some money, but we borrowed the 500 pounds that we needed for a deposit. And then we had a builder who did a poor job. Oh, it's- I can go on, you can come back tomorrow, and I can entertain you with it.

[0:36:40]

And how did you meet? How did you meet Frances?

How did we meet- Frances? In 1958 I was the first non-British member of the Student Orchestra of Great Britain, consisting of music students from the four London colleges: Royal Academy, Royal College, Guildhall and Trinity. And we went to Brussels for the World Expo and *Jeunesse Musicale* festival. And there I was the *cor anglais* player in the- You know the *cor anglais* is the- like bass clarinet to the clarinet. And the principal oboe was Anthony Camden. And, and the second oboe Sarah Frances. These were names; they both

became very good professionals as well. Anthony and I became close friends; we got on very well. And that would be '58. And we started playing together. He played first oboe, I played second oboe in an orchestra by Leonard Hirsch, who was a very well-known teacher, player and a coach of the National Youth Orchestra strings. And that was a paid job. And we went around Hertfordshire schools. And he got married on the 2nd of May 1959. And I was invited. And I went- I didn't have a dinner jacket. I didn't know it was black tie. I didn't know what it meant being black tie. I just, I think he rang me up. I didn't have a printed invitation. But I knew where he lived, because I've been to the house before. Anyway, I went by tube to- and then walked there in- I had a suit, a dark suit. And he lent me a bow tie. And I go down and I see this blonde girl talking to some of them and- and Anthony came and introduced us. And the rest is history. We started dancing and finished, the party finished. I met Anthony's brother, who became a lifelong friend. Sadly, he died as well a few years ago. We played chamber music together, we played- we toured together. I mean, everything led to something. Anyway, at about half past eleven all the tubes will have stopped. Anthony's father was the most famous bassoon player in the country. Archie Camden and his wife, Joyce with whom, again, I went touring. She played the piano, and I was one of the group playing the oboe. She said, "Kerry, take Frances and Stephen home." We found out that we lived- if you turn left, first turning on the right, the sixth house along. Very convenient. This is a marriage of convenience you realise?

[0:40:15]

So- and that's it- we started. We found out about each other and by the time she went to Vienna, we decided- we knew, we were going to get married. We knew what the reaction of mother will be. Mother Mildred opposed everything to begin with. If you said, "That light is too dark," she would say, "No, it's too light." And then she would change. But the first thing was: No. So, she wouldn't have been very pleased. Londoner, Jewish, musician. Lucky I wasn't black. Anyway, a- a week before she went to Vienna, we knew we were going to be apart. By then I had the job, so I was alright. And we decided to get a ring, an engagement ring. And we went- next to Selfridges there was a jeweller called Bravingtons. And we went there, and we looked at all the cheap jewellery. And we saw a- a ring, a nice engagement ring, for- I don't think it was gold or it certainly wasn't eighteen carat gold. And we went- six pounds. And we went in. I mean, I- by that time I was nineteen pounds a week. She didn't have- no, she- parents gave her money, but she was- she didn't want to ask parents for money

anyway. And of course, I had, you know, I had to pay the rent here. Anyway, we go in, we buy this ring. And this is Frances's usual first step, when we buy anything, even now, then she goes outside to have a look at the window again, to see whether she's done the right thing. So, we go out, we bought this ring, we go out, we look at it in the window, and we decided that was very good. And start walking, and then suddenly, “Mr. Nagy! Will you come back?” We thought, “Oh, God, what have we done?” It wasn’t a cheque; we had paid cash. Anyway, we go back, he said, “I'm sorry, we made a mistake. It's only four pounds. Here is two pounds back.” I mean, two pounds paid for a week's food for one person. I mean, it was quite a lot of money still. If not a week’s a few days’ food. So that's, that's how we met. And then- then when she came back from Vienna, the parents went- well, first of all, she studied in Vienna. And that Easter, she decided, don't forget, they were still Communists. There’s still the Iron Curtain. There was a- a deal- package deal to go to Budapest for a long weekend. And she decided that she wanted to meet the family. I mean, she had the money because by then she had 400 pounds in the bank to live on. Anyway, she went to Budapest for three days and said they met. And then, in the summer before she came back, she went to Hungary again for a week, stayed with my parents. And, and then her parents went out to meet my parents. So, they must have suspected something. Well, the parents knew me by then well. And I was always welcomed. They lived in Grimsby. I still kept on going every holiday I went up to Sheffield for a few days, sometimes a week.

[0:44:42]

To this lady?

With the parents- staying with the family. Anyway, what I was going to say that- that the parents went out and met my parents and they came back together. And I picked them up at Victoria Station. They came by train. Picked them up about six o'clock in the evening. I had a- I think either bed for them - here. Parents- then - no. I think that they had a- my father-in-law occasionally came down to London. He was the secretary of a big fishery and came down to London from time to time. Ideal Home Exhibition or dealing with clients. So, they- they stayed in a hotel in Kensington. And anyway, I prepared an engagement dinner. And I went on- by then I had a car, and I went down to pick up- no, I didn't have a car. I beg your pardon. Yeah. No. I went up to pick up Frances and- and the parents and brought them here for

dinner. And they suddenly realised that we are getting engaged. So, there was- the opposition was beaten by Parliament.

[0:46:18]

And how did your parents react to?

They loved her from the first go. Not only that, Frances was a churchgoer at that time and wanted a church wedding. And- and I didn't want a church wedding. Okay? Not because I'm Jewish, but because I don't believe in- I'm an- you would call I'm an agnostic or an atheist. You know, I believe to live in the way religion - real religion - dictates, but I'm not a believer. Anyway, I wrote to my parents about this, and my father wrote back of all the people. My father wrote back and he said, "Look, to you, it doesn't mean anything. To her, it means everything. So why don't you go and get married in a church?" I think that was probably the last time she was inside a church, except when there are other occasions. I've been many times inside a church because I did a lot of concerts in churches. That's- that's the story so far.

And how did you- you had two children? You had two children?

Two children, yes.

And how did you decide to raise your children? What sort of identity did you want to pass on?

[0:48:08]

It didn't come up. They went to the local primary school where there was the first black headmistress, Mrs. Gilroy. Absolutely wonderful person. There wasn't a lot- [coughs] excuse me. There wasn't a lot of religious instruction. They went- and then they went to Newham School, still a State school. And then I went to UCS Juniors, and of course, you know, it's a non-denominational school. And then the Seniors where half the people are either Jewish or half-Jewish. And it's a very enlightened school. It's not the greatest school academically. It becomes- it's, it's got a good record because of the intake. But it's a wonderful school because

you get children coming out of them and they're decent human beings. So, the whole thing just didn't come up. You know. It was just- I would say to you, we were in love from the first evening and I believe we are still. [laughs] Anyway, I have no reason to believe the- the opposite. So, it's- it’s not- and of course now, as I said to you, she shows all the characteristics in- she talks with her right hand and holds the telephone with the left, which caused an injury three or four months ago, maybe six months ago. We were in a theatre. And she had the programme in her hand and in the interval, she was gesticulating and poked her eye. And it got terribly bloodshot. So much so that I called the manager, and the manager had a quick look and he said, “I think you're right. She should go to a hospital.” They called a time- they called a taxi. They rang up the hospital - what is it called? - at the bottom end of Westminster Bridge on the other side, and we got there about ten o'clock in the evening. They had a quick look at her. They called for a specialist. There is apparently a roving specialist amongst three or four hospitals. The specialist arrived at half past twelve, and proceeded to give her the most thorough examination. And thank goodness, no harm done. Not even a scratch. Just very bloodshot. It took six weeks for it to completely recover. But she's got the characteristic and this is why she is a bit of a *Yiddishe* mama when she worries about the children. She worries about the grandchildren. I worry when there is a reason to worry over there's something that I may be able to help. Otherwise, no, I don't. She does. And that's why was coined the phrase, “You don’t have to know the *Shema Yisrael* to be Jewish.”

[0:51:54]

And do you have many other Hungarian friends?

Yeah – no. I’ve got a- we have got a lot of English friends as well. In the- we started a bridge club when the wife of another mixed marriage, an English man and a wife was a Hungarian girl – alright? And she had cancer, unfortunately, but- I can’t now remember what- what cancer it was but some- some internal organ, and died at the age of fifty-nine. And this was in 2001. By then we- we went to a bridge club and learned to play bridge. And Jeffrey, the man, was left alone and Frances said- oh yes, I played bridge in the tennis club that I belong to. And Frances didn't at that time. What we did, we played tennis every Tuesday afternoon. Frances was still in employment or working as an advisor, but during the school hours.

She became a teacher?

[0:53:28]

In- in- in schools. Advisory teacher for science, she was. And I played tennis from one o'clock till three o'clock every Tuesday afternoon. And then we went into the hut and played bridge for an hour, hour and a half. Anyway, I wanted to enter earn? this - my friend Jeffrey, a Yorkshireman - as a social member, twenty-five pounds a year. And at that time, because of personality differences, not involving me, but the bridge group divided. So that, the bridge didn't go on. The tennis went on, but the bridge didn't. And Frances said, “Why don't we start a bridge club? Our doctor friend and his wife plays, our dentist friend and his wife are English, English Jews - they play. Why don't we form a bridge club ourselves?” And this was September 2001. It's been going since then, every Tuesday. I mean, we have breaks, that sometimes somebody is on holiday. We had- at most- up to now we had nineteen members. We have never had nineteen together. Eighteen we had, for a few times, but never had nineteen together. Sadly, now we're only sixteen because three are completely out. And- and I would say to you, about half of them are English Jew- almost all Jewish except one and the rest are all Hungarian Jews. And us two. And we played last night, we had twelve people. And we play from eight o'clock and then we have a cup of tea at half past nine. And then we have from 10 o'clock onwards we have another hour and a quarter. And we- some only come for half, half- for the first half. One person only comes for the second half. And it's been- so the friendships sort of stay together. Sadly, the age is catching up.

[0:56:12]

And when you came, obviously you were- you were a refugee. When did you become British?

Nineteen sixty-four. [1964]

And was that important for you?

Very - yes. After five years, you could apply for nationalisation - naturalisation. Wasn't quite straightforward in some ways. The- you probably don't know - you may know – that most orchestras, there's a lot of ‘cliques and needle’. There are a lot of arguments about the pitch and about that this is too fast, this is too slow. Orchestras are not necessarily a happy place

where chamber music is a happy place. Hence that I went in for more and more chamber music later.

Because it's much smaller.

[0:57:01]

Because it's much smaller. Yes. And there was a clique in the wind department, and I didn't wish to toe the line. There's two of us - a horn player who was also playing in the student orchestra of Great Britain in ‘58. And they had a go at him, “You are too loud.” And they completely wrecked his confidence. And, you know- unfortunately, Colin Davis asked for me personally, to do *Fidelio*. There- there were three of us: a principal oboe, a co-principal who played principal with the second when there are two players, or second with the principal. And when there were three, I played *cor anglais*. But I got on very well with the second player. The principal was jealous. And the principal’s trio partner was the first flute, and he was a nasty piece of work. And when - *Fidelio* has a very big oboe part. The- the principal had very good technique, but an awful sound, and very loud. And Colin Davis asked for me personally to play, though all the other principals played. Normally all the principals played together, or all the co-principals played together. Well, I was asked and it was an unfortunate situation. Though it was one of my greatest musical experience, because he was wonderful in Fidelio. Not necessarily in every opera, but in Fidelio, he was absolutely wonderful. And I was very successful. And so, the needles started, so much so that one day I found when I put my oboe down and went out of the pit- I think it was a performance of *Barber of Seville.* There's a long break. And I came back- luckily, I- by chance I had a look at the- and there was a paper ball stuffed up my bell.

Sabotage?

[0:59:29]

But I was warned: don't make enemies for yourself. Because when you apply for the naturalisation, you have to put an advert in the paper, a local paper, if anybody has any complaint about me. And this chap would have been bad enough. Even twenty- thirty-five years later, he was trying to get me out of a little- a little orchestra, which I really didn't want

to play in. So, it wasn't necessarily a- a happy place. And, and then of course, we got married in ‘61. So, I never fought back. I would now, but I never fought back. Anyway- and there was another thing. A year into being in England, there was an interview with a police person. And I, I went- it was somewhere in- near Piccadilly. And- and we talked and he said, “And what did you do during the Revolution?” And I told him. Obviously, most people said, “Oh, I fought for the freedom” and, “I did this and I was shot” and – or, “I was injured.” And I said, “I'm afraid I missed the demonstration. So, I went home and I practised.” And he took great exception to this. “Ah, you know who Nero was?” I said, “Yes, I think I know.” “Well, he was fiddling while Rome was burned.” Anyway, then I applied for the naturalisation. The principal of the college sponsored me. Who was the? And- and the workplace, Sadler’s Wells, sponsored- sponsored me. Though, I mean, it took- it’s a long- it takes a time. By the time the whole thing came up, I think, I may have already left the Wells, or I may have still been there, I can't remember. But then you have an interview with somebody. This was called Sergeant Terry. By then I was married for two and a half years. And he came out, we sat in this room. There's a table, and the three of us, Frances, him and me had a cup of coffee. And he didn't take sugar.

[1:02:19]

And- and he said, “Well, this is really a formality.” Oh, that's right. I still was at Sadler’s Wells- “You have good references. You've got a- you're working in a place who gave you a reference and you married an English girl.” And then he said to Frances, “Well, if you don't mind leaving us, I would like to be left with your husband.” And I think an hour and the half he was talking to me, including about this man, what happened three years, or four years earlier. At the end, he said, “Well, I think everything is fine,” he said to Frances. But he was, you know, he- he proceeded to interrogate me for an hour and a half pretty strongly after saying, “This is only a formality now.”

And then you…?

And that’s- and that's- I became- signed an Oath of Allegiance, and I became British.

And how do you define yourself today in terms of your identity?

I find that I am desperately upset about the political situation. I left a country which was, to begin with, anti-Semitic. Then it was anti-anybody who wasn't working-class. Then- then again, I left- you know, then I left a country- laws were brought in every other day, new laws without Parliament approval. Anyway, it would have been rubber-stamping. And I came to a country when I learned stability, tolerance, all the best British attitudes, alright? And I now see these eroded. I see this self-destruction. Whichever side you are on. And instead of preferring the unity of a party, to the unity of the country, and the- what it achieved instead of unifying the Conservative Party, which is just as divided as it was before, instead it's divided the whole country. And, and - I'm all right. I've got- it's my house. If I'm short of- I've got a good pension. We have got some savings. But I mean, if I want to, I can downsize, or I can take some money out of the house. We can live- both my sons have good jobs and earn well. And I see the country which I love being destructed, for decades, even if something good comes out of it. The leavers, who may be right, but they are talking - through them, whatever, that I will not mention if I'm on camera, about what a wonderful opportunity - even now, without any proof. The others, you know, the other party who wants to bring in communist ideas. I- I see a leader who wants to please everybody in the meantime, completely wreck the whole situation. And, and it's not the country that I love, which gave me a home, gave me a future - a wonderful future - and, and kicked up the status quo, which wasn't perfect. Nothing is ever perfect, but this was the beauty. That things moved slowly, reformed, then more and more education. "We will revolutionarily change the curriculum", "We will revolution..." And then the teachers don't know. And by the time they learn all the new things- and we were both in education. And, and by the time you learn the new things, a new government comes in: "We will- the, the most revolutionary change since sliced bread." And- and here we are on the knife's edge, and nobody knows what's going to happen. And whatever going to- is going to happen, already the poison is there. And it hurts. Probably- Frances says, "It's no good, worrying."

[1:07:45]

I used to say that to her. Now, she says it to me. Because you can't do anything about it. All I can- I went on the march. Alright? Several people who feel the same way as me, said, "Well done." I mean, eighty-four. Two and a half hours slow, hardly moving, from Green Park where we picked up the- with my son, going to Horse Guards, up to Horse Guards, which would be a ten-minute walk, maybe a quarter of an hour if you walk slowly. But my son

walks fast. And, you know, walk, stop, walk, stop. And then, you know, to make, make an effort and make a stand. And a couple of my friends just said, “What good do you think it will take?” And I take real exception to that. I mean, if you say, “Well, well done for standing up for your principals. Do you think it will do any good?” Do they disregard the signature? Not completely. It's not wasted space, the five and a quarter million signatures, and 1 million people. It's not wasted space. And there we are.

And what do you think of Hungary today? Are you worried about that? Is that something you…?

[1:09:20]

Hungary is an even worse place. There- there is a dictator, who is- he is not an anti-Semite. He, you know, is Orbán, Viktor Orbán, fluent English speaker, studied at the London School of Economics on a [George] Soros scholarship. And then I go to Hungary six months ago, or a year ago and as we drive in from- in the taxi from the airport I get right-wing posters deriding Soros, and you know, with a - Jewish nose. And he moved into the- the royal palace. And- and he's popular because number one, because he said, “We don't want any immigrants here.” And this is probably- when we talk about immigrants and this is what the British public just didn’t appreciate, that they thought immigrants means- they’re not- the- Brexiters, Brexiteers are against European immigration. Well, that has reduced considerably. A lot of them have left. They think immigration is all the immigration from Africa and Asia. And- and in Hungary, well, it's against politics - not correct. And he has erected a fence. But he also erected tents or buildings, and give- gives them food but- but the only way you go is that way, and not in the country. And that reduced, funnily, the anti-Semitism, because the Fascist party [Movement for a Better Hungary] Jobbik, has lost a lot of votes. Otherwise, it’s a complete chaos, like it is in France, like it is in the United States. But this country used to be as solid as a rock. And it hurts, because I chose this country. You were born here, but I actually chose this country because of its values.

[1:12:06]

Stephen, you are- the other thing I was going to ask you, you are both a survivor and a refugee.

Yeah? Survivor?

And a refugee.

Yes?

Do you still- do you see yourself as a, still today, as a refugee or as a…?

No.

No.

No, neither am I treated by the majority of the population. Occasionally- I remember going in to deputise in a show, and a couple of the younger players said, “How long have you lived in this country?” And my answer was, “Much longer than you have.” I think I speak a- I- I've got a fairly good command of the language. I mean, I write most of the letters. You never completely lose your accent, whatever you do. I was twenty-one and a half when I came. If I had been about six, seven years younger, no. As it is, I say one sentence and people know that I was- I wasn't born here. On the other hand, a lot of people say that they under- they understand better what I say than some of the natives. And you know, I wrote my autobiography. We went over it with Frances grammatically, spelling-wise. Not an awful lot of correction. But there's- there’s some. But when she writes a letter, she brings it to me to see. You know, so, I think- I- I certainly don't feel- I feel myself British from top to toe. And most of the time, I'm treated as such. Very- there was one occasion if I may say so, that my doctor friend, who also speaks very good Hungarian- English. I mean, he studied, he came and studied in, in, in Bart’s [St. Bartholomew’s Hospital, London]. And we- we were out in Hertfordshire on a Sunday with Frances and her- his wife. And his wife is Hungarian. And we went and ordered some drinks and some food. And we paid for it. And we took the drinks and half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, an hour. And, we see that other people have come much after us getting their food and we don’t. After an hour and a quarter an hour and twenty minutes we went up to the- to the bar and said to the chap, “Can you tell us what’s- what?” and he said, “Oh, it will be another twenty minutes.” And we said, “Well…”, yeah, we- we said what we felt. “Well, go back to Poland.” At which time we said, “We want you- we want

the money back, and now." And then we left. And we went somewhere else, we had a dinner. And the next day we wrote- and I don't normally write, signing, "*Professor of Oboe*" but I put all the- all my letters there. He wrote down, "*Peter Brunner, Doctor"* and – all his letters, whatever. And we wrote to the brewery. And we got an apology from the brewery. It said, "Not surprisingly, the landlord had a different version. However, we would like to offer our sincere apologies." Very seldom did it- that's the- that's the one major thing that- that we felt. And you know, as I said, my relation, where the- where the other refugee, adopted son said, "Nobody invited you here." I can't think of any other occasion when I'm reminded who I am. Except while I was in the orchestra, you know, this clique. That wasn't helpful.

[1:17:01]

Did you- you had obviously the war experiences. Did you talk about your experiences, or is it something which is now coming back more? Your experiences during the war in Budapest?

It's always there. It will always there under the surface, if for nothing else, when you complain about my life, you know, my situation now it's still a hundred-thousand times better than- than I experienced. So, I mean, I came a long way. I've been very lucky in my life. I had some misfortunes, done good things, some bad- you know some bad things which, you know, which I'm- I'd like to forget about. I've had some problems which I've created, which I hope I would have apologised for. But otherwise, I think I'm very lucky and a very happy man. And I have my health. As you know, if there's a pain, well, anybody who wakes up in the morning at my age and nothing hurts is- they should worry. And I've- I've played- I've played tennis for the last forty - how many years? Forty- seventy-one - forty-eight years. And I still play twice a week regularly, but, you know, yesterday I played an hour and a half. Normally I play about two hours. Frances played two hours yesterday. And- and I go to the gym - twice a week.

Do you think your experiences have- how have they shaped your life? Do you think-?

Oh, yes. Oh yes, very much so.

In which ways? In which ways?

Very much so. And- and Frances helped to smooth over the rough corners of which there were a number- a good number. I think there may be one or two still. Even she has her failings. [laughs]

[1:19:26]

But do you think related to your experiences of- I mean you were- of separation, of…?

Who? Frances?

No, your- you. Do you think your experiences of that time, 1944 to 1945, had an effect on your life?

Oh, very much so. Very much so. Very much so.

In which way?

I get. I get- I- I supported the Labour- Labour Party. And I no longer support the Labour Party. Certainly not while this lot are- are in power. And, if somebody asked me what religion I am, I will say, either “none of your business” or “I'm not religious, but as a race, I'm Jewish.” But I do not fill in forms where they ask your religion, colour, whether white, European or whatever. I- I completely disagree with that. And, I- I mean, I've mentioned this before, I- once you've gone without food, or adequate food, you appreciate the food you eat. And this causes a problem. You see me at my slimmest for a long time. I lost five kilos since last September, partly because my blood sugar went up a bit and it’s a bit borderline. So, I decided well, that's a good excuse for losing weight. But if I have a plate of spaghetti, I eat it. I don't leave- you go to a restaurant and the portions are too big. And I don't leave anything. Furthermore, I object to people leaving things. Especially- I've got one friend, or rather his wife, who eats it, eat and then, “Would you like some seconds?” “Yes.” And leaves half the seconds. Or she feels that it’s the- there is a, some sort of ladies’ book or something which says, “Always leave something on your plate.” There used to be- it's an old English habit. It was. No longer, but she still- she, funnily enough they came- they lived in the north up to about fifteen years ago. And it obviously happens there. And I- I- I find that- I find that very hard to put up with, but I don't say anything.

[1:22:41]

So, it's mostly the food, the food? The hunger-

Food, yeah.

The hunger and the food?

And?

The food side has affected you.

The food side of it. Yes. Yeah. I don't like food wasted, and sometimes you have to waste food. One of my grandsons, the older one- I mean, they love my food and- and I love it that they- they love my food but what I'm cooking. Maybe one day you come and sample it. But, if I do bacon and egg for them, one eats it all. One cuts studiously all the fat, all the- and leaves, you know. He’s right. He doesn’t, you know, he doesn’t like it. Maybe it's- maybe it's bad for you.

But for you, it's difficult.

Where- where would we be all, if we- if we only did what's good for us? But I mean, he doesn't- neither of them wastes food. You can't make enough that they don't- can’t eat it. I eat everything, but I appreciate that Frances sometimes cannot eat any more. She doesn't leave things, because she believes that- and- and you know, sometimes, you know, I- I say, “Well, you help yourself.” And I do- don’t do the helping. Because you know how much you can eat. Or she often says, “Don't give me too much.” And I try. But on the whole, one out of twenty-five that she leaves something, so it’s- it’s not chronic.

And do you find it has affected your parenting? Do you think it affected how you…?

Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely. I think it makes you appreciate how good life is in this country. And don't let's go back to politics of today. Even if they try to make it worse.

So, I think, Stephen, just to- I- we can't- we don't have the time to talk about your career in depth. But what were your personal highlights of your career? In- in music?

[1:25:18]

Well, there were- there were several. One was playing in Athens, at the bottom of the Acropolis, in the Herodes Atticus Open Air Theatre, playing Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, with Stravinsky conducting. I can tell you, hopefully off camera, but it doesn't matter if it's on camera, that he was absolutely disastrous as a conductor. He was a lovely man at the rehearsal, smiling, but something went wrong. And then you need a conductor. You think that the conductor only does this. You can do it- you can play without him. When a conductor is needed: when the soloist comes in a half a bar or a bar too soon, or a bar too late, and then you have to- and the performance nearly came to a standstill. But it was wonderful, nevertheless. And it was- you looked back, and you saw the Acropolis lighted up. And there were 4,000 people and gave the greatest living composer a standing ovation. And then we all sat down, got ready, and he forgot his- in his own piece, that before you start the piece there is a narrator. And straightaway brought in the trumpets with a fanfare. But it was still- still a very, very great occasion. And maybe the other one, when at Trinity College of Music, 1958, the day before we broke up at Easter, the principal called me in, patted me on the back, he said, "My boy, I decided you're going to play the Strauß Oboe Concerto in the Summer Concert." "Thank you very much, Sir." I didn't even know Strauß wrote an oboe concerto. It was- only wrote- written nine years earlier. And, so my first journey was to go to Boosey& Hawkes, buy the copy, for three months I did nothing but to live Strauß Oboe Concerto, five, six hours a day. I learned it. And I played it with the orchestra on June the 4th 1958. And that led me to a lot of people hearing me. And when I played- I played my audition at Sadler's Wells, I played the Strauss Oboe Concerto. And I noticed it's a very long blow, and I learned to circle a breath, which means you can- I can blow and breathe at the same time. I can show you this- [demonstrates] air left my mouth and- air left my mouth, and I was still breathing in. If you put your hand there, you will feel [demonstrates].

[1:29:08]

As a technique?

As a technique. Glass blowers do it. It's- I taught all my students, but it was a new thing in England. Nobody did it except the air force and Léon Goossens, and they didn't realise how they did it. There was even a book, by Eve Laroche which said, that “this is harmful to the health and unmusical”. She didn't know what- what it was, but she criticised it. And I got my first job with that. I went to the Geneva Competition and played and got into the semi-final with that. That's as far as I got. That's another- but there were lots of highlights. I could see, if Frances were here, it's the 2nd of May 1959 when we met. But that wasn't a musical highlight.

No, but a highlight, nevertheless.

[1:30:14]

I'm very lucky. I've had a lot of highlights, and just a few- a few things which I like to forget about, so I won’t mention them.

Do you have any regrets? Anything you think- any regrets?

Maybe occasionally I've been a bit too critical on- on pupils. I learned at my experience. This is unfortunately a fault which I share with my mother. My mother was a brilliant teacher, but not a good enough motivator. When you teach, it’s not enough to teach; you have to make the pupil accept what you say. Especially at the beginning of my career, I would stop people too often, or I would- there's a lot to criticise. You've got to know your priorities and not criticise everything, especially private pupils. I wanted to give good value for money. And I didn't by doing that. I now know, and I think motivational skills are probably my best. If you talk to my pupils, I mean I- I get over fifty Christmas cards still, from pupils. Occasional telephone calls. And, very recently, I don't think you would know Ruth Ben-Nathan. And she's an Ashkenazi and her husband is a Sephardi. And Ruth played for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The manager of the BBC Symphony Orchestra is a former pupil of mine. Paul Hughes. Unfortunately, I was double booked. I couldn't go to- to Ruth’s retirement party. But my name was down. And Paul, this former pupil of mine, came up to Ruth and he said, “Isn't Stephen here?” And she said, “Oh, I'm sorry. He couldn't come.” And Paul said, “Oh, it's a pity. If I learned any- whatever I know about music, I learned from him.” And that's the very much hated manager, because, who doesn't hate the general manager? Especially of an

orchestra. That's what he said to Ruth. So, I think I've got motivational skills. I was quite a strong disciplinarian. If people were late, I wouldn't tolerate it. And there was- one or two occasions- when they didn't- somebody forgot to turn up. And I turfed her out of the, the ensemble. One in particular I remember. Seven of us were ready- seven of them are ready in dinner jackets and it was public concert, in a church, at Hinde Street. Second horn didn't turn up. Well, we had to do that show. And next day, the director of studies, assistant director of studies went to see her. And he came to me and he said, "Sorry, Stephen," I said, "What was the reason?" He said, "Amnesia." I said, "Not good enough. You can tell her not to bother to turn up to the next"- he was out. When I- I did acting head of job, I never wanted a desk job. I, I did it for the then principal, Philip Jones, who said, "Stephen, do it for me for a year because I can't afford another person." I was the principal lecturer and I did it for him free. I had very good salary. But I mean, that meant a lot of extra time. And paperwork, which I hate, though I can do it. And- and, you know, peop- two or three times- people complained that I, I disciplined people. And once I did head department work, and that was the terminus, at the last day of entry, five o'clock Friday afternoon, or Thursday afternoon. Friday morning somebody came with the entry form. Somebody I liked very much. He was simply a lovely boy. "I'm sorry, Dave, I can't make an exception." So eventually- because previous- my predecessor made exception. He was all very wishy washy. After- after a while, in the chamber music and in, in, in the, in the oboe teaching as well. Then they turned up on time. And so did I. I was always the- a half an hour early. Twice in my life I was late. And I regret it even now. Once, because I had a puncture. I should have left a little more time with the car. I was playing in the National Theatre and they held the curtain for me. Because- and I was only on ten minutes after the beginning and I got there right on time for the beginning. But I had to put a costume on and get down to positions. And they- they held the curtain. And once was even worse. I came back to London. I was double booked. And I had schools concerts down in Chichester - and a show in Birmingham. The theatre was opposite the station. And the Pullman Express got there forty minutes to spare, except that the Pullman Express broke down. And I was two and a half hour late. Just in time for the third act, where there was a very big cor anglais solo. I- I had a very big- and that was a season with Nureyev and Fontaine. They weren't dancing. I had a London season with them. I had to lie my way out. I won't tell you what I'd said, but I had to lie my way out of that situation. And- and they swallowed it and I regret it ever since. Maybe if you say I have- I have any regrets, that- that I really regret. Except that even though it was not my fault. The schools concerts, lecture recitals, three of them were already in my, in my book. And I was offered three weeks' work.

One week in Birmingham- I was a freelance by then. And- and two weeks playing for Fontaine and Nureyev which was unforgettable. There was a lot at stake. And I really- I'm ashamed of myself, but I have no- no way, and I couldn't afford to lose three weeks' work.

And how do you see yourself in terms of musical inspirations? In terms of Continental and British music? Where do you think or how is your Hungarian…?

Music is international. When I arrived, I could hardly speak English. But, I, I sat down to play some chamber music. And it's an international language; we didn't have to talk.

[1:39:32]

I mean, in terms of composers, do you feel you're more drawn to certain composers? To certain music?

I like the one which I get the most money for. [laughing] But listen, I'm a true artist, this is what Stravinsky said, Stravinsky said, "Do you want to talk about money? Talk to me. Do you want to talk about music? Talk to my manager." And- no, I mean, I've got favourite composers. I love listening to Mozart. I prefer playing Beethoven. Mozart is the most difficult one, because it's crystal clear. And the slightest thing is transparent. It's a favourite of our politicians – it's transparent. But otherwise, I love music. We still go to- we went to a wonderful concert last- we're going tomorrow evening to- oh no, that's theatre. But that's a surprise. Now we're going to *The Force of Destiny*. We went last week to- you heard of Bernard Haitink. He was ninety- it was a ninety -year concert, both of them. We went to- did Mahler's Fourth Symphony. And I'm not a great Mahler admirer. That was spellbounding. Every note of it. And I, you know, my pupils played from the earliest music: Bach, Handel, Telemann to Berio, Opus Number Zoo, when you had to play and talk almost the same time. And you know, you give- you give your pupils an all-round education.

[1:41:30]

And do you have a favourite piece for yourself to play?

I've lots of favourites pieces. I think the Haydn Oboe Concerto is very close to my heart. There's no question about it. Every Beethoven symphony. Another one may be the Mozart Symphonia Concertante for four wind instruments. I played that as the oboe soloist in- in Hungary. I played it in this country as well. But I- I don't really- I just love listening to music even now, having been in the profession for forty-one years. It's, it's treated me very well. It's not easy, and it's very much personal choice. You know, so many times my non-music, non-musician friends say, "Well, I don't know much about music, but my opinion is…" I say, "Stop. Doesn't matter whether you know about music or not, you're entitled to your opinion." To say that somebody should be standing this way and not this way or holding the oboe this way or that way – that's different. But what a performance does to you is- it's- it's very personal. There's no- you know, you can't- there's no first past the post. There's no photo finish. It's personal. As a rule, I've never, I never read 100% criticism where everybody liked it. There's always somebody who says something about it. I get annoyed sometimes, but it's very personal.

[1:43:35]

Stephen, is there anything I haven't asked you, which we haven't talked about which you'd like to mention here?

How was the interview? [laughs]

Excellent. Excellent! [both laugh]

I'm sorry if I overspoke the limit.

No, you haven't.

But I've got so many memories due to my somewhat advanced age, that I could entertain you for a long time yet.

That's a- very good.

Believe it or not, I was quite selective. [laughs]

I've got one more question for you. Do you have a message for anyone who might watch this film later?

To anyone who?

A message for anyone who will watch this interview, based on your experiences?

Be yourself, and rather than say what you think the interviewer and the cameraman would like to hear. [Bea laughs] Do you- do you get this?

No.

Don't say something which you think that- that you or the way I say it, Frank, would want- want to hear. So, then they could say, "Oh, but that was a good chap." Be yourself. And they will like certain things you said, and they will not like cert- they won't like everything, because you can't like everything. And also, the way you say it, that is you, and don't change it. You can't change it. And that- they may like it, or they may not like it, but don't try to say things for effect, and because you think that this particular interview is about saying that "I fought for the freedom", "I was a victim of the Holocaust" – which I was I suppose, yes. I was, having been on my own for nearly four months. And I suffered. And they beat me up, just to say because- because nobody has beaten me up - physically. I've had my argument with conductors. But - be yourself. And this is what I try to instil in my sons. My younger son is- is unfortunately very, very much my like me. Both of them are like me. They don't suffer fools gladly. In fact, I am- I suff- I am a bit more moderate than they are, even. They're both in leading positions. One earning very well through that. One earning reasonably. And they, you know, they complain about certain things, but they can- I mean, Tim is working for Deutsche Bank and from time to time is summoned to Frankfurt. And he tells me- and- and they just don't know. You know, these bosses, they have champagne receptions, but they don't know what they are talking about. Robin taught in a school and- and stood up for students like I did, and got into - not deep water, but argument with the management. I was- you know, I was told that I'm too near to my pupils, because I always put the pupil's interest first. And I've got a clear conscience about it. Didn't always work but- you know, and, and- and stuck up for them. When they came for a concert, I put their stands up. The orchestra

manager put the stands, folding stands, on to the chairs. Well, A: I wanted my pupils to concentrate on what they were going to do, to warm up their instrument. Number three: Have you ever tried to undo a music stand? You can trap your finger. It's- it's, you know, I can put a stand up in no time. I'm a- very quick. I've got a lot of experience, but not everybody. And then you can have to tighten up the screws. Well, that already causes a bit of aggro with your fingers when you want- especially when you want to do some fast passage work. And I didn't, I wasn't too ashamed to put the- or move the chairs. And I think this is, you know- “Be yourself” is a very good- very good thing to say.

[1:49:25]

Okay.

Yeah. And don't burn the toast. I didn't burn it. The side of it gets burned because the cheese didn't cover it. You think I didn't notice it? [laughs]

Stephen, thank you very, very much for this interview-

Not at all.

And for sharing-

I actually enjoyed it and I- it was lovely. You are a very sympathetic person, both of you. Frank is a wonderful man. He takes sugar in tea and coffee but I forgive him. Everybody must have some- some- nobody is perfect- Well, I am nearest to it, but-

Okay, thank you very much.

Not at all.

One moment…

[End of Interview]
[1:50:10]

[1:50:24]

[Start of photographs and documents]

Photo 1

That's the- the first- the picture at the top or the picture down below? The picture down below would be Budapest 1941. With my brother, who is six years older than I am.

Photo 2

That's me by the ice -skating rink, I think it could be in 1945 when I was ten.

Photo 3

That is a class photo taken in 1941. It’s the first class in- first year in the primary school, and I am fifth from the right in the third row. Next to the headmaster.

Photo 4

This is the basketball team of my secondary school and it was taken at the event of the competition, country-wide competition, in which we came third. And I am the one with number 12.

Photo 5

That is my picture at the age of eighteen, in 1953 before I started losing my hair. In Budapest.

Photo 6

That is a class photo in Budapest in the school, the matriculation photo, in 1953 – June. And I am second row from the bottom on the right-hand side.

Photo 7

It is a publicity photo taken in 1964 with me and my wife and this is on our brochure in London.

[1:52:42]

Photo 8

That is also London 1964, and that is our brochure which we used to send to different places and agents to get some concerts.

Photo 9

Yep, that is Athens 1966 rehearsing with the great composer Stravinsky.

Photo 10

Friday the 13th of October 1961. My wedding day.

Photo 11

1967 in London with my first child, the heir to the Nagy throne. *His name?* Oh, name- Tim - Timothy. We call him Tim.

Photo 12

It is in Hampstead Cemetery by the Cenotaph, 2015 – 11th of November. At 11 o'clock. *What are you playing?* The cor anglais. *Which piece?* 'The Last Post', which should be played on a trumpet, but they couldn't find a trumpeter.

Document 1

That is the front page of my autobiography. A picture taken in- last year 2018. In fact, in this very room.

Document 2

This dates from 1899 when the Jews were still respected members of the community. And it's the original document, proving that my grandfather changed his name from Neufeld to Nagy, which is sounding more Hungarian.

Document 3

This is my father's army identification document, the picture showing that he has been decorated, highly decorated. And this dates from 1918, the last year of the war - of the First World War.

[1:55:24]

Document 4

It's the front cover of my father's identification document as a member of the army.

Document 5

That is a document from 1935, the year I was born, showing that my father was a reservist in the Hungarian Army.

Document 6

This is a document dated from 1939. On the back page, showing the number of decorations he has gained. And the front page at the top says that he is in Hungarian**,** *Kivételezett Zsidó*, which means, "exempt Jew". So that is- mean- means that he is exempt from being called up and taken to a punishment brigade, like most of the other Jews were.

Document 7

This is an original document dated 1942 soon after Hungary joined the war, saying that he should be treated as an exempt meaning special Jew because of his service to the country and his decorations. So, he should be given special treatment. *This relates to…?* Relates to a possibility of being called up to a punishment brigade, like most other military-age Jews were.

Document 8

This is an official document issued by the Swiss embassy in Budapest on the 25th of October 1944, ten days after the *coup d'état*, when the fascists really took over. And it's called a *Schutzpass*, which says that he is- his name is on a joint passport issued by the Swiss Embassy, so he should be treated as a Swiss citizen. *And whose name is on it... on the document?*

My father's name is on - on it, saying that he is- he appears on the joint passport, proving that he is a Swiss citizen, and therefore, he should have the rights of a Swiss citizen. And that's what saved his life.

Document 9

This is a memorial erected about twenty years ago on the east side of the Danube very near the Parliament building, and it symbolises that Jews were taken to the Danube and murdered there. They were made to take their shoes off and shot into the Danube, because the city was

already surrounded, and they couldn't be deported. Had my father not had the Swiss *Schutzpass*, he would have had the same fate.

[1:59:10]

Document 10
This is a postcard which was received by my father. My aunt and my uncle were both deported to Auschwitz. We- we have no knowledge what happened to my uncle. But this is- this letter came as a reply to a newspaper advert saying that this person knew my aunt, and she survived Auschwitz and Birkenau. But they got separated on the march in 1945, and she was presumed to have died on the march.

Document 11
Is the other side of the same postcard, with the address of my uncle's brother on it.

Document 12
This is an identification document identifying me, that- as a member of the basketball team of the civil service, and it dates- dated 1948 when I was thirteen. And our trainer and manager had to take these before every match to prove that we are bona fide members of the basketball team.

Document 13
This is the- my Certificate of Naturalisation. Dated the 21st of December 1962.

Photo 13
This is a family photo from 2017 Christmas, in Sydney. *Who is in the picture?* My younger son lives in Sydney with his partner and the London family spent Christmas and the New Year- New Year's Eve together. And this is the balcony of my son's flat.

Thank you very much, Stephen.

Thank you

[End of photographs and documents]

[2:02:06]

[End of 2nd Part recording]

[2:04:38]

[Total length of interview]- [4:20:16]